

Trees and Humans

Trees and humans share

A deep connection with

One another.

Humans breathe in the oxygen that trees produce

From the carbon dioxide humans exhale.

Both of them have major influence

In the ecosystems around the world.

The trees know they are

Part of the ground,

Their roots grow interconnected with

the land in order to thrive.

Humans think they are

Part of the superior race,

Our roots grow in hollow homes

Hidden from the land

Withering away.

Humans have been too busy to

See the roots dug up

Of dead trees.

Trees know the importance of

All beings of the earth

That grow together

in unity.

Trees grow together connected by root systems

Humans grow together by communicating with each other

A connection has been lost between beings

We live in relation with everything

We all have connections to everything

Rooted in our hearts

We are one

Consequences

I loved the idea of freedom when I finally get my driver's license

The excitement of being able to go somewhere by myself

There is a sense of exhilaration when you get in a fast car.

Eventually I began to see a responsibility to take care of a car,

But that isn't the whole part of the responsibility.

Learning to drive is a practical skill

But it's not that black and white,

Or maybe it's the fact that consequences are easy to ignore.

I began to see what other people ignore after they lock their car doors,

They look out windows trying to understand the environment without being affected by it.

The burden of running a car weighs on my shoulders.

What goes unrealized is driving cars hurts ourselves.

We are suffocating because we are born breathing smoggy air.

Our actions have consequences.

Life is not a line with a start and a finish,

Life is a continuous circle constantly changing.

Each plant, animal and rock has a purpose.

We are still animals even though we have changed habitats into houses and paths into roads.

We have to stop thinking what we do doesn't have consequence,

Or maybe we just took the idea and accepted it,

And did not question it.

Like the car companies selling items that are missing warning labels.

Why would you question something that makes life easier?

But remember an easy life is a misled one.

Our health is being put at risk because no one ever questioned what happens after this when we take a breath of exhaust.

The risks are different and varied.

They hurt our lungs, our hearts and change our very DNA.

Sadly those who are most helpless are babies before they are even born and children.

They are the ones playing outside breathing toxic air and the babies that were born too early and didn't make it.

It's the child who was exposed to exhaust in the womb and now is diagnosed with cancer.

Is it worth it to go out every Friday night?

Is it worth it to have a future as murky and gloomy as smog in the sky.

They have always said that children are the future.

What type of future is one where babies are born knowing they will have health problems?

This path that we have chosen is the wrong one. This path is based on greed of the easy life while children suffer the consequences.

Our earth is our home and we must protect it

This bubble of clean air around our planet will run out,

There is no reset button.

We have one shot at keeping our earth clean.

Together we could change the way we build communities.

I ask people of this planet to take on responsibility to see

the consequences that have hurt every human being.

The problem won't go away

We can't settle for just okay

If we take on responsibility for what we have done

That's the first step of many going in the right direction.

Reluctant High School Adventures

Terrified, is what Teagan is feeling as she sees a little red lizard, or what she thinks is a lizard, crawling across the floor. Teagan jumping up onto her desk screaming, hopes someone will save her. Realizing that her younger brother was the only one home, and he won't care. Suddenly, the little red lizard starts to scream back.

"Hey calm down, your screaming is hurting my ears," The lizard says rubbing his little head. Delightful! Teagan picks up her giant Biology textbook and throws it as hard as she can at the lizard. The lizard attempts to catch the book, but fails and he topples over.

"That is a big book! Awe and look there is a cute little elephant on the front," The lizard says stroking the front of the textbook.

"How do you know how to talk?!? You are a lizard!" Teagan exclaims, not at all calm and still up on the desk.

"First of all I'm a dragon, and second, my name is Mushu, use it!" Mushu yells.

"Okay, Mushu, where did you come from and why are you here?" Asks Teagan coming down slowly from the desk.

"I'm from China, and I was just sleeping, and then I woke up in your living room. I need your help to go back home!" Mushu yells desperately.

"Nope. Not doing it, I'm perfectly happy, sitting in my room doing homework, because it means I don't have to deal with people," Teagan replies picking up her

Biology textbook up off the floor. Suddenly, Teagan hears the front door open; she grabs Mushu by the tail, and shoves him into the closet.

"Oh Teagan," Alyssa, Teagan's older sister, sings, coming into the room. "I had a thought," she says about as sweetly as a snake, "you should help people more, for example, your little brother who needs help with math homework," Alyssa says pushing their little brother, Max, into the room. Alyssa smiling and waving, Alyssa closes Teagan's bedroom door before she can say anything.

"That was rude!" Mushu says angrily as he shoves his way out of the closet and dusts himself off.

"Whoa!" Max exclaims, eyes lighting up. "Can we keep him?" Pleads Max.

"Nope, he has to go home," Teagan says matter-of-factly opening the math textbook.

"We're going to help him right?" Max asks looking up at Teagan. Teagan looks at Max, then Mushu, then the Math textbook.

"Fine!" Huffs Teagan slamming the textbook shut, knowing nothing was going to get done.

The next day Teagan and Max take Mushu to school with no plan, hoping they were going to be able to come up with something. Teagan had agreed the night before to take Mushu to Biology if Max took him to English after. Biology is first block and Teagan slumps onto her stool right as the bell rings for class to start. The teacher was droning on about cells or something, Teagan can't focus because she is too busy trying

to keep Mushu quiet. Quietly, but quickly, Teagan's friend Megan rushes in and plops down next to Teagan.

"Hi," Megan whispers, trying to catch her breath.

"Why are you late?" Teagan asks while in the process of kicking her backpack.

"I forgot to pack for the China trip I'm going on to help teach English," Sighs Megan.

"China?" Teagan and Mushu says in unison, Teagan instinctively kicks her backpack hard, too hard. Mushu shrieks.

"Teagan, office!" The teacher shouts, pointing to the door. Teagan sighs picking up her backpack and walks out. Teagan panics on her way to the principal's office. What if he finds Mushu? What will happen? How will she tell Max? These questions and hundreds more are running through her brain as she knocks on the principal's door. The principal brings her into his office right away.

"Why are you here Teagan?" The principal asks. "I don't know sir," lies Teagan. She hates lying especially to people of authority.

"I heard you were being disruptive with something in you backpack," The principal says smirking slightly.

"Nope," Teagan says with a straight face. Teagan is starting to rub her sweaty palms on her jeans.

"You wouldn't mind if I looked in your backpack than?" The principal asks, outstretching his hand.

"I would actually," Teagan says putting her backpack between her legs as her already fast heartbeat speeds up more.

"Why is that?" The principal asks getting more and more frustrated.

"Personal," states Teagan. The principal is starting to get more and more suspicious. He continues to interrogate Teagan for about ten more minutes. Teagan continues to give one word answers and avoid the questions, which only results in her suspension. Leaving Teagan the principals angry at Mushu for being the reason she got suspended. Teagan now has a plan on how to get Mushu home, but she is beginning to doubt it is worth it because of getting suspended.

It is the day Megan is leaving for China, and Teagan and Max are going to say goodbye to her so that they can slip Mushu into her bag. When they arrive Teagan gives Megan a hug and Max slowly unzips the bag, so as not to make any noise, and slides Mushu inside and closes it back up. The plan worked out perfectly.

Teagan and Max left the airport laughing and talking with each other like they haven't done in a long time. After helping Mushu get home Teagan felt happier and was a nicer person to be around.

Grace Clemont
Westside Secondary
Grade 11

Time Can't Heal This

When I first broke my arm, it didn't hurt for the first few moments. I had pulled myself off the ground, stared at my twisted wrist before the pain slammed into me, knocking the breath out of me and I wailed until my mother gathered me in her arms and took me to the hospital.

My doctors give me medication to help with the pain and wrapped a cast around the broken parts. Ending it with a smile that could blind.

"Give it 6 weeks." He said, "Come back and we'll take that cast off, be careful though! That arm is still fragile, take good care of it and don't do anything reckless."

I did as I was told and my arm healed within six weeks.

When I had my first heartbreak, I did the same. Except I played both the doctor and patient. There was no medication to numb the pain, and no professionals to tell me what to do. So I spent long sleepless nights rewrapping the cast until I could finally get the job done right. I messed up a few times and injured myself more in the process but finally I had made the perfect support around the jagged edges of my heart.

"Let it heal," I said to myself, wiping away my last tear. "Don't do anything reckless."

To be fair, I didn't do anything. I gave my heart the time it needed, and, like my arm, it began to heal. Soon, I took the cast off. Maybe I had done the job of wrapping it a little rough because some parts weren't in the places they used to be. But it worked, and breathing didn't hurt anymore.

"Don't do anything reckless," I told myself, for my heart no longer ached.

And then I met you.

You had the same scars I did. Maybe that was why I found myself drawn to you. You brought me in with a hesitant smile and gentle hands that understood my pain, the pain that still haunted me at night, and the same one that came to you. We fell into each other's embrace and understanding. My heart glowed; you were the medicine that numbed the pain. I fooled myself into thinking that I was yours too. I gave you all my supplies and all my soul to keep you glowing; it gave me hope. Sometimes our rough edges cut each other again but everytime we soothed the wounds together.

Grace Clemont
Westside Secondary
Grade 11

I was reckless. I forgot that after you remove the cast there's still a period of healing left. My heart was too weak, and yours could never be healed. Because while I slept, you tore the bandages I had so delicately placed on your heart, and let yourself get cut deeper. You let it cut too deep and soon your jagged edges ripped into mine.

You switched off and your heart got infected because you refused to heal it. Suddenly I couldn't fix it, and you let it rot. Your eyes went cold and your heart turned black. You reached into my newly healed heart and crushed it within your twisted hands and left me gasping on the pavement. This time I couldn't pull myself up.

You mustn't have known I had used all my supplies up on you. You didn't know that while you ripped away my handiwork, you were taking something you couldn't give back.

And I didn't know that the second break is always worse.

The lamplight cast an eerie glow on the cobblestone streets. As close to midnight as it was on such a night, there was no one out on the streets. There wasn't a living soul, human or otherwise, to witness the thick, white fog that seeped out of the cemetery and into the streets. It muffled all the sounds of the night, except for one thing: the distinct sound of footsteps.

She didn't leave the fog for it was what allowed her to walk out in the real world after so long within the ground. Her name had once been Helena, but she'd forgotten it in the years she'd spent buried beneath the ground.

She'd been forced to spend the past one hundred years rotting below the surface, her final moments playing out in her mind like a horrible film scene stuck on repeat. The cursed dead like her didn't get happy endings. In fact, the cursed like her didn't get any ending. Only a constant pain and rage consuming them until the nights like these when they got to leave their graves if only until the morning light came.

This was not her first time back, nor would it be her last - well aware of the soil that covered her; it was nights like these when she could have tiny freedom that she crawled out of the ground like a starved man toward food. And the payment for the night air upon her face, the feeling of wind and fresh rain - she paid it with only a moment's hesitation. If she didn't want to pay she wouldn't leave her grave. But she'd never once declined the opportunity.

Maybe if the dead were allowed to think and realize what the payment was and what it meant she might not have done so. She might have resisted the temptation of the air and the sweet wind of the world of the living. But, alas, the dead could not think and so she did not realize what it was that she was truly doing on those sweet blissful nights she managed to have some freedom and she did not know what the consequences of her choices did.

She could not think because her mind was full of anger, even the wonder of the living world was not enough. To her hatred this one night was only a drop of water in the ocean. There was no way to make it any different than what it was. And that anger, which had built over the century interned below ground in her shallow unmarked grave, came howling out of her like a hurricane when she walked above the ground.

It wasn't simply because of how she had died that caused her to remain behind, a prisoner beneath ground. It was the day that she had died that had made her the way she was, for every single person killed on that day became a part of the in-between worlds. It was for those killed by those like Helena was now, a desperate soul looking to spend a single night above the Earth that had the same fate befall upon them. If Helena knew the truth, if she didn't go out on those nights once a century, she might not have chosen to pay for her brief freedom with the blood of others, trapping them in the same fate that she had been ensnared into.

But it never worked that way. And tonight it was no different.

That night wherever Helena walked, wherever she tread, death followed. The anger and rage flowing through her punished the guilty and the innocent indiscriminately. Whoever had the misfortune of finding themselves in her path, found death. They too would have the chance to walk again, one hundred years from this day.

Anticipation

Silence hung over the theatre like a heavy black curtain. Only one crisp spotlight was illuminating a lustrous piano, the colour of night. Flakes of dust could be seen in the golden ray, gently floating down like snowflakes. I breathed in, the stench of stale air rushing into my nose and the pounding of my heart ringing in my head as loud as a thundering bison stampede. I rose from my seat, parting the warm crimson coloured chair, the only comfort in the whole theatre. Hundreds of eyes pierced me like daggers as I shuffled onto the wooden stage that creaked and sent plumes of dust swirling upwards with each step. Approaching the monstrous piano, I was swallowed by silence as the stampede in my head grew louder. My mouth was dry and lips chapped; however, a tinge of sour bile still resonated on my tongue from earlier.

The piano bench did not have a comforting warmth to it like the theatre chair. It was stiff as bricks even though it was made of nothing but cheap wood. The paint was chipping and splinters brushed against my legs, threatening me with their sharpness. My eyes fell down to the pristine keys that blinded me with the glow of the horrendous yellow spotlight reflecting off them like a mirror. As I moved my clammy hands burning with heat towards the keys, I felt welcomed by the icy cold air sitting on top. I shut my eyes, embracing the cool atmosphere of the stage and inhaled one last breath of stale air.

Suddenly, my surroundings felt familiar. This monstrous instrument made me feel welcomed and a waterfall of adrenaline filled my body. With my pasty fingers positioned above the glimmering keys, I began to play a tsunami of notes. My fingers danced across the piano, filling the room with dynamics and a huge range of notes. The silence was swallowed by music.

In A World of My Own

"You're worthless!"

"You can't do it!"

"Nobody cares about you!"

I wake up in a cold sweat, my alarm ringing in my ears, blaring out the demons for at least a couple seconds. I slowly crawl out of bed and get ready for school. Pulling my hair back in a messy bun and zipping up my light blue sweater, I grab my sketchbook, stuff it in my backpack, and head out the door.

It's a crisp October morning; walking to the bus stop I see the familiar groups of friends, couples, and peers buzzing about all their Halloween preparations. I just idle away from them and pull out my book.

"Everybody hates you!"

"Everyone is judging you!"

"Just go back ho-

I plug in my earbuds and put my book away as the bus arrives.

The last time I remember being truly happy was when my family was perfect: perfect mother, perfect father, perfect pet, perfect house, perfect everything... Unfortunately, that all ended when my parents divorced, after that; we moved across the city, our dog died, I never see my dad anymore, and my mom started working nights to pay for the

house. After all of this I just closed myself off. I lost contact with all my friends and turned to stories and drawing.

Stories and drawings are better friends... They're always there for you when nobody else is.

The school bus pulls up outside Peachberry High School. The prison I've been attending for four years, just waiting to be released at the end of next year.

"If you make it... Which you won't!"

I head to my first class; art, the only class I enjoy. Once I reach the classroom I see an unfamiliar face at my table. *"Maybe we're just having a desk change."* I think to myself as I make my way to the table in the back. However, I soon realize that I don't recognize her. Seconds later, the bell rings and everyone else is still in the same seats. I go take my seat.

"Good morning class! I hope you had a relaxing weekend. My teacher, Ms. Clarke announced energetic as usual. "Today we have a new student, Rayne Willows?"

The girl at my table, slowly rises out of her chair. Her smooth, dirty blonde hair covering her face. She quickly pushes it out of her face and gives a small smile to the class.

"Welcome to Peachberry High Rayne!" Ms. Clarke beams in her direction. "Anyways class, today we're going to work with watercolour paints. I want one person at

each table to collect the materials, you can paint whatever you would like as long as it's appropriate. Now, let's get to work!"

I turn to face Rayne, we lock eyes for a moment. Her smokey blue eyes look worn out and pained. *"She's like me..."*

"Uh, hi Rayne. I'm Elyssa..."

"Hi Elyssa... So are we going to get started?"

"Yeah! I'll go get the supplies." I reply. I go to the closet and grab the aprons, paint brushes, paint tablets, and water and set it on the table. We quietly work on our own assignments only looking up to get more paint.

"Okay class, we have ten minutes left so I want the people that didn't grab the supplies to do the cleaning." Ms. Clarke calls out. Rayne stands up quickly, gathers her paint brushes and rushes to the sink. *"Well that was weird."* I think to myself. I look over and notice she didn't grab my brushes. I pick them up and take them to the sink.

"Hey, you didn't grab my paint brushes, so I decided to bring them over and-" I lose my train of thought when I see Rayne, with her sleeves rolled up I see cuts and scars.

She quickly covers up her arms and runs back to the table to scoop up her things just as the bell rings for next class. Before she leaves she whispers, "You didn't see anything. Just leave me alone."

After a painfully boring History class, I set out to find Rayne. I have a feeling I know where she'll be. New kids always try to find an empty table in the cafeteria or in an

empty hallway. Sure enough, I find her in the vacant hallway near the art classroom.

Rayne immediately spots me and looks away.

“I told you to leave me alone.”

“I don’t think you should be alone right now, you can’t change what I saw.”

“I can’t talk about it. I just met you! How am I supposed to trust you?” Rayne says as she chokes back tears.

“I understand everything about you. I know I just met you, but that doesn’t change anything. You’re suffering and I know it. You can’t make me leave because I know you need someone right now.” I take a seat beside Rayne, but she moves away. Rayne tries to gather her belongings and stand up, but I grab her wrist. She winces and pulls my hand off.

“Your cuts are new.” I mumble to mostly myself.

Rayne takes a deep breath and sits back down, tears streaming down her face as she looks down at her arms.

“Promise me you aren’t just saying that you know what I’m going through. I’ve had way too many people do that to me.”

“Don’t worry, I’m dealing with it too. You can trust me, I’m not like them.”

Rayne looks up at me and gives me a sad smile, her eyes red and puffy with tears still falling across her face.

“The truth is, I’ve been suffering with anxiety and depression my whole life. It’s been in my family for years. Two years ago, I lost my older sister to suicide. She was my only friend at school; she was pretty, smart, and athletic, but deep down she was

suffering. She didn't tell anyone what she was going through, not even me. I'll never forget the day I walked into the bathroom to see her dead on the floor, pills everywhere. After she died, I started getting bullied by everyone. With her not there, their words were getting to me. People would say that I should have been the one who should have died. We moved here to have a fresh start, but the bullying followed. People started to find my private accounts I would use to post art and they would make fun of me there. My cutting was the only way for me to feel better. At least for a moment, the only thing that hurt was my arms. She was always my shield, she protected me from everything and everyone that wanted to hurt me. She was always there for me when I needed her. I just wish I could have been there for her..."

Rayne finishes her story. I don't say anything, I just wrap my arms around her in a tight embrace. I hear her soft sobs next to my ear. She's kept this from everyone for so long, I can't imagine losing someone like that.

"Rayne?"

"Y-Yeah?"

"You're not alone anymore, we're going to get through this together. I'm glad you told me your story and I'm glad I met you today. You've already helped me so much. Just hold on a little longer."

"I'm here for you."

Liv

I can't stand it anymore. I'm done was the last thing she ever texted me. The minute it took me to realize what she meant felt like years. I ran out of the house not even bothering with a jacket. The cool autumn breeze whipped my hair into my face. I didn't care. I had to get to her before she did something drastic. It was only two blocks to her place. I could see her silhouetted on the roof of her apartment building. I was too late. Time froze as she stepped off the edge. I screamed.

That had been over a week ago and I still couldn't muster up the courage to go into my best friend's apartment. The funeral had been a quiet one. Liv had been a stranger around here and had mostly kept to herself. I had been hiding in the library when I first met her. Recognizing the book she was reading, I had quickly struck up a conversation with her and we became fast friends.

She never let on that anything was bothering her. She had sometimes talked about ending it all, but always in jest. Or so it had seemed. She was never one to make rash decisions. I couldn't fathom what had pushed her to take that last step. She had seemed fine. Really. Like everyone, she had bad days too, but . . . had I really been that blind? I needed to know why, and there was only one way to find out. The answer had to be in her apartment. But first, I had to face the fact that when I walked in, I wouldn't see Liv lying on the couch with a book in one hand and a cup of tea in the other.

Taking a deep breath, I pushed open the door and tossed my spare key on the kitchen counter. Everything was exactly as I had last seen it. Even the pile of library books on the table which seemed to be perpetually overdue. Slowly, I made my way through the apartment. There was nothing out of the ordinary. I picked up the book she had been currently reading; a note fell out. In quaintly-scripted letters, the note read: *It will be easier if you come back on your own. They shall make you queen whether or not you so desire.* It was signed with a single monogram. It sounded like something straight out of one of the fantasy novels she always read.

A crash roused me from my thoughts. The front door was shouldered open by two muscular guys. They were both dressed in leather armour and had multiple weapons hanging at their hips. Neither of them looked like they were playing dress-up though. They both glared at me with ice-cold eyes.

“What’s going on-”

The darker one cut me off with a growl,

“He’s not giving you a choice this time.”

“Who? What’s happening?” I was starting to get a bit terrified.

They both started towards me. I scampered backwards, but smacked into a wall.

I felt as if I was falling through nothingness.

I hit the ground hard and black spots floated in front of my eyes. All around me were stone walls, in an asymmetrical, almost square configuration. Judging from the smell, I appeared

to have landed in a dungeon or torture chamber. The two warriors were nowhere to be seen, but I could hear the murmurs of a conversation on the other side of the wall.

“ . . . you mean you don’t think it is the right girl?”

“She looked . . . and didn’t try to . . .”

“She might’ve . . . acting”

“Possibly, or . . .”

The voices faded in and out until they reached the cell door. The door swung open revealing the tallest man I had ever seen. He was dressed much the same as the other two, but had a rich purple cloak draped over one shoulder and a single sword at his waist.

He stared at me for a moment, then said in a dangerously quiet voice, “Who is this? I told you to bring me back my daughter.”

“You told us to bring you the one found in those human living quarters, your Majesty.”

“Well, why are you still here? Go find my daughter!” He glared at them. Under his breath he muttered, “She must finally take responsibility for the damage she has caused this kingdom.” The two warriors glanced at each other and disappeared.

He turned his attention back to me.

“And what to do with some scrawny human youngling?” I didn’t bother answering; he seemed to be talking to himself. Besides, I had enough running through my brain at the moment.

He had been staring at me for a solid two minutes when his eyes suddenly narrowed.

“What were you doing in my daughter’s living space and what have you done with her?”

“Your daughter?”

“Olivanna the fourth of Corvinth.”

“Corvinth? Olivanna? Oh, wait, Liv?” I knew I was starting to sound like an idiot, repeating everything he said, but I was having a hard time putting this all together. Maybe I’d wake up soon and find out it was all a dream.

Then I realized he was still waiting for an answer.

“I was trying to find out why she . . .” I stumbled over the next few words, “why she . . .” I couldn’t say it out loud. My mind still refused to accept the fact that she was no longer alive. I swallowed again, but I couldn’t force the words out. He continued to glare at me. I closed my eyes briefly. “Why she killed herself.”

“She what?” The roar of the silence that followed was deafening.

I watched the storm brewing behind his silver eyes. An explosion was imminent. I think it was obvious now why she chose to escape. His hand dropped to the hilt of his sword. Now I had to worry about me.