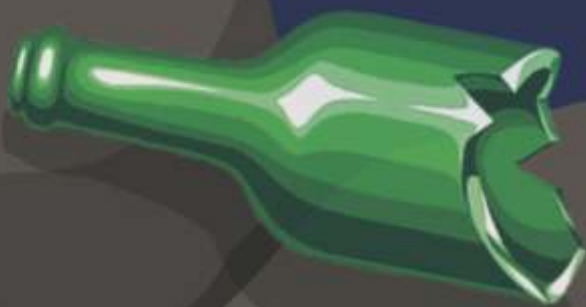


The Glint of Light on Broken Glass



An Anthology of Creative Writing
Centauri Arts Academy 2022-23

The Glint of Light on Broken Glass

*a collection of writings by the students of the Centauri
Arts Academy*

***“Don't tell me the moon is shining; show
me the glint of light on broken glass.”***

- Anton Chekhov

THE GLINT OF LIGHT ON BROKEN GLASS

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INTRODUCTION

Twelve writers sit in a circle, lap desks on their knees, soft music playing in the background, and you can sense the anticipation. “Think of a character intent on a task,” I tell them. “It can be anything you like, but give them a strong reason for doing it. A reason not to stop.” Pens hover above paper. Fingers rest lightly on keyboards. There is a brief flurry of action. “Now, bring in a second character. This person needs something - and they need it right now. They want the first character to stop what they are doing and listen. What is it they need?” A second flurry of activity as writers commit their ideas to the page. “Here, you have the ingredients of a scene filled with tension and conflict. Two characters who want different things. What will happen? How will you sustain the conflict? Who will win out in the end? Let’s write for ten minutes, and then we’ll see who wants to share.”

Often, the uninitiated have little idea what we do in a writing class, but for the young people who join us weekly - virtually, or in our studio - it can mean anything from a fascinating hobby to a lifeline. Some of our writers *need* to write. They long to immerse themselves in story, to share their thoughts and emotions, to experience a flow state. They enjoy escapism: ninety minutes a week of uninterrupted time to do something they love, to explore different lives, different worlds. Or maybe it isn’t escapism that drives them, but a need to make sense of the real world in which we live.

Years ago, a young writer told me how hard she felt it was to be respected for her love of writing. One sibling was a dancer, another played hockey, and there were ample opportunities for family and friends to celebrate their achievements. But what of the young writer in the family? Our creative writing classes - and this anthology - seek to give recognition and a voice to young people who love to write. There is nothing more exciting, more inspiring, and I know you will

agree when you share their stories and dreams in the pages that follow.

I started teaching creative writing more than a decade ago, after a few years as a drama instructor. At first, I found the process unsettling; drama students show in their expressions and responses that they are engaged and inspired; in a creative writing class, students look inward. But with time, I started to see how valuable this can be. In a world where solo time has been almost entirely replaced by screen time, and daydreaming is almost a thing of the past, these young writers were spending time with their own ideas, their own imaginations. Studies have shown again and again just how important this is to brain health and to our wellbeing. Creative writing is a vital skill that can be taught, and with time, students become more proficient and successful writers. But the value of writing goes beyond that. When we write, we discover ourselves. And when we shape our work for publication in an anthology like this one, we share a part of ourselves with the world. That's empowering, life-affirming - and critically important.

Finally, an important note. Occasionally young writers choose to tackle issues, situations and emotions that may prove upsetting for some people. When this happens, a writing instructor has a tough decision to make. Should we 'censor' those students, or allow them to write freely, at risk of unsettling a reader? We have made the decision, in this anthology, to allow our students complete freedom of expression, but **where a piece deals with potentially upsetting subject matter, an asterisk* appears at the end of the title.**

I hope you enjoy the excellent writing pieces in our 2022-2023 anthology.

Julie Hartley

Writing Instructor; Co-director of Centauri Arts

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A Consequential Dress Fitting

Shelly Altman

A pink, tight, silky dress, to be made smaller for the young girl, and lace to cover her bosoms. *Less cleavage*, the mother had said, *she can't look like a wh__ at her cousin's wedding*. Vienna had merely nodded, watching the girl stand uncomfortably in the dress, the mother pulling the fabric tighter. *She'll lose it*, the mother said, motioning to her. *It's needed for next week. Sunday*. Due dates had always been a part of her life, in her last seamstressing job and now in her current, solo job. Vienna had only nodded, watching a situation she'd witnessed so many times play out yet again. They left her with a deposit, a needle and a thread—unaware of how many times she'd stabbed her finger out of mere frustration, not being able to do anything about the way things were. She went through this process more than once a week. Young girls and mothers on a mission, insisting on a diet so their daughters would look 'better' in a dress. Vienna only nodded and complied, drawing more and more blood out of her finger each time until it grew white and went nearly numb. Years and years of it, really, for this reason among others. The pain was something deserved. She couldn't utter a word in objection—or if it was possible, she just couldn't bring herself to in such a world.

The table that had once been white now stood filled with colour, needles stabbed down into the afore-painted wood and a few chairs encircling it, usually tucked in neatly against it. There were drawers aligning it, filled with her earnings and different supplies. Countless needle sizes, the whole rainbow and more of thread—a small strawberry-shaped cushion for holding pins, with white, red and green circles on it: a gift from an old colleague she'd once been close with, her name now sounding unfamiliar as it rolled off her tongue. The small room felt too big; just herself and the pink silk dress.

It hadn't always been so lonesome. She'd once worked with a team of ladies in seamstressing for an important company. She'd been a top employee, friends with everyone, and had fallen for a coworker. As a friend, of course. Giselle had been a radiant beauty with a soft smile that left Vienna breathless.

They'd worked late nights together, chatting over food bought from the New York City street vendors, sharing every last detail of their thoughts. One night had evoked something, as Giselle professed to liking women and Vienna had been baffled. She shook her head, picking up her food when Giselle confessed that it was Vienna she loved. Vienna had told her no, feeling uncomfortable— so uncomfortable she'd left and started her own business. All her friends from those days had slowly disconnected with her, until none remained. Vienna realized later on that she had liked Giselle, too.

She'd dreamt of her own place for so long, but this wasn't what she'd fantasized it would be. As a CD of Mariah Carey's newest album played, she yearned to be back with everyone else. Working alongside them, talking about their newest designs and how they wished they could submit them somewhere. The company had folded three years ago, filing for bankruptcy before closing down for good. Vienna didn't know where she'd ever find these people again, and couldn't muster the courage to send them a letter in the mail— not even the letter that would apologize to Giselle for being as blind as can be. She wished to, though. Perhaps that mattered for something.

Vienna heard pounding on her door. A mother, a young girl and a bag with their requests. Vienna let them in once she'd bandaged her finger again, listening as the mother explained. It was all the same, though this time it was a yellow, black and white checkered dress. Only the styles changed as time passed. Vienna recalled the days when what kept her busy were poofy dresses accompanied by poofy sleeves. *Tighter*, this mother requested, *and a new zipper*, going on to explain that the zipper was cheap and had broken quite easily after purchasing. Vienna wondered why they were here if it was a cheap dress. Perhaps the dress was needed for a special occasion, one with a theme? She nodded, to show she understood. The girl stepped into the dress and stood in front of the mirror, fear in her eyes as Vienna added pins to pull the seams tighter. *You look great*, her mother said, and the corner of the girl's lips curled upwards as if in

agreement, though Vienna could see from her eyes that she disagreed strongly. Having put in all the necessary pins, Vienna requested to know when the dress would be required. *Tomorrow*, the mother said, which had Vienna quite...frazzled, to say the least. She nodded again, marking it down. They'd be able to pick it up the following day, Monday. A deposit, and they left.

A small one woman show. She couldn't do this alone any more. It was not worth it to hold back from the ones she loved and the people who deserved better. She scribbled in her reservation book, under her own name, a time and description: *Vienna. Mon, 10am. A properly fitted dress, and a letter to Giselle.* Perhaps the only thing that had been confining her was herself. All she needed was the motivation, accompanied by an empty reservation on a Monday morning.

The Unexpected Splitting

Shelly Altman

She looks happy, she looks so happy with me. A smile on her lips, humming to the radio as it plays, though I know she'd prefer one of her CDs to the current hits looping on the radio. She's always marched to the beat of her own drum, rather than following the pathways of others. Yet, here she is, giving in to me as she often does. I love making her feel so weak with love that she has to give in to me. I love it almost as much as I love the long, flowy dresses she wears while she bakes. At such times, life feels surreal and my heart swells with longing for her. I love her, I cannot truly believe that she's mine. That we wed, that the ring on her finger is from me...well, she doesn't have it on now, since she's baking, after all. Another thing that I love about her: this consideration for our love even in the material objects that describe it.

"We're getting a divorce," she says, and I drop the bowl filled with the dry ingredients for the cake. The flour, the baking soda, the salt, the sugar— it flies everywhere, and the white smoke of the flour fills the air. My lungs tighten from the flour-heavy air and what she's said. A divorce? What for? Why so suddenly? It's only been two months short of a year! *Why?*

Perhaps I should not have trusted her— a woman like her. A woman like her who took so long to let herself love me, who arranged the wedding in secret just so we could have what we have. For her own gain, for my own humiliation in the end. What do all my efforts mean to her, truly? Forget the money. The thousands spent were worth every penny to me if it meant happiness, even if it had to be concealed for so long behind the front of a tight-knit friendship. Though all the time we spent? All the effort? Just for her to stomp on everything, to divorce me. Eventually, it will be to her, and to the whole world, as if our love had never existed. Maybe this love I trusted in...maybe it was never real. Perhaps my life is just a game I have no control over and she is just another piece on the board out to obliterate

mine.

My fist clenches. I can't look her in the eye. I don't think I will ever be able to look at her again, at anyone like her.

Not ever again.

A Letter*

Chiara Rocca

Dear Gray,

The entire hospital smelled like the minty freshness of a pack of gum. That was the first thing I thought of when I walked in to visit Connor's dad at the ICU.

I'll be honest, I didn't even want to go visit Connor in the first place, though my mother said I should. Hospitals scare me. I think they scare everyone, really. Anyone who says they like being in a hospital is a liar. I hate the smell, that minty freshness, how it would smell so good in any other circumstance. I hate the extreme cleanliness and the lack of colour. *White contains all other colours*, people like to say, but really, it's just white.

I was by myself in the hospital. I drove myself there. Looking back, I don't know why I didn't just lie that I was going to the hospital and then drive somewhere else. I think I have this deep internalized honour code that makes it hard for me to lie.

People with dry skin and wrinkles were pushing carts of oxygen, dressed in nothing but a sheet that opened at the back. If I could tell you the exact number of butts I saw, it would probably be a high number. I got something from the vending machine before I went to see Connor, as a sad sort of tradition that my family and I used to honour whenever we went to the hospital. I got a bag of gummy bears, and ate them all in a span of two minutes, then resisted the urge to throw them right back up. I even tried smelling the fruity inside of the package, but it didn't matter. All I could smell was the icy heat of the hospital.

You know when a scent takes you back to when you were really young? That was what was happening to me, but in probably the worst way possible. It reminded me of when my grandfather and my grandmother and my uncle and aunt were here, and where they all died, and the ward where I had to be sent after, and where Connor's dad would probably die, too.

I don't know how, but I eventually got up the nerve to look for Connor in the waiting room. That's where my mother said he would be. When his dad was admitted on Tuesday, he followed them to the hospital, and he hasn't left since. I'm writing to you at midnight on Saturday. I visited Connor yesterday. Friday. He was still dressed in the clothes from Tuesday when I saw him, and is probably there in the same clothes right now.

It didn't take long to find him. He was in the waiting room. His hands were folded in his lap and he was sitting with his head down and his knees apart. I could see him running his fingers over his bruised knuckles over and over again. I briefly wondered what had happened to them. There were hardly any people in the waiting room, just a select few, which was odd because of the time that I was there. He didn't see me at first, so I had to call his name.

"Connor?"

His head sprung up immediately at my voice, or at the sound of his own name. He looked surprised to see me.

"Lovatt?"

I didn't make a move to sit down next to him. "You're still here, huh?"

"Yeah," he said. He didn't make a move to stand up.

"You're here, too."

"Yeah."

There was silence.

"His heart," he said. "They have to take it out. They said there's a small chance he'll make it through."

"Are you okay?" I asked him. It was a stupid question in hindsight, but I asked him anyway.

He smiled weakly at me. "Yeah. Now I am."

I didn't know what to say back, so I didn't say anything.

"How's your hand?" I asked. The knuckles were purple.

He shielded them from me, like he was embarrassed I had seen. I still wondered what had happened to him, but I didn't

ask, because I was afraid he wouldn't tell me, or would hate me for asking.

"Can I--" It was a stupid question. Again. But I asked anyway. "Can I hold your hand?"

That was when I sat down next to him. I felt sick to my stomach because of the gummies and the smell and Connor being so sad in front me. He was still hiding his hand from me. I was worried he would say no.

"Yeah." His hand was in his lap, outstretched towards me.

We held hands like that for a while. It was both awkward and soothing. And Connor started crying right there in the waiting room. I stayed with him for a couple hours, and then came back home to write you this letter. I told him I would go wait with him again tomorrow. I still hate hospitals, but maybe a bit less now.

Love always,
Lovatt

Survival of the Fittest

Denneke Anna Robinson-Keys

I sprint across the yard, my eyes streaming and my heart pounding in my chest. *How could they do this? Don't they love me the same as the others?* I think to myself, but I know the answer. It is because I am the weakest of my siblings. As I approach the cliff I spread my brown, speckled wings behind me. Launching off the edge, I steadily beat them until I am high enough to catch a wind current that will carry me far away from this place. The clouds are thick above me and I can tell there will be rain soon, heavy rain. I shouldn't stay in the sky for long. I need to find shelter. I look back at the house behind me, so small now I can barely see it. Back down in that house are my sisters and my parents. They don't yet know I am gone and I can't predict how they'll react when they find out.

I look at the vast sea far below me and swoop down in a dive, spreading my wings at just the right moment so I don't hit the water, then glide along just above its surface. The salty sea spray hits my face, stinging my watery eyes. As I race along I remember what I overheard my parents saying just before I left. "Our son, that's who. He's the weakest of the three. He's the one who will have to go."

Will Our Bridge Burn? The Sad Metaphor of a Friendship

Denneke Anna Robinson-Keys

Once, there were two green valleys, with the sun shining down on them and a deep canyon running between them, separating them. Stretched across the canyon, connecting the two places, was a sturdy bridge made of strips of wood connected by thick rope. The bridge was used a lot, and like any well-loved object, it sometimes got worn down and needed maintenance. One day, I noticed the bridge was damaged slightly. Naturally, I went to investigate, to see what was broken and what I needed to do to fix it, but before I could even get halfway across, one of the wooden slats broke under me and I fell into the dark abyss below.

It took me two years to climb completely out of the canyon, and when I finally came crawling out into the light again, the bridge was still there, beckoning to me. I could see the damaged spot, the one I originally went to fix, bright and glaring, like the notification bubble in the corner of an app, saying “Come. Look at me. Care for me. Fix me.” The broken wood plank was there too, one half still attached to the rope, swaying gently in the tunnel of air rising up from the cold, lonely pit.

But something had changed. When I looked at the bridge again, after so long of being trapped alone in that wretched canyon, I didn't see it the same way as before. That strong pathway, the one I had used so many times to visit the beautiful land on the other side, was gone, replaced with a haunting, crying ghost of what it used to be. I no longer trusted it to support me and not to let me fall. So I walked away.

Time has passed, I'm a little older now and a little stronger, and the scars have had time to heal. I often wander in my valley, exploring the places I never thought to pay attention to. I was just coming back from another amazing adventure when I pushed my way through a patch of thick bushes and stumbled, by chance, upon the canyon and the bridge. I had

almost forgotten about it, but there it was, just the same as I left it not that long ago, though it seems to me like it's been forever.

There is a person standing on the other side now too, just standing there at the bridge. They are too far away to discern much about them, but I can see they are holding a flaming torch and looking directly at me, staring deeply into my eyes. I don't know what to do. They look like they want something from me but I can't tell what. One thing is certain though: I still don't want to cross that bridge, not even just one step. Not even to meet the person on the other side. I'm still too scared of falling.

Death's Ties

Isadora Riquelme

In midnight's breath
Does terror rise
In darkness caressed

Unfastens death's ties
Awoken from immortality
Stretching, for who knows how long it lies

Lies in earth's cold fatality
Reminiscing of worlds unknown.
Now, it ponders actively,

Taking new steps, legs wind blown.
Who could ever fathom
Such solidarity alone?

Gazing for its next victim
A continuation of horror
For others to become

Ghoulish lives of undead
Waiting for its next meal, to be fed.

Too Much*

Isadora Riquelme

I could almost see my aunt falling to pieces, her skin shredding, blowing off in the wind, her hands reaching for me, but too far away - always too far away. As the too-bright lights reflected off the too-shiny walls and the too-unnatural clothing fell loosely off my too-fragile aunt, I could feel myself dissolving from the inside out. My heart was tied in strings to Aunt Celeste's and the more her heartbeat slowed, the more the strings pulled pain from me. Like snow, the long hair that I used to braid - or knot, depending on who you asked - spread out on the pillow. Her trembling form was blurred by my tears and I could feel desperation pulsing from me in waves, yet there was nothing I could do, no amount of love could save her.

And I had too much love.

It was all too much.

Don't Believe Everything You Hear

Cameron Green

BEATRICE

I'm 10 minutes late. I'm running, despite the snapping of my feeble high-heels. I let the whizzing of the cars passing by me set the tone for my pace, as well as my heartbeat. Each car is driving over the speed limit, but you're *supposed* to live without limits, aren't you? All my life I've lived within the rules, but now it's time to break them. I grip the note in my hand, and the bitter taste in my mouth still feels new to me. I hope Aria hasn't already texted her family to let them know that she loves them, because she doesn't deserve to still have love in her.

ARIA

I pick up my phone, the colourful home screen greeting me for the 15th time since I got here. I don't live my life on someone else's terms. She wants to meet with me, and she says that it's just to "catch up". If that was really the case, we wouldn't be meeting in a dark alleyway at 10 o'clock at night. She knows that, and she knows that *I* must know that, which means she isn't the Beatrice that I used to know. She's planned something new for me after all these years, and she must be acting out of jealousy.

BEATRICE

In high school, I valued punctuality. I was a goody two shoes, and my innocence made my entire personality moldable for whoever wanted to control me. I was seriously gullible, and Aria knew it. She tied the puppet strings around my wrists, right in front of my eyes. She used me as her ego-booster, cutting off all of my existing friendships so that I could "devote everything to her". I couldn't process her wrongdoings, so I simply assumed that she admired me in the way that I admired her. I started to copy her unconsciously, making others prefer me over her. When she turned against me, she cut me off from the last person

I had: my own mother. When I looked through the window and saw my mother alive for the last time, Aria was with her. Now, I suppose you could say I'm on my way to "pull an Aria".

ARIA

Most people would be terrified. Why should a girl who has just been released from jail be meeting up with the daughter of the woman she supposedly robbed of life? The reason I agreed to this meet-up is simple; I'm Aria, and she's Beatrice. I'm bold, she's cowardly. Most importantly, I did *not* do anything to her mother. I was known for my impulsivity in high school, sure, but I would never go that far. I have a brain, and for the whole town to believe I ruined Beatrice's mother because of a rumour proves that many others are lacking one.

UNIDENTIFIED

I watch it all from behind the bush. First, Beatrice shows Aria the last note I ever wrote. Aria throws in some questionable statements with her conclusion that the note is meaningless. As Beatrice lets her mind get the best of her, the rest is history. Now, Aria is nowhere to be seen. Beatrice is crying out of regret. My beautiful, intelligent little girl, what have you turned into? Despite what she has done, I want to hug her. I want to wave my arms and tell her that I'm alive, and that I was never gone - only unconscious. Except, I can't, because I'm paralyzed. Before I can dwell on the situation any longer, Aria is pulling me away from the scene behind the bushes. The catch is that she isn't Aria; she's Aria's impersonator. This fake Aria - who, mind you, is also Aria's long-lost twin - has been framing the *real* Aria for all these years. "Don't believe everything you hear" is my only advice for our town.

A Life of Unstructured Chaos

Cameron Green

My notes app hates me. I talk too much, especially when I am nervous. “Stop talking so much.” “Slow down.” “Let someone else speak.” Any one of these statements is all it takes for me to curl up and stop speaking to anyone. Or, better yet, become cold and completely closed-off. Just one month ago, I was in this state of numbness. Every day was the same. It was as if everyone else was fighting their battles while I was still in the lobby.

Right now, I would do anything to have that back.

That state of numbness was at least a state of predictability. I knew for a fact that things would be fine, that *I would be fine*. Now, I am fending for myself. Each day, each hour that ticks by on the clock, is a new disaster. Who stood up to who? How am I *yet again* the villain? How am I going to be humiliated in a new form, to keep things interesting? I cannot keep track anymore. Of my life, or of me. It is all a structureless whirlwind that I have no control over, no say in at all. For me, I work in a similar way. From the outside, everyone thinks that they know everything about me. I am just some know-it-all, I suppose. I dress minimalistic, which, for others, triggers the idea that I have a minimal heart. On the inside, it is all a knotted mess. My emotions are bottled up in my chest, bursting through when no one would expect it. No healthy coping mechanisms could be found in me, that is for sure. I am honestly a walking red flag.

My name is familiar to others, but it never *clicks* in someone’s head. Everyone knows who I am, but no one knows *me*. People refer to me in a vague manner, too. “Oh, Evelynne? She is smart, is she not?” Or, “Evelynne? She isn’t friends with anyone, really.” Fair enough, I suppose. I have screamed those words before. No matter how hard I try - *really try* - I can never adjust to a group of people. It is as if my identity is a switch that I can never turn off. It is truly a painful form of originality.

I have definitely been told I am mature for my age, but I

have also been told the exact opposite. It depends on the person, the standards being held and the conversations that I rehearsed previously in my head. I might not be attention-seeking, but I am definitely in search of validation. Still, no matter how much I try to change myself for others, I find their voices crawling back every time. I do not talk about them, not as much as I should. I am not an easy forgiver, but I always try to forget. I do not need any of those memories back. I left it all behind years ago, and for good reason. Or, that is what I think. With every inner turmoil, every disaster and every existential crisis greeting my being, nothing is predictable. They could come back, easily. My guard is not up nearly as much as it should be.

Everyone has a light to their darkness, or a warm embrace to their cold, or a voice of empowerment in a room of silence. For me, that “special something” is music. I let soft melodies bring me comfort when nothing else does. I craft special playlists that only I would appreciate. I put aside all else and focus on *me* when no one else will. Meaningful, heartfelt bridges are what bring me hope. I play dreamy songs instead of actually dreaming, thanks to my crippling sleep schedule. Ethereal melodies can change a person, and they have definitely changed *me*.

I do not know why I waste so much time. I have to write. I *need* to write. I have idealisms to embody and work to submit, all in such a short period of time. I should not waste so much time obsessing over each sentence that escapes from my lips. I should not waste so much time locking my true self in a cage when I know she is going to break out of it. I should not waste so much time worrying how others perceive me, and how things really are on the inside. I should not waste so much time obsessing over every disaster when I know they are only going to keep coming.

I waste so much time dwelling on the unstructured chaos named “Life”. Not just any life, but Evelynne’s life.

My life.

Six Ways of Looking at Me

Isadora Riquelme

If you wanted me to tell you ten things about myself, I couldn't. I only know five.

Everyday of my existence is a circle I swim in.

I am bored bored bored bored bored bored.

I am constantly goggle-eyed (but seriously, it's not that bad to see everyone looking like a bubble).

Outside my bubble, I'm called Georgie. Inside my bubble my name sounds like a stream of bubbles. Oh wait, it is.

If you've never set foot (or flipper?) in the sea then your humour turns salty to make up for it. So I would like to offer my condolences if I'm rude.

If you haven't figured it out by now, I'm a goldfish. And if you circle back to point 1, then look down at point 2, you'll realize how pointless my existence is. Honestly, the life of a goldfish is dull in the extreme. The most exciting thing that ever happened to me was when my bowl contracted a rare species of fungus.

But now, outside my bowl of tranquility (or mind-numbing insanity, your choice) there is absolute commotion. From what my goggle-eyes can tell there is a new resident in the house. She jumps up on my shelf and blinks her large, golden eyes at me.

Suddenly, I have a number 6.

Spider Threads, Lemon Trees and Orange Spray

Denneke Anna Robinson-Keys

Spider threads catch at my face as I walk through the decaying door frame, yet another sign that no one has been here in a long time. The one-room house is dusty and the wood slats that make up the walls are dry and crumbling, like they might blow away into the wind at any moment. There is a jukebox in the corner, a bonfire pit dug out of the dirt and old playing cards scattered on the ground. It looks like it could have been a party house, used by teenagers for secret get-togethers, to smoke and drink without their parents ever knowing. But in the middle of the woods? The overgrown rose bushes creep in through windows, their vines wrapping around and around the falling-apart rocking chair as it sways slightly in the breeze, making a soft creaking noise. That, combined with the leafless trees and the dead grass outside, makes this place feel like it belongs in a ghost town. I'm in the middle of what was once a lemon farm, with the fruit rotting on the ground and the sour smell in the air. I walk outside and around to the back of the building, where a pile of old broken picture frames are also entangled with rose vines. Some of the pictures are still there too, dirty and wet in the mud. One is of a gas station, another displays a lighthouse with a couple standing proudly outside in the sun. The colours are faded and bleached from years spent in the sun, but I can still see the smiling face of the woman, so proud of something I will never know. I shiver and rub my arms. The wind has picked up and it's getting colder. I use some of the most tattered picture frames to start a fire in the pit. It feels like stealing, taking over someone's space like this, though no one seems to care about this place anymore. I look out, above the caved-in roof, at the sun, setting in a pink and orange spray over the horizon, and hope I'm making the right choice.

A Cat

Denneke Anna Robinson-Keys

I'm falling, down, down, down, launching myself through the air with my powerful back legs in an attempt to escape my fate. The air whistles past my pointed ears, swiveled back in fear as a yowl escapes my throat. My paws are stretched forward, clawing uselessly at the space in front of me. My body is outstretched in an aerodynamic line, angled down as I make my descent to the floor below, getting closer and closer to my freedom. If I can just make it in time, I can run out of here as fast as I can and avoid what might befall me. My back legs are reaching forward now too, all four paws splayed under me in preparation for my landing. My tail lashes from side to side and I'm almost there. Then I hear something. She is on my tail, her grasping, hairless hands reaching out to grab me. I can see her arms on either side of me now and feel her fingers wrapping around my stomach, pulling me away from my only hope of salvation. I let out a cry of despair. I don't want this, don't deserve it. The humiliation is too much. For a mighty god like myself to be brought so low!

The human pulls me back up to her, snuggling me against her chest and rubbing her nose against my fluffy white fur. "Oh, silly kitty!" she exclaims delightedly. "You can't escape me!"

That Man*

Kate Maly

I despise this man. He counters my every move with such ease and clarity that makes me regret ever trying to defeat him. We are supposedly ‘allies’ in the war that rages outside of the tent, but as long as he sleeps in this bunker with me, I will hate him. There will forever be that burning passion in my soul that hates this man, from head to toe. That pure anger and hate when I see him is teetering on the edge of insanity. But there is a sense of excitement and thrill when we speak - like a chess game. And like any game, if I try hard enough, I’ll eventually beat him. I’ll strike up a topic of interest one day, and I’ll have him stumped. I’ll perform a checkmate so fast that nobody would even think of it even occurring. I will beat him one of these days, and he will finally stay in his place.

“I won’t be around forever, Ryon.”

Those words hit me quicker and harder than a bullet train ever could; I go through all five stages of grief in a split second. He says this to me nonchalantly, as our fellow soldiers died outside on the battlefield just moments before. Many more are wounded and suffering. I’m an utter fool. Even if he can best me and all of our fellow soldiers psychologically and verbally, there will be a day where he eventually leaves. Or maybe I’ll leave before him. I signed up for this war, knowing that full well. I wonder at what point in this living hell I forgot about that.

I’m learning to tolerate him now. We’re becoming equals, even though in his mind he might still be superior. As long as we get on that blood stained field every day, we can’t judge whose life is worth more. We are both soldiers of this war, human beings with integrity.

As pitiful and ignorant as it sounds, I would rather a bullet hit me than him. I’d hate to see the day where our lovely

games of chess come to a stalemate. That doesn't mean I'd jump in front of a bullet for him, but the idea of him leaving makes me sad. Even though, a few weeks ago, I told myself that I would loathe him eternally, I don't want to move my bishop if he can never respond.

"Hmm... I don't know."

I have been waiting for those words all year long - I have finally beaten him! I've made a move in a chess game that he cannot counter! I've won! A rush of dopamine surges through my body and I almost leap from my seat and run across the base. I am so happy, I wholeheartedly believe this is the peak of my life. Of course, I may win again in the future, I don't doubt it; but the first time for *anything* is always a momentous occasion. Nothing I ever do will compare to the excitement, the *thrill* of beating him. I look ridiculous, I won't deny it - a grown man who had fought in battles, wars, getting excited like a hyper high school student who just got a Valentine's gift. The grin on my face is like no other; I won't stop smiling for the rest of the day.

I like spending time with this man. Our fellow soldiers look at our debates as a waste of time, but I wouldn't miss it for anything in the world. Before this war, I was lonely. While my comrades have families and children to go back to, the only person waiting for me is my brother, whom I'm sure has already moved on with life, gambling his money away at casinos across the country. I never liked him, not as a child and not now. But my debates with this man are something I look forward to. I've never had this feeling, of knowing there's something waiting for me which I can enjoy with my entire soul. I still don't know what he thinks of me, but these days, he might be the only person I really *like*.

"If I die, you better avenge me- ok?"

He always says the most horrific things in the most

brutal situations, as if death is something to dismiss. I fear that this man doesn't reciprocate the feelings I have for him, or worse, he *does* but won't admit it. He speaks these words while lying on a gurney with a gunshot wound in his leg. The same gurney that I'm sure countless other soldiers have died on. For the first time, I'm truly afraid that the only person I have ever cherished is going to slip through my fingers and leave me. And it is my fault. My mind will remind me of this in every waking moment. I could've been the one to take that hit, sacrifice myself in his stead, but I was powerless. As he ran across the field, with a dummy grenade in hand, ready to throw it, he was shot by a sniper in a nearby abandoned building. The worst part was, I *saw* that sniper, and I did nothing; I couldn't save him when it mattered most.

I hate myself more than I hate the person who shot him.

I cried for that man. It sounds weak, but trust me: I felt like my world was collapsing in on itself. I was worse than weak. I was a fool. An idiot, a dim witted man. I had invested so much trust, so much care in a man who, like me, was sadly a mortal. Signing up for this war was essentially signing a contract with the devil. I had signed my own death certificate. He had done that too. *He was a man too good to die*, my brain tells itself, again and again. *He had a life, he had dignity, he had someone who cared for him, so why would he throw himself onto the battlefield like that? Like his life held no meaning?* I remember it was roughly 1am when the truth hit me. I sat on my roughly made bed, and cried into my pillow. The air was cold, and I still believe to this day that it was the worst night of my life. I was pathetic. I was useless in the moment when he had needed me, and when *I* needed me. I hated myself.

“Why on earth would you think that? I’m sure that someone out there cares for you.”

We sit on the concrete floor of the basement, leaning against the wall. His leg has a cast on it, and he has trouble walking even short distances by himself. He won’t be back on the frontline for a month or two. I look at him, and tell him I don’t understand his willingness to die on the battlefield when he has people who care and worry about him. He deflects this by arguing that surely I have people who are concerned for me, too. That’s when I tell him: I have no one. I don’t know why he tries to reassure me I am wrong, but it gives me comfort that he does. We sit on the ground and talk about meaningless things for the rest of the day. I start to hate myself a little bit less.

I care for this man. I care for him too much. I’ve fallen into a spiral of worry - any crash, any thud, I think it’s him, and run around worrying that he’s hurt himself. I know I have no right to say this, but I worry for him more than myself. My guilt over the bullet wound in his leg has led me to believe that if I help him and care for him, I will eventually hate myself less. Of course, that isn’t true. The more I see him, the worse I feel. I tell myself that he is just one more casualty of the war, but that annoying, utterly intolerable voice rings in the back of my head, whispering that I was at fault. From a logical point of view, there was barely anything I could have done to prevent his injury. But from an emotional point of view, I’m certain I could have done something to save him. Or at least, I could have tried.

“You’ve gotten much better than when we debated for the first time, I hope you know.”

I win again. Then again. Then again. Then again. Then again. Then again. Over and over. Of course, it’s not me winning *all* the time, but it occurs much more often than previous times. The thrill, the rush, the happiness, the adrenaline... it isn’t there

anymore. I wish I hadn't jinxed myself when I beat him for the first time and said, 'Of course, I may win again in the future, I don't doubt it; but the first time for *anything* is always a momentous occasion.' It was almost a cursed prophecy, one that I could not escape. There's no celebration and there's no smile on my face, now, when I win. I don't exactly know what's gotten into me, but I'm numb every time I win. No positive or negative emotions, just... nothing. I fear that sooner or later he'll notice, and eventually leave me. And if *he* left... I don't know what I'd do with myself. I would have nobody. Nobody to look forward to simply being around. Nobody to stay strong for, nobody to live for. I need to lie to him. It's not an easy thing to do, but I need to lie. Right to his face.

I need this man. I don't know why it took me so long to find this out. All these emotions for him... the gradual transformation from hate to love, I should've noticed it sooner. I need to keep him alive for as long as humanly possible. I need to save him. I need him to live through this hellscape. *He has to live*. I don't tell him this outright, of course. But I need to protect him. Although I've already dug this hole for myself, I know that my attitude is starting to waver over to a side of insanity. I promise myself, I promise *him* that I won't ever go insane. I just hope that I can keep my word. Even if I'm in this hole I can't climb out of, it'd be better to keep digging rather than stay in one spot and cry.

"If you're thinking about doing anything foolish, don't. Remember: stay focused and calm."

He told me this as we prepared to walk out into the battlefield. He and I were going to retake an abandoned building the enemy had seized. I don't know what ticked him off about my behaviour, but he noticed something. I thought, *I need to be more discreet*. If anything happened to him, I knew I would

never forgive myself. I knew something for certain, now - I would take a bullet for him.

I stuck by his side as we crept up to the first floor of the building. Moonshine crept in through the broken windows. Moss and mold grew thick on the walls and floors. The glint of light on the shattered glass all around us illuminated the room. On the second floor, there would be death. It might be the enemy soldiers' death, or it might be mine. But I would make certain it wasn't his. Some people say you find your fate on the path you take to avoid it, and for his sake, I hoped and prayed this wasn't true.

“Team A, with me. Team B, search the higher floors and work your way down. If everything goes to plan, we'll meet in the middle with most of us alive. This building is most likely littered with traps, so watch your back.” These were the last words he spoke to me before our groups separated. My heart hammered in my chest. I was starting to regret every single thing I'd said, thought of, or done. With every step my team or his team took, I felt him slipping from my grasp. *Please, whoever or whatever is out there, keep him safe. Please.*

I loved him.

I loved him.

We were supposed to meet in the middle.

We met in the middle.

Apparently, the mind is alive for 6 minutes after the body dies. Maybe, for those six minutes, he saw the tears running down my face.

A Life For A Life*

Lucy Micklea

I slid into the front seat of my car and typed in the directions for the house where I would soon commit a murder.

The sharp voice of the Google Maps A.I. rang out from the car's speakers. '*Starting route to 2322 Sinclair Avenue.*'

As I drove, I recalled the time I asked Enzo why he never invited me over to his house. He had been my best friend from Grade Eight to Grade Eleven, after all, and I had never seen his house. In fact, the only thing I knew about his home life was that he lived alone with his father. When I first started asking, he gave me excuses.

It's always such a mess.

My dog is aggressive towards people he doesn't know.

I have family staying over.

At first, I bought it all. But a few months ago, when he started switching up his excuses a little too much, I confronted him and asked for the truth.

It wasn't easy, getting him to tell me. I had to swear I would keep it a secret and not get anyone else involved and never breathe a word of it to another person. Finally, he just looked me in the eyes and said, "It's not safe, Liberty."

Naturally, I asked him why. He just swallowed and looked down. When he spoke, his voice was meek and quiet.

"Because of my dad."

I didn't ask for clarification, but he gave it to me anyway, pulling up the sleeves of his sweatshirt to show me his arms, slashed and burned and bruised. Some of the injuries were healing, but others looked fresh.

We never spoke about it again, and I did my best to support Enzo. I offered my help; my mom was a police officer after all. But he insisted I not get myself or anyone else involved. So I tried to block it from my mind.

Today was the first time in months that I had allowed myself to think about it because this morning my parents had

gotten a call from the school guidance counselor, informing us that Enzo had killed himself at 3 a.m.

At first, I was in shock. My mind couldn't process it; how could Lorenzo Jasper Pierce have killed himself? He was so positive and optimistic. He was a friend to everyone and he always looked on the bright side. He hated whenever I would get pessimistic; he would tell me to look at the situation realistically and realize the good right in front of my eyes. He was one of those people who believed that everyone deserves a second chance and no one is really a bad person deep down and everything will be okay. In fact, I had to wrack my brain just to remember a time when he wasn't smiling or laughing.

Then I remembered the day when he had told me the truth.

And that was when I realized it.

The people who called us wouldn't say how he had done it, or if he had left a note. All they gave me was their condolences and the date of his funeral. I spiraled into rage. I could go to a thousand funerals in a thousand cemeteries in a thousand black dresses with a thousand different people, and it still wouldn't bring my best friend back. No amount of funerals or sympathy cards or eulogies would change the fact that Lorenzo Jasper Pierce had killed himself because of his father.

I couldn't go back in time.

I couldn't fix what had happened.

I couldn't save the person I loved most in this world.

But I could do something about the person who caused his death.

I could make him pay.

It was nearing midnight, and according to Google Maps, I was two minutes away from Enzo's house. He wouldn't be there, of course; he had been moved already. But that wasn't why I was going.

I was going to the house at 2322 Sinclair Avenue to kill a man.

I decided to park my car one street over, so I wouldn't be

linked to the crime. I slipped out of the car and began my short walk. All the houses on Sinclair Avenue looked roughly the same: short and small, nothing flashy or eye-catching about any of them. If I hadn't been going to number 2322 to commit a murder, I would have walked right past it.

The yard was nothing but dead grass and a concrete path up to the door. The house was short in height, but long. It was made of red brick that had faded in color with time. I couldn't see much of the house from the front. A white door with a glass window, a doorknob, and a mail slot. Two windows on either side of the door, each with closed blinds. A rusted sign by the door that gave the house number.

I walked up the path and stuck my hand through the mail slot. It was difficult, but I had small forearms, so I could easily unlock the door from the inside. I pushed it open. The mudroom was cramped, holding nothing but a pair of black boots and a black puffer jacket, along with Enzo's ripped Converse and olive green puffer jacket. I crept into the main part of the house. On one side was the living room; the news was playing on the TV. There were stains all along the carpet and couch. There was an ashtray on the coffee table filled with cigarettes, and the entire room was littered with beer bottles and cans, broken and unbroken, empty and untouched. On the other side was the kitchen, which was just as cramped and small. The oven was off, and there was a half-empty pot of Kraft Dinner on the stove top. The sink was overflowing with dirty dishes, and just like the living room, the kitchen was covered in beer bottles and cans. As I took another step, I felt my foot come up against something hard and cylindrical. I almost fell, but I managed to right myself against the counter. What was more concerning was the loud crunch the object had emitted when I stepped on it. I looked down to see it was a metal beer can, squashed down into the floor. I held my breath, my heart speeding up.

But nothing happened.

I exhaled a heavy breath and stepped away from the counter, picking up the can and throwing it out. I peeked into the

fridge, which was stuffed to the brim with beer bottles, takeout containers, hot sauce, and other expired crap. I scrunched up my nose and shut the door. In between the kitchen and the living room was a hallway. At the end of the hallway was a staircase leading up to darkness. I slowly walked down the hall and up the stairs, the floors creaking under my steps every once in a while as I climbed to the second floor. Every time there was a creak, I paused on instinct, terrified of being discovered. At this point, my breathing was labored and heavy, and I could hear my heartbeat pounding in my ears.

The top floor was simple, just a hallway with four doors along it. I opened the first door: a laundry room. I opened the next door, across from the laundry room: a bathroom, small and cramped. The counter held an uncountable amount of pill bottles. A small plastic cup held a blue toothbrush that was still wet, a nearly empty toothpaste tube, and a green toothbrush. Dry.

Enzo's.

The tub shower was moldy along the edges and held nothing but a white bar of soap and a bottle of Dove shampoo. I stepped out of the bathroom and closed the door, breathing hard. That toothbrush, aside from his shoes and coat, was the first peek I had gotten into Enzo's life here.

My best friend.

My stomach churned and my head swam, but I forced myself to stand and go to the next room. I cracked the door open the smallest bit.

All I saw was the bloodstain on the carpet before I slammed the door shut. I couldn't go in his room. I couldn't. There were too many memories associated with him that I could find in there. The last thing I needed was to have a mental breakdown in a dead kid's old room in a house I had broken into. I leaned back against the door and closed my eyes, forcing my heart to slow as I stared down the next door.

His father's room.

My hand slid down to the messenger bag resting on my shoulder. Inside it, I felt the distinct shape of my mother's police

gun I had taken from her uniform that night. It felt unfamiliar and strange in my hand as I gripped it, ready to pull it out.

I could hear his father's loud snores from inside the bedroom, making me flinch every time. Slowly, slowly, I extended a hand and touched the doorknob. *Turn. Pull. Push.*

And then his door was open. Like the rest of the house, it was decorated with empty beer bottles and cans and an overflowing ashtray. His comforter was thin and small, barely covering his sleeping figure. I felt bile inch up my throat, my body reacting with disgust at simply being in the same room as him. I took one step, and then-

CREEEEEAK.

I stopped, frozen in place. My heartbeat slammed through all of my pulse points, so loud I was sure he could hear it. Another layer of sweat built along my hairline. My hand, the one against the gun, shook violently, so much so that I thought I might accidentally shoot one of the only bullets I had packed. His snore broke off in a loud sniffing sound. He rolled over from his side to his back. His labored breathing resumed, and he was asleep again. I took a step, my entire body trembling. Another, another, and more and more until I was right beside his bed.

Finding an example of his handwriting was fairly easy, in the form of his grocery list. Unsurprisingly, all that was on it was beer, frozen microwave meals, and chips.

I had always been good at mimicking handwriting. I used to half-joke that it was the only thing I was good at. Enzo hated it when I did that and forced me to list at least five other things I was good at. We usually got to around fifteen.

I hadn't copied someone's handwriting in a while, because it seemed like almost everything I was good at reminded me of him. But, when I was forging a suicide note from his father in which he confessed to abusing his son and being the reason for his suicide, it all came back to me.

Once I was finished, I slipped the pen in my bag and left the note on his bedside table. Then, I turned to face him.

The hand in my messenger bag pulled up and out, until

the loaded gun was hanging loosely by my side.

My hand went up.

It hovered near his head.

It moved closer, closer, closer until it came to rest beside his temple.

My breath was shaky. My hands were sweating.

I was hot and cold and cold and hot.

A lump rose in my throat, heavy and weighted.

A quivering breath in. And one more out.

I swallowed the lump in my throat.

I squeezed my eyes closed.

And I took the shot.

The sound reverberated through my skull. The gun fell down to my side, and I dropped it back in the messenger bag. I stumbled back a step, my hand pressed over my mouth, my eyes still squeezed shut. I felt a tear trickle down my cheek and onto my hand. I blindly turned around to face the window near the bed. For the first time all night, I couldn't hear my heartbeat. It was silent.

I took a step back, and another, and more and more until I was out of his room. I forced my eyes open and took a deep breath in and out. *Focus on what you're doing, not what you're feeling.*

I walked down the staircase. I walked down the hall. I entered the mudroom. I opened the door. I stepped outside. I closed the door. I reached through the mail slot. I locked the door from the inside. I walked down the concrete path. I walked down the street. I reached my car. I opened the door and slid into the driver's seat.

In my head, I could hear the gun going off. I could hear his father snoring. I could hear the creaking floors. I could hear Enzo's voice. I could see his smile. I could see his eyes, sad and wistful.

'Just let it go, Liberty.'

I swallowed hard, my eyes clouding with tears. "I-I'm s-sorry." I choked.

He said nothing.

He just smiled.

And then a cold gust of night air swept over me and he was gone and I was left with the gunshot and his father's peaceful snores and the truth of what I had done.

And I dropped my forehead against the steering wheel and cried.

You and me

Chelsea Eason

I don't want to be hurt but I am
I don't want to be me but I am
I want to be you but I'm not
I want your beauty
I want the attention
I want the people
I want the family

But I can't have any of it

I am me
You are you

I have beauty, just not yours
I get attention, just not yours
I want your people but I prefer mine
I want your family but I love mine more
I want to be you but sometimes I think *you* want to be *me*

Maybe you want to be me.

Tables and Tiny Toes

Chelsea Eason

Stubbing your tiny toe on the side of a table. I hate it. I've had *basically* a broken arm and stubbing your tiny toe is *far* worse.

I am terrified of it, ever since it first happened. I am terrified of getting too close to table legs or anything pointy near my feet.

My mother says it happens and there is nothing you can do about it. Well, she's scared of spiders and they're everywhere, she said that's different. She says I have an "irrational fear," but I think it is perfectly normal to be protective of your tiny toe.

It just sticks out like a little nub, it's barely even a toe! Mother says if I should be scared of anything, it's sharks because those can *hurt you*. I brought up the spider thing again and she didn't like that. She said some spiders could kill you so it's better to be safe than sorry.

I told her that if you hit your baby toe too hard, *it could come off* and you would only have nine toes. Imagine being that kid at school who only has nine toes because they hit it against a wall too hard. That's terrifying! So much bullying just from a table leg.

Mother says that maybe some table might need a toe for its legs, I said maybe some spider wanted more street cred. Mother said spiders don't have street cred and I said tables don't need toes.

Mother sighed and said I was "something else," whatever that means, all because I am scared of getting my toe chopped off. Well, I said she was something else for being scared of something *I* could kill with a shoe.

Mother said I should stub my toe. I said she should wake up with a spider on her face. I think I took it too far because the next day all the tables and couches *and chairs* were moved ever so slightly, and I stubbed my toe five times throughout the day.

I think my mother also stubbed her toe the next morning because she was screaming a lot.

Then I remembered I had placed my toy spider on her face before coming downstairs for breakfast...

Mother said I'm grounded for putting a toy spider on her face while she slept but I think she should be grounded for moving tables and couches so that I stubbed my toe all day.

Lights in the Sky

Chelsea Eason

I rolled over in my bed, unable to sleep, like most nights. My mind was ablaze with ideas and thoughts I couldn't put into words I or anyone else would understand.

My eyes fell to the floor, which was lit by white light from behind my thin curtains. Hoping to see beautiful lights in the sky, I crawled out of bed.

I looked out my window, pulling back the curtains to see what I thought would be a dark sky. Once the curtains and blinds were out of the way, I began to scan the sky for the pale green lights I hoped for.

To no avail, I looked higher in the sky and saw the moon, brighter than I had ever seen it. My body was flooded with goosebumps, chills running up and down my spine.

Memories of late nights on the back deck with my parents left me at ease. The bright light of the night sky calmed whatever stressful thoughts I had moments before.

Finally, sleepy at last, I dimmed the blinds and closed the thin curtains. In the warmth of my bed, I fell asleep, at peace, without knowing if I would even remember the moment in the morning.

Encounter in the Mushroom Cave

Denneke Anna Robinson-Keys

I pressed my back against the stone wall and clutched my hand to my chest, breathing heavily. But there was no time to rest. I ran deeper and deeper into the crevice. It was dark, so dark I couldn't even see a meter in front of me. Judging I was far enough in, I stopped to catch my breath. This thin, shadowy tunnel in the rock had been a long shot, but it seemed to be working... for now. My face and palms were sweaty and my hands shook as I reached down to my waist. The small leather pouch was still there, tied to my belt with string. I let out a small sigh of relief, but I couldn't relax. I wouldn't be safe for long. My pursuer probably had an incredible sense of smell to make up for its lack of hearing. Not that that would help. I remember reading somewhere that they can sense body heat. I chuckled nervously. I was going to die, and before I even turned 17. I was sure any second I would see it poking its huge scaly nose in the crack of rock I had slipped through and either breaking the rock surrounding me, crushing us both, or snapping me up and swallowing me whole.

I took a few steps backwards until I felt the rock brushing my shoulders. The rough stone behind me wasn't flat like I had expected. It curved gradually upward, as if to make an arched ceiling far above me. The air had changed too. It was colder now, more clear, completely different from the stuffy tunnel. But that didn't make sense. I was underground, the only access to the surface being my tunnel. A tunnel, mind you, that a giant creature like that couldn't possibly fit through. Right?

My eyes were beginning to adjust, and as I grew accustomed to my dim surroundings, I realized I wasn't in a narrow gap anymore. The tunnel had opened up to a huge cavern, and a dark patch on the far wall told me the tunnel continued again on the other side. Stalactites hung from the ceiling high above me, growing thicker around the edges of the cave. Some even reached all the way to the floor, where

stalagmites formed giant pillars of gray stone, thick around as the tree trunks used to build the royal stables back home. A small lagoon backed the left wall, the stagnant black water reflecting the dim light of what was arguably the most interesting part of the cave. All around the space, winding down the stalactites, clinging to the ceiling and climbing up the walls, was fungus. Green moss and blue toadstools and orange shelf mushrooms, all faintly glowing with bioluminescent light. Despite my imminent danger, I felt drawn to them. I walked over to the nearest pillar and let my hand brush lightly against a toadstool. They were so mesmerizing.

Suddenly, a sound behind me shook me out of my daze: a soft *hiss*. I whirled around, and there it was. The snake. As long as at least three carriages, and probably big enough to swallow a horse whole. I could see its thick, strong muscles rippling under its green and brown scales interrupted by patches of white, as it slithered menacingly towards me, its head raised in strike position. As its pink, forked tongue flickered quickly, in and out of its mouth, tasting the air, I caught a glimpse of its gleaming fangs. The tunnel behind me, my only escape, was too far away now, I wouldn't make it in time. Stupid me, wanting to look closer at the glowing mushrooms. I had sealed my own fate. My muscles tensed and my heart pounded. I couldn't breathe. I met the snake's eyes, glowing red in the darkness, even brighter than the moss around us. At least it would be a quick death. I squeezed my eyes shut, refusing to let the snake's gaping black maw be the last thing I saw. I clutched the pouch at my waist. *I'm sorry Father. Sister. Brother. I failed you.* I clenched my jaw and braced myself. *Here's hoping the afterlife is a nice place.*

But instead of overwhelming pain, followed by complete nothingness, something soft brushed the tip of my nose, and I felt a warm breath on my lips. Startled, my eyes fluttered open. A young boy was in front of me. He looked around my age, and he was standing so close, our noses touched. His eyes were red too, like the snake's, and they stared deeply into mine, wary yet curious. His hand reached up, lightly brushing my right cheek

with the backs of his fingers. A shiver spread through my body and I released the breath I'd been holding. His skin was pale, and the backs of his hands and his forearms were covered in green and brown scales, intermittently separated by snowy white patches. Realization slowly dawned on me. "Are... are you..." I dared to whisper-breathe.

The boy closed his eyes and breathed in deeply, his tongue flickering, then opened his eyes again to meet mine. "You don't smell dangerous." he said slowly, and with great determination, as if words didn't come naturally to him, "but why are you here?"

Love, Life, Light, Liberty

Amalyn K.

The necklace was falling. Plummeting to the floor at record speed.

I couldn't stop it.

All I could do was watch.

It's funny how memories can be held within a physical object. Both the good and the bad. How much you can love an object, but one slight mistake can make the love come crashing down. I thought I had built a net, a net that could catch all of the memories even if the necklace was ever lost to me. I guess somewhere there was a hole. My mom's necklace, the object. My only reminder of her other than the memories. The net was ripped, unusable. Worthless. My hand didn't move fast enough, my heart skipped a beat as it sank deeper into the endless pit of despair. I could feel the memories slipping out of my brain, the gate broken, the dam destroyed. My hope, buried under a million glass shards. There was a brick roof above me, making it impossible to move forward but protecting me from the outside world. The one thing, the one thing that helped me look out of the brick void was that necklace. Years of sitting on the beach, watching the silver chain dangle from a strong, bold neck. The salty breeze tickling my cheeks. The waves grabbing for my toes. All of those years came flooding back to me. Then, the car. The car accident that made those memories the good, old ones. The good days, old. I grabbed for the necklace, but my hand seemed to move no faster than a snail. I squeezed my eyes shut in a futile attempt to hold back tears. The last hope I had left, the hope I had dared to reach for in the endless sea of glass. Of bad memories. Of my dad. The person who changed. Who changed into a worse man. My dad, now stuck in a void of despair. My short arm was not able to pull him out. He had dug himself too deep. The accident had dug him in too deep. I reached for the necklace, and for a split second, I felt my hands wrap around the

smooth, cool surface of jade. Then, it unraveled, like the world I had carefully pieced together. The life my mother had helped me build. I wished the knots in my heart would unravel, but it felt impossible.

One last time, I swiped for the four jade pendants, dangling on their silver chain. I felt something cool press against my palm. Was it the necklace? Suddenly, I felt my shaking knees give way as I plummeted to the floor. I didn't care what happened to me anymore. I too, had fallen into the pit of no return. Of no hope. I could almost feel the sea of glass surrounding me, the sea my hope had fallen into.

I hit the hard, stone floor. I was okay, but I didn't know about the necklace. I looked around. It was nowhere to be seen.

Then, I felt the engravings of the necklace pressing into my skin: a heart, a star, a tree and a moon.

Love. Light. Life. Liberty.

The 4 L's.

I had it, I did, clutched tightly in my left hand.

It hadn't shattered.

The glass my hope had sunk into dissolved as relief burned it to ash. I got up, wrapping my hands around the necklace. I was glad I hadn't lost those memories. I wasn't ready.

Not yet.

The Broken Destiny

Lily-Anne B.

I gently placed it down. The gem. I had never expected to be holding the GEM. A small, shiny gem the colour of a lavender night sky, streaked with bright highlights and coloured with darker and lighter shades of purple, from amethyst to lavender to bright, exciting orchid. The gem sparkled in the dim light of the room. It was called the Destiny Gem, and it was the number one most wanted, worshipped, beloved item in the lands of Erth. Not that I would, like, sacrifice anyone for it. Though, as I stared deeply into the gem, my eyes getting cloudy, it seemed to be calling my name. *No. I'm not crazy. It's just some gem.* But I still felt honoured that they had chosen me, of all people, to place it here.

It had taken weeks of waiting to even look for a reservation to see it and hear its history for just five minutes, and this had only cost me \$100. The gem gleamed because everyone who came to see it loved polishing it before they left. It was the same gleam I saw in my sister Lorrie's eyes - the mischievous gleam I always noticed before she did something 'clever'.

It had been my job to get the gem somewhere safe, somewhere secure, so it could be preserved for the next century.

The gem wobbled dangerously, but I paid no notice.

The Gem Association, guardians of the Destiny Gem, had agreed to let me help preserve the almighty Destiny Gem. It was only the size of my pinkie finger, but touching it, feeling it, seeing it, even breathing near it could change my life forever. Now, all I needed to do was get out. Then I would get paid \$50,000 and I would be famous for my role in preserving it forever.

Suddenly, it teetered, even more dangerously than before.

The gem glowered dangerously over the pedestal, wobbling, squirming.

My heart skipped a beat, and the gem, the beloved, worshipped gem FELL.

The GEM.

They're bound to know it was me: I was the ONLY POSSIBLE person who could POSSIBLY break the PRECIOUS POLISHED GEM.

...Wow, that was quite the tongue twister.

The gem fell in what felt like slow-motion, whirling and twirling and dancing in the air. My heart wrenched and my mind was drenched with possible ways I could escape this horrible reality.

I was vexed. Guilt flashed before my eyes. Hundreds of thousands of people would be devastated. Torn apart. This couldn't be happening. This was... it was simply horrible! I looked again for a solution, a way millions wouldn't be wailing by tomorrow.

There was none. *None!* Just my luck, I guess. My heart was thrashing like a bird caught in a fox's jaws. My sweat was slick across my face. My throat was dry, too dry to call out. I shuddered violently all over. I *hated* this feeling of horror, panic, overwhelming guilt and horrible shame. My fists were so tight, my knuckles almost white. My legs were stiff as rock. I couldn't move. I was paralyzed.

Almost at the floor, I told myself. *Almost there.*

My suffering, my pounding fear, powerful rage, wrenching sadness and horrible disgust was all mixed deeply into my heart like slush messily tossed around.

Three

Two

One

Zero.

The Destiny Gem landed on the floor and shattered violently. A clatter, a noise so loud and high pitched my ears were ringing for a moment. It was still loud, still shrieking on, the Destiny Gem. It was ringing and shattering in horrible replays in my mind, each one more unbearable than the last. It

felt like a wasp or hornets had attacked my heart, a jaguar had bitten my stomach, a crocodile was munching on my liver. Pain was more in my mind than physical, though I'd prefer the pain of being bitten by a bullet than this horrifying, death-threatening, horrible, terrible feeling.

Slowly, in a hoarse whisper, I asked:

"What have I done?"

ballerina

Leah Chan

twinkling melody
trapped in a box
pointed toes
rose-tinted glass
swan's feathers
upon fresh snow
expectations
parcels of burdens
delivered to the doorstep

like ballerinas to music
they will fall still

Faster

Leah Chan

I sprint across the yard, my eyes streaming, my heart pounding in my chest. My only thoughts consist of two words: *Run* and *Fast*. But oh, lo and behold, the gosh-darn it fence. Of course. Who could've guessed that my end would come as I slammed into a picket fence - a gorgeous one, with vines twisting around the slats, and flowers just starting to bloom?

With a sudden adrenaline rush, I jump over the fence and clear it with a couple meters to spare.

What - in the actual - world?

Before I can give it a second thought, the screeching of tires snaps me back to reality. Cue my teacher showing up and giving me a life lesson on looking both ways before you cross the street. No one's surprised.

I'm still reeling from my little trick with the jump over the fence. My mind is spinning much faster than the rest of me can comprehend. My shoes slap the pavement methodically, each of my panting breaths more strained than the last. I glance back, and ohhh that's a mistake. The dripping mess following behind me only makes my steps falter, and only does the same to my heart. The beast is white, blindingly so, with vividly coloured, eye-wateringly bright hair cascading in waves that reflect off the sun and into my eyes. A giant horn protrudes from its skull, shining and ready to stab me.

Yeah. If I'd known I was going to be chased by a unicorn this morning, I would not have gotten out of bed.

A Snowy Meeting

Madeleine Opie

I hear the crunch of snow beneath my horse's feet as it trudges slowly through the snow. I look up into the starry night sky, and pull on the reins of my horse to slow down. At that moment it starts snowing. I slow my horse to a complete stop and let the snow shower me in a thin layer of white. *This is the right thing to do*, I think to myself. *It must be. It needs to be.*

"Onward!" I shout.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Alyssa turns to ask.

"Yes. I need to do it." We had just started to enter the snowy tundra. "You should put your coat on dear," I tell her. She puts on her heavy fleece coat and I stare in front of us, out into the icy tundra.

"Iris, what worries you?" Alyssa asks, buttoning up the coat.

"Will we be able to stop him?" I say, turning to face her.

"We will." Alyssa pushes a strand of my hair behind my ear, then she whispers under her breath, "We have to."

My army keeps moving forward as we push through the ever-growing snowstorm.

"My king," says a guard next to me, arm raised, blocking his face from the wind.

"Yes, Captain Kent?" I reply with a stutter, as the cold air seeps through my wool jacket.

"Our troops are freezing." He gestures to the many soldiers struggling to keep up behind us. "I recommend we rest and wait out the storm. One of our soldiers spotted a cave a little while back."

I know he's right. The air is getting colder and colder. But I can't stop, I won't stop. Not until my daughter's death is avenged.

"No, captain." I say.

The captain shudders as he nods, and I feel a twinge of guilt in my heart. "We must go on," I say, sparing a last look at

my freezing troops before continuing through the snow.

Alyssa and I trudge through the snow on foot now, hearing the soft crunch of snow beneath our boots. Snow swirls around us, the storm getting only more violent as time passes.

“We shouldn’t have left the horses,” I say, wrapping my arms around my shivering body.

“It’s not your fault,” Alyssa replies. “We didn’t think that we would have to go this far to find him.”

“You’re right.” I try to sound convincing, even though I’m not really convinced myself.

“Look,” Alyssa cries, “there’s a snowbank up ahead. Let’s wait the storm out.”

I nod. We push our way through the wind towards the snowbank, and the others follow.

“All that matters is that we find him and stop the attack,” Alyssa says, trying to make a grove in the snow for us to sit in.

I nod again, turning to help her. We huddle up in the crevice to keep warm. It doesn’t give us much protection from the furious winds but it will have to do for now, or at least until he comes.

As the wind and snow howl through the icy tundra, the king’s army slowly advances to the spot where two queens from the neighboring kingdom are trying to keep warm. It is Iris who awakes first, to the clip-clop of horse hoofs against the icy ground. She turns to Alyssa, still fast asleep behind their makeshift barricade. Iris shakes Alyssa until her eyelids flickered open.

“W-what is it? Alyssa mumbles, wrapping her arms around herself as the cold wind hits her.

“Shh,” Iris hisses, putting a finger to her lips then pointing towards the sound of horse hoofs. Trying to be as quiet as possible, Alyssa leans towards Iris, resting her gentle hand on

her face. “Go now,” she whispers. “It is time. I will be right behind you.”

Iris gives a slight nod, then stands and tries to compose herself as best she can in the howling winds. She takes a deep breath and walks out towards the king and his army. The king sees Iris the second she walks out from behind the snow bank. He gives a slight raise of his hand from atop his horse, and the whole army stops in their tracks.

“What are you doing here, sister?” bellows the king.

“I am here to make peace with you,” Iris yells through the raging storm. “Please do not wage war on my kingdom.”

“Your kingdom!” the king spits out in disgust. “Your kingdom is responsible for the death of my daughter. I will not rest until your kingdom is in ashes!”

“Please reconsider, your highness!” yells Alyssa, dashing out from behind the snowbank.

“I see you are both here,” the king says. “I assume your troops are also behind that snow bank?”

“No troops, just us,” Iris says, raising her hands slightly as a sign of peace.

“Do not stand in my way, sister,” the king says, firmly. With a wave of his hand he gestures to the rest of his army and they start slowly marching past the two shivering queens.

“Andy, wait!” Iris yells after him.

With that, the king stops abruptly, causing his troops to bump into each other. The king stands still. *That name... he hasn't heard that name since his sister left him.*

“Wait,” Iris continues, taking only a second's pause. “Your daughter, the princess, she isn't dead! She's at the castle. She's safe.”

Iris falls silent, waiting for the king's reaction. All he does is stare. Then, he looks at Iris.

“How? Why?”

“She arrived last night. She had traveled on foot to our castle. She asked for refuge, telling us that someone had tried to poison her. Thankfully one of her guards warned her that a

cloaked stranger had broken into the kitchens. She left just in time, and she decided it was safer not to tell anyone.”

“Who tried to poison her?” demands the king, his cheeks turning red.

“Abrutia. They tried to frame us!” Iris says.

Everyone falls silent. Only the wind can be heard, howling through the icy tundra.

The king leans down from his horse and offers Iris his hand with a smile.

“Well, sister, looks like we have some kingdoms to ruin.”

Iris smiles, Accepting the offer, she grasps her brother's hand and clammers onto the horse.

Alyssa climbs onto the general's horse and they set off together.

That night, the wind dies down, the stars shining brightly in the sky. Iris and Alyssa have just sent a letter to their kingdom, requesting troops to meet them on the border of Abrutia. Everyone has settled down for the night. In the dark, the king smiles to himself, for his plan is working. Everything is going exactly as planned...

Sheet Music

Leah Chan

Like an autumn breeze, it breaks the silence with a melodious song that chills my heart and ruffles the leaves. With a single note, a spell is placed on the dark night.

When it rains, the rain drums a beat on the window as the piano plays a solo, backlit by the moon's spotlight. A cascade of notes, striking the street like lightning and thunder ringing harmoniously.

On still nights, the piano plays like a string slipping through the curtains, brushing my ears, and continuing on its never-ending path.

When clouds cover the moon, the piano whispers a slow, sad song, the tones resonating through the dark street, knocking against windows and doors.

Every night, it plays without a player, rain or shine, shaking the trees and spiraling down the street. The piano sits, midnight black wood shining in moonlight, snow white and ash black keys pouring lilting melodies onto the street. A cacophony of sounds, an orchestra of music, a woven basket, with only the piano as a conductor.

I sit by the window, watching the pools of moonlight glimmer, an ear pressed against the cold glass as the piano plays. A moving truck sits across the street, and a man in a tuxedo stares at the piano with an unreadable expression. My heart tenses as he walks up to the piano and kicks it, making it fall silent. A triumphant smirk erupts on his face, and I feel my fists clench. Leaves of paper flutter to the ground, and I jump to my feet. The man in the tuxedo is gone when I throw open the door and pick up the paper, the moving truck all but a memory as I place the sheet music back on the piano. The piano doesn't pick up again, nor does it for the next month. The street seems quieter, laughter more subdued, dogs less energetic for the entire month.

My heart aches, and I replay the situation. Could it have gone differently? Could I have stopped him? One night I step out the door and walk over to the piano, which hasn't played in so long I'm scared it'll never play again. I sit on the smooth bench, running my fingers over the wood, the cushions, over the keys. I played piano once before. I can do it again. If it brings life back to the street, if it fills my heart with love again. If it reinvigorates my neighbourhood. I take a shallow breath, my fingers poised over the piano, eyes trained on the sheet music tensely.

I drop my fingers, and they move across the keys like dancers across a stage. My heart leaps in my throat as I follow the notes on the paper.

When I'm done, I step away, wiping my sweaty palms on my pants. The piano keeps playing, and my heart feels satisfied. I smile and run to my house to grab my old sheet music.

Stars Shine Brightest in the Dark

Leah Chan

Small pools of whispery moonlight gather on the ground, weaving through an endless sea of dappled grass. Dew gently brushes the ground from the fresh rain, sparkling like the moon on broken glass. The sky is still light, the stars still hiding behind the bright warmth of the sun. As the sun sinks past the rise of the earth and the branches dance with the quiet songs of the night, the wind stirs the leaves, picking them up and tossing them into the air. The moon begins to rise into the dark sky, and the stars appear. They twinkle down at the world as a breeze moves my hair, lifting the soft curls and letting them play around my face, tickling my nose, brushing my neck. The sky is a deep purple, swirling with black mist, peppered with bright stars. Darkness seeps into the edges of the sky, but the stars illuminate the ground, dazzling the sky with bright lights that sparkle more intensely than the streetlights filling the bustling streets and the glow from every bedroom window. Stars really do shine the brightest in the dark.

Life After Death - a scene

Chiara Rocca

EXT. A BALCONY. NIGHT.

The balcony is lit up only by a string of Christmas lights yet to be taken down. A puff of smoke, then the faces of the characters appear. SPARKY is lit up in a deep midnight blue, while DANNY is lit by yellow reminiscent of sunlight. They pass a cigarette back and forth between them. They have just met, through friends, and stand on the balcony together in silence.

DANNY

Can I ask you something?

SPARKY

No one's stopping you.

DANNY

Do you think there's life after death?

SPARKY

We're not going to start with, "What's your favourite colour?" or anything like that?

Silence. SPARKY takes a drag and coughs.

SPARKY (cont'd)

What made you ask that?

DANNY

(shrugs) Just curious, I guess.

SPARKY

Are you religious?

DANNY

Not in the conventional sense.

SPARKY

Well then?

The colours on their faces flicker. A beat of comfortable silence.

DANNY

I was just thinking about it, before I met you. When I was chasing them around in the grass. There's so many years that humans have been alive here. So many years of evolution that we haven't been a part of. My question is just... why here? Why now?

DANNY looks at her. To him, she is a divine angel of youth with all the answers. It's a look of childlike curiosity and wonder.

DANNY (cont'd)

Is there a reason, do you think?

SPARKY

(hesitates) I don't know.

DANNY laughs to himself.

DANNY

That's it?

SPARKY

It's not exactly an easy question.

DANNY

I know...just, it looks like you've thought about it before.

SPARKY

I have.

DANNY smiles at her. Though the two are very different, they are a reflection of each other. DANNY is figuring this out for himself.

DANNY

Right.

SPARKY

You don't know me.

DANNY

I know.

SPARKY

You're acting like you do.

DANNY

But I do, in a sense.

SPARKY

What?

DANNY

We're the same.

SPARKY

I wouldn't go that far.

Beat.

DANNY

You don't like that, do you?

SPARKY

What's that?

DANNY

People being like you.

SPARKY

If you mean that I like to be considered unique then you're right.

DANNY

I guess I am.

SPARKY's turn to laugh, out of disbelief.

SPARKY

Who are you, anyway?

DANNY

Whoever you want me to be.

To Be Mrs. Bernard Is to Be a Picket Fence

Chiara Rocca

It has been left on the seat, and is so tiny you might not even have seen it if you weren't paying attention. It is separated from its wearer, either lost or left on purpose, it is difficult to tell. If you located it, and looked carefully at it, you might notice that it is an engagement ring. It may have been of value once, though the main diamond has been removed, leaving only the family crest and name imprinted on the inside. You would have to look carefully to notice that. *Bernard*. That's the name on the inside. The name the owner hoped to share with their beloved. A family name, descended from riches. The crest is of importance, akin to the royal family or the Kennedys. Now it has been left on the subway, missing from Bernard and its fortune, for the next person to find it.

Though Cassie is a simple girl, she does like shiny things. She knows what she likes, and knows what she doesn't. She has a maturity for someone of such a young age. Only fifteen, she is. She likes jewelry and romance. She detests taking the subway by herself.

Cassie sits on an aisle seat, her hands folded carefully in her lap, her school bag on the seat beside her. She bounces her knee up and down, and every so often, she peers around at her surroundings. She has heard many horror stories of girls getting taken from the subway by men, kids her age becoming victims of violence. She pulls her skirt down and sighs, looking at the bag beside her. After a moment, she pulls it into her lap.

It clatters on the seat, from the force of the bag. She doesn't notice it at first, is more concerned with the guy wearing baggy pants making his way down the aisle. Her eyes follow him as he passes, and he doesn't stop to look at her. She exhales loudly, and looks back down at her lap.

She sees it out of the corner of her eyes. A glint of gold from the sunlight, coming in from the outside station. She tilts her head, checks over her shoulder, and picks the ring up in her

hands. She slides it onto one finger, and then another. It is too big, and slides off as soon as she puts it on. *Bad luck*, people say of lost engagement rings. But Cassie has never heard this superstition. All she knows is that the ring is a thing of beauty, missing diamond and all.

Victoria Kinsey is having an affair.

She is engaged to a man of importance, Mr. Patrick Bernard, the gifted son of the oil tycoon, Leonard Bernard. She is entranced by their riches, and the many many rooms of their house, but to say she has any romantic feelings for Patrick would be a lie.

Their gardener is a gifted man himself. Georgie, she calls him. He doesn't have a name, or at least doesn't call himself by one. Names are a social construct, he has told her. The night of Ms. Kinsey and Mr. Bernard's engagement, she vomited right there in Georgie's flowers. That was the night they met, and the night she fell for him.

Today is the day she will tell Patrick.

She makes her way down the stairs, hoping to find Patrick sitting at their marble dinner table. And he is. Flanked by his own mother and father.

He grins perfectly at her. "Honey!" he calls, and she forces a smile. "Ready?"

"For what?" she asks quietly. She is always a bit intimidated by his parents, both powerful and beautiful for people of middle age.

"The museum, of course." He laughs toward his parents, like she is *so adorable and ditsy it's unbearable*. "Let's be on our way, shall we? I have the car ready."

The thought of getting into the Bernards' limousine makes Victoria feel like vomiting again. "Can we take the train, darling?" she asks.

Patrick chuckles at her once again. "The train? The poor, stinking subway that serves as transportation for homeless people?"

She swallows hard. “That’s the one.” She is positive they will stick out against all the ordinary people, but she isn’t in any mood to care. The subway will remind her of her old life, before the creaking of picket fences and fake smiles of butlers and housekeepers. “Please, darling?”

Casting a glance toward his parents, Patrick says, “Well, as you wish.”

She smiles to herself, delighting in her rare victory. When they walk past the security guards and out the gates, heading for the nearest station, she feels Patrick shudder. Her smile widens.

On the train, Victoria sits, but Patrick stands, holding onto the railing with his posture straight. He looks over his shoulder every time someone walks by, before glancing back at his fiancée.

“Sit down with me, won’t you, darling?” she asks, patting the seat next to her, but Patrick shakes his head.

“Thank you, sweetheart, but I prefer to stand.” He eyes the seat, secretly disgusted with how many common folk sat there before his fiancée. “I’m quite alright, really.”

They spend the next few moments in silence, as the train pulls in and out of stations. Though the carriage is quite loud, with the conversations of teenagers and the loud snores of homeless men scattered along its length, the silence that stretches between them is almost unbearable. She realizes, sweating in her seat, that this is what it would be like for the rest of their lives: forced conversations, nothing in common with each other. Georgie seems so much more, well, *real*. He has ambitions, power, a passion within him. The thought of him is all it takes to stir Victoria into action. She glances up at Patrick.

“I’m sorry, Patrick, I can’t,” she says, shaking her head. She makes a motion to get up, though he blocks the way.

“You can’t do what? Go to the museum? Are you feeling alright, darling? I know, it’s this god-awful subway. Now, if we had taken the car...”

“No!” She cuts him off more harshly than she intends. She detests the way he speaks, the way he looks down on the very things she enjoys. She detests *him*. “I can’t marry you! Why can’t you see? I’m in love with someone else.”

Patrick lets out a cackle so loud it could have awoken the people in Australia. Bystanders turn to look at them. Victoria blushes, and shrinks inward toward her seat. “Don’t be ridiculous, darling. You love me. That’s what you told me when I gave you that ring.”

She twists the ring off her finger in an act of defiance. The ring has always been too tight, a suffocation of her real life. “Well, then, take it back! I never wanted it!” She pulls it off so forcefully the diamond falls out, rolling onto the floor. “I want to marry your gardener.”

“Romulo?” Patrick stares at her, his mouth agape.

“Georgie.” She is standing now, and holds the ring in her hand. “His name is Georgie. And I love him, and I have never loved you, and you can take your ring back, because I will never ever, *ever* be Mrs. Bernard.”

She throws the ring at him with such force that he is knocked back in surprise. He doesn’t catch the ring; it lands on the seat where she had been sitting. She pushes past him towards the door, and doesn’t look back as she leaves. “Sweetheart!” he calls after her, but it is too late. This is St. Andrews station and she is gone, forever erased from Patrick Bernard’s life.

Cassie looks at the ring, too big on her finger, and twists around to tap the boy who sits behind her. “Do you want this?” she asks him. “I really think you should have it.”

From Above

Sam Griffin

I'm on a floating island. It's the first time that I've ever been away from the towers, but I can still see them. It's weird though, because I'm actually above them and I've never ever been above them before. I mean, I guess I could go above them any time I like with the shuttles and stuff, but space travel is expensive and my parents never really saw the point in going to another planet. Earth is perfectly fine. This island, though, I can see right through like a pane of glass but I can't see the edges of it. So I have to either stand completely still and hope the glass can hold my weight. Or I have to feel for the edges of the glass and hope I don't fall to my death. All normal stuff.

I might as well feel out for where the glass stops. See where I'm safe and where I'm not. So I start walking out very, very carefully. I keep my full weight on one of my legs and use the other to feel ahead for a drop. Each time I don't find one, I step forward. I do this for a little bit, then I start walking, slowly at first, then normally. Looking down, I notice how beautiful Toronto is from above. I can see everything. The thousands of streets are all lit up with lights and trees. And there are the towers, giant stone and steel monoliths kilometers tall, looking like swords protecting the Earth. I glance over to my high school, a humongous thing that juts out from one of the towers like a tree branch. It can fit a total of 3 million people within its walls and still have space for more. It's not even that big of a school compared to some of the other ones my old middle school friends go to, but it is definitely the prettiest one. It's an art school, so obviously there are a lot of murals and such, but it's also a very green school. It has tons of ivy and shrubbery surrounding the building, because it was built on an old mansion. It also has a weird layout with a courtyard they had to build around because of a special tree in it that they weren't allowed to get rid of. It's such a beautiful tree. And for all its beauty and grace the whole school is to be torn down and replaced with a

new one, fit to house twice the amount of students. In the process, they will have to destroy the tree.

Thinking of this, I have to look away. Looking down around the school only reminds me of the memories I had there. I just can't bear it. This was my school. Part of what shaped me to be who I am.

I looked up. And above, somehow standing a good 6 ft above me, is a man staring back at me. He's old. Grey hair. Fine tailored suit. And for some reason he scares me more than the thousands of feet below me that would cause me to sink into oblivion should I drop.

I'm so startled that I step backwards in a sudden involuntary motion. And then I trip, and I'm falling. Down, and down, and down. I look up, see the man's face and realize I've fallen through the glass. I'm racing straight down towards the ground at such an extreme speed that my skin starts to burn and peel from my bones.

Let's just say that I woke up very quickly.

Pursued

Vivian Carbin

She was crouched down on the floor in between two pews in the church, hiding from the very thing that she knew had been following her for weeks. Wherever she went she could feel its presence, she could feel it watching her, hiding in the shadows. The church was dark, so dark that she couldn't see her hands in front of her face. Suddenly the doors creaked open, the sound piercing the cold air. Heavy footsteps grew louder and louder as the thing came closer. She could hear its claws tearing apart the wooden pews as it walked down the aisle. Her heart was beating in her chest faster than it ever had before, her breath quickening, her body shivering with terror.

Suddenly the noise stopped.

The only thing she could hear was her breath, cutting through the silence.

It had found her.

The Dark

Will Steeve

I wake up in a cold sweat. I don't know why I'm sweating so hard. I look around the room and see, lit up in the darkness, my clock. 2:33, it reads. It's the only light in the room aside from the pale shine of the moon from the window.

As I sit up in bed, I begin to cough. I need a glass of water. I open my door to find that the hallway is just as dark as my room. *That's strange...* I think, because I could've sworn I left the light on when I climbed upstairs to bed a few short hours ago. I inch along the hallway to the place where I know the light switch will be. I flick the switch. *Click.* Nothing happens. The shadows close in on all sides. A freezing rush of terror shoots through my bones. A primal fear of the dark has awoken inside me.

I peer down the stairs, and now that this panic is crawling within me, I know it won't be let out for a long time. I imagine things, horrible things, at the bottom of these stairs. But what if it isn't just my imagination?

I skip the first stair, which I know will creak, and tiptoe down the steps to turn the corner into the kitchen. I flick the kitchen's light switch as well. *Click.* Nothing. I look around and see my fridge's digital clock lit up in the darkness, the same color as my bedside table's. 2:35.

THUMP. A second jolt of fear shoots through my bones, and I feel as if a cold hand has reached into my stomach and clamped around my heart.

I hear pitter-pattering upstairs, as if some... some *thing* is creeping on its tiptoes across the hall. When I hear the telltale creak at the top of the stairs, that now-familiar jolt of fear rushes through me again. Whatever this is, it's coming down the stairs now, coming for *me*.

I run across the kitchen, towards my drawer of knives. Some small, rational voice in my head tells me that pulling out a knife is crazy, but... it could be anything upstairs.

A THUMP comes from the foot of the stairwell, so I lunge towards where I think the drawer is. I seize the first handle I can get my hands on and turn to face the beast behind me.

A slow, vicious growling comes from the other side of the room. Frantically, I flick the light switch again. *Click*. Nothing. The growling begins again, and I hear the pitter-patter of the beast's feet. *Click. Click. Click*. This time, the clicking isn't coming from the light switch. I sprint to my basement stairs and jump down. Something thumps repeatedly behind me. The beast is following. I find the nearest wall and slide my hand across. When I find a light switch I flick it up and down, up and down. *Click. Click. Click. Click*. Growls come from behind me again. *Click. Click. Click. Click*. Something hairy coils around my legs. *Click. Click. Click. Click*.

Click. Suddenly, the lights turn on. My arm is raised high in the air, a spoon clutched tightly in my hand, but... nothing stands in front of me. I glance down and see the beast... wait. No. It's my cat. He's growling - no, purring! And as he winds around my legs, his claws on the floor make a familiar noise. *Click. Click. Click. Click*.

The Last Words They Say

A collaborative poem by the Saturday Writing Salon

Why do people lack self love?
The last words you say is the thing they need most.

Are flared pants old fashioned?
Your parents always know best.

Why can't we be normal?
Because we lack the energy to try.

What is the purpose of Saturn's rings?
She told me the truth before she died.

What will end the world?
Only things that smell good.

What is the meaning of life?
Candy necklaces and Paris, Texas.

Why will the sun die?
Because we know how to clone sheep.

Why is the sky the limit?
Because the moon's too far away.

How do you care for something no one has ever cared for?
The ocean is the least explored part of the planet.

How do you care for someone no one has ever cared for?
The ocean holds the most life on earth.

How do you spot a liar?
Listen to the last words they say.

