

SCRIPSI





SCRIPSI  
RUYTON  
LITERARY PUBLICATION

VOLUME 8: 2014



## CONTENTS



YEAR	AUTHOR	TITLE	PAGE
7	PHILIPPA DANKS	THEN SHE FELL...	6
7	MOLLY FUREY	SAYING GOODBYE	8
7	ROSIE GRAHAM	RASPBERRY SWIRLS	10
7	ELLORA KELLY	LIZARD ENCOUNTER	12
7	ANGELA LIN	BLUEBACK	13
7	ANGELYN NEOH	PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT	15
7	GRACE CHENXIN WANG	LAST SUMMER NIGHT	17
7	HILLARY WANG	OPENING A DOOR OF MEMORIES	18
7	LEYLA YUCEL	METAPHOR POEM	20
8	CIARA BRENNAN	TO BE LOVED	21
8	JESSICA CLARKE	EQUAL PAY	24
8	ELLA CROSBY	THE MONSTER	26
8	POLLYANNA DOWELL	THE COLOUR OF FIRE	29
8	JESSICA HEPWORTH	THE BALLAD OF BLACKBEARD	31
8	JESSICA HEPWORTH	LETTING GO	33
8	EMMA LEE	DARKEST AFRICA	36
8	EMMA LEE	FLIGHT 370	39
8	MAEVE LUU	MY GRANDMA	40
8	FLORRIE MCKAY	OH, ORDER IS A LOVELY THING	42
8	ROSIE ROBERTS	RECALLED	44
8	CLAUDIA SCHONFELDT	BROTHERS	47
8	CLAUDIA SCHONFELDT	HELL'S FIRE	48
8	CLAUDIA SCHWARZ	DYING EMBERS	49
8	SINDHU VELAGA	GRAN'S RED DIARY	52
9	NATASHA BORASH	TRUE FRIENDS	54
9	SARAH CHEANG	INTO THE DARKNESS	55
9	CALIDA EVANS	BUT HOME IS NO MORE	57
9	SOPHIE HE	THE HOME OF THE HOMELESS	60
9	CARISSA LAU	CEMETERY	62
9	RACHELLE PAPANTUONO	A SEASONAL SCHOOL	63
9	CHARLOTTE RODWAY	THE ST. REGIS	65
9	MEREDITH RULE	ONE FLOOR BELOW	67
9	MILLICENT TRIGAR	HUMAN RIGHTS	70
9	ANGELA YAN	CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT	72

## CONTENTS



YEAR	AUTHOR	TITLE	PAGE
10	RACHEL BAILLIE	REDHEADS ANONYMOUS ACTIVIST FIGHTERS (RAAF)	74
10	SALLY CHAO	STATUE OF RIBBERTY	78
10	IMOGEN FEDER	SEARCHING FOR THE STARS	82
10	ANNIE GLEISNER	MOTEL HELL	85
10	LOUISE MONSELL-BUTLER	AUDACIOUS	89
10	MADELINE NOLAN	PROCRASTINATION STATION AKA THE INTERNET	91
10	CLAIRE SMART	ASYLUM SEEKERS	93
10	HANNAH WINSPEAR-SCHILLINGS	DUSK FALLS	95
10	ANITA YE	LET'S PLAY FOUR SQUARE!	99
11	LAURA ALDOUS	ALIYAH REMEMBERED	101
11	MARINA ALTSON	GHOSTS OF THE PAST	103
11	MARINA ALTSON	IT'S TIME TO KILL CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	106
11	SARAH BILLINGS	THE QUEST FOR FREEDOM	109
11	NICOLA BONIN	THE DOME	113
11	GEORGIA EVANS	TWIN TOWERS	114
11	NICOLE MCAULIFFE	TURBULENCE	116
11	NIAMH MCCARTHY	THE RACE	119
11	CHARLOTTE WIRTZ	UN MAJEUR	122
11	GRACE YUAN	NEGATIVE	124
12	CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG	SACRIFICE	127
12	ISABELLA BEISCHER	REFUGE	130
12	JOANNA COOKSON	LOVE AND MEMORY	134
12	MI-TU KIEU	THE LAMBS OF WAR	138
12	GILLIAN LIM	GLORIFICATION OF CRIME	141
12	GILLIAN LIM	THE FIGHT FOR POWER	143
12	ANNABEL LOANE	MY STORY, HIS STORY	146
12	CARLA MILEO	IL SILENZIO E IL SENTIMENTO, L'EMOZIONE E LA PAURA	149
12	PEARL PAGUIO	A PROBLEM WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO WATCH ANY LONGER	153
12	LAUREN SIBREE	CUTS TO FOREIGN AID? WHAT'S GOING ON, AUSTRALIA?	155
12	DYAN TAYLOR	SEIG HEIL 2	158
12	SARAH WATLING	SLACKTIVISM	162

## EDITORIAL

MS DANIELLE COOPER  
ACTING DEAN OF ENGLISH

Once again, this year's *Scriptsi* showcases the best of Ruyton's talented writers. The English Department takes immense pride in encouraging students to write creatively and to share their ideas and diverse styles. This year's exceptional stories reveal the willingness of students to take risks with language and techniques, and the ability to embrace the new. Authors such as Dickens, Shakespeare and Harper Lee critique, and expose, the values of the world in which they live. Much of the student writing this year has similarly reflected the issues facing our world, and this has been handled with maturity and courage.

Ruyton's long-established tradition of the Isobelle Carmody Award continues to inspire student writing. This year's topic *The Building* resulted in a vast array of approaches, topics and themes. We were fortunate to have published author, Ms Sue Lawson, judge the collection. Sue's advice to our budding authors was to write stories which were compelling and had the capacity to move readers. She noted that the best stories had attention grabbing starts that set the mood for the story and introduced characters and setting quickly. Short stories do not allow for elaborate set ups so an engaging beginning is critical. Strong writing also contains fresh imagery, as these examples from students' stories reveal: 'waves reached up towards her like monsters', 'the sky gleamed like a pearl' and 'a forest of trees with dilapidated bricks'. Dialogue is also necessary as it brings stories and characters to life. Sue also advised students to edit carefully as this is what makes a good story become great. If students accept that as much time needs to be given to editing as writing, their writing will be enhanced. This goes beyond the technical aspects of writing but also to considering whether descriptions could be stronger or imagery more precise.

The collection of writing in this eighth edition of *Scriptsi* includes students' writing from all levels in the Senior School – fictional narratives, poetry, speeches and personal memoirs. Some are recipients of awards such as the Boroondara Literary Awards, Isobelle Carmody Awards and Orator of the Year Awards; while others are representative of the fine quality of writing in our talented students.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the enthusiasm and encouragement of the English teachers who have been instrumental in mentoring the creativity in their students: Ms Kiri Adams, Mrs Diane Berold, Mr Hugh Gundlach, Miss Jessica Kitt, Ms Alison Paisley, Ms Alison Shackell, Mr Paul Upperton and Mr Walter Zavattiero. Thank you to Ms Tonya Peters, Director of Development, for her involvement and expertise in helping us publish this edition of Scripsi.



#### EDITORIAL



THEN SHE FELL...

PHILIPPA DANKS  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
RUNNER-UP

Winter, 1999

'Hubert, I'm getting sick of this shower plug getting blocked! And this toilet! I hate this house!' shouted Fanny from the bathroom that adjoined the bedroom where Hubert, her beloved husband was getting dressed for work. Fanny walked into the bedroom, lay down on the bed and said in a calmer manner, 'Hubert, are you sure you don't want to move, to an apartment or something closer to your work? I mean, we could spend more time together, or sleep in longer?'

Fanny finally persuaded Hubert to move to an apartment and was busy, searching through magazines and newspapers, websites and real estate agencies, trying to find somewhere suitable. Late at night, after hours and hours of tiresome work, she came across one advertisement with a number highlighted in a massive font. These numbers were the price of the apartment and were the thing that convinced Fanny completely. The pictures shown were of an old, rundown room with cupboards and carpet both faded in colour. But this did not stop her. There was also one very strange, suspicious shadow lurking in the corner of the room. It was quite small and round in shape with a spiky object poking out of its main body. But of course, Fanny's eyesight was not sharp enough to recognise this doubtful figure. Hopefully he'll agree, thought Fanny.

That Thursday morning, as the sun began to rise, Fanny and Hubert made their way to the red brick apartment. Windows and balconies were lined up perfectly above a tall metal door. In front of that door stood a young lady, looking prim and proper with her hair done in a tight bow and a neat business suit fixed to her fit, athletic body.

Tracy Tullun, their real estate agent, toured the two around the whole building until they finally reached a door with number 13 written on it. Inside, spiders and cobwebs hogged the corners of the rooms. Paint was peeling off the walls and dust was everywhere! It was clear that there was some talking to be done in order for both Fanny and Hubert to be convinced.

'I am sorry, this apartment does need a little clean up. Would you like me to organise a cleaner? It would look magnificent with some nice furniture and a new paint job. I can also get you a painter.' Tracy was very keen to sell this apartment and was trying her best, giving it all she'd got.

After many minutes of convincing and bargaining, Fanny and her





husband had agreed to buy this apartment on some conditions, if a cleaner and a painter came to clean the whole place up, all for free. Tracy wasn't very keen on the word 'free' but decided that it was all worth it.

Four weeks had passed and everything was now in place. Fanny and Hubert had sold their old apartment, the painter and cleaner had come and furniture was now moved in, although boxes of crockery and stuff still lay untouched everywhere.

That night, as Fanny and Hubert sat at the dinner table, surrounded by brown cardboard boxes, Hubert announced that his work wanted him to go to Narrachoot for a whole week.

'Really? Do you have to?' Fanny asked worriedly.

'I think so. But it's only one week, you can deal with that, can't you?' said Hubert, with a very relaxed tone.

'When are you leaving?'

'This Sunday.'

Sunday came around quickly and Fanny sent Hubert off in a shiny black taxi, through the busy streets of London, all the way to the airport.

That night, after Fanny had drifted off into a pretty dream, she was suddenly awoken after feeling a strong tug of her hair. She reached for the lamp and snapped the switch. She felt her hair and looked all around her bedroom, making sure it wasn't real. Oh, it's just my dream, she thought and dozed back into a deep sleep.

At 5am that morning, Fanny was woken again, this time from a blistering, cold draft sweeping through her bedroom, causing her to shiver. The window was open and the curtains were blowing in the howling breeze. Fanny was now quite suspicious, but closed the window and eventually fell back to sleep, once again.

The next night, after a long day at work and a dinner out with a friend, Fanny went to sleep and woke up once again, this time to the howl of something creepy and mysterious. '*Fanny, Fanny, you are next*', it roared.

Fanny was now extremely scared and nervous. She looked around and saw that the window was open again! Fanny shoved the covers down to the end of her bed and stood on her pillow which was now wet and cold. She reached out the window to pull it back in and felt something push her.

Then she fell...



SAYING GOODBYE

MOLLY FUREY  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
WINNER

The fireplace lay cold and empty now, her tired eyes rested on the hearth where she had knelt so many times in front of an open fire. Her fragile body could no longer carry the earthy smelling wood or bend to tend the glowing flames. She remembered sitting by this fire, with a brand new baby resting in her arms rocking back and forth, back and forth gen-tly in the peaceful warmth. She didn't want to leave this house where so many memories had been made. 'Old age is cruel, sad and lonely,' Clara thought to herself. Its most recent turnover was her realisation, with the gentle encouragement of her daughter Rosie, that she could no longer live alone. Clara pulled back the lace curtains, Rosie would be here soon to take her away from this place. She didn't want to leave, she wanted to live here until the day she died, she wanted to have every one of her memories linked back to this house, she wanted to stay.

7

She stood up and walked down the small corridor that led to her bedroom. She stood there in silence staring at the empty walls where photos had once hung. She remembered the Sunday mornings when a wide-awake Rosie would come bounding into Clara and her husband, Fred's, bedroom and snuggle up in-between them. She could still hear Rosie's giggles as Fred playfully tossed the tiny angel into the air. Now the giggles seemed to echo through the cold, lonely house. She stood there for a while and then turned and shuffled into the kitchen and lowered herself slowly into a creaking wooden chair. She loved the fact that the chairs were all different. She ran her hand over the worn surface of the old timber table. She remembered the laughter, the tears, the joy and the heartache that had been shared around this table. She looked to the end of the table, the place where Fred had sat at every meal. How she missed him. The five years had not eased the pain. She missed him every single day. The smell of warm bread as it was lifted from the stove wafted through her memory.

Clara stood up and walked towards the back door. She pushed open the rickety screen door that led to the small back garden where she and Fred had spent hours every week-end gardening and planting things in their veggie garden. Fred was extremely proud of his veggie garden, he never let a carrot be planted out of line or a tomato plant grow too high, everything was perfect. But these days, the veggie patch was old and over-grown. Clara couldn't bend over anymore to clean it up. She felt that she had let Fred down, it just

wasn't right seeing the veggie garden so messy. She turned around and looked up at the tree that Rosie used to spend hours climbing every day. She remembered the time that Rosie got stuck on a branch and Fred had to climb up and carry her down. She couldn't bear to think that soon someone else would be living in this house and climbing Rosie's tree. She turned around again and looked at the tiny shed in the corner of the garden where Fred kept all of his tools and Rosie kept all of her toys. Clara could feel her eyes welling up with tears but she didn't want to cry.

She walked back inside and saw Rosie standing inside what used to be her bedroom. Even the old faded pink carpet had a memory to go with it. 'It's time,' said Rosie. Clara nodded. She walked down the hallway for the last time ever. Hand-in-hand with Rosie, they walked out of the door and shut it for one last time. She locked the door and walked down the path and stood there for a while gazing up at the house. She could feel tears trickling down her face. 'Goodbye,' she whispered.



RASPBERRY  
SWIRLS

ROSIE GRAHAM

*Ding dong ding dong.* It was early in the morning, and Scarlett leapt out of bed and cushioned her-self onto her usual seat underneath the window sill. Lifting her head slightly, she peeked out the window to watch drops of rain trickle down the window.

*Ding dong ding dong.* The piercing ding and dongs still rang in her ear. 'Axel! Would you please stop it?' Her brother poked his head into the door frame of Scarlett's bedroom and giggled. Axel held a large toy bell and had a grin smeared on his face from one ear to the other. 'But Scaaaaaarlett...'

His head bobbed to one side and widened his bright blue eyes. Out he stuck his bottom lip, and whimpered, 'Scaaarlett.' Scarlett knew what he was going on about, she promised him a trip to the lolly shop.

'You promised!!' He wailed. Scarlett turned her head towards the dull window as her eyes followed a raindrop down to the bottom, and slowly turned back to her complaining brother. 'Hmm...' she said, 'only if you stop clanking that old bell right this instant!' Axel sat up straight and gradually put down his old toy. 'Good,' she glanced at her watch. 'Get ready to leave in ten minutes.' Axel gave her a toothy smirk and energetically jumped up and ran into the room next door.

Scarlett yawned, and lifted herself up from her seat. It took five footsteps for her to reach a pile of clothes on the end of her bed. Picking up an old shirt, she put it over the front of her pyjamas and looked in the mirror. Scarlett looked very tired, you could see the way the bags underneath her emerald eyes drooped. It appeared like her hair was teased and hadn't been brushed for at least three days; but that didn't worry her as she flicked it up in a quick ponytail and moved on to what to wear. Scarlett noticed a brown splotch on the front of her shirt. Thinking about the soup she had the night before, Scarlett muttered,

*'Dammit.'*

She picked up a pair of old, faded blue jeans and tried them on. She looked at every angle in the mirror, but obviously didn't like the look of them, as she ripped them off of her legs. It was hard to please a girl like Scarlett. She tried on another pair of plain black leggings. 'They'll have to do..' She muttered. Slipping on a coat to cover her dirty shirt, she yelled her brother's name, and they were off.

The two companions took the normal route, down the street, turn left to pass the bakery, and the sweetest tasting lollies would be



in the shop on the left.

'Scarlett, please buy me the new raspberry swirls, you know how much I've been wanting them!!' Axel pulled out his bottom lip again and made his puppy dog eyes. Scarlett giggled.

'Of course Axel. I have five dollars anyway.' Jumping up and down, he clapped his hands silently and smiled with glee.

A familiar chime hummed in the air, as Meredith, the shop keeper, whizzed the door open. A small mountain of grey hair sat on the top of her head in a tight bun.

'Good morning children? How are you this fine mooorning?' Meredith sings, as her mouth moves in an almost creepy smile. It looked like her blue eyes almost stared into your soul.

'Good,' Axel replied, 'did you get any raspberry swirls in?' You could tell how eager he was when he asked in this way.

'Oh but of course! We have at least ten jars in the store now...' Meredith turned her head suddenly to peek in the window. She placed her flat hand on top of her eyebrows so she could see through. 'Yep. Around ten I would say.' Meredith turned into the doorway and yelled, 'Shut the door behind you! It's chilly out there.' Following close behind Meredith, Scarlett and Axel moved into the sweetly scented room. Scarlett noticed a blackboard on the back wall with the number 'five' on it. 'Weird,' she whispered to herself. Picking up a jar of the raspberry swirls, Meredith grinned and said, 'You can try a sample now if you would like.' Axel screeched. He opened the stiff jar and plucked one out. Slowly, he shut his eyes and placed the sugar coated candy on his tongue and closed his mouth. But something peculiar happened at that moment. Axel just stood there expressionless, but then, he started to sway.

'What's he doing?!' Scarlett's eyes widened as she started to worry.

Meredith watched and smiled. 'Oh, he's fine. I'm sure of it.'

Scarlett snatched the jar of raspberry lollies and read out the label.

'Poison!' She yelled, 'Poison!!!!' She yanked her head in Axel's direction, and in horror, she watched him drop to the floor. She had witnessed the death of her own seven year old brother.

'My work here is done,' smirked Meredith, as she turned and erased the 'five' off of the blackboard.

She wrote something else, but Scarlett couldn't see properly as she had been crying. When her blurred vision sharpened, she read a 'six' on the blackboard and heard Meredith ask:

'Would you like to try one too Scarlett?'



7

LIZARD  
ENCOUNTER

ELLORA KELLY

The book I am reading is a camouflaged, sleeping lizard.

It lies there in wait, its cover half lifted, till night.

As you open it up, you look deep down into its gizzard,

It's happy! Its skin, crinkly pages, basking in the warmth.

We cuddle under blankets, hiding secrets till the dawn.



7

BLUEBACK

ANGELA LIN

In my deep, dark murky dreams,  
Where everything is as it seems,  
The old fish looms out of the blur,  
A turning moon, Blueback's eyes were,  
Swimming here, swimming there,  
Remembering things without a care,  
Some things I want, some unexpected,  
But in my dreams I fully rested.

Down a crevice, once we trekked,  
Cold, pale blue water, yes I checked,  
Old Blueback let me grab his fins,  
And to the bottom, walls to my skin,  
I saw a horrifying sight,  
Of sailors dead, floating through the night,  
Their glass eyes open, I nearly screamed,  
But it's alright, it's just a dream.

Through more drowned people, I was led,  
Blueback leading up ahead,  
Saw little girls with drifting hair,  
And more dead sailors, out of air,  
With puffy hands, they're dead and cold,  
Their big brass buttons, gleaming gold.  
And at the end, Mad Macka lay,  
Beside my father, clear as day.

Blueback hovered, right above,  
The ragged body of the father I love,  
A gaping hole, just at his side,  
The indication of how he'd died,  
His skin was grey, his eyelids pearly,  
At thirty-two, he had died early,  
Looking peaceful, fast asleep,  
Outstretched a hand to touch his cheek.

7



BLUEBACK

Then Blueback pulled me back, away,  
From Father, how I wished to stay,  
But Blueback old with fins so strong,  
He drew me up and how I long,  
To bring my father back with me,  
To see my mother, again happy,  
But past the plankton, I was taken,  
And in my bed, I awaken.

Tears and dark, is all I see,  
My dorm is quiet as can be,  
My friends asleep and sometimes snoring,  
While I, awake, not even yawning,  
Crying softly for my father,  
Writing letters to my mother,  
I knew no one else would know,  
The pain of missing someone so.



7

Helloooo  
Hallooooooooooooo  
Hello.

I know that was weird, or even creepy, but I was just practising my speech.

So how was that? Was that effective? Was that perfect? Or should there be more...

As some of you may have guessed, my topic is 'PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT'.

When I first heard this proverb, I thought, 'Well, nobody's perfect, so why practice?'

Yes!

BUT WAIT! Before we start celebrating, we all know that our beloved English teacher is going to come in and say, 'Girls, girls! How disappointing. You should all know that the word 'perfect' can mean different things to different people.'

For example, in the recent Commonwealth Games, perfection for some will come in the form of the ultimate gold, or, breaking a record; but for others, it may be achieving their personal best. As all of you would, no doubt, have experienced or observed, practice can sometimes be hard, frustrating, lonely, boring, or even futile. For the time we have, I'd like to share with you two of my favourite stories about practice.

My Grandmother tells me of this true story about a boy and his toilet turkey. A young boy who was toilet training, had difficulty sitting still in the bathroom, so, to keep him occupied, his mother gave him a real life turkey, to put on his lap...

And you can guess what happened when he grew up, and even more interesting, what happened when his turkey died. I guess he didn't have much of a Thanksgiving! So the moral of this story is, be careful what you incorporate into your practice, as this may lead to bad habits.

Another good one is about a man who tried to impress his kids by doing Yoga himself, and ended up having back surgery. The funny thing is, that this was how he walked before the incident *\*Before walk: Bow legged, tip toed... and this is how he walked afterwards. \*After walk: stiff back and neck, arms stiff by side, chin up (neck brace).*

I guess that is why it's important to practice with proper guidance; otherwise it could have severe consequences.

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

ANGELYN NEOH  
ORATOR OF THE YEAR  
WINNER



PRACTICE MAKES  
PERFECT

Seriously though, what's even more scary is how fast technology is advancing and impacting the way we practice. In the future, and maybe not too distant world, just like Neo in the Matrix movies showing on TV, we could simply plug a connection directly into our brain and fly a helicopter, or be a black belt karate expert instantly, without ever having to practice or learn.

But until then, I will continue to watch my baby sister Ariane, day by day, piece by piece, and part by part, patiently learning to put together her favourite Noddy Toytown puzzle, until it's complete.

In conclusion, I think we can all agree that the proverb 'Practice makes Perfect' really means that good practice, with the right equipment, technique, method, teachers, environment and attitude truly makes perfect.



7

The trees were shedding their beautiful cloaks,  
And the frigid frost arrived as winter awoke.  
The leaves as red as a fox's hide,  
A swirling and eddying, relentless tide.  
Graceful ballerinas pivoting in mid-air,  
And a handful of soldiers perfectly aware.  
The waning foliage,  
A delicate collage.  
Strewn across the bleak, sodden landscape,  
Crushed and obliterated like an expired mandate.  
The crisp winds blew by in a breeze,  
The impending blight quite at ease.  
The taste of the rain's salute,  
Prominent as the fog's pursuit.  
The cloudbursts and shadows reunite,  
Washing away the last summer night.



LAST SUMMER  
NIGHT

GRACE CHENXIN WANG



OPENING A DOOR  
OF MEMORIES

HILLARY WANG

ISOBELLE CARMODY

CREATIVE WRITING AWARD

HIGHLY COMMENDED

I look at my calendar and notice the date, it's already been five years. I quickly change and rush out of the door. I don't know why, but it feels like I need to visit that place.

I ride my bike around a few danger signs as I finally arrive in front of an abandoned hotel. Inside, the hotel walls are flaking as easily as the skin of a pastry. I smile at the thought of how similar it looks since the last time I came. A wave of nostalgia washes over me as I recognise the familiar cream entrance. There are still crayon marks graffitied on the walls.

*Two young children were playing at the front desk of a recently abandoned hotel. A young boy excitedly observed their surroundings. 'This is gonna be our secret hideout!' He declared. The young girl was going to veto the idea, but she gave up when she saw the boy's anticipation. 'Boys these days', she thought.*

I pull out a drawer and I see a little wooden sign. There are two messy stick figures painted in a colourful hue with a large title stating 'Our Secret Hideout'. I place the sign at the front desk where it used to stand whenever we came to play. I find the open/closed sign, still flipped on the closed side.

*The boy and girl continued developing the hideout bit by bit. It was a place they visited and spent time at everyday. Their parents would be curious about missing food here and there, they would also get annoyed whenever the children returned home late. But both of them kept silent about the hideout. Keeping the secret was part of the fun.*

I run my finger across the small coffee table, now covered in a thick layer of dust. I can still remember all the things we used to talk about and all the snacks we ate at this table. My finger reaches a bump on the surface of the table while travelling through the layers of dust. I uncover the hidden object and find a small photo frame. In the photo, there is a boy sliding down the swirly banister of a staircase.

*After recently watching a cartoon, the boy was keen to try sliding down the banister. The girl protested saying it was too dangerous. The boy confidently walked up the staircase and told her not to worry.*

I walk towards the staircase, now sealed with warning tapes. The tape is wearing away and you can barely see the writing. One end of the tape is tied on one side of the banister, the other end is tied to a broken stub with small chips of wood surrounding it on the floor.

*A man was walking along the more quiet areas, when he heard a young girl screaming for help. After finding the young girl in an abandoned hotel, he called*



*the hospital and helped the girl rush an injured, unconscious young boy to the hospital. As the boy got admitted, the girl couldn't do anything but stare anxiously at the hospital door.*

I rip the tape off and pick at the rough end of the wooden stub. This is the very place he fell. I break the whole stub off the banister at the memory of what happened afterwards.

*After a few days, the boy was allowed visitors in the hospital. The girl was the first one to rush into his ward. But the response was one she was not expecting at all.*

*'Who are you?'*

*The girl was frozen at this answer. A nurse came in and smiled apologetically at the girl. 'Due to severe head injuries, he appears to have amnesia'.*

*'Amnesia?'*

*'It's when you lose your memory,' the nurse confirmed. The young girl widened her eyes and looked frantically at the nurse. 'He does not remember anyone, including his family, friends, and you.' At the next meeting, the boy didn't come, not that she had been expecting him to come. After all, he was leaving the town because of what happened.*

I turn around and decide to leave, this place is getting a little overwhelming. I accidentally bump into a small table and a crinkled white note flies off. It has been gathering a bit of dust. The date is today's date exactly five years ago.

I open the note and read from it:

*Hello friend,*

*By the time you read this I am probably already gone. I wish I had more time to remember everyone around me. I'll probably learn something from the letters you told me to collect. Chances are, you might not ever see this note. But it's ok to hope, isn't it?*

*P.S I will visit this place annually on this day, look forward to seeing you again.*

I hear the sound of clashing metal outside and also someone yelling as they most likely crashed into a certain someone's bike. I walk outside and see a boy who is currently attempting to get up from underneath his bicycle. 'Keep doing that and you'll go to hospital again.' The boy notices me and mutters under his breath, 'As bossy as ever I see'.

Even so, but the both of us can't stop grinning.

I flip the *open/closed sign* to the *Open* sign as we walk in.

'Welcome back'.



METAPHOR POEM

LEYLA YUCEL

Wood benches are hard like the ragged bark of the tree,  
The gentle wind blows past and through me,  
Dry as a desert is the soil lining the ground,  
It is silent save for the distant muttering sounds,  
The sun's rays beating down at me with angry golden fingers,  
The tree's branches probe out like a virus that lingers,  
The air is fresh and the flowers smell sweet,  
The bees are people, places to go and things to complete,  
Sitting, watching the shadows play with the light,  
The suddenly loud construction noises cause such a fright,  
People working, steady and sure,  
The fruit falls like bombs from in a war,  
Landing on the corpses of once vibrant leaves,  
Together on the floor an Autumn pattern they weave,  
With bright shades of orange and green,  
Mixed with brown and purple the colours can be seen,  
The light and the dark, the bright and the dull,  
Within this place any bad feelings are null,  
Seeming to guard you with the best of its ability,  
Spreading the feeling of tranquility,



7



I remember the day I first heard the name Charity Hollows. *It was strange*, I thought, *how the two parts of her name are almost in conflict*; ‘Charity’ conjuring up feelings of warmth and kindness, whereas the name ‘Hollows’ felt eerily empty.

It was on a rather uneventful day, when I was summoned by my parents to our drawing room, at the front of the house. There, among the fine assortment of cushiony furniture and various antiques, I saw a small, young girl. I can still see her large eyes peering at me now. A swirl of hair nestled on her shoulder, like the sky at midnight, with the stars still in it. All her features shared this night-like resemblance – dark and sparkly. Only her skin was pale, so very pale – though it was hard to get skin much darker than sand where we lived.

She looked up as I entered the room, as did both my parents, my mother with her white hands on the girl’s shoulders. My father approached me, his blue eyes looking into mine. He bent down, to even himself with my 12-year-old height, and whispered in my ear.

‘This is the girl we were telling you about,’ he murmured, and I could sense the corners of his mouth unravelling themselves into the smile I knew so well. ‘Well, now, stop looking like a codfish with your eyes all open, and go and introduce yourself.’

I swallowed a lump in my throat and nodded, taking several small steps forward.

‘Hello... so you must be Charity, then?’ I muttered, trying to sound friendly.

‘Hollows,’ the girl replied promptly.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘My name,’ and here she took a rather dramatic pause, ‘is Charity Hollows.’

‘Huh.’ I was dumbfounded. ‘And my name is Aubrey. Aubrey Moore.’



What my father had said before was true, about having told me about Charity prior to our first meeting. *Both* of my parents had told me about her, piecing together her backstory through their letter correspondence with her parents. They told me that they’d been close with the Hollows in the past, when they’d visited England. They hadn’t been in contact for a long time, but with the war raging on, Charity’s parents said they felt it their duty to support their country.



My parents agreed to keep Charity safe in that time.

The night before we were expecting Charity, my mother pulled me aside.

'Aubrey, I want to talk to you a bit more about that Hollows girl.' At this point, Mother's face had contorted itself into a nervous twist, which surprised me (she was never nervous). 'Well, she's ten years old. That's quite a bit younger than you.'

'Okay,' I said.

'And she's well... special.'

'I'm special!'

'Well, by her type of special, I mean... *strange*. A bit eccentric. Just be patient with her, please.'

And in an effort to please my beautiful mother, I said yes, of course I would. I used to always wish I had Mother's blonde curls instead of my wooden twigs, and her hazel eyes instead of my puddles. I suppose I wasn't terribly ugly. I just wasn't terribly pretty, either.



After breakfast, on my first morning with Charity Hollows, I decided to give her a formal tour of the house. She'd really only seen the dining hall, the drawing room and her bedroom since yesterday evening, and naturally, I wanted to show her all the other, better, rooms.

When we arrived at the library, instead of admiring the shelves of books, she flocked to the window.

'Oh, what a beautiful place! I've always loved the countryside,' she cried.

'Well, I suppose it's alright,' I replied, thinking not much of it, seeing as it was what I'd grown up with all my life.

'Say, Aubrey, what's that old-looking place down there?' She said, pointing to some old castle ruins.

'Well, Daddy says that some hundreds of years ago, our family used to live in a castle. Which wasn't that uncommon, because there used to be loads of castles. See how big it is? It became too big to look after properly, which was why we built this house. But look at all the books, Charity. Don't you want to read?'

'I never liked reading,' she said, 'I was never good at it.'

Frankly, this surprised me. But, as the day passed on, that little dark creature continued to surprise me. She ate lots, couldn't

concentrate on toys. She really only liked playing outside. Charity Hollows was high maintenance, I'll tell you.

TO BE LOVED



The next morning, she begged to see the castle ruins.

'You know, Aubrey,' she said as we walked, 'I can hear these voices sometimes. I think they're fairy spirits, talking to me.'

I thought she was crazy, but each day we'd visit the ruins, and she'd tell me she could hear these voices. It wasn't until she started telling me about the people that had once lived in the castle, when I began to... *believe* her.

When we were there one day, I found myself thinking about Charity's parents and how they shipped her off, away from the war. How alone she must have felt. And perhaps I began to see why she liked that old, abandoned castle so much.

'Hey Charity,' I said, 'I think I can hear those voices too.'



## EQUAL PAY

JESSICA CLARKE  
ORATOR OF THE YEAR  
WINNER

Picture this:

You have recently graduated from University, and you're going to your very first serious, fulltime job interview. You're nervous when you arrive for your interview and even more nervous when you see a boy you know going for the same job. After the interview is finished, and all the nerves have evaporated, you get the job. So does the boy you know because they are hiring ten graduates. You're thrilled and start working straight away. A couple of months later, you see a snapchat of the boy's first pay check. He is being paid 18% more than you for exactly the same job. How can that be?

Now picture this:

It is the 1990s and your Mum has been doing very well at work. People don't talk about what they get paid so she doesn't realise that she is paid less than her male workmates who do the same job.

There is almost 30 years between these two scenarios, yet the only thing that has changed is that women have now become more aware of the substantial gap in pay. We are in 2014 now, the gender pay gap should be a long gone problem but there is still a gender pay gap present. In one lifetime that can mean the difference of one million dollars between a man and a woman. This matters to me.

This matters to society. Imagine what life could be like when everyone is paid purely based on their job, and gender has nothing to do with it. A consequence of many women leaving the work force is that the money made by the country is not as much and the country is no longer as rich as it would have been had the women stayed working. Society can be immensely affected by this gender pay gap. The more people working, the better off the country is. Hence, we need women to be encouraged and appreciated in the work force, which can only be done with equal pay.

This matters to women across the globe. The gender pay gap is prevalent in 194 countries, so it is very widespread. Studies showed that replacing a man's name with a woman's name on a resume reduces the salary offered. When I found this information out, I was shocked, appalled, speechless. Something so little as changing the name could affect the money given? If women are paid based on the work produced by them, not based on their gender, then it would give women as a whole, more motivation and confidence towards working.



This matters to us. Studies show that it could possibly take another 50 years for equal pay to come about, but with the persistence of women, and society in general, I believe we can make the time it takes to close the gap shorter. The majority of people sitting here in this room will be at some stage in our lives, part of the 58.6% of women in the world, 16 years and over, who are looking for a job, or already working. And all of us will feel the impact of the gender pay gap, whether it be long, or short term, if it is not closed. We will be affected by the gender pay gap, so it is time to pitch in and help equivalent pay to become worldwide. Individual women can assist closing the gap by negotiating like a man. This means believing in themselves, and not being embarrassed to have the conversation. Are we seriously going to let the boys we grew up with, be paid more than us? I DON'T THINK SO!!!

Equal and fair pay matters to me. A day without sunshine is night. And a world without equality is just not right.



## THE MONSTER

ELLA CROSBY

I have not visited this house, my childhood home, in manws. This place is no longer my home; the events that occurred here prevent that, but I cannot bring myself to leave without saying good-bye.

The scarred wooden door opens reluctantly, creaking, as if in pain. I understand its reluctance to let anyone in; it, like me, may have just forgotten how.



I drift through the corridors, wandering past the remnants of my life before: past the remnants of her.

I ascend the stairs slowly, trailing my fingers over the bannister we used to spend hours sliding down, now dusty and rotting away. The wind howls through broken windows, and the billowing drapes look like lonely ghosts struggling to escape the confines of the house.

Lying abandoned on the ground is the one-eyed doll that we fought over constantly, now staring vacantly at the ceiling. I look away quickly, the glassy eye conjuring up memories of that night.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I continue down the hallway, and come to a sudden halt.

At the end of the corridor is an old photograph of a family which, to all outward appearances, seems perfectly happy. I trace the brittle grins with a fingernail. That seemingly untroubled family doesn't exist anymore, and I'm not sure it ever really did. My eyes linger on the face of the little blonde girl with pigtails and stars in her eyes. I watched the life fade from those eyes.

I am responsible. I have always known, deep down, that it was my fault; I was weak, and it was my cowardice that killed her. I let that monster murder my only sister, and for that I will never forgive myself.

I sink to the floor with my head in my hands, the pain in my heart unbearable. It feels like I'm being torn apart from the inside. A tear slipping down my cheek surprises me; it has been a long time since I allowed myself that vulnerability. I catch it on my finger, and watch as it leaves a shimmering trail down my hand, before falling down to land on a faded page of sheet music.

I stare at it; a manifestation of my sorrow sinking into a relic of one of my only happy memories. Music was my only escape from the monster that lived in our house, and he managed to destroy even that. Dragging myself out of the memories, I follow the trail of sheet music towards a room full of secrets and despair.



This place used to be my safe haven, the only place I could be myself. It was the only room in the house that ever held laughter; that ever held love. I never dreamed that the monster would invade our only sanctuary.



*I made the monster angry: I started crying. The monster doesn't like tears. He says that tears are a sign of weakness, and that the weak deserve to die.*

*Letty snatches my hand as we run away as fast as we can. I try to keep up with her bouncing blonde pigtails we as run through the seemingly endless corridors until we reach the music room. She turns around and gives me a shaky smile.*

*'It's going to be alright. I won't let him hurt you, I promise.'*

*She hides me under the piano, and together we wait.*



I don't hear him enter, but I can smell him; stale beer and sickly cologne.

'Tell me where she is or I'll kill you instead.'

There's a moment of silence before the sound of a slap fills the quiet room. I press my fist into my mouth to stop my scream from escaping, and squeeze my eyes shut.

'Elodie, I know you can hear me. I just want you to know that this is your fault, sweetheart. All your fault.'

He laughs, and I hear my sister take a deep breath, before the sound of breaking glass shatters the quiet. There's a barely audible gasp, and then a heavy thud.

I open my eyes, and she's staring right at me. I hear the monster leaving the room, but he doesn't matter anymore. What matters is the bottle buried in Letty's chest, and the fact that she isn't looking at me, but staring right through me.

And all I can do is stare right back into her empty gaze.



With difficulty, I shake the memories from my mind, and lift one foot across the threshold, towards the instrument that saved my life.

I approach the tortured piano warily, like it's a wounded animal. It sits alone in the desolate room, a beautiful, damaged thing amongst crumbling walls and splintered furniture. Trailing my fingers across the once glossy surface, I slowly lift the lid and rest my fingers on the keys.

I take a deep breath, and begin to play.





THE MONSTER

The music pours out of me in a rushing torrent.  
All the years of bottled up emotions; anger, pain, fear and sorrow,  
flowing through my fingers.  
I close my eyes as tears stream down my face.  
I play the way we had to tiptoe around the house,  
The yelling, the screaming,  
The bruises that covered our faces,  
The constant state of fear we lived in,  
And I play for my sister; for the little girl who never grew up.



8

## THE COLOUR OF FIRE

POLLYANNA DOWELL  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
RUNNER UP

Dim grey, the colour of the dust clouds, form around the wreckage as I stand there and watch, helpless. Something so tall and strong, now a pile of rubble. Strangers just see it as faded crimson bricks and dull concrete, a simple house just like every other in the street; but they haven't witnessed the memories held in those walls. The men have knocked down the remains of my burnt house, now the memories are just a distant echo in my head, like a heartbeat fading and slowing down until it stops forever.

Scarlet red, the colour of our uniform. My school was what you would call normal, we had the sporty ones, the drama kids, people who just blended in and the bullies. Then there was me, the one who liked drawing. On my way to art class, they surrounded me, called me names and pushed me around. After they were done, my vision was blurred and everything became a sea of red; I'm not sure whether it was our blazers or blood. Since I was an easy target, the bullying became a regular thing and only got worse. My parents didn't understand why I was failing school, why I was scared to wake up and face people everyday; but art was the thing that kept me waking up each morning.

Silver Grey, the colour of magnets. Art was like a magnet, always pulling me away from my problems and fears and putting me in my own world. It was a way of expressing my feelings and sharing my perspective. Despite being passionate and trying hard like my parents always encouraged me to, they were never supportive of what I did. They didn't see the rainbow of colours hidden within a drop of water. They didn't listen to music and see colours in their mind's eye. No one understood, but in art, people are always going to contradict you, for every person who likes your work there will be someone who doesn't; I was just waiting to find that someone who understood, who believed.

Cobalt Blue, the colour of our stove top. It was the beginning of third term and my parents had been called into the school. This was my final school year and after just receiving my report my teachers and parents were concerned. I decided to cook dinner. I thought mum would appreciate it and that it might soften the blow I was about to receive; it didn't. My parents were shouting, just like the bullies. Everything became a blur. I burst out the door and ran down our wooden front steps. They were creaking as if to say 'run;' and so I did. I ran out into the cool night air. I didn't know where I was



THE COLOUR  
OF FIRE

8

going, but I wasn't scared; it was just like painting a picture. Often you start off with one idea, not knowing where you're going. So you paint, sketch, draw, until you see your idea as it is in your mind.

Bottle Green, the colour of the trees. I held on to their branches feeling the tips of the leaves brush past my fingers, cold and damp from the night air. I wanted to paint, I wanted to show the texture of the leaves and their vibrant colour. The feeling of the dewy air as I breathed it in through my dense lungs. But to do that, I had to go home, something I knew I would have to face eventually.

Pure Black, the colour of smoke. As I walked slowly back to my house I began to smell smoke. My heart was racing in my chest as my sore feet pounded the pavement. It became increasingly difficult to take a deep breath but I begged my lungs to keep going as I ran towards the burning house. My burning house. The fire was blazing and I felt as if my skin was sizzling. I only saw a few glimpses of my house before everything went as black as the smoke.

Cyan blue, the colour of confusion, the colour of my thoughts. Both of my parents died that night. They say it was because of the stove top, the cobalt blue stove top, which I had left on. It was my fault. I thought that what my parents had to say that night was bad, but I don't think it could have been worse than this feeling of separation, this want for closure that sits in my chest.

In art you can create any colour, any shade. I used to see the world in all its colours and paint it as I saw it. Now it seems that just like the smoke, everything around me is turning black. Like a duckling, following its mother, I'm following my parents into their world of darkness. There is one speck of light though, one bright star left in my skies. I'm moving away. I'll never have to return to this place, never have to face another day at that school, never have to see the burnt shell sitting vacant in our street. My life has become a blank canvas, a new beginning ready to be filled, ready to start again. My life has never been that simple, but now I can't wait to fill my canvas with the vibrant colours that I see in my future.



A long, long time ago a fearsome pirate roamed the sea,  
With brutal skills and great bravado, from him they all would flee.  
His breath was bad, his habits worse, was nothing that he feared,  
This man was Edward Teach, also known as the Blackbeard.

THE BALLAD OF  
BLACKBEARD

JESSICA HEPWORTH

On his ship, Queen Anne's Revenge, Blackbeard would roam the sea,  
He broke the law but didn't care, a fearless pirate he.  
He spent his life attacking ships and gathering much treasure,  
Before releasing captives he would take their clothes for good measure.

Everyone knew to fear Blackbeard, no one dared cross his path,  
For townsfolk dreaded the day that they would hear his roaring laugh.  
When one poor man refused to give the pirate his precious ring,  
Blackbeard chopped that finger off clean, he was not forgiving.

Blackbeard held a gathering with song and lots of rum,  
And many pirates and friends of his, were all asked to come.  
Blackbeard celebrated his insouciant, intrepid life,  
But little did he know, all his plans, they were in strife.

For the governor of Virginia, Alexander Spotswood,  
Heard of Blackbeard's meeting, ordered; 'Get rid of him for good!'  
He sent two sloops, commanded by lieutenant Robert Maynard;  
'Let's hoist the sails! Come on men, let's make sure they don't get far!'

As the dawn approached, the pirates espied the enemy sails,  
But Blackbeard wasn't scared at all, this fight he would not fail.  
The pirates prepared for battle, they knew that blood would be shed,  
'Let's blast their ships and destroy their pride!' the savage  
Blackbeard said.

The canons roared, hitting their targets, the pirates venting their spleen,  
But then they cheered, one navy ship had been blown to smithereens.  
But there was another, whose captain had a very cunning idea:  
'Hide under the decks, for then they'll think we abandoned ship  
in fear.'



THE BALLAD OF  
BLACKBEARD

When Blackbeard met the other ship, he howled and tossed his head,  
'Ha, we've scared them off, they knew they'd wind up dead!'  
But all of a sudden the navy men ambushed the clueless crew,  
They assailed the pirates who in return, bravely fought back too.

And soon enough Blackbeard and Maynard, they came face to face,  
'Hello pirate,' Maynard jeered, 'Go on and leave this place.'  
And Blackbeard laughed and gave a smile, his own notorious grin,  
'I rather die then surrender, my friend, let this battle begin.'

The men both drew their pistols, two loud shots rang through the air,  
Blackbeard missed but Maynard hit, leaving Blackbeard in despair.  
The pirate was shot, but continued to wildly swing his cutlass 'round,  
Before he could land a fatal blow he fell suddenly to the ground.

8

For one of Maynard's men had crept to Blackbeard from behind,  
And slit his throat, he'd killed the pirate, the death was quick  
yet unkind.  
From the bow of Maynard's sloop, his head was hung by a string,  
That was the death of the great Blackbeard, the fearsome pirate king.



Sometimes, the things we love most, are the things that tear us apart.

Looking across the horizon, I watch the setting sun turn skyscrapers into dark and looming shapes, their silhouettes piercing the soft, peach coloured sky. The air is still, yet holds a breath of warmth which comforts my shaking body. In the distance I hear the call of a bird and the waves of the ocean which lie beyond the city skyline. Slowly these peaceful sounds are drowned from my mind, consumed by the cacophonous crowd which has gathered below, staring at the young man perched on the building's balcony. I swallow the feeling of nausea, but this only lets it spread like a disease until my whole body is frozen with fear. I turn and take one last look into the room, its walls covered in baby blue wallpaper with little stars decorating the border...

...floor 50...

*I walked slowly into the classroom, my eyes downcast. It had taken all of the courage in the world for me, to let go of my mother's hand. When the teacher asked my name, I looked up and saw a sea of small, blank faces, staring into my eyes with such intensity it felt that they were looking into my soul. But there was one face which was different. Her hair was the colour of flames and burned bright in the sea of blonde and brunette children. Her lips were as red as a freshly picked strawberry, ripe and juicy and delicious. Her eyes were green like the emerald necklace my mother wore around her neck. Then she looked at me and smiled, and her face lit up the room like lights on a Christmas tree.*

...floor 41...

*We were inseparable. I was the plain, logical vanilla ice cream, and she was the chocolate topping and sprinkles which brought life to the whole dessert. We had walked to and from school together for as long as I could remember. She danced alongside me, her eyes dancing with fire to the same extent she herself moved. She was beautiful.*

*When we arrived at my house, she said goodbye before crossing the road and continuing down the street. I watched her until she had turned the corner and I could no longer see her. Then I kept my-self busy to help pass the hours until I could see her again, when I would meet her outside my house in the morning.*

...floor 35...

LETTING GO

JESSICA HEPWORTH  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
HIGHLY COMMENDED



## LETTING GO

*The sun emerged from its hiding place, and beams of light shone through the gaps where my curtain failed to cover its window. I rubbed my eyes and willed myself to move, one foot in front of the other. My body was fatigued from my late night of study but I knew that as soon as I saw her face, I would have all the energy I needed. She was my inspiration, for her I would do anything.*

*After the short amount of time it took for me to get ready, I went outside to wait for her. Soon enough, I saw her casually round the corner, the one she disappeared around every afternoon. She looked at me and smiled. After all these years, her smile was still as warm and inviting as the sun after a harsh winter. I returned her smile, and she blushed, before crossing the road to meet me.*

*She never made it.*



*Neither of us saw the dark grey station wagon fly around the corner, the driver tending to a pair of noisy children in the back seat. Before she fell, in the split second before the collision, I looked into her eyes, her emerald eyes, and before I could even scream her name, they were gone.*

*...floor 23...*

*The walls were covered in baby blue wallpaper with little stars decorating the border. It was de-ceiving: a brightly lit room which housed grief and despair. I held her hand as my eyes traced over her motionless face: her chin, her mouth, her nose, her eyes. They still had not opened. Everyday for months since that fateful day, I had sat by her bed. Sometimes I would talk to her, in the hope that my voice would waken her from her sleep. On other days I would just watch, watch and hope, and cry. Some days the pain was unbearable, I could not imagine a life without her.*

*Then one day they turned the life support off, and something within me died as well. She was gone and, all of a sudden, there was no reason to live. I gave her one last kiss, and walked slowly to the balcony.*

*...floor 9...*

*The wind whipped at my face as I plummeted like an aeroplane falling out of the sky.*

*...floor 8...*

*She had left me alone in a world which was so big that it scared me.*

...floor 7...

It had been unfair to her, taking her life when there was still so much to live for.

...floor 6...

I had never had the chance to say goodbye.

...floor 5...

But I would see her again soon.

...floor 4...

And she would greet me with those sparkling, emerald eyes.

...floor 3...

I would hold her in my arms again.

...floor 2...

And for the first time in a long time,

...floor 1...

I smiled.





## DARKEST AFRICA

EMMA LEE

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

WINNER



I hold Ayo's hand as we walk across the parking lot, watching his face as he focuses on staying upright, one foot in front of the other. We reach the trolley line and I crouch down next to him with a smile, placing my hands on his tiny waist.

Ayo's precious little laugh rings out as I swing him up into the shopping trolley, making sure he's sitting, before pushing the trolley towards the supermarket, sending Ayo into another fit of giggles.

The people we pass smile at us. Most of them know our faces from our regular Sunday visits to the mall, and all of them love Ayo. Every week we are stopped by people who all wish to talk to my gorgeous six year-old brother. They smile, and tell him he must have grown a foot since they last saw him. To this, Ayo responds with a puff of the chest and a solemn, 'I know,' that makes every-one laugh. The little stops prolong our trip but I don't mind. I love talking to people. The market run is normally the highlight of my week.

'Dela!' Ayo's call pulls me from my thoughts, and I look down at the trolley to see he has turned around and is now kneeling, facing me.

'Dela,' he repeats, when he's sure he has my attention, 'can we please get something special this week?'

The hope in his face is heart breaking and I'm instantly angry at our impoverished state. There are kids all around the world who would get an easy 'yes' in answer to that question. Kids who will gain access to so many opportunities, opportunities that will always be just out of reach for others, like Ayo and me. I wish I could grant Ayo this small happiness, but I know in my heart we would need a miracle for that to happen. I would give anything for that miracle.

'Ayo, turn around,' I say in an attempt to distract him, but I can tell I haven't succeeded, by the way his face falls in disappointment, converting my answer to a 'no.'

He rebounds quickly though, rocking back onto his heels and replying with a cheeky grin, 'It's more fun this way.'

My mind searches for a strict answer but my heart isn't in it. He knows I could never be mad at him. My cute little brother knows just how to manipulate the world around his little finger. Ayo is only six, but dad seems to think he will be the one to lift us out of poverty. Personally, I think it's a ridiculous weight to place on his young, frail shoulders, but Ayo definitely has a special spark. Maybe he could make a better life for himself, for our family.

I roll Ayo into the supermarket and begin grabbing food off the shelves and crossing items off the list clutched in my hand. Ayo quickly gets restless and so I pick him up, setting him down gently, before sending him off to go and pick some fruit with strict instructions.

About a minute after Ayo leaves, I am checking yet another item off the list when the building shakes violently, sending the tower of canned produce on my right, tumbling to the floor. The bustle around me quiets to a dull murmur until being completely extinguished by the next tremor. The silence is eerie, and for some reason it worries me more than the shaking of the supermarket. It means other people are as worried as I am, making this growing horror a reality.

Ayo, where is Ayo? My heart thuds in time with a gunshot.

Close.

Too close.

The world flies back into motion, people scrambling in all directions, reaching for loved ones and disappearing out the door, swept along by the stampeding crowd. Abandoning my shopping cart I sprint for the fresh produce aisle, moving against the tide of people shoving towards the exit. I'm not moving fast enough. I feel as if I'm wading through thick mud. The distance should have been easy enough for me to complete, but it feels like a marathon. If anything happens to him..., I shove the thought out of my mind before it can take root, reaching the end of the aisle and rounding the corner.

He isn't there.

Through my panic I hear another two gunshots coming from the other side of the mall, intensifying my desperation. My breath is now coming in terrified gasps. I spin on my heel, desperately searching the now empty room for the slightest movement, any sign of life. My mind is trapped in a shell of fear that shatters when I hear a familiar, but terrible, sound.

Ayo's scream pierces through all of the other noise and I look down the centre aisle to find him standing outside the supermarket exit. My intense relief at finding him is immediately replaced with a new level of horror as I realise why he screamed in such terror.

There are three bodies lying in pools blood, the result of another three shots my clouded mind had prevented me from hearing.



DARKEST AFRICA

My legs begin to move without any conscious thought and suddenly, I am there, reaching for Ayo.

Then, I see the gun.

Barrel pointed straight at Ayo, I know with certainty that the bullet will land a killing blow. I don't have time to think, acting purely on instinct. I throw my body in front of his, in a desperate bid to save his life.



8

She peered out the window  
 At the landscape below  
 Amazement shining in her gaze  
 Directed at cities ablaze  
 But what she and the others couldn't have known  
 They would never again see a city's glow

He fiddled with the food tray  
 She bounced him on her knee  
 His eyes fixed on the screen  
 Stubbornly fighting sleep  
 But he had never even wildly dreamed  
 This would be his last night to fall freely asleep

The man across the aisle  
 Hid a restless smile  
 The surprise he had planned  
 Made the arduous trip worthwhile  
 But he and the others hadn't foreseen  
 Death had spoken its final summoning

The engines start to falter

Wings thrown out of kilter  
 A man launches himself valiantly  
 To shield his beloved family  
 Together the passengers brave the whirlwind  
 Their dreams blown astray, thoughts torn in the wind

A sudden flash  
 A sickening crash  
 An earsplitting crack  
 Then no sound at all

Time for once stands cold and still  
 The world of distant memories filled  
 Together they leave to fly safely at last  
 Upon the wings of an angel's mast



## MY GRANDMA

MAEVE LUU



The unmistakable scent of Red Door fills the room and a woman follows, with hair of orange flames. Her hands are as delicate and pale as a china doll. When she hugs me her cheek is as soft as goose feathers. 'How is Marta today?' she inquires. She is referring to my role in her Sound of Music production. This woman is my Grandma. Grandma is not like most grandmas. I'm sure everyone would say that about their grandma, but it is true. She is a single minded rebel who often has a point to prove but she is also the milk of human kindness.

Grandma is single minded to the point of craziness. A prime example would be when she puts on musicals with intellectually challenged adults. She puts heart and soul into it. Sometimes she acts as though she has ants living in her pants! When casting, nobody is spared if she thinks she needs them. She ensnares members of our family, professional actors and for Show Boat, a local Sudanese community. All inhibition put aside, she will even prance around in lingerie and fish net stockings if required.

My Grandma likes to break rules. As a result of this, my mum gave her a book called, 'The Little Old Lady who broke all the rules.' She is as cheeky as a monkey with her actions. My mum is really strict about junk food. Whenever Grandma comes to our house she always brings precisely three packets of Smiths Original chips, often just before meal times!

Grandma can be as embarrassing as having your pants being pulled down in front of your friends. When my sister had her fourth birthday party, Grandma found a cupcake that a child had licked and proceeded to eat it in front of one of mum's work colleagues. Just to make the point that we are wasteful! Mum was absolutely mortified.

Grandma has an obsession with toilets and believes that they should be readily available anywhere and everywhere. When we are out and about she always needs to go. Once she came to a grandparents and special friends day at school; whilst on the tour of my school she decided she needed to go to the toilet. Whenever she needs to go she quips, 'When you gotta go you gotta go.' I cringe when she says that.

Grandma has an inspirational and encouraging side to her as well. Whenever you don't succeed in something she always tells you the things you did right and not what you didn't do right. She likes to give a gift for every grandchild's achievement. Her gifts are always a surprise; once I got One Direction stick on nails and a toothbrush.

*'Help will be always be given to people at Hogwarts who need it.'*

PROFESSOR ALBUS DUMBLEDORE, *The Half Blood Prince*.

MY GRANDMA

Like Professor Dumbledore, Grandma is always there for us in the face of adversity. Grandma is there for our failures, tears and despair. She even sat up with me till midnight correcting my linear equations homework.

Grandma is extremely dedicated to all of her family members. She goes to the ends of the earth to make everything right. When her father was suffering from dementia she went through fire and water to maximise the quality and happiness in his life, even when this meant fighting bloody wars with the Director of Nursing. Last year she sat up into the early hours of the morning making my Elizabethan cuffs for Notables' Day.

Grandma can be single minded and rebellious but she will go to any length to make everything right. Though difficult at times, Grandma is an incredible person. She is a firework bursting colours, passion and noise!



OH, ORDER IS A  
LOVELY THING

FLORRIE MCKAY  
ORATOR OF THE YEAR  
HIGHLY COMMENDED



You, third from the left, 2nd row. Your collar needs sorting – in or out – you decide – but not one of each, please. Is that a ladder in your tights? Oh, and I also suspect that one of your ear lobes hangs lower than the other. Hmm, I don't suppose you could fix that. No, didn't think so. Today my purpose is to convince you of the critical need for care, order and attention to detail. I'm serious. This matters!

A survey shows that the majority of people in the United States feel stressed or anxious about the amount of clutter in their house. A shocking 91% say they are overwhelmed by it from time to time and most say they won't invite people over when they feel their house is cluttered. Don't be overwhelmed by it, simply never let it happen in the first place. Items that are not required should be jettisoned from your life. Necessary artefacts should be stored carefully in an orderly way in keeping with an established system. Dewey, you know library man, Dewey decimal system, he was a genius but something simpler will probably suffice if you are just a novice at this order thing.

Author and philosopher, Edmund Burke, told us that 'Good order is the foundation of all great things'. I'm still working on getting to the great things, but those of you who know me will all agree that I have the good order part well and truly under control. I invite you to give up your lives of disarray and chaos and come join me on planet 'sorted'. On this particular planet, there are some rules as fundamental as any devised by physicists. Symmetry is essential. Colours may not clash. There is always a beginning, a middle and an end. 'To be continued' is simply an unacceptable writing strategy. Oh order is a lovely thing, on disarray it lays its wings, teaching simplicity to sing.

In your school work, it matters. The study timetable, if completed correctly can be a thing of both beauty and usefulness. The study notes, a haven of structure and simplicity. After all, order and simplicity are the first steps toward mastery of a subject. In your school environment it matters. Your locker or mine? I know you wouldn't miss the mould, the ants, the smell if you traded up.

Why, why does this matter so? Well, from my perspective the imposition of order on all corners of life, is well, simply normal. So much distress (mine in particular) and chaos could be avoided if you all adopted a little more care and imposed a little more discipline on your unruly lives. I've been brought up knowing, 'that if you shut the cupboard door the room is half tidy.' No one famous said that, that

comes from my Gran. Wise woman – a lot to learn from her, alphabetised spice shelf, colour coded clothes drawer; are we seeing a family resemblance here?

But the order thing must have skipped a generation. My mother is a stellar example of why this matters. She carries a cavernous handbag full of all sorts of unnecessary objects. It is pointless, as she can never find anything she wants amongst the rubble and debris. And that really matters. She never has any certainty about the location of her car keys which, very disturbingly, means that I am likely to be late. None of that ‘better late than never’ line will ever wash with me. I live by a simple mantra when it comes to timeliness, early is on time, on time is late and late is unacceptable.

There is a whole world out there enticing you towards a life that lacks discipline and structure. Don’t sweat the small stuff, you hear. Sorry girls, I am here to tell you should be sweating buckets over those details because a mountain is composed of tiny grains of earth and the ocean is made up of tiny drops of water. Chaos is simply order waiting to be deciphered – and the sooner the better.



OH, ORDER IS A  
LOVELY THING





RECALLED

ROSIE ROBERTS

The moment you walk onto the corner of Smith's Street and Whittle Road, your eyes immediately rest on the dilapidated, worn down building bearing the faded sign, '*Sunny Days Old Folks Home, where your elderly are respected.*' The once bright orange and yellows of the billboard was the only suggestion of colour on the front façade. The wooden weatherboards of the old building had started to rot and fall apart, held together only by ancient, rusted nails, that didn't appear to be able to hold much in place.

Bert Partridge noticed these unappealing aspects when his eyes lay on the building that his family had forced him to move into. '*You're unsafe to the family.*' His daughter's voice fills his head. When he walked over the threshold of the old building with his carer, the scent of musk and Glen 20 air freshener wafted up Bert's nose, clogging up his senses. A pat on the arm snapped Bert from his air-freshener induced thoughts, and brought his attention to a plump middle-aged woman staring at him with pity in her eyes.

'You must be Mr. Partridge.' The lady spoke with a southern drawl, her words kind but her tone clipped. 'My name is Mrs. Doyle.' She drew out the syllables of her name, as if Bert was a child of a young age.

'Yes that's right, Mrs... Mrs... Ms...? I beg your pardon, what did you say your name was?' Bert searched his memory, or lack of one, for a name of the woman standing right in front of him.

'Mrs. Doyle.' She spoke, again drawing out the sounds of her name. 'Welcome to Sunny Days. I hope you're looking forward to your stay as much as we are.' Mrs. Doyle announced the welcoming with the attitude of a hotel concierge, the faux happiness not so well disguised. It was then that Bert finally looked around the room he was standing in. He took in the moth-eaten couch, the type that was decorated in floral patterns but always looked dirty. He glanced down at the mottled grey carpet that covered the entire sitting room. His eyes finally travelled to an elderly man in the corner of the room, asleep, his soft snores filling in the void of silence that had accumulated in the room. It was then that Bert realised that this was not a place he wanted to be.

'I'm just going to go outside for some air.' He wheezed as he registered how constricting and stuffy the room was. Before he was given an answer, Bert unglued himself from his carer and took slow, thumping steps outside. Once outside, Bert's feet didn't stop where



he had intended, instead he walked out of the rusted gate and turned right, his decision purely based on instinct.

Bert felt if time had stopped when he had entered the home for the elderly, so he was surprised to find outside life moving onwards. The events of the morning slipped from his mind, seemingly vanishing the further he walked. Mrs. Doyle, the couch, the man in the corner of the room, the carpet, his carer, each shedding from his mind like an item of clothing every block or so.

'Excuse me Sir, you look a little lost, can I help you?' A young looking man asked Bert. After a long pause, he finally began to answer the man's question.

'Uh... Uh... Sorry what was your question?' Bert looked at the man dubiously. The man's eyes filled with sympathy.

'Where are you from?' He repeated, lengthening his syllables just as Mrs. Doyle had.

'Sunny Days elderly home.' The man's face flashed with surprise as Bert answered him.

'Let me take you there.' They travelled in silence and the man pulled up gently to the curb. Bert's door opened and Mrs. Doyle poked her head in the open frame.

'We were worried you weren't going to come back Mr. Partridge.'

'Who are you?' Bert asked, his voice filled with uncertainty. With his question, Mrs. Doyle's face fell, her normal stony features softening for a split second.

'Come inside, dear.' She ordered to Bert. He waltzed inside, the smell of the sitting room hitting him with full force once again.

'Yes, Alzheimer's I'm afraid.' Mrs. Doyle's hushed voice drifted up the path into the doorway. 'I just wonder how he remembered the place.'

'*Alzheimer's?* *Who has Alzheimer's?*' Bert thought to himself as the wind carried Mrs. Doyle's statement.

'Come along dear, let's get you into your room.' Mrs. Doyle hooked Bert's arm through hers and led the old man through the dingy corridor leading off the tatty sitting room.

'Who are you ma'am?' The forgetful man asked for the second time in five minutes.

'Mrs. Doy-le.' The woman answered with false gusto, this time speaking to Bert like he was learning his a, b, c's. 'Do you know where you are dear?' She looked at him, craning her neck towards him in anticipation.



RECALLED

'Sunny Days, where your elderly are respected.'

'Blimey,' Mrs. Doyle muttered under her breath. 'How did you remember?'

'I guess it's not hard to forget.' The old man looked the woman in the eyes, a hint of a smile playing on his lips.

Bert Partridge forgets everything, yet he remembered the wooden façade with its orange and yellow hued sign. He remembered the rusted nails barely holding the building up. Bert Partridge forgets everything, yet he recalled the building.



8

Take my hand brother and I will keep you safe  
from all the white ghosts' strange ways,  
I'll show you the trees, the bush and the seas  
and where the old kangaroos graze.  
Take my hand brother, we could go far and wide  
to the place where the kookaburras nest,  
We will fly through the sky, touching so high  
and moving from east and west.

Take my hand brother down to the river  
where the scaly fish are free,  
Where the Golden Wattles sway and bees buzz  
all day, by the Bunya Bunya tree.  
Take my hand brother as we dance with the  
spirits before the silver moon comes out,  
We will swim with the currents and the animals  
of the sea until the next dry drought.

But when the time finally comes when you sail  
to the land of strangers and the unknown,  
Remember me brother, remember your people  
and place where you have grown.  
Remember the kangaroos, the kookaburra nests  
and the Bunya Bunya trees,  
The rivers, the scaly fish and the silver bright  
moon it was a time when you were free.



## BROTHERS

CLAUDIA  
SCHONFELDT



HELL'S FIRE

CLAUDIA SCHONFELDT

She watched the sunbaked plain, as the sun began to set,  
In summer '39, a day she would never forget.  
Her tender eyes narrowed and she clenched her callused hand,  
At the people who had no respect, for her beautiful prized land.

The ghostly smoke came first, rising into the sky,  
Clawing at living creatures that happened to be near by.  
Pale of water in hand, on top of an ebony steed,  
she raced towards hell, as her land began to bleed.

The devil's hands lashed, diminishing anything in sight,  
The wide sky shuddered, killing the peaceful night.  
She raced down the hill, and saw the opening was nigh,  
determination growing, until she heard a cry.

A terrified child, a sea of flames that burned,  
Whimpering for help, but no one seemed concerned.  
She turned on her stallion, no question in her choice,  
And darted towards the trees, where she'd heard the voice.

She galloped towards the fearful child, suffering from the blaze,  
Saving him from the torment of the bright and fiery maze.  
And even though she became the hero of that night,  
her prized land was lost, replaced with an horrendous sight.

An eerie, charcoal forest, blackened country ground,  
and the land that usually spoke to her, was making no sound.  
Her heart throbbed in dismay at what the devil had done,  
In summer '39, the day that hell had won.



They were all crazy. Every single one of them. The screams, the fits, the calling of names. The building was full of deranged people. But somehow, I was drawn to one of them.

Her name was Arabella.

I don't know why or how she was here, she seemed sane enough. She would just sit on her chair, in her private room, looking out to the forests. Her bright blue eyes were faded and her brown tufts of curly hair hung just below her shoulders. It was almost as if she was a ghost of a girl, mirroring her past. At night, she would stare at the flickering fire, then start to read her book. The same one, every night, and she would always read it eerily, turning the pages as if they would snap in front of her. She would always – *always* – request I'd be with her from 6pm (to light the fire) until 11pm (where she'd fall asleep). As the embers died, she'd always tell me:

'You know, when I was your age, I looked exactly like you. The curly brown hair and the blue eyes.'

She said it softly, as if she didn't want me to hear what she was saying. It was hard to imagine a twenty-three year old Arabella Jones, but over the next couple of weeks, I found myself looking more and more like the photo of her when she was my age.

My hair got more ringlets, and my eyes got brighter. Some nights, when Arabella had just fallen asleep, I'd stare at the photo, the embers' small flames flickering off the glass frame. It was haunting, not necessarily scary, just haunting.

But I thought, it wouldn't be too bad to look like her.

The night that I asked her why she was here, her blue pools filled with a tragic liquid, but she talked anyway.

'My husband died here – he was a madman, to say the least. And I thought, I'm reaching 94, so it wouldn't be a bad place to die.'

I remember a puzzled look crossing my face – thinking, there couldn't be a more terrible place to die, amongst crazy people, but I didn't argue. That wasn't part of my job – I was there to keep Arabella company, not question her antics.

'He was in the war. After that, he was haunted by the horrors of the prisoner of war camps. Before he went to war, we had a marriage that every young person dreamed of. The photos just about show it.'

She always spoke nonchalantly. She gestured to the photos on her mantelpiece, the same mantle where the photo of twenty-three year old Arabella sat. Alongside that photo were five photos of her and a



young fellow – who I assumed to be her husband – playing around. It was only then that I took the time to look at them. One photo was of them swimming, another of –

‘His name was Mac.’

I had turned around quickly to see Arabella awake, staring at me, smiling as I looked at the photos.

‘It’s okay, you can keep looking at them, I just thought I’d tell you.’

And with that, she fell asleep.

The next photo was of her and Mac on a bike, Arabella in the basket and Mac on the seat. They were both laughing, looking so happy. One photo caught my eye.

Arabella and a girl who looks like her, the only difference being that the grey is a lighter shade to represent her hair in the black and white photo. Their arms were around each other and they were both laughing. Trees surrounded them and they both had piggy tails with matching ribbons. Their dresses seem to be from the late 30s. I could just point out a peep of a picnic mat behind them and a large, gorgeous lake. I turned the frame over and there was a sticky note on the back.

*Luci and I at Hemsworth Lake, 20th September, 1938. We had a picnic with Mac and James (Luci’s husband). The food was varied – Luci made chocolate cakes, lamingtons and shortbread, I made baguettes, cheese and bacon rolls and Vegemite scrolls. The boys were in charge of drinks.*

I had set the photo frame back down, the whole scene unfolding before me in my imagination. They were all so perfect before the war. But then Mac, and I assume James too, had to go. I looked at the next photo, which I thought was her family. I turned the frame over to see if it had anything written on it.

Nothing.

#### TWO YEARS LATER...

The night she died, she told me seven words that have haunted me to this day. I remember it so clearly.

‘Oh, Clara,’ she had said weakly.

‘Shh, shh, don’t speak, the ambulance is on its way,’ I told her.

‘I want to die here, darling, so there’s no point. I felt a gut wrenching pain settle itself in the pit of my stomach.’

‘Please don’t leave me,’ I said, barely able to speak. Tears drizzled down my face.



'There's a box over there for you. They're the photos. But remember darling, I am your future.' DYING EMBERS

Those words.

Those seven words.

I was, am and will be, Arabella Jones.



# 8





I never understood why a corpse would need such a pretty box if it was just going to be buried. When my goldfish died, we flushed it down the toilet.

It was in the church, my aunty was giving her speech. I still remember my mother's face when she was making her eulogy, cold as rock, shocked probably. I was looking at the stained glass windows around me, not wanting to look at the dead body. When my aunty was nearly finished, I knew because I had heard her practising. I accidentally looked at the body. Her thin, grey hair was pulled back and she wore a green, floral dress. I just realised I was staring at the body, when a limp hand flopped onto Grandma's chest. I blinked hard then looked at my mum to see if she'd noticed. She was staring straight ahead but she felt me look at her, pulled me closer and whispered, 'It's okay, Mollie.' I decided I was just imagining things, so I ignored it.

At the burial, everyone was dressed in black, holding dark umbrellas sheltering them from the harsh weather brought down from the miserable, grey sky. I never knew my grandmother, but I was there in black clothes like everyone else and the only thing I understood was that my Gran, who I'd never met, had gone to Heaven, where the angels lived.

A week later, we were cleaning out my grandmother's house for selling. The building was quite grand. Outside were small shrubs amongst clumps of purple flowers. We stepped inside and I noticed the chandelier hanging from the high ceiling. The air seemed unnaturally cold, as if a breeze was coming through the closed windows. The building was quite elegant, and, like an old person, gentle and homely except for the cold. I was looking around when my mum told me to start clearing out the attic. I skipped up the dusty, staircase and climbed the step-ladder to an attic.

The room matched the rest of the building by look; old and elegant, but it was more cosy and smelt like old people. I fumbled around before finding a long cord hanging from the ceiling. I pulled it and on came a dim orange light from a dusty light bulb. The attic seemed to be my grandma's favourite spot in the house, maybe that was why the house was so dusty. It seemed odd that she chose to live most of her life in a dark, dusty room since the house was so large. I started to collect my Gran's things. To be honest, the room was quite messy. I started to collect her personal belongings first, thick glasses

here, a cream-coloured shawl there. I spotted a pink book, so I picked it up and blew off the dust; *Little Women*. I saw the red ribbon hanging out of the book, a few pages from the back. It seemed sad that she was so close, but died before finishing the book.

I continued to look around the dark, musty attic, taking in everything. It was the closest I would ever get to my grandma. While I was looking around, I remembered what I was supposed to be doing up here. Clearing out. I looked around the untidy attic for books and started to pile them on top of the other in a cardboard box. I was just starting a new pile when I noticed a red leather book with a leopard print pattern. It had a strip of leather running across the open side of the book-end when I turned it over. I could see it latched with a knob. I turned it and opened the book.

As soon as I opened it, the first thing I saw was the handmade pocket on the inside of the front cover. It was a square piece of material sewed on with a pale purple thread. On each lined page of the book was curly calligraphy-like writing in black ink. This book was clearly my Gran's diary but I couldn't quite make out many of the words. I flicked through the pages with more fancy writing and a few doodles. The writing was so swirly, it was almost hypnotising.

I put it in my coat pocket and quickly packed the other boxes. I had just finished putting everything in its cardboard prison before realising I couldn't lift this down the ladder myself. I shouted out to my mother who came rushing up. She climbed up to the attic, the ladder squeaking underneath her. She looked from me to all the boxes I had packed and chuckled. 'And how did you plan to get all these downstairs Mollie?' It was the first time I'd seen my mother smile in days since Gran had 'passed', as my Dad said.

Mum helped me take the boxes downstairs to the large kitchen. I looked around the room. The oven seemed clean and unused and the red digital clock on it told me I had spent over three hours in the attic, as if time had sped up in the old room. The kitchen floor was littered with boxes and I felt proud of the work I had done. We left the boxes for the removal truck and drove home. In the car I looked at the diary again, and even though I hadn't met her, it was the closest I had ever felt to my grandma.



TRUE FRIENDS

NATASHA BORASH

9

Best friends are incredibly hard to find,  
Memories still remain clear in my mind,  
You are there to catch me when I fall,  
Lifting me up and back over the wall.

We share tears of laughter at every joke,  
Not one cross word is said as fun is poked,  
We always have fun when we are together,  
Even in the cold, most monstrous weather.

You are the only one who understands me,  
Opening my eyes to the new possibility,  
The light in your eyes and the radiant smile,  
Along with your unique and individual style.

The longing of staying together forever,  
I will be waiting for you wherever, whenever,  
But for now I must say goodbye to you,  
We will meet again, I know it to be true.

As true best friends we are never far apart,  
Possibly in distance, but never really at heart.



'Savannah, get out of there!'

'No, just wait a second, I've almost got them.'

'I'm serious, I can hear someone coming, we've got to go now.'

'Okay, little miss grumpy pants, I've got it. Let's go.'

*It just disappeared. Like that, in a blink an eye. It went away and never came back. People ran around in chaos, confusion and sheer terror. Nothing like this had ever happened, well, not that I knew of anyway. Historians couldn't find anything close to this in their records. Even the scientists were baffled and no one had a logical explanation for it. There had to be a reason why the sun disappeared.*

We furtively sneaked through the dark street, two agile silhouettes framed against the eerie moonlight. I moved like an elephant, trudging through mud, in contrast to Savannah's nimble and graceful steps. My skin was deathly pale in comparison to hers, naturally tanned and glowing. Her hair was the colour of sweet honey, whereas my hair was as dark as the night. We were a team of opposites, but people always said opposites attract. The cold wind pierced my skin, sending a chill through my bones like ripples on a pond. Thankfully, we were almost home.

*Months passed and still, people were waiting like obedient dogs for a plausible reason for its abrupt disappearance. Electricity had completely gone out, supermarkets had been raided, nowhere was safe anymore. People hid in worry and uncertainty, but mostly fear of the unknown. People sought refuge with others they could trust. New territories and distinct groups were formed, each with different opinions, customs and guidelines to live by, but there were still countless outliers, people who were unwilling to comply with the strict rules of any single group.*

At last, we reached the familiar path to our rundown, but safe abode, adorned with useless knick-knacks, treasured keepsakes and precious memories. Savannah, being the tech freak in our dynamic duo, crafted and fixed most of the devices around the house. The bicycle powered generators had been our greatest salvations, giving us the energy to power simple items like the radio, heater and, my personal favourite, the microwave. The water filter system had also proved its worth, providing clean and pure drinking water. We had just gotten four more batteries to add to our meagre collection and Savannah was eager to go out again on another raid to find even more.

*Although the electricity had been cut due to the dependence on solar energy as the sole source of electricity, people still found ways to live. Batteries were priceless commodities that were constantly fought over, whilst money was utterly*



worthless. People were driven to the point of insanity, trying to discover the reason for its incomprehensible and unforeseen vanishing. No scientist nor politician was able to provide succour to the public's relentless demands for answers, so people unequivocally fell further into despair. Nevertheless, there was still a handful of idealists who believed that there was a way to get it back.

'Madeline Estella Hazel Buchanan, would you please hurry up!'

'Savannah, there is something that I would love to give you, and it's called patience. So if you would kindly just wait while I get more supplies.'

'Fine.'

Savannah was the unofficial leader of all our expeditions, but she never admitted it. She mapped out everywhere we went, all I had to do was follow and stay silent. She didn't tell me where we were going tonight, but I trusted her because she seemed so fervent and keen to go exploring. I noticed her steps gradually slowing down, a sure sign that meant we were almost there. I squinted into the distance and could just make out a lonely greenhouse at the end of the road. Savannah gently squeezed my sweaty palm, her usual indication that we had arrived.

As we entered the greenhouse, a wave of heat crashed onto us. Savannah, already exploring far ahead of me, gasped. 'Maddy! You would not believe what I found, look at this!' Exclaimed Savannah with a hint of delight in her voice. I sauntered at my own pace towards her, and noticed the plants in here were still alive. I knelt down and immediately smelt the overpowering aroma of wet soil. Maybe the overhead sprinkler system was still in use? However, I couldn't investigate further because of Savannah's insistent calls.

As I finally caught up to her, I realised what had her transfixed. It was beautiful, absolutely stunning. It glowed with an unnatural luminosity, illuminating the small tent with warmth and radiating an alluring aroma. The plant was a phenomenon and we marvelled at its beauty. Unbeknownst to us, a silent figure had been soundlessly observing us ever since we laid foot in the greenhouse.



The day he turns six, his big sister decides to mark their heights on the doorframe leading into kitchen.

She steals a big fat permanent marker from their father's study and drags over a chair from the dining table. It's a heavy wooden chair, and the legs scrape and scratch, decorating the floor with four identical scratch markings. While she clammers onto the chair, he stares out the window, at the trees and the fields and the grass. He wishes he were outside, roaming free, but it's been raining for two days straight. The heavens have opened up and let loose a torrential downpour of epic proportions, thick grey clouds smothering the landscape in their hungry grasp. The rain falls heavily, pounding out a steady rhythm of pitter patter, ear splitting and all consuming.

'Chin up, stand straight – no, stop standing on your tippy toes,' his sister says, and his attention snaps back inside to the warmth and safety of their home.

'There, done. Now we'll be able to see how much you've grown,' she tells him, smiles and ruffles his hair.

'What about you?' He asks, grinning back.

'I don't know about that, pipsqueak, do you think you can reach?'

'I know that!' He squeals, 'but what if I stand on some books or something?'

'Fine, go ahead'

He races up the stairs, the steps creak and groan underneath him and he bursts into his room. In the gloom his glow-in-the-dark dinosaur stickers light up the ceiling, like stars on a canvas of black void. He pulls out a couple of heavy books from his bookcase. They're the encyclopaedia set that he got last Christmas but never actually looked at. The spines are thick and strong and dig into his hands. With a grunt he lifts them into the air.

Holding a bundle of books tightly in his arms he races back down the stairs and carefully arranges them into a tower.

'Be careful,' his sister warns, handing him the marker. It's a bit too big for his little hands, and when he pulls off the cap the weird smell tickles his nose. He drags the tip of the marker against the rough grains of the wooden door frame.

'Tada!'



Later that night he lies in his bed, squeezes his eyes shut and tries to pretend that he can't hear his parents arguing downstairs. His father

## BUT HOME IS NO MORE

CALIDA EVANS

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HIGHLY COMMENDED



BUT HOME IS  
NO MORE

is rather loud, so loud that even clamping his hands over his ears won't shut it out. They're using complicated adult words so he doesn't really understand what they're saying. He thinks that maybe they're arguing about the black lines he and his sister made. After all, as soon as their father saw them, he glared and growled and screamed and his breath smelled like beer. He understands that, at least. He understands that when his father drinks he gets angry, unpredictable, transforming into a terrifying monster that lurks in the shadows. Even now, he can feel its breath on the back of his neck, dark, piercing eyes watching his every move.

There's a thumping on the stairs and his door flings open, and blinding light from the hallway illuminates the room. He jumps and gasps, quickly pulling the covers over his head, desperately trying to form some sort of barrier between him and the outside world.

'Grab some clothing, we're leaving,' a voice says. He realises that it's only his mother and looks up. Her eyes are red and raw and her face is wet.

9

Later, a small car will hurtle down an empty highway, lights illuminating its path through the haze. Overhead, the sky is dark with treacherous black clouds, and the rain is pelting down in a symphony of almighty rage. A small boy presses himself against the window, wipes condensation away from the window and gazes longingly at an old weatherboard house up in the distance.

But the car drives further and further away, and the boy gives up looking and stares down at his hands. Next to the boy, a girl slumps across the seat, eyes closed, defeated.

A CD plays faintly in the background, and soft happy music with no words washes over the car, whispering of happier times.

'We're just going to stay with some of my friends for a while', his mother tells him.

He decides that he doesn't like the city. He misses the feeling of the cold morning breeze brushing through his hair. He misses his room with his dinosaur stickers. He misses the creaky stairs and he misses his warm bed.

This place is nothing like his home. The skyscrapers loom over him, great and powerful and he finds that he feels pathetically small. They are solid slabs of concrete cutting into the sky, surrounding

him. He feels trapped, encircled, with a wave of bustling people moving in and around him. Crushing him and drowning him, claiming him as their own. There's no grass or fields or trees, only harsh, frightening blacks and greys.

BUT HOME IS  
NO MORE

And somewhere else entirely, the brand new owners of an old weatherboard house paint over a wooden doorframe with two horizontal black lines and the last physical traces of a young boy disappear forever.

9



THE HOME OF  
THE HOMELESS

SOPHIE HE

When I became the CEO of a major marketing company, I expected to look out of my floor-to-ceiling tinted windows and see an endless expanse of glass skyscrapers, none taller than my own. I'd see the sunlight winking at the mosaic of office windows and then I'd see my own smiling reflection in the newly-cleaned windows. But when I looked out of the dusty windows of the dinghy ground-floor concrete office, all I saw was the brick wall of an out-of-business milkbar. The pavement was blanketed by a layer of litter that almost drew away from the homeless man clinging onto his thread-bare blanket of hope, soothing his sanity which threatened to slip away with every passing day. He squatted with his stick-insect legs tucked into his fragile little bird body, with a square of cardboard next to him, reading: Hav a Nise Dai. I tossed him a glare every morning, but my anger seemed to always smack straight into his wall of kindness.

9

*Every morning, I woke up to the scent of freshly-brewed coffees entering the office building across the road, reminding me of the hot chocolates my mother used to bring us after a full day of begging on the streets. Those were the days when the word 'home' meant family. Now, home was what I call my trusty old sleeping bag, pressed against the jagged edges of a sturdy brick wall. As I wiped the jewels of sleep from my eyes, the office across the road came to life; one by one, weary-eyed employees were swallowed by the concrete monster, its eyes flickered open as the blinds recoiled and finally, its stomach began to grumble as the sound of printers resonated through the crisp morning air. And situated right next to the mouth of the monster was the office of possibly the richest man in New York City.*

The enormity of the patchwork quilt of bricks almost engulfed his frail body as the ground beneath his bare feet threatened to do the same. Fresh graffiti dripped down the wall to meet the weeds sprouting from cracks in the sidewalk. Above, the sky coughed and wheezed for air as the weight of winter slowly descended onto the city. The homeless man's health was disintegrating, the hunger and cold was finally catching up to him. But every single day, he still waved at me though his hands were shaking with cold, he still smiled at me though his teeth chattered in the stabbing chill of the wind and he still greeted me though his voice was hoarse from years of silence. His clothes entertained the possibility of frostbite, his life was the definition of poverty but his heart knew the true meaning of happiness.

*The man in that office had it all: a job, a family, a roof over his head, what more could he want? I just couldn't understand how someone could have everything but still be miserable. The three years that he's worked there, he's never smiled, not even once. Wherever he went, people looked up at him with fear, power seemed to ooze from his pores. He dwarfed all his onlookers and could make any man cower in the face of his anger. But in this city of faces, his would be the last I'd ever see.*

It was a lonely Friday evening, the moon hung lower than usual, brushing the land with its ghostly light. The city was haunted by an ominous gale that swept through the dark alleys, chanting warnings of the tragedy that would follow. Pedestrians quickened their steps, attempting to escape the ear-piercing screams of the wind, everyone rushed towards the safety of their homes. Suddenly, the wind ceased, what replaced it was the loudest silence I'd ever heard. Outside my window, the man was lying impossibly still, staring at the moon with a look of longing on his face. And that was the moment I knew, I sprinted down the steps and rushed to his side as the sky started spitting. He blinked at me blankly and whispered his last words, 'Don't take life too seriously. No one gets out alive anyways.' And with a smile plastered on his face, he left the earth, the wind whistling out the last few bars of the soundtrack of his life...



## CEMETERY

CARISSA LAU

The wind whistled over the wrecked concrete path, the street grey and deserted as usual. crows howled on tall, strangled branches as the storm swept through the cemetery. Broken weatherboard houses creaked as the gust brushed through the tattered windows. Dying clouds hung limply, rumbling and growling. The first drop of crystal glass ice fell, ricocheting into trillions of pieces.

At the end of the wrinkled gravel path sat a miserable house, tears streaked from its glassy eyes as the rain poured down. The tear stains remained as a shrill cry ran throughout the town. Footsteps splashed in the icy puddles, the sound quickly dispersed into a million butterflies, the soft flapping of wings drifted and died away.

No one lived in Verac Manor, except a plump caretaker. White, coarse bristles stood out from his shiny, scratched marble head. Buttons bulged from his worn, cotton, striped shirt and his spiky, barbed coat waved in the wind.

The days seemed endless, never ending, but the caretaker never complained. Without Courtney, he was lost, living for no reason. They were meant to be together for eternity, until the angels took her and she rose to heaven, fluffy white candy floss scattered the floor. Angels with long, pale, straight hair in flowing, white dresses flew, twirling and singing as soft as a bird's tune on a summer morning.

The day streaked on like water colours on a white canvas. The colours danced around the page, blurry. Blotches of colour scattered across the caretaker's eyes: musky greys, ocean blues and a patch of midnight black, where the cataract was clouding, like maggots in a dead corpse.

The gate groaned and swung open revealing 12 by 6, neat rows of emerald-green moss-covered graves.

The cemetery had been pretty years ago; white carnations with cherry-blossom pink trimmings used to decorate the paths, dark, olive-green ferns lined the rotunda and grass covered the rest of the cemetery.

Photos of the past illuminated each grave, as if the people were still alive. Dim lights lit the exterior of the brick mausoleum, vines hung like dead spiders' limbs and black cats prowled among the sleeping.

The caretaker tried his best to maintain the cemetery, but over the decade, the plants had overgrown and the mausoleum was no longer visible. The flowers had wilted and died while the grass had melted and disappeared, leaving clumped soil.



Rooster sirens pierced the dawn silence. The sky was cloudless blue. Thrilled, I sprinted to ma screaming, 'School today!'. The dry season was continuing, the arid land gave us permission to go to school. Our school closes on rainy days, as it is new. 'Dear, please get some water on the way back, here's a bucket,' requested ma. I put on a smoothed white shirt and trousers and took off outside. I would find breakfast on the way.

I trudged along the red dirt that was sailing with the wind. The journey was to be a long one, but at least I'd go to school. I saw the large green tree acting almost like an umbrella, shading the dirt below. The leaves were rich and healthy despite the rainless spell. The roots of the tree must go deep down below retrieving a sip of water when needed. I rushed towards the tree seeing fresh figs scattered around below. This was my snack before school; two figs kept me going till lunch. We don't go to school when it rains because the track gets slippery and dangerous. As I continued towards school, I could not help but think of the last time it had rained. I crossed a stream that was dry from the extended drought. This was where I usually got my water but today I would have to go further past the school. Everything around here seemed to be parched. Dry and shrivelled up into tiny little balls. Usually the trip to school was safe but wild animals are always on the prowl. The boundaries of the school, the four trees, stood proudly. The trees were old yet encased in the trunks held the spirits of our people.

I saw my friends; they were chasing each other and I decided to join in. Rudo seemed to be forcing a smile so I asked, 'Hey, you ok?'. 'No my brother is sick, real sick,' Rudo answered. He seemed worried, but why wouldn't he be. That is how most people die isn't it? Being sick. I reassured him that I would pray for his brother's health. 'C'mon' I said, 'let's sing.' Singing always brought up the mood a few notches and helped us feel enthusiastic about learning. A teacher picked up a small copper bell and shook it, hinting that our play was over. We raced to class and sat on the floor.

The class was buzzing with energy and life. We all scrambled like chickens in a pen to find a place on the white cloth. The teacher strolled around all of us, catching the eyes of every student. With a large smile she beamed, 'Class, today we will learn times tables.' She wrote the words on the board and started her lesson. Nobody in this class had ever heard of times tables before, and we all stared up with



startled faces. But still we were intrigued by this new concept and loved to learn something new to share with family. I loved the teacher, and it seemed everyone else did too. The class looked up to our teacher with such gratitude and thankfulness it inspired me to become a teacher when I was older. And I would build a school.

When school finished, I waved my friends good bye and went to fetch some water. Oh I might add, with a full belly. School always replenished us with a meal, which is the main reason ma sends me. I walked along a track, to where the river was. The bucket I carried was small and plastic but was enough to fit a reasonable amount of water. After much walking I arrived at the partially dry river. The river was large but only water holes remained. I lowered the bucket under the murky water and filled it close to the top. The load was quite heavy, but by putting it on my head it was lighter. Sometimes if I'm clumsy I would get soaked but I would dry in this weather so that wasn't a problem. The trip back was going to be tiring, but it gave me some reflection time. I could think about friends or school or family. Really anything that took my interest. I usually pictured myself leaving the village for high school and how I would cope with it. I could see my father picking at some rock at the mine. But that wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to become a teacher and teach the people in my village. That would be nice, I would do that. For me. For my family. For the village.

The next day the rooster sirens were competing with the sound of heavy rain. My school had finally come to a term break as rain had broken the drought. School was out. I hurried to the middle of the hut: 'Ma, why can't we go to school on rainy days?' She chuckled softly and answered, 'Don't be silly dear, the school doesn't have any roof or walls. The dirt would be turned to mud by now.' I sighed, the school will be a proper building I hoped. One day. And I would help it to be.



Once a landmark of New York City, the old St. Regis Hotel was now sectioned off by metres of cautionary yellow tape. Desolate, the 20-storey building sat like a person in quarantine, as explosive technicians continued their crowd control.

Gone was the opulence and gone was the life, but the memories remained.

'Ten!'

*A wave of white flooded into the room as a groom carried his bride over the threshold.*

'Nine!'

*A kerfuffle of shuffling feet and muffled voices echoed down the halls before six pairs of legs entered the pool gate.*

'Eight!'

*The sound of silence infiltrated the bar, as a lonesome man stared at his blank phone screen.*

'Seven!'

*Black garments hung haphazardly around the disheveled room.*

'Six!'

*Cabin luggage in tow, a pilot made his way to his regular room. Even the jet-lag couldn't hinder his navigational skills, as he dozily travelled the all-to-familiar halls. The weekly red eye from Los Angeles had him at the St. Regis at 5am every Friday morning, and had for the past thirteen years.*

'Five!'

*A Mr. and Mrs. Smith signed in at the check in desk, and made their way, arm in arm, to the elevator. Wedding bands, forgotten in pockets and purses, the adulterers came together in a passionate embrace. The combination of immorality and infidelity sullied the crisp, white bed sheets.*

'Four!'

*A fan whirred overhead monotonously as two miotic pupils stared out from the smoky haze. A cough. A moan. An escaped breath. Another cough. A man rolled to his side; hands fumbling blindly on the bedside table, knocking the castoff syringe to the floor. Returning to his back, he continued watching the pink elephants and orange monkeys swinging from the fan.*

'Three!'

*Flustered makeup artists and pretentious actors filtered through the lobby, gingerly side-stepping the wall of cameras. Lighting equipment triggered sweaty foreheads, whilst rain towers fashioned a storm, on a clear spring day.*

'Two!'

THE ST. REGIS

CHARLOTTE RODWAY  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
WINNER



*A clock ticked noisily. The warm, summer wind collided with the glass window causing a woman to jump. Her manicured fingernails drummed the bench, anxiously. Again, she checked her watch. Only a minute had passed. Locked up in this room, with a security guard outdoors, she let herself slip, momentarily into relaxation. She looked at her new identification. Laura Adams was no more. Erin Tolstoy had taken her place. To ensure her survival, she had to leave her life behind, and here, in the St. Regis, Witness Protection transformed her into someone else.*

*'One!'*

*Cameras flashed and news anchors reported as a President stepped up to the podium. The grand staircase had carried many ascents but none quite like this.*

*If walls could talk, they would have some sordid stories to tell.*



9

‘That’s another.’

The fifth person this week alone. I had been counting, recording their names in my notebook, if they had them. Numbers were all that mattered to people here now, numbers were important because a person’s number determined the cold containment in which their corpse would eventually be stored.

*If things don’t improve soon*, I thought to myself, *it won’t be long before the whole town would be lining the corridors*. Only a matter of time before the water coolers sit empty and the arrangement of nourished flowers wilt, dispirited and neglected.

A corpse was removed, only to be rapidly replaced by another nearing that lifeless condition. Coughs became the major form of communication, overpowering the chatter of the nurses, and the incessant beeping of the machines. I remained quiet, I walked the halls with my head down, and my hands deep within my pockets. My satchel contained the few things that I felt I should always keep with me, its thick strap ensured the protection of these items. Within its leather bindings lay my notebook pages with names, dates and numbers, a torch, and hospital papers, and my rowing badge.

The emergency door, wide open. Markings of where trolleys had frantically been pushed scraped against the walls lay forgotten.

I had never witnessed anything so powerful as this disease. Its unpredictable qualities scared everyone. Something that has the ability to eat its way into the living and destroy everything with sentience. A beat, a blink, a flinch. It was so human-like, yet so destructive. It pierced one with its unfamiliar presence, moved quickly and continued to then eat its way at others. It came in many forms: viruses, pains, always accompanied by an unexplained bite; but each progressed into something that could cease a heartbeat. I collected each autopsy, often from the main office bin.

‘Harper! Get this one downstairs, now!’ An unfamiliar voice demanded. I took orders from many, all of which I obeyed. It was just like being at school. My knowledge of biology extended to my half completed year 12 subject – this plague had even killed my studies. Everything I thought I knew had changed. This outbreak had become bigger than anything in my textbooks. Resources had become scarce, rooms were at their capacity, medical services in high demand, and there hidden within many is something that is growing, and infecting. People came, sometimes accompanied by a brave

## ONE FLOOR BELOW

MEREDITH RULE

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

RUNNER-UP





loved one, but often alone. 'Number 37.'

'But what is his name?' I thought to myself. At that moment I was thrown a key, which landed sharply in the cup of my palms. It reflected the limited light from the ceiling, and flashed in front of my eyes. I hooked it onto my lanyard. A clipboard is passed in my direction, thick with papers.

'Downstairs.' The tall figure pointed his blue rubber glove to the elevator doors.

The trolley glided across the rubber flooring, but the wheels hesitated every so often, questioning my resolve. My clipboard rested under my elbow. I pulled my lanyard out from the underneath of the thin collar of my shirt, and with my free hand, lifted it over my loosely pulled back hair. I turned to see the large figure striding in the other direction down the hallway, towards the emergency ward. Like a clear summers' day, he was decked in blue and white, with flesh only visible in the small gap between his face mask and cap. His eyes that were tired and aching, had stared down at me.

I pressed the button, dragging the trolley behind me, and inserted the key. The keys were followed by a moment of hesitation and then a determined effort to close the doors..The cold metal of the elevator walls made me jump as I tried to keep my distance from what lay under the thin white sheet.

The elevator came to a stop marked by a faint 'ding', and the doors opened again. I was now confronted with a dark room, square and rather uniform. A square of light from the elevator is mirrored into the blackness. A long metal bench divides the room into two. I pause to allow for time in which my eyes could adjust to the light. I draw in a cold breath as my hands take to the metal bar of the trolley, and I push forward into the darkness. The doors behind me come to a close, I quickly reach into my satchel and withdraw my torch. I force my bodyweight to the left, expecting the wheels of the trolley to follow my bearing. Reflective numbers appear 1... 2... 3... on my left. My only job was to *find number 37, that's it*, I kept telling myself.

I could tell my heart was pounding, beating too fast and too hard. I stopped to rest my hand upon the left side of my neck, my pulse had never been so strong. Mine was the only one that bulged, and bounced vigorously, in this lifeless morgue.

I slowly wheeled Mr 37 down to the back of the room, the torch tight within my grip. It jumps as I take each step. I reach the numbers



on the back wall which in their illuminated state read 35... 36... 37... .

At that moment, my heart missed a beat.

The hairs lining my arms rose at the thought of the dark, the unknown. But it was those hidden entities exposed in the lucent light that truly scared me. The white sheet was thin, weightless. It revealed what was left of a face that my eyes had seen a million times before. It was Jason – my boyfriend.



ONE FLOOR  
BELOW

9

HUMAN RIGHTS

MILLCENT TRIGAR

ORATOR OF THE YEAR

WINNER

*Human beings are not property. Let us double our efforts so that the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — ‘no one shall be held in slavery or servitude’ — ring true.’*

KOFI ANNAN



India, located in the Middle East of Asia, has the largest concentration of slavery in all its forms. And while it is estimated that around 30 million humans are in slavery world-wide, a near 15 million of those are currently serving in India. That's half of the world's slaves.

Trafficked into brothels, manual labour and debt bondage, Indian slaves live an appalling life. And if the idea of being forced into slavery isn't harsh enough, some are born into it. Slavery is the only life they know. I'm not talking about the casual house chores like the crummy 'unpacking of the dishwasher', that mum makes you to do every night. I mean full blown 12-24 hour hard labour with little to no pay. The dishes don't sound so unappealing now.

Not only do those in slavery suffer excruciating hours, but many undergo verbal abuse such as threats and insults, poor living conditions, lack of food and even physical and sexual abuse. To some extent, it is difficult to explain the life of a slave without actually experiencing it. But as I tell the story of 13 year old Rambho from Ashram, India, I will attempt to help you understand the life of an Indian slave.

Rambho's single mother, who was barely making it by money-wise, was seduced into an offer with a loom owner, who promised that her son would have schooling, a home and money to send back home if he came to work in his factory. Upon his arrival, Rambho was taught how to work the machines, and was already weaving rugs from that very day. With even younger slaves beside him, Rambho slept on makeshift, uncomfortable beds. He awoke at 4am and worked through till 11pm, fed only two small, unappealing meals. The promises made by the loom owner were a hoax, as there was no education provided for Rambho, and the money sent back home was meagre. The work the young boy received was demanding and if he complained, the loom owner would beat him with a stick, or force his fingers into boiling oil.

After a gruelling year, by chance, the police discovered the loom and all its slavery, and Rambho was returned to his family. In an

interview with him by the campaign organisation 'Free the Slaves', Rambho said 'I won't let anybody go there, even by mistake. I'll tell them that they hit you and they beat you and they don't treat you right.'

The quote 'I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks,' from Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* explains that everyone is the same, and the treatment they receive should be too. While *To Kill a Mockingbird* does not necessarily show or discuss the topic of slavery; it is only implied, it does, however, explain the inequality of black men compared to the white men.

In the same way, those who employ slaves think of themselves as superior also, and do not see those who work for them as equals. The possessors of slaves beat, rape and abuse their servants, just because they believe themselves to be of greater importance.

While International campaigns such as 'Home Alone', 'The Abolition Project' and 'Victim Protection Campaign' strive to eradicate slavery everywhere, the association 'Walk Free' aims to cease slavery in India. And while none of us can personally put an end to the torment that millions of Indian slaves go through every single day, we can surely lend a hand in tackling this broken human right.

Not a lot is being asked of us, and simply our signatures on a petition like the one on 'Walk Free's website is a positive step. Just because we go to a good school and live in Australia, does not mean that we are unaffected by slavery in India, or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

*'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil, is that good men do nothing.'*

EDMUND BURKE



CIVILIANS  
IN ARMED  
CONFLICT –  
SPEECH

ANGELA YAN  
ORATOR OF THE YEAR  
HIGHLY COMMENDED



Picture this. You are playing on a beach, the sun is shining and you can see the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean. Your friends are by your side and you are enjoying the moment. Suddenly something explodes behind you. The force throws you to the ground and life is taken away from you in the blink of an eye.

This is exactly what happened to four boys aged 9 to 11 from the Bakr family living in Gaza. They were cousins playing football on the beach just like any other day. One shell was dropped by Israeli forces on a fishermen's shed and the other was dropped right beside them. They were rushed to hospital, but it was too late. The Israeli military claimed that the target of the strike was the Hamas terrorist organisation, the largest Palestinian militant group that opposes peace with Israel. The deaths of these four boys is only one of many examples of civilians finding themselves trapped in armed conflict.

The inhabitants of war-torn countries have no rights. CNN reporter, Karl Penhaul, was told by locals in Gaza that the previous night, the Israeli Air Force dropped down pamphlets telling them to leave because they were going to bomb these areas the following morning. Despite it being good that Israel gave the civilians warning of their attacks, it does not make the situation right. One man leaving with his family said he felt like they were already dead. Civilian homes are treated like Lego blocks that can be rebuilt just as quickly as they are torn down. The truth is, that when the bombs hit and homes are destroyed, people will have nowhere to go and nothing left.

Conflicts in Gaza have resulted in more than 3,000 people dead. Not only Gaza, but during the decade-long war in Afghanistan, it was estimated that at least 21,000 civilians were killed. The number of civilian casualties in Pakistan was as high or even higher with the death toll being from 20,000 to 50,000. The Iraq body count estimated that as a result of direct war violence starting in early May 2014, at least 133,000 civilians were killed. These statistics show how merciless war can be and also how urgently the civilians of these countries need to make their voices heard.

One of the doctors in rural Damascus, Syria, said that 'it's like a terrifying nightmare that just keeps going on and on. You live everyday as if it's your last because you might die any second'. The conflict in Syria is between the government and the rebels, again, leaving innocent civilians in the firing line. The Syrian government

attacked rebel-held areas with poisonous chlorine gas. Yes, they were trying to eliminate the rebels, but did they even think about who the majority of people living there actually were?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that you have the right to live, and to live in freedom and safety. These wars are a violation of this right because civilians wake up in the morning not knowing whether they will do so the next morning or any morning in the future. They cannot stay in their homes or freely roam the streets without fear.

Civilians in war-torn countries face hardships every day, but fortunately several organisations, such as the *Centre for Civilians in Conflict*, are there to help. They travel to conflict zones and actually speak to people affected so that they can advise those in power on ways to recognise, protect and help them.

One other significant organisation is the *International Committee of the Red Cross*, which is also known as the ICRC. This organisation provides humanitarian aid for people affected by conflict and armed violence. They also make sure that civilians do not face discrimination and can access health care, safe drinking water and agricultural land.

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows how the innocent people in the community must be protected. For example in the novel, Miss Maudie says 'Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy... That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.' The 'mockingbirds' in these wars are civilians, including children, and rather than being protected, they are subjected to violence. People have the right to live in safety and security. The battlefields have moved to civilian homes and streets and it seems that for those living in these areas, life is a waiting game. They should not have to live and remain walking ghosts.



REDHEADS  
ANONYMOUS  
ACTIVIST FIGHTERS  
(RAAF)

RACHEL BAILLIE  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
HIGHLY COMMENDED &  
BOROONDARA  
LITERARY AWARDS  
WINNER OR HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

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*'The Building stands on no moral ground. Our righteous strength shall bring it down.'*

This quote was scrawled on a whiteboard propped up against the back wall of Wallace Samuel's garage. Wallace believed he was not like ordinary men; he was a strong ginger leader in the eyes of God. He had a mission. He had gathered together a following of fierce activists, luring them in with the promise of a brighter future, and together, they would destroy *The Building*. It would crumble beneath the weight of their weapons and the red-hot fury of Wallace and his organisation: The RAAF.

Several people tried to explain to him that the acronym 'RAAF' was already taken. Now, Wallace had this endearing quality that enabled him to offend almost everyone he met. He argued loudly and continuously that even though redheads were among the most discriminated group of people in Australia, the recessive red-haired gene was directly linked to superior intelligence. Therefore, anybody debating his views was in the wrong.

It went downhill for him from there.

Some days he'd come home from the pub or even the supermarket with bruises smudging his jaw. Eventually his parents just didn't ask.

However, his warriors never questioned. The faith they had in his saint-like halo of red was unbreakable. Or at least, they agreed with some of his views.

At first, one might think the RAAF meetings were composed of completely harmless and docile people who didn't mind being nicknamed 'Ranga.' But one should think again. These redheads were sick and tired of the nicknames. They were soldiers, of different ages and genders and backgrounds, but brought together by a fiery passion for justice.

Fortnightly, Wallace cleared out the garage, which actually belonged to his parents', as did the house he still lived in, and set up a forum of plastic chairs and light snacks. A quote was always in the background of meetings, usually related to *The Building*. Since Wallace was a pretentious, ego-driven fool, the quotes were usually some rhyme he'd thought of himself and deemed quotable enough for the meetings. His quotes often were suspiciously similar to Nelson Mandela's words, but the last person who pointed this out was expelled, by Wallace, from the RAAF, on the grounds they

didn't support 'The Cause'.

That day, members of the RAAF began to pile into Wallace's garage. He waited until all were seated until the meeting officially began.

'Welcome. It's good to see you all here.' He clapped his hands together. 'As we know, January has just shy of two weeks left. What important day is coming up soon?'

Nobody put much thought into Wallace's rhetorical questions. Most people had no clue what he was on about; they were only there for the food, and a chance to complain.

'That's right: Australia Day. But how is this any time to be proud? Our country is in shame. How can this nation stand for the systematic oppression of those who bare the reddest hair?'

The crowd let out angry murmurs of agreement. The buzz left him feeling slightly breathless. He considered taking a puff from the asthma inhaler in his pocket, but he didn't want to seem weak in front of the people who admired him so.

'But we are fighters for our people.' His eyes shone beneath his pale brows. 'We will bring our force to power. We will rise against those undignified blondes and brunettes! They may be celebrating the day of Federation, but what's the truth? We bring the truth! We bring the Rederation!'

'Rederation!' The audience cheered in unison, some with raised fists. 'Down with The Building! Long live the Ginger!'

After the cheering subsided, the troop discussed their plan of attack. It was beautiful in Wallace's eyes. It took months to formulate, but the guerrilla gang all put their orange tufted heads together for the ultimate plot of political anarchy. The paintball guns were stacked in Wallace's room, awaiting their chance to serve 'The Cause'. At the strike of midnight on the 26th, they would open fire at The Building, that horrible place which represented the discrimination of his people. The red paint would splatter the outside walls and deliver the message to the evil forces inside: 'Rederation is here!'

They would rise up against the odds. The Building would fall, along with the offensive prejudice against redheads in Australia. A new era of Rederation would begin. Wallace was sure of it.

The others? Not so much.

Wallace had considered giving each member a balaclava, but then

REDHEADS  
ANONYMOUS  
ACTIVIST FIGHTERS  
(RAAF)

IO



he thought about the true value of 'The Cause'. It would be disgraceful to hide the hair, even if this meant revealing their identities. But wouldn't that surely be better for the history books in years to come?

Further planning of the assault would begin, but now, it was time to watch a film starring an inspirational ginger (this was as much loved a tradition by members as Ed Sheeran karaoke nights). Today they watched *Moulin Rouge* with Nicole Kidman, projected onto the whiteboard after Wallace reluctantly wiped his quote off. He took a seat amongst the crowd, for a true leader sat alongside his people.

Then he started to think about things.

He thought about the boy he was long ago, who sat alone at lunch and pressed sweaty palms into his eyes to stop the tears. He wondered if schoolyard bullying followed the laws of biology. Was the social hierarchy based on survival of the fittest? Would there always be a runt of the litter that Mother Nature knew best to abandon?

Were all asthmatic, redheaded kids doomed from the start?

He thought about the other kids who loomed over him and laughed the way cruel little boys do at the hair only his mother could describe as 'unique'. He often thought about those boys, and he would smile to himself, because they didn't know justice like he did. His paint guns would be aimed at *The Building*, but perhaps they would also be pointed at some lesser known, sneering faces, all for 'The Cause.'

But times had changed. The dark days of teen-hood were behind him. He was in the role he was born to play, looking ahead to a future road of power, money and pretty girls. Once the attack on *The Building* commenced, he and his people would be celebrated as they deserved to be, and the redheads of Australia could come out of hiding. Julia Gillard would be proud.

Wallace was a proud and fierce leader who didn't often think about mortality, neither his own or of 'The Cause'. He was not the type of man who knew that one day he'd be forgotten, just the way the cruel little boys, who grew up to be cruel men, would forget the slurs they hurled at the redheaded asthmatic kid. And Wallace didn't know, or maybe he didn't care, that he was a boy turned bitter who went about retribution in all the wrong ways, and now he'd grown up

IO

to become a cruel man too.

The meeting concluded in good time, as did Wallace's poisoned thoughts. He switched off the projector and wished his people goodbye and Godspeed. They headed back to their lives of oppression, but the pain would not last much longer. They would rise up. They would prevail.

The next time the RAAF assembled, hell would paint the golden arches of The Building, and that infamous clown statue, who laughed cruelly at Wallace's people, would fall. There wasn't much plan for what would occur after the attack, but that didn't matter to Wallace. He was ready for the moment he would cry out, seconds before they fired: 'God is ginger! God is great!'



REDHEADS  
ANONYMOUS  
ACTIVIST FIGHTERS  
(RAAF)

IO

STATUE OF  
RIBBERTY

SALLY CHAO  
BOROONDARA

LITERARY AWARDS

WINNER OR HIGHLY

COMMENDED

*'I want to live simply. I want to sit by the window when it rains and read books I'll never be tested on. I want to paint because I want to, not because I've got something to prove. I want to listen to my body, fall asleep when the moon is high and wake up slowly, with no place to rush off to. I want to not be governed by money or clocks or any of the artificial restraints that humanity imposes on itself. I just want to be boundless and infinite.'*

ANONYMOUS

*Each living identity is welcomed into this world, creating a pathway of life from the moment our eyes witnessed the world. A building. It can be metaphorically symbolised as the destination to the beginning or end of one's journey. Although, journeys are never infinite. Each inviting, exciting, momentary action and adventure we proceed into doing does not last forever. We come to find along our journeys, that we get caught in buildings, between the walls of reality and fantasy. We triumph, with the thought that our worlds are expanding, although in actuality, they are only shrinking, until we are suffocated by the walls of reality that eventually grasp us in despair and whisk us away as if our very existence is merely just as relevant as a single star billions of light years away in another universe.*

*Whether you're born human or animal; we're all just a frog in the big city.*

*Sometimes, each emotion we possess expands, multiplies and fills the empty space of these suffocating walls and we find ourselves arriving at our destined building before our journey has even departed.*

My name is Alfredo.

*I'm big; yet small.*

*I'm rich; yet poor.*

*I'm lively; yet violent*

*And I'm pretty; yet ugly.*

*I'm also a frog.*

New York City – the reigning capital of the world. Where questions are answered, where dreams are capital-ised and where loves are eternalised; or perished.

The skyline anticipated its stormy awakening as it exhaled a fetid breeze across the overshadowing expanse of New York City, the air as crisp as the precisely cut edge of a brand new book that had not yet touched shelving.

IO

Each forthcoming moment for Alfredo saw his fragile structure being discriminated by society, yet today brought forth an electric state of mind, powerful enough to compensate the poor weather and even poorer state of mind. Tonight Alfredo would bind the barriers between himself and society; he was going on a romantic date with a woman of human nature.

At 6:30pm, Alfredo roamed the manic, glamorised, urbanised streets of New York City on his way to feast upon a Parisian cuisine in his luxe, champagne coloured vehicle.

'Alfredo?!' He knew the voice without knowing its owner; her voice resonated with him, despite the fact they'd only just barely met? He gazed, escaped gravity, embraced towards her, like a panicked newborn infant towards its mother.

'*Bon jour belle...*' Alfredo softly crooned into her ear, like a gentle beast, softly approaching its prey. The elixir of her perfume lingered around each cell of Alfredo's nostrils.

'*Can I get you a CROAK-A-COLA?*' He asked, even before taking a seat at their table, was this action to eager? Or did it exude a vibe of confidence and resilience?

'*Sure!*' She exclaimed, releasing an equally exuberant vibe.

*Already from such a mere introduction, it could be predicted their personalities were so equally comparable, and what could ever try to fight good with good? This was a momentous realisation for Alfredo; it is not all of society that looks down on the frog.*

*As each word was expressed; as each laugh emerged; as each smile was exchanged; as each processor of drinks began to flourish; and as each forthcoming tick of the clock passed, it was the only suppression of time; the nemesis of the night.*

The doors of the kitchen emerged open, releasing a sheer scent of the meal that was to be shared between this potentially forgoing relationship. Although, in such a way, the residue of the scent resonated with Alfredo too quickly, in an undesirable way.

The shadow of this Parisian waiter crept behind Alfredo, the scent growing stronger. It was not until the waiter identified this resonated scent, which sent Alfredo into a frozen, reluctant state of mind.

*'Frogs legs for the lady.'*

IO

STATUE OF  
RIBBERTY

The silence was loud. Alfredo was broken, forgetting the controversial menu of the Parisian cuisine. No words could be spoken. Actions were only so able to be completed. It was as if someone was tearing Alfredo from the flesh, slowly, then all at once. WHY WOULD SHE ORDER SUCH A VIOLENT, SENSITIVE DISH? No compensation for this woman, who could very well be feasting negligently upon Alfredo's very frog family, he vastly emerged from the restaurant, his actions speaking louder than his words could have ever.

*Alfredo wanted his Lady Liberty, but he just ended up with one of the others.*  
'Alfredo, NO!' She exclaimed with a sense of urgency.

As he emerged into the frigid breeze of New York, he was struck when he witnessed that his car had been *TOAD*.

Enough.

IO

For all his life, Alfredo longed for the embrace of New York City. To be accepted into an urbanised society, where no two people are the same, where his threads of life would be extended, eternalised. **But no.** What fulfilment did he aspire to now, now that he has foreseen all of society and how they treat those of the frog nature?

He knew that his very life, his stable state of mind, were hanging by a thread. Was he ready to cut these threads?

**The Statue of Liberty, Big. Yet Small.** Located on Liberty Island outside of the urbanised New York City, isolated from the rest of its neighbouring city. That's how Alfredo viewed his entire life, isolated from the rest of humanity. He didn't feel comfortable in the skin he was gifted with. Being a frog, he felt such a superior difference with the rest of humanity he felt at times he wanted to cut his threads of life, and today was the day, so it was off to **the building** where his journey will end and be reborn at the same time.

As Alfredo boarded the very last Liberty Island ferry, he contemplated and comprehended his sorrow, arbitrary cycle of life. *If I don't come back, who will know?*

Alfredo hopped veraciously from the rusted, tortured docks of Liberty Island, defying gravity as he so fiercely emerged underneath the closed gates of the The Statue of Liberty.

Each step towards the tip of the threads only closed the clocks of time. Each breathe drew the curtains of life together.

Alfredo reached the highest, northern point of the Statue of Liberty. What was there to contemplate? His thoughts were merely

going where he was now going; into the rivers of New York... Because *water*; while it has the power to sustain and prolong our existence, at the very same time, it holds the power to terminate us.

He took a step, a leap so grand that no frog could conquer such a drastic measure. For the first time in Alfredo's life, he felt breathless in such an uplifted state, as his jump into the river saw that all his life, he wasn't searching for the acceptance of New York City; he was searching for '*the world beyond our knowledge...*' As his body weightlessly immersed into the river, he was finally accepted into a place, where no matter his structure, would be accepted...

Not only the river, but, his thoughts were his assassin, the walls of life suffocated him.

So, whether you are born human or animal, we're all just a frog in the big city.



STATUE OF  
RIBBERTY

IO

SEARCHING FOR  
THE STARS

IMOGEN FEDER  
ISOBELLE CARMODY  
HIGHLY COMMENDED

When I was seven years old, my father took me star gazing. We lay underneath the sky, wrapped in blankets, our eyes wide open. We would search in silence, only interrupted by the wind rushing through the trees and the murmur of cars in a far away land. It was so peaceful, the sky so bright. I remember now only in dreams and sadness, but my father once told me that Orion was his favourite constellation.

‘But why?’ I would pester him, engulfed by the magic of Gemini and the brightness of Perseus. ‘Because,’ he would take my hand, ‘No matter where you are in the world, no matter if it’s cloudy or clear, you can always see The Hunter with his belt and shining sword. In this way, I believe we can always be together.’

My father lied to me. You can’t see stars in New York City. Instead the sky is filled with murky smoke and the fluorescent light of a thousand buildings. And even if you could, there would be no appreciation of the endless centuries that glow up above. When I first moved to this city, I would search *The Celestial Handbook* for some similarity, a sense of being at home but I felt like I was wandering aimlessly, lost. All I knew was that I hated this city.

The summer that my father passed away, we all had our own ways of coping. I spent my days studying the ceiling of my room and listening to my father’s records. Clouds floated through the endless blue but the evening sky had lost its magic. My Mum was a strong woman but she needed her family. She wrote e-mails and talked in monotones to her sister in New York. Once I woke in the early morning and pressed my ear against her door. I realised then, with a sense of unease, that we wouldn’t be staying in Albuquerque for long.

*Tick, tick, tick*, the harder I try to ignore the noise, the louder it gets. I’ve been in New York for only a week but somehow it feels longer. Sitting in my aunt’s kitchen, she pesters me about if I’m excited about my new school or if I had a boyfriend in New Mexico. I smile politely but I soon realise that my aunt knows nothing about me. When my mum walks in and states that, ‘Caroline hates New York City,’ her face registers from shock to confusion to concern.

I look away, embarrassed. ‘She says that the people are too loud and the towers are too tall.’

‘Kinda different from New Mexico, right?’

I smile half heartedly but excuse myself a minute later. I am different from them; I prefer silence and my thoughts. My father was the same.

IO

*The Celestial Handbook's* pages flutter open, the well worn binder heavy in my hand. It had been my father's book when he was a boy, and the pages are crackly and rigid with age. I flip to chapter five, 'Orion: The Hunter of the Sky,' and take in the intricate diagram and the messy, scribbled notes in the margin. *Seen July 26th 2007 in Carlsbad Caverns with Caroline – her first time.* I smile, remembering that humid and clear night. Tracing the stars with my finger, something catches my eye, something I have not noticed before. The back of Orion's page is stuck to another, leaving the chapter incomplete. With shaking hands, I lightly tear between the pages, intrigued by the mystery. Small, messy words are revealed when I finally pry the pages open, my father's distinctive scrawl making me gasp.

*My dearest Caroline,*

*Unfortunately, the stars were not in my favour. My time with you is something I am eternally thankful for but I have learnt to accept my condition, as I hope you will too.*

*I know it will be hard but New York will be good to you and your mother, believe me... I want you to visit Grand Central Station. I hope that you will see why.*

*Love always,  
Your father.*

It's oddly quiet. The train hisses and grunts and the lights flicker with an eerie glow. I always imagined the Subway to be busy, but instead I sit alone on my orange seat. My map tells me that Grand Central will be in five stops. The butterflies won't settle in my stomach. I try to distract myself. I wonder when my father came to New York. Did he feel as out of place as I do? And my train of thought goes around and around, *why is he taking me here?*

With squinting eyes, I find myself in the centre of the morning rush. The young, the old, the short and tall brush past me but I hardly notice. My attention rests firmly on the building in front of me. It's beautiful. Pillars encase the huge glass windows, the ancient statues on the roof casting shadows onto the sidewalk. It's something from another place, another century. But it still doesn't answer my question.

I O



SEARCHING FOR  
THE STARS

Why did my dad want me to come here? I feel sick with confusion. My father and I loved to hike the red canyons, to ski and to bike ride together. He took us to Carlsbad Caverns to explore the endless caves and to see the beautiful stars that people from all over the world flocked to see. It doesn't make sense that the last place he would take me would be here, a solid building in the middle of a bustling city that will never feel like home. But I have faith in my father, so I push the butterflies down and take a deep breath. *Here I go.*

As I walk through the station, stars of golden and yellow light shine down on me. The ceiling is filled with constellations, there's Gemini and Perseus, Taurus and Pisces. My eyes take in the wonder above me and I can not believe it. I can see Orion, his shining belt and his sharp sword, just like I would at home. My eyes fill with tears. I am so happy and I laugh out loud, not even caring what people think. I want to scream, 'Grand Central Station has a ceiling full of stars!' Because it all makes sense now. This city that I have hated for so long, now opens its arms to me, we understand each other. People rush by, they have trains to catch, places to be but for me, the world has stopped.

With my father's letter in hand, I take sanctuary underneath a ceiling of stars. Some say the brightest stars in the world can be seen in New Mexico. I know now that if you look hard enough, they're pretty bright here too.



IO

I had just swung my other leg over the top of the fence when the biting wind slapped me. Before I began my descent I took in the view from my vantage point. The night was clinging to everything, wrapping me in its icy darkness and enveloping everything around me along with it. Only the opposing force of moon was enough to pierce the gloom. Not that I would necessarily describe the night as gloomy. While some may consider the grounds of the abandoned California Motor Inn that currently stretched out before me to be desolate, decrepit and deserted, I considered it to be a forest. A forest with trees of dilapidated brick and leaves of remnants of past visitors, long forgotten in time. And like all forests, it had its secrets still left undiscovered.

Once over, I scanned my eyes across the empty car park. Shattered glass glittered on the pavement and the overgrown trees seemed as if they were bursting to escape their confines. The white graffiti reflecting the moon's light from the rooves of the buildings, projecting the word 'void' into the night seemed almost amusing to me. In a way this place felt like a void, sucking in wanderers and wayfarers, deranged enough to think about drifting inside. I lifted my camera to capture my first picture of the night, the shutter echoing through the near silence. I say 'near silence' because somewhere close by, an incessant hiss was ringing out into the night.

Rounding the corner I see the hooded figure standing there, spray can in hand. I stood and observed as finishing touches were added, a few more stokes of silver paint. Standing back to admire their work, big letters spelling out the words 'Motel Hell.'

'You do know vandalism's illegal?' I asked.

'You do know breaking and entering's illegal,' the hooded figure retorted without even glancing my way.

'I haven't actually broken anything yet,' I added. At that point she finally decided to turn around to acknowledge me.

'You're missing out on all the fun then,' she smirked. Without warning she lifted her arm back before hurtling the spray can as hard as she could. It sailed through the air before colliding with a wall and hitting the ground in a clamour. After a few seconds of stunned silence I whipped back around to find out what her problem was, but she had already disappeared inside. I lifted my camera to take a photo of the fresh vandalism and began walking before I could give myself enough time to question why I was following her into the motel.

## MOTEL HELL

ANNIE GLEISNER

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

RUNNER-UP

# IO

When I found her again she was too busy rustling through the contents of the old conference room to even notice me. Beams of light from the moon managed to sneak their way in through delicate, fluttering curtains illuminating glowing strips across the floor. In what the light could pick up there was yet more glistening glass amongst a conglomeration of various other items strewn across the floor. The moon also landed her in a pool of light, her hood now pushed back allowing the light to frame her, her hair darker than the night outside, her back still towards me. The shutter from my camera fractured the silence yet again.

'Why do you do that?' She inquired, without even hazarding a look my way.

'Do what?'

'You know,' she gestured, 'the photos.' She finally looked up at me. 'I mean, what's so interesting about a heap of broken old junk?' She looked me in the eye before turning back to rummage through a stack of withering, deceased old books. I turned my camera over in my hands before responding.

'I find beauty in decay.' I finally replied. 'People might only see this place as an abandoned, crummy old motel, but to me it's like a forest. A forest filled with mystery and beauty just waiting to be uncovered.' I looked up from the camera to see her facing me, listening attentively.

'See, that's where you and I are different. To you, this place is a forest. To me, it's a jungle.'

I leaned down to pick up one of the books sitting in the pile, the word 'genesis' printed in small, almost indiscernible text across the top of the crumpled page of the standard issue motel room bible. Flipping it over the old cover seemed to be withered and creased, like an old woman's complexion.

'Ironic, huh?' I turned the Bible towards her. She shot me an incredulous look. I tossed the Bible into her hands. 'Finding something like this in 'Motel Hell.'

She smirked.

I was too busy taking pictures of the pool when I lost her again. The frozen water still left there, home to a number of crates and pillows and bicycle wheels hanging contentedly in their watery life. The now obsolete 'Pool Out of Order' sign still attached to the decrepit gate, singing softly in the wind, swaying on its hinges. This

IO

time it was not my shutter that broke the silence of the night, but the sound of a chair shattering on the pavement after being thrown from the second story balcony.

'Is everything alright?' I exhale as I finally reach the room atop the flights of stairs, from which chairs were being thrown.

'Everything's great, why do you ask?' She replied nonchalantly, emerging from her position, rummaging through the items in the cupboard.

'Then why are chairs flying off balconies?' I move into the middle of the room to fully take in the sight. It had clearly been some sort of under the sea themed room back in the day. There was a ghastly wallpaper covering the room with its assortment of coral and tropical fish and rippling water letting the artificial light in. And of course, to top it all off, the horrendous baby pink Lion's Paw shell headboard to really balance the room out.

'Have you ever thrown a chair off a balcony? I can assure you it is an utterly satisfying feeling.' Again she was too focused on what she was doing to merit me a glance. I continued to stare at her.

'I'm serious,' she insisted, picking up another chair in the corner and thrusting it into my hands. 'Give it a go.' I looked down at the chair, then back up at her, staring as if she had grown a third eye. 'See, this is what I mean by the whole jungle forest thing. All you're interested in is finding hidden meaning in things, in discovering their 'secrets.' But have you ever thought that maybe a dump is just a dump, or a crummy motel just a crummy motel? This place is my jungle because I can see it for what it really is and now I can run free in it. Maybe if you just-' I didn't get to hear the rest of her sentence because I had already taken the three steps necessary to reach the edge of the balcony and tossed the chair over it.

It landed with the most satisfying crash I have ever heard. I turned around to see her grinning.

'Is there anything else I can throw?'

Soon, everything from heaters to dressers were being thrown over the balcony in the most fulfilling cacophony of sound. I didn't even notice when she took my camera and started taking pictures.

'I think that's everything,' she sighed, a contented look sprawled across her face.

'Not everything,' I replied, turning back into the room one last time. My fingers were gripped around it and my foot braced up

IO

MOTEL HELL

against the wall as I wrenched the headboard from its fixtures. She came in to help me lift the shell all the way over the balcony and sent it crashing against the pavement with the loudest explosion of them all. We gazed, stunned, at the pile of furniture carcasses below until the moment was interrupted by the droning of police sirens. 'What's your name?' She finally got around to asking me.

'Abigail.' I replied.

'Well Abigail,' she handed my camera over to me. 'It seems as if this is our cue to leave.'

She took my hand in hers, and then we were running.



IO

It was the thrill that I lived for. The wind rushing past my face as it danced in my curly hair. Nothing but the sound of my thumping heart. 2,000 feet up in the air. Views as clear as an untouched pond. James always said that it was a risky business; that every time I jumped out of a plane it could be my last time. I never listened to him, only focused on the ground below and the empty space between me and the earth. I was always looking for something to jump off, climb up, swim across or devour. In the small town of Morven I was known as the daredevil, the one who was bold, brave and literally bulletproof (my attempt at climbing the police wall back in '07 resulted in me being fired at and as a consequence, scars now mark my skin). Nothing so outrageous or risky was too much for me, I was up for anything.

I have had my fair share of accidents though. A snake bite left me paralysed for a few hours. Food poisoning from a curry sent me to hospital for a week. My most lethal stunt was swimming from Spain to Morocco. I swam into a bloom of jellyfish. All I remember was sinking into the Alboran Sea. Darkness overcame me as the sun above was fading and I could no longer see my oxygen bubbles. James saved my life by pulling me out of the water. After that, I was forced to break from my extravagant antics, for James' sake.

Now I was travelling eight and a half hours to London where my next stunt stood – 300 metres of pure glass and shining beauty. Nobody was going to hold me back. There was a lack of adrenaline in my blood and I needed the feeling of thrill back in my veins.



I walked another three steps, just so my head could lean over the edge of the building. The view of London was majestic at this time of night. London Eye was turning at a leisurely pace, making everything seem like a slow motion movie. I could hear the shouts of the crowd gathered behind me yelling to climb back over the safety barrier. This was my most dangerous jump and as much as I wanted to get back to safety, my stiffened and cold legs restricted me. The weight of my parachute strapped tight on my back seemed to get heavier and heavier as the seconds, which felt like hours, passed. I took my hand off the railing, shuffling even closer towards the edge. I took one last glance back at James, he mouthed 'see you at the bottom', before turning around. He could never watch me jump; too scared for my life. The sun was slowly disappearing behind the horizon, making the

IO

AUDACIOUS

scene below shine strange colours of red and orange. 800 feet of air flowing beneath me. A flock of birds chirping and flying above. When I jump, I would become another speck in the sky, yet instead of flying, I would be falling.

As I stepped out, I immediately began to drop. I was graciously, elegantly and calmly falling. The surrounding buildings were now a blur and the dewy evening air soaked my clothes. Everything was so quiet. I could only hear the beating of my heart and the whirling of the wind rushing past my ears. 27 seconds and I would be on the ground, feet landing heavily in the park below.

My hands promptly searched for the buckle to release my chute. My numb fingers failed to grip the clasp, my heart rate escalated, making my head thump.

The ground was nearing, the trees becoming bigger, the worried faces of the people below becoming clearer. I was spinning now, everything was smearing together as my head became a haze. Goose bumps emerging from my neck. James' words running through my mind, see you at the bottom, see you at the bottom. I knew I wasn't going to make it. I knew that this jump was one too far. I continued to fall with the wind brushing through my hair and the cold air nibbling at my skin. I was too audacious; a risk taker. This was going to be my last jump.



IO

When I was first told I needed to stop procrastinating, I had no idea what that meant, so I did what any normal teenager would do, I turned to the internet for guidance. Wikipedia, my one true love, informed me that '*Procrastination is the practice of carrying out less urgent tasks in preference to more urgent ones.*' This simple definition does not do justice to the serious issue I have with putting off doing my homework until 3am the morning of when it is due. It is an illness. The idea of spending six hours at school doing work, and then having to come home and do more, I just disagree with on principle. That's at least what I tell myself as I watch the Bratz movie to avoid having to do anything remotely productive.

I think my real problem is that I am an excellent liar. This is not to teachers, who I'm trying to explain why I haven't started my 3,000 word journal we have meant to have been writing all term. Oh no, I am an expert at lying to myself. Some of my methods include spending an hour making a detailed list of everything I need to get done that day because 'I need to be organised'; deciding to start making myself a gourmet lunch at 11:00, because 'I need food for thought' and my personal favourite, looking up motivational quotes for an hour and a half so I can be inspired to finally do some work. But you'd still think after doing all of this, I would finally settle down and get it over with, but you're wrong. I still maintain that if I had been born twenty years earlier when there was not the constant calling of the internet, I would have got my work done on time and yet here I am being told how lucky I am. I have the valuable source of infinite information which we call the internet. Please, I'm so happy I have the internet because of all the knowledge I can obtain from it. Seriously, I can think of a million other things I would prefer to use the internet for than actually using it for productivity.

If you're still wondering how I could possibly spend so much time wasting away in front of an inanimate object, the truth is, I honestly don't know myself. One thing I can say for certain is, you have to agree with me on some level, that you have said 'five more minutes' and then an hour later you're *still* scrolling your dash. Well I experience the same, except with me it's more like five more minutes and then the next thing I know I'm on the weird side of youtube watching some middleaged Mexican man giving a make-up tutorial whilst looking out my window trying to convince myself that, no, that is most definitely not the sun.

PROCRASTINATION  
STATION  
AKA  
THE INTERNET

MADELINE NOLAN

IO



PROCRASTINATION  
STATION  
AKA  
THE INTERNET

If there has been one thing I have learnt in all my time as a professional procrastinator, it is that not doing the work never pays off. Instead, I spend the hours leading up to the deadline, forever looming over my head, feeling guilty and not entirely enjoying myself as I surf the web looking up pictures of cats dressed as Christmas elves. I would strongly urge everyone who is reading this to learn from my many, many mistakes and stop procrastinating. As someone who speaks purely from experience, I can safely say that the effort of trying to catch up on three chapters of Maths in one night does NOT outweigh the rewards. As an ancient proverb states: *Procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried.* I always knew all those hours spent looking up motivational quotes would come to something.



IO

## ASYLUM SEEKERS

CLAIRE SMART

ORATOR OF THE YEAR

WINNER

Let us begin with an apology. We should be sorry. We should be sorry that we live in a society in which human rights are breached on a daily basis, because every day, refugees are turned back by the Australian government, forced away from a life of peace, forced away from opportunities, and forced away from their basic human rights. Picture this. At the age of just 9 years old, you have resorted to drinking detention centre shampoo in desperate attempt to poison yourself. And if that's not bad enough, your parents and younger sisters were raped, then thrown overboard by pirates during your only form of escape from the war zone that you once called home. This sounds like a life that no one would have to live, but Iraqi refugee, Samira, lives it everyday.

We have failed to protect, or even identify refugees by redirecting them to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, breaching Australia's obligation under the International Refugee Convention. The Australian Government's belief is that, by keeping refugees out of Australia, we are preventing sinking boats, deception and even fatalities. But does this short term prevention outweigh the long term damage deterring asylum seekers has on Australia?

Keep in mind that we are dealing with human beings; these innocent people are the ones who have to deal with our mistakes. While turning asylum seekers away we are discouraging unsafe travel, but we aren't really preventing the problem. Sending them to other underdeveloped, unsafe countries is more dangerous than the risks of sinking boats, and costs almost the same as letting them in. As well as this, making it legal, makes it safer for refugees, which helps tackle the issue of sinking boats anyway.

Take a good look at the person next to you. They are safe; away from bombings, poverty, gunshots and sex trafficking threats. They can go outside. They have freedom of speech and are respected and loved. We are fortunate enough to experience these rights on a daily basis, yet how do we still manage to take them for granted? Ignoring 'boat people' and turning back 'queue jumpers' is a violation of human rights on our part, because everyone has the right to seek asylum in Australia, whether or not they have a valid visa. We are the 10th richest country in the world, but in 2011 Australia hosted only 0.29% of the world's 10 million asylum seekers. Why is it that we pride ourselves on our fairness and multiculturalism, yet we turn away refugees because of their circumstances?

# IO

But letting asylum seekers in is so much more than that; it's about embracing the benefits of accepting deserving people into our society. The higher population in Australia creates more human power, more ideas and more development, which boosts the economy. Introducing refugees demands a higher level of social workers and educators, creating more jobs and more experience for Australians. With a growing population, we can learn to utilise our resources and work towards eliminating poverty through education and opportunities, at such an insignificant cost.

A larger range of cultures in our society increases awareness and encourages acceptance within communities. It provides a stronger and more respectful relationship with other countries, which is something that we desperately need, considering how selfish we have been to countries like France and the US, who have managed to share their resources with more than 3 million refugees. As a developed country, it is our responsibility, our privilege to share with others. There's always the excuse that Australia doesn't have enough space for all these people; but we have the 3rd lowest density in the world. And yes, most of our land is desert, but when it comes to choosing between hot weather and a war zone, I wouldn't think twice.

Maybe the government does have the best interests of asylum seekers in mind. But think about child abuse in churches, the stolen generation. Just because the government has good intentions for refugees, doesn't mean that they're really doing the right thing by them. We all make mistakes, but it's time for us to learn from them and prioritise short term prevention with long term damage. In the words of civil rights activist, Mary Angelou; *'History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.'*

If Australia is always talking about reducing poverty and sharing wealth, why are we ignoring those who are so close to home? How can we deprive distressed children like Samira from their basic necessities? We have the resources, the money and the space for struggling refugees, so why are we constantly pushing them away? Even our national anthem seeks acceptance and development for our society: *'For those who come across the seas, we've boundless plains to share, with courage let us all combine to advance Australia fair.'*



IO

The sun shone.

Slowly, Dusk stirred, surprised he was alive. When he had closed his eyes, he felt sure he would end up standing in front of the Thousand Hells, where flames wrapped scalding hot sheets around black iron gates.

But this was assuredly the land of the living, lit by the sun and plagued by thirst. Dusk coughed and rolled over, grimacing at the dryness in his throat. When was the last time he'd had something to drink?

'Too damn long,' he whispered, or tried to. What came out was an incoherent, sticky retching. He tried rolling over, and almost toppled into the sea. Slowly, he braced his hands against the raft and felt along the edges, trying to judge its size.

The answer he got was no more encouraging than anything else. The raft measured almost three arm-lengths on each side. He would have to curl almost double to lie on it.

How had this happened? Only a day earlier he had been aboard *The Widow's Nest*. She had certainly been the fastest of the ships available in Annipor Harbour, where Dusk had arrived to return home after long years of being fostered by the Grand Thaumaturge. The winds had been against them for most of the journey, but the oarsmen had seen them safely past the rocky coast and into the open sea.

Then the storm had come.

For a moment, panic tried to grip him. He could die quite easily here, far away from any form of civilisation, and certainly far away from Dragon's Nest, where they all waited for him. Night, all kind concern for her younger brother. His father, Lord Fell, soberly proud of his son's decision to study magic across the sea in Annipor.

But the panic soon slid off. It simply could not gain purchase when pain and thirst were already fighting for dominance. The throbbing in his head seemed much more bearable if he closed his eyes...

He wasn't entirely sure when he woke next, but he woke up under the stars, and a rushing wind that at least cooled him. He coughed, harshly, and tried to lever himself up into a sitting position. *I should get some shelter from the sun*, he thought. Talking seemed like too much of an effort now. *I should get something to drink*.

Painfully, he turned his head and stared out across the dazzling surface of the ocean. None of the waves showed any inclination of

## DUSK FALLS

HANNAH WINSPEAR-  
SCHILLINGS  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
WINNER

IO

turning fresh to please him, and if any other pieces of the ship remained, they had long been flung in other directions.

He wondered if he was going to survive, and was suddenly reminded of his father. 'We are the Blackthorne family, Dusk,' Lord Fell of Dragon's Nest had told him. Dusk could hear his voice in the salt-edged wind as surely as if he were standing beside him. 'We come from King Blackthorne the First, and we live with his blood in our veins. We survive.'

'We survive,' Dusk mumbled as he lay back down. The glare of the sun was hurting his eyes, so he closed them. He needed water.

Their family had always been afraid of water. Their ancestral home of Dragon's Nest was an island fortress in the middle of the salt sea, hewn by their ancestor Beryn the Brave from hexagonal cylinders of dark stone. Dusk had always felt protected in the shadow of its massive stone walls.

'Fear death by water, Dusk,' his father had told him. When you lived on an island, death always came by sea. 'Fear it, always.'

When he woke up again, he could not have said if it were night or day. The sky gleamed like a pearl, but that could mean anything. Grey and white mixed and swirled until it made him so dizzy he had to look away. *I need to see*, he thought. Slowly, he set his elbows beneath him and rolled over, looking to what his fever-addled mind told him was the north.

In the end, it didn't matter which direction he looked to. The sea heaved and churned, restless and endless. He stared at it, and was reminded of his sister's eyes. Night Blackthorne had almost exactly the same colour eyes.

His older sister liked sketching the sea, he remembered. And the sea eagles too; they came to land near Night's room, he knew. Their droppings paled the stone grotesques that hunched on the roof, the thousand stone raptors that hunched over the walls of the ancient fortress. Night would stand beneath the grey mantle of an incoming storm, head tilted back. Occasionally she would stop, snap her head down, and call to her younger brother to come and see what she had seen.

'Look at this! A dragon in the clouds! Right there! That means summer's going to stay for longer than we thought, and we'll have an east wind.'

He would laugh and say, 'But that's just stories.' He had never

IO

really paid much attention to the books on cloud-gazing, but he knew Night liked to indulge herself.

Whoever Night was.

While he was trying to remember, an east wind began to blow, and a gleam of red-gold broke through the clouds, showing him that it was sunset, late evening, the time of fading days and gathering dreams. He stared blankly as the stars came out. His father had taught him the constellations when he was a child, but he couldn't remember any of them now.

He fell asleep as the raft pitched beneath him.

In the dream, it didn't feel like drowning.

In the dream, there was a surreal sense of calm. A weightless floating, a slow drift downwards to the inevitable, but no panic. The surface shone pale emerald, and he knew if he could just reach out his hand... if he could only stretch his fingers up towards the light...

But he couldn't muster the strength. The sea slowly cooled his skin, whispering water-logic in his ears as it slowly dragged him down.

Hands took him from the sea, and bound him with rope. He felt himself get hauled up into the air, swinging now and then to bang against the side of a ship. Why had they taken him from the water?

Fear death by water. Someone had said that once, but he couldn't remember who.

'Why isn't he responding?'

'Heat stroke, probably.'

'No.' The voice spoke with soft authority, and he turned his head to find eyes that shone like the waves. 'I've drawn a few like this from the water before. Watch.'

The owner of the blue-green eyes stood up, and he was laid gently on the deck. At once he stood, moving forward until he could see the water again, through the railings of the ship. The waves called to him, enticing him back. Why had they taken him?

'Sea-madness?' Said another voice.

'No. He would be dead, gone to join the waves, if it were so. I don't have a name for this. The sea took something from him.'

'What should we do with him, Captain?'

'Leave him,' said the sea-eyed voice softly. 'I have seen a few healed of this, with time and care, but we cannot do it here. We will take him back to Dragon's Nest. Tend the sails.'

IO

DUSK FALLS

He leaned forward as the sea surged and then began to slide past under the ship's keel. His body swayed with the motion of the ship, his hands spread wide, and he sighed softly as his name slipped from his mind and down into the waters, down and down, past blue-green into eternity.



IO

Clearing the clutter of paper from your desk is no easy task. Mounds of assignments clog the area; and your mind. Your collection of stuffed animals creates a skyline of fur on top of the dresser; lusting for their company as their buttoned eyes lure you in. You shake it off and remind yourself of the homework which lies ahead; there's no time for child's play anymore.

The prospect of adulthood was something to be anticipated as a child. We once dreamed of magically turning into a 'grown up'; we looked up to them and longed for the day that we would fill their massive shoes. We dressed up in our mother's dresses, pretending to be princesses, ignoring the fabric which swamped our frames and painted our faces in their makeup like clowns. We were once trustful of life's misleading possibilities; blindly proclaiming to fulfil our bold ambitions of being real life Cinderellas and Prince Charmings. However, now that the end of adolescence looms over our heads and we are slowly venturing into 'The Real World', everything which we once wished for, now seems delusional. R.I.P childhood; you were great.

It is hard to not get caught up in the pressures of teenage life. Homework, tests, social life, self-imposed pressures; the list goes on. Apparently we are not children anymore, but teenagers. Therefore it is socially unacceptable to think like a child; or engage in 'babyish' games. Which is pretty miserable. Don't hesitate to put on your nostalgia goggles and relive the fun times of hide and seek, four square, tiggly and of course, the blisters obtained from obsessive monkey barring. Okay, maybe not the blisters. Ah, the joyous years of childhood, everything from falling off your bike, to failing to cartwheel.

Strange to think that we always want what we can't have. As children, many of us had once counted down the days until we would hit thirteen. It meant that we were no longer classed as twelves. Such an awkward age. Many would turn back time to relinquish their youth; maybe tweak some changes, play a few games of four square and long to never return to the comparatively depressingly dull scene of their adulthood. But... That would be ridiculous. As memorable as your childhood may have been, it is not impossible to satisfy your deepest cravings of youthful enjoyment even at our 'ripe old' ages. Yes, you heard me right, there are solutions to the void which has been bugging us old people for ages. Our lost childhood.

LET'S PLAY FOUR  
SQUARE!

ANITA YE

IO



LET'S PLAY FOUR  
SQUARE!

Who said you can't stroll through Toys R Us with a ridiculously wide smile as you recollect old memories? Who said you couldn't join in a friendly game of four square with some merry primary schoolers? Who said it's absurd to hang upside down from the monkey bars until recess was over? Right... Maybe not the last one... You get the point. The others were pretty fun though. Just because you are no longer physically and biologically a child, it is not a crime to act or think like one. Just don't get too carried away; you may have to do homework later. Sorry, just had to remind you.

Despite what others think, it is never wrong to play with teddy bears once in a while. Also there is nothing wrong with terrorising the toy section of your local Target. Whatever floats your boat. Buy your baby sister a Carebear – then keep it for yourself. Feeling generous? Splurge on a massive pink unicorn; your new best friend. Maybe it will even replace your iPhone, who knows. No shame in doing so.

Childhood may have escaped from our hands for now; but it is not lost forever. There is no need to rewind time to chase something which has already supposedly disintegrated. Instead, create a new childhood for yourself; enjoy life to the fullest; like a child.



IO

A chair, a table, a bed. Four white walls, and one door. Above, a single light bulb hung from a cord, casting a soft, yellow glow on the stark room. A small window with a pull down blind was on the opposite wall, and through this, Aliyah could see into the concrete courtyard encased by walls the colour of stormy skies. A small brown ball bounced off one of these walls and into the hands of a boy, back and forth, back and forth. Something to do, a way to pass the time.

Aliyah's fingers skimmed along the rough rug that lay under her body, the frayed edges prickling her skin. The weaved material reminded her of the times before, how Umi had taught her to make bowls and cups from reeds; her steady, protecting hands guiding the reeds above and beneath each other like a patchwork. Unlike the boy, Aliyah did not have a ball, instead she liked to think of how things were before and imagine that each thought was a strong and solid brick that she could pile up around her to create a protective encasement that could fight off the fear. Sometimes she was so sure she had heard Marlah's giggling laughter or Abbi's voice calling her that she would turn, only to find another white wall. But there were also things from before that Aliyah did not ever want to think about, things that she tried to forget. The war. The control, the running, the screams, the hiding, the pleading, the tears. The loss. But as hard as she tried, even her bricks crumbled as these terrors would seep back into her mind; consuming her as her eyes closed.

And Aliyah remembered.

Aliyah was shaken from her bed in the dead of night, 'hush now,' whispered Abbi, 'gather only what you need, it is time to go.' Down the stairs, through the corridor, out the door and into the night they fled. Even at night the streets were not quiet. Distant alarms sounded, dogs barked, and the occasional pop sounded as they scampered through the city. The pounding of Aliyah's heart reminded her of the pounding footsteps that at any minute could pursue them.

Her hand clamped down hard over her sister's mouth. 'Don't make a sound,' she breathed into Marlah's ear. From among the fruit crates they heard the soldiers' footsteps trace the truck and then, the flap at the back of the truck lifted up. She felt Marlah stiffen in her arms. There was shuffling and then the scrape of a crate across the floor. Muttering. And then the flap was shut and the truck began to roll forward again. Peeling her hand from Marlah's face, Aliyah let the unstoppable tears roll down her cheeks.

## ALIYAH REMEMBERED

LAURA ALDOUS  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
OVERALL WINNER



Aliyah woke with a start. Umi's face looked like something from an abstract nightmare. The cracked lips, darting blood shot eyes, grimy hair, colourless filthy skin and hollow cheeks did not belong to the kind and comforting face that Aliyah knew. Over the thunderous rumble of the engine, Aliyah could still make out Marlah's whimpering and wailing as she clutched Umi's skirt to her chest, wringing and unwringing it in her hands. There was no food. For two days all they had eaten was a hand full of beans each from a can. Marlah was ill and frail and hope of ever reaching the golden land was fading fast. Umi held Marlah over the side rail and as she wretched up the little that was in her stomach, she shrieked as the waves reached up towards her, threatening to submerge them all.

The open sea and endless horizon was boundless. Aliyah wondered if she would ever see anything other than water and sky. Wondered what was happening at home. Questioned why they had got on this boat. Aliyah thought that her sister would die on this boat. Falling in and out of consciousness, Aliyah dreamt of the land of Australia and how, when they arrived, she would be able to play outside, to draw and learn to write, to sing, to play with her sister, and live with her family in a place where they would never be afraid. Aliyah prayed they would make it.

They were always afraid. Afraid that the boat would sink, afraid that there would be no food or water and they would starve, afraid of thieves and capture, and afraid that Marlah would not be strong enough. They drifted, they plunged, they jolted and rolled, and when finally they saw a Navy ship, Aliyah was sure that Marlah would be taken care of, and that they would be protected from the many shadows that haunted them. But instead they were yelled at by men in uniforms who looked very similar to the soldiers.

A chair, a table, a bed. Four white walls, and one door. She was the boy's ball, caught in an endless cycle moving from memory to memory. Unable to control, unable to decide, caught and then thrown. This was Aliyah's world now, confined in this building, so different from how she had imagined it. It was not one of freedom and happiness, but instead a world of control, rules and regulations, much like the one she had so desperately fled. A world of walls the colour of stormy seas. A world of separation and loss. And a world where even her strong and solid bricks are not enough to suppress the memories, and so, Aliyah remembered.



GHOSTS OF  
THE PAST

MARINA ALTSON  
BOROONDARA  
LITERARY AWARD  
WINNER OR HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

Ghosts roam the interlocking, chained corridors. Among them are the ghosts of the past; friends, relatives, sons, fathers and brothers. These ghosts slide their misty, frostbitten hands along the stone walls and chill the air with their haunting whispers. Then the ghosts of the future suck away the sweetness of time and snap the delusional dreams stretching to escape. But the present ghosts; those are the most poignant. Plagued with stale thoughts, their heavy feet slide along the dank floor and slop their trailing rags through the murky puddles. Fading and distorted memories poke the ghosts forward, reminding them why to move while the forgetful ghosts curl in their corners and stare with cloudy eyes at the stones.

*You stop and lethargically turn your head to the northern wall, where a hole reluctantly allows a wisp of light to seep in, only to drown in the bitter, unwelcoming darkness. You reach desperately and shiver uncontrollably, your mouth curving up from the pitiful source of hope. You raise the other arm and slowly circle your fingers around the icy, jagged bars separating that mythical paradise from inside. A deep sigh escapes your lips and your body soon collapses against the stone wall. The ghosts of the past whisper. First one. Then two. Soon a frosty chorus of moans fill the air. They lay soothing arms around your waist and your eyes prickle with exhaustion. Your hands unlatch from the bars as you drift to the welcoming floor. The ghosts twist their slimy bodies around you and their whispers grow louder. The floor blankets you in an inescapable coldness. You struggle once more towards the pathetic ray of light and watch dancing particles in the air. Their liveliness mock you and drift in and out of the window. In and out. In and out. In and-*

*Further along the prison corridor, a rusty door swings open and sings against stone. Your past ghosts hiss at the noise, unravelling from you and slither away into the protruding darkness. Your head falls to the side and your eyes struggle to adjust to a different moving particle – a much larger particle – making indistinguishable noises.*

The present ghosts stiffen as the man moves past. With each swing of a thick, black baton ghosts cringe against the walls, attempting to melt into the stone. They lift shivering hands over their heads and jerk at the memories the baton brings. The man gestures back to the door where another man stands. No. Not a man. Ghosts' eyes widen as they stare towards the foreign figure and her eyes widen in reply.

The woman studies her hands and stares back at herself, laughing in a field beside a man hugging her waist. Her lacy, white dress drifts in the wind as autumn, red leaves swirl around. Emptiness



overwhelms as she touches the man's face in the image. She closes her eyes and envisions the feel of his arms around her again, his warmth shielding her from the wind and promising her protection from all the troubles of the world. Her eyes begin to sting but she forces them to look at the disgusting guard.

'You have ten minutes', he sneers through a thick accent. The man pokes the ghosts with his baton and a sinister smile spreads over his face. He chuckles to himself and beckons her forward.

The woman clutches her coat and follows, staring with equal horror and sadness at the ghosts below. Their clothes are worn and baggy and she can count each rib on their bare, malnourished chests. They stare at her with hollow eyes and concave cheeks. They see nothing but fading colours and shapes.

The picture feels heavy in her hand as if the smiling people in the image don't belong here. Her heels crunch against the small rocks between the stones on the floor causing her legs to wobble. However, the woman retains her balance and studies each ghost's face. She looks to the left, then to the right, then behind her shoulder and back again. She looks at over one hundred ghosts yet only sees the one face plastered on each.

*Two particles draw closer to you. They confuse you. They are inside yet reek of somewhere else. They don't belong. They're not the same. You cringe away and protect your face but the particles and their strange noises creep closer and closer. A particle wobbles then steadies itself in front of you. It somehow shrinks in size and two circles open and close in front of you. You look at their light colour. They remind you of the sky and those fleeting images you get through the hole. They seem so familiar, so wondrous. The circles are halved as they point their wondrous colours downwards to two even smaller particles, embraced in each other like the ghosts. But different. Different... yet familiar.*

'One minute', the guard calls, his voice bouncing around the ghosts.

The woman sighs and desperately looks at the ghost in front of her. Unseeing eyes, sunken face; they were all the same.

*An excruciating thirst suddenly comes over you. A tickling sensation ripples through your mouth as colours and shapes match. Those beautiful, blue circles belonged to a woman. A much, much younger woman. Why was this older woman wearing them? Strange lines crease the younger woman's perfect skin and sadness – such sadness – engulfs her beauty. Your thirst increases. You are searching, scraping for a noise.*

II

*'Time's up.'*

*'But I—'*

*The larger particle twists long, firm fingers around the woman's arm. You reach for her. You had promised protection. The noise suddenly comes to you; the name! You try to scream, a new thirst shivering down your body. You need to make the noise; you need to speak but your throat — hoarse as sandpaper — only allows a whisper.*

*'Claire,' you whisper.*

*The particles drift down the corridor. Their retreating footsteps mock.*

*'Claire!' You whisper.*

*Ghosts of the past come in faster now, their chorus gaining speed and volume. She has to turn around. She has to!*

*'Cl—'*

Ghosts roam the interlocking, chained corridors. Among them are the ghosts of the past. These ghosts slide their misty, frostbitten hands along the stone walls and chill the air with their haunting whispers.



IT'S TIME TO  
KILL CAPITAL  
PUNISHMENT

MARINA ALTSON

SUZANNE NORTHEY

PUBLIC SPEAKING

COMPETITION

WINNER

# II

Don't fight fire with fire.'

'Two wrongs don't make a right.'

Remember those as kids?

'Okay!' We said. 'We get it!'

We kill people for killing people because you are not allowed to kill people...What?

In many societies, humans contradict their primary laws. Life is our most basic human right. It is not a privilege that can be taken away. This is why murder is a crime because *none* of us has the right to remove something that precious from another human being. *Freedom*, however, is a privilege which can be removed as a form of punishment. Murderers should be imprisoned and forced to do jobs for the society we all can enjoy. But we *don't* have the right to take another human's life. We cannot play God. It's time to kill capital punishment.

Now there are three stages in the death penalty: charging, prosecuting and executing. It only seems fitting that I should lay out the realities of each stage, which are either ignored or unknown by those who support the death penalty.

First stage: charging. When you hear 'capital punishment' I am sure many of you think of America. It is infamous for being the only first world country still using it. But why don't we think of Iran, Sudan or the other 54 countries which use the death penalty to a much greater and crueler extent? Many believe that capital punishment is on the decline. However, the latest figures from Amnesty International show in 2012 there were at least 1,722 death sentences. This then increased by over 200 the following year. These figures don't even include the execution numbers from China which are kept secret but rumoured to be at least 2,000 per year. That's more than the world total. Yet I personally don't think of China when I think capital punishment. Do you?

We also delude ourselves into thinking the death penalty is only for murder. In reality, 20 countries impose it for petty crimes such as bribery and theft. I can respect – though not agree with – just one capital offence: a life for a life. But this is no longer the case. Just 10 years ago, China had over 50 capital offences.

Second stage: prosecution. We in the West are outraged by media reports of unfair and misogynistic 'justice' systems in some Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Such as rapists escaping penalty but

their victims sentenced to death for 'adultery'! Well in America – a more sneaky 'white middle-class' legal tinkering evades equality within their legal system. People opposed to the death penalty are excluded from juries in trials relating to death row. Yes, the 1969 doctrine was altered to include those with a 'philosophical opposition' believed to still want to choose the death penalty. But a jury is supposed to represent a community decision. They should not be manipulated to exclude those within the community.

What about those falsely accused on death row? In America, studies in the National Academy of Sciences show an extreme 4% of people on death row were in fact innocent. Oops this means that one in every 25 prisoners just died in vain. The death penalty is permanent – you can't bring a person back from the dead but you can release them from prison when a mistake is made.

Final stage: execution. Early forms of capital punishment were designed to be slow, painful, and torturous such as stoning, crucifixion and even being slowly crushed by elephants. Americans more recently invented the electric chair, gas chamber, firing squad and, of course, the lethal injection.

The injection is seen as the most 'humane' way of execution – if execution can ever be deemed humane. However, the three-drug cocktail used on US prisoners for the past 20 years is no longer being supplied by Europe. So America has turned to barbaric experimental drugs. If they have been abolished for use on animals why on earth are we using them on other human beings? But on the 9th of January this year, Ohio scheduled to inject Dennis McGuire with two untested drugs; the sedative midazolam; and an overdose of the painkiller hydromorphone which would kill McGuire within five minutes – or so was their goal. Experts on these drugs warned that McGuire would not peacefully drift away but would be awake, struggling and failing to pull enough air into his lungs until death. The reply? '[He is] not entitled to a pain-free execution.' ...Wait I thought America had the most 'humane' way of execution? Not only has the State of Ohio failed to morally develop from the crude notion of 'a life for a life' but now indulges in the medieval practises of torture. And yes, I would deem McGuire gasping for air for 28 minutes as torture.

But it's fine right? At least we're not actually using those medieval punishments. Would you believe more countries use stoning as a





IT'S TIME TO  
KILL CAPITAL  
PUNISHMENT

death penalty than the lethal injection? Seven countries still dig people into the ground up to their waist before stones are hurled at them from their neighbours, friends and family until death. In fact, in most places it is customary for a family member to throw the first rock. There are at least 11 people in Iran right now awaiting stoning sentences most of which are women accused of 'adultery'.

Finally, what message does capital punishment give? Revenge is justice? An eye for an eye? Should grieving families and friends take matters into their own hands? There are cases every day which reflect their countries' capital punishments such as Farzana Parveen in Pakistani who married against her fathers wishes. She was on her way to court on May 27 this year when she was beaten to death with bricks by a mob. Did I mention she was 25 and pregnant?

II

Stephan Bright (a human rights attorney) said 'it can be argued that rapists deserve to be raped, that mutilators deserve to be mutilated. Most societies, however, refrain from... engaging in the same behaviour as the criminals'. Well then why do we have the death penalty? 'Don't fight fire with fire'. 'Two wrongs don't make a right'. It's time to kill capital punishment.



I would look up at the stars every night. They reminded me of home. A bitter cold breeze whistled past my ears and caused my coat to sway to the left, as I guided my eyes through the consolations. The wind is the only movement in this desolate place. I wondered how far away the stars were, one hundred light years? What had the world been like when these stars had actually shone one hundred years ago?

I crawled out of bed as the sun craved to be noticed behind my blinds, casting a straight line of light across my bed. I kept my room clean most of the time – well, it was kept clean for me. All I had to do was throw my clothes in a bucket and it would appear in my wardrobe thirty seconds later. I watched the steam rise up out of the shower as I washed off Camilla Mirai and became Aelius, the quiet but resourceful Male North Korean Leader. The shower gave me Aelius' skin, blood, appearance, saliva, DNA everything, with the exclusion of his mind. I always felt a sinking betrayal when I became Aelius, a betrayal to myself and what I believed in. The shower door opened and I was once again taller with shorter hair and coffee-coloured skin.

The fresh, crisp air spread through my lungs like water on a cracked pavement. North Korea was different during the day – colourless and bleak. The land ahead lunged towards the horizon, as far as the eye could see. Dirt mounds dotted along the way. A road ran parallel to the horizon stretching from my left to my right. I knelt down feeling the tracks for vibration – the train was nearly here. A worm caught my attention a few feet away. It was attempting to climb a vertical wall and was failing miserably. At what point I wondered would it realise it was an impossible task? That was when I noticed the train. I ran – it felt good to feel my heart race and my legs move. I leapt for the carriage and the train sped into the clouds.

I enjoyed being up high, above the haunted place where I lived and led. My stomach dropped towards my groin at least a dozen times before we were above the clouds. A man to my left read a newspaper, his brow creased with worry I presumed, worry for his future. A mother held her baby close to her chest at the other end of the carriage – it howled as the train dipped. We had the carriage to ourselves. I grabbed the pole as the train started to descend, the pole was like sandpaper, scratchy and hard against my soft skin. The train whistled its warning and plunged thirty-five stories vertically into the Government Centre.



Antiseptic assailed me with its piercing stench as I looked around the circular building. Blinding white walls and metallic floors made up the structure. The quiet hum of voices and footsteps were the only sounds heard. I joined a line and waited. I spat into the dish, my aim had improved. 'Aelius' came up on the screen and relief washed over me.

A screen appears in front of me, displaying the route I would take to get to South Korea for a 'meeting' that would evolve into a war. The plan was for me to argue with the South Korean Leaders to join our defence force: we were asking for a war with South Korea on a silver platter. This was the moment I had waited my whole life for – everything I had worked for was about to be put into play. I had to hide my smile. Tonight would be the night.

I looked up at the stars that night from the middle of the Government Centre as I waited for the train. The sky was clear and promising. The wind whistled throughout the Centre and froze my skin through my coat. My mind was buzzing with thoughts faster than the speed of the train throughout the night sky. I couldn't control them and separate the doubts from the fears. My watch signalled midnight when the train finally stopped. Now was my chance. I deviated from the route I was given.

I stepped out hesitantly, then ran as fast as I could to the light on the horizon. I couldn't see what I was stepping on but it was uneven and hard to grip – the only light was the one ahead and the stars. Drawing nearer to the light, I could now see people waiting there for me. I don't know how long the last two hundred metres took me to run but it felt like hours. When I finally reached them, I didn't speak. I was strangled by the smell of home cooking and eternal love.

Women, men and children filled the small square surrounded by old buildings. Their faces were afraid but I knew I was more scared than them. We piled into a small cart, about fifty people in a five by five metre space. The cart rattled along as the sun began to appear, warning us that time was scarce. Not one whisper. No movement. The smell of sweat lingered.

We had arrived at the water's edge when I knew I had been discovered. I had not had a shower in twelve hours. I was Camilla Mirai, a thin, short woman who never spoke. The driver cocked the cart into gear and it became the boat that would lead the others, but not me, to safety. Men, women and children climbed into the boat as



I spotted the headlight only a short distance away. I watched the boat with its human cargo go out to sea and my heart began to pound. A strong hand grabbed my arm.

'Your signal was lost, Aelius, and our computers could not track you. But they could find you Ma'am. Would you care to explain?'

His grip tightened.

I closed my eyes and focused on my breathing.



THE QUEST FOR  
FREEDOM

II

The elevator appeared endless. It rose high above the space modules suspended above the ground floor ceiling of The Centre. The incline was sharp, an incredible slope. The smell of antiseptic was strong, as I listened to the whirrs, jolts and clanks of The Centre's machinery. To the right of the escalator lay a small, narrow winding staircase. 'The double helix' it was called. It was for the janitor's use only.

Mr Tobor stood seven feet tall in the lobby of The Centre. Not only was he imposing, but athletic too. Perfectly sculpted, as any Iron Man would be. His gaze pierced the hearts of all women. He was by far the most intelligent navigator in The Centre, and very capable too. Not all Iron Men were like Mr Tobor though. Many did not live longer than a year. Some were incapable of performing the simplest of tasks. And there were those who went rogue, and lived in the Wilde, never heard of or seen again.

# II

I've always wondered what it would be like to travel up the escalator in The Centre. Everyone common worked in the offices on the ground floor. Those working for EyeCorp were granted access to the elevator and levels one to six. But only The Centre's finest navigators were able to access level seven. Inferiors weren't even accepted in the building, unless of course they were a janitor, like me.

Mr Tobor had been around for almost a year now. I would always listen for the Director's booming laugh echoing around the lobby. That is how I knew when Mr Tobor was in. He would often tell the funniest jokes or make the wittiest remarks, funny enough to have the Director in hysterics. He was so smart for an Iron Man of one year, so quick too, almost human, but better.

His first launch was in less than a month. I watched, for weeks, all navigators tested mentally and physically, even emotionally, for the chance to prove they were worthy of being a part of the launch. But how could they compete with Mr Tobor? He wasn't built to feel, only to know and to do. The Director announced the selected few to be a part of the launch soon after the testing. Of course Mr Tobor wasn't the only navigator chosen, but there were few humans who were.

Times were changing, I could tell. There were often moments where I overheard snippets of private conversations. The Direction was always hushed when he spoke of Iron Men. I knew he was disturbed by the number of Inferiors massing outside the boundaries of The Centre, but I never thought any action would be taken.

The sky was darker than usual on the day of the launch. I climbed down the narrow winding staircase one step at a time. As I reached the bottom I peered out the glass windows of The Centre. They were tinted, so those outside could not see in. I suppose I was an outsider too, looking in on a future I didn't belong to. The Director laughed. I instantly lost my train of thought, as he and Mr Tobor took the elevator to level seven, leaving me and the past behind.

It was five o'clock when the power went out. Quite strange, I thought, it had been a decade since the last blackout. That was when I knew something was terribly wrong. The Officers from EyeCorp barged through the doors of The Centre. Women screamed, commoners were grabbed, windows were shattered. It was at that point when I noticed The Director and Mr Tobor in the rear corner of the lobby observing all and yet, they remained unharmed.

That was the last thing I remember before The Dome was enforced. All selected humans, meaning those gifted talent and blessed, and of course, Iron Men, remain inside The Dome. All Inferiors, less capable humans, commoners and the rest are locked outside The Dome where resources are low and disease is endemic.

The advancement of The Iron Men and technology created a cruel world. Those inside The Dome have a chance, an expectation to succeed. But what do those outside The Dome have? We are left on the outside, looking in.



## TWIN TOWERS

GEORGIA EVANS

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HIGHLY COMMENDED

I approach the bright blue lights which reach tall into the dark night sky, a place where the Twin Towers used to proudly stand. The city lights flicker in the reflection of the rippled water of the pool in front of me. I stare at the names on the cool grey surface encircling the water, not allowing my eyes to wander to the familiar names which would ruin my composure. A cool breeze chills me to my core, the American flag flapping in the wind, my long hair flowing behind me. I feel my heart flutter as the sight in front of me takes me back to the day I'd vowed to forget.

*'Glowing embers and debris rained over New York City. As my heart pounded I saw the specs of people down below starting to gather. People stood at the tall, endless windows on the eighty-eighth floor of the South Tower to stare in awe at the once symmetrical skyscraper in front of us. I continually spun around frantically, attempting to make sense of the events that had just occurred in front of me. My colleagues were running from their perfectly aligned desks at their office to either stare out over the city or to run out the exit, or join the mass of workers trying to run down the stairs or tediously long escalators. I quickly joined the mass at the start of the stairs, however, as the flatscreen televisions on our floor switched on, I quickly returned with a crowd of people to observe.*

*'The North Tower has been hit by American Airlines Flight 11. Evacuation of the North Tower has commenced. South Tower has been reported safe and evacuation is not necessary. Please remain calm until further information is found.'*

*There was a short buzz as all the television screens turned on to a common news station and I inhaled deeply, attempting to calm myself now that the threat to the South Tower was gone. I ran back to the window and stared as the flames engulfed the tower, my stomach churning inside.*

I run my fingers along the smooth, chilled surface, finally reading the engraved names of all those I'd worked with and lost. The names appear to be infinite as the lump in my throat becomes more prominent with each person. The sensation of immense guilt flows through my mind. How was it fair that I had escaped and all these people hadn't? I'd been so sure I wouldn't live through it all. If only everyone had known it was not safe to be staring through the windows at the other tower and that we should have all been evacuating as well.

*I woke up underneath a pile of metal and plaster. A piece of paper was alight two centimetres from my face, forcing me to jerk backwards in fright. Spluttering, I lifted part of a desk off of my torso and slowly stood, barely able to see through*

II

*the cloud of smoke forcing mascara stained tears down my already damp cheeks. I had no concept of where I was, various flickers of either lights or fire were everywhere and desperate figures were running around in the haze. I began to follow the small crowd, tearing off a sleeve of my shirt to hold over my mouth. Where people had only that morning been working at their desks making busy phone calls and filing paperwork at their desks, it was now filled with smoke, panicked voices in the distance and objects lying on the floor.*

I close my eyes as I remember that day, five years ago in 2001. The nightmares continue to haunt me relentlessly. I can almost smell the smoke in the air at times. I have kept myself away from this place for so long, frightened of the effects it would have. The counsellor has been suggesting this as a possibility since the beginning, however the nauseating feeling in my stomach does not coincide with the feeling of acceptance or relief that I am supposed to experience. I can still no longer walk through the rotating doors to smile at the receptionist whom was lost in the fires, or use the quick elevators that no longer exist or talk to most of the friends on my level because almost all of them were part of the 3,000 people who were killed. In my new job I have remained separate from most of my colleagues, unable to allow myself to bond with others without dealing with my internal trauma, however, unable to face what happened.

Finally I reach the pool of the South Tower, where I had worked. Slowly I move around the square, allowing myself to read the names of those whom I had worked with. People whom I had encountered once or twice are in front of me and my vision begins to blur as liquid gathers behind my eyes, ready to fall. The slow, steady tapping of my heels on the pavement comes to a halt as I approach the names of those I'd been closest with. I reach out my tentative fingers to slowly trace the names which were written in bronze on the memorial. My composure is lost as the tears begin to retrace their path down my face. Sniffing, I reach into the pocket of my long coat and retrieve a white flower which I place gently on the memorial to remind them that I haven't forgotten them and I never will. As I turn away, I watch the blue light extend high into the sky where my tower used to be. I remember the joyous times I'd spent with my colleagues prior to 9/11 and a faint smile passes my lips as I walk through the city lights.





## TURBULENCE

NICOLE MCAULIFFE  
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD  
FOR CREATIVE WRITING  
RUNNER-UP

'Down the corridor, first door to the right and enjoy your flight!'

You nod politely and walk down the long, clean corridor, boarding the flight to London. Already the Boeing's hub was packed, bustling with commuters, a sight that made you uneasy. An odd feeling, considering your current predicament. People are trying to get their bags into the overhead lockers whilst avoiding disruption to the other passengers. You see a kind-faced old woman, who smiles at you when you walk past, a recently married couple going on their honeymoon, and finally, sitting across from you, a woman with a baby asleep in her arms and two children fighting over ownership of the blanket. They had been fighting non-stop ever since they arrived at the airport and their mother was completely worn out. She was recovering from the death of her parents who, only in their fifties, had died in a sudden car accident. Their lives had been finally getting back on track.

# II

The plane takes off with little turbulence, but you still hold on to the sides of the seat as if your life depends on it. How ironic.

'Good afternoon sir, would you care for a beverage?'

You shake your head; then, on second thought ask for a coffee. It's bound to be a long night. You sip quietly on the drink, gently chewing on the foam edges of the cup. On your right is a man, around thirty, intent on his mobile, a single businessman. His family consists of only his pet dog, who lives with him at his home in New York City, a lonely life.

You're getting quite uncomfortable now; the strapping is rubbing against the back of your shoulders. It's only been a few hours. You think, 'It's just a few more to go. Just a few more hours of this torture until finally you – *all* of you – will be free.' To your left is a woman fast asleep. After almost thirty years without contact with her parents, her brothers and sisters, she finally decided to reconcile, after being diagnosed with lung cancer, with only having months to live. Her head tilts towards you, towards your shoulder. That's where the switch is. Heart-pounding, you move quickly and practically lie on the businessman to avoid premature catastrophe. He looks at you weirdly, stunned, but as you gently lift her back into her seat, his face relaxes. Her eyes flutter a little as she smiles serenely. Nothing eases suffering like human touch.

As night time approaches, the people around you begin to fall asleep, but you're not tired. You think about how that mother will never see her children grow up, that woman over there is never going to make it to her daughter's wedding and finally, that man's wife who will fall into a deep depression once she hears the news, just to end up overdosing on her medication. Such a pleasant thought.

You reflect on your life for a while, while others are asleep. You reflect on the hardships that have come with growing up without your parents, living in a home with people who aren't your family, being bullied for being different. You have long black hair, piercing green eyes and an unshaven beard. Your tall, muscular physique has turned many an eye over the past decades as you have made your way, quietly, through society. In university you were a promising athlete, with basketball your forté. Always the one with the broken heart, you have never experienced what it is to take something like that away from a person. As they say, you're never too old to learn.



Turbulence.

A little Australian boy wakes up a little way down front. As he tugs on his mother's shirt, she finally wakes to see the deep tears streaming down his small face.

'What's wrong sweetheart?'

'Mummy, the plane is shaky.' He whimpers.

'Oh darling.'

And with this, she embraces his trembling form, his head buried in her breast as she comforts him until the plane stops shaking.

'It's all right folks, we've just passed through an area of local turbulence. Please remain seated, seat belts fastened and enjoy the rest of your flight. Just a few more hours until we arrive in beautiful London! The city of dreams.'

What are dreams? Some dream to be astronauts, exploring the world in search of hope and other life. Others dream of smaller things, a family, a new house or just surviving the day. You dream of being remembered. How good would it be to be remembered?

It's almost time now. You're doing so well. You walk to the toilets.

'Did you need the lavatory sir?'

## TURBULENCE

You shake your head and begin to unbutton your shirt. The air-hostess looks confused, not knowing if she should be alerting anyone of your suspicious behaviour.

As you unbutton your shirt, the bomb becomes more noticeable. The air-hostess' eyes widen as she realises what is underneath. She lets out a faint yelp as the colour drains from her face.



You walk down the aisles of the airplane, the bomb now fully on show. Children, mothers and people who are alone are crying, some people are petitioning to throw you off the plane. Now it's time for you to speak up. You are on your own now.



*'Standing on the promises I cannot fall, listening every moment to the Spirit's call, resting in my Saviour as my all in all, standing on the promises of God.'*

# II



A crying boy stands, 'Please mister, we're just going to go see my daddy.' His eyes are tear-stained, his whole body quivering and his mouth turned into the saddest look you have ever seen... you will ever see.



They say explosions were heard from kilometres away. The aftermath from the crash was devastating. All 215 passengers from the aircraft died and almost two thousand people working in the Lloyd's Building of London. Devastation, catastrophe and heartbreak are all that remains.



The husband and wife sat rigidly in the cold, hard chairs, staring across the desk in front of them.

‘Mr and Mrs Goodman,’ began the cool voice of the doctor opposite the couple, ‘I am sure you are both aware of the crisis humans are facing on Earth.’

Mr and Mrs Goodman nodded as the doctor straightened his wire spectacles. He was wearing a crisp, white lab coat which seemed to blend in with the surrounding walls, intensifying the sterile feel of the institute.

‘Unfortunately,’ the doctor continued unemotionally, ‘you have conceived twin boys. Therefore it is necessary to make one of the two an In-valid. The process is quite simple; we inject the child who has the inferior genes with those that will self-destruct.’

‘You’re going to kill him?’ Asked Mrs Goodman weakly.

‘Oh no, not straight away. The genes will not cause his death until his twentieth birthday. On that day, yes, he will die. Think of it as a sacrifice for Mankind. Not only will the number of people on this over-populated Earth decrease, but those with undesirable genes will die eventually too.’



As soon as Isaac Goodman was born, he was destined to die; he was an In-valid. Every day of his life, since he could remember, he had been treated differently to his twin brother, Eugene, the shining star, the one who would live a long and successful life. However, Isaac was never bitter towards his brother. Eugene was, to Isaac, like a ladder of success.

With Eugene’s help, he was going to achieve what everyone had always said he could not do.

Isaac mounted the Creeper, a forever-moving spiral staircase that led to Eugene’s room.

‘Are you sure you want to do this?’ Eugene asked as Isaac entered the room.

‘Eugene, I have exactly one hundred and thirty-two days until I turn twenty. In other words, one hundred and thirty-two days until I die,’ Isaac said, ignoring his brother’s wince, ‘I have been training for this for as long as people have been treating me like I’m less than human.’

‘I know,’ sighed Eugene, ‘it’s just... I worry sometimes.’

‘It can’t go wrong. We’ve planned every detail.’

Back downstairs, Isaac was training as usual. With each stroke through the water, he pictured himself there in the stadium during the Olympic Games of 2068. Hearing the roar of the crowd. All cheering for who they thought was Eugene Goodman.

'14 days,' Isaac said, his hollow voice reverberating off the steel walls of the room.

'Stay still,' Eugene replied quietly, 'the blood transfusion is almost done. The test should come out fine.'

'And the urine samples?'

'They're in the bag. It's done.' Eugene soothed, pulling the needle out of Isaac's arm.

Thirteen days later, Isaac was sitting in a laboratory, waiting. The room was completely silent, and there was a faint taste of disinfectant in his dry mouth. Footsteps from the hallway were growing louder and louder against the marble floors. A tall woman with a tight bun and pointed nose motioned for Isaac to sit on the bench for her to take a DNA sample.

She withdrew a Genotester; a thin needle with a small screen attached.

The doctor jabbed the needle into Isaac's arm, and after a few seconds the screen lit up displaying the name 'Eugene Goodman' and then 'Valid' underneath.

'Thank you. You may leave now.'

Although relieved and stunned that their plan had worked, Isaac awoke the next morning feeling nauseated. Today was the day he would compete. Today was also his last day alive.

The stadium was even bigger than he had imagined. When Isaac stepped out into the spotlight, everything, every sound and sight, was greater than the scene he had been picturing for so long in his mind.

Walking towards the starting blocks, Isaac could feel his legs shaking uncontrollably. He could only hope his body would not fail him too early. The deafening roar of the crowd seemed to have stopped as the eight contestants stepped on to their blocks and got into position.

This was it. This was everything Isaac had worked for. It was his chance, his chance to prove that his genes, although deemed to be flawed by science, did not define him or hold back what he could achieve.

# II

And then suddenly, without realising it, Isaac was powering through the water like he had never done before. With each stroke he reached out as far as possible in front of him, willing his heart to keep pumping for only a few seconds longer... just a few seconds.

The end of the pool was only metres away now. His heart beating ferociously, Isaac powered through the water, and reached out his left hand to touch the sensory pad at the pool wall.

He had done it. He had won.

With one last, strenuous effort, Isaac heaved himself out of the pool, before collapsing, his heart beating for the last time.

Isaac Goodman, the Invalid, had succeeded.



# II

UN MAJEUR

CHARLOTTE WIRTZ

Eve Grande was born in the year 2145 into a world full of fear and uncertainty. A world which was almost completely out of any individual's control. Looking out of her bedroom window she could see the shining lights of the city on the horizon in the west. Beautiful and enlightening towers which pierced the clear blue sky stood tall, inspiring her, but also warning her of what was to come. A future of prosperity in '*the only perfect place on earth*'.

Walking into her school on that dreary, cold Thursday afternoon, she could see the fear set into the eyes of the boys and girls around her. Her class today was to receive a presentation from the all controlling enterprise which called itself The Bridge. The Bridge in the last twenty years had accumulated more power than any company had achieved in all the years previously. Today, we no longer saw governments or committees, Prime Ministers or Heads of State, we merely saw the ever present charcoal and grey emblem, plastered like the Nazi Swastika across the face of planet earth. The Presentation would be nothing new for the gathered assembly – they had heard all the rumours and knew all their chances, when they stepped into the examination centre in November. Eve knew that when she graduated she would either be transformed into a shining light of The Bridge or be plunged into darkness.

When Eve was little, The Headmaster had told her stories about what he called the 'scraps' of society – those who had been segregated, who plunged into the void of humanity with no hope of changing their likely fate. Gobs was what many generally referred to those who were in the genetically lower classes below The Bridge. Gobs were so dramatically different that at Maturity they had their genetic codes stolen, becoming the property of The Bridge. Their DNA was not changed but stored for when The Bridge decided to test any new genetic engineering advancement. Such advancements would eventually go to improve the lives and health of those who passed the torturous Maturity Tests.

As the name suggests, The Maturity tests are taken by every seventeen year old on planet Earth, the year before they turn eighteen. Much like the examinations of the 21st Century, they are perfectly designed to find those with the highest likelihood of success and prosperity in the future; those whose heads mirror and cherish the ideals of The Bridge.

Looking up from her cold, angular desk, Eve saw the metallic



ticking clock looming over her. Its slow and constant sound became her heart-beat as she sped through the complex and interrogating questions before her. The sweat on the back of her neck started to pool in crevices – her worry grew with each passing minute.

The loud-speaker erupted abruptly, booming its warning in dark tones. 'Fifteen more minutes. Fifteen more minutes'.

The warning did not break the trance she had created between her pen and her paper. Nothing she thought could break the flow which increased its velocity with each flick of her pen. As she started to read the final question on the cold and white last page, she could hear soft sobs bouncing eerily against the minimal and harsh institutional walls. She could not see the tears of her classmate but she could feel their soft delicacy against her cheeks, much like a serial dream.

She looked to her left through large clear panes of glass and saw a world that was so full of injustice and terror, a world that she would soon be joining in some aspect. How *The Bridge* felt it could remove human rights based on the words on a page never correlated with her innate morals.

Standing up from her chair, she looked at the faces of the women and men around her. They looked drained and devoid of the beauty usual in human life; eyes were sad with anxiety. She walked towards the door, stating her name and pricking her finger as she stepped into the long gleaming hallway.

Walking towards the large automatic doors, Eve heard the click of the autocom as it flashed to life, '*Eve Grande, Eve Grande please proceed to The Maturity Officer*'.

She felt her heart drop as her name echoed around the large empty spaces. She knew too well what the words meant for her and what was destined for her DNA.

Darkness.





NEGATIVE 'Negative.'

GRACE YUAN

The digitalised voice echoed and bounced off the glistening walls of the metallic booth. Two lone figures sat huddled at the monitor in the centre of the room, hands clasped tightly together. Soundless tears trickled down the woman's ghostly pale, hollow cheeks as her body quivered uncontrollably. The man ran his fingers through her wispy, translucent hair in a desperate attempt to calm them both. There they remained, consumed with pain and heartache.

'Genine,' the young man's mellow voice glided through the air, sucking away the sinister silence. The two syllables triggered a broken sob from Genine as she clutched her husband's hands more forcefully.

'Genine. It's just a test,' he whispered soothingly. 'It's just a test.'

The foreboding red crosses next to their names flashed ominously on the sheer screen of the monitor.

'Yes, Mendello. It's a test that will change our lives forever,' Genine's usually calm, melodious voice was cracked and strained.

The door swung open smoothly and a middle-aged man bearing a solemn expression strode into the room.

'Dr. Cannister,' he announced, placing a digital notebook on the polished steel table.

'Please accept my sincere condolences for your loss,' he recited mechanically. He rifled through the files on the machine, muttering to himself as he skimmed through them.

'Genine and Mendello Chromost. It has been determined that you do not have the authority to conceive under any circumstance with the combination of your genomes.'

He paused as he shut his notebook with a snap. 'Albinism and cystic fibrosis. Please read through the files I have provided. As you will see, there is one hundred percent chance that your children would have been carriers of albinism and fifty percent chance for cystic fibrosis. It is unacceptable.'

A strangled cry escaped through Genine's pursed lips.



'Mendello, I refuse. I refuse to listen to a word they say.'

The couple sat in the rear of the sky shuttle as they hurtled towards The Association. The words seemed to rouse Mendello from his frozen state. He cupped his wife's chiseled cheek, his brown, weathered hands starkly contrasting with her papery white skin.



'We'll figure it out,' he consoled her. His expression said otherwise, however, as his brow was deeply furrowed and his stature was tense. The two sat in yet another silence that day, as they watched the city pass by in a blur beneath them.

As the shuttle neared to The Association, Genine knew. She knew that she would not succumb to the control of the government. She was going to have her baby. She was going to raise it to be happy and healthy. She was going to grow old as a proud mother. She was not going to let them win.



The revolving glass doors swung open as Genine and Mendello stepped into the familiar atmosphere of The Association. As always the air seemed to reek of staleness, the building was stifling.

Screams of desperation sliced through the air like knives. A woman in her early twenties desperately clawed at the officer who had her in his grasp.

'My baby!' She wailed, over and over again, gasping for air.

Genine felt dread as she watched the mother's feeble attempts at escape. There, being played out right in front of her as if it were a warning, were the consequences of defying society. She gripped Mendello's sturdy arm and clenched her eyes shut as he gently guided her away, trying to block the doubts clouding her mind.



Sitting in front of her desk, Genine thumbed through the research files in her digital notebook. The Association believed in the possibility of immortality. Its sole function was to achieve the impossible. Genine was one of the rare genetically damaged who had the privilege of working for the organization, because of her high intelligence.

Technology in 2068 was at its peak. No more paper, pens, brooms, hammers. No, everything now functioned purely with highly advanced machinery. And Genine hated it. She hated the mechanical feel of the world, lost without its human touch. She longed for the simple aspects of life that had been abolished. Most of all, she longed for the freedom of having a child. Instead, her days were filled with constant experiments, aimed to find the key to prolonging life. Life expectancy had already spiralled to one hundred and thirty years. But it was never enough.

She double-clicked on a hidden file in her notebook, enlarging it

on her screen. The two hundred and eleven year old Blowhead Whale. The key to immortality. Her hands trembled as she held the information that could change the world once and for all. Pigment of whale blood. That was all it was. It was the secret to longevity. And she had known this for four years. There had always been a constant internal debate raging inside her about whether she should release the vital information to the government. Her index finger hovered over the delete button. She thought of rampant technology. Of control. Of the baby she was restricted from having. She pressed Delete. And just like that, the file was gone.

In a world where conceiving a baby without permission cost you ten years in prison, Genine felt lost and helpless. Very few couples were given the approval to conceive as very few people were deemed genetically acceptable. She flipped through the online newspaper and came to an abrupt stop at the advertisement section. A miniature heading in the bottom corner caught her attention. The words bore into her, bringing both nausea and hope.

Genetic Repair Technology. Dr. Allelian.

She inhaled sharply. That was it. That was the answer. With a few operations, both she and Mendello would be devoid of any genetic faults. She would no longer be unnaturally pale and susceptible to the sun; Mendello would no longer be a carrier of cystic fibrosis. Genine hungrily took in the description below the heading, her eyes devouring the words. Underground business. Illegal. Success not guaranteed. None of those things mattered to her. Not when her chance at happiness was at stake. All she had ever wanted was a child to call her own. If it meant booking an appointment with Dr. Allelian and losing a portion of her identity, so be it.

She would do anything but give in.



II

Cassandra stared into her milky tea and realised with aching certainty that this had to end. It had to stop. *She* had to be stopped.

‘I mean, look at how much better off we’d be, the *world* would be!’

She’d always known about her sister’s ideals, her whole life she’d believed this... wanted this... **nightmare** with all her heart – Cassandra realised now, but back then had paid little heed. She’d just had to keep an eye on her baby sister to ensure it never got out of hand, that those visions of hers never became a reality. That way, they’d both be safe. It was no longer simply her safety that she was concerned about. She took a sip of the tea.

‘We’re going to save everyone! We will be free of all this bloodshed! Isn’t that what you want?’

There was a part of her that had always feared this day. The lukewarm liquid trickled down her throat attempting to fill the void inside her to no avail. Bright explosions lit up the sky like stars, littering the city below her. From here, the screams of her people were nothing more than wisps of the wind but that didn’t change the hollow pain she felt with each cry for help. It was true that Cassandra wanted nothing more than to see the end of this violence. She’d spent her life watching her people die, innocent people whose lives didn’t need to be cut short by this desperate conflict. But this, what she was proposing, wasn’t a solution. It was barely even humane.

‘I’m building a brighter future, don’t you see Cass?’

Her sister’s words, that smile laced with excitement, those wide eyes; it all reverberated in her skull, crashing around noisily in the now silent night. How could she think this was the answer? With shaking hands she set down her tea. Another explosion bathed the room in neon green, twisting the shadows into horrific malformed spirits. They grasped outward at Cassandra, their knife like claws clinging to her gown and lunging at her golden circlet, as if begging her to prevent any more from joining their haunted ranks. They knew she was the only one who could.

Beckoned by their call, she walked over to the symbol of her rule over this blood-soaked nation as the Sovereign, examining it in the fading light. It swirled in a perfect smooth arc, a ribbon crystalized around her vermilion hair, adorned with gems that burst into bloom with all the radiance of spring, each one a gift in the unification of their land – the day when nine kingdoms became one. Once, this beautiful artefact was a symbol of all-encompassing

# I 2

power. Now, in this time of bloodshed and chaos, it represented little more than a figurehead trapped by legislation and politics. With the rise of the Median and their conspiratorial agenda to completely disrupt the balance of power by removing the government in the name of 'freedom', Cassandra could only watch as those trusted with running the country transformed into rabid dogs attacking her and each other. It wouldn't take the Median to end the golden era of their country, the Forum was about to tear itself apart. How did it all come to this, she pondered. As she turned away she felt something small next to her foot. Inspecting it closely, she could have laughed. It was a cracked white pawn from her last chess game with her sister.

'Check and mate, little sister. You always were too impulsive for a game of such strategy.' Oh, Cassandra lived to regret those words. Her brazen sister's world wasn't one bound by red tape or regulations like her own. She saw only black and white. Simple, effective rules. To her, there was no room for speculation – either you belonged alive or...

'It's simple really, Cass. We just have to remove them from the equation.'

You were a traitor and you died for your sins. Anyone involved in the Median, anyone who questioned or fought back, all of them were to be culled in a mass public execution. 'They would become shining examples to the rest of the populous,' her sister had claimed. More like martyrs, Cassandra thought. To enact this would not bring about diplomacy like her sister seemed to think, it would bring about hell. A weeping wail echoed through the walls as outside a mother mourned her son in the dying moonlight. Cassandra's fingers closed around the pawn. That's all this war ever was to her sister anyway, a big game in which there are winners and there are losers. Simple. But this wasn't how you played the game. People's lives are not pawns to be tossed aside meaninglessly. That kind of innocence was insanity, guiltless, without remorse, it couldn't be controlled. Her sister was prepared to walk a path paved with skeletons and flesh in order to keep her simplistic ideals alive. But Cassandra was not. She turned towards the door. In the dawn's pale light the shadow of the pawn, now standing up tall and proud smudged the harsh lines of the chessboard into palette of grey and black.

For all the world Cassandra looked every bit the graceful ruler as

# I 2

she glided into the vapid hallway, the crystalline walls distorting her reflection into something far more sinister. Her feet made no sound on the smooth tiles as she sailed along, the elegant spectre, towards her checkmate. Could she really do this? Before she had time to cast a doubtful shadow she had arrived, casting the amphitheatre that swelled and stormed with aggression into a serene silence. Without hesitation a sea of heads bowed in respect as if the heaviness her heart held was dragging them down with her. They too knew about the plans of the younger royal and were as divided as Cassandra's own heart. But they were not the ones that mattered. Her sister had gained support in the shadowed reaches of the nation, amongst the bitter and vengeful who felt wronged by the sadistic movement. It would not be long before her nightmarish ideas became a reality, murdering not only the people but the very morality of their country. *This was necessary*, Cassandra told herself. *I must, to save my people*. She lightly shook her head as though that would rid her of the grief and guilt she was drowning in. After what felt like hours of suffocating doubt, the guest of honour arrived. A solitary tear rolled down her cheek as she stared into the eyes of the sister she loved so much.

'Nadia de Valdove,'

*My dear little sister, I beg for your forgiveness.*

'For your crimes conspiring against the people of our Nation, and your dangerous plans for the future,'

*This no longer is a simple game. People's lives are at stake. Please try to understand.*

'As Sovereign of our great land,'

*But I know your heart and all it contains, and thus I know...*

'I, Cassandra de Valdove,'

*That as your sister, and as your friend...*

'Hereby sentence you...'

*You cannot be allowed to continue your madness, at any cost.*

'To death.'



# I 2

Torchlight streaks the deck above, piercing the cracks as we wait, silent and expectant, in the dark, fetid air of the hold. A man barks orders, his voice crackling over the megaphone. I hear the *clump, clump* of heavy boots, then the sound of bare feet padding across the deck as people are herded onto the navy vessel anchored alongside our creaking junk. In the darkness I wait, packed like a sardine with 70 other sweaty, salt-gritted bodies yet no one makes a sound. The hatch is suddenly thrown open and a torch beam sweeps over us; there is an expletive from the invisible man above and he reels from the stench that hits him like a train. In broken Vietnamese, he orders us to come up. I join the milling crowd of asylum seekers on deck, my head swirling with thoughts of what the future may bring. In the commotion, I notice the weather has turned: a grey fog rolls in from the inky sky over the heaving waves, transforming the junk into a tumultuous, shifting seesaw.

# I 2

JAGGED CLIFFS LOOM against a starless sky the night we arrive on Christmas Island. A menacing razor wire fence and rows of squat, grey buildings greet us. A man dressed in a crisp uniform announces: 'The fence surrounding the detention centre is designed to stop detainees from entering or leaving the premises without permission.' His pale blue eyes scan our curious, dirty faces with indifference.

Apprehension courses through me, then Quyen whispers in my ear. 'Be brave child, this will lead to the bright future your family desires for you,' and my fear recedes.

I am allocated a room with Quyen and we are given bedding and new clothes, including two pairs of jeans each. We squeal in delight, pouncing on the jeans and lifting them in the air like trophies.

Quyen exclaims, 'I have only ever seen jeans in posters of western movies!'

I laugh and shoot imaginary bullets like a cowboy shouting. 'And I have only owned two pairs of pants at the one time!'

We collapse on the bed in fits of giggles.

As the days pass, people begin to feel safe and we emerge from our shells. Each muted word is no longer a jarring note in the silence, a dissonant affront to one's solitude. I befriend a woman named Tara and her sister, Ming, and we trade stories, although I find it difficult to share my journey without plummeting into despair. I can't forget the hold; the crush of contorted limbs clawing and writhing in the confined space and the arctic gush of saltwater. My throat constricts

at the memory of Truong's body lying cold and inert, his blistered lips parted in a state of guileless surprise at the tragedy of his own death. I try to block the image from my mind and, instead, appreciate my good fortune in reaching safety. I worry about Quyen; she rarely leaves her room, preferring to lie in bed, body curled in a foetal position, staring blankly at the grey wall. 'Come outside and eat lunch with me Quyen' I say to her.

'I have no desire to look at the wire fence that entraps us, if that's what sitting outside involves,' she groans, turning to face the wall again.

The trauma of the journey is my constant companion but as each day passes, feelings of hope and optimism for the future grow stronger. I delight in the taste of cool, fresh drinking water that soothes my scorched throat and my sun-damaged skin begins to heal. During the long, slow hours in detention I think about my family. I recall my mother nursing me as a child; she wore a red hibiscus flower in the long curtain of her hair and gently rocked me to sleep. The soft hum of the soldier's wife's lament she sang and the sweet fragrance of hibiscus interlaces my dreams each night. As always, this memory resurrects my desire for the comforting sound of Truong's singing. I reach for his fragile body in my sleep, aching for the reassuring press of his head against my chin. Yet as I grope at the shapeless darkness, the chilling reality jolts me awake; Truong will never return. Only the trick of the dancing shadows that form ghoulis apparitions of the dead are here with me.

As the long, uneventful weeks stretch into months, a creeping claustrophobia grips me. We are unable to leave the camp without a travel document and despite my repeated requests; one has not materialized for me. I respect the Australian government and its procedures but I am a prisoner in this place. The sterile grey walls, cramped rooms and narrow hallways leading to endless rows of homogenized dormitories are squeezing the life out of me. I miss wandering through the streets of my village and watching my little brother, Loc, slay imaginary dragons with his friends under the light of the silk lanterns that hang from acacia trees. I miss greeting my aunty selling beef noodles and traipsing past the fish market lined with gleaming silver-backed fish, its briny stink filling the air. I yearn to wander through the vibrant fabric stands, coffee yards, hear the rattling talk of women at the jewellery market and the bustle of people going about their daily business. Yet despite the impossibility

# I 2



of achieving my goals while in the detention centre, my spirit remains alive and I have faith that one day I will make a new and better life for myself in Australia.



Night after night, I dream that I am alone on a vast plain in the Australian outback. I lie beneath a blanket of flowers that scatter over my chest and gather around my neck like a garland. Occasionally the wind whispers past and I feel the stems shift and loose petals take flight. Above me, the sky is an incandescent crimson; beneath me, the sunburnt land tumbles to ravines, smoothes to plains and stretches to eternity. I raise my head and let the flowers fall; there are no wire fences to restrict me to a designated area, no guards to glare at me when I step beyond the confines. In my dream, my skin glows and I feel like I am made of steel; the metal is gleaming and strong and shines around me like starlight. I have such a feeling of lightness and happiness that my body vibrates with power and emotion. I walk across the coppery plain; the tangled spinifex and golden-orbed acacias shimmer in the light. I feel the hot rush of noon hit my cheeks and I bask in the glowing warmth of the sunset, soaking up its last penetrating rays. Suddenly a towering cross wire fence springs from the earth stopping me in my tracks. Limitless in height, it reaches up to the clouds, harsh and menacing against the softness of the pink, clouded sky. I try to break through the wire, believing that my metallic skin will penetrate its defence and liberate me from the restrictions of the detention centre. Yet I am mistaken; my steel body grows heavy and burdensome. I feel myself sinking into the sun-parched earth, shrinking in the shadow of the wire and succumbing to its overbearing power and authority.



I wrench myself awake from the harrowing dream, my body doused in chilling sweat. Yet I know that each night when I close my eyes, this same dream will envelop me. It is my faith and optimism conflicting with the hopelessness of my situation that throws my mind into torment. It has been a year since I arrived on Christmas Island and I have not yet found placement in Australia. As I lie beside Quyen, my body nestled against hers, I think of Truong. I yearn for his clear, pure voice to transcend the miasma of anguish clouding my mind and to imbue my heart with warmth and comfort. Quyen sighs,

tears roll down her pallid cheeks as she whispers, 'I should have never taken him. It is wrong that he had to suffer for my shame. Why should he be the one who is punished?'

REFUGE

We fall silent, the cold grey walls and empty spaces in the room echo the hollowness of my heart.



I 2

The morning was dark and gloomy when I arrived at my grandmother's. The fog fell thick and heavy over the city like an ominous blanket sealing in the cold, and rain thudded continuously down on the pavement as I passed through the gate, fiddling in my purse for the house keys. The harsh wind whipped around my exposed face and I shivered. Clutching my jacket tightly around me, I unlocked the door and let myself in, pausing only to wipe my feet on the grubby mat just inside the threshold.

'Yiayia, I'm here,' I called out as I carefully placed my bags inside the door and walked down the hall to the living room at the back end of the house.

'*Yiá sou agápi mou*, thank you for coming'.

The living room was virtually unrecognisable; boxes were piled high in every inch of floor space, the furniture was shrouded in plastic coverings, stacks of clothes lay folded neatly in piles on the floor and two small bags of toiletries had been placed atop an assortment of blankets and wraps. My grandmother was huddled in the only uncovered armchair left in the room, hands grasping at the thin shawl around her shoulders.

Each time I saw her, her deterioration stunned me and I felt the familiar sorrow threatening to overwhelm me. I forced myself to repress my feelings with silent reassurances that all was still well, and inhaled deeply until I felt my calm return. She sat with her back hunched over as her thin, frail arms struggled to reach up and pull her shawl more tightly around her slight body.

I could still vividly remember a time when, not so long ago, my grandmother would be up and about whenever I came over, cooking meals and constantly pressing me to eat more, despite my protests as I attempted to wave off her extensive array of Greek sweets and delicacies. The ever-present aroma of baked roasts and hot stuffed vegetables had now evaporated, replaced by the stale smell of musty carpet and old furniture. We would have a family meal every week and she would spend all day preparing the food and ensuring that the children were fed before anyone else. Even now, when I come to help her with meals, she tries to convince me to eat my lunch first, and worries if I have to wait. I guess some things never change.

I plucked one of the blankets off the floor and carefully draped it over my grandmother's legs before bending down to plant a tender kiss on her cheek. It was her last day at home; tomorrow morning

she would move into a nursing home in the suburbs and the house would be prepared for sale. I grasped her hand and looked up into her sad, tired eyes.

'I'll still come visit you,' I said.

My grandmother slowly nodded her head in assent but remained silent. Her eyes turned away from mine and began scanning the length of the room as she let out a deep shuddering sigh of exhaustion that racked her small frame. Her sorrow at leaving was evident, and I gently squeezed her hand in comfort as though I understood, even though I wasn't sure that I did.

Seizing my moment, I lightly dashed back down the hallway to retrieve my bag, pulling out a large photo album as I returned and crouching at my grandmother's side. I dragged a small coffee table across the room and laid out the album, displaying it in front of her like a prize.

'*Tí éinaí aftó?*' My grandmother's face took on a puzzled expression and she strained forward in her chair.

'It's a photo album, yiayia. *Fotografíes.*' In reality, it was really more of a scrapbook. I had become something of an amateur photographer over the past few years and naturally took it upon myself to record every memorable family event – leaving me with an extensive collection of photos. I had begun compiling them over the summer initially as a memory album for myself, but after a few weeks I found that the focus had naturally shifted. I became more interested in tracking the life of my grandmother as opposed to my own. I only had photos from the past few years in my collection, and so I had gathered up older photographs from various members of my extended family until I had a sufficient chronological recollection of my grandmother's life.

'A picture paints a thousand words,' my grandmother replied, as she smiled indulgently up at me and released a short laugh.

The photos I had compiled ranged almost the entire length of what I knew of my grandmother's lifespan: her arrival in Australia, her wedding with my grandfather, family photos of her with my mother and her siblings, me and my siblings, my cousins, her great-grandson. I was secretly chuffed with myself for my dedication and the time I had spent preparing this album and proudly opened the cover to the first page, waiting expectantly for my grandmother's reaction.

The first photograph was of my grandmother and her two

# I 2

brothers, standing with their parents outside their home in Greece. It was dated the 12th of March 1938. The house was silhouetted by the vast landscape in the background; the ground was crusted with dirt and rocks and the skyline stretched back into the distance, meeting the edge of the earth as the rising sun seeped across the land. Even in black and white the photograph was enchanting, and I longed to visit the rugged countryside. The photo opposite was of my grandmother's arrival in Australia, some six or seven years later. I had no photos during the time that had elapsed in between; it had been the time of World War II and the few photos that I had managed to scrounge up I opted to exclude.

I glanced at my grandmother's face, expecting to see surprise, happiness, and appreciation, but instead her expression had grown sombre and hard. Her mouth was no longer poised in smile and had flattened into a firm line, as she stared wanly out across the room with glazed eyes.

'Don't you like it, yiayia? There's more pictures, look you haven't even seen them yet...' I trailed off, realising that something was amiss. A sense of panic threatened to rise within me. A few minutes passed in tense silence, before my grandmother began to speak.

She told me about her family. She told me about her life in Greece. She told me about her father, who worked as a general in the Second World War. She told me about her brothers, both even younger than her. She told me of the house that had been ransacked by villagers driven to the point of desperation by poverty. She told me of her kidnapping. The two years she had spent walking across Greece to find her family again. Sleeping in Church orphanages and convents, picking lice out of children's skin. The fear, the hunger, the separation. She told me all of this.

These were not things we spoke of; in all the time I had known them, my grandparents had never spoken of the war times or their reasons for leaving Greece. I quickly flicked the album to the middle and opened a page at random, hoping to dispel the solemn mood that had descended and return my grandmother to her usual self.

'Oxí, go back and fix the beginning.' I stared at my grandmother, confused by her request. Nevertheless, I turned the pages back until I reached the first two photographs.

'Remove those,' she uttered.

I grimaced as I stared down at the album and attempted to quell

# I 2

the stream of emotions that gushed through me like an open floodgate of water, a torrent of chilled liquid rushing through my veins. My cheeks were flushed pink from humiliation and I felt my composure shatter like the icy surface of a lake that could no longer bear the pressure. The feeling was familiar to me: failure. The memories of my past failures came flooding back to me, and my insecurity at being only an amateur photographer returned in force. A cold hand gripped my heart and I felt as if my throat was being constricted.

‘But, yiayia...’ I began to protest before I abruptly stopped myself, sensing a mix of emotions within my grandmother beyond my understanding. The way that I saw it, the faces in the first photograph were smiling and the children were holding hands, laughing gaily; a happy snapshot of a treasured memory. Yet, my grandmother’s face reflected none of the fond happiness I had hoped for and instead appeared pained as she instructed me once again to remove the photos.

I had omitted the few photos that I found pertaining to the Second World War, feeling that my grandmother may not want the reminder, but now I was beginning to realise that what I had included was, in my grandmother’s eyes, a far worse reminder. The five smiling faces from the first photo had been replaced by one solitary figure wearing a sombre expression in the second. A picture paints a thousand words. Looking at the two photographs now side by side, the jarring contrast was obvious. I wondered why I had not made the connection myself.

Here is what I believe: nothing causes suffering like the loss of that which is precious and irreplaceable in life. They say that time heals everything, but even a lifetime may not always be long enough. Although we find ways to carry on in life, we all bear the pain of our past – whatever it may be.

I reached across and tore out the first two pages of the album, leaving jagged lines of fragmented paper as the introduction to the collection of photographs. It hurt me to tarnish my months of hard work but I suppose it made sense in a way – my grandmother’s past was not without damage, so why should my recollection of it be?

I folded the torn out pages and slipped them back into my bag, hidden from sight and hidden from memory.



I 2

THE LAMBS  
OF WAR

MI-TU KIEU

'You know, for a mere writer you have very interesting connections Mr Yusuf,' the white man said. His suffocating American accent reverberated off the steel table that separated me from him, emphasising the foetid air of the small room. I looked down at my hands.

'You forgot the handcuffs.'

The overhead light paused in its buzzing as the American let out a low laugh, 'I am so sorry I had to ask you to come like that, it has given you a false understanding of why you are needed here.'

'I wasn't asked. I was ordered... with four Nigerian militants at my door.'

'As I said, you have very interesting connections.'

'Well I could say the same about you. CIA?' I was demanding an answer but he pretended that I had only humoured him, though the tensing of his body suggested otherwise. It took a while until he decided it was in his interests to indulge me. 'I am part of an anti-terrorist force that has allied with the Nigerian army; in particular, the covert operative section. I am here to seek your assistance.'

I ignored the last few words he said. 'I guess there is a lot in it for the West to try to foment a war against terrorism in Africa. I know the record. If Nigeria goes... Chad goes. Kenya goes.' I wondered to myself what 'goes' even meant.

'You were at the site of the bombing in Jos.' He made a grim attempt at a smile.

'I just caught the second bombing, near the bus station.' I felt the dull burn of my freshly healing wound creep up the outside of my thigh.

'There were at least 100 deaths and many more casualties – innocent casualties.'

'I know the statistics.' They made me sick.

'Then you know your people are dying. And you would know that it would be absurd to refuse foreign aid at such a time; we – you and me – have the power to intervene, to change this unfortunate course of warfare. But if we don't do anything, well, evil would look a bit like us.' His certainty imposed itself onto me but deep down I was already on his side; just scared of the repercussions.

'Yusuf is a very common Islamic surname is it not?' He took my contemplative quietness as consent, his shoulders smoothing as I replied with a grunt. He continued, 'I suppose that is why you never changed it when you left the Boko Haram.'

'I was never a part of the Boko Haram.'

I 2

‘No, but you were born into it. The – great – Mohammed Yusuf was your father,’ he paused, ‘and you ran away after he died – age fifteen.’

Again, I said nothing, but for him it was more than enough. ‘I must admit, I have been following you for a while now and, like I said, I am here to seek your assistance.’

‘What if my assistance causes more harm than good?’ I knew what he wanted.

‘Your lack of action will inevitably cause more harm than good,’ he said morosely. There will always be more fighting, more war, more sacrifices, and more tragedies before there is peace. However, it is important, Mr Yusuf, that you take a side in conflict if you want to remain human.’

‘You want me to lead you to Sanin Yusuf’, my brother. All the trouble he had caused. The only thing that protected me from dying at the merciless hands of the Boko Haram was our shared blood and I wished now that could have been enough for me to take no part in the whole affair.

‘There was a rumour that he was there to ‘overlook’ the attack.’ The American pressed, ‘have you seen him since?’

I became silent again. Yes, I had seen my brother, multiple times privately and when I asked him about his actions, his eyes had gleamed triumphantly and I knew that when my own brother saw a dead body he couldn’t even see their wounds. He had told me, ‘they were only war casualties and they died in the right cause.’ I had nearly choked on my bile.

‘Mr Yusuf, it does not bode well for your people to withhold vital information. Eventually action must be taken; there is always a point of change when you refuse to turn a blind eye. How many more innocent people must die before you reach it?’ The Westerner spoke urgently now, his words strong, breaking through my final barrier. I laid down my neutrality like a lamb, ready for the sacrifice. I could no longer remain a mere civilian. I had both the power and means to intervene.

My love, Quivina, flashed through my mind; the letter she had sent in secrecy last night lamenting her sister who was stolen by the Boko Haram months ago. Her surprise that she had enough tears to spill for her Aunt’s little boy in Cameroon, snatched just the night before and forced to join the sect.

I 2



I knew that in a war like this there was no longer time to hesitate. Getting rid of Sanin was a lesser evil that would prevent the loss of more innocents. No more could I give into the fear that after this discussion, I would cease to be degage.

The American slid a tattered book towards me, saying, 'This was an intriguing find in your house today.'

I laughed hesitantly, 'Ah you Americans, what is so intriguing about the Quran?'

He returned my smile, 'your copy has been well read, but for it to have collected dust, one must have left it for some time. Tell me, am I wrong?'

He was right; I could no longer hand back the decision to somebody in whom I struggled to believe in. My inevitable decision to kill Sanin was the ultimate show that I could not condone his actions any longer.

It was a life for the many lives... in the name of the greater good.

'I trust you will make the right move Mr Yusuf.'



I 2

#FreeBieber. The motto of a devoted Twitter army who still argue that pop star Justin Bieber, even as he has been arrested *yet again*, is somehow innocent. Now, #FreeBieber may seem harmless or mildly amusing, but what if I told you that #FreeBieber could actually represent something dark and dangerous? Something that has been affecting every single one of us? We might think that the criminals like Justin Bieber have no relevance to us, and we can continue living our happy lives, untouched by glorified images of crime. Wrong. We are exposed to the glorification of crime everywhere and we have become tolerant, even awed by this idolisation. Looking again to #FreeBieber. These fans were willing to completely dismiss the severity of Bieber's drink driving, to ignore the fact that he not only endangered himself but all those around him. Now, we may not all support Bieber's continuous delinquent antics, but in some ways we have all become that deluded Belieber, Tweeting in caps-lock. We need to become aware that there are severe dangers that lie in the glorification of crimes.

This glorification often stems from the media, who, whether we notice it or not, have enough power to bend society to their will. Schapelle Corby, convicted drug smuggler, was recently released on parole from Bali's Kerobokan Prison after nine years. The media has practically imploded from excitement. Exclusive interviews were cast, and Corby's story has promptly been adapted into a feature film.

Let's step back for a minute and look a bit more analytically at Corby's case. Why exactly is there so much hype surrounding her? If it's for how some people believe that imprisoning Corby was a miscarriage of justice or was somehow racist, Corby attempted to smuggle drugs into another country. Last time I checked, that's a crime, and that's a fair enough reason to arrest her. But the portion of the media praising Corby seem to be glossing over this little fact, implying that crimes can be easily dismissed for an opportunity to craft a falsely tragic hero. The turmoil surrounding Corby is unfounded, but the media continues to blindly bestow unjustified glory and push us to believe that we should do the same.

Some may argue, however, that we have enough sense to realise that the media can be biased and irrational, so we aren't that influenced by their portrayal of crime. But our lines between fact and fiction, between reasonable and ridiculous become blurred after our overexposure to the media. We cannot naively believe that our

## GLORIFICATION OF CRIME

GILLIAN LIM

ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC

SPEAKING COMPETITION

FINALIST

# I 2

viewpoints of criminals can remain untainted, because there are too many people who have twisted tales of crimes to unthinkable proportions. Soon, we too may begin to adopt questionable morals as our own.

The notorious stockbroking antics of Jordan Belfort were captured in Martin Scorsese's film, *The Wolf of Wall Street*. The film once more enraptured audiences with the notion that ordinary mortals like us could be easily making millions of dollars a week. Now, Scorsese and Belfort have asserted over and over that this story is intended to be a cautionary tale, and indeed, Belfort and many of his colleagues served time in prison on charges of fraud and money laundering.

Clearly though, not everybody in the audience came away having really absorbed the moral of the story. After the film was released, the number of people searching for stockbroking jobs in the United States suddenly escalated 80%, and in the United Kingdom, 44%. I'm guessing that none of us here have the sudden burning desire to smuggle drugs into third-world countries, or launch into illegal stockbroking escapades, but such glorification of these offences can lead us to wonder, 'Maybe crime does pay.' And then? What if everybody suddenly decided they wanted to become the next Wolf of Wall Street? We cannot possibly live in a society where the law comes beneath greed and immorality. And all because one film made crime look a little too rewarding. Even if it is accidental, our morals can be remoulded so that we are tempted by the fake world offered in the deification of crimes.

Now, I'm not saying that we should simply halt all media coverage of crimes, or that all entertainment should only depict sunshine and rainbows, but when the deification of crimes has become socially, morally and psychologically damaging, we can no longer consider our perspective of crimes as a trivial matter anymore. Glorification is the ultimate crime now, and unless we're aware of that, we will all remain guilty.



I 2

*The core of our conflicts is the desire for power, as we cannot withstand the possibility of being powerless.*

THE FIGHT  
FOR POWER

GILLIAN LIM

'Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.' O'Brien's haunting words from George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 allude to how often an authority's goal in conflict is to possess complete and utter control over society's thoughts and reality, embodying their thirst for ultimate power. This depiction of a tyrannical government's quest for infallible domination may seem a little extremist, but in fact, most of the conflicts of history, both vast and petty, can be stripped down to reveal that eventually, our conflicts result from a desire to find or defend our power. For us everyday citizens, power does not necessarily signify global domination, but simply the control we have over our decisions, thoughts, and future. We all desire and essentially need some kind of power in our lives and can go to immense lengths to maintain it, but we also bear witness to the often devastating ramifications that erupt in humankind's perpetual battle for power.

Fundamentally, the notion of power is subjective, and the extent to which it is desired varies between individuals and between authorities. For many, power can simply equate to freedom. How unbearably powerless would we be if we no longer had the freedom to make our own choices, to think openly and without oppression? For many of the ambitious and dominating, power extends beyond the concept to become a yearning for control. To have the ability to dictate others' lives and to remove their freedom at will can be a threatening, but nevertheless tempting, prospect. Therefore, if anybody threatens to diminish our freedoms, we instinctively protest, and the conflict shapes itself to become an intricate balance between letting society be governed peacefully and maintaining our own individual power. However, often this intricate social order is upset and for better or for worse, we may find ourselves fighting to regain our power as authorities also struggle to attain control, resulting in ramifications that can be both beneficial and devastating.

A common saying goes along the lines that 'knowledge is power', and indeed, the awareness we have of our existence and our desire to perpetually learn has become a valuable form of power. Yet, our discoveries often come at a cost, as controversies and new perspectives can cause social upheaval. Authorities attempt to step

I 2

in, prevent this social unrest from coming to fruition, and so we have a battle for two powers; peace and progress. What happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object? Something explosive, devastating, but ultimately unpredictable. Similarly, the ramifications of conflict for power can be cataclysmic, yet be integral to our lives. Bertolt Brecht explores this explosive clash between two parties' pursuit for power in his play, *Life of Galileo*. Throughout the play, life is shown to be ultimately governed by the Church's teachings, representing their desire for a monopoly over their population's views. Contrastingly, Galileo fights for the freedom to bestow power upon the commoners through providing his studies in Italian, becoming the lone figure in the battle for power in the form of free-thinking and discoveries. Thus, we can see that although the Church and Galileo are dichotomised vastly in their goals, ultimately, they are also paralleled in that they both strive to claim power of a kind. In today's age, we might too easily support the battle for progress and learning, and why wouldn't we? We need the scientists, the sceptics, the artists, and the free-thinkers to continuously ask, 'Why?' Or 'What if?' Lest society succumbs to an authority's numbing desire for power through control.

# I2

However, once an authority has achieved a dominating sense of power, society often finds it difficult to reclaim enough strength to protest. When we are powerless, we are afraid; afraid of the looming threat of the authority's control, afraid of the unforeseen consequences that could snowball should we ever try to recover power for ourselves. Before 2010, many Middle Eastern countries possessed this ingrained fear of their dictatorship's relentless control and the consequences of rebellion. Social and political unrest rippled under the surface of society, but never accumulated to any remarkable protest, until one man stood up. Mohamed Bouazizi and his tragic martyrdom became the spark needed for the rest of his country to realise that they did not have to live under oppression, that they deserved to live freely under their own power. The floodgates were opened. One of the most explosive and consuming revolutions of our time commenced, embodying how, as individuals, we should not remain submissive to a government's rigid control. As humans, we are thirsty for power, whether it be knowledge, progress, or freedom. We just need to acknowledge that often, these powers are worth fighting for, in spite of the collateral damage we fear may arise. As

the Mexican revolutionary, Emiliano Zapata, once exclaimed: *'I rather die on my feet than live upon my knees.'*

We need to consider, the people who drag us from our knees to our feet, the catalysts who represent the fight for society's empowerment. Before, we looked at Galileo Galilei and Mohamed Bouazizi, the tales of successful individuals who ignited society's battle for power against an overwhelming authority. What do we do then if our revolutionary never surfaces? What happens to the individuals who tried to grasp power and failed? Maybe they were wiped from the world, permanently silenced, or more disturbingly, maybe they never existed at all. Under the power of authority, the rulers often strive to maintain their control by stifling the desire or thought of power amongst the population. Soon, citizens are either too afraid to consider rebellion, or too ignorant to consider that they might be able to live free of oppression. Referring again to Orwell's novel 1984, the Party's central mantra is to rule society completely and utterly by controlling their thoughts and beliefs, ultimately utilising their power to *suppress* the possibility of inner and ideological conflict. Thoughtcrime, classed as the most heretical and heinous crime, is at its core the Party's means of ensuring that nobody can even fathom the idea of anyone possessing power other than the Party. Through Big Brother's reign, the Party strips the citizens of Oceania of nearly all forms of power, including knowledge, freedom of speech, and even individuality. Subsequently, sometimes two plus two has to equal five, because as the powerless, we have no reason or footing to say otherwise. Without power, we become ignorant, submissive, and too terrified to start conflict, but if we are all so repressed, then how can we rely on anybody to protest for our power?

Many of our conflicts revolve around the notion of power, because many of us desire and essentially need power to maintain basic control over our lives. As humans, we crave a sense of awareness and control, because when forces try to remove these powers, they also rob us of what it is to be individual and intrinsically human. Often, we need to struggle, to withstand the ramifications of conflict for the sake of power, because as American psychoanalyst Esther Harding once asserted, *'Conflict is the beginning of consciousness.'*



I 2

MY STORY,  
HIS STORY

ANNABEL LOANE

A DISARRAY of loose-leaf notes is splayed across my lap, promising half written sentences dissolving into ramblings of nothingness. For inspiration I read long-winded Russian romantic novels and sit brooding in coffee shops. Yet still, my pages are left blank, college-ruled lines void of anything worthwhile I might have to share. Writer's block. How can I have writer's block? I'm not even a writer, just an amateur attempting to play in the big league.

THE WEEK PRIOR to visiting my father in defeat, a friend, attempting to compliment me, commented: 'You could *totally* exploit that Jewish Holocaust thing.'

*Does that count as exploitation? Am I not able to write that authentically?* I thought.

I went home and stared at my blank pages. Tepidly, I picked up a pen and wrote AUSCHWITZ STORY at the top.

I SHARPLY look up to the sound of a faint wheezing, my father's frail hands attempting to manoeuvre his hard metal wheelchair, until he clumsily clasps them together across his woollen blanket. His hands shake. Almost as if the simple act of being is too much for his aching bones.

'Pa.'

'Hello, daughter,' he says in Yiddish.

'Did Nurse Al explain to you why I'm here?' I clearly enunciate every word to accommodate for his age.

'I'm old, not deaf.'

'So, will you tell me your Auschwitz story?'

Anything you write will be a meager shadow. I do not believe it is possible to convey the horrors of what we have suffered.'

'Tatenui, my voice has hollowed, let me borrow yours so they will all remember.'

A tense pause followed, the static in the air rippling around us as we sat awkwardly.

'I visited Mamah's grave yesterday. I left some flowers from you.'

My father hasn't visited her grave in years – in fact he hasn't left the confines of the nursing home for that long either. As I approached her tiny plot of land, the old flowers I had left on my last visit were deteriorating, the sharp pink and yellow hues slowly disintegrating into muddy browns that lay wasting on her grave. The rain carved pathways down the white tombstone and my knees sank into the soft spongy grass as I knelt before it. Leaves littered the ground, the

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autumn remnants dotting the cemetery and donating splashes of burnt orange colour as far as the eye can see. Row upon row of tombstones were empty of visitors, only the dark clouds casting deep shadows across the field.

AFTERNOON. We sit across from each other. He speaks meticulously, each word carefully picked out, almost as if he had rehearsed the exact string of descriptions. He told me about the camp. Thousands crammed onto trains. The strongest sought out and grouped to work. The gas chambers. On the walls written: 'Put shoes into cubbyholes and tie them together so you won't lose them. After showers you will receive hot coffee.' The daily labor that ruined his legs, the motto of Auschwitz engrained: *Arbeit Macht Frei*, Work Will Set You Free

He continues talking. Occasionally losing his way as if swept unwillingly into the past. Examining his frail stature, I find it hard to imagine he was once so resilient against these atrocities. He mutters under his breath '*Az men lebt, derlebt men.*' When one lives, one experiences. I quickly tried to distinguish between whether it was another saying from Auschwitz or a Yiddish proverb.

'Maybe I have enough experience for all who died,' he declares.

THIS IS WHAT I BELIEVE: As Marcel Proust put it: 'We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full.' I think my father managed to isolate himself from feeling anything at all. It never lasts. The suffering finds a way to explode, breaking the surface, changing everything. I first found out about my father's involvement when I was eight. He never delved into the past; it was never discussed, like his life only commenced when I was born. He used to sit in his armchair at midnight, staring at the blackened wall for hours. He couldn't hear me when I spoke to him. Or maybe he could. Maybe it was just easier to stare back at me than to release the torment that dominated his mind.

The moment his past became my present was on a trip interstate. Staying in a hotel room was a novel experience, the crisp bed linen sharply turned down into perfect squares. The soft patter of the shower sounded against the incessant blare of my cartoons, the neon lights from the TV illuminating the wall behind me in technicolour. *Thud.* 'Pa?' The soft trickle of the water was the only reply I received. Nervously I crept to the door and timidly knocked. 'Are you okay in there, Pa?' An oozing trail of water slowly seeped under the closed

I 2



door until it reached the barrier of the carpet and sunk in. I burst through to find my father curled up in the corner of the shower, water cascading down his face as he sat gaping at the tiles. He was clawing at his legs.

To my eight year old self it was hard to comprehend why my father, my image of stability, would be collapsed in the shower, breathing becoming more sporadic. I stepped into the shower and cupped his cheeks in my hands, silently brushing the hair from his eyes.

ON MY NEXT VISIT, I find my father staring out the bay window. I place a bound copy of the story in his lap. He clumsily fingers the pages and his eyes glaze over, welling up with... pride? Sadness?

'I could not sleep a minute last night. When I sleep, I dream, I dream, I dream.'

He lifted his aged face towards me, the sunlight streaming in, catching the dust and causing it to dance and flicker around him.

'I have tried to express all that I saw in my youth, all that made my world so dark. Maybe you have finally done it yourself.'

*'Di pen shist erger fun a fayl.'* The pen stings worse than the arrow.

A faint smile plays across my father's lips – the first in a long time.

'Would you take me to Muter?'

It is hard to conceal my obvious shock. I enclose his frail hands in mine, tracing the wrinkles that carve out lines through his palm, and lead him to the door.

THE SUN beats down on Mumah's grave, the granite flecks iridescent and sparkling under the heat. The brown mountains flow in the distance like a roller coaster, forming an unbreakable chain that frames my view. I wheel Pa until he is directly in front of Ma's grave and he unfurls the crumpled story from his breast pocket. He commences reading my story, his story, in a hushed voice, barely audible, as if only speaking to the lingering spirit of Mumah. He pauses on some words, holding them in his mouth before he speaks, like he is contemplating and savouring them. Together we sit, alternating lines until the sun creaks at the horizon, the sky awash in a vivid red. As the wind whispers past, Pa starts singing a Yiddish lullaby from when I was a child. His voice carries the words across the field like honey, rippling sweetly through the air.



*'You can lose your way groping among the shadows of the past. It's frightening how many people and things there are in a man's past that have stopped moving. The living people we've lost in the crypts of time sleep so soundly side by side with the dead that the same darkness envelops them all.'*

LOUIS-FERDINAND CÉLINE, *Journey to the End of the Night*

Rain. It fell softly upon the terracotta tiles, the dull drumming echoing around the thick walls of the church. Head bowed, my nose was filled with the wet and warm and sweet smell of soggy air. *Pioggia*. I like the rain, so did my father; the soft melody, a relief from the stifled silence of the darkened space. My father would tell me, *l'acqua trova sempre la sua strada verso il mare*. Water will always find its way back to the sea. He had the sea in his veins.

The priest's sharp bell shook me from my dream, slicing through the silence. He wore a thick black tunic, that looked like it carried the dust from centuries past. Bible in hand, he threw a solemn glance towards his audience, then strode to the polished box in the centre of the room. 'Ora, if any of Signor Valante's family would like to come and wish him a final farewell, *avanti, per favore*.'

A slight splash upon my nape made me flinch, then relax as the cool droplet trickled along my spine, giving way under my tight collar. They dress differently in *Roma*, a funeral is seen as an event; yet here, everyone's faces were downcast, in solemn sincerity. My shirt tightened across my chest. I felt the gaze of my sister upon me in expectation, piercing from beneath her latticed veil. I didn't look at her. *La pioggia è pesante*. I had to go forward. 'Andiamo... come on!' I frowned. 'Just get this over with.'

The news of his death had not shaken me; not nearly as much as the fragile voice of the news bearer on the receiver; I guess the trained hardness of my heart resisted such emotion. He had wanted that, I'm sure. I picture him, on the train station platform, wearing his salt stained shirt baring his tanned leathery chest; skin, hardened like pelt. His face twisted, as if in the full glare of the sun, a grimace. Whether he was pained by my departure, or purely by my existence, I don't know. Through a six-year-old's eyes, this was a cruel sight and a contradiction to the idea that family loved you, that family and home were forever. He didn't even raise one of his calloused hands in addio, farewell. He had gripped my shoulder, *colui che serve il dio in*

IL SILENZIO E  
IL SENTIMENTO,  
L'EMOZIONE  
E LA PAURA

(SILENCE AND  
SENTIMENT,  
EMOTION  
AND FEAR)

CARLA MILEO

I 2

IL SILENZIO E  
IL SENTIMENTO,  
L'EMOZIONE  
E LA PAURA

(SILENCE AND  
SENTIMENT,  
EMOTION  
AND FEAR)

*cielo, non ha bisogno di padre sulla terra.* He who serves God in heaven, needs no father on Earth. Maybe he didn't say it that way, maybe I misheard him. But how could I love this man?

The pew squeaked furiously as I twisted my hips, drawing a sharp breath as I rose. My feet trod heavily upon the stone floor, the echoes engulfed by the constant pattering of the rain and the waiting gazes of my pursuers. '*Andiamo.*' Corporate habit drew a ruler down my spine, and learned respect bowed my head; the profound atmosphere like a weight, heavy on my shoulders. Closer, slower, further. What if I ran from here, would they remember my name? '*Pazzo! Be a man!*'

Onwards.

HERE IS WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE TRUE: my father lived a life of dissatisfaction. *Una vita inutile*, striving in vain, in hope. Reaping the jewels of the sea, warmed by the sun, caressed and lulled by the soft kiss of the water and the gentle rocking of the waves. Born and bred in a quiet town, air thick with tradition and comfort. He could not have this *vita* for his only son. *Chi ha una retta coscienza possiede un regno.* His own desire leads every man. I suppose his was to know that his son was walking tall amongst the great buildings of Roma, amidst the smoke, the sights and the sounds of this greatness. This high life.

*Un collegio* was his idea of my escape from his destiny. From seven in the morning until the afternoon, my days operated with repetition and precision. The scarce moments of silence and serenity were treasured. In these times, I learned to shut out the world around me, I discovered that I could escape. Behind closed eyes I would wander to the sea, where I marvelled at the glistening sunlight dancing upon the crystal water. The salt air would cleanse my lungs, and the sun would warm my skin. Upon the horizon, the boats of the *pescatori* would glide towards the shore, laden with the morning's catch. My father among them, hand gripping the splintered rim of his vessel. He would smile and wave at me as he returned.

The polished wood was cool to touch. With the help of three local men, we lifted the lid and placed it gently upon the stone floor. There he lay, in utter tranquility, sleeping with the dead. His was the only face towards the heavens. He took with him knowledge, wisdom that only age bestows. I had believed once that it was the responsibility of the old to pass on this wisdom, so that they may be enlightened, live with fewer regrets. But he was selfish, he did not give me this.

*Roma* has disappointed me. If you ask me why, I would say that it

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had incomparable beauty, and it nurtured brutality. It sheltered the miserable humanity. For years I tried in vain to keep my pace alongside this fast moving culture, it changed me, and I failed. If success is shown in numbers, then I was one of the most successful. If clothes were a measure of character, then I was one of the most highly regarded. I was good, one of the best, and I hated it. As a young man, my hatred was fuelled by incomprehension, just as his actions were made in the hope of my prosperity. Yet somehow my internal momentum drove me from this culture, from this world my father was pushing me towards. It drove me to the sea, it drove me home.

*Chi di gatta nasce, sorci piglia.* What is bred in the bone will not go out of the flesh.

In these times, I would find myself drifting aimlessly through the swarming city, somehow removed from the constant throng of noise and activity. I would go to the river *Tiber*. The great canal of *Roma*. Here I found peace. There is great serenity in silence, yet it only resonates with the call from within, rising up until the threshold of repression has been breached; like a scream, rising, fighting to escape through the lips. Too long attenuated, it will not be silenced. My mind would wander to the depths of the river, the deep, my thoughts settling beneath the chattering and the noise of the world above. *Il silenzio e il sentimento. L'emozione e la paura.* This brief clarity, allowing me to see through the haggard inconstant splashes of beauty, so worshipped here. The angels cast in stone, watching me from above.

He never told me why he made the decision he did. In his incisive letters to me between my annual return, he would speak in proverbial. He could not read, he could not write, he only listened and understood. My sisters would write for him. *Chi ha più giudizio più nadoperi.* To whom much is entrusted, much is required. These were his last words to me. They weighed heavily on my heart.

His life a mystery to me. Yet he was my beginning. In the eyes of the public I stride in unrivalled conviction, yet beneath this shrouded veil, I am nothing; my inner being gaping wide, like the great void. In my readings I have stumbled upon writings of such truth that my insides leapt in frenzy, uncontrolled like a spasm of the muscle, this sense of resonance and understanding. *'That is perhaps what we seek throughout life, that and nothing more, the greatest possible sorrow so as to become fully ourselves before dying.'*

*Mio padre*, he sleeps now. He is distant upon the horizon, drifting

IL SILENZIO E  
IL SENTIMENTO,  
L'EMOZIONE  
E LA PAURA

(SILENCE AND  
SENTIMENT,  
EMOTION  
AND FEAR)

I 2

IL SILENZIO E  
IL SENTIMENTO,  
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E LA PAURA

(SILENCE AND  
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AND FEAR)

upon the calm currents as the sun rises, spilling its colour into the sea; staining it a magnificent scarlet. 'In the sky, two swarms of swallows converge, pull apart, interweave again like veils drifting at cross-currents.' The sea rocking him gracefully, the liquid velvet gently kissing the sides of his vessel. He is far from this harrowing silence.

As I trace the deep crevices of his cold face, carved by longevity, I am overcome by a growing sense of compassion for this man. For a second I stop breathing. I wanted to whisper *tí voglio bene* (*I love you*), in his ear, to see his face sink in content, for him to know that I was with him and that he need not have fear as he left this world. But I can never say it, not today, nor tomorrow nor any other. Years. It took me years to face him again, and now I stare freely, and he is gone. *Tí voglio bene.*



I 2

Those of you who know me well, will know that I am endlessly fascinated by the resplendent contemporary art form that is known as twerking. When used in appropriate settings, this majestic dance is, to me, not only a fantastic form of cardio but my platform for self-expression. However, despite my passion for twerking, I can't help but worry about the music videos it's been featured in as of late, or more specifically, the messages that these clips send. Sadly, these videos typically depict women in a way that they are just there to be mindless objects, nothing more than for the pleasure of men and that all girls want to be treated that way.

Let me set the scene: a man sitting on top of a pile of scantily clad women as he decides which one he wants to pick. This image is accompanied by the lyrics 'got her saved on my phone under big booty' – poetic, I know!

I think we can all agree that music videos like the one I've just described do little to celebrate the intelligence of women, our opinions and our value beyond our bodies.

We live in a time when feminism is prevalent in our society. We live in a country that prides itself on equality and tolerance for all. With this in mind, these videos which objectify women, whose presence is still disturbingly wide-spread, have no place in our lives and it is time that we banned them once and for all.

Some people have called simply for age restrictions on sexist music videos. However, wouldn't this just create a dangerous double standard? That the derogatory mindset promoted by these videos is okay, just not for children?

The fact is, these sexist attitudes are not okay for anyone and graphic music videos that objectify women encourage this sort of toxic mindset. You might not think that a small video can have such a large psychological impact, but it does and research has indicated that those consistently watching these clips have an associated tolerance for sexist, racist and even rape tolerant attitudes.

An attitude might not appear so damaging on the surface, but think of the consequences it leads to that become a reality for us: sexual assault, domestic abuse, the violence that will afflict at least 1 in 3 of us women in our lifetime. What we think about women affects what we do. As long as people continue to see women as less than equal, disrespect and violence will continue.

Ask yourself if you're okay with this. The answer, I hope, is a

## A PROBLEM WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO WATCH ANY LONGER

PEARL PAGUIO

ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC

SPEAKING COMPETITION

FINALIST

# I 2

A PROBLEM WE  
SHOULDN'T  
HAVE TO WATCH  
ANY LONGER

resounding no and it's time that we did something about it.

Now I'm not a mind reader, but I could guess that you're probably thinking – hey, banning sexist music videos sounds pretty sweet, but how's that gonna work? Couldn't anybody figure out how to bypass a ban?

Well, yes. Those concerns are entirely valid because sadly, there's always the undeniable possibility that people will find a way to upload or access prohibited content. However, placing an embargo on these music videos does something so much more important than just trying to stop people from watching them.

It flags to society as a whole that this hyper-sexualised and objectifying content is not normal and it is not what we should be basing our behaviour or views towards women off. A label like a ban says to the community: this probably isn't something we should be watching and it promotes a mindset we should work to discourage. It says to boys: this is not how you treat a girl, or anyone for that matter. Yet, most importantly, it says to girls: this derogatory and humiliating treatment that you see here; it's not okay. It's not okay, and you deserve better.

I think we all know that realistically, a ban on music videos where women are objectified won't be the ultimate cure for sexism because sadly, this issue is a lot more complex than that and has many other causes. Still, we've got to find ways to spark that conversation which leads to progress and we've got to take steps against the spread of ideas that limit equality. A popular platform like music videos is a good start for us: perhaps prohibiting these videos will help free us from prejudices against women.



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Picture this. There are two boats on a river. One, a luxurious cruise ship, the other a raft, barely staying afloat. Whilst staff on the cruise ship continue to build their already lavish boat, people on the raft below call out for help. They're sinking. 'Sorry!' call out the crew on the cruise ship, 'we can't afford to help you, we need to build the 37th floor of our ship.' The cruise ship sails on, and the raft is left behind, slowly sinking. Seems pretty unreasonable, don't you think? Words that come to mind include selfish, greedy and uncaring, to name a few. Not typically words you would associate with Australia. Yet, I'm ashamed to inform you, that as far as my metaphor goes, the cruise ship represents our great country, and the poor, struggling raft could substitute for any number of third world countries we are refusing to help. Tony Abbott's decision to cut foreign aid is embarrassing. It is a deep contradiction of Australia's moral obligations as an affluent nation, and will not only adversely affect the people in recipient countries, but will also permanently damage Australia's international reputation.

Abbott's primary explanation of the cuts is that, 'We will build the roads of the 21st century rather than shovel money abroad.' Ah Tony, tactful as always! I'm sure Australian aid recipients in Africa and the Middle East would hardly perceive their desperately needed funds as '[shovelled] money.' In fact, we know, and Abbott knows, that for many people, foreign aid is the difference between life and death. I'm sure I don't need to tell you that less funding will mean vulnerable people in developing countries will continue to be entrenched in a deep and devastating cycle of poverty. Here, at Ruyton, under the sublime leadership of Zoe Rachcoff, our Sustainability Captain, we sponsor the local, disadvantaged worm community, providing the little slugs the opportunity to develop and grow to their full potential, allowing them to reach the ripe old age of six, the life expectancy for your average worm. Yet, we must remind ourselves, that we live in a world in which we must sponsor not only the local worms, but children, who, unlike us, were not born among the lucky few, who have a lesser chance of reaching their sixth birthday than the worms of Kew. And, if we parallel the Ruyton community's sponsorship of worms, with the Australian community's sponsorship of people in developing countries, I think you'll find that as a school, we are doing a lot more for the worms, than our nation is doing for people in developing countries.

## CUTS TO FOREIGN AID? WHAT'S GOING ON, AUSTRALIA?

LAUREN SIBREE  
ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC  
SPEAKING AWARD  
WINNER

# I 2



# I2

Furthermore, consider this, by withdrawing our funding from countries that are in desperate need of stability, we are essentially encouraging refugees to flee these regions. So, either Abbot wasn't serious about his admittedly appalling promise to stop the boats, or he just really hasn't thought this one through.

Aside from the devastating impacts on others, what is truly tragic is the fact that we are pulling a thin, threadbare blanket of safety from those who need it most, to build a few Australian roads. When did it become okay for us to balance the books on the backs of the poor? Our shiny new roads come at the expense of people's lives. Abbot argues that 'We can't continue to fund a massive increase in foreign aid at the expense of investment in the Australian economy,' and continues to demonstrate his obsession with our budget deficit. But what our political leader glaringly fails to acknowledge, is the fact that our economy is only struggling relative to itself, and our budget deficit is the smallest in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Furthermore, Tony; if Australia's economy is really in such a pickle, explain to me why it is that the Australian government has already set aside \$11 million dollars as an 'initial grant' for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, when we literally share the games with people in developing countries who physically can't run 100m because they are malnourished and living in poverty? It's simply incorrect to argue that Australia doesn't have the money to spend. It's more a question of where our skewed priorities are directing our ample funds.

In defence of Abbot's decision, many commentators reasonably argue that much of Australian tax-payer money intended for foreign aid does not reach the countries in need, and really, does little to improve conditions in recipient countries. Let me be clear. It has never been claimed that aid is a panacea for global poverty. We know, and Australian tax-payers know, that aid has only ever been regarded as part of the solution, along with many other strategies including boosting trade, sensible macroeconomic policies and private sector investment.

And the alleged corruption I mentioned, well let's put that into perspective. Over seven years of AusAID's operation, only 0.017% of Australia's total foreign aid money was considered losses due to fraud and corruption. That's about \$1.70 for every \$10,000. Let's

compare this to other beloved Australian agencies: the amount of fraud losses that have been identified by good old CentreLink is 4.5 times greater than that of AusAid, and for the revered, praised and internationally acclaimed Medicare system, losses could be up to 35 times greater. Clearly, those who argue against foreign aid for fear of 'corruption' haven't done their research.

Let's touch on the global perception of Abbot's decision. Relations with our two nearest nations, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea are still bruised after the antics over asylum seekers during the election. The last thing we need is for Tony Abbott to reinforce the message the international cooperation barely makes an appearance on our priority list. The Coalition's decision reinforces growing perceptions throughout the Asia-Pacific region and, unfortunately, beyond that, Australia is a spoilt and selfish nation that appears indifferent to our moral obligation to the poor. Abbott could learn from Britain's Prime Minister, David Cameron, who increased Britain's foreign aid budget from 0.56% to 0.7% of gross national income.

Now, let's be honest, it's no secret that Britain has been hit hard with financial problems, but in response to criticism that Britain should be solving its own economic problems first, before those of the rest of the world, Cameron declares: 'When people are dying, we don't believe in finding excuses'. I hope your large ears caught that one, Tony, because that right there, is the generosity and sense of moral obligation that Australia is so desperately lacking.

For now, our little Australian cruise ship is doing pleasingly. Construction work on our 37th floor is going well, and it gives us a great view of all the little rafts struggling by in the cold, torrid water below. But for how long? Australia's 'isolationist policy' might buy us some new roads, but certainly no new friends. It's safe to say, that in our time of need, we'll be out there in the water alone.



I 2

SEIG HEIL 2

DYAN TAYLOR

In the morning the ceiling is patterned with leaves. There is an oak tree outside the window that rustles like fresh linen. Steady now, *Imah* would say, as she cut the material in a straight line. Hold it tight. If I relax the sheet will crinkle.

There are boots moving in the kitchen. They are Mr Rosenheim's boots. It is okay. I could always tell when *Abba* returned by the sound of his boots. *Thud, thunk. Thud, thunk.* Mr Rosenheim's boots are lighter, and in the morning he drags his feet. *Abba* always stood upright, back straight, head high, arms at his side. If he met other men in uniform he would raise a hand to his brow. *Guten tag! Seig heil.*

The floorboards are cold and my breath mists before me. Outside the dog barks, *roof*, just once, but I ignore him. Winter is coming. *Abba* said I would be safe here with the Rosenheims. *Imah* said she'd join me once she's settled the shop. It's been ten days but I've heard no word.

I 2

I take the pail from the barn. This is what is expected of me. I must milk the cow and sweep the floors. The grass is wet with dew and the breeze smells sweet. *Imah* could tell where fabrics came from just by their smell. Here, she'd say, holding it up to my nose. I breathe in. There is dust and musk and soap.

*Roof*, the dog barks. A mangy brown thing all covered in last night's dew, not like the sleek Alsations *Abba's* fellow men in uniform own. *Roof*. Go to the roof. The attic, quick! Steady now, *Imah* says. The ladder is old and wooden and a splinter drives into my finger. In the attic it is cool and dark and cramped. There are boots moving downstairs. *Clunk, clunk.* I do not know these boots. These boots have steel toes.

There are shouts and screams and bangs, and then another. *Imah* holds me tight for many hours. She smells of soap and cotton and orange peel. I look up at her but the small window has shadowed her face, so all I can see is the glint of her eyes. There are more shouts and glass shatters and now I can smell burning wood. The boots race back out into the streets, *clunk, clunk*, but we do not move. Only later does *Imah* press her face to the small window. I stand behind her, peering out. The streets are littered with shards of broken glass, glinting like crystals in the dark. I think it is beautiful but *Imah* has started to cry.

I find the cow in the paddock and she murmurs a greeting. Her teats are full and warm in my palms. It does not take long to fill the

pail but by then the hem of my dress is soaked with wet and my feet are tingling from the cold. The sun has risen behind the cottage so all I can see is a black silhouette. Once inside, it takes a minute for my eyes to adjust.

Mrs Rosenheim is making *shakshouka*. It is not as good as *Imah's*. Don't touch! *Imah* would say, slapping my prying hands. My fingertips are tainted red from the thick tomato sauce. I lick them clean, one by one, standing by the door. Jacob called by last night, *Imah* says with a smile, but you were already asleep. He is a good boy. I blush but say nothing. Steady now. I help bring the pot to the table. *Abba!* His boots are on the stairs, *thud, thunk, thud, thunk*. His eyes are tired and he is dressed in his uniform, the coat creased from wear and the pants loose at his knees. He peers through the curtain and whispers something to *Imah* but she does not seem to have heard. She turns away.

Are you hungry? Mrs Rosenheim asks. Yes, please. We eat alone. Where is Mr Rosenheim? He has gone into the village. Mrs Rosenheim does not look at me as she says this. Winter is coming, I say, looking out the window. Mrs Rosenheim nods. Yes, she says. It is coming.

I laugh as I race down the alley, Jacob close behind me. I stop and swirl around. You're quick, I say. Jacob puts his hands on his knees and tries to catch his breath. But you're quicker.

We walk to the café, our arms brushing. The gravel crunches beneath our feet like an old man's cough. Jacob's cheeks are pink from the running and his curls are getting longer, framing his face. A column of uniforms marches towards us and Jacob puts his arm around my waist, pulling me closer. Our steps drift to the edge of the street. *Stoppen!* A man at the front of the column calls. We halt. The old man has died. He coughs no more. *Guten tag*. Jacob's smile is weak and the man studies him closely. *Seig heil!* Jacob's hand is tight on my waist and somehow I know this means to keep my head lowered. After a moment the old man is resurrected with his cough as the column marches further down the street. Jacob waits and then lets out a heavy sigh. He does not let go of my waist. We should go home, he says.

By mid-afternoon it has begun to snow, blanketing the cottage and its field with cold. White crystals dance in the air outside, glinting like broken glass, shopfront shattered on the streets as *Imah*

# I 2

and I traipse through in the black of night. A man lies sleeping in the street, face down in a dark ring of wet. God forgive them for their sins, *Imah* whispers. We stop outside a grey building I recognise as the one *Abba* works in. Wait here, *Imah* says. Quiet. She disappears inside and then re-emerges a few minutes later, *Abba* behind her. *Abba* kisses her on both cheeks and hands her a bag. We continue down the street, more sleeping bodies on either side of us. There is a light on in Jacob's window. Inside it is warm but his eyes are cold.

Mrs Rosenheim pulls on a second coat and heads out into the falling snow. I can hear a low humming, and then a kind of guttural spurt, mechanic. The cat meows and spreads out by the fire, though the flames are starting to sputter and die. I retrieve more wood and add it to the blackening pile. The dog continues to bark. *Guten tag*, a man's voice calls. I peer outside the window. A car has pulled up beside the cottage and a man steps down to hand something to Mrs Rosenheim. His face is grim and he does not say anything else. Mrs Rosenheim waits until the car has disappeared around the bend before she comes back inside. It is for you, she says, as she passes me the letter. Her hands are lined with age.

Quickly, *Imah* says. Quietly. I carry a bag of my belongings, leather handles flaking in my sweaty palms. Jacob leads the way to the railway tracks, slinking down back alleys and avoiding low lit streetlamps. Be quick. Be quiet. The tracks are slick with ice and Jacob holds my hand as we cross and wait on the other side. His palms are warm but when a train pulls up in the darkness he has to let go. Steady now. He lifts me up into a wide crate of dust and animal smells. A man I do not know is there to help me to my feet once I'm inside. He does not smile but nods at Jacob. You'll be safe with the Rosenheims, *Imah* says, fingers clutching at mine. I do not understand. I want to be safe with you. *Imah's* face is wet with tears and snow.

The letter is bulky in my hands and when I shake it there is a slunk sound. The paper is soggy and poorly sealed. Slowly I prise it open. *Abba's* badge is shiny against his coat as *Imah* straightens his collar. Tonight, we will celebrate. *Abba's* face is bright with hope.

I run my fingers over the dented metal. Dark red splotches half cover the symbol. *Seig heil!* Beneath the badge is *Imah's* finest hair pin of jade and silver, wrapped in a yellow cloth. I do not understand. I pull the pin away. The cloth is cut into the Star of David. A word is printed in the centre, black ink smudged at the edges. *Jude*. Mrs

# I 2

Rosenheim puts a hand on my shoulder. My eyes are wet with crystals.

SEIG HEIL 2

*Blessed be Him, Lord our God.* The synagogue is filled with a thousand glowing candles. We are dressed in our finest clothes, but I have grown and the shoes pinch my toes. The *Rabbi* is large and friendly and his voice croaks like the small green frogs you can sometimes find in the pond in the park. He praises the Lord and he praises the people and he praises the Fatherland. His robes are black and he opens his arms wide, as if he were embracing us all with his words. Two of his teeth are missing and when he smiles he is like a child discovering something for the first time. *Abba* says he is the best *Rabbi* the synagogue has ever had.

I tuck the badge and the hair pin back into the letter, but keep the yellow star scrunched in my palm.



I 2

## SLACKTIVISM

SOCIAL CHANGE  
DOES NOT JUST  
COME FROM  
SOCIAL MEDIA

SARAH WATLING  
ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC  
SPEAKING COMPETITION  
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Slacktivism. I must admit that when I first heard this word, I too was a little bit confused. It's not about child vaccinations, child soldiers, or the beloved topic of drugs in sport. It's about when you arrive on Facebook and see the depressing post of, 'like this if you think endangered otters should be saved,' 'my daughter thinks she's ugly, like this if you think she's beautiful,' and my personal favourite, 'my brother doesn't have any friends; like this if you want to be his friend.' In fact, these are all very touching and sad realities, but in truth, your like will not save the otters, rectify self-esteem issues, and you will never truly be his friend. Yes, that's right, Slacktivism stands for slack activism and I think it's pretty clear that this wave of activism is too passive to make a difference and results from the failure of anyone to really want to take a risk with their beliefs.

Many of you will be familiar with the new worldwide phenomenon; the make-up free selfie. On various forms of social media, women of all ages have been posting pictures of themselves without make-up. They then nominate someone else to do the same. This whole concept is roughly linked to breast-cancer awareness, yet author Emily Buchanan states that *if anything, it was trivialising a very serious issue and using it to justify a vanity project. She says that if we do something that dresses itself up as altruism, we feel good. And when it's so easy, why wouldn't we? Take a picture, post it to Facebook, good deed done for the day. Aren't I wonderful?*

Yet, this form of activism is cowardly and it is disengaging society from the real action, which happens on the streets, not from the security of our bedrooms. We must make the distinction between activism and social awareness. Whilst the make up free selfie is fine for building empathy and recognition, we'd have to be kidding ourselves to think that this is actually making a difference to the way we lead our lives.

The revolutionary wave of protests throughout Bahrain, Syria, Iraq and more, known as the Arab Spring, used social media in their activism attempts. However, this was only done in order to organise protests, rallies and demonstrations. I think the issue is that our mentality has changed so that we believe that social media was the reason for this revolutionary success. However, in reality the real action was on the street; where something was at stake, where there was risk and where this sacrifice was their lives. These people exhibited so much more courage and strength than we give them credit for. The development of social media has developed a laziness

# I2

in us, in that we believe we have the ability to forge change from the comfort of our bedrooms.

The famous Ghandi quote didn't come from no where; *you must be the change you want to see in the world*. Evidently, forging change is only measured by our ability to take a risk. Sometimes we need to go further than just posting a picture. I'm sure you're all aware of the recent protests regarding fee changes to universities. Whether you agree politically or not, I can say that thousands posted their opinions regarding the issue on social media. Yet, there was one teenage girl who understood that these posts were too easy to brush off, and if she wanted to make real change she was going to have to put herself into a risky situation. She commenced a protest around parliament, joined by thousands of university students. One policewoman stated, *I asked her her age and she said 15*. When she asked why she was there, she said *'I'm fighting for my future.'*

Ultimately social change will need to come from more than just social media. If there's an issue we believe is important, let's do something about it. Real change requires sacrifice. Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Malala didn't sit back and like, share or retweet their cause. We, in a country like Australia, have the power to make real change, and to not just take the easy option.



SLACKTIVISM

SOCIAL CHANGE  
DOES NOT JUST  
COME FROM  
SOCIAL MEDIA

I 2







