

INTERROBANG

JAMES HARGEST COLLEGE 2022



CREATIVE ARTS AND WRITING MAGAZINE

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to 2022's edition of *Interrobang*. This is the 12th edition of James Hargest's Creative writing magazine, and (in our very biased opinion) the best to date. The sheer volume of talent across all year levels has been astounding. Selecting 40 pages for the magazine was no easy task. We thoroughly enjoyed every submission, and want to thank everyone who sent us some of their work for consideration. It can be scary to put your art out there, but this is what *Interrobang* is all about. A celebration of art, creativity, and all the talent our school has to offer. Whatever your chosen field, we encourage you to never stop creating. There is equal value in both the creative process and final product of art.

With that being said, we'd like to congratulate those whose submissions were chosen. Each artist should take pride in this achievement, and every reader should feel immensely privileged to be able to view their work.

In the 2022 version of *Interrobang*, you will find everything from poetry and photography, to scary stories and powerful paintings. You'll be delighted by clever pieces about the family pet and moved by insightful commentary on teenage identity.

The editing team hopes that even just a few of you will be inspired to create something yourself. We hope that something just might make it to the pages of the next *Interrobang* or land further afield, because, as our students keep proving, you never know where art will take you.

Mā te wā,
Charlotte and Alice, *Interrobang* editors

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A GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE

BY CHARLOTTE DASSEN

The door slams shut, locking me outside.

The worried and bumbling voices are cut away instantly, leaving trees that reach up into the clouds and birds that tweet as sweetly as they would in a fairytale. I dart forward, onto the grass, whose dew is so unruly it is an ocean to wade through and explore.

The little sheep, who slowly appeared at the same time as the pretty flowers a while ago, are already playing a silly game of tag. They make goofy youthful noises, like if feet shuffling on carpet was vocalised -- and sometimes, they'll leave long, white snakes lying on the grass for me to snatch away and play with.

It is a fragrant and sweet air, and wonderful to be in. The creaky swing seat tucked away at the back of the garden is where I go. After bashing away the spiders, I settle in the middle. Today, the seat has a groaning, rocking-chair sway to the tune of the birds that almost lulls me to a gentle slumber.

Almost.

Instead, I hear a scamper. A scurry. A swish in the grass. My eyes narrow, darting from place to place. There! In the grass, a small mouse chitters away without a care in the world. The trees and swingset become the background of a battlefield, where my heartbeat pounds like it's frantically trying to escape my chest. My hind legs raise. My head lowers – and I'm off!

The sprint was a sloppy dance in watery muck as we sprint through the garden. If the creatures near the fence were rocketships, we move as fast as light itself, weaving between bushes, up and down and around different surfaces. I leap through the long grass. Eventually, the critter cowers behind a thick rosebush, tearfully squeaking for its life.

I lurk like a guard outside a castle. Connected in a western standoff, the only move left for the cornered, skimpish critter is a wild scamper. Those bigger, snake-leaving creatures cannot have as much fun playing chase as I am with the mouse.

The second it moves, I'm already there swiping, grabbing and pulling until the trophy is carved and I declare myself the champion of the world! Then, while parading the wild grass streets and looking for somewhere to snooze, I notice something.

An open window.

Taking my opportunity in a whirlwind of momentum and swiftness, I jump through

the small hatch with the mouse in my mouth, straight into a comfortable and light-feeling bedroom.

However, just before I can get settled on the duvet, the shouting perks up and big, encompassing hands pick me up effortlessly. No matter how much I protest or wriggle, I end up in the exact same spot as before.

Thrown outside, the door slams in my face. I turn back to the delightful, sweet air and the dew-drenched grass. Without a mouse to show for my efforts, nor a well-deserved nap ... even the creatures playing chase are having more fun.

The critter is soon dumped outside too.

It seems some people can't appreciate a gift when they receive one.



BY ANNABELLE ATKINS

REFLECTION

BY RUBY HICKEY

This piece won first place in the Dan Davin writing competition.

The lift comes to a sudden halt and the lights flicker out. My finger, still hovering over the tenth circular button, begins to tremble. The glow of a pixellated red seven above the lift doors allows me to see the shadowed faces around me, all so official, so tense, so intimidating. Lawyers. They let out a unanimous groan. The shuffle of papers, leather and fabric fills the air as the tense men ruffle through their briefcases in search of their phones. Several profanity-filled calls later and the intercom crackles on, "Do not panic folks, help is on the way, please remain cal—" the buzz of the intercom cuts out with a piercing screech. Well, I guess we wait.

I slide down the wall and curl my legs up to my chest. Staring at the dated linoleum floor, I try to block out the harsh lights created by cellphone torches. Whoever suggested putting a courthouse in a high-rise building is my number one enemy right now. My mind starts wandering and I picture my destination, floor ten. A floor where I spent so many months recounting stories and reopening scars, whilst staring into the eyes of the two people who broke me. The floor on which a single decision has the power to turn me into just another statistic. A floor where I could mend the wide-open gash of a broken childhood with the word "guilty" acting as a sticky plaster. But first, I've got to get out of this damn lift.

Just as I stand up, I hear a soft cry. My eyes dart around, and that's when I see her. Through the crowd of polished shoes and black suits, I spot a small girl no older than three. A slight smile escapes my usual stone-cold expression as my eyes lock on the girl in the corner. In her arms, she clutches a tattered pink blanket. Her short blonde pigtails tied with coloured elastic bands, mismatched stained pyjamas and bare feet, feel oddly familiar with my own childhood.

I gaze up beside her at a man wearing a fancy black suit and a Mickey Mouse printed tie. He's the type of man I recognise all too well. The type of man who had taken me out of class, so we could have a friendly chat about the bruises that covered every inch of my tiny malnourished body. I try to convince myself the man is her father and not one of the welfare workers I have so much experience with. But, I guess it's true; it takes one to know one. By looking at this familiar sight, I know that nameless little girl better than anyone.

The lift jerks. The men fall silent. My focus returns to the teary-eyed toddler and instinct takes over. I rush past the frozen shells of the men that were

standing here a few seconds prior and over to the little girl. Now crouched down in front of her, I whisper, "It's okay." She drops the blanket and wraps her tiny, frail arms around my neck. I'm fixated on the sound of her soft sniffles and accelerating heartbeat as the shakes become more and more forceful by the second. My eyes screw shut and everything else fades away.

A blinding light switches from eye to eye as I regain consciousness. One small click and the light disappears. Hesitantly, I open my eyes. A woman wearing a green uniform and holding a small silver torch lingers above me. She pulls out some type of medical ID badge and begins her scripted "I'm here to help" speech. Disregarding her, I survey the surrounding room. By the number of lunch breaks I've spent wandering around this building, it doesn't take me long to realise I'm lying on the hard marble tile of floor seven's hallway. Guess we made it out of the lift. We. Every ounce of air is sucked out of my lungs as the image of the little girl comes flooding back. "WHERE IS SHE?!" I yell.

A loud chuckle erupts from my left. I whip my head around to see the group of men from the lift gathered a few metres away. They look... amused? "Crazy woman," one mutters under his breath, "Should've seen her in there, literally talking to the walls," another says whilst nudging a second woman wearing a green uniform. Huh? Dizziness hits me like a truck as I rush up to my feet. I stumble over to the lift. Men in hard hats carrying tools stand nearby arguing. After shoving my way past them, I stare in disbelief at the empty elevator. No tattered pink blanket, no man with a Mickey Mouse tie, and no little girl.

Where could she have gone? My body goes into autopilot. I don't have the slightest clue where I am going, but that has no effect on my sprint down the crowded hallway. This is the type of action that would lead to a tearful therapist visit fuelled by embarrassment, but if the defence is right, and I'm delusional, nothing else matters. A small glimpse of someone in a window stops me in my tracks. I turn and stare into the old glass pane. The woman looking back at me resembles the little girl in every detail. Only older, with large under-eye bags and sandpaper-like skin. Bewildered, I press my head against the windowpane.

Any sense of reality has vanished by the time I notice a hasty click of heels from down the hallway getting louder and louder. "There you are!" I hear my lawyer call out in the distance. She struts over and comes to a standstill behind me. Her beige acrylic nails dig into my forearm as she tries to drag me down the hallway. Yet I stand with my feet frozen in place. I pull my forehead off the window and take one last look at the not so little girl staring back at me. I hope she's loved. I hope she's at peace. Above all, I hope she is happy. My lawyer sighs, "Quit looking at yourself, Stella. The jury's ready."

ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER TIME

BY CLAIRE PHILLIPSON

The horizon grows darker. The sky clouds over, the cart rocks sideways. The wind grows stronger, a growing chill creeps up his spine. His hands grip the sail, wood slipping beneath his palm. "Mama," the boy whispered. She continues to look ahead, ignoring him. She had been like this for most of the trip. He can see it in the distance, what he'd been looking for. His family's saviour, his new home. Waves lap onto the tracks, growing close to the cart. The boy stares out, allowing the soft lap of the waves to lull him into a fractured sleep.

His dreams appear like shards of broken glass falling from one into another, stabbing at his heart and haunting his mind. An image of his family falling into the deep black ocean is implanted in his mind. He wakes with a cry, so loud that the lone birds above cry back to him. He looked at his family, still and safe on the cart. Out of nowhere, he was filled with an immense amount of hopelessness. Could he find the strength to do this?

He thinks back, lost in his memories. What did his mother always say, 'In another place, another time.' Her hope and courage inspired his family's trip to safety. They needed to do this, he reminded himself. He thinks back to his home, before everything went wrong. The warm sun filled the kitchen with joy and ambition. One day that had all changed, the happiness turned into fear. A husk of his house was left behind. Cruel men had prowled the streets, destroying any happiness that dredged through the horror. He knew that their escape meant something. He had to carry on.

He snaps back to reality. "Mama," he cried. Why was she ignoring him? All of a sudden, the wind picked up, and the cart moved faster against the railways. He would get there. He felt so much excitement, he knew nothing bad would happen in his new home. Then, out of nowhere the wind stopped. The cart came to a skidding halt. He was thrown forward, crashing into the sail. He sat up with tears running down his face. His head was pounding. He looked at his family. They did nothing, they just continued to stare. He pushed the cart from behind, trying to get to his new haven. He was close. Soon the wind picked up. It was a powerful gust of wind that gave the cart the push it needed. He sat back down, watching the waves wash up against the rocks by the track.

He felt time pass as if it was in an hourglass. Soon he realised he was there because the beach was so close. His smile spread across his face. He was so close to screaming with the sheer joy of the achievement he felt. "Guys, we're here, we're here!" he screamed. He ran onto the beach, not waiting for his family. A thick fog set over the beach. He spun around. They were gone, his family was gone. He ran through the fog, trying to find the cool water that had soothed him to sleep for many nights. He ran faster when he was sure the water was just ahead of him. He pushed through the barrier of fog and came to see the cart on the edge of the track. A scream echoed through the large expanse of beach. They weren't there. They weren't on the cart.

He jumped on the cart, trying to find them. He saw his brother's bag riddled with holes and his parents' gear stuffed underneath the cart's sole seat. He looked up, and that's when he noticed a strange mist had settled over where his family had sat. The mist seemed to be sprinkled with a thick, black dusting of colour. He took a step back, as he stood back, he noticed that the mist was forming three shapes. Soon he was back on shore and that's when he saw it. Each shape the mist had made took the form of his family. His little brother was bouncing, unable to keep on his seat in the back. His father looked at him, eyes full of pride, holding the boy's gaze. At last, his mother looked at him, her smile getting wider.

He didn't know what was going on until he remembered. He remembered his dreams he had on the long journey. He looked up at the mist figures, "you're dead." His throat was full of tears. His mother's form opened her mouth. He winced at the disembodied sound it made. "In another place, another time," it seemed to whisper. That's what broke him. He curled up in a ball and cried. He cried until he felt his lungs constrict. He sat up sobbing. Looking up at the mist, he saw them smiling at him. He smiled back. His brother waved at him. He saw the bottom of the mist form fade, the tail of the mist being sucked up into the sky. One by one, they all disappeared, fading into the cloudy sky. Then they were gone.

He cried again, he cried, and he cried, and he cried. He cried until he couldn't cry any longer. He realised he needed to get to safety. That's what his family would have wanted. He knew he couldn't stay on the beach, as it was getting dark. He took a deep breath, and that's when he decided he was going to carry on and live his life, in this other place, this other time.

PHOTOGRAPHY

BY TIANA TURNBULL





OUT ON THE SHELF WINNER

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Cinderella; she was young, beautiful and gay. Her father was a soldier in the army and often left her with her spiteful, mean and homophobic stepmother and bigoted stepsisters. Her stepsisters avoided her at all costs, fearing she would hit on them or kiss them the second she had the chance. They would run from her and call it the lesbianella touch if they brushed shoulders.

One dreaded night, her father was away, and her stepmother marched into her room holding the telephone. Her stepmother's face was red and puffy, and Cinderella knew something had to be wrong. She held the phone out to Cinderella, her hand trembling, she took it, and as the bad news took over her body, she dropped the phone, and it fell to the floor in sorrow.

Time went on, and she began to heal; her household remained a battlefield for Cinderella and Cinderella had to keep a low profile and hide her true self. Grenades were being thrown from every person in her house. She could do no right. Every action resulted in a snide comment or a dive to get away from the lesbianella touch; all a display to showcase their disgust and bigotry. One night, her stepmother sat at the end of the table with her stepsisters sitting snug behind her avoiding Cinderella's end of the table. Her stepmother told her about the ball, which was full of wealthy aristocrats and dignitaries. She was to go to the ball and dance all night with the prince or a dignitary, with the plan that she would get married to him and finally bring honour to the family and get over 'this silly little phase'. Her mouth dropped as she realised the set-up. She was instructed to 'dress like a girl' for once, she was to wear an sparkly poofy pink ball dress and her face would be smothered with makeup, all things Cinderella felt opposed to at her core. She slid her food across the table; with the notion of something Cinderella touched, touching them, her stepsisters jumped. Cinderella stormed out of the room and slammed her bedroom door in horror.

After days of silent treatment (to the delight of the stepsisters) and falling asleep while sobbing in dismay, the night of the ball arrived. Cinderella was all dolled up in a puffy, lace, pink gown; her stepmother smothered her face in red lipstick, blush and contour until she was almost unrecognisable. She sat in her room staring at the mirror, she didn't recognise herself and she didn't like what she saw. She felt a shiver up her spine, and in the mirror's reflection, she saw a figure appear. A young woman with long blond hair and a neat white suit, holding a wand with a star on its end. She was an image of beauty.

Cinderella spun in her chair, her eyes twinkling in awe. The angelic being addressed herself as her fairy godmother. She said she had been observing poor Cinderella's grief for a while and was here to help with her terrible dilemma.

With a wave of her wand, Cinderella's face was cleared of the caked makeup, and she was changed into a tailored white suit that matched what her fairy godmother was wearing. Her fairy godmother held out the dress jacket her stepmother had laid out for her and said she must hide her change in the car ride over. Cinderella held this angelic woman's hand and asked if she would please accompany her to the ball. Her fairy godmother joyfully curled her mouth and whispered, I will meet you there.

Cinderella wandered downstairs with a secret excitement. She held her clean face low and kept her jacket held tight as she sat in the back of her car. Her self-absorbed stepsisters squabbled the whole trip over who would get the wealthiest boyfriend. No one noticed Cinderella's completely changed look.

She arrived at the ball and immediately scanned the room for the beautiful young lady in the matching suit. She spotted her standing incognito in the corner; she went to approach when her stepmother grabbed her arm and marched her over to the prince.

He was dressed in a long-tailed suit jacket with matching trousers and a white shirt. A butler approached and asked for her to remove her coat. Her suit was slowly revealed, and the prince grinned at her and realised this might not be the girl for him or for 'any' him at all. He squeezed her arm, reading the fury radiating off her stepmother and left the two of them – her stepmother infuriated, turned to chase him whilst profusely apologising for her unkempt and embarrassing stepdaughter, emphasising the word step. As the prince departed, her stepmother turned and scolded her and threw insults to her. Cinderella was far too excited to notice as she was drawn to the goddess in the corner. She took the drink from her hand and led her to the dance floor. They danced the entire night in their bubble, captivated by each other. Eventually, the night struck midnight, and the fairy godmother needed to leave. Cinderella watched her go and saw a small star-shaped wand drop from her pocket. She ran after her, calling her name, hoping for another moment of bliss. She couldn't catch her. The rest of the night, she sat reliving the rare emotion of pure happiness she had just felt.

She arrived home, ignoring the tirade of remarks from her stepmother and stepsisters. As she marched up the stairs, her stepmother yelled her final bigoted comments at her and threw a vase at her; it fell little more than an inch behind her. Cinderella locked her bedroom door full of rage and began packing her bag. She snuck out in the middle of the night, cradling the wand as she left. She sat under the local bridge, protecting herself from the relentless rain, and began to sway the wand. Some stars and swirls appeared, and the person who had momentarily taken her away from her reality appeared. The person who had created emotions she didn't know she was capable of since the fateful day of her father's death; pure happiness and optimism. She stood up, and this beautiful woman held her in an embrace. She explained the events that occurred after she left, and her fairy godmother suggested she stay with her for a few days. Those few days turned into a few weeks and then a few years, and after some fighting and protesting for law changes, they were married and lived happily ever after.

OUT ON THE SHELF

RUNNER UP

It started like a gentle jab, a subtle and rhythmic action. Nemo's surroundings were a murky darkness, and each disturbance felt like ripples on a peaceful surface. Soon enough, the jabs increased in speed, forceful and pulsing like an energetic heartbeat. His senses were waking from a shallow sleep. Afternoon light flooded his vision as he begrudgingly opened his eyes. Nemo's gaze was met with the previous sight he saw before drifting off into the silence. A lecture hall partially crowded by students. It was the usual mixture of overachieving scholars, busily typing away, and students on the verge of sleep.

Of course, he belonged to the rare few who were brave enough to take a nap during class. Such an action wasn't due to the fact that he was sleep deprived or felt confident, unlike the few surrounding students. Rather, he had a different reason for attending the lesson entirely, and that reason happened to be missing today, which filled him with disappointment.

The only assignment that mattered to him was the task he offered the fellow student beside him. Which was to wake him up five minutes before class concluded. This resulted in the subtle rhythmic tappings. A pen annoyingly tapping his shoulders. The person holding the pen didn't even bother making eye contact with him. Their eyes were instead glued to the professor making his closing statements. Nemo's movements were groggy as he arched up, gently swatting away the pen during the motion.

"Please make sure to go over your notes and email me if you have any concerns. And uh," the professors pointed at Nemo "You, who was napping away all this time, I'd like to have a conversation with you." It didn't matter to anyone. The obvious event that was about to occur the moment the hall fell emptied. But the professor's request felt heavy in Nemo's stomach. It mattered to him. He didn't like adults. Even though he was a young adult himself. As a matter of fact, he didn't really like himself either.

The intercepting sound of conversation slowly faded away as more students took their leave. Two souls were left within the hall. Though there was no change in temperature, it suddenly felt cold without the liveliness. Nemo refused to meet the professor's daunting gaze, which was obviously studying him.

"Yes, professor?" Nemo's voice momentarily replaced the silence.

There was no reply.

The professor only sat down at his desk and brought out a pen and paper. There was a ring occupying his fourth finger. He was married, was the obvious thought. Then there was his face, it was wrinkled from time, yet it still held good shape. Paired with his eyes, oak coloured with a deep wisdom to them. His resting expression was a strange one. As if the entire world's pain had fallen into his dreary body, becoming accustomed to it all. Only then did Nemo realize that he was mimicking the professor's actions. Studying the person in front of him.

"Forgive me, I have plenty of students in the class," the professor broke the silence
"What is your name?"
"Nemo."

There was a hint of hesitance, Nemo saw it in the professor's hands. How it abruptly stopped its journey towards the paper.

"It's not the name of the fish," Nemo jumped in before a misunderstanding formed. It was an automatic reaction. People always laughed and made relation to that animated movie.

"I'm well aware," the professor said, a smile forming, "so which is it?"

"Excuse me?"

"Is your name inspired by the alias Odysseus took when he tricked the cyclops? Or are you named after the great Prince Dakkar?"

Nemo was left speechless, those characters never came to people's minds when his name was mentioned. Even though many knew the name Odysseus and his adventures, few remembered his second name, 'Nemo'. Rather than that, the name Dakkar was a complete mystery to people, with only the most avid readers aware of the character.

"Prince Dakkar, sir," Nemo's voice was a brewed mix of hesitance and hopefulness.

"My name was inspired by Prince Dakkar."

The professor laughed hard. Nemo's eyes fell to the floor and a hot brew of embarrassment filled him.

"I'm sorry," the professor said.

"It's okay, people laugh at my name."

"No, don't misunderstand," he said "My name is Julius Verne."

Nemo's eyes were swift, dawning over the professor. He couldn't hide his feelings, it was apparent from the smile he now was forcibly holding back.

"Verne," The professor repeated, "My mother was an English major. When she married my father, she saw it as a lost opportunity to not name me after such a wonderful author." Without a doubt, both of them were imagining the face of that French author. Coincidentally, the creator of Prince Dakkar. Or as he named himself in the novel. Captain Nemo.

"That's a better reason than my parents," Nemo said "Both of them just loved adventures. So why not just name their son after two of the best adventurers in fiction, is what they were probably thinking."

"You have wonderful parents, Nemo," the professor said, gesturing to a chair opposite of him. Nemo sat down, more at ease than he was a few seconds ago.

"Yes, my parents are great," Nemo said "But don't you think it's an ambitious name? It feels like I have the responsibility of becoming a great person. Or someone who has to accomplish something worthwhile."

"You're a tough kid, Nemo." Professor Verne began scribbling on paper.

"I'm tough?"

"The toughest people are normally those who have highest expectations of themselves, the most stubborn. I should know. I was one of them."

"I don't think I'm tough. Or stubborn." Nemo knew he was hard on himself though. He felt it in him everytime he woke up. Professor Verne stopped writing "Are you aware of your name's meaning?"

"No." Nemo was hesitant in answering. Because he did know. And he didn't like it.

"It means 'nobody'."

Nemo didn't know how to respond. His name meant 'nobody'. It sounded like a poor joke. A sick joke. He was literally 'nobody'.

"Why did you call me here, professor?" Nemo asked, changing the conversation.

"I was concerned and curious," professor Verne said "Why would someone spend their time sleeping in an optional class rather than sleeping out of it."

"I just felt like it."

"You felt like spending free time sleeping in a class," professor Verne smiled "I believe you need to be a better liar, Nemo."

"I'm not lying."

"It's not the first time you've come to this class without sleeping, so it's all a bit contradictory. There's a better and more genuine reason you're here."

Cracks began forming on his protective barrier. He didn't like that, he didn't want to get hurt. It's what always happens when someone asks daunting questions. Even though the professor was indeed smiling, and looked calm, Nemo knew the professor wouldn't let him leave until he knew the proper answer. It's exactly what was said, professor Verne was stubborn.

The 'genuine reason' the professor was seeking was a shameful and embarrassing one. Something most people would judge him for. He felt like a freak every time he thought of it. Knowing that he may never truly belong anywhere. But here he was, faced against a person seemingly filled with curiosity over his reasoning. However, he felt like the professor understood his situation, understood every bit of his being even though he only knew Nemo's name. That's what was concerning Nemo.

"There's a person who attends your class and, it makes me happy,' Nemo took a slight pause, "The simple happiness I get whenever I see them. They always have this sad look on their face. Like they're troubled over something that didn't involve the lesson. Like they were at a loss over something else. I always thought to myself, 'How can anybody mirror me so well?' Nemo's words held a semblance of sorrow, yet he masked it in a poorly attempted smile "It's the same as you, professor, I'm just concerned and curious. I slept because they were missing from your lesson today."

Professor Verne squinted his eyes. Nemo couldn't hide it from him. It was only a matter of seconds before the barrier finally broke.

"Considering how reasonable that answer is, and comparing it to how you lied before, there's one detail you're leaving out, isn't there?" Professor Verne asked softly.

The hidden detail clung to Nemo like a virus, blooming behind his ears and chest. It almost felt real enough to physically affect him, like a sickness. But it wasn't a sickness. Some people may consider it to be a sickness but to Nemo, it was just a small secret. A small secret great enough to change his life.

To Nemo, it was a laughable situation. A laughable situation that could cause him to gain enough sadness for tears. "So this is how it goes." Is what Nemo thought. His eyes finally fell onto the professor, and what met them was a gaze filled with the understanding he was concerned about. He may have truly known Nemo's reason all along.

"The person just ends up being a guy," Nemo smiled, a singular tear falling from the edge of his eyes "I happen to like a guy."

Nemo looked away when the words left him, he couldn't bear to see the professor's reaction. He hated how he let it out so easily. How he could share such a huge part of him to a person he met a few minutes ago. Much less an adult who was oblivious to the pain of holding such a secret.

Professor Verne said nothing, pouring forward a silence almost as heavy as his secret. He wished the professor would say something. At this point, the silence hurt more than words. It made him feel vulnerable. As if the time taken to fill the silence was enough to collect words that would stab deep.

"Silence equals death."

Nemo's face permeated with confusion, he didn't dare speak. The professor's words flew through the air, stubbornly lingering.

"A quote from an activists movement in 1980," the professor said in a voice filled with nostalgia "are you aware of what happened around that time?"

Nemo shook his head. His history wasn't great. Three decades ago was ancient history for him.

"AIDS ran rampant in America, mainly affecting homosexuals or bisexual men. The quote was a cry for support. A message to those hiding to take a stand. Because if they didn't, they'd end up being gone to those that loved them. Back then, the world was a crueler place towards queers. Though AIDS was painful to those infected, it could never truly hurt more than the hate from the people around you. Especially those that loved you. That is why people stayed silent. That is why staying silent meant death. It was a blackness which held few rays of hope. Even then, that ray of hope was small. So they stayed silent within that darkness hoping for help," the professor's words quivered with a deep sorrow "But you know, Nemo, for me, during that time, the silence equalled my survival."

The professor's words lingered heavier this time. It took a moment for those words to seep into Nemo's head. A long moment of silence for the realization to hit. It made sense now, the wisdom within the professor's eyes, his gaze that felt like it held understanding over what he was going through.

"You're the same as me?"

Professor Verne nodded, smiling weakly, "I'm sure you have the same mindset. 'Silence equals death'. Though the gravity of it may not be as violent as it was many years ago, I'm sure to you, it means everything. I was the same as you, and I made that phrase the foundational rule of my life. Because of it, I never moved forward," he gestured to the ring on his fourth finger.

"You're married to a man?"

"Quite the opposite, I married a fine woman from Kansas. I hid that part of me from her for years. I held a lie that grew more lethal as the years passed, and when the guilt was too much to carry, I finally told her. The simplest way of saying it is... I hurt her. I broke her heart."

"Are you properly married now?" Nemo emphasized "properly" as he stared at the ring.

"No. We obviously divorced."

"Then why keep the ring?"

"It's for remembrance. What I did was beyond irresponsible. Because of my stubbornness, I ruined a life. I don't think I deserve to be let go so easily. Would it be right to let go of such a terrible action? To forget it all and not bear the pain I've inflicted? Because I don't think anything will ever be enough to pay the price."

Though it wasn't a situation to do so, Nemo slightly laughed, making the professor flinch. He just happened to remember what the professor said minutes ago,

"You're tough, professor," Nemo repeated "The toughest people normally have the highest expectations for themselves, and the most stubborn. I should know. I'm one of them."

Professor Verne smiled, "You're a brave boy. It's a terrifying thing to break your shell, giving away such a big part of you to someone you met only minutes before. I had decades and couldn't do it."

"I'm not brave."

"I think you are, Nemo. The world's an egg after all. To give birth to something, you've gotta destroy the world right before your eyes. The reason it's so difficult is, you're the only one that has the power to do so."

"When I asked if you knew the meaning of your name, I saw the pain in your eyes. I didn't mean it to be an insult. I found it beautiful. Being nothing doesn't mean you'll never amount to anything, it's the opposite. You are named after two of the greatest adventurers in literacy. It is because they are nothing, they could become anything they wanted. They broke their eggs and walked free."

"If you don't break the egg, you grow too big and hurt yourself and the people around you. It is the simple lesson, heal your wounds or else you'll bleed on those you love. Don't underestimate the people that love you, Nemo. Or else you end up hurting them, then yourself. Tell them the truth about yourself. Because that part of you is more beautiful than anything life could give. Instead of telling this old man, who's far too late to break his shell."

Tears fell from professor Verne. They were old tears. Tears that had lived within him for decades. Nemo could only imagine the pain each tear carried. He knew then, those words had shook Nemo to his core. Those words would echo through him as the years progressed. He would remember them when he was old.

Nemo stood, making his way around the desk and hugged professor Verne. It was because no words could ever be enough. Every word that could have left Nemo would have felt empty to him. It was one of those moments where one action held more meaning than any word's definition. The professor answered the hug, it was a tight embrace. While Nemo thought it would be weird to hug a person you met only minutes before, these last few minutes had been worth years. So he said nothing. The professor said nothing. They just hugged.

"Thank you, Nemo," The professor wiped tears away. "I think I've used up enough of your time. I better not catch you sleeping during my lectures again." Nemo laughed and grabbed his bag, walking away. When he reached the foot of the door, he turned to look at Professor Verne once again before leaving, "It's advice from someone who hasn't lived long but... I don't think it's too late for you."

Professor Verne smiled as he saw Nemo walk away. Only then did he decide to remove the ring from his finger.



BY HAZEL GRAY

THE HALLWAY

BY TESS MCGREGOR

Waiting, I was waiting for the feeling of guilt to escape my brain. I was waiting for the pool of blood in the hallway carpet to soak in. I was waiting for the speculations and judgement. But there I sat in the silence of the hallway with my sister's head on my lap, dead. I did not shed a tear. I had no thought of why, just the feeling of guilt. The hallway, now the place that resembles my sister's last breath. The hallway is empty, but also full. It is full of emotion. The emotions were indescribable. No one was home, no one was to know. The blood was now drying on the knife I used and the clothes I wore. My sister was cold to touch and as pale as a ghost. Five, the age of my sister now dead in my lap. Seven, that number of stabs it took for her death. Twelve, the age of myself, the killer. Six, the number of days till my Dad arrives home. The number of days left till I'm locked away forever. Alone. Alone with the guilt.

Why? Why would I, such a young "innocent" boy, commit such a horrific and disgusting crime? Well, I was jealous, jealous of my sister. Always getting all the attention, ever since she started playing soccer. Dad's favourite sport. I was never into soccer, I was more like my Mum. We loved doing music together. I would often fall asleep to the sound of her playing the flute. My sister was perfect in the eyes of my Dad. But me, my Dad looked at me like a burden and a waste of space, useless. All I wanted was my Dad to love me, like the way Mum did before she died of leukaemia just one year before. The more my sister excelled in soccer, the stronger the bond between our father and her grew. The more distant my bond with him became. Why? Why did Dad not love me? I was different, I was and still am nothing like him. But my sister, she was the same as him in every way. I guess that's why Dad and I never bonded. My Dad and my sister were like two peas in a pod, but the pod only had room for two peas, and therefore I was left out, I was alone. All I wanted was a way to get the attention and love my sister received from our father. She had to go. But how?

The last straw was when I awoke on Christmas to find her surrounded by gifts. As well as the gift I wanted, Mum's flute. All I got was a card and a chocolate bar. I felt unloved and unwanted. I felt like an outcast, even in my own house. I needed her gone. I wanted everything to be back to normal like it was before she was born. I couldn't take the pain anymore, it was eating me up inside and taking over my body. The envious voices in my head would say "Kill her." The 2nd Of January 1997, the day it all took place. Dad was away on his work trip, it was just me and her, alone. The hallway, the location of her death. But why the hallway? The hallway was empty, no feelings attached, no memories, no warmth and no sense of home.

As I sit in my cell waiting, I have no sorrow, no pain. No family pictures, no family to remember. I'm here alone. Alone with the guilt.



BY DECLAN CROMBIE



BY DESTINY MORGAN-FLETCHER

OLD

BY MILES YOUNG

The hustle and bustle of the clearing was energizing. Men in straw hats meandered around, shifting planks and transporting nails. Many heavy ladders leaned up against the wooden skeleton of the building. Buckets of paint laid in the shade of the trees waiting to be used. The banging and clatter of hammers and tools created a beat the workers followed, everyone unconsciously moving in rhythm. Thunk-Thunk-Thunk-. The animals grazed in the shade waiting for their new home to be completed, as the nearby meadow was sown with seeds. The plough being towed long by the workhorse, a brand-new model -the first- ready to be used. Not yet old.

The feeling of peace lay like a thick blanket over the sun-bleached red of the wood, bringing an aura of peace and calm. The stink of pigs, sheep and horses had long faded. Sunlight wove through the cracks in the old, termite ridden planks. Dust sprinkled the saw dusted floor, highlighting the mouse tracks snaking along the floor leading to the large beasts of metal and fire. Rust creeping like decayed red vines down the mechanical appendages that once ended in wheels. The long Y shaped rod that once was warmed by the back of a workhorse, was now barely hanging onto the bulky body of the construction. The incredible grating claws loomed over the floor, hooked and crooked, casting lingering shadows amidst the piles of refuse. Old.

Flames licked up the wood of the barn, the graffitied, carved walls disappearing under the smoke and fire. Embers lit up the dried grass of the clearing around it. The warm blanket of calm turned to a raging inferno of chaos and destruction. The steel hinges on the doors let out an awful screeching, the barn singing like an opera from hell. Emerging from the surrounding forest was a cacophony of noise, trembling the ground and skies as wildlife fled the heat. The crooked hooks of the old Victorian plough clattered to the floor in a bout of chaos and echoed out to the drunks; throwing their glass bottles of beer at the once beautiful barn like it was something to be ridiculed. Like it wasn't special at all. Like it wasn't old.

MEMOIRS OF A BEAST

BY JESS POLLARD

I am awoken from my slumber by a creaky door. Ah at last... food. I leap off the couch down to the giants, meowing and trying to press myself against them for food. Finally the food has arrived. Fine cuisine could be better. I don't know how they magically get food out of nowhere but I am not complaining. Once I am done I go back to sleep.

It is now later in the day and all of the humans have awoken. I wonder how they get so tall, what do they eat? Anyway in a house full of huge people I need to assert my dominance. I prance around the house getting the fur here, there and everywhere. I am just about to go into the biggest room when I hear... growling? I jump up to the window and see a ginger cat pestering a black and white cat until he goes away. Oh geez. That cat is grumpy all the time and for some reason loves to come up my driveway. He's too strong to fight, but maybe if I befriend him he will go away? It's worth a shot.

I cautiously jump off the windowsill and start to make my way to the cat door. Why do we have a cat door anyway? The human door works just fine! I squish my way under the gate and am met with deep growls. I don't really have a plan on how I'm going to make friends with him, it's basically impossible. "Um, do you want to be friends with me?" He pauses then, looks even more irritated than he did before.

"Why would I be friends with you? I don't need friends and never will! Now leave me alone and never talk to me again!" he hisses. I stay still. "Go now!!!" He lunges towards me. This is it. Goodbye food, goodbye world. "Shoo Shoo! Get out of here." He scurries off in a hurry with the giant's call. "Silly cat." I should get Mum a dead bird for that.

I lazily hop up onto the bed. I like this spot the best. The curtains are always open and there are pillows everywhere, which makes it a nice place to nap. The humans don't usually come in here during the day so I get it all to myself. I prop myself up on the fluffiest pillow and begin to shut my eyes and go to sleep. I'm dreaming of blue skies, fish are everywhere. Best dream ever.

I wake up to the smell of tuna. The blue sky has turned into a sort of orangey colour and it seems colder now. I make my way to the laundry room where the food is and start to eat. I finish my food and head to the lounge to sleep. What a crazy day. I wonder what would have happened if the giant didn't save me. Whatever. thinking about stuff is tiring. I'm going to sleep.

CONSENT

Did I tell you that
you could put that in my drink?
Did you know what it would do to me?
Did you even stop and think?
I was at the party for a reason,
I wasn't there for you.
My clothing wasn't an excuse,
although you knew that too.
I was wearing nothing special,
just some jeans and standard shoes.
But even if it were a dress,
you shouldn't be excused.

Did I tell you that you could call me princess—
or any other name?
That look in your eyes when you called me pretty
will forever bring me shame.
You may say that words are simply words,
and that to you they're nothing.
Yet, you fail to acknowledge that
your words were cruel and cunning.
Words hold meaning and intent,
they are meant to describe.
But I do not belong to you—
my name wasn't yours to decide.

Did you think that you had won,
when you chose to shatter me?
Did you think that when you stole my soul,
I wouldn't grow to be
so much stronger than you'd ever think,
and be recovering—
from what you did and all you took
that night you stole from me.
For, now I have loving friends,
and a life I've grown to love.
You remain but a shadow,
barely seen now from above.

It's easier to ignore now,
I barely see your face.
I sleep so much more peacefully,
because love took your place.



BY CLAIRE BEST



BY BROOKE HUFFADINE

LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

BY DANICA SWANEPOEL

Mary Maloney's point of view:

I can't believe my eyes. I'm at my husband's funeral as an innocent widow. Jack Noonan came to see me personally last Saturday to tell me the news. Mr. O'mally waited patiently in the car that was sitting so very still in front of the house. It reminded me of my dear husband Patric. The police car reminded me of my husband when I saw him lying on the floor when I had killed him that Thursday night. The police closed the case of my dead husband after two weeks of looking.

Jack had said they couldn't find any clues and so they had to close the case. The day of the death the police had finished most of the lamb and the rest was eaten by cats I had found in a dumpster right behind the Corner Street. I do mourn my husband. However there is still this feeling of anger and betrayal that I don't think will ever leave me. I am going to be a single mother and he cheated on me with another woman.

The worst part is I knew this young lady. She went to my high school. I knew her name was familiar and I just could not place her name until I was going through my phone book and saw her name. At first, I couldn't believe it but then I went back to the yearbook and saw her photo and her name written neatly next to her photo. She even wrote a message in my yearbook. "What a cute couple!" That's what she wrote. I can't believe her. How dare she?

I feel a tap on my shoulder and realize it's Jack. "Remember Mary if you want to leave we can go anytime you want just let me know." I nod as it's the only thing I can do it's like my voice has disappeared and I can feel the tears come back up all over again I choke down a sob. Jack just sighs. If only he knew how sorry I was.

Jack Noonan's point of view:

I let out a big sigh, not because of anything Mary has done but because I feel like I have failed. I couldn't even find my dead best friend's killer. Not only that my wife cheated on me with another man. I still can't

believe it. She won't tell me who it is but what's even more suspicious is that when I told her about Patric's death she bawled her eyes out. She had only met him once at our wedding. I don't think they have met again.

I never liked when my wife met my work colleagues as she doesn't need to worry about my crime life. I always thought it would be too dangerous and could put her in harm's way. The only way Mary knows her is when I had spoken about her. Patric was the opposite of me. He let his wife get to know all his colleagues. I honestly find it insane and now look at what happened. He's dead. I feel lost.

What am I going to do? I feel like it's right in front of me but it's just out of reach. I've still tried to find the murderer even though the case has been closed. It's my job and I don't give up. I'm alone in my house as my wife decided to pack up her things one day and leave to stay with her sister across the country. She wrote me two letters. I opened one and that's how I know where she is, but I can't open the second one. Honestly, I'm too scared of what it says. The first one was awful to read. What if the second one is worse?

Poor Maloney. I feel awful for her. I can't even imagine what she must be going through. I'd been too distracted with my own thoughts that I hadn't realized that she was shaking next to me. I put my hand on her shoulder and she looks up at me with those big brown eyes.

Mary Maloney's point of view:

"Jack," I whisper. My voice is raspy from all the crying these last couple of weeks. "I don't know if I can do this." Jack looks at me with tired eyes as if he hasn't slept in days. It must be all my fault. I caused all of this. All this mess playing out in front of me. I look up and notice everyone is staring at me with beady eyes like they can see my sins written all over my body. "Ms. Maloney, it is ok if you can't do the speech." Jack says in a soothing voice. I stand up on weak legs and hobble my way over in front of everyone.

Jack follows quietly behind me. My throat starts to close and the tears are threatening once again. I pull out my piece of paper from my pocket and unfold it but a tear falls on the piece of paper. Jack hands me a dark blue handkerchief. I look at him with a small smile and take the handkerchief to wipe my eyes. I read out the speech. It's only three lines long but I couldn't read half of it. After everybody had said their little remarks of sorrow for my husband or should I say my ex-husband I am

unmarried now. Jack drove me home.

All this stress from the criminal case. It's so overwhelming. I don't know if I can have this baby alone. Jack was taking me up the stairs for an afternoon catnap but I must have lost my balance and fell all the way down the stairs. Twelve agonizing stairs. "Mary!" Jack raced down the stairs with more speed than I have ever seen anybody use. Surely he must have skipped some steps. As nobody surely can move that fast. Can they? Maybe I'm seeing things. I must have hit my head pretty hard when I fell down the stairs but all the pain is in my stomach area.

That can't be good, oh no please don't tell me the baby's been hurt. I can't lose this child. This child is the last thing I have oh my poor Patric. "Oh, Mary are you ok wait hold on ill call an ambulance, and everything will be ok. Just hold on one minute." My vision started blurring and I can't seem to keep my eyes open a minute longer.

A COUPLE OF WEEKS EARLIER

Patric Maloney's point of view:

I had to tell her even though I don't want to. I was standing by the living room window feeling guilty. Don't take me wrong she is a lovely wife. However, I knew she would never love me after I told her the news. Next thing I get this pain in my head. What on earth...

Mary Maloney's point of view:

I'm done. I can't believe it. How? That stupid wife of Jack told him and then he figured it out. I'm going to jail and I will lose my baby. The disgust in Jack's eyes was awful. He moved me to a cell and now my poor baby won't live the life I tried so hard to fight for. "I'm so sorry darling."

The end

WINGED REGRET

BY KATIE MELGREN

This story was highly commended in the Dan Davin writing competition.

Winged victory sat on her pedestal, renowned and admired. A lone statue, she had nothing to do except gaze upon the masses and bide her time. She looked down upon the unsuspecting mortals, and did nothing but brood. If her head were still attached and body not crafted from stone, she contemplated the tears that would fall. Not from grief of her bygone era, as it was romanticized in every corner of her room. Not from melancholy from the loss of her worshippers; modern visitors regarded her with awe every day. No. She would shed a tear for what she had witnessed in her prime. If not for stone veins, her ichor would fester and run black from impossibly imperfect divine rage.

Victory was a goddess, yet she was a woman. A woman, who bore witness to the glory of ancient Greece. A woman, who did nothing but gaze over her people, who had worshipped her and praised her. She had watched as men offered her baskets of fruit, olives and wines, sculpted statues to her, and praised her name. Every celebration of victory in battle or academics was in tribute to her name.

Yet those who wore the same figure, the same femininity, and fashioned their robes after her in respect, were beaten. They were disrespected. They were owned. They were the women of ancient Greece. Their bodies were fashioned after the divine feminine, yet their existence was dreadful and humiliating. Her proud figure watched as women wept, dragged away from Victory by the very men that paid their respects. They had screamed for relief, and were only afforded brutality. They had pled for freedom, and were afforded slavery. Victory was a statue who did nothing but stand tall. She embodied all of the victories from useless conflict because of masculinity's aggression. A feminine face of patriarchal triumph. She was a divine power, rendered powerless, and only observed.

It was a men's society, a men's culture, and yet she, a feminine figure, had represented their achievements. She, crafted to embody beauty, was highly respected, when mortals reflecting her qualities were treated no better than dogs. The other gods had long forsaken women, who suffered for no reason other than them daring to have opposed masculinity. Being the yin to their yang. Victory could only stand and endure, for she was only a statue.

Victory watched as crowds viewed her broken visage of crumbled marble, and saw how they idealised that awful era. She was worn by years of exposure from weather and the temperament of man. Even in the modern era, if she looked closely enough, she could still see the men who feel the need to exert their masculinity over the room; women who cowered at the side of men, and how women tended to flock together in groups.

She wondered, if it were not for her being bound to the last remnants of her legacy, whether anything could have changed if she could step down from her raised podium and exact righteousness. Whether she could have stopped the brutalisation of those who were her equivalent mortal image. Whether she could have stopped the rape of womankind. Despite everything, she stays bound to her crumbling marble form, the last of her supposed grand legacy, and broods on the point of it all. If only she saved even one.



BY AMANDA HENDERSON

MEREDITH SNOW

BY JAMES BATH

This story was highly commended in the Dan Davin writing competition.

Was it by choice that brought her flying
Could it have been a faulty rail
Perhaps maliciousness was the cause
Of the beautiful death of Meredith Snow

She was only twenty-four, had a whole life ahead of her. She had bought a ticket to the 61st-floor observation deck atop the famous Athena Lotte on 31st Street. Jonathan L. Burke, from management on the ground floor, noticed her red scarf caught in the wind and heard the thud. Now, he sits in the back of a police car as a possible witness to the crime. My pocket buzzes; it's my secretary.

"Jesus mate," he said. "You heard the news?"

"I'm there right now."

He let out a deep audible breath. "...I saw the photos, you're telling me she fell three-hundred metres and landed without a bruise? Something's not right here."

"What do they all think at the office?"

"Brad and Jo? Dunno.. but look, I took physics at school man, I know Newton's laws and stuff, you don't think—"

I cut him off. "Nonsense. Balderdash. Rubbish. You're a detective, not a conspiracy theorist, Dave. There is no way anyone could stage such an event."

"Stage?" He groaned. "Bloody hell. I know you can't stage a woman falling three-hundred metres from a freaking skyscraper. But what if someone, like...quickly swapped out the real body for a fake, nicer looking person and fled the scene?"

"Someone would have seen."

"Fair."

"Regardless, I checked the footage. There were no reliable angles." There was a slight pause as he pondered.

"Right, I'll be there soon, bye."

Her face, so ceremonious in her slumber,
Indented deep atop a car
What notion went through her mind
To bring about this perpetual siesta

I gaze over to the centre of the scene, the white chalk outlining on top of the smashed car. She lays peacefully on the roof, the tinted black car encompassed by yellow tape. There is no blood. Her purple lipstick and

dark mascara are still intact, even with the sprinkles of rain and mist in the air. She has not a single trace of any exterior trauma or lacerations on her body. I budge through the policemen, looking for the leading officer. There he is, looking stern.

"She was an old bookkeeper, born in Berkeley, California," he tells me. "Snow had supportive parents, Vincent and Helen, both well known in the community, real good sorts."

"Why would she do such a thing?"

"Honestly, detective, I'm asking the same question," he sighs under his breath. "She had a stable social network and no prior history of mental health diagnosis. It's all a bit odd if you ask me."

For the first time in years, the more I seem to know about this victim, the more my hairs stand up on my arms. Her innocent hazel eyes, still wide open, stare up at the sky from where she had descended. Meredith, what could you be hiding?

She had such a dreamy countenance
Oh, what iniquity led this entity
To lay in this resting place
And stranded her here with a dear serenity

On the 61st-floor, gather an array of perspectives. The realisation dawns upon me that an event like this will touch not only those involved but their families, children, and friends. The action from one individual can be catastrophic, traumatising, so to speak. Time, money, interviews, articles, tears. All could be wasted in a desperate search for answers. Answers we may never find. Part of me believes that some crimes should never be solved but remain locked away in the mind of the victim. For the good of the world, and often for the interest of my own wellbeing. Miss Meredith Snow, by all means, the least likely to commit such an act, may have been motivated by factors we would never guess. All this rebuttal could also be the result of a misstep, a trip, with an unfortunate outcome. Something still doesn't sit right with me. I peek over the edge, looking down, oh so far down. Such a fall, not a scratch. This will need some time to digest. Taking a seat, I grab my lighter and pull a cigarette from the pack.

From the observation deck
At the border of the Athena Lotte
She flew, closing the page
Prying the book shut
And with her final words left on a note
An orchestra of observers around her
She looked flawless in her red gloves and coat

BUY BUY BUY

BY CHELSEA SMITH

This poem was highly commended in the Dan Davin writing competition.

Breath inhales my mask glued to my face.
I stand, I watch.
Wind picks up, combing its cool hands through my hair
I shiver, stand, and watch.
Neighbours, cousins, my peers, scavenge around.
I stand, I stare, I watch.
All I can see are vile rats. Ripping apart trolleys, shelves, food, sanity.

A mother shouts out to clear the way, but nobody has time for her, nobody has time for
The 60-year-old man.
The pregnant lady.
The 11-year-old boy.
Not today.

I try to look at the other side of the supermarket. All I see are rats, rats, rats.
You fill your basket with flour, bread, toilet paper
So do I.
The cashier stares us down but all I can do is grab.
We have no time for the desolate souls of workers here. It's a pandemic. We need to hurry.
I head back to my car and bam! I'm smacked by the waves of honks. Even the cars are crying out.

Rats weave their scrawny pathetic bodies in and around me, my peers, my neighbours.
People scream
and people screech
and people beg
but no one listens.

My car is parked next to an elderly woman.
She staggers as she jostles her trolley out to her car, wind devouring her tenuous body whole.
Her eyes beg out,
but her cries are instantaneously dismissed.

The fraught mother with the five kids scrambles to calm her youth but she knows this is just the beginning.
So do I, but all I do is merely stare and watch.
I roll my trolley across the sharp surface of the concrete. Concrete that like the mother is worn and tired.
I reach out to my car and swipe my fingers through the dust and debris
My face fixated on revolting rats.
I sigh.
I guess this is life now.

BACKCOUNTRY CRIME

BY LILAH JACK

This piece was highly commended in the Dan Davin writing competition.

Trudging through the dense bush, trying to follow the trickle of a path, was Jamie Smith. Night was falling over the Hunter Mountains surrounding Green Lake, and Jamie had to get there, fast. He reached up to turn on his headlamp as the once green ferns around him had now blurred into a deep seaweed colour. But nothing happened. Jamie yanked it off his head and fumbled with it, desperately hoping he had missed the button the first time. Still nothing. "Uh Oh," Jamie said to nobody in particular. Pushing down the panic rising in his throat, he carried on walking towards where he could just glimpse the trees thinning out.

By the time he made it to Green Lake Hut the moon was high in the sky, casting an eerie glow on the tussock filled clearing. The door opened freely exposing the worn timber flooring covered in a thin layer of dust, to the left were unoccupied bunk beds and the air smelled sour and musty. Jamie heaved his pack off his back and started to dig around for matches. When he eventually found some, he shuffled around the small room, and one by one, he lit all the candles so the room was bathed in flickering orange light. Sleepily pulling out his tea for the night, Jamie sat on the dining table, way too tired to care about proper manners.

After Jamie had finished his meal, he dragged his sleeping bag out of his pack and collapsed onto it. He lay there for a few seconds listening to a possum scuffling around outside the window, but he couldn't help feeling that something was off. Ignoring the uncertain butterflies in his stomach, he rolled over and sunk into a deep sleep.

At exactly 1:24 am that night the manhole swung open, hinging down towards the floor. Then, very slowly, a fibre was lowered down until it just touched the floor, pooling upon contact. The next few minutes were uneventful but then a figure gradually lowered itself down, hitting the floor with a soft thud. It padded its way over to where Jamie was sleeping and hovered over his face for a long while as if examining him. Suddenly it lifted him and slunk back to the manhole, pausing just for a second before effortlessly hoisting him back up the strands.

The next day was muted and Jamie Smith was no more.

SUNRISE

BY ALICE MCINTOSH

Sunrise

It's a new day today.

The sun knows because it rises,
Stretches into the sky like every other day
Extending its hands into my living room
Peeking carefully at first and then relinquishing inhibition,
Leaving no corner or crevice untouched,
Looking around until it finds me, who has been awake long before it got here.

This is a time of quiet companionship, for the sun and me
She interrupts my morning vigil,
Which begins predawn everyday,
Of pacing
Shaking
Of dread and sobbing tears
Asking nothing from me but a place to stretch out her light,
An opportunity to express all she is capable of,
Whilst most wish her away
Using curtains and bleary eyed morning stares

And it is only in this window,
this brief overlap of my solitude with hers,
That I too stretch –
Breathe in and out.
Pour a cup of tea without shaking hands
Taste the bitter herbs on my tongue
in this moment it's working,
The air carries to every part of me
doesn't get snagged or caught or trapped
But flows full of ease
for now

Too soon though, we are no longer the only ones awake,
Curtains are drawn back and coffee is brewed.
As if startled by this noise
The sun withdraws,
First missing patches of the carpet,
Then leaving entire window panes dark
Pulling back more and more and more
until I finally walk

Outside

And I'll never know why but the sun isn't there anymore.
Isn't in the lightbulbs in my classrooms,
Doesn't reach me when I sit at the back
And begin to breathe
Faster and faster and faster and –

It's nowhere in the hallways I end up in
Or in the reassuring voices of my friends

the morning lives only in my memory
Respite is no where else to be found
So there is nothing to do but stare straight ahead:
move through the obstacle course of the coming hours,
A checklist of steps to complete
So that if I'm lucky, I'll have a sunlit morning once again.



BY DECLAN CROMBIE

IDENTITY

BY NICOLE LINA

Identity is an intricate and complex construct, especially regarding the dilemma of its creation during adolescence. As we are all familiar with the stress of educational work, social activity and our households, we have all experienced this weight of expectations. These educational, familiar and social pressures set forth a communal sort of “chaos” during adolescence and in response, threaten the construction of a fortified identity of the teenager.

We can see the complicated situations in the development of teenage identity through the fact that most teenagers don’t possess a strong value hierarchy to steer their way through this “chaos.” Perhaps, it is better said that at such a young and complicated stage in life, their value hierarchy is not fixed but rather a little lost.

In saying this, without a strong value hierarchy, the identity tends to lack fortitude—invoking existential doubt in the minds of teenagers and endangering their sense of self. This results in the tendency to seek immediate gratifications to ease the anxiety of adolescence; For example, partying, procrastination and alcohol/drug consumption. According to the University of Otago’s chapter on ‘Alcohol use in adolescence’ [David F. and Joseph B.], “...over 1 in 3 young people aged 12–16 engage in binge drinking [1] with a similar fraction of young people aged 16–21 engaging in hazardous drinking [2].” As a teenager myself, I find that this adolescent disorientation stems from the lack of experience, essentially challenging the ability to form a solid set of values and opinions that are in a sense, individual.

Although it can be said that, for teenagers, it’s the best thing they know at such an age, it is no less true that this typical behaviour may be a result of ignorance or disinterest in responsibility. This simple contentment is predicated on the short-term distractions to the ‘chaos’ of life. Furthermore, we often find ourselves doing senseless things to try to run away from the obligations that chase us simply because we’re less concerned with the long-term consequences.

On the other hand, while many can disregard this time as merely the youthful and pessimistic attitude, it is relevant and true for a major proportion of young people. Faced with the struggles of losing

friendships, academic and familial pressures as well as the crises that plague the world, it can be hard to maintain a healthy and positive position. Since this is generally the first time man must handle and be responsible for concerns like such, seen through the youth's eyes, adolescence is the pinnacle of adversity.

In addition to a fragile sense of self, we must investigate the theme of authenticity during this period. This question of fitting in with the people around us and how much we are willing to extort our “belief system” to the values of our friends and family. The difficulty here lies in the necessity to learn how to fit in and conduct oneself within society but only to such a point where it doesn't ultimately weaken your sense of integrity. This is especially difficult being a teenager who still lacks individuality due to only having started forming a true sense of such. We are often afflicted with our conscience telling us that we have betrayed our principles only to be liked by the people around us. However, we can't completely negate the inclination to adapt ourselves to appease the hunger of our social desires. The beliefs and opinions of teenagers at this stage are constantly changing and evolving until we can reach that fortified identity and value hierarchy. Since we still haven't learnt all the rules of this game (lack of experience of the world) and as such, we can't break them (form our own opinions— individuality). Thus, as we lack a sense of direction, we struggle to visualise a specific image of the person in and of itself that we want to be and we confuse this vision with a person who owns a myriad of life's basic components (good job, love, happiness).

Nonetheless, we can at least minimise this chaos by actively pursuing growth and improvement. We must treat ourselves properly, however, not in the sense of total exemption from “sin” as the majority of teenagers must experiment and weave through these confusing aspects of adolescence to gain a true sense of maturity. In terms of pursuing a tolerable future, we must be persistent with goals and personal development to find some order within the chaos.

MURDER AT MIDNIGHT

BY HENRY WOODWARD

Darkness. Only the hazy light of the moon illuminates the quaint town. An owl hoots its concern as a grim figure creeps past it. The sense of dread in the air is imminent. Bruce wanders along the deserted road completely alone except for a single bush. He stares at the bush, his heart filled with sadness knowing this bush is in some ways exactly the same. No friends, no family and all alone in a world that doesn't even know it exists.

The world waits in silence as the man strolls down the empty road. It seems like hours have passed until one by one houses pop up by the side of the street. A small cottage then a large house, until the road is filled with dark unlit houses that remain unmoving.

The moon glistens off the knife clenched firmly in his hand and the knife itself looks as if it is eager for what comes next. He is a lone figure in the dead of night with one purpose. He blinks away the tears from his eyes as he approaches the only house still awake in this dead quiet town. The only thing that can be heard are his muffled footsteps coming up to the doorstep, the only thing that can be seen is a glimmer of silver next to a dark figure.

He looks across at the mailbox barely able to make out the words. WILLIS, Bruce winces as if this name brings him much pain. In his mind he can't stop replaying the thought of him and his son playing around this lawn, his lawn. As he enters the house no more can be heard but a whimper as he approaches the living room. A woman is sitting in front of the television with a boy no more than five years old, completely unaware of the man slowly creeping up behind them.

Silence and then an ear splitting scream that can be heard across the entire neighborhood. Another horrifying scream fills the silence emitted by the night sky then there's silence, an eerie chilling silence. As the man emerges from the house trembling, his hands covered in blood, tears filling his eyes, he merely collapses on the ground and weeps. Sirens fill the air. Cars pull up and he is hauled to his feet with immense force but he doesn't even look up. He does not resist. He does not fight. He only says one thing: "My family died tonight."



BY AMANDA HENDERSON

