



# InCITE 2017





The CITE Executive thanks the student and teacher participants for their support of the 2017 InCITE Writing Competition.

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by Andrew Stokes, grade 11,  
Crescent School



Paul Dunn



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by Sabrina Pietrangelo  
The Country Day School

# Conflicted



by Lauren Knowles  
Villanova College



I fumbled with the door handle in my best attempt to get a grip, despite the slipperiness of my sweat-ridden palms. I glanced over my shoulder every other second. I tried my best to remain focused and fight through the salty tears that blurred my vision and stung my face as they slid down my cheeks. A moment to think was all I needed, just one moment to think. As my legs were about to collapse and take me down with them, I managed to turn the handle and barge through the bathroom door. Scrambling desperately to the nearest sink, I hovered over it, hands gripped so tightly to the rim that my knuckles began to turn white. I was floating in and out of consciousness; my vision came and went in flashes. I placed one hand over my heart and shut my eyes, tuning everything out until my breathing had returned to a pace that was as close to normal as possible—given the circumstances. Taking deep breaths, I prepared to face the unsightly, sweaty and downright ugly mess I would be faced with when I looked at myself in the mirror. Never in my deepest imagination could I have conjured up the vision I saw.

“Don’t worry,” smiled the woman who appeared to the right of me, “you have nothing to fear.” She placed a reassuring hand on my back, and to my own astonishment, I wasn’t startled. There was an inexplicable sense of comfort and familiarity in her voice.

“Don’t lie to her; she has everything to fear,” a deeper voice boomed from another woman who appeared on the left. She was not like the other. There was no solace in her demeanor—just brutal honesty. Yet something about her intrigued me. Instantly, I wanted her opinion and validation for any and everything.

I couldn’t help but notice a striking resemblance between the three of us. There were only a few things that set us apart. The woman on my left was draped in white clothing with gold embellishments; in contrast, the woman on my right was garbed in black and wore blood-red lipstick. And there I was in the middle, a result of the two.

“Who are you? Where did you come—?”

“Don’t ask questions you already know the answer to,” the woman on the left snapped, “you know us better than anyone, and we know you.”

“Pardon the interruption, but we have a very important decision to make. I’m terribly afraid that time will soon escape us darling,” the woman on the right chimed in politely.

I anxiously looked down at my watch, in fear of the realization that this was true—and it was. The hands of the clock reached up and constricted my throat, its grasp tightening with every second. I opened my mouth to respond, but to no avail. Silence and desperation clung to the musty bathroom air.

“The choice is very simple,” said the woman on the left through a sinister smile, “either we do it, or we don’t.”

“We don’t have to do this, there is always another way out—always an alternative,” added my right hand woman.

“Oh but we do. We all know we want to, don’t we?” smirked the other.

“I—,” yet again I struggled to compose a proper sentence, “I don’t know.”

“Just breathe. You’ll make the right decision I’m sure.”

“You’d be surprised what you can do. I know you have it in you. I mean hell—I’m proof of that,” the woman on the left argued with pride in her voice.



# The Difficult Conversation



by Sebastiano Giannelli  
Royal St. George's College

"I'm afraid we've done all we can do. I can only hope that you'll make the right choice. I have faith. I know you will," the other pleaded with such high hopes.

I sighed, knowing that no matter what I do, I will always dwell on the possibilities of an alternative course of action. I hated feeling this way. Stressed, I ran my hands through my matted curls that were almost as tangled as my current state of affairs. If I listened to the woman on my right, I was quite obviously choosing the path that feels safe—it felt righteous. There was a sincerity in her smile that exuded warmth and guaranteed protection. With that being said, I couldn't deny the temptation of the woman on the left. There was an enticing element of thrill in her eyes. The same sort of thrill that was found in doing something that you knew you shouldn't be doing. The same sort of thrill that was so utterly inviting.

"It's time," the dark woman continued slyly, "You know what needs to be done."

"We'll be there every step of the way. Are you sure you want to do this?" asked the other, with a look of concern.

"I have no other option," I stuttered.

"The choice is yours. Our fate rests in your hands. No pressure." And with that, they were both gone as quick as they came...

I've made up my mind and there is no turning back. I am ready.

The cherry blossoms bloom bright,

A peaceful place for a chat,

When the darkness breaks light,

I curse under my breath "drat."

I'm home, I'm back,

No trouble for me,

Outside it's all black,

"Welcome home," said she.

"But you are still late, it's past curfew!" she shouts,

"Oh no, it is not!" a clever reply.

"Oh t'is true!" a shout coming by.

"I'll tell you it's not, it's quarter past six."

"Oh yes, it is, or have you gone sick?"

"I'll tell you, I haven't gone sick!"

"Let's just stop fighting and calm down!"

Our fight, like always, goes around and round.

"My thoughts exactly. Enough with this pointless fight."

And with this, all is done.

Once? Now? Forever undone?

The day has gone by,

The house is asleep

The day has gone by.



# It's All in My Head

by McKenna Ryan  
The Country Day School



Why won't you leave me alone?  
Do you hold on to my memories, my focus, and my tame emotions for your own pleasure?  
You had overstayed your welcome the moment you arrived.  
That moment is blackened in space,  
I fish for what has happened but get tangled in the hook and line.  
I wish I could protest your invasion but I was preoccupied with the convulsions of fear.  
I felt myself being dragged to death's door.

Don't over exaggerate now, I am in your head but,  
You can not blame me for walking into a home with the doors wide open.  
You have not even spent that long with me, you might as well enjoy the time we have together.  
It will go faster... I swear.

You are possessive and controlling by nature.  
I spend time tiptoeing around you  
Trying to avoid your unbearable screams.  
Why must you imprison me away from the things I enjoy,  
Distance me from the people I love,  
the way I was?

You should be thanking me,  
I was the one who stopped you from resting in death's home.  
I woke you up from the childish belief that you are more than a moment in time.  
You are fragile.  
You are not infinite  
not undefeatable,  
not as strong as you thought.  
You broke under pressure.

No.  
I refuse to be told I am not strong,  
Although I have had to muster up all the strength I have to coexist with you,  
I see your angry words are tainted with a hint of desperation.  
You know I am getting stronger.

Yes, I broke at the moment of impact.  
No, those breaks were not just bones.  
But the body is resilient and so am I.  
Once those fractures heal and the swelling is down you know there will be no place left  
for you.  
I will not let you leave with my memories and happiness,  
I can not let you.  
I will not let you.

You say this, but what makes you think that you actually have control of the situation?  
You prod and poke me,  
enrage me.  
I will take what I wish.  
I have already taken much  
My hunger grows with your strength.  
You can not handle my screams.  
I will make you conform.

You get to voice your discomforts while I struggle to keep mine down,  
below the surface.  
Tired of begging for help to get away from you  
When I know you are the one who decides when you leave.  
I would not need a crutch if you did not weigh on my shoulders.  
You are just in my head.

Just in your head, yet I physically restrict you,  
contain you,  
exhaust you,  
play with your emotions  
until you feel nothing but the headache.

I will heal and you will leave.

Not until more time has passed, do not neglect the fact that  
I am in your head.



It was just a singular moment, blackened in time.

You need to accept that before you move forward.

I,

hit so fast. you,

Your skull fractured under pressure along with your plans,  
calm disposition,  
and undertaking of how the world works.

I still shiver at the thought of the moment of impact.  
I laid there shocked, there was a moment of silence,  
and then my screams.  
I was left unarmed against everything around me, including you.

Just a brain injury. I am just in your head.  
You are just a concussion.

You are I am  
just in your head.







# Cold Blood

by Max Gross  
Crescent School



A ridiculously blistering school day was not excessively uncommon in Ubique Town, especially in the scorching month of June. Gallons upon gallons of pubescent sweat was gushing down faces, the water fountains were almost out of the gloriously refreshing water, and the teachers were nowhere to be seen. Although not apparently in existence, every student at Willis Carrier Public School could tell you exactly where to find the educators. A small, dimly lit room facing the playground, with its drapes shut, was the Teacher's Lounge. Though small, the room had the Holy Grail of the wearers school: The AC. A huge and white box of magical proportions. There were rumors, circulating it got so cold that you could sit an ice cube on a table for an hour without a drop of liquid. This was all tall tales, though, as not one student has ever stepped one small foot within a meter.

"I would give my left arm for a minute in the Lounge," said a young blond boy named Xavier, of about ten years and the protagonist of our story. Xavier, being quite the regular right-handed student, had no use for a left hand. His sport of choice, the incredulously European, soccer was utilised with feet. His long term best friend, winner of the town's Pie Eating Contest two years in a row, and certified lefty was not so thrilled by the idea.

"Well, you're lucky that you don't have fricking Raynaud's disease," replied the slightly overweight Evan Kingsdale Jr., or "Chilly" as everyone called him. Raynaud's disease is a malady in which the recipient is always cold. Many overheating peers were rightfully jealous, but Chilly did not like Raynaud or his disease. Recess was coming to a quick close, so the current match between Chilly and Xavier had to come to an end. Ten to zilch was the end result, another win from Xavier, so Chilly was heated up about the results.

If Chilly wasn't yelling at Xavier, or maybe even if he was standing on the other side, the boys would have noticed the drapes open up a slight bit to reveal the beaten down skeptic face of the principal, Mr. Vasquez. A small Hispanic man, he would have to be the unlucky bearer of bad news; what he hated most about being in charge. As an orphan from Mexico himself, he understood and knew that it would not be easy for him, or his student. He, although, had to do it. Was he scared, yes. But would fear ever stop the draconian headmaster. No.

A quick flashback, when not being overused, can be a perfectly timed escape from the current plotline, and give the reader even more context to the piece of literature. This precise flashback happened at quarter-past eleven the previous night. Ronald, the towering father of Xavier, was the town drunk. Since the divorce, most of his spare time was spent at the exact bar he worked at. Hangover after hangover, Ron was not a great worker and would show up hours late. Despite all of this, there should be a slight pity in your heart for the Ukrainian immigrant. Most of his family was still in the motherland, and he and his son were all alone. His boss at St. Dunstan's Bar and Grill did not share the exact same pity. It was an hour earlier that he had been fired for excessive alcohol consumption, which is exactly what he was doing precisely before disaster struck

"You haven't seen the last of me, you mother----" yelled Ron, with the same ferocity and velocity of a mountain lion. However, you may notice a cutoff near the end of the sentence. This was not used in an excuse exclude swearing, but as this was the exact split-second that the intoxicated man stepped right onto Everwhite Road.

There was no PA at Willis Carrier, so if the principal was to call someone to his office, he would have to do it in person. This made the conversation he was about to have even more difficult. Xavier was in History class, with a teacher almost as boring as the subject she was teaching. Any break, even if it meant going to the washroom, was envied by the rest of the class.

"Mr. Sirko, please come with me" remarked Mr. Vasquez to the disinterested students, searching for the sunburnt face of Xavier. He was secretly hoping that he was absent for the time being, but alas, the unfortunate boy stood up. A cynical abundance of chattering came from the back off the class, but not so much as if the principal wasn't there. A quick glance by Vasquez hushed everybody up.

"Am I in trouble, sir. I can tell you that-" responded Xavier hurriedly.

"You're not in trouble currently, Mr. Sirko, but if I catch you and Mr. Kingsdale conspiring after school one more time, I will have reason to investigate. I don't like to repeat myself, so along we go."

With this, the boy and the headmaster headed off. The droning monotone voice of the History teacher (who had just moved to the history of the Netherlands) faded slowly into the background. The two, however, did not head to the headmaster's office, but up three floors to the forbidden room. The Teacher's Lounge. Maybe it was the fear of the tough Hispanic man in charge, or the freezing cold air blowing from the AC, but there was a sense of dread in Xavier's heart. A sense of dread only matched by the one in Mr. Vasquez's.

"If you are wondering why I have called you here," nervously said the principal, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief. "it is because I have some genuinely awful news for you. I hate to have to do this, as I was in your shoes once, but..." He couldn't continue. He, a grown man, was himself almost on the verge of tears.

"Sir—" Xavier was prepared, he thought. Anyway, how bad could the news be?

"Do you want a drink of water, Xavier"

"Please, sir, tell me. I can handle the truth."

"It's about your father." The words couldn't come out, and if they did, how could he say it in a reassuring tone. He was no actor. But he was a human being. He picked up a glass of vodka disguised as water, took a well-deserved shot, and slowly enunciated "your father was hit by a car"

This flashback is used for more dramatic purposes, as it leaves a cliffhanger from the last paragraph. It takes place just twenty minutes after the former. We know now that Ronald was hit by the car on Everwhite Road. This flashback, weirdly enough, is from a different character's perspective; one that we have yet to introduce. Sheriff Chabata, a man of Zimbabwe descent, was in a rough patch. To say a rough patch, however, did not entirely cover it. There was a sickness circulating Europe that specifically targeted older women, which his Irish aunt had recently caught. Every dollar, pound, euro, franc, etc. was being sent to her, being the Sheriff's only living (though unluckily not for long) relative. Because of this, and a low paying law enforcing job, he was in serious debt.

He couldn't afford food, water, or rent. The three things necessary in life were out of his reach, with only the quiet hum of the AC in the motel room he was staying at to keep him sane. In actuality, he wasn't "staying" there, as Ratman Motel has been closed since 1966, and was a



frequent place for cocaine addicts to have meetings. If caught, he could say he was on a bust. This, however, did not explain the bumping he heard from the side stairwell.

Bump, bump, bump. The imagination could go wild, especially the imagination of a lonely, depressed, twenty year old man. Bump, bump, bump. The noise was getting louder and louder with every bump. Like the sound made by repeatedly hitting a potato sack with a wooden bat Bump, bump, bump.

And as the fear of the supernatural crawled down the Sheriff's body, two human shapes came into the beam of his flashlight. One man dragging another; a dead man. Ronald Sirko. And, with an upward look, he saw the face of the murderer...

Evan Kingsdale Sr.

The best lawyer, now manslaughterer and destroyer of evidence, but most importantly father of his best friend, Evan "Chilly" Kingsdale Jr. Ever since Chabata told him what he saw (after a trip to the Police Station) he hated both of them. Jr. and Sr. They killed the love of his life, his father. Murdered him in cold blood. No force on Earth could stop him from despising his friend. Friend, now, was not the correct word. Enemy. Awful, awful, awful, enemy. The effect that this would have on his life was too big for a ten year old to comprehend, but he blamed every last drop on the Kingsdales.

He arrived back at school, to pack up his bag, as he was heading for the unknown. Death threats to Evan Kingsdale Jr. in his head. Tears were streaming down his face, but he wanted to be strong. For his father. He wasn't doing well, but he wasn't doing terrible either. That was until his friend (or enemy) came up to him.

"You OK?" questioned Chilly, not yet hearing the news.

"Like you don't already know, Evan" responded Xavier, an ounce of resentment on his lips.

"What the-" confusedly, Chilly was taken back.

"You horrible, horrible, horrible-" Anger built up, like a toddler with Jenga blocks

"What did I ever do to you!" shouted Chilly, outraged

"You want to know, do you? You killed my father, you and your-" the tower got higher and higher, ready to fall to the ground. One last tipping was all that was needed for a torrential meltdown.

Chilly, with every right to be, was mad. Friends fight, but not like this.

"What, your awful, drunk, stupid excuse of a dad?"

He ran. He ran as far as he could go. Leaving his bag behind, he sprinted. With no intention in his head, his heart had a different plan. Back up the road, and right to the Police Station. As he arrived, he knew what he needed to do. The holding cell (where prisoners who hadn't yet gone to trial) contained only one man. One man, who has affected his life more than anybody.

"Kingsdale" he would not be scared, he would face his fears.

"Xavier... I-" but Kingsdale Sr. was scared of the young boy.

"You killed my father, and you ruined my life"

"I didn't try to... I mean-"

"I hate you. I hate you. I hate you and your stupid son."

"It was an accident... I swear... I... I'm sorry"

"That doesn't excuse you"

"I know that it doesn't, and none of my apologies will be able to fix that. I am, however, sorry. I can't understand your pain, but I can try to help. Don't push away my son. He will be there for you in these tough times, and to lose a father and a friend is much harder. For the both of you young children, believe in Evan Kingsdale Jr."

This one small sentence, made by a successful lawyer, changed Xavier in an exceptional way. His father told him a quote from a Chinese philosopher, Mencius: "Friends are the siblings God never gave us." And how could he abandon family, especially at a time like this? He understood that losing a dad did not mean losing a friend. Was he still irate? Of course. No human words could stop him from getting mad, but he finally did understand that a long grudge was detrimental. This, however, did not restart the friendship instantly. The comment about his father was horrendous. But he learned to forgive. His friendship was back on track, not fully the same as before; how could it be the same with so many new variables? The one thing that was certain was that he was happy.

Three years had passed. The horrors of the fourth grade were not forgotten, but placed in a glass cage for the both of them, Xavier and Chilly, to reflect upon and learn. Apologies were made, and hands were shaken. With Kingsdale Sr. in jail for attempted destruction of evidence, Xavier now lived with Chilly. The day was almost over, and the two boys were lying in their bunk bed.

"Ready for the rematch tomorrow?" said Chilly energetically.

"You're going down, like yesterday and the day before that." tiredly responded Xavier.

It was true, as Chilly has never been as spectacular in Soccer as Xavier, but there was still a hope in the boy's eyes. Hope, as it would seem, was stronger than hate.





by Manvis Xia  
Crescent School



by Katie Wilkinson  
St. Clement's School







# My Brother and I

by Ella Mathison  
The York School



It was a Saturday afternoon during the month of July. I had been living alone for 6 months and there hadn't been any word from my family since I left. Maybe they didn't want to talk to me or weren't sure what to say.

It was a small house and I ended up renting it from a cousin who lived nearby. I hadn't done any renovations, or even added furniture. All that remained was the oak kitchen table and the mixture of knives and forks left in the drawer. I bought a mattress and put it upstairs, but currently didn't have much of a bedroom. Or any rooms with labels, to be truthful.

There wasn't much to do without the comfort and laughter of my family. I had started hobbies, but they usually ended badly. I attempted to sew a blanket for my new place, but that didn't go as planned. My mother used to sew and I couldn't help but wonder if it was my anger that held me back from doing it properly.

I hadn't spoken to anyone since I arrived. So, when I heard a sharp tap on the brass door knocker, I spilled my coffee.

There he stood. A person I half expected to see standing on my porch, but never truly believed would appear. He didn't utter a word, and instead offered me a torn sheet of paper with the words 'July 14th'. I took the paper and allowed him to come inside.

"I expect mother asked you to come?" I told him, taking a mug out of the top drawer and turning on the stove.

"Typically accurate," he nodded as he sat on one of the kitchen chairs, and gazed around. He preferred two tea bags and a spoonful of honey. Anything else and he would toss it into a bush.

I looked over my shoulder at him. He wore a work jacket with a nametag on the right breast: "Theodore Parker, Manager." He turned and caught me staring, I quickly looked back at the tea.

"Cathy, mother wants to sell your things, unless you want them," he said, taking a small but discrete sip of the tea I had just brought him.

Once I had sat down with my own drink, I shook my head, "I don't want to talk about that." Theo had never been good with people.

"Would you like them? You're things, I mean. I have them in my car, just down there, Cathy. I can get them for you." He said, tapping his foot. I shook my head. Perhaps he really wanted to get me my things, but I'd rather she sold them. Maybe they could get some money for them and maybe I would never have to think about them again.

"It's July 14th," Theo said, taking another sip of his drink. "Mom and Dad's—"

"Anniversary. Yes, I know." I shrugged. Normally, we would be drinking champagne by then.

"Remember that time we went to the lake?" Theo said. "August 22nd, the last day of summer. I was going into grade 12 and you grade 10. Louisa and Helene wouldn't stop stealing your books? The ones about that warlock who lost his magical powers. And Grayson asked you to read them to him? And when you did, everyone listened, Cathy. Everyone. We all huddled up in a circle and listened. Do you remember?" Asked Theo.

I smiled. "Yes. The book was called 'Drained'. *Every ounce of fun we had in the past, gone forever.*"

Theo looked at me with grief in his eyes, opened his mouth, and sighed. "We want you back, Cathy. Mom wants you back."

I chewed my lip, my eyes darted across the sunlit dust on the ground. "No, Theo. I didn't mean it like that, I'm talking about the book. The title was called Drained. And on the front it said in bold: *'Every ounce of fun we had in the past, gone forever.'*"

"I know," he said. "We still just want you back." He moved his briefcase from the floor to the table. I stared at it while he flipped up latches and exposed its contents. He rummaged and then retrieved a small, turquoise envelope, which he handed to me. I immediately recognized the handwriting as my mother's. There was nothing inside and when I turned it over, I realized the address was hers, not mine. I looked at my brother.

"She wants you to write to her. And I hope you do, Cathy. I hope you write all of us." With that, he took his briefcase and coat, and closed the door behind him.

I added an extra bag to my tea and with a pen in hand and paper in front of me, I wrote.





# Westbound to Kipling

by Ellen Taylor  
St. Clement's School



by Mira Cantor  
The Country Day School

*Attention all passengers on Line 2. We are currently experiencing a delay westbound at Ossington Station...*

Curse words, mumbles, grumbles  
Anxious glances at watches  
The lucrative lull of conversation  
"Can you believe it?"  
"Not again!"  
"Toronto needs to invest in better transit."  
9 more stops.

*Attention all passengers on Line 2. We are currently experiencing a delay westbound at Keele Station...*

"Can you believe it?"  
"Not again!"  
"Toronto needs to invest in better transit."  
We are like moles  
We run underground  
Blind to the yellow, green, blue and purple  
Lines that criss-cross our city and  
Define our lives.  
How long we've been down here  
That is unclear  
Ten minutes, an hour, a month, a year?

*Attention all passengers on Line 2. We are currently experiencing a delay westbound at Jane Station...*

"Can you believe it?"  
"Not again!"  
"Toronto needs to invest in better transit."  
The most difficult conversation in fact  
Is with my patience, or what is left of it  
And still in tact.  
2 more stops.  
You can do it  
Only two more stops  
You're almost through it

An empty coffee cup rolls on the floor.  
I cannot take this anymore.





# Better Off This Way

by Allison Zhao  
University of Toronto Schools



I met her first in class. I remember every word).

Hi. I, uh –

Hi...?

*I don't have a partner for this project and I don't know you but uh, would you like to be partners?*

Sure. Yeah. Not a problem.

(I am glad I didn't have to ask and we work in silence).

(I see her again a week later at lunch. It's me who reaches out this time.

The conversation is not any less awkward).

Heya. You're all alone?

(I don't mention that I am too).

*Yeah. Yeah, I – um, I usually am. Always am, actually.*

Well, like, if you want, you could...

*Really? You don't –*

No, no, no, it's fine –

(We sit together, because it's better than being alone).

(Our first real argument is entirely my fault).

*Are you okay?*

What? Yes, of course I am. Where the hell did that come from?

*... You're not okay. What happened to you?*

Nothing. I'm fine.

*That's a lie –*

Shut up, there's nothing wrong with me!

(She doesn't give up on me).

*You're crying. I find you here all alone and you're crying and you expect me to believe that there's nothing wrong? What kind of trash do you think I am?*

Go away.

*I most certainly will not.*

(I break then).

Fine. Fine. You wanna know where I've been? In a psychiatrist's chair. They put me on meds for depression. Anxiety too. Some mishmash of disorders I don't care to know.

It's official. I'm a damaged girl.

*Oh.*

*... Did you really think I'd think less of you for that?*

(If I was crying before, I am sobbing now).

(And we continue through the years, until the day we graduate).

*I... I have something to tell you.*

Sure, what's up?

*Before we graduate, I... uh... I just wanted you to know. It's not that important but it's also sort of something you need to know and I have had a crush on you for the last five years.*

...

(She is blushing and I know she is about to cry. She knows what I have to tell her).

I'm sorry.

(I know it should change nothing about her, about us, but I know it does anyways).

I, uh... this is really awkward.

(And I know that it's the wrong thing to say).

*I understand. I guess... I guess I always knew? But I wanted you to know... Thanks for being my friend. Good luck in uni. Thank you for being everything I ever wanted.*

(She turns and runs then and I do not follow).

(We don't keep in touch. I see her a year later. She is holding hands with a pretty young woman and she looks happy.

I want to tell her that I miss her, that I am sorry, and that I still want to be her friend.

But that is a conversation too difficult for us to face).





# Telegram to Tradition

by Audrey Michel  
Toronto French School



## 1. lessons learned

the wind loops its golden-rayed jazz through  
the peepholes in my baba's lace curtains.

from a pudgy toddler's fist tumble beads in  
an Impressionist's spill and

her chest made of oak plopped beside me in  
contentment  
is liberated from its drawers

now exploited by peach fingers  
spreading color on the floor like apricot jam on bread:  
finger painting.

key scratches and creaking floorboards  
skip into the left ear and  
slide out the right.

warning: baba has returned.

the next sounds are not quite so slippery:  
"Keiko!"

—my name catches like a hook and sticks—  
"how many times have i told you  
not to touch see  
there is a method  
a system don't you see  
everything has its place so  
its been this way for generations why  
must you disturb what i have told you  
ought not to be disturbed?"

crow claws swoop and sort the  
indignant scarlets from the mass of sunk blues  
whose brilliances burn the prison of tradition and  
char understanding into little grey toddlers.

"Japanese girls marry Japanese boys." Stop.

## 1. lessons broken

the sparrowhawk outgrows her nest and soars over a  
sea of Verlaine which  
welcomes with the certain  
foreign familiarity that greets  
the pilgrim upon his altar.

"Keiko!"  
from a different mouth it sounds so different  
I marvel  
at the clarion hook that is offered by a stranger  
"come and eat with us!"  
a dusty fable about wolves and vulnerable sheep  
evaporates under his brightness and  
one nod leads to many.

hands white and so transparent,  
so unlike my own,  
i can see the purple of the veins skipping up his wrists  
as slim foreign fingers unbraid my dark hair  
with the gentleness of a swan.

shared tales itch beneath my skin so  
the snake begins to shed while  
boiling oceans melt under a bridge that stirs  
and prompts and questions like  
— who knew pizza was the next ambrosia but  
don't even get me started on the wonders of pineapple!

metamorphosis should be stitched on  
the wings of my kimono in  
violent violets to commemorate  
my first bouquet and the resulting blush.

oh—  
that a youthful heart is empowered to  
intertwine its learned lessons with its inert precepts  
should give us all a hope  
that the vascular is graftable;  
that our orchards can blossom with both cherry and apple buds.





for the next gift he gave knotted two families and  
tore humanity's history tapestry.

"Will you marry me?"

What? Stop.

1. lessons taught

"Welcome home!"

on a Japanese plane surrounded by Japanese  
the Japanese flight attendant's paste smile  
grates and grounds me.

Home? Right.

once upon a time the miso aroma would embrace and  
not recoil like it does now;  
I long for the warmth of familiarity  
— but where does that lie?

twisting and turning and twining  
goes the ring round my finger like  
the pen scratching in my trachea.

baba's familiar formalities must be observed so  
dark almond eyes squint past my stuttered Morse-  
code deluge on defibrillation and ionic bonding:  
my terminology denotes advancement which  
ruffles.

withered her skin may be but  
piquant as always are her questions and  
at last the grouse is coaxed and prodded into the open moor.

portraits in retrograde —  
mother carries ghost baby's baby  
armed with iron and starch like  
her mother's mother's mother.

virgin steeped in sepia and flowers  
drowning in the grim frown of the strange  
next-door neighbor.  
girl developed in monochrome and  
conditioned in the severe alleys of culture  
wears a uniform whose brass buttons  
snub Tojo himself.

a real-life still life of a childhood idol lost makes  
a patient pondering precipitate

finally—  
"Baba"  
a gentle hook jerks tears from stone  
"I love"

Full Stop.





by Andre Corona  
Crescent School

# A World Away



by Eloisa Cervantes  
The York School



This is the conversation we dread having. It's formulaic and rarely diverges from the script. It begins in standard silence; an averted gaze, maybe a frozen breath. A heartbeat. Then it's an occupied hand that taps the table, pulls on a fraying hem, or let's out a long held sigh. It's peppered with thick pauses and often moves too slowly for our liking. We emerge with our eyes stinging, our breaths shaky, and our minds racing.

A mother tries to explain to her child, who is preparing to leave the nest, that the world is not becoming the place she wished for her daughter to discover. Her brow creases inwards as she searches for words while her daughter's eyes widen in expectation. "I'm sorry," she whispers. It is not enough to convey the emotions that have possessed her—she has no name for them. They are beyond the boundaries of worry or sorrow.

"Why are you apologizing for something you didn't do?" Now it is her daughter's turn to furrow her brow, in the same bewildered way as the boy next door.

He presses his lips together and runs one hand through his curly hair, flattening the left side. "I'm sorry," the static voice on the phone states, clearly unapologetic.

"But—I mean...why?" He stands up brusquely when he can't remain seated any longer. His free hand spasms uncontrollably as he reaches for anything to distress and settles for a string hanging loose from his shirt.

"I—I already told you, it's not you. It's me. It's just better this way..."

"Is it?" he mumbles. There's an unnecessarily long pause that almost matches the brutal and thoughtless words he's just received.

"Listen, I've got to go. Sorry, again...bye, Logan." There's a crackle and then a beep that ends the sloppy breakup. Logan's heart squeezes painfully and drops to the empty pit behind his belly button, where his fretful insides are wringing out the shock.

A man, on his way home from work, messages his brother as he exits the subway two blocks away from Logan's house. His heart is also crushed as he reads: They say they're going to send us back. Two brothers, finally on the same continent after many years, are facing separation directly into its sallow eyes. Its fingers, coated in inexplicable fear, have grasped the brothers' hopes and efforts and torn them down. It has happened to them before, and it was bound to happen again. The brother stops in the middle of the sidewalk. His heart hurts too much to breathe, as if he has been punched by disbelief. His brother's wound has transcended one time zone and hundreds of kilometers.

On the same texting platform he and thousands of others are using, a younger girl who is not quite yet in high school has just finished messaging a friend. After sitting pensively at her desk for a minute, she ventures downstairs to ask her father a question. She finds him watching the news in the living room. "Dad, can I ask you something?"

"Of course." He immediately lowers the volume on the television.

"Why do people stare at us when they hear that we're not speaking in English to each other?"

"What do you mean?" he asks. His eyes flit back to the screen while he contemplates her query. She is just beginning to understand the world around her, and he cannot prevent it.

"I mean...when we were at that restaurant yesterday, when we were just talking about school and stuff, the family next to us kept looking over, and they didn't even try to hide it. It was, like,



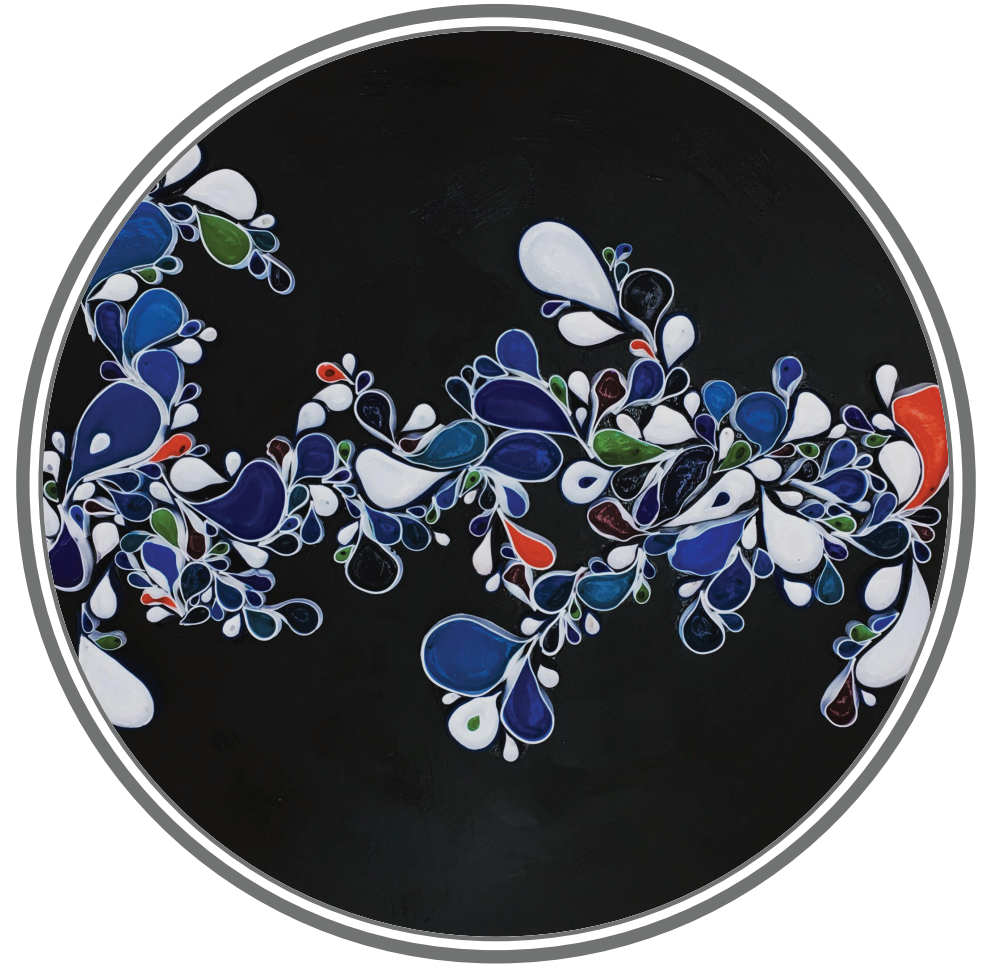
a big deal for them. “It’s the not the first time it’s happened,” she adds in a rush. “I was just wondering why...”

Her father exhales slowly, as if trying to push an answer out.

“I don’t know why, Pilar. The reasons are always different. Maybe they were just surprised. There’s no harm in that.” He stops for a moment. “Although sometimes people are frightened of what they can’t understand.”

“But...could it be because they thought we were talking about something bad? Were they afraid of us?” She looks sharply into his eyes, trying to understand why someone would find her beloved family menacing. In return, her father tries to form an honest yet reassuring response. He finds that it is not possible.

In what seems like a world away, a mother tries to protect her child from an uncertain future.





# Dear Body

by Hilary Fleming  
The Bishop Strachan School



Dear Body,

This is an eternal apology. I am sorry for not giving you the credit you deserve. Thank you for bringing me home the night I had too much to drink, lifting me from the floor, and understanding I had to keep moving. Thank you for protecting me as that boy tried to curl his hand around your thigh. You tensed up, showing him that your lack of consciousness is not consent. Body, you allowed me to prove everyone wrong, giving me the strength to run that extra mile, and knowing that in that moment I needed to more than anything.

I am apologizing for the numerous times I hurt you. Leaving a pain so strong you can still feel it deep in your bones, shaking you to your core. Some days I swear I can still feel your soul ache, like a broken arm that never quite healed. Your stomach knots as I look in the mirror pulling and prodding at you. Grabbing at your thighs till I can see light shine between them, sucking in your stomach as I run my fingers over your ribcage. Examining every inch of you, leaving you red, black and blue. Making you into my own personal sculpture, trying to change every part of you. But draft after draft you still seem to come up short of perfection. I have tried so many times; I don't think I know what perfection is anymore.

Body, I can't begin to explain how sorry I am. I blamed you for existing. Wishing that one-day you would just fade away, leaving me less to worry about. I apologize for standing by, letting my mind destroy you, picking away at you piece by piece, only to leave behind a hollow shell with the empty promise of "pretty". I regret scratching your knees against the bathroom floor, feeling the cold marble against your skin as I stuck my fingers down your throat. There are days I glance down at your scarred knuckles and remember those nights. The nights I thought "This will make you better, make me happier," "This is what needed to be done." Believing that in some sadistic way I was improving you; making you loveable.

Maybe the artwork that I have titled: Failure, version #467 will finally be looked at as beautiful. Or when I deprived you of nutrients for over a week making you feel sick, you were nauseous at the taste of water, too dizzy to make it all the way up the stairs. I was forcing you to be something that you are not. I am sorry that I wanted you to be different, and that keeping me strong and healthy was not quite enough.

I can still feel the scars on my waist from the fights we had in the soft light of the early morning, hot tears dripping down my cheeks as the moon slowly turns into the sun. Running my fingers over the lines counting a number of times you didn't add up. Hating you as I looked through the broken mirror. Only to see shattered pieces of the girl I used to be. Body, you have seen me change more than anyone. Watching as I metamorphosed from the little girl with white blonde pigtails, riding her yellow bike through the park, in her brother's cargo shorts. You healed her scratched elbows, helping get back on the bike when she fell. Now I am the girl with the black eyeliner running down her cheeks crying in the bathroom of the house party she so desperately wants to leave; you carry her between sobs, mending her broken heart.

Body you were 11, strutting down that tent line as if it were a runway. The summer sun kissing your barely bronzed skin, you made me feel invincible. Tight clothes hugging my nonexistent curves, a boy stops you to exclaim, "You got hot over the year." You take this as a compliment.

At 14, Body together we walk down to the bus stop. Feeling mature wearing heeled boots and more makeup than my mother would approve of. A construction worker stops you; vulgarly he expresses his approval of you. "Looking good sweetie," he yells over the sound of his jackhammer. He scans you from your feet up, examining you as if you were a piece of meat. He does this only to look up at your face and yell back, "Too young" at his friends. You turn bright red from my embarrassment. Pulling at your cardigan to hide yourself. Frightened but excited that your adolescent figure can be mistaken for a woman.

Now 17, you no longer hide from the world. I swear back at the boys who are simply trying to "complement" you. Still, you zip up as unrequited glances attack you on the subway. You feel uncomfortable but no longer embarrassed. A boy places his hand on your waist in a grungy basement full of teenagers; you still take this as a compliment.

At 17 he doesn't call. Body I blamed you. I forced you to run a little further that day, eat a little bit less. Body, I pretended to accept you, yet I still tear down every piece of you. Picking away at what your mother calls a "beautiful face". Though looking in the mirror all I can see is a battlefield, every pore a crater, every blemish a mountain. Longing for the perfect skin and shiny hair, seen on the advertisements that surround me. Spending dollars upon dollars on every cream, gel, oil to make you fit society's standard of beauty. Confusing my attack on your natural state of being, for pampering.

Most of all, I forgive us. I forgive us for never resembling the glamorous long-legged models that I idolized, the ones who taught me to worship beauty as my religion, glossy magazines as my bible. Body, it is not our fault that I was so susceptible to the world. It was never our choice to be bombarded with weight loss pills and self-tanners, using "not good enough" as an advertisement. Body, we never asked for this; the ideals I held for us were unachievable and I realize that now. I cannot promise us that this mistake with not be made again. There will be days I look in the mirror and my heart will sink to your feet, as I cannot see the light shine between our thighs. There will be days that our nose will resemble a glacier, our skin cracked like the Sahara desert, but Body, remember, I love us. Remember that every day I am fighting to see the good and the beauty in us, and I am sorry I could not see it before.





## Untitled 2

by Amarah Hasham-Steele  
St. Clement's School



I should ask him out. What's the worst that could happen?

He could hear you.

Isn't that kind of the point?

He could say yes.

Why is that so bad?

You could go out with him and realize that he's amazing.

What's wrong with that?

You could slowly start to talk every day and eventually develop an irreplaceable bond that some might even call love, only to have him break your heart, leaving you to carry the knowledge that you were never good enough for him and never should have started anything.

I should enter that contest. It looks cool.

But what if you win?

That would be great.

But what if people find out that you won?

Well, it's always fun to share your accomplishments.

But what if people start to think you're really smart?

That might be nice.

But what if everyone around you begins to set unreasonably high expectations for you, and you just aren't competent enough to live up to all of them? And what if you try your hardest to be as perfect as everyone thinks you are, but, in the end, the pressure breaks you completely?

I should offer this person advice. It's a good thing to do, right?

They might decide to follow it.

But that's what I want them to do, isn't it?

It might be the perfect advice.

Wouldn't that be ideal?

They might come back and ask you for advice again.

Well I can deal with that.

They might begin to come to you whenever they need a beacon of hope in an otherwise grey

world, and follow your advice every time it's given. But, after an eternity of sage wisdom, you might one day offer uneducated advice, and, when their entire life crumbles, it will be all your fault.

I should stop having conversations with you. You don't matter.

But sometimes I'm right...

You don't matter.

I'm just looking out for you...

You don't matter.

I'm your best friend...

You're a little voice inside my head. You don't matter.

And this time, I get the last word.



# Beware Whom You Trust

by Coco Wang  
Havergal College



by Dennis Stepanov  
Crescent School

(Interpretation of a specific moment: when Emilia presents the handkerchief to Iago)

We all have an Emilia in our lives. We confide in Emilia. We tell her our stories, our secrets. We keep her close because Emilia is our friend. We think Emilia is loyal and will look out for our best interests. But, little do we know, that one day, we will crumble in her hands.

From the beginning of the Shakespearean play, *Othello*, we can immediately develop strong opinions about certain characters. However, Emilia is not one of them. We first meet Emilia through her husband, Iago, who disrespects and belittles her openly. Then, the first line that Emilia says in the play “you have little cause to say so” holds no weight and tells us nothing about the character (2.1.120). At this point, all we know is that Emilia attends to Desdemona.

Because Emilia lives in the shadow rather than in the spotlight, we may assume that she is incapable of making decisions. Many argue that Emilia doesn’t mean any harm when she presents the handkerchief to Iago because she is powerless under her husband’s control, and she does not know of Iago’s evil plan. Many say that she does not purposefully give him the handkerchief because he rips it out of her hands. But, is she really as weak as we think? Does she really not know her husband’s plans? Does she not show Iago the handkerchief on purpose?

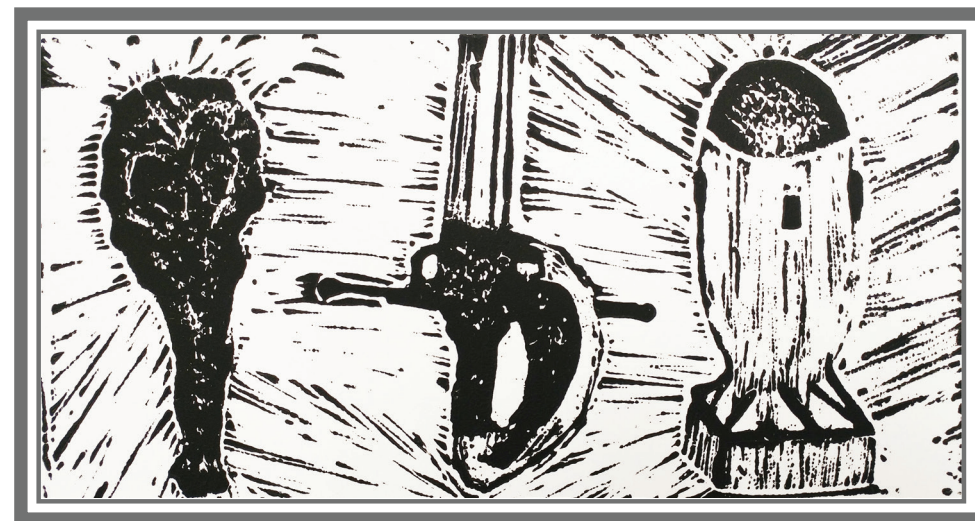
Emilia evidently knows that Desdemona loves this strawberry handkerchief from *Othello*, and she even says herself that Desdemona kisses it, talks to it, and never parts with it (3.3.329). Emilia also knows that her own husband has “wooed [her] to steal” that handkerchief for a long time (3.3.326). Now, if my husband were to ask me repeatedly to get another woman’s strawberry handkerchief for him, I would be very concerned and suspicious. Keep in mind that

Emilia is the one who said that men “are all but stomachs, and [women] are all but food” and after men are done with women, they “belch [them].” (3.4.110-113). Evidently, Emilia is a smart girl who has the capacity to form her own opinions and to draw conclusions. Therefore, it is logical that, even if Emilia doesn’t know every detail of Iago’s plan, she knows that something is not right and his plan must somehow involve Desdemona.

So, why does Emilia decide to give the handkerchief to Iago if she knows that he is scheming? Easy. The need for love. It is almost as if this process of presenting the handkerchief to Iago is Emilia’s flirtatious attempt to hold Iago’s attention and maybe even to receive praise in place of condemnations such as “foolish wife” (3.3.337). We can see through the interaction between Emilia and Iago that she is flirting with him, as she drags out the conversation by starting with a vague phrase of “I have a thing for you”, almost forcing Iago to continue the conversation (3.3.334). The way Emilia approaches the conversation shows that she wants to use the handkerchief as an excuse or opportunity to connect to her husband. Unfortunately, Iago is too focused and busy for her childish ways.

Evidence shows that Emilia makes the conscious decision to sacrifice her friendship and trust with Desdemona by giving Iago the handkerchief in hopes of gaining a little expression of love from Iago. If Emilia does not want Iago to have the handkerchief, she would not have presented it to him. If she values her friendship with Desdemona, she would have told Desdemona about the missing handkerchief after Iago snatches it out of her hands. Little does Desdemona know that it is the person who she trusts and keeps so close to her that causes her ultimate downfall and ruins her marriage.

In our lives, Emilia puts us first until something better comes up. Whether it is wealth, love, or status, she will do whatever it takes to get what she wants even if it means hurting us in the process. We think that Emilia has our best intentions in mind, but that is clearly not the case. You might say that you have great friends and that there is no way anyone around you is an Emilia, but how would you know if he or she is not an Emilia in disguise? Think for a moment, who is the Emilia in your life?





## Threshold

by Mckenna Ryan  
The Country Day School



## The Massacre

by Anudev Gill  
MacLachlan College



It was a cold and foggy October morning and one could see the leaves rustling on the old cobblestone steps. The faint sound of a horse carriage on the aged stones echoed throughout the alleyway that Udham Singh was walking through. He was taking brisk steps through London's many alleyways so as to perform his task as quickly as possible. Udham shivered from the cold even though he was wearing a large overcoat above his sweater. He thought about the heavy weight that he was concealing in the pocket of his overcoat. Even though the Webley Mk I .455 revolver was hidden inside his coat pocket it felt much heavier for Udham Singh than it should have. Nonetheless, Udham cleared his mind and continued on, remembering his goal and the vow he had made at the age of 20. Reaching his destination, Udham sat down on a wet and cold bench next to a man in very posh and formal attire.

For a while there was no conversation between the two men but eventually, the silence became too much to bear. "Hello, how do you do?" said the man in the posh attire. "My name is Sir Michael O'Dwyer."

"Good morning," responded Udham, "My name is Udham Singh."

O'Dwyer then promptly responded and said, "You must be from India then. I lived in India for a while and grew accustomed to the names native to the country. In fact, I was the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab for seven years."

To this Udham responded in a quiet voice, "I am aware. After all you made quite the stir back in those days."

O'Dwyer was unsure how to respond and looked confused. O'Dwyer remembered the massacre. A thousand people who were trying to start a riot at Jallianwala Bagh. O'Dwyer assessed his options and said, "You are aware that the people at Jallianwala Bagh were trying start a riot and upthrow the British government. We had to handle the situation as best we could."

"And that meant firing into a crowd of children and elders. Which of those children or old people was going to be able to over-throw the British government, may I ask? It had specifically been made clear that the congregation assembled were there to enjoy a religious festival, none of which involved starting riots or overthrowing the British government." Udham's voice was cold on the surface but O'Dwyer could sense the heat beneath.

Still O'Dwyer felt certain that they had proceeded according to protocol and felt no sympathy for the many that had been massacred at the Bagh. In fact, his response was even more heartless than Udham had expected. "Why does it matter anyways? Those Indians were probably going to conspire about something eventually. We just stopped a problem before it happened. What's your interest in the matter?"

Udham told O'Dwyer his story. "On the day of the massacre I thought it would be a good idea to go to the Bagh to enjoy the celebrations, but just as everybody had filed in, I heard the sound of cars. At first I just assumed those cars would be people passing by but soon I heard soldiers marching. As soon as the soldiers surrounded all the entrances I knew something was amiss, but little did I realize that the soldiers planned to shoot at the entire crowd. I just assumed the soldiers were there to make sure there were no riots. However, as soon as I saw people being shot next to me and jumping into wells to try and save themselves, I knew this would be a day forever stained with the blood of the people gathered there. It was then, at the age of 20, I made





a vow to kill the person who had said that this brutal attack was justifiable and with purpose!"

O'Dwyer was now concerned. He asked slowly, "Who, may I ask, are you trying to kill?" Udham didn't respond but slowly reached into his coat pocket. A look of panic came over Michael O'Dwyer's face.

Just as slowly Udham Singh took out the Webley revolver and said, "This is for the many slaughtered that day at Jallianwala Bagh and for those who are scarred with the memories of their loved ones being brutally shot and killed!" With this, Udham Singh fired the revolver three times. The look on O'Dwyer's face was of terror. The three bullets found their mark.

Udham waited at the bench next to O'Dwyer's slumped dead body until a police constable arrived. They put Udham in a horse-drawn carriage to transport him to prison and when asked by the constable why he killed O'Dwyer, Udham only said, "To avenge all those being forced to live like slaves under the British rule. I did this action for a reason and if I were given the chance to live that moment again, the outcome would be the same every time."

#### Author's Note

This story was based on true events. The events that happened at Jallianwala Bagh actually occurred and this did prompt Udham Singh to kill Sir Michael O'Dwyer.

Jallianwala Bagh was a small garden located in Amritsar, a region of Punjab. In this place, on the 13th of April the massacre took place. The reason many people were gathered was because it was the festival of Baisakhi, a religious festival in Sikhism. Sir Michael O'Dwyer thought that the people gathering there would mean they would soon revolt against the government and supported Reginald Dyer's actions. Reginald Dyer at that time was the military commander for Amritsar and thought the best way to handle this situation would be by massacring all the people gathered there. Reginald Dyer brought two armoured cars with him as well as 60 soldiers. However, as the two cars were too big to fit into the Bagh, Dyer had to leave them behind. Yet, Dyer ordered his soldiers to line up and they blocked all of the exits out of the Bagh. Reginald Dyer then gave the order to fire and specifically ordered his soldiers to fire into the thickest parts of the crowd so as to injure more people. Some people grew so desperate that they even tried jumping into the well in the Bagh to save themselves but the fall was too high. A total of 1500 people were killed that day but Michael O'Dwyer still supported every single one of Reginald Dyer's actions. This is what fueled the animosity between Udham Singh and O'Dwyer as Udham was present at the day of the massacre.





# Unlabelled, No Name Body

by Alyssa Gaylard  
Appleby College



“What’s your nationality?” she asks.  
I answer with Canadian,  
But this isn’t what she meant.  
Because although in reality my nationality is defined by my country of residence,  
She wants to decipher the hidden meaning behind my tight curls and my figure  
that’s bathed with a tan complexion that she just can’t figure out.  
So she asks a second time, slightly annoyed by my interpretation of literal definitions.  
It’s almost like I’m being held for some sort of questioning inquisition.  
Yet again her ignorance clouds her intentions and she asks, “But, where are you really from?”  
I’m really from Canada,  
born in Mississauga,  
English speaking,  
yet she still seems to be critiquing this somehow  
not-up-to-her-standards answer.  
After what felt like hours of questions being hit back at me like a game  
of ping-pong that I’m so evidently losing,  
She finally says “Since you’re being so literal, what’s your ethnicity?”  
Before I can even get a word in, I hear:  
“You must be Latina!”  
She says the word Latina with her sub-consciously racist “accent”,  
The same one that plagues the “Mexican Man” costume sold to an everyday ignorant bigot  
from your local Spirit of Halloween.  
I answer with “No, I’m...”  
But once again, before I could finish she asks,  
“What are you then?”  
I’m a living breathing person punctured by people poking at personal predispositions.  
But,  
I didn’t say that.  
I was sick of the argument, so I lay it rest and told her what she wanted to know.  
My father is from Sierra Leone and my mother from Poland.  
Just as I thought that this timely talk had come to a close,  
She claims my very own identity as wrong, like it’s an incorrect answer on a  
standardized test.  
“But you don’t look half black?”  
I’m sorry that I don’t look like your ideal of a 50% mix of chocolate and vanilla  
like a soft serve sweet swirled ice cream cone.  
Because according to you, my body don’t seem to suit your idea of my culture.  
Because according to you, I’m the colored shirts in a laundry load  
with your bleached ideals suffocating my vibrant pigments.  
Because according to you, the percentage of my racial definition is only determined  
by the fact that people would consider me as a

white passing  
person  
of  
colour.  
A person who struggles to have a say in race-based discussions  
because she’s just:  
“A privileged upper-class white girl”.  
So yes, I’ve got more of my mother’s skin tone  
and her straight hair turned my kinky-curled dream into one of 3d texture that  
I’ll never get over.  
So yes, I wish I could told tell you which side of my family I could relate to.  
But,  
I can’t.  
I will always be an unknown figure that society can’t put a label on.  
Just like on the census,  
I will always just  
be labeled  
Other.



# Friendly Fire

by Bryan Wong  
Crescent School



SIMON

So I hear that Nick wants to take you to prom.

GREER

What? Nick Saunders?

SIMON

Yeah, I heard he's going to ask you next week. After his football game. He's going to make some amazing pass, and all the girls are going to drop their panties, and then he's going to bring out the signs and the balloons and the roses and ta-dah! Greer Corson, will you go to prom with me?

GREER

I'm not even going to the game next week. And since when did you talk to Nick Saunders?

SIMON

I don't. I overheard him in the halls this past week.

Beat.

So?

GREER

So what?

SIMON

Are you — like, are you — not that it even matters to me — you can — I'm sure you'll have no — tons of other guys will probably ask you — you can decide for yourself, but are — are you going to say yes?

GREER

I don't know, Simon! Who gives a shit! Can we please talk about something else?

SIMON

Yeah, I — yeah. Sorry about — sorry about that, Greer.

GREER

It's fine.

GREER nudges SIMON and winks.

But I hear Caroline Culbert wants to ask a certain someone to prom.

SIMON

Yeah, I know. She already did. I said no.

GREER

What, why?

SIMON

I already have someone in mind.

Beat.

Hey, I got the new Battlefield game the other day. Want to come over and try it with me later tonight? Might help get your mind off things — you know — after the visit.

GREER

Simon, you know I hate those games.

SIMON

That's because you don't understand how to play them! There's so much more to them — there's teamwork, strategy, communication—

GREER

Guns.

SIMON

Well, yeah — of course. Guns. But — you see — you got to understand how to properly use one.

GREER

How does one properly use a gun?

SIMON

I mean — it's just a video game, Greer — but you can't do what you



normally do.

GREER

What's that?

SIMON

If you want to get something out of it, you can't just play how you normally play. I mean — you just shoot, Greer. You just shoot. Everyone and everywhere. You end up shooting me too, by accident. It's all just blue-on-blue to you. I mean — your ammo. It has to have purpose. Otherwise you — you just end up wasting it all. On friendly fire.

A MOTHER enters with her TODDLER. She is texting on her phone. The TODDLER sits down and begins to play with his toy truck.

He's all over the news now.

GREER

What?

SIMON

Your father. He's everywhere. Fox News, especially.

GREER

You mean the States care about it too?

SIMON

They love it there. They're using it to justify all that bullshit — you know — the Second Amendment crap. They're saying if an old white guy can shoot an unarmed black kid in Toronto as if it were any American city, then it must not be a gun problem they're having.

GREER

Then what could it be?

SIMON

I don't know. Self-defence. Crime. Black crime.

Beat.

GREER

I visited Toni's parents last night. Just to — just to drop off some of his clothes that he left in my room. I — I told them. They seemed — they seemed really happy about it. They told me that they can help pay for anything if I need it.

Beat.

They said — they said that they hope he has Toni's smile. That — that was the one thing.

Beat.

And I — I think that's what I'm hoping for too. His smile.

SIMON puts his arm around GREER. GREER leans her head on SIMON's shoulder. My mom knows too. She didn't — she didn't seem mad — or disappointed. Just sad. She — she looked really sad. I told Adam, but I don't think he believed me. He just kind of said, "Nice," and then went into his bedroom and closed the door. He played his goth music really loudly that night.

Beat.

It's only a matter of time before — before the whole school knows. I mean, you can't — you can't tell now. But in a few months, everyone — everyone will be able to see it.

GREER and SIMON watch the TODDLER play with his toy truck. The MOTHER stops texting on her phone to pick up a call. She is clearly ignoring her TODDLER.

SIMON

So, are you — are you going to — to tell your father — today?

Beat.

GREER

I — I think so.

Beat.

I mean, he — he deserves it, right? Not — not to know, but — but because he — because he deserves it.

Beat.

He took — he took him away — away from me. Just — just like — just like that.

Beat.

Toni — I can't — I can't see Toni anymore. I can't —

Beat.







by Bryan Wong  
Crescent School



by Charles Hilberdink  
MacLachlan College

He — he deserves it. He — he — he deserves it. He —

GREER stands up.

(yelling at the MOTHER) Can you — can you just — just put your fucking phone down and pay attention to your baby?

The MOTHER turns to GREER, shocked. She grabs her TODDLER and rushes out, leaving her phone and his toy truck behind. She rushes back in and grabs her phone, forgetting to pick up her TODDLER's toy truck. GREER falls back onto the bench and begins to cry. SIMON holds GREER in his arms.

(sobbing) How — how am I supposed to — to have a fucking child when — when I'm still a child myself? How am I — am I supposed to be a good — a good mother with no — with no — fucking — with no fucking father to help me? I'm going to be — oh, God! — I'm going to be a terrible — a terrible mother!

SIMON

No — Greer, you won't — you won't be. It's — it's okay. It's all — it's all going to be — it's all going to be okay.

GREER

How? How, Simon? I'm — I'm supposed to go to Queen's Commerce next year, and then — and then I'm supposed to graduate and find a job and — kids — they aren't — they aren't supposed to come! Not for — not for another ten — fifteen years!

SIMON

It's okay, Greer. It's all going to be okay. Just — just calm down.

SIMON strokes GREER's back and brushes her hair, tucking it behind her ears. GREER stops crying.

I know — I know you're upset. I know you're mad. I just — I just don't want to see — to see you throw away everything, you know? I mean, with your — with your father. And I know — I know you want to keep it — to keep him. So with — with your father, I don't — I don't want to see — to see you throw your baby — to see you throw him away as well. I just — I just don't want to see you use your baby you know? To use - to use your baby as — as —

GREER

Ammo.

SIMON

Yeah. Ammo.







# Three Little Words

by Madelyn Mackintosh  
The York School



You've always loved the spring.

How the chickadees sing, perched in their willows, announcing the end of their slumber. Squirrels drift out of burrows and the creek's currents push fish downstream in a low hiss. Newly coloured branches burst into the skies once more and sunlight that has remained dull behind the barricade of grey clouds stuns at full force. There's something almost comforting about the fresh start, about watching as the world comes back to life.

You sit by the brook, legs swung over its rocky edge. The one in the woods behind the park, with the blooming pastel flowers and ivy creeping up the stones that sit in the water. The one with broken wood panels that mark the path to get there, although you know the route so well you could find it blind.

You check your watch - he's late. He's always late.

Your body reclines to face the sky and you squint as the light catches your eye. It's hard to tell if the nerves you feel are delight or apprehension. He's turning eighteen today, and he's finally free, and you're happy for him. You really are. But it also feels like the end of an era, like the beginnings of a conclusion that you are not ready for. As the days slip by faster and faster in a whirlwind that drags you along, you are desperately trying to grip onto a reality that is slipping away. Because he's eighteen today, but you're still seventeen. In less than a month he'll be in Glasgow and you'll still be here, sitting by the brook. And you're not ready to sit alone.

A voice echoes down the path behind you. "Hey, I brought coffee."

You spin around to see him walking towards you, a to-go cup in each hand and a rugged smile plastered across his face. His hair is a cropped and unkempt dishwater blonde, uncombed but still sparkling in the light. A broad frame and tall stature is complimented by a fitted cyan flannel, and he saunters towards you in dirt-stained too-worn Kodiaks.

You feel your heart rate rise. Just a little, though. Just a little. Just enough.

"I know - I was supposed to be here twenty minutes ago, you don't have to tell me." He says, handing you a cup and sitting down beside you. You chuckle.

"I've stopped trying. You do know how to tell time, right?" You reply, nudging his shoulder. "Because I can arrange for a kindergartener to tutor you, if that would help."

"You're hilarious."

"I know."

You grin, taking a sip of your latte.

He leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees and looking up at you expectantly. "So, you said you had a surprise for me. You made me wait three days to know what it is," he says eagerly. "Tell me."

"You made me wait twenty minutes," you jab back, reaching into your back pocket to fish out a small parcel. His smile widens as you hand it to him and he looks like a giddy child. That little boy you've known for millennia has somehow grown into a man. When did that happen?

He flips it over in his hands, examining the shoddy wrapping loosely tied with a scrap of twine. He delicately pulls apart the string and peels back the paper to unveil the gleaming pin below. It's a silvery-blue, made of aluminum, molded into intricate strands that twist and cascade downward. It looks like water and shines as he holds it up to the light. He cocks his head.

Your heart rate quickens again as you gesture to the creek. "I dunno, I just thought that when

you go to Scotland, it might, you know, remind you of, of -"

"Us," he finishes. Your smile falters.

*Three weeks and he'll be gone*, whispers a voice inside of you. Not your heart, something deeper than that. A being that resides beyond you, one that you have no control over. *Three weeks and he'll be in Glasgow and you'll still be here and unless you say something you'll never see him again.*

"It's not much," you murmur. He softly shakes his head, turning to meet your gaze. You stare into his eyes, his beautiful glittering eyes, which are pale and shining but dark and mysterious. That drew you in like a dance to a rhythm all their own.

He places his free hand around yours and squeezes your palm. "No, no, it is," he says, understanding.

*Now*. It urges again. *You have to know if there's a chance.*

He reaches up to his chest and pokes the pin into his flannel. His lips turning up at the edges as he breaks eye contact. "I'm going to miss this the most," he says quietly, turning to look at the creek. He squeezes your hand again and it feels like you're ripping in two. It's hard to articulate the impossibility of breathing when his hand grazes your lower back, or his laugh sends vibrations through your chest. When he looks at you with that rugged smile, or when he squeezes your hand.

*You have nothing to lose. So what are you so afraid of?*

And maybe it's him, or you, or the brook, but today you listen to that voice.

"I love you," you exhale, unsure whether you're telling him or yourself. And he looks up at you.

But suddenly you're in open air, suspended in a space between the stars. You feel as though the void surrounding your limp frame is tightening like a noose, as your vocal cords restrict in a desperate hunt for words that will not come.

So, you curse your heart. Your heart, that has always moved one step faster than your mind. That is always threatening to pump out of your chest and that you don't know how to contain. Your heart that has screamed for him, constantly for him, always for *him*.

Maybe he's always heard it. Now he certainly has.

His response is soft and distant, an echo. "Since?"

A question you do not know how to answer. There is no beginning or end, only an endless wheel from which you cannot escape, though you don't want to leave. But you don't know how to tell him that, so instead you say, "Three years."

Your gazes remain locked and you can see cogs turning behind his eyes. Behind yours a world is burning down, your world, as you wait for a response. It feels like the blood running through your veins has turned into fire and you can feel the force of a million earthquakes running through your shaking body. You're not sure if he can tell. You hope he can't.

So, with a final surge of irrationality, you squeeze his hand back.

But carefully, delicately even, he pulls away. And you understand. Your gut wrenches, your eyes flood, and your shoulders turn limp and helpless. But you understand. Because understanding is all you know how to do.



# The Art of Patience

by Andrew Leishman  
Royal St. George's College



I'm a working class man. I spend twelve hours a day busting my ass off at the Saltsburg Steel Factory and all for what? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Shitty pay, shitty hours, and an all-around shitty life. And to make matters worse, I spend two hours a day commuting to this steel piece of shit.

So there I was sitting on the number 52 bus running south back into the city and this guy decides he wants to have a goddamn concert on the bus. I mean, he's got these purple Beats hanging around his neck, showing the world that he's got swag and is tough as nails. So I'm sitting across from the guy and he starts blasting his music out loud, not even connected to his headphones.

It was one of those days, dark and stormy, tiny droplets of water cascading down the windows of the bus and I was tired – like really tired. Now normally, I am much more tolerant of those insufferable idiots who are oblivious to the world around them; however, today this guy was really getting on my nerves. My blood was starting to boil. I could feel my blood pressure skyrocketing as the thickening blood oozed through my veins.

I figured he was just messing around and would turn the music off after the first song, but this was not the case. The incessant, obnoxious beat of the blaring base continued until I finally tapped the guy's knee and asked him to plug in his headphones. He just stared at me and then said, "Piss off."

Now I've been in therapy for the last few months after an incident between myself, this other guy, and his head going through a window. The old me would, without question, have started a fight. I mean, with my blood pressure as high as it was and the incessant twitching of my left eye signaling my eventual eruption, it was a miracle I didn't smash his jaw to pieces. However, this was the new me. So, instead of making a scene, I just shot the man an icy smile and said, "Sorry Sir, I apologize for bothering you; if you would like to continue playing your music out loud, that is your own prerogative."

So, feeling my vital signs returning to normal, I returned to my seat and closed my eyes, waiting for my stop to be announced. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of the thunderous thud, thud, thud, of the man's music, the driver announced my stop. Now, I'm not normally a paranoid man; however, as I exited the bus, so did the man playing the music. I quickened my pace and lifted my hood, noticing that the man was walking in my direction just ten paces behind me. Then came that all too familiar voice yelling, "Yo, Oldman, where you going?" I kept walking, trying to tune out the man's yelling, but he was just so persistent; "Where you going? Not man enough to face me?"

My heart was racing, faster, faster, threatening to explode right out of my chest. I turned around. My left eye was twitching, every muscle in my beaten-up body rigid and flexed. I stared straight into the man's black eyes and said, "Hey man, you ready?"

"Oh, I'm ready alright," the man replied.

Then I paused, my eyes fixed on my opponent, and said, "Well, what are you waiting for? Aren't you going to play?"

The man stood still and in an angry and confused voice said, "Play? What the hell are you talking about?"

He was looking at me like I had ten heads, and I said, "Play your music. C'mon, drop that beat. We're gonna have a dance party, you and I. Let's go, we can dance together. C'mon!"

The man was frozen in place as I started shouting, "Let's go, play it! Play it! Play it! I want to hear your music!"

The man dropped his hands and began backing up, saying, "You're crazy, yo!"

"Play it!" I shouted once more, and then he ran off. I couldn't have been more relieved, because I've never danced in my life.



# A Father's Dream

by Nimrit Dhillon  
Appleby College



With the fans on their feet, half giddy with anticipation and the other half quiet with dread, I skate past the blue line, wind up for a clapper, and let the puck fly. I'm not about to disappoint my father and lose this playoff game – I know the goalie doesn't stand a chance even before I take the shot.

My nickname is *The Deliverer* and that is just what I do: deliver goals. Being a left-winger defines me; it's all I know. Breaking the record for the most points logged in my rookie year in the OHL, I am being touted as the next Sidney Crosby. That's a lot to live up to. Scouts and U.S. colleges call my house daily, looking to recruit me. My dad meets with them, takes down the offer details, and pins the papers to the bulletin board in the kitchen. He says it's a family accomplishment, so we should share the success like we would a meal. I guess I agree, but it's a fine line between that and showing off.

"That's it! That's it!" I hear my coach shouting from the bench.

"Your luck is gonna to run out, buddy. I'll see you behind the McDonald's counter this time next year," the opposing captain says as I skate by.

The loud horns, clappers, and cheers hit me like a brick wall. As I look past the bench and up at my dad, who sits in the same seat in the same row for every home game, I see him giving me 'the signal' – his hand clenched in a fist held close to his heart. That one means, 'I am proud of you'.

Over the years, we've developed our own sign language to communicate: skate faster, shoot blocker side, head up, back check harder. Though I have had great coaches and played on many great teams, my 'real' coach has always been my dad. He played in the Nation Hockey League for 23 games, playing for the Ottawa Senators. He was good, but not great, as he is fond of telling me. He is using his experience to ensure that I have an NHL career that spans decades.

"You are going places, Cory," my coach says in the dressing room, as the team celebrates the win.

Although I hear him, and I am happy we won, I am tuned out. I am thinking about my science fair project and my DNA model. Math and Science have always been my passions in school, but this year, I am absolutely thriving in both subjects. I feel like the material is finally challenging me. I have been looking at the science and engineering programs at the major Canadian universities in hopes to getting into a research based school.

I walk into the night air and hear the honk of my dad's car. It's home time. I get into the car and I barely sit down when my dad makes an announcement.

"Boy, just wait 'til you get home! I have the biggest surprise for you!"

I can't think of what the surprise could be. My birthday was last month. My report card is not out yet, but Dad wouldn't consider that anything of importance anyway.

We walk through the front door and I drop my hockey bag in the hall. I head upstairs to take a shower, but my dad stops me.

"Hey, kiddo, come into the kitchen for your surprise."

I walk into the kitchen. There is an envelope on the kitchen table, right underneath the bulletin board.

I walk towards the table, towards the envelope.

"Come on, open it," he urges, as he pushes it towards me.

I open the envelope, not knowing what to expect. It is a letter. There is red and gold at the top of the page and then I see the image – the Ottawa Senators' logo. Oh my God, what is this? I freeze and look over at my dad. I don't need to read the letter to know what's inside.

"Whatya think about that, Cory? Isn't that the best thing you've ever seen?" Dad does the fist to heart gesture again, and I know at that moment that I have left this for too long. I must tell him now.

My tongue refuses to move, dry and heavy. I am at a loss for words. My heart races and I feel like I am going to faint.

"Yeah, that's great. I guess. The thing is, Dad..." I start, but I just can't finish.

Tears start to form. Dad looks confused. I am frozen with fear. This letter is better than winning the Stanley Cup for him. He has driven me to practices and tournaments, paid for private coaches, and bought me new equipment every single season all for the hopes of getting a letter like this someday.

"What's the matter?" my dad asks.

"Well, it's hard to explain."

My dad looks puzzled and gestures to me to keep talking. He takes the letter and pins it to the bulletin board.

"Try me," he coaxes.

I honestly can't tell if he's angry, surprised, or concerned. I've been dreading this moment for months now.

"Dad, this is the hardest thing for me to say. I love you so much. I love hockey. The thing is...I just can't play anymore."

There, I said it. I feel the weight immediately shift off my shoulders. I am flushed in the cheeks, tears rolling down my face, but I feel the fear being replaced with relief.

"I know you need a break, buddy. It's been a rough season. How about we go see the Leafs game tonight?" Dad responds, turning his back as he reaches into the cupboard for a snack.

"What? Dad, did you hear me? I just can't play hockey anymore. My chance for getting into Waterloo Engineering hinges on my marks this year. I need to pour everything I have into that. Dad, do you hear me?" I reply, feeling a boost of courage I didn't know I had.

"Haha! Son, you're in! What the hell do you need to go to university for? You will earn millions doing what you love to do!"

Dad's back is still turned and he is busy texting on his phone. He is never going to give up on his dream. His dream. My stomach turns with the thought of what's about to come next.

"Dad, please turn around and listen," I say, as I take his arm and gently tug him to face me. "My dream is to be a researcher. An engineer. A scholar. That's what I love to do. I can't pursue that while playing hockey. The playoffs are over and I don't want to play next season."

Dad just stares. He starts to cry. We stand for what seems like hours but really are mere seconds.

"Cory, son, all I want is the best for you. I want you to be happy," he responds. He starts to place his hand in a fist and I know everything is going to be okay. He is my hero.



# Ugly Break Up

by Amy Nam  
Bayview Glen School



Boy	Girl
It was in the afternoon when I confessed.	It was in the afternoon when he did it.
I went to her house and saw her sitting on the couch in the living room.	I was simply watching TV.
I nervously sat beside her.	He sat next to me, and I noticed his remorseful expression.
"We need to talk," I said.	That didn't sound too good.
"What? What is it?" W urged.	I asked him what was wrong.
"I don't know how to say this without hurting you..." I began.	A panicked feeling arose inside me, but I pushed it down.
"Say what?" She looked anxious and agitated.	The feeling fought back.
"I don't love you anymore." I managed to speak the long-awaited words. "We need to break up."	His words pierced my ears. I had to bite my lip to keep me from crying.
She started asking me a bunch of obvious questions.	"What? Why? What did I do?" I felt so many things at once. Sorrow, weak, and empty, but also enraged, indignant, and furious.
"It's not you, it's me," I stated.	Like I'd believe that pathetic excuse.
"I'm sorry."	He's not sorry. I know it.
She started to cry.	I couldn't hold back the tears. They flooded my eyes like a roaring waterfall cascading over a cliff.
She suddenly slapped me.	My hand was cherry red from smacking him so hard.
I touched my cheek gingerly.	He totally deserved it.
"Why? Why now? Why don't you love me anymore?" she hollered.	I screamed the questions so hard, my throat hurt after.
"It's complicated."	<i>Sure it is</i> , I thought.
"Tell me," she pleaded. "Tell me now."	I begged him for an explanation.
"No," I said.	<i>No?!</i>
"Yes," she implored. "Please."	I shouldn't have said please. He didn't merit my manners.
"I can't," I told her.	He didn't think I was tough enough to take it.
"Yes, you can!" she cried.	I was ashamed to be entreating him to tell me, but I had to know.
"Because... I love someone else, okay?" I shouted.	I was taken aback.

Boy	Girl
"Who?" she asked.	The question was evidently the first to come to mind.
"Alyssa," I answered.	He knew I hated Alyssa.
"Why her?" she questioned. "What does she have that I don't?"	Alyssa was the most manipulative, controlling, and extravagant girl I knew. What made her so special?
"For one thing, she's really pretty," I replied.	I had to admit, she was. A lot prettier than me, that's for sure.
"She's loaded with money."	How shallow of him. He likes her because of her money?
"And she's very popular."	I couldn't believe I ever loved him.
"You're incredibly superficial," she uttered, the pain clear in her voice. "I thought you were such a kind, sensitive, and genuine person. But oh, was I wrong. You're simplistic, facile, and sickening. I sincerely cared for you, but did you? No! You just throw my feelings onto the curb without a single hesitation!"	He outraged me. He infuriated me. He disgusted me.
"If you don't love someone," I argued, "why waste their feelings?" You shouldn't show them fake feelings. That's just cruel."	He did have a point, but I couldn't let him win.
"When did you realize you felt something for Alyssa?" she demanded.	"About four months ago," he responded.
"Four months ago?!" she shrieked. "You've known for four months and never decided to tell me sooner? What is wrong with you?"	He was unbelievable, implausible, and dubious.
I attempted to reconcile. "Look, I said I'm sorry."	Lies. All lies. I couldn't take it anymore. Between sobs, I mumbled, "Leave. Just go. I don't want to see you ever again."
I left.	He left, thank goodness.
I felt culpable for causing her agony.	He probably didn't care at all.
I went home and had a snack.	I bawled until no more tears came.
I wasn't proud of what I did, however, it had to be done. I didn't feel necessarily happy, but I was relieved. I finally did it. It was over.	How could he just end three years of our relationship like that? Didn't he care? Well, he clearly didn't. I felt broken. Inconsolable. <i>Alone</i> .
Worst part was, I knew Alyssa didn't love me.	Worst part was, I still loved him.

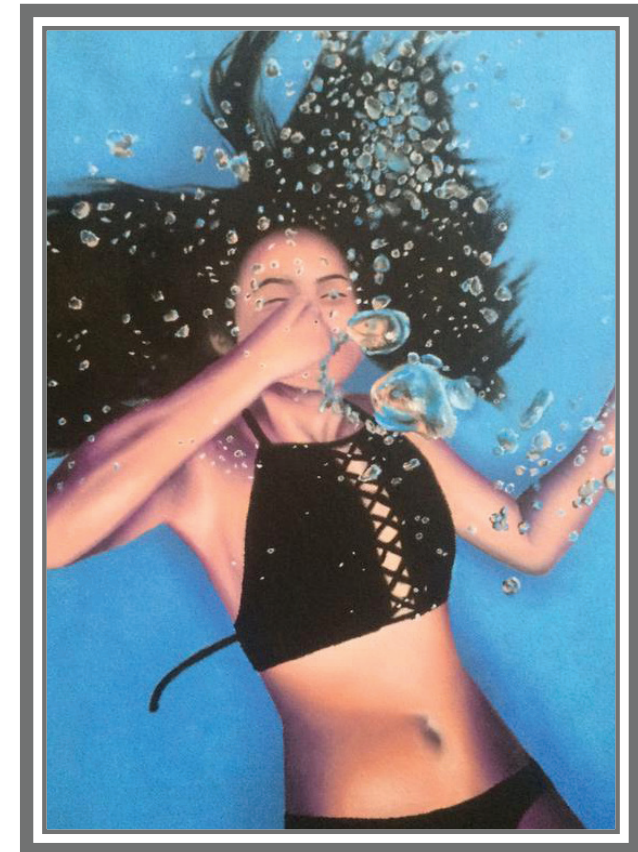




by Jessica Chu  
MacLachlan College



by Megan Sugiyama  
St. Clement's School





# It Started Off So Innocent

by Sachin Ahuja  
Appleby College



There was a knock. “Go hide in the closet,” he whispered, wide-eyed. He opened the door a crack, heard the stomps of three idiots run down the hall, snickering, and let out a sigh of relief. She fell out, along with a pile of dirty clothes, angry but laughing. “I’m so sorry,” he blushed, “I just threw everything in there when—” “It’s fine. I don’t really mind the smell of guy for some reason. Really, it’s fine. You can play the music again.”

And I ain’t never did this before no... J. Cole started from the Mac Book on the dark, cluttered desk. He liked this song.

“You like this song?” she asked. “This used to be my favourite.”

“Yeah,” he nodded, smiling. It was a guy’s room. There was a Gorillaz poster and a crooked Chance poster on the corkboard over the bed, above that was a shelf with a stack of messy papers threatening to fall. On the desk were university brochures, a pack of gum, a diet coke, and a piece of thread.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Uh, it’s kind of stupid. All of my sisters give me a bracelet as like a symbol of protection. We do it every year. My family can be obsessive and kinda annoying, especially my mom, but I guess they mean well.”

She sighed, gazing through the window. “My mom works hard.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know.”

The pause got uncomfortably long, so he proceeded to talk about last year’s trip to Jamaica, and about his brother, and about his roommate, and his classes, and his friends, none of which he had any complaints about. He had never kissed a girl before, and when he kissed her, her eyes stayed wide open.

She pulled away. “Look, I’m just—I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine.” His palms were sweaty. “Hey, uh, tell me more about your sister.”

“I told you. She’s my best friend. She’s been really good through everything. You know, like the last couple years.” She paused.

Since they met two weeks ago, he had always felt vaguely guilty around her, as if he didn’t deserve all that he had. It made him uncomfortable.

It was on repeat: baby be gentle cause... Cause I ain’t never did this before no...

“What about your parents?” he asked.

“I told you, my mom’s really hard working. She does everything. I haven’t really told many people this, but I live in a hotel. It’s my mom’s.”

“That’s cool, I guess.” A pit formed in his stomach. The bed was uncomfortable, it creaked with every movement.

Yeah, it’s okay. My dad’s kind of an asshole. He doesn’t come around much,” she said flatly.

His heart raced. “I’m so sorry.”

She forced a laugh, “There’s nothing you can do about it. It’s fine.”

He thought to countless drives with his dad to practice, to restaurants, in different countries, blasting rock music, playing video games, and changed the subject. “What about your friends?”

You mentioned that guy Jeff. What’s he like?”

I wanna get somethin off my mental, I can tell you a pro but baby be gentle cause...

She cringed. “Why him?”

“Just wondering,” he said.

“Yeah, no it’s fine. He was a good guy. He was into rugby and soccer and stuff. Anyway, he asked me out a couple years ago. We dated. And it was good.”

“But?”

“But nothing. I mean, there was this party,” she sighed. “It was my fault, I was drunk.

“Let’s just say, I’ve done this before.”





by Zachary Tolstoy  
MacLachlan College



by Lily Scheinberg  
The Country Day School





# A Pool of Religion and Tradition

by Annelies Verellen  
MacLachlan College



Principal KIPFER's office. Geneva, Switzerland. Enter MR and MRS KHAN. MS KIPFER stands up behind her desk to greet the KHANS.

MS KIPFER: Thank you for making time on such short notice. This just couldn't wait.

MR KHAN: Our girls are not in trouble though, eh?

Beat.

MS KIPFER: Well, that is actually why I wanted to meet with you.

MS KIPFER notices MR and MRS KHAN's hesitance to take a seat. MS KIPFER points at the chairs

MS KIPFER: Please, have a seat.

MS KIPFER: I have asked you to meet with me in regards to the absence of your children at the swimming lessons. Our teachers have noticed that your children are never at school when we run them. I was hoping you could give us some more clarity on this matter.

Beat.

MRS KHAN: Oh, we don't want our girls to partake in the mixed swimming lessons. My husband and I have decided to not send our girls to these lessons.

MR KHAN: Yes, we prefer to not send our girls to the mixed swimming lessons, but if you would create separate lessons, we could consider allowing our girls to participate.

MS KIPFER: What do you mean by "separate lessons?" I'm not sure I understand.

MR KHAN: I'm sorry if I was unclear. We don't want our girls to partake in gender-mixed swimming lessons.

MS KIPFER: You'll have to excuse me but I still don't think I fully grasp the reasoning behind your decision. Do you mind explaining it a bit more to me?

MR KHAN: Well, you see, my family is Muslim. Our faith doesn't agree with gender-mixed swimming lessons, so my wife and I see it as our duty to keep our daughters away from the lessons.

MS KIPFER moves her red glasses from her nose to her head and leans forward on her desk.

MS KIPFER: Thank you for explaining Mr Khan, but I have to tell you that the

swimming lessons are an educational requirement.

Beat

MRS KHAN: What do you mean exactly by "educational requirement"? Are our children obligated to partake in the lessons?

MS KIPFER: The swimming lessons are a requirement in our curriculum. Each child has to successfully complete the swimming lessons in order to receive their diploma. So, yes your daughters are obligated to participate.

MR KHAN: Well, I must admit that we were unfamiliar with this rule of your school policy.

MRS KHAN: Can our girls be exempted from the lessons?

MR KHAN: Yes, I am sure you can make arrangements to exempt our girls from the lessons. Right, Ms Kipfer?

MS KIPFER now puts down her glasses

MS KIPFER: I am afraid not, sir.

MS KHAN: What do you mean? What are you telling us?

MS KIPFER: Swimming lessons are required by law, ma'am. It is not just our school policy. This law is created regardless from religious beliefs. Every school has to comply with this law, and so must we.

MRS KHAN turns to her husband and says under her breath.

MRS KHAN: Love, we should look for another school. I won't allow our girls to stay here any longer; this school does not respect our Muslim values and traditions.

MR KHAN: No, no! Wait! Let's not jump to drastic conclusions just yet!

Beat.

MR KHAN: I respect the fact that every child has to learn how to swim. We understand that, but do you require the lessons to be gender-mixed? Is that a law in Switzerland too?

MS KIPFER: Yes I do require them to be gender-mixed. This is not the Swiss law talking. It is our Swiss tradition.





MR KHAN shuffles to the edge of his chair.

MR KHAN: Can't you schedule lessons just for the girls of the school? That way, our girls can partake in the swimming lessons too.

MS KIPFER: Mister Khan, it is tradition to have the students swim in gender-mixed lessons. It is Swiss tradition, and I am sorry to let you down but I won't split the girls and the boys into two separate groups.

MR KHAN: So it is Swiss tradition to not care about peoples' religious beliefs?

MS. KIPFER: I hear what you are saying Mister Khan, I really do but we have run gender-mixed swimming lessons for generations. I am not going to change that.

MR KHAN stands up from his chair.

MR KHAN: Ms Kipfer, you are being negligent towards our faith! I will not agree to this! I don't understand why the swimming lessons have to be gender-mixed.

MS KIPFER: We believe that children will develop essential social skills by having them take lessons with each other and the swimming lessons are a big part of that. In your daughters' case, the gender-mixed swimming lessons will be beneficial to them, especially in their case. They are still new to the country and to Swiss values and traditions, and I believe that the lessons will help them integrate into ...

MS KIPFER is interrupted by a furious MR KHAN.

MR KHAN: Don't you dare tell me how I should raise my children miss Kipfer! I have my daughters' best interests at heart. You are the one who is careless! You are the one who refuses to cooperate!

MS KIPFER: I can't do anything about it. I stand by our Swiss values just like you stand by your religious values.

MR KHAN now walks to the door and raises his voice.

MR KHAN: I was under the impression that we, as citizens of Switzerland, have the right to religious freedom in this country. I must have read that wrong, Ms Kipfer.

MRS KHAN: Love, please don't make a scene. Come here. Let's sit back down.

MR KHAN: No, I will make a scene! This country promised us rights and freedoms, and they are not being respected or followed! I will not stand by and let them violate our rights!

MS KHAN: Calm down, we can work something out! Isn't that right miss Kipfer?

MS KIPFER: I am afraid not, ma'am.

Beat.

MR KHAN: Let's go. I don't want to be here a minute longer. I have had enough. This isn't the last you have seen of me, Ms Kipfer. I can assure you that the next time we see each other, it will be in a courthouse!

MR KHAN exits and leaves the door open, MRS KHAN stands up.

MRS KHAN: Thank you very much for your time Ms Kipfer. We really appreciate it. I apologize for my husband's behaviour. Raoul is very passionate.

MS KIPFER: No apologies needed. I can imagine that it can't be easy for you and your family moving to a completely different country. I wish you the best of luck.

Epilogue

This conversation is based on an actual human rights case in Switzerland from January 2017. The legal case took place between a Muslim family, who moved from Turkey to Switzerland, and the government of Switzerland. The parents stated that the Swiss government had violated their right to religious freedom as the government didn't allow the children of this family to be exempted from the school's gender-mixed swimming lessons due to the family's religious beliefs. This is a version of the conversation that might have taken place between the parents and the principal of their school before the trial began. At trial, the Swiss tradition of gender-mixed swimming lessons was upheld.



# The Difficult Conversation

by Kiara Chong  
Bayview Glen School



I glanced at the backseat to find my six year old son staring intently out the window. Not even one for many words, he seemed eerily silent. Something was definitely wrong.

“How was school today? Was it ok?” I asked.

“I guess,” he replied as he stared far off into the vacant distance.

He seemed farther adrift in his thoughts than usual. I watched him carefully as he began his customary twirling of the lock of hair by his right ear. Round and round it went in miniature swirls around his index finger.

“Do you have any homework Mark?” I asked as we walked into the house.

“I guess,” he replied monotonously.

“Well, if you get it done, you can play some Xbox before dinner. How’s that sound?” I said trying to drum up some enthusiasm.

“Um, okay...” he replied softly as he disappeared into his room while twirling and twirling his lock of hair.

“Perhaps he’s just tired,” I hoped to myself as I prepared dinner.

It was one of Erica’s late work days and I was left to prepare dinner. Attempting to stay positive, I told myself he would be better once he had some food.

“It’s dinner time!” I called out as I set the plates onto the table.

Mark came down the stairs, washed his hands and took his usual spot at the table. I gave him a smile before turning around to wash my hands.

“Bon appetit,” I said cheerfully as I dried my hands and took a seat.

“Thanks Dad,” he replied.

We ate in silence for a while. I watched closely as he twirled strands of pasta around his fork, mesmerized by the patterns he created.

“Hey Dad?” he asked, breaking the silence.

“Uh huh?” I replied.

“Am I autistic?” he asked abruptly.

His words sliced viciously through the air, destroying in mere seconds the fragile bubble we had spent years creating. I could hardly breathe.

“That’s an interesting question. Why do you ask?” I replied as carefully and calmly as I could.

“I heard some kids in class say that I am. They made fun of me. I don’t even know what that means,” he said looking down at his plate while he created small swirls of pasta. “Some of them even called me a weirdo. I know what THAT means.”

“He’s too young for this,” I thought in a silent panic. I had known this day would come. I just never imagined it would come this soon.

“Just ignore them, Mark. If anyone makes you feel uncomfortable you should talk to the teacher or have me talk to the teacher,” I said as I masked my anger and pain with calmness.

“Yeah I know that, but why do they keep calling me autistic? What does that even mean?” he asked, now avoiding my gaze. “It’s something bad...isn’t it?”

“Well Mark, when someone has autism it means that he’s a bit different – he’s special. People with autism have brains that are wired in special ways. It isn’t bad. It’s just different,” I replied

nonchalantly, trying my best to sound casual.

“So am I?”

I could feel my throat tightening into a knot as I said, “Special and different? Of course you are,” I smiled.

“Special, different and autistic,” he said in a near whisper. “I don’t want to be. I don’t. Is there something wrong with me Dad?” he spoke quietly, sounding fearful of my answer.

“Of course not Mark, you –”

“Then I don’t get it!” he said, tears pouring down his cheeks as he dropped his fork onto his plate.

I walked over to him and hugged him, struggling to fight back my own tears. I felt certain that my heart was breaking into a million sharp pieces. I wrapped my arms around him tightly.

“Mark. Mom and I love you just the way you are.”

“Why do the kids pick on me?” he asked in sad confusion. “Why? It isn’t fair.”

“You’re right. It isn’t fair.”

“Aren’t we all special? You and mom always say that everyone is special – special in their own way. So why are the kids so mean to me? We’re all different because we’re different people, right?” he argued in frustration.

“Mark, sometimes people don’t understand that we should appreciate our differences – the things that make each and every one of us special. There’s a saying that some people march to the beat of a different drummer. While most people march to a similar drum beat, some people like you march to a completely different and special beat. Some people just don’t realize this.”

After a few of minutes of silence, he began to wipe away his tears.

“...I have my own drummer?” he questioned. He looked unconvinced.

“Yeah,” I stammered. “Your own unique drummer.”

“I like having my own drummer,” he said looking into the distance.

“And that’s what’s most important Mark.”

“Actually,” he began.

I held my breath anxiously, waiting for him to continue.

“I don’t want my own drummer. I want to be the drummer.”

I exhaled with relief and smiled. “Mark, I know you’ll be an amazing drummer.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna make my own special drum beat,” he beamed.



# Gently, Into That Good-Night

by Minh Truong  
Pickering College



*Seen at 12:04 AM*

My sight locked to the white screen. I sighed. It was a calm afternoon—no scorching sun, the breezy wind delivering a tender sleepiness. My own smell of paint and fresh wood of the drama club was overwhelmed by the monotonous lemon room-cleaner mixed with morphine. The unusual mixture tingled my nose. The blink of my cursor on the chat box synced with the beeps of the hospital monitor. They were sending out signals hopelessly into empty space. I felt somewhat relatable to those small blips. The cursor will continue blinking and no texts will be typed, the monitor will beep until it stops – filled with the patient’s sorrowful moan. Or I might just continue sending messages, but ‘Seen at...’ will be the only reply I get. Things like this happen all the time, and I usually don’t mind. But not today. We wouldn’t be seeing each other for a long time.

“Vic, why don’t you leave your phone for a while, she’s waking up” – the soft voice came to me, interrupting my thoughts. My great-grandmother trembled on her bed, enjoying this last nap. She slowly opened her eyes. Her pupils rolled around, analyzing everyone in the room, finally falling on me.

As our eyes met, my Dad stood up and whispered in her ear. “Vic is leaving for Canada, he’s here to say goodbye...” as he uttered every word, I forced myself to give her a smile. I thought everyone in the room was doing the same thing. They looked at me with admiring eyes, but I thought they would burst into tears in a split second. The room fell silent again, though the monitor tried to break it with its beeps.

I stood up, approaching the bed. I bent myself down to her ear, my hand feeling the smooth skin of her hand. “Take care, ma. I’ll be back soon,” I whispered. She turned to me, her eyes swollen. Her voice was inaudible, but I heard murmurs from everyone around me:

“Where’s your father?” my grandma told everyone with a bitter chuckle. Everyone gave out a sigh. Great-Grandma never completely recognized us. As both of us grew older, I greatly resembled my father, especially in her dwindling eyesight. At every family meeting, I suddenly became a 40-year-old man in her eyes, and he became her grandson.

No one is ready for change. As for me, now, I am not ready to leave this country—to say goodbye knowing that tomorrow won’t be sparrows flowing in sunlight but maple leaves flowing in snow. I am not ready to send a simple message: “Goodbye, catch you later... for a while,” to a girl, knowing that we won’t see each other face-to-face for a long time, to miss the warmth of her soft hands and the coziness of her voice. I wasn’t ready to tell her that I was leaving, knowing that when things got out, she would be just a slice of my childhood memory. But foremost, I know, my great-grandmother wasn’t ready to see her son in the same hospital, wired to his bed, awaiting his unknown day to be free: from his bed of pain, from his world. No parent wants to see their kids die.

Hugs and pats, wishes and kisses, the cold hospital room suddenly started to feel more alive, their admiring eyes gave me a light of hope. I smiled back, feeling slightly warmer. The sun seemed to shine brighter.

“Let’s go see grandpa,” my father said. I nodded.

My phone light was blinking—a new message received. I put it neatly in my left pocket as we walked through the array of departments and came to the familiar place. I could see the window

of the room. Green colours brightened in the sunlight, dived into the solid red of the walls—a small leaf in the garden of red roses. Things went slowly for me, the hallway seemed so endless. The strong cleaners turned the fresh breath of rose. The flickering lights turned the emerging sunlight of heaven. As the door at the end of the hallway came into my sight, I slowly inhaled. My heartbeats and footsteps combined. I walked in.

The old man lied on the bed, his eyes dimmed. His neck, arms and legs surrounded by wire, like a hopeless puppet lying on an empty shelf. His face twisted, distorted from the tubes. Nevertheless, he forced himself to turn to the door, his eyes shut tightly, holding in the pain. His hands waved around, to give the visiting guests a welcoming handshake, but tears kept flowing out. It was painful for him. All he wanted to do was acknowledge our presence. It meant the world to him.

I grabbed a chair and sat by the bed. He was covered by the sunlight from the window, but his hands were cold as I grasped them. I couldn’t speak.

“This could be the last time you’ll see him,” the earlier words from my Dad echoed in my mind, “It could be your last lullaby to Grandpa.”

“What should I say?” I asked, trying to steady my distorted voice.

“You don’t have to say anything,” Dad replied, “tell him you’re going to Canada. He would have loved to visit you there.” He paused. “He just loves the sheer moments of being there with his grandchildren.”

My hands shivered as I tried to hold onto his cold hands. Our eyes met. In what others now saw as soulless eyes, I saw a light of happiness. He could not move his mouth, but his eyes shone out a smile. His mouth vibrated, the tubes prevented him from speaking.

“Vic is leaving tomorrow, to Canada, Dad,” said my father. My grandfather’s eyes opened wide. He tried to utter a word, in vain. His hands broke free, he covered his ears, his feet shook, as if he desired to break free. The doctors had to come and restrain him.

The rest of the day I just sat there, beside the bed, trying to feel his affection as much as possible. Others’ presence was blurry to me. I felt like a little child, playing with my grandfather. Just sitting there warmed us. My father was right: I don’t have to say anything at all.

“Time to go,” my father finally said. Hesitantly, I let go of his hands. As I walked to the door, I turned around.

“Goodbye Grandpa,” I whispered.

And for a brief moment, he used all of his strength. His eyes locked on me, he slowly raised his hand, jerked it around like a wave. The energy was so much for him that he fainted. For a brief moment, my warm face felt a cold drip traveled through it. I saw a kid waving back at me, a naïve look in his eyes. He was giving me a smile. One hand wiped away the tears, I waved back to him, and smiled. I turned around. The sunlight had gone from the cold, empty hallway.

As we walked to the parking lot, my father noticed the blink on my phone.

“Why don’t you check your phone? She might reply.”

I did not reply. For a moment, I felt ready.

Distance means nothing, when someone means so much.



by Gert Jan Verellen  
MacLachlan College



# One Call Away



by Lina Nayvelt  
The Bishop Strachan School

“Hello my name is ... and I am a volunteer at The Jewish National Fund... the trees are planted in Israel...”

This is the start of the long script other volunteers and I were to follow. No wonder people hang up on us. My task was to call a list of strangers and ask them to buy trees that will be planted along the border of Israel and Gaza.

The moment arrives when I have to make the first call. I sit down at one of the tables. I grab the phone, and dial the first number. I wait, and I listen to the long ringback tone. The more I wait the more worried I become. This is the first time that I’ve ever called a person for a reason like this. I don’t even know what to say. I start imagining how the conversation might turn out. *Should I follow the script they gave me? Will I raise any money? Will anyone hang up on me?* Before I can gather my thoughts, I hear an old lady’s voice on the phone.

“Hello?” And then I make one big mistake - I follow the script. I start reading right through “Hello-my-name-is-Lina-and-I-am-a-volunteer-at-the-JNF,” and even in my head, I realized that I must’ve sounded pretty boring because whoever I was talking to just straight up hung up on me. I mean, how *rude* is that? Then I remember all of the times my parents and I would get those annoying calls from other organisations asking for donations. That is exactly what my family does - we just hang up on them. Who wants to stop in the middle of whatever they’re doing to have to listen to someone rant about a donation for fifteen minutes? I begin to realize just how daunting this task may be.

I dial the second number, and I wait. And I wait, and I wait. I wait more... Ok *great*, I hear the voicemail. I end the call. The next call is the same. So are about the next twenty calls until I get an answer.

“Hello?” I quickly look at the phone list because I didn’t expect anyone to answer. Her name is Ms. Boat.

“Yes, hello Ms. Boat...”

After I’m done speaking, partially following the script, and then a short period of silence, she simply says, “I know you’re young and all, but can I give you some advice? Make sure to pronounce my name **CORRECTLY** by looking at the card.” I thought *what card? How else do you pronounce b-o-a-t?*

“I’m sorry, but would you still like to donate?”

“NO THANKS.”

“Ok.” I pause, and I start reading through the script, looking for what I need to say next. “Umm.” Found it! I ask the question and put my pen over the empty field of the form. “Would you like to give us your email address for updates?” Then, disrespectfully she says, “NOPE, I’m donating online **BYE!**” and hangs up.

That was awkward, I think. I only have to do this volunteer work for three hours, but what about people that do this as a job? I wonder if they are professionals at handling difficult conversations.

The next call was *much* weirder. Someone who sounds like a teenager picks up. I start talking and so on... Everything seems to be going fine, and then I hear him having a conversation with





his mother about any upcoming birthdays and where they will be, while we are on the phone. "I will buy one tree." Oh well, I check the tree amount on the paper and write down the information. All of a sudden, he asks me "Did you say your name is Lina Nayvelt? Do you have any siblings?" He asks curiously as if he knows someone with the same last name as me.

"Umm." I wonder if I should answer him. "No, why?" You know what? I can just say that really went off the script and made the conversation so much more awkward than it already is for any telethon caller.

The awkwardness in telethon calling is that you are calling a total stranger by the phone numbers provided by the organisation and convincing them to buy a tree to be planted halfway across the globe. You don't know the person you're calling and they don't know you; therefore the ground rule of telethon calling is the call topic should remain the same: the New Year of Trees Festival, and the trees to be planted along the Israeli border thanks to the donators. That is the subject, *not* about if I have any other siblings. This is for a good cause, but it is almost an art to inspire whoever you're calling to donate while not reading a lecture to them about why they're donating.

My thirty-fourth call is a different story.

I dial the number, I call, I wait. There it is, the dreaded ringback tone. I sit and wait. My ear is too hot from holding the phone beside it so long. An elderly man picks up on the other side. I say: "Hello, am I speaking with Mr. Adelberg?"

"Hello."

"My name is Lina Nayvelt, and I am a volunteer at the JNF. Would you like to buy trees for the New Year of Trees Festival to plant along the Israeli border?"

"Yes, I think we can cut this conversation much shorter. I know your organisation. I would like to buy four trees, and dedicate two of them for my two sons who burned in Israel." Silence. I just had a small time of blankness. I remembered all of the wars and fights that are going on around the world right now, and how we all just seem to forget. We all just seem to live on, while on the other side of the world there are people that are dying.

I replied, "As I am a volunteer, I am not able to do that, so I will give the phone to the supervisor." I gave the phone to the supervisor, but I still stood there, with stillness in my head.

What these calls have taught me I don't know. I think what I learned is never to hang up on a volunteer caller asking for a donation, especially while they're still talking. Then, I feel there could be a much deeper lesson. There are so many different ways totally random lives could connect in one place. Just one call away. I called so many people, and took up a few minutes of their lives. I don't even know who they are, or how they look, or what their family is like, or the house they live in. But I know that I just left a small footprint in many people's lives by just a call. On this day, they were all called for one cause by the same person and they will never know that that is a fact, the fact that so many lives, and their stories could be connected in such a small and unpredictable way.

\*any used names used were changed





by Julia Garbe  
The Country Day School



# Squirrels are Nuts



by Kelly Lang  
Greenwood College School

When you are alone in the woods, there aren't many people to talk to, just the trees, the sky, the creatures, and yourself. So, of course, Murphy chose the intelligent conversation. He started talking to himself. At least, he hoped it was the intelligent option. There were some smart-looking squirrels who eyed him suspiciously from the trees, but he doubted that they would be very interested in what he had to say. Murphy was lonely. The first sign of madness is talking to yourself, but there was nobody around to judge.

"The reason I am alone in the woods is very simple, and very stupid. I went a little way off the path to find some dry wood, and I got lost. I have no idea which way to go to get back to the trailer."

Murphy noticed that talking to himself had really helped organize his mind. Suddenly, he wasn't so lonely, and the forest didn't seem quite so dark. He continued talking.

"Ha! You should have listened when Pap was showing you those survival skills. He said they would come in handy!"

"You were the one who started playing with the hunting knife! You killed us!"

"We are the same person! Now hush, I think the squirrels are laughing at us."

It is actually quite difficult keeping back the hysteria while talking to yourself. And those squirrels were definitely laughing as they nibbled on their nuts in the cute way that squirrels do. Murphy would give almost anything to be back at the trailer, chewing on some nuts. Now Murphy was not only talking nuts, but was thinking nuts as well. Murphy was allergic to nuts. He had to stay sane to find his way back.

"You can't be nuts. Squirrels are nuts"

Yes, that made sense. Just stick to what you know, and you will be okay, thought Murphy. You will make it out of here alive. Murphy started running in the opposite direction, towards what he hoped was his grandfather.

"Squirrels eat nuts. You don't. You can never be nuts."

"That's a weird logic."

"I know this because I don't eat nuts!"

The forest wasn't dark or lonely at all anymore. Murphy started skipping.

"Nuts, Nuts, Nuts! Wheee!"

Now he knew he was going crazy. He stopped skipping to avoid trampling a squirrel, who was snuffling around in the dirt, oblivious to Murphy's insanity. The squirrel ran away.

"How about a thank you, little squirrel?"

The squirrel continued on running, away from the funny human. Murphy looked down at the dirt to where the squirrel was digging. He saw a small acorn, half covered by a fallen leaf. Without thinking, Murphy picked up the acorn and threw it at the squirrel.

"You forgot your nut, you crazy squirrel! Come back!"

Another squirrel burst out of a bush, startling him. It picked up the acorn and ran away with it. Murphy followed in hot pursuit.

"Stop, thief! That's not your acorn! I need to give it back to the other squirrel!"

Murphy stopped running to catch his breath. Squirrels, he discovered, were as fast as they were nuts.

"I hate squirrels."

Murphy started running after the squirrel again, but it was out of sight. In the distance, he saw another squirrel. And another. The forest was full of those crazy squirrels. He reached down and picked a handful of nuts off the ground.

"Here, squirrel."

"Heeeere, squirrely squirrel."

His grandfather found him, babbling to himself, in front of their trailer, pelting squirrels with peanuts they had left out for the birds. Pap shook his head.

"Murphy, my boy, come here. You got lost again."



# I Need You to Listen!

by Caroline Leys  
MacLachlan College



## SCENE 1

Tyler and his mom are in the kitchen. It's lunchtime.

MOM: Oh Tyler you can't tell anyone else!

Tyler stands up from his chair.

TYLER: What do you mean?

MOM: Listen. What you are, it's perceived as being disgusting; and living where we do, this will not be easy! You will shame this family and hurt your father. He talks so highly of you. You're his boy, his man! If you come out we will never be able to show our faces in church again.

TYLER: I can't just pretend to be something I'm not.

MOM: Of course you can! So many people pretend and just never get married. You can still be happy.

TYLER: Mom!

MOM: Tyler, I love you no matter what, but your father won't. You are my son and I love you! Even if this is a sin, you are my blood -- and times are changing. Other people just won't see it that way.

TYLER: So you're saying I have to pretend for the rest of my life?

MOM: No just until you move out of this house! Oh stop crying. Do it for me and your father!

## SCENE 2

Parents are sitting on the couch in the living room with Tyler in front of them.

TYLER: Mom, Dad I really need to tell you something, and I need you to listen!

DAD: Well, go on son we're listening.

MOM: Tyler what are you doing?

TYLER: Well, umm, I've been meaning to tell you this for a long time. Also, I promise that this is not a phase ... I'm gay.

Several beats.

TYLER: Mom, Dad please say something. This was really hard for me to say.

DAD: Oh Linda, where did we go wrong? What did I do to have a son -- if I can even call him that -- commit such a sin? Was it the lack of hunting trips? Did I not give him enough man talks?

TYLER: Dad it's not a sin. Its love!

DAD: How do you know what love is? You're a confused and moronic 14-year old boy. Have you been hanging around the Smith's son? Did he make you do this?

TYLER: No, Luke has done nothing. Why can't you accept me for who I am?

Dad stands ups facing Tyler.

DAD: Oh you're damn right I don't accept this. This is filthy, disgusting!

TYLER: Listen to...

DAD: No, I will not listen to you. Try to explain why you are deciding to tear this family apart!

TYLER: That's not what I'm doing!

DAD: How am I supposed to ever show my face in church again with a gay son? How am I supposed to go anywhere without being judged by everyone? You are ruining the name of this family!

TYLER: You're not the gay one. You don't have to worry about this.

DAD: You are going to hell, going to hell!

TYLER: I'm still the son you raised, the son you love and were always so proud of. Remember when I won the basketball game and caught my first fish? Are all my accomplishments worth nothing?

Mom starts crying.

DAD: I can't even look at you! Look, you've made your mother cry.

TYLER: Do you even care about me? I didn't make her cry you did!

DAD: What do you mean? She's crying because you're ruining this family!

TYLER: No she's not. I have already told her and she's crying because of you.

DAD: What, when?

TYLER: This morning. She told me not to tell you because she thought you were going to act like this. I thought you'd be loving and remember me for the person I really am. I guess I was wrong about you, like you are about me.

Dad looks at Mom.

DAD: Is this true? Did you accept this behaviour?

TYLER: This is not a behaviour. It is who I am.

MOM: Robert listen to me. He is our son!

DAD: Is he really? This is not how I brought my son up!

MOM: I can't even look at you!

Mom runs upstairs.





DAD: Oh stop your crying. Linda come back down here.

#### SCENE 4

DAD: How can we accept this?

MOM: What are we going to do, throw him out?

DAD: Of course not. We are going to remind him about God and who he is intended to be. All he does is school and bible study.

MOM: This is what you're not getting. He was intended this was. He can't be changed!

Mom storms out of the room.

DAD: Linda don't walk out on me. Get back here!

MOM: Oh my lord. Robert get in here!

DAD: What do you want!

MOM: He's gone. Everything is gone.

DAD: What!

Mom picks a note up from the ground.

MOM: "Since I can't be myself or loved in my own home, I'm going to find somewhere where I am and can be, Tyler"







# The 'Conversation'

by Jack Ferguson  
Crescent School



I hear the roar of the engine outside my bedroom window. My stomach starts to turn. All I can feel is the rattle in my chest as the car accelerates. It feels as though there are birds flying around inside me. It isn't the excited fluttering of butterflies like when I go down a drop on a rollercoaster. It is the other feeling. The one that I can't control. It is the one that makes me want to stay in bed and pull the sheets over my head. The one that makes Mondays more difficult. Leaving the house more challenging. Leaving my *mother's* house more challenging, that is.

My breathing starts to accelerate and I hear myself breathing harder. My thoughts start to race and the voices start yelling. Should I go to the window and look? What if he sees me? What if she is with him? Will the top be down? Will he look up? Don't go to the window. Don't look. The voices rage on as the roar of the engine grows closer. The voices dart so quickly now that they feel like bats whirling around inside my head, each delivering another option, another question. It is as though a wild animal is charging towards my camp and I can't decide if I should stay to fight or turn and run. Fight or flee. Is this what it feels like? The urge to save myself; to flee? Surely this isn't instinct, it can't be! Something this small surely can't be forcing my hunter's instinct to kick in. Especially because it's over my father driving up my street.

How is it that I got here? How is it that my father driving past my house can produce such a basic human instinct in me, inside the safety of my home? I am safe. I am in my home. My mother is here with me. She will protect me. I run to the window. I have to look. I throw open my blind just in time to see the red Porsche roaring by my front door, top down, and there he is, driving the car that represents so much for me.

The day my father drove up with a new car, the fourth car in his collection, was the day that I started to realize there was a monster growing inside of me. It is a part of me I wish to bury deep underground like a fossil, never to be discovered. Most boys would be excited at the sight of a shiny red Porsche pulling up in their driveway, but not me. My dad told me it was a present for "her" but I knew the truth. It was for him. He bought it for himself, another car for himself. I doubt in fact that he would ever let her drive it, but he'll continue to tell us otherwise. The monster was growing bigger. It had horns and claws, but I was only eleven. How big would the monster get? Would I be able to contain it?

The cars and boats my father owns are what he loves to spend his money on. They make him happy and he loves taking care of his cars and boats. Unfortunately these inanimate objects are his babies while his actual son stands on the sidelines, waiting for attention. When it comes time to pay for things like school or sports, there is no money. His answer is always the same: "Sorry buddy, I can't afford to pay for school or sports." Every "no" is a moment of realization. I want to scream and yell. There is a fire raging inside of me that is going to burst. I am like a volcano, just waiting to blow. I hope every time I ask, that it will be different. That this time, my dad will put his arm around me and say, "Of course I will pay, nothing would make me prouder." My hope of such an outcome is rooted in the false reality of my desire for acceptance.

I cannot tame the monster anymore. The opportunity presents itself and the monster takes control. There it is, the beautiful red Porsche glimmering in the sunlight, the keys sitting on the passenger seat. He's run inside to grab something from the house and there it is: opportunity. One quick turn of the key, into reverse and down the driveway. It all happens so quickly. I do

not even remember getting into the car. I do not remember turning the leather-strapped wheel or pushing the gas pedal down. The roar of the engine started, and I do not remember much else but the impact of an air bag on my face.

I open my eyes and there is my mother. Her face is filled with concern and worry. I know that face. It isn't good. I hurt all over, especially my leg. I feel each and every ache as I turn my head to see my brother sitting beside my bed. What happened? How did I get here? It's all a blur. I am putting the pieces back together as I come to, searching for my last memory. My head pounds, and suddenly I remember. The Porsche! Oh God, where is my father?

"How bad is the car?" I ask.

"It's a car, who cares, the most important thing is that you are alright."

But where is my father?

"Dad?" I mumble.

I look around the room, searching, trying to find the one person that I hoped would be there.

"I am sorry, I am so sorry."



# Reticence

by Hanna Segal  
The Country Day School



I took a deep breath and extended my hand towards the night sky exposing the palm of my hand, the pale orb emerging through my fingers, illuminating my face. I closed my fist, and imagined I had stolen the moon away from the stars, until the thought of a moonless night sky saddened me. So, I put it back.

The lush, untamed grass tickled my neck and trapped my body in a sea of budding weeds. Warm air passed through my hair and clothing reminding me of the adjacent summer and the imminent end of my high school excursion. I began to wonder what summer felt like in different places, different cities. I wondered what summer felt like to different people, and what the night sky looked like to different people. These thoughts often circled my mind. His abrupt voice reminded me of his presence. His body was a few centimeters away from mine. "What are you looking at?" A static expression crossed his face. I twisted my body to lie on my side. I looked at this boy curiously. I looked at his almond shaped eyes. His furrowed brows. His nose. His cheeks. His lips. A few years older than I was, he had no desire or direction. I thought about the mental image I kept of his brain. It was unvarnished, made of grey stone. I wondered what the night sky looked like to him. "I'm looking at that star right there." I pointed to a star directly above my head. It wasn't the brightest star, not even close, but it had a sort of radiance that caught my attention. He looked at me for a few seconds before speaking. "You're always looking at things a billion miles away." He stood up and patted down his messy hair, then lazily covered it with a baseball cap, "Lakeshore Convenience Cashier" written in red on the front. I don't remember a time before he began to work at the corner store. I assume that was all he thought he could achieve, but we never spoke about things like that. In the two years I knew him we never really spoke about anything at all, and we certainly did not speak about things like what the night sky looked like.

During the drive home I looked out of his truck window in silence. Passing through the dull town always made me uncomfortable. I didn't like the thought of being trapped there forever, so I tried to imagine a moonless sky but I didn't like the thought of that much either. I tilted my head to look at the boy sitting next to me, just a few centimeters away. I wondered if I was only wasting my time with him. I began to realize that he was trapped and completely unaware, fooled into thinking his daily routine was all that life could offer. "Is something wrong?" His voice cut through the stiff atmosphere. I was pushed out of my thoughts. I knew he wasn't really interested in the answer. "No," I looked down at my lap trying to push away my concerns, "just thinking about my future, I guess." He grinned repress his laughter. "You're still young. You shouldn't be thinking of the future." Something in my heart fractured and a flame ignited in the pit of my stomach. I understood that I wasn't worrying about my future, but that I was worried about ending up like the tiresome boy beside me. "I want to do something big," I said slowly. "I want to see the world." I wanted to see more than just the world, I wanted to know all the extraordinary things I could do, all the extraordinary people I could meet. I wanted to speak to people about all the things that instilled curiosity and wonder inside me. His voice became serious, "What is there to see?". Suddenly, I became overwhelmed with the feeling of sadness. I thanked him for the ride

and stepped out of the truck.

I looked out of my bedroom window at the sky later that evening. I looked at all the stars, a billion miles away, I focused on the brightest one I could find. I thought about the moon. I thought about that town. I thought about myself. I thought about him. I slowly understood that the night sky would look the same to him even if somebody had stolen the moon away from the stars.



# Riptide

by Norah Peebles  
The Bishop Strachan School



“I want you to give me my heart back.”

You look over, tentative, but she’s just reclined to lie on her back, holding a limp daisy in her hand and picking the petals off it. She doesn’t seem to process your words, and you’re suddenly reminded that the two of you are in a damp field of wildflowers in the gloaming, and you’ve got to be getting home soon. She doesn’t have anywhere to be.

You wonder if she’s even listening.

“No,” she answers, quietly, and you guess that answers that question.

You scrub a hand over your face, tired, because it’s getting dark and she’s always more honest in the dark. You keep asking her things, but you’re not really sure you want the truth from her when she’s hidden behind a thin veil of moonlight and wet strands of grass. You have nothing to hide behind, and like this, she’s too beautiful for you to deal with.

You glance over before you can stop yourself, and her face is retreating into blocky shapes and quivering shadows in the descending night. Her eyes are silvery with the stars overhead, and something warm glows in your chest before you remember you’re not supposed to love her. You manage to tear your gaze away, but it’s hard.

God, you never learn, do you?

“Please,” you say, soft, and the word is rounded in the space between the two of you. “I need it. I need to move on.”

She doesn’t respond for a moment, just finds another daisy in the uneven grass to pluck the petals off of, twirling a dandelion in her fingers while she thinks about an answer. “Two days,” she says, finally. “Two days, and then you can have your heart back. I’ll be long gone by then.”

“California?” you ask, because you can’t resist. She’s always loved California.

“Not telling.” She twirls the dandelion faster, and it slips from her fingers back into the tangles of the field. “Did you know an overspilling heart is better than an empty one?”

“Yeah,” you say, because you’ve had a too-full heart for years, up until the point where you had no more control and it stayed with her. “But it hurts more.”

“So you still want yours back?” she asks, closing her eyes and tilting her head back until her face is bathed in pale light from the moon, inky shadows coating her neck and the dips of her eyes, until only her lids and the tip of her nose are left silver. She twists her fingers in the wildflowers and overgrown grass, and you think of her last summer, when you drove out to the ocean together and spent a day with the water and salt and sand.

She was still beautiful then, just as she was before and will be after, just as she is now. Sun flushing her skin red and sand in the crooks of her fingers and between her toes, saltwater clinging to the line of her shoulders and collecting in the shelf of her collarbones. You love her now as you did then.

That day, you got caught in a rip tide and were pulled under, everything a blur of liquid filling your lungs and hands wildly reaching for anything as your body was tossed beneath the waves like a toy, until arms wrapped around you and you were broken from the grip of the current. She towed you back to shore, held you up as you coughed up saltwater, and neither of you mentioned it if her hands were too tight on your shoulders, as if she was afraid you would be pulled away from her again.

But that was then. You both had put it out of your mind the best you could and you, with years of practice in repressing events, had just made sandcastles with her on the beach until it got cold and the sun dipped low under the horizon and you both went home.

You’re reminded of that now, but instead of being pulled from the rip tide, you feel like she’s pulling you into it. You feel like you’re already in it.

“Yeah,” you exhale, “I still want it.”

She turns her head to look at you, finally tearing her eyes away from where the gloaming has descended into a full night sky, complete with a glittering array of stars and a moon suspended above. Her fingers twist harder in the uneven grass, and she uses her nails to pluck a couple of pretty, damp flowers from their roots. Her palms curl around them, and she crushes them in a fist as she tilts her head farther back to look at the night around you, neck a column of silvery light in the cast of the moon. “It will hurt,” she tells you lowly, and it sounds like a promise.

“It already hurts.” You turn your head to look at her, and she meets your eyes with something pleading hidden in her face. You don’t know what she sees in you, but she doesn’t look like she likes it.

“I know,” she says, and closes her eyes. “I know.”

“Please give me my heart back.” You think that your voice breaks, but the quiet rustle of wind is suddenly loud in your ears and you can feel your blood beating.

“Two days.” *Two days and then I’m in California and you’re still stuck in this town*, she doesn’t say. You want to say that two days is too far away, that you need your heart back and you need it now, but she is ethereal in the moonlight and you’re afraid that if you reached out and touched her your hand would just pass right through. You don’t know how to ask something of a ghost.

She turns her head to you and finally, she moves - reaches a hand out, the hand not curled into a fist around crushed wildflowers, and you meet her halfway. Her fingers curl around yours, and you just hold hands for a moment as the night settles around you. You breathe. She breathes with you. You still want your heart back.

It’s enough, though, for now.

It’s enough.



# A One-Sided Conversation

by Catherine Steblaj  
Hillfield Strathallan College



Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

Hey D! Are you still not coming to Homecoming? I know you and Kyle got in a fight but that's no reason for you not to go, just hang out with me. Come on D we'll just go and dance, it'll be fun! Ugh call me back so I can continue to shame you for your bad decisions. Love you.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

D! I heard something happened and no one will tell me what's happening. Are you okay?! Your mom said that she got a call from the hospital saying you were admitted, what the hell is going on?! Please call me back.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

Hey D. Your mom won't let me see you. 10 years of friendship and I can't even see you. I'd break in if the nurses weren't such hard asses. Just know that I love you and I'm planning the great heist that will allow us to watch Netflix together again. You better not go ahead with Grey's without me. See you soon. Love you.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

Hey D. Still denied from seeing you. Something about how only family members are allowed in the ICU, not like we're basically sisters or anything. Tell your mom if she doesn't let me see you soon I will egg your house and I'm only partly joking. Anyways, the heist is moving into stage two of planning. Two questions: do you know where I can buy a grappling hook and how much upper body strength does it take to scale a building? Hang in there, D, I'll see you soon. Love you.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

It's been ten hours since your mom told me. I can't believe that you're gone. I feel like that time in grade 8 where we got in that fight and we said that we hated each other and didn't talk for two months. Only it's worse now, because last time I knew we would work it out. God, I miss you already. I can't even do ten hours without you. How the hell am I supposed to live the rest of my life?!

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

People keep trying to tell me that you're in a better place now but all that does is piss me off. You promised that we'd do all this together. First college roommates, then dance partners, bridesmaids, godparents, award show hosts like Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. We were supposed

to grow old and be the bitter old ladies that told kids to get off our lawns and own a million cats together. How is you being in a better place going to make up for losing that?

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

We buried you today. It was terrible. All these people you hate came and said "I wish I knew her better" and the usual bull that makes them feel better. You would've hated it. The only bright side was when they did the procession and Angela tripped and fell. It was pretty great. I also made sure that they painted your nails the way you like. At least you'll look like you wherever you are.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

It's been a week since you left. Everyone tells me that it'll get easier with time but I don't know how. Every time I see your name I feel like I got punched a million times right to the gut. They say the pain becomes manageable but I don't know how this will ever be manageable. I feel like I was ripped in half and I am the only one who can see that I'm not whole anymore.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

So I may have gotten suspended. Some idiot told me I should just "get over it already", as if that was an option. Yet the school blames me for the fact that his nose is broken. I mean, I swear they reward you for stupidity here. I hope he can never smell his gross cologne again.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

It's a month from graduation and my mom keeps pressuring me to think about university but all I can think about is how we were going to go together. I can't even look at those ridiculous info packages without breaking down. This was supposed to be our big adventure. How am I supposed to do this without you?

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

I told my mom I'm not going next year. She keeps trying to fight me on it. She thinks a change of scenery would be good for me. That it would help me move on. Why can't she understand that moving on means forgetting you? I would rather be stuck here in this Godforsaken town till I die than do that.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

Hey D. I needed to hear your voice. Graduation is tomorrow and I don't know how I'm going





# A Message to Remember



by Marie-France Thompson  
Ashbury College

to survive this without you. It seems so final. Before, when your desk was empty in calculus I could pretend that you were on a vacation somewhere warm and nice, lying on the beach, drinking a margarita. That image is getting harder and harder to hold on to.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

I've officially graduated. I know we always talked about how great it would feel like but it honestly feels terrible. Maybe that's because I feel like I'm leaving you behind too. They say it's not the case but that doesn't change anything.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

I walked to your house tonight for the first time since the accident. I sat on the curb outside and waited for your light to come on for a couple hours. At one point it did, and I got up to run into your house but then I realized that it was just your mom. I guess you really aren't coming back.

Hey it's Delilah. Leave a message after the beep.

So after relentless nagging, my mom finally convinced me to go to university. I move out tomorrow. Packing up my room is terrible because it makes it harder to remember all the times we sat here doing stereotypical sleepover things. It's almost freeing in a way; it makes the memories more private. It doesn't change how much I miss you though. I don't think anything will ever change that. Man, I hope that you're up there watching. What else am I doing all this for if you can't even laugh at my mistakes? I just wish that we could make them together. No matter what though, I'll always love you, Delilah.

Voicemail Full.

I stood in the ditch next to the highway for two hours in the freezing cold gathering information on the car crash that happened just before my very eyes. From my point of view, the boy's wheels lost grip on the ice as he tried to avoid hitting the car that abruptly stopped in front of him. Both the driver and passenger in the car ahead of his were not severely injured and were rushed to the hospital right away. As I wrote what I had witnessed on the form, my boss comes to me and tells me in a very calm voice that I will be the one informing the parents of their son's death. I told myself it would be easy, but the more I thought about it, the more stressed I became. Informing a stranger of a family members death is like slack lining; one little mistake leads to even more tension.

As I walked towards my cop car, the sounds of wheels spinning in the slush on the highway and the yelling all turned to silence. I turned to take one last look and took a deep breath. As the brittle snow pushed by the strong winds fell down on to my face I felt a warm tear roll down my ice-cold cheek. The teenage boy's death brought back rushing memories of my son that passed away last year from leukemia. I slowly got into my car and drove to the address I was given. It was hard to focus on my driving, as my thoughts were fixated on my son. Since the day John passed away, he'd always been on my mind but this experience is not one anyone should have to go through.

After a short 30 minutes, I arrived at their home. Some part of me wished that I could just keep driving but a small part of me also felt that I was the right person to deliver this life-changing tragedy. From the inside of my car through my frosty window I saw the outline of a big modern house. I tried to look into their main window but all I could see through mine was something lit up of different colors. I opened my door and slowly got out of my car thinking of all the possible ways I could inform his family. I looked across the street into the window and the colorful lights were those on a Christmas tree. I looked further into their living room and was intrigued by the joyous and heartwarming family. I missed these moments the most.

I stepped around my car and walked towards the entrance. Their narrow path that lead to the door had been freshly shoveled. I finally reached their door and lingered for a few minutes. I reminded myself of the four L's as my shaking finger rung the doorbell. Location, language, body language, and leave. Location, language, body language, and leave. A jumpy, blonde, little girl opened the door. Noticing my police uniform, she stepped back looking intimidated. I bent down a little to reach her height but she kept looking downward. So I gently asked her if I could speak to her parents. She loudly yelled, "Mom, Dad come to the door!" She then skipped back to the kitchen to join her family. I could hear them talking and laughing.

I suddenly felt nauseous as both her parents came to the door. Their merry faces dropped to dazed faces. I introduced myself, "Hi Mr. and Ms. Johnson, I am officer Jordan Clarke." The mother quickly replied with a worried but confused, "H-e-l-l-o?" I continued, "I am here to notify you of your sons death in a car accident this morning. The medical group tried everything but it wasn't enough to bring him back". I paused for a while and then continued but this time differently. As I elaborated and tried to comfort them I thought to myself, the four L's weren't enough. I will forever remember that moment when the doctor walked into the waiting room to inform me that my son died. He was the one who informed me of the worst news of my entire



# A Colourful Conversation



by Mehar Soni  
Hillfield Strathallan College

life. These words were life changing, which made me responsible, so this meant more than just a list of L's. So I reminded myself that his parents are not an inconvenience and that my words, my face, my role will always be apart of their life.

I finished by saying, "I'm sincerely sorry for your loss. I also lost my son last year, it's not easy but you will get through this together". I finally was able to take a deep breath as I waited for a response. His mother looked at me as her bright blue eyes filled with tears and replied, "Would you like to come in?" I stepped into their home and gave them a comforting hug. This was only the beginning of a friendship that lasted a lifetime.

It's a complicated thing  
This conversation between Something and Everything  
Empty water falling from the sky  
Everything streaks it with colour

In this world, what always goes unspoken?  
This conversation about want  
Only involving body language, perhaps even less  
This desire to burn and burn and burn  
Green and gold with envy

Borders and divides and colours between people  
Hatred, prejudice and desire to end  
People find it easier to hold objects like erasers  
than to hold and care for their own  
Another form of burnt bridges

This struggle for honest work  
This problem about those left outside  
Old cups and five cent change  
This conversation is written on cardboard  
Everyone is blind

Painters always seem to have it easy.  
Controlling a palate of colour  
The divide between Something and Everything  
Right between their hands  
All the colour in the world  
Held between ten fingers  
Carpals, phalanges and logic say the ones who view the world as a puzzle  
I call it beauty  
A beauty worth worshipping

What really is beauty?  
Maidens with fair hair, princes covered in jewels and crowns and glory?  
This conversation about fairy tales and reality  
People say that children want to live in castles  
High upon the mountainside, alone and filled with their illusions  
I know of a few who would rather not live at all  
Uniqueness and ability is what I see  
What I wish those who only saw the colour black could  
To see the world as something and everything  
Not as castles and ball gowns and crowns



Some people live in their own castles  
Permanent, unmoving residents  
They gaze down on all that are weak  
Weak meaning different  
Weak meaning caring and thoughtful and precious  
Weak meaning the same between two  
All castles crumble eventually  
Especially this conversation about power

All this talk about death and assistance  
Live your life to the fullest people say  
What about those who dreamt of more  
More than sitting in hospital beds  
More than lying alone in darkness  
Living life to the fullest may seem pointless  
If it is full of silence

The simplest thing of all  
This conversation between  
One holding a blue umbrella, looking, searching but her eyes find nothing  
Another standing right behind, sitting on a bench, holding something in her eyes, begging  
someone to search  
Some call it fate  
To me it seems like a gust of clear colour  
Pushing two auras together  
Under the cover of a drop of colourful rain and a blue umbrella

This conversation about love  
Some say minds, dowry, matches made in heaven and flowers  
I call it the colour wheel  
Red, Blue and Yellow  
Mixing and creating and fresh beginnings  
As if there was Something  
Simply touch the colour of a beautiful magenta  
and it spreads like a flower  
Blossoming into Everything

This fear of the beyond  
Of the metal and black holes and lack of oxygen  
This sense of wonder and mathematics  
Beyond what our eyes can see  
Much more beyond than what light can reach  
This is the conversation  
that those who think outside the Universe will speak



The invisible conversation about what goes behind other's minds  
Hallucinations, obsessions with mirrors, washrooms and food  
Obsessions with the colour red and the blanks that follow  
People who think  
In different universes than this one  
People who think in colour and depth and emotion and numbers  
Consider them  
They also leave their mark

The conversations that are familiar  
Some that occur over the breakfast table as  
Ma and Pa find a lost magenta sock  
Or flatten down the stick-ups with a magenta comb held in magenta-coloured hands  
Sometimes it's just Ma or Pa or Uncle or Grandma  
Sometimes the air in between the tables and chairs  
is too full of other's dreams  
neither Something nor Everything  
Just another castle

This most difficult conversation of life  
Castles  
Blindness  
Painters and beauty  
Colour and empty, meaningless water  
This conversation will last  
Far beyond the colourful lands  
of Something, Everything and a beautiful, flowering magenta



by Kyra Bates  
The Country Day School



## After Eden



by Jessyca Durivage Morgan  
Ashbury College



Never in my life did I ever need to have a conversation like this with anyone – because, back when I was really alive, I never experienced anything like this. What could have prepared me for this experience? I was never ready for this scenario. Who would have been? Who possibly could have known?

My name is Eve Hexad, formerly Elise Hexad. My name was changed after my brother used me to experiment with revival from the dead. I was murdered five years ago, and my sadistic killer ripped out my heart and ate it. My brother was able to bring me back to life, using a technology he invented that he called “biowires”. But that isn’t important. It does not matter anymore what happened five years ago. What is important is that I couldn’t feel when I was brought back. No emotion. Not joy, not sorrow, not even anger. I wanted to love my brother, because I knew I had loved him before. He had mattered so much to me – my older twin brother, the one who was waiting to welcome me into the world, the one who cheered me on as I conquered my fears, and who would always be there for me. The one whose tears I dried when his first love rejected him in middle school, who I used to stay up late with to protect from the monsters living in his dreams, and the one who used to help me bandage my blistered feet after an intense skating competition.

I have those memories, from back when I was Elise, but they don’t seem like my own anymore. It’s like watching a movie where I am acting a part. It makes me uncomfortable, and knowing someone so intimately as I know Elise scares me. I feel as if I am violating the person I was every time I delve into her memories. Instead of being a fleshy, breakable human with a huge heart that could make people cry with the movements of my body, I am this. I am an emotionless freak getting by on the memory of what happiness feels like, and instead of a heart an empty hole in my chest that burns and aches and twitches like it knows that there should be a thump dictating the tempo of my life.

How can I tell him that I feel nothing when people come to me, begging for help? I am the incarnation of a long-dead deity – I even share her name – and many would come for miles around trying to get help for injuries, or financial problems, or life advice. As much as I wanted to pity the people that came, I did not. I betrayed the very person I used to be by simply existing. Although I cannot hate myself, as hate cannot exist without love, I do know that I am an ugly, twisted, disgusting creature that should be purged from the face of the earth. If I told my twin that, I know it would break him, so I stay silent and smile like I know that he needs me like he needs to breathe.

How can I tell him that when I am attacked by religious radicals, I refuse to fight not for fear of hurting them, but because pain is better than emptiness? My body is incredibly strong – the body of an Olympian gold medalist enhanced by science. I could have easily hurt or killed any one of them. I let him think what he wants – whether it is that I am being kind to them or him, it does not matter to me. I suppose I am being kind to him, in a way. I don’t let him know why I truly am a monster. I don’t tell him how I met Winston. Winston, missing his right arm, eating his apples with a smile – I don’t tell him how Winston was the only person like me. Emotionless. Empty. Broken.

The others were not. I was the first immortal, but that does not mean that I was the last. De-





spite the fact that I was emotionless, my brother did not notice, too caught up in the honeymoon period of my return. Everyone that came seemed to have emotions except for those of us who were missing something. Winston with his arm, and me with my heart. I did not tell my brother that Winston was my only friend, or that I found myself gravitating towards him because of what we had both become. I did not tell my brother what I let Winston convince me of, with his slippery snake’s tongue dancing in my ears.

I used to avoid the public at all costs, until Winston proposed a way that I could feel again. So, then I did talk. I acted. I put on a show for all of the viewers at home, telling them of my experiences. I skated for crowds in a television studio, I shared every intimate detail of my murder, and I rallied humanity behind me as they realized that I was a human like them. Except, I’m not a human like them. I don’t remember what it’s like to be a human like them.

Because so many people now stood by me, it was only natural for them to want to send me gifts. It was only natural for me to agree, and give out my address. It was only natural for my killer to come and find me.

With my strength, I made quick work of him. He made me feel something again. He made me feel rage, pure and blinding. I killed him and I enjoyed it, and I would do it again if I could. I reached into his chest and ripped out his still-beating heart. I placed it into my own chest, and I waited to feel. I disposed of the body, and waited. I waited and I waited. Nothing happened. I suppose you understand now. I suppose you understand that while I sit here, a rotting heart in my chest, I cannot tell my brother what I’ve done, why I’m like this. Why despite needing with every fibre of my being to tell him that I can’t feel, I can’t. I love my brother too much to do that.

So, instead of telling him the truth when he asks if I am all right, I’ll tell him “I’m fine,” and rot just a little more inside.

## MIDDLE CATEGORY - GRADES 7 AND 8

First Place:  
Second Place:  
Third Place:

## UPPER CATEGORY - GRADES 9 AND 10

First Place:  
Second Place:  
Third Place:

## SENIOR CATEGORY - GRADES 11 AND 12

First Place:  
Second Place:  
Third Place:

# List of Contributing CIS Ontario Schools



Appleby College  
Ashbury College  
Bayview Glen  
The Bishop Strachan School  
The Country Day School  
Crescent School  
Greenwood College  
Havergal College  
Hillfield Strathallan College  
MacLachlan College  
Pickering College  
Royal St. George's College  
St. Clement's School  
Toronto French School  
University of Toronto Schools  
The York School  
Villanova College