



LAKEFIELD
LITERARY *Festival*

2018

YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST
WINNERS

2018 Senior Fiction Winner

Chop Off My Finger, or Remove My Heart

by Evan Campbell

Grade 12 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

At some point my heart began to flutter with every breath I took, but I didn't want to replace the organ. Together, we have learned the intricacies of life. The difference between a daisy and a rose. We have learned how to keep going, to persevere through clots that wanted to block us from each other. We have fought the demons in my brain and the monsters in my skin and the arrows through my chest. But losing my heart would mean losing my pain tolerance, leaving nothing to protect me from a loss. Like the loss of a marriage or the loss of a wife. Or, the loss of a heart....

But every mother who has given her child up for adoption would understand, even better than I, why I choose to drive to the heart shop today.

When I get there, a woman dressed in jean shorts and a buttoned-up red t-shirt can be seen inside. She is leaning against a counter, her long legs and arms positioned to pollute the air with her confidence. As I approach, she quickly glances over my roughed-up jeans and safety vest, radiating out like a spider who has caught a fly. Before coming out to greet me, she turns around and bends across the desk to grab the clipboard and pen that rest on the far corner.

“Hello there, may I help you with something?” she asks.

Her voice is husky in a way that leaves me twitching to hear more.

“I wish to sell my heart.”

“Well, of course, we have some of the finest hearts for you to upgrade to.” Her eyes draw out all my inner secrets. “And I'm sure I could give you a great deal for your old heart too.”

“I think you misunderstand me. I want to sell my heart, not trade it in.”

This time her eyes gaze over me slowly. Before, she looked at me like she was looking at a living room through a window, but now she can tell I am more of a basement kind of person.

“Well, I'm sure we could find an arrangement, but I can't offer a price without knowing what kind of shape it is in....” Her voice trails off as she takes a step forward, as if getting closer to me will invite me to open up.

So I do. But I've already prepared my foyer to look as clean as it can be. I tell her about how my heart has been beating since the moment it started. It's loyal like a brother; it will beat and beat through rain and snow and sickness and health. I tell her about its honesty too, about how it always beats at a rate that matches how I am feeling. It quickens at the start of love. It quickens even more

at the loss of it. But most importantly, I tell her it loves in a way no heart has ever loved before and it never stops. It just keeps beating, and beating, and beating.

But fooling a salesperson is like trying to fight a boxer, so she must know that there are weaknesses I dare not tell her about. But unlike a boxer, she's seductive, as no other woman has ever been to me. She runs her fingers over my chest and asks me:

"What else?"

I stumble backwards at the touch of her hand.

"That's it. That's all of my heart."

But she knows otherwise; she takes her fingers and wades her way through my blood and into the home I didn't dare show anyone else, and she says:

"What else?"

I find myself unable to lie to someone so beautiful and taunting, so I tell her about the arrow stuck deep within my heart. I tell her about how the entry wound was patched up by an untrained army medic, who had his own heart broken as well. But rather than fixing the clumsy job he made, I hide the scar with as much skin and as many smiles as I can.

Then I tell her the worst part: that every time my heart beats, the arrow wiggles just a little bit, keeping me alive, but also reminding me of the pain that life has brought. I tell her that its beating has grown into a chant: "I am alive. I want to die," it says.

I am alive. I want to die.

Her hand, which has been dancing along my bloodstream, is withdrawn. The warmth of my blood is replaced with a stream of shame. Her lips, once rosy red, draw themselves into a thin, pale line.

"No dealer will ever put a price on an already pierced heart," she says.

I feel her stern but pitiful glare, though I cannot look up.

"You know an arrow-pierced piece of art is forever owned by the artist," she says. "I cannot free you. They call it He-art for a reason."

I do not need to look up to know she has gone back to lean against the desk, waiting for another fly to land in her trap. This conversation was just a job for her, but for me it's a reminder.

I leave the shop to catch a cab. When I walk into my home, the sound of *Call of Duty* rings through the house. My son must be home. I'd call to him, but getting a response would be unlikely. Instead, I go to my bedroom and exchange my sweater for a t-shirt. Then, hesitantly, I open up the top drawer of my dresser and pull out a wooden box. As I open it, I can hear the moan of the violin

that is engraved on its top. Inside the box, a golden ring sits outlined against rich blue fabric that works as padding on the bottom.

I sigh and look down at my finger.

It was finally time to become someone else's work of art.

Amore et Bellum

by Rebekah Irwin

Grade 12 – Adam Scott Collegiate Vocational Institute

Sunbeams seeped through the window and cast their golden rays upon the luckiest of objects in the room. It was truly the most wondrous of days. It was the kind of day that could be characterized by childlike grins and ticklish laughter as spring flowers blossomed into the marvellous hues of a late Easter. Unbeknownst to the young woman who daydreamed while she stared out at the epitome of spring days through the polished glass of a picture window, was the scene occurring out of reach across the great expanse of ocean, separating humanity from immorality, decency from cruelty.

She rose from her small desk in front of the window to begin her day. As she stood up, the golden band that encompassed her ring finger sparkled in the sunlight, the reminder that he would always be with her no matter the distance. As she left her bedroom, she heard the familiar sound of a bicycle. Its whirl could be heard even above the noise of the busy streets. The sounds of automobiles, horse-drawn buggies, and the streetcar were constant; yet the bicycle offered a fresh one. She waited for the louder whizzing when it would fly by the house, and she started to smile, but instead, she heard the bicycle skid to a stop. Within moments, there was a sharp rap at the front door.

“Telegram!” the voice of a young boy called.

She hurried to open the door. Rarely did anyone send her telegrams.

“Good morning,” she said, smiling. “It’s a lovely day, isn’t it?”

The boy looked solemn. “This job hardly ever makes for a lovely day, ma’am.”

Her smile faded.

“A message from the War Department.” He held out a thin strip of paper.

She received it with trembling fingers. Anxiety weighed heavy on her chest and unsettled her stomach. The sun seemed too bright and the streets too loud. She unfolded the strip of paper.

We regret to inform you... Name. Rank. Serial number. Killed in Action....

She sank to the floor. Yearning tore at her chest as the slip of paper fluttered to the ground. She sobbed into her hands. In the sunlight, she caught a glimpse of the sparkle from her wedding band. He said he would always be with her.

“The army will send his belongings with his body,” the boy said. His was a face that had seen this type of pain so many times before.

She felt she could say nothing. Her entire being knew complete and utter anguish. She wanted to apologize to the boy, but she could not. Instead she raised her tear-stained face and choked out: “He was far too young to die.”

“Pardon me, ma’am.” The boy looked down and faced the saddened soul who wept before him. “But bullets know no age.”

Colours

by Betsy Macdonnell

Grade 12 – Lakefield College School

My palms were leaking sweat. To me the couch felt as though it was deliberately making me uncomfortable, mimicking the feeling in the air. Tension beyond belief. The walls were painted a sunny yellow, but today, all it reminded me of was urine. I avoided the sunken, tear-stained eyes of my mother. Adults were talking – my school counsellor, my teachers, but in the room it could've just been the two of us. No child ever expects to break a parent's heart; I certainly never did. But here I was, in this stupid yellow room, watching my mom's heart shatter into a million little pieces.

The reason for this heartbreak started months before. It was the winter of my seventh grade, and I felt as if my life were falling apart. My reflection in the mirror no longer became a friendly face but someone I despised. I was a stranger to myself. I wanted to feel whole again; I wanted to be perfect. In a warped attempt to do this I gave my meals to the toilet immediately after eating them. I was secretive, sneaking up to my third-floor washroom, leaving the tap running to hide the heaving sounds from my body. Weighing myself became a habit. I rejoiced in the small numbers, and I punished myself for the larger ones.

One day, the number was bigger than I had hoped for. In retrospect, I think this number was small, but back then, it signified a failure. The world turned red. I was angry; I was upset. I wanted to take it out on someone, but instead I turned on myself. I pulled a tack out of my green- and-pink-striped bulletin board and put it to my arm. I let the tip glide across my fair skin. The red of my mind externalized itself, leaving its traces on my arm. I felt relieved. That was all it took. I slipped on a hoodie and went about my life.

I wish I could tell you that was the only tack to touch my skin. It would be a much happier story that way. I wish I could tell you that after that incident I realized I'd made a terrible mistake. That I stopped weighing myself, and that the bathroom became just another room again. I wish that was the story I was telling you, but it isn't. The trails left by tacks turned to scars. They told the stories of my internal pain along the outside of my body. My life was stained with red. It was the colour I saw on the insides of my eyes as tears streamed out. It was the colour of the trail that led me to the toilet, time and time again. It was the colour of my arms, my thighs, and my stomach. It was the colour of my faults. I kept my arms covered – always. As the days got warmer, I didn't let my skin feel the sun, for with the sun would come my secrets. The sun meant vulnerability, and as far as I was concerned, vulnerability wasn't an option. Until it was the only option.

I was sitting in class, wishing I could be anywhere else. My arms were sore, and I was tired after yet another sleepless night. My wish was granted. A friendly face appeared at the door of my classroom, that of a teacher I'd had two years prior. She asked me to come with her and walked me to her classroom. Confused, I sat there and let the innocence of the room wash over me. It

seemed like a lifetime ago that I had sat at those desks. It was before puberty, before mean girls, before stupid boys, before all of this. It was a time I remembered fondly. It was a time where the sun shone more days than it rained. It was a time when I was happy. Her mouth formed words, but her eyes screamed the truth: "I know."

That was it. My façade broke. I was no longer strong, or weak. I was no longer hiding, lying, covering the truth. For the first time in months I was forced to be real. I was forced to let someone into the warped inner workings of my mind. The reality of it hit me like a wave. Suddenly the story came pouring out, the way it is right now on these pages. My body crashed with every wave that hit, as I realized the consequences of my actions. You don't truly realize the impact you have on other people until you hurt them.

The school was obligated to tell my parents. In less than twenty-four hours my secrets would be out in the open. My life was about to change, and I was terrified. No one ever expects to break a parent's heart. But here I was, trying to figure out the best way to do it. Is there really any good way to break the heart of someone that loves you? Hours turned into minutes, minutes turned into seconds, and suddenly I was right outside that door. Outside of that room with its urine-coloured walls, its uncomfortable chairs, and the heartbreak I could no longer avoid. My hand felt its way to the door's handle. With discomfort I turned it, and all that was left to do was push.

It is commonly said that you never forget your first heartbreak, but what is less acknowledged is that you never forget the first heart you break. Looking into the tear-stained eyes of my mother I knew that was true. How could I have hurt the one person who loves me more than anything else? The woman who carried me, who sang to me, who promised she'd love me more than the moon, the stars, and the universe. How could I have been that selfish? I locked eyes with my mother, both of us in tears. The truth no longer stood between us; instead, it encompassed us.

That was the first step to recovery. When a part of your life is hidden, it seems a lot less manageable. Despite my initial fears, the love and support of my family helped me to take the next step. My brothers' innocence made me want to get better. My mom's unconditional love made me want to heal. And my dad's unwavering acceptance in the way he would kiss my broken arms before bed made me want to love myself.

Recovery isn't linear. It mimics the surface of the earth, rising and falling at the appropriate times. Some days there are ten steps backward, and one step forward. Other days there are ten steps forward, and one step back. One day isn't more important than the other; each day there are steps forward. Recovery is turmoil and triumph. It's acceptance and anger. It is strength caused by weakness. It is the ability to move on.

Red is no longer the colour of my life. The once hellishly raised grooves of my arm are now merely indents. They no longer define my body, or my soul. But they have sunk into my skin; they are a part of me and always will be. The lines once red are now white. The colour of fresh starts.

2018 Junior Fiction Winner

Eli

by Dana Jordan

Grade 9 – Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

Do you know what it feels like to be falling, but never hit the ground? To feel like a stranger in your own skin. Never comfortable enough to feel at home, but not desperate enough to leave. That was my dysphoria. Sometimes it made me feel claustrophobic, a caged bird.

When it got really bad, I felt so alone. Deep within myself, I sought an abditory.

Other times it wasn't as prominent. I tried to convince myself that maybe I was just a girl going through a phase. But my dysphoria served as a sour reminder that "who I am" was still there, latching on to my periphery.

I traced the familiar sheets, lying awake in my garish bedroom, wanting, but unable, to get up. Procrastination I knew all too well. I tried to wish the butterflies on the wall into subtle hues of green; I wished I could just tell my mom that this room wasn't me anymore – *this* wasn't me.

Sometimes fantasizing about tiny things allowed me to hide from the bigger picture, although not for long. It took all of my energy on days like this, but eventually I forced myself to rise, trying to abandon the thought.

However, as if the shadows were whispering to me, I knew.

I couldn't pretend anymore.

My mom wouldn't kick me out. She really loved me. Although she wasn't exactly left wing, eventually everything would be okay. It had to be. No, this was more of an internal battle, one that'd been waging for years.

I wasn't the transgender person you hear about, the one who always knew they were different. As a kid, I wore dresses and played with dolls; hell, I even threw my share of tea parties. Still, I wondered... Was it okay to be feminine as a trans boy; would I really be accepted in the community?

Was I trans enough?

Despite any doubts, I wanted to come out. What'd probably kept me from taking the leap for so long, was that I was scared. Not that my family wouldn't accept me, but that they wouldn't believe me. Deep down, I knew that I was a boy. That was all that mattered.

It was a slow Sunday morning, but from the edge of the bed where I'd been sitting, these thoughts raced through my head. I brandished the scissors that had been lying on my bedside table. I saw them glint in the fluorescent light and gripped the handles hard. Slowly at first, I began chopping, but as I

gained momentum, I couldn't stop. Each strand of hair that fell defeated onto the ground made me feel as if I was a king conquering a battle.

The release of surfacing to breathe, lungs aflame.

"Eli," I whispered to myself. The boy reflected back at me was unfamiliar simply from newness. Nonetheless, as my shadow, I'd known him my whole life.

I search even now. For the words to illustrate the feeling of affirmation and security which that expression of masculinity had given me. After all this time, I can only find one word. Safe. No longer a victim of scrutiny – from myself or others.

"Eliza!" my mom hollered from her room in our small apartment. "C'mere."

"Coming," I called back, some of my newly acquired confidence dissipating with the sound of my birth name. I was brought back to reality with a sharp snap.

I could already envision the look of horror on my mother's face, when she would see what had mere minutes ago been her "daughter's" treasured auburn locks, now plundered.

Trying my best not to panic, I had reasoned with myself. This was the opportunity I'd been waiting for.

As I crept down the hall toward her room like a ghost, I could barely feel my feet on the ground. I brimmed with anticipation, and my stomach gave a violent hurl. In. Out. Breaths came and parted so fleetingly, pulling me back under, into a dark place of monstrous waves, unleashing the anxiety I'd been working so hard that year to tame.

I hadn't apprehended how difficult those two words would be to utter. So foreign to the tongue. I can't explain their power. The feeling. My hand on the door, I pushed, eyes shut briefly. I realized that there would never be a perfect time. Now had to be good enough.

I could already see her eyes opening wide with shock and concern, but I quickly cut her off.

"Mom, I need to tell you something before you say, or ask, anything about..." I gestured vaguely at the messy masterpiece I'd created.

"I...well...what?" she crossed her arms, flustered.

"I've been wanting to tell you this for a while. I hope you support me, because it's not just a phase... it's who I am. I haven't given you much proof of that yet, but..."

"What is? What are you talking about?" She was impatient then. Trying in vain to find the missing puzzle piece, but searching in all the wrong places.

Where she was from, those deemed "others" were silenced. However, times were changing, and after some experience and education, so would her mindset. She wanted me to be myself. Always.

I'm one of the lucky ones. You shouldn't have to be lucky to be loved unconditionally, but some can't say as much.

“I don’t understand Eliza...”

“It’s Eli.”

2018 Senior Nonfiction Winner

The Art of Failure

by Claire Campbell

Grade 11 – Lakefield College School

I remember in my very first high school class, my teacher projected a big circular chart on the board. The middle was a blue circle with the words “comfort zone” printed in the centre; the outer circle was yellow and labelled “stretch zone”; and the final circle, a strikingly bright red, had the words “panic zone” written in big, block letters.

I had always had incredibly high expectations for myself. I did well in school, I was in two bands, and I swam competitively. I excelled in areas with predictable outcomes: Studying hard correlated with good grades; practising repertoire made my technique better; and swim practice helped make my times drop. The predictability of it all is what I liked so much. I was comfortable knowing that I controlled my success; how well I did was entirely up to me. It wasn’t until high school that I was forced out of that comfort zone I thrived in.

You see, the problem with making friends is that you cannot make people like you. You can check off all of the criteria you believe makes the ideal person, but the unfortunate truth of it all, the truth from which we so frequently blind ourselves, is that we aren’t in control. Your social success lies entirely in the hands of others, and despite all the efforts you throw into a friendship, sometimes it just doesn’t work. These “failures” defined my high school career for two years. The failed relationships, the missing invitations, and the lack of a social circle swallowed my successes whole. I spent countless hours obsessing over every aspect of my life. I evaluated and re-evaluated all of the elements of myself that others didn’t like.

The most difficult part, though, was that this was all in my panic zone.

Before ninth grade, I had never left my comfort zone. I didn’t have any reason to. I went to an elementary school with 100 kids; I was in, what my parents liked to call, “the Montessori Bubble.” And this bubble served its purpose, acting as a sort of extended womb; I grew up in a school with my hand held every step of the way. I was coddled in every sense of the word, and I wouldn’t have traded it for the world. I learned about courage in an environment where “failing” was never a possibility, and that’s an incredible gift. I grew up fearless of the future. There was no reason to doubt myself because never once had I not succeeded.

Because of my irrational confidence going into high school, I had a massive comfort zone, followed by little-to-no stretch zone, and a panic zone I had yet to encounter. On my very first day, I found it.

Everything about my first day of high school was terrifying. I had never been exposed to more than 100 kids, and there were 360 sitting in the chapel. I had never had to make friends, and now I knew nobody. And most importantly, I had never done an icebreaker game in my life, and by 9:00 a.m., we had done more than twenty.

This all became overwhelming rather quickly. Two hours into my grade-nine orientation, I passed out, had a seizure, and woke up to a panic attack, all because I was so scared.

Fear, like failure, isn't something that's easy to quantify. I found it incredibly difficult to explain to the ER doctor why I had passed out. I tried to explain the activities we had done that morning, but every event was veiled with an immense negativity I couldn't quite put into words. I had found my panic zone and was remarkably unaware of how I was going to live in it for the rest of my life. I was afraid of failing, and that's not something that you can just avoid.

The next day, I made the best decision I'd ever made: I went back to school. I took a deep breath, put on my favourite t-shirt, and tried again – this time, with a water bottle in hand.

That moment summarized my first two years of high school. In 730 days, 16 courses, and too many “failures” to count, I learned the most important thing I ever will. Falling off isn't the hard part; it's getting back on the horse. Anyone can have an unfavourable outcome, but the key is learning how to not be a failure while failing.

It took a few tries, but I eventually found my stretch zone: the beautiful bridge between thriving and being unconscious. The stretch zone is defined as the area of relative comfort where we can grow as individuals, the zone where if “failing” occurs, it becomes a place of learning not of defeat. The diagram my teacher had projected on the board made an incredible amount of sense, but it lacked an important detail: your zones are not static. They move and change as you grow, and that's the beauty of it. Finding a place where I felt comfortable to try new things and step out of my comfort zone is how I re-found my success.

Success is not defined by an absence of failure; it is simply the presence of growth.

So now, with one year left of high school, I find myself constantly out of my comfort zone and absolutely thriving. I have found a home in my beautiful, yellow, stretch zone, and take every day as an opportunity to try something new, and be okay if it doesn't quite work out. I am in a constant state of growth, and simply put, I am working to master the art of failing.

2018 Senior Nonfiction Runner-up

Aflame With Hope

by Alice Tierney Prindiville-Porto
Grade 12 – Lakefield College School

Hope is a flame. Hope is my source of strength. It allows me to cultivate peace and compassion through doubt and uncertainty. The power of hope lies in its ability to alter perception. Hope is a flame inside of us. It is constantly burning, whether we can recognize it or not. Even when we cannot feed it and it withers, our flame does not go out.

Each time we meet an obstacle, we have the opportunity to choose hope. Our world is ablaze with division that has a capacity to lead to our demise. If there was ever a time to spread tolerance, and ultimately acceptance, it is now. To do this, we must shift our perception of community from “others” to human beings. This process of shifting perception requires vulnerability and depth that can only be accessed through hope. Choosing hope is going to save us.

Each time we meet an obstacle, we have the opportunity to choose hope. Our flames fuel advancement. My flame aspires to light a path for all beings, in the name of feminism. As a young girl, I loved stories of women who defied social norms. Pandora kept hope in a box, for she knew that we would need it. From studying Jane Austen’s heroines to Rosa Parks, I relished the opportunity to establish a complex identity. In grade eight, my Humanities teacher introduced me to intersectional feminist literature by handing me a copy of the story, “Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Suffice it to say, I was hooked. I identify as an intersectional feminist who advocates for all individuals. This philosophy recognizes that oppression for women is influenced by overlapping identities such as, race, ability, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. Feminism involves living with this awareness. Feminism is my hope, and thus my advocacy.

Each time we meet an obstacle, we have the opportunity to choose hope. The obstacles of my childhood led to a herculean event. On October 12th, 2012, when I was physically removed from the care of my mother, my father received sole custody of me. For a variety of reasons, it was decided that in order for me to transition smoothly from my mother’s care to my father’s care, I was to be sent to a wilderness therapy survival program for 89 days. These physically and emotionally taxing three months brought me into a period of extreme darkness. It is not hyperbolic to state that for me to simply exist during this time took every fibre of my being – and then some. Giving up became increasingly enticing as I got colder, covered in more dirt, and isolated from human beings. Only my hope for contentment and enlightenment as an independent adult provided me with the ability to endure. Choosing hope gave me an existence.

Each time we meet an obstacle, we have the opportunity to choose hope. In April of my grade 11 year, I became aware that my financial situation might not be able to provide me with a final year at “The Grove”. This possibility broke my heart. Lakefield College School is a place that has taught me what it means to lead a life of love, curiosity, and happiness. This community has redefined for me what it means to truly live. This belief in others was magnified when, extremely

distraught, I shared my truth to those closest to me. And how they responded is what is special about my Lakefield experience. I heard their cry to me: take charge of your destiny. They proceeded to provide me with the necessary resources to do so. I began to have crucial, and at times challenging conversations. One of those led to meeting with my Head of School. During this time, my room was covered in sticky notes that bore words inspiring resiliency: Faith, Trust, and Hope. This did not mean I constantly maintained a positive mindset; in fact, roughly one day a week I would end my day falling asleep with tears in my eyes. My flame withered but was not extinguished. Finally, on June 15th, I met with the Headmaster, and he shared the news that I would be returning here in the fall. This school supported me in choosing hope. This sacred space, my school, allowed me to recognize my flame. It is difficult for me to express my love for LCS through words. But, I sincerely wish for my teachers, staff, and peers to know how profoundly they have impacted my life. From the very bottom of my heart, I thank them.

Each time we meet an obstacle, we have the opportunity to choose hope. May we go forth and recognize, fuel, and stoke our flames. If we invite this force into our lives, hope has the ability to transform our narratives.

2018 Senior Poetry Co-Winner

Homesick

Your fingertips find the brittle orange flower petals, charred from decay
but still rigidly displayed, and I guide your hand away from sensing my senseless act
of destruction. Their stems still stand proud, the petals resilient, in a white porcelain vase.

The record player to the right spins The Andrews Sisters (always),
a tribute to an era I used to wish I'd lived through. The expanse of my ignorance
poisons the innocence of a room that was once fit for a child.

Look up, and your eyes will find a bottle scraped clean from the inside out,
to hold delicately dead roses dripping deep crimson.
Walk around my room and the body count might alarm you.

My bookshelf houses secrets and stories, stories of secrets,
a stack of my dad's old Pink Floyd CDs, and an orchid I killed
in a matter of weeks – less than a season to shrivel her softness.

Almost impressive, then.

Turn right and you'll face Pandora's box, which can melt my bones into liquid lead,
but which seems docile when your hair falls delicately against the golden sheets,
only ever heavy over me.

Get to know where in the floor the hardwood creaks, make music of it with me;
we can dance with the dried flowers, bring life back to this slaughterhouse,
extract those abandoned before running as far away as we can.

Wake up the window, shake out the rug dusted with ash of incense and urns,
rip open the door, tie up the sheets, make rope of the threaded gold.
We escape at midnight, laughing maniacally as we chase after the dawn

with brittle orange flower petals that tear from our heels like a fire beneath our feet.
Keep moving, it urges, relentless, even when the flames prickle our ankles
and the smell of the burn rises to meet our senses paralyzed with dread.

Dance with me.

I've opened my skull and showed you my sin, tapped each wall with your ear
pressed firmly against it, listening. Now let the rods fall out from your spine
and let blood-red wine fade with the ache of having nowhere to go.

Hypnotize me.

Tell me everything you've ever loved, everyone you've ever seen in half
and I'll watch the death rise in your eyes; I'll devour it
to remind me of where I come from.

* * * * *

By Alivia Buchan

Grade 12 - Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

My Love is a Preheated Oven

I thought my love was a rose, bright and vibrant, lush and full,
yet, so full of thorns, forming tiny, puncturing pinpricks,
its life withered and wilted, as my love became the howling wind.

Whirling and swirling, twisting, it became the twister
annihilating all piece by piece, laying down the heavy crimson petals,
darkening the sun like belligerent arrows, stripping my world of light.

He was the warm but blinding sun: his crushing smile and piercing eyes,
his black, slicked-back hair and uneasy touch, his charming surface,
and compelling control, his hidden toxicity (an air to err). I should have known.

He was the star, the shining light at the end of the narrow tunnel that no one
told me was the cowcatcher thundering towards me, his guards piercing,
scarring my flesh, sending me into this black hole that swallowed me,

Relentlessly tormenting me, stretching my heart to its breaking point,
this stressed muscle slowly calms as I hold his love, cold and still-beating,
the roast pan waiting, my knife bloodied on the counter.

* * * * *

By Sadie Jacobs

Grade 12 - Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

Desktop

It's covered,
Unexcavated.
The detritus of my life
Clutters it.

This battleground that's interred stayed
For my most recent
Of half-decades,
But has never been unearthed, or
Been too far away.

Here I work and take my leisure.
Here I ignore, bear burdens, take breathers
Or sometimes try to make it draw nearer,
But never go far enough.

Hanging in suspense,
Like fate upon a dial.
Will the convoy make it through?
What about operator Giles?

Infinite stories, perpetually intersected
Tied, hang-dried, dissected
But buried and forgotten
Underneath a thousand passions.

Infinite real possibilities rationed
Lie improbably disturbed
In this deeper, forgotten, physical recess
Of something that feels interior.

* * * * *

By Robert Beda

Grade 12 - Adam Scott Collegiate Vocational Institute

Hourglass

I was once a dreamer, stumbling through barren desert dust
without hope of ever laying eyes
on the rose I sought:
petals glistening with the diamonds of dawn, with the sweetest
fragrance of that blood-red blossom,
a perfect fantasy slipping faster from my grasp than the stars that evade the rising sun.

Once I dreamt,
clawing hand over hand through the rolling, shifting sea of arid sand
to catch the fading ghost of my future,
but it was only as I fell through all my lost time
that I understood my own folly,
releasing at last my stranglehold on the seed,
that simple, overlooked answer
that I had for so long
clung to.
For the rose grows not where it's sought, but where
it's planted.

Now I dream anew,
and the sand is steadily washed away by fertile rain
to reveal the vivid shoots of green below,
growing steadily from the seeds I've sown,
one bloom after another,
all because of that one perfect rose.

I pause...
and finally let go of the breath I've held
as the midnight hour draws to a close,
taking with it the fading ghost of hardships past.

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By Lauren Moher

Grade 12 - Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School

Rekindling the Light

There once was a land full of laughter and pride,
No one was unhappy or wept.
People loved, people lived.
Those people had more than they could ever need.
They had friends, family, peace,
And smiles that grew every day.
When it was time for bed, they dreamt good dreams, bathed in light,
A light, much brighter than the sun.
A light so bright that people almost took it for granted,
Until...it suddenly burned out.

Those people woke up to darkness, to hatred.
No one knew what to do – they imitated others,
They saw people changing, hurting, grieving for the light they had lost.
And over time, everyone burnt out.
Those people lost the one thing that was most important.
Hope.
Everyone lost hope – except for one.

This boy did not worry that the world around him was dark.
He still loved, he still cared.
He was the sliver of light in the darkness.
He did what he could, travelling the land, helping others regain their light.
Some were too far gone.
They welcomed the darkness, making a new way of life in blackness.
But this boy helped wherever he could,
Telling everyone that he lit the dark to help others.

Fireworks erupted, the light was returning!
With every light that was rekindled,
The thing that they needed,
The thing they had lost.
Hope was returning.
Every day the light grew until hope finally came back.

There was peace, there was laughter.
Those people could finally smile again.

People still speak of the boy who kept hope alive.
They say he had magic, they say he went through time and back.
But none of those things are true.
He could have been me, he could have been you.
No one is too big or too small to do something so great.
In a world of darkness, keep spreading the light!

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By Carrie Caruana
Grade 9 - Crestwood Secondary School

The Old Man

The old man,
Crawling at a dirty corner,
In the coldest winter,
Freezing, starving.
He is trembling,
Lonely, despairing,
Losing courage.

The old man,
Does he know where his home is?
Does he know who his family is?
The answer doesn't show,
Submerging in the wind,
Circling with snowflakes.

The old man
Is ignored,
Compared
To people who are loved.
He has nothing in common,
With people in the wonderful world.
He is treated with inequality
Because he doesn't have the possibility,
Of finding a home.

The old man
Knows the existence of people like him,
Suffering from the same harsh living conditions,
But nobody is thinking of helping them
And putting thoughts into action.
Because responsibility is a heavy rock,
Escaping is the best solution.

The old man,
His eyes are closed,
His hair is covered with snow,
His emotions are calmed down,
He finds himself in a sweet place,

Where humans care for each other,
Where rights are valued,
Where weak people are cherished.

The old man
Died.

No one notices an active life
Disappearing in the darkest night.
Powerful citizens are sharing the fireplace,
As they hold their blankets tighter,
Their ignorance of homeless people,
Makes their hearts colder.

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By Alisa Lu

Grade 10 - Lakefield College School