

**SURREY LIBRARIES**

**2020**

**young  
adult  
writing  
contest**



**SURREY LIBRARIES**  
*discover·connect·inspire*



Proudly Presents

A Collection of Winning Entries  
for the

**2020  
young adult  
writing contest**

*Short Stories, Poetry, Comics & Random*



# Foreword

I am pleased to present this anthology of winning creative works from the 2020 Surrey Libraries Young Adult Writing Contest. I would like to congratulate all the young writers, who, with their energy and commitment, entered the contest and contributed to youth art and culture in the Surrey community. The authenticity, creativity, and intelligence shown in the entries we received reflect the brilliance of this community's teen writers.

The Young Adult Writing Contest has drawn young talent in the Lower Mainland since 1987. We have been very fortunate to have stalwart judges who come from teaching, publishing, and creative writing backgrounds, who give of their time and talent to judge young people's works each year. Moreover, the generous contributions of our community sponsors allow young writers to be rewarded for their writing.

The Young Adult Writing Contest is a long-standing tradition that harnesses the creative energies of young people, giving them confidence beyond the contest itself.

As a core literacy program for teens, the contest has significant impact on self-identity and the development of intellectual, verbal, and imaginative skills.

The contest is completely free and lifts barriers to fine arts extracurricular programs that usually come at a cost to teens and their families.

The winners of the contest were recognized in October at a Virtual Awards Ceremony. We were privileged to have Aislinn Hunter, the award-winning Canadian novelist, poet, teacher and the author of eight highly acclaimed books, as our keynote speaker.

Kelly E. Lau  
Teen Services Librarian

# Acknowledgments

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

## Our Champions

---



## Our Guardians

---



Surrey  
International  
Writers'  
Conference

## Our Enthusiasts

---



## Our Allies

---

ABC Recycling

FASTSIGNS of Surrey

Key Innovations

Save-on-Foods & More Rewards

Staples Business Advantage Canada

*And our fabulous contest judges:*

**Heinz Senger, Jocelyn Crawford, kc dyer, Natalie Hryciuk, Kyle McKillop, Jennifer Zilm, Sylvia Taylor, Lisa Voisin, Francis Munroe, Stephanie Fenton, Mia Jensen, Annie K. Wong, Jesset Karlen**

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

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	i
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	ii
<b>Junior Short Story</b>	
First Prize: <i>The Worker</i> by Gurleena Sukhija.....	2
Second Prize: <i>Number 98</i> by Sofia Lemay .....	6
Third Prize: <i>Clueless</i> by Tiffany Montefrio .....	10
Honourable Mention: <i>Watercolors</i> by Victoria Wang.....	14
Honourable Mention: <i>The Girl Who Visits Dreams</i> by Emma Hong.....	18
<b>Senior Short Story</b>	
First Prize: <i>Saudade</i> by Akash Ranu.....	23
Second Prize: <i>An Attempt at Building a Coffin for Ma</i> by Yue Chen.....	27
Third Prize: <i>Separate Ways</i> by Carmen Campbell.....	32
Honourable Mention: <i>The Everything Tree</i> by Annie Huang .....	36
Honourable Mention: <i>Citylights</i> by Rena Su .....	40
<b>Junior Poetry</b>	
First Prize: <i>Grow Up</i> by Gurleena Sukhija.....	46
Second Prize: <i>Assimilation</i> by Alyana Amadeo .....	48
Third Prize: <i>Hirosaki Castle</i> by Richard Su .....	50
Honourable Mention: <i>Rabbit Hole</i> by Khushi Cheema.....	51
Honourable Mention: <i>SKIN</i> by Leigh Kathryn Baculi .....	52
<b>Senior Poetry</b>	
First Prize: <i>Plum Tea</i> by Maggie Lu .....	54
Second Prize: <i>Ode to the Window</i> by Ava Popowitz.....	56
Third Prize: <i>Overthinker</i> by Yana Fershstein .....	58
Honourable Mention: <i>Quick Fixes</i> by Audrey Kemp.....	59
Honourable Mention: <i>Astronomical Alliteration</i> by Muskan Poddar.....	60
<b>Comics</b>	
First Prize: <i>Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven</i> by Yue Che.....	62
Second Prize: <i>A Different Kind of Mind</i> by Stin Dang.....	68
Third Prize: <i>Quiescent</i> by Andrew Jung .....	75
Honourable Mention: <i>Stick Guy</i> by Seth Corbett .....	81
<b>Random</b>	
First Prize: <i>Ethical Consumerism in a Capitalist State</i> by Muskan Guglani .....	87
Second Prize: <i>recounting that summer in which i woke, ate, slept, and repeated the motions mentioned above</i> by Yue Chen.....	91
Third Prize: <i>Aletheia</i> by Dean Oh .....	92
Honourable Mention: <i>Crown in the Grave</i> by Gurshaan Chadha .....	96



# **Junior Short Story**

# Junior Short Story: First Prize

by Gurleena Sukhija

## The Worker

Piles and piles of rotting corpses line the edge of the town. The dead supposedly wait years to be buried in an unmarked grave, probably displeased with their descendants for not being wealthy enough to afford a casket. Most bodies are destined to be stuffed aggressively into the ground. The workers undoubtedly apply their own spit to soften the sand into mud. This ensures that the cadaver is packed far enough into the earth so that a child won't trip over a limb during a game of tag.

When I was younger, I found these workers disgusting. They'd come home reeking of ugly misfortune, wiping flakes of stray flesh off their dusty green bodysuits, splattered in brown stains that they refuse to explain. The image of the dead clings to them tenaciously, like a piece of emptiness that arrives back with them when they step back into town. No matter how they've groomed themselves, or how long they've been retired, we know a worker when we see one. The way they carry themselves like they're hollow inside, keeping their heads down at the grocery store, slumping while driving their cars, and fingers constantly intertwined tightly at the center of their potbellies.

The town's rumours often reported that only thieves and madmen take the job, to steal a couple bucks from a dead man's pockets or to remove organs to sell on the black market. Nobody has ever considered that they work for a dime an hour just to keep themselves relatively intact. Relatively unbroken. Relatively secure.

The rumours only spread because the workers are feared. Mothers told their children to stay away from them. Fathers cocked their snipers at the thought of them. Children didn't look them in the eye and teenagers dared one another to look them in the eye.

When I was a little boy, I had a friend who once hid behind the gas station near the cemetery at half past two in the morning. He told me that the workers walked back to town like zombies, drunkenly and recklessly. He said that their mouths sagged into frowns, and bodies oozed across the desert. He'd said that one of them had fallen, and he didn't get up. I pretended to understand what that meant.

When I was fourteen, I had begun to avoid my older brother. He'd become lifeless and

porcelain, torn apart from his seams. He was almost never home and when he was, he was locked in his room, staring at the wall. Beer bottles dotted every corner of the house, messy and shattered. His eyes, once energetic and jovial, had changed. Not that I've ever caught any anger or sadness in them. There was just so much of...nothing. There was so much nothing that it could fill up oceans, replace every ounce of water with its deep, dark substitution. There was so much silence that one could go deaf with it, screaming for the noise to stop, unaware that there was no noise at all.

He was impeccably empty from the inside out. And I knew then, even if we never spoke about it, what he did to keep us afloat. We never spoke about how my school bus passed the graves on the way to the academy. We never spoke about how his hands patted the bodies into the ground a little too carelessly. We never spoke of how he kept forgetting to clean his boots when he came home, mud and flesh clinging haphazardly to the soles.

When he died two years later, I found myself alone in this great big world. As a teenager with no guidance, I had easily slipped down a dirt road of drugs and alcohol, realizing too late that I was bankrupt, that I hadn't even graduated high school. I had nobody to help me. I had no way out of this suffocating, corpse infested town where gossip was the law and the dead were disrespected. Unfortunately, I also had no other choice. I put on my brother's leather boots and headed to the edge of the town.

A couple months into my new field of work, I began to notice an odor. I was careful to stay clean, careful to keep the job from consuming me like it had other workers. I turned my house inside out, wiping every nook and cranny down with buckets of Lysol. My showers became hourly when I was at home, and I scrubbed myself down with cheap sponges until I was swollen with frustration. The smell got stronger every single day, until my hands were reeking with rot and my body melted into puddles of acid when I went to sleep.

I wasn't sure why I was smelling death on myself. I wasn't sure why nobody else could smell it. I wasn't sure why it followed me day and night, disturbing my sleep and haunting my body. I felt like a corpse burying my brothers and sisters every single day. Death had rubbed off on me, and only I knew that it had. Only I could feel it lurking.

Death is like a skunk's spray, a raging mist of eternal scent. Except death can't be washed

## **The Worker by Gurleena Sukhija**

away with tomato juice. Death emits a different kind of fragrance, rotten and cold and rosy. It lingers.

On the worst nights, I'd wake up in a cold sweat, my fingernails subconsciously tugging at my arms, breaking through that thin sheet of skin, letting the blood pool on my blanket. I thought that maybe if I scratched enough, I could scratch the smell away. I would be able to smell the living under all those layers of decay. The fresh warm blood and the sharp pain would clear my mind. I'd be able to feel cleansed and fresh and alive. But I never did.

I always felt...empty.

Walking home one night, I fell backwards onto the ground. It was no accident, and none of the other workers around me pretended that it was. They stepped over me, around me, leaving me alone. I was just another casualty. I stayed like that for hours. I didn't get up. I didn't want to keep living when everything was telling me that I was a dead man. I longed for the earth to swallow me whole, pulling me deep under its surface, filling all the gaps in my heart with pounds and pounds of dirt. I longed for my brother to hold me in his arms and tell me that the life I'd chosen was right. I'd chosen to die so that I could be reunited with him.

"Hey," a voice called out.

I looked up to see a man staring down at me. "Are you going to get up?" he questioned, concerned eyes washing over me. "Sooner or later, you're going to have to."

"I won't," I promised.

"Why are you down here?" he asked.

"I'm a worker."

He shook his head. "I meant, why are you lying on the ground hoping for death like so many workers before you?"

"I'm empty," I replied, the words heavy as they fall from my lips.

He tilted his head just slightly, eyes burning into mine, thinking. “What if,” he began, “being empty means that all you have to do is fill yourself up?”

I considered this. “What if it doesn’t?”

He offered me his hand. “You’ll never know if you lay here all night.”

And in that moment, as I stared at this man who had offered me so much of what I did not have, what I thought I did not want. It only takes a second to realize that I craved it. I craved life so much that an ocean that is full of empty is not the one I wanted to sail. I would much rather revel in noise than in silence. And he was giving it to me like it’s nothing. Like he has more to give.

I found myself taking his extended hand, frightening myself with such an involuntary action. An electric current jolted through me, the heat of his skin seeping through my pores, searching for the emptiness, searching, searching, searching. Filling every gap with warmth until dandelions sprouted inside of me, proving to me that I could sustain life. And maybe, just maybe, I could also sustain mine.

“You aren’t alone anymore,” he told me, walking with me into town at half past two in the morning. “You’ve got a friend now.”

The flowers bloomed inside of me all night. And by the time I reached home, I realized that their scent had overcome the aroma of a rotting corpse. ◆

# Junior Short Story: Second Prize

by Sofia Lemay

## Number 98

I will not lie to you. The first time Mr. Whitman walked through the door, I was a tiny bit frightened. Just a little scared, unsettled... Okay fine, I was terrified. I cannot say I have not come across some very strange things in twenty years of occupying this profession. Yes indeed, everything from hearts to skulls, ancient runes, enigmatic names, and mystical symbols. Yes, I have done weird things, met weird people... But of all the curious things and people I have encountered, Mr. Whitman is undoubtedly the strangest.

I had just finished for the day and was getting ready to leave when the door opened. A blast of the frigid November air swept into the parlour, making me shiver. I looked up, my gaze slowly travelling from his huge feet, up his immense figure, registering his muscled arms, badly shaven face, mouth set in a tight line, impenetrable blue eyes, finishing off with a huge scar stretching from his left temple to his chin, slashing across his pale lips. The sparse hair on his head was white and yet he didn't give off the impression of being very old. He was so large he barely fit through the door. Wordlessly, he made his way across the room and sat in the designated chair. Slowly, he lifted his huge hand, the size of a dinner plate, and raised it to the opposite upper arm, just underneath his shoulder, tracing a small vertical line.

"Um, you want a tattoo?" I asked. He nodded. As I went through the procedure, I thought of all the other shady characters that had entered my tattoo parlour in twenty years and tried to reassure myself. But there was something in Mr. Whitman that frightened me. Maybe it was the implacable look in his blue eyes as I engraved the small line on his arm. He stared straight ahead, and I was unable to read the sinister look on his face. When I finished, he stood up and took one long look at his tattoo. I remember thinking how much he could possibly study it. After all, a line is just a line. As I watched him leave, I could not shake the strange feeling of dread that had settled over me.

And he came back. Each time requesting the very same thing: a small vertical line to add to the ever-growing number of vertical lines on his arm.

Mr. Whitman has been my customer for more than two years now. Sometimes requesting

several lines in one visit, sometimes not coming in for weeks at a time. His timing unpredictable, but his demand invariable. Always the very same vertical line.

At last count he had 96.

I don't question him much. Sometimes it is best to shut up and be quiet. However, I cannot deny the fact that I am very curious.

It's January, sliding slowly into February. That time of the year when the joy of Christmas and New Year is gone but the chill of winter remains. I was just about to open the parlour for the day when I see Mr. Whitman enter a crumbly apartment building at the other end of the street. Despite being scared of Mr. Whitman, this arouses my curiosity more than ever. Now, I will be honest, my tattoo parlour is not in the most elegant of neighbourhoods, far from it. But this particular building has been falling apart for a while and really gives the street an air of neglect.

I cross the street, intent on following him inside, but as I place my hand on the doorknob, I begin to have second thoughts and quickly walk away before I can do anything I will regret.

Minutes later, Mr. Whitman walks into the parlour and requests yet another little line. Number 97. He did something in that building. Something that he has done 96 other times, I am sure of it. Something sinister, probably not even legal. As he walks out, I decide I must put this right once and for all. I need to know what he is keeping track of with his 97 lines. So I decide to follow him. I wait a few seconds then hurry out, locking the parlour door and flipping the sign that says it's closed. Mr. Whitman strides purposefully down the street, and I hurry after him, trying to keep up with his large steps. Not once does he turn around to check if anyone is following him, making my task easier. He walks for almost half an hour, then stops abruptly in front of a bakery and disappears inside. Minutes later he reappears carrying a cake box. Mr. Whitman is a strange person, probably quite a shady character, but of all his weird doings, this one quite literally takes the cake. He continues walking, carrying the box, and I continue following him, my head full of questions. Suddenly, a thought occurs to me. Is there really a cake in that box? Or something else, more sinister, more suited to Mr. Whitman's creepy personality? The thought nearly makes me hurry back to the tattoo parlour, but I keep going, tailing Mr. Whitman who still doesn't turn around. He doesn't walk

## **Number 98 by Sofia Lemay**

a lot further before reaching a quaint little house at the edge of a well-kept neighbourhood. I take in the carefully kept front lawn and despite the cold, the few sparse plants growing underneath the window, which is framed with lace curtains. It looks like an old grandma could live here. Mr. Whitman walks up to the front door and knocks softly. The door opens but I cannot see the person inside the house. Mr. Whitman's immense figure hides them from me. He disappears inside, leaving me shivering in the cold. Time ticks by slowly, as I wonder what he is doing in there. Should I do something? But what? I am just about to give up and leave when he reappears. As the door swings shut behind him, he looks straight at me and meets my eyes. I instantly know it's too late to hide.

"I will come to your shop tomorrow for another mark," he says in a grave voice. "She is number 98." He points at the house and walks away, not giving me the chance to speak. I look at him striding away, then at the house. She is number 98. What does that even mean? He didn't... My heart thumping, I run up to the house and knock on the door like a crazy maniac. It seems like hours before it swings open, revealing a sweet-looking old lady.

"Why, hello," she says in a sweet voice. A huge sigh of relief escapes me. "How can I help you?" she asks, looking at me strangely. I suppose I did just knock on her front door like a crazy maniac.

"Oh, um, do you know Mr. Whitman?" I ask.

"Oh yes," she says, "he's such a darling. An excellent man." I nearly fall over in shock.

"He didn't hurt you?" I ask. Now it's her turn to look shocked.

"Alfred? Hurt me? Never! Alfred is my ray of sunshine."

"B- but, but then... Why the tattoos?" I stammer.

"He needs them," she says soberly. I just stare at her. "As a reminder," she says, "that he is not a bad person. Just a good person who did bad things."

"He... What?"

"Alfred... Alfred was a soldier in his youth. That's how he got the scar. He saw and did

horrible things, and he needs to carry all those he helped with him to be able to feel better about all those he hurt.”

“The lines... They represent people he helped?”

“Yes.”

“Ohhh,” I almost laugh in relief, “I thought they were his victims...”

“Loneliness and misery are Alfred’s victims...” she says, her eyes fixed on something above my head. “He’s brought me so much happiness... More than I could ever dream of having.”

Number 98. The 98th person he’s helped. She looks so blissful, and I suddenly feel horrible. I can’t believe I actually thought Mr. Whitman was a murderer!

The next day, Mr. Whitman is the first customer to walk into my tattoo parlour. Slowly, I pick up my needles and begin what I have now done 98 times. 98 times. 98 people. 98 happy people because of one man. And I suddenly see why he studied the lines so intently after they had been engraved in his skin. Because those lines are more than just lines. Each and every one of them tells a story.

“Mr Whitman?”

“What?” He asks in his gruff and grave voice. I set down my needle, having finished the 98th line. I slowly reach out and touch the first one. I remember that cold November day and ask:

“Can you tell me this one’s story?” ◆

## Junior Short Story: Third Prize

by Tiffany Montefrio

### Clueless

Glancing at my phone, I realized it was past midnight and I had gotten distracted with homework. I got up slowly and pushed my chair back, trying not to make a noise. A cold breeze ruffled my hair.

“Hey, Lucy,” I whispered, poking at my sister who was still laying on the bed beside my desk. “Did you leave the window open?” I quickly shut the window as a leaf fluttered in, clearing my throat.

“No,” she replied drowsily. “I was sleeping the whole time. Didn’t you open it a couple minutes ago?” she asked, rubbing her eyes. I went back to my desk, shaking my head. Being tired was probably making me unaware of everything. My vision was starting to darken and the noise of the clock that was once quiet was now echoing in my ears like a big drum.

“You have to sleep now. It’s so late,” she said and turned on her lamp, reaching for her glasses. “Can you close it? You’ve been coughing a fit. All this cold air isn’t healthy.”

“I have to study for the test,” I protested. Although half of my brain was telling me to listen. Lucy groaned and pulled her blanket up to her chest as she grabbed a book from her nightstand. I rolled my eyes and closed my textbook. ‘I won’t be able to focus if I’m tired anyway,’ I thought to myself, falling happily on my bed. At that moment I let my thoughts carry me away as I finally slept.

My phone buzzed with notifications. I stretched out my arms and turned on my lamp. My sister was probably already at work as her bed was empty. My ringer sounded, followed with a call notification from my friend Sadie.

“Sadie?” I croaked, confused as to why she was calling me at this hour.

“What were you doing? You called me an hour ago then you completely ignored me.” She whispered angrily. “My parents are still asleep!”

“What do you mean? I never texted you. I just woke up,” I protested, slipping on my socks.

“Don’t blame it on Lucy. I know the way you text.” Sadie mumbled. I could hear her footsteps

over the phone, followed by the sound of a toilet flushing.

“Are you in the bathroom?” I asked, pulling out my computer from my desk. “Wait, so you’re saying I called and texted you?”

“Yes and yes. Do you know how loud that was? You almost gave me a heart attack!” The girl hissed.

“Are you sure that was me?” I stifled a laugh before I muted myself in surprise.

“Hey! I already caught you! Stop playing dumb,” she muttered. It seemed like she was brushing her teeth.

“Whatever,” I reluctantly said, unmuting myself and giving up. I wasn’t in the mood to find out who called her, it was probably Lucy anyway.

“Did you know about the test today? I totally forgot!” Sadie cried. “It’s the last test of this term as well! I’m going to fail and my parents are going to kill me.”

“I can help you study,” I offered. “I’m free today so I think I can come over.”

“Thank goodness we don’t have to go to school today,” she whispered, hanging up.

I groaned and shuffled over to my closet. My room was bright pink with white flowers painted over the walls. There was a baby blue dresser in the corner and fairy lights hung on my white bed frame. The floorboards creaked everywhere I stepped. My parents usually weren’t able to afford any renovations on our old house, so my bedroom was older than me. I ran my fingers through my clothes, trying to find the perfect one. Finally, I picked out a crimson hoodie with black stitching. I stared at my phone for a bit and finally texted back.

‘Coming.’ I sent the text. As I opened the door, the cold autumn air washed over me. I pulled my hood over my head to warm the goosebumps on my neck.

‘Ok, see ya there.’ Sadie replied. With my fingers still gripping the phone, I slipped it back into my pocket. ‘What was Sadie talking about?’ I wondered, slipping on my sneakers. My fingers grew numb as the walk progressed. Even though Sadie’s house was only a block

## **Clueless by Tiffany Montefrio**

away, it felt like an hour or two. My feet didn't seem to want to move and my head swirled with blank thoughts.

"Sorry!" A grown man muttered after bumping into me abruptly. I didn't catch a good glimpse of him, but I could tell he looked really sick. I rubbed my shoulders with my hands, trying to keep out the cold. I exhaled and let out a puff of smoke. It was probably the only amusing thing about being in freezing weather.

"Hey, over here!" a familiar voice called. It was Sadie. I looked up at her, pulling down my hood. She was waving at me from her balcony, gesturing me to come in. Her house had a white exterior and a beautiful garden in the front yard filled with extravagant flowers. I smiled as I arrived at the entrance. I traced the elegant carvings that resided on the door with my fingers. After ringing the doorbell, I knelt down to find the two teddy bears that the both of us had placed on the doorstep when we were younger.

"You don't have to ring so many times, you know?" Sadie chuckled from the inside of the house, her footsteps echoed down the stairs. She unlocked the door and opened it invitingly. Her dog barked at me happily.

"Come on! I've been waiting for you. Don't forget we have to email the test by lunch," she chided and grabbed my arm, pulling me up the stairs.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm coming!" I grinned as we both ran into her room, collapsing on the bed.

"Okay, so I got the textbook," she said, pulling it out of her desk. "What do I do?" I took it from her hands. The weight of it surprised me. It was filled with dozens of notes and empty paper.

"I think you're smart enough for the first few questions," I started, muttering as I looked for the study sheet. "Only the last few might be hard. Sixteen, twenty-four, and twenty-five." She grabbed the sheet from my hand, examining the paper.

"I think I can do the rest, I just need to study for sixteen," she replied, pointing at the number.

"Well, the answer is in the textbook. It's just hard to find." I flipped open the textbook, careful not to let any paper fall out. "Here, page two hundred eighty-one, sixth sentence in the corner over here," I said proudly, fingering the sentence.

“Thanks, I’ll add that to my notes,” she smiled. “What do you want to do? You can’t just be staying here for a five-minute visit, can you?” Sadie handed me her phone before she headed towards the door. “I saw a headline about a new virus that has appeared. I haven’t read about it yet. I’m going to go to the bathroom. Don’t mess up my phone,” the girl warned, exiting the room. I stared at her phone blankly and realized she hadn’t been lying. There was a new virus. And there were thousands of articles talking about it. Curious, I clicked on one hastily as Sadie entered the room again.

“That was quick,” I said, feeling a bit startled as my friend slammed the door and quickly sat beside me.

“Can I read it?” She asked, grabbing the phone.

“Obviously.”

“New virus grows infecting people by the thousands.” She announced in a deep voice, giggling. “If you have any of the following symptoms, please consult your doctor and avoid as much contact with anyone else as much as possible,” the girl rolled her eyes carelessly and twirled her hair.

“As a necessary precaution, all citizens will be required to wear the suits provided to everyone if you are to go outside. The virus seems to be only spread by human contact. There have been more than fifty-six thousand deaths reported in North America just today,” Sadie’s eyes darkened. “If you are having trouble adjusting to new temperatures, coughing, have a sore throat—“

“Hold on, I’m going to get some water.” I said, my throat felt a bit dry now that she read it out.

“Geez, that is like your millionth cup of water today.” She joked, only to freeze with her eyes locked on the screen.

“What do you mean? This is like my first cup,” I chuckled, opening the bedroom door.

“The last symptom... is memory loss.” At that moment, I opened the bedroom door to find several empty cups of water scattered across the counter. ◆

# Junior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Victoria Wang

## Watercolors

'They say art is alive, and I thought that it was just a saying'

I dipped my paintbrush into the small, damp rectangle of chocolate brown from my brand-new pack of watercolors and dragged it across the paper as smooth strokes of brown appeared onto the page for the finishing touch on my hair. I grinned, taking a step back to admire the finished portrait of myself. The dark brunette hair, brown eyes, and tan skin. Lastly, I grabbed a dark black marker to sign my name in the bottom right corner with a flourish, Eve Price. I turned to collect the brushes and tidy up the table when I saw a flash of movement behind me.

Surprised, I whirled around to see nothing out of the ordinary. I was about to simply dismiss it as a trick of light only to realize that there is nothing to reflect the light upon. I rubbed my eyes, surely it was nothing.

Ping! I nearly jumped at the sound of my phone's notification. Jeez, what is wrong with me today, I thought as I seized it in my hands and read the newly sent text.

Alex: Be there in twenty, got to help my mom with something, see you soon!

I sighed, remembering that I promised Alex, my best friend since the age of seven, that I would help him with his biology homework, and I texted back 'okay.' As I turned back around I froze, bewildered. My portrait, which originally had a neutral expression, neither happy nor sad, had changed. The left corner of my lips had curled up into a sneer and with my right eyebrow raised. It looked as if it was challenging me. I stared at it wide-eyed, aghast. I was sure that I did not paint my portrait that way.

I wandered forwards, unable to stop myself. As my outstretched hand was about to touch the wet paint, I stopped. I stared into the deep brown orbs of the portrait's eyes which in this lighting, almost looked black. But as I was about to pull my hand away, another hand, not unlike my own, busted out from the canvas.

I let out a yelp, as it grabbed onto my right elbow and pulled me towards the portrait. Instinctively, I struggled to push away. But as much as I struggled, the hand was stronger.

As I planted my feet on the ground, hitting the hand with my free left hand, another hand popped out through the thin layer of fabric and enclosed it around my other hand. With a big tug, I felt myself fly forwards. I squeezed my eyes shut as my face was about to make contact with the canvas, but it never came. Instead, I felt the sensation of jumping off the high diving board at the public pool, when you are in between the board and water, the wind whipping your hair and the swooping feeling in your stomach. It was like I was falling into a dark void. At first, I was falling fast, then slower and slower. It was almost like I was in space until finally, I landed lightly on my back. I opened my eyes to see... nothing. Well not exactly nothing, darkness. Nothing but darkness. Slowly, I sat up and tried to figure out my surroundings; no success. My heart was pounding loudly, questions whirled around in my head. Where am I? Why am I here? Is this a dream? I cannot seem to get my head straight,

“Over here nitwit,” a sharp voice called out behind me. I whirled around to face the owner of the voice. I took a quick intake of breath. Right there, standing in front of me was... me? It was as if I was looking into a reflection. The only difference between the two of us were the facial expressions. With one of her dark eyebrows raised, eyes narrowed, and lips twisted into a wicked smile, was a look that has never nor would ever cross my face. Beneath all that was unmistakably a look of triumph.

My eyes widened, “Who... what are you?” I stammered, trying to get my head straight. She rolled her eyes.

“What do you expect me to say, that I’m a figment of your imagination? An invention of your brain? Some useless being that just looks like you, that doesn’t actually exist?”

“Maybe,” I said under my breath. Then louder, mustering all my courage I said, “Well then who are you?” She glared at me.

“You? Your reflection. There on anything and anywhere you are on. Mirrors, water, photos,” she paused, “Paintings...”

“W-well then,” I said stunned, “W-why am I here?”

“Why are you here?” she repeated, “Why are you here? Why for revenge of course,”

## **Watercolors by Victoria Wang**

“Excuse me?”

“The rules you have to follow on the other side, my side as you may call it. You are always on the other side of the reflection, doing whatever you want whilst I, as the reflection, am confined to the limits of the invisible wall separating the two sides. Well guess what, I am sick and tired of it!” she ranted, throwing her hands up in exasperation.

“Well then why don’t you leave?” She pursed her lips, face scrunched up as if explaining something to a thickheaded baby. Then she relaxed it, her facial expressions returning to that horrid sneer.

“Not very bright, are you? Only one of us can be on, as you might call it, your side, so long as you stay on this side...” My eyes widened as realization dawned on me.

“Then you can be on the other.”

“There you go, see how you like it here for a change. Now, I’d hate to dawdle so good luck with spending the rest of your life in this!” she cackled. There was a loud crack in the air, and she was gone. I spun around, feeling helpless. Then suddenly, the place brightened, and I was standing in a bright white room. I nearly gasped as I saw a blank canvas set up on a stand merely five feet away. I slowly shuffled over, unsure of what I would find. As I came closer, I found myself staring through what resembled a window. In front of me was my reflection rummaging through my desk, pulling out the paints and brushes which I had just put away a couple minutes ago. That’s when I heard a door open from far away.

“Eve?” A voice called out from upstairs. Alex, I widened my eyes in realization. She – or should I say, my reflection, smirked. “Eve! Where are you?!”

“No!” I screamed, but my voice was stifled. I hit my hands against the invisible wall between the canvas and the rest of the world. “Don’t come down! Get help!” But it seemed as if only she could hear me.

“Over here!” she said. I heard Alex’s footsteps walk towards the door. Just before the door burst open she drew a fine veil as if from nowhere and used it to cover the canvas, leaving my point of view blurred and obscuring me from Alex’s view.

“Oh, there you are,” Alex said, relieved. Embracing her in what seemed like a hug, he caught sight of me, or rather my portrait. “What’s that?” he asked, pointing at me. The reflection smiled brightly.

“Just some experiment. I’m starting to paint people. In fact, why don’t I paint you?” Alex shrugged.

“Okay?”

“No! Alex don’t! Don’t trust her!” I screeched and I shouted for what seemed like hours, until my voice was hoarse. But he didn’t even flinch, he just smiled and took out his books, flipping through the pages. She laughed, as if I said something funny, which caused Alex to raise his head.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Oh nothing,” she said. Alex turned back to his notes. She turned to face me and our eyes met for a moment, a smirk still playing on her lips, her eyes dark and dangerous.

I slammed myself at the invisible wall, my hands banging at the surface, but they did not hear me. I watched helplessly as they finished their work, but as they were about to leave, she picked up my palette of watercolors. She whispered something to him which I could not hear. I tried to read her lips, only getting a couple of disconnected words out of it.

Paint, you, and now. I screamed, hot tears streaking down my face, I screamed, and I screamed, but I was too late. I heard a shuffle behind me, and I turned to see who it was: Alex. His eyes wide, his whole body shaking, he uttered three words.

“Where am I?” ◆

## **Junior Short Story: Honourable Mention**

by Emma Hong

### **The Girl Who Visits Dreams**

My eyes sting as soon as I open them. I instantly recognize the familiar swirls of greys, greens, and blues. The low hills blooming with rice flowers and tiny figures of sheep grazing further away.

This is my third time visiting this dream. It always starts with the same placid pastoral scenery, but this time, I see a girl laying amongst the white flowers. Her long black hair is entangled with the grass and fog. The scenery isn't the only thing I recognize.

I could see others' dreams at a young age. I usually visited dreams of the oppressed and those suffering. Granny Lee said there is a reason the heavens have gifted us with this ability and talent. But when I was little I would see trivial dreams like that of Mrs Kang. She dreamt of throwing her cheating husband off a roof (I sent granny to give her some fruit).

Yet as I grew up I saw the dreams of those from around the world. Those who are running for their lives, fighting wars, struggling due to poverty, escaping abusive parents and other kinds of sufferings were present in my dreams.

At first I was overjoyed that I graduated from throwing-cheating-husbands dreams but I soon came to understand that I could only see the affliction of others. I was powerless in terms of actually helping them. I couldn't fly to Yemen or end wars.

Seeing my deflated face, Granny tried her best to encourage me with heartfelt words.

"Aislin, the key is to never get despondent, but to use the source of your discouragement to fuel your motivation" she said. But my growing feeling of impotence and powerlessness eventually stopped me from seeing dreams. That is, until recently.

I saw this girl many times at school. She was quiet and reticent, so I never got the chance to talk to her or even know her name. But I remember the boys going crazy over her sweet and angelic face.

I stare at her for some time but she remains unmoving under the clouds. Seeing that the girl won't open her eyes, I wander around and wonder why I'm in this peculiar dream.

Then all of a sudden, everything goes black.

When I regain my consciousness I realize that I'm in a forest with the same pale colours from the hills. As I look around, I see a strange looking creature that has the appearance of a deer but azure and with an elephant's trunk. The creature looks back at me and starts trotting away. Without thinking I follow it deeper into the forest.

The forest is just as tranquil as the hills. Maybe the gods have gifted me with this dream for a change. I lose sight of the blue creature, but I notice that the forest is filled with all sorts of strange but fascinating animals. I spot a rabbit with six legs, fat round bees with wings the colours of the rainbow, a herd of horse-like caterpillars, and best of all, a flying tiger with black and pink stripes. The girl must have a pleasant life to dream these kinds of dreams.

No one at school knows that I can visit the dreams of others. It's not really a secret or anything, but I find it embarrassing. After all, what's the use of visiting dreams when observing is all you can do? It's basically the same as watching the news in first person.

Not only is the forest filled with odd creatures, it's profuse with plants that cannot be found in botanical books. I walk past ferns the size of high-rise apartments, flowers that change colours, neon mushrooms, and trees with pure white trunks.

As I walk further and further into the forest, I see stranger and stranger things. The once calm forest is now replaced with a dark and gloomy atmosphere. It's almost as if the dream is warning me from going any further. The exact moment the thought crosses my mind, something big and furry crashes into me and I'm once again in a world of black. When I wake up I'm still surrounded in darkness but I hear faint voices and snippets of a conversation.

“—she should have protected herself.”

“I knew that face was hiding secrets.”

“We cannot take further action without proof...”

## ***The Girl Who Visits Dreams* by Emma Hong**

I then feel a sear of hot humiliation that is not coming from me.

The girl appears out of nowhere and the blackness slowly melts into a dim and unlit room. The room is stuffy and smells of Pacs Detergent. The only bright object is the girl's white dress.

I now know why this dream felt unusual. I usually see dreams in the first person perspective, but as of now I am observing as the third person! Before I could congratulate myself for this discovery, I moved again but in a different place in the same room. When I look down I'm wearing the girl's white dress.

I'm trembling uncontrollably and it feels like a boulder is dancing in my stomach. I realize that someone is gripping my wrists tightly.

A man.

I scream but a creature nestles into my throat, blocking the airway.

His face is that of whom I – no, whom the girl trusts. Relief and confusion seep into me. His face is constantly changing into the policeman who's a regular at the coffee shop, my uncle, my dad, my teacher, a classmate, the neighbour who always mows the lawn on Sunday, and the grocery store man.

Before I know it the scene changes once again, now into a courtroom. I just want to go home. No one is taking my side. Not even my mom. Not even my sisters. The judge opens her mouth.

“This man is a brilliant man. We cannot ruin his life and destroy his family just because of a one-time mistake.”

What about my life?

Doesn't my life matter too?

Sunlight is streaming through the crack of my blinds when I open my eyes. I look down and I'm clad in my blue and white pyjamas and not a white dress.

***The Girl Who Visits Dreams* by Emma Hong**

Then everything hits me.

While I was stupidly drowning in self-pity, this girl was fighting a battle all on her own.

She's not on the other side of the globe. She's right here a few blocks away.

I can help her.

I have to help her. ◆

# **Senior Short Story**

# Senior Short Story: First Prize

by Akash Ranu

## Saudade

A deep emotional state of nostalgic or profound melancholic longing for an absent something or someone that one cares for and/or loves.

ooooo

The couple get into the car, the pace of the world moving in slow motion, as they reach the hospital. It's so familiar to Sawyer that her heart hurts.

"Are you going to be okay?" he asks Sawyer, "do you want me to come with you?"

Sawyer shakes her head. "No. I'm fine, but thank you," she says. "I've needed this closure for a while, I think." Turning to her boyfriend, she asks, "Is it okay if I go up by myself? I just... need to talk to him alone."

Her boyfriend nods, leaning his head out to reach his hand out to her shoulder.

She doesn't say anything, because she doesn't want to start crying, and she's sure that if she says anything it'll only be followed by tears.

The walk to the hospital room is excruciatingly difficult. She has to stop a few times, and lean against the wall, before she reaches the door. When she opens it, it's empty of any visitors, and she realizes that his family must have cleared out to give her space.

He hasn't changed, and Sawyer is so startled for a second she has to compose herself to catch her breath. He's still the seventeen year old boy that she fell in love with. And for this moment, out of selfishness and wish fulfillment, she lets it be just that. He's not lying down, unconscious in a hospital bed, and she's not seeing someone else in college. They're both seventeen, at the beach, on the porch, in the car, in each other's arms—they're both seventeen and everywhere.

You're staring at me like I'm made of glass, but I'm not.

It seems as if all his quirks and crevices have been preserved, and this is just a model of him. The way his eyelashes brush against his cheeks. The way his lips seem to curl upwards

## **Saudade by Akash Ranu**

even if he's not trying to smile. There's this sort of timelessness to him. It's just all him, and it hits her hard.

This is why she's avoided coming here for the past three years. Sometimes out of guilt. Sometimes out of selfishness. She had moved on with her life, without him. She had gone to college, and had fallen in love again. In a way, she's always assumed that he would come back to her. Although artificial, his heart has been beating for the last three years.

Her hand unconsciously gravitates towards him. She runs her hand through his hair, and trails down until she's stroking his cheek. These gestures feel so easy, like *deja vu*. Maybe her mind has forgotten what it feels like to be with him, but her body hasn't. Muscle memory. It's such a familiar feeling that nostalgia crashes against her ribs, again and again until she's sure that they're about to crack wide open.

She wishes that he could see her now. How much happier she is.

She had prepared this conversation for years, ever since the night that he told her he was dying. She knew that someday, they would have their last conversation. She had thought of a thousand ways to start. Sometimes, she planned to watch a movie, or maybe just lay in each other's arms in comfortable silence. Something romantic.

There's nothing romantic about this.

"Hi Parker," she starts nonetheless. She smiles at him, because he would have wanted to see her smile. "I know I haven't visited you in a while, but I hope coming here today will make up for that." Pausing, she gets up from her chair, and sits down on the end of his bed.

"Um, I got my hair dyed yesterday. I'm a redhead now, see?" Running her hands through her shoulder length hair, she hooks a tendril of it behind her ear. "I know what you're thinking. I'm still not huge on radical changes, but I just did it on a whim. I think it looks okay."

Letting out a shaky laugh, she groans. "God, I'm so horrible. I'm literally just rambling on about my hair." She sighs. "I don't even know what to say or how to start."

"I guess I should tell you that I have a boyfriend. His name is Blake. I know, what a boring

classic, right? We met the first week of freshman year, and we were good friends until we started dating. He actually asked me out a week later, but I told him that I didn't want to. And still, he stayed friends with me for months, almost a year. But I had feelings for him too, you know? I think I just needed some time to let my walls down. And then one day again, I realized I was in love with him." She sighs. "I wish I could have been able to do that with you. I wasted so much time, so much time on being selfish and horrible. I've been thinking for the last three years, if only, if only, you know? If only had I let you in quicker? If only I could have come to California quicker..." She chokes on her voice.

"I think I'm supposed to apologize for moving on without you," she says softly, "but I don't think I can. Because Blake makes me happy, Park, and I think you would want that for me too."

She brushes a strand of hair off his forehead to the side. "I never wanted to move on, and I still don't know if doing this is the right thing. That summer, I couldn't imagine the notion of me being with anyone else other than you. Because you mean the world to me, Park. Even now, I can't imagine being with anyone else, but it somehow works with Blake."

She wants to tell him that for the first few months, all she did was call him. Listen to the monotonous ringing tone, until his voicemail would pick up. She never cried, though. She had just felt numb, almost as if her body was refusing to believe that the boy she had spent almost every day of summer falling in love with was gone. She feels tears on her cheeks but doesn't bother to wipe them. "I honestly think, there is not a thing in this world I wouldn't sacrifice to be able to talk to you again. You were my best friend, and the first person I loved. And God, Park, I wanted you to be my last more than anything."

She tries to find a sign that her Park is there somewhere. That he's just sleeping, that he can hear her.

I don't know about you, but me? I'm going to fight. Fight like hell.

"I actually taught Blake how to deal with my panic attacks. I don't get them often anymore, but I do, occasionally."

She remembers that time in the car, when she broke down in front of Park, and he held her in his lap and grasped onto her tightly until she could feel again. How she fell asleep in

## **Saudade by Akash Ranu**

his arms, against the curve of his neck. You're not the only one with panic attacks, he had smiled wryly.

"You taught me how to be okay with myself. Make me feel less small, more worthy, and that's more than anyone has ever done for me. You taught me that I don't need to be close to someone to help them."

They sit in silence for a while, until she finds the courage to speak.

"I don't know how to let you go," she says, her voice breaking.

She can't form words in her mouth for a while, because she's sobbing, holding onto his waist, his face, his hand, his arm. She cries without holding back, soundlessly, until his clothes are all wet.

"I want you to know that no matter where I am, no matter how old I am, no matter what I'm doing, I will always, always love you. There is this part of my heart that only ever beats for you. And for as long as I live, for as long as I remember you, that part will belong to you. Forever. I just want you to know that."

She sighs, her chest suddenly having this empty feeling when she tells him that. She's kept it in her for so long, and she realizes it carried a heavier weight than she thought it would.

"I'm going to go, because I'm sure other people want to talk to you before they let you go." She gets up, and kisses him on the forehead, then realizing that she's thought of a thousand ways to start this conversation, but none to end it.

She can't get herself to say goodbye, so she just says, "I'll see you later."

Just like she has a thousand times.

And she really hopes that she will. ◆

## Senior Short Story: Second Prize

by Yue Chen

### An Attempt At Building a Coffin for Ma

Ma died, so Bo dragged an axe up the mountain.

It was the 10th of October. It was also Bo's fifth birthday. Ma would usually dance around their red-dirt stove and cook up a shiny blue duck egg just for the occasion. But that 10th of October, Ma lay on a straw mat, very still, very quiet, and very pale.

Granny had clutched Bo's shoulders with her withered hands very tightly. She was not Bo's actual granny, but he called her Granny anyway.

"Your Ma's going on a trip to heaven," Granny said. "Don't be too sad. It's a good place..."

"Is it free?"

"Excuse me, sonny?" Granny was not expecting that question.

"The trip to heaven, is it free?" Trips cost money, which Ma and Bo didn't have.

She sighed and nodded.

"Can Ma take me with her then?" After a moment, Bo added, "It's my birthday."

Granny shook her head.

"Will... she come back?"

She shook her head again.

Then people came, from all over the village. Granny joined their discussion of who would feed Bo in the future and who would pay for the coffin and the burial ground and the paper money that needed to be burnt... Bo learned that it was awfully expensive to die. He thought he would never try it.

"The child has no living relatives! We, as respectable neighbours, must help—"

"We aren't obliged to pay a penny!"

## **An Attempt At Building a Coffin for Ma by Yue Chen**

“Yes, just wrap her up with the mat, dig a ditch, and get it over with!”

There was too much yelling, typical for adults. So Bo trudged out of the hut and into the chilly sunlight. Suddenly, he was very sad. He imagined Ma, in a ditch and rolled up in the half of a straw mat they had, her feet sticking out on one side and the top of her head out the other.

Bo decided then, that he must chop down a tree to build Ma a comfortable coffin.

Therefore, on that particular 10th of October, under a cloudless autumn sky, Bo dragged an axe up the big mountain that was behind their hut, upon which stood a big forest.

The axe was so heavy that it hurt his arms, but Bo kept going. He kept searching for the perfect tree. This one was too thin, and that one too crooked... There! He finally found one that appeared just right.

“Hello, sir,” Bo bowed to the tree.

“Hello,” the tree nodded its golden leaves in greeting. It was big and tall and straight, with a swirling pattern in its bark. Ma’s favourite tree was the violet sandalwood, which she said was noble and beautiful. This tree looked noble and beautiful.

“Sir, do you happen to be a violet sandalwood?” Bo asked.

“No,” the tree said. “I am a tree.”

“I know. That’s why I asked you if you are a violet sandalwood. If you are a mushroom, I wouldn’t have asked in the first place. So are you a violet sandalwood?”

The tree digested the information. “A violet sandalwood... is a tree?”

“Yes.”

“If a violet sandalwood is a tree, and I am also a tree...” A few leaves tumbled down. The tree must be thinking really hard. “Then yes, I must be a violet sandalwood.”

Something seemed off, but Bo did not question the tree. If it identified as a violet

***An Attempt At Building a Coffin for Ma by Yue Chen***

sandalwood, then it was a violet sandalwood.

“Master Violet Sandalwood, can I chop you down?” he asked. “I need your wood to build a coffin, as I am too poor to buy one.”

A pause. Bo added. “Please, and thank you.”

The tree considered this. “I suppose...”

“Hold on! Hold on!” A chipmunk popped out of the undergrowth, screeching so hard that nuts discharged from its mouth like bullets and straight into Bo’s face.

“Ouch!” He dropped the axe and took cover behind it.

The chipmunk ignored Bo and hopped up the tree. “Mind you, I am gone for one moment! How hard is it to not request someone to chop you up in one moment?”

“You were gone for... lots and lots of one moments,” the tree mumbled.

“That is not the point, mossy-brained lump! I’ve weeded you for my whole life, and what do I get? Not a word of consultation before you casually offered up your entire physical existence to a two-legged stranger!” The chipmunk’s fur stuck out in a furry explosion of fury. “And you, human! Every day, countless innocent trees who could have enjoyed long, happy lives had to die because of your greedy species, you tailless tree-murderer!”

“He’s not a tree-murderer.” The tree reminded the chipmunk. “He hasn’t murdered me yet.”

The chipmunk puffed out his cheek in an extraordinarily puffy fashion. “Tree-murderer-to-be, then!”

“He asked, and he said ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’” the tree said. “He is a very well-mannered tree-murderer-to-be if you ask me...”

“I didn’t ask you.” The chipmunk glared knives at the tree, or more fittingly, it glared little pine needles that were slightly prickly but mainly cute.

“I don’t mean to be a murderer...” Bo’s voice was small. He thought of Ma, in the winter,

## ***An Attempt At Building a Coffin for Ma* by Yue Chen**

thawing his frostbitten skin with her cozy hugs and lullabies, her voice like lard melting over steamed buns. He thought of her washing laundries in icy currents, her hands purple and cracked, to earn enough for a pot of hot mutton soup to heat Bo's stomach. She had always kept Bo warm. "I just want to keep Ma warm with a coffin. She would be very cold, being buried. And winter will come soon..."

The wind wept. Bo's cheeks felt hot and wet. Perhaps he was the one weeping.

The tree's branches swayed, nobly. "I've warmed woodpeckers and squirrels and chipmunks... I wouldn't mind warming your Ma too."

"But!" The chipmunk perked up. "But—"

"I've stood for a long, long time. I could do with lying down for a while."

The chipmunk stared at the tree. With every blink, its black eyes grew shinier.

"If that's what you want," it finally murmured, then began to scrutinize Bo up and down and around. "And how do you plan to take down a tree with those toothpick arms of yours?"

"By asking nicely...?"

"I didn't hear you ask." The chipmunk puffed up its chest.

Bo began again. "Master Violet Sandal—"

"I mean, ask me!" The chipmunk crossed its tiny paws. "I am the one who could truly help."

"Oh, uh... Master Chipmunk, can you help me?"

The chipmunk waited.

"Please, and thank you..." Bo added quickly. "Very, very much."

The chipmunk was pleased. It called up its beaver friends, who he bragged to be brave zoo-escapees. The beavers munched on the trunk with incredible gusto. A crash! The ground shook, and then, there was a log resting in front of Bo.

### ***An Attempt At Building a Coffin for Ma by Yue Chen***

The chipmunk called up other chipmunks, squirrels, badgers, moles... there were hundreds of them! A sea of fuzzy fur and shiny eyes helped Bo roll the log down the mountain. They sang songs about the forest and noble trees and how horribly loathsome foxes were. The log sang too, an earthly grumble. Even Bo chimed in. He got most lyrics wrong, but the tunes still tasted light and sweet on his tongue like a cloud containing a rainbow.

As the party reached the foot of the mountain, adult voices disrupted their chorus. The little creatures scattered instantly, leaving Bo alone with the log.

Someone had heard the clamour and informed the police.

Bo was questioned for involvement in illegal logging activities. He told them that the tree wanted to be Ma's coffin and fell willingly... They cut him off there.

In the end, they took the log.

They took Ma too, wrapped in a straw mat.

Bo sat very still and very pale beside his very quiet hut. Bitterness surged in his eyes. Singing echoed in his ears. Was it Ma, or the animals, or both? Tears burst out. He sobbed and howled and cried, a wordless, red-hot flood of grief and anger and helplessness.

Then, in the end, there was only sadness. Sadness, like the sky and Ma's lullabies, was very blue, very pure, and very vast. Its cold weight sat in his chest and trickled into his bones and soaked his marrow. In the end, Bo fell asleep in its boundless arms, feeling tiny, feeling like air, feeling like nothing at all. ◆

# Senior Short Story: Third Prize

by Carmen Campbell

## Separate Ways

“Seatbelts on.”

I glanced into the rearview mirror to make sure Maia and Dylan had heard me, which they clearly hadn't considering they were busily making out. I looked to the passenger seat for help, but Candace was staring absentmindedly out the window at the ocean.

“Cool,” I muttered under my breath as I put the car in drive. The motion of the car backing out of the parking spot seemed to bring everyone back to reality. Dylan broke away from Maia and tapped me on the shoulder. “Hey Stace, can we get McDonalds on the way back?”

“Only if you're paying for it.”

“Yeah, I could go for some nuggets right now,” Candace said wistfully.

We hit a speed bump. The sand in my sneakers rolled around, and I shifted uncomfortably in my wet bikini.

The four of us had left for vacation almost a week ago, and spent most of our time between the beach and the cabin doing absolutely nothing. While it was definitely relaxing, I had hoped to spend less of the trip third wheeling. At least I had Candace, even if she did seem kind of detached sometimes. Now here we were with only two days left. This trip was meant to be the best time of our lives, a final week together before we went our separate ways for university. And yet, I felt underwhelmed. Almost sad. I inhaled deeply, taking in the mixed smells of salt and tropical sunscreen, and turned the radio up.

Once we were back at the cabin and changed out of our soaking swimsuits, I pulled Candace and Maia aside. “Guys, we really need to talk.”

Maia's eyebrows shot up. “What's wrong?”

“Look,” I sighed, “I don't want you to take this the wrong way...”

She looked at me expectantly.

“We barely have any time left. And as much as I love hanging out with my brother, I was thinking we could do something tonight. Without Dylan.”

“Oh.”

“Honestly, I agree with Stacey,” Candace said, to my relief. “We need some girl time.”

I nodded, and Candace continued. “Actually, I have an idea. Everyone go get changed and meet me at the car in 10.”

Ten minutes later we were back in the car, with Candace at the wheel. She refused to tell us where we were headed. Outside, the sun was setting fast and the sky was a plume of purple, deepening towards night. The car took a sharp turn onto a winding dirt road that seemed to go on forever. By now, it was completely black outside. We reached a huge grassy clearing at the end of the road, and Candace parked the car. “We need to go on foot now,” she declared, and set off into the dark. Maia and I followed her uneasily down a flight of rickety wooden steps, stumbling every few seconds on the account that we could barely see a foot in front of us. I had an anxious feeling growing in the pit of my stomach, but I pushed it out of my mind. We were safe, and it was just a forest. We made it to the bottom of the stairs and I felt sand underneath my feet, still warm from the heat of the sun earlier that day. We were on a beach. A very, very secluded one.

Maia turned on her phone’s flashlight. “What are we doing here?” She frowned, looking as grumpy as she usually looked when she was away from my brother. Maia had changed a lot since they got together, and all my hopes for us to reconnect on this vacation went out the window when she invited him to come along.

Candace smiled excitedly. “Isn’t it cool? And no one is here!” She started unbuttoning her shirt.

“Whoa,” I exclaimed, “what are you doing?”

“Going swimming. Wanna come?”

“But we don’t have swimsuits with us.”

## **Separate Ways by Carmen Campbell**

She grinned, and slipped off her pants. Usually, I would have said no. I'm not known for being an adventurous person, and definitely not a risk taker, but this was a hail mary. I would do anything to get my best friend back, if only for a night.

"Come on, Maia. Please?"

"Fine." She got up and lifted her dress over her head, and we all made our way to the water. It was freezing, as expected. I could feel Maia's misery through her muffled complaints.

"Oh my god, guys, look up." Candace had her head tilted backwards and was staring into the sky. We all lifted our gaze. The velvety sky was covered in more stars than I had ever seen.

"Yeah," I whispered, "it's amazing."

"No," Candace said, "not that."

"What?"

"It's a moonless night."

I looked back up. "Oh, I didn't notice. Wow."

Meanwhile, Maia was making her way deeper and deeper into the ocean. I was only in up to my waist and already shivering, so I decided to take the plunge and get it over with. The icy water was a shock to my system, but I was flooded with warmth immediately after. I came back up to the surface, and noticed Candace staring at the still water as though she were in a trance. I swam over to her.

"Candace, what are you doing?"

She was running her fingers gently through the water, smiling down at them. I peered into the water, in awe with the unexpectedness of what I was seeing. Every time her hand moved through the water, little sparkles of white light would follow her fingers and trace her movements, leaving a trail of luminescent glow. It was impossible not to gasp at the whirlwinds of light enveloping her every movement.

“Phosphorescence,” she said slowly.

In the dark, there was no way Candace could have seen the confused grimace on my face.

“What the hell is that?”

“It’s like... plankton. It glows when the water is disturbed. I read about it, and it can only be seen on moonless nights.”

I scanned the sea, squinting, and was able to distinguish Maia a few feet away from me surrounded by the same shimmering lights. Diving back into the water, I began swimming towards her, but got distracted by something in the corner of my eye. It was glowing like the phosphorescence, but it was bigger and more beautiful. I let myself be drawn to it. As I waded towards the oscillating gleam, Maia called out to me. I couldn’t hear her. Once I got closer, I noticed radiant tendrils whipping and floating around it. Candace shouted at me.

“It’s okay,” I called back, “I just want to see what it is.”

There was a jolt of electricity, and then drowsy pain, and I stared down at the hot wound on my waist. Shock and fear paralyzed me, rendering my limbs useless in the cold water. I felt my head descend below the surface, the electric pulses still zipping through my body. I had turned inanimate and like lead, I was sinking fast. I landed with a thump, the distinct soft feeling of the grainy sea floor below my stiff back.

“Stacey!” Two voices were yelling, getting closer, but I couldn’t move. There was fire in my throat, fire on my legs, fire in my vision. All I could do was look up at the big white light, a moon on a moonless night. ◆

## Senior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Annie Huang

### The Everything Tree

Did you ever hear about that big old oak tree that has been sitting in Willow Ville for forever? Well, that is me. Ridiculous right? A talking oak tree that has been alive since... well, you get what I mean. People in this neighborhood call me the Everything Tree because I have seen everything that has happened here. The mayor even put a metal plaque in front of me, shiny with my name engraved on it. You could say I am quite a legend.

Over the years, I have grown to learn everyone's names and all the shops around here. I know everything that goes on. Until one winter evening, a moving truck comes along and stops in front of the empty blue house on the tall hill. Out comes a little boy, with his sister, their parents and a cute beagle. I watch them for a few hours as they unload the truck and move things into their new house. Well, I guess I have new names to learn now.

The next morning, when I wake up, the boy and his sister are already reading my plaque. "Wow," the boy said. "Let's climb it Alex!" the sister exclaimed. The kids love me. I mean, they all do of course. As they climb and swing on my big muscular branches, they laugh, and joke around. When their beagle comes out barking and wagging its tail, they climb back down and follow it back inside. There is something about how the little boy treated me. With utmost care and love that made me decide that this kid is a favourite and I am going to do whatever I can to keep him happy and watch over him with utmost care and love too.

Being a tree, standing here and in my case talking, is an important job. I like watching families change, how they spend their holidays and watching kids grow, learn, and have fun. I love observing Alex as he goes to school and plays with his sister everyday. I love seeing him so happy.

Winter turns to Spring and let me tell you, my neighborhood is not the same. I see workers digging. I wonder what they are adding. Maybe a new park! I would love to see that. I look around and there is a sign nailed to the fence of Alex's house. It says, "small dump". A dump? What is going to happen to this neighborhood? I am asking too many questions. I am the Everything tree. Aren't I supposed to know everything?

Weeks past and the dump is finished. Garbage trucks come and go to drop off trash.

I see Alex and his family looking out their window. I let out a sigh which just sounds like a deep moan in the wind. I watch as the sky begins to pile with smoke and the trash is being dropped off. It begins to rain.

It begins to rain, and I know the clouds are crying. I want to cry too, as raindrops trickle down my branches.

The raindrops are my tears too.

I swarm in sadness as months pass and the sky gets piled higher with smoke. The dump gets more filled. It is getting more difficult to see Alex's house from where I am standing. I still see Alex go to school, come home and spend time with his family. But it is not the same.

A few years have gone by now. It is Summer. Kids are playing, swimming in the pool, and Alex is now in high school. Ruby is off to college now. Kids, they grow up so fast, and me, well I still stand here, watching over everything. The dump is still standing too, although it is not used as much because the mayor built a garbage plant. Alex still comes to visit me. "You really last forever, don't you?" he tells me. He is right. I can survive everything. After all, I am the Everything Tree. As Willow Ville begins to change, both positively and negatively, I realized that care and love are what creates such a tight bond between Alex and I.

A bond so tight it cannot ever be broken. Ever.

I might have spoken too soon though because there is a new sign. This time nailed to my trunk. I cannot read it, so I wait till Alex comes to look that evening. He reads it and lets out a gasp. This cannot be good. He says they are cutting me down to make room for a new park in two weeks. Tears roll down his cheeks. I want to tell him that it is ok. But it is not, and soon I am crying too. I continue to do so as Alex slowly walks back to his house.

I have had a good life I suppose. I have watched kids grow up and move away, families celebrate and have fun together. I observed Alex as he grew up with his sister, climbed my muscular branches and watched over him with utmost care. Two weeks will fly, I know it. I start to count down the days I have left. I feel Alex's heart breaking.

So is mine.

## ***The Everything Tree* by Annie Huang**

14 days turn into 10, then 6 and finally the day has come. Alex came every one of those 14 days with his beagle. He would sit on my biggest branch and talk for a while. Then, he had come down, waved goodbye and went home with an expression filled with so much sadness it made my heart swell.

Hours pass today but no trucks, or saws or any scary machines. I start to wonder what is going on. Noon turns to sunset, then midnight and still a no-show. Hope begins to bud slowly in my chest, and I begin to wonder if they forgot about me.

Maybe I am staying. Maybe.

The next morning, the sign on my trunk is gone. Perhaps I am dreaming, I told myself. But then I realized that I am surely not because Alex comes running out and shouts when he notices that the sign is gone too.

Then it clicked. They never forgot about me. Alex was the one who stopped them from cutting me down. How? I really have no idea... but he saved my life. I probably will not be able to repay him ever, but at least I am still standing here, watching over him.

So that is how I stayed here. It has been another few years now and I heard that Alex is going to college soon. Even though he is all grown up, he still comes over to visit me occasionally. On the last day before heading to college, he climbs down from my branches after some time and reaches into his pocket. He takes out a piece of paper with some writing on it and places it gently on one of my branches. "Don't read it till I leave ok?" he says softly and waves at me one last time before heading home.

I miss him already.

I watch Alex as he loads his car with his belongings and drives off into the distance on this peaceful August morning. I look down at his letter and begin to read.

*Dear Everything Tree,*

*Time really flies. I still remember when I climbed your branches for the first time. You are an extraordinarily strong and beautiful tree. I will come back to visit soon.*

*I will never forget you, so do not forget me either.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alex*

Do not worry Alex, I will never forget you.

I will always remember,

I promise. ◆

## Senior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Rena Su

### Citylights

Summertime at thirteen was the best. Nights consisted of my brother Gavin and me in the middle of a paved road out in the country, lying on the back of his newly acquired pickup truck.

We'd stare up at the sky and blast out rock songs from the '70s.

Gavin was three years older than me, had a driver's license, and thoroughly enjoyed pointing it out. He never did it in a menacing way, but he simply liked talking about his future. "I wanna go to college already," he'd say out of the blue.

"Why?" I didn't know why he wanted to leave the town behind, why he would look so far down in the future, why he never quite thought of this quiet town in the British Columbia interior as his home.

"Maybe I'll just leave," he told me. "For a change."

"Everything is so nice here though."

Gavin smiled. "Change is nice too, y'know?"

"What? Are you just going to leave me behind?"

"Maybe only for a little bit—just to see what's out there."

"I'm gonna miss you," I told him.

"Maybe I'll go to New York?"

"Then," I paused, "maybe I'll go to New York too."

"And we can play Led Zeppelin in Central Park. Or... eat Manhattan Clam Chowder by Union Square."

"Getting specific, aren't we?" I grinned as I teased him. "You don't even know if it's gonna happen."

Gavin smiled and sat up. “Hey... don’t say that!”

I crossed my arms and smirked. “I’m gonna make it happen, no matter what it takes.”

“Promise?” Gavin asked after a noticeable silence. I must’ve taken Gavin by surprise. I shook his hand.

“Promise.”

And there we were—midsummer, in the middle of nowhere-in-particular, BC, on an unmarked road making schemes to end up in New York. I wasn’t sure if it was a joke or not, but part of me truly wanted it to happen.

\*\*\*

Then it came crashing down. A single pitcher full of water. All shattered onto the ground. Gavin was never a clumsy person but the split second he walked towards the dinner table seemed to linger. His hands almost seemed like they weren’t his anymore, as the glassware slid out. My dad glanced away from his placemat on the checkerboard tablecloth and my mother sighed. I brushed it off.

The bumps, bruises, and drops of handheld objects only got worse.

Once, it was a basket of blueberries, next an electric drill.

My parents ended up taking him to the local clinic to get answers. The doctors only told him it may be a side effect of his growth spurts or stress, and reminded him to keep his sleep habits in check. None of it helped. His clumsiness only got worse.

We left him alone but a seizure became the last straw.

My parents decided to drive two hours and take him to a hospital in the city and prayed for a diagnosis, an answer. Something that would put a label to Gavin’s struggles. We wanted a disease name that we could search on the internet for information and a cure.

Gavin ended up phoning me during the middle of the school day a month later. “I just got my diagnosis back.”

## **Citylights by Rena Su**

The word diagnosis shook through my body. “That’s good news... right?”

“No,” Gavin replied. He sighed, quietly.

“What’s wrong?” I felt dread rising within me—sweat that seemed to leak out into my palms.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen to me.” He stopped for a moment. “Actually... I do. But I — I.”

“You what?”

“I don’t want to believe it.”

We spent an hour on the phone. Gavin told me about his Juvenile Huntington’s disease and how it was only going to be getting worse. How it’s a degenerative disorder so it would all go downhill. How it takes away mobility and memories. How he feared for the future for the first time ever, in the case that he even had one at all.

The day before, I didn’t even know what Huntington’s was. Now, the bright afternoon sun seemed to be out of place. I didn’t know what to expect.

I hung up the phone reluctantly, as the last thing I wanted was for him to be alone. I took my laptop out of my backpack and began to search. ‘What is Huntington’s disease?’ Search. Huntington’s is a degenerative disorder that causes uncontrolled movements, mood swings, loss of cognition. ‘Is there a cure to Huntington’s disease?’ Search. No. No, there isn’t. ‘How long are you expected to live with Juvenile Huntington’s?’ Search. Fifteen years.

I stopped after the last search. And I cried.

The rest of the school day, I sat in the stall of the girls’ washroom. I stopped crying a while after; numb. Yet, I couldn’t stop thinking. I stared at the tiled floor and clawed at my hair.

Gavin was my big brother and my inspiration. He was the one who was supposed to buy me milkshakes and write me postcards from New York.

When I returned home, I hugged Gavin tight. I didn't want to let go of him, since it felt like I would lose him if I did. He wrapped his sweater-covered arms around me and we stayed like that for what seemed like a benevolent eternity.

"I wanna get out of here," he told me. "To leave and go somewhere far away... anywhere that isn't this."

"Stay," I told him. "I'll stay with you."

It was then that I realized he wasn't joking about our promise.

\*\*\*

I got accepted to Barnard College during my senior year. It was as I had wished—right in the middle of New York, but I stared at the acceptance letter as if it were for a stranger. I didn't know whether I should go, or whether I regretted applying.

Gavin got progressively worse. He became wheelchair-bound and it became difficult for him to talk. He was losing cognition and seemed to forget more as time went on.

I didn't tell Gavin about Barnard but my parents told me to go. That his dream was also mine. That I should be living for myself, that I should party or dance or go to bars or whatever it is that young adults do these days for escapism.

I did.

\*\*\*

I returned to my lonely town the following summer, opting to leave concrete high rises and return to evergreen forests and blueberry fields. The farm seemed stagnant when I returned, as if it remained a constant in the sleepy town. I had become used to New York with its skyline and people that never quite remained the same.

My parents had decided to sell Gavin's pickup truck, knowing full well that he would never be able to drive it again.

## **Citylights by Rena Su**

As a result, I took mom's Volkswagen instead.

I drove Gavin to look at the stars that night, just like so many years ago. Now I had a driver's license and a life outside of this small town. I had roommates in New York and a biochemistry lab project and open mics to read slam poetry at.

But I felt the same. I was the same person, and so was Gavin.

This was us, under the stars, just like our childhood summers.

"It's been... a while," Gavin mumbled.

"I know," I told him.

I looked to Gavin instead of the skies. It was us two in the open. The silence was covered by only the wind. "I miss this."

I nodded. I remembered the past. Gavin before his Huntington's, me before college, just us two as kids and without any worries in the world. Back then, the stars looked empty. As if we could paint within the gaps of the universe.

But now, the darkness simply feels alone.

Two young people underneath the vastness of the universe, with fate barely in our hands.

"I'm gonna miss this," I told him.

Sometime in the future, I will be watching these stars alone. I will barely see them when the citylights crowd around them in New York. ◆

# **Junior Poetry**

## Junior Poetry: First Prize

by Gurleena Sukhija

### Grow Up

I think about the inevitability  
Of dalmatian spots and paper skin  
I think about how rude it is  
to ask a flower to wilt when it has barely bloomed

The sun did not start bleeding yellow yesterday  
Nor the day before  
And it will not stop tomorrow  
Nor the day after

How rude you are, I tell Life,  
To tell me to stop breathing at around eighty-four  
When I've barely had enough time to go blind  
And enjoy World Peace

Grow up, someone told me once  
A sharpness in her tone that told me she was a force to be reckoned with  
Grow up, she said again. And do it quickly.  
Yes, I said. You are right, I said.

I tried, I told her a few days later,  
But I couldn't stop dancing  
The rain pitter pattered outside  
Beating in sync with my heart  
Nobody was home  
And I was barefoot  
And my goodness, I couldn't stop dancing

I will paint the galaxy on my body  
And sketch the sky into my hair

And only children will tell you, with a finger to their lips  
That the only way to paint every star before you die  
Is to not die at all

So may I request of you kindly  
With a please and a thank you  
To allow me to sit with my flowers for eternity  
Because we refuse to wilt

## Junior Poetry: Second Prize

by Alyana Amadeo

### Assimilation

1867 the year a nation will be “founded”

Country bounded by the people exploited with morals unanimously doubted

But bless those Europeans for saving the savages

Generations irreversibly whitewashed from their damages

Think of an ideal nation;

If you picture 50 shades of white for our population, the indigenous clearly aren't the ones who  
need an education.

If great minds think alike, then fools rarely differ

Your ideal Canada would be foolish, I can't help but snicker.

I know English has changed quite a bit so let me give a quick lesson in grammar,

“Unity” and “homogeneity” are synonymous in no manner

A population of humans cannot fall into a mold, a child who does whatever they're told isn't  
living, it's being controlled

You'll never have your perfect society, attempts to rid of variety will be in vain when all you've  
done is create broken families filled with resentment and anxiety

Maybe even break some people's sobriety.

A solely like-minded country, how could one see the faults of a nation when everyone is a  
cultivated replication of your creation

What furthers us in civilizations to continue to evolve with new innovations

Is difference in mind, life and uniqueness of living as an individual, not as imitations

New perspectives brought to the table can't be brushed by your ignorant ideas of superiority

The validity of a person shouldn't come from their appearance or their state of authority.

Assimilation of culture is a type of murder, killing years of language, fashion, beliefs, and values  
as if it were a disorder

People who are different does not equate to being lesser

Trying to fix problems that don't exist to create benefits and opportunities to exploit just makes  
you more of an aggressor

Assimilating a culture you deem inferior is not preventing the coexistence of cultures,  
the idea of anything else may seem inedible, but really it's postponing the diverse inevitable.

## Junior Poetry: Third Prize

by Richard Su

### Hirosaki Castle

Cherry blossoms flow  
                  into the midnight sky,  
Steadily, they vanish  
                  into the unknown

Lanterns lit, illuminating  
                  each murky corner  
Hung onto oak twigs

The petals fall like shooting stars  
                  as I attempt to form  
Constellations with my  
                  worn out eyes

## **Junior Poetry: Honourable Mention**

by Khushi Cheema

### **Rabbit Hole**

The little girl could not sleep  
Because the flame blew out  
And she had no more sheep to count  
She started to weep  
Letting her mind spiral deep  
To distract her from what was hiding in the darkness  
But she started to remember every nightmare and all her bad dreams  
Her body no longer had control  
Her Cinderella eyes grew wide, her face became stone and her heart started to thump  
As her mind started to twirl down the Rabbit Hole  
Her fears dragged her down  
She lost herself to her thoughts  
Her mind walked into a trap where devils danced, and monsters marched  
The little girl is stuck and can't climb out of the Rabbit Hole

## Junior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Leigh Kathryn Baculi

### SKIN

Their skin is not a weapon, break down those walls.  
Her hijab's not a cover to hide terroristic bombs.  
We are not a virus, we are not a plague.  
Racism can't be justified.  
Hell no, no, no way.  
If you call this democracy, I call it hypocrisy.  
Whatever your opinions are, I'll still say what I say.  
"I can't breathe." His neck under your knee.  
Skittles aren't weapons, what can't you see?  
"I don't have a gun." You still shot him twice.  
No apology said will be enough or suffice.  
"All because Ling Ling had to eat a bat."  
Racism never left, it's being filmed and that's a fact.  
"I can't breathe," "Hands up or I'll shoot."  
You can't silence our voices, you can't just press mute.  
You swore to protect us and yet your actions say otherwise.  
How many times do we need to protest, expose all your lies?  
Don't hide behind your badge, don't say it was their fault.  
ACAB, take it with a grain of salt.  
It doesn't mean if you're white, life was handed on a platter.  
We're just asking for you to realize that Black Lives Matter.  
You know, all your life you've had countless rights.  
From a country built by slaves, it's not a pretty sight.  
Let's talk about racism and not hear that pointless chatter  
Nothing will be acknowledged until Black Lives Matter.

# **Senior Poetry**

## Senior Poetry: First Prize

by Maggie Lu

### Plum Tea

Her voice, gently rattling  
like a bamboo thicket in the breeze—  
greet me as I step over the threshold.

“Xiang si ni le:”  
“I’ve missed you to death.”

Silver tresses gathered  
cautiously atop her head  
are a silk cocoon,  
washed gold by the stroke of evening’s hue.

Six years crept, patiently by,  
last I’ve glimpsed Great Aunt—  
last I’ve trod into the foreign embrace  
of my familial homeland.

I watch as her weathered fingers stir  
sweet plum tea—  
tendrils of steam take flight, marrying aromas  
of millennia-steeped tradition  
dancing above blackened stovetops.

Lambent shadows paint over cracks  
in the ashen walls. Our words blend,  
ringing, singing, melting

into the midsummer heat,  
scattered amongst dusk's slipping embers.

Into my palm she presses, as I step beneath the stars,  
a jar of twilight-tinted drupes. Dark plums plucked  
for late night brews:  
“Now, bao bei, you may make your own.”

Tiled rooftops and dusty orchards  
dissolve as my cab pulls ever closer to the  
eerie glow of skyscrapers – concrete barbs:  
the spine of an industrial dragon  
slumbering over the horizon.

Billboards begin their race before my weary eyes,  
offering tea-scented soaps and prune-flavoured gums.  
Neon lights and alien sights;  
my gaze wanders back to Great Aunt's plums,  
like a traveler returning  
to a distant home.

## Senior Poetry: Second Prize

by Ava Popowitz

### Ode to the Window

To the window,  
your delight of daydreamers  
knight of gleaming armour  
who shields us from the weather's cruelty,  
but while awakening the beauty of the outside world.  
gleaming pond,  
our skates of curiosity  
scrape along your pearly paths of pristine ice,  
as you lead us through your mountain ranges  
of dappled sunshine and clouds.  
Oh enchanting portal,  
you whisk us away from our wild lives,  
into your whirls of whimsy  
across forests and cities in the sky.  
spontaneous artist,  
you stylistically take us  
to new idyllic locations  
with each fresh bubbling wave  
of your emotion.  
resourceful poet,  
musician of atmospheres,  
sculptor of seasons,  
advocate of the world's stillness,

***Ode to the Window* by Ava Popowitz**

your fingers carefully smooth  
the moments right before us that we might ignore  
into assimilating compositions.  
Clever dancer,  
with a whisper that brushes by our ears on the cool breeze,  
you bypass our bustling natures  
dressed in your gown of elegant mystique,  
and you draw our reflections into your dance  
which unites reminiscence with aspirations  
and ties it all in the silver bow of the present,  
the beautiful picturesque breath  
of seeing the world through your view.

# Senior Poetry: Third Prize

by Yana Fershstein

## Overthinker

lobotomize me.  
silence my mind;  
scorching sun evaporate my stream of consciousness.  
drown my hippocampus in the rain.  
let every train of thought barreling through my brain derail in one final glorious explosion!  
though “thought” is far too soft a word for these machines;  
these conscious nightmares they call intellect.  
they screech and chug, chug, chug, all day and night,  
and billow out words and words and endless words,  
and scream under the guise of mindful rationality!  
please.  
let the violence between my temples become still.  
let the void caress my skull.  
let it lull me to sleep.  
let me rest...

## Senior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Audrey Kemp

### Quick Fixes

The buttercup army conquered our lawn  
Small petals of burn-your-eyes-out yellow  
Converging in a masterpiece: an eye-sore.  
My dad gave me the yard's waste bin, and said:  
"Pluck off all of their heads. That'll do the trick."  
I beheaded them with a vicious vengeance  
Ground them with my nails until they bled ink  
The yard was green again, for a while.

When the marsh in my room turned into a swamp,  
I moved the clothes off from the floor and into the hall.  
The books and papers and trash and crushed dreams  
All found a new home in the depths of my closet.  
They fit nicely, with a good shove.  
I even vacuumed, around the carpet, but not under.  
It did the job, and the room was clean  
For a while.

This taught me a trick, prepared me for life  
Knowing if one day my tears welled up in hordes  
If they battered on closed doors,  
Begging to spill out  
I'd hold them in  
I'd stifle them, shackle them down  
Sweep them under the rug, out of sight  
Out of mind—  
With faith they'd be gone for a while.

# Senior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Muskan Poddar

## Astronomical Alliteration

Astronauts accelerate across atmospheres  
Blast-off backfires; BOOM! you'll hear  
Cluster of craters 'cross the cosmos  
Destroyed by detonations, detected and disclosed

Eclipses emanate tenebrosity to Earth  
Faraway formations found firstly on the fourth  
Gravity in galaxies guarantee guard  
Habitation holds hassles, hollow holes in the stars

Inquire infinite impossibilities  
Jaunting in July calls for joyous jamborees  
Kepler called Copernicus all correctly  
Lunar landings were a lie – laughable theory

Math measures metrics, Mercury to Mars  
Never noticed Neptune is notably far  
Orbiting orderly, observing our own selves  
Part-time planet Pluto put upon the shelf

Questionable quests to queer quaint places  
Radiant rockets revolve 'round in races  
Stellar supernovas, spectacular sights  
Sun's summer solstice seen by satellites

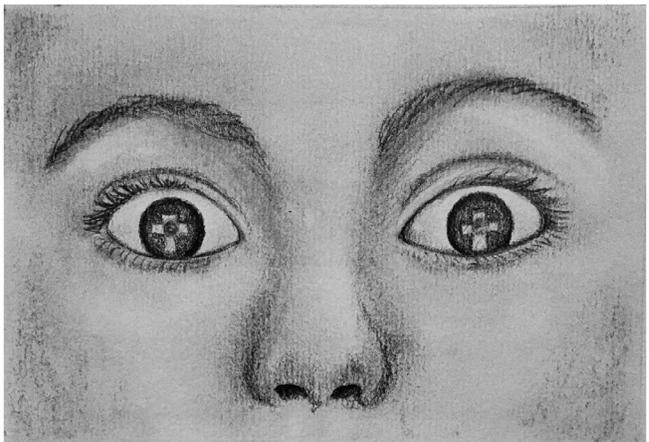
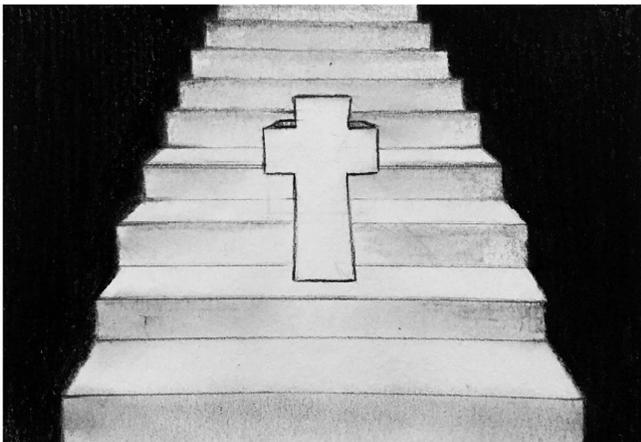
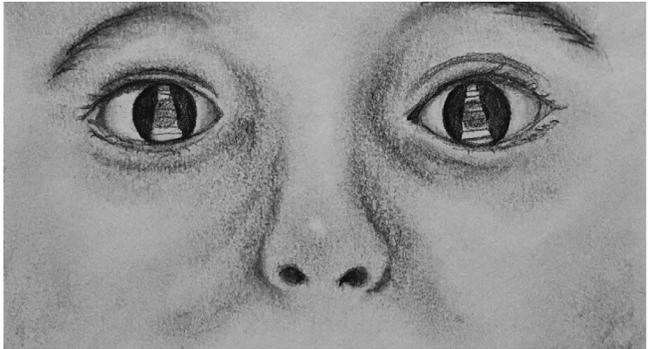
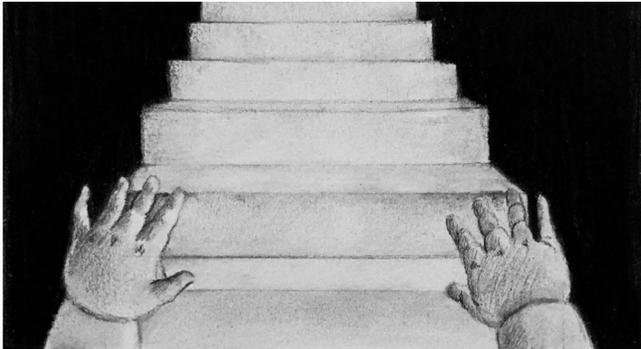
Shooting stars in space's solar systems, speeding  
Telescopes tell timeless tales and readings  
Universes undoubtedly are unforeseen  
Visionaries venture through vacuums in dreams

Wormholes warping the wonders of time  
Xenologists do X-rays on aliens' eyne  
You found yourself a yellow dwarf yesterday  
Zero points of zodiacs: special in a way

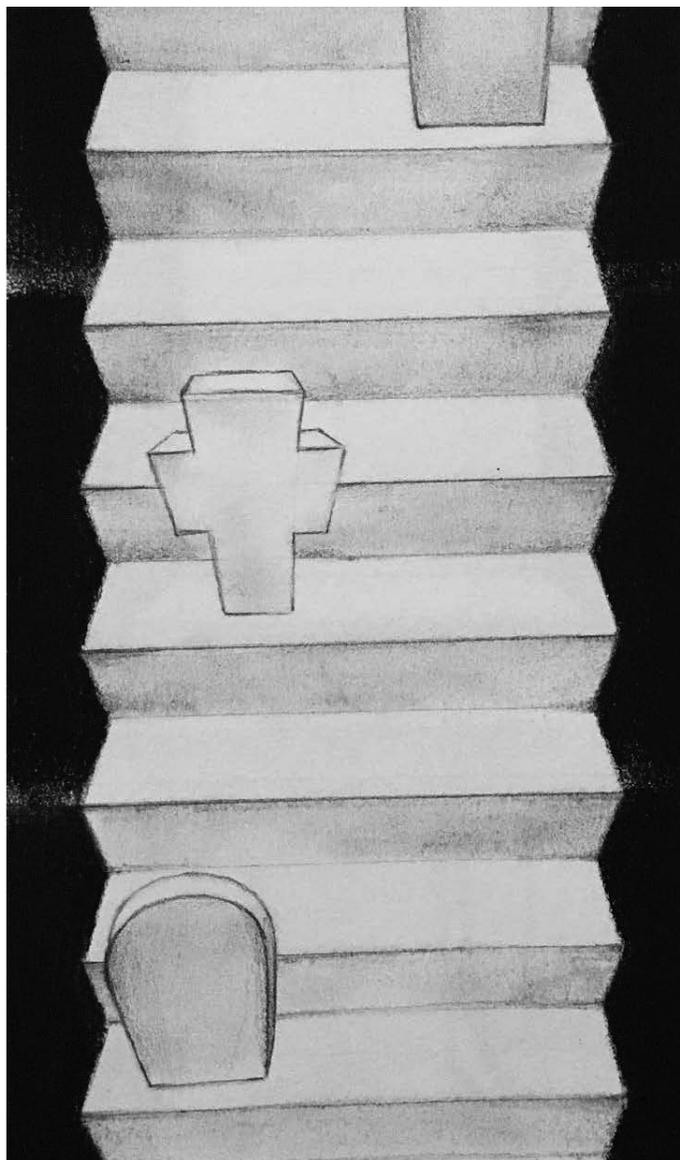
# Comics

**Comics: First Prize**

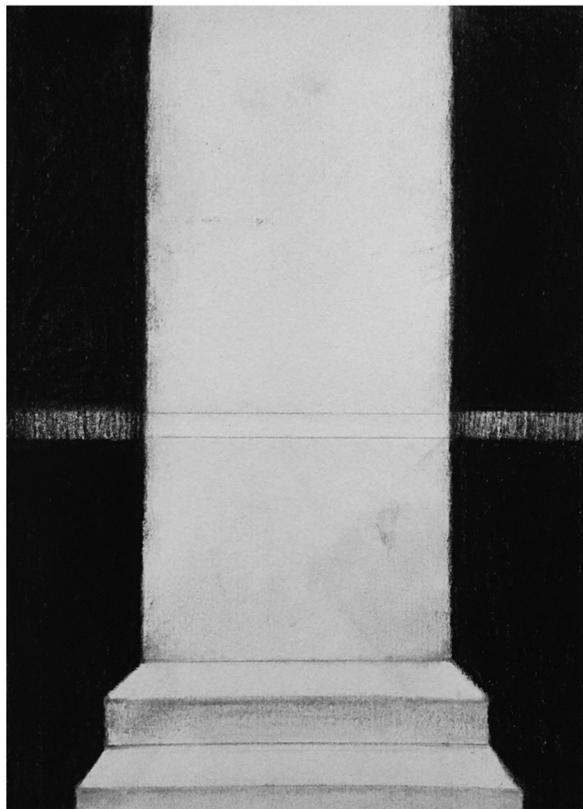
*Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven* by Yue Chen



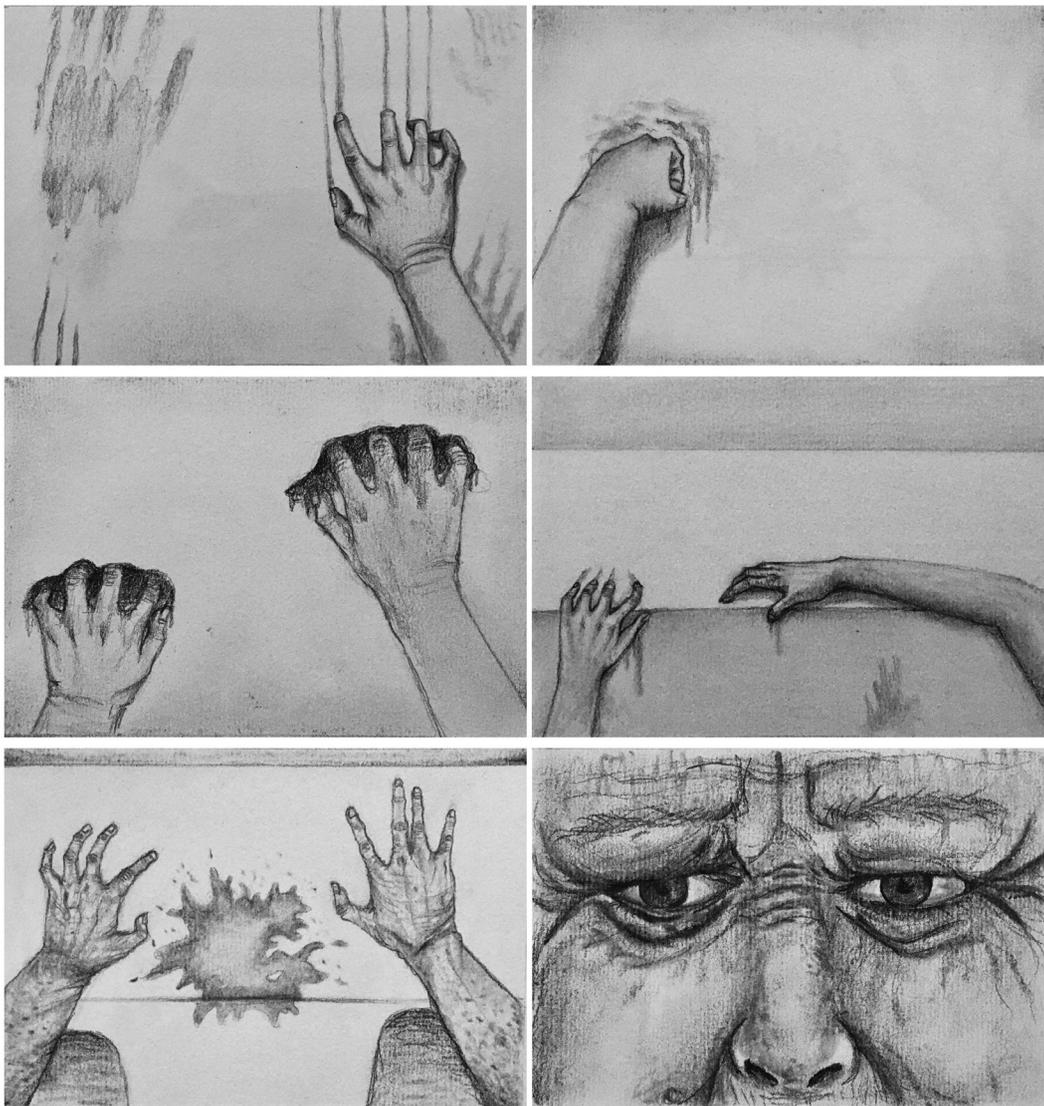
***Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven* by Yue Chen**



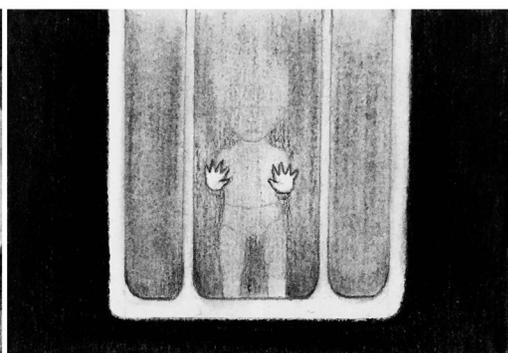
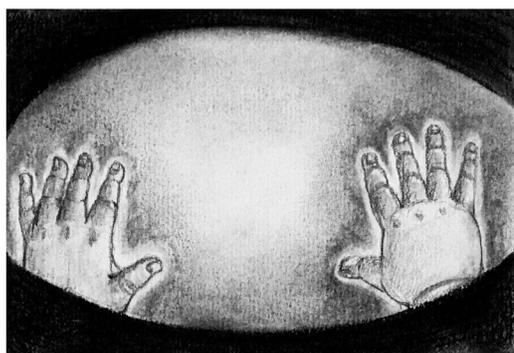
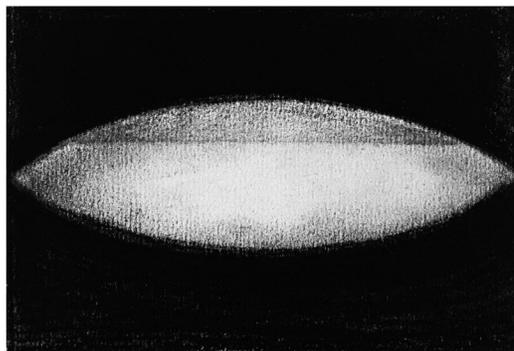
***Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven* by Yue Chen**



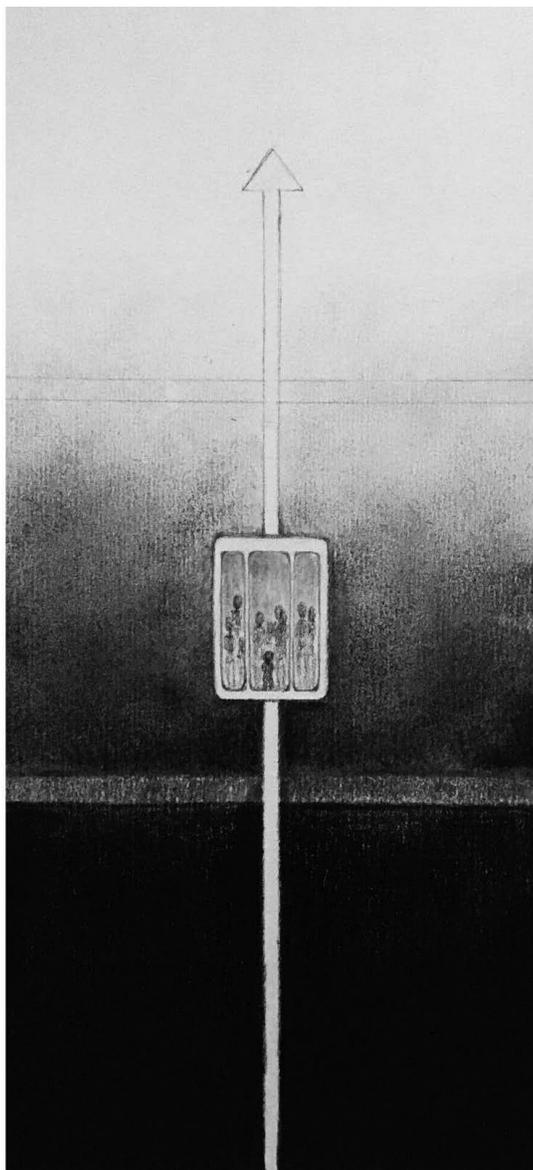
**Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven by Yue Chen**



***Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven* by Yue Chen**



***Stairs of Life, Elevator to Heaven* by Yue Chen**



# Comics: Second Prize

*A Different Kind of Mind* by Stin Dang



FOR MOST OF MY LIFE,  
I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT I CAN BE A LITTLE TOO MUCH.



I EASILY BURST OUT IN EMOTION,



AND MY BRAIN ALWAYS FEELS LIKE IT'S ON A TOTALLY DIFFERENT WAVELENGTH THAN OTHERS.



HEY WHAT'S UP!!!

I HAVE POOR VOLUME CONTROL,

IT'S ME!!



AND I LIKE TO MOVE A LOT.

**A Different Kind of Mind by Stin Dang**



I GET CAN GET PAINFULLY  
OVERSTIMULATED BY  
CERTAIN SOUNDS,



AND THERE ARE  
CERTAIN FOOD  
TEXTURES  
I CAN'T STAND.





**A Different Kind of Mind** by Stin Dang

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, THESE THINGS ABOUT MYSELF WERE SEEN AS FAULTS THAT NEEDED TO BE CORRECTED.





IT CAN BE FRUSTRATING AND LONELY, LIVING YOUR LIFE KNOWING YOU WILL ALWAYS BE DIFFERENT AND THERES NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT



BUT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND,  
WHO WILL LOVE YOU FOR ALL YOUR INTRICACIES

**IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO ADMIT TO MYSELF THAT I WAS NEURODIVERGENT,  
AND AN EVEN LONGER TIME TO REALISE I DONT OWE ANYBODY ANYTHING.**



**I MIGHT BE DIFFERENT,  
BUT DIFFERENT IS OKAY.**

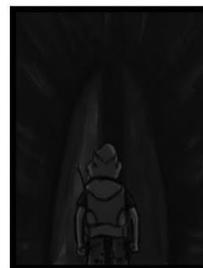
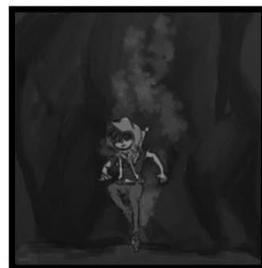




I WASNT ENTIRELY SURE HOW I GOT HERE,  
ALL I KNOW IS THAT WHEN I WOKE UP...

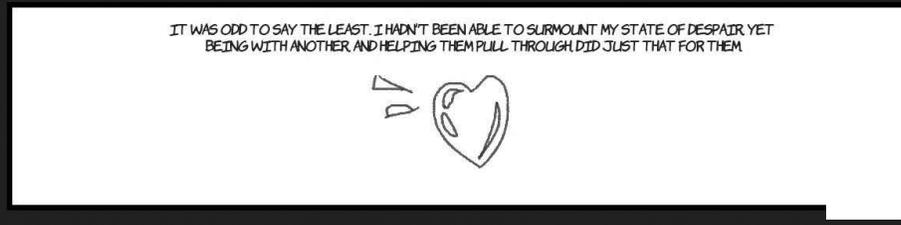
Quiescent by Andrew Jung





Quiescent by Andrew Jung





## Quiescent by Andrew Jung

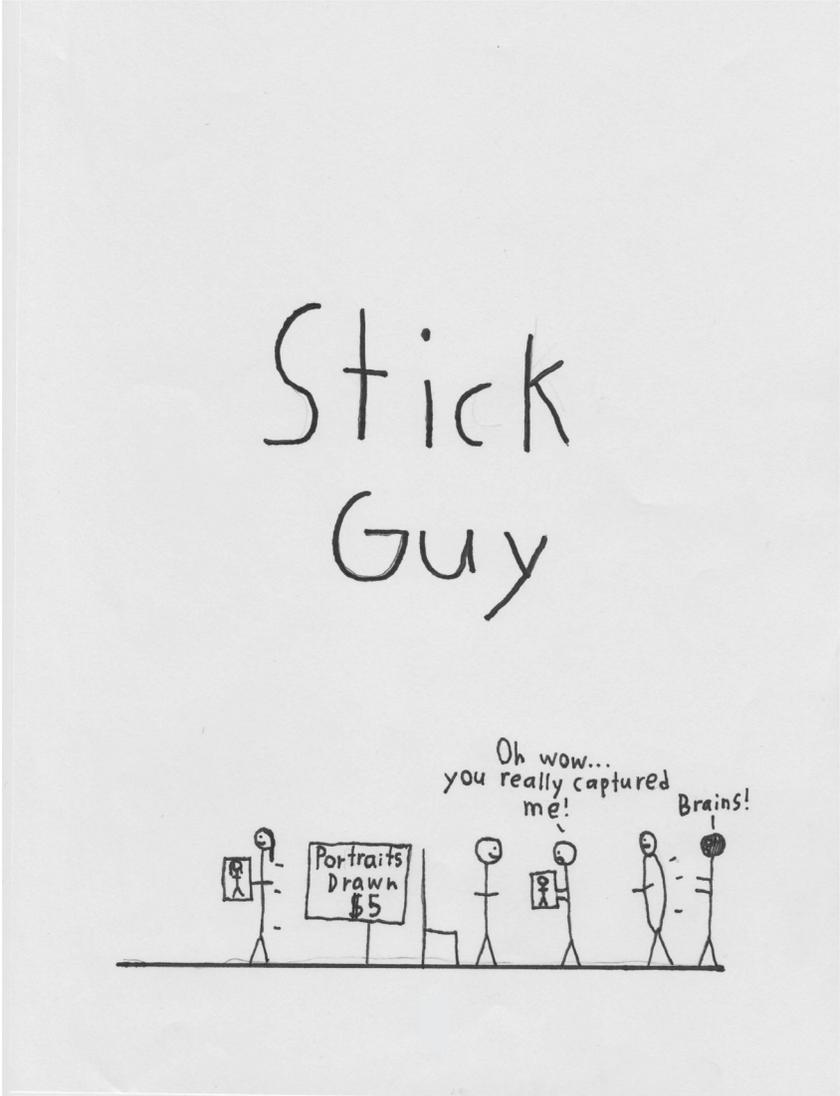


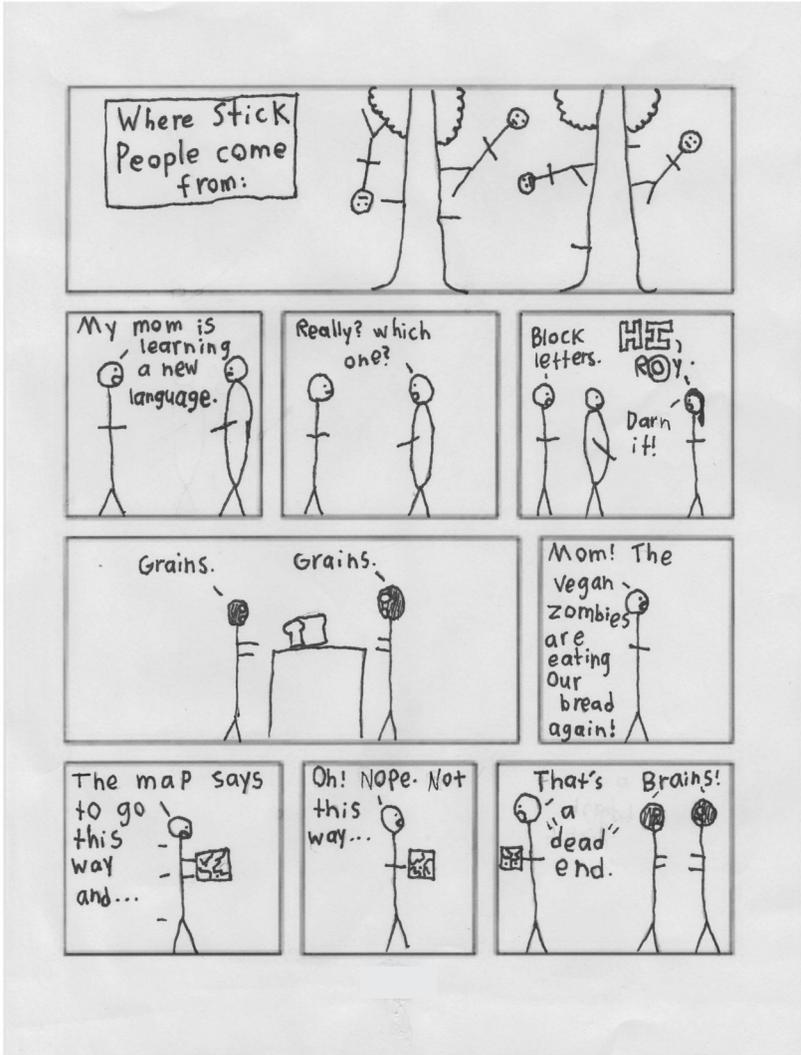
REVEL IN THIS MOMENT: PROSPERITY STEMS FROM YOUR PRESENCE. NOT ALONE, BUT TOGETHER WE WILL FACE YOUR FEARS, AND YOU WILL LEARN TO ACCEPT YOURSELF.

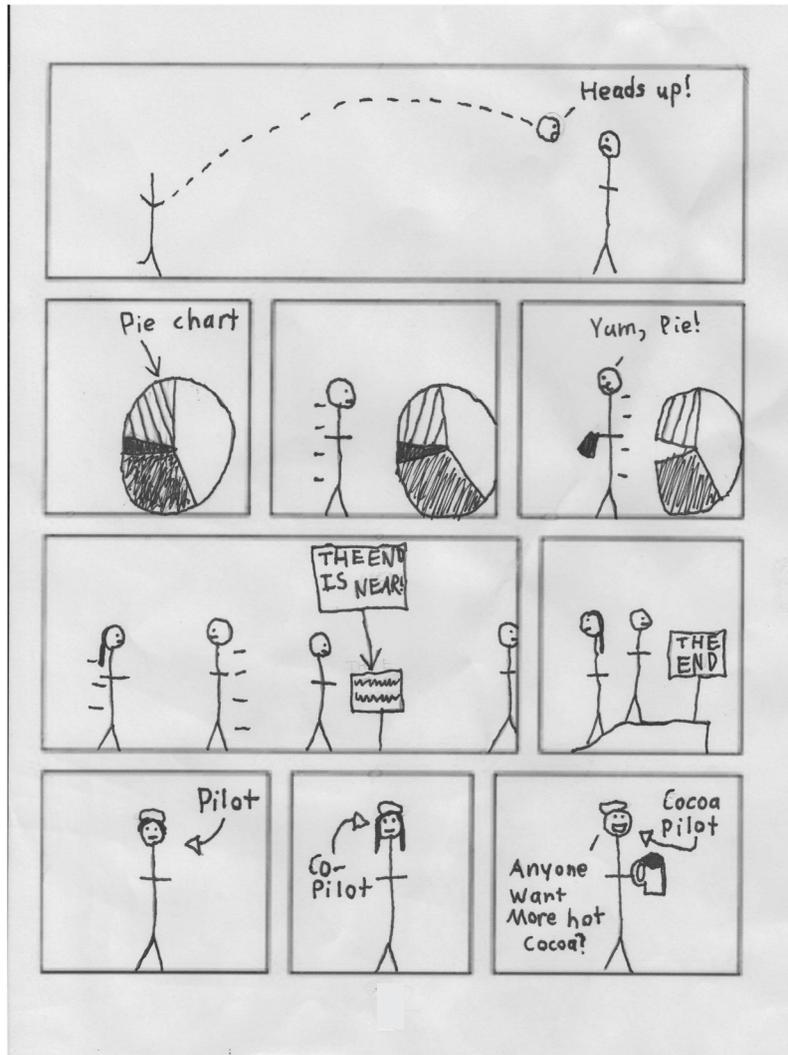


**Comics: Honourable Mention**

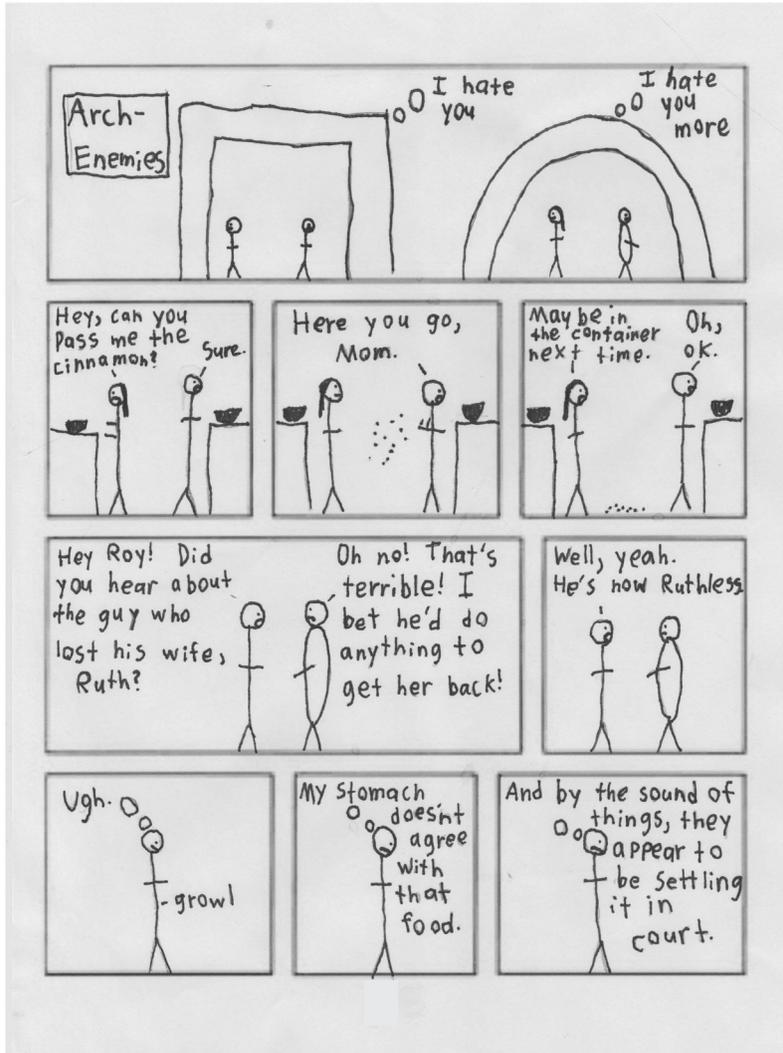
**Stick Guy** by Seth Corbett

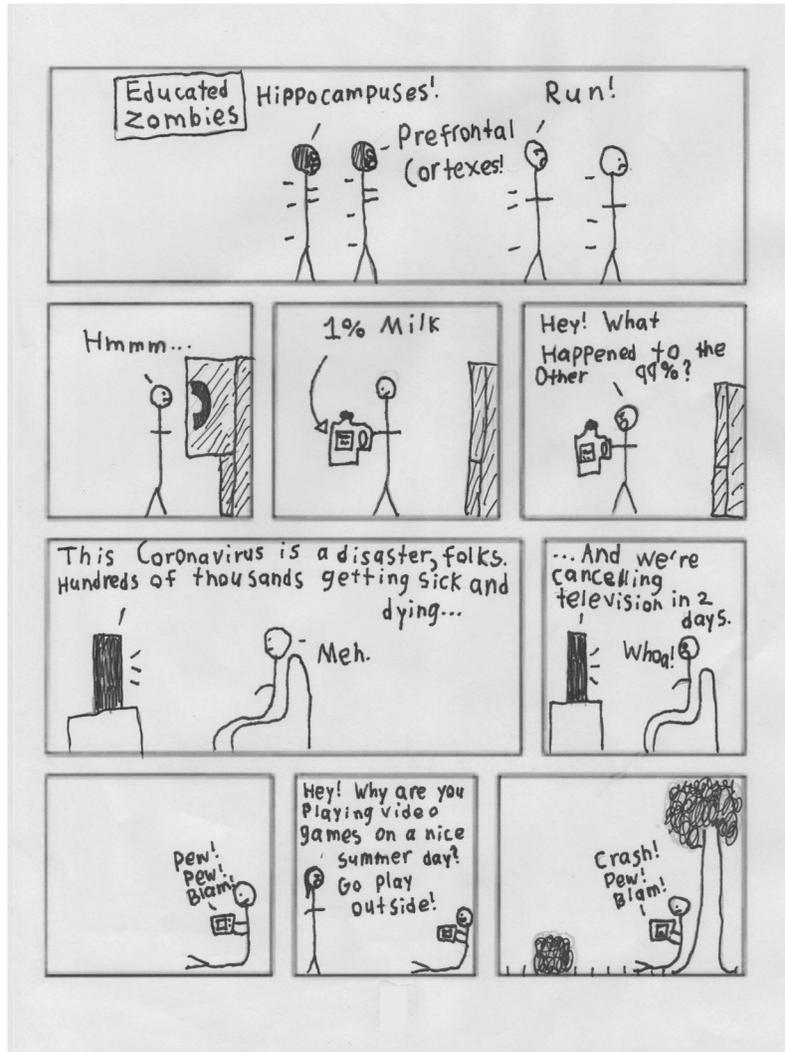






**Stick Guy by Seth Corbett**





# Random

## Ethical Consumerism in a Capitalist State

Many people in the present climate are making decisions in their everyday lives to be more environmentally and socially conscious, some doing so by attempting to be an “ethical consumer”. The ethical consumerism movement considers every purchase one makes to be a political act, and a message sent to manufacturers and vendors. The theory is that if enough people opt to shop ethically, companies will stop unethical practices but in actuality the concept of an ethical consumer is an unrealistic notion. The ethical consumerism movement is based solely on guilt, but it is impossible to even be an ethical consumer in the current market due to competing values, a limited product selection, the price of “ethically conscious” products, and a lack of global transparency.

There are many aspects to running a company, all of which have the potential of being unethical. When one decides they want to shop ethically, they must consider a number of factors, and weigh them against their values. For example, a company may provide environmentally friendly products, while not providing their workers with a living wage. The buyer is then forced to decide which of their values are more important to them: environmental consciousness, or workers’ rights. No matter which decision the buyer makes, they will feel guilty for undermining the other value. A real-life example of a situation like this would be Vivienne Westwood’s fashion boutiques. Westwood is a self-proclaimed “climate warrior,”<sup>1</sup> and a majority of her clothes are eco-conscious, but her companies also employ the use of sweatshops to manufacture the clothes. These situations arise increasingly more often when consumers attempt to shop ethically, and they force shoppers to value certain morals higher than others, automatically making the purchase unethical. The majority of companies, especially the big corporations, are never truly ethical because under a capital state there are always components of a business that would be considered morally incorrect, and the companies themselves are aware of that. Businesses know that focusing on improving one ethical facet of their production process, so as to market themselves as a righteous brand, would be easier than fixing every problem. So, they focus on one component, advertise that, and remain silent on all their other moral issues.<sup>2</sup> There is the rare company that has no obvious

<sup>1</sup> Katz, G. (2012, September 16). Don't ask about fashion: Vivienne Westwood casts herself as climate warrior. *The Canadian Press*.

<sup>2</sup> Engel, J., & Szech, N. (2020). A little good is good enough: Ethical consumption, cheap excuses, and moral self-licensing. *PLoS ONE*, 15(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0227036>

## ***Ethical Consumerism in a Capitalist State* by Muskan Guglani**

moral issues, but these companies' products are often very niche and have an extremely limited stock.

Capitalism thrives off the laziness of consumers, which is concretized through ease of access to products. Companies like Walmart and Amazon are successful because they make an enormous variety of products extremely accessible for a low price, but there is no doubt that their ethics, much like their goods, are extremely discounted.<sup>3</sup> Most consumption is the product of an unconscious routine, and making the choice to shop ethically is an attempt to break this routine.<sup>4</sup> This can be extremely tough, though, because companies that work hard towards being fully ethical often offer a small selection of products that are usually very specific and unversatile.

There simply are not enough completely ethically sourced products, so it is impossible for anyone to buy *everything* entirely ethically. Among the many reasons for the limited selection of ethically sourced products, one is the cost of actually manufacturing these products. For example, organic products are in high demand, but they are more expensive to make than “regularly” manufactured food. The manufacturers of organic products don't generally use chemical accelerants, and therefore produce less with the same amount of land.<sup>5</sup> Many people, when deciding that they want to become an ethical consumer, assume that it will be a full lifestyle change and when they realize that some things just cannot be bought ethically, they are yet again faced with guilt for doing something immoral. Another aspect of ethical consumerism that perpetuates guilt for whoever attempts to be a part of the movement is who the movement is actually accessible to due to the price points.

Products that are sourced ethically are always more expensive than the ones that are not. Though there are usually valid reasons for the price points, the movement is often taken advantage of by brands and used as an advertisement rather than a real change. Due to increased production costs, low demand, and increased wages for workers, it is

<sup>3</sup> Foroohar, R. (2012). Walmart's Discounted Ethics. *TIME*, 179(18), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Schoolman, E.D. (2016), Completing the Circuit: Routine, Reflection, and Ethical Consumption. *Sociol Forum*, 31, 619-641. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12266>

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, H. (2010). Sweet & Lowdown. *Mother Jones*, 35(3), 58-79.

## ***Ethical Consumerism in a Capitalist State* by Muskan Guglani**

not possible for ethically manufactured products to be cheap, but many companies take advantage of this by adding buzzwords like ‘organic’ and ‘eco-friendly’ and hiking up the price far more than necessary.<sup>6</sup> For example, at Walmart a consumer can buy “ethically sourced” ground beef for \$22, or they could buy essentially the same product that does not advertise ethicality for \$9. Price points like this make the ethical consumerism movement even less accessible to people in lower economic classes. The movement is disguised as a way for everyone to perpetuate change by adjusting their buying habits and when people cannot afford to make these adjustments, they are made to feel personally responsible for the lack of advancements in the market even though they have no option but to buy things from immoral businesses. The only people who can afford to be an ethical consumer are the uber-rich, but they are the ones who own the companies that benefit off people having no option but to buy their unethically sourced products. Though the wealthy are at an advantage when it comes to consuming morally, everyone is at a disadvantage because of how the global market works, and the standards, or lack thereof, that manufacturers are held to.

The reason many people choose not to shop ethically, is because they don’t actually know what the problem is with what they’re buying. If people were completely aware of where their products come from, not only would it make the movement more appealing, it would make being an ethical consumer a real possibility. Many companies who advertise ethically sourced products make said products seem much more ethical than they actually are. Recently, there has been a lot of “greenwashing” in businesses, meaning they use buzzwords like “small-batch”, “natural”, and “eco-friendly,” that don’t translate as proof of ethicality.<sup>7</sup> This is only possible because there are not many policies and guidelines that force manufacturers to be completely honest in their advertising. A common example of this would be the extremely lacking protocols that the USDA and CFIA have for food that is legally considered organic. They are very vague and open to exploitation because of their use of “loophole language.” Many policies are watered down by adding “if necessary”

<sup>6</sup>White, K., Hardisty, D. J., & Habib, R. (2020, June 1). *The Elusive Green Consumer*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2019/07/the-elusive-green-consumer>

<sup>7</sup>Montell, A. (2017, May 19). *This Is What an Ethical Beauty Company Actually Looks Like*. Retrieved from <https://www.byrdie.com/eco-friendly-beauty-brands>

## **Ethical Consumerism in a Capitalist State by Muskan Guglani**

qualifiers after protocols, because adding “if necessary” essentially means you don’t have to follow the guideline. Such language allows for things like synthetic materials and GMOs to be present in food that is labelled organic, but the average consumer won’t know that unless they take the time to do thorough research.<sup>8</sup> Someone who is trying to be an ethical consumer can consume such products and think that they are promoting change, when in actuality they are just kept in the dark about the true ethical quality of what they are consuming.

Trying to be an ethical consumer is a cascade of continuous obstacles, which ends with common people feeling guilty because of a system that is rigged against them. It is futile, if not impossible because of competing values, a limited product selection, inaccessibility due to price, and a lack of global transparency. Attempting to buy ethically does not provoke nearly as much change as one would expect, because the theory of ethical consumerism does not hold up in a capitalist state. Rather than trying to be a “model consumer”, a way to make actual change would be to push for policies that require global transparency. The burden of moral accountability should fall on corporations, as they have the ability to make change, instead of consumers who are exploited because of their moral compasses. ♦

<sup>8</sup>Schmelzer, P. (1998). Label loophole. *Progressive*, 62(5), 28.

### References

- Engel, J., & Szech, N. (2020). A little good is good enough: Ethical consumption, cheap excuses, and moral self-licensing. *PLoS ONE*, 15(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0227036>
- Foroohar, R. (2012). Walmart’s Discounted Ethics. *TIME*, 179(18), 19.
- Katz, G. (2012, September 16). Don’t ask about fashion: Vivienne Westwood casts herself as climate warrior. *The Canadian Press*.
- Montell, A. (2017, May 19). *This Is What an Ethical Beauty Company Actually Looks Like*. Retrieved from <https://www.byrdie.com/eco-friendly-beauty-brands>
- Rogers, H. (2010). Sweet & Lowdown. *Mother Jones*, 35(3), 58–79.
- Schmelzer, P. (1998). Label loophole. *Progressive*, 62(5), 28.
- Schoolman, E.D. (2016), Completing the Circuit: Routine, Reflection, and Ethical Consumption. *Sociol Forum*, 31, 619-641. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soef.12266>
- White, K., Hardisty, D. J., & Habib, R. (2020, June 1). *The Elusive Green Consumer*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2019/07/the-elusive-green-consumer>

## **Random: Second Prize**

by Yue Chen  
Creative Non-Fiction

### **recounting that summer in which i woke, ate, slept, and repeated the motions mentioned above**

That summer, I returned to my subtropical city.

During my absence, Guangzhou kept busy. It grew to be more grand and glamorous, with new malls, new galleries, a constant stream of new people to meet and new places to explore. The cuisine bombarded my taste buds: dim sum, hot pot, creamy swirls of noodles, and spicy barbecue wrapped in banana leaves...

At night, city lights seemed to bring all of the heavens down to earth. Shadows only existed under lacklustre eyes, concealed behind painted faces and smiles curved upon a thousand shades of red: crimson, strawberry, sparkling sangria, majestic mahogany... its brilliance was blinding, but sometimes, I felt like a restless tourist in the place that gave birth to me.

I found my corner of peace elsewhere, in a dusty little town: Xingning, Dad's hometown. Where buildings were hybrids of freshly poured concrete and century-old bricks. Everything and every breath were warm and gold and tangerine, coloured by the summer heat.

There, in Grandma's ancient apartment, she happily shared a case of old books with me. We read all day. When we grew thirsty, amber tea was served in a violet clay pot and poured in little rain-coloured cups. When we grew hungry, Grandma and I walked down four flights of stairs and up the street. Amid the honking of tricycles and jingles of bicycles, we bought ingredients fresh off the hands of farmers. Meals consisted of porcelain bowls of crystalline soup and pearly rice, accompanied by little cubes of fresh tofu and a handful of greens. When stars blinked, we unrolled the bamboo mats and hung the gauze, which swayed and danced to keep mosquitoes away. Then we dreamed.

As such, among the sweet scents of oolong, I woke, I ate, and I slept. I wrote broken verses of poetry and drifted away to a world of yellowed-paged books. Life became the old song that I never got tired of, on repeat. Its melodies were simple, yet plucked at all the right strings.

Why had I tried to make life harder before? A full belly, a wandering mind, and words are all I need as I slowly grow to be fragile and old and tattooed with wrinkles. That summer, I found something that metropolises and materialism never gave me. I found tranquility in simplicity. ◆

# Random: Third Prize

by Dean Oh  
Essay

## Aletheia

Man has experienced dread and misery ever since he was launched into this boundless universe by the cold, unforgiving hand of evolution. In our kind's earliest days, life was dark and suffering was omnipresent. Death was just around the corner for the early homo sapiens who were mercilessly slaughtered by the egregious forces of nature; with drought, famine, disease, starvation, predatory animals and the like all brought on by the harsh reality of Darwin's supreme maxim: survival of the fittest. Man was truly afraid, and for centuries he existed as a primal creature, hunting and gathering, locked in the predator/prey relationships which governed the rest of animalia. Everywhere man travelled, his will to live was frustrated by the endless danger which engulfed his existence, man was prey, and nature was his predator.

Nature was not entirely unforgiving, however, as she bestowed upon man a gift. One that would lie at the core of his essence and set him apart from the rest of the primal beasts which lay beside him: the gift of reason. Man made swift use of this gift, conceiving tools to ease his feeding rituals, languages to communicate with other humans, fire to provide him with light, clothes to provide him with warmth, shelter to facilitate his protection, and on and on and on. As man realized the existence of his gift, he embarked on an endless journey, ceaselessly conceiving newfound systems and tools to ease his survival. He built complex civilizations upon the pillar of cooperation, and man's status in the universe accordingly began to rise. Man recognized his weaknesses and conceived innumerable technologies to remediate them, augmenting his existence to the point where all of nature lay at his feet. Where once he feared the sharp claws of a bear, they now feared the arrow of his bow and the tip of his spear. Where once he feared the finite nature of food, his mechanical systems of farming, hunting and cooking now worked like clockwork to ensure his stomach was full. Man's journey was long and hard, but his numerous inventions, machines and systems constantly worked to remediate whatever material problems he had. Man masterfully utilized aspects of nature in his invariably complex systems, manipulating his environment with such mastery as he was once manipulated by the cold hand of nature.

The journey of man continued, as he developed systems more wondrous than the last,

achieved feats more fantastical than ever imagined, as he perfected and developed civilization and society. Whilst the problems of nature were never truly alleviated, man's systems continued to improve, continuing to aid him in his struggle against nature.

This brings us to our current state, to the industrial, mechanical society we now inhabit. As one looks around at the gray concrete roads that stretch across every corner, or the glossy metallic automobiles which allow us to traverse them, one may feel a sense of impermanent security, as we realize this sprawling landscape is not a feat of nature but one of metal.

Perhaps we may shift our gaze to the numerous citizens which inhabit our minuscule area. For the most part, their bellies appear full, complex shelters shield them from natural forces, and they are healed from disease by those with countless years of scientific knowledge and expertise. They are protected from unsavoury acts by uniformed policemen, who prevent malfunctions of the societal machine. You, the reader, may also feel a sense of security, and it is statistically likely that you are able to enjoy a good meal or congregate with friends, that you are sheltered from the elements by a complex abode, complete with an intricate network of pipes, metal and cement. It is likely that your life bears almost no resemblance to the primitive man of old, as you need not worry about the forces of nature, of starvation and early death that was constantly plaguing his life. A dispassionate onlooker may even go as far as to say that your life and mine are "easy." It may even appear to this onlooker that the long journey of man, at least in the developed world, has come to an end. As one treats themselves to a good meal or enjoys the company of friends inside an intricate abode, it is easy to momentarily share this sentiment, as we feel a spark of happiness. This spark is transient, however, as we soon realize we must trudge along to school or work the next day, that the momentary joy that was felt was an illusion. These sparks of joy dissipate as we ready ourselves for the mindless tedium which awaits us, just on the horizon.

Indeed, in between these joyful moments of bliss, there exists a sense of despair, a momentary realization of the Kafkaesque nature of our existence. This moment of mental clarity and despair is almost as fleeting as our bouts of bliss, and yet it is all the more real.

## ***Aletheia* by Dean Oh**

It is the feeling one endures when punching numbers into Excel at a 9 - 5 job, realizing they had done this exact task in the same manner, in the same room and at the same time as yesterday or the day before; realizing they will likely engage in the same endeavours tomorrow and the day after that. This feeling is like gazing into an endless, homogenous abyss and coming to the realization that one is slowly descending into this nebulous infinity of emptiness. It is the sudden recognition that one's life is just as mechanical as the technological wonders that mankind has dreamt up in recent years, as organized and predictable as the intricate network of dull grey roads which connect every house and street corner together. But most of all, it is the momentary pondering of our place in the universe, a transient understanding of the fact that our mundane daily routines are meaningless, that they signify no true fulfillment for us. This sentiment is transitory, however, and just as soon as it dawns on us, it fades into the mist.

Many deem this sentiment “nihilism”, as it stems from a lack of meaning and fulfillment in the universe. The mechanical nature of modern industrial culture bestows upon us a routine, one which may award us with good grades or a paycheck, but one which fails to imbue our lives with cosmic purpose. The conflict between each individual's craving to locate substantive meaning in the universe, to find a soul, and the obvious lack of soul in the sprawling metallic landscape of modern society creates a deeply felt frustration, one that grows ever stronger as our awareness grows of the nature of existence.

When society has been transformed into a machine, when entire natural landscapes have been torn and replaced with man-made technologies and architecture, when our natural needs and fears are remediated by complex and intricate systems that we seldom need to ponder, we begin to feel as soulless as the pipes, roads and machines which drive our society “forward.” And though momentary sparks of bliss may distract us from the mindless tedium which characterizes much of our lives, we cannot help but fall into these bouts of disillusionment, of sobering mental clarity.

Though these transient moments of truth begin as momentary feelings, they may evolve into a general mood of nihilism, a subconscious dread lurking in the dark depths of our psyche; one that perverts our perceptions and causes us to view all that we perceive as empty,

pathetic and meaningless. Many citizens of the developed world may be characterized as such and may be termed the “nihilists” of our age. They are those who have had far too many moments of existential dread, viewing modern civilization and their own lives as entirely meaningless. The accompanying psychological effects of this are devastating, with many nihilists simply giving up the possibility of meaning and resigning themselves to apathy, surrendering themselves to the absurdity of the uncaring and all encompassing universe. From this description it is clear nihilism is the zeitgeist of our age, with many citizens feeling a sense of emptiness clawing away at their very being, one that stems from a lack of meaning and purpose.

Perhaps we may now examine primeval man from a different light. Though he was plagued by the constant fear of death and disease with little time for recreation; though nature bullied, oppressed and harassed him at every turn, he possessed a meaningful life. Each day presented a fresh obstacle, a new challenge to overcome, the meaning of life in this case being tied to basic survival. Each endeavour of his was directed at this singular aim, a purpose which imbued his every action and influenced his every move. Survival was the telos of primitive man, and though we would likely never trade places with him, he was content. Through all our wondrous advancements, we have strayed further from nature, further from a possibility of finding true freedom and meaning.

Maybe, just maybe, we have lost our way. ◆

## Random: Honourable Mention

by Gurshaan Chadha  
Song Lyrics

### Crown in the Grave

(Parody of *Money in the Grave* by Drake)

*This is an educationally informative song that highlights the several major events of the reign of King Louis XVI. Mainly, it involves King Louis XVI's thoughts on his entire reign as king and nearing execution by guillotine. In addition, the outlooks of famous English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, and leader of the Committee of Public Safety (whom also led the Reign of Terror), Maximilien Robespierre, are included in the song.*

Yeah, okay  
King Louis on the beat, mmm  
Yeah, yeah

*(King Louis point of view)*

I mean, where, in France, should I, really even start  
I got art that I'm keepin' in the palace  
I got these peasants tryna dream about status  
Thinkin' back to the fact that they dead  
Thought my tax wasn't facts till they sat behind bars  
I got two mates, one need a heart  
Yeah, they grin, I could tell they class apart  
I got revo's tryna kill me outta wraith  
'Cause I never provided égalité  
I got bread stacks with me; never gave  
Then the bread riots hit me, '78  
Been a good life; I'm bout to get slayed  
When I die, put my crown in the grave

*(King Louis point of view)*

When I die, put my crown in the grave  
Really gotta hear the same question every day  
pests over here and they tryna catch a case

**Crown in the Grave by Gurshaan Chadha**

I really might tat “Realest King” on my face  
King Louis, run the beat like a race  
“How’d it feel bein’ bad ruler every day?”  
Then I’m like “Yah, pretty good, go away”

*(King Louis point of view)*

Ain’t about to die with regret, I done gave it.  
Royalty flopped ‘cuz the people’s faith dropped  
Really messed up and my head’s gon’ chop  
life’s been lavish, ain’t no part I would crop  
Louis on the beat and it hits nonstop  
I don’t wanna change, ‘cause of laws that enact  
Prices fly, so I’m always good where I’m at  
Word to the first, second, third estate  
Tell ‘em when I die, put my crown in the grave

*(Thomas Hobbes point of view)*

Couple ‘cobins killing all, no respect (respect)  
We try to tell ‘em that they all incorrect (incorrect)  
They really brainwash, he in awe with the facts (facts)  
Extremes thinkin’ public’s gonna crawl small like they pets (pets)

*(Thomas Hobbes point of view)*

Overthrow us if you really wanna get it (get it)  
Kill him, future’s gon’ get worse like a splinter (splinter)  
Fate ringin, gon’ be a reign of terror (terror)  
Y’all are cooked up and there’s really no limit (no limit)  
False hope is what you hopin’ every day (every day)  
He tried fleeing but the plan went astray (astray)  
Ain’t no fault of Marie’s, still had to pay (pay)  
Bury that brain-plucking estate, time to bounce (bounce)

## **Crown in the Grave by Gurshaan Chadha**

*(Maximilien Robespierre's point of view)*

Gotta mount on my horse: prowess (gotta mount on my horse of prowess)  
You peasants snitches so I gotta reroute it (so I gotta reroute it)  
Pierre slicing necks, still stayin' the proudest  
Got 'em all stressing like the King when Marie's 'round him  
And I'll never talk about it  
Those phonies loud but the rev' screams the loudest  
Killin' opposition, gettin' too crowded  
Cause the way I execute, never treated like a king  
The blade swing (swing)  
Then I leave 'em all astounded  
Guillotine takin' heads and I'm countin'  
Four figures was the goal til I hit  
These foes ain't agreein', so bury them beneath  
Ross got it

*(King Louis point of view)*

When I die, put my crown in the grave  
Really gotta hear the same question every day  
pests over here and they tryna catch a case  
I really might tat "Realest King" on my face'  
King Louis, run the beat like a race  
"How'd it feel bein' bad ruler every day?"  
Then I'm like "Yah, pretty good, go away"  
Ain't about to die with regret, I done gave it.



**SURREY LIBRARIES**

*discover·connect·inspire*

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