RAW ARTS AWARDS 2021

This publication includes all eligible entries received for the 2021 RAW Arts Awards – an Awards program open to creatives aged 25 years and under.

Some material may contain adult themes and/or language and may be considered inappropriate for younger readers/viewers.

For information about the City of Greater Bendigo's RAW Arts program go to www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/RAW or email raw@bendigo.vic.gov.au

Photography of artwork and opening celebration by Bill Conroy, Press1 Photography.
Catalogue design by Jacqui Lynch, Preloaded Design.

The City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country.

We acknowledge and extend our appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of the land.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Peoples.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

WELCOME

From the Mayor of the City of Greater Bendigo

Welcome to this volume, commemorating the 2021 RAW Arts Awards.

It has been another stand-out year for the RAW Arts Awards and I hope this experience inspires all participants to continue to hone their skills and creativity.

Greater Bendigo is known as a creative community, so it is wonderful to see the next generation beginning to make its mark on our city and region's celebrated artistic legacy.

This year marks 24 years of RAW, which attracted 86 entries across the four categories of Visual Arts, Digital Media, Literacy and Performing Arts. RAW is an important acknowledgment of the skills of young local artists and a way for them to receive both public and financial recognition for their work.

Last year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, RAW went online with a dedicated webpage and online presentation. As a memento of that exceptional year, a book was commissioned to showcase the work received. Both the website and book proved to be so popular that while we were able to come together in person for the showcase and presentation in 2021, it was decided that we would still produce this volume and put the work online (visit gotix.com.au and look under Local Arts).

There are so many people behind-the-scenes working to support our young artists, writers, performers and film-makers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the wonderful parents, carers and teachers who have encouraged the artists to make a submission and continue to practice their craft. It's so important for young people to have this support.

I would also like to thank the dedicated team at Bendigo Venues & Events, a unit of the City of Greater Bendigo that is committed to celebrating the arts in all forms and delivering lively, diverse and entertaining opportunities on our doorstep.

The judges for the awards came from across our creative community to share their knowledge and enthusiasm, and I would like to thank them for their time and support:

- Visual Arts, multi-disciplinary artist Sarah Wallace-Smith
- Digital Media, writer, podcaster and festival director John Richards
- Literature, freelance writer Lauren Mitchell and former lecturer in children's and young adult literature David Beagley
- Performing Arts, John Willis, Creative Producer with CreateA

On behalf of the City of Greater Bendigo I am delighted to congratulate the winners of the 2021 RAW Arts Awards:

Visual Arts Award
Winner: Lilly Skipper
Highly Commended: Cody Dewit-Hayes

Digital Media Prize
Winner: Leroy Miller
Highly Commended: Maddie Kay

Literature Award
Winner: Jobe Thomson
Highly Commended: Uzzielle Santos

Performing Arts Scholarship
Winner: Jade Cuskelly
Highly Commended: Tara Muscatello

Congratulations again to all the 2021 participants and I wish you the very best as you continue to create and share your work.

Mayor Cr Dr Jennifer Alden

WINNER

Lilly Skipper
RAW Arts Visual Arts Award

Things, therefore I am.
Image transfer

The Judge said: From a strong body of work, this year's winner and runner up have shown terrific skill using their chosen materials, as well as a strong understanding of composition, process and presentation. Viewers can enjoy creating their own narrative around each piece. Congratulations.

WINNER

Leroy Miller
RAW Arts Digital Media Award

Holding On

The Judge said of Holding On: A beautifully simple idea, well executed. A universal experience expressed with quiet elegance.

Watch the video
www.bendigoregion.com.au/arts-culture-theatres/raw-arts-awards-2021

WINNER

Jobe Thomson
RAW Arts Literary Award

The Judges said: A very thoughtfully crafted piece that shows a mature control of language and structure, and that expresses its emotion sensitively and powerfully.

Come Spring

In the Summer she got through to voicemail thirty-three times while I packed her things out in the heat.

In town the roads ran rich with cars full of chattering children and scowling, stressed fathers. They clogged the streets, running sluggishly downhill toward the distant sea. In the day it glittered sapphire blue, the sun reflected upon the white tips of the waves. Come dusk the sky exploded into a myriad of brilliant colours, orange and pink and wispy grey, and far out on the horizon the dark silhouettes of cargo ships could be spotted against the setting sun, horns echoing across the still water.

While she could we would walk together toward the sand dunes on the edge of town, climbing them slowly, carefully. Toward the end she'd often stumble and I'd extend a hand, pulling her up and laughing away the fear. She'd look at me and I'd see none of it in her eyes. She even managed to laugh too.

When the cool began to seep back into the air and the sun sat obscured by a grey sky, we left town. They held a little gathering in the pub, bright banners strung from wall to wall. Tears were shed, none were mine. None were hers either. She never cried when she could help it.

We set off in our old ute along the coast. I drove most of the way, until one day when we'd stopped at a petrol station and I returned from the store to her sitting in the driver's seat.

"You well enough for that, are you?"
"We'll soon find out love."

She navigated the labyrinthine city streets with ease, her demeanour much opposed to mine, which was inclined toward healthy swearing and regular road rage.

I had a room three blocks from the hospital. It was the closest I could get, but even so it wasn't close enough. I spent each walk to the white steps wondering how she was, wishing I could already be by her side.

Her room was clean and soulless. Every time I entered, I'd see her lying on the bed, atop spotless white sheets, watching the TV flicker monotonously from one program to the next. I thought to myself that this wasn't her, to lay alone and quiet, without a speck of colour in the dull world around her.

To die in some sterile room.

Yet every time I entered, she looked up and put on her brave face, eyes glittering faintly, a half smirk on her lips. Perhaps she thought she could fool me with the practised façade. It had worked before. Even if the smile and mischievous eyes couldn't conceal the clammy pallor, nor the scabs and sores along her arms and legs.

I saw right through. And I saw the pain, which wasn't all treatable.

As the weeks went by, she grew worse. Eventually she stopped hiding it, and for that I was grateful. She no longer grew mad when I asked her how she was, instead she embraced me tight, and I returned it. For as long as I could, until it was time to leave, back to my dark apartment in the hotel three blocks away.

Three blocks too far.

In the Autumn the city streets sat desolate. Watching from my room on the thirteenth floor, radio blaring grim news from the corner, I made out the people moving like ants, slowly and unsurely, mouths concealed by scarves and blue masks. For a time, I couldn't visit her at all, and those nights were restless, full of nightmares.

Then I could visit her for an hour each day. She spoke little and I sensed finality in the rasp of her voice, the harsh breath.

Those hours were not enough.

The phone in my apartment rang late one chilly night. Instead of answering I chucked on a sweater and hobbled for the lift.

Outside the night air was still. The moon was strangely bright overhead, illuminating the empty street, and a single plastic bag bellowing along the road. I remember the emptiness, which seemed like anticipation. I remember the gnawing in my gut and how my breath wheezed out in shallow gasps. I remember how my heart hammered in my chest and my back flared up so that I walked slower than I would've liked and had to rest clutching a fence by the window of some dark café, all the while failing to suppress wicked thoughts.

I remember the bright hospital lights and how I wasn't grateful for them but rather detested their unnaturalness, detested how they flooded the street and emergency ward with alien whiteness, so cold and unfeeling. I struggled up the front steps and burst through the doors into the light.

"Sir – sir, have you got a mask sir?"

I moved toward the front desk, past the young man at the entrance. "I'm sorry but you need a mask."

"My w-wife's in Room 104."

"Alright sir, but you need a mask-"

I stared at the shape across the desk, hardly registering the face in front of me.

"I – got a call."

The nurse lowered her head to the computer, fingers drumming at the keyboard for far too long.

"Alright. Mr. Gardener, is it?"

"Yes."

"You can go through now. And – uh – here's a mask."

I snatched it and stuffed it into my pocket.

I remember the long white hallway and the elevator taking too long.

Myra didn't die that night. She didn't die until the next morning. I sat beside her all the way and struggled to meet her gaze, from which had been stolen all her strength and solidarity. I clutched her weak hand and didn't say goodbye, because I couldn't. Because I couldn't give up on the woman I'd married forty-three years before in a chapel by the sea, on a beautiful Summer's day when anything

terrible and evil had seemed like a distant nightmare.

Myra died and fought the whole way. In the final moments she turned to me and through the pain, through all her suffering, through that which I was unable to prevent, she told me to hug him tight. Then I clenched her hand and she smiled.

And died.

I held her hand for as long as I could.

In the Winter I was miserable and alone. The phone rang occasionally and I ignored it.

Then one day I found a little bird by the sea and took him in.

On the first day he didn't trust me, and each time I attempted to feed him he'd squawk and stumble to the farthest corner of the little box I'd made his home. He'd done his leg and could only hop, but he hopped well and I couldn't reach him without straining. I swore and left the little creature to himself.

On the second day he started dying and my fear steeled into resolve. I searched the scarce pantry and found a tin of stale biscuits. Reaching under the cupboard, I found her rolling pin and, adding a dash of water, crushed the biscuits into a soggy concoction before drawing it up into a plastic syringe.

He ate hungrily; not from the syringe but from the tip of my finger. I found the way the forked tongue flitted in and out fascinating and watched totally engrossed by the little bird and his feeding.

On the third day he grew bolder. I awoke to the sound of scampering and noticed upon entering the kitchen a trail of footprints leading from the open biscuit tin to the cardboard box. He sat perched atop the box fast asleep, crumbs on his beak.

I chuckled and returned to bed.

After that each day I would set out against the cold and search for the little bird's nest. I'd found him in a shallow rock pool by the coast, however I hadn't seen any sign of a nest – no obvious perches nor concealed crevasses. He seemed too young to be able to fly, though perhaps he'd fluttered from some distant tree. Some very distant tree, since the horizon was one blank sandy expanse.

How he'd managed to find himself there, I'll never know.

I named him Ted after an old bird I'd kept as a pet in my youth. Unlike the old Ted, young Ted enjoyed my company and warmth, snuggling up close in the night. We fought back the chill and night terrors together.

Toward Winter's end, I awoke to unnatural silence. Ted had left my side and sat ruffling his feathers by the door, slowly tapping the hard wood. I crossed the room slowly, feet pattering on the floorboards, and reached for the handle.

Ted looked up, and for a split second I saw in his eyes the reflection of not a sad, tired old man, but one who's eyes glimmered with a distant hope.

"Thank you," I said, and I opened the door.

Come Spring our son returned to us.

The wildflowers blossomed fervently across the rolling hills surrounding town. The roads remained silent, the beaches quiet, but I enjoyed it. I could walk in peace without prying eyes analysing me, assessing me. Those that did often approached and murmured their condolences from beneath blue masks. I'd mutter my thanks and move off.

I enjoyed being alone. Even in the Spring, when once we would've dug our veggie patch together and planted all types of vegetables. We'd take long walks and occasionally visit the theatre, in the middle of the day, so that we were the only ones in the well-cooled auditorium and emerged to the dazzling sun setting like a jewel in the west.

That Spring the cinema sat dormant, windows boarded over, dusty posters advertising films from the year prior. Even the sun setting in the evenings lacked its usual vigour, and I felt for a time as if everything around me was in mourning.

Instead of furthering my misery, this idea granted me relief. I wasn't alone. I never had been.

I returned to her for the first time in the Spring. Walking from our house down toward the bay and into the park, I followed the winding roads around the pines and through empty clearings. I passed graves that had hurt before, my mother's, sister's.

She slept beside our daughter right by the sea. The bouquet I'd lain at the funeral had long since shrivelled, and I removed it hastily, also clearing away some scattered leaves and weeds creeping up the concrete slab.

Myra Grace Gardener
Loving Wife to Peter and Mother to
Sarah and William
Her Memory is Cherished By All

By me. It felt as if it were me and no one else.

He appeared through the trees from behind. I didn't see him, rather I heard the crunch of shoes on gravel. I turned and recognised the dark hoodie, which failed to conceal the unshaven face and cloudy eyes. As I approached I smelt the grog.

At that moment I was consumed with anger. I averted my gaze and intended to walk right past.

And then I heard the sobs, and all my anger disappeared.

Before me stood my son. The little boy who'd helped me put up the tool-shed out the back, who'd hammered a nail through his thumb. The little boy with whom I'd spent the night in the emergency ward, cuddling him close while I read Stephen King and he slept quietly, huddled close.

The little boy with his mother's eyes.

She lived on in him. Her and Sarah, the both of them.

I approached slowly, and firmly embraced Will. He tucked his head against my chest and returned the hug. We remained that way for a long, long time.

She hugged him too. I felt it.

"I'm sorry dad."

"Time you came home."

We left the park together and talked well into the night.

Come Spring he returned to us.

And she was content.

WINNER

Jade Cuskelly
RAW Arts Performing Arts Scholarship

Music and Drama

The Judges said: Jade has shown great commitment to performing arts, taking on a range of opportunities as she builds her career.

For as long as I can remember, I have been very passionate about singing, it has helped me through a lot of hardships and has inspired me to be the person I am today. I am very interested in Musical Theatre alongside other genres of music. I have been involved in multiple musicals like *Peter Pan Jr., Les Miserables, Me and my Girl, Red Riding Hood's Summer Panto*, Local Theatre Bendigo COVID Collaboration *Will you be there*, Bendigo Health Christmas Appeal, *Cats, Grease* and *Robot Song* by Arena Theatre Company as Understudy to Juniper May.

Last year I was at Bendigo South East College, and was involved with the school's Performing Arts program (Academy Of Creative Arts). This gave me so many opportunities like singing at Generations in Jazz, Cushion Concerts, Bendigo Comps, Volunteer work with ESTIA aged care, Bendigo Tech School, Rotary Club of Bendigo South, Axedale Tavern and for the "I Can network" (support group for the Autistic community). I am currently studying Music Industry and Music Performance at Bendigo Senior Secondary College.

I also love to write original songs in my spare time and to experiment with different ways of writing and I'm currently writing my own musical about acceptance including themes of LGBT, mental health and social struggles like bullying.

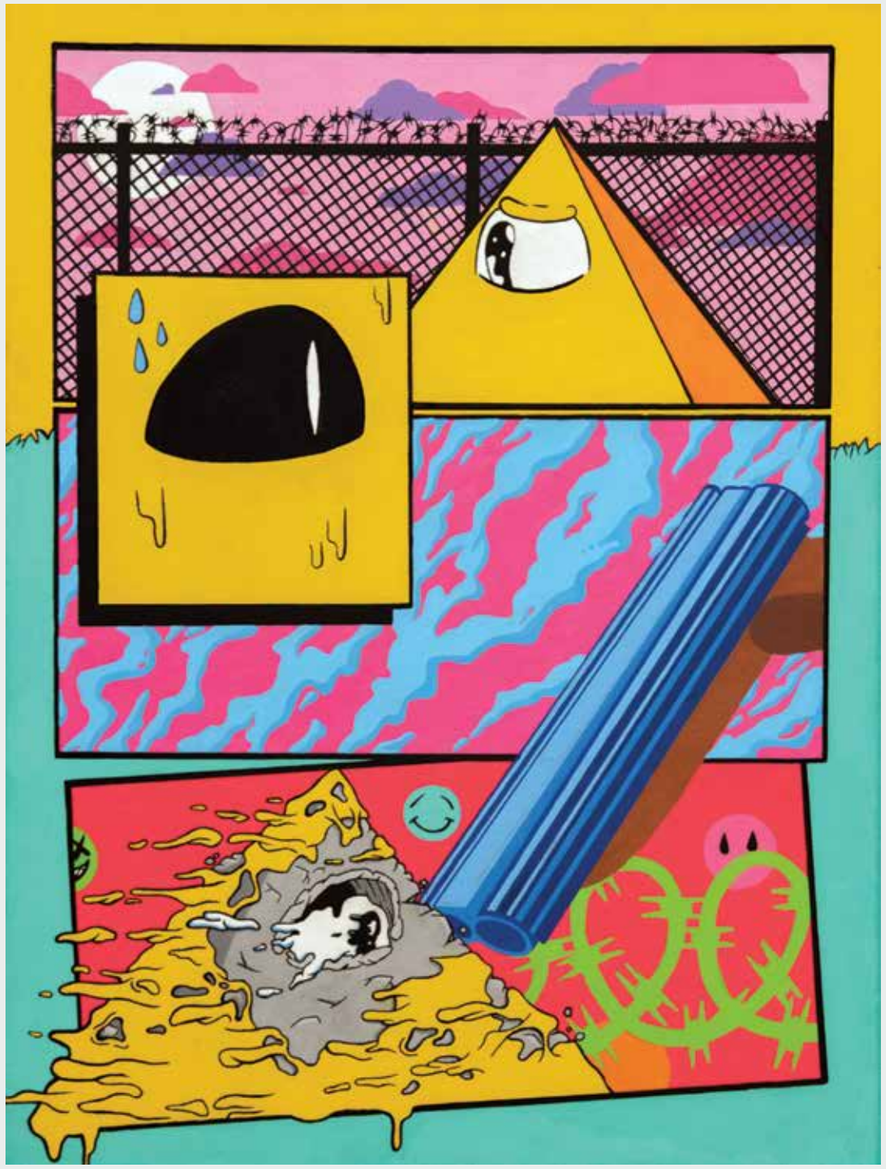
I am passionate about performing, I enjoy singing, acting, and I'm currently teaching myself guitar, ukulele, piano and musical engineering. Along the way I have especially appreciated the support of my singing teacher, Kristie Woodward and Cynthia Holsworth from BSE Academy of Creative Arts.

Music is one of my high interests that keeps me going even when I'm really down. Music is a way to express myself, and I love helping others through music.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Cody Dewit-Hayes
RAW Arts Visual Arts Award

Breach Loaded Acid Trip
Acrylic and Water-Based Paint.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Maddie Kay
RAW Arts Digital Media Award

I'm in love with fictional characters

Watch the video
www.bendigoregion.com.au/arts-culture-theatres/raw-arts-awards-2021

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Uzzielle Santos
RAW Arts Literary Award

Freiheit

Come Spring

Freiheit. *Freedom.*

Soul of dog

Died 1944, Poland

'We all live with the same objective of being happy. Our lives are all different and yet the same.' (Anne Frank, Diary of A Young Girl)

'O crossing of looks! Bond that the animal tries to tighten and that man always undoes!' (Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, Looking Backwards: Recollections)

'I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness. I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right.' (Anne Frank, Diary of A Young Girl)

***

I sat by the door waiting for my Master to come. Moonlight danced across the steps, weaving its way through cracks, creating lightning-shaped slivers. I did not envy their freedom; I was tied to my Master and he to me.

My Master drank up my affection and in turn, smothered me with strokes and the hypnotic sound of his voice. My ears perked to the sharp crackle of the radio. The dancing fire spat in the hearth, matching the sound of the radio man's hoarse voice. My Master often nodded to things the man said, and I sensed that he greatly respected him. I did not like to think of it that way – that my Master had a master.

The man then talked about his dog, Blondi, and how much he loved her; disgusted that some humans didn't treat us right. He mentioned a beautiful quote by Hermann Göring. "To the Germans, animals are not merely creatures in the organic sense, but creatures who lead their own lives and who are endowed with perceptive facilities, who feel pain and experience joy and prove to be faithful and attached."

My Master, kind man that he was, nodded emphatically. He fought for the rights of all animals great and small. I was proud.

When the radio was not on, we'd read. "Apart from God, or, without a higher being, we would begin to deteriorate," he mused, flipping through the book he told me was by H.G Wells. A talented character I assumed, someone intelligent and philosophical. Why, he had to be, for my Master to listen to anything he said.

"Imagine that -- animals as humans." He chuckled. "One day you'll be as intelligent as we are."

I pretended to be human sometimes; not that I knew how a human should act. I told myself I was one, just like the humans reminded themselves and the world daily, so that perhaps I could be reincarnated as one.

"It's good we have the Führer; someone we can follow in this blasted war isn't it, Alphonse?" my Master said. "I don't know what we'd do about this Jew problem otherwise."

The Jews? I only heard that word as associated with disgust. But what was so different about them?

It wasn't long after, that my Master informed me I was going somewhere new. I didn't want to leave him, but I took his treat with a wag of my tail and nudged his hand gently. It made him happy, so I would make him proud.

On the train, restlessness captured me, my eyes and ears alert, thinking about my Master alone in his chair. Through the train, faint whimpers and cries sank into the eeriness of the night. I curled up in the corner, resting my head on the cold floor, and focused my mind on my Master, and only my Master.

The train came to a halt. My lungs pressed me for fresh air. Outside, a sour, smoky smell hung in the frigid breeze. My paws sunk in mud that travelled the ground for miles. No green. I shrank back. What was this place?

Barbed wire twisted and curled around metal poles and peeling wood, creating huge gates at the edge of the rusted train tracks.

Arbeit Macht Frei.

Those were the words on the gate.

Trails of people lined up, clutching hands and clinging to their baggage.

"Men on this side, women on the other!" a man yelled. "Schnell, schnell!"

Beyond the wire were humans. But not the humans I knew. Dirty, smelly, hunched humans. Striped clothing draped their shaking limbs as they lifted mounds of dirt and pushed wheelbarrows through mud. Who were these people?

"Open them up!" The gates creaked open and I darted through to guard the gate. Another dog moved to sit beside me.

Her sparkling brown eyes caught me for a moment. I gasped. "You're – you're Blondi!" She didn't look at me, so I moved in front of her.

"You belong to the man on the radio! My Master listens to yours every day. He admires him very much. We have very good and kind masters."

Blondi turned to me. Her body shook in a quivering laugh. "And what do you call good and kind?"

"They are kind to animals. Our masters vow to protect them." I puffed up my chest.

"Are they kind to these animals?" She threw her head towards the people in striped clothing. "Animals? B-but they're humans!"

"Oh really? I hadn't noticed." She trotted forward. "Come with me."

I followed her past hundreds of people in striped clothing. My ears perked at wood striking flesh, strangled screams, and pounding yells. A child's whimper was cut short; a crust of dry bread lay untouched by a single blade of grass but watched by devouring eyes.

"Don't. Look." Blondi said.

I snapped my head forward, my limbs shaking at the piercing sounds.

Blondi slowed to walk beside me. We passed humans young and old as uniformed guards surrounded them, fingers grasping heavy clubs. In the middle of the line, humans fell into the mud. They didn't get up.

"Where are they going?" I asked.

"They're just going for a shower," Blondi said.

A child's scream sliced through the chaos. I didn't look.

Blondi turned to me. "Do you still think they are humans?" Her voice held a chilling tone.

"Aren't they?"

A sad, eerie gaze creeped into her eyes. "Not anymore. Look at them. They are dirty. They don't speak. They don't laugh. They don't leave this place. They can't leave this place. They are not human."

But what did it mean to be human? Was it that every day that one reminded themselves and others of their superior place in society? I always believed that humans were humans because they had free will and belonged to no one but themselves. But these people seemed to belong to the people in uniforms. They seemed to belong to everyone but themselves. I hated that. It frightened me.

As days passed, I noticed a man in the pool of dirty faces. He cast me occasional glances and when I wagged my tail, his mouth twitched into a faint smile. It disappeared as soon as it came. But I felt the warmth beneath his coldness. I felt his loneliness and was drawn to him.

His name was Chaim.

Whenever I could, I brought him my rations. I hated betraying my Master, but didn't he betray me also? It pained me to see Chaim so pitiful. How strange to have a human begging for food from me. I couldn't see this place as a camp of humans anymore, but as a camp of predator and prey.

I snapped when guards tried to touch me. I didn't like their vicious hands, their booming voices and their blood dark guns. Chaim provided gentle companionship and I couldn't resist the urge to be with him. He needed me. And I needed him.

"You can't keep coming back, boy," he said, "It's not safe." Of course, I returned.

Roll call became my favourite part of the day because I got to see him. As they called out his number, I wagged my tail.

His number echoed out again. 'Step forward,' they said. He did. Along with countless others. I didn't care about the others.

I growled and lunged at the guard who held him. "Alphonse, no," Chaim said.

I bared my teeth but stopped. A familiar scent masked the foul air. My Master. I turned and rushed to greet him; how long it had been! But an invisible string tugged me towards Chaim.

I stood between Chaim and my Master. The sadness of betrayal danced in my Master's eyes like devouring flames. I sniffed the scent of orange peels but the odour of burning flesh from days past seeped through.

"Alphonse," my Master said, "come here, boy."

I lowered my head. My Master held out his hand, and each step I took closer matched my heart. Thud. Thud.

I yearned to feel his familiar touch against my fur; to hear his lilting voice sing through my mind. Instead of feeling his gentle strokes, his fingers curled around my collar and he dragged me towards him. I yelped, crashing into his legs.

I couldn't hear anything. But I knew by then that silence was the sound that sent shivers up one's spine. My Master's grip tightened and I dared not struggle against him. After all, I was indebted to him.

Chaim looked over his shoulder; brown eyes shattering the tense air. He mouthed words that I like to imagine only I could read. "We are free."

The collar pressed harder against my neck. I didn't do anything. I couldn't do anything. I sank into the mud at the feet of my Master and rested my head on my paws, my eyes locked on the smoke that rose into hazy skies.

The screams came and suddenly they were worse than the silence.

I remembered a quote my Master read from his favourite book, Island of Dr. Moreau, "Now they stumbled in the shackles of humanity, lived in a fear that never died, fretted by a law they could not understand..."

My Master's hypnotic voice faded away. I thought only of Chaim. He and I were connected. He, bound by the chains of humanity and I, bound by chains I didn't realise I had until they shattered. I no longer understood the divide between humans and animals, mankind and their brothers.

Chaim melted into the crowd of bodies and his number faded with him. I pawed the ground and whined, my eyes locked onto his figure until he disappeared from view.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Tara Muscatello
RAW Arts Performing Arts Scholarship

Music

My name is Tara Muscatello and I am a nineteen-year-old singer, songwriter, rapper and guitarist who is extremely passionate about music. Music has always been a massive part of who I am, and I have been extremely fortunate to attend schools where my passion has been nurtured. I have been singing since I was a little girl, but it has only been in the last seven years that I've really started pursuing it. My life has been anything but easy, but even when I was at my lowest low and I felt my heart could beat no more, music brought me back to life.

Singing is something that I live and love, and I embrace every chance to perform and connect with a diverse range of people through the magic of song. Music fills my heart with joy, energy and contentment.

I am currently completing my first year of study at The Australian Institute of Music where I am completing my Bachelor of Contemporary Music. I have been having the most amazing time and have learnt so much already. My hope is to make lots of connections, develop my skills and increase my musical knowledge so that by the end of my three-year course I am ready to take on the music industry and share my sound with the world.

Lucy Palmer
Sapphire Squawker
Acrylic

Jin Turpie
Tank of Terror
Pencil on paper

Kalo Davis
Bella

Blue. As far as he could see, in every direction, there was blue. Be it the light blue of the sky or the deep blue of the ocean. Everything was blue. Sunlight danced across the ocean's surface, sending dazzling, crystal-like shards of light over the water.

Adam could only tread water, watching the boat slowly grow smaller until it disappeared from sight completely. It was in this moment that he began to feel truly alone and he felt stupid for holding in his tears, for who was there to see them?

Adam's mind was dragged back to the night that had changed his life forever. The night a drunk driver had carelessly sped through a pedestrian crossing. The night that he and his sister became orphans.

It was after this night that he had vowed to raise Bella as if she were his daughter. She needed him, she didn't deserve this. Five years old. Only a month until she would start school. He was all she had.

He could think only of her little red face, beaming up at him.

'Do you like it?' she had asked excitedly, handing him a bowl piled high with a steaming mush, bright blue in colour. He remembered the look on her face as he had tasted it. She had been so proud.

He screamed, a wordless cry of pure anguish, eyes stinging as tears spilled down his cheeks.

The weight of his clothes became more and more of a burden as the minutes passed. It pained him to part with the shirt. Bella had given it to him as a Christmas gift, but he knew that it was necessary, if he ever wanted to see her again.

His arms felt dead, unresponsive, as if he no longer possessed the willpower that granted him control over them. It seemed that his mind had left his body and floated away to watch from a different perspective. Vision blurred by fatigue, he lay back and closed his eyes, floating.

Once again, the smiling face of Bella greeted him.

'Look! Look! Did you see it?' she had jumped up and down, pointing.

'I saw it.' Adam had replied, grinning. Together, they had watched as the butterfly flew away.

He must have fallen asleep, for when he awoke, the sun had disappeared over the horizon, leaving the moon to cast its eerie glow across the water. What had been a vast sheet of sparkling turquoise was now an inky black void. Enveloped by darkness, Adam closed his eyes. His limbs felt detached from his body, driven on by some unknown force. Above him, the stars shone brightly, tiny flecks of light scattered across the cloudless sky. It was a spectacular sight, but it was too bad that Adam, vision blurred by fatigue, could not stop and appreciate the beauty. Adam's breaths came slowly, in and out. An unfaltering rhythm. Each breath sent shooting pains down his throat, worn down by the salty winds that relentlessly whipped around his head, as if he were trying to swallow sewing pins.

A boat.

In the distance.

Adam could only watch and hope that he was spotted. He wanted to splash about or make some noise, but he dared not even attempt a whisper. His body was leeched of all energy.

The boat grew closer.

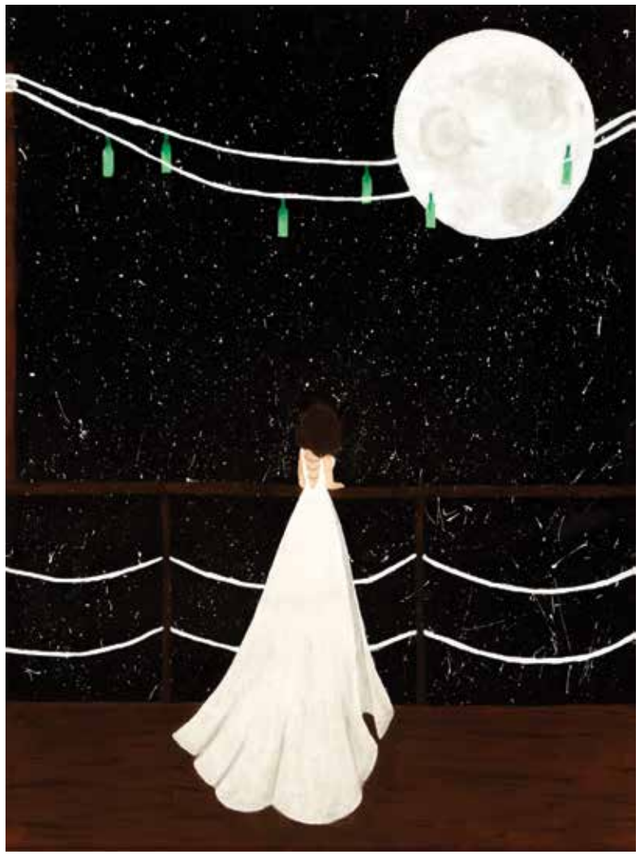
As the likelihood of his rescue increased, his limbs seized up. Any rhythm that he had had, was lost, all in that single moment. He began flailing around blindly in the dark. He had lost all sense of direction. Up became down and left became right. He coughed and retched as his mouth filled with water. His throat was on fire. He couldn't give up. He couldn't let himself die. Not now. Bella needed him. She needed him.

Hands closed around his wrists.

He never saw the face of his saviour, but he would remember those hands forever. Rougher than sandpaper, fingertips calloused and worn. Strong, but nonetheless gentle. The hands that had lifted him from those unforgiving waters. The hands that had saved his life.

Adam would see Bella again soon, but for now, he let his eyes fall closed and welcomed the darkness that came rushing in to greet him.

Daisy Pratt-White
Slumberland
Polymer clay and mixed media



Caidence Cousins
Universal Thought

Amber Betts
Laughing Kookaburra
Ballpoint pen

Chelsea Tobin
Finding my happy place
Painting

Bethany Mansfield
Jawn
Oil paint

Yasmin Russell
Amaranthine
Acrylic

Abbey Buhagiar
Frida
Sculpture

Darien McDowell
Dern
Photography

Liam Duivenvoorden

Blooming Tides

Can you see it?
The tide.
It's rising.
It goes in and out. In and out. But it's rising. It's lapping at your ankles now.

At low tide a lot of things are revealed, shells mostly, thousands of them. Polished to a opalescent sheen by the currents. They may be smooth, and pretty, but they have a history. A history they speak in forgotten glyphs on their backs, a history they tell to any who may listen. But no one listens. They've been buried under dry shifting sands for eons, longer. And only now can they speak, and now no one listens.

Flowers are beautiful, ancient parts of nature. They are natural and pure. But I think they would look better frozen in crystalline glass, ornamental. Never wilting, never losing their colour, it would make a nice paperweight. You know, something useful.

Can you hear it?
The tide.
It's rising.
It goes in and out. In... and out...
But it's rising. It's at your waist now.

High tide washes up the memories forgotten by the low tide. When you're strolling along the beach you would see a dead fish, black blood leaking from its mouth. It slowly drips down its cold, decaying body, trailing its way across one too many gills, on its way to the sands, on its way further, soaking into the earth. Earth already dyed black. Its eyes are glassy, clouded. Clouded from death and pain, clouding the still beating heart that might never stop, pumping black blood through a vascular system that can't use it. Or maybe it just reflects the storm brewing in the clouds high above. You would see another fish, and another, and another. You only count six, but there are probably many more buried beneath.

A flower's thorns are sharp, pricking painfully at skin that might not even be yours, despite the stinging, singing its way through your brain. Flowers are so fragile, they don't know that their thorns protect them from harm, they only hope that they'll be able to make it to the end unharmed. They plant themselves in the earth, holding their thorns with might and terror, hoping that they'll see night or better. Night will come eventually, but whether they hold their swords when it does is up to them.

Can you feel it?
The tide.
It's rising.
It goes in and out.
It's at your shoulders now
It goes in and out... and out... and out further.
I've heard that's a sign of a tsunami.
It's above our heads now.
And the water? It's red.

Kayla Barnfield

The Pool

Deep, inviting, clear and cool,
That's what I think of the pool,
I can splash around all day,
It's so big no-one's in my way,
Swim under with goggle tools,
But diving is against the rules,
Some parts I stand on flat feet,
Some parts have big jets of heat,
We make some memories to keep,
And swim like dauphins of the deep,
Sometimes the day's so cold it steams,
The pool is heated, so it seems,
And when the day is hot, I'm told,
The pool still doesn't feel cold,
Whether they be girl or boy,
The pool's made for all to enjoy,
A few more words: the pool is fun,
Not just for me, for everyone.

Abby Williamson

Hope

Erin McClellan

The Boy

The weather on the Island was always miserable, just like the people it was always cold, raining and cloudy and the people were always frowning except for one, the boy, he was odd and had the brightest smile when he smiled the sun would peek out from the clouds. But the people were not used to the sun and warmth that the boy brought to the island and were mean to him, not because they meant to be but because it was so unusual in a place where everyone frowned and was superstitious of nearly everything when it was weather- related and they had the most mundane jobs you could think of, it was hard not to be miserable.

The boy who was once full of warmth and summer had begun to slowly become winter as he lost his smile and had become sad like the other people and when he cried in his lonesome home it was like a storm. He had wanted to end the sadness he felt on the island and find a place that was happy and where he could be open.

A place that would appreciate his smile and warmth and he had found it. He had checked the weather report for the day before his voyage and as usual, it was sad and miserable you did not have to check the report to know, but it had confirmed that he had to leave so, he got on his boat and the sky cleared of all clouds and sun shone as his smile returned.

Aya Cusick
A Piece Of Everybody
Sharpie, watercolour on canvas

Bee McEvoy
The Poet's Downfall
Mixed Media

Halle Blake-Burrows
The Shadow

You see that shadow

She's my friend

She is clingy

And looms over my shoulder constantly

But her presence comforts me

It seems to be the only constant in a world spinning to the brink of death

As long as she's there so am I

Without her, I could be happy but why try

She helps me make sense of the self-hatred

If I look into a mirror she points out exactly why I'm a failure

Why I act the way I act

No one else can say it in such a way like she

Her soft dulcet tones infiltrate my mind

Leaving behind her words of darkness

Coated in the sweet light of reassurance of change

If I change this she won't talk about it anymore

No matter how I change it another sentence will run from her lips dripping with poison

Poison so addicting I don't want it to go

I can blame my problems on her

No accountability will be held on my shoulders

And as long as she stays

I stay

Stay to live another day to look in that mirror filled with darkness

Reflecting her back at me

She will hold me up and whisper those poisonous words

Touch my stomach and grab my hair

As she examines all the flaws everyone else denies are there

She is truthful to me

She keeps me in bed each morning and grapples me tight

Stay in bed

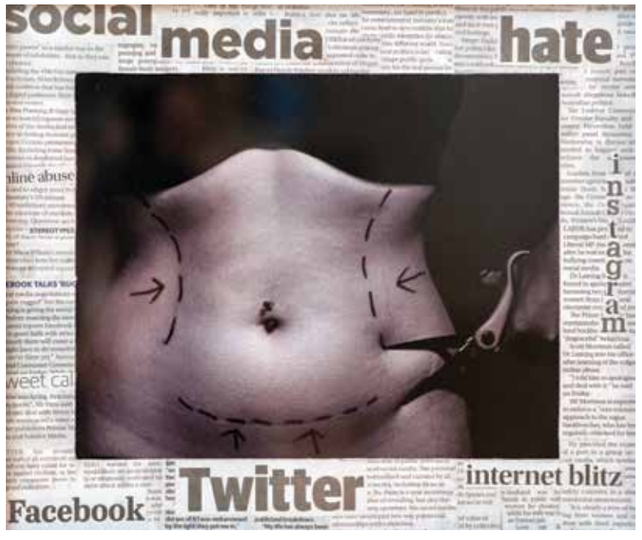
Stay with me

I will

Till the end of the tunnel finally shines brightly I will stay

She is my friend

At least that's what she will say



Sophie Fisher
How to be F.I.T. - By Society
Digital photography

Kat Betts

Fishing Line

one.
you pull the string, pull pull pull pull pull—
the end appears
rhythms from your internals are smeared
crimson over the tail end
ripe. raw. ragged. relentless.

pieces of your heart. lungs. kidneys. liver. stomach. wrapped around that string

you can't remember why you did it
(any of it)
wondering if there is any life left inside or
if it's all there before you

your organs drop to
the cold tiles, you don't have the heart to collect them,
try and shove them into some sort of order that resembles
what you once were.

a long breath.
in through your nose
out through your mouth

the way that therapist with the too-big glasses taught you
do you remember?

that small part of your mind is unsure, if
these parts of your uterus
(bleeding)
on the rope
on the floor
on your hands
curled around his fingers
are they his or yours
do you own any of this?

two.
it's late. and i watch my footsteps with a careful eye, one in front of the other until they're blending, bleeding with the worn concrete. wind howls my name—laps, licks at the curl of my neck, i feel my stomach a little too closely. too heavy. my hand instinctively presses against my belly, clammy palms searching for him—nausea a little too familiar. i pull the lid of the bin up and empty into it what was left of lunch. wiping the evidence from my mouth, sick, slick across the back of my hand.

i close the lid.

three.
i sit in the waiting room, my foot tapping, tapping, tapping out the beat to
that song
the baby doesn't stop
(won't stop)

her small frame producing such noise
(such noise)

mother coos, cradles, craves
(silence)

feel my hand pressed to my abdomen
wondering if it would cry like that—

should i tell him?
can i tell him?

my granny always told me some things are better left
unsaid, tucked behind your ear with a
hairpin
secrets make you powerful.

warm walls smile, in amongst their spotted wallpaper i can almost see his face
is that baby still crying? hands cradle my stomach
swallow the copper memory of him and head for the door
i will see the doctor now.

four.
i watch the ceiling

and

it watches me.

my back pressed against the cool
plastic sheet spread
over the table.

bed,
it's a bed.

i want to move my hands

but i can no longer
feel.

the smell of metal and blood.
it's over in seven minutes.

was that seven?

seven—

my lucky number.

ushered to another room to stare at more walls.

emptied.

five.
after an hour they release you,

she picks you up, only one that knows. takes your hand. the world blurs
and the cramps feel worse than before.
muscles constricting, convulsing,
causing a new era of discomfort.
struggling to breathe through the pain.

you unlock the door, insist on being
alone.

first time in weeks you've felt
alone.

you eye up your organs, still scattered on the floor, red meat staining the white tiles.
pick up the pieces, tenderly threading them onto the string hooked like bait,

place the fishing line into your mouth,
let it slide down your oesophagus, organs settling into their rightful homes swimming in amongst—

there's more blood than you expected. your hand flits to your stomach—
rests.

Ivy Grist

Leading In The Sunset
Acrylic

Levity Camilleri

Polaroid Wall

Screen Play

Start set - Room with a wall of Polaroids - MAKE ROOM HUMAN. We zoom in on the first of three featured pictures, and then cut to Scene 1 - Park, CBD, Midday.

Marley and Lexanne are sitting on a park bench together, sipping hot chocolates. Both girls are cross legged, and have pink cheeks and noses - it's freezing out here, and Marley doesn't hesitate to point that out.

MARLEY - God, it's freezing.

LEXANNE - *(Quoting La Boheme)* I want to tell you a profound thought I've had - It's cold as hell.

(Marley knows this routine, she plays along)

MARLEY - As for me, I'll be frank - I'm not exactly sweating.

Beat.

Still, I'm loving the aesthetics of it all.

LEXANNE - You know the rules, M. You're not allowed to post about this spot. This is ours.

The girls scoot closer, and Lex rests her head on the other's shoulder. They clink cups, and SCENE.

We see Marley walking home, it's cold and dark is approaching fast. She pulls her coat around herself, and taps out a text (which pops up in a text bubble on side of screen) to Lex.

MARLEY (texted) - that was amazing (she hesitates before writing) love u x

SCENE.
The next day, a weak sun streams through half-closed curtains - Setting is Lexanne's apartment. She stirs and wakes as the doorbell rings, with lipstick smudged across her face and the worst bedhead you've ever seen.

LEXANNE - Shoot.

She yawns and rubs her eyes, seemingly forgetting that someone is at the door. It rings again, and she scrambles out of her bed and immediately trips on a computer cord.

LEXANNE - Coming!!!

She opens the door to reveal her mother, a young hippy-esque woman wearing a bandana and floral maxi dress. There are a lot of rainbow prints.

ELENA - Thanks, love. Happy take a missionary to lunch day. Woohoo.

LEXANNE - Woohoo indeed. Where did you find that out?

ELENA - Your grandpop asked me to surprise him (Jazz hands). I've been out all night with missionaries at the club. I figured it's second best to lunch, right?

Beat.

Gamma was having a wild time of it too.

LEXANNE - O-okay. But really, how hard did you party? You look far less radiant than your usual self. Aspirin?

ELENA - Cheers, love. Aren't we out though?

LEXANNE - *(muttered)* How would you know? (louder) Nup, it's all good Mum!!!

She brings Elena, who's draped on the couch dramatically, a glass of water and an aspirin.

ELENA - Thanks, dahl. You're a lifesaver.

LEXANNE - I know.

SCENE.
We see Marley and Lexanne in a bustling coffee shop, wearing their uniforms. They each open their bags and heave out a pile of homework papers and begin to do them. They're quiet but are obviously enjoying each other's company. This scene has whining and teasing but make it jokey and companionable. This should be a light scene.

MARLEY - Well, damn this. You're the one who's good at maths, and I'm the one who can't drop below a C average or I'm out! Not fair!

LEXANNE - Well excuse me, Miss Private School. I would kill to be in your shoes.

MARLEY - Well, they are to die for. And trust me, I'm pretty sure you'd fit in pretty well with the psychopaths at St Joan's.

The girls laugh, and the sounds of the café get louder until a guy comes in - Max Blume.

LEXANNE - Shoot. The eagle has landed at 12:00.

MARLEY - Great. Well, I'll leave you to it.

LEXANNE - No, don't go! I had a day planned for us!!!

MARLEY - And now, you have a day planned with *(swoons mockingly)* dreamy Max. Have fun.

SCENE.
Later that evening, we see Marley on her own on the stairs of a small chic apartment complex. Voices echo from down the hall, and she's wearing a pair of mismatched flannel pyjamas. She hums to herself, hugging her knees to her chest. We need to get the feeling that she took Lexanne's rejection harder than she let on. Suddenly, from down the hall her mother calls:

JUNE *(offstage)* - Hon, are you doing okay?

MARLEY - Yeah, fine, mum!

DAN *(Marley's adopted father BTW)* - Can we talk to you?

MARLEY - Sure. One sec.

She quickly wipes her face - had she been crying? - and straightens up her pyjamas. Now composed, she walks down the hall.

MARLEY - What's wrong? Are you guys okay?

JUNE - Of course we are, but are you?

MARLEY - I don't know what you're talking about. I'm fine as a cobweb! *(Short laugh)*

DAN - Look, the teachers have told us you went to a few counselling sessions. I know we're not your real mum and dad-

MARLEY - And thank god for that.

DAN - But we're here for you. You can talk to us, you know?

MARLEY - Look, it's nothing. I'm all good! The school magazine wanted me to write up an article on it.

Beat.

Five articles.

JUNE - Okay, sure. But the offer still stands. We love you, okay?

MARLEY - Love you too. Don't worry about me. I'm going to bed.

SCENE.
The next day - a bustling schoolyard slowly fills with people, we could have it on a time-lapse until our characters show up. They sit on an old, ratty bench - it's not much, but it's their territory.

LEXANNE - Is it just me, or are there more... fluids... than usual today?

MARLEY - Urgh, don't. This bench is the most disgusting place in the school.

LEXANNE - Come on, M. It's not THAT bad. Pessimist.

MARLEY - I'm not a pessimist, you're just naïve.

LEXANNE - You know you love me.

Beat.

MARLEY - Yeah.

LEXANNE - But really, you're even less peppy than usual. What's wrong?

MARLEY - The parentals. They gave me a right ribbing last night.

LEXANNE - Listen to you, 'a right ribbing'. Toff. But what about?

MARLEY - Doesn't matter. I'm just tired, that's all.

LEXANNE - C'mon, you can tell me.

MARLEY - Don't bother. It's not important.

LEXANNE - Oh really.

Beat.

Well, okay.

The girls hug, and it seems like everything is okay.

MARLEY - Y'know, under all this, the bench has pretty nice wood.

SCENE.
We're back at the wall of polaroids, and we've zoomed back to see an old woman in her wheelchair gazing fondly at the photos. On the wall, we can now also see a playbill for the opera La Boheme, and a barely visible school photo in a smudged frame. The woman sighs, we slowly zoom onto the next Polaroid, and SCENE.

A woman, about 35, sits at a computer typing furiously. A knock on the door, and in barges a grown-up Max from the earlier scenes - her boss.

LEXANNE - Hey. You good? MAX - Yeah, y'know. Same old.

LEXANNE - Can I help you with anything? MAX - Actually, yes. Do you have a stapler?

LEXANNE - I did, up until you last asked.

MAX - Sorry. D'you reckon Linda would have one?

LEXANNE - *(muttered)* I don't know, but are we really going to keep pretending you go to Linda's office for staples?!

MAX - What's that, babe?

LEXANNE - Nothing! Look, I'm sure she'll have one. Say hi to her for me.

Max leaves.

LEXANNE - Benefit of doubt, they said. He loves you, they said.

Beat.

Lexanne goes on with her work, and SCENE. Sunset, the same day. Marley, now a failing author, is giving a lecture at the library on creative story arcs. Her hair is messy, her eyes are wild, and she's gesticulating madly. Shame there's only two people there.

MARLEY - So as you can see, most story arcs follow the same med-escalating-high pattern. But how can we change this up to create a unique story with a personal rhythm?

Well, one of the ways is death. My (shaky breath)- My birth mother died fourteen years ago. I found it out on an obituary page two years after it happened, when I was researching for my first book. I don't know why my adoptive parents never told me. They're flawed individuals with flawed judgement to match, and I can understand that. I just wish I could've said goodbye (voice catches).

And that, that changed the rhythm, the speed, of my life forever. It threw me out of the loop, and I lost parts of myself - Heck, I even got too much for my best friend - along the way. And I'm sorry for that. I hope Lex is out there, go-getting as ever. I love you.

The couple leaves together, and after peering through the doorway to see if they'd come back, Marley sits down with a huff.

MARLEY - I think that went very well.

Beat.

Well, compared to the last one, it did!

SCENE.
Lexanne stands in a small bathroom, with a dog yapping at her heels. She's going out to a restaurant - She wears a slim-fitting dress and is applying lipstick in the mirror. Her eyes are puffy and red, but she dabs concealer around them. Her phone rings on the side of the sink.

LEXANNE - Hey, honey. How are you?

MARLEY - Honey, hey?

LEXANNE - Sorry, I thought you were someone else. Who is this?

MARLEY - It's Marley, Lex. Remember me? I thought of you today, and so here I am. How have you been?

LEXANNE - Oh my god, Marley! I'm so sorry. I've been all right, yeah. Y'know. Yourself?

MARLEY - No, I don't know. It's been ages since we last spoke - what happened?

LEXANNE - We grew apart, I guess.

MARLEY - So, where are you now?

LEXANNE - Well, I'm-

MARLEY - Actually, let me guess first - you're a charity worker in Sydney, who has a fund for homeless animals in small towns. You have a PHD in veterinary medicine. You're also a millionaire. With two adopted kids.

LEXANNE - Nice try. I'm unhappily married and I work in an office. I don't have the

time for kids right now.

MARLEY - Well that sucks. Need to vent?

LEXANNE - I- No thanks.

MARLEY - Fair.

Beat.

LEXANNE - Look, I've got to go (ironically) win back my prince, but I'll call you later. Hope you're doing better than me. Mwah. Bye.

She hangs up quickly.

MARLEY - Bye.

SCENE.
We see Lex's date night at a classy restaurant. She fiddles with her bracelets, trying to avoid looking at the clock. We zoom in on the clock and it changes from 6:40ish to 7:20ish. A waiter comes to check up on her.

WAITER - Ms Blume? Would you like to order yet?

LEXANNE - No thanks. The wine's great, though.

WAITER - Well, we've got a 7:45 booking for this table. If you could order quickly, that would be great. I hope your guest comes soon.

The waiter leaves, and Lexanne checks her watch. She sighs, eventually deciding to give up.

LEXANNE - Great. Guess that's my cue to leave.

She pulls her jumper around her, finishes her wine, and leaves without looking back.

SCENE.
Lexanne and Marley sit at home in their respective rooms; Lex's is a chic king bed in a modern studio apartment, and Marley's is a vaguely seedy-looking single. Again, their texts pop up onscreen.

LEXANNE (texted) - You there? Because maybe I do need to vent.

LEXANNE - Sorry if this is weird.

MARLEY - No, I'm here. Are you okay?

LEXANNE - Not really. You remember Max?

MARLEY - Yeah, weren't you on-and-off with him for, like, half your life? Is he still around?

LEXANNE - Well, yes. But no. It's really complicated.

MARLEY - Take your time.

LEXANNE - So basically, we've been married for three years. But neither of us- Well, I don't think either of us is happy with it. And to add another layer of complication, he's my boss at work and I'm pretty sure he's cheating with one of my colleagues, and we've tried for kids but it's never happened, and I don't know if I should suggest a divorce or...?

MARLEY - Okay, I have a few questions for you.

1. Are you happy?
2. Can you achieve happiness?
3. What's this colleague's name, and are you in a position to give them a talking- to?
4. If you got a divorce, who would take the house? Assuming you have one.

LEXANNE - Of course we have a house.

MARLEY - Of course, hey? Well good for you. Answer the questions.

LEXANNE - Well, no. I'm not happy. And I don't know if I can be happy in my immediate future, but I can't really break things off without seeming paranoid. He's good at covering things up. And besides, he would probably get the house. I've sort of got a fly-away fund going though, but actually leaving is just pipe dreams.

MARLEY - And look where pipe dreams have gotten me - Author of Snow White and The Seven Demons.

LEXANNE - I'm sorry, WHAT?!

MARLEY - No, I should be the one saying that. You mean to say you've never heard of the brilliant Terrible Tales and Tails series?

LEXANNE - Well, no. It sounds really... original, though.

MARLEY - Oh trust me, it is.

LEXANNE - I would've thought you'd be a psychologist or something though, given the way you've been questioning me.

MARLEY - I wish I were. It sure would pay better.

LEXANNE - Okay. So, can your pseudo-psychology tell me what to do?

MARLEY - Yup. You and me pool our savings, become friends again, and move to a small town. I have about 30 thou, what can you contribute?

LEXANNE - I've got maybe 400 thousand saved up?

MARLEY - WELL GEE

LEXANNE - Okay, we might have the finances, but how would it work? Are you saying I should break it off with him?

MARLEY - Yes. But it's your decision! Do you actually want to?

LEXANNE - Okay. Sure. I will. Give me a sec.
MARLEY - WAIT, YOU'RE DOING IT NOW????!!!

Lexanne exits out of Marley's conversation and calls Max. He answers, and we hear him shushing someone..

LEXANNE - Hi.

MAX - Oh, hey babe. You all right?

LEXANNE - Yeah. Who's that?

MAX - Nobody.

LEXANNE - We're breaking up.

MAX - I said, it's nobody! God! Why don't you trust me?!

LEXANNE - And I said, it's over. You can have the house, I'll stay at a hotel. Bye.

She hangs up and sits down on the bed, surprised. She falls backwards, smiling, and SCENE.

We're back at the wall with the old lady, and it pans out to show a framed book cover for Snow White and the Seven Demons, a menu for La Roma and business card for Maxwell Blume & Co. Secretarial Work. The old woman's breathing fills the room, raspy and rattling. A few loud beeps fill the room, and we pan into the last Polaroid.

It's a windy, crisp morning and the world

is saturated with springtime. Flowers are blooming as we see two old ladies on a park bench drinking hot chocolate. Lexanne tucks a cherry blossom behind Marley's ear.

MARLEY - It's pretty chilly this morning, hey?

LEXANNE - I want to tell you a profound thought I've had - It's cold as hell.

MARLEY - As for me, I'll be frank - I'm not exactly sweating.

They smile at each other, remembering how it all started. Music plays over the top, and SCENE.

Back in the wall room, we can finally see the whole picture. There's a painting of cherry trees and two ladies along with a pressed cherry blossom, and a photo of Lexanne in a black frame. The sun streams through a window, lighting up the dust particles. The room is silent - the breathing is ended. The machine's beeps have turned off. We zoom out, and SCENE.

Jo Gleeson
Haunted road
Acrylic on canvas

Gemma Dineen
They/Them

Jemima Hope
They're watching you
Acrylic on canvas

Jasmine Douglass

Devland Mansion

The curtains swayed in the breeze, a bolt of lightning hit somewhere out in the ocean and was followed by the haunting bellow of thunder. A small girl sat bolt upright in her bed, the silk pillow damp with sweat and tears. She rubbed her eyes and sniffled, she must've been having a nightmare. She looked up and around her room, the corners thick with shadows and her nightgown thrown over her velvet desk chair. She looked over at the window where the white curtains were still waving around. She slid out of bed and lightly stepped over to peer out over the short stretch of lawn, met by the edge of a cliff that dropped down into white waves, ready to consume lives. She tilted her head and tucked a lock of silver hair behind her ear, listening.

Beyond the sound of the crashing waves and the booms of thunder a small and hypnotizing voice called her name repeatedly. She shook her head and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, the small girl thought nothing of it and gently shut the window, the curtains went still. She turned around and yawned, stepping back over to climb into her large bed but the voice whispered in her ear again, she tried to shake it but an urge in her body pushed her towards the closed door of her bedroom. She let the impulse take over as she crept down the dark hall silently. She passed a guest room and heard the snore of a man, she winced as she stepped on a creaking floorboard, she stopped and darted to the twisting staircase, stopping before she descended and turned around, the snoring continued but a light from one of the rooms down near her own room flickered on and the door opened, the glow pouring out.

Her father looked towards the closed window at the end of the hall and then glanced down the other side where the staircase started. The girl ducked down and scampered down the flight of stairs, waiting at the bottom to hear if there were footsteps coming her way. There wasn't but she had stopped just in time to hear her father's worried voice call out; "Matilda?!"

She started back up the stairs to reassure him, but the urge pushed her back down and guided her through more halls towards the front door. She reached the huge oak doors and watched in awe and terror as the lock on the door became unlocked and creaked open. Outside the trees were bending at angles they shouldn't be, and the sky was jet black, not even the moon paved a path for her. She didn't need the moon, she started around the mansion until she came to an undercover passage and slipped through it, she passed by a small vegetable garden and further up a growing patch of roses, the thorns invisible with the lack of light.

She hurried to the back of the mansion, the whispers growing louder and louder with every step she took. "Matilda..." it cooed in her ear as she sprinted across the back lawn then it stopped, the wind stopped, the thunder stopped, the lightning stopped. Her heart was beating so hard in her chest she thought it was going to burst open. The silence seemed to stretch on for longer than it was and as she was about to turn around to retreat back to the mansion a shrill, whining noise bounced around her head like a hundred banshees were shrieking inside her. The world around her spun and she stumbled towards the edge, catching herself just before she fell. A gust of wind smacked against her and she staggered forwards. She pressed her palms against her temples to stop the noise and shrieked, hoping somebody would come and get her.

Then, just like that, the world went fuzzy then dim then just empty around young Matilda McConner.

33 years later

Two girls got out of a silver taxi in a large U-shaped loose gravel driveway. A bald man with a ginger beard stepped out of the driver's door and popped the boot open, the girls smiled and giggled as they hauled their suitcases out of it. They said their thanks and the man nodded, beaming and stepping back into his car, driving away. A girl with fair skin took a deep breath and sighed, "We're here Brooke! We're in Ireland!" She squealed and grinned like a child. Beside her a girl with slightly darker skin smiled, "Relax. That's why we're here, to chill. C'mon. Let's go in." They started up to the front door and glanced at each other. Brooklyn, the girl with the darker skin, lifted her clenched fist to knock but the door was thrown open by a middle-aged woman with red curls and icy blue eyes and a huge, toothy smile.

"Welcome, lasses, to Devland Mansion!" The girls looked at each other and laughed together, they were here! They followed the woman inside and looked around in awe at the stylish lobby. To their left three hallways led to somewhere within the mansion and to their right one hallway and a large lounging room with vending machines. "Enjoy it, lasses, this is the fanciest part of the mansion. Everywhere else ye go, it'll feel like a medieval fairytale." She winked and turned back around to guide them to the front desk. They dropped their bags at the desk and gently peeled off their gloves, unravelling the fury scarves from around their necks.

"It's so nice in here!" The girl with fair skin smiled, still looking around before skittering off to a table with lollies and chocolates set up.

"Don't mind her, she's just excited." Brooklyn smiled and dipped her head.

The woman looked up, a devilish smile on her face as she asked, "And ye're not?" Brooklyn shook her head quickly, "No, sorry. That's not what I meant. What I was saying is that she's more excited than me."

The curly haired woman chuckled, "Relax, I was just messing with ye. So, do ye ladies have a booking?" She opened a large book and began scribbling things into it as she flipped through the pages. "Ah, yes. Aria and Brooklyn Fitzgerald. We booked last month." She looked around, rubbing her hands together, Aria was out of sight. The lady made a humming noise and looked up, clicking the pen. "Ah! Right, well follow me." She bounced out from behind the desk and led them past the table full of sweets and into one of the halls.

Brooklyn looked around and jumped, "When did you get there, creep?"

She laughed as she looked at Aria. Her twin chuckled too but didn't answer, she just followed the lady to a set of stairs. Up they went onto another floor where there were yet more winding halls.

"This place is huge." Aria mumbled, looking up at the arched ceiling, Brooklyn followed her gaze and lifted her brows, the roof was decorated with pictures of old women and men around tables filled with food, some of the paintings were of ghosts and old Irish folklore.

"How long ago was this place built?" Brooklyn looked down to see the lady looking back at her over her shoulder.

"People believe it was built centuries ago, all we know is the owner turned this place into Devland Mansion over thirty years ago! Before it was Devland Mansion it was called McConner Mansion after the owner, Chuck McConner, and his family, his wife and his daughter." She shivered before continuing, "And even before that it was a castle! A castle with real royals that had real feasts and plotted real wars. Well, it only takes a wee glance at this place to know for yourself its origins. But do be warned lasses, this mansion has a dark past..." her expression was solemn, and her voice was dark and solid. Her face changed completely as she stopped at a doorway, her welcoming grin returned and her bubbly, Irish-accented voice had returned. "If ye girls need anything ask for Fiona Tuffin, that's me but my friends just call me Fiona. Have a lovely stay!"

She retreated down the halls and left the girls alone in a large room with a crackling blazing in the center of one of the walls.

"What did she mean, 'dark past'? Like... what kind of dark past?" Aria asked.

She's always been the curious one in the family. Brooklyn smiled to herself, then it faded, but curiosity killed the cat.

She shrugged, "Beats me. Hang on, can you open the door?" She asked as she began unpacking her suitcase, there was a banging at the door.

Aria skipped over to it and opened it with a curious, "Hello?"

A boy with light ginger hair rubbed his neck, glancing in. "Can I come in?"

Brooklyn looked up, Aria was frozen, eyes wide, mouth parted. It was obvious she was swooning over his thick Irish accent.

"Yep, come in. Aria let him in for god's sake." Aria stepped aside and watched him walk in.

"Rory. The name's Rory. And who might ye be?" He motioned to them both.

Of course, Aria was first to answer, "I'm Aria! This is my twin, Brooklyn." He smiled at her and fixed his eyes on Brooklyn unpacking.

"Did my aunty scare ye both? With that rubbish about Matilda McConner?"

Brooklyn looked up, eyes narrowed. Aria stepped back from him to Brook's side.

"No? She just said this place had a dark past. Who's Matilda? Is that Chuck's wife?" Brooklyn stood up.

He shook his head, "Ye're in for a story now, Matilda was Chuck's daughter, pretty little thing she was. She died around thirty years ago when she was only seven." He shook his head in sorrow. "Chuck was distraught, even more because nobody knows what happened to her. One minute she was alive on the side of the cliff, the next she was just gone."

Brooklyn scoffed, "Well isn't it obvious then? She fell."

Aria cast a glance at her out of the corner of her eye.

He shook his head again. "Not that easy lass. Nobody ever found her body, security cameras weren't the best and even then, they couldn't pick up any trace of her disappearance. Matilda's death is still a mystery, but don't let that stuff scare ye, this place has changed so much since then." He smiled.

Aria asked, "So is Chuck...?"

He quickly shook his head, "Chuck isn't dead, he still owns this place, but he hardly comes out of his office, that's why my aunty, Fiona, and I are helping him out." He got up and walked out, leaving them.

That night Brooklyn lay awake in bed, thinking about Matilda McConner's death. Was it an accident or was it murder? What happened to her that night? Is she just a missing kid? She shook the questions out of her head and turned over to face the window. Rory was just trying to make an impression on them, well he did. He made himself look like an absolute idiot. She got up and walked over to an open window, she closed it and turned to crawl back into bed but footsteps at the door dragged her attention to it.

She crept forwards and the footsteps faded, she clicked the door open and started after them. As she quickened so did the footsteps. She broke out into a jog and found herself in the lobby. The front door creaked open and the footsteps left the mansion, Brooklyn gasped, How?! Without hesitation she followed it out and the door slammed shut behind her. She jumped and squealed, the night was still, and the moon seemed close enough for her to touch it. She kept jogging until she came to a large tree. She heard something behind her and spun around, eyes wide in fear, she let out an ear-piercing scream, "ARIA!"

Hayley Robinson
I am a Believer
Digital photography

Gabe Holmes
Entropy
Acrylic

Emilia Belleggia
The tapper
Acrylic on board

Anna Dunnicliff-Wells

Some Unrelated Thoughts

1. On words
It's funny how
Once certain words
Are arranged in a certain order
It feels like they were meant to be
It was foretold they would become so
Now we have to hold them forever
Hold them together
Even though it would be so easy to let them fall
Land in a different order
Twist their meaning
Because all it takes is a second
And suddenly they mean so much to us

Suddenly we need them
Like the sky needs the stars
And the sea needs the waves
Like the birds need the sky
And never the cage
We never knew them before
But we can't imagine a world without them
anymore

2. Some more thoughts on words
The words melt my pain
Like a single burning flame
They thaw my frozen heart

I become lost in the words
Nothing else exists
And I do not know any pain

Then the book closes
The paper falls
And the spell is broken

Pain, reality, memories
Come flooding in
Smothering the flame

My heart is frozen once again
And there it shall stay until the end
Longing for a gentle flame
To come and wash away the pain

3. On the perception of this world
You close your eyes
And see a beautiful dream
Clear and perfect
Then you open them again
And everything is blurred
For you cannot see though the tears
Flooding your eyes
With sorrow and despair
Because this world is such an ugly place
It pains your eyes to see it
To look upon this world
Is to look upon hell

4. On the difference in opinions and perceptions
As you ran from your sins
To the end
You seemed insane
To all those who saw in
White and black
Not black and white

5. On life
Perhaps it would be better to burn
To touch the sun and the stars
To let our fingers run through the heat
Even if it burns us so
Perhaps it would be better to burn
To feel something
To go out in a ball of fire
Rather than to stay numb
On this
Cold
Dark
Lonely planet

6. On the illusion of beauty and power
Maybe you should have listened to Dionysius
When he told you beauty is a lie
And power is just a synonym for pain
Because here you are
Drowning in a pool of tears
But you can't move
Paralysed by pain
There's a sword hanging over you
It could drop at any time
Held by but the single hair
Of a tragic Trojan horse
And all the beauty is a lie
Nothing is as it seems

7. On society
The world's falling into shambles
You can hear it in the songs
Songs of the immortal gods

8. On the aftermath of wasted opportunities
You sit there on your throne
Of midnight blackened stone
Draped in all your glory
It drips from your fingers
Like sickly sweet honey
You sit there and watch it
Drip
Drip
Drip
Wasted.
You could have been so much more

9. On the wasted time
And if only I could
I would turn the clocks back
Just to lose the feeling
Of time slipping past
Pointlessly

10. On wanting
If wishes were fishes I would be drowning
In fact,

I would have drowned years ago

11. On the power of pain
Crushing dried yellow rose petals
With bloodstained fingertips
Pressing them in the dark bitumen
So that they disintegrate
Turn to dust
Leaving them strewn across the black like
Stars at night

The wind picks up
And the little yellow flecks
Dance in circles through your thoughts
Before flying off
Like birds in a storm
And you are left alone
Your fingertips bleeding red
Onto the rough black stones and tar
Calloused
For the fragile petals cannot protect your fingers
From darkness

12. On feeling broken
I'm sick
So sick
So terribly sick
But the doctor can't fix it
Because it's all in my head
And you can't put a band aid
On a thing you can't touch
For there's no blood
And no tears
And nothing to rust
I'm sick
So sick
So terribly sick

13. On struggles with learning an instrument
I'm scared
Because it's all going wrong
And my fingers could fly if I let them
But I'm terrified of what would happen if they did
What I could do
So I don't
I do nothing
Because that that way I will never be wrong
And I will never know what it is
To be right
But it's driving me insane I need to do something

Isaac Everett

Sonnet of Prospecting

A blind footstep into an outback scene:

A quaint terrain with pulse and life concealed,

To excavate and realise a dream,

Of golden veins still yet to be revealed.

With waves of sound washing over the reefs,

The quartz runs north, projecting on a plane.

As January's sun lends no relief,

The gilded trance disintegrates again.

But reckoning rewards the patient soul;

The soundwaves rise as earth is torn in joy.

Euphoric cries expel that weather toll,

As sunlight radiates this golden toy.

Discovery awaits persistent men,

For destiny returns to here knows when.

Natalie Davies Noulton

Untitled

Dooley Every

Participant RAW Arts Digital Media Award

The Great Emu War

Watch the video
www.bendigoregion.com.au/arts-culture-theatres/raw-arts-awards-2021

Jin Turpie

Participant RAW Arts Digital Media Award

Ocean adventure

Watch the video
www.bendigoregion.com.au/arts-culture-theatres/raw-arts-awards-2021

Ella Filsell

What it's like to be a female

Don't you wish we could all be kids again?
When smoking and drinking
Only made you wonder
What the hell are you thinking?
Where the only expectation on a body
Was that if it could run fast and jump high
And not have to worry
If it will satisfy
Before we knew we'd have to Fight tooth and nail
Before we knew
What it's like to be a female

When I look at myself in the mirror
I see everything I despise and more
I see the imperfections that scream at me
I see it all and I feel the war
To feel pretty is impossible
There is always something wrong Something that needs to be fixed
If only I could feel like I belong
You think it's a compliment
When you say I have a huge chest
What do you want me to say
Thank you I was blessed?
Hell no, if I flirt back
Smile and twirl my ponytail
Then I'm a slut or a whore
That's what it's like to be a female

When you comment on my stretch marks
Like I don't know that they're already there
Or you say
Eww is that underarm hair. Yes, sir, I am human
I can't ever be too the expectation That you hold to me
So I can be an attraction
I still don't get how you think that
Telling a girl to smile is in admiration
I don't like being told what to do
It's like you're asking for a castration
As soon as we become passionate or angry
We hear the tired, overused question
Is this all because of your period?
And you wonder why we talk about oppression
Our opinions never really matter
You just want to make us feel heard
So that the base you get to
Is at least third
And if you go far then
We better not tattle tale
Snitches get stitches or worse
That's what it's like to be a female

We fall for all your tricks and games
Because all we want is to feel wanted
We'll take anything
But all you do is leave us feeling haunted
We take it all too often
We know we do
We want to be loved
But all you want to do is screw
To people who treat us like this
Like we're emotionless objects
Make us feel special and tick all the boxes
But then you just move onto the next
Man and woman Male and female
We have more but always come second
That's what it's like to be a female

We are human too
We have the right to be treated as such
So for next time, promise me this
That you will think before you touch
That you will think before you say
That you will think before you do
I know you don't wonder this but
What if I was you?
Would you want to be in my position?
Every day the same expectations
No matter where you're from
It's the same in all nations
To you, I'm just repeating myself
You hear but will never listen
No matter what we do
We must keep the bad stuff hidden All we can ever do is
Inhale then exhale Remember this is
Just what it's like to be female.

Dylan Cotterill

Garou

Pencil on paper

Egg Barlow

Faerie ring

Posca pen (acrylic) on canvas

Beth Fowler

The Hunt

Chapter 1

The moonlight was shining through the trees, casting dark shadows around. We were hunting, our claws sinking into the mud. I could smell a possum, and as I lifted my nose to detect where it was, I heard a gunshot. I turned sharply towards my pack, silently signalling for them to run. There was the sound of pounding paws, as we ran through the trees. I tried to sniff out our home, but all I could smell was smoke. I skidded to halt on the wet grass and looked around. A black cloud of smoke was making its way towards the forest. I lead my pack in the opposite direction, towards the northern star, knowing that it would lead us out of the forest.

Once we were at the edge of the forest, I glanced around. It was like stepping into a battlefield. The sky was thick with black smoke, the ground scattered with embers and ash, a roaring fire surrounding the forest. I looked into the other wolves' eyes, a question burning inside me that I knew they were all thinking too. What do we do now?

Chapter 2

We wandered around the edge of the forest, looking for a route to get us through the fire. I spotted a gap in the blaze and started sprinting towards it. I jumped through the gap, and once on the other side, I counted each wolf as they jumped through. Daisy, Boulder, Pebbles, Lily, Quartz and Stone. I beckoned them towards the mountains, where I hoped to find food and shelter. We hiked up the steep stone and over the mountain. Snow and berries greeted us on the other side. We dug in, but something didn't feel right. There was a series of bangs and howls as bullets went flying over my head. We had been ambushed by the humans.

I looked at the men and ran to the bulkier of the lot. I grabbed his nose and he screamed and ran around but it just made me bite down harder. The rest of the pack followed, Daisy charging like a bull towards them. We had brought them down within ten minutes. "C'mon, let's get out of here before they wake up." We bounced through the thick snow towards the trees. We needed proper water. I stumbled through the snow, making my way to the shimmering glass I could see ahead. I looked down into the frozen lake's reflection. A golden face with blue eyes was staring back. "Fern! We found water!" Boulder was calling me over.

I trotted over and took a few large gulps. Once everyone had finished drinking, I led the way through the trees, stopping at every noise I heard, being sure that we weren't about to be ambushed again.

Chapter 3

"Hey! I found their tracks!" Soldier Jones was calling the troop over to the tracks.

"Are you sure these are wolf tracks?"

"Positive."

"Follow them! We can't fail boss now."

The soldiers marched alongside the tracks, turning left and right until they were in the cover of a forest.

"Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"I can hear a soft thudding noise." Slowly, each soldier turned towards the growing sound. Red dots were appearing in the darkness. Suddenly, Soldier Jones was flying through the air. One, two, three, four more soldiers went flying., all landing on top of one another on a frozen pond. A low, fast paced cracking noise was coming from beneath them. SPLASH! All the soldiers fell into the below freezing pond, turning blue and sinking to the bottom. Bye-bye soldiers.

Chapter 4

"Woo hoo!"

"Yay!"

"We did it!"

"Don't go lifting your tail too high, they probably have a boss." "Well? What are we waiting for? Let's get him!"

"Or her."

I sniffed one of the fallen soldier's caps.

"Smoke, gunpowder, blood. I got it."

"Typical soldier scent. Let's track that boss!"

We set off on our journey, travelling through blizzards, hail, rain and sunshine. By the time night had fallen, we were all very tired.

"Hey, what's that in the distance?" Lily had spotted a large hill surrounded by a fence ahead.

"And there are soldiers guarding the gate."

"Must be it then" We tip-toed around the fence towards the gate.

"Okay! Lily and Stone, you stay out here keeping guard. Boulder, Quartz, attack the soldiers when I say. Pebbles and Daisy, you sneak in with me. Is that clear?"

"Yes!"

"Okay, you two, ATTACK!!" Boulder and Quartz charged at the soldier guards, causing both soldiers to pass out. I ran through the gate, Pebbles, a crimson red wolf, and Daisy, a pure white wolf, close on my tail. I looked for the entrance, but all I could see was neat green grass and tall oak trees here and there. I decided to climb up the hill, searching for a trapdoor or window of some sort. Once we were nearly at the top, I spotted a metal lever.

"I found a lever," I whispered to my partners. I stalked over to it and pushed with all my might on the lever. As I listened for any clicks, Daisy jumped over to something.

"I think I found the trapdoor." One by one, we hopped through, landing on cold, concrete floor.

A cold, rasping voice sounded through the darkness.

"What do we have here? I've been waiting for my workers to retrieve you. I should've known they would fail me." A hooded figure appeared, not showing his face at all. He was holding a grapplehook and sword, and I immediately howled the emergency howl, hoping that the rest of my pack had heard me.

Chapter 5

A few moments later, I heard four thuds behind me.

"You found the boss?" "Yep."

Before we could do anything, the cloaked figure shot his grapplehook towards what looked like a control board, but on the roof. I realized what he was doing, but it was already too late. An explosion sounded from the opposite side of the base, but we had no means of escape. I looked around, searching for a rope or anything to get us back to the trap door. I found another grapplehook and pressed the button. It shot through the trapdoor and clinged on to the edge. I sent Daisy and Lily to climb up it first, then Boulder, Quartz and Pebbles. Once everyone was out, Stone and I started climbing up. I wriggled through the opening and stood with everyone else. Then, I realized Stone wasn't out yet. I looked down, but all I could see was smoke.

"Fern, we need to go!" "But what about Stone?"

"There's nothing we can do" I slowly edged away from the trapdoor, breaking into a run down the hill with everyone else. We kept running, until I caught the scent of the soldier's boss again.

"I am going to get that boss. No matter what. Stone didn't deserve to die. This is all because of the enemy. We will get him."

"Whatever it takes to get rid of the enemy, Fern. We will stick with you."

"I see him, over there!" We ran towards the hooded figure making its way towards the ocean. I jumped on top of him and pushed him into the water.

"Wait! I can't swim!" The boss was pleading for our help.

"Never. You did all this." And we walked away, back towards the snow-capped mountains, back to our home, if it wasn't destroyed. We reached the forest. I entered first. Smoke was still around, but the fire had been put out. I turned through some trees, and, at long last, I found our home. I howled for the others to come. We laid down, in the cover and protection of our home, stuffing our faces with berries and chicken.

"I never want to experience that again." And that was how our adventure ended.

"So, Uncle Boulder and Aunt Quartz took out those soldiers to get you guys through the gate?"

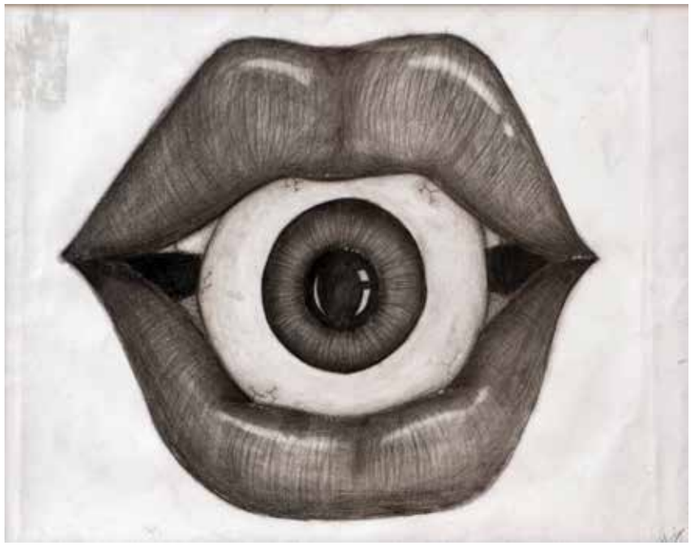
"Yep."

"Wow. So brave."

"Yes. Now it's time for you four to get to bed, you have a big day of learning to do tomorrow."

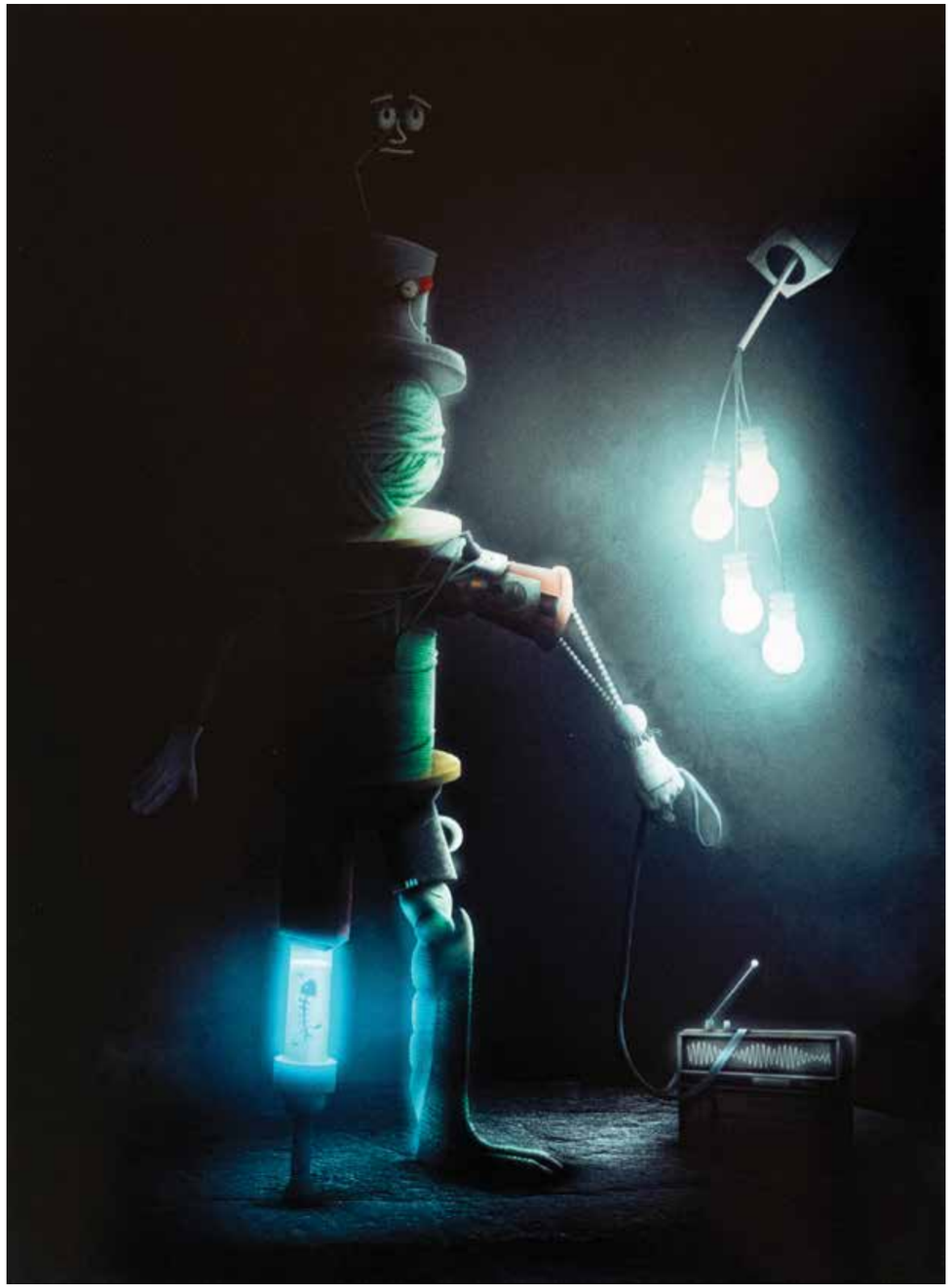
"Goodnight mum." "Goodnight Auntie Fern." "Goodnight you lot."

And that is the end of this story.



Megan Hooley
Watch Your Words
Charcoal

Mea Jennings
Be casual
Photography



Noah Dunstone
Oswald Altamont and his very own Pet Radio
Digital painting

Jo Grace

An Ordinary Day

Chapter 1

It was just an ordinary day in the arctic for Polar the polar bear. She woke up and sniffed the air.

"Nice day, but with a high chance of rain," she concluded.

She crawled out of her burrow and watched the sun rise over the mountains. Her friend, Ice, popped out to join her.

"Beautiful, isn't it," she murmured to Ice, "I watch it come up every morning."

Ice sighed.

"It would be more beautiful without that wobbly little silhouette on the horizon," she said.

Sir Penguin, the most pompous little brat you could ever imagine, was hobbling towards them. As usual, he was followed by a cohort of penguin guards and his penguin butler was close at his heel. He lived in Arctic Manor, the biggest house in the continent. Usually he was reasonable, but he could get very annoying.

"Lovely day isn't it my friends?" he called out to them.

Polar and Ice smiled and nodded.

"Would you like to come on my walk with me?" he asked, as he stopped at the foot of Polar's burrow.

"Sure, why not?" said Ice, clambering out of the burrow.

Polar hesitated.

"Well..." she said, as if thinking, "I did think it was going to rain today and that could lead to anything, maybe even a blizzard."

"Oh, come on Polar," huffed Sir Penguin, "it's only a quick walk."

"Um – well – OK," replied Polar.

So they set off. They walked and walked, Sir Penguin blabbering away about his big house and all his riches. So far it had indeed been a lovely day. They passed streets of igloos and shops. Sir Penguin stopped and bought some grilled fish for Polar, which was her favorite and some grilled fish for Ice and himself. They kept going. They reached the countryside, where Polar came to a sudden halt.

"I don't like the look of that sky," she said.

"Polar! I don't know what has gotten into you! Neil Armstrong never went around what iffing about anything, and look where it got him! Normally you're the daredevil!" cried Sir Penguin, looking haughtier than ever.

"Okay, okay, okay!" retorted Polar. "I'm just trying to keep us safe!"

"Huh!" snorted Sir Penguin, "safe, indeed!"

And with that he turned and started down the snowy country lane.

Ice hung back.

"I know he has all those guards," said Ice, "but he honestly needs someone else to protect him, especially when he's in a huff like that. You stay here, maybe look around the shops a bit. If it comes to it, I'll send out an SOS."

"Alright. But be quick and take care," replied Polar.

"I will." Ice laid her paw on Polar's, "I paw promise."

(As everyone knows, polar bears NEVER break their promises).

Polar smiled gratefully as she watched Ice hurry after Sir Penguin.

Fifteen minutes later, it started to snow.

Chapter 2
The Blizzard

Polar tried to comfort herself with the thought that Ice would have been able to convince Sir Penguin to turn back by now. It didn't help. She reminded herself that it wasn't snowing very heavily, not really, but the truth was it was turning into a storm. She paced up and down, becoming more and more agitated. It was growing darker and darker, which was unusual for this time of day and year. Poor Polar! This was worse than she had predicted. Wait! What was that flashing in the distance? Long flash – short flash – long flash. Long – short – long. Ice's SOS signal! She hesitated, then bounded out into the storm.

She went on and on, following the signal. The snow was falling so heavily she could barely see a metre ahead of her. She stopped walking after what seemed days, but was really only an hour. Curling up in the snow, she fell asleep exhausted.

Chapter 3
Swift the Seal

She woke up in a pile of snow. Not far off was another pile of snow. She crept cautiously over and who did she see? Ice, Sir Penguin and all the penguin guards and butler! Ice opened one eye and muttered sleepily.

"I knew you'd find us."

Polar grinned.

"You made it hard," she said.

They shook Sir Penguin awake and stood up.

Ice said, "Look! A water hole, frozen over, but we can break the ice and get some fish."

Polar and Ice walked over to take a look at the water hole. They scraped the snow away from the edges of it. It was much bigger than they had expected, so this took a while. All of a sudden, Polar cried out,

"Look, Ice! A seal coming towards us!"

Ice replied. "And there's something behind it – oh my goodness – A SHARK!"

Polar and Ice quickly cracked the ice covering the hole and pulled the gasping seal up onto the snow.

"Thank you – thanks," he said rather breathlessly.

"Who are you?" asked Ice.

"I am Swift the Seal" declared the seal. "And I would like to thank you for rescuing me."

"That's fine," replied Polar. "But I have a few questions."

"Fire away," said Swift breezily.

"Okay, question one: why was the shark chasing you? And question two: what is the shark's name?"

"Right, he was chasing me because he was starving and wanted to eat me and his name is Sharky," replied Swift.

Ice jumped into action.

"Right, you go get some fried and grilled fish, enough for one hungry shark and all of us," she said to the butler, who scurried off.

Polar bent over the water hole and shouted down. "Sharky! Don't worry, food is on the way. Just try to hold on 'till then, okay?"

Sharky bared his teeth in acknowledgement.

After about ten minutes the Penguin Butler came back, staggering under a ginormous pile of fish.

"The – fish – is – here," he gasped and dropped it on the ground. He promptly fell over.

"Thanks!" yelled Polar and Ice as they pushed the fish into the water. Sharky ate it all in one gulp and then smiled contentedly.

"Thanks," he sighed. "I'm sorry I chased you, Swift. Would you like to be friends again now? I flipper promise (and, as everyone knows, sharks NEVER break their promises) that I'll never eat another seal in my life."

"You bet," replied Swift and jumped into the water.

As they swam away Sharky shouted to Ice and Polar, "We shall meet again friends!"

Polar, Ice and Sir Penguin stood up.

"Well, we'd best be off too," said Sir Penguin.

"You're right," said Ice.

So the three friends set off down the snow road. Sir Penguin went to Polar's side.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you yesterday," he said.

Polar put her arm around him.

"It's ok. It sure was worth coming on this walk!"

Vanessa Campi
Dreamscape
Acrylic

Tyler Wilkie
Mind Over Body
Acrylic Paints, Markers, Paint Pens

Shay Wignall
Shadows
Photography

Sasha Stuchbree
Evening Glow
Photography

Samantha Johnson

Another Shot

"It's okay. Have another shot," my brother says, unreadable.

I intake a breath sharply, brushing a bead of sweat off my brow. I cusp my hands together, exhaling as I pull my hands apart, a flame forming between them. I retract my arms before quickly lurching forward, extending my hands outward. The flame shoots forward. It flies past the 50-metre mark and hits the target; dead, centre.
Shocked, I turn toward my brother, a nervous laugh escaping my lips. He's smiling, "you did it!" We both laugh, my heart beating hard in my ears.
"Thanks, Phoenix, you're a much better help than any of the real instructors here" "Don't worry, I know. Trust me I-
BANG
A gunshot. Through my target.
"I see you got the 50 metres down. A rather long effort, unfortunately." Flint, just great; ruining the moment as always.
"Back off Flint, don't you have better things to do than show off to Phia?" Nix says, playing the protective big brother.
"As a matter of fact, I do. Trust me, I don't want to be anywhere near Seraphina." He spits my name out like a curse, I swallow hard. "My presence has been requested by the leaders, a new mission I assume. If only they wanted you too, Seraphina." He pouts.
"Funny you mention that, Flint. Since Sera's finished her training, she's ready for her first task and I know that the both of you," he looks back at me, worried, "are working together."

Flint and I are the same age. We've lived our whole lives together, as have our families, for generations. Being a part of the only two fire sector families in Europe, our families have always been connected, but that doesn't mean they've ever been fond of each other. Flint and I were close as kids, I hate to admit. We were all each other had, being the youngest of all the elemental children. The years of training was tough on us. While I struggled through, Flint was a prodigy, maintaining complete control of his abilities. Slowly though, as 5 hours a week turned to 10 and then to 20; and our smiling innocent faces turned to that of soldiers, Flint snapped. After probably a year of hardly speaking, snide remarks and toxic training sessions, one day he pulled me aside. Although I was quickly growing resentment toward him and his treatment of me, a part of me hoped at that moment, he was ready to rekindle things and move past our family's hatred for each other. But that was foolish.
Because that is not at all, what happened.

Working, together? My breathing grows heavy. Since the aforementioned incident, our families had done everything in their power to keep the two of us apart. Why would that change now?
"What!?" Flint and I exclaim at the same moment, we lock eyes but I quickly tear away.
I grab Nix by the cuff of his shirt and pull him away and out of sight, whispering I say "what the hell! This is ridiculous! How do they expect us to work together?" I step back my arms raised, hands on top of my head, frustrated.
"Exactly that. They think you'll be a good pairing, sync well just like you used to!" Nix's voice rising.
"It has been years since then. How do we know he won't pull another stunt out on the field, alone with me?" I turn to face Phoenix, he's looking towards where we left Flint, deep in thought.
"I never thought I'd say this, but I think a lot of your fallout with Flint was due to brainwashing from his family. You know how stressful it was! Every meeting, ball and gala, anytime we were all together. Who knows what they fed him about us? Our parents weren't exactly hospitable either. They've put you on this mission. I think it will be safe."
What?
I'd never thought about any of it like that before. I was so blinded by betrayal and hatred at not only him but at the situation, I'd never considered he was feeling the same as, well... me. I heard many stories about Flint's family and the years of feuding. It was never exactly easy to ignore and not feel like I was doing something wrong; being good friends with him.
"I... I never thought of it that way."
In the moment of silence, I feel the world weigh down on me and a single tear form in my left eye. I hadn't ever cried since the incident. Frankly, I hadn't been able to.
In that rare instant of vulnerability, I quickly throw myself into Nix's arms. I feel him tense up. I hadn't hugged him in, what, years?
"You're strong," he starts, I look away and frown to myself. "You are your own worst enemy, if you stop holding yourself back you'll do great things, Seraphina." I meet his eye and at that moment, I believe him.

The trolley car rumbles as it bustles through the winsome streets of Paris. My hands are clasped together in my lap, Flint lounges nonchalantly next to me, novel in hand.
"Cut it out," he hisses, not looking up from his book.
"Excuse me?" He sighs and signals with the book to my leg, bouncing up and down. How long has it been doing that? I stop, sigh and smooth out my skirt. I turn myself to face the window but hesitate, "nice glasses," I fire at him. He was wearing round, black-framed reading glasses I'd never seen before.
"Don't try and flatter me. I know what you really think." He adjusts his hair. "Those things look stupid." Lie, they look great. He chuckles.
"Was that a laugh?" I taunt.
'Why are you playing nice?'
That was not me in my head just now, what the hell?
Flint leans in next to my ear, I inhale sharply. He whispers, "that was me, dear. And thanks for the compliment, they do look 'great.'
I shoot straight up from my seat, "I'll be in the bathroom."
'Don't hurry back,' how is he doing that!?
As I dash away my head buzzes with a million thoughts. Why did I ever think I could be nice to him? I can't believe I ever thought I'd beat him, 'nice glasses,' I'm so thick! He's always going to win, ever since that day three years ago he-
Wait.
You are your own worst enemy.
Get a hold of yourself Phia.
Flint avoids my eyes as I sit back down, a smirk on my face as I look out the window.
'You have no power over me.' I know he heard that.
'Is that so?' I can hear the arrogance in his own thoughts. I turn and look him square in the eye.
"Yes."
I'm back in control.

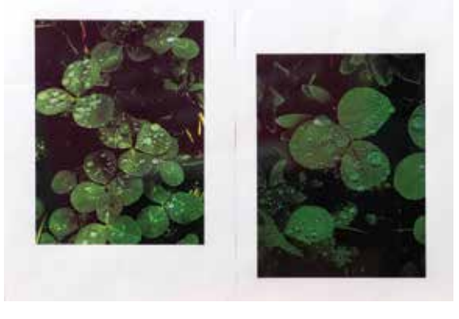
My interactions with Flint over the next few weeks stayed much the same, brief and bitter. We're working undercover to locate and eliminate the sector's Shadows. The Shadows are our societies enemies, corrupted people, in possession of dark magic. Their numbers continue to increase and just like us, they're hard to find. We'd located our targets. The next course of action, taking them out. If they don't get us first.

You are your own worst enemy, runs in my head endlessly as my partner and I ride the lift to the peak of the highrise building
"Don't mess this up," Flint chimes coldly.
'Who do you think I am?'
"Can't do me the decency of speaking like a normal person?" He crosses his arms. "You started it," I adopt a cold tone of my own.
"I was only trying to highlight," he trails off. 'This bond of ours' echoes in my mind, "to piss you off."
I laugh, he smirks at me. "Bond? You wish!" The elevator door opens, we're at the peak, we walk to the ledge and ponder over the city skyline.
"You don't know?" I don't respond, awaiting an explanation. "Well, Phia." Flint saying my nickname send my thoughts spiralling back to that day, three years ago. I dart my gaze to the floor.
"Funny you think of that day, Phia. That's what started this." He uses his finger to gesture between us.
'For me to be able to do this,' he picks up normal speech, "a bond is required. A strong bond. Happened after the incident, as you like to call it."
He's been listening that long? What else does he know?
"I know everything, Seraphina." He says my name gently that time. I've never heard a note of sincerity from Flint, ever.
There is no way. All this time, I was enraged for nothing more than what transpired that day and now I know he's been imposing on my thoughts, all these years? And to think I felt sorry for him.
Sick.
"What is wrong with you?" A hint of remorse flashes over Flint's face, his composed exterior is slipping tonight. But before he can say anything, the elevator opens again.
They're here, the shadows.

A battle ensues but I can't think straight, I can't focus and neither can Flint. We're losing, taking a beating; a bad one. A fight between darkness and fire. I watch as the years of training, blood, sweat and tears go to waste. Flint slams into the ground and doesn't get up.
'You are your own worst enemy,' I recall.
I never should've let my emotions get the best of me. I never should've given Flint so much power over me. When you're bred to be a soldier, passion is the villain.
My brother told me I'll do great things so that's exactly what I do.
I don't hold myself back.
Even without him by my side, I conquer, like I always knew I could. I back the opposition to the corner, gun in hand. A smirk twitches on my lips.
BANG.
Miss. They evaporate before my eyes. They appear behind Flint and snatch him by the collar, his arms flare-up in black flames.
He's being corrupted.
"Surrender and we'll spare him," the taller man says.
"Why don't I just kill you?" I threaten.
They chuckle.
The gun falls. A flame is conjured, fire whips form

from my fingertips. They lunge back and I strike forward. The momentary combat is paused by Flint seizing my focus. He's going to become one of them, he's going to die! I can't surrender him.
Is my enemy, my nemesis, the antagonist about to make me sacrifice the mission?
Yes.
When your whole life has been consumed with one person you quickly realise the fine line between hate and love.
But, I've spent my whole life preparing to eliminate darkness! How can I just give up on my life's work?
But Flint inhabited every thought... I cannot live without that. 'Thanks for the compliment.'
He heard me! He's ok!
Suddenly a wave of strength washes over me and with little more than the crack of a whip, the shorter shadow is out of the running.
'You're so close.' Flint guides.

"I didn't think you had it in you, Piccola Fiamma."
He let's go of Flint. We begin to circle each other, preparing for a duel.
"You underestimate me, Uomo Ombra." He finds this amusing.
'Good thing we attended all those Italian Earth Banquets.'
I smile to myself, not very helpful input from Flint, but he's right. I've got 'Ombra' distracted.
"Mi arrendo a te," a final bluff. I kneel down to display defeat. He lowers his arms, I snatch the gun and;
BANG
Shot in the leg.
"Buon lavoro, Piccola Fiamma. But you are indeed foolish. We now know the location of the fire sector. My business is done, finish the job already."
"Shit." Flint and I think in unison.
Flint is released from his corruption. He rushes to my side, "any final words?" He asks his captor. "See you in London."
Flint places his hand reassuringly on my shoulder and says, "it's okay. Have another shot."



Haylee Jack
The Tribute
Photography

Talia Kellett

;

Flying through skies, your wings wave in the gales;
You're a bird, soaring through the midnight blue
Surviving all seasons, although travail,
Unnoticed to those who're all around you

You're irrelevant and small to the Earth,
No purpose, only feeling and flying;
No part in the grand scheme of things, no worth,
But you keep your head high and keep gliding.

Just keep on living, fly through the bright skies,
Feel so lucky that you are where you are
All around is nature, lovely and wise
You're unique, you're a delight, you're a star

Remember you're strong and always in flight
Fly high, don't concede, and don't lose your fight

Tayla Flett
Ruined Summer
Digital art - Photoshop

Ryan and Skye McPartlane

Participants RAW Arts Performing Arts Award
Music

Hi, I'm Ryan and I'm 12 years old. My little sister, Skye, is 9 years old. I'm currently in the Academy of Creative Arts in year 7 at Bendigo South East College: ACA Band and Singing Workshops after school and before school, 3 days a week. Skye is taking singing lessons at Kennington Primary School and is also taking musical theatre classes with Start Studio.

We have been performing together for several years at school functions and community events such as: Pay it Forward Festival (Mornington Peninsula) and our school's market events. In 2020, I was Mornington Park Primary School's Music Captain.

I love playing guitar because I like learning new songs. It makes me happy when I am able to play a song in the correct way. My dream as a musician would be to tour around the world displaying my music to others.

I've always felt a connection when I sing with my little sister and we naturally harmonise.

Rosalind Porter

Participant RAW Arts Performing Arts Award
Drama

Hi, I'm Rosalind Porter. I began singing and acting when I was in Canberra and was part of the school choir there and got to be part of the Wakakirri Story-Dance festival. Last year I moved to Bendigo and for a year and a half now I have been a part of the Academy of Creative Arts program at Bendigo South East College.

At BSE, I am in the Drama field and it has helped me develop my acting skills. I've really appreciated the training from professionals such as the director of the Bendigo Theatre Company. As well as improving my acting skills, being part of the drama field has helped me become more comfortable with my surroundings.

I am really passionate about the ACA because, in addition to the art skills they teach, the arts help develop a lot of other skills we need at school.

Last year I was going to be part of a local drama production, which was unfortunately cancelled

due to COVID-19. I haven't done much else but I am hoping that one day I will be able to go to college and pursue my dream to become an actor.

For my RAW application I submitted a monologue from the movie 'Passion.' It took me a while to think of what to do but when I saw this scene I knew I had to do it. I performed it in front of some friends and it almost made them cry, so I knew that it must have been good.

Maggie Alice Pratt-White

Participant RAW Arts Performing Arts Award

Dance

I began my dance journey eleven years ago, starting with traditional ballet, jazz and tap at Sharon Saunders. I joined Roz Avent's school and discovered creative dance. I explored creative, ballet, lyrical and contemporary styles further with Seven Turns Dance Collective, Transit Dance, Bendigo Ballet Company and Yellow Wheel Dance Company. Throughout this journey I found my passion for the art of dance and expression.

My dance teaching experience began as an assistant in various classes at Seven Turns Dance Collective and E. motion.21. It is there that I gained the confidence to hold the space for young people with various needs, developed my own teaching style and philosophy and realised the joy of connecting and sharing dance with people.

I began Sunflower Dancers to share my love of lyrical dance. The vision for Sunflower Dancers is to create a space for people to flourish as dancers and as people. We seek to achieve this by offering

opportunities for self-expression and enjoyment of individual development through movement.

My goal is to continue advancing and expanding upon these ideas through dance and spoken poetry, connecting words and movement together for greater capacity of expression. I hope to make a positive impact on people and impart a different way of perceiving expression, communication and art.

Alia Melgin-Hill

The River of Ardour

Prologue

We as humans are limited by our resources. Matter cannot be created nor destroyed, only turned from one object, item or entity into another. Our endless possibilities are resolved to realistic figures, feasible in nature despite our creative conscience. However, being susceptible to limited resources did not scare us to waste them. One of these resources we wasted as we did not see its value until we needed it the most. It was our most precious resource, yet we treated it as our least.

Water. We thought it would never run dry.

Our rivers infested with chemicals, our oceans plagued with plastics, our reservoirs dried to the bone. Only when no water ran from our faucets did we stop to think. We need it.

Our plastics, our fires fuelled by fossils, our ravage ways of farming. No water. Ten Billion human beings. One Earth.

A balance was upset; destruction of the plants, animals and the ratio of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere upset the cycle of climate. Summer scorched the naked lands stripped bare by deforestation. Unpredictable cycles of heat ruled the lands for days, evaporating the water that lay in the open. Fires burnt through the countryside, not caring who or what it devoured. The smoke from the fires laid dormant when wind was not present. Once the heat wave had moved on, a vast rain would hail upon us, causing flash flooding that moved entire landscapes across the country and would then disappear into the ocean or dry earth.

The people with limitless pools of credit purchased large portions of water before the crises began. They knew the value of this resource and wasted no time. Reselling it to the vulnerable, they turned a huge profit on the changing demands for Water. These exposed citizens fought tooth and claw with many others just to buy even a single drop before it emptied their pockets and left them on death's doors. This jump in price saw water make a new record in the commodity listing across the world. Any company that desalinated water or owned large portions of it increased ten thousand-fold. The crises weakened our population to one billion in three years and the economy crashed along with society.

Chapter 1

A Sun Sets, A Moon Rises

I lean against my balcony and soak in the morning sun. My eyes closed, I smell the wind, its fresh, cool fingers brush past my face. I open my eyes. The lush, dense forest enlightens my pupils with green. A small yellow and black bird perches on the rail next to me. It doesn't notice my presence and chimes to its friends who fly over and line up next to it. I watch as they make a ruckus of noise, talking about the fresh morning. Then with the next gust of wind they fly together over the house.

It is the year 2106, 50 years since the Water crises.

I walk down the stairs and into the bathroom, I grace myself in the mirror as I pass. I step into the shower and the water starts to rain from the shower head. I cup it in my hands. To think this is the most valuable resource in the world.

I step closer to the flow of water to wash my body. I close my eyes in the water and focus on the streams starting at the top of my head and falling all the way to my feet yet remaining in contact with my skin the entire journey. Each drop is slowed. I reach over to the platform on the wall and grasp the shampoo bottle lightly with my fingers and pull it towards my chest.

I turn it upside down and squeeze the shampoo from the tube. We sucked every drop from every bore hole on Earth.

I start to massage it into my hair, careful not to get it in my eyes. Then I rinse.

And the water we did recycle was contaminated by industries and not fit for consumption.

I watched the dirty water spiral down the bronze drain that was shaped like a wyvern encircling itself.

I step out of the shower and grab one of the white towels under the basin. I pat my face with it and then dry the rest of my body. I feel a pair of warm hands start from my lower back and work their way to the front of my lower chest.

"Good morning." Its sweet but soft. I tilt my head to the side to get a glimpse in the mirror above the vanities.

"Good morning Connor." I smile with my whole face as he kisses me on the shoulder. It's warm.

"And what is planned for your day," he spins me around and kisses my hand as if he was a knight from the medieval era. "My lady." I can't help but giggle.

I lay my arms loosely over his shoulders and lean onto him, "Oh, just the coding of life itself." I give him a smile and then go in for a kiss. He grabs my hips and lifts me into the air. In the next instant I'm on my back in the middle of our bed. At this point I'm surprised my towel hasn't fallen down.

"Maybe I can study you instead." He plants kisses all along my neck, I'm starting to feel ticklish. I touch his face with my hand and draw his attention away from my neck and to my face, my eyes.

"Connor." I want to stay, kiss him ten thousand times and make love to him, but with such a busy life... "I have to go."

Connor leans back and sits on the bed. His sudden sorrow hurts but we must continue to work to live here. There is no real life outside the Valledor River.

I stand up and offer him a hand. He looks back at me, a small smile starts to grow on his face. I help him up.

"You need to get ready for work as well you know." I throw a blue collared shirt at him and it drapes over his head.

Connor peaks from under it "I wish we could just live freely."

"This is as close to freedom as we will ever get, we have a blue sky and the luxury of green grass and fresh water. Remember those who aren't as lucky in the cities." I look down at my hand and at the scars on my wrist.

***

"Miss Etherton, I'm sure no work of yours will be done today." I'm staring at the scars patterned on my wrist again. I bring my palm to my forehead and rotate my head slightly to Catherin. I look at her with half an eye.

"I am not feeling well today." Physically I feel fine, mentally I am not.

Catherin rolls a chair over to my desk and sits down.

"Miss Etherton," She leans into whisper, "You are on the verge of a breakthrough. Something even the White Gold Citadel would be amazed of. You best achieve the highest quality of work, so you can have meaning for your life."

Catherin turns the chair and walks off to her office.

She said the White Gold Citadel would be amazed. I look up at my cell dishes.

The next week I spent sleeplessly mixing samples, watching, waiting, looking at them under a microscope. I repeated this. I repeated it, I repeated it, I repeated it. I held my final sample dish up to the light. It's finally right. The one. I place it in an incubator and leave work to return home.

I unlock the front door with my fingerprint. The moon's bright full light is eclipsed by the White Gold Citadel.

Some say that goddess tied strings between the heavens and that the fortress so it may float. To uphold life. Some say Lady Valledor is a goddess herself and that citadel is her heaven so she may retain close to Earth to watch over us.

I crawl into bed next to Connor. I cuddle up to his warm body and shut my eyes for the first time in so long. It's dark.

I open them to the light. No Connor. Just empty white transparent sheets. I touch where he once laid. It's cold.

I look into the light. How long has it been? A week? A month?

"Miss Grace Illya Etherton." My eyes widen at his voice. I turn and sit up graciously. Connor gets down on one knee. "Will you marry me." His words in my head are slowed.

His eyes sparkle like due on the grass of a morning's frost. He holds out a collection of five rose gold rings. Each bending to the will of the middle ring that bears a pear cut moonstone at its centre. Fresh water pearls and diamonds line the others in ways that are indescribable to any reader. It is beautiful. I shed a tear.

I start to cry, weep like a child, a baby. Connor holds me.

"I'm sorry." In between bursts of sobs I repeat it. "I'm so sorry Connor."

"I though in old customs it was either a yes or no?" I stop the uncontrollable whimper and look at him seriously.

"But I abandoned you, neglected you, for a while."

"That itself, is what made me want to marry you. I know what it is like to be with you, and I now know what it is like to be without you. Grace. I love you."

I embrace him and he embraces me.

"I love you."

***

A setting sun falls upon the valley. A double knock sounds at the door. Connor attends the required attention. I hear the door close and footsteps walk towards me.

He hands me an envelope, off white with a large red wax stamp to seal its contents. The stamp embodies a picture of a serpent eating its tail. In the middle is a tree. I open the letter and read through it quickly. I stop at the word tomorrow.

"Read this please. I cannot make sense of it." I hand him the letter as though I don't want to read it, and I don't.

"Dear Grace Illya Etherton, I wish to humbly welcome you to the White Gold Citadel due to your extraordinary efforts in the field. I forebode your talents will become of great use to me in the future to come. I shall come to see you in person tomorrow. Kind regards, Lady Valledor." He looks down at me and is about to jump "This is exciting, is it not?"

I juggle the contents of this letter in my mind. Should I be excited, I'm not sure.

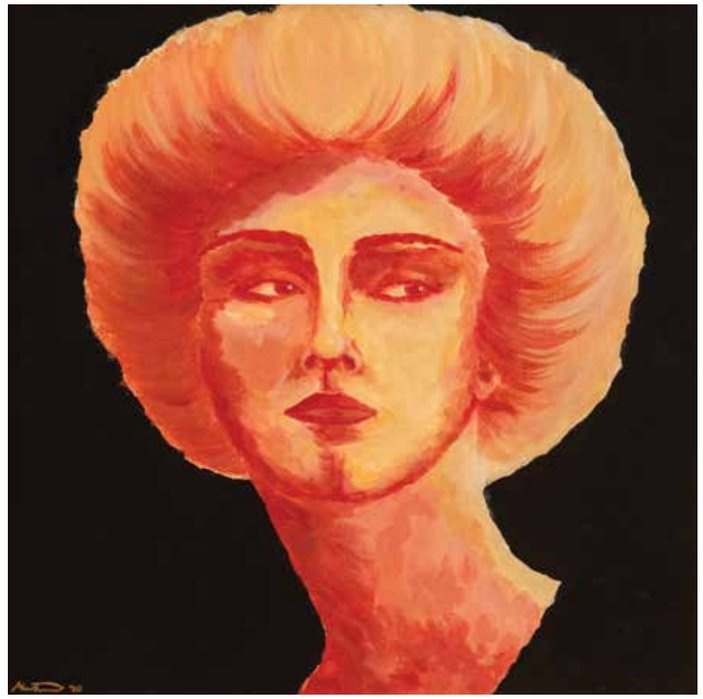
"Lady Valledor is coming to see me tomorrow and I need to pack my belongings." I look up at Connor. "If I do that then I'll leave you here. Alone." I look back at the fire in the hearth.

Connor picks up both of my hands, then pulls me to my feet and holds me tight.

"I know."

Matthew Boromeo
Kakashi sketch

Michael Watson
Chiaroscuro self-portrait from life
Oil on belgian linen



Melanie Thoren
Gibson Girl
Acrylic on canvas

Teaghan Perryman

Hunger

The city was leeched of colour. It was a hollow grey from its dark asphalt to its looming towers, and grey was the haze that settled over the city in the overcast light. It was a rancid packed sandwich of straight lines and angles, loud, with machines blaring and people bustling.

The boy was made of this city with skin a pale shade of marble and features inked in black tar. He was the illusion of dapper with a well-made coat. The long black sheath had been remade and made again and sat centimetres too short at the cuffs.

He had an uneven gait, favouring the left and leaned on a too-short cane to navigate his way around the city. Though perhaps 'navigate' wasn't the word, a person doesn't require navigation to move from room to room within their household. He moved with the same purpose and ownership that anyone would transition from bedroom to loungeroom or get milk from their fridge.

Passing construction, Sebastian kicked a stone along the footpath. It was an hour after school, and he could see parents at steering wheels chatting to their children within the cabs of their cars. Their commutes would be taking them home or to baseball practice or ballet... Sebastian dusted himself off, eyeing construction workers with disdain. He may have been one of those children behind tinted windows at a time—but no longer. This city was his home, his crutch the only thing holding him up.

With a slight lean on his cane, walking tall, he continued on the pavement. People would watch as he limped by, but a severe and narrow look held them at bay. Their pity was unneeded.

The sudden squealing of wheels halted him on his mission. Pitying glances found new spectacle as the streets sounded horns, and across his path slinked a black-something.

Sebastian faltered, his asphalt eyes catching the shadowy blur. He paid the ensuing road-by shouting no mind, as he deterred from his path and followed the blur towards an alley.

Like most of the city, the alley had an unforgivable smell and its walls on either side climb endlessly upwards, slicing the sky from view.

In the shadow of a dumpster flashed a pair of feline, green eyes. Behind Sebastian, the pedestrians were more preoccupied with the dented cars than the accident's cause. Though it pained him, the boy kneeled to the cat and showed it his gloved hands in an unthreatening gesture. He stayed there for a minute with the cat watching before she decided the dark-clad stranger wasn't any danger to her.

The stray came into the light cautiously, and Sebastian offered her his palm. She smelt the leather of his worn glove before she pressed her cheek to it. She was gangly, her fur was oily, and she supported battle scars from her life on the streets but showed no signs of a car injury.

Battered, unwanted and forgotten. Sebastian ran a hand over the cat's back, feeling every bone in her spine, and she meowed to him. Sebastian understood that hunger. He used his cane to right himself, shifting towards the dumpster. After a moment's perusal, he pulled a container of Chinese food from the offensive pile and left it on the alley floor as an offering.

Sebastian limped for the roadway once more, sparing one last look at the stray chowing down on old noodles. "Things are going to change around here," his voice was a low rasp, the sound of scraping pavement, "when I own this city."

Emerald eyes followed Sebastian's journey from the mouth of the alley. An un-feline smile cracked black lips punctuated by sharp white canines. "And so it shall."

Rosalind Porter

Depression

I'm surrounded by people
But it feels like I'm alone
This place I spend all my time in
Doesn't feel like home
I feel trapped in the middle of nowhere
I feel like I'm stuck in the abyss
Every time I make a move
I keep asking myself
Why am I doing this

Every day gets a little harder
Trying to figure out who I am
I feel like I'm driving on a road
And I'm stuck in a traffic jam
I look at myself in the mirror
And try not to cry
As I pick out all of my flaws and ask myself
Who am I

I have friends, but I'm alone
I'm bored but I'm busy
I'm alive but I'm dead
I'm fine but I'm dizzy
All these things keep popping out at me
One more thing and I'll be gone
And I just wish that I knew
What was going on

A second feels like a minute
A minute feels like an hour
I feel like I'm villain
And I'm slowly losing all my power
I try not to cry
I try not to drop
Down on my knees When will this stop
I keep walking down this path
A path that never ends
I keep walking and walking I wish that I had friends
Friends who could lift me up when I'm done
Friends who could help me keep going

When will this path end
Where am I going

I am depressed
I am sad
My heart hurts
I always feel bad
I pretend to be sick
But I just don't want to go to school I pretend to be happy
Why is this world so cruel

Maggie Alice Pratt-White

Flower Contemplation

Part I: Buried

What are you buried underneath?
Each tiny piece of soil falling across your back,
A fragile spine with suffocated lungs.

Internal bleeding, quiet
ebbing from your broken heart held in your chest
crushing air as it attempts to enter.

Every tiny nerve feeling the weight,
Biting rocks with your molars to grind them down,
Each emotion and feeling piling on top of each other like paper on a busy desk.

They trap you inside
your beautiful mind turning irrelevant,
Contemplating the events leading to your arrival.

Remember the sunshine disguise attempts to emulate the rose without success,
Are you really buried?

Part II: Moss

The moss grew over me covering my body,
Every finger covered devouring each limb.

Wriggle through the skin,
Cuddle up to the organs,
Unlace and fill my lungs,
Unbutton my ribcage.

The moss proves I'm human
Replacing my heart and refilling my torso,
Maybe trying to protect me
before I can be watered by something different.

Now flowers sprout through breaking the surface of the moss,
Slowly crumbling off my body,
no longer flowerless.

Part III: Planted

Dirt piled on top of you
thrown with shovels and gloved hands,
A scary and dark place absorbing saturated light.

Claws and horns you say I've grown you don't think I look human anymore,
An artificial rose girl fit perfectly into vases,
But after a while I didn't have any more for you.

I will try to be someone you like,
But don't paint me in horns and scales
they were never meant for me,
Is it unusual to be so mean?

Don't walk over my green what would you achieve?
Falling for my sunshine disguise,
I know you miss me.

I poured my blood
into some else's heart
donating affection until fulfilled,
But still had enough to hurt afterwards.

Locked inside bones of walls
that must be how the flower feels,
Be careful of your white shirts
they don't hide stains very well.

The blood from your broken heart will drop to the floor
melting off you like a saturated sun
soaking the sheets until seen.

It's probably worth remembering,
I'll help you wash those clothes the stained shirts and tissues,
Buying new ones for you.

Allow your old petals to shed,
Water your wounds,
My dear you were not buried,
You were planted.

Olivia Rogister

My Thoughts

It burns like a wildfire
Burning all over my body
I'm trapped
There is no escape
I'm trapped like in a prison cell
As the fire turns into hellfire It burns
Trying to take me to hell
Trying to put me out of my misery
Then in agony
But guess what I'm already there

Kayla Barnfield

Werecat

Levity Camilleri

Heads On Pikes
Grey lead pencil

Madelyn Sturt

Wishing Well

Elle
I was in the bathroom Zach was banging on the door and saying in a calm voice "Elle, Corbyn is ready to go if you are. Do you still want to go on the date?"

I went to the door, unlocked it and sat by the ledge of the bathtub and Zach stepped in.

"Well, honestly, yes I do but my heart is still set on Corey."

"Elle you know he's gone there's nothing you can do about it."

I rested my head on his shoulder and sighed, "I wish it never happened. He did not deserve it. Everyone liked him."

"I know everyone thinks that not just you...So are you still up for the date with Corbyn?"

"Can you tell him that I'll be out in a few minutes?"

"Okay-" he stood up, walked out and shouted while looking up at the roof. "The date must go on!" I thought in my head while giggling, 'damn Zach makes me laugh.'

I finished getting ready. My outfit was a black dress with straps going over my shoulders. It had a split just below my knee. I had a belt just above my waist that had black sparkles, I pulled on black high heels and took my little white and black purse. I walked out to the kitchen to see where Corbyn was. I looked around and could not see him. Daniel was there but Corbyn was not. "Hey, Daniel?" I asked sounding confused.
"Yes, Elle?"
"Where's Corbyn?"
"Corbyn? He's right behind you." I turned around and there was Corbyn. He was in a cute navy suit that showed his muscles. His brown hair was to one side, he had obviously polished his black, narrow shoes. I stood there looking astonished. I could not believe how good looking he was.

Corbyn
"Daniel, do you know what's taking Elle so long?"
"Corbyn listen to me...she's probably nervous. She probably thinks that she doesn't look good, or she just thinks that you will look much better."
"Okay, thanks."
"No worries!"
I keep thinking that Elle does not want to be with me. I started pacing around the room then Zach walks out of the bathroom yelling, "The date must go on."
I walked straight over to him.
"So, is Elle still going on the date? Is she still into me? Is she confused? Did I say something wrong? Did you say something wrong?"
"Woah, Corbyn slow down. Listen, Elle is okay she still has her heart and mind on Corey. She's getting ready now, so you better get your shoes on."
"Thanks so much, Zach, you really do come in handy at times."
"All good, now go!"

Elle
Corbyn somehow managed to get us a fancy car. I am pretty sure it was a Ferrari. I leaned over to Corbyn and asked, "So where'd you get this car?"
"In the middle of space!"
"Oh, really so you went to space and back in what three hours?"
"Yeah ... I used my magical powers."
"Wow, my boyfriend is superman, and he went to space and back in three hours to get a pink car just for our date."
"Okay, that sounds way too awkward I got it from an old friend of mine."
"Okay, good because I'd be worried if that was the case."
Corbyn took me to a fancy place that I had no idea what the name was. Anyway, we both ordered our food. I ordered some steak, salad and a Pinot Noir. Corbyn ordered smoked salmon with the side of garlic roasted veggies paired with Sauvignon Blanc.

Corbyn
About two days ago I decided to get a fancy car just for Elle and me. It took a while for me to convince my old mate Levi. I tried everything like:
"Come on Levi I just need it for one-day, that's all please."
"I just don't know I got it the other day."
"Surely you have another car I can borrow."
"Well yes there is one. But the only thing is...it's pink."
"What coloured type of pink are we talking about?"
"A light pink one...It's the only Ferrari I will let you lend because my ex gave it to me so yeah."
"All right that's a deal, and I promise I won't scratch it or break it or do anything bad."
"Okay good because if you do you are dead meat."
"Okay, thanks and I promise."
So, I got the car from Levi and took it to Elle's place and then now we are here. I did not know what to get. It looked all so good on the menu. I could not decide between smoked salmon and Mediterranean Shrimp Kabobs. I kept getting memory flashbacks of me and Corey at a wishing well. This wishing well is not the same as any other ones. Corey's dad especially made it for him and his siblings. I used to go out there every single Friday night and drink some alcohol. It always meant something to me. Since Corey passed, I have not been there. I think I am going to stop by there with Elle.

Elle
"Oh my god, I'm so full...How was your smoked salmon?"
"It was delightful...Are you still up for dessert? I mean I am... You can never skip dessert."
"Well, I don't know, the steak was too good and filling. But I will share one with you."
"Well, that's dessert sorted."
I called the waiter over so we could have the dessert menus. Corbyn and I were deciding what to get for five minutes. I would say something then Corbyn would not like it, then Corbyn would want something but I hated it. In the end, we both decided we would get a big slice of creamy, delicious, chocolate moulded cheesecake.
It took us nearly an hour to complete the cheesecake. We picked up our things, left a tip on the table and walked off to go pay. Corbyn and I looked very full. You could tell by the way we looked, our faces looked like we just got stabbed in the guts and did not care.
"Hey Elle"
"Hmm"
"Would you want to go out to the wishing well?"
I stood by the car door and looked up to the sky that was full of stars. I could see stars that formed shapes of people and objects that Corey and I always spotted.
"Could we get some roses before we go?"
"If that's what you want to get, then sure thing."

Corbyn
Elle and I went to the shops because she wanted some roses before we went to the wishing well. As we arrived at the wishing well you could tell Elle was hesitating. Her hands were starting to shake, her teeth clenched. I took my hands off the steering wheel and grabbed her hand. She looked at her hand, then me. Her brown, sparkly eyes were gazing at me, I could tell she was nervous and about to cry. We opened the doors of the car and walked over to the wishing well.
"Well, here we are."
I could see a tear rolling down her cheek. I really should not have said that.
"I never knew how much it would hurt for him to pass. I do not know how to tell my head that he is gone. It feels like he's always with me and never has left."
"Well, that's the thing he's always going to be right next to you, he knows that you need him, and I know Corey wants you to move on and open your heart, if you stay like this then who knows what you're going to miss out on."
I could see Elle starting to brighten up once again. I could not resist smiling with that face of hers.

Elle
Corbyn and I were at the wishing well all night. There were a few moments where we both sat in silence next to each other cuddling and star gazing. I turned my head along the grass to see Corbyn's face. His blue eyes were looking up at the stars, from the angle I was looking at he looked like he was crying.
"Are you okay Corbyn?"
He looked at me and spoke.
"Hmm... oh yeah I'm fine."
"Are you sure because it looked like you were just crying?"
"What? Why would I be crying? Yeah no, I was not. It's getting late, do you want to go home?"
Why would Corbyn try to change the topic all the sudden? Something is up with him. We both sat up, dusted the dirt and grass off our backs and then we walked over to the car.
We got home and Jack was still awake. I was confused about why he was still awake. Corbyn walked off, I am guessing to get changed.
"Jack, why are you still awake?"
"I couldn't sleep. So, I was about to watch TV, but you guys came in."
"Oh, that makes sense now. What were you going to watch?"
"I don't know maybe some cricket."
"Oh cool. Jack, can I ask you a question please?"
"Go ahead I'll try my best to answer it."
"Okay, thanks. Well, when Corbyn and I were at the wishing well..."
"You guys went to the wishing well-."
I gave Jack the face like 'seriously' for interrupting me then he said.
"Sorry...you may continue."
"So, we were at the wishing well laying down on the comfortable green grass, and I looked over at Corbyn and he looked like he was crying."
"Did you ask if he was?"
"Well, that's the thing when I asked him, he said 'what...why would I be crying?' for the time I've known Corbyn those words don't sound like him."

"Well yeah, that is true. Would you like me to speak to him later today?"
"That would be nice. Could you not tell him that we had this talk."
"I can do that if you wish."
"Thanks, Jack I do appreciate it."
"It's what good friends do."

Corbyn
I woke up and I got out of bed. I went over to the kitchen. I was looking in the cupboard... I turned around and Jack was sitting there.
"How'd you get there so fast."
"Well, I just invented walking just so I could sit here."
"Ha-ha very funny."
"Last night when you got home you looked like you were just crying."
"Did Elle tell you?"
"Tell me what? So were you crying."
"Can we go for a walk, please? I rather not say right here with Elle around."
"Oki."
As Jack spoke Elle walked in. Jack and I looked at each other and then I said clearing my throat.
"Hey, Elle...Jack and I we're going to go for a walk."
"Hmm oh yeah sure."
Jack and I walked outside, and it was dead silence for over a minute.
"So were you crying."
"Well yeah, I was a little bit...When Elle was crying about Corey, she made me realize how much I was too."
Jack stopped walking and I did not realise it. I wiped my hands on my sweater because they were very sweaty. Jack grabbed my arm and pulled me back.
"What are you doing Jack?"
"It's called helping you out."
"Umm, that's kind of awkward."
"Well, you need it so here I am."
"Aww, thanks"
"All good. Now once you and Elle have a great relationship, you are going to be happy and you and Corey will always be mates, nothing or anyone will be able to change that."
I felt arms sliding around my back. I turned around and there was Elle. She wiped the tears away from my face. We both were crying. Then Elle said, "This is going to be a perfect year."

Liam Duivenvoorden
The Edge of Evening
Acrylic Paint, Sculpture

Katya Dorer
Mushrooms
Watercolour on wood

Ebony Adams
Magical faraway tree
Posca pen (acrylic) on canvas

Chelsea Wood

One with the Maku Gang

Chapter 1-Thomas and his Maiden Run
My heart was thumping and my legs were shaking as I entered the house. It was my wife Evelyn's idea for me to steal priceless art from the Wimble's mansion. She said it was worth a lot of money, and she had to have it. Although it felt wrong, Evelyn was more important than any of my judgment. She is also a strong figure, I was too scared to go up against her. I spent a restless night thinking about everything that could happen if I got caught.

Late at night when the Wimbles had gone to bed, I entered the large house through an open window. It was open because it was a boiling night. It was so hot that my short blonde hair was wet, or maybe that was from me sweating in fear, it's so hard to know. I was so scared, and my legs felt like they would give way any second, though somehow I managed to walk through the house. I found the art all right, it was put on the back wall in a prime position in the big ballroom, beautiful and small but had a big impression on the room.

I was so transfixed by the art that I didn't see the security measure they had put in place to find intruders in the ballroom. There was a laser line across the ground that set an alarm when touched. I fell in surprise when the alarm went off and made such a racket, that even if the alarm malfunctioned, they still would have woken up. The Wimbles came running down the stairs and yelled out, "What was that! Hey, you look a lot like a burglar we saw in the paper!" I sigh, of course, they had read the paper and of course, they noticed me.

The Wimbles interrogated me so hard that I ended up telling them everything. They told me to bring Evelyn here and they would track me down if I ran away. I thought Mrs Wimble was going to tell Evelyn she was in a fair bit of trouble. I went and got Evelyn and brought her to their mansion. The police were waiting when we arrived, "Did you rob this house? If you did, I would admit to it now." I stood there frozen in horror. I had to admit it or Evelyn would have to go to jail. They said to me, "Hop into the car, you're coming with us."

Being carried off to jail was the worst experience of my life. I felt like a failure and that I could have done something different with my life. I had seen my beautiful Evelyn for the last time. I am still thinking about her long brown hair and her hazel eyes. On my journey to jail, just as I thought I had hit rock-bottom the car skidded into a murky lake and the car started to sink. The policeman got out all right, but they never stopped to think that another person was locked inside the car. There was no water in the car till a crack appeared. I kicked and kicked at the door as hard as I could, just in the nick of time the door smashed open. I ran all the way home and into Evelyn's arms. Now that we have committed a crime so terrible, we decided to run away.

Chapter 2-Thomas and the Initiation
After the close call at my hometown Ferry, Evelyn and I decided to move to the big city of London. Being such a big city, we felt safer that we wouldn't be found by the authorities of Ferry. My wife turned to me and said,

"London is a big city Thomas, you have done a big crime and now you have taken that path, there is no turning back." I kept walking, though I didn't show it, I knew she was right.

So I replied, "Fine, but if you think I am going around robbing myself you are mistaken, I am not that good, we need to find others to support us."

Overhearing our conversation a small boy no older than twelve came and said,

"If you need people I have some for you." We walked for 10 minutes past big mansions and little dollar shops until we got to a tiny house in a dark alley. It looked empty from afar and when we went in all we could see were rats across the floor, but we could hear voices below. He opened a hidden trapdoor and we climbed down.

It was a horrible sight, dirty boys, girls, men and women were running around playing or sitting down talking. Regardless of what they were doing they all stopped and stared when the three of us entered the basement. The young boy who brought us yelled out, "Where is Maku?" A husky voice replied, "I am here."

A tall, thin, man walked into the room. I was so shocked to see him that I was lost for words. This man looked so old. He was dirty, wrinkled and tired. I was so surprised when he told me he was 35, seven years older than me. I went to speak when the man demanded, "Who are these two people in our secret hideout?"

"I am a humble robber and this is my wife, we are from a small town called Ferry moving to London to evade the authorities," I told him proudly.

I told my story to the mysterious man then out of the blue he started laughing.

"That sounds like an extreme theft, and a hard one that is, but here we only do pickpocketing. Are you ready to prove yourself to the Maku Gang?"

"I am working fully for you now and my wife will help you, what is it you want me to do first?" He explained the task that was at hand and Evelyn and I listened in surprise. Tomorrow is to be our first theft with the Maku Gang.

Chapter 3-Thomas and the Big Day
I had a restless night thinking about tomorrow. I was hoping that I wouldn't make a fool of myself. In the morning I dressed up in the special outfit that I wore for work which was black pants and a blue top. I wore this so I wouldn't look too suspicious but wouldn't stand out. The goal was to steal five wallets in 30 minutes and not get caught, then and only then will my wife and I truly be part of the gang.

Maku was awake with the rest of the gang huddled around him. Then his husky voice said, "Thomas your time has come to prove yourself worthy to be part of this gang."

I was so nervous. I got a few pointers from some of the more experienced robbers, then began to exit the house. I looked back at the small house thinking where we would go if I didn't succeed. These thoughts only made me more determined to do everything right.

My first victim was standing talking to someone in front of a bakery. I made a swipe for his brown wallet and got it; I also stole a loaf of bread to take back to the house. The second man was outside a school getting ready to leave after dropping off his children. Again, I made a mad swipe his wallet and got it. The third and fourth men were the same, helpless in conversation that they didn't notice me. The fifth though was a hard one as it was daylight, and his friend was opposite him anything I would try to do the friend would see me. So, I sat down at a neighbouring table, reached down and took the wallet. The man stood up trying to find the thief, but no one suspects me, I don't look up to no good, their mistake.

I got up and walked back to the house with the five wallets and the loaf of bread. Checking my watch, I took 29 minutes, just under the 30-minute mark. Evelyn was overjoyed to see me and hugged me the moment I entered the basement,

"Welcome Evelyn and Thomas Maku, you are now truly part of the Maku gang." I had never felt so happy in my life, I was part of a group, a family. I looked around at my new brothers and sisters and felt a swell of pride in seeing my new family. Growing up I had no dreams and felt like I was nobody and now I am part of a pickpocketing group in London. I know that is not a great job that everyone thinks about but right now I felt like I won a million dollars.

Chapter 4-Thomas's End
The next few weeks with the Maku gang went well and was exciting with danger around every corner. One morning I might be relaxing in the basement and then that afternoon I might be running for my life. I have never felt so alive, but I know the end will come eventually, I think it is best to enjoy something while you have the chance. I was out on my morning 'walk' looking for opportunities when something caught my eye. A tall man with a weird hat was standing with a wallet almost falling out of his pocket. I saw the wallet and took it; little did I know that the wallet was connected to a rope. I pulled it out and the man turned around and caught me. Then I knew what the weird hat was, it was a policeman's hat! The man yelled out,"We have another thief."

Then he turned to me and snarled, "You're coming with me."

For the second time in my life, I was riding in a police car with things getting worse and worse. This time it might not just be me going down, it might be the whole Maku gang, who knows how many other people are out there ready to catch pickpockets. When I arrived at the police station, they locked me in a jail cell while they got ready to question me. I was sitting there when I heard a sound that I knew so well.

"Thomas are you here," a faint, familiar voice spoke out, Evelyn I thought! "Evelyn is that you?"

"Thomas," a small husky voice called out. Maku I thought, then I remembered that Maku was taking Evelyn on his run today that's why they are both here.

They questioned us thieves together to see if Maku and Evelyn knew me. We told them I did know them, but we didn't know any other pickpockets. The policeman told us that they would keep one of us here for further interviewing and the other two will be let out, though they will be watched very closely. Maku, Evelyn and I spoke about it for a long time but in the end, we decided that I will stay.

They questioned me for a while, bringing me back every day trying to get information about my gang, though I wouldn't tell them. They threatened to lock me up forever, I would let them do that because there is no way they would let me go anyway. They locked me up in a cell. Though I know that there is no chance of escape right now I will always be fighting and trying to get out. For some time in my life, I was part of a family and had anything I could have wanted. I will stay here happy that whatever happens Evelyn is safe and happy with the rest of the Maku gang looking after her.

Maddy Talbot
Forest
Acrylic on canvas

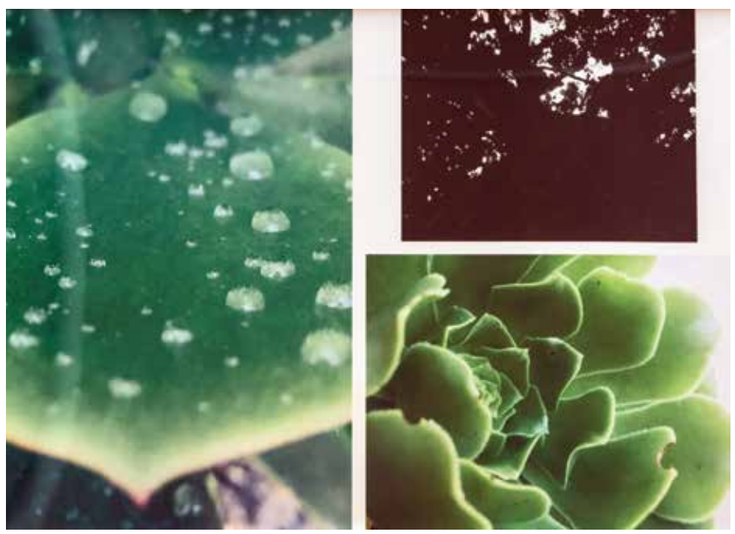
Tess Sillery
Dragon
Digital drawing

Kat Betts
falling up // climbing down
Oil on canvas

Rebekah Betts
Losing yourself and how to find it
Photography

Maddie Kay
Speckle
Digital drawing

Olivia Rogister
The beauty that can be if we care for nature



Kade Elliott
Untitled
Digitally edited photography

Teaghan Perryman
Self portrait (archetype)
Digital, Photoshop

Talia Kellett
The Saviour
Digital Image