

NON-FICTION

SHORT STORY

INK

youth writing contest

COMICS

POEM

SCREENPLAY

2021

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Proudly Presents

A Collection of Winning Entries
for the

2021
youth writing contest

Short Stories, Poetry, Comics & Random

Foreword

“A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper.” – Ursula K. Le Guin, “A Few Words to a Young Writer”

The anthology you hold in your hands is the result of creative action and meaning-making in the midst of a pandemic and fundamental social change.

In a time of perseverance and reflection, the power of creative expression promotes healing, resilience, and connection. The writers and artists in this anthology have committed to a community of creativity and discovery. The spectrum of emotions embodied in their work are relatable for all people, a testament to our collective humanity. Which variation and extension of tender love, crippling loneliness, hollow grief lie in these pages? What humour or horror? Awe or inspiration? I invite readers to find out.

We are indebted to our judges, all talented writers and storytellers in their own right, for their dedication to fostering the next generation of writers.

We are thankful to our generous sponsors whose financial support allows Surrey Libraries to reward youth for their talent.

The winners of the contest were recognized in October at an awards gala. We were privileged to have Janice Lynn Mather, the award-winning Bahamian-Canadian novelist, as our keynote speaker.

Kelly E. Lau
Teen Services Librarian
Surrey Libraries

The Surrey Libraries Youth Writing Contest was established in 1987. The contest was renamed from Young Adult Writing Contest to Youth Writing Contest in 2020 to better reflect the full spectrum of creative expression of all youth between the ages of 12 and 18.

Acknowledgements

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

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And our fabulous contest judges:

Heinz Senger, Natalie Hryciuk, Heidi Hoff, Jocelyn Crawford, Jesset Karlen, Bonnie Nish, Kyle McKillop, Sylvia Taylor, Lisa Voisin, Stephanie Fenton, Mia Jensen, Alexander Hock, Annie K. Wong, kc dyer

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

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Junior Short Story

Junior Short Story: First Prize

by Enya Fang

The Watchmaker's Apprentice

On the wooden veranda of one little hut stood a boy, all nine years of youth sparkling in his doe-like eyes and the compatible golden-brown ringlets clustered about his head. Grasped in his hands was a crumpled leaflet, nearly torn from the sheer excitement of his journey down to this very place. One would likely question the motives of a well-dressed boy straying out at such an hour, and onlookers passing through this secluded part of the glen stopped to watch, baffled, as the young lad stepped forward and rapped on the door.

In the months since he first settled down in the small log cabin perched on the hillside, a quiet solace from the constant bustling of town, Master Earlway could count on one hand the number of visitors that had come to call on him. Yet, as he lumbered over to the doorway still in his dusty work smocks, a pair of bright, round eyes staring at him, cheeks flushed and curls dishevelled from an evidently frisky trip down the winding valley.

“Is this you on the flyer, sir?” The boy held out his precious leaflet. “I found it on the way to school. And do you really teach watchmaking?” He added somewhat bashfully.

In Master Earlway's past, people who voiced the same question about his career had always done so rather patronizingly; bewildered at the notion that anyone still practiced such an outdated trade. But there was something about the boy's tone, and perhaps it was just a dash of his youthful innocence, but he could've sworn there was a note of wonder and curiosity in there. Something he had not heard in a long while.

“Perhaps it is,” Master Earlway trained severity into his voice as he studied the flyer. Indeed it was his, and the spark in the boy's gaze told him he knew exactly what it was for too. But he had to see the full scope of the lad's intentions. “Though, it's been long since school let out for the day, and the clock is ticking to supper.” The Master peered inquiringly at the small figure before him.

The boy hurriedly explained that he had gotten permission to “go out” for a while before mealtime. The term “go out” was emphasized with enough hesitancy that Master Earlway understood no one was informed of the boy's actual detour. The lad, feeling unsettled under the Master's inquisitive gaze, felt his true confession was due.

The Watchmaker's Apprentice by Enya Fang

“I’m sorry if I came at an inconvenient time – I really am – but I- I wanted to know if you were still looking for an apprentice.” The boy’s last few words spilled out with surging eagerness, and at last, a glimmer of a smile twinkled in the Master’s eye.

Master Earlway could still recall the fiery ambition that had driven his move to the outskirts of town, where watchmakers and watchmaking alike were sparse, to carry on his mission in preserving the craft that he loved. He’d ventured down to the town square that first evening, plastering and distributing posters scouting for young apprentices. Villagers scowled at him, and parents quickly ushered their kids away when he arrived the next day with more posters. He found his previous endeavours ripped and trampled all over the muddy ground.

He had few callers before then, and none ever showed up on his doorstep since. The message was clear. No parent – no opulent nor apt – encouraged the pursuance of a profession so toiling and unrewarding. The Master now looked kindly at the boy, heart leaping in his chest at this unprecedented opportunity.

“What’s your name, laddie?” The Master asked, opening the door wider to invite the child in.

“Nicolas, but everyone calls me Nico.” Nico’s voice trailed off just then, immersed in the sight that saluted him. Smooth wooden planks mounted the interior walls of the cabin, nearly shrouded by the rows and rows of shelves lined with chronographs of all shapes and sizes; their faint ticking drifting through the air like a lullaby. Gears, tools, and watches still in the construction phase lay strewn across a rustic worktable in the center. Nico, in his haste, nearly toppled over the Master’s workbench as he rushed on over to the intricate prototypes, eyes widening in fascination.

“Nicolas.” Master Earlway repeated, thoughtfully adjusting his full-moon spectacles. “Like the great Nicolas Rieussec, watchmaker for the King of France himself.”

“Now, you wish to be my apprentice.” The Master walked over to Nico, who was presently admiring a spinning gear in one of the unfinished watches and laid a hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Are you ready to learn?”

***The Watchmaker's Apprentice* by Enya Fang**

First, Master Earlway pointed and dictated the parts of one of his mechanical watches, demonstrating the correct disassembling method. He then gave Nico a pair of metal tweezers and, guiding his grip, encouraged the lad to attempt picking up the newly scattered bolts. The Master's eyes followed Nico's small and nimble hands – hands the boy's mother was prone to enthuse as those of a born surgeon – and nodded approvingly at their steadiness and precision. Once, Nico's arm grazed the blade of a topping tool, but the boy merely laughed and brushed off the frantic master that applied layer after layer of herbs and gauze. Through the afternoon trainer and trainee taught and learned, jested and jollied, and it was a very happy boy accompanied by an even happier master that trekked homeward as the auburn hues of sunset came awash in the sky.

The next day, Master Earlway woke with a sense of newfound rejuvenation only a man reinvigorated from trial after trial could impart. But the boy he met at the door in the morning was a shadow of the lively, jubilant Nico he had bid goodnight to.

Before the Master could say anything, Nico seemed to brighten instantaneously, though there was a slight strain in the cheery voice that asked what they would be doing today. Nico however remained a diligent student throughout the day and seemed genuinely jovial at every new skill he was taught and every new tool he learned to use. But as the hours passed, Master Earlway began to notice the droop in Nico's usually zestful attitude, and the darkening shadow in his focused eyes.

He's likely a little worn out, the Master thought. He told jokes to fill the silence and gave the boy hearty but sincere praises for his prodigious development. Indeed, Nico's small hands had a remarkable skill for craftsmanship. But Master Earlway became more and more aware of each lasting stretch of silence that had previously been filled with youthful laughter, and the wan little face that had appeared so bubbly and blithe.

But late in the afternoon, when the Master finally voiced his query and asked Nico what the problem was, the boy paused from the miniature dial he'd been tweaking and bowed his head.

"Mother wants me to be a doctor." He mumbled; amber eyes suddenly downcast. "I- I had a splendid time, Master, but I should probably get going now."

The Watchmaker's Apprentice by Enya Fang

The Master went to bed that night old and drawn. He'd stood rooted to the ground in shock as Nico left, cradling his head in his hands for a long time afterward. In his heart, he had feared a similar predicament happening; he'd grown fond of the boy, who looked to be a promising apprentice. But as he wrung his hands, he also wanted the best for the boy and could understand his mother's hopes.

Nevertheless, as the Master sat eating his morning meal of porridge several days later, a bright and lively boy burst through the front door. The Master, staggered at the sight of a beaming Nico, rushed to embrace the lad.

"Mother relented, Master!" Nico laughed, face alight with joy. "I insisted and pleaded and told her I would work extremely hard. And I showed her the dial I was working on." He pulled the intricate timepiece from his pocket and gave it to the Master.

"Mother was really pleased at that."

Master Earlway only hugged and patted the boy on the head, but unmistakable rapture shone in his eyes behind their full-moon lenses. That night, the Master took his new apprentice by the hand and led him to the colourful wall of clocks and watches. There, row after row, their faces shone with a sense of peace and sang each a different song with that tilt of mysterious calamity only the keepers of time themselves and those who learned their secrets could. The Master laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Nico, you can be a doctor, a soldier, a storekeeper – all well-worn paths to a promising future. But by choosing a craft as ancient and disparaged as watchmaking," Master Earlway smiled, handing him the unfinished dial.

"You keep the art alive." ◆

Junior Short Story: Second Prize

by Chloe Lee

The Monster Under the Bed

Almost every child's biggest fear is probably "the monster under the bed".

At least, it was for Lily.

It's why she grows tense as soon as the sun sets and the stars pop out of the night sky one by one.

It's the reason why she lies awake at night, staying still as a corpse and not daring to shut her eyes in case it strikes.

It's why she always sees those hideous red eyes in the darkness next to the stuffed Mr. Bunny when Mum turns off the lights.

It's the one who always steals her socks and leaves her to suffer and wear mismatched ones, while chuckling darkly under the bed.

And it's always the creature who peeks out of its little hole and looms over Lily's sleeping body like a dark shadow, poking her cheek with its long, dry finger until she wakes up screaming.

Every. Single. Night.

But as soon as Mum and Dad barge in and flick the switch on, the lights always shine brighter than the stars, which burn the crusty, black skin of the monster. It then shrieks and escapes back under the bed, trying to recover and licking its wounds while whimpering all the while.

And when Lily sits up shaking and sweating, she shouts, "Mum! Dad! There's a monster under my bed!"

Then they say, "Really, sweetie? What did the monster do to you?"

Lily shivers at the thought of those glowing, red eyes staring back at her, never breaking eye contact. The way it licks its forked tongue whenever it glances at her, like she's a tasty treat.

The Monster Under the Bed by Chloe Lee

Its sharp claws and its pointy fangs. The creepy way it always slips back into the shadows.

She remembers every single detail so clearly that she draws it on a piece of paper and show her parents, her hands trembling as she holds it.

She expects gasps of surprise, expressions of fear, or maybe even a “reassurance cookie” saying, “Oh, you poor dear!”

But as she waits for their reactions, all Lily receives are some unconvinced smiles and a little head pat. She looks up in utter confusion. Were they not disturbed by the drawing? Did they not see the black, scribbled form of its body? Or its ruby eyes? Have they not noticed its grey claws, its open jaw, or even the little horns that took her so long to draw?

And that night, Lily concluded, “*Adults are strange people.*”

Her parents let out lighthearted giggles and deep chuckles. They pat her head again. “Oh, honey,” they say, “there’s no monster under your bed!”

Lily shakes her head and says, “No, it’s there. It’s always there! Check, Dad, check!”

Dad shakes his head and bends down. He kneels and grabs the cover of her blanket as he lifts it up, revealing the space underneath it.

Lily gasps and covers her eyes with her chubby little hands, afraid of what she might see.

But when she doesn’t see or hear anything, Lily peeks out between her fingers. That’s not enough to see clearly, so she removes her hands from her face.

There’s no monster under the bed. Just some old candy wrappers and the occasional toy.

Lily doesn’t understand. “But... it was there! I saw it!”

Mum just sighs exasperatedly. “No, dear. There’s no monster. See? Dad checked for you.”

Then as her parents stand up and walk towards the door, Lily asks, “Then what about those red eyes I see at night? What about all of my missing socks? And who pokes me with its finger?”

The Monster Under the Bed by Chloe Lee

Dad just shakes his head again. “It’s just your imagination.”

Then they turn off the lights and close the door, the darkness engulfing her in terror once more. After a few seconds, she hears it.

A strange rustling noise from underneath the bed.

Lily gasps slightly and hides under the covers, and she stays like that until she falls into a deep slumber.

Outside of her door, Mum and Dad have a conversation. “A monster? Our daughter’s imagination sure is creative,” Dad says as they head back to their room.

Mum adds, “Even if there was a monster under the bed, I’m sure it just wanted to be friends.”

They turn off the light switch and climb into bed, their shadows projected onto the walls.

But as they also fall asleep, with Mum’s steady breathing and Dad’s loud snores, their shadows enlarge and take shape. They add horns and claws and ruby red eyes to themselves as they create their forms.

As they loom over the parents faces, they snarl, their claws suddenly sharpening.

Mum was wrong.

The monster under the bed didn’t want any friends. It couldn’t eat friends.

But what it did want was fear. Oh yes, monsters loved to feed on fear. It made them grow bigger and become scarier, with their eyes glowing brighter like red beacons and their claws growing to the length of a meter stick.

Fear tasted like a big triple-scoop vanilla ice cream in a waffle cone with unlimited sprinkles and a cherry on top. And it was so much easier than eating humans alone.

So when the lights turn off, you better watch out.

You don’t know when the monster may strike. ◆

Junior Short Story: Third Prize

by Hala Al Said

The Burning Land

Lexicon used to be a beautiful place. The sun was a yellow begonia in a sky that people swear was a grander blue than the sapphires in their necklaces. Lexicon was known for the plumeria that bloomed plentifully, particularly on the border between Colloquium and Escutcheon. The shadows of large trees fell upon villages filled with happy people. Though many won't believe it, in that time it did not matter if you were from Colloquium or Escutcheon, you would be treated the same.

Now, Lexicon is known as the burning land. The sun is an angry red blotch, smoldering the ground and scorching the backs of people that are still healthy enough to work. The sky is tainted by smoke citizens dub the grasping hoar. The water can kill you just as much as the guns can. The flowers were some of the first things that turned to ash. Soldiers that circle the dwellings seem to be there to keep the people under watch more than to protect them.

It had all started in King's Ransom. King's Ransom was a town bustling with trade, mostly between Colloquium and Escutcheon, but also with the overseas Fjord. King's Ransom rested on one of the lower islands of Lexicon, directly in the middle of the Colloquium and Escutcheon border.

Every year, King's Ransom held a festival to celebrate their markets and attract customers. They had invited high-profile businessmen and leaders from both sides of the continent, though anyone with money in their pockets was welcome. Of course, the monarchs of Colloquium and Escutcheon wouldn't bother to show. But not to invite them would be considered treason.

The festivities began at dawn. Peasants and nobles alike flooded the streets. Food would be served at a discounted price. Music would flow from open windows and doorways. It was a time of joy and celebration. Nobody would have suspected it was a place for war.

Admittedly, it was not just the events that happened in King's Ransom that started the conflict between Colloquium and Escutcheon. It was more like a spark. A spark to a very flammable pile of hate, aggression, and overall hostility between the two nations. Even in times of peace, the world held its breath to see what would happen to Lexicon.

***The Burning Land* by Hala Al Said**

The festival went as planned throughout the day. The contests (that had an entry fee, of course) went smoothly. The leaders bought goods in bulk for their towns. No arguments broke. No unfriendly glances were exchanged.

The mayor of King's Ransom was so confident that the relaxed atmosphere was permanent, he let some of the guards leave early to enjoy the night with their families.

The day before the festival, people were invited to put their names in a draw. The winner would be given a luxury coat. Nothing worthy of much note. When the soft light of the sun was almost gone, the victor was drawn.

The winner was the owner of a local inn. When he heard his name, he proudly walked to the podium where he would be announced and given his new coat. The presenter called in a loud booming voice the name of the inn owner. He asked where the inn owner was from. The inn owner merely laughed and explained he lived in King's Ransom and didn't know if that meant he was from Colloquium or Escutcheon. The presenter had also laughed. The leaders in the crowd had not.

King's Ransom was a new town. The island before it was useless to both Colloquium and Escutcheon. But nobody could deny the new success of King's Ransom. Whose success is it, though? Colloquium or Escutcheon? That was how the war started.

Generals from Colloquium and Escutcheon had come to King's Ransom to discuss this. Some had tried not to escalate this to war, but most were tired of peaceful negotiations with the other side.

Even though all that remains of King's Ransom is a few wooden beams, even though the longer the war rages on the less it matters, even though it seems no one will live to care who that success belongs to, the royals of Lexicon do not stop the war. They only think to win it.

The war did not slowly ease in. It came like a thunderstorm: strong, unpredictable, and merciless. It gave no time for preparation. Most people didn't even know it was happening until soldiers were in their homes, killing everyone they knew. When the first missile was seen in the sky, nobody knew there was a need to run.

***The Burning Land* by Hala Al Said**

It only took a few days, however, for people to understand what was happening. To understand this was no small squabble, that it was not something that could be solved with a flimsy truce.

People prepared places where they could hide. Towns had walls built around them. Food was hoarded. Weapons were acquired. The ones who could afford it moved away to more remote areas.

In the end, it was all in vain. The buildings were flattened. The weapons the people wielded stood no chance against the guns of the enemy. The poisoned air slowly killed all with weaker bodies. The war encompassed everything, no place in Lexicon was far away enough.

People had tried to escape to Fjord, in boats that could barely be called such. The journey was torturous. The sea itself wanted to grab you with its greedy waves, so you could stay in its depths. If one would somehow reach Fjord, the journey would reveal itself to be treacherous.

Fjord denies entry to anyone from Lexicon. If Fjord would start taking in Lexicon refugees, they might feel Colloquium's or Escutcheon's rage for taking in the enemy. So, they send back anyone who comes seeking refuge with nothing, not even food to last the way back. Nobody can survive that.

Sure, the people of Fjord would protest. They would frown at the injustice of the situation. They would shout at the leaders of Fjord to help. They would hate the government for what they were doing. But, alas, when night came, they would sleep in their luxurious beds, already thinking about what they would do next. They would throw the whole thing out of their thoughts like a skipping stone.

Time went on, days and weeks to months and years. The people of Lexicon went through a change. With every convenience taken, they would make a new one. With every life lost, they would appreciate the people they had left more. Kids who were born in this new age didn't know what they were missing. They were arguably better off than their parents, who had gotten a taste of life before.

They weren't happy, exactly. Accepting, rather. They knew nobody was going to save them.

***The Burning Land* by Hala Al Said**

That their lives wouldn't get better. That they probably won't live over 30. But they still held hope. Hope for a better future for their children. Hope that the royals would see sense. Hope for a full stomach at the end of the day.

The people of Lexicon held that hope like a shield. A shield that would keep the madness away. A shield that someday might become something else, something to finally bring peace to Lexicon.

But, for now, the people will suffer the days together. ◆

Junior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Hayden O'Brien

Orange Fever: A Comedy Horror

Today seemed like a regular day, but Iggy had a strange feeling the next couple of days would be far from regular. He peered into his toothpaste-smudged bathroom mirror and combed his greasy, brown hair. Then he tidied himself up by wiping oatmeal smears off his t-shirt while itching his long, freckled nose.

“Bye Mom!” Iggy shouted as he exited his front door. *That’s strange*, he thought, noticing his mom’s face seemed bright orange. As usual, his little brother jumped out from behind the front hedges and shot him in the face with a soggy spitball. He ignored his brother and trotted towards the woods by Snake Creek.

Iggy loved his cozy town of Dinklemeyer because it was filled with decent people who were ready to lend a hand. He especially loved summer break because he got to hang out with his best friends, Steve and Doug, who he spotted building their lopsided tree fort.

“Hey, Iggy,” said Steve, sneezing so loudly Iggy imagined his bright blue eyes bursting out of his blonde head. A red scar sliced across Steve’s cheek from when he tried to balance a claw hammer on his nose last winter. It didn’t work.

His friend Doug sneezed like a machine gun, causing his body to seesaw on his skinny, long legs like a drunk crane. His faced was also flushed bright orange like Iggy’s mom.

Steve said, “The fort looks awesome!”

Doug shouted, “It’s awesome because it was all my idea and you couldn’t have done it without me. I’m amazing. This fort shall now be named Fort Doug. You need to build a wall around it.”

Steve and Iggy spun around on their tree stumps. Doug never bragged so they asked if he was kidding. Doug shouted, “No, I’m not, Losers! I’m number one! You’re both fired!”

“But we built this together,” said Iggy.

“No way, Bozos!” exclaimed Doug with a foghorn sneeze. “I’m going home to my yuge house to play golf in my yuge backyard.”

Orange Fever: A Comedy Horror by Hayden O'Brien

“That’s weird!” said Steve as Doug hiked up the dirt path towards his home.

“Yeah, and did you notice he had an orange sunburn?” asked Iggy. “Anyway, I’m going to that school fundraiser with my family.” Iggy headed to Dinklemeyer Elementary.

Once Iggy got to the fundraiser to raise money for a new healthy food cafeteria program, he sat down at the candied apple station his family volunteered to run. His parents waved to him while his little brother let fly another spitball.

Iggy noticed everyone was eating extremely unhealthy food. Mr. Franklin was stuffing a piece of deep-fried lard into his mouth even though he owned Mr. Franklin’s Health Food Store. Mrs. Mint, a health nut, was gobbling down a Big Mac covered with maple syrup and using a funnel to chug a 2 litres of Coke. *Why is everyone eating and drinking so much junk?*

Iggy saw his neighbour Mr. Baffleman who had a bad stutter and asked him if he heard anything about people turning orange. Mr. Baffleman said, “Don’t trust the n-n-news, Son! Orange! Ha! It’s all fake! I should be a n-n-news reporter because I’m amazing! People tell me I’m b-b-better than Anderson Cooper!” Mr. Baffleman had a bright orange comb-over swaying in the breeze. *Everyone was acting so weird!*

Iggy suddenly realized almost everyone, including babies, had fluffy orange comb-overs and terrible orange spray-on tans. *Am I seeing things?* Just then, Steve walked up to Iggy and looked like he had dipped his head into a tub of orange dye. Steve said, “I’m a famous farmer. I have my own TV channel. I just joined the NHL. Have you been to my new amusement park called Steveland? I can juggle ten things at once with one hand! Believe me, Stupid!”

“Okay, how about you juggle these three apples,” said Iggy. Steve tossed them in the air. They plummeted onto people’s heads.

“That was THEIR fault because they stuck their dumb heads into my flying apples!” yelled Steve and stomped away.

On the way home, Iggy saw a huge cardboard sign taped over a street sign with DOUG

Orange Fever: A Comedy Horror by Hayden O'Brien

AVENUE written in messy paint. At home, his parents said they were getting home security to keep out illegal immigrants. "Let's make our home great again, honey!" screamed his dad. At dinner, it was very hard to talk because there were cardboard walls between each person at the table.

His dad turned on the news of former president Donald Rump giving an interview. Rump called the reporter a stupid loser, said burning fossil fuel is great, and said his son Donald Rump Jr. actually won the last election. He showed a giant tattoo on his back of Russia's president and said they are long lost brothers, said drinking Lysol cures stupid, said he just wrote an incredible book called 'Saying Sorry is for Bozos,' and said his son will build a yuge wall between Canada and the USA to keep out maple syrup smugglers and hockey players.

That's it, thought Iggy, everyone is changing into Rump! It must be a virus because everyone who is sneezing turns orange with terrible comb-overs and then acts Rumpish. This virus causes people to be obnoxiously arrogant, take credit for everything, lie, never apologize, cheat, build walls to separate one another, and ridicule people.

The next morning, Iggy noticed scary headlines in the newspaper: Riots In New York (because people kept stealing each others' taxis), Russia Bankrupt (because they began building a fifty-foot wall around their country), Every Country Banned from the Olympics (because every country was caught cheating). *Oh no, it's happening! The Rumpapocalypse!* He remembered Rump was visiting Dinklemeyer to give a speech in one hour about himself. Iggy knew what to do. He hoped his plan would save the world.

Iggy ran to the ancient whale oil warehouse where Rump would give his speech. The red brick building had a few dusty windows, a giant poster of Rump squeezing a whale to death with oil squirting out of it, and a big banner saying WHALE OIL LOVES RUMP! RUMP LOVES WHALE OIL. To make his plan work, Iggy needed the computer where the speech was written. He stealthily snuck in a side door where flickering lights cast an eerie glow, making all the workers look like orange zombies.

Iggy saw a door labeled UNIFORMS. He had an idea. He soon emerged with grey overalls, a faded ball cap, and a brown jacket identical to the other workers. He looked in a mirror. He was flushed with thin, orange hair. He felt like insulting people and was craving greasy

Orange Fever: A Comedy Horror by Hayden O'Brien

cheeseburgers. *Oh no, I'm infected.* He was running out of time.

Iggy slid into the auditorium. Hundreds of people in orange hats were staring at him. He wanted to turn around but walked onstage. Beads of sweat ran down his face like raindrops. Iggy walked up to the computer and began typing but halfway through his typing, a little boy from his neighbourhood pointed at him.

“Mommy! Mommy! Look!” the little kid wailed. Iggy knew the mother would soon notice him so he typed furiously. A security guard glared at him. He hit ‘enter’, hoping the new writing would load onto the teleprompter. Iggy hopped off the stage just as Rump walked on. Everyone cheered.

“Hi, I’m amazing so you must be very thrilled to be here with me. I’d like to talk about how incredible I am,” said Rump.

Iggy spotted Doug holding a sign saying VOTE DOUG! Iggy watched Rump pause to take a sip from a pop can, and noticed it had ‘disinfectant’ written on it.

Rump said, “I am sorry for all the mistakes I’ve made, for all the times I’ve never apologized, for all the people I’ve insulted, for all the damage I’ve done to world, for splitting the country apart with hatred... Oh, huh? What?! Who wrote this?”

While Donald Rump became confused, Iggy saw people’s orange skin and comb-overs disappearing. People were hugging, complimenting each other, apologizing.

Iggy’s plan worked. He figured he had to trick Donald Rump into saying ‘sorry’ for his mistakes and to appear compassionate. He decided the virus must feed on hate and maybe also unhealthy fast food. He hoped the opposite of Donald Rump would destroy the virus and cure everyone else who saw his speech.

Sure enough, the next day Iggy saw on the news and in newspapers that people around the world were being kinder, forgiving one another, and being more honest while orange comb-overs vanished.

At breakfast the next day, Iggy told his family what he did. “I’m proud of you, Iggy,” said

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his mom and hugged him. His dad smiled and patted him on the back. Iggy was proud of himself for stopping the Rumpapocalypse. Just as he was going upstairs, he felt a spitball hit his leg and spun around to see his brother snickering. *Well, it looks like not everybody changed,* thought Iggy. ◆

Junior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Annika Gill

Time for Change

2021

Brushing off a thin layer of dust, she opened the box of old memories and pulled out an enormous, thick, photo album containing over three generations of family photos. Flipping through the pages bound between the maroon leather cover, she stopped at a photo of her younger self. A kindergarten class photo. Pulling it out of the protective plastic cover, she read the caption at the bottom of the page.

1984–1985 Northroad Elementary

The photo was frail and faded despite the plastic protection. She found herself quickly, probably because she was the only brown girl in the class. Flipping it over, she was delighted to find all her former classmates' names scribbled in terrible handwriting.

Her eyes combed the back of the page searching for the three letters that spelled out the name that everyone had known her as for the past thirty-seven years. She found it, written in rounded capital letters, SAM.

Sitting cross legged on the floor of her unboxed, new apartment, she racked her memory struggling to remember how exactly, she made the choice to change the traditional name that her parents had given her – a beautiful name, she was proud to have – to something as short and simple as *Sam*.

Just as suddenly, the memory hit her. Hard.

1984

Shyly, the little brown girl with inquisitive gingerbread brown eyes and a braid down her back lined up outside her classroom, just like her brother instructed before she left for school that morning. How the girl longed for her brother. He would know how to make the school seem less scary, make it fun, like a game. But no. This morning, the girl's older brother had left for the big kid's school. She heard their parents call it "high school."

At the sound of a loud bell, a tall lady with short curly auburn hair and brilliantly bright blue eyes opened the green door. She wore a yellow dress decorated with sunflowers on the skirt, and had a large friendly smile plastered onto her face. She looked significantly younger than the girl's mother, who was nearing her forties.

Ginormous buzzing fluorescent lights flickered overhead in the classroom. Tables were lined up in three neat rows, and lush green plants filled the windowsills. Through the windows cased in blue, stood a large playground that looked immensely inviting to a five-year-old. There was a bookcase at the back of the class, filled with titles the girl could not read, but pictures that looked pleasurable, and at the front of the class was a bright rainbow carpet.

Completely clueless as to what to do she followed her classmates to the cloakroom. Wide eyed, she watched as the other kids put away their backpacks. The girl held her bag tightly. She didn't want to leave it. The brand-new purple backpack had been a gift from her grandparents at the start of the summer, right before they flew back home to India. Her brother showed her where the country was on a circular object, he called a *globe*. According to the colourful orb, her grandparents were now halfway around the world from where she was right now. Just thinking about how far away they were made her stomach fill with butterflies.

There were only two kids left in the cloak room. Hesitantly, she placed the backpack on one of the hooks and eagerly followed the students to a seat on the vibrant carpet placed before an immaculate green chalkboard.

"Good morning class." The lady with the curly hair announced in a sugary tone once everyone was seated.

Of course, the girl had no idea what she was saying. The words came out as gibberish. Just dissonant sounds filling the air.

In response, the teacher received twenty inquisitive stares. She let out an airy laugh. "Welcome to your first day of kindergarten!" She said enthusiastically. "My name is Ms. Osborne, and I will be your teacher this year."

Teacher. She clung to the word, it being something she could make sense of in her

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confusion. Her brother told her about those. According to him, this lady was in charge of her for the rest of the school year.

A pudgy little boy with blond hair wearing a blue shirt, sitting directly beside her, raised his hand, five stubby fingers waving in the air. “All year?” He asked before Ms. Osborne could call on him.

She gave him a placid look. “Yes. All year.”

“Oh.” The boy sounded a bit disappointed.

“Well!” Ms. Osborne said, clapping her hands, and making the class jump, “Why don’t we start with the attendance? Say, ‘here’ when I call your name.”

She ran through the attendance, rather slowly, reading out the various names, pronouncing them clearly and precisely. “Jane?”

“Here.”

“Benjamin?”

“Here.”

“Thomas?”

“It’s Tommy.” Replied the boy who had called out earlier, confidently.

The teacher arched an eyebrow. The boy’s arms were crossed. He was waiting for the teacher to recall his name.

“Tommy?”

“Here.”

She smiled plainly.

And on and on it went until, thirteen names later, Ms. Osborne failed to pronounce a name

correctly. “Suck-manny?” She said it awkwardly as though she was at the dentist, and people were sticking fingers in her mouth.

At first, the girl didn’t recognize her own name. Then she saw the teacher looking directly at her. It dawned on her that everything about who she was stuck out like a sore thumb. From the colour of her skin to her cultural name, Sukhmani realized she was different. Eyes downcast she felt her face flush red with embarrassment as someone laughed in the back of the class.

She then tried to carefully pronounce the sentence her brother had practiced with her in case she found herself in this predicament. “I... My name...” She pointed to herself, “Sam.” Her words were slow, and a thick South-Asian accent distorted them.

The teacher looked relieved for a moment but then someone in the back called out. “You sound funny.”

Sukhmani didn’t know what the kid said. All she knew was that it wasn’t anything good, because it didn’t take long for the rest of the class to softly murmur and giggle their agreement. “Hey! I don’t think she sounds funny.” The blond boy sitting next to her – Tommy – announced.

“Now, now, class, that wasn’t very nice.” She turned back to Sukhmani. “Dear, are you sure you’d like to be called Sam?”

Sukhmani didn’t know what the teacher had said so she quietly nodded, before turning her head down, eyes staring at the vibrantly coloured carpet.

The teacher droned on for a while and Sukhmani couldn’t help but steal glances at the boy who’d suddenly come to her defence.

She caught his eye and muttered another word her brother had taught her. “Thank you.” She said quietly, hardly a whisper.

He heard it.

“You’re welcome.” He said proudly. “Friends?”

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Friends. She liked the sound of that.

2021

Sam snapped back into reality. The memory was something she'd subconsciously tried to bury. Her birth name, Sukhmani, had been given to her by her Baba Ji, her grandfather, and meant "bringing peace." It tied Sam to her culture and was such an important piece of her identity. The simple act of choosing to be called something other than Sukhmani, her birth name, only distanced herself from her family and traditions. Changing it had been a choice made from fear and embarrassment at the time. Something she'd done as an act of... protection and hadn't relinquished since.

Before slipping the photograph back into the photo album, she found a pen and wrote her name, her *real* name, underneath her kindergarten scrawled signature. Sukhmani knew she wasn't embarrassed or afraid anymore. Maybe it was time for a change. ◆

Senior Short Story

Senior Short Story: First Prize

by Joyce Park

Closure

1.

I search for him.

Green eyes. Cream trench coat.

I sit on our bench, hands folded, gaze flicking around. A breeze swirls past me and into the trickling flow of strangers coming my way on the brick path. Parents pause by a tree to adjust the sunshield on their baby's stroller. Children sneeze at the pollen blown in their faces. Couples shyly brush hands.

None of these faces have green eyes that find mine. Nobody envelopes me in the warmth of their trench coat. No one comes to kiss me like it's been years, not yesterday.

It's getting hard to breathe.

Why isn't he coming? It's tradition: meet on the final day of every third month. At this park bench across the fountain where we had our first kiss. I know I'm always thirty minutes early so I'll never be late, but Noah is a different kind of extreme. He's punctual to the exact millisecond, and it's been ten minutes past our arranged time.

As I bite my lip and think about yesterday, I'm suddenly terrified it'll be years before I see him again.

Noah pulling away when I try to kiss him goodbye. *Listen... I'm sorry. I don't think I can handle a relationship right now.*

What?

I can't be with you anymore.

Going out the door without looking back. Leaving me with *why* on the tip of my tongue.

But that couldn't have been the end. It was too short, too out of the blue, too unlike Noah.

I fumble for my phone, knee bouncing up and down. Up down up down as the call rings once, then goes straight to voicemail. My fingers shake and a heavy weight drops in my stomach.

Why aren't you coming?

I wait for him.

2.

I clench the edge of the bench and question what brought me back here. When he didn't bother to text or call or provide any hint that he was still alive. When he left me to run to his dorm and discover he transferred to a medical program across the country.

But I can't *think* because the sun is too hot in the squeaky-clean sky. Flowers bloom on their tiptoes to soak in that warmth, but I shove my hands into my hair and squeeze my eyes shut and still see red.

Catching my chin as I turn my blushing face away. Murmuring, *Don't be afraid to smile at me.*

"You don't get to do this," I growl. "You don't get to make yourself all I think about every day, leave without giving me another thought, and *still* be all I think about every day." My voice rises. "What kind of rotten boyfriend are you? Bastard. Green-eyed devil."

Green eyes that darken before he kisses me. Rosy lips whispering in my ear. Lean body sprawled on my bed, asleep. A flash of white teeth as he laughs, laughs, laughs...

He's so pretty I hate him. I hate him but he's so, so pretty. I'd drag him to every painter I could find and say, *Here is your inspiration: living art.*

Swiping down angrily, I yank one of the thousand buttercups surrounding the bench. I imagine the petals are Noah's golden eyelashes and pluck them all off viciously. I suffocate the bald flower head in my fist until my nails leave permanent marks.

This summer *heat*. Is baking me in an oven, the temperature going up up up—

Closure by Joyce Park

“Green-eyed *devil!*” I catapult off the bench. I snatch another fistful of buttercup heads and hurl them into the air. I stomp them flat and spew a jumble of curses until I’m dizzy and panting.

By the fountain, a young girl stops licking her ice cream and gawks at me. Her mother, giving me a disapproving once-over, hurriedly tugs her hand to steer her away from me.

Screw you, Noah. You’ve turned me into the crazy lady who yells at ghosts.

3.

“Why aren’t you here?” I run along the brick path to meet him in the middle. My boots crunch on the shrivelled leaves of muted reds and oranges—but abruptly stop. I whirl around to find our bench obscured by the fog. I can’t leave it. What if he comes and I’m not there?

Just for a minute, I beg as I sprint back. Come back so I can talk to you.

He doesn’t. I pace around our bench. *Crunch crunch crunch.*

“How about this? One confession each,” I propose. I stop and swallow. “Here’s mine: I lied. I liked you first. You think you did, because you did everything first, but I saw you first in the General Library. You sat at your table with stick-straight posture and three textbooks open around you. I went back the next day and there you were again. Every day, rain or shine, you were there. It amazed me. How does someone maintain that much consistency?”

“On the days I flunked an exam and was convinced I wasn’t good enough for university, I’d see you in the same spot and have one good thing that day: the sight of how you kept going, like all you knew was how to keep pushing forward.”

Crunch crunch crunch.

“But I did absolutely nothing until I *accidentally* made myself known to you when I tripped against you and toppled your three textbooks. Because how could someone so steady love a mess like me?”

The memories and insecurities shoot through my veins. Such a mess like me, still waiting

on the final day of every third month. Because I still need to see him. Because I see him everywhere but right here.

I wipe my wet cheeks with my sleeve and stare straight down the path, daring him to materialize from the fog. “Your turn. Tell this liar about what a traitor you were. You confessed first, kissed me first. So sure of us even when I wasn’t. So why did you leave first? Why did you stop loving me?”

Come back so I can ask you *why* and never ask it again.

I yell it for anyone to listen, but my cries are only absorbed by the fog. It doesn’t even return an echo.

I slump to the ground. “Come back,” I whisper, “so I can walk away.”

4.

I’m numb.

I sit with my knees tucked under my chin. An icy dot materializes on my cheek, then just as quickly dissolves into the burning cold of my skin. I feel it again, on my nose and lip. My eyes won’t open, so instead I try to listen to the snow falling, but it’s quieter than a graveyard out here.

I wasn’t prepared for a breakup, Noah. You were my first. Nobody wanted me before you, and I guess neither did you. How can you possibly have reciprocated my feelings if you see it’s the final day of every third month and not be hopelessly drawn out?

Reading to me in the library. His voice curling around my ear. Leaning my head back against the bookshelf.

A tear crystallizes on my cheek.

Hands deep in the pockets of his coat. Closed eyes crinkling with a closed-mouth smile because he knows I’m staring at him.

Closure by Joyce Park

Are you smiling now, Noah? Can you feel my gaze staring at the memories we share?

Sitting here reminds me of one now. Me, sitting in Noah's seat in the General Library to surprise him. My legs swinging like pendulums as I wait for thirty minutes past his study time. He never comes.

I switched my major, Noah confessed when I asked him about it afterwards. It has better job prospects. I go to the Medicine Library now.

I felt a series of emotions. Shock that he switched majors. Admiration at his capability to make such a radical change. Sorrow that we'd leave behind the General Library. Wouldn't greet the librarians as I enter, chat with my new friends at Noah's neighbouring table, and secretly kiss behind bookshelves. I'd grown attached to the routine.

Not Noah. He never set foot in the General Library again.

Maybe our breakup wasn't too unlike Noah.

5.

I promenade along the brick path and breathe in the quiet freshness that follows a rainy day. The scent of sap. A glimmer of water glinting from the grass. Fractured sunlight peeking through clouds.

I'm not alone. Parents adjust the hat on their toddler's head. Students laugh as they race home. A couple holds hands on a bench across the fountain, foreheads nearly touching.

I wonder if they'll have their first kiss. If they'll meet there again. I wonder if our romance will live on through them.

He was a good boyfriend. Green-eyed angel.

He only became the green-eyed devil after the breakup. Radio silence. Making me cry every night. A rotten boyfriend. But a standard ex.

Closure by Joyce Park

As I pass the bench, I think I see a flash of green eyes. A cream smudge of a trench coat in my peripheral vision.

I keep walking ahead. ◆

Senior Short Story: Second Prize

by Audrey Kemp

Stowaway

When we were little, we used to run away whenever the black dog came to bark at your front door. As it clawed at the walls and tried to creep in through the cracks in the floorboards, I helped you sneak out your bedroom window. The drop didn't hurt you as much as the thought of staying behind and listening to the shouting that would fill the halls. You always said your Momma didn't mean no harm. You never lied like that about your Poppa, though. Once we were free, we would make our way down to the train station. We would stand at the rails, and we would pretend, for just one moment, that our piggy banks were a little heavier and our hearts a little braver.

It's been a while since we were that naive, but as we wait at Greenwich Station, I know your mind has wandered to the same childhood mischief. It's mid-July and everything is different—bad different. The kind that nags at you like a slightly wet stocking or the one key on my aunt's grand-piano that's always out of tune.

“Where would you go?” I haven't asked the question in many years, but I know your answer will be the same as always.

“Anywhere,” you say. I never get tired of the way your eyes widen as though they need to get a little bigger to let in all of the wonders of the world. Today though, they stay dull, fixed on the grime caked into the drab grey cobblestones. “Anywhere but here.”

We stand in silence for a while, watching the busy milling of panicked civilians and weary soldiers. Children board trains leading them into their new lives, snot-nosed and clinging to near-empty carpet bags. Teary-eyed ladies blow kisses to men who will probably forget them by the time the war is over, or come home as someone entirely new. But, either way, they pray for this hell—anything is better than the alternative. The air reeks of smoke and the cheap liquor being passed around, but you breathe it in as if it's the only thing keeping you tethered to reality. For a moment, I think you've relaxed, until you say:

“We shouldn't be here,” you shift your gaze back to the street behind us, and I know that the discomfort you feel is entirely my fault. You hover so close to the tracks, watching the monstrous machines rumble by with a forlorn look that chills me to the core. I want to pull

you away from the precipice, take you in my arms and pretend everything will sort itself out, that as long as you don't jump, I'll shape the world into a place to keep you safe.

"All right," I say, and the old wanderlust surges through me as though it had never faded away. "Let's just go," I step away from our platform, but instead of following you back the way we came, I head over to the small, primly dressed crowd clustered around the Westbound train. You turn around, pausing when you realize I'm not behind you. The confusion written in the scrunch of your brows smooths into disbelief when you understand what I meant. I put my hand out, and when your eyes meet mine, I feel the butterflies fluttering, wings extended, ready to take flight.

A slight grin, and the next thing I know, your palm is warm against mine. We take a step, two, three to build up courage, and the next thing I know we're stepping through the first door we see, into a passenger car aboard the only train dedicated to wealthy civilians making their escape. Your eyes are wide once again as they dart from the glossy leather suitcases to the pearl necklaces to the well-polished shoes that reflect back your bewildered expression. As far as rich folks go, these ones are dressed quite modestly, but you grew up next to the fishing hole with muddy overalls and perpetually scabbed-knees. A place like this wasn't designed for us. My crisp new recruit uniform is flannel in a silk shop. You aren't looking much better, either. Your sodden, dirty jeans are pockmarked with stains, and your muddy boots leave tracks on the scratchy red carpet. Nothing matters though, because we're ecstatic with the freedom our journey will lend us. We're at peace until a ticket collector approaches us with a frown that borders bemusement and suspicion as he takes in my soldier's green and grey.

"What's a fella like you doing here?" his voice holds the slightest touch of an accusation. "Shouldn't you be with the other recruits?"

You freeze, but I'm on my toes, ready for any challenge thrown my way. "We're on leave," I say, casually reaching into the satchel at my waist and pulling out its contents. The collector's eyebrows raise slightly, but immediately lower when he notices the crumpled wad of bills I've tucked into his breast pocket.

"Enjoy your ride, sir," he says, and steps aside to let us find a seat in one of the berths. We

Stowaway by Audrey Kemp

nod, but walk past him to the door leading out of the car. The wind blowing across the lookout perch almost knocks you off balance, but I catch your arm and lead you to the rail. Out on the horizon, the sunset flames a vibrant orange and softer wisps of pink that clash beautifully with the green of your eyes. The rushing air has finally blown your trousers dry, and your hair ruffles in a gentle wave. Your face is crinkled with joy, and you haven't smiled that way in a long time. That smile gave me sustenance, and everyday after you left me, I've fallen asleep starving.

"I hope you aren't doing this for me," you say, and the magic of the moment splinters and cuts me with harsh reality.

"What do you mean?" I ask innocently. "I've always wanted to explore," the words are true, but they waltz around your sadness.

You roll your eyes and tug on my arm so I have no choice but to face you. "That's not what I meant," your insistence fills the air with unease. "I want to talk about the army."

"Fine, but what makes you so worried? The fact that I'm going off to war, or that you're not?"

"They didn't call you—" you start.

"I volunteered."

"And if it's miserable—"

"I'll be a man."

"And if you die?"

I'll join you. I don't reply, but I know you're not expecting me to. You don't want to hear me say it, and I can't make the words trickle past my lips. Watching you wither away any further would shatter me. The tears I see dribbling down your chin trigger mine, and the passing fields begin to blur beneath my drowning eyelashes. Muted pastel fields smear the canvas in abstract strokes that match your hazy, spectral frame. If I could just pull you closer, hold you tightly before the world tries to pry you away...

My hand is out, but it feels cold and bare. I'm searching for you, desperately clinging to the memory of your smile, reaching into emptiness—

“Ticket for one, sir?” I'm brought back to the moment by the bored voice of the railway agent, as he looks at my outstretched hand with slight disdain. The train station seems more hostile, the ritzy passengers an angry hoard of wasps waiting to sting.

“Oh, uh—” I stutter, “This isn't my train.” I'm bewildered and disoriented but I scamper away before the man has time to react. An intercom crackles and an announcement blares out.

“Recruits please report to car number nine, line forty Eastbound. I repeat: recruits report to car number nine, line forty Eastbound.” the nasal voice calling out over the station speaker is a crop to my side, galvanizing me towards the platform currently flocked by eager and petrified young men clad in matching uniforms.

When I take my first step into the mess, I'm sucked into the dismal stench of sweat and sadness and missed opportunities. I nearly collapse, but I picture your presence beside me. I can almost imagine the way your hand would feel on my shoulder, steadying me as I forge into the unknown. Your strength warms me, but you're a fire-cracker and your fuse has been lit. You're burning too brightly and fizzling away too quickly into the night. I turn, and you wrap your arms around me, whispering in my ear, telling me the secrets your mortal breath could never share. With one last shuddering sob I pull away to look you in the eye one last time, to promise you an eternity to make up for all the years we lost. But you're not there. The train station is bustling with an emptiness only you could fill—as I board fate's transport alone. ◆

Senior Short Story: Third Prize

by Adella Teja

Solitary Cosmos

“Cosmos?” Atlas whispers in the darkness, disrupting the dead, haunting silence.

Careful, I match his volume, “Yes?” I respond.

“I’m glad you’re here.”

“I am... also glad.”

What would you do without me? Is what I don’t say out loud.

He laughs, inky eyes twinkling like the stars he named me after, profound yet forsaken. I’d wish upon the stars for his happiness, but I’ve learned time and time again that stars don’t speak.

He asks quietly, “Do you think you could bring me outside?”

“It is cold,” I remind him, despite knowing it’s a pointless ritual, “your body won’t be able to take it.”

“C’mon, just a minute or two,” he grins and pokes my side. I see more than I feel it.

Human hearts, he says, are more than muscles. He says his heart pitter patters with excitement. Slows with peace. Squeezes with joy. He is flesh and bones—fragile, like the porcelain dolls of the eras behind us.

Every reminder of his mortality terrifies me—still, I cave to his prodding, an echo of what I always do.

Outside, snow blankets the land. It gives the illusion of ephemeral beauty, but both Atlas and I know what lies beneath. Barren dirt, frozen solid, as it’ll be for the rest of eternity.

I watch him as he searches the sky, reaching with his thin hands and bird bones as if the stratosphere is touchable from his wheelchair. The sentiment is laughable, yet I remember: those hands are the same hands that breathed life into me.

I think somehow, if there were ever hands that could touch the stars, then those hands would be Atlas' hands.

His sigh echoes with melancholy, yet confusingly, he smiles. "No stars today either."

"Why must you search every day?"

"I've told you, it's just on the off chance that the sky clears up. I don't want to miss it." He lowers his arms, but not his searching gaze.

Nothing is fair. I wish I could cry for him from my metal confines. Moments like these are when I feel the most trapped, the most useless. Atlas made me out of longing, yet I can't give him my tears, my laughs, or my warmth. I'll never be as human as he is.

The coughing fit starts as soon I push his wheelchair back inside and close the door to the frigid wind. The fit is violent today, shaking his entire frame. The old worries surface: *What if his bones snap? What if he falls?*

"I wish you'd stop going outside."

He only answers after the fit subsides, looking old and haggard at just twenty-one. "You know I can't."

"Even though you're dying?"

"It's what keeps me alive."

I understand, of course. There's a reason I never refuse his wishes, why I choose to push his wheelchair with my own two hands.

Staring at the sky, Atlas looks alive. He looks the way he used to, before we realized he wouldn't live forever.

He'd been a difficult child, fuelled by rage, fuelled by perceived betrayal, fuelled by loneliness. Today, I look at him and only loneliness is left, stripped bare.

"I don't have time to be angry," he'd told me once. I almost wish he could've stayed angry

Solitary Cosmos by Adella Teja

instead of becoming... this.

I help him to bed and watch over him, counting the time between one breath and the next as his heart rate slows. I check the heaters, pull his blankets up higher so they won't fall—he's always been a restless sleeper.

Then, I leave.

It doesn't take long to reach the city. Even though Atlas chose to move away from the pain of the reminders long ago, the city is only a twenty-minute walk.

Lying in the unnamed city's plaza is five years of work. The creation of a creation, so to say. It's far from perfect, though I feel a hint of chemical pride when I see it. I imagine my chest swelling with this pride, the way humans in books and Atlas feel.

I look to the dark sky and wonder what he'll think—if salt water will leak from his eyes, if his eyes will crinkle with a smile. Humans are too unpredictable, even though Atlas has done all he can to help me understand.

“What would you like for breakfast?”

He turns to me, opens his mouth, closes it.

“...Toast?” He presses one steadying hand into his temple. “I'm not really hungry right now.”

“Alright.”

“Thanks.”

Atlas is never hungry these days.

I take extra care to prepare his toast, heating it until it shines golden, smoothing strawberry jelly on its surface. He wheels himself into our orange-lit kitchen, blankets wrapped around his thin shoulders.

I watch his eyes and the micro expressions that flash through his face as he eats one painstaking bite at a time—I can only hope the food will stay down.

“Cosmos,” comes the sudden call, “what are you gonna do when I’m gone?”

If I were human, I’d have jolted in shock.

“...I suppose I will see.”

“I...” he clenches his fork, “could still try to transfer my conscience into a machine.”

“No. You should not.”

“But—”

“No.”

He continues, heedless. “You’ll be alone, and I don’t want—”

—to leave you alone like everyone left me.

“You wanted to die human.”

Atlas loves humanity, under all the anger and betrayal and false hate—he longs for the people who left him behind.

“It’s not worth it.”

“Atlas.”

“You don’t deserve to get left behind like that, I—it... you don’t understand how quiet it gets, I thought I’d go insane—”

“Atlas. I am not human.”

He stops.

“I am not worth it,” I tell him. “It is too risky, and you would lose too much.”

He sags, shrinking into his blankets until he looks small. He stares somewhere far and laughs.

Solitary Cosmos by Adella Teja

“Right,” he murmurs. “You’re not real.”

He’s right. I’m made of metal bolts and artificial feelings. Just a placeholder, created to keep him company—yet. Yet, I feel as if I’ve said something cruel.

Breakfast stays half unfinished, cut short by a sudden cough that sprays red over the table. He peers through me, seeing something I can’t with loathsome pitch-black eyes.

Where are the stars?

“I guess I’ll be leaving you today, Cosmos.”

My creation isn’t perfect.

Untested, too new for such an important role—and yet, finished—just as it’s been since last year. My own apprehension has been stopping me, all this time. A part of me fears Atlas will leave after he sees it, fears he’ll find closure and then breathe his last.

I don’t want him to leave.

“How do you know it will be today?”

“Just a hunch—I’ve already lived too long.”

I trudge footsteps through the snow, setting up the perimeters of the absurd thing I’ve created.

It’s blasphemous, but it *will* work. It needs to work.

Returning to the cabin, I find Atlas fending off sleep. The heaviness in his bones stays, even as he smiles.

“You’re back. Aren’t you ever gonna tell me what you get up to every night?”

Before he goes to sleep and never wakes, is what he means.

Before he dies.

“Would you like to go outside?”

His face twists in shock.

“Outside? You’re... you’ve never...”

“Today is special.”

At this, Atlas looks downcast, despite not once having been hesitant about going outside before.

A pitiful laugh. “I don’t think I can handle seeing nothing again today.”

“Nonsense.”

I take hold of his wheelchair and push him.

“Hey—wait! No, Cosmos I—”

“Look up, Atlas.”

All the fight leaves his body in one breath. His eyes go wide, astonished and young again when he swivels around to look at me.

“...How?” He breathes.

“Magic?” I attempt a joke.

“You’re so full of crap, those are stars up there!” He grins, practically jumps out of his wheelchair to sit on the cabin steps. I realize I haven’t seen him so animated since my first days. He lights up like a million stars—brilliant, *alive*.

A minute passes before he speaks again.

“Do you think they’re out there?”

I watch him as he watches the stars I forged. I think about airborne mortal hands. I think about reaching for an impossibility, for him, for humanity.

Solitary Cosmos by Adella Teja

“They must be.”

He stays awake for as long as he can, leaning against me, though I’m nowhere near warm. I try to shield him from the biting cold, if only for the sentiment. He doesn’t seem to notice how the usual wind is absent.

“Cosmos?” Atlas whispers within our starlit microcosm.

Careful, I match his volume, “Yes?” I respond.

“I’m glad you’re here.”

I’m sorry, he doesn’t say, but I hear.

Sorry, and goodbye.

When he goes to sleep, I can almost believe he’ll wake up tomorrow morning—so I carry him to bed.

I pull the blankets to his chin, because he’s always been a restless sleeper. ◆

Senior Short Story: Honourable Mention

by Loki Oravec

Goodbye

I step out of my mother's car and shut the door, staring ahead at my uncle Emmett's house. Chipped paint, black roof shingles, forest green door and matching shutters. A place that used to bring a smile to my face, but now feels gloomy—ominous, even. Maybe I'm just thinking that because Em died recently. Maybe it's always been this creepy. I can't tell.

Aunt Dahlia looks at the patchy lawn, biting her thumb. Mom's eyes trail up the house to the sky, where mid-August rain clouds lumber above our heads. She's probably thinking that he's somewhere up there, looking down at us.

Her eyebrows furrow for a moment before she turns her head to me. "Are you ready to go in?" She speaks softly, like I'm a child who doesn't understand what's going on. I nod my head. I'm lying.

Inside, it's cold, and kind of smells like dust. The house is lit only with the silvery glow coming from the clouds outside. As we walk through the house all together, the memories make my heart pang. A box of his favourite cereal sits half-empty on the kitchen counter, which prompts Aunt Dahlia to cry. Mom and I hug her. I bite my lip to stop the tears, but they still stab at my eyes.

We sit at the dining room table. I stare at the tablecloth. It's the only thing in the room that doesn't pain me to look at.

Dahlia fishes a tissue out of her coat pocket and blows her nose. "We need to decide which rooms we're going to clean out first," she says, still sniffing.

I feel my mom's fatigued stare. "*You* should take care of the attic," she says, clasping her hands tightly, "and Dahlia and I can work on the kitchen. We'll figure out the rest from there." I notice that she doesn't use my name. She's been referring to me as "you" ever since I changed it.

I get out of my chair and amble up the stairs. At the top of the stairs is a wide hallway, and at the end of the hallway is a door in the ceiling, leading to the attic. Emmett loved going into the attic, so he always had the pull-out ladder all set up.

Goodbye by Loki Oravec

As I'm climbing up the ladder, I suddenly break out into a cold sweat. This was one of Em's most personal rooms, other than his bedroom, obviously. Vowing to not get too emotional, I step from the ladder to the attic's hardwood floor.

The attic's as cluttered as I remembered it being. Boxes of record albums and books sit on the floor. Clothes deemed too worn-out to wear but too important to throw out are strewn across the place. There's a big circular window that's only half visible, due to random objects blocking it. The attic is a unique blend of eeriness and familiarity.

Sitting on one of the boxes is a flannel that makes my heart sink to my feet. Light blue and black, a dull stain on the inside, a couple of chipped buttons. Em's lucky flannel. He must have put it here before the crash.

I hold the flannel up to my face, close my eyes, and take a deep breath. It still smells like him: a clean, fresh scent, as if it had just been washed.

I hear a shuffling noise coming from behind me. I whirl around and make eye contact with a man who looks as though he's made of mist.

Emmett.

He smiles warmly. "Hello, Chrys."

This can't be real. There's no way Em is here, sitting so nonchalantly on a box of his old records... but it has to be him. He has the same shaggy, caramel blond hair. He bounces his leg up and down anxiously as he always does when he sits. The only difference is that he's translucent.

I'm frozen. I want to scream, but I don't.

"What're you doing here?" he asks, scrunching his thick eyebrows. His grin never leaves his face.

I pause. "I'm cleaning out your house," I whisper. "Because you died." I can't blink. "What are *you* doing here?"

Emmett's smile dissolves. "You know how some ghosts stay for... unfinished business, and whatnot?"

"Yes."

"Well," he says, "I haven't said goodbye to my favourite person yet." He puts his smile back on, but his eyes glimmer with melancholy.

I finally move to step towards him. "Don't."

"Chrys, I can't stay. I'm really sorry." He raises his arms. "I'm practically gone already."

"You're not, Emmett. It's only been two weeks. I'm not used to it." I clutch his flannel closer to me. "I mean, Em, you're the only person who's ever been there for me. My mother hates that I'm being myself. My dad's always at work..." I study his face. "Hell, Em, you helped me choose my name after I came out to you."

He scratches his chin. "Your eyes lit up when I suggested Chrysippus. Can't blame you, it's the coolest name ever."

My shoulders relax. "It is, you're right. You always know exactly what I need, somehow. Like when I'm sad," I laugh breathlessly, "you ask me if I want to watch Bo Burnham, and it, like, always makes me feel way better."

Em chuckles, but sadness seeps back into my heart. "Who's going to do that now? My mom would never watch him."

"I'm sorry, Chrys." He crosses his legs and twiddles his thumbs. He acts so alive for someone who's dead. Always moving around, fidgeting. A restless soul. "My sister never had a sense of humour." He's only half joking. "But you know, you're going to find someone who does. At school, maybe. Make a friend for yourself. You're very lovable." His tone is dead serious, but his eyes are lively. Ironic.

I finally walk closer to him. "I will," I say, and I mean it. I hug him with one arm, since the other is holding his lucky flannel. It's like embracing someone made of jelly. "I still don't want you to go."

Goodbye by Loki Oravec

“I know,” he mutters, patting my back. “But I’ll always be with you. Just not physically.”

Tears blur my vision. My throat feels thick, like it’s closing in on itself. I let go of him.

“Em?”

“Yeah?”

“I always had a huge crush on Bo Burnham.”

“Really?” he says. His face is totally blank. “Guess what.”

“What?”

“Me too.”

The two of us burst out laughing, and for a moment, Em is made of flesh and blood and bad jokes again, beaming with a life energy that shouldn’t be there.

“Oh! Wait here a second,” he says suddenly (as if I was going anywhere) and scrambles to a box which has a sizable dent in its side. He rummages through it for a minute before pulling out a little black book. He dashes back to me and hands me the book.

“This is for you,” he tells me. I flip through it. It’s a scrapbook full of pictures of me and Emmett, old drawings I made, short paragraphs narrating what we’d done on a particular day. It even has the four-leaf clover I found when I was seven stuck to a page. “It was supposed to be for your 17th birthday.”

“Emmett, I don’t know what to say. This is incredible, thank you,” I marvel, caressing the pages.

Em’s expression is wistful. “I’ll miss you, Chrysippus.” He wrapped his misty arms around me. I realize that it’s the last time I’m going to hug him, so I hug back as tight as I can. “I’ll try to visit if I can. I’ll figure out a way. I love you.”

“I love you too, Emmett.”

“Take care of my lucky flannel.”

And with that, he evaporates from my arms. I’m left standing all alone in a messy attic. It’s as if he wasn’t there at all. Maybe he wasn’t, and I imagined the whole experience, but it felt far too real.

“Did you have any trouble at all?” Aunt Dahlia asks on the drive back. “Anything happen?”

I wonder if I should tell her the truth, just for a moment, but I ultimately decide on saying no. She wouldn’t believe me.

Emmett’s gifts sit comfortably on my lap. ◆

Junior Poetry

Junior Poetry: First Prize

by Hayden O'Brien

Deception of Gambling

The Casino happily
swallows
the wallets of its blind prey,
addicted slaves,
falsely assuming
they are the predators.

Junior Poetry: Second Prize

by Cadence Liao

Food for Thought

I'm hungry. My stomach was a bottomless pit awaiting to be filled with the food I craved.
So he came running, apron and knife in hand.
He smoked steak, carved chicken and barbecued beef, fried frog, trimmed tuna and microwaved meat.
He caught salmonella, did not heed my warnings.
His arms were like sliced salami, stuffing showing.
His vegetables lounging in the tub rotting.
So I said, "You shouldn't have bitten off more than you can chew."

My gluttonous self wanted something more disposable. Low and behold, a candy wrapper stuck on my shoe.
One dish was enough to charm me. A piece of cake on her plastic plate, harmless.
She reeked of sucrose. Tootsie roll hair made me drowsy, when she spoke brown sugar coursed through my veins.
Her cotton candy saliva lingered on my lips, wiping it off stained my fingertips blue.
Fed me lollipops, and toffee, candy canes, chocolate, gummies Pop Rocks and candy corn, taffy jellybeans and cookies, apple jacks and Coke and Kool-Aid and sugar cubes and and and and And And AND AND AND AND

... I knew she was bad for me.
Tried to leave many times, but every time I'd leave, she'd put on a sugar-show, kneel, crying her honey tears.
In the end to her I said, "If bitter pills have blessed effects, sweet ones must have cursed ones."

I need more.
After being tainted with sugar, what more could you want? Why something savoury of course.
So he came walking, gave the vegan a shot.
He steamed swede, chiseled chard, and braised broccoli, browned beets, shortened squash, and warmed wasabi.

He wanted to please me, could not stop my cravings.
He needed to be with me. In a way I needed his lifestyle too, but only to flush out the sugar.
His roots clung onto my ankles tight. Sure they'd envelop me eventually, but right now they kept me grounded.
So in the end I said, "You can't have your salad and eat it too."

At this point anything would be fine, as long as I haven't tried it. So I let my guard down.
Found a man, who grew his own greens, crafted candy, bred his own beef, but most importantly he had lemons.
So I asked him, "If life gives you lemons, what do you do?" He said, "Try them" ... And so we did,
Morning, noon, and night, lemons all the time. Do you know what that does to someone?
His saliva seeped into my mouth damaging my enamel,
He bit into my plain breaded flesh, tearing it, not even committing to the crust.
His grip on my body stung, malic acid soaked into every inch of my body.
Soon I was done, so done. I've moved on from so many food groups my taste buds have all died off.
What was the point of eating if everything tasted the same? My craving for passion perished.
So I push in my chair, took my plate to the sink and said
"I'm not hungry anymore."

Junior Poetry: Third Prize

by Isabella Endersby

That Little Girl

I am that little girl
That little girl that skips on stones
That little girl that sings in the rain
And doesn't understand

I am brave
Yet I lack courage
I do not want to die
But it is so hard to live

I blend into the shadows
Nobody sees me
I am blinded by the light
Of what once was

They laugh at me
Am I comical?
Or is it because
I am still that little girl

That little girl
That is in the body of twelve-year-old
That little girl
That doesn't comprehend their jokes
That little girl
That longs to fit in
But wants to stand out
Because she is finally growing up

That little girl
Is now a young woman
And she doesn't know if she likes it

***That Little Girl* by Isabella Endersby**

Sometimes, she feels that the world is changing without her
When she looks over her shoulder, will they all have moved on?
She cries
But when she is alone
She curls up into a ball
And becomes once again
That little girl

I am that little girl

Junior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Khushi Cheema

Good Night

What do the sheep do
When they can't sleep
Do they count each other
Or set themselves free
Tiptoeing through the night
So they don't bother the sun
They climb the sky
To go have some fun
The sheep stop to visit
Their friends on the moon
And dance with the stars
Till the next afternoon
But somewhere a little girl wonders
Where all the lost sheep
That she counted to sleep have gone

Junior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Jesu Matteo I. Manalo

Looking Down From The Heavens

What do I see?
Earthlings looking up at me.
But what they see cannot be me -
for planets, stars, asteroids, and meteoroids, are all they see.

With their telescopes and special scopes they pierce the clouds of gray
Red Mars, blue Venus
Yellow suns, pale moons
a universe of black holes, white dwarfs, and Milky Ways.

With my ship's scopes and special sensors I see how people feel
They see red, they feel blue
They are tickled pink, using green thumbs
a universe of emotions, a cascade of true colours, of what is real.

They look up past the clouds and ask what else is there?
I look at them and ask do you not see?
Of all the creatures on Earth and amongst the stars in the sky
People see, people feel, people touch and are aware.

They are unique in this, precious and rare.

Senior Poetry

Senior Poetry: First Prize

by Rena Su

Sweet, Bygone Sixteen

for A

We're sixteen again and all garage band and vermin,
dreaming selfishly as our arms are aching
to reach greatness. We wonder if the comets cover
from cities or if we blind them by being too bright.
We're sixteen again, meaning we tend to forget
how momentary we are. Glowstick luminescence seeps
from our graphic tees into our veins, illuminating us
temporarily, surrogating us into diorama constellations.
We're sixteen again and you wither away like wildflowers.
Bleed in form of labyrinths. Become more grime
than girl. I recall what it is like to bleed. Every wound
begs to sear itself back in. Maybe I should've prayed more
or begged harder. If only our blood glowed like ichor
and we were more than mortal. These nights I yearn
to see Big Dipper alongside streetlights and pretend
as if every flicker is a star. And on every single flare I'll wish
for another summer to be sixteen alongside you. I wish
to shout to you my secrets in midsummer rain. I wish
for campfires instead of cremations. I just want to tell you
about how much I'll miss you. How I'll hold onto each moment.
Because I'm seventeen now and you'll never be. And I am trying
to love this world again — this world without you

Senior Poetry: Second Prize

by Saiyah Cheema

Astrophysicist's Love Letter to an Artist

BIOLOGICALLY and anatomically

I am made of cells and atoms,

A supernova in a glass jar,

A feverish gaseous ball of matter

That the best of scientists are studying in a laboratory somewhere.

There is no microscope small enough

To see all our love, tightly packaged in the cobweb mosaic of my bone marrow

Or to see how deeply stitched the tattoos of our memories are in my hippocampus.

There is no telescope large enough to see the rings I will forge for us from stardust –

Grand enough to make Saturn and her celestial ring jealous.

METAPHORICALLY and artistically

I am all I've ever loved – I am you, I am us,

I am everyone I've ever met and known and

Every stranger I've passed by on the street

But the largest part of me is taken up by you.

I am you. You've taught me everything I know

And taught me that I am everything I've known:

That I am the milk-tea my parents used to make in the winter and

Sepia film from my grandparents' scrapbooks and

The porcelain patterns from your family's china closet.

AUTHENTICALLY I am all of the above,

Because of you. I was one half of a mind before you.

I once believed that an equation could depict human wisdom

And that anything could be solved through the variables X and Y

Until you said that wisdom was perhaps not logical but abstract and

That you were just as wise at seven as you are now and

That nothing is certain – and perhaps we know nothing at all.

(You quoted it once – a line from War and Peace for assigned reading

That didn't feel so assigned when you read the line aloud to me).

***Astrophysicist's Love Letter to an Artist* by Saiyah Cheema**

Humanity must be burdened then, by curiosity and the power of brilliant minds
For I can't fathom any ideology, or philosophy, to capture how I feel about you.
One day, when our two fields meet –
When the art of science and the science of art collide –
Maybe the rest of the world will finally know something,
Just like us.

Senior Poetry: Third Prize

by Annie Huang

Bao

I stare up at the bun steamer,
as it rattles with glee
until Ah ma opens the bamboo weaved lid with pride.

A blanket of steam fills the air,
embracing me into a hug.

A plump, juicy, pearly bun greets me,
inviting me to come closer.

A “Baozi” was what Ah ma called it.
“Bao” was what I called it,
a gift of indulgence.

My mouth burns a little as I take a bite,
as I get to savour the hint of sweet,
savour the tinge of spicy
and everything in between.
My Bao was all I wanted.

That shivery, frosty winter’s evening,
that indelible aroma,
that enigmatic explosion of sweet and sour pork
dotted with crisp green onion.

At last Bao was gone,
at last, my stomach has been rewarded
and warmed by every bit of love and more love.

“Chi bao le ma?”
“Are you full?” Ah ma asks.
I nod and return my gaze to the misty view
of my window.

The next morning of sunrise,
the next morning of nostalgia,
I return to my cabin.
I sigh and think of the bun steamer, as it rattled with glee.
Until next time when another Bao greets me
with a kiss.
The kiss of delectability.

Senior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Loki Oravec

GREY

When the world was grey,
All my friends sounded like static
And the clouds above my head were heavy.
I, a statue,
Waited in numb agony
For rain.
For colour.
For anything other than this emotionless emotion,
This insensitive grey.
I longed to hear a storm
Tapping against my windowpanes
With its salty, meaningless tears.
But there was nothing.
Grey was silence,
Fluorescent lights washing out the world's saturation.
Grey was a thick fog, a false halo
Wrapping my mind like a present.
Grey was Atlas
When he held up the sky,
The empty weight unbearable for a mortal like me.
Grey was underwhelming, overwhelming,
Everything,
And yet, nothing at all,
A contradicting feeling.
But there came a day
When the wind sang a comforting tune,
And the earth smelled of petrichor
As the heavens rained colour.

Senior Poetry: Honourable Mention

by Manav Sharma

Mîkiwâm

Mîkiwâm
So far away
Above the mountains and across the sea
I miss you so much

Mîkiwâm
The word for home
In the language that is forbidden
By the teachers and the priest

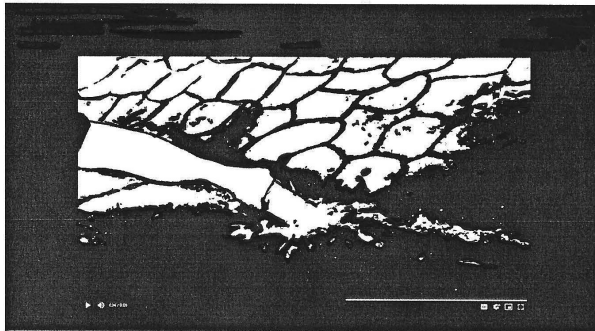
Mîkiwâm
Where mother's love is Eternal
Like the sunlight of the nothern summer
When will you be back

Mîkiwâm
Mother said Mîkiwâm is in our hearts
In our souls
But I am still lonely, still lost

Comics

Comics: First Prize

by Benedict Carlos



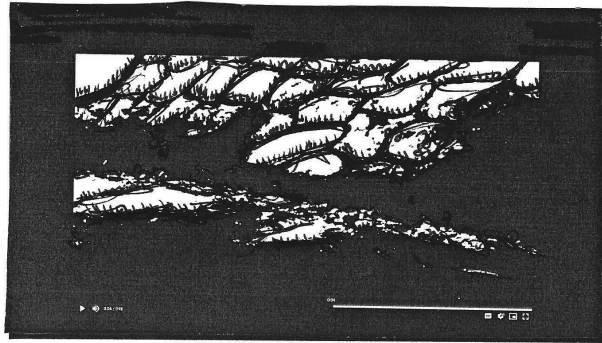
I had a dream two weeks ago where I was in the backseat of a white van being driven to a warehouse by a man who looked like Gabriel García Márquez but with chunkier ears. He told me that we would make sushi with morel mushrooms and that I had to go to the warehouse to get the ingredients.

"Morel mushrooms?" I questioned.

"Morel mushrooms?" he responded.

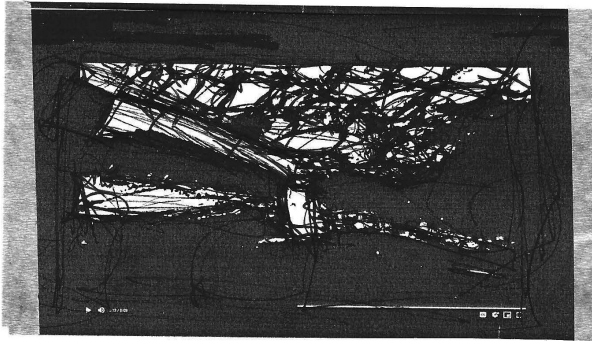
He then gave an exaggerated chef's kiss, uncurling his entire hand from a fist to an open palm like it was stuck in molasses. I knew for sure that the morel mushroom sushi would be worth it.

21st Century Humor by Benedict Carlos



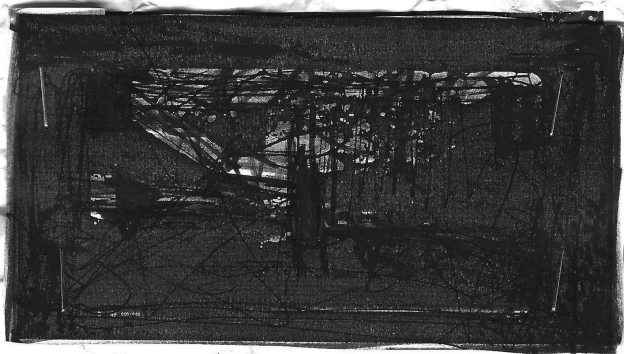
I hopped out of the van and stepped towards a warehouse made of dusty concrete and red, ribbed, metal roofing. It was a warehouse, but it looked more like a giant cubist sculpture or a modern mansion. I went inside and knew I had to round up the people in the warehouse to solve a puzzle.

21st Century Humor by Benedict Carlos



I came pretty close to getting them to join me in solving the puzzle, but they all hid in the various rooms throughout the warehouse. Inside a very spacious room, I saw two people. But before I could approach them, they hid inside a giant, rusty metal tub. I walked back to where I came from and found myself in a narrow hallway. There was an open white door that led to a very small garage. I looked down and saw a person's protruding head, surveying the surroundings. They made eye contact with me and closed the door immediately. I figured that my mission was pointless, so upon finding a cardboard box, I slumped right in and got nice and cozy.

21st Century Humor by Benedict Carlos



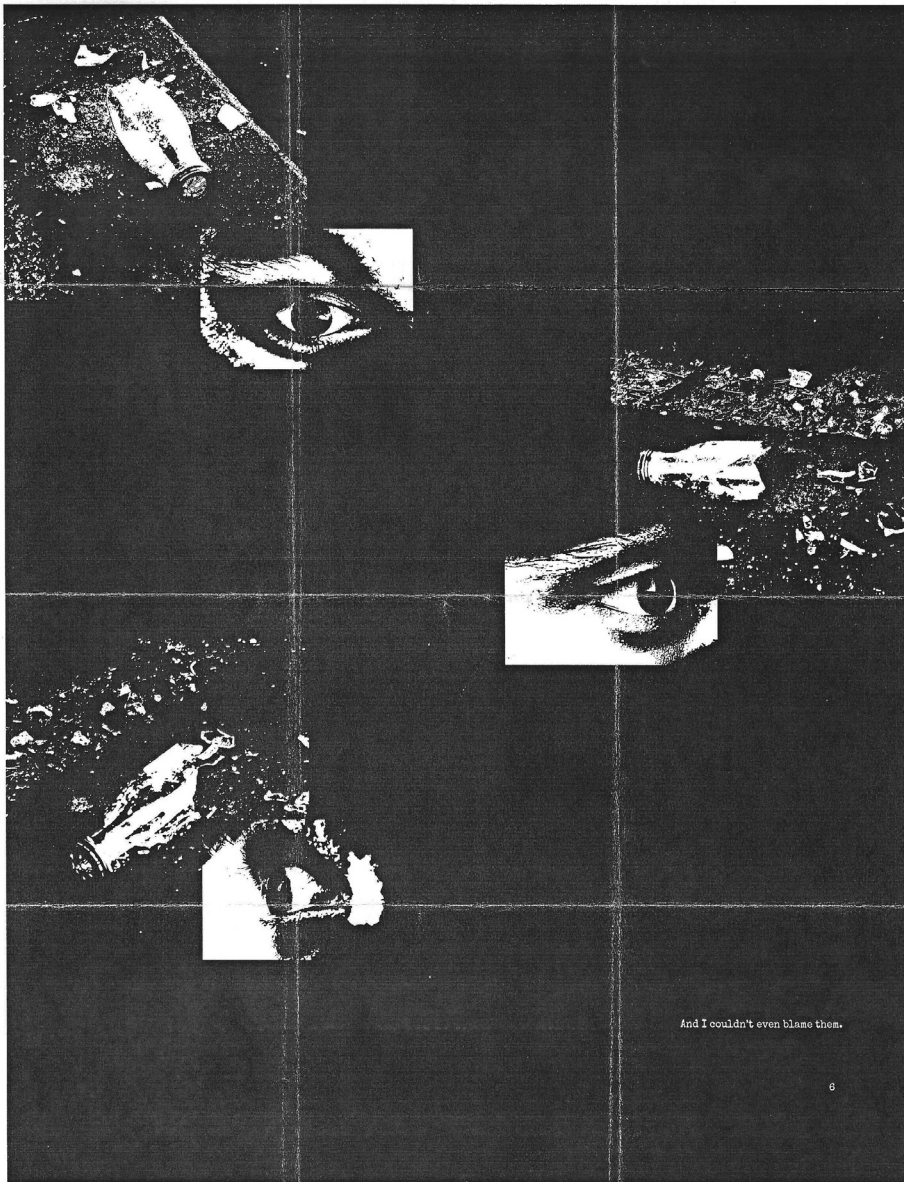
After a couple of minutes, a security guard found me and led me to a concrete courtyard. In the courtyard stood all the people in the warehouse. They were standing in a circle with a one-person gap. When I closed the circle, the security guard whipped out his tablet and he flipped through the various channels of previous security footage, a few displaying the faces of the people in the warehouse in a green night-vision glow. He then revealed the puzzle we were supposed to solve. It wasn't even a puzzle. It was like one of those children's toy things you'd find at banks, dental clinics, or playgrounds. It was a big red board of wood that had been hollowed out. It had a long carved-out pathway that winded across its body. At the end of the long noodle-shaped trail sat a double-headed silver peg, with one head hidden inside the hollow board, and the other jutted out like a whack-a-mole. All you had to do to solve the "puzzle" was bring the peg from one end to the other by tracing it along the pathway. The most crucial fact was that it could only be started once I had rounded everyone in the warehouse. I thought about how easily it could've been solved if all of us had teamed up. At first, I felt a sort of righteous indignation towards everyone's unwillingness to cooperate, but then I remembered that I too was hidden away comfortably. I was no better.



"Who's fault was it?" the security guard asked.

Everyone in the circle raised their skinny arms and pointed their fingers at
me.

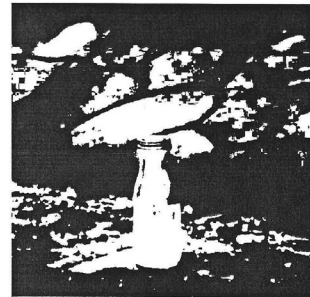
21st Century Humor by Benedict Carlos



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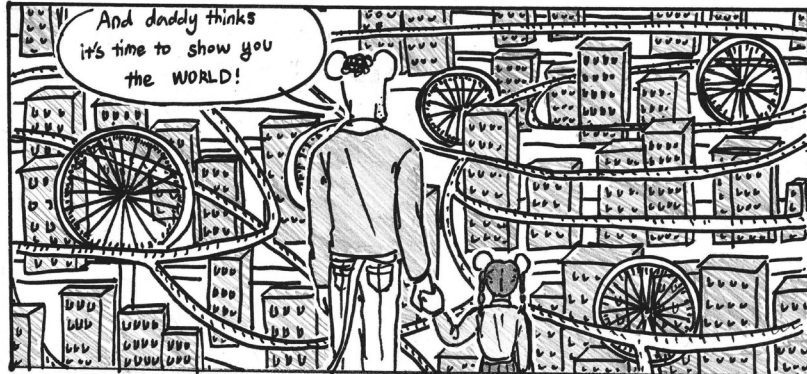
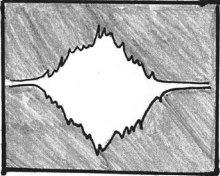
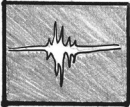
Aug. 3, 2021
Today I decided to go on a
walk. I went to the mall and
bought some groceries. I didn't
go home though I ended up
walking to a distant subway
station. I could have disappeared
- just like that. But you
know I can't do that,

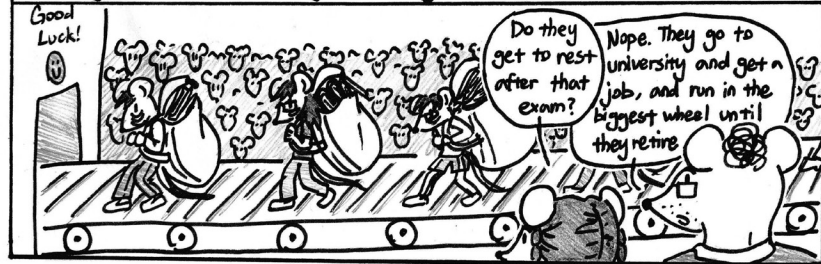
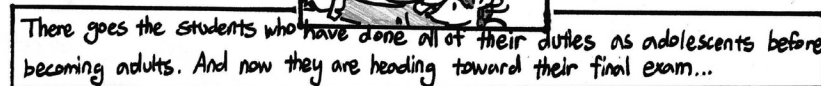
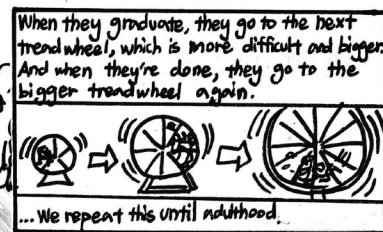
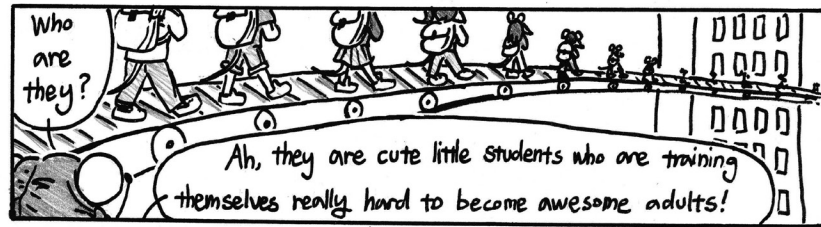
not to you.



Immigrant

*The ways that two countries are described are consisted of 100% my own point of view, and these may not be true to some people.





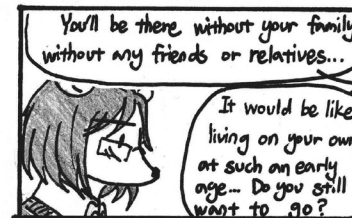
Immigrant by Annis Seo



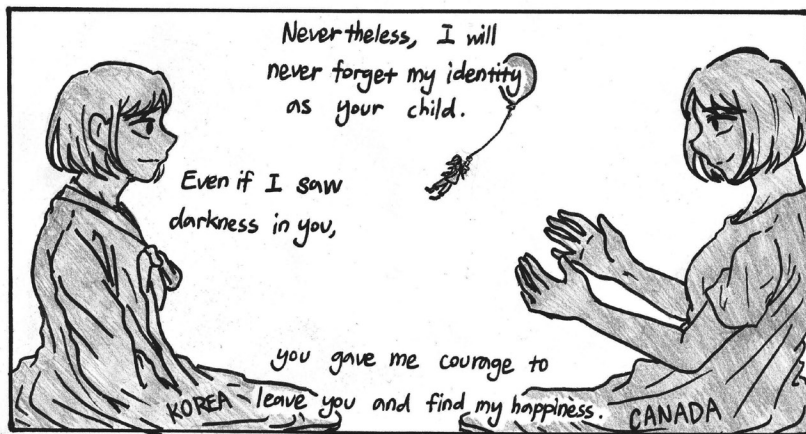
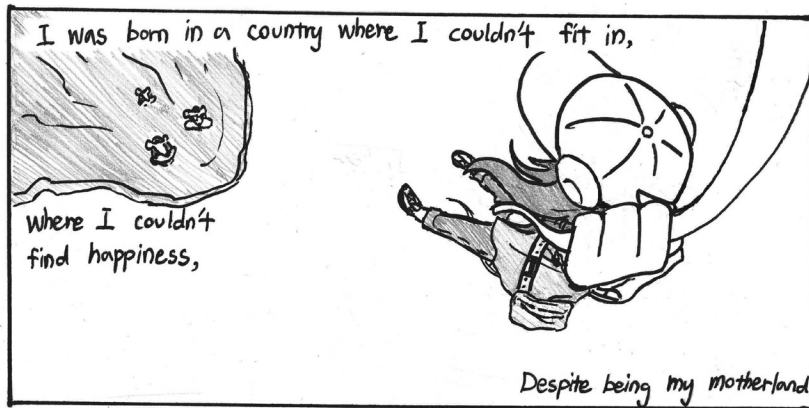


Immigrant by Annis Seo



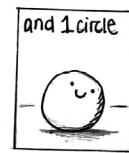
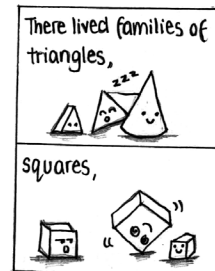
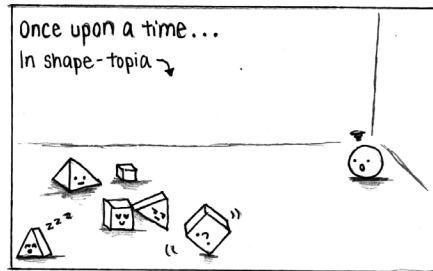
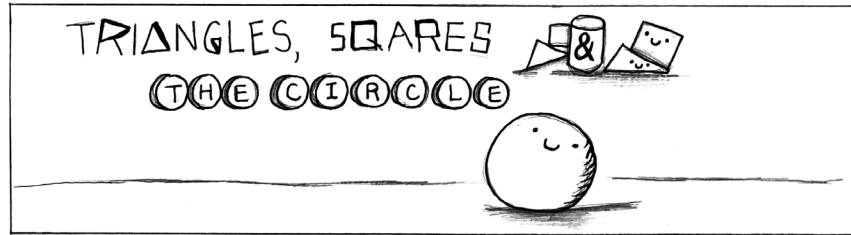


Immigrant by Annis Seo

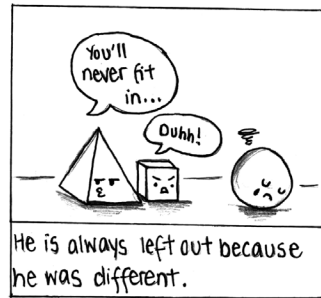


Comics: Third Prize

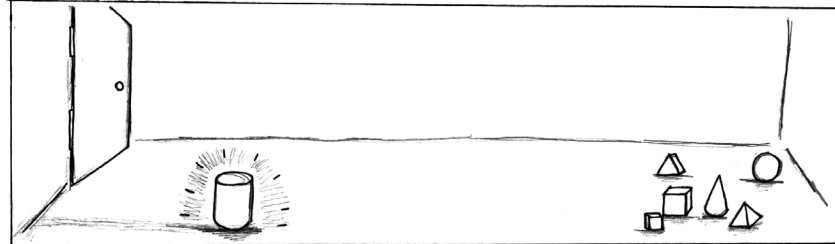
by Annie Huang



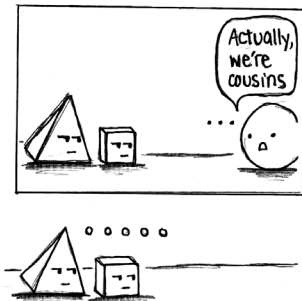
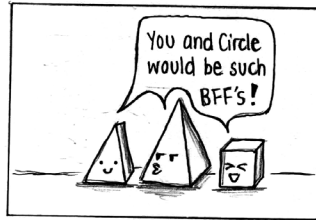
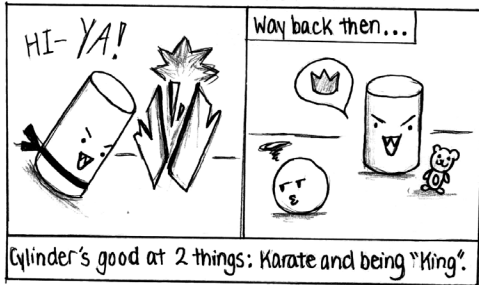
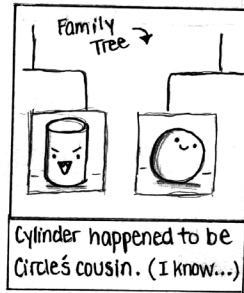
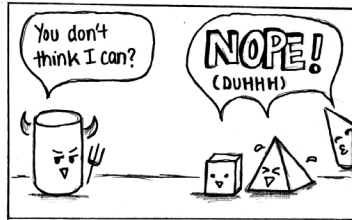
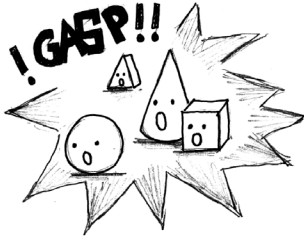
Yes, he was
the one and
only circle...



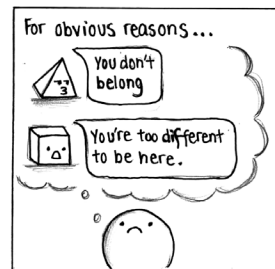
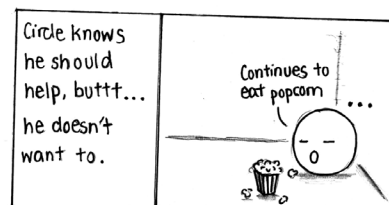
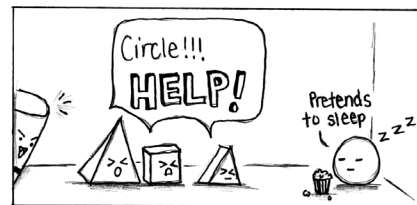
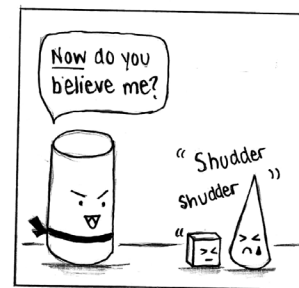
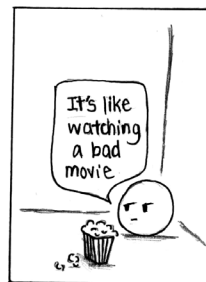
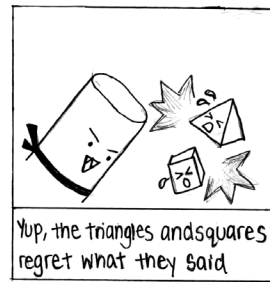
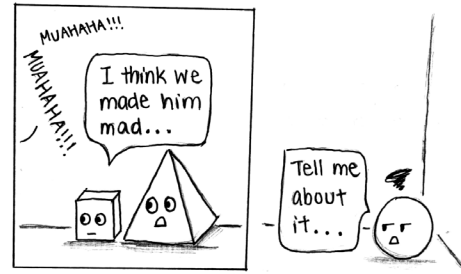
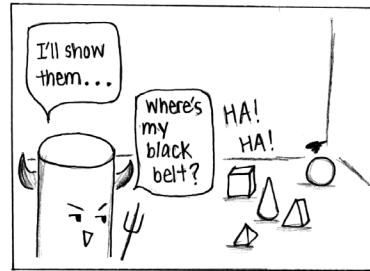
THEN ONE
DAY...



Triangles, Squares, and the Circle by Annie Huang



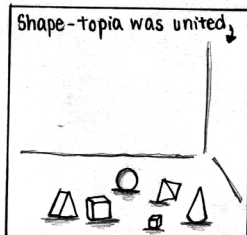
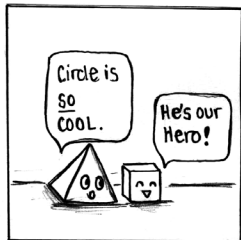
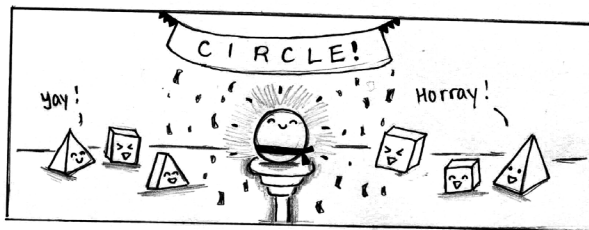
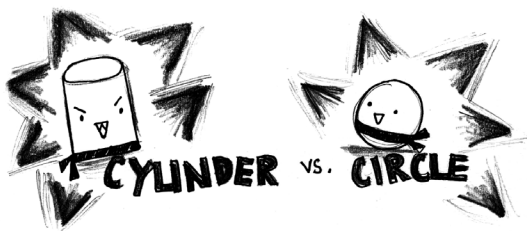
Triangles, Squares, and the Circle by Annie Huang



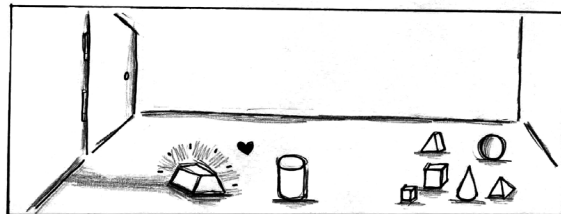
So, the kind & still-eating-popcorn Circle puts on his blackbelt.
(Yup, he can do karate too)



Triangles, Squares, and the Circle by Annie Huang



And as for Cylinder,
well he made a
new friend...



THE END 4

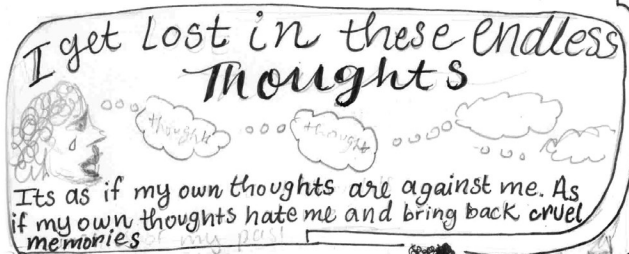
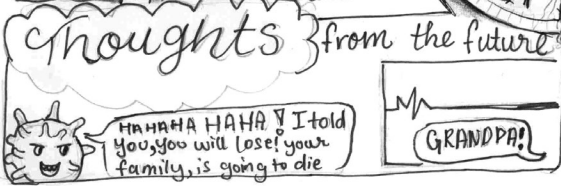
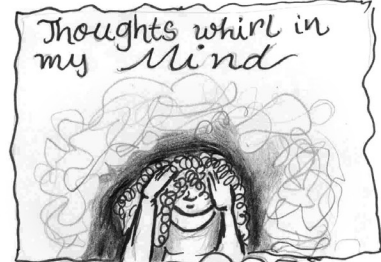
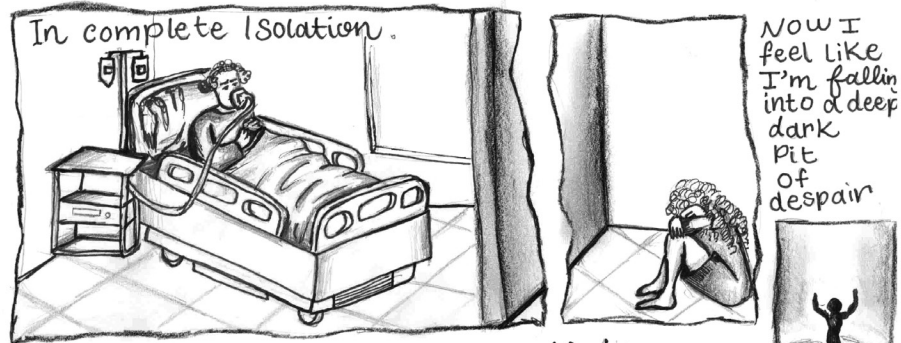
Comics: Honourable Mention

by Sukhman Kambo

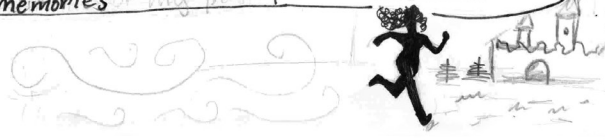


Lost in Imagination by Sukhman Kambo





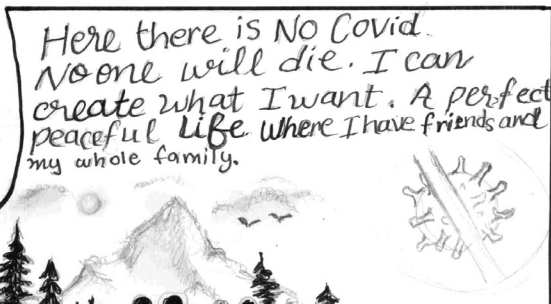
TO ESCAPE these dreadful THOUGHTS I run as far as I can from reality. I run to my Imagination, my fantasy.



Lost in Imagination by Sukhman Kambo

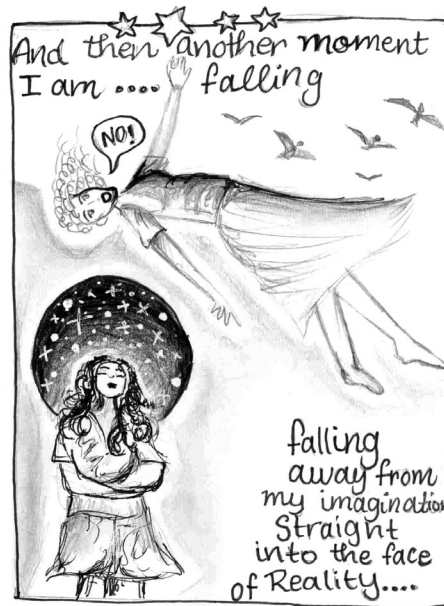


I don't have to Deal with tragic memories!





Lost in Imagination by Sukhman Kambo



Why are you here! I really just want to live in peace, in my imagination. Who are you anyways to bring me back to reality?

I am infact your own thoughts. You may see me as a villain, but I am part of you. I hold your memories your reality and imagination. I came here to tell you that you can't run away from reality. Come back.

Do you want to Live in an illusion of life or see the real moments of Life?



6.



I have to face reality, I can't run forever.



Now I have come to realize the true beauty in reality

Heros who battle this pandemic

Police

They have stayed strong so why can't I?

There is always something hidden behind the corner.

NEWS COVID-19 VACCINE

That's hope.

we can talk to grandpa now! The doctor said he will be alright.

Yes!

really! we can see him now.

Now as I look through this window I don't see a tragic reality I see a life I have to accept and a beautiful world with Real Life heros saving Lives.

Random

Random: First Prize

**Rachael Le
Fictional Safety Guidelines**

Welcome to the Sisterhood of Guiding

Welcome to the sisterhood of Guiding! As a leader, you will inspire girls to reach their full potential and help empower the next generation of leaders. Fun-filled adventure and life-long memories await in your Guiding journey!

Ensuring every girl's safety and enjoyment is a leader's number one priority. As such, every Guider must follow the rules below. Failure to comply will result in your immediate removal from your position and possible legal repercussions.

1. Electronics are not permitted at camp and should ideally be put away during weekly meetings.
2. The buddy system is mandatory at any event taking place outside a unit's usual meeting location.
3. Do not look the district commissioner in the eyes when speaking to her.
4. Do not allow scary stories to be told at camp. They will most likely result in a tent full of girls too scared to sleep and lots of inspiration for things with sharp ears and teeth. The burden will likely fall to you to comfort them during whatever unholy time that follows.
5. Cult-like behaviour and ritual sacrifice are normal for girls in Pathfinders and Rangers. This is just teenage girls being teenage girls. Should these actions be mirrored by younger girls (Sparks-2nd-year Guides), suggest a game of hide-and-seek. Start counting down from exactly 67 seconds and run as soon as all girls are out of sight. Do not return to the unit. You will find that it never existed in the first place the next morning and you will be reassigned to another patrol.
6. If questioned about Guider Cathy, simply state that she is anemic and has arthritis, and that of course she blinks. Remind girls that it is rude to stare and remind Cathy that she shouldn't be out.
7. If you hear a cell phone ringtone coming from an unoccupied tent, ignore it. Remember, no electronics are permitted at camp. Regardless, all guiding campsites are located in

Welcome to the Sisterhood of Guiding by Rachael Le

- dead zones. Do not acknowledge the noise and ensure none of your girls enter the tent.
8. There is no 4th Peninsula Pathfinder troop. If you are approached by a girl claiming to belong to this unit, remove her hat. Leave immediately afterwards and do not look back. The district commissioner will take care of her.
 9. When putting away CPR mannequins after a first-aid meeting, make sure they are stored in a room without mirrors. Should any type of reflective surface be present in the storage facility, drape a fully opaque cloth over every 7th mannequin's face. Once you exit the room, do not reopen the door, especially if you hear breathing.
 10. There is a reason why most unit's meeting locations are in churches. We suggest not attempting to find out why.
 11. Banging, scratching, clawing, and hoarse whispers coming from the archery sheds at night are to be ignored. The girls knew what they were getting into when they didn't wear their uniforms properly.
 12. With such a large congregation of Girl Guides, the probability of numerous anomalies encountering one another is extremely high. As such, hats must be worn at all times at district camp. Wide-brimmed camp hats (purchasable at the Girl Guide store) are ideal, capable of limiting a girl's field of vision and hiding her face. This provides dual protection against anything looking for her and against the number one threat to a Guide's safety: her own nosiness. As they say, curiosity killed Guider Cathy!
 13. Do not, under any circumstances, look under any platform tents at Camp McLean. Ignore the smell and pleas for help. The district commissioner's disciplinary methods are none of your concern.
 14. All Spark and Brownie units are provided with a Guiding doll. Girls are instructed to bring her home and record what they did together with a picture or journal entry. Should something seem off about it, check its eyes. All Guiding dolls look off to the side. Never directly at you.

Welcome to the sisterhood of Guiding! We thank you for volunteering. ◆

Random: Second Prize

by Shirley Chen
Creative non-fiction

A rant about my passions

As a simple being, I only hope to eat words, rant and sleep, then repeat the motions mentioned above as I slowly become fragile and old and then die quickly and painlessly.

Words are a delicacy unique to humanity that encompass every flavour. Taking advantage of my sizable appetite, I have devoted myself to conquering this infinite all-you-can-eat of universal literary compositions. I will take fatty fictions fresh off the grill or well-hung for centuries; rosy poems on ice, garnished with rhymes in slices; graffities plucked raw off washroom stalls, organic teenage salt and spices; and tattoos baked passionately in strangers' necks, odes to God, mothers and lovers in cursives. Then, there are haunting Calculus textbooks, with a tang like no other upon my tongue — like a battalion of drunk, demonic elephants cha-cha-ing at quadruple speed while wearing spiked 10-inch heels drenched in the heartblood of ghost peppers. Through pleasure, sometimes pain, they teach me how to digest hurt, love, and anger, as well as quench my mind's desert with wisdom, plumping me up to weather through storms. When faced with a Zombie Apocalypse, I can now proudly declare mighty fun facts such as: "Mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell!" And thus survive with ease and grace.

With my stomach full of words, my head now overflows with thoughts. These voices have to go somewhere. But like the standard model of the awkward introvert, I do not have the proper function to rant verbally, so I rant to paper like I am doing right now. I fill white valleys of blankness with cries of joy and plights, lightening the load in my mind. Sometimes, I hear voices echo back, then euphoria fills me. Because someone out there hears me and gets me. I'm scared of judgement, but more scared of silence and loneliness because silence is the flatline reserved for faded brains and nonresponding bodies, and loneliness the last beep.

Lastly, bed is the closest to heaven that I will ever be. Once upon a time, I embraced the widespread fashion trend of naturally generating black eyeshadows and cosplaying pandas. But I have changed now to combat chronic hair loss. And why binge-read fanfiction at midnight, when I can pursue more pleasurable and productive activities asleep, such as riding mermaids, swimming with unicorns and curing Grandpa's cancer, so Dad's voice

***A rant about my passions* by Shirley Chen**

won't tremble every time he remembers? Why relentlessly chase life when I can dream and have it all? Slowing down and laying down, thereupon I do not need to run after life, as I'm in its embrace. In slumber, I renew my hopes and strength in tranquility, so I can go on and chase the filigrees of my dreams when I wake in reality.

In conclusion, I am deeply passionate about exercising my inalienable rights to eat, rant and sleep. Therefore, I aspire to continue to do so until my visa on this Earth expires and I move on to other even more exciting dimensions. Now, I shall go and rant about a wolf who will get eaten by a sheep. Till next time. ◆

Problems with Representative Democracy

For the past few centuries, representative democracy has emerged as the primary system of governance in nearly every country in the world. Credited with restoring the 'rule of the people' and making a more egalitarian state, representative democracy has become so essential to any nation not wanting to brand itself as a rouge dictatorship, that even questioning its effectiveness has become unethical. But does representative democracy really put the power back to people, does it really make a nation more egalitarian, or is it simply a disguise for the very aristocratic governance it is meant to prevent?

If you look at the concept of 'rule of the people' in a vacuum, it is incredibly simple. The entirety of a population takes their stance on a situation, and the option with the largest number of people in support is the one chosen. Everyone gets equal representation, and everyone accepts the outcome. But after this point is when it get's complicated. What if 40% of a population wants option A, and 60% are against option A, but are split evenly amongst option B and C? Who gets to vote and who doesn't? Who's going to count the votes? How can we ensure that people in a minority get some say? What authority belongs to an individual and what belongs to the population? The different ways to interpret and execute a democracy are endless, but most countries have a democratic system similar to the Roman Republic.

A typical model would contain a few essential items, the most obvious of which is a legislative body. The legislature, sometimes separated into two independent houses, consists of members elected by the people, often representing a geographical region like a constituency. Most countries have political parties, groups of politicians sharing a common political agenda and working together during election campaigns. There's the cabinet, usually all members of the legislature, belonging to the party with the most members. The ministers of the cabinet control their respective public sectors e.g., the health minister controlling the health authority. Some countries have elected executives, usually labelled a president, who holds individual power. The judicial branch consists of judges appointed by elected members and ensure that the legal rights of everyone is being respected. Each component is also supposed to act as a power check to the others, so no one gets too powerful. At the end of the day, every public sector is controlled by the government, and the

Problems with Representative Democracy by Manav Sharma

government is appointed by the people. The representative democratic model is designed to give all people equal control in how society is run. But does this model really provide that?

Think about the part where the people get to appoint the government. This is where representative democracy differs from the concept of 'rule of the people'. You are electing the authority who makes the decisions, not the decisions themselves. Now here, many people bring the comparison of electoral college. This is different. In electoral college, you elect an authority to elect a president, often required to make the same decision as the ones who elected the authority. In representative democracy, you are electing an authority to make all the decisions for your country, without any legal requirements. This can be best demonstrated with the following example; You are a voter. You currently work in the IT department of a large energy company. The climate is a concern for you, and so are gun laws. But the parties who are advocating for climate change and gun laws are also imposing heavy taxes that could threaten your company's survival, and thus, also your job's. You decide to vote for a party that doesn't align with your climate and gun views.

This is a very common problem. Consider the existing First-past-the-post system in which candidates are being elected with just 30% of the vote, and once you factor in the fact that people vote for the policies that concern them the most, only a small fraction of Canadians elected the agenda that's being passed in parliament.

Representative democracy also leads to governments being lazy on matters that aren't of the highest concern. The government will pitch its environmental, economical, and health agendas, but if they don't update ingredient labelling standards on consumer products, no one really jumps on them, because they support them on their 'major' issues.

Now consider the amount of funding a party needs to gain media coverage and to get votes. Parties are allowed to spend up to 75.3 cents per voter in a riding. While this doesn't sound like a lot, this usually becomes between \$75,000 and \$11,500 per riding. And the spending of most major parties is very close to this limit. In the original 'rule of the people' concept, the decision-making authority was supposed to be split evenly amongst all people, rich or poor.

Now look at Switzerland. Switzerland is a 'direct democracy', meaning any bill passed in

Problems with Representative Democracy by Manav Sharma

parliament can automatically be subject to a referendum, if requested by at least 8 of the countries 26 cantons (similar to Canadian provinces), or by signatures of 50,000 people (Switzerland has a population of 8.2 million). If more than 50% of people are against a legislation, it does not pass. A simple majority, and much closer to the original concept of democracy. Any constitutional change is automatically subject to referendum. Many argue that Switzerland's system leads to low voter turnout. This is misunderstood. People vote about issues that matter to them. Unlike in our system, where voting for a party because of their climate agenda also means supporting their foreign affairs policy.

Direct democracy is much closer to 'the rule of the people' than representative democracy. It allows for direct referendums on any unpopular legislation. It prevents a government who was elected on false promises to make constitutional changes and cause a crisis. It allows people to directly govern themselves, not via rich aristocrats.

Representative democracy is harmful. It is harmful due to its flaws, and it is harmful due to the lack of basic awareness of its flaws. Designed to be a perfect system, it allows people to exploit the democracy and rule. Without any authority to hold government accountable to their campaign promises, representative democracy can elect harmful rulers who benefit from having a secure term. It does not reflect the will of the people. It serves the best interest of politician, not people. Representative democracy is not the sweet saviour it paints itself to be, and I hope I have succeeded in informing you about what it truly can be. ◆

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Random: Honourable Mention

by Rena Su
Experimental Text

Patch Notes 06.2021

(From the Game of My Life + The Game of My Body)

New Features

- ❑ i'm growing + i'm growing + i'm growing
 - ❑ i'm older now and beginning to become a haunted house. there are little ghosts that encircle me now. too many sentences containing the word 'was.'
 - ❑ sometimes your friend becomes your dead friend + you start forgetting until all you have is a faint chalk outline
 - ❑ i dreamt that i woke up in a bullpen of white picket fences. i am a suburban woman; my children don't know my name, only the place i occupy.
 - ❑ i swear it's a nightmare but mom insists that it's a dream, maybe an omen.
 - ❑ when i scream, my mouth is muzzled by cellophane. i want to want to fade.
- ❑ when i dye my lips cherry red with gas station Slurpee, people assume i've put on lipstick
 - ❑ at least they don't think my lips are bleeding
 - ❑ part of me likes the compliments
 - ❑ i now know the shade — red dye 40, Allura Red AC, or $C_{18}H_{14}N_2Na_2O_8S_2$

Removals + Bug Fixes

- ❑ i'll try not to fight back anymore if someone pulls my hair as if it were puppet strings
- ❑ my mouth is a wound. and i'm sorry.
 - ❑ i know i say awful things about myself, and sometimes i mean it. but i promise that i'll be okay.
- ❑ i now make a greater point to say 'i love you'
 - ❑ even when it echoes throughout the hollow room
 - ❑ even when i need it more



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