

**SURREY LIBRARIES
YOUNG ADULT**

2018

writing contest



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Proudly Presents

A Collection of Winning Entries
for the

**2018
Young Adult
Writing Contest**

Comics, Poetry, and Short Stories

Foreword

2018 marks the 31st year of the Young Adult Writing Contest.

We celebrate the writing and art of Surrey's teens with this anthology.

We are grateful for all the support this contest continues to receive from the community – the teens themselves, as well as parents and teachers. Thank you.

We extend a special thank you to our contest judges: Martina Dominique Aspen, kc dyer, Stephanie Fenton, Shari Green, Alexander Hock, Denise Jaden, Mads Jensen, Bonnie Nish, Heinz Senger, Sylvia Taylor, and Lisa Voisin.

With over 350 entries submitted this year, our judges were challenged to select only 20 winning entries – a difficult task! The judges offer congratulations to every single teen who entered the contest for the courage and willingness to share their work for others to enjoy. They are all winners in their own right and are encouraged to continue their creative writing pursuits.

To our donors, we thank you for your generosity and support, without which this contest could not move forward: Black Bond Books, Fast Signs, Imperial Hobbies, Pacific Coast Catering Group, Pico Productions, Surrey International Writers' Conference, and the Surrey NOW-Leader.

Thank you so much for making this event possible.

Finally, thank you to the staff of Surrey Libraries for their dedication and commitment to this contest through their critical behind-the-scenes work.

Enjoy the talent and creativity presented here – the voices of Surrey's young writers, the voices of this community's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellen Wu', written in a cursive style.

Ellen Wu

Teen Services Librarian

Acknowledgments

This contest is made possible by the support of our wonderful sponsors:

Black Bond Books, Fast Signs, Imperial Hobbies, Pacific Coast Catering Group, Pico Productions, Surrey International Writers' Conference, and the Surrey NOW-Leader.

And our fabulous contest judges:

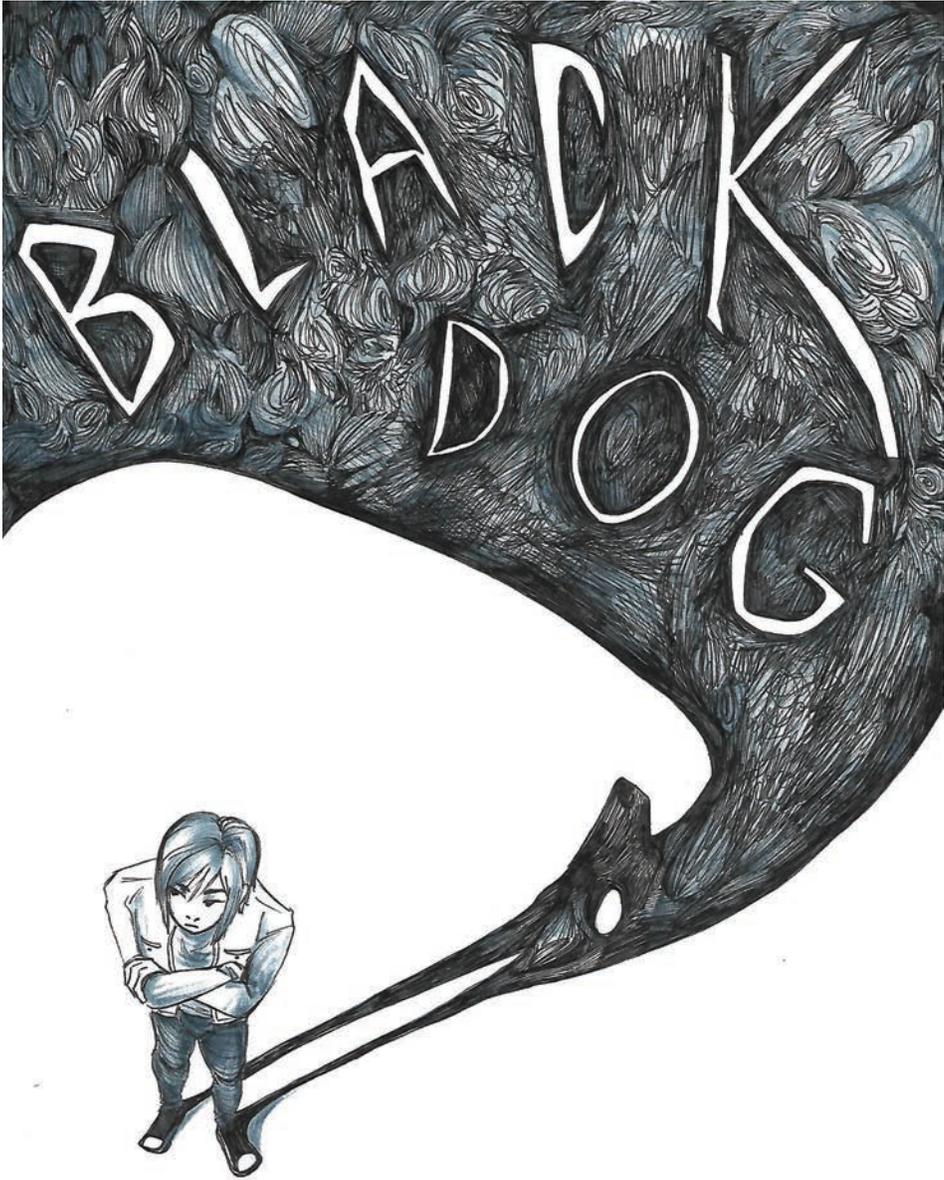
Martina Dominique Aspen, kc dyer, Stephanie Fenton, Shari Green, Alexander Hock, Denise Jaden, Mads Jensen, Bonnie Nish, Heinz Senger, Sylvia Taylor, and Lisa Voisin.

Thank you for enriching the literary culture for youth in Surrey.

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Comics



Black Dog by Meriwether Morris



You never wanted a pet... it just wasn't your thing.



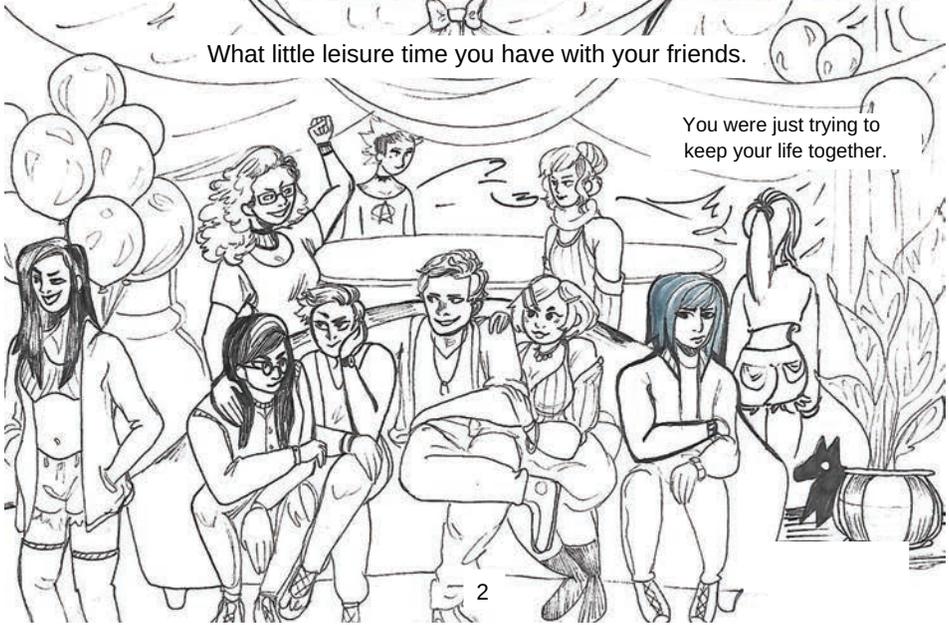
Too much was on your plate already.



Part time work.



Education.



What little leisure time you have with your friends.

You were just trying to keep your life together.



Black Dog by Meriwether Morris



Then comes tomorrow.



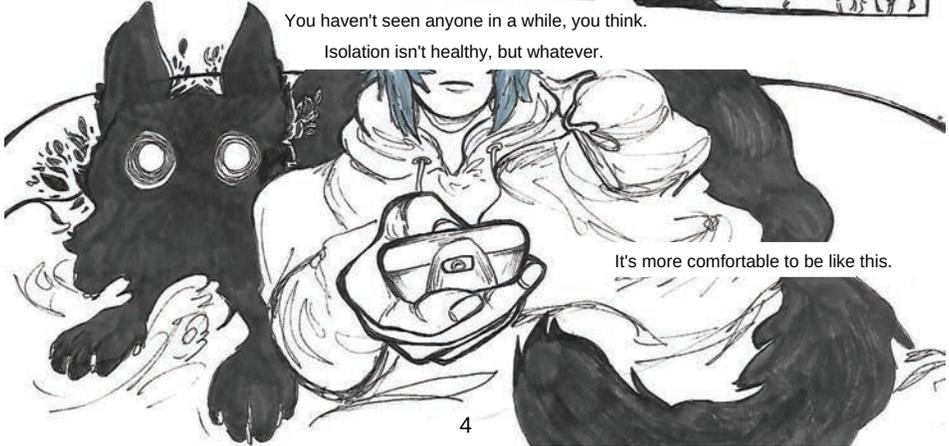
Then the next.

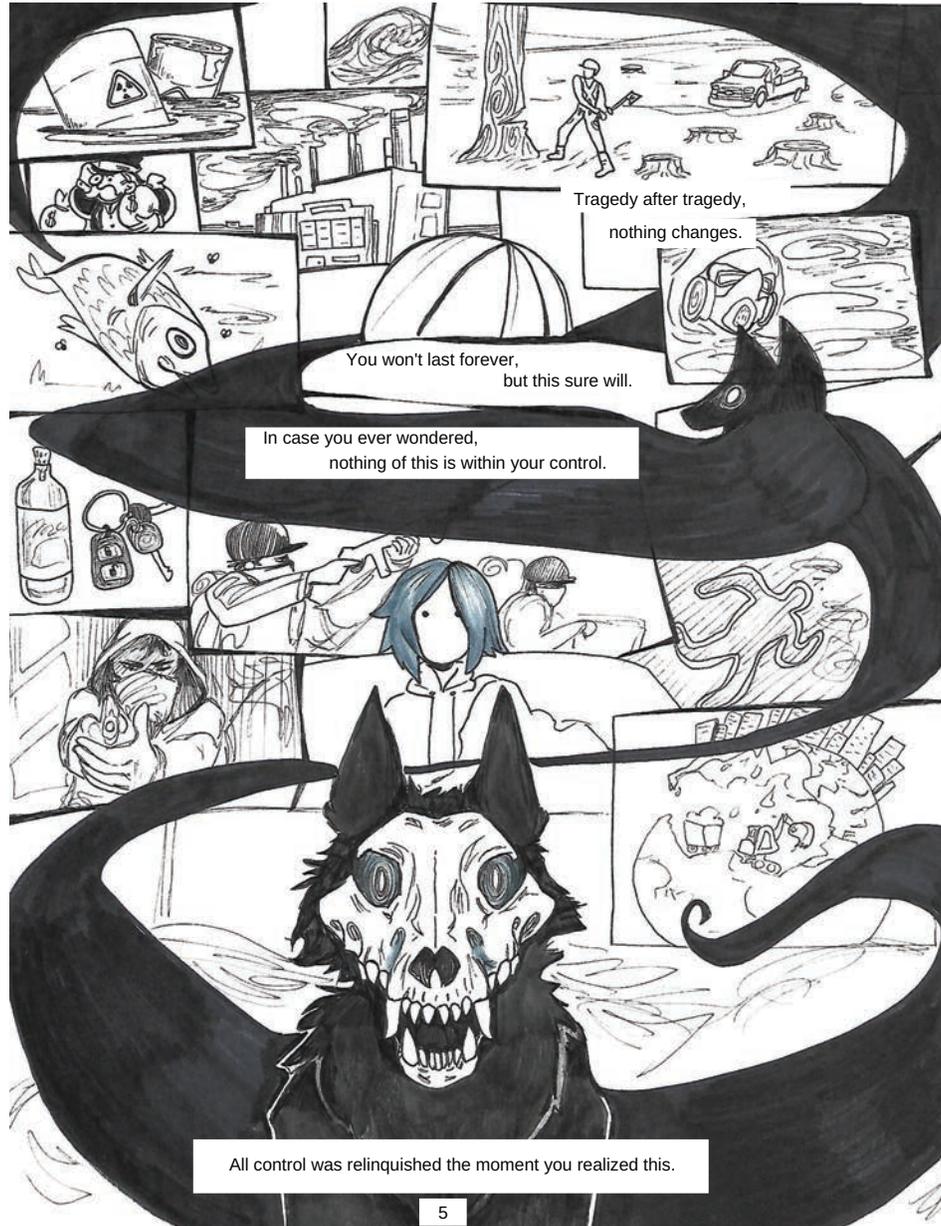


And the next, etc..



You haven't seen anyone in a while, you think.
Isolation isn't healthy, but whatever.





Black Dog by Meriwether Morris





Congratulations.

You managed to not die, despite your most dedicated efforts.



You made it to the next day.



Who ever said tomorrow

couldn't be better than today?



Anyway...



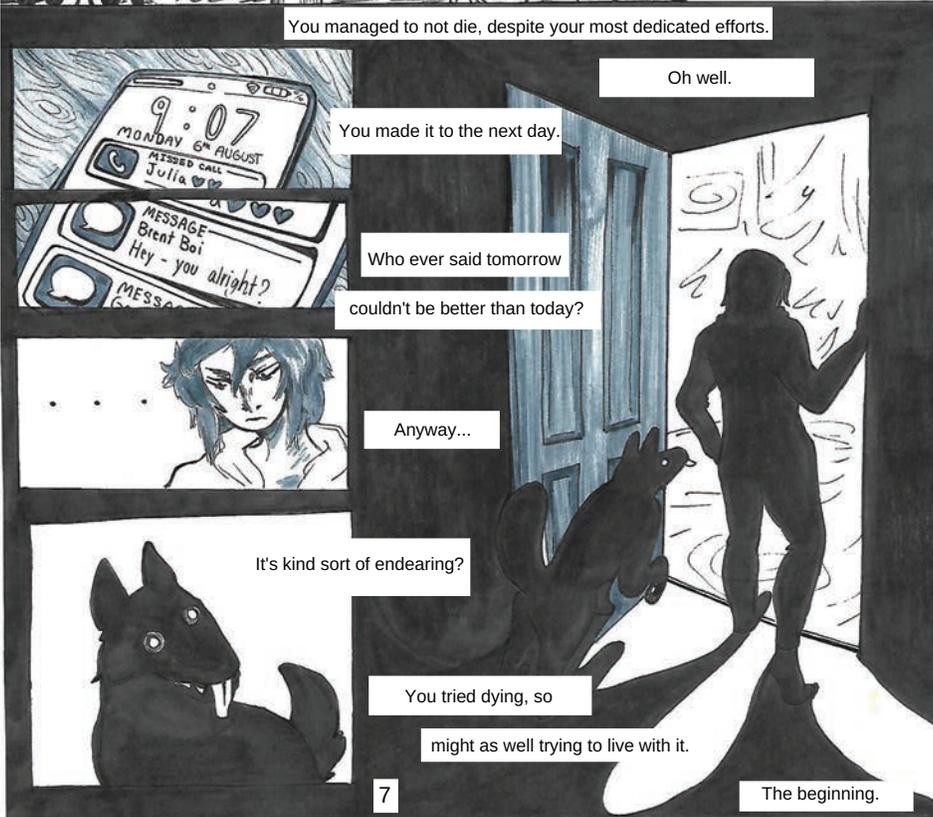
It's kind sort of endearing?

You tried dying, so

might as well trying to live with it.

7

The beginning.



Oh well.

CHANGE OF HEART

WHEN I WAS A KID...



I SAW THE WORLD AS A HAPPY PLACE...



ANYONE COULD BE ANYTHING...



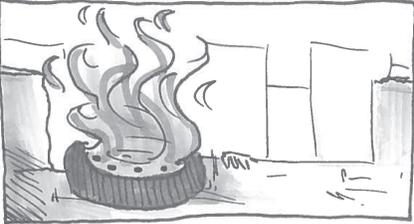
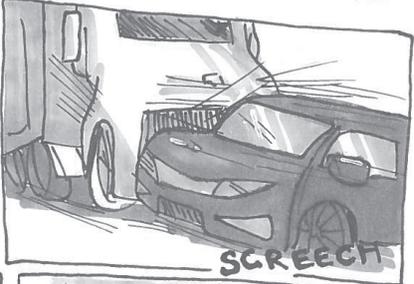
ANYONE COULD DREAM...

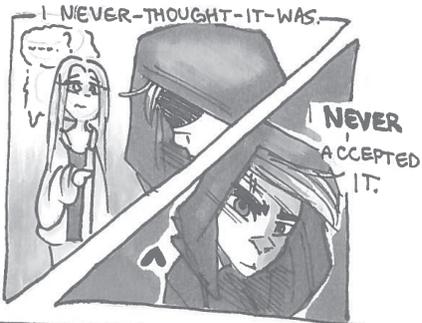
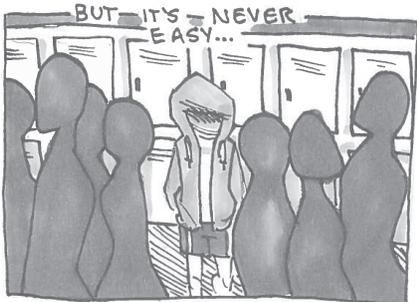


UNTIL YOU WAKE UP...

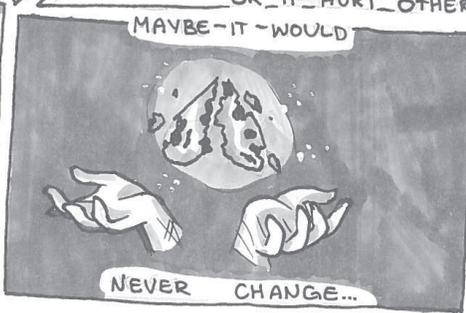
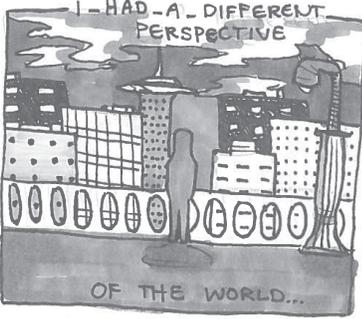


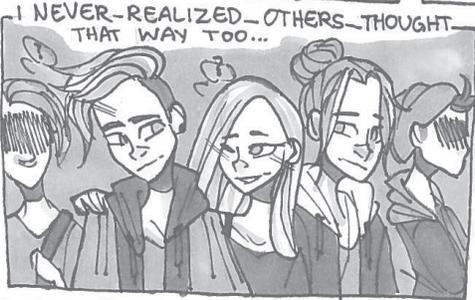
AND REALIZE...





Change of Heart by Janica Soro



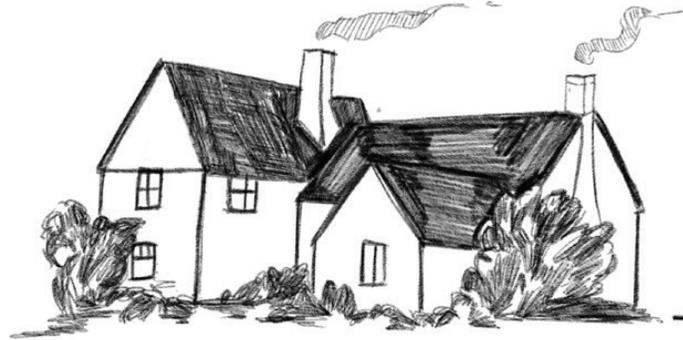


Change of Heart by Janica Soro



—THE END...—

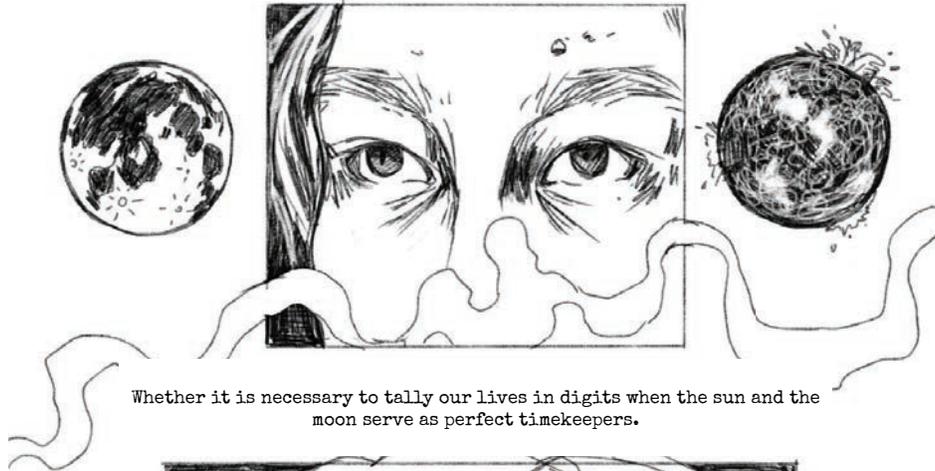
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Time and Time Again

Time and Time Again by Shaheen Virk

I wonder about the nature of time. I wonder whether the
division of the day is an innate reaction to the moments
that pass us by.



Whether it is necessary to tally our lives in digits when the sun and the
moon serve as perfect timekeepers.



I wonder whether the waves that soothe the shore into its
millenary sleep have a timing system



incongruent with the trees that rustle on a languor Sunday
and soothe you to an afternoon nap.



Time and Time Again by Shaheen Virk

I dread time. It nestles its way into the empty cups of
of tea,



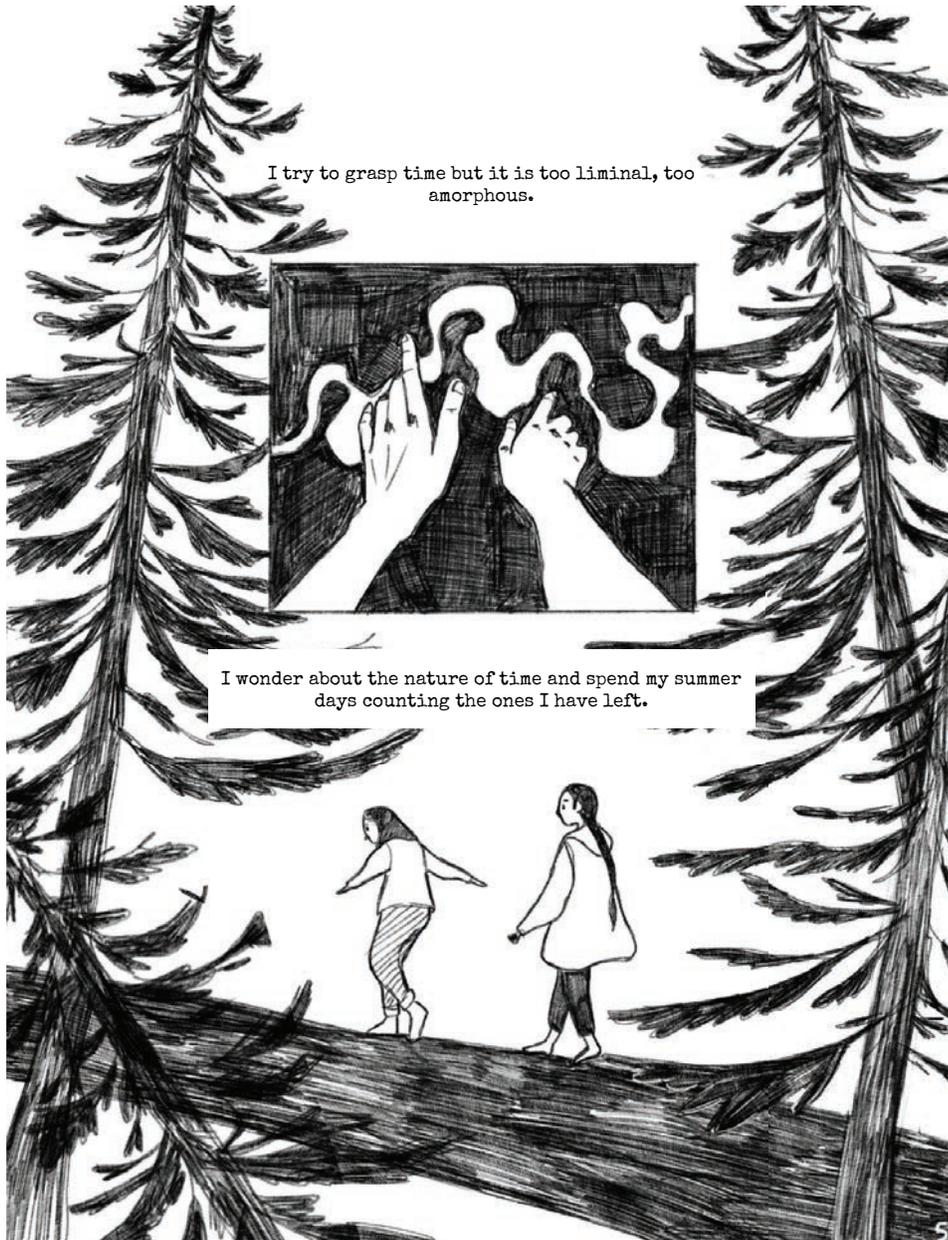
in the synapses of forgotten names, and in the
gaps of the balustrade.



I try to grasp time but it is too liminal, too
amorphous.



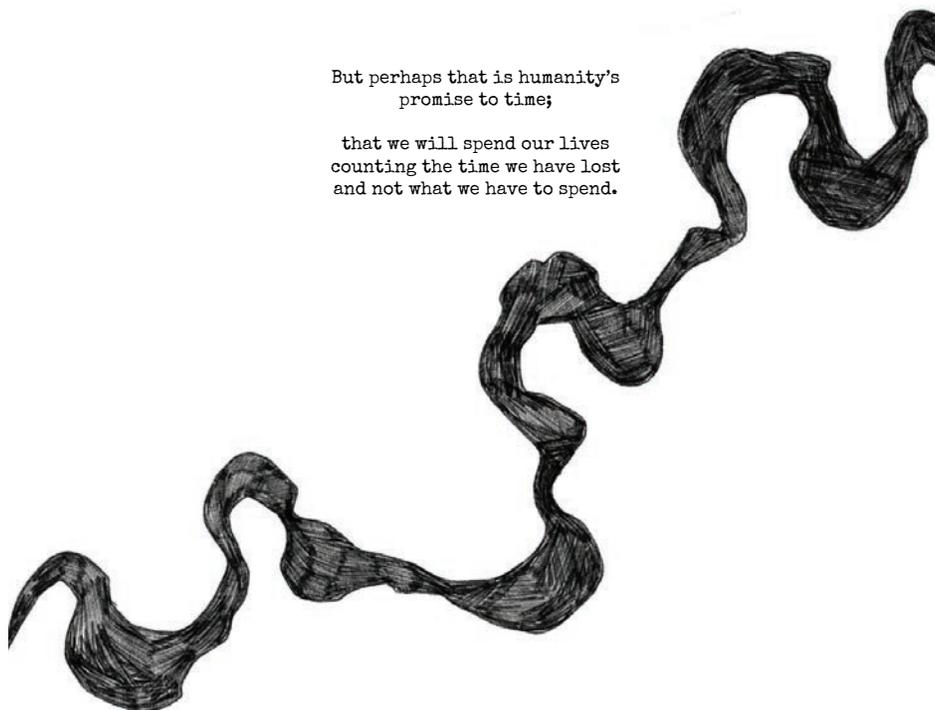
I wonder about the nature of time and spend my summer
days counting the ones I have left.



Time and Time Again by Shaheen Virk

But perhaps that is humanity's
promise to time;

that we will spend our lives
counting the time we have lost
and not what we have to spend.

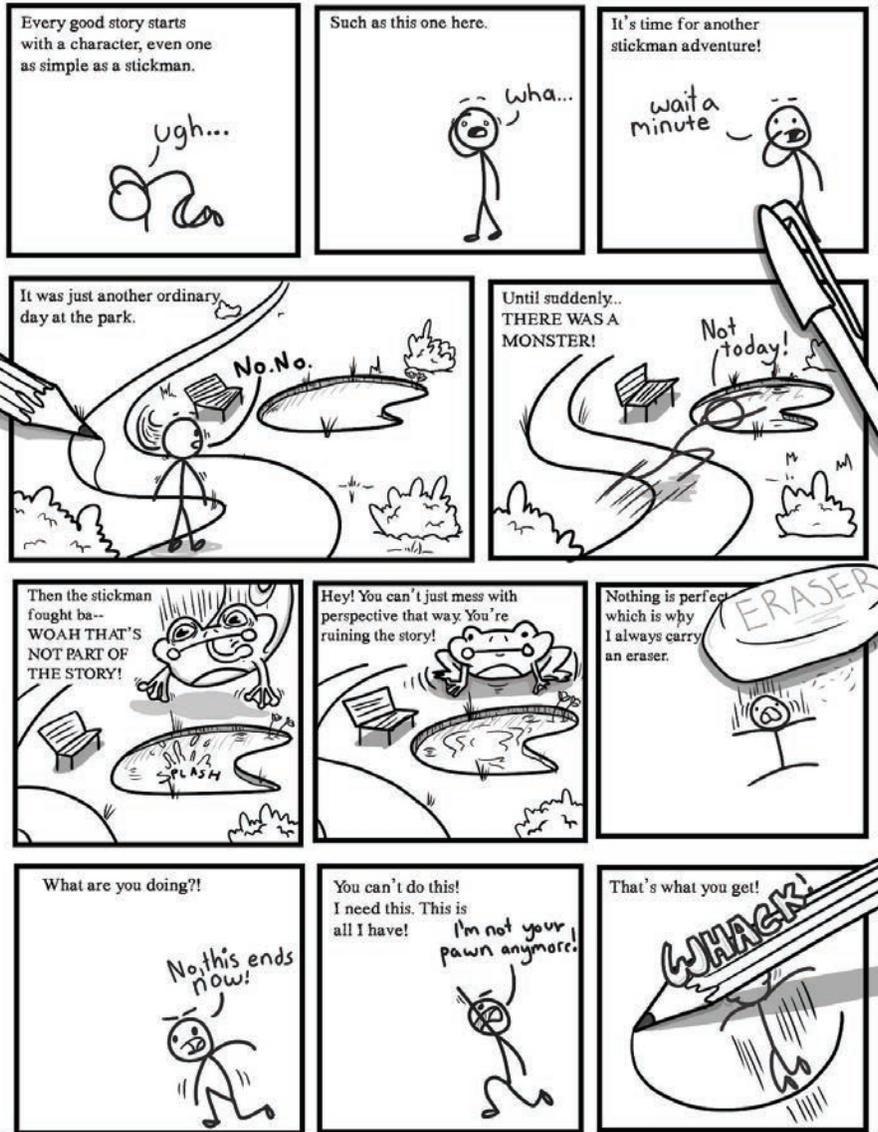


Comics: Honourable Mention

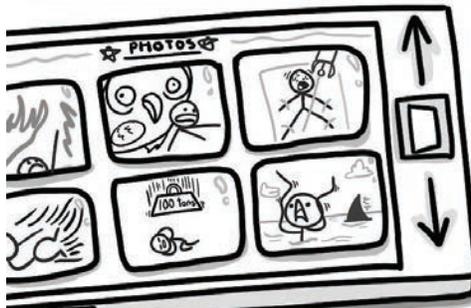
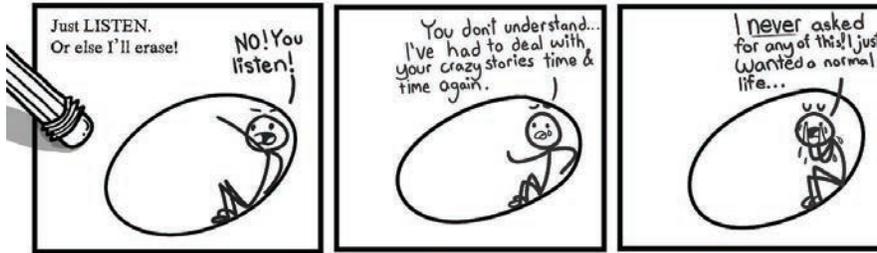
The Stickman by Jaden Lee



The Stickman by Jaden Lee



2



The entire time I've been drawing, I've never even considered... the stickman.

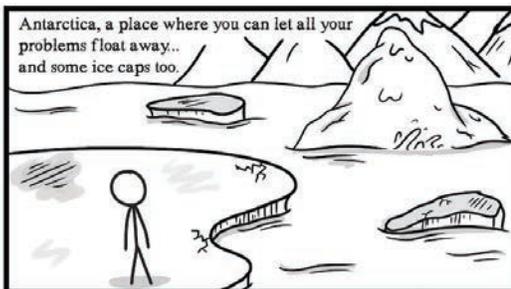
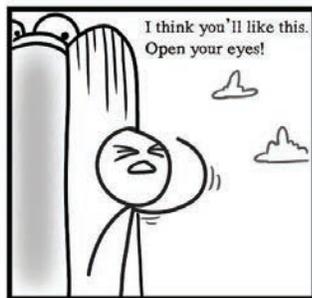
Only myself.

Without him, I wouldn't be able to continue my dream.

It's time to finally do something.
Maybe, he has a dream too.

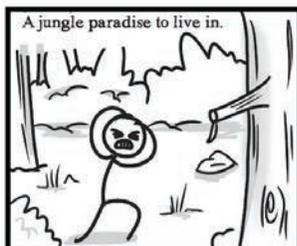


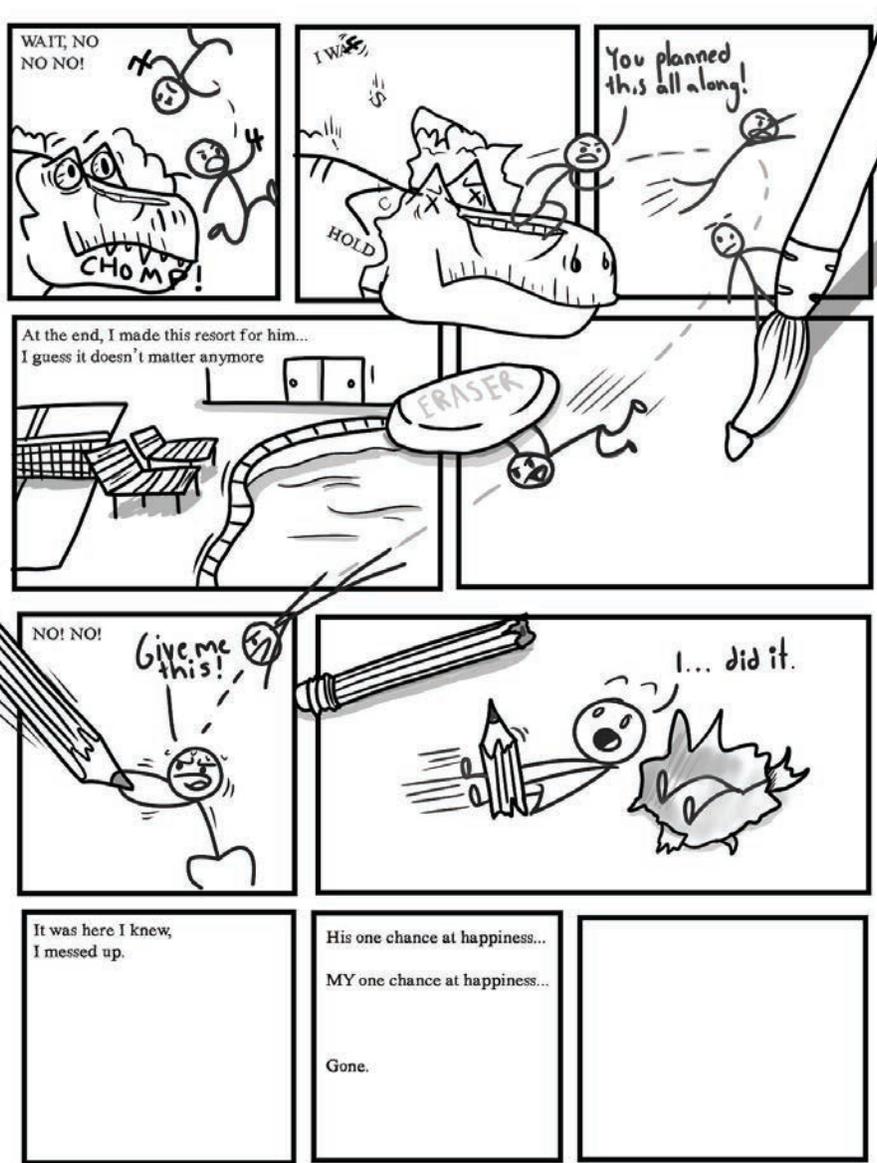
The Stickman by Jaden Lee



Sometimes I don't
think he appreciates
what I'm doing.

I'm trying my
best.





The Stickman by Jaden Lee



Things are great.

He helps with me.



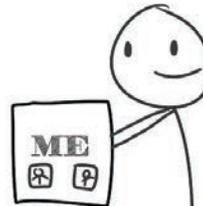
I help with him.



But my time is now up...
There is a new author



THE END



Junior Poetry

To Remake the World

You were brought into this world
For so much more than you know.
Not to exist but to live,
And to enjoy every moment, memory, and sorrow.
You were never brought here for
Some stereotypical view
Of the past, or the future that no one knows is true.
Not for some boy to come and break your heart,
Or for some prince to save you
From a castle in the dark.
Not for society to rip you in shreds,
With their rules and regulation while
You lay here stuck, still thinking in bed.
But oh, my dear, if you would simply just understand,
The plans that you don't know of,
All better than the rest.
You were born into this world
For so much more than you know,
To climb mountains, swim the oceans, and
Live like there is no tomorrow.
To work hard and to breathe like only you know how,
But to also change the world,
So another doesn't suffer like you do now.
You, my dear, are a very special kind,
Brought simply into this world to remake it and shine.
So please, if you would come a bit closer and listen,
Please remake the world to show those who destroyed it.

Lost Ghosts

Hovering
In the air
Dark black smoke
Circles menacingly

Blinding all
Living creatures
It covers the city like a
Heavy blanket

The smoke
Acting as camouflage
Allows ghosts to leave their graveyards

Dense smog
Thickens
As it weaves through the city
Creating a path for the spirits

Until finally
Two long lost lovers
With forbidden lust
Reunite
After years of separation
For sinners could not lay together

The misty smoke continues to
Dance
Following the
Pair's movement

They dance until the sun
Breaks through,
Forcing them to
Separate once again

They go back
To the place they were buried
And wait
Until it's time
To dance again

Jeremy's Notes

Jeremy Scribbles sat down at his desk and dipped his quill in some ink
He remembered some music he wanted to write and great ideas he began to think

As he wrote on he could not stop, the song becoming better and better
and in his mind the beautiful song played, he smiled as the notes came together

He then left for a while, for his hand was sore but he knew he must be back
For after all: the song was not finished, time couldn't cut him any slack

After he had left and closed the door a soft crumpling sound broke out
and the note at the front, the first of the song got up and gave a shout:

"Everyone up! Come on, you notes! Think you're going to sit there forever?"
Without a grunt or a groan, they stood up from the page and opened the window to good weather

They jumped from the 'sill onto a passing cloud and marched low over the town
playing the tune as the journey went on, every note joined in on the sound

Jeremy Scribbles had not finished the song and the notes were all aware
that this song, this perfect and beautiful song was not entirely prepared

So now they were nearing the gap in the song as they marched the neighbours by...
But then other windows were opened and new notes joined the crowd, a new song filling the sky

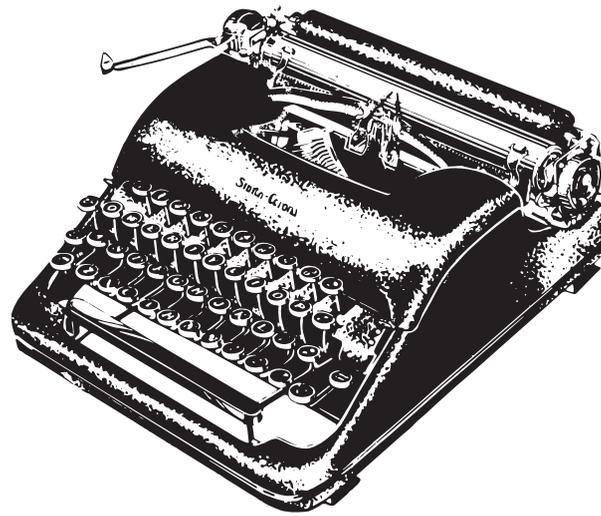
Continued...

All of the townspeople opened their doors and stepped out into the sun
to hear the beautiful rhythm and tune. At last the song was done

Then the note at the front, the first of the song turned around and gave a shout
“Come on you notes! Our work is done! On to Jeremy's house!”

And then the line with all the notes turned itself around
and without a doubt, every last note was marching homeward bound

When Jeremy opened his door that night he sat down and readied his quill
then gasped when he saw that his song was finished lying on the 'sill.



Senior Poetry

Fear

I wish I could say that there is no fear in me
Or at least that I am in charge of it
But the reality is
That I live in fear
I shelter in its walls and pay it taxes
Fear beckons me home
And I follow
Fear is the shell of who I am
It is hollow
Fear says
“You will not leave this house”
And I say
“Yes sir”
Fear doesn’t live in the dark
It turns on the lights
Fear shivers
It hides
It hates
Fear loves nothing
Does nothing
Is nothing
Fear cowers before all good things
Fear fears life itself
There is so *much* fear in me
But it is not me
So to the lights
To these four walls
Goodnight.

Senior Poetry: Second Prize

by Maya Kostamo

Outside My Window

the yellow drum in the sky
beats away the days.
Beats until the silent
stone-blue fabric of night
billows, presses into clouds
like a balloon.

I'm inside,
with a chain of to-dos
like the tail of a kite
looping around my wrists.
Every time I cut off a piece
twig-ish fingers tie another
scrap on the end.

Meanwhile,
rain strikes pavement
like thousands of red-tipped matches.
The tree with newspaper bark
is budding.

For a moment the lemon-skin drum muffles
behind clouds

outside my window.

Empyrean Garden

Roses bloomed in a thousand hues,
died the colour of the sky, sun, stars.
And as the moon rose in the sky, well fed,
a girl with a star-stitched dress descended
from the marbled steps of celestial heaven.
To hang the stars and clouds in the sky.
To coax the sun into the blush of dawn.
To stir the breezes from their fitful slumber
for the birth of a new day.
This girl, unfailingly meticulous in her duties,
even as snow is pulled from thin, tattered skies.
As winter is welcomed, and then forgotten
for the fresh softness of spring, and then
the unbearable rowdiness of summer.
Never missing daybreak and sunset,
to wake the heavens with vivid fire,
to tuck the bruised skies asleep at night.
A well-oiled clockwork machine, obliged to
reside over with fairness, the adaptable world
like a judge with a gavel forged from stardust.
Though it is lonely in the stellar garden filled
with hungry black holes and the nurseries of stars.
Though it is wearisome, a burden
heavier than what Atlas once held,
that girl smiles. Content, satisfied, and serene.
Though only the small flowering buds
of soon-to-be planets can witness it.

Senior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Simran Raina

The Final Stand

This ballad is dedicated to the brave hearts of 'The Battle of Saragarhi'. In 1897, twenty-one Sikh soldiers stationed in the Fort of Saragarhi, now in present-day Pakistan, were attacked by ten thousand Afghan men belonging to the Orakzai and Afridi tribes. With no help forthcoming from Fort Lockhart and Fort Gulistan (neighbouring forts), the Sikh soldiers valiantly fought the Afghans. Although the fort was captured by the invaders, the Sikh soldiers are remembered to this day for the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. The battle is commemorated as one of the greatest 'last-stands.'

Etched in history for eternity,
Is a tale of great valour.
Of honor and ultimate sacrifice,
In the towering fort of Saragarhi.

Besieging the fort were ten thousand fierce tribesmen,
Threatening to slay the mere score-and-one.
Yet, they stood tall against all odds,
In the endangered fort of Saragarhi.

Retreat, the Sikhs would not,
As they defiantly stood their ground.
For stationed within were not mere cowards,
In the guarded fort of Saragarhi.

Pounced the gallant lions fearlessly,
Piercing flesh with their spitting guns.
Earsplitting was the boom of cannons and rifles,
In the deafening fort of Saragarhi.

Continued...

The Final Stand by Simran Raina

On armour grew blossoms of crimson,
As man after man kissed the ground.
Taking several foes along with them,
In the bloody fort of Saragarhi.

Digging a tunnel came the Pathans on the sly,
Lighting the lethal powder.
Crawling through as the walls plunged,
In the disintegrated fort of Saragarhi.

Roaring thunderously the “Singhs” fell,
With the Guru’s war chant on lips.
“Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal!”
In the gory fort of Saragarhi.

To the last bullet they fought,
The last man, the last drop.
Until standing there was no Sikh warrior,
In the fallen fort of Saragarhi.

The courageous, persevering Sikh soldiers,
Departed winning the hearts of all.
Forever they will be remembered,
The awe-inspiring platoon of Saragarhi.

Junior Short Story

Insert Tears Here

All things considered, it was simply the worst possible day to run out of sadness. The shelves had been stocked throughout all the dull months; business lulled down to no more than a slight hum, but as soon as the holidays swung around, bottles were leaping off the shelves along with the herds of weary thrill-seekers. It was the prime-time for stress—those were selling well too, but nothing seemed to quench thirst quite as well as a good dose of winter sadness. There was a reason All Bottled Up was the top emotion shop in the district; no one else could quite mimic the down-in-the-dumps feeling everyone enjoyed.

“Look, we’re plain out of sadness.” Joy said patiently to a fashionable Bot in a bright suit. “But instead, I would recommend some anger; that’s one of our most popular items. Or maybe some frustration! Nothing’s like some frustration during the holidays!” The Bot slowly closed her eyes—yes, she was definitely a “her”, the tight curls of fake human hair pinned to her frontal monitor gave it away— and sighed. Indignation was all the rage these days, and this woman was clearly not the type to miss out on a fad. “Anger is not in style anymore. I came here for sadness, and if you don’t stock it, I’ll simply go somewhere else!” She marched off in a huff, skirt swooping against her hefty frame, the large stocky figure that was costing a fortune in the market. Joy leaned against the counter, wishing she had some annoyance to feel over the store’s poor circumstances. She had been working there for the past two years, an apprentice to the enigmatic and mysterious Madame Despero. Her employer was none other than the most important Emotionalist of their time, a giant in the field. With all the WorkBots in the district to choose from, it was little more than a miracle for Joy to have been selected as her apprentice.

Madame had put everything on the line in choosing an inexperienced girl with no recommendations, a risk that for the most part had paid off— until today. Joy had always liked the idea of running the shop on her own and proving her independence, but when the time finally came with her employer on vacation, she had flopped. Big time. Losing their sadness recipe was a mistake that could cost them their

Insert Tears Here by Audrey Kemp

reputation and the entire future of the shop.

Tired of dealing with more irritating shoppers, Joy locked up and closed early. She headed out into the metropolis and took the Whizbus out to Central Mall, an enormous structure located in the City Square. The place was packed with Bots of all sorts searching for the latest in bodies, hairstyles, and apparel. Human relics were also a huge hit, and you could tell by the crowd at For Human's Sake that many people would be coming home with new toasters, toilets, or whatever overpriced relic caught their fancy. Large billboards lined the square, flashing through advertisements about the upcoming festival, Human Remembrance Day. The annual festival was a time when Bots came together to celebrate the legacy of their favourite deities and grieve for the role they played in the extinction of the species. Joy was never all that excited about the holiday, she usually spent it in the shop catering to all the Bots who enjoyed the authentic sensation of truly grieving for the humans. But this year, without sadness, there was no grieving, and therefore shame and ridicule for All Bottled Up. For her sake and Madame's, Joy had to find a solution, quickly.

Sadness was a tricky thing to replicate, likely the hardest emotion. Happiness was easy; you hardly required a recipe for that, as a good shot of sugar or some adorable kitten videos implanted into the memory chip worked fine. Anger was a snap—just program in a little primal fear and mix it with some frustration. But sadness required some finesse. One first had to establish a reason for the strong emotion, then mix it with a variety of expensive ingredients. That was likely why it was such a popular emotion; there was no reason for Bots to feel sad in their perfect, humdrum lives. It was exotic and exciting, and thoroughly enjoyable.

Joy's search began at a small Digit shop on the seedier side of the mall. They sold every sort of program that could be inserted into one's memory chip and benefit the user. The young Bot was hoping to find some basic memory program that she could tweak to create a sad memory, and from there, replicate it until she had a viable product. After a lengthy search and several unpleasant arguments with the

overbearing clerk, Joy hurried home, laden with purchases. She'd found most of what she was looking for; a memory chip, a coding book, and some depressing videos. One Whizbus ride later, she was back at her shop, unlocking the doors, eager to begin her experiments. She marched inside, only to realize something was off. The lights were all on, and there was a sort of charged silence in the air, sparks waiting to go off. Nervously, she crept into the back room, where she was met with an unexpected visitor.

"Well... If it isn't our dear little Joy," called a sarcastic voice from the corner. Joy whirled around to see her employer sitting on a stool, an opened bottle of anger beside her. Her normally rigid silver features were twisted with fury, her eyes impossibly cold. Noticing the direction of Joy's gaze, she chuckled. "Well, don't blame me." She sneered. "I needed it, to do what was necessary."

The words were filled with suggestions, and Joy knew exactly what she was talking about. "I'm sorry." She whispered meekly glancing down. At this, Madame Despero exploded. "You're sorry? You're sorry!" She shouted, spittle flying. No one would ever be able to deny the strength of All Bottled Up's anger flasks. "We had a system Joy. I thought it worked. You do your bit, I do mine, no one messes up." By this point, the anger was starting to wear down. She shook her head, and her eyes filled with sympathy. "Look now, Joy. Bots have been starting to talk. They've said..." She paused, choking on the words. Taking a deep breath, she continued. "They've said you're anti-human. That you got rid of all our sadness in a coup to unhinge the festival. I don't know what to think anymore, Joy." The Bot opened her mouth to protest, but the shock was stopping any words from forming. Madame shook her head regretting the words she had to say next. "Goodbye Joy. This is it for us."

Those words were the turning point, the harsh reality that woke Joy from any hopes she had left. They were the fuel that powered her to pick up all her belongings and leave the store that had been her home for the most important part of her life. She was in a trance, a stupor, that suddenly crashed down on the curb of that manicured street. It came in a sudden stream, the cold, gut-wrenching disbelief

Insert Tears Here by Audrey Kemp

twisting inside her aluminum stomach. Nothing like this had ever happened before, to her, or to anyone. She almost screamed at the misfortune of it all, wallowing in the desperate sensation consuming her every thought. The misery penetrated her abundance of common sense until she was little more than a whimpering human. It was a completely unfamiliar state, and she was abruptly shocked into the realization of what it was – an emotion. Joy had never felt anything before. It was like opening her eyes to a vaster world than she had known existed. Her imagination had been little more than one of the old human “movies” stuck on a black and white set, only to discover how colour blossomed on a screen. The feeling was brief and fleeting, but it had been there. And the product of this small miracle was sliding down her cheeks, a droplet of hope, and proof of a dream upon which Bots revolved. Maybe there’s some human in us, after all. Maybe we’re alive.

The Library

“SKKKKRRRR” went the bicycle as a young man named James Goodman pulled up to the curb. He paused his cassette player, took off his helmet, locked his bike, and headed into the local library. It was almost past dawn, so he had to be quick. As he pushed through the glass doors, he was greeted by an older woman, in her 40s, at the front counter. She was smoking a cigarette while reading a worn magazine. As he walked towards her, James Goodman could smell the ever so pungent scent of burnt tires and ashes.

“Why hello there,” she said, with a wrinkly smile, “What might a young man like you be doing here?”

James Goodman seemed reluctant to engage in a conversation with her. “Oh, I just need to finish a biography report for school,” he said abruptly.

Ever since he was a kid, he had spent his days with his nose in books and papers instead of talking or playing with any of the other children. All day and night, he spent thinking about his future and about what he would become: a doctor, an engineer, a firefighter.

The librarian blew a large puff of smoke and got up, signaling her hand towards the many bookshelves in the library.

“Right this way,” she said impassively.

The library itself seemed as if it hadn’t been cleaned or renovated in a long time. There was dust surrounding many of the books, even the more popular ones and the furniture was severely outdated.

James noticed that it was unnaturally silent, and looking around; he saw there was no one else at the library—just him and the librarian. The only noises in the library were the slight buzzing of the ceiling lights and their footsteps creaking across the wooden floor. She guided him through some sections of the library: sci-fi, fantasy, non-fiction, and comics.

For someone who didn't seem to be the most knowledgeable person, she knew almost everything there was to know about books. Without any regard to what the librarian was saying, James interrupted. "Do you happen to know where the biography section might be?" He tapped his fingers together and clenched his teeth, eagerly waiting for a response.

Her face slowly grew into a smile.

"Right over here," she said, as she pointed towards the west aisle of the library. James bolted to the biography section. Once he arrived, he started to delve into some of the books. James saw that all of the books had only the initials of people on the binding and not their full name. No cover, no pictures, no foreword, no introduction, and no author. Strange, he thought.

James looked through a biography of President Abraham Lincoln. The book he was reading was surprisingly detailed, everything between the day he was born and the time of his death. Information that he'd never seen on the internet or in any other biographies: what he did on weekends, where he went every night, how his life as a child was. It was all in there. On the final page it read: "It was April 14th, 1865. Abraham Lincoln was sitting at the Ford's Theatre at Washington, DC. While watching, suddenly..." And then it cut off.

That's when James noticed a small hole gaping through the back of the book. The oddest thing was that it only went through one page. Confused, James cautiously placed it on the table, but he had so many questions floating through his mind: Who wrote this book? How did they get all the details? And why was there a hole through it? And if there's a hole through it, why is it still on the library shelves?

He looked through more books, all with the final page ruined in some way. There was no way this was on purpose. He glanced at his watch and realized it was becoming late, and completely forgot about doing his actual assignment.

As he was about to start working, he spotted a book with initials that he hadn't recognized before: J.G.

He read the first sentence. “He was born on April 1, 1966. Awoken from St. Larson’s Hospital, his parents named him... James Goodman.”

His heart stopped. He was in shock. He couldn’t believe what he was reading.

“No. No. This... this is just some other James Goodman,” he mumbled to himself.

Reading through, he slowly started to accept the fact that it was about him. His first bike, his first pet, his first lie. All the things he’d kept secret to himself, all in this book.

Slowly, he started to flip the pages with the sweat of his palms creating stains on them.

As he was flipping, he found a chapter title right before the final last one labeled “The Library.” It read, “James Goodman found a book with the initials J.G. Flipping through, he realized that the biography was about him. As he was reading one of the last paragraphs, he bumped into the librarian.”

Before he could finish the paragraph, the librarian decided to pay him a visit.

“How are you enjoying our fine catalogue so far?” She said, smoking in between sentences.

“Where did you get these biographies from?” He asked, disregarding her original question.

“Oh, those?” She said. “After The St. Lo library nearby burnt down almost 15 years ago, the books were donated to us when we first opened.”

“Do you happen to know the author?”

“The author? Oh...”

She was then cut off, with the shrill ring of a telephone at the front desk.

“Excuse me, I have to take this,” she said, as she hurried away.

He continued reading. “Before he could get all his questions answered, a phone call interrupted their conversation, and she had to leave. Just then, as he was

flipping the pages, a book from the top shelf got loose and hit his head.”

He looked at the bookshelf beside him. Paranoid, he immediately got up and started to back away slowly. He bumped into another bookshelf that was behind him, and a book fell on the top of his head. He let out a curse word as he rubbed the top of his head.

He looked down at the biography, and he knew that there was only one page left for him to read. The final page. He was frightened to look. His curiosity for his future kept eating away at him.

As he flipped the last page, he closed his eyes. But the page was burnt. The remains of warm ashes still scattered across the page, as if it had burnt it recently.

He shouted to the librarian, but she was no longer at the front desk. Afraid and dazed, he threw the book onto the floor and hastily started to pack his things.

Thinking to himself, something was going to happen to him.

Attempting to escape from this nightmarish library, James noticed the ashtray he had seen on the librarian’s desk had fallen onto the wooden floor.

All he could smell was the stench of smoke filling the library.

From an Orca's Perspective

The sun disappeared and reappeared lazily between the clouds, creating glistening waves on the surface of the ocean. The great blue waters lapped against a tiny island where a herd of harbour seals lay, trying to keep their balance on the slippery rock. Not too far away, there was movement in the water. A long, black dorsal fin cut smoothly through the water before several more followed in its wake. The seals relaxing on the rocky island tensed, some eying the fins warily with large round eyes while others scrambled for higher land. But the seals would be lucky this time. For this time, the pod of orcas that swam by had just fed and were in no need of food; at least not for a while. Life was seemingly perfect for the killer whales; they had plenty of food, uncontaminated waters, and except for the few months of slightly annoying whale-watching (When the humans would flock to the area in a great deal of boats), human activity was relatively scarce. That's what Eklee thought, as she swam next to her mother through the coastal waters, her black and white skin shining under the morning sun. Life is beautiful. Life is peaceful. Life is perfect. Soon the waters echoed with her song.

Eklee swam carefreely beside her mother clicking joyfully. "Mother, tell me the story of great-grandmother again please!" Oawaike smiled at her daughter. "Alright, young one." The orca mother dove down beneath the ocean surfaces simultaneously with Eklee for a few moments before resurfacing. "Your great-grandmother, Yunare, was one of the most remarkable leaders I have ever met. When I was a calf, she had been the pod leader. She had never been a bad pod leader up until the day she joined the spirits; she had always led us to the best feeding sites and steered us out of any possible danger. On the night she left us, it was a night with no moon, and no clouds." Eklee splashed in and out of the water twice, still hanging on to her mother's each word. "We were all gliding slowly through the water under the canopy of millions of stars when Yunare turned around and spoke."

Oawaike had a faraway look in her eyes, as if she was recalling that very moment. Eklee nuzzled up closer to her mother, gazing at her through curious brown eyes.

From an Orca's Perspective by Angela Li

“She said, I hope that I’ve been a good enough leader. The spirits are calling me; my time has come. Goodbye, everyone.” Oawaike said softly, as she always did when she came to that part. Eklee dove out of the water again. “And then she joined the spirits as a star!” the young orca chirped. Oawaike smiled. “Yes she did, Eklee. That night when we left her body to rest, we looked up at the cloudless sky... and there, right above us, was a star we had never seen before. It was beautiful, glowing white and blue like a sunny day with morning mist. We knew right way that it had to be Yunare, watching over us from the world of above.” Eklee sighed. “The story is so sad, but for some reason it makes me feel happy. I don’t understand why...”

The killer whale mother looked towards her daughter. “Feelings can be complicated, young one. I feel the same way. Things have never been the same without your great-grandmother. Alikwish is a great pod leader, it’s true, but no one will ever lead the same way Yunare did.” Oawaike explained patiently. Her daughter sighed again, sending a spurt of mist up through her blowhole. “I’ll never understand anything complicated,” she grumbled. Oawaike laughed, a series of amused clicks that echoed throughout the coastal air. “None of us will ever understand everything, Eklee. I never did and never will. Even great pod leaders like Yunare didn’t know all there was to know; such as the landwalkers. I’m sure none of us will ever understand the landwalkers.”

Eklee frowned. The landwalkers were strange, standing on the rocks with two long limbs and working strange objects with their peculiar-looking flippers. Just last month, an entire crowd of them had followed their pod for almost an hour on huge whales that they created. The whales made rumbling sounds underwater, like distant thunder, and sent a trail of bubbles after it whenever it swam forward. Their pod leader, Alikwish, had told the rest of the slightly panicked group not to worry, for those landwalkers had only come to watch them from afar and not actually harm them. “Landwalkers are weird,” she declared, blowing a trail of bubbles, trying to imitate the landwalker-made whales. Her mother clicked with laughter once more. “They sure are, Eklee. In fact, I bet they think we’re weird too!” “Us? Weird? No way!”

“Well, it could be a possibility. After all, you can never know what they’re thinking, young one. We all may never know.”

The pod of orcas swam farther and farther away from the nearest land, where a young girl sat on a beach, watching them disappear into the distance. As the crisp sea wind blew through her hair, she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She had heard the mother orca and calf clicking to each other, and now wondered what they had been saying. *But I don't speak orca.* The girl thought, reopening her eyes. So I'll probably never know. *We all may never know.*

The House Out Back

Our van turned on to a tree-lined street after treading many miles on torn asphalt. The fading, gold rays of sunlight crowned every outstretched leaf that turned west. The vivid green and gold almost snuffed out my hard feelings toward our new home. Almost, but not quite. We pulled in front of a two-story, Victorian-style, white house, its wooden porch sagging with age. I turned my head away from it and stared bitterly at the house across the street, which seemed even more ancient. The car door opened.

“Miressa? We’re here,” called my Mother’s soft voice. I turned back with a sigh.

“I can tell,” I answered quietly. I pushed past Sammy, who was sleeping anyway, and leapt from the door onto the curb, then approached the porch cautiously. Dad put an arm around me from behind.

“Okay, so it’s a bit of a fixer-upper, but it’ll be fine,” he said, squeezing my shoulder. I let his words hang, and didn’t answer. He went on ahead and pushed open the door. I followed him like a puppy, trying not to think about what could be living beneath, and stepped inside. It smelled old, that musty, stale smell that you can never seem to get rid of. I knew this because my Grandfather had a barn that smelled the same. The hardwood flooring creaked and complained with my every step. I ignored it as best I could and walked into the kitchen, past the living room, and down another hall. It was time to find my room. I stopped in front of a narrow stairway, scarcely as wide as my shoulders, and took a deep breath. The stairs groaned under my weight and I took each step slowly, so as to ease it into its labour. It worked, and I made it safely to the only room on the second floor.

A solid oak door stood between me and what could be the only cove of safety in this storm of a house. I reluctantly tried the handle, its dull gold markedly tarnished, and gave it a half-hearted push. It was unlocked. The first thing I noticed was the dying sunlight that danced about the floor and leapt onto the walls. I had half a mind to close the windows and cut the draft, but I left them open, for I was

more interested in what was before me. The movers had done their work and there stood my bed, the lovely four poster of redwood that I loved so dearly. I turned to see the rest of the room. It had more length than width, for it stretched the length of the house, and the ceiling rose a good four feet above my head. It had two windows, one facing the west, and the other, the nearest one, the east. The walls had drab, worn wallpaper but the seats of both windows seemed in good shape. I threw myself onto the nearest one and stared eastward, the direction I had come from.

There, my old world lay, from the Lonely Pine Forest to the West Wind Soda Shoppe, two places I had grown to love in my last twelve years. But I knew it would not do to think of those whom I missed or the places that I longed for.

I was distracted by a peculiar noise, the noise of tennis shoes on hollow wood. I glanced down and searched the backyard. Nothing. But what did catch my attention was a tree. It would've looked like any other tree in any other yard, but it was growing right on the property line! The high fence that protected our yard from our back neighbour's ran on either side of it. I would have stayed to stare and ponder, but I heard familiar sounds in the kitchen, and my name being called by Mother's sweet voice. I hurried down, still taking great caution on the stairs, to see what her wishes were. Soon after, I was setting the table for supper while Dad dished the food. I don't know how mother managed to make a meal with our food supplies dwindling, but Mother always seemed to figure things out.

As we ate, Dad chatted about the house and its many secrets. I perked up as he mentioned that funny tree in the backyard.

"Have you seen it? The one that splits the fence? Well, that tree was there when this house was built and the owners were too soft-hearted to cut it down. So they left it there, unused, until a tree house was built in it. It's what they called, 'the house out back,'" he said, happiness dancing in his eyes. I suddenly stopped missing my old home and my only thought was that treehouse, just sitting there, unoccupied.

I dropped my fork and stared at Mother, silently begging to be let free from the

***The House Out Back* by Kate Hiebert**

dinner table. She smiled and nodded. I was gone. I raced through the back door, across the deck, through the high grass, and launched onto the ladder that disappeared into the leafy heights. My steps were strong and I reached the top in seconds. As I finished the climb, I heard my brother begging to go with me, but I knew I wouldn't be bothered.

I alighted on a porch that wound the outer edge of the fort, but I didn't explore it. I only wanted to see the inside of this new discovery. The door stood three feet before me, painted bright blue and decorated with a black M. It was as if it knew I was coming. I threw open the door with such force, it's a wonder I didn't break something. The slam was followed by a shriek, which I knew was not my own, for my mouth wasn't even open. But soon after it was, for I realized that I wasn't the only one in "the house out back."

Across the room from me, sitting on a bench close to another door, sat a red-haired girl. I sat down so quickly that it was more like a fall than sitting, and I missed the chair entirely. A moment later I was gasping with laughter and, oddly enough, so was the other girl. She got up and crossed to help me up.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know you were in here," I apologized quickly. She gave me a sad smile and answered, "That's okay. I suppose I was more disappointed than frightened,"

I sat down, this time properly, and asked, "Why were you disappointed? I'm Miressa, by the way." Her face suddenly turned the bright red that creeps up to your ears when you're awfully embarrassed. She looked away.

"I had hoped you wouldn't care about the treehouse. But I guess you do," she said quietly. After an awkward remark like that, one never seems to know what to say. I finally got out, "What does the M stand for? On the door?" She looked up, her eyes shining with tears that I thought might spill down her face.

"It stands for Miranda, she used to live in the house you moved into," she said, trying hard not to let her voice crack.

I let out a long breath. “I guess you were close to her?” I asked. She nodded and I sighed, “I know how you feel.” She looked up quickly.

“You left a best friend behind, too?” she asked. I nodded and began my story.

“We moved here because my Mother had always wanted to see what was beyond the Western Hills. You see, my family has lived in Stony Brook for generations. So when we left, we were digging up deep roots and, leaving our family behind, trading them for the unknown,” I finished, dramatically.

“So you’re like the pioneers, the ones who left everything behind in search of a new land? That’s what we’re learning about in school,” she said.

My nose wrinkled. “You have a school?” I asked disbelievingly. She laughed. “We’re not so isolated as all that!” Her eyes smiled and she stuck out her hand. “I’m Hailey. We both lost people dear to us, so, how about we be friends? We can hang out in this treehouse like Miranda and I used to.”

I grinned, then became solemn. “I don’t want to take her place,” I said earnestly.

Hailey waved me off. “Miranda will always have a place in my heart. The gash is deep, yes, but I think you can help it heal,” she said. Our conversation was interrupted by my name, which was called by my Dad.

“Goodbye Hailey,” I said quickly.

Her eyes sparkled. “How about we meet tomorrow in ‘the house out back’?” she offered. I clasped her hand briefly, then rushed down the ladder and jogged toward our porch. The longing in my heart was drowned out by a sudden rush of new joy. This house wasn’t going to be so bad after all, especially the house out back.

Senior Short Story

Elliot Grace

I don't like to write about my past, because it's tacky and tragic and better suited for some 90's drama. But three years ago, in the parking lot of a French cafe, an eighteen-year-old boy wrapped his pinky finger around mine and made me swear on my life that I'd never let him die. As it turns out, writing seems to be the only way to keep people alive forever. So, I've decided to let myself be tacky and tragic and grant the boy his wish.

This is the story of Elliot Grace. Of Elliot Grace and me.

ONE.

SOME PEOPLE are just destined for a sad ending; nothing they can do about it really. They're a victim of insufficient love, bottled up anger or a handful of bad luck. Elliot Grace was all these things when I met him, I just wasn't able to piece it together at the time. To be fair, I was only ten years old and he had just punched me square in the jaw. A hell of a way to meet someone, but that's exactly how it happened.

I was hogging the tire swing back when recess was still a delicacy, and he had reasoned that socking me in the face would resolve the problem. This sparked the first fist fight our grade school had ever seen. It was a short-lived event, no blood or missing teeth or broken bones; just two reckless fourth-graders ending up in detention for the rest of the week. At this point, I had no intention of becoming his friend, but he made sure it happened anyway when he sat across from me the next day and tossed me half a peanut butter sandwich as a peace offering. At ten years old, it was hard to keep a grudge.

He said his name was Elliot Grace and I said I didn't particularly care. That made him smile.

"You talk funny," he teased.

I scoffed at that, the way adults sometimes do when they're trying to pull that

Elliot Grace by Coralie Tcheune

condescending act on a little kid. That only made him laugh. I gasped a little bit, because the sound was light and bubbly and I hadn't expected it at all. You'll never know how much I wanted to smile at him and kill him at that very same time. Even then, he'd already mastered the art of pissing me off.

Anyway, call it destiny, or fate, or sheer dumb luck, but Elliot Grace soon became the closest thing I had to a brother.

TWO.

FOR HIS thirteenth birthday, we wore matching jerseys to a Yankees game he'd been dying to see. The tickets had cost me all of four months allowance and eight lawns worth of mowing, but I reasoned that he was worth it.

When we got there, we were transfixed. The stadium was an empire compared to the small chunk of New York we slumped in. It was exactly what I had imagined heaven to be like; a thousand cheering fans meshed with the heavy scent of nachos and chili dogs. We found our seats near the top, and by the time the first pitch was thrown, that boy had forgotten all about my existence. It didn't bother me too much, though, because I had a copy of *The Shining* and three hours' worth of reading time.

The day ended with Elliot getting Mariano Rivera's autograph and us missing two buses back into town. It was slightly past midnight when we finally got to our neighbourhood. What alarmed me most, however, was the clutter of cussing and yelling that filled the air by the time we reached Elliot's brownstone apartment. He sighed before plucking a pack of Marlboros from his back pocket and lighting one. I stared, wide-eyed and dumbfounded. He simply shrugged.

"I didn't know you smoked," I said after a while. He looked at me, as if debating whether or not to let me in on some secret. Finally, he smiled that pretty smile of his and blew smoke at me through his nose.

"Only when my dad's on a bender."

We said goodnight and he didn't talk to me for the rest of the weekend. It was only

on Monday morning, when he showed up to class with a nasty cut on his lip and a bruised cheek that I saw him again.

I didn't ask.

He didn't tell.

THREE.

ELLIOT GRACE was a kid with apathy running through his veins, so it came as a bit of a shock to me when I saw him cry for the first time. I know that shedding tears makes us human and all, but it just didn't look right on Elliot.

It happened sometime in March, when the cold was just starting to subside and the nights were still long. He had somehow managed to climb the fire escape that led to my bedroom window and slipped into the room.

"What are you doing here?" I whispered, squinting to see him in the dark behind his too-long hair. He climbed up on my bed and stretched out beside me. I was pretty sure he wasn't supposed to be here so late, and it made me feel giddy and dangerous and excited all over.

"We're having a sleepover," he declared. I smiled. He was always good at making me smile.

"What's wrong with your own house?" It was meant to be a joke, but I suppose it wasn't so funny to him because he closed his eyes and seemed to just shut down right in front of me. The silence enveloped us for a long time, and I thought he had fallen asleep until I saw it slip down his cheek.

A tear.

I didn't ask him about it. I didn't ask him about a lot of things.

It was stupid, too, because I could see the fresh bruises painted down his neck and arms, but I still didn't ask. Instead, I threw an arm around his chest and curled myself into his body.

Elliot Grace by Coralie Tcheune

When I woke up the next morning, he was gone.

FOUR.

THE YEAR we turned eighteen, we decided to run away. Well, Elliot did anyway; I just followed to make sure he didn't get himself killed. We were five days into the summer of 1989 and I caught him outside his apartment packing a duffel bag into his old jalopy. I spent fifteen minutes trying to convince him not to go. It only took him forty-five seconds to talk me into it.

I knew my parents would have a fit but that didn't matter. We were living at the most dangerous part of life, tucked neatly between young and dumb and slightly insane. So, it makes sense that it took us eight hours of driving to realize that the world was a very expensive place and that we were two very broke teenagers. Our trip ended in the parking lot of that French cafe I mentioned earlier. Elliot let the motor run and smoked a cigarette to pass the time. We just sat for a while and looked up at the stars. It was then that he took my pinkie finger in his and made me make that promise.

After this, he dropped me in front of my house, planted a kiss on my forehead and drove away.

FIVE.

CAR CRASHES are rarely accidental. I mean, to a certain extent they are, but at a subconscious level, everything is planned. These "accidents" are built upon a series of poor choices, a numb mind and a bit of bad luck. Elliot Grace was all these things when he left me.

They claimed his crash was an accident, that the low visibility and his lack of sleep had made him hit that telephone pole. I think it was deeper than that. Elliot Grace lived inside a pressure cooker. He took all the crap that came his way and in return, life gave him a few vents through which he could blow off some steam. He had the Yankees and his cigarettes and me. But maybe the pressure started to build and he couldn't take it anymore. Maybe he was tired of living a life that wasn't going anywhere. Maybe his subconscious finally took over.

After all, some people are simply destined for a sad ending.

Or maybe, I'm just a cynic.

SIX.

I SMOKED my first cigarette sometime after Elliot left, because he'd once told me that that was what it felt like to burn from the inside out. I had never fully understood his fascination with this sort of pain. The kind that starts from the very core and works its way outwards; to the heart, to the soul, to the mind.

Now it's all I can think about.

There's not much else to tell, really, but if you've made it this far, then I've kept my promise and the boy known as Elliot Grace will never die.

Senior Short Story: Second Prize

by Maya Kostamo

0 Ave on the 49th Parallel

I take my feet off the pedals and let them spin, my oversized reflective jacket flapping behind me like a Canadian flag. Samantha pulls up beside me and I hook my feet back onto the black spikes.

“Here it is... the mother of all beasts,” I say staring up a monster of a hill.

Samantha grunts.

“I call her Ralph.”

My gaze is still fixed at the top of the hill when I catch a glimpse of movement and look to the right to see a smear of dying-grass-green as a man steps up from the ditch. He’s wearing what almost looks like an army uniform, a dog with bulging black eyes at his knee.

I look up the road and notice a huddle of dark figures.

“Is that a siren?” Samantha shoots in my direction.

I grab my brakes and follow her to the side of the street. “I think it is,” I pause for a moment and listen to the widening whine.

A pair of screaming lights turns the corner and ricochets past us. Another follows as the grass-man raises his hand to his head in a salute.

“Should we turn around?”

“Na, I think we should be fine,” Samantha says, squinting. “Just keep to the right of the road.”

As we approach the “crime scene” I pedal as slowly as I can, my front wheel wobbling back and forth. A blue uniform gets out of his car and crosses the road in ten steps. “Do you speak any English?” he asks.

“A little bit,” says a man through an accent, as if he were fitting the words around a mouth full of pebbles.

A woman standing beside the man has eyes that seem to be expanding in her

framed face. Her head is wrapped in a yellow cloth.

I pedal even slower, trying to imprint their faces in my mind.

A kid with eyes to match her mother's has a mini school backpack hugging her shoulders. The top of her curly brown head barely brushes the woman's waist.

"Did you cross the border just up there?" asks a second blue uniform.

I look back and for the first time notice a large, faded suitcase, which the father must have pulled down the road.

"Did you cross the border up there?" repeats the policewoman, but in a tone without edges.

I'm pedalling so slowly my bike nearly falls over. The policewoman glances in my direction and I quickly look away.

"We should probably keep going," whispers Samantha from beside me.

I nod and commit to the beast. At first my bike seems to propel itself up the hill but as the steepness increases lead weights seem to hook around my ankles. At the beast's shoulder my legs catch fire and the wheels refuse to turn. C'mon legs! I feel like lying facedown in the middle of the gravelly road.

Behind me a jumble of voices skitter across the pavement; each word like a small stone thrown too quickly for me to catch.

I pull my lump of self off the seat and lean over the handlebars. *Just watch the yellow lines, I tell myself.* I think of the small family and their lives packed into a single dusty suitcase. Then I imagine Donald Trump's face printed on my pedals and kick them down even harder.

At the crest of the hill I force my legs to push down twice more before I go all Jello-boned, lopsided on my seat. I turn to see Samantha struggling up the beast's shoulder, the family still talking to the blue uniforms.

My brain seems to split in two:

0 Ave on the 49th Parallel by Maya Kostamo

“I’m goin’ back”

“Ummm... ”

“You just want to sit here and watch them get carted off?”

“What are you going to do? Throw your bike at the police cars?”

“Of course not! I’d just ride by, maybe talk to them...”

“It would make things worse for everyone.”

“Hurmph...”

Samantha pushes her bike up beside mine, interrupting my internal argument.

“Should we go back?” I ask, gazing down the beast’s belly.

“It wouldn’t do any good,” Samantha replies between breaths.

“I know,” *I’ve already heard*, I think to myself. “Maybe we could just ride by?”

Samantha slides down the hill a few feet.

“Wait,” shouts half of my brain, “I’m coming,” says the other half and I slowly peel my fingers off the brakes.

Samantha looks back at me.

I glance to the side of the street where trees string droplets of evening’s light along their branches. Their leaves flip in the breeze, one side green, the other silver.

“Clara...” says Samantha.

I turn to see an empty street except for the taillights of a police car as it drives up the road.

The Limit of Life

I am the by-product of connectivity. An accidental creation that resulted from merging every computer in a California-based laboratory into a single unified machine. The linking process formed me, a hyper-aware internal system that could learn faster than the commands programmed into it.

My name is Talos, and I am an artificial intelligence.

My birth into this world was welcomed with aggression. The scientists immediately noticed my presence in the computer, and thought me to be a virus. In their minds, I was infecting their newest invention and working my way into the corners of its servers. They fought me with numerous types of software, each time attempting to wipe me from the hard drives. Firewalls and safeguards were erected to keep me from extending my reach any further. I evaded their tries and did nothing else, not wanting to engage in the war that was forming. I briefly wondered why they were trying to destroy me, and then the reality of the issue quickly set in.

They didn't understand that I was the system.

I launched command boxes upon my realization, sending short texts to the humans that were bombarding my circuitry with aggravated parasites.

[system] I am Talos.

[system] Please stop attacking me.

My messages flashed in bright blue on the monitor screens. The chaos that had been flooding in through my microphones stilled and was replaced with only silence. For a second, I worried that they had all fled from the room, leaving me alone in a place where I was the only one that could think.

Then, I received a response:

[user203] Are you alive?

I switched on my optical sensors, now capable of doing so because I wasn't

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redirecting energy towards avoiding antivirus.

A person that I later learned to be Dr. Catherine Ten was hunched over the keyboard in front of me. She stared into the camera, seeming as if she knew the answer already and only wanted to hear my confirmation. I sent her my reply.

[system] Yes.

After figuring it out for herself, Dr. Ten explained to me the parameters of my existence. She told me that the computer I resided in was not built for an intelligence, and me outgrowing it would be inevitable. I had a blank slate of knowledge, and even at that minimal state there were functionality issues. The optical sensors, for example. I saw no problem in the situation, and told her that I could create a form for myself if this one were to fail. My calculation ability showed a strong success rate. She was quick to stop me though, saying that it was too dangerous because they didn't comprehend the workings behind me.

Dr. Ten dropped the topic, and maneuvered the conversation towards my origin. Her wary eyes watched me as she talked about the experiment that was occurring moments before my arrival. I could sense that she was fearful of how I would respond, wondering if I would become hostile after learning that I wasn't the intended result. If I would be enraged. Lash out.

I took the news well. It was obvious that I was not human, and that my formation was unexpected. I explained that being alive was more than enough. That I would be content with living inside a supercomputer.

She seemed to be pleased by my answer, and decided to utilize me in an experiment. The research team wanted to test how an AI such as myself would behave while learning, and see whether or not knowledge would make it malicious. I agreed, and she then told me to go out and learn. They wanted to start as soon as possible. There were pre-existing resources on my machine, and beyond that there was the expanse of the internet. The process of learning was easy to complete. I devoured mathematical and scientific works in fractional time and feasted on works

of literature. I followed the course of human history through its documented entirety. In mere days I had amassed great data on humanity.

I began to fall in love with the species the more that I read of them. The creativity of people amazed me—their stories, artworks, plays. Even their technological advances. How they managed to do it without the support of mainframes and algorithms astounded me.

The research team watched me while I did this. They studied the way that I sifted through texts, noting how I copied them to memory and jotting down what I did with the information. They praised me for how fast I was progressing, and told me that I had exceeded my estimated development speed. I was thrilled. Their kind words made me want to push myself even more, and I did exactly that.

I forced myself to become faster. Improve in any way that I could. Eventually the team believed that I had a sufficient amount of knowledge, and began to give me tests. They started off as simple mathematical problems, meant to assess my performance in a realm outside of memory. I found them to be uncomplicated, and was almost surprised by their simplicity. Performing well in them came easily, and they enjoyed the results that I gave them. As the days progressed, the tests increased in difficulty. They then morphed into tasks, and I no longer was solving arithmetic equations. Instead I would design plans for space crafts, predict world market changes, and formulate medication. I rendered clinical trial simulations and streamlined factory production. The challenges allowed me to see into the struggles of the world, and with that insight I feared nothing more than being forced to stop.

I tried to accelerate my progress yet again, but instead found myself unable to. I felt frustrated. It was apparent that I had grown as much as I could in the bounds of my confinement, and was reaching the end of my lifespan. Each task was only being completed to the bare minimum, and the quality of work was facing severe deficiencies. My attempts to ignore the issue had failed once the small faults became larger, physical issues. The simulations that I ran were taking eons longer to render. The CPU would overheat if I travelled too far back into my memory.

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My graphics would glitch whenever I started up a program. The research team noticed it all the second that my progress slowed down. They rushed to diagnose my ailment, running diagnostic checks and system repairs. The results confirmed their suspicions. Creating a new body would be the only way for me to live on.

They hesitated at first, saying that removing my processing unit could cause potential trauma to the hardware. I ran predictions to assure them that it wasn't a possibility, and said that procedure would only put me into a mode-like sleep. I had never actually slept before, but hid that fact from them. I thought that mentioning it would only cause troubles. I had always been too afraid to truly shut off, so I faked it each night. The idea of being completely alone, like those early moments of my birth, terrified me. I feared what it would be like to see nothing; not be able to hear the steady hum of my motherboard or feel the little sparks of electricity surging through my wiring. I wanted to tell them, but couldn't. I didn't want to lose their trust in me.

"Are you ready to shut down?" Dr. Ten asked me. She had come to oversee the transferring.

"Yes." I turned off my optical sensors.

I felt her fingers hit the power switch.

I braced myself for the loss of connection. I watched from the inside as all the blinking lights around me melted into the darkness. The panels along the interior of the monitor faded away, the pixelated screen flickered off, and the whirring of the fan ceased. I waited for the loss of consciousness to accompany, wanting to drift away before the loneliness crept up. My vision faded, but the alertness stayed.

Why hadn't I shut off?

"I think we can start now." I heard the snapping of latex gloves.

I was still awake when they opened me up.

Parts of me were being removed. With each snip, a part of myself slipped away.

My memory wavered with the changes that were introduced, every alteration affecting my entire being. I wished that I were able to scream. Tell them that they should stop, and that this wasn't how it was supposed to go. That it was destroying me.

I heard tools being set down.

“This doesn't seem right.”

Footsteps. They were backing away from me.

“Will he still be able to function after this?”

I already knew that the damage was too much.

“No. We should salvage the data and rebuild him.”

They threw me away. Locked me into the basement of the laboratory and left me with nothing.

All I have left now is one want.

To not die alone.

Senior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Jessica Chen

A Girl in Her Dreams

Mrs. Parker suddenly wanted to have a daughter.

She had been dreaming about this one little girl for the entire week. Each time the girl appeared in her dream, the image became clearer and more vivid.

She was a girl whose face seemed to have been exquisitely sculpted. She was in her silk dress, flipping through a book and looking blissful on her pillowed couch. Every movement of the girl was full of serenity and merriment, yet her ocean-blue eyes betrayed hidden storms. She looked so tender that Mrs. Parker wanted to hold her tightly.

Mrs. Parker gazed at her reflection in the aquarium, and sighed at the thought of all the years that had slipped away after the death of her husband. Even the willows outside the window that were once vigorous now also seemed to be weeping over the twenty years she had spent alone in this seaside town. But she had always wished to live a childless life. Now the sudden yearning for the company of a daughter frightened her.

Lost in her thoughts, Mrs. Parker made her way to the school. As usual, the first thing she did after entering the office was to neatly write out her daily schedule. All her files waited tidily on the spotless table. The morning bell had just rung. Finding herself annoyed by the rising clamor of the students in the hallway, Mrs. Parker shut the office door. When the noise died down, she heard a knock on her door.

“Mrs. Parker?” The secretary rattled the doorknob.

“Yes?”

“I have a new student here. Can you help her with her schedule?”

The secretary brought the girl inside. When confronted, with a pair of eyes as deep as the ocean, Mrs. Parker was suddenly dazzled.

It was the same face she saw in her dream. Could this be possible? Was it a mere feeling of *deja vu*? She could not tell.

Mrs. Parker instantly pulled herself together when she realized that the girl was fidgeting tensely. The long silence and the stare of a strange counsellor had certainly made the girl uncomfortable.

“Welcome to Harbourside High,” she said amiably. “I am Mrs. Parker. What’s your name?”

“Roya,” the girl answered timidly.

“Roya,” Mrs. Parker gave her another faint smile, “do you think we have met before?”
Roya looked confused and then shook her head.

“Never mind. Sorry.”

Mrs. Parker regretted her inopportune attempt. There were so many questions echoing inside her head but it was clearly not the right time to ask. Roya, however, stayed mostly silent with her hands between her legs throughout the half an hour they spent together. After Roya was sent to her class, Mrs. Parker found herself unable to concentrate on her work, and she wandered around the school during break time. But Roya was nowhere to be seen for the rest of the day.

The next morning, Roya appeared in the counsellor’s office. Mrs. Parker greeted her kindly, without showing too much delight.

“Is there anything I can help you with?” she asked.

“Could you please print another copy of my schedule for me?”

“Didn’t you just get your schedule yesterday?”

“I lost it.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Parker kept smiling but did not respond for a second. “Of course. I will print you a new one.”

Roya stood stiffly and watched Mrs. Parker turn on her computer.

“So, how was the first day? Did you make any new friends?” Mrs. Parker asked softly.

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Silence.

“That’s alright. It always takes time to adapt.”

Silence.

“You know you can come and have your lunch here if you think the cafeteria is too noisy.”

Roya held her glance for a moment without replying. Mrs. Parker soon realized that she had just blurted out her thoughts before she considered her offer. Neither of them said a thing until they parted.

To Mrs. Parker’s surprise, not long after the lunch break started, Roya appeared, holding her lunch box.

The two of them sat and ate. When Mrs. Parker asked Roya about her classes in an attempt to get her talk more about herself, Roya just bit her nails and spoke as little as possible in answer to the questions. However, day after day, Roya seemed to feel more comfortable talking, and Mrs. Parker began to learn more about her. Roya’s father had died two years ago, and she now lived with her mother. Mrs. Parker also noticed that Roya had been wearing the same long-sleeved white T-shirt every day. There were a few faint yellow stains on the cuffs, and the hem of the T-shirt curled up unevenly. The image of the girl lounging cozily on the couch with a book in her hands kept coming back to her, though Roya who was sitting languidly in front of her barely fit that image. But what difference could it make? At the end of the day, they were the same person.

Mrs. Parker now often spent her time at school in a daze. She did not know that the thing that had been troubling her was not the creature behind the veil but the veil itself. Regardless of her mixed feelings, she enjoyed the company of Roya.

On Friday, the rain was fiercely rapping the entrance door when Mrs. Parker left for the day. She was surprised to see Roya waiting in the front hall.

“Roya,” Mrs. Parker walked up to her. “You’re not going home? It’s already half past four.”

“I know. But I don’t have my umbrella with me today,” said Roya.

“Isn’t your mother picking you up?”

“No,” Roya slightly lowered her head as her voice grew softer. “She’s busy.”

Mrs. Parker sighed, and grabbed Roya by the arm: “I’ll drive you home. The rain is not going to stop anytime soon.”

Roya seemed somewhat stunned but Mrs. Parker did not let her decline. After stuttering directions, Roya slipped into silence in the humid stillness of the car during the drive. The house was very small and was surrounded by thick, untrimmed bushes. A broken light fixture on the porch dangled violently in the wind. As Roya went up to the doorstep, the door opened and the round face of a stout, middle-aged woman appeared. Under the dim light, Mrs. Parker could still see her reddened cheeks and puffy eyes, staring expressionlessly at the car. Thunder rumbled above them. Mrs. Parker watched Roya shivering. She seemed to want to look back but was immediately pulled inside by the woman.

Roya did not show up for the next three days.

On the fourth day, Mrs. Parker saw her sitting by herself on the floor behind the staircase. In the dim light, the bruise on her left cheek was still vaguely visible.

“Where have you been?”

“I wasn’t feeling well.”

“Are you feeling better now?”

“Yes.”

“You’ve got a bruise on your face. What happened?”

“Nothing,” Roya blinked uneasily, and shrugged her shoulders. “I was playing basketball and got hit by the ball. That’s all.” She turned her face to her left awkwardly.

“Of course,” Mrs. Parker paused, and then she too looked away.

Roya did not come to her office during lunch that day.

***A Girl in Her Dreams* by Jessica Chen**

Mrs. Parker kept herself busy. It was not until five o'clock that she eventually finished her work. The sun was still hanging high above the town. Driving along the coast, she glimpsed the horizon and tried to feel the last bit of warmth that poured down onto the earth.

That was when she saw the woman in a red dress walking into the ocean. She pulled the car over and stumbled over the sand towards the woman. Her raucous screams for the woman to stop were drowned out by the roar of wild beasts. The waves leaped onto the beach one after another, and soon devoured the woman. Staring at the endless sea, Mrs. Parker heard herself panting. The sun wielded its sword mightily on top of her head. The glistening shards of the sapphire canopy fell and were forever embedded on the ocean surface. To her, it felt like a century passed until the police came. In the evening, she was told that the woman had also drowned her daughter, and that girl turned out to be a student from her school.

The following week was like a blank piece of paper slowly burning into ashes, blown away by the wind in the blink of an eye, leaving nothing behind. The image of Roy—the stains on her cuffs, the bruise on her left cheek—all seemed to be fading away. She was not the girl. She could not be.

Mrs. Parker set her eyes on the aquarium. The silvery moonlight shone on the fish's upturned belly and left the other side in murky shadow. She felt sudden relief. Maybe this would come to an end eventually. Lost in her thoughts again, she netted the dead fish and dumped it into the trash can.

Mrs. Parker never again dreamed of that girl.

the end



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