

Middle School English *Compilation*

2019

KOREA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

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Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to look through this book. The Middle School English Department at KIS has long sought to find a way to celebrate the best pieces of work created throughout the year by our amazing students. After plenty of deliberation and much discussion, we have come up with the first edition of this compilation. We want to thank all of the students for sharing their work; risking criticism and judgement from a large audience is intimidating. Your work at one time or another has been everything from tear inducing to inspiring, and, as teachers, we are so happy to have been on the journey with you!

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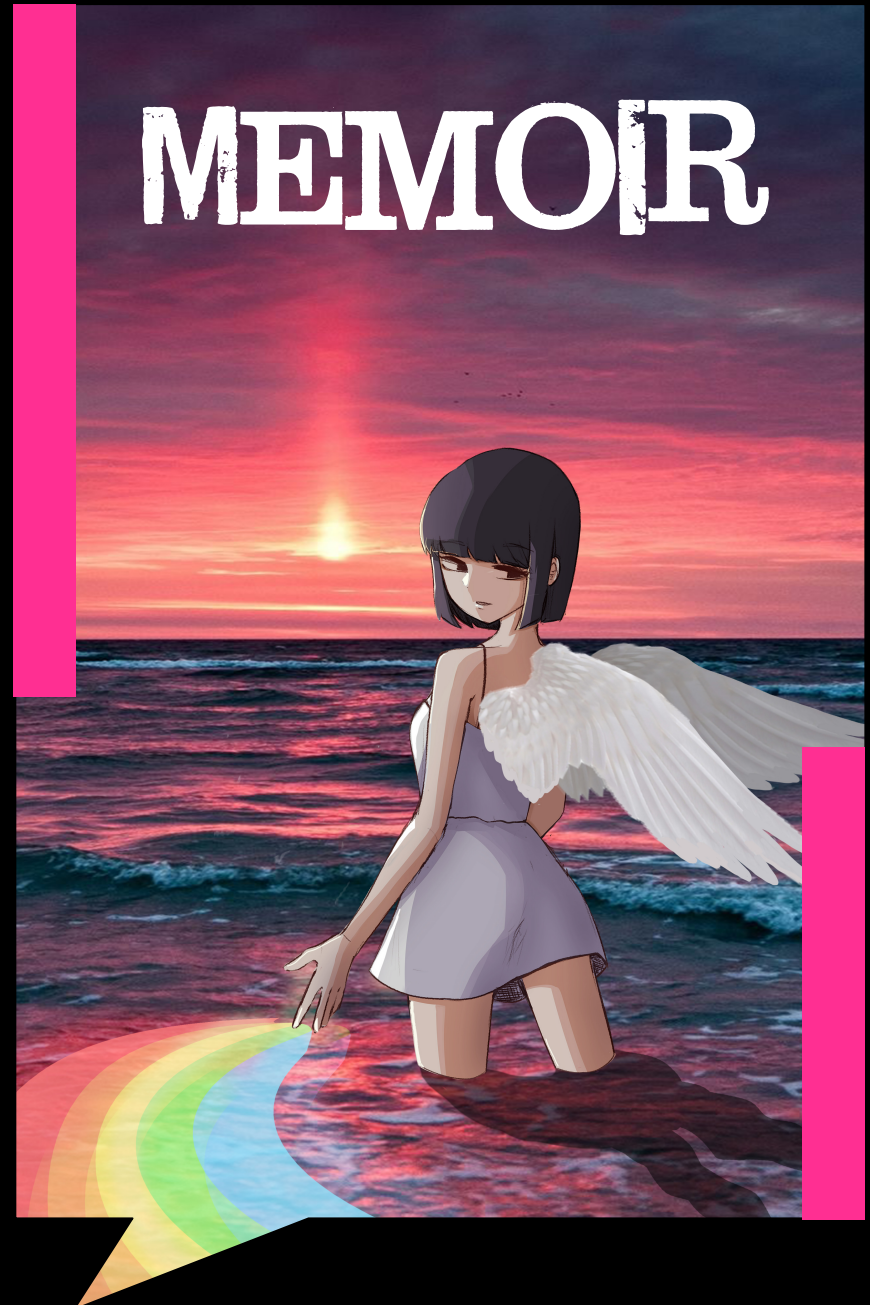
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A Perfect Pebble-Like Day

By: Eunbean Lee (Grade 8)

It was a bright, sunny day, and I looked out the window of the car, dozing off with earphones in both ears. It was the kind of day that makes you want to do some overdue spring cleaning, the kind where your curtains are swished back, the sun making the dust in the air sparkle. The kind of day where you could sit at a park bench for hours, the kind where you want to hold your loved one's hand. To express it as a color, it would be cherry blossom pink, the color of a blushed primrose. Through the opened car window, I hear a group of people, speaking in a variety of languages that I didn't categorize. Without much care, I changed my playlist and stretched in the limited space that is the back seat of the car. After all, why would it matter that I can't understand them?

Exiting onto the parking lot, I slipped my hand into my dad's warm, callused hand as the gravel made crunching sounds underneath our feet. Twirling my earphone cords idly between my fingers, we exited the parking lot. Out on the streets, like any warm Saturday in spring, people ranging from tourists to shopkeepers were bustling in the streets. With a skip in my step, we walked past shops, each filled with people looking through products, drinking iced coffee or munching on a treat bought from the stands. With the sun shining down on us, we slipped into a nearby café, the smell of fresh coffee inviting us in. We exited out the back door and into a small patio, where there were pebbles under my feet. Bushes and shrubs covered the warm beams of the sun, casting unique shadows on the pebbled floor. A table enough to seat eight sat in the midst of the shadows, creating a line between the light and the shade. A stone basin sat in the middle, as rainwater from the morning drizzle reflected the vibrant sky above.

The three of us sat down in silence, my dad, brother and I, enjoying the solitude for a moment. Soon, the silence was broken by the sounds of footsteps on the pebble floor. A family of three entered, and my dad sprang up to say hello. The parents said hello's as good friends would, and they exchanged polite greetings with me as well. Behind her mother's legs emerged a small girl, dressed in a pale dress with cloudy grey leggings. As the adults made way to the table and started ordering drinks, the girl, named Rose, strolled over to the stone basin. Her parents were my dad's friends, and they come from Thailand, but speak fluent English, and I've known them since forever. The girl, however, was about two to three years of age, and according to her parents, she can't speak English. Rose was only young and in my experience, kids her age don't seem to talk much anyway, no matter their nationality or language, so I didn't put much thought into what I would do.

Making my way to the little girl, who was looking into the stone basin, I crouched to get to her eye level. She grabbed a cloudy pebble, about the size of her fist. Mimicking her movements, I grabbed a similar pebble, and seeing that she was throwing the pebble into the shrubbery, tossed it into the stone basin, making the water droplets dance in the sun, cooling spots on my hand. Our eyes met, watery, dark brown ones and black ones, and with a smile, she tossed her new pebble into the basin, water splashing all over her small face. Giggling, she grabbed as many pebbles as she could in her tiny hands and threw them in the basin. When we were engulfed in the cool liquid, we both laughed and tossed in pebbles until the basin was filled with damp pebbles.

A Perfect Pebble-Like Day Continued...

The rest of the day wasn't all that easy. Constantly, the foreign language was unsettling to my ears, like a music note that's not supposed to be there. Constantly she'd ask questions, demanding answers, the one thing I couldn't give back. Her parents seemed to have understood, and always stuck by Rose and I to let me answer her questions.

"She's asking how old you are." "She wants you to walk with her," the fact that they gave up their time with my dad to allow me to interact with Rose was thankful, sure. But every interaction I had with Rose, it felt like I was lying to her in some way, like telling her I understand when actually I didn't. We started walking to our next destination, and I couldn't help but feel guilt and sorrow for her parents and her in the pit of my stomach, my drink in my hand tasting like sandpaper, difficult to swallow. Because in hindsight, they must have had a difficult time, Rose was on the talkative side, and she'd talk very often. However, they didn't seem to mind too much.

Our next and final destination of the day was lunch. Sitting on the floor with my legs crossed, I entertained myself and Rose with one of her stuffed animals. When our food came out and we all fed ourselves, we exited into the streets where the afternoon breeze carried the faint scents of flowers. As Rose talked to her parents again, we prepared to part. Thanking the parents for an enjoyable day and for translating, they told me that Rose told them that she had a fun time. We said our farewells, and I held Rose's soft, tiny body in my arms for a split second, her baby scent lingering on my clothes, then we were off.

"So, what did you guys think?" My dad's voice brought me back from my daydream. Of course, my apathetic brother wasn't even attempting to answer, leaving my dad's expectations on me.

"Wasn't that bad, was it?"

"Yeah, I guess," I answered, my thoughts flicking back to the day's events. I may have had a fair day, but on the other hand, Rose may have not. While a feeling of shame and guiltiness swallowed me like a wave, I put my hands in my pockets, feeling something cool and smooth in them. I took it out and saw that it was a pretty pebble, one that Rose picked out for me at the café when we threw the pebbles. It was a pale shade of grey, the same shade as the milky grey sky outside. Turning it over in my hand, it was an almost perfect pebble, only with a couple of bumps on one side. Smiling, I put it back in my pocket. Guilty feeling begone, a small light brightened in my mind. Rose and I were just like the pebble, a couple bumps along the way, just like how we couldn't talk, but almost perfect otherwise.

When They're Gone

By: Jeongho Ha (Grade 8)

When They're Gone Continued...

I scurried between the crowd of people in the Adidas store, apologizing in Japanese every time I narrowly bumped into a person. My iPhone vibrated and displayed three words: Incoming call: Mom. I slid my fingers across the glass screen, brought the phone up to my ears. My mom's voice boomed imperceptibly out of the speaker, muffled by the loud music in the store. I ran up the stairs to the first floor as quickly as I could, my shoes clanking loudly on the steel staircase. My stomach churned and did a barrel roll, just like the peaceful vacation that had turned into chaos. A glimpse of the main door came into my sight, and I squeezed out every muscle in my leg to run out of the building as fast as I could.

"Jeongho, where are you? Come outside," my mom's voice finally became audible without the music in the clothing store, her voice wobbly and powerless.

"I'm outside the Adidas store now," I replied, confused about what was happening. The humid summer of 2018 pushed down on both of my shoulders, it's humidity taking my breath away. My mom had given me 20,000 yen to shop in the street of Harajuku ten minutes ago, and now her concern was hurrying me out of the store. My mom took a short breath, and replied over the phone,

"Hana is sick."

Three months before the trip to Japan, our family adopted two female Singapuras, each named Haru and Hana. My first encounter with the two felines was chaotic—I was not a big fan of cats, nor did I even know that my parents had adopted two cats. It was March 2nd, 2018. I walked into my sister's room after school to return her the calculator I had borrowed from her. After returning the calculator, I was on my way out of the room when I noticed a huge cardboard box covered with a towel. Without any thought, I placed the towel off to the side of the box and peeked in. As soon as I brought my face closer to the box, a gray shadow jumped out and hid behind the curtains. My sister screamed, "What are you doing Jeongho!"

Surprised, I replied back carefully. "I was just curious—"

"I don't care, now get out of my room!" she yelled back.

I took a step away from the box and quietly walked back to my room, fearing another high-pitched scream that hurt my eardrums.

The next day, I woke up early in the morning to see what was really inside the box. I knocked twice on the door and asked my sister, "May I come in?"

"Sure, come on in. Just don't touch anything without my permission," she replied. I slowly opened the door and closed it behind my back without making any noise. I saw the cardboard box. "Can I see inside?" I asked, waiting for a reply.

My sister took a moment to think, and replied, "I think they should be sleeping now, just don't startle them."

I nodded my head and slowly opened up the blanket. Inside the box were two cats, both the size of my palm. One of them blinked and stared at me, and I instantly fell in love with my cats. For the next seven days, I went to my sister's room everyday and played with the cats for an hour or two. However, back then, I had not realized how much the two had meant to me.

But now I was in Japan, in the busy streets of Harajuku, 1220 kilometers away from Hana. My legs wouldn't budge and I stood hopelessly in front of the store. The sky turned gray and drizzled beads of water over me. Melancholy descended over me with the rain.

"I'm almost here," my mom spoke over the phone. In the corner of my vision, I saw the black Toyota roll up. I tugged on the metallic door handle which was wrapped with bright yellow tape with a label that read: 'No. 1 Tokyo Rent-A-Car Service'. The yellow tape leaked adhesive from its corners as my wet hand made contact with it. The door opened up, and inside was everyone in my family except my dad. We drove back to the hotel, and no one dared to speak on the way back. It was clear that my mom had been struck the hardest with the news, and tears were visible in her eyes. Her emotion was on a tightrope, barely managing to stay on a strand of rope, trying the best to keep the tears in. It seemed like a small push would knock her off and make her break down into tears.

After an eternal thirty minutes, we finally arrived at the hotel. My mom placed the room card against the scanner and opened up the door after she heard a loud click. Everyone entered the suite silently without any words.

"Why are you back so early?" my dad asked us, his face imbued with confusion.

"Hana is sick— she is infected with FIP," my mother repeated the dreadful words, and her eyes were tearing up again. My dad also turned away and wiped his eyes with his T-shirt. My mother stood in the middle of the room, her face elucidating her emotions. It was a tug-of-war between the brightness and the worry—both emotions tantamount in power. The room filled up with deafening silence, the darkness in the room slowly burgeoning, filling up the room like a faucet on a bathtub.

"The doctor said that the mortality rate was..." Brightness made its last effort to not crumble, but it eventually let loose of the rope. Worry and darkness filled up my mother's emotion, tears rolled down her cheek, and her legs shuddered. She gave all the strength that was left, and replied, "100%." My dad let out a sigh and sat down on the couch.

"What options do we have?" my dad said after gathering his thoughts.

"Either prolonging her life with painkillers and medications or..." my mother took another deep breath, "Euthanasia."

The last day of the trip passed in a breeze, everyone in my family fearing another call from the vet. In a blink of an eye, we returned to Korea. As soon as we left the airport, we drove to the vet to meet Hana. My family entered the building and followed the nurse to the room where Hana was treated. We all cried silently as we petted Hana in our arms. For the next week, we visited her everyday. The veterinarian told us that she was getting better day by day, which gave us more hopes of Hana's recovery. But our hopes did not last long.

It was the fateful day of August 17th. Hana was continuously getting better, and it seemed like she could come back home in a matter of days. My family was eating dinner when the dreaded phone call finally came. As soon as my mom saw whom the call was coming from, she ordered everyone to go and change quickly. When everyone was ready, we drove to the veterinarian. In the car, my mom reminded everyone in a low voice, "Everyone, this might be the last time we see Hana. Make up your minds, and let's give Hana all of the love we have."

Everyone nodded in consensus, except for my father who was praying with his rosary in his hands. The four-door came to a stop, everyone slowly walked out of the car, and we gathered together to enter the hospital. The nurse guided us to a glass incubator where Hana was resting. She was lying helplessly on the white cushioning, with dozens of IV injections flowing into her body. Each breath tired her out. The intervals between the breaths became longer by every breath. The glass wall steamed up everytime she breathed, the fogging becoming clearer with every breath. Every second, death came closer to Hana. My family all cuddled up and looked into the incubator.

"You can do it, Hana," my mom whispered.

"Come on," my dad whispered. "You've only got a bit more to go," my sister whispered.

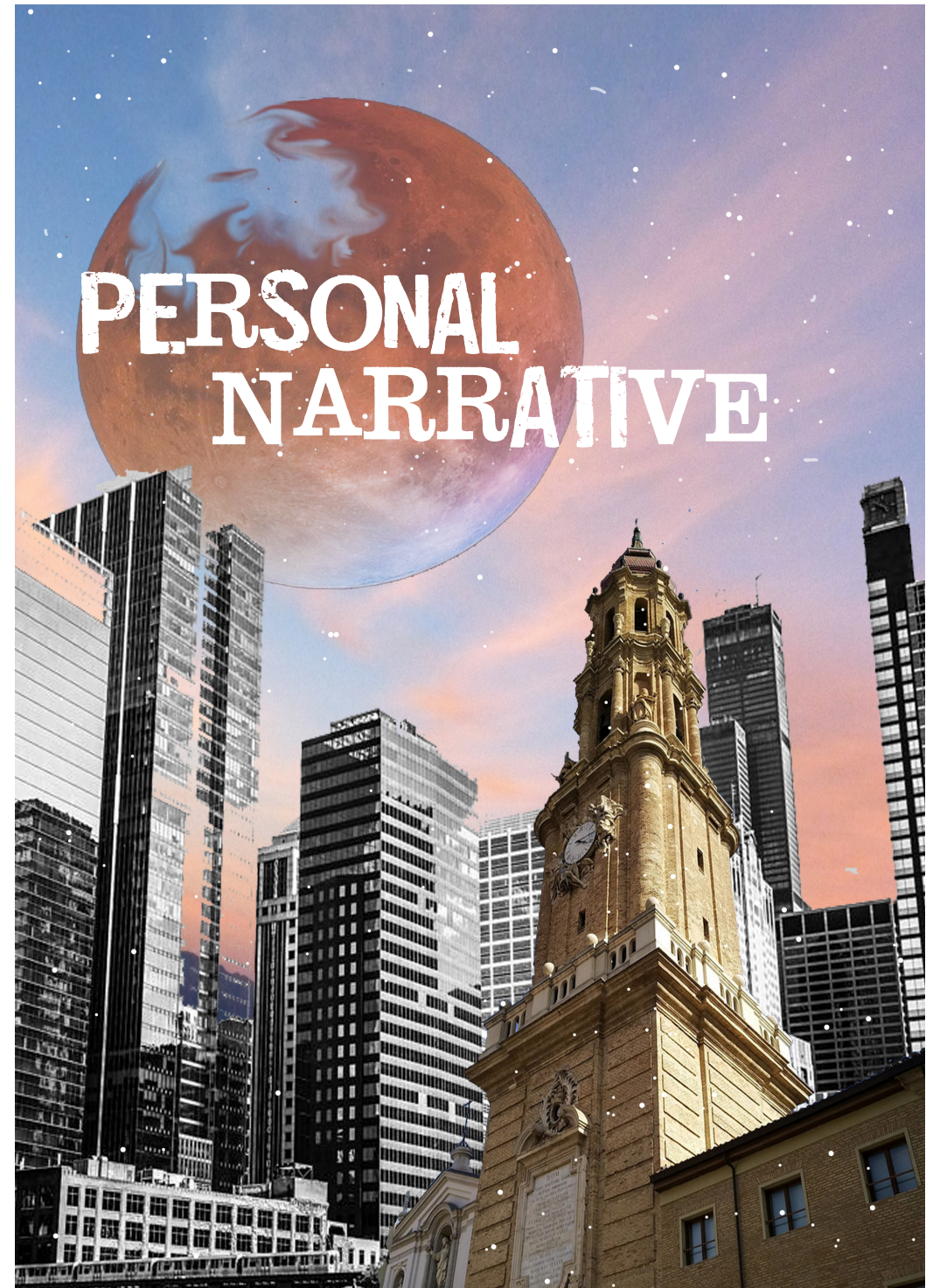
"You've come so far," my twin sister whispered.

"Please Hana, please don't die," I whispered, tears dripping down my eyes.

"Please don't die, please..." I slumped down onto my knees and started sobbing. My vision blurred up with tears, but I didn't even have the strength to wipe my eyes. I felt so powerless, not being able to do anything to help my cat. Guilt filled up inside me. I regretted every single action that I did not take that could have saved Hana. I could not stop thinking about things that I could have done better. I raised my head up and took another look at Hana. There was almost no fogging in the glass now, and she breathed very slowly. My eyes flooded with tears, and so did everyone in my family. Hana took her last breath, and never breathed again. Her heart rate rapidly decreased, and all the fogging in the incubator was gone. My heart shattered like a china bowl, cracking into small pieces.

The doctor concluded her death and said, "Hana died on August 17th, 2018, 7:34 PM. She will be cremated tomorrow at 10:00 AM." Everyone in my family accepted her death and did not cry until we got back in the car. There, we talked about what an adorable cat she was. My shattered heart was put back together, but an ugly, life-changing scar remained.

"I didn't know that losing Hana would be this hard, mom. I cannot stop regretting." My mom then said a statement that would forever be embedded into my heart: "It's okay, Jeongho," she said. "You only know how important something was to you when they're gone."



Cotton Candy

By: Jisoo Yu (Grade 6)

A bead of sweat snaked down my forehead. I clenched my palm, drenched with nervous sweat. My heart was thumping against my chest, beating with fear and excitement.

Why was I so nervous? I had been hyped up to ride the Canopy Flyer for weeks now, ever since my parents first told me and my cousin that we were going to the amusement park.

"Next!" I heard the worker yell, and the couple in front of me went up the stairs. I gulped. We were next.

I stared as another Canopy Flyer zoomed through the air. It felt like time had stopped as I waited, the tense of the atmosphere stifling me.

"Look, it's almost our turn!" My cousin blurted beside me, jumping up and down. Her short pigtails flew up and down in the air, bouncing against her shoulders like basketballs. The soft, pink fluff of cotton candy I had bought for her earlier was melting down its' stick, running down her fingers. A tiny pink drop landed on the cement ground.

"Yeah. Are you scared?" She stopped jumping, and stared at me incredulously.

"No way! I've been waiting to ride this for weeks!"

"Well, you'd better finish your cotton candy before we get on."

She stared at the huge pile of pink wool in front of her. "I don't want to finish it."

A tiny ball of annoyance nibbled away at me. She had begged me to buy it a few minutes ago, and now she wanted to throw it away? What a waste, I thought.

"What? It hadn't been sticky when you bought it for me!" My cousin protested.

The worker glanced at us, annoyed. We were being pretty loud.

"Quiet down, Seoha." I hissed, avoiding eye contact with everyone else in the line.

She turned her back towards me and pouted, crossing her arms. I sighed. I had really tried not to be fussy, but I was just looking out for her!

Deep inside, I really wanted to be patient with her. But then again, wasn't I supposed to be the responsible one, the one that was supposed to take care of her until our parents came to pick us off later?

The ear-piercing squeak of rusty metal from above jerked me out of my thoughts. The couple were getting off of their ride, the woman still blabbering on to the man loudly. "That was quick," I thought. The worker was gesturing for us, and two other people behind us to step over the safety line. I knew it was going to be much more awkward riding with random strangers, and I wanted the experience to be the best as possible, especially after hearing how excited my cousin was. I begged the worker to let the father and son behind me go ahead, pleading for me and my cousin to sit alone during the ride. The worker probably rolled his eyes in his head, but let us wait. A few anticipating yet queasy minutes passed. It was finally our turn.

The worker led us to a short shelf on the left side. I took off my cardigan and shoulder bag, placing it inside one of the empty compartments. I took the stick of half-finished cotton candy from my cousin, and tossed it into a trashcan nearby. The surface was still coated with a layer of candy, and I wiped my fingers on my shirt hastily.

Cotton Candy Continued...

The worker led us to a short shelf on the left side. I took off my cardigan and shoulder bag, placing it inside one of the empty compartments. I took the stick of half-finished cotton candy from my cousin, and tossed it into a trashcan nearby. The surface was still coated with a layer of candy, and I wiped my fingers on my shirt hastily.

The worker led us up the small emergency stairs onto a small platform, where the vehicle hung. I had seen the same car speeding through the air for thirty minutes straight, but looking at it close-up felt different. The car was suspended from a heavy metal track in the air. There were two seats, backs facing each other. I headed for the one that faced forward, but my cousin was already hopping onto it. As soon as I was on the seat facing backwards, a small orange lap-bar came down from over my head.

Click.

Once I was locked in, the seat beneath me lurched, and started moving along the trail. We were moving, slowly but surely. The clickety-clack coming from the tracks we were attached onto was getting louder and louder. The seat was shaking even more. I stared as we crawled across the metal platform. I could feel my palms sweating, my heart pounding. The fact that I was facing backwards and couldn't see where we were going made the waiting even more stressful. The thud of my heartbeat rang in my ears, blocking out every other noise. I gulped. It was like when the music quietened down in a horror movie, and everyone in the theater was completely silent and frozen, waiting for the jumpscare. Any moment now, we would be off the platform- A jerk. For a second, everything was silent. There was nothing below my feet except air. Then, as if someone had pressed a button, we were flying.

The roaring of the wind was overpowering. The breeze slapped my face violently as we sped through the air, hanging off by a metal track in the sky. My heart was caught in my throat, and I couldn't breathe. I felt like a limp arm of a poorly assembled doll, tossed here and there in the sky effortlessly. The clicking of the gears were buzzing furiously in my ears, along with the whoosh of the wind that were surrounding us. I felt a spike of adrenaline rush through my body, and couldn't help but feel thrilled and exhilarated. I was on top of the world, staring at all the tiny heads below, my feet dangling off the edge carelessly. It was a strange feeling, one mixed with the faraway feeling of numbed fear, but also of hope that I would be able to stay up here forever, happy and untroubled, the breeze blowing out any thoughts cluttering my head.

Suddenly, a distant memory resurfaced from the back of my brain. It was a memory from back when me and my cousin were still living together with our grandparents, and it was hard to grasp, even harder to hold onto. My cousin had knocked over my piggy bank when I was at school. It had been in thousands of tiny pink shards all over my bedroom floor. Now that I looked back, it didn't seem like a big deal, but back then, I was furious at her.



Ride of Your Life

By: Leo Chung (Grade 6)

"Seoha! Why were you in my room?" I had yelled at her.
"It was an accident!" She had protested, almost in tears. Our grandmother had to come in and separate us the whole day.

"You have to be more understanding, since you're older. I'm sure she didn't mean to break it." My grandmother had chided, but I had been too mad to listen to her. It felt like I was always getting the blame.

Thinking back now, I had acted childish. I could've always bought another piggy bank, and none of the coins were lost. I remember feeling bad that I had lost my cool at her, but too proud to apologise. We had gotten into trouble together, broken our arms together, walked to school together, even competed against who could swing higher in the nearby playground. I realised how childish I was being, getting impatient with her over a stick of cotton candy.

.....
Suddenly, I realised that we were slowing down. The clicking of the gears was much quieter, and the wind wasn't attacking as hard. I sat in the seat, my throat dry, feeling the excitement slowly seep out of my body. The ride was over.

I felt disappointed, and a part of me wanted to stay locked into my seat, and ride a second time. While fantasizing, I heard the worker yell at us to lift our feet. A second of flying, and suddenly we were on the metal platform once more. As the ride squeaked to a stop, and the heavy strain on my lap was lifted. I hopped off, slightly light-headed from being in the air for so long. I staggered down the stairs, grabbed my bag and cardigan, and waited for my cousin. When she caught up to me, she immediately started telling me about how amazing the ride was. I was secretly glad she was talking to me again.

"Can we please go on it again?" She begged, and stared at me with her innocent, puppy dog eyes. I raised my eyebrows and grinned.

"Maybe the next time we come." My eye caught a small hot dog stand. "Hey, do you wanna get some hot dogs? I'm starving!"

Her eyes lit up dangerously. "Let's race to the stand! Whoever loses has to give up one packet of chilli sauce!"

"Deal!"



It was a bright and sunny September morning. Leaves and branches waved in the cool breeze. My hair whipped from side to side as the wind fluctuated back and forth. I shuffled my feet, sending little dust clouds flying in the air.

The man currently in front of me thanked the attendant and passed the harness to him. He hyperventilated as he approached his girlfriend, who gave him a high-five while dropping her expensive phone. I bent down and held the phone to her, who thanked me. I instantly felt happier; doing good deeds for other people I didn't even know. I excitedly jumped up and down while being nervous at the same time.

The experience reminded me of the time I had done the Euro Bungee Trampoline when I was a little boy. Soaring through the air, my scared face was plastered on me like a masked zombie. However, after the ride, I was grinning and boasting to my friends, who were amazed by my confidence and risk-taking.

My mind floated back to earlier in last year, when I had stood at the exact same spot, watching my dad confidently ascending the pole. Only after we had gone home he had shown me the ripped hole in his shirt from one of the rings. We laughed together and ate a great big feast dinner with our whole family and friends. Yum!

I was ready to go. I had done something like this before, hadn't I?

Once I had gathered my thoughts together, I put on my harness and looked to the man attending the ride. He motioned for me to start my climb. I nodded quickly and clipped the D-ring around my harness.

The pole was beginning to teeter by my climbing. The rusty old rings attached to the pole creaked with fright as I wound myself up the long pillar. The pole was etched with sloppy carvings of people's names on it.

A ring came loose, and I almost slipped off with fright! Thank goodness I was at the top; I could see the end of the pole clearly.

Suddenly, as the fog began to clear, the pole seemed to grow longer... and longer... and longer. I gazed in shock and stopped for a few moments.

Regaining my composure, I continued to escalate the trunk of the pole again.

After many pauses, I had made my way to the very very top of the pole. I looked down, and saw many little ant-looking people. They waltzed and shimmed back and forth, awaiting my liftoff. I had a slight vertigo as I steadied my balance on the small platform, which was way too small for my large feet. I wondered what would happen if the heaviest person on Earth attempted to climb it.

Ready to jump, I took deep breaths.

1, 2, 3...

Nope. Not yet.

Let's try again, my brain seemed to call to me.

Nope. Not yet.

Let's try again, my brain seemed to call to me.

COTTON CANDY



Ugh. I couldn't seem to make my body just lift one foot and tip over! Again! my brain seemed to call to me once again, only sounding frustrated.
1, 2, 3...

Unlike before, my brain did not force me to not jump, but rather my whole body suddenly tipped over and soon I was falling down the air. I couldn't believe it!

I let the wind take control of my body, and in a moment I was doing twirls, somersaults, and cartwheels midair. I've always wanted to fly through the air, since the 1st grade in the school spring fair long jump. The ride was only open to 4th graders and up, but I had to leave to Korea in 3rd grade. I remember when I was crying, hugging my dad as we had to leave to security at the airport.

So this is what a bird does everyday! I thought to myself.

... I snapped myself out of my dream state and I flashed a big smile to the people below as I gradually floated down below as I gradually floated down.

I slowly descended the pole on the side, which was meant for leaving the ride. I heaved and panted, exhausted after the ride.

I had done it! I had conquered my fear of heights! Now, I would be finally able to ride my dream of planes without any fear. I felt a rush of relief over my body, and it almost knocked me down again. My friend, who was riding next, congratulated me by clapping and high-fiving me.

He then inquired anxiously, "How is it? Is it really good? Bad? Tell me."

I only replied:

"It's the ride of your life."

Never Satisfied

By: Danika Plamondon (Grade 6)

The black pebble plopped onto the rough lake only to bounce right off the water and push its way through the wind. I watched it land on the water again, and counted how many times it pushed its way off from the lake, as if the rock weighed no more than a little feather and drop back down. I counted the sound of splashes in my heads.

One

Two

Three

Four!

It lifted and dropped back onto the water four times! I tried to close my mouth, which was hung wide open, but failed. I stomped my foot dramatically.

"How on earth do you do that??" I asked turning to face my dad.

I wished I could wipe his boastful smile right off from his face.

"Years of practise, Danika," he replied boastfully.

I clenched my jaw as I picked up the first rock I saw in front of me. With all my might I had stored inside of me, I pushed it out as I threw the rock as far as I could.... only for it to land right in front of me. Before I could even blink, I saw water spring up, towards the sky with blinding speed. I watched the water as it made its way inside my nose, and before I even had the chance to yelp out loud, the water blinded my vision.

"It went in my eyes and nose. Help!" I yelled.

I turned back to my dad expecting him to do something- anything! But the only answer I got back from him was a laugh. He threw the rock from his hand, but this time I didn't want to look at the rock land on the water. But it was useless. I heard 4 splashes.

"You have to choose the right one. The rocks you've been throwing were too bumpy. It works better if the rock's flat," he said.

"Umm, that would have been really helpful if you would've told me that 5 minutes ago," I grumble.

I finally sat on the huge rock behind me and watched the little robin land inches away from my feet as I felt my anger and frustration fade away like a burning fire fading into mere ashes. And even though this wasn't my home, whenever I saw the endless stretch meadow, the stretch trees before me, and the tiny white house located in the middle of nowhere, I felt a sudden overwhelming swell of emotions rushing towards me. The place felt like home. And right now, with the sparkly lake standing before my eyes, there was nowhere in the world I wanted to be but where I was now. "My dad must have been so lucky to have grown up in Plamondon. To be able to sit by the lake whenever he wanted to. To be woken up everyday from the beautiful chirping of birds and the golden sunshine against his face," I said to myself. I thought of the every days I've endured at home. To have to drive for about an hour just to get close to a lake which was most likely crowded with people. To be woken up not from the sound of birds chirping but from the continuous hum of cars whizzing past our house and the whirling sound of helicopters.

In Korea, the nights were always full with bright colors- the orange glow of the streetlights, the yellow flickering lights of the cars, and the white glimmer from the phones everyone carried around. It was as if the whole world was always wide awake- always alive with its bright lights and its endless noise. But now it felt as if the whole world fell asleep, the only light being the glowing stars sprinkled across the night sky like shining



freckles. The whole forest was utterly silent, the only noise being the silent swish of the trees, so gentle and soundless I could slightly hear the faint thrumming of my heart beating. Then a sudden emotion flashed through me, disrupting and shattering my light heart into bits and pieces. Why can't I live like my dad? Why do I live like my dad? Why do I have to live in such a loud, restless city? Why in already 2 days I have to go back to Korea and go back to my tiring life?

Jealousy and desire coursed through me, stinging my throat. It was unfair that my cousins who were similar ages as me being 9 and 7 years old got to live in Plamondon while I was the only kid who lived in Korea. How come I couldn't live here just like them? While they had a huge meadow all to themselves to play in, I was stuck in a tiny bedroom. While they had their own treehouse and a secret hut in the forest to play in, I spent all my days contemplating what I should do not to get bored.

Finally, I couldn't keep all my emotions inside my head. I had to say it out loud, though I knew my dad would give me a long lecture about how I am being selfish and unthoughtful.

"How come my cousins get to live here but not me? They must be so lucky and it's not fair. I'm tired of living in such a busy and crowded place," I muttered.

I was startled when I heard a laugh, the last thing I was expecting.

"Why are you laughing?" I demanded.

"Because you're cousins are constantly begging you're uncle and aunt that they don't like living in Plamondon," he said.

I stared at him blankly, searching desperately in my mind for reasons why they wanted to move out of Plamondon. Did they like the feeling of being trapped in a small room all day?

Did they like the feeling of being pushed around in the malls as if they were nothing but a fly?

When I couldn't find any logical ideas, I turned back to him and asked,

"Why?"

"They're jealous of you because you get to travel out of Korea on Holidays while they never got to do that. They are always stuck in Plamondon even in their holidays. They're always stuck in a remote town with the same people they know while you always get to meet new people living in a place that has so many people," he said.

"Were you like that too?" I asked still puzzled.

"Of course! Everyone's like that. They always want things other people have while those other people might want the things you have."

"That's silly. I want their life while they want mine. Why can't we trade?" I asked.

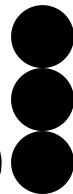
"But if you trade lives, the same thing would happen. While they want to live in a peaceful town you would want to live in a city," he replied.

"So I guess in life, you can never have everything," I said after a moment of silence. "And if you keep comparing the things you have in life to other people, you would never think that you have enough. I should probably be glad with the things I have in life."

"You're exactly right," my dad said.

"I guess that's what it's like to be a human," I thought to myself.

Never satisfied.



NEVER SATISFIED

Fujipon

By: Simona Choi (Grade 6)

I could feel the quiet rumble shake my legs, and run up my spine.

Alright! We're finally on the Pirate Ship! I thought, while we silently drifted out on the water from the dock. I peered out of the window which sat right next to my head, watching all the mountains come into view, and disappear into the fog. I let my mind wander, between past and present and future.

On the cable car, only a couple minutes ago, I stole a glance at mom's phone, and saw exactly what had been right in front of me. The clouds covered the distant mountains like a soft white blanket over the vibrant blue. The ocean even further behind gave the picture a slightly lighter blue. A shady green painted the valleys, while small houses dotted them. "Nice shot," I commented. My mom looked at me, and smiled. "Thanks, Honey." she replied.

I recently noticed, that my mom and dad were on there phones a lot. What they are doing is always a mystery, but I do know that there is this hurricane. For know, I'm not too worried about it, not at all.

About an hour ago, I saw the best option for a souvenir for my Advisory. Advisory is a class that's my favorite, and will be for eternity. I wanted to give them something that I know of, or have done before. I saw a cute, baby Mt. Fuji keychain, and an Onsen Mochi keychain. I thought they would be perfect! *I wonder what they will think of the souvenirs.* I thought.

What my mom said snapped me out of my thoughts. "Oh no...". My gaze turned to my mom who was staring at her phone. "What? What is it??"

"I'm gonna ask her for advice." She said, judging by her thumbs which were darting all across the screen, she was typing or texting. My question still hung in the air when I adjusted myself in the bench, waiting for an answer.

My mom hesitated to answer, but she knew she had to tell me. My mom turned to face me, but her eyes were still glued to her phone. "The hurricane is getting stronger, and we might have to leave early."

That second, I could feel my heart plummet into my stomach. My body flinched at the sentence when I repeated it in my head. Again and again my head replayed it, but no matter how many times I heard it I refused to believe it. I decided to let my mind think about the souvenirs again. I remembered that on the package, next to the keychains, it said 'Fujipon' and a height that I couldn't remember. Fujipon. I let it echo in my head, instead of my mom and dad's conversation.

Fujipon must be the full name of Mt. Fuji. It does make a lot of sense. I thought, while I try my best to resist saying it outloud. I wasn't in the mood at the moment.

An odd sensation came over me, and I felt the sudden urge to cry. My throat felt sore, and my head started to throb a little. I pushed the feeling away, and stared out of the window. I was truly looking forward to going to Okinawa, an island little ways South of Japan, but we still have today, and I hope that we will leave tomorrow!

On our way back to the hotel, I look around the cable car. We have already seen all the scenes, but it doesn't seem to change the marveling effect. "On clear days you will see the majestic Mount. Fuji in the distance, to the left." The robotic speaker above me announced. I looked out the window and stared as hard as I can, to catch at least a glimpse of the Mountain.

"Do you see it?" I ask to no one in particular.

"No. It might be too fog- ooh, do you think that's a small part of it?" My mom thought out loud, pointing to a small patch of vivid blue.

All of us, except my brother, leaned close to the window.

"Looks like it." My sister declared,

"I think it is!" I confirmed with excitement. "Now I can tell all my friends that I saw a part of Mount. Fuji!"

The simple thought of Mt. Fuji was a little exciting, but mostly calming. I could feel all my fears melt away at the mere presence of it. It sent a message that sounded to me like, Don't worry.

When You Have No Choice But To Say Goodbye

By: Esther Winklehner (Grade 6)

My eyes welled up for what seemed like the billionth time today. I gulped, not being able to hold back my emotions any longer. Tears were streaming down my face as I uttered the words "No, no, no!" over and over again, concentrating on not losing it completely.

I caressed the hollow empty body, with its crimson mouth and faded green eyes. Any other person would think that this lifeless cat was horrific to look at but, to me, she was still my beautiful Coco. Still my best friend, but at the same time, losing her life.

I remember my mom's calm voice only a few short days before,

"I'm sorry, but I think that you'll have to let go."

I knew that something was wrong, or else she would never have said that to me, but all the same, I wasn't fazed by her statement. It all seemed very insignificant and unimportant at the time. Though I wasn't sure what she meant at first, her eyes flared when she said it. I could see that whatever it was, was very important to her, and she clearly thought that it would be very important to me too.

"Mom, what is it?"

"It's Coco. If you've been paying attention to her, then you would have noticed that she's becoming very quiet and hasn't been moving around as much."

And I did. I noticed all those things and I knew that something was wrong, I just didn't know whether I should ask or not. I was afraid.

My usual smirk disappeared immediately, and my face fell. I got up slowly from my desk and went to the couch where was lying..

"Esther...don't," Mom called after me. "I don't think you're ready." But it was already too late. I dropped to my knees and cradled her limp head in my arms.

"Oh, Coco," I whispered. "Where have you gone?"

"Is she dead?" I asked, my tear stained cheeks making me look vulnerable and weak.

"No, she's sleeping. Her right kidney has failed."

I lifted Coco and gently pulled her closer towards my chest and felt our hearts beating together in perfect harmony. As I listened silently to the angelic music this sound made in my head, the truth suddenly dawned on me, as if it were the morning sun shining its golden rays of light onto my face. My oldest friend, the cat who watched me as a baby, played with me, and comforted me during hard times, was about to meet her end.

"Shh," I whispered delicately into Coco's perfectly shaped ear, trying to block out the noise from the rest of the world (and whatever else mom was saying at that moment). I rocked her body slowly while my salty drops ran down my nose and exploded on my cat's soft and velvety fur.

I decided that I couldn't bear to look at her anymore. Still I noticed that thick red blood had begun staining her mouth and teeth. And her eyes, oh her beautiful eyes! They were now losing color with every breath that she took. I pulled her closer, cuddled up, and lay there with her hoping to asleep.

When You Have No Choice But To Say Goodbye Continued...

The Wave Continued...

I wanted to sleep more than anything. Sleep would make it all go away. After sleeping, I would wake up in a different world, I told myself. I could disappear and fly away like a beautiful hummingbird; away from all the suffering that Coco was enduring. As I drifted off, all of the memories started coming back to me, and some I forgot just as quickly as they came.

"...Wake up!" I could tell my mom was trying to whisper as softly as possible into my ear. Coco opened her mouth but couldn't make a sound. Instead, she placed her paw on my hand.

"Coco..." I sighed, the upper part of my body shooting up. I was moving so fast that everything around me was blurred and I couldn't see properly. When I looked down I saw Coco lying on my lap and I let go of a breath that I didn't realize I was holding.

"Give her a turn to hold Coco" Mom enunciated sternly looking me right in the eye.

"Can I please have a bit more time?" "You've been doing so for an hour and a half already!" Mom pointed out, frowning at me. "Please give her a turn!"

"Now run along it's time for her to say her goodbyes to Coco as well."

I sighed while wrapping the pink, fluffy blanket that held Coco in place around her. Left, right, left, right again and again until her face was hidden from view. Then, I lifted her ever so slightly off my lap before placing her softly onto her lap. As the winter frost crept up my leg, I felt a chill run down my spine. The only place that remained warm was my face, where my hot salty tears had been a few minutes ago.

"Please Coco, don't leave," I whispered.

The Wave

By: Sophie Kang (Grade 6)

It was late morning, warm outside, as the waves crashing along the shore showed no mercy towards the peaceful, sunny, beach. They looked small in the water, far out in the vast ocean. But the impact of the waves onto shore sent shells, rocks, and sand scattering in every direction.

I'm doing it! I'm doing it! I thought to myself in my head, as my boogie board sped rapidly towards the shore on a wave - head first.

Before I hopped onto the royal blue board, it didn't seem like such a bad idea. I was with my older sister on the beach, waiting for the oldest sibling, my brother, to come down from the beach house, so that I could get on and learn how to ride the waves with him guiding me. But before he came down, I waded into the water alongside my sister.

"You want to go first?" I asked, as my sister and I stood at the edge of the water, breathing in the salty beach air and feeling the large waves crashing at our feet.

I tried hard to conceal the fact that I was slightly nervous to go on the boogie board we brought from the beach house, and I wasn't about to admit it. The last scenario I wanted to get myself into was to have a wave of ocean water slamming into my face. I hate the taste of saltwater going up my nose and in my mouth!

"Sure," she replied as she took the board from my grasp, balancing it on the water and gripping the sides as she prepared to go in. She seemed relaxed and laid back about it even though it was the first time doing this for both of us. I wondered, is it really that bad?

I noticed that the waves were extremely high today so my sister and I had to stay especially close to the shore. In the distance, I could see my family at the beach house - only a few minutes walk from where we were currently lounging.

After my friend waded back out of the ocean with the board and gave it to me, I went in a bit later with my brother. He was the sporty type so I assumed he knew how to ride it. He had said it was no big deal. I looked at him uneasy even though I volunteered to go out first with him. I could feel my heart pounding inside my chest, threatening to break through my rib cage.

He had noticed I looked a little unsure but simply said, "Come on! It's a piece of cake. I'll help you."

"Okay, okay," I replied as I gradually trudged into the water with the board, trying to calm down my nerves.

"Alright," said my brother as he got into the water beside me. As I said earlier, the waves were crazy high so we had to stay close to shore. "All you're basically going to do is, wait for a good wave to arrive, jump onto the boogie board on your chest, and start paddling towards shore along with the wave. Got it?"

"Yeah, I guess" I said as I positioned the board to face the shore and held the sides tightly so it would be easy to start moving right away along with the water.

Suddenly, without warning, a huge wave approached us along with my brother's yelling, "Now, now, NOW!"

Startled, I looked back and felt anxiety, dread, and excitement all at the same time coursing through my body.

Oh gosh here it comes...what did I set myself up for?

I realized a split second too late what was going on, and when I did, I had no choice but to jump on top of the board, and start kicking towards shore as frantically and fast as possible.

And that's how I ended up racing towards the shore - littered with all sorts of broken shells, rocks, and other needle like items. My brother noticed faster than I did that I wasn't going to make it in time, so he gave me a push to help me out.

It worked, but the wave was so powerful that it shoved me to the shore a lot faster that I had anticipated. I braced myself as I crashed onto it, along with the wave. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, we were pretty close - too close to the shore.

My upper body was fine on impact, because it was on the board. My legs, hanging of the end however, not so much. The injury wasn't that bad, but it was extremely irritating. My legs were bleeding and had scrapes and cuts all over, stinging because of the sand.

I faintly heard my brother's voice and my other family members asking if I was alright, but I barely heard them because all I was thinking at the moment was, 'I seriously shouldn't have done that. I seriously shouldn't have done that. I seriously shouldn't have done that.'





PERFECT

I'm perfect.
 Sorry, that sounded pretty obnoxious, didn't it?
 Let me try again.
 Hey, it's me.
 The girl who always has a smile on her face,
 the girl who always buys people lunch,
 gives out compliments out of the blue.
 The girl who is nice, considerate, kind.
 But, I'm also the girl
 who talks about people behind their back,
 doesn't lend others her pencils,
 the girl who is irritatingly loud,
 doesn't know what personal space is, and doesn't
 say "Hi" in the hallways.
 But does that make me a
 Bad person? Annoying? Ignorant?
 Is that who you really think I am?
 A girl who seems really nice
 but is actually mean in the inside?
 Is that me?

Hi.
 Do you like this fake smile
 plastered on my face?
 All my emotions hidden behind?
 I want to cry, I want to yell, I want to scream,
 and I want to cry again.
 But it's always
 silence...
 It's always been like this.
 Every Single Second Of My Life
 My parents used to talk to me about tv shows,
 play Scrabble with me every weekend,
 and say "Goodnight!"
 as they tucked me into bed.
 But now,
 everything's changed.
 My parents ask me about my grades,
 they tell me about the new math tutor that
 everyone's trying to get an appointment with,
 and say "We know you'll do great!"
 "We know you're the best!"
 "We know you're our perfect little daughter."
 Perfect.
 What does it even mean to be perfect?
 Good grades, beautiful smile, great body, pretty?
 People always expect me to be perfect.
 Act, like I'm perfect.
 But no, I'm just a broken little girl, that nobody, not
 even my parents seem to notice
 I'm-Perfect.

**By: Gina Baik
 Grade 8**

The way the world judges us

By: Christie Choi Grade 8

A's, B's, C's, D's, and F's,
 that's how the world judges us.

We are different from those labels,
 but the world may not know that.

I am different from what you think, and I can show
 more than just an A or an F.

I am more than a grade,
 and grades don't define who I am.

You don't know how hard I tried,
 you don't know what I went through.

Not even a few hours of sleep,
 and countless time of effort.
 But who cares—
 all you know are those 5 letters
 A, B, C, D, and F

Which One?

People say:

When there is darkness

There are stars

When there is rain

There are rainbows

When there is despair

There is hope

What about me?

Am I like the

darkness

rain

despair?

Or am I like the

stars

rainbows

hope?

By: Adela Wang
 Grade 8

MY HERO

*I first walked into this big room
I saw a beautiful man sitting on his chair
His hair was as perfect as a model
I sat down on a seat in the middle of the room*

*The room was bright
Sun shining through the side windows
It shined perfectly on his forehead
There were math posters
Everywhere covering up the joyful room
There was a big white board in the
Front of the room containing all the equations*

*His voice boomed through the class
Making everyone look up
His eyes reminded me of the
Deep blue ocean*

*I grabbed and put every single
piece of knowledge he taught me in me
I left the class looking back to my hero
He cleared the dark swarm of clouds
that covered me
He filled up my head with lights and hopes*

I said my last goodbye

To my love, my hero, my savior, Mr. Forrestal

*By: Sean Kim
Grade 8*

Love Life

*I stand with a boy
I miss and I'm feeling immediate fear.
Shoot me,
I hear the blade towards me,
Protect me,
Before all is gone.*

*By: Miley Chang
Grade 8*

Letter Poem

Dear Myself,

Everyday I see you in the mirror
Varies in styles and looks but having the same existence
Everyday I feel how much you're tired
Raging to show yourself but
Yielding to the
Ones meant to shine
No one cares about your
Existence except for me

Stars are in all styles and looks
Hoping to shine their own special light
Indicating their own lights in the dark
Night that people glance to
Eager to make a pair of eyes amazed by their
Shining self

All of this effort is used to
Shine themselves

Are you any different from them
No

I see you everyday trying to shine
Never getting used to the meteors full of hatred
Depression being the only friend you have
I see you everyday trying to shine
Varying in styles and looks
I see you as a beautiful star
Do not
Underestimate yourself
All stars shine in different ways
Let yourself be you

Everyone shines as an individual.

Sincerely,

Your Sun

*By: Juri Nakayama
Grade 8*



Rage: red,
red like lava
boiling out of a volcano
burning everything it touches.

Sadness: blue,
blue like tears
falling from your eyes
blurring your vision.

Happiness: yellow,
yellow like the sun,
and dandelions that
decorate the grassy field.

Loneliness: grey,
the same grey
as the cold, unforgiving mist,
that clouds around you.

These emotions, are
different coloured markers
Markers, that you use to decorate your life.
You can draw a gorgeous tropical forest,
or you can draw a hot solitary desert
You can be anything you ever wanted,
But there is one important thing you should remember-

Markers are permanent.

MARKERS
By: Jivan Woo
Grade 8

BOREDOM

Dear Boredom,

*You give color to lives that have
None—
But taking from others,
That is a sin
Novelty and creativity—
I've prayed for years
So they can be returned to me
Everyday I live in a loop
Every action foreseen
Stripped of color,
I'm lost in shades of gray
Hues have fade away
My red passion burnet off
The joy of yellow decayed
And courage of orange still lacks
Though I will wait,
For the return of my colors of life*

*By: Masahide Fukutome
Grade 8*

HOW EYES CHANGE

Emma was a young girl with bright hazel eyes
Eyes full of willpower, that burned like blazing torches in
midnight.
She was seven years old.

At the age of eight,
Emma watched as her friend came crying back from school
Because a boy teased her for being too outspoken and
opinionated.
The next day, she quit her debate team.

At the age of thirteen,
Emma watched as a highschooler stood in front of the
bathroom mirror
Obsessing over every "imperfection" on her features
Grimaced look on her face as she made internalized hateful
comments
About her own nose, eyes, and lips.
The same following day, Emma judged herself in the same
manner.

At the age of fourteen,
She scanned through short magazines
And gazed at all the models whose appearances seemed to
be perfect
Wondering if having straight hair, a slim nose, and wearing
makeup,
Determines whether or not you will be accepted by society's
standards.

Emma stared at her own reflection in the mirror,
Ashamed of being in her own skin.
Unable to fight the tears
As she criticizes every feature of her face.
She skipped all her meals that day.

At the age of fifteen,
She started to eat a minimum of one meal a day.
She tried her hardest to mold herself into the society's
wants.
She worked to shape herself into something completely
distinctive that
If she took a glance in the mirror, she wouldn't be able to
recognize herself.

Emma is now sixteen.
She glimpses a look of herself through a glass window.
Her stick-like body, her cheeks sulking, red lips,
And most importantly, colorless eyes.

*By: Rachel Lee
Grade 8*

Murderer and a savior

You are a murderer,
you kill freedom,
you kill faith,
and you kill the cheerfulness of our
young soul.

Thousands of victims fall because of you,
falling down to their knees,
head facing down,
Fearing embarrassment.

You're a savior.
You plant specs of hope,
you pull us up to the clouds,
and let us feel the warmth of glory.

You give us poison with medicine.
You're just a number and a letter,
how are you so powerful?
how...just how do you change us so easily?

What are you?
Why do I need you?
What do you want?

Dear Powerschool,

I'd not have you interfering with my life.

by: Junwon Choi
Grade 8

Thoughts

I want to be colourful—
like the wings of a peacock.

I want to be meaningful—
like everyone else.

By: Soomin Yoo
Grade 8

THE GREATEST BULLY

Dear Homework,
You are an issue, without solutions.

You are
the Black Hole of school,
not mentioned in Hawking's theory.

Waves of stress approach,
when teachers say
we should adore you.

Hunched over a desk,
on the couch, on the bed.
Equation by equation, book by book.
More tedious than reading Shakespeare.
We think the end
is near,
but
we
forget
about the villain:

Procrastination.

Minds explode with temptation.
Trembling fingers, hovering above the keyboard.
But your power makes us try.
Try to defeat the villain,
in every route possible

9:35 p.m.
10:14 p.m.
11:00 p.m.
Eyelids begin to droop.

I drag my body,
and mind, up the ladder of sheets,
reaching the puffy blankets.
Before...
Nothing.
Complete darkness.
When the sun rises again,
your cycle begins
once more.

By: Joshua Choi
Grade 8

Miserably Yours,
Joshua Choi,
Prey of the Homework cycle



●●● Winter

By: Aria Jacobsen (Grade 7)

As a 9th grader girl I was nervous to come back to school, scared of all the possibilities, not to mention I would now be holding the weight of Highschool on my shoulders. I stepped in the Cafeteria and was immediately surged with the smell of sweat, perfume and food. To my left was a group of kids, a few boys and one of them was crying. My heart fell a little but It wasn't like I was going to help. It's not like I really need to though. I'm popular and that's all I need right? I looked ahead at my friends, sitting at a table towards the lunch line and I slowly walked down the center aisle. As I reached my table I slid into my seat and looked around. I was quickly comforted by the sight of my friend Braydon sitting beside me and I began to feel pleased again. I hadn't seen him all summer and I missed him. We talked a little on the phone but he stopped answering after a few weeks, leaving the rest to today. I turned towards him and heard my back crack a little.

"Hey Braydon!" I smiled, the corners of my lips spreading like fresh butter unable to hold back my excitement, I couldn't wait to tell him about my vacation to the Bahamas. He turned in his chair, a grim look on his face and his hair ruffled like he'd just woken up. His face was pale and dry. My huge smile loosened to merely a grin, weakened by his gray eyes looming over me.

"Whad'ya want?" He asked, his facial expression tough and cold. His chapped lips shouting out the words like a crossbow. I leaned back too much causing me to fall and hit my head on the chair behind me. I urgently sat up, the back of my head throbbing like someone swinging a wrecking ball into my head, the pain atrocious. I was still shocked by the sudden change in behavior so I stayed silent until Braydon left to go join another table. The rest of the day was foggy and I couldn't stop myself from repeating this moment in my head. Maybe I shouldn't have just sat there, I could have stood up for myself. I was worried I had done something wrong to offset him or anger him but I just couldn't figure it out. I think most importantly that is when I realized I didn't fit in the popular group anymore.

Tomorrow is Wednesday and If you know me then you know I hate Wednesdays. The thing is Wednesdays are kind of like deserted islands. You get there and it feels like it's a long way to get off. To me that's kind of like the days of the week in some perhaps alternate reality. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is kind of like the ocean, essentially trapping you on Wednesday. When I'm at wednesday It feels like there is no escape and you just have to have hope until you reach Friday that it'll be okay. Maybe I'm thinking too much about this but I'm just trying to think of something other than the fact that today I ruined a 5-year long friendship that I don't think I can recover. I think I need to start new. I started with cutting my hair so it went down to my ears. I put my old black ringed earrings in and I finally felt okay with myself.

I brought my hand down as I was stretching to frantically slap my alarm clock that was ringing in my head. I looked at it briefly; 5:30 am. I yawned and groaned, It was like I blinked last night and just --"Bam!"-- get ready for school. I turned over in my bed and unexpectedly fell to the ground, falling right on my shoulder. I made a loud thump on the ground that caused my mom to come in to start yelling at me in Filipino about my hair and talking about our downstairs neighbors and me falling on the floor but all I did was just curl back up in my comforter on the cold ground, contemplating pretending to be sick.

Winter Continued...

I finally decided, once my mom left, to get up and get dressed in a pair of Adidas joggers and a grey hoodie, messing up my short hair and putting a tad bit of gel in it. Done. I picked up my bag and hurriedly shoved my books and notebooks inside. I shut the door to the apartment complex and pressed the down button on the elevator. I was sure I was going to regret today.

I walked into first block and immediately heads turned. I waved slightly, an awkward smile spreading across my face as I slid into my chair. I pulled my hood over my head and pulled some hair out. I laid my head down ignoring the looks from Braydon's friends. My face flourished with red as I realized I had no one reach out to now, no one to talk too and no one to make friends with because they all thought I was a jerk. It's true, all these years I had been mean to others not realising how bad they had it. I just thought because my life was great I didn't need to make others happy. God I was an idiot. I wish I could just go back and change myself. Who would want to be friends with me now? Maybe I should just change schools, or change my identity. I sighed to myself, burying my head deeper within my hands. My mom would never let me do that, I guess I'll just have to deal with it myself. Everyone's eyes drifted to the side and I thought the teacher had arrived but then she spoke

"Hey Guys.. I'm Debbie and I've got moved up into this class." I looked up and realised it was the girl I saw in the cafeteria yesterday. I remembered her from the blue streak in her hair and now I noticed since she was closer that she had and few bandages over her cheek and an eyepatch on her eye. The white color of the eyepatch contrasted nicely to her cocoa brown skin that was smooth as melted chocolate. She looked nervously across the room then looked straight down. A few boys in the back of the room chuckled a bit at her awkwardness. The teacher pushed her to tell more. "And what do you like to do?" Mrs. Malley asked, her voice perky and her mouth forming a smile that looked like it could substitute the sun. "Uh.. I like to go roller skating and skateboarding. I also kind of like going to cafes with my friends and chill." A burst of laughter erupted once again. When she looked down this time she looked embarrassed, but she also looked really sad. I ignored the laughter and my eyes were fixed on her. She was really pretty but not in the standard popular girl way, she was beautiful. She took a seat by the window and I could see the dust from the room dancing in the rays of the sun above her. I don't think I have smiled like I did since the first day of school.

When class was over I stayed a little bit longer than normal, acting like I was having trouble putting my textbooks in my bag. I looked up and caught a glimpse of her walking out the door and I quickly grabbed my still-unzipped bookbag and rushed out the door. I heard Mrs. Malley start to wish me goodbye but I didn't have time. I quickly grabbed Debbie's arm and dragged her closer to me. I look up at her and she looked very alarmed, then I realized I still had a really firm hold on her small, weak wrist and I let go. Immediately when she was out of her moment of shock she reached her tiny hand up and smacked me. It didn't hurt my cheek that much but it hurt me inside. I watched her run off to my right into the library. I'm so insensitive, I should have known she wouldn't have forgiven me, god I should have even known grabbing her arm wasn't okay even if I was a good person. I'm so stupid and I've probably ruined my chance of being her friend. I sighed and zipped my backpack off, walking to 4th period. I'm so hopeless.

I walked into the cafeteria, pushing my side into the door to get it to open. My body grew weakened to the sight of my old table full. It's not like I was going to still sit there anyway but

I'm surprised on how quickly they replaced me. I shrugged, I just need to find somewhere to sit. I looked around, looking for an empty table. Turns out all 14 tables in our cafeteria were 'full' or they wouldn't dare except me there. I finally decided to grab a bagel and head to the Greenhouse. The greenhouse is in the middle of our school and it's name doesn't quite fit. It's just a room decorated with fountains and a few plants and picnic tables. I opened the door to the greenhouse feeling the cold air brush against my cheeks, turning my face a rosey color, flourished against the pale white color of my face. I noticed Debbie's head turn in my direction. By her facial expression I guessed she thought I followed her in here but I just tried to ignore her as I sat on the picnic table, looking down at the bagel I pulled out of my pocket. It was still warm and I felt the warmest heating up my hands. I signed, my breathe a nice white contrast to the sky. I tensed up, pulling my jacket tighter. How cold was it today?, that's when I noticed Debbie moved to sit in front of me, looking to her side, trying not to make it a big deal. Her face was more red than usual, or atleast when I saw her last and I realised she was blushing. I opened my mouth to speak but she interrupted me

"I'm sorry for slapping you earlier." She said. I couldn't stop myself from smiling, her voice sounded so soft and just adorable. She didn't sound the same as she did earlier and I don't blame her. I haven't done great with all the pressure that I've had for the past few days and I don't think she has either. We talked about how much homework we had and which classes we didn't like but I couldn't stop my eyes from staring at her. She was so beautiful, her black hair running over the curves of her shoulders, the blue streak running down the side of her hair like a waterfall matching the greenish blue color of her eyes. Her skin warm and smooth like a cup of hot chocolate. Eventually she noticed me staring and I swear my heart leaped into my lungs for a minute and I couldn't breathe. She just laughed and I realised my face had grown embarrassingly red. We talked more about how school was last year and how she had dyed her hair the streak of blue to remember her sister who died because of suicide. She had killed herself due to her lack of acceptance. Her sister had been gender fluid, meaning she didn't identify as a girl or a boy. "She identified as herself" Debbie would say. She quickly started crying and I walked over and sat with her, pulling her towards my chest. She wasn't just any girl. She had a story, a world, a reality. I wanted to become closer to her, so I asked in a gentle quiet tone..

"Will you go to Boba Kings with me? I'll meet you after school right outside the front doors... If that's okay." She nodded, her head rubbing against the soft material of my jacket. I smiled and stood up. "I'll see you then?" Debbie Smiled, tucking her arms into her navy blue shawl.

I walked out of the school building, my light arms swinging into the sky and then running through my hair. --Is this a date?-- I asked myself, my heart pounding against my chest, my pulse softening my hearing so I just heard the hard rhythmic beat of itself. I sat down on one of the stone ledges in front of the school and waited for Debbie. I looked around and saw stuff falling from the sky-- rain probably. I pulled my hood over my head and shrugged. Then I realised something. Debbie was standing about 6 feet in front of me, spinning around. I tilted my head at her confused and then I got it. It wasn't raining... It was snowing! I took my hood off and grabbed her arm, spinning her so she was looking into my eyes.

Winter Continued...

"Thanks for today" I said, spinning her around again. I heard some people pass by whispering "Their gay" or "Disgusting" but I ignored them. Debbie on the other hand seemed a little offset by them but I just moved her closer to me, looking into her eyes letting her know I'm there for her.

We started walking to Boba Kings and I kicked rocks that didn't go with the small gravel parking lot we walked over. "So.. you like boys don't you" I heard her say. My face turned red again. It was quite a personal question and.. slightly random. I licked my chapped rose-gold lips. "I'm actually pan.. Which means I like all gend--" I was cut off by Debbie's light voice "I know what Pan means dummy. I'm actually pan too." She laughed, a puff of white air coming out her mouth. I felt my hand go numb as I moved my hand from my pocket to hold hers. Butterflies appeared and disappeared from my stomach within seconds and I smiled again. I didn't care if I looked stupid with my dumb smile plastered over my face, I wanted to show how proud I was, how proud I was of myself and Debbie. I adjusted my hand slightly so our fingers interlocked. Why would I want to be ashamed of love? No one wants to slow dance in the dark. At the end of the day we ended up making stupid jokes and pick up lines as we drank boba tea watching the snowfall from the sky, the crisp crackling of the fire in the background. I smiled. This was only the beginning of winter.

Alone ●●●

By: June Yang (Grade 7)

The bus was ruining my looks.

Seriously, it actually was. Every bump in the road made my hair jump the slightest bit, making it fall out of the perfect formation I had arranged it in earlier this morning, and the black seats clashed with my dress.

At least I was sitting alone. I was the only one in the bus to have a whole two seats to myself. I had given the losers who had dared to approach the seat next to me my signature death stare.

My thoughts were disrupted by the abrupt stopping of the bus. It screeched to a stop, making my hair jump the highest yet. I silently cursed the world- why couldn't my parents just agree to drive me in our XX?

I got ready to glare at whoever got into the bus at that stop. They had completely ruined my first-day hair! Also, the neighborhood we had stopped at looked extremely poor. How could anyone live in those one-floor apartment shacks? My curiosity rose higher as I saw someone get on the bus. Someone who actually lived here would be attending my school. Then I saw the person who had gotten on our bus properly. It was a girl who looked slightly older than me.

She looked TERRIBLE. She was unlike anything I had ever seen before. Her hair was an unattractive shade of brown and a tangled mess. Her face looked damaged beyond repair with red blotches - not to mention her clothes. How could anyone even show themselves with those clothes on in public?

Alone Continued...

My thoughts were disrupted when I noticed the most unsettling detail of all. She was coming towards me. Clearly, she had mistaken my staring at her as friendly interest. I frantically looked around the bus for another seat I could point her to, only to find that there were none. The seat next to mine was the only seat left on the whole bus.

She was still coming closer to me. I began to panic. I couldn't let her sit next to me- maybe her ugliness was contagious.

She was in the aisle in front of mine now. I glared menacingly at her and slammed my hand down on the seat next to mine. "This seat is taken," I said to her, forcing a smile onto my face.

"There's no one there," the girl hesitantly replied, taking a step closer to me.

"IT'S TAKEN." I said slightly louder, not even bothering to smile anymore. I flashed her my signature glare.

"Why don't you want me to sit next to you? Do you hate me that mu-" she began.

"NO!" I yelled at her. "I TOLD YOU THAT YOU COULDN'T SIT HERE, WHY WON'T YOU JUST BACK OFF?"

"But-"

"SHUT UP! HOW CAN I," I screeched, motioning at myself, "SIT NEXT TO SOMEONE LIKE YOU?" I finished, gesturing at her.

She looked down. I noticed that she was beginning to tear up, but didn't feel any sympathy for her. I watched as she trudged up toward the driver and said something to him. The driver motioned to the seat next to me, but the girl shook her head. The two of them discussed for a while until the driver motioned next to him. The girl slowly sat down on the bus steps.

I relaxed back into my bus seat and took out my phone. As I expected, my hair was completely ruined due to my yelling at the girl. I sighed, despair slowly filling me- how would I survive my first day of school when there were losers like the girl terminating the campus and ruining my hair?

To take my mind off of my unfortunate situation, I checked my social media platforms. Like always, I saw that I had a mountain of texts waiting to greet me on every messaging app I visited. I ignored all of them- they probably said the same admiring things anyway.

I met up with my group of Too soon, the bell rang, signaling that five minutes were left until the start of my first class. I managed to free myself from my friends. "Lunch, under the big tree. Be there," I told them.

As I approached the spot where my friends and I had agreed to meet, I saw that a girl was already sitting in the tree's shade- it was probably one of my friends, no one else would dare.

I walked up to her with a smile and began to greet her. "Hey! It's nice to see y-" Then I saw her face properly, and my words were abruptly cut off. This girl wasn't one of my friends. She was the loser on my bus who I had yelled at earlier today.

"Move," I said to her, pointing away from the tree. I watched as she looked down at her feet and remained silent. "Are you deaf? I said MOVE!" I spat at her.

"You aren't the boss of me. I can sit wherever I want," she retorted after what seemed like forever.

"EXCUSE ME?" I motioned to my friends, who had gathered around me. "I am Krystal Pierce- the queen of this stupid school. I am somebody. You are- you know what? I don't even know your name. In fact, no one probably knows your name. You are nobody. And don't you know? "Nobody"s don't stand up to "somebody"s. So MOVE." I said, narrowing my eyes.

She sniffed. Then she moved away from my tree.

Alone Continued...

I didn't have to worry about that girl again for a while. I got a new car, so I didn't have to ride the bus anymore. My life continued the way I once had, with my popularity soaring. Everything was perfect.

Until the day everything changed.

Until the day my life fell to pieces that I couldn't glue back together.

The day started off normal, like any other day. I was driving to the mall to meet my A clique friends in my new car.

I don't know whose fault the accident was. I wasn't paying full attention to the road as I drove, my mind was busy thinking about the new clothes I'd buy with my friends.

However, when I saw the black blob behind me through my rearview window, zooming towards my car far over the speed limit, my brain was intact enough to scream one word at me: danger.

I tried to stop my car, but it was too late.

When the black blob, which I could now identify as a car, was practically a foot away from the back of my car, I realized the horror of my situation.

In movies, they show thrilling climaxes and intense turning points in slow motion, but at that moment, I found the world moving just as fast as usual. Instead, the realization of danger caused a rush of adrenaline to course through me, allowing me to process several events at once.

My mind whispered a single phrase to me before the chaos began- Everything is about to change. For a moment, everything was quiet- the calm before my storm.

Then the calm abruptly ended and my storm began.

A crashing sound of metal against metal.

Then for a split second, the sensation of soaring- catapulting across the sky.

A loud thumping sound.

A wave of pain crashing over me.

Then nothing.

Complete blackness.

When I wake up, I'm on a tiny bed that's as hard as stone in a drab room. The smell of alcohol fills the air, stinging my nose.

Ew, I thought. This room smells gross. Where's my perfume?

Then the panic finally settled in- where was I? I tried to sit up, only to find that I couldn't. I slumped back onto the bed and stared up at the ceiling of my room.

That's when I noticed two very shocking things. One, the ceiling had a very realistic looking picture of an extremely ugly girl painted on it. This girl's face was hideous, with scratches, blotches, and deformities flashing across it like lightning bolts.

Two, the ceiling didn't have a picture painted on it at all- it was reflective. Which could only mean...

I was the girl displayed on the ceiling, but that was impossible. The ceiling girl looked nothing like me. She was disgusting. I was beautiful.

I reached up to touch my face. The girl on the ceiling did the same. I frowned, and she mirrored me. That's when the truth slapped me full in the face- I was in a hospital. The words car accident flashed in my mind, and the memories came suddenly flowing back to me- the black blob coming toward me far too fast, my mind screaming danger at me, me flying across the car, the sound of shattering glass, quiet blackness...

The girl in the ceiling really was me. The new me, with red blotches and scars that the accident had inflicted on me all over my face.

I was hideous.

I closed my eyes. Maybe this was all a dream- a terrible nightmare. I would wake up any moment now

As my mind drifted, I heard two voices talking right outside the door of my room.
"She'll survive." one of them said.
"At what price?" the other replied.
"We already know she'll most likely be paralyzed from the waist down. She won't be able to stand or walk. I heard she used to dance professionally, poor thing."
My eyes snapped open in disbelief.
I was hideous.
I would dance no more.

After a few weeks of unsuccessful rehabilitation attempts, the doctors who worked at the hospital I stayed in officially announced me disabled from the waist down. During the weeks of my stay, they told me the details of what had happened during my accident and a few days after. Phrases like "huge crash" and "so sorry" and "very lucky to be alive" were used most often—apparently, the crash had been big enough to make the news, and I was supposed to be dead.

Little did I know, the events that would follow my discharge from the hospital would make me wish I were dead.

My bad luck started the morning I was supposed to return back to school when I couldn't find anything decent to wear. I found that I couldn't even put on makeup because it irritated my scars. As I wheeled myself to school, the wind completely destroyed my hair, which had taken hours to perfect.

My first class that day was English, so I rolled myself there. However, as I wheeled into my English classroom, I immediately noticed that something was off. Usually, my friends would swarm me like paparazzi as soon as they saw me, but today, no one even greeted me. Not even a single "hello" was directed my way.

Don't worry, maybe they're just shocked to see you here again, I told myself.

However, when no one invited me to sit at their table, I began to doubt the conclusion I had come to previously, and when the same thing happened in all of my following classes, I began to worry.

I was relieved when lunch time finally came. I walked over to the large tree where me and my friends had usually ate. To my surprise, no one was there, waiting for me. Maybe they're running a bit late, I told myself, rolling myself under the tree's shade.

Five minutes passed, and no one came to sit by me. Then ten minutes. Then fifteen.

That's when reality decided to smack me in the face— what if no one was coming to sit with me because no one actually wanted to sit with me? I began looking around me, trying to spot my friends.

Then I saw them— the usual A clique that I sat with. Well, apparently, that I used to sit with— now they were sitting under the second biggest tree in our school. Away from me.

A fresh feeling of dread and something else washed over me. I felt ten emotions at the same time: betrayal, sadness, anger... but above all, the unknown feeling that had washed over me before.

As I stared at the friends who had left me, I realized what the feeling had been. I hadn't realized what it had been before because I had never felt it before that moment.

The feeling was loneliness. For the first time in my life, I was all alone. Lonely.

Slow Improvement

By: Layla Lee (Grade 6)

I stared at the blank test sheet, the Korean characters became blurs of black and white ink, the sound of pencil lead cracking and pens clicking became faint background noise as my mind wandered elsewhere. The faces of my determined peers zoomed out of focus as I flipped my paper over. Without glancing up, I felt my teacher's sharp gaze, yet I knew she would not dare say anything as I laid my head down on the desk.

The clock ticked past three, and my classmates abruptly stood up, shuffling to hand in their tests. I waited for the crowd to pass, stood up and walked to the desk, my footsteps heavy. Packing my bag with what seemed like useless bricks, I stared at the covered in the drawings of my classmates. The homework, written near the various drawings, in straight, orderly handwriting was ignored, well knowing it would not be understood nor done.

Jumping into the white sheets, my body sank into the soft mattress, staring at the plain white ceiling. I relaxed my tensed muscles, slowly reaching for my phone. I watched the battery deplete, sighing in response. I dozed off, rethinking through my day. The test lingered in my mind, the blurs of black and white ink taunting my brain, stress piling. Feeling numb, I knew I could never be satisfied regardless of the hours contributed to studying. My room began to spin, sweat trickling down my face, breathing becoming uncontrollable. I felt an unusual wave of heat take over my body, my heart racing wildly. Hearing the chime of my apartment door, I took refuge in my bathroom, and quickly splashed cold water on my face, the water feeling like a cool breeze on a summer's day. The water camouflaged what had been tears, and after what seemed like hours in the little room, I swiftly escaped the interrogation of whoever had entered, I quickly walked back into my room. Opening up my phone, the bright screen illuminated the room, my eyes squinting at the light. Tapping through my numerous education apps, I clicked through the many lessons, making sure I understood each lesson. Spending hours comprehending the material, I clicked off my phone, the room returning to the dark room it had been.

The murmurs filled up the once empty corridor, the sounds of kids laughing and shouting bouncing off the walls. Shoving my way past the rows of students greeting their friends with laughter, I stumbled into the classroom, yet was shocked to see the polar opposite inside the classroom. Faces laced with worry and shock quickly turned away, the expressions. Neat, organized handwriting showed the word "test", undeniably belonging to the person watching the students like a hawk. As quickly as I had entered, my feet dragged me out of the room, entering the busy hallway once more. Feeling beads of sweat trickle down the veins of my hands, my eyes urgently searching for a hide-away. Among the dozens of people filling the halls, I could feel my breathing quicken uncontrollably, my feet taking me a random direction. A door cracked open, exposing an empty classroom filled with desks and chairs yet no



Slow Improvement Continued...

students. Closing the door behind me, I sank to my knees, the sound of my uncontrollable breaths hidden by the sound of the large unhinged door. The sounds of my classmates died out, signaling the beginning of class. Taking a large breath, I sighed as I composed myself, tears drying up on my face. It's ok. *You can do this. Don't cry.* I told myself as I placed my hands on my knees, pulling myself up. Slowly walking to the classroom, I wiped the remaining sweat and tears, holding one hand to my chest, taking deep inhales then exhales. Now facing the dark brown door, my hand reached for the indent in the wood, my breathing betraying me. Gripping the door firmly, I slid the door open, immediately seeing dozens of faces turn towards the door. Silently, I quickly walked to my desk, attempting to ignore the many stares I received. Slipping through the side of my desk, I noticed the sheets of paper laid on my desk, full of diagrams and labels. Flipping through the papers, I recognized the information, my hands already reaching for the pencil.

Handing in a fully filled out test, a slight grin arose through my face, the sides of my mouth rising. The thoughts of "It's not even going to be graded, you wrote all the answers in English. Why are you so happy?" lurked in the back of my thoughts, yet I dismissed those thoughts as I sat back down in my chair, a sigh of relief escaping my tensed body.

Entering the hallway full of commotion, the sound slowly died out, dozens of eyes shooting a piercing glance, and while attempting to ignore the glances and whispers shot my way, I walked towards the door, only to see several people crowded towards the bulletin board announcing the scores. "Someone must have gotten a good grade" I thought as I hooked my bag on the side of my desk, glancing up only to see shocked faces, jaws reaching the floor. Curiosity getting the best of me, I walked up to the board, the crowd of people parting paths, whispering in shock. Staring at the paper, I noticed nothing unusual, except for my name being written with the numbers 1 and 100 right beside. Attempting to keep a neutral expression yet failing, my eyes widened, then squinted to make sure I had read the paper correctly. I knew I was supposed to feel proud, yet a feeling of unease and dread washed through me, a chill causing me to shiver. I slowly walked to my desk, the bell saving me from the interrogations and stares.

"And you guys can be dismissed early, go ahead. Have a great weekend!" The classroom erupted into cheers, students already racing out the door.

"Congrats by the way! And don't mind the stuff people are saying about you, they're probably just shocked"

Oh, um... thanks."

"And I was just curious, how'd you understand the material so easily? I had trouble with this unit" The words entered my brain, yet left as soon as I had heard them, jumbling up the words into an incoherent language.

"It's okay, I know you aren't the best at Korean. Congrats anyway!" Picking up her backpack, she walked out the classroom, leaving me and my thoughts. Lifting my bag, I head towards the door, glimpsing at the paper once more in awe.

The hallway was back to normal the next day, full of yelling and kids chasing each other down the halls. I had arrived early, dozing off until the loud bang of the door caused me to escape my thoughts. Noticing that the sound was made by students who had opened the door too quickly,

I began to doze off again, unaware of the group of students heading toward my desk.

"How'd you do it? I got caught cheating every time." Murmurs of agreement came from the group, whispers from outside the group already filling the room. Being able to understand them but unable to make out the words to reply, I stared at them with a dazed look, as they waited for my answer. "I wasn't caught because I didn't cheat" was what I had hoped to tell them, yet no words came out, my brain messing up the individual words till it was a sentence in incomprehensible Korean.

The bell rang and everyone quickly ran to their seat; yet I could still hear the soft whispers indirectly accusing me, beads of sweat already forming throughout my body. My breathing quickened uncontrollably, despite my attempts at taking large breaths. A billion thoughts raced through my brain, the tiniest things now worrying me as I sat restless during the class.

I dreaded the end of class, frightened to face the interrogations and suspicions of my classmates. The bell announced our dismissal, yet as usual I waited for majority of the students to leave, yet was shocked when the teacher called me over.

"I know there's been a few rumors about your test grades, so I wanted to show you that there was no mistake or change of grades" My test paper was undeniably marked with an 100, the answers, however still written in English.

"And I translated all the answers from English to Korean so I was able to make sure they were correct. Congrats!" she exclaimed joyfully, and while I showed her a smile, my mind was only thinking of ways to silence the rumors, my main priority. Walking home, I thought of all the possible scenarios and situations that could possibly occur, and while I knew this would do more harm than good, my brain thought of the countless events that could end terribly, then the situations that could end up worse. Coping mechanisms... Coping mechanisms... I thought to myself as I silenced the suffocating thoughts, replacing them with deep inhales and exhales.





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Free Verse

This is the me that you barely see
The loneliest me that will forever be

People assume that the clown in the room is the most favored
but I disagree
I say the clown is an attention seeker,
public speaker,
and the ultimate silence breaker

Ripped my off-white, bought me GOLF
I know you sick of me talking about brands
but what do you want from me?
These are the only things keeping me company
Purchase some stuff
until I'm annoyed
these are the block that are filling the void
been there for so long
I don't even know who I am no more

Tic-tok, tic-tok
time keeps going
but I feel like the clown keeps coming
Gravity's not working, going upside down
Ask me how I'm doing
so I don't have to press that 9-1-1

Wait hold up, what if Royce is betraying me over?
What if Dad and Mom is over?
What if I'm going backwards?
What if I'm losing my mind?
Gat if I'm getting too comfortable?
What if my legacy is getting into trouble
instead of my accomplishments?

When will I bloom into the flower
that my parents have already turned into?

Ikor the alternate version of me,
the loneliest part of me
This is the me you barely see

**By: Roki Kim
Grade 8**