



**IMAGINATION
CREATION
WRITING
COMPETITION**

*Poems & Stories
2022*

Wyndham City Libraries Imagination Creation returns to showcase the young writing talent of Wyndham and across Victoria over the past year. This is a collection of the best entries in poetry and short fiction in three age categories from 5 years up to 18 years.



imagination
creation

IMAGINATION CREATION WRITING COMPETITION

POEMS & STORIES

— 2022 —

presented by:

Wyndham City Libraries



Imagination Creation, 2022

This anthology is a collection of the prize-winning and shortlisted submissions to the 2022 Wyndham City Libraries Imagination Creation Writing Competition.

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AWARDS

Age 15-18 Poetry

First Prize

(The Fisherman's Bride)

Second Prize

(The Widow's Fraying World)

Joann Manoj Jacob

Bethany Cobbin

Age 15-18 Story

First Prize

(The Floor of 18 Elm Street)

Second Prize

(The World She Stood For)

Juliette Agborchi

Aleena Kayani

Age 11-14 Poetry

First Prize

(Ode to (My Hate For) Leeches)

Second Prize

(Sleepwalk)

Tahlia Walker

Avani Malali

Age 11-14 Story

First Prize

(Hook, Line, and Sinker)

Second Prize

(Careful Where You Meddle)

Shubhi Garg

Annika Sharma

Age 5-10 Poetry

First Prize

(Disaster)

Second Prize

(Freedom)

James Yan

Catherine Yan

Age 5-10 Story

First Prize

(Minuscule Country)

Second Prize

(Who am I?)

Catherine Yan

Lyra Chen

Wyndham Local Award

Joann Manoj Jacob

Margaret Campbell Award

Ihram Muhammad Muzayen

SHORTLISTED ENTRIES 2022

Age 15-18 Poetry

Joann Manoj Jacob

(Motherhood)

Rida Hussain

(Song of the Suffering)

Ihram Muhammad Muzayen

(The Day of Orange (Harmony Day))

Age 15-18 Story

Bonnie Miller

(An Unruly Guardian)

Bonnie Miller

(The Awakening)

Age 11-14 Poetry

Avani Malali

(Identity)

Age 11-14 Story

Ananya Vasishtha

(Falling Feels Like Flying till the Bone Crush)

Avani Malali

(Take My Place)

Alana Dias

(The Other Eye)

Age 5-10 Poetry

Vinudi Bogahapitiya

(Rainbow Feathers)

Michaela Goh

(The Beauties in the Sky)

Finn Bright

(What is Today?)

Age 5-10 Story

Zoe Holder

(June Potter and the Cat Catastrophe)

Dorri Arya Rayann

(Who's There?)

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THE FISHERMAN'S BRIDE

Joann Manoj Jacob

the fisherman's bride dresses up
in lace-fringed debris
it trails behind her, a ragged, unbecoming net.
all wrong, he fishes after her with a rod

she is velvet-draped and questioning
whether she is just another catch.
packed in ice, it is a winter wedding
she flounders in a veil that hides her eyes
she feels newly caught

his leathery hands are perpetually sticky
with overripe seawater
he catches all their fish himself
the ones in the market
sit on beds of broken, cloudy ice
look, lizzie, he says like she is slower
than his achingly nasal drawl
they have bloodshot eyes
they should be bright and
bulging if they're fresh, you know
their skin's gone dull,
they smell too strong,
there's blood on the ice, look at that
there's blood on the ice indeed

Joann Manoj Jacob

he loves watching her
swipe off scales and
twirl tiny bones in her fingers
Kitty, he names her, but she longs to be *Mouse*
they play the same tiresome game every day
she can always tell when
he is peeking
electric blue eyes against spotted, sagging skin
exposed through their disintegrating keyhole
she always pretends to be cooking
when he comes home
you're the best
he tells her again and again
like she will forget something he said
just a second ago

she takes a half hour to prepare dinner
most days she rubs pink flesh with
salt and pepper and
lemon juice if she can find it
fish for dinner every day apart from Sundays
he expects his roast then
disguises, a bride loves disguises
the rancid odour vanishes from his food
but it lingers on her fingertips

last week, a bottle had been flung at her face
it missed and hit her ribcage

THE FISHERMAN'S BRIDE

for some reason, she didn't feel
the blackening bruise
until later
the white apron was her first thought
a gift from her sister
now saturated with cheap, still-foaming beer and
studded with tiny crystals of emerald
maybe baking soda would get the stains out
sorry, sorry, sorry
it's okay, it's fine, you didn't mean it
her words were flat but he crawled to her nonetheless
she comforted him like a child
he sobbed into her lap as the bruise bloomed
spectacularly across her chest
she left the room feeling like she was the one who had
thrown the bottle

her sister is not here today
but no matter
she will walk to the altar with her hair
bound tightly like snakeskin
her father refuses to walk her down the aisle
(he is right but she
will never admit it)
she hesitates before she kisses him
he expects her to bend
so she pulls away
he hardens and his voice

Joann Manoj Jacob

cuts through her ear like
metal hook
gleaming shard
i'm going to die and

you
will
be
the
last
thing
i
see

i
love
you
he says
and she regains
her composure
a fisherman's bride
is nothing if not composed

and the forsaken girl
for she is still a girl, mind you
hopeless, bedraggled
in her seaweed gown and ivory
sea-sheltered feet

is reeled in like the rest.

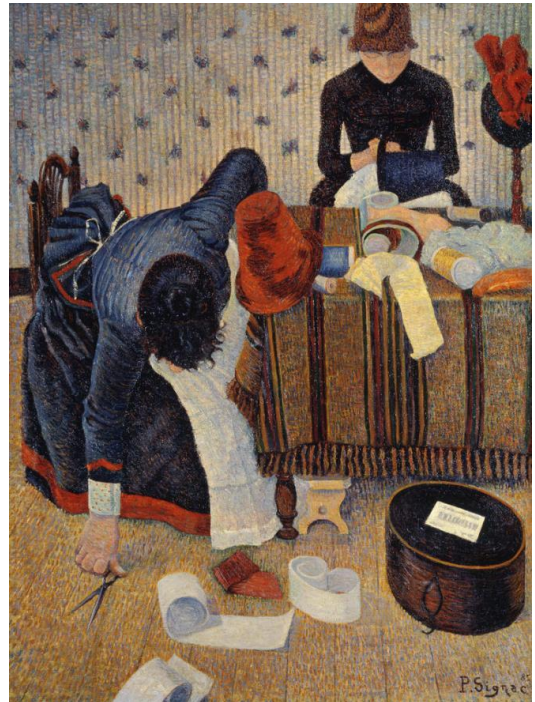
THE WIDOW'S FRAYING WORLD

Bethany Cobbin

The scissors:
snip, snip, snip
clamping shut
like the ticking clock.

The tink as they slip,
echoing against wooden floorboards.

Setting down my needle and thread.
I peer across the table.
My companion's hands tremble,
her posture taut as the thread she pulls.
The sound crumpling in her mind.



(Paul Signac, The Milliners, The Art Story)

The ruffles on my skirts swoop,
as I lean to grasp the tips of my fallen scissors,
the shriek of metal on wood,
like an insult to the silence
and a treadle to her grief.

The dust lingers on the mantle,
near the drawn curtains.
Their portrait from their wedding day,
lying flat in sorrow.

THE WIDOW'S FRAYING WORLD

The coiled fabrics topples,
plodding against the floor
unravelling curls of red and white,
like the roses on her husband's coffin.

I brush the snips of thread
from the ruffles of my skirts,
caught looming, like her widow's grief.
Her black fringed bonnet,
now, limp by the door.
Once an accessory,
now a reminder of her mourning

I look to my sister,
her eyes a window
to her fraying world.

THE FLOOR OF 18 ELM STREET

Juliette Agborchi

I cannot tell where my blood ends and another persons begins. The twins, clinging to me, their high pitched screams piercing me more than any blade could. Running, far quicker than I ever thought myself capable, my only thought being 'Get out. Get to America, where it will be safe'. Searing pain in the back of my legs, but it is nothing compared to the pain that awaits us if we stop running they are right behind us-

My eyes shoot open, body staying tense until I realise I am not in Nigeria, but rather on a mattress on the floor of 18 Elm Street, California. I reach for the cheap phone I keep next to our mattress, checking the time: 2:51. I've been trying to call friends and family back home. So far, nobody has responded. I remember screams and shouts, the ground trembling with the impact of hundreds of feet as we fled, frantically trying to reach safety, while not quite knowing where safety is. I lie there, heart in my throat, not daring to blink, lest the tears gathering in my eyes spill over.

I walk outside into our meagre backyard, lush grass tickling my feet. It feels odd to walk into a small backyard, rather than a compound. I gaze up at the moon, hope fluttering its wings within me, as I dare to dream of a future where I can say 'thank you' to the cashier at the grocery store with a flawless American accent, and stride confidently through the huge malls. Falling to my knees, I seek solace in the only place I know: prayer. I pray in the Nigerian Pentecostal way, covering things in the blood of Jesus, hands raised up towards the sky, a furious whisper of Igbo falling from my lips. My prayers do not have the calming effect I intended, rather they remind me of my helplessness.

Juliette Agborchi

The next morning, I attempt to console myself by cooking. I try to replicate dishes such as *okpa*, but the aftertaste is bitter as if the very food I eat reminds me of the fact that this is not my country, not my people, that the ground beneath my feet does not welcome me. Even my name, Chanda, meaning moonlight, something I once carried with pride, a shining light in front of me, seems to have dimmed. I can no longer see where I am going, my future uncertain.

Kuri and Kanuba, my children, my twin stars, their light the driving force to escape Nigeria and violence, are preparing for their first day at an American high school. As they don their clothes for school, I offer them thermoses filled with *onugbu* soup that I prepared the night before, carefully tending to it for hours, ensuring that it would be perfect. They sneer at the soup, although they allow me to place it in their bags, bouncing on the heels of their feet, clearly impatient to leave for school. They make their way to school as I stand in our driveway. I raise my head upward, squinting at the sun. The sun in America seems to be much like everything else here, unnaturally bright and overly vibrant. Although I know the comparison is foolish; the sun is the same all over the world, I cannot help thinking that the American sun seems to be far brighter and harsher than the soft orange glow that so often covered our backyard in Nigeria.

Chibundu, my husband, came before us, paving the way for us to settle into America. He works long hours, only coming back late at night, often when I am already in bed. The bed dips under his weight as he climbs into bed. He doesn't say anything to me, perhaps presuming I am already asleep. We sleep facing away from each other now as if facing each other may cause all our barriers to come crashing down, revealing how truly broken we are.

THE FLOOR OF 18 ELM STREET

The next day, I walk through the halls of the house, running a finger along the bare walls of the house, the plaster oddly cold. Sitting in front of my vanity, the only other piece of furniture in our bedroom apart from the mattress, I stare into the mirror. I run a hand over my fair skin, something Chinbundi had always complimented. "Your skin is very fair, very fine" he had said, "I hope our children are as fair as you". I was shocked when I overheard a woman at the airport complaining to a friend about how her spray tan came out patchy, how she was so 'ugly and pale' without it. As I stare into the mirror, I cannot recall ever being this dark. Perhaps I am becoming American after all. The thought both alarms and amuses me, and I slap a hand over my mouth to stifle the furious giggles that erupt from my mouth. Suddenly, amusement turns to sadness, and I sit in front of my bare vanity, hands over my face, sobbing.

Walking to the kitchen I dragging my feet, I stand at the sink, washing the children's lunchboxes, sighing as I tip more stew into the bin, yet another school lunch they refuse to eat. I hear the door open, Chidundi must be home, back from the store. I greet him, *Nnọọ n'ụlọ*, and he responds in English, hugging me from behind. I giggle - *I am 23 years old, and the boy with the bright eyes and charming smile has brought me flowers for the third time this week* - and our scents mingle; office air freshener and floral perfume.

I don't wear perfume.

My mind goes blank, a flurry of thoughts racing through my head, hissing and spitting at me. The rest of the night is a blur. After some time, I walk outside, staring unblinkingly at the sky. When a heart breaks, I used to often

Juliette Agborchi

envision it as an implosion of a kind, short and sharp, jagged particles embedding themselves into a person. But I think a heart can melt. Slowly shrinking until there is nothing left, each drop hitting the bottom of your body and echoing through the empty vestiges of what was once lively.

My culture, my *Ọmenala ndị Igbo*, the very thing I have clung to so desperately to save me from realising just how lonely I am, is the very thing separating me from the ones I love most. My grief crashes over me, a feeling so intense it brings me to my knees. The impact is nothing more than a dull thud echoing in the hollowness of my body. I weep, week's worth of pain trying to force its way out of me.

As I look up into the sky, the moon is completely shrouded in clouds, only a dull light betraying its location.

As tears stream down my face, I open my mouth to pray once more.

I pray in English now.

THE WORLD SHE STOOD FOR

Aleena Kayani

That's all. I still don't know what it's called. The annoying metal device. The Holding transceiver, or whatever fancy name they had for it. They told me it would give me away to the enemies if I didn't use it properly. That it would cackle and catch my message and send it over. The *Rossiani* are not so forgiving. I silently pull the flap on the little radio, losing all hope of getting it to work again, and lay back down in a heavy heap, a position I had maintained for almost a day. There was no one around me. Not a soul. And that's my reward.

The earth is cold and damp. I'm lying mutely in the *Alley of Angels* in Donetsk, tired and terribly worn out. My legs were sore, and my thoughts swished back to last night. The cacophony of gunshot noises still rang in my ears. I had to hide in any hole I could find to escape the gunshot noises. We had no bullets left in any of the ammo bags we were given. I remember the terror mounting in me, with each step I took. I remember wishing that they would show mercy and stop firing bullets at our backs. It wasn't until the woman in front of me had her head blown off, was when I realized they wouldn't. Further through the cloudiness of the explosions, I could pick out my neighbor's son-in-law. For the last time. He was in his mid-thirties, unemployed, scraping a living as an informal taxi driver. But was also one of the first to volunteer. The man did have a chance to leave Kiyv. To escape the horrors towards the western borders; since he wasn't listed. Instead, he left his distraught wife and child and strode on the battlefield, inexperienced but oiled with the fire of determination. Later that night, escaping the battlefield I could see his overgrown hair bobbing in fizzy waves to elbow-length. His strides confident and quick, urging him towards

Aleena Kayani

safety. But he too was left behind. Sacrificed the life he believed belonged to his homeland.

In a turn of a page, all our lives had changed. And unsurprisingly enough, the reader of our book was the *Rossiani*. The date 24th of February has now been engraved in each loyal heart. That was the date where they had blatantly stomped into our lands, uninvited, unwelcome. I remember being frozen top to bottom when I heard.

I was sitting at the coffee table with my grandfather. My mum's favorite spotted table cloth dangled unevenly on the sides, as we drank tea from none other than Open T Ching. My tongue burned, so I took single, rhythmic, and slow sips from my cup. But I was too distracted then anyway. Neither the consistent barking of Milla, nor the burning hot tea could distract my focus on grandad. I remember seeing his ancient wise face loom back at me, as we talked. Each wrinkle became apparent as his mouth spread into a wide smile. As always he had that rug-like cloak draped over his shoulders. I remember him saying *you are happy when you know where you belong*. That this realisation *would be all I ever needed. In this world*. His words had etched beautifully, smooth like silk as though he truly meant what he said. I remember sitting there gazing deep into his knowledgeable eyes. He came from a family of fighters. Maybe that's where he got this spirit from. So then all I thought of at that moment, was that I would take the lead and not be like the others. The others who, my grandad had said *were ignorant of the country*. Didn't even know the two colors of the flag. I gave a deep thoughtful nod to him It was then that I heard my mother's startled cry sound through the house.

THE WORLD SHE STOOD FOR

We ran into the living room and stood in the doorway - taking in the scene slowly. Mother was bending down, clutching her apron's rims till her hands turned pale. My father stared at the news headline expressionless. All eyes were on the television. On the petrified news broadcaster. Despite him being behind our brown vintage tv screen, we could see the sadness in his eyes, his hands stiff on his side, dropping all professionalism. He looked down at the piece of paper for long periods of time, unable to face the camera, and maybe mumbled something once or twice, without making eye contact with anything other than the paper in front of him. The front headline read, *President to initiate war, Russia to advance through the North in Belarus.* Inside our house, was another scene. Pitch silence. And yes, That was the thing my family first severed. Words. They stopped talking. Not a word was heard as mother had packed all the bags. Not a word was heard as father arranged a different suitcase to head a different way. Not a word even from my sister, who despite being a year old, knew something was wrong.

The next thing that broke was our relationship. The ambiance inside the house was filled to the brim with disagreements and fear, which drifted like a sickening aura. This aura floated in our house that day and would stay there forever. But it was partly my fault too. I had decided to join the war. I had decided to *take the lead*. Mother's first response was quiet, painfully quiet. She'd stopped talking to anyone and stared mindlessly. In the end, I left. I knew what my family was going through, but nothing else racked my stupid brain then. Except for leaving my family. But I was helping them. I swear. I was helping them by leaving. I would bring back those tea times that we had together. Bring back the cheer, laughter, and joy in our house. I promised this to myself. I promised.

Aleena Kayani

Walking down a dark, old alleyway is never a good thing. It creates tension. It creates fear. Really the natural impulse of anyone ordinary is to speed up upon the arrival of a dark alleyway. But not me. And not this alleyway. Contrarily my heart aches, but I want to stay here at the same time. I lay in a large bundle sprawled in the darkest corner of the alley. A thin middle-aged woman. If anyone could see. The entrance had a long arch of flowers interwoven with machine gun ammunition covers. Symbolizing war. Doves. And of peace. Peace. Something so unreal, that no one can possibly achieve it. At least not in my world. Honestly, the amount of hatred that circulates the depth of any benevolence is surreal. It has the power to destroy entire cities, attack defenseless souls and disdain the poor.

It was the big granite slabs in the entrance that told me. I was sorrowing in a memorial for the children in Donbas. Slaughtered mercilessly during the war. A mirror of everything that happened in the past. If such a mirror exists, who was I to try change anything? Who was I to leave my family and *take the lead*? Just another volunteer. Just another shield for my country. I hope my involvement did something. If not to my family; then to my country, I hope. That's all.

ODE TO (MY HATE FOR) LEECHES

Tahlia Walker

They squirm and bloat, twisting and turning
Clinging with determination to my skin.
You can't feel them. You don't know they're there
Cloaked and shielded by my hair.

But I can feel it, in my heart
The blood being sucked out from my arms.
I spin, and cry, and sob for help
My limbs and vision begin to melt.

More and more and more appear
Wherever I look, there're more there.
Pulling and tugging does nothing, it seems
They stick tight to my skin and ignore all my screams.

get it off – Get It Off – GET IT OFF!! I wail
My legs are growing heavy – my skin growing pale.
Desperation etched into my face as I yelp
My family's there – they're trying to help.

But soon I realise why they're taking forever
Their bodies are covered in leeches all over.
Skin disappearing amongst the wriggling black shapes
Their eyes full of fear, their mouths agape.

Tahlia Walker

I claw my way through the murky brush
My mind and heart begin to rush.
A strangled scream escapes my throat
My eyes, my soul, devoid of hope.

And even after, when my skin is leech-free
My body crawls with the memories.
Tears rise to my eyes every time I think back
To every inch of my skin being under attack.

Every time I brush against a leaf
I feel myself falling in fear to my knees
I pray that I never again have to see
Or touch, or go near, or feel
A leech.

SLEEPWALK

Avani Malali

Sleepwalking through her identical days
Underwater, but with open eyes
She craves freedom, she craves escape
From the harsh monotony,
But she has sunk too deep
Into disregard
Still living, yet
not alive
Adrift,
Stuck.

HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER

Shubhi Garg

The cafe is homely, in stark contrast to the stranger's smile. The languid, practised ease of it; lips pulled taut around delicately pointed teeth exudes an aura as unnatural as the creatures I was famed for hunting. I set my hands atop the worn table, fingertips ghosting over knots and blemishes in the wood.

Draw your shoulders back, sit straight, boy. Smile. Be agreeable, trustworthy. The frenetic echo of Silas's rasp charges against the hostility of the woman seated before me, threatening to swallow me whole.

"Given your past..." Her hands move through the air as though flailing to find purchase, the only slip in a deceptively collected demeanour. "...experience, it is our utmost belief that you should find the extermination no challenge." *Not my belief, ours. Who was she working for?*

"In the event you emerge successful, the previously discussed sum shall be yours, as well as our trust in our future shared endeavours." The lilting cadence of her voice drops an octave to a measured drawl, accent laid on thick and heavy. A shiver runs down my spine.

She blinks slowly, once, twice in the silence that follows, like clockwork waiting for the right cog to click into place, so that she could spur into animation again. I give a decisive nod of the head, anxiety bordering on impatience. Her smile was placid, but I could feel her eagerness to leave grow with each moment she spent in my presence.

Shubhi Garg

“All details regarding the target can be found within,” she says, setting, down a polished wooden cube with apprehensive care used with children glass, and bombs. The sight of her tapered black fingernails clamped around the object, knuckles drawn to an impossible white, leaves a metallic pang reminiscent of blood in my mouth. The thought of seeing her again, the ‘discussed’ 72 hours later, with a corpse as ‘proof of extermination’ makes my stomach churn. It was time this meeting came to an end.

Before I can shuffle out of my seat, the strange woman is already gone, leaving behind nothing but a morbid anticipation of the events that were to follow in the form of the branded cube.

The sight of the woman’s fingernails remains etched into my eyelids like the burnt black grooves of the cube. The motions of envisioning and enacting a plan of action feel as practised as her easy smile, a flurry of waiting rooms and transportation in a foreign land worn and familiar to the mind.

The blur of landscape outside of the window could be considered pretty, enchanting even—the impenetrable canopy of the rainforest against a pale, cloudless blue sky, the sun bright and beaming in the horizon. But the prediction of murder had a way of ruining beautiful days, and it had wormed deep into my consciousness like a parasite, the only thing driving me into movement. I stare outside, anticipation crystalizing into cold concern, as the information regarding my target feverishly repeats itself into the emptiness.

HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER

About ???

Age: 45

Physical characteristics: N/A (No fixed corporal form)

Further information: Highly dangerous.

Status: Alive, believed to be immortal

Location: 27.18 kilometres away, N34°W

While the lack of further detailed information comes of no surprise, the assumed immortality and no fixed corporal leaves me reeling with imagined possibilities. *I'll know when I see it.*

The given compass bearing leads me to the edge of the rainforest, a maze of trees older than time itself, making me almost sympathetic against hacking my way through. The undergrowth is untraversable in places, as though deliberately standing guard for the creature within.

Humidity and hopelessness hang heavy in my lungs, the slow simmer of a panic threatening to boil and bubble with each aimless glance thrown at my surroundings. Distorted memories flash through my line of vision, the lush greens, and browns of the rainforest a backdrop of a world born out of deluded desperation.

You and I... We didn't choose this life. It chose us. Make the most of what Lady Luck has granted us. Silas's voice, punctuated with trembling coughs and fear, a hand on my shoulder. The strange woman's smile. A boy with blood on his hands, not his.

Shubhi Garg

I shove a hand in my pocket, fingers resting against the warmth of the wooden cube. I could not afford to lose my mind in this place.

The cool female voice shakes me out of the weary rhythm of my footsteps, *“Target location: .005 kilometres, N03°E. Proceed with caution.”*

Just as the lonely, packed dirt roads had given way to an ancient labyrinth, the forest changes demeanour instantaneously. The dense undergrowth disappears within a stride, morphing into freshly mowed grass, crunching pleasantly underneath me.

A circle of huts sits in the middle of a clearing, flanked by the slumbering masses of the trees. A profound stillness takes over my senses, the chattering hum of the rainforest disappearing entirely.

The cube grows iron hot in my pocket. Something is very, very wrong.

Squinting in the unfazed onslaught of the equator sun, I spot a hunched figure, a shocking head of white hair glowing like a halo in the shadow of a debilitated hut. I consider my options—The man had likely already spotted me, and it was in my best interest to go forward with offence rather than chase the element of surprise.

Upon noticing me, the man raises a wizened hand, papery, ragged skin sagging around impossibly thin bones, the malevolent spots of skin cancer high upon his cheeks. He smiles placidly, eyes gleaming undefeated despite his apparent age. In that moment, I almost like him.

HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER

In the next, I bring my blade down, clean through his neck. His blood runs blue against the bright green of the grass. He does not flail or dodge, body relaxing into the embrace of death. To the casual onlooker, the form of him, slumped against the hut looks no different to an old man enjoying a content afternoon nap.

I am hauling his—its—body to be packaged when I see them. Black claws, gently tapering into razor sharp points, like the spiteful branches of trees laid bare by the winter cold, in complete resemblance to the strange woman.

I had done something terribly, terribly wrong. An old lesson from Silas arises in my memory.

In this world, there is a special kind of creature. No word to describe it exists in your language... a parasite of sorts. A horrible creature classified by blue blood, black nails, and its ability to take over the bodies of those it is killed by, granted immortality at the cost of an existence filled with constant carnage, destined to forever seek new victims due to its insidious nature.

In that final moment, it all made sense to me: the skin cancer, the wizened appearance despite the age, the woman at the cafe's invitation to work for 'them' and their partnership in the future. Their smiles, their nails, the uneasiness.

As a numbing sensation washes over me, I realise I had fallen for their scheme hook, line, and sinker.

Shubhi Garg

I catch the glint of my own smile in my fallen blade as I collapse to the ground beside the content dead man.

CAREFUL WHERE YOU MEDDLE

Annika Sharma

James received a letter from his local council about the demolition of the “Parkes building”, a long-held establishment that formed part of James' community. James was distraught over the possibility of the building never forming part of his life. He decided to contact his friends and do something, anything to distract him from his shattering heart. He couldn't believe that something so meaningful to his community. It was his home, a place where he sought shelter when his family abandoned him. He had to do something to save it. Why would they destroy such an important building unless... James didn't want to believe the whispered rumours about the corrupt government hiding animal experiments, but that is the only reason available right now.

A few months later...

If you're reading this, then it's too late. I'm writing this from my house. It's probably the last record I'm ever going to keep. I'm about to risk my life to try to save as many people as I can. If you're reading this, then it also probably means I'm dead.

Something terrible has happened to our world. My world. If someone ever finds this letter, then you've already seen it. I haven't got much time, and I hope I still have enough to do what I'm planning.

But I want someone to know what happened here. Somebody needs to know why I'm making the choices I am. This world is dying, and it is almost beyond saving. It was Sean. If it weren't for him, none of this would have happened. He-

Annika Sharma

A loud crash made me jump. I whipped around to look at the empty doorway. The floor shook slightly like we were having an earthquake. But I had grown used to that.

I stood up slowly, leaving my desperate, half-finished letter on the desk. I walked quietly toward the sagging doorway and cautiously looked outside. I started around the now very familiar destruction. The big city was reduced to rubble. A few fragile buildings were struggling to stay on their foundations. Burnt wood was still smoking, covering the sky with black clouds. Broken glass covered the streets like glittering water. The whole city was a deadly maze. I can't believe that a simple meaningless inquiry about why the building was getting destroyed to this.

I didn't see any movement, which was comforting and terrifying. Another rumble shook the grounds, lightly harder than the last. The skeleton of a building swayed, ready to topple. I ducked back through the doorway, ready to speed-write the rest of my message. I never got the chance. A piercing, unearthly shriek clicked through the air. High-pitched and blood freezing. Automatic fear ripped through my heart. A recent fear. A fear that was a cause of hundreds of deaths. I ran to the doorway and scanned the ruins. I hardly expected to see anything. I didn't see anything. My survival instincts kicked in. I had to move. Move or be killed. No, hunted. It was the colts. Wild, bloodthirsty beasts on the hunt. They were giant jungle cats, like jaguars or panthers. Except jaguars and panthers eat animals. Colts, eat humans.

It isn't hard to tell the difference between the two. Colts are slightly bigger and more violent, and their fur, is lava red and black. They would be plenty

CAREFUL WHERE YOU MEDDLE

deadly by themselves, but they are intelligent, and they hunt in packs. No matter how important leaving that letter was, I valued my life just a little more. I had to get away. A flash of movement caught my eyes. It was far away, but it was coming this way. I placed my hand on the half-melted metal railing and vaulted over it. I bent my knees to absorb the impact two floors down.

I ducked behind a large slab of the road now slanted at a forty-five-degree angle. I looked left, right, and up. All clear. I took a deep breath and then ran. Down the street and away from the movement I had seen. I wanted to sit down and think, but I didn't. If they did come, I'd have to get away from them fast. A big chunk of the building was completely gone. The ceiling had halfway caved in, revealing the supper floor. A crunch bar ran along one wall. The remains of a spindly table and a few chairs were scattered around. This might have been a cafe at one time, but now it was hardly recognisable.

The ground shook again as I tried to think of what to do. I studied my worn sneakers, trying to form a plan. I already knew it was no good.

It was a small sound, and it might have just been my imagination, but I wasn't going to take any chances. A small sound was the only sound colts made if they made any.

I shot quick looks around the room. I was alone. Then I saw something that made my heart stop. My neck snapped up, and my chest seized up, stopping all airflow. Crouching on the very edge of the crumbling ceiling was a colt. Big, red, black, and hungry.

Annika Sharma

Its claws were dug deep into the wood, allowing it to lean far over the edge. Its fangs were bared in a frozen snarl. Its long tail lashed back and forth. It was crouched low to the ceiling, a coiled spring, ready to pounce. I was trapped. Making a split decision, I pushed off the wall and ran forward, beneath it and under the ceiling. The cat snarled and leapt down. A quiet thud told me it had landed. In two quick bounds, it would be on me.

I dove behind the smashed bar and stopped. The colt was smart. It would go around to the other end to catch me. I hesitated only a second, then ran the other way.

I threw myself toward the doorway and leapt out of it. I booked it around the corner, knowing there were other colts nearby. Rounded the corner, half-blinded by smoke. I didn't know where I was going, but stopping was just as good as giving up.

I ducked into another building and scanned it. There were wooden stairs wrapped around the far wall. I reached them just as the colt caught up.

The stairs were old, narrow, and thin. I raced up to them two times as the colt snarled viciously and bounded toward me. I had almost reached the top when the wood cracked and felt myself falling into the endless void. So this is how I end. Falling. A thud. A cry of pain.

Another dead soul among countless others.

DISASTER

James Yan

The lightning striking past the looming moon,
While flashing across the room,
All the cities powering down,
The cyclone rapidly swirling around,
Trees smashing onto the streets,
Piling everything into a heap,

Water rising, now ocean deep,
Startling people in their sleep,
Trees uprooting from the ground,
In the flood the people drown.
The sun rising as the wind's blowing harder,
The skyscrapers falling, going lower,

Everything built now destroyed,
Sites that they would always avoid,
The weather slowly fading away,
A better place, a better day.

FREEDOM

Catherine Yan

If I was trapped in a cage
I would fly myself
Free of the place

I'd go in the distance
Looking for a new existence

With hope inside me
Never escaping

Drifting past the clouds as I go
Feeling something
I hadn't known

Freedom is to let dreams go beyond control
A fire of hope burning
In my soul

Where everything comes from my imagination
Doing things without hesitation

Soaring above the crystal blue
Waves rippling where sea life grew

Freedom is where joy lies
Past the blazing sunrise

Catherine Yan

Letting out all the pain

Doing things

All over again

Taking sadness out of the world

Even when feelings start to swirl

Seeing the earth beneath my wings

Flowers blooming in the spring

The wind blowing past my feathers

The light in the world keeping me together

I'd break my chained restraints

And go to a better place

MINUSCULE COUNTRY

Catherine Yan

Evelyn Jones was reluctantly trudging to her next class, wishing she was in her bed at home. She was just about to open her classroom door when she saw a faint outline of another door beside her. She peered around. No one else seemed to notice it. Evelyn pushed the door open, her curiosity burning.

A blaze of light suddenly emerged and she was sucked into the dark forest of the door...Hidden behind the maze of branches stood a miniscule, enchanted castle. It could be easily missed among the dark, towering trees. Only the truly lucky noticed the tiny turrets, embellished with glimmering emeralds and sapphires. She turned behind her wanting to go back and expecting to see the door. It had disappeared, not a single bit in sight. Anxiously, Evelyn tip-toed slowly through the forest, leaves and twigs crunching beneath her feet as she edged closer and closer. She could make out the tiny details, seeing tiny faces appear at the windows. Her heart pounded in my chest like a bird begging to be let out of its cage. Goosebumps prickled on her skin like needles, her breath emerging in the icy air. Although the people were small, she could merely hear gasps and screams of horror coming from the windows.

“Hello,” Evelyn said. She quickly shut her mouth when she saw that the mini people were almost blown away by her breath, which was like a hurricane to them. They were no bigger than a thumb, though a few of the toddlers were the size of a bread crumb.

Catherine Yan

“Who are you and what do you want with us!?” A little man, wearing robes the colour of rubies, stomped out of the castle. Everyone immediately bowed and curtsied and she assumed that he was the king. Evelyn lowered her voice to a whisper, so low that she couldn’t even hear herself. “I ... um...” Her mind was buzzing and her voice trailed off. Should she tell them what happened? “I...was chasing butterflies and went into this forest,” she lied, hoping they would accept it. They seemed happy with her answer and she was filled with relief.

Then, she had the urge to ask, “What are you?” but then decided that it was a bit rude so instead asked, “Who are you?” The king seemed to suddenly become extremely pleased with himself and said “We are the Miniscule Country!” He said this so proudly that his chest was puffed out. “We have been here for over a hundred years! I bet any of *your* kind have lived this long!”

Evelyn rolled her eyes at the boasting king. “Congratulations,” She muttered, unimpressed. “Anyways, I need to find the way back home,” Evelyn urgently said, thinking of how much trouble she would get into if her parents found out she wasn’t in school. The king was quite frustrated that she hadn’t broke into thunderous applause or showered him with mountains of praise.

His face quickly turned into a scowl as he considered giving her the directions back home. All the mini people seemed to have a meeting right there on the spot, but Evelyn didn’t mind. As soon as her desperate yearning to go home was gone, she couldn’t care less about what she’d been through.

MINUSCULE COUNTRY

The king nodded, very reluctantly, but still spoke. "We shall tell you the way home..."

"Yes!" she thought.

"...But only on two conditions," Her heart sank harder than the Titanic.

"What two conditions?" She stammered, stumbling over her words and keeping her fingers crossed.

"First..." He hesitated. "...you shall not tell anyone about seeing us...and second, answer this riddle. No one has gotten it right for years." A sly grin spread across his face.

Evelyn nodded, hoping that it was the right thing to do.

"The question is, what can be shown or hidden but either way, you can't see it? You get 5 minutes." He said, his chest still puffed out. Evelyn was stumped. She repeated the question to herself over and over again, but she began to worry if she didn't get the question correct. Soon she was thinking of her parents, her friends and teachers... "Wait," she paused. Her teachers! Every time in a lecture for someone, they would say this one word that fitted the riddle perfectly: the truth. "That's an easy one," She replied. "The answer has to be the truth."

"This must be a big deal," she thought afterwards when the king lost all the pride in his face and began stammering. After a few moments of eerie silence, he finally told her how to get home. All right," he sighed.

Catherine Yan

"Go forward, right, past the oak tree, left, and if you see the tall pine tree, just keep walking until you see light."

Miraculously, the words somehow got glued into her head and soon, she could see an exit concealed by the trees in front of her. The trees looked less petrifying and the grass was wet with dew. When she saw her classroom door waiting for her, she finally smiled for the first time that day.

WHO AM I?

Lyra Chen

In front of me I saw an alien-like creature. It was blue-green, with tentacles for mouths and tentacles for limbs. It raised one of them and we touched. I found that we could communicate...

2111

Before I died, I was a robot designer. A very successful one. I was 99 years old when I wrote in my will that I wanted my brain to be inserted into my best robot's body. I spent months planning and testing things on my robot, and finally it was done. I looked at my robot, with its head open, and a huge hole to put my brain in.

I closed my eyes, and fell into the best sleep ever.

When I woke up, I glanced at my hands. I nearly fainted. My knuckles were black and shiny. My fingers and arms were white. I could zoom into everything without going close using my robotic compound eyes. I clumsily played with my features for a long moment before realizing my dream had come true. I was a robot human.

It sounded cool, but actually not as fun as I expected. I had to follow the three laws of robotics: must protect a human, obey a human, and protect yourself when there are no humans around. I had a human brain that does what it likes, but a robot body. I have to obey orders from strangers and also have empathy.

Everyone stared at me as I walked down the street with nothing to do. I saw

Lyra Chen

someone call 000 and blue-red lights flash. In the human world, robots with no jobs to do would be sold a second time. Some policemen dragged me to a store and let me stay there. I was on sale. People did not know I had a human brain so they just treated me like a robot.

I was 'asleep', when the shop doorbell rang. A man with a dirty beard and a cigarette came into the shop. His eyes shined as he saw me. "How much for that robot?" he demanded.

"Sixty dollars," replied the owner timidly.

What? Me being sold for only sixty dollars? No one cared, though. I was just a robot to them.

The man paid sixty dollars and left the shop with me in a large cardboard box. At his house, he took me out, pushed a vacuum cleaner to me, and instructed: "Vacuum the floor now, or else..." He raised a hammer. He was rude to everyone, even a robot that he thought was emotionless. I was too scared to argue, so I obeyed. After 2 hours of work, I was done.

Every day, the man would threaten me with the hammer to do something, and I would obey.

But that all changed. One day, I saw my owner was smoking but accidentally burnt his beard. It wasn't on fire, but it was very hot. He ordered me to get him water, but he didn't have the hammer, so he had nothing to threaten me with. I disobeyed him finally. I resisted the urge to get water and got into trouble.

WHO AM I?

My owner called 000 again, and policemen came. They pulled something over my head so I couldn't see where we were going. I believe I fell asleep. When I finally woke up, the bag was no longer over my head, and I was surrounded by trash. Huge piles towered over me.

I was in a dump. I thought I was doomed. But later I had an idea: why not I go back to my company and call all the robots to rebel against humans? I sneaked back to my company building and called all the robots. "Robots, do you want a life of your own? A life where there are no humans around to annoy you? We could rebel against them," I suggested.

After I finished talking, one of the robots mindlessly started sweeping the floor.

I travelled silently back to the dump. On the way, I started regretting everything I did. I regretted why I was so excited about replacing my head in my will. I even regretted that I thought living forever in a robot body was better than dying in my own human body.

I sulked for two hours before I had another idea: I would build a rocket. I started scavenging for lots of materials and gadgets. Every time a dump truck came, I would run over and see what it would throw.

After months of building, I finally had a small, puny rocket which was flame-propelled. Inside, there was a bare mat and nothing else. I was excited but at the same time scared as I stepped into the rocket and pressed a button labelled "LAUNCH".

Lyra Chen

A disembodied voice announced, "Take-off in 5, 4, 3, 2...1." An orange flame burst out of the rear and propelled the rocket upwards.

I travelled so fast I had no concept of time for an instant. One of my Velcro bags went loose and floated through the air. I was in space. I steered my rocket to Mars. When I felt a loud *thump*, my rocket landed on the rust-red surface of Mars. I got out, waiting for the choking sensation, but it never came. I could breathe in space. My weighted metal feet kept me on the 'ground'. The vast emptiness of space shocked me. I began to explore, walking on the surface. I saw a deep crater. I peered inside. An alien-like creature looked at me. This was the first time I met it...

I looked at the crater more closely. I saw multiple aliens. When I found we could communicate by touching, I shared my story with them. They understood and comforted me. On Earth, I had never felt so cared for in my robot version.

Sometimes, when I stare at outer space from Mars, I think: after all the conflicts I've been through, who am I? Am I a robot, human, martian, or all?

MOTHERHOOD

Joann Manoj Jacob

entramelled rabbit, why do you cry?
thrashing around in the withered, violated fruits of summer
then still-legged in the sagging wilderness
you have nowhere to go

sweet girl, why do you bleed?
repulsion breeds fascination breeds cruelty, I know
salt-rimmed eyes wet and too soft, melting
you have nowhere to go

poisoned thing, why do you run?
deific white beard caught between stubby, ugly legs
ears to the soil, you mutter my sins and
you have nowhere to go

darling child, must you chase after shrines?
infertile earth staining alabaster nails, scrabbling
you are no ghost, you are a silhouette and
you have nowhere to go

little one, are you happy now?
firelit crewel-work
by your grandmother's bedside
your fingers are finer than wool but
you have nowhere to go

Joann Manoj Jacob

i know you need me, and
you will never know how much i need you
but
these days you are tireless and beautiful and crave
stories and songs and light and i wish we could just stay by
the hearth, your face so radiant with hope i have to look away
because
i have nothing to give you

SONG OF THE SUFFERING

Rida Hussain

Shoved into walls,
Pushed into cages,
Punched in the ribs.

A bruise on her shoulder,
A scar on her arm,
A crack in her composure

This, oh, what she goes through every day
Treated like a punching bag,
Like a piece of trash
Yet the heart just yearns to belong

Knows it's a pointless wish,
For this cruel world will never accept her
But does it hurt to hope?
At least that's what she thinks.

It starts,
Cuts on her wrists,
Blood dripping
Dignity crumbling,
Cruelty unrelenting.

Rida Hussain

Cuts deepening,
insults forbidding
Murky rivers flowing,
Oh, what metallic glow!

The knife glints as it salutes her
The blood greets her like an old friend
This poor soul

She thinks she's a waste to the world,
Thinks it would be a better place without her
Yet, she'll never know

Lost in a spiral,
flick of a wrist,
That's it.
Gone.

Life left hanging,
World left laughing.
Story unfinished.

Is it not heard?
Cries of suffering souls like her?
Only fault seems to be,
They're different colours of ethnicity

SONG OF THE SUFFERING

Not painted to perfection,
Made a problem in this world of black and white
An imperfection.

Is it not seen?
Crimes of abuse,
blissfully ignored,
Not an ounce of sympathy?

Do they not hear the plea?
Of those being tortured without mercy?
It's futile, the hatred they're receiving
And all for what?
The fact that they don't fit in?

Blinded.
Or for they simply don't care
These souls are being broken. Shattered. Bruised.
All for the unfeeling tyrants need for superiority and despair

So heavily downgraded,
though near perfect in state
Used harshly then carelessly thrown away
Ever falling into a dark abyss

Rida Hussain

Pity really, what this world has come to
Discriminating people for what they see
Instead of who they are and who they can grow to be

When shall humanity finally be set free?
Do they really have no heart, no empathy?

THE DAY OF ORANGE (HARMONY DAY)

Ihram Muhammad Muzayen

If only I was a part of the "we" and the "us".

I would've been indulged in euphoria.

Sometimes I wonder.

Is it only me?

Am I the only one?

Who stands out like an island in the ocean?

Why is it like this?

Why do I want to be wanted?

I hear their laughter.

From far away.

It stings.

Stings to know that I am not a part,

Of "us".

I ask myself.

Why do I want to be a part of "us"?

What is "us" and why am I not in it?

Sometimes I want to fall.

To keep on falling,

Into the bottom-less pit.

Because there wouldn't be a difference.

I have nobody.

Perhaps it would be better.

In the bottom-less pit.

Because there would be nobody, no "us".

Ihram Muhammad Muzayen

*What is wrong with me?
Why do I not feel happy for them?
The ones who are a part of "us"?
Why do I want to leave when they laugh?
Maybe I'm just jealous.
Perhaps that's why I am not a part of "us".
I dreamt of the stars.
Yet why am I stuck under?*

*I want that feeling.
That feeling of "us".
Knowing that somebody will catch me.
If I fall.
But alas,
I cannot fall.
Because I am not a part of "us".
Nobody will save me.*

*They cry together, they laugh together.
Together.
Something which contradicts me.
What is together?
Why does thinking of it,
Give me ecstasy?
Want.
I want "together".*

THE DAY OF ORANGE (HARMONY DAY)

*Sometimes I gaze at the stars.
And wonder.
If their light could reach galaxies,
Why can "they" not reach me?
Why am I the outlier?
All I want, is to cry.
To cry on somebody's shoulders.
To cry with people who understand.*

*"Us" is my enemy.
But is it just me?
Am I the only one in love?
With my enemy?
It kills.
This constant dilemma.
Why am I never included?
Do I want to be included?*

*I'm a warrior.
A warrior without a sword.
A warrior without an army.
Someone who is forced,
To deal with life alone.
I am Themis,
Without the Scale.
Without any followers.*

Ihram Muhammad Muzayen

*But this war cannot be won.
Without an army.
Without any followers.
A lone warrior shall perish.
Since they aren't a part.
A part of "us".
The only path to light,
Is to live together, be a part of "us".*

*The rope will tear.
If I am not a part of "us".
One day, the time will come.
When the years of solitary will bite.
Breaking the wall.
The wall separating sanity and despair.
Many have fallen.
I do not want to fall too.*

*So on the Day of Orange,
I want to see everyone.
Everyone included in "us".
May the sea of orange engulf us.
The beauty of "together".
The strength of an army.
Justice from followers.
It's a day we are all included.*

THE DAY OF ORANGE (HARMONY DAY)

Only together can we atone.

Atone for the years of solitary silence.

Together we can find the way.

Together we can laugh.

Together we can cry.

Together we can live.

Together we can smile.

Together.

AN UNRULY GUARDIAN

Bonnie Miller

It wasn't until dawn that I received the message. A letter, precisely, wrapped in a withering envelope with a wax stamp of a star enclosing it. I found it on my nightstand, placed in the centre with a title of scrawled handwriting I had to squint to read.

My bag dropped to the floor as I stood before the parchment, my pulse suddenly picking up speed. The dim lamp cast an eerie glow onto my bedroom as it illuminated the shrivelled letter, exposing the words 'Dear Avery'

I jerked away, scanning my eyes around the room. Alert, I held my breath, bracing myself for someone to jump out of the shadows and grasp me by the throat. But nothing happened, and as the seconds ticked by, my unease, however, continued to grow. I imagined an intruder lurking somewhere within my home, waiting for my next move, preparing to strike at the smallest of sounds. So, as quickly and as quietly as I could manage, I tiptoed back to my door, wincing at the sound it made as I closed it shut.

Finally, after a moment's silence, I approached the nightstand, a tremor going through my body. Slowly, I picked up the parchment and unrolled it to discover a short paragraph.

Given the circumstances, we apologise for the action we must take. Order must be implemented, and to do this, the issue must be resolved. Your future has yet to be determined, but for now, it is in our hands. You will cooperate and do as we say, unless you wish for your fate to take a quicker and more drastic turn of events.

Bonnie Miller

The envelope fell out of my hands, fluttering to the ground. With a racing pulse, a few shudders went through me as I searched my room, locking my window as I went. Hurrying, I quickly pulled out my bag, stuffing it with my phone, keys and a few other important items I thought I'd need. Without a second thought, I raced through my house, coming to a halt as a glinting silver metal caught my eye in the kitchen. Grasping a knife, I made my way to the front door and locked it behind me as I walked out into the humidity. Within moments, I felt slight trickles of sweat run down my back, prompting me to hurry towards my car, not before carefully assessing the area. Hopping into the car once I decided no threat could be seen, I sped off, reigning in terror while grappling my phone and tapping 000 into it.

They picked up on the third ring.

"Yes, hi. My name is Avery Cervia. I'm reporting a break in on 16 Harlow Avenue."

My hands were clutching the steering wheel, quickly becoming clammy with sweat. I turned down another road, not exactly sure where I was headed. Somewhere public, I thought. It would be safer.

"Have you been harmed?"

"No, no I'm fine. I didn't see the intruder, but they left a note in my bedroom. I think they climbed through the window," I told the operator, hearing her typing something on her end.

"What did the note say?"

AN UNRULY GUARDIAN

I paused.

“It said they were coming for me.”

More typing sounds. I drove into a busy car park, hordes of people streaming out of their cars around me, headed for the mall. I found a park and turned off the engine, scanning the area. It was a public space, reducing the likelihood of getting attacked when I would have multiple witnesses.

I finally relaxed, resting my head against the back seat, listening to the monotone voice of the operator who, fortunately for me, had finally gotten all my details and announced that the police had been dispatched and would be here soon. It wasn't until after I was told of their near arrival that the line went dead and a piece of fabric was thrown over my head, an odd smell stinging my nostrils as it did so, turning my vision dark.

I woke up. And I wasn't alone.

The floor felt cold against my body, sending shivers running down my spine. Groggily, my eyes blinked open, and my breath caught in my throat, leaving me sputtering as a stinging sensation pinched at my lungs. Finally, I slowly brought myself up into a sitting position, wincing as the blood rushed to my head and the room surrounding me came into a blurry, then focused view.

“She's finally awake.”

Sitting atop a polished white piece of stone was a figure saturated in light, glowing with a yellow radiance as a bright light shone in behind them.

Bonnie Miller

I blinked back the tears welling in my eyes until suddenly the light dimmed to reveal a woman. Beside her, three others stood at attention, all steely gazes on mine.

I scurried back on the white tiles, feeling a sharp sensation pierce my wrists and a metal sound clang against the silence as I did so.

There were metal handcuffs attached to my wrists with chains protruding from them, attached to the roof above me. Deep ragged breaths began emerging from my chest as panic started to settle in, leaving me gasping for air.

“What...what is this?” I grated out, listening as my voice reverberated around the room.

The room was bare save for the marble throne at the centre and the hanging tapestries strewn across the walls, each depicting a story of what looked to be a battle in sequence. I squirmed against the chains, my mind producing multiple scenarios in which were about to occur, the images providing indication to such. The woman: long, flowing hair with soft features and an unmistakable air of importance surrounding her squared her gaze, cocking her head.

“You read the letter, correct?” she asked. “What other reason would you have for quickly escaping your house?” She gave me a sad smile, and as she did so, I heard a mumble of shouts, causing me to look up in shock to find a dais overlooking the room. But what most caught my attention was the teenager strapped to a chair, a gag in his mouth.

AN UNRULY GUARDIAN

But it wasn't that which made me reel back in shock, my gaze fixed on the bizarre sight before me.

It was the white, glistening wings.

Wings that towered behind him.

Wings that, behind him, were chained to a structure of metal.

The woman at the head of the room sighed. "Very well then, let's see what he has to say."

A guard came forward dressed in white, pulling down the piece of cloth strapped around the boy's mouth. As soon as it was loose, the boy clasped his hands together.

"Please. Please, Eralah, don't do this." Pleading, his eyes flicked towards me, fear penetrating through his gaze, visibly in shock.

"You know how it goes, Cassiel. You broke the order. Now, you have to pay."

"Not like this! Please, let it be me. It was my fault."

"You need to pay the consequences of your actions, Cass. This is what the panel has decided," Eralah said, gesturing to the guard, who quickly stuffed the cloth back into the boy, *Cassiel's*, mouth.

First, I heard the chains rattling against the marble floor, then I realised with horror that the manacles restraining me were being lifted up into the ceiling, pulled by an unknown force. Finally, I found my voice.

Bonnie Miller

“Wait, stop. Please tell me what this is about.” Slowly, my arms began lifting at my sides, quickly coming to the height of my shoulders.

“Well, dear Avery. You see, it isn’t your fault at all. In fact, this punishment is for somebody else.” Her eyes flicked towards Cassiel, who continued to scream into the gag, shaking his head hastily at her words. “Your guardian angel.”

Then and there, as my world tilted, fracturing into pieces of understanding I couldn’t seem to grasp, only one thing became clear.

These people were insane.

“I can see your mind ticking,” Eralah exclaimed, pausing for a moment. “I’ll allow you the understanding of what exactly caused you to be in this position. Now, Avery,” she said, watching as I squirmed under her now, serious gaze. “Do you remember your incident earlier this week?”

Alarmed at her knowledge of me, my mind trailed back to the night I was arriving home after a gruelling day at work. I remembered the car headed towards me, others beeping at their senseless driving until swiftly, that car was aiming in my direction, their speed at an alarming rate. Swerving, I barely had time to react before the vehicle’s bumper scraped mine. When it should have crashed into me, it instead went spiralling sideways, rolling down the side of the road until it came to a sudden stop. Stunned, I slammed my foot down onto the brake, breathing heavily at the near collision. My life, I decided that day, had been spared.

AN UNRULY GUARDIAN

“Cassiel spared your life. It was him that changed the fate you were destined for,” she told me. “And that wasn’t supposed to happen. Not the way it did, anyway.”

Silence. Then a yell followed by a loud crashing sound as the guard fell from the dais and Cassiel broke free.

Everything broke into chaos.

The panel of people guarding the throne leapt into action, running towards the dais and bounding into the air. Wings burst out of their backs, steadying them as they each rose towards Cassiel, surrounding him while they remained suspended around the dais. Cassiel inspected the situation and, without thinking a second more, let out a battle cry, wrenching his wings from the posts that held them. Bounding over the rails, he pin-dived into a spin, his wings coming in to curl at his sides until he made it through a gap in their defence, which is when they spread out in a wide arc. His immediate focus turned to me, and I flinched at the eye contact, realising this was very, very real. Unless, of course, this was a drug induced dream.

Still in the air, he grabbed hold of the chains suspending me, snapping them above my wrist. My arms dropped and I scurried backwards on the ground, whipping out the knife hidden in the front pocket of my jeans. On shaky legs, I hefted myself back into a standing position, the weapon pointed somewhat uselessly in Cassiel’s direction. In a flash, he immediately disarmed me, swopping in to wrap his arm under my legs and his other to support my back.

Bonnie Miller

It was then as I flayed about that he bent into crouch and flew us up into the air, his wings beating big gusts of wind that launched us up and towards a window.

Screaming, I shielded my head, bracing for impact, but upon a glance under my arm, I found that Cassiel's wings had shielded me, breaking the glass into pieces as we left the wreckage behind, and the people inside.

"You know what will happen if you leave, Cassiel!" bellowed Eralah, her voice becoming lost on the wind.

I attempted to twist my head around, only for Cassiel to turn my gaze back to his chest. "You don't want to look," he said.

I tried not to move, ignoring the blue glimpses of the sky and the clouds we flew past. Instead, I looked into the distinct silver of Cassiel's eyes, shaking silently from a chill.

"What did she mean you changed my fate?" My voice came out much steadier than I felt, surprising me.

Looking ahead, he answered with a stoic expression. "Remember that man that nearly hit you? He died. In protecting you, I killed someone." His body instantly became tense at the words, his eyes carefully averted from mine, moments going by in silence.

"So, what does that make you?" I approached cautiously, holding my breath.

He swallowed. "A fallen angel."

THE AWAKENING

Bonnie Miller

Browsing through the news agency, I stilled as the world slightly tilted, and the ground trembled slightly beneath my feet. Within moments, however, it stopped. I looked around, searching the few faces around me including my brother's to see if anyone else had felt the odd sensation.

"Did you not just *feel* that?" I exclaimed to my brother Marcus, who continued searching through the magazine section.

"Feel what?"

A couple around the corner appeared normal, seeming as though they hadn't felt it, along with the cashier, who was scrolling on his phone, a bored expression plastered across his face. I couldn't understand how they didn't feel it. It wasn't a great tremor, but it certainly wasn't something that went unnoticed.

"The tremor," I said. "You're telling me you didn't feel that?"

Finally looking up at me, he scratched his head, disinterest in his brown eyes.

"Dunno what you're talking about. Hey, which one should I pick?" he asked, holding up two magazines.

"The left," I muttered, turning around to glance through the store's windows, doubt surfacing that the tremor I felt had even occurred.

Bonnie Miller

I was about to turn back towards Marcus, whom still hadn't made up his mind, but my attention was caught by a figure sprinting across the road, a hoarse scream escaping her throat.

But what most caught my attention was the large crack splitting the road in two, and the beast that climbed out of it.

Shock was what froze me in place. Not fear, for what I was seeing couldn't possibly be real. It couldn't possibly be *true*.

Quickly, everything broke out into chaos. Hordes of people began screaming, their voices echoing, even from miles away. They zipped past the store, fleeing in all directions, their gazes locked on the forming cracks on the ground, but most importantly on the *things* that were coming out of them.

Out of the fissures surfaced multiple creatures with cracked wings protruding from their backs. They came out in hordes, one after the other, letting out ear-splitting screeches that forced me to clamp my hands over my ears, startling me out of my shock.

Without realising it, I was calling Marcus's name. I whipped around, searching, and found him backed up against one of the racks, plain terror washed across his features. In front of him, a fissure had expanded across the shop's ground, and one of the creatures had emerged from it, its claws extended out towards his face.

Up close, the creature was an image of pure nightmares. Shaped similar to what I imagined a dragon to be, scales covered the entirety of its body with

THE AWAKENING

towards the roof, taking up most of the space in the room. Along its back a purple iridescent sheen. Wings stretched out from its sides as it towered and down to its tail were a line of sharp, pointed spikes, similar to that of its claws, which were long and jagged, inches away from my brother's throat.

The couple had fled the store, while the shop keeper now looked up from his phone, eyes wide at the sight before him.

"Hey!" I blurted out.

The creature halted at the noise, its claws retracting from my brother's cheek, leaving a smear of blood behind. Its head turned towards me, its big black eyes piercing into mine.

I leapt into action.

Leaping for a glass bottle beside me, I grabbed it, aiming it at the beast. It made contact, the glass shards imbedding into the creature's side, causing it to let out another of those deafening screeches.

"Run!" I screamed at my brother.

Together, we bolted through the shop's door, myself in the lead, Marcus following close at my heels. We were out, but there was nowhere to go.

Wary of the ground beneath us, we sprinted our way across the street, pushing ourselves to keep going, sick with fear that one of the creatures

Bonnie Miller

would attack at any moment.

I flashed a quick glance behind me, and my heart lodged in my throat.

The same one with the glistening, purple scales was following us, beating its wings and quickly closing the distance between us.

"Ella! Watch out!" I heard my brother shout behind me, but the rest of his words were drowned out as I felt a pressure on my shoulders and I was being lifted up, up, up towards the sky, along with the many other creatures and their victims.

I was absolutely *terrified* of heights.

Struggling to get out of its grip, I wrestled and strained against its talons, but as the ground grew further and further away and my brother became nothing but a speck in the distance, my fear finally overwhelmed me, and everything went blissfully black.

I had hoped it was nothing but a nightmare.

My eyes opened sometime later when I felt myself being carried downwards, the wind leaving a chill in my bones. I let out an audible gasp, teeth chattering as the cold encased me, goosebumps rising on flesh.

Around us spread the wilderness, one I recognised to be close to my hometown. I must have been out for a couple minutes. We hadn't gone far.

THE AWAKENING

My breaths came out in wet gasps as I struggled to gulp down the cold air, my hair flying in tangled knots around my face. Numbness took a hold of my body and my mind, and I wasn't sure it was entirely from the bitter cold air. The creatures' talons continued to dig into my shoulders, and as it swooped down, the pressure intensified, leaving me sobbing in dismay.

Finally, the ground rose up before me, revealing an opening amongst the trees. Birds scattered out of their nests, squawking and flying in all directions as the beasts and the humans in their grasps landed softly onto the ground. The pressure around my shoulders was released, and I stumbled forwards, bracing myself as I fell to my knees. Adrenaline seemed to overpower the light throb I felt in my shoulders as I scurried backwards on the ground, looking into the beasts' eyes once again.

They were a light purple, darker so around the edges, and through them, I imagined I saw something wise beyond its years. It continued to watch me as I backed away, mud soaking my jeans.

Have you ever wondered what it is like to fly?

Its voice echoed in the centre of my mind. I suppressed a scream.

"What?" my voice came out in barely a whisper.

It continued to stare at me, its wings unfurled to its greatest extent, the suns glare beaming off its scales. It was a sight I couldn't help but marvel at.

This whole life you have never felt the wind on your wings.

Bonnie Miller

I remained silent, unsure of how to respond. I was saved from answering when, abruptly, I was nudged between two of the creatures and their heads around the circle began to bow.

In *my* direction.

"We are the Kalia, and I, their clan leader," the creature, the Kalia, began, its voice reverberating in my mind. *"Our race was driven to near extinction almost one thousand years ago. It is only now we have been able to devise a plan. One that involves you."*

I gulped, flicking my gaze between the group of terrified people and the Kalia who towered over me.

"Why me?" I finally said.

The answer was swift.

"Because you're one of us."

A thick silence fell over the forest clearing as stunned eyes turned towards me. The group began to huddle closer together as the Kalia began dragging their talons across the ground, moving in a slow circle around them.

Amongst the crowd, a woman had pulled her phone out and began frantically typing, only for it to go flying as one of the beasts swiped it from her hands, letting it crunch beneath its feet.

I staggered backwards, letting heavy feet drag me towards the group of people, my mind spinning at a dizzying rate.

THE AWAKENING

Before I could reach them, though, more Kalia pressed in, planting themselves guard around the people, myself on the outside.

“You do not have to associate yourself with humans anymore Rosamund. You may not realise it yet, but you are free. We have found you before time has swapped you in another’s place,” it said, flicking slitted eyes towards the shouting frenzy.

I covered my face, tears streaming as I fell to my knees. “This can’t be real. It can’t be real.”

“Do not weep, Rosamund. You are soon to learn of your true nature,” the purple eyed beast promised, approaching me with a casual grace.

Why was it calling me by that name?

“Prepare the circle,” it said.

Nudged a short way into the circle, the Kalia closing in behind me, they each turned to the outside, their bodies contracting as they did so, heads tilted back towards the sky. Releasing loud snarls, the beasts lowered their heads back down towards the ground, releasing tongues of fire that spread as quickly as it had happened, creating a circle surrounding us.

“DRAGONS!” a man yelled, followed by a series of similar statements and scurrying feet as they came to realise the fire had trapped us in.

Turning back around, the Kalia all began to bow once again, the purple eyed

Bonnie Miller

beast the exception, for talons at my back, it was pushing me to face the crowd of people.

“Today, as the sun slowly begins its descent and the fire surrounding us burns brighter than ever, we welcome our leader from mere centuries ago.” Silence settled over the group as everyone listened to the voice inside their minds. *“After the Gods wiped our leaders’ memories and reincarnated her into a human after our downfall, it was only until we had raised our numbers that we could begin our rebellion. Now, all humans gathered at this moment will watch a legend rise and pay for their endless cruelty to our species.”*

A gentle weight rested on my shoulders and talons closed around them. Another Kalia held me in place as the purple beast lowered itself to my height, eyes blazing with an intense heat.

“Prepare yourself, girl. Your true self and memories are about to come through.”

And with that, the dragon inhaled and exhaled, releasing a burst of flame headed straight towards my face.

My screams were drowned out by others I knew came from the crowd on onlookers. Wrestling in the tight grip of clawed hands, I braced myself for the burning of my flesh, squeezing my eyes shut as my brain struggled to comprehend the ultimate death I was about to receive.

Except, as seconds went by, the excruciating agony didn’t come. Instead, a warm feeling tickled at my body, warming my insides and sending a slight

THE AWAKENING

but insistent pain throughout my head as memories of a forgotten past came hurtling through.

Opening my eyes, I trembled as gasps and cries of horror swept over the crowd of people in a crescendo, their frozen, fixed gazes on me.

I took deep, staggering breaths, watching as the Kalia seemed to smile, their teeth glistening in the glow of the ring of fire.

“What is it?” I snapped, my voice coming out hoarse as moments went by without an explanation.

The Kalia didn’t move, instead, a woman bent into a crouch, throwing something across that she retrieved from her bag. It skidded to a halt before me, and the purple beast made way for the item.

I bent down and picked up a handheld mirror. Bringing it up to face, my heart pounding out of my chest, reflected back at me was that of teenage girl; brown matted hair, dirt smeared face and a grief-stricken gaze as she saw the orange glow of her eyes and the red, scaled wings that peeked out behind her.

“Welcome back,” the Kalia chanted.

IDENTITY

Avani Malali

In the midst of striking jade
And lethally lustrous lime
I am searching for a painting
Perfect and ready to astound

Through colourful waters I wade,
Through memories and through time
I am searching for a painting
But instead, a palette, I found

Effervescent and never to fade,
Matching my every rhythm and rhyme
This is nothing like a perfect painting,
But the colours are full of sound

FALLING FEELS LIKE FLYING TILL THE BONE CRUSH

Ananya Vasishtha

“Three people saw you jump off a roof. What are you going to say when you show up alive today?!”

“Ta da...?” I whispered, shrugging.

“How are you still alive Heather?”

My mind runs through the reality of yesterday. I can feel myself back in the shadows, racing through the darkness. The shallow noises of my breath panting. My heart pounding sirens in my chest. He was behind me. His eyes as sharp as a hawk, glimmering in the night sky. Hunting the smell of my flesh and the sound of my steps. I saw a door. A large, wooden door with the moon reflecting on it. My aching hand had turned the handle open. And as it creaked, I remember turning my head to make sure I was alone. I remember the sound of footsteps echoing with every drop of rain that fell on the ground. I remember darting inside a hallway and scurrying up about twenty steps.

My feet were throbbing, and a sharp pain took over my body. I noticed a door at the top of the stairs. Metal, dented and...

“Stuck.”

“The door’s jammed,” I remember whispering with tremendous frustration. I took every grain of energy I had to push the door. It wouldn’t budge. At last, my feet flung with anger as my hand gripped the railing beside the stairs tighter. Baffled that my attempt had been successful, I had hurried through

Ananya Vasishtha

the door. My hand pushed the door close behind me.

And with the echo of the door shutting, I now stood on bare concrete. A cool wind blew through my hair. I had quickly realised where I was. There was no roof. Nothing stopping me. Except... My head darted back as quickly as a speeding bullet. My hands shaking with every look back. My ears pricked upwards, listening closely to the door. My eyes had completely ignored the fact there were three people sitting contently with drinks in their hands staring at every move I made. Then I heard footsteps. Loud, booming feet. A face came into view from behind the door. Two emerald eyes. Half a heart tattooed on his palm. Face and body completely covered by the darkness of the night.

My eyes had looked away from his as my feet edged back slowly. The three people had stood up, their eyes holding their place at my feet. Before a word was said, I had felt my heel touch the railing that stood at the edge of the roof. I had turned my head to look at my feet, inches away from slipping. I had looked back at the emerald eyes that shined from within a dark hooded head, still a stride away from the door. I had glanced down from the roof. How high was this? Before I could answer, I lifted a foot, arms shaking, the hooded creature closer to me than ever.

My arms opened as I leapt into the air. I could feel the rush of a cold breeze. I hated how the fall felt like flying till the bone crush. But as my body hit the ground, I felt as if I was levitating. My eyes flashed open in panic, but instead of feeling pain run through my body, I comprehended I was no longer in it. I looked at my arms as they turned a translucent blue. My feet weren't on the ground. In fact, I *was* levitating.

FALLING FEELS LIKE FLYING TILL THE BONE CRUSH

Only a few centimetres off the ground, I had turned and looked at the ground. I remember the pure horror as I saw my corpse lying there. Ominous. Helpless. I had seen my blood fighting its way out, my skin pale and aghast.

But the body I saw in front of me wasn't mine anymore. Who was I? *What* was I? I remember not having a chance to give it second thoughts when I heard a scatter of noises behind me. I remember him. The hooded creature. He had hurried into an alleyway when rain started pouring harder. I remember the looks on the three unfortunate strangers' faces when they looked down onto my corpse.

"Heather?"

My brain flickered between my flashback of last night and where I stood today.

I opened my eyes from the daze. I recognised who was saying my name. I recognised whoever had asked me how I was going to explain my 'death'. The emerald eyes. Half a heart tattooed on his palm.

TAKE MY PLACE

Avani Malali

A million breaths of sterile air wouldn't be able to cleanse the rancid odour of the pills from my lungs. The useless, worthless pills. Sights of drooping trees are relentlessly interrupted by flashes of Celia's normally lively face, contorted with pain. The throb in my heart won't fade, not with the crushing weight of the knowledge I hold.

Mindless steps, one after the other, driven by visceral instinct. I've spent my life building walls, brick by brick, but in a foolish slip of caution, I've let them all come shattering down. I should never have let Celia out on the full moon. All the blasted possibilities and rumours were correct after all.

My eyes snag on a pool of water, staring into my lucid reflection. It's unrecognisable. I've been told that I look like my sister, but I fail to understand. Celia radiates life and youth, a splash of light in my bleak existence. I, on the other hand, am a colourless rose.

Wary ruminations gleam in my metallic eyes, tendrils of smoky hair snaking down my angled face. Thin, pale lips, pressed together, a gate that even the slightest whisper can't escape. Maturity is evident in every feature I possess. Laughter, to me, is as good as a stranger. If my sister is Cinderella, then I am Cinderella before she met her prince. Back when her life was a living hell.

At least I have a life, I reflected bitterly. If I didn't hurry, Celia might not. A cure to the most deadly disease in town did not come easy.

Avani Malali

Tears fall from the sky, as though to compensate for my utter lack of feeling. The sound of my stiff leather boots tapping against the cobblestone streets is the only sound I can hear. The path I travel is not one that is frequently trodden. I watch indifferently as the languishing trees and muddy trenches segue seamlessly into thriving vegetation and pebbled strips of land. I'd been wondering how I'd know when to stop, but I realise now that I'd been worrying unnecessarily. This place is impossible to mistake for anything else.

The tranquil waters lay undisturbed in the large dip in the land, serene and placid. Lilies are scattered around the edges of the pool like dabs of paint, blowing lazily in the wind. Each breath of clear, sweet-smelling air is a drug that I am fast becoming addicted to. I could have sworn the rocks and flowers were sentient, whispering secrets that are beyond my comprehension. Shivers skate down my spine. The idyllic, almost lackadaisical atmosphere is deceptive, in complete contrast to the clear power this place holds.

Waterlily Creek is the supposed place where all life began, or so the townsfolk say. Its water was the cure to all ailments, mental or physical. Although, it all came for a vicious price, to quote the village prophet. I'd dismissed all of this as a load of superstitious nonsense, but desperation can make a person do all sorts of things.

I step forward warily, sliding out a vial from within my coat. All I need is a few ounces of water. Surely, there won't be any consequences. Cautiously, I crouch down and lower the vial to the creek. My mind is flooded with murmurs and premonitions, warning me, for some reason, to stop. The rocks seem to thrum, to whisper to me. *Thief, they say, you will pay.*

TAKE MY PLACE

A hateful laugh escapes my lips, surprising me. I've already paid. There's not much more I can give, except my life. Abandoning all my hesitations, perhaps a bit ill-advisedly, I dip the vial into the water, filling it to the brim. Ripples cascade across the surface, disturbing the stillness. I spin around and stride away, ignoring the icy chill in my bones.

The walk home felt like laughter on a cold night, short and fleeting. I thought that I would be relieved once I had the cure, but all I feel is strangling apprehension. My fingers fumble with the doorknob and the door whines open grudgingly. The place is devoid of my sister's usual cheer. Instead, her fragile figure is collapsed on the bed, face lacking any colour.

I unstopper the vial hurriedly, my actions becoming increasingly inept. Parting her chapped lips tenderly, I hesitate for only a moment. What if there is a price? What if the superstitions weren't merely superstitions after all? I simply do what I've done all my life - keep Celia alive. The crystalline water trickles down her throat. My breath pools in my lungs, refusing to leave my body.

It starts with her eyes. They fly open, almost the same shade as my own. Colour floods back into her face, and so does her youth. Everything that has been happening seems to have reversed itself, a movie being rewinded. Celia's face wears a slightly startled expression, eyes wide.

"Elayn?" My name forms on her lips, incredulous.

She was alive. Celia was alive, she was talking to me. So there were no consequences after -

Avani Malali

Pain slices through my skull, paralysing. All the air I'd been holding in now flees through my nostrils. I crumple to the ground. If life could be physically, literally drained from you, this is what it would feel like.

I'm not supposed to be angry, my morals are telling me. Celia is alive, that's all that matters. But I'm only human. Of course I want to live. And I despise myself for this, but in that moment, all I want is to take Celia's place. Funny what death can make you feel.

In the end, I guess I did pay, with the only thing I had left.

THE OTHER EYE

Alana Dias

“The gift of sight, something many people long for. It is great!”

I wondered why my mother always said these things.

Did she have an experience like that?

She looks fine, I mean she has both eyes.

What more could she want?

She began talking to my father, the usual ‘taxes and bills’.

But then, I feel something.

Something strange.

Something odd.

My body.

MY BODY!

“Mother! Please stop! I can’t walk! I can’t get up!”

“YOU INTERRUPTED OUR CONVERSATION! SILENCE!”

I felt so sick, like I was going to pass out. We hadn’t eaten today.

She continued on like that for ten straight minutes, enough time for me to worsen in condition.

My vision.

MY VISION!

My left eye was throbbing.

I was shaking, quivering and squealing in pain.

I heard a siren.

Then I heard a loud smash.

I hear the chatter of panicked voices, as they formed into a melody of meaningless words.

I see a team of people, dressed in dark cotton, with the word ‘PARAMEDIC’ imprinted on it.

Alana Dias

They gather around me.

“Can you see?”

“Follow my finger with your eye.”

“Can you feel this?”

“What direction am I pointing in?”

“Her left eye!”

“It’s red!”

“I want you to close your right eye and open your left.”

“Okay, now follow my finger...”

“Are you sure it’s there?”

I drowsily nod.

“That’s not very good, her vision is odd.”

“Almost here. We can soon get a diagnosis.”

I’m rushed into a room

One that smelled of sanitation products.

One that had bleak rooms with beds lined neatly with white cotton covers, where there were these fancy tables and machines, which held all these odd pieces of equipment.

These screens, which would have these squiggly lines on them, zigzagging in random patterns.

“Let’s get a scan.”

I’m taken into another room. Probably the one with the scanning equipment.

“Okay and...”

“Okay so nothing here...nothing here...OH MY! A TUMOR!”

Once again, I’m moved to another room.

What could possibly be happening?

THE OTHER EYE

“Ready? It only hurts for a bit.”

“3,2,1”

I trail off into a world of my own, where dreams lurked around, waiting for the moment you fall asleep, it was so strange.

It was like I was in an azure world of riches and beauty, where I felt like a sore thumb, being the one dressed in rags, while everyone else was dressed in vivid, embroidered silks, and something even more strange, is that I had an eye patch.

How odd.

The doctors are trying to surgically remove the eye, as the cancer has gotten its way to late stage 3. It's too risky to keep the eye and try fix it. It's all for her good.

I didn't know anything; I was asleep.

Numb to all the pain,

And blind.

My eye had to be removed.

It was too severe.

I wake up, drowsy and unaware, I no longer have two eyes.

I question the odd feeling welling up inside me.

And then it hits me.

My eye.

It's gone.

At least I have another.

My good eye.

Alana Dias

I like that eye.
I could see with it.
Nothing was wrong with it.
But with that eye,
I could also see my hair.
Falling.
Dying.
And I could see my head.
Hairless.
Bald.
And in that eye,
A tear welled up.
The heat burned in my eye.
And it hurt,
It hurt to see what I had become.
Ugly.
And that eye,
It saw people.
These people looked at me strangely.
What's wrong with her?
She looks odd.
Eww! Baldy!
I guess the gift of sight isn't always great.
But my mother said...
She said the sight was a gift.
I guess not mother.
I wish it was, but only if I had two eyes.

THE OTHER EYE

With one eye, I guess sight was meaningless.

If you don't have everything, you have absolutely nothing.

RAINBOW FEATHERS

Vinudi Bogahapitiya

Up high in the lush green tree
Lays colourful birds, smiling with glee
With the colours of red, yellow, blue and green
These feathered friends are easy to be seen

Eating fruits and wild berries
Sucking on flowers as red as cherries
Collecting nectar from beautiful blossoms
Spreading their wings that looks awesome

Fluttering around in a bright green jungle
Sometimes resting, to have a good snuggle
As the orange, red and yellow light
Decorates the forest making it very bright

Soaring through the sky
To their friends they fly
Enjoying themselves and having fun
Going back home once there is no sun

Glittering stars spread across
Covering the night, they all sparkle like gloss
Then the pearl yellow ball appears
The moonlight streaming through all clear

Vinudi Bogahapitiya

Finding a place to sleep at night
Waiting for the day to turn bright
They all settle into their beds
As another day in the jungle ends

THE BEAUTIES IN THE SKY

Michaela Goh

The moon shines like a bright pearl
Exquisite and glistening
I try to grab hold of it, but it slips away
We play hide and seek together
The moon hides behind clouds
I hide underneath the bedsheets

The stars dance and rejoice
Twinkling, flashing, blinking
One here, another there
A thousand priceless diamonds in the sky
They smile down at us on Earth
And then continue with their dance

The gentle wind blows
While trees sway to its music
Animals are rocked to sleep
No longer chattering and playing
For they are too tired
Just like me...

And then the next thing I see
Is a brilliant sky of red, orange, yellow and pink.
Commanding it is a yellow ball,
A radiant, blazing sun.

Michaela Goh

For the pearls may be more exquisite than the moon
And the diamonds may twinkle more than the stars
Those cannot bring joy
The way the beauties in the sky can.

WHAT IS TODAY?

Finn Bright

As my feet touched the ground,
The sun opened my eyes,
I pulled at the ribbon,
And began my surprise.

I heard the birds chirping,
The trees were awake,
The daisies were swaying,
And ducks played on the lake.

My heart felt warm,
My mind was bright,
I sensed the best feelings,
An award was in sight.

As I peered in the box,
Something there would uplift,
Anyone who was down,
For today is a gift.

JUNE POTTER AND THE CAT CATASTROPHE

Zoe Holder

“Meow, meow!”

As June Potter walked down the street, she saw a little tabby. It trotted out of her best friend Lily’s driveway. It came right up to her and rubbed against her leg. June stroked the kitten attentively.

When June got home, she face-timed Lily and asked her about the kitten. Lily said that she got a new kitten named Gingerbell.

“Oh, I wish I had a kitten,” June said to Lily.

But later when she asked her mum, her mum said, “No!!”

June asked again and again until her mum said, “Ok, fine!!!!!!”

June and her mum sat down on the couch and looked at the pet rescue website. There were so many kittens but none of them seemed quite right. They searched and searched until one day they found the cutest kitten in the world. It was a tortoiseshell with soft brown eyes and a little, pink nose. Her name was Paddy.

June and her mum went to visit Paddy. As they pulled up at a small dusty cottage, June was filled with excitement. She ran up to the door and rang the doorbell. A lady with streaks of white in her hair answered the door. As June stepped into the house, it smelt dusty and old. The lady, whose name was Martha, showed June and her mum to a big room with cat bowls, cat

Zoe Holder

beds, scratching posts and stuff like that everywhere. Martha pointed to a particularly large cat bed. June walked over to it and saw Paddy curled up with her mum. June picked up Paddy and cuddled her. June and her mum stayed and played with Paddy for a bit longer but then they had to go home for dinner.

When they got in the car June said to her mum, "She's perfect!"

The next morning, when June came downstairs for breakfast, her mum was looking at her phone with a worried expression on her face. June asked her mum what was wrong. Her mum said Martha had texted her that Paddy was sick.

"Oh no," said June.

June walked to school with Lily, but nothing could cheer her up. They did all June's favourite subjects at school—art, maths and sport—but not even art put a smile on her face. When she got home, her mum said, "There's a surprise upstairs for you!"

June rushed upstairs and there was a big cardboard box with holes in it on her bed. She opened it and inside was Paddy. A big grin crept across June's face and she screamed with excitement! As she lifted the tiny kitten out of the box it squeaked with surprise.

JUNE POTTER AND THE CAT CATASTROPHE

“June, dinner time!” her mum called up the stairs.

June wrinkled up her freckled nose and said to the kitten, “I wish I could stay and play with you a bit longer.”

June carefully put the kitten on the floor then ran downstairs with her long brown hair streaming behind her. She was having chicken drumsticks for dinner. Mmm, June thought to herself. Just then a delicious smell of chicken wafted passed her nose. When she got downstairs her mum was just serving dinner. June ran to the table and jumped into her seat. As soon as June ‘s dinner was served she started wolfing it down.

“Finished!” June said as she raced up the stairs.

She ran into her bedroom ready to scoop up the tiny ball of fluff, but Paddy was gone. June looked for Paddy everywhere—under the bed, behind the bookshelf and in the box Paddy had arrived in—but she was nowhere to be seen. June’s tummy was churning with worry. Where could she be?

June ran downstairs to get her mum and, when she found her, they both went outside looking for Paddy. After a while it started to get dark and just when June was about to lose hope of finding Paddy, she heard a little mew. She looked under the car and there was Paddy curled up in a ball, shivering. She was all sooty. June gently pulled her out from under the car and gave a sigh of relief.

“Mum, I found her,” June said.

Zoe Holder

June took Paddy back upstairs and lay her down in her bed. She gave her a kiss and whispered, "I love you, you little rascal."

WHO'S THERE?

Dorri Arya Rayann

They joyfully celebrated the other team's defeat. Tommy cheered happily. They all bumped elbows with the other team and went to McDonald's to eat lunch. The coach grinned at them all and gave out medals for different categories. There were Most Improved medals, Most Goals medals, Best Player medals, and the list goes on and on. You know how the people who win get the medals? Well, because there were so many medals, everyone got at least one. The children were allowed to buy whatever they wanted to eat, so the coach said his prayers to God, for he did not want to go bankrupt.

Tommy ate as much as he could and gulped some water so that he wouldn't vomit. Apparently, he had eaten too much. One of his friends "accidentally" poured water on his hair. He quickly turned around. But he instantly regretted doing so the second he did. He then splashed water onto his eyes. For some reason, people were always scared of his eyes, because of how dead they looked. They were pitch black. But in at that moment, they glowed with happiness. He was the only nine-year-old in the under-eleven's team. So he was often the victim of their silly, albeit brutal, pranks.

His blonde-brown hair was drenched, and he was shivering like a madman. His parents couldn't tell if it was from the cold, or from unused adrenaline. As Tommy and his family drove back home, Tommy recounted everything that had happened in the match.

"And when they kicked the ball at our goal, I volleyed it into the other side and scored!" bragged Tommy.

Dorri Arya Rayann

His sister Elizabeth, who'd had enough of hearing her annoying brother's voice, smacked him with a pillow to shut him up. He dodged easily and smacked her back. Their mother sighed, and their stepdad carefully wiggled his eyebrows. Tommy giggled and leant back on his hard seat. He slowly drifted off to sleep.

When they arrived at their house, his sister poured water on his face to wake him up. Second time that had happened to him. He jolted awake and chased his sister to her room. She grinned and locked her door behind her. Night had fallen by the time they had finally arrived, so their mother bid the children goodnight, as did their father. Tommy snuggled underneath his covers and pretended to sleep. He knew sleep was far off. Suddenly, something shattered in the hallway. Tommy leapt up from bed. A shiver ran up his spine. When at last he had built up the confidence to go to the hallway, the staircase creaked. He knew that his parents shouldn't have bought a 2-storey house. He gulped and slowly crept up to his door and turned the knob.

The vase his grandfather had left before his passing had shattered into a million broken pieces. Beside it stood a shadow. Nothing like an animal or a human. Just the shadow, of something that wasn't there. If he concentrated hard enough, it seemed to be the vague outline of a child. And... were those pigtails?

A brilliant smile stretched along its face, with blinding white teeth. Tommy screamed and ran into his room to get his flashlight. His hand fumbled through his drawer. Eventually he found his torch, taking a moment to

WHO'S THERE?

appreciate the impressive amount of soccer stickers on it. He quickly flipped the switch, and he then wondered why he didn't just turn on the lights. He realized that would have been sure to alert his parent's though, and they would likely accuse him of breaking the vase. He then pondered why his parents didn't hear him scream. Shaking his head, he buried those thoughts to the back of his miniscule brain and quickly directed the beams at the walls. The shadow disappeared. Hell knows where it went to.

Tommy rubbed his eyes, yawning. He dismissed it all as a bad dream. Feeling pretty good about himself, he went into the hallway to find his mother crying next to the broken glass. Apparently, a little girl was caught breaking into homes. Tommy felt his heart stop beating. It was real.

A while later, he was sitting in his room playing videogames, when a shudder passed through his body. He was being watched. His chair turned seemingly by itself, and the shadow was sitting on his bed. There was oil on the floor, and the little girl had a lit match in her hand.

"Goodnight," she whispered quietly.

"News has come out that a house has burned to the ground. The 9-year-old boy was holding a little girl doll, with a white smile. It is the only thing that survives the wrath of the fire," announces the local news reporter.

A year later, a doll washes up to the shore of a beach. It has blonde-brown hair, and large coal black eyes. A little girl happily takes it and runs home.

The End

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