



2019 Young Authors' Conference

Marg Van Dusen Award Recipients and Honorable Mentions

ELEMENTARY

Recipient of Marg Van Dusen Award

Lily Eckerman, Grade 6, Juniper Ridge Elementary: *Broken Beyond Repair*

Honorable Mentions

Gr. 4

Kelsi Moss, Arthur Hatton Elementary: *The Big Green Fluffy Monster*

William Alexander Barrie, Ecole Lloyd George: *Jour Un: Vendredi*

Gr. 5

Jordyn Peace, Parkcrest Elementary: *Hold On*

Gr. 6

Allie Piroddi, Kamloops School of the Arts: *The Sun Is Just Another Star*

Gr. 7

Richard R. Sharp, Savona Elementary: *OMD Ending*

SECONDARY

Recipients of Marg Van Dusen Award

Vivian McLean, Gr. 11, Desert Sands Community School: *Expectations and Phones*

Honorable Mentions

Gr. 8

Parker Morrison, Westsyde Secondary: *Outer Shadows*

Gr. 9

Kiara Johnston, South Kamloops Secondary: *The Boy in Blue*

Brianna Narcisse, Chase Secondary: *Wandering*

Gr. 10

Abbie Israel-Armand, Kamloops School of the Arts: *Ode to the City and Disposable*

Gr. 11

Alexa Marshall, South Kamloops Secondary: *A Woman Scorn'd*

Gr. 12

Talia Wiens, South Kamloops Secondary: *The Price of Freedom*

Broken Beyond Repair

Sadness. It surrounds me like a bubble. I don't know how to escape, all I know is that I'm slowly drowning in it. Suffocating.

My mother was always happy, and her mood spread around the room like vines on an old building.

She is not gone. I see her in dark corners. I see her in the flowers that grow and the oak in the backyard. The shapes only remind me of what I have lost and what little I have left.

My father never recovered from the loss. To be honest, I didn't either. It's as if the stopped heartbeat of my mother's caused the shattering of my father's.

My dad and I moved. Not that it matters anymore. My friends don't talk to me or call me to see if I'm okay. It's not like I would respond. We moved because my father can't stand the memories left behind in the house. He wants to get rid of his bubble of sadness, but it won't do anything. I saw the way my father looked at my mother when she was a loving, thinking, and walking human. He is desperate.

Our new house might have once been pretty with its cute shutters and lovely garden, but the years were anything but kind. It was a one floor suite with a cozy living room situated around a fireplace. A kitchen is tucked into the corner. The windows are cracked, the rooms smell of mildew, and the stove smells like something had been cremated in it. The ceiling in my

room is cracked and there is only room for a bed, a dresser, and a bedside table. There is a small window with a lovely view of the neighbour's wall. The bathroom has a toilet, sink, and a bathtub with legs that look like a wolf's foot.

We had moved from one side of Manhattan to the other, so I had to enroll in a new school. The next day, I came late to class. A girl with blond hair and the brightest smile I've ever seen came and sat beside me. I looked around. There were plenty of seats left, so why did she sit right beside me? I haven't brushed my hair in a month, and I had worn the same clothes for a week. I probably smelled like the inside of my kitchen oven.

"Hello, my name is Eleanor, what's yours?" she said.

"Bella," I say. I wanted to make this conversation stop immediately.

"I think your hair looks great today. What do you do to make it so shiny?"

"It's natural," I say.

"I wish that I had hair like yours but my mother won't let me use products."

"At least you have a mother," I replied bluntly.

The next day, I wake up early to the sound of my alarm clock blaring in my ears. I go to the bathtub, fill it with water, but I only decide to wet my hair. Twenty minutes later, my hair is looking better than ever.

Again Eleanor sits beside me, and this time she compliments my teeth. They are quite yellow from the lack of brushing.

“At least yours don’t need braces.” Elenore sighs.

What is her game?

The next day, I brush my hair, but this time I also scrub my teeth until they are pearly white.

Again and again this happens. In about a month, I have established a routine. Wake up, have a shower, put on deodorant, brush teeth, brush hair, get dressed. Progress.

A new challenge greets me.

“Do you want to hang out sometime soon?” asks Elenore.

“Maybe, but I have lots of homework this week.”

“I guess you’re right, me too.” I can tell she feels like a deflated balloon.

I have no homework. I just want to be alone.

She asks again the next day, and the next. Two weeks pass and I know that my excuses are getting weak.

“Do you want to hang out after school today?” I ask

“I was beginning to think you would never ask,” Elenore says with a smile.

Later that day, Elenore lingers in the hallway while I am in my bathroom. When I exit, I see Elenore looking at an old family photo.

“Who is this?” asked Elenore, pointing at my grandma.

“That’s my grandma Mary Anne, and beside her is my grandpa Philipo.”

“And this?” Elenore asks politely, but I could sense that she was slowly working her way to the truth.

“My father, and that’s me. I was five in this picture.”

“And the woman beside your father?”

“My mother,” my voice quivered. “She died of cancer a year ago.”

“We don’t have to talk about it.”

“I need someone to talk to. My father doesn’t even know I exist anymore; my friends don’t talk to me anymore.”

“You have me.”

“I guess I do,” I knew Elenore wanted me to tell her everything. “It’s the little things that mean everything to me now. The way she used to sing to me before bed or tuck the hair behind her ears when she was feeling stressed.

“The worst part was that she lost her sanity before she died. It drove her mad, not being able to do anything. Near the end, she couldn’t walk, feel, or take care of herself.”

By the time I had finished my story, tears were gushing like waterfalls down my cheeks and pooling at my shirt collar.

Eleanor looked at me for a moment before saying; “You know, ‘it takes ten times as long to put yourself back together as it does to fall apart’ that’s what the ‘*Hunger Games*’ character, Finnick Odair, once said. You will be able to find peace with your father, and you will be able to put

yourself together, even if it takes a century. I will be there every step of the way, no matter what.”

I collapsed, knowing that my mother had sent me an angel.

The Big Green Fluffy Monster

By Kelsi Moss

Grade 4

Arthur Hatton Elementary

I live in my house with a monster
And it scares me all the time.

It has big bright blue eyes
And long fluffy green hair.

It can't walk quietly, so it stomps all around
With its razor sharp teeth and garbage smelling breath.

It stinks so badly and smells like rotten eggs on spoiled milk
That the monster always takes hour long showers to smell better... but it never goes away.

And then there is the eating, it never stops
Even food right out of my hand, what if it eats me too?

Sometimes IT CHASES ME!
Running down the hallway, and all over the house to find me.

If it spots me it will try to get me, but I am fast.
All I want is for the monster to someday move out.

The big green fluffy monster is so humongous I have to share a bedroom with two other
people!

I want to go in the monsters room sometimes, but I know that's just trouble.

One day I will make it so scared that maybe it will run away.
I'm going to find a way sooner or later.

I have told my Mom and Dad and they just don't believe me.
Oh, wait I think they are right- maybe it's just my imagination.

There is no big green fluffy monster, just my older sister!!

Oh Little Beardy

By Kelsi Moss

Grade 4

Arthur Hatton Elementary

Where the desert sand can blow,
And you see cacti grow,
What a scaly little creature you are.

Red, orange, yellow, brown, black and blue,
There are so many amazing colours on you.

I see you sit on a large rock all day,
Basking in the sun coming your way.
For a desert dragon you are so cute!

Oh little beardy I want to keep you,
But I know I can't and that makes me so blue.

You eat plants, worms, and bugs too,
And that's one of the reasons I can't keep you.
My parents will not allow a lizard in our home.

I guess I will have to wait and see what fate will do,
OH LITTLE BEARDY I LOVE YOU!

LE MYSTÈRE DE MES PARENTS

JOUR UN: VENDREDI

C'était un journée normal j'ai levé se habillé et manger mon céréale. Mon père boit sa café ma mère se déguise. Ah l'autobus arrive" "Au revoir." 2 min plus tard. Enfin je suis à l'école. J'ai just fais les maths, le gym, lecture et l'écriture aujourd'hui. C'était 2:35 RIHHHHHHHHHIG!!! L'école est maintenant fini et je vais marcher à la maison. Quand j'ai marché j'ai trouvé un montre, le montre était tu en noir avec beaucoup de bouton desu. J'ai mis dans mon sakado et continuer à marcher. Quand j'ai arrivé à la maison maman et papa était encore au travaux. J'ai assis sur le sofa et regarder le télé. Quand je regarder le télé j'ai entendu quelque chose. J'ai ouvrir mon sakado et le montre bris un petit lumière rouge. Mais ça a dister quelque chose "CODE ROUGE!" "CODE ROUGE!" "L'AIDE NOUS EN A UN CODE ROUGE LE SIREM ÉTAIT VOLÉ!" "Qu-ce que c'est un code rouge et quel sirem? J'ai assise sur le sofa et continue à regarder le télé. A 3:25 papa a revient à la maison et commencer souper. Après le souper j'ai demandé papa "Si tu a trouver un montre qui a dit code rouge le sirem était volé qu'est ce-que tu ferais" et il a immobilize.

Aaaaaah je je ne sais pas, peut-être leser ou tu a trouver. Ensuite il a regarder maman inquiète.

JOUR DEUX: SAMEDI

Quand j'ai levé ce matin maman et papa n'était pas à la maison. J'ai téléphoné maman mais elle n'a pas répondu. J'ai téléphoné papa mais il n'a pas répondu. J'ai regarder autour de la maison et j'ai trouver le business card de papa. J'ai téléphoné le nombre sur le card mais j'ai just entendu ça..."Si tu veux set nombre de téléphone si vou plait téléphoner sur un montre." "Qu-ce qu'il veut dire téléphone sur montre?" "Le montre que j'ai trouver!" J'ai aller prendre mon sakado j'ai pris le montre et pousser un de les buton mais ça a just donner une address. Alors j'ai suivre l'adress just a la place..J'étais surpris quand l'adress était de la vier bibliothèque. J'ai aller dans le bibliothèque "Hello" j'ai dit. J'ai regardé autour du bibliothèque et j'ai trouver un livre qui s'appelle l'espion secret. La niue, passer quand j'aiter m'aider dans mes pyjama j'ai entendu papa dit "l'espion secret." J'ai tiré le livre mais quelque chose arrive. Un porte à ouvrir j'entrai dedans ..."un quartier général. secret." "Woooooooooooo" "Qui est tu!" "Je suis je suis" "Mr. Barrie vient avec moi." "Tes parents était kidnappé par DEMON EYES" "Qui est DEMON EYES" "Le deuxième plus voulait persson dans le monde!" "Tu dois retrouver tes parents et attraper DEMON EYES per-ce qu'il a le sirem secret." "Pourquoi moi, pourquoi est-ce que je dois faire." "Ça c'est pourquoi je n'ai pas les enfants." "Per-ce que tu est le plus bon espion con a." "Ou yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaayy!" "En a un dispositif de pistage sur tes parents." "Heyyy!" "Zip it." "En va te donner le dispositif de pistage et les gadgets."

“Moris.” “Donner Mr.Barrie ses gadgets et le dispositif de pistage.” “Oui capitaine.” 10 minutes plus tard. “Alors ou est-ce qu'on va?” “A un de les hangars de pêche a les boat quais.” “Tu dois aussi retrouver le sirem secret.” “Oui.” 10 minutes dans un auteau. “Bwha ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.” “J'ai finalement attraper vous.” “Ha ,ha,ha!” “ARÊTTE!” “Qui est tu.” “William pourquoi est tu ici.” “Attaque lui.” “Nope.” “Comment a comment a il.” “Au Revoir DEMON EYES.” “Ha-ya!” “TING” “Hu?” “C'etait un robot!” “Ha,ha,ha,ha.” “Tu a vraiment penser que tu peux attraper moi.” “Oui.” J'ai dit avec un sourire desu mon visage. “Bonjour.” “Vraiment comment est-ce que tu fais ça?” “Téléportation.” “Tu sont en état d'arrestation et ou est le sirem.” “Je ne vais pas dit a toi.” “OU EST LE SIREM.” “Je na pas.” “Quoi”

JOUR TROIS: DIMANCHE

“ALORS il n'avez pas.” “Non il n'avez pas.” “Alors qui a.” “En ne sai pas.” “En a un appel entrant capitaine.” “Mieux sur l'écran.” “Bonjour espion secret est-ce que sa c'est ton petit sirem ha,ha,ha.” “Alchemy.” “Ha,ha,ha, pensais que j'étais mort, n'est-ce pas mais je ne suis pas ha,ha,ha.”

À SUIVRE

WILLIAM. ALEXANDER. BARRIE
GRADE 4
ÉCOLE LLOYD GEORGE ELEMENTARY

Jordyn Peace
Grade 5
Parkcrest Elementary
Hold On

1

I woke up to the sound of sirens screaming. I glanced at the clock showing 3:11 in the morning. I sprung out of bed, running down the hall to find my little brother George on a stretcher outside, being loaded into the ambulance. I looked at my mom outside watching, while crying on the phone. She glanced at me, then quickly looked away continuing to talk. She hung up soon after. I watched the tears stream down her face, not knowing what to do. I felt frozen in my spot. Not able to move, talk, or even breath. I found my balance and slowly walked outside. I shivered to feel the breeze around me. I walked up to my mom who was trying to hide her face from being seen. I watched her pull her hand away from her face thinking she might say something, but all stayed silent except for the quiet cries I heard from her. I watched the ambulance take off in the dark night with my brother inside. My mom had stopped crying now but still didn't say a word, just stared in the same spot until finally, she looked at me.

"He didn't deserve this," she whispered. Tears coming to her eyes.

"Deserve what?" I asked.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," she said avoiding my question.

We walked inside not saying a word. I went to my bedroom wondering what had happened. The clock struck 4:00. I fell into bed, dozing off soon after. When the morning rose, I was dreading the news. I stumbled down the hall. When at the end, I saw a note that read, "I'm at the hospital with George. I don't know when we'll be back but it should

Jordyn Peace
Grade 5
Parkcrest Elementary
Hold On
2

be soon. -Mom." I ran back to my bedroom looking at the clock. I had slept in until 10:00 in the morning! I grabbed my phone looking through notifications when I saw two missed calls from Mom. I dialled her number and slowly lifted my phone up to my ear.

"Hello?" I said, my voice shaking.

"Hi, Mia," Mom responded.

"What happened? Is George okay? Can you come home now?" I blurted out.

"George..." Mom's voice cracked. "He had a stroke."

Crying hard now, Mom and I discussed what had happened. Apparently, George was having a seizure and getting sick so mom decided to call the ambulance. They took him with them, and here we are.

"They don't think he's going to make it," she cried. "I'll call Grandma and get her to pick you up and bring you here."

"Okay." I sobbed.

"Goodbye Mia, I love you!"

"Bye Mom, love you too."

We hung up both crying. Minutes later, Grandma arrived.

"Mia! Are you here?" Grandma yelled in her croaky voice.

"Yes!" I ran to the door grabbing my boots and jacket and stepped out the door.

Grandma was in her old, red pickup truck with the windows down and her head out.

"Hi, Darling!" Grandma's country voice was now showing.

Jordyn Peace
Grade 5
Parkcrest Elementary
Hold On
3

“Hi, Grandma,” I smiled.

I opened the old creaky passenger door, getting inside.

“Did you hear?” I asked.

“Yes,” Grandma replied. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, at least this time I know how hard it’s going to be to get over it, and if he doesn’t make it... He’ll be in a better place with Dad.” I started to cry again.

“Oh, honey!” Grandma cried. “It’s okay.”

We drove to the hospital stopping on the way at a drive-through for breakfast. When we arrived at the hospital, Mom wasn’t in the waiting area. A nurse approached us asking us our names.

“I’m Mia Skyles and this is my grandma Agnes Kale.”

“Oh, you two are needed in room 4,” she stated and began to lead us.

I glanced at her name tag showing the name Amy Tang. We walked to room 4 where Amy slowly opened the door. I saw my brother in the hospital bed surrounded by uncles, aunts, and cousins when out of the corner of my eye I saw Mom. She was crying more than yesterday, more than on the phone today, more than when Dad had passed. I had never seen her cry that way. The tears rolled down her cheek. Her eyes squinting so that she could barely see her surroundings. The sound was quiet but distinct. I suddenly felt a shiver in the room. Some might say it was just the AC kicking in, but why would the AC be on in the winter? I believe that that was when my four-year-old brother

Jordyn Peace
Grade 5
Parkcrest Elementary
Hold On

4

George's soul left his body. The room stayed quiet while we watched his body lay there, meanwhile his soul watching us.

After all was done we cried for weeks, but I knew George was with Dad watching down on us. Probably laughing at us with his cute little laugh. After a while, Mom and I adapted to the different lifestyle of a two-person family and agreed it was calmer for the both of us, but we still did miss George. I mean, sleeping was better because there was no crying at bedtime, and there was less dirty laundry on a day to day basis, but the time we missed George the most was at dinner. We didn't get to hear his jokes or watch him make faces at the food, or even just watch him eat. George and Dad were alike in many ways... Including the way they died.

I will forever love, remember, miss, and hold on to those memories I have of Dad and George. I am thankful for that time I got to know them. I am lucky for it.

The Sun Is Just Another Star

I watch the sun rise over the city divided into circles, like it has every morning. But today is different. *Today, you have to prove yourself*, I remind myself.

I feel the faint tug of my mother's hands. My reflection in the mirror shows my plain face and my reddish-brown hair being pulled into a low braid. My mother thinks I'm so beautiful, and she does have good judgement, but I worry that it will falter before the judges of the First Circlet.

My mother and I live in the Fifth Circlet. The poorest circlet, and the largest one at that. The First Circlet is ringed by the Second Circlet, and the Second by the Third, and so on. The citizens of the First Circlet are soldiers, trained for battles that they only know, as details of the war are kept secret. They can't marry or have children, and that is for one reason: you have to prove yourself by showing skills in combat and be assessed by members of the First Circlet. But only members of the Second Circlet and some members of the Third are let in for Defiance Day, as they call these assessments. A dirty trick to keep the poorest poor and only the rich to advance in wealth.

My mother somehow thinks that I am pretty enough and strong enough to pass as someone from the Second Circlet. I don't think so, but I go along with it. It's worth a try.

I admire my mother's work in the mirror. The braid brushes against my shoulder. Not a single hair is out of place. I smile and my mother drapes a silk robe over my shoulder. She then

pulls a tin of novelty ointment out of a drawer and rubs it on my face. My skin brightens. It almost glows. I have only seen this on Second and First Circle citizens.

“Where did you get this?” I ask her, curious. “You know we shouldn’t spend money on things like this.”

“Lynn, I did it for you,” she responds. Her eyes are glazed over with tears. “Remember that the sun is just another star.” My mother looks me in the eyes. I get it. She means that the people from the Fifth Circle are equal to those from the Second and First, in that they are all humans, just divided by class. It’s the same idea with the sun and all the other stars in the universe. The sun provides the most light and therefore gets the most attention, but in reality, it’s just a star like all its other counterparts. I smile. Me and my mother have the same view on our society here, in which wealth shouldn’t determine the quality of your life, but it somehow does.

The sun is just another star.

I run through the streets and pass through the border of the Fourth Circle so fast that the guards don’t notice me. I’m lucky. The curfew guards aren’t usually this sleepy, most of all on a day like this. I do the same with the other border walls, and only after I reach the border between the Third and the Second do I hear the guards yelling and cursing, but then I’m lost in the crowd of people.

I follow the crowd up to the shining First Circle Citadel. I can’t believe that I was looked over so easily, but then I hear the guards ushering out a group of ratty-looking, skinny boys. *It could have been so much worse*, I tell myself.

Once the guards have looked over everyone, the doors open into a glamorous, shining room. A gold-plated table for three members of the First Circlet is up ahead. Two males and a female. One of the male members eyes me suspiciously, then averts his gaze to something else.

Now that the guards have mostly cleared out, everyone stands and mills around. I stand, alone, as nobody knows me from the Second or Third Circlet. I can see that some of them look considerably stronger and broader than me, and my heart starts to race.. A thinner boy with close-cropped brown hair grabs a metal broadsword from the weapons rack that had just come to my attention, and points it at a frail-looking girl. One of the First Circlet members notices. The male with a thin, rigid face who stared at me when I first came in, bellows, “Enough! All weapons shall not be touched until evaluations!”

He clears his throat and begins. “Welcome, all of you, to the 114th Defiance Day! Please, sit down,” and he motions to the bleachers that have suddenly appeared.

Everyone finds a seat and waits in nervous anticipation. One of the men calls up the first boy, a broad-shouldered, tough-looking guy. He struts over to the knives and accidentally slices his hand on his first throw. He howls like a two-year-old and his scream is so high-pitched that it shatters some glass on the far end of the hall.

When the next person, a tall, curvy girl, is called up, I’m aware of a heavy banging on the door and shouting. Angry shouting, like rioting protesters. I’ve heard of this before, rebels who oppose the First Circlet and the whole Circlet system itself, and it’s always shut down by the

government. The girl grabs a bow and her aim is so off that it hits the gold-plated table and cracks the plating. The banging and shouting is getting louder and louder, but I try to ignore it. Then, the members of the First Circle are screaming at the protesters. They've gotten through, and I know who's with them. My mother appears. She came to fight because of the fact that I shouldn't be allowed in just because I'm a member of the poorest circle and everyone should have the opportunity to be here, regardless of their circle.

The male member grabs a knife and next thing I know, it's going straight into her chest.

Maybe the sun is just another star, but nobody acknowledges that. The protesters just fought for their human rights and my mother died for the cause. These members of the First Circle think they're better than everyone else, and how many more casualties will become of this innate narcissism?

Without thinking, I throw a knife too, at the members' table, aiming straight for the man who killed my mother, feeling a sharp pinch of regret because he is a person just like me.

It comes up through the vent in the floor like liquid, taking form inches from me. It's slick and black. It's arms are long and sharp. It's eyes glossy and dead.

It's toying with my brain. Triggering protocols, overloading my head with warnings. I can't access it's mind, it's firewalls covering every barrier. I can't even budge at its presence. It's like I'm staring into infinity. It's inconceivable. I could just die right here. I've never fought something this powerful. Every method of destruction is alien to me.

"Not used to this?" It grumbles. It shifts into its human form. The short man in the dress shirt. "Used to my cowardly human vessel?"

"I'm not scared of you." I lie. I'm terrified. I can't move. "And I won't be. You can't take every life."

"Dare doubt me?" it grins. Its ugly form makes me want to die. Everything about this thing makes me want to die. I know its in my thoughts, and though these thoughts aren't mine, where I truly dwell. I act harmless, but the beast doesn't know what I'm capable of, but it will.

It shallows my confidence, shattering it like glass.

"When will you be?" I don't care to know, but I stall.

I had a future, maybe with *her*. Not a chance that happens now. Everyone had something. It's my fault. If I don't do something, it will all be gone. "Why?"

It grabs my waist and lifts me.

"It's simple." it smiles. "Life has purpose. One fulfills that purpose, you're granted a longer life. One fails, death. My fourteen centuries will be put to good use, thanks to your pitiful species."

“Welcome,” I squirm. “Have you thought of everything?”

It mocks and laughs. “Why? You can do it for me.”

I try to move. “I’m not that strong.”

“Give yourself some credit. The strongest human mind could do anything.” Its delicate human eyes fade and it warps to its true form. “So you’ll serve great use.”

“No,” I say. It severs my nerve diagnostics, then stabs me in the neck, inserting a finger into my throat, I feel it running up my spinal cord. It’s strangely motivating, I only have a single option left. The only thing I could do is think. In my brain, it’s making me a computer, its little error machine. But now it’s in my brain, I can attack.

I’m formulating a structure, in my protective mind. I can connect a termination cell to the nerve endings in its arm, sending fluctuations to its brain. I predict it will think it’s a new enhancement, then run diagnostics, which will derail its brain and processes sending it into shock.

The charge is set, once it touches my mind, the cell will activate.

It grows closer, my operating systems are faulty and there’s a chance I can’t heal, but it won’t kill me yet.

My eyes adjust, as the beast freezes, it’s finger emerges from my throat. The cell is sent, its instantaneous. Its brain and mind are ruptured. It drops me and falls backward, five feet from me.

I heal my nerves, it’ll take a minute - that’s all I need. It’s brain will heal in two minutes, I predict. Mine isn’t damaged enough to take that long, but I can’t quite move yet.

I heal the gaping hole in my esophagus and mangled brainstem.

At this rate of its brain healing, its immune system might come back faster than anything else, but that's a difficult process.

I watch it struggle. As my nerves heal, I smile. Its senses are active, So I know it can watch me kill it.

"Don't overthink." I growl. My neck and head are coming online. The whirring of my father's machines are deafening.

I feel my arms heal, they're weak and there will be a struggle, but I'll make it. I reach forward and smother my hands on the glass riddled floor. I pry myself forward and plant my other arm. The pain is agony, like each piece is a sword to my chest, but I don't care. I'm going to push through and kill this thing.

I can feel my torn shirt soak up the bloody handprints I leave behind. Pinpricks of scarlet appear in the corners of my vision. I can hear the voices taunting, whispering doubt as I crawl. I'll keep pretending not to hear.

My legs are coming back, and I can stand. I perk myself up on my knees, pushing myself to stand.. "They say everything is temporary, and that you should put your time to good use." I say, my throat aching. "Should have taken your chances, man."

I take a knee beside it and rest my broken hand on its shoulders. "You never know what you have until it's gone, even when these things come back, you still take them for granted." My finger shifts into a black tentacle, piercing its skull. "I'm going to make sure you go for good."

I feel my finger creep along the thick walls of its skull. My mind can hear the beast's struggling thoughts. I inhale slowly, taking in the heavy stench of death in the air.

OMD Ending

Richard R. Sharp
Grade 7
Savona Elementary School

“I’ll give you more pain and war than you brought this planet. I’ll stick you in hell and listen to you suffer in my dreams.” I gaze into its dead eyes. “It’s heavenly.”

I’ll kill it. Send enough cells to mangle its whole brain.

I assemble an army, bringing all the pain and anger to one place, to assemble teams of super killer cells to terminate this thing. I weave carefully, closing every hole and disadvantage until they’re nothing but insignificant moons.

I pool my energy and build a bridge, letting the cells stream through. It stares at me in defeat the moment before the cells hit. I can feel the pain as the cells kill it. Let it die. I’m not letting it leave alive. Not after the death and trauma. Another age outlived.

Expectations

Vivian McLean

Grade 11

Desert Sands Community School

I was ten years old when they first asked me,

“When you grow up, what will you be?”

The average human life span is seventy-eight years.

I was about one eighth that when asked these words.

They told us to think of all the possibilities

So I sat and thought, not knowing what to be.

My mind ran fast, but the clock ran faster.

I tried making a list, which took half an hour.

Staring at my page, wondering “What will I be?

“Is one of these careers the right one for me?”

They asked again; I had to decide.

Which profession would I adopt ‘til the day I die?

Actress, astronaut, carpenter, farmer,

Veterinarian, geologist, beekeeper or barber?

My thoughts ran fast, yet time ran faster.

I went to the teacher and told her my answer.

I said I'd be a massage therapist.

Why? Because that's what my mother is.

Phones
Vivian McLean
Grade 11
Desert Sands Community School

"It's the phones,"

Say the teachers

Who don't want to see the bruises.

"It's the phones,"

Say the reporters

Who won't look for truth among ruses.

"It's the phones,"

Says the government

Who re-allocates mental health funds.

"It's the phones,"

Say the doctors

Who ignore jutting ribs and battered lungs.

"It's the phones,"

Say the police

Who arrest another teen of colour.

"It's the phones,"

Phones

Vivian McLean

Grade 11

Desert Sands Community School

Say the psychologists

Who'd rather avoid certain disorders.

“It's the phones,”

Say the parents

Who ignore closed doors and declining grades.

“It's the phones,”

Say the politicians

Who only care about winning the next race.

.....

“Is it really just the phones?”

Echo the youths,

“Or is it that some teachers refuse to confront abuse?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Reply today's kids,

“Or is it that some reporters won't tell my story as it is?”

Phones

Vivian McLean

Grade 11

Desert Sands Community School

“Is it really just the phones?”

Shouts back a classroom,

“Or is it rising suicide rates and a future that seems doomed?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Question the curious teens,

“Or is it that I’m pushed from the hospital as quickly as can be?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Query the children,

“Or is it that your prejudice has deterred me from religion?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Respond the juvenile,

“Or is it that you haven't tried my shoes for a mile?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Asks my generation,

“Or is it that we still haven't overcome racial segregation?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Phones

Vivian McLean

Grade 11

Desert Sands Community School

Pry the underage,

“Or is it that bodies of government put some of us in cages?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Challenge the adolescents,

“Or is it that gay and trans people are struggling to find acceptance?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Screams a school mob,

“Or is it that women and people of colour are paid less for the same job?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Wonder your children,

“Or is it that sexual assault is often blamed on the victim?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

Debate the minors,

“Or is it that Earth is dying and we are none the wiser?”

“Is it really just the phones?”

I implore you.

Phones

Vivian McLean

Grade 11

Desert Sands Community School

And maybe the answer is

“Yes. Yes, it really is.”

But now I ask you,

“Who gave us phones as kids?”

When walking down a street, there are normally patches of ground darker than others. Sometimes, they're from you. Shadows differ from person to person. A tall man may have a longer shadow than a man of average height. But height doesn't matter with Shadows. It all comes down to emotional trauma and power. You can never tell which is which, making it dangerous when passing a kind looking woman with a large Shadow behind her. You never know if she has gone through the death of a friend or family member, or if she works with the government as a weapons master.

The Shadows can change on a daily basis, though. On Remembrance Day, most would have a Shadow much bigger than usual. But wait some hours, and you'll find that there are usually no longer Shadows double the size of their owner, if it comes from them emotionally. The powerful however, can hide their Shadow to pretend its emotional at that moment. They go to a Shade Witch, pay a healthy amount of money, and get their Shadow temporarily cut. It only lasts three months though, before it grows again and has to be removed. One girl, however, never went to a Shade Witch, even when she could afford it. She loved the thrill of being feared, loved being sought after to be killed. Her eyes would light up, not with joy -although that was there- but with the reflection of fires burning in front of her, her Shadow seeming to grin with her. Everyone knew of the Fire, and whispered her stories around campfires. Everyone knew how she nearly ended the world.

Everyone knew this story.

Her life had been completely and utterly boring. She had lived alone in a soggy cardboard box for the majority of her life, wandering the streets of Ohio. Well, not completely alone. She had a cat named Matilda. She had found Matilda one day while scavenging through a dumpster--a real classy thing. She had wiped her too long hair from her face, and spotted a light gray tabby cat. It's fur had been matted, much like her own. Though it wasn't the knotted fur or the broken paw which made her decide to take it to her box. It was it's eyes, the brightest of blue. Closer to the colour of the shadow of fluffy clouds. They shined despite the musty and dirty atmosphere.

It was then, she thought-- no, *knew*-- that her life would turn around.

For better or for worse, she'd find out later.

At that moment, however, she let go of the apple core and old pizza crust in her hands and stepped towards the cat, her bare feet scraping the leafy floor covering hard concrete. She was mere meters from the small figure. Reaching out her hand, she inched to pet the top of it's head. The cat stared, crystal eyes filled with pure curiosity and fear. She crouched down, a foot away. The cat cocked it's head to the side. Trembling, she lowered her hand to the cat's head. They both seemed to stop breathing, but it was only the cold air that made the breaths visible that gave it away. She touched the cat's head, and gently scratched its ear. The cat froze up, but eventually started to purr. It leaned it's frail body into her hand, shivering.

Slowly taking the cat into her arms, she wrapped her ripped and muddy coat she had stolen from a store earlier that month and walked back towards her little brown house with a new friend, a long and dark shape following them home.

It had been two weeks since adopting Matilda, and things had never been more stressful. She had to find food not only for herself, but also for the cat. The one good thing to come out of this situation was that she found pants and a shirt to replace the rags she'd been wearing before at a nearby Goodwill, which may have seemed cheap, but to her it seemed to cost an arm and a leg, although she no longer smelled like a garbage dump-- for now.

She snuck behind the corner of the crumby cafe she called home and dove into the dumpster, ripping open bags.

She struck gold.

There were uneaten bagels, plastic cups she could fill with water, and even a full, ripe banana, only with a few brown spots. She squealed with happiness, and brought the bag back to her box, which was only a few meters away. Her Shadow seemed to laugh as well, dancing with her down the alleyway. Matilda meowed, peering up at her with interest. The girl threw her half a bagel, accidentally spooking the cat. She

shrugged and munched on the other half, sighing as the contents hit her stomach. She was about to eat another one when something tapped her on the shoulder. She spun around, readying herself for a fight with another street-roamer. Instead, she met the gaze of a woman in a suit covered with a tan trench coat. Her dark hair was tightly tied back into a ponytail, pulling back her skin. Her eyes were darker than her hair, if that was even possible. She had a tight smile that didn't meet the darkness of her eyes.

She looked down at the ragged girls' fists, and chuckled.

"No need for that, Ms. Emery. I am not here to fight you," said the woman.

Emery stared, shocked and confused.

"How do you know my name?" she said, less of an asking tone and more of a telling one. Her Shadow grew larger, radiating power and anger.

The woman grinned wider, ignoring her question.

"I am Fondosia, and I'm here to train you to destroy the world."

The Boy In Blue

1994

As they have found the boy in the blue book, where should I start? He wouldn't recognize the sirens nor the blinking lights of unfamiliar cameras, but perhaps he would recall the silence of those who saw.

Cameras flashed one by one highlighting the boy's lifeless body milliseconds at a time, dancing over his paralyzed figure they wished his helpless soul away into the gloomy night. He was the headline of the papers that week, his body encased in a coffee-coloured picture. He was the boy that had been missing since 1991, December 2nd. He wore a dark blue rain slicker worn nearly opaque with his tattered jeans clinging to his limbs like a young child hugging to their mother in the dark. The boy in blue was an unfortunate sight to the unfamiliar eye, but to those who listen, he was only another mishap. He was found dead in a forest siding the mighty railroad. No one knew when he had passed or where he was going, we just knew he was gone, and gone was that.

To whom it may concern, he didn't have a real name, nor a place to stay. Some tend to tell themselves he left this town, went to find something new, something beneficial, even now, as his new-found body lay unmoving in the forest waiting to jolt back to life like everyone hopes it would if they left him. He was the boy in blue, and that was how we knew him.

...

It was early fall, 1993 when the boy first found the blue book. I left it waiting, buried beneath fallen leaves suffocated between tree roots. To you, it may have looked like any other book, another stiffened binding and course covers sandwiching pages of paper, but it held a pulling appeal to the naked eye. Upon pages were photos of various faces, all parallel to each other, all smiling, all well. All these new faces, all of these new *people* shared one thing, they were all happy, and that was enough to satisfy any heart.

In a town permanently cold was a boy who knew himself better than anyone else, a boy who fought his own demons, and yet they came too many times. A boy who was caught dreaming aloud, dreams too big for any city to contain, used to fill the streets with a warmth, a meaning. Yet now, the roads are left numbing.

The book itself was never what bewitched his soul, seducing him into the unfathomable trap. It was the raw curiosity of the matter that led him to his unfortunate ending. What lie beneath the worn covers was a collection that belonged to a soul too far gone into the darkness of the night; only those who were blank would dare turn the crumbling pages. Over a dozen smiles spotted the aging folio. If only they knew their fate before they stood standing for their last portrait.

...

“Smile,” I had ordered the boy in blue. He had obeyed, flashing an ear-to-ear grin for the camera. The boy felt welcomed here, safe as he stood in front of me. I offered him something that he couldn't get from anyone else: a second glance. He was alone, we both knew he was, it was him against the world.

There was something about the colour blue that sang with my soul, the way it could wield an abundance of emotions; it gravitated towards me and I welcomed it with open arms. I pondered the boy in blue, his defunct body lie before me merely a day ago. I stood watching him, waiting for his chest to rise and fall as it should, but nothing came.

I placed the boy's picture in my book, delicately lifting the plastic sheet encasing my friends and slipping his grin beside the blue-eyed girl. I took pride in my work, the array of blue was considered more of a revelation in the eyes of an unknowing viewer. A photographer maybe they thought, but definitely not who I am, no one dare say it, it would be maniacal to even think it. It's a relatively large city this one, everyone here stands dumbfounded, beaming at life through rose-coloured glasses, letting all things bad slip through their fingertips like soap in a bathtub. I smiled at the picture of the boy, he fit in here, he belonged here. His soul longed for the opportunity to fit in, and I gave it to him. I was a hero in his eyes, a gift from god to wish upon.

I saved him, and yet now he lay cold and dead among my arms, a scarlet liquid draining from his body, soaking into the ground around me. It was as if mother nature thanked me for my succor, she took the boy into her arms and drank his ichor to sooth her neurotic thoughts.

...

I watched as pale men took away the boy's frail body, lifting him from the tinted ground as blades of grass stuck glued to his corpse. Cameras flashed, taking his state in and capturing the moment in flashing pictures. He asked for this, he ached for it, I know he did, the boy in blue.

As the killer of men, I not only take, but give in return. I take those away from the sadness they are swallowed by, when blade meets throat. I mean no harm, I am helping. As your

Kiara Johnston

Grade 9

South Kamloops Secondary School

1994

4

blood forms into streams along my arms, I am helping. I summon my demons to swallow your sword. I give you to the earth and in return, you give me your life.

Wandering

As I lay on the bed, staring blankly at the ceiling, looking at the slants of bright sunlight coming through the window, I wonder what to do. My weekends are usually spent seeking inspiration, whether it be reorganizing my room or rereading a long forgotten book. My thoughts are interrupted by the sounds of my dad’s thumping footsteps coming down the hallway, announcing “let’s go.” Growing up, I learned to not ask where we were going, because the only answer I would get was “you want to come or what?”

So, I just went along with him. Sometimes, we end up at the gas station getting something to drink, or going to a cousin’s house. Other times, it’s a surprise, a place I’ve never been before. I don’t care much because I love going along just for the ride, no matter where we go.

As I make my way to the front door, I snatch up my jacket and scarf from the hooks on the bedroom door, and head to where all the boots and shoes are neatly stacked on the rack that is slowly warping. I grab my soft brown boots, and slip them on, feeling that warm sensation of faux leather wrapped around my feet. I toss my scarf over one shoulder, then the other, and throw on my jacket. With a twist of the gold door knob, with the reflection of a mirror, I see my wondering eyes staring back at me as the door cracks open.

I step outside and feel that instant cooldown feeling, goosebumps racing along my skin, seeing that the half-melted snow is still on the ground with specks of dirt incorporated with it. I shut the door behind me, hearing the reassuring click to confirm its closed, and

make my way to the car. I pop open the door and hop inside, the warm air of the heater blasting in my face as I sit down. We back out of the driveway and drive around, seeing what everybody is up to. Then, when we make our way to the backroads, I know where we're going.

As I sit there admiring the scenery, I feel the paved road change to gravel underneath my feet, sensing each and every pothole in the road going up the hill. Outside the window looks like a marvelous day, with the sun shining brightly and wisps of clouds here and there. Climbing the hill on the way to the backroads, there's a nice view of Chase. The trees frame a small picture of our town, resembling a photograph. From where I'm sitting, I can see the cars coming and going along the highway. I note the river dividing me and civilization, sensing how quiet it is up here, aside from the birds. Beyond the town, I can see the mountain, sitting there quietly watching. As we get farther along the road, the trees around us get denser and thicker, becoming thicket of leaves and branches.

I turn off the heat as my forehead glistens with sweat, and roll down my window to listen. You can hear the trees rustle around you and the trill of birds contained inside them. In the air is the scent of the forest, along with a hint of wood. It's as if you could taste the cedar in your mouth. As I hear the car rattle, along comes the feeling of the shakes from the potholes splayed out across the road. I can feel the cool breeze blowing in my face, refreshing compared to the hot heat from the car. As we continue further and further, I see up the mountains in the distance the charred trees scattered about, looking like toothpicks. As we reach our destination (which is nowhere exactly) we are coming up to Neskonlith lake and drive by.

"Wandering"
Brianna Narcisse
Chase Secondary School
Grade 9

That night, as I lay in bed, I look back at the day. I was in this same spot earlier looking for inspiration, when inspiration came to me. We may have drove around maybe going somewhere, but it doesn't always mean there has to be an exact destination. Sometimes it's nice to escape reality and wander about, forgetting all of your worries.

Not all those who wander are lost ~ J.R.R Tolkien

Ode To The City

I say to you, vast and great,
That despite the unknown, I find immense comfort
In your towering structures and your endless streets
The days that go on
And on
The sun beating down on your cracked cement
Shining and reflecting on your crystal windows
The rivers that flow through your centre
In perfect contrast to your man made bridges
And your countless city blocks
You swallow me whole,
Capturing and hiding me in the middle of your madness
The sort of chaos that feels
Just like home

It is not the people inside of your skyscrapers
Nor the obsession over your many currency papers,
But it is you

Your chilly nights that go on forever
Your shimmering lights that keep us safe
when the moon is out and uncertainty takes over
It is not the wind that calms me
Or the movies that play in the theatres
Or the people that occupy your space
No, it is you.
Alive, deafening, city of grace.
Alive, but only because I *feel* alive
And that feeling I owe to you
Oh, nameless city, I see myself in your shadows and corridors,
I see myself getting lost each and every day but never minding at all

I often become lost in your lights,
and your appearance on the skyline
I wake each night just before 2am to exit my house and explore yours
A hidden culture that never sleeps
Of your own creation
A meeting of thinkers and the free ones
I am blessed to be able to know you
I have known your beauty from the beginning

And I adore it

Each time I lay my head down to rest,

I think of your secrets and your safety

I wallow in the magnificence of how easy it is for me to become lost in you

I find myself lost and tucked away in your corners

But I am not afraid

Because beneath the fear and confusion and unknown,

I remember that you always feel

Just like home

Disposable

So let them stare

For when the sun stirs

Blending the sky with milky soft tones

Dawn to day

Day to dusk

For when the light is no longer

And the cool of the night takes over

For when you are full

Or empty

For when you are full and empty at once

I will be here still

Here I wait for always

I waste not my days or energy but rather

Dreams

Sec, a dream is never a waste

A dream of

You

Time and space

My midnight moon

Let them stare let them whisper let them fear

The words that flow from your eyes before pouring out of your lips

Let them stare.

Allow them to bring forth their chains of oppression for they will not chain you

They can not chain you

No chain can hold back your

Hurricane

A soul of gorgeous flame, not afraid

Soul of love and loss and strength and wonder

Their chains hold them on the ground while

Your wind carries you away

Let them stare

For when you search desperately for a friendly face,

I shall be here still

I will be here always

Waiting and weeping and loving and dreaming

Always wasting my dreams

On you

A strong word

Always

But strength is key when I have wished you unto the clouds

And you have left me here

On the ground

A Woman Scorn'd

Frosty air enveloped her as she tiptoed out from her tent. Wrapped in Emrys' wolf's pelt, the waking camp greeted her, the bare murmurings of conversation rolling through the other tents, the suggestion of sunrise staining the sky oranges and burning the clouds to pinks, even if the golden morning light had yet to peek over the tops of the forest's evergreens. She yawned, scrunching her face at the cold. There was no comfort in the cold, even if it was an old friend.

The grounds between tents were slick with crystals of snow and ice, the mud beneath frozen solid from the gross chill of the eternally old mountains. Alec held her clean clothing and towel tightly in hand, muscles aching with every minute movement. As she made her way in towards the shifting of tents to buildings, there was a sudden jump in activity, but nearly all those who were up were female; young women bringing in laundry, old women dumping or fetching water, young girls who danced along the street, following their mothers to the kitchens for their daily duties. It made her heart ache.

Some of the younger girls looked at her with burning curiosity, which she understood completely; her hair was still braided tightly in the Icarim's ceremonious way, but was thoroughly caked with dirt and grime and some blood near her forehead's scalp; she limped, graceless despite her best efforts, because of a visibly nasty cut up her left calf; and she was wrapped in one of the *Princes*' esteemed generals' wolf's skin. If she had been one of those young girls, she would have stopped completely in the middle of the street and gaped.

The bustle died down, but not completely, as she trekked on, back into the ring of tents that surrounded the inner circle of established buildings that was the village. She nearly ran into an Icarim boy or two as they stepped from their tents, but if they hadn't been awake before, they

certainly were after she walked past in her dishevelled state. The tents became less and less frequent, and the path became steeper and steeper until stairs took its place, probably carved eons ago and the very firsts, now worn down to bare skiffs. They took greater shape as she trudged on, slowly winding up the mountain side to her ultimate destination.

She kept looking back, out at the view, following until her tent was no longer distinct, simply a slight wave in a sea of canvas. From there, she began looking up, to the massive plumes of cloud coming from just above her, rolling off the mountainside. The discord between the warmth of the springs and the morning's frozen air was made abundantly clear by those very plumes, and few things were as stunning, other than the hot springs themselves. Carved out of the deep rock of the mountains, that itself was peppered with pinks and greens and random bouts of lustre, with water as innocently striking as a baby's blue eyes, the first few hot springs that she saw were nearly quiet, the only perceptible bit of sound being the slight hiss of hot water and cool air meeting.

As she climbed the stairs up to the first level of springs, the humidity that surrounded her reminded Alec too much of summer's nights spent dancing around bonfires in Endeas, but the possibility of a good, early morning soak this far North was enough to make anyone shove old nostalgia deep into the pit of their stomachs. The wind rose as she did, whipping around her and stirring the cloud into swirling cyclones of wet heat. She stopped somewhere in the third of five or six tiers of hot springs, dropping her things and stripping quickly, sinking straight into the water thereafter with a hissing sigh. Her body was sore, her mind heavy from the effects of the Praxis. There were still moments as she lay there in the scalding water where she reflexively

jolted herself from her state of near-sleep, her heart slamming into her chest with sudden fear.

But, for the most part, she felt herself illuminated by a shining triumph.

She untangled her hair from the braids, laughing when it puffed out to the sides of her head; she washed her hair with the small bar of soap, hidden in her towel; she scrubbed her skin raw with another hidden tool, her small body brush, until the mud and blood that so weighed her conscience and body were but another part of the water around her. She counted the bruises that littered her body, examined with a small mirror the rough, scabbing cut that sloped from between her neck's arteries to just underneath her left collarbone. And as the sun began to rise over those old, old mountains and into the valley, she, too, rose, wrapping herself in her towel and taking in the light.

The Price of Freedom

“Kill him! Kill him!” The chant caught on quicker than a wildfire until I couldn’t even hear my own thoughts. I pushed through the crowd, trying to get to a position where I could see the execution. The prisoner was kneeling on the raised wooden platform. His hair was matted with dried blood and the rags he wore barely covered his torso. He wasn’t anyone important. Just the other day I had seen him hawking fish at the market. It wasn’t uncommon for people to disappear, only to later reappear on the block. This was the emperor’s way of controlling the kingdom he had conquered. He would claim these innocent people were rebels or sorcerers or murderers ready to slit your throat for a slice of bread. The people seemed to love him for it. That is, until it was their own father, brother, or son. Then the love changed to hate.

The broad sword came down, severing head from body. I winced, but didn’t look away. The first time I had seen an execution, I hadn’t been able keep my breakfast down. It hadn’t been the blood so much as the cheering that had followed.

I flinched as I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“Everything is in place; wait for my signal.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I watched as he vanished into the crowd before I continued to jostle my way to the front.

Rumour had it that the emperor was going to make an appearance. He always did at the executions honouring the anniversary of his conquest. We had been preparing for months. Nothing was going to go wrong. After today, we would finally be free.

Talia Wiens

Grade 12 South Kamloops Secondary School

The Price of Freedom

2

The closer I got to the front, the more condensed the crowd became. The murmurs intensified, indicating that they were dragging the next prisoner up to the block.

“But she’s just a child.”

“She’s probably a rebel.”

“A witch, I say she’s a witch.”

The emperor would deliver his speech after the last execution, which, if we had predicted correctly, would be this one. I scanned the wall behind me. Our four archers were in place. A number of the others were intermingled throughout the crowd, carrying smoke bombs and noise makers.

I mumbled an apology as I pushed past a family in order to see the stage. My heart skipped a beat. I gasped in disbelief. It couldn’t be. I had spent my whole life trying to protect her. My little sister stood on the platform, standing tall, but fighting back tears. Even from this distance, I could see the clear blue stone hanging around her neck. The one I gave her the night I vowed to always protect her.

Before I had fully processed what was happening, I had my dagger in my hand. Even from here, it would hit the executioner in the heart. I never missed.

The little girl beside me started crying. She had the same blond curls as my sister. The same way of clinging to her father. I hesitated. If I killed the executioner, our whole plan would be ruined. We may never get another chance to overthrow the emperor’s iron grip on our kingdom. Next week, it might be this little girl on the block and another the week after. And it

Talia Wiens

Grade 12 South Kamloops Secondary School

The Price of Freedom

3

may never stop. This might be our only chance. But it was my sister up there. I had always been there for her. The executioner raised his sword. She was all I had left.

I pocketed my dagger and the sword came down. No one around me flinched, but I couldn't stop the scream that ripped from my lips. A scream that was lost in the cheering that sounded crass to my ears. The little girl had stopped whimpering.

I watched the executioner kick her severed head to the side. Her eyes were still open; her blond hair was now stained red. I couldn't breathe.

“The pretty ones are the most entertaining.”

I spun around, trying to identify the speaker. He would pay. They all would pay. They all cheered as my little sister died. Fury filled my veins. Never again would I let them take someone I cared about from me.

A hush fell over the crowd. Soldiers escorted the diamond-clad emperor to the platform, falling back as he mounted the stage. I slipped my hand into my pocket, clenching the smoke bomb lying beside my dagger. I was ready for whatever was to come. Carelessly, he stepped over the puddle of blood and turned to face the crowd.

“My loyal subjects, we are gathered on this momentous da-”

His speech was cut off with a gurgle. Only those of us who were watching for it saw the ebony arrow pierce his neck. For a moment, time seemed to stop. The mighty emperor's body hit the ground with a dull thud. The soldiers drew their swords in unison. I let the smoke bomb tumble from my hand. Smoke, chaos, and voices all blurred together around me. The captain of

Talia Wiens

Grade 12 South Kamloops Secondary School

The Price of Freedom

4

the guard was yelling out disregarded orders, as his soldiers were overpowered. Someone grabbed my hand.

“We did it! We are free!”

The words didn't register. I was still staring at the stage stained with my sister's blood. It was for her I had joined the revolution in the first place. It was for her I had conspired against the tyrant ruling over us, so that she would have a chance at a better life. It was all for her, but she was no longer here. I closed my eyes briefly. A chant started up around me.

“We are free! We are free!”

But would I ever truly be free?