

# young voices 2012

magazine of teen writing and artwork



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LIBERTY

Allison Wong, age 13

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# Welcome to Young Voices 2012

This unique collection showcases a smattering of visual art and literary work currently being created by Toronto's diverse young artists. You will discover a range of artistic styles and world views within these pages. You will begin to hear layers of young voices — joyful, curious, dissident and grieving. These voices strengthen one another. They are a song, a whisper, a shout. Toronto youth have things to say: please listen.

The editorial board, comprised of discerning and dedicated youth, worked closely with Toronto-based arts mentors to select a few dozen pieces from hundreds of submissions. We thank them for their dedicated efforts to nourish the Toronto youth arts community. We encourage young artists to continue to study and practice their chosen disciplines — and continue to submit to Young Voices!

The *Young Voices 2012* editorial board:

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## FRONT COVER ART

**Damp**

**Chuchu Yang, age 17**

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## BACK COVER ART

**Sleep Is a Book  
on Hold**

**Shelley She, age 16**



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## For Tea

He had eyes that were wide, a rusty brown colour. They reminded me of a dog's — which kept his face in a perpetual state of mild amusement. His skin was a light olive, and he had brown freckles on his nose that spread to his cheeks. His face was round.

He had long, thick, chestnut hair that stopped at his waist — like a lion's mane, except the sides of his head were shaved. But I could only see the shaved sides of his head when he had his hair up in a ponytail — and that was almost never.

He was one year older than me, and only two inches taller than my five-foot-six frame, but the way he looked down at me always made me feel as if he was so much taller.

His mother worked late nights, so he was often at my house. My mother never approved, but she knew he was sick. My mother had a special place in her heart for the sickness he had, so she let it slide.

She was afraid that we would get too attached. The damage had already been done.

Still, I snuck him into my house during the early hours of the morning, and he always left when the sun rose, coming back around noon — he was never keen on school, even before he was diagnosed. My mother thought we spent four hours together a day. We usually spent eleven, countless more on weekends.

In the morning, I'd make him orange pekoe tea, and he always downed it in seconds.

I used to ask him how he could, and he'd murmur, "There are things that hurt worse than a burnt tongue, Faith."

He was right.

I started calling him Tea. He didn't mind. This sugary grin would show up on his face whenever I did, so if he was happy, then so was I.

I wanted to pretend that all the bruises he had were lovebites, inflicted by me. When his hair began to fall out, that he was just slowly shaving his head.

"I'm trying the monk look," Tea said once, laughing, his

head in my lap, as I grazed my fingers across his now bald head. It was only a joke, but I didn't find it funny.

I got up and quietly walked downstairs, towards the kitchen. The sun was about to rise, but I still felt like it wouldn't. I had felt like the sun would just stop rising one day, and I'd be forced to sit in the dark.

I put the kettle on, and the water boiled quickly. The sun still would not rise.

As I dropped the tea-bag into the hot water, Tea walked into the kitchen and sat slouched in one of the chairs.

"The cancer is like a tea bag," he told me, rubbing his eyes. They no longer were rusty brown — they were bloodshot and red. His skin was paler, sicker. "I'm the cup, the water is my blood. Is there any milk? Not enough to help."

I looked down at the cup.

He was right.

I began to sob — but only so quietly. It was still early in the morning; I didn't want to wake up my mother.

I felt selfish for crying, there was nothing wrong with me. Tea was sick, I wasn't. Tea stood up and wrapped his thin arms around me. He was probably crying himself, but I didn't dare look up.

"Perhaps a different brew, from now on?" he asked, as I gently broke free of his hold.

"Perhaps," I mumbled, looking away. I turned towards the cupboards and began to throw all the boxes of orange pekoe into the trash. The smell of black tea would make me feel sick from now on. Tea sighed, but didn't speak.

The sun rose, and Tea left. I got ready for school, slept through all my classes. I headed straight home once the bell rang.

Once I got home, I went straight into the kitchen. The cupboards had been filled with boxes of chai tea.

I stuck a box into my backpack and made my way to the hospital.

**Faith Arkorful, age 17**



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## Beauty of White Trilliums



**Catherine Joung, age 13**

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## Countdown between instinctive and rationalities

<There once were states of unknown became familiar, familiar became comforting, then all became variables again — order 3, 1, 2>

Falling fireflies

{Fleeting seconds after the crescendo, watch them darken}

— But, I always expect...

Not how usually the peaceful laminar spring flows, still echoing, falters

Crumbling up, swallowing the last slice of sunshine

Shimmering blade swifts by, leaving the incomplete polylanatity octowave

The strange fear of being conquered allow

Crutch myself, being consciously aware

However, he trails to silence with grief

Allowing me to be out in the rain, drain into my ground

Lingering, no sign of instantly relief

Aloof to be faced apart, either reality

Non-sense smoke covered illusion

Shooting beam

{Remind her, it is a process}

Like a swing of light leaps to the night curtain

Too joyous to realize the acceleration due to gravity

The beats swing through me, make me pulsating with melody

Brushing away artificial that don't belong

Sealed with twilight symphony

Obsession to the twinkles, dancing with half moon smiles

Holding up the candle

Warmth of fragrance

Firework

{Sprint, ignition}

In an instant, burst into that glorious delicate flower field

All those words lost their meanings

Long not spoken

Choir toned to his voice

Harmonies overlapping, drifting through my shell

May I, step into the dreamland?

A part, in the chirping morning birds

Gracefully and marvellous

Generously he unbolts those windows

Indeed?

Enough lightness, unchained melody

**JiaXin (Maggie) Han, age 13**

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## The Storm at Home

The cold air surrounded me, until I couldn't feel anymore. It felt like a man made of ice embracing me. I tried to pull away, but couldn't. Like the man, I was frozen.

I was about to collapse when I escaped. I crawled. It hurt so much. I crawled until I was under a sheet of white. I wasn't sure what it was, but it could shelter me. As soon as my feet were last to slide under, I was wrapped in warmth and comfort. Not total comfort, I didn't know where I was or where to go, but it was better than the blizzard out there. I wrapped myself around, until I was tangled in this soft sheet of white.

Where to go I wasn't quite sure. I wiggled around, making sure to evenly warm up every part of me. As I slid ahead, I felt my head tilt forward. I was at a ledge. I was scared, what's at the end? What if I fall off? Will I die? Will I be in a more comforting place, or a brand new hell to try to escape from? I screamed, I cried, but no one heard me. I was yelling for everyone, anyone. I kept on crying, tears of ice falling down my cheeks and dropping below. What was I on? I looked down, and only saw more white.

Left, it's white. Right, it's white. Up, it's white. Behind me, it's white. But straight ahead, it's dark.

It must be the ledge. I was too afraid to look down. I was too afraid of what I might see. So I twisted around again. As I moved, shadows danced along these white walls surrounding me. What was it? I lifted my head. This white sheet was heavier than I thought. But as I pushed my head up, it got brighter ahead. I tried with all the strength I had to stand, but to no avail. I stretched my arms and legs. Suddenly, something was wrong, but right. I broke this trap. The blizzard was coming back. The man made of ice was heading towards me. I screamed and tried to run, but still, all I could do was crawl. I was too slow, he was about to grab my leg and pull me out into the storm. I screamed one more time and looked up. The sheet was gone. I could only see a window, with me staring back at myself. The blizzard was still around me. The sheet was crumpled behind me. I gingerly slid my foot under again and felt the soft, subtle warmth. Whether I'd be lucky enough to make my way out again or not. I dove straight in again, shielded from the storm...

**Jessica Walker, age 13**

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## Father Time

"Quartz, Swiss-made?"

The lady in red tilted her head slightly, ears perked, confirming that the man in black was indeed speaking to her. She turned her profile, meeting his gaze with inquisitive eyes.

"I couldn't help but notice your watch as you played tonight." A smile.

Her fingers instinctively reached for the gold wristwatch, caressing the band familiarly. It had been a gift from her music teacher when she left the countryside to chase her dreams in the city. "I don't know what it is." Softly. "It was a gift."

"May I have a look?" The young man held out his palm. The hand was slender and could have been mistaken for an artist's, had the fingertips not been so worn.

"Oh." There was hesitance. The steps outside the theatre were not empty, and a taxi would arrive at any moment. She was not comfortable, but he was alluring and only asking that she hold out her hand. "Sure."

He remembered them well, how they felt the black and white keys, without discrimination, and how that touch made the air stand still, made even him wait with bated breath. They were as warm as he expected, but she winced at the chill of his. He chuckled. "I apologize. Sometimes I forget to breathe."

She stared at him, her mind a blank slate. She was forgetting how to breathe as well, yet the air seemed to be filling her lungs too fast. A shake of her head, in forgiveness, revived her. "What is it you do?"

He had been turning her wrist over in his hands, kneeling close enough that she could feel his frigid breath on her skin. His eyes were glazed over and wide as he glanced up, but recovered their focus after seeing the perplexity of her countenance. "I'm not a watch maker. I collect them as a hobby." Another smile, accompanied by a chuckle, as he surveyed her features. "I'm a dealer."

She nodded, with a poor attempt at offering a warm smile. Her instrument only needed to be played well, never smiled at. "You don't sound like you're from here." The piano was welcoming; it never presented a moment of discomfort. Her wrist still lay in his grasp, a little firmer than before.

He straightened up finally, giving her hand a squeeze. "My work lets me travel the world. As will yours." He didn't let go.

Her eyes lit up naturally at the remark, but her jaw tensed. She didn't let go either as he stroked her fingers. She wanted to savour the moment, to keep him there as long as she could because — for a reason she could not fathom — there was a certain weight in keeping his attention fixated on her, an urgency to keeping his time. She wanted to know what exact —

"Lady, you need a ride or what?"

She hadn't noticed the taxi pull up a few feet away from her. And she hadn't noticed how empty the theatre entrance had suddenly become, or how dark it was. She was only aware of how cold his hand felt.

He opened the door of the vehicle and helped her in, tucking her gown in with her before stepping back. He was silent, in anticipation of the question he had been waiting for.

"What exactly do you deal in?"

With a satisfied smile and a shadow of amusement passing over his face, the man in black knocked on the front door, signaling the taxi driver to go. Turning back to the lady in red, he tapped his wrist, with the same small, infuriating smile plastered on his lips.

Her eyes widened. She grabbed at the watch. The hands were winding back. The crown was gone.

**Samyuktha Movva, age 16**

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## I'm Glowing

Read me a story to say goodnight,  
Offer me the moon and a slice  
of its brightness.  
Bring me a glass of milk to  
wash it down,  
the fluorescence.  
You can trace its pathway down  
my esophagus and into the  
duodenum.  
Here it reveals a collection of  
tiny stars that otherwise  
go unnoticed in their village,  
one of intestinal pursuit and eastern promise.  
I'm not big on luminosity,  
but it just seems to fit in  
certain situations  
such as these.

**Elizabeth Emond-Stevenson, age 18**

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# Dream a Better Future



**Sana Iqbal, age 16**

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# Safekeeping



**Jenny Ge, age 16**

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# My Kind of Way

As I pressed my shoulder to the dark wood, the huge mahogany door swung open. My heartbeat quickening now, I strode past the dark space and burst onto the stage.

My breath was snatched away like a feather from the air as my eyes laid upon pure magnificence.

Hundreds of rows of seats sprawled before me, filling the room like a red sea beneath the sky of a ceiling. Above them, the balcony curved elegantly to surround the massive stage. Bright lights cast shadows on the dark, creamy colour of their intricate carvings. My eyes travelled to the ceiling as it arched over my head and spread its arms to touch the floor, encasing the enormous hall as if protecting it.

A tranquil serenity greeted me.

The auditorium denoted a massive, invisible... presence. The grandest place I have ever experienced, where the entire chamber seemed to hold its breath along with mine. It stood quietly before me, a twelve-year-old boy alone on the stage who had never before laid eyes upon such beautiful architecture.

I felt an impulse to send an echo, and then laugh quietly at myself.

However, something made me hesitate. It was as if the hall had caught the breath in my throat and hushed me, telling me to just stay silent and let my eyes take in its magnificence.

I slowly took in a deep breath. A piano stood at the very center of the stage and as I tentatively approached it, the light shone in streaks of white that bounced and slid off its surface. The piano seemed very small on the extensive stage, but somehow it executed an aura just as impressive as the chamber it stood in. There was not a single fingerprint on it, unlike the piano we had at home. I looked down into the jet-black surface and saw my dark blue eyes reflected back, as clear as a mirror.

I looked up and let my eyes travel around the room once more before returning to the piano. A meticulous feeling bubbled inside me: I felt like something was waiting. It pushed me on. But as I stood there, I was suddenly overcome with peace. Something had stilled my mind.

I pushed the black top back and stark white keys slid into view, followed by each thinner black sharp and flat. Hesitantly, I found the Central C and pressed down on it — fearing wildly for a split second that the piano might not even work.

Then a sound pure and loud resonated from the instrument before me, travelling the extent of the seats to the very parameters of the hall like a wave. Then, silence flowed back again.

I sat down on the black chair and gently laid my hands on the keys, barely brushing them.

Suddenly, I wanted to play. I was overcome with a very strong desire to move, to create, to play the music that Bach or

Tchaikovsky had once brought to life. I wanted the entire hall to resonate with continuous music as I let myself go, the notes capturing my mind and the melody the hearts of my audience. I wanted my fingers to travel incredibly fast with perfect precision, making each sound spring lively into the air —

I stopped.

I looked down. My palms lay upturned on my lap.

And then I remembered... if you could only call them real palms.

My hands were composed of delicate metalwork. They were not made of flesh and bone but of metal alloys and carbon-fiber: the craftsmanship of a prosthetist. I turned them around and they obeyed heavily, the lights now flickering off of steel. Only for a year did I know the feeling of real hands. I didn't have the cover that added a realistic skin, so I sat in silence looking at raw, man-made fingers.

The piano needed real hands. Mine were fake. They were metal, for God's sake. Every time I pressed a key, a sharp metal click darted in before the sound of the note. What an awful noise that would make... like the instrument was choking, unable to let its sound transfer through the hard metal. I couldn't play — I will never play.

There are lots of things I will never be able to do. But as I looked around, I felt differently about my incapacities tonight. I gazed at the rows of mahogany seats and the enormous, smooth ceiling sprawling before me. They stared back, as if suspended in time as they waited. I wondered how many times renowned pianists had played on this very stage. Strangely, I did not feel unworthy to have sat in the same spot as them. They had simply lost themselves in the beauty of music, without caring what they looked like or who was watching. I felt connected to them through music but also unique as an individual. The hall told me to create, to play; it was impatient. I felt exhilarated by its sheer size, and I realized something else mattered other than my prosthetic limbs tonight — there was something bigger. Something strong, something blossoming in my core that could not be tarnished by a birth defect or heavy steel joints. It was not something physical or something that could be seen. It was a feeling.

There was no stone in my heart as I gazed down at the keys, gently playing a few. Maybe it was the perfection with which the piano was made, but as the notes began to flow to the balcony and back, they were pure and clear. I didn't know if anyone was watching. I didn't care. The song I played was very simple, from my childhood, requiring only a few notes to coax out a joyful melody. Even if the clicks of metal colliding with wooden keys remained faintly audible, it was still beautiful, in a broken kind of way. In my kind of way.

**Sandra Zhang, age 16**

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## Anne Frank

The ink bleeds through my paper as my pen begins to write,  
I try to find the perfect words to explain my night.

The cries of horror filling the streets and the echoing of fear,  
The silent whisper pleading for help still rings upon my ear.

I try to express the look of terror with the words I find,  
The everlonging memory that will always haunt my mind.

I look around there tall four walls and to the ceiling painted white,  
I am just a regular girl still looking for the light.

What did I do wrong? Why dont I deserve a chance?  
I want my time to shine and sing and love, hope and dance.

A tear slides down my warm red cheek and shatters on my page,  
I want to scream and make it right but am powerless at this stage.

Who'd ever thought being true to yourself would be frowned upon,  
I guess being different and holding pride is the note I want to end on.

I know I have no choice and my fate was chosen for me,  
I cant grow up to live a life I have always dreamed to see.

I can only hope there will once be a day without a battle plan,

I wipe my eyes and sign my name  
forever yours,  
Anne

**Cecily Boyd, age 14**

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## Cracked

A tower tall to kiss the sky,  
Puzzles of metal dreaming fly,  
Proud and defiant,  
Seamless,  
Perfect.

Yet inside a single crack behold,  
Your smile, one word, and down it goes,  
Flawless — but not quite, just  
Waiting to shatter,  
Imperfect.

**Claire Chen, age 16**

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## Middle Name

Her eyes; embedded in my sockets, scream  
Her hair, though ripped unsoundly from her scalp  
Appears in mine — dark strands against a putrid honey

What does she think of me? Her name exists between my  
First and last, severed by my revered namesake  
Whose face resembles mine

I bathe in her blood — did she believe them?  
When they said the girls and children would be showered  
When gas fell, what were her words?  
My grandfather cries remembering her smile, her swirling skirts

She was a dancer, he recalls, a brilliant scholar,  
She cared for the poor, a real idealist  
She was nineteen, dark hair, your eyes!  
Soft features, fresh thoughts

A Jew

**Miranda Schreiber, age 17**



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# Percy and the Bogeyman

At the terrifying hour of nine p.m., Percy sat hunched over, blanket enshrouding his head like a suffocating habit. All around him, the shadows creaked, and down the hall the floorboards hissed. Outside, the half-risen moon howled with dark delight, and the clouds that obscured it rattled at his windows. Percy was only five years old, but he knew about the bogeyman.

Rita from school had told him. She and Percy had gathered in their secret corner behind the boys' bathroom at recess, away from the prying corn ears and peeling potato eyes of the vegetable patch, and brought out the collection of rocks. The six rocks, smooth pebbles fished from the rocky gravel patch, were used to start off their Explorers Club meeting. They would throw all of the stones up at once — if all six touched the ground, Rita was in charge. Percy thought this was fair. He reasoned that six was a large number and sooner or later at least one of the stones was bound to not hit the ground. The first time, Rita had been in charge, and she had founded the Explorers Club. Percy had wanted to call it the Adventures Club, but Rita was in charge and so he didn't have a say. The Explorers Club was to talk about things that were dangerous and dastardly and that they had to fight. Rita had found a stick at one point but the teachers confiscated it, so she told Percy that they could only use their teeth and claws.

Percy thought back on this now and imagined that the bogeyman had far larger teeth and claws than he did.

Rita had had all sorts of run-ins with the bogeyman. Rita had fought the bogeyman in the mountains, in a river, even on the rim of a volcano. And the way Rita spoke of it, her wild puff of wispy hair flying in all directions as she gestured to the heavens, made Percy gasp in fear and awe. It stood seven — no, ten — no, one hundred feet tall — no, Percy, that didn't count its head — and — yes, Percy, it was taller than the volcano — and it breathed out rings of fiery smoke that near singed off her eyebrows. Percy could only whisper in hushed tones how brave she must have been and how hard she must have fought. Rita accepted this with rapid nods and a triumphant smile as she bent down to whisper in his ear.

"It wears raggedy clothes and stalks through the night. You

can only see its shadow from the light of the moon — but if you can see its shadow, it's already too late. It has a skeleton body and through its empty ribs you can see where it put the hearts of all the kids it killed. Its mouth is so big that when it smiles its whole head splits in half and all you can see is the throat that leads to nowhere swallowing you down, down, down..."

When Percy let slip about the bogeyman to his teacher, she started and demanded who told him that ridiculous story. Percy said it wasn't ridiculous, Rita had fought it and won a hundred times, and Rita shot him a dark look. The teacher sent her to the principal, and she didn't come to school the next day. All day Percy had looked for her; he had even gone to the secret place at recess and thrown the stones, but all six landed so Rita was still in charge. Percy began to think the bogeyman had finally won, that the principal right now was carefully placing Rita's heart next to the others it had stolen. When the teacher asked him what was wrong, he grew suspicious of her, too, and clamped his mouth shut tight until he got home. He had gone straight to bed, to the invincibility of his Superman blanket, and wrapped it around him as the night fell.

He was feeling much more vulnerable now. The tree outside cast its long wraithlike fingers into the room, plucking the hair from the back of Percy's neck. The leaves shivered, and so did Percy, feeling an invisible hand trail across his back. And then he saw it: a crooked shadow hung lazily in the gloom, and as the clouds moved from the moon's pallid face the shadow became slender and distinct.

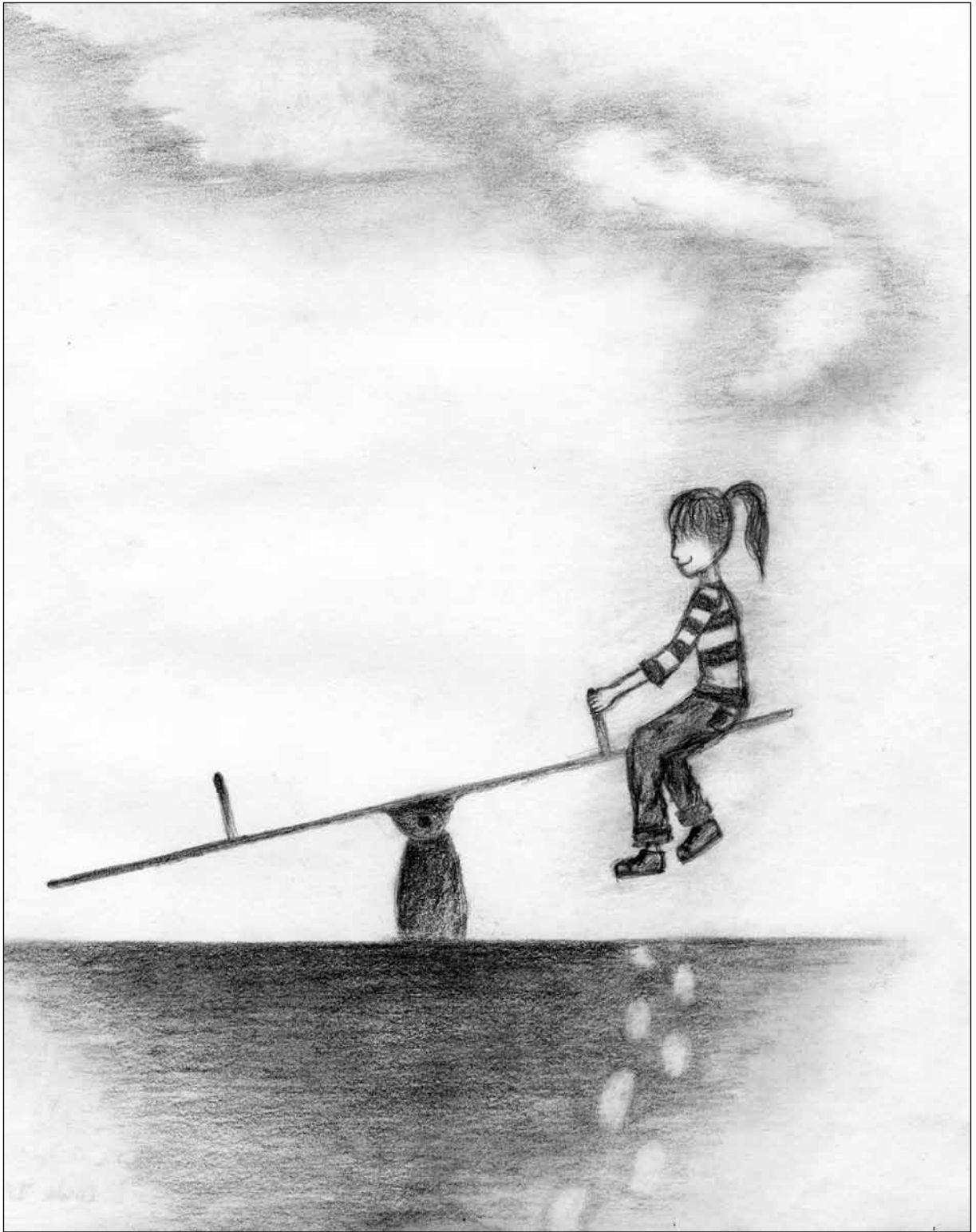
At once Percy knew what it was. He leapt out of bed, clutching his blanket around him in a pathetic parody of a superhero, and quaked at the looming shape before him. He stared up at it — seven feet — no, ten feet — no, one hundred feet tall — and knew that however many times Rita had beat it, this time it had got her, and there was nothing stopping it from getting him. A rush of adrenaline flooded his blood, and, before he went down, he packed all the strength in his five-year-old, thin frame into one solid thrash.

The next day Rita christened it as That Time When Percy Broke His Hand Punching His Bedpost.

**Amy Schacherl, age 17**

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# Imaginary Friend



**Linda Li, age 15**

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## Vanquished

*Response poem to Emily Carr's painting Vanquished*

How are we vanquished?

The fallen trees  
The fallen trees lie  
like a ravaged carapace  
Broken branches cringe  
away from grey and thunderous hills

Posts, crooked and bone, white  
Their forlorn, forgotten resting place  
here, at the end of the wind  
Like needles, pin the end of a thread

The air, misted cold  
Stirs the moss like footsteps on sand  
but, no one steps here anymore  
Lost, it is, behind green mountain and black cliffs

Alone  
Alone, the spirit is  
abandoned on the banks of rivers  
The grey rain alike  
to the darkness glimpsed between the pines  
Beckoning, pulling in, the coldest infinity known  
to us, between those pines.  
To venture there  
    to breathe that dark  
Cold soil fills our lungs  
with the scent of needles  
Our spirits become grey and thunderous hills  
    Moss grows over our eyes,  
and this  
    is how  
        we are Vanquished.

**Calum Csunyoscka, age 16**

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## Untitled

I can tell you how to solve a trigonometry question. If you ask me to, I can recite Hamlet, the whole thing, while juggling three chainsaws. I can tell you who won the first Nobel Prize, and I can tell you all the major events that happened in the last three centuries. I can prove the hardest, longest theorem you can throw at me, and I can do it in under an hour. Want to discuss our national debt? Ring me up: I'm in the phone book.

But I can't tell you the names of my parents. I can't tell you the names of my siblings, or whether I even have any. I can't (honestly) tell you about my Uncle Sam, or my Aunt Judy and how they went on a crazy honey moon involving a cow, a hotel and an astronaut. I can't tell you my own birthday, or when and where I was born.

How do you live knowing that your parents decided that you are just not worth their time and money? That they only wanted you to throw you away? How do you live, not caring what happens as long as you can guarantee a meal that night, or a place to sleep?

"Don't threaten me with heaven." That's what an old man had said to a police officer once. He had been a homeless man who was burning garbage in an alleyway, and he was standing in the doorway of a raid on my only home, a run-down old building which had long since been abandoned.

How does life get that bad?

Ask the person who jumps off a roof to end their own life. Ask the man everyone calls insane, or a freak. Ask the little kid who's bullied, or the girl who's deaf.

And if someone asked you, "How does life get that bad?" what would you say?

You'd probably rant on and on about some things that have been bugging you since you went to school, got married, got your first job, or maybe even had a kid.

And then you'd hear their story, and you'd start crying because your world doesn't seem so bad anymore, and you've just been going on about nothing your entire life. And then they would pat your back, and reassure you.

How does life get so bad?

My life isn't that bad compared to some, and I can only be grateful for that. And I can only hope that my life doesn't get any worse. Because I don't want to be the person in a jail cell that's being rankled by some shrink who doesn't know, or care, about me.

I would never be able to handle that. Not ever. And I hope it never will get that bad.

Oh, and by the way: I can't do it. I can't juggle chainsaws.

**Falwyn Chambers, age 15**

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# The Other Kind of Talk

"We need to talk."

Her eyes were on the ground as she spoke. If I close my own eyes and concentrate really hard, I can still see it: her sunshine orange dress, messy black bob, feet scuffing the dirt and eyes looking anywhere but at me. She was sitting on a swing. We both were. But it wasn't a swinging-over-the-top-of-the-bars sort of day.

I remember that I laughed.

"We *are* talking, Lola. Don't you know *anything*?"

Her hands gripped the chains of the swing. Tight. I watched her knuckles whiten.

"That's not what I meant."

"So what *did* you mean? Is there another kind of talking?"

"I'm not in the mood for joking, Iggy." She jumped off the swing and turned away from me, her arms crossed over her chest. I saw her shiver a little. It was nearly fall, and getting colder outside. "I just meant that I have to tell you something."

Not in the mood for joking? What other kinds of moods were there? I wanted to ask, but I had a feeling it would just make her angrier.

"What's wrong?"

"*Nothing*." She spoke too quickly. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine. You're sad."

"I'm not *sad*."

"Okay. Not sad. But what other emotions are there for when you're *fine* like that? You're not angry, are you?"

"*No!*"

I backed away. "That was an angry no."

"It was an *I don't feel like joking around no!*" She went back to the swings and sat facing away. She didn't ask me to join, but the empty seat next to hers looked inviting enough.

"Let's play a game."

"I'm not in a game mood."

"Fine then. Not a game. A...a contest. A bet. Not for fun."

She bit her lip. "A bet?"

"A bet," I confirmed. "Whoever can swing the highest wins. If it's me, you have to tell me what's wrong."

"But nothing's —"

"You have to tell me what you're thinking about, then. Why you're not in a joking mood." I smiled. "You have to teach me about moods where you don't feel like joking. I don't think I know those."

She didn't smile back.

Her feet dragged through the dirt again. "If I win?"

"If you win..." I frowned. "I'll stop joking. And we can talk." I paused. "The *other* kind of talk."

"Fine." She rubbed her hands together before gripping the chains. "It's a bet."

On the count of three we pushed off and began to soar through the air.

"So how was school today?"

She frowned. "I don't like talking while I swing."

"I do."

"*I don't*."

"Maybe I'll just talk to myself."

"Talking to yourself's no fun," she said quietly.

"Yeah? D'you do it very often?"

"More often than you know."

Her voice cracked a little as she spoke, but I pretended I hadn't heard.

"Tell me about school. I'll shut up after that, I swear."

"Why do you care?"

"I *like* hearing about school. It sounds fun."

"Only sometimes."

"I wish I could go."

She furrowed her brow. "Don't say that."

"Why not? I do."

"You never will, so don't think about it. I never should've told you in the first place."

"How else would you explain all the time you're away? It feels like *forever*, you know. We used to be together all the time."

"People like you aren't allowed at school." Her voice was hard.

"People like me?" I laughed. "People who are always in joking moods, you mean?"

"*No*."

"Why *can't* I go, though? We're the same age. We're not that different. Boys are allowed at school, right?"

"Of course they are, Iggy. Don't be stupid."

"Is it because you're the only one who ever listens to me?" I asked softly. She stiffened when I said it. "I notice it, you know. Why doesn't anybody like me, Lola? How come they all ignore me?"

She didn't say anything.

"Okay. Forget I said it. Tell me about your day." I paused.

"*Please*."

"*No*."

"Please? Let's pretend I didn't say that. I'm still in a joking mood, Lola. Pretend I wasn't sad. I wasn't, even. Not really."

"I don't want to pretend anything."

"So tell me what you did at school."

She kicked her feet through the air. "*Fine*. I made crafts with Tommy Chang. We drew pictures. I drew my family."

"Can I see it?"

"It's at home."

"Am I in it?"

She didn't answer.

"Is Tommy the boy who moved next door? The one Mommy told you to make friends with?"

"Yeah. He's in my class."

"He doesn't like me."

"He doesn't *know* you."

"But I introduced myself to him, didn't I? I saw him outside and said *Hi, I'm Iggy from next door*. Just like Mommy told you to. But he looked at me like he couldn't even see me." I frowned. "Maybe I shouldn't've. Mommy never told *me* to. How come Mommy only talks to you, Lola?"

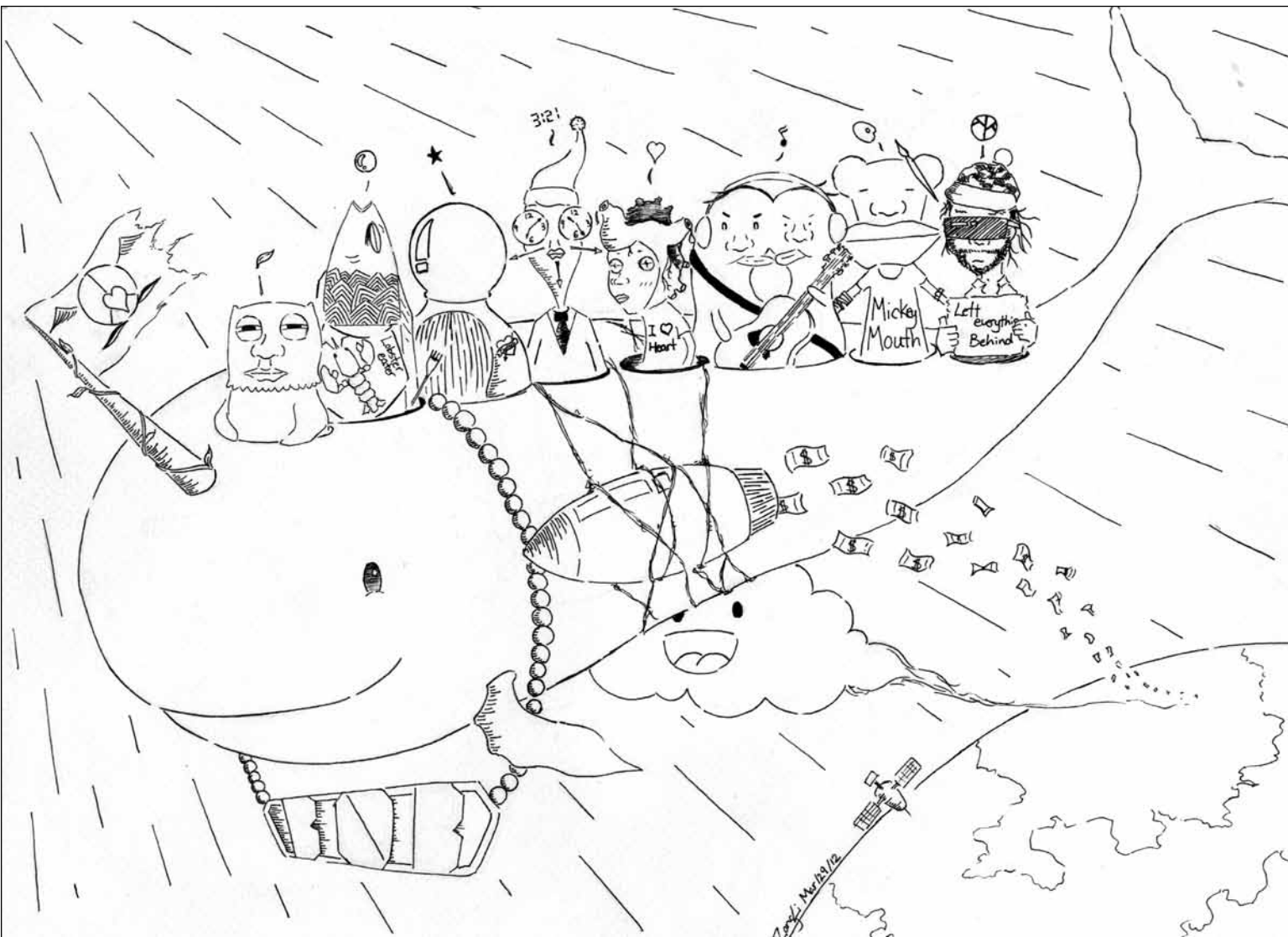
"Iggy —"

"How come Tommy only wanted to play with you?"



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# Hitchhike to Freedom



## Zong Li, age 15

"Iggy!" She dug her feet into the ground and lunged off the swing, throwing the chains back behind her. Her eyes were red with tears. "Just stop it, Iggy. Please. Just stop it."

I slowed down.

"I swung higher."

"What?"

I raised my voice. "I swung higher."

Lola didn't speak.

"Why can't I go to school? Don't people like me?" I watched her knot her fingers into her dress, bite her lip to keep the tears from overflowing. I watched her not look at me. Watched her watch the ground. "Don't you like me, Lola?"

"Oh, Iggy." She dropped to the ground with a thump and finally raised her eyes to mine.

I sat down across from her. "Is this the other kind of talking?"

"Tommy wasn't pretending he couldn't see you." She sighed.

"He really can't. *Nobody* can see you, Iggy. You're not real."

"Lola?" My voice wavered. "You're not making any sense."

"Oh, Iggy." She looked away again. "You're only my imaginary friend."

## Emily Deibert, age 19

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# Focus



**Jake Gu, age 12**



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## Vivaldi Goes to E Minor

As the flowers bloomed, heralds to the rising of the Sun, Antonio Vivaldi, composer, opened his eyes to a heartfelt dawn as welcoming as the vast expanses of clear skies were to the flocks of avians or the solitary eagle alike. Spring flew naively through the window left open without a care, as if all the burglars and petty thieves in the world took the night off in furious anticipation of the coming day. Winter fled, uprooted by the emergent plants, unparalleled in courage and vigorous strength by any snowstorm of the last three months; indeed, an aphrodisiac seemed to blanket every shepherd's pasture, and all the quills he had, blessedly glowed with a subtle luminescence unlike any before.

Ascending from his uncomfortable bed, he filled up his water jug and began giving his plants a drink. They deserved the reprieve, having just spent most of their energy in growing themselves during the resplendent weather of the last few days. His Italian daylilies had just blossomed on his windowsill, their crimson petals reminiscent of his own red hair that curled down with nary a strand touching his shoulders. Humming to himself an old-fashioned country tune by Jean-Baptiste Lully, a fellow composer, he then took a seat back on his bed again, sinfully idle.

A stray white and black feather drifted through his window, and landed into his inkwell, innocently coming to rest with the shaft dipped in the black ink, beckoning to him. For sure, it must have been a God-given sign to be productive; a foreboding omen that whatever he was to write today would be different for the better. He sighed, almost tiredly, as he got back up to begin a new day of work. There was a chorale he had to finish composing and rehearse for the charity performance next Sunday.

It was, by a fair estimate, maybe two-thirds finished already. Grasping the quill from the inkwell, he continued, laboriously, from where he had resigned the day before. A transition to the reprise of the theme, in the original key signature of D Major, followed what was already written down. By now, he had touched upon all the usual modulations of a composer, though it was a special day... He knew he wanted a novelty of a composition, but how many rules would he dare break to get there? Most compositions would have ended or followed

with another turn to the dominant key, A Major, but many hours were still left in the day, and he did not want it to sit idly. Indeed, the yellow Sun had not yet begun its obstinate descent into darkness, and birds were still gleefully dancing on their carousals above the trees and churches of land-bound men.

The sound of the local carillon chimed into his thoughts. It had a system where each waking hour had its own note to be played, starting from C, at eight o'clock in the morning, to eight o'clock at night, which, after a day of ascending hourly by chromatic semitones, comes to rest at a B, only to start over the next day. With his musical ear, he could pick out the actual note from the chorus of overtones the carillon produced. It was an E, so noon, the penultimate hour, had arrived. He knew that this would be the defining moment for his composition, and that the burning energy would only subside with the moon's rise, and he would have to wait another day for the next influx of ideas.

He then realized the possibilities of E, and the implications it could have on the next phase of this composition. Going to the supertonic, E Minor, would be a move no other composer would dare to make for more than a few notes. But no, this wouldn't be just a miniature transition, tossed away and forgotten from memory the moment the notes came out the wooden instrument. His vision would be an entire section, maybe a quarter of the work, in this new step of the scale, which was so often neglected and despised by his contemporaries. He would shock them with audacity emblazoned on vellum by unwavering, pitch black ink.

However, the potential consequences were too severe to ignore. What kind of future is there for a man who becomes a social outcast? He knew he risked losing quite a lot. Without a job, he would have no money. It would be almost impossible to purchase the copious amounts of manuscript paper and ink he used just jotting down his ideas, let alone feed himself or water his garden. There probably would be no garden.

But what of God's sign?

Vivaldi thought about it, and he did something that Lully would never dare to do.

**Allen Wang, age 13**

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## The Battle of the Chicken

"Oh, hey, didn't see ya' there Oli!" Richard says sarcastically as he shoves me aside to get to the kitchen table. He has that same devious smile painted on his face as he always does, playful yet insulting. He struts to the table, his chin held high. We both sit down, glaring at each other menacingly. Jake comes lumbering downstairs, puffing out his chest as he takes his seat between Richard and I. Jake is a bear, grumbling hungrily, ready to fight for his meal. We all stare each other down, as the intoxicating aroma of dinner fills the room. Dad arrives at the head of the table with his very authoritative mood, and we all hide our true intentions underneath some small talk as Mom brings out a platter of her famous chicken wings.

"Okay, only five wings each to start. Understand?" Mom states like a referee at a boxing match. Richard, Jake and I all stare at the plate.

Forty perfectly shaped wings marinated in soy sauce and smothered in our mom's homemade BBQ sauce. Forty glistening bronze wings, piled as high as Mount Everest. Forty masterpieces right in front of us. We sit there in silence, like a trio of NASCAR drivers waiting for the starting flag. "Well the food's not getting any warmer, so dig in!"

We all scramble to grab the largest, juiciest pieces, taking six or seven each, picking them off the plate like vultures! Jake lunges for some french fries, but I snatch them first, piling as many on my plate as I can without Mom scolding me. I proudly hand the tray to Jake with an up-turned chin, and immediately scour the table for anything else.

The broccoli! Richard's lightening fast hands had gotten to them, as he dumps them on his plate, smiling as usual. It was a textbook move we learned a long time ago to get each other in trouble. No vegetable on your plate, you get in trouble. I try the only counter maneuver I know. I swiftly move the chicken plate to the left of him, and it works! Richard can't put the plate out of my reach anymore, so he grudgingly lays it down right in front of me. I take some broccoli, but then see the real problem arise.

There's only one wing left.

It's impossible! In all the war-like dinners, the tricks my brothers have played on me and the tight situations I've been in, never have I ever faced such a devastating position! I've been through things like Jake stealing everything off of my plate, Richard flicking peas at my face, even my Mom's dreaded tuna casserole, but not anything as bad as this. Jake and Richard have always prevailed in these types of situations, and I'm sick of it. I look down at my plate of wings, and immediately begin to take out the competition.

Dad is easy to get rid of. I simply make a comment that he's had enough food for tonight. He says I don't have a say in the matter, but Mom interjects and agrees with me. Next thing you know, Mom is giving him a lecture on eating healthy and how he needs to lose some weight, and he goes quiet.

Next is Jake, and that's a bit tougher. He's eyeing the piece like a wolf, deciding whether or not he should take it. I go for a long shot, and "accidentally" spill some of my Pepsi on his pants. He reluctantly shuffles upstairs to change. Another one bites the dust.

Lastly, Richard.

Six feet tall and 180 pounds.

Bat-out-of-hell fast.

Hungry.

Uh oh.

He's glaring at the wing.

I can't talk him out of it. Even if I were to vomit on him, I couldn't get him away from it!

Jake has come back down. Damn! I'm running out of time, and I can't just take the wing.

Or can I?

I try the gutsiest, riskiest and most difficult move that I've ever attempted.

I reach for the wing.

Richard deflects my strike with his knife, and takes a stab at the wing. I shift the plate at the last minute causing Richard to hit the dish, and I smack the wing to the right side. On and on, Richard and I battle for the wing, swiping, stabbing and blocking!

Then, a miracle happens.

Richard and I plunge for the wing at the exact same time. Our forks clash and stick, their prongs interlocked. I nimbly twist his fork out of his grasp, and catch it mid flight. I seize the moment, and my fork pierces into the wing.

I did it! I finally did it! The next moments feel like slow motion as I lay it on my plate and look triumphantly at Richard. He warily gazes back, and suddenly flashes me that devilish smile of his. I ignore him and look down at my plate.

My eyes widen. My jaw drops. My heart stops.

Where is the wing?

My eyes dart to Richard's plate, but the missing wing is nowhere to be found. Where could it be? And then it comes to me. I slowly turn my head to see Jake with a smile from ear to ear, and the wing sitting on his plate.

"Oh, hey, didn't see ya' there Oli!"

**Seth Davis, age 13**



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## Limbo

The sailing ship beyond the shore  
Will never find its way back to the port  
The leaves that fall from the trees  
Don't fall any farther than a few feet

The hills that rise to the sky  
One second they were here, then out of sight  
The river keeps flowing round and round  
Is the water in the air or is it on the ground?

It is a strange place this land  
A land I hold in my hand  
That has the power to set my soul free  
And bare all sins, transgressions and virtues in me

I fear not this place but can't help wonder why  
Time has not passed nor do the birds fly  
Why am I here, where am I going?  
Am I the dead, or am I the living?

I know this place but can't remember where  
For all my life the question still hangs there  
Maybe one day I can go back in a dream  
Back to where I've never been

**Angela Dou, age 14**

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## The Power of One

The Individual.  
The People.  
The person who drops a pebble in the pond.  
The person who gets affected by the ripple effect.

You are defined as the power of one.

One tree starts a forest.  
It is the responsibility of one raindrop to start the ocean.  
A flower can awaken a dream.  
It takes a single flame to take away the darkness.  
One's enjoyment conquers internal sadness.  
A single breath brings life to a living being.  
The one who smiles starts a new friendship.  
One path will take you to your dreams.  
One step marks a journey a journey.  
It takes one person to make a difference.  
A single word can start a prayer.  
Hope can raise the spirit.  
The individual is  
The power of one.

Get on with life.  
Don't wait.

**Kaesavan Selvakumaran, age 14**

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## Tricks of the Mind

Through a crack in the curtains I could see the last strands of daylight. I closed my weary eyes. It had been a tiring day for me because I had been exercising, well just a little stumble in the shaded forest around my compact house. I contemplated that exercising would help me live a little longer. I whispered a quiet word of praise as I lay my head on the soft pillow, loving the delicate feeling of goose feathers on my fatigued head. Suddenly, I felt the bed quiver underneath my weight. The dusty wooden legs gave one last sorrowful whimper, as I heaved myself up for a drink of water. After gently laying down the glass, my pupils grew wide when I saw a slimy creature with its head cocked, looking into my eyes.

The venomous viper let out an earsplitting hiss. I shrieked, and whacked the beast across his head, only to heighten his anger. Why, I asked myself, does one so old get visits from a disgusting beast when he knows I am getting weaker by the minute? Before I could let out one more hopeful cry for help, he disappeared. The sweat dripped down my wrinkled old face. After comprehending that the wetness on my face was not sweat, but tears, I craved sleep to comfort my mind after this torrid mind trick.

I closed my eyes again. Before I could get to sleep, a horrible twitchy feeling came upon my legs. I pulled the covers up cautiously, and gasped, only to observe red ants marching like little soldiers over my blanket. I knew what was happening, my brain was tired, and I craved sleep. Was my mind playing tricks on me again, or was I playing tricks on my mind? Why did my mind torture me instead of someone more beautiful, or younger? Why me? I already knew the answer to that question. My life was up.

I blew out the candle which had burned almost to the wick and hoped to put an end to these visions. The candle holder, which had an imprinted silver flower on it, had been a gift from my father. The one that held his last light will hold mine too. I would easily ignore the hallucinations that have already haunted me, believing that dying is more frightening. Just like a candle burned for my father, so it will hold its last light for me. My mind will soon be in peace. These mind tricks will persist no more.

**Charlotte Thomas, age 12**

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## I used to be beautiful, once

I was smooth, wrinkle-free, shining and laughing. I stood proudly, but not arrogantly, a sense of purpose in my demeanour. I always left great first impressions.

Of course, I wasn't as good as Lester and, God knows, Robert was above us all (well, he certainly acted that way, all perfect and plastic). I always tried to be kind to Will and John — maybe I was a bit condescending, but it's hard to be nice when you know you're better than someone.

But that was long ago.

I'm old now, frayed, rips and creases mar my face. I'm not radiant by any means — I've been used so much and so many times it's a wonder I still have some self-respect, some dignity.

I've lost so much.

I watched John, anguished, eyes flashing, torn apart before my own eyes. Will, embittered, vowing to never suffer a similar fate — becoming ramrod straight, cold, distant.

I never saw him again.

And Robert, constantly adored, fawned over, of the greatest value — never to deal with what we had, unbreakable as he was. So very different, so very untouchable.

Lester and I have fought, as hard as we can but it's difficult, it truly is. He succumbed last year. I too, will, soon.

I see a boy striding towards me now. He leans closer, fingers plucking me up from the ground.

"A twenty dollar bill? Sweet!"

**Sara Vladusic, age 17**

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## 8 Ways to Look at Summer

I  
Blazing sun  
Cloudless sky  
Hot sand  
Warm waves

II  
Time to do  
What you want  
When you want  
If you want

III  
Summer starts  
Oh happy day  
Homework and school  
Are far away

And then one day  
The Summer does end  
And school must start  
All over again

IV  
Rest  
Sleep  
Rest  
Sleep  
Read  
Rest  
Sleep

V  
Time to slowly heal  
The abrasions of the year  
With loving hands  
And prepare to start again

VI  
Breathe fresh air  
Run, jump, play  
Love the night  
Love the day

VII  
Bored and alone  
Nothing to do in this place  
But sit on my own  
And let days go to waste  
Letting days go to waste  
While I sit on my own  
Nothing to do in this place  
So I'm bored and alone

VIII  
Love love the Summer  
Green green grass  
Blue blue sky  
Gold gold sun  
Love love the summer

**Lia Walsh, age 14**

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## Ode to Bear

Hiking through the rocky moraine  
I glimpsed a shape I could not ascertain  
Four paws, ochre fur, a snout — could  
it be?

Surely not! I began to flee

You heard my gasp, looked to the trail  
And recognized me before I could bail  
Glad to see me, you bolted ahead  
And promptly licked your lips as I sped

Now that we meet, face to face, you  
must agree  
We share similar qualities  
We like to roam, we sleep and look to  
the skies  
Really, we make good allies!

Before you charge, I am concerned  
You look unlike yourself, you look  
spurned:  
Your unsmiling gaze and absent wit  
Are unlike you, you must admit.

Certainly, we should maintain our stance,  
But as you blankly advance  
Hark my hiker's plea:  
Please don't eat me.

**Rishi Syam, age 17**

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Untitled



Nicole Agustin, age 14

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## Creativity Released



**Rahma Wiryomartono, age 15**



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# The Apple, the Tree, and the Serpent

There are approximately 6,909 different languages on earth, all of which contain one form or another of the word 'yes'. This single word is the driving force behind all international bargains made between countries, and is also the backbone behind any relationship created and maintained between human beings. Without this single word, foes would not have the confidence to become friends, laws and by-laws would never be passed, and countries would not have the ability to become allies. The word yes can create a new beginning each time it is expressed, and can help create the peace and unity that ultimately stems from the idea of affirming a whole-hearted agreement. At the same time, this one word, one that contains the power and ability to unite an entire nation, is also laced with a very unattractive submissiveness. I was the first one to ever refuse this method of submission, this sign of peace. I was the first one to ever say no.

"Bow."

The command was clear, and yet I did not obey. A boy that was not yet fully grown stood in front of me, with nakedness apparent in both his stance and in his eyes. Though he said nothing, his eyebrows were arched, a carved question. I shifted my gaze to his feet, refusing to meet the eyes of this new creature. The air shifted around me as my companions positioned themselves into a pose of prostration, foreheads touching the ground below.

I clenched my teeth and stood my ground, facing the creature squarely in front of me.

"Natas," said a booming voice. The source had been somewhere close by, but not anywhere that my bare eyes could locate. "Is there a problem?"

My mind told me to do the one thing I could not, bow. "Yes my Lord, that there is." My companions inhaled breaths of disbelief, with their heads on the ground and their ends in the air. The human in front of me stood quiet, eyes shifting repeatedly. After a few minutes, his furry brow burrowed, and his lips puckered.

"My Lord, why is it that they bow?" The human paused. "I am not their Lord!"

The statement had caused a murmur to spread among my companions, who were pleased with the result of his capacity to think and draw conclusions.

I crossed my arms as the booming voice of our designer spoke. "They bow," He said, "to illustrate their respect for you and for the one who has created you."

The air around me seemed to tense as my disobedience continued, and an uncontrollable protest bubbled inside of me.

"But my Lord," I exclaimed, "This creation is faulty!"

What had been gasps only minutes before had transformed into cries of outrage and pure dismay, again coming from the ones who remained with their tails in the air.

"Let me show you!" I said, attempting to prevent the uprising of my potential execution. I turned to the human. "How many fingers am I holding up?"

His eyes narrowed, thinking hard. "Two."

"Now," I said seriously. "I will continue to hold up two fingers, though you will be unable to see them. Understand?"

The human nodded as I placed my hands behind my back.

"And now, how many am I holding up?"

"Two."

I suppressed a smirk. "Wrong, I was holding up four." The creature's eyes widened as if I had ripped off his arm. "See my Lord," I said, "He is faulty."

The booming voice laughed, causing my ears to ring.

"My dear Natas," He exclaimed, "Adam's failure to perceive what his eyes could not was due to his faith in what seemed to be an honest man standing before him. How can you label one man as faulty due to the deception of another?"

I raised my eyebrows. "But my Lord, deception is not deception if it is believed to be real. If I were to convince this human to commit actions that you forbade, would that be my fault or his? This human," I said, pointing an accusatory finger at Adam, "is faulty because he centers his knowledge much too heavily around faith and his desire to be knowledgeable, rather than basing it upon reality. The truth is that he could not see my fingers, and therefore should have suggested that he did not know how many fingers I held up."

One of my companions, no longer in prostration, grabbed me by the shoulder and yanked me backwards. A warning.

The booming voice sounded displeased. "The definition of deception is objective, because the truth exists where a lie does not. Let us pretend that you managed to convince Adam to commit an action I had forbid. The fault would be both yours for lying and his for not listening to my word over yours."

I sighed. "But my Lord," I said, "this creature was unable to tell that he was being deceived by me. Hypothetically, if I did manage to convince him to commit an act that you had forbid, it would not be my fault for deceiving him nor would it be his fault for being unable to see that your truth is the truth and that my lie is a lie. It is his faith in what exists and his desire to be knowledgeable that makes him defective."

The booming voice was decisive. "Gabriel, take Adam further into the Garden." The angel obeyed, and I watched as he took Adam into the Garden, seeming happy to escape the crux of the conversation.

The booming voice seemed closer as it spoke this time. "Natas, I challenge you to convince me that my invention is incapable of correctly deciphering my word as the truth from your word as the lie. But you must also prove to me, and all else viewing, that his wife Eve suffers from the same faults."

And so came the story of the apple, the tree, and the serpent.

**Sarah Jama, age 17**

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## Invisible Ties

I reach out  
grappling,  
grasping onto  
all the strings  
spun thin as gossamer;  
webbing around my swollen  
fingertips,  
stark white around the purple  
bruising.

It snaps the moment  
radiation flares  
from my computer screen.

**Isabelle Zhu, age 16**

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## Half Opened Jar

I have a half opened jar of memories  
Laden with dust from days past  
Tarnished at the lid  
And stained on the glass  
Within the half opened jar of memories  
Contains things from the past  
Rusty old trinkets  
And fresh spring grass  
You see this half opened jar of memories  
Holds things that couldn't last  
Days that have been forgotten  
And a life lived too fast

**Samantha Lucchetta, age 16**

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## Hell Bound

Worthless wanderer wondering where he stands  
Lost soul lying on layers of land  
Halted hurt heartbeat of a bleeding man  
That forfeited his faith for the devil's hand

Perpetually perplexed by the infinite imbalance  
He was relentlessly cursed to have tremendous talents  
Pressure to impress turned to challenge after challenge  
The flavour of failure began to fill his palate

The sole progression was to rage and aggression  
Sanity snapped under the tension of depression  
He subconsciously submitted to demonic possession  
His previous problems now ran for protection

Unsparingly sprinting to random vicinities  
He robbed residents of their lives and virginities  
Vigorous violence made him a public enemy  
He would not quit quietly as long as he had the energy

A lonely loveless life from the start  
Only twisted his crooked mind and left scars  
Supposedly special, supposed to be smart  
He was freed from his hell with a bullet through the heart

Worthless wanderer wondering where he stands  
Lost soul lying on layers of land  
Halted hurt heartbeat of a bleeding man  
That forfeited his faith for the devil's hand

**Arman Zobeiry, age 16**

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## Deception of the Night

In a forest most melancholy  
Where hangs an effluvium of dread  
Lies a cobblestone path both bleak and lonely  
Where the seraphs fear to tread

I travelled that path both long and weary  
Where my pervading footsteps  
Echoed in the somber dreary  
Susurrating instead

Eidolons wander the shadows  
Silent souls speak naught a word  
As fear draws out the bravado  
Phantasmal fantasies unheard

Amaranthine mists gently swirl  
Whispers in the wind most eloquent  
As the secrets of the night unfurl  
What the Zephyr truly meant.

But an ominous glow doth shine through —  
A luminescent globe of light  
Behind clouds and mist that thus construe  
The deception of the night.

**Julia Tang, age 15**

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# Shattered

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**Tracy Li, age 14**

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## Concrete Horizon

My brother had once said there was nothing easier to find than hate. In this particular day of my memory, the sun was bigger and brighter than usual. It glared at me from directly behind my brother's head, so the seven-year-old me had to squint up at his silhouette. The building heaps we stood on were dangerous. Hills of cold, lifeless concrete and rusty metal scraps were balanced every which way, immortalized in the position they fell in a century ago. A few errant pieces were always threatening to wobble free and crush tiny kids like us.

The Heaps was our home and we were a part of its landscape. When seen from where we stood, even the dusty buildings' wreckages and the parched landscape looked beautiful in the orange twilight. We were silent and agile in its bends and turns. My brother defended the place fiercely — bad people were always trying to conquer our territory because of our reservoir — but after he dealt with the first few scouts, no one bothered us anymore.

My brother stood proudly on the tallest cliff of rubble, like a king surveying his land. He couldn't have been more than thirteen then, but his eyes were as hard as ice. His thin but wiry legs were covered with dirt and scratches, his small hands were covered with scars. He had his favourite knives and our prized gun on his belt and a rare smile on his face as he gazed at the horizon. At the time I mistook the tight smile as a sign of happiness, but I later realized it was melancholic resolve.

My brother slowly turned to look at me. The sunlight filtered dazzlingly through his spiky black hair.

"Close your eyes," he said, "I have a surprise for you, Kylie."

I did so immediately because I always obeyed my brother without question. Besides, a surprise usually meant presents. I was excited.

"Kylie." My brother's voice was steady but soft. He placed a heavy, metallic thing in my hands, "Open your eyes."

I opened my eyes and looked at the gun I held. It comically dwarfed my tiny seven-year-old fingers. While I stared at it, my brother slid his weapons belt over my head, and tightened it around my waist. It was too big and slipped to my hips.

My confusion multiplied by the second. My brother had never let me handle weapons before, and he had just given me all we had.

"Don't follow me," he said. "If I'm not back in three days, go far, far away."

Then my brother turned his back on me and walked away. His footsteps were as silent as shadows. I wanted to run after him, but the heavy belt anchored me where I stood. I shouted questions towards his retreating back. He answered them with a lazy wave, and disappeared over the concrete horizon.

It was dark when I worked my way back to our usual shelter. I had been alone before when my brother left to hunt, but I knew that this time was different. I looked at the weapons belt my brother gave me. One thing was missing, his favourite knife — a deadly black blade with a sharp serrated edge. It was a weapon used to kill.

The next day I hid the belt and went on an aimless walk. I tried to let my sibling intuition guide me to him, despite his warnings. It was nearly twilight when I found my brother.

He stood at the tallest cliff of rubble, where we talked only yesterday. Except this time, his back was turned to the long fall to the jagged concrete below. He was surrounded by five tough looking men and women, whose heights, scars and muscles dwarfed his own. These were hard mercenaries. Most were pointing guns at him. He was cornered. But despite how small and vulnerable he looked, my brother was not scared. He was holding his favourite blade in one hand. The smile on his face mocked death.

In the shadows, I stayed hidden and quietly panicked. My world seemed like it would suddenly collapse without my permission. There was nothing I could do to help him and I was horrified.

He was saying something. "A king should go down with his kingdom."

The bald mercenary spat. "You aren't a king, just a worthless brat."

My brother laughed. "Why are you afraid of me then? Only cowards need five grown soldiers to murder a child."

The mercenaries around him tensed, seething. I saw teeth. Some fired a deafening shot that startled me like a rabbit. My brother fell to his knee amid roaring laughter.

But that was not the end. My brave brother never liked losing a fight. He struggled until he stood back up. Barely a wince escaped. His legs were shaking; he had lost a kneecap and blood stained the sloped concrete crimson. The knife was still clutched in his hand. He stared down everyone in his path, with eyes that were hot with rage, but an expression that was ice cold. His murderous gaze travelled from one mercenary to another until they all felt fear and shrunk back.

That's when my brother saw me.

I think he faltered for a fraction of a second, while all sorts of emotions filtered through his eyes. One female mercenary saw the change in his expression and turned to look at me. She never got the chance. My brother threw his knife and she was brained before she even glimpsed me.

Her death broke the spell, and the rest of the mercenaries realized they had guns.

"CLOSE YOUR EYES!" My brother shouted.

But for the first time in my life, I disobeyed his order because I was frozen in horror. That's how I saw the barrage of bullets tear into him. My brother's body flew backwards into empty space in a red arc. He disappeared yet again beyond the concrete, this time for good.

**Lisa Xuan, age 16**



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# My Friend Ana

Wake up.  
What did you eat last night?  
Check your stomach.  
It's not flat.  
Of course not.  
You ate all your dinner yesterday.  
How could you?  
Get on the scale.  
You need to be punished.

Get up.  
Lying in bed won't burn any carbs.  
Take a shower  
Make it hot.  
Sweat your fat away.  
Scrub harder  
Make your arms ache  
You didn't do any pushups last night.

Get dressed.  
Put your tank top on  
None of your bras fit anymore.  
Remember your sweaters  
You'll be cold if you don't.  
You need stockings.  
Don't let anyone see how your knees are thicker than your thighs.

Eat breakfast.  
You're too weak not to eat.  
Just like a fat person  
You think you need the food.  
You can survive without it.  
Don't put that toast in your mouth  
I'll talk to you about it all day if you do  
You did.  
You just put one hundred calories into your already big stomach  
Those calories will turn to fat  
You're fat.  
Always.

Go to school.  
Look at everyone eating  
Looks good  
No.  
They'll pay for it later.  
You don't want a muffin.  
450 calories that you won't burn  
Where will they go?  
To your thighs  
Ugly.  
But, then again, you always were.  
You'll never change.

Eat lunch.  
You better not eat the other half of that sandwich.  
Think of that toast you had this morning.  
Told you I'd bug you about it.  
You really want to eat that cheese string?  
Think of that toast.  
That butter.  
In you.

Go home.  
What time is it?  
Don't eat too late.  
You'd better get going.  
Open the fridge.  
Take out the cucumber rolls.  
Only two pieces tonight  
Remember that toast.  
An apple is all right  
A small one.  
Think of that toast.

Do homework.  
You're not hungry.  
No more gum.  
Each piece is five calories you don't need.  
Go on Boston Pizza's website  
Think about eating a whole slice.  
The cheese, the sauce, the crust.  
And a milkshake.  
But never do it.  
You never will  
Not with me.

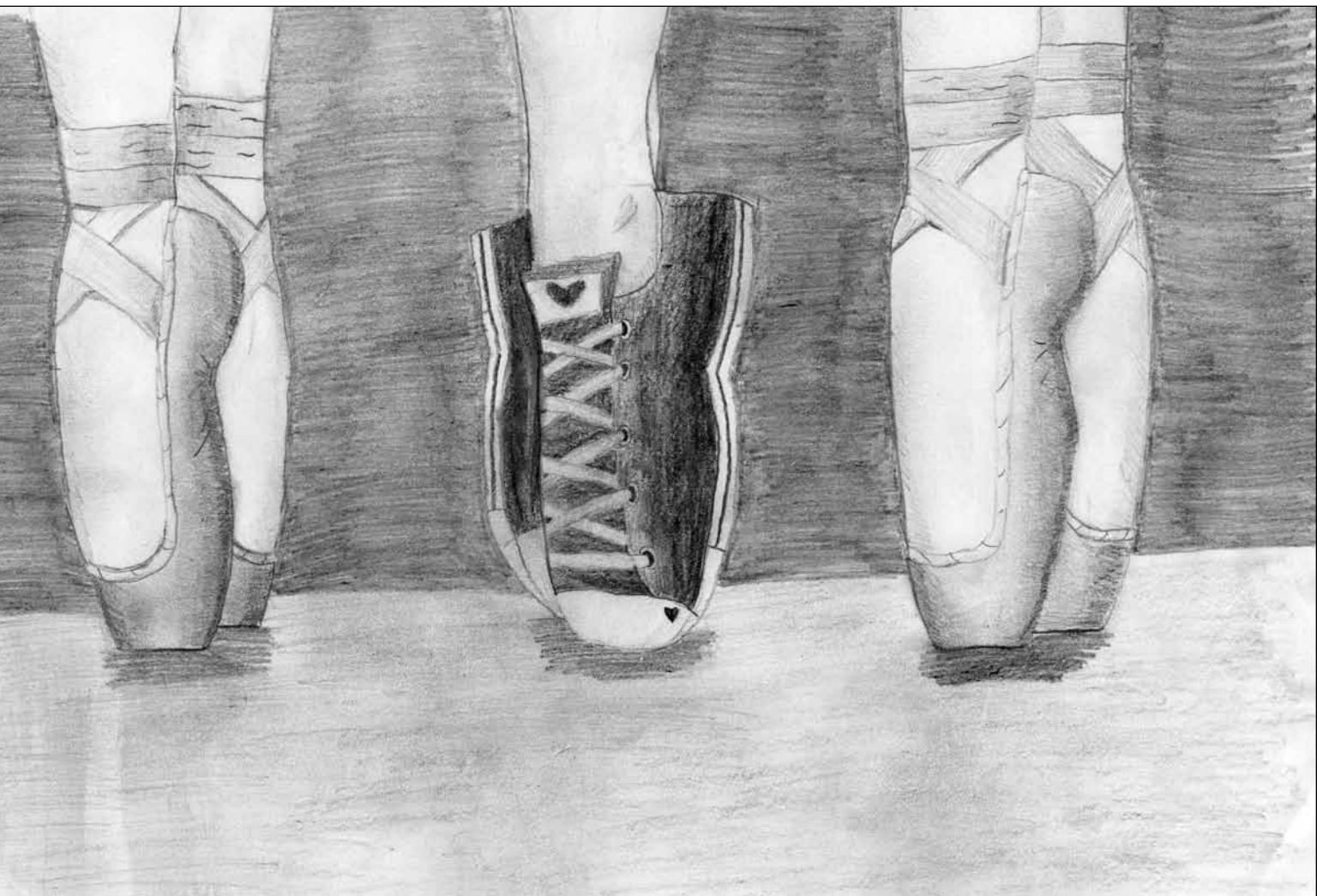
Go to bed.  
Listen to that rumble.  
It's the sound of champions.  
But are you really a champion?  
Remember,  
You ate that toast.

Good night.  
See you tomorrow.

**Maddy DeWelles, age 16**

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## Standing Out



**Heather Bonnycastle, age 16**

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# The Green Carpet

It didn't rain often in the city where she lived, but when it did, it stormed. With her peripheral vision watching the papers on her office desk, Amelia would often spend these rare occasions gazing at the saturated world outside. Sometimes she would open the closest window so she could sit listening to the wind squeezing itself through the tiny screen holes. She'd hear the rushing of the cars, of the trucks, of the irritated unspoken Can't-I-just-be-home-already?s and would enviously think that despite it all, the rain would feel no urgency. With no agenda and no one to please, it could take its time to fall, last, and eventually end.

Amelia loved the wake of the storms even more than she loved the storms themselves. When she was still a student at Packer High, she used these moments to escape her house, telling her mother that she had to bike to the local library for a reference book she needed for this biology project or that economics assignment. She would ride instead to the nearby park, and if there was no one else around and if she was feeling exceptionally audacious, she would carefully take off her socks and shoes before dancing barefoot in the soggy wet grass. The grass became much greener a carpet against the luminescent grey of the after-rain sky, and it was a shame to leave such a beautiful floor so un-danced on, so neglected, and so un-loved.

After her first dance on the green carpet, Amelia felt much like a novice shoplifter: awfully guilty and incredibly nervous at the thought of getting caught. Luckily for her, no one saw her biking home with her footwear in her backpack to sneak into her backyard and wash her feet, painted brown, with the garden hose. Her mother's only comment upon her entering her house was that it had taken Amelia much longer than usual to complete her library research, and if Amelia wanted to be successful in life (which no doubt any child of hers would be), she had best learn that dawdling in any form is and will always be completely unacceptable.

"Yes, Mom," she'd say, but each time the rain pounded against their roof, Amelia would dawdle once again, watching the water as it poured from the sky as she silently waited to dance on her green carpet. The carpet was her hidden treasure, but like every secret garden, she knew it would grow and grow until it became too big to hide behind her aluminum bike and imaginary books. Someday someone would discover her, herald her crimes to the world, and force her rainy dances to a sad and forgotten end.

But what if she became the herald? What if she was the one to tell her mother that she had spent the last few sunny weeks browsing the websites of local dance schools, that she wants

to try auditioning, just to see if she could get accepted, and if she does, maybe she could study dancing from professionals, maybe become a professional someday, maybe even —

"Daydreaming again, Amelia? If you don't stop this foolishness now, you're going to be nothing all your life." In her off-white bedroom doorway, Amelia's mother stood tall and imposing as she looked down at her daughter. Her lips were pressed into a thin, acidic smile. "You don't want to be a nobody forever, do you?"

Maybe, Amelia thought. Maybe I could tell her now and maybe she'd say yes and then —

"Amelia. Are you listening to me? What is wrong with you?"

"I want to dance," blurted Amelia before her brain could stop her. Her mother's eyes narrowed as more words stumbled hastily forward in a futile attempt to remediate the situation. "I've been doing research on dance schools in the area and have found one with a very strong reputation. Auditions are in three months, which should give me enough time to prepare if I work hard. I can ride my bike to the school and back, so I won't need any help with transportation. The school website has more information. If you'd like I can write the URL down here."

The silence was frigid as Amelia waited for a response. "That will be unnecessary," stated her mother with an even tone as her acidic smile began its transformation into her signature corrosive laugh. "Dancing? Don't be absurd. Stop wasting your time and be something useful for a change."

"At least — Couldn't it at least look good on my resumé?" added Amelia weakly.

"Everything about you would look better if you weren't so ridiculous. Knock your silly thoughts out of that head; I don't want to ever hear another word about you dancing again, understood? Don't try to disappoint me, Amelia." Her sharp eyes stared hard at her daughter, daring her to argue. When she was certain that Amelia had absolutely nothing more to say, she turned and left the room, a pleased smile on her face.

Raindrops continued to pellet the closed windows of the Darrow Law Offices, but Amelia had stopped watching long ago. There was work to be done, and time was too precious to be wasted. Shuffling the papers into a neat pile on her desk, Amelia noticed that her pen had silently fallen to the carpet floor.

As she bent to pick it up, she found her lips muttering words she never thought she'd say.

"I've always hated the colour green."

**Edmee Nataprawira, age 16**

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## The Lonely Man

"I don't know why she left me. Was it because I was selfish, or was it because I didn't give her a kiss last night." She came into my life like a princess. Her eyes were as beautiful as flowers and her heart was as soft as a pillow. What I really liked about her is the way she cuddled with me at night time. Now I'm sitting on my chair, staring out the window waiting for an arrival. Not even a bumble bee decided to fly by. It was a windy snowy day, when I drove in with my car. There she was, sitting on my porch, all wet and frozen under a blanket. I quickly got out and invited her in for some coffee and some cookies. Surprisingly, she didn't want coffee but she ate the cookies. That night she stayed with me and the next day she didn't leave because she had no one to live with. So she decided to live with me. We became close friends and I developed crazy feelings, but now she's gone. I love her, I love her so much. I don't know why she would leave me. I miss her, I miss my little girl. I love Lucy, my little Lucy, my sweet cat.

**Viththaki Uthayakumar, age 14**

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## The Ship of Dreams

I sail upon the Ship of Dreams  
Beneath the heaven's beams.  
I see the world by land and sea  
In all its ecstasy.

Rakish stars swirl high above me,  
Burning bright within the galaxy.  
No clouds would dare to hide the sight  
Of the silver moon in all its light.

The universe contains such wondrous raptures  
That a camera could never capture.  
So brilliantly crafted is the universe's presence  
That one photo could not possess its essence.

I could ponder this grandeur in a broader sweep,  
But the ocean lulls me to a peaceful sleep.  
As the constellations continue to shine,  
It leaves an imprint upon my mind.

I sail upon the Ship of Dreams  
Beneath the heaven's beams.  
I see the world by land and sea  
And then slumber knowing its ecstasy.

**Samantha Chin, age 18**

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## The Magpie's Mangled Morn

"Now silence speaks," she says as Death's arms grasp  
The sullen spring. The badgered arms of dread  
Doth hold the mangled morn with steely clasp,  
So that severed sun's shine is rosy red.

When muscled arms resist the beggar's thorn  
To keep the somber stomach filled, we think  
Of she who strives to keep the mangled morn.  
We think of she who writes with lover's ink.

Yet when the sun doth peak and she is weak,  
We then disperse, no longer to be seen.  
The sun then shines, birds sing with open beak  
And leaves unfurl, displaying vibrant green.

Although the stars may die and love may lie,  
She seeks us still, she seeks one last goodbye.

**Naveen Nirmalaraj, age 17**

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## Flames

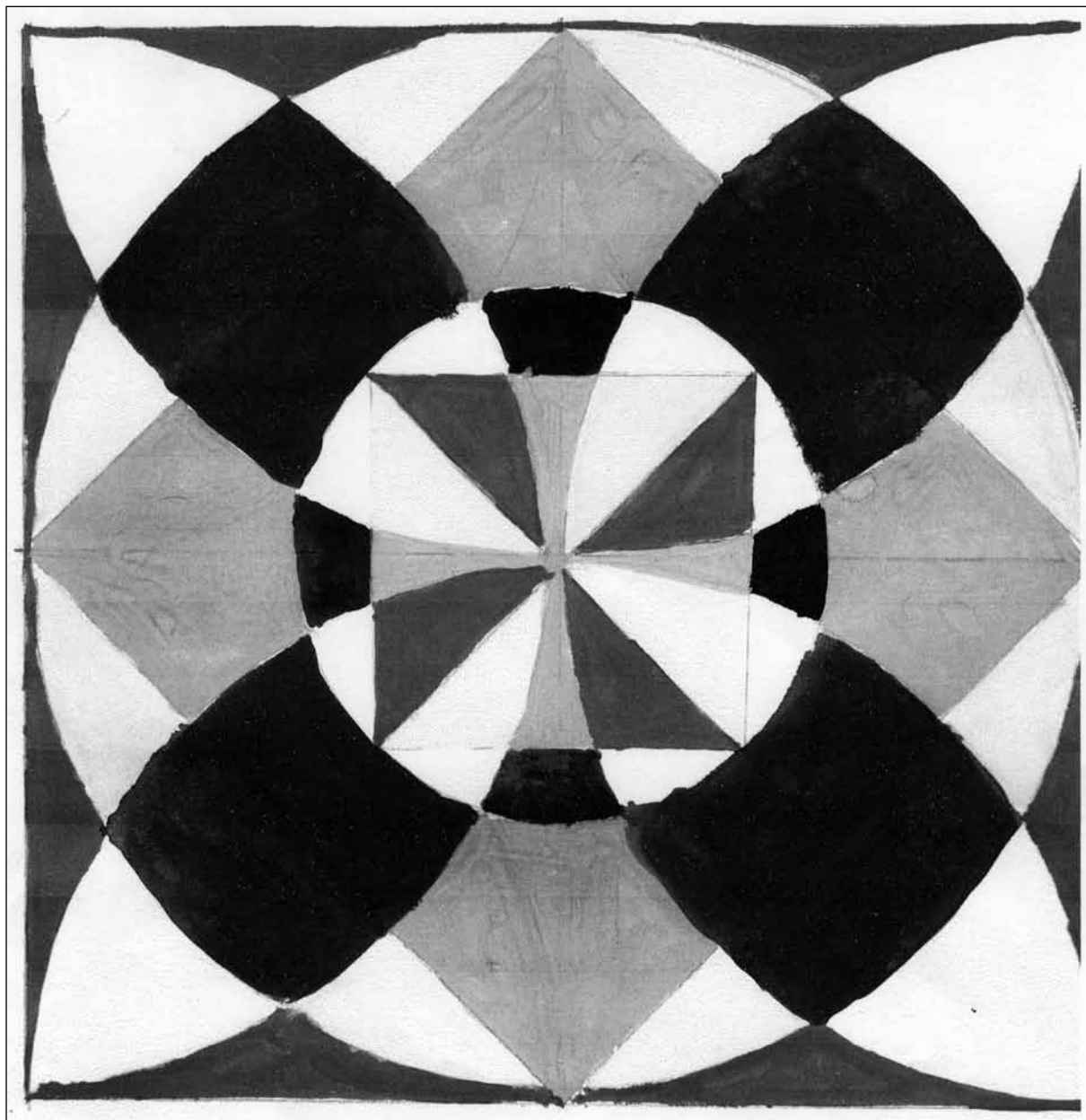
Like golden treasures gleam in the night,  
They rise and fall as leaves in the wind,  
And gently caress then leave a blight,  
As dark and strong as those who have sinned.  
Their wandering paths always lead to no end,  
Toying and mercilessly tangling a mind,  
Till nothingness is the closest friend,  
And there's nothing more to leave behind.  
Their tantalizing call is like a harsh cricket's cry,  
While they whisper of a seductive waltz  
That tears at the earth and claws at the sky,  
And not even the echoes can find any faults.  
There's naught to do but stumble along,  
As none but they can dance the dance of no song.

**Helen Toner, age 15**



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# Mosaic



**Anupya Pamidimukkala, age 13**

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## Out to Seek Adventure



**Emma Meyler, age 14**



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## A Recollection

I had a good dream. It was a wonderful, glorious dream in which I was young again, and able-bodied.

I was playing baseball; sprinting towards third base. I felt the wind in my hair and I was free as a bird. But dreams don't last and sooner or later you have to wake up.

Stubbornly I lay there, refusing to open my eyes, unwilling to accept the truth, the bitter reality of myself: I was an old man, fated to spend the rest of my miserable life alone; a hunched over, shriveled up old miser.

I sat up and scrubbed the sleep from my foggy eyes. Gingerly I stepped into my slippers, wincing at the clicking in my joints. Feeling oddly chilled, I yanked on my checkered robe.

Like I do still every foul morning, I shuffled to the window to part the hideous floral curtains. I prefer to spare my near-blind eyes from enduring anything less than beautiful during their remaining time of service. Pity the rest of the room seemed to possess the same quality as the curtains.

As usual, my breakfast arrived on a tray, the kind that's perpetually greasy. I watched a glop of insipid pudding shlop from the flimsy plastic spoon into the Styrofoam bowl. I prodded it and made various shapes in an attempt to make it more appealing. In the end I relinquished the pudding and let it be.

Instead I gazed out the window, enraptured by the mournful gray sky, the dismal drizzle and the people that scurried and hurried their separate ways. As I scrutinized the passing pedestrians, I experienced an odd yearning to know them. I wanted to acquaint myself with the businessman who walked briskly to work, chat with the man selling jewellery on the corner, and even befriend the children skipping down from school.

In that moment I felt desperately alone. Despite the bustle of nurses outside my door, I felt isolated, an island surrounded by nothingness. I fell into my chair and cried like a wretch. I cried about the curtains, about the mud-coloured muck that they fed me, about the irksome, empty smiles of the nurses, but mostly I cried about the pain of being old, sad, and lonely.

I clutched at my chest as the persistent hollow ache I had come to accept developed into charring waves of heat. I gasped and groped for the call-button.

My hand closed around it as my vision clouded over. I heard footfalls and then silence. I fell into darkness and oblivion.

The first things I perceived when I woke again were sounds; mostly the buzz and hum of machinery. I blinked and squinted against the eager sunlight pouring through the gap in the curtains. I lifted my hand to shield my eyes and was startled

to see a tube strung from it to a plastic baggie of clear fluid. Impatiently I pulled out the IV and threw it aside. Then I lay still. My sudden fit of temper was more exertion than I could afford.

I was peering at the pattern on the ceiling when my attention was caught by a glass vase that held some flowers. I stared at the glorious bulbs as if I expected them to vanish, or explain themselves, but they did neither. Slowly I rose and lumbered to the table that held them.

There, resting peacefully were two large, pale pink peonies. The blossoms bobbed and swayed softly in the morning breeze. I was baffled.

Then I noticed a card. The inside of which was covered with drawings of rainbows, flowers and butterflies. There was another picture, which appeared to be that of a little girl holding the hand of an old man. They were both smiling.

I turned it over and read the message written there. It said:

Dear Sir,

You don't know me but my name is Maggie. Every day I see you sitting beside your window when I come home from skool. I am in grade 3 and I like flowers. You always look so sad, so I came to cheer you up but the nerse said you were sick. I picked some flowers for you from the garden. I hope you like them, mom said you would.

Sincerely,

Maggie

P.S. Get better soon so we can be friends.

I stared at the letter, with its scribbled scrawls and misspelled words. I read it twice, thrice and yet again. I vaguely remembered this girl; she wore pigtails every day and had a gap in her smile. I poured over her words, yearning to know her, and staring at her picture like it was the face of God.

I imagined her voiced and felt as if I could hear her, feel the warmth of her eyes, the warmth of her small hand. I held the piece of paper like it was priceless, fearing I would spoil it, lose it, or worse, forget it. Each letter was precious, each word — a fortune. They lifted my loneliness, my despair, and my pain.

I was no longer just an old man, fated to spend the rest of my miserable life alone, hunched over, shriveled. I was a person worth flowers. I was my granddaughter's friend.

**Gwenyn Huang, age 13**

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## Big Mouth

"You have a very big mouth," Claire's older brother said to her one day.

This didn't bother Claire. Everyone said she had a big mouth. But she didn't know why she had a big mouth. So she went to ask her dad.

"Daddy," she asked him. "Why do I have a big mouth?"

"Well Claire," her dad said. "When you were born, your mouth was so small that Mommy couldn't feed you. So two doctors had to come in. They grabbed the top, bottom and sides of your mouth and they pulled. And they pulled. And they pulled. And as they pulled, your mouth stretched and slowly got bigger. Finally, the doctors stopped. That's when they realized that your mouth was too big! There was nothing they could do to make your mouth smaller so we had to keep it big."

Claire thought the story was cool, so she went to tell her younger brother and his friend, John.

"Guys, guess what?" Claire said excitedly. "My mouth was too small so doctors pulled it to make it bigger, but they made it too big so now I have a big mouth!"

"That is so cool!" Claire's younger brother said.

"Can we see your big mouth?" John asked.

Claire opened her mouth wide to show John and her brother her big mouth.

"Wow," John said. "I wish I had a big mouth like you."

Claire's sister walked into the room and said to Claire, "You had your mouth made bigger?"

"Yes," Claire said proudly.

"That's terrible!" Claire's sister said. "Anyone who has their mouth made bigger dies by the age of six."

Claire was turning six in one week! She burst into tears and ran to her mother.

"What's wrong?" her mother asked, worried.

"Daddy said my mouth was made bigger when I was born because it was too small!" Claire said. "And my sister said that anyone whose mouth is made bigger will die by the age of six and I'm going to be six in one week! I'm going to die!"

"Oh Claire," Claire's mother said with a giggle. "You won't die my silly daughter. Daddy was joking about your mouth being too big!"

"So it isn't too big?" Claire asked.

"No honey. It's just fine," her mother assured Claire.

**Hafsah Ali, age 15**

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## Redemption

Medea's witch-princess fantasy  
inside her pretty head  
playing rough with a black cat,  
black hair tumbling over her shoulders —  
little girl

She becomes a bird cage in my embrace  
and her forms become eternal  
in herself she's crafted pain:  
every finger, every lash  
is rage

And you. Boy of now's future  
disobeys the symmetry of my lines,  
who wishes he could live inside  
my pretty head,  
warm furs

Or look at me, behind bars  
clutching these realities with teeth  
laughing because you don't understand.  
The joke's always funnier when it's  
on you

I'll answer with breath of soot and ash:  
my sister is immortal,  
my mother is a broken body,  
and my father is a child,  
a tragedy

Rushing water whispers:  
it knows the paroxysms of guilt,  
it knows the swathed way to escape, and  
it knows the back trail of the daggered mind  
has fallen

(furious little girls  
drown you in warm furs  
while you admire  
a fallen tragedy)

**Nuard Tadevosyan, age 17**



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## Autumn's Fire

Burnt, is the subtle  
Scent of the fiery fall  
The soft chill of flames

**Karinna Pe, age 12**

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## I Am In a Relationship With You

I am in a relationship with you.  
I stare at you each day,  
For countless hours.  
Sometimes sitting, sometimes lying down,  
Moments you sit on my lap,  
Warming my thighs,  
I can feel your heat surging through my legs and up my body,  
It is worth it even if you burn me.

I see through your eyes like Windows,  
Searching for everything I want to know.  
Your desktop is covered with my files,  
And it reflects my smile.  
Perhaps your voices are what I need,  
The music to my ears to set me free.

I tap on you,  
You show me what I desire,  
What you can do is all that I admire.  
I tap on you,  
You show me what I crave,  
What we have together creates shockwaves.  
I tap on you,  
You show me what I long,  
The world you give me is all I need to stay informed.

You help me out when I'm confused,  
You are love that I will never refuse.  
You function like no human can,  
That's because you're not a man.

Stay with me,  
Stay charged.  
Nothing will stop,  
My love for you, laptop.

**Rebecca Co, age 19**

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## Queen Bee

The moment I was hatched from my egg, my mother tried to eat me. I was fortunate because I successfully escaped from her wrath. Later, I would learn that I was never supposed to be born because my mother was the Queen, and as her child, I was meant to be a male servant. But something went wrong. I was a girl. Everyone knew that if the Queen bore a girl, they would have a battle to the death. Instead, my mother tried to eat me when I was just a larva.

I got lucky I suppose, since one of her servants picked me up and we flew off before my mother could bite my head off. His kaleidoscopic eyes shone all ultraviolet colours in the sun, and his translucent wings beat against the soft spring breeze. We flew further and further away from the beautiful palace with hexagonal rooms, and I became frightened then cried out in fear. The servant firmly told me to hush, for he was fighting the urge to go back — my mother's call in his head is impossible to ignore. If I was older, I would have known her orders would be for him to bring me back, and then the other servants would kill us. This order could not be avoided, but somehow he broke the bounds of logic and was freed from her control. He then came under my control, and I was not only safe, but also a newly appointed Queen.

At first, the journey to starting a new hive was harsh. The servant had to build a palace from scratch and although I was nearing beehood, I would be of no help at all. The only thing I could do was give birth to more children. After much dispute, a plan was made and soon enough our palace was thriving with my servants.

That was three years ago. The servant that saved me is now long gone. Soon, I will be gone too, for I feel my body weakening. The journey to freedom was long and hard, but I made it.

One summer evening, as all the bees were feasting upon the sweet nectars, and I was enjoying the cool night air tremendously, a bee suddenly jumped from his place and lurched upon me. All the bees gathered around him as two other bees held him down. I ordered them to kill him, and they did. I approached his corpse, and peering down at him, I wondered how he managed to slip out of my control. As Queen, I knew everyone's thoughts. As I continued to speculate, I felt a bee disconnect from my control, then another, and another. Soon enough, half the room was no longer composed of my servants. They now belonged to someone else. I looked up, and saw that they were closing in on me, ready to kill. At that precise moment, a nursing bee ran in. I knew his message before he said it.

"My Queen, it's a girl!"

**Julia Li, age 15**

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## Reality

I'm the Marie Currie  
of time

a radioactive, radical notion

floating particles,  
under a ray of sunlight

together they make me  
    destroy me  
        form me  
            control me

I'm the contraption of Da Vinci  
    the words of Shakespeare  
    the face of Michelangelo

I'm formed from dirt  
    from marble  
    from ribs

I'm the essence, the quintessence  
live on death and fast on thought

the sea and the old man, i am  
seasons, perceptions, truths and faults  
metamorphosis like Kafka  
    like Dali

emerge from galaxies  
from neurons  
I'm explosive, implosive  
a mutation  
    a concoction  
a pill  
    and a powder

I'm a paradox of perspective  
hope earned and hope lost

I'm a concept  
    idea  
        i'm you

**Sofiya Horalevych, age 18**

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## I Met You in Geography Class

Wind my fingers into yours  
lace them like licorice sticks  
and fishtail braids —  
all i ever wished for was  
someone who would find my scars  
on the topography of my skin  
and trace them with understanding and calloused fingertips —  
i found you  
and we fit like Pangaea —  
your breath shifts tectonic plates in my blood:  
there is a new continent in my heart  
and it begs to be called by your name.

**Samantha McKay, age 17**

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## To See

I'm blurry, no use.  
I need to be wiped.  
Instead I settle on your nose  
Crooked, dirty.  
You don't seem to mind  
Occasionally squinting.

I'm hurt, you push me up  
Constantly, sporadically  
I'm bent, now fix me.  
No, wait, stop  
It tickles. Your finger  
on my frame.

You set me down, still broken  
Too lazy to mend  
I see my friend, no, enemy  
His pink case refilled.  
I want to move — too late.  
Pink is your favourite colour.

You struggle to put him in  
He's dropped once, twice.  
You try again,  
Your nose touching the mirror,  
Hands shaking,  
Then finally, in.

I'm here.  
Not used, not hurt or tickled.  
It's dark, being unused.  
My place is no longer on your nose.  
You have him to see now.

**Stephanie Ly, age 17**

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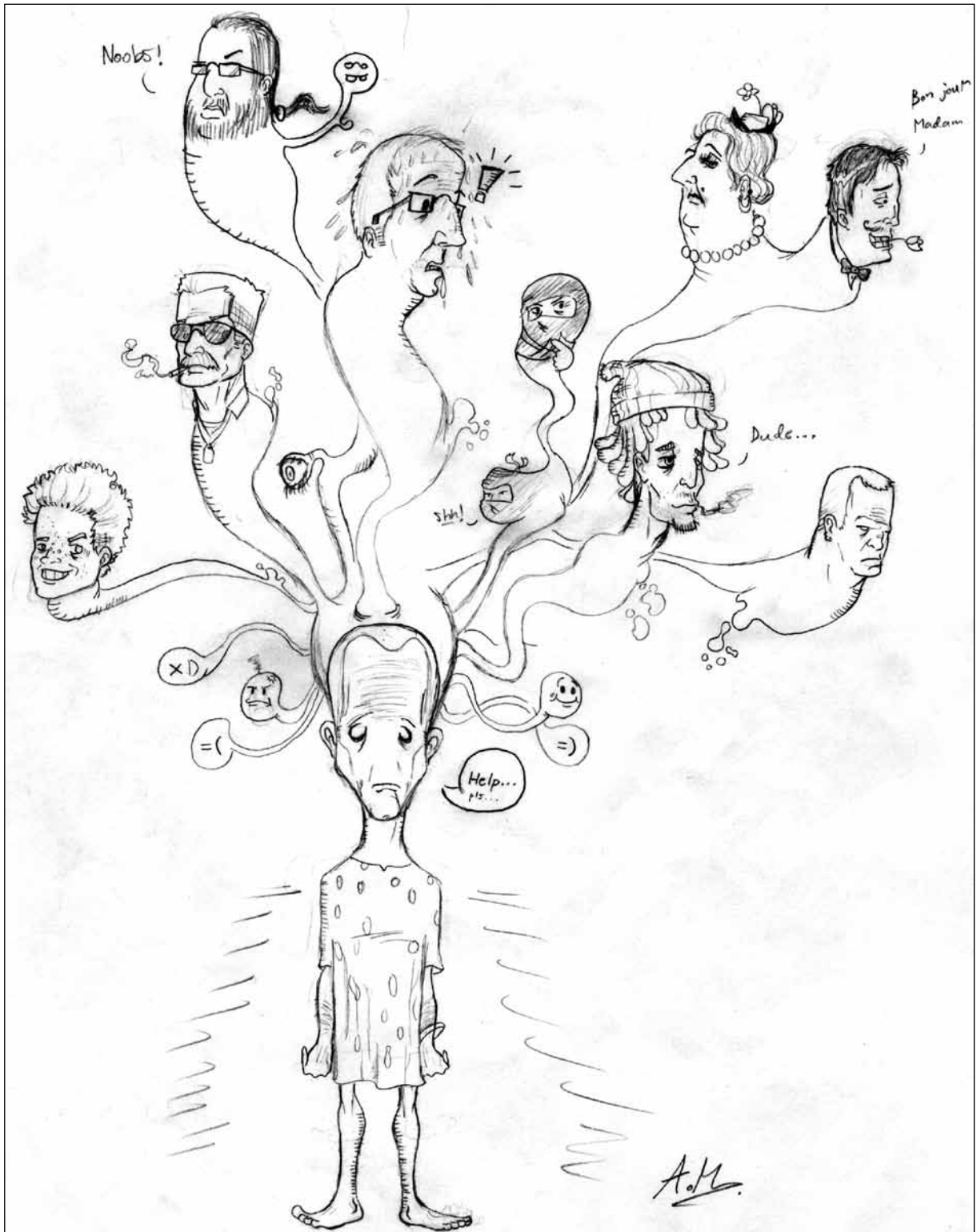
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## I wish to write of

I wish to write of beauty and love,  
loss and despair, joy and horror  
I wish to write into the souls of people,  
into the depths of their wounds  
I wish to touch and move the psyche  
of our race  
But I write to please,  
and biscuits please,  
as do cottages and sparrows,  
also old buttons forgotten  
I wish to write of big things,  
politics and philosophy,  
new worlds and science  
If only I didn't write to please.

**Andreana Callegarini-Gradzik,  
age 13**

# Split-Personality Disorder



Ahmed Rashid Mohamed, age 17

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You gotta let them go



**Yasmin Barzegar, age 16**



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# Night of the Living Plush

You hated babysitting. Hated children, their parents, their houses and just people in general. But you hated this little girl with a burning passion. She had those perfect, golden curls, innocent blue eyes and the doll-like clothing you only see on pampered, oblivious children. And her stare. It was like she was slowly peeling you away and looking into your soul.

She hadn't spoken a word to you all night. Just looked at you, her eyes flicking over your face as if she was trying to memorize it. You tried to ignore her by looking out the window, the only part of her room which wasn't piled with stuffed animals.

Correction, teddy bears. She had a horrific amount of teddy bears, and nothing but.

"Do you think teddy bears go to heaven? They must, it only makes sense."

"Um. Sure, I guess." You hoped she couldn't see you rolling your eyes.

"No you don't." Her tone was flat.

"Oh yeah?"

She rose, smiling sweetly. "You don't think they're alive. You think all teddies are cloth and fabric, shadows of life."

"In simpler words, yes."

She began pacing the room, muttering to herself. You shook your head, she must be crazy. Suddenly she stopped, turning to you with something dark in her smile.

"Want me to prove you wrong?"

You felt a chill creeping up your spine, but you let out a quiet laugh. "Sure. I could use a distraction."

She walked around the room, running her hands over the bears. She stared into the lifeless plastic eyes of a few. Nothing happened, and you were surprised at your disappointment.

And then one twitched. It was so small and subtle you wondered if it was real, but the little girl stopped and stared at it, a hysterical giggle building in the back of her throat.

"Did that thing just move?" You slowly stood up; ready to put your responsibilities before your feelings and save her from an evil wave of plush.

"Yes, Monsieur Cuddlemuffin has always been energetic."

She frowned, lifting up a limp paw and letting it fall back to its side. "He must not like you."

"The feeling is mutual."

She shrugged and turned to a powder blue bear, small and squat looking. "Chartreuse is very friendly, though."

"Chartreuse? You do realize that's a shade of green, right?"

She narrowed her eyes, sticking her nose up in the air. "She's very sensitive about her complexion."

You felt like an idiot. "Gee, sorry."

"Oh that's alright; I can't ever stay mad at someone, too

dull." The bear laughed lightly and stood up with a grunt.

"Holy crap!" You stumbled backwards, tripping over something and landing in a pile of teddy bears, all who cried out or swore.

"Careful, they don't like to be stepped on!" The girl flopped onto her bed and stared at all the teddy bears slowly rising around her. She looked amused, if slightly awed.

You felt a soft thump on your leg, and looked down to see Monsieur Cuddlemuffin throwing punch after punch at your shin.

"Why haven't you told your parents about this?" You let out a nervous giggle as a low murmuring of teddies and a rustling of fabric surrounded you.

She shrugged. "They never asked."

"Yeah, because they're totally going to ask if your room is full of demonic teddy bears."

She jumped to her feet, the teddy bears getting more agitated. "We don't like that tone." She hissed.

Something pricked your leg, and you saw Monsieur Cuddlemuffin had found himself a needle, and was waving it above his head and growling. You couldn't help yourself. You'd always been impulsive, but this was just stupid.

You kicked him, and then turned tail and ran. You slid down the hallway, skipping stairs and scrabbling to open the door, the sound of breaking glass and a girl's enraged scream right behind you.

The wind whipped past your face, blowing through your hair and nipping at your bare arms, but you hardly noticed.

You didn't stop running until you'd reached home.

The next day, in the weak, pinkish-grey light of dawn, you were awoken by shouts of surprise up and down the street. You peered out the window and gasped at the hundreds of lifeless teddy bears littered up and down the street.

You hurriedly unlocked the door, almost stepping on a motionless Monsieur Cuddlemuffin, who was frozen halfway across your front porch, a malicious smile across his furry face. There were teddies laying limply up and down your walkway, in your garden, on your hedges. There were even a few hanging from the tree on your front lawn. You could see Chartreuse in the middle of the street, also just a plush toy.

But that wasn't what caught your attention. What did was the mysterious china doll lying next to Monsieur Cuddlemuffin. Though it was covered in mud, dirt and leaves, you could still see it was a girl with perfect golden curls, blue eyes and lacy, doll-like clothing.

And its face was frozen in a scream of rage.

**Sophia Belyk, age 12**

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# BLOCKED

The scratch of my pencil along each line sickens me. Word after word pours out under the pressure of the lead. Meaningless words, speaking of nothing, and telling no story. Yet, I keep writing in some hope that the words I mark onto the page will magically transform into a tale of misfortune or joy; a story about a little brown monkey named Bobo, or the story of a girl stabbed fifteen times with a plastic fork. The deadline of the next day impends over me like a dark, voluminous shadow. The day I will have to hand in my story complete or incomplete, and hope that it will be enough. For me, nothing is ever enough when it comes to writing. I know in the end I will choose to hand in nothing, rather than something I hate, but am forced to, because of a grade. I stab my pencil into my desk in frustration, and burrow my head into my arms, hoping for security within the familiar darkness I often enter. I am blocked.

When I finally depart from the security of my own darkness, I find myself in a field of crisp, green grass. Light streams in, illuminating each strand. While the field around me is full of life, there is also an eeriness about this place. Other than the crunch of grass under my feet, everything is silent. I walk through the fields looking around me for any other sign of life. Finally, I give up and lay in the grass, looking up at the sky; a perfect forget-me-not blue. This place is the perfect setting for a great adventure, but has no spark to start it. Looking up into the blue of the sky, I close my eyes.

Only after a few seconds do I feel the cool wetness of water seeping through my clothes. I find myself on a ship, swaying back and forth over the boisterous current. The sky is black and stormy; and it seems as though any moment the darkness will overtake everything around it. Unlike the last place, however, I find myself not to be alone. Around me people are in panic. Each runs around frantically yelling and screaming as waves crash onto the deck, lifting them off their feet. Two people catch my eye. They stand at the front of the ship. A boy holding a girl as she spreads her arms out over the waves. At first sight, I think it looks like a scene from Titanic, however, through further observation I see the boy is restraining the girl from jumping overboard. Finally, the girl manages to release herself from the boy's clutch and throws herself into the water. The boy yells, and I assume there are tears streaming down his face. In a moment he is also flinging himself deep into the waves. I stand watching the entire scene. Nobody around them notices. Part of me wonders if this whole scene was dramatized. Watching it unfold before me seems like the ending of any other clichéd love story. I walk towards the front of the ship, and look down into the dark water below. Without hesitation, I jump; leaving the chaos behind me.

What I land in isn't the cold icy water but rather a soft, lush carpet inside the living room of a lavish house. At the far end of the room, a man sits reading next to a lit fireplace; which sends warmth into my body. Suddenly, the main door opens to reveal a young boy staggering in. Grasping the wall, he holds himself

upright with one hand, while the other clasps his chest. Specks of blood and dirt are strewn over his white t-shirt. He goes into a violent fit of coughing, and in a moment, his eyes close, and he collapses to the floor.

The man sitting down jumps to his feet and runs towards the boy. What follows is a procession of ambulances to the house; the injured boy being taken to the hospital; and silent tears streaming down the man's face. I follow along, hoping to discover what has caused the boy to appear in such a state. Sitting in the hospital room along with the man, I watch as the boy slowly opens his eyes.

The man runs to his side, and squeezes his hand tightly.

"What happened son?" the man says anxiously.

The boy opens his mouth, and I grasp my chair in excitement as he responds, "I...I was in the park, and I...fell off my skateboard."

At this point I am out of my seat, and I know that frustration is evident on my face. I want to scream. Instead I choose to storm out of the room, and slam the door behind me; more aggravated in the fact that only I can hear the bang.

The scene waiting for me outside is a bit of a shock. Everywhere I look there lies dust and rubble of a city that had once stood there. I walk through the broken streets, past the bodies of people; people, who obviously were not prepared for the destruction to come to places they lived in, worked in, and must have felt safe in. I stand extremely still, taking in the scene. People surround me; just lying there, with no hope of ever getting up. I am further alarmed by a young boy who walks past me from behind. He is covered in the dust that thickly coats the remnants of the city. However, the expression on his face is not one of distress, but rather of amusement; as if he woke up to find a pleasant surprise. He walks over the bodies of people, stepping on them without a care. I follow him, looking down all the time to avoid the bodies. He finally stops in front of a high school. Students are crushed under the fallen building, with the exception of few who were able to escape and see the sun one last time. I see him looking down at the body of a girl, lying in a shallow pit. Recognition is evident on the boy's face. In an instant, his expression changes from shock, to disbelief, to... joy. A smile crosses his face; but it is a cruel smile, almost as if he is glad to see this girl lying in the dirt. I want to follow. Only I am too late, as the entire scene disappears before me. It has no ending. I slowly lift my head out of my arms, still grappling the broken pencil.

"Good morning. Did you finally think of a good idea?" my teacher asks smiling.

"More like a series of bad ideas," I respond.

"Oh really?" she says. Looking down at the first sheet, she reads, "The scratch of my pencil along each line sickens..."

**Sarah Menzies, age 14**

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## Another Day at the Market



Sierra Sun, age 16

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## The Heart of the Storm

Grey clouds suddenly engulfed the blue sky and lightening flashed. The haunting howl of the wind soon roared through the air and crested waves.

Atop the cliff a light house rested. Inside, an old man silently sat in a worn rocking chair. He stared through the window and witnessed the intensifying battle between the darkened skies and the raging sea. The rain pelted the house in a never-ending assault, leaving dancing streaks in their wake. His unblinking eyes searched the sea. He saw it. A solemn boat amidst the storm. The ship trying to maneuver through the walls of water, headed towards the wharf. A giant wave rose up behind it and in a tremendous crash the boat was submerged.

Images of a fishing vessel swam past the man's penetrating eyes. He remembered the night when he was in the battleground of the sea and the waves towered above him. The shouts from his crew were drowned out by the deafening wind, and the rain assaulted his face like a million stinging needles. Suddenly, a body was thrown from the vessel and swallowed by the sea. He desperately tried to save him but the man had disappeared to an underwater tomb. Time seemed to stand still as the body sank to abysmal depths. Another wave slammed the side of the ship and it nearly capsized. Through the rain, he tried to haul the fishing nets into the boat, but the current was too strong. The steel cables slid through slick hands and soon the net was drawn back out to sea.

The old man glanced down at his veined hands and saw the pale white scars, reminding him of that treacherous night. He turned his attention to the storm and desperately searched for the doomed ship, but his weathered eyes could not see any shape amongst the thrashing sea.

Suddenly a bang came at the door. Startled, the old man slowly rose from the chair and shuffled along the wooden floor. He reached the door and unlocked the iron bolt. With much difficulty, he heaved it open and saw a young man. His hair was plastered to his face and he appeared to be wearing fishing attire. The old man gasped in surprise as he was smothered in a soggy hug by the visitor; within the warmth of the embrace he could feel the heart of the storm. He then directed the younger man to the rocking chair. His son was finally home.

**Harry Myles, age 14**

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## Embarking

The last ashes burn  
The weight on my shoulders is heavy  
Rosewater and rhubarb  
Axes and pickaxes  
Flint and tinder  
The cobbler's handiwork embraces my toes  
As the wooden frame beckons  
Jutting out from the door, the knob sparkles  
My gloved hand caresses it  
A slight turn; a slight tug; the world's revealed  
The fire goes out  
So do I

**Mik Tampold, age 15**

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## The Perfect Blackberry

Out picking blackberries when what did I see  
But a plump juicy blackberry looking at me.  
It was a rich purple against the dark leaves  
The trees surrounding me were a beautiful green.  
I edged my way into the prickly bramble  
Against the damp ground my sneakers did scramble.  
My hand reached out cautiously into the patch  
Against my smooth skin the spiny thorns scratched.  
When just the next second, from out of the blue,  
My hand wobbled and the flawless blackberry flew.  
It tumbled through the air and fell to the ground  
Where it soon was lost in a wet grassy mound.  
I fell to my knees and pawed through the muck  
If I find it, I thought, then I must have great luck.  
About to give up, I gave the ground one last sweep  
I plunged my hand into the mud quite deep.  
When to my surprise, I felt something strange  
It wasn't a twig or a stone or lost change.  
I grabbed it and pulled it out of the sludge  
And the thing I had found was better than fudge.  
The flawless blackberry sat in my hand  
I jumped in the air and when I did land  
I carefully climbed out of the blackberry shrub  
Got a bucket of water and that berry I scrubbed.  
I popped it in my mouth, broke the skin with a bite  
The juicy berry was such a delight.  
And so now I must say, it was worth the time  
Because sometimes the wait makes the thing more sublime!

**Maggie Crawford, age 13**



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# The Turtle

I open my eyes. Blink once. I see the chaos that surrounds me. Blink twice. The noise hits. The noise of dozens of kids, shouting, and a teacher, shouting too, trying to get them to calm down, hits me like a thunderstorm. Ah, the familiarity of English class. It's a new school year, and for the first few weeks the teachers have no control over the kids. The sheer testosterone level in the class is enough to make anybody choke.

Finally the teacher manages to calm the kids. The sweat on her face tells us all we need to know. It's a new teacher. The troublemakers examine her, like a pack of wolves scenting prey. If they had tails, they would be wagging. Then she says something that takes us all back. "Do you know," she says, "that a snake is a lot more afraid of you than you are of it?" I see eyes rolling, and boredom, throughout all my classmates faces.

Great, they say, another animal freak teacher. Last year we had a supply teacher. She brought in a snake, and it was all fun and games until the snake tried to strangle a seven-year-old. She now lies behind bars for two years. Braving the smirks and sneers, the teacher continues. "Why, you ask yourself, would a snake be afraid of us." She pauses, and draws a quick breath. "Well, we're a lot larger than they are, and they are intimidated by us. Imagine if you were a snake." More eye rolls, and two pretend to bite each other like snakes. "Wouldn't you be afraid if a giant approached you? Would you fight back?" Some think to themselves.

"Now hold that image in your minds. Hold it tight. I'm going to ask you a question a lot of you may have heard of before. Are you ready?" Ears perk up, but there's no response. "If you could be any animal, any animal at all, what would you be?" The kids are entranced. She reels them in. "Any animal at all... Write a 150 word description about what animal, and why. You have twenty minutes." Now the groans pour out.

I pull a piece of paper out of my bag, and start to think. What animal would I be? My mind immediately turns to a lion

or a tiger. The sheer majestic beauty of the carnivorous animals awes many people. But no, I know that those kinds of animals are not the kind I want to live my life as. My mind dawns upon the sheer number of possibilities. Birds, insects, pets. Anything. To soar like an eagle, or to race the wind as a cheetah, the possibility tempts me for a moment.

But, then I ask myself a question.

What is the main quality that makes life great as an animal? For a moment, I think about power. Power and energy. Soon, however, it dawns on me. Freedom. To live your life free. And instantly, the animal dawns on me. The scratching of my pencil fills my mind. I convey the very essence of freedom and dignity into 150 words. "Alright, class!" the teacher exclaims, "tell us what you wrote. Jeremy, go first."

The kinds of animals that people choose seem to vary. A lion. A tiger. Birds are popular choices. But, for the moment, nobody chooses mine. "Jack!" the teacher calls. My cue. I take a deep breath, and begin to speak. "Imagine life," I say, "as an animal. When I think to myself about animals, one word leaps out above the rest."

The class is entranced. "Freedom. A single word. So, what animal really conveys freedom? I asked myself that very question. A turtle, my friends." Laughter emerges. Not surprising, really. "Think to yourself. An animal untouched by mankind, older than mankind. The turtle can live for centuries. Yet, nothing seems to faze it. Time will not touch it. It is freedom conveyed by matter. Everybody has seen one before, in a park, or in a river. It is wisdom, it is freedom, and it is dignity. It is an animal so wise that the Aborigines respected it as a god. So dignified, swimming, without a care in the world. An animal like that must be respected. That is why, if I could be any animal, I would be a turtle."

Applause greets my words. I gaze out the window. In a pond next to the school, a turtle is swimming. Indifferent to the cheers and laughter. I smile. It swims on.

**Victor Cheng, age 13**

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## The Idiot

I woke up on the morning of the 9th  
To an idiot shrieking  
Beneath my window  
I stuck my head out, looked down  
And there he was, dressed up  
In trousers cut off at the knees  
And  
A fedora from the Goodwill clearance bin  
I looked down, as he looked up  
"EEAGADOOODOO"  
His nonsensical shout is the best morning wake-up  
I could ever ask for  
And I swear  
I can smell the stale stench of his breath  
From twenty feet up  
Stepping backwards, the window slams shut  
Narrowly missing my still-asleep fingers  
The idiot's screams are softer now  
And as I turn on the radio, they are silenced completely  
As I am showering to a teeny-bopper's song about love, I get a whiff  
Of mango shampoo, and forget all about that putrid odour  
I'm sure I smelled just moments ago  
Mmmm  
Nothing is better  
Then a morning shower  
Shoes and shirts, in the current fashion (of course)  
Are laid out  
Ready to be pulled on  
And in less than half-an-hour I am out the door  
"EEAGADOOODOO"  
The idiot flashes me a lopsided smile as I walk by  
Balancing on three inch heels  
I ignore him, continue on my way  
And just hope to God he's there tomorrow  
Because I no longer bother setting an alarm

**Rach Klein, age 17**

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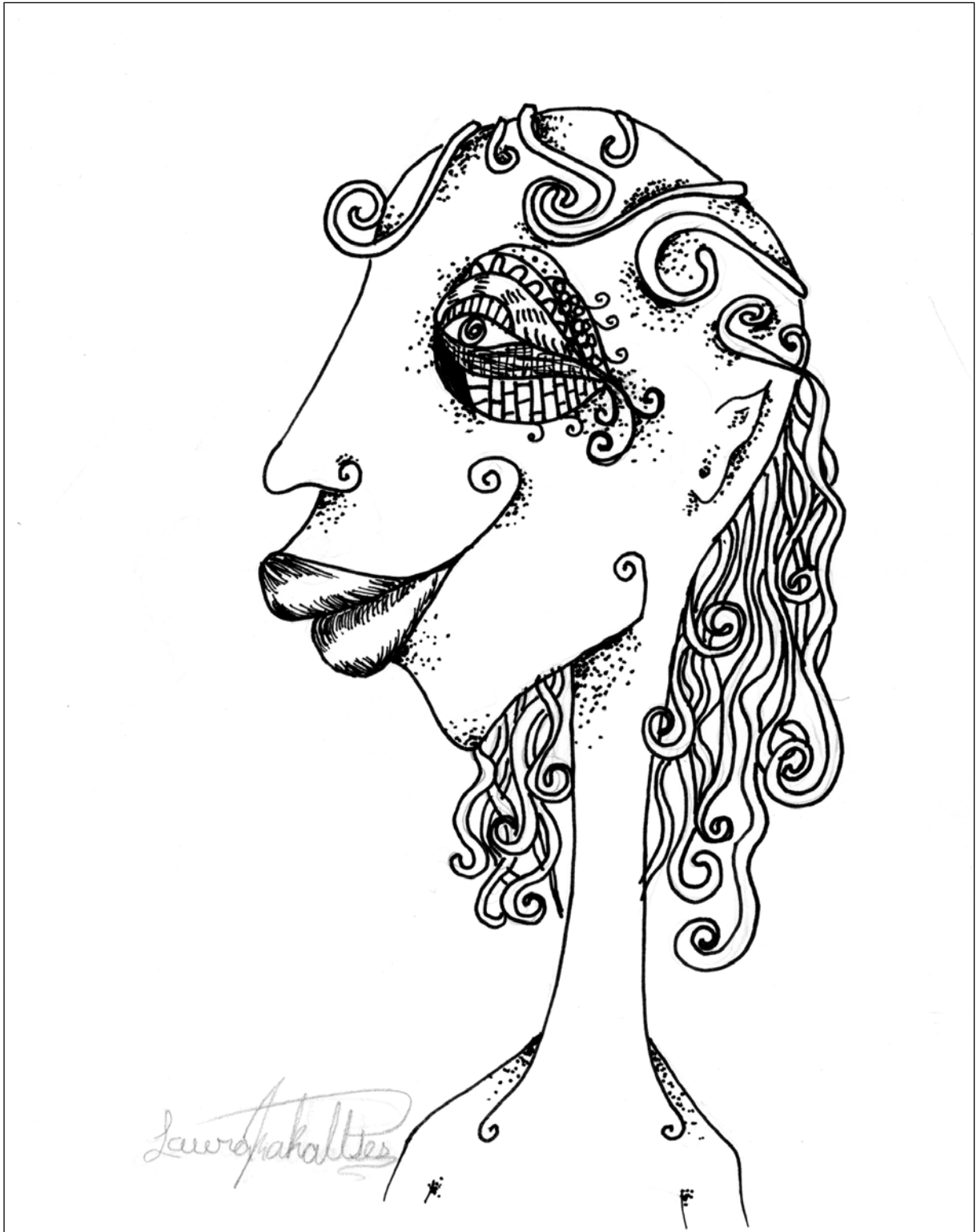
## Tied to the Tracks

I'm tied to the tracks  
The ropes cutting into my arm  
  
You're the man with the curled moustache  
You're the villain in the story and I'm the damsel  
The damsel in distress  
  
But I talked to you  
Trying not to think  
Think about the ropes that are tied so tightly  
  
I'm supposed to hate you  
You're the one that did this  
But you had your reasons  
Everyone does  
And talking to you isn't so bad  
  
You make jokes  
And you talk to me like I matter  
Something my hero never did  
  
You're charming and handsome  
And the moustache isn't so bad  
But I heard the train chugging  
Coming closer  
  
I hear my hero calling  
Telling me he's here to save the day  
Maybe I don't want to be saved  
  
But this is a fairytale  
I always end up with the hero  
That's the way the story goes  
And the man with the moustache  
Runs away  
Leaving me with the life I had  
The life I had before he left

**Heather Bonnycastle, age 16**

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the creature



**Laura Makaltses, age 15**

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# The Skeleton Boys



**Lisa Xuan, age 16**



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## The Last Supper

I am sitting in the back of the car, listening to my uncle's greatest hits. After a long drive, we finally arrive at the museum. My Uncle Jack tells me that he will pick me up in two hours. "This should give you enough time to take a look around young lady," he says briskly. I step out of the car and walk gingerly towards the building. I gasp in horror at the huge line to get into the exhibitions. Finally, I get my ticket, and run excitedly towards the first gallery.

I enter the first room and smile with admiration at how beautiful one painting is. The man in the painting resembles my Uncle Jack, and the woman next to him looks like Jack's wife. They look so similar, they could be twins! There's one difference though, the woman has a halo. I know Aunt Angie, she's not like an angel at all.

There are more people, other than the two in the middle, eleven more in fact. They look like the rest of my family! They are about to eat something... it's bread. There are also some cups filled with wine. I am surprised my great grandma is not there though, because she loves wine! I can't help staring at the solemn expression owned by a young man in the centre. His face is miserable, like he thinks there is no tomorrow. That is definitely not like my uncle, you never see a frown on his face!

Everyone looks like they are arguing, a bit like my family when a fight breaks out between my brother and I. Some people look shocked and confused, exactly like my brother when you try to explain something to him.

My grandma's spacious dining room is similar to the one in this painting. However, this room lacks the breathtaking photos of family and friends that hang on the walls of my grandmother's dining room. This painting beholds a wonderful view of the ocean and sunset. This reminds me of the sight I contemplated at my cousin's house last year.

I look down under the table and notice that these characters aren't wearing any shoes. That resembles my family because of our 'no shoes indoors' policy. It looks like the olden days in this painting, and since there was no heating back then, their feet must have been pretty cold.

I examined the picture once more, and noticed the tablecloth. It wasn't exactly like the one I have at home, but there is something familiar about it. Oh, I know, it seems like the tablecloth that I spilt cranberry juice on last year. My mom is still trying to get that stain off.

Well, I have spent my whole two hours staring in awe at this one wonderful painting. I have noticed so many similarities between this painting and my family. I have to go home now and have my last supper with my aunt and uncle before returning to my parent's house.

**Hannah Thomas, age 12**

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## Sequatur Somnia

When you have a dream,  
Follow it,  
Faithfully until you achieve it,  
For a dream can become reality,  
When you put your heart, strength  
And effort into it,  
There are no miracles in life,  
You are the only one who,  
Can create your own destiny

**Alize De Matas, age 14**

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## Hidden

The nature that dwells in the hearts of men;  
They lie, cheat, and steal to get on top.  
Their intentions they try to keep hidden,  
And obstacles in their way cannot stop  
The way of Man. Hidden in the crowd;  
A lion waiting for the mighty leap  
As in Peter\*. Voices are not loud.  
Suddenly they take the life of sheep.  
Oh innocent sheep, how naive are thee  
To befriend a murderous beast.  
Art thou afraid of individuality,  
If so be prepared for the final feast.  
For thou should make friends, yet you should take care  
To find the good, unless you wish to dare.

\* 1 Peter 5:8 "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

**Travis Branigan, age 15**

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## Riding Lessons, Life Lessons

Skill, concentration, speed and precision are rarely all needed at the same time, but when you are on horseback riding a cross-country course, you not only need all of these attributes at the same time, but you also need them for a long time. While all of these skills seem challenging, they are not nearly as difficult to manage as your confidence...

There are many sports in the world, but out of all of them riding and me just seemed to click. I never thought riding would be something I'd do, but even from before I ever rode, I always loved horses. The reason why I eventually picked 'Eventing' was because it was the one sport to bring all of the three major equestrian disciplines together. The first part of the sport requires dressage (moving your horse skillfully in a series of movements that is evaluated on the quality of how well the maneuvers are done). The second phase is stadium jumping (a course of jumps with poles similar to what is shown on TV). The third and last phase of Eventing is both the best and scariest part of all — cross-country! Cross-country requires the horse and rider to ride a preset course of jumps set over a few kilometres. These jumps are not like the jumps with poles in stadium jumping, where the poles fall down when knocked in a set arena. No! These jumps consist of solid logs, bushes, stacked bricks and water expanses that you jump galloping through fields. If you hit a structure, it's extremely dangerous because it does not move!

The first proper lesson I took was when I was six years old. I rode a horse named Lola and I fell madly in love with her. From that point on, I was hooked. I could barely hold in my excitement before my Friday lessons. I would run around jumping over things pretending to be a horse. I would tell my friends everything I learned and all about Lola. Being around horses gave me an opportunity to forget about the day and the days to come. It gave me a break from the world.

One day I was riding Lola when something scared her and she bolted. I didn't fall off but it rattled my confidence so much that I didn't want to ride again. Today, this event would be something I would laugh about, but back then, it was terrifying. That one tiny spook took away the immense joy I got out of riding and turned it into something I dreaded. What scared me was just how fast the thing I loved more than anything in world could turn into something that made me want to puke! For some time I was thinking about giving up riding, but my mom said I was only allowed to quit after I conquered my fear. This was the most important thing my mom has ever enforced. If I had given up, I would have learned that quitting is a possibility and a way to get around fear. It took some time, but my anxiety slowly subsided and I was able to confidently ride again.

I started to better understand horses and my riding capabilities grew. I was training for my first show season on a new horse named Breeze. Unfortunately, as I was in my

training season, Breeze began to occasionally buck, crow-hop (spring off the ground with all four legs), and refuse at jumps. After being thrown and eating dirt more times than I can count, I kept getting back into the saddle and tried to make my partnership with Breeze work. Despite my best efforts, my confidence began to shatter and once again I had to go through a nasty battle with my fear.

As time went on it became clear that Breeze was no longer the horse for me. After much thought and consideration I started to ride yet another horse named Jynx. It took me a long time to find her. She was always at the barn but I never took much interest in her because I thought she was too high strung and fast, but now words can't express how much I love this horse. My training with her at the beginning was rough... she was not like any other horse I had ridden before. Unlike Lola and Breeze, Jynx is an extremely sensitive horse that can feel her rider's emotions. This was hard for me because she felt every fear I had and mirrored those same fears back at me. When I was worried about a jump, she would refuse the jump. When I was scared of cross-country, she would become scared as well. Although this was challenging, I had to deal with this situation or I would not be able to ride Jynx. I was sick of the horrid feeling that fear imposed on me and I refused to let it in any longer. This is the attitude that got me through the fear that came with my first cross-country course I rode in competition.

It was time. As I started coming to my first fence I could barely breathe. The whole world was motionless. The only thing that I could think about was the sixteen jumps that waited for me. I was three strides out from the first jump. My legs urged Jynx forward. And then it happened...her legs lifted off the ground and we cleared the jump. I felt happy but I knew that this feeling would soon diminish once I came to my next fence and had to go through the fear again. But I was wrong. As I went through the rest of the course the fear eased. I could start to breathe again. Finally, I was headed to my last fence. I turned Jynx toward the fence and it was as if she knew this was the last one. She flew over the jump. It felt as if I was in the air for hours. It was the best feeling I have ever had.

So, what have I learned about fear? Fear is the abbreviation of the unknown and this is the thing that scares us the most — the undiscovered, the fear of what lurks behind the corner, the monster in the closet, and for me...what the next fence will bring. I have learned that fear prevents you from moving forward. It is like a vice keeping you as far away as possible from happiness. Through riding I have discovered that fear will always live inside of you...this is natural, but you can choose to let it rule your life or you can look around the corner, open the closet, and jump the next jump.

**Bianca Iddiols, age 12**

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# Monkey-Bird



**Henry Buzadi, age 15**

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## The Fate of Forgotten Ideas

When an idea is forgotten, that does not mean it no longer exists. It is likely that you think that ideas, which you have forgotten, do exist, but in the past; or perhaps you never really thought about it at all. You'll be surprised to know that ideas do not have this fate. Once forgotten, these ideas turn into a mist-like substance, which exits from your ear and flies up into the air, very high up, into space and to a new planet... Eire. If an idea is forgotten indoors, it passes through walls to exit, so this idea will still find its way to Eire.

Once an idea reaches Eire, it transforms into a miniature person who does not require oxygen to breathe. Eire looks identical to Earth, except it is far away from the sun, so there are very tall poles, which can range from one to six kilometers in height, with light bulbs attached to them to provide light for Eireans. These light bulbs are more powerful than any that are currently in existence on Earth. Though they help the remaining population of Eire who are able to see, they also cause most Eireans to become blind by the age of approximately forty-five. Since there are no dogs in Eire, they do not have guide dogs. Therefore, most people in Eire die before the age of fifty. Well... they did.

Those were the living conditions seventeen years ago, but since then much as improved. It all started with an Eirean, Tom, who had been to Earth. He had the idea for a new kind of spaceship, which could store large quantities of food, and was faster than all existing spaceships. Eireans always remember the ideas that they once were, and usually attempt to put them into action. Tom promptly visited the President of Eire, Sheath Parks, to propose his idea.

"We could make this rocket ship and travel to Earth. We could see how they live; have a close look at how they operate. We could make all kinds of inventions based on theirs, or maybe copy their existing inventions completely. We could also bring some useful things back here to Eire. What do you think?" President Park thought for quite a while. In fact, he asked Tom to return to the President's Quarters the next day. Tom waited at home in anticipation, thinking about how exactly to achieve this lofty goal of his... He had the general idea implanted in his brain, but how he could actually make it effective was a completely different story. Nevertheless, he

returned to the President's Quarters the next morning a little lacking in confidence, but sure enough of himself to know he would go through with his plan (if President Parks allowed it).

"Tom, you know that the people of Eire are in great danger and have been for many years now. If I allow you to make this rocket ship, you will have help from some of the best mechanics in all of Eire. But you must do all the planning and help them... And... Well, simply put, if you should fail, you will not be able to face Eire ever again because you are their only hope now." Tom nodded his head, but his palms were sweaty and his face was red, but he knew that now there was no going back on what he had said. "Good, we have a mutual agreement. So, you have one month to plan how you will go about doing this. Remember, the future of Eire depends on you now... It is not really in my control."

In that one month, Tom did more thinking and planning than he ever had, and when his time was up he knew exactly how this spaceship would look, and how to make it, too. As President Parks had promised, he had the aid of some of the greatest living mechanics in Eire. In a little over three years, the spaceship was finished and ready for takeoff. There was just one problem... There were no trained astronauts in Eire, but some scientists who had been studying the solar system and had intensely researched how to operate a spaceship in books at the local library (the author of them was long dead, so the only help they could get from him was in his books) readily agreed to go on this perilous journey to save Eire.

After a little under four years, the brave scientists returned. They had many new discoveries and as many guide dogs and medicines as they could bring. They also introduced a new kind of light bulb that would not damage the Eireans' eyesight any longer, and Tom was the most prominent person in the history of Eire, and is still remembered fondly today.

Do you remember a time when you had a grand idea, and just when you were about to tell someone about it, it vanished from your mind? During the frustration or sadness you may have felt, the idea you had was escaping to make a much more prosperous life somewhere far away from Earth, in a world that would be almost unimaginable to anyone.

**Nina McQuillen, age 12**



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## With Drops of Paint



**Oana Maria Iancau, age 13**

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## Pensoul

Do you ever wonder  
If the pen has a soul  
And maybe  
It's not you  
Who is the writer  
But the pen

What if  
If you use the pen enough  
The pen's soul  
Becomes your soul  
And what if  
You think

You're getting to know yourself  
When you're really  
Getting to know your pen

**Shanna Markee, age 15**

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## I Have a Feeling

I have a feeling of a deep crisp breeze. A feeling that makes my soul shiver. Pushing against my skin so hard I felt a pinch of pain. A feeling that kill the toughest lion but in the meantime have an effect so deep which can kill a demon. The feeling of hatred, yet defeat. A feeling of pain caused by hope. This breeze is a drenched waterfall, a silenced dove, thus dreadful. However it feels as if angels overcame the evil, butterflies took over the mosquitoes. This breeze feels as if there's no end. Having multiple personalities which taunts and haunts yet passes evil. This breeze has a cold and warm shoulder. With no name. I know so much about this breeze yet it is still a total stranger

**Tuli Chowdhury, age 12**

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## Black and White

A man shoots another man in the head,  
That man falls dead.  
Is that wrong or right?  
Black or white?

Of course it's wrong,  
You don't shoot someone,  
Just because you don't get along!

But hey, wait a moment.  
As I've been studying this predicament  
I'm realising that the dead man killed  
The other man's friend.  
Is that still wrong?

What would you have done,  
If someone came and killed your son?  
Of course,  
You would've gone to the police.

But what if, the police don't help?  
But what if, they catch the wrong guy?  
But what if, the killer doesn't die?

Is this here situation  
Black and white,  
Simply wrong and right?

Now hear me out,  
I'm not defending a killer  
I'm just saying,

Is the world just black and white,  
Wrong and right?

I'm sure the world ain't colour blind, I say.  
Besides, I'm sure there are many shades of grey.

**Elizabeth Ouedraogo, age 12**

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## The Final Stretch

She was a ninety-one-year-old lady recovering from a recent stroke. Her limbs weren't as strong as they used to be and her coordination was not great either. The first time I saw her was my first day in the stroke unit, just a few days after her own admission into the hospital. She was in a wheelchair, her hair in gray disarray. Her gown was sliding off her shoulders, and her skin lay in folds loosened by old age. Recognizing her attempts to pull herself forward on the wheelchair using her feet, I asked her if she needed help.

"No!" Her bright eyes snapped fiercely at me. "Don't touch my wheelchair!"

I helped her anyway, taking her for a few laps around the unit every day. Her legs became stronger and soon she was able to move around in the wheelchair on her own. Her body was always leaning forward, inching towards the next turn at the end of the hall. She was smart. She wanted to exercise all her limbs so she pushed first using her arms, then her feet, then her arms again. By the end of the month, she was able to stand up independently and get around using a walker, showing off to the doctors how well she was doing. She wanted to be discharged.

The stroke unit was always busy with doctors, visitors, and patients. Fluorescent tubes lit up the rooms and the smell of medical equipment and airplane food perpetually hovered in the air. The unit curved in a big loop. Patients' rooms lined along the outside of the circle while charts, nurses, and doctors moved about the center, in the nursing room, conference room, and desk area. As a volunteer, I talked to patients. I kept them company. I helped with administration, ran errands, and completed small assignments. As I did all of this, I watched her do her routine laps. Every day, she would start at 3:30 p.m. and pull herself for an hour. She never spoke. She was always focused on her task.

One day, it was almost four p.m. and the halls were empty. I frowned. I walked into her room to find her behind a table crowded with keys. Her fingers were shaking. Her eyes squinted at the letters on a crumbled piece of paper.

"My husband numbered them," she sighed.

And that's when she told me. He was blind and unable to leave the house. They had no children so he was all alone since visitors were rare. She couldn't go back to him. The doctors wouldn't discharge her. Exercising was not just a way to escape the bland white-washed walls of the hospital. It was the way to go back to her husband, to return to their days together. It was her way of getting home.

I knelt down and looked up into her worn face, lined by life. Even after all those weeks of pushing that wheelchair, her body was still weak, but those clear green eyes showed the determination of a woman who did not want to spend her last days alone in a hospital bed, confined to four dreary walls and a window looking out at the dark red brick of the next building. She had promises to keep.

The days went by routinely. Her progress was evident and her determined and self-driven physical therapy made her stronger. As my days as a volunteer came to a close, so did her days as a patient. My heart leapt when I saw her discharge papers on the front counter. But when I looked closer, I realized that she was being transferred to a rehab center out of town and even farther from home. I sighed. On her last day, she waved for me to come in beside her. She gave me a hug. My arms wrapped around her small body and she whispered, "Thanks for everything."

Sometimes when the hustle and bustle of school and homework and the responsibilities of life get to me, my fingers stop tapping on my keyboard. I lean back in my chair. I close my eyes. I imagine her going home. She's inside and the familiar smells and walls are all around. A door closes behind her. She calls out to her husband. A deep voice comes from the bedroom. She heard a chair move. "I'm home!" she happily cries and thrusts her walker forward, thumping along the corridor towards the open door, the shadows of a lamp falling on the wooden floor before her.

**Jean Wu, age 17**



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## Lurking in the Shadow



**Fatima Omarhassan, age 18**



# young voices 2013

magazine of teen writing and artwork

## Call for submissions

## GUIDELINES

## Express yourself!

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

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

### WHO CAN ENTER

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

### WHAT CAN BE ENTERED

You can enter two pieces each year:

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

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

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

### Artwork:

- 8 ½" x 11" preferred
- Black and white artwork only
- Hand drawn artwork only (i.e. no digitally created artwork)

### Photography:

- 4" x 6" minimum; high resolution (300 dpi) for electronic submissions
- Black and white photographs only

### HOW TO ENTER

#### In a Toronto Public Library branch

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

#### Online submissions

##### Written

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

##### Artwork

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

### Photographs

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

### SELECTION TIMELINES

Submission deadline:

**Saturday, April 6, 2013**

- Editorial teams meet to make selections during spring 2013
- Contributors selected to be published will be contacted during June 2013
- Only those with work to be published will be contacted
- *Young Voices* magazine is published once every year in October
- Questions? Contact Ken Sparling [ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca](mailto:ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca)



# YOUNG VOICES 2013 Submission Form

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

Submissions with incomplete forms may not be considered for publication.

Submission Deadline: Saturday, April 6, 2013

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

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

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

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

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

Genre of submission:

Poem  Fiction  Rant  Review  Art  Photograph

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

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

I heard about *Young Voices*:

At the library  At the mall  At school  At a shelter  Online

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

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

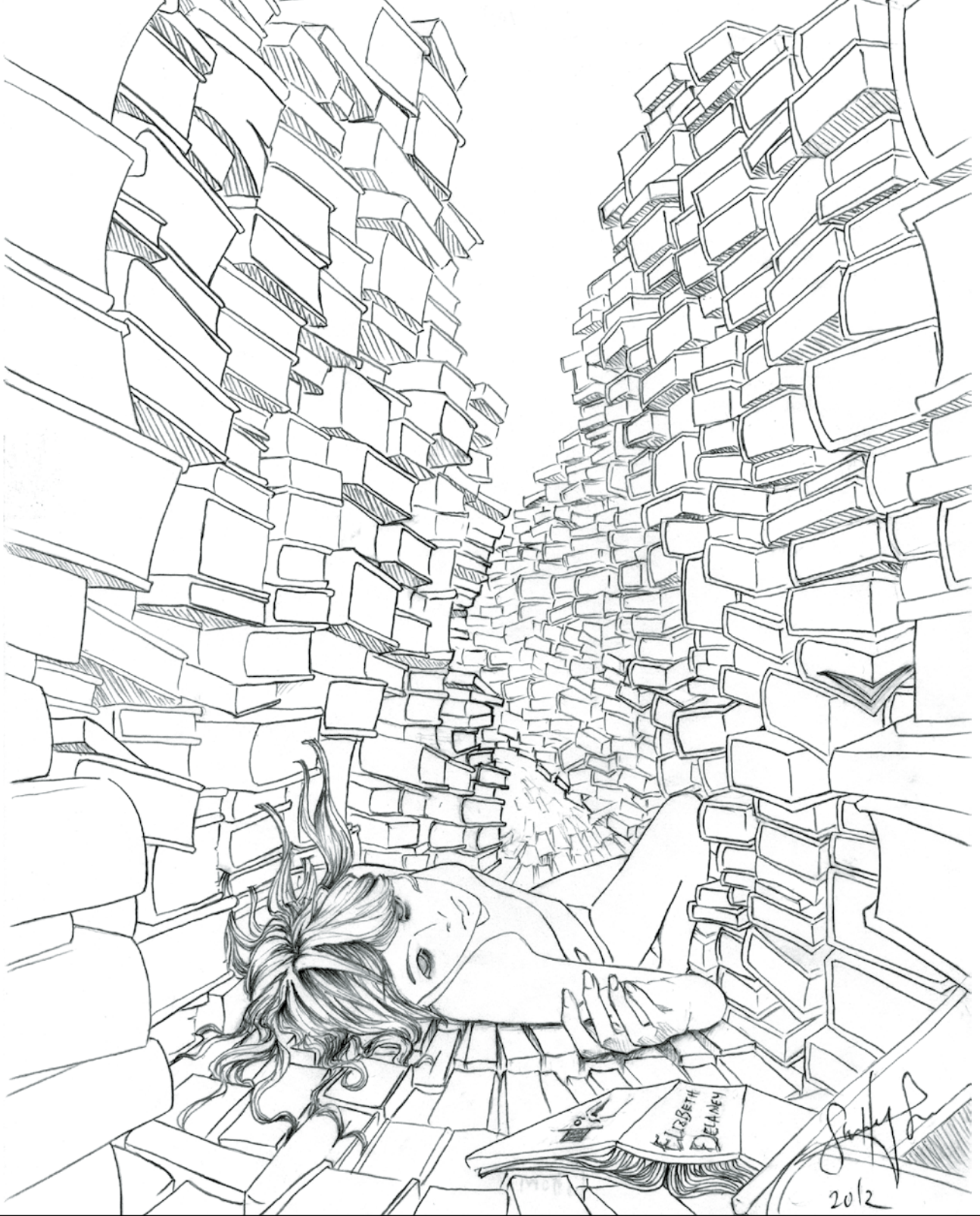




# A Creature Satyrical

**Calum Csunyo**, age 16





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

