

Finding the Edge Pieces

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT WRITINGS
FROM THE PONDS HIGH SCHOOL

The Ponds High School
180 Riverbank Drive, The Ponds NSW 2769

Published by WestWords Ltd
PO Box 2327
North Parramatta NSW 1750

1800WESTWORDS | admin@westwords.com.au
www.westwords.com.au

WestWords
Executive Director: Michael Campbell
Producer: James Roy
Associate Producer: Christina Donoghue
Digital Content Producer: Christian Pazzaglia
Development Consultant: Kathie Elliot, Square Pegs Consulting
Marketing Consultant: Simon Graham
Publicity: DMCPR

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Graphic design by
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From WestWords

BY JAMES ROY, WESTWORDS

When I first attended The Ponds High School I was staggered at the size. The size of the school, the size of the suburb itself, the size of some of the houses, the size of the Swedish furniture store in an adjoining suburb. The Ponds is part of a growing region, out on the crackling edge of Sydney's north-west edge, spreading and engulfing old milking sheds and chicken farms like lava. This is Western Sydney on fast-forward. This is the whole world looking for opportunities, finding them here, and getting on with it.

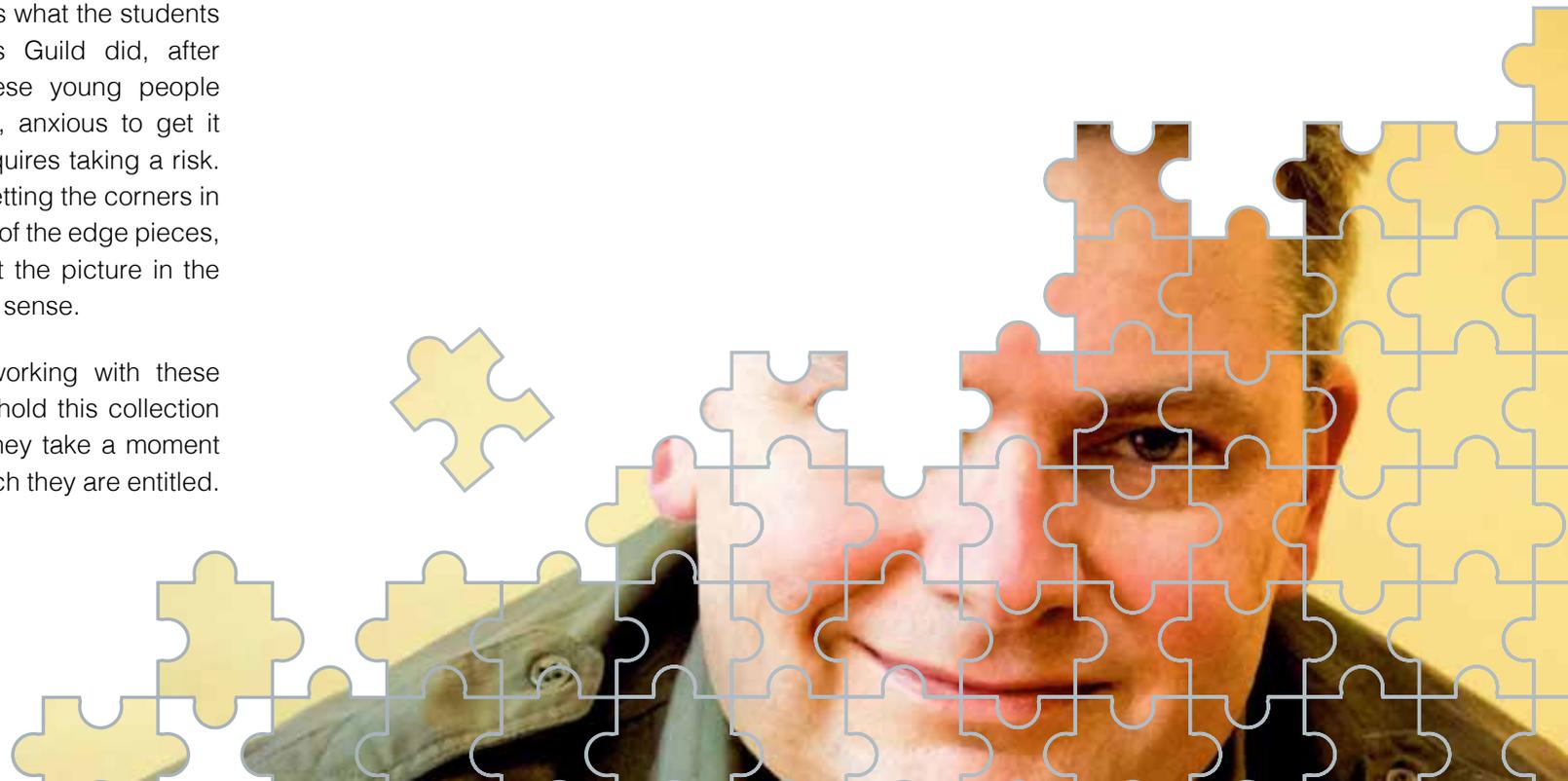
Getting on with it – this is what the students in the Creative Writers Guild did, after a bit of prodding. These young people are careful, considered, anxious to get it right. But making art requires taking a risk. Sometimes it involves getting the corners in place, followed by a few of the edge pieces, all the while hoping that the picture in the middle will start to make sense.

It's been a pleasure working with these young people. As they hold this collection in their hands, I hope they take a moment to enjoy the pride to which they are entitled.

James Roy

James Roy is an author and musician from the Blue Mountains. He has published over 35 books for young people, several of which have won or been nominated for major literary awards, including *One Thousand Hills* (with Noël Zihabamwe), which won the NSW Premier's History Prize and the NSW Premier's Literary award,

and *Town*, which won the NSW Premier's Literary Award and was nominated for the prestigious German Youth Literature Prize. He has written libretti and songs about killer whales, Henry Lawson and exploding canines, he holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney, and works for WestWords as producer.



Principal's message

MRS WEAL

I am very proud to be writing the Principal's message of The Ponds High School inaugural writing anthology. It is true that "there is a story in all of us" but some people have a skill that allows them to write us into the stories they have within. I still remember my first year of teaching when a Year 7 Katrina, used an image that still stays with me today. She wrote of "a fringe of sky, peppered by stars". Real but Unusual - a lesson I still, in 2020, use to encourage plot lines and imagery. Years later, I marveled at Extension 2 English students that authored polished pieces of crafted writing in narrative, analytical, drama, speeches film and poetry. If a text can make you laugh or cry at poignant moments success is determined.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this anthology and know that students will be proud to

share this with their families and eventually their children and grandchildren as their first published pieces. I am also sure parents will relish sharing this with relatives and friends. I thank the teachers Ms Caro, Ms Voukelatos, Ms Kelly and Ms Jane for giving up their afternoons to support the Writers Guild and for nurturing and encouraging the contributors. English teaching is unique cycle of marking to give feedback and encouraging to create. I can see the impact of teachers in the crafting and in the experimentation with form, especially poetic form.

Thank you to the students for sharing the stories within, especially those with multiple pieces. I know that students have greatly enjoyed the writing process and you will too as you explore all the pieces of the puzzle that make up this anthology. My advice to readers is to be courageous, share your stories and read avidly to explore worlds beyond our reach in reality.

From the teachers

**BENJAMIN BENNETT AND LARA JANE HANCOCK,
ACTING HEAD TEACHERS ENGLISH**

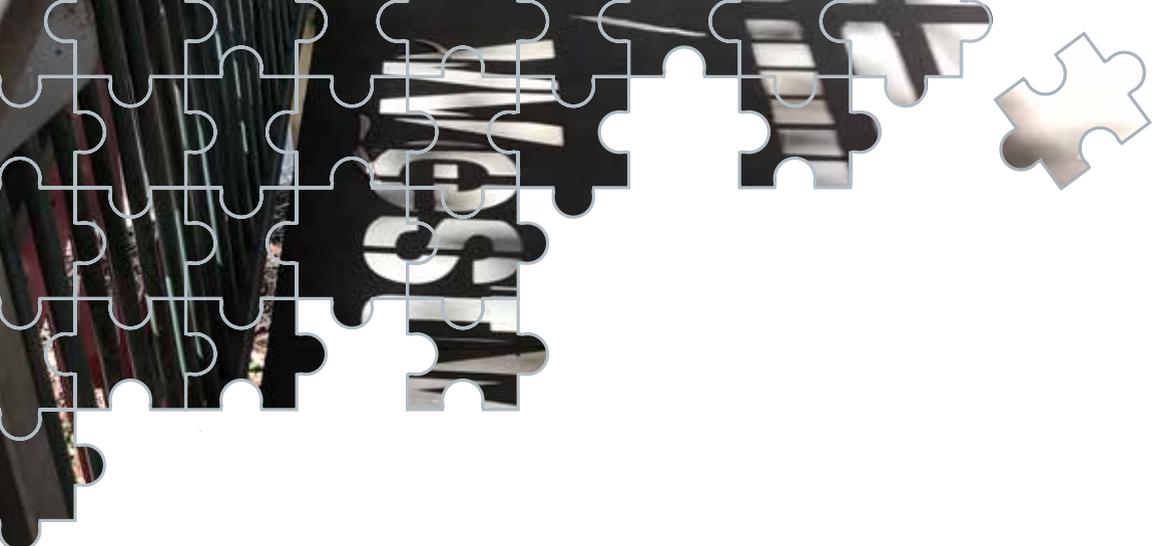
"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

- Maya Angelou

The following collection of work proudly represents the dedication and creativity of The Ponds High School Creative Writers Guild. This inaugural publication is a testament to the enthusiasm of these students as well as their mentors, sharing a passion for literature with each other and the school community. The stories and compositions within these pages capture the imagination and perspective of these

young writers, sharing views of the world that are varied and complex. As they find the edge pieces, connect them together and form a mosaic of student voices, this anthology marks a significant achievement. We look forward to future publications and encourage the Creative Writers Guild to continue to express themselves and share the countless untold stories within.





About WestWords

BY JAMES ROY, WESTWORDS

WestWords is Western Sydney's Literature Development Organisation. We provide pathways of opportunity for the development of Western Sydney voices through innovative literature and related arts programs. We believe literacy, self-expression and creativity changes lives and communities. WestWords is committed to providing an environment where the stories of the communities of Western Sydney and the places they come from are celebrated. The guiding philosophy of WestWords is a belief that the unique perspectives and stories of the Western Sydney area deserve

to be celebrated, developed in literature and shared with a wider audience.

We believe that engagement with reading and writing allows young people in particular to develop their imagination, gives voice to their stories and experiences, hones skills in written expression and illustration, and sets them on a trajectory for life. With a focus on literature, we deliver residencies, fellowships, workshops, performances, presentations and publications. Our partners include teachers, schools, universities, community and arts organisations.

WestWords would like to thank The Ponds High School, its principal Jennifer Weal, Miriam Kelly, Benjamin Bennett, Lara Jane Hancock, and the two teachers who kept the group on task, Rosylina Caro and Jennifer Voukelatos. We would also like to acknowledge Sailor Studios, who always do

such a great job for us, as well as Margaret Redrup-May and the team at Blacktown City Libraries.

Finally, thank you to the students, whose enthusiasm, inspiration and dedication led to the book you now hold.

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At ACU, we offer a welcoming environment for everyone. We stand for meaningful education, vital research, and life-changing community engagement.



Rope

WRITING BY MARIAM

As I walked hand in hand with my mother through the busy streets of Blacktown, seeing all the different people walk amongst us, I never questioned the validity of who I was or what made up me. I just saw myself as a person and never felt as if I didn't belong. As I got older and visited Sudan for the first time, the crowded streets felt familiar to home, but the actual streets could not have been further from what I knew. Filled with stray rubbish and the roads consisting

of practically just dirt, I didn't understand why it was so different.

"Habibti!" my aunties and uncles would yell at me as they ran to us in the airport, a term of endearment I had never heard from anyone but my mother. "Kefek?" they'd ask and I would look up towards my mother in the hope she would translate for me, their judgemental eyes burned into my mind forever.

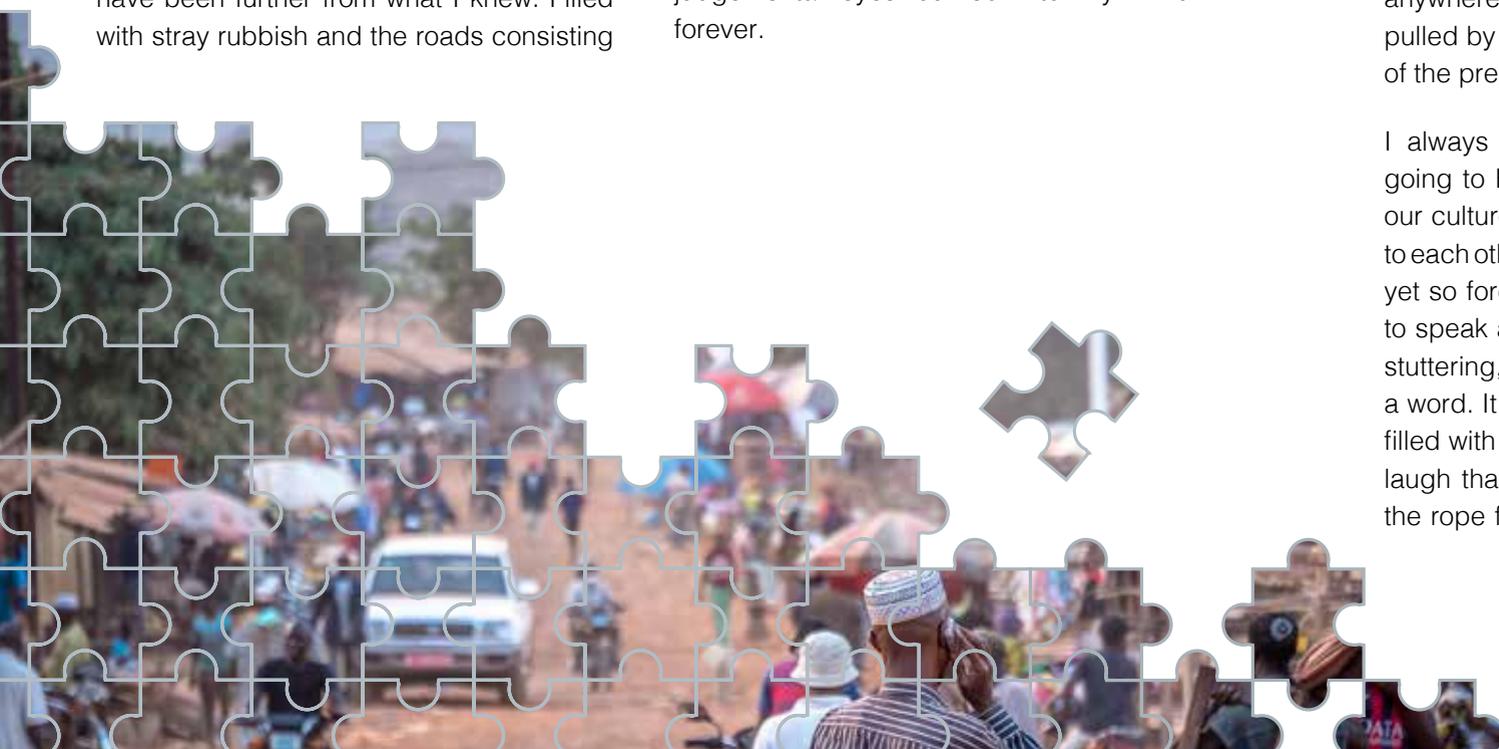
The entire trip consisted of awkward conversations and confusion from both sides that just ended up in no attempt being made to communicate. I wish I could have had a conversation with my Teta in Arabic. I wish I didn't feel the constant judgement from myself or from others, the constant thoughts that told me I wasn't Egyptian but I wasn't Australian either, that I didn't belong anywhere. I felt like I was a rope, being pulled by both sides, slowly fraying from all of the pressure.

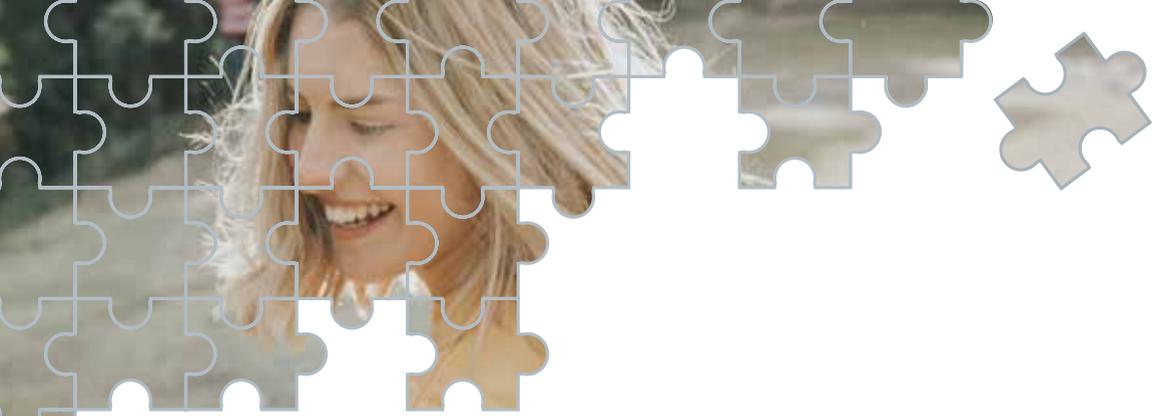
I always felt envious seeing my cousins going to Egypt and Sudan, learning about our culture, wearing flowy jalabiyas, talking to each other in a language I found so familiar yet so foreign all at once. Whenever I tried to speak amongst them they'd laugh at my stuttering, or when I'd pause to remember a word. It was a hearty laugh, one that was filled with pity and judgement all at once. A laugh that almost made me feel like when the rope frayed it would be okay, but even

I knew the threads that connected us were beginning to tear, faster and faster.

I stopped attending events where my family would be. I started straightening my curls and I stopped eating what my Mum would cook. The familiar scent of cardamom, cumin and coriander began to be something I avoided, rather than craved. If I couldn't be Arab, then I'd be Australian, but I'd always hate the beach.

As I grew older, I began to lose the resentment I felt towards my culture and began learning Arabic. The connections that unravelled started to grow stronger, unbothered by the pull from either side, beginning to find balance between the sides of who I am. I'm far from fluency but the threads between my background and I mend with each word I learn. Rather than this rope being something that held me back, I know now it's something that holds me together.





Sunny Girl

WRITING AND ILLUSTRATION BY TAVLEEN

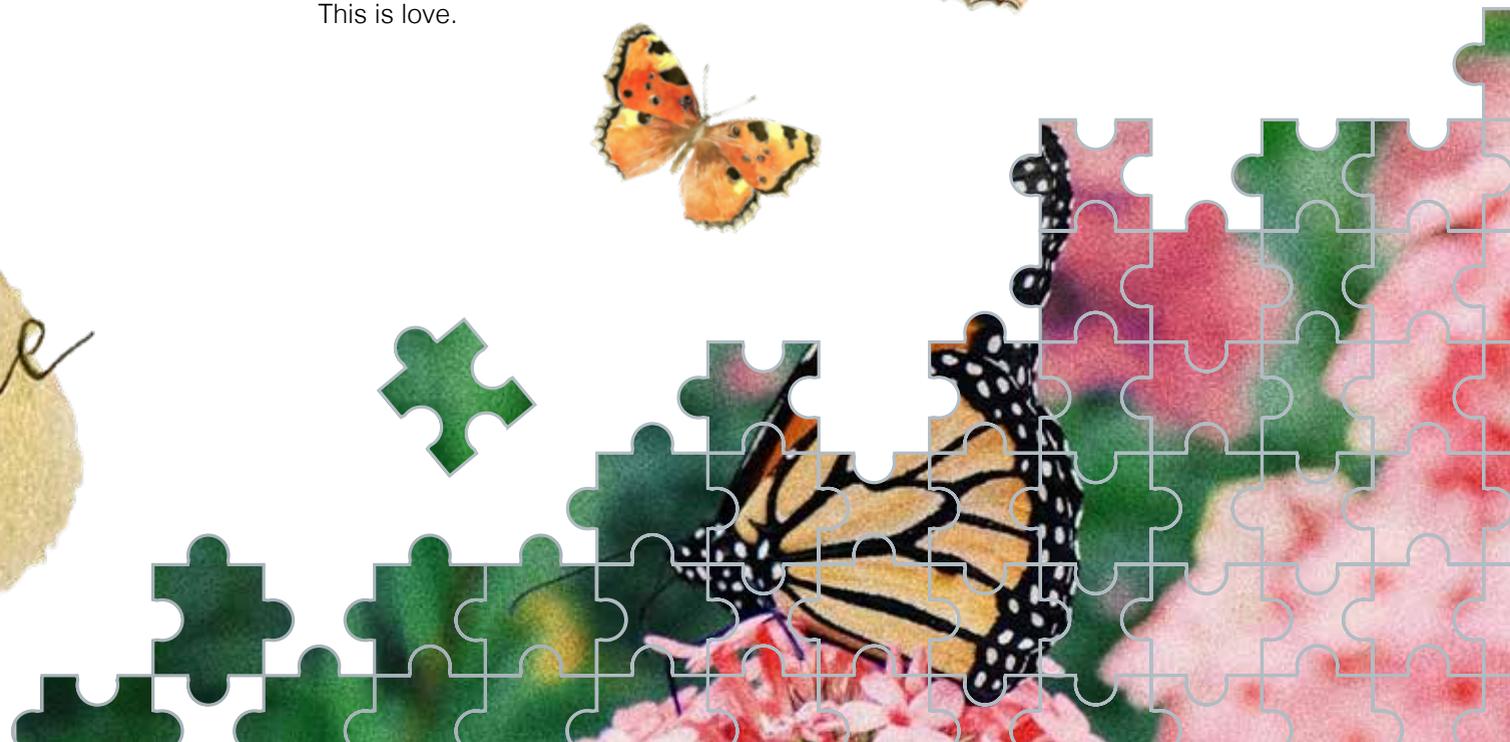
Her physique demands attention.
Not in the vulgar way, no.
She is soft like silk sheets.
Her tan contrasts with white of the pavement.
Her body is made of smooth hills
And she is the imperfectly perfect one.
She gleams under the burning rays of the sun,
She is the sun.
Not to be looked at or you'll go blind.
But I can't help it and as I look,
I see her mouth part into a laugh
Like the children she watches.
It's this stranger's laugh that
Plasters a grin on my own face
And so, I realise peace.



Untouchable

WRITING BY MILANA

It beats
like monarch wings.
The rush
like how the waves run
yet fall short.
They're pulled back.
False hope.
Untouchable.
This is love.



Air

WRITING BY ZANIN - ILLUSTRATION BY JANANI

I couldn't breathe.
The world felt like it was closing in,
With the rubbish covering the sea there was little room to move,
Happy clouds turned dark and roaring whales were silenced.

I had no choice but to hide away,
Forced into confinement,
My home was taken from me.

My ancestors belonged here,
This land was all I knew, it was what felt comfortable,
But the home that was once mine, was now belonging to plastic.

Over time I heard the chaos die,

I opened my eyes and came out of my shell,
My green skin began to glow.

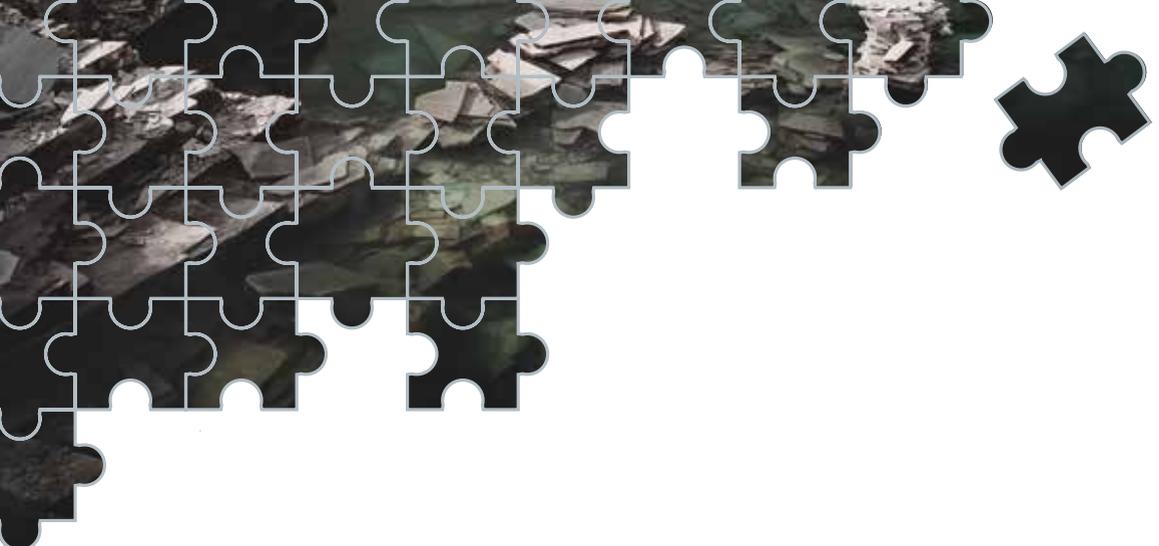
I slowly began to notice re-appearance of;
The roaring whales,
The cheery dolphins,
And the excitement of flying fish.

I couldn't help but wonder what had happened.

No tie around my neck,
Or bottle lid stuck in my throat,
No suffocating atmosphere causing my lungs to burst.

The world finally got its personality back,
Was free from its oppressive figures.
Earth was Earth again, no humans in sight.
This is when I knew, the whole world was at home.





A World of Peace?

WRITING BY BILVIKA

Ignorant bliss, a treasure of the past.
Unfortunately, our world chose to let go,
A long time ago
To the ideas that brought us peace,
To the morals that never creased
To the beliefs that now cease to exist
Choosing a world of war,
Conflict and grease
But at what cost?
Our innocence is long past

Versatility

WRITING BY HARNEET

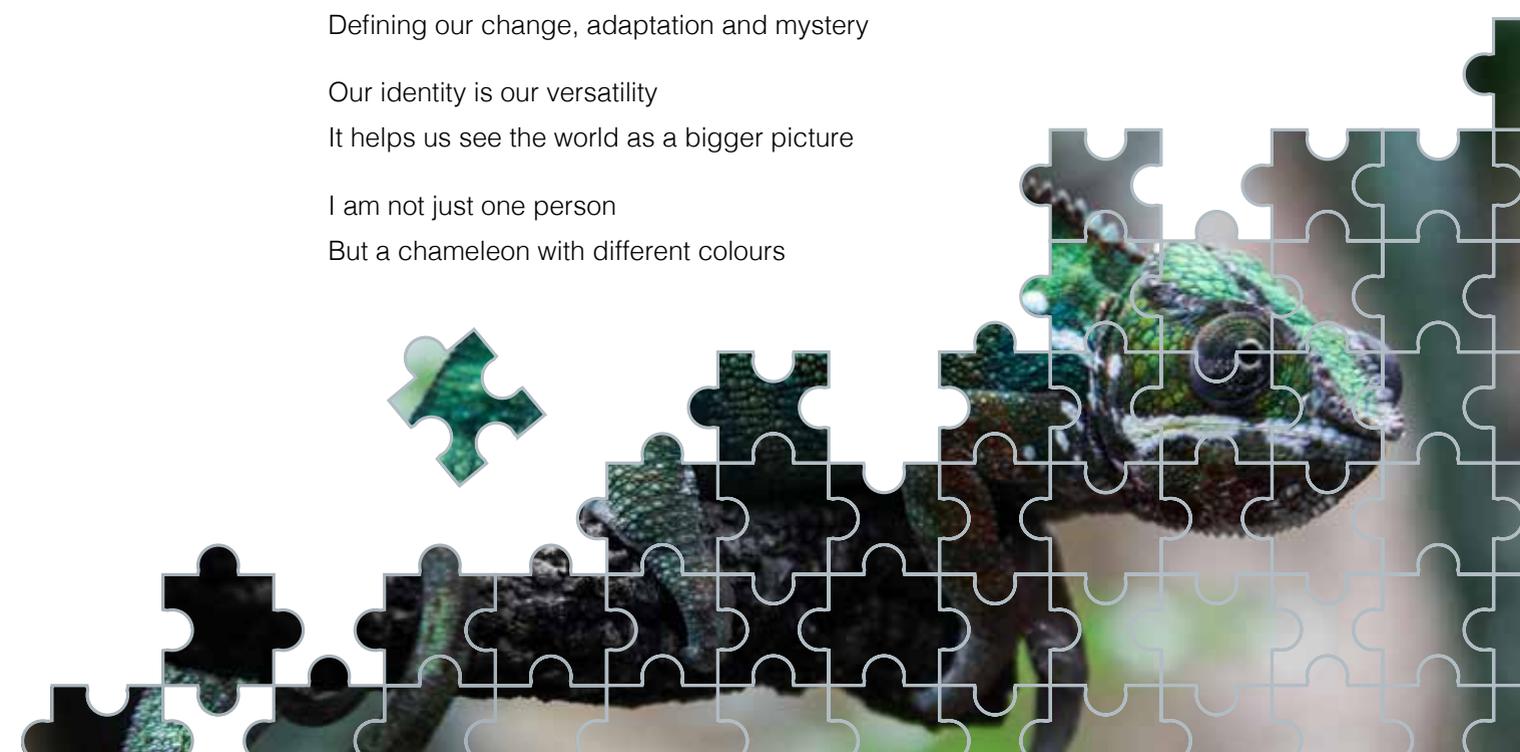
Spinning at a million an hour
The world constantly changes
So, does our place in it

Different colours, different races
Different cultures, different places

The magic of versatility
Flows through the veins of human history
Defining our change, adaptation and mystery

Our identity is our versatility
It helps us see the world as a bigger picture

I am not just one person
But a chameleon with different colours



She is Home

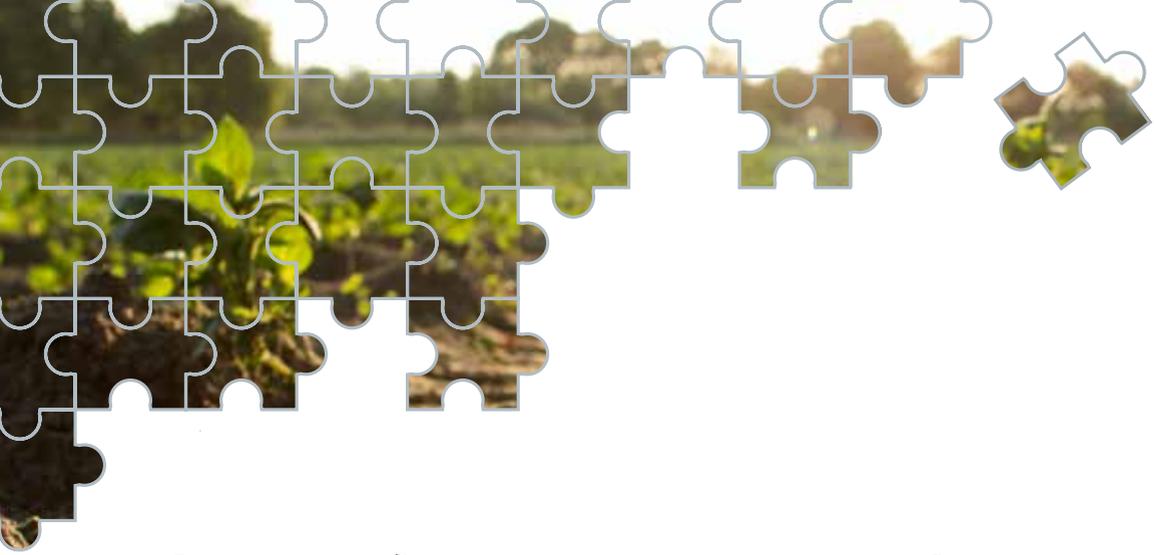
WRITING AND ILLUSTRATION BY MILANA

I dance in fields of yellow and white,
My bare feet deep in its greenery,
The sun kisses my face with its light,
Each day I greet so eagerly.
I let my wild curly hair run with the wind,
I can taste the pollened air,
Earth's forces within me, we're dancing twinned,
Her and I, the perfect pair.

I have a deep love for her nature,
Her flowers and warmth she bares,
She is my everlasting entablature,
She brings forth goodness, I know she cares.
She is with me always, wherever I go,
The happiness she gives me remains,
Her sparks last till tomorrow,
Her elements run through my pulsing veins.

I am old, yet I'm in my youth,
My love for living is great.
My passion for her is a truth,
Our bond is known to be our fate.
I like to be present in each moment,
Smile and run with earth's flow,
For my happiness is my bestowment,
And my love for her is what I bestow.





The Smallest Things

WRITING BY ZAHRAH - ILLUSTRATION BY JANANI



Day and night our lives intermingle
Ruminating, retracing, we redeem ourselves
Through the seeds we plant
Through the foundations we build
Through the stream of ambition flowing down the rivers of prosperity
We seek our identity, we seek the truth, WHO ARE WE?
Are we the moon that rises only when the sun has set?
Are we the voice that pursues an audience?
Are we the chains of steel that refuse to break?
Are we the key to unlocked doors of freedom? Opportunity?
I am everything, I am nothing, I am but a ball of cat fur.
I am the fur that flies in the wind, seeking an escape
I am soft, I am cuddly, and I am easy to shape
So, I mould my own path, my key, and my self-esteem
To show the world how the smallest things can shape my dream
Of a world where we are equal and a society that learns
That nothing is more significant than a ball of cat fur.



Away from Home

WRITING BY TIJIL

No matter how many times I make it, the taste does not resemble anything close to what I grew up with. The scent fails to take me back. I drink the tea as I run down the stairs, three at a time. I remember doing four as a kid, when the neighbouring friends from my village would call me down to play cricket, as soon as we finished school. I would throw my school bag across the room, before picking up my bat, and rushing out into the streets. Hours would pass, but we

would not tire.

Those times are now feeble memories, diminishing by the day. A sense of loneliness surrounds me, with the absence of the laughter and joy that I was constantly exposed to. The sudden responsibilities of independence have consumed me, to the point that I do not know where I am, and why I am in this place.

My world has been locked up, into the small

four walls of my empty house, and my office building in Manchester City.

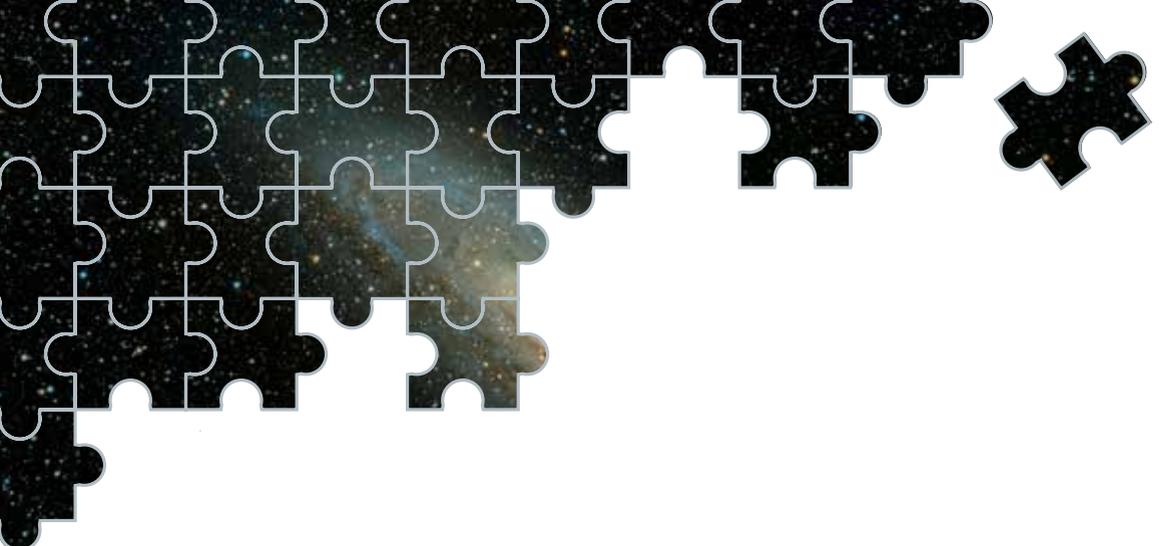
I have been here for years now, yet I still feel new. Maybe because things are so different here. Maybe because there is no one here that I know. Maybe I need to go back...

I pick up my black leather shoes and quickly fit my feet into them, whilst gazing at the clock. I put on my wristwatch, before picking up my suitcase and stepping out of the four walls.

It is a typical, windy day. Nothing like the hot, humid weather that I was used to. My black suit provides an added sense of warmth in the cold atmosphere. I start walking towards the bus stop, motionlessly, paying little attention to whatever happens around me. Perhaps, that is why this city is still so new to me. Still so unfamiliar. Still so foreign.

I try to keep in the present and notice the beautiful surroundings. The lush, green grass on the sidewalks; the peaceful chirping of the birds and the swift movements of the wind. I had not noticed these before. You see amazing things when the mind is living with you. When the mind wanders off into its own world, which it does very often with me, the world seems motionless, nothing sparks and nothing surprises. Everything seems the same.

As I wait for the bus, a rare beam of sunlight is shone upon me. I look up in awe, squinting my eyes at the bright, blue sky that was coloured in grey a few moments ago. The sight of the blue skies enhances me, the motionless figure I was is now disappeared. The mind is with me. Perhaps, this is a new start. Perhaps, this is my new world.



Eclipse

WRITING BY MUNEEZA - ILLUSTRATION BY JANANI



I am the moon
Waxing, waning

Making the ocean chorus
Beautiful, even with its dips and craters

Bright and shining as ever
Even though it is not full

I am the sun
Spilling out honey golden rays

Her gift powerful enough
To set the world on fire

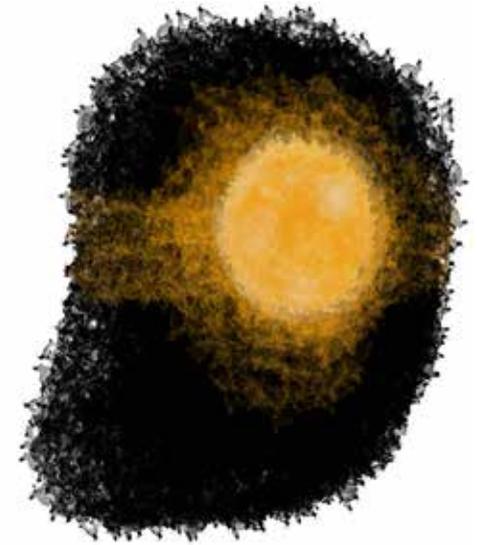
Taking her rightful place
With pride, on the horizon



I am an eclipse
Bringing darkness to the world at will

Hiding away her light
In the orchestra of her mind

Stealing away breaths
With her rosy ring of flame



"I Like to Hide"

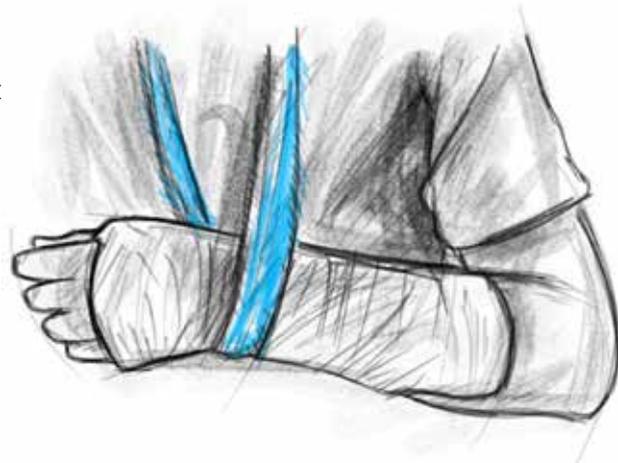
WRITING AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANANI

I was on the ground.
People crowded around me.
My side was numb.
There was a high-pitched whine.

Teachers yelled,
children giggled,
my mother panicked and carried me to the doctors.

I noticed the odd angle my arm dangled at.
Then noticed the whining was my screams.

The screaming never ceased until they put
the cast on my arm.



Five-year-old me
knew what
silence and
peace was
then.

Four weeks later, as my fracture healed remarkably fast, they slid the cast off.
I felt naked, at that moment.
The thing that hid my weakness was gone now.

The whole world could see who I was without a cast to hide the scared,
little girl.

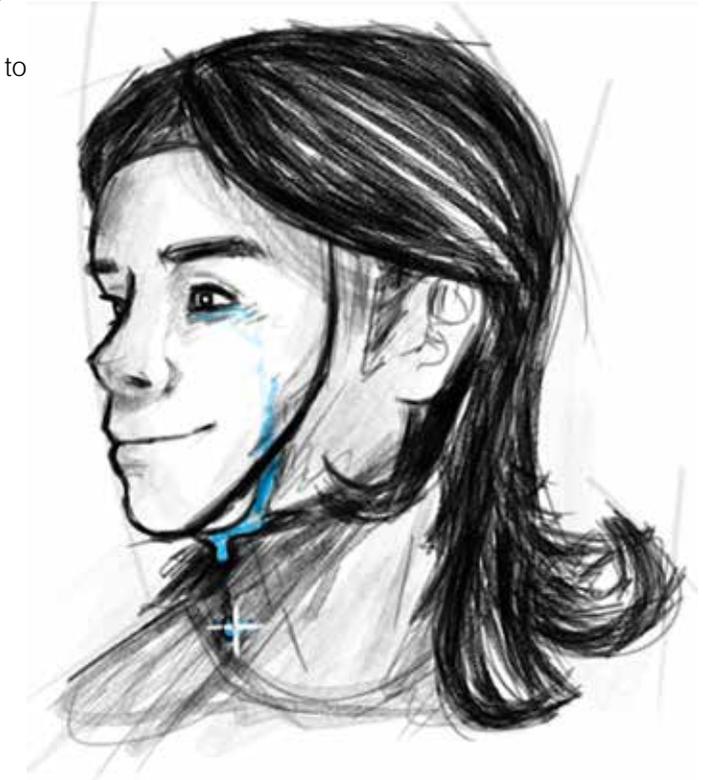
Five-year-old me needed a mask.

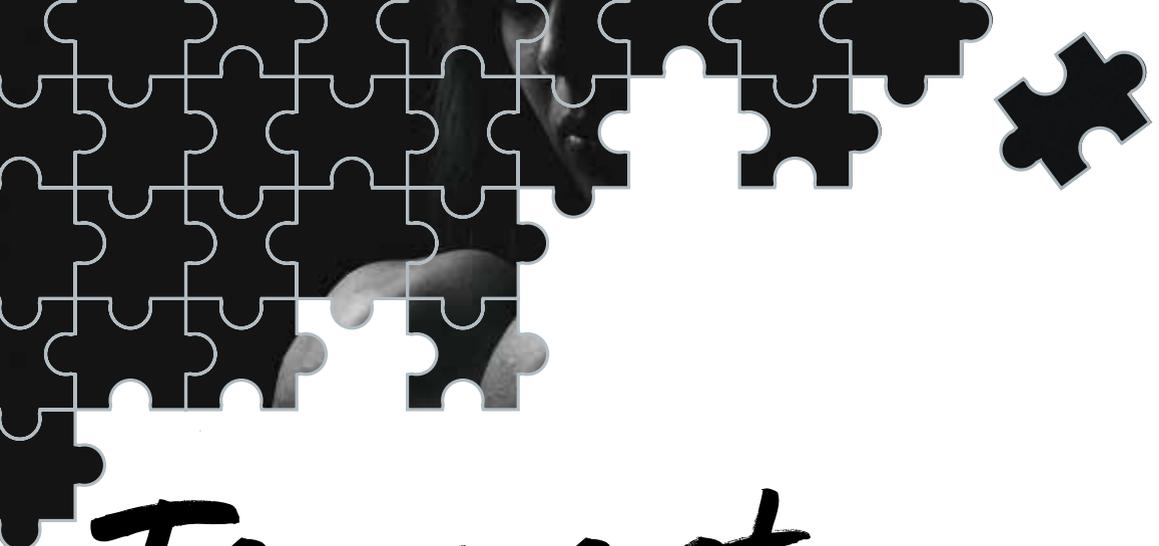
Without it, the voices would get to
me and reveal my insecurities.

Five-year-old me
pulled on a mask.

She wouldn't open

herself up after that.





Tempest

WRITING BY MILANA

Fear

Darkness, it consumes you.
Shapes and distorted figures standby.
Like fear, it's unexpected
Out of the blue,
you don't know its limits,
Where it lies.
Fear is an instinct
a way of surviving,
Trying to desperately un-know what you
already know.
Your heart pounds
it's conniving.
How can you live with fear as a constant
foe?

I fear my light will be overshadowed,
By something dark,
something twisted.
I fear that my worth will no longer be
hallowed,
A period of darkness is inevitable,
and we're all enlisted.
For a night lasts 500 godly years,
500 years of anguishing fear.
The moon I will follow,
I'll adhere,
wondering when the light will interfere.

Hope

The universe births a magical flare,
Its pattern of events change to cope.
For after a period of winter,
a period of despair,
comes spring,
a season of hope.

Joy

Salty incense
Sapphire blue
Sun-kissed meadows.



Boat

WRITING BY HARNEET

A small boat could be seen bobbing up and down with the waves along the horizon. An old man behind the steering wheel with several fishing nets. Little did he know that I was watching, silently and persistently eyeing this foolish but bold man as he continued on, pulling in creatures that weren't his to take. This man had grown on me – maybe because he was different to the others.

Unlike them, he didn't just become a part of me; he was using me, taking away small pieces of me to sell to the others who weren't far behind. Travelling around distant regions

of the world without ever settling down, no one to pass on his legacy to, I could almost relate to this man's loneliness. Who was this person, and was he aware of my patience slowly reaching the brim? His travels were what surprised me the most as he didn't just stay in one place. I guess that's where we were both alike.

The man had a bald head with grey eyes that brimmed with the knowledge and experience collected from a variety of places around the world. His now fragile arms were once the greatest machines I had ever witnessed, keeping this man

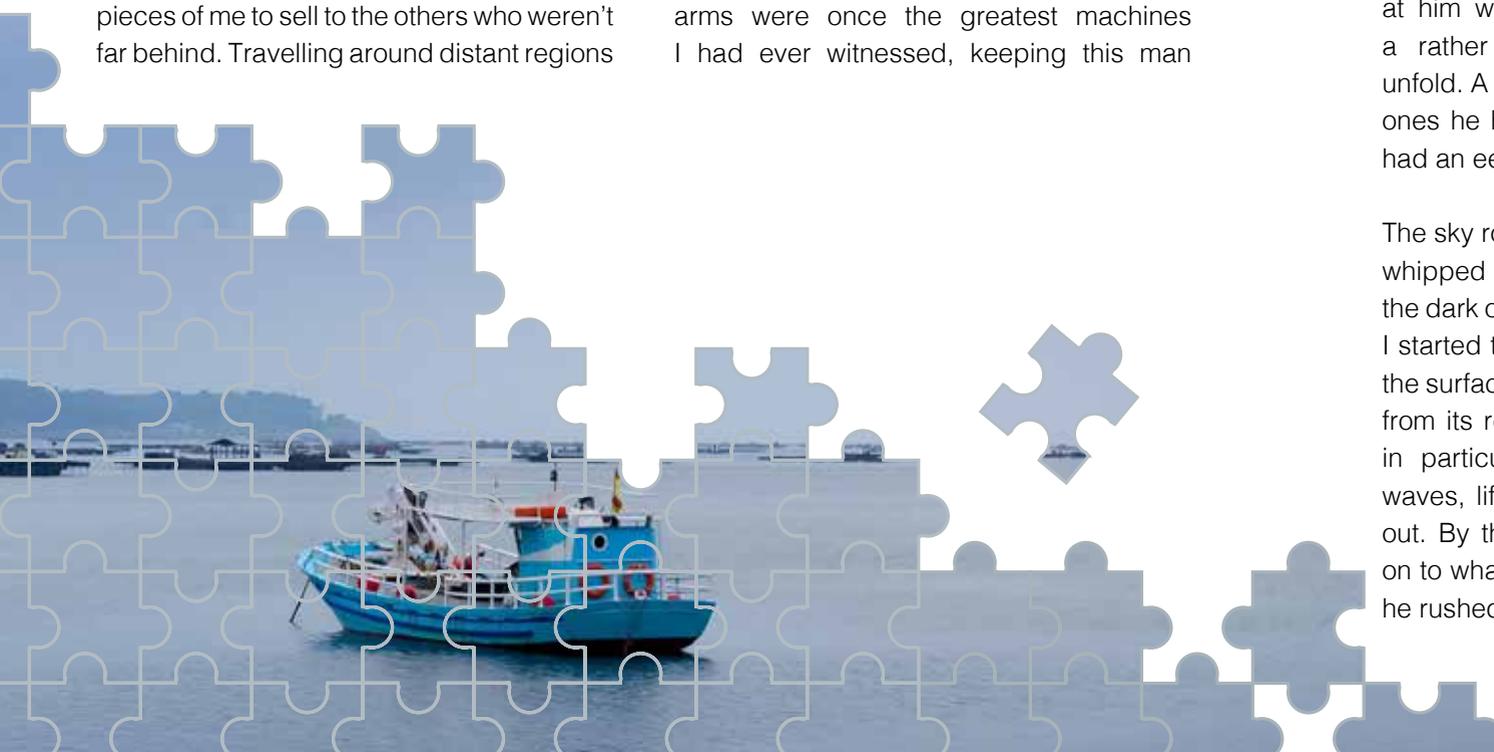
alive through the toughest storms ever to exist. He was my book, my only source for erudition about the great lands beyond the coastlines, another reason why he was my greatest prey. Today was the day my collection of antiques would get larger, as today was the day I would take this man for my own.

Salty tears silently rolled down the boat's window, dripping over the drenched wooden planks. The man's reflection stared at him while he gazed outside, watching a rather unexpected, windy, nightmare unfold. A storm was brewing but not like the ones he had experienced before; this one had an eerie taste to it.

The sky roared aggressively as large winds whipped around my body, foreshadowing the dark ominous clouds that were rolling in. I started to design minuscule ripples along the surface of my body, awakening the boat from its rest. It chugged towards nowhere in particular. The small ripples became waves, lifting the wooden structure further out. By this time the old man had caught on to what was happening. Spontaneously, he rushed inside believing that he could be

saved from the events that followed while I laughed knowing that nothing could save him now. The old boat oscillated at great heights, however, it never tipped over the edge. My waves, on the other hand, accumulated more water every second.

Once again, the small boat reached the apex of the monstrous wave. This time the wind's final blow sent the vessel crashing downwards into the empty abyss. In one giant gulp, I consumed the remains, for the first time feeling the vulnerability and weakness of the man who had once travelled the whole world. I could feel him squirming for his breath, trying to fight his way to the surface as I slowly asphyxiated his lungs by flooding them with water. Every second passing, his struggle became weaker. His entire life flashed before his eyes. Three minutes, it only took three minutes until finally every essence of the man's soul was mine. He belonged to me now, he is a part of the sea. Venice, Greece, The Arabian Peninsula... The man's spirit flowed through me and gave me the lens to finally see the world that laid beyond. It was as if I could see the whole world.





Crying Echoes

WRITING BY MILANA

Ignorance

Somebody's crying
Do you hear?
Prints of a man,
paint their skin.
Prints of a man
mask their tears.

Somebody's crying
Yet they're silenced?
Words from a child,
never heard.
Words from a child,
deemed imagined.

Somebody's crying
Do you hear?
Innocent tears,
desperation.
Our ignorance.
A child is crying.

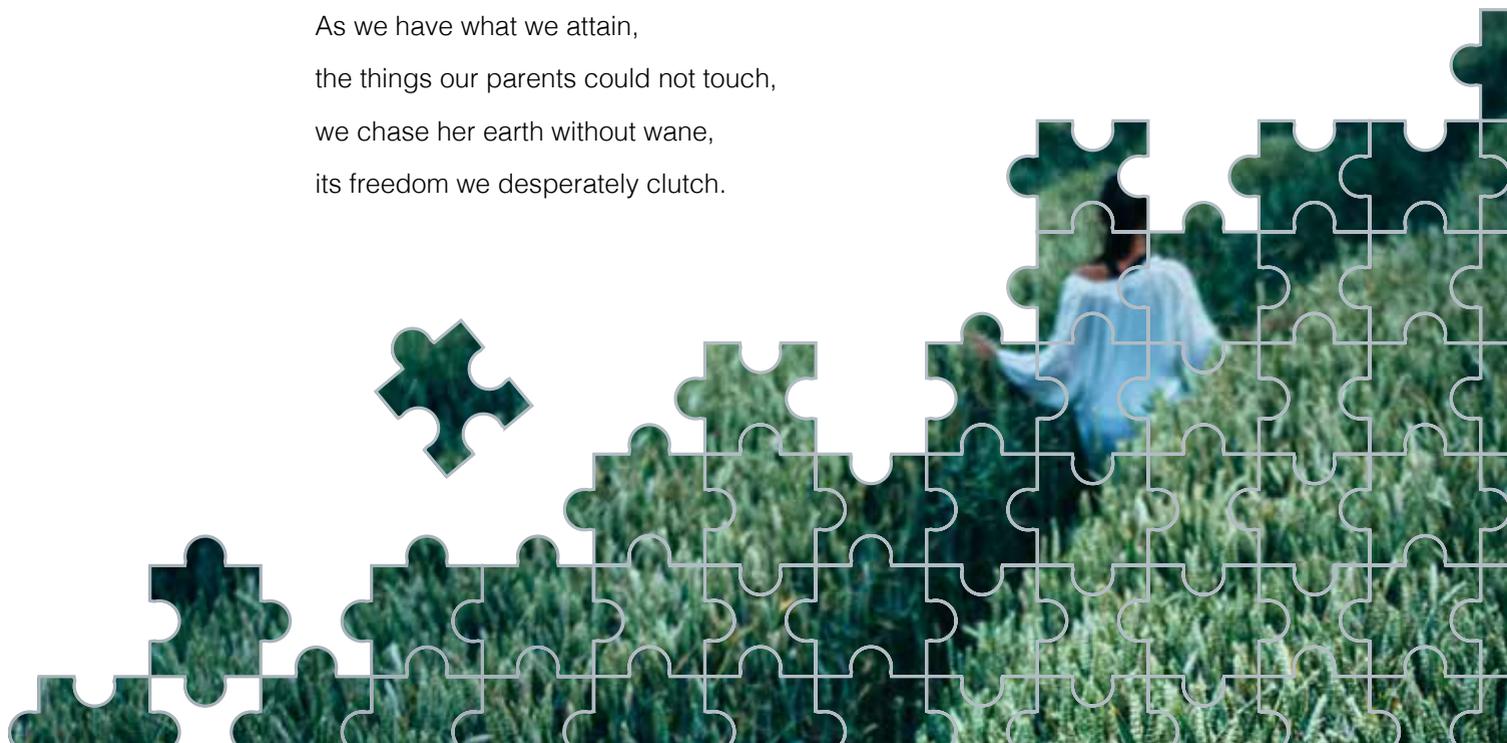
Freedom

As the wind fumes through our face,
tangling our curly hair,
it's the sunshine we so longingly chase,
the feeling of running bare.

As we run through emerald fields,
fresh from springtime's rain,
the sweetness of its incense yields,
who are we to ever complain?

As we run, jump, swim, fly,
we forever live joyously,
it's our energy that will not die,
we live each day so buoyantly.

As we have what we attain,
the things our parents could not touch,
we chase her earth without wane,
its freedom we desperately clutch.



Her

WRITING BY ZANIN - ILLUSTRATION BY JANANI

She loved endlessly,
Cried deeply,
And cared solemnly.

Effort was voluntary,
Her time was your time.
She cherished passionately,
And became your right hand.

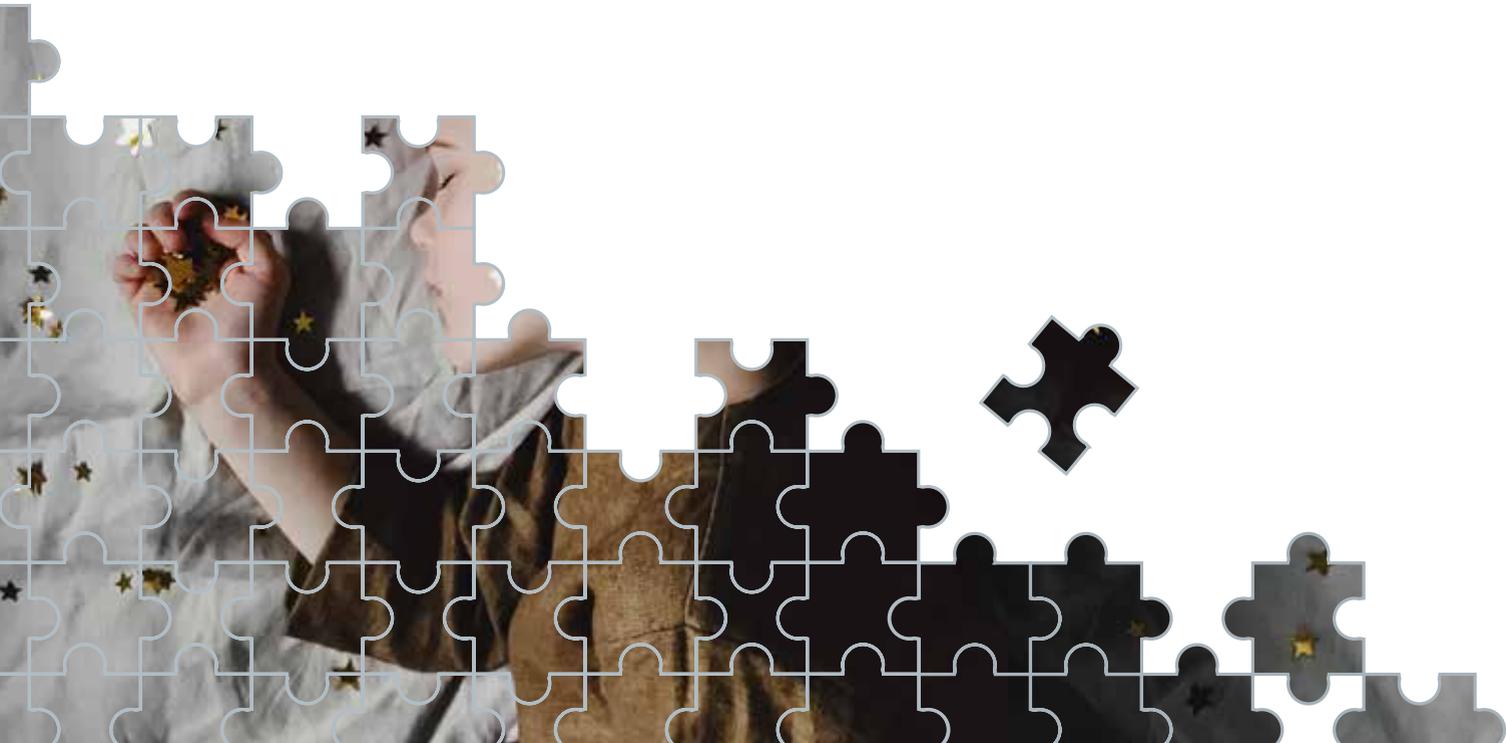
In the end she laid on her final bed,
Seizing to find someone to reach out,
To save her, like she had for them.

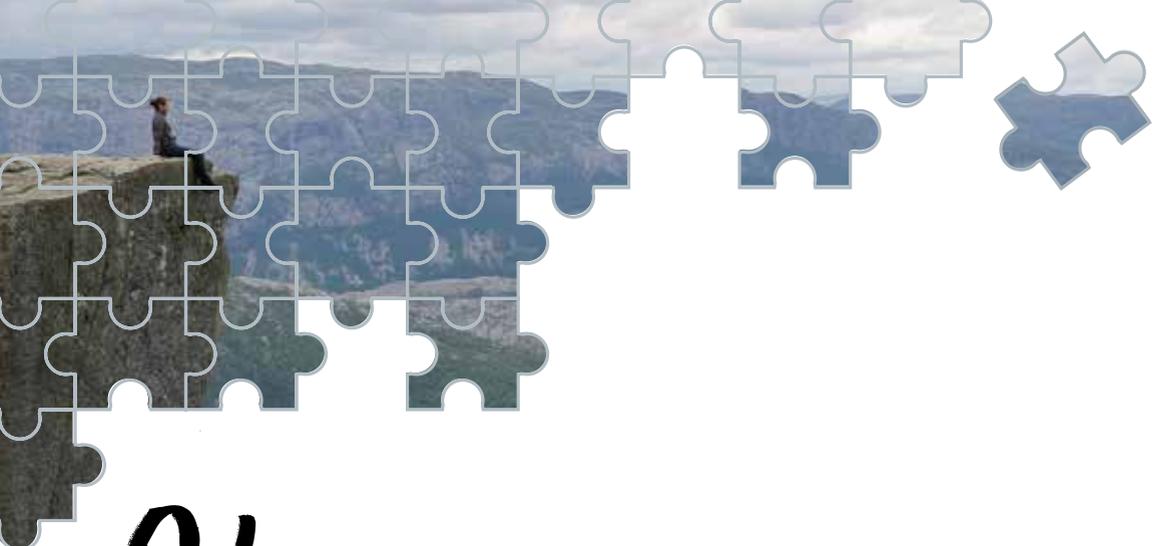


No one in sight.

In the end she realised her value
In the end she knew she would be the only one there
for herself
Karma had lied.

In the end she appreciated herself
Loved herself,
And cared for only herself
In the end she found her inner peace.





Choice

WRITING BY TAVLEEN

A whole life ahead of me.
Acts of power within me escape through
the cracks.
I can go out and scream at the top of my
lungs
On the thinnest cliff
Of the highest peak.
I can twirl and stumble and sweat
Until I fall in tears of silly joy.
I can sing with the croakiest of voices
Whenever I choose
because it's my choice.

I have this life ahead of me
And so, I write.
I write so I remember.
I write so others know.
They may choose to live freely, as I have.
I will know they lived to find the little
specks of happy

In each day as I have
Because we all know,
This dreamlike reality will one day come to
an end.

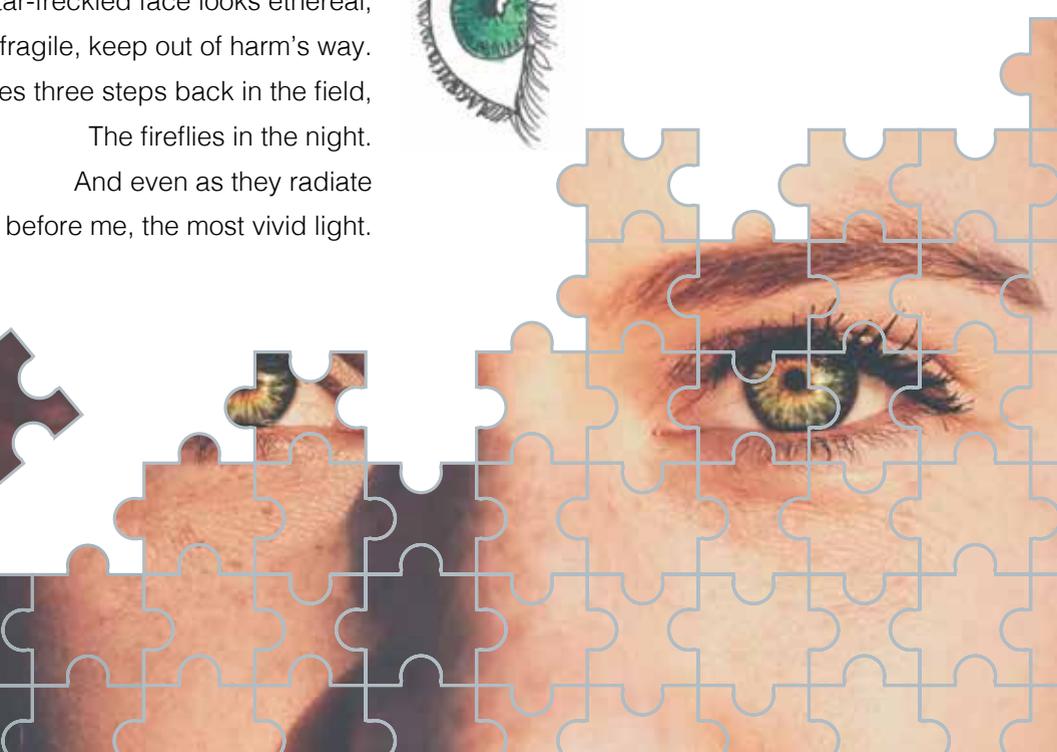
Use your power.



She is the Light

WRITING AND ILLUSTRATION BY TAVLEEN

Her orbs are green, forest
They look gold below the moon.
Her body emits the heat I crave
In the cold winters of June
I must have been staring far too long
She's now smiling at me face.
Her dimples bring me so much joy,
Her worries have left without a trace.
Her skin has been softly kissed,
From the sun every day.
Her star-freckled face looks ethereal,
Too fragile, keep out of harm's way.
She moves three steps back in the field,
The fireflies in the night.
And even as they radiate
The stands before me, the most vivid light.



Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile

WRITING BY MACKENZIE

She sat dutifully in front of the clouded mirror; one arm half-raised. Her hand twitched with the pale make-up brush, as she squinted at the figure, she saw in the mirror's reflection. A rosy-cheeked woman stared back at Lottie, her doe-eyes looking too big for her dainty face.

The woman in the reflection was pretty, with long auburn curls cascading

down her arched back. Lottie did not know the woman that stared back at her; not by her beauty, not by her poise, and certainly not by her thin-lipped smile. Lottie lowered the brush to the marbled vanity. She wondered why the woman had suddenly appeared in the mirror, and frowned, her stained lips glistening in the low light.

The woman in the mirror frowned as well, and a surge of untamed anxiousness settled in Lottie's stomach. It looked rather wrong, seeing a frown on this woman's face, even though Lottie had no recollection of who she may be. Lottie blinked slowly, her eyes drooping for two-second intervals, but still, the frown coming from the mirror did not alter.

Lottie wrinkled her nose, eyeing the mirror rather reproachfully, hoping her passive-aggressiveness would tempt the mirror-woman to move. She didn't, instead opting to glower back at Lottie, seemingly mocking her.

Lottie's cheeks flushed pink and she turned her head to focus on the fluffy black carpet in unnecessary protest. Tapping her foot twice on the floor, Lottie made the same rhythmic pattern with her finger's tips on the vanity.

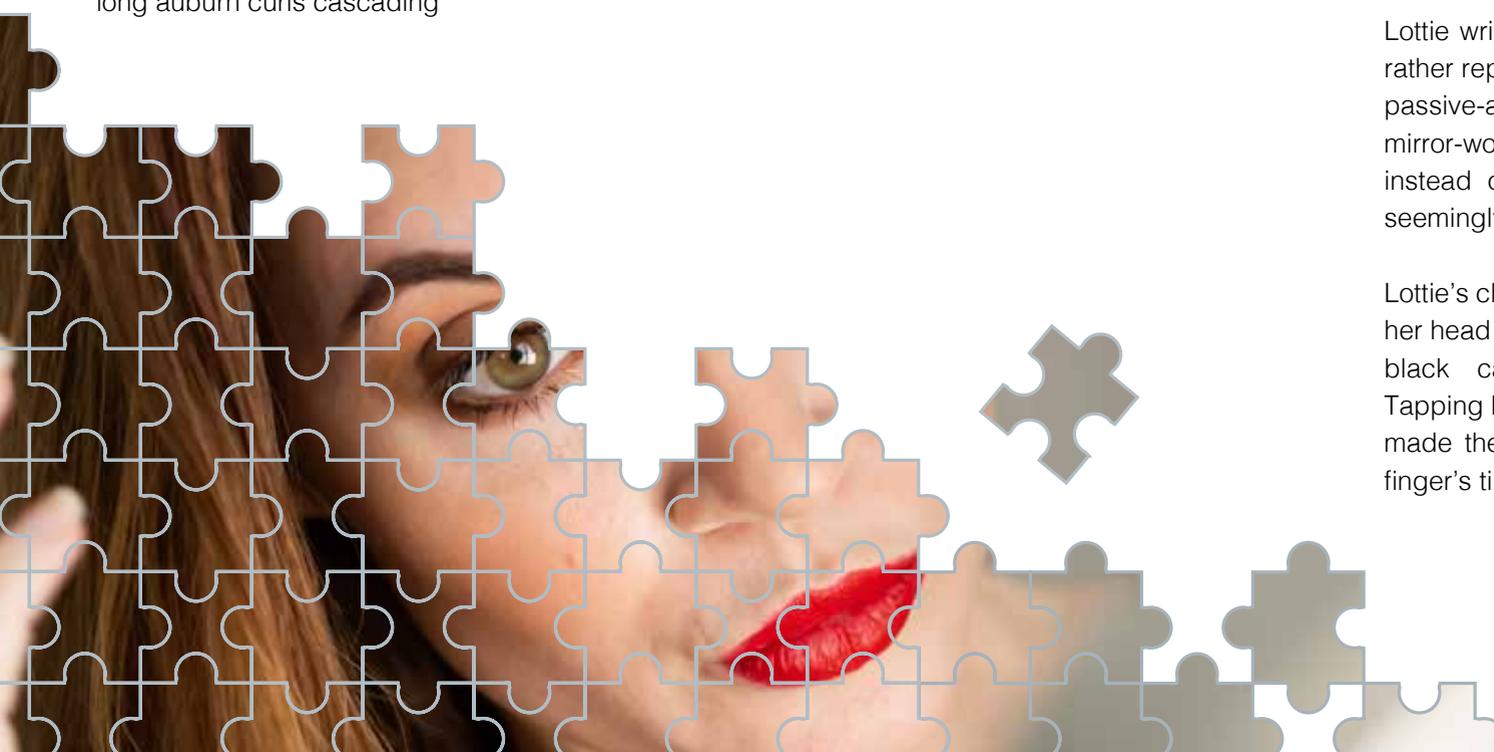
She bit her lip, heaved a breathy sigh, and raised her chin towards the mirror once more. Oh, oh, she thought, it was me.

The woman in the mirror was no longer the woman in the mirror. In fact, she looked rather identical to Lottie.

Lottie thought it was rather odd, that she did not recognise her own face, even though it was devoid of make-up.

She pulled a face similar to one she would make after smelling something particularly foul. Lottie stood from her marbled vanity and flung her auburn curls over her pale shoulder.

She trod across the carpet, her toes sinking into it, and paused at her open door, stricken with a sudden chill that made the hairs on her arms stand. There was a knock, behind her.





Hollow Men

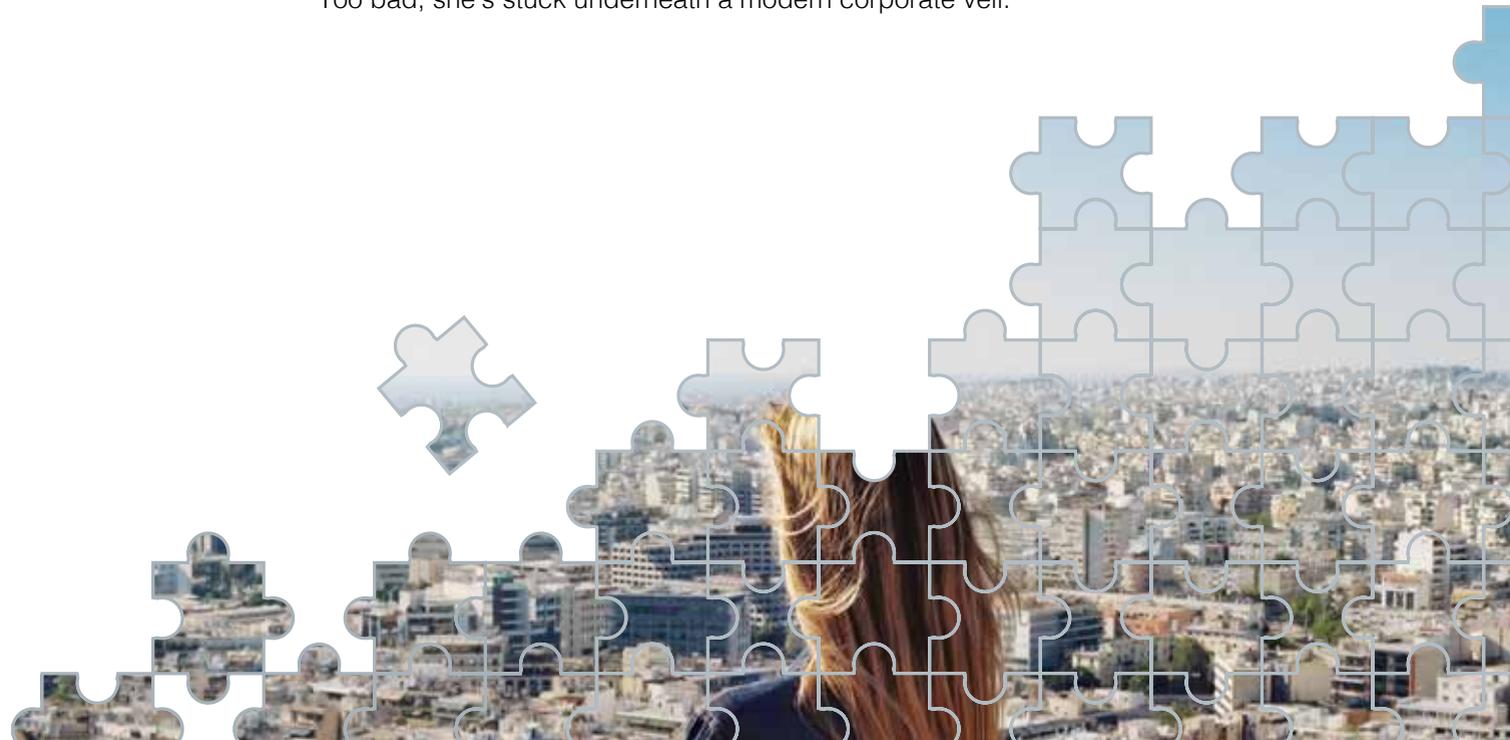
WRITING BY BILVIKA

Life; nothing but an empty dream,
a hollow series of events,
day passing day,
until one, where we land upon our grave.
Our purpose we question, yet every day.
Our failures we reason,
reminiscing on past success.
Clasping onto moments of joy,
trembling to let go.
Lies we acknowledge ever so low,
our potential we do not see,
our lies we tell ourselves,
To hide from the truth,
we're nothing but hollow men.
Hollow men with hearts,
waiting to be filled.

The Modern Corporate Veil

WRITING BY BILVIKA

An extroverted actress,
a showman for what they see,
a young girl deciding which place to be.
Flipping through pages of her life,
Blind that the current is only one chapter of her tale.
Yet alas her vision forbids her to look further
Further into the future, further into the world
where everything is not rubies or pearls.
Her thoughts warped; amongst modern chaos,
desperately calling for bail.
Too bad, she's stuck underneath a modern corporate veil.



Crimson Stained

WRITING BY MILANA

The call to shed man's blood,
left crimson stained poppies as night fell.
Figures lay across fields
that fate never intended to be victorious.
Boys with the lost potential to be men,
Australia's future fathers gone;
leaving hopeful mothers with nothing but a telegram
delivered by a boy,
and no one to welcome home.



Raindrops

WRITING BY TAVLEEN

Our late-night burritos lie on the table.
The fizz from the lemonade has dispersed.
The jukebox plays a soft piano tune
as I look out of the French windows
into the forests as green as life.
The cushions squished under my weight
Look dark through the shadows the grey sky casts.
The soft blanket you have wrapped right around my legs
Seems to lose its warmth
More and more and more
As my back leans against you.
I feel your heartbeat against my left shoulder blade,
as loud as drums,
And I wonder
If you ever asked me to remain in your embrace,
I'd give up everything to stay here with you.
I focus on the lingering kiss you left upon my forehead
As we watch the rain
And I wonder once more,
How the raindrops fight to reach the bottom
Just as you and I fight for who loves the other most.
"Thank you," I whisper to the one above
In the embrace of my world.





You

WRITING BY ZANIN

Cry, cry, cry, but don't cry in front of them
Laugh... laugh... but don't laugh too much
Do your hair, do your makeup, be a lady.

Lower your skirt, let your hair down,
Do not satisfy the oppressor.

Have your own hobbies, but don't go off track,
Dance like there's no tomorrow, but only in your room
You are free to go out, but only if I say so
You have a right to say your opinion, only if it agrees with mine

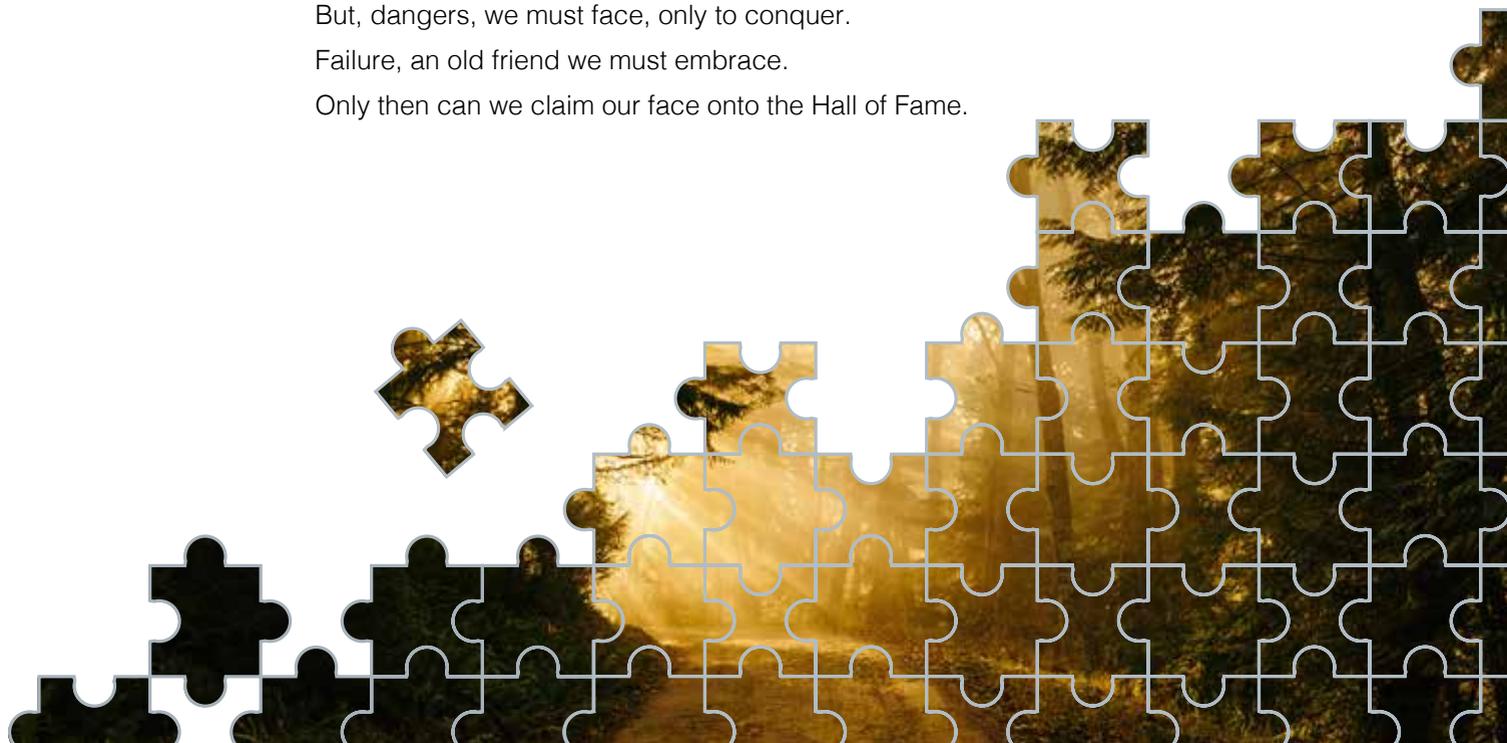
Stand up for yourself, but look weak to show respect
Express yourself how you'd like, only if it follows social norms
Never disobey the oppressor,
but most importantly, don't forget to be yourself.

Hall of Fame

WRITING BY BILVIKA

The universe works in remarkable ways,
Providing endless paths for those to come,
Yet pulls you in like a kite, strings attached to follow only one.
Leaving behind well-trodden paths is a sin for what they see,
Yet they fail to notice the radiating glow,
that shines ever so brightly from only the paths left undiscovered.
The glow; that beholds a greater unknown identity,
Calling young adventurers,
seeking their presence.

One may warn or be weary of these paths,
As danger drips with every breath
But, dangers, we must face, only to conquer.
Failure, an old friend we must embrace.
Only then can we claim our face onto the Hall of Fame.



I'm Daydreaming Again

WRITING BY JANANI

I'm daydreaming again.
I haven't slipped so far before.
It was just class, my pen pressing ink
Into the paper beneath.

I'm daydreaming again
As the teacher speaks, droning about
Cliff dwellings, words blending,
Until she says, "Clover".

I'm daydreaming again,
I just know it.
There are four-leafed clovers pressed in my hand.
There's no peace here as I stare at the inferno razing.

I'm daydreaming again,
About the smoke and ash that
Clogs my mouth and throat, burning everything around me.
There's nothing left, nothing left, nothing left—

"You're daydreaming again."
The teacher is curt, annoyed, and so is the class.
They all hold four-leaf clovers.
They won't save them.

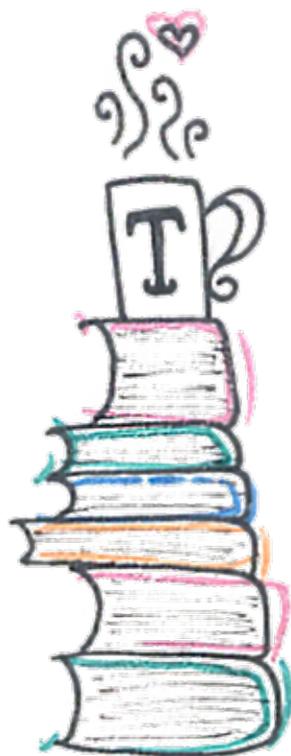
"You're daydreaming again,"
Is all they say.
They just don't see
That I've seen their fiery end.



The Book in Your Hands

WRITING AND ILLUSTRATION BY TAVLEEN

The book in your hands,
As you sit still and read.
There's fog in your glasses,
From the peppermint tea.
There's a pause in your breath,
As the climax grows near.
You see all the words,
The book's all you hear.
You become lost from this world,
As you read this book.
An adventurous journey,
Reading away in your nook.
You sit smiling alone,
Your private abyss.
The book in your hands,
Is simple bliss.

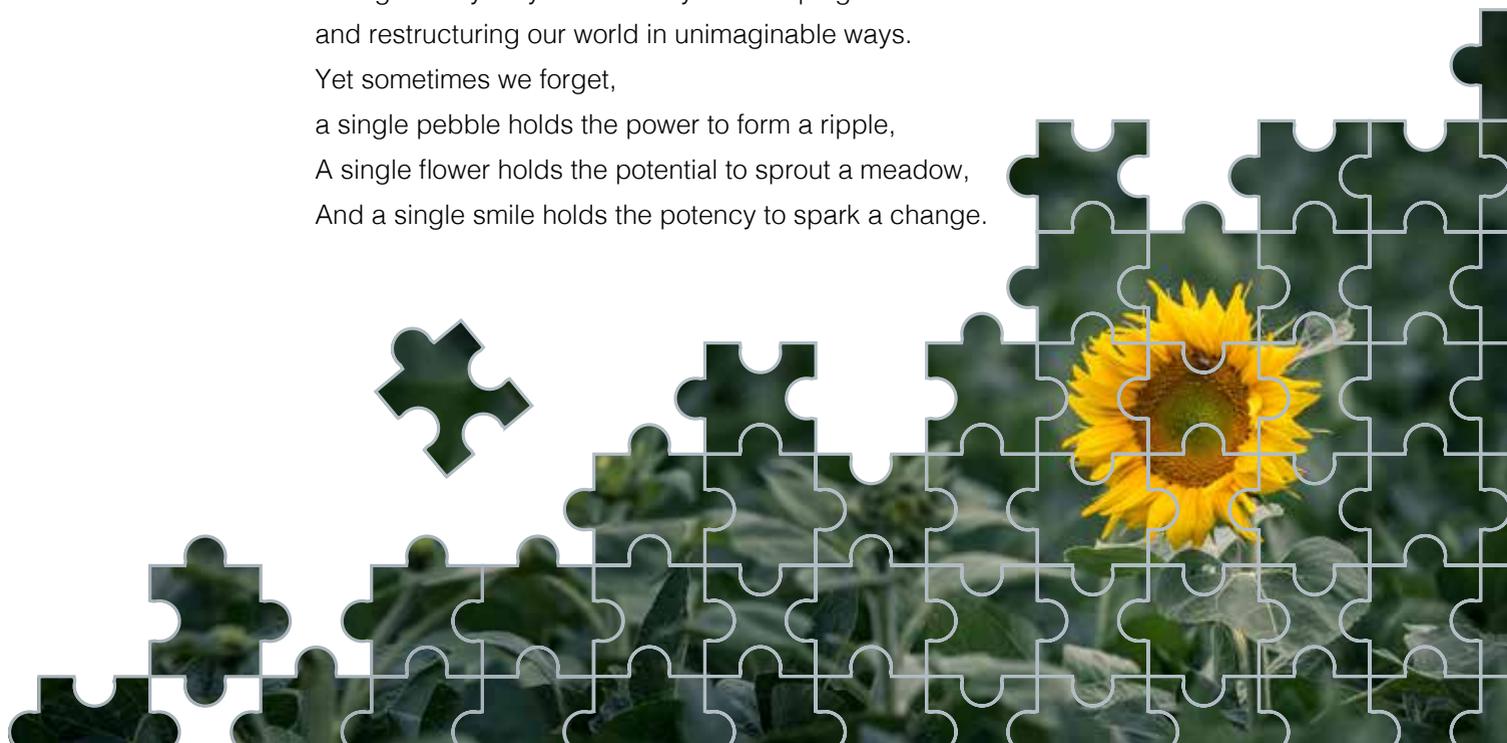


Single Entity

WRITING BY BILVIKA

A flower by the meadow,
A pebble by a lake
A smile on Christmas morning,
I resemble a flower, a pebble and a smile,
in greater ways than one can imagine.
A single entity in a vast ocean of havoc.
A single entity isolated in a crowd of peers.
A single entity drowning in modern chaos.

Yet sometimes, we forget that,
A single entity is capable of change,
A single entity may hold the key to reshaping
and restructuring our world in unimaginable ways.
Yet sometimes we forget,
a single pebble holds the power to form a ripple,
A single flower holds the potential to sprout a meadow,
And a single smile holds the potency to spark a change.



Child's Play

WRITING BY MACKENZIE

His little chest heaved from acute shortness of breath. His cheeks were flushed pink from his boisterous spirit, and his floppy auburn hair fell over thick-rimmed glasses. Here he stood on the edge of the Mount Livingroom, lava pools of mismatched plastic Lego pieces bubbling and uninviting.

Burnt cushions stretched across the barren land, and books with loose stitching and torn pages bobbed unnaturally on the searing hot substance.

Strewn trucks shot up from the lava in geysers, almost causing Arlo to wobble where he

stood, trying to map out the safest path.

He adjusted his glasses on his freckled nose, squinting his eyes towards the horizon. His tread through Mount Livingroom would be more dangerous than travelling across the bubbling seas of Soapy Baths, where he could barely see over the roaring storm and splashing of a rubber whale's magnificent tail.

It would definitely be more dangerous than wading through the darkened cave of his closet, where bats made of fabric sung from metal rods over his head, causing panic to

swell in his tummy.

Yet, he would not let fear deter him this time, and took an unnerving step onto the closest floating cushion to him.

It sunk slightly under his weight, but Arlo moved his other foot to meet the first. He clapped a small hand to his chest in relief, before making a half jump onto a book titled *Adventurer's first steps*, then onto the next larger cushion.

A surge of plastic lava shot up before him, and Arlo yelped, trying to steady his balance so he was not touched.

Once his footing was regaining, he looked to his feet, where only one blue sneaker hugged a little too tightly to his left foot.

Arlo nodded to himself and looked out again. Then he saw it! The missing shoe, up ahead, sitting on top of a colourful box filled with bouncy balls. The warmth filling his chest caused him to cover his mouth while he giggled. It was travelling upstream with the searing Lego lava, away from him.

He couldn't let the shoe get away! Arlo took

another stumbling step forward, onto the top of the large suede couch.

He footwork was sloppy, and he continued to wobble on one foot. Arlo steadied himself with both arms half-raised stretched out in front of him.

Arlo pursed his lips, blowing a raspberry to himself in relief. The shoe wasn't too far ahead of him, and he knew by the feeling in his tummy that he could get to it in time.

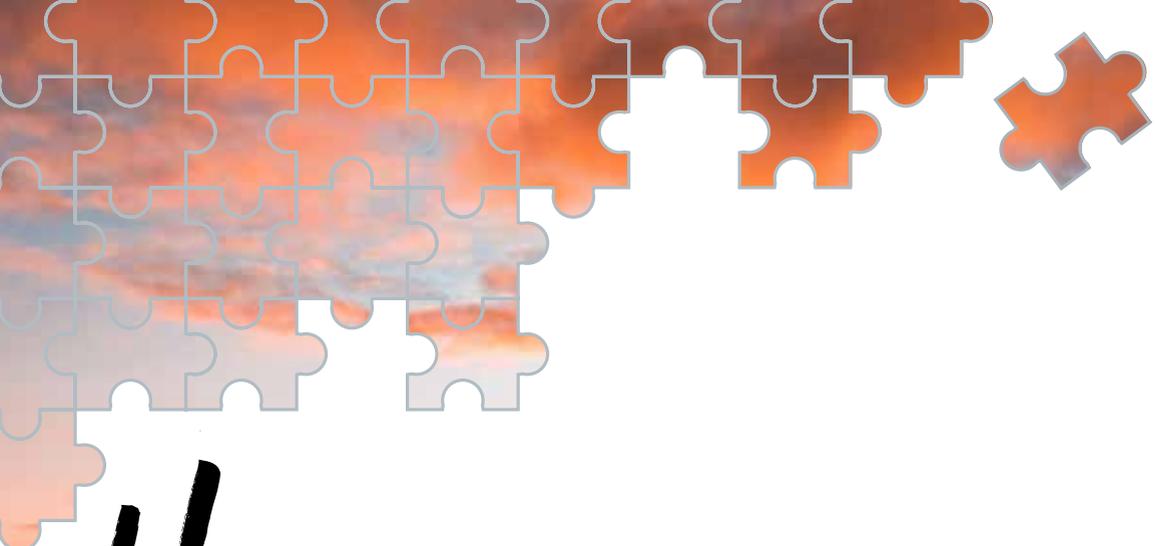
He took another hesitant step onto another buoyant book and brought his other foot to meet the first, perfectly balanced.

There was one more half-sunken book between himself and the toy box. Arlo took one of the deepest breaths he had ever taken before, and in a moment of courage, he lounged for the shoe and-

"Arlo! Are you ready to go?" his mother said.

Arlo froze from where he stood, clutching his other shoe with strewn Lego pieces around him.

"Yeah!"



Human

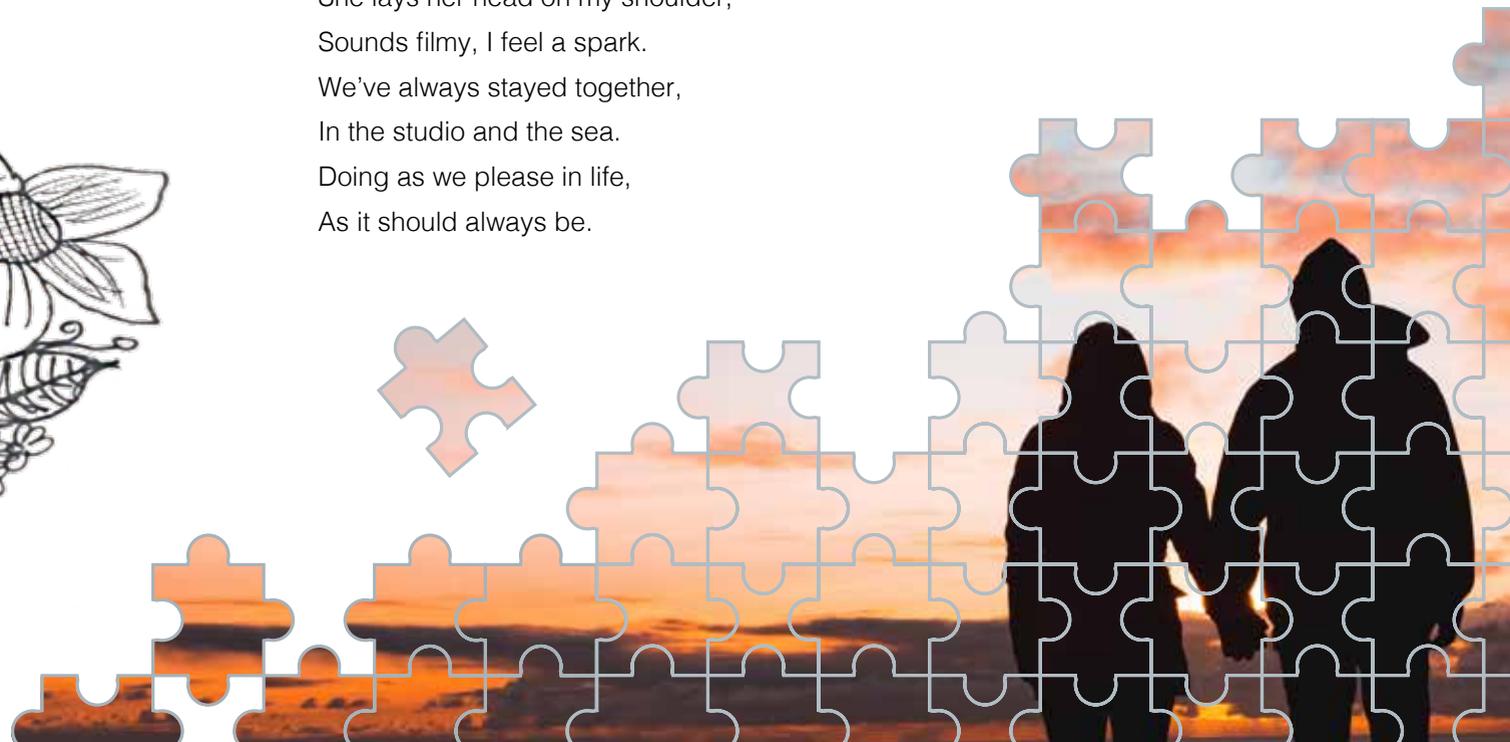
WRITING AND ILLUSTRATION BY TAVLEEN

The glimmer of the chandelier
Hits her in the eye.
She doesn't stop, spins some more,
I wonder how and why?
Her arms look straight, no curve or crook,
Her body is slick with sweat.
It glistens from the golden light,
She isn't done, not yet.
She closes in, not far away,
From the wooden pole.
She can't hear me, too loud thoughts,
I have no control.
And then she spins and drops down,
To the dirty floor.
Her eyes are closed, a smirk too clear,
The girl that I adore.



She watches me in curiosity,
Her hands planted on her hips.
I look to the clear water,
Smile once and take my dip.
The cold water envelops me,
Cool streaming through my veins.
I flip around to look at her,
Her face pale as if in pain.
I take a dive, deep below,
The water ripples fast.
I feel so free, no chains attached,
My tranquil home at last.
I turn back round and swim above,
Water rolls down my skin.
I take a breath, see her face,
Finally, relieved, with a grin.

I sit with her now, Thursday,
Sunny at the park.
She lays her head on my shoulder,
Sounds filmy, I feel a spark.
We've always stayed together,
In the studio and the sea.
Doing as we please in life,
As it should always be.



The Führer's Son

WRITING BY MILANA

Reverberated echoes,
ricocheting through our land.
Women and children,
impaled by metal;
Mass killings,
by hatred-stained steel.

The white men
with rifles loaded,
ready to murder one
who thinks different;
looks different;
deemed an enemy.

Immense fear,
bodies painted red.
Freedom is only found
deep in the grave.
Who knew an idea,
could innocently kill?



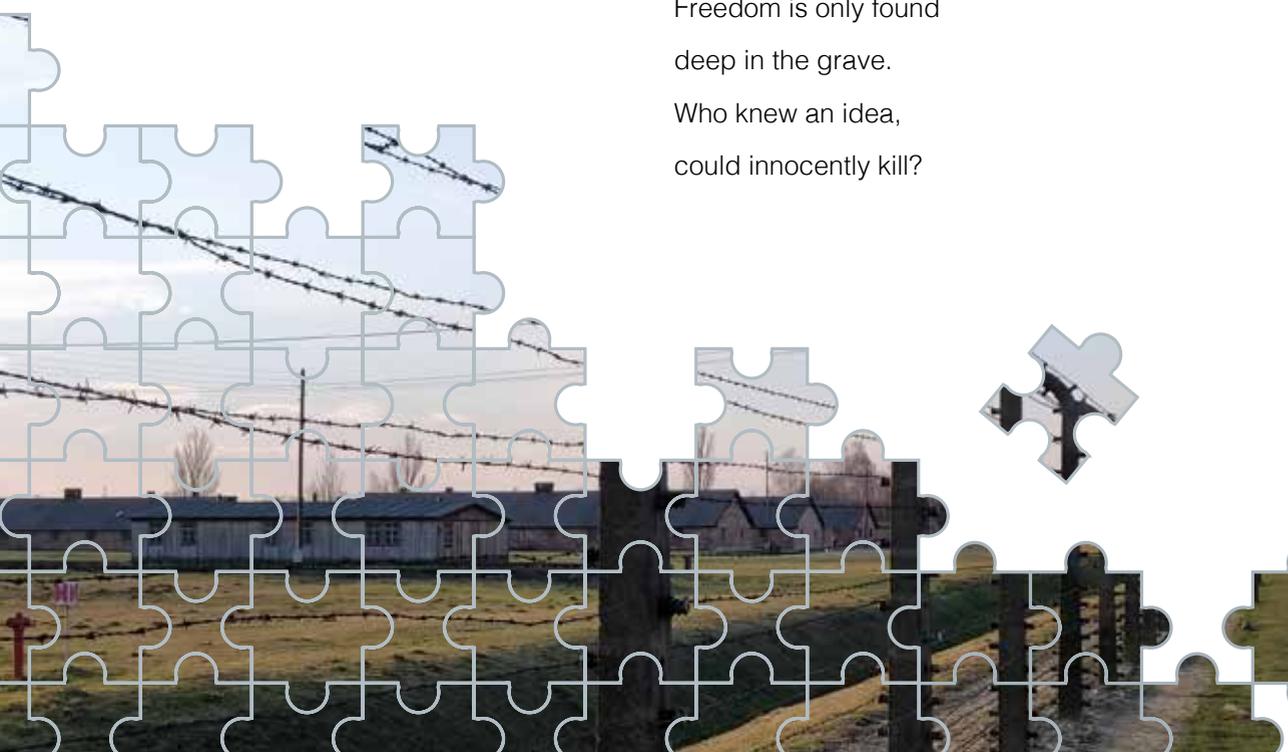
Stagnant

WRITING BY MILANA

I am like a pit of stagnant water;
Never flowing, never changing.
Those around me are like a lamb to the
slaughter,
What lies within me, is always raging.
I've waited for them to drown too,
Into my deep, unkempt waters,
Yet somehow, they never do,
Leaving me stranded, away they saunter.

Every time they've jumped in to save me,
They're frightened by the patrolling
demons.
They walk close to my waters carefree,
Which makes me fall further, the waters
deepen.
As I fall, others tell me the surface is
always within reach,
Yet when I dare to look up, it's nowhere to
be found.
Why can't you just see the positives, they
would beseech,
But all I can see is that I've already
drowned.

You feel further from inland,
Thoughts stretch as far as the sea
So don't say you understand,
Unless you're down here too, right next to
me
I'm not asking you to understand where
I've been,
Nor am I asking to be carefree,
You just have to jump in,
Please, take a deep breath and just save
me.





When the World Comes Home

WRITING BY HIMANI

How many countries have you visited so far?

“The whole world”, I would say with a smirk.

I have seen the remarkable rainforests of Peru

Through the cuckoos that fly past my house every morning,

I have seen the radical rivers of Russia

Through the paintings of my artsy mum,
I have seen the magnificent mountains of Nepal

Through the towers of bookshelves at home

Which provide me with the same sense of adventure

Every time I flick through those pages,

I have seen the gorgeous gardens of Japan

Through the blooming roses and daisies

that sway in my backyard,

I have tasted the sweet sweets of India

Through my mum’s sensational cooking skills,

I have tasted the spicy spice of Thailand

Through the 2-minute noodles my dad hides in the pantry,

I have felt the freezing frostiness of New Zealand

Through the breezes of cold air occasionally coming from the aircon,

I have felt the harsh heats of Africa

Through the warmth of my blanket,

And I have understood the Whole World

Which lives within my very home.

My home, my family is the Whole World

I now know that being there is not important,

but to feel it through your imagination is.

Trapped

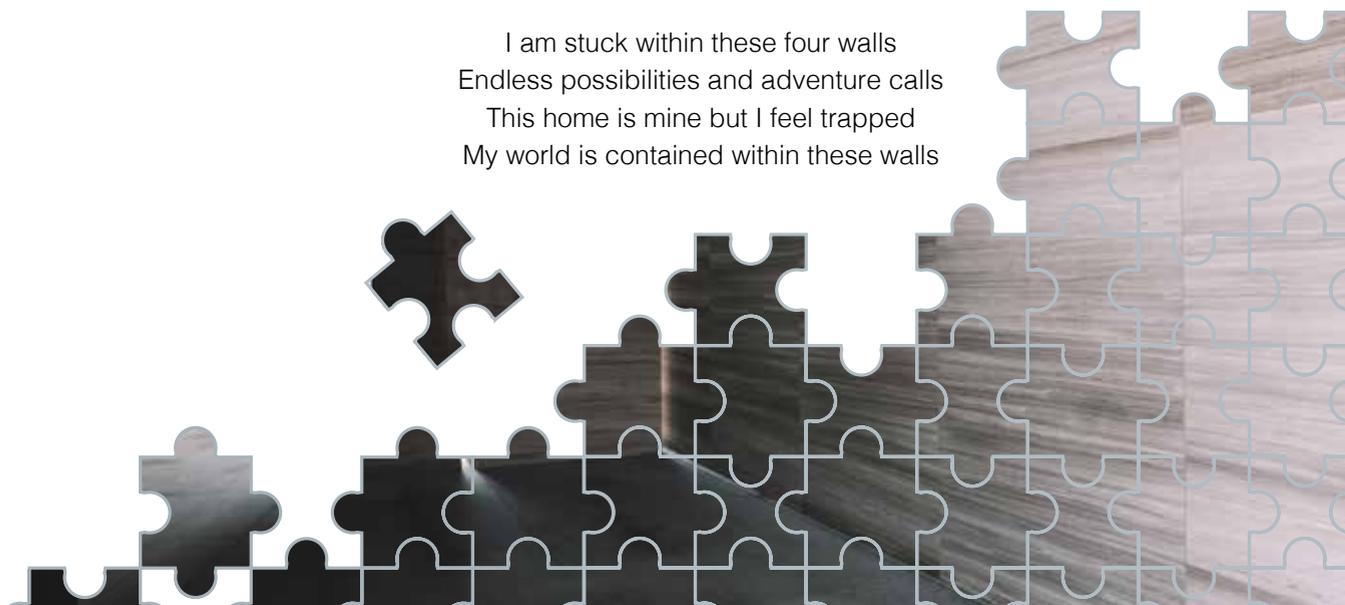
WRITING BY HAYLEY

Walking to a room with nothing but four walls
The darkness beckons and calls
You resist the urge to leave this world
But your brain travels mindlessly whilst you sit within these walls

Disconnected, thoughtless and deep
As you drift off into a peaceful sleep
Your mind races thinking of all the endless possibilities
But you are stuck, tucked away deep

You want to be set free
Travel the world, take risks and to sight see
I would do anything to be away from this home
Oh, how I wish to be free
Another country, another lifestyle, another culture
To gaze around Europe and admire the agriculture
Be amongst the locals and cherish their heritage
Discover and adapt to their culture

I am stuck within these four walls
Endless possibilities and adventure calls
This home is mine but I feel trapped
My world is contained within these walls



Birthday

WRITING BY MACKENZIE

Emerald eyes glisten in the sunlight,
Better sight had been required, and lopsided spectacles were selected.
The scent of fresh butter melting on oven raised bread,
Caused dietary reactions within swollen throats.
Clown noses causing inconsequential terror,
Shoving untouched cake down greedy children's throats.



Honey

WRITING BY ZANIN

The feeling of my heart dropping to my stomach,
Toes rising to the top of my shoes as I curl them
While my eyes blur from the salty tears I try to hold back.

I watched what I thought would be mine forever,
Slip away into the whining wind right before me.

Squeezing my pain away my hands clench,
Leaving crescent love marks in my palm.

I saw the moon turn red, bleeding in vein
Screaming the name I least wanted to hear.

I felt heaviness on my lips,
Carrying my love words, waiting to be said
Letting honey flow out of my hand,
Touching the tips of my fingers as it yearned for affection.



When the World Split

WRITING BY CHESCA

Father says that it was Mother's Fault
Mother says that it was Father's Fault
With one fight they halved the world

I live in the North
I live in the South
I miss my sister
I miss my brother
With one fight we are a world apart

Where I live its cold
Where I live its hot
Where we live its dark and broken
With one fight they filled the world we knew
in darkness

We thought marriage joined people
We thought a ring was round to represent
how endless love is
We thought this but... we were wrong
We live like parallel lines to never meet
ever again

A family of divorce
The only thing left is a picture

The Descent of Icarus

WRITING BY MUNEEZA

I beam with joy
My chest blossoming
With the petals of the sun

But the flavours of my desire
Overcome the words of my mother
'beware the tender emotion of love'

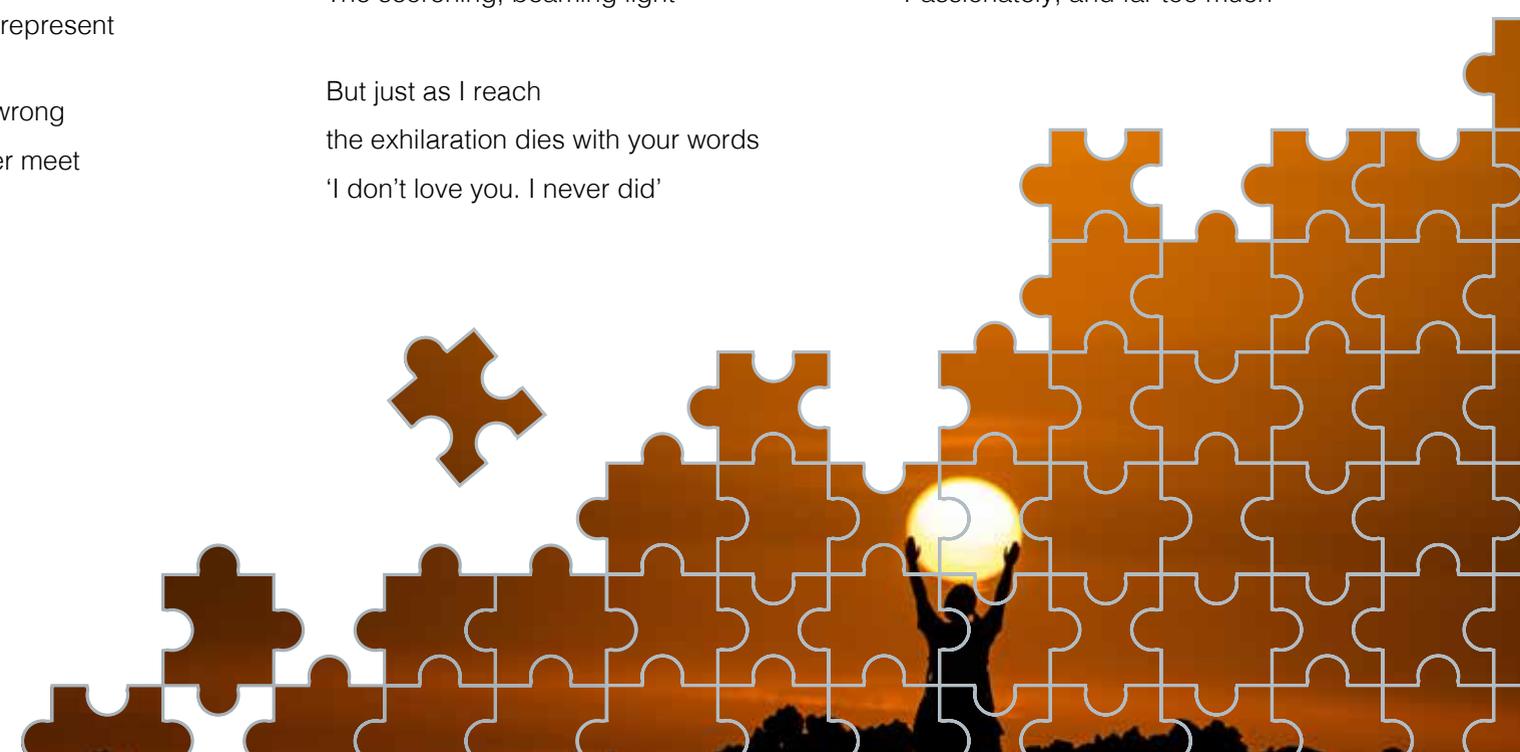
Fingers and wings outstretched
As I reach towards
The scorching, beaming light

But just as I reach
the exhilaration dies with your words
'I don't love you. I never did'

As my pulse echoes your name
My skin and my feathered wings
Burn from your dawn coloured eyes

And just like the mistake of Icarus
I collapse through the wind of their lies
The graceful fall of an eternity

For I loved you
Just how Icarus loved the sun
Passionately, and far too much



I am a Puzzle

WRITING BY CHESCA

I am a puzzle
I am made of thousands of pieces
I am found to be complicated

I am a puzzle
I could be a waste of time to some people
I could be found as boring

I am a puzzle
Sometimes I can be put together
Sometimes I can be pulled apart

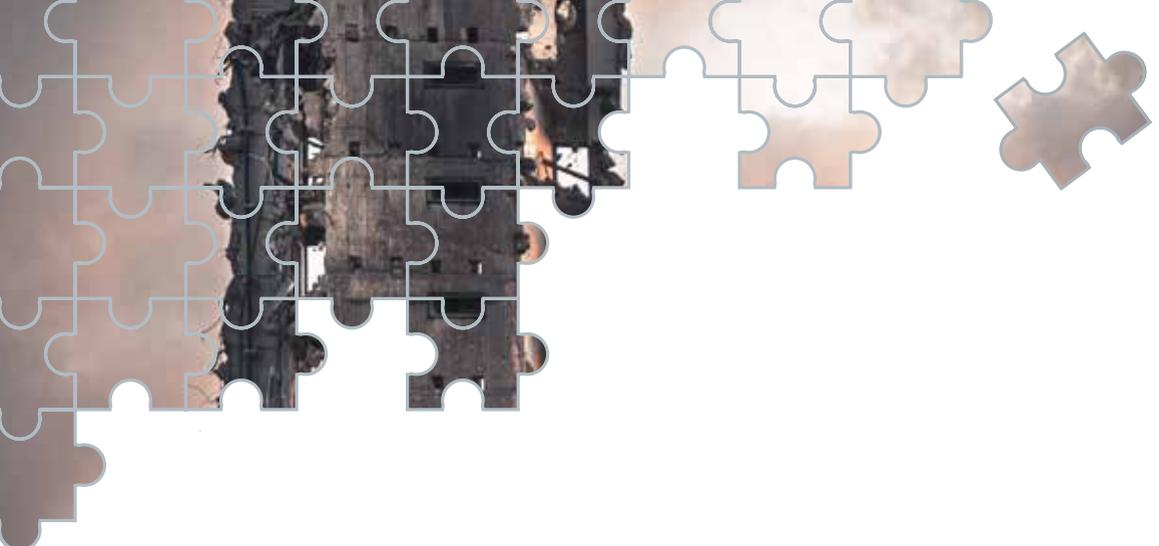
But like a puzzle
I can be complete
I just need to find the edge pieces



The Button

WRITING BY PRAKHAR

Sunshine
was not enough to illuminate the darkness
in his mind.
The plastic button surrounded by the fleshy cells near his temple
Held the power to bring the world at home.
The loneliness could be extinguished.
The hatred could be incinerated.
The twisted mental struggle could be straightened out
All this
In his mind.
Maybe his heart?
Fingers felt the smooth circular plastic.
The button was pressed, his eyes dropped to the back of his head.
Body was there
Mind was somewhere else.
A person appeared
Another, and another
He was filled with ecstasy upon their beaming smiles.
They were not real. But, to him,
They were. Holographic utopia.
Outside him was
Despair, Turmoil, Conformity.
Inside him was
The World. Home.



A Little Better than Before

WRITING BY JANANI

So. This year hasn't been great so far. Pretty bad, I guess. Generous, but terribly bad.

I mean, where to start? So many things seemed to occur at the same time. The majority of us survived the interdimensional Phoenix Lord's temporary reign of destruction. Our backyards were littered with the ghosts of soldiers, floating down from the sky like blackened snowflakes from the fires that raged along the state's

borders; my friend Max found his entire swimming pool brimming with soaked ash and dust. We had to huddle up to one other, for many days and nights, armed with buckets of water and hoses in case our beds were set alight by the Lord's pyro-spirits.

(Thank the indie kids for saving us, in the words of Patrick Ness, I guess).

We also lived through what could have

been the greatest massacre from the Pathogen Agents (those guys really don't know when to have a break. Seriously. They thought it was a great time to attack during the summer holidays. Don't they have families that would appreciate their presence on New Year's Eve? Maybe their kids? Husbands and wives?)

(And even after eleven months, the Pathogen Agents are still operating, albeit in smaller factions rather than the First Wave. Like, please, stop, we've had enough time trying to avoid your pandemic-creating bombs).

(Thank you, Chosen Ones, I guess, for not letting us die again).

And there was also Among Us. Yeah, I'm talking about that. Have you seen the number of friendships being torn apart by that game? In my group alone, half

of us wanted to murder the other simply because our in-game avatars had been stabbed through the face as they waited for their task of downloading data to be completed.

(The Chosen Ones weren't there to save us from that bloodbath).

Oh, and not to mention that Trump-Biden debate. That was horrific. It made my ears bleed. It seemed the Chosen Ones weren't there to spare us of that mind-numbing experience.

It seemed the Chosen Ones couldn't save all the people we dearly knew.

And it seemed the Chosen Ones weren't here to stop the Phoenix Lord's second attempt of letting the world burn. Well. They did stop him, eventually. But not in our area.

Because right now, my school was burning down.

All the students and the people neighbouring houses gathered by the lake a little way to the south, watching the school hiccup another wave of light and heat, the walls crumbling as a fifty-metre pyro-spirit, all hulking and spewing fire, grumbled and howled and completely trashed the burning remains of our school. Somewhere along the ground, I could see little flashes of the Chosen Ones' signature blue light smack against the pyro-spirit, driving it back and making it even more mad.

If everyone fought fire with fire, the entire world would go up in smoke, Lemony Snicket said. But who even reads books when said world was going up in smoke? Definitely not the Chosen Ones, that's for sure. I bet they barely had time to read, let alone go to school because they were too busy, well, saving the world.

"Damn," said Max, staring up at the inferno with barely an interested look.

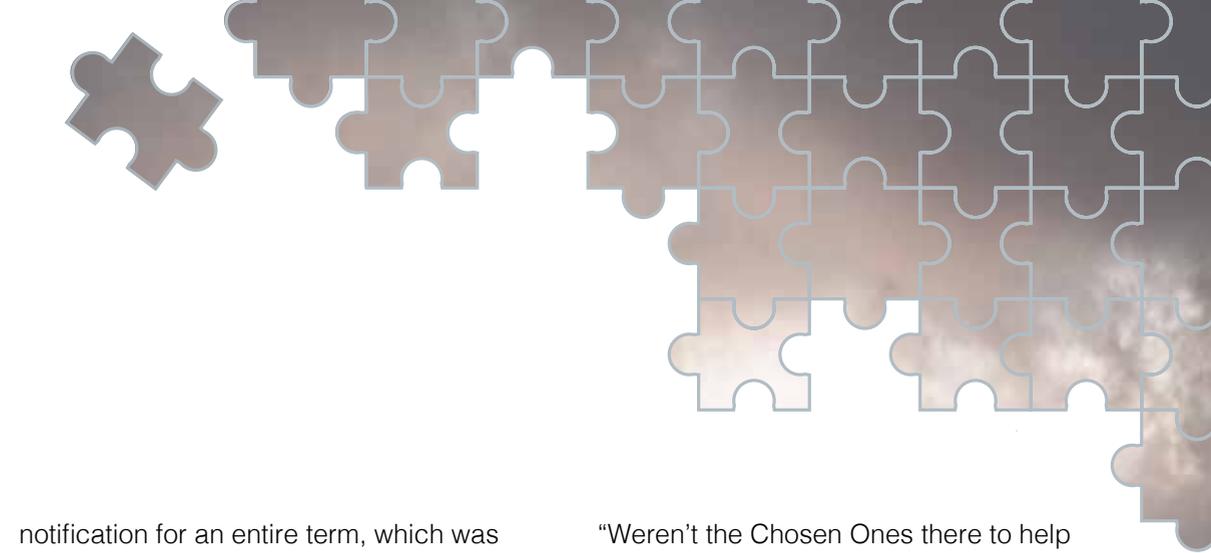
"Damn," said the rest of my group, wiping the backs of our hands against our faces to wipe the sweat off our faces.

The pyro-spirit and the Chosen Ones barely heard a word. They just kept fighting, our school the battleground for whatever world-ending plans they were trying to stop/to initiate.

"How many times has this school been trashed?" asked Jean as she sidled up to me. The teachers were screaming out names to see if we were all here; I think they called out a few names a couple more times, their voices a little frantic.

"I think I was here for that rat problem last year," continued Jean.

"Oh, yeah," I said. The demonic sewer rats weren't that much of a problem at first – they ate up every single assessment



notification for an entire term, which was every student's dream come true, even for the smart people.

"The demon rats really enjoyed nesting here," I added. "I bet they had a blast trying to eat us at the end of last year."

"Ollie," Jean drawled, dragging out my name in slight amusement. Her dark eyes glittered in the dim, orange light around us.

"Okay, okay. Um, let's see – year seven. That was with the killer mosquitoes. That's about... our school got trashed, or remotely damaged, about six times."

Jean scoffed and told me there was no way our school had been damaged six times in the span of four years. I begged to differ; she hadn't been in Australia long enough to see what our kind of crazy was like.

Hey, we've had alien invasions, too. It's not just the Americans who get that kind of special treatment.

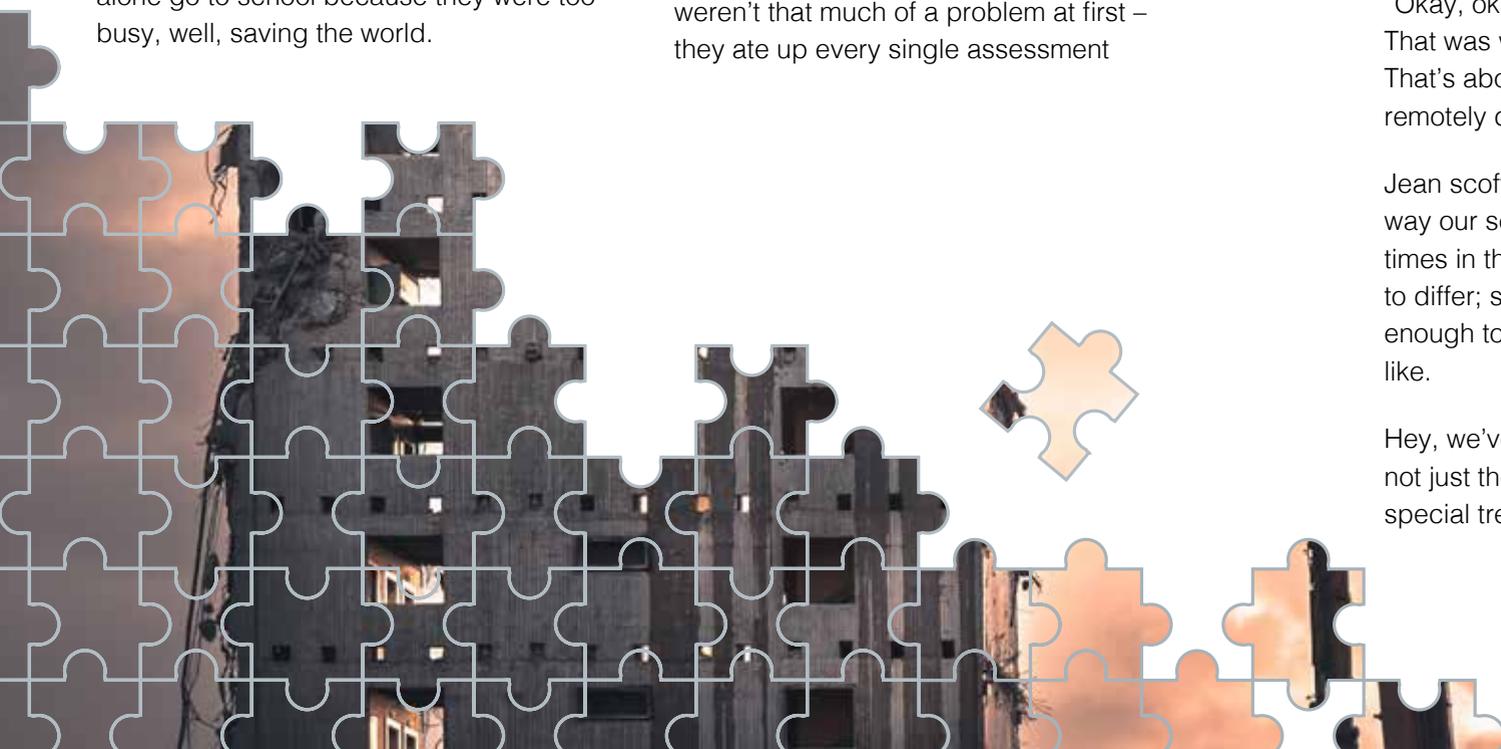
"Weren't the Chosen Ones there to help you out?" Jean asked, gesturing to the flashes of blue light within the red and gold flames razing our school.

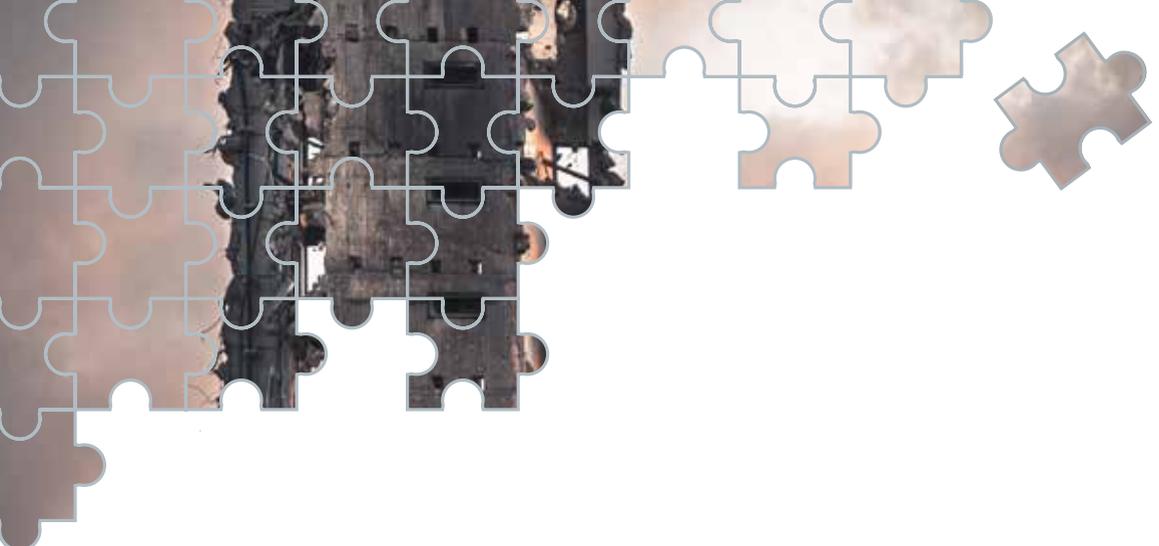
I told her the Chosen Ones were like the Avengers – they didn't handle street-level problems like demon rats eating assessment notifications and children; they handled things like aliens and demons. "We're a little below their paygrade," I said with a small shrug. "But hey, at least this year ended with a bang."

The rest of our group nodded sagely. "With a bang," they echoed, as if that was the most important thing they had ever heard this entire year.

Jean nodded, then glanced back up at our school. "D'you ever wish this would all stop, Ollie?" she asked, her voice quiet but loud enough for me, and me alone, to hear.

I blinked, but I didn't say anything, not just yet. We watched as the Chosen Ones





somehow gathered the last of their limitless energy, like they always did, and blasted the pyro-spirit into oblivion, the last of the Phoenix Lord's minions exploding in a shower of golden sparks and halting his world-ending I Want To Rule This Entire Dimension plans.

The adults cheered because now we get to live (for now) in peace and harmony (for now) and their children could now grow up and get jobs and lead great lives.

The students just mumbled half-hearted praises and watched as the Chosen Ones began to help first responders put out the fires and clean up the smouldering remains of the newly reconstructed school buildings, smoke spewing up from the debris. We watched as a few teachers sped towards the first responders, yelling if there were any more children inside. We watched as they continued yelling for those children. Just yelling. And yelling, yelling, yelling.

D'you ever wish this would all stop?

"Truth is..." I turned to Jean, just watched her as she gazed at me. Our eyes locked, trying to figure out what the other was thinking. "Truth is," I started again, "I don't think none of this is ever gonna stop. I think we're just going to keep getting invaded by fire overlords and disease-making criminals and demon rats. But... it might get worse. Could get worse, will get worse. But, like, it also might get better too, you know?"

I waved a hand at the Chosen Ones, who were digging through the rubble trying to reach the survivors, the students who had gotten themselves stuck before they could get out. "As much as they're kind of flaky," I said, "the Chosen Ones have spent more time helping us than ignoring us. They're always there for us."

We heard a set of gleeful cries. Somewhere towards the school, we could see the Chosen Ones, wreathed in

blue light and glory, help the last of the survivors to their feet, letting nurses who had arrived in ambulances check over them for any injuries; but what seemed to be of most importance was that the missing students were all alive and breathing.

"They'll always be there to make sure things are a little better than before," I told Jean softly.

Beside me, Jean nodded silently.

Because even if the Chosen Ones, with all their blue flashy lights and powers and admirable heroism, weren't here to save us from fire overlords and disease-making criminals and demon rats, there was one thing they had imparted on us the moment we saw them rescuing us from cyclones and fires and killer mosquitos:

Hope.

Because even when the world is burning around you, you can still make it out with hope burning on inside you; like a candle guiding you through the dark oppressing hallways.

You just had to show the world you weren't going to back down so easily.

And we could do that, couldn't we?

Adventures of Willow

WRITING BY ZAHRAH

The warmth of the morning sun, the chirping of the sparrows and the smell of fresh pancakes, set the scene for another magical day. Willow forcing her heavy eyelids open, awoke from her dream-less sleep.

Today, Willow's lazy and unbothered personality was on par with the curiosity and excitement stirring within her. Her drive as an explorer urged Willow to explore the enormous world that surrounded her, starting with her new home. A home with unexpected creatures, called humans.

Grabbing her backpack, and tying her auburn hair into a braid, Willow let out a loud whistle. Within a few seconds, a round fluffy squirrel came sprinting towards her. "Yes! My ride's here," she said with excitement.

Her small hands grabbed onto the fur of the warm clever animal and letting out another whistle, the two of them rode through the wind. Through the tall grass shards, Willow could now only see the top of the human's fortress as the squirrel's tiny feet entered the

realm of the giants. Her mouth was watering from the scent of pancakes that was now much stronger, but the loud rumbling of voices and music turned her attention towards a magnificent screen of light.

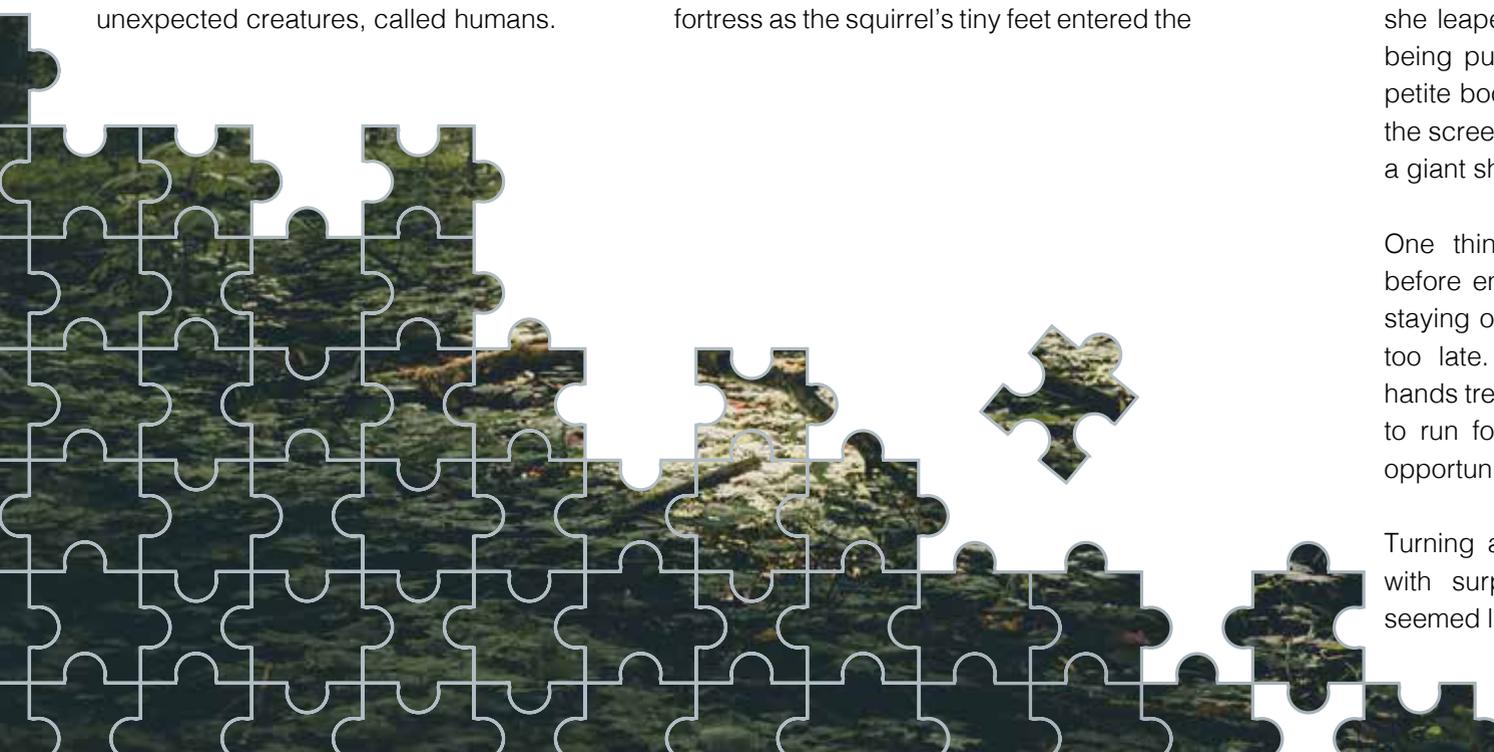
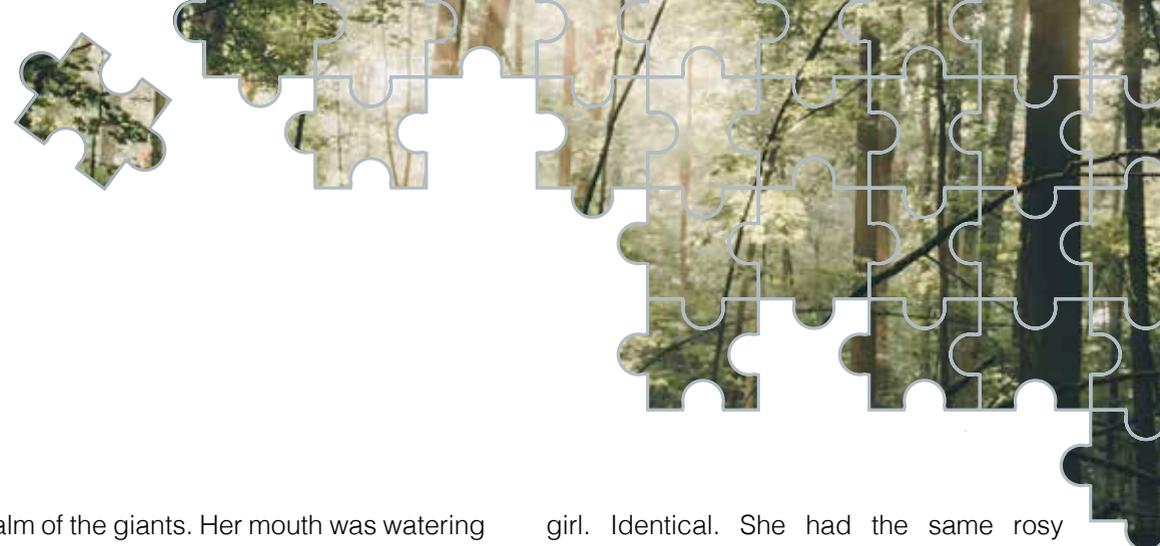
With every flash of light was a picture. A young boy baking cookies with his mom, a soccer match in Brazil and a news anchor reporting the status of a pandemic in America. Willow could see the whole world through this five millimeter-thin screen. As she leaped off the squirrel, she felt herself being pulled closer and closer. When her petite body was only an arm's reach away, the screen suddenly turned pitch black and a giant shadow loomed behind her.

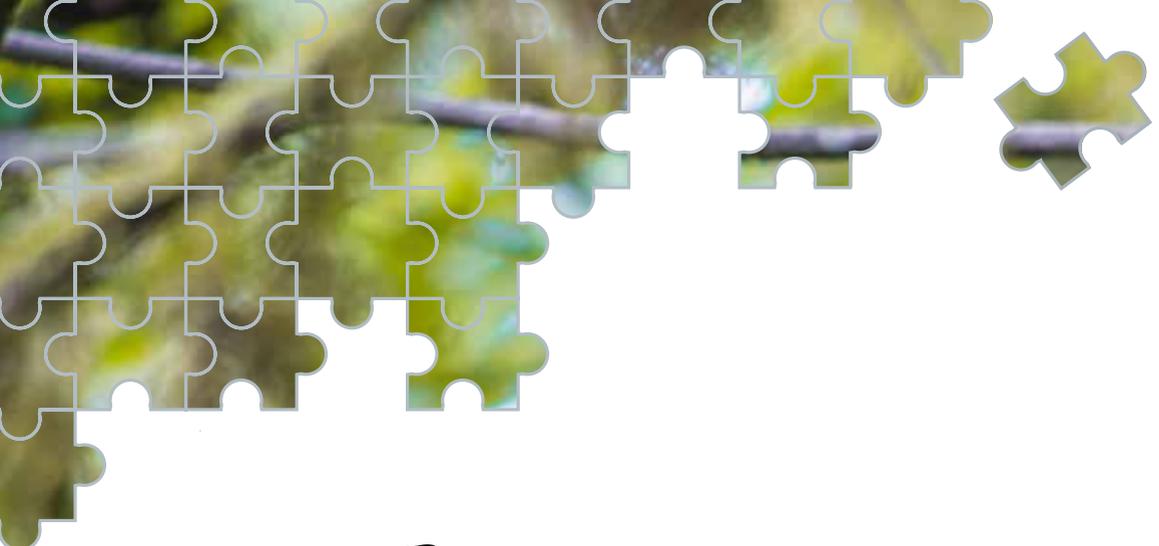
One thing she had always told herself before entering a human's realm was that staying out of sight was a must. But it was too late. She had been found out. Her hands trembled in fear, but she did not want to run for she knew this was the perfect opportunity.

Turning around slowly, her eyes widened with surprise as she looked into what seemed like a reflection of herself. A human

girl. Identical. She had the same rosy freckles sprinkled on her cheek, the same vivid eyes that searched the oceans, and the same excitement that stirred within her. Perhaps they were each other's other half, or the half they desired to be. The human girl noticed the surprise on Willow's face and bending down, reached out her hand for Willow to hop on.

Hesitantly, but with curiosity, Willow hopped on and together the girls journeyed through the realms of the fortress. A room of mother nature with the irises of France, jasmines of Pakistan and sunflowers of Ukraine, a room of the nation's landmarks perfect for Willow to climb, and a buffet with never-ending menus of curry, pasta, noodles and pudding. For the human girl, the house was only a home, but for Willow it was the world and this all she ever wanted.





Too Controversial

WRITING BY MARIAM

The world does not need night owls or fern.

But it does need gauze.

Because of the medical industry.

They need gauze.

To cover bullet wounds,

And stuff.

What does the world need?

It needs compassion.

From the medical industry.

Yeah.

Cool.

Nice.

What is a fern?

I don't know.

Do you know?

I do not know what a fern is.

When I say night owl.

I thought of Harry Potter.

Can we talk about that?

I don't know.

Maybe it's,

Too controversial.

Crazy.



My Life, My Home

WRITING BY CHESCA

They say
life is like a wishing well
where wishes dwell and slowly come true

They say
life is a story in which we all live
where we find purpose
which will come to you as easy as looking
up at the clear skies

They say
life is beautiful for everyone
where we all have opportunities

They say this
as my home is engulfed by fire
where my wishes turned into tears
And the smoke fills the skies

There's no place like home when you live
in a flare



Flash Fiction

WRITING BY HAYLEY, TAVLEEN AND MUNEEZA

Butterflies

He looked at her with deep longing in his eyes. Her golden hair and skin glistened in the sun. His heart was in his throat and her stomach was full of butterflies.

"I don't think I love you anymore," her voice faded away as she walked further.

- HAYLEY

The Hug

Small, dainty feet touch the Australian ground. They had come all the way from India. He was looking at her with love and she was curious. She recognised him and he smiled. The three-year-old seemed so happy and careless, she ran through and tackled him into a long-delayed, bone-crushing hug.

- TAVLEEN

Skirt and Step

Her words, femininity, echo around the world. She is judged by the character of her words, not by the length of her skirt.

He stands, dominance screaming through the room. Built by the sweetness in his heart, rather than by the soft sway in his step.

Gender, who needs it?

- MUNEEZA





Hymn to the Sky

WRITING BY MUNEEZA

One eye shut
One arm raised
My finger following the glistening stars
Connecting the constellations
I sigh in peace
The velvety feeling of comfort
Washes over me
I whisper, "Home"

70 000 miles away
A young girl lies
Hands over both ears
The stars are out and shining
But she's too scared to look up
Planes screaming destruction
Bombs dropping
She sighs, "Home"

Across the country
In a small shack
A boy looks out at the stars
Mum isn't home yet
He looks down
At dirty fingernails
And ragged clothes
Tears well. "Home"

?

WRITING BY MUNEEZA

You aren't just a name
You are fragments
And you are pieces

You are the argument
You had with your mother
Last week

You are the tears
You shed
When you lost your aunt

You are the breath of air
That was exhaled
On your 16th birthday candles

You are the farewell
You gave your best friend
Before he moved

You are the feeling
Of passing your
Year 8 math exam

You aren't just a name
You are everywhere
In everyone



Look Within

WRITING BY JANANI

Mallory was getting frustrated. It was all she was feeling the past week.

She dipped her brush into the paint, brought it up, splattered light blue onto the canvas, and stared at it. She stared it. It looked like the sky, just a small part of it.

Mallory smothered on some more colours – greens, greys, whites, reds, browns. It looked like the street outside her house. Birds in trees, flowers swaying, leaves crinkling. Cars rumbling, people chatting.

Without a word, Mallory set down her brush and palette and peered into the painting. It was quiet. Unusually quiet. No one was

there. There were always people in her paintings. Why wasn't anyone here?

Sighing for the umpteenth time that day, Mallory picked up the canvas and flung it behind her. She reached for a blank one and set it on the easel, grabbed her paints and splashed them onto it, smearing the colours.

Her hands moved swiftly, pulling together vibrant tones, and pushing out flat shadows. When Mallory looked up, she found Paris gleaming back at her from the other side of the painted window, trees glistening in the fading sun, the Eiffel Tower dominating

everything. Mallory pressed her face against the window, peering through it. Champ de Mars was silent, empty.

No one was there.
No one was there.

Mallory shoved the painting to the ground, a whine bubbling from her throat. There was a hot feeling boiling in her chest, spreading to her head, blurring her vision as she lifted her hands up to her face.

Where was everyone?
Where was everyone?!

Was there nothing else out there in the world beyond her home?
Had the world suddenly collapsed into dust and disappeared?

Was no one going to stand there by Mallory's side and wonder what had happened?
Why did loneliness have to hurt so painfully?

Mallory peeked through her fingers, darkness lining the edges of her vision. She saw herself standing before the mirror in the room, glowing faintly. Behind her, the empty street. And the window framed her small form.

The darkness in her mind receded, then. Mallory stepped away from the mirror, head cocked at the reflection. Her gaze was still latched to its surface as she bent down to grab another canvas. Her hands snagged the brushes, the paints.

After a moment, Mallory's brush gently stroked the rough canvas. Paints swirled. Colours burned. Mallory painted a window frame with the scene beyond nestled in warm hues of red and gold.

It was a living space, in the neighbour's house. The couches were tucked away, the coffee table glistened, and there was — Mallory stared into the window— there was a family on the other side. A happy, laughing family. They held each other's hands, their voices loud and cheery.

Mallory was enraptured. Their liveliness... she missed it. She hadn't seen that in the world outside.

Tracing a finger along the windowpane, Mallory smiled. She was looking so far beyond... when all she had to do was look within.



The Key to Happiness

WRITING BY TAVLEEN

They look so green now. Shining. They're full of the bright life, Mama always tells me of. The green the cabbage patch holds makes me smile. Papa helped me plant them last summer. We watched them grow through the seasons. Papa will be very pleased. He would dig and I would water. He had once told me my hands were too soft to touch the brown dirt. I thought he wouldn't mind when he had taken a trip to Uncle Chase's house. I remember slipping on my torn, blue dungaree and skipping to the patch. Papa wasn't going to be back for another day. It had been too long since they had been watered. I had gone ahead and started digging and then watering.

Uncle Chase and Papa seemed to come back quick enough. Papa had pulled up and looked at me once. His eyes flashed with hurt and he told me I had done the

wrong thing. Uncle Chase looked broken as tears spilled down my cheeks. Papa didn't talk to me. He came inside and washed my hands. He rubbed them together around the cool hand cream. He had then left. Uncle Chase had waved me a goodbye with a small smile. Papa talked to me after two days. I promised him to never touch the dirt like that again.

"Only with gloves, darling. Seeing as you can't help yourself," he had smiled.

I had told him the cracks and scabs that littered the skin of his own rough hands would worsen but he would always grin, kiss my forehead and shoo me away to water the patch.

We would always run past the cottage and over the bumpy hills. Ma always shouted for us to slow down. She never

liked it when we returned back home with bruises covering our skin. I would giggle and continue through the wind. Papa always won. I would be sweating and out of breath, but the red-checked mat always remained the same

"Sit, Winnie," he would wheeze. Ma would finally make it and come along to eat the pies and cakes. The corn maze surrounded our bodies and our family buffet was planted on the mat. The corn maze hid us well. They kept us warm and they stored away the memories of our picnics. The corn stalks stored away the many laughs we shared as they rustled in the warm air. The sun always illuminated Papa's face as it wrinkled.

I have those memories now. I look to the cabbage patch and smile my prettiest smile, the real one, all teeth. I walk through the corn maze to our old and battered picnic mat. Just like every Friday afternoon. I see him. He's walking slower and as he spots me, he starts his elderly stiff jog. I jog. We both then rush to the mat and I hear his laughter boom through the air as my own laugh collides with his, my head thrown back towards the blue sky.

"Hi, Papa," I grin.

"Hey, sweetheart." He smiles, red tinting his skin.

"Let's eat, Papa," I rush.

We eat to our hearts content. I throw grapes into his mouth as Ma arrives.

"Ah, ah," she scolds.

Papa and I look towards one another and hold back our smiles. Ma goes to sleep on the mat not long after we all finish our picnic. I am looking at the green patch from a distance now. The corn maze covers it.

"Winnie..." Papa says.

"Yes, Papa," I reply, my head turning to look into his amber eyes.

"Forget-me-not," he says. Our promise.

"Never, Papa," I answer as we both extend our pinkies and clasp them together.

The Final Pieces

MRS CARO AND MISS VOUKELATOS

Thursday afternoons were spent together to realise a common goal. We wanted to publish a book and so the Creative Writers Guild was born. All members come from different year groups, different backgrounds and different world views. At first the idea seemed fun and easy, we spent time crafting different pieces. We experimented with form, structure, words and sounds.

As the weeks wore on, our guild members drifted away. What once was a band of twenty, is now a just a crew of fifteen. We continued to share ideas and comment on each other's works. We laughed, we disagreed, and we wrote.

The compositions here represent the time we have spent together. It represents the ideas and dreams we have found. It represents pieces of ourselves.

We hope to inspire others to join our quest, to find the courage to express themselves, to pick up a pen and just write.

