

VOICES

ALBERTA

STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

Supplement to Alberta Voices

Volume 6, Number 1



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The issue of student literacy continues to capture the attention of many Canadians. As a result, throughout the country, students write standardized tests that evaluate many aspects of students' comprehension of and ability in English language arts. However, we also realize that language arts are about more than passing a test; for many students, writing is about unlocking creativity and talents. That is what this student writing contest is all about. It demonstrates to students that writing is about communicating with a broader audience, that process is necessary, that polish is essential and that personal motivation leads to excellence in writing. Consequently, the writing published in this year's *Alberta Voices* supplement is rich, fresh, alive and diverse.

The primary goal of the writing contest is to celebrate the excellent writing of students and teachers in Alberta. The contest achieves this goal not only through publishing this annual supplement but also by providing teachers with an opportunity to acknowledge excellent writing in their own classrooms. The simple act of encouraging students to submit their work for adjudication itself validates students' writing. The contest also serves as an effective tool for motivating students to continue to create and share the best of their writing. With these benefits in mind, I encourage both teachers and students to submit their writing to next year's writing contest. To this end, an entry form has been included.

I thank all who submitted entries to this year's contest. Your writing was interesting, stimulating and a pleasure to read. Congratulations to the winners and to those who received honourable mentions. The publication of your writing in this supplement is a tangible acknowledgement of the quality of your work.

This year the number of submissions again increased significantly (120 entries were received). Consequently, we were able to offer prizes at all five levels: lower elementary, upper elementary, junior high, senior high and teachers/student teachers.

I thank our judges—Rillah Sheridan Carson, Amanda Stalwick and Gloria Michalchuk—for volunteering both their time and their expertise.

In editing the pieces in this supplement, we have corrected simple spelling and punctuation errors but have left in word choice, paragraphing and sentence structure indicating an author's age and development. I thank the Document Production team at Barnett House for their professionalism and their conscientious work in editing and formatting this publication, and ATA staff advisor Dorothy Stanley for her assistance and guidance in implementing the writing contest.

Working on this contest has been a pleasure. However, this is my final year as writing contest editor. Next year, Lana Black will return to the editor's chair. On her behalf, I encourage teachers and students to share and celebrate their writing by entering next year's contest.

Enjoy reading!

—David Slomp

Good Friend

Corey Olson

A good friend . . .
Wrestles
Plays with you
Shares with you
Plays games with you
Phones you
Invites you over
E-mails you

And NEVER, NEVER,
NEVER . . .
Kisses you
Picks up chairs and bangs you on the head
Ditches you
Fights with you



Corey Olson is a Grade 2 student at Ralph McCall School in Airdrie. (Jenn Taggart and Gwen Glavine, teachers)

Winter and Summer

Madison Graham

Winter
Snowy, cold
Snowing, sledding, freezing
Summer is warm and winter is cold
Running, walking, jogging
Sunny, hot
Summer

Madison Graham is a Grade 2 student at Ralph McCall School in Airdrie. (Jenn Taggart and Gwen Glavine, teachers)



Apples

Tyler Yackel

Apple
Juicy, red
Growing, falling, squirting
Red delicious apples

Tyler Yackel is a Grade 2 student at Ralph McCall School in Airdrie. (Jenn Taggart and Gwen Glavine, teachers)

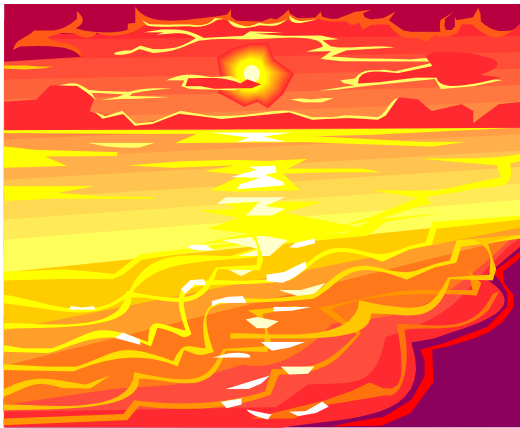


Sunset

Rena Silver

Sunset
Many colours
Gazing, thinking, always
Sinking into perfect visions
Sleepy

Rena Silver is a Grade 5 student at Talmud Torah School in Edmonton. (Cindy Chisholm, teacher)

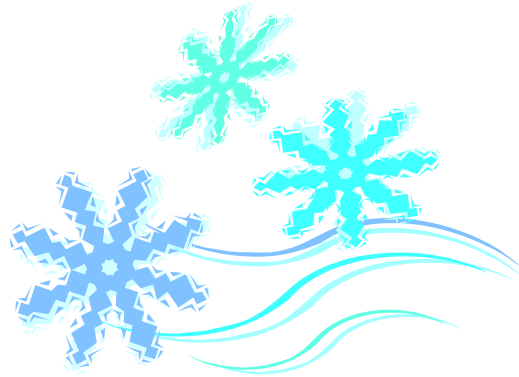


Winter's First Snowfall

Alexis Oswald

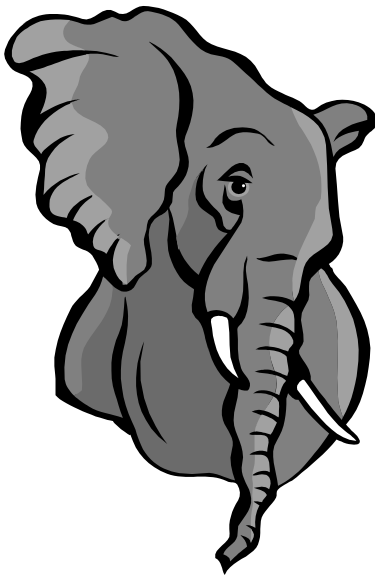
On winter's first snowfall
As you step out the door
Winter greets you with
A cold rush
Of icy wind
Outside all is silent
As snowflakes
Drift slowly from
The sky
The trees
Stand blanketed in snow
Icicles hang from the roof
Beautiful frost crystals
Cover windows
As the world is enveloped in a blanket
Of snow
On winter's
First snowfall

Alexis Oswald is a Grade 5 student at Lakeland Ridge School in Sherwood Park. (Barb Wright, teacher)



Through the Eyes of an Elephant

Isabelle Zelazny



An elephant
An elephant
People only
Care for ivory
Not for my
Beauties
Not for my
Cries
Am I worth as
Little as a
Thing?
A hunter
A killer
A shot as fast
As a racing
Horse
No mercy
A death that
Lays up on our
Hands
No more me
No more me
No one cares but
Only for my
Ivory
If you were
Looking through
My eyes you
Would think
Just once more
Would you have
Mercy?

Isabelle Zelazny is a Grade 6 student at Cardinal Newman School in Calgary. (Janet Hamilton, teacher)

Winter's Hour

Timothy Chan

Winter stalks across the dying land,
returning like some long-forgotten revenant
rising from the grave.

His icy breath falls,
forming crystalline shards of ice in the air.
The nights lengthen,
ever so slowly,
ever so imperceptibly,
and then . . .

The scythe of Winter lays its first blow.
The grass stiffens, freezes.
The trees wilt, shedding their once-radiant leaves.
Animals burrow deeper into their lairs, seeking to evade what is inevitable.
The host of birds flee south, seeking solace in warmer places.
Vibrant flowers, touched by Winter's fell hand,
collapse bent and broken to the ground,
their colours fading into nothingness,
their wretched forms begging for release from their torturous existence.
The frost-encrusted trees grope upwards towards the uncaring skies
like twisted spectral shapes frozen in agony.

The bitter arctic wind howls across the land,
pitting its raw, uncontested power
against all that was once thriving and verdant,
its icy touch squeezing the last remnants of life and warmth
from all that remain.

Then, Winter casts his pale white blanket over his new realm.
Ethereal ashen flakes stream down from the heavens,
carpeting the earth in an icy shroud,
snuffing out the final vestiges of vitality.

Soon,
the land becomes a featureless, desolate plain,
devoid of life.
The skies are darkened,
the light of the sun muted by Winter's bleak veil.

Junior High Poetry—Winner

The harsh wind ghosts about,
sending eddies of sparkling stars swirling round,
scouring the surface of the frigid white sea.

Silver-blue daggers sprout from the branches of trees,
each one ready to burst
into a supernova of ice
lest it fall.

Diamond-like planes spread across every surface,
cruel, yet beautiful,
coating the world in sheets of sapphire.

And, amongst all this, Winter stands tall.
He is an unstoppable conqueror,
silently revelling in his unchallenged authority,
lording over his lifeless lands.

He has transformed the earth
into a barren wasteland
with nothing left to reminisce at what the world had been
before his coming.

His kingdom is harsh,
deadly,
devoid of hospitality,
but scenic
and awe-inspiring
at the same time.

He is the unsurpassable ruler of this forsaken land,
his new empire,
which he holds tightly in his icy grip.

Now, no one can dare stand before Winter,
for this is his hour.



Timothy Chan is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Edith Mitchell, teacher)

My Special Place

Heather Bronson

The cool morning breeze softly stirs my hair,
rustling the leaves of nearby trees.

I sit, watching, as suddenly the sun
rises to break the grey dawn, spilling
across fields of gold, green, and brown,
showing the silhouettes of mountains
in the distance,
illuminating windmills, still in the early morning.

I can see the river below me,
shrouded in mist,
whispering, gliding swift and sure
between the trees.

Always flowing, following its course
to far-off places.

I look toward the town,
beginning to waken and come to life.
Empty streets fill with people
walking, running, talking, laughing,
starting their day.

I turn now and look the other way
and see the castle dark against the lightening sky,
standing tall and proud,
high upon its rock.
In years past it was besieged and
fought over, partially destroyed,
yet still it stands,
unmoving and majestic.

I feel wildflowers tickling my feet,
swaying in the breeze,
graceful and fragrant.
Blue, purple, and yellow,
a myriad of colours
carpeting the hillside.

I stand slowly, drinking in
the beauty around me.
I slowly turn to descend the hill,
the sand cliffs.

I walk home,
the cool morning breeze
softly stirring my hair.

Slovakia.



Heather Bronson is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Edith Mitchell, teacher)

Dreamily Waiting . . .

Janine Bartels

Waiting beneath a Willow tree I gaze up at the dark sky,
a black velvet cloth glittering with diamonds;
far-off are the glowing city lights,
and the distant sound of chaos . . .
but all is calm here, beneath the Willow tree.

I sit on a tire swing,
gently swaying with the wind;
occasionally I spin myself round and round,
unstoppable unless the old worn rope gives way . . .
only then will I come tumbling down.

I wait patiently for what seems an eternity,
time ticks so very slowly;
vehicles roar past on a neighbouring road,
I watch the lights become brighter . . .
and slowly begin to fade away.

Grasshoppers are merrily chirping,
fireflies glowing brightly;
amongst the recognizable is the mysterious,
a perplexing chorus of tinkling bells and sparkling light . . .
what could it be?

I heed the rustling of the Willow leaves,
I hear whispering roundabout;
no one else is in the vicinity,
I look straight up . . .
to a sudden rustling.

Winged insects quickly flittered behind the Willow leaves,
curiously the whispering has stopped;
it is now extraordinarily silent,
lights are flickering above . . .
what is it?

I stare up at the branches,
not blinking;
the edge of my vision there is wavering,
it's just a moth . . .
a glowing moth?



Junior High Poetry—Honourable Mention

It is fluttering towards me,
I am simply staring;
it hovered, vibrating and iridescent,
emitting a glow . . .
it is neither a moth nor butterfly.

She is a fairy,
translucent, butterfly-like wings;
she was a tiny winged human,
dressed in her surroundings . . .
nature's beauty.

I gaze, hindering to pay attention,
ouch;
an abrupt tug on my hair awakens me,
fairies were hovering in the air around me . . .
not winged insects.

A chant began,
fellow human sing our tune;
underneath the midsummer moon,
you are the only one we need . . .
and it's almost midnight noon.

Unexpectedly I am in the spotlight,
a vehicle passes on the neighbouring road;
I glance away,
and focus back on the fairies quickly . . .
they vanished.

The service I was to bestow is now nonexistent,
I rest on the tire swing, swaying with the wind;
beneath the Willow tree,
dreamily waiting . . .
for the fairies.

Janine Bartels is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Edith Mitchell, teacher)

Life

Aerlan Barrett

An intuitive emotion, corrupting all logic and reasoning,
some call it love, others call it pain,
I call it life.

Life is meant to be hard,
meant to cast stones,
meant to break us.

To some people it has little purpose or being,
to others it can be a world.

A world with endless ideas and possibilities,
a place of their own.

But in our real, tangible lives,

All you can see is through a foggy spectacle,
Eyes,

All you can hear is through a crude and infamous box,
Ears.

So why is it that all this distortion doesn't matter?
Why is it that all I see and hear is perfection?

No matter my eyes,
no matter my ears.

This emotion,
This . . . love of life,
fogs your judgment,
crushes your mind,
kills your sense.

But if you look closely,
if you feel its taste in your mouth,
If you hear its song in your ears,
It might just heal you.



Aerlan Barrett is a Grade 9 student at McKernan School in Edmonton. (Edith Mitchell, teacher)

The Beginning

Joseph Maslen

Mr Chamberlain was greeted with a cool rush of air as he opened the tarnished door of his aged corner shop and set out for his usual morning walk. Mist had filled the old cobbled streets overnight, and the last leaf had finally fallen from the ancient oak that stood outside his shop. A brisk wind ruffled his white hair and cut right through his worn, grey overcoat, but Mr Chamberlain merely smiled and started to walk down his usual path along Main Street, down Peterson Avenue and into Valleybrook Park.

"G'morning, Mrs Ferris," he said to an elderly lady passing by.

"Boy, not even the weather will keep you in, will it, Mr Chamberlain?" replied the lady as she rubbed her hands together in an effort to warm them.

"No ma'am." He smiled. "I love this time of year."

It was true, Mr Chamberlain did love the fall. Mainly for the reason that it was the only season that did not remind him of how old he really was. You see, three years ago, his dear friend and business partner passed away during the spring. Two years ago, Mr Chamberlain's younger brother passed on during the winter. And just last year, Mr Chamberlain's wife died over the summer. Though it had been a difficult three years, all of the deaths were merely of old age. But a loss is a loss no matter how you look at it, and to Mr Chamberlain, the loss of two dear friends and his wife to natural causes was a reoccurring reminder that his life could come to an end at any moment. It was true, Mr Chamberlain did love the fall but only for the sad reason that he did not have to relive a death of the only three people in the world he ever loved.

The warm aroma of fresh bread filled his lungs for a brief moment as he walked past the old bakery and then was gone with a cool gust of wind. He marvelled at all the bare trees that seemed to have lost all of their leaves overnight. Still gazing up as he turned the corner down Peterson Avenue, he nearly ran right into a towering hooded man wearing a black cloak. It was almost as if the strange man was expecting Mr Chamberlain because he just stood there, blocking the sidewalk.

"Pardon me," said Mr Chamberlain, but the man did not budge. Mr Chamberlain peered up at the man, whose face was completely hidden except for two pure white eyes. Mr Chamberlain took a step back, still staring into the white eyes. And the eyes stared back. They seemed to look right through him, deep into his soul. Suddenly he saw himself running down Main Street, constantly looking back over his shoulder. He saw himself run right into Mrs Ferris. And after talking to her for a brief moment, he continued to run down the street and into his corner shop, locking the door behind him. And then through the window he saw himself fall to his knees, breathing heavily and clutching his heart with both hands. Finally, he froze and collapsed.

The man closed his white eyes and disappeared. Mr Chamberlain stumbled back. Several questions flashed through his mind. Dumbfounded and quite frightened by what he just saw, Mr Chamberlain continued his walk down Peterson Avenue and into Valleybrook Park. Nothing could keep him from his morning walk.

Once in the valley, he noticed the air was much cooler and the mist was much thicker, allowing him to see only a few feet in front of him. But Mr Chamberlain was not surprised because this was usually the case during the fall. What did surprise him was that there was absolutely no wind. The usual autumn breeze that rustled the trees was replaced by a kind of eerie silence that made every crunching step echo throughout the valley.

"Hello, Mr Chamberlain!" said a youthful voice from behind him.

Mr Chamberlain turned around. "Oh, you scared me, Johnny. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I finished delivering the newspapers a bit early, so I decided to take a walk through the park. I'd better get going, though. Mother will be worrying." Johnny ran past Mr Chamberlain and disappeared into the mist.

Suddenly, he felt a cold hand grip his shoulder. He wheeled around to see two pure white eyes staring down at him. Mistakenly, he made eye contact and suddenly a chill set over him. The air seemed to be sucked right out of his lungs and a strange power seemed to pull his eyes and force him to hold eye contact. Then an image formed within the white eyes and Mr Chamberlain saw himself running down Main Street looking back over his shoulder. He saw himself run into Mrs Ferris and hurry into his corner shop, locking the door behind him. And then through the window he saw himself fall to his knees, breathing heavily and clutching his heart with both hands. Finally, he froze and collapsed.

Then in a wisp of a black cloak the cold hand was removed from his shoulder and the strange man was gone. Mr Chamberlain's heart was pounding and his hands were trembling. He began to wonder if this walk was the safest thing for him. Mr Chamberlain had gone for his walk every day for the past 10 years and for the first time he felt as though his age was finally catching up to him. He was not frightened by much at his age, but running into a cloaked man twice and seeing himself collapse scared him. On top of that, it truly was quite cold out. So, for the first time in 10 years, Mr Chamberlain decided to turn around and make his way back to his old shop.

Back on Peterson Avenue the mist began to thin out and the sun was starting to peak through the clouds. The wind was still calm, and even the slightest noise could be heard throughout the cobblestone streets.

Mr Chamberlain turned the corner onto Main Street. He walked past the bakery again, but instead of smelling the warm aroma of freshly baked bread, the air suddenly became cooler and he felt the presence of someone behind him. A chill went down his spine and Mr Chamberlain knew who it was.

Not wanting to make contact with the piercing white eyes again, he quickly began to run down the street. He ran as fast as his weary legs could carry him and kept looking back to see if the strange creature was following him. Paying no attention to what was ahead of him, he ran right into Mrs Ferris and nearly knocked her off her feet.

"Oh, pardon me, Mrs Ferris." He staggered, trying to catch his breath.

"Is something the matter, Mr Chamberlain? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Oh, no . . . I have seen something far worse," he said quickly and pointed to the man, who was still standing near the end of the street.

"Do you see him?"

"See what?" She squinted.

"That man outside the bakery!"

She turned to him. "Are you okay? You look pale."

"I'm sorry." Mr Chamberlain was confused. He did not understand how she couldn't see him. "I must go." He continued to rush down Main Street. He reached his corner shop and quickly ran in, locking the door behind him. He thought the strange man was gone, but when he turned around he found the man staring down at him.

Suddenly Mr Chamberlain felt a sharp pain in his chest, and he fell to his knees in agony. His life flashed before his eyes. All his memories came back to him. He saw his wife, but only for a moment . . . and then it was gone. Breathing heavily, he clutched his heart with both hands. And finally he froze and collapsed.



Junior High Prose—Winner

The cloaked man stood for a moment and checked his pocket watch; right on time. Then slowly he picked up the fragile old man and checked his pulse; nothing. Leaving his body, he gently took the man's soul and carried it away . . .

* * *

Mr Chamberlain was greeted with a warm rush of air as he opened the freshly painted door of his corner shop and set out for his usual morning walk. The spring aroma of flowers filled the newly paved streets, and the oak that stood outside his shop was abundant with leaves. A cool breeze ruffled his thick, dark hair and blew at his brand-new sports jacket. Mr Chamberlain smiled and started to walk down his usual path along Main Street, down Peterson Avenue and into Valleybrook Park.

"Good morning, Jack," spoke a gentle voice from behind him. It was a voice Mr Chamberlain had not heard in a long time. He turned around as his wife fell into his arms. One journey of his life had ended and another had just begun . . .

Joseph Maslen is a Grade 9 student at École St Matthew School in Calgary. (Dave Cracknell, teacher)

Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean

Ty Neitz

"Sir, we are taking damages in the rear of the plane!"

"I am vaguely aware of that, Lieutenant," said a sweating and nervous pilot. "Where is my rear gunner?"

"Dead, Sir."

"Well, get someone new in there."

"Sir! Are you daft? That would be suicide! You do know that there are two Bf 110s back there."

"Lieutenant, we are not at the drop zone yet, and we are just sitting ducks if you don't get someone in there NOW." The large cargo plane spluttered as one of the engines began to go. "Reset the speed and fuel intake on the starboard engine," Colonel Williams told his co-pilot.

"Now, Lieutenant, unless you get someone back there covering our tail, I will have to push you out the hatch without your parachute!" Colonel Williams threatened as he pulled the wheel for everything that plane had, to swerve out of the way of another Bf 110 fire lane. The plane groaned as it pulled down to the left. "Come on, baby, hold together."

Ting, ting. "What the heck are you idiots doing back there? If we take much more of this we won't make it."

"Sir, we are having trouble getting the body out so someone can get in."

"Well, hurry it up a little!"

More bullets pierced the hull. "LIEUTENANT!"

Boom. One of the Bf 110s exploded. "We got him, Sir!" screamed the Lieutenant.

"Good, but there is still more of them. Don't get cocky." In a few moments, the excellent marksmanship and training of my men paid off and all the Bf 110s were gone. *Beep, beep.* The controls began to flash and beep. Gas was leaking from the tank and both engines were severely damaged.

"Approaching drop zone. Prepare for jump."

"But, Sir, where are you going to land? You won't get anywhere in the scrap pile!"

"I'll be fine, Lieutenant. Just get ready." After a few minutes of silence, Colonel started the count, "In five, four, three, two, one, open the hatch, jump!" One by one all 20 of the servicemen jumped. Then out of nowhere the plane took fire.

"What is it, Colonel?" questioned the co-pilot.

"I was just about to ask you that, but it must be an anti-air gun."

"If it is we won't last long. According to the controls all we need is one more hit."

The lines that filled Colonel Williams's face sunk even deeper into his wartorn face. One grey hair showed in thinning hair as the realization that this could be his last drop really sunk in.

"Sir, the readings show only 20 litres of gas left in the tank and the starboard engine is off-line." *Boooooo.* Another shot fired from the AA gun and pierced the left engine. "Both engines are down, Sir. We are losing altitude. What are we going to do?"

"We are going to land this baby of mine." Twenty years of air force training now surfaced as the plane groaned from side to side heading straight for a thick French forest.

"Sir, can't you see the forest?" yelled the co-pilot.

"Of course I do!"

"Then what are you doing flying straight for it?"

"If you see an open field, please tell me, because I am open to any options!"

As the plane continued to plummet down, no further options arose, and as the ground came closer and closer, it became obvious that no other options were going to arise. "Son, if you live through this and get home, tell my wife I love her and go home to your father. You've done him proud, and I'm honoured to have served with you."

The plane had gained so much speed on the descent that it sounded and shook like it would be torn to pieces by just the force of the air. As they both said their final prayers, they hit the ground.

* * *

Four hours later, Colonel Tibet woke to find himself alive. Ecstatic, he turned to his co-pilot, and then just as quickly as his joy rose, it plummeted through the floor of the plane. Sergeant Lenard Bills had a huge branch through his chest. It had come in through the windshield and penetrated his best friend. Devastated, he crawled out of the cockpit and out the bent hatch and fell to the earth bawling like a child. After regaining his senses, he heard something in the bushes. "Who's there?" he yelled, trying to pull himself together.

Ten German soldiers jumped out of the bushes on all sides of the plane, yelling German and pointing the guns threateningly at him. "I don't speak German, only English."

One of the Germans spat on the Colonel and growled with a strong German accent, "You worthless Canadian scum. You flew over and dropped parachuters over German territory earlier and shot down three planes. I should shoot you now! My brother was one of those pilots, and I have been assured that his blood will be avenged, but you are under the mercies of our General. He would like to speak to you and learn of the whereabouts of your comrades so they can be dealt with quickly. Where is your co-pilot? You could not have managed a plane like this by yourself."

As tears built up in his eyes and with a cracking voice, he said with great poise, "He is dead. Shoot me now. Avenge your brother's blood because I will tell you nothing."

"You fool. I would not just shoot you. You will beg for death at my hand and then you will endure more pain before I, being the compassionate person I am, oblige your wish. But now you will go see General Tibet." One of them came up behind me and whacked the back of my head with the butt of their gun, and that's the last I ever saw of my plane or Sergeant Bills.

* * *

I woke to whisperings of German. My knowledge of the language is very limited, and the throbbing from the back of my head didn't encourage my want to try and think. I opened my eyes and looked around. I was in a small tent with a table in front of me and my hands tied behind my chair. The canvas of the tent was very thick and no light entered. The only light in the tent came from a yellow light pointing at me. Two soldiers stood at the opening of the tent. One of them poked their head out of the flap, and I think I caught him saying, "He's awake, Sir, come see."

The entrance to the tent swung wide open and some natural light filled the room; it couldn't have been more than nine o'clock in the morning, and a man clad in grey and a big bushy moustache entered. "Well, I see you have more stamina than some of your other Canadian friends we captured over the course of this war, Colonel Williams. Yes, I read your dog tag. Did we have a run-in a few years ago in Poland?"



Junior High Prose—Honourable Mention

"I should have killed you then and there. I didn't think you would survive running straight into a Polish resistance group."

"Well, I have my ways as I see you have yours to have survived flying a parachuting plane this long. But of little consequence that is now. But what will determine how awful you are fed will rely on what you tell me today."

"I told your men I wouldn't say a thing."

"I tend to differ in my opinion on this subject, Colonel. Now, where did you drop your men and how many of them did you drop?" Silence filled the room. "Have it your way." General Tibet made a signal to a Sergeant standing in the corner behind me. The whip cracked down on what of my back was exposed from the back of my chair. Tears welled up in my eyes, but my mouth was still closed. "How is your memory now?" As silence continued to fill the room, General Tibet backed away from the table and gave another signal. The whip continued to come crashing down for several minutes and wreaked havoc on Colonel Williams's breaking spirit. As his chest lay on the table and tears flowed freely from his eyes drowning a river of tears and sweat. Smiling radiantly with great pleasure, General Tibet said, "Never under my command have I had the chance to aggressively convince someone to give me this much information. You will bring me much pleasure, Colonel Williams. Until tomorrow." Turning to his men, General Tibet commanded, "Leave him. Let him contemplate his fate through the cold of the night."

* * *

That evening a miracle happened for Colonel Williams. The last of a French resistance group attacked the camp and saved all the prisoners in the camp. Suffering great fatigue and lack of willpower, Colonel Williams was carried out, but a vague voice was heard. "We've got ya, Colonel. Everything will be all right. You'll make it a little longer after surviving that crash." Then, he blanked out.

* * *

"John, John, are you awake?" Colonel Williams opened his eyes to see General Marshall, a good friend of his, sitting on his bed. "Hey, this is nothing, John, compared to Poland, remember that? If you and I can survive that, John, you'll pull through this."

"Kenneth, oh, it's been so long since I have seen you."

"Well, being a General I can make some small exceptions, and I bring you good news. The Prime Minister has heard news of what you have done and gone through in this war and has given me permission to rank you a General. Your expertise and knowledge will be well accepted by strategists. No more flying that plane. You have served your country well and fought for the freedom of our people. But for now, you have to rest."

"Ken, that is great news, but I've got to get back in a plane with my men. That is all I've ever known."

"Well, John, there's more. You're going home. You will be strategizing in Canada. Your work is done in Europe. Because of your age and the severity of your injuries, you are being ordered to go home. I'm sorry, John." At that, General Kenneth Marshall got up and left, and John just lay there speechless, but then the pain got to him and he fell back to sleep.

* * *

After a week of being under constant watch of nurses, John packed up and went home. By the mercies of General Marshall, General John Williams was allowed to fly his own plane home. Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean their radio frequencies were jammed, and German voices were heard muffled through the radio. Then bullets began to be fired on the plane.

"Get someone in the rear gun!" yelled General Williams. More problems began to surface somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean.

Ty Neitz is a Grade 9 student at Erskine School in Erskine. (Rae Munden, teacher)

The Number 23

Afton Rentz

The summer before my junior year was when he moved here. He was a young guy, African American. His first name was Michael, but everyone just called him Mikey. It just fit him, you know? Michael just sounded too formal for someone who lived in old T-shirts and jeans, so Mikey it was.

In our little town of Wilmington, North Carolina, nobody really cared about political correctness or social courtesy, or anything like that. To my friends and I, he was just different. Not like us. So, throughout that summer, whenever we came across him anywhere, some of the guys would point and laugh. This was a source of amusement for us throughout the summer months. Me and my girlfriends thought that it was probably just a way for the guys to blow off steam or show off. Stupid, but harmless.

However, by the time September rolled around, the seemingly harmless pointing and laughing had, in fact, turned quite harmful. Rude jokes and comments flew around the hallways more than usual when school started, and I wasn't the only one who noticed it, either. My best friend, Grace, pulled me aside in English one day and began talking in a frantic whisper so as not to be overheard by Mr McKay.

"Maggie, this has to stop!" she hissed in my ear.

"What?" I whispered back, pretending not to know what she was talking about; I wasn't in the mood for a lecture.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about!" she replied. "The teasing!" Her voice had risen and some heads turned toward us.

I raised a finger to my lips. "Shut up!" I snapped. "Everything's fine; it's just a bit of fun."

Grace looked at me long and hard, then turned on her heel and flew out the door just as the bell rang. I stood there, trying to avoid the unwanted feeling of guilt that was creeping into my conscience.

But things were far from fine by the time October blew into November. My friends had been getting meaner, but there wasn't much I could do about it. They were my friends, right? Eventually,

I came around to my friends' way of thinking: if he let himself be teased, he deserved whatever he got. Soon, I was the one making jokes and laughing when he walked by. I felt safe with my friends around me; I mean, it wasn't like I was the only one.

On the 20th of November, basketball tryouts began. This was the day most of the guys in our group and, indeed, the school had been looking forward to since school began. Basketball is as big here as hockey is in Canada. Even the girls went to the tryouts to cheer on their favourites. However, we were shocked when one new face joined the old ones.

A crop of short black hair. An extra-large T-shirt and shorts hanging off a lanky 6'1" frame. Slim yet muscular arms and legs. My girlfriends shrieked with laughter as Mikey walked onto the court. He looked up and I looked away quickly, strangely hoping he didn't realize that I was the same girl who taunted him in the hallways.



Apparently, the other guys on the court shared our group opinion, for they started laughing too. A jock named Dustin Parker threw a ball at Mikey, probably hoping that it would either hit him or he would drop it. I'm sure he didn't expect Mikey to catch the ball deftly in his right hand, dribble once and drill it back, left-handed, to its astonished owner.

"That little punk," growled Dustin. He started toward Mikey, but his friend held him back.

"Cool it, Parker."

Dustin shook off his buddy but was still glaring at Mikey when Coach Dalton told them to stretch and run some lines. But all the dirty looks in the world wouldn't get you on the team, and all the guys were tired when the tryout ended at 6 P.M.

The next day at lunch, the names of the guys who made the team were posted on the bulletin board outside of the lunchroom. My friends and I were walking to the lunchroom when Dustin Parker walked past us, whistling. I looked up at the list. Sure enough, no Mikey. I felt a pang of sadness, and wondered why. *It's not my fault*, I told myself angrily, as I followed my friends back to our usual lunch table.

After school that day, I ran into a friend of mine, Steve. We started talking and the subject changed abruptly to Mikey.

"He needs a friend," he said pointedly, looking at me.

"No, he doesn't," I argued back, but I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that a friend was exactly what Mikey needed.

"Oh, yes, he does," Steve said persistently. "In fact, I should be his friend!" His face lit up.

"No—don't!" was out of my mouth before I could stop it.

"What?" he said, turning to me, blue eyes blazing. "Why not? Because you're afraid that everyone'll tease you too, because you're my friend? Is that why, Maggie?"

"No," I said weakly, "I just . . ."

"Whatever, Maggie." His voice was as cold as his eyes. "Let me know once you've decided to care about someone other than yourself." And with that he walked away, leaving me to feel like I'd just been punched in the stomach.

Until December, Steve made a point of ignoring me and hanging out with Mikey. Two weeks before school let out for that much-needed winter break, Mikey stopped coming to school. At first I didn't notice, but then I wondered. I tried to ask Steve, but he wasn't talking to me, and I gave up on him.

When school resumed again in January, I noticed that posters had been tacked up advertising the big basketball game in March. *March*, I thought. *That's two months away!* But, surprisingly, a rush of school spirit swept through Laney High all through February and right up to the 14th of March. Anticipation and adrenaline alike were running high.

The big day finally arrived. The game was to be Richmond versus our own Laney High. Both teams had done well in the end-of-season tournament, and this was sure to be an exciting game. The gym was filled with the buzz of conversation, until the Richmond players stepped out onto the court. There was a collective gasp as Mikey walked to centre court to take the jump ball. The whistle blew. Game on.

For the first half, Laney fans and players alike were astounded. Mikey made point after point and set up plays for his teammates. By halftime, Richmond was in the lead. Our team got their focus back in the second half, and were leading 84–80, with two minutes left in the game.

Mikey passed the ball to a teammate for a layup. 84–82. Only a minute left. Mikey brought the ball up, but it was stolen by Dustin, who tried to shoot. He was blocked by a Richmond player and Mikey brought the ball back up. He was outside the three-point line when Dustin unexpectedly rushed him. Mikey faked and then brought his hand up to shoot. Everyone watched the ball fall neatly into the hoop. *Swish*. Three points.

Junior High Prose—Honourable Mention

The crowd went wild, cheering and screaming. A mass of green and white swarmed onto the floor and lifted a grinning Mikey onto their shoulders. My eyes misted over as number 23 was carried away. A hand touched my arm.

"He's amazing, Steve," I whispered, tears running down my cheeks. "I never knew . . ."

"What's amazing is what happens when you give someone a chance." Steve guided me down off the bleachers, until we came to where Mikey was being let down, laughing, by his team. The elated boys made their way into the locker room, but I stopped Mikey before he could follow them.

"Mikey?" I asked cautiously.

"That's me!" he answered. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"You probably don't remember me. My name's Maggie . . ." I proceeded to tell him everything, about how I used to tease and ignore him. I apologized and finished with "I hope you'll forgive me."

To my surprise, Mikey wrapped me in a hug. "It takes a strong person to admit it when they're wrong." He smiled.

I grinned back and asked him if he would ever consider playing basketball professionally. "You're really good."

He looked at me. "You think so?"

"Definitely," I replied.

"Well, if I make it to the NBA, promise you'll come to a game?" he asked, starting toward the locker room.

I laughed. "Count on it!"

"Don't forget!" he called back. "Number 23!"

And there I was, five years later, watching a red Chicago Bulls jersey go charging down the polished court of Staples Center. You guessed it, number 23.

Afton Rentz is a Grade 9 student at Allendale School in Edmonton. (Robin Knight, teacher)

Say Nothing

Kait Young

I remember thinking there was something different going on when the new girl, Sadie, was your partner in gym class. It was only fourth grade, so I found a new buddy easily, but I was still confused about how you could leave me so easily. Then again, you were the type to include everyone, and get along with the world. You used to be so good with people, better than I ever was, and it showed. You always laughed, always had so much fun no matter who you were around. It bugged me a bit, sure, but I was your best friend, and Sadie wasn't. So I didn't say anything.

In seventh grade, we were in the same homeroom. Along with Sadie, who seemed to have a particular disdain for you when she realized you were a tomboy. But that didn't matter. We would sit in class and make fun of her weird hair, or shoes, or preppy designer jacket that was totally impractical for soccer intramurals at lunch. It was great fun, aside from when we would get yelled at for talking when we should have been working. But when you turned 13 (three months before me) and styled your hair straight and streaky like Sadie's, and bought a fake (and, yes, everyone knew it was fake) designer jacket, it wasn't very funny. You liked it though, and I wasn't going to rain on your parade. All I did was smile and say nothing.

We had eaten lunch together for eight years; it was tradition now. Every day, in the farthest back corner of the lunchroom, we'd eat our homemade sandwiches and sip our juice boxes without a care. Then came the days where you wouldn't bring a lunch kit. It wasn't "cool" anymore, you told me. Or stopped bringing lunch altogether. And then came the day in June of eighth grade when you, in your Ralph Lauren jacket and Gucci shoes, told me you were going to go sit with Sadie, and her friends. And wish as I might have, I never said anything.

Halloween in 10th grade (the big scary world of high school), you forgot about my birthday sleepover and made plans with Sadie instead. I was a big person though, so I let it slip. And I let you forgetting our Christmas gift exchange slip as well. I still don't know whether you liked that journal I left in your mailbox (the one you had pointed out months earlier at the mall as absolutely *adoring*), or if you ever got it. Maybe it was firewood for that party you had at your place in April after the snow melted. The one I found out about from your mother two weeks later. I let that slide too. After all, you still told me *we* were best friends. So I said nothing.

You scared me when you phoned drunk from Sadie's one night, about four months before graduation. It didn't sound like you. I didn't know it *was* you until someone in the background called your name. I hate, though, how I snuck out at 3 AM on a Sunday morning in February to pick you up in my Mom's car. And you puked in the back seat. I also hated how you would skip English, our only class together, to smoke it up in the sixth-floor girls' bathroom with Sadie and Marc. That's another thing; I really hated your boyfriend. How you couldn't see that he treated you like dirt is beyond me. Maybe one too many joints, or two too many drinks. Or maybe you just liked having someone be there for you. I was there for you, but I guess Marc was who you wanted more. And again, I bit my tongue and said nothing.

The day your parents kicked you out was not a good day. But could you blame them? You were out of control. And no one could stop you anymore. Not even Sadie. I still tried though. Whether you were coherent enough to know I only wanted the best for you, who knows. I do know that when you slapped me, it hurt. And that when you told me I hadn't been your best friend for years, and that I was too naive to realize it, that broke my heart. But I let you go, walk out of that door without another

word, because that was what you wanted. And honestly, I couldn't say anything.

It was always our dream to do all those important life things together, like graduate high school, and go to university, and become a part of the "real world." But only I got to live that dream to the fullest. That didn't mean you weren't part of that "real world." You just skipped all the other stages, and went directly to a very different world than I ended up in. I saw you all over town though; somehow we still managed to live within walking distance of each other. But it hurt to see you like you were, because you weren't the person I remembered knowing. Your parents came around my apartment one day, asking if I knew where you were living. And I wanted to tell them Marc's, because that would have been the right thing to do. But how could I? They didn't know just how bad things had gotten, and I selfishly didn't want to be the one to dash their hopes. (They always had such great hopes for you, you know that?) I know that all they wanted to do was help, but you didn't want it. And I might not have been *your* best friend, but you were still *mine*. So I didn't say a thing.

Yesterday you and I hung out for the first time in a long time. But time had changed things. It was weird; for once I did all the talking, instead of you. I'm still not good at it, but hopefully you didn't mind. Maybe in those periods of silence, where I tried to rub away the cold around me, you read my mind like you used to. You have no idea how much that habit of yours drove me insane. Then you'd know the things I couldn't say, wouldn't say, or maybe just didn't know I wanted to say. Who knows, though, maybe we can hang out again sometime soon, and talk some more. If I ever work up the nerve to go back into that cemetery. Because there are a lot of things I wish I'd said before.



Kait Young is a Grade 12 student at Jasper Place High School in Edmonton. (Judy Shapka, teacher)

The Melancholy Tale of Butter Boy

Kelsie Ermantrout

You Spectators are all alike.

Gluttonous, glamorous, selfish.

You're oblivious to the agonies I've endured in my life!

I only had pure joy in the first moments of my life. I was born from one of the premium Jersey cows of Mr Jackal, and my cream was sweet and rich. Mr Jackal said so himself. But then they took my cream away. My glory, my self—they stole it from me! But that wasn't the only hell they put me through: they decided to throw me in a gargantuan metal basin, and there I was beaten over and over again with this metal robot/machine. I couldn't elude the abuse I was put through. It lasted for eternity; by the time they were done with me, I couldn't move.

I was paralyzed for a long while. Even now, it is painful to stretch, and I carefully shimmy and slide where I need to go.

Shortly after, I was poisoned—yes, poisoned! I was injected with a toxic chemical called "salt." Did it sting? Of course it did! I've grown accustomed to it inside me, but I still feel the painful tumours that won't dissipate.

The loathsome villains then proceeded to wrap me up in suffocating aluminum, and I was then transported into a frigid habitat along with several thousand other captives like me. We were stranded on wire beds, unable to move from our confinements. The only way to have conversation was through our wrapping, cartons, and containers. It was only here I was granted an education of sorts; I often eavesdropped on the Spectators, picking up on proper English.

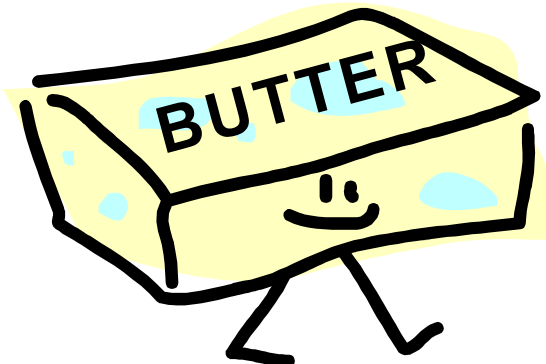
This prison I was in worked like this: you were placed in the back of the room first, with nothing to do but sit all day. But you gradually made your way to the front. It was here the Spectators would peer at us. Those in front had the best view—but also the most perilous place in the prison. When you got to the front, you knew your time had come to leave; within minutes you were stolen by a Spectator.

Never to be seen again.

They took all my friends. Skimmy, the carton of milk, was stolen away before I had a chance to wish him good luck. They also took Ed Nog. He smiled as he was stuck into a big rectangular cart and whisked away.

But it was a while before they took me. Apparently I was too fat for the discriminating bastards. I'll admit, I am bitter, but if you had a genetic flaw that couldn't be fixed, wouldn't your pride too be wounded by incessant remarks? "Should we get some butter?" was a question I was constantly hearing. It was always followed by either "No, butter is bad for you" or "Becel is healthier."

I grew to loathe the name Becel. Spectators lionized the product a bit excessively, and the envy boiled up inside me.



Senior High Prose—Honourable Mention

I then became melancholy, till I realized this worked to my advantage; it extended my shelf life, and I WAS loved in a perverse fashion. *Spectators don't buy me because they can't resist me! I came to think. One taste and they crave more! I am the very definition of decadence! I'm hated because I'm superior!*

This elation was short-lived.

"Skimmy! I am Mr Jackal's Grade-A Fresh Farm Salted Milk Butter!" I told my friend one day (prior to her leaving). "Exceptional in quality when compared with Becel!" Skimmy shook her carton with exasperation; she'd heard this all before. Tewper Cent, a fellow milk buddy, wavered angrily.

"You know, you're not the best," he snapped. "You're only second-grade milk butter—not cream butter." There was dead silence all round the prison. All the dairy products had overheard; I was humiliated, humbled again. My bitter feelings were then directed toward the cream butters of Qualico Dairy Farms.

After an eternity (or what seemed like it), I finally found my way to the front of the prison. I was finally fully able to observe the Spectators. They walked around idly, peering in at us constantly and reaching in, tearing us away from our prison home. It didn't take long for my Spectator to come for me; she scarred me with her inch-long fingernails. Leopard-printed coats (the one she wore that day) are the devil's advocate. They give all dairy products the illusion of a wonderful, posh home. Spectators who wore arabesque trinkets or sophisticated clothing took home only the best of the best; therefore, all dairy products would have a luxurious life.

What a fool I was! I was taken around the store in a cramped metal cart, stuffed into a suffocating plastic pit, and then stuffed into yet another frigid environment, another prison. I couldn't see through the door as to what was going on, but the temperature was more tolerable. Safeway life was a thing of the past; I would then wait patiently in my home for a while.

I discovered other foods besides dairy products: fruits, vegetables, and meat. I was scared of these acquaintances, for they'd tell me stories that horrified me. They always spoke of me being next for being "eaten," and it happened whenever a food was taken out of the prison. I had no idea what this was. I knew it wasn't good. Food would always come back missing some parts of themselves—apples would be cut, meat would have peculiar-shaped chunks taken out of it, milk cartons would change shape. And always, the food of choice would never speak again.

One day, I learned what it meant to be "eaten."

The female Spectator snatched me out of the fridge. She scratched me again with her fingernails (which, I must say, were nicely coloured). I was tossed roughly onto a hard surface, and I heard something that sounded like, "Niefe please."

What's a niefe? I pondered. I would soon find out; just then something seared into me, numbingly sharp, splitting me in two. There was a pain that had me thinking I would die. That's the best way to describe it, for the emotion really is indescribable. I bawled silently. I saw my other self being smothered into a piece of blackened bread which then . . . vanished into the Spectator. It was then I blacked out.

I found myself back in the jail when I woke up; my wounds were haphazardly covered with tinfoil. I was reduced to a blob the size of two cherries. I was tormented with spasms shuddering all through me, and I periodically blacked out for a time afterwards. Too depressed to speak, it was reminiscent of the experience when my cream was stolen, except much worse.

After a period of time, I decided to make a life for myself and get out of my captivity.

My chance came when one of the Spectators left the prison door open for too long. I had never really walked much before, as there was no real opportunity for me to go anywhere. I slowly plodded, shifting my weight side to side, but I didn't realize there was no grounding for me to walk on.

I splattered onto the floor. The pain passed through me again, and I fell unconscious.

A Spectator must've seen me, for I was on the same hard surface when I came to. *Why didn't he place me back in prison?* This passed briefly through my mind when I decided, *No bother; I'm free!* The environment around me was warmer, and my comfort levels soared.

Senior High Prose—Honourable Mention

I meditated in my tranquil state for a bit, and then proceeded to explore.

Some other food was sitting idly by, in a large bowl. I went over to them, and we had a very nice conversation. They too were going exploring, as one of the Spectators was going to let them go into this big thing called a “microwave.”

“An adventure!” I declared. “I’d like to go with you if you don’t mind.”

“Join us, join us!” they pleaded. So I did. I sat on the thing they called a “plate” and a Spectator carefully placed us in. He shut a large door and we all waited.

“What’ll happen, what’ll happen?” the popcorn asked each other. I heard some loud beeping noises and then felt intense heat.

I then died.

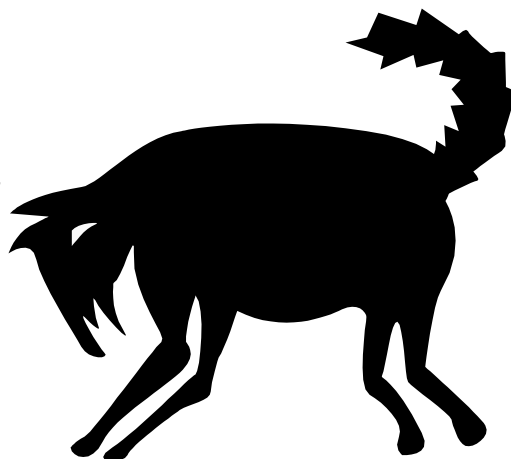
I was rejected for my fat content then devoured for my taste. I was quartered for butter, and melted for popcorn. I have lived a thousand deaths, and have seen the deaths of many friends. Think of me the next time you crave a bowl of popcorn, for my suffering is worth more than that!

Kelsie Ermantrout is a Grade 11 student at Bellerose Composite High School in St Albert. (Brian Grant, teacher)

Truth

Fahad Hameed

Five hundred years ago, people lived in a great civilization of large buildings and even larger weapons. They spent their days fighting amongst each other, never realizing what was truly important. They fought over who could kill the planet faster. Sucking the life out of the earth, cutting down her lungs, even poisoning her waters were all part of their dark agenda. With each passing day the planet became weaker and more drained. One day, man created a weapon, a powerful weapon that could destroy anything. On that day the planet fought back. Great beasts evolved from everywhere, very similar to those of the original inhabitants of the planet. These beasts were smarter, stronger, and were even able to craft languages and cultures of their own. The claw beasts, as their name implied, had monstrous claws perfect for digging and tunnelling. They could tunnel underground and pull unlucky humans to their deaths in their massive tunnel mazes. The bird beasts controlled the skies, using their deadly poisonous claws and razor-sharp beaks to shred any human foolish enough to cross their paths. The wolf beasts, considered the most dangerous of the three breeds, travelled in massive packs, sometimes consisting of 500 or more. They could use makeshift weapons, or simply use their deadly fangs and claws to annihilate entire towns and cities. When the world had literally ended, all that was left of the human race were the massive buildings which they had so proudly constructed. Years passed. The beasts eventually disappeared, perhaps satisfied with what they had accomplished. Then came the dawn of life, an amazing event that occurred some 300 years after the death of mankind, as humanity had been given a final chance. Small villages appeared, spreading slowly. The new race of humanity was not to be left to govern themselves. As a precaution, transcendent beings fell upon the earth, known only as angels, and taught the humans of the fall of their ancestors. Once they had completed their task, they vanished into the skies . . .



It was a tale told from generation to generation. People often forgot values unless they were constantly reinforced. As a child, Fahad never understood why nobody could enter the cities. There was nothing to fear as long as there were no beasts. He was told that the cities were sacred, and not to be trespassed on. Nevertheless, humanity's thirst for knowledge is something that has no limit.

Fahad gazed at the walls of the ancient building. They were truly magnificent. While no children under 18 years were allowed to come to the ancient cities alone, the boy could simply not resist the urge to explore. It was a saying that the beasts that "cleansed" the first world still lurked around in the cities. He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to imagine the beasts. At first, he couldn't even fathom what kind of animal could destroy such a city, let alone the world. But suddenly, he saw them. In his mind, he could see their blood-soaked mouths and claws. Their eyes, full of the hatred of a thousand years of mistreatment, frighteningly looked similar to that of his own. He opened his eyes instantly, and looked warily about. His thirst for adventure had not yet been quenched, but he did not feel like standing alone in this ancient city. As he trekked along the deadly quiet city streets, he could picture what it would have been like 500 years ago. Suddenly, he thought he heard a growl. Instinctively turning around, he half expected to see a wolf beast staring at him. However, all he saw was the rusting ancient metal poles. Frightened now, he ran towards a building. He knew it was strictly forbidden to enter the ancient buildings, but now was not the time to worry about rules. He entered the dark building, and for a moment he considered returning outside, but his explorer's instinct had suddenly

returned. He peered into the darkness, looking for some magical source of light. He felt against the walls to keep his balance, as there seemed to be bumpy debris all over the ground. Suddenly he felt something on his hand, a protrusion coming from the wall. He pressed on it, and suddenly the entire room lit up with a heavy light from the ceiling. For a moment, he was blinded by both shock and the sudden change in light. Once his vision returned, he stopped to admire the amazing architecture that was this magnificent building. He looked down at the debris on the ground, and his blood turned cold. He stared at the remains of humans, some which looked like they had their skulls crushed by a heavy hammer; others looked as if they were sliced in two. One particular skeleton sat in a chair, one that had a long spear shaft thrust through it. His heart was beating faster now than any other time he could remember. With a chilled heart and a shaken soul, he continued, climbing a massive set of stairs. As he reached the second floor of the building, he began to hear more growling. This time it sounded nearer than it had before. Panicking, he ran into an open room, and immediately shut the door. Once again, he had let his imagination lead him to trouble. He searched the walls for another light panel, and upon his success, analyzed the room he was now in. It consisted of a bed, a table, and a door leading to another room. On top of the bed lay a small machine with a dark black screen. On it read a number of strange characters, alongside a variety of differently coloured buttons. He pressed a number of the buttons before the machine began to make a soft whirring sound. Suddenly, the dark screen lit up to a bright blue. The screen remained blue, as if waiting for something. Looking for some kind of answer, he mashed whatever buttons he could see on the small machine. Suddenly, the screen blacked out but began to play faint voices.

“You understand the problem?” asked a voice from inside the machine.

“Of course. Mind you, there is still much to be done,” replied a woman’s voice.

“This is the only solution? Are you sure this is all that can be done?”

“If I wasn’t sure, these mutants wouldn’t be rampant already.”

“You released them without my consent? Human lives are at stake!”

“This is our only option. The Earth cannot handle any more humans or else it will die, do you understand? Ten thousand humans will survive, and you know already that this planet is done for.”

“This planet can still handle human life for several generations. Killing off 99 per cent of humanity is not a valid option.”

“Don’t you see? This plan is perfect; the humans who return after the apocalypse will be able to start over, a fresh start.”

“God forgive us. Billions of human lives are about to end, and there is nothing that can be done . . .”

“If it makes you feel better, once the mutants have rid the human gene from the planet, they won’t die, simply hibernate.”

“Hibernate? Do you mean to tell me they will again strike down the human race?”

“Brilliant, isn’t it? This way, these creatures will constantly keep the human population in che—”

Suddenly, the screen went black. A small, round cylinder popped out from the bottom of the machine and fell to the ground. Fahad scrambled to replace it, but it was no use. Abandoning the machine, he tried to analyze what he had just heard. Suddenly, he realized what the growling was, and went to the window and looked down at the massing groups of beasts. Some taking flight, others marching along the ground.

Fahad Hameed is a Grade 11 student at Bellerose Composite High School in St Albert. (Brian Grant, teacher)

Witch-Lady

Jennifer Hawirko

Cries of anger and hatred filled the air around Tryana's small cottage. Calmly, she opened the door of her simple home and stepped out onto the step to face the crowd. She made a powerful picture there, framed against her dark doorway: her white hair unbound and fluttering in the wind, her amber eyes flashing. Her brown woollen skirt snapped in the wind, and her simple cotton blouse flowed around her. Behind her skirts wound a white tomcat. She smiled as two large, burly men stepped forward and bound her wrists behind her back with cheap hemp rope. They pulled Tryana from her home and pulled her through the mob to the Gathering Place in the centre of the village. Only once before had she entered the Gathering Place, for it was sacred and usually only for men. When Tryana had been but five summers, she had seen a "witch" sentenced and burned there. Now she too was being led to that fate.

The men hauled her into the large log building and then stood reverently beside her, awaiting further command from the village Elder. The Elder raised himself from his chair, leaning heavily on his cane.

"Tryana, you stand before us, accused of practising the devil's black magic: witchcraft. What do you have to say for your defence?"

Proudly she looked him straight in the eye and answered, "Naught, except that I am innocent of all charges." The gathered people gasped at her insolence and pride.

Nodding, he waved his hand, and one by one the villagers, people she had known all her life, stepped forward to testify against her. Stories of two-headed goats and milk spoiled ere it had left the udder were thrown at her. All this she could stand; she knew she was innocent and nothing would break her spirit. She began to work discreetly at her bindings. But then Tryana's amber eyes widened and filled with tears when her childhood sister-friend, Lana, stepped forward to accuse Tryana of cursing her with obesity. Inwardly Tryana giggled; Lana had always loved sweets and food in general. She turned her mind back to escape and continued to work at the hemp.

Finally the proceedings ended, with not one word in Tryana's favour. The Elder sat down to "deliberate upon the evidence." As the whispers rose, he made a show of thinking very hard and weighing her declaration against the evidence.

All that thinking must be hurting his head, Tryana thought. He normally does not do that much.

Finally, he raised his arms. The whispers ceased immediately.

"After carefully weighing the evidence I have reached a verdict," he declared. "The witch Tryana must not be allowed to continue her evil ways. She will be burned in the Gathering Place ere sunset. Tryana, do you repent of your sins?"

Tryana looked up at her father's old friend and smiled. Then she turned her head and spit on the swept dirt floor of the Gathering Place.

"No, Elder, I do not. I am not a Dark Witch as you all seem to believe. I practise the way of my mother and hers before her. I plant



and gather herbs to help and heal. You all came to me for my tonics. Just as you went to my mother and her mother before her.

"Your minds are small indeed to believe that I could harm any of you. Lana, you and I were great friends, but you became jealous of me. It was never my fault that the boys preferred me to you, and yet you blame me for your shortcomings." Tryana turned to look at Lana, but she turned her head away.

"Jack, you accuse me of sending the coughing sickness to your grandmother." Neither would he meet her eyes.

"What reason did I have to kill her? She was kind to me and I loved her as my own. Elder . . ."

"Silence her! She tries to confuse us!" screamed the Elder.

"You cannot silence me, Elder!" She bared her teeth at the men who turned to gag her. "Elder, you have listened to the stories woven by hateful, jealous, and superstitious minds. Even if I told you the true reasons behind many of the stories, I doubt you would believe me. In truth, you too want me dead, and merely because of a bet you lost to my father. The sins of the father shall be repaid by the son or, in this case, the daughter. Everyone here knows that when I die all of my possessions become yours." A nerve started to tick in the Elder's forehead.

"Do not even try to deny it because, though I do not practise the Dark Ways, I do have some power of my own. I possess the Seeing Eye. I can see the truth behind your lies. I can see the darkness in your souls. I know all your hearts and know that you are petty and afraid. Try to kill me, try to burn me. I. Dare. You." With these last words, she finally managed to tear through the cheap hemp.

In a rage, the Elder's eyes bugged out and his face turned a frightening shade of purple. He screamed for wood and torches to be brought. The assembled people immediately scrambled to do his bidding. Tryana stood calmly in the centre, like the eye of the storm. She closed her eyes and began to chant softly to herself.

"Green is the womb, from which all life springs.
White is the air and the gossamer wings."

The chant took on a tune-like quality and became a song.

"Blue is the water of which the undine sings.
Red is the fire, death destruction brings."

As her voice grew in volume, the villagers stopped what they were doing and turned to look at her. Then the chant changed.

"Fire, Water, Earth, and Air,
Lend to me the power there."

Palpable fear ran through the people like wind over the plains.

"Protective Light is what I seek;
My heart is strong, my soul not weak."

Her skin began to glow from within; her hair started to shimmer and blew around her head as though she was within a whirlwind.

"Binding souls and strengthening hearts.
This dear world, I'll not depart."

Tryana brought her unbound hands from behind her back and held them cupped in front of her. In her palms, a light gathered and began to grow.

Senior High Prose—Honourable Mention

“Command the sky, and fly the earth;
Fire and water, guide me, rebirth!”

The light spilled over her hands like water and fell to the floor in a cascade. It spread from her, forming a disc on the floor.

“Witch-Lady. Goddess. I am She.
Great Lady Mother, allow me leave.”

She opened her eyes. The light arced over her head, forming a domed cage around her. A perfect circle of light surrounded her.

“What once was mine I now take back,
The light now I’ll never lack.”

Within, her unseeing eyes burned with a holy light, so bright they burned whoever looked. Then the light spread and completely covered her.

“Lend to me the powers all,
Mother, Sisters, heed my call!”

The light vanished and she stood before them, garbed in a white silk under-tunic. Overtop she wore a white sleeveless dress, edged in gold embroidery. The sleeves of her under-tunic were tight and tapered to her middle finger. At her waist was a golden girdle laced with silver and sapphires; her long skirt brushed the floor and pooled at her feet. Her white-blond hair was held back from her face with a gold and silver coronet. Her amber eyes still burned with a light that was unmatched by any mortal woman.

She looked at the silent and still people. They stared back at her, some with awe but most with fear. She smiled again and spoke.

“We are not the same.”

She lifted her left hand, palm up, and light spilled over her again. Then she was gone. Her words echoed around the Gathering Place and imprinted themselves in the minds of those who had once been her people.

“We are not the same . . .”

Jennifer Hawirko is a Grade 11 student at Bellerose Composite High School in St Albert. (Brian Grant, teacher)

Murder

Marv Machura

Murder.

A young man (18) bludgeoned: five young men (18) responsible.

It was a house party, Saturday night.

Some point of honour.

Alcohol.

Frustrations.

Pride.

Older men absent.

Time-tested rules silenced,
maybe lost, pushed aside

By profit and pleasure.

We let them find their own way.

Worse than wolves,
Much like insects.

Anyway, on the front page today, Monday,
The five accused cover their heads in shame
As cameras click and

larger-than-life, shining cops guide them

in the lawhouse

like young swine to slaughter.

Hands tied. Bent inward, no foolish bravado
In the dim winter morning light.

They're already dead, these five who were there
When their flame burned hot
And control slipped
As the Universe shifted.
And another young man's heart stopped beating.

Time went on—unstoppable/forward-only.

The wheels of Justice start to turn

And the brake of Mercy burns

While Hope waits to be reborn.

Marv Machura is an instructor at NorQuest College in Edmonton.



Untitled

Maria King

To everything there is a season,
a time for every purpose under the sun.
A time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
a time to kill and a time to heal . . .
a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance . . .
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to lose and a time to seek;
a time to rend and a time to sew;
a time to keep silent and a time to speak;
a time to love and a time to hate;
a time for war and a time for peace.

—Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

Prelude

I buried you
almost three years ago,
before the grass grew
atop your grave,
before the wind
stopped crying your name.
Still there is a hush
during harvest,
the colours of spring
and autumn still muted.
Your footsteps have been erased
from the dirt



but the sun still hints at your smile.

Summer

There is a moment
that passes
when I revisit
the absence:

where for a moment
it is written
out of memory

still he is here;
out in the field
checking on the cattle

waiting for my eyes
to meet his,
to fall into embrace
in front of the barn
on a hazy August night.

Autumn

Sometimes I still wake
in darkness' curtain
and reach for him
but grasp only a cold pillow

hear his footsteps down the hall
but find only the cat

wait to be pulled
into wanting arms,
to watch languid leaves
drift deeply towards the ground,
but instead fall asleep
in his easy chair.

I dreamt of him last night
and woke up with a smile.

Winter

The moon glows in December
bright over snow-covered fields
over the ground
you're laid to rest in;
over harvested land.

It seems brighter this year
than previous ones
though I still miss you
as though just yesterday
you left me.

I wait now for spring;
for the time to seed and till
and for the warm summer nights
and another harvest

the years leaking together—
melting now into
one long dreamscape
until I am with you again.

Spring

And now the trees
are three years older;
three harvests,
three winters.

Now life has yet again
entered into spring
and here I am
in the land of rebirth.
You are still here somehow,
amidst the spirited fields
and whispering wind.

I will continue.

Maria King is a student teacher at St Albert Catholic High School in St Albert.

Trans-Canada Headed West

Mandi MacLennan

Dark skies—
Morning and pouring rain
Follow us West.

Tears trickle down my cheek
As I say goodbye to home.
Pathetic fallacy at its best.

Quebec, a large place
Seems small as we flash by.
Our country shrinking.

A two-day journey, in itself,
Ontario.
My heart sinking.

The Prairie's yellow mirage
Induces dreams.
A paralyzing sleep invades my mind and body.

Destination Alberta somewhat reached as
More rain baptizes new roots.
Man's best friend comforts me.

Mosquitoes, our new alarm clock,
Tell us we need to keep going.
A few more hours North.

Welcome
To the hamlet of Wabasca.
A new beginning.

Mandi MacLennan is a teacher at Mistassiniy School in Wabasca.



Saskatchewan

Megan Bachiu

In this land
I do not see what others see.
A geography that is
captivating and ancient—
one that does not tell
its story so quickly
as the Plains of Abraham
or the mountain towns of Alberta.
The farmer's fields and
the small poplar trees are not
as impenetrable or domineering
as the great Canadian Shield
or the big trees that populate
British Columbia.
It is a quiet beauty—
one that can be seen only
by those who have also grown
in this inexplicable land
and who are intertwined in its history.
The mysteries that the land holds—
of old buffalo jumps
and battles between human and nature—
are not easily revealed to the eye.
The mysteries are held dear,
and yet they are worth unlocking.
The clear, cold night sky shows
its heart when the Northern Lights dance.
The slow steady music of the
breeze kissing the trees has its own pulse.
Walking through the fields of wheat
I am surrounded by my own ocean,
with ripples and waves that never climax.
The dun-coloured fields
hold no obvious value
and thus are considered worthless.
But they contain all I need—
a heart, a song, a pulse,
a place where I am home.



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