Hornsby Girls’ High School

2016
**Burning Bright** is the annual publication of Hornsby Girls’ High School students’ writing.

It celebrates the creativity, passion and versatility of our students and we hope that you will enjoy reading it.

Thank you to **Kristel Rodrigues** in Year 9 for her beautiful cover design.

Please respect all these works as the intellectual property of the students who created them.

### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash Fiction 2016</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Editors:** Margaret Motherwell and Janet Walker
Each day, I went out to the park to shoot someone. Position...and click. Another life to add to my collection. I would come home to observe my day's catch in my photo book. I didn't know what happened to the 'someone' but they seemed to vanish into the picture and no-one would remember them. A bit like me. I could remember nothing of my own past and neither did anyone else. I didn't know who I was, where I belonged, or how I felt-I had no memories or my own feelings. I was simply dunked into a moving picture called life, filled with people who created their own memories and emotions, unlike me. The photos' feelings became mine and their memories became mine. Of course, I only captured happy lives because I wanted to be happy - and I thought I was.

Trouble. The number of people coming to the park started decreasing. If it continued, there would be no-one to take photos of. But that couldn't happen. The photos were my life - I needed them to build my memories and feelings. What if I faded away along with my emotions? But for days and weeks the park remained empty. And for days and weeks I lived forgetting what had happened the day before, numb from emotions. I was just an empty shell carried by the blue waves, floating through time.

There was someone there. I was walking around the park which was the only familiar place I knew, when a lone figure stopped me in my tracks. It was a girl. It was the first person I had seen in a long time and it could have been the only chance to capture someone. I seized my camera and lifted it up, ready to shoot. The girl turned her head and saw me. I frantically clicked the trigger before she could move and get away. The girl disappeared in front of me and dissolved into my photo.
I couldn’t believe my luck. When I got home, I glued the photos into my book feeling satisfied for the first time. I set my eyes on the page, getting ready to absorb the happy feelings it held. I stared. The girl wasn’t smiling. She looked sad. No, this wasn’t meant to happen! I clenched my teeth in frustration and I felt something warm and wet roll down my cheek. It was water from my eyes - my eyes were raining. I realized it was the first time I had cried and I didn’t know how to stop it. I glared at the photos, waiting for an answer to anything. Was this what it was like to have feelings? The rain didn’t stop, and neither did the unrecognizable waves of pain washing over me.

The tears turned into a flood and the flood turned into an ocean of confusion. I couldn’t feel myself anymore and my eyes dropped. When I opened my eyes, the world was dark and smelt of paper. Suddenly, most of the darkness was lifted off and I was staring into the face of a giant girl through a blurry white sheet. She turned a page in the book and gasped at the photos.

“Well...that’s interesting. That’s very interesting,” she muttered softly. She was the girl in my photos. How had she gotten out? The girl grabbed something and a huge wall of photos came rushing down towards me and the world was dark again. I recognized the wall as a page of my book. I tried to move, but failed. That’s when I realized that I was a photo too.

I was glued between the pages of the memories and lives of my hostages, locked in my own jail. But I discovered that I had felt something. Fear of not being able to take photos, desperation of finding someone, joy of capturing a life, frustration and uncontrollable sadness, the one that brought me here. The pleasure I had found from collecting photos was fake. I had found my own emotions and created my own past. With that I was happy enough. But I was fading, fading away slowly...
Alfred tossed the red book into the bin. It contained the photos he had taken of himself to see if he had a chance to excel in photography. “Not likely,” he muttered, as the heavy book sank deep below the chocolate wrappers and empty milk cartons. He thought back to when he and Lisa were sitting in the living room, looking through the red book filled with pictures earlier that evening.

She turned a page in the book and gasped at the photos. “Well…that’s interesting. That’s very interesting,” she muttered. Alfred knew from the tone of her voice. She hated them! And who could blame her? Half of the pictures were in black and white, draining the colour from Alfred’s beautiful brown eyes, and half had been scribbled over by Alfred in red and yellow crayon, covering his sandy gold hair.

Alfred lay in bed early the next morning, watching the sun rise outside his window. He tiptoed out of his room and into the kitchen, where he began grabbing flour and sugar from the pantry. “If I can’t be a photographer, I’ll be a baker, instead!” he whispered to himself as he began cracking eggs into a bowl.

Hours later, black smoke poured out of the oven, escaping its jaws and flying to freedom. Alfred held a dish cloth, madly flapping it at the oven, trying to put out the fire. He jumped when Lisa rushed in with a fire extinguisher, yelling, “OUT OF THE WAY!” She sprinted into the kitchen, almost knocking Alfred to the ground and shot white foam all over the oven. The smoke stopped and so did the fire. Alfred sighed in relief. Lisa turned and scowled in fury. She had black soot in her yellow hair and on her orange pyjamas. She was not happy.

Alfred gulped. “Sorry, sis.” He croaked. Lisa sighed and hugged him, glad he was safe, before asking him what he was doing with the oven. He pointed to a burnt cake on the counter before offering his big sister a piece. “Of course,” she replied, taking a bite out of her slice.

Sirens wailed. Alfred ran up to Lisa, who was lying silently on a bed being wheeled away to the ambulance. Alfred held her hand, “Sorry for forgetting about your allergies,” he whispered to her. Lisa gave him a soft smile from behind her oxygen mask, before she was wheeled away, up a ramp and into the ambulance. The doors were shut, and Alfred watched sadly as Lisa was driven away, the sirens still wailing as loud as thunder.

Long after the sun had dipped below the horizon, Alfred sat at the dinner table with Lisa, eating a dinner of roast chicken, as she asked him questions about his day and how his food
was. But Alfred was silent. He had been silent since Lisa had been discharged from hospital and they had taken the bus home. He felt guilty about being so excited about having a special thing he was good at, he’d forgotten about his sister and had almost killed her. Lisa, being an optimist, told him, “It wasn’t your fault,” but the guilt wriggled around in his stomach and reminded him of what he had done.

That night, the guilt kept Alfred awake in bed. He baked that cake to see if it could become a special skill of his. “Obviously not,” he thought. He rolled over and thought of his fear, his heart pounding, when Lisa had collapsed to the floor and Alfred had reached for the phone to call for help. “I love Lisa,” he thought. “She’s my sister.” He sat up quickly. He had figured it out.

Alfred tiptoed out of his room and pushed open the door to Lisa’s, a small sliver of light guiding him to her bed. She had the blanket covering her. It was a cold winter’s night.

Alfred carefully hopped onto her bed, lay down and gave her a hug. “My special skill,” he whispered in her ear, “is caring about you.” Lisa smiled in her sleep. Alfred then closed his eyes and joined her in the land of dreams.
Year 7 students studied the novel Playing Beatie Bow and completed a creative project on the theme of ‘Family’.

Eleana Xu chose to write a piece of fan fiction.

CARGO

By Eleana Xu

4 February, 1874

Winds beat hard against the struggling ship – in broad daylight. They showed no mercy as they manipulated the waves, forcing the shabby ship from one side to the other in a few moments. The cargo, stored safely in the hold, was moving dangerously and carrying the whole ship’s weight with it. Judah ran from his position in the fo’c’sle to below deck where most of his shipmates were, cowering under the fierce ocean spray made by the waves.

“Blimey, the cargo’s nae stable, I can feel it from under my feet!” His lilting Orkney tongue was just loud enough for the people around him to hear, but not to cut through the fierce commotion. Judah hadn’t quite experienced a storm as bad as this, and as easy-going as he was, he felt rather scared.

All at once, the boys around him erupted into reply, but Judah was only half listening. His calloused palms gripped the narrow railing as his other hand sought to close the trapdoor separating the main top deck from the bustling shelter of the lower deck. As he gazed blankly into the crowd he thought of his family, probably doing what they did every day. Father was in his shop. Beatie was at the Ragged School. Dovey and Granny were probably at home too, helping Father and cooking and cleaning. Then Abigail came into his mind. He had no idea what she would be doing in her time, but he hoped she was doing fine. He’d missed her, and he couldn’t seem to get her out of his mind, even as his very life was at risk.

Just as Judah turned his attention back to the present situation, The Brothers gave a horrible lurch and seemed to topple sideways. Suddenly he seemed suspended in a dream world and everything seemed to happen in slow motion. His grip on the railing tightened and his tanned knuckles turned white. Cries and shouts could be heard as the ship abruptly flipped over and upside down. Judah’s world turned upside down with it. Water rushed in through holes in the shabby deck and soon the furniture, the cargo and the crew were floating in the water. The ship was barely floating in the treacherous ocean and soon it began to sink steadily. A few heartbeats later, nothing could be seen of The Brothers anymore.
Judah spent precious moments flailing underwater, knowing that if he didn’t get to the surface quick enough he would drown. He struggled frantically, waving his limbs and his hair and clothes were swirling in the water. Bubbles erupted around him and after an immense effort he swam to the surface.

Poor Judah had watched as his shipmates died in front of him. He had been clever – and lucky enough to cling onto a piece of cargo, knowing that it would float, but his shipmates had an unfortunate ending. Furthermore, he had watched his precious ship – which had been a home, a mother, a refuge – get swallowed by the depths of the ocean.

He looked into the sky, not knowing what to do. Judah was startled at its steadfast blueness, never failing even when accompanied by fierce gales and winds. His muscles ached from trying to float and he was aware of the feeling of the coarse timber against his palms. He looked around and there was absolutely no trace of The Brothers, except for the leftover timber. Every piece seemed to be drifting apart, to who knows where. Judah felt the same way – he felt he was cut off from the rest of the world and didn’t know what to do in life anymore. At that moment he thought of his family again – and Abigail.

Judah couldn’t seem to get her out of his mind lately, and now was no exception, even though he was currently stranded in the middle of the ocean. Her departure had left a lasting impression on him, and though he continued his happy image he was hurting inside. Judah’s feelings were extremely mixed up, as he still loved Dovey but had felt an attraction to Abigail ever since she had come into his world. Then he had kissed her on the beach one day, and for that moment everything had seemed so right, so perfect. However, later when Dovey had been saved from the fire he had felt so relieved, and then he couldn’t imagine a life without Dovey either.

Since Abigail had left it seemed that everything Judah did, every movement and easy smile, was for her. He’d known that Abby was going to leave anyway, and when the time came to say their final goodbyes he had tried to suppress the emotion brewing inside him. His carefree exterior hid deep emotions that even Judah hadn’t known he was capable of feeling, and it seemed when Abigail stumbled into his life he had unlocked these feelings. It made saying goodbye a whole lot harder, in his opinion. His face was a mask as he held her shoulders and stared for a moment into her eyes, as they bid each other farewell. Judah would never forget the moment she stared back at him, her face a mirror image of his, and subsequently left his life forever.

He gazed into the blinding blue sky once more, marvelling at its clean, happy image in contrast to the terrible weather. It was like his personality – a happy blue-sky image on the outside but turmoil on the inside. Judah seemed to see Abigail’s face in the brilliant sky, but it disappeared just as quickly as it appeared, just like the glimmer of hope inside him which was now extinguished.
Judah’s lifeless body lay beached on the sand, the faithful piece of timber underneath him. The pieces of cargo had drifted ashore, no matter where they were, and been salvaged. The piece carrying Judah had ended up right on the beach where Judah had first kissed Abigail.
Year 7 Poetry

There, I Found

By Damya Wijesekera

I found a feather.

Where silk scarves of wind
Wind around the many-necked branches
Of wise trees,
Gnarled with intelligence
Where soft birds hum soft notes
Into the soft air,
And the trees echo birdsong,
Where flowers flood the scented air,
And drown the road
With petals.

There
I found a feather.

_Damya’s poem received a ‘Highly Commended’ Award in the Dorothea Mackellar National Poetry Competition._
I like a thing with LOTS of salt

By Katherine Louey

Hey, what can I say?
I like a thing with lots of salt,
It makes it taste so good,
I LOVE a thing with lots of salt,
So it doesn’t taste like wood.

Hey, what can I say?
I sprinkle (pour) some on marmalade,
And chopped up apples too,
I even later salt on cake,
It is just what I do.

Hey, what can I say?
As we calmly sit for lunch,
I take a bite of food,
Then bounce my knees and grit my teeth,
As it I’d just gone nude.

Hey, what can I say?
I spring up swiftly from my seat,
Then rush to heavenly pantry,
I spot a gleaming bucket of salt,
In all its shimmering glory.
Hey, what can I say?
I snatch the million tonne of salt,
And haul it to the table,
Where open eyes are peeking wide,
They whisper, “She’s not stable!”

Hey, what can I say?
The glistening form of pure white sand,
It’s the best thing in the world,
On cheesecake, fruit and chocolate too,
All gathered in and swirled

Hey, what can I say?
I know one day as I eat more,
I’ll take my last big breath,
With clogged up cells and heart attacks,
The salt will be my death.

But hey, what can I say?
I like a thing with lots of salt,
It makes it taste so good,
I LOVE a thing with lots of salt,
I guess that’s childhood.

*Katherine’s poem received a ‘Commended’ Award in the Dorothea Mackellar National Poetry Competition.*
Jonah raised his foot again and slammed it back into the young boy’s face. The cheers and applause ignited the confidence within him and the amused look on David’s face made those flames of confidence erupt and spread the fire. His dirty old shoe was mashed against the boys’ face and went harder and harder into his face when he whimpered. Again Jonah raised his foot from the young boy’s face. Taking this as an opportunity, the little boy spoke up.

“Please. Stop! I’m sorry for copying your answers. It was just one glance. I swe-.”. Jonah rolled his eyes and kicked the boy’s face again.

The crowd which had surrounded them, burst into another round of cheers. Jonah smirked and flipped his dark brown hair to the side. All the cheers and applause made him confident but only one person’s opinion mattered to Jonah, his brother David. He searched the crowd but couldn’t find David anywhere. A frown made its way onto Jonah’s face as he saw his brother walking to his car. Without hesitation, Jonah left the boy and ran past the cheering crowd. He knocked his fists on the window and waited until it was rolled down.

“I thought you were catching the bus today,” David stated in a monotonous tone. All earlier traces of amusement had fled from his face.

“Why did you leave, David? It was hilarious beating up that boy. I mean everyone else thought it was awesome.” Jonah furrowed his eyebrows trying to read behind the bored, blank look on David’s face.

“Get in the car. I need to show you something.” David finally decided after a moment.

Jonah rolled his eyes and hopped into the car. In a matter of minutes they were at home. Jonah followed his older brother and waited until David approached him holding a huge book in his hands.

“What’s that?” Jonah asked, making room for David. His older brother opened it to reveal many pictures of him and his fiancé, Lianne.
“I used to be like you, always beating people up and treating them like they don’t matter. That was until Lianne full on scolded me and showed me that inflicting pain on others is uncalled for. Call me cheesy, but she is the one person I love more than anyone else in the world.”

That’s all David had to say to make Jonah’s heart break. David loved Lianne more than he loved his own brother. It had been years since the last time David had said those three special words to Jonah but only a few hours since David told Lianne he loved her. All his life, Jonah had looked up to David and loved him. David was his best friend, his parent and his older brother. Hearing his role model say that he loved Lianne more than Jonah, triggered a wave of emotions.

It started off as hurt and sadness but soon Jonah was clenching his fists and gritting his teeth. David was completely oblivious to how furious his fourteen year old bother was and kept going.

“I’m the lock and she’s the key. The password to us will always be trust.” David sighed with a goofy smile on his face. His eyes were filled with love. Love that was for Lianne not Jonah. Lianne.

“So you’ve told her about that horrible thing you did before?” Jonah raised his eyebrow trying to cover up the hurt and fury. However David could see right through his brother’s façade.

“No Jon-“

Jonah stood up abruptly and ran out of the house. He was very familiar with the place he was running to. David took him there every weekend. Jonah knew what he was about to do would cause him to lose David’s trust but he had to do it. The fast-paced, heavy stomps from his shoes matched the rhythm of his heart. Jonah had finally reached his destination.

“If this is how it is when they are engaged, imagine what it will be like when they get married. I will be invisible...unloved.” This thought raced through Jonah’s mind as he knocked on the door. It swung open revealing a beautiful woman with long black hair and gorgeous blue eyes.

“Jonah, honey what are you doing here?” The woman asked, frown lines appearing on her forehead.

Jonah took a deep breath. He opened his mouth knowing the next few words would change everything.

“Lianne...”
Half an hour had passed since Jonah had told Lianne everything about David’s secret. He couldn’t forget the shocked and frightened look on her face. Regret and guilt suffocated him but what he had done ensured that the wedding wouldn’t happen and he would be the one David loved more. Jonah never thought about the consequences he would have to face when David heard the wedding was off. Jonah continued throwing the ball up and down as the thoughts of the recent events replayed in his mind and haunted him.

Suddenly the door slammed open which caused Jonah to drop the ball and fall off his bed in shock. He looked up to see a very furious David. At the sight of him Jonah knew what he had said to Lianne had crossed the line. Jonah got up and walked closer to David. Even from back there he could see David’s red puffy eyes and dried tears crusting near his eyes and nose. His face was flushed red with anger and his teeth were clamped down tightly together.

“HOW COULD YOU SAY THAT TO LIANNE, JONAH?” David yelled at the top of his lungs, slightly cracking at the end.

“I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have said that to Lianne but I was scared, David. Scared that one day you would choose her over me.” Jonah sobbed and cautiously took a glance at David’s face. He wasn’t angry anymore. He was hurt and disappointed.

“You ruined my relationship with the one girl I ever loved Jonah! How can I ever trust you?” All the hurt and disappointment disappeared. He had a distant look in his eyes. David no longer looked at Jonah with the same love he used to. Jonah’s plan had backfired and now David couldn’t even look his brother in the eyes.

Jonah dropped down on his knees and clasped his hands until his knuckles turned white. He closed his eyes from the blinding light which escaped through the door. The light which was the hope that escaped from David’s world of love.

David’s tall figure loomed over Jonah’s defeated body in disgust. “Never forget the password.” The words confused Jonah.

“What password?” he thought. Jonah’s older brother shook his head and walked backwards slowly.

With each step he took, the light slowly diminished.

With each step he took, the hope slowly diminished.

Only a little light was there...

“You are no brother to me, Jonah.” And just like that the darkness swallowed Jonah and all the hope was gone. David walked out of the room and slammed the door. As the door closed Jonah realised what the password was.

TRUST...
Lily pushed open the door on the wall.

Green trees looked golden as the radiant sun shone upon them, their leaves shimmering in the soft breeze blowing throughout the forest. Lush green grass stood tall and proud, waving in the breeze. Lily could only marvel at the beauty before her. There were many animals in the forest, little brown squirrels that scurried from tree to tree, chirping birds looking almighty on the top of the trees, and snow white bunnies that soon disappeared among the tangle of bushes. Lily forced herself to move her sight away from the scene, and looked back. She saw a lone boy staring at her. She saw him open his mouth and heard him say “Never forget, the password is …..”

“Lily!”

Lily could hear a voice calling her name, but she didn’t want to wake up yet, she wanted to hear what the boy was saying.

“Lily!”

The voice called out again, louder this time, followed by vigorous shaking, forcing Lily to wake up.

“Lily, you slept through the whole of lunch, again! This is the third time this week, are you all right?” Lily looked up, and saw her friend Julie’s face. Well, her so-called friend. Lily knew that Julie didn’t like her at all, in fact, she hated her. Lily had known that ever since she had overheard the conversation between Julie and Millia, but she pretended she didn’t know, she didn’t want to be left alone again.

“I’m all right, don’t worry.” Lily said as she faked her smile.

“Tell me Lily, did you have the same dream again, the one where you saw the forest?” Julie asked. When Lily gave no response, she continued. “It’s that dream again isn’t it? How many times have I told you, it’s probably just a stupid daydream you had when you were little, I ….. “Julie’s nagging was cut short by the shrill of the school bell, but before she went back to her desk, she mouthed “I’ll talk to you later.”

Class officially started when the History teacher, Mr Walker, stomped in. He was quite a funny teacher, and Lily enjoyed his class, but today, she couldn’t concentrate at all. It seemed like ten years had passed before the shrill of the school bell rang again, signalling the end of school.
Lily picked up her bag and walked straight out of class. She allowed her feet to take her out of the school, but as soon as she found herself outside the school gates, she could tell that she wasn’t heading home. She was heading to her other home, the only world she had known before dear Mr and Mrs Wilkins took her under their roof. She was heading to the orphanage.

As Lily pushed open the heavy wooden doors of the orphanage, Lily could tell that nothing much had changed. Old Nancy still stood behind the old fashioned oak desk, smiling as always. The same paintings still hung upon the walls, and the carving she left on the oak desk before she left was still there.

“Hello dear, have you come back to visit Old Nancy again, or are you going back to the backyard again?” Old Nancy smiled. “I’m having a look at the backyard again, see you Nancy.”

“Have fun. Dear me, where did I leave my glasses again…..” Nancy’s voice echoed throughout the hallway as Lily hurried to the backyard. She had been coming back to the orphanage to search for the door to the beautiful golden forest again. She remembered that the door had been somewhere in the backyard, but had been unable to find it yet.

A gust of wind hit Lily when she pushed open the doors opening up to the backyard. Lily was happy to see nothing much had changed in the backyard either. The same flowers bloomed in the field of grass, the sweet scent of them drifting through the wind. Then she saw the great oak tree. What used to be the strong branches were now broken and dangling in the air. What used to be the emerald green leaves of the tree were now left wilting in a pile on the ground. Lily could see that a massive sign with the words, ‘Dangerous, do not touch. To be cut down’ painted on it was nailed to the ground. The bright red paint seemed all too bright for Lily’s eyes. Lily soon found herself jogging across the backyard, tearing the sign to shreds. Tears formed in her eyes as she looked away.

It was then that Lily saw the carving on one of the bricks on the wall behind the wilting tree. Lily wiped her tears away with her sleeve to take a better look. She could see clearly now. It said, ‘What is the password?’ Lily was ecstatic; she had found it. She had found the door to the golden forest.

It was also then that Lily realised another thing; she couldn’t go back to the golden forest any more. She couldn’t go back.

She had forgotten the password.
The dew settled on the dead grass, dampening all that touched it. I could see others already lighting their campfires, preparing for another day of fighting for our rights. There was a feeling of impatience, stronger than yesterday settling over us like a thin blanket of fog. It was brewing. We had become a family. Strengthened by our shared discrimination, we would fight as one.

We were seen as foreigners in our own land, aliens pushed aside and belittled. We didn’t matter individually, we couldn’t make a difference but as a community we would stand for what we believed in. Opposite Parliament House we shouted, we hollered, we waited.

We had no land. We were homeless trying to support our case as well as support our families. The founders of the embassy continued to spread hope and peace throughout the camp but people were becoming restless. We needed some evidence that our protest was being heard. As a community, we presented a list of demands, pleading that someone would understand our situation and join the fight for justice.

As the original owners and custodians of this land, we deserved our say. Not only had they severed the connections between us and our land, our sacred sites but they murdered us mercilessly. All we wanted was legal title and rights to our own land but we were denied and rejected. Discarded, viewed as though we were scum on their shoes.

We were ordered to leave. Then the police came, swarming our embassy, trampling our tents, signs, possessions. Anything that was in the way was destroyed. Many stayed to fight, as a last attempt to stand up for what we believed in. Where else had we to go? We had nothing to lose. What had taken years to build up, took moments to tear down.

Now, once again, we were standing up for our beliefs. Our tents re-erected, the tension growing stronger, a sense of apprehension was in the air as we waited patiently outside the white, sterile Parliament House. We were two hundred strong as we held our position waiting for the police force to come, and come they did. Once again, they turned over our tents and assaulted those who stood in the way. Our peaceful protest was no more.

A gruff policeman wrenched my arm causing me to scream in pain. I writhed in agony as he placed his leather boot against the nape of the neck. “You don’t belong here you abo, so go back to where you came from,” he spat, crouching down, his stinking breath brushing my
ear. As he left, I scrambled to my feet. I belonged here; I would fight for my cause until my last dying breath.

Those who left were more determined than ever because this was and always would be our land and our home. No one could change that.
A sorry would not change what happened. Federation Square was full of people, standing, shoulders rubbing against others as they shuffled into position. Many there were of Aboriginal heritage, staring solemnly at the black screen, waiting. One man sat alone on a park bench nearby, half his face covered by a newspaper, the other half by his hat. His hands were wrinkled with lines, each one with its own story, a distant memory. His hands were also marked with scars, faded with time, softened by age. He was unnoticeable in the crowd, another insignificant character, watching for when the screen would flicker to life.

A small sound from the speakers set up around the square signified the beginning of the speech. The man rustled his newspaper quietly and brought his eyes to just above the paper, so he could watch the screen discreetly. His eyes were sunken in and heavy crow’s feet extended from the corners. He looked old and frail, like he could collapse and disappear in the next gust of wind. He looked slowly back at the top of his newspaper, where a date could be seen. It was February 13th, 2008. It had taken Australia over forty years to get to this moment.

Kevin Rudd appeared on the screen, a serious look sketched onto his features. At first it all started off as a drone, a typical parliamentary speech full of large words that the community who sat listening just wouldn’t relate to. Yet the old man sat entranced, wide eyes staring at the screen, seemingly unable to blink. Taking in every word that was said. No one saw his eyes shining ever so slightly with a build-up of water. Why would they? He was just another person of the crowd.

Kevin Rudd continued through his speech, teary-eyed, “As Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the parliament of Australia,” he breathed shakily, “I am sorry.”

At this point, the old man got up and walked slowly away, his walking cane trembling in his hand. He had left his newspaper behind. He was pale in the face and muttering, “I am sorry.”

And then he was on the ground, almost, anyway. He had been caught from totally collapsing by a middle aged man. The man had aboriginal heritage, you could see it in his features. The old man flinched away from him, landing on his knees on the ground. He was
gaspıng, not used to moving so fast. He couldn’t look the man in the eye, even when asked to look up.

“I was…I was just doing my job.” He slowly spoke.

The man helping him went to collect the old man’s newspaper, noticing he had left it behind. While picking it up something fell out of between the pages. It was a police badge, imprinted with ‘Under the command of A.O.Neville’.

“Just doing my job...” he whimpered.
STOLEN

By Ella Bradford

August 12th 1909

Screams. My feet pounded against the dust, sending up small clouds in my wake. I clung desperately to my little girl’s hand. “They won’t get you Peggy!” I croaked as we sprinted towards the bush. Peggy stared back up to me, fear etched into her light brown eyes.

“Okay Ma,” she panted back to me.

We were so close to the bush, to safety. Pegs ran alongside me, her small bare feet in perfect rhythm with my slightly larger ones. We began to run with the earth, with the spirits. I could feel it, in the pounding of my heart and the sharp intakes of our breaths. Suddenly, without any notice, I fell, my ankle twisting one way and my foot the other. Peggy screamed a hoarse shriek which chilled me to the bone. I swivelled my head around and saw them. They were wobbling towards us, wheels spinning against the dirt road, creeping closer to us like a snake, going in for the kill.

Peggy was on the ground next to me in an instant, shaking me and whispering insistently “We gotta go, Ma”.

“No Pegs!” I shouted at her, “You gotta go, you gotta leave me!” Peggy looked at me, confused.

“But Mama-”

“But now Peggy!”

But we were too late. They were upon us, jumping out of their car, sporting blue uniforms and shiny badges; they were running, running so fast. Peggy jumped up and tried to escape, but they were already there, holding tightly onto her arms, her shoulders. Seeing my daughter being ripped away from me gave me strength. I wobbled unsteadily to my feet.

“Stop it!” I screamed. “This isn’t fair, it isn’t right!” I clawed at the officers, trying to make them let go of my baby. They held me off as if I was nothing but an annoying fly, getting in their way. “Pegs!” I yelled to my daughter.

“Ma!” She cried back.

“Hang on Peggy, it’ll be okay!”

I hit and kicked the guard who was restraining me. “Please, please!” I sobbed. Peggy was fighting to reach me, her little body struggling against the officer trying to get her into the
car. I reached my fingers to touch her, to be with her, and she did the same. Our fingertips brushed for one second, and then she was yanked away from me. As she was shoved into the car, I screamed out to her “I’ll find you Pegs! Don’t worry! I love you!” And as she was driven away into the dust, I saw her face one last time, staring out at me through the dirty glass.

I sank to my knees, feeling consumed, desperate, but strangely hopeful. I knew that I would find Peggy one day, and I knew that I would bring her home, no matter how long it took.
THE STRANGER’S KNOCK

By Maria Korotaeva

The knocking on our door came early. Too early. Mother had struggled to her feet and shuffled to the small window near the doorway and looked outside. My head which was resting comfortably on my brother shifted, and I knew we were both awake. No one knocked this early. Even being in the sleepy state that I was, I could sense that the person standing behind doorway was a stranger. It was a stranger’s knock. Hasty and unfamiliar.

I was watching my mother. She always said it wasn’t safe to open the door when Daddy wasn’t home. They could take us away - Callan and I. And we wanted to stay with Mother.

The knocking grew from hasty to sharp. Mother was still at the window. Voices could be heard from outside. Unfamiliar voices. I rose from the mattress and adjusted my night shawl, my feet padding quietly against the floor. My brother was still in bed.

Mother turned to face me. Her hands were fumbling for her collar and her knees were shaking a little.

“Wake up your brother,” she whispered, “back window. Hurry.” I nodded and reached for my brother’s hand, tugging it firmly. Callan scrambled up, and we both scurried towards the window. The knocking had turned into a furious bang and mother was right behind us, coaxing us through the window pane.

We ran. Hand in hand, we ran. The roar of the car was heard too soon, and Mother yelled something. Callan was crying, but I kept pulling us along. We didn’t want to be taken by strangers. We wanted to stay with Mother.

I heard shouts again. They had abandoned the car- the strangers - and they were running after us. They were faster than us, but we kept going. Two of them swerved in front of us, and one grabbed Mother and held her down. Callan was snatched first, but he fought back, kicking the strangers. They had cursed and one gripped my shoulder. Mother was screaming and I blindly thrashed at the men, biting down and kicking wherever I could.

We were taken into the car. I thought I saw Daddy running towards us, but I wasn’t sure. The windows were drawn with dark brown curtains, and I was crying, and Callan was holding my hand. Mother’s yells were heard and I didn’t want to go. One of the strangers smiled at us, and my brother scowled in return.

“You’re safe,” the stranger said, “you’ll be happy.” And then he laughed.

“Please take us back,” I whispered, “we want Mother.”

The strangers said nothing, and neither did we.
My fingers rested lightly on top of the wooden desks. My nails were digging into the rough peeling wood, as little shavings fell lightly onto my lap like snowflakes. Our high school really needed some renovations. These desks belong in a museum, not a classroom. I looked at the peeling wallpaper and different stains stuck on the mouldy carpet. I wasn’t overly eager to find out how old they were. I looked around the classroom. Everyone was chatting loudly with the people around them - some were leaning in little huddles around the room. I let out a long, sigh, contemplating what a shallow society our high school was that people gathered between desks to mutter about things – probably other people. Others were craning their necks over desks, extending their ears, trying to eavesdrop on whatever gossip they could hear. As per the usual turnout of things, Maisy and I were the only people not partaking in the multiple conversations that were going on around us. We were never inviting into them - not that we wanted to be. Maisy sat in front of me, next to the window. I wondered what she was thinking. She was impossible to read - even though I called her my best friend, I knew that I really didn’t know that much about Maisy. I knew that she was part Aboriginal, and lived with her grandma on the other side of town. She was kind, but quiet and studious. A quiet, modest girl, with feelings I could never reach.

Our teacher finally arrived, panting, with a sloshing cup of coffee held in one hand as she balanced six heavy folders in her other one. She dumped all the folders and the coffee on the desk, muttering an excuse. “Now, ladies, I have some interesting information regarding your HSC subjects! It has just confirmed that Aboriginal languages are now a HSC subject! It will help preserve Aboriginal languages, and I encourage every one of you to do it. It’ll be rewarding! Without even realising, my eyes immediately drifted to Maisy. And it wasn’t just me- everyone looked at Maisy, who deliberately kept her eyes straight at the teacher, determined to ignore the pairs of eyes that looked at her like she was an artwork displayed in a glass case. I looked away with guilt, as the bell rang, and the classroom was emptied. The teacher left too, asking us to turn off the lights when we were leaving. I looked at Maisy, and sat down next to her.

Are you doing it? I asked.

“Why should I? It’ll only draw attention. Plus, no one else is doing it. Not to mention, just because I’m part Aboriginal, doesn’t mean I can speak the language. I just know some words”.

“I know you want to do it. And you’re not going to be alone. I don’t know about you, but I’m really keen to learn your language............Let’s do it together!
I knew that I honestly wanted to do this as a subject, and Maisy did too. Even if she tried to hide it.

I knew her connection to this language was strong - it always was, and always will be.
MELODY

By Bronwyn Dyer

Melody’s narrow face was sprinkled
With an array of freckles
Her piercing blue eyes
Could see through
Any lie told
She was shy
Always keeping her opinion to
Herself

She loved the thrill of running
The wind whipping
At her pale skin
Even though she seemed
Simplistic, boring even
Her mind was a complex
Maze of wild ideas
[my bed]

It has a pull on me
Its ability to lure me in
Any time, any day, any night.

It could be the smell of
freshly washed sheets
left outside for the sun to bathe in
or the touch, the feel
of crisp white linen against my arm.

The way the mattress bounces
reminds me of the tale my mother once told me
about 5 little monkeys who had
a bit too much fun.

Memories linger of pillow fights with friends.
Ones who I have kept and
ones that I’ve lost.

It’s under the bed
that traps my thoughts.
Where my father searched for monsters
lurking underneath.
It serves as a nightly reminder
of myths that used to
haunt me
and fears that I’ve overcome.

My bed is a bus
or a train
that leads me into my dreams
filled with endless wishes,
deepest desires and
darkest fears.

By Stephanie Lee
An old woman is seen shuffling along the road of an abandoned ghost town, her arm outstretched as if she is being pulled by an invisible shadow. She moves like a ghost along the quiet empty lane, stopping every few metres to gaze around, to breathe. The sun is lowering herself behind the horizon, her beautiful rays casting warm afternoon shadows. The old lady looks drained, lifeless, a walking body of emptiness. She comes to a stop. Clenching and unclenching her fists, she seems to stand up taller as if her surroundings, the landscape and the atmosphere give her life. It is all silent in this abandoned country town except for the distant call of the birds and the subtle whispering of the wind. The further she shuffles through the town, the more her ghostly figure seems to come alive. This was home. 

She passes her old home as a tsunami of nostalgia crushes over her. She can’t help but remember when she used to run home from school, tripping over her own feet, shoes caked with dirt. She can still smell the sweet scent of afternoon tea. Opening and closing her fists unconsciously, she turns away, inching her feet further into the town. The rows of musty country shops are now filled with run down signs, with shop windows coated in blankets of dust. She stops. Her heartbeat quickens as she slowly makes her way over to the small brick enclosure that was once where she would wait for the bus. It sat neatly on the edge of the town, neighbouring a thick dense forest that nobody, not even the civilians would know how to navigate. 

The bus stop was now littered with scraps of rubbish and on the walls were hundreds of cut out newspaper clippings dating back to over a hundred years ago. She sits on the old, decaying green bench as all her childhood memories wash over her, soaking her in a puddle of nostalgia. They used to hang around here, her brother and her, mainly after school while waiting for the bus. There was that one time when the bus driver never came so they had to trek for over an hour home in the dark. By then their dinner was cold and the hot water wasn’t working. Or the time when she nearly broke her leg running across the green seat. She stays seated, still, for a long time until a row of newspaper clippings catches her eye. Certain words sprung out at her, words which send sharp jolts of dread and horror through her. “Missing Girl,” “Young girl disappears,” “Vanishes into thin air,” were all printed boldly
across the articles. They dated back to over eighty years ago. Clenching and unclenching her fists, she begins to read,

“It was only a few days ago when eleven year old Eloise Wilson disappeared from her local bus stop of her hometown in Northern Territory, Australia. Evidence shows that she was last seen at the bus stop in the late afternoon, however, there have been no leads to whether she was kidnapped or ran away. Police are continuing their investigations on this mysterious case which presents almost no evidence…”

Glancing around, she notices that many of the articles read the same thing about the girl, how she disappeared as if she was a ghost, vanishing as if she was never there. The old woman chuckles softly, a hoarse sound in the air as if she knew something that nobody else did.

By now the sun has set and cast an orange haze over the darkening sky. The air is still. Dusk had come. Slumped against the corner of the bench, the old woman sways, hands clenching and unclenching as she remembers her childhood home. She reminisces about the musty days of the summer, the constant creak of her front porch swing, the warm fiery glow of the evening. Closing her eyes she whispers to herself, “Eloise... this,” she pauses, “is home.”

Something had led her away the last time she was here. Something had pushed her, a force that enveloped her small, small body, pulling her like an invisible shadow. She is still. A faint whisper in the trees calls, “Eloise... Eloise...” draws her to her feet and towards the ominous forest that sat a vigil over her town. With a crazed mechanical look on her face, she stretches out her arm, allowing the whispers to lead her away. The old woman disappears, a ghost from this ghost town, vanishing completely as if she were part of the wind. It was just like the little girl did all those years ago.
KRASIMIRA AND THE BRIDE MARKET

By Jenny Lee

Her thoughts were like dirty clothes in a washing machine, tossing and turning around, being pressured to become what was supposed to be clean, polished and normal. She had never felt so confused before. Krasimira’s emotions raced inside of her, draining her out. Krasimira was given only fourteen years to stay with her daughter Teodora until the harsh reality of poverty and tradition would force her to sacrifice Teodora to the bride markets, when in spring the delicate girls of Bulgaria gathered in Stara Zagora to be sold as wives to men they didn’t even know. The day had arrived too fast and become Krasimira’s responsibility.

She called out, “Teodora, come sit next to me, it’s cold out there, your legs will get tired, the wind is blowing so much!” To her mother’s pleading she replied, “I want to look out for our bus, what if we miss it?” Krasimira sighed. It would be their last day together and she wanted to stay with Teodora, but Teodora was too excited. But she couldn’t blame Teodora. Who could blame a fourteen year old teenager for being excited about wearing something other than daggy old clothes for a change?

Just like her name, Teodora was Krasimira’s divine gift. She sank deeper into the wooden mean green bench and held tighter her old mean grey pouch. Just the thought of letting Teodora go into the scary and unrealistic reality of society made her head hurt.

Krasimira looked over to her daughter, who was standing eagerly on the edge of the pathway looking out for their bus. Teodora was still so youthful and although she purposely wore clothes that she thought made her look more mature as possible, but Teodora would always look like a baby in Krasimira’s eyes. Krasimira’s eyes on the other hand continued to become more and more gloomy. In only a few hours her darling daughter would no longer be with her.

She leaned back and sighed, only to be met with a cold hard brick wall. Krasimira looked around the bus stop. There was a disgustingly large amount of flyers stuck to the wall. They had all shapes and sizes with the occasional coloured ones. But there was one that caught her eye. A large poster that had nice colour printing with what seemed to be a bible. “Come praise Jesus Today” was written in Bulgarian. If only Krasimira could become Jesus himself. He didn’t have to deal with the Bride Markets.
Every second her face became more and more crinkled with worry and confusion. Krasimira had gone to re-dye her hair a fine golden yellow and permed her hair with respectable curls. She ensured she bought the roundest gold looking earrings; everyone trusted people with round earrings. Krasimira was wearing a detective coat but instead of being a cool and slick brown it was a cool and calm bluish grey that came all the way down to her feet. Peeping out from the V-neck of her coat was a gold chain patterned silk scarf that she bought from the cheapjacks. Then of course there was her pouch that always reminded her of the tin foil hat she took to church, to the markets, to anywhere, as it was actually her only bag. Krasimira tried to look as rich as possible, for men bid higher for girls whose family looked wealthy. Just like her name, Krasimira, everybody loved her and her calm and collected personality. But today was like no other day. There was nothing that filled Krasimira with more inexplicably complicated than the Bride Markets.

Even the air at Stara Zagora smelt of excitement yet sadness. Confusion and fright yet felicity. She looked around to see others just like them, mothers and daughters and daughter and mothers hand in hand already accepting their fate of being separated. Krasimira saw men, as relaxed as could be, walking around leisurely with their wallets sticking out of their loose jeans. She closed her eyes and prepared herself.

“I have to do this. It’s tradition and it’s wrong to go against tradition. This will benefit everyone and we will get more money from this,” she told herself strongly and firmly.

Krasimira looked at the sky hopefully; she closed her eyes, clenched her pouch tighter and opened her eyes slowly. Krasimira took one last glance at the sky, smiled then shouted, “Look at this beautiful girl! She cooks and cleans! She’s a pretty and innocent girl! She’s my daughter! She’s Teodora!”
A READER

By Amie Doan

The story
Entwined its fingers
With the threads
Of her mind
And sucked her
In

The story
Enthralled her body
Captured her senses
Until all she could
See, smell, hear, feel, taste
Were the tear-stained pages
And the tiers of ink

The story
Stripped off her flesh
Drained her veins
Replaced them with
Succulent adjectives
Tender nouns
The jittering blood of punctuation
The story
Gouged out her insides
Disembowelled her
And stuffed
Brimful until it gushed out of her ears
Dribbled out of her mouth
Fell in rivulets from her eyelids

The story trickled down her neck
Pooled in her collarbone
Flowed around the curve of her breast
Ran along the concave of her waist
Cascaded down her thigh
Puddling at her feet
Engulfing her
Drowning her

Until the end
Left her
Hollow
Shivering
Naked
Exalted

Amie was the runner-up in Junior Secondary section of the Dorothea Mackellar National Poetry Competition.
Year 10 Writing

Winners of the Old Girls’ Union Writing Competition

Jade Yuen and Lauren Lancaster

MEMORIES

By Jade Yuen

Slowly they gathered in the middle of the little beach. There was something sinister about the way the waves lapped up stray grains of sand back out to the vast ocean where they got lost at the bottom, never to be seen again.

It had not always been this way.

The beach had once been a place where grass grew in tussocks, routinely flattened by the gentle breeze that blew over the landscape, before springing back up again, as fresh as daisies. Over time, the wind had grown fiercer, dragging eroded granules of rock to rest on the grass. The almost burial-like procedure continued until what had once been, was no more.

They had once been a collection of vivid memories, filled with vibrant colours and life. I used to be able to recall everything perfectly as if it had happened yesterday. What you were wearing the day you looked me in the eye and blatantly told me that you hated me. You were joking, of course. You always were.

I used to be able to remember the small things that you did. The way you always tucked a stray strand of hair behind your ear when you were nervous and how you would always suddenly go silent with rage when someone talked over you, but fake a smile when they asked for your opinion. You were - as everyone said - the assertive one. Everyone craved your attention, but no one gave you any back.

I used to be able to remember how disheartened you would get after every gathering. How you would always silently shake with tears when you were alone with me. We wouldn’t speak for hours until you would lift your head up from my lap and smile as if nothing had happened. You would say: “It’s nothing. Not anymore. Sorry if I made you worry, Ky.”

It was never nothing with you. I knew you were lying, but before I could help you, you would slip out of reach, just like the water that threatened to pull you under.

I can remember all your idiosyncrasies and habits. The gentle slope of your nose and the way your eyes shone when you talked about something you loved. My lips still remembered
the weight of yours but not the shape of your name. It was one blade of grass the wind had
decided to pluck out and drop into the awaiting ocean.

All the memories of you started to gather in the middle of the beach. Thousands upon
thousands, confused and bettered. None of them containing the one detail I craved the
most. You told me that you didn’t mind but when you said my name, it reminded me that I
could never say yours back.

The waves crashed onto land, propelled by a sudden gust of wind. By the time the water
had receded, what had once been dry sand was now sodden and lifeless. What had once
been the middle of the beach had disappeared and with it, taking away my memories of
you.

I could see the pain in your eyes as you visited me the next day. Something inside me broke,
but I could no longer feel any connection to you. You reminded me that you would be there
for me, even when I lost everything but that didn’t help either of us. I knew you were
becoming increasingly hurt every time you saw me forget something new. I didn’t know how
to comfort you even though I wanted to. It was like a double-edged sword and we were the
victims, being mercilessly cut down each day.

Slowly they gathered in the middle of the minute beach. The water had almost completely
covered the landscape, burying what had once been, under a torrent of unrelenting waves.
The weather had become more and more unpredictable with each oncoming day, as had my
emotions.

I knew that you remembered clearly what I did yesterday, even though I didn’t. I saw the
fear in your eyes as you approached me today. I saw you nervously glance down at my
hands as if they would suddenly attack you; like they had a life of their own. You stood more
than a metre away from me. I had never felt this alone in my life. I wanted to reach out to
you, to tell you that it was okay, but the words were caught in my throat.

You left moments after, without even exchanging a word, tears threatening to spill from
your eyes.

You knew it was getting progressively worse when I forgot what the wooden object placed
in front of me was. You knew it was consuming me quicker than you had expected. I saw the
hopeful spark your eyes always held when you visited me diminish into oblivion.

You cut our daily meetings to once every fortnight and stopped bringing me things you
claimed that I loved. Slowly, but surely, the water swallowed up the remaining particles of
sand, dumping them at the bottom of the seabed; memories I could no longer retrieve. You
were the barrier that had stopped the rushing water from consuming any more of the beach, and I had hoped that you would stay there.

You didn’t.

Ever since your departure, the water had reached the top of the beach, devouring the grains of sand without even so much of a struggle. The grass no longer sprung back up in revival after the howling wind subsided. It was the quiet before a storm, each blade of grass waiting in silence as the water advanced, like a lion stalking its prey.

And then it struck. They had reached the point of no return.
WHERE THE ROSES GROW WEARY

By Lauren Lancaster

The glass doors opened with a loud hissing noise, like a tyre puncturing. The air rushing in, needles of ice pricking her exposed face as she stepped out of the comfort of the airport onto the frigid tarmac.

The light danced around her, pinning in deranged circles, threatening to overcome her retinas before she quickly folded herself into a tin skeleton of a cab, barely warmer than the biting European air outside.

The tin can shot along the dilapidated roads, sending remnants of asphalt spitting to either side. Within, it smelt of tobacco and old plastic and she sunk further into the safety of her coat, wondering why she had returned to this place, remembering all that had been lost.

She suspected she only ever had one true affair with the knife, and all those others were meagre attempts to regain what she had lost so long ago. She sat daily, watching her synthetic roses, virulent with red, their fluorescence driving into her tired eyes persistently as she remained on the porch. She would sit observing their activity, although truly they had none, disassociating herself from the solemn sermons their moth-bitten, blushing heads delivered, ducking and weaving in the tepid south-west wind.

She had seen too many roses for a lifetime.

She had lost, or perceived to have lost (and looked for death on the horizon because she feared this loss) the ability to make things happen. How useful youth once was in the creation of day-to-day happenings. Now she forgot the seasons and enjoyed only the pleasant sensation of nothingness, forgetting those who had come and gone, welcoming mild weather.

A jolt and the shuddering halt of the tin can’s engine knocked her heavy fatigued head back. There, her father’s house, in the familiar Slovakian village, with its once-healthy walls and strong structure, She had found it easily enough, buried deep in the winter snow, and had enquired of the locals as to if anyone resided within after all these years.

They regarded her, not more obliging than they were wary, with the knowing gaze of people carrying with them burdens of the past – a past that had become her burden too.

Her accent was rusty, stilted with signs of her absence, the native tongue she had once possessed had long since been liberated – a stray, cut loose from its ill-fitting cultural confinement. She spoke in disconnected snippets, the prosaic language of forgotten dinner
parties and family get-togethers. Of basic, textbook Czech. She hated the harsh, sluggish tongue, all those barren vowels that tripped reluctantly from the lips. She had wished never to hear those sunken verbs again and had tried to forget it all, but the people spoke with a dramatic flourish, demanding that they remember her forceful tone, intense with purpose.

She walked self-consciously as the watchful gaze of the village people followed her, making her feel a pariah; a fugitive, returned to bring back old spirits in that small lonely place.

Her father, like so many fathers during the war, died when she was eleven. Fathers, husbands, brothers, friends, men. No-one spoke of it now; after all, death was the most reliable thing in life, and they were a liberated people. But those who were left behind dared to glorify it, stripping it of its depth, speaking of souls and eternity.

She could not and carried the weight of his death to the other side of the world, where time seemed to pass slowly as she whiled her days away, never daring to lay her grief down, even behind the walls of polymer buds she surrounded herself with. She took comfort only in the cool caress of the blade as it fell through her spidery, pale fingers to the meagre cushioning of her waif-like thigh.

Inside the house, she retreated to the stairs, her fingers grazing the peeling walls, and paused to consider the dust-coated telephone that sat by the abandoned fireplace, drawn back on its haunches, ready to pounce. To announce, like the uniforms had on that still, grey day so many years ago. She remembered when her fingers had not yet felt the sting of a hard day’s work, when her father would take them in his, a china doll’s hand held by its maker, with love and care, lest the hand should shatter.

People almost never came to the house now, she had been told; it was kilometres away from the offensive imposition of neighbouring cities; the journey was too difficult.

Sometimes she felt the inexplicable pull of the anonymity of the city. A place where such social tools of misinformation as gossip and hearsay were not so readily employed as they were in the Slovakian town. She envied the compartmentalised lives they led, their regimented working hours; drifting particles accumulating within the throbbing nebula of urban life.

But the suffocation she knew well. She politely declined, choosing to spend her days tending her weary roses, their cracked stems emerging from the dull ceramic pots on the porch.

She turned to close the door behind her; like she had the day after the uniforms knocked their leather-clad hands upon the same door. Their eyes had been blank, two dimensional slates upon which emotion was written off as collateral damage. “His body could not be
found or recovered, unfortunately,” they said, before the door of her father’s house was closed, seemingly forever, at the time, by her paling, shaking hand.

She had run to a place where time was merely collateral damage, given up in the fruitless pursuit of happiness. Oh, Father. When do the living become the dead and the dead become the forgotten? Here the roses will never grow weary as they did in Slovakia and the light will dance lazily across our peripheries and soon we will ride the light as it fades away to a place where time, pain and light become forgotten specks in our own little eternity, you and I.
In the early 2000s, historian Keith Windschuttle, published a book that changed the way Australians saw their past, and in turn how we saw our future; *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Windschuttle’s work criticised traditional perspectives on Australian colonisation and argued that white settlers had not treated the Indigenous Australians with anywhere near the barbarity we had believed them to. He contested the British massacres of Indigenous people and paints the First Australians as aggressive and criminal in their behaviour. Windschuttle, an Australian historian of British heritage, had drawn on his legacy of colonial privilege to reshape our past. This was history from the winners’ podium. The ‘history wars,’ despite stemming from what Professor Robert Manne called ‘one of the most implausible, ignorant and pitiless books about Australian history written for many years,’ had major political consequences. Windschuttle and his teachings were embraced and defended by the Howard government, in order to justify a lack of Indigenous reconciliation. Notwithstanding swathes of evidence to the contrary, Windschuttle’s history had enormous power—because he got to write it.

The way we view the world is constantly influenced by the way others saw it first. History is not the record of absolute truths, but a continuously shifting collective memory. And this memory has colossal influence over culture, politics and people. ‘History is written by the victors’, may be a truism, but we see this phenomenon time and time again.

Australian asylum seeker policy today rewrites the past and personhood of vulnerable people who ask for our help. Off shore detention and our near Orwellian journalistic restrictions are integral parts of this paternalism, in place so that we only hear the victors history; controlling an ideological narrative that shapes attitudes in very significant ways. We are bombarded with pseudo-military government slogans, of people smugglers and stronger boarders and stopping drownings at sea. This rhetoric of fear not only wins votes, but actually draws citizens into colluding in the silencing of dissenting voices. Our past is being written for us by the powerful.

However, ‘History is written by the victors,’ isn’t quite right. History is written by the writers, and we get to choose whose history we read. Indigenous Australian leader Pat Dodson was this year selected by the Australian Labor Party for a seat in the senate, and this is a critical
step forward in terms of giving the historically marginalised a voice of their own. There are of course other Indigenous members of parliament, but having Dodson, who in 1989 was part of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody and is currently a chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, having this influential and experienced Australian leader, take a safe seat in the senate that guarantees the power to shape decisions, is a tangible way of putting a pen into the hand of the disenfranchised to write the history that affects them.

The internet and social media have played huge parts in democratising the past, and the present. We see in this new media, avenues for the empowerment of the marginalised, opportunities for voices of people whose stories don’t fit the prevailing history, to be heard. In 2013, former CIA employee, Edward Snowden leaked classified government information to a number of journalists who broadcast the content over the internet. Whether you agree with Snowden’s actions or not, the fact that he was able to share these historically significant documents, against the will of the US government, through the power of the internet, speaks volumes for this new media’s influence over how we consume our stories, and the stories it allows us to consume.

Our narratives are broadening - and these people are just some of many who are helping to change the way we look at our past, ourselves and the stories we tell; levelling the playfield, shifting the nature of history, to transition from an exercise of privilege and domination to an opportunity for marginalised voices to speak to us from beyond the pale.
He knows his breath smells like whiskey, his facial hair mangy and his dress shirt is a sweat-soaked, crinkled mess. He knows he’s probably going to lose his job anytime in the next week and that he should’ve been home hours ago. He knows all this, and yet he heads there anyway.

There’s a word for what he’s becoming, a word that starts with ‘a’. No, not that one. He reached that point a while ago. This word, though, he doesn’t want to think about it, and hasn’t been, really, for the past few months. And isn’t that funny? He avoids the issue by embracing the issue. He laughs bitterly to himself, because that seems to be the only kind of humour he can manage these days. Mrs Krawczyk, the serpentine old lady a few houses to the left of him, eyes him with suspicion as she passes him on the pavement. Where they are walking. He pauses. Walking?

Why am I not in my car, he thinks. Better yet, where is my car? He doesn’t know. Did I even drive to work today? He can’t remember. He keeps walking.

It’s only a minute or so later when he arrives at the unmown havoc that is his front lawn. Another thing I’ve forgotten to do! He skirts his driveway, glancing into the grimy garage window as he does so, and oh thank God, so I did walk today.

His knuckles rasp a tentative rhythm on the timber of his front door. It swings open moments later, a gangly seven year old blinking up at him. Jules.

“Hi, Dad”, she mumbles, and since when did she stop jumping and screaming like she normally does?

“Hey, kiddo”, he replies, and his voice comes out gravelly and unsure. There’s a tense silence between them (a tense silence between a father and his seven year old daughter, Jesus Christ how did I manage that?) until Jules says “Mum’s in the living room,” and all but vaults up the stairs to her room.

Mum. Talia. He rounds the foyer corner, and her back’s to him, but he can see the tense pull of her muscles and the slight tremble of her hands. She’s been waiting for him. For an hour,
or maybe even four, he doesn’t know; she’s always been a stubborn one. He’s frozen as he studies her, and even more so when she turns around.

“Phil,” she says, and God he hates himself so much and she must think he doesn’t love her anymore but that’s nowhere near the truth. She’s too good for him, always has been and always will be. She was a fierce, vivacious spirit until not long ago, yet the woman in front of him now has a nest of hair, eye bags a sunken, deepening blue, and eyes a lot dimmer than they used to be.

He hates himself.

“Phil,” she says - no, pleads - again, and he can’t do this to her anymore.

“I want a divorce,” he hears himself say, and no, that wasn’t what he meant to say. God, no no no. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to him, he can’t lose her. He’s been too selfish to give her the chance to find someone else to treat her and the kids better, but it looks like he’s done it now.

He’s already picturing the sandy-blond who’d buy her flowers because he wants to, who’d pick Mitch and Jules up from school on time instead of an hour late, who his goddamn mother-in-law would like a hell of a lot more than she likes Phil. He hates the sandy-blond.

Phil brings his eyes to face Talia’s, and it’s like looking into the bottom of an empty bottle. There’s the disappointment that fun time’s over, and then a crashing wave of increasing self-hatred because he’s rapidly slipping down the rungs of the ladder of life.

He’s still lost in the hardened amber brown of her eyes when he feels the sting in his rugged cheek. Her palm has struck him lightning fast, too quick for him to react, and he only stares stunned at her as his previously ruddy cheek grows even redder. She breathes in low, ragged heaves and when she finally speaks, it’s not in the furious screams they used to have when Mitch was first born and they couldn’t do anything right, or the empty monotony of when he first stumbled home drunk off his arse.

“You bastard,” she whispers, and that’s the voice his own mother used on his deadbeat father when he was a boy, and God, he’s always said he’d never be like his old man but it turns out he was wrong.

He knows what’s coming. Hell, he’s seen what’s coming. Please leave, or You’re despicable, or maybe even You will have absolutely nothing to do with Phillip, you pathetic excuse of a father. Oh God, Mitch and Jules. He’s only going to get to see them once a month, for sure.

But Talia doesn’t demand that he leave, or tell Jules why he wasn’t at her last game and why he couldn’t drop Mitch off at his dance lessons that afternoon. She raises her slender hand, and he thinks she’s going to slap him again and he deserves it, he does, but the back of her
hand is in front of his nose now and his eyes are drawn to the minimalist diamond ring on her finger that he knew she’d love.

“Twelve years ago you danced with me, in the middle of a hall in front of my family and everyone we knew, and you said to me, ‘I’m not going to be good at this. I’m probably going to forget our anniversary and really, I’m probably going to ruin everything. But I love you a lot, and I hope you love me enough to forgive those things.’ You’ve forgotten our anniversary three times, and I forgave you for that, and you’re ruining everything now, but I remember exactly what you said, and I still love you enough. You’re not going to ruin this for me, you’re not going to ruin this for Jules or Mitch, and you’re not going to ruin this for yourself.”

He’s crying now, because he remembers that, and the way she grinned up at him, and simply said, ‘I’ll love you plenty’. He doesn’t know what to do, not now or for a long time coming, because he’s not a good person, but Talia is, and she seems to think he could be one too.

“I’m really not good at this” he says, a self-deprecating laugh, and she takes his cold cheeks in her warm hands and looks him dead in the eye and says, ‘You really aren’t,’ but she’s sort of smiling and she still loves him and he’s going to try harder for her, and apparently himself.
It’s a funny thing, really. I woke up this morning and my arms were curved around you. Two dimples on the lower back, the mole on the right shoulder blade, the thin ditch that appeared when you arched your back into me. I felt the ghosts of your contours grumble and sigh as I ran my fingers up and down your spine.

Does your wound still hurt? The one gaping in your lower front. I asked the doctor, but I can’t recall what he had said to me. His mouth was moving but I was not hearing. I only remember the hand that squeezed mine; your hand. And how your tight pulses that day should have sent alarming shocks through my body, but instead all I felt was a calm embrace.

During the last part, the white coats shut me out the room. I’d stared at my hands and the faint outlines your squeeze had imprinted. I’d stared at them til I continued to see them with my eyes closed, week after week.

Do you remember that time we took that trip, where I took you to the furthest point of the big blue, and you caught that fish? Your dark hair fell around your shoulders as you frantically jerked at the line. Your eyes met mine mid-tug and I could see in the glassy reflection the excitement of the panic that mirrored my own. Then when you’d finally won the game of tug-o-war, the line sailed smoothly in an airborne sweep and it wasn’t long before the body hit the surface with a scaly thump.

You looked up at me with an expression of incredulity and fear. Incredulous at the situation you’d caught yourself in, yet fearful that erratic delivery might’ve killed the fish. You crouched over it like a curious child and I mimicked, lowering myself with care. We hunched over the animal, watching the last of its breaths leave its gills. A final timid twitch in the tail, then one moment it was there, and the next - it was no longer there. Its pouted lips relaxed in an open gape and I felt your long hair brush the nape of my neck, the weight of your thoughts resting on my shoulders. Contemplation flurried about your mind - I could tell, because you were absent from me when your hands grabbed my hands and played in their contours. The lifeless body lay in a shiny mass, and everywhere was glittering.

What were you thinking that day? What was it that had transported you from that pinpoint of a moment? I ask but you don’t hear. Or is it just that I don’t hear your reply. I don’t know, but I do know it will soon be alright. Everything will soon be alright.

I remember your long black hair splayed across the clinical white pillow. The strands tangled and flirted with the other, but when I touched them, they were soft and still. I kissed his cold
forehead and saw in your eyes the incredulity and fear. But you didn’t fear for yourself or for him, you feared for me. The wound was open like the lips of the fish and I heard it echo the last of your words. Then you were cold as well.

You don’t have to be scared for me. You left me, but I’ll follow you. Tonight the curves of your shoulders will be solid again, and I can open my eyes, knowing for certain I’ll meet yours. The marks on my hand will be caressed away with your careful touch and I will hear your thoughts again.

Then I’m bending next to you once more, and you reach for my hand. I feel the burden of our loss lean upon four shoulders and our bodies crouch over him, protecting him, and everywhere will be glittering.
If I asked you right now – where do your clothes come from, how many of you could give me an answer? Not the brand – but where and who made them.

Trendy clothing is cheaper than ever, and cheap clothing is trendier than ever. And this is thanks to fast fashion retailers like Zara, H&M, and Forever 21. These companies churn out new designs and mass produce on a weekly basis, in a bid to persuade you that, yes, you really do need another five-dollar T-shirt.

How does any clothing company make money? Let’s be honest. You know.

Rana Plaza. You’ve heard the name. Everybody has. On an early morning in April 2013, the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh brought a hidden side of fashion to front page news. Over one thousand workers paid the ultimate price for our cheap clothing. In the weeks following the collapse, it seemed as though that was all I would hear about whenever I turned on the television, or browsed the internet. It seemed as though people would finally notice, and there would be reform.

But nowadays?

I haven’t heard a single shred of news from mainstream media. Sure, there are other important news stories to report on. But that does absolutely nothing to deter from the terrible hypocrisy of how we are hiding this slave labour in the fashion industry.

We are turning a blind eye. The corporations and the factories are turning a blind eye. Cutting corners and disregarding safety measures have become an accepted part of doing business in this model. And believe it or not, there is no one there to prevent this. Bangladesh has five thousand, six hundred garment factories, and less than two hundred safety inspectors.

How can less than two hundred people keep up with the fast-paced world of fast fashion and work to ensure the safety of the millions of people in this industry?

But that isn’t to say they are completely useless. In recent years, inspectors have uncovered shoddy electrical wiring, lack of proper fire exits, and heavy machinery overloading floors – just to name a few. Do these corporations and factories know they’re crossing boundaries and breaking laws? Probably. Do they care? Probably not. But we should.
We have taken a step backward, and crossed into a world where, apparently, having your passport taken away, working in a factory where there are bars on the windows and being paid less than three dollars for a sixteen hour working day is a perfectly acceptable practice that is well within the bounds of human rights.

You and I grow up thinking everyone is equal, but those clothes, some of which are probably on your back right now, are produced by their blood. When twenty-three year old Shima and the union in the factory she works at submitted a list of demands to the managers, their voices were not heard. They were beaten by other staffers.

These men and women are oppressed. Somewhere along the line, we have collectively decided that it’s okay for us to take away what should be fundamental human rights. As comedian and political commentator John Oliver said, we have told these workers, ‘Hey, make this shirt, we’ll ship it around the world, it’ll be worn once and thrown away! Now make a thousand more!’

Right now, you may be thinking, why should we try? There are plenty of other people making an effort. God forbid, I’ve said the same thing myself.

But what if we all said that?

I ask you now – why aren’t you doing anything? There’s a simple answer – people fear tie dye. We fear the aesthetic that comes with organic clothing – that is, DIY clothing, hemp, and your mum’s jeans that haven’t seen the light of day since the 80’s.

What if I told you, you wouldn’t necessarily have to give up your favourite brands? Because there is a way. We need to slow down. We need to stop returning home with bags stuffed to the brim with brand new clothes. If we consume less, factories produce less, and maybe – just maybe, those workers will finally be paid a living wage. I am not calling for a boycott. If we do that, those men, women, and children will be out of a job, forced to pick a new job from a list of undesirables.

Instead, I am asking you to think about what you buy. Cross back to a time where clothes weren’t churned out by a factory. Where there were four seasons of clothing a year, not fifty-two.

I want you to remember this number – thirty.

Next time you wander into a store and happen across a dress (or anything else) that you just have to buy or you’ll ‘die’, ask yourself this question -

Will I wear this a minimum of thirty times?

If so, go ahead! But if any part of you hesitates, it’s time to put that item back on the rack.
One day, you and I will look back at this era as a new form of slavery. It is time for us to slow down the rate at which we consume. We need to make these corporations accept responsibility, and to force them to take a step back and say, ‘Hey, we’ve crossed a line here. What we’re doing isn’t just unethical and immoral; it’s downright illegal.’ When we give these workers back their rights, we will have crossed a boundary – in the right direction this time.

We, the consumers, have the power to set this in motion. If we start asking, the industry will listen. Because we carry the story of the people who make our clothes around with us.
JELLY SWEAT

By Coco Huang

Mr Schrotts was a jelly-man.

Every morning, he flopped out of bed straight into his jelly-suit machine. It was his greatest invention, or so he thought, as jelly puffed from the pipes and encased his skin with its damp sponginess. Ten seconds later, he would stick out a foot by habit and smile and say, “Ah!” as the outer layer solidified into a jelly-shoe. He loved his machine, he loved his wife who would yawn and slink into the kitchen, he loved his little Jeremy Schrotts Jnr whose wobbly eyes grew round at his creations, but most of all, he loved the tremendous torrents of jelly that flowed from his jelly-factory from day to night. He was also very proud of his shiny bald head. He would shave it, humming tunefully, so his jelly-top-hat could slide on and off with a charming squeak. That was his style, the style of the magnificently striped jelly-suit that adorned his brilliance on his sunny strolls to work.

To Jeremy Schrotts Jnr, his father was a man worth more than jelly. Although jelly could buy gems of all kinds, little Jem didn’t need to be bought. He stuck to his father like gelatin, and was fiercely loyal. After all, Mr Schrotts was a remarkable man. It was his father who bought and fixed his toys with his clever fingers. It was his father who put the nuts into bolts to build his metal companions. And it was his father’s machines which pumped out twice as much jelly as all the other factories combined. He made the most jelly, but also gave the most jelly to those who needed it, the clean type too. “Don’t touch dirty jelly,” Mr Schrotts would tell his little Jem. “If it looks funny or smells funny, then stay well away from it.” So little Jem kept his jelly-cubes safely zipped inside the cool-pouch, another of his father’s inventions. Dirty jelly was dangerous.

One evening, when Mr Schrotts was enjoying a dessert of his wife’s jelly and chocolate rings, he noticed how his son’s jelly-lined plate was untouched. He recognised the dogged question that licked the insides of little Jem’s eyes, that made them jelly-clear and distant and was often reflected in his own. He watched amusedly as the boy bounded after it, panting lightly in the world of his mind, and just when he’d caught it, he cleared his throat to call him back.

Little Jem picked up his spoon. “Daddy,” he asked suddenly. “Why does Danny Snizzle’s daddy have a new jelly-factory?”
Mr Schrotts’ smiling jelly-mouth curdled instantly under the heat that consumed him. Snizzle, always Snizzle. His wiry frame struggled to contain the violent energy that threatened to burst from his veins at the name. Snizzle, Snep, they had all sneezed on him from the day his jelly had been hailed as the finest in the nation. He had put sweat into that jelly, and always did, whilst Snizzle had put in his father’s gold. The gold ran out, but the sweat never did. He knew the sweat that Snizzle now used was a dirty blend of bodily fluids that somehow matched his own. Snizzle had not a drop of it under his portly arms, he thought, and if he did, it would kill him to use it. How nice would it be if he drowned in his own jelly, made by hundreds of hungry, clammy hands which had brushed snot from dribbly noses and scratched flaky scalps. Snep, too, would be suspended in the mixture, his slimy limbs suffocatingly knotted together.

Mr Schrotts raged in silence.

***

Little Jem hid under the bed.

Not because of what had happened last night. He had completely forgotten how his father’s face had unnervingly locked up tight after his question. He could not remember how his mother had dragged him to his room, and begged him to sleep despite his barely-touched dessert. He did not recall the bumps and bruises that filtered into his dreams. But he did remember who his father had invited over for tea.

He glimpsed the approaching green jelly-top-hat and shrunk closer to the wall. The man wore a green jelly-suit, but his jelly was too thin to cover the patchy red sores on his skin. Dirty jelly was dangerous. Little Jem knew little about him; only that he sneezed like an octopus, the hairy arms in his nostrils pulsing with motion, and his inky eyebrows squirmed when he stared at them for too long. When he had asked his father about the man’s jelly, Mr Schrotts had laughed, but his chin had wrinkled uncomfortably. “Mr Snep works for the Government,” he had said. “They don’t let in people with dirty jelly.” But little Jem’s keen eyes noticed that every time Mr Snep left, his cool-pouch was always a bit fuller.

This time was no exception. Mr Snep rang the doorbell, ate a jelly-biscuit, and walked out with crumbs stuck on his jelly-suit. His cool-pouch bulged like the back of his bare, rounded head. Little Jem wondered what would happen if he touched it - would it be firm but soft like his father’s? Or would his hand sink right into it? After all, he thought, wearing jelly on one’s head would eventually cause brain-bones to soften until they were nothing but jelly-like mush. He giggled at the thought of jelly-headed men in jelly-suits. With jelly-necklaced women.

And all of a sudden, he knew what to do.

***
Mr Schrotts came home to find his son with a packet of jelly-sweets. They were shaped like babies and smiled sunnily. A cold, crinkly hand gripped his gut as he realised they were not his.

“Are those from the Snizzle Jelly-Factory?” Little Jem nodded without meeting his eyes. His forlornness was framed by his ill-fittingly bright jelly-suit. Mr Schrotts noted the rainbow jelly squished into his son’s hair from the jelly-top-hat, and the faint initial coughing of a jelly-suit-machine that had been on all day. He quickly turned a few dials and flipped a switch, soothing it to sleep.

“She didn’t like my jelly-suit.” Little Jem rubbed a jelly-baby between his fingers. “Then Danny came and showed her all the things his jelly could do. It could never get dirty, because it only stuck to his skin.”

Mr Schrotts said nothing.

“He gave me some of it to try, too. But Daddy, if his jelly is really clean, then how clean really is our jelly?”

Mr Schrotts said nothing. He took one of his wife’s short, sharp knives from the kitchen and sat opposite of his son. Two men in jelly-suits. Mr Schrotts took a jelly-baby from the packet and, in one downwards motion, sliced its cheery head from its body. The ridged knife left indentations where the neck would be. Then he shook the toothpick-tube and stuck the head atop a toothpick. He had stuck it in too far, because the toothpick skewered the head completely, and a little wood peeped out from its top. The jelly-baby’s smile was sweet and bloodless.

“This is what you do,” Mr Schrotts said quietly, “to those who stick their feet in front of yours.”

A long, contemplative silence ensued.

They bit off the heads as elegantly as they could.

***

The Snizzle Jelly-Factory Grand Opening blazed to an end. The conductor raised his baton and the band unleashed a flurry of fiery, triumphant notes. They could be heard through the whole of town, and spurred on the jelly-workers who stirred together the unset mixtures and poured them into the enormous jelly-bucket that stood proudly behind the instruments. It was almost full as the band reached their climatic crescendo, an overwhelming soundscape of jubilation.

Little Jem emerged from the jelly-factory. His father waved and he ran up to him, breaking away from his class group and ignoring his teacher’s calls. He wasted no time in describing the diligent jelly-workers with their pristine coats and rubbery gloves. He only nodded.
Mr Schrotts saw how his jelly-backpack leaned inwards with weightlessness. Good boy, he thought. You did what I told you to. The little black box, disguised as a pencil case, would be tucked somewhere under a pipe. Mr Schrotts slipped a hand into his pocket, where a device recognised his fingers. The conductor raised his arms, god-like, and brought them down for the final scorching roar.

But instead there was a crunch. It was almost a self-conscious, embarrassed one, like an amplified yawn. The jelly-factory wobbled. Its metal pieces shivered, then someone screamed and they piled upon each other, as though their legs had been swept out from beneath them. The jelly-bucket rolled to its side, coating men and brass in layers of lukewarm jelly until they could not breathe.

Mr Snizzle watched as blood and skin and jelly seeped from the broken veins of his beloved jelly-factory, down into the streets.

Danny watched as his father’s dreams of fame and recognition crushed his heart with its shattered metal shards.

Mr Snep watched the crowd shriek and run, right into the liquid jelly that drowned them. He slid into the rocky depths of the shadows, waiting. There would be many jelly-men he could latch onto.

Mr Schrott’s wife looked up from her laundry. She couldn’t see it, but heard it, and absent-minded rubbed the marks on her neck. She wondered if she could have done anything, if she had known.

Mr Schrotts did not watch. He drove away, his victory leaving a bitter aftertaste in his mouth.

And little Jem sat beside him. In all the pandemonium, he had held on to a sweaty hand which had guided him to safety. The same sweat leached into his father’s jelly-suit, blurring its brilliant colours into a dirty, murky mass. Only little Jem noticed. But he didn’t cry. He didn’t speak.

Because Jeremy Schrotts Jnr was a jelly-man.

As at the date of publication, Coco’s story ‘Jelly Sweat’ was on the shortlist for the Katharine Susannah Pritchard Writers’ Centre Short Fiction Awards with the winners to be announced in December 2016.
Year 11 Extension Writing

Students studying Year 11 English Extension undertook an Independent Investigation assignment which involved the creation of an extensive Major Work.

Shirin Shaban and Coco Huang chose to write a short story and Jess Shao chose to write a short story cycle.
I used to speak to God every night when I was nine.

It would be impossible for me to pinpoint when at first the conversations began. They were there since before I could remember otherwise, and it wasn’t something I was about to complain about. Not everyone, I knew, was honoured to talk with God himself. Sometimes we’d go for hours, talking about my day, about life, about wrong and right, family and most importantly about how Firouzeh Mahmadi got ABBA CDs for her birthday and I didn’t.

. . . .

“God, Firouzeh’s parents have two cars.”

Azar, the number of cars they own is not important.

“Firouzeh’s mum drives one and her father drives another. But my maman and my baba don’t have any. Is that fair? Do you love her more than you love me?”

Material things are not important to me, child. I love all my children the same - even the ones with no cars.

“God?”
Yes, Azar.

“Can you tell Firouzeh’s parents to give us one of their cars?”

Azar joon¹, that is not something that I can do. 
I must leave now.

. . . . .

By the time I was ten, I had already decided that I was to be a prophet when I grew older.

I’d pre-decided my first three commandments: No sadness, no pain, and everybody gets a car. No questions asked.

When I told God about my plans he laughed heavily, and briefly, while his snowy beard shook, the channels in his forehead seemed shallower. The Imams in the mosques had the same style of facial hair as him, which made me think for a long while about God’s influence on men’s fashion. I decided that it was to be expected someone so important would be a trend-setter; it was not long before I began planning my own haute culture to prepare for my role as female prophet-to-be.

One day as I was practising for my future fame, I tied crimson, azure and saffron headscarfs in a bunch, letting them stylishly enveloped my waist. My grandmother walked in as I was posing my look in front of the family’s sole full length mirror. My nose tingled with the sweaty scent of sumac and garlic that lingered permanently on her body. She clicked her tongue disapprovingly, calling me as colour blind as a donkey, before enveloping me in the midst of her swaying bosom.

I learnt later that year that donkeys weren’t really colour blind; around about the same time, my grandma died.

. . . . .

My cousin, Elaheh was the only person I told about my prophetdom. She played along for a few weeks, calling me “Nabi² Azar” and asking what God thought about her new outfit. But one day, in the thick balmy summer, as I preached to her about how God said he’d buy everyone a car, she replied petulantly that I needed to stop with my games. I asked her

¹ A Persian term of endearment synonymous with ‘dear’
² ‘Nabi’ means prophet in Arabic
what she meant, but she only sighed and said, “Azar, you can’t actually believe God talks to you…”

My face burnt with embarrassment and my sight grew blurred with irritation. A blistering heat flared in my tummy and some fire deep within me possessed my right hand flinging it violently across my cousin’s face. Her aching cries permeated the quiet rooms of the cramped house. It was only moments before my mother’s sister burst into the room and clasped the girl to her chest.

“What happened, Elaheh joon,” the centre of my aunt’s unibrow grew thick at the middle as her forehead furrowed, “Why are you crying?” The fire in my chest was gone, black ash lay in its place. Instead of anger I was left with a tingling heart that was willing her not to tell; not to reveal my secret. God must have told her not to say anything because she kept her mouth shut, or rather kept it open and continued to scream.

That night he didn’t speak with me. As I sat up in my bed and put away my copy of ‘Weekly Ettelaat’, he was silent. As I turned off the lights, he was silent. And when I finally closed my eyes, I heard not a peep.

My heart throbbed that night. Like how a face feels after it has been slapped.

. . . . .

It was like that for a week.

Though he was there every night, no reprimands were spoken. No cars were discussed. And no words were exchanged about what I had done. Instead, I basked in the agonising awareness of my actions. The despicable knowledge of my own violent capabilities. I lived in a state of anxiety; surely I was about to be struck down for my actions, because “bad things happen to bad people, Azar”…

When he finally spoke, I tried hard not to let my eyes linger too long in his vicinity. Too ashamed of myself. Too afraid of what he would say.

My child...

“God?”
Have you been thinking about what you did to Elaheh?

“Yes, God.”

You have considered your wrongs?

“Yes”

Do you remember what I told you about violence?

“Yes”

Then you promise not to do this sort of thing again?

“I swear! I swear on maman bozorgi3”

There is a wealth of anger in this world, Azar that is large enough without you donating to it.

“God?”

Do not worry, child. You must sleep now; Ms. Farhadi has an arithmetic test planned for you tomorrow.

“Okay”

Sleep well, bacheham.

. . . . .

Indeed Madam Farhadi presented us with a maths test. And indeed, even though God had warned me, I scored especially disastrously.

. . . . .

Mordad4 was my favourite month of the year; partly because it marked the gleeful transition into winter and playing in the snow, but mainly because there were so many birthdays to celebrate. It was a fortunate curse of my father’s family that everyone was born in the same month. My mother would complain about her expanding waistline to anyone

3 “Maman bozorg” meaning grandmother in Persian
4 Iranian equivalent for the month of August
who would listen; the result of eating leftover cake every day for a month. My father would begin to wrap the gifts; the cheaper ones he had picked up during Nowruz sales, months before, and I, at the mercy of hoards of unidentifiable family members, had my elastic cheeks assaulted by wandering pincers.

After dinner the whole entire family would gather, drink tea and nibble sweet things not usually allowed because “Jilah dear, the doctor said his cholesterol is much too high”. At the adults’ table, my uncles would speak sternly of the Shah’s regime, the increasing tension between revolutionaries and the government, and boast pompously about how many protests they had taken part in. These familiar bodies, with their familiar moustaches and their familiar heaving laughs. It was hard to imagine that these were the violent people God warned me of. These were the same men who’d rally ferociously like caged tigers against their government for the good of the people, he’d said, but would ultimately be crushed by another rule under a different name.

God told me not to follow their footsteps.

And so I promised I wouldn’t.

. . . . .

My grandmother’s fifty-fifth birthday was an auspicious occasion. Her son, two daughters and their husbands, wives and children gathered in the biggest of the family houses for a grand celebration. With money she had been saving, she announced that she would take her sons and daughters to Abadan watch a night screening of The Deers; my parents among them. My parents left me and the other children at my Aunt Golnaz’s home, and crammed into Daie’s Mehdi’s Renault. We stayed up singing loudly and off-key to Googoosh’s new album, and created a massive shared bed in the middle of the lounge room.

Lying in a cocoon of warm blankets and sweaty children, I was peaceful, for I couldn’t possibly have known. For there was no warning like the maths test. No sign from God, from man. No indication of anything out of the ordinary. No different, besides the fire that

---

5 Daie meaning uncle
6 A famous Persian singer pre-revolution
consumed my parents and aunts and uncles. Nothing, but the fiery blaze that annihilated the trust of an entire nation.

It was the deadliest terrorist attack the world had seen to date. There were accusations and bitter trials to capture the perpetrator. The political inspiration behind the fire that erased four hundred people in one night. Every living soul had burned to ash in a violent eruption of flames and gasoline. My parents included.

An unfamiliar feeling settled in my chest when I was told what had happened. A mix of anger, disbelief and betrayal stirred within me.

“God, how could you?”

*I am sorry my child... I cannot stop hate and evil, I can only spread love.*

Not good enough.

“Don’t you love me? My parents?”

*Of course I do.*

Not good enough.

“Then why didn’t you stop this?”

*It was not my place to stop this, Azar.*

Not good enough.

“This is your fault...”

*Azar, this -*

“*Stop it! You did this to them.*”

*Azar...*

A hopeless voice within me throbbed, asking how someone who loved me so much could take so much from me.

*Child, there are things I cannot change.*

“*Leave! I don’t want to talk to you.*”
It seemed after that, God didn’t really want to talk to me either.

... 

The days following the fire, numbness took hold of my body; temporarily paralysed by the notion of a life without my maman’s loving smile, without my baba’s worn hands, without my grandma smelling of garlic and sumac.

People were fighting in the streets. Pictures of the Shah were burned. Calls for peace were made. All actions imparted through violence; violent words and actions had become the means to an end. The world had erupted in a cacophony of senseless brutality. And all I wanted was for my parents to return to me - to hold me in their arms and to tell me that I was safe and loved and that they would never leave me again.

But even my young mind was beginning to realise that death was something unwavering.

I stayed with Elaheh’s family after the attack. Her sorry eyes watched me timidly, and whenever I looked at her I would recognise the same look of pity that had become common on the faces of my gaping relatives. So I stopped looking. I stopped telling her any more about God and prophets and my plan for no pain, partly because I was too humiliated to face her, but much more prominently, because I no longer believed in a painless world, or a world full of joy.

During the night I would think about my last conversation with God, embarrassed with how I’d reacted. For all his warnings of arrogance, violence and maths tests, I had never appreciated his unspoken warning: patience.

A few weeks later, lying repentant and tearful in my bed I considered talking to God again. Some small part of me had finally realised that without him I had no one; so I called for him, “God, are you there?”

I prayed for him to come and speak to me; to embrace me in warmth and comfort, still hopeful, believing he would come if I willed it hard enough.

I was returned with a gut-wrenching silence. Painful, heartbreaking, soul crushing silence.

A horrible discomfort erupted within me, like I was speaking, but was not being heard. Like I
was being heard, but overlooked.

It made my heart ache more than a thousand slaps.

More than losing a thousand cars.

Because I’d failed my test.

Because he was gone.

And because I knew that he was never coming back.
Reflection Statement

The short story is written on the basis of conversing with God, which was an aspect of Persepolis which I found heart-breaking; as she ultimately sacrifices her relationship with God and realises the magnitude of what she has done. I appropriated this idea in the same context, but created a new character, a new situation and a different sort of relationship.

The main concepts I dealt with include childhood & childish innocence, moral dilemmas and family, which are all explored through the character of Azar. The childish nature of believing one is a prophet, the strong relationships with her parents and grandma and the choices she makes between right and wrong are all aspects of the novel which I tried to emphasise through different language techniques and devices. While the childish innocence and family were more specific to Persepolis, my exploration of right and wrong and moral conundrums was appropriated from The White Tiger, which also deals with issues of making choices between what you should do and what you can do.

I varied my language techniques based on the emotions I wanted to convey to the audience, utilising olfactory imagery to evoke the responder’s personal memories and to create a sense of familiarity and intimacy between Azar and her grandmother. The breaking up of the text was done to allow me to convey certain words and phrases more prominently. For example, after and before each break in text, I aligned the first (or first few) sentences in the centre to emphasise their importance, for example, “It seemed after that, God didn’t really want to talk to me either.” These points in the text seemed important to me in conveying how Azar’s understanding of the world was shifting and the sort of unfathomable things that she as a child was beginning to comprehend. The use of first person was chosen in order to make the responder feel more connected with the narrator, and to put them in the position of Azar, as a young girl coming to terms with the world.

I chose the context of revolutionary Iran from one of my texts (Persepolis), because it was a situation and culture that I was familiar with and knew about, and the social and cultural changes and conflict taking place were suitable as a backdrop, and play a key role, in her coming to terms with “peace”, violence and death. At that time, the country was in turmoil and the political future of the nation was unknown and unstable, and I used this context to reflect Azar’s own personal dilemmas and internal debates.
While the work was not made with a specific audience in mind, people who are more familiar with the cultural context would better understand the story, and thus is suitable for readers of Persian background or with knowledge of life in Iran before the revolution.

Exploring two different texts and being able to appropriate the most moving aspects of each allowed me to create a piece that emboldens, in my opinion, the most significant ideas I wished to convey to the audience, and allowed me to create a text that I am happy with.
At 11:12am, on an unusually warm July morning, the man who loved God’s daughter left the church.

Though his beard had grizzled and his eyes had softened, he walked with a steady gait, the piece of gravel wedged in his boot crunching rhythmically on the streets of Berlin. A tram rattled past, a sudden burst of dialogue filling his ears. He caught a whiff of cold beer and stale smoke from a pub. Ethanol and tetraphene, he thought with a wrinkled nose. Aromatic rings mingling with hydrocarbon chains. Sinking deep down into his lungs.

A bell tolled feebly in the distance, weary from all the deaths it had announced. He glanced up at the pale concrete blocks that huddled together; they had remained that way through the war. The bakery on the corner was motionless and silent, its floor dusted with spilt flour and grains. The sweet pastries and gold had disappeared in the night.

There was an old bitterness that lined his stomach, a solid mass which grew by day. It would kill him, he knew, before he could savour the scent of crisp autumn leaves. He would go quietly. His body was unravelling from the inside, and it pained him too much to watch.

God had been absent the morning Emil Fischer stepped into His home for the first time in years. Emil was immediately bathed in the hard light which cascaded in from above. He flinched at its intensity. It sliced through him as though he was as translucent as the glass circle that topped the dome. The rows of pews were packed with faces lowered in prayer, though Emil could not bring himself to join them. His hands, hidden in his pockets, refused
to touch the cool chain-linked beads of his rosary. He was certain the towering stone structures would amplify his unsteady heart.

Emil ignored the heads that turned and the whispers that swirled in reverberation like his wife’s ashes as they drifted down the Dahme, led by the river’s current. They were just carbon. Pure, simple carbon. God had moulded him from it, had let him play with it, had never thought His daughter would be abducted by men. His secrets were forced from her tender lips, His beautiful world tainted with cries of anguish. Emil had hidden ashamedly from Him, humbled by His punishment, but today, after months of muted grief, he had worked up the nerve to absolve his sins.

Except they could not be forgiven. In the musty little room with the padded seat, Emil touched his forehead with clammy fingers and forced them over his heart and across his shoulders. “Bless me Father, for I have sinned.” His own shallow voice unnerved him. “My last confession was . . .” He trailed off, as he could not remember. “I accuse myself of the following sins.” He almost choked on those words. His voice cracked as he recounted the mortal offences he had committed against God and His daughter, though his apology brought him no relief. “For these and all the sins of my past life, I am truly sorry.” His throat closed even tighter.

The concealed voice that blessed him was tinny and nasal, almost bored. “Our Father smiles on those who have served our great motherland. Recite your three Hail Marys when you awaken each morning and you shall be blessed. May God be with us,” the voice responded, quoting a familiar military slogan. Emil recognised it as the same voice that had incited unknown passions in men, then recited psalms to their corpses.
At 12:15pm, Emil stepped into his laboratory, a silent sacristy with wide arched windows. They’d cleaned it up after he’d lost his mind, the glassware replaced and his cupboard restocked. It was as though they had anticipated his return for months; the new receptionist waved him in, ignoring his rough coat with the frayed sleeves and his ragged beard. His face was flushed, almost indignantly. His laces had come undone. He looked nothing like the well-groomed, stout and bespectacled man in the photograph next to his name.

A wad of uncompleted reports sat on his desk, waiting expectantly. Next to it was his notebook. His Codex Gigas, as his freshly-graduated assistants had nicknamed it. The Devil’s Bible. The name never ceased to chill him. It was a plain, age-brittled book with Greek letters and numbers and arrows, the language that God’s daughter and her lovers spoke. He was its author, and as his eyes scanned his slanted shorthand, he was filled with the same familiar unease that had plagued him when he’d written it. To achieve such detail had been painstaking; he remembered the times he had worked through winter nights, with an extra fur coat and a flask of almost-frozen coffee. The scrawled numbers, equations, predicted formulas that practically shivered across the pages were a testament to those turbulent times. He shuddered at the cold impersonality of his own words, awestruck as his students were by the power that lay behind them. It was these words that had started a war within a war.

It had begun with the Englishman, in 1913. Emil had met the man’s father in Munich, where Emil had been invited to Liebig’s lectures on organic synthesis. Their youthful days had been
filled with plenty of coffee and cakes and cheerful bickering. Four decades later, the battered letter from his forgotten friend in London had surprised him; Emil learned that he had abandoned architecture for archaeology, and that his son, Hans Thacher Clarke, had won a research fellowship to study oxazole synthesis and esterification at the University of Berlin. That had been six years ago, before their countries had grown irritated with each other like children, before the churches had spewed their hateful sermons, before the grey years had rolled in. Hans had reminded Emil of his youth; tall, light-haired, and possessed with a restless curiosity. Hans too had loved God’s daughter, but, like many other men, he’d asked her too much. He was just twenty-six when he was burned.

Emil recalled the day he’d heard the tinkle of glass. He’d been instructing his pupils and assumed they’d brushed a beaker off the bench. Then an ear-piercing scream sliced through the hallway and their chattering abruptly stopped. A door slammed, and uneven footsteps had pounded on the floor. Hans burst in a moment later, his face contorted in fear.

“Herr Professor Fischer!” He’d cried, in great distress. “What will become of me?”

Emil noticed a faint patch on his pant leg, and the smell that came with it. The innocent scent had often accompanied his lunch, but now it sowed the seeds of dread. “What happened? Is that . . . ?” Hans nodded and Emil cursed loudly, oblivious to the reactions of his students. “Under the pain of death,” he told them, “do not leave this room.” He locked them in from the outside just in case, and hurried Hans to the first aid room. There, they had placed Hans’ leg under running water for over an hour before the first signs of redness had appeared. His skin had bubbled into shiny, bulging blisters and his cells had swollen and burst. The pus trickled down in yellow, globular streams, like softened butter that had gone off, and clotted the drain. There was nothing Emil could do but watch him suffer as he
burned from where he could not see. Hans had underestimated God’s daughter. He twisted in agony at every rupture in his body. He paid for his mistake in pain.

Emil had been glad that Hans returned to England after two months in hospital. He’d visited him infrequently, unable to bear seeing the ragged scars that disfigured his leg. They were a stark reminder of his negligence; he’d known the chlorination procedure Hans had suggested was dangerous, yet he’d thoughtlessly handed him the materials and told him to take care. He did not gloss over his foolishness in his report to the German Chemical Society. It had left its mark on Hans’ flesh and on his memory.

Two years later, after the world had descended into chaos, the Society wrote back. They’d read what happened to the Englishman. They’d known what Emil had coaxed from God’s daughter. They wrote to tell him they wanted more.

***

At 14:30pm, Emil stood on the steps of the Schauspielhaus. The Devil’s Bible that he had retrieved was tucked under his arm. The theatre was closed, under new management, but its doors were unlocked. The rounded garden beds that flanked the entrance had withered; Schiller’s marble eyes stared self-assuredly at the empty courtyard, a laurel wreath adorning his head. Perhaps it was his *Ode to Joy* that he held to his heart with rigid hands.

Emil was alone. At first, he’d become accustomed to his solitude after his sons had grown into men and left him to pursue their own interests. Then the Englishman had come. It was Hans who’d accompanied him on Sundays, first to the cathedral then to the theatre. Though he devoted his life to God’s daughter, Hans was an equally keen clarinettist. It was Hans
who had introduced him to the fine arts. Now the theatre no longer impressed Emil with its
grandeur, its pillars resembling bars of a cage rather than monuments of human ingenuity.

Little light filtered into the Grand Hall. Its galleries were bare, the raised stage voiceless, and
the stalls empty. The new electric chandeliers hung dumbly, refusing to illuminate the grand
organ that spanned the width of the hall. The orchestral pit was deep in the shadows. Emil
blinking, unsure whether the figure was real. Near the front, light glinted in the metal frame
of a wheelchair. How it had managed to get up the stairs, he did not know. He approached it
cautiously.

The man looked up with ageless eyes that could not see. They were rimmed a dark reddish-
purple, and Emil suppressed the horror that crept in from nowhere. He’d seen too many of
those eyes, fixed in a perpetual, unfocused stare, as he had thrown them into the furnace.
Not one of the fifty rodents he’d performed his tests on had survived. The British had never
cought up.

Emil sat next to the spectral man, whose legs did not reach the floor. The man suddenly
burst into applause, then shushed him. “They’ve finished tuning. They’re about to begin,” he
whispered excitedly.

“What are they playing?” Emil asked, envisaging the phantom orchestra, the players as
sinewy figures of darkness. The man shushed him again, but began to hum the low bass
notes. A simple, steady pulse. The notes thrummed with a quiet energy, like men marching
solemnly to their deaths. Emil held his breath; he was certain that this was the symphony
Hans had described to him with such passion. The man’s voice became uneven as more and
more melodic lines entered, keeping the beat with his fingers.
Emil felt another presence beside him, youthful and full of vivacity. His heart warmed at the memory. They had always sat together near the front so Hans could observe the musicians. Sometimes, during a moment of intense drama, he would nudge him and say, “The second cellist is bored. He’s poking the third violist with his bow.” Or, “I’m not sure if I agree with his interpretation. Not enough *rubato*.” A few weeks after Hans left, the Berlin Philharmonic had played the symphony that he’d been desperate to hear. Emil, still guilt-ridden, had had dinner early and alone.

The man stopped humming, trying to catch his breath. The complexity of the piece had overwhelmed and exhausted him, and the orchestra grumbled and disintegrated. He spoke with a soft lisp. “We are moved by nothing but pure patriotism for those who have sacrificed so much for us.” The man quoted the composer’s words. “But look what our chauvinism has done. Look at what it has made us into. I may be blind, but even that I can see.”

And then Emil looked through the damaged eyes of God. He saw the men who had sharpened the knowledge He had given them into weapons, who had learned enough secrets from His daughter that they became drunk with pride and power. There were men like him, who had turned their love for His daughter against her, uncomfortable with their task, but reassuring themselves that it was their own best interests. Every man had wanted to live. Emil remembered a forgotten face; the colleague who had refused orders. He’d burned his papers, adamant that he would not produce the gas which turned water into acid. There had been others willing to join him too, those who had taken the oath, who lived by *primum non nocere*. First, do no harm. Their voices soon faded to silence when they’d
realised the repercussions of resistance.

The man and his family had vanished overnight.

From his new perspective, Emil understood how his deep resentment for God after He had taken his sons had been wrong. God had never had the power to do so. After all, He was just a blind and broken man in a wheelchair, almost indistinguishable from His shadow, unable to keep up with the second movement of Beethoven’s seventh symphony, let alone the world.

***

At 17:00pm, the man with the broken watch arrived home.

It rained that evening, a gentle drizzle that pattered against the window. It was not the rain that had damaged his pocket watch; the birthday gift from his son Walther had stopped years ago, though he took it with him by habit. He did not know it stopped the moment Walther placed his gun under his chin and fired. Instead, the letter outlined that he’d died at the Somme, fearlessly volunteering to lead the first wave of men who had fallen like puppets with their strings cut before they’d taken five steps. Alfred, his other son, determined but naïve, had followed in his brother’s footsteps and died slowly of typhoid. Emil did not mourn them anymore. He’d sacrificed them to God’s daughter to recompense for his deeds.

Their photographs watched from the mantle as he boiled water for his potatoes. What did they think of their father now? Emil pondered how little space he occupied. A stove-top, a sink, a bathroom and a bed. Apart from these, and a shelf full of old publications, there was not much to indicate his existence.
It was during his years at Würzburg when he’d truly lived, as a lover of God’s daughter. He’d wanted to learn everything he could; he’d peppered her with his hypotheses and amused her with his failures. She was a woman with all the answers, which she guided him towards but would not show him. She had looked over his hexagonal sketches and would only shake her head, which infuriated him but spurred him on. After two decades of research, he had ignored the thunderous applause when he’d seen her smile. His work had garnered him awards and prizes, even the prestigious Nobel one. But he knew even without them, she would remember his name among her lovers.

He sprinkled a little salt on his potatoes, and found last night’s ham. As he chewed the tasteless lumps, he flipped through his notebook. During the war, he was assigned to work on the chemical that burned from the inside. He could never get rid of the smell; sweet and spicy, like onions, or mustard. God’s daughter had looked on in mute horror as he’d poured the liquid onto rats, timing how long it took for their skin and fur to split and blister. It had thrilled him, his newfound disobedience to her rules, and though he reminded himself that his work had the sole purpose of keeping him alive, there was a small part of him that enjoyed it. He saw an identical desire concealed in his peers, and knew that all men were essentially the same.

Now the thought of what he’d done repulsed him. Driven by instinct, he searched through his drawers until he found an old bottle of wine. He had no opener, so he smashed it down on his *Codex Gigas*, the liquid seeping into its pages like blood. He found a matchbox and struck a match, but before he let go, he hesitated. His hands gripped it until the flame scorched his fingers, and he yelped and blew it out. He couldn’t do it, he realised. Even if he dropped the match, the book could never be burned. Not by him, not by God.
He felt fatigue pulling on his limbs, telling him to lie down, to rest. He opened the almost-bare kitchen cupboard and took his pillbox, shaking the remaining pills onto his hand. He doubted whether they would cure him and swallowed them in a gulp. The window was open, but he didn’t mind the cool, soothing breeze. It stroked his skin with light rain. He hugged his notebook, sank onto his bed, and waited.

***

At 22:17pm, God’s daughter climbed in. She took the sodden book from the unconscious man’s hands. Sprawled on the bed, he faintly resembled the young man when he’d begun to love her. She smiled ruefully. If he had chosen to live, he would have learned why she’d steered him towards the secret that had fallen into the wrong hands. It would have cured him of the disease he’d acquired from his earlier experiments. The old bitterness, which had grown by day. Years later, after a second war simmered to an end, she would whisper the same thought in an American lover’s ear. Perhaps he would use it to save lives.

Nonetheless, she loved the man whose chest grew still and breathing grew weak. His brow was soft and unwrinkled; soon he would be at peace. She did what her father would have done; she tucked him in bed, and kissed him goodnight.

As at the date of publication, Coco’s story, ‘God’s Daughter’ was on the shortlist for the Joseph Furphy Commemorative Literary Prize with the winners to be announced in December 2016.
Reflection Statement

*God’s Daughter* is an exploration of science, religion, religious hypocrisy, human nature and morality. It portrays how war brings out the worst in men and damages an individual’s religious identity and personal values. I also explore the coexistence of science and religion; how an individual can develop a spiritual obsession with discovering the “truth” through science (symbolised by God’s daughter), but how this discovery about innate human nature forces the individual to acknowledge the fragility of religious faith and the ineradicable darkness within him.

Emil, my protagonist, is a man with plenty of contradictions. He’s a scientist, but a Catholic; a German, yet loves an Englishman like a son. He’s devoted to science, but abuses it for nationalistic purposes. These internal conflicts deny him a fixed, easily definable identity. Emil becomes extremely guilt-ridden and repulsed by the evil within him, and chooses suicide as a means of escape. This evil is symbolised by his notebook, which he recorded his development of mustard gas. His “Devil’s Bible” is a binary opposition to God, and Emil realises the darkness in man it represents can never be destroyed. His religious beliefs about an omnipotent God are also challenged; I personified God as a blind, disabled man to represent His powerlessness over immoral human actions during the war. With this realisation, Emil’s religious identity falls apart and he discovers his inner darkness, brought out by war.

*Night* was a large source of inspiration, as it also reveals the horrors of war. I appropriated many war-related themes and setting from Wiesel’s novel – the loss of morality and religious identity, and the corruptive instinct to survive – as well as the symbolism of night. Night represents the darkness of the human soul; in my story, a bakery was looted during
the night, hinting at the sacrifice of morality necessary for survival. An outspoken scientist “disappears” during the night because he refuses to produce chemical weapons. From Winterson’s novel, I incorporated the notion of religious hypocrisy; the priest at the confessional offers religious advice tainted with politics, as the German Catholic Church promoted nationalism and militarism during the Great War. I also imitated Winterson’s postmodern style through using flashbacks, which convey Emil’s inability to escape from his guilt-ridden past.

*God’s Daughter* is intended for an intellectual and mature young adult audience, specifically those interested in chemical warfare and the German society in the 1910s. Extensive research has profoundly impacted my story; it enabled me to develop Emil’s voice as I learned his tragic background. Emil and Hans were real scientists, so I researched their personal lives, their chemical procedures, and the traditions of the Catholic Church. The cathedral Emil visits is modelled on St Hedwig’s Cathedral, which is walking-distance from the Schauspielhaus, known as the Konzerthaus Berlin today. I believe small details like these have contributed to the authenticity of my story. Overall, I am satisfied with what I’ve written; I have gained a deeper understanding of how war can shape an individual’s identity.
He wakes up to the rough scratch of metal against his face and the bitter breeze. The morning had arrived softly, grey and quiet, curiously still. Raindrops hit the truck in staccato creating a rhythmic cycle, stopping and starting as they please. Things go in their own way.

Blinking the sleep from his eyes, he stretches to release the knots in his shoulders as he hears the engine rumbling to a start. Slowly, steadily, the town recedes further and further into the distance until it reduces to a speck along the horizon, before dissipating into the early morning mist.

A spider plays hide and seek along the edge of the pick-up truck’s trunk. Everything passes by in a blur as the tyres stumble over potholes and uneven roads that lead to Somewhere. Around him, the trees wait for leaves to colour the empty palettes of their branches.

“Where are ya headin’ to?” The gruff voice behind the wheel rasps. Cigarette fumes contaminate the air.

He watches as the spider dangles dangerously on the edge and doesn’t stop as it reaches the boundary between metal and road – so it falls, falls over the edge and he bids it an unsaid farewell.

“Nowhere,” he replies, meeting the driver’s eyes through the rear view mirror.

“Nowhere. Can you do that?”

They pass sleeping towns, sleeping people and roads that lead to Somewheres. He shifts his position, leaning his back against the pick-up truck. He watches the road trail in reverse, and wonders which Nowhere he’ll end up in this time.
The cold ground has his body in knots again, the coarse concrete serving as a poor substitute for a pillow. Water comes down soft and grey, barely there, but it still comes down and his wet clothes feel heavy on his shoulders. The air about hung with a damp, earthy scent. An ongoing staccato of droplets dance on his head.

He doesn’t recall stopping at this discoloured little town, quiet and eerily still. Nameless. A Nowhere. He doesn’t recall – not that he cares. He fools himself as he watches the trail of ants nearby scuttling chaotically, trying to find shelter from the rain. He had learnt to let go, to detach himself from small things, names and faces. He calls it Living Independently. Lost between Somewhere and Nowhere at all.

Sometimes, though, as he sits on the asphalt beside the road waiting for a car or truck or anything really, he wonders how it would feel to be living bound to something. Bound to a job? He scoffs. Some life you’d be living. Bound to time? You’d spend all of it working out how many months, days, hours and seconds you have left until Death comes knocking at your doorstep. He fiddles with his watch, fiddles with time, just as a thought passes his mind.

Bound to someone else?
He doesn’t let himself get used to his surroundings, he never does. Familiarity lowers your guard, and vulnerability settles in. He’s stopped walking, finding himself in the middle of another Nowhere. No, this isn’t the Nowhere he’s looking for. He raises one hand, points his thumb to the sky while his other brushed back his dampened hair. Water continues to rain down.

In the distance, he spots an approaching speck of yellow. The low rumbling of the vehicle could be heard miles off (and he assumes it has had its better days) but curiously enough as the yellow truck arrives it appeared pristine and glossy, neither a single dent nor chip in paint. The lively yellow gleamed proudly and almost unfittingly against the grey of the surroundings. A sunflower sprouting in a wasteland.

“Hey! Want a ride?”

The voice startles him out of his thoughts; it’s bright, clear, like the familiar bell that rings above your head as you enter a coffee shop. This was a change from the gruff voices and stubbled chins he’s used to, and when he looks up to see a set of wide doe eyes peering back, his voice catches in his throat.

“Sorry?” He chokes out as he fights an internal battle; the woman’s eyes stared through him. Vulnerability was a feeling he hadn’t experienced in a long time. She chuckles.

“What I meant is, do you need a ride?” The corners of her mouth upturn slightly, eyes glinting with a hint of mocking glee.

He brought back his voice with a cough, and nods his head.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Where are you going?”

There was a pause, but he answers like always does.

“Nowhere. Can you do that?”

Perhaps it’s the knowing smile the woman replies with, or the sudden gust of wind that sent
a tingle down his spine but he hears his heart pound audibly against his ribcage and his breath is knocked out of him.

“Sure, climb in.”

Wordlessly, he makes his way to the open back of the truck, a practiced routine.

“What are you doing back there?” She flashes a grin as he shoots her a questioning look. She pats the empty seat next to her.

“Don’t you want to see the road go in the right direction?”

And as he settles into the front of the bright yellow truck, for the first time in a long time, he feels as though he is going Somewhere.

-------------

Observing the woman, (her name is Nelly, he learns), he hasn’t quite made up his mind what sort of person she is. She gently hums along to the soft classical music from the radio, eyes concentrating on the road ahead. And just as he thinks she’s about to fall asleep, her eyes widen and she cracks some lame, irrelevant joke.

“Say, why was six afraid of seven?”

“Why?”

“It wasn’t. Numbers are not sentient and thus incapable of feeling emotions, including fear!”

Her face spreads into a wide grin as she giggle-snorts so hard it leaves her breathless, wheezing for air and she takes one hand off the wheel to wipe a tear from her eye. He stares back blankly.

-------------

“We’re really headed nowhere, huh?” Nelly mumbles as she lulls into a slow yawn. Grey trees, grey rocks, grey everything blurring into one as the bright yellow truck makes its way down the road. The earlier rain had subsided into a gentle drizzle.
“To Nowhere,” he corrects her, “Nowhere with a capital N.”

Nelly scoffs, “You can’t say nowhere with a capital N. It wouldn’t be nowhere.”

His eyes meet hers, challenging her to go on. So she does.

“If you say you are nowhere with a capital N,” she continues, “you’d have specified it. And when you specify something, it stops being an illusion, and it becomes real.”

The pleasure of believing what we see is boundless, as we wish our souls to be.

The drive continues in silence. Later as the truck’s engine rumbles in discontent, and the drizzling rain dies away, he speaks up.

“Who said it was an illusion?”
The truck’s grumbling comes eventually to a complete halt, giving out, and Nelly breathes out a sigh of frustration. A smile tugs at the other’s lips, but is wiped the moment she turns to him.

She smiles back at him apologetically. “Would this Nowhere do for you?”

“Well,” he chuckles, “We don’t really have a choice, do we?”

The two of them lie side by side on the grass, arms folded behind heads under the same sky as they watch the winking stars. Blades of grass tickle his face as he turns to the bundle of laughs next to him. They sound like bells and yellow sunshine, and it’s hard to look away.

They talk of stars, of dreams, of everything in between and they lay there, for a fleeting eternity. And the night continues to go in its own way.

“What’s your story?” It was soft, barely there, but he hears it and he turns to the stars. He waits for her to continue.

“Your story. Tell me why you’re Lost, with a capital L.” “I don’t have one.” He hears a silent breath.

“You’ve got to have one. Everybody has one.”

She props herself on one elbow and stares at him. And for the first time, her features are in full view. He sees the universe in her eyes.

“Tell me about your Nowhere. Your Nowhere with a capital N.”

“It’s where it is. Nowhere.” He closes his eyes and gathers his thoughts.

“There are people who are afraid of nothingness.” Nelly nods for him to keep going, and
he feels her settle back down onto the grass beside him. “They are afraid of never-ending emptiness, emptiness that lasts eternity after eternity. They try to avoid it, keeping clear of the darkness, but I don’t think nothingness is bad.” He hears gentle rustling as she turns to face him, and he continues. “I want to see it, to prove people that they’re wrong.”

“So why don’t you just kill yourself?” Her voice was barely above a whisper.

He pauses – he’d be lying if he said it never crossed his mind. Of course it has. But if he did, who would he have to prove wrong?

So he doesn’t respond.

“You are really Something,” she breathes. “Something with a capital S.”

And it’s funny, he feels, that for the first time in a long time, he finds his home by his side.

------------

He wakes up under the same sky, to the earthy smell of morning drizzle and the bitter breeze and emptiness.

Emptiness resonates the most.

He tries to untie the knots in his body, but it’s hard when wet clothes are always so heavy. His eyes heavy from sleep, and his hair heavy, plastered to his forehead. But what is heaviest is waking up alone; waking up to no one, emptiness, nothingness. He finds it hard standing up with the heaviness bound to his heart.

The concrete road is a darker shade of black, perhaps from the rain, perhaps from the tears. He isn’t sure – his mind is a mess, a mess of stars and dreams and the colour yellow, a mess of everything so he shuts his eyes. And all he can see is the emptiness that goes on for eternity after eternity, no colours, no stars, no universe.

He found his Nowhere.

And at last he understands why people are so afraid of it. He’s still a mess, but he’s heading Somewhere now. The quietness of the morning was grey and curiously still. The staccato of raindrops fall in their rhythmic cycle, stopping and
starting as they please. And things continue to go in their own way.
Some people are like powdered chocolate. They appear soft and kind at first; bursting with promises of sweetness. But as you add hot water, they turn dark and bitter – you regret putting in so much of them in the first place.

Some people are like flower buds before bloom. They appear reserved and quiet, perhaps a little afraid of the world too. But as they bloom, their colours are capable of painting a million canvases.

Nelly wasn’t quite sure how she’d fit between the two, but she knew for a fact that her big brother certainly, positively fit into the latter.

She saw the world in hues and shades. Sadness is grey and bitter, like the chill down your spine on winter nights. Happiness is warm and yellow, like coming home to your family. Her father, a sepia brown, strict but loving and reliable. And her brother, definitely a bright yellow – her favourite colour. He was soft, warm and everything she adored and looked up to.

And during their weekly countryside trips to see the stars, he’d taught her all the constellations he knew. (But only a few stuck.)

“I’ll be your Big Dipper,” he grins as he ruffles his younger sister’s hair. “And you can be my Little Dipper, and father can be our Mother Bear Ursula.” He pauses, and gently wipes her nose. “So don’t cry anymore, alright? We’ll always be here for you.” Nelly’s tear-stricken cheeks glow under the moon and she blinks back childishly.

“---------

“That one there,” Nelly lifts a long, pale finger against the star-filled sky, “That one is the most well-known constellation, Orion the hunter. It’s the easiest to spot.”

The stranger hums in response.

“And there’s also Canis Major, Gemeni – oh look over there! My favourite constellation,” she points with childish glee, “Ursula Major.”
He lets out a small chuckle, and Nelly elbows him disapprovingly.

“In Roman mythology,” she starts matter-of-factly, “Ursula Major was once a beautiful young woman named Callisto who had been turned into a bear and placed into the sky.”

“How’d you know so much?” He silently shifts closer and she rests her head on his shoulder. She doesn’t answer, but instead closes her eyes and feels his presence; it was warm and gentle, like the yellow of the sun after a heavy downpour.

------------

Afterwards, she would remember the warmth in her chest. She would remember his quiet smile, his kind radiance, the softest loving touch, and the most vibrant yellow imaginable that comes to her mind.

And at his funeral, the rain had poured its heart out. The death shook her, and left her lost in a dull and discoloured world. A cold sting of betrayal filled her with a dark, bitter taste, sorrow had set her eyes to grey – but things continued in their own way.

------------

She travels from one Somewhere to the next, under the same sky. The drizzling of rain subsides – temporary, she predicts. The pick-up whizzes past a familiar lone figure, thumb toward the sky and she wavers for a clear second.

She doesn’t stop.
Reflection Statement

The purpose of the short stories I’ve composed is to communicate and convey the complex relationships between humans, the sense of attachment and detachment. The two short stories explored the concept of being lost, sometimes by choice, and the idea of heading towards a Somewhere and a Nowhere. Somewhere represents a place you want to be, perhaps a goal or somewhere you would want eventually to arrive at. It can also give a feeling of belonging or being bound to someone, something, or a place. Nowhere, however, represents a sense of freedom but also loneliness, and a feeling of detachment and emptiness, a place where nothing and no one else is. The burden of forming personal connections and relationships is also explored through the stories, as the bonds between Nelly, her brother, and the stranger are broken, and displays the consequences involved with each. Research on the names and locations of constellations were carried out before the writing of the stories to strengthen the legitimacy and authenticity of the plot. The stories are aimed at an older audience, who’d have a more complex understanding of the characters and the themes throughout the text.

Structural, stylistic and linguistic techniques from *The Lost Dog* and *Slumdog Millionaire* have been included and are reflected in the two stories. There are a number of time skips throughout the plot, which is a present structural technique in both texts. These time skips allowed the plot to develop without over describing every event that occurs in between, and provides a better sense of narrative. Both the hitch hiking stranger and Nelly’s older brother are unnamed much like Tom’s dog in *The Lost Dog*, as I felt that it was unnecessary, and would otherwise diminish the mystery and anonymity surrounding the stranger. The symbolism of the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper paralleled Jamal, Latika and Salim’s roles of the Three Musketeers in *Slumdog Millionaire*, which strengthened relationships between each character and heightened the plot. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, Latika’s representation as the colour yellow throughout the film also echoed in the short stories as the colour of happiness and warmth, which was the colour of Nelly’s truck, and reminded her of her brother. Rainy weather is used throughout the texts as pathetic fallacy, reflecting the overall mood of the stories – this was also subtly foreshadowed as the spider in the beginning falls to its death, and as the superstition goes: kill a spider and it will rain. The repetition of certain phrases put emphasis and highlights the recurring cycle that the stranger is trapped
in as he searches for Nowhere. By using the quote from *The Lost Dog*, “The pleasure of believing what we see is boundless, as we wish our souls to be,” the stranger’s belief in a Nowhere is conveyed – he saw it as freedom, and in his heart he truly believed there is a Nowhere to be found.
THE REVELATION

By Shilan Ye

The first discovery was a single word. It was dropped from the outside world into the four walls surrounding their lives.

Her father received it alone, and that evening, he sat on the couch beside her, staring absently as the world news blared from the television. He was thinking of how irrelevant and meaningless everything had become.

Lily suspected nothing until she heard her mother’s muffled sobbing through the walls, and felt the house tremble too. Perhaps they had had another argument. She hated how thin the walls were, and she put her earphones in and began playing music.

Within a week, her father began ‘working from home’, explaining he had been promoted. But she found crumpled bloodied tissues in the bin, and more in a plastic bag hanging from his sock draw. Her father passed off the nosebleeds as exhaustion, but after raiding her parents’ bedside tables and finding the doctor’s notes, there were no more ‘it could just be’s’ to hide behind. The word ‘cancer’ had been buried in meaningless medical jargon, as if even the doctors did not want her to find out.

Lily’s world suddenly expanded- the four walls of her home were permeated by ceaseless phone calls from the hospital and relatives.

Inside the four walls, things were muffled. Lily’s mother had waited two years before telling her her grandfather had passed away, and that her holiday to Shanghai was for the funeral preparations. As Lily grew older, the tendency of her parents to withhold such information, and their emotional ineptitude, became more apparent. She wondered how long her parents would clutch onto the hope that in keeping her ignorant this time, they would somehow smooth over the irrevocable change that was occurring.

Over the next few weeks they traipsed through the wake of the diagnosis, each finding their own path. It was as if everyone had become a criminal, skulking around their home.

The night before the operation, their paths crossed over. Lily hugged her father tightly as they sat down for dinner. It was something she had grown out of in primary school- they
were both awkward at showing physical affection. He was so thin, she could easily wrap my arms around his waist. It did not occur to her that that would be the last time in months that she could hug him again: the L-shaped incision slashed his abdominal muscles, and the scar would be too sore to touch.

Her father held her gently, still refusing to say the word. She knew it had devastated his pride to acknowledge his own vulnerability.

“Be good to your mother. These few days will be hard for her, ok?”

Lily nodded, but knew he was thinking far further ahead, of the uncertain eternity which loomed closer. She did not speak but chewed the salmon fiercely, fearing the slick lump solidifying in her throat would burst.

“I will do everything I can for your sake, to live for two more years.”

It was the raw sincerity and love behind his abrupt statement that hurt the most. She was angry that he had considered death as a possibility, and at that moment, she could not bear to be in the same room as him.

Lily ran and locked herself in the bathroom, and a childish desire hoped someone would find her there. She craved the indulgence of crying. Lily was not brave like her mother, who had begun the paperwork to sell their family business.

She felt distinctly like an actress, opening the tap melodramatically and standing over the sink. Her reflection, that wretched image, was unrecognisable and almost laughable. Her eyes were red already, and she was gasping like a fish.

Cry, she willed herself.

But although the scene was set, the tears remained stubbornly inside her. No matter how many terrifying thoughts her mind conjured, she could not cry, and she wondered if she was even human.

She imagined herself fatherless. She imagined the end of Sunday morning sudoku competitions and evening strolls around their local primary school. She imagined the girl two grades below her, whose mother was battling breast cancer, and who was always running marathons to support charities, and who all the teachers and students took pity on and admired. Oh that poor girl, they would say, but so brave: the cancer was glorified. She imagined telling her friends her father had cancer, feeling the word tremble on her tongue, feeling all the sharp edges slice her tongue sweetly. Surely they would wrap her generously in empty words of comfort.

I am so messed up, she shuddered. Suddenly she heard knocking on the door.

“Lily, come out!”
She held her breath, waiting until her father’s footsteps receded.

“The dinner is getting cold!”

I hate you, Daddy.

Never again would she make such a devastating discovery. She wondered for a moment if impassivity was genetic, and took a towel, buried her face in it, and rubbed her skin until it stung. Still, it could not erase the shame and disgust she felt.

The next few months played out in fast forward. She watched, ecstatic but wary, as her father came home after a successful operation. She watched as he gained weight again, the stitches were removed, the scar began to heal over, and friends gradually stopped asking, ‘How is your Dad?’

But still she remained acutely aware of the irreversible discovery she had made. It had been a test of courage, of the simplest human compassion and morality, and Lily had failed. She began to see signs of her own inadequacy everywhere, and as her father returned to full health, she realised slowly she could only be thankful, and bury and hide the revelation.
In September this year, we celebrated Literacy Week. One of the activities was a ‘Flash Fiction’ competition.

Students who entered were given a location, an object and a genre and had 7 days to write a 1000 word short story using these three prompts.

The location was a hospital. The object was a kaleidoscope. The students could choose from science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, thriller or drama.

Junior Winner: Maggie Knight (Year 7)
Junior Runner-up: Jessica Brown (Year 7)
Senior Winner: Coco Huang (Year 11)
Senior Runner-up: Janice Chu (Year 11)
Rules were not made to be broken in this city. They were made to confine us, scare us, break us. The rule they made two months ago changed everything. An eye for an eye. That is all. But they have modified it to apply to just one thing: Lives. You save somebody’s life, and you can take another.

My name is Doctor Annora Hugo. I am a professional brain surgeon, doctor, and I was formerly in the defence force. I have saved more lives than there are pages in a book. And suddenly, I have become the most feared person in the country.

As I stepped out of my apartment, I could feel the Earth’s breath hitch. Walking down the streets, there was a small bubble around me, blocking out the people, the noise, the voices. And I walked in this bubble everywhere I went.

Upon arrival to the hospital, I made my way to my office. Flicking the light switch, a cold shiver ran through my fingers and spots swam across my vision as bright light blasted through the room. Thoughts continued paving roads through my mind as my eyes fluttered around my papers, taking in about as much information as I had friends. My colleagues were reluctant to let me perform any operations for the fear of me saving that person would mean that they had a greater chance of being killed.

But everybody was wrong. Yes, I have saved lives. I have saved hundreds. Both in and out of the operation theatre. But I did not start saving people’s lives because I wanted to be able to kill them in the end. I did not put my own life at risk in West Africa, treating children with Ebola when I knew very well that I would probably get it too, just so I would legally be allowed to kill. I did not go to the Middle East with a gun in my hand, knowing that there was a good chance that I would die just so that I could kill the people back home. I did not save all those people’s lives just so I could take another; I saved them because I knew that any human would do the same for me.

Even through all this, people seem to ignore the other part of the Eye For An Eye law. They forget that if you have not killed your amount saved lives within fifteen years, then the government will kill you.

I saved my first life on my twentieth birthday. It was when I was doing fitness training at my local pool. I was doing laps when I noticed the body in the water. I got it out of the pool. I stopped them from drowning; I saved their life. And through all the chaos, I did not hesitate giving my name as the one who saved him. I was oblivious to the fact that this was the start of the Eye For An Eye population control program. I did not know that in fourteen years, eleven months and thirty days later, I would be fearing my life.

Today is the thirtieth of September. The day before my thirty-fifth birthday. Today, I could murder two hundred and eighteen people.
Or tomorrow, I will be murdered myself.

In my office, I sat there, slowly turning a small kaleidoscope in my hands. How could such a small thing could have such colour and brightness in such a dark world I did not know.

The walls of my mind began caving in, crushing my thoughts. There was no way that I would sacrifice so many people’s lives just to save my own, never, but it did not stop the nerves that came with apprehended death. Snapshots of my life flashed through my head like a photo album being thrown in the air; pictures were flying everywhere, in a terrible jumble of war, desert, surgery, children, and dead bodies. I remembered when I had friends, family; I remembered all those happy, precious moments and how all thanks to the horrid, horrid government, everything had been torn away from me. Everything. I watched my knuckles growing white as I gripped the table, and the rattling breaths escaping my lungs almost blocked out everything else. I did not hear the footsteps approaching my office; the creaking of the door; the sound of my name being called multiple times.

“Doctor Hugo!”

I glanced up and pulled myself from my shattered state. “Y-yes?”

I knew by the look in the President’s eyes before her words even came out. But they reinforced it anyway.

“How many have you killed?”

I gulped, and steadied my breathing as the next sentence leapt from my mouth.

“Nobody. And I never will. So go ahead, you witch, and kill me. Because I don’t care. You’re not sick -”

I paused as the president’s pathetic face dropped.

“You’re not sick, you’re twisted. Sick makes it sound like there’s a cure, and there is none for everything you’ve done. But I don’t care. Stuff your stupid government, stuff you and everybody else who ever doubted me, because I am a good person and I am proud and you will never be anything but evil. So go ahead. Kill me. I don’t care; I don’t care because I know that I am neither the first nor the last person that you’ll kill. So do it now, before I do the same to you.”

“Okay,” she said, and smirked as she pulled a pistol from her belt. A man who had been standing next to her during my rant grabbed my head and shoved me to the ground, where I stayed kneeling in front of the woman. “You were right. You are not my first kill. But I just hope you know…” she said, smirking. I glared at her as she put the end of the gun to my forehead.

“I just hope you know that I could have been yours.”
REMEMBER

By Jessica Brown

I perch at the table, the hour's getting later...

With a puerile fear I would climb into bed at night. I would lay suspended in the vacillating bouts of fear that shuddered forth slowly every time I heard it. Every time I grit my teeth and clamped my palms onto my ears. Every time I wanted to say stop, but couldn’t. I heard it, the beating, the blood, the cries, the words, the hands of my father, my little brother’s empty bed, my mother silent and cowardly in her own bed. And my own heart pounding, cowardly too. I remember that.

He was supposed to be here. He surely would have called...

My father was transmuted into a beast with each flare of redoubtable anger - it launched itself with claws outstretched. The anger was him, consumed him, it was incessant and broke the facade of love that my mother had once married. Perhaps my mother’s own fear and love, in an intertwining confusion, vindicated his actions in her mind. Perhaps his irascible attitude and devastation made her accede to his abuse. It broke the husk of my heart, which fell to reveal a vast expanse of nothingness. I remember that.

I wait a little longer, there's no one in the driveway...

I remember my mother's kaleidoscope. My mother was a kaleidoscope - of fragrances, of emotions, of time. I remember her.

Suddenly the phone rings, a voice says something's happened, that I should come right now...

I remember my brother, his vibrancy. He was a walking sun - infectious happiness and kindness. I remember him.

I pull up to the entrance, walk right to the front desk. They lead me down a million halls, a maze that's never-ending...

I remember a girl who loved me forever and always. She held my hand too tight and told me she wanted me through the good, the bad and the ugly. I remember her too.

They talk about what happened, but I can barely hear them - I try to keep a straight face as I run up to his bedside...
"Caleb, it's me," I look at her tears. It's like forgetting the words to your favourite song. I can't believe it. The words were so sweet. I'm disoriented again. I'm forgetting, the memories slipping beyond reach.

Does he remember me? I collapse on the floor, bury my head into his hand...

"Millie, what's wrong?"
"Do you know why you're here? In hospital?"
"I can't remember,"
"It's called anterograde amnesia,"
"What's that?"
"It's an inability to form new memories," her eyes are desperate. They remind me of night, and a memory comes to me. We were together, alone, and it was late. We talked about all kinds of things, like we normally did. We fitted together so well, it was so easy to talk from the heart. But I was crying. I was crying on her. She had her arm around me, comforting me, the way her selfless self was inclined. I was bleeding on her. Why was I bleeding?

He doesn’t remember why he was bleeding. He doesn’t remember the reason behind his own hurt. He doesn’t remember how, late at night, he’d sit and cry and give in to that evil fiend of silver. He doesn’t remember...

“When you cried, I’d wipe away all of your tears. When you’d scream, I’d fight away all of your fears. I’ve held your hand through all of these years…” Millie is really wounded. I don’t understand what’s going on. Why am I here again? It feels familiar, but I can’t quite grasp the words as she tells me again.

It's like talking to someone who's intoxicated. He'll ask me every few minutes why he's here. He's been fragmented, reduced to shaky white chalk outlines...

She holds my hand too tight and talks too fast; her words are just a blur, hazy and never-ending. Someone’s twisted the kaleidoscope behind both of my eyes and made everything permanently foggy. I don't quite understand what's going on.

I buzz for a nurse because I have to ask what triggered this. She tells me...

She’s not who I remember. I remember a girl who smiled forever and always. Who laughed forever and always. She was forever and always happy.
And she was my, Caleb Swanson’s, forever and always.
What happened?

They found him, rescued him from the car he had wired to cause his own demise...

Her name is Millie.
She’s my best friend.
Her favourite colour is soft red, like deoxygenated blood.
She loves contemporary dance but hates jazz.
Her favourite book is The City by Dean Koontz.
Her favourite person is me, me, me.
I make a list of everything I can remember about her.

The carbon monoxide damaged his brain. He can remember events before the attempt but not after, they explain...

She looks shocked.
She looks tired.
She looks saddened.
She doesn’t look the way I remember her – but then again it’s hard to remember her exactly.
Was she always this stressed, this upset?
I make a list of everything I can about her now.

It’s time to go but I can’t pull myself away - I need to stay here and remind myself why I love him forever and always.
Otherwise it might just be forever and not always. Or never.

I stand.

She says goodbye like it’s the last time.

I walk away, out of his room, out of the hospital, out of his life, even, maybe. I need to be alone – my inner demon cries out for attention.

Maybe it won’t be forever and always.

I know something’s just happened, but I can’t remember what. I ask a nurse and she says that it’s normal for someone with my condition to forget when I have visitors.
I have to ask her what my condition is and she is patient as she quells my unbridled anxiety.

Anterograde amnesia. I don't remember that.
“I can’t. I can’t.”

He choked childishly on those words. They made his knees weaken, made little water bubbles cloud his vision. He heard Libby sigh softly in exasperation, inching easily across the wooden plank she’d begged from old Mr Pete. It creaked under the weight of her young, lithe body, but she didn’t notice and stretched out her hand.

Her luminous, curious eyes warmed him from the inside. “Come on, Timmy. Yes, you can.” Her face was freckled from the sunlight that bathed them in its soft glow. He wished he was as high-spirited and daring as she was, possessed with the light-heartedness of childhood, yet he couldn’t even place a foot on the thin beam that rested on either sides of the stream. It wasn’t the gurgling water that scared him, nor the dizzying height. It was the rocks that hid under the surface; they could instantly scrape the flesh from his bones. But how could he refuse his sister’s lightly-browned hand?

Ever so carefully, he placed his feet onto the plank. It was barely the width of his shoes. He forced himself not to look down, holding on to a modicum of courage. Libby was at the dead centre of the plank. He shuffled towards her without lifting his feet. He reached out, focusing only on closing the distance between their hands, and when they finally touched, his heart tumbled in elation. He had done it! Libby smiled and cheered and gripped his hand and in the midst of that bright moment, uneasiness slid in. Libby noticed it too, but before she could speak, the wood beneath their feet gave a startling crack and he watched as she flailed and toppled downwards, falling where she believed she would never fall.

Moments later, he followed.

***

He came to consciousness, and knew his mother was there by the way she traced the thin, faded scar on his arm from an old game. Her fingers were light, but coated with a layer of residual powder. He couldn’t imagine how long she spent hiding the markings she never refused. He wondered where he was. The air was heavier, as though it was shared, and his body was immovable, caught in a web of plastic. His eyelids were weighed shut, but his thoughts roamed freely and navigated the room.

“I’m sorry,” he heard a thin voice say. “This should have never happened. He never meant it. Please don’t blame him, after all he’s been through.”

His mind swirled in confusion. What had happened? He searched fruitlessly, trying to link together the kaleidoscope of memories in his mind. He recalled the sensation of falling;
painless, just like it had been when he was younger. When Libby was around. He tried not to think of her, but the old wound was still raw.

“I need to tell you the truth,” the voice continued, breaking into little breaths. “I don’t know if you can hear me, but you need to know. About your father.”

Dad, he thought mutely. He had no recollection of his father’s face, only a blurred mass. A few flashes illuminated his thoughts; using his empty bottles as bowling pins, hiding in the closet that didn’t obscure their heated voices, watching as dark blue patches mottled Libby’s face after she stood between them. Libby. Gone. As though the light in her eyes had been pinched out as easily as a candle’s. It was such a common occurrence that the proffered sympathy was polite and cold. One moment she was there, the next she wasn’t.

“Your father had a sister too. I don’t know if you remember Auntie May; you were very young when she died.”

That surprised him. He had always thought his father was an only child.

“You and Libby were feverish with measles when Dad heard she was very sick. Typhoid or something. He wanted to see her, but she lived eight hours away from our farm. I didn’t want him to go; I couldn’t care for you two alone. So I yelled at him, told him he was selfish and a terrible parent. But I was the selfish one. And he got so angry at me. That was the first time that he . . .” She trailed off, knowing he understood exactly what she meant. He’d turned a blind eye, pretending to be absorbed in the newspaper or counting the number of peas on his plate. It had happened for so long that he’d forgotten when it began, let alone why.

“And then . . . yesterday . . .” He sensed his mother’s trembling. “Why did you have to act like Libby?”

Her name triggered an explosion of scenes. His mother, unconscious. His father, slamming into her. The broken skin of his knuckles. His father’s face, stubbly and sharp, bent from an unexpected blow. Then reverberating pain and emptiness beneath his feet. The stairs, he realised. That would explain the faint throbbing at the back of his head. He heard his mother’s voice again, pulling him back into the room.

“. . . But it was my fault she died. In this very room.”

His heart stopped. What did she mean?

“Everything was my fault, even you,” the voice cried. “I deserve what your father does to me. And if you hate me after this, I’ll deserve it. I was here with Libby after the accident. She was barely clinging on to life, you know that’s her nature, but she was in so much pain. So I ended it.”

Disbelief overwhelmed him.
“I loved her too much to see her suffer. So I let her go.”

He was suddenly enraged, violent. He wanted to break through his stupor, tear off the tubing on his chest and strangle his own mother with it. He despised what she had done; she’d denied him the only happiness he’d lived for. What little he had left was worthless, and so he made a decision.

He wouldn’t come back.
TRANSFER
By Janice Chu

In the far-off distance, a tremulous child’s voice:

“Ma! I-I’ve decided! When I grow up, I wanna help people save their lives!”

In the far-off distance, a woman’s warm laugh, the purr of a running car engine—

CRASH

Everything shimmers with a rainbow luminescence, and then goes black.

What was it they used to say? In the beginning, there was darkness, an endless nothingness I floated through, mind blank to the poignant tang of red, the bitter taste in my mouth. And then—

Suddenly I was here, jolting awake from a quickly forgotten void, squinting at the unbearably bright light illuminating this forsaken cell of a room. And what a cell it was! A sterile, white, four-walled cuboid, a dusty wooden table beside a skeletal bed and cheap plastic chair upon which I was perched adorning this lonely hideaway. If it weren’t for the looming, superimposed pillar in clear view of this room’s only window proclaiming Mercy Hospital, I could have sworn that this truly were a room cell, some certain kind of punishment for…what? I couldn’t recall.

How did I get here?

I glanced to my right: The table squats there, petrified and still.

I glanced to my left: A blank white wall a couple of steps forward, revealing nothing, betraying nothing.

I cast my eyes forward: The still corpse of a slumbering child, thin ebony strands of hair dusting her pale cheeks, a cold chill emanating from her clearly troubled, evidently slack face.

“H-hello…?” I ventured, a tentative hand reaching over to wave over her face. Nothing, not even a warm breath. “Are...you okay?”

“No.” My hand drew back, before my very eyes assured me that no, that can’t possibly have been her speaking. It wasn’t even from the right direction—

Sharp hawk-golden eyes met blue as this unexpected newcomer effortlessly broke my chair’s fall as I stood and pivoted around, reaching with a single downy arm without once
breaking eye contact.
I kid you not, if there were ever a time to gape, this was it. Like a goldfish? Pshaw, not that weak. No. Look at that head! Not human, by far, but what seemed like a superimposed hawk’s head nestled on humanoid shoulders covered by soft down. In this situation, there’s only one way you can gape, and that’s in the bamboozled recoil of an alligator taken by surprise, no doubt.

“I—I—who are you?!”

“Miss Rosa Maryam’s doctor,” they replied stiffly, indicating towards the resting girl. Then, withdrawing from their pocket a small black cylinder to offer to me, they continued, “and now, pressed for time as we are, I would very much appreciate it if we could hasten with this lesson? You will need this kaleidoscope.”

I stared at the item resting in their palm, turned my eyes upwards to study their still, feather-speckled face, shifted my gaze to Rosa’s motionless form.

“I…don’t quite understand…?”

“Excuse me?”

My eyes snapped back on the doctor’s, and I asked plaintively, “What am I doing here?”

“You aren’t aware?” the doctor asks, squinting at me curiously, “Unusual. It says in the records that you’re due here in order to complete your course with this final lesson.” They pause, flat eyes glancing down at their watch, and nods affirmatively, continuing, “Miss Maryam does not have much time left, and considering your lateness, I’m afraid we shall have to sacrifice the pacing. Please, accept the kaleidoscope so we may begin. I will explain as we conduct this lesson.”

Needless to say, I think I can speak for everyone here when I say that I was completely and utterly underwhelmed by confusion.

Nevertheless, I reached for—no? The doctor shook their head, and I instead held my hand out for the cylinder for them to drop in my palm, and weighed up the slick black metal. Something shifted inside, like tiny marbles clacking against one another as gravity’s love-song drew them downwards. The doctor nodded, and gestured for me to retake my seat. I obliged, as the doctor retreated once again, behind me. A flip, flip, flap of pages rustling and a calm “ah,” caught my attention briefly, but a firm hand holding my head forward insisted on my forward-facing attention.

“Now,” the doctor explained solemnly, “The final stage of the Transferral is a simple one, often marked with a single item much treasured by the patient. In this case, the optical instrument you hold here in your hands. This is, while indicating otherwise, not a particularly complex procedure, but one of the more specialised branches of medical magic known in this world.” I blinked, and tried to straighten up, but still that firm hand refused to
let me budge. *Wait, what?*—“Yet, without the corresponding subject, a Transferral will not be possible. This, dear child, is the secret to this technique: When a patient is almost completely empty, through the use of binding magics and the grounding possession, we are able to literally transfer a subject’s soul into the patient’s near-empty husk, and thus, essentially, bring them back to life.”—*Is it too late to back out of it?*—“Fortunately or not, once begun, not one subject has, up to this date, managed to deter themselves from completing the ritual, once it is begun. But that is fine, for a bodiless soul—surely you realised?—has no purpose to be fulfilled but this. Now, you must direct your gaze through the kaleidoscope and witness the patient with your very own eyes. Do so now.”

The doctor’s hand tapped my forehead twice, and, almost certainly not by my own volition, I put the kaleidoscope to my eyes to witness—

A flourishing, shimmering array of colours, ever-changing, ever-shifting. An external force tilted my head back, and amidst the shining silvers and golds and reds and blues, I could see her—

“All your participation in this course, of course, is acknowledged, and will serve you well in your life afterwards. Thank you, child, for in your loss, we will find gain. I hope we see you again soon.”

The colours sparkle once more brightly, and then there is only black.
An original publication of student work
by the English Faculty
Hornsby Girls’ High School

2016