



**HORNSBY GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL**  
**2017**



***Burning Bright*** is the annual publication of Hornsby Girls' High School students' writing.

It celebrates the creativity, passion and versatility of our students and we hope that you will enjoy reading it.

Thank you to Helena Feng in Year 9 for her beautiful cover design.

We would also like to make a special acknowledgement of Coco Huang (Year 12) for her extraordinary achievements in creative writing over her time at Hornsby Girls' High School as well as her tireless commitment to our Creative Writers' Group and her willingness to mentor other students. Coco Huang is a name to remember in the future!

Please respect all these works as the intellectual property of the students who created them.

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**Editor:** Janet Walker

# **Year 7 Writing**

## **Winners of the Old Girls' Union Writing Competition**

**Alexandra Fee**

### **JUST LIKE HER**

**By Alexandra Fee**

She had built a city.

A city falling to the ground, and dying, just like her. A city that was frail and weak, just like her. She was dying, and she knew it.

She had cried in the beginning, but now no more tears would come out. Just the everlasting ache in her chest, and the weak beat of her heart.

They had moved her to a new room, and she had asked to keep the city with her. It lay on top of an empty suitcase and a tin box of medicine, her only belongings. Every day the city fell a little more, the cardboard breaking down in the damp weather. They had asked her why she wanted to keep it. She replied softly, almost afraid to say the words aloud.

"Because it reminds me of myself," she said, adding words in her mind to finish the sentence. Frail. Weak. Dying.

The nurses followed her will, shooting her the sad looks and expressions of regret and sadness that she hated. When they at last moved all her belongings into the new room, she attempted to follow clutching her chest as she sat up slowly. She wanted to do this alone. She pushed the white sheets off her frail legs, and sat on the edge of the bed. She gently eased her weight onto her legs and stood up.

A great deal of independence and pride rushed through her. She lifted her leg up, and put her foot down. It suddenly felt difficult to breathe. Her chest felt so heavy, so heavy... The darkness surrounded her and she was out before she hit the floor.

When she came to, she was in a cleaner, brighter room. The opaque windows of the new room made her feel claustrophobic. She looked round her, and saw the city. The city remained with her, still crumbling and falling like her. It was strangely comforting, and she looked at it with soft eyes.

A week later, and she still hadn't gotten used to the cleaner, brighter, medicine-smelling room. The smell of unauthentic cleanliness filled her nose.

And then it began.

Fire, surging through her veins, as she struggled to breathe. She choked violently as red clouded her vision. The pain grew in her chest as her brain demanded the oxygen her blocked airways couldn't give. She used her now weak hands to search for the emergency button, her hands trailing across the wall.

She could feel her hair on her face, as she frantically searched for the button. Her right hand brushed across a lump and she pressed it before fainting in the hospital bed, her hands clutching her throat.

"...operation..."

"Immediately...blocked airways..."

She was awake. She could see the light through her closed eyes, and she kept them closed, not wanting to see the harsh, white light. But she opened them anyway, into the concerned eyes of a nurse.

The nurse chattered excitedly at her awakening, but she wasn't listening. They were going to operate on her. Again.

Memories flowed through her mind, as she remembered her first operation, two years ago, when she was seven. When the city has just started to crumble.

The smell of the gas they called anaesthetic, and the sharp operating knife, lying on the tray beside her. She had struggled the first time, when they pressed the gas mask on her nose. She had kicked, and thrashed, but was forced to succumb to the drug in the end.

They told her nothing about the upcoming operation, but it was on her mind every day. And when the day came that they wheeled her into the familiar operating room, she screamed in recognition and alarm.

Disfigured words came out in a scream of pain and anguish of what was to come. They pushed her down, and lifted her onto the bed that had killed so many before her.

In the end, they resorted to strapping her down, so she couldn't move. But she continued to scream. Her mouth continued to scream in an attempt to get them to stop.

This time, the drug came in the form of a needle. The drug that would make her numb and cold. Just like being dead, but breathing. Did she fear death? There were times where death had been her best friend, and times where she had cried in the fear of death, because she didn't want to die.

She wondered if her city could be strong again. Not a failure like it was now, but strong and proud. Fearless.

But she had so much to fear.

As they slowly counted down, and her eyelids grew heavy, her last thought before the needle was a city.

A strong, fearless city.

# EYES

By Alice Xie

*Alice entered this story in this year's 'Write 4 Fun' competition.*

They snapped open when the call came after so long. Dimness filtered its vision, blurring the edge with thin vague wafts of light slanting down in shafts from above, vainly attempting to penetrate the depths. All that it could see, all that it had to see was those jagged shadows, those pathetic creatures who had taken the single source of joy in its bitter otiose world. It jerked its misshapen weapons; enmity welled up within it, building into an inferno which burned, flames of hatred curling into its glassy eyes. How dare they. It had roamed within its murky kingdom for as long as time, grown as the ruler of the abysses. No one dared to cross it. Not until now.

They had boasted and derided with glee of their extraordinary fortune and wit. They had celebrated through the night, the gluttonous sloshing of wine and clang of metal clear over the faint lapping of tongues of water licking the sides of the boat. When the cloak of night swallowed the world with heavens of azure dusted with vivid cyan veils with pinpricks of forlorn light constantly osculating above, they dreamt of the wealth, fame and prosperity that generously coated the petite waterlogged chest they had fished from the ocean. Fished, unaware, from an owner.

From the torrents of eerie silver lined light shattered upon the obsidian waves, a silhouette rose through the limpid water, forming it rose before breaking through the surface, its grotesque figure glimmering faintly. The octopus fidgeted, hostility welling once more. The monster greedily felt its way to the prize – that vivid glow. The treasure, its treasure, was the only radiance in its tenebrous life was onboard the ship. And nothing would stand between them.

The most dangerous weapon in the world.

It lay cushioned upon a threadbare age sheened crimson velvet pillow within a retired wrinkled fatigued chest. For how long it had been before it had last seen the light? The illuminate sphere of light pondered to itself. All it had heard last was its owner's dying screams.

Terror. It filled the air that night and rang to the heavens as the tower of light erupted, spiraling upwards. Disfigured unnamable shapes were tossed upwards, like limp ragged dolls with their crazed screams a symphony with the hysterical crashing of waves against the boat. Eerie veils of sourly glaring clouds squinted away as the light, stark against the night, climbed higher, before shattering into the stars. And the shapes, the shapes sunk down, avidity swallowed by the tides.

It was left in tatters, splinters of wood the phantom of a fine ship, drifting to the horizon. Dawn had brought a cold violet sky dusted with fine magenta. Outlined by a harsh shadow, a water soaked chest with shards of crystal and a single singed tentacle, still grasping its prize, floated into the ocean's secrets, away from the greedy hands of mortal men. The monster had claimed its prize. And it would never let go.



## Year 7 Poetry

### GOOD ENOUGH

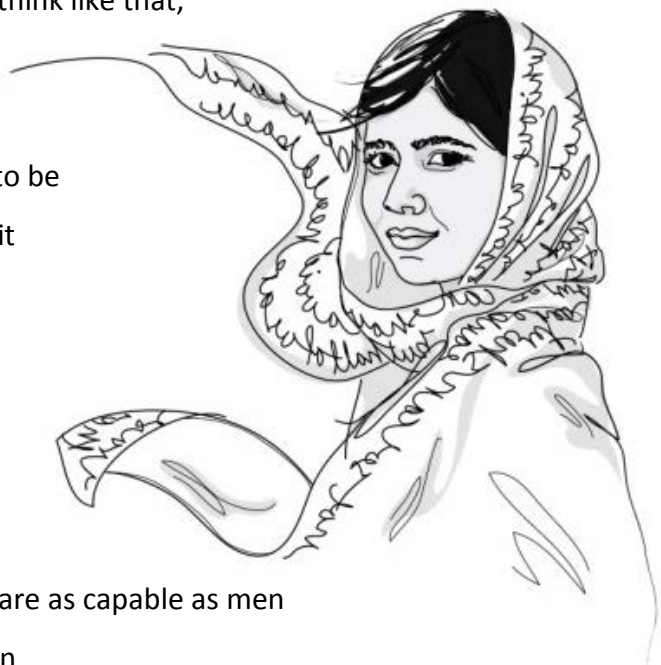
By Utsa Parajuli

People say that I'm not good enough,  
That I'm too weak and fragile  
But who are you to call yourself tough  
The only thing you see is my gender and nothing more  
You think that just because I am a girl I am of no use to you

But what you don't see is under this wall,  
This wall of my physique,  
Is that actually we are all the same  
We all are weak in the perspective of one another  
Though one never really is stronger than the other  
I tell them time and time again that we are all equal  
Yet, I am still told that I am not good enough

But for some reason they are all taught to think like that,  
That they are superior to everyone else,  
But are they really?  
What we are is not what they perceive us to be  
We aren't the helpless ones who stand by it  
No we will prove ourselves to the rest  
Showing the best of us.

We have proved ourselves in society,  
Malala, Mother Teresa, Rosa Parks  
All these people have proved that women are as capable as men  
That we can achieve greatness just like men  
That we can reach just as high limits of greatness as they can  
That no one is actually better, superior or even tougher than the other  
We are all equal, that we are all in fact good enough.



## HOME

By Ineke Tanoto

Eight years I have spent,  
Hearing the buzzing of bees,  
Smelling the lavender scent,  
While picking kumquats off trees

We had a gate,  
A ball would be thrown,  
And then we would wait,  
Sometimes we got it on our own

Embedded on the ground,  
Are a family of stones,  
Very tightly bound,  
On it I have grown

Of those days,  
I have forgotten.

## PUPPETS

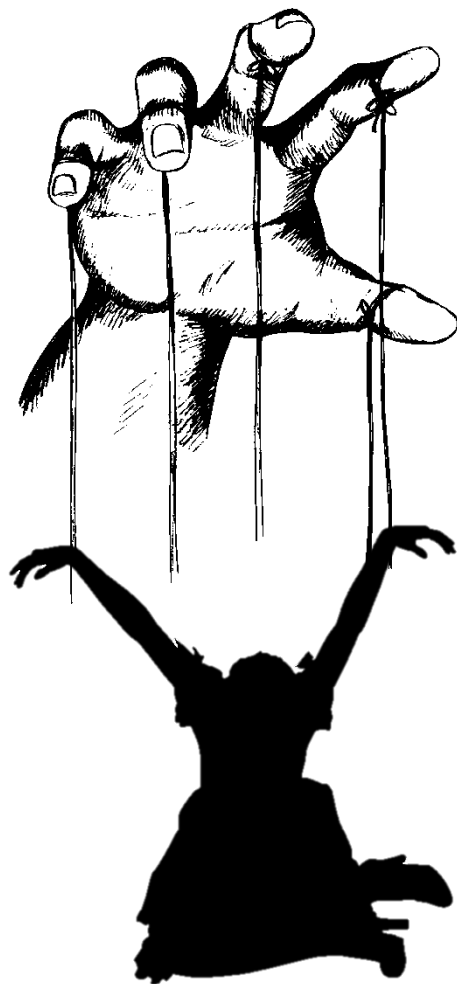
That's what we truly are  
Someone else pulling the strings  
Someone else controlling our bodies  
Telling us what to do  
Who to be  
Making our every move for us  
Whether we want to or not

Our every move is not what we want it to be  
Because what we first think is changed so much  
by the someone else  
That it's no longer our choice  
Like the wrapping paper on a present  
The layers and layers of wrapping paper  
Cover up how small the present truly is

Puppets  
That's what we truly are  
Controlled by the expectation of others  
All our efforts never being enough  
Never good work or well done

Always do better  
Do better  
Do better

It's not just the expectations  
But the fear  
Fear of what happens if you do less than what's  
expected  
The fears



The expectations  
They make you want to hide  
Dig a pit and never come out  
But these expectations won't get a hold of us

As long as our wants  
Our aims  
Our goals  
Are definite  
And we let  
Nothing  
Get in our way

By Sanctus Ann Jo

# Year 8 Writing

## Winners of the Old Girls' Union Writing Competition Jessica Brown and Sidney Zhangfan

### I WONDERLAND

By Jessica Brown

Is it possible to be two things at once?

For example, could you possibly be both a hero and a villain?

Monotonous and chromatic?

Living but not?

Invisible yet seen?

I'd like to believe that it is possible, because I think that I might even be a mixture of things. My father disagreed; believing in routine, in a world trapped in a stasis of darkness, of monotonous lullabies. With him, everything and everyone was either black or white. Not both, never both. Both meant different and so both were dangerous and bad.

I believe that my father was a dangerously beautiful person; terribly magnificent in his thinking.

He was also probably a villain.



When I awaken, the world is still there. The fog that clogged my mind fades after a moment or so and I allow my surroundings to close in on me, focusing on the engraving above my head. *To live is Christ and to die is gain.* I have no idea what a Christ is but the last part is beautiful. *To die is gain.*

Dying is an art. Some are, admittedly, better at it than others. My mother had a real knack for it, but my father was terrible. He could've tried harder.

I prop myself up on my hands and scoot gently backwards so my back rests against the cold stone walls, walls of comfort and wisdom. Remnants of stained glass lie in the corner, coloured with tears. They reflect the pale rays of light in shades of melancholy. The ceiling paint has long since peeled off, but a few scattered remains litter the floor. I am yet to tidy them.

My breath is warm and moist and tastes like forgotten dreams. It cuts through the crisp

morning air like a knife through bread. The sun has already risen from its grave and the annihilating moon has long since dragged the tides away.  
The morning is blackening.



“Estelle, what happened to Humpty Dumpty?” Owen’s baby blue eyes; constellations, gaze up at me and threaten to engulf me into a timeless galaxy.

“He hatched. And the most beautiful thing in the world came out,” I pause, thinking, “It was a...Christ,”

“What’s that?” Toddlers are the most constant thing in this world. Their unquenchable curiosity and thirst for more, drives most people insane. But not me. I’m insane already.

“A Christ is the most wonderful thing you can imagine.” The child considers this.

“Like...like chocolate?” he asks, thoughtfully.

“Better.” Owen was perplexed. What could be better than chocolate?!?

“I know what’s better than chocolate,” Olivia states, matter-of-factly, holding up an artwork which consisted of three shaky figures. One had angel wings and a halo. All three beamed at us.

“My daddy was an angel before he turned bad,” I smile at the five year old.

“It’s lovely, Liv,”

“Estelle, will my daddy come home soon? Will he be good?” Josh’s precious milk chocolate saucers stare up at me.

“What about my daddy?” Jamie asks. Soon, a symphony of tiny but demanding voices are all insisting that I give them an answer.

“Gather around and I’ll tell you a story...”

“...and that changed everything. All the daddies stopped killing and fighting and all the mummies rushed to the daddies to hug them.”

“That’s impossible,” Jordan, the eldest of the orphans with an attitude, spits, “Our mothers are dead,” her spite was almost contagious, “and our fathers may as well be.”



“Estelle, I’m afraid I have some bad news. You cannot work here anymore.” Mrs Jones’ sternness shook me like a doll. She wasn’t convivial to begin with but today her words were like acid.

“Oh...” That little word meant more than I could comprehend.

“Our funding was cut. The money is needed for war efforts. The children...cannot be looked after.”

“It’s an orphanage. They have no place to go!”

“I’m sorry.”

With that, she leaves me alone. The blow of the news ruptures through my mind like a bullet.

I feel myself deflate and sink into an abyss of despair.



That very night, the deafening jet-like siren blares across the town. I can almost taste the deaths of the children, imminent if I don't help them.

I ran. The sky was the colour of hopelessness, of desperation, of death.

"Estelle?" The constellations, wide with fright, trembled. Daniel, a baby, erupted into a handful of notes. Twenty-one children, ranging from three months to fifteen years, all alone in the world, need me.



Karen and Lee gave each other a quick squeeze on the shoulder, each aware that the other was about to fall apart.

"She's only twenty-three. Is it possible for a cure to be developed in her lifetime?" Lee questioned. Dr Doriane chose his words cautiously, as was in his prudent nature.

"As of now, we can give her some medications. It may assist but there are no guarantees, unfortunately." Karen pressed her hand against the glass barrier that isolated her daughter from the world.

"We can tell you a little more about her condition if you like."

"Yes, please," Lee replied. Maybe knowledge meant power in this situation? Karen, a reticent character at best, simply nodded in response.

"The hallucinations appear to involve a group of children that she seems to care for and soothe via storytelling. May I ask how long this has been going on for?"

"She's been...different all her life. But things only worsened recently."



My stories calm the children enough to lead them to my home, which should be out of the strike zone. We create a safe haven for ourselves, a sanctuary of tranquillity. We use paints and create images. Olivia paints me wearing a foreign dress, flying high above the world, grasping onto the red reins of ribbon as the stories carry me away.



"Yes, she's a hero for going through all this but a villain because she can't be controlled. Human genetically, but disintegrating. Alive, but far from living. Invisible; yet watched constantly. Lifeless but colourful. Dissolved into labels, a disability, a condition, thirteen letters. But still my daughter."

Karen hid in the supply closet of the Mental Health Hospital as she tried to deduce her daughter's identity. What if she could never return to reality?

"Estelle," she cried, slumping to the floor in a heap of overwhelming grief, "Who are you?"

● ● ●

The lettering above my sleeping place does not get unnoticed. I like to think that it is my inspiration, *to live is Christ and to die is gain*. I tell stories about it, based on those nine words.

"Estelle?" Jordan approaches me quietly one night, tearful, "What if to gain, I have to die?"

● ● ●

Schizophrenia...a word that changed everything.

## NEVERLAND

By Sidney Zhangfan

At school, in any school really, there was always that one kid that had their noses stuck in a book. After class, they would get that cardboarded bunch of paper and enter the worlds that were kept inside of those yellow pieces of paper. They would live a new life, experience new things that no one would know of. These adventure seeking people were the only ones who lived a life in fantasy and drama.

The bell rang, a loud ring that echoed and left its traces in the classroom and broke the weary minds of many students. All of them groaned and exclaimed in despair at their test. All of them left the classroom in hope of getting that good spot on the oval, where the sun shone the brightest, however one stayed behind. Her freckled nose was dug deep in a thick book, her dark hair covering a part of her face, showing her dedicated emotions of entering the world in the book. Sarah, the kid that reads books to live, sat there with nothing holding her back from the freedom. Her mind had started to run into the life of Peter Pan, joining his crew in Neverland, to find sanctuary from the pirates. It was all good, her joy at its fullest of when she was in a land where she could let go of all her troubled thoughts and self; where she could let her imagination run wild like a free horse galloping down a hill.

As soon school had ended, the students rushed to places with friends or went home without any worries. However being the child of a drunk woman and a drug dealer for a father, she would do anything to run away, to escape the hell that awaited her everyday. There she sat on the bus, her eyes peering out the large window, to see a mother and a child, walking down the streets hand in hand. Sadness and envy filled her heart at the sight of the merry and lucky family in front of her. Sinking into the forceful clutches of misery, she let herself fall into dark pity, her eyes giving up.

Her bus came to a stop, as Sarah got up from her seat and left the bus, into the vertical street that showed the perfect view of the drowsy sun slowly sliding into orange fluffs. The line of golden autumn trees stood there against the white stone wall; it was all like the vertical streets of Japan, where the cherry blossoms would coat the ground. The warm sunlight hit her face gently, filling her up with some heat that she would soon lose as she entered the very entrance of fiery hell.

"Oh my gosh, why can't you just not go and live on the streets? I don't need a slut like you in my house!"

The shouting could be heard from a kilometre away, nevertheless she still pushed herself with all her might into the house. However things weren't as expected. As she stepped into the musky house, her drunk mother was standing right at the door with a bottle of whiskey.



“Oh great, now you’re back, just right after that druggo insulted me. If you were never born, nothing like this crap would happ...”

Her mother slurred then picked up a wooden bat and swung it at Sarah. Since she was used to such things happening, she immediately dodged the blow and ran to her room, in hopes of saving her life. “Yes that’s right, go escape, no one needs a whore like you in this place. Why can’t you just get out of this house already?”

Her mother swayed her bat a few more times as the whiskey caught up to her. She accidentally hit herself in the head, and although it wasn’t a fatal strike, it made her lose consciousness.

Sarah gasped for breath, her heart racing faster than if she had ran a marathon. She didn’t expect her mother to be standing at the doorway, but to be lying on the ground with a bottle right next to her. She saw the bat coming but not the early insults. A train of anxiety crashed to her, its metal pieces and shards piercing her with thoughts of insecurity about her home and family. Sooner or later, she needed to call for help to escape the monstrosities that lived down below.

“I should just read my problems away,” she thought as she reached into her school bag and pulled out the book that she treasured for years. The memories came into her mind, racing to get there like 100m sprinters running for the finish line. Her grandmother was the only person that stayed by her side, keeping Sarah away from her ill parents. They were the best of friends, doing everything together, going to the park, baking cakes and judging characters in the stories. That was until the car accident had happened, the sirens and crashing still played in Sarah’s mind, haunting her ever since that day. It left Sarah broken and lost, treasuring her seventh birthday present and the last one, the good old Peter Pan. Her long fingers traced the cover of her prize possession as a wave of emotions came over her. Tears soon began to flow down her face like a river and she let out muffled cries of agony. But the tears had also given her the strength to want to prove that her grandmother still lived within her.

Without hesitation, Sarah opened her book and continued on with the adventures she had finally came back to. Her eyes opened, as she found herself in a white dress with red lining, the bottom half coated with ruby printed letters. Her dark brown hair was styled fashionably in a bun with pieces hanging out and she wore red leather heels. All around her were green trees, their tall trunks standing high and majestic. The sand was light beige and had been perfectly shaped by the curved waves. The sky and ground contrasted like a paint palette. Sarah stood surprised and overwhelmed, eyes glistening with tears of happiness.

Suddenly a bang shattered the silence, a sound that probably came from the nearby shore. She ran towards the commotion, filled with excitement and curiosity. She hid behind a large

rock and viewed the scene in front of her. There was a large pirate ship, firing cannons at flying people. Sarah found herself staring at the gang, Peter Pan and the Lost Boys. "Ya bloody little rascals, you won't get away with this, I will come back after you to get your heads," the self-proclaimed captain of the crew snarled at them, as he and his ship soon sailed into the distance, until they could barely be seen.

Sarah stared at the boys, as they cried in victory. She wanted to join them so badly. Preoccupied, her hands slipped and she fell onto her bottom, making a loud thump and giving a tiny screech. The Lost Boys and their leader all turned their dirty heads in her direction. Sarah leaped in fright, pain spreading through her body. Her skinny figure could be seen from the distance, shaking as the group approached her. "I'm sorry, I wasn't doing anything at all, please let me join your gang, you guys were so cool out there," she said softly, her head bowed. Suddenly the gang huddled up, their heads down as they shared their thoughts.

Sarah stood there, waiting for their responses, hearing a few compliments and the word 'yes' amongst their whispers. Suddenly Peter Pan grabbed her hand and shook it with a toothy grin.

"Of course you can! Since you said that we were 'cool', we'll accept you."

He smiled as he and his crew cheered and hooted in excitement. All of a sudden, she felt a large weight press down upon her as she was pulled back into reality.

"Now, this is what you get! Look at your father - a pitiful creature indeed! Time to say goodbye to your world, Sarah!"

Her psychotic mum stood above her with a dagger raised. As the knife came down, pain pierced through Sarah's chest and she felt warm liquid running down her clothes. She looked down as she sat in her own pool of blood. Her body lost the strength to hold any longer, and she heard her mother's ghastly laugh echoing around the room. Sarah placed her hand to protect her book, just before another stab went right through both.

"No this can't be happening!"

Tears ran down Sarah's cheeks, as she caught a glimpse of her grandmother, hand stretched out for her to take hold of it.

"Why, why now?" Sarah murmured, as she drew her last breath, taking the hand of her grandmother, leaving reality without any regrets. Her soul ran free as she caught up with the Lost Boys, as they entered a new journey in the Neverland. It wasn't her book anymore, it was her life. Freedom and adventure awaited her.

Eleana Xu entered the 2017 NYC Flash Fiction competition. The Flash Fiction Challenge is a competition that challenges writers around the world to create short stories based on genre, location, and object assignments. Each writer participates in at least 2 writing challenges and as many as 4 depending on how well they place in each challenge. When the competition begins, writers are placed in groups where they will be judged against other writers within their same group. Each group receives its own unique genre, location, and object assignments. Eleana's prompts were Drama, a botanical garden and a fish hook. Eleana's story, 'Angel's Garden' placed 14<sup>th</sup> in the first challenge.

## Angel's Garden

By Eleana Xu

*The light and fervour once alive in Remiel's blue eyes were gone. The begonias seemed to glow with newfound strength and vitality.*

~

Professor Steinbeck finally finished his talk, which apparently meant the students were dismissed to look around the botanical gardens. I came out of my stupor and was forced to haul myself up to my feet. Inevitably, I hadn't even noticed I'd fallen asleep.

I turned to Cartor, the only friend I had in the group.

"What do we have to do?"

Cartor looked at me sympathetically and glanced at Professor Steinbeck before answering,

"We choose a plant in the gardens and write a paper on it for next week."

I nodded in thanks and moved away as quickly as I could, but a loud, harsh voice intruded.

"Jerico."

Cursing silently, I stopped and walked back to the professor.

"How much of my lecture did you understand?"

I responded with a withering glance but he only seemed amused.

"I do hope you're listening, because I'd hate to have you again next year," he drawled. The sarcastic smirk on his face just made me want to punch it right off. I waited till the tension rose to a considerable level.

"You won't."

Professor Steinbeck looked annoyingly amused. He crossed his arms and seemingly waited for me to go on. I quickly searched for something to break the silence.

"S-sir, was this place always a botanical garden?" I blurted.

Weirdly, the professor's eyes turned distant, as if remembering something. "It was once a place of many beautiful flowers, rumoured to be a haunt of angels," he said, in a completely different voice.

Professor Steinbeck's blue eyes seemed to be focused on something else, so I rushed to a nearby patch of begonias and started taking notes. However, I couldn't concentrate because of the intoxicating but somehow familiar smell of the flowers, and once more I drifted away.

As I plummeted into my starry, swirling subconscious, a vision of a fishhook appeared quick as a flash, and imprinted its bright shadow right in front of me. It haunted me so much that I was forced to wake up.

To my utter dismay, the hook was real, shining, and enormous. The wicked curve of the hook gleamed in the sunlight. Finally, I came to the edge of the hook and strangely I couldn't take my eyes off it. I felt it tugging at my soul, willing it to come out...

I gasped and fell into the begonia patch. Everything was swirling around me, super-fast yet extra-slow. The shadows seemed to be darkening and closing in on me, and I was falling. The stars winked at me evilly.

~

*"Has your soul ever been captured, Remiel?" I asked.*

*"No," he answered, smiling at me. "Our souls are much brighter than that of humans', so we don't need to be guided."*

*I watched in awe as Remiel retrieved his hook and stroked it gently as if it were alive.*

*"The begonias are beautiful, are they not?"*

*"Yes..." I sat up a little straighter.*

*"When I was... young," Remiel began. "I used to stay here for hours, watching the begonias. They are as beautiful now as they were then." Remiel thrust his fishhook far into the distance, searching for more souls.*

*His hand reached out to rest on my shoulder. "You remind me of when I was your age."*

*I was about to say something when suddenly Remiel's face hardened, his fingers whitening as he nervously wound the golden rope. He began frantically reeling it in, and to my horror the enormous fishhook at the end was sparking, cracked and blackened, devoid of all its previous celestial beauty.*

*"We're under attack."*

*His voice was pained. Remiel called out to his fellow angels for help. Just before his friends arrived, he led me to a place where he said I would be safe, and left.*

*I had no idea how long I stayed. All I knew was that Remiel was out there somewhere, and that things would never be the same.*

*After what seemed like forever, I could take it no more. I snuck out of my safe haven and found the garden completely empty, except...*

*I rushed to Remiel's side and found his own fishhook buried deep into his shoulder, the golden cord snapped and fraying at the edges. Golden blood was leaking out of the wound.*

*"Remiel!" I gasped. His eyes fluttered open and he tried to smile.*

*"lahhel... " Remiel's voice had reduced to a whisper, far different from the deep, reassuring voice that had always guided me.*

*"I made a mistake... a grave mistake... bringing you here," he said, each word bringing him fresh pain. "I never should have..."*

*Tears were streaming down my cheeks, stealing the words I wanted to say. All I could do was put my head next to Remiel's chest and weep like a child. He managed to lift his hand and stroke my head sadly.*

*"There were many things... many things I could have taught you. I'm sorry." With each passing word Remiel became weaker and weaker.*

*"lahhel, listen. My soul... it is captured. It is leaving me..." Remiel could no longer go on.*

*I nodded, sending a fresh batch of tears down my face. I lifted Remiel up, with the hook still in his shoulder, and laid him as gently as I could into the patch of begonias. All my previous energy exhausted, I smiled sadly back at the great wizened face.*

*"The flowers are beautiful today, Remiel."*

*"So they are." Remiel opened his eyes and stared up at me.*

*His eyes were blue. Piercingly blue. They seemed to search my soul.*

*I saw Remiel's hook flash golden, filled with the vitality of before. Its potency seemed to illuminate the flowers around it in one blinding flash, and the light was gone.*

*~*

*As I slipped further and further into oblivion, I envisioned Professor Steinbeck's piercing blue eyes beneath the darkness of my eyelids.*

## YEAR 8 POETRY

### Paper Crane Memories

By Damya Wijesekera

*Damya's poem won the Junior Secondary Section of the 2017 Dorothea Mackellar National Poetry Competition.*

*Start by folding a coloured piece of paper into four triangles.*

I always started with blue paper;  
Light blue, so we could write messages.  
I have never used anything else, even now, when there's nothing to say.  
Why change?

*Turn the paper over, and fold into four squares.*

I always liked that, turning the paper over.  
It was like a person, the good and the evil.  
But this is isn't people, she said.  
Does it make a difference?

*Bring the corners together and compress into one small square.*

I always found that part hard.  
It's still hard, even to this day, when my repertoire is so practised.  
I used to need help. I was glad of her patience.  
Was she happy too?

*Fold one side into two triangular flaps, then, on the other side, repeat.*

I always remembered that; repeat. A word which became itself.  
Often I have wished I could repeat time,  
Go back to the days before, just for the pleasure, for the togetherness.  
Can the clock really be turned back?

*Open up one face, and fold it down so it is a long diamond. Repeat.*

I always liked how the shape was so different,  
Even though it was nearly the same, like us.  
Later I realised, how points that were once touching, grew far apart.

Was that a prophecy of our friendship?

*Fold in two triangular flaps again, and repeat.*

I always liked how skinny it became, and

I never forgot to point out the similarities.

She retorted, it was the way the shadows fell on her, melting into summer pre-darkness.

With only a dream as our connection, am I alone now?

*Fold up the tail.*

I always watched how she folded the tail; perfect.

She tried to teach me, before she left, left for far-away.

I don't know the name of the place.

In the end, isn't 'not-here' the only description?

*Fold up the head.*

I always did the head scrappily

Excitement at the penultimate step.

I was excited when she first arrived here, home, my home,

Was this her home as well?

*Now fly away...*

### **Judge's Comment**

*Symbolism is one of the most powerful tools in a poet's toolbox, and this poem uses it incredibly well. The structure is also very impressive. This is a poem which deserves to be submitted to proper, "serious" literary journals. Fantastic writing.*

## Not Yet

By Damya Wijesekera

*At the date of publication, Damya's poem had been shortlisted for the Katharine Susannah Pritchard Foundation Poetry Awards.*

They ask of me to think straight.  
But I can't do that yet –  
All my thoughts are wobbly lines,  
Long, but going nowhere.  
They want me to think straight,  
When all I can do,  
Is meander along the sidelines.  
They tell me to focus,  
But there's no fun or freedom in concentration.  
Not yet.  
Shouldn't we be free to think?  
They want my 'valuable opinions'.  
I don't have the time  
To make 'valuable opinions',  
For deaf ears, blind eyes, dead fingers.  
Thinking straight is a set path.  
Thinking straight is swimming with the flow.  
Thinking straight is climbing an endless road of hills.  
Where the end of one hill, is the start of another.  
I don't want to go that way.  
I'd prefer to go crashing through the bushes, the long way, around those hills.  
I'd still end up somewhere, wouldn't I?  
It would be a bad place, they'd say.  
So you have to think straight.  
Maybe so. But...  
If I end up there, then I'll just go crashing out the bushes again,  
Until I'm somewhere worthwhile, someday.

Let them take shortcuts –  
I'm going the long way.



## **PACKAGE FOR THE DISTANT FUTURE**

**By Sowon Kang**

Dear inheritor,

Since you have dared to open this container

You must be living in some far-distant,

Unimaginable future.

Enclosed you will find evidence

Of our existence:

A neatly arranged stationery box,

A pile of phones and laptops,

A few pairs of earphones,

Some posters of famous celebrities,

Some make-up tools and beauty products from our time.

I hope these things are useful in your world

Although they may not be as valuable.

We had a lot of waste

And things that weren't very necessary.

Do not live in a set world

With a fixed mindset.

I hope the world opens itself to creativity,

Born again as a blank white page.

## WRITING

By Damya Wijesekera

When I write,  
I sit at my desk,  
Rig up the ropes  
And sail away.

When I write,  
My creativity  
becomes a torch,  
My pen takes  
Form as a sword.

When I write  
I visit a  
Golden realm  
Of vivid ideas.

When I write  
I let  
people  
live

•

Jessica Brown is a Year 8 member of our Creative Writers' Group. One of the activities this year was to compose a piece of writing in response to the book *Lost in Translation* by Ella Frances Saunders – a book which “celebrates the words from across the globe that remain stubbornly – tantalisingly – not *quite* translatable.” Jessica chose to write a poem.

## VERGE OF MAYBE

By Jessica Brown

it is cold and i stand on the verge of maybe.

before me lies the sea

and, behind me, stone.

before me it is dark and the waves move endlessly.

before me beckons,

because whether the fall kills me or not

i can trust in the water to bring me home.

before me is so wide and distant and alone;

i think it needs a friend.

before me stands *kalpa*

the passing of time on such a scale

before me i see planets spin

faster than i could ever run

before me the stars seem

to fade away and disappear:

*kalpa.*

behind me is the graveyard  
where we used to talk through the night,  
huddled in the wings of an angel statue-  
when we were young  
and didn't yet know the name of fear.  
behind me is my childhood,  
the weathervane in the shape of a flying dove  
that i painted when we were seven,  
the braids i tied in your hair when we were eight,  
the flower crown of wildflowers i made  
when we were nine.  
behind me is *naz*  
a word you taught me  
that defined us  
assurance derived from knowing you are  
loved unconditionally:  
*naz*.

i've been here some few thousand times  
and i've never been able to take the step.  
to make the jump.  
leave the rock and stone behind  
for the embrace of the water.  
now i look to the night sky,  
knowing that it listens, it gauges my mood,  
that it is a part of that subtle art:

*nunchi.*

all the things that i am stuck in-between –  
the water, the rock,  
my childhood, my possibilities –  
they stare up into the same apologetic sky:  
*saudade.*

there are no stars,  
no moons,  
no suns  
but even so i know that the sky is  
*szimpatikus* –  
my intuition has always told me that  
if the sky were a person,  
it would be a good person.  
It would be  
*szimpatikus.*

maybe it has made space for me.  
maybe it is waiting for me.  
maybe it won't tell me how to love.  
maybe it'll teach me how to dream.  
maybe i can dream so much  
that i become an air person, a  
*luftmensch.*

i step off the verge of maybe,  
my arms reaching out as if to fly.  
for a moment the air catches me with outstretched hands,  
as if it was holding me  
one last time:  
*meraki,*  
the sky is holding me wholeheartedly,  
with it's soul, passion and love:  
*meraki.*

then i fall and  
the water becomes my world entire  
and i feel almost a sense of *hiraeth*:  
homesickness for the place i know i can  
never return to.

it is cold and i feel infinite:  
*illimité.*

## **Winner of the Mary Armstrong Public Speaking Competition**

### **THE COURAGE OF YOUR CONVICTIONS**

**By Kate Chipman**

My six year old self used to say that when I grow up, I wanted to be an astronaut. I wanted to be a ballerina, I wanted to be a chef, I wanted to be a famous singer. But as you really grow up, the realisation it's not all that easy hits you. You begin to understand that the bedtime stories about doing whatever your heart desires become a mere fantasy, because today's society tells us something very different to 'follow your dreams'. And the only way to overcome this harsh reality broached by society is to abide by the courage of your convictions. By this, I mean always acting in accordance with your beliefs, in spite of criticism or disapproval. I mean having the sheer strength to stick by what you're passionate about, in the light of contradictory ideas.

As bizarre as it may seem, most of us first experience any backlash against the pursuit of passion over reason from our parents. Yes, those same parents that taught us to dream big; the ones who taught us to live by the mantra that anything is possible. The very people who showed us how to have courage in our convictions, yet also the first to suggest that living by your convictions might not be the way to go. Just think about it- the parental pressure to study subjects that will get you a good grade, even though you know you'd much rather take art than commerce. The assumed pressure to explore the "safe options" before considering the obscure ones. But if you ask yourself why your parents put so much pressure on you to make certain choices, it's usually because they care for you. They want you to succeed in this unpredictable game that is life, and the best way to find success is usually sticking to the 'safe options', right? Which brings me to what society says.

Society tells me that if I want to make it anywhere, I either need lots of money or a high status. Now, this demand for money is not really a surprise. If you want to make it, living in Sydney where the median house price is 1.15 million dollars, you're going to need quite a bit of money. But society goes beyond this to create even more expectations of us. As a student at a selective high school, many people would simply assume that I am going to take subjects along the lines of 4 unit Maths, English Extension 2, Physics, Chemistry and Economics. It's understood that I'll be aiming for a top ATAR, to get me into Medicine, Engineering or Law at uni. But not only is this assumption completely false, but by stereotyping people in such a way, you are immediately dampening the courage they have

in their convictions. And it's not like society denies this pressure- a global study has confirmed that 75% of Australian teenage girls feel stressed about school.

But why does it matter? Surely your parents and society know best, no matter what your convictions are. But the fact is that genuine interest remains the surest way to succeed, and this is because the power you can gain from having courage in your convictions is immeasurable. It can evoke creativity, spark enthusiasm, and solve problems beyond belief. We know how little correlation there is between salary and job satisfaction. We should be making our passion our pay check, because if we want society to succeed, we need to first thrive as individuals, and the only way to come about this is through the courage of your convictions.

It's about being unique; it's about working against the majority. Because the societal norm of success will never change unless we challenge it now. If you really want to be an astronaut when you grow up, you can do it....because once you have the courage of your convictions on your side, anything is possible.



## **Year 9 Writing**

### **Winners of the Old Girls' Union Writing Competition**

**Laura Calbes and Anna Simpson**

#### **BENJI AND THE INSANE DOCTORS**

**By Laura Calbes**

Benji was alone at home enjoying his customary junk food when disaster struck. He had been seated at his couch with a fistful of fries in his chubby hands, re-watching his favourite cartoon. Suddenly the characters vanished, replaced by a frazzled reporter who blurted "Insane doctors on the loose!"

Grumbling as he retrieved the fries he had dropped into the fatty jowls of his neck, Benji focused on the reporter. "A group of insane doctors are roaming the streets," the reporter cried. "Residents are warned to stay indoors to avoid being strangled with stethoscopes!" As fast as it had appeared the news broadcast was gone. The cartoon's corny music filtered back through the speakers. Benji, however, was nowhere to be found, and had left a large imprint in the sagging couch.

Benji was hurtling into the kitchen with all the grace of a beached whale, already concocting a plan of attack. He hated doctors with a passion, and had thwarted all the doctors his concerned parents had tried to contact. Defeated, his parents had dropped the matter, although all the town doctors knew of his ... predicament. "Let them come," he thought, searching for the kitchen torch. "I'll blind them! No one gets Benji without a fight."

After grabbing the torch from its usual place next to the fruit bowl, it took Benji less than a second to spot that the bulb was missing. Venting his anger by throwing a sad, wilted pear into the garbage disposal, he began ransacking the kitchen. Where could one torch bulb be after all? After practically destroying the kitchen, he was forced to concede that it was somewhere else, and waddled into the bathroom.

A quick search there revealed no bulbs, and Benji was beginning to panic. Where on Earth could a single bulb be hiding, that would make it so impossible to find?!

Sprinting into the living room, his eyes fell upon his school project: a circuit involving an apple battery and the missing bulb. He sprung forward, seized the bulb, and ripped it free of the wires before inserting it into the torch.

He sneered at the remains of the apple battery, and as a final insult, lobbed it out one of the windows. A loud yowl informed him that he had likely hurt the neighbour's cat. Benji couldn't find in himself to care.

He raced to the front door, only to stop in horror. The doctors were already there! Waiting outside the door, ready to beat his head in with a clipboard or something! Benji didn't know, he was never any good at this kind of thing anyway.

His torch was a long distance weapon, and they were already quite close! His hands, slippery with sweat and grease, closed tight around the torch with a crushing grip. No, he would not be bested like this! He was Benji of the XXXL pants, he could survive! Then he had an idea.

The idea was terrible, one of the least successful ideas to ever exist, so far into the realm of absurdity it had doubled back and lapped. It was apples. More precisely, hurling apples at these definitely dangerous doctors.

His parents, in the hope of a change of heart, had kept the fruit bowl full of apples, certainly enough to live off of for a couple of days. He had also been taught that 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away'. So why not use all these apples to bombard the ones outside the door? His mind filled with images of castles and catapults, but with apples in place of boulders. Back in the kitchen, Benji gathered up as many apples as he could find.

He rushed back to the door, dropping a few apples in his haste. He dimly recognised that the doctors outside were discussing Halloween. Why? He had no idea. Probably just something insane doctors did. Maybe just the insane.

Throwing wide the door, Benji began to pelt the group of insane doctors with apples, screaming about how they would never make him be healthy and how they made a mistake coming to his domain. The group scattered, panicked. He continued throwing apples until the group had retreated onto the road, watching him. He slammed the door shut hard enough to rattle its hinges. "Didn't get me this time," he muttered victoriously. "You'll never get ol' Benji."

Benji finished his meal, watched the rest of the cartoon and went to bed, anticipating some peaceful sleep after his horrible ordeal with the doctors. He snored loudly, like a chainsaw noise through a megaphone. His tired neighbours simply adjusted their earplugs and cried in despair.

The next morning, Benji collected his mail and the newspaper from the front door, then proceeded to fry himself twelve rashers of bacon, six sausages and four eggs. He poured himself a large one litre takeaway cup's worth of chocolate milk and settled down to eat his breakfast. Halfway through, he glanced at the newspaper. His angry roar shook the neighbourhood.

"Psycho attacks trick-or-treaters!" the headline proclaimed, "More details on page five." He rubbed his eyes indignantly before re-reading the headline. It remained the same. Benji

shredded the newspaper and threw his remaining egg in the bin. "I've got to stop eating these," he growled, "they're making me hallucinate!"

## ILLUMINATION

By Anna Simpson

We were never given a sun. A sun was a second chance; redemption after the lights went out. When darkness cloaked our world, smothering us in dense smoke, humans became animals, driven only by hunger. With no electricity, there was no restraint. Without electricity, our instincts kicked in.

May the best man win.

I woke up to darkness as usual. No golden light filtered through the shutters and the dew on the lawn did not sparkle. I did not get changed in the mornings anymore; there was no need to when there was nothing to see.

I scratched my fingernails along the plaster of my wall, letting the screech of the house feed my sanity. Only sound kept me connected to this place. The world had disappeared before my eyes and there was little in the way of me believing I disappeared too.

I let the walls guide me through my home. I did not need them. I could walk through these barren corridors without their guide, but they were more of a comfort than anything as I wandered to what used to be my living room, and now my base of operations. While predators stalked the streets, ears always alert for their next victim, I stayed inside and thought. I pondered many things, but one thought never left my mind: how could I bring electricity back? How could I rebirth that magnificent spark on which we had constructed our nation? If I could, then this planet would return to its state of Elysium, and crawl out from the suffocating abyss.

I had not done much thinking lately. My thoughts were constantly interrupted by the panging pain in my stomach. Hunger took no prisoners. The pantry was almost empty, save for some rotting vegetables and some tin cans. Soon, I would have no choice but to venture out from my stinking home and slip through the woods until I had something more to put on the table. It would be a tremendous risk, but a necessary one for my survival.

I gently ran the palm of my hand along the pantry, feeling each dusty and bare shelf as a reminder of my deadline. Two weeks. That's all the food I owned, aside from the rotting vegetables on the bottom shelf, but I would never risk eating them. Desperation would send me to the woods.

I tapped the lid of a small can – probably tuna – revelling in the metallic vibrations. Any sound was melodious nowadays. While I listened to the monotonous rapture, another sound caught my attention. It was soft and dainty, a sound I had not heard in a while.

Singing.

The melody was arguably off key and notes hung in the air, unfinished. I carefully crept towards a window, craning my neck in eagerness to hear more.

I stared in the direction of the window. Though I could not see anything, it felt only right to focus my attention in the correct direction. The somewhat raspy voice sounded like one of an old woman, the tapping of a cane adding to my case. Why she was singing, I did not know, but it was a dangerous tune, the song leading guerrillas right to her. I needed to get to her first.

For some peculiar reason, that day I threw caution to the wind, leaping haphazardly out the front door to ambush the woman. I ran into her shaky frame, catching her cane in my hand. She did little to acknowledge my existence, barely pausing her song before beginning again. I dragged her inside, placing what I had decided was a madwoman in an armchair.

“Be quiet, it’s a battleground out there,” I hissed, my hands firmly planted on her shoulders.

The woman stopped singing, and in her short-lived silence, she seemed to put a spell on the house too. Every creek suddenly eerily quiet. “Oh bollocks, I’ll be fine. Here, have an apple.”

Something firm was wedged between my palm and her shoulder. I blinked in confusion. Why share food when one can barely provide for themselves? “Thanks,” I said, wanting to ask more questions than was appropriate.

As soon as I released the old lady, she began to hum an erratic tune. I left her to it.

I bit into the apple, my selfish instincts preventing me from returning it. It was as crisp as anything, but as bitter as the cold outside. I could not see her, but I felt the woman’s impossible gaze on me as I ate.

“Good apple, huh? Pink Lady really is the tastiest, and I think I gave you the last one from that orchard. Now, if you wouldn’t mind lending me some potato, I would much appreciate it.”

Uninvited, I heard the woman stand up and head towards my pantry, mumbling to herself. I do not know how she knew where it was.

“I wouldn’t eat the potato in there, it’s rotten. I have some tuna if you want it,” I said, frowning.

The woman just chuckled. “Oh darling, I don’t want to eat the potato...” she trailed off, mumbling to herself again.

I listened to her as she mumbled, indistinguishable words running together in a jumble. Underneath her scattered voice, I could hear the sounds of something being pulled from her

pockets, something metal. I wandered over as I heard the tinkling of glass, curiosity getting the better of me. I did not speak, not wanting to disturb the woman's strange antics.

"Thank you, my dear," the old woman said mysteriously.

I began to respond, "Wha-"

A bright white interrupted my thoughts, sun spots clouding my eyes. I blinked rapidly as I watched an image appear before me. A little light globe, barely illuminating the room, sat on the floor by the old woman. It was hooked up to a mouldy potato, looking like something from a surgeon's office.

"Thank you, my dear," the lady repeated, "This is an old school trick, one I never thought I would have to use."

I stared at the woman. Frizzy grey string stuck up from her head like a hairball, and her wrinkles were deeply grooved. Her dark, brown eyes stared into mine as she began to laugh. Slowly, it rose into a howl, and I watched with disturbed curiosity.

The woman suddenly stopped. I breathed in, waiting for her to speak.

"Oh," she said, "that was a green apple."

## **Year 10 Writing**

### **Winners of the Old Girls' Union Writing Competition**

**Amie Doan and Angela Pan**

#### **THE GARDEN OF THE GODS**

By Amie Doan

The first eyeball appeared on Argos' arm, blinking blearily up at him. Shock coursed through his body, hot and fast as he scrambled to cover it up. One moment, he had been pouring wine for the gods' banquet and the next, a pimple had split open to reveal an eye.

"Boy, what's wrong?" the goddess nearby purred.

Her mortal suitors paused their posturing to glare at him. All the mortals in the garden of the gods hankered after divine attention, like orphans after love.

Argos merely bowed, his heart racing as he tried to hide the eye. The perfectly manicured fruit trees and elegant shrubbery were beginning to blur into a lush green mess, and he didn't trust himself with words. After a moment, the goddess' doe eyes flicked back to her suitors, bored.

Nothing this bizarre had ever occurred in the garden of the gods. Only beautiful things happened here, to beautiful people discussing beautiful subjects.

The eyeball was most definitely not beautiful.

It was not without alarm that this thought came to Argos. Beauty was to the body what language was to the mind. There was nothing the gods favoured more than perfect flesh. And a god's favour was worth all else. The gods were divine, glorious and Argos loved them as he loved the sky, earth and sea.

A second eyeball split painfully open on his back, chafing on the fabric of his toga. Panic rose up in him, quick and bitter as bile.

"Hey, boy! More wine over here." The honey-sweet voice of Apollo, the golden god, beckoned him over from amongst throngs of fawning mortal women. Argos scrambled to attend to him.

Pop, pop, pop. Three new eyeballs made wet squelches as Argos scurried over. He wanted to vomit. Everything spun around him, the sky, the blades of grass, the mortals sprawled beneath glittering gods. When would the eyes stop?

“Ah, finally!” Apollo hardly gave Argos a cursory glance as he poured a shaking stream of wine. Instead, the god clutched onto a small wrapped object in his left hand.

No, not an object, but a baby. Faint gurgles escaped from a soft round face, framed by downy ringlets.

“Isn’t she beautiful? One of my mortal women gave birth to her.” said Apollo. The surrounding women rustled, obviously perturbed by the mention of a rival. Their pretty faces soured.

“Actually I find her rather disagreeable.”

“She’s repulsive.”

Shrill voices rose in a chorus, filled with hate and jealousy for a child. Every one of Argos’ eyeballs inspected the women, feral in the face of Apollo’s favour.

Argos felt a twinge of wrongness. Shouldn’t Apollo protect his daughter?

But the god remained silent, only smiling a smile that grew more blinding the longer Argos looked at it.

The eyeballs were springing forth in earnest now. One popped up on his hand and six on his back all within the space of seconds. Dizzily, Argos stumbled away from Apollo, his head shattering into thirty fragmented viewpoints. Around him, the other attendants tried to hide their sniggers from him in vain; his vision encompassed the whole banquet. He could see every one of their delightedly disgusted stares as dozens of hideous eyeballs popped up like acne. He had to get rid of them before any gods noticed.

But how? Confusion ran rampant in his mind. The eyeballs now numbered more than fifty. All at once, hot tears sprung to eyes, mingling with rivulets of sweat.

“Come here, boy.”

Argos swivelled to find himself face to face with Zeus, king of the gods, crouching in a bush.

Every fibre in his body froze, torn between elation and terror.

Zeus was above them all. Divine. Imperious. Perfect.

The haze in Argos’ mind cleared, replaced by a sharp fear. Even the most obsessive of mortals did not beg for Zeus’ favour. You did not question a king.



The god didn't look quite so perfect now. At first the god looked regal, even amongst the shrubbery. However all of Argos' eyes could see that he was clutching his eyes, as blood rolled down his cheeks. Zeus had been blinded.

"Come closer, boy." Zeus' voice rumbled like the grating of boulder on boulder. "I cannot see you, but I can sense you."

On closer inspection, the god was hunched over something soft and pale, almost obscured from view by his silken robes. The thing cried out half-heartedly, metal flashing in Argos' shattered vision.

It was a naked woman. Her cheeks were flushed a blotchy pink and her eyes flickered wildly about. She would have been pretty if she didn't look so much like a wild animal, struggling with a dagger underneath Zeus' bulk.

Argos' mouth went dry and his eyes, numbering just a hundred, drank in the scene against his will.

"Take the dagger from her." Zeus commanded. "But do not hurt her. I like them feisty."

The woman had stopped fighting now, her white body limp and her eyes glazed over like those of a dead fish. It was like she was no longer alive. Gently, Argos pried the dagger from her fingers, the metal cold against the eyelids on his palms.

A sense of deep wrongness sunk into his bones.

"D-don't the others see this?" Argos' voice came out in stuttering stops, his heart quivering. What was he asking? How dare he question the king of the gods.

After a moment, Zeus gave a rumbling laugh, his chiselled torso vibrating.

"The mortals do not see. Those who think the mortals watch them have a problem."

Crack. With each word, the gilded truth Argos had built for himself shattered, crumbling away to reveal the decay underneath. What had happened to the perfection of the gods? The gods were meant to rule the mortals, not use them.

For the first time, Argos cast his mind to all of his eyes and saw.

He saw the rotten core in the midst of all the perfection. He saw the cruel glint in a goddess' eyes as she watched her suitors to maul each other for her favour. He saw a baby being torn apart by Apollo's mortal wives, driven by a twisted love for the golden god. He saw a girl, trapped by the king of gods. Every one of them, mad with desire, manipulation and lust.

He had a hundred eyes at his command, and he saw the garden for what it was.

A garden of monsters.

## PASSENGER

By Angela Pan

His words were a dull throb, ringing in the air. His tone was unflinching. Palpable tension lingered in the air. She saw her reflection in the cold, hard stare of pale grey eyes. She was a victim, helpless and afraid in the face of power, superiority, and authority. The immediate implication of his words did not sink in until she blinked. Hot tears welled, shining stars against the blank canvas of pure ivory and dilated pupils, clear irises widened almost comically in disbelief. They threatened to mortify her. Her cheeks heated, thrust upon hot coals. Her skin prickled. The air was stifling. She furtively glanced around, but no eyes met hers. Their heads turned away and they averted their eyes; it was so ironically obvious that they had been unabashedly staring mere seconds earlier. It was ironically obvious that help would not come. It was obvious, that she did not belong.

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It was a sweltering day. The azure sky glinted overhead. Winking rays did little to mask the scorching heat radiating from the sun. Glistening droplets of sweat beaded at her brow bone. They dripped; across weary, leathery ebony skin, across the deep-set wrinkles which lined her forehead, like words across a page. She reached up and rubbed smooth circles with a calloused palm across her temple, but the blaring heat from above overpowered her, and the dull throb inside her head would not subside. She could not stand this heat much longer.

At last, it whipped across the corner. Salvation. It screeched as it came to a halt. Doors hiss, swinging open with a worn groan. She yearned to leap into the welcoming cool air. Nevertheless, she would have to wait. She bided her time, as They boarded. She knew her place. They all did.

When it was her turn, she shuffled slowly, up the stairs and into the aisle. She headed towards the back. Through Their section, she walked. Their discomfort at her presence was blatant, so thinly veiled, she could tell just by the way they leaned, shoulders sloping, away from her as she passed, although whether by reflex or practice she could not discern.

Wearily, she trudged, back hunched, to her section. Others filed in after into the row beside her. They mirrored her, eyes downcast, hunched backs; they too knew that they did not belong. She let out an audible sigh as she gingerly lowered herself into the window seat, feeling the tattered, worn fabric stretched taut over rigid plastic beneath her hands. It was times like this when she longed for the plush comfort of Their section. But she knew her place.

The bus doors hissed once again, and lurched into motion once again.

Fresh, unfiltered summer breeze fluttered in through the small cracked window, brushing gingerly across her gaunt cheekbones. She glanced outside. Soft eyes surveyed idyllic suburbia. White picket fences lined the streets in almost startling precision. Children in pinafores giggled and pranced in lush green yards while housewives cast watchful eyes from picturesque patios. The scene was soothingly familiar. Yet, she felt a prickle spread across her back.

A sense of unease rushed through her core as the bus faltered to a stop. More people boarded, filling in cold seats. But it was not until a lone man filed in, that a feeling of dread pooled in her stomach. He was one of Them. Narrowed, beady eyes cast over row after row of filled seats. His face contorts as he turns to the driver. She should have seen it coming. At her age, she should have known.

She met the driver's cold hard gaze in the mirror. His eyes betrayed meaning unuttered. They showed barely mitigated contempt. They both knew what was coming.

"You all know how this works," he drawls. "Empty those seats."

He points an incriminating finger towards her direction.

"That row there. Clear out, now!"

Without haste, the others shuffle out into the aisle, leaving empty seats next to her. Mortification and degradation hang in the air. Their cheeks are flushed, eyes stinging. And worse, They were staring. From the comfort of their section, pairs of clear blue eyes, unblinking. They were the very semblance of innocence. Only They knew it was wrong too. But they wouldn't step in. Because privilege was ignorance, and ignorance was bliss.

"Now, don't go messing around, you know what to do!"

Now his sharp words were directed at her. They were barbed threats, glinting daggers pointed towards her through the charged air. She moved to comply, but faltered in the motion, hesitant. She could almost feel the collective breath held by her newfound audience. Even she does not know what she is about to do.

The driver strode up the aisle, into her row. His ferocious demeanour caused her to shrink further into her seat.

Once more, he tried. "Let me have that seat."

The air was suffocating her now, no better than the blazing heat she had just escaped from. She felt all eyes on her, and her neck pickled. In all directions she glanced, imploringly, for help. Yet as her eyes scanned around her, heads turned away, eyes averted, it was obvious no help would come.

With an air of resignation, she was wearied by this stalemate. Yet, she held his gaze, firm, but did not know how long she could hold out.

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She thinks of her mother, her unruly ashen curls and big, booming laughter. Of how she had often she had clutched her on her bosom and rocked her so serenely.

Her favourite quote had been, "You'll turn out ordinary if you're not careful."

*But what good does being careful bring?* She asked herself now, feeling the weight of Their gazes on her. It certainly hadn't saved her father that night. She remembers it as clear as day. A day not unlike this one, when the searing heat had left her drenched in sweat. It was that night, when he hadn't returned home. It was that night she had found his body, strung up high on the large oak in the park, the noose enclosed tight around his neck. Retribution for his ebony skin.

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By now, she had made up her mind.

She felt the searing heat of Their gazes, of the driver's cold, unflinching gaze.

She decided it was time to cease. Cease being ordinary. Cease being compliant. She would not be silenced. She would not be swayed. She would not apologize for *her* ebony skin.

She returned his hard stare with a smile of her own.

The azure sky glinted overhead.

## **Year 11 Writing**

### **Year 11 Advanced Short Story exploring *Crossing Boundaries***

#### **TENIR ET SOUVENIR**

**By Lorrain Gong**

Her tenant was a strange sort. Not in a sinister or disturbing way, but there was a strangeness about the man that made him almost endearing. She remembered the first time they had met; he had looked barely 18, not that she could ever guess his age since he didn't look like he'd grown a day older in the six years that he had lived there. He was still as gangly as he was then, looking like a boy who had not quite finished going through puberty with his awkward limbs and incessant fidgeting.

At first she had been reluctant to let him a flat – he seemed as though he were unable to feed himself properly, let alone pay for accommodation. He had arrived at her door with a backpack and the advertisement and devoid of all other worldly possessions, drenched from head to toe with only a large wide-brimmed sunhat for refuge. She supposed she accepted him more out of sympathy for his seemingly pitiable state than her confidence in his bank account. It wasn't as if he was a bad tenant, in fact, he was quite the opposite. He cleaned up after himself in communal areas, always paid his rent on time and followed all of the house rules to the T. He was never loud nor invited loud friends over – but then he didn't really seem like he had friends at all. He was a nice kid though; played board games with elderly Mr Harris, helped Ms Williams hang up her washing when her back played up and read to Mrs Thompson whose eyes were failing her.

She felt she should be glad that he wasn't another one of those reckless teens, throwing mad parties with drugs and alcohol doing whatever heinous things to her wallpaper but sometimes she wished he were a bit more... normal. He liked to spend a large portion of his time gardening – he had multiple flowerpots and planters in and around his flat which he tended to regularly. This in and of itself was fairly nondescript but she would often see and hear him speaking to himself, gesticulating wildly as if there was someone there with him on the balcony while he tended to his vegetation. He'd sometimes even sing to his plants (she guessed) with that boyish voice of his although nothing he sang sounded like it came from this century. On her routine visit to his flat to collect rent she also couldn't help but notice how all of his belongings and furniture were squashed away in the corners of the room as if there was something invisible taking up the rest of the space. Books and various contraptions covered almost every available surface but the floor was always spotless. She

had once suggested for him to buy another table or bookshelf and to rearrange his things to make better use of the space but that had only earned her a scandalised look and indignant blustering. “The spirits like it this way,” he had said to her then, and it was a mystery to her then as much as it was now.

Most conversation with him could be trying at times since he would sometimes seem to trail off before he’d finish a sentence and say something completely unrelated to the subject at hand. One of the more unsettling parts about talking to him would be his somewhat superhuman ability to stare – rarely at her, but past her or at his feet. He also tended to wander aimlessly around the complex, stopping and staring at nothing in particular. Over time, she and the other tenants learned to forgive these small peculiarities and to her, at least, his oddities were a small part of his charm and as people came and went, she saw him almost as a constant in her life.

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He had never seen the sky. Not really, at least. They said it was blue and blue it should be since everyone said it was so but to him, the sky had always resembled ashes for as long as he could remember. He always enjoyed watching the sunset and sunrise though, the skies alight with fire for just a few moments every day and that would be enough.

For a time, the only thing he could see was red. Red everywhere, clouding his senses, the scent of blood clogging his lungs, his hands stained with gore and viscera as he *tried just to keep them alive*. Even in dreams, he saw red. Red sticking to his clothes, no matter how hard he tried to wash them, watching and re-watching those he had failed to save choke on their own blood. He would wake screaming; echoing those he watched grow limp in his arms and, like them, all he could do was stare. He was good at what he did – healing people, saving them – but no one can save those who have already been claimed by death.

He never died. Not when all of the people he had known were laid to rest all those years ago, not when his memories of them had begun to fade – not even when he had almost begun to forget their names. He took to wandering, never staying in one place for long and never becoming attached.

At some point he picked up gardening. It was nice to do something with his hands and to care for something, albeit differently to how he may have done it in the past. The spirits liked his gardens too. He was able to see them when no one else could – thus it had been from the moment he first opened his eyes. As he wandered, in every place he visited, he would come across a multitude of spirits, many of them lost or craving company. He would talk to them, sing to them, tell them stories of the places he’d been to, the things he’d done and gradually, they would come to see his dwelling as their own. He had taken to moving his furniture to take up as little space as they could for the spirits as they would dance and he would watch them, sometimes transfixed for hours on end.

Throughout his wanderings, he would always find her. In this century or the next, they would always meet and she would always give him a place to stay, a friendly face. She never remembered him. She had been Aurelia, Juliana, Caroline, and when he met her again six years ago, she introduced herself to him as Alice. Sometimes he forgot and called her by another name but she would only look at him questioningly and smile. She never saw the spirits. She never did, but he remembered a time when she believed him when he said they were real.

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She hummed to herself as she ascended the stairs to his flat – something she remembered him singing to his plants some time ago. She would always say that she was only there to collect his rent but every time she would stay a bit longer to talk to him, to hear one of his stories, to drink a cup of tea with him. This time, he was waiting for her at the door and before he let her inside he asked, “Say, Alice, can you describe the colour of the sky to me today?”

## **Year 11 Advanced Short Story exploring *The Individual and Society***

### **Assessment Task Notification**

**By Amanda Fang**

**ASSESSMENT TASK NOTIFICATION:** YOUR FIRST CHANCE TO PROVE YOURSELF AS A FATHER

**Subject:** THE WATER HAS BROKEN

**Academic Year:** 15 graduated years later

**Task number:** The fourth milestone; 5 anniversaries, 6 cups of coffee, 29 paperclips later

**Date issued:** 2<sup>nd</sup> OF MARCH, 2017, 5:21 AM

**Task weighting:** Am I good enough?

#### **Task description:**

You are to jolt upright in your bed at 5:21 AM to the sensation of howls tunnelling into your right ear, your body slapped by the sheets that are suddenly pulled taut towards the figure convulsing beside you. This is your cue to rip away from the bed while babbling fragmented sentences of comfort to your beloved- be careful not to almost somersault towards the phone standing on the cabinet on the other side of the room. You will allow this device to enter your shaky, sweating grip while using the free fingers on your other hand to press a jumble of numbers that sing out an awkward tune as you type.

Finally, you will hear it jump into the next verse, the triple *brrrr-brrrr-brrrr* trill which vibrates into your palm and into your veins, coursing towards your pounding heart. The next few moments will be a blur, from when the white-cloaked professionals on the other end receive your breathy run-on sentences to when you're rushing your gasping lover into the front seat of your Honda; the streets, the still-dimming lights and the grey-blue smog of dawn whirling past your bewildered face. As the drawn-out gasps circulating in the car start to become a permanent part of your hearing, you are to ask yourself countless deliberating questions about your choices- why didn't you just send her there six hours ago, you should've put up some more pillows to support her when she slept, what if the porridge was too cold...

After doing this, you should arrive promptly at the hospital carpark, the looming sign inviting you to your fatherhood ceremony. You are to help her quickly but tentatively out of the car while feeling her round, heavy form press into your side, and you make your way slowly towards the hospital where the clean white aesthetic, anaesthetic, swallows your senses whole. You are to mull over and over about all the possible things that could go wrong. You



are to realize that it is too late for this. You will greet the friendly receptionist and the nurses will come, followed by the doctors, in their white gowns and blue hair nets. You are to watch your wife being transferred off your shoulder and onto a medical bed, on which she is wheeled down a long, illuminated hallway with you following closely. Her gasping will distort into short cries and screams and you are to do nothing but watch wide-eyed and keen-eared as you wonder to yourself, why oh why did I put her through this, never again, no more children. Her shins will be at acute angles to her knees, spread wide open like wings as her face scrunches and she also scrunches your supporting hand to pieces. You will hear the nurses' soothing words of encouragement and see their pearly white smiles, whiter than the surroundings, as half-minutes, minutes, half-hours then hours go by. It will be a while before you see the blue-gloved hands smattered in streaks of clumpy pink and red. The clenched-teeth cries, the screams, the babbles in blue and white-

And finally, once you have completed all this, you are to feel the release on your hand, hear the symphony of congratulations and see the writhing blur of new flesh amongst the cleanliness. You will hear the cry that rings far louder than the rest of the sounds; you will see the cradle of blue holding her morphing into the soft pink embrace that is your wife's. You will bend in to press your face against your tired lover to gaze at him.

**Final Mark:**

You see that he is soft, small and glorious. The world falls silent as the universe is touched with the flutter of this new life, and nothing else matters.

## YEAR 11 POETRY

### ACCEPTANCE

**By Arushi Joshi**

*Arushi's poem won first prize in the University of Canberra Young Poets' Awards.*

i was 11  
when my friend came back  
from her holiday in bali.

we huddled around her,  
admired her pretty braids;  
whispered in awe:  
"you're so tanned!"

seven of us, and we stuck out  
our skinny forearms to compare.  
my turn, and i added,  
"i'm tanned, too."

there was silence,  
and there were small heads shaking  
and little frowns on the young girls' faces  
and i could have been swept away  
in the eternity that passed until  
the bell rang and it was time for class  
and we were drifting away until the moment was  
lost.

when i look back  
(and i shouldn't, but i do),  
i see the theatrics of the moment,  
as perhaps an orchestrated opening to  
a film about self-doubt.

(because in that distant quiet,  
where six white girls had held their breath,  
my 11-year-old self had sighed,  
"...but not the right kind.")

**Judge's comment:** *An exceptional poem that has poise and emotional depth – achieved through its clear-eyed attention to the moment.*

## TANGO

By Varsha Krithivasan

*Varsha's poem won equal third prize in the University of Canberra Young Poets' Awards.*

you can always tell when I'm nervous  
when my hearts beating out of my chest  
when I want the ground to swallow me up  
you can tell; and not because of the pink that flushes  
my round cheeks or the way my eyes look down.  
you can tell; because I go from a 1 to a 5  
from a stutterer to a st-st-stutterer  
you can tell; not because my fingers fidget  
but because my words dance...with two left feet  
avoiding s's and m's like potholes on the dance floor  
my words dance as if they were in a club  
dancing the same move again and again and again  
unstable, wasted  
my words dance as if they had no partner  
grappling the air; god knows where  
swaying alone, right to left to left to left  
my words dance as if no one was watching  
even though they know you are watching; hearing, listening  
to every single repeated syllable, laughing in confusion  
the echo of "did you forget your name"  
or "why do you do that"  
as if I choose to do that, as if I choose to stumble  
if my words choose to dance with no music  
no rhythm, no beat, with two left feet

My words dance the tango  
Not the fluent kind  
With feet flowing between  
Twirling dresses and see mines  
The kind you find in the basement late at night  
Silent, sweaty, slow, tripping over and you know  
The music doesn't have to be there  
With laughter and euphoria in the air  
The hum of your heart next to mine  
I can scream I can stutter, and I will still shine  
My words dance with high heels  
Treading with care but you will still feel  
Like you're on top of the world, like you won't ever fall  
My words dance the tango, the waltz and the jive  
My words dance  
My words are alive

## **Year 11 Extension Writing**

**Students studying Year 11 English Extension undertook an Independent Investigation assignment which involved the creation of an extensive Major Work. Ena Nam chose to write a short story cycle.**

### **SEOUL AWAKENING**

**By Ena Nam**

#### **Caged**

The musty, hay-scented air in the pen house welcomes me. As usual, the chickens sit wing-to-wing in rows, their twitchy heads poking out through the cage-wire as if anticipating my arrival. With ritualistic care I begin my daily task, easing into the rhythm of the chickens' low clucking as I gently scoop my hand into the coop. Each egg fills my cupped hands with rounded warmth that sends a shiver of pleasure down my spine. I pick one egg at a time, controlling my grip for fear of dropping it or squeezing too hard. Dad says the job'll get quicker when I'm older, but I like it this way. Holding an egg is like holding the world in your hands – it glows with life, and beginnings and mysteries undiscovered. I make sure to give the chickens a solemn nod of appreciation. Although most of their beady eyes are only ever looking for chicken feed, perhaps some do twinkle with the same secret connection that I feel for them.

The farm's been strangely quiet since Yunhee left us. The day she turned sixteen, she packed up her bags and marched off to the station. Mum glared and Dad shouted, but my sister was louder this time. She screamed that she was sick of the farm, the chickens, and all our "small-town retardations", whatever that may be. Then she zipped herself off to Seoul, just like that.

It's never been quite the same since then, at least not for me. Dad spends most of his time in his tractor, ploughing on as if nothing's happened. Mum attends Sunday morning service as usual and maintains her usual composure, although sometimes I feel the burn of her eyes on the back of my neck when I kneel-down for prayer. I know that look all too well now. She's always warning me in some way or another: 'If you dare to turn out like your sister, I'm feeding you to the pigs.'

Mum says Seoul is all dark alleyways and stone-faced strangers and buildings so tall they block out the sky. She says everyone there is never happy and always angry because they're

always wanting more. I guess I'm pretty scared of the city, too. It seems so big and grey and there are no fences to tell you which carrot patch belongs to whom.

But today, while I sit and eat dinner in front of the TV, Seoul looks kind-of magical. In the news the city square is totally filled with people who are all brandishing candles. Some people are also shouting and holding big red signs. Thousands of people seem to have spilled out into the streets and they look like an ocean of twinkling stars, all swimming together towards some place. I stop spooning rice into my mouth and gape at the screen.

I suddenly remember what Yunhee told me before she left us. "Seoul is a place of light," she had said. "People there have to be awake all the time."

"That's horrible," I replied, pouting my bottom lip defiantly.

Then my sister had knelt down to look me in the eye, her brown gaze penetrating. "Sunny, you need to be *awake* to know what is right and what is wrong," I remember her saying, "And to know what you *want*."

Now, as I sit mesmerized by the sparkling mass of people in the screen, I realise I don't really know what they're marching-on about. "Mum, what do these people *want*?"

Mum rolls her eyes, so that for a second they go white. "I don't bloody care and you don't need to know."

I don't quite know what I want myself, either.

On the TV, the news-reporter has stopped talking about Seoul and is now droning on about some epidemic.

*"...the AI disease has been spreading rapidly, affecting hundreds of chicken farmers in the southern regions..."*

My ears prick at the word 'chicken'. The screen shows blurred footage of a chicken farm, a lot like ours, except this one seems to have a huge hole in the ground. What I hear next makes me choke on my food.

*"...more than ten thousand infected chickens have been gassed and buried alive to prevent further spreading of the disease..."*

I feel my dinner heave inside my stomach. "This... can't happen to us." I turn a shocked face to my parents but Dad just grunts and switches off the news. Mum shifts uncomfortably then leaves the room, which is dead dark and quiet without the TV blaring.

I slump in my chair and stay there, long after the sun's given up its last rays of light, and Mum and Dad have hit the sack. I can't move. All I can think is that *they're going to bury our chickens*.

Hot tears splash onto my clenched fists.

*If only Yunhee was here.*

Then I remember what Yunhee said about being awake. I lift my head to swipe the snot and tears off my face with my sleeve. I know what I want to do.

When I reach the pen house it's dark and chilly and I shiver in my nightgown. The coop looks eerie in the moonlight, with rows of cage-wire casting long, thin shadows across the floor. I flash my torch towards the chickens and sigh with relief to see them safely huddled inside. Little eyes open and glint in the flashlight as I walk by rattling the doors of the enclosure. "Time to wake up," I say. My heart is beating in my ears. My fingers quiver as I fumble with the latch on one of the cages. I can't believe what I'm about to do. I undo the cage door so that it clangs open. Then I move onto the next cage, my breath as fast as my hands.

As I hurriedly open up the doors I imagine the chickens spilling out onto the dusty floor of the pen house. I can already imagine my mass of winged-warriors marching outside then setting fire to the farm in a blazing-red streak of feathers. They will be as alive and alight as Seoul, and no one will be able to bury their fury.

"C'mon, let's go out!" I yank the latch open. "The cage is open."

Wire cuts into my skin and I feel blood trickle from my fingers. Hair clings to my hot, sweaty face and I wipe the strands away from my eyes.

I notice the sun's started to come up, sending shafts of light through the windows and into the coop. As light seeps into the pen house I can finally see the chickens clearly. They're sitting obediently inside their cages, unmoved by the opening-up of space before them. A new wave of panic hits me. Dad should be up soon, and if he finds me... "Wake up!" I'm yelling now. I try to pull a chicken out but it's like a rock fixed into its cage. It clucks and ruffles its feathers fearfully, while its neighbours stupidly blink their eyes at me as if expecting chicken feed. When the truth hits me I sink to the floor, crying and exhausted. The chickens will never come out - they can't even see the prison they're encaged in.

A few days later, men in white jumpsuits and masks arrive in trucks to drill a hole in the ground. The chickens are poured into the pit like sewage. Heads still twitching, clucking, the gas not yet fully in their system. They're a massive red and brown stream of feathers descending into their grave. It's an excruciating process. Dad stands by and watches the men, defeated. I want to look away but I'm rooted to my hiding place behind a tin shed.

As the chickens chug into the pit only one or two of them resist. Their wings flap in a frenzy of feathers and their eyes roll about, loose in their sockets from the gas. I watch as their screaming beaks are swiftly bulldozed shut, muffled by a triumphant sweep of dirt. But what haunts me most are the chickens that slide so obediently to their death. Their glassy little eyes stare - oblivious, stupid, empty - and remain open even as the dirt rains down.

I find myself shivering in the shower that night, trying to scrub off the stench of rotting chicken and soil that has settled deep into my skin. My sister was right. To trust blindly is to find yourself in eternal darkness. I need find my own place of light, where I can learn to be awake.

The cage is open.

## Meeting Yunah

Seoul was brighter than she remembered. Misun stared out the window with child-like wonder as the taxi darted through the busy streets. Her eyes, accustomed to the dull grey concrete and bushland back in Australia, felt dazed by the high-rise buildings that spilled yellow light and the multi-coloured neon signs flashing as if beckoning to her. She was dizzied by the vibrancy and had to send her gaze down to the floor. For the hundredth time in her fourteen-hour-long trip, Misun shook her head and thought,

*What on earth am I doing here?*

She still couldn't understand the sudden impulse that had driven her to drop out three days of work and travel nine thousand kilometres to see this daughter, her daughter, who she'd thought she'd forgotten.

At the hotel she dived straight for the bed, drained and light-headed from the long ride, and lay there staring up at the chandelier. She recalled the white ceiling she had fearfully watched when she had been imprisoned in her hospital bed sixteen years ago. At first the baby was an extension of the man she loathed. It would tie her to him like a despicable knot. Then the baby began to swell inside her and its weight in her belly made her feel light with wonder, and when its tiny feet pounded against her body so did her heart. But any feelings of motherly tenderness were quickly smothered by smashed glass and shouted arguments, and she already knew then that she would leave; she would never become a mother to the child. So when she was offered to study in Sydney she had left without hesitation. There were no tear-washed farewells over the new-born, not even on the plane, only the relief of escape and a burning shame at her own selfishness.

Misun heaved herself from the plush comfort of the bed and rummaged through her suitcase. From beneath a pile of underwear she fished out a piece of paper with an address, printed in neat Korean. Years back the child's grandmother, who'd taken her in, had sent this with a photo of the girl, smiling delightfully over her ice-cream and wearing a yellow pinafore clearly too big for her. On the back of the photo was written: *Her name's Yunah. It's never too late to come.*

Misun had been able to ignore the pang of pain she felt when she saw the tiny hands gripping the ice-cream, and the little pink tongue in mid-lick. Now as she knelt on the carpet she was overcome by a new rush of feeling.

*But what if it is too late?*

The girl would be sixteen, now. Misun would be no mother to her – she hadn't even bothered to give her a name, for god's sake. Her chest tightened.



*Why am I here?*

Misun switched on the bedside television, desperate for a distraction. The room suddenly filled with a blue glow and the smooth, solemn voice of an evening news reporter intruded her thoughts.

*'...the tragedy of last month's Sewol ferry incident continues. An estimated loss of three-hundred and four lives...'*

Misun remembered reading about the sinking of the *Sewol* ferry in the Sunday Telegraph. She had been horrified by the irresponsibility - the illegal design of the ship, the overloaded cargo and the inexperienced crew – that let so many lives slip away. Just like that. Two hundred and fifty of the victims were students in their first year at high-school. Sixteen, the same age as Yunah.

*'...the victims' families can be seen camping out in mourning and protest here in Gwanghwamun Square...'*

The screen showed a huddle of makeshift tents in the middle of the city square, their thin canvas covers whipping in the wind. Fathers of victims sat on the concrete holding protest signs, their cheeks hollow from fasting for weeks. Mothers in yellow raincoats shivered and cried in the rain. The footage cut to a ferry-port, where a woman was screaming her child's name to the ocean and struggling to throw herself into the waves as others held her back with tears streaming.

Misun felt her heart was being wrung. She felt herself move out of her comfortable hotel bed and into the skin of the heart-shattered mothers. She too was fighting wind and rain and calling for her child. She fell asleep with the wail of mourning women ringing in her ears.

The next morning Misun caught the taxi with the address to her daughter's apartment folded carefully in her coat pocket. Closing the door of the taxi, her hands began to shake. A nauseating queasiness intensified in her stomach until it twisted and writhed like a snake. 'Uhm, Gwanghwamun Square, please,' she rasped to the driver. The snake uncoiled itself and released her insides. But the relief was quickly replaced by a heavier regret that made her sink into her seat. Her daughter's address remained untouched in her pocket as the city fled by her window.

*I'm sorry, Yunah. I don't have the guts to do it.*

Climbing out the taxi at the city square, the air was fresh with a wintry coolness that quickly turned Misun's nose pink. She found herself walking towards the *Sewol*-disaster memorial site as if hypnotized by the yellow ribbons waving to her from the tops of tents. There was a petition booth, a wall of post-it-notes bearing messages of comfort, and a pile of flowers at the foot of a statuette of the sinking ferry. Inside one of the tents, the walls were lined with photos of all the victims, most of them school photos. Misun's heart heaved at the thought of her own daughter's young face forever frozen inside a photograph.

And then, there were the families' quarters. Up close, the tents looked even shabbier, but the people were unexpectedly cheerful. A group of mothers and some volunteers huddled around a table chatting and making yellow ribbons of commemoration. Another tent was handing out hot tea to strangers who'd stopped by to take part in the memorial service. A woman with a large round face in a flower-printed apron spotted Louise standing awkwardly and beckoned to her to join the table of ribbon-makers. Embarrassed, she sidled into a seat and gratefully accepted a steaming paper cup of coffee, warming her chilly hands.

The women's eyes were swollen-red and their wind-swept hair clung to their faces, but their hands were steady and strong, folding and stamping the ribbons almost aggressively. Mesmerized by the rhythmic work of the mothers' hands, Misun suddenly blurted, 'How do you do it?'

To her embarrassment, she was choking on tears. 'How do you keep on going like this?'

The chatter seeped out of the tent and a suffocating gaze turned on her. She wanted to sink through the floor like the *Sewol* ferry had into the ocean, and disappear forever. The round-faced woman broke the silence.

'Well, what else can we do?' she said gently. 'When my son stopped coming home, my whole world crumpled. But I can't just...quit.'

'We can't help it,' said another woman, her eyes brimming with tears but never leaving her busy hands. 'Once you're a mother, you're a mother. You're a mother wherever your kid may be, and if that's a hundred miles below the ocean, you dive in for them.'

'It's a bloody curse, I'm telling you,' said the round-faced woman, with a chuckle. 'But it's also a blessing,' she added softly.

*That's why.*

When Misun stepped out from the warmth of the tent evening had fallen. The city was coming to life with lights, and around her candles from the memorial flickered and glowed. Amongst the night-time buzz of the square Misun walked with certainty in her steps. In her hand she held a carefully folded piece of paper. On it was an address she had already memorised.

The crowd around her thickened as protestors holding candles marched beside her, setting the streets ablaze. Seoul was brighter than ever and she was going to see her daughter.

## State Finalist in the Plain English Speaking Competition 2017

### CLASS WARFARE

By Sophie Shead

It sometimes seems that nothing will be able to unite NewsCorp and Fairfax; that differing political ideologies and affiliations make them fundamentally and intractably opposed. But one subject that seems, especially in recent months, to be able to transcend politics and bring together the perpetually divided, is a shared distaste for the 'toxic' coaching culture that is overtaking our selective school system.

Now, regardless of the merit of its subject, it's interesting to note that the fight against selective schools and coaching culture has often been a disturbingly racist one. This was particularly clear in the somewhat infamous *Good Weekend* article, 'Testing Times: Selective Schools and Tiger Parents', whose author Anna Broinowski does not overwhelm us with her subtlety when she says that "ambivalence about selective schools stems from the fact that enrolments are dominated by children of Asian backgrounds." And she sustains that sentiment through her piece, save for a moment of inspiring narrative redemption when near the conclusion of her article she visits Sydney Girls, and sees that "Sure, most students appear to be of Chinese, Indian or Arabic descent, but their accents are broad Aussie and they're lively, individual and thriving."

Or the more journalistically balanced, but perhaps equally misinformed, *Australian* Article, 'Hyper-racialised selective schools broaden the ethnic divide,' which speaks of racial segregation at selective schools, with particular concern for the whites left behind. According to academic-cum-journalist, Christina Ho's research, "Anglo children stick together or feel alienated," and she calls out coaching as the primary contributory evil in this regard, and just "very unhealthy," all up, calling for government reform of the selective system to become less easily cheatable through coaching. Though it's difficult to deny racial aspects of either extracurricular tutoring or the selective school system, it's hard to have a rational conversation when so much of that conversation is clouded by at worst bias and at best, just a lack of understanding of either the demographic or the mechanism it seeks to represent.

I think there is more to say for coaching culture, or at least a more nuanced discussion of it to be had than media will allow. First though, I want to concede the problem with coaching culture in so far as makes selective schools and academic achievement more inaccessible to those from low socio-economic backgrounds. A student's ability to gain selective school entry shouldn't be dependent on the financial privilege that hours of tutoring requires and I think this the most powerful argument against coaching culture.

However, most vocal critics of tutoring are disapproving not of its unequal distribution but of its impact on the students and education that it does affect. And that second critique is one with which I believe there is compelling reason to disagree. Disregarding the question of fairness for a moment, let's have a look at the question of impact. There are more than 3000 tutoring businesses in New South Wales and Victoria. You can take your pick, from Dr Du, Talent 100, Matrix, Intuition, James An, Pre Uni, most of which rake in about \$4000 per term per child. And while business success is of course, by itself no indication of worthiness, it does suggest that something seems to work.

Tutoring, or at least the kind of tutoring certain SMH contributors love to hate, involves either learning of this year's syllabus at a deeper level than limited school time allows for, or getting a head start on next year's schoolwork. So while critics may condemn tutoring as an exercise in concrete rote learning or as learning for the ever vague and ominous 'wrong reasons', there's one thing no critic of coaching can deny; it is about learning. Well, obviously, but the merit of a culture that is normalising 'extra education' seems to be getting strangely overlooked. No matter how naturally smart a kid is, they can still learn more, and for those who spend hours upon hours at tutoring colleges, coaching piques intellectual curiosity. That's intuitively true, right? A fairly easy way to make people more interested in knowledge for its own sake is to expose them to more of it.

One of my friends, who conforms with great diligence to the 'poorly adjusted coached kid' stereotype, was heavily tutored for the OC Test, the Selective Test and so on throughout high school. Yet despite what so many articles would have you believe, she has consistently expressed how much she genuinely enjoys her coaching - because she finds it genuinely interesting. Tutoring gives you more to be curious about.

'But no!' the soccer mums cry, "what about the friendless Asians!?"

Well, let's look the worst case (and in my experience, tremendously uncommon) scenario; a student devoid of natural talent, who is tutored for the sole reason of achieving a high ATAR and has no desire for understanding outside of a marks-based framework. I would support coaching even then. Because in practice, beside differences in parental moral superiority, learning For-The-Sake-Of-Marks is oddly enough pretty similar to learning Not-For-The-Sake-Of-Marks. No shining light emits from the faces of students who think about calculus in the context of humanity's interminable search for understanding and it's unlikely that the ability of students who think about calculus simply as an area of the maths syllabus will suffer because of it.

And even if a student retains their tunnel vision and fails to adopt a more liberal view of education, they're still doing something productive. The study of subjects like maths and physics requires mundane repetition and rote drilling and it's juvenile to assume that those methods are somehow lesser because they fit less neatly into a cookie cutter mould of

model education. The smug disdain with which our culture is beginning to regard the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are not inherent, through practice and repetition; our bizarre fetishisation of 'natural talent' as somehow almost morally admirable, is a short sighted and insularly western way of thinking.

But beyond that, even apart from posing deadly risk to the quality of education, a number of critics have denounced coaching as contributing to mental illness. This is an almost universally unsubstantiated assertion, with zero studies in Australia actually having been undertaken about the effects of tutoring on mental health. But even to engage generously with those assertions, the reason most often given, that 'tutoring puts too much pressure on their young heads' doesn't take into account things like the selection bias that necessarily exists in these industries, whereby people who either choose to have this kind of mark increasing coaching, or are forced into it by their parents, are likely to put pressure on themselves regardless. There has not been one shred of conclusive evidence to say that the model of the Australian coaching college harms either mental health or education.

We need to be able to have a conversation that comes from a place free of racial bias, resentment or even just racial fixation, if we want to actually understand and engage with this system. Coaching culture is a force that no number of well-intentioned articles will be able to affect and consequential inequality needs to inform how we fund education. But, in and of itself coaching culture represents a young population that is becoming more educationally engaged, and an education system that is demanding more of its students. Surely that is something to be celebrated.

# Year 12 Writing

## Year 12 Writing on *Discovery*

MR TAKUMA

By Coco Huang

*Coco's story was the winner of the Young Adult Prose section of the Laura Literary Awards 2017.*

Ron stepped out of the rain and dropped the food-laden rucksack with a thump. "Just heard the news, Mr Takuma," he said, flicking a wet strand from his nose and searching his pockets for a cigarette. "The war's over."

"What?" I jolted upright so violently that my elbow dislodged the pile of twigs, sending some of them tumbling into the fire. The renewed heat warmed my cheeks. Forgotten seeds of memory, trapped in the creases of my mind, began to sprout; the light and crisp scent of tatami mats, the breathless thrill of forbidden books, and the long-fingered caress of a woman reminded me dearly of home. An urge swelled within me, an irresistible one, filling my body with an emotion with such potency, such indescribable beauty, that I had not felt for years.

I raised my head and laughed, the sound amplified by the dank walls. "I can go home, Ron." I combed my fingers through my overgrown hair, barely noticing his half-hearted smile. "My wife – Misaki – and my daughters – oh, yes, my daughters! Did you know, Ron, the last thing she whispered in my ear, just before the train left, at the very last minute, was that I would be a father' I swear, during those hard times, it was the only thing that kept me alive'

"I'm happy for you," Ron replied, but he didn't meet my eyes. His breath shuddered as he exhaled, the motion pulsing through his hunched frame. A curling wisp of smoke obscured his trembling mouth.

I understood his unsaid words. "You don't have to go home," I told him with great-sincerity. "You could come with me. Misaki and I will care for you, to repay your favour." Already I noticed how childishly hopeful my words sounded.

He shook his head. "How could I? I can't speak your language; I'd be killed the second I set foot there. No, I'd be better off back in America, working my ass off for Pa, marrying some average girl who cooks and cleans and doesn't give a fuck about what I think or know." His sudden cynicism shocked me, a clear reminder that although he was ten years younger than I was, he'd seen plenty more.

"It cannot be worse than you think," I tried to reassure him, but he was oblivious to my reply.

"They'll just think I'm another screwed-up bastard who was there, but did nothing. Come to think of it, won't they think that about you as well?"

A quiet shame burned my throat like bile. "No," I lied. "I will be a hero."

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Perhaps I would have been one, if I'd done the right thing. By some miracle, I'd survived the night my countrymen fell, the soft undergrowth concealing their bodies as the dense jungle air hummed with spits of bullets and rattles. Somehow, amidst all the frenzied screams and confusion, I'd found the moss-rimmed cave, tucked beside a burbling spring. It was there that I'd drawn my knife, knowing that our defeat on this island would be inevitable, and I was determined to finish my task the way I'd been taught –*seppuku*, a quick slice across the abdomen. An honourable death.

But then an image I'd treasured materialised in my mind. We were standing together, Misaki and I, her hair meticulously arranged to complement her white kimono whilst mine blended with my dark haori. While we waited for the photographer to set up, I couldn't resist whispering the lines of poetry I'd translated with my professor in secret:

*"I love thee with the breath,*

*Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,*

*I shall but love thee better after death."*

I cried out those words as I made the first cut. The cold steel went in and out numbly but a minute later the pain followed, darkness overtaking me as swiftly as death itself. I couldn't do it, I knew. Because it would kill her as well.

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"No, I won't be a hero," I admitted to Ron, "because I am as much their enemy as you are. After all, I studied your language for years when it was forbidden to do so. Even the war couldn't keep me away from what I loved. But I suppose it did in the end, when they found out."

It would be even worse now, if I went home. The whispers and the pointed fingers I could stand, but the eyes that stared with open hostility I couldn't. Traitor, a man had spat, the saliva rolling down my boots as they'd forced me onto the train.

What would happen to Misaki if I returned?

Ron shrugged. "At least I didn't kill you."

Fortunately he didn't. I remembered waking to find a rifle in my face, held by trembling hands. I'd begged him not to shoot, in English, which startled him greatly. He was as curious towards me as I was towards him; over time and healing wounds, our tentative conversations became fluid and natural, like the spring we drank from and dipped reed-woven nets in to catch fish. When the American liberation finally settled down, Ron re-joined his troops, but he returned with food whenever he could.

Seeing him in his present state of mind forced a lump in my throat. "Ron," I said gently. "I need to go." My words stretched taut across the rift that had already opened between us.

"I understand, Mr Takuma. I get it." His disheartened voice resonated dully in my ears. I fetched him the letters to post, and handed them to him with a sense of finality. He squinted at my handwriting then stiffened.

"Mr Takuma?" He asked, almost inaudibly. "Where does Misaki live?"

"Well, we used to live in an apartment in Tokyo, but since it was bombed frequently, she moved to her mother's place in Hiroshima."

He was silent.

"Ron?" Fear sliced open my stomach like a knife.

"I'm so sorry, Mr Takuma," Ron said. "They're gone."



## MANNEQUIN

By Coco Huang

Paul sighed, the pins in his mouth pricking his tongue. The sewing machine whined to a stop, no longer spitting out *tuk-tuk-tuks* as it punctured layers of nylon and spandex. His phone was hidden under the piles of fabric on his desk, tangled in the measuring tape. He answered it while undoing the knots.

"Hi, Cucumber." He still cringed at the nickname. Whenever he stood next to his wife Joanne, he certainly lived up to it.

"Hi," he replied awkwardly. "How's training?"

"Going good." In the background, he could pick out the sound of grunting women, followed by a triumphant yell. "Just a minute – GET YOUR ASS UP, ROXY! NOW!" Joanne's voice slammed into the side of his face. "Anyway, darling, has it arrived yet?"

He set down the phone and frowned, thumbing the backstitch. "No," he murmured. His work was a little crooked, and although Joanne probably wouldn't notice, it irritated him enough to unpick it.

"Are you sure?" A touch of impatience tinged Joanne's voice. "I called up the National Kick-Wrestling Association and they said they'd posted my trophy weeks ago."

"Well, maybe it got lost."

"Maybe. At least it gives you more time to get another display cabinet." Her throaty laugh cut through his thoughts. "How's my new suit coming along?"

He pinched and pulled out the thread, leaving a dotted line of holes. "Fine, just fine."

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He went in with a torch and his measuring tape, refusing to turn on the lights. He knew the layout of the room by heart; the walls were adorned with life-sized posters of his wife in mid-air, her thigh muscles tense and bulging as she delivered a strike. These images encircled the rows of display cabinets, which stood at Joanne's eye level but towered over Paul. The edges of the ceiling were lined with LED bulbs, and he'd almost been blinded once by the glare from the glass panels and the golden statues behind them. They all belonged to his wife, except for a dusty folder which contained his few certifications. There wasn't much of a market for handmade clothing, especially when mass-producing clothing printers made everything so cheap, but there was little else he could do. He'd gotten into the kick-wrestling attire niche after he'd met Joanne, but he still shopped for groceries with her credit card.

He knelt, as though measuring a client, and placed his tape along the ground. He memorised the dimensions of the space available for the new cabinet and scrolled through the cabinets he'd bookmarked on his phone. None of them would fit. He exhaled, slightly irritated, and headed to the kitchen. Joanne had moved his box of tea leaves to a different shelf. He opened the lid and inhaled, allowing the fragrance to soothe his mind.

While the water boiled, he sifted through the fridge. There was plenty of beef for dinner, but perhaps he would go out and buy some chicken. After all, his wife had said his belly was protruding and his thighs were getting flabby the last time they were in bed together. He pinched the thin roll of fat over his stomach, testing its tautness. Even though his wife ate half his weight in meat every week and grew larger, she remained firm in all the right places.

The kettle clicked off. He saw his reflection in the steel casing, and wondered when his eyes had grown so still.

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It was yet another celebratory dinner; plenty of women, and plenty of beer. The kick-wrestlers laughed and spilt their drinks, resting their arms on their husbands' shoulders. They murmured appreciatively when Paul arrived, and one of the women elbowed Joanne. "He's a real beauty," she whispered saucily, cracking her massive knuckles. "Didn't think you'd go for the petite type, though."

Joanne raised an eyebrow. "He's not petite where it matters." The women broke into hoots of laughter, splattering the table with pale specks of spit. Paul smiled, reluctantly polite. He'd heard that one before.

The evening wore on, and Paul found himself alone with his thoughts as usual. He'd grown tired of observing the women, admiring the broad bumps of muscle that strained from open-back dresses, their vein-ridden biceps and well-built calves that trembled with life. The other men had complimented his outfit, a pine-green self-tailored suit with subtle vertical stripes, but he heard a hint of something underneath their voices that made him doubt their sincerity. He'd had too much to drink, he knew, and now the corners of his vision had softened and his inner musings were slurred. Staggering a little, he excused himself and headed for the bathroom.

He wasn't aware of his name being called, the sound overpowered by the amplified splash of his urine against the urinal. He knew there was a hand on his shoulder, an unwelcome shake, and a lopsided smile. He shrank away instinctively.

"Bloody hell, mate. You don't remember me?" The man's bristles were in focus, dark and prickly. His skin seemed too tight, his nose too wide. "Black Friday Peppers? Back at uni?" The husky voice seemed familiar, but too distorted to recognise.

Paul followed the bristles up to the dark-circled eyes. "Kevin?"

"That's more like it!" Kevin slapped him on the back good-humouredly. "You look good, man."

"Thanks," Paul said, trying to examine him clearly while his mind protested. "You've put on weight," his mouth said, to his own horror.

Kevin chuckled. "Well, the missus doesn't mind too much. Mia's buried under her work half the time and when she isn't, she's going on about headaches and other shit."

"You married Mia?" Paul exclaimed incredulously. The last time he'd seen her was at Kevin's mother's restaurant, where their band had played on Friday nights. She'd come around complaining they were too loud, shooting them a side glare whilst mixing cocktails. But Paul had stood to the side with his amp turned down low, so only he could hear himself playing the bass. It was an intimate experience, hearing himself even when he was overshadowed by the drums and the lead - like there was a ghost instrument in his mind. But its voice had left when he'd sold the guitar, a sacrifice to meet the costs of living independently from his parents.

". . . And luckily she knew the right people, and got some odd jobs here and there . . ."

"Good, good," Paul murmured distractedly. He could feel the weight of the instrument on his lap, the four steel strings on his once-calloused fingers. He hummed an old melody, not quite sure of the words.

"Hey, I remember that one." Kevin's voice was accompanied by a faint tinkling.

Paul nodded. There was a line he'd loved in that song, a simple but intriguing one, that he'd written on the ceiling of his first apartment so he'd see it just before the lights went out.

*The sea throws rocks together, but time leaves us polished stones.*

Perhaps time had indeed polished him, he pondered. He was a beautiful, good husband, and wealthy enough to do what he loved. He'd left behind the stubborn and reckless young man he was, proud of eluding authority. Despite his wild adolescence, he'd succeeded in fulfilling his parents' wishes. Yet sometimes there was a subtle bitterness in his throat; a passing touch when his wife wasn't home for dinner, or when he put another trophy on display. He knew he was rambling on, making no sense, his mind a turbulent sea tossing around thoughts like stones.

Kevin grunted, drawing his attention. With a loud *zip*, his fly came unstuck and he did up the button, an ugly, grey standard one that Paul recognised from cheap general stores. "Let's go out for drinks, I'll shout you one." Paul vaguely heard him, and didn't resist when Kevin guided him by the arm.

It was muggy and damp outside, the rain bringing little relief from the sticky sweat that crept down their necks. A glass was placed in Paul's hand and he drank from it, the coldness

forcing him awake. Kevin smiled when he noticed his change in demeanour. "So," he began, deftly licking the foam from his lips in a single movement. "How did you end up with someone like Joanne?"

"Pure luck," Paul said and laughed, as though he'd already planned his answer. "After I left uni, I went on so many blind dates. None of them worked out; they were all kind of a joke, really." Kevin nodded in sympathy. "So I got desperate and . . . well, turned to my old ways." He saw Kevin's eyes flicker for a second; the disconcerting movement assured him that Kevin hadn't forgotten his highs and lows. He fidgeted, tracing the beads of water that trailed down the sides of the glass, suddenly aware of how little space was between them.

"Let's just leave it at substance abuse." Kevin said, also uneasy with being reminded of the rash decisions they'd made.

"Call it whatever you want," Paul shrugged. He chewed on a half-melted ice cube, the sensation both uncomfortable and satisfying. "Anyway, one night I ended up at a strip club – the guys there probably thought I was gay – and then these women – yes, they were older than I was – thought I was the entertainment, until . . ." He gestured exaggeratedly for Kevin to continue.

"Joanne?"

"Yes, Joanne. She was huge, and clearly a kick-wrestler, so they took one look at her and crumbled."

"Wow," Kevin said, awestruck. "What a remarkable woman."

"And you know what she told them?" Paul ignored him, his words tumbling out faster than he could catch them. "She said, 'Fuck off, assholes. He's mine.'"

"That's am-" He belched and laughed embarrassedly, and Paul caught a whiff of cinnamon on his breath mingled with the stench of beer. He tried not to think of how he'd tasted it before, on more than one occasion, how he'd woken up in the afternoon with the scent of apple and cinnamon cake lingering between his teeth.

"I hope, for your own sake, you won't return to those old ways." Kevin's words clicked him back in place, and he blushed at his daydreams.

"I know, I know." He swirled around the ice cubes, wishing they would melt faster. "It's bad for Joanne's public image."

"Not only that." Kevin leaned closer. "Honestly, I didn't think you could kick the habit, but you did, and you look great. But I've always wondered . . . every time you said you'd stop, there was something that sucked you back in. The excitement, perhaps, but now I'm starting to think it wasn't just that. You were afraid when it wore off. Afraid of what, I don't know, but you'd break every mirror you saw. You weren't scared of your own face, for sure – so

what was it?"

A lump forced itself up his throat. "I-I don't know," he lied. "It was ages ago, I don't remember."

"Of course." Kevin leant back, evidently disappointed. "I'm sorry for asking. So, what's it like having a woman like Joanne? Plenty of fun, I suppose?"

Paul sighed inwardly in relief, his tension dissipating into the clammy air. "No, we're very careful. We discussed having children, but that's not possible since it would interfere with her career." He couldn't imagine her trophy room being replaced with a nursery, or what it would be like to hold a child in his arms. He would probably never find out.

"That's a shame," Kevin said. "But you're so supportive of her nonetheless. Didn't she win some national kick-wrestling championship recently?"

"Yes, and I'm very proud of her," Paul replied. It was his default response. "But I've never seen her kick-wrestle before."

"What?" Kevin exclaimed in disbelief. "Not even once?"

"She said it'd be too violent to watch."

"Nonsense," he snorted, handing him his business card. His eyes gleamed briefly as he extended the invitation. "I'll take you if you want."

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Paul trimmed the ends and stretched it over a mannequin. It was a shame he hadn't finished it in time for Joanne's match that evening – he'd been strangely unsettled since he last saw Kevin, winding the thread incautiously and jamming the machine. He'd finished off the remaining seams by hand, but his stitches were uneven and he'd nicked his thumb. Even as he inspected his work, the same odd sensation returned; his mouth tasted like wood and he breathed through a tight throat.

His little workroom was a mess; perhaps that had triggered his nerves. He did his best to clean it - he stored away the excess fabric, rearranged his tools, and swept up the loose bits on the floor – but the feeling only intensified. He kept cleaning, hoping it would go away, but it lingered in the little nooks and crannies that he couldn't reach. He tried telling himself that he was alright, despite the growing faintness in his head. Then he realised he wasn't breathing and gasped, a dizzying rush of air bursting through his lungs. He hunched in, trying to hold on as his vision spun and the colours blurred to white.

"Are you alright?"

He must have imagined it. The mannequin beside him stared down with concerned eyes,

painted a fake blue. It patted down the lapels of its suit self-consciously and blinked, uncertain of what to do. And suddenly another mannequin jerked, convulsing as it tested its limbs. It was his wife with all her scars and bruises, beaming in her new bodysuit. "Hi, I'm Joanne," she said, posing with her hand casually on her hip. "I'm a seven-time national champion in kick-wrestling, ranked third internationally. And this is my adorable and lovely husband." She held out a hand and the mannequin sauntered to her side, pecking her on the cheek. Its face was a permanent smile, accentuated by perfectly shaped eyebrows. "I'm Paul," it said brightly, extending a hand. "Pleased to meet you."

Paul gaped at them, too stunned to respond. And suddenly he understood. It was an answer he'd known but denied himself, too afraid to disrupt the seeming stability of his day-to-day life. It had watched him from the mirror as he waxed his forearms, shaking its head as he ripped out hair in painful strips. It had seen him conceal the blemishes on his face, the unwanted scars of adolescence. And now it looked at him, eye-to-eye, and waited for his next move.

Paul smiled bitterly, an ugly but honest smile he didn't dare to wear in public. The mannequin's smile faltered; it leant back on its stand, and Joanne was gone. He flipped open his diary and called the number on the business card. As he waited for Kevin to pick up, he took the rotary cutter from his desk and removed its safety case. Deep in thought, he fingered the cool metal. Then he hurled it at the mannequin.

The blade thudded, sinking into its plastic chest.

## **Year 12 Extension 1: Life Writing Genre**

### **THE MAN IN THE RING: A PROLOGUE**

**By Simone Boucher**

I spent the first eighteen years of my life saying I would never follow in my father's footsteps, yet here I am, retracing the same path he took; the same path that killed him.

In reading this autobiography, I'm assuming you've most likely heard of my father. If you haven't, and picked this book up despite my haggard face and sweat-soaked, half-naked form on the cover without knowing one of the biggest names in twentieth century boxing history, I'll tell you about him.

My father's name was James Young Jr., but the world knew him as Little Jimmy. (Many of you, I think, are now experiencing an 'a-ha' moment and realising you actually *have* heard of my father, but hadn't made the connection between us.) He was born in 1961 to the streets of New Orleans, and according to my grandma – his mother – he was picking fights and spitting blood in the back alleys years before he decided to make a living out of it. He became a king in the Louisiana scene, but when he climbed to the pro-ring he was barely an adult and only five foot nine, below average for a boxer, and a heavyweight competitor at that. Little Jimmy, everyone called him, but they didn't think he'd be the fastest out there – agile and sharp, compact and unafraid. By the time he was twenty-seven, he had all four major heavyweight titles under his belt and a legacy forged that would last lifetimes.

It was on March 14<sup>th</sup> of 1989 that my father fought against Adrien LaMontagne. People called him 'The Mountain,' both for his surname and for the fact that was a quarter inch shy of six foot five. That was my father's last fight. In the fourteenth round, LaMontagne swung a right hook that caught below my father's left ear as he raised his fists to block the attack. He was too slow and he was sent reeling backwards, head smacking soundly against the canvas. The crowd waited for him to rise. I've watched the footage an unhealthy amount of times now, and even knowing what happens, I sometimes find myself waiting with them for the moment his eyes will blink open and he'll grasp the ropes behind him and stumble to his feet again.

He never does.

A stretcher carried him out of the ring and to the nearest hospital. The doctors found a subdural haemorrhage in his skull – the side where he fell – and tried to save him. The surgery failed, and he died two days later.

He didn't know it, but at the time, my mother was pregnant with me. She found out the day before his fight, but kept silent out of worry that news of a child would only distract him. After all, few people thought he wouldn't come out of that ring victorious, much less clinging to life for a long forty-three hours. You can imagine how substantial her feelings of regret were when March 14<sup>th</sup> came and went. When he was in that two day coma, my mom used to tell me about the sparse few minutes she had with him. She told him then, his limp hand pressed to her stomach as every broken plea fell from her lips. That was the closest I ever was to him, unborn and living a moment I could only ever know of through another's words.

And so you cannot blame me, I think, for not wanting to follow in my father's footsteps for all those years, knowing the ending he had.

Besides, far too much of my childhood, my life, had been featured in the media for me to have wanted fame. It was a constant intrusion on my family, and I hated the attention, the lack of privacy and tact. But it wasn't always the reporters – neighbours, teachers, friend, they all knew my father's story, but with my family so close, many of them wanted to know more; wanted the thrill of knowing something the articles never said.

Years went by, and people began to push my father to the back of their minds – he was still a legend, no doubt, but what good is it to dwell on old legends when you could watch new ones grow. But the questions never stopped, not really, and each time someone asked, '*Young? You're Little Jimmy's boy?*' there would come the inevitable: '*You planning on being like your father then?*'

It was selfish of me, but more than the invasion of privacy, I hated the expectation that came with my name. It loomed over me as I watched the kids around me dream of a life that was never questioned, yet every aspiration of mine that wasn't 'legendary boxer' seemed small – disappointing – to a world that wanted me to be *great*. I had shoes to fill, but they were much too large.

I continued my vehement rejection of the sport as the years flitted by, anticipating how unextraordinary I would be to the public.

What I didn't anticipate, however, was the first time I would wind my hands in black wraps and slip a pair of gloves over them, just to see. I remember how it felt, the memory of the rush of my fist and the thump of it against the punching bag as vivid as if I were living it now, and I understood then that this was a part of me.

Now, I find myself penning an odd hybridisation of biography and autobiography about the path that led to that moment – the path of James Young Jr. – and the one I've paved since. After all, I didn't spend those first eighteen years without ambition. I wanted to become an author, and even though I chose bruises over books, I can still tell stories. So I am telling one now, at what seems like the mid-point of my career, because I've learned



that the ring is a place where one may go and never come back. It's a story that starts in the streets of New Orleans in 1961 and has no ending, not yet, but it's about a man who shaped a legend and another who's trying to do the same.

## **YEAR 12 POETRY**

### **GRAVEYARD OF THE BUTTERFLIES**

**By Coco Huang**

*Coco's poem won equal third prize in the University of Canberra Young Poets' Awards.*

A lone tree stands in the town square,  
gnarled branches like twisted hands  
reaching; nestled in its joints,  
a thousand maple-red leaves  
sleep with folded wings.

A breeze – it chills the old moaning tree  
that rubs its palms together for warmth;  
Awake – crisp-veined leaves a-flutter  
with lusty hues of rich red gold  
enchant the wandering eye  
and drown in its  
abysmal black.

Now and again, a butterfly breaks free,  
soars in sunlight and splendour  
ascends with violent vigour  
but feels and knows  
the dying of the  
breeze.

There lies the brave soul,  
There lie all the brave;  
The children, pink with wild delight  
leave footsteps on their grave.

But not all children are lovingly scarved –  
How he wishes that he were!  
If only a trace of his mother's light touch,  
swathed between layers of wool and fur –

He doesn't.

By the damp pit he kneels and prays  
and stirs the ghost-leaves in their graves  
with questions that no child should ask:  
whether it hurts when butterflies die,  
and where, and how,  
and when, and why.

## **Flash Fiction 2017**

**In September this year, we celebrated Literacy Week. One of the activities was a ‘Flash Fiction’ competition.**

**Students who entered were given a location, an object and a genre and had 7 days to write a 1000 word short story.**

**The location was a wharf. The object was a thimble. The students could choose from fantasy, historical fiction, or mystery.**

<b>Winner:</b>	Coco Huang (Year 12)
<b>Runner-up:</b>	Damya Wijesekera (Year 8)
<b>Honourable Mention:</b>	Parmis Amiri (Year 7)

## **Blackout Poetry 2017**

**We also ran a ‘Blackout Poetry’ competition as part of Literacy Week. Blackout poetry focuses on rearranging words from an existing text and creating a new meaning. Students needed to take a page of a newspaper or any other text, and take a permanent marker to cross out words that are unnecessary or irrelevant to the effect they were trying to create. The idea is to create a completely new text from previously published words or images. Students could also use illustrations and images to enhance the effect.**

<b>Winner:</b>	Claire Luther (Year 8)
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## THE PINNIPEDS

By Coco Huang

It was a wonder the wharf was still standing, long after the lake had dried. Its silver silt was well-buried beneath the loose, stinging dirt the wind carried from where the town had once stood. The bollards were as rusted and worn as the woman who sat with her feet dangling almost childishly over its edge. Despite the heaviness in her bones, she felt only the lightness of her soul – for how long had she not eaten? Had she forgotten hunger, and pain, and pleasure? Or had time consumed her humanity, stolen her ability to feel, and left her less substantial than even the Pinnipeds?

No, she thought. Because I remember.

She remembered running down the wharf with rain pounding in her ears, her heart mangled and burning. The storm was fierce; she drew her husband's coat around her more tightly, though it repulsed her to wear Pinniped skin. But it protected her from the rain that corroded anything it fell upon, and for that, at least, she was grateful. The waves thrashed onto the wharf behind her, threatening to burn her. Finally, she made it to the sand – but before she could run to shelter, a desolate voice wailed, "Mama!" and she turned to find the half-child stranded on the shore.

She traced the scarred patches on her palms, which had burned horrendously when she'd picked up the wet child. She'd never told her husband Marius why she'd started wearing gloves, though he was blind. Instead, she'd told him the orphanage's roof had collapsed and the children needed someplace dry for the night. She smiled at the stroke of serendipity when she'd later heard that the orphanage had been reduced to unsalvageable ruins. They named the child Lenard, and nobody suspected a thing.

But the older he grew, the more apparent his Pinniped blood became. He was taught to hate the creatures that ate up all the fish and crawled onto the rocks in the spring, retracting their elegant dark hairs and splitting their tails into legs. Women were often enchanted by their sublime beauty, and the sleek sensuality of their bodies. The men hated how their wives looked with such open desire at the Pinnipeds, and so they took great pleasure in skinning them, alive and writhing, when they got caught in their hooked nets. Pinniped blood did not burn them like water.

Instead of attending such spectacles, Lenard would take his grandfather's boat out, an old dinghy smelling of Pinniped skins. At first, she was afraid he wanted to become a fisherman, and realise that the water would not hurt him. As a child, he was restless, inattentive, often caught absent-mindedly wandering amongst the raw-handed fisherwomen down by the

wharf. But after she'd found him rummaging through her father's maps, she knew he was searching for something to answer the quiet call within him.

"I want to go to Idris," he said suddenly one day, when she was resting in bed. He had been reading to Marius in the room opposite hers.

She sensed that Marius stiffened. "Who have you been talking to?"

"The fisherwomen. They say not many men can afford to send their wives there. It must be such a small isle that it is not marked on the maps."

Marius was unusually quiet. "And why does Idris interest you?" he asked, his voice tense.

"Because no woman has ever returned from it."

She heard Marius sigh.

"Idris does not exist," he said simply. "It is a promise we make to unfaithful women, so that they willingly board the ships. Then we give them a drink, leave them with the Pinnipeds and keep their half-children."

"But the children – they don't come ashore?"

He didn't respond.

A few days later, she recalled, the townsfolk were gathered by the wharf, drawn by the scent of a rumour. She'd guided Marius by the arm as Lenard pushed through the crowd, until he broke through to its centre. He towered over the mayor while the man was on his knees weeping. "She never knew!" he cried. "She never knew!"

Beside him was his daughter's chewed-off hand, still in a fisherwoman's net. Held tightly in her palm was a thimble. A love-token.

In that moment, she'd realised what Lenard had done. The horror of it still made her tremble. She remembered, after Marius had spoken to him, that Lenard had asked her whether he was a half-child. She did not have the resolve to deny it.

Then he'd stayed in for days, his barely-constrained anger casting shadows over his face. When he finally went out, he would be gone the whole day and returned only at night. He was seen courting the mayor's daughter, who was known for her fierce rejection of suitors and love of adventure. She had probably longed to explore Idris. And he had convinced her to do so.

"I have lost my mother," Lenard said, his voice wavering, "and you have lost a daughter. But now we have all found the truth. And it is more bitter, more twisted, and more despicable than you consider Pinnipeds to be!" Even the Pinnipeds watching from the rocks were silent.

He smiled bitterly. "But I am fortune to be a half-child. What a great curse it is to be human!"

With that, he threw himself into the water where, to astonished gasps, his skin melted into grey hairs. The last she saw of him was his silvery tail, slicing powerfully through the water while his clothes drifted ashore.

\*

And now she prepared to join him – the old wharf creaked as she stood, poised to dive. For the first time in decades, it began to rain; slowly, then in a thunderous downpour, the water submerging the Pinniped bones that lined the forgotten lake, reminding her of the night she'd cast her half-child into the darkness, heavy-hearted but hoping he would find his father. But he had returned to her, to show her the truth. And now she would too.

## CHIZETTE OF HEMSHIRE

By Damya Wijesekera

The multitude of coruscating flames in the fireplace outlined the objects in the room, lit only by the lustre of a single candle and the fire itself. The articles in the room connected themselves through this light; the candle next to the bed, the girl in it, the doctor leaning over the bed to retrieve his briefcase.

“Madam Shasamme, I trust she will be alright. There is no harm come to her.”

The flames wavered, the woman did not.

“She cannot have been in the water for too long.”

Silence.

“Then goodnight, Madam, and I wish Chizette a speedy recovery.” Saying so, the doctor departed.

Like any seaside city in Kaniken, the witch-run town Hemshire had a number of wide streets framed in low-ceilinged buildings, with minimal garden. Adeleman Lane was one such example, running adjacent to the sea, beginning where the wharf ended.

Like any lane in Hemshire, Adeleman Lane had a number of witcheries; businesses in which witches applied their magical services to everyday uses. They were small and hidden, displaying dusty windows beneath broad marquees. Madam Shasamme’s Witchery, at the edge of the wharf, was no different; with a library of spell-books at the right, rolls of invisible-silks and umbrella-stands of wands and broomsticks at the left, and a herb-scattered counter two-steps back from the middle.

And, like any witch owning a witchery in Adeleman Lane, Madam had an apprentice. Chizette was trained to wake before sunrise. She learnt spells from a spellbook and kept a broomstick. Thus occupied, she worked all day and studied in the evening.

It was on the evening exactly seven days after the doctor’s visit that Madam Shasamme put down her wand and summed up her protégé in a single, assuming glance. Chizette saw the coming lecture, and averted her face.

“Chizette.”

*Chizette*

“You fail to impress me. Your wand lies disused; your broomstick lacks repair. Spells fly out of your head as easily as I coax them in. Day by day your performance worsens.”

*Day-by-day-I-grow-stronger.*



"I perhaps could accept this if at least you looked as a witch should, but you disappoint me even here. Curling roseate hair and golden skin? You should attire yourself in a ghost's complexion and dye your hair sable. I want a witch, not a princess, to continue my legacy."  
*Continue-your-own-legacy-chizette-what-is-hers-is-not-yours.*

"And this incessant obsession with the ocean! A week prior you drew attention to us by wandering off out on the wharf at midnight. It is lucky for you that they found you only moments after you fell in. The ocean, Chizette, is a dangerous thing!"

*AND-SO-AM-!!!!*

Chizette could take no more, she cupped her hands about her ears and fled upstairs. Upon reaching her own bedroom, she felt a need to shut out the rest of the world, and slammed the door. Having accomplished this, she sank to her knees, curled up in a ball, and wept.

Many hours later, Chizette awakened. Madam Shasamme had retired to bed, all was silent. Feeling the stale night air pressing in on her, Chizette went to the open window. Hemshire was as plain at night as at day. Stars did not strike the terracotta, moonbeams did not flow through windows.

She sighed. It was not her fault that she looked as she did. It was not her fault that she mislearnt witchcraft. It was not her fault that water attracted her. Her perpetrator was the Desire; when the Desire came, Chizette left. Immediately. Without questions. The Desire was ruthless, and attacked if she didn't comply. Just as it had attacked that night, one long week ago, leaving her feverish on the edge of the jetty, when she had been too afraid to do as told.

The Desire started as a stinging from inside of her heart. It pierced her inside out, then burnt her soul out and grew itself inside of her, waiting to strike. And when it peaked, it was the worst. So long as she was able to think, it did not matter how the Desire played with her heart. But when it overtook her mind she had to succumb to it. The Desire would drive her away from the Witchery and Madam, and to the very edge of the wharf's only jetty. And from there, Chizette could not make out what it wanted.

She winced, the Desire had reached its fatal point, she could no longer hold it back.  
*Come-chizette-come-to-yourself.*

Chizette looked down and her eyes widened. Beneath her nails, particles of blood were forming. This had never happened before.  
She went.

The Desire was relentless tonight, and she stopped neither in thoughts nor footsteps until they were at the edge of the water.  
Blood had begun to cover her cuticles.

She stared up at the sky. No moon, and no clouds. It was a special night. An unlucky night.

*Now-chizette-now-remove-all-your-witches-articles.*

She emptied her apron. A thimble. A bookmark. A sprig of herb. She laid down the lacy apron itself. She removed her shoes, her hair ribbons, and finally stood again.

*Good.*

Blood was dripping from her fingertips.

The first red sphere fell into the ocean. Time slowed as it plummeted.

It hit the water.

A roaring wind ensued; the water thrashed fiercely, the waves parted. A glowing mist rose up. When it disappeared, Chizette perceived a multitude of people. They stood in the pale, glowing sand, in glowing robes of red and purple. Their skin glowed golden, their hair glowed pink. Their eyes shone like far-distant rainbows.

*Come-forth-Chizette;you-are-not-witch;you-are-a-being-of-the-ocean-like-us;you-are-one-of-us.*

It was the Desire's voice, by yet not the Desire.

*Bleed-away;lose-your-humanity-and-return-to-us;we-are-your-tomorrow-your-yesterday-and-your-forever.*

And then Chizette realised; they were the Desire. They were the Desire, and so was she. She was one of them, and this was what she had to do.

*Just-one-step...*

And she stepped, off the edge of the jetty and into her future.

As she disappeared into the spoondrift, waves rose out of the sea, and buffeted against the jetty, washing away the blood that had stained before there.

## FROZEN IN TIME

By Parmis Amiri

As soon as the grey snow fell, we all knew. In a hurry, houses were emptied and possessions collected, with every person fleeing for their life. I saw the shepherd herding his cattle and the sewer running towards the wharves, his fabrics covered with soot, his equipment, needles, threads and thimble, littering the ground. He did not return to collect them. There was no time left.

Swirls of pink and blue and gold engulfed the small town as the guards' magic created illusions to fool the coming army. I ran towards the shore, each step matching the throb in my head. Babies cried as mothers desperately rocked them to and fro, dogs barked and pegasi neighed. In a city by the water, the fire was foreign. Jumping, I summoned a column of water for support. I rose, with the ocean swirling around my feet, and inspected the unfolding chaos. Elders clung to their children, their wrinkled cheeks stained with tears, not ready to say goodbye. Two people to remain from each family to fool the invading king. I could see his fires lighting up the sky. Soon, he would emerge from the thunderous clouds, atop his scaly, flying monster and unleash hell upon all those who remained.

"Everyone! To the ships. Now!" my voice pierced the air. The chaos was momentarily silenced, and not before long the wooden vessels were prepared to go. The more I thought, the more comical my plan appeared. My life was not the only one at risk! There were thousands of citizens relying on my idea to work. I needed to focus. Frantically, I raised my arms. Here it went. It was all or nothing.

With all the might I had left, I summoned monstrous waves. Agony rippled through my body and shook my bones. The spiral of water below me weakened. I wavered, and so did my magic. Again, come on, try again. I raised my arms. I imagined the ocean, its wild, untamed nature resisting my commands. 'But the ocean is at your control,' I whispered, 'it has always been your puppet, and you will always be its master.' I raised my arm, pulling an imaginary string to control the beast at my feet. I heard the creak of wood. With every breath, I urged the waves to rise higher, become stronger. The ocean hissed and crashed against the shore, but obeyed nonetheless. I felt the buoyancy of the ships as it flowed into the ocean.

The boats slowly drifted into the sunset. I could still see the outline of it in the shine of the stars.

Uncertainty gripped at my heart. I watched as the ocean rose around it, swirling and capturing everything onboard. I blew into the wind, and it froze. A gigantic cube of ice housing thousands of people. I wished that they did not die with their dreams still ripe. The ship slowly descended and finally sank into the ocean. "Promise a safe slumber." I whispered my last ounce of strength against the wind. No longer resisting the ocean, I collapsed. It swallowed me, and I was engulfed in darkness.

Harsh voices boom over me. I jolt awake, sitting up. My head is pounding and I can feel my body trying to kill itself. My vision's blur is cleared after few seconds and I see two red-irised eyes stare at me.

No, through me.

'Why are you the only one left?' his voice is gruff, dripping with impatience and hatred. Scars litter his face, and there are stitches where his left eyebrow should be. The helmet catches the light, blinding me. If not for his crimson eyes, I would never have thought he was from royalty.

'It's the curse, you see. Every few years it...it happens. They just...all... go mad.' My voice is childishly high-pitched and sorrowful. I'd better make this work. I see the suspicion bloom in his face.

It would take much more than a lie to convince this general. "They just walk off into the ocean."

"And you're not mad? Why are you unaffected?" his fingers graze over his sword. I did not miss it.

"I am a mere peasant. No magic, no money... no family. I had nothing to live for." I stare at the setting sun. It must have been hours since they found me. I wonder if everyone is still onboard the wooden vessel. My magic must protect them. If not, I am doomed; "The ocean is forgiving. I will be safe in the cradle of its waves."

His forehead wrinkles in deep thought. What do you do with a worthless, starving enemy, he must be thinking. I can almost feel the pain and torture he is imagining to inflict upon me. His fingers tighten around the hilt of his sword. I am worthless, I silently plea, There is nothing I can offer.

His fingers loosen and I see the resolve in his eyes. He rises to his feet, and I hear the clink of metal as he walks away. I make sure he, along with his whole army of men standing on the cliff, see me leisurely approaching the ocean. The sand tickles my bare feet and my footsteps are washed away.

The first touch of the ocean sends shivers down my spine. It is so cold, so... frozen. I follow the faint, glowing trail of sand towards the ship. All the citizens are still captured in the ice, at the bottom of the ocean. We will live, but when will be the next time we see the light of the day, we do not know.

Frozen in both time and water, we wait.

## BLACKOUT POETRY

By Claire Luther



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