



Imagination Creation Western Union Young Writers

Stories and Poems 2018





Imagination Creation, 2018

Compiled by Rebecca Keegel

This anthology is a collection of the prize-winning submissions to the Imagination Creation Writing Competition 2018.

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Imagination Creation

Western Union Young Writers
WRITING COMPETITION 2018

Sponsored by
Western Union Writers
Wyndham City Council
Wyndham Community and Education Centre
Kirpal Singh Chauh
Margaret Campbell

15-18 Poetry

First Prize:	Lucinda Worthing-Shore
Second Prize:	Jesse Blakers
Highly Commended:	Jesse Blakers
Highly Commended:	Jesse Blakers
Commended:	Lucy Ruffell-Hazell

15-18 Story

First Prize:	Chelsea Hindle
Second Prize:	Ankitha Nair Bujkumar
Highly Commended:	Katie Hutton
Commended:	Zahra Shahriar

11-14 Poetry

First Prize:	Daniella Camacho
Second Prize:	Margaret Fan
Highly Commended:	Joann Manoj Jacob
Highly Commended:	Syazwana Saifudin
Highly Commended:	Syazwani Saifudin
Highly Commended:	Sreeja Gullapalli

11-14 Story

First Prize:	Margaret Fan
Second Prize:	Jacob Burfoot
Second Prize:	Kelsea Thomson
Commended:	Olyvia Khaw
Commended:	Anjali Bujkumar

<10 Poetry

First Prize:	Natalie Barclay
Second Prize:	Tahlia Walker
Highly Commended:	Ethan London
Commended:	Ava Pretorius
Commended:	Odessa Zubanov
Commended:	Senaya Pimburage

<10 Story

First Prize:	Asun Deng
Second Prize:	Rebecca Ethige
Highly Commended:	Mia Ishii
Highly Commended:	Abdul Rahman

Sherryl Clark Award

Chelsea Hindle

Short-listed Poetry

Allyson Wu

Tim Roskam

Isara Emmanuel Thommagee

Sagar Sujith

Natalie Barclay

Fathima Sumah Quaisy

Penelope Duran

Chloe Hannan

Ashita Kumar

Farwah Kahuma

Short-listed Story

Senaya Pimburage

Mia Ishii

Darawyn Fraser

Hasuru Amaranayake

Emily Lewer

Bonnie Miller

Jamie Tan

Aniesha Kor

Tiara Hudson

Aryahi Taralkar

Emily Anderson

Elisha Koh

Ayan Rahil

Penelope Duran

Theresa

Saanjana Kapoor

Yi Chin Chou



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Friendship

By Natalie Barclay

After the painting 'A Token of Friendship'

by Arthur Collingridge, 1890

In the field the grass
is dry beneath my feet.
It smells of hay.
This delicate afternoon
is full of birdsong.
Slowly the brown calf
approaches me.
I put out my hand
and show her an apple.
She sniffs it,
her damp nose
touching my skin.
Friends.



Losing A Friend

By Rebecca Ethige

When I was almost ten years old, I lost my best friend, Jessica. It's a day I will never forget. Almost every detail is as fresh as it was the day it happened. It was a normal Monday at middle school. I remember getting on the bus and feeling very strange and thinking to myself, 'did I wear this outfit to school yesterday?' I brushed off the strange feeling as quickly as I could, I got to school, went to my locker like normal and then went to my classroom where I sat and talked to my friend. I remember asking if she had seen Jessica because I was waiting for her to get there. Jessica and I always went to get breakfast from the cafeteria together in the mornings. I figured she was just running a little late and decided to sit and talk with my friend a little more.

While sitting there talking to my friend, another classmate ran into my homeroom class and was shouting, 'Jessica just collapsed out in the hallway!' To which everyone in the class rushed out into the hall while I yelled back at her, 'Which Jessica!' to which she replied, 'Batdorf'. I remember pushing through the crowd of kids circled around her lying on the ground. My teacher was holding her telling everyone to get back to class. My two other best friends were standing there with us; my teacher told the other teacher in the hall to call the nurse and again told us to return to our classrooms. We all did as we were told and I sat by the door of my classroom so I could keep an eye out. I watched out the windows next to the door as the nurse came up the elevator and started to perform CPR on her.

The guidance adviser saw my friend and I watching and came into the room and told me that Jessica was going to be fine and that I needed to return to my seat. She told me they were taking Jessie to the hospital and her mom was on her way. I remember seeing Dawn's car pull up out front and watched her run into the building and her crying as she saw her daughter lying there. At that moment all I wanted to do was leave the room and hug her and go with them to the hospital but the guidance advisor wouldn't let me leave the room. The whole school was to stay in the classroom until the ambulance and paramedics got there and had taken Jessica to the hospital.

After they had allowed us to leave the room, I went to my first class where everyone was talking about what had happened, how we were going to visit her in the hospital, and how we all expected her to be ok. I don't recall much of what we learned in class that day

because I was too concerned about my best friend. After that class, I had gym, where again everyone was talking about it. I heard from a few people that this one girl in our grade had made a horrible comment about the situation, so I got really angry and decided to go address the issue with the vice principal. When I got to the office, I found that the vice principal was at the hospital with Jessica and her family and that my issue would just have to wait. I was told to return to my classroom. I remember thinking it was strange for the vice principal to be there with them, even though it was also nice of her to do. I was furious about what this girl was saying and the rude things about Jessica, but I just had to wipe it off my brain.

When I got to class, I took my seat as usual and then an announcement came on that said 'Teachers have been given a statement to read to all classes. Please do so now'. The room fell silent and my stomach turned around, knowing this probably was really regretful news. I fell into shock hearing my teacher, the one who had been out in the hallway with Jessica, read 'At 9:15 this morning, Jessica Ann Batdorf passed away at Holy Spirit Hospital. If students need to deal with their grief or be excused please go to the library'. He was crying, I couldn't hold it together, so I got up from my chair along with a few good friends and walked out of the room. I remember throwing my books across the hall and just falling on the ground crying. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't breathe, I thought I was losing my mind, how can an 11-year-old girl just die? My friends pulled me up to my feet and we walked to the library holding each other.

There were a lot of people in the library. Some that didn't even talk to Jessica, some that were mean to her, and others that were close to her like I had been. The teachers were making their rounds comforting the kids. I wasn't crying, I just sat there staring at the ground. All I could think was it was some kind of twisted joke, that I'd see her the next day and everything would be fine. I remember worrying about Dawn and Heather, Jessica's mom and sister. I don't know how long I sat there until the teachers gave us permission to start calling our parents to come get us from school.

I got to the phone, still not crying, and called my house. My dad, who was working nights at the time, was home and answered. As soon as I tried to say what had happened, I started to cry so hard he couldn't understand me and was laughing at me. I had to convince him I wasn't joking and I needed him to come get me. I could tell instantly the change in his tone as soon as I could muster out the words that Jessica had died. He said he'd send my



mom to get me. I don't recall how long I had to wait for my mom to get there; I don't even remember the ride home. I just know that when I had got to my house, my sister and a close friends of Jessica's and mine were there crying as well. We just sat there in silence for a while, hugging each other.

It turns out that Jessica, at the age of 11, had a heart murmur. When she collapsed, her heart had stopped and couldn't revive itself. Losing a best friend was really rough on me, but I've learned I have to be happy for her, for the life she had lived. The last time I talked to her was the previous Saturday, she was so happy. I remember her telling me how much she valued our friendship and that she loved me. Losing her taught me not to take people or things for granted. To not be judgemental of people, that was definitely a lesson to our whole school that year.

Life's too short to worry about the negative things, to be angry or to be mean to anyone. The most important thing for me now is to be happy and grateful for a healthy family, and my overall life. I've learned to see what is truly important and what I need to fight for. I also feel after losing her I've become a stronger person, more level-headed, and less judging. She's a memory I will carry with me until I die. I, one day, will tell my children about her and teach them that life is to be cherished because it should be. You never know when your time is up and tomorrow you must be happy with the choices you've made in your life. I know I will be.

Hold My Hands

By Ankitha Nair Bijukumar

Small wrinkled fingers clench and unclench in the fringes of your blurry vision. They are roll-like in their chubbiness, almost ridiculously plump, but babies have always been endearingly disproportionate. Soft, unblemished skin, a gentle, glowing pink, adorned by fingernails so impossibly tiny and delicate they appear like miniature seashells. Your fingers are outstretched, blindly searching for security. Warmth surrounds them as a larger hand cradles your own, your fingers gently curling around it by their own accord, holding on with a fierce, stubborn tenacity, a hardwired, biological instinct.

When you arrived in this world, the only fears that had been ingrained into your psyche were the fears of being dropped and of loud noises. Your mind is untainted by worry and caution, and the world is a marvellous place of wonder and discovery. Your hands are your tools of navigation, always grabbing, fiddling and wandering to appease your insatiable curiosity. Somehow, they're always vaguely sticky with the last meal you ate, food that was mashed carelessly between grabby fingertips and shoved in the vague direction of your mouth, usually missing their destination by a few inches. Your mother sighs wearily, and wipes the smeared remains of yet another meal off your face.

Dirt somehow also makes its way under your fingertips, much to her chagrin. Your mother didn't understand that such small sacrifices were necessary when building the perfect sand castle. It had been a masterful creation, you reminisced with a distinct air of pride. Even the neighbour's daughter hadn't made a tower as perfect as yours. Her turrets were too wonky, and her flags were all wrong.

There is a row of callouses on your palm now, the mark of a true playground master, as every child knew. The other children on the playground would watch you in awe. You could skip one bar, two bars, even three on the monkey bars, and perform ridiculous gravity-defying feats on the flying fox. A pleased smirk grew on your face. You were, indisputably, the coolest kid in your class.

A moment's lapse in concentration, a stumble, and then a fall.

You raised your hands shakily to examine them. They were covered in countless miniscule grazes, but the sting of embarrassment and wounded pride hurt more deeply.



Tears streamed down your grubby cheeks as you wailed, the injustice of the situation being too much for a child's heart to bear. The comforting arms of your teacher swept you up, and the sick-bay staff cuddled and cooed over you. *Rightly so*, you thought, sniffing petulantly. They presented you with a Barbie bandage, and patted your sore hands reassuringly. *You'll be fine, you're a big girl*. You looked down dubiously at your injured hands. Barbie smiled confidently up at you, her face slightly distorted by the stretching of the bandage. You took a deep breath and rubbed your eyes before putting on a brave face. *They were right. You are a big girl*.

Your plain nails are now decorated in glittering, dizzying shades of pink, blue, purple. Bracelets and bangles jingle on your wrists, and you had squeezed as many rings as humanly possible onto your fingers. *You look ridiculous*, your sister piped up snidely. *It's fashion*, you sigh and roll your eyes. Your family just couldn't understand.

Soon, the glamour of your hands begins to matter less and less. Your nails are plain more often than not, worn and jagged from excessive chewing,

'You'll cause permanent damage if you keep doing that,' your mother warns. Buried beneath piles of assignments, tests and exams, you couldn't care less about the state of your nails. The callouses of your childhood have faded away, and new ones emerge in their place. One on the inside curve of your thumb, another by your index finger, the skin shiny and sore. Nowadays, your hands are rarely free of ink stains. You clench your fists to hide their shaking and nervously clutch your pencil case, footsteps shuffling and unsure as you walk into your final exam.

'Graduated with Honours' reads the scroll of paper clutched between your fingertips. You don't think life has ever felt this incredible.

The wedding band on your ring finger sends light glittering and dancing in all directions, shimmering with a lifetime's worth of promises. It's beautiful, perfect even, but nowhere near as perfect as the feeling of your fingers intertwined with his. Tanned, warm, calloused, his large palm cradles your own. He holds your heart, and you've never felt safer.

The frosty June air nips at your numb fingertips, and you absently remind yourself to add gloves to the weekly shopping list. Your fingers are clumsy in their half-frozen state, fumbling with the keys to the front door.

'Mum!' three small voices chorus, and all of a sudden you are swarmed by the tiny figures of your daughters, arms outstretched in embrace. Small fingers clutch your clothes,

and there is a tugging on your scarf as a tiny voice proclaims proudly ‘Mum, I made you another drawing’. You smile.

Your skin has become wrinkled, shrivelled. *Almost like old leather*, you observe detachedly. Veins bulge, and the slender, artistic fingertips that had earned you so many compliments in your youth appear to have vanished entirely, replaced by squat, rough digits. A plastic tube disappears into your wrist, one of many connected to your body. The wedding band is still there, the only comforting constancy amongst the strange newness of everything. Your tired senses haltingly examine and process the world around you. The ever-present bustle of doctors, the clinical, cool cleanliness of the bed sheets, the crinkle and rustle of the hospital gown.

The outline of your fingertips becomes blurry, wavering, and darkness gathers at the corners of your vision as the beeping of the heart rate monitor fills your ears. Around you, the frantic sounds of the doctors and nurses begin to fade away, and your ears strain to distinguish another sound. Warm laughter, a low timbre, with a slight breathy quality to it that you have grown to love over the years. You wonder how you lived for an entire decade without hearing that wondrous sound. A beloved voice calls your name, the syllables achingly familiar and well-worn on their lips. It sounds like home. The light finally dims, darkness rushing forward to take its place as a roaring, whooshing emptiness fills your ears. *Inhale*, your brain instructs your failing lungs and miraculously, they obey, drawing their first breath in so long that hadn’t been interrupted by a stinging, wheezing rasp. *Ironic that it’s your last*, the remnants of your conscience supply wryly. *Exhale*. Your hands relax, fingertips unfurling gently, palms facing the sky. It was a good life.



Home

By Zahra Shahriar

My home is people.

They're everywhere, walking, jogging, running, or even sprinting across the timeless asphalt. They're bumping into me, till now, I can feel their restless selves brushing across me with a '*Side please!*' in a beautiful broken English. So excited. Eagerness radiating from their every soul, they rush to wherever; their ever important jobs using up 80% of their lives, to their parties where every other family in the area was invited, to their families.

My home is architecture.

Historical buildings take me back in time. I walk through the alleyways of the Old City that sighs a hundred years of memory, I trace my fingers lightly along the crumbling brick walls. I see the longstanding home of my father and grandfather. A bigger one of my grandfather's grandfather, a bigger one of someone generations and generations before mine. Gleeful children flying their artwork during the Kite Festival. The main city contains buildings of utter vibrancy— there's music and colours along the hidden routes, silent music, laughing colours and a whispering magic; for anyone willing to find it.

My home is food.

It's the main buzz of the city, really. Starting with the bearded 60-something tea stall owners, sending you toothless grins as you compliment their tea, to the betel-stained smiles of the '*mamus*' serving you the best biriyani in the world, as you breathe in the ancient scent of a million years of heritage. Smirking at the portions served anywhere else in the world, we dig in to the rice, lentil, and fish like it's the first and last meal we'll ever get in forever. I still can taste the rice cakes served with the spiciest mustard and dried fish paste you'll ever eat, mixed with the hyperventilation of '*what-will-my-parents-say-if-they-catch-me-eating-unhealthy-street-food*'.

My home is religion.

The blowing of a conch welcomes me as I reach the colourful Temple. They chant to their Gods, palms pressed together, eyes closed. I stand outside in respect and smile,

watching them. When the *Puja* is over, they rush to me, adorn me with flowers, feed me delicious sweets despite me begging for no more, laughing at the pleasurable chaos. I cover my hair with my scarf, edging closer to the Masjid, my arms and feet still wet from *wudu*. I greet my fellow sisters as the enchanting *Adhaan* sounds, music to my ears. I close my eyes and step on the prayer mat. Soon we are done, and we sit and ask Allah for his mercy for our sins, thank him for the life we are granted. It is a peaceful, serene atmosphere.

My home is festivals.

The beating of drums. Singing. Dancing. The sounds of various glass bangles. The ruffles in *saris*. The silly masks. The bursts of red and white. The welcoming of a New Year. I walk in my sari carefully, adjusting it as I wave at a giggling little girl who waves back, her tiny face painted in a spectrum of colours. The atmosphere suddenly changes with a gasp of *Boishakhi* rain. It's nearly springtime, *Falgun*, and we welcome it with splashes of orange and vivacious yellow. We dance some more, sing some more. Birds chirp. Flowers bloom. The grass smells stunning.

Eid-ul-Fitr is wonderful. The new clothes, tasty food, family holding you tight. How the entire city empties the night before, we watch on TV as they hustle back to their houses. We take pictures of our henna decorated hands, bickering over whose design is nicer. Mandatory Eid selfies. Eid day, calling '*Eid Mubarak!*', after 30 days of fasting comes a celebration of a lifetime. Eid-ul-Azha marks sacrifice, reminds us that whatever comes from Allah, must go back to Him as well. It's a beautiful concept to remember.

Durga Puja is vibrant. I again wait patiently for their Puja to complete, smiling at the statue with 10 arms guarding 10 directions wearing the most beautiful sari and ornaments. There is so much food, I go home with a bright streak of vermilion *bindi* on my forehead. Holi is special. The kaleidoscopic colours that bring the city alive, promises, that the world of black and white *can* be diminished. Diwali is the festival of lights— fireworks and sky lanterns embed the night sky with some more stars.

My home is hard work.

Let's head towards the countryside for a bit. Lush green paddy fields and mustard fields shining with gold carry the footprints of hundreds of farmers, wiping the sweat off their foreheads with their worn out sleeves, planting a few more seeds and picking the



bounty off during harvest season. Silvery waves on the crystalline water, reddening with the setting sun, the water comfortable enough for the fisherman to catch fish to their heart's content, singing traditional *majhi* songs; all dedicated to put food on our plates. The village women sewing the ever gorgeous '*nakshi katha*', depicting their stories through needle and thread. The cowherds whistling to the cows, playing flutes under trees, towing his animals back to shelter at night. The students all over the country during exam time, nails biting, pens clattering, hums of the studying of their last minute revision and aiming for that A+.

My home is about sacrifice.

It's 1952. There is a hustle on the streets. There are whispers about how others wanted to influence another language onto us, thus signalling rebellion. No, we are not weak; yes, we will win. And we did. We invented a day dedicated to respecting one's mother tongue.

It's 1971. A war has begun. Young recruits from all over the nation have joined forces to drive the foreign leaders out of our country. Blood was lost. Mothers wept, clutching the lifeless bodies of their children close to their hearts as they breathed out final words of triumph. We won that battle as well. United, we are unbeatable.

My home is painful.

A lone girl with eyes full of dreams of fame, walks at night. She doesn't know he's behind her, hands rough, yellow teeth glistening, eyes filled with desire. She will make the headlines tomorrow, but can now never show her face to the world in shame. A man with only so much money to support his family of 6 and a sick 80 something year old mother rushes back home – his children haven't eaten all day. He is robbed, his wife breaks down in agony. A cafe, popular amongst the wealthy and even foreigners, becomes a warzone in a matter of seconds. Lives are lost, my people are blamed, tears are shed. Mothers becoming murderous to their own children. Politicians everywhere, sprouting out their own theories, muddling up right and wrong, propaganda flooding my newsfeed, democracy and justice forgotten.

But, my home is beautiful.

It's hectic, to stay alive in such a land. A land where there is constant heartbreak, a continuous fear in our minds. But amidst the suffering, there is hope I hold on to. My home has unity; it has a bond so strong that I feel the loss of it now from time to time, now being away from it.

My home ignites nostalgia.

Midnight drives through the city with my parents, the night sky illuminated with lights and stars.

Going to my grandmother's house miles and miles away; munching on chips that mum packed, through the sweltering heat and sitting in the traffic jam for hours.

Chatting with my cousins under the open air at the evenings, swatting at mosquitoes but marvelling at the blinking fireflies smiling in the dark.

Warm, summer rain. Drenching in the sweetness while eating sour, green mangoes.

Those never-ending winter weddings, a new dress every single time.

Exam season, us sweating bullets at whatever question thrown at us.

Parties with my friends.

My last day of school.

Leaving, and saying goodbye.

My home holds memories to last an eternity of lifetimes, the secrets that I shared with it hold a million more.

My home cradles me close, safe and protective, awaiting the day I return.

My home, is Dhaka.



Orphaned

By Anjali Bijukumar

I shivered as the harsh wind cut through me like a knife and large droplets of rain pelted down like bullets. Wistfully, I watched laughing children purchase hot snacks from stores and devour them in seconds. The smell of spices, sweets and savouries wafted in the air, aggravating my hunger and in despair I shrunk further back into my bed made from discarded newspapers. I curled into a ball, my numb hands buried in my tattered jacket as I slowly drifted off to sleep. When I woke up, the sun shone warmly on my face and wispy clouds adorned the blue sky. I got up and strolled around the busy market place scouring for food.

Life was different until a month ago. What was happening to me right now was something I didn't even visualise in my worst nightmares. I had loving and doting parents, a decent family home, good friends; all of that had vanished into thin air in seconds. My dad and mom, I can't believe that they are gone. How I fervently wish that this life I was leading now was a very bad dream.

While we packed for a trip to India, I was very excited. Escaping the harsh winter in London was an added incentive. My parents and I had an awesome time in the first two weeks of our vacation. In the third week of our trip, we went to Delhi, the capital city of India. We had an exciting time there exploring the city's rich heritage and feasting on scrumptious food from the restaurants. On a Friday, the day before we were to fly back to London, we went to a busy market place to buy some artefacts to take back home. During our shopping spree, we suddenly heard people shouting and screaming. We immediately sensed something was wrong and hurried off to the parking lot. Suddenly, a dozen men came running towards where we were. They were tall and muscular with a wild look on their faces. They had huge guns in their hands and with no provocation, they suddenly started firing shots at the crowd. Mom and Dad dragged me along as they ran. Blood curdling screams filled the air. Just as we reached the large metal gates leading to the exit, I heard deafening shots near me and I fell on the ground as both my parents collapsed on the ground with shots in their backs. I screamed in horror. My dad mouthed the word 'run' to me when I looked at his dying face. With one last look at my parents, I crawled out of the place.

India was a foreign country for me. My mom was an Indian by birth who migrated to UK during her university days where she had met my dad, an English native. They fell in love and got married. My connection with India was only through the stories my mom told me and the occasional visits from my maternal grandparents while they were alive. This was our first visit to mom's home country. I had turned twelve a month back and this trip was a gift for me to experience a part of my cultural background. My mom's relatives lived in Kerala, a state in South India with tropical climate and a multitude of beautiful beaches. They were very welcoming and kind to us. But in Dehli, I knew no one and didn't speak Hindi.

Everything else that happened on that horrible day was a blank page in my mind. All I remember is that I took refuge in an abandoned house that night and cried myself to sleep. I was all alone in the world, an orphan in a foreign country. Terror seized my entire spirit and I didn't even know how many days I spent in a dazed stupor.

Maya, the rich girl from London started begging in the Indian streets for food. Life on the streets was hundred times harder and dangerous than you ever read in books or movies. I befriended a group of beggar children who taught me the skills to stay safe in the streets. A good night's sleep was also a significant risk as there were people out there who prowled the night to abduct sleeping kids. Everyday as I begged in the streets with my new friends, I was treated like filth. Privileged children scoffed at us. I never realised until then that money was so important in this world. With no money, there was no guarantee of food, shelter or clothing. If I hadn't met these kids, I would have died, or someone might have killed me on the streets. I didn't want to eat or beg for food initially as all I wanted then was to die too. Without my parents, I didn't want to live in the cruel world. But the group of beggar kids I befriended took me under their wings and I became one of them. Even with the language barrier, they helped me a lot. They took me to a police station once to ask their help in getting me back to my country. But none of the police paid any attention to us and beat us for hanging around there. I had lost all hope by then that I would ever return to London. I started to adjust to my surroundings. Some days I ran errands to earn money like my friends, other days we begged. Illness was one of my worst nightmares and the harsh weather often caused other kids in our group to contract horrible diseases. Without the aid of shelter, food or medicine, even the common cold was proving to be deadly.



But my life changed for the better one fine day. One day I saw a group of English tourists outside a restaurant. I watched them and listened to their conversations in English, the language which was ingrained in me. An ache went through me and a sudden nostalgia for my home country coursed through my body. I remembered my parents and my life a few months back and tears started streaming down my face. Then suddenly, the security person standing in front of the restaurant started shooing me away. As I was not budging, he pushed me, and I fell on to the concrete road in a heap and my leg started bleeding. One of the ladies in the group let out a cry seeing the cruelty and came running towards me. She helped me get up and asked me if I was fine. When I replied in my good English accent, she appeared shocked. She called her friends over and they all started to speak to me at once. They asked me to follow them to their hotel.

Snuggled in cosy blankets in a posh hotel, sipping hot chocolate, I told the group of English tourists my story. I told them where the rest of my dad's family lived in England. Within hours, I was on the phone to my grandparents, who had thought I was also dead until then. They filled me in on all the details of how they came to know of my parents' death and how they were all enquiring on what happened to my dead body. They were over the moon that I was alive. Apparently, the UK embassy in India had flown my parents' bodies to England and they were given a proper burial.

Sarah, one of the ladies in the group became my guardian till my grandparents arrived in India. There were many official formalities to be taken care of before I could fly back to London. When I finally boarded the flight for London, I slumped on my seat with relief imagining the horrible life that I so narrowly escaped. The death of my parents weighed heavily on my soul. As we drove towards my grandparents' home from Heathrow airport, I took in my surroundings and felt hopeful for the first time in many months. I was going to begin a new chapter of my life. As I had experienced the harsh living conditions of a beggar, I vowed to myself that I would never take for granted the life that I have. Before leaving India, with the help of my grandparents, I enrolled my street friends to a reputed orphanage and contributed a good sum of money for their welfare. I would never ever forget the strong little people who helped me survive those horrible days. There was a talk of someone planning to make a movie on my experiences. If that happens and I become rich, I will go back again to India and start an orphanage myself. There is nothing worse in this world than feeling alone and I would do my share in helping those who are truly alone.

Emotions

By Senaya Pimburage

Emotions flow in our heart everyday,
Happiness chases our sorrow away...
Relief twinkles and excitement glows,
Like a river, emotion flows...
Anger is drowned by calmness and love
Fear and dismay does bravery shove...
Grief is covered in a blanket of joy
Emotions make our life enjoy...
All these feelings fill our lives,
With the bad feelings sharp as knives...
The good feelings conquer the bad
Because of that, we should all be glad.
But deep in our hearts, there's a black hole,
That drills bad thoughts into our soul...
Defeat that emotion if you are smart...
For there lurks disappointment,
Which darkens every heart...



A Father's Wishes

By Kelsea Thomson

The game of life was truly cruel.

'Hey, Dad. It's game over.' She stared down at the embedded gravestone, the gentle wind ruffling her brown locks. The sky was a pale lilac and pink, not a cloud in sight as the sun slowly sunk behind the horizon.

She smiled sadly. 'How have you been?'

She knew she wouldn't receive an answer, but the tears still welled up in her dark blue eyes. She placed the dark yellow carnations in front of the head, running her fingers over the engraved words. 'It's Father's Day today, and my friends all bought fancy gifts for their dads,' she whispered, stroking the stone. 'Jessica got a nice mug. Kayla even bought a crocodile-skin journal.'

She looked over her shoulder, her eyes skimming over the seemingly endless gravestones, but the lack of other people comforted her.

Her sad eyes found her father's grave once more, and she sat in front of it, crossing her legs over the grass. 'Mum didn't come out of your room. She didn't want me to hear, but I heard her crying.' She shrugged on her coat tighter. 'I would have gotten you something nicer for Father's Day, but I know you like carnations best.'

She thought back to the smiling faces of her friends as they purchased their gifts, laughing and joking around as she glanced around the store. They hadn't seemed to notice her mood, but she didn't mind. 'Kayla, does this make me look fat?' Jessica asked, as she tightened the green coat around her shoulders and looked through the mirror to her red-headed friend.

She frowned slightly, not understanding her friend's careless comments. The trio of friends had been shopping for Father's Day presents and they had stopped at many different stores before finally buying anything for their parents.

'God yes, definitely don't buy that,' Kayla shrieked, batting away the fabric, before her eyes fell onto a purple top. 'Ooh, I will have to try that on.' When Kayla appeared once more, ready wearing purple lipstick and fake eyelashes, she had to admit it looked good. The purple top was shoulder-less and clung to her skin. But she couldn't bring herself to encourage her friend. 'Uh Kayla, come on you can honestly consider choosing to wear that

really?' Jess scoffed, snickering quietly as she eyed a mug on the store's shelving. 'I think I will just buy something for Dad like that old mug, but it's not like I actually want to spend money on him, Dad's family oath is money doesn't grow on trees.'

Her two friends went off to look around, giggling, as she stayed where she sat. She knew it was a joke, but it wasn't funny. She knew she would give any amount of money just to see her father one more time, but the chance had long gone. Staring at the white mug that held a heart and the words 'Number #1 Dad', she stood up and walked towards it. If she couldn't have her father, then she would at least have made sure Jess' father would be happy with his daughter's thoughtfulness.

Despite her blonde friend's hesitation to buy the cheaply priced mug, she purchased it and hurried out of the store to see her two friends talking with a boy around their age. 'Jess,' she mumbled, holding out the mug, 'I bought it to give to your dad. Don't bother returning it.'

The blonde looked at her suspiciously, 'What about your dad? You could just give the gross little thing to him.'

'Uh- I have already got him something,' she replied reassuringly, stuffing the mug into her friend's cream bag. Jessica flipped her blond straight hair over her shoulder before shrugging and strutting down the hall, her noisy high high-heals clapping loudly on the shiny floor.

'I don't want to tell them. You know, that you are forever at peace resting underground,' she spoke softly to the stone. 'They don't ask about you much anyway.'

She sighed, picking up a small pebble and tossing it in the air before putting it back. Her hands grasped and fumbled feeling the small pebble, anything to remove the useless feeling of emptiness on the inside and feeling nothing on the outside. She wanted to hug him, tell him that she loved him, to feel his unshaven beard as he kissed her forehead goodnight. But she never would again.

'They had asked me what I had gotten you, later,' she continued, her fingers grazing over the other flowers that sat around his grave. 'I said that I had gotten you your favourite, the yellow carnations, and they laughed at me. But I couldn't bring myself to tell them about you.' She shut her eyes as tears welled up in her eyes.

'I miss you, Dad.' She let out a choked sob. 'I really, really miss you.'



Her pillow was already soaked in tears when her father walked in. His hair looked roused from laying in his bedroom, and his eyes were slightly bloodshot. 'What's wrong, honey-bee?' he whispered, sitting on the end of her bed and grabbing her hand.

He squeezed it tightly as she responded, 'I'm sorry for waking you up so early. But it doesn't matter, it is not that important.' She sniffed, turning over her pillow to the dry side, and shrugging deeper into her covers.

'Just because it is something that is not as bad as war and death, that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, honey-bee.'

She turned her head to look up at her father, her teary eyes brimming with more tears.

'He broke up with me. I loved him... and I thought he loved me too,' she explained quietly, hiccupping softly between words. 'He called me an awfully hurtful name and walked off.'

He cupped her chin and made her look up at him.

'Honey-bee, your mother did not spend nine months making you and growing your heart inside her to have it broken in a few hours,' he whispered, but a fierce intensity was evident in his dark blue eyes. 'And if he broke up with you that way, then he never deserved you anyway. You are truly amazing, very beautiful and the strongest person I have ever known.'

She flung her arms around her father, weeping softly. He repeated the action, holding his daughter close. 'Am I allowed to go ahead and shoot him yet where it hurts, or do I have to wait a specific amount of time before that's allowed, I am asking for your permission. Because I will not let an inconsiderate juvenile boy ever hurt my little thirteen-year-old honey-bee,' he asked, curiosity actually hidden in his voice.

She giggled quietly, despite herself. 'Dad, you'd get arrested!'

'I'd get arrested for you a thousand times, honey-bee, and would never once regret it.'

'Mum says I'm not supposed to visit you, but I had to.' She smiled softly, closing her eyes and breathing in deeply. 'She says it isn't good for my mental state.'

The sun sunk deeper and deeper under the horizon, as night-time settled in around the graveyard. 'I can't really blame her though, she misses you just like I do,' she shrugged.

'Do you remember that time in the hospital? When I wanted you to hold onto my hand and say that you would make it? I couldn't see it a year ago, but I can remember it now.'

'The desperate look in your eyes, that expressed emotions you didn't want to show me, because you were being you, staying in control and keeping charge of your feelings and emotions. I couldn't see that the one thing you wanted was for your pain to all be over. You wanted freedom, and I wasn't willing to give it to you. I'm sorry for that, Dad. I didn't mean to cause you more pain than what had already been given.'

Dad had died later that day. A harsh leukemia, that had affected him for years. She was too young and naive to notice the colour fading out of her father's eyes, his gradually shallower fading skin, and the dramatic change he made as he visually lost too much weight. It had happened so quickly. Her father collapsing suddenly, in a still moment of time, then the rush of ambulances and her mother sobbing hysterically. She didn't understand what had happened.

She didn't understand that the last words her father would hear would be those she said at the hospital. The last words that he would ever hear again.

'Dad? Don't die just yet. Mum and I love you and we want you to come home What about our game? Dad?' Her father had fallen into a sleep he would never wake up from again.

It was then she had understood. She knew her father had died. Through desperate tears and screams, the doctors rushed in to try and restart his heart. She remembered having to be pulled back, wanting to be at her father's side, but not being allowed. They never got his heart to beat again.

'So, Dad, this is me. Mum is gone, a shell of the person she used to be before. And I? I want the depression to end. I want the constant pitiful looks from people who knew you to cease, and I no longer want to cry myself to sleep and expect you to come into my room and comfort me like you did a year ago. I have never forgotten that, Dad. I never would be able to,' she whispered, clutching the knife close to her chest. 'This is my goodbye, the one only you would get to hear.'

She dreamt she could be happy. She hoped her father could come back. She wished that she didn't feel the guilt of causing her father's death. She prayed that she would see him again.



But he also wished, hidden behind the thick bracken in the bushes and invisible to humans, that she saw him. He wished that she could hear his echoing screams as she shoved the knife into her heart. He wished she could see him crumple to the ground, sobbing as he watched his daughter die alone.

The sun finally sank behind the horizon, as the sky turned dark. The body lay, a motionless figure gazing upwards to the clouds next to her father's grave, fingers holding onto the knife. Blood stained her black hoodie and her scarred legs were evident from underneath the material of her shorts. The dark circles under her eyes were visible as her silent tears washed away the makeup, and her sickly pale skin shone iridescently underneath the rising moon.

And now it was truly game over.

Father

By Lucinda Worthing-Shore

even now he haunts me
a ghostly memory refusing to fade
he is trapped, he cannot escape the seas
in my imagination where he continues to wade

maybe i cannot escape him
possibly i myself am trapped inside my mind
in my own nightmare that will not dim,
he is creeping, lurking, waiting from behind

he will not drown in my tears
for they are nothing against his rough skin
his skin with the lines of words and fears
permanent words that mean i belong to him

glassy eyes and rosy cheeks
years on end i feel the same
of cigarettes would he reek
but now i refuse to call him dad and call him by his name

does he remember me saying no?
i wonder how he felt
when his daughter said she didn't want to go
did my hatred make his melt?

when will you leave, dear father?
i hope you know that i hate you
i ask myself; if my father is a monster
am i a monster too?



I Deserve It

By Olyvia Khaw

Now I'm scared.

Terrified.

I've been running for 2 hours non-stop and my burning, heaving lungs can't take it anymore. My legs that I haven't really used much for the last 5 years are so tired and out of energy I'm afraid that they might drop off any moment. But I can't stop. No way.

They might catch me.

Flashback:

'Papa, why can't I have those roller skates that everybody else has?' I questioned, while poking at the glass in the department store.

'Not now, honey.'

Ugh, that was always the reply. There was never an explanation. Or an apology. I rolled my eyes. It wasn't fair. Everyone in my class had at least one pair of roller skates. It didn't matter what colour or style. White, red, jewelled, low cut. I just wanted a pair. I wanted to fit in. It didn't want to be that kid, every Thursday afternoon, that never joined in on skating competitions and evening fun because I couldn't afford to buy those skates.

Present Time:

Now I'm annoyed.

At myself.

If only I didn't have such an ungrateful attitude towards life. Everything would've changed. If only I had kept my big mouth shut and not started the same argument that had been happening for the past 3 weeks. About how I never get anything I want, which is not true, and how no one ever gives an explanation as to why, which is also once again not true.

The searing sun was shining directly on my face. Not that it mattered anymore. I just had to keep running.

Flashback:

'Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear Monique, happy birthday to you.' Papa enthusiastically sang to me as he presented me with a box wrapped in a used pink polka dot wrapper. 'Surprise!'

I gasped. I don't think I have ever been so astonished in my life. The first thing that surprised me was the present. I almost never receive any big or major presents, let alone in a big box, only mini cardboard messages. The other thing was the wrapper. Yes, it was old and worn. But still, though. Probably the first time I've seen such a pretty one. I didn't hesitate to attack the present. Layers and layers of the wrapper, falling to the ground. I guess what I saw next shocked me.

'Oh my goodness! Papa! You didn't have to...!' I screamed with excitement.

I couldn't really focus on anything else right then. Not even Papa asking me if I liked it or not. As my vision started fogging up and tears began to fall right in the corner of my eye, I saw it. Lying between sheets of thin, translucent paper, was a brand new pair of roller skates.

Present Time:

That was probably the most amazing part of my 13 years of life. Now I could see why I had to be patient. Nothing ever comes easy in life... right? I didn't want to care about anything else, the only thing I wanted to do at that moment was test them out.

However, under all the excitement there were other thoughts, more deep and dark, like negativitiy swirling through all the laughter and joy. The thoughts that would change everything.

Flashback:

'Goodnight, Papa! Thanks for the present!' My voice echoed down the hall. My legs were tired from spending 3 solid hours in the hot sun practising on the roller skates. I could finally show everyone in my class that I wasn't a loner, I had a pair of roller skates and that I wasn't that kid that was always left out. I slowly fell asleep, peacefully.

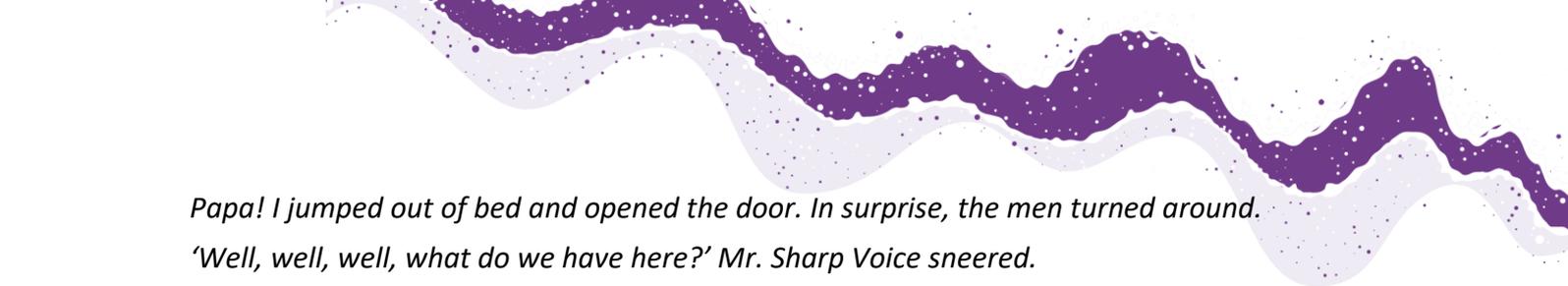
I woke to some men having a heated argument just outside my door. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but I could tell there were two men yelling at Papa.

'Is he the guy that took it?' a voice in the darkness asked.

'Yes, it is him. I remember the brown cardigan and the black boots!' another voice, slightly accented, replied.

'Well, is it you?' the sharp voice yelled.

'No! How could you say such a preposterous thing!' Papa screamed.



Papa! I jumped out of bed and opened the door. In surprise, the men turned around.

'Well, well, well, what do we have here?' Mr. Sharp Voice sneered.

'What's going on? Who are these people, Papa?' I frightfully looked at him. What was happening? I was so confused, tired and annoyed. Why can't I just sleep in peace?

'Well,' Mr. Accented Voice explained, 'it seems that your lovely papa over here stole a pair of brand new roller skates today at 7:27 in the morning, shortly before the store opened.'

Stole?

That word endlessly echoed in my head. Stole? Papa wouldn't do such a thing! He is the most kindest and caring person you will ever meet.

'So therefore, there will be consequences for the actions of deliberate theft, including serving time in the army, jail for 6 years or...' Mr. Sharp Voice continued on, giving off a really bad vibe about the whole thing. The other guy elbowed him in the ribs. I glanced at my aging father who, hiding in the shadows, gave me a pleading look.

So he did. He stole those brand new roller skates. Just for me. For my joy and happiness and wanting to fit in. For my unnecessary selfish needs and stubborn attitude. For me. Not for him, it didn't help him in any way at all. It was all for me. And I had to do something about it. 'No.' I calmly said.

'What?' Mr. Sharp Voice snapped, annoyed.

Present Time:

I gasp as I struggle to hold back the flowing ears. They could fill the oceans. Did I really turn into that selfish, unwanted person?

My Papa.

No.

The tears must wait. The ocean can dry up. But Papa can't.

Flashback:

'Well, aren't you going to escort me to the prison?' I asked cautiously.

'Hmm... it seems as though you're too young for this,' Mr. Accented Voice read from his papers.

'It's either your Papa serves time... OR you get...'

'NO! NOT THE DEATH SENTENCE!' Papa screamed at them. 'NO, NO, NO!'

'Yes, yes, yes.' Both the men smiled.

At that moment, I realised how careful I had to be. These men were not to be reckoned with and one wrong move meant punishment. Severe. I quickly grabbed the pair of roller skates and ran for the door.

'Hey! You! Get back here!'

I hesitated for a moment but then saw Papa's face: scared, panicky and most importantly, the look of understanding. He knew what I was doing. He nodded and then said, 'Bye, bye my darling Monique! I shall see you again, whether sooner or later, I shall!'

Present Time:

So here I am. Running away from a corrupt police officer who wouldn't let me have all the consequences that I deserved and the shop owner who couldn't cut my father some slack.

And it's all my fault.

All of it.

And I don't know how long I'll be running or if I'll just be a wanted criminal or maybe, just maybe, a little luck might come my way and save me, but I know I deserve this. In fact, no. I don't deserve luck. Someone else does.

That little piece of luck needs to save my Papa.

It needs to do it quick.



An Ode To Ice-Cream

By Ava Pretorius

You are as cold and icy
as the ocean

All your different flavours
make me weak at the knees

You melt on my mouth like
the sun melts the snow

Oh Ice-cream what would
I do without you

Ode to Water

By Ethan London

Oh water, oh water!
You have many uses, so necessary.
When I am hurt, I preciously pour you on my wound.
Without you, life is dreary.

To me you are most wondrous,
With a taste as fresh as a newly plucked peach.
Your rain can be most thunderous,
Like waves crashing on a beach.

When I feel thirsty and vulnerable,
I drink you and am satisfied.
My strength becomes unimaginable,
Even though your powerful rain drenches me.

Unlike the scorching, humid sun,
I am refreshingly cooled by you.
When swimming in a pool for fun,
I know what I can do.

Water you are my most trusted friend,
Extremely clear as crystal.
Your uses will never end,
Even once you turn to ice.



The Stone Seekers

By Jacob Burfoot

1

The boy woke up, gasping for air. He was in a dark room, void of any light. The bed where he lay wasn't his bed. Sure, it was nice, but that wasn't the point. He was scared. The boy had no idea how he got there. The air was stale, like a sterile hospital. At the end of a corridor there was a steel door with no features at all. The boy got up out of bed and walked towards the metal door. It loomed over him. He put his ear to it. 'Matt'... The boy reeled back. He remembered. His name was Matt. He pushed it open.

The scene of a beach with two other children on an island greeted him. They were on the other side of a body of water. Matt took a step into the water. A horrible chill ran down his spine. He took another step. And another. He was almost on the other side. Then the ground began to break beneath him. Suddenly, it opened up beneath him and the last thing he remembered was the sense of falling....

Matt woke up in his *real* bed, taking in shallow breaths. The sound of the fire crackling in the orphanage calmed him. Matt's parents were killed in a freak plane accident over the Bermuda triangle. He didn't like talking or thinking about his parents' mysterious deaths.

'Can't sleep?' Xavier asked from the bunk above him.

'Bad dream,' Matt answered.

'Get back to sleep,' Xavier told him.

And that's exactly what Matt did.

2

He's back at the door again, but this time he's more prepared. He shoves it open and walks through. As Matt expected, the mystery children were still there. He takes his first step into the water and he feels the air thinning around him. He continues towards the kids on the other side. Again, Matt feels the ground cracking beneath him. Matt bolts for the other side and one of the mystery children notices him and starts to run towards him. Matt is going to make it. But just as he has this thought, he slips and falls. He scrabbles for ground but finds no purchase. He is once again overcome by the sense of falling, until the mystery

boy catches him. He hauls him over the edge. Matt kneels on the ground, inhaling oxygen, when he notices something about the mystery kid that he should have noticed earlier.

'Thanks Xavier,' Matt says. 'Why are we here?' He opens his mouth to speak, but before he can answer, a sudden darkness washes over the two of them and sweeps them from the dream world like the wind playing with a leaf.

Matt wakes up in his bed again, half confused, half annoyed.

'Why was Xavier in my dream?' Matt asks himself.

He is annoyed that the dream had ended so abruptly. Xavier seemed to have woken up at the same time as him. He looked at him with a look Matt had never seen on his face before. *Confusion.*

That was when Matt knew that it was no ordinary dream. Xavier's look told him that.

3

It was morning again. Time seemed to pass quicker in the real world.

Mr. Wammy, the founder of the orphanage walked into the room.

He was a decent man and never lost his temper. He had become like a father to Matt.

'Xavier, Matt, we have a new child joining us and I would like you to make him feel welcome. He transferred from our New South Wales branch,' Mr. Wammy explained.

As if on cue, there was a knock on the heavy doors of the orphanage. 'Ah, that must be them now.'

He walked to the door made of wood that looked like it belonged on antique furniture.

The door creaked as it opened, and Xavier and Matt saw a relatively tall boy with fair hair looking at them. A man with a greying beard and hair accompanied him.

Matt and Xavier looked at the boy in shock. It wasn't because he was as tall as Mr. Wammy (who was quite tall for his age), it was because he was the boy from Xavier and Matt's dream.

'Greetings, Mr. Wammy. My name is Johan Skiter. You two must be the friends that Thomas here mentioned.'

The three boys locked eyes with each other and they knew that they were meant to meet.



They began by showing the new boy around the orphanage - *'This is the kitchen...'*, that sort of thing. Thomas didn't talk much, but he seemed nice enough, laughing at their jokes and all that. When Matt went to bed that night, he hoped he would have the same dream that he had last night.

4

It's the metal door again, and Matt is almost happy. He wants to talk to Xavier and Thomas.

He pushes it open with confidence, and he's back at the beach. He steps into the water for the third time. But there is no cracking ground, no dark wind to sweep them away. He spots Thomas and Xavier on the island. They wave to him. Matt takes some time to examine the place. The beautiful clear blue water that he paid no attention to on his last two visits. He walks up to Xavier and Thomas and they smile. They wanted to have a closer look at this place as much as he did, but just when they thought they were safe, the ground once again began to crack. Matt groaned. Not this again! The ground broke, but there was no dark, endless hole for them to fall down. Instead, it was a cave with solid ground. Well, it looked solid. Xavier gives them a look, and then says, 'Shall we go?'

Matt and Thomas nod their heads. They each jump down, Matt first, then Thomas and finally Xavier.

The cave is pitch dark, and they don't have any lights. 'Damn!' says Thomas as he stares at the cave they must navigate in the dark. Matt sees him looking around and has a brainwave. 'Well, this is our dream. Maybe we can control it somehow,' Matt says. A bright light appears in his hand.

'Awesome,' Thomas breathed.

'How did you do that?' Xavier asks.

'Just imagine it,' Matt tells him. Two more flickering lights appear alongside Matt's.

'Cool!' Xavier exclaimed.

They continue along the once dark cave, the lights in their hands creating shadows on the walls, making the cave seem very eerie. They arrive in a room that had been carved out of the rock cave. It seemed so perfect. The walls were impossibly smooth, like someone had used sandpaper on them. In the centre of the room, a large crystal sat on a pedestal, hovering in the air. Thomas drew a breath in awe.

'What is it?' Xavier asked.

'Don't know,' said Matt, 'but I'm finding out.' Matt walked up to the crystal and put his hand to it. It immediately started glowing red hot. Matt drew his hand away from the crystal.

'That's hot!' Matt exclaimed. The crystal shattered, sending chunks of white hot rock around the room. Where the crystal once was, a beige book formed on the pedestal.

'Hey, I know that book!' Thomas shouted. 'It's in the bag I brought with me! I was never able to open it though. It was like the pages had been glued shut.'

Matt and Xavier stared at him in amazement. The next thing they know, they are sucked out of the dream world and they're waking up in bed.

5

'That was some dream,' Matt hears Xavier mumble to him and Thomas.

'Where is this book anyway?' Matt asks Thomas.

'In my bag. But I can't open it'.

Thomas takes out the book and hands it to Xavier. *'Give it your best shot,'* Thomas says.

Xavier tries to open it. He fails. He tries harder. He fails. He tries his hardest. What do you suppose happens? Yep. He fails.

'Man, you're right. It is like its been glued up,' Xavier gasps.

'Let me try,' Matt says.

'Sure, go ahead.' Xavier tosses the book to Matt. He grasps the pages and the book opens.

'Huh?' Xavier and Thomas say in unison. Matt scans the first page. A red gem with gold veins coursing through it is on the first page.

'That's the gem from our dream, isn't it?' Thomas asks.

'Sure is. But the one in the dream didn't have those gold veins.'

Matt turns the page, and a bunch of photos spill onto the floor.

'These are flight records for my parents' flight.' He looks at the records and something clicks inside his head. Shock.

'Xavier, you were learning to fly a plane before your parents died, weren't you?' Matt asks him.



‘Yeah,’ he answers. ‘It has the readings of all the flight instruments here. Is there anything wrong with them?’ Xavier must have noticed the same thing as Matt, because his eyes light up with shock.

‘No. All the instruments have the right readings. But they only show them right before the crash, which means that whatever caused the crash fried all the instruments. Which subsequently means...’ he drew a breath, ‘...a bomb. Or some other kind of attack on the plane’.

‘What about a lightning strike or something?’ Thomas asks.

‘Wouldn't cause that kind of damage. A lightning strike wouldn't damage the plane because of the metal body. It would just disperse around the plane.’

‘So, it was a terrorist attack,’ Matt mumbles.

6

Johan Skiter entered the room. He was wearing a fancy shirt and appeared to have shaved some of his beard off.

‘Why shave the beard?’ Thomas asked him.

‘Because I felt like it,’ The man joked. ‘Sorry to bother you boys. Looks like you're getting along well. Just want to have a quick chat.’

Matt noticed the man looking at the open book on the floor. Matt may have imagined it, but a flash of surprise crossed the old man face.

‘You opened the book...’ he said. He regained his composure and began to talk. ‘I'm sure you already know that you're... different. You're the chosen ones to acquire and protect the legendary Philosopher's Stone.’

‘You mean like Harry Potter?’ Thomas asked.

‘The Philosopher's Stone was only an inspiration for that story,’ explained Mr Skiter ‘It is known by many names: Philosopher's Stone, Celestial Rock, Red Elixir, and many more. It was rumoured to be able to turn rocks into gold, grant eternal life and make dreams reality. Alchemists, people who tried to turn matter into other forms sought out the Philosopher's Stone. It has become a legend and is represented by the colour crimson.’

That crystal from the dream... Matt thinks to himself.

‘Get to the point,’ Thomas says. He seems to have grown more outspoken since they first met, which was only yesterday.

‘Matt, your parents were on the plane that crashed, correct?’

‘Yeah, your point being?’ he answers.

‘It was believed that your parents were the possessors of the true Philosopher’s Stone. The plane crash that killed them wasn’t a terror attack.’ He drew a deep breath and a hacking cough emerged from his throat. He took a handkerchief out his pocket. ‘It was an attack by the stone seekers. It is highly likely that they have possession of the stone now,’ he explained. ‘We’re heading there now. I have a plane to take us most of the way and a boat to get us near the crash site,’ he continued.

‘Mr. Wammy can come too, right?’ Xavier asked.

The man smiled. ‘Of course, he can’.

7

The flight was relatively uneventful, apart from when Xavier drew a moustache on Thomas when he was asleep. Thomas cracked up laughing. It was only then that he realised he hadn’t laughed much since his parents died. He sighed at the thought.

They landed on top of a massive ship on the ocean. ‘Do you own all of this?’ Thomas asked.

‘Let’s just say I have some rich and powerful friends,’ Mr. Skiter joked.

Matt, Xavier and Thomas got to share one of the massive rooms on the gargantuan ship. Johan walked in and explained that they might experience some winds.

‘The Bermuda triangle has strange air currents. They cause massive waves and that’s why we can’t get any closer. You boys are going to need to get dressed into diving suits so we can explore down there.’

A few minutes later, they were ready to leave.

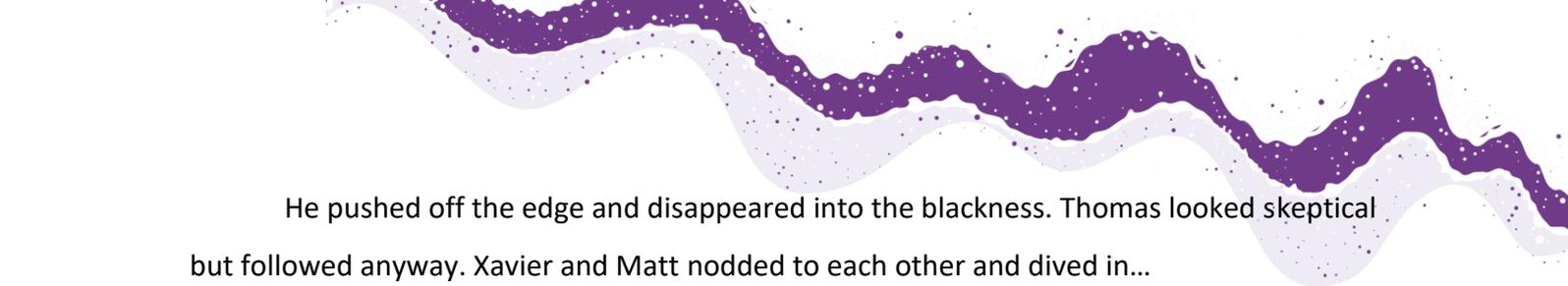
They walked to the starboard side of the boat and Mr. Wammy told them the basics of diving, like how to push off the edge and the art of equalising.

Matt noticed Thomas was shivering. ‘What’s wrong?’ he asked the boy.

‘I don’t like the water. My parents drowned in it’.

‘Don’t worry. We’ve got good diving gear. What’s the worst that can happen?’ Matt meant to cheer the boy up but he didn’t look any better.

Mr. Wammy spoke up. ‘I’ll go in first, then you three follow me. There’s a communicator inside the helmet. Use it to communicate if we get separated.’



He pushed off the edge and disappeared into the blackness. Thomas looked skeptical but followed anyway. Xavier and Matt nodded to each other and dived in...

8

Black.

Everything is black. Matt, Xavier and Thomas regroup and meet up with Mr. Wammy. The salty water is cold as ice. Out of the corner of his eye, Matt notices Thomas seems to be having trouble. Has his fear of water caught up with him? No, it wasn't that. The hose to his air tank has snapped. Matt kicks over to him as fast as he can. Not sure what to do, he takes his regulator out of his mouth and plunges it into Thomas', but now Matt is drowning. His foot catches on something on the floor and he kicks hard to try to get away from it. But then he realises it isn't part of the ocean floor. It is made of metal. And it is a door. He heaves at the handle and it finally pops open. He swims inside and discovers the door is an airlock. Who would need an airlock all the way out here? He asked himself. Thomas follows him and he contacts Xavier and Mr. Wammy. They swim over to the airlock hatch and get in. As the water drains out, Matt asks them who would need something like this in the first place.

'My guess is the stone seekers. They probably wanted to be close to the plane crash site for some reason'.

The four of them made their way through the silent corridors of the mysterious complex. It was incredibly still.

'Looks abandoned.' Matt commented.

'Hey! There's a map here!' Xavier said.

'Control room's up there'. Thomas pointed to the centre of the map.

'It's not far from here. Come on, let's go,' Matt replied.

They travelled towards the control room without issue. They even found time to look out of the windows overlooking the sea. 'Whoa, it's like an aquarium!' Thomas said in awe.

A few minutes later they arrived in the control room. There was a chair and a woman was sitting in it. She didn't seem to acknowledge the newcomers' arrival. Lights blinked and flashed around the room. Security cameras were trained on areas of the complex and one was trained on the control room. The woman spoke up.

'I've been expecting you,' she said. She had a throaty voice, like she was sick. She got up out of the chair and turned towards them.

'You three are necessary for the resurrection. You are the sacrifices for the Devourer to finally enter this reality!'

'Wait... sacrifices?!' Xavier shouts at the woman.

She didn't seem to be listening. She droned on. 'With the Philosopher's Stone in my possession I can finally restore him to full power!'

She stared at Mr. Wammy. 'But you are not needed.' She drew a pistol from a holster on her belt and shot the old man twice in the head and four times in the chest. Matt was speechless. Mr. Wammy, the man who had given him a home for most of his life. Mr. Wammy, the man who had looked after him, who cooked his meals, who had put a roof over his and his best friend's heads. He started crying.

'Get up, boy!' the woman shouted at him. A brutal, overwhelming rage overcame him. With a ferocious roar, he charged at the woman and slammed her into the wall with tumultuous force. With all the savagery he could muster he screamed. **'What's wrong with you!?!? You murder a man and think that it's just any old thing, huh? Answer me!'** he spat.

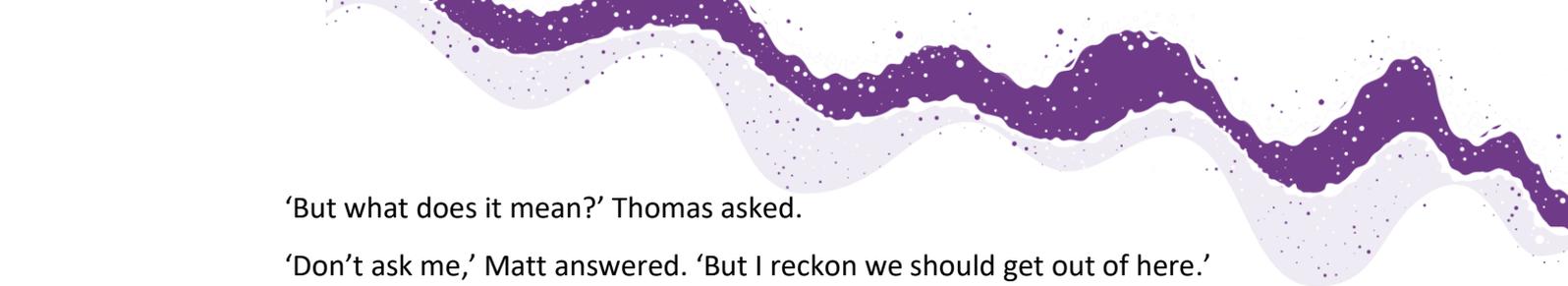
'Enough, Matt,' Xavier said, tear marks streaking from his eyes. 'She's dead.'

Matt dropped to the floor, let go of the body and watched it fall. He'd killed someone. He'd actually killed someone. He knew it would haunt him for the rest of his life, even if it was someone as evil as that.

'Come on, get up. We've got a stone to find.' Still shaken from the experience, he got up and started walking. 'He was a good man,' Xavier said.

They reached the back of the massive control room and saw a crystal floating on a pedestal. It was the same crystal from the dream: *The Philosopher's Stone*. Xavier and Thomas nodded to him. He walked up to the pedestal and touched the crystal. Just like in the dream, it grew hot and shattered. But this time, instead of scattering across the room, pieces of the stone flew towards the trio and imbedded themselves in Matt, Xavier and Thomas's arms. Xavier was knocked back against the wall, and Matt and Thomas fell over with the force of the impact. The pieces of the stone vanished inside their arms and began to glow a deep crimson beneath their skin. They stared at the pieces in awe.

'Cool,' Xavier breathed.



‘But what does it mean?’ Thomas asked.

‘Don’t ask me,’ Matt answered. ‘But I reckon we should get out of here.’

‘Sure thing,’ said Thomas and Xavier in unison. They ran through the corridors of the evil building, wishing to leave all memories of it behind. But they stopped dead in their tracks when an inhuman screech filled the air.

‘What was that?’ Xavier asked, covering his ears.

‘Something I think we should run away from!’ exclaimed Matt.

So they did. They reached the exit of the building only to find a shocking sight.

‘What the hell happened to the ocean?’ Xavier shouted. The entire ocean had been drained. Another screech filled the air.

‘That’s what happened,’ Matt answered. A massive creature was rising out of the ocean.

‘No, it *is* the ocean,’ Matt thought to himself.

The creature spotted them and threw a massive fist at the three boys.

‘Take cover!’ Matt yelled. They dived to the left, barely avoiding the doom that would have befallen all of them if they had been a second later.

‘Wait! Remember what Johan told us about the stone?’

‘No,’ Xavier answered.

‘He said it can make dreams a reality. Remember what we did in that cave back in the dream?’

Xavier and Thomas’s eyes lit up. Matt focused hard and summoned a ball of flame into his hand and hurled it at the beast. It was extinguished immediately.

‘Don’t be stupid! That thing’s made of water. Fire won’t work.’

Xavier placed his hands on the ground and a massive fist leapt up from the seabed. It passed right through the monster.

‘Let me try,’ Thomas said.

Jets of water shot up from the ground and slammed into the body of the beast, but it only made things worse. The creature seemed to get bigger as the water jets hit it. The monster roared and sent one of his gargantuan fists right at Matt. He jumped out of the way, but he was too late. The fist sent his body cartwheeling through the air and into the side of the building...

Matt is back at the door again. He pushes it open and finds himself at the beach again. But there is no Xavier. No Thomas. He walks over to the cave where he, Xavier and Thomas first found the Philosopher's Stone. The pedestal is gone, replaced by a stone tablet. It is written in a language Matt has never seen before, but he can read it all the same. Matt gets up. He has renewed strength from the tablet. He's ready to leave. The wind sweeps through and Matt returns to the real world...

Matt wakes up. He has a plan. Xavier and Thomas are still fighting the monster. Matt runs over to them. They're covered in scratches and cuts. But they're still fighting. They stare at him in disbelief. 'You're... you're alive!' Xavier shouts. The commotion caused by the monster is almost forgotten.

'I have a plan,' Matt tells them. 'Xavier, I need some fire.'

'But fire doesn't work on it,' Xavier says skeptically.

'Just do it!' Matt orders. Xavier sighs and throws two balls of flame at the creature.

As before, they are put out immediately.

'There, are you happy?' he says with an annoyed look on his face.

'That's good. Thomas, some water in the sky,' He looks confused but does it anyway.

'Now it's my turn,' Matt says. His hands begin to glow an electric, crackling white. He shoots the beam of energy into the sky. The realisation dawns on Thomas and Xavier as they begin to understand Matt's plan. He explains to them:

'That thing's made of water, right? Xavier, your fire evaporated some of it and some of Thomas's water. Rising steam becomes rainclouds and then...' he looks to the sky. The cloud created by Xavier and Thomas is hanging in the air, charged with electricity. A blinding flash of light shoots down from the cloud and strikes the monster in the back. It roars in agony and begins to lose shape. It splashes over the seabed and fills the ocean up once again.

'...a thundercloud is created,' Matt finishes.

The crisis averted, Matt calls Johan with the communicator and asks him to pick them up.

Johan's crackly voice emerged from the communicator.



‘You wouldn’t believe this. We were heading out of the danger zone and the ocean starts to vanish. The ship had nothing to float on, and we were on our side for a while, but now the water’s back. Weird, huh?’

The three boys look at each other sheepishly.

Epilogue

Matt, Xavier and Thomas return home to the orphanage. Johan becomes the new manager of the orphanage and a memorial is set up in honour of Mr. Wammy. Everything may be fine now, but Matt will never forget his experiences or his parents.

Nature

By Syazwani Saifudin

Have you ever seen the first rays of light, when the sun cracks open the day?

Or the way the flowers with their colourful clothes dance and sway?

What about the tide rolling in and out like a blanket on the bed of the sea?

Or the birds, swooping through the cotton clouds, feeling ever so free?

Do you ever notice the way the earth provides so much life and allows so much to grow?

Or the beautiful, white crystals glimmering on the ground after freshly fallen snow?

Have you ever wondered what the wind whispers to the trees?

Or why the leaves are always waltzing with the calming melody of the breeze?

Can you clearly imagine the tiny, twinkling stars lighting up the night?

Or the moon casting down shiny glows, ever so bright?

Do you picture the morning dew, resting on the sparkling shards of grass?

Or the gorgeous colours that glow with liveliness as the seasons pass?

What can you feel when your feet sink into the crunchy, golden specks of sand?

Or do you wonder what the rocky giants of the earth think, standing proud and grand?

Have you ever given a thought to where the crystal clear rushing water goes to?

Or the palette of warm colours merged together on a gorgeous dusk, creating a spectacular view?

For these small things in nature,

Are what makes life so worthwhile,

Because every once and again, these things tend to make you smile!



Umbrella

By Daniella Camacho

In a sea of dullness
He stood out
A trusty companion
For any whereabouts
A hero for all
Through thick and thin
But most of all
He'd fight for the win

In the springtime he rested
Until security was at stake
Birds swooping
A most certain fate
WHOOSH! WHAM!
Were the sounds heard
But luckily
He knew how to deter
Spreading his own wings
He commenced his attack
Heroic and fierce
And all without a scratch

During the summer
A shield from the sun
No matter where you go
You'll never be glum
Although on the big side
He may seem bulky
You can trust in him

Because he won't leave you sulking

As flame coloured leaves
free themselves of their captors
Our helpful little friend
Begins a new chapter
A protector from raindrops
A different kind of task
He strives to keep all dry
Even in the dark

The climate continues to cool
Blankets of snow on the ground
The wind picks up its pace
And new dangers are now found
He begins to wobble
And is blown inside out



Sorrow

By Sreeja Gullapalli

They sailed on great ships,
And brought along thieves.
They stole our territories,
And claimed them theirs.
They brought along rabbits,
And built more fences.
Sentenced us to lonely lives,
Of sorrow, horror and fear.

No mother's arms to hold us,
No fathers love to guide us.
They stole from our family,
And from our infant days.
Sentenced us to lonely lives,
Of sorrow, horror and fear.

Ones who fought for us,
Were soon turned to dust.
They stole our lives,
'Til everyone shivered with fear.
They sentenced us to lonely lives,
Of sorrow, horror and fear.

We sailed to different islands,
Or hid in the shadows.
Till sun shone brightly,
And they gave back what was ours.
Now there is no reason to live lonely lives,
Of sorrow, horror and fear.

Dignity

By Joann Manoj Jacob

Based on the marching of the Jews during the Holocaust. Never again.

Sneered at, jeered at, rags flapping in the wind.
Men, women, children, who never even sinned.
Heads down in shame, pale faces gaunt and thin.
Marching to their death, on the outside, looking in.

He stands out from the rest, his face shining and proud.
He marches with dignity, quiet, but loud.
He looks on, he knows his grim fate.
Yet, he is dignified, and walks with a determined gait.

Keep on marching, regardless of age,
The young, the old, in an invisible cage.
Walking barefoot, cold and damp,
Walking to their doom, a horrific death camp.

He marches on, his proudness reflects.
All curses and pain his demeanour deflects.
His fellow men stare at him with red sunken eyes,
He seemed blissfully unaware of their horrific surprise.

Shoved into the train, no room to breathe,
Smells like urine, blood and rotten teeth.
Fear permeates the air, nowhere to run,
Long gone are the days of sunshine and fun.

He looks out of the box shaped window, tiny and square.
Rolling green hillsides and blue lakes at him stare.



He looks on in dignity, he looks on in pride.
He takes a breath of freedom, takes it into his stride.

Arrive at the work camp, a terrible sight.
The strong being separated from the old and the slight.
Families torn apart, broken spirits and broken hearts.
The smell of fear mixes with the smell of blood,
Being scorned at, treated like mud.

He is led to a chamber, he knows what is in store,
He marches with dignity, ignoring the gore.
He walks into the chamber, prodded by a guard.
He knows what must be done, it is set in stone and hard.
He breathes his last, he takes his last breath.
He dies proudly, a dignified death.

Scissors

By Odessa Zubanov

Never trust scissors unless you must!

It wasn't my fault!

The scissors went crazy
they twisted and turned,
they snipped and snapped,
and cut and tore.

They poked and ripped,
they zipped and tipped,
they zoomed and whizzed
and made a BIG MESS
of mother's pretty dress.

It Wasn't My Fault!



Unwanted Guilt

By Katie Hutton

She lay still in the dark, a hazy shadow as her flesh melted in a puddle of ink black guilt. Her face emotionless but her soul inflicted with agony. The feeling of the rusty metal against her raw skin, scraping and tearing, echoing in her mind. Anguish as the hook grabbed at her flesh and yanked cruelly, engraving scars of permanent pain. The steel edge prodding, poking and scratching the lining of her insides and drawing blood with every rough movement. Her hand disobeying her mind, shaking and clenching at the metal triangle. The broken flesh, a bloodied mess on the ground as the wire curve kept digging and jerking at the cells of life inside her.

And then her willpower broke.

'I give my consent.' Her mother's tone condemned silence. She looked down at her daughter with eyes that said *'It's for the best'*.

Immediately the forms were slapped in front of the uncertain girl and a pen forced into her hand.

The papers were signed, dated and the youth whisked away.

She lay on the flat bed, which had cushioning but not comfort, her mother planted behind her saying not a word. The nurses' rapid talk was unnoticed like curtains in a room.

The clean white room was slightly blued from the bright lights which reflected off the polished floor and into the eyes of the girl.

She stared up at the white ceiling, thoughtless, wordless, emotionless...

Her leg twitched in response to an unconscious squirmish.

Her mother stepped forward and pressed a hard hand on her daughter's arm, and grunted, 'You'll thank me for it later, trust me, I *do* know what it's like to be where you are'.

Another leg twitch.

'Be calm, you've got nothing to worry about,' came the nurse's sweet voice flowing through the air.

1, 2, 3. She counted in her head as her breathing evened out. She was calm, because she didn't have anything to worry about.

At the slight twinge of the needle being propelled up inside her, she felt a twinge from somewhere else inside, that she would never be calm again.

'All done,' the words floated into her ears, yet her mind was concentrated elsewhere, absent from her conscious being. Her mother's words echoing in her mind, '*Trust me, I know*'.

It was finished.

The mother and daughter were whisked out and they left. With the artificial light from the clinic still in her eyes, she stared out the car window. Her mother sat behind the steering wheel driving the conversation.

'This will spare you a lot of pain. It's the best way. You'll appreciate it later. You won't have to go through all of the grief of being isolated from society. Be thankful.'

Mother and daughter went home, to the house with clothes folded in drawers and all the coathangers thrown out. They shared the same car, the same house, but they were not together.

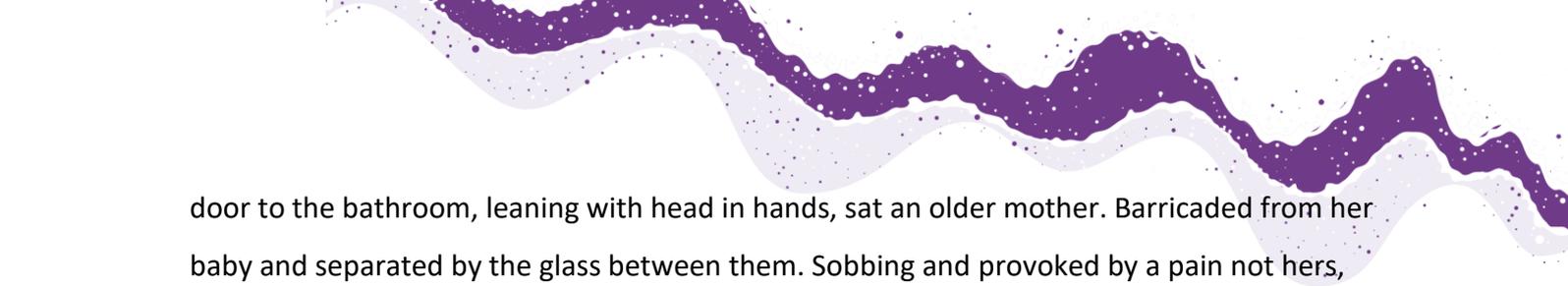
Her agony pierced the glass around her and her voice sent shards of pain resounding through the house. She sat in the puddle. Water beat down on her as she beat the glass around her. The water pounded on her and scalded her skin. With each throe, her distressed body quivered and threatened to abandon her. Her shrieks were ever constant in the background, but for her, there was just the glass around her and the bruised infant between her legs.

Her anguish driven eyes looked down at the battered form that lay, not moving, not crying, not breathing. Her soul panged with utmost despair as her hands, unguided, scooped up her little one and held her tightly in a tender embrace.

For the only time.

And there was only a mother and her stillborn, and the glass around her.

The door hung feebly but upright, despite the pressure it was holding in and the shards of pain trying to penetrate the wood. Despite the conflicting emotions spinning around it in a tornado, it stood firm. Behind the glass, in the hallway, slumped against the



door to the bathroom, leaning with head in hands, sat an older mother. Barricaded from her baby and separated by the glass between them. Sobbing and provoked by a pain not hers, even her own scars showing her poignancy. The tumult of emotion not completely held back by the door, sent her weeping body into utter desolation and remorse.

In the house absent of coathangers, was a young mother trapped in the shower, her stillborn at her breast, both surrounded by glass. And outside, her mother sat surrounded by wood.

The sharp changed from scalding to biting went unnoticed by the girl sitting in the dark, filmy pool. She was paralysed in time, just as the life of her daughter was. The absence of emotion made things evident that were covered before in layers of sentiment. And she knew. She just knew.

When she did emerge from behind that feeble door, she walked without life because that was inside the shower still. She walked on, past the hallway, with every noncommittal step the shards of pain embedded themselves further into her.

And life distanced itself from her.

Life and her mother.

Her eyes absent from even artificial light as she walked to where her mother was still crouched, head bowed.

‘I can’t thank you. For what you tried to do to me and for what you forced me to do.’ It was not an accusation, it was merely a statement deprived of feeling as she now was.

‘I’m sorry. I made a mistake,’ the words choked out at first and then rushed out like water coming from an unused tap. ‘I should have told you long ago the reason why I hate coathangers.’ She reached for her daughter’s hand, showing only a lack of practice.

‘I couldn’t. The pain and the guilt stopped me, in the moment I first held you... I regretted ever picking up that coat hanger and I’m so glad I didn’t go through with it.’ Her daughter stiffened at her words, the first confession at last.

Now, her hands were unguided, stroking her daughter’s hair.

'Lilibeth, my promise. I broke you. Made you endure the pain I couldn't. When you are the best thing that happened to me. Lilibeth, my promise, come back to me.'

With those simple, ardent words, one of the shards was removed gently from her chest and the wound left behind began to heal. And there was only a mother and her daughter, in each other's arms, weeping with tears of joy and tears of guilt.



On The Shelf

By Lucy Ruffell-Hazell

She sits on the toy-shelf,
day after day.

Porcelain skin chipped,
Dress worn ragged,
Hair falling out in patches, revealing the decaying glue beneath.

Come and love me, she seems to call.
But she is too desperate, too old.
She has been played with too many times,
By too many children to have any value now.

Beauty had not brought with it eternal love.
All too soon she was discarded; a younger prettier doll took her place.

No one to repaint her porcelain skin,
Or to sew together her shabby dress.

She is alone-
Without her pretty face she has no purpose.

memento mori

By Margaret Fan

she's fine, she says, with a dazzling smile,
there's nothing you need to worry about.

i'm fine, it's cool, everything's okay,
i wasn't affected.

i'm strong.

she keeps up the pretense, the façade, the mask,
and they all believe her.

they all believe her.

and she crumbles and swirls and takes her final stand,
she goes unheard for the final time,
she drops the pretense.

she throws away her script and picks up the pill,
chasing it down with bitterness and truth.

because even the strong must die.

and even the famous must fade.



How she and she fell in love

By Jesse Blakers

she is gorgeous, damn it. *gorgeous*.

lips so full that they pout even when lifted into a smile

her chest rises and falls, hills hiding a valley of freckles.

it's cold – is it okay to reach for her hand?

i didn't think we'd be out for such a while.

i didn't hold her hand. she buried them in her coat.

that's okay because now it's spring and her eyes are sparkling.

her toe nails are sporting the bright pink polish i bought her

it's warming up – legs intertwine on the grass.

how can I be this happy? it's startling.

don't second guess yourself. *breathe*, play it cool.

the sweltering heat of summer can't mess this up

because that mini skirt hugs her hips so *damn well*.

does she want to roll around in the sand as much as i do?

i don't want a simple hookup.

there are leaves all over the ground now.

she has another tattoo, but only i get to see that one.

a denim jacket hides it; *i* keep her warm as we walk

she lets go my hand to dance in the leaves

and I am falling in love.

When Your World Revolves Around Him

By Jesse Blakers

he he
could could
make make
me me
so so
incandescently indescribably
happy empty
that that
i i
forgot forgot
how how
to to
breathe smile



Let's Never Go Clubbing Again

By Jesse Blakers

you feel like it's happened
even though it hasn't. not really

sandpaper hands where
they are not wanted. not really

someone building themselves
on top of you, around you.
planks of wood pressing
against wherever it hurts most

even though IT never happened. ~~not really~~
even though i danced in mesh and glitter
the wooden planks still hurt
and the sand paper hands still burn

Addison

By Margaret Fan

Addison Campbell is fifteen-years-old when her first boyfriend breaks up with her.

'Oh, Addi... I'm so sorry...'

Addison laughs into her phone, brokenly, tiredly. She sits cross-legged on her bed, the small TV in front of her playing America's Next Top Model reruns, eating ice-cream straight out of the Ben and Jerry's tub.

'Wait, are you sad at all?' her best friend asks, her voice inquisitive.

'Yeah, I guess... we were just together for so long, you know? And then out of nowhere he just texts that he's met someone else, and that we weren't really anything. How does someone do that?'

'I'm rolling my eyes right now,' Genevieve informs her from the other end of the line. 'I really am. That's how stupid you're being right now, because he doesn't matter, not anymore. Hey, when you're over him, do you wanna watch a movie at my place?'

'Which one?'

'That one about the black hole.'

'I'm over it. I'll be over in fifteen.'

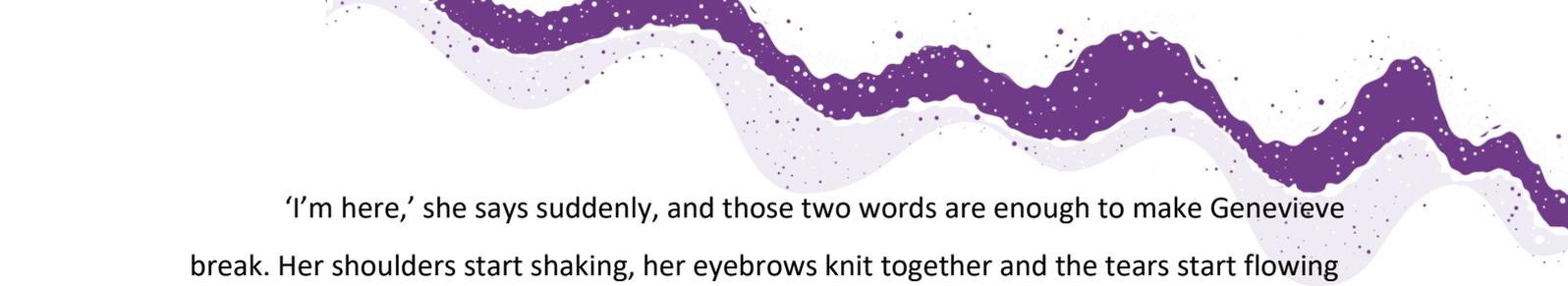
Addison Campbell is fifteen-and-a-half-years-old when her best friend's father dies.

'Are you okay?' she asks, sitting down on the marble steps next to Genevieve.

Addison's blonde hair cascades between them, a curtain of yellows and browns.

Genevieve is silent for a minute, long fingers playing with the braided half-crown in her hair. She finally brings her hands down to her lap, clenching them into fists, her nails pressing into her palms. A random thought leaps unbidden into Addison's mind: *those fake nails must hurt.*

'I'm fine,' Genevieve answers unemotionally. She keeps her face stoic, but Addison can see the turmoil raging just below the surface. The loss of her father hadn't just affected her mother. It left everyone in her family, every friend they'd ever made, wounded.



'I'm here,' she says suddenly, and those two words are enough to make Genevieve break. Her shoulders start shaking, her eyebrows knit together and the tears start flowing down her face. Will she ever run out?

'I'm here for you, Vivi,' Addison says quietly. She doesn't say anything else; she just lets Genevieve lean into her and cry quietly.

Sometimes all you need is a shoulder to cry on.

Addison Campbell is sixteen-years-old when she is betrayed.

'What have you *done*?' Genevieve's little sister, Amy, shrieks. Addison glances up nonchalantly from where she's working. An easel with a canvas propped up on it stands in front of her.

'You've *destroyed* it!' Amy sobs. Addison glances back at what she's painting over; one of Amy's old art projects that she'd thought needed a touch-up.

'Ah...' Addison winces. 'Well, um. You see. I was just –'

'*GET OUT!*' Amy screams, tears running down her cheeks. She rushes over and dabs at the damp surface with her thumb, knocking Addison's art supplies onto the wooden floor. She feels her face twist into a scowl. *Melodramatic*, she thinks.

And she is, really. All Addison has managed to do in those quiet five minutes is fill the blank, monocolour sky with fluffy clouds.

Addison glances helplessly over when she hears Genevieve's bedroom door click open. She's stepping out to charge her phone... Addison mouths '*help*' to her, pleading silently for backup.

Genevieve casts her gaze over at Amy. Her eyes shift to Addison.

She shakes her head imperceptibly. Mouthes, *sorry, Addison*.

And she walks right past her to plug in her phone.

Addison Campbell is seventeen-years-old when she is offered a cigarette by her boyfriend.

'It makes you feel good,' he shrugs. Addison doesn't question him; he's a varsity jock, he knows what he's doing.

She lets him light it and stick it between her lips, layered with dark red lipstick. She inhales. Exhales.

She feels *relaxed*.

She looks *cool*.

And she doesn't care, for the moment, that she is changing everything.

Addison Campbell is eighteen-years-old when she is left behind.

It is the start of senior year, and Genevieve already feels Addison is drifting away. She hates how Addison has dyed her hair platinum blonde. She hates the stupid hipster cigarettes. She hates that Addison adds swear words to every sentence she speaks.

She starts hanging out with other girls like herself: the freckled, curly brunette with hazel eyes, Stacey; the transgender girl-to-guy with bronze bangs falling in his dark eyes, Alex; and of course, her geeky blonde boyfriend, Thomas, who loves Star Wars and Genevieve with all his heart.

Addison Campbell is alone. Her varsity jock boyfriend has broken it off with her, claiming that she's cheating on him. And maybe she is, having flings with other boys at parties, but it's not really *her* fault. She blames it all on the tequila.

Addison is alone.

There is no one there to help her when she starts failing in biology and history.

There is no one around to tip off a teacher or a doctor when she starts coming to school, not in crop tops and short shorts, but in long-sleeved shirts and sweatpants.

There are so many scars on her wrists she can keep tallies on them.

All her 'friends' have left her behind, because she is no longer the Fun One. She is no longer the Loud One. She is the Depressed One.

She is not Addison Campbell anymore.



Addison Campbell is eighteen-years-old when her depression spirals down at an uncontrollable rate.

‘Honey, are you sure you’re okay?’ her mother asks one night, spearing a lamb chunk with her fork. ‘I’m really concerned about you. I just got your third-quarter report card, and it’s not good, especially for you.’

Addison almost tells her. She almost melts down.

‘Yeah,’ she shrugs. ‘I’m fine.’

I’m fine. I’m fine. I’m fine.

But this world is a big one, and it contains many ignorant people. One of them is Addison’s tired mother, who nods and turns back to her food.

When someone says ‘I’m fine’, you need to look into their eyes and tell them, ‘I know you’re not’.

No one who says ‘I’m fine’ is ever okay.

Nothing is okay to the one who says ‘I’m fine’.

Addison Campbell is eighteen-years-old when she carries out her plan.

She leaves the envelope in her drawer and pins the folded piece of paper to her bulletin board. Her mother is at work; she’s always at work these days.

She takes out the pills and goes to the bathroom, looking at herself for the last time.

Skinny arms. Oversized sweater. Jeans so faded they could be Addison herself. Long, choppy and thin platinum blonde hair. Big blue eyes, clear of mascara.

She puts on her most scuffed sneakers and walks outside into the snow, letting the wind freeze her face. She starts walking.

Soon, she reaches it - the old oak tree Genevieve and she always played at. Its branches are bare, the snow falling steadily now. The wind is howling at a million miles an hour.

Addison half-smiles at it. She slips out her black Sharpie and hesitates.

No.

She needs something more permanent.

She shoves the Sharpie back into her pocket and takes her Swiss army knife out of her other pocket. She starts to carve in the tree. A reminder of who she was.

Addison Campbell, she writes, is okay now. She signs it with a heart.

The pills slide down her throat, quick as anything, and she chases it down with snow. Her vision doubles, and she crumples to the floor like a paper bag.

Early the next morning, the police locate her body. She lies so still, face still fixed in a little smile, that at first, they think she's asleep.

Addison Campbell is finally at peace.

Late in the afternoon, five hours after they find Addison's body and the suicide note she'd pinned to her bulletin board, they find the envelope in her drawer.

It's labelled *To Genevieve*, so they don't touch it. They give it to Genevieve, who's already a sobbing mess.

Dear Mom, Thomas Wells, Stacey Eldridge, Alex Valdes, my best friend Genevieve Stewart, and the police:

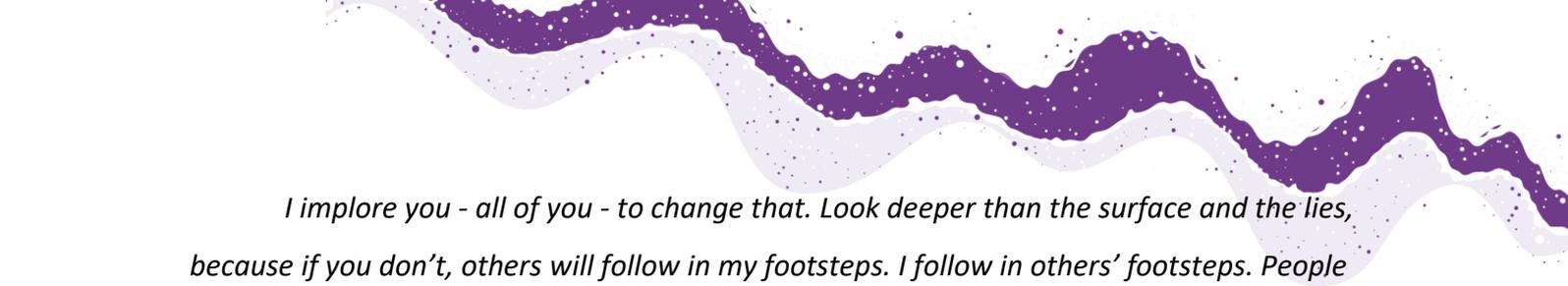
My name is Addison Campbell and I took my own life.

By the time you read this, I will be gone. Don't try to revive me; if the pills failed to kill me, my first Harry Potter T-Shirt and faded jeans will succumb to the cold faster than I do.

I'm sorry, Mom, Thomas, Stacey, Alex, Genevieve. I know you'll be sad, and I know you'll hate me for what I've done. But please, know it had to be done.

There is, with exceptions to the people this letter is addressed to, no one who liked me on this Earth that didn't change some aspect of who I was. There are going to be so many people who sneer and call me a coward for what I've done. But they are wrong, because they drove me to this.

No one cared enough about me to expose the 'I'm fine' lie. No one cared enough about me to pull up my sweater sleeves and find the scars.



I implore you - all of you - to change that. Look deeper than the surface and the lies, because if you don't, others will follow in my footsteps. I follow in others' footsteps. People commit suicide every day, and no one cares enough about them - really cares - to try and get the word out.

Maybe if I had people who cared about me, I wouldn't be sleeping under the oak tree.

Oh, and one last wish; bury me in the clothes you find me in. Bury me in my first Harry Potter T-Shirt, my first jeans, my first sneakers. Bury me with all my 'firsts', so all the old and tattered can finally rest as well.

I guess this note counts as a will, too. Don't try to deny it. I want everything I own to be donated to suicide prevention charities and causes. I want to save those on the edge.

*Love,
Addison Campbell*

Dear Genevieve,

I'm really sorry but it was for the best. You'll think you'll be haunted for the rest of your life, but you won't be. I know you, Genevieve. You're going to be a great cartoonist.

I hope things work out with you and Thomas. You're so compatible, and he's so safe, you know?

Anyway, you have my luck. You have all the love I was denied. You're Genevieve Stewart, and you'll find a way.

I have faith in you.

*Love,
Addison Campbell
Your (former) best friend*

Stars

By Tahlia Walker

The stars twinkle above me.
Shades of green surround me.
Light is faint.
The leaves rustle beneath me.
With its hollow black eyes, it lifts its head
and strikes.
Yellow fangs pierce my skin and I fall to the ground.
As I hit the leafy floor bed,
I hear it slither away
and I wonder if it will be the last sound I ever hear.
My eyelids close.

The sirens wail.
I stare at the red cross symbolised on my blanket.
I feel a sharp pain in my arm.
The needle pushes deep into my skin.
It hurts.
Suddenly, warm relief spreads through my body and I find I can speak
But I will never be the same again.



The Big Cheater

By Mia Ishii

‘Will everyone please stop talking?’ my teacher asked. Everyone was too busy talking about a coming event, the race! It comes up every year on February the 10th.

After school, a girl named Izzy bumped into me. I didn’t know much about her.

‘Hi,’ Izzy said awkwardly.

‘Hi Izzy,’ I answered.

She smiled at me. ‘Guess what? I am going to enter the race! I think I might win,’ Izzy said happily.

How come Izzy wanted to enter? Izzy always loses the race. Izzy always hated sports, so why had she signed up for the race again?

Every time, you put your name in a hat. Sometimes you get your name picked out. When your name gets picked, you choose who you want to compete with.

‘How would you catch up with Katie?’ I asked. Me and Izzy were sitting under a tree talking.

‘I can catch up. Don’t be silly!’ Izzy replied. Izzy had just said she was going to compete with Katie if she would get her name picked out.

Katie was the fastest girl in the whole school! Katie always won the race.

It was finally the day of the race! The Mayor was up on the stage. ‘Today is the day of the race! I will put my hand in the hat and pick a name...’ he began. ‘Izzy, who are you going to verse?’ the Mayor asked.

‘Katie,’ said Izzy, simply.

‘Ok...’ said the Mayor, surprised.

‘Ok. Go!!!’ the Mayor shouted.

Izzy was so fast! I never knew that. Katie was way behind Izzy! Izzy was so close to the finish line when...

YES! Izzy had won! I couldn’t believe it.

The crowd clapped louder than when Katie had won before. Suddenly, a boy called, ‘Hey! Look that girl has wheels on her shoes! Is that why she won?’ The boy was standing

up. The Mayor looked at Izzy and chased Izzy all the way to the next suburb. Everyone laughed.



Space Attack

By Abdul Rahman

‘There he goes again!’ All the boys in Amul’s year level were getting very irritable, listening to Amul drone on and on about dull aeroplanes. A little boy named Amul had a passion for aeroplanes. He could tell the type of an aeroplane in the air. He could tell you the aeroplanes in order of fastest to slowest or from biggest to smallest.

Amul could tell you the parts of aeroplanes, ways they were built and even name the engines of the different types of aeroplanes. He also had a lot of confidence in everything, which usually led him to be able to do things that others couldn’t. But not only did he have a lot of confidence, he was also very intelligent.

Now, more than anything, the kid named Amul wanted a plane company of his own to run. But when he grew up, he didn’t get to own a plane company, he instead got a job at a government department. He was able to earn enough money to make his own car company and made his own type of really fancy cars and was able to get his own plane company. He worked day and night to design and make new planes and their parts. He made hundreds of new engine types and other plane parts. He also made big ones, small ones, supersonic ones as well as slow ones. But as he made more and more planes, the demand also got higher and higher because the people of the world loved the awesome, supersonic airplanes that Amul made.

Once the president of NASA had heard about the supersonic airplanes that were in service, he was keen to meet the owner of those airlines. He was soon able to get in contact with Amul, and when he did, the owner of NAZA scheduled a meeting with him.

In the meeting, Amul showed the head of NAZA all of the rooms in his headquarters. He showed how everything was built as well as where everything was designed and ideas were formed for different fantastic air crafts. While Amul had tea and biscuits with NASA’s head, Amul was asked many questions. The final question the visitor asked went like this, NASA’s head leaned in closer and asked the question he had wanted to ask the whole time since he had heard of Amul’s supersonic planes company. The question was, ‘Will you go into space and try and discover a new planet?’

This question was immediately answered by an extremely confident Amul. ‘Yes, sure. I will!’

After promising to stay in touch with Amul, the president of NAZA left.

The very next day, Amul went into his private workshop and started to draw up plans for the super craft that would be going into space, one that would provide him with luxuries of home but be able to withstand all that space could throw at him. Amul and his smarts in the end, got him a space craft that would fit the requirements. He named the craft **Space Slicer**.

He put everlasting batteries, a special TV, food resources, oxygen suppliers, and gravity machines as well as many other things that would be necessary in the trip. Once he was prepared, he gave a few interviews and then left earth in an extremem machine. Despite the fact that Amul was quite brave, he wasn't 100 percent happy at the idea of having to spend a few weeks, maybe even months in space. In a week, Amul passed Pluto and with seeing all the planets in the solar system, he had new thoughts on this space idea. Another week went by and Amul was starting to reconsider the choice of having to be in space. But, the next day, Amul was met with a surprise, he was back at earth! But at least that was what he thought.

He was about to check the radar when he noticed that the structure of the continents were not the same as the ones at the earth that he came from. He checked the radar and confirmed that this must be a parallel earth. Amul snapped a few quick pictures and then went into the atmosphere to check if the planet was inhabited or uninhabited. As he went inside the atmosphere and came close to the ground, he found it was inhabited by human-like creatures. The human-like creatures saw Amul and rushed to grab anything nearby to throw at the Space Slicer.

Amul reacted lightning fast and deployed all defence and attack forces along with the secret weapon. Whipping Doritos. All of his weapons were working hard, they were shooting and the Whipping Doritos were whipping. He was able to quickly make the citizens surrender.

Amul quickly took a few pictures and was about to exit the parallel earth and go back to the earth that he had come from. But the army came and was heavily armed. They forced Amul to surrender. He was in plain disgrace at being captured by some human-like creatures. Amul got all of his gadgets taken away. He was left in a prison cell which had only one window. But the window was made from force glass (a type of really strong glass). Amul



was stuck in the prison for 33 hours before remembering he had some acid shoe laces on his shoes, which he still had. He used them to cut the bars. He then sneaked to the room where his suit was kept. He found it empty and unguarded.

Amul carefully made his way to the suit but his feet got hit by a laser trap. As soon as he realised his mistake, it was too late and all the guards had come and already captured him. He was soon sent back to his cell. Amul gave up hope and decided to just rest. He went to the window to look outside, but found a crack and started to hit the glass with some parts of the bed that he was meant to be sleeping in. Amul soon broke it and escaped. He then went into the main entrance as a stranger and went to see his suit and ship. He stole them back and then quickly zoomed out of the parallel earth and headed back towards earth.

He had a lot of fun going back to his home because he was really quite relieved. After a couple of weeks, he got earth in his sights. When he arrived at earth, Amul was greeted with many millions of people all trying to get a glimpse of the person who had just gone out of the solar system and back all in one piece. He gladly met everyone. But soon stuff started to get out of hand and so he went back to his house to have some rest. The next day, he set off to see the head of NAZA and showed him the pictures. Then he showed them to the world. After showing such amazing things, Amul was getting a lot of interviews. Amul was also in every new history book. The great Amul was the richest and one of the most successful people to have ever lived on the face of earth.

Hide

By Asun Deng

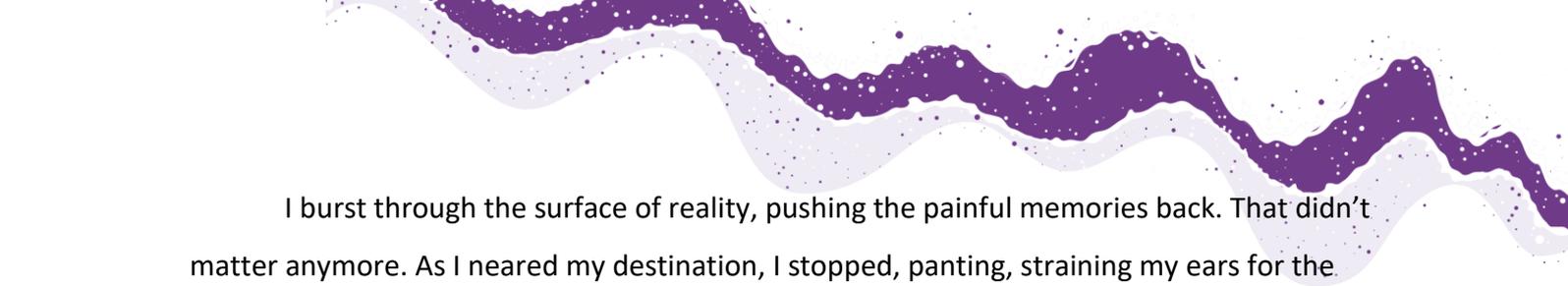
I've always been the one to hide. I guess you could say I could beat anyone in a game of hide and seek. But I can't say that I can prove that. Honestly, I don't have enough time to play. Maybe because my whole life is just a game. Me, the hider, and the police, the seekers. I don't even know why they want me. Since birth, I was wanted. Since birth. That's when this game even began. I wonder which side wins. The hiders or the seekers.

I slowly bring myself to peer over the top of the edge, wishing, hoping that they were gone. They were. I hauled myself out of the water tank, dripping wet. The lid clanged to the floor. I winced. Any minute now, they'll come back. I listened hesitantly. I only heard the distant wail of sirens. I sighed and pulled myself out. Sometimes, I know I shouldn't say this, but the police can be kind of annoying. I flopped on the grass, catching my breath before I started dragging my feet. Where? That I can answer. I'm finding my father. To ask him this. Why? Why would you pick this path of life? It's hard for you, for Mum and for me. *No.* I thought bitterly. *Not Mum. I don't have a mum. Remember. You did that.*

Well, anyway, it wasn't like this was the first time I had to hide. Once it was this time when I had to bury myself alive. Good thing they were in a rush, or I would of suffocated. They searched briefly before racing off. As I was thinking I heard the distant wail of sirens nearing. My breath got caught in my throat, and my hands felt clammy. Normally it wouldn't bother me, but I just escaped. Normally, they would give up on the search for at least an hour, and another hour to find me again. Not this fast. Were they following me this whole time? They knew I was here. I knew I had to run, but I was... stuck.

Hurry up. I told myself. *Don't be like this. You're on a mission to find... him. Not to get caught by the police.* I snapped back to reality. I have one goal. And I'm going to achieve it. Heart pounding, I darted away.

As I ran, I remembered things. Like how my father would come home covered in blood, and how he slammed the door behind him, as he heard the police sirens. How my mother screamed, and ran, advising me to do the same. And the next morning, everything seemed normal. As if last night never happened.



I burst through the surface of reality, pushing the painful memories back. That didn't matter anymore. As I neared my destination, I stopped, panting, straining my ears for the unmistakable sound of sirens. None. I blew a sigh of relief before opening the door.

The room was dusty. Layers, upon layers of dust sat on each other. And the cobwebs. They were every everywhere. In every nook and cranny and in all the corners. I ducked my head as I entered, so I wouldn't brush any invisible strands of the sticky silk. In the middle of the room sat a man. Seen only because of the candle, which sent flickering shadows of him across the room. The man was the infamous Icarus Paladin himself, scheming another plan to make himself feel noticed, feared, and respected.

I walked forward, hesitantly. I could see that he was armed. I picked up a gun on one of the cardboard boxes, stuffed it in my belt and walked forward.

'What are you doing here?' he snarled. *He was always the one to speak first.*

'To reason with you,' I replied calmly.

'To reason. With ME!?' He let out a harsh laugh, which filled the room with its horrible, mocking sound.

'Maybe, if you listen to me, you'll change your mind!' I insisted.

'Listening is bad enough. Listening to people is worse. But I can tolerate it. But listening to unworthy scum, like you, and your mother, is beyond my limit,' he spat out.

Rage engulfed me. Shaking, I brought out the gun, and pointed it right at him. 'Don't you **dare** talk about my mother like that in front of me.'

'Do it,' he said, jeeringly. 'Shoot me. And prove to me who you really are. But to shoot your father? That'll be villainy for sure.'

I dropped my gun. *I'll be just like my father,* I realized. 'No.'

'Well? Who are you going to be? The hero, or the villain?' he asked mockingly.

'Neither.' And I walked into the night.

As I walked on the pavement, I heard the distant sound of sirens. The sound I had always feared. But now I don't care. It's not like I'm a villain.

Origami Cranes

By Chelsea Hindle

Silence is a powerful prison, Conlan knows that better than anyone else. He has been trapped in a silent prison since he was nine, cut off, isolated.

He finds his solace in his hands. A slip of paper can become a flower or a crane. He can fold anything with his quick fingers, but he likes cranes the most.

Every afternoon, Conlan slings his backpack over his shoulder and trudges to the park. He curls up under the elm tree that is *his* tree, his back rubbing against the rough bark. Then out comes his coloured paper and he begins to fold his paper cranes. He has made eight hundred and thirty cranes. Today he will add ten more to his collection as he folds beneath the elm. He never says anything, never does anything other than fold, and once he has ten cranes, he stands and leaves.

But today is different. He hasn't seen her yet, but she is sitting underneath the oak tree. She isn't folding cranes, but she is as lonely as he is. She is reading a book, but she hasn't turned the page for several minutes. She is watching Conlan.

Suddenly, she gets to her feet and hurries over to him. She puts her hands on her hips and speaks.

Conlan can't hear her, but he sees her feet at the edge of his field of vision. He bows his head down further and creases the paper more than necessary. When she doesn't go away, he glances up. He takes in her thin body, thin hair and too big eyes and he immediately knows something. The girl's body cries out: *sick! hospital! dying...*

Conlan stiffens. He sees the girl's mouth move, but she talks too fast for him to understand what she says. His hands tremble with anxiety, crushing the paper under his fingers, he wishes she would go away.

She doesn't go away. She sits down on the grass next to him and picks up one of his finished birds. She turns it over in her hands, frowning at it. She wants to know what it is.

Conlan puts down his half-finished crane, and then signs to her, *o-r-i-g-a-m-i. Paper crane.*

She tilts her head on one side, and this time he can see her question. Why?

Conlan tries to stop his hands shaking. *I'm making a thousand.*



She tilts her head even further. She doesn't know what to make of his hand gestures. Then her eyes light up. I know, he sees her say, you're deaf. That's why you're doing those thing. She flicks her finger downward in imitation of the *thousand* sign.

Conlan nods, hoping that she will leave him alone now. He turns his attention back to the crane and begins folding with renewed vigour. Now that she knows he is deaf, she'll leave. She won't talk to him now. Just like everyone else, she'll shut off and leave.

But the girl doesn't leave. She keeps turning the crane over in her hands. Then she taps him on the shoulder. She holds out the crane to him, then picks up a piece of white paper. She waves the paper at him. Gestures to the crane.

He frowns at her, so she begins to unfold the paper crane. Conlan's eyes widen in alarm, but she quickly stops and puts it back together. Teach, she says, very clearly. *Teach me.*

Conlan hesitates, but she is insistent. Please?

He sighs and takes the paper, teaching her how to fold the crane, making each crease with care. When he has finished, she smiles and pulls out a yellow sheet of paper. Then she begins making her own crane. He goes back to finishing off his first. Occasionally, she taps his shoulder. He looks and corrects her mistakes.

Ten minutes later, Conlan has finished nine cranes, and the girl has finished her yellow crane. It is a clumsy bird, very lopsided, and it makes Conlan grin. She has done her best. He motions to her to keep the crane, but she puts it in the bag with his.

Then she grins and gets to her feet. She waves and runs away.

Conlan gets up too. He has only made nine birds today, but a tenth bird, a little lopsided yellow crane, lies folded in his bag. He smiles to himself and begins his walk home.

The next day he walks to the park and finds *her* leaning against *his* tree. She looks up and grins at him.

She pats the ground next to her. Conlan hesitates and then sits down. Eagerly, the girl greets him, hesitation making her sign language clumsy. Conlan returns the gesture.

Then she hands him a crane, just as lopsided as yesterday's, which she has made from her school paper. Conlan smiles, shakes his head and tips out his origami paper.

He nods to his paper, *this is better paper. Can't fold with that.* He nods to her paper.

She deflates, but she picks a blue sheet of his origami paper and begins on her second crane. After she's finished she gives it to him and he adds to his pile. Then, with painstaking care, she begins spelling things out for him on her hands.

He watches, amused, as she clumsily spells out her name. *E-N-N-E—no, they are both As. A-N-N-A-B-A—no, that is an E, she has E and A confused. A-N-N-A-B-E-L-L-A—another E.*

A-N-N-A-B-E-L-L-E. My name is Annabelle.

All afternoon, Conlan and Annabelle make paper cranes. When they have ten—eight hundred and fifty—he teaches Annabelle more sign language. He laughs at her clumsy birds and clumsy signs. But Annabelle laughs too. They laugh together—like friends.

The next day, they are back. Annabelle makes three paper cranes, and Conlan notices that they're no longer lopsided. Conlan makes seven and now has eight hundred and sixty. He teaches her more words. *Tree. Bird. Friend.*

Each day the number of cranes grows by ten. He reaches nine hundred birds.

Annabelle's cranes are now as elegant and beautiful as Conlan's. They show no sign of the clumsiness the first had. And each day, Conlan takes them home and he hangs them in the curtain of birds that cover his doorway.

He explains to her as time passes, that he was not always deaf. Once he could hear. But he'd lost his hearing and he'd had to learn sign language. He tells her it is a good thing he has always loved languages and can learn them fast. He says he once heard that making a thousand paper cranes brings good luck. He doesn't really believe in good luck, but he wants to make a thousand paper cranes, show that he can.

Annabelle explains to him that she wasn't always sick either. Once she'd been healthy. But she'd got sick with what the nurses and her parents call leukemia. She hasn't been to proper school in two years. While Conlan comes from school each day, she comes from the hospital.

Maybe if we make a thousand cranes I'll get better and you'll be able to hear again, she tells him. *Let's try.*

Conlan nods.

Won't be able to come tomorrow, Annabelle tells him as she gets ready to leave. *But you could see me in hospital.*



The next day, Conlan and his mother go to the hospital in visiting hours. He asks after Annabelle and the nurse takes them to her room. She looks very small in the white hospital bed, with lots of tubes and needles in her. She smiles when she sees Conlan, his origami paper in his hand. Annabelle's mother smiles, and then leaves, taking Conlan's mother with her.

Conlan sits in a chair. *Okay?* He asks.

Annabelle nods. *Good. You?*

Good too.

He takes out the origami paper and hands her a sheet. Ten more paper cranes come alive that day, Conlan takes them home and they hang in his doorway. They make a rainbow that spins and swirls whenever anyone walks through. Only ninety more cranes. Only ninety more before he has a thousand.

The next day he is back at the hospital. He and Annabelle bring the count to nine hundred and twenty.

The days pass. Conlan notices the little birds that Annabelle makes lose their gracefulness. They are clumsy again, but Conlan says nothing. He hangs them in the doorway.

Soon, Annabelle is out of hospital and they meet in the park again. They reach nine hundred and forty beneath the autumn-coloured elm tree.

They have nine hundred and fifty the next day. Nine hundred and sixty the day after.

They are friends. They share their dreams, hopes, fears. Conlan tells her of his loneliness and at night thanks God for his new friend. Annabelle tells him how much she hates hospitals, of her longing to go back to school.

The days turn cold and the count of cranes becomes nine hundred and ninety. Then nine hundred and ninety-nine.

Let's make the last one special, Annabelle tells him. *So we always remember the thousandth crane.*

Conlan shows her a piece of paper which he has kept ever since he started the origami cranes. It is glimmering silver and will make a beautiful crane.

Conlan brushes his fingertips against it and smiles, then he hands the paper to Annabelle. *You make it,* he says when his hands are free.

Annabelle smiles and begins to make the crane. He notices that her hands are trembling. Her folds are not right, her hands are shaking too much.

In frustration, she throws down the half-finished crane. *I can't do it!* Her signs are sharp and angry. *You finish it, Conlan. I can't make the cranes anymore.*

Conlan finishes the crane, and then he holds it up and hands it back to her. She holds the crane and smiles at it, the same way she smiled over the first one she'd seen—eight hundred and thirty-one.

We did it, Conlan tells her. We finished. We made a thousand paper cranes.

Annabelle grins. Then she says, *will I still see you? Even though...* her hands stop moving. *Even though we aren't making any more cranes?*

Of course! We're still friends. Conlan gets to his feet. *See you tomorrow?*

Annabelle nods. *Yep.*

Conlan gets to the park before Annabelle the next day, he sits down with his back to the elm tree, just like he used to do. But he hasn't brought his origami paper this time. He has no more cranes to make, they each hang in their rainbow glory in his doorway.

He waits for five minutes, but Annabelle doesn't appear. He grows restless, so he watches the kids on the monkey bars and the swings. Annabelle doesn't come.

Finally, he gets to his feet and he walks home, feeling his heart squeeze up inside him. Loneliness gnaws his stomach.

He sits in his room, watching a draught spin the thousand cranes. Then his mother opens the door and comes in. She sits on the end of his bed and puts her hand on his knee.

Her whole posture immediately tells Conlan that she has bad news. She looks as if she's trying not to cry. Being strong for his sake.

Conlan, she says, it's Annabelle. Her dad called to tell me some bad news. She's very sick and the doctors... her fingers stop doing as she bids them... they don't know if she'll be okay.

Tears sting Conlan's eyes and he looks away. He sees the eddying cranes and focuses on the last one, the silver one which Annabelle couldn't finish.

Can I see her?

He glances back at his mother as she answers him, *I'm not sure, but let's go see.*



The doctors won't let Conlan and his mother in. Conlan gives one of the nurses the crane and she promises to take it to Annabelle. Annabelle's dad is there, his eyes red and puffy. He promises to tell them if there's any change.

It is a little less than a week later when the call comes for Conlan. He cannot use the phone, so his mother does for him. He watches as she speaks. He sees her stiffen, tears in her eyes, as she nods, hanging up.

Conlan...

Conlan already knows what she is going to say. He wraps his arms around her waist. She hugs him and they both cry.

The day of the funeral comes, and Conlan arrives early, his bag over his shoulder. Annabelle's mother hugs him and her dad shakes his hand.

They talk to him and he understands some of it, but his mother translates it all for him.

Thank you for coming, Conlan, her dad says, and thank you for your offer. Annabelle would've loved that.

All Annabelle's mother can say through her tears is, *thank you. You know what, Conlan? You were her best friend...*

She was adamant about that, her dad adds. She loved that you weren't scared of her sickness, like other children were. She loved being your friend. Thank you for that.

Conlan looks away, unable to see through his tears. Silently, he hands his bag to Annabelle's dad. Her dad takes it and opens it. His mouth falls open as he sees nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine paper cranes in rainbow glory. *Thank you*, is the only thing he can mouth as he stares at them in amazement.

Conlan smiles, then watches as Annabelle's mum hands him the silver crane he'd given Annabelle. *For you.*

Her dad motions for him to follow. Conlan follows, and her dad leads him to her coffin. She looks very small in the coffin, like she had when he first saw her in the hospital bed. She clasps a bouquet of paper flowers.

Together, Conlan and her father spread the lid of the coffin with rainbow paper cranes. Nine hundred and ninety-nine of them.

But the thousandth crane lies in the coffin, over Annabelle's heart. It is a tiny silver memorial to the friendship she and Conlan share. It will live in Conlan's heart as a memory of a girl who'd stepped into his prison and shared his confinement. Who'd spoken sound into his world of silence.

For her he'd made the silver crane.



Meet Me There

By Syazwana Saifudin

Right where land meets the rippling sea

Where the placid waves are truly free

Meet me there

Meet me there

When the sand is softly golden

And the memories spent, still beholden

Meet me there

Meet me there

Where there are hushed whispers through the breeze

When the wind blows gently past the scrubby, clawed trees

Meet me there

Meet me there

When the salty sea breeze blows

Where the wind will lead you, nobody knows

Meet me there

Meet me there

When the sun glistens down on the waves by the shore

Where there is limitless boundaries to where you can explore

Meet me there

Meet me there

When the timid clouds are hidden away
And the sky is beaming blue above the bay

Meet me there
Meet me there

When the sun breaches the horizon
And bestows a golden path across the sea
I'll be waiting
Smiling back at you with glee



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