



## A Message from the Writers Guild of Alberta and the Edmonton Public Library

It takes courage to speak your mind in writing, to expose your words onto a screen or sheet of paper. Even more difficult is to do it when you're growing out of childhood into the new skin of a young adult. The teens represented in this anthology have what it takes. They have creativity. Passion. Good ideas. They're articulate, playful at times, deadly serious on occasion.

There is always a next generation of writers in the making. It's our job to find those talents and nurture them. To let them know we need them to keep on writing, keep on tuning the literary voices that one day will be telling the world the stories of a new time. The Isabel Miller Young Writers Award is a step in that direction, one of many steps in the ongoing task of bringing words, ideas, and imagination to the forefront of our communities.

The Writers Guild of Alberta and the Edmonton Public Library would like to thank all the teens who generously shared their writing with us. Thank you also to our jurors, who took on the difficult chore of selecting, from a total of almost 250 entries, the poems and short stories you're about to read. Finally, thank you, reader, you are an all-important part of the writing equation. You're doing your job too. Right now.

Sincerely,

The WGA and EPL

### **2010 Isabel Miller Young Writers Award Jurors:**

Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail

Anna Marie Sewell

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## 2010 Isabel Miller Young Writers Award Jurors

**Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail** ([www.daniellemc.com](http://www.daniellemc.com)) is now based out of Edmonton after a series of moves across North America and England. She has had her poems, fiction, and nonfiction published since she was a teen growing up in Ottawa and her first book, *For the Love of Flying: the Story of Laurentian Air Services* (Robin Brass Studio), was published in 2009. This fall Danielle will be writer-in-residence at Berton House in Dawson City, Yukon where she'll work on a history of aviation in Canada's north as well as a novel.

**Anna Marie Sewell** (<http://asewell.frontenachouse.com>) writes mainly for performance. Recent work includes: *Suite: Fifth World Drum*, a spoken word performance presented at Talking Stick Festival, part of the 2010 Cultural Olympiad; and *Honour Songs*, a multimedia community collaboration produced during Edmonton's Cultural Capital year, 2007. Her premier poetry collection, *Fifth World Drum* (Frontenac House, 2009) was nominated for the Alberta Readers' Choice Award and the City of Edmonton Book Prize, and shortlisted for the Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry. Anna Marie incorporates indigenous and international languages, song, and elements of theatre into her performance.

## Contents

<b>Stephanie Li</b>	What Comes Between ( <i>First Place</i> )	5
<b>Lara Hon</b>	Good Enough ( <i>Second Place</i> )	8
<b>Sabrina Dahl</b>	The Dancer ( <i>Third Place</i> )	10
<b>Sara Alfazema</b>	Poetic Jam	11
<b>Caitrin Armstrong</b>	Me?	12
	Little Dots	14
<b>Georgia Ashworth</b>	Do Not Let Me Die	16
	Fade	18
<b>Christine Bajzar</b>	Arissa	19
<b>Alexandra Barr</b>	Home	21
<b>Elise Bobet</b>	The Amazing Disposable Woman ( <i>Honourable Mention</i> )	23
<b>Jordanna Bubar</b>	Wonderland	24
<b>Kristian Callan</b>	Hallucinations	26
<b>Liza Chatterjee</b>	Clock	28
	Gone ( <i>Honourable Mention</i> )	30
<b>Eric Christenson</b>	December Nights	32
<b>Bri Coulombe</b>	Dissipate	34
	Snow	36
<b>Emily Devereux</b>	Dear Elise	40
<b>Janeen Dittmann</b>	My Feature Presentation	43
<b>K.N. Duffy</b>	Close-mindedness	45
<b>Deana Freitas</b>	Moonlit Pond ( <i>Honourable Mention</i> )	46
<b>Jennifer Galambos</b>	Asleep	47
<b>Elle Glover</b>	Depth ( <i>Honourable Mention</i> )	48
<b>Rayna Hoedl</b>	An Unexpected Adventure	50
<b>Meara Kirwin</b>	The Fairytale of Life	52
<b>Nicole LeBlanc</b>	Prince Charming? ( <i>Honourable Mention</i> )	54
<b>Adrienne Leung</b>	The Gladiator	56
<b>Yunmei Li</b>	The Mourning	58
<b>Chris Liu</b>	Good Morning America	60
<b>Krista Low</b>	I Didn't Feel Like Doing Work Today...	61
<b>Kinza Malik</b>	Dear Diary	62
<b>Daniela McGonigal</b>	Storming of the Bastille	64
<b>David McGonigal</b>	You Run to the Tree...	66
<b>Josef Benjamin Méthot</b>	Ulaanbaatar	68
<b>Alex Migdal</b>	Weeds	71
	Steel	72
<b>Dakota Montgomery</b>	Between the Pages	74
<b>Alison Morphy</b>	Robbery	76

<b>Michelle Nguyen</b>	Mirror, Mirror	77
<b>Allysha Porter</b>	Life	79
<b>Laura Rohac</b>	Struck by Sunshine (Honourable Mention)	80
<b>Neetu Sandhu</b>	Satan 2	82
<b>Brett Sheehan</b>	Of Train Trestle Bridges and Rainy Evenings (Honourable Mention)	84
<b>Rae Simpson</b>	Ravine After Rainfall (Honourable Mention)	86
<b>Frances Takach</b>	Diary of an Anorexic Girl	86
<b>Nandini Thogarapalli</b>	And They Tell You, "Live Loud and Happy" (Honourable Mention)	89
<b>Erin Vance</b>	critique (Honourable Mention)	90
	elegy to Wilde	91
<b>Colleen Xie</b>	You're Not Here	92

## Content Advisory

We hope you enjoy these pieces of prose and poetry. Because youth live such varying and dynamic lives, you will find many different subjects, opinions and worldviews explored in the following pages. We are glad to provide a safe space for this exploration, but must warn our readers that topics may be unsuitable for some readers.

Compositions may contain the topics of drugs, death, sexuality, violence/ weapons, and/or expression of negative events or emotions. You will also find unique stories and poetry exploring and expressing feelings of love, freedom, success, salvation, beauty, as well as triumph over adversity and suffering. Please use discretion as you choose to read each of the pieces included in this anthology.

Whether you choose to read all or only selected entries, you will see the remarkable joy and creative results that come as writers challenge the limits of the written word and bask in each outcome.

## What Comes Between

*"Riveting, chilling, and finely wrought, this piece manages to portray the complexity of armed conflict -- nationalism, colonization, individual survival -- in a single episode. The author's word choice is both evocative and provocative, and she applies it equally well in dialogue, description, and characterization. We were particularly impressed with her ability to convey linguistic and cultural differences seamlessly in the text. The story's climax, rendered in stream-of-consciousness style, is incredibly effective and demonstrates this author's gift for narrative pacing."* (Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail and Anna Marie Sewell, jurors of the 2010 Isabel Miller Young Writers Award)

The dawn did not come peacefully this morning. Grey light spilled over the horizon and settled into the rice paddies like the stench of rot. The light is creeping towards camp when I awaken. It seems the regiment is slower to rise now than a few months ago. Some combination of sadness and disbelief has caked over our skin, sapping our energy during the night, when no comfort can be found in an adrenaline rush.

*"Levez-vous!"*

The wake-up call continues as I finish my C rations and gather my camera. Nam Định City is visible in the distance on this clear day, so I want a few photographs before the troop marches south again. We're heading down from Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, to join the French Union Forces in Thái Bình.

I'm observing the view through a rectangle I've made with my fingers and thumbs, when Jean-Luc Martin walks over. He's the only one in the regiment who can speak fluent English.

"You're in the jeep today, *Robert*." He still pronounces my name the French way. "I wish I could ride in high style too, like you war photographers. Instead, I'll be mucking around, looking for those Việt Minh dogs."

I nod and hold the camera up to snap a photo of him. It's hard to imagine that this smiling, joking face belongs to a veteran soldier. I suppose Jean-Luc has already accepted he might die next week, tomorrow, or even in his next heartbeat. He's not going to be paranoid about it. Eight years of war will do that to a person.

“I’ll send this to your wife once it’s developed,” I tell him. He seems reassured. The one thing Jean-Luc fears is being forgotten – I think he’s a bit jealous of me because every picture I take carries a bit of me with it. Like some of the other soldiers, he has written a farewell letter to his wife, to be delivered post-mortem. Blood and sweat stain the paper as he keeps it in his pocket and clutches it during tense moments.

He wants me to deliver it. I tell him he’s not going to die.

This dirty war, *la sale guerre*, may be over soon. Our troop has received word that the Geneva Conference back home is coming to an agreement. It won’t be too soon. Half of the regiment’s soldiers don’t even know why they’re fighting the Vietnamese nationalist movement. Surprisingly – or not so surprisingly – that half consists of the fiercest fighters, the children, freshly weaned off of action figures and good-guy-bad-guy stories.

I bet the history books will portray the French as the good guys, and the Vietnamese as the bad guys. I’m neither. I’m on neither side. Do I pray for the French to win so I don’t end up a prisoner of war? Of course. Do I think the French belong in Indochina? No.

My only real desire is for the armies to go home.

There won’t be a winner in this war. The French will fight to keep their colonies, and the Vietnamese will fight to liberate them, and either side will hope that the other will give up. I’ve seen five wars, though, and I’ve witnessed things that tell me that war is no place for a fragile bird like Hope. Those memories are especially vivid because of the stench of death: gunpowder, smoke, rot, and excrement. Most people aren’t aware that when someone dies, their rectal muscles relax. The battlefield is not a glorious place.

On the battlefield, hope is like a reed before the flood. Hope is what I had for the friendliest, bravest soldiers; I hoped that they would die quickly and painlessly, not with their insides hanging out, covered in their own waste, and screaming for their mothers.

I’ve tried to stop myself from chasing hopes, but I can’t help it. Not now, as the end of the war draws near. I allow myself to hope that the next time I see these soldiers will be with their backs turned away from me, headed home.

Several hours have passed, and I’m all kinds of sore from the jeep ride. The driver stops for a moment so I can stretch my legs. I squint through the afternoon sun at the soldiers making their way through a field

beside the road, out of formation, guns slung over their backs. It’s the perfect opportunity to take a photograph to anticipate the future, a photo of these men on their way home.

I leave the jeep and jog up to the regiment, heedless of the jeep driver’s warnings. The men are well used to my presence. Once I reach a suitable distance behind their backs, I hold the camera to my eye, and take the photograph. It turns out well enough, but I want to capture both the soldiers and the long road they must walk.

To my left, the road to Thái Bình stretches for untold miles. I keep walking, keep searching for that perfect vantage point to take that iconic photo, an image that represents both a departure and a return, and my own willingness to Hope –

– but the sunlight is suddenly so bright, too bright, and my ears are ringing but I hear someone scream for a medic and I wonder who was hurt and if it was Jean-Luc I should keep an eye on his letter but it’s too hard to keep my eyes open and the sunlight is just too bright, painfully bright.

*Stephanie Li, 17*

Edmonton

First Place Winner

## Good Enough

*"The author evokes a deep emotional response in this story and we come to care for the narrator, her boyfriend and her family in less than two pages. Through excellent dialogue, description and believable interactions, the author also does a superb job of portraying how, in times of crisis, ordinary actions and casual attentions seem both salvation and burden. The narrator's struggle to acknowledge her grief without lapsing into self-pity rings devastatingly true." (Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail and Anna Marie Sewell, jurors of the 2010 Isabel Miller Young Writers Award)*

First there was the foundation and bronzer to darken my drawn skin. Peach coloured concealer, creamy as a cat's purr, under my eyes to hide the dark circles. The dark kohl defined my eyes, and made them look less red. Finally, rose pink blush whisked against the apples of my cheeks to obscure the sunken look they had taken on.

I smiled at myself in the mirror, seeing a little of that old warmth flash across my face.

"Good enough," I said aloud, in the quiet, predawn of my familiar room.

\*\*\*

My siblings were a glorious chaos that swept me up in its lovely normality. My mom swooped down the stairs, nourishing us with hugs and waffles.

"Do you have a date with Joseph after school?" she asked, checking her lipstick in the back of a spoon.

"Yup," I said cheerily, "we're going to get some coffee, I think."

"Have fun sweetie," she said, giving me a little squeeze, before herding my younger siblings towards the door. I left the rest of my waffle, no longer needing to pretend to have an appetite.

\*\*\*

"Brought you coffee!" I called. "Are you decent?"

"Yeah, come on back!" He was sitting up in bed, smiling at me. A doctor leaving the room shook his head disapprovingly at the coffee, but let me hand it to him. It wouldn't really do anything, anyway. Joseph clasped it gratefully, eyes lighting up. I studied his face silently, as he sipped the hot drink. His normally tanned skin he joked about being a 'Hispanic perk' was

grey, emphasized by his shorn head of black curls. The thin gown looked like a paper bag on a scarecrow. I sat on the edge of my bed and held his hand, talking about my day and what he'd been up to. When he got tired, he stroked my long hair and started to drift off to the lullaby of beeping hospital machines. I disengaged myself gently from his grasp, kneeling down to retrieve my bag when two nurses came in, standing at the door.

"Poor dear," clucked the one, a faint British accent colouring her voice, "they say he's terminal." I stayed crouched behind the bed.

"Who's the girl?" asked the other, obviously new to the ward.

"Oh, it's so sad," murmured the first. "She's his girlfriend, visits him almost every day."

"So sad," echoed the newbie, as they turned to attend to other people's tragedies.

\*\*\*

I could feel my hands shaking as I leaned against Joseph's night table. Tears trickled from my eyes, as silent as falling leaves. My phone began to buzz, and I dug it out quickly, before it could disturb Joseph's slumber.

"Yes?" I affected an air of cheeriness, spotting my mom on the caller ID.

"Hi darling, dinner soon. You and Joseph done yet?"

"Yup, see you soon. Love you!" She returned my sentiment and hung up.

I plunged my hand back into my purse, pulling out a mirror and eyeliner, repairing the wreck of my face. I needed this. I needed to look normal. More blush, to compensate for my ashen cheeks. I couldn't tell her. More mascara, to counteract the effect of eyes like slits from crying.

I needed one place where I wasn't the dying boy's girlfriend. A quick final glance in the mirror, checking that my mask was in place. I smiled, even as a poison as numbing as Novocain spread across my face.

"Good enough."

**Laura Hon, 15**

Spruce Grove

Second Place Winner

## The Dancer

*"We kept coming back to this poem: it is just exquisite in its simplicity. The images are powerful, the sense of movement is palpable, and we were really impressed with its elegant spareness."* (Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail and Anna Marie Sewell, jurors of the 2010 Isabel Miller Young Writers Award)

A gentle hurricane of pink,  
Bound to an hourglass  
That's running out of time.

She whirls, and twirls,  
Dizzying her head.  
And for a moment,  
She forgets her mortality.

**Sabrina Dahl, 14**

Calgary

Third Place Winner

## Poetic Jam

## Poetic Jam

I'm uninspired, because my imagination expired.  
My thoughts get barb wired, whenever my brain is required.

I want to be a poet; use pen and paper to relinquish the flow.  
Write logical lyrics  
that linger like a buzzing mosquito.  
Conduct a symphony of vowels, better than a Maestro.  
Pressing down on similes as if they are keys on a piano.

**Sara Alfazema, 17**

Edmonton

## Me?

In that hour between 3 and 4  
Sleep betrays me to my thoughts  
And I am left alone with myself

I lie there, acutely aware of every thread of cotton in my sheets  
Every drop of darkness that surrounds me  
I feel every cell in my body throbbing,  
My mind is strangely clear  
And I know that I am alive, that  
I am

But then, in that twilight hour  
I have time for doubt  
For wonder  
For fear  
My daytime barricade is breached  
By my solitude

Except, it is no longer my solitude, me  
For how can it be that I feel  
Think  
It just, it just can't be  
That I, am I  
That these are thoughts  
That this is existence  
But...? Why...?  
Anything?  
Everything?

My(?) mind(?) whirls  
Until at last, finally,  
Blissfully  
I am gripped by panic  
So real, so human  
I fumble for the light switch,

Praying, praying that it is solid,  
Tangible  
I gasp  
As objects that only a few minutes (hours?) ago  
Seemed so irrational, intangible,  
Unbelievable  
Are flung into the light  
And I cover my (my!) eyes  
From the light  
But it has already worked its magic

And in the morning, all is well  
The juice pours,  
I drink it  
But always, always  
There is that  
Fear  
That I might trip  
Over the fabric cover of reality  
And send it tumbling down,  
Revealing  
What lies beneath.

*Caitrin Armstrong, 16*

Edmonton

## Little Dots

They file in, chattering nervously,  
Holding their heads high,  
Afraid that their precious knowledge might  
Slop  
Over the edges  
And be lost forever  
A precarious balance

And then it begins  
Scratch, write, circle  
Fill in those rows of little dots  
Deliberate and debate,  
Which one is the  
Best  
Which one will let you  
Win

The clock is your enemy  
You glare at it  
And the person behind you  
Chewing gum, kicking your chair  
The silence,  
Even with flipping pages, and coughs  
Is stifling  
You are impatient,  
Just wanting it to be over,  
Done with  
But you still  
Need  
That grade  
Don't you?

But then,  
You are done  
Those perfect little rows of dots  
Looking so right  
Where are the wrong ones hiding?

And they file out,  
Exhausted, drained  
As they were emptied onto those white forms  
Nothing left to remember  
Done

They are ready now,  
To fill up again  
For the next test.

*Caitrin Armstrong, 16*  
Edmonton

## Do Not Let Me Die

My parents died when I was young,  
I'm living on my own,  
There are people all around me,  
Yet I feel so alone,

No one smiles anymore,  
When I pass they look away,  
No one has enough to spare,  
For a lonely stray,

I don't remember the last time,  
I really felt alive,  
There's only one thing on my mind,  
A single word; survive,

From dusk till dawn I work and work,  
Finding treasure in the trash,  
Take each breath as a blessing,  
Never knowing if it will be my last,

Everybody hopes and prays,  
With every step and every breath,  
We all steer clear of the diseased,  
For sickness means sure death

I dream at night of somewhere far away,  
Where I go to school and have a choice,  
I laugh with friends, I have a home,  
When I speak someone will hear my voice,

Somewhere I could eat three meals,  
Have water whenever I like,  
At a simple twist of a tap,  
Not a scorching three mile hike,

Somewhere I don't have to,  
Cry myself to sleep at night,  
Somewhere I don't have to fear,  
Those lurking in the night,

And when you scream and curse the world,  
Somewhere far across the sea,  
When you say life is so unfair,  
Do you ever once think of me?

How can this world be just,  
When you have all and I have none?  
Who says he'll have six and he'll have two,  
And you shall all share one?

Do you ever think to try and help?  
You with all your wealth and might?  
Do you know how much it hurts?  
How much I want to end this fight?

You can be the reason,  
Why I will cease to cry,  
The power is well within your reach,  
Please do not let me die.

*Georgia Ashworth, 13*

Edmonton

## Fade

Endless yearning for a word of praise,  
A kiss, a hug, a tender gaze,  
But love is met with cold indifference,  
Hopes crushed without interference,

The wind drowns out the muffled screams,  
Leaves fall like tears from solemn trees,

I scream and scream but no one hears,  
I've waited to matter all these years,  
But no one seems to care I'm here,  
Sometimes I feel I will disappear,

The wind drowns out the muffled screams,  
Leaves fall like tears from solemn trees,

I used to feel sadness, anger as well,  
But now it seems I am only an empty shell,  
Why should I keep trying, why do I resist,  
When to the people who matter most, I don't exist,

The wind drowns out the muffled screams,  
Leaves fall like tears from solemn trees,

But I am a bird with broken wings,  
A peasant forgotten in a land of kings,  
I think I will fall like the leaves in the shade,  
Blend into the background, slowly fade.

*Georgia Ashworth, 13*

Edmonton

## Arissa

The dark shapes of the night shadowed trees rushed by. Branches and twigs leaped suddenly out of the darkness. Fallen trees blocked one's path through the forest. The moon was obscured by clouds; the stars twinkled faintly through the night's fog, giving off just enough light to see objects a foot in front of one's face. But, the darkness was otherwise so complete, so impenetrable, that moving at any speed was deadly.

The black cloaked rider navigated quickly through the trees with a practiced ease. Above the sound of his quickened heartbeat, he could discern the racing hooves of the riders he sought to evade. He heard one of the men cry out as he hit a tree branch he'd not seen until it was too late to avoid it. *They do not know these woods as well as I do*, the rider thought, laughing quietly for a moment as another of his pursuers cried out.

Risking a backwards glance as the moon freed itself of the clouds, the rider was dismayed to discover that, despite his pace and winding route, still ten of the fifteen riders tailed him. Gritting his teeth, he turned his gaze ahead of him again. He knew that his horse was growing ever more tired and would not be able to keep up this pace much longer. Around him the forest was becoming less and less familiar, and, up to this point, familiarity with the forest had been his advantage. The trees were thinning rapidly, and the woods were opening up into a large clearing, in which the rider could discern at least a dozen people milling about. The cloaked rider pulled hard on the reins hoping to stop so he could turn and avoid the glade, knowing that he was moving too fast to simply turn. But, he was too late, the horse stopped just beyond the edge of the trees. The figures in the clearing started, clearly surprised, and scrambled to draw their weapons at the sight of the dark rider. It was only a few seconds before many of them held swords or knives in their hands. The horse whinnied as though it knew that his rider had only a dagger up his sleeve, and not wearing his sword at his waist and so would be unable to draw it in time to fight the men before him.

Suddenly, behind him, the horses of his pursuers whinnied loudly, and their hoof beats echoed loudly in the near silence of the forest's night. The rider's cowed head swiveled. For a mere second he looked at the trees and then back at the armed men in the front of him. A quiet groan of exasperation escaped the rider's lips. At only a slight tug on the reins, the horse turned away from the clearing.

“He cannot be allowed to leave!” one of the men in the clearing (who appeared to be the leader) called out. But rather than making any attempt to run, the rider slid nimbly from the horse. As soon as the rider had dismounted, the horse bolted into the trees. It took the men in the clearing only a moment to realize why the rider had not run.

As his pursuers crashed through the trees into the clearing pulling their horses to an abrupt halt, the black cloaked figure noticed that they were two less than when he had last looked. For the first time, his eyes fell upon the gleaming emblem that all but one of his followers wore—behind two crossed swords, two silver-white snakes coiled around a golden staff embossed with rubies, and a crown balanced precariously atop the staff. *The King’s Guard!* he realized suddenly.

Leaping from their horses, all of the guards charged forwards.

“Enough!” called the one who bore no emblem before they reached the rider.

“But, your Highness...” one of his men began to counter.

“I said enough,” he said shortly, looking at the man who recoiled fearfully in response. One by one, the King’s guards lowered their weapons and backed away from the cloaked figure.

“You are the prince?” another of the men in the clearing asked in surprise before someone else elbowed him.

The prince ignored them. “I am tired of this,” he told his quarry who had not yet relaxed his stance. “It is past time for you to give up and come back before you get hurt.”

The other men in the clearing looked at each other in confusion. “What are you implying? That I cannot take care of myself?” the cloaked figure inquired, the anger in his voice palpable. “And what if I do not want to?”

Anger flared in the prince’s eyes. He dismounted quickly, and easily. He strode towards the still tense figure he had hunted...

*Christine Bajzar, 15*

Edmonton

## Home

The house was surrounded by whispers and scorns whenever a glance came upon it. It always was. But the Old Woman who lived there was accustomed to it. On summer mornings she would come and sit on the crooked porch dappled by the filtered sun coming through the branches of the oak tree. And each day she would smile. And she would wait.

Mrs. Smith would always be the first to pass by on her jog in dawn’s young arms. She’d pause at her neighbor’s house and shake her head at the dilapidated thing while the grass in its yard tickled her ankles with its long, lush strands. Then she’d turn to the woman with skin as creased as the crumpled sea, and declare:

“My, look at your lawn! The grass is so tall you could get lost in there. You really should take better care of your home.”

And the Old Woman would reply that she was taking very good care of her home.

Then Mrs. Smith would return home and mow her lawn, and the playful wind would come along and steal the noisy buzz from its motor and carry it to the Old Woman’s attentive ears. And she’d close her eyes.

Next it was always Mr. Jones. On his way to get the newspaper he’d pause to take in the dreadful state of the Old Woman’s garden. Light shone timidly through the holes in the leaves chewed away by bugs, and the flowers would pitifully droop from lack of water. And each day Mr. Jones would shake his head; turn to the woman with eyes the colour of dawn and say:

“Look at your poor garden, it’s wilting from thirst and being eaten alive by bugs. You should really take better care of your home.”

And the Old Woman would reply that she was taking excellent care of her home.

Then after he retrieved the newspaper, Mr. Jones would tend to his own yard. He’d unwind the hose and splash the garden with the spray of water until the flowers were so drenched they nearly drowned. Shortly after he’d take bottles with little skulls and crossbones and spray his precious plants to keep the bugs away. And the Old Woman would see and shake her head.

Soon after Mr. Jones, Teresa, the Old Woman’s daughter would come by for an early lunch. She’d get out of her car and come into her

mother's house and sigh when she felt how cold it was, and how dark. Then she'd turn to the Old Woman and proclaim:

"Mother, your house is as cold as the Arctic, and as dark as night whenever I come. You really should take better care of your home."

And the Old Woman would reply that she was taking extraordinary care of her home.

Then later that day Teresa would call and mention how warm her house was, and how bright. And the Old Woman would run a hand through her wispy cloud hair and put the spoken word to images in mind. And she would sigh as the wind does when it rustles myriads of leaves with its breath.

Then Mr. Williams would comment on the fact that she had no car on his way home from work. And the mailman, as he peered in the window, would ask why it was she had no stove. And Mrs. Collins would often wonder aloud why it was that the Old Woman did nothing with the dying oak. And each of them would say she should take better care of her home. And to each person the Old Woman would reply that she was taking wonderfully good care of it.

But one day there was another visitor. He was not a neighbor, or family, but nor was he a stranger. He was about seven, with hair the colour of a sandstorm and he held a toy plane above his head as he ran back and forth down the sidewalk, laughing with bright eyes. Then he too noticed the house and the Old Woman seated in front of it, and curious, he came over to her.

"Why aren't you taking good care of your home?" he questioned, tilting his head.

"Oh, but I am," replied the woman. "I'm treating it very well indeed. For you."

"For me?" demanded the boy, confused.

"Yes, for you. I tried to tell them," she sighed, "But I gave up. No one listens, they never do. Not the Joneses or the Williamses, the Smiths or the Collinses. After all, not many treat the world with such care as I."

*Alexandra Barr, 14*

Edmonton

## The Amazing Disposable Woman

You see her there on weekday mornings, at the bus stop by the bank, the amazing disposable woman, chin resting in her hands, eyes down. They say she was raised by plastic bottles, half human half commodity, aesthetically pleasing but hollow inside.

The astounding disposable woman, look at her, then look through her, see her fill herself with trashy pop songs, chocolate bars, expensive clothing, fad diets, trying to find something to satiate her, to fill her and shake her awake and show her what was important and stop her from drowning herself in great piles of things she didn't need.

The mysterious disposable woman, so lost, but so close to understanding. Sometimes she would lift her head and stare at the telephone poles, and you would look at her eyes and see miles of nothing reflected in them. And you could imagine her, in the center of all that nothing, surrounded by her objects, searching for some sort of meaning, some escape from the cheap, disposable life she lived. And it resonated with you, because she seemed so close to that epiphany, that truth and belief that was grander and more valuable than any object she could ever buy, though it wasn't something she could ever hold or pin proudly on a wall.

But then she would snap back to the real world, the world of concrete and many empty things, the world where she was rummaging through her handbag, looking for her bus pass and those calorie-wise chips she had saved from yesterday.

*Elise Bobet, 17*

Edmonton

Honourable Mention

## Wonderland

Just a reminder  
A word to the wise  
A keepsake  
A notice  
A shock or surprise  
A memory, remember me when colours fade  
Into the rabbit hole it goes away  
What an adventure yet depressing to see  
That the world doesn't stay when I leave for me  
Imagine the wonder and beauty flies free  
With wings of gold, just silver for me  
Let us go in reverse and shall we take flight  
Only to be barred down by those eyes with such height  
Oh how they stare and bare you down  
I see an upside down smile to their upside frown  
They say they aren't smiling but they know wrong  
It's comical the stepping stones I skipped along  
The colours of their structures and beautiful stone  
And structure sticks crumple bricks, suddenly they're alone  
So laugh they may in their upside down frowns  
We are the realists and they're circus clowns  
Why live a monster  
And steal from a thief  
A cheat  
A scam  
Swim the ocean of grief  
A killer of thrillers and all our dieing dreams  
When the dream is to die and start living it seems.  
So jump to the moon when you fall from the ground  
The trees won't hold you lost to be found.  
Why breathe when its breath taking and ruin a run  
It's the fastest we'll go so let's race for fun

Damn the blazing eyes and their barring stare  
Live to live, and fall to feel you're there  
The fact may be sad but I'll confess that I'm glad  
On the inside, we're all a little bit mad.

*Jordanna Bubar, 16*

Edmonton

## Hallucinations

The whitewash oblivion of my padded surroundings opened up before me as, with considerable effort, I forced open my eyelids. A radiant ball of caged light, attached to the ceiling, emitted a small hum as it scorched the room with its flaring intensity. The light sent out waves of blaring heat every few seconds and it produced a shrill whine as it did so. Those sounds mixed with the heat made me feel uncomfortable and a little frightened. At first my eyes watered from the stark brightness of my cell, for surely that's what it was, but in due time my eyes adjusted to my whereabouts and I immediately noticed a dark spot. The first question that went through my mind, rather than the obvious, *'Where the hell am I?'* was instead, *'Who the hell is that?'* as my eyes focused on the darker area of the room. A small girl with raven-black hair huddled overtop of what looked like a dead fish. Though, it's not quite true that she was there at all. She was both there and not, as she shifted through different levels of transparency.

Speaking was impossible as my mouth felt like a desert, so instead I made a weak whispering sound to get her attention. I'm not sure why exactly I tried to get her attention though, it's not as if I usually make a point of talking to strange girls who do strange things, shortly after waking in strange places, but I couldn't seem to help myself- it just happened. She didn't move to look at me however and, other than her occasional glances and prods at the dead fish, she didn't really do anything. Again, I tried to communicate with her, and again I could do nothing more than push out a whisper past my cracked lips. The ball of light flashed again, brighter than before, so to protect my eyes from that stinging heat and damming light I lowered my head. I cursed to myself with my head bowed. But halfway through my profane monologue, I noticed something rather odd. I was wearing a white coat, *'But not just a white coat,'* I thought, *'It's a strait jacket.'*

The realization hit me like a pound of bricks. A cold chill, worse than the blaring heat, crept up my spine as I slowly raised my eyes to the stare of the little girl. Her face, if that's what you'd call it, was not two inches from mine, and I could see every detail etched in her ever-moving flesh. The skin on her face shifted over her features like oil on the surface of a pond, and her two obsidian eyes enveloped my own. I was disgusted, horrified, and yet hypnotized, for I could not look away no matter how much I willed it. However,

all that was lost to me in the next moment as her eyes expanded and devoured my world, all I could see was an endless torrent of blackness, it was all I could feel as well, like a deep sickness that thrived in my very soul. The blackness of this void was a soupy mixture of all that ever was or ever will be evil. It felt like I was wading through a stew of razor blades and vinegar and it smelled, *god how it smelled*, of dead fish and burning flesh. There was a bitter taste in my mouth, metallic and sour. It seared my palette and made me want to vomit, but I had to fight back the urge. If I didn't- if I opened my mouth for even a moment- I knew the consuming blackness would enter me, manifest within my body, and rip me asunder. In the distance, as though through a wet dishcloth, I could hear the shrill cry of the light-ball.

I screamed myself awake.

But that wasn't right, because my mouth was far too dry for me to scream, and my eyes weren't quite open yet.

The whitewash oblivion of my padded surroundings opened up before me as, with considerable effort, I forced open my eyelids. A radiant ball of caged light, attached to the-

I couldn't move or say anything. I was aware of what was happening, but all I could do was play out the story that had already been told. As my eyes rolled in their sockets searching for the dark spot of the room- despite my commands to stop- a brief insight echoed in my mind, *'this must be Insanity.'*

*Kristian Callan, 16*

Edmonton

## Clock

I am Clock—the endless music of humanity  
neither harsh  
nor gentle  
nor changing  
but an infinite drone.

I tick through wars and holidays  
and am always—always -  
behind the throne reminding  
monarch that time is drawing ever near.

For the dying man, I will  
March-march-march him toward the welcome arms of sleep, too slowly quick;  
And for the waiting child I

Drip

Drip

D

R

O

P

Into her lap, as smooth as the glinting viper. Too quickly slow.

And I am behind you, inside you, whispering into your ephemeral ear

Of time...

and death ...

and cradled sleep in its watery wholeness...

the foolish millisecond of man,

who will kill and fight and strain

to be the master of his tiny digit for the time it takes the universe to blink.

Within me, seasons pass,

Golden cloud-morn becomes impish fog-night

The earth wrinkles and pulls in reddish unrestraint.

Life unfurls and is burned back within the earth.

Through this all I count.

I am Clock.

When you see my face, do you but see the insignificant hour?

Or do you see the ancient clock, pushing you along?

Do you see Time

with its harbinger smirk

Counting away?

*Liza Chatterjee, 13*

Edmonton

## Gone

In the crisp autumn evening, a thousand ruddy hues from the setting sun illuminated the hill he walked down. The many trees that lined the path whispered him a greeting. It had been a long day, and he was looking for some peace, and clean, open air. Did either of them even exist in the city, he wondered?

Sprinkles of red gravel scuttled away from his feet, treading fast along a steep, grubby path that lead to a large statue. No easy feat for his aging, achy bones. It was a large, somewhat ugly tornado memorial, but he imagined it was a tomb, or an ancient ruler's crumbling visage. There, now it looked much better.

He sat on one of the wooden benches surrounding the statue, and breathed in deeply, throwing glances at the park around him. It even looked almost natural. After a tiring day, this seemed like a good place to sit and watch. He stretched, letting the kinks out of his back.

He had always hated the city, even in his youth, and in old age it was harder than ever to put up with.

But still, there still seemed to be some fresh air left. Not like home, but it would do.

A wind swirled toward him, stirring up the grass and playing with his hair, laughing.

It danced across the surface of the water. It was smooth and glossy, without a ripple, as though someone had washed and ironed the surface. The pond reflected the glowing sky, a myriad of colours in the fading light, the brilliant reflections only interrupted by geese.

It was working now, all of his woes were being erased by the wind, and the water, and the sky. The one place left untouched by the city.

Then there came the noises, maybe loud but never harsh, never completely filling the silence. The wind now racing through the scalloped-edged aspen leaves, a jay calling out, they were as shadowy as the coming dusk.

He continued along the soothing path, relaxing his nerves. A wild rose bush grew on the side. He neared, it noticing the hamburger wrapper entangled in its branches. He bent to pull it out, his back creaking.

How did it get here, he wondered?

As he pocketed it, a loud, pathetic, whine came from somewhere

around the pond. The old man whirled around. A fishing rod? The peaceful, once still water was ruffled, its polished reflections erased. There were only fragments left, scattered wildly. He saw, suddenly, the ever nearing suburbs, the just visible highway, and an ugly smudge of factory smoke, the plume like a stray paint on a ruined masterpiece. The city was still closing in.

And just like that, all of his near contentment was gone; all of his worries came thundering back, his now burning heart reminding him again that *she was gone*.

Self pity and resentment flooded into him, escaping through his eyes.

His weary, disappointed feet carried him through twilight-ridden streets to the imprisoning world of home.

*Liza Chatterjee, 13*

Edmonton

Honourable Mention

## December Nights

good morning Ms. Universe  
how does the world breathe today? do you see me standing under your  
wings? my eyes on your eyes in my eyes  
do you recall young Richard gazing at your majesty? (not long ago)  
you at his?  
did you fear him?  
did he fear you?  
can the Creator cower before the Created?

Richard Feynman feared himself. he was God  
Jokester Prankster Murderer  
"I killed 135'000"  
"Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman"

but What Do You Care What Other People Think?  
you, who stands beside the wings of your Mother Daughter Lover  
you, who knows everything of the Great Big Nothing

69 years of lockpicks and hieroglyphs  
answers unanswered  
questions unquestioned  
lack of progression in a progressing world  
do you miss the brainhunger, mindstarved in your knowledge?  
do you regret those weeks of work? (t'was all for naught)  
purpose lost in purpose found  
and what you found was all

there you sit by your Mistress  
gazing down at me  
you see Oppenheimer, Wilson, Bethe (That man was such a Bohr)  
you laugh at my future  
I laugh at your past  
you know I know  
we'll both know  
when your Lady flies me away

good night Mr. Feynman  
I breathe well today

*Eric Christenson, 16*  
Edmonton

## Dissipate

a lamp, a book, a bag  
a mirror too big  
the walls painted  
a colour too bright  
things that may be  
around me  
achromatize

thoughts take wing  
they swing  
entering  
a new realm entirely  
voices, one voice?  
roars, whispers?  
i'm trying to see, perceive  
is that you, me?

us lost in lust  
we won't suffer  
the scrutiny  
creeping up behind  
this scene  
microscopic diamonds  
cover our dermis  
the passion seamlessly  
evaporates

mesmerizing  
hypnotizing  
yet always awry  
we still find a way  
to penetrate rapture  
we capture  
every instant

all the while ignorant  
to the most profound ardor  
that awaits  
our final sobriety

while my eyes  
are once more  
introduced to the  
saturation  
surrounding this moment  
all at once  
the presage  
is plain to see  
the devastation:  
it's irrevocable

*Bri Coulombe, 17*

Edmonton

## Snow

This cold room smells of  
freshly made coffee  
I sit staring out the window  
the snow  
falling  
slowly  
the stillness reminds me of  
better times  
sweeter times

the ghosts of people I once knew  
linger  
they're sitting in the empty chairs  
watching me  
struggle  
watching me contemplate  
walk or run  
crawl  
stay  
because sometimes I wish  
I never woke up at all

I couldn't tell you how many  
skeletons  
sleep in my closet  
I'm too afraid to  
look  
open the door  
and clean  
wash away  
destroy  
the memories that  
haunt me

salvation seems to me  
a far off dream and  
freedom  
a shooting star that  
vanishes  
all too quickly  
all the choices  
every fork in the road  
the result  
all my fault  
my heart to blame  
my mind clouded  
left in the  
dust

I could smash this window  
make myself bleed  
just to feel  
alive  
I need to know if  
I'm still  
alive  
the winter air  
a cold hand on my neck  
adrenaline making  
my blood boil  
I'd run to the ocean  
run to the sky  
spread my wings  
fly  
but to say I'd escape this  
hell  
would be a lie  
  
I'd still be trapped  
in this body  
this mind  
soul

I sit in this cage  
with a stack of  
fresh paper  
a pen  
fiction spilling  
filling  
the blank pages  
trying to put in to  
words  
this emptiness  
a void  
that consumes  
all  
of  
me

these wishes  
visions  
of a different life  
doubt cuts like a  
knife  
disappointment  
even deeper  
things that can  
never be  
places I will never  
see  
a person I don't want  
to be

so the snow  
falls heavier  
faster  
the flakes  
made of intricate  
design  
are bigger  
they settle

they cover  
all hope  
they hide you  
disguise you  
change you  
create me  
distort me  
my reality

well I'm losing  
now  
peace of mind  
long gone  
I struggle to find  
the meaning  
I fail as  
the world thrives  
but this dark  
and empty room  
its all I know  
these lies  
they're all I know  
and  
I  
believe.

*Bri Coulombe, 17*  
Edmonton

## Dear Elise

dear Elise,

come home soon. i miss you.

love, me.

--

dear Elise,

come home soon. this city is lonely without you. i miss you—everyone does.

i hate to sound greedy, but i miss you the most. everything here is cold.

i walk downtown, through the crowded streets, and i don't see anything,

anymore. not the colours, the life, the endless movement. it stands still,

because you aren't here to point out the smile of a passing stranger, the

shapes the clouds make in the sky, or to slow down and close your eyes

just to feel the wind, blowing. the wind, that comes from everywhere. you

made me slow down and listen, to think about it all.

but now it's dead here. a city of millions, but it's dead.

the memories make it worse. there are so many places that remind me of

you, that stir up my loneliness again when i thought my broken pieces had

finally settled.

i miss the blunt sting of your honesty. i never realized how much courage

it took to do the things you did. i'm not a coward, but neither am i brave. i

stand in the face of my fears, however, i do nothing to fight them.

nothing. and lately, all i do is lie to myself. i'm sorry.

love, me

--

dear Elise,

come home soon. all your words echo in my head, but as time passes,

they're falling away. i'm scared all the little things will fade. i want the infinite

cycle of your voice, whispering in my ear, making me remember...

i remember walking downtown at night, listening to the cars and to the

silence between us, because that silence meant everything we could never

put into words. i remember the lines on your palms, how your hand felt in

mine. the nights before it got cold, when we'd just walk until we got lost

among the buildings, or the trees, or the nothingness. the inside jokes, the

laughter, the tears. i remember holding you while you cried. trying to make

everything better.

but trying isn't good enough, sometimes. in the end, you still left me here,

alone. all i can do, is try to remember, and hope.

love, me

--

dear Elise

come home. there's so much you could be here. so many chances.

i missed my chance with you. with everything. i had one shot, and i blew it.

i thought i understood you. i thought you cared about these memories, this

future. i know you hurt, deep inside, but i thought the possibility of the future

would give you hope. but it wasn't enough. trying, and trying to try, was too

hard for you.

you ran away. i just want my one shot back. i want you to take it back.

there's more than this cold city, and these uncaring people. come home.

love me.

--

dear Elise

i want you back.

i'm not responsible for this. it's not my fault. at least... that's what i keep trying to tell myself. maybe. what everyone else tries to convince me, anyways.

i should have been able to do something.

i tried everything. i feel so helpless. why wasn't it enough, Elise? that fact

that someone cared wasn't enough for you to stay here. it was always enough for me, but what am i left with now?  
it doesn't matter. trying is going to be enough this time. i'm going to save myself, but not like you did.

love, always, me

--

dear Elise

i'm going to be completely honest. just this once.  
i understand.  
i understand why you'd want to tear yourself apart, inside out and outside in. how you could give up your dreams, because you think they'll never come true, and because failing would hurt more if you still had hope.  
but i don't agree. failing is better than never trying.  
you tore yourself apart, you tore me apart, but worst of all, you tore us apart, in a way that can never be fixed. you aren't coming back. you had a chance, i would have helped you fix everything, i would have been the one to never leave.  
i hate thinking about it. that one shot you took. how you could have done this to everyone, but more so, to yourself. how could you make that decision? you weren't brave enough to live your life, so you saved yourself from life, and told me to live for you. maybe that's why i'm still here. someone has to be here, to remember. i just wish you would have taken the one shot i gave you to fix things.  
instead, you used one shot through the heart, to take it all away. one shot was all it took.

I love you Elise.

Love,  
me.

**Emily Devereux, 17**  
Edmonton

## My Feature Presentation

As I trudge through the thick slush, I feel the wetness absorb through my boots. The coldness seeps through my socks and attacks my feet. I contemplate returning home. Cold feet? The entire day? I could escape this plight. I feel as if a sad song is playing in the background and my name is rolling up the center of my screen. I could easily return to my haven. I could elude the pernicious stares and the echoing whispers that pierce my very soul. This is a decision I make daily. Cold feet. Another day. Continue. I near the front doors of the school. Their daunting steel composure intimidates me as I brace myself for entrance. Immediately, time slows. Life is surreal. Are people this cruel? I slump deeper into the baggy sweater that conceals me: my shield, or my costume.

*That's not what I heard.. Did you know that.. his best friend.. that's not the story.. I heard she.. I'm so not surprised.*

The stories continue. The students are ruthless and indefatigable. I don't understand. The rumours that have been concocted cut into my core. My once perfect record has been tainted and I don't know why. I am the same—the same simple student I have always been. I have spent twelve years with these people. What changed? What have I done to them? Nothing? I once thought nothing. I have come to believe that I did do something. I wish I could make them laugh again. I still long for their friendship. I attempt to soothe myself with a penitent attitude. It doesn't help. A once simple life has been snatched and replaced with this movie: a cast of antagonists and a script of sardonic words.

One whole month. One whole month. One whole month. This phrase started out at three and slowly made its way to one. It repeats in my head rhythmically with each step I take. I approach my locker hesitantly. I notice that something is different. My cinematographer focuses his lens; my locker becomes clear. The crude words marked on locker number 315 allow the ignorant to become enlightened. As the locker slowly comes out of focus, my final hope for a person who has not yet heard the fictitious tales is obliterated. I have to remind myself to breathe. Inhale or exhale? Which is it that I need to do? I soon realize I can no longer do either.

My thoughts are halted as the deafening silence is broken. I hear the pattern of footsteps edging down the hallway. I brace myself for a catty comment, for its arrival is imminent. The footsteps stop. Waiting. Waiting.

Nothing. I circle around and look up at my favourite teacher. I watch his eyes trace up and down my locker. Heat rises up my back, to my neck, on my face. With a sincere smile, he nods and continues on his way. Inhale. That's what I needed to do. The microphone amplifies my heartbeat; it vibrates up and down the hallway. I know he has heard the stories. Everyone has. Some Good Samaritan has taken it upon himself to see of that, but could it be that someone, anyone, actually has chosen to disbelieve these stories? Relief. Exhale.

As I watch him disappear off set, a phrase comes to mind. My narrator is speaking. *Fight back with such courage as you have. Clear in your conscience on this: Their cause, if they had one, is nothing; they hate for hate's sake.* I know I haven't done anything wrong. Not only do I know this, but people who matter know this. My dear friend. Although he is miles away, he understands. He knows what has happened. My teacher. Myself. My conscience is clear. The lights in the hallway brighten as the mood changes. The music is lighter and louder. I stand up a little taller, and breathe a little deeper. A smile appears out of nowhere. A smile that hasn't been lost, nor has it been stolen. Just forgotten. One whole month. This once negative phrase has transformed into something positive. One whole month of activities and excitement. One whole month to let everyone else see the smile on my face. One whole month to let them wonder. I rub away the writings from my locker, and with a jubilant song, credits roll.

**Janeen Dittmann, 18**

Cardston

## Close-mindedness

There are vultures circling in the sky;  
the sand is black, the tide is high.  
The salt scathes our sun-burnt skin,  
as the waves to do the rocks.  
The water rushes up and pulls us down –  
we nearly drown.

There are pennies laying on the tracks,  
twelve to be exact.  
Through the night, all the people with places to be  
trudge past loudly,  
sending the last of our hopes soaring through the open prairie air  
or flattened under steel.

We find our only solace in substance  
or on the community pool terrace;  
where we race or erase  
the silly constructs that were once sanctuaries,  
back on the prairies.  
And here we learn there is in fact a reason  
that some kids are smiling more than the others;  
and that true love is a rarity,  
and friendship charity.

The stars looked different from our Suburban backyard –  
fenced-in, and less clear; as if blanketed by smog.  
When we were young, and yelled out  
into the fields of grain, hoping for an echo;  
our mother told us: "we are all going to die".  
You tried your hardest not to cry; as did I.  
As did I.

**K.N. Duffy, 17**

Calgary

## Moonlit Pond

I'm star-stricken  
by moonlight.

My fingers touch wet grass  
as my eyes graze  
the black sheet of night.

Faded velvet,  
your hand reaches  
to hold mine.

We are like the hyacinth  
dancing on the water's surface,  
or the koi  
who sing sweet streams of bubbles  
as they flit through glassy substance.

And the man on the moon,  
with craters in his face  
wallows in envy  
as our lips connect  
and you send a buzz of lightning  
through my empty veins.

*Deana Freitas, 17*

St. Albert  
Honourable Mention

## Asleep

My tongue,  
swollen with the taste of sleep  
smothers my mind

gentle snores drift through  
the wall  
in a taunting lullaby

How long will I be counting sheep  
and whatever else floats above my head  
in the dark

All the moments lost  
and found  
in soft sheets and pillowcases

with thoughts the waking mind  
can only dream of

*Jennifer Galambos, 18*

Calgary

## Depth

The black water glistens, reflecting the light of the midday sun. Beads of sweat appear at the nape of my neck. Condensing, they cling to my sun-bleached hair and begin to drip down my back, soaking my shirt. I stare into the deep abyss, curling my toes around the salt-encrusted edge of the jetty. How many times have I made this jump? It must be hundreds, but those days seem so distant now.

There was a time when I would have raced across these jagged planks of wood and hurled myself over the edge, laughing all the way. That was before, when this water was safe. This very same water that stares up at me now used to wait for us to jump, ready to catch us, to cushion our fall. Now, I look into those depths and am unsure. The darkness could hold any number of things. These things tend to lurk just out of sight. Out of reach of the light, they wait.

You used to look into this water in wonder, awestruck by the life that existed below the surface. *It's another world*, you used to tell me. I never saw it. You would leap, holding your breath, into the waves, diving down deeper and deeper until I couldn't follow you anymore. I would surface, gulping down lungfuls of briny air and wait for you. You would always follow. Slowly, you would make your ascent, as if reluctant to leave that murky world. Then, one day, you didn't.

When we were thrown from the boat that stormy day, I waited for you. Peering down past my feet I searched the blackness for you, not particularly worried, because you always came back. How long I stared into those depths I do not know. Unable to follow you, I floated there.

It did not take them long to find me, those men in the orange jackets. They used words I did not understand. Words like hypothermic. I remember screaming your name. They couldn't find you either.

As I stand here, baking in the sun, engulfed in doubt, I remember your face. The expression you always wore while falling through the air, knowing what awaited you at the bottom. That confidence seemed contagious then and I cling to it now.

The black water is calling me, offering reprieve from this blistering heat, or maybe the voice is yours. I do not know what force pulls me towards the waves as I leap. Breaking through the surface, I descend into the deep. The crushing dark surrounds me and I kick towards the light.

The sun on my face tells me I have made it. The ocean cradles me as I float on my back, gazing not into the dark, but into the sky. Gulls circle overhead, screeching and wheeling back and forth. I lay there, unmoving, enjoying the freedom of this summer's day and knowing that there are many more to come.

*Elle Glover, 18*

St. Albert

Honourable Mention

## An Unexpected Adventure

“Yawn! What a lovely nap,” said Hailey drowsily. *It would be perfect if my back wasn't so itchy*, she thought. *Eeep! I can't reach! OH NO, my arm isn't even an arm anymore! In fact, none of me is the same! I'M A HAMSTER! Oh dear, what an amusing little predicament I'm in.* Hailey started scurrying around in circles. Exhausted, she sat down.

“Ahem,” went a tiny voice. Hailey jumped a mile into the air. “Sorry! I didn't mean to startle you,” apologized the voice. Slowly, Hailey turned around. The voice belonged to a small, shy looking hamster.

“I'm Doctor Frankenhamster, but you can call me Dr. F. I turned you into a hamster because you humans are always wishing that they could just eat and sleep all day, just like their pets. Well, now you can!”

Hailey looked at the hamster in disbelief, “You turned me into a hamster because you thought I'd like to just eat and sleep all day?”

Dr. F nodded.

“Well, you're missing one important fact. I'M A HAMSTER! I do not want to eat and sleep my life away as a hamster. I'd rather be a human! Change me back!” ordered Hailey.

“I'm afraid I can't do that,” admitted Dr. F, “I need a parrot feather, some dog hair, hamster food and water that fish have swam in. Unfortunately, I used up all those ingredients when I turned you into a hamster. We'll have to find more if you want to be a human again.”

Just then, my younger sister, Jenifer, walked into the room and exclaimed, “Mommy! Mommy! Look, Mr. Buns has a friend! Now we have to buy a bigger cage and get more toys...” her voice trailed off as she went in search of her mother. Dr. F was blushing, if hamsters could blush. Hailey had an idea.

“Dr. F, we need to get Jenifer to take us with her. It's the only way we can get a parrot feather,” said Hailey, banging on the bars of the cage in an effort to get Jenifer's attention. Dr. Frankenhamster joined her. To their relief, Jenifer returned. She had her shoes and jacket on, ready to leave for the pet store.

“Aww, do you want to come too?” The hamsters nodded. “Well, I'll only bring Mr. Buns. Cho-cho has to stay here.” Jenifer left with Mr. Buns, accidentally leaving the cage door open.

Hailey waited until she heard the door click, then she leapt out of the cage and onto the table. Carefully she skittered across the table and jumped onto the hardwood floor, which caused her to lose her grip and slid into a wall. *Ouch!* thought Hailey, trying to regain her balance. It was strange for her to be walking so close to the ground. She stumbled often, but she soon learned how and scurried over to the fish tank. It was on a coffee table, and Hailey knew she was going to have to climb it, but it looked as impossible as climbing Mount Everest. She looked to her left and saw a black couch. She got an idea and jumped on it. Her nails dug into it. Hailey scrambled up the couch then leapt to the goldfish bowl. She fell right in! Fortunately, Jenifer and Dr. F opened the door and came in. Jenifer immediately scooped Hailey out and put her on the ground. Hailey ran to Dr. Frankenhamster and asked if he had a parrot feather. Dr. F showed her his paw. He had brightly coloured feathers stuck in between his claws. Jenifer scooped up the hamsters and locked them in their cage.

“You two have to stay here until I have your new home ready, okay?” The hamsters nodded.

“Ok, I have the dog hair and hamster food is in the bowl over there. I see you got parrot feathers but we still need fish water!” said Hailey, looking out of the cage and at the fish tank.

“Au contraire. I was going to dump it on you anyways,” smiled Dr. F, staring to pick the feathers out of his claws. Hailey brought over a mouthful of hamster food and spit it out in front of the doctor. She combed dog hair off her stomach and put it on the pile, which now had bright feathers on it. “Now roll in it,” ordered Dr. F. Hailey obliged. As soon as she was covered in the mixture, she started tingling. She jumped out of the cage as she began to grow. In no time at all, she was herself again! She turned to the hamster. “Thank you!” whispered Hailey. After this little adventure, Hailey never viewed hamsters in the same way again.

**Rayna Hoedl, 12**

Edmonton

## The Fairytale of Life

Sometimes, life is like a unicorn,  
Twisted horn like every  
Unnoticed  
Daily miracle,  
He's pure and joyous, only for you.  
He bows his silken head and lets you climb aboard,  
And you glide through the world with ease,  
Smiling.

Sometimes, life is like a dragon,  
Spiked tail like a back-stabbing friend-  
Shocking.  
You often sneak around a dragon-  
Leave the trouble for another,  
Then someone slays it,  
And lives in glory,  
And you wish you had chanced it,  
Regretting.

Sometimes, life is like a goblin,  
Each wart like each insult thrown at you,  
Splat.  
Grumbling and groaning,  
Covering the world in mud,  
Turning every airy meadow into a cramped crumbling cave,  
Splat.

Sometimes, life is like a fairy,  
Like the half-way friend that never follows through,  
Fickle.  
Full of tricks, surprises, and loop-de-loops,  
Exhilarating, glittering,  
But then-  
Defeated,  
Tricked.

Sometimes, life is like a centaur,  
Piercing eyes like bossing parents,  
Strong and controlling,  
Or guided by fate-  
Followed meekly by you,  
Fearing.

Sometimes, life is like a phoenix,  
Sweet song like a reprieve after a storm,  
Healing with its powerful tears,  
Full of fire, full of passion,  
Strong.

But always, life is like a fairytale.  
Witches and wolves may want you,  
Twisting trails may trick you,  
Yet your fairy godmother is forever there-  
If only you trust in her,  
Comforting.

*Meara Kirwin, 14*

Edmonton

## Prince Charming?

Sasha turned her page with a sigh, wishing that these dragons and princes would come to life. To live a life filled with magic and adventure would be far better than the one she was living now. Maybe she could actually find a prince in another world, one who knew how to wear his pants around his waist rather than his knees. She went back to her reading.

CRASH!

She gave a small scream as she was jolted out of her reverie by a rock coming through her window. Before she could wrap her mind around it, a young man jumped through her window.

“How - who - what?” she spluttered, staring at him. He looked like a prince, complete with golden hair, a circlet, and neat clothing.

“I have come to rescue you from your evil step-mother!” he told the room at large. Then he actually saw Sasha and looked her up and down. “I always thought princesses would be pretty, but I guess you’ll do. Come on.” Without further ado, he grabbed her arm and started to haul her towards the broken window.

Choosing to ignore his obvious snub at her looks, she told him, “You’ve got it wrong. I’m not a princess, and my step-mother is like a real mother to me,” she wondered if this boy had escaped from the asylum five blocks away. He seemed to be a little...different.

“Oh, no, you’re the one I want,” he told her, and he pulled her out the window.

Her scream died in her throat as she looked around. Her backyard was still there, but the park behind her house now stretched for as far as the eye could see. The city skyline was gone and she swore she could see mountains in the distance.

“What is all this?” she asked, her voice hushed with awe.

“Magic,” he answered simply, and pulled her up onto his horse. It seemed to be the only explanation she would get. He spurred his white stallion forward and they were off, speeding through meadows and forests.

She hadn’t known that a horse could go so fast, but she tried to take in everything she could, even while she was bouncing up and down on the back of his saddle. *At least he didn’t make me ride in front*, she thought, rather uncharitably. *I can’t imagine was a saddle horn would feel like.*

They rode for what seemed like hours, and the prince didn’t even

check to see how she was faring or if she was even on the horse behind him. They were riding through a thick forest when three monsters came out. The horse reared with fright, dumping Sasha as the prince held on.

“Foul beasts!” he howled. “I’ll destroy you!” and he urged his horse at the three ogres.

Sasha watched, horrified, as the three ogres seemed to be overwhelming the prince. His horse helped, kicking and pawing at the creatures, but no matter how good the horse was, the swordsman had to know what he was doing, and the prince obviously didn’t. It was a miracle he didn’t cut his own head off.

“You’ll do well for dinner,” a smooth, oily voice said from behind her. As she spun to look, her arms were grabbed in a vice-like grip, immobilizing her almost completely. She kicked out and screeched for the prince to save her, like they always did in the stories, but the prince looked up from his own fight and blanched at the thing holding Sasha.

“Sorry,” he told her. ‘I know when I’m losing,’ and he spurred his horse through the trees, leaving Sasha alone with the ogre holding her and the two the prince had left alive.

“Unhand me!” Sasha said, trying to sound like the maidens she had read about. “My father will behead all of you –”

“I’m sure he will, deary,” the one holding her said, as he slung her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. ‘But by then it will be too late for you, won’t it?’

His hold on her left her free to kick and punch and screech in his ear as he loped easily through the forest. It didn’t seem to faze him, and when they reached the camp, the ogre adjusted his grip, preparing to throw her into the boiling water over the fire. She closed her eyes.

She opened them with a start when the impact with hot water didn’t come. All she could see was cream, and she pulled the book off her face. *I was dreaming*, she thought with relief, then she opened her book and resumed reading.

Princes, magic, and adventures could stay on the pages of her books, where they belonged!

**Nicole LeBlanc, 16**

Woking

Honourable Mention

## The Gladiator

“*habet, hoc, habet,*” he has had it. Aurelius felt the churn of the Tiber River in his empty stomach, as his eyelids fluttered over his grey eyes. The summer air cocooned around him, baking all of Rome in a suffocating heat. A bead of sweat slid down from his forehead, leaving a wet trail on his dusty cheek. He wiped it off, battling the real tears back in his eyes. He was turning sixteen today, a fitting way to celebrate.

All too soon, the ominous grating of metal resounded and the gate shifted slowly, revealing the packed Coliseum. Aurelius stepped out onto the cracked dirt and the cheer that rose out of the bloodthirsty crowd threatened to chase him back out through the shaded dusty tunnel. Aurelius gripped the hilt tightly, but the shaking in his body came from fear, not strength. His steps were slow as he counted them one by one knowing the number he had left decreased with every step.

The sounds that encircled him faded into the background leaving only the pounding of his heart and the quick shallow breaths escaping his dry lips. His eyes darted left and right, flitting from the crowd, the arena and finally, his opponent. An ill-fitted boy, too young to be a gladiator stood before him. Tangled brown hair, thin face and wide eyes. Aurelius stared in amazement, as the boy dropped to his knees and bowed his head.

The crowd gasped and Aurelius stood frozen, sword in hand. The boy must have committed a capital crime. According to the laws, Aurelius was to teach him a lesson, with a slow and painful death. It was a privilege to be given an easy job, one that didn't endanger his own life. Aurelius was now faced with a choice, to finish the boy off and have those young eyes haunt him the rest of his life, or face the emperor's wrath and the risk of danger to his own life. Both choices were heavy consequences, all that was left was his decision, to be loyal to the crown and his family, or to do what was loyal to his own heart. The silence lengthened and Aurelius made his decision, lowering his sword, he stepped forward and addressed the boy.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?” Aurelius was well aware of the murmur of unease that rippled through the crowd like the long grass on a windy afternoon.

“My name is Scaeva,” he whispered, “I don't know why I'm here.” His voice wavered like a lone flame, vulnerable to the elements surrounding him.

Aurelius's face darkened as he realised what crime Scaeva had committed, his name had revealed it all. Scaeva meant left-handed, an anomaly in an ideal society, rumours of sorcerers spread like wildfire with all those born that way. “You are left-handed, that is why.” Aurelius heard the rumble as the Emperor stepped into the arena, surrounded by many guards. “I cannot kill you for that.”

“Please, just do it quick.” Scaeva looked at him imploringly, “if you do not, the Emperor will send for another man, without as kind a heart as you, and he will draw it out my death as long as possible. The Emperor may spare your life even if you kill me quick.” The boy's hand was surprisingly firm as he gripped Aurelius's wrist, his eyes bore a look of one condemned, mixed with determination and sadness, grave beyond his tender years.

Aurelius felt the cold realisation of his situation, there wasn't clean solution to the problem. He tightened his grip on the hilt as his mind spun with the different endings that never left without leaving a sick horrifying feeling that threatened to cloud his conscience. Taking in a ragged breath, he spoke, “I am going to speak to the emperor. If he does not see the truth in my words, then I will distract them.” Aurelius steadied his sword. “If fighting breaks out, You make a run for the entrance, keep running and you should be able to hide out till dark and make an escape. There are many people here, all which do not have a clear picture of your face. You will live.”

“You will die then, in my place.” The words hung in the humid air, “you do not know me, yet you are so willing to risk everything for a stranger.”

Tears finally slide down Aurelius's face. “Living is worth nothing if you live with no meaning. Standing up for what you believe in, doing what is right, that is one of the few decisions I can make, and it is one that will live on, in you.”

*Adrienne Leung, 14*

Edmonton

## The Mourning

Intertwined in the dreary grey sheets, a tiny figure rolled around restlessly. Her sweaty fists were bunched tightly around a gnarl of the damp cloth that trapped her clammy skin with their never-ending creases, worn beyond repair. The air was too humid to allow for much rest, although no one in this damned city would be able to sleep even if it were cool. Down below, the voices of tormented souls rang out, their sorrows drowned with gallons of drink or sachets of crystals. Cars were heard in the distance, quite some distance away from this proletariat district, yet the rotten egg and gasoline smell of exhaust never affected the bourgeois or the affluent, only here. The street lights cast an eerie glow on the grimy windows, making it near impossible to see the stars, although no one here reached for them anyway. Even the moon reflected a sickly green.

A slight bang could be heard just outside her door, a door that was kept closed by nothing but a simple padlock. There was the unmistakable sound of uneven stumbling, and then another loud crash of something hard hitting the fragile door. The girl on the bed jolted awake from her troubled sleep, if one could call that state of slight unconsciousness sleep. She would have felt fear, but the sense was greatly marred by the gentle numbness from some white capsules, a bottle of which lay spilling on her floor beside a small pile of 100 dollar bills. She dragged herself in a daze towards the sound, not bothering to detangle the sheet that still smelled of man. She hesitated before pulling open the door, but then whipped it open in a moment of surrender.

She gasped when she saw him quivering out in the hallway of the apartment building, his knuckles white from gripping the ridges on her doorframe. Letting out a moan, he fell forward into pale arms that did not look like they would be able to hold his weight if it were not for the fact he was almost as petite as she. Grasping him tightly, she felt his dry heaves, his body shuddering against hers.

“Tony? Oh my god, Tony? Tony, what’s wrong?” She was wide awake now. Filled with the unsettling scent of urine, her nose cringed. The nauseating tang of metal, red liquid metal, rolled and dripped through the air to rest on her tongue. She pulled back and held him at arm’s length. Staring into his deep brown eyes, she felt more frightened than ever. He looked

helplessly back at her. His dark mahogany skin was covered with bruises and thin, red knife marks. Both eyes were swollen, one of them surrounded by a twisted oval of darker purple. Looking down, she started at the sight of thick rope lines across both wrists. His coat and wallet were gone.

“I was at the party,” he choked and then started babbling, tripping over his words, “I ain’t just any blackie. I’m Tony, I’m ME. Why can’t I just be me?” He gave another dry sob and collapsed on the old worn carpet. The tears came freely now, and they dampened some of the rust coloured stains already on the floor. Flustered, she scrambled to help sit him on the rumpled bed. “They pissed on me; they tied me up and pissed on me!” Whimpering, she struggled to calm him down and wipe away the hurt that hung off him, almost as thick as the scent of blood. “We are nothing, aren’t we? We’re just insignificant specks of dust, falling with no place to land.” His voice contained a hopelessness that no 16 year old should have.

They looked up simultaneously as the sun’s first rays peeped over the distant horizon, highlighting the rain droplets racing themselves down the thin glass. Raising herself to the window, the girl looked over the fallen city and wondered how anyone could survive this way. Turning around she reached back for him, but found to her sorrow that no matter how close she held him, she couldn’t quite reach him anymore. The rain chose that moment to pick up speed, and the sound of its cold fingers drumming against the window mixed and formed a rhythmic beat with his sobs. The sky seemed to be mourning. As it wept incessantly, the wind grieved- howling and wailing. The girl wondered at the bitter tears. Was it crying to wash away the sins of mankind? Or perhaps it was wailing at how short-lived all happiness was? While the rain fell during the early dawn, she seemed to grasp an aftertaste of twisted and oppressive beauty, and came to the conclusion that the sky was weeping to wash away the sins of the world.

*Yunmei Li, 17*

Edmonton

## Good Morning America

I sit in my prison, tool in hand  
As the conveyer carries out its will.  
And around this forlorn metallic land  
Lies greater numbers of myself still.

The fluorescents cast their numbing glow  
Sprayed across Ford's greatest scheme  
Which sounds my defeat with unceasing flow  
Of plastic visions of America's dream.

Plastic skin on plastic parts  
Plastic love in plastic hearts.  
My role in this sadist's task  
Is to maintain the communist arts.

"She must be the same!" is the cry that's pressed  
"From here to Sudan to Sri Lanka to Spain  
The children expect - no, *demand* - the best  
A want only Freedomland can sustain."

And so I sit here night after night  
Limply scanning the Freedom fest  
To ensure their troops are at full might:  
Perfection demanded for righteous conquest.

How long I'll sit, I cannot tell  
The outside world seems as far as Hell  
But if Hell is there then what is here?  
The row of she-demons draws ever so near  
Facsimile smiles seem so sincere;  
Chaos reigns for a Platonic year.

*Chris Liu, 17*  
Edmonton

## I Didn't Feel Like Doing Work Today...

I can't believe that I am being forced  
To scribe this poem I don't desire to write.  
The task before me fills me with remorse;  
Compels most people to take rapid flight.

For I am lacking poet's endless talents  
To rhyme and reason well on any whim.  
I am no Shakespeare, wrought with eloquence;  
I am no author great compared to him.

No matter how in any skill I lack,  
I still must trudge through dreary drudging chore.  
Instead of being lazy, dull and slack,  
I must escape the duty put before.

So here my sonnet I present to you  
Be grateful that 'twas not your work to do.

*Krista Low, 18*  
Airdrie

## Dear Diary

May 22

Dear Diary,

I have been trapped in this prison for two weeks now. It's torture. Everyday I am woken when pelted with popcorn and then the camera flashes blind me. This cage is so small that I suffocate, and the food is disgusting. People just don't have respect for monkeys anymore. My most recent plan to escape was also a failure. I don't think I will ever be able to escape so I have decided to just ignore the horrifying monsters and live my life as I would in the jungle.

May 23

Dear Diary,

Ignoring was not the solution. Today, they were twice as annoying. The worst were the children. How am I supposed to ignore someone who copies, mocks and irritates me every second? They did everything I did, just to make my life miserable. Why don't they ever leave me alone?

P.S. They don't even leave me alone at night. Last night, I saw them.

P.P.S. No, I am not paranoid!

May 24

Dear Diary,

You must be wondering why I am writing like this. This is the result of my Plan B. Yesterday I tried to hide and blend in the tree in my cage. Unfortunately, they found me. I thought I could still camouflage, so I continued to hide there. After two hours of trying to get me to come down, they called the highest zoo authorities. I think my acting was so incredible that they actually thought I was dead! Before, I could do anything I was attacked by two huge veterinarians and given electric shocks. I don't know, how much longer, I will be able to survive.

May 25

Dear Diary,

Today was the best day I've had ever since I got trapped in here. All day no one came near me. They didn't interrupt, insult or irritate me! How? Well, it started early this morning. I was still loopy from the electric shocks and the kids were getting on my nerves. They didn't care. All they wanted was entertainment. Well, I gave them entertainment. I did all the crazy moves I could think of. They got so terrified that they finally left. Now, no one will want me and the zoo authorities will let me go back to the jungle! I knew I would find a way!

May 26

### Mutated Monkey

Scientific results show that an ordinary monkey at the Valley Zoo is actually a new undiscovered species. He may be the only one in the world. Reports show that unlike common monkeys, this species is extremely intelligent and is able to communicate telepathically with other animals. "I first suspected him three days ago when I saw him writing a diary," says the zookeeper. Scientists are looking more into his abnormal behaviour in the past couple of days. This can lead to incredible discoveries. Further research will be conducted. Go and visit this miraculous monkey at the Valley Zoo near you!

### Notice from Valley Zoo:

This monkey is completely harmless. The Valley Zoo has a safe environment and there will be no danger to anyone. If you have any information or concerns regarding this monkey, contact us at 678-982-1545.

May 27

Dear Diary,

They are back! I thought they left, but it was all a plan to attack me with an army when I least expected it. What did I do to them? I liked it better when there were only a few. Now, everyday there is a line that goes around the world and comes back to my cage. Each person is adding more misery to my life. I NEED HELP! I'll even pay someone. Cash or credit?

*Kinza Malik, 13*

Edmonton

## Storming of The Bastille

July 14, 1789: From the guard's point of view

I am standing inside the Bastille. Outside, an angry mob of 300 people are screaming curses at us and pounding their many dirty fists on the wooden doors; the gates won't hold much longer. They are here to kill us and free the prisoners, I just know it! I am terrified. My pale and sweaty hands are shaking, and I can feel my whole body trembling. I feel the anxiety hanging like a mist in the air of the damp, cold prison, with its unfriendly stone walls, heavy wooden doors and cold, black metal bars. I can actually taste the anxious feelings on my tongue, they are so heavy in the space between us sentinels.

Suddenly we hear a man yell out to us in a gruff voice over the vast horde and the deafening noise, "Come on out, you damn cowards! We won't hurt you! We promise!" I look at my three comrades. They nod silently to indicate I should open the mahogany gates to let the persistent souls in. I hesitate on opening the entrance to the prison house. Suppose they're lying? But the frightened hand-gestures from the other guards make me open the huge entry. I feel as if I'm going to vomit, I'm that scared. The others look like they're going to be sick, too.

Light from a weak sun comes pouring in and there are triumphant screams from the vast amount of commoners. I hear startled cries from the three guards, which are suddenly silenced. I look over at them to see what made them go deathly silent like that, and what I see makes my stomach plummet and the scream freeze in my dry throat. There they are, with quivering spears through the head, throat and chest, their eyes like windows that have closed their shutters forever in an abandoned house.

I hear dimly, "There's one more! Kill him!" I look up, see one of the commoners throw yet another spear, see it zooming toward me, the air whistling as it goes through it. I try to move yet I seem to have lost the will to budge from the place where I stand. I feel it sink itself into my chest, directly over my frantically beating heart with a squelching noise. Tremendous pain grips me. I scream in agony and horror, looking down at the dark blood oozing from the wound, and something hot and crimson comes trickling out of my mouth, now frozen in a gaping "O". The ground comes zooming up to

meet me out of nowhere, and I hit the cold, gray stone floor with a tremendous thud as my failing heart stops pumping, much to the happiness of the swarm. Darkness is solidifying around me, and I feel Death's cold hands caress me lovingly. There is so much that I haven't done with my life, but Death is now going to be the last thing that I will ever feel again...

*Daniela McGonigal, 14*

Calgary

## You Run To The Tree...

You run to the Tree, grass whipping by, blurry and unfocused. You breathe in the smell of wet grass, soft and dew-spotted, as the early morning Sun rises and strikes the water droplets hanging off of the leaves, a thousand miniature rainbows in a thousand tiny worlds. You arrive at the Tree, rising up above the other younger, lowlier Trees, a king in a crowd of peasants.

One foot rests on a root, ancient and gnarled, a root of the Tree. You start to climb, hand over hand, foot over foot, almost flying, up, up, up to the top of the Tree.

In the distance, your parents sit on a park bench, absorbed in a conversation, oblivious to the whereabouts of their son, You, Yourself, a Lord in this, the Tree of Life and Souls, the Pine that is Tree.

As You revel in your newfound freedom, No One appears.

"You. You, Yourself, in the Flesh and Blood. Blood." No One whispers in your ear. Smoke, black and oily, wreathes around You, cocooning You, embracing, enchanting You in darkness.

"Y-You, you are No One," You stutter, streaming eyes turning red and puffy.

"You are You, and I am No One, drawn from your Imagination, a Figment, a Fragment, the Lost Puzzle Piece, escaped from the Asylum where the most immoral of your Inspirations are incarcerated, enchained by links and bonds of sorrow, crushing them, grinding them down, deeper, deeper, until they are gone, evaporated, reduced to dust and sand," No One whispers in your other ear; You turn to see him, but he is before You, in all his terrifying glory.

Sharp, pointed teeth, cruelly hooked nose, black-yellow eyes, sallow, grayish skin, stretched so tight it should have burst by now. No One is surrounded by a shock of hair, colourless, empty, devoid of life. It disappears, and You feel faint, dizzy. Feet slip, hands grab, and miss. You fall, silently screaming. You are no longer Lord in the Pine that is Tree. Twisting and turning, trying to avoid branches as they scratch your face, arms, legs. Then it stops. Time. Time is Frozen; No One comes out, grinning a maniacal grin as his Hand is raised, slowly, almost imperceptively. The Hand snaps its fingers, and Time continues.

A loud crack accompanies your landing, You land on your leg; the bones snap, break, crumple up in a few short seconds.

The pain. Pain, nothing but and nothing more, Pain through shredded skin and muscle, tissue and bone.

"No One brought this upon me," You whisper. "Nothing is worse, No One's game is finished."

You speak too soon; a branch, broken in your fall, crashes down through the unbroken branches, landing on your head. A small cut forms above your eye.

The world around You becomes blurry and unfocused; the trees; the grass, the squirrels and sparrows sipping the dew; your parents, running across the field, mouths open in horror.

And You, Yourself, slip into Unconsciousness, a Sleep not drawn on Tiredness.

*David McGonigal, 12*

Calgary

## Ulaanbaatar

hand halfway to the coffee pot  
contemplating casual Friday  
the TV full of pleasant heads  
he Stops.  
some epiphany takes him  
an occasion, mind, he has little experienced in  
five and twenty years of adulthood  
two kids  
two cars  
a wife once  
or rather none at all now  
a picture-book American dream  
but for the dream.

he hums now  
from memory  
a patriotic tune, to mourn the black and white  
dying on the table  
he turns a page  
coffee forgotten  
but letters flee his eyes he  
struggles  
to comprehend meaning  
in the Sunday Comics.

he remembers well his father's mornings  
how words slid  
rich and plump  
through the crumbs  
"stuff you can sink your teeth into"  
his father would say  
and laugh, as though  
Nicaragua were the Troy of our times  
and Odysseus stood fast in defence of America.

over coffee he would chide his country  
as though a Soviet march  
could teach one more  
than America the Beautiful  
or the lessons of public education,  
laughing as he folded the world neatly amidst his breakfast  
then demanding the capital of Mongolia  
as though this were the most important  
word of them all  
a child disagreed.

he can see that question now,  
too slow to escape it  
open on the table  
wondering at a world  
naked before his eyes  
exploration too grand and too vast  
for sight grown shaded  
and heart hard shut  
against a world that proved all too big to face  
long ago.

behind him coffee pot screams for attention  
television reminds him  
do

not

go

outside

he can't remember how long  
he has been here  
held, helpless for judgement  
before a panel of himself  
a snake curling in his stomach

he stands  
sounds, unnoticed  
ooze from the television  
wonders where Mongolia is

too afraid to bring himself  
to find an atlas

the coffee bubbles over  
spills across the counter  
in bravery, he reaches for it  
stands  
in a stained suit  
in an empty house,  
coffee pot dripping in his hand.

Then he lets it go,  
tosses the glass and liquid across the neat lines  
sha  
tter  
ing  
photographs of far-away  
three panels too perfectly timed  
words like a gavel,  
as though  
the mere act of denial can hide  
two dozen years  
and the television drown out  
the story of a lifetime

*Josef Benjamin Méthot, 17*  
Calgary

## Weeds

I walked the fields of Beauty today,  
Where life's perfect vision had chosen to stay.  
An intrusion aghast me, a dandelion's flaws,  
What an ugly, rancid thing it was.

It spewed its yellow, so sickly and bright,  
My vision not blinded, but lack of foresight,  
Led me to crush it, cried murder afoul,  
Walking away, no smile but a scowl.

I should have been warned, but who was to say,  
Mother watched Beauty with careful display.  
The earth shook, clouds parted, Mother had deemed,  
My vision was flawed, justice reigneth supreme.

Gone was my hair, grew the pollen so white,  
With venomous ivy to spread my skewed plight.  
Goodbye to my arms, broadleaves took their place,  
Gone was the pitiful sight of my face.

In the dandelion of Beauty was where I then stayed,  
My hollow stem rung by a heartbeat dismayed.

*Alex Migdal, 17*  
Edmonton

## Steel

The doors clanged shut behind him, the impact of their steel reverberating through his body. He flinched at the deafening sound and shut his eyes for an instant, briefly shrouding his world in darkness. It was the same feeling he had felt everyday for the past four and a half years. The difference in direction, however, was what made this moment feel overwhelming.

He was walking south toward the guarded exit of the prison. Two guards walked alongside him, stiff in their marches. The prisoner's eyes darted wildly in all directions, absorbing all the subtle differences in the area. Had the fluorescent bulbs always flickered like that? When had there been leaks in the ceiling?

*Maybe my vision's been getting worse, he wondered.*

His mother had never gotten around to buying him the glasses he needed when he was 16. Just a few months before he was arrested, an optometrist had informed him he was near-sighted, but it was only in its beginning stages. He wasn't expecting to get the glasses anyway. There wasn't money for glasses. There wasn't money for anything.

That's why drug-dealing had seemed like the ideal solution. A Ziploc bag filled with some white pills was all that he needed to sell to bring supper to the table for the next couple of nights. He wasn't proud of himself, never had been, but as long as he was taking care of his mother, nothing else mattered.

Rounding the corner of the corridor, two police officers shuffled past the prisoner. His heart almost jumped to his throat at the sight of them, as it always did when he ran into law enforcement. The blaring of the sirens and whirlwind of reds and blues were embedded in his memory, a plague that never ceased to let go. The night the prisoner was arrested was the day the person inside him died. All the hopes and dreams burning within him were extinguished into thin tendrils of smoke.

More lucid was the memory of his mom opening the front door as she witnessed him being forced into the police cruiser. Her mouth agape, eyes wide open, a cruel hybrid of terror and devastation staring right at him. Her pleas to the officers to let him go rung in his ear just as clearly as they had that night. He wanted to forget it, to desperately let it go, yet the memory refused to relinquish its grip.

He had not seen his mother since then. Four and a half years had passed and the thought of her still burdened him with a deep, gaping pain. For the first year, he had held hope that she would come visit, but after anx-

iously waiting at the beginning of each month and getting the quick shake of an officer's head, he finally let it sink that his mother had lost hope for him. He understood.

The prisoner handed his dull orange pants and shirt to the officer in exchange of a folded white t-shirt and black pants. The guard pointed to a door on the right.

"Change in there," he intoned monotonously.

As the prisoner walked into the cramped room, the guard added, "Oh, and there's someone here to pick you up."

The prisoner froze. He turned to the guard, who had gone back to directing other prisoners. Had he just heard him right? Someone was here waiting for him? In a mad rush of adrenaline, he threw the clothes on and burst out the door. A guard, waiting for him just outside, led him down a set of stairs.

Halfway down the stairs, he noticed two small feet in over worn, ragged shoes standing at the bottom. With each downward step he took, more and more of the figure's shape was revealed. When he reached the bottom, he stood face to face with a woman half his size and a face that was almost unrecognizable.

"My God," she whispered, her face riddled with creases and wrinkles, "how you've changed, boy."

He felt unsure of what to do. He stood still, bending his head slightly downwards, not wanting to face her eyes, those same eyes that had haunted him for the longest time.

"Glad to see me?" she asked.

He looked up at her, paused, and then nodded.

"Good," she said, smiling.

The two walked out the doors of the prison. He was overtaken by the air, how fresh and clear it felt. She led him to a car that looked like it was about to fall apart any moment. He slid in the backseat as the car's engine sputtered to life.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"Home," she replied.

He turned back to the prison, its gates closing as the car pulled away.

*But where is home?*

**Alex Migdal, 17**

Edmonton

## Between the Pages

Run your fingers over my exquisite pages, feel the slight indentations left by the gentle kiss of the printing press. Anticipation is just pouring out of you. You want to dive in and feast on the splendor of words, to assuage the hunger that builds inside of you even as we speak.

So many years I have spent abandoned and alone. At the mercy of every shallow fool who wants only to admire my beauty with their untrained eyes, when all I desire is to be truly appreciated. I need a sharp mind to delve into the mysteries contained in my fragile pages. Your mind is markedly quick when compared to those of your predecessors. I know that once you open up my cover, you will truly appreciate the masterpiece inside.

Only if you choose to read me, you say? Oh my dear, rest assured that you will indeed succumb. Nothing you have tried can wean you from your addition to the colourful world of stories. Reality has become nothing but a pale shadow, a trial to be endured before you can return to the land kept so carefully in the safety of your mind.

They say the eyes are the window to the soul. If so, imagine what I can see as each set of orbs peer over my pages. Reading me as, at the same time, I read all of your darkest secrets. You see a reader may only take away the knowledge that is displayed on the page for all to see, but a book that is read receives something far more precious; a piece of the reader's soul.

You gasp in horror and outrage at the very idea that you may have surrendered something as precious as a piece of your soul, particularly to as unsavory a character as I. Surely there must be a mistake, I could not have stolen anything without you noticing. It is simply not reasonable! As a feverish inventory of your mental processes reveals nothing out of place, smugly you decide I must have been bluffing. To prove to you my sincerity, I ask a simple question. For what purpose do you read?

Many people indulge in the written word to find all that escapes them in real life, be it adventure, sophistication or romance. Still other readers live only to compare their lifestyles and decisions, forgetting the artistic license that so many authors indulge in. Which are you? Do you read to escape, justify or enhance your life?

Whichever type of reader you happen to be, one thing is certain, at some point in your incredibly short existence you will have been influ-

enced by the power of the written word. And does that not mean that the work of literature that has so influenced you can now lay claim to the part of you that it changed? Your eyes open in shock and sudden realization. No longer can you deny it to yourself, you know deep down in the furthest regions of your heart that I am right. Never again will you be able to look at a book without contemplating the fragments of soul kept jealously between its pages.

I see I have disgusted you with my boasting. Bile rises in your throat as you envision tearing my exquisite signatures from their leather binding and watching as the cloud of dust and ancient glue falls quietly to your feet. Mine would be a silent death, marked only by the rending of paper and your sighs of satisfaction. If only you could bear to complete the act. We both know that you will not be able to. Fear of the unknown grips you like an icy hand clamped over your chest, making each breath more difficult to draw than the last. By destroying me you also risk destroying your only opportunity to gaze into a whirling maelstrom of souls, to discover what makes us who we truly are. What secret lies at the heart of man, what pressing confidence that no one is able to share? What could possibly be the enigma that shapes us all?

The answer, my dear, lies between my pages. Walk away and you will never know what you have missed. Knowing that you turned down the possibility of learning the souls of many, as well as your own, could you live with yourself? Walk away into the torment of uncertainty and unquenchable curiosity, or open the book.

Slowly, as if no longer controlled by your mind, your fingers close around my dusty spine. The pages crack ominously as you open the cover and begin to read...

*Dakota Montgomery, 18*

Canmore

## Robbery

Red dust lifted and fell to the rhythm of my footsteps. I could hear the distant gurgling of the river as I stepped out of the protective forest, into the bright flower covered graveyard.

“Everything in this darn town is so clean and happy, even the graveyard!!!” I grumbled as I stomped over a small wooden bridge that rose above a sparkling stream. The stream fed millions of colourful carnations that carpeted the yard. Sudden anger ripped through me and I let out a bellow of rage, I felt like ripping every single flower from the ground to make the graveyard dark and grim like I pictured it should be.

Stalking away, I turned off the dusty path onto Main Street; the bank towered over me, as I grew closer. I paused at the elementary school studying the empty slides that were usually filled with children bubbling with laughter, a wave of sand, pushed by the wind, washed over the lonely equipment as if to prove my point. As I stared grieving over my lost childhood, a lonely feeling crept up into my gut, at that moment I would have given every thing to be a kid again and correct my mistakes. But I also remembered the nasty teacher that strapped me and called me an idiot everyday, I took a deep breath and turned away without a backwards glance. My evil mood returned as I passed the church with a sneer, while mostly everyone was listening to the preacher, I would rob the little wimpy town of Calamere. I stopped to peer through the barred windows of the jail, and pictured myself staring out with handcuffs around my wrists. I was certain I saw my reflection mouth the words “Don’t do it Milligan!” The reflections solemn eyes shrivelled my soul. I turned away slowly, my sweaty hand clutching the silver knife inside my coat. I pulled the knife out and watched the sharp sides glitter in the summer sun. My last thread of confidence vanished, and I dashed to the banks large glass doors, clutching the warm metal handle I collapsed into hysterics, looking through the polished glass I studied the costumers inside. Pulling myself together, I took a deep breath and shoved the door open.

“GIVE ME YOUR MONEY!!!!!!” I bellowed at the startled customers as I pulled my knife from my jacket...

*Alison Morphy, 12*

Sherwood Park

## Mirror, Mirror

Her hand brushed the dust off the silver splashed mirror—her body trembled as she opened her wide, azure eyes resembling those of a cat’s. She was not as beautiful as a goddess on her evening stroll but she was as radiant as the sun... But still, tears roll down her eyes. She guessed she was obese as she never knew the difference; her pessimistic mind restrained her from joyful judgements. She had always been confused—people said girls who were obese were most likely skinny, was she one? She did not know herself. Who cared for her that could tell her truthfully. Her family would always be too kind to tell her she was corpulent. Who would ridicule her for possibly not knowing her size? Who? She was a lone soldier fighting an incessant war.

She stood motionless gazing at her form. The golden, wavy hair she had worked day and night on, lingered to her waist with dazzling sparkles which made you think of the sands at a beach on a midsummer day. Her immense lips were polished crimson; they were soft, kissable, and sweet. Her eyebrows were neat crescents which were elevated from her eyes only a few centimetres. She had her eyelashes elongated and her eyelids painted the color of spring- it was a hardly visible cerise. Her chalk white dress clenched her thin body making it slightly difficult to breathe; but its magnificent intricate designs flowered from bottom to top. Her legs were as smooth as silk and her exquisite ruby pumps lifted her off the auburn hardwood. She was not petite and nor she was not a giant. Though one of her arms was just a few millimetres shorter than the other, her picturesque bleached skin made up for it—they were a perfect shade...

Though all she could see in her reflection was a lonely, lost girl failing at trend and shape. She thought her eyes were dull and didn’t sparkle of the life she wished she had. Her head was too jagged and sharp furthermore her hair was too oily, dry, and lifeless. Her skin was too pale and coarse with random hints of hair. Her lips were too wide, and didn’t bring comfort and welcome. Even a smile would be useless with her clown like makeup. She thought her dress looked like a new accessory on a broken antique doll. She looked like a giraffe in heels... But it was all in her head. She was the most stunning girl, not perfect, but purely incredible—just marvellous. Again, who would tell her? Who was brave enough to venture the cave to find the crystals which lay far beyond the light of day? Who?

She slowly stepped away from the mirror, careful of the loud noise her heels may produce. Then she whispered in her almost inaudible gentle, sweet voice,

“Mirror, mirror on the wall, please tell me I’m at least fairer than some at all”

*Michelle Nguyen, 13*

Calgary

## Life

It hits us like stones through windows

Breaking us down

Ripping us from limb to limb

Hardship

Troubles

Anger

It changes courses like the rivers

Hold me, hold her, hold him.

We blow right through these things that matter

Run for cover

Hide down under

Cold

Hot

Shallow

Full

Light the fire

Make the bed

Running with scissors, running in circles

Running away, then running ahead.

Change

Breathe in fumes

Breathe out forever

We will not let go and fall backwards

Shush

Stop...

Think

*Allysha Porter, 15*

Didsbury

## Struck by Sunshine

I'd been meeting up with Gabrielle for a while. Every time I saw her, it was like a shard of sunshine struck me in the chest. Because of this, I started wearing even darker colours than usual. It wasn't that I disliked Gabrielle herself, but the feeling of possible spontaneous combustion made me uncomfortable. In preparation, I was standing in the shadows waiting for her—soaking up the darkness, as it were.

"Morning, Alvar!" She chirped, coming up behind me and tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around, and like always, her smile reminded me of the sun in early morning. It was impossible not to return her smile, even though mine probably more resembled a grimace-smirk hybrid than an actual grin.

I mumbled back, "Good morning." So much for soaking up the darkness. I was already engulfed in her radiance.

The problem with the relationship between Gabrielle and I at that time was that we were only a bit friendlier than acquaintances. We were both Mages, the very best in our respective regions even though we were both very young. This was the only connection we had, so I made the most of it. The area around my village had many ingredients that were key in making charms, potions and medicine. Gabrielle lived in a big city where you had to pay for these ingredients. So I invited her to come whenever she wanted to my village so she could pick as much as she wanted for free. It was beneficial for both of us, because I think I was falling in love with Gabrielle, and I felt the need to see her as often as possible.

We walked together out of the village and into the forest that surrounded it. I glanced over at her as we walked, "I like your belts," I blurted. She had thin chains with little gold disks fastened to them, which crisscrossed around her hips. I'd always taken special notice of accessories. It probably wasn't normal for men to notice how appealingly shiny someone's pendant was in the sunset glow—not that I had much of a frame of reference to go off. My specialty as a Mage was to make wearable charms, so of course I paid lots of attention to other's jewelry.

"Thanks," her emerald eyes glittered, "I like your lightning bolts."

She was referring to the gold lightning bolt that I had fashioned myself that fastened my violet cloak around my neck, and also to the one I used as a buckle on my dark red leather belt. Gold was a very versatile metal when it came to magic, so they were both affixed with several charms.

My cheeks heated up, knowing that she noticed them, and had even complimented them.

"And I like all your earrings too. The mark of a true Magician," Gabrielle continued, "Plus, they're a lot more interesting than the usual ones." I fingered them self-consciously. I had a lot of them—four on my left ear: the ones male Elves get at their coming of age ceremony, the ones Magicians get from graduating into the profession, a long black cuff that ran along the top of my pointed ears, and a bar that went across my ear from the top to bottom. My right ear was less interesting with the coming of age one, the graduation one and a thin dark silver ring. All of them were, naturally, laced with magic. I was very physically weak, so I used magic to make myself more durable to the plights of everyday life.

Nothing else was said for a while. We got to a meadow that had little herbs with tiny pink flowers that magicians called Cupid's Blossom because it was often used to make love potions or marriage charms. Unsurprisingly, this was the highest request from customers across the board. Then Gabrielle spoke again, tucking a strand of her long golden hair behind her ear delicately, "So are the lightning bolts a motif for you?"

"Uh, well," I stuttered as I collected more Cupid's Blossom, "Some of the villagers think that I was born from lightning. You know, because my eyes are red and all." Actually, what the majority of the villagers thought was that I was a demon and not to be trusted. Since day one, I had been avoided like a plague, which as far as they were concerned, I was.

"Well, I think they're pretty eyes," Gabrielle said. And I'm sure that at that point I flushed to the tips of my ears.

I blinked, remembered how to breathe again, and then broke into my first, all out grin, "Thanks!" Suddenly, I was full up to the brim with confidence. Maybe being struck with shards of sunshine wasn't so bad after all.

*Laura Rohac, 15*

Edmonton

Honourable Mention

## SATAN 2

Scars slickly slide, squirming silently to surround  
My bodies a maze scars forming all around,  
Everyday a new one forms to make a mark on me,  
Never to please my master how I wish it did indeed.

I tell my teachers fibs,  
To make the days fly by  
What's on your leg?  
A bruise, a scar?  
Why is your leg swelling was it hit by a car?  
I could just tell the truth, let the pain subside  
Or I could lie, let the fists pummel down,  
Staying with the pain  
No smile.  
No frown.

**SATAN,**  
comes home hotter than the sun  
Ready to play his game of what he thinks is fun  
Mon was eliminated fast in the game, couldn't take the torture couldn't take  
the pain.  
Choking from the intoxication of his many sins  
this is were we fight but he  
Always wins.

The blood begins to drip staining the carpet dark red,  
The glass has be lodged directly in my head,  
He takes another bottle and smashes it gracefully down only to  
Chuckle slowly as it it's the ground.  
It's deep inside my thigh, so deep I should cry.  
He gets up and leaves,

As I clean up the mess  
**Take the glass from my head**  
**Take the glass from my thigh**  
Put them on the floor  
And pray to god to let me die  
Then I start stare at the mess  
all a test.

This time I might have to go and confess but  
There's one thing that stops me,  
It's what momma did.  
She told the cops too early in the game  
When SATAN got a hold of her he pounded her insane.  
The cops never stopped him they had no clues  
Just a tiny old girl who was only 8  
With 2 long pigtails and a treacherous fate.  
My dad has done this since I was 10,  
5 years later and it still happens over and over again.

Maybe I should end my life  
It might be best  
Slit each damned wrist or put a gun to my chest,  
Eat some pills, hang my head instead no matter what I'd rather be  
**Dead.**  
I should Put this vacant soul to rest as I walk to the bathroom I stab my  
chest  
**No more lies,**  
**Fake smiles**  
**Or**  
**Fatal pain**  
never to see  
HIS horrid face again.

**Neetu Sandhu, 14**  
Edmonton

## Of Train Trestle Bridges and Rainy Evenings

Glistening, iridescent orbs patter softly upon the roof of my car, caressing the contours of her body. The fresh aroma of the rain stifles intoxicating gasoline fumes, bringing memories of late night drives and rainy mornings. As each drop falls, I can almost hear the aged train trestle bridge sigh; the cracked Chinese pavement laugh; but all I really hear is the soft patter of raindrops upon the roof of my car. Funny, how a single raindrop echoes in a confined space.

"You know what I noticed?" A hand gently touches my shoulder and I turn to look at the beautiful girl beside me. Tiny prismatic rainbows dance across her face, casting subtle shadows beneath her soft chin, porcelain nose, and petite lower lip. Her gaze wanders beyond the windshield, between the flitting of the wipers, "Rain falls on everyone; it doesn't care if you're white or black, straight or gay. It just, falls."

I slide my hand tenderly down the side of her smooth face, "I think the windshield wipers work better over there. All I see is rain."

She scowls. I smile back, "Want to know what I see?"

As she buries her face into my polyester-cotton t-shirt, her reply becomes muffled, "I don't want to, mood wrecker."

I draw her close. The rain reminds me of the night we told the truth, the long drive to her parent's house, the rainy morning after, teardrops and gasoline.

"No, I'm serious. Do you see that cluster of three stars there?"

She looks away. "I see clouds."

I smile, "Those three stars make up Orion's belt. Follow the rest of the constellation. There's his sword and shield."

Still half hiding in my t-shirt, she shrugs, "Big deal. All I see is a bunch of stars."

Resting on her forehead, I bring my voice down to a low whisper, "Maybe, but do you know the story behind that bunch of stars?"

The rain patters softly. "Orion was a mighty hunter who fell in love with the goddess Artemis. Apollo found out about his sister's affair with a mortal and was furious. He decided to put his sister's dishonor to an end."

Her breath comes short. "Orion was a strong swimmer, so Apollo waited until only Orion's head bobbed above the surface of the water and he called his sister over. Knowing Artemis would never pass up a bet, he challenged Artemis to hit what was floating in the ocean with an arrow. She did, and killed her lover."

I feel her squirm and she raises her head in alarm, "What kind of story is that?"

I stroke her hair with my left hand, "You didn't let me finish." Her eyebrow arches. "When Orion's body washed to shore, Artemis realized what she had done and raised his body into the sky so they could always be together."

Closing her eyes, she nestles her head comfortably into my chest, "That's much better."

Smiling, I motion to kiss her on the forehead. My lips meet hers instead.

The rap of metal meeting glass reverberates through the car, and harsh, blinding light floods the cab. A man wearing a blue uniform squints through the foggy window, the badge on his chest lapping up the blue and red light of his squad car greedily.

I roll down my window, "What seems to be the problem, officer?"

Squinting inside the car, the officer lowers the flashlight to his straining belt. Removing his wide brimmed hat, he smiles apologetically, "Sorry ladies, thought you might be one of those teenage couples. We've been getting lots of them coming up here on nights like this and we're trying to put an end to it."

I look over at the beautiful girl. She returns my gaze. The officer rests his arm on the car. "It's alright officer. We can stop coming here too if you'd like."

The officer shakes his head, "Not to worry." He laughs, "I can see why they come up here. There's something romantic about sitting at the city limits by the old bridge in the moonlight; like out of an old movie or something."

The girl kisses me on the cheek. "It really is romantic up here."

The officer's smile slides. His eyes are arrows. Without another word, he replaces his hat and walks back to his squad car.

The red and blue lights disappear. A single tear rolls down her face.

The rain continues to fall, pattering through the old car's fumes. Gasoline and teardrops; the silence that followed the night we told the truth.

I roll up my window and fake a smile, "I guess the rain couldn't soak through his hat."

She smiles back. Funny, how a single teardrop echoes.

**Brett Sheehan, 18**

Morinville

Honourable Mention

## Ravine after Rainfall

The ravine is wet and calm  
After a heavy rainfall

Peaceful and bright,  
A sleeping giant dowsed with water

The soil is spongy and moist  
Cool and damp,  
Tread on by few.

There is an echoing silence  
Except for birds singing their songs in harmony  
As if they were in a choir  
The lyrics to their songs remaining an open secret

The leaves of the trees  
Are as green as a red-eyed tree frog  
Shining out in the midst of the forest ...  
Raindrops shimmering in the light

The scent of pine needles and leaves  
Evident in the air  
The taste of fresh dew  
Walking off the tongue

The bark is rough and coarse  
A billion crooked branches  
Dripping droplets of water  
Onto the shrubs below

The ravine is wet and calm  
After the heavy rainfall

*Rae Simpson, 14*

Edmonton

Honourable Mention

## Diary of an Anorexic Girl

Shapes blur past my face. Acknowledgement of my existence is minimal. I shyly nod to a girl I know, but my heart flutters with disappointment as she lowers her gaze. Girls shrieking with excitement rush past, connecting with their friends across the hall. The bell echoes loud and resonating. I realize I am kidding myself and release a restrained sigh through my nose. I wish to be heard by no one.

Tugging my sweater tighter to my body, I feel the imprint my arms make beneath the bulk of the sleeves. I wrap my arms around them and sigh once more. They aren't skinny enough. I fear that they never will be. This leads to the panicked clutching of my elbows in an attempt to salvage an impression of bone. Having failed, my attention moves to my shoulders and ribs. I am searching for comfort but only find failure. All I ever find is failure. My eyes shift back and forth as I survey the depressing blue and red pattern of my shoes. The colors that were once bright and uplifting now leave me with a sense of defeat. The laces are incrustated with various specks of dirt; the life has drained out of them just as the light has disappeared from my eyes and the glow is consumed by darkness. I twitch inwardly as a brusque guy grunts, shoving past me to catch the eye of blond bimbo. I brush off the imaginary imprint he made on my shoulder. I wish to be touched by no one. Leaning against the protruding brick wall surrounding the East hallway, I recall the disastrous events that occurred yesterday. Since then, both nothing and everything has changed.

VVVMM! The vibrating of my phone shakes me awake, as bus number 36 to Ledger pulls on in the darkness. The contents of my colored hobo bag are an endless supply of gum, lip gloss, an iPod, several books and my phone, intertwined with pens and pencils. I answer the phone on its final ring.

"Hello?" There is nothing but silence. And then sobbing. My heart rate increases, my chest fluttering. I try again, tugging the phone closer to my ear in case of a lack of reception. "Hello?" This time, my mother's voice incases me with dread.

"It's Grandpa." More sobbing, "He's gone." My teeth clench together and my throat closes up. It's too late to change anything and an overwhelming fear grips me. So much that I could have learned from him, so much we could have done, but in the end time is a real bitch. It sets limits on

relationships and acts as a barrier to things that should be said but cannot be uttered in time.

I shut my eyes as a single tear streaks down my face. My pale face, colored red by the brisk wind chill of -40 degrees. Nothing is safe.

As I recall the events of the earlier day, yesterday appears clearer to me. He's gone and I couldn't control it. I can't control anything. I feel fat and ugly. The fact that I might feel this way for the rest of my life terrifies me more than I can even comprehend. The feeling of anxiety deepens and I pull my sweater lower and lower to cover my legs. I start to turn around and walk slowly towards my locker. I miss him already. The loss hangs in the air like a concrete object.

It's lunchtime and people are beginning to eat their lunches in the most diverse and unappetizing ways. As I reach my locker, I become aware for the first time that day, of the painful pit in the bottom of my stomach. It wants to devour but I reject the idea. Fine. Let it devour. Then there will be less of me to worry about covering. I grab the paper bag lunch from my locker, containing an apple and a few crackers. They go straight into the garbage. Feeling accomplished, I shut the locker door shut once more and try to avoid the gazes of several people as they pass me in the hall. I keep my eyes straight ahead and silently will them to not see me. Encompassed in my own peaceful world, I feel safe for the first time.

*Frances Takach, 18*

Edmonton

## **And They Tell You, "Live Loud and Happy"**

My Father

laughed, a little too loudly.

My mother

swept her eyes downwards.

My Father,

smiled, just a little too happily.

My aunts

furiously whispered.

My Father,

walked, much too animatedly.

And somehow, I felt sad.

Laughing heartily, from his belly

He was a little too loud.

Smiling widely, from his heart

He was just a little too happy.

Walking, bouncing from joy

He was much too animated.

Because he shouldn't be lively,

during his daughter's nuptials,

Because he shouldn't be cheerful,

for his daughter's new found love.

Because he shouldn't be effervescent,

at perhaps, the thought of grandchildren.

Laughing, smiling, walking,

a little too loud,

just too happily,

much too animated,

on his daughter's wedding day

everyone was ashamed.

And somehow, I felt sad.

*Nandini Thogarapalli, 16*

Calgary

Honourable Mention

## critique

i feel inadequate,  
like a package left out in the rain, on the front step of an abandoned house.  
unworthy of that signature in the right- hand corner of my painting.  
unworthy of recognition.  
i see you looking at my art,  
questioning my purpose, my intention.  
[ why? ]  
you take one look at my painting, read one line of my poem, hear one bar of  
my song,  
and tear off a piece of my psyche.  
chip away the eggshell barricade shielding me from reality.  
rip my clothing to shreds.  
make me vulnerable and scared.  
naked in the face of artistic credibility.  
and the tears rush forth from my marrow,  
doubt rattles my brain.  
and i shake. Unsteady, unstable. insatiable.  
i long to know what you think of my art.  
i long to know what will become of my heart.  
i ache to know what you think of me.  
but i'm too afraid to ask.  
too inadequate to listen.

*Erin Vance, 16*

Okotoks

Honourable Mention

## elegy to Wilde

my darling, i am so sorry.  
i feel as though i have failed you once again.  
failed you as an artist, a poet, a lover, a friend.  
failed to convey sentiment with pencil,  
images with words.  
failed to convey the soft amorous beat of my heart with my lips  
failed to translate this heavy prose into cigarette smoke.  
and to transform the strings of a guitar into spinal cord longing.  
darling, i am so sorry.  
but i hold no regrets.  
i do not regret the money spent on canvases spoilt by suppressed memory.  
i do not regret pencils broken time and again by a strong hold on agony.  
i do not regret clumsy kisses exposing insecurities,  
or nights spent dreaming without slumber.  
i do not regret wastebaskets full of crumpled papers,  
or sheet music disfigured in summer rain.  
i regret nothing but that which i have not taken the time to learn and love.  
i regret nothing but the time i have wasted in doubt and inquietude.  
darling, i am all but sorry,  
i am filled with unabashed pride.  
i want to share my creations with the world, be them as simple as a cheese-  
cake fresh from the oven,  
or as byzantine as a novel validating the Dadaists impact on modern society.  
i want to photograph the world in ink and pen,  
i want to sing songs of awakening,  
and manifest creativity in all that i see, think, and do.  
i want to grow.  
i want to stop being sorry for my inner truth.

my darling, i am an artist, a poet, a lover, a friend.  
this is my melancholy; brought to an end.

*Erin Vance, 16*

Okotoks

## You're Not Here

I'm cold.

You're not here to hold me.

I'm lonely.

You're not here to talk to me.

I'm afraid.

You're not here to protect me.

I'm crying.

You're not here to comfort me.

I'm waiting.

You're still not here yet.

I look into your heart.

I'm not there.

*Colleen Xie, 16*

Edmonton

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