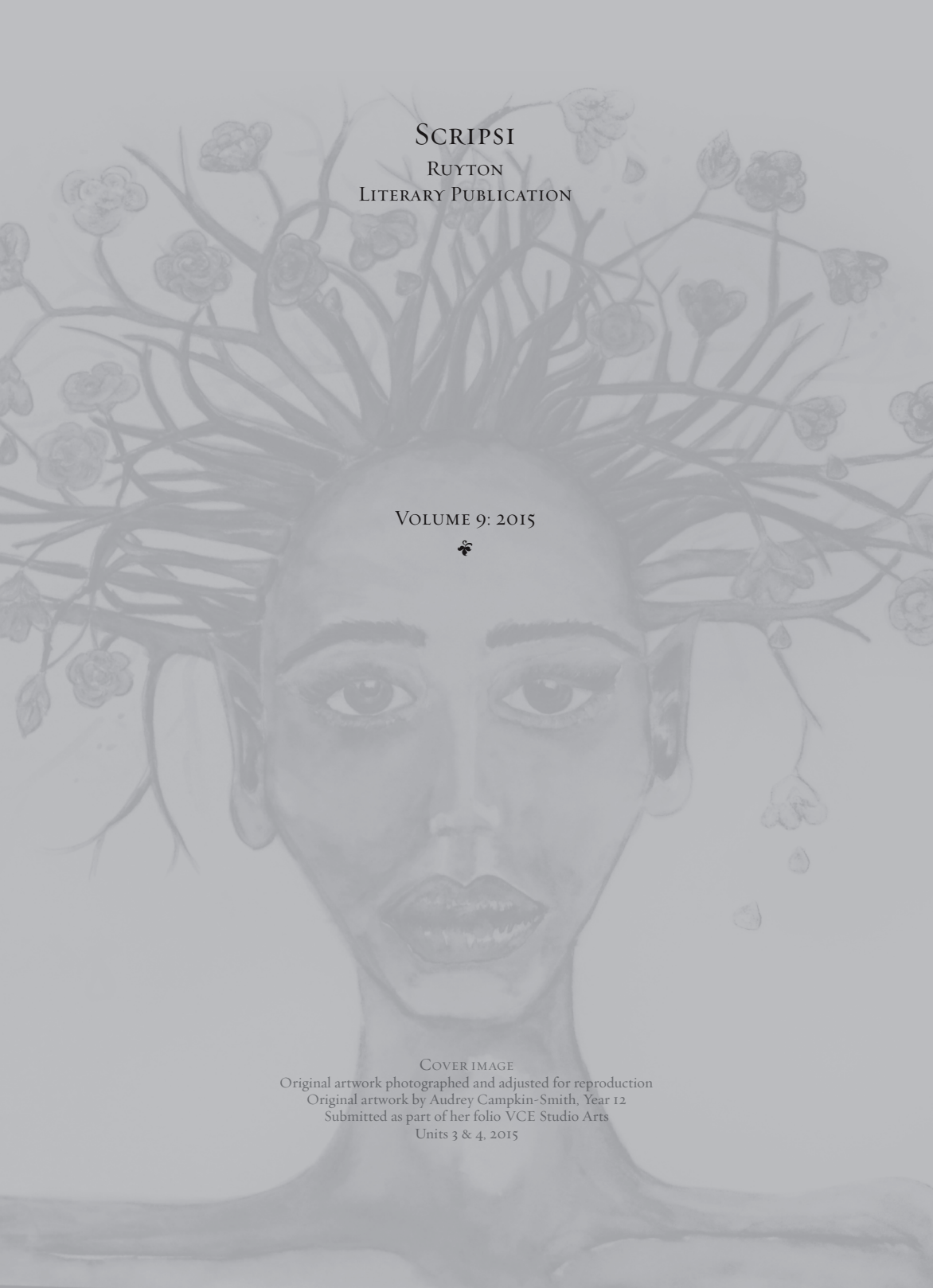


SCRIPSI





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COVER IMAGE

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'Curiosity, empathy. The humility to listen and the courage to speak.' These are the qualities a good writer should have according to Hannie Rayson, the Australian playwright and author. Now in its ninth year, the English Department's anthology of student writing, *Scriptsi*, continues to showcase the very best student writing in the Senior School. Offering an opportunity for students to be recognised and celebrated, the literary publication enables our talented writers to demonstrate their interest in, and passion for, writing.

The Ruyton English Department is proud of the achievements of the students whose work features in this year's publication. The range of ideas explored, and the thought-provoking subjects broached, reveal the Ruyton students as definitely having the 'courage to speak.' Highly imaginative and original, the pieces also demonstrate complexity and maturity in terms of literary skills and expression. The culture of creative writing at Ruyton continues to be nurtured and celebrated both within and outside the classroom. Reading widely, thinking deeply about issues and closely observing the world we share and the people in it are integral in providing inspiration for the talented writers selected for this year's publication.

Included in this anthology are the winning pieces of the Isobelle Carmody Award for Creative Writing, this year judged by author, Hannie Rayson. In announcing the winners, Hannie stated that the majority of the stories were powerful, creative, confronting and well-crafted. When reflecting on the writing process, she impressed upon the students the importance of dialogue, plausible characters and plot. Hannie also encouraged the students to '*make the hearts of their readers swell.*' These stories will undoubtedly do exactly that: unsettle, move and delight you. The English Department hope you will enjoy this year's superb collection of student writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE WATER
FACTION 2859

ISABELLE ALEXANDRAKIS

It hasn't rained for decades. The whole world is a ball of desert. My name is Aaliyah Wilson. Everyone says that rain was the most beautiful thing on earth, regenerating and hydrating everything; giving us all fresh and clean water. There was even something called a 'rainbow' that glistened across the clear, alluring sky after the rain had finished its job.

Sadly, that isn't reality here on Earth. It's the year 2859. Earth is crumbling apart, people are starving and many can't survive much longer. The UMOTW (United Ministers Of The World) issued a plan several years ago: in order to regain the amount of water, they developed the Water Factions. Every year, the toughest two competitors from each country are sent to space to find any remains of water left in our galaxy. Many don't return. The country to find water first wins an entire year of 'pampering' and three quarters of the water; the remaining quarter gets divided between the losing countries. Australia hasn't won the Water Faction for decades.

In a few weeks, the deciders (as they are called) will be coming down to every town in our country to find the two toughest competitors Australia has to offer.

7

I can't believe it. Today's the day the deciders come and pick the competitors. I am hoping they pick me but then again, what if I never return?

'You excited honey?'

'I don't know what to feel, mum. I want to go but what if –'

'Stop focusing on the 'what ifs,' Aaliyah. You know you would love to get chosen to fight for what we deserve.'

I could tell by the look in my mother's eye how much it hurt her to see me pleading to leave and fight. Her daughter would be gone, out of reach, helpless in the endless darkness outside earth.

'I better get going now if I want to go to the trials.'

'Bye sweetie.'

I enter the intimidating building with hope in my hand. I have nothing to lose.

'Name and age.'

'Aaliyah Wilson, 16 years of age.'

'Take a left turn. The first door to your right will be your warm-up room. You will share it with five other girls. Then you will be called

by one of the administrators.'

'Thanks.'

My mind is moving a million miles an hour. Just thinking about the trial is making me nervous. My heart is beating rapidly; the noise echoing through my head. I open the door to find a group of MUCH tougher girls than me. Their looks give me shivers. They look at me like I am the rubbish tossed onto the dirty sidewalk. I start to stretch to look a bit sportier than I actually am, but all I hear are snorts of laughter.

'Aaliyah Wilson?'

'Yes, umm, here!' More snickering.

'Follow me.'

The journey to the arena takes forever. I lose count of the tiles on the floor at around about 194.

Deep breaths, Aaliyah, deep breaths.

'Nervous?'

I turn around to see a mysterious grey-eyed boy.

'Oh, hi, um, yeah, just a little.'

'Don't worry, I'm sure you'll ace it.'

'Thanks.'

And off he went before I could say bye. Thoughts of him filled my head. Who was he? *Focus, Aaliyah, this is your only chance to prove your worth*, I tell myself.

'Aaliyah, we are ready.'

'Here goes nothing,' I murmur.

The nights and days leading up to the announcement of which two people will be chosen are excruciating. Finally, after many restless nights, it is time to enter the city square.

'Welcome, citizens of Metropolis. Today is the exiting announcement day. Here in this beautiful envelope I have the names of two citizens who have been chosen to compete in this year's Water Faction Competition. Now shall I get started?'

The crowd roars with anticipation and excitement.

'The male competitor for the 2859 Water Faction Competition is... Talon Cronin!'

I can't make out who it is – wait – no, it can't be. It's the boy I met right before my trial!

'Give it up for Talon Cronin!'

'I can tell all you girls are dying to find who this year's female



competitor is. Aaliyah Wilson!

Everyone turns to me with jealousy filling their eyes. I am astonished, gob-smacked as I make my way to the platform to accept the honour. All I can think of is how can I do this, leave everyone behind for who knows how long?

They had planned for the space shuttle to leave at dusk. Now, I am saying my goodbyes to my family who are just as astonished as I am. The last person left is my beloved mum.

‘Promise me you will come back safe and sound?’

‘Promise.’ I will never forget the embrace from my mum. Potentially my last.

I turn to leave for the shuttle. I take my last step on earth, with Talon, on to the shuttle.

‘There is no turning back now.’ I say with a grin to Talon.

‘Let’s show them what we’re made of.’



7

CAKE

Sweet like a full sugar cane
Decorated like what you would eat with the Queen
Tastes good in your mouth like melted caramel
It can be as big as you want it to be
Cake

THE SEA

The waves like a morning bath splash
The sand like thousands of glistening gems in the sun
The creatures like shadows of the night
Chilly but fun to play in
The Sea

SCHOOL

The classrooms like jail prisons
The teachers like medieval romans
The students work quietly like mice
Too much homework
School



SIMILE POEMS

RACHEL CHEE



THE SPRING HILL

BELLA EAMES

The willow tree's branches flicking like a whip,
The hill pokes out of the ground like a knuckle on a hand,
The grass flowing like the waves on the ocean,
I relax in my place of solace as the river runs,
Looking out past the rolling hills.

The wind tickles my cheek as if a fairy is dancing on it,
The bleak sky is as grey as an old man's eyes,
The sun hides behind the clouds like the confidence
in a shy person,
The rabbits hide back in their burrows, the birds
flap towards their nest,
The fog thickens, laying low over the flowing water.

7

The cold wind is as harsh as the wind on Everest,
Across the river a dirt road stretches across like a
rubber band,
I make the return journey home over the hill as round
as a dome,
I walk home before curfew, awaiting my next visit.
The Spring Hill.



AN
INSPIRATIONAL
PERSON

SUSAN FANG
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER

Good morning class and Mr. Zavattiero. Today I am going to talk about an inspirational person. There are many inspirational people in the world, but I believe that a broad definition of someone inspirational is someone who does not necessarily achieve greatness themselves, but who has aided or influenced others to achieve greatness. Someone inspirational is someone who has made a difference. After saying that, I can conclude that someone inspirational in my life is my sister Suwen Fang. Not only has she influenced many others and me with her powerful and inspiring actions, but she has also acted as my umbrella to protect me from rain in my life. This one action has shaped me to become who I am today.

Suwen was born into a happy and loving family in the year of 1999, making her 16 this year. Her life story is a fortunate and positive one, and that is how she is able to spread her optimism to all those around her, to brighten and liven up their days. In the year of 2003, I was born. When I looked at Suwen, I not only saw an older sister, but I also saw a huge role model, an incredibly smart mentor and a miraculous hero. I followed her wherever she went and believed everything she said. She would always say that life is like an onion, full of many layers, and that in order to truly live life, one must peel off the outer layers to reveal life's greatest joys. She has helped me experience those joys by bringing new gifts in my life that could not have been given to me by anyone else, and which I have treasured, every day. These small but empowering actions have made my early years better than they could have ever been. That is something that makes her truly inspirational.

I still remember my first day at school when I was only a small 4-year-old girl who had never really gained a special friend in my previous years. I was a nervous wreck to go into a strange and new environment that I had never encountered before. Luckily, Suwen went to the same school as me and stayed with me during recess and lunch. But it is not for the way Suwen cared for me that day that inspired me, it is the fact that the next day, she encouraged me to make my first friend, and that has inspired me even all the way up to today. She taught me that comfort is a familiar luxury in one's life, but there will always be a time to explore the unfamiliarity of a new world. I became a bit more independent that day; that moral message made me who I am, and helped me experience the joys in life that I may not have experienced otherwise.

7

Suwen believes that happiness is the best gift of life. I asked her whether money was important as well, and she said: 'Money is not as valuable as happiness for the mere reason that it has a value. Happiness does not have a price and is not limited to what it is labeled as, but money has a certain value printed on the note or coin that determines its cost. Happiness can be anything; there are no boundaries and it is something that can keep a dying person alive.' Suwen knows that she has not encountered many tough hardships in her life and is happy for the way she lives her life right now. After hearing Suwen's thoughts on these topics, I realized that this is why she inspires me. Her thoughts are what inspire my life and me.

I admire the mere fact that Suwen can be anything to me. Though she protects me, she also encourages me to explore new depths in life. She keeps order and organises my things at times, whilst she can be fun and have not a care in the world at others. When life starts raining on me, she becomes my umbrella, and when the sun shines, she embraces it with me. When I am upset or unhappy with something, Suwen always finds a way to make me happy. She might buy my favourite food or just tell me a joke to lighten up my spirits. She has somehow always been there for me when I have been sad and that has made all the difference.

The little things that Suwen does are what make her inspirational. Unlike many influential people in the world, she has not made herself famous for the things she has done or the actions she has taken, but she has done one thing that every inspirational and influential person is known for. She has made a difference. No, the difference she has made is not influential upon the whole wide world, but her difference has made an impact on someone's life. She has made a difference to my life and the way I live it all the way up to today. She is not as influential as Nelson Mandela, nor does she have the leadership skills of Barack Obama. She is just my sister... my teacher and my guardian, my umbrella when there is rain. That is why the most inspirational person in my life is my sister, Suwen Fang.



Sally and Amanda were the two most popular girls at their school. They could get away with almost anything. But not everyone was that popular, like Lucy for example. She wasn't your average teenage girl. Instead of liking shoe shopping and makeup, Lucy preferred studying for tests and being organized!

One day in the cafeteria, Sally gave Amanda the most awful dare. It was the meanest dare they had ever done.

'Oh my God, do you try to look that ugly or did you just wake up like that?' Amanda spat the words at Lucy, as Sally had dared her.

The whole cafeteria erupted into a chorus of laughter, pointing and jeering at Lucy. She immediately started crying and ran off, mortified, trying to think of anything she possibly could have done to Amanda.

Amanda walked back to the table she had been sitting at. Sally gave her a high five. She smiled at Amanda, hoping she never realized just how insecure she felt. Sally knew Amanda just went along with everything even though she knew it was wrong. As people went over to congratulate her she tried to shoo them away because she was far from proud of what she had done. But this one kid came up to Amanda, frustration in his voice.

'You try being her for a day... I dare you!'

'Sure!' Amanda said, disbelievingly.

That night, Amanda lay in bed, feeling guiltier than she ever had. She didn't know what to do. She felt the need to impress Sally, even though she knew it was mean and wrong. Lucy on the other hand, lay in her bed feeling depressed. She never thought her high school years would be so miserable.

The next day, Amanda woke up in Lucy's room, with Lucy's mum yelling at her to hurry up and get dressed. Amanda screamed and jumped out of bed, terrified and distressed. She went in search for her slippers only to find a dark grey, very boring pair of slippers laying on the floor. She caught a glimpse of her tiny feet, which was weird because she had big feet, so she ran to the mirror to discover the impossible: she was in Lucy's body!

Lucy had experienced the same thing that morning, but less dramatic. When they arrived at school, Amanda ran over to Lucy and dragged her into the storeroom.

'Give me my body back!' she yelled.

'What are you talking about! I had nothing to do with this, but it's



karma I guess. Besides, I'm fine with this arrangement anyway; I mean, going from the misfit of the school to the most popular isn't exactly being hard done by,' Lucy replied.

'Well, going from popular to a loner is!' Amanda barked.

Lucy gave Amanda that look you get when you take something too far. Lucy walked out of the room and went off to find Sally.

'Hello, Sally. To what do I owe the pleasure of your acquaintance?'

'What?' said Sally, bamboozled.

'I mean, 'sup girlfriend, what's happening in girl land?' Lucy said, not familiar with 'girl talk'.

'Nothing much. Hey, that was so funny yesterday!'

'No, it wasn't! It was so mean!' Lucy yelled.

'What's up with you, Amanda? You're acting weird.'

'Nothing, I'm just tired. See you later.'

Amanda ran up to Sally.

'Omg, I had the weirdest dream last night!'

'Um, I don't care, loner! What a freak show!' Sally said.

'What? Stop being such a –' Amanda stopped herself there and realized she was in Lucy's body. So she just walked off and tried to find someone to sit with or someone to talk to. Unfortunately she was unsuccessful and sat at a table on her own and ate her lunch.

Later on in science class Amanda was paired up with Sally.

'Hey Sal, how are you?' Amanda said.

'Please don't call me Sal. Only my friends call me Sal, and you are not my friend, just my little puppet I play with,' Sally replied.

When she woke the next morning, Amanda was relieved to see she was back in her original body. So she jumped out of her bed and put on her fluffy pink slippers, sprinted down stairs, past her mum who was asleep in bed, grabbed an Up n' Go and rode her bike straight to school. She ran over to Lucy and pulled her into the same storeroom she had the day before.

'I'm so sorry! I was so mean to you and you didn't do anything to me. How about you come sit with me at lunchtime today?' Amanda said.

'I'd love to,' Lucy replied happily.

Amanda ran over to Sally and gave her a piece of her mind.

'You are a mean, rude bully who judges people on looks and looks only!' Amanda barked.

'What the hell is with you lately Amanda, you were so weird



yesterday, and now!

'I guess I just wasn't me, and it took you a day to even notice that. In fact you still don't know what happened yesterday, but like you care. Bye Sally, I want nothing to do with you ever again,' Amanda belted out with confidence.

'You... what... wait, AHHH! You are going to regret this. Biggest mistake you ever made!' And with that, Sally stormed off.

Amanda and Lucy became best friends after that and looked out for each other no matter what. Sally, on the other hand, well, she was not a problem anymore.



7

MUSIC TO
MY HEART

ELIZA LAMB

Music has a gentle soul,
A beating heart and way of letting people's emotions fly.
Note by note, line by line,
The magic is coming together bit by bit.
When played she touches everyone,
With the streams of emotions flowing out of every place.
When her fingers touch you,
She gives you a feeling of magic.
Word by word, motion by motion,
A creation is being developed in seconds.
High, low, repeat.
Music enters your soul with her big beating heart,
Holds on and never lets go.



7

THE DANCE OF
THE RAIN

VANESSA LAY

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HONOURABLE MENTION

I rest my head against the window, watching the blurs and smudges that are other cars passing, and I wonder where they are going. I wonder at the tranquil state the rain has put me in, sliding down the glass in droplets that look as fragile as crystal. I imagine myself as that delicate droplet, gracefully sliding down the cold glass. If only I could incorporate those delicate droplets' movements into myself. Maybe then my mother would really be proud of me...

'Penny?' I hear a voice say.

I look up and see my mother staring worriedly at me in the rear view mirror, creases appearing in her normally smooth, perfect skin as she raises her eyebrows.

'I'm fine,' I mutter, turning away again to stare at the dainty, elegant dance of the rain, merging together and then falling ever so quickly down the window. I am unconsciously drifting back to my earlier thoughts. What could I do to make my mother proud? Something in the nature of the rain, in its quiet, tranquil beauty. I have always wanted to dance...

I feel an idea poking at me, illuminated with flashing lightbulbs and I instantly sit up straight from my normally hunched position. Who said I couldn't dance?

'Mum,' I start and she nods to signal she is listening, though still not taking her eyes off the road. 'Could I... maybe start learning dancing?'

She looks startled but quickly recovers. 'Why yes, of course! My friend's friend's cousin owns a ballet studio! You could join there! It is an absolutely elite ballet studio for only the upper class.'

My eyes widen in horror. Ballet? Horrible images of pink tutus and frilly, lacy clothes flash through my brain. I have been thinking more along the lines of jazz... I open my mouth to protest but as I look up at my mum I am helpless as I see the enthusiastic look on her face. I slump back against the seat again, as she goes on and on about how I should start straight away so I have less time for dilly-dallying.



I cannot help but turn around and around, looking at everything, stunned into complete, utter bewilderment and fear at the spacious studio. It is just a bit too elite. The floors glitter and glow so brightly that I risk blinding myself looking down. There are chandeliers and bright, white walls and everywhere I look there are snotty girls chatting to each other and just being elegant. I look down halfheartedly at the navy blue leotard I am wearing. I take a deep



breath and stride into class... and straight away crash into someone and knock them to the ground.

'I'm sorry!' I cry and hurriedly stand and offer them my hand... and then I realise. The person I have bumped into was Madame Lefont, my new ballet teacher, and my mum's friend's friend's cousin, who mum has most definitely asked to pass back info about me. I gulp at the disgusted expression on her face as she ignores my hand and still manages to get up in a dignified way.

She claps her hands together and calls, 'To the bars. In first position!'

This is how the rest of my weeks go. In pain and confusion, I try to contort myself into the shapes that the rest of the girls can. My mother does not even notice as she continues chatting proudly to other mothers about her little ballerina daughter.

Soon enough it is the annual *Winter Ballet Performance*, and my ballet teacher has placed me right at the back, where I can't be seen, even from the theatre balcony. I am dreading it very much and I'm not sure how I can keep my pride intact as I go on the stage with ballet dancers who actually know what they're doing. My mother would not miss this chance to see her little ballerina either.

Everything goes by in a whirlwind of time and suddenly I am on the stage of the prestigious Bessing Academy. I cannot concentrate and from the first moment I am covered in cold sweat and fear swirls inside me like a snowstorm, threatening to turn me to ice as soon as I start the performance. It'd be an understatement to say I am petrified. I catch my mother's eyes and she smiles proudly at me.

That's when everything settles down, the low murmuring of the crowd and the floodlights come on. No. My body refuses to move, and I stand there as around me there are just silhouettes moving slowly by. I can't... Tears fill my eyes but still I stand there, scared stiff, and tears start to fall down my face and I start to tremble. I am still holding my mother's eyes and I watch as she turns blank. Her face is the only one I can see and right now, at this moment, it is the only thing that matters.

I blink furiously, trying to keep in the rest of the tears. Suddenly my mother is gone, my focus is gone on her and I can hear sniggering and whispering, that I definitely know is about me. Energy seeps out of my body and I fall.... Down, down, down. Just like the rain.



7

There is red dust everywhere. My family has lived on the land for generations. There are always cycles of floods and droughts, but this is the worst drought that anyone can remember. For four years we have woken up every day, praying that the sky will cloud over and send us some kind of hope. But there is no point now. No point to hope. No point to planting crops that are destined to die.

We all know that our fate is challenged and that one day our family will have to move off the land. Every day the sun comes up, bringing scorching heat and more fear to my family and me. It dries up the little moisture that is left and brings my family closer and closer to having to move to the city.

I search the cupboard, my eyes hungrily looking for something other than dried bread and canned beans, but there is nothing else. I turn and reach for my bag as I hear the groaning and wheezing of the bus that takes me to school. The metal door knob, hot from the morning sun, burns my hand as I turn it. That would've hurt me two years ago, but now I am accustomed to the pain. The worn down seats in the bus retain the scorching heat and they burn my thighs as I sit down. I look around trying to find some familiar faces, but cannot seem to. I don't know where they've gone.

I daydream on the long drive to school of the times when my friends and I would ride our bikes to our favourite waterhole and swim in the cool water until the sun started to go down and we would have to hurry home to our waiting families. Our fathers would talk about their work, how the crops were growing fast and how the markets were rising. Talks like that are history now. I think of the times my friends and I would laugh and enjoy ourselves, unlike the hardship we are experiencing now. My mother always says that there is no point to living in the past so she doesn't tolerate any talk about previous years.

I am woken from my dreams by the sound of screeching tyres on the dried up ground outside the school. It is almost deserted. The two other students and I climb off the old bus and make our way, one step at a time, to the school's courtyard. Memories of the days when our ears were deafened by the sound of children playing flood my mind. Now it is the exact opposite.

There is no joy.

The children that are left are from families that are either determined to battle the drought, or ignore the obvious future.



HOPE Only one of my best friends is left. I can't decide if we are determined or ignorant.

The days have all rolled into one tiring experience.

Sun, heat and dust.

I am back on the bus going home. Suddenly, something is different. The bus starts to slow and I look outside. The scenery looks the same to me, but I can tell that something has changed. All the normal sounds on the bus are different. The children have gone quiet, and there is a new noise that has entered the bus and captured everyone's attention. What is different and what does it mean?

Without warning the bus stops, the doors creak open and we all emerge. I am the first one out. Then something extraordinary happens.

A single droplet lands on my arm.

I look up, and I see hope.

7



Stuck here. Deserted. Has been for years. Mum says people don't flood in like the rain. No one dares come near this town. We're the only ones left.

The old lady Nora's still here. She says the rain will stop any day now; she's said that since I was little. We have no contact with the outside world. The signal is gone due to the heavy rain. No mail from family has come. They must think we're dead. Mum says we'll be out of here soon, hopefully. Hopefully.

My brother's sick. He needs medical attention. Mum's very attentive to Tom, anything he needs she will find a way to get. She has to walk up the hill to Nora's. Since she's on a hill, the water hasn't got her yet.

Mum is 47, I think. She seems to be okay. Mum says that we need to look out for each other, and if we see a glimmer of hope, catch and take it. She's worried about Tom; she can see he is slowly leaving us. He only has a few months left, she thinks.

Dad's the one trying to fix the Internet tower to contact people. It's not like we don't have enough supplies here to stay. But how long can we last before there is no land left? Or before we go mad.

I'm starting to see people, swimming in the flooded pool. They keep going under. I run to help them, but they're gone. I'm just waiting for a miracle. A miracle that can save the town, our home, me.

Mum's home from Nora's. I've already started the fire. My hands are covered with plump red blisters. Mum gives me a card. I'm not sure what for. It says:

Happy 16th Birthday Emma!

Love, Mum and Dad.

I can't believe it. I don't even remember my own birthday. The birthday about me. I'm scared. If I'm forgetting and seeing things, how're mum and dad coping?

Today I wake up with a large thump of rain: rain that never comes, never goes, just stays. What is in this town for me, rain collector, unplugging the rain containers? I need to go. I need to run.

I've thought about this for years, wanting to leave this nightmare. I grab my clothes, not much but they will have to do. My favourite thing of mum's – the candle that she has never burnt. The old picture of us – the landscape has changed a lot through the years. The locket that I was given when I was five.

I go to put it around my neck and see my wrinkly hands, like my



mum's after walking up the hill. My legs are sore like there is cement in my shoes. It's hard to lift them.

I open the door and the water comes rushing in. We have two doors so we can block out the rain. I make sure I'm not caught in the current, while watching the rapids rush down the road.



It's been three days. I've slept in trees, covering myself with my brothers' raincoat, and cuddled my mum's candle.

I hear a buzzing in the air, a sound that I've heard before but I don't know where. My mind is telling me to look up, but I can't, my body's not letting me open my eyes.

Then I feel it. A cold hand on my neck, pressing into my neck.

'No pulse, get her in the helicopter now!' someone yells. I have a feeling this isn't going to have a happy ending. Then I see it: a light. A light that leads to a door.

I turn around to see me. I'm lying on a bed, people poking me, zapping me, a lady telling me to fight, but what for? If I wake, I'll have no one. Is that the life I want to live?

Suddenly, I see a person, no face, just a silhouette telling me to fight, live, live your life. I take one step towards me. And then it's pitch black.

'Oh darling, you put up a fight, a great one, for your age,' a lady in a white gown says.

'Where am I?'

'Darling, don't you remember? We found you face down in a river. It seems to us that you were there for several minutes. Luckily we found you just in time. Now if you don't mind me, where is your family?' she questions.

'I live in Woodland Town. It gets a lot of rain. Have you not heard of it?' She looks at me with a face that can't be described.

'That place has been deserted for years. Everyone was evacuated twenty years ago. Not so long ago, the firefighters and police were looking around to see if people still lived there. They looked everywhere. No one's there, sweetheart.'

I'm staring at her, speechless. I see images: mum, dad, Tom, all playing together except I see a banner in the background saying Family Picnic 1977. I feel in my pocket: old crumbs of a candle. My hand comes to an old piece of paper, with my family. I look up into a mirror, and I don't see me. Then my mind hits pitch black.



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The moon is cheese.
The moon is rocket science.
The moon is holey.
The moon is a round clock.
The moon is a bright star.
The moon is a shiny pearl.
The moon is a night light.
The moon is a sea of silver fish.
The moon is a glittering diamond.
The moon is a white balloon.



THE MOON

INGRID MELTON

7

IVORY PEARL

CHARLOTTE OAKLEY

An effervescent pearl, floating in the dark eclipse,
changing, slowly changing.

A bouquet of jasmine, clasped by the cobalt blue.
A curved orb of the night, illuminating one's path.
Leaves everybody stopping, staring in awe.

A crescent tied off with ivory,
Gleaming, shining, luminous through the night
Slowly fading into a curve, frosted with icing sugar.

Darting into carved windows, dancing around the globe.
Providing light, to fill the night from darkness and gloom.
But how do you feel? A balanced ball, with no light in
sight,
Except your own.



7

Dora Jackson shook her sea-salted hair in the twilight breeze.

The wind had picked up, and she squinted through the gusts blowing knots of hair in all directions. She pulled off the diving gear clinging to her body, and pressed her towel onto her strong frame. Slinging the weights over her shoulder, she trudged up to the broad timber house where her mother and father would be waiting for her.

Like her grandmother, Dora knew all of the secrets of Longboat Bay. She didn't mean to find them, she would just stumble upon them as she swam into the crystal depths of the bay. As Dora made her way home, it occurred to her that Longboat Bay hadn't always been the same. As a child she vaguely remembered the shock that hit everyone across the beach. She remembered the smoke that used to come billowing from the shore. The fumes that intoxicated her mouth and her nose when she fell asleep. Her thoughts were interrupted suddenly by her mother opening the door. Immediate warmth rushed through her joints as she was welcomed home with a kiss and a hug.

Dora gave herself one last rub with her towel, and hung it over the rack standing by the door, ready for tomorrow morning's swim. She skipped to her room in as few leaps as possible to avoid slipping on the floor, and flopped lazily onto her bed. After day dreaming for a minute, she slouched over to her cupboard and threw on a t-shirt. Bouncing into the dining room, she found her parents sipping on water, tentatively.

'Hello, sweetheart,' said her father, Abel.

'Hey dad. How's your day been?'

Her mother smiled sweetly down to her, pleased by her daughter's politeness. She looked back up to Abel, her husband.

'Good, thank you, darling.' He paused, then continued. 'Today in the lab, your mother and I did some more research on the causes of underwater tornados.'

Dora looked up delightedly, admiring her wonderful parents. She hoped to be like them one day.

A little bit later, she found herself sitting down at the dining room table, feeding from a bowl of spaghetti bolognese. The noodles twisted and twirled around her fork, like leaves falling softly to the ground on an Autumn day. She slurped the pasta into her eager mouth. Cherishing every bite, she hadn't even realised that her parents were sitting together smiling; her father twiddling his thumb

ONE DAY I...

(A SEQUEL TO TIM
WINTON'S BLUEBACK)

CHARLOTTE OAKLEY

7

and forefinger with a thin sheet of paper between it. Dora looked up at her parents, who were still sitting dumbfounded, with sheepish smiles on their faces.

'Here.' Her mother slowly pulled the envelope from her father's hand and held it out. Dora pushed her chair backwards, and with a creaking noise, stumbled out of it and proceeded to her parents. She took the envelope with pride, and swept nimbly back to her seat.

She read through the letter, her insides squirming and crawling like worms. The letter was addressed from Underwater Australasia, a company that was determined to bring awareness to the ocean, and to continue research from what others had left behind.

She read:

7

Dear Dora,

Your family: your grandmother, your mother and your father, have all played a part in bringing you this opportunity.

We invite you to come over to our base in Western Australia, to tell us your story about Longboat Bay. Like your father, we have delved deeper into stories from many people, and have invited them to come and speak to us.

We would thoroughly appreciate it if you would come and talk to us to help us discover more about Blueback. From your father, we have heard and researched stories to help protect your big blue friend's environment.

If all goes well, we would love to have you back in the future to discover more things, so we can help everyone in the marine world. Like your mother and father, we know that you have the complete capacity to become a marine biologist.

Thank you for being an underwater citizen,

You are changing the world.

Yours sincerely,

*David Roothem,
Manager of Underwater Australasia.*

Dora's insides did a 360 degree flip, like a rollercoaster. After hopping off the ride she went to hug her parents. She embraced them with love, and said a few simple words that could change everything.

'I'm going to be like you.'



ONE DAY L...
(A SEQUEL TO TIM
WINTON'S BLUEBACK)

7

OUTSIDE

VERONICA PEREZ-TORRES
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
RUNNER-UP

It was one late winter afternoon.

I was sitting on the couch, a mug of warm chocolate in my hand, when she asked for the first time ever.

The question.

I had been dreading, yet expecting it, ever since she'd learnt to talk, but it did not stop the fear creeping into me, and the way my face changed from pink to pale white.

Carefully placing the crayons next to the paper she had been drawing on, she stared up at me, her big green eyes studying my expression, and as our eyes met, I shuddered.

'I want to know,' she said softly. 'Why I can't go outside.'

I shuddered again, shaking my head as I did so and grasping the mug tightly in my hand. I didn't want to answer her; I didn't want to go against her mother's wishes. But another part of me knew she had the right to know. I tried to find words to explain, but my mind was blank and my ears focused on the storm raging on outside. She continued to stare at me, waiting expectantly.

'There is nothing out there,' I said finally. 'Nothing. There is no reason to go out. There would be no reason for you to go outside.'

'There must be.' She spoke even more quietly than before, her voice barely a whisper. 'There must be more than... *this*.' She indicated the room we were in, a slight edge of impatience in her voice.

The rain pounded the windows, and thunder rumbled menacingly outside, but it was as if a spell had been cast upon the room, and neither of us said a word. Then slowly, as if in a trance, she stood up.

'What are you doing?' I said. Something was not right, something was wrong with her.

She didn't answer. There was a coldness in her eyes I'd never seen before. I jumped up, spilling the hot chocolate all over my trousers. Looking down, I tried to rub away the spill with my free hand, the other clutching the mug. A brown stain was slowly spreading over the fabric. When I looked back up again, she was gone.

'No!' I breathed. I ran towards the door and flung it open.

It was raining so hard that all I could see was white. Squinting past the rain, I tried to make out something, anything. Fear was tearing at my insides.

Just as I turned back, I thought I saw a dark shadow moving between the curtains of water, and hope burned inside me. But then it was gone, and there was nothing.



My throat was dry, and I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach. I closed the door, and immediately the sound of the rain ceased to just a quiet patter. There was a chance, just a small chance, that she hadn't left the house. That she was merely playing a game, laughing at me from her hiding spot. I dashed between rooms, poking my head past every door, checking under beds and inside wardrobes. But I couldn't find her. Slowly, I walked back to the last place I'd seen her. The paper she had been drawing on was still there, but there was something wrong..

My heart was beating strongly against my chest. In two short strides I had reached the piece of paper. Taking a deep breath, I looked at it.

She had drawn a picture of a girl. She had the same green eyes as herself, and she had the same dark hair. The girl was standing in the rain, and she had her arm to the side, as if she was waving.

I fainted.

The crayons scattered around the floor bounced into corners as my head hit the ground.

She had left.



OMBRE

ISABELLA PERRIGNON

7

Reaching out to those whom you keep dear in heart,
Fingers brush souls, passing through unacknowledged,
No touch, no gravity, only a distant wind,
Inexpressible affliction, pain, torture.

War of a bushfire, one flicker burns all,
Tears flowing like a waterfall of sorrows,
Disconnected, love a long-lost illusion,
A hopeless spirit; a discontented grey.

Howling, howling, wailing, crying,
Desperate, ever close, but too far away,
Two worlds, two of many different dimensions,
One, the world before the passing; Heaven; Hell;

Time will steal goodness,
Time will steal joy,
Time will steal happiness,
Time will steal love,

You can't take back what you've lost.



LAST NIGHT

MIRANDA SIMONDSON

Nature was fighting last night,
The wind was howling
And rustling through the intimidating trees.
The rain fell in big drops onto my skin,
My feet sank into the wet ground
It was like I was being pulled from below.
I could feel the cold mud oozing between my toes.

The air was thick last night,
I could taste the moisture sitting on my tongue,
My breaths were loud, slow but yet, uncontrolled.
The sky was pitch black, still and frozen in time.
I snuggle my hands into my warm hoodie pockets,
They are tiny toasters protecting me from the cold.

I was being followed last night,
I could hear footsteps behind me,
As I walked faster he walked faster.
Shivers climbed up my spine,
I started to lose my breath,
I ran, and ran,
Everything got louder and faster,
I could hear them laughing,
Bang!

Everything changed last night,
I got up as a new person,
Not alive anymore,
The air was no longer thick,
It was crisp and weightless,
I rose from the ground,
I am coming for you,
Laughing man.



THE OCEAN

SARAH SUTHERLAND

Her roaring waves and chilly waters,
Brushing over your trembling skin.
Her throbbing heart pounding with the tides,
Beating you about the terrified shore.
She carries you up before thrusting you down
continuously,
She's forever a liquid-lined masterpiece, a mystery.
She's a force of nature,
Powerful as a knight in glistening armour.
She's the wild horizon,
She's the edge of glory.
Her never-ending wilderness is utterly out of sight,
Her roaring waves sound you to your sleep tonight.

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She emerges like vivid, blinding car lights bleeding over
a declivitous slope in the inky early AM,
She howls like a lonely wolf in the moonlight.
She bellows like an angry tiger roaring from beyond,
She towers atop like the skyscrapers of New York City.
She cleanses like the dead sea of Jordan,
She is as viscous as a hissing tap left running.
She is as unpredictable as a magician who flips your
mind around completely,
She is more frightening than a father telling a spooky
story to a gullible young child.

She's the sand tangled through your knotted, salty hair,
She's the salt that's cemented to your tingling skin.
She's the gradually fading tan line that wanes over
countless memories,
She's the dawn's horizon.
She's the bath of nature, cleansing and revitalizing,
She's the sun's bed, for the time it must abandon to the
horizon.
She's the shore of glory.
She's a glass half full with a silver lining.



The wind banged against the walls and glass
Its icy fingers searching every crack
With no luck the wind blew against the grass
The wind blew its icy breath cooling everything in its
path
It threw everything it could carry
The wind hit the glass as it did its icy laugh
It howled through the day and night
Never stopping to rest.



THE WIND

ELYSE TAN

7

THE HEART OF
AUSTRALIA

ELISE TAYLOR

Her mood changes by the hour
Depending on the colour of her skin
Her eyes are red like a ruby
But can change to a purple maroon

She silently bellows when people walk on her
But is calm when they walk around
She moans as the day passes
Wanting it to never end

The people admire her striking beauty
Celebrities come to see her
She just simply smiles and says hello
As they take many photos
Uluru.



7

All you need to know about me:
I am 13 years old
I have Asperger's Syndrome
I became an only child three months, two weeks, six days, eight hours
and twenty-seven minutes ago
I hate anyone who calls me Jessie
I hate myself

FLURRY

MADÉLINE TRUONG
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
WINNER

PUDDLES:

Drip, drip, drip. The rain spattered their plastic coats, one blue, one red – clinging to the bright material in astonishingly stark contrast to the gloomy landscape around them, sequinning the girls in glittering, fat droplets. Gumboots splashed into the once still, murky puddles on the uneven path. Forlorn, soggy autumn leaves lay patterning the ground. Their wet, slapping hair flew around, clinging to identical, flushed, beaming faces, giggling hysterically on a joke only they seemed to hear. Throwing their short, stubby, toddler legs into the sprinkling surface of the next puddle, they squealed in delight. Twirling in childish dreams.

That was our special thing. You were the only person I ever understood.

Some days, pain just bounces off me. As if my body has been saturated with it.

The world is more than upside down, that would be too simple to work my mind around. It's become a mutation where everything's fake and distant. Like the fake cream you buy in aerosols, now smeared disgustingly over my life. Masking all the damage it does to you behind foaming sugar churned up into 'yummy goodness'.

I need to remember this before I go, because it's part of you, like you were part of me.

RAIN:

We were born a team. Like the fat, luscious drops you feel in that exhilarating, tropical rain, alive and bursting with life. The type that draws you out of your hiding place just to dance under the gaping heavens.

'Everyone deserves a friend,' you said on our tenth birthday – tumbling scarlet hair, deep blue eyes – 'I need you, you need me, it wouldn't make sense for us not to be together.'

Three months, two weeks, six days, eight hours and twenty-one minutes ago...

Pant*pant*pant



FLURRY

A young girl dashes through the gate, clunking down the street, bag heaving, shoes thumping.

At the opposite end of the school, her near mirror image dawdles out of class, mind full.

COLLECTION:

We traveled many experiences in life independently, though you were always there to guide me around obstacles.

The counsellors don't get it. 'She probably doesn't realize what she's dealing with. Try to help her; I know it's hard. People with ASD tend to have a limited emotional scale,' they belch out to my parents, as if I'm deaf. Of course I get it. Of course I know what happened.

I did it.

Tentatively, she steps out into a vehicle's path. The tram squeals and slows. With bursting lungs she squishes inside. The driver frowns, flustered – already behind schedule.

Curls bouncing, her petite, passive face gazing deeply into a void – thud, thud...

VAPORIZATION:

You always came back to me and we journeyed together.

A thin, quiet girl, puffed, settles herself, pressed between bulging school bags. Though her eyes avoided any contact, they glittered with thought.

The driver leaned on the wheel – anxious.

Mind full, science essay.

CLOUDS:

Somewhere up there; you never came back down. You stayed hidden amongst the clouds, perhaps with God, perhaps with no one.

As clouds grow darker, it's harder to see you and my heart mimics their grief. Dragging my soul further down the slimy walls of a bottomless well, full of despair.

She glanced up: an urban city, bustling street... Jessie stepping onto the road to join her.

Thud, thud, thu –

RAIN:

Now, I'm like drizzle. That pathetic, inconvenient splutter that barely punctures the gloomy air, when above a thundering black mass bears

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down upon it, bursting with the expectation for more.

A primeval scream pierced the air. Brakes screeched, lights flashed, phones dialed, people yelled. Flaming hair streaming, her body possessed by an uncontrollable force, she burst out of the tram, flying to comfort her in last moments of life. But she was gone: as quick as that. A tiny limp, lifeless body sprawled on the road. 'NO! NO! DON'T! STAY WITH ME – PLEASE... NO, Jessie...' Scream.

...

PUDDLES:

She never got to say goodbye. She screeched at the driver, at the ambulance when they came. Wildly begging fantasy of reality.

I murdered the only person in the world who loved and accepted me for who I was.

Without you, I am that savage, selfish monstrosity my condition always threatened. I'm terrified of that beast who will rip and tear me to shreds, forever chasing me – who only you could tame. But now I won't put up a fight, because I need you back.

She looks half dead. There is no fuel for her spirit, the dancing flames in her eyes now snuffed. She'll neither speak, nor eat. Simply existing because her body hasn't given up yet, though her mind did long ago.

My life is a flurry: wild and merciless, an endless whirling spiral. You didn't deserve to go.

I loved seeing you gaze back through that imperfect wobble of water, as though you were only past the microscopic molecules of the surface, back in the world I used to know, three months, two weeks, six days, eight hours and twenty-seven minutes ago..

But I can't pretend any more. I need Jessie back. So I'm letting go – away from the flurry.



FLYING

MAYA WILMSHURST

My stomach drops and
The world falls away beneath me
Its majestic blues and greens
Like the splashes of colour on a painter's palette.
The crisscrossing stripes lined with
Little dolls' houses and toy cars.
The clouds close like the curtains on a grand stage
And suddenly my world is white
White cotton dances around me
Gracefully performing carefully prepared routines
The sun is the spotlight shining on the dancers
Its rays revealing the ravishing routine.

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A noise drones on in my ears
Humming harshly like a swarm of bees
Punctuated by the constant murmur
Of parents chatting and children arguing.
It stops...
A static buzz sounds and a voice speaks out:
'Prepare for landing.'



It was a frosty July afternoon in the heart of winter and I was in a dilemma. Dad had told me off last week for constantly relying on the school cafeteria to provide my lunch, which was, in his words, 'a convenient but expensive way of eating unhealthy food'. So for the week to come, starting tomorrow, I was to make my own lunch. Only I had just realised about six minutes ago that I couldn't actually make my lunch out of nothing. Who knew you needed food to make it? Apparently not me...

I slung my bag over my shoulder and grabbed my house keys from the hook behind the door. 'Hey Mum! I'm just going out to Woolworths for a few minutes to grab some stuff to make lunch with!'

'Leaving things until last minute again? Fine, as long as you take your phone!'

'Duh Mum, I always have my phone on me!'

Slipping into my black flats, I pushed open the front door and stepped out. Grey clouds were scudding across the sky overhead, warning of a looming storm. I'll have to hurry, I thought to myself. I do *not* want to get stuck in rain, especially because I happen to be having a terrific hair day today! Leafless trees lining the sidewalk reached their long, bare fingers up in vain attempts to snag a wisp of cloud. I smiled, finding beauty in even the gloomiest of days.

Arriving at Woolworths, I strode through the automatic glass doors and headed straight for the bread section. A loaf of wholemeal bread went flying into the plastic shopping basket I'd picked up on the way in. Dashing over to the long fridge at the back of the store, I added four mini-tubs of Chobani greek yoghurt, blackberry flavour – my favourite. After some fruit went into the basket as well, I realised it was getting quite heavy, so I placed it down on the floor by the corner. Next, a bag of those ready-washed salads from the veggie section. I walked slowly down the aisle, reading all the names and descriptions of the salads. A traditional garden salad would have been the safe choice, but there were also the leafy greens to consider which claimed to be 'a delightful assortment of textures and flavours'. Or I could have got one with cherry tomatoes, but that one wasn't on special... and let's be honest, I was not made of money.

After an agonising five minutes or so of trying to choose the perfect salad, I looked up. That's when I noticed him. He was a middle-aged man with short light brown hair, standing stock-still about two metres away just staring at me. I did a double-take and

MR. SUPERMARKET
STALKER
(BASED ON A TRUE
STORY)

JACQUELINE DU
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HONOURABLE MENTION



MR. SUPERMARKET
STALKER
(BASED ON A TRUE
STORY)

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glanced quickly around me. But no, I had my back to the wall and there was no one else nearby. Okayyy, I thought to myself. This is weird. I couldn't exactly tell if he was staring at me or just into space. So I turned, grabbed a random salad, edged awkwardly to the right and 'hotfooted' it to the checkout to wait in line, picking up my shopping basket as I went. Suddenly, a loud rumble of thunder interrupted my thoughts. Alarmed, I looked out the glass automatic doors and watched as the heavens opened up and rain came bucketing down.

So much for that plan, I grumbled. I am not going out now, no way! I spun on my heel and marched out of line. Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I sent Mum a quick text, letting her know that I was trapped by a storm and I'd be home as soon as it finished. As I slid it back into my coat though, I noticed the same staring man from before, this time standing closer. Properly worried now, I walked down aisle 12 and tried to busy myself by reading labels on the various spices shelved. Coriander, paprika, cinnamon, fennel seeds... Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the creepy guy heading towards me again. He walked behind me, so I angled my head ever-so-slightly to the other side, trying to catch him in my peripheral vision. My eyes widened with realisation when *he didn't walk out the other side*. I was chillingly aware of the fact that he was immediately behind me; and the aisle wasn't very wide. Afraid he was going to try to stab me in the back, my eyes frantically scanned the shelf in front of me, searching for glass items I could throw at him. Darn it, should've walked down aisle 8 instead: that one had the utensils!

A sudden flash of lightning lit up the store for one shimmering second, heightening the ominous atmosphere and it was then that I felt a tap on my shoulder. Panicking, I couldn't take it anymore. Spinning around with a bottle of cumin powder clutched tightly in my hand I yelled, 'What do you want?' The man looked, took a surprised step back and almost crashed into the shelves. He nervously gestured to my hand, slightly afraid.

'Um, I think you have my shopping basket,' he mumbled.

'Oh.' *Awkward*. My face flamed red. 'Right. Here you go.'

'Thanks.'

As he left, the rain drizzled to a stop and the glowing sun broke through the clouds. Yikes, what a shopping trip!



SPRING RAIN

ANGELA LIN

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HONOURABLE MENTION

Lilac Imber was a new student who moved to my class at an odd time in the year. Everyone had already developed solid friendship circles by this point, and normally they were not keen on expanding them. Despite this, her cheery attitude encouraged everyone to include and get along with her and she instantly became popular. If you could describe Lilac, you would probably say she seemed like spring—calm, beautiful and happy. But in reality, she's shown me over the time I knew her that her heart has been filled with rain.

The story began five years ago. Along with countless other people, I quickly befriended the popular new girl. Unlike the others, however, I felt like I was particularly close to her, because we had several common interests and spent almost every day together before, during and after school. I bonded with her faster than I'd ever bonded with anyone before, not that I'd done that much bonding to begin with. It wasn't like I was completely friendless before Lilac; it was just that I had only had 'friends'. No 'best friends', no 'soul mates', no 'companions'—nothing of the sort. She was a nice change because I had finally found someone I could share my snarky comments, quirky humour and embarrassing secrets with. And though Lilac did share her darkest secrets, in turn, with me (like how when she was little she hugged a random woman in the supermarket because she was wearing the same outfit as her mum), she always seemed a little distant and mysterious no matter how close we became as friends. She never shared much about her family, nor had I ever met any of her relatives through the course of the three and a half years I'd known her. Furthermore, whenever we'd hung out at her tiny apartment after school, we had always been alone because apparently her parents worked all week apart from weekends; even public holidays. I could never come over on weekends, either, because Lilac worked all Saturday and Sunday at her part-time job which was at a café in the city.

The last time I ever spoke to Lilac was during our final year of high school. It was just another normal day near the end of the third term. Lilac and I were walking to her apartment as it was not far from the school, and the weather was nice because it was spring. At this point, I'd known her for a little over three years. As we were walking, I was complaining about how my parents were being stingy about some petty problem I no longer remember. This wasn't the first time I'd grumbled about my parents, but on this particular



occasion, my rant was especially long because they'd really ticked me off. I raved on and on for the entire walk to the apartment complex, and was still complaining as Lilac unlocked the door to her apartment. Usually Lilac was a good listener, and she contributed quietly to my rants no matter how minuscule or pointless the issue. It seemed it was just this one time that Lilac snapped. It seemed it had always been a touchy topic, and I'd just reached the limit to the amount of times I could've touched upon it. Before I could step foot into her home, she turned to me with a look in her eyes I had never seen before. I remember her words to this day, 'You don't understand. At least you have *parents!*' she'd yelled, oblivious to her surroundings. 'You shouldn't take precious people like that for granted. Just over three years ago, my parents *died* to protect me, and all you ever talk about is how stupid a-and annoying they are? Why don't you think a little about what would happen if they were gone?!' Tears welled up in her eyes as she slammed the door in my face. I remember I heard sobbing on the other side of the door and stared, speechless, before quietly walking back to my house and continuing on as if nothing had happened. I didn't know how to react, so I simply chose not to.

8

The day after that incident, Lilac returned to school just like how I'd returned home—as if nothing had happened. It appeared that with no direction in which to head, she had decided to rebuild that wall around her of a fake personality that had fake emotions. At first I didn't approach her because I was afraid of what she'd say. Later, I realised I had simply given up. Soon after that, we graduated and I haven't seen her since.

As far as I know, Lilac never again undid her façade of a calm and happy spring, nor did she ever again show her true heart that was being drowned by the merciless rain. To this day, every time I think of my friend, Lilac Imber, the image that comes to me is of spring rain.



Right. Now, all of you are going to listen to what I have to say and I want none of your opinions.

Imagine if your teachers told you this every morning. How would you feel? Good morning Year 8 and teachers; today I'll be talking about freedom of speech. First, I'll start off by talking about what freedom of speech is, then I'll share some stories, we'll discuss how we are constantly being influenced in Australia, and finally I'll show you all how you can use this freedom of speech.

So first of all, what is freedom of speech? Freedom of speech is the right to express your own ideas and opinions without anyone interfering or punishing you for it. There is a difference between freedom of speech and just being plain rude of course.

Lets move onto those stories now. I'm going to take you all back in time and introduce you to a man named Socrates. Socrates was a very interesting man indeed. He would always ask question when someone brought forward their idea. He would always ask, how did you come up with that? When did you think of this? Does this makes sense with that? And because he asked such questions, the people of Athens sent him to jail. They told him either to kill himself or leave Athens. Socrates chose to kill himself because without that freedom of speech, he felt there was no point in living.

Now, lets fast-forward the clock to the present day. I'm sure all of you are aware of the sports brand NIKE. Well, as popular and trendy as their merchandise may be, the story behind how their products are made is not so awesome. Children in Pakistan and a few other countries are forced day and night to make all these products in terrible conditions – just for us to use. The magazine LIFE were brave enough to use their freedom of speech to say that what NIKE was doing was not right, but in fact child labour and should not be tolerated just because NIKE is a big company. If it wasn't for the magazine LIFE, those children would still be working tirelessly today.

So, those were some stories from around the world. And here is my personal story. In Vietnam, there was a dictatorship, meaning the schooling wasn't great nor was the housing. My grandparents had strong beliefs against the dictatorship so they decided to move to Australia. They used their freedom of speech to stay true to their beliefs. If they hadn't done so then I wouldn't be alive, let alone talking to you all right now.

So you think you have freedom of speech in Australia? Think

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

MIRA MENYEN
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER



FREEDOM OF
SPEECH

again. We are constantly being influenced by the media, government and those around us. For example, ISIS has been using the media to convert others to their side and yes as shocking as it is, others have joined. When former Prime Minister Tony Abbott wouldn't let his ministers go on a show to present their views, he stripped them of their freedom of speech. No one should ever be allowed to take away your freedom of speech. Now take those around you. If your best friend thinks something is cool, then its highly likely you will too because that is the impact they have on you.

Freedom of speech is so powerful, so I'm going to show you how you can use it with just three steps. First of all, don't be influenced by the media, government and so forth because you know for yourself what is right and what is wrong. Secondly, ask questions! Be curious because ignorance is so boring. Thirdly, express your ideas and opinions. The world is listening, so tell it, express it!

To conclude, I have told you what freedom of speech is, shared some stories, we've discussed how we are influenced in Australia and now you know how to use you freedom of speech. So let me leave you with this message. Michelle Obama said that freedom of speech is a universal right; if we don't listen to criticism from others and debate over our ideas then we won't be able to improve as a person let alone the world itself. So having shared that, I hope you all go out there and express your ideas and don't be afraid to listen to someone else's as well. Thank you.



*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus begins the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

T'was a scorching day down under, 26th of Jan,
At precisely 1.02pm, Aunt Gertrude's day began.
Puttin' on her ol' cork hat, she waddled down the stairs,
Of the rickety outback station, near that big red rock in Ayers.

*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus continues the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

She dawdled to the kitchen, rubbing daggy bludger eyes,
For brekkie, vegemite and toast, but found to her surprise...
Uncle Clancy, Aunty Fran, Bessie, Dingo too,
All them Aussie blokes and mates, true as truest blue.

*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus continues the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

'Strewth, you took your time ol' Gerty', all the crowd did cry,
'Oy, its just past arvo yet', Aunt Gertrude did reply.
'Well come on then, it's Straya Day, so time to start the party.'
'I'm starvin', Baz and Fitzzy said, 'throw tucker on the barbie!'

*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus continues the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

And so the snags did sizzle fast, whilst juicy lamb chops charred,
Kids were running wild around, knockin' wickets in the yard.
Tim tams, lamingtons and beer, this one had the lot,
with sausage rolls, tomato sauce and meat pies steaming hot.

*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus continues the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

Then without a warning wandered through the rusted door,
Koalas, wombats, kangaroos, with dirty muddy paws.
'Please do let us join the party,' old man emu pleaded,
'We won't stay long, for just a moment,' budgerigar proceeded.



THE BALLAD OF
AUNTY GERTRUDE

*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus continues the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

'Oh, stay for a snack,' Aunt Gertrude grinned, a twinkle in her eye,
'NOW HOW SHOULD WE EAT YOU,' Clancy said, 'BARBECUED OR
FRIED?!'
The galahs screamed, kookaburras shrieked, the cockatoos did screech,
But in the end, there was Buckley's chance of fleeing from knife's reach.

*The story of an Aussie gal, both admired and wooed
Thus concludes the ballad of our great Auntie Gertrude.*

8

Finally, at longest last, the end of day had come,
The final rays of scorching sun creeping through the gums.
And through the window, bloody red, the figure could be found,
Of old Aunt Gertrude standing there, her flab jiggling 'round.



The door slammed shut. Everything in the room seemed to shrink away from the entryway, awaiting the presence of *him*, waiting for his polished shoes to slice through the calm, peaceful atmosphere. I was a statue at the kitchen table, arms balanced, legs crossed, pencil poised for writing, not even a breath daring to escape my lips as he walked into the room, footsteps calm and steady, perfectly normal footsteps. He dropped his briefcase onto the floor, a natural and ordinary action, perfectly normal in every way. He walked to the kettle and filled it with water before flicking the machine into action, perfectly normal. The scene appeared to be mundane, his every movement was typical and average, his behaviour was nothing special, nothing to be noted, but as I sat there and as he placed a teabag into a mug, there was such an immense amount of anticipation and fear collected in the room, it was pressing into me, forcing my body to remain perfectly still, blocking my airways and my mind. I knew he could feel it too.

Ding, ding, ding. The phone vibrated and blared its happy tune. He walked out of the room and soon, an explosion of yelling and cursing ensued. This routine was repeated like a dance sequence everyday. I knew who was on the line. I knew what happened every time my mother called. Almost immediately, yells of 'When are you coming home you useless woman?' and 'Your daughter is just like you!' bounced off the ceiling and walls to reach my ears. I cowered as he dropped the receiver with a loud clang and stormed into the room, his face red with barely contained fury as his eyes dart wildly to my face. 'You,' he spat. I flinched at his voice. 'Upstairs. Now.'

I dropped my pen and it slid off the table soundlessly as I scurried up the stairs and into my room. His feet pounded after me, each step echoing with rage and madness. Before my body registered his presence, a slap was delivered to my face. No sound escaped from my lips as tears streamed down my face in a steady waterfall. The room blurred around me into a muddle of colour and pain. I crawled towards the doorway frantically, only to see his face, inches from mine. 'Running away?' he snarled, his face contorted into a mask of disgust. 'Go on,' he said, smirking, 'I dare you.' He dragged me by my hair as I desperately attempted to escape his vice-like grip. He delivered blow after blow, all whilst yelling obscenities and cursing my mother and I to hell.

And abruptly, I felt water. Water in my eyes. Water in my nose.

I DARE YOU

GRACE WANG

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

RUNNER-UP



Water in my mouth. Cold water, cold like the feeling clenching my heart and freezing my mind, cold like the hand forcing my head down, down into the filthy, porcelain bowl. Struggle was futile, the strength in that cursed hand held me captive even as I thrashed about. With each futile action, hope drained from me, swirled down into the seemingly bottomless pool of dirty water. 'I dare you, I dare you.' The same words floated around me as I lay submerged in the water, the same three words haunted my every action, my every breath and movement. 'I dare you.'

And then the pressure placed upon my head was suddenly released. I flew out of the bowl and gasped for air, like a goldfish out of water. When I turned to face my captor, body rigid with anticipation, he had disappeared already. My legs uncurled from beneath me and I stared at my beaten reflection in the bathroom mirror. My hair hung in dripping clumps around my face, a fresh bruise had bloomed beneath my right eye, a new addition to the garden of flowering marks. This same routine, like some kind of twisted dance, unfolded every single excruciating day. *How long do I have to endure this for?* I thought to myself. *I can't do this. I can't. I can't...* I ran my hands through my hair and gave myself a final glance in the mirror. *I can't do this anymore. I won't.*

Night was falling. The stars danced through the sky as the moon's soft light shone down upon me, bathing me in its comforting light. The sharp blade I held dug into my palm, slicing into my skin, scarlet warmth staining my hand. Shadows waltzed through the hallway as I crawled along. They circled in front of me, dipping and swirling, drifting along as they lead me to *his* room, the room whose door stood ajar, quietly welcoming me in. I hesitated slightly, the empty abyss of darkness loomed over me, taunting me. 'Go on,' it seemed to say, 'I dare you.'



‘Emily, I’d be lying to you if I said I don’t miss him.’

Glancing across the table, you look up to see your daughter wearing an expression far too innocent for her sixteen years. You sigh—she’s always been oblivious and much too optimistic, so much so that it’s landed her in the principal’s office at least six times this month. As you scan her face, the striking resemblance she shares with her late father becomes apparent, and to be quite frank, you still can’t look her in the eyes without hearing his voice. Swallowing the lump in your throat, you ask Emily what she’d like to ask about him. You already know, but you need to get the words out, for fear of those damn tears falling. What she says next, however, is nothing close to what you predicted.

‘Did you love him?’

And, oh, you hadn’t expected such an innocent question, so naive, and it makes your eyes glaze over with a film of fresh tears. You can feel the lump bobbing in your throat grow bigger and you struggle to push down the sob that wracks your body. Releasing a shaky breath, you nod.

‘Of course, Em. I loved him more than anything.’

She nods, as if she can’t tell that you’re basically breaking down right in front of her. It’s happened more than once, and she’s learnt to just leave you be. This time, when you look back at her, she’s peering out the window, and you let your eyes follow hers. It’s a clear night sky, you realise, and the revelation prompts a new set of painful memories to be brought to the forefront of your troubled mind—memories that take you back to the night before the accident.

You were both twenty-four, still in the ‘honeymoon phase’ and the world was at your feet. It was that night, however, that you still remember so well, in the most vivid detail. He was laying on the grass outside, and naturally, you were there with him. Conversation started out playfully and there was the usual banter, but as the world slowed to a stop, the only sound heard was your heartbeats and the slow, even tempo of his breathing. He sat up, facing you with a look in his eyes that you’d never seen before, and you still can’t quite figure out what it was. And then he said something that you don’t think you’ll ever be able to forget.

‘Look at the stars. Start counting them; when you’re done, that’s when I’ll stop loving you.’

Seeing your confused expression, his mouth stretched into a



bashful grin. Offering a smile and a firm squeeze of your shoulder as reassurance, he ruffled your hair, eyes shining brightly in the darkness.

'Hey, tell ya what, I dare you to start counting those stars, and keep going 'til you finish. See if I stop loving you before then.'

At the time, you didn't really understand how much power those words would have over you—sure, you had both laughed over how cheesy and cliché he was being, but looking back now, you cry over it because when you think about it, all you feel is regret. But then you ask yourself why? Didn't you already live your life with him? What is there to regret? Yet it doesn't stop those bitter tears from falling and reminding you of what you should've said. The least you can do is fulfill his farfetched request.

8

Choking back any signs of your weakness, you turn around just in time to see your daughter exiting the kitchen, leaving you alone with your thoughts. Focusing your attention back through the glass pane, you find that any fog that was previously clouding the midnight sky has now cleared, revealing a black canvas dotted with countless constellations and clusters of gleaming silver. In that moment, you know that you'll never stop counting, so long as there are enough stars in the sky.

'Three hundred and sixty five thousand, eight hundred and ninety-three stars and counting, my love.'



My immediate response must have been the wrong thing to say. The laughter has stopped dead; the girls aren't saying a word. Irina had pulled away when the dare was set and I wish she was still close to me. All is silent and I'm trying to figure out what to say when Zara starts talking.

'Miranda? What do you mean why?' She's smiling but it's wavering and uncertain. I pause for a second and I feel Irina's concerned stare. A quick glance around the room to gauge the other girls' reactions leaves me internally wincing. Heather is silent, which in itself is impressive, and Audrey has stopped braiding her hair.

'I mean, wouldn't it be kinda awkward? Jake's your brother and you want me to...'

'Kiss him?'

She laughs. 'Don't be silly. I think this is a step in the right direction for you. I've known you since we were in kinder and I doubt you've ever kissed anyone? Have you?'

Audrey giggles and Zara stares expectantly at me. Irina looks up and she cocks an eyebrow. I drop my gaze and leave the question hanging.

'Don't you think it's time to grow up? Besides, even I can admit he's really hot,' Zara continues.

Before I even open my mouth Heather takes this opportunity to interject. 'She's probably the super wild type who pretends to be all innocent and stuff.'

Irina laughs at that. Zara notices this and points at her. 'Don't you dare relax! After we're finished with Miranda we're going to be talking about your love life!'

Irina turns bright red, opens and closes her mouth a few times before ducking her head meekly and nodding. Zara stands up. 'I'm off to grab the victim.'

Having dodged the question I flash her a quick smile. Audrey's fiery locks have now been tamed in a braid that sweeps over her left shoulder and Heather is quietly whispering to her, every once in while throwing a glance in my direction. Clearly, the question has not been forgotten.

Less than a minute later Zara comes back with Jake. Jake is admittedly handsome, he's the type that is everyone's type. Heather and Audrey blush slightly when he smiles at them but he just doesn't do it for me. Then he turns to me and while I am fearful, I also feel curious.

TRUTH AND DARE

LEYLA YUCEL

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

WINNER

BOORONDARA LITERARY

AWARDS

PRIZE WINNER



What would it be like to kiss a guy?

He walks over and takes my hand, helping me to my feet.

'Hey, Jake, sorry for dragging you into this.'

'Nah, s'okay.' He smiles brightly and it feels like even the dark corners of the room have been lit up.

I'm not sure what I expect when we kiss but this isn't it. The kiss itself is great, just like him, but there's no tingle. It feels flat. The atmosphere of Zara's room has been sweeping me along. But at what cost? In the back of my mind, guilt is forming. A heavy weight dragging me down. Tingle or no tingle, a kiss is a kiss. And while I may regret it later, I'm certainly not regretting it now. I break away with a coy smile.

Our hands linger a few seconds too long. The laughter of the room brings us back and we separate suddenly. An awkward look crosses his face before he attempts a shaky smile. He takes a step backwards and as the girls break out of their shock he turns and leaves. The door closing behind him, they erupt into laughter.

I force myself to look at Irina. Needle-straight hair is falling across her downturned face in strands. A wall between us. She quickly glances up at the door and in that moment I see the jealousy she has been trying to hide. Almond eyes glimmering with unshed tears – she subtly wipes them away. I force myself to look away. I hate this. I hate hurting her. Zara claps excitedly and Audrey lands a wet kiss on my cheek holding my hands happily while Heather laughs in the background. They are so oblivious.

I return to Irina's side. Between us lies an ocean. She's never felt more distant than now. I lean over and whisper in her ear. 'I don't want to hide this either.'

I take a hold of Irina's hand under the sleeping bag and squeeze it gently. She doesn't pull away. I feel relieved when she returns the squeeze.

Zara is leaning forward, smugly smiling, a victorious flash in her eyes. 'Irina. Truth or dare?'

Irina looks at me for a second, squeezes my hand tightly and a determined smile crosses her face. I know what she's going to say before she says it and I know it's time. They'll just have to accept us.

'Truth.'



RAIN DANCE

EMMA ALDOUS

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

WINNER

It's all he ever wanted, to see her dance in the rain. To see the townsfolk fling back their heads and let the cool water caress their dry lips. He wanted to teach the children to swim, to see his daughter take her first stroke, arms flailing while her golden skin soaked up the soft morning rays.

For as long as she could remember, Elizabeth Parker had not seen rain. It hadn't rained since she was four, at least her Papa said so, but she couldn't remember all the way back then. She had often wondered if rain was just a myth her Papa told around the campfire in the dead of night. Perhaps it was just a word he had constructed to explain absence. Absence of hope, absence of community, absence of life. Or perhaps rain had become extinct, a past phenomena. However many theories Lizzy created, she couldn't explain why she longed to feel a raindrop roll down the bridge of her nose before falling to the cracked ground in an explosion of new life. Papa said the rain would come again, and she believed him, because Papa always told the truth.

Her Papa's name was Johnny. He was the mayor of the small town of Abercourt in the deep, dry Northern Territory. Abercourt was a farming town, or at least it used to be. When Johnny was appointed the role of mayor, the town had been booming. They grew sorghum and drove cattle along the vast rolling plains. The drought started with one very dry summer. That summer the farmers' crops didn't grow. With no crops they had no money, but the mayor kept hopes high. Come autumn, still not a single drop of liquid optimism fell from the sky. Mother Nature had given the farmers an ultimatum: find a new job or move out. Most of the farmers took the latter option and left. When people began to move away Johnny would beg them to stay, but now he said nothing.

When summer came again it still hadn't rained. Each blade of fresh green grass was now just a yellow stump, chomped to its roots by the skeleton cows. The creeks had dried up, leaving bridges with no purpose, and Abercourt with no water. They got their drinking water sent in trucks from Darwin. Johnny always shared it evenly, making sure there was enough for everyone.

As water began to evaporate so did the twinkle in Johnny's eye. He used to get the whole town together on a Friday night, and tell stories around the campfire. After everyone had spoken to their



hearts' content they would finish the night with a rain dance. Although everyone knew it wasn't going to stem the drought, they would throw all their effort into it. It started with a stomp on both feet, left then right. As all the people combined their power the ground would shake and thick plumes of red dust would erupt like a volcano into the night sky. They continued stomping, waving their hands around in the air until everyone was exhausted and the old people had to creak their bodies into awaiting chairs. Then they would cheer and laugh, a stampede of jubilation shaking the earth.

The summer that Lizzy turned eight marked the fourth year of no rain. Lizzy's birthday was on a Friday this year, but there would be no rain dance tonight. At breakfast her Papa was silent. She was at school when she heard the news. The business that ran the trucks from Darwin had gone broke, and Abercourt couldn't afford anyone else to bring the water. If rain didn't come right now, they would all have to leave.

That night she found her Papa sitting on the ground outside their peeling weatherboard house. Gently, she lifted his chin to look into his dark eyes. His beautiful eyes, that were once full of joy and wonder, were now lost, a black hole sucking happiness out of the universe. In that moment she saw something she had never seen in her Papa before. She saw it in the wrinkles in his forehead. She saw it in the way his eyes couldn't quite meet hers. Fear. Her unbreakable father, who had always kept everyone together, was reduced to a small piteous man.

'It'll be alright.' Her muffled whisper was no more than a pathetic lie.

Johnny shook his head. Slowly she wrapped her tiny body around him, a lost butterfly interlocked in an eternal embrace. Tears fell from her cheeks and gently rolled down her Papa's face. And then there were tears everywhere. Upon her, upon her Papa, upon the ground. All around her tears fell, plopping onto the parched soil. With every drop crimson dust catapulted into the air before greedily soaking up the liquid. But these tears weren't from Lizzy's puffed eyes. They were tears from the sky.

Rain.

And as these tears fell wracking the silent night, Lizzy stood and began to stomp, left then right. All around her people were emerging



from their houses. As they too felt the soft water on their calloused skin, people young and old came and joined the little girl. As the rain fell, rejuvenating life into every soul, Johnny's tired body sat surrounded by the people of his town. Arms waving, feet stomping, they danced. They danced for Johnny. They danced for rain.

RAIN DANCE



BREAKING
SEASONS

ELLA BOND

Mother Nature stood at the door of her house, admiring the magnificent world below her. Pearly clouds swirled, intertwining with one another, casting fascinating shadows on the earth's terrain. The snow scattered over the mountains was beginning to thaw, revealing the brown grasses that hid beneath them. Prince Winter's reign was over; he and my sisters were in desperate need of rest. Spring was expected to arrive over the hill at any time with her three beautiful children to visit Mother Nature.

The eldest of Springs' three daughters was September. Her apron was full of daffodils, daisies and lush stitched grasses that cascaded gracefully down to the tight bow that sat just above her waist. Octovia's curly golden locks and rosy cheeks radiated warmth and light over the cities. Lastly was young Novembre, her strawberry blonde curls falling below her shoulders as she played tag with the sunbeams and wandered knee deep in blossoms, humming softly to the white birds that fluttered around her. The sisters' beauty was envied and admired by many.

Mother Nature beckoned to Baby June, the youngest of the Winter children. As she hauled herself up beside me, dark, disheveled hair covered her pale grey skin. June was utterly drained. Spring never came, and with each passing day she grew weaker as her emotions slowly began to consume her. Mother Nature took baby June in her arms, 'Spring will come dear, we must be patient.' The uncertainty in her voice made baby June frown; big tears chased each other down her gaunt cheekbones, and plummeted to the earth, washing the floors of the world. The rain never stopped. Baby June's tears only worsened the conditions we had created.

Spring's daughters refused to awaken from their slumber, drastically worsening the eternal Winter. It was past the changeover time. The selfish ways of the Spring months have not only affected us, but the earth we protect. The uncontrollable storms raged through the atmosphere, and the sea of tears from baby June continued to damage the earth. Her screams lashed out over the sky in bright electrifying strikes, as sooty clouds growled and rumbled, thrown about in the sky.

September and her sisters awoke to a chilly sensation that slowly began to spread throughout their bodies. Octovia's cheeks were washed of their colour, as September's daisies interwoven with the daffodils began to wither. The overpowering scent of smoke filled



their nostrils: malicious lightning was shooting itself though the sky. The sisters looked to one another, each had the same depleted look of exhaustion. Their silvery frail hands were as rough as the trunk of an elderly oak tree, skin as crepuscular and icy as the storm attacking the earth. Each of them exchanged alarming looks: they were becoming Winter.

September used the remains of the strength she had to summon Mother Nature.

'We are remorseful for what we have done,' she whispered, choking back tears. Mother Nature looked down to where September sat, her brittle bones stuck out from her pasty skin.

'End the Winter. Stop the sisters,' September choked.

Mother Nature shook her head, 'We each have responsibilities that others rely on us to do September, and that requires trust. I trust that you will learn from this experience, as you cannot improve without mistakes.'

September's strength was then restored. As she stood, her flaming cheeks were revived, her skin softened to the satiny glow it originally retained. She was quickly greeted by her sisters, whose beauty had also returned.

September let out a wide toothy smile, diminishing the clouds in the sky. Young Novembre awoke the seeds, whispered to the trees to begin to bud and called the robins back from the South. The earth rejoiced as the final droplets of water were evaporated from the earth's surface. But the damage baby June's sea of tears left was permanent: no amount of sunshine could hide the damage of the rain.



WHY WE SHOULD
STOP THE
INTERVENTION

CIARA BRENNAN
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
RUNNER-UP



‘The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.’ This memorable line was from John F. Kennedy’s Civil Rights Announcement, back in 1963. Over 50 years on, the message still holds true: when one man, or one group of people, are treated less fairly than every one else – it doesn’t matter who they are – then all people are worse off. Why? Because it means we are surrounded by unfairness, by prejudice, and by cruelty.

Though here in Australia, we are considered fair to all cultures, what we don’t see is the poor treatment of specific groups of people by our governments. One particular example of this is the mistreatment of Aboriginal Australians living in remote communities, through an obscure program known as the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

The Northern Territory Emergency Response, also shortened to NTER, or ‘the Intervention’, was a government initiative first implemented in 2007. It supposedly aimed to strengthen the disadvantaged communities of the Northern Territory and protect Indigenous children from abuse and domestic violence. At this point, you are probably wondering what could possibly be wrong with the Intervention. Well, there’s a lot.

Firstly, it heavily regulates the lives of Aboriginal families. They do not receive money, but are forced to shop with ration cards. At school, children must be taught in English for the first four hours of the day – even though, to them, English is often a third, or even fourth, language.

Secondly, the Intervention has also had many economical downsides for the Indigenous. It caused the government-funded Community Development Employment Projects to be abolished, meaning a great loss of jobs. Within four years, the unemployment rate increased by 14%. The Australian government also took over a great deal of the Indigenous people’s sacred land, therefore not treating them as its traditional owners.

I’ve only just touched the surface, but it’s pretty clear to see that the Intervention is questionable. In fact, it violates specific human rights, as laid out in the Universal Declaration for the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Namely, Article 3: the right of the Indigenous to self-determination (which is the community’s right to solve their own issues as they wish). This is all very well, but the Australian government did not consult

one Indigenous person before implementing the program.

Article 4: the right of the Indigenous to self-govern (meaning a right to exercise changes in their communities).

And Article 21: the right of the Indigenous to an improvement of their economic and social situations *without discrimination*. Not only have their situations not improved, but they've been actively discriminated against, since the Intervention does not apply to non-Indigenous Australians in these communities.

'The Intervention offers us nothing... excepting the feeling of being second-class citizens,' said one elder from the Aboriginal community of Utopia.

Now, you could probably excuse some of the flaws in the program, if change was being made. But, eight years on, and over 88 million dollars later, little has been achieved. In terms of *positive* achievement, that is. After five years, the detrimental impacts of the program are shocking. Suicide rates increased by 500% in the first four years, and around 200 more incidents of domestic violence have been occurring since the Intervention.

This lack of success has led people to believe the Emergency Response was the government's way of accessing land for mining. A lot of evidence points towards this fact, especially the loss of land.

Many also believe the Emergency Response is trying to instill the non-Indigenous lifestyle in Indigenous communities, as it does not recognise cultural and language differences. As said by an Aboriginal elder, 'The white man's way of thinking is being forced upon us, and is forcing us to abandon our culture'.

Not only are Indigenous Australians speaking out against the Intervention, there are also many non-Indigenous groups that are opposed. Central Land Council and the Australian Human Rights Commission are the two main organisations that have conducted research on the Intervention. Both are opposed to the program, and instead suggest the government tries to support Indigenous families, and consult Indigenous communities. They also recommend a focus on substance abuse and land rights, as well as child abuse and domestic violence. Despite their many efforts, however, the Australian government has refused to remodel their policies. Instead, they've extended the duration of the Emergency Response for another seven years.

So, though this issue may seem obscure at first, and maybe too



WHY WE SHOULD
STOP THE
INTERVENTION

small to worry about, it is clear to see that it's actually a very big issue. For over 200 years, Indigenous Australians have suffered, and still, our governments continue to implement programs which actively discriminate against these peoples, while making unfair generalisations. The rights of the Indigenous are here threatened, and I will again refer to Kennedy when I say to you that while these people's rights are threatened, so are ours diminished.



My older brother was a fairly typical one. He always bragged that he was better than me. From being better at Maths and Science, to who was capable of holding their breath for the longest, his self-pride enshrouded him wherever he went. He believed he was the perfect man. Shaggy light brown hair, blue eyes; he even claimed that a girl had once kissed him on the cheek when he was eight. Sadly, I could never figure out if he ever recounted a mendacious story.

He stood at around one and a half metres tall. I had once asked him if I was better for being the shortest. He frankly said, 'No, that's not right. It's a privilege to be the tallest, the biggest, or the strongest. Dictating your shortness is like saying that you're the weakest, the wimpiest, and the worst.' That hit me hard, that one solitary comment. It was worse than an adult's gush of wrath and vitriol, because it was from my brother, one of the people I believed to truly love me.

I often asked him if I could have a turn at being the best. He reluctantly agreed, but on the condition that I had to surpass his own achievements. It was invariably the same: 'Climb the pole and touch the top, I dare you.' I couldn't lay a foot on it. 'Swim non-stop to the edge of the lake and back without drowning, I dare you.' I swam halfway, found myself fighting for breath, and unwillingly turned back. 'Run to the end of the road to the yellow brick house and back, in under two minutes, I dare you.' It seemed too simple: down the road, to the end, across the road, yellow brick house, return. In only two minutes. I sprinted swiftly, hastily swerving around the cars with caution. I touched the house and returned. I demanded the time. 'Two minutes and six seconds, just a few seconds shy of the limit.' Devastated, I sulked, internally screaming at myself. Bright, bold words, were flashing in my brain, digging into my heart: I was a failure.

I stood regretful, mad, ashamed of myself. 'Two minutes and six seconds, just a few seconds shy.' It constantly replayed in my head, bringing back memories of the other nightmare. 'You are the weakest, the wimpiest, and the worst.' My brother was gazing at the stopwatch, with a smug grin crawling onto his face. He didn't seem to be showing much sympathy. It disgusted me that he was standing with the sense of pride and the achievement of beating me once again. I was so close, which made my defeat even more miserable. Slowly, the anger inside me soon turned into ambition. I yearned to



beat him. I knew I could beat him.

The next day, I stood alongside my brother, fully prepared for the challenge. He towered over me, his shadow clouded my body, blocking out the sun. Yet, I refused to show any sign of fear. His intimidation did not affect my proud demeanour, which I thankfully acquired from him. He stared at me, eyes wide, then withdrew and sighed. He reached into his pocket for his stopwatch, and looked at me with a slight nod. I was more than ready to conquer this competition. Beating the time and defeating my brother was all I had desired to do.

As soon as the word 'go' left his lips, the adrenaline made me accelerate faster than a speeding bullet. I was ready, ready to overcome my brother. I was running much faster than he expected. I was flying through the streets, with my eyes fixed on the golden prize. The yellow brick house was not far from here. The bricks themselves were shining with gold. I could not take my eyes off the spectacular sight.

'Rosie, Rosie.' A cold breeze sent shivers down my spine. Was that his voice? The sound came from afar. I turned my head around to locate my brother, still running at full speed. He was unrecognisable, just a blur in the distance, I was running too fast. Suddenly, the honk of a car horn blurred into my ears. I turned forward, screamed and hit... the car. The car, the horn, his voice, the yellow brick house, the prize: gone. Those were the last memories I had of the accident.

I woke up to the sombre, monotone sounds of a hospital. Gadgets and tubes lay everywhere. My arms were wrapped up in solid plaster. I didn't remember how I arrived there. I saw my brother, next to me, looking straight into my eyes with tears streaming down his face. It wasn't him anymore. It wasn't the boy with the boastful, show-off attitude, it was the boy with the solemn, concerning, caring look. It was my brother; he loved me. The accident made him finally understand that the most important part of our relationship was not about being the best. He loved me because he was as good as me. 'Tell me you're wrong,' I whispered, 'I dare you.'



A LIFE IN RED

ELLA CROSBY

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HONOURABLE MENTION

Billowing clouds roll across the desert, engulfing the arid landscape. I squint and pretend the red cloud carries rain. The illusion is quickly spoiled by the dusty wind tearing through my hair. Returning to reality, I'm blinking sand from my eyes when I see him — *Gramps*. A tiny figure against the bloody sky, arms raised to welcome the storm.

I take off at a run, eyes fixed on him. The dust stings as I sprint through it, blind to anything but the swirling red clouds around me. The storm is closing in and soon I'll be completely blind. Being lost out here equates to almost certain death, especially when you're as old as Gramps is. I have to get to him, have to save him, but he's too far away. I watch in horror as he vanishes into the cloud.

Once, I was the one lost in the dust. Unable to return home in time, I stumbled around, searching desperately for a way out. Five-year-old feet aching and eyes burning with unshed tears, I had begun to give up hope when I heard a voice cry out over the roar of the wind.

"A-Adèle! Can you hear me? Where are you?" Choked and wretched as it was, Gramps' voice was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. He carried me home, whispering stories of a happier time, of rain, as we battled through the bone-dry storm.

I used to love listening to Gramps talk about the rain. To me it was alien and magical: water, falling from the sky. That was before I grew up. Before I grew up and realised that rain and the life it brought was a thing of the past; something dreamed of by those who were too naïve or stubborn to know any better.

Gramps met Grandmama in the rain. He always said she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, even shivering on the side of the road like a drowned rat. Gramps used to laugh through his tears when he remembered how she had thrown one soggy high-heel at him when he first approached her.

It was love at first sight, *le coup de foudre*, Grandmama called it, unlikely as it was, between the earnest Australian farm boy turned soldier and the willowy, sharp-tongued Parisian girl.

Now, Gramps is old, sick and terribly tired. He's forgotten Grandmama's smile and the red dress she was wearing when they first met; his own name; and me, his only grandchild. But he still remembers the rain. He still stands on the porch every morning and sniffs the air, searching for a windblown scent he'll never smell again. It hasn't rained in fifteen years, not since the end of the War, when



the enemy decided to try and kill everyone instead of admitting defeat. So they stole the rain away with their nuclear weapons and their pride, leaving us without water and without hope.

For so many years it's been us against the world. Gramps and Adèle. Adèle and Gramps. The family of two struggling to survive at the edge of civilisation. I could lose him today, just like he lost Grandmama. I wouldn't find anything to bury.

I'm screaming, choking on dust as his name tears itself from my throat. Then I hear it: music. Someone is singing, the voice soaring as it fights to be heard.

"C'est lui pour moi, moi pour lui dans la vie, Il me l'a dit, l'a juré pour la vie."

Their wedding song; their promise that their love was for life. Gramps is singing the song he and Grandmama danced to all those years ago on the grass while the lone violinist played, bringing to life a day I thought he had long forgotten. I can see them now, holding each other as they sang, heedless of the rain pouring down around them. They were so very young then; so utterly in love.

I never met Grandmama, though she gave me her name. Even after he's forgotten everything else, Gramps still can't say 'Adèle' without it catching in his throat. But he's saying it now, over and over.

My last glimpse of Gramps is through the red haze. He's reaching an arm out into the wind, inviting the storm to dance. For a moment, the streams of dust around him hint at a rippling skirt and he sways. Then the storm swallows him up.



GEOFFREY

AMY HALE

Geoff met me with a shot glass and a wry smile. The clink of whiskey ice cubes on a whiskey glass with whiskey breath. My sister shuffles in her seat. He taps his foot, but not to the rhythm of Dad's record, but to the rhythm of his own beat. He's the type of relative who you have to meet up with, but don't really want to. I never liked him; he was quick witted, quick to judge and quick to leave. But, then, all of a sudden, he was slow. Slowing down, anyway. '*Ninety-one not out.*' Dad used to say.

And it's funny. Not ha-ha funny, or my sister's YouTube videos funny, that the ball that hit him for six wasn't even on the full. He was intimidating, tall and stooping. I used to imagine him with a cigar drooping out his mouth, tobacco breath and tobacco smoke. The smoke wasn't even uncomfortable: he was uncomfortable. The fact that we didn't even know him was the worst. He would come over and settle under the cloud of tension, silver hair matching the silver smoke with his silver heart. He wouldn't tell stories, he would drink and stay silent. I never thought of him as old until he was.

Geoffrey, right? It's like he introduced himself whenever he saw us. Geoffrey the familiar stranger. Geoffrey was a warm name, the purple Wiggle, the kid from 21 Jump Street. But Geoffrey wasn't warm. He was colder than his whiskey ice cubes. I never called him Grandpa, not once, not ever. He was always Geoff to me. He played tennis. Lived alone. Drank Jack Daniels scotch. Rotary member. Widowed.

Little words equal can a big person. Widower was a punch in the face, literally. She was beautiful, like the old photos. She knitted, she cooked, she sewed. She was normal, and I never met her. Maybe if she was extraordinary she would've lived. No one ever told me how she died.

I think he was lonely.

I never really knew.

Geoffrey used to be young once, and I think that's why we overlooked him. The small notes he used to scribble on the edge of napkins or the Converse he wore with an oversized sweater. They are young people things. It's funny, not ha-ha funny or my sister's YouTube videos funny, that when we are old, all we want is to be young again.

We all dressed up, black suits that we'll never wear again to say goodbye to the familiar stranger that we never knew. Dad cries, my



GEOFFREY

sister cries, Mum wears dark sunglasses. I feel bad for not crying as the priest mumbles what a great man he was. It never ended though; he kept coming back as napkins behind coffee tables or cigarette stubs. These things will always remind me of him.

He will never leave.

Because he is in all of us, even me. I am him, Dad is him.

We are all him.

I don't know when I'll let him go.

Ninety-One and OUT.



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WHY I WANT
TO BE AN ARMY
OFFICER

AMY HALE

Guns and war aren't my thing. Neither is getting my pretty little nails dirty or even wearing a jumpsuit. I would rather live oblivious with a Starbucks cup in one hand and an iPhone 6 in the other. I don't want to live with a gun in my right and fear in my left. Maybe this makes me a bad person? I don't think it does. I think it makes me the same as everyone else.

Lance Corporal Eamon Hale, 27 years old. Tall, big build. Muscly. Ginger/brown hair with blue eyes. Moustache. That's my half-brother in a nutshell. He's categorised, known as Hale. A name, but he's so much more than that. He's selfless, brave, loving, kind and intelligent. But he's an Army Officer. Why? How would I describe him? Eamon is 27 years old but to be honest he acts about 57 at times, and seven at others. He gets mad when I flick channels on TV too quickly, and he likes Doctor Who. He tickles my little sister and taught me how to juggle. He has really big, buggy eyes and I hate his moustache. He makes it curl at the ends because it makes him look 'sophisticated'. He carries a comb around and talks like he's an old man. He's classic, original. I couldn't imagine him even going near Starbucks. He's very different to anyone else I know. I couldn't imagine him in combat either because he wouldn't hurt a fly. I think that's why he's such a good soldier. He won't hurt a fly, but he will protect people. He's not a weak protector that stands up for people because he has to, he's strong. The strongest person I know.

Personally, my family was very worried when he went to Afghanistan. He told me that I shouldn't be worried because he isn't going into combat; he's just going to keep the peace. What a powerful peace it is. Peace isn't silence or resolution. Peace is protection. Eamon keeps the peace, that's what he does. He despises conflict which is annoying at times when I want to tell him off for eating all the good yoghurt. It's good in others because he doesn't crave conflict like others where he works. When I tell people that my brother is in the Army, they get all awkward and mumble, 'I'm so sorry, is he okay?' Because the reality of it all is the only Army stories we're told are of tough men with tattoos who get killed in combat. What about the others? They don't know my brother and his best friend Tilly. Tilly is a short Aboriginal man who's really awkward but with a killer smile and a contagious personality. I often joke to Eamon that they should get married, because they act like they are already. Mates. They call each other mates, but they're brothers. Fighting together



WHY I WANT
TO BE AN ARMY
OFFICER

has forged an unbreakable bond, and it's only after you try to protect the people who are so innocent together you find out how close they are. Eamon and Tilly aren't big men with tattoos and no teeth. They're people too.

This Anzac Day, maybe don't treat it like any other day. The average men who try their very hardest but might not get remembered are the ones we need to remember. My brother isn't a war hero, but he's my hero. He went to another country to protect faces he didn't know. And he accomplished that. This Anzac Day, remember the people who gave their lives for the war, and those who didn't. They're all heroes.

And they come back just the same as they always do. When my brother came back, he gave me an Afghan hat, a big grin and a hug, just like always.

After I talked with my brother, I'm trading my Starbucks for confidence, and my iPhone for an ability to stand up for people. I'm no hero, and I'm not in the army either. But I can show them that what they do matters, in my own way.

This Anzac Day, we will remember them.



The world was all dried up. Shriveled like a raisin and broken like cracked lips. No crops grew anymore, the animals were dead, and soon the humans would be too.

Patrick remembered the rain. He remembered pressing his pale cheeks to the cool glass and watching the water droplets race each other to the windowsill. He remembered what a real rainbow looked like, its beautiful colours decorating the sky. He remembered splashing around in muddy puddles in his yellow gumboots. He remembered when he used to smile.

Tea didn't remember, for she was born in the third year of the drought. She could only imagine the touch, the sound, the taste of the water that had once fallen from the sky.

'Mama, where're we goin?'

Tea pressed her face closer into her mother's soft shirt, clinging to it with her tiny hands.

'To find a new home.'

But Patrick didn't want to find a new home. Not when his father was on earth, in the ground and in the sky. Patrick knew he was there, watching over him, Tea and Mum. But they were being evacuated, boarding the last spaceship which would follow no particular route, bound for the nearest inhabitable planet.

Tea and Patrick were guided by their mother's hands, following the crowd of people jostling toward the spacecraft. It was a gargantuan structure, so large it was impossible to believe it would lift off the ground. Its titanium walls reflected the sun, with numerous panels jutting out from all angles.

They walked through the large, automatic gates of the spacecraft, and Patrick was consumed by the looming monster, swallowed into the darkness. He couldn't breathe, so he ran. He needed just one more look, one more breath of fresh air, one more glimpse of the world. He weaved his way through the nameless faces that moved against him, desperate to escape. He ran until the spacecraft was a distance behind him. Patrick sat in the red dust, and looked at the sky.

'Please,' he whispered, 'please.'

But the sky did not answer.

'Paddy?'

Patrick turned his head. Tea was looking down at him, twirling her ponytail around her finger over and over again. Her emerald eyes sparkled in the sunlight, reminding Patrick of their mother.

'Go away.'

Tea moved toward Patrick, hesitated, and decided to sit down



beside him. Patrick lowered his head into his hands.

'You know,' said Tea, 'it won't be so bad.'

'I just can't leave.'

'Dad would want us to go. We can't stay here.'

'How would you know?' Patrick screamed. 'You didn't even know him!'

Tea turned away.

'I'm sorry,' Patrick sighed.

They sat in silence, looking out across the barren land. Large cracks had formed over the years, scarring the earth as if sliced by a knife. A sudden jolt disturbed their thoughts, and the children remembered where they were. Patrick jumped up, looking across the empty space between them and the spacecraft's gates. They had started to close. He grabbed Tea's hand and dragged her to her feet.

They began to run. But Patrick's legs were longer and he could run faster than Tea. He looked behind him, only to see Tea struggling to keep up. He raced back to her and grabbed her arm, pulling her along as they moved towards the closing gates. They could not be left behind. They were so close, Patrick knew they could make it...

'Paddy!'

Patrick felt her hand slip out of his as Tea stumbled and fell on the hard pavement. He lifted her up, trickles of blood dribbling down her knees. The children were desperate. With one last effort, they lunged through the small opening, the gates closing with a sigh behind them.

It took a moment for the children to regain their breath, as they stood in the entrance of the spacecraft. They made it. The floors began to shake; it was time to leave.

Patrick hugged his body. He felt sick. He didn't want to leave, but it was either that or stay and die. A sudden thumping on the gates made him jump.

'Is anybody there? Please, help me!' The voice, although muffled, was one that the children knew.

'Mum!' they screamed, 'Mum!'

The children pounded on the gates, 'Please somebody help! Mum, please, Mum!'

But there was no one to hear their cries.

'Tea, Paddy!' cried the muffled voice, 'Oh, thank God you're okay. I... I was so worried. One minute you were there and then... then... I



couldn't find you... I love you, please remember I love you!

'No, Mum, no!'

The floor began to shake violently and the children fell to their knees. The spacecraft began to move. They were slowly rising off the ground. The children could no longer hear their mother's voice. They sat, quivering, before crumbling into each other's arms, and there they remained, and quietly they cried.



Tea slept peacefully, her head resting on Patrick's lap. He stroked her hair and looked out into the unending universe. All Patrick could see were twinkling specks shining against the inky black space. This was the sky he had always known, the sky in which his father lived, and where his mum would soon be. Patrick knew that wherever he went, they would be there.

Tea stirred. 'Paddy, are we gonna be okay?'

'Yeah,' said Patrick, 'we're gonna be okay.'



THE PILLARS
OF CREATION

ALICIA JONES

Hidden within its shadowy depths, alone amongst the vast nothingness that surrounds it, millions of years away from anything, lies a cloud, a grey, gloomy cloud. Each ball of fluff just lays there still. No wind to give it movement, no colour to give it essence. Although lifeless on the outside, deep within its dusty skin, three pillars stand tall. Surrounded by glistening little balls of light, dominating the dreary shadows of neighbouring clouds, life sits among the lifeless, among the Pillars of Creation.

The tallest one stands four light years tall, appearing so small compared to the rest of its home. All around them, large stars come to life, and others die, exploding like dynamite, then slowly becoming a new star again. From a distance, you can take in their beauty. You can see each shape and curve, and wonder at their elegance. But closer up, you see the dust and the gasses that lie still amongst the chaos as stars slowly form. Each star's beginning is reckless as the flames spark from the gasses pulled in by the hefty force of gravity as it traps anything that ventures near. All the violence and heat creates a sense of being at the epicentre of a super volcanic eruption. Nothing is stable, strong wind-like forces smash the air around the centre of the soon-to-be-born star. Although it takes years upon years, finally beauty is born. Stars are forever treacherous balls of gas, but as a little ball of sparkling light adding life to the darkness of space, they are peaceful beings in the night sky.

Sadly, after its long life, there is no peaceful end; stars are always going out with a bang, and a large one. The fiery ball slowly turns on itself as it runs out of fuel to burn, and as it becomes more and more unsettled, it explodes like a trip mine, sudden and fast, as you never know exactly when a star might burst. As it launches parts of itself all over space, it leaves a gas cloud, that will slowly be pulled together and reform into the star's heir, another to take its place again amongst the many stars of the glorious Milky Way.

Out in distant space, little mostly happens. You can see the events that occur in the galaxies around you, but you don't know what it would be like to be in them, all you can do is stare at the beauties of each star that creates its own light to find its way in the vast, blackness that circles it. At the galaxies that slowly merge together in a rage of galactic cannibalism, or at the black holes, invisible round balls bending space and time, engulfing anything that comes near them, compacting it in their infinite gravity, erasing it from existence.



But sadly, this place is no longer in existence. For 6,500 years, this place of beauty and marvels has been replaced by a large supernova that slowly engulfed it. Ending this wonderful place of creation like it started. All life must end, but as little astronomers stare up at the sky with wide gleamy eyes, this place still exists, and there are many more like it that are ready for discovery, for little dreams to find them and bask in their glory as they paint the night sky with all the stars that they hold. Dreams give these places light, as they are hidden in the darkness. There is no colour in space, it's dangerous and violent, but the only good thing it can contain are dreams, and those are found among the stars.



COLLAPSE

EMMA LEE

It's snowing. Flakes drift through the air, settling on my helmet, my goggles, gloves, poles and skis. It's beautiful, serene. Completely picturesque.

I stand at the top of the run, wind running through my braids and lifting them off my shoulders. It seems to be spinning from the bottom of the slope, from where the mist is slowly advancing.

'Ready?'

I answer by pushing with my poles and then I'm flying, forgetting everything outside of this moment. Instinct takes over and I'm a bird, weightless and doing what I was made to do.

We weave past each other, edging the fresh snow onto each other's skis, laughing. Drifting apart and drawing together like waves upon frozen sand.

The moguls loom in my vision and I embrace the challenge, dipping, lifting, running over the snow, becoming one with the mountain.

The wind sets me alight from within, burning my calves and licking my skin. Lending me strength. Sucking me down and pushing me to go faster, faster, *faster*.

I am enveloped in mist. It clings to my hair and drips down my goggles, freezing my nose and encasing me in crystal.

Faster it insists, *faster*.

Slipping, heart pounding, sliding down the slope, I move faster.

Faster.

The wind sends me reeling, pulling me down the mountain and whipping across my unprotected face. It rips past my lips and whispers down my throat.

Faster, *fast*—

Falter.

I come to an abrupt stop. Turning around, I look back at where I came from. My heart flickers when all I register is mist and blurry figures drifting by in a haze. That's when I realise we've been separated, parted by the thrill of the race.

The mist seems to be closing around me, wrapping me in its suffocating hug. I turn away from the realisation and the fear. Fear brought on by the rumbling that brought me to a stop, the tremors that have returned, louder than before. The sound of their quaking ricochets through the misty air, shooting out and then returning.

Glancing back again, I see the fog thicken and seemingly roll

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down the mountain, growing as it does, forming a hulking shadow of snowflakes and mist. Then I'm sliding, slipping, rolling down the slope and tripping in my haste, the wind's wicked laughter echoing down my spine.

Just before the imposing wall reaches me, the snow beneath my feet cracks, collapsing. Releasing shards of threatening ice. Then the storm of collected hail rains down on me. My feet lead me down the slope, skis sticking in the icy snow, twisting my ankles and tearing at tendons. My hands are busy doing anything possible to halt the treacherous fall, eyes and mouth shut tight, the scream of terror and agony bunched up inside of me.

I'm flipping, forwards, backwards, sideways. Powerless against the influence of the accumulating terror. So many times I don't even know which way I'm turning, or if I'm even turning any more.

The fall ends and I'm trapped, suffocating in a cold so pure I can't breathe or think.

I shudder. Once. Twice. Again and again, each shudder rubbing me raw.

I open my eyes but all I see is a coffin of snow.

Hold on, I think.

Hold on.



THE RIGHT TO
OBJECT

FLORRIE MCKAY
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER

Each of you has come here today with an impassioned plea for the protection of important human rights. How have you done that? How have you convinced us of the worth of your cause? Words made into sentences, spoken out loud. Speech.

We know that you are free to speak because the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects what we like to call free speech in Article 19, which provides that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the right to hold opinions without interference.

What better place to test this thesis, about being free to speak, than at our own prestigious Speech Night. It's your moment as Captain to strut and fret your hour upon the stage. You're free to speak. Why then does every girl start her speech in just the same way? Are you remembering now, what I didn't do this morning? In every speech, every possible person, is addressed, greeted, in rank order.

What is going on? Put simply, I suppose, each girl is tempering her speech to ensure that she does not give offence.

Well, you might say we need a bit more respect these days. But recently this trade-off between the freedom to speak and a right *not* to be offended has become a topic for serious debate.

But we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves – that's about the limits that should apply to freedom of speech. It warrants further consideration, but let's get you on board with the basic concept first.

Freedom of speech goes to the heart of human dignity for it is what we use to defend all other rights and freedoms. History is littered with despotic systems that understood that free speech was their worst enemy. Today many governments restrict the ability of their citizens to express an opinion, in order to close out the opposition.

In Australia, the Human Rights Commission advocates for free speech. Amnesty International works for those who suffer in order to speak, around the world.

An example: in Abu Dhabi, a woman was jailed for 'writing bad words' but what she had done was post a photo of someone abusing the rights of others by parking illegally in a disabled car spot.

The freedom of the media to publish and comment, is fundamental to understanding exactly what is going on in society. We might wonder if there is truly balance on the TV show Q and A, but think of Peter Greste, the Australian journalist who languished in jail for tarnishing Egypt's image by broadcasting 'false' information.



But that is 'out there'. Not here. This is a liberal democracy and do we not rejoice? For we are young and free. But have you heard of the Australian Border Force Act 2015? It's a new law that stops workers in Detention Centres revealing what they see while doing their jobs. Does that sound like free speech? The government says it is only trying to protect operational security. But hold on a minute, couldn't that law be used to send doctors to jail for reporting abuse of asylum seekers?

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right, but not an absolute one. We are not free to 'chat' about how we might undertake criminal acts. Freedom of expression does not extend to expressing oneself if that causes physical harm to others, such as with child pornography. But come back from these extremes and it is hard to agree on what the necessary limits need to be.

Recently, when extremists murdered Charlie Hebdo's employees in Paris because their cartoons had caused offence by ridiculing the Prophet Mohammed, we started to think hard about these limits.

Should my right to speak freely include a right to offend? Our own government recently considered repealing the protections that outlaw speech that offends on the basis of race. The plan has been shelved, so for now there is one ground on which I am not free to insult you.

Maybe that sounds right. But even laws that are introduced to tamp down on the most poisonous of utterances can end up as a tool of repression. In Rwanda, for example, discussion of ethnic culpability for the 1994 genocide that disagrees with the official version is banned. The stated reason is to avoid a resurgence of ethnic hatred. Critics say that the government uses these restrictions to crack down on dissent of many kinds.

As Voltaire said, I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it. The fact that I find something offensive should not be used as an excuse for shutting down the speech. Because that is exactly how millions of people are silenced the world over, that is how repressive regimes thrive.

Did I insult you by not greeting you in the usual manner of a speech today? I invite you, tell me what you really think; do your worst, if you really feel the need to say it.

For what protects your right to say things I find objectionable is precisely what protects my right to object.



ORPHAN TRAIN

MADISON MELTON
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HONOURABLE MENTION

Somehow, even at a mere five years old, I knew I would never see my mother again. Perhaps I hoped it would not be so, and when I was all grown up I'd somehow find her in the huge place that is New York City. But I had never been much of a dreamer.

It was an uncharacteristically frigid March morning, the train station bustling with passengers of all shapes and sizes. The orphans were always easy to pick out; most were dressed in little more than patched pants and ragged dresses. Faded ribbons hung loose on the lopsided pigtails of the younger girls. These were children exposed much too early to hardship, who had never heard the words 'I love you'. This was my fate; it had been since the day my mother left me at an orphanage, five years ago.

'You look after your sibling, you hear?' In my memory, she always looked like an angel. Golden hair, beautiful features, clothed in a stunning white dress. Her hand rested gently on her protruding belly, settling the being growing inside. The reality was different.

'I promise,' I nodded solemnly, five-year-old me not understanding the harsh solemnity of what was happening. Her plea had confused me at first; but when a little bundle of life was left at the doorstep, I understood. I peered out the window, watched her walk away. Mama turned around for a final time, and I will never forget her expression. Her entire being was in indecision, logic and love at war. Logic won that battle; but little did she know love had stepped in. A gift more powerful than anything else: a brother. Somebody to love, something worth holding onto. Some children cried themselves to sleep. Some children did not speak again for years. But I stood strong, steady. I had a promise to keep.

'Come, Oliver, we don't want to miss the train!' I reprimanded, but my tone was gentle. The scrawny-haired child looked up from his game, eager to please. I held out my pale hand and he took it.

'What's your name, Miss?' The ticket conductor was kind, sharply punching a hole in my ticket and my brother's.

'Aurelia, sir,' I replied proudly.

'Have a nice ride, Aurelia,' the ticket master winked.

That night, falling asleep was harder than it had ever been. Our seats were straight backed, hard and cold. Oliver lay across my lap, his gentle breaths having relaxed long ago. Everyone's dreams were always similar: snapshots of a happy family, a beautiful house. Some nights, when I lay awake alone, I could almost imagine the dreams,



spiralling into the sky; moulding into one, a single huge cloud of hope.

Six. That's how many days we sat, cramped in too little space. That's how many towns we visited, places we got examined, teeth checked, muscles measured, skin pinched. That is how many times we were made to feel like animals, trying our best to please our potential 'masters'. Six days I stared out the droplet-covered window, looking but not seeing the beautiful harsh landscapes we passed. The rain matched the mood on the train; there was little laughing or smiling, the days a blur, filled with apprehension. It was only when the sun went down and the stars came out that the tears finally fell. I tried to be brave; we all did. But it didn't last long.

March 12th, 1904. The seventh day. The day it finally stopped raining and the sun came out, that was the day my heart started raining. It never stopped. Because it was then, in a little town in Kentucky, that I lost my brother.

We stood on a platform like we always did, our patience and hope vanishing rapidly. I held tight to Oliver's hand, praying to God that somebody would want us, would want us both. I scanned the crowd, looking for my perfect family. I didn't see them. Silently, I begged Oliver to remain quiet, to blend in with the pack.

'Look, Ellie! The rain is gone! Look at the sun!' His sweet little voice lit up the entire crowd. He smiled, all loose teeth and dimples, his blonde hair golden in the sunlight. My heart sank.

'I'll take him.' A middle-aged man spoke up, his voice gruff. His tan face was weathered and wrinkled, his hair sparse. He seemed kindly, but he'd taken my brother.

I heard Ms Smithson ask politely if they would take two, and heard, rather than saw the little jump of shock and frantic *no*. No, we can only support one. No, we only need one. I'd heard them all. I knelt down, my eyes raking Oliver's face, taking in every last imperfection one last time.

'You be good, you hear me? Keep dreaming, keep imagining. You can do anything. Never give up hope. I'll see you again.' My words were a rush, only a small portion of the waterfall that was my heart.

'Love you,' Oliver nodded solemnly, his huge baby blue eyes round and innocent. I hugged him once, then quickly pushed him away. His new parents took him by the hand, leading him away, to his new life. But as the distance between us grew, that was when he realised.



His brow crinkled in confusion, his eyes widening.

'Ellie!' Oliver cried. His sobs broke my heart. 'Ellie, no! You have to come too!'

I shook my head slowly. *No*, I murmured silently. *No, I can't go with you.*

The next few days were a blur. The rain outside was gone, replaced by the jubilant sun. But it might as well have still been there, for all I noticed. It was flooding, inside the confinement of my body. The dam of my heart had collapsed, and no matter how much I tried, over the many years, it was never completely mended. Patched, yes, but there was always a hole.



9

The rain splattered onto the cobbled street, bouncing off the black bricks and imitating the marching sound of a storming army.

A little girl stood frozen with her brother and mother, in the undercroft of a doorway, watching the rain fall. Their bare feet and dirty clothes highlighted their poverty. A lambent street lamp lit their hollowed-out faces and reflected off the pavement, making the rain shimmer as it fell. It was early in the morning, so early that the sun had not yet appeared behind the buildings, but already the day was beginning. People's chatter and the clip clop and rattle of carriages could be heard.

The poverty-stricken trio began to dart through the rain, the darkness of the morning enveloping them as they wove through alleyways and streets. As they moved downtown, the ringing of Big Ben's bell announced that it was 5am.

The little family turned a corner and suddenly were on a street with thousands of other people all ready to start a working day. The crowd buzzed with polite small talk. They were collectively a mob of the poorest people in London, yet despite the dark rings under their eyes, the cuts and bruises and missing fingers, the homes they would never have, they still managed to act with cordiality, for they were survivors.

The rain seemed to have ceased, and the soaking group watched the doors to the two-storey factories slowly open. This particular family made their way to the one on the left.

The textile factory stood one street away from the Thames in downtown London. The stench from the river exacerbated the already difficult 14-hour work days. It was widely accepted that the pay in this sort of factory was poor, but the reality for many workers was that it was their only choice if they wanted to survive. This particular family had run into unfortunate circumstances when their father had fled their country home, and the family had decided to move to London in pursuit of employment. The children had barely any education; they had only learnt to read from a small Bible their mother had kept safe.

People began to flood in through high brass doors. A bright cockney accent caused the young girl to spin around.

"G'morning to ya Cloud."

The little girl lit up at the sound of her nickname. She had gained it from her allocated job at the textile mill. She spent all day collecting the falling bits of cotton from the ground. She was constantly surrounded by a sea of white and her purity and goodness earned her the name Cloud. Her real name, Eleanor, had long been forgotten.

THE WEIGHT OF A COTTON CLOUD

LAURA TINNEY

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

RUNNER-UP



“Morning, Edita,” Cloud responded, smiling at the old woman who engulfed her in a warm hug. Edita worked with Cloud’s mother in the card-room. It was most dusty there and many workers had developed terrible coughs from the build up in their lungs. Jamie, her little brother, had by far the worst job, as he was the littlest. He would crawl under the machines and fix them whilst they were still going. Children of his age were preferable but it was the most dangerous. Edita had previously worked there and now possessed only 6 fingers in total.

The group split as they entered the factory, each going off to their own areas. The whizzing, burring and loudness of the machines that were aligned in neat rows, the putrid smell and the choking dust overwhelmed Cloud as it always had done, yet after spotting the supervisor’s tall hat, with his whip in hand and eagle’s eyes, she made a point to quickly get to work. She had felt the wrath for her disobedience and had scars on her back to show for it. On her first day she had attempted to rest after standing on her feet for five hours straight but was whipped for it; needless to say, she never stopped moving nowadays. The factory whirred to life; people moved throughout the cotton storm. The white pieces of fluff were forever falling and oppressing the workers. Suffocating them. Weighing them down.

The little girl wove through the rows picking up pieces of cotton, gliding through the winter wonderland she envisioned in her head. Cloud always saw the silver lining. However, even she could not un-see the sullen, tired faces of the children and women, she could not un-hear the anguished screams from the lashings dealt, she could not un-feel the dark feeling that gripped her whenever she walked through those brass doors each day: she could not forget.

Out of the corner of her eye she watched her brother climb under another machine to fix the thread. She averted her eyes for one moment, but they were quickly brought back by an ear-piercing scream. She turned to see her brother lying surrounded by blood, not moving. “Jamie!” she yelled, her tears falling like rain, as she watched the blood taint the pure white cotton as his body was surrounded. A whip lashed out across her back, striking her like lightning. A thunderous yell soon followed. Jamie’s face paled to a grey that matched a winter’s sky. Cloud stood alone and watched as the cotton storm continued to swirl. Continued to fall. Down... down... down...



Tim was a terrible brother.

He was always messing things up with his happy-go-lucky attitude. I don't think he even knew what the word 'responsibility' meant.

To be fair, he was seven. But that didn't mean that he was any less of a pain.

Like just last week when we were at the supermarket:

'Tim, could you grab the eggs?'

Crash. Something small and oily hit the back of my leg.

'Sur-re, in a second.'

I turned around from the shelf to see whatever was currently taking up his short attention span, not expecting something great. I wasn't disappointed.

'Tim,' I said carefully. 'Whatcha doin?'

'Nothing.' He was hiding the majority of the mess with his small back. I waited.

He turned around and with the most earnest look he could manage he said: 'I'll clean it up, I swear! Don't worry, brother.' To anyone else, the puppy-eyed look may have worked, but I knew better.

Inspecting the scene, three things caught my eye: olives flung in every corner of the aisle; Tim mopping up the mess with the jumper I bought him yesterday; and shards of a broken glass jar just laying haphazardly in the general wreckage zone. His favourite stuffed frog was tucked safely under his arm.

After calling staff, cleaning him up and apologising profusely to anyone who passed, I asked him what on earth he was doing with the olive jar.

He simply replied, 'George McFroggy wanted olives for dinner,' as if that was perfectly sound reasoning.

He was always doing stuff like that.

Even though I understood the reason why I needed to take him everywhere, I didn't understand why he had to always make life so hard for me. My father tells me that he doesn't have time to deal with us, but even so, he doesn't realise the pain I go through everyday by having Tim around.

Like when I'm trying to study, Tim barges into my room and starts singing obnoxiously loudly about whatever he thinks will help me finish my work. Which usually means Taylor Swift or food.

He jumps on my back at the most inopportune times, like when I'm serving someone at my waiting job, or chucks his frog in my face and asks me to play with him.

OLIVE JARS,
GUINEA PIGS &
TAYLOR SWIFT

ADELINE TRIEU



One time he even got into trouble at school for letting the class guinea pig 'back into its natural habitat', meaning outside. I don't think he realises we live in a snake ridden area in Australia, but I still had to go with him to see the principal.

He usually says that he's trying to get me to have fun, and I get that he's trying to help, but all it does is just get on my nerves.

Sometimes though, he's alright. Like today. Humming a little tune as we walked, he was picking autumn leaves from the ground for his stuffed frog. It was a quiet little Sunday, drizzling slightly as we walked on a footpath between the road and the river.

'Edward?' Tim said, pausing his tune. His hair was glittery from the rain.

'Yeah?'

'When's mummy coming back?'

I sighed. A couple years ago she packed her bags and told us that she 'just needed a break.' She was quite a young mum to have had us, and was always complaining that the fun part of her life had ended after having me. But I still loved her, as any son should. I remember thinking that day that it was fine, since dad left home all the time, and I remember believing her when she said that she'd be back in a week. I believed her when she promised that she 'wouldn't forget,' and I believed her when she said that she loved us, with all her heart. Because if she loved us, she'd come back, right? I remember saying that in my mind, over and over again in the weeks and months that followed.

Even though I knew, deep inside, that she'd left us, I didn't realise completely what had happened until my dad had given up on raising us and given the responsibility to me. I didn't realise until it was up to me to get food, until it was up to me to take Tim to school and organise all his paperwork. My dad paid for things from the other side of the world, but at most times it felt like he didn't even exist. I lost half my childhood after my mum left, as well as half my family.

From then on, it was just the two of us. Sometimes though, more than anything in the world, I wished that it wasn't. Sometimes, more than anything in the world, I sort of understood my mum, and wished that Tim wasn't my responsibility. But I would lock that thought away, deep in my brain, because he's my brother, and I have to look out for him, whether as a sibling or a guardian.

'Tim, you know I love you, right?'



He nodded and mumbled, 'Love you too,' while picking up another leaf and wiping it on his pants.

'But Mum's not gonna come back for awhile, and I'll just have to be enough.'

It's at times like these that I think kids are way smarter than adults. Maybe it was just something in my expression, but Tim looked back at me, smiled, and told me the best thing I could've heard from him right then.

'You're more than enough. You're the best brother I could ask for.'

My eyes welled up. I wanted to hug him so much in that moment that it felt like my chest would burst.

Instead, I tackled him, before lifting him up into the biggest bearhug I could give.

'Stop! You're gonna crush me!' he said, giggling.

I just grinned and hugged a little harder. Even if he was a pain, even if he did drop olive jars and set free school property, he was still the one person left in the world who loved me no matter what.

Maybe, just maybe, he wasn't such a terrible brother after all.



OLIVE JARS,
GUINEA PIGS &
TAYLOR SWIFT



One Sunday in 1971, Mary and Megan's weekly picnic was sabotaged by the pouring rain and thunder, but Megan still insisted that they go.

'It's our special time, Mum, no thunderstorm can stop me from going.'

After sitting under a small pink umbrella on a bench covered in rain drops and eating their delicious jam sandwiches, Mary was eventually persuaded to play chase in the pouring rain.

Every day that I get the chance I always go to visit her. Probably because I feel guilty leaving her with people she doesn't know. That eats at me every single day, but I know it is the right choice for she and I. On the last few occasions that I visited, the sun has been out so we can go on beautiful walks and sit outside. Today the sky is dark and it's pouring down with rain. I can see the millions of tiny droplets running down my car window.

Every morning that I wake up I don't know where I am. I can't remember what happened the day before, and I lie in silence. But this morning as I woke up, I heard pounding on the roof. I couldn't figure out what it was until a lady came to get me out of bed and mentioned that it is raining. That is the sound I heard and couldn't remember. The nice young lady helped me into a wheelchair and pushed me out into a long hallway that led into a large room full of other people.

'Welcome back, Megan, it's been a while,' Ellie, the lady at the front desk said to me while I was signing in.

'Yeah, I had an extra busy week last week.'

'Well, I'm glad you could come and visit her, Mary isn't doing very well,' Ellie said to me while I was punching in the code for the door. As soon as I entered the living room, I felt a great sense of sadness and loneliness, and it almost brought a tear to my eye. I searched the room for her face and found it, staring out the window into oblivion. She was sitting all by herself in the corner.

I can always find peace when I sit by myself. I can never seem to properly connect with anyone and when I think about it, I don't know any of these people. But I do love watching these millions of tiny rain droplets running down the window. I am following two at the moment waiting to see which one will win the race to the bottom. A beautiful young girl sits down next to me on the couch, I can see my reflection in her blue eyes, and the light that is hitting her blonde hair distracts me from what I was doing.

'What are you doing over here?' she says, her voice was so kind and loving. I can't remember what I was doing just a moment ago, though, and I don't know how to tell her that, so I just turn away.

She's a completely different person compared to what she used to



be like. This distance between us is heartbreaking. The emptiness in her eyes just brings me to tears.

When I look back at the girl sitting on the couch I can see tears welling in her blue eyes.

She hasn't talked to me for years and sometimes I don't know if she's just forgotten how to talk or she's forgotten who I am.

I really hope she comes to visit me again, she seems very kind and sweet. But she also seems so sad, and the way she's looking at me makes me think she knows me. But I've never seen this woman in my life.

'How are you, Mum,' I asked. Again, a blank face that turned away. *She must be confused. I don't have a daughter.*

She's a lost soul who can't be retrieved, she's stuck all by herself. The things that I would give to just have one day with the mother that I used to have. The mother who could remember who her daughter was.

This girl's face looks very sad; I can't stand the sight of sadness in people's eyes. Once again I look out the window to the rain droplets and I can see a young girl running around on the grass in the pouring rain. Her face is lit by smiles and her hand is holding another's. She looks like the girl sitting next to me: the same bright blue eyes and blonde hair, just smaller. In the back of my head I could hear their conversation, she was with her mother, and her mum called her Megan.

Just when I thought it was time to leave she turned back and looked me straight in the eyes.

'Megan?'

'Yes, I'm here, Mum,' I said while I felt tears running down my cheeks and my smile growing. 'I'll always be here.'

'Megan, come here,' Mary said with open arms. In seconds Megan was in the air with her mum's arms wrapped around her. They ran, danced and sang until they couldn't anymore and the rain was still pouring down. Their clothes were sopping, hair drenched and the only thing Megan said on their way home was, 'I love you, Mum, and I will never forget today, never ever.'



CHANGE

ELISE ALLIBON
ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD
FOR CREATIVE WRITING
HONOURABLE MENTION

Devastation has struck the coast of Kenya as excessive water has flooded the eastern coast town of Gymbia. The small coastal town is surrounded by dry African trees that shade the small mud-brick homes which litter the village. The well that sits in the town centre used to be drained dry of even the smallest drops of moisture, but is now overflowing with water. Children that were once playing simple games as their parents worked, have now been left without hope as gaining income is becoming near impossible as work is no longer available. Stray cats and dogs that once ran wild, caught up in the cheerful laughter coming from joyous children, have now been abandoned as everyone leaves for higher ground. With animals dying and crops underwater from the extravagant abundance of rain, it seems that there is little hope for the small town of Gymbia. The once-thriving town is now under great stress as village residents are suffering from devastation as their homes are flooded and farmland drowned. Fatalities have cursed the east coast as the persistent moisture is bringing unwanted diseases among the already weak townspeople. The lingering rain continues to damage property, and the lasting dampness has already caused fatal infections affecting most of Gymbia's population.

The townspeople built their village below the mountains to capture the precipitation in the dry climate, but have now realised their mistake. The village is beginning to drown from the rain that was once much needed, and with ocean levels continuing to rise due to climate change, help is in high demand for this poverty-stricken village. Distressed residents have sent out cries of help to neighbouring countries, hoping for the best, but sadly it's only going down-hill from here.

Call 1300-874 or text 'HELP' to 946-738.

I turned the TV off.

I couldn't help but notice my surroundings. I was sitting on my white leather couch, phone in hand, the TV blaring and my dog sleeping peacefully at my feet. This didn't seem fair. I have so much; a beautiful house, a well-paid job and a sense of security, yet they have so little.

It was when my girlfriend spoke that I decided I wanted to help.

'God dammit, they're always asking for our bloody money. I mean, why should we have to give away our hard-earned dollars to 'help the needy'. It's all just ridiculous.'

IO

I picked up my phone, ignored my partner's rude remarks and dialled 1300-874. It seemed as though the dial tone was endless, until the end of the constant beeping became apparent. The voice on the other end of the line was soft and gentle, unlike that of the nasty and vicious tone of my girlfriend.

A woman named Ashaki reassured me that the decision I was about to make, was the right one. The generous middle-aged African woman was advocating for change, and was volunteering her time to aid these helpless people. The hole of pity in my chest only grew larger as I listened to her tender voice that was filled with desperation. The helpless African people needed a glimmer of hope, and I could only dream of assisting them by providing my knowledge in environmental science. She made me understand that poverty is not an accident. Even though many think of it as bad luck or misfortune, poverty is man-made and I know that it can be removed by the selfless actions of humans. I want to be the change that this world needs.

Logging onto the computer, I immediately booked a one-way flight to Kenya and, although I knew the risks and dangers of leaving my girlfriend behind, I could not help but think of all the innocent families that needed my help. I packed my bags and, as I headed for the front door, I looked over at the tall woman sprawled messily over the couch. Her long blonde hair cascaded over her shoulders, and with a full face of makeup it was hard to see her natural beauty, but a pretty face is nothing if the personality behind it shows nothing but selfishness.

The bustling Gymbian streets were filled with the cries of lonely and frightened children. Families were huddled together on-top of the unstable rooftops that once sheltered their home. Pigs and cows could be seen in the far paddocks, stranded and helpless as the water made it impossible for them to walk. Injured, tired and frail residents could be seen struggling to wade through the water that covered the ground as far as the eye could see.

With Ashaki by my side I began to help a young girl, only looking 3 or 4, who had lost her mother in the most recent influx of rain. She was standing against a doorway, with water pooling at her foot as she held an old rag doll to her chest. Her thick curly hair was knotted and her faded white dress was torn at the seams. Ashaki picked her up and carried her weak body in her arms as we took her someplace safer, but as much as we would have liked, we could not guarantee

IO

CHANGE

that she would be reunited with her mother.

No one cares anymore. It has been two weeks and the world has forgotten about the disaster that hit Gymbia. The supportive donations have stopped coming in as publicity has been lost, and those who are fortunate are no longer giving generous offerings.

The water has been drained and is no longer causing damage, but the destruction that has been brought upon this town cannot be undone. Many homes have suffered irreversible scarring. The farmland will not be of any use until the ground is dryer. Disease is quickly spreading and the many people who have died from fatal illnesses will forever remain in the memories of their loved ones.

Ashaki is beautiful. Her untamed, curly black hair flows free past her shoulders that are covered in bright fabric. Her smile is brighter than her sun, and her eyes warmer than the best summer days. She has a heart of gold and her ability to nurture those who have nothing to give her in return astounds me. I've never felt stronger about such an incredible woman and it was during our fourth week working in Gymbia that I confessed my love.

The world is meant to be loved, and it is through the kindness of others that we truly are able to appreciate how amazing people can be.



IO

Nuclear power. Just the mention of these two words triggers a sense of panic, fear and hysteria in many. We are generally quick to associate the words nuclear power with tragic incidents, like the Fukushima accident in March 2013 or the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Yet, the reality is that nuclear power is one of the safest and cleanest methods of generating electricity. Australia has the most known uranium resources worldwide, almost 31% of the world's total. Nevertheless, we use no nuclear power whatsoever. Are we too dependent on coal and other fossil fuels to produce electricity? Or have we grown a misconceived fear of nuclear power, to even consider it as part of our future?

We should look to France, as nuclear energy is its primary source of power. Approximately 75% of its electricity is derived from nuclear power. In contrast, Australia relies heavily on fossil fuels, especially coal. According to the World Bank, in 2012, 95.4% of Australia's energy consumption was from fossil fuels. Enormous amounts of greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels. These greenhouse gases play a key role in the worldwide crisis of global warming. In addition, Australia is among one of the highest per capita greenhouse gas polluters in the world. Scientists predict that a global temperature rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius will result in the disappearance of 25% of the Earth's plants and animals. Should we just sit back and watch as we destroy our ecosystems? We can change this by switching to alternative methods of energy, like nuclear power.

Unlike fossil fuels, nuclear power emits no greenhouse gases. A nuclear power station works by nuclear fission, which is the splitting of the nucleus of atoms. Massive amounts of energy are released when atoms split. Moreover, nuclear fission only produces small amounts of waste. Nuclear fission is also extremely effective, as two hundred and fifty grams of uranium produces twenty thousand times more electricity than the same amount of coal.

In spite of this, many argue that nuclear power can have devastating repercussions as there are lots of risks affiliated with it. For instance, the terrible Chernobyl incident in Ukraine in 1986 killed 30 people and injured countless more. Similarly, the dreadful Fukushima meltdown in Japan in 2013, demonstrated the detrimental effects that radiation can have on our health. Additionally nuclear power reactors are quite costly to build. Some also contend that nuclear power will

NUCLEAR POWER IN AUSTRALIA

SARAH CHEANG
ORATOR OF THE YEAR
WINNER

IO

increase the possibility of being a potential target of a terrorist attack. However the benefits of nuclear power significantly outweigh the risks.

In the shadow of the recent Fukushima disaster, we now have a promising solution to prevent any future nuclear accidents, thorium reactors. Also known as a molten salt reactor, thorium reactors, as the name suggests, use thorium as a fuel rather than uranium. Thorium is very similar to uranium, except it is three times more abundant in the Earth's crust. Thorium reactors are immune to melting down and blowing up, because they do not rely on huge amounts of water to cool them. Alternatively, they have a passive cooling system. Furthermore, thorium reactors are resistant to becoming nuclear weapons, as the fuel is unsuitable for use as a nuclear weapon.

Australia must consider implementing nuclear power as it is an auspicious option for the future. It is also both a stable and reliable base load of energy. In spite of costly building expenses, the upkeep of a nuclear power station is relatively cheap. Nuclear power is also extremely clean and environmentally friendly. Although the problem of radiation and waste remains unresolved, scientists are working to develop new technology to safely and securely manage and store the radioactive waste produced by nuclear fission. This year, the G7 leaders pledged to make a substantial reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 and to totally eliminate the use of fossil fuels by 2100. Australia would not be able to even meet demands for our current energy consumption using only renewable energy sources. We may be apprehensive to accept nuclear power as a consequence of former nuclear accidents, but we must remember that although we are products of our past, we don't have to be prisoners of it.



IO

The agitating clanging of the bell resonated through the school, causing the silent classroom to erupt with chatter. People streamed out from their classes into the hallways as they hastily tried to reach their lockers before everyone else. The door closed with a soft click and I was left alone in the classroom, with nothing but the dim sunlight to keep me company. Unhurriedly, I slid my books one by one into my bag, and got out of my chair, making sure to push it under the table. I slowly trudged to the gaping school gates. There were many students outside, all of them on their phones, rapidly texting their families and friends. I found my way to a decently shaded spot, where I placed my bag on the ground. Sliding my hands into my pockets, I began to wait.

Mere minutes of waiting felt like hours to me. One by one, my classmates left with their parents. I listened to their animated voices, chattering about what they did at school as well as other pointless trivialities. Watching and waiting patiently, I stood still like a living statue as the wind whispered around me, gently ruffling my brown locks. After what seemed like an eternity, the last of the students left, and I was finally left alone.

It is an immensely strange feeling to wait for no one; like expecting a wish to be granted when it hasn't even been made. I knew my parents weren't coming. That was a fact I knew to be true. Yet, I stood there, silently waiting for them to arrive.

'They have to come,' I thought. 'They will come.'

Seconds of waiting became minutes, and minutes became hours. My bottom lip trembled and the last of my foolish hope crumbled to dust. A single crystalline tear slid down my face and paused for a second on my chin, glinting in the sunlight, before dropping onto the grey slate ground. Another followed, and soon my body was racked with sobs, my former feigned composure completely lost. It was as if every individual one of my tears, was a fraction of my hope, so pure and perfect; and when they hit the unforgiving ground, splattering in all directions, my innocent longing would shatter, piece by piece. As I sank down onto the ground, defeated, I felt something cold drip suddenly onto my head. Slowly tilting my head upwards, I was met with grey clouds and rain. It didn't take long for it to start pouring down. Closing my eyes, I let the cool drops mingle with my own hot tears until there was no telling the difference between the two. You wouldn't be able to tell that I was crying, but

ABANDONED

FELICITY CHEN

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

RUNNER-UP

IO

nonetheless, I was completely and utterly broken inside.

I slowly made my way to the tram station, not caring for the cold. In fact, I didn't try to resist it, choosing instead to simply relax and accept it. It was my sole source of comfort, and I shivered as it wrapped its bony and bitter hands around me, offering me condolence. The tram arrived and for a short second, I saw a pale girl with bloodshot eyes in the translucent door. She looked at me reproachfully, as if her sadness had been caused by me. I made my way through the silent tram and sat on the far end, collapsing carelessly onto the seat and closing my eyes, exhausted without having done anything.

'Get out of my house!'

'Your house?! Who earns the damn money for the family?!

'You still call this a family?! There isn't one damned good thing about this place!'

'Oh yeah?! Well how about you get out of here since you hate it so much?!

I heard something smash against the wall, as I huddled in a fetal position behind my bedroom door. My hands were tightly pressed on my ears as I desperately tried to block out the terrifying noises coming from outside my room.

'Why did I ever think I loved you anyway?! You're nothing but an eyesore!'

'I'm glad we finally agree on something! You've never done anything but complain!'

A door slammed, and I heard my dad kick the wall and yell in frustration. Through a grey-tinted window, I saw the car hastily reverse out of the driveway and speed off out of my sight.

It had been 8 months since that incident, and I was in my room again, attempting to solve a particularly difficult question. I heard the front door open as well as some muffled footsteps, before hearing it close again. I was quite certain that had been my mother. Could I even call her that anymore? She obviously didn't care very much about me, only ever stepping foot into this house to drop off my money for a month. She had a new family to love now. A salesman as a husband and two small sons. Of course she didn't have time for me. Sighing, I put my arithmetic aside and went to collect the monthly delivery. I shivered as my bare feet touched the cold white tiles of the kitchen floor. Whilst my mother had moved on successfully, my father was much less fortunate. He is always out drinking, trying pathetically to drown his sorrows in alcohol. I almost never see him either, unless I am still awake in the latest hours of the night, when I hear his heavily drunken footsteps stumble towards his room, bringing the stench of alcohol with him.

IO

The tram stopped suddenly, and I was jolted awake. The rain was still pouring outside. I quickly got off the tram and took my time walking back home. There wasn't anything I could look forward to anyway. The house is cold and grey, giving it a dead and lifeless feeling. This was my home now. This was my life. No longer would my father come to pick me up from school with his beckoning arms and cheery smile. No longer would my mother be sitting on the couch in front of the television, welcoming me home. The house would never again be filled with laughter or the warmth and life that family brought.

As I reached the doorway, the rain stopped abruptly. Now even the rain has abandoned me.



ABANDONED

IO

SONNET

STEPHANIE HUA

Is it okay, if I am not perfect?
Is it fine, if I sometimes make mistakes?
A jar of a sister, filled with 'expect'.
Mother's hunger for hope, has to be slaked.

I swear I am trying to my fullest.
You slug forward, you and your heavy shell,
A doctor, a lawyer or a dentist,
Do I need a coat of armour as well?

Should I be like her treading hefty feet,
She who doesn't always give me great hints.
She who does everything like an elite,
I'll mirror every move, stepping in prints.

Happiness will find you, not if you force,
Mother commands, but I make her throat hoarse.



IO

He does everything with utmost compliance, eyes dewy with joy and submissiveness. Dogs are such naive, beautiful beasts. He laps at my fingers, not seeking, but offering affection.

‘See you Tiger...’

‘Woof!’



A hand slapping my back and a greasy black pompadour wobbling over his emerald eyes: Antony is back. Who knew studying in America could toughen a lad so much, his nose and jawline now gaunt. If he were originally a Greek god, he’s now a marble statue of one.

‘Whoa buddy, you’re looking great! How was it? You went without even telling anyone, we all missed you, y’know?’ Andy teased, gently grinding an elbow into Tony’s third rib. Tony smiled without showing his alluring marble teeth, that’s new. Henry walked around the corner resting his arm around Tony’s shoulder.

‘I learnt a game which they always play in the pub, it’s kinda like a variation of Russian Roulette’, he explains, ‘You roll two die and if their sum is 2two or 12 you must complete a dare’ the freckled cubes sit patiently on his palm. Henry tosses the die between his hands. Six and six.

‘Um, I dare you... e-eat this stale cookie’ Tony stutters, lips and fingers quivering as he hands him an overdue snack from the depths of his pocket.

Edward rolls two and five. Jonathan rolls one and three. The blocks chatter in my hand. One and one.

I shrug, anticipating, Tony doesn’t make good ones.

‘You know Karson’s bag? The black one that’s always in his locker, it’s stinking up the locker room, probably his old sports gear or something. I dare you, take his bag.’

‘Right, I’ll try grabbing it after school’

‘Um, you need to take it now.’

‘Don’t worry bro, you can trust me’

He hesitated.

It’s quite heavy, emitting a putrid odour. I drag it out of his locker. Bump, crack. Oops. I think something snapped, it should be okay if it’s a baseball bat or a racquet, I’ll buy him a new one. Tony didn’t tell me where to take it to. I’ll take it home, probably wash and throw out a few things.

I DARE YOU,
TAKE HIS BAG

STEPHANIE HUA

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HONOURABLE MENTION

IO

I DARE YOU,
TAKE HIS BAG

The bag is perched on my seat. I reach my hand in pulling out, a broken baseball bat?

A leg.

A leg brittle and decomposing. Hands shuddering, I eased open the zipper hoping to find any sports equipment, any at all. But none. Unless Karson used his body for sports.

I cannot sleep tonight with him dead in Karson's bag next to me.

'Karson, you know my address?'

'Marty, I followed you home. You took my bag, after all'

'It was a dare'

'I know' He simpered.

'...'

'Do you want to keep it?' He gave him a perfunctory kick.

'Not in particular'

'Here's the fun part. Congratulations on qualifying for the game. You have two cards you can play: Assist me or live in the bag' He recited.

Except Karson you don't understand, I don't really get to 'live' in the bag do I?

Karson swings open the vault.

'Here's my garden'

'I'm sorry but I still don't understand' A pretty dull garden if you ask me, rows and rows of black bags.

'It's a game you see, people never pick strangers, always friends, family, loved ones.' Karson explained, nodding.

A game? Karson's game is tossing bones not die, it's sick, relying on chance, hatred and love. But Karson's my friend.

'Do you know what happens to a human being when faced with death'

'They try to escape, to avoid the end'

'Their hatred and love unravel, like flowers blooming in spring: a truly beautiful sight. All their different coloured petals weaving a garden, a sanctuary.' he announced, arms spread, endearingly.'

He gently unzipped a black bag. I catch a glimpse of a shrivelled up corpse.

I guess he doesn't water them.

'First, we need to do some pruning'

He yanks a corpse out from a bag, drags it by its armpits, then hurls it into an antiquated Mazda.

IO

'Come on'

Cold sweat clings onto my clammy skin, my muscles are aching from the labour, my hands uncontrollably twitching, frantically diving into a black bag searching. I tilt my head backwards, the pill tumbling down my oesophagus. The sweet, sweet loot.

I grab the black bag containing the corpse throwing it into the trunk.

'Can't believe we only made 17 grand, there should be 18, did you take one of 'em?'

He presses his forearm into my neck holding me on the wall. My head pulsates trying to think of an explanation.

'It was juss one, I was having withdraal sytoms' I splutter, slurring. 'Tch' he spits. 'You screwed up Marty...'

'No! Please don't leave me!'

'Please don't leave you? You are leaving me.'

I do not want to be his dog, but I need his goods.

'No! Please Karson, I need my monthly fix!'

'Marty' he pauses 'how about this? I have an offer for you.'

'Yes! Anything please—'

'You get your doses if you keep quiet and dare someone to take my bag'

'Whoa man! How are you? You left without even telling us, we missed you, buddy' Edward teased, gently squeezing my shoulder. I smiled. Sorry guys.

'I kinda miss Tony's game,' the die sit waiting in my trembling palm.

Jonathan tosses the die. Six and six. Oh no, not Jonathan, he's too innocent, too gentle, it would be cruel to use him.

It's sick either way, screw it.

He shrugs.

Sorry Jonathan.

'You know Karson's black bag? The one that's always in his locker, it's stinking up the locker room, probably his old sports gear or something. I dare you, take his bag.'

'Cool, I'll try getting it after school'

'You should take it now..'

'Don't worry bro, you can trust me'

Sorry Jonathan.

I brush the crumbs off my seat. Thank you Karson, he was a delicious one.

IO



PASTICHE OF
HEMINGWAY'S
HILLS LIKE WHITE
ELEPHANTS

DELINA PHAM

IO

The evening brought a cool, but subtle, wind to the café, one that was not easily noticed until you had goosebumps. Moonlight filtered through the clouds, but was enough to illuminate the night. Birds sat on the roof of the church opposite, where bells rang hourly. The café was on the corner of a main road, however, several people always managed to stop by. A mother and her daughter sat at a table outside.

'What should we have?' the mother asked. She took off her cardigan and let it hang against her chair.

'It's a cool night,' the girl said. The church bell rang seven times.

'Let's have coffee.' The mother beckoned for a waiter. 'One strong cappuccino, please, and a skinny latte.'

'Would you like any of them with sugar?'

'None for the cappuccino, and two for the latte.' The mother looked at her daughter. She nodded back, but was looking at the moon.

The man left, and soon came back with two mugs of coffee placed on bone china saucers. He lay the two on the wooden table and slid them to the mother and girl. The girl was still gazing at the moon. It possessed a specific luminance that was only found in spring.

'Nice night,' the mother said.

'Could've been nicer,' the girl blew across the top of her latte.

'At least it's somewhat nice.'

'You don't know that. Just because you say it's nice doesn't mean it is.' The girl drank her coffee.

The mother frowned, then smiled. 'Are you enjoying your latte?'

The girl took another sip in response.

'Is it better than the last café?'

'I don't know,' the girl said. 'It just tastes like coffee. All coffees taste the same.'

The mother had disregarded her cappuccino. She looked at the café window. 'It says they've got a world famous hot chocolate.'

The girl continued to drink her latte.

'Apparently they've also got cakes and biscuits. Would you like to try one?'

'Oh, stop it already.'

'You're the one who should stop. I'm trying to have a nice time,' the mother said. 'We're together at a lovely café, we've ordered and had coffees. Isn't that nice?'

The girl shrugged. 'Could've been nicer if we had ordered three. You were meant to meet her tonight.' As the church bell rang nine

times, the girl's gaze turned back to the moon.

'The moon is beautiful.' The mother looked at it, then at the girl.
'The full moon phase doesn't last long.'

The girl set her cup down onto its saucer and placed her hands in her lap.

'Just like the moon, Fi. It's just a phase, it'll soon pass over, like all the other phases. It might come back, but it won't last long, I promise. I've had plenty of friends who went through the same thing as you.'

The girl turned her gaze to her hands.

'They all saw the same psychotherapist and got fixed.'

'I'm not broken,' the girl looked up at her mother.

'I didn't say you are. I'm just saying that they all saw the same therapist, and look how happy they are now.'

'I'm happy.' The girl sipped at her latte. 'Are you happy?'

'I am. But maybe we can see the same psychotherapist and see what's wrong, I'll be there with you.'

'Nothing is wrong with me.' The girl pressed her ring deep into her finger. It was bought for her just last week.

'Perhaps one of my friends can talk to you about this? I'm sure I can get a hold of them.'

'I said nothing is wrong with me.'

'I didn't say anything was wrong with you. It's just not...natural.'

The birds had stopped chirping.

'When is it planned?'

'Two months.'

'Where at?'

'Her backyard. We were meant to do it at the church, but the priest said it would make people uncomfortable.'

'Am I invited?'

'You are if you think you are.'

'Do you want me to come?'

The girl shrugged and sipped her coffee. 'It's happening whether or not you decide to come.'

The mother's coffee had turned cold. 'But do you want me to come?'

'I don't care.'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't care whether or not you show up.'

'Well, I care.'

'Then if you care, come.'

IO

PASTICHE OF
HEMINGWAY'S
HILLS LIKE WHITE
ELEPHANTS

'It's not that simple, Fi.' The mother looked at the girl. She was looking at the moon. 'I am very happy for you, I really am. It's just...'
The mother turned her back and stared at the church yearningly.

'That's okay. I don't care if you come or not.'

'It's not that easy for me.'

The man returned to collect the cups and saucers. He looked sideways at the mother, whose coffee was not yet touched.

'Are you done with that, ma'am?'

'Yes, take it away.'

'You won't get it back.'

'I know, I know.'

The man glanced at the girl, then took the two sets and walked away.

'You know I love you,' the mother said.

'I know.'

'And you know I'd love to come.'

'I know.'

'But I'm not too sure if I can come. Do you understand?'

'Yes.'

'Are you okay?'

'Yes, I'm okay.'



IO

TELEPHONIST OF
THE TOWN

JULIA RIGG

'Can phone 15 be put through to 19 please?'

'Just putting you through now,' I said in my raw, Aussie accent. People knew us as the tarts of the town – wearing ridiculous layers of makeup; reapplying our lipstick every second call, just in case it had smudged on the transmitter... not that it mattered, as we worked throughout the day in a room surrounded by women. I grabbed the worn, wire cord and placed it into slot 19.

My job, rather basic, but better than nothing, didn't require much beyond answering the phone to people who wanted to be connected to others. Warrnambool during the 1950s was a small town; everyone knew everything about everybody. I'd even started recognising people's voices and phone numbers.

Another call came through, interrupting my thoughts and giving me a quick, sharp fright. 'Hi there, may phone 34 be put through to 23 please?' Phone 34 was Jane's boyfriend. Jane was a staff member here doing telephony and she ensured everyone knew which line he was on just in case he ever called. 'Just putting you through now', I said curiously. I'd never been asked to connect someone to phone 23 before, maybe they were new to town. There was no secret that sitting in front of phone calls accessible to me sparked much temptation to listen in, despite the fact it was strictly prohibited. I wasn't sure what went through the other telephonists' minds, but for me, I was desperate to know what conversations those connected lines were having. Instead of disconnecting myself from the call and making the line available to the next person, I listened in, my heart rate fast.

'Maggie, how are you settling in? I haven't got the chance to arrange a time to meet and catch up on the years we've missed together, but now that work's under control and Jane on full-time, there should be an opportunity.' Hearing these words would generally put someone off listening to any more out of shock and horror, but the curiosity in me seemed to dominate and I sat in silence waiting for her reply.

'Hello James, I'm settling in just fine. The town is very small and I can tell everyone knows each other by the way a passerby interacts with each other. Yes, I would like to see you, it has been far too long.' I had finally heard enough. I turned off the line and tilted my head in Jane's direction, innocent of knowing the words I had just heard. I didn't know whether to tell her what I'd heard or not as we weren't

IO

particularly close, but I knew if I was her I'd be desperate to know anything that went on behind my back.

The time was 6:00pm. That was when we turned off the telephone exchange and went home. From the moment I'd heard that conversation, I felt bad knowing something she didn't, and so powerful; like Big Brother. My nosiness once again overruled, and I confronted her, too foolish to realise what I was about to enter myself into. 'Jane,' I called, running after her as she stepped outside the post office in her pink heels. 'Your man called today, line 34. I thought I would do you a favour and listen to who he was talking to – I'd never heard of the line 23 before.'

'What makes you think it is alright to intrude on someone's private conversations like that? It's against our confidentiality policy.' I could tell Jane got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning, but I continued in the hope she would appreciate what I was just about to tell her.

'Yes, I know it was wrong of me, but you have to understand that I heard something that you might want to know.' I continued, 'He's seeing Maggie, she's new to town, but they have history... he's keeping things from you.' Her reaction just worsened... probably frustrated and confused about the reality of the situation, and knowing I heard something that was personal to her. She marched off in a fury.

I woke up to Friday. I only needed to get through this day and I would be able to enjoy my weekend. As I entered the post office, I was immediately confronted by the post master, angry as ever. I knew straight away, without the need for words or an explanation, that he had found out I had breached the confidentiality rules.

As it can be imagined, that Friday was a quick one in the office, full of signing papers and lectures by the post master. I could only think of one thing when leaving the building for the last time; not to let nosiness and curiosity get in front of wisdom that following policy is customary no matter what the circumstance.



IO

Scientists say that rain is the most misunderstood weather element.

It is complex and powerful. It is the collision of two vastly different energy sources. Rain is formed by the violent meeting of a high and a low-pressure system. Each with different intentions, these pressure systems when combined, result in a release of energy.

Unimpressed, I straighten the knife. *There*. My eyes dart towards the kitchen, and with them I feel the rest of my body move in a frantic stride. I open the dishwasher. The hot steam finds my face, and I can feel my skin give in to the pressure of the heat. A single drop of sweat forms in the black bags under my eyes and begins to fall slowly. It eventually joins the others that perch in the bridge between my nose and upper lip. I pull the warm plates out and place each down on the kitchen bench with a soft, but hurried *clink*. I look to the clock, then briskly to the plates. And back to the clock, realizing that I had looked, but not closely enough to comprehend the time. 6:48.

Twelve minutes. *Twelve*, check on the pie in the oven and the eldest, finest wine in the cupboard. *Eleven*, make what is a complete mess of myself, into someone elegant. Someone that would impress even her. *Ten*, cover the monstrosity that was my face. *Nine*, ask the kids to brush their hair and clean their teeth. *Eight*, demand that the kids brush their hair and clean their teeth. *Seven*, tell Dave to demand the kids brush their hair and clean their teeth. *Six*, check on the pie in the oven, and the eldest, finest wine in the cupboard. *Five*, polish the cutlery so that I could see the same clear image of a tired, stressed and worried woman looking back at me. *Four*, light the candles, so that the warmth could shower her nastiness. *Three*, pat out the creases in my dress and find the centre part in my hair. It usually fell to the side and put up a fight as I pushed it to where I desired.

Two, breathe in and let my chest protrude far from my body. *One*, close my eyes and let out a large breath. It would be the last one for the next few hours.

Díng dong. I have lived in my house for years now, and had become very familiar with the chiming of the doorbell each day. But tonight, it scared me. The sound lingers and carries a threatening quality in its tone. I wait for a couple of seconds, before opening the door to let in the squalling night air. It was bitter. The wind whistles as Mick, my brother, gracefully steps through the doorway. Not far behind him is my high-spirited mother, Karen. The wind roars and with

PETRICHOR

MEREDITH RULE

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

OVERALL SCHOOL WINNER

IO

one malicious gale, carries another being through the door. It's her. I hug Mick, who greets me with a familiar, friendly smile. I kiss my mother, after the children ran to her excitedly. Several pairs of eyes were watching, waiting for a friendly encounter between us both. But I feel myself freeze, as her eyes lock with mine – Maybe it was the tempest brewing outside that had seeped through the door as they entered. I am reluctant to, but I lean in and give her a hug. She grips onto me, and that's when I thought I'd never breathe again. Her hair is freshly washed and curled. An overpowering aroma encompasses her neck, one that I could not bear to stand much longer. And that's when I notice her ears. They were studded with my mother's pearls from when she was a young girl; the ones that I was promised to have in my own ears. All I could think of, was all of the horrible revolting names I could call her. But then I realized, that I never would do it. Never could do it.

As we pull apart, I recollect my thoughts, gripping them tightly as they are pulled into the tornado that is stirring within.

'Hello, Isabelle,' I say kindly. She replies the only way she knows how: rudely. 'Wow! You've filled out a lot since the last time I saw you.' I smile as politely as I could in that moment, try to forget it and move on.

I welcome everybody, and insist that they take a seat in the dining room. As they are taking off their coats and finding their spots, I take the chance to escape to the kitchen. I rest my hands on the bench, and my head drops to my chest, realizing that this moment would be the calm before the storm. Before I would have to face her again. I would sit as far away as possible, and place my attention on the flickering candles or the children or the polished cutlery. It had been over a few minutes, a few too many minutes to leave Dave and her together, even with others in the room. I grab the bottle of wine I had prepared earlier, pour a glass, gulp it down and treasure its comforting taste.

I return with the wine, to find six of the seven wooden chairs occupied. The seventh, I discover, is a spot facing my mother. It is also the vacancy right next to Isabelle, who seems to be relishing the surprised expression on my face. 'Is everything okay?' She had asked a question that she had already known the answer to. She knew that I was annoyed, and that I was standing on a cliff ready to throw myself over the edge into the violent, crashing waves. But, like I had done many times before, I clench my jaw, purse my lips and nod.

IO

'Can I help anyone to any drinks?' I ask, holding the wine out, purposefully displaying the label, which reads: *Margaret River, Shiraz, 1985*. Mum's face lights up, Dave nods pleasingly, and Mick holds out his glass. Isabelle pulls a disgusted face that I had seen so many times before.

'I'm not drinking. I'm watching my weight.' She said as she gestures to her flat stomach and her forgotten appetite. I look to my full glass, my portly belly and then to my wedding ring, surrounded by my bulging fingers.

I spent the majority of the night in the kitchen. The smell of the pie oozes out of the crevices of the oven, and it relaxes me. Feeling that it's ready, I take it out, and carefully serve a generous piece on each plate.

Dinner continues. Conversations are tailored around her successes, her ambitions and her interests. I watch the candle sway erratically, and remain silent.

As everyone places their cutlery together in the centre of their plate, I collect the dishes. Her plate remains virtually untouched. I notice a movement of the carrots and potato, but the pie sits full and cold.

Before I can shed a tear, I grab the dishes and disappear into the kitchen. I place them down and run my hands along the kitchen bench. Like a monsoon that would begin ever so gently, a tear rushes down my face. I had fallen into the position that I had at the beginning of the night: shoulders hunched, resting on the bench, head in my chest. I can't control my hatred for her. *How can she be so rude?* I am so angry, so jealous, and so sick and tired. I have had enough.

Moments passed, I remain still and distraught. Like a strike of lightning I heard the dishes clatter. I look up, shocked to find her slowly placing them into the sink and washing them with her hands. Her sleeves are rolled up, hair is pulled back, and face expressionless. At first I am confused. It is dead silent. The wind outside had stopped wailing and had calmed itself. I sniff. I realize that this was the first time, in the many years that I had known her, that we are alone together. She seems different; normal. She is not nasty, and is acting out of kindness. And it is then that the heavens opened. I can't control the relief, as tears stream down my face. She has been hiding behind someone that she isn't. We are alike, and she is nothing different to me.



IO

Corey was unimpressed. His interview was supposed to start 15 minutes ago. If they didn't call him in soon, he would be tardy for his much anticipated lunch date. He had arranged to meet a bewitching little blonde with flirtatious eyes at 1pm, and had reserved a table at a lavish restaurant around the corner. It was now 12:45 and he was going to have to leave if they kept him waiting much longer.

He jiggled his custom tailored Italian leather dress shoe on the oak coffee table in front of him. The incessant tapping caused the prim receptionist across the waiting room to squint her beady eyes at him over her spectacles in a chastising manner. He waved a dismissive hand at her, smirked, and kept jiggling. What was her problem? She obviously had no idea who he was!

Corey was in the waiting room of his uncle's notorious finance company. He was there under protest. His parents had decided that it was time for him to earn his own income and experience the working world. It was a bit of a bore really, but he had agreed because his father had promised him the use of their chalet that weekend if he went to the interview. Perhaps if his date went well, the alluring blonde could accompany him.

It wasn't as if Corey needed a job. His family was ridiculously wealthy and Corey had just about everything he required to live a first-class life; sky-rise apartment, corporate box tickets to NBA games, stylish clothes, cars, silver spoons, and the renowned last name that never failed to reel in the gold-digging ladies.

Corey Guradi had a handsome face. His teeth were alabaster and perfectly straight thanks to the overpriced dentist his parents had paid for in his childhood. His Armani suit curled snug around his toned and tanned body, the new Rolex he purchased just for this occasion encasing his wrist. He knew the blonde would be impressed, and it had been impossible not to notice the envious and admiring glances from the chump who had sat across from him in the waiting room, and was now being interviewed in the next room. Corey could not fathom why the interview with that poor excuse of a rival was taking so long. It was inconceivable that he would ever be chosen over Corey.

The door to the interview room swung open. The chump practically fell out of the room, his pudgy face blotchy and with obvious sweat stains on his puckered shirt. Corey didn't even try to stifle his disdainful snort at the sight. This was going to be too easy. He would trump that poor excuse for a rival in 5 minutes tops, and

IO

make his date after all.

‘Mr Guradi, Mr Grey will see you now.’

Corey leisurely rose from his comfortable position on the old leather couch. He fixed the gold cufflinks on his shirt, straightened his already straight tie and passed a hand through his golden locks. He paraded with supreme confidence into the interview room, perfectly aware of the admiring looks directed at him by his fumbling opponent and the snooty receptionist.

To anyone else, Mr Grey would have appeared intimidating as he sat at his large impressive desk with his arms folded in front of him. Corey, however, was not just anyone, and he was certainly not fazed by his uncle. He flung himself into the low armchair opposite the desk and greeted his interviewer with an apathetic smirk.

‘I’ve run out of time, so let’s make this quick,’ he told his uncle.

Mr Grey raised one of his thick, unruly eyebrows at his nephew.

‘Corey’, he said, ‘why should I employ you? What can you offer my business that is unique and that I need? That other guy had some really good ideas.’

Corey jerked his head back in laughter, ‘Oh, is this really necessary Uncle? Let’s stop playing games. We both know I’m getting the job. I vote that we just wrap this show up now, agreed?’

Corey stood up, delivered his uncle one of his victorious smiles, and left the room. ‘Wish me luck, I’ve got a date,’ he called over his shoulder as he retreated.

Mr Grey raised both his thick, unruly eyebrows, obviously unimpressed by the lack of professionalism his nephew had brought to the interview. He had always suspected that young Corey lacked depth, but this was beyond the pale.

As Corey sashayed down the suburban streets after his outstanding interview, he couldn’t help but notice how vibrant the world around him had suddenly become. He felt alive; the sky was bluer, the grass greener, and his Rolex even more lustrous than when he first checked it this morning.

Life was good.

As Corey settled himself at the table to await his date, his smartphone beeped with a notification. Corey nearly tumbled off his chair.

‘Corey, I’m sorry, you didn’t get the job. See you at Christmas – Uncle Grey.’



IO

INTO THE
SPOTLIGHT

ANGELA YAN

'And... cut!'

As the camera stopped rolling and Nolan uttered his last words, adrenalin filled his body. The director met him with a firm handshake and he replied with a grin, knowing that this moment was the start of his career.

Pushing through the doors of *20th Century Fox Studios*, he knew he had done a good job and loved the feeling. It was a feeling of something changing; as if he had completely left his old life behind. Looking up at the lavish apartments of Los Angeles, Nolan thought about his own place with its faded timber walls and parched front lawn. He longed for a better life, one filled with fame, fortune and comfort. Strolling back to his hotel, he glimpsed his reflection in a shop window, displaying the most lavish jewellery one would ever hope to find. When he saw himself, he was wearing his old *Beatles* t-shirt with a pair of ripped jeans. Unlike before, however, his hair, which was usually in disarray, was gelled to perfection. A flawless head on his body stared at him and he smiled back.

After a year of anticipation, Nolan sat at the premiere of the blockbuster, knees shaking and feet tingling. A week later, all of his friends and family had seen the movie. That same week, he began receiving offers from multiple directors wanting him in their own films. With each letter in the mail or phone call that he answered, his pockets became heavier. He replaced his worn *Dunlop* sneakers with *Louis Vuitton* slip-ons and his scruffy t-shirts with *Ralph Lauren*. To his parents' sadness but also their pride, he left home and moved into a penthouse in the heart of the city. He fit into the 'high life' like a hand in a glove and it welcomed him with parties, gatherings and most importantly, money.

A year after the success of his first blockbuster, Nolan woke up to the sun creeping through the openings scattering the forest of skyscrapers. It was a Saturday, a day to relax and do whatever he pleased with his wealth. The air was crisp, biting at his cheeks as he left the well-heated lobby. Just as he placed his gloves over his numb fingertips, he heard a squeal and looked around to find two star-struck girls armed with their iPhones. After the selfies were taken, he continued on his path, still hearing the chatter of the girls. It was new to him, this world of fame, and he simply couldn't navigate it yet. As he turned the corner, he stepped into the café where he was a regular, and was met by the aroma of fresh coffee beans and warm

IO

pastries that caressed his taste buds. Breaking his trance, however, was someone, relatively forcefully, tapping his arm. After five photos taken and the same number of autographs given, he left with a stained magazine, half-eaten croissant and cold coffee.

More aggravated than before, he crossed the road and walked into a nearby park where he sat on a wooden bench by the pond. Looking across the water, the ducks quarreled while the delicate autumn leaves rained around them with each gust of wind. Opening his magazine, Nolan was mortified to see a picture of himself, just as he did every day, walk onto his balcony, stretch and look to the cars below, all, of course, without his shirt on. Fame brought him a world where privacy meant nothing and his every move was open to criticism. Overwhelmed with anger, he shouted and threw the magazine into the pond. When he heard the single click of a camera, he instantly regretted his actions. Storming back onto the main street and towards his hotel, he was swamped by a mob of paparazzi, one grabbing him to a halt. Without thinking, his arm swung around and landed right on the man's cheekbone. The crowd was silenced by a loud 'crack' and the pavement was painted red. He looked down with tears in his eyes at his blood-stained knuckles. Fame was consuming everything that made him himself, changing him into someone he couldn't control.

Months passed and the date of the court hearing arrived. Legs trembling and palms saturated, he listened to the testimonies of the witnesses, each one stabbing him with guilt. After the confirmation of the gavel, he felt the sting of the metal cuffs around his wrists. As he glimpsed the man's bandaged face and icy glare, he looked to his feet. However, meeting the hopeful eyes of his loyal fans, his face lifted; three months alone to reflect, regroup and not let these people down again. Feeling the warmth of his mother's arms wrapped around his shoulders, he turned towards the packed corridor.

'Sorry mum,' he muttered.



I O

A GREY FUTURE

ROSE ADAMS

SUZANNE NORTHEY PUBLIC

SPEAKING AWARD

WINNER

The year is 2030. You wake up and look outside your bedroom window. The apocalyptic night of a world reduced to metal, fire and ash, where you are simply a plaything in a world governed by robotics, has become real.

Whilst robotic advancement could prove enormously beneficial to our society – particularly in relation to medicine and manufacturing productivity – can we be sure these hyper-intelligent robots would have our best interests at heart? Do you really think that we slow, soft-bodied and biological humans, couldn't be overthrown by the fast and technological?

Currently robotic prosthetics are improving thousands of lives. But as science continues to push the boundaries of the possible, these prosthetics are slowly becoming available only to those who can afford them, not necessarily those who need them. Now, the latest advancement in robotic prosthetics is called the 'Terminator' arm. This prosthetic is wizard. When you see food and you want to eat set food, your brain sends signals to your arm, telling it to pick up the food, eat the food. This prosthetic can do that. And just for the small price of \$45,000.

Ironically, the countries with the highest rates of amputations, with more than 300,000 occurring each year due to land mines, are developing and war-torn. Do you really think they will be able to afford this? They are creating an incredible piece of robotic technology, but being so unaffordable, it is useless.

We have all seen the horrific work safe ads; we know that many dangerous jobs exist in today's world. But if we implemented robotics specifically in professions where lives were put at risk, couldn't we save them? For example, last year 92 workers in a Samsung factory in South Korea died of leukaemia because of exposure to benzene and other cancer-causing chemicals. This was completely preventable. Do you know who can't get leukaemia? Robotics.

But where do we draw the line? It is estimated that in 25 years, 3 million professions will be automated. Do you think that could be true? But when you think about it we can see it happening now. I mean I can't even remember the last time I haven't used the self-serve checkout at Woolworths.

Now the picture becomes clear, doesn't it? A world where a robot delivers your mail, collects your rubbish, cleans your house, and even teaches your subjects. They are everywhere but what if they turn against us?



The truth is, that by advancing robotics and artificial intelligence we are summoning a demon. We are conjuring up something that is potentially so much more powerful than us, and we don't even know if we will be able to control the results

Robotics really are a threat to us, and I am not the only one who thinks so. World-renowned scientist Professor Stephen Hawking believes that if we don't control the development of robotics it could really 'spell the end of the human race' and I couldn't agree more. These robots could take off on their own, re-design themselves and then overthrow us without a moment's hesitation. It will be us against them; humans, limited by our slow biological evolution. Do you really think we won't be superseded?

Now, whilst we are on the topic of armies of killer robots, I'm sure whenever you think about this, which of course you all do on a daily basis, you think many years into the future. How about today? The US army has been given the all clear to explore the replacement of human forces with robot ones, stating that, if they begin to see a threat from the robots, they can just pull the plug. But really, should we allow it to get to that stage?

Will these 'soldiers' have empathy and all the subtle advantages that come with it? Will they be able to distinguish targets and use force proportionately? Understand the difference between a man holding a gun and a child brandishing a plastic sword? I mean these robots are called LAR's, lethal autonomous robots. I hear lethal and I'm done. These robots have one sole purpose to identify, attack and kill targets without any order given by a human. Surely giving a machine the ability to choose who they can kill violates fundamental human dignities. For these robots to be useful, we need to give them the ability to make decisions but with that comes the ability to rebel.

The question you have to ask yourself is this: what is going to stop intelligent machines from grouping together and rewiring themselves so all the safeguards we put in to protect the human race, stop working?

It really is as Nathan, a technology titan who has created a female robot, said in 2015 science fiction thriller *Ex Machina*, 'One day the robots are going to look back on us the same way we look at fossil skeletons on the plains of Africa. An upright ape living in dust with crude language and tools, all set for extinction.'



RAIN

MILLA MARSTON

I can smell it. I can feel the humidity rise as the clouds roll through and blanket the town in grey.

It's Rainday.

A light breeze blows through my sandglass window, a cool change from the usual dry heat of every other day. The women pull out and rain sails and erect them facing the direction of the breeze to catch maximal water. At the same time the men run and ready themselves for the harvest. The Head wears his racoon cap and leads the others towards the border of town.

We are all taken down the hall in single file and grab our boots seed bags. Our job is to cultivate the land and plant the new crops for the town. We work quick and effectively. There's no knowing when the next Rainday will be. The Thinkers have tried to predict their patterns but there is something that doesn't add up.

II

Every Rainday, enough rain is collected to sustain us until the next, though rations are decreasing. The harvest always brings back enough meat too, but I've been to the edge of town myself and there is nothing there, no animals. Here, no one questions it, saying it has been like this for decades but it has never added up to me.

The rain continues until the ground around our town is sodden and the men struggle to get back. I stop suddenly, the sky then clears and its back to dry drought weather. All of the children are gathered back inside and we go back into our schedule. Today we have a visit from the Head.

'Today's harvest has been rich. We found one of what we believed to have died out during the first year of the drought, a kangaroo. Tonight we shall have a town celebration. This Rainday signifies hope for us, we will find others.'

Quarantine is what they call it. After the epidemic, our town was closed off and quarantined, told for our safety. The only government messages we have received since this day are deliveries of supplies that we ourselves can't grow or produce and messages promising hope. I though am sceptical. We haven't had a Rainday like this for years and I'm curious. Just curious. After lunch, I run to the town bell tower and look out for others still beyond the town boundary. Its barren. That's when I feel a whisper on my neck and a hand on my shoulder. It is just Xander.

Xander and I have been placed together since our pre-schooling and he is one of the only people I trust in this dry town. He questions

it too sometimes; the randomness yet perfectly timed nature of the Raindays. We want to get out, go beyond, and today is our day. He gives me a knowing look. We've been planning this for a year and the time has come.

The children all line up to go into their next classes and we follow suit, lagging near the back. In our bags we have a small supply of water and our lunch. We know the bush well. We've had the red dirt as our home forever and we know how to live off the Earth. As the classroom door draws closer and the teachers walk in, we run. We run quickly and swiftly, dodging eyes, anything that could catch us out, anything that could give us away. As the bell tower rings, we are out of the suburban town. Alone. We head towards the bush-land, to edge of the town border. I look over to Xander, who seems different, more aware, scared and stiff. Walking into the shade he looks over at me, and I know what he's thinking. This was a stupid idea.

'I need to know what's out there.'

His lips turn down, his eyes tracing the ground. 'What are we going to do when we get there? If there are people out there they aren't going to just accept us with open arms and tell us the story of why we are really here.' He's right.

'I'm going, you can go back.' It is my final effort to get him to continue.

'You'll die without me.' He jokes, but as usual, he's probably right.

I can see the town boundary. It is rusted, twisted remains of a fence that was once used to keep us in or something else out. My speed picks up and Xander lags behind. Touching the hot rusted metal feels forbidden, exciting, like the time we snuck out and drank the liquor from the back of the town bar. I keep walking, tripping on the upturned edge of a metal sign with strange unseen symbols. Xander can't comprehend them either, saying that it must be a warning from the epidemic.

In the distance I can make out two dim lights and a green light periodically flashing. I grab Xander's hand and pull him in the direction of the lights. The red dust creates a haze infant of us that is hard to see through.

Then I hear it. The car engine. I run closer, with my arm out stretched in front of me; in an aim to shield my eyes from the dust. It is a building, newer than the ones in our town. It is bland and cold looking. Built from concrete and glass. It stands tall, next to the live



RAIN

car out the front of the door, passenger-less. Xander hold me back, but I need to go inside, get out of this heat and answer my questions. As he relaxes I run inside, Xander not far behind.

They turn to me, confused and guns ready. Xander stands behind me.

‘We need to go.’

Stepping forward, their guns shift and I open my arm and palm. Closer to the centre of the round room, is a man, in a grey clean suit. With Xander still behind me I approach the imposing man.

‘Welcome Bliss and Xander. Men, lower your guns.’

How does he know who we are?

We are lead to a meeting room where the man explains it all, the Raindays, the epidemic, everything. It’s hard to take in. I imagine it’s between how people feel when they find out they are adopted or have a terminal illness. Empty. Each one of us in the town, each family, holds the key to finding a cure. A cure to this Epidemic. The men during every Rainday weren’t hunting, they were being tested and the rain was used as a device of control and reason. After the epidemic was cured our safeguarded town was no longer a necessity yet they have kept us believing so in case of another out break.

It is too much to take in. Xander and I are taken to a room where we are to stay until they work out what to do with us.

In the room Xander turns me around and whispers in my ear, ‘It is too easy, this must be a test, we need to get out.’

I know what he means, but what now, we are truly trapped in the walls of our own ambition.



II

It's two o'clock in the morning and I am jolted awake by the harsh sound of the air-raid siren, cutting through the rhythmic drumming of rain on the roof. Quickly, I light the candle on my nightstand, grab the half-packed satchel beside my bed and stuff my blanket into it, snatch up my pillow under my arm and run for the nursery. I sweep my two year-old brother, Anton, into my arms and dash into the kitchen. Six year-old Sofie runs in, trembling like a leaf, but with her small emergency satchel swung over her shoulder and pillow under her arm, the mini mirror-image of myself. A few seconds later, Mama and my twin brother, Franz, come in, each bearing satchels, Mama carrying the baby.

Mama shepherds us into the pouring rain, and onto the frantic, crowded street, full of panicked women, children and teenage boys, who, like Franz, are too young to join the army. We are all running desperately toward Gesundbrunnen underground train station, which leads into windowless Bunker B, where we shelter during these frequent raids. The three minute walk from our home to the station feels more like hours, as we glance hurriedly at the rain-blurred sky, searching for, but hoping to not see, Allied planes.

We reach the bunker just as the first bomb rocks the earth. We scramble through the unmarked green door on the underground platform, leading to safety. I slip on the wet concrete stair as another bomb shakes the ground beneath my feet. For a split second, I see myself tumbling down the stairs, the unlucky Anton still in my arms. But I feel Franz's strong grasp on my arm as he steadies me and we continue down the stairs.

The frame around the door entering the airlock is lit with luminescent paint, making it easy to spot. Beyond that, there is a series of warren-like rooms. We walk together to the room reserved for mothers with young children, which, unlike the rest of the rooms, houses walls lined with bunk beds.

Franz and I help Mama to get settled with her babies before heading out into another room filled with wooden benches. Just as we are sitting down, the all-clear siren goes.

Now that the adrenaline of the evacuation is gone, my feet feel like lead as I slowly clamber to my feet and make my way back in to Mama and the little ones with Franz. We slowly climb four flights of concrete steps out of the bunker and three more flights up from the platform of the station and eventually make it home, into dry clothes

WHEN THE CANDLES GO OUT

MARY MELTON



and back into our beds. Tonight, the whole process took less than an hour.

As the rain continues to pour down day after day, our luck begins to run out as the Allies take advantage of their superior navigational technology and bomb us relentlessly with very minimal resistance from our own air force. The raids begin to stretch out to upwards of three hours and the lack of a proper air-ventilation system begins to be problematic.

We have been in the bunker for over four hours when I see something that freezes my blood: the candles are flickering even though there is no air movement. The Sicherheitsund Hilfsdienst, security and help service orders an evacuation of what is supposed to be our safe haven. Women and children are rapidly woken from their slumbers on their tiny bunk beds by an alarm, a different alarm, one we're not used to. But we all know what it means: GET OUT NOW! Everyone is thinking the same thing: stay in here, safe from the bombs, and die of asphyxiation, or get out and die from an Allied bomb. Either way we are as good as dead. Although I desperately want to stay with him, I am quickly separated from my brother by the anxious crowd and the desperate pleas for help that I am hearing from my mother. But I cannot find her. There are people everywhere, pressing against me on all sides. I am getting worried; I know my mother needs me. She has three young children and only two hands. My eyes swivel from side to side, as I desperately search for her face in the crowd.

Suddenly, I see her on the other side of the room, about to be pressed into the airlock and out the exit. Relief floods my chest for only an instant until my stomach churns with worry and anxiety as darkness begins to envelop the windowless room. The candles are starting to go out completely. I desperately push my way through the crowd, uttering 'excuse me and thanks as I go, my head throbbing and vision darkening from oxygen deficiency. Soon, I reach her and sweep Anton up into my arms. I balance him on my hip and grab hold of Sofie's small hand. Mama holds baby Elli close to her chest, bundled in blankets, as she tries to soothe her cries of hunger. As quickly as we can, we battle the dizziness and make our way up the crowded staircase into the underground train station. The bombs continue to drop and my anxiety rises as we are shepherded up out of the station onto the street and into the pouring rain, where we



gratefully gulp lungfuls of oxygen.

As we press up against the brick wall of the station for the slight protection it offers, fear becomes reality as we step out into the war-torn street and glance down toward where our house is. Or was. It is not there anymore. It has been blasted to rubble by a direct hit. Panic, fear, shock and sheer sadness close my throat as I wonder what happens next. I want to run over and search through the rubble for any of my belongings, especially my picture of Papa and my brother Lukas before they left to fight.

But I can't. My mind races as I try despairingly to think of a place where we could be safe. Finally, I remember. A cave where Franz, Lukas and I used to play when we were younger. But we have to wait for Franz. As the minutes draw out, panic pulls me under. I remember the headache, blurry vision and dizziness I had when I was in there. And then I know. Franz is not coming. Of all the ways he could die in a war, he is killed by asphyxiation. Silently, I curse Hitler and his Nazis for being too cheap to install a ventilation system in our converted train station bunker. I glance at Mama and understanding passes between us. We mustn't cry. We must hold ourselves together and find safety, or we will all join Franz in death.

My voice cracks as I whisper my idea to Mama. She nods her head and a single tear rolls down her cheek. Together, we run quickly down the street toward the park as Sofie asks where Franz is. I tell her not to worry about him, that he's safe now.

Then I hear an ominous whistling above us. I look up and in the bucketing rain can just make out a small black object whizzing toward the ground. The fear in Mama's eyes freezes my heart and she frees one arm from Elli's blankets and pulls me close and we press the tiny children between us.

And then we are thrown apart from one another as the ground shakes and shrapnel flies and an enormous bang fills my ears. Pain floods my body. I can't breathe. I squint up at the rain and red-hot shrapnel pouring from the sky, hoping to make out just one star.

But I can't. I close my eyes forever as I whisper three words.
'We're coming, Franz.'



HARVEST

HELENA MILEO

Nick commanded the steering wheel of his 4 wheel drive with ease as he swung off the smooth road onto his gravel driveway. The radiant sun bit at his hands through the thin film of dust covering his windscreen. The tread on his car wheels crunched on the grit of the gently curving path, leading the vehicle past flat fields of dry terrain. Guiding his car to a gradual stop, he pulled up next to a neat weatherboard house with a picket-railed veranda, his home. Switching off the ignition, Nick gathered a short pile of paperwork in the passenger seat, steady sliding out of the car. Deep lines took form beside his hazel brown eyes, as he blocked out the glaring sun. It was hot.

Striding up the step of his house to the front door, Nick jiggled the key in the locked door, letting himself in. Cool air spilled out from inside the shade of his house. Stepping inside into the lounge room, Nick threw his key-chain in the small bowl on the coffee table, sliding the paperwork along its side. A muted light filled the room through the weave of the cotton drapes pulled shut over the windows. Sinking into the worn leather sofa, Nick leaned forward to grab the silver laptop sitting on the coffee table. Opening its lid in a swift movement, his desktop was filled in pages covered in numerical figures, a deep frown assuming place on Nick's forehead. Four words circulating in his head, 'Just think about it.' Hours passed, and the bright sun outside sailed to the west, leaving speckles of light scattered through the dark night sky. Nick had not moved, hunched over the single light radiating into the room coming from his laptop. He must have altered the numbers a hundred times, however, there was only one result, debt and deficit. Nick slammed his laptop shut, both hands pushing back his brown wavy hair with a deep sigh. Heaving himself to his feet, he wandered to his room.

There was no sharp shrill which shattered the air of serenity hanging over Nick as he slept, he gently rolled over to the side of his bed and rose. Half-dressed and in a daze he dawdled out onto the veranda overlooking the plot before him. The exuberant sunrise painted layers of sunburst orange cellophane on every surface it touched, shining warmth on Nick's tired face. Pulling on the Blundstone's, which lived beside the front door, Nick descended from the veranda onto the stony driveway. Shading his eyes with his hand, he continued to walk forward down the road leading through the fields. With each step, a small cloud of dust congregated in the air behind his feet. The still air smelled of the heat to come with the

II

rising sun. The orange morning sun drew elongated shadows trailing the foot high stubs sprouting out of the ploughed ground. Walking past his failed crop, he eventually reached the water reservoir on the outskirts of his property. There had once been a large lake used to irrigate the farm, with a network of underground pipes feeding out into the fields. 'The great lake,' Nick scoffed to himself, staring down at the thin layer of sludge sitting in the bottom of the vacuous ditch. The sluggish water reflected pale mauve, the only product from a sky as barren of clouds as his farm of a healthy harvest.

As Nick turned back from the dried up reservoir to return home, a gentle breeze began to stir the stagnant air. He could hear the distant rattle of sunburnt leaves on the boarder of the property. His back to the nearly-risen sun, the wrinkles around his eyes smoothed over. He focused his eyes on the sky, desperately searching for a cloud or any other promise of rain. Nothing but the vastness of a godless sky. A hopeless sky.

Trudging up the step to his home and kicking off his boots, Nick resettled himself on the lounge room sofa. His strong hands resting on either leg, his eyes resting on the stack of paperwork still sitting on the coffee table. 'BRITON REAL ESTATE' boldly written on the header. Reluctantly, he took hold of the documents, studying the text and fine print. Restlessly, he stood up and walked out onto the veranda, closing the creaking screen door behind him. Placing his hand on the warm wooden rail, he closed his eyes towards the horizon. The corrugated iron roof protecting him from the baking sun which was now directly above him. In his mind he could see the wheat fields before him growing, sprouting out of the freshly ploughed land, each golden blade swaying softly in unison to the gentle breeze. He could remember himself as a child, playing in the same field. Hours were spent hiding in the tall grass, moving small mounds of soil with plastic toy trucks. The rich soil would entrench itself in the beds of his nails as he would determinedly scour the ground for life. Only the rich scent of his mother's cooking could lure him from his fields.

Nick's eyes gradually opened to see what was really before him. Steady breaths of wind began circulating around the fields, spreading a dusty mist. The dried twigs sticking abruptly out of the ground did not sway gracefully, chasing the breeze in a ripple effect. No, they stood pathetically like burnt stumps, jutting out of the ground after



HARVEST a bush fire. The wind picked up, channeling a whistling whisper through the pickets of the veranda. A gust of wind blew, signaling a far off cracking of hardened blades of wheat. Nick's grip tightened on the rail, the comforting smooth surface steadying him. A deep knot began to twist in the pit of his stomach. 'What more can I do?' he silently screamed into the galloping breeze.

Turning his back to the fields, he dragged his feet inside. Hesitantly, begrudgingly, he kneeled beside the coffee table, sliding the paperwork towards himself; hand slightly shaking, Nick signed the bottom of the page. With a deep sigh, he heaved himself up and gathered the paperwork. Grabbing his keys off the coffee table, Nick walked outside to his car. The wind gently beat against the windows as he sat inside. Fumbling with his keys, he switched on the ignition. Cautiously reversing out of the driveway, Nick made his way onto the highway on the border of the farm. With his window slightly open, warm air spilled into the car, rustling through Nick's hair. He approached a forest green exit sign; it read 'EDMONT EXIT 8 MILES'. Along the side of the highway the surface of soil had begun to crack under the sun's unwavering heat.

Shifting his glance to the revision mirror, Nick's squinting eyes were instantly drawn to a small grey figure floating on the horizon behind him. Double take. Slowing to an eventual stop, he pulled up on the side of the highway. Deeply inhaling as he stepped out of the car, the air was thick. Casting his eyes down the highway behind him, a shadow-like presence descended in the distance. Clouds. With this, Nick jumped back inside his car, indicated right, locked the steering wheel in full rotation and turned around. Driving back home, the clouds gingerly crept over the sky. Looking down to the passenger seat, Nick smirked at the pile of paperwork accompanying him, 'Not just yet,' he said.



II

'Any spare change?' An almost toothless man addressed the many pairs of shoes passing his make-shift home on the dank, artificially lit train platform.

The man suddenly looked up, feeling the weight of his Styrofoam cup increase by several gold coins. His eyes met the open, slightly bulky face of a reasonably young man, who smiled down at him warmly, even understandingly, before he limped his separate way. Heph Clemence heard a muffled 'Bless you!' as his uneven strides carried him away from the scene. He smiled to himself; he too knew what it was like to be an outsider, to be considered unworthy by his own community. Even though he originated from one of the wealthiest families in all of Volantis, the great-layered metropolis, his handicap had dragged him down its levels nonetheless. Heph was slightly comforted by the fact that others were tangled in situations worse than his own, a thought that he swiftly expelled from his mind, the feeling of shame rising in his chest.

Heph had never travelled so far beneath the surface before. He was two levels deep into the depths of 'the sewers', a name which the citizens of the upper levels colloquially graced the underground cities. The cities above the surface had been experiencing an onslaught of torrential rainstorms for the past week, the kind of storms that flooded the streets almost a foot deep and kept young children awake in their beds. It wasn't irregular for unfortunate citizens of the surface to be caught by falling gallons of dirty water that had been accumulating in the streets of the upper cities. The busy train station was frenzied and hazy, as the drains from the surface leaked into the underground, filling the lungs of its inhabitants with the sickly sweet odour of rain and the grime and perversion of the big cities above. Heph could imagine the children who would inhale the stench, knowing that water fell from the sky miles above their heads, dreaming they could one day taste it for themselves...

Heph broke from his reverie, realising he had no clue where his good foot was taking him. He craned his neck above the crowd, he knew he could find the right exit if he just found a directory—

'Hephy? Oh thank goodness, it's you!' A large, smooth hand clamped itself on Heph's shoulder like a vice, making escape all but impossible.

'Hello Vincent,' he mumbled, his eyes reluctantly meeting his

CASCADE

ISABELLA POULIER

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

WINNER



elder brother's. Vincent hadn't changed, except for the addition of a small thin moustache on his upper lip. This had achieved the impossible and rendered him even more handsome than he had been twenty years prior. The serenity of his features had not travelled to his eyes, however, which darted around nervously, as though anticipating theft or indecency. As it turned out, Heph's brother did not share his gift for resourcefulness.

'...in a hurry to get out of that god-awful rainstorm, you see, by the time the doors had shut, I realised I had boarded the wrong bullet train! Of course you know these corkscrew lines travel so god damned fast these days... The next thing I knew I was *here*,' he spoke the last word in a whisper, as though his business superiors would somehow hear him all the way from The Top, a distance of four cities above their heads.

II

Heph and his estranged brother found the directory as one, associating with one another for the first time in twenty years, all the while indulging Heph in the plans of his multimillion dollar project to create a giant, invisible 'umbrella' over Volantis, to reduce flooding and water pollution. 'The key is to keep the rain *out* and the sunlight in,' he had said, as though explaining the concept to a small child. At the end of the transaction, Vincent struggled with his words for an instant, his mouth forming a perfect 'o' shape.

'Well Heph, you're looking... well,' he lied. It was clear that Heph's limp had only worsened. His hair, having greyed prematurely, gave him the look of a much older man. His basic, shabby attire formed a stark contrast to his brother's sleek suit. His condition prevented him from earning much, but he made do. His hands ghosted over his disfigurement; all it had taken was the union of two recessive genes, a one in four chance. He remembered the last time he had seen his mother, cursing her heterozygous nature, mourning a son still living. The shouts from that day seemed to continue to echo through the intervening years.

The two brothers parted with awkward nods, however Heph's muddy eyes were now bright, his reasons for coming here consolidated in his mind. In the last two years he has found a second chance: a government-run programme for free miracle surgery. The waiting list was long and there was no certainty that it would be over anytime soon, however, along with the rain came a sense of anticipation. His time was near. He had taken the corkscrew down

below the surface to the government complex that coordinated whose life would be changed forever. He did not know what good being there as the names were announced would do, he usually waited by the phone, however his brother's unconcealed pity kept his aching legs moving towards his destination.

'Hello sir, will you be attending the selection today? Shall I remove your name from the call list?' Heph nodded, he could hear almost no sound from outside the doors apart from the quiet buzzing of whispers. He entered, expecting to find a small group of people much like him. Instead, his eyes were assaulted by an onslaught of humanity. More than one hundred people were crammed into the space: women, children, men, husbands, mothers, sons... All bearing some kind of disablement. Wheelchairs, crutches, even beds could be seen scattered amongst the silent crowd. At the front of the room a colossal glass sphere was filled with thousands of names labelled onto tiny black marbles. The marbles began to spin and dance around their enclosure, creating a soft gushing sound as they clicked against one another infinitely. Heph was reminded of the sound of falling sand or the fast pattering of rain on his apartment roof.

'First name: Robert Zimms!' Silence prevailed amongst the crowds. No one jumped for joy, knowing that at last they had received a second chance. A small man in the corner picked up a phone and dialled. The next three selections continued in this fashion, the many crippled watching the sphere in silence, no one from the crowd was selected. Heph felt ill. He watched the balls rise and fall like some kind of sick lotto game. It seemed only he knew just how many people from above the surface were waiting with their hands on their phone receivers, desperate to correct the kind of problems the people of this room would disregard in an instant. It suddenly occurred to him that these people must only come to the ceremony because they don't own a phone themselves. A young child began to cry as the last name was selected from the sphere.

Heph thought of the instant ovens, the 3D televisions, the zip lifts, even the corkscrew train he had used today, which had transported him from the ground level to a mile below in less than five seconds. All these things were nothing special to him. Heph began to wonder just how many levels lay beneath this one...did the sticky scent of fresh rain reach their noses also?

For some, with the rain came hope and the whisper of a dream.



CASCADE

For others, it brought realisation and understanding. It was now clear to Heph what he must do, his resolve as strong as the barrier that would in a few short months bar the city from the changes rain brings forevermore. He picked up his belongings and left the cramped room, leaving those who remained with only marginally greater odds.

'Heph Clemence?'



II

A single drop of hope falls from the sky, and slides down the dried river bank, leaving a threadlike trail behind. It could join another, and form a trickle, which would eventually find another and another and form a creek. Then a stream, then a river, where it would make up not even one millionth of the storm of spray that leaps onto our bare feet from the mouth of the gushing river. But that single drop fades into the hot sand, lost beneath the fiery expanse that is the sky above.

Nerida trails behind me, the dilly-bag slumped over her shoulder. We urge ourselves forward, feet burning with every footprint that is left on the red ochre soil. My dark arms clasp the water container just as they held Nerida when she was a baby, but it is empty of any weight that could slow us. As we walk, the land becomes more cracked and more brittle beneath our calloused soles. We are now moving into unknown territory. We are lost. Fear of the unknown and untouched holds us back. But fear of the White Man pushes us forward. Slowly, we make our way. Forwards? Backwards? Perhaps to the edge of the Earth, and still we may find no waterhole. Neither of us had prepared for such a difficult trek; it is usually too hot and dry to migrate North during the Birak season, and our water supplies vanished faster than we could imagine. The only moisture within miles of empty terrain is the sweat that drips from my temple.

My feet are well trained for the journey; I am used to moving. But not used to change. I can't remember the last time a real change decorated our monotonous, yet nomadic lives. Our stories and paths and landmarks have remained the same since before the sun began to shine. The first time we saw a white skinned devil, we feared, we ran. And we are still running, it seems. After that first time, more of them came. They brought new things, new colours. Their clothes were vivid, richer than any colour I had ever seen. And they brought long gleaming pipes that shone brighter than the Southern stars. But the pipes made thunderous noises and stole the spirits of five Kamilaroi men. The White Man keeps on bringing things; food and grog and sickness. But they also take things. They take our hunt. They take our soil. They take our waterhole. So we run from them, then they can't take our stories. We will still have our tribe. As long as they don't take our children.

Nerida calls my name but I fail to hear it over the loud bleating of the white-hot sun.

'Kirra!' she calls again, collapsing as the hoarse sound echoes

A SINGLE DROP

CLAIRE SMART

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD FOR

CREATIVE WRITING

HIGHLY COMMENDED



across the empty plain.

Blood begins to seep through her cracked lips as I hoist her onto my shoulders with a groan from my objecting back.

'Why can't we go back to the Ngadyung Waterhole? White Man would have moved on by now.' Nerida's cracked voice scratches my ears from behind my shoulder.

'They don't budge, you know that.' I try to maintain my patience; she is too young to understand the White Man, who settled on the Kamilaroi land just short of six moons ago.

She says the words that we've both been hiding from. 'But I'm thirsty.'

'Distract yourself,' I say, growing with irritability, my temper quickly falling through the cracks of the hard ground.

'Tell me a story, Kirra.' She has regained the honey sweet voice that once charmed every member of our tribe, including me this time. I listen for the soft whistle of the wind, and the distant call of a brown eagle, then after a deep breath of the pungent summer air, begin an age-old story.

'A time ago, in a distant generation—'

'Long, long ago,' she adds.

'Long, long ago, in a time we call the Dreamtime, there was the longest drought season any spirit had ever seen. And there was a frog. It was the largest frog ever known, larger than the wedge-tailed eagle's wings, its tummy wider than the length of a swamp eel. It was called Tiddalik. It was so thirsty, drying up in the barren land, burning under the scorching sun.' I look up at the sky, then down again at my bare feet.

'And it was greedy,' added Nerida, 'Greedy like the White Man.'

I continued. 'So greedy that one day, it stole all the water in the world and drank it. There were no streams, no creeks and no waterholes left. The animals began to thirst, so they gathered and tried to get their water back. And there was only one way to do that, Nerida.'

'They had to make Tidallik laugh.' Nerida giggles – I can feel her chest vibrating against my back, and I wait for her laughter to subside, then continue.

'The kookaburra told its funniest joke and laughed louder than ever, but Tiddalik's mouth remained shut. The kangaroo jumped higher than the scorching sun, but still there was no water. The

II

lizard puffed out its chest, imitating the arrogant frog, but Tiddalik was not amused. Finally, Nabunum the eel, whose skin was so cracked and dry, shrivelled to his curving spine, danced the traditional Gaxabara dance. And Tiddalik began to smirk. Water dribbled out of his mouth, filling creeks and small streams, and as the emaciated Nabunum's spirit continued to dance, Tiddalik burst into laughter, and the rest of the water rushed into the rivers and waterholes. And the drought was broken.'

'Then what happened? To Tiddalik?'

'I don't know, Nerida. I'm beginning to lose the story.'

'Silly Kirra! It will never be lost.' Nerida's ringing laugh echoes across the empty plain, slicing the stifling air.

But it is starting to become lost. While the White Man grows, Nerida and I shrink, like an eel shrivelling under the hot sun. They take more water, our throats get drier. They explore more – we run further. More farmland – less sacred ground. Striving – barely surviving.

My eyes close with guilt and regret at my fading memory. But Nerida's laugh almost projects onto the back of my eyelids. I can see colour of the bright crimson of the red water lily after which she was named, the colour of white crest of the cockatoo that soars the sky at dusk, the colour of young yellowed Eucalyptus buds. Colours of the native land. Of the land that may soon be lost. Her giggle brings a smile to my lips, despite the hot sweat that now drips onto my neck and the sharp pang in my lower back. My head tilts back. I breathe in the cool, heavy smell of the spirits that shift through the changing air. And as I lower my head, a single drop of rain falls from above in front of my feet. Then so does another. And another.



ECHOES IN
MY MIND

ANITA YE

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

RUNNER-UP

II

I watched the man.
He paced back and forth on the verandah, eyes placed firmly on the blazing horizon. His hands reached towards his face, as he palmed off the perspiration.
I watched, as he lit a cigarette. He'd rolled them himself. Cheaper that way, one would imagine.
Money's tight in these times.
A small ember was produced from the flick of the lighter as he brought his head towards the burning flame. He drew in the chemicals and sighed. Relief.
A large puff of smoke was released from the whisper of his lips.



I watched the man with his mother.
He'd so much love to give to everyone but himself.
And soon he had none.



I watched the man.
His white shirt had become moist from the unforgiving beating inferno in the sky. He trudged through the dry cornfields; gritting his teeth as the dry stalks formed callouses against his burnt arms. He was lost.
He'd no direction.
Yet he was looking for a way out.



I watched the mother.
A broken woman.
I watched,
As the pills fell from the wisps of her fingers.
I watched,
As she fumbled for her water; she looked exhausted.
Exasperated; she was defeated.
Slumped.
She had not a soul left to care for her.



I watched the man.
He'd sat in the rotting chair facing towards the thirsty cornfields. Yellow, dry and barren, they longed to be quenched.

His dilapidated house brought an air of helplessness. The sickening linger of old tobacco hanging in the air could almost be seen; an aged grey, relieved impatiently like silk through the purse of his chapped lips. Cracked walls, adorned with peeling paint kept him enclosed in this cage of illness. His eyes had become glassy as his stare got lost into horizon. Hands grappling onto nothing.

Air.

He couldn't even breathe anymore. Even it seemed tainted. But he wouldn't know. He didn't care.



I watched the boy.
He was so lively; full of vitality.
Curious to the world around him, an abundance of life and ambition. He said he wanted to help people; a doctor. Bright kid.

He'd grown before my eyes.

Lucy... Matilda... Elizabeth...

He'd so much love to give.

That he saved none for himself.

I'd watched the people around him dwindle into oblivion.

One by one.

Lucy... Matilda... Elizabeth... Little John... Father...

Mother.

I'd watched him light countless cigarettes, with the stub of the first; repeating until there was nothing to be heard but the distant sounds of painful heaving. Yet he'd never know when to stop.

Rinse and repeat he'd think.

He never cared.



I watched the man.

He'd thought himself as one who'd been blessed with reckless vigour; desensitised to the sufferings around him.

He was tough they'd all say. A man of steel; impenetrable.

So much, that he had begun to believe them. It was all he'd ever known.

He was a man who'd seem to be pungent with the scent of diesel fuel and tobacco. A man whose hair lay limp, to the



ECHOES IN
MY MIND

left of his face, coated lightly with grease. A man whose eyes carried an aura of defeat.

Those eyes always managed to carry themselves towards that neglected crop.

He'd been a farmer. Maize.

I'd watch him.

Helplessly beating through the fields, swatting flies away with the flutters of his hands, ignoring the danger which could lurk beneath his feet. Snakes. Spiders.

I'd never know what he was looking for. What his purpose was.

Everyone knew there was nothing out there, beyond that crumbling home.

II

I watched the baby.

1.5kg.

Month and a half premature.

Squirmed helplessly for what seemed like months on end.

In that incubator.

The boy would come see *it* someday; recoiling in disgust as he'd inspect the 'grossly' deformed creature that *it* appeared to him. *It's* wrinkly pink skin; the shrivelled little appendages; the toes, curled in pure instinct. How it seemed so helpless. So feeble.

He despised it.

He despised it; as he watched it grow up. Inch by inch; the baby grew.

Into a capable young man.

He was no longer Little John.

He'd earned his name after many years. And the man hated every inch of him.

I watched the father.

He'd placed his son on his lap. His pride.

He always looked so proud. Face was always sickeningly plastered with the widest grin. Million dollar smile; I guess. How blessed.

He brushed his son's curly hair out of his face and planted a loving kiss on his forehead.

Affection.

The son squirmed in delight and produced an innocent, high pitched giggle. They had so much love for each other. The both of them.

He's a genius; the father would say. To *all* his friends. They'd envied him; the lot of them.

Wished their sons were like that. It was always like that. He'd never waste an opportunity to tell everyone.

As he'd walk hand in hand with his son; he'd failed to see past his pride. His son had grown tired of his father's endearment. He'd felt tormented; confused; used.

He failed to see that he'd grown upset. Or that his son no longer beamed in the palm of his father's hand. That he was nothing but a commodity to his father, the man who'd loved him the most.

The son's love dwindled by each sunrise and sunset. Yet, the father never noticed. The boy was still his beautiful son.



I watched the man.

His hands trembled, as he clumsily packed the roll full of tobacco. He coughed as he struggled to keep a hold of the structure. The floor became littered with remnants of this substance he was so hopelessly addicted to.

His trembling hands reached deep into the enclaves of the bag. Desperation written over his face as tried to retrieve the last of the contents. He winced as he found it empty.

Flustered, he threw the empty bag away and watched the wind carry it away into the emptiness. He'd let his mind wander.

He'd wondered where it would let the wind carry.

He wasn't always a deep thinker. Guess thinking's the only thing that anyone can do; if there ain't anything to do.

He'd wondered about Lucy

He'd wondered about Matilda.

Elizabeth

Little John.

Mother.



II

Father.
Where'd they gone?

I watched the young man.
Dashing fella he *was*. Womaniser; as the youth say.
By 19 he'd married for the first time.
By 23 he'd moved on with another one.
By 25 it was another.
By 31, he no longer had enough energy.

I watched the man.
I watched the door knob turn, as he imposed his presence
at the front. The boards creaked under his feet as he
paced back and forth, hysterically coughing into a stupor.
He fell on the floor with his face in his hands as he tried
to regain mobility. He was disgusted by he'd become.
Who he was.
He was not a farmer.
He was not a brother.
He was not a son.
He was not human anymore.
He would no longer waddle through the cornfields
searching for answers.
There was none left.
He'd given up.
There was nothing left to do.

I watched the man.
I watched as he lit his last cigarette; struggling to breathe.
I watched as he threw it into the last remaining fields of
barren stalks; the ember still burning.
I watched as he crawled through the dust, feet lumbering
across the broken surface. His hands fumbled through his
pockets; he was looking for something.
I'd seen the glimmer of the lighter; I'd heard the flick of
the wheel, I'd felt his fear, I'd smelt the smoulder. I could
almost taste the helplessness the crackle of thunder
produced by the ferocity of fire.
He'd touched my heart.

I'd witnessed the anger of the flame; red, orange, yellow
colliding in pure rage. The product of a broken man; a
lost soul, who'd grown tired of searching.
I'd wished I could help. Somehow.
And so I *wept* for him.



I'd let my tears pour across the valley; across the fiery
plains; ending years of suffering. I'd been selfish; I'd been
cruel; I'd been scared.
But I wasn't anymore.
I'd watched the clusters of men emerge from the stables;
his neighbours. They'd raised their arms in salvation;
gratitude. I'd heard the cacophony of women and
children; bouts of laughter, infectious over the great land.
I'd felt great happiness as I kissed the curves of their
faces; dampened the fibres of their clothing; cured the
sickness of the land.
Which I created.
The man crosses my mind from time to time.
Each time I can't help but weep.
Each time I let my tears roll into the rivers and through
the ocean. Purifying, cleansing, touching the souls of
many.
I'm no longer afraid; I no longer hold back.
I let my presence be known.



THE DROUGHT

GRACE ZIMMERMAN

ISOBELLE CARMODY AWARD

FOR CREATIVE WRITING

HIGHLY COMMENDED

As the harsh yellow light crept below the horizon, Dad walked through the front door. His skin was pink and distressed from the aggressive sun. He looked wilted, like the rows of corn that stretched across our land. My sister and I were beached across the lounge room carpet, too lethargic to even turn our heads towards the rustle of the door. Mum sat staring at the table, either deep in thought or fascinated by the crochet doily in the centre.

It was only when Dad broke the silence with a simple, “Hello”, that Mum snapped out of her daydream. She slightly crooked her head and offered Dad a gentle smile, the kind of smile that depicted how we all felt those days: tired. Dad curtly smiled back and his dried lips cracked.

The latter few weeks had been stagnant, in all sense of the word. My sister and I had barely moved from the couch for anything less than food or sleep. The heat overwhelmed our bodies so that sluggishness took over, as if the world was in slow motion. It was too hot to play; too hot to go outside; too hot to even move. So instead, we would lie motionless on the ground, holding cool ice wrapped in floral tea towels to our heads. Occasionally, if we were bored enough I'd hear my sister slide out a board game or some cards from the cupboard and it would entertain us for a while. But once I won and she threw a tantrum, the game was over and we'd settle back on the ground into a languid quiet.

We sat down for dinner after dusk. A cool breeze travelled through the open doors and windows of the house. The air revived us from our lethargy, and my sister began to persistently kick me from under the table. My parents exchanged tense pleasantries, and I watched the ice cube in Mum's finished drink slowly melt away into a watery puddle at the bottom of her glass. Precious droplets slowly teased down the sides to form a wet ring around the table. Mum and Dad spoke emptily about anything, which was nothing.

Crops were the same; money was the same; weather was the same. Conversation gingerly waned into silence, until all that could be noted was the continuous clink of cutlery against the china. As Mum's glass lifted from the table, the excess condensation streaked across the wood, slightly soaking into the grain. I couldn't help but see it as a waste, a mark of carelessness.

The concept of rain was both a fading memory and a distant promise for us now. The past weeks had offered no relief from the



dry heat. The sky, which we relied on, was progressively letting us down. Withered corn stalks slumped over like old men under the immense power of the sun. Our world had crisped up like a potato roasting in the oven. The drought latched onto our land slowly drawing away all sense of life, sapping up Dad's spirit.

Dad's temper rose with the temperature. He began chiding us for lying around or sitting slumped at the table. My sister, who had always been moody, sat at the dinner table that night in an appalling humour. Her overall air clawed at the already damp mood to draw it down to a level of tenseness and agitation. Dad asked her how she was, which caused her head to slowly turn and her gaze to settle into a sharp glare directed at him. I sat uncomfortably, feeling the intensity of her look emanating from her seat.

"Don't give me that attitude, young lady." Dad's face reddened and his jaw tightened.

I noticeably stiffened in my seat as my sister opened her mouth.

"Don't tell me what to do! You're never around, so why would you care?"

The look of defiance in her eyes began to shrink away as she noticed the anger rise in Dad's body. He slammed his hand against the table with such force that it shook. I heard a tiny whimper escape from my sister before she quickly silenced herself. We were all frozen in fear for unendurable seconds. I looked to mum, but she had her head covered and eyes focused on her hands. My sister's eyes watered and hands clenched under the force of Dad's gaze. He quietly said, "Go to your room". To which she proceeded to abruptly run upstairs. The tension had been broken, but not forgotten as we all excused ourselves from the table.

I woke up tangled in my sheets; hair sprawled across my pillow; and my feet hanging off the side of the bed. The strength of the wind had picked up during the night and had made my sleep light and restless. In my sleepy haze I could hear a gentle pitter patter on the tin roof. The tapping progressively became faster and louder and as I came to, I turned to look outside. I had left my window open. The gale had pushed droplet after droplet into the edge of my room. I looked in amazement as my teddy began to get soaked. Settling my bare feet against the floorboards, I creaked over to my window and had to forcefully pulled the sticky lever shut. With a click, a light shone from the hallway through the crack in the bottom of my door.



Outside I heard the muffled laughter of my parents and my sister's feet clambering across the floor. Being one to never miss out, I frantically ran to the door to join the rest on my family.

We all stood content in the kitchen; watching on as water continuously slid down past the window panes. It was me who took the first step outside. I felt the water drifting past my feet as it had not yet soaked into the arid land. The water filled up the formation of crevices to make miniature rivers that I imagined ants would want to picnic around. Only after did I notice droplets prickling against my skin, so I turned to look up at the stormy sky. Rain had erupted from above to cut through the numbing heat. My sister and I ran around laughing, slowly getting drenched, but we didn't care. It was the first time in months that felt alive. Dad, who stood, the pent up frustration draining from his body, stretched his arms towards me. I flinched at the contact. But instead, he picked me up and spun me around in a fit of impulsivity.

After some time we all returned inside, cold and soaking. Wrapping ourselves in towels from the spare cupboard, we all sat as a family, in the lounge room. The rain washed away our past and left us reunited, waiting for dawn.

For weeks after, the rain didn't come. My Dad was positive for a while; the rain had quenched a much needed thirst for hope. But a few weeks on, we sat resigned at the dinner table; talking about anything, which was nothing.



II

It was the beginning of January when Olivia was sent away. Instead of the graceful leap from the nest as she had imagined, it was more like a forceful shove. She had plummeted from the secure bubble of home, wheeling and screeching. Where her friends had either made plans for University or were arranging gap years to exotic places, she had fallen face first into the red dust of the Australian outback. And she hated it. She hated the feeling of gritty sand in her socks and sweat sticking stray hair to the back of her neck. Within the first minutes of leaving the dingy airport her lips were cracked and flies had attempted to launch themselves at the canals of her ears. By the first hour in the bus she was ready to sell her soul for some air conditioning. Hell had nothing on this place.

Once the two-hour bus ride (which was more like a rolling tin can) had slowly ticked away she'd finally arrived at her accommodation for the three weeks. The cabin she was staying in was less like a motel and more like a rundown shed. The wooden beams that supported a tin patio roof were rotting and the front door didn't seem to be in any better condition. Minutes after entering the stale bungalow she found herself staring dejectedly at rusted pots and pans on a lopsided shelf as she attempted to hold back tears. The place was a dump.

Just after her father had booked the plane ticket to send her here, Olivia had delved into the trusty TripAdvisor website. There had she looked up the best accommodation in the Australian outback and spent hours admiring hotel rooms with working air conditioning and luxurious pools. However, after the sobering thought that she had to pay for everything on the trip, she had decided on this small and cheap cabin. The website had boasted three star accommodation with a white tiled bathroom and a small but fashionable kitchenette. Turned out the people who ran the website were liars. The one thing they didn't lie about was the time it took to get in and out of Alice Springs. This tin shed was only half an hour from the government school where she would spend her days volunteering. Funny, the word 'volunteering' made it seem like she wanted to be there. How ironic.

Two days after she arrived, Olivia visited the school to learn the ropes and take her first class. It was a grim place, more like a jail, with high wire fences, asphalt yards and bricks the colour of the sand. The classrooms were stuffed with mismatched desks and faulty chairs and the carpet was half dirt and half dust. Yet as she wandered

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around the school she could see the young aboriginal children laughing as they chased each other across the grubby yard or as they lined up for class. Olivia didn't understand why; didn't they know the filth they lived in? All through her tour the plucky school principal had barked in her ear, explaining emergency procedures and what to do if a child was hurt. Soon they came to a stop outside the entrance to the reception.

'Do you have any more questions about how things are run here?' the principal asked.

'Where are the toilets again?' Olivia said as her heart crept into her throat.

Once in the bathroom Olivia locked herself in a stall and inhaled deeply. Mistake. The bathroom smelt as if it hadn't been cleaned in weeks. After dry retching in the toilet a few times she sat with her face in her hands, elbows braced on knees. Why had she agreed to come? She didn't belong here in this dirty, filthy place! What on earth made her think she could survive three weeks of this? Well the choice to come hadn't exactly been all hers; her parents had made an ultimatum. Either she payed for her entire University tuition or she helped out at an underprivileged school for a few weeks. No big deal, the choice was easy back home. 'Besides,' her parents had argued, 'this will give you a chance to become more worldly'. Worldly? Olivia thought bitterly as she looked around the cubicle. There was nothing worldly about this.

On the bus trip home she brooded silently, her mind wracked with misgivings. What if the kids didn't like her? Or worse, what if they hadn't learnt anything? She was undaunted by the lack of experience back in Sydney (she had, after all, helped her little brother with his maths homework now and then), but now she wasn't so sure. The day had been horrendous, the kids even worse. They were all aged around the 10-year mark and had reached the bratty stage. At the start of the lesson they filed in and glanced at her as if she were one of the fixtures. As they passed she tried to fit names to faces, working from the clean sheet of paper. *Adoni, Gaman, Darrí, Moree...* she sighed. She would never learn them in time. However, it was once the class started her day took another downward spiral; Eerin and Adoni had just learnt the wonders of paper planes. As she was trying to teach they would toss the folded paper high in the air and watch it soar across the classroom, fingers

I 2

crossed in hopes of it colliding with some poor victim's back. It was only when she lost her temper had Eerin and Adoni focused on what was on the board. Looking back on it she didn't feel guilty for what she had said. *If you don't at least try to listen you're not going anywhere in life. I don't care. I don't even have to be here! It's your own life you're ruining.* The paper planes had stopped and faces turned towards her with expressions of disbelief. They stayed quiet after that. Good. Maybe they'll listen next time.

It had been after that nightmare Olivia realised that the trip was going to be worse than she had imagined. Seeking distraction she turned her attention to the passing landscape outside. Whenever she informed others of her plans so come up here, they told her about the beauty of the sky and the sand. They told her of great ruby plains that stretched as far as the sky was clear. They told her of the glory of the night sky; stars so clear in their multitude that it made you wish to count them all. But Olivia saw nothing of that. She saw nothing but death. It was in the moisture-deprived trees, the kangaroo carcass on the side of the road. Everything was either dying or dead. The only things that appeared to be alive were her and the birds that circled high above this barren wasteland.

I 2

Each day proved to be another challenge, another bump in the road. Slowly the kids began to pick up the lessons but her heart just wasn't in it. She lost faith in the practice and lost faith in the students. Three weeks weren't going to change their lives, why should she try? Every night Olivia locked herself away in her cabin to read. She vanished into the vapid selfishness of *Anna Karenina* and lived alongside the egocentric Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. The latest book she read was *Daniel Deronda*, found on the modestly stocked bookshelf in the cabin. The pages were dirty and paper-thin, the spine cracked and broken. Yet as she delicately worked her way through the novel she found herself entranced by the plight of Gwendolen Harleth. She obsessed over the vanity, the sense of entitlement, the absurdity of this woman and how she tackled life. A niggling question tugged in the back of her mind, wondering why she admired this character. Yes Gwendolen was excellently written, eliciting both compassion and dislike from Olivia: yet there was more to this self-centred character, something she couldn't quite understand.

One morning as Olivia walked through the town centre, she saw one of her students, Moree, sitting dejectedly on the footpath. Atop the concrete in front of her rested a small canvas hat filled with only a few pieces of loose change. Moree had once told her that her name meant water or a spring, and Olivia could see why. In this land of dirt and dust, Moree was a tranquil river. She seemed to be untarnished by the squalor around her, her eyes always sparkled with a hunger for learning. Yet here she was reduced to begging on a footpath, treated as a ghost by passing legs. How many of the others lived like this? Darri, Eerin, Jarrah, did they spend their nights begging too? The sight of this young girl seemed to grip Olivia's heart, but she didn't approach her. Instead, she let herself fade slowly into the throng of patrons, as much of a ghost as Moree.

That night Olivia couldn't sleep. The image of the young girl haunted the darkness, creeping into her mind just as the first lull of sleep would wash over her. Beneath her back grains of sand rubbed her skin. They were always there. No matter how many times Olivia shook out the bag once she got back in there was always more of the grit inside. Finally, after hours of tossing and turning she kicked out of the sleeping bag and ripped it from the bed. She made her way to the thin wooden door and opened it forcefully. Her face was slapped with a sudden burst of cool night air and into the darkness she threw the bag. 'Jesus Christ enough with the sand! Enough with all of this! If you like sand so much just stay out there.' As her heart slowed in its racing and nothing but silence answered her screeching, Olivia realised that she was, in fact, shouting at a sleeping bag.

The following morning Olivia arrived at the school early to set up. She walked through the rusted gates and admired the sky above her. It was the first time since she had arrived that the day was cold, sky overcast, and air heavy with moisture. Even the school building itself, which had previously been a vivid red brick seemed drained of colour. How fitting! The glum exterior matched her interior. Once the class started Olivia took it upon herself to study every child closely and imagine what their home life was like. Poverty, abuse, squalor, there was not one person who Olivia believed had a happy home. If they had, they wouldn't be here. Yet still they came to school everyday and laughed in the yard during lunch. Adoni, Gannan, Darri, Moree, Eerin, all of them, despite where they had come from. For the first time in her life, Olivia felt truly ashamed. It

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was a deep and desperate sense of disgrace. Where she had spent the night shouting at a stuffed bag, they had gone home and tried their hardest with the homework. Gone home to an endless hunger and solved equations written on dirty paper, the dirty paper that was now so neatly placed upon their desks waiting correction. Over the weeks her kids had grown touchingly determined to get their questions right, and on those occasions when they made a mistake they were abashed with contrition. Once the students entered the classroom they were untiring and persistent, as if, in this jail-like room, they could suspend their grievances, their extreme poverty and dream of a future.

It was on the bus ride home that Olivia finally recognised why the bratty Gwendolen Harleth intrigued her so; it was her! It was her, Olivia; here in this remote state with children she could not bear to teach. The shame from earlier washed over her once more.

What am I to do now? She asked herself and the answer came back to her soundlessly. She knew what she had to do. She had to endure. She had to tolerate the sand, the flies, the dirt, the tears, the famine, and try to give Moree and the others the best possible chance to get out of this grave; the grave that had been so neatly dug by her white ancestors. Back in the rolling tin can the tires spat up great plumes of dust behind them. In her seat Olivia vibrated along with the road and breathed in the recycled bus air. The landscape outside her window quickened into a red blur and for the first time since she had arrived, Olivia felt at peace. The decision was made.

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She spent most of the following week in a happy daze. During the day she would help the children, listen to their stories and grade their homework. Content with the monotony. At night she would lounge on the veranda and watch the setting sun paint the sand vibrant pink or brooding purple. She did not know the kind of peace she would find sitting for pleasure and waiting for nothing. Olivia almost didn't want to go home.

But all good things must come to an end.

It was the empty desk that told her something was wrong, the desk that had not been occupied for two days now. Teachers told her it was perfectly normal for the children to skip school for days at a time, sometimes even weeks. But not Moree, she wouldn't do that. Oh, how Olivia wished she were wrong. The principal had come.

She told her a different lie, one that couldn't possibly be true. Moree. The darling little ghost girl with the name that meant water or spring... Olivia couldn't breathe. The air that was supposed to enter her lungs did not come. She reached for the seat behind her and collapsed in a dull heap. No, no, no, no, no. This type of thing doesn't happen in real life, it doesn't happen to people she knew.

But not to worry, this isn't the first time this has happened and it certainly won't be the last. Chin up, Olivia, don't cry; you don't have anything to cry about. You have a class to teach.

A keening, shivering moan built its way from deep within her chest.

In her room Olivia curled into a ball under the gritty sleeping bag, probed her heart and felt the burns. Turning her face on the thick pillow she watched the sun set on the horizon, casting her room in a brilliant orange hue. In the thick bands of light that filtered through her window she could see dust motes rotating, suspended like tiny planets. She watched them dance across the room until they eventually settled on the book resting upon her bedside table. She continued watching even after the night sky had stolen all remnants of light.

Softly, as she felt herself drift into a languid darkness, a dry, scorching air devoured her body and soul.



'He works with fish... No not a marine biologist, a geneticist actually. He looks at fish, and their muscular structure is very similar to our own, I think. Yeah, um, and so he experiments on fish to study their genetic abilities. Oh, I forgot to say, these particular fish have regenerative capabilities, that's the point of course, and so he studies them and then passes on his findings to doctors who see if that will help with any of their patients, who have stuff like muscular dystrophy. But at the moment, I think he's researching stem cells...'

I lose both their interest and their patience. They make an attempt at politeness before whisking away. I am left standing alone at the fringe of the party. I go to my husband; he is with his colleagues. They are laughing and discussing genetics in their faded grey turtlenecks. The women wear the same dull colours. I wear shocking yellow and dangly earrings; I feel ostracised in my own home.

'Fifty, David!' smirks a middle aged man. 'So old! I definitely see some grey hairs in there!'

Scientists have no concept of when they are being rude or not, including my husband. I am fifty-one, and am greyer than David.

'At least I'm not bald, Sergio,' my husband returns slyly. More inelegant laughter.

'Nonsense!' Nadia intervenes. 'David looks far younger than most of us here! In fact, I fear he might've defied Darwin and has stopped evolving altogether!' They become more raucous.

David stands up a little straighter, his grin a little wider at that comment. Nadia is the head of the Institute, and an American beauty. She gave David his position as the Deputy Head. He gives her a look bordering on adoration.

I smile while my brain glosses over scientific terms.

My mother-in-law congratulates me on the party. She wants to leave early. My sister-in-law, Karen, gives me a sympathetic look as she drags her children away from my daughters.

In the piano's reflection, I see my smile slowly transform to a grimace.



My daughter, Charlotte, comes down from unplugging the fairy lights with a small package.

'For you, Dad,' she says, yawning. Sorry, I forgot.'

It is a tiny, silver-framed photo of a black and white Darwin. My husband beams and hugs her, staring at the little faded picture as he had stared at Nadia.

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I see his smile leave his face as she grabs *The Aeneid* on the way back up.

Genetics works both ways, he often tells me sagely. It certainly does.

David stands the picture next to our family photo on his bedside table. He thanks me for the party before sinking to sleep. I feel Darwin's gaze in the dark.

'The Infinite Rise of Augustus?' Charlotte asks me sceptically. She towers over me, having inherited her height from my husband.

'Hey, I don't agree with him. I just edit these papers, I don't write them.'

'Well, whichever professor it is this time, he needs to come up with a less cheesy title. You have a Classics degree Mum; you should write a paper rebutting him!'

I snort. 'Love, who would accept a paper from me? Getting things published is your father's job.'

Thank goodness she missed the resentment.

When David gets home we're all in the kitchen, dancing to the Weather Girls. Well, Rachel and I are dancing. Charlotte leans on the doorway, rolling her eyes. I scream out the lyrics, twisting around, with my hands in the air, grasping a wooden spoon I am using to stir the curry. I wear a shocking pink tunic and bangles that jingle crudely. I hear the lock click and David's there, looking at us silently.

I stop immediately, and return to the curry. He doesn't join in, just walks away slowly, past Charlotte.

'See? Even Dad thinks you're a daggy dancer, Mum.'

She's probably right.

David picks at his curry, the food he loves most in the world. Instead of eating, he tells me all about Nadia, how she has an apartment in Rome over this really fancy restaurant, how she lives on a houseboat in London, how she's from Maine but doesn't like to talk about it.

Then he goes on to tell me:

1. All about a particular deviation in one of the fish's chromosomes that the whole lab got excited about
2. How 'Nature' magazine wants him to do another piece
3. How he has a whole new string of conferences to go to.

Charlotte finishes quickly and leaves. Rachel stares blankly at her empty plate. All around I see my busts. Emperor Hadrian, Emperor Trajan, Socrates, Theseus, Athena, they all stare down at him menacingly. But I can feel Darwin from all the way upstairs.



David hits the bed and starts snoring. Darwin and I exchange a hateful look. I slam the frame down, but it doesn't help.



David asks me to come to a work dinner with him. I am surprised; he never does. Again, everyone wears grey turtlenecks, and completely ignores me. I wonder if I should be required to speak at all tonight and chuckle to myself, thinking the answer was 'most likely not'. They talk, about their newest favourite books. Nadia mentions *The Regeneration of Vertebrates* and David launches into a tirade of praise. I raise an eyebrow. I bought him that for his birthday. I decide to break my vow of silence.

'I quite enjoyed the book *Crossing the Rubicon*. I don't know whether you have read it?'

Staring and confusion.

'Yes, it's about Caesar and the impact that crossing the Rubicon River with his army still intact caused on the Roman Republic.'

Nothing. As I suspected.

David shakes his head slightly. 'Indeed, my dear. But what of the impact that Rydell has caused with his statement that the invertebrate is incapable of evolving with pure regenerative capabilities?'

My bright yellow is once again too bright.



My husband goes back and forth from conferences. Spain, Rome with Nadia, Massachusetts, London with Nadia, Adelaide, New Zealand, Jerusalem with Nadia.

Darwin remains behind, the only presence in the room. He stares at me alone in the bed, the black and white man laughing at me quietly. He upset the balance of things. Society was perfectly happy being blissfully unaware of the truth before his stupid, undeniable theory. So was I. Everything was fine before him! I try to smash him. I rage and throw him on the floor but he bounces back every time. I can't break him. And he can't break me.



When the kids are in school, I go out. I go to the museum, and I look at the Ancient Greek and Roman ruins. And I decide to take Darwin

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with me. I bring him out, show him how we have evolved, what his theory proves. He agrees with me, he admires the marble statues, reads with me about the gods. 'Very worthwhile', I say to him.

I come home, no dinner made, the kids in their rooms, David back from Jerusalem.

'Where were you?' he asks. I notice that his grey hairs have grown in number.

'With Darwin,' I say shortly, placing the little picture on my own beside table, not David's. I do not look at him, I do not ask about his trip. I can feel his gaze on my back as I change. I imagine him studying me, willing me to turn around and come to him. But I refuse.



The following day David hands the girls their presents. I am turning to leave; Darwin stuffed at the bottom of my bag, when he calls me over.

He's frowning, struggling to comprehend my behaviour.

'Where are you going?'

'Out,' I say lightly. 'Don't know where yet.' I proceed to flounce away, but he catches me by the hand.

'Wait, I have something for you,' he declares urgently.

He brings out a long, woollen blue scarf, very similar to the one that Nadia often wears. My heart begins to sink, but then I feel Darwin's frame poking me from inside my bag and the pain leaves immediately. I then think, of course, in all of Jerusalem, he finds the one shop that sells plain woollen scarves in the middle of summer. I smile casually, waltz out and dump the scarf in the neighbour's bin.



The next day, I'm sitting on a low wall outside a theatre, a banner advertising 'Oedipus' fluttering above, Darwin standing proudly beside me. My phone rings. It is my boss, Richard. He sounds tired and worried. His researcher has had to resign due to family issues. He needs someone to go to Athens to write a paper on the influence of Pericles, and could I, please, please do it?

I hesitate, wondering if I should call David before glancing down at Darwin. We must evolve, he tells me.

Which is true, I think, and you cannot argue with Darwin. He cannot be destroyed, I must remember that.

I smile and turn my attention back to Richard, wondering whether my husband would enjoy Greece, the museums, the tavernas, the ouzo, the real Athena. Always forward, never back.



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Thirty three and clothed in a pink singlet and black exercise pants, Naomi L. lowered her chest to the ground and raised herself steadily up again, morning rays warming her back. Body rigid and straight, she performed her push-ups in a fluid movement, breathing in the crisp morning air with each repetition. Her routine of one hundred pushups was well-practised by now, she knew how to conserve her energy until it was required after the seventy-fifth repetition. Bending, straightening, bending, straightening, she exercised to a steady rhythm. She found the push-ups immensely soothing, as if a small amount of weight was lifted from her back with each repetition until she was temporarily liberated from the thoughts of her abandoned life back in Sydney. If only the liberation didn't end at the last push-up, when she stood up with numb shoulders and the unpleasant realisation of returned reality.

It was after her daily exercise that Naomi would sit on the verandah sipping green tea and painful thoughts would jumble together in her mind. Anxiety and uncertainty generated unwanted guilt. Instead of a former primary teacher who was 'the victim of sexual misconduct' she could be the lonely Siren, luring George Bishop to his doom. Naomi Leondopolous: Siren. Her Greek heritage fitted the part perfectly. But was it possible? Had she unconsciously made an attempt to dress seductively (she had shown a bit of cleavage on some occasions) and lured George Bishop into the dark carpark one night? Then she remembered how she had screamed when he grabbed her shoulders from behind, the sleepless nights afterwards, the constant flashbacks and the anxiety attacks. The guilt quickly disappeared; it was a luxury she couldn't afford nowadays .



The rundown property in which she had sought sanctuary for the past six weeks was situated in the Wollemi district of the Blue Mountains, nestled fifteen kilometres away from the nearest town. The timber house was badly needing renovating, threatening to fall to pieces any minute. Windows required re-paneling, rotten wooden boards creaked and the timber peeled and cracked. But it was her safe house, located in an area so isolated that there was no threat to Naomi L. (except of going mad of course).

She wasn't particularly enamoured of the nature which surrounded the property either, the red Bloodwoods made her feel

A WALL OF
GREEN

SOPHIE KLEIMAN

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claustrophobic, as if they were looming over her and accusing her of being an interloper in their world of unruly beauty. Slowly she taught herself to view the trees as a wall of green, protecting her from the pain and distress which had sent her packing her bags and driving up into the mountains in the first place. However, her indifference towards nature turned to dislike when it came to creepy crawlies, the way they would surprise you when you walked into the kitchen in the morning, staring at you (you couldn't actually see their eyes- they were too minuscule, but Naomi L. could feel them), watching your every move and waiting for the perfect moment to drop onto your shoulder. The only true comfort she found in nature was the thriving bridal veil creeper, a noxious weed which had found it ways into the Wollemi wilderness from South East Asia. The creeper formed tangled masses, scrambling across the soil and climbing up the Bloodwood trees. Although listed as one of Australia's *20 weeds of national significance*, she found the alien weed strangely attractive. The twisting stems, shining green leaves, fleshy white-petalled flowers as well as the burgundy-coloured berries filled her with a longing for something foreign, something romantic.

Every day, Naomi L. would stick to the routine that she had created for herself. Wake up at 9am, perform her morning pushups, have a shower, eat breakfast, watch the 12pm daily sport overview, eat lunch, complete a cryptic crossword from the book she had found in the cupboard, have a nap, perform her evening pushups, eat dinner and go to bed. Once a week she would drive into the nearest town to stock up on food and magazines, but she didn't like to spend a lot of time there. Locals would stare at her, as she pushed a trolley down the supermarket aisle. A thirty-something year old woman in the Hazelbrook supermarket wearing some old tracksuit pants, ugg boots and faded hoodie was clearly not a local. She felt like an *outsider*, always expecting calls of obscenity and abuse but they never came.



On returning from her weekly visit into town one evening, Naomi L. discovered another car parked in the garage. A forest-green ute with 'Total Tree Carers' painted on the side, looking like it could use a great deal of repairing work. The lodge was designed for two guests, but she had presumed that a shabby lodge in the middle-of-nowhere would not attract any visitors apart from herself.

A young man stepped out of the sliding door and onto the

verandah. He introduced himself as Ted Barker (Clearly he had taken his surname into deep consideration when deciding on his career). His short hair was a dirty blonde, and he wore skinny jeans and a hoodie. He didn't fit the hippie tree-hugger stereotype she'd always pictured in her head; instead, his youthful presence making her feel more invigorated than she had been since arriving here.

He frowned. 'You clearly weren't told by the landlady but I'm staying here for one night, just to do some work-related stuff.'

She felt a little giddy at the prospect of having a male roommate but tried her best to conceal the teenage excitement which was rising up in her. She summoned the courage to ask him about his job, and as they talked on the verandah she found herself gradually becoming more animated. Their conversation was of the bridal veil creeper, or *Asparagus Asparagoïdes* as he referred to it. Ted Barker explained to her how the creeper forms a thick barrier just below the soil surface which limits the access of other plants to nutrients and moisture and how this in turn affects animals which depend on these plants to survive. The appreciation she had developed for the bridal creeper gradually dissipated, realising that without Ted the Total Tree Carer's assistance, her wall of green would be damaged by this destructive alien weed; leaving her defenseless. At this thought, she felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude towards Ted-who had just unknowingly become her saviour from the deadly bridal creeper.

It was with all this unaccustomed interaction with a young male that Naomi L. felt a sudden sunburst of yearning within her, which was instantly overshadowed by guilt. She was supposed to be unable to experience any sexual attraction after being assaulted, distressed at the mere idea of being intimate with another person. But she felt so overcome with intense emotions and sexual longing that it was like being her hormonal teenage self again.

'So, what do you do?'

The question hit her like a ton of bricks. She didn't like being asked questions. They made her feel vulnerable, as if her most private thoughts and secrets were going to be exposed. Suddenly, the hormonal teenager was gone and she felt like a thirty three year old 'sexual misconduct' victim once more.

'I'm a primary school teacher.'

'So shouldn't you be teaching?'

'I quit my job a few weeks ago.'

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‘Why?’

Lie, Naomi, lie.

But instead, the effect of his question was to make her stand up and offer some tea.

‘Thank you’ he said, smiling slightly.

The unanswered question hung burning in the air whilst she stood by the kitchen bench, waiting for the tea to brew. She turned to look at Ted. He was a stranger, yet his casual dress and relaxed stance on the verandah seemed to presume intimacy. It appeared that her wariness of strangers and resistance to men did not apply to Ted Barker; instead, his foreignness made him more mysterious and attractive by the second. Naomi L. decided he was not a threat.



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The following day she went about her daily routine as usual. Ted had already left for the day when she walked outside and performed her pushups with the accompanying music of the magpies’ morning call. She didn’t know what time he’d return (though the bridal creeper appeared particularly visible today so she presumed he had a long task ahead of him), but she hoped it would give her enough time to go about all her usual activities in peace. Most importantly, she hoped it would give her enough time to do her evening pushups without disturbance. With Ted’s arrival her emotions were in a precarious state, so a day to herself was required in order for these emotions to die down sufficiently. She felt oddly vulnerable, a sensation completely foreign to her after her six weeks living under the safety net of solitude.

She had performed her evening pushups and was beginning to prepare dinner when she heard the sound of Ted Barker ascending the steps of the verandah. She didn’t turn around, in case her rosy cheeks from the rising steam were mistaken for blushing (any inappropriate outpouring of enthusiasm would make her seem mad and creepy). The house fell silent for a while; assuming he had gone to the bathroom, she continued on with her task of stirring and humming.

In a rapid movement, Naomi L. was grabbed by her shoulders from behind. A scream rose up in her throat as a response, and her heart began to beat as if she’d just performed two hundred push-ups and was about to go into cardiac arrest.

‘Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. I was just going to lend a hand with the dinner instead of letting you do all the work.’

His body towered over her, entrapping her between the stove and his tall, menacing figure. A wave of anxiety washed over her. Ted Barker was no longer the attractive stranger, he was an imminent threat. She had to escape, but where could she run? To whom could she run to?

‘Naomi? You’re as white as a ghost..’

For perhaps ten minutes she ran clumsily through the darkness wilderness, the sound of her lungs gasping for air filled her ears. Dead branches and leaves crackled under her feet, the rapidly increasing tempo of her strides becoming a signal of her growing anxiety. Her throat was beginning to constrict and her head was starting to spin, yet Naomi L. continued to stumble on through the wall of green (or black as it now appeared for nightfall had well and truly arrived). Survival instincts were spurring her on but soon it grew impossible to continue, the feeling of constriction had now spread to the chest and her desperate gasps for air were almost inaudible. She needed to calm herself down. Lying on the ground with hands under her trembling shoulders and legs outstretched behind her, she began to perform her pushups. Her voice croaked ‘one, two, three, four...’ it took ten repetitions before the exercise began to have its soothing effect, her heart rate and breathing slowly returning to their usual rhythm.

The anxiety had passed by the time she felt something creep up her left leg. Darkness impaired her vision so she could only just make out the spider’s fluorescent red-wedged back as it disappeared onto the forest floor, leaving an acute stinging sensation in her upper-thigh. She knew that lying still would slow the venom moving through the body, yet she needed assistance. Already light-headedness and nausea rendered her motionless, the only option was to call for help.

Naomi L. lay paralysed on the forest floor, all she could see now was pitch black.

‘Someone help me... please! I don’t know where I am... I’m not from here...’

Her voice was soaked up by the looming bloodwoods, drowned in the darkness around her.



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ASYLUM SEEKERS

ELIZA LI

ALAN PATTERSON PUBLIC

SPEAKING AWARD

WINNER

In the wake of the tragedy, that is the Syrian Refugee Crisis, we have witnessed what true inhumanity looks like; where today, innocent children are being caught in the crossfire of a political battle. Despite the announcement by the Abbot Government on Tuesday that Australia will provide formal sanctuary to 12,000 Syrian refugees, this is simply not enough; because we could, and should, be doing so much more.

And thus we must consider: What kind of a nation are we?

Since 2013, our Australian stance on accepting Asylum seekers has been eminent – we will STOP THE BOATS at all costs. Rejecting boats, sending boats back, to Nauru, to Manus Island – we’ve tried it all, it’s known to us as the Australian Asylum Seeker Policy, which is Fair and just.

But internationally, our actions to prevent asylum seekers from settling in our country are seen as a ‘strange obsession’ which reflects the disgustingly selfish Australian values. It is almost impossible, for less wealthy, less developed and smaller nations, to fathom how we, one of the most economic and socially developed countries, can be declining a basic human right to those who are absolutely helpless.

When UN figures revealed that in 2013, Australia was home to only 4% of the world’s asylum seekers, it’s no wonder why we have been criticised left, right and centre, most notably by the leaders of China, Fiji and even, the UN. Once again we are seen as shooting ourselves in the foot, our own actions are damaging our international reputation.

Represented by ruthless leaders, who commit to ‘stopping at nothing’ to end asylum seekers from settling in our nation, we should be ashamed for lack of compassion we have shown towards those who have turned to us for help.

We need to stick by our Australia values, we need to show some compassion.

We can only interpret words off a page and figures in statistic, but we will never truly experience the devastation of not having a home. Asylum seekers have no home. They have no hope.

For the simple privilege to leave their country, they risk their lives, spend their entire life savings on just a one way ticket. A ticket which gives them a glimpse of hope, but buys them an overcrowded, unhygienic voyage, unlikely to make it to their destination.

In an exclusive 60 minutes interview with Bashir Yousef, one of

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the few teenage asylum seekers who was finally settled in Australia last year, he revealed, 'we were treated lesser than humans, we were treated lesser than animals. We were promised food and water, but ran out in only a week. Some parents stole the last of the supplies and secretly fed their children, but I had no one. I was only 14. In hind sight Bashir was one of the lucky ones, as he lives to tell his story today. Unfortunately, in a recent report by the UN it was disclosed that only two thirds of these boats ever safely make it to their destination. For the lucky ones who survive the journey, the struggle doesn't end there, they are immediately held in detention, waiting for our approval.

It should be our moral obligation to provide refuge for these asylum seekers who have the courage and tenacity to chase their only chance of hope.

Unfortunately, for decades now our government has fabricated this idea that asylum seekers are 'illegal', 'pests', 'cue jumpers', demanding a right they are not entitled to.

However, Article 14 in The UN Refugee Convention (which Australia helped to draft) recognises that refugees have a right to enter a country for the purposes of seeking asylum, regardless of how they arrive or whether they hold valid documents.

Asylum seekers do not break any Australian laws simply by arriving on boats without authorisation. So why are we going around calling genuine asylum seekers illegal? They have as much right to life in this country as we do.

Although some may argue, an influx of asylum seekers resettled in Australia will cost our government too much due to various benefit payouts. We may not realise that accepting asylum seekers would actually be more economically efficient.

As of February 2014, Tony Abbott has mandated a team of engineers to build lifeboats, which are for the sole purpose of intercepting asylum seeker boats entering Australian waters by sending them back to Indonesia. However, sneaky Tony Abbott probably doesn't want us to know that these lifeboats cost over \$200,000 each to build and can only be used once.

To date, spending over \$4 million on this project to tow away asylum seekers, we must put into perspective that it would have only cost \$3.8 million to settle all 4,600 asylum seekers who applied for sanctuary in Australia last year. That's \$4 million we literally chucked

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out to sea and 4,600 lives we jeopardised.

But what's more quizzical is the mentality there is an overcrowding or 'influx' of asylum seekers in our country, if statistically 'if all the 750,000 refugees Australia has accepted since 1945 were still alive today, they would only represent a total of 3% of the current Australian population'

So I urge us all to consider what kind of nation are we?

Actions speak louder than words. We must remember what goes around comes around.

This could be anyone of us, we don't know what the future holds and we don't know when our nation will be in a time of crisis. Maybe we will, one day, need to seek asylum away from Australia, and maybe one day the world will remember what we did to the asylum seekers of today.

It's no longer Labour vs. Liberal, it is Australia vs. the world. Let's not ruin our international reputation and sever our ties, we need to stick by our Australia values, we need to show some compassion.

We are among the privileged few who have had the relative freedom and wealth to actually make a difference, they are looking at us, for our help...

...so what kind of nation are we?



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