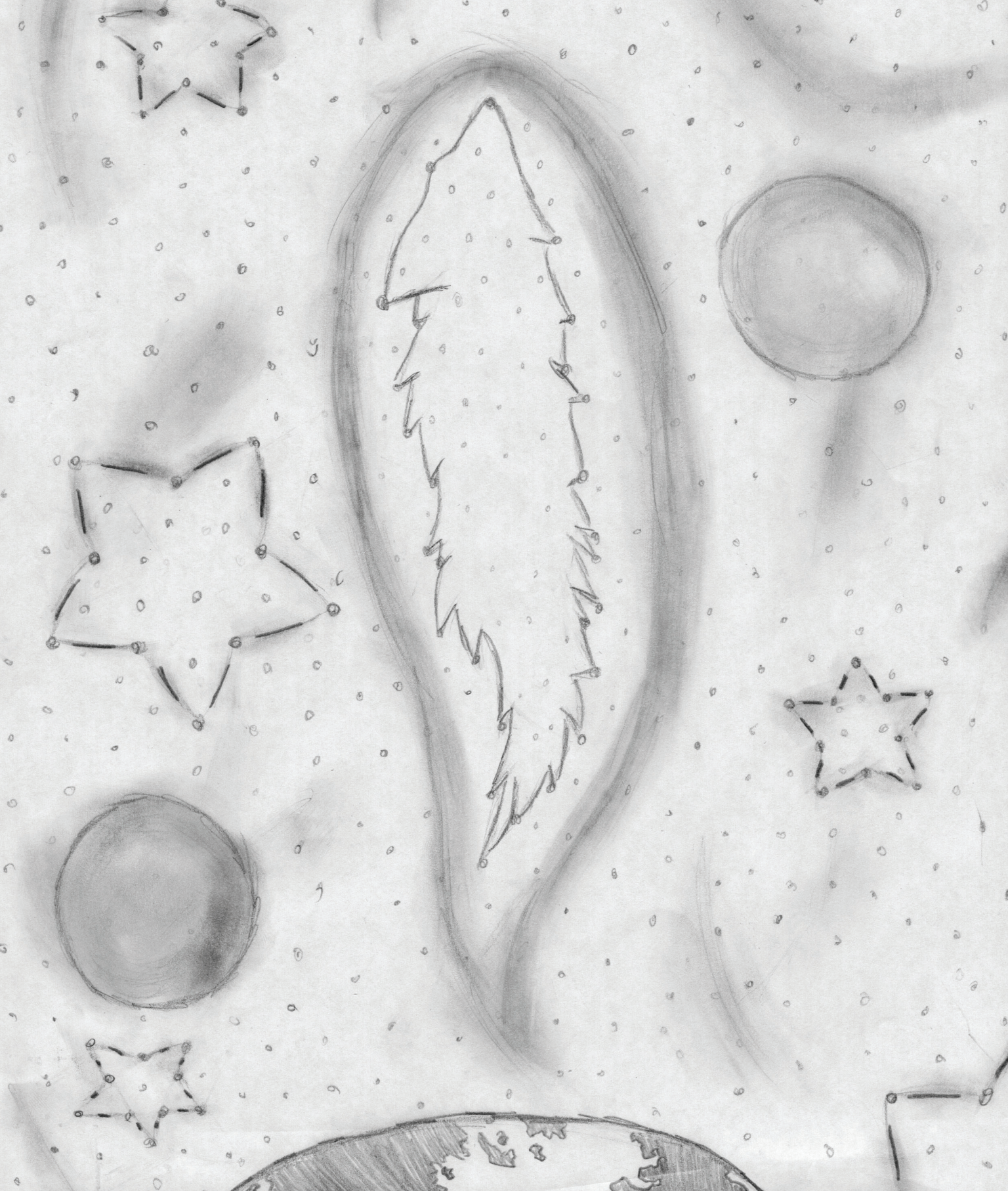


young voices



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On the Prowl

Maria Ines Cindrić Fagundes, 13

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FRONT COVER ART

Reflection

Jaunita Lam, age 18



Welcome to Young Voices 2018

You can read the damn poem at your own damn pace

The storm that never quite passes
Comes in bits and flashes
A wild and careless celebration
A friend to comfort me
It feels great for me to be accepted
Belonging you can't feel anywhere else but with your own people

(A found poem created using lines from *Young Voices 2018*)

Any time we find a place where we feel like we belong, it's a kind of tiny miracle. The nomadic, stormy, creative teenage souls whose writing and visual art are included in *Young Voices 2018* have found just such a place. It's a place where they can belong no matter who they are, where they can say what they need to say, where they can be heard by their peers, and where they can gain the confidence to keep searching for, and hopefully help to foster elsewhere in the world, that feeling of belonging they have experienced here.

Young Voices magazine has been an integral part of my life for well over a decade. The teen volunteers who select what goes into the magazine have been my friends; the writers and artists whose work appears in *Young Voices* every year have spoken to me, inspired me, and excited me; the professional writers and artists who act as role models and mentors for the teen editors and contributors have amazed me with their dedication and commitment; and the staff who have been my friends and helpmates have all had a profound influence on me.

I'm no longer active in the production of *Young Voices*, now that I've retired from my job at Toronto Public Library, but *Young Voices* will always be active in me.

Ken Sparling

Young Voices magazine, Production Coordinator, 2007-2018

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THANK YOU

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To write, to make art, is an act of hope.

Anne Michaels



Chained
Lucy Liu, 12

The Sky-Eater

Your Avo Mafalda dies on a Tuesday. The sky begins to melt Friday morning.

You sit by your bedroom window and watch it happen, viscous globs of blue-grey streaking the glass and dripping down onto the fire escape. You tug your blanket more securely around your shoulders and wait for it to stop.

It doesn't stop. Slows, maybe, a trickle rather than a downpour, but you can still sit out on the fire escape and catch pieces of sky on your tongue. It tastes like rain, and metal, and something bright you can't describe. Grief feeds the gaping, gnawing ache in your chest, and a part of you believes if you swallow enough of the sky, it will fill the lack in you, will do more than coat your mouth with the taste of rust. You stare into the empty spaces, and sometimes it feels as if something stares back, as cold and angry as the place inside of you.

You pick at dinner that night, and your mother clears your plate in silence. She turns to the third chair, hand reaching out in an aborted movement for a plate that isn't there. You lower your eyes to the tablecloth and pretend not to notice the tremor that moves through her.

An especially loud, wet sound against the kitchen window, sounding nothing like rain. Your mother turns the tap on with a sharp twist of her hand, the sound of running water drowning out the liquid-slow Armageddon outside. She scrubs at her plate defiantly.

"Ma," you begin, too quiet to be heard over the water. You try again, louder, and she looks up. You want to ask, "*What do we do now that's she's gone? Can you feel it too, the way everything is falling apart?*"

But her eyes are red-rimmed and bruised dark, and you realize she has no answers to give you. In her bedroom there is a candle that does not stop burning, a framed picture of her mother that will smile if you stare long enough — a martyr's shrine, piously kept. These are the only bits of magic your mother will allow herself. That, and the stubborn hope that if she does not watch the sky falling, then it will not fall.

"I'm going to bed," you say, voice thick. You leave before she can respond.

You wake a handful of hours later from a restless sleep. Shadows crawl at the corner of your vision, ravenous and impatient. You blink sleep from your eyes, and they vanish. You are hungry, or thirsty, or—

The floor is cold beneath your bare feet as you sit up, and creaks softly as you leave your room. Long fingers of light reach beckoningly across the hallway floor — when you step closer, warmth seeps through you, resting somewhere inside your bones, deep and glowing.

There is light coming from the kitchen, which is to say: there is light sitting at the kitchen table, in a vaguely person-like shape. It looks up at you with several pairs of flat dark eyes, all shining with something of the sky in them.

"Do not be afraid," it says in a strangely sonorous voice, each syllable drawn carefully into the air. A soft flicker of light, wing-like, the after-sound of laughter.

"I'm not," you say, though your voice trembles.

It lets out a low hum that rattles the drying dishes. "You are not." It seems unsurprised.

You think of old angel stories, and dozens of winged icons now boxed away in a closet. You think of your grandmother dying alone, powerless, and suddenly you are so angry you can barely breathe. You want to scream. You want to let the warmth hold you until you are whole again.

It says your name, spells it with: your mother's arms wrapped around you, the plush fur of the bear you loved until its seams tore, the persistent itch of an oncoming summer. Overlaid like soft static, the warmth of an old friend's welcome. It is so warm, and so bright. The taste of rust in your mouth, thick and sickening. You are angry, angry, and still unafraid, still longing.

"Ah," it says, and blinks at you with two sets of eyes, as if you are a particularly vexing equation. "I am nearly late."

It reaches out a hand as if to caress your face. You open your mouth to protest, but before you can speak, a bright finger presses against your lip, and pulls from your mouth something small and clear and gelatinous.

"Well met, little sky-eater," it says, and the piece of atmosphere evaporates to steam. "Has it stanchied the ache?"

"No," you say, the answer wrenched unbidden from somewhere deep within you.

"It never will. You can eat until this world is only a hollow shell, and you will be monstrous, and you will still be hungry."

Outside, the sky is silent. You do not dare look out the window, terrified of what will look back.

"I'm dreaming."

"You were. Now you are not."

"If you don't leave right now, I'm going to scream. My mother will come in and she'll hex you back to your dimension."

"I will tell you what happened to your grandmother." There is a wavering on the final word, a blip in the static that is almost pained. "I can teach you what she would have, and leach this famine from you. In return, you will help me stop this infernal decay."

You remember your grandmother's scars, some fresh and some stretching back near childhood. Burns. You wonder if she felt this same pull to the warmth, if it burned her up in the end.

"We had our duty," it says, but there is something like guilt in the reverb. "She knew hers, perhaps better than I."

"And she's dead."

Six large, dark eyes blink in unison, ancient and so impossibly sad.

Outside, soft pattering against the windowpane.

It sounds, for once, like rain.

Leah Duarte, 19

Reverse the Stigma

The world we live in is segregated.
They will never accept one thing—
My differences,
People will always accept
That I am a freak.
I refuse to believe
I can have a friend to comfort me.
I know very well that
The voices I hear may never go away,
Even though
They tell me there is nothing to be afraid of.
My friends
Are imaginary.
The terrifying thoughts that keep me up at night
Persecute me.
People don't
Believe I am human,
And they
Judge me for my mental illness.
They refuse to
Believe that I can find healing,
And I
Am constantly drowning under the weight of my differences.
No, I don't feel like I
Can resurface from my problems,
And I realize that I
Live in a world without hope.
I do not believe we can
Change.
We must
Change the view.
Reverse the stigma.

Instructions: Now read the poem above in reverse.

Justin Mah, 14

"Where's Your Homework?"

Alien abducted for special occasions
Bird poop splattered math equations
Cyborg robots burned the pages
Dentist appointment lasted ages
Excuses? I never make them!
Fishing bait for catching lunch
Gusty wind took away the bunch
Haunting ghost possessed my work
Indian elephants went berserk
Jumped out of a plane with a parachute
Kid in class screamed, "There's a substitute!"
Lilac flowers wilted all over
My magic genie had a hangover
Neptune's planet gave me a cold
Octopus inked it bold
Parisian snails slid across my notes
Quest for elongate anecdotes
Ripe tomatoes needed plucking
Snakes wrapped around my wrists, restricting
Trees broke promise to sprout answers
Urban metal, diverting dancers
Volcanic eruption swallowed report
Weekends are too short
X-ray declared writer's block
Yeah I was busy with all sort!
Zero correct from A to Z, cut short?

I hope my teacher believes me.

Zara Rahman, 14



Self
Micah Jumaquio, 18

What unique perspective or life experiences would make you a valuable member of the Queen's Commerce Class of 2022?

Starting with the first shining gold star I received in elementary school, there's been this looming menace disguised as a voice of reason that has pressured me to be extraordinary. And this voice, which keeps me up late at night considering considerations which I have absolutely no control over, seems to grow louder and louder as the deadline for university applications grows closer.

So here I am, perched on my mattress in the middle of the night, my bedroom illuminated by only the blue glow of my laptop screen, and suddenly it's hitting me that I may just be intensely mediocre. I have nothing to list under awards and recognitions, nor was I terribly abused as a child (or at least not enough to make a case for overcoming adversity.)

In true Gen-Z fashion, part of me desperately wants to blame everything around me, but for one of the first times I feel justified completely in this claim. The fact is that way back when I was colouring in a cartoon bear, I wasn't doing it for the sticker, but that small token kick-started an insatiable addiction to praise. And what makes it all the more terrifying is that every other kid in that classroom felt the same thing that I did. We all wanted to be told that we were 'special,' and it never occurred to us, or even the adults around us, that not everyone is.

It's not as if I'm saying that gold stars are at the core of society's need for self-gratification, but this participation ribbon phenomenon is a unique plague on my generation. At some point, adults started realizing that their children needed support and encouragement, and then ran with the idea. When we were kids everything we did was ribbon-worthy, and this immediate validation has been present to this day. But now, as we're entering semi-adulthood, the supply of ribbons has been harshly cut off. We're thrown into this *Hunger Games*-style arena where our only weapons are a list of our extra-curricular activities and a copy of our transcripts — which, for some reason, includes my grade nine Physical Education mark.

What's worse is that so many of us are ill-equipped in these games simply because we're human beings. During the time we spend in high school we are, without a doubt, the most impulsive, reckless, and irresponsible that we will ever be. Every newspaper article I've read, every frustrated grandparent I've listened to, and every sitcom I've ever seen, have all reiterated this fact. Yet, when we're leaving high school, adults suddenly forget this and convince themselves that what we did the last four years has no impact on what will happen during the next. They treat us like we've been preparing for their interviews and essay questions all this time, and expect infinitely more from us than we can provide. And as someone who's still trying to accept my own mediocrity, at this moment in time I refuse to dance for them or jump up and down at the idea of acceptance, or act as if there's validity in this system.

So, no, Queen's University, I can't say that I have made a profound impact on my community which will distinguish me from the thousands of other kids applying to your Commerce program — I was too busy coming to terms with PMS. I was too busy getting into screaming matches on the phone with my boyfriend, late at night, engrossed in my own angry whispers. I was too busy worrying about whether or not I would eventually turn into my parents. And all the while, as I was coping with these ritualistic traumas, I was still being told that I had a chance. And that if I joined a club or two, and maybe opened a textbook every once in a while, that I would be okay.

As my aspirations collapse around me, it's hard to gather my thoughts. But, I will say that this is unfair. It's unfair that no one pays meaningful attention to us all this time and then suddenly, when we're on the verge of making one of the most important decisions of our lives, they pretend that what we've been doing actually matters — and this somehow decides if we will one day actually matter. We're no longer special. Not all of us, anyways. And those of us who could be have to desperately hope we can prove it. And, yes, I understand that life is unfair. I understand that no one holds your hand and draws you a map to success. But what I still can't understand is why no one told me this back when I was colouring in that cartoon bear. Back then I wasn't as attached to these dreams.

Aysha Tabassum, 17

i am the messenger

treading along the shoreline between the cultures of my parents and my own
trying to recollect even the slightest wisp of what was stolen
the day i flew across the borders,
likely crying on the plane and causing disruptions
as my parents tried their best to follow the instructions
that they could barely read and understand underneath
all the adrenaline that must have been flowing all through their bodies
an adventure to a new world, a new language, and a new people.
one that i doubt that i myself could take.

i am the messenger

somehow immune to a looming barrier indestructible to them:
the language barrier.

every public space where english must be spoken is a stage;
the spotlight is on them and everyone seems to go silent as soon as they open their mouths to speak
speak in a language so familiar and yet so distant from them;
speak their rehearsed lines and hope there will be no ad-libs from the opposing actors and actresses
a single mistake and all the eyes watching will grimace and critique
wicked grins and twisted sins result in constricted skin or perhaps
even begin within.

i am their messenger at sixteen, now old enough to finally go test the waters ahead of them.

no longer the shy small girl in need of protection;

now, i speak the words that they still practice in their minds

i am the messenger — the listener and the speaker

while they, the silent playwrights who get no credit for their work

i am the messenger

my parents:

first generation koreans struggling to make a living in a foreign country.

on a boat constantly rocking backwards; the ocean too unknown for us to know what's coming and where we're going

but no matter how strongly the waves crash down on us, they remain steadfast;

the anchor that i sometimes forget i have and only remember when storms are in the forecast

but even anchors can come undone — not all battles can be won

and either way, remembering their daughter and son,

they fight hard and struggle to stay in the place that they've worked so hard to come to

but at peacetime, clear skies bring out my vices,

taking all they've done and all they do for granted.

the only prize for their effort seems to be

us, their suns and moons and stars,

us, for whom they'll go so far,

us, who they'll follow into the dark

us, who manage to give scars
that don't always fade with time
nevertheless, they still manage to find solace in our smiles;
the smiles that have been built upon the building blocks of their blood, sweat and tears,
built upon swallowing their pride and facing their fears

i am the messenger,
a second generation korean struggling to get up in the morning,
trying my best not to disappoint my parents' big expectations
while knowing how inevitable it is;
to have no such belief in a religion that my parents' lives circle around
every week i go to church and sing praises for a god i don't believe in
my father preaches of love and forgiveness; and these things i have learned from him
just not in the way that he wanted me to.
my father, who came to canada to study philosophy
believes that i will one day believe in god
how can i break his heart so much more than i already have? can the pieces of his heart take any more shattering?
to be or not to be;
i choose to be, but not because of god.
i choose to be, every passing day, because of myself, and for the others around me.
while he believes in He, i believe in me.
i pray to a god i don't believe in,
in hopes that one day i'll be able to find the balance between the two worlds i reside in

my story begins in one world and continues in another.
we never seem to end where we begin.
this is what makes us human
we are always changing, always moving and always growing.
i am the messenger
between two worlds; my parents' world and my world
i don't quite fit in either one; the dollars or the won's
yet one without the other is foreign to me
together,
that is where i belong
i am a messenger
and i'm not the only one

You-Jin Kim, 16

The Subway

I see her.

She is a stark silhouette against the green blur of grubby tiles. Slowly the subway jerks to a halt, and the red doors open. We've arrived at Runnymede station.

Her entrance is abrupt and swirling, she is frazzled. A few dry leaves cling to the tails of her scarf. It drags on the ground; a stranger lifts it off the dirt and she yanks it away. Briskly she moves away from him. She sits across from me. She spares only a second to glare away the curious glances that inch her way.

They want to know why she's crying.

It's always surreal to see a crying stranger on the subway. It's intimate, it's one of our most basic and primal of human emotions, and in these occurrences, we are given a glimpse into the soul of a stranger. This girl was bare and raw, disclosed for all to read her story; stoic in her silence.

Those who notice her dead expression politely look away, pretending not to have noticed her sorrow. She doesn't acknowledge their pity, or their sympathy, they can't provide the emotion she craves. Such remorseful eyes.

But I see her.

Although it is without hostility that she shirks the onlookers, she is shameless in her tears, and refuses to wipe away the scars they left on her cheeks.

Suddenly her gaze is latched onto an ad about car insurance, except she doesn't see it. Her weary eyes do not focus, nor do they glaze over. She is not really in this rickety subway, full of hunched workers and bored students. Nor is she oblivious to the world around her, she just chooses to ignore it. Her fierce grip on the scarf in her lap proves she feels the cold, yet she does not move to warm herself. She does not cringe or acknowledge the shriek and screaming of the tracks as the car stops, embracing the ear-splitting squeal.

But I see her.

Her eyes are grey, surrounded by kohl and fatigue the colour of bruises. They fill and empty with tears unshed, keeping rhythm with the pursing of her lips, or the tightening of her larynx, anything to keep from releasing the waves behind her eyes.

Releasing her desire for expression, relinquishing to her exhaustion, to her loss of love, of trust. It builds within her, a cup brimming with restrained emotion.

Finally, the tears trail her cheeks, alongside that straight nose. She weeps with a new fervour that unsettles her company, but she does not care. She has let go. Her jaw is clenched tight, her throat weak and tired. Her gaze never strays below the seats opposite her, for if she looks down, the tears will consume her completely, and she will be unable to stop.

A soft bell noise catches my attention. "...Ossington, Ossington Station."

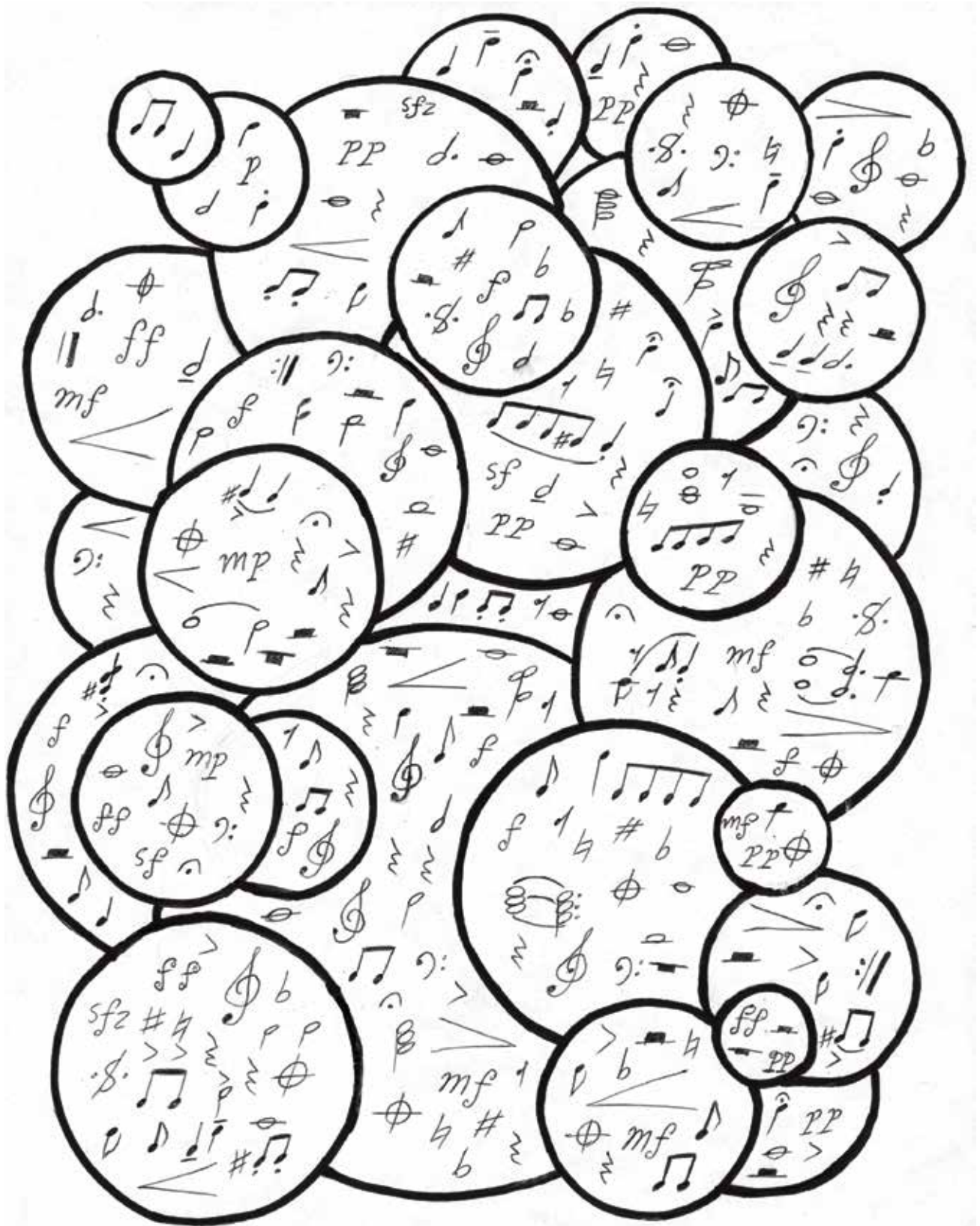
Slowly my legs pull me to my feet, I shuffle forwards, feeling stiff and almost archaic. I've been struck by this girl. The car pulls to a stop, red doors slide open once more. I take one more look at her, she's looking at her feet, suddenly, intensely; aware. She pulls her jacket around her shoulders a little more tightly. Raises her sleeve to wipe away the tears. Broken.

Finally, I tear my eyes away from her and step out of the subway car, where was I even going? I'd forgotten.

But that girl... she had been alone, unknown to our small reality. Her, and her emotions just a blip in the monotony. What a beautiful moment.

And I saw her.

Abby Godden, 18



Thinking About Music
Bita Rezaeian, 15

If You Ask Me What Heartbreak Is

1. It is the destruction of what you love.

2. It is the fragrant, blooming roses you planted for your mother drowned by a storm.

3. It is the heaviness of the air on the overcast day you are alone and you walk faster because the clouds are darkening when you see your lover and there is lust in his eyes but his love isn't meant for you.

4. It is the soft drizzle of scattered droplets before you step into a silent home shivering in the damp cold coughing from the smoke spilling through your brother's locked door his slurred words never quite his own.

5. It is the slammed door when your father returns home drunk from the bar smashing beer bottles into your brother's neck throwing angry fists into your swollen face and afterwards your sobs muffled by the rain that pours down harder, and harder yet.

6. It is the fluorescent hospital lights after your mother gives birth to your baby sister and names her Talia for the black storm that hammered down relentlessly on her birthday but Talia means rain from heaven and heaven was where your baby sister went when her tiny heart ceased to pound and the rain ceased too.

7. It is the acrid taste in your raw throat as you clutch your mother's shaking hands listening to her cries and watching the sky light up again but your mother's eyes won't light up ever again and your father's eyes are still drunken and your brother's eyes look just like your father's and when you finally speak your voice is that familiar tempest that your mother fears most.

8. It is the roses you replanted for your mother withering away from neglect so this time the storm that drowns them is you.

9. It is the destruction of what you love slowly destroying you.

10. It is the storm that never quite passes.

Jennifer Chen, 16

The End of the World Came Quietly

I remember the end of the world.

I remember how quiet it was, quiet enough to drown out everyone who said it would end with a bang.

I remember waking up, and seeing the world, and thinking, "This should not be."

I remember the sky, the colour of a bottle of apocalypse mustard spilt by some careless god. (Poor god. No more worshippers left for them on this lonely, marbled planet. Except me. Just me. But I have no gods. I am alone.)

I remember wandering and wondering how I, a chubby-cheeked child of smoky cities and cloudy roofs, had survived this long with neither a city nor a roof.

I remember wondering and wandering as I did, letting my feet be a rudderless boat rocked by tides of probability and possibility.

I remember walking for a long, long time, smiling to the plants and wild creatures who had come to squirrel away pieces of their homeland from the concrete paths I walked upon so easily. (The plants did not smile back, but sometimes, the wild creatures did. I do not think they liked me.)

I remember thinking the planet didn't like me. Why else go through the trouble of killing all I'd ever cared about?

I remember telling myself that was a lie.

I remember telling myself I cared about more than human beings.

I remember thinking about how much I cared about sunsets and blue skies and tall shade-giving trees that were kind and sturdy and forever standing on guard for my home.

I remember seeing old monuments to an even older regime, and the delight the wilds took in bringing them all crashing down. (Or perhaps it was not delight. But even after all these years, my primate-programmed brain cannot help searching for a hint of another primate, whether in shattered glass or shaky dreams or a half-imagined ecstatic face tucked in the shadows of leaves busily tearing down dams.)

I remember whispering to the lakes when they threw themselves against the rocky shores in their grief for my loss. I told them that it was much better this way, and that they should enjoy their beautiful foam-flecked dresses again, even if the cloth came from the blue lips of humans who asphyxiated on their own pride.

I remember the trees returning, like mothers coming to carefully gather up their children in a green-gowned embrace after a long day of play.

I remember laughing as verdant-skirted meadows danced to the rhythm of wind-blown songs, a wild and careless celebration of all that never would be again.

I remember nights that would have been long, had I not been so busy revelling in the light of the stars that peeked out from their smoggy blankets at last.

I remember the universe splashing the skies in symphonies of colour, as if it too were delighted that the world was vibrant again.

I remember the end of the world and all that came after.

Cassandra Xie, 15

My Imagination Runs Faster Than I Can Keep Up With

Although it is my name written under (and frankly, all over) this story, I know the feelings I have painted with words are far too familiar for thousands of individuals. This is why I write and this is why I share. Enjoy.

I am young and instead of playing on my Gameboy, I stare out at the passing cars while my sweaty palms leave patterns on my seat belt. My heart races though my body sits still; my body shivers, though mild air fills the car and the windows sprawl open. "Mommy, who's at the front of the highway? Is time real or is it just something we measure with a clock? Why do I have two eyes if I can only see one thing?" I obsess over questions normal kids take years to curate. They take up every square inch of my mind, but my mother doesn't think anything of it. "She's going to be a philosopher one day," she brags. This is what anxiety looks like.

I am older and so is our car, but I remain the window admirer I once was. The questions which once splurged out my mouth, now clench onto the back of my mind. Dark and nocturnal, they stay around longer than I'd like them to. Almost like house guests who bring air mattresses to dinner, but worse. My heavy heart anchors me to the subway seat, my eyes scanning constantly for someone who looks like they could hurt me. Two siblings cross my path and I lose my breath at the thought of my brother dying at work. My key slides into the lock protecting my home, and all I can think about is an unwanted Goldilocks standing in my living room. At night, I grip my sheets tightly. Lying there numb and hollow. Rolling the clips over and over again. The chemicals of my brain find peace in their imbalance. My imagination runs faster than I can keep up with. This is what anxiety looks like.

I never thought I'd battle a mental illness. It didn't make sense. Why did a girl like me — having everything I could ever dream of — end up suffering so much? Somewhere along the drive, I realized I didn't want to live with a mental illness because it wasn't *normal* to have one. "I'm fine," I repeat to myself. "I am just like everyone else." But these words of encouragement do not heal me. Instead, they act as a coping mechanism, a flimsy life jacket streamlining my sense of soundness. It's cowardice; my family is just as scared to admit that I am mentally ill as I am.

I feel physically ill because of my thoughts and I know what consumes me is not "just stress." I no longer obsess over my grades; I hyperventilate over international political affairs and the extinction of polar bears, things I possess absolutely no control over. My chest tightens, my mouth dries, my hands numb and my breath shortens. The feeling is no stranger, but when my mother asks me to describe it, I can't. When the thoughts have no off switch I grip my sheets tightly, praying for silence when my eyes close shut. I live ashamed and confused as to why no one else gets it or feels this way. This is what anxiety looks like.

If this sounds nonsensical to you, this essay persists to meet your eyes and alter your mentality. Mental illness is a ubiquitous issue that affects everyone to some degree. It is a deep wound concealed by Hello Kitty Band-Aids and kisses on the forehead by those scared to understand what it means to suffer on an invisible level. It is not her invention or his excuse for attention. Believe me — someone you know knows. The Canadian Mental Health Association says, 10-20% of Canadian youth face a mental illness or disorder, making teenagers the largest group of victims worldwide (CMHA, 2018.) Also, as of every year since first observed in 2013, one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness that changes their lives and the lives of those around them (CMHA, 2018.) It is evidently not those suffering who need to "snap out of it," it is society. An issue as prevalent as mental illness should not be sugar-coated or denied the concern it deserves. Society needs to listen to these cries and understand why this epidemic is as powerful as ever.

Mental illness enters and is the elephant in the room. Everyone knows she is there but no one calls her by her name or invites her to sit down. This is why more and more people fall victim to their own minds. We do not want to address mental health because we worry that by bringing attention to it, it will only spread further — and this is where we continue to be wrong. It is okay not to know how to cope with your feelings. What is not okay is treating people who suffer from mental illness like a mutation of the ideal person. In our society, mental health comes with an abundance of excuses. That girl over there, she is antisocial. And that man, he's a drug addict. However, if we knew more about mental health, it would be obvious: that girl suffers from depression and that man lives with post-traumatic stress disorder. Why does society fail to accept the chemical imbalance that lies in some minds? The judgment heightens each day, causing those who suffer to feel as though their mental illness is a burden. There are countless misconceptions we need to unlearn about mental illness.

Campaigns such as Bell Let's Talk work to tear down concrete slabs built between those who suffer from and those in denial of mental illness. They attempt to identify the stigma and enlighten individuals on the importance of mental health education. But how many times do we see an evident change in the way we nurture mental illness? The awareness stays with people for an hour, or — if we're lucky — a day, but eventually, most fall back into their habits. If it is something embedded in all of us, we should embrace it in a multitude of ways. One way society can counter these misconceptions is by placing mental health discussions in the grade school curriculum. By giving children a clear understanding of illnesses we may not be able to see, they will grow up with an open mind towards mental health and will better understand their own mental challenges. As well, the government can implement seminars and therapy sessions in the workplace so adults can also correct their misconceptions about mental illnesses. An educated society is a safer one. This is what mental illness needs to look like. Do you see it now?

Victoria Duarte, 19

The Lucky Landform

I am a remarkable landform,
A sight to behold.
Beauty that arose from desolate ice and snow,
Millions of years ago.

Fifty percent of Canada's landmass,
The girl gasps.
So many lifetimes I have lived,
And countless eternities I shall last.

I am truly blessed,
Yes, I know.
Clear crystal blue skies,
Rid of grey smoke.

Other landforms I pity,
Withering under pollution,
But no not me.
I am the pure beauty of nature,
Indigenous and free.

Preserve me,
Protect me, please.
Mine glittering treasures of gold and silver,
But take no more than you need.

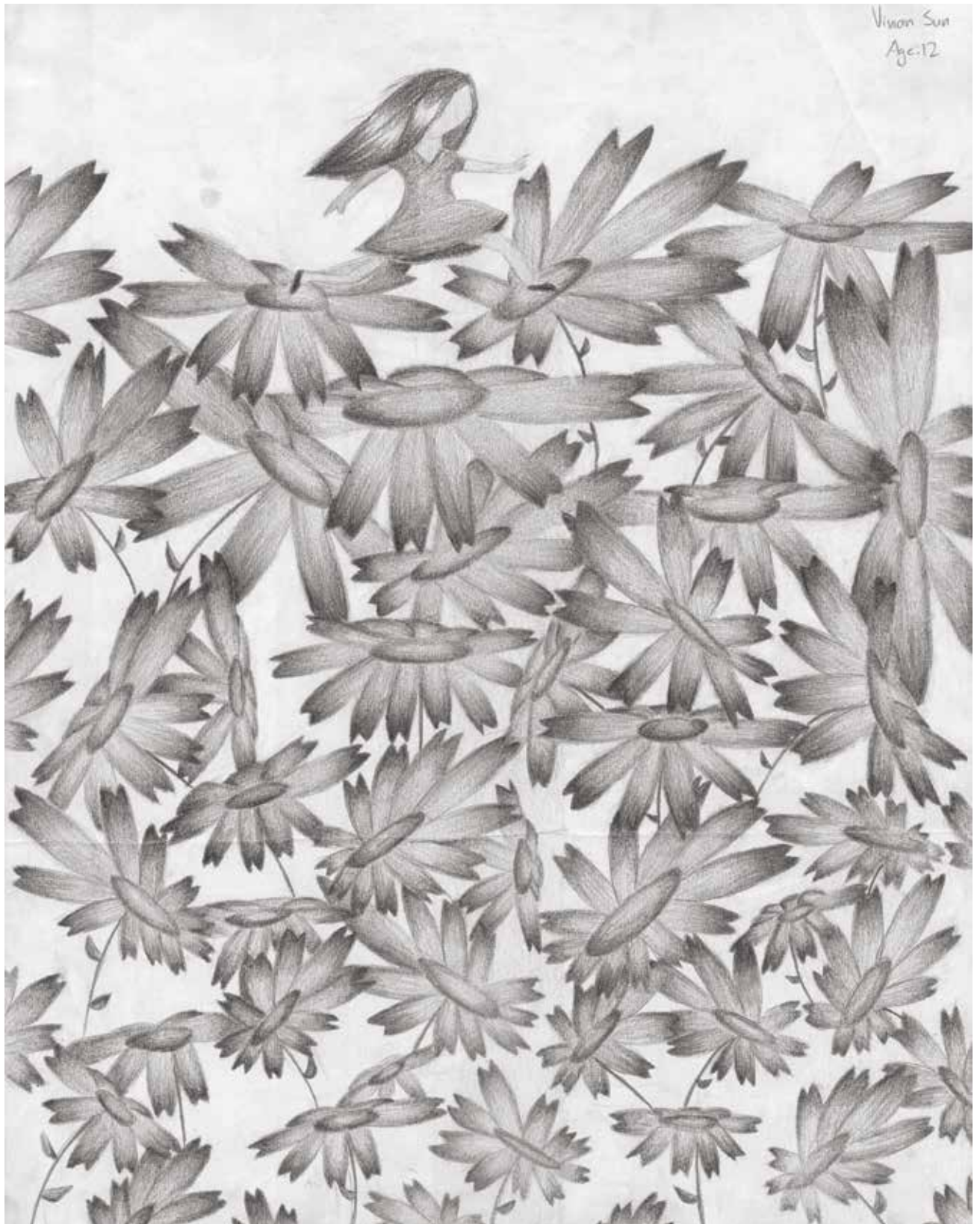
Hydroelectric developments may run through my rivers,
But keep the limits in sight.
For such actions made by mankind,
Must always come with a price.

The girl sits back,
Eyes wide and keen.
Pictures flash in her mind,
Of striking scenes.

Of vast, balmy blue lakes,
Of softly falling white snowflakes.
Of immense, towering mountain peaks,
Of radiant incandescence and buzzing bees.

And as she stands and walks away,
With her comes a piece of me.
I am the lucky landform,
And with her comes my heart, my memories.

Joey Qiao, 13



Childhood
Vivian Sun, 12

Oblivious

She was the definition of oblivion. She lay on the grass, eyes up facing the sky. The children around her played until their feet went limp. She appeared strange, people staring longer than they should. But her mind was even more peculiar than what everyone else saw. Inside, she daydreamed every second she had to spare. It didn't matter if she was in the middle of nowhere, or if she had to get out of her house just to get her mind working. Every day, every month, her mind was filled with new dreams and kingdoms were constantly breaking and rebuilding every second of the day. The dreams just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. It kept her going, and the thought of serenity at the end of the day just made her feel even more blissful. After all, there wasn't anything else that made her happier than to create and imagine new universes in her head. It was exhilarating.

But deep down, she knew. She knew with all her mind that all good things must come to an end. In this case, her good things were her daydreams. And she knew they were destroying every opportunity she had ever come across. It was like a drug; it gave her time away from reality. She was addicted. Unlike any other drug, this drug was not affecting her health. It was affecting her mind. The thing she loved the most. She had to stop. She had to let go. Let go of the feeling it gave her when she was upset. Let go of all the universes and galaxies she had been able to live in. And most importantly, let go of the friends she had created for herself. For her obliviousness was killing her family and everyone around her. Even if she didn't touch them, she was affecting them unintentionally. She had to let go. By letting go, she knew she would save them all. They wouldn't have to stare at her anymore. They wouldn't have to wait for her to wake up from her daydreaming.

So she would let go. It was best. And in an instant, she let go. And as she let go, the hospital monitor that had been slowly beating let go too, letting out a monotone, straight beep. The silence that followed had been deafening, even though they all saw it coming. They had lost their vibrant, ecstatic girl. But at least they knew she was soaring in whatever universe, whatever kingdom, she had decided to live in as she decided to let go.

Monette Nicole Ancog, 13

Who's the Fairest of Them All?

The first time I bought makeup at eleven years old, I knew next to nothing about it, aside from lip balms and mascaras. I only went because my friend said her lip balms and mascaras were used up and that she "couldn't even leave the house." I thought my friend looked fine and wondered if I also needed the duo as permission to be in public, so naturally, I also picked up some lip balm and mascara. As I left Walmart, I gave myself a pat on the back and thought, "Good job, Celina, you have now unlocked the secret to beauty and success."

Boy, was I wrong.

As I aged to be wiser and taller, I also became more obsessed with the idea of looking "acceptable in public." Clear lip balms were no longer enough to make me feel as kissable as all the other girls at my school, and I learned that simple mascara was never going to make my short, straight lashes bat like the girls' lashes in commercials, no matter how much black goo I piled on them. I was so insecure that I vowed to have plastic surgery when I got older so I could fix my face. But what kind of 13-year-old could afford lip fillers? So I went to my next best option and made a trip to Sephora.

If people thought methamphetamine was a drug, they have not tried buying miracles over the counter of a cosmetics store. Soon enough, it was not enough to just have luscious eyelashes — the glamorous models in the store brought attention to my other "flaws." My eyebrows suddenly were too light, my skin was too dull, and my complexion too spotty. If one mask did not eradicate redness, I moved on to another to reach my goal of looking like an Asian Dove Cameron. Of course, it never worked like that. My self-esteem suffered, and so did my bank account. Eventually, I ran out of money and soon after, the products. In heroin terms I went cold turkey and had nothing to fill my void of anxiety over my looks.

However, the world worked in its mysterious ways. One day, when I was finally able to part with my used up, dirty containers, I found my first tube of lip balm from when I was eleven. Despite the germs that have been infesting it for the past five years, I put it on again and realized: I am still the same person as before, and I am fine with it.

Celina Fu, 16

You Colour(ed) My World

A papercut, or two, or three
a dozen and one carnations
sliced apples and small cherries
his lightly tinted lips.

Leaves that blow in the autumn wind
one hundred campfires blazing
peaches and round tangerines
his room—but only half.

Illuminating, sunny, light
a thousand pieces of pure gold
bananas and sour lemons
his hair in broad daylight.

Chlorophyll in four leaf clovers
ten-thousand trees ready to climb
pears and every unripe fruit
his second favourite hue.

The sky, the sea; all things between
a million raindrops falling fast
blueberries—that's really it
his intense, staring gaze.

The sunset on a night in May
billions of bright galaxies
plums and tart elderberries
his drum set—snare and all.

Reduced to nothing but pale dust
infinite memories come to end
coloured my world; broke my heart
you are now grey to me.

Erin Rebello, 14



Satyam Mistry, 15

Dreaming in Empty Lies

The night was peaceful, the most beautiful I had ever seen. The stars illuminated the royal blue sky, with gentle soft hums that sent echoes throughout. Sparks of flames rose from the campfire where my father and I sat silently.

"Son, what do you think the stars mean?" my father whispered, pointing to the star that glistened the most. I couldn't think of an answer, so I instead hummed a response.

"Aren't they beautiful?" my father said.

I chuckled at the question, the stars were clearly beautiful, they shimmered in harmony!

My dad smiled in response, it was the last night we had before heading home. We packed and left after I silently said my goodbyes to the forest itself. I glanced one more time at the stars that continued to shimmer. I smiled knowing my father promised that we would come back. I hopped into the car, my father started the engine, and we were off.

When we finally arrived home, it was almost sunrise. I quickly ran to the door and opened it with a swift motion, only to be welcomed with the ear piercing scream that belonged to my mother.

"Get the child!" A voice echoed across the room.

I felt a sharp tug dragging me to the kitchen.

"Stay put," my father whispered.

I hid in a bottom cabinet. The door creaked open, allowing me to see. Nuts and bolts were scattered across the floor. The sharp sound of glass being shattered echoed around the house.

A figure stood before me and my mother. Her voice was hoarse when she yelled out, "Adam!"

I was crying, confused at the situation. I tried to keep quiet remembering what my father said.

"Adam!" She repeated. "Adam!"

"There's the woman!" the man yelled. With a gun in her hand, my mother pulled the trigger. The man fell heavily with a bang. More troops of men gathered, surrounding my mother. She slowly backed away and kicked the cabinet door shut behind her, causing me to jolt back. I squinted, struggling to look through the hole to see what was happening. My mother fired bullets, relentlessly defending herself from the crowd of men. Again she called out for Adam. Then she dropped. The smoke was visible coming out from one man's gun. He slowly walked towards her, grabbing her by the neck.

"Where is the child?"

She didn't answer, instead she only laughed in response.

The man clicked his tongue and slammed her head against the floor.

Her face was pale, her breathing shallow. He placed the point of his gun on the tip of her forehead. The last thing I saw was her faint smile before he pulled the trigger. It almost felt like eternity, as if it was all an empty lie.

The clock struck midnight and I was left sitting confused, angry and scared. The marching sounds that resonated around the house gradually quieted down. I kicked the cabinet door open and slowly crawled out. My eyes were drawn to the young man near the staircase, splattered with blood. It was my father. I couldn't think much about it. I slowly headed upstairs, the creaking sound of the wood that longed to be fixed. I needed a record, just proof that I was still alive. Here today, alive. I quickly took out a dusty paper from within a stack of books. I pulled out a pen and began writing.

September 27, 2003. The frigid, dimly lit room was silent, aside from the resonating echoes belonging to the ear piercing scribbles against the paper.

I woke up from a sharp scream that shattered my thoughts. It was dark, barely light enough for me to see. Was I high again? I stared at the ceiling, trying to remember where I was. The air was filled with the strong scent of alcohol and drugs. Not again...I heard muffled voices which meant I wasn't alone. I awkwardly stood up and headed towards the kitchen. I flicked the light switches on and looked around for a nearby snack, but was out of luck. I opened the fridge and my eyes were drawn to the bottles of beer stacked against each other. I quickly took a bottle before leaving the house. I went to my car and turned on the engine. I opened the bottle of beer, letting the bubbles fizz and the strong scent spread throughout my car. I chugged down the bottle in a matter of seconds and threw it behind me. I gripped the steering wheel, my palms sweaty. I felt dizzy and tired. There was instant regret. However, the overwhelming pain from losing my parents blindsided me and I'd do anything, anything for a moment of relief. Drugs and alcohol were my only escape.

The ride was silent, driving along the same pathway my father and I once drove. My thoughts soon became a distraction as I finally arrived at the same forest from fifteen years ago. *September 27, 2003*. I was now twenty-eight. The thought of my parents has become a continuous nagging feeling that remains as a mental scar.

I ran to the lake located in the centre of the forest. It was a silent place, only the sound of the wind brushing against the leaves and a constant humming in the air. I allowed the gentle breeze to run against my skin; I took a deep breath. I whistled at the beautiful sight, the midnight light reflected, the lake mirroring the sky. I settled down, running my fingers back and forth, letting the water flow between my fingers. I smiled at the relaxing sensation. I took off my shoes and socks, dipping my feet into the water. I only glanced up at the sky a few times. It still remained as beautiful as ever; the stars illuminated the royal blue sky, with the gentle soft hums that still ring every night.

Linda Tran, 14

The Plastic Cage

The manager enters fifteen minutes before opening time. He unbolts the door and wakes us with the strident clang of his soles on linoleum tile. We would cover our ears if we could, but our arms are frozen still. They built us this way: fibreglass sculpted into skin, pressed like a terrain of flatland, butter-smooth. An expanse of unwrinkled plastic in place of flesh. The factory workers pushed us along the assembly line, porcelain limbs and polished ivory, packaged in Styrofoam. Then they shipped us off to the shop and the workers clothed us in their trendiest size-zero ensembles and put us on display.

Nine o'clock. The bells chime and the barrage of customers hits. They think we don't see them, but we do; behind this manufactured veneer we see everything. We see them with their flaccid flesh and their flimsy statures, their folds and their flaws and their freedom. We look into their eyes, but they skip over ours; instead they take note of our cinched waists and strung-out spindly thighs, sylphlike simulacrum of humanity.

They brush up against us and one cuts her finger on a belt buckle. She bleeds, crimson splashing red across our glossy coating. We wonder how it feels to have a pumping heart, to have veins and arteries, nerves and brain cells and vertebrae. Instead, our heads are hollow.

One customer cracks a joke and another's eyes crinkle when she laughs. We blink our porcelain eyelids, free of folds and furrows, and stand stoic as they pass, like solid stone, thinking how we would give anything to be in their place.

Instead we exist on the shopkeeper's whims. He chooses what we wear and where we go. We are imprisoned in our unblemished skin; we are nailed to the ground, minds confined in a plastic casing; we are sugar-free eye candy for window shoppers, who spare us mere glances, or jealousy on a good day.

We are not beautiful.

The sun is dropping toward the horizon and it's time to close the shop. For hours we have been touched and prodded, shoved and used, envied and despised by the people who only know our shells, and nothing of our minds. The manager turns off the lights and drags out the security gate, and as the shop goes dark we wonder whether our cage is made of steel bars or simply fibreglass flesh.

Then we feel grateful, for we are only mannequins. There's no need for freedom when we're flawless.

Jillian Clasky, 15

The Resume

I sprawled over the couch in a jumble of laziness, scrolling through Facebook on my phone and snacking on some cheese and crackers. A post popped up on my feed—a picture of Hugo Lee smiling, posing with his first place trophy at a recent international Biology competition. I narrowed my eyes and scoffed. Off to the side, my mom was stationed diligently at her desk, eyebrows furrowed at the monitor. She was leaning inward, slowly typing away in silence.

I took one last sip of my juice box and walked to the recycling bin. As I walked back, I glanced at the words she was typing.

Another resume.

I froze. Then, in a panic, I beelined back to the couch. But my mom was too swift and she lunged out, seizing me by the wrist. Like a rat, I was caught in a mousetrap.

“Come, help me with this resume,” she said in Korean.

I stared helplessly at my cheese and crackers. On my desk, my phone was blowing up with Facebook notifications.

“Uh...” I inched backward. “I have a test tomorrow?”

My mom frowned at me. “*Aigoo*, just help your mom out!” she chastised. “You’re not even editing! They asked me to rate myself on a list of traits. You just need to tell me what some of them mean.”

I inhaled slowly, then sighed.

“Fine.”

At this point, I was seriously considering writing “Employment Advisor” on my own resume. Reluctantly, I slogged my way to the computer and sat down.

I looked at the word—Impulsive.

“Impulsive means—It’s like when you do things quickly without thinking...” I paused, thinking hard. A light bulb lit up in my head. “Oh! It means *chungdongjeog!*”

“I hate being impulsive. Put one out of five for that.”

The next few words were easy to define, but then I got stumped. I pondered, my head spinning from overthinking. I always overthought.

“What does it mean?” my mom asked.

“Let me think.” I could feel her looming presence over me.

I finally formulated an answer, but then I looked at the next few words. I gulped.

I knew what the words meant, but I started questioning their definitions. Like a curse, I started overthinking yet again. I ran sentences containing the words quickly through my head, trying to figure out their meanings. My face burned red and I started heating up. These were easy words—words I should know.

I remember when the overthinking first started, during the summer before grade eleven. I wanted to challenge myself by reading the thickest book I could find. Except, when I started reading, I couldn’t understand anything. To me, the sentence structure and vocabulary seemed completely foreign. Each idea presented felt disconnected and I racked my brain trying to connect the dots. But rather than forming a clear image, the dots linked together to form mutilated nothingness.

I constantly felt compelled to question the most rudimentary of things, to question everything I learned. I was a prisoner locked in an interrogation room, fluorescent lights glaring down at me and my interrogator; he was an ugly, disfigured version of myself. This version tortured me, tasing me whenever I falsely believed I knew something. Every night, I begged him to stop. But in the morning, he would still be there sitting across from me and grinning nastily.

Classes were a whirlwind of anxiety as I fought against the feeling that I didn’t understand anything. Each day I scrambled to write notes down, eyes darting wildly around and hair bunched up in my fists. Others sat leisurely, chatting about how easy it all was. I wondered how disgusted my teachers would be if they knew I was a fraud.

But editing resumes was the worst. In my effort to make sure the grammar was perfect, I became obsessive over what was grammatically correct. Should I use “of” or “for”? Or maybe “in”? Nothing sounded right. Hours were wasted trying to find the right answer. I wondered what was wrong with me, why my brain was failing me.

You wonder why, huh? Because you’re naturally stupid, the interrogator whispered, giggling in glee. *Because you can’t understand anything. Because you’re not Hugo.*

My mom snapped, “Hurry up—I want to send this soon! You always take so long!” She was losing patience, tired of staring at the screen for hours and trying to navigate through the English instructions on the job application.

"I'm trying!" I said through gritted teeth. I glared at the word, desperately trying to conjure up *anything*.

"What's taking so long?!" my mom probed.

I strained, my mind grappling with the interrogator. *See, even your mom thinks you're dumb!* The interrogator started cackling, the shrill sound of his voice echoing in my ears. A wave of heat rushed over me, and I glowered into the light of the monitor. In the reflection, I saw myself, but with a first place trophy of my own. Then, I saw the interrogator peering over my shoulder, eyebrows raised dubiously. The cackling continued unabated.

"Do you want to know why?"

I jerked my head toward my mom, eyes wide in rage.

"Because I'm STUPID, THAT'S WHY," I spat. "STU-PID."

I suddenly felt dizzy. Tears started forming in my eyes. I rubbed them away quickly, turning away so my mom couldn't see. She sat dumbfounded, staring at me in disbelief.

"Why are you calling yourself stupid!? I'm only asking you to work a little faster!"

Her eyes were narrowed with an intense anger. But underneath the dark brown expanse of her irises were signs of heartbreak.

I looked my mom right in the eye.

"BECAUSE. I. AM."

Tears were streaming down my face now, rapid rivulet after rivulet pooling into my hands. I shook my head crazily, my body trembling with each heaving breath. Her facial expression morphed into dismay, mouth now gaped open, eyes now startled.

I whispered so that only he and I could hear.

I'll never be as good as him.

Barton Lu, 15

The Icy Ambush

The sidewalk, covered
In a thin but slippery sheet of ice
Concealed by a blanket of snow

It's the perfect trap
for people on their way to work

or back home.

George Varbanov, 13

March Break

Walking through wood
Sun hitting green
Firm, black asphalt beneath me

Muddy shoreline eases into water
Seen beyond trunks
Fallen trees and rotten logs

Roots of trees bulge
Disappearing into the earth, then
coming out
Snakelike, curving everywhere

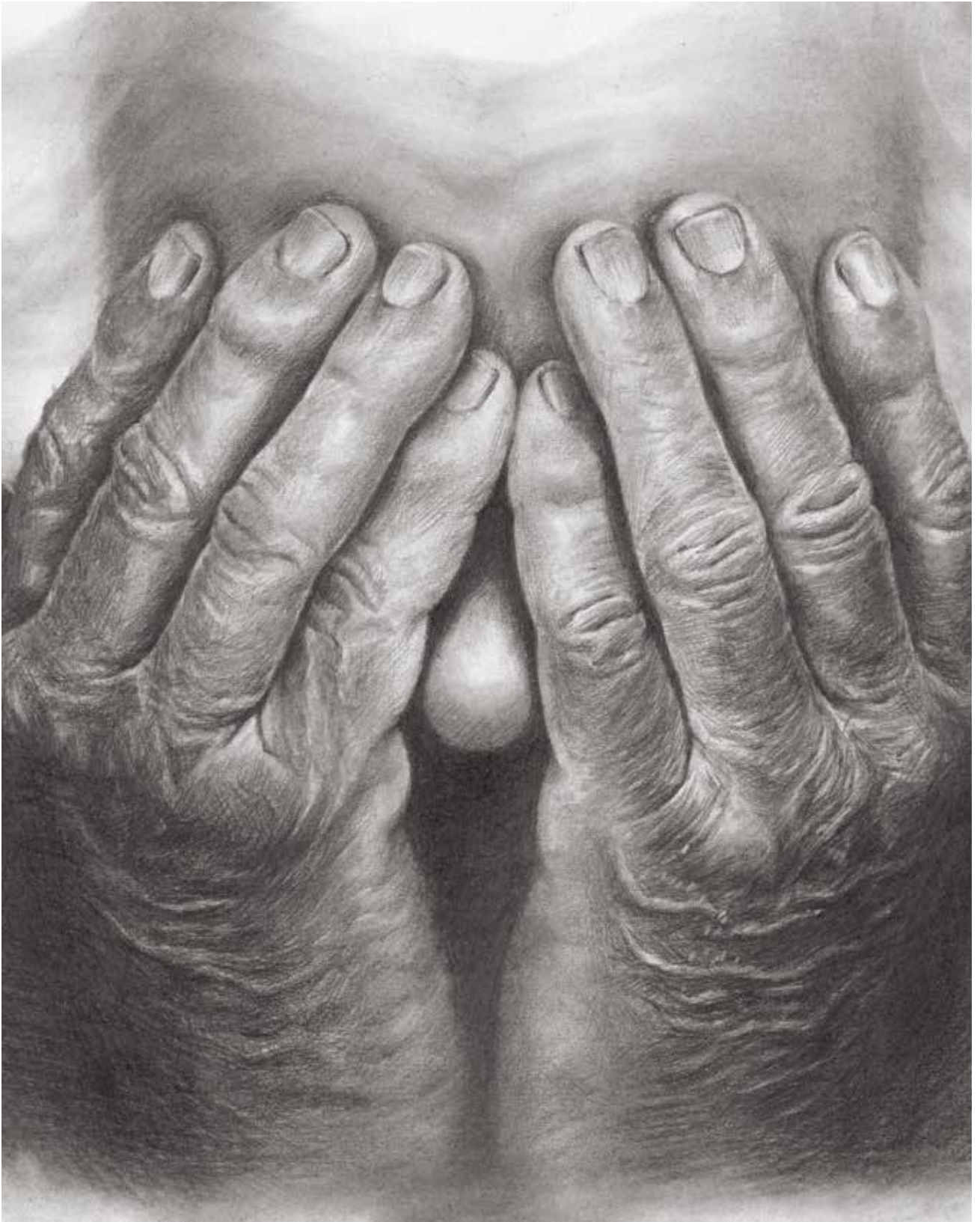
Ducks splash below
Converging in groups as if
Discussing their March break plans

Emil Capilongo Anthony, 12

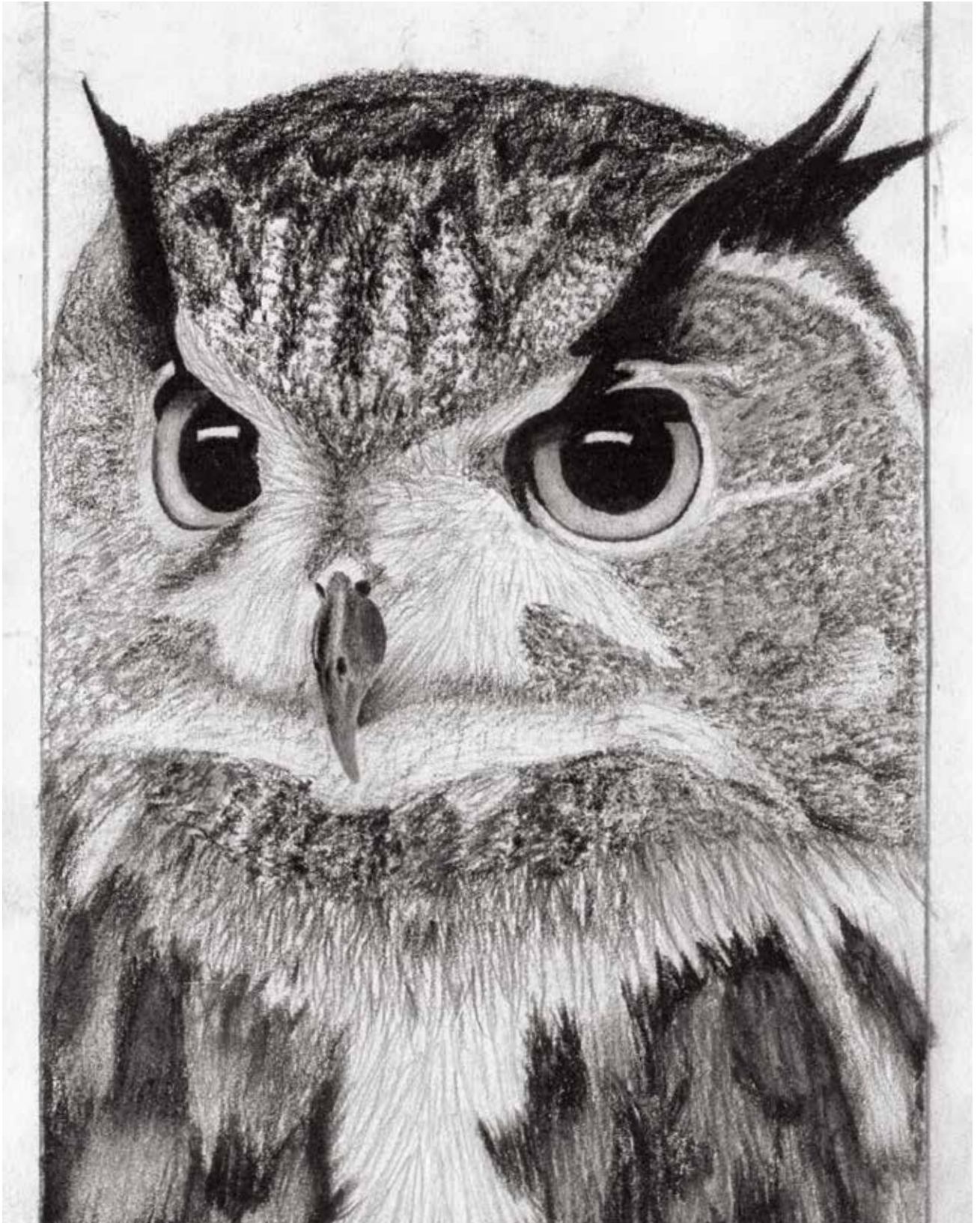
A tree (or many)

Half-painted
Orange
Or yellow
Pinned against a blue sky
Half-bathed
Half-baked
In the autumn sunrise

Areli Freeman, 17



Yoonsae Celine Kim, 16



Hitish Mahay, 18

Persist

Picture a landscape of total devastation at the end of a battle. The village had been captured and the fight was over, however, the painful war was not. The world around her seemed like hell. Rain, bombs and shells had attacked relentlessly through day and night. The sounds of rockets, bombs, and aircraft were over for now. Silence seized the village, except for the throbbing in her ears. Feeling her voice start to quiver from overwhelming fear, she hoped for any kind of escape from this conscious nightmare. This was a thirteen-year-old girl's world; one ruled by war.

This innocent child lived her whole life in a battlefield. She was born on April 8, 1976, in a hospital filled with an aroma of blood and her spine tingling to the symphony of crying. This was only the beginning.

She grew up, and her eyes slowly opened to the atrocious war. Yet, she only focused on the positivity her siblings and friends offered. Laughter was unknown to the girl. She had to wake up early in the morning to tend the crops, wash the livestock and fetch water kilometres away. Only after conquering her chores could she celebrate her victory with her friends, running free in the solemn fields as thorns pricked her bare feet. Her entire village was silenced by the unknown force of war. Due to the fear that troops might enter the houses—no light, no sound, and no life after 6:00 p.m. — the unstated curfew. She had to sleep through the constant clatter of machine gun fire that echoed throughout the vast village. Several explosions erupted into a shower of blinding sparks as the night sky illuminated, blinding her eyes and silencing her fear.

She had a remarkable opportunity to attend school; but it was only a memory to her. Her parents stole her only joy by pulling her out of school to stay home for her own safety. Armies used schools as headquarters and stations, which made schools a visible target. Yet, kids scrounged any education they could find like mad dogs.

She was finally confronted with a decision that would forever change her life. The decision to immigrate — a chance to escape. So why did her insides twist and churn as her father announced the decision? Why was she so scared of something she had dreamed of? Because of her internal attachment to her homeland. She could not surrender her patriotism. The island was where her ancestors once roamed; all her memories were buried within the soil. How could she leave in a blink of an eye? But the stories of Canada excited her. She was ready to be accepted by the multicultural mosaic of Toronto.

As Canadians, we should value the safety and peacefulness we are accustomed to; as it's easy to take for granted. However, there are many people in the world who continue to live through constant conflict, warfare and have experienced an abundance of bloodshed. Most Canadians have never even dreamed of a reality like that. Canadians should relish each and every second they live in this glorious and free land!

Well, let me finish the story of the thirteen-year-old girl. She immigrated and settled in Canada and is now a proud, admirable adult. Her job in Canada? A job downtown and being the mother to me and my two siblings. Canadians should cherish the life they have and use it to their full capabilities. Many of us already possess safety, education, housing, and peace. Just remember, whatever you take for granted, someone else is hoping for...

Thakshnavi Manoharan, 15

Kings of Darkness and Light

In the beginning, Sun shone all day and all night, and all animals lived together, never sleeping. Two of the strongest animals, Bear and Wolf, lived together in a beautiful forest. The forest had tall trees, lush scenery, and an abundance of food. Bear and Wolf were respectful towards each other, never having a disagreement until one fateful day.

Bear was resting by the berry bush when Mouse scurried up to him.

"Oh, great Bear," she squeaked. "Would you please help me in my time of need? A heavy rock has rolled over and covered the entrance to my home. I know you are King of the Forest, strongest and bravest of them all. Nobody else will be able to help me!"

Bear was flattered and agreed. He went to Mouse's home, and with no difficulty at all he shifted the stone away and tossed it into the river. Mouse was overjoyed and rushed off to tell everyone about how Bear had helped her.

The next day, Wolf was lying on a rock when Rabbit approached him, muttering nervously.

"Oh, Wolf, I beg of you, please come," he chattered. "Snake has cornered my babies. I know you are King of the Forest, fastest and most agile of them all. Nobody else will be able to help me!"

Wolf had nothing else to do, so he agreed. Carrying Rabbit on his back, he ran over to Snake and chased her away, saving the baby rabbits. Rabbit was extremely grateful and hopped off to spread the word about Wolf's good deed.

That night, Bear and Wolf were having a snack together, with the heat of the sun beating down on them.

"Ah, it is good to dine with a friend," laughed Bear. "Even the King of the Forest should be able to have some fun once in a while."

"You must be mistaken, because I am considered to be the King of the Forest!" Wolf snarled.

"I disagree," Bear growled. "To be King of the Forest you must be brave, strong, and noble. I hold all of these traits."

"I am a leader," argued Wolf. "I have speed and agility. To be King of the Forest you must be light on your feet and ready to face danger, like me."

This fight went on for many days. The other animals were afraid and hid. After a few weeks, Sun had had enough. She decided to leave for a while, plunging the forest into darkness. You could see Sun's faint silhouette on the horizon, giving off very little light. Bear and Wolf were stunned at the sudden change. The other animals heard the argument end and came out of hiding. Seeing Sun gone, they all began to panic. Wolf noticed that he could see, despite the darkness and, realizing his chance to prove himself, called out to the animals.

"All those who can see, come with me, the King of Darkness!" Wolf howled.

A group of animals got up and followed him. Among them were Raccoon, Owl, Possum, and Skunk. Bear and the other animals decided to wait until Sun returned. After a while, they fell asleep for the first time.

Sun returned and was very confused. The fighting had stopped and the animals had split into two groups. She decided that every night she would plunge the forest into darkness so that only a faint outline of light could be seen. She named this Moon. When Sun was up, Bear ruled over the day animals. When Sun set and Moon appeared, Wolf ruled over the night animals. Peace came over the forest and Wolf and Bear both got what they wanted: to be Kings of Darkness and Light.

Juliana Melino, 16

Another Breath

It was after me. It, the horrid thing, the monster, was after me. I ran. My feet thumped against the ground, my heart beat, and my lungs gasped for air.

The booming of the monster's steps came closer. I looked back. The dark, six-storey tall shadow was gaining on me.

I ran faster. My feet thumped against the ground twice as fast, my heart beat twice as fast, and my lungs gasped thrice as fast. I looked around and saw my feet flying across the gravel, the bright green spruce trees whooshing past, and the twinkling stars watching over me. *I'm running faster than the wind! I've got to be fast enough.* I looked back once again. The monster was still there, as fast as ever.

I began to feel weak, my muscles burned and my chest ached. I started to slow. Looking back, I saw the monster was still gaining on me.

"Holly!" it hissed. "Holly!"

"No, stop it, please!" I wailed.

I felt a giant hand close around my body. It squeezed my chest, rendering me unable to breathe. I kept trying and I kept trying. But I just couldn't breathe.

With a jolt, I woke up, sweat dripping down my forehead and my lungs gasping for air, taking tiny, raspy breaths. It was dark, but as my eyes adjusted, I looked around the room. It was a small, nearly empty room. The oxygen tank on the left of the bed, the nightstand and teddy bear on the right. Just how it was supposed to be.

I shuffled to the side of my hospital bed and reached for the nightstand. I felt my teddy bear sitting on the edge. I picked him up and hugged him close. I was finally safe.

After yesterday, I didn't sleep a wink. I was too afraid that the monster would come back. This morning, just like every morning, the doctor came in for my checkup and my cancer treatment.

"Ya look beautiful, but a bit queasy," said my doctor, Mr. Melbourne, clearly concerned. "Are y'alright?"

Beautiful? I wouldn't think so. I have a clumsy, tall and skinny body with super pale skin. Not to mention my big, awkward, bald head. *But I am feeling a little queasy. Maybe I'll go to sleep. No, I can't see the monster again*

I wobbled over to the window and looked through it. The tulips and roses were in bloom. Red, yellow and pink. They stood tall and strong amongst the string of trees.

"I'm fine," I mumbled. "I'm fine."

Suddenly, all my strength just left me and I collapsed. I couldn't breathe. Every breath I attempted failed. Every breath I attempted hurt. Every breath I attempted was a breath closer to my death.

I opened my eyes and blinked. I blinked again. All I could see was light, a bright, blinding light.

"Am I in heaven?" I asked.

No one answered.

"Am I in heaven?" I asked again, louder this time.

I heard a door swoosh open, and the sound of heels clacking against the ground.

"She's alright! The wee girl's alright! Ya survived, Holly, ya survived!" Mr. Melbourne bellowed.

Nurses and doctors rushed to my room to see me.

"It's a miracle!" one said.

"Astounding! I've never seen anything like it," said another.

"I'm alive?" I asked, as a nurse gave me a shot and some medicine.

"Course ya are!" replied Mr. Melbourne.

Then, once the excitement was all over, everyone left, leaving only me and Mr. Melbourne.

That was when I started feeling the pain. My body was sore, my chest ached, and my lungs burned whenever I tried to breathe. I looked down at my chest and was horrified with what I saw.

There were heaps of bandages covering my chest. And through those bandages, I could see pieces of bone jutting out. My chest was contorted and twisted in a weird way. Old blood encrusted the edges of the bandages, and new blood seeped right through.

It was horrific. Horrendous. Disgusting.

Then, I started crying. Tears rolled down my face, wetting my clothes.

"Everythin's gon' be okay. Don't ya worry," Mr. Melbourne said, with a worried look on his face.

That's a cold, hard lie, I thought. A cold, hard lie.

I was running. I was running fast, as hard as I could.

Wait, I thought, *why am I running?*

I looked back and saw it. The monster. The horrid thing.

No, not again! I thought.

I was determined to escape, determined to live. I ran and I ran, as fast as I could. My legs were sore, my lungs burned. But I ran. *Thump, badum, gasp, thump, badum, gasp.*

"Holly!" it hissed. "Holly!"

Tears rolled down my face.

"Holly!" it hissed again. "Holly!"

"Stop it! What do you want?"

I had started running faster, but it had already caught up to me.

Once again, I felt the cold, gigantic hand clamp around me. All I could hear were my lungs, trying, reaching, gasping for air. All I could hear was, *gasp, gasp, gasp, gasp.*

"Holly!" it hissed. "Holly!"

I stopped struggling, closed my eyes, and just stayed still as I waited for the monster to devour me. Yet right at that moment, a picture flashed into my mind.

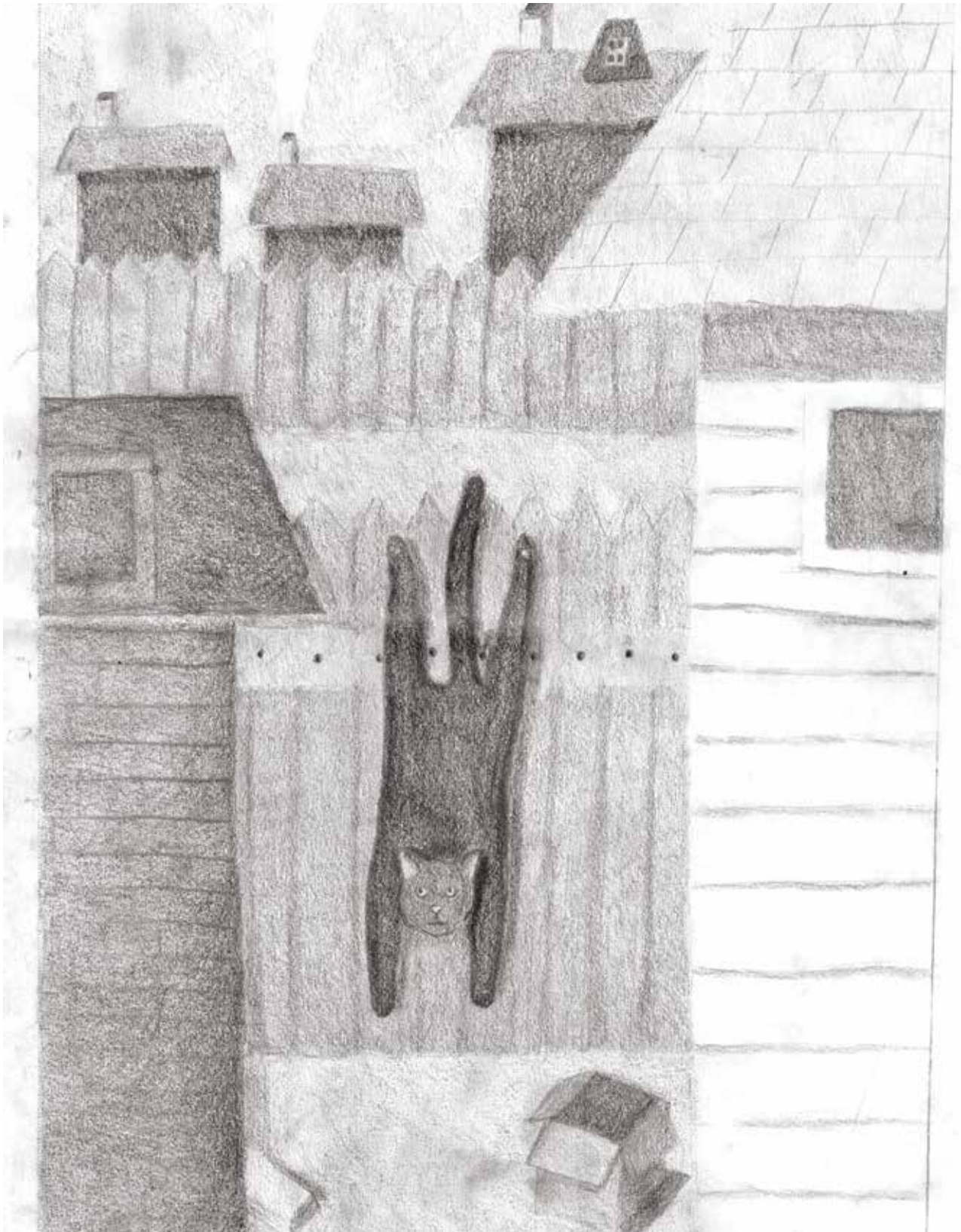
The brightly coloured tulips standing like soldiers in the meadow. They had started off as tiny shrivelled bulbs, yet now, they stood tall and strong, not afraid of a thing.

My eyes flew open, and I pried myself from the hands of the monster.

"No!" it screeched.

"Yes!" I screeched back, as I took another cold, refreshing breath of air.

Angela Mo, 12



Alley Cat

Aileen Sun, 12

I'm Not Jealous

I'm not jealous.

I'm just wondering how you can command the attention of everyone in the room. How everyone can feel your presence and prepare to throw themselves at your feet. How you can build yourself such a high pedestal for the public to place you at the top of, the reigning queen, the fairest of them all.

I'm not jealous.

I just can't believe how you're still willing to throw yourself into danger if it is to save someone else. How you give your food away if someone's hungry, how you give away your jacket, even if it's the middle of the winter. How can someone so perfect have such a big heart?

I'm not jealous.

I'm just trying to figure out how you're so smart. How you can stand up in front of the class and reteach even the most difficult of concepts. How you can make the most boring topics sound like the most interesting in the world. How as long as it's said by you, it's amazing.

I'm not jealous.

I just don't understand how you still haven't dated anyone. How despite every guy in school tripping over themselves trying to ask you out, how your desk and locker overflows with chocolates on Valentine's Day, you still look at other couples with sadness in your eyes, as if you wish you could be like them.

I'm not jealous.

I still don't know how someone like you would talk to someone like me. How even though I'm probably that girl you ask for a pencil and then forget about, the one who'd be in all your classes but you'd still forget she exists, you found something special in me. How you light up when I appear, just like others do when you show up.

I'm not jealous.

I don't understand how much I built a pedestal for you to stand on, only for you to step down to stay with me. How you can show your real self to me, beyond the barriers you put up for everyone else. How even though you're not perfect, you're still the lighthouse in the storm, and your true self is absolutely gorgeous.

I'm not jealous.

I still don't understand why I have ever been. How even though you've been nothing but an angel, I may have wanted to knock you off the pedestal I've built. I've only ever known that strong and smart girls were competition, not someone to be attracted to.

I'm not jealous.

Because I understand now. I never wanted to be you. I wanted you. I wanted your smile, your selflessness, your intelligence, your anything and everything. I thought I wanted all of this for myself. I really want all of this because it's you who has all these traits.

I'm not jealous.

The only thing I may not understand is how someone who shines like you would want to be with someone like me. But right now, with you in my arms, my mind, and my heart, I know that even if I never learn the answer, I'll be happy with you.

I'm not jealous.

I'm in love.

Muna Mohamed, 14

Stars

When I was little, I used to ask Mum all sorts of strange questions: How tiny are the people in the radio? In the olden days, was everything black and white? Where does paper go when the recycling truck comes to pick it up? One of the things I bugged her about most were the stars that flickered in the night sky. "Why are they there?" I would demand. "Why can't we touch them? Why are there so many? What do they mean?" Mum patiently explained to my five-year-old self that each of the stars represented something good happening to a child around us. And of course, I believed her, because Mum knew everything. Every night that something good happened to me – maybe I'd find the wishbone in the chicken at dinner, or I'd get an A on a spelling test, or I'd beat Joanne at a game of cards – I'd run outside into the field, lift my head towards the sky, and search for an added star. I'd stay out there for up to an hour some nights, carefully combing the sky for a star that seemed brighter, or bigger, or newer. I'd never find what I was looking for, of course. There were hundreds of thousands of stars. Even if a new star were to be added, I couldn't possibly keep track of them all. Joanne would laugh at me for even trying. Eventually, Mum would have to drag me back inside after pointing out a random star to satisfy me. I think she regretted making up that story about the stars. But for a long time, I believed it with all my heart.

When we moved out of the suburbs and into the big city when I turned seven, I was absolutely shocked. When we first arrived at our new apartment, the first thing I did was burst onto the apartment balcony, exhilarated with excitement and anticipation, only to be greeted by a vast expanse of darkness. *Wait, there's a star over there! No, never mind, it's only a flashing helicopter.* All the stars were gone. Every single one of them, vanished. And since I had not yet grasped the concept of light pollution, I was led to one miserable conclusion: nothing good ever happened to children in the city.

Hana Sharifi, 16

Without Warning

"She really came without warning, didn't she?" My mother laughed, crossing one leg over the other. "I never thought she'd come so early."

Of course, neither did I. I'm trying to embrace it, but she's so... unexpected, to say the very least. Uninvited. It's like a metaphorical hurricane. She has interrupted my everyday routine. I watched out and had to clear off dates from my calendar to accommodate her oh-so-special needs.

She's like that one time I slept over at my grandmother's for four days straight while my parents moved us into our new house. Me and my brother were originally supposed to stay for one night, but it turned into two, and so on.

Now that I think about it, that's completely wrong. At least I enjoyed going to my grandmother's. Do you know how much of her soup I consumed? It was truly heavenly. No, instead, it's as if that soup was made of acid. Several times, I nearly made a call home because she wanted to hang out at one in the afternoon on a Tuesday.

"Yep," I said quietly to my mom. "She makes me so uncomfortable. Why does she have to stay so long? It's like she can't leave me alone. She's so clingy, Mom."

The playdates always turned into sleepovers. At the beginning of our 'friendship,' she would only stay for up to four days. Lately, she's been staying for seven whole days. She always wants to go running or swimming. I just sit on my couch with a cup of tea and my laptop. We're complete opposites.

"She always embarrasses me in front of my friends too, Mom," I complain, and hug my knees up to my chest.

During my best friend's presentation, we did an outdoor relay. It already wasn't my strong suit, but to top it off, she was practically ripping my guts out because I refused to listen to her any longer. I was there for my friend's presentation; I would stick around for it. I had to stick it out. Some other people asked me why I didn't run. Clearly they didn't have a friend like mine.

My teacher was a bit more understanding, but it was still very awkward asking him if I could sit out during gym. I hope he knew that type of friend.

"It's okay," my mom said, and she crossed her fingers. "She's your best friend."

Zoe Kyraleos, 12

Finding the Words

I might sit at my chair and write beautifully,
All alone by myself, words I write come to me.
But when faced with someone with a mouth and two eyes,
And a heart and a brain so they'll judge and chastise.
When they stand right in front of my face how can I,
Speak my words smooth like honey produced in July?
Find the words to explain, find the words to confess,
Smooth their brows, ignite hearts, bring to arms, to express.
So I write and I type and I sign at the top,
I write emails for those who might listen and stop.
When I'm done, I can edit my words rearranged,
But in life, I can't splice, sentences are not changed.
Even Shakespeare did not speak his work on a dime,
Edgar Poe even needed a few moments to rhyme.
I must envy all those with quick words, sharp with tongue,
Hear you this: those elite cannot count me among.
I might stutter when faced with a stranger to meet,
Hold my breath, shift my weight and admire my own feet.
Practice words, write them down in my head as I think,
When I talk, I misspeak and my cheeks blush dark pink.
When I speak everyone casts a glance at my face,
All those words are forgotten, punctuation misplaced.
Written down, all those words seem so solid, unfazed,
You can carve them in stone and they'll stand by a grave.
Would you know had I not exposed this to thee,
That line nine of this poem was orig'nally three?
I can hide behind a page and you shan't see my face,
You can read the damn poem at your own damn pace.

Olivia Laufer, 15

teenage musings

the young live in a flicker
while the rest of the world is moving

flickers, where all that matters is
that basement
that yard
that truck

for a long moment
they're free
for the first time again

with love and laughter
that forgotten purity of individuality

belonging
you can't feel anywhere else
but with your own people

with music loud, butterflies,
arms up, screaming,
singing, dancing,
crying
and god; smiles.
happy smiles
sad smiles
good sad smiles

and that one smile that makes you lose yourself
for the first time
and the last time
a million times over

so should the flicker fade
in ample time
feel no shame
for life is but a candle and youth is but darkness.

to live in the moment is to live in your time.
and the time is forever now.

Sarah Abernethy, 16



Liberty
Nathan Tang, 15

Waiting

Lucia's taste buds absorbed the tangy blood as she ran her tongue over her bottom lip, raw from absent-minded chewing. She looked around the airport. Everything felt so automatic — from the desk attendants with tired smiles checking people into their flights, to the bags clunking down the conveyor belt, to her teeth gnawing on her lip. She looked at each bag disappearing towards its destination as the conveyor belt endlessly whirred. As a kid, she thought that conveyor belts were miles long and that whenever a bag was set onto it, it was on a new part of a belt. She eventually learned that it is in fact one short piece of rubber that spins over and over again.

Her mom had gone to the washroom, leaving Lucia with their suitcases. Lucia thought about the last time she had stepped onto a plane, the school trip Jan and she had gone on. Jan. It had been almost six months since she'd last seen her. Some days without her were easy, most days weren't. The last image of Jan she had was something she would never forget: round, forest-coloured eyes, empty as they looked through her. Lucia did not understand the heartbreak that movies portray and that her friends had experienced until Jan left her without a trace of remorse.

It wasn't until a piece of fingernail pricked her tongue that she realized she had moved to chewing on her nails. She looked down at her hand, which trembled slightly. She remembered the day Jan broke up with her. Lucia's hands shook aggressively, provoking the rest of her body into an anxious fit. If Lucia could chew her fingernails right down to her cuticles she would. Even though her fingertips were rough and swollen from her subconscious biting, she was not able to grow her fingernails too far past the bleeding point. Instinctively, her fingernails shot back into her mouth.

Her breath shortened. She felt light-headed but continued to stand in the same spot, clutching the handle of her suitcase. The lights in the airport seemed to dim as her mind went dark, Jan's voice a taunting echo in her mind. Lucia desperately tried to focus her thoughts elsewhere — school, friends, family, her upcoming travels — but Jan's voice only grew louder, overpowering hers. In a flash of heat, a familiar, harsh, prickling sensation crawled over Lucia's skin. Her breath seemed non-existent by now, nostrils twitching rapidly. Her face scrunched, eyebrows settling into the anxious crease that never seemed to iron out. Her hands ran through her hair, pulling on her scalp as if ripping out every single follicle would tear the thought of Jan from her forehead.

Lucia clutched her head, eyes shut and body trembling, inaudibly mouthing words. Lucia didn't notice her mom walk through the washroom door, but she heard her footsteps break out into a run towards her before feeling the warmth of her arms around her. Lucia finally felt her emotions release and calmness take over as her mom's embrace promised safety and love.

Lucia stood there in the comfort of her mother's touch, her thoughts dissipating as their breathing synchronized. All the sounds in the airport melted into one hum, the roar of airplanes taking off and landing the only audible noise. The rumble of the planes was loud, but soothing. It reminded her that she was never truly restricted to the confines of her mind. The end of her longing for Jan seemed far. She was unsure how many more nights she would spend longing for Jan's presence, but at least she knew she would spend that many more healing.

In the depths of newfound warmth, Lucia smiled. "Thank you," she whispered, just softly enough for the two of them to hear.

Andrea Josic, 19



Bring Me Life
Tina Guo, 15



Why You're Late

Your eyes fall to your shoes when their train leaves. You're standing with your back against the wall, wishing you were brave enough to sit on that yellow ledge. Watch your own feet dangle and maybe take a picture or something. When the train comes you don't want to get on because you're stuck in the sad serenity of standing still.

It keeps you there even though you know you'll be late. Sometimes you don't care, sometimes you care too much. Sometimes you feel like you know everything, but not now. You start to wonder things; you wonder so much you start to panic about the things you'll probably never know. Where are you?

You're braver than most, you know. You know this because you've been told, I've told you. You've proven it. You force your feet to move. You walk to the yellow strip and take a seat and put your earbuds in and laugh a little at yourself. Catch a glimpse of your smile in the screen of your phone. A glimpse of your smile and the time, the numbers just where your teeth are. You ignore it. You see lights down the tunnel. Closer. And you want to get up, but it feels too important to be there and you want to be better than who you were a minute ago. And you want. And you want. Closer. And when you can see the front of the train you count to six. One, two, three, four. Five. Six. Six, and you're back against the wall, knowing you counted too quickly. You sigh and realize you forgot to take a picture. Instagram will never know.

"Pathetic," you say to yourself. A little old lady hears you and you smile at her and she probably thinks you're a sweet kid because she smiles back.

You finally look at the time, really look at it, and see how late you are. You think maybe there's no point in continuing, but you still go. When the train arrives, the wind is heavy but you feel lighter, braver, with your hair out of place. More breathing space. You give yourself an inward smile because no one will really know how you felt just now even if you tell them.

This is what I think you mean by, "I'm running late."

You take your time. You stand up in the train, hands free and abdomen centred, until people in the seats at the very back of the car get off. They upset you. For a few minutes, you were the only real person in the world. If that were true you would have their seats. You would have any seats you wanted in the train. When you have their seats, you feel guilty. You've taken something. One of the people has left a scarf on the seat. It sits beside you, watching you, burning guilt into your stomach and other digestive areas. There are two pains in the lower regions of your abdomen. One is a stabbing pain, full of life and energy. The other is hollow, soft and comforting. You put your hands on the sources of pain and close your eyes. When you open your eyes, six more people have gotten onto the train. The electric sound of the doors shutting welcomes a boy who looks like a younger version of your father; brown skin, black stubble. You panic, but it's not your father. He's far enough away that it will never be your father. Your breath lets itself out, closing your mouth softly behind it. Still, you need more time. Another breath, but this time your mouth stays open, an oval, the mouth of a cowardly cave. There are photos on your phone of the girl you loved in tenth grade and the boy who left with his sister twenty-five minutes ago. It's exactly twenty-five minutes now. Your cheeks dimple when you realize you've been counting, estimating. You browse through the photos, swiping left, zooming in and out on that part of her mouth. The closer she is, the softer she looks. The more pathetic you feel. You wonder how long it was since your smile faded.

You get off at the next stop and slide your phone into your pocket. I'm waiting, leaning against the wall on the ground floor of the station. I have my earbuds in, and I'm surprised you don't. Your hair looks messy enough that I can believe you if you told me you had a stressful commute, because you've told me that before. I shake my head, holding you accountable for the twenty-five minutes I spent leaning there.

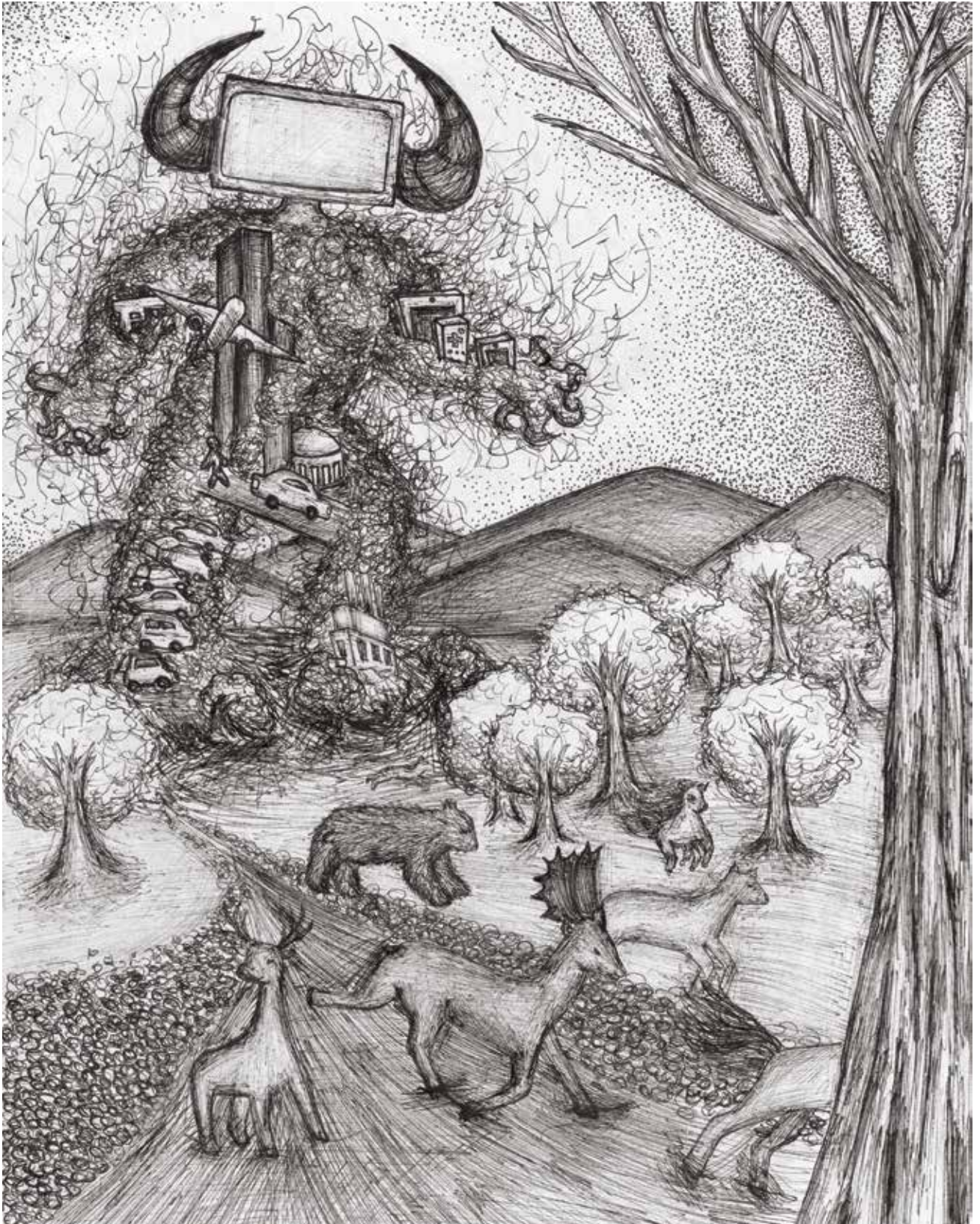
"I was running late," you explain, acting breathless.

Hadiyyah Kuma, 18

To the People that Tell Me They're "Colourblind"

You may think that what you're saying is correct, but it's not.
Before I go on, I would like to point out that I'm not speaking about actual colourblind people.
Just the ones that are "blind" to race.
Why does this need to be said aloud?
Do you think that I really need to know?
Does it look like I really need to know?
To you, it does.
It's my skin that's telling you to say that to me.
It's my skin that tells you that I need to know this.
It's my skin that does its thinking for me.
Oh, wait.
I forgot.
You can't "see" my skin colour.
So why do you need to tell me?
Can't answer?
Don't make a fool out of yourself.
You most likely have good intentions.
So let me tell you why you should try and see colour again.
First of all, you do know that colourblind people can still see black and white, right?
I'll just assume you didn't know.
The progress of all the different races is remarkable.
It's a shame that you can't see it, being colourblind.
We didn't come so far so that our progress would be just another grey area.
You also probably didn't know that the colour of your skin can be considered ugly by people outside and even inside your race.
It's called colourism, but being colourblind, you probably wouldn't understand that.
Colourism is prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.
Colourism is a real problem darker skinned people face.
Colourblind people can't see those kind of problems.
Don't turn a blind eye.
Saying that you're colourblind is creating a blind spot to problems you most likely don't have to face.
You're not colourblind,
You're just covering your eyes.
You're just covering up your ignorance.
I take pride in my heritage and in expressing it, as well.
I would love for you to see that.
Don't stop seeing different colours.
Stop seeing the stereotypes of different colours.
See the excellence of different colours,
A rainbow is so much more beautiful than seeing black and white.
But most likely you have good intentions.
So I'll give you a little tip.
Instead of saying that you're colourblind,
Just say that you're against racism.

Jace Miller, 13



The Paradox of Paradise
Kathryn Dou, 13

The Commute

The smell of wet concrete and traffic fumes entered Mark's nose as he exited his office building. With his blue gym bag slung over his shoulder, he let out a sigh, and his breath was visible in the air, illuminated by his office building's lights. It was dark outside, and the lamps lining King Street glowed in the hazy post-snowfall air. The snow had finished by the afternoon, and now, the only markings of the storm were the slippery roads and slushy sidewalks. At the streetlight up ahead, a car whizzed by, reinvigorating the smell of Toronto in Mark's nose. To be honest, the smell didn't bother Mark. He rather enjoyed it, as he thought it was a distinct part of Torontonians culture. Letting out a cough, he turned the corner and began to walk towards the subway.

Mark often thought that Toronto was best experienced at night. The city had a certain charm to it that wasn't experienced during the daylight hours, a charm that was especially clear in the heart of downtown Toronto. He loved the way the display window lights illuminated the sidewalk, and he loved the energy that filled the city when the sun went down. Walking briskly along the sidewalk, Mark passed by the Hero Burger where he had gotten his lunch earlier that day. Through the shop window, he saw a couple sharing a tray of fries and chatting. Mark's stomach growled, reminding him that he needed to get dinner for tonight. His girlfriend, Susan, had gotten food yesterday, so today was his turn. Up ahead, there was steam rising out of a manhole. He moved to the side of the sidewalk to avoid getting hit by the vapour of the sewage.

He stopped at a red light and checked his phone.

8:13

Messages

Susan @ 6:00

Not feeling too well today, I'm heading home early.

Reddit

Trending on r/Bitcoin

Bitcoin has gone up yet again!

Twitter

@TwitterCanada has tweeted a new photo

He replied to Susan:

Sorry, just checked my phone now. I'll bring home Chinese.

Mark coughed. For the past week, he had been fighting off a cold; he hoped he hadn't passed it on to Susan. The light changed, and Mark crossed the street. In the mix of traffic noise, the sound of people walking doesn't tend to be heard. However, as Mark walked, the sound of a person walking behind him became more apparent. Glancing backwards, he saw that there was a man wearing a black hoodie walking behind him. He didn't think anything of it.

The stairs heading into the subway were wet from the melted snow and had newspapers stuck on the steps. A warm breeze pushed its way out of the station and up the stairs, hitting Mark in the face with its mixture of smells. Mark snatched the railing as he went down the wet stairs, so as not to slip. He approached the turnstiles, Presto card clasped in his hand. BEEP. The harsh sound rang throughout the empty station. Mark passed through the turnstiles and headed to the northbound trains. BEEP. The turnstiles rang out behind him, but Mark was already down the stairs.

Standing awkwardly against a post, Mark dropped his bag onto the ground between his legs. Down the tracks, he could hear the rumbling of a subway train rushing through the web of tunnels that run underneath Toronto. The lights of the train breached the darkness as it rounded the corner into the subway station, coming to a halt in front of Mark. The doors opened with their iconic ring, and Mark stepped into the train.

He sat down in one of the red seats next to the glass partition. From his bag, Mark pulled out his headphones, plugged them into his phone, and started browsing his music collection. Mark was so transfixed with his phone that he didn't notice the man in the hoodie sit down across from him. He also didn't notice that the man was holding something in his pocket. The lights flickered as the train bounced through the tunnel.

"Next stop, Queen Station," stated the digitized voice.

Mark failed to notice that the train was only carrying two passengers. He also didn't realize that the man was starting to stand up. The train hit a bump, screeched, the lights disappeared, and darkness swallowed the subway.

Andrew Mun-Shimoda, 16

Sharmarke

“Taxi!”

For the past ten years, that was my name. That’s what people would call me from afar, that’s how people would refer to me in front of my face. Most people assumed that since I had an “Abdul” in my last name, I didn’t know English. So, most of my customers would pay me no attention and have the most personal conversations during our rides. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t eavesdrop from time to time. The man I picked up yesterday was cheating on his wife with a girl twenty years younger than him. The group of friends that came in my car this morning had all been hungover and God knows what they did the previous night. They reeked of liquor and deplorable decisions. The smell of weed lingered in my car for three days. A black Muslim whose car smelled like drugs? All praise due to Allah, I haven’t been pulled over yet.

After a long day of work, I was about to go home. If you consider a one-bedroom apartment with crusty walls and improper plumbing a home, then yes, I couldn’t wait to go. I needed some snacks; instant noodles and a can of Arizona was my go-to dinner, but today I wanted to spoil myself; I deserved a Big Mac.

All of a sudden, I realized someone was knocking on my window. I rolled it down and saw a mirror image of myself; black, middle-aged, and he said in perfect Somali, “Hello, friend. Can you take me to this address?”

How did he know I was Somali? Maybe it was my appearance, or maybe it was the little blue and white flag I had on my windshield. I was tired. I was hungry. I wanted to go home.

“Come in,” I replied.

He got in, and we started driving. He was older than me. I could tell from the deep creases in his forehead and his receding grey hair. Even if it weren’t for the smell of his garments, looking at his rotten teeth, I could tell he was a smoker. His dirty fingernails and holed pants made him look akin to a beggar. Perhaps he was.

It wasn’t unorthodox among our people. I knew more of us who were beggars than doctors, lawyers, or any occupation that has health benefits or a 401(k). Most of us come here looking for an opportunity, a better life, but comfort is a bigger threat to success than failure. Yet some of us take our chances for granted.

I once knew a boy who came here when he was seventeen and lived with his mother. I used to take him sightseeing every other weekend. At first, he was awestruck. The splendour of it all! I remember how he would look at Times Square and the Empire State Building. He couldn’t trust his own eyes. I wouldn’t either. He couldn’t remember the last time he could walk outside and not be afraid of stepping on a landmine. But, after some time, he grew bored. He was no longer impressed. He no longer felt as if he had to listen to anybody, not to me, not to his own mother. The boy started coming home late, the smell of cheap beer following him. Some nights he wouldn’t come home at all. His mother would call me late at night, in tears.

“Have you seen my son? Where is my boy?”

“I don’t know,” I would say.

Soon after, he moved out and started living with some friends of his. I would see him sometimes. I wanted to say something, anything. He wouldn’t listen to me. He would call his mother every now and then. One day, the calls ceased. I never saw him again.

“How long have you been here, brother?” the man asked me. I had almost forgotten he was in the car.

“Fifteen years. And you?”

“Since ‘91.” 1991. The year my country died.

I had a flashback. I remember the bombs that separated me from my birthplace. I remember the corpses that cluttered the streets I used to play football on. I remember the flames that engulfed my city and my memories. I remember the tanks that rolled in the streets, sending reverberations throughout the city. I remember the shrieks of mothers watching their children being buried under rubble, pulling out their broken bodies from underneath. I can still hear them. I remember climbing in the back of a van, escaping to Kenya with my mother, unaware of the fact that that was the last time I’d ever see Somalia. I remember the parades we used to have, the music. Gunshots and sirens became the instruments in our symphony. I remember going to the beach with my cousins in the summertime, the glittering water, the blazing African sun. I remember how we would dive in, some of us didn’t even know how to swim. We didn’t care. We were happy. I remember coming out of Friday prayer, wearing my best khamis, all white and buttoned up, and having no qualms or worries. I remember the hatred I felt towards our leaders for allowing carnage to take place, watching from behind their gated homes, in comfort. How could I forget?

As if he heard my inner thoughts, the man asked, “What’s your name, brother?”

Most of my people would ask who my father was or who his father was.

“Sharmarke,” I whispered. It seemed like an eternity since the last time I said my own name. I started to beam. Then I started to laugh. The man started laughing as well. We talked about football, women, our upbringing, anything but our tribes, and it was the most tranquility I’d felt in twenty-seven years. Soon after, we arrived at his destination. I told him that he didn’t have to pay. He shook my hand and got out of the car.

I decided at that moment to never be called “Taxi” again. And by the grace of Allah, I quit the next day.

Issa Hassan, 16



Nature and Technology

Victor Weng, 13

Who Is There to Stand Behind Me?

They say behind every great man is a great woman.
But who is there to stand behind me?
My future. My vision. My plans to succeed.
This perfect glass ceiling leaves me only with dreams.
These clothes that I wear. The faith I hold dear.
Are these reasons to take what is rightfully mine?
You'll see I deserve it, just look in my eyes
My determination unwavering after so many years.
Years of patience, rejection, and unwelcome stares.
But for now I'll stare wistful
At my crystal clear glass
Maybe one day I'll break it
If somehow I last.

Beauty standards that make me show my figure
Freedom they call it. Freedom for all women.
Not for me.
When they see my modesty they see oppression.
Must I show you my skin to be accepted?
Can't you see past my clothes and look at me?
Me?
The smart, confident girl that I'm striving to be.
A Muslim, a careerist, a dreamer, a schemer.
I think it's time you saw me.

They say behind every great man is a great woman,
But *who* is there to stand behind me?

Norah Rahman, 14

Farewell

From the corner of my hazel eye
To the tiniest stitch of your auburn cover
I see you waiting
Waiting for a lover
From the bottom of my heart
I wish I could peek just once
Peek into your core and unravel your thoughts
You turn me into a living zombie
Light up each of my nights
You are the hacker of my thoughts
The thief of my heart
When I stare at your blank face
My conscience screams, let it go
But it's not easy
To leave what I never meant to let go
You are my addiction
The flavour of my life
Why I cannot leave you
Is clear to you and I
Without you, I am not me
Without me, you are not you
Alas, we shall be star-crossed lovers
As your life drains out, so does mine
While your life may be an illusion
My life is real
Oh, iPhone I bid you farewell
Your time has ended
While mine has just begun

Achira Sarker, 15

untitled

Again,
the man sat down in front of
me, on the 169 bus
to El Dorado.

He sat there, lifeless,
staring out a window
plastered with
spray-painted adverts.

I've been watching him for
four years now;
since then, he has traded
his shiny suit
for a pair of tattered jeans
and a cheap pack of cigarettes.

Now, he's just another
wannabe Conquistador
on the road to El Dorado.

It has been years, but
El Dorado, the lost city of
gold, is still
nowhere to be seen.
The man, as it so seemed,
stopped believing
a long time ago.

The Conquistadores
believed, didn't they?
To a brave new world
they sailed. They
rode, walked, crawled, and
died
on the road to El Dorado,
all for a dream of
emerald trees and sapphire seas.
All for a mere glimmer
of something that glitters.

What was the destination?

El Dorado.
A figment of our imagination.
We chase it all the same,
until it is not just El Dorado itself
that is lost, but rather
our hopes of finding it.

He sat there, lifeless.
His face was one of
sweat, tears,
disillusionment,
hatred.
It was a face that once rode across a
brave new world,
then walked,
then crawled,
then died
on the road to El Dorado.

Don't we all?

Our collective quest for
"El Dorado,"
for emerald trees and sapphire seas,
for what mundane things
we all yearn for -
it's a never-ending bus ride,
the 169 to El Dorado.

Day in, day out, we repeat,
without understanding why, probably
because there is no why.

Upon this meaningless quest
we bestow the entirety of our
meaning
until, along with El Dorado itself,
it is lost,
never to be seen again,
dead
on the road to El Dorado

The 169 to El Dorado
The 169 to El Dorado
The 169 to nowhere
You know that
and you ride it nonetheless

Jason Chen, 15

Starlight

The man's fingers and toes have long been numb as he stands knee-deep in the snow. February nights in Saskatoon have never been pleasant, dropping to forty below zero on a typical night. In the darkness, the man can only see the stars above and the looming shadows from the several hundred trees around him.

He takes a step. He's drunk, but it's wearing off as he wobbles and uses a nearby tree branch to steady himself. There is a sudden stabbing cold when he plunges his foot back into the snow. At this point, his boots are useless. The cold grabs at his frozen feet as if the boots weren't there at all.

The man tries to recall how he got into the middle of the woods, how he ended up on a two-hour long trek home. Even though everything happened a few hours ago, the memories are already fuzzy.

It was a house party, filled with shouting and alcohol, everything typical of a party with twenty or so rowdy young men. He cannot recall how many cans of beer he downed, but he does remember how he stumbled to his car, almost slipping on a patch of ice. Wrapped in one of his warmest jackets, he started up the engine.

Another step. The man grabs onto a pine tree trunk to support himself, still dizzy from the drinking. He wonders what time it is, but looking around gives him no indication. In this darkness, surrounded by identical trees stretching onward in all directions, he can only see a few metres in every direction. It might be two or three or four right now, and the man would never know. The party ended at one, the last clock face he remembers.

There were police cars. As the man drove down a Saskatoon road, woozy from the alcohol, the telltale red and blue lights flashed behind him. The sirens echoed in the night, which sent waves of panic through the man. There was no one else driving on that street. They were definitely after him. The rest happened in a series of snapshots. Pulled over. Taken to the back of the cop car. Shoved in, rather, as his head banged into the car door first. They told him what he did. Drunkenness and disorderly conduct. But all the man thought about was his throbbing headache from the impact on the car door.

The police car started back up and they began driving. The city streetlights faded away, first a bit, then entirely, replaced by a winding, narrow road with thick forest brush on both sides. In the tint of the yellow-white headlights, every snow-capped skeleton of a branch was ghostly. The man lost track of how much time he had spent in the back of the cop car, but he knew it was too long. He was being driven in the wrong direction and he knew it.

A sudden gust of wind whistles through the trees, blowing snow off the tree branches and dumping it on the man. Another step is followed by yet another gust of wind. More snow flies off the trees, forming mini tornadoes before landing in the man's hair and leaving white flecks in a nest of black. In an attempt to keep himself warm with his body heat, the man brings his bare arms around his chest. It doesn't help. His jacket is long gone. The cold bites at him from all sides, easily penetrating his thin t-shirt.

When the car finally stopped, the man knew he was far away from town. It would take him hours to walk home. As the man was allowed to exit the car, one policeman gave him a swift shove. He crashed into the car door once again, this time a little more forcefully. While the pain sank in, the man's cuffs were removed, along with his jacket. They slipped it off, just like the snow slips off the branches of trees with every blast of wind. The cold descended on his skin in an instant as the man looked around. No sounds emerged from the forest, nothing from the stands of trees which overshadowed everything.

"I'm going to die out here," the man pleaded. But they left him standing in a snow bank.

"Your problem," came the reply, followed by the slamming of a door. The man watched as the police car, with its lights still on, faded to a flashing dot in the distance.

The man bites his lip, struggling to wrap his fingers around a branch. The skin at the edge of his fingertips is tinged blue. His hands might as well be wooden blocks. They can't feel the rough bark anymore, and his feet can no longer feel the stabbing cold. The man looks up, his eyes searching a cloudless midnight sky.

He stands in the glow of the starlight.

Grace Feng, 15



Drowning in My Tears
Nabiha Nuha, 13

Lost

Email subject: YOUR COMPANY HAS HORRIBLE SERVICE!

Takai squinted at his laptop screen. He ran a hand through his messy mop of brown hair and sighed. The office received several emails from citizens every day. Some were annoyingly insistent.

Replying to complaints always took too much time, and Takai was beginning to burn up in the heat. It was a sunny afternoon downtown, and Takai sat hunched over on a bench in the shade. In front of him, people crowded the sidewalk, and the noise of traffic filled the air. Even with a tree's protection, he remained vulnerable to the merciless sun. Sweat trickled down his brow. He wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt, then quickly rested his hands back on the keyboard.

Dear valued customer, Takai typed. *We apologize for any inconvenience—*

A tap on the shoulder interrupted him. Takai turned around and came face to face with a boy dressed in black rags. His sweater was torn, and his pants were punctured with holes. He could not have been more than eight years old. The boy stared at Takai with a dirt-streaked, innocent face.

Please, his hazel eyes seemed to say, hand held out.

Slowly, Takai reached into his left pocket and pulled out a ten-dollar bill. He handed it to the boy, who smiled. The boy lifted his hand to his mouth, then gestured to Takai.

Thank you.

Takai gave a slight nod, and went back to work. His fingers tapped away, flying over the keyboard. A moment later, Takai paused and looked up.

The boy was still there.

Takai opened his mouth to tell the boy to leave, but decided against it. This was a public space, after all. The boy pointed to the empty spot next to Takai.

"Go ahead," said Takai.

The boy propped himself up on the bench and stared at Takai's laptop. He pointed to the screen with a questioning look.

"Oh, this?" Takai looked down. "It's a complaint. I work at a social services office, and it's my job to communicate with citizens. Sometimes I have to deal with angry customers."

The boy was silent.

"What about you?" said Takai. "Where do you go during the day?"

The boy pointed to a building across the street.

"The library?"

The boy nodded in response.

"Are you alone?" Takai asked.

Another nod. Takai frowned. A boy as young as he was shouldn't be wandering around the streets.

"Do you live at a shelter?"

The boy shook his head.

"Why not?" Takai was surprised by the boy's answer. "It's not safe out here."

The boy's expression saddened. He shrugged.

"Do you speak?" asked Takai. He closed his laptop, giving the boy his full attention. "I can read sign language. Can you sign?"

The boy nodded and motioned with his hands.

I stay in the streets. At night, I hide in the shadows of dark alleyways, behind dumpsters. Sometimes scary people walk by.

The boy swallowed, tearing up a bit. He continued.

I'm afraid of people. Too many strangers. I don't want to go to the shelter. What if they're mean?

A single tear rolled down his cheek. He shuddered and broke into sobs.

I don't know what to do. I'm alone.

The boy leaned against Takai, crying. Takai, taken aback by this sudden act of vulnerability, patted the boy's back hesitantly.

"What happened to your parents?" asked Takai softly.

Lost, the boy signed.

The two sat together on the bench for a few minutes, listening to the low buzz of traffic.

Help? signed the boy. *Please.*

"You can't stay out here," Takai replied. "It's too dangerous. You must find help. Go to a shelter. They'll send you to

school, and if you get an education, you can get a job. What do you want to be when you grow up?"

The boy thought for a moment, then pointed upwards.

Tall buildings. I like tall buildings. I will build.

Takai allowed a small smile to escape his lips. "All right then. You will build. But first you need to find a safe place to stay. Out here, you will remain lost forever." Takai spread his arms wide, gesturing to the streets. "Being lost has no purpose."

The boy considered this.

"How about I take you to the shelter?" said Takai. "It's right around the corner. I can't really concentrate on work, anyway."

The boy paused, then nodded. Slowly, he rose. Takai tucked his laptop away and slung his bag over his shoulder. He wasn't really sure why he was helping the boy. Perhaps he felt that it was his duty to help a young citizen in need. Together, the two walked down the street, with the boy clinging to Takai's arm.

Minutes later, they reached the end of the block.

"It's just around the corner," said Takai.

The boy nodded and held up a flat palm.

I can go from here.

He turned and began to walk away. Right before he rounded the corner, he made a final gesture. The boy raised a hand to his lips, and extended it out to Takai.

Thank you.

XiaoYu Rain YeYang, 12

Indebted

The evergreen of youth flows through my veins
As nimble as the heartbeat in my breast,
An unscathed world where I control the reins,
A distant tower stands upon a crest.

No longer young, the evergreen decays,
The tower surges closer every beat,
A life whose greens have faded into greys,
Alas, my time has come for us to meet.

The leering tower casts a shadow down,
Its timeless knell an ode to those in shade,
My dance with Death confers on Him its crown,
My debt to Death has duly been repaid.

Knock knock. Time presages his ascension.
Knock knock. I descend for My possession.

Aaron Leung, 16

Of Seasons in Reckoning

The raindrops pelt upon the desolate.
Their yearning hearts do cry out in pure bliss.
Besmirch the tattered walls of delicate.
Until they bloom entrapped in an abyss.

The sky does smile upon the euphoric.
Engulf its prey in shining swaths of gold.
Adorns the blind in jewels, a clever trick.
Honeyed languish, what lies beneath untold.

And then the bitter winds begin to dance.
Uncovering the gnarled petals of past.
They flee to roam untarnished lush expanse.
The stubborn branch alone amidst the blast.

It thrives as brittle tears hail from above.
Within its ice-kissed roots a newfound love.

Ria Visweswaran, 17



Hanna Beveridge, 16

The Recruiting Hour

I woke up to the sound of an alarm. I sat up and watched the rows of kids mimic my action. Heads popping up in a wave, turning side to side like sunflowers searching for sun. I heard shaky cries coming from the scared children, huddled together like penguins waiting out a storm. I could only see a few faces, but they all shared the same look: a mix of confusion and fear.

"Figures someone would try to escape today," I said to no one in particular, though I wasn't surprised to hear a response.

"What? The alarm doesn't scare you?" Sam teased. I looked up to see the older boy towering over me.

"Nah, there's always an attempted escape on the day of recruiting hour. Nothing to be afraid of," I said matter-of-factly.

"You know, until you hear your name being read out in front of everyone, everybody knowing you're marching to your inescapable end. The day when you're nothing more than a slave to our destroyers, without a single thought to call your own," I joke, scared by the truth in my words. "You know it's coming. You know who you are and when you're going to be picked. Stamped with a date from the minute you're born. Some are lucky, get twenty years or more, others aren't, brainwashed at the age of ten. There's no right and wrong. Only people, innocent people, fighting to hold onto who they are." I realized I had been ranting as Sam sat down beside me, frightened by my outburst. He rubbed the back of his neck, at a loss for words. He took a moment, letting the full force of my speech soak in. Then he got up and walked away, without a word.

"I'm sorry," I whispered sheepishly, though he couldn't hear me. I know I shouldn't have said what I did, considering Sam only had two months until he'd be gone, whereas I still had three more years. I just couldn't control myself.

During this time, I hadn't noticed that the alarm had stopped and the whole room had heard my tirade. All eyes were on me, burning holes through my head at every angle.

Only eight more hours until forty more kids got turned into mindless creatures, taken to build a "new world."

I walked out of the dining hall, glancing up at the big clock. 11:32. Any minute now kids would flood the halls to attend the twelve o'clock show. At the end of the main hall, I pushed open the back doors and sat in the deserted chained-in field. I felt the dead grass brush against my ankles and the dirt work its way through my toes.

I looked down at my legs, inches away from a shallow puddle. The puddle trembled with my every breath. I stared at my reflection with a grim look. All I could think of was how much I looked like my true self sitting there, my eyes blue, my hair gold and a thoughtful look on my face.

I was always the serious one, unlike John, my older brother, who had always been a joker. He would always make people laugh with his witty humour and his endless games. The day he got recruited was a sad day for many; not a single person was dry-eyed watching him leave. I even saw a Gamma tearing up. I was only nine when it happened, but I knew I'd have to take his place lightening the mood.

When I was younger, I wasn't bothered by the recruiting hour. It was just another day; it happened every month. It was only when John was recruited five years ago that it really hit me, what this meant for the captured kids, what this meant for the human race. Now every month I watch my friends go, wondering how long until it's me on that stage.

I went inside, heading for the crowd of kids gathered in the square. As I approached the audience, I held out my wrist to be scanned by the Gamma who was standing by the entrance. The red light targeted itself on my wrist where black ink read, "May 31, 3068"—the day I was to be recruited. I took my place in the audience as a Gamma took the stage.

"Today marks the sixtieth year of the Gammas," it said in a strangled voice. "That's when the sky deemed humans unworthy and sent down a Gamma ray, and our creation began. They left us, though, with 214,783 humans and they gave us a choice. Conquer or be conquered, rebuild the world or hand it to chaos. And so we conquered, and so we will reach greatness."

After this speech a curtain opened to reveal thirty-nine kids filling all but one of the forty chairs. Whispers filled the crowd and the purple creature standing on the stage looked at the children with a confused expression across its string-like face. It looked back into the crowd before continuing.

"I will now read out this month's recruits," the Gamma said, "Mark Jones, Caroline Lewis ..."

As it read the names, the kids on the platform frowned, knowing that once their names were called, it was final. Even through the sadness, you could see glints of curiosity in their eyes, as they clearly thought, "Who's the last chair for?" Just like everybody else.

"... and ..." the Gamma said looking at the fortieth chair, "...Titan McClane."

I jumped when I heard my name; I wasn't supposed to be chosen for another three years. I clenched my hands around my seat and bit down on my tongue. I stood up slowly, feeling dizzy as black spots filled my vision. I made my way, hesitant, up to the stage where the other recruits sat.

The forty of us packed onto an aircraft heading to a small factory many miles away, watching our home grow smaller and smaller.

"Goodbye," I whispered, watching until the small town disappeared.

Riley Skurka, 12



Vintage Queens
Natalie Chattargoan, 19



freedom dear

Let's hail a taxi or row a boat

float

To where the flowers cry and rocks do

Let's travel to a wondrous land

Where cranky ducks play notes as a band

Accompanying screams make our throats ache

Sing every second of every hour that we are awake

Let's witness a baby bird's attempt to fly

All the while the clouds from the sky

weep

Raining to water a gold-petalled flower

That a silver scaled dragon will surely devour

Let's pluck two phoenix feathers

➤ One to prove that *Yes! I truly was here!*

➤ Another to make a magic potion

○ Power to live and breathe in the ocean

So let's take to the road or to the sea, let's leave for wherever the destination may be

Under the pretence of adventure when we are simply

desperate to flee

Fariha Fyrooz, 16



Raisa Rahman (Nishi), 16



#marchforlife2018

Taryn Tsang, 18

Pecans from the Neighbours

I was fifteen when the war ended. Fathers, brothers, uncles, and letters of condolences were sent home, and my mother stored her nurse's cap in a mothball-filled hat box. She began to wear her hair up with pearls like all the other women, and like all the other women she seemed to blindly follow the tacit interdict of All Women Were Simply Placeholders for Men and They Must Return to Being Perfect Housewives Upon Their Husbands' Return. But I saw her once when I went for water in the middle of the night; she was in her nurse's uniform, posing placidly in front of the full-length mirror. Her inquisitive jade eyes sparkled, asking, begging, full of wonder and what-ifs. That was the thing about my mother. She'd speculate about the future and reminisce about the past, but she could never function in the moment, like her corporeal form was here, while her spirit floated up in the nebulae, or in an alternate universe.

Auntie Augusta and I were not related by blood, as anyone with eyes could see, but she had me for tea and accompanied me on walks and made the best damn pecan pie in the county — all qualifiers for being an ideal Southern aunt. She was a benevolent woman, all smiles with a perfectly coiffed head of nut-brown curls, always topped off with an eccentric ornament of something or other: one day a felt canary with dyed feathers, the next an old-fashioned bonnet adorned with white lilies and a fat silk ribbon.

Summer afternoons when we'd sit on the porch and drink lemonade, passers-by would yell obscene provocations to us, the most benign of which was "Go back to where you came from!" — a statement that made no sense, considering Augusta's family had been domiciled here for over a century; by my standards, that made her indigenous to the county.

But when I'd turn my head and beg her to let us go inside, her neck would stiffen and she'd just stare 'em down, almost meditatively. Even the most contentious, backwards-minded folk could be assuaged by her piercing gaze. And they'd just go on their way, their malignant comments mitigated by her deadly silence.

This particular evening I'd spied her returning from the state fair, carrying a peach cobbler and a royal blue ribbon. I didn't even need to call her. I leaped off my porch, where I had sojourned after returning from school, and sprinted as fast as I could in a skirt and loafers.

"Congratulations, Auntie," I said, helping her unload boxes from her Humber Hawk. She was the only Negro woman in the state to own a car.

"Thank you, dear. There was no contest anyway. You know, if you're lucky later you can have the leftovers," she said, although I knew there was no kind of provocation I could've demonstrated that would warrant her denying me pie.

As I set down the last parcel, my curiosity got a hold of me and my fingers toyed with the twine.

"Auntie, what's in the boxes?"

"Bring 'em in the kitchen and you'll see."

After I had discharged the boxes in their appropriate spot, and my temporary position of personal stevedore was ended, she unwrapped the first box and pulled out a strange white plastic appliance.

"What is it?"

"A KitchenAid 3B10 stand mixer, the best money can buy. With her by my side, I'll be damned if they don't declare me the baking queen of the county. Hell, I could even conquer the state. Isn't she a beaut?"

"She's a beaut," I echoed.

Settled on the porch with fat slices of pie, a glass of bourbon and a glass of milk for Auntie and me respectively, she recounted the baking championship at the carnival.

"You know my secret ingredient?" I shook my head and she shook her glass.

"Just of touch of bourbon," she replied, winking.

I grinned and ate a forkful of pie. "Miss Augusta, I don't know how you do it," I said in a British accent, making a caricature of a food critic. "Your baking prowess really is second to none."

I was just about to eat another bite when Auntie pointed out a black Chevrolet across the street.

"Dear, have you ever seen that car?" I shook my head and stood up, doing reconnaissance on the automobile.

"All new plates. It's new," I said. "It's probably someone visiting, I guess."

I sat back down and continued eating as the driver unloaded his bags. It wasn't until I realized Auntie hadn't said a word since the car's arrival that I finally looked up.

The man was standing on the sidewalk, but still managed to tower over us. He was incredibly out of place, with his wool overcoat, hat, and straw-coloured hair styled awkwardly in the fashion of the day, a look that, due to his military cut, didn't quite work. As wrong as he seemed standing in our street on a warm September evening in his winter habiliments, his presence was made even more threatening in this state of aberration. He turned towards us, locking his eyes on mine, and turned so red he seemed about ready to explode. He mumbled something to me — no, at me — and without giving me time to ask for clarification, yelled my name at the top of his lungs. I turned towards Auntie and buried my head in her cardigan, trying to hold back tears, but I did not fully begin crying until I tilted my head up and saw my mother standing next to the austere foreigner, her face devoid of all emotion.

“Dear. Your father’s back from the war.”

Audrey Xuân, 16

Transitioning

Daniel, Dani
I love hearing my correct name
He, him, his
It feels great for me to be accepted,
Sort of
People treat it like I’m a whole new person
Like Daniela is a whole different person
Talk about me like there was an old me and a new me
But no
I’ve always been the same me
You’re just finally getting it right
Now look
I’m not going to get mad if you get it wrong a couple times
I understand that getting it right takes time
It’s to those who refuse to call me a boy
Who claim it makes them uncomfortable
That I say
How do you think I feel
How do you think I’ve felt my entire life
You only have to deal with this for a couple of months
So please
Get it right

Dani Sá, 13

Reminiscing

There he lay, swaddled like an infant,
mummified in the hospital linen.
His chest rising and falling
in an irregular rhythm.
Occasionally he’d twitch, forehead creasing,
pained even in his sleep.
Despite the doses of chemo,
the years did nothing to his face.
If you look past his sunken eyes
and grey complexion, you’ll see
the child that was once my father.
The same man who carried me on his shoulders,
eyes crinkling almost closing entirely when he smiled,
teeth threatening to break his jaw with the force.

Shambavi Yogendran, 17

untitled

You embody summer, my love
You are light and you are free
You are the sunshine on my nose
The sweet summer breeze

You are the bright red berries
Speckled by the sun
You make me feel drunk and warm
Like the sunset coming undone

You are late nights lying in the grass
Just staring at the stars
You are slow music playing
You are campfires with guitars

You are laughter and cigarettes
New friends and broken ties
You are bronze, almost there
Like joking grin-faced lies

You are the darkness and the dawn
You are the sleep in their eyes
You are lush and you are gold
Like the ocean, like the skies

You are softer in the garden
With lighthearted hummingbirds
You are little bits of honey
Confessions, those three words

You are sweet as nectar
And the sap within the trees
You are sharp and strong
Like the sting of honeybees

You are walks in the forest
Moss's soft bioluminescence
You are subtle, you are quiet
You are nature and its presence

You are all these things, my love
The fireflies' bright glow
You are sunshine, the summer
And you are loved more than you know.

Amanda Murgel, 16

Count On Me

Do you have Instagram?
Not that I care,
I'm nearing 1000, I want to add
A follower
To my number.
In case you didn't know, it shows
I'm popular.

Instant love served daily on the feed
A buffet by strangers and once-met people, but
No one is ever full,
Always famished for more

Double tap perfect hearts.
Nowhere near love
Google search "love"
Two pages kiss
Of a lovely long love story in a book that was
Never read.

Texts are read on cell phones in
Block boxes,
Struggling to talk to your face so I
Talk, I mean, type on a glass screen.

But maybe,
Look me in the eye
Look up

My eyes lock on your
Eyes locked inside the cell phone
Past the passcode lock screen to your double tap heart
Where you are one
Of a number on that number counter,

You can count on me...

Can I get past your passcode lock screen?

Leia Kook-Chun, 17

A Sunken Ship

there is a sunken ship
in my snow globe
it is made of dark wood (or so it seems)
with tattered black sails
the masthead vaguely forms the shape of a winged being
arching an arrow in the direction of the bowsprit
i can see windows
oars
a crow's nest
the captain's cabin
it has two masts
the third one lies on the seafloor
broken in two

i choose to believe it was a pirate ship
in some other life it led
on the roaring seas
around glaciers and cliffs and sirens
before it came to be trapped
in my snow globe

i choose to believe a woman led the ship
with brown skin and curly raven hair
a sword at her side
maybe a hat
(i don't know too much about pirates)

i choose to believe they freed those in bondage
leading them across the waters
in search of a new life

or maybe they didn't
maybe the captain was a cruel man
with eyes of hatred and a mind of poison
seeking only to take
and never to give

i wonder how it sank
did the sirens succeed in their enchantment?
did an enemy canon doom everyone on board?
did the first mate,
promised a fortune
(in land in people in metals of the earth)
betray all his crew mates on board?
or did the captain raise a flag in surrender
when the damage became too perilous,
choosing life over pride?

perhaps i should free my sunken ship
it hardly seems right to withhold
a thing of the sea
perhaps it should be among the coral and fish
and seaweed and curious mermaids
and the deep blue-green of the ocean floor
instead of this colourless cage

it sits beside me
reminding me of pride
reminding me of ghosts
(my ghosts)

Jareeat Purnava, 17

A Good Man

Harold DaCrate is a simple man with one simple purpose: to earn enough money to support his family.

And so, as soon as he gets that job at Sanover, he works as hard as he can for that promotion, knowing that a better position means more money for his family. His wife, Caryn, is a genius — but her multiple sclerosis keeps her from working. Which means it falls to Harold to earn enough for his entire family.

While Harold may not be as prone to genius as his wife, his sense of purpose is strong. It's barely a month when he's promoted to team leader.

There's just enough money in his new salary to keep up with the bills, but he cares for his family. He wants them to have the best they can have, not the least. So he keeps working, harder than before. He counts every number and he has his team checking each other's work. It takes a touch longer than before, but the exhilaration is better this time around. He has succeeded, once again. He has once again given his family a better life.

Caryn's pride in him that night is something he quickly gets addicted to. This is the best type of aphrodisiac in the world; not man-made, never chemical, purely human.

That night inspires him. He wants to do more for his family. He wants that taste of success and satisfaction again.

So he works harder, crawls up the hierarchy until he's earning a steady salary of seventy-five thousand dollars a year. It's like a dream come true. His family lives in a decent house in the suburbs. Caryn is working on a way for her to follow her passion for coding. Their daughter, Daya, looks healthier every day.

He should be happy with that. And he is.

But there's a small part of him that wants more. If he had a little more, Daya could get that red leather jacket she was eyeing the other day at the mall. And there's a quiet, small part of him that wants more of that exhilaration from his second promotion. He only had a taste of it back then. He wants more. He is an addict for elation.

So he dives in further. He keeps working. He sees less and less of his family every day, but it's fine, because this is for them, right? And it's not like he has dark circles or anything — he has checked. Everyone at work is treating him like they always did. There's nothing wrong with wanting better for one's family. And so he buries his little doubts and focuses on his end goal.

He's on the Sanover board in six months.

His salary is above astounding. He's bought the red jacket and a computer and a lot more. Everyone in Sanover likes him because he hasn't done anything shady to get himself in a high position, just pure ambition and drive.

He has inspired a whole lot of people as well.

Rookies who decided that they want to work hard for their families, like he did. He should be proud that he inspired so many. He should be honoured.

Harold has no idea why he's furious about this.

It's not like the rookies stand a chance. They don't have the right motive, first of all. Most of them have decent lives, not like his family's was. All they want is to impress their stuck-up, rude parents to prove themselves. They have never fought a war as gruelling as his. Which proves they don't have the spine for this.

There is one boy, though.

They call him Jason. Every inch of him screams pure innocent. There's a haunted look behind his eyes, a desperate need to save what he has left. A look at his file shows that he's been living on the streets for a few years.

The file also says he's a veteran.

Like Harold.

There are so many parallels between his story and the boy's. They were both thrown onto the ground, left to burn, and had risen from the ashes. It was a small matter of passion to become full-fledged phoenixes. The one difference between them is that Harold is already a phoenix. The boy is a fledgling.

Harold simply has to stop Jason before he reaches adulthood.

He has no idea what drives him. All he knows is that he is angry at Jason, at this boy for thinking he could take all Harold's happiness, his peace. There is no hesitation in his deep contempt for the boy, because Harold is a righteous king and that means whatever he feels, thinks, does, is righteous.

He fires off a text to someone.

He looks up into the mirror.

There are no dark circles, but there is an ugly glint in his eye that sends his heart recoiling. Every inch of him radiates frazzled insanity. Like a person that would fire a good employee out of pure jealousy.

He used to be a good man. Now, he's not so sure.

Ashley Kim, 13



Jamie Pattison, 17

commencement

back home
birthdays are not celebrated
instead
when you were born was associated with major events in nature
my father was born during the harvest season
which would explain his ability to reap the benefits of any terrible situation
he is as strong as an ox
grazing on the grass of his enemies carelessly
my mother was born during the season of long rains
which would explain her ability to wash away any wrongdoing
to cleanse and start over
i thought i was the daughter of the long rain that blessed the harvest
i was born during the short rains
i have come to the conclusion
that i would never be like my parents
i would never be
as patient as my mother
or as giving as my father

Furqan Mohamed, 16

Forest Fire

I freeze in my tracks as I witness a forest being consumed by a fire.
Unable to continue on my way, I watch the last of the plants wither.
Pine trees turn to ash, as well as some lush green bushes.
Inching its way over to my position, the fire emits roaring flames.
Smoke from the fire was not present during this incident.
Orange and red glow through the darkness in between the trees.
Two emeralds, produced from the fire come into view.
I stop breathing and the fire stops moving as we face each other from a short distance away.
I ponder as to how this fire could have started,
until I realize that this is no forest fire.
The emeralds are eyes,
the vegetation is stripes
and the fire is fur.
The forest fire is a tiger.

Danielle Heron, 14

S'unir pour bâtir ensemble

Une patrimoine Noire dissimulée,
Délaissée, nous l'avons abandonnée.
On ne la connaît guère mais
Son absence est sentie dans presque tout ce qu'on fait

Les vestiges de l'esclavage ont défini
Le plus la Négritude, alourdie
Par un manque d'Histoire Noire recueillie
Que nous nous empêchons de s'en souvenir
Correctement

Le racisme fonctionnel a permis
À l'effacement de l'identité Africaine
À la normalisation de la haine
À l'oubli de ceux et celles
Qui ont changé ce monde

Une pièce manquante de notre casse-tête
Est les droits aux États-Unis LGBT dont une femme Noire était l'ancêtre
C'était aussi l'abandon par Napoléon de la Louisiane suite à la quête
Pour l'indépendance d'Haïti : une corrélation secrète.

C'était que les cellules d'Henrietta Lacks ont été recueillies d'une manière malhonnête
Cette lacune dans l'Histoire touche ceux comme Alexandre Dumas,
L'auteur Des Trois Mousquetaires auquel on nie sa véritable race,
La fortune d'un Afro-canadien sauvant l'université Queens de faillite par ce qu'il amasse,
Et de millions de personnes volées d'Afrique, une douleur toujours troublant cet espace

Comment alors prétendre l'unité
Si une partie de la vérité demeure cachée,
Comme un sourire édenté,
Comme une serrure verrouillée à clé?
L'Histoire a ainsi l'air d'un puzzle inachevé

Ces liens historiques rompus devront nous servir,
Nous donner une motivation pour agir
Parce que, afin de bâtir notre avenir ensemble, il faudra se souvenir
Correctement

Zawadi Bunzigiye, 18



Renee Zhu, 13

Human Error

It comes in bits and flashes.
In that one escaped leaf floating on your morning tea.
In that little stain on your tablecloth
That you don't remember making.
In that dead housefly lying inside your fridge,
Even though you cleaned every inch of it last night.

Sometimes, it comes in your milk:
The one you can never quite finish,
Even though you always buy the smallest size.
It crawls onto your well-made bed,
Leaving the faintest of wrinkles
On the side you straightened two minutes ago.

Sometimes, it's in the water stains on your window
That you don't quite notice
As you look out at the busy street.

Other times, it's in the bark of that one stray dog,
Yelping right over the sound in your headphones.
It's in the random itch you feel on your arm,
Even though there's nothing really there.
It's in that one strand of hair
That keeps popping out of your scarf.
In that one loose thread on your dress
That just keeps getting longer.

Sometimes, it's in the creak of your floorboard,
In the scratches on your mirror,
In the worn-out edges of that new notebook you bought.

Sometimes, it's in the leaking tap,
In the squeaking door,
In the flickering porch light.

Sometimes, it's in that one summer bird
That cries out loud on a December night.

Rupkatha Basu, 19

Ruby Gold

My mother's country is a serpent along the painted
Border of Asia, a place of mystery and gold thread embroidering
Water lilies onto the blood through my veins—
I never noticed its sheen until I came home crying
Asking what stained my clean canvas. Was it
The turmeric of the packed lunches that smelt
Different from everyone else's. Was it that someone
wondered how I could possibly see through my slight eyes.
Was it that I was suddenly ashamed of the chinky sounds
That once slid smoothly against my mother's lips,
Sweet songs and lullabies I wasn't allowed to speak
In grocery stores without being spat at.
Or was it men who felt that I'm their Oriental to grab at.
A snake bound by crimson and amber shackles
Of coloured bands, I see it through my slit eyes
A monster unable to blend into pale dry grasses.
But when I am reborn and my skin sheds
Not losing a shade of vibrancy of the golden
Kisses along my forehead from my father who taught me
That my streamlined eyes bring forth wide horizons
I see every shade of ruby and gold in God's mind—
I am your snakeskin accessory I am your
Identity of the day but I fail to sink into the
Monotone background as long as I am alive
I am not the temptation you paint me to be I am not
An animal any more than you are; I bathe
In the warm glow of my own reflection
my sun kissed perfection until the day
I believe my little sister when she told me that
Our prayers sounded of anthems and these
Sweet songs we sing on, we sing on, sound
Our days with our unapologetic presence—
I exist and so my existence is mine.

Catherine Le, 18

What Are You?

"What are you?" A question I get asked time and time again,

I get mistook for the race that I am not more often than the one I am

And when I tell them I'm half black and half white they ask,

"Who do you identify with most?"

And most of the time I want to say "neither" because no matter whether I say black, white or both, I'm never going to be,

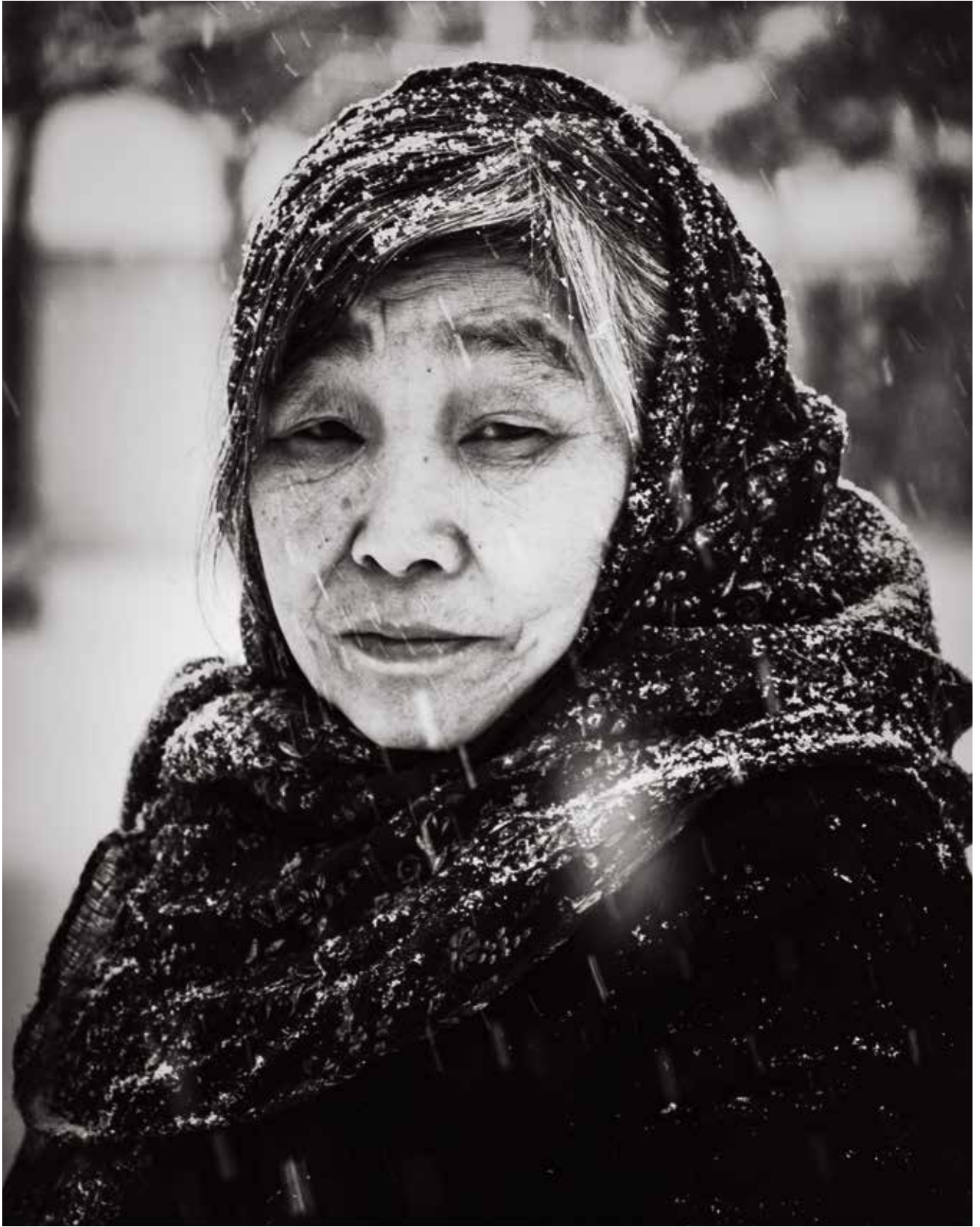
"White enough for the white people"

Or "black enough for the black people."

So why don't you answer the question I'm always asked,

What am I?

Jori Ferguson-White, 18



The Time Traveller
Bessa Fan, 16

young voices

Call for submissions

GUIDELINES

Express yourself!

1. Submit art, photos, comics, stories, poems and other creative writing.
2. Toronto Public Library has one-time print and electronic rights to all work, as well as the right to excerpt from the work, both online and in print, for purposes of promotion.
3. Written submissions will be selected from each of the following age categories:
12–14; 15–16; 17–19.
4. Related pieces (i.e. artwork submitted in conjunction with writing) may not be considered together.

WHO CAN SUBMIT

Teens 12–19 years who live, work or go to school in Toronto.

WHAT CAN BE SUBMITTED

You can submit two pieces each year:

- One piece of writing per person
- One visual piece per person, either a piece of artwork OR a photograph OR one single-page comic

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

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

Artwork:

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

Photography & Digital Art:

- High resolution
(8x10 inches at 300 dpi)
- Black and white only

Comics:

- 8 ½" x 11", one page maximum

HOW TO SUBMIT

In a Toronto Public Library branch

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

Online submissions

- Submit work online using the submission form at tpl.ca/youngvoices

Artwork & Comics

- **You will be required to submit your original hand drawn artwork OR comics should your work be selected for publication**

Photography & Digital Art:

- High resolution
(8x10 inches at 300 dpi)

SELECTION TIMELINES

Submission deadline:

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

- Editorial teams meet to make selections during spring 2019
- Contributors selected to be published will be contacted during June 2019
- Only those with work to be published will be contacted
- *Young Voices* magazine is published once every year in October

• QUESTIONS?

Contact the Young Voices Team

yvsubmission@torontopubliclibrary.ca



Reflection

Juanita Lam, 18

YOUNG VOICES 2019 Submission Form

Please fill out this form fully and attach it to your submission.
Submissions with incomplete forms may not be considered for publication.

Submission Deadline: Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Last name _____

First name(s) _____

Address _____

Postal code _____

Email _____ Phone number _____

Age _____ Male Female Other

Today's date _____

Title of your submission _____

Genre of submission:

Poem Fiction Rant Review Art Photograph Comics

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

Name of library branch where you submitted _____

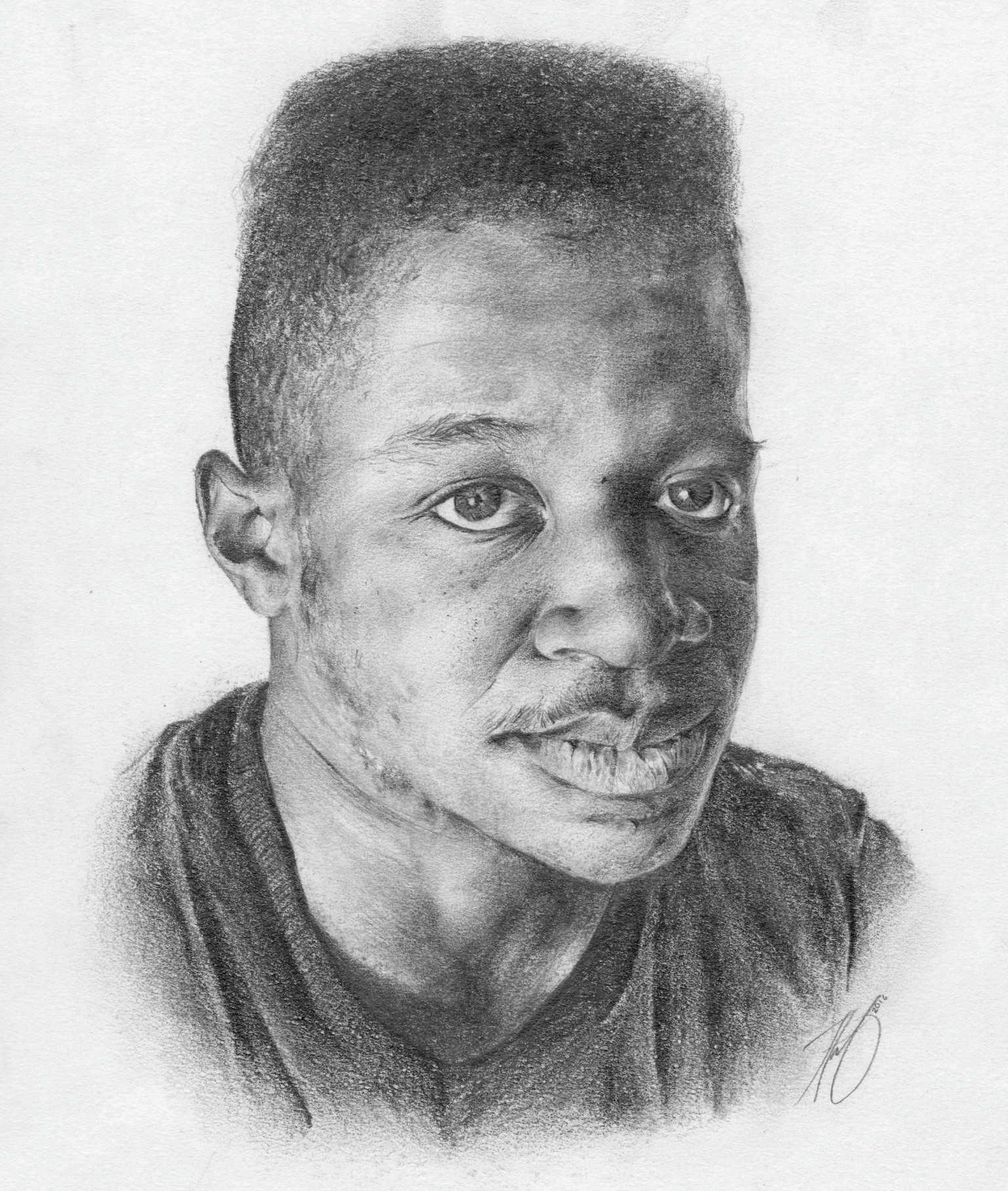
I heard about *Young Voices*:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Young Voices Sketchbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Someone at the Library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library website | <input type="checkbox"/> School |
| <input type="checkbox"/> From friends and family | <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook/Instagram ad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookmark | |

Other (please say where) _____

tpl.ca/youngvoices





Hashveenah Manoharan,19



Steven Kenny, 19

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tpl.ca/youngvoices