

# The Lupine Prize



2019

The  
Lupine Prize





# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	5
<b>Middle School Poetry</b>	
“The Wise One” by Jerry Zhu (G8)	9
<b>Middle School Prose</b>	
“The Western Hospital” by Angel Xu (G8)	13
“Cora Brave” by July Wen (G6)	17
“The Shot” by Jerry Zhu (G8)	24
“My Grandpa’s Hens” by Lucy Wang (G6)	30
<b>High School Poetry</b>	
“On a Bus” by Sophie He (DP2)	35
“Dunhuang” by Tara Shen (G10)	36
“Danǎe” by Terry Tang (DP1)	37
“The Flower” by Stephanie Choi (DP1)	39
“Paulownia Flowers Outside the Window” by Sophie Zhang (G9)	40
<b>High School Prose</b>	
“Mid-Stage” by Cherry Yan (G10)	43
“Artistic Differences” by Benjamin Li (DP1)	51
“Hearth” by Terry Tang (DP1)	58
“On the Wings of Angels” by Tiffany Han (G10)	64
“The Window” by Tiffany Han (G10)	70
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	75

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHERRY YAN



# Introduction

The Lupine Prize is an excellent opportunity for students to be creative and express themselves. It was wonderful to see so many entries, and it has been a joy to be able to read them all! I am so happy to have seen such enthusiasm among students. A big well done to everyone who participated and congratulations to the finalists.

*Emma Richardson*

*Head of Middle School English Department*

Now in its fifth year, the Lupine Prize continues to go from strength to strength. The quality of writing from our school community is always astonishing, and the number of superb entries made it very difficult to pick our 2019 winners. Many thanks to everyone who submitted their work – and if you didn't make it into the anthology this time, maybe 2020 will be your year!

*Dave Haysom*

*Head of High School English Department*



# Middle School



*Middle School Poetry – First Place*

# The Wise One

By Jerry Zhu (G8)

It was three years ago,  
On a hot summer day;  
On a test so difficult,  
It made me pray.

And that's when the wise one showed himself to me,  
And asked, "young one, what is it that you seek?"  
I looked at him with wonder and disbelief;  
As I was certain I was dreaming, being too surreal for me.

ILLUSTRATION BY TINA HAN



But as I did the ol' reliable pinch,  
I realized I was as awake as I ever would be;  
I looked on in awe, at the wise one before me;  
His expression bemused, chuckling at me.

I regained my composure as I stumbled on my words,  
“Oh what should I call you? I’m at a loss for words!”

He laughed a hearty, joyous laugh.

And he said, “Oh mortal, I am the wise one.

I will answer your question, whatever it may be.”

I thought back to what had brought me here,

And asked, “Please tell me, O wise one, oh, please do;

How do I study well the subject of math,

When I just can’t seem to go fast enough.”

Quick came the reply, booming and deep,

“Young lad, there is a simple step that you must take

You must practice again and again, without being lazy;

Until you can solve the questions in your sleep.”

As I thanked him greatly he began to fade,

And clouds came and covered his great figure

And suddenly, there I was, in the test room again,

Able to solve the question that lay.

A year went by, as I continued to doubt,

Whether the encounter was just a dream or not.

Until one day I saw myself stranded,

In the metro station, completely empty-handed.

As I whispered the words, “O wise one, please help me”

I felt myself falling into clouds and fog,

Then sitting in the great chair again,

In front of the old wise one, he said,

“We meet again, young child;

What is your question today?”

I asked with anticipation and uncertainty,

“How do I manage money, O wise one, please tell me.”

He responded “Ah, what a simple question indeed.  
One has to invest and spend wisely;  
Do not waste, only use money with what you really need.”

I nodded, as I fell again into the clouds,  
Then I found myself sitting at home, back from where I had gone.

Now six months ago, I was struggling with a game,  
And again, I thought, “O wise one, please help me.”  
I drifted into the bright domain,  
Of his quiet dwelling, as I snapped awake again.

He said to me, “Ah, what do you wish to seek now?”  
As I sat up straight on my seat.  
I asked him, again, with confidence,  
“What is the key, O wise one, to have good luck?”

There was silence, and then his expression changed,  
As I saw him open his mouth in rage.  
He bellowed, “Fool, why would you ask me this?  
I cannot teach you any keys to luck.

“Luck is a given at birth, to those select few.  
Are you implying that you wish to manipulate,  
The principles of chance and randomness?”

I stammered, “No, O wise one, I do not wish to offend;  
It is only with humility that I come to inquire.  
I am deeply sorry, O wise one, I have little to say,  
Except tell me, who is bestowed with luck?”

He said, “My, it will be the people you see,  
Who come and take what you have achieved!  
May it be when you have received some recognition,  
They will beat you, with their luck, with ease!”

I could only stammer, "O wise one, why is it this way?"  
He said, "this is the way of life;  
Luck will determine many things in time;  
And there is little difference that you may make."  
"Now leave my realm, and I do not wish to see you again!"  
I fell again, this time without comfort, like I had been punched  
    in the gut.  
Into my seat again, bruised and dizzy.  
Just as I began to regain my composure,  
I heard laughing, and "You lost!" being yelled.

# The Western Hospital

By Angel Xu (G8)

“Uncle Edward?” A trembling voice travelled in the darkness, and slowly with a shadow, a young girl appeared in the empty hospital lobby. The light of the lobby was glaring. There was a letter pinned on the wall. Lucy read the title out loud:

“The Western Hospital will be inherited by Dr. Edward, the student of the pre-dean. The date was twenty-third of July this year, which was... three months ago!”

That’s queer. Lucy thought. Her uncle Edward, just as the doctor mentioned in the letter, “disappeared” uncommonly after her sixteen birthday on twenty-second of April. He was supposed to be back at home with Lucy’s delayed birthday presents, but she had already lost contact with him since then. This was odd because uncle Edward used to live with Lucy since she was five, and each year he would buy Lucy lovely clothes and dress her up like a barbie doll on her birthday.

Lucy’s mother told her that uncle Edward worked in a hospital that was located at the west side of the town, so she decided to drop by and surprise her uncle while he was working. But it seemed like there were no patients in the hospital, and she wondered if the Dr. Edward on the letter was her uncle.

“Are you here, uncle Edward?” She called out again.

Suddenly, she heard a crack from the hallway that sounded as if a glass bottle had just been dropped on the ground. Lucy tried to listen to the echo carefully and finally arrived in front of a metal room with an electronic password lock.

LABORATORY.

She read the sign on the door. What could the password be? She asked herself.

Maybe I'll try my uncle's birthday. It didn't work.

Or maybe... my birthday? She was unsure about her guesses, but she was so curious to see what was behind the door. As she typed in the password, the door opened.

The room was filled with darkness and she could only see shadows with the help of the hallway lights. As she moved forwards, she stepped on something wet and almost slipped over. She touched an icy glass when she tried to find the switch of the light. It was a colossal glass container and Lucy saw something glimmering in the dark. She moved closer, put her hands on the glass and looked as hard as she could.

It was a specimen of a young lady that "stood" creepily in the glass container, her eyes wide open as if she were still alive.

Lucy was shocked, frightened and terrified. She turned around quickly and saw something even more terrifying — the room was for taxidermy but an insane scientist or doctor must have been using it on humans. She looked around again and saw that the room was full of glass boxes that each had a young lady in it: young ladies that were about her age and dressed in Barbie doll clothes.

No. 14.

Lucy found that there was a number for every single lady, and number fourteen was the last victim here. But there were fifteen boxes in the room. No, it can't be. She told herself. At that moment she thought that her uncle was part of this crime. She wanted to escape, she wanted to get out of this hospital.

She ran out of the laboratory as fast as she could and finally realized the viscous liquid that she stepped on at the beginning was blood. Bloody footsteps marked on the floor as she ran, but she couldn't care that much. Right then she heard footsteps coming from the stairs and was stunned completely.

"Is anyone there?" She heard a familiar voice. It was her uncle Edward.

"Uncle Edward?"

"Lucy! You're here! Such a surprise, my dear. Why did you come?" Uncle Edward walked towards Lucy. He was wearing a

white doctor's coat, but there seemed to be blood splashed all over it from only minutes ago since the liquid was shimmering under the light.

"What were you doing, uncle?" Lucy saw the blood. She was scared that her uncle might be the one who killed the ladies back in the room and put them into the glass boxes.

"Oh, don't mind the blood, please. I was doing a heart transplant upstairs. Come, Lucy. Come to my office and let's have some tea." He walked pass Lucy and headed into the hallway.

"Why are there no patients in your hospital, uncle?" She asked. Lucy lied and forced herself to calm her shaky voice, pretending that her uncle was innocent but still bringing up this topic. She was too scared to ask about what she had seen in the laboratory, but right now this was the only thing she could think of. She tried to convince herself that what she saw wasn't real.



ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE YU

“No patients? No, my dear Lucy, they *are* guests!”

“So there are patients — I mean, *guests* that are here?”

“Yes, I’ve counted, there are fifteen guests.”

“Who was the last one? What happened to her?” Lucy’s voice was starting to tremble. She wanted to leave the room, leave the hospital and stay away from her uncle.

“You’re such a curious girl, Lucy. Our last guest arrived about ten minutes ago, and I believe you already know what *will* happen to her.”

# **Cora Brave**

By July Wen (G6)

## **1**

Everyone was super excited about what was going to happen to her in the next few years, but clearly, she wasn't.

She was going to Mars.

Yep. You heard me. Mars.

Her name was Cora Brave. Her family was one of the most well-known families in the U.S., selling gasoline to all Americans.

The Braves had three daughters, and she was the youngest one. And by "the youngest," I mean that she was the most spoiled, rude, and unreasonable one.

She got whatever she wanted throughout the fourteen years of her life: from stuffed unicorns, when she was four, to the newest iPhone, not to mention that she'd had 128 phones when she was thirteen. If I want to list every single object she got, I need to add a hundred extra pages. She had everything a girl can brag and show off about and she was, clearly, very popular. Every girl at school seemed to love her. They would wave at her whenever they see her in the corridors and would go up to her and say things like, "I love your hair!" "Your earrings are so cool!" "You're so awesome!" and try to get into her social circle and become popular. And the boys either liked her or admired her.

You might think that it is not fair for her to have everything a person needs and wants to succeed at an age of fourteen, while others had to work really hard to be just barely getting by. Well, all I can say is that it is still fair — her father and mother worked for it.

Everything seemed to be perfect until she reached the age of fourteen.

The resources on Earth started to run out. For example, fos-

sil fuels. What do you use fossil fuels for? Gasoline and petroleum.

The Braves' profit started to decline, and they knew that it was not going to increase. They made a decision: they were moving to Mars with all their pieces of equipment and would start their businesses there.

By now, every family had at least one spaceship. And the Braves? They had twelve. They had everything to enjoy their life. But if they were to move to Mars, they would have nothing.

The monetary units on Mars were not the same as the one on Earth and the two were not allowed to be exchanged. All they would have were some cars and a house they bought a few years ago. No more fame, no more money, no more people admiring them.

And Cora was not happy.

Leaving all the popularity behind and start a new life? It did not work for Cora.

But the bad thing was that no matter how peevish she was, things did not work out for her this time.

The Braves had to go.

But Cora tried to find a solution. She was going to save the family business and avoid staying on Mars forever. She was going to find other resources as replacements for fossil fuels on Mars and sell them to people on Earth



ILLUSTRATION BY JULY WEN

## 2

Back then when she was still the spoiled little princess. I would've told you that her plans were definitely not going to work, but not this time.

She became a completely different girl. She wasn't that rude anymore; she wasn't that proud of herself anymore; and she started to study really hard. Back in the old days, she barely received any Bs, but now, she was getting straight As. She was studying in the Space and Technology domain and was also working on Artificial Intelligence. She was a genius in this area and she was going to university three years before her peers.

She started her project to avoid staying on Mars, but as she grew up, different things happened, changing her mind. She had to stay on Mars, but she didn't mind doing it. Cora Brave is not the spoiled little girl people knew her as any more: she was the hope of all the people on Earth and an all-time heroine. The resource-run-down event changed her completely.

## 3

When she was twenty-two years old, Cora graduated with three doctorates. She was Dr. Brave now, instead of Miss.Brave. She was the discoverer of the Ice Coal and this resource gave the rest of the people who were still on Earth another chance to live. She also proved that the Alien Theory existed and discovered some species of aliens. The UFOs were no more Unknown Flying Objects; they were the spaceships of friendly creatures.

Cora Brave was the lifesaver of the whole humanity.

You think the story will end now? Happily ever after?

Sorry to tell you this, but no. We are nowhere close to the end.

I'll tell you the rest of the story.

Dr. Brave, known as the lifesaver of humans, was also the destroyer of humans. She discovered the Ice Coal, but she didn't let people know that it was also harmful to humans. She discovered the aliens, but also helped them took objects and technology away from humans, which meant that the aliens were not really "friendly creatures" after all, but harmful creatures.

Why? Why did Dr. Brave betray her kind?

She did it for two reasons: money and fame.

These two elements are the destroyer of every intelligent person on earth. Everybody wants money. Everybody wants fame. Isn't it just wonderful to be admired by everyone and enjoy life as a billionaire?

That's what Dr. Brave thought. She wanted that kind of feeling when she was so popular and rich. She wanted that kind of feeling she got back on Earth, years ago.

Because of her desire for money and fame, humans were trapped under a huge lie of "high technology" and they were in danger.

Because of her desire for money and fame, every human who understood high technology, which was invented by hard work, was taken by aliens that paid some Mars bills.

I know what you think. How could Dr. Brave have done all of that just for money? Well, that was because of her childhood — how she enjoyed being rich and popular. There were years where she was selfless and wanted to work for humans, but after she worked on her master degrees, she met the aliens in a space trip and suddenly remembered her childhood enjoyment through a conversation.

The time seemed to stop. Everyone besides her froze. Suddenly, she saw some creatures. She was scared. She grabbed a laser gun by her side and aimed at the glowing creature.

But the creatures started to talk and surprisingly, she understood them.

*O Cora Brave please listen*

*We are not here to harm*

*You've enjoyed your childhood*

*You've enjoyed living at Earth  
Just be quiet and think 'bout why*

*You are intelligent and you are brave*

*You are never one of them  
Those stupid mortals only want your brain*

*Will you just give it to them this easily*

*You are not one of them*

*Follow us*

*Follow us*

*You will get what you've always wanted"*

The creatures glared at her after saying these words, and she freaked out.

She went crazy for a week but was finally back to normal on the eighth day. No one seemed to know about her talk with the aliens and she obviously didn't want to tell anyone — she thought about it in the crazy days. She remembered how she felt when she was on Earth, ignorance, embraced by popularity and richness. So,

she made a decision; a decision that might end the human kind one day.

She chose to support the aliens.

## 5

Years flew by. Dr. Brave was twenty-eight years old. She was moving, again, but this time, with the aliens.

The night before she left, she had a dream. She dreamed about the gratefulness in the people's eyes when they first received Ice Coals. She dreamed about how her favorite teachers had told her about being kind, honest, and helpful. Did she do any of that? Did she help her people? What have her ever done to support her people? That night, she felt something that she had never felt in years. She felt that she wasn't even better than the little fourteen-year-old, spoiled Cora. She woke up in her deepest fear and doubt.

## 6

She got off her bed, walked out of her house, and realized that she was on Mars, somewhere inside a huge artificial greenhouse, somewhere she couldn't even see the stars. She realized she had been in this greenhouse for years, without even looking at the stars. She realized that this was somewhere not home.

She wanted to shout, to yell, and to sing. She wanted to go home, back to Mother Earth, but she couldn't. She felt like a little girl again, not knowing where her parents were. Alone in the crowds, she started crying.

There was no way that she could go back to Earth. Humans had used all the resources, cut down all the trees, and hunted all the animals. They all betrayed Mother Earth, and she was the one who should have been blamed the most. But no one can blame her anymore. The healthy Earth was already gone. This was the first time anyone had realized that they've lost Earth forever and they could never find the perfect replacement.

She was scared. She was sad. There were so many things happening in her brain.

She laid down quietly on the fake grass. She fell asleep.  
And she never woke up.

*Earth is our only home.*

*Protect her, while we still have time.*



*ILLUSTRATION BY JULY WEN*

# The Shot

By Jerry Zhu (G8)

A cool breeze blew across the sidewalk, stirring up fallen leaves into small clusters. The boy walked along at a steady pace, looking around, as if he was searching for something.

“Is this the place?”

As he entered the gate, a silence greeted him. The silence was overwhelming, yet at the same time filled with anxiety. It was late August, and as the weather was still quite hot, he didn’t really expect to see anybody on the fields. Walking into the building, he pushed the door and felt the cool, air-conditioned air. Except he didn’t, as he hit the door realizing it was supposed to be pulled, not pushed. Pulling the door open in exasperation, he walked up the stairs to find his classroom.

There wasn’t much commotion inside of his classroom, as his classmates had mostly settled in. He quietly walked to the only seat available, only to be called by the teacher. “Hi there, are you Sevege? Come up and introduce yourself!”

Reluctantly, he walked to the front of the room and tried to make his introduction as brief as possible. “Hi everybody, I’m Sevege and I’m 12 years old. My favorite sport is basketball.” With a sigh of relief, he prepared to sit down. It was then that he noticed a laughing pair of boys at the back calling out to him. Curious, he walked over to them. One of them whispered to him, “Hey, you want to play basketball today during lunch?” The other boy chimed in, “It’s going to be really fun!” Sevege wasn’t too sure about it, but he agreed anyway. He reasoned there couldn’t be much trouble from making a few friends.

The morning passed quickly, as the teachers played various icebreaker games and passed out textbooks. As noon arrived, he finished his lunch quickly to find the boys he had met earlier. Walk-

ing down to the basketball courts, he started to feel a bit anxious. He wasn't really the best player, and he was in doubt about whether he would disappoint the other players. He slowed for a second, but resumed again with confidence. "No harm can be done," he thought.

He saw the boys he had met earlier as well as a slightly shorter boy. As he looked at them with uncertainty, they quickly introduced themselves. The tallest of them was called Jeccup, the shorter one was James, while the shortest one was Alan. Jeccup said to them all, "Let's divide the teams up and get playing. I'll be with Seavage."

As the game began, Seavage felt a lot better. He was able to pass and help Jeccup, and he even scored a point. He looked at the older students playing on the other courts with confidence. "I'll be one of them in no time!" he thought.

It was at that moment that he heard the shout from Jeccup. "Seavage! What are you doing?" He snapped back into focus, only to realize that Alan and James had scored two points while he was daydreaming. Jeccup was obviously angry. Seavage hurried to move into a defensive position, but to no avail. The other team soon scored another point and the game was over.

"Seavage! What are you doing? I've never seen anybody be so bad at basketball!" said Jeccup.

Seavage was embarrassed but defiant. "I made a mistake, ok?"

Jeccup scoffed, and walked up to Seavage. "Get out of here, you piece of trash."

Seavage barely stopped himself from hitting Jeccup. "Say that again. I dare you."

"Just get out of here, we don't have time for people who are as bad as you."

James chimed in, "Exactly. Get out of here, because you suck."

Seavage prepared to lunge towards Jeccup, but it was at that moment that Alan stepped in. Looking sternly at all of them, he said: "Listen. Let's not start a fight here. Seavage, if you get into a fight you're going to get kicked out on the first day of school, and you do not want that to happen. James and Jeccup, please stop pro-

voking him.” Seavage stepped back with defiance, as James and Jecup walked away, laughing.

Seavage felt terrible. He had likely just made enemies with two of the most powerful boys in his class, and there was probably more trouble to come. He swore under his breath at his bad luck as he silently walked back into the building.

It was soon that he found himself choosing a snack at the convenience store after classes had ended for the day. There was little that he could do, he reflected. Bullies would be bullies. Walking to the cashier, he caught sight of somebody who seemed familiar. Stopping, he asked, “Hi, I’m sorry, but what’s your name again?”

The stranger replied, “I’m Alan. Are you all right from lunch time?”

“I’m fine,” said Seavage. “But I was wondering, how can you avoid getting bullied by that pair?”

Alan answered silently, “Really, you just have to earn their

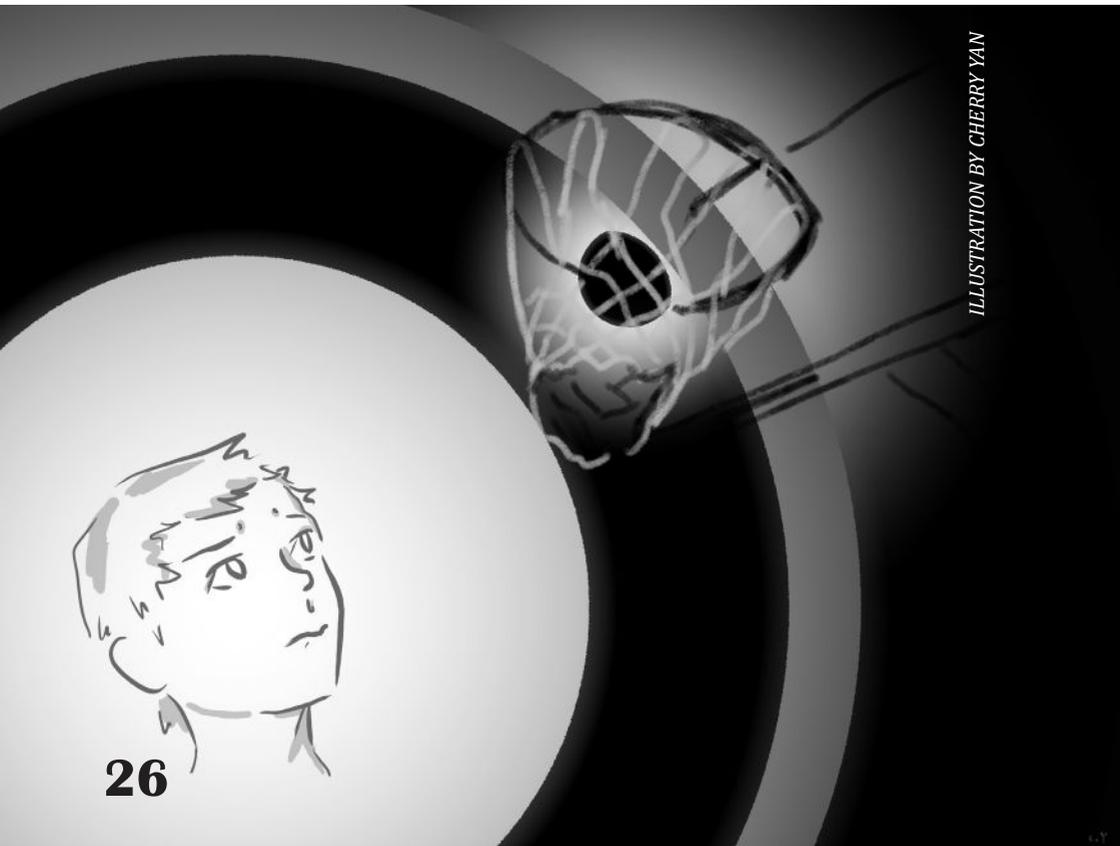


ILLUSTRATION BY CHERRY YAN

respect. I was bullied by them in the past too, but I was good at academics and they needed my help. It was something that I had to earn.”

As Alan left, Seavage started to walk home thinking about his predicament. What was it that had led him into this unfortunate situation? He kept thinking about Alan’s words. How could he get respect from people who were better at basketball than he was? As he stood in the elevator in his apartment building, he noticed an advertisement on the wall. “Improve your basketball today! Private classes available close to you!” It suddenly hit him. If he could become better at basketball than them, he could get their respect and end the bullying. It was at least worth a shot, he thought.

As the schooldays passed, autumn crept into Beijing and the leaves started to yellow in a beautiful array of colors. But Seavage had no time for admiring leaves, as he had started his basketball classes. He had had a few classes and his teacher wasn’t too happy with his progress. Seavage didn’t think much of it. As long as he was having classes, he must be improving, he thought.

It was Monday again, and as two weeks had passed Seavage was confident with his abilities. As he strolled into class, he saw James and Jeccup snickering. Alan was sitting silently, reading a book. As Seavage sauntered towards them, he could hear James saying, “Here comes the big loser again.”

Paying no mind, he walked up and asked them: “Up for a rematch today? This time let’s have Alan and I versus you two.

“Sure, this will be fun,” Jeccup replied snidely.

As he listened to the usual morning announcements, Seavage caught something he didn’t expect to hear. “Under 14 boys basketball tryouts are at the start of October! Come and tryout at the basketball court to get into the team!” Seavage mentally noted down the date on the board, making sure that he would show up for the tryouts.

As noon rolled around again, Seavage once again headed down to the basketball courts. It was much cooler now than the last time he had come here. The wind felt comforting and encouraging

against his face. He would win this game, and show them who was to be respected.

The game started out with a point scored by Alan. Savage played to his best, and defended all he could, but Jeccup's natural height advantage bypassed Alan's defenses. The score was 1-0, then 1-1, then 2-1. Alan was trying his best to stop James, but little could be done as Savage saw James confidently shoot the layup. As the game ended, James and Jeccup walked away, grinning in triumph.

Savage could not believe it. It was Alan's fault. No, he had been the weakness in their defense. He couldn't believe that he had lost with his preparations. He wanted to just give up and disappear. As he ran back into the building, he felt tears come to his eyes. He couldn't have just lost to them. He just couldn't have...

"Don't worry. Life has its ups and downs."

Savage heard Alan's voice and lifted his head up to find himself in an empty classroom. He saw Alan sitting in front of him, with a concerned look on his face. "Are you all right?" he asked. Savage silently nodded. Alan said, "Don't worry. Just keep practicing and you'll get better than them. Don't give up. Ever." Leaving the room, he patted Savage on the back.

The days wore on, and as the days became shorter and colder Savage kept on training more. October was drawing near, and Savage was becoming faster, stronger, and more accurate. His coach had commented that he was much more enthusiastic nowadays than he was before. It was on the first day of October that he walked into his classroom again, silent yet confident. As he listened to the usual morning announcements, he caught what he needed. After school, the tryouts would be held in the basketball courts.

As the last bell of the day rang, Savage packed up his things and walked to the basketball court. He was ready this time. He saw the other participants, and he knew them all. Alan, James, and Jeccup had lined up already, waiting for him. Hurrying to the line to join his classmates, once again he heard snickering. He tried not to let it discourage him, but it was still quite daunting nevertheless. Many of his other classmates were at the sidelines, watching their

performance.

The coach said: "Let's begin. We'll play 2v2 as usual, and the winning team will get into this year's basketball team." Savage walked to Alan, as James and Jeccup did the same. The coach shouted, "We'll play to three points. Good luck to all of you!"

The game started badly, with Jeccup scoring against Alan. Savage wasn't discouraged though. He scored a point, making the game even again. He heard cheering from his other classmates beside the court, and saw Alan's dedication. However, James scored a point again even under his relentless defense. He doubted whether he could win, but that was when he saw his chance. Alan wasn't defended and he had the ball. Savage ran outside of the three point line, and got the ball from Alan.

At that point, he had an unobstructed shot. He heard cheering. He saw Jeccup running towards him. He had trained for this moment for months. He lined up his shot, and he knew that his shot would score. It would end the game, gaining him respect and entry into the basketball team. This shot would decide everything.

Everyone's eyes were fixated on the ball as it left Savage's hands. As it landed on the basket, it started rolling on the rim. There was a collective gasp.

And then, there was silence.

# My Grandpa's Hens

By Lucy Wang (G6)



*PHOTOGRAPH BY LUCY WANG*

My grandpa has two hens, one is big, brown, smart, and graceful. I call her “Brown”. The other hen is smaller than Brown, she is yellow, so I call her “Yellow”. She seems to be a companion of Brown because she follows Brown everywhere, like to hatch their eggs together, walk together, and sleep together.

Last Saturday, my grandpa was airing paddies and after doing this, he left them there and told me to

shoo his hens away if they came to have some food, then he went to sleep. Just as he predicted, Brown and Yellow did go to fetch some food to eat. I saw them doing this, so I shooed them away. After some minutes, they came again with pathetic looks on their little faces. “Alright, they won,” I thought.

I stamped on some of those paddies and got a great amount of rice. I threw some to Brown and some to Yellow. They ate with great pleasure. After finishing her food, Brown cautiously came near me and tilted her head to one side, and she seemed to be asking me to give her some more food. “Stop acting cute! I’m not supposed to give you paddies anyway,” I told Brown. But, no matter how hard I tried to tell Brown off for having more food, she just wouldn’t budge! Then I thought, “Alright, I’ll go if you will not.” So I went indoors, took a piece of bread, went out again and watched the slow-

poke Yellow slowly eat her food. Suddenly, Brown came out of nowhere and took a big chunk of bread from me and quickly gobbled it down. "Hey!" I yelled to Brown. She cooed to me in reply, trying to steal another piece at the same time while I was trying to shoo her away. When I saw her funny expression, I thought it would be fun to let her eat from my hands. So, I ripped a small piece of bread off and put it on my hand. Brown looked up and cooed. I nodded without even knowing why I did this. Brown immediately craned her neck towards the bread and ate it. It itched and tickled my hand! After I fed her, Brown seemed to like me more than before!

That day, I tried putting rice, sunflower seeds, and dried banana on my hands and Brown loved them all! When my grandpa got up and saw me feeding Brown, he told me that if I continued to feed Brown for a long time, she might even begin to recognize me as the girl that kept feeding her.

*PHOTOGRAPH BY LUCY WANG*





ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE YU

# High School



# On a Bus

By Sophie He (DP2)

The sweat-aged plastic handles grin yellow  
Soused and pickled by thousands of lives

Some taste like decades of skin  
Cracking every winter, when dusty ice  
Rubs between the skin and dirty potatoes every day.  
Frost-eroded canyons form, before the old ones heal.  
One hand fermenting with the handle,  
Where the sweaty salt and the salty sweat  
Floods the yellow indents on the plastic handles  
Floods the black indents on the pale hands.  
The other hand clenches a few paper bills left for  
Maybe the next hospital trip.

Some smell of ink from high school essays  
Young girls that wish to one day see another city  
To not be drowned in unwanted pity  
And the sunrise not accompanied by manual labor,  
Nights of no sleep, where poverty is her captor.  
The girls leave the bus with their shoulders sore,  
As they lean in when their legs decide to rest.

Some shine with bright oily coats, a share of the man's precious  
Aged single-use plastic lunchbox where oils and vegetables are  
Unfamiliar guests that only descend during salary days. His body  
Wriggles, hanging from the handle, dragged down by the animalistic  
Desire for sleep: he walked kilometers to buy the cheapest leftover pork fats.

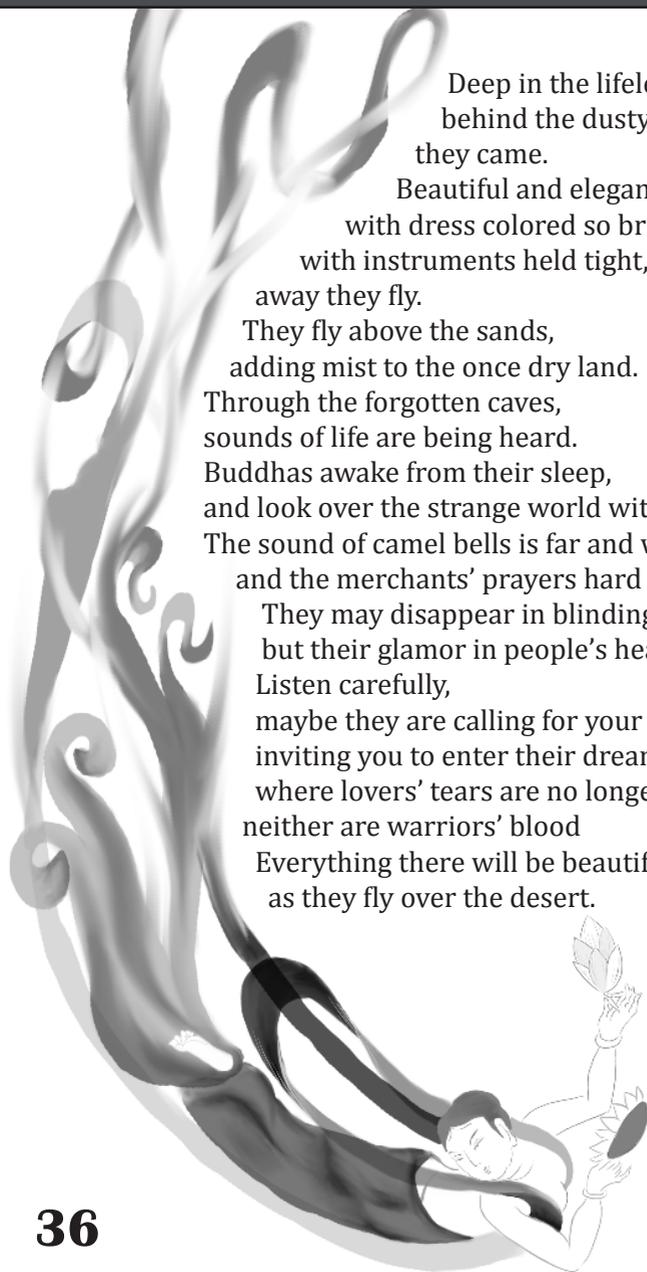
By the end of the day, the sweaty handles will be wiped.  
Yet they are still soured yellow in different flavors of people's lives.

# Dunhuang

By Tara Shen (G10)

ILLUSTRATION BY CHERRY YAN

Deep in the lifeless desert,  
behind the dusty hills,  
they came.  
Beautiful and elegant,  
with dress colored so bright,  
with instruments held tight,  
away they fly.  
They fly above the sands,  
adding mist to the once dry land.  
Through the forgotten caves,  
sounds of life are being heard.  
Buddhas awake from their sleep,  
and look over the strange world with eyes deep.  
The sound of camel bells is far and weak,  
and the merchants' prayers hard to seek.  
They may disappear in blinding sands one day,  
but their glamor in people's hearts will stay.  
Listen carefully,  
maybe they are calling for your names,  
inviting you to enter their dreams,  
where lovers' tears are no longer shed,  
neither are warriors' blood  
Everything there will be beautiful and elegant,  
as they fly over the desert.



# Danäe

By Terry Tang (DP1)

There's incessant ticking from the clock on the wall,  
You wake to it every morning. The hour hand ends at where it began  
And there you would bid it good night.

Each moment of day is a parting of ways from the light  
Which waves through the windows. Each arc of an hour and  
Orbit of day becomes a wearisome sight.

When twice the door of your prison slams shut  
And leaves you lonely in darkness, and five days from seven  
You're carried away to face the sting of the storm,

How do you cling to the withering thread  
Of your hope and never yet falter, when desperation decrees  
That thread someday to break its wavering form?

...

Then came a day when flowers sprung  
In pots before the window, and curtains lifted from the panes  
To show their brilliant blooms.

And tea you made for every sundown  
Right before the night, for tea with close companions  
Lifted evening's grimmest glooms.

You frame the world around you on  
A phone's fluorescent screen, and fill the room around you  
with the books you've yet to read,

You take joy in the ordinary  
Wonders of your life, while from your hurt  
imprisoned, you live as if you're freed.

...

The clock's incessant ticking brings  
No distant sign of hope, and life's unending darkness  
Is as blinding as the night...

There may not be a light that marks  
The end of every tunnel, but joy you've found in darkness,  
Then need there still be light?

*ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE ZHANG*



*High School Poetry – Honourable Mention*

# The Flower

By Stephanie Choi (DP1)

A flower does not grow within a transparent glass,  
instead it wilts and drowns in its own catastrophic chaos.  
Though the water is green, life there will not be  
pretty for all to see but fading perpetually.  
If only the flower knew exactly where to bloom,  
growing from the grave, where fears are uncaged.  
Many are afraid of death-ridden soil  
but from the darkest deaths come the  
brightest  
of breaths

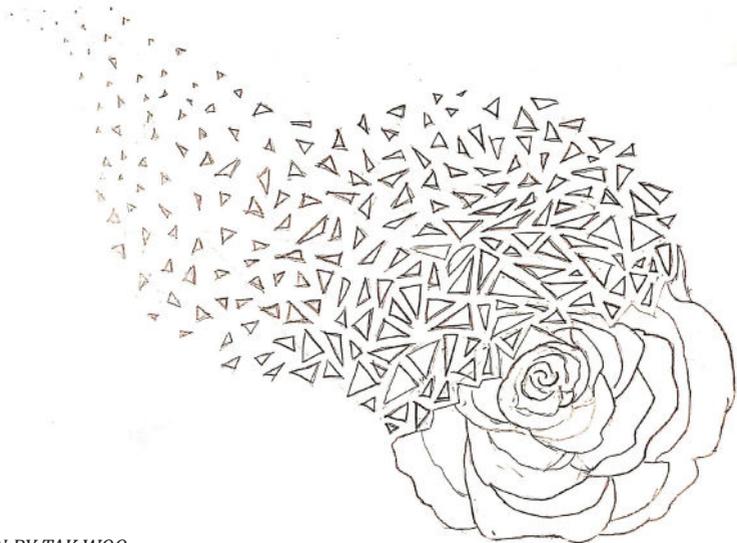


ILLUSTRATION BY TAK WOO

# Paulownia Flowers Outside the Window

By Sophie Zhang (G9)

Of the reds and yellows apples resting in distant house's sunshine  
An hour's drive away from my home.  
Of rickety door and the marks made slowly along a table's line  
Where my love is hardly shown.

Aching smells of fresh rice chimed with pears and pumpkin,  
Sound of the smoking vent choking up precious smells.  
Rubber slippers with holes rounded wrinkled feet in linin,  
Moving in a slow pattern to the hum of a clock, the buzzing of a cell.

April 7th, a sun blown Saturday,  
Bags of traditionally packaged milk were laid on the turned off heater.  
Wrinkled hands grabbed my own smooth ones tightly,  
Yellowed teeth smiled, and I wonder if a boy smiled like that 70 winters ago.

April 15th, as the sky darkened,  
A woman quickly finished a conversation with her father, and turned to her child.  
A shaking, weathered hand put down the unfitting new technology,  
And called for his long love to accompany him to rest.

As the midnight clock struck in the silence,  
The old man rested at last.  
His hands will no longer cook home flavored meals for me,  
His fingers will no longer caress my face.

\*\*\*

I didn't hear my father the next morning,  
As he said the lies that haunt me for life,  
Or to say, the words with which my emotional stability fought,  
*"Your grandfather passed away last night."*

Black was worn at the ceremony, and I did not want to cry,  
But it wasn't the sadness at never seeing my grandfather again.  
As I saw him, as if he was sleeping,  
And he might wake up,  
And smile,  
And ask what I wanted to eat today,  
The tears fell free with guilt, guilt at all the times I did not make him smile,  
The guilt at all the times I had smacked his hand away and harshened my voice.

The kitchen was pale in the warming weathers of April,  
An elderly woman laughed and cooked as before,  
The laughs were hollow, the smells were dimmed,  
As if a badly placed Instagram filter was on the scene,  
And the coldness of warm day chilled me to the core.

Pictures were not taken down yet,  
Your smile was in every frame in every corner of every room.  
A noose strained my heart of how I didn't look and cherish that smile more,  
And the trapdoor opened beneath my feet as I realized there's no chance  
of that anymore.

Paulownia flowers bloomed at the window,  
Their purple colors climbing up to the 6th floor window I stood at.  
*You see the flowers?* You used to hold my hand on the window and ask.  
*They mean the spring is here.*

I broke.

Why is it not coming this year?!  
Why not, when I need it the most,  
Why is it you disintegrate in the most beautiful days of life?  
And I hold the windowsill and feel the cold through my numb fingers.  
Why do people leave and God does not wipe our memory of them?  
Because God is cruel and kind,  
To let us remember and touch our love,  
But never ever again to even have one more word or another hug.

I regret that I had thought of you as strange and weird when we walked in the park,  
When you clapped your hands as you walked because it was good for your health,  
I regret not taking more pictures with you and having something to look at,  
Forget it.  
I regret everything I never did and I never said with you.

Even if you were old and introverted to me,  
Even if I was more modern and a teenager in her moods,  
But always,  
Love can be felt even if the words are clumsy and disordered,  
Affections can be smelt through meals and heard in the tone.

And to the end of our days,  
We'll hold this love as if it is the pearl of our lives,  
For the pearls of love are jewels that no one can ever lose.

To my grandfather.  
1942.7.10 – 2018.4.16.  
Your lived a life with love. I love you.

我想您了。

Te echo  
de  
me nos.

난 당신을  
그리워요  
I  
miss  
you ♡



Ich  
vermisse  
dich.

あなたが  
なくて寂しいです



Tu me manques

ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE ZHANG

# Mid-Stage

By Cherry Yan (G10)

After what seemed like a millennium of slumber, he opened his eyes in an attempt to visualize his surroundings. For a moment he thought he was blind. That was when he realized there were no surroundings: nothing else but uncanny mystery extended into darkness beyond. Not even the air was stirring.

Others would have scrambled to their feet, would have already burst into hopeless shouting for help and madly fumbling for the edge of his incarceration, would have already jerked into a stop, listening ominously for any sound from their backs, and conjecturing creepy clowns coming up from his back and surprising him with spine-chilling smiles.

But he didn't. The little boy who should have been petrified had been kidnapped, and the criminal left nothing but a barren land of equivalent darkness in his heart. He got used to it. There he sat, staring.

“Where am I?”

Suddenly, abruptly — words failed to describe it — a thin ray of white light pierced through the darkness and jabbed into his eyes. Readjusted, he resumed to investigate the light, and found letters like slender spectres forming into sequences of words. They were in firm order, as if framed within a textbox. A cursor blinked behind the period.

*You are in the Mid-Stage.*

\*\*\*



ILLUSTRATION BY TINA HAN

“What the hell?” slightly faltering, he questioned. “Wh-who are you?” To his surprise, letters began quickly flowing out from the cursor, as if someone were typing.

*The Mid-Stage is the interception of Life and Death, where people seek evidence to unwarranted claims of the past.*

*I am Curator No. 295.*

He probed for an incident called “death” but drowned: He couldn’t remember anything that happened.

“So, I’m dead, eh?”

*On April 1st, you were inebriated and got struck by a truck after leaving a pub.*

Well, his life had been a mess, so ending his life wasn’t so dissatisfying. Anyhow, there was no point in continuing a life of acosting various women, getting as drunk as a sow, and ending up in nasty fights over some hot girl.

He was puzzled, exceptionally ridiculed. *If whatever-whoever-is talking to me, is me, he thought, then I am able to answer unanswered questions by myself. Then, what will be the purpose of having an extension of subconsciousness, in which there is no more hope?*

*But wait, he paused himself. All my questions have been answered by this ghostly mastermind, whatever it is. Can all my questions be answered?*

*“Can you answer any question?”*

*Positive; I will answer any question you ask but will not initiate any conversation with you.*

*He forced a wry smile. “How old was I?”*

*19 years, 7 months, 16 days.*

*“How many pets have I kept in my whole life?”*

*7. 4 dogs, 2 snakes, and 1 iguana. 1 dog is still alive.*

The numbers were precisely accurate. Out of curiosity, he asked another question to which he expected no response, another so ridiculous and trivial that none would have taken to care.

*“How many eggs did I eat when I was four?”*

*58.*

Suddenly he was convinced of one thing: resurrection in memories. The questions were meaningless, but who knew for how long he would stay here. Maybe reviewing his life was not a bad idea after all. After all, his life had been a negligible one, so why not squeeze out the measly drops of blissful serendipity?

*Innocently the cursor blinked.*

\*\*\*

Time tiptoed into the deepest corner of the boundless room. He could not resist asking new questions when he grasped onto that faint sense of accomplishment that came with each response. He had truly *accomplished* a whole lot in his life made from seclusion and numbness.

*“How many times have I cursed in my life?”*

*46,289...*

*Cursing helps release a man’s stress, he thought. Isn’t that where all the bad habits ensue?*

*“How many cigarettes did I finish?”*

*Approximately 6 per day; 8,760, including special occasions.*

The desperation coexisted with his memories ever since kindergarten, long before he started smoking. He desperately wanted to fit in because he didn't want to be bullied for his shyness, so he began hanging out with the "cool boys": tricking girls, throwing stones at cooing birds. They told him to throw a caterpillar in a girl's lunchbox. He didn't know she was the principal's daughter. They gave him away in front of the principal, and he was expelled. Those scum. But he was too timid to resist, afraid to be beaten up.

"How many times have I escaped from home?"

*56. 20 successful, 36 unsuccessful.*

36 unsuccessful — that was why home had never been a safe haven for any of his grievance. He faintly felt the pain left by his father's fist on his cheekbones. 36 times. Struck to the floor, helpless and wretched, he witnessed the pain running through his mother. She was probably by blood the only one who still loved him, until her broken ribs jabbed into her lungs and killed her. But nothing could be worse, right?

Right...? His voice cracked. "How many times have I stolen?"  
*285 times.*

He recalled the first time genuinely borrowing from someone — Mrs. Jackson from Brookville Middle School. Fearing rejection (although he was always ostracized), he didn't inform her, and technically made the mistake first. But she was absent that day, and he *did* return what he borrowed with an apology note. Then, he was horribly scolded because of dishonesty. *Dishonesty?* His artless faith shriveled. He could have said nothing and wouldn't have been scolded. But if being honest simply made a man more treacherous, would ignorance prevail? So, the world would rather end up having people furtively "borrowing" things and shamelessly being dishonest? What's sadder, he gave in, because he did not want to taste the bitterness of honesty ever again. And since then, he began furtively "borrowing" his life through the world of "integrity".

"What was the last thing I worked hard for?" he began trembling.

*"Last Glimpse of Hope"*

The school musical director approached him months before summer and said he was perfect for the leading role. He was enraptured: no one had ever recognized him. He spent all his summer perfecting skills and preparing for the audition: learned all the songs, faced himself in the mirror trying to be in character, and paced gently across the floor at midnight, practicing blocking. He wanted the role desperately, more than anything he ever desired, because he could finally be in the light and prove himself to be more than a shadow.

*You piece of junk.* He heard a faint voice echoing.

School resumed and he gave it a shot. He didn't show his full potential, but others said it was touching enough. *What did they say? "You nailed it!"*

Then someone else got the part and he got nothing.

*You piece of junk.* More voices chattered in the dark. *You piece of junk,* he repeated after them.

He cried until his tears turned red. Screw the role! He only needed was a reply — a reason why they chose another. *Was it the voice? The emotion?* Were they afraid to hurt his feelings? The truth might be painful, but not as much as *nothing*.

"Don't bother that piece of junk!" He overheard people talking to the boy who got the role. Weren't they the ones who said he nailed it? Then he realized how invisible he was.

You piece of junk you piece of junk you—

He shook violently while the chatters engulfed him. Bit by bit he relinquished any sort of earthly kindness in this world, with each fist pounding on his weary body. Yeah, how a timid puppet grew up to be a piece of useless crap. *Who could have possibly loved a piece of junk like him?*

"And who could have possibly loved a piece of junk like me?" He did not realize he was whimpering the last chain of thought.

At that very moment the cursor broadened, elongated, brightened, until it expanded into a rectangular screen, its colorful spectrums bewildering the darkness. Then he saw two figures on the screen, smiling at him:

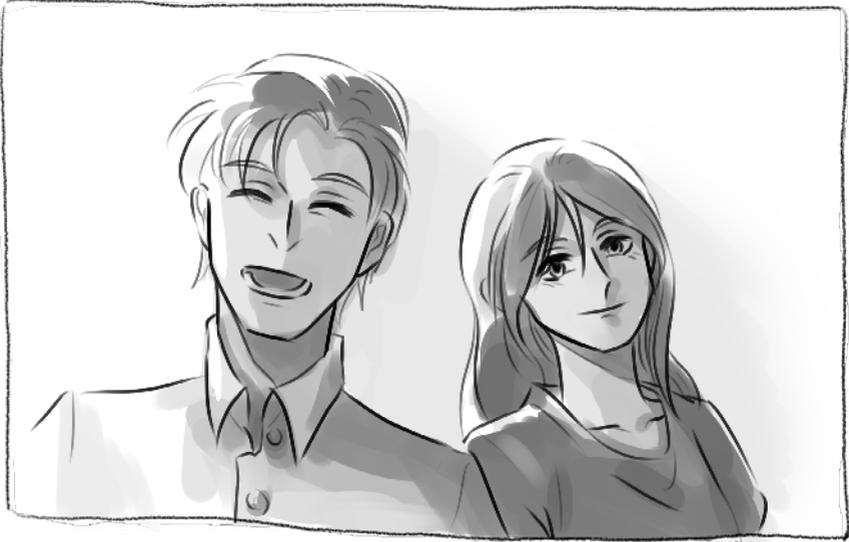


ILLUSTRATION BY TINA HAN

*Eugene and Ann.*

\*\*\*

The arctic of hatred and helplessness, which for years cumulated in his heart, instantly melted, gushing out of his eyes.

The 20 times in which he successfully escaped from home he ran to Eugene's. Eugene would make him hot chocolate and waffles and talk with him through the night, even when they both had tests the next morning. Parents had been warned by school staff about him, the freak, and were told to keep their children away from him. Eugene was never bothered. He wasn't talkative and was exceptionally clumsy in comforting people. That was why a friend like Eugene was rare: Not always cheering him up right away, but he was *actually there*.

"Don't cry," said Eugene that night when he failed the audition and cried like hell, "we still have waffles."

He chuckled with teary eyes at the thought of that gauche remark. For some moments he was afraid that Eugene was just play-

ing nice but actually hated him. He knew.

Compared to her brother, Ann was much more extroverted. Being pulled out of bed by her brother for help, she acted like she didn't care, like she was so sleepy and she would return to bed. But once started, she wouldn't stop: telling funny jokes, claiming that she would go and punch his father, boasting to threaten bullies to stay away from him... they weren't real, but made him feel better. Eventually the three of them ended up always going to that same little corner shop at the end of the road for ice cream in the same afternoons. She asked him bold questions, too.

"You ever kissed? Which girl do you like at school?"

He always laughed away those questions but never answered because, to be honest, *she was the one*. He never told her. But their parents eventually found out they were hanging out with the freak, so they moved. His entire world collapsed. The moribund ghost that rose from the wasteland then stopped believing in any kindness, smothered all the laughter and sunlight, and locked away all its warmth.

But miraculously the Curator found the key and unlocked the casket.

What would a man need other than genuine friends? Eugene and Ann were the lights that had shown in his world when all other stars faded, the sympathy had held him back from forsaking the world. He couldn't have possibly asked for more. His heart was suddenly stuffed with a strong urge. *I want to see them again, just once more*. He wanted to go and pat Eugene on the back and tell Ann that she was the one.

"I want to see them again." He knew it wasn't a question, neither did he expect any response from the Curator.

Then, the room brightened with a buttercream-yellow spread across the darkness, and lines flowed out from the cursor.

*Congratulations, you found the Purpose to your life. Many tend to fall into the same cycle of asking questions after questions in the Mid-Stage, until they die in this world. That's when they go to Heaven or Hell. Then they die, forever.*

“Who are you?”

*I am Curator No. 295, the assembly of hope within you.*

After a pause of astonishment, “Can you actually believe such a hopeless man like me can even find hope in life to continue living?”

*There is always hope and goodness to live for, even when it seems to be the darkest hours.*

As the Curator spoke a door opened, which lead to a gloomy tunnel.

*You will return to that world and start a new life from a womb.*

He was at the exit. “But how can I find them?”

*One day you will. The Purpose will lead you to them.*

\*\*\*

After what seems like a millennium of slumber, he opens his eyes in an attempt to visualize his surroundings. But he bears no fear: he has a promise to keep.

# Artistic Differences

By Benjamin Li (DP1)

The snow landed softly on the canvas.

Jo waited in the market square, his back stiff from the chilly air. All around him, the streetlamps shined languidly, emanating a dull amber glow. The wind moaned as it drifted through the empty lanes, refused from every household nearby.

Jo adjusted the painting upon the easel, dusting off the snow that had fallen onto the frame. As his gaze flitted across every brush and stroke of this chef-d'oeuvre, something caught the edge of his eye. It was the plaque nailed to the edge of the frame:

ADRIAN CHAMBERS  
HIGH WICKER STREET NO. 116  
STATE MUSEUM OF FOLK ART

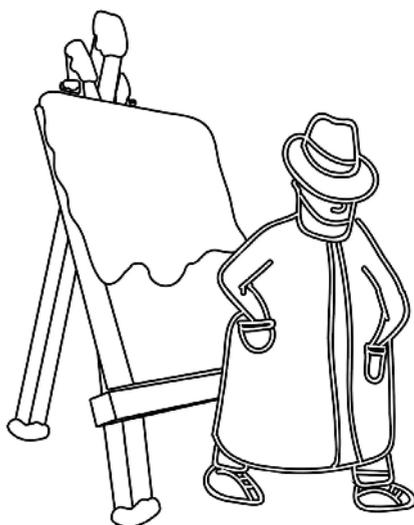


ILLUSTRATION BY ESTHER YANG

With a poignant sigh, he gave the plaque an additional scrub, restoring its dull copper sheen in the bleakness of the night.

*That would've pleased Mr. Chambers, he reflected. If only he were here to see.*

He had just visited Mr. Chambers in the morning. The snow had already begun to fall by then, and the entire town was enveloped by a thin veil of mist. Jo had been trudging through the snow pensively, shivering under his threadbare overcoat. In his haste, he had forgotten to pocket the gloves that Rosamund had laid out for

him and, thus, he had to carry his painting with his tender hands exposed to the stinging frost. The painting itself, however, had been carefully wrapped in brown packaging paper. Jo had taken extra measures to ensure that not a glimpse of the painting was visible from the outside, for he was well aware of the things that befell those who dared to disclose their true intentions, especially after that scandal Arvin had instigated.

The thought of Arvin left a bitter taste in Jo's mouth. The two of them had not parted on the best of terms. Nonetheless, he had kept their dream alive with this painting. Having applied the final touches of his work only yesterday, he had immediately called Mr. Chambers, and he was in such a state of ecstasy that he barely perceived the gravity in Mr. Chambers' tone. Still, this had been a momentous occasion, and in the morning, he had promptly set off to the Folk Art Museum, where he hoped Mr. Chambers would give him the approval he sought.

As he approached the museum, a brownstone edifice of antique appearance, Jo inexplicably felt as though he was being stalked. Yet when he glanced behind his shoulder, there wasn't a single soul in sight save for an elderly couple hobbling in the snow. Relieved, Jo had resumed his ascent across the museum's marble steps.

Once he was inside, Jo headed straight for Mr. Chambers' office. Around him loomed the dimly lighted corridors, their wall-papers blemished and peeling off in the corners. Treading through these familiar hallways, Jo couldn't help but reminisce about the golden days of his youth, when he and Arvin had roamed the galleries with Mr. Chambers at their side. As the jovial old curator of the museum, Mr. Adrian Chambers had taken both Jo and Arvin in as his own prodigies, hoping to nurture them into proficient artists someday. It was during this time that Jo and Arvin first discovered the lie that existed at the heart of their community, for Mr. Chambers' convivial lectures had helped enlighten their eyes to reality. As time flew by, Arvin's passion for truth and justice grew tenfold as he repeatedly droned on about how he was going to burn out "the can-

cer” in the town. Initially hesitant, Jo had tried to caution restraint. Yet over time he too became consumed by the revolutionary flame, and together with Arvin, he had concocted a ploy to achieve their ideals with a symbolic art piece powerful enough to sway even the most conservative of minds.

*It matters not, Jo ruminated. Arvin’s gone now. He left me no choice. The curator’s my last hope.*

He had arrived in front of Mr. Chambers’ office.

*Knock, knock.*

“Come in,” came the reply.

Jo pushed open the door, which creaked noisily upon its hinge.

Mr. Chambers was seated behind his desk.

“Jo—” he stood up, pushing back his spectacles.

“Yes, Mr. Chambers, it’s all done,” Jo interjected, hastily unwrapping the sealed painting. “My life’s work,” he beamed enthusiastically, “feast your eyes!”

Tearing off the last piece of wrapping paper, Jo revealed the painting in its full glory. It was, conceivably, the most scathing criticism towards a municipality. On the fringe of the painting was a myriad of personages: to the right were burly figures dressed in police uniforms, each exchanging money with an armed gangster. To the left were respectably dressed citizens standing in what seemed to be a courtroom, their gnarly hands clutching immense chains that bound ragged women shrieking in anguish. At the center was indubitably a caricature of the mayor, a bloated, pig-like face gorging on the cash handed to him by the figures on the sides.

Mr. Chambers’ lower lip quivered.

“Jo, son—”

“Look, sir, I know, I *know* what you’re going to say,” Jo rambled on without intermission. “But this is our only chance! We can’t let the mayor and his goons get away, or it’d have been all for nothing. Please, sir. We need to get a list of contacts. I’m sure you have many connections—”

“Jo, listen—”

“—And we have to get in touch with them now! I’m going to the market square tonight, and I want you to invite as many people as possible. Then I’ll unveil this masterpiece, and the whole town will come to know the truth! After that, they’ll have to do something about it, if there’s any decency left in this world. Right, sir?”

Mr. Chambers bowed his head.

“Mr. Chambers?” Jo inquired, mystified. “Did you hear what I said?”

“Quite clearly, son,” Mr. Chambers responded solemnly. “And the answer is no.”

Jo was taken aback. “What do you mean?”

The curator heaved a plaintive sigh.

“Jo, you have to understand. This is far too perilous, especially for you. If you choose to go down this path—” Mr. Chambers faltered, his expression darkening. “Those people you’re up against? You’ve no idea what they’re capable of.”

Jo was incredulous. Mr. Chambers was the last person he had expected to be refused by.

“They *will* come for you,” the curator continued, “and everyone who’s ever helped you. You have to stop.”

“And sacrifice what I’ve worked for my entire life?”

“Why not save yourself to fight another day? I’m sure there’ll come a time for artistic freedom in this state. Until then, just keep yourself out of harm’s way.”

“No!” Jo snarled furiously. “You’re doing this to protect yourself, you spineless coward.”

Mr. Chambers stared mournfully at his pupil. For a moment he was at a loss.

“Jo,” he finally spoke, “does this have anything to do with Arvin? Because if that’s the case, I completely understand—”

“No!” Jo exclaimed, utterly aghast. *How could Mr. Chambers even assort me with the likes of Arvin?* It was Arvin, not he, who had openly condemned the municipal government and civil service for their corruption and incompetence with no regard for himself or his friends. It was also Arvin, not he, who had been falsely accused

of perjury and charged accordingly. Notwithstanding, Jo had once felt sympathy for Arvin's plight, when they had still been on friendly terms. Yet after his release, Arvin was never the same again. Jo couldn't put his finger on it, but something must have occurred that altered Arvin fundamentally. Since he became a free man, Arvin no longer discussed his political opinions or any matters of significance. Instead, he began to drown his grievances in alcohol while frequenting nightclubs as his full-time occupation. He also found himself a girlfriend of sorts, a middle-aged socialite named Miranda. Under her influence, Arvin became truly hedonistic, lavishly indulging in leisure from day to night. There was usually a throng of Miranda's friends who followed them wherever they went. There was no knowing how many women Arvin cavorted with nowadays.

Jo had once attempted to make Arvin see reason. It was a humid summer night, and Jo had finally located Arvin in an underground nightclub, where he was enjoying the company of his "entourage".

Jo had marched right towards his former friend.

"Arvin? Where have you been?"

"Hi, Jo," Arvin yawned. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

Jo could hardly contain his indignation. "You should be *busy* working on our project."

Arvin's countenance fell.

"Get out," he scowled.

"Arvin, please—"

"Get out before I call the guard."

Jo had departed promptly after that, although he did recall brushing past someone who looked rather like Rosamund. Still, his mind had been preoccupied with Arvin's betrayal at the time, and now, fuming in front of Mr. Chambers, he felt betrayed yet again.

"I thought you of all people should understand." Jo's tone was full of reproach.

"I do, son, but—"

"But you're going to abandon me anyway? Just like every other person in my life? Like Arvin? Like my parents? Well, guess

what? Good riddance!”

Jo strode towards the door. As he reached for the doorknob, he turned around one last time.

“I’ll do this on my own. One way or another, I’ll make this horror come to light.”

He slammed the door on his way out.

Descending the dusty stairs, Jo’s mind was a whirlwind. He was experiencing such an emotional nadir that he hardly realized the elderly couple he saw earlier were going in the direction of Mr. Chambers’ office, striding with their backs unusually straight. When they passed by, Jo inadvertently caught sight of a metal surface glinting within the woman’s pocket, the outline of which, pressed against the pocket, had resembled a pistol somewhat.

The hallway suddenly seemed colder than before.

Exiting the museum, Jo’s thoughts were swirling in another world. By the time he arrived home, it was already evening. The furnace had gone cold, and a musty smell permeated the air. Leaning the painting carefully against a wall, Jo proceeded to slump on the sofa, his mind in reverie. An hour later, Rosamund returned and stepped into their unlit, gloomy apartment.

Jo did not stir as Rosamund turned on the lights. Nor did he question his wife where she had been after her work shift ended three hours ago. He simply sat there, musing thoughtfully on how he would rally the townspeople to his side. He didn’t even notice Rosamund lingering behind the sofa until she sat beside him.

“Jo, darling?”

Jo stared into the distance.

“Darling? I’m going out.”

“OK.”

“It’s for the best. For both of us, I think.”

He nodded.

“It’s not you, it’s me.”

“OK.” He saw that Rosamund’s ring was not on her finger.

“Jo, I’m going to Arvin’s.”

Jo shuddered.

“OK”, he muttered, after a moment of silence.

Rosamund rose without a word and walked out. Jo remained seated on the sofa. He did not feel embittered. In fact, he no longer felt anything.

A few minutes later, Jo put on his overcoat, took an easel and his painting, and left the building. He plodded through the murky streets with singular conviction. At length, he arrived at the market square, where he had expected to find a bustling crowd awaiting him. Yet it was completely deserted, without a soul in sight. Even the stalls had been removed.

Jo turned away from the painting. He exhaled a sigh, watching the vapor rise in the moonlight. No one had come to hear him. No one even cared. The cold was closing in, the wind stabbing through his garments. Gradually, drowsiness settled over Jo. The snow, alien before, suddenly seemed so inviting, so irresistible. His legs buckled beneath him, and he felt his eyelids becoming droopy. The world melted away into darkness...

\* \* \*

The next day, a man wearing a blue threadbare overcoat was seen lying on the snow in the old marketplace. Several dignified and benevolent citizens of the town walked past this sprawled form, their heads held high and their pace hasty. It was respect that they held for this poor unfortunate soul, who had not been able to withstand the onslaught of winter. No one noticed the painting beside him, on which those magnificent colors, now disfigured by the snow that had fallen upon the canvas during the night, will forever fade from memory.

# Hearth

By Terry Tang (DP1)

Tattered bits of cloth wrapped around the old man as he dragged his feet from shore, limbs like the frail branches of trees as they battled against the howling wind. Cradled in his arms was a bundle of thin linen fabric, a cocoon that swayed with every step. A fierce storm was brewing, gathering the remnants of its predecessor to envelop the sky and cast a shadow over the city. The tide crept to batter the rocks at sea as formidable waves pushed and rushed one another till they collapsed, soaking the sand. Howling winds blew across the palm trees of the beach, bending their trunks as soldiers bent catapults, launching coconuts afar and into the hungry ocean.

Strong gusts of air battered the feeble man as he came to a halt at a door, with its mahogany frame unfazed by the downpour. He took shelter under the protective roof of the house, diverting the rain in streams flowing down the street, gathering in ponds where pavements ended. After a long while, he decided that he could not withstand the chilling weather much longer; it was a matter of time before the cruel cold took him down. Cuddling the bundle with his left arm, the man knocked on the door of the house.

After a lengthy pause, he heard muffled footsteps coming closer to the door. The man leaned back for a bit, almost exposing himself to the rain, as the footsteps paused. Presumably the owner of the house was peering out at this strange visitor, pondering why he was there. Finally the door opened, revealing a middle-aged man in his nightgown, looking very drowsy.

“Excuse me sir, but —”

“How much money do you want?” The home-owner interrupted, without concealing his instinctive assumption that the elderly stranger was a beggar.

“Not money... Chance you to have a room I can stay in, for

one night or two?" was the distraught reply.

The middle-aged man rubbed his head wearily, looking back at his vast living room, with carpets of fine delicate fur spread over the ground. As he did so, the old man peered across his shoulders to see almost a dozen entrances adjoining to a theater-like quarter, each leading off to its own hallway and lit up with chandeliers.

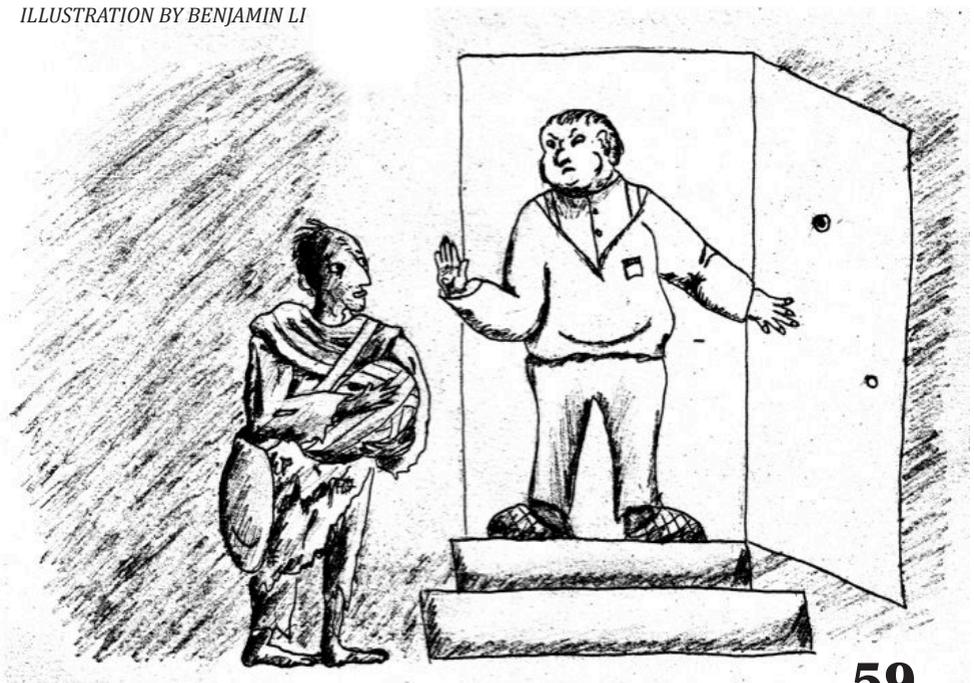
"No," the middle-aged man turned back and said, crossing his arms to feign a look of resentment. "In fact I don't think there's space for you in our garden either. I'm going to ask you to leave."

"Not even the —"

"Not even the garden. Nor the dumpsters." The home-owner cut off the old man firmly, his decision now made and his act now perfected. "Good" — he slammed the door in the old man's face — "bye."

And so the old man was left, standing in midst of a raging storm, pummeled by the gale and longing for warmth as he left the windows of the first house. He proceeded then to knock on the doors of the surrounding households; going place to place in search of any benevolent stranger who would gladly open doors to him. He

*ILLUSTRATION BY BENJAMIN LI*



found no such place in such a town, as all opening of doors amounted only to the cruel syllables of rejection. Clear that no hearth was to be encountered, he made his way to the underside of one of the buildings, where the elevated platform had just about enough space to accommodate a weary customer and his luggage. Settling his precious bundle down, he made rest upon the pebbles and dreamt of his homeland; of rioting soldiers and kidnappings, of famine and starvation. He recalled journeying away from the mess in search of a better home, sailing towards a vast horizon, his boat capsizing by the storm as he lost all of his possessions... The man gazed at the cocoon of cloth beside him... At least it was still there, resting upon the tips of pebbles, his only remaining possession save the ragged clothes draped upon his shoulders.

Morning came with the sunrise, for the raging storm had departed from the town. The old man awoke to the whistling of a mourning dove, and decided that it was best he journeyed onwards to the next settlement for a chance of any long-desired food to fill the dark void crying in his body. He hardly desired any water, having suffered the endless drizzle just last night. But he knew that he had to get some supplies to keep going...

Under the warming sunlight of the second day since his unexpected arrival at land, the elder left the village pursuing the sandy road that hopefully would lead him to a more promising area. Trudging along the fields of corn and rice, he came across several patches of fruits and berries, which he fed himself with vigor. Occasionally, when his invaluable load showed distress, he tended to it warmly, feeding berries through the linen fabric till it was satiated. At last the man arrived at another town, slightly larger than the first.

The old man wandered around the semi-crowded streets of the town, trying his best to look befitting in the midst of strolling locals. Eventually he reached the center, where most of the townsfolk were going about their business. The man sat down at the corner of a fountain in the center square. Here he knew that kind people could identify him as a poor man, and offer him money, or even housing

for the night. He had high hopes, and those high hopes soared even more when he saw a woman — dressed fancily — walk towards him, pulling out her purse. He casually reached out his hands to collect his pension...

And received nothing. For the woman was merely performing her foolish tradition, and upon tossing the coin into the fountain she made a gesture of prayer, then left — as if the old man was too insignificant for her eyes to view. So he was left sitting by the fountain, with a growing sense of self-pity as he realized no one would be out there to help.

Night fell and the elder decided once more to chance a sheltering hearth where he could finally feel a sense of home. Carrying the ever-present bundle of cloth, he strode to a rather warm-looking house, and knocked on its door. Soon came the owner, a young man who seemed to be in his 20s.

“Excuse me sir but may I please ask —”

Little was spoken before the door slammed in his face; the young man most likely thinking of better things to do than accommodating a poor man for the night. Or perhaps it was that he didn’t want the warm tropical breeze of the island to waft into his cold, unwelcoming palace. Nevertheless, it was clear that the old man wasn’t going to be staying there tonight.

Still not giving up, the old man proceeded to another household, where he politely knocked on the door, to be greeted by a middle-aged woman. He once again asked to be accommodated, not seeing that the poor woman was trembling at the sight of him.

“Why... yes.” She replied, very reluctantly.

The poor woman led the poor man to an empty bedroom, where he was elated! He danced around the room, marveling at its kind, welcoming furniture, and thanked the woman with a string of accented English, as she did not speak his native language. At last, forgetting all custom and courtesy, he lay down upon the bed and began to snore. It was the first time ever since his arrival that the old man slept a deep sleep.

“Y-yes, he certainly isn’t native.” Whispered the woman at

the phone. “No, I’m sure I heard a string of words that sounded quite Arabic! And he positively strolled into the house and intruded into our guest room... I could not stop him lest he attacked me with whatever was in that bundle of his.”

“Alright, ma’am, we will be on our way,” was the distorted reply.

Thirty minutes later the old man found himself no longer sleeping in the bed, but at the border of the village with his carry-on beside him, and two policemen guarding the entrance. They must have seen what fortune he carried with him — and yet still refrained from sympathizing. Warily, the old man crawled up to his feet and rounded the village, in hopes of finding his utopia where finally some rest could be found.

Journeying through the plains and fields of the cold giants who would not serve him, the old man walked with tiring steps towards his next destination, wherever it may be. Occasionally, drizzles of rain would nourish him enough to continue on, but for the most part he was somber, as no sign of house nor town nor city crossed his path. And what if it did? Would he not once more be rejected by the cruel, uncaring demeanors of mankind?

Had it not been his valuable load, the old man would have come to rest long ago. But he had a mission; unraveling the bundle of cloth once more, he fed his scarce supply of berries and dry corn to a demanding mouth, whose smiles of joy drove him to continue on and whose howls of woe saddened him even further on their little “vacation”. The baby, who he’d rescued from his homeland in an urgent escape, had stayed with him for the number of weeks from land to land, sea to sea. Even now, the child looked to him as a father, and he looked to it as a son. Standing back up again, the old man remembered his mission and thus recommenced his walk.

At last, he reached a sign that indicated the presence of a metropolis ahead. With renewed energy, the man covered the last miles in no time. No longer trying to seek help from the inhabitants of the city, he instead searched around for one specific facility he had in mind. Cradling the baby in his bundle, the man walked and

walked. And he walked and walked. Walked until the signs of the heavens and the cross lit up in front of him — or rather, until he saw the neon light of a hospital. For fear of harsh rejection should he reveal his identity, the man placed his treasured load upon the steps of the building, and left.

Wandering the streets of the city, he came to rest by the dark yet welcoming housing of an urban alley, where he knew none would disturb his peace. No longer with the burden of a dutiful midwife, he lay down on the grimy floor, more comfortable than any cold and sinister bed of a house. He slept then, knowing that it would be his last sleep; yet he slept, knowing that it would be the happiest sleep since the beginning of the end.

\*\*\*

The baby had grown. It was pure chance that 30 years ago he had been taken in by a hospital, where one of the workers had raised him up to become a successful man in business. It was pure chance that he had not starved from the hours without food and water, lying in wait on the steps of the hospital for his adopter. It was pure chance that he did not know the heroic act an old man had committed in order to save him in times of chaos. For now he lived in a wealthy home, filled with the warmth of the hearth and away from the others of the city.

The middle-aged man sat at the couch of the living room, reading newspapers on politics as he drank champagne from a crystal glass. He heard several knocks at the door. The man, slightly annoyed, got out of his comfortable position from the chair to get the door, footsteps nearing the entrance of his house. He opened up, revealing an old man dressed in tattered bits of cloth.

“Excuse me sir, but...”

# On the Wings of Angels

By Tiffany Han (G10)

It was the end.

That day, the news broke. The sky was boiling, covering the world in a dark black canopy of smoky clouds as if heaven itself had been set on fire. The mist and smoke swirled together in the cold winter air, making shapes that were hard to decipher. To me, it looked like wings, as if the angels were escaping from the burning heaven, leaving us with no hope and saviors. The reporter, whose lips were quivering, struggled to speak the destructive words. The same lips, from which horrifying news had been uttered before, often without expression or feeling, now trembled. The report was over, and still, I sat unstimulated while the advertisements played one after another. Everything was still, and everyone was still, as the world held its breath. Soon, we would realize that everything was too late, the end had come for all of us. The city would become nothing but floating dust and blackened ashes in a few hours with us along with it.

I did not realize, for a long time, that I was still sitting on the bench in the familiar hospital corridor. The same corridors I had walked just this morning, preparing for another day's busy work. I rose gently, afraid to wake the world from its deadly silence. The cries of rage, of fury and of desperation and sadness faded into nothing but background. Not far from the hospital, there was a plaza. I didn't want to go home, going home meant being alone, meant accepting, meant giving up. So, I chose an unoccupied bench on the edge of the plaza and sat down. I preoccupied my last hours by watching the people around me, not because I was nothing, because I had nothing anymore, and all I could do was watch. There were still a few stragglers wandering about, their eyes were like the pit of a moonless night sky, empty of all lights. The eyes of dreamers,

dreaming of the things they wanted to but could never attempt anymore. Everyone knew then, unlike the movies and fictions, here, there was no one to save us. There were no saviors.

I heard screaming off in the distance, followed by what sounded like gunshots. Eventually, the screaming faded, and was replaced by the dead eerie silence once more. A woman, around thirty years old or so, had walked over and taken a seat next to me. I felt no awkwardness around her, not anymore. Everyone was the same, because we would all be leaving here soon. We would leave, like how the angels had run from heaven, unwilling and defeated, helpless. The air was cold, the wind tore ruthlessly through the air, ricocheting off the sides of buildings. I didn't think about death, I couldn't, for my mind was as blank as a piece of slowly melting arctic ice.

A choir group had arrived, along with a priest. The priest spoke soft comforting words into a microphone. I could no longer understand what he was saying, but his voice was steady and soft. A small crowd started to gather. Some members of the crowd were sobbing, others solemn-faced, and most of them wore the blank, dreamy expression. They sought the comfort of that steady voice as if it was the last column holding up the boiling sky. The singing from the choir group reverberated in the air. The music reminds me of warm Christmas ginger cookie straight from the oven. It sang to me; the song was beautiful but sad. It was the song of the world that rang in my ears, coming from my heart, tragic and helpless. Yet, the air seemed a little warmer, and the wind blew softer, for I embraced the song. I observed the women next to me more closely. She seemed to be clutching her hand rather gingerly.

"You alright?" I asked, surprised that my voice had not left me.

She smiled sadly. "Oh, I'm okay, I mean... I came to stitch up this cut on my hand, but now after the news..." she shrugged. There was no need to say anymore.

What was the point of seeking a cure if we would all be gone in a few short hours? I thought there was little meaning to it. The

music in my ear sounded defeated and hopeless. Yet I could not just leave her like this, could I? Not if I could help, just a little. I was no savior, I couldn't be. My hand twisted together in my lap. I didn't even know why I was struggling. Perhaps it was the crying man in the distance, or perhaps it was the soft warm music, I decided that it doesn't matter.

"Come with me," said I, standing up. "I work in the hospital. Used to, anyway." She smiled and followed. Soon, I was back in the familiar corridor where I spent restless nights operating, days meeting with countless patients and where I spent short quiet moments smiling satisfyingly at the wall after a successful treatment of a particularly difficult case.

I found the supplies I needed in an old operating room. The hospital was entirely empty. Everyone who could leave had gone. There was not a single doctor around anymore, except for me. I stitched the wound quickly, the way I did with thousands of cuts over the past years. When I did so, the woman's wound seemed no different from the thousands of cuts I'd helped heal in the past. And just for a moment, today, this day, felt just like the hundreds of thousands of days I had lived in the past. Then, I glanced at my watch. There were around 40 minutes left. All the 40 minutes in my life flashed before my eyes, my first class in elementary school, first final test, first job interview, first date... When I finished stitching, my chest felt as if it was being compressed, squeezed together as if by an invisible outside force. I had a sudden urge to crumble down on the cold, clean hospital floor and scream at the top of my lungs and sob until the pressure was gone. The woman tapped me on the shoulder.

"Thanks doctor," she whispered, her voice soft.

"That's..." I tried to say, but my voice had left me. She looked at me understandingly. I suddenly realized, with the early morning sunlight streaming in from the nearest window, that her eyes were beautiful.

"Why don't you show me some of your patients?" She asked me, still using that gentle voice as if she was talking to a young little

boy.

I started to lead her down the corridor. When I reached those familiar hospital room doors, I found them already empty. The patients must have gone home by now. I was about to turn and tell the women that all the patients were gone, but I came up short when I saw her grinning.

“Listen,” she said with the hint of a smile. Then I heard it, it was music. It was not the harmonic type like from the plaza choir, but husky, shaky and very off key. And this old man, I had decided that it must have been an old man, was singing a cheerful nursery rhyme. The rhyme sounded odd but strangely sad in the old man’s voice.

I hurried to the room with the song and saw an old man sitting at the bedside of a young boy. The boy looked only about five or six years old. The old man looked even more ancient next to the young child. His skin held the wrinkles of time, his frame was very thin, but his eyes shone brightly. He sat with his back to the window, and the sunlight pouring in around him made him look as if he was glowing.

“Are you the child’s grandparent?” I asked, guilty about interrupting such an off key but somehow beautiful song.

“Oh, me?” The old man laughed, “no, I’m just in the next room. Cancer patient.” He made a thumbs up gesture as if he was still a little kid who had gotten full marks at a test.

“Where are his parents?”

“Gone. They have a daughter at home, apparently. Decided to leave this kid here.” There was gunshot outside once more, this time much closer. The screams and gunshot laid the beat for the music outside, creating a perfect harmonic tune.

I now saw that the little boy’s bandage was soaked through with blood. He looked pale as if he was a newly formed ghost. The bloodstain on the white bed sheet around him made him look even more tiny, insignificant. But after all, we were all insignificant. With 30 minutes to go, our fate seemed finally equal under the clear blue sky. The black clouds were dissipating.

“Oh, I bandaged him. I’m old, and I don’t know many medical things. My hands shake so much these days so I couldn’t help him much. All the doctors left, they didn’t even finish his operation.” The old man elaborated, catching my observation of the boy’s condition.

A hatred, so strong and intense, flooded my chest. The hate was for those doctors, my colleagues, those so called honorable doctors, looked up to by almost everyone in the society, probably looked up to by the boy who now lay dying covered in blood. They left as soon as they could, not even caring about what they had left behind.

Before I realized what I was doing, I started to finish the boy’s surgery. I asked the women who accompanied me here to take some supplies from the operation room as I worked. Worked like I had done every day here in this hospital. Worked as I had on the old women with hypertension, with the man who came so close to death with his cerebrovascular block, the young girl with inflammatory heart diseases. This boy was silent except for occasional groans of pain. The congealed blood made the old bandage stick to his pale skin and I cut them off little by little. The boy’s eyes remained closed all the time. The pressing feeling in my chest left, as my hands moved as if they had a mind of their own. Soon, my hand was covered with the boy’s blood, but the boy had now been properly treated, and now lay half asleep on a bed with clean bed sheets.

“I’d better check on the other patients, they might need help,” I announced after I was done, throwing the old bloodstained bedsheet aside on the floor. I turned to leave.

“But don’t you think it’s a little too late, son? There are no saviors, it’s the end. You can still go home, you know,” said the old man. Strangely, there was a ghost of a smile playing around his lips.

“There are no saviors,” the women echoed the old man musingly. She was smiling as well.

“But don’t we have 20 more minutes?” I asked shortly. I turned to leave once more, but heard a soft rustle and a barely audible murmur. The little boy had said something.

“What did he say?” I asked.

The old man looked up, the sunlight unfolded its golden rays around him, the boy, the women, and the white hospital bed. There was short silence, during which the figures in front of me glowed like the halos of angels as the music swelled outside, inside, and in my soul.

“He said, ‘*his* savior had come.’”



# The Window

By Tiffany Han (G10)

The rain seemed determined to wipe away everything on the street outside. The advertisement, broken in half by the pure velocity of the wind, now jutted into the traffic lane. Luckily, there were no cars in sight, since any driver who had any sense would've pulled over to the side of the road. No one sane would drive in this weather.

Inside the café, it was warm and dry. Conversations were soft and gentle, creating a harmonic murmur that reverberated within its walls. The misty windows and door looking out onto the street seemed to have completely separated the world outside from the cozy café's interior.

That was all very well with Halden. Halden sat beside the window, reading. On the small round wooden table in front of him, a book lay open. On the top left corner of each page, the title of the book was printed in tiny letters: *The Essential Philosophies of the Ancient Empires*. The text in the book was so small, reading it required no less than a magnifying glass. The book looked so intimidating, no one would have looked twice at it in a bookstore. Of course, Halden had not the slightest idea what the book was talking about. He had to read the same sentence six times already and he still couldn't make any sense of it.

Yet, that's not important, is it? No one in the café could tell that Halden did not understand a single word. They might be thinking that Halden was a professor or scholar of some kind. At least, that's what Halden hoped. From time to time, Halden would look up and steal a glance or two out the window, although his attention quickly returned to the book as if afraid people would notice his mind wandering away.

Halden's patience was thinning and he looked up from the

book much more often. He looked up and saw a waiter heading toward him. His eyes quickly darted back to the book and he did not look up again until the waiter set down his coffee. He stayed like that, staring at the exact same page for a few more minutes before the door of the café creaked open. A tremor of conversation escaped the café into the world outside. A bit of the rain-scented breeze managed to pass the door and reach Halden's nose. Halden looked up and smiled. His friend, Don, had finally arrived.

In his forties, balding and wearing a slightly worn grey sweater that looked a little tight on him, Don looked like an ordinary man. Don was a stocky man but had kind eyes — the type of eyes that hid nothing. They reflected Don's practicality and settled nature — a look of naïve innocence that was in contrast with the look that was often in Halden's eyes.

The two friends both grinned as if they were still school-boys meeting each other for the first time after a long summer vacation. Don smelled like the rain.

"Halden, you forgot to tell me about the birthday gift I sent you a while back! The talking cat?" Don said and the two laughed openly, cutting across the harmonic murmur of the room. Any stranger could have seen that the two were good friends. Indeed, Don and Halden had been great friends ever since school. Yet, the two were neither similar in character nor in appearance.

The two of them kept on talking for some time. The coffee tasted warm, and was made even warmer by the rain outside. The two men both sank lower in their chairs, looking so relaxed in each other's presence.

"Halden, I wanted to ask you something," Don said, sipping his coffee.

"Not that regurgitating sink again?" Halden answered, still chortling.

"No Halden," Don chuckled, "it's about your company, Blue Trust," said Don. Halden's laughter died away.

"What about Blue Trust?" He asked in a casual tone.

"Well, you see, I got a job offer from Blue Trust. I had this

friend, who knows a friend, who knows this manager from Blue Trust, and word got to me that the manager will be going into retirement soon. I took the shot...you know...if there was a chance..." Don's voice drifted off.

"Well? Did you get it then?" Halden asked, keeping his voice natural. He wondered why he didn't feel happy for his friend. Yet, his hands twisted together under the table and he had to intentionally keep the expression on his face neutral. His face muscles seemed to be slipping a little bit out of his control.

"Yes, I did!" Don shrugged, "But you know me, Halden. I'm not a man of change. I've lived in the same apartment for ten years, same company for seven years, same car for six years... I just wanted to, you know, check with you first, since you work there and all." Don's cheeks flushed a little pink, but it could have been due to the coffee. Now, the room seemed not warm but a little hot to Halden, as if scorching red hot coals had been placed around the table. Manager? That position was even higher than Halden's.

Halden had been moving around from company to company every year. Each time, he described his new workplace as the best possible place to work. He talked as if he just got the job of his dreams. That made a lot of his friends jealous, and Halden was coming to believe it as well. He knitted his brows and a look of uncertainty crossed his face.

"Well, I've not really thought about it, but now..." Halden's heart raced. He tried to leave out his feelings but his face still felt oddly stiff, unwilling to move. His throat seemed a little too dry for his attempts to utter anything had failed. His thoughts were as jumbled as the sentences in that book he sought to understand earlier. His eyes stared straight ahead and he had the complexion of someone being slowly strangled to death. He cleared his throat, "But now, I don't think it would suit you, Don... I really don't... too much work... and not meaningful. I think I'll be applying to another job myself soon." Halden could only catch a few phrases of what he was saying, as if he was listening through a badly tuned radio.

Don's eyes widened a little in surprise, but he quickly

shrugged. “Well, I knew I should have asked you first! Ha, glad I had the foresight to ask, because I trust what comes out of your mouth, not one of those blabbering representatives, eh? I never really wanted to change anyway. I’ve got my life stable and good, I’m not looking for trouble. I’m too old for adventures.” He emptied his cup of coffee. Halden was staring down at the wooden table, his cheeks still flushed.

“Always happy to help, Don,” Halden heard himself say. He tried to smile and did not know whether he managed it or not because his nerves seemed to have stopped working completely. Though his fingertips had turned white, he did not untwist his hands, instead gripped them harder. His eyes traveled up and he looked out the window. Some stragglers too late to find shelter from the wind and rain were struggling as their umbrellas bent and their clothes whipped in all directions. Halden found that, deep in his heart, he liked the sight, it made him feel superior as if he was in a better place than the people outside. It didn’t matter much though.



ILLUSTRATION BY TINA HAN

That night, the wind howled loudly outside of Halden’s apartment window, ricocheting off the buildings in the city. He thought about his talk with Don that day. A feeling of guilt weighed on him. Perhaps he should tell him to take that chance after all, but he was exhausted and did not want to reach out and pick up his phone.



# Acknowledgments

Many thanks:

First and foremost to all of the English teachers – across the middle school, high school and EAL teams – who are continually working to foster a passion for reading and writing in our students: Taurean Allen, Lindsey Devillier, Loredana Giovanelli, Holly Grace, Reuben Haggar, Peter Herrera, Sophie Lauratet, Sophie Li, Ralf Mayenberger, Taylor Muller, Zoë O’Dea, Emma Richardson, Hannah Richardson, John Stephens, Erin Volkert, Jesse Yabut and Yang Yan.

To the other members of staff who helped make this anthology happen: Will Wang, who ordered our beautiful shiny trophies; Chuck Leseberg, who made sure our promotional videos made it out into the world via Wolfbites; Dyson Dong, Lu Lihua, Susie Su, Michael Sun and everyone else who provided support for the ceremony itself; Richard Brock, Ivy Jiang and the communications team for helping us record and share the event; and Robert Wang, who has consistently provided the utmost support and encouragement.

To the Lupine Minions: the talented and hard-working students who devoted their time to helping us promote the prize (by producing incredible videos and posters, and communicating with students and parents) as well as illustrating and editing the anthology itself. Maria An, Yumin Cho, Stephanie Choi, Wendy Fan, Natalie Fang, Amy Feng, Tiffany Han, Tina Han, Jane Hwang, Daniel Kim, Minsun Kim, Seoyun Kwon, Benjamin Li, Jessie Li, Martin Li, Alina Temutsilekhu, Long-Er Wang, Mandy Wang, Tak Woo, Spring Xia, Cherry Yan, Esther Yang, Alice Yu, Kiki Zhang, Sophie Zhang, Vanessa Zhang and Tuttler Zhou – you guys are amazing!

Finally, thanks to our former head of the English department, April Wang, who made the Lupine Prize into the institution it is today. Were it not for her many years of hard work, the anthology you are reading would not exist!

*Dave Haysom*  
*Head of High School English Department*  
2019.04.02



