

THE ALPINE PATH

Volume 2, December 2021

From the Editor

We were worried that *The Alpine Path* would be a one-hit wonder, but we couldn't be more thrilled with the result of Volume 2. Reflecting the creativity of a wide range of ages and cultures, this volume will entertain and inspire you. You'll find adventure, comedy, tragedy, and beauty.

We were surprised and pleased to receive several excellent submissions from Malaysian students. We hope that you and your children will enjoy this glimpse into a different culture as you learn some new words and phrases.

We want to thank everyone who submitted for this volume and all who continue to support the journal. Please let us know what you think about Volume 2. Which pieces are your favorites? What would you like to see in future volumes? Share this with your friends and encourage your students to start writing for the next volume!

Gong Xi NO Covid

Hanna Law, 11, from Malaysia

Every Chinese New Year, we look forward to receiving ang pow (red packet money), enjoy delectable pineapple tarts, and dig into scrumptious fried chicken. Those are the wonderful things we fondly anticipate during our Chinese New Year reunion. Imagine not being able to play with my cousins at all?

During the last Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown, no one was allowed to travel back to their hometown to celebrate Chinese New Year. Therefore, most families end up having no extended family reunion gathering. Some attended "homeless parties" in the same district where they are located, and some had simple dinner at their own house. That was how my family was deprived of reunion as well. (By the way, just to clarify we are not homeless, so we never attended the homeless party.)

Against all odds, God created humans with creativity. In the face of the pandemic, people use Zoom or Whatsapp video calls to replace physical gatherings this year. Virtual reunions are better than no reunion!

Sadly, there is no angpow for kids this year! Instead, kids have to stay at home to practice piano and stare at their homework. Oh no! Can you imagine how the kids feel? Perhaps, adults would be happier because they can save from ang pow money this year.

The kids obviously felt bored, and the only thing they can do is to play BOARD game with the not so BORING parents till late night.

To sum up, this Chinese New Year, it is in fact a Covid year whereby people only can stay at their cozy home, watching CoCo cartoons while drinking Coca Cola.

I think Gong Xi Fa Chai is not important this year, Gong Xi no Covid is a more relevant Chinese New Year greeting this year. May we have a better Chinese New Year celebration next year! Gong Xi Gong Xi! 🏔️

My Underwater World

Julie Anne Chou, 11

Flowery peacocks, perfectionist cleaners and armour-plated lobsters. My name is Julie Anne and I welcome you to explore my beautiful underwater world.

It's a crowded street teeming with creatures. The highway leads to a big forest, which is a good place to play hide and seek! Two 'lawn mowers' patrol the place, eating all the grass up! There's also a castle with a armour-plated, sharp-pincer, guard 'dog' living inside. Have you kept fish before? Let me share with you about my aquarium.

My aquarium is 2 feet in length. Perfect in size to house a number of vibrant colored fishes called guppies. Smacked right in the middle is a castle where the ferocious crayfish lives. It's a distant cousin of the Boston lobster. The water is kept crystal clear by the sponge filters and the aquarium glass is spotless thanks to the sucker fish diligently feeding on any algae growing. It's mesmerizing to watch them all day long.

You would think keeping fishes is all fun and enjoyment! Actually, it is no easy feat. Daily feeding is a must! Otherwise they start eating each other. You can't feed them too much too, else they may die of overeating. Apart from food, their poop has to be removed and water changed. All this you have to do, rain or shine. Otherwise you end up with a smelly ugly tank of murky greenish water, with zero fish in sight. Every rose has its thorns. And the biggest thorn is the fact that I can't be away from home too long as this little world is fully reliant on me.

Having this fish tank has taught me many things.

- To find joy in little things.
- To be responsible in feeding and cleaning to ensure the fishes are happy.
- And (whisper) that my mum is glad so she won't make me throw them out.
- But most importantly, it shows me this! With the right attitude and diligence, I can maintain a beautiful aquarium that brings joy.

The lock down is loosening up... I may soon get to go out and meet my friends. Will I still have time to take care of my aquarium? Most people only see the fruit of the labour, but not the effort and time spent to upkeep. I can't tell the future, but for the coming days and weeks, it is a resounding YES! For I love my aquarium and the pets there. Hope all of you will have the chance to enjoy an aquarium at home. 🏠

I Am a Bird

Jonathan Chou, 7

I am a bird, I like to fly. I am very happy. I don't like wolf because it will eat me up. And I don't like lynx because it will also eat me up. If I see them, I will fly 10 hundred meters high. So, they can't catch me! Because, if they catch me, they will eat me. So, that's why I say I don't like them.

I like to eat worms and fish and baby mountain goat. I'm an eagle, so I live in the mountain range. So I can catch the food that I like to eat. And I'm very happy. I hunt at the rocky ranges, and there's a lot of mountain goats there. I like to eat baby mountain goat because they are very juicy and nice! And I will fly away from white tiger. So, I won't get eaten up!! I can fly very far and straight.

My nest is in the small hole in the mountain. My nest is very dark and nothing can eat my baby. It's very hard to find the mountain goat baby. So, I have to fly very far to find it. My baby like to eat juicy baby mountain goat. All the baby mountain goat stay away from my nest. So, I can fly very far because all the baby mountain goat stay away from my nest. Also, I have to fly very far to get water because the water is very far away.

I like to be a bird because I like to fly. I like to fly because it's very fun to be in the air. So, I say, the end! 🏠



Madison Eastburn, 15

Emily's Audition for the Nutcracker

Jenna Rae, 16

Nervously, Emily walked into her new ballet studio, Fly High Ballet School. Holding onto her mother's hand tightly, she stared at the grey carpeted floor as her mom guided her towards the front desk.

"Hi, how can I help you?" a gentle lady with glasses asked.

"Hi, this is Emily Brown. We are here to sign her up for ballet," explained Mom.

"Okay, here's a form you can fill out. Once you finish, I can give you a list of the classes she qualifies for."

"Thank you." Emily and her mom walked over to some chairs in the corner and her mom began the paperwork. As she waited, Emily inspected the room. Colorful pictures depicting multiple dancers lined the azure walls. The room lacked variety, containing only a handful of black chairs and a single desk, where a lady worked on a computer. Soft ballet music filled the room along with the quiet chatter of the dancers waiting for their next class. The smell of clean carpet, sweaty dance shoes, and various scents of deodorants and perfumes flowed into the room. Everything in this studio felt familiar, like her old studio. Emily fought back a shudder. She tried to forget her experiences at Stars Ballet Academy. Once her mother finished the paperwork, they walked back to the desk together. The lady at the desk filed the paperwork and pressed some buttons on her computer.

"Okay, here are the ballet classes she qualifies for," said the lady, handing Emily's mom a sheet of paper, "Auditions for our studio's production of the Nutcracker are next Saturday if Emily is interest-

ed," the lady informed them. Mom thanked her and walked Emily out of the studio. Emily opened the car door and jumped into the passenger seat.

"So, do you think you want to audition for the Nutcracker?" Mom asked. Emily bit her lip nervously. Previous auditions that she had participated in had not ended well.

"I'm new to the studio and I don't know anyone," Emily explained, staring at her shoes.

"Okay, well, how about you think about it and let me know what you decide," Mom suggested. Emily nodded.

Over the next few days, Emily attended her ballet classes and surprised herself by enjoying them. At her last studio, girls would tease her and advise her to quit ballet because of her height. It was true that Emily was tiny for her age, but that didn't mean that she would never be a ballerina. Emily worked harder than any other girl she knew. However, she could not stand their teasing anymore and decided to switch studios. Now that she knew this new studio was better, she decided that she would audition for the Nutcracker.

Dressed in a black leotard and pink tights, Emily walked into auditions for the ballet Nutcracker with a bag slung over her shoulder. She set down her dance bag and pulled out her pointe shoes. As she put on her pointe shoes, she noticed the other girls snickering behind their hands. Emily wondered what they were laughing at. Sliding into her straddle, she began to stretch her legs. As Emily reached over her leg, she heard the other dancers whisper to each other loudly,

"That's the new girl over there. She's so tiny! Does she really think she can try out? She looks so young." Stunned, Emily realized they were talking about her. Trying not to cry, she grabbed her water bottle and gulped down some water. Shaking all over, she tried to stretch, but she felt like crying. Suddenly, a lovely lady wearing blue called her name along with 4 other girls. Taking slow, deep breaths, Emily nervously walked towards the audition room, trying to ignore the giggles of the other dancers. As she stepped into the audition room, Emily took a deep breath and focused on performing her best.

They started out with a simple center tendu combination and Emily began to relax. As the audition progressed, Emily performed with confidence and focused on making her technique perfect. After Emily walked out of the room, she heard the other girls whispering about how she would never receive a part because of her size, but Emily refused to listen. She performed her best and whatever happened, she would be proud of herself.

On Monday, Emily showed up to ballet class and noticed a group of girls huddled around a paper on the wall. Curious, Emily crept closer to the paper. It was a list of the dancers who would be going to callbacks on Saturday. Once the group of girls dispersed, Emily nervously glanced at the paper and saw that she had received callbacks for the role of Clara. Excitedly, she hurried to class, determined to work her hardest every day until callbacks.

For the next few days, Emily worked hard in her classes and at home.

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Every free moment she received she spent practicing ballet. Finally, the day arrived and Emily felt prepared to perform her best. She walked in the front doors of her dance studio and found a spot to set her bags. She ignored the whispers coming from the girls next to her. Emily tied her pointe shoes and began to warm up. She tried to ignore the conversation happening next to her, but it was hard to block out.

“I don’t even know why they bothered to call her back,” one girl stated.

“I know!” answered another, “She is way too small to play the part of Clara. I don’t know why she even decided to show up.”

Knowing they were talking about her, Emily fought to hold back tears. Kneeling by her bag, she noticed a piece of paper sticking out. Wiping away tears, she pulled out the paper and read the following words. Emily, I know you will perform beautifully today at callbacks. Remember who you are and don’t let anyone tell you differently. Love, Mom. Emily smiled. Her mom was right. Why was she paying attention to what others thought of her? She was special and had worked hard all week to prepare. With that thought in mind, Emily continued to warm up. A few minutes later, her dance instructor, Mrs. Clarke, announced that all of the girls auditioning for Clara needed to head to studio 1. Confidently, Emily walked into the studio and took her place on the dance floor.

On Monday, Emily nervously sat at the table by her mom’s phone, waiting for the call from her dance teacher. Suddenly, Emily’s mom’s phone began to ring and Emily knew it must be her dance teacher calling about the auditions. Nervously, Emily picked up the phone with her sweaty hands. After answering the call, Emily waited to hear the results from the auditions.

“Emily, this is Mrs. Clarke from Fly High Ballet School. I am pleased to inform you that we have selected you to play the role of Clara in this year’s Nutcracker. Do you accept your role?” Emily was shocked and speechless. She almost dropped the phone, but she recovered in time to catch it.

“Emily? Are you still there?” Mrs. Clarke asked.

“Yes, I am. Of course I would love to play the part of Clara!” Emily excitedly told her teacher. After she hung up, she ran to tell her family the wonderful news. They were proud of her and what she had accomplished. Excitedly, Emily bolted to her room and collapsed on the bed. She was proud of herself and could not wait for rehearsals to start. 🏔️

A Song to the Shadows

Madison Eastburn, 15

Oh, how you shroud the world in your mighty shadows. Most live in fear of you, yet some have grown to understand your ways. Some seek the comfort of being hidden in a murky haze; instead of being transparently seen during the day. Instead of being afraid of what lies in your depths, they too get lost in your beauty. They see the surreal worlds you bring about and the protection you give. I too, wait until you take control of the sky, commanding all light to fade. All the glimmers of the stars light-years away may finally have their moment. You give the smallest of stars a chance to shine on through the night. With a new perspective, one can see how you yourself mean no harm. It is what you conceal that does. Maybe, with a change of heart, more can learn to understand your mysterious ways, as I do. They could understand your glories, oh dark veil of the night, as I have. 🏔️



Verity Evans, 15

Valley Song

Joanna Malone, 14

Down from the ice-hung branches of the steadfast, watchful trees
Down from the hills and meadows where the daffodil has blown,
I hear it on the sighing lips of the aimless-roving breeze,
The call to follow, follow, where the wild swan has flown.
I hear it in the wild laugh the raven flings aloft.
I hear it in the beating wings of wander-driven geese.
I hear it in the murmur of the streamlet, low and soft.
They are calling me to wander back, to home and fire and peace.
Oh wander back, oh wander back, oh wander back again.
Where in the glade, the sun and shade, they mingled so completely.
No matter where I roam to, I hear that old refrain,
`Tis calling me so urgently, but ah, so sad and sweetly.

I have left that wood behind me, but it will not let me be
For ever in the gloaming-light, the haunting songs come back,
And, entwined with ancient words and tunes, I hear it calling me,
To go up the quiet valley, by that seldom-trodden track.
Still the wild swan keeps calling, and the winds among the stone,
And the whisper of dry grasses on a cold and windy night
As I walk along the meadows, deep in dreaming and alone,
And watch the wild woodlands don the satins of moonlight.

Oh wander back, oh wander back, oh wander back again
There in that wood, we often stood, and watched the squirrels at play,
Ah, how my feet are longing once again to walk that lane,
Where the daffodils of summer danced, as golden as the day.

There are voices never silenced, there are eyes that will not sleep,
There are memories of treasures kept within the cygnet's breast.
There are places not forgotten, buried in the heart so deep,
And, on vagrant winds of autumn, flung far north and to the west.
Fly, wild swan, away ye, you may travel where you will,
You may someday soar above that place of dear, beloved ground.
Cease your flight for but a moment and light upon that hill,
And there my home and heartland you will have touched and found.

Oh wander back, oh wander back, oh wander back again,
`Twas there that sat the small brown cat and drank the gilded sun.
The hills and dells are washed now, as then, with cool rain.
But all the days I knew there are over with and done. 🏔️

Treasure Hunt

Esther Leaverton, 13

I'm Goin' On a Treasure Hunt
I'm goin' on a treasure hunt,
I'm gonna find some gold.
I'm goin' on a treasure hunt
(Or so I've been told).
I'm gonna find silver that's been
mined
(I've heard there isn't no other kind).
I'm goin' on a treasure hunt,
I'm gonna find some gold.
I'm goin' on a treasure hunt
(Or so I've been told).
I'm gonna find a ruby stone
Sunk in a rock that's shaped like a
cone.
For I'm goin' on a treasure hunt,
I'm gonna find some gold.
I'm goin' on a treasure hunt
(As long as it's not too cold).
Bye-bye! I'm off to find some gold! 🏔️

A Happy Day!

Joyous Teoh, 8

"What a day for fishing!" Otter said.
He took his fishing pole and some
meat. He caught a big fish. "This
will be a delicious meal," he said.

Beaver was ready for a walk. "How
perfect is the day, it will be fine to
go out." Clop-clop, clop-clop, he
walked for a long while. Then, he
went back for dinner.

Duck dove into the water. "What a
day for swimming!" she said. She
swam and swam. Later, she got
back for dinner.

Turtle was ready to take her nap.
"What a fine day," she said in her
lazy voice. She slept for a long
while. When she woke up, it was
time for her dinner.

Otter, Beaver, Duck and Turtle had
a happy day! 🏔️

Once Upon a Gold Rush (1849)

Sarah Anne Chou, 9

Once upon a gold rush, there lived a proud gold nugget. He lived with his friends (other kinds of jewels) in a big underground hollow cave. The gold piece was nicknamed Con, aptly named after his conceited character.

One day a man called Mavic managed to dig out the underground cave, but he only found a big gold nugget, who of course was Con. For the rest of the treasures were comfortably tugged in the rock crevices, but Con had come out to the middle of the cave so everyone could admire his handsome yellow outfit.

Mavic was a silly man and he thought that the gold nugget could speak and understand him. So he shouted loudly to the nugget (in case it is a little deaf), "You silly gold nugget! Why are you out in the open instead of being tugged cozily in the cool moist earth? But never mind, I'll take you home and I shall be rich! The gold rush is on! Men from all countries have come to gather gold!! And now I'm sure I have found the biggest gold nugget yet! You giant gold nugget, I declare, you must weigh at least a tonne!"

But as I had already told you, the man was really silly. "Hmmm," he said, "I will try to find more gold in this special underground hidey hole." And so he dug deeper into the walls of the cave. But he did not even espy the other jewels tugged by the crevices, for Mavic was a little blind himself. While he was digging in the side of the cave, there was a rockslide and he got buried and died!

Then the jewels had a meeting. Con said in his proud metallic golden voice, "You can make me your King." His golden chest swelled so much he looked about to burst.

"Why should we?" clamoured the jewels. The ruby and garnet went even redder with rage.

"Because, I am the ONLY gold here. And I am very expensive, and also the wisest one here! If you had listened carefully to the wise men just now, you would have heard that he mentioned a gold rush! See even the most important creatures (excepting me) like humans, are searching all over the world for me!!!!!! Why and he said I weigh a tonne! I think humans are about 2 grams? That means I am more superior than them. And they want to seek me out, what an honour! Hmmp! Pah! Well I guess you envy me, but you can't be me, cause you're only plain jewels!"

The other jewels went even angrier that they all turned as red as could be, even the diamond turned purple with fury. As for the amethyst, you should have seen her. She was simply dancing and turning

all sorts of angry colours, red yellow orange and even her own usual purple became so dark it was clouded over, looking like purple grape skin.

Con the gold stared at them in amazement. "Who do you think you are!" Bellowed Con, "To stutter and turn funny colours, acting like a silly baby? Be polite and address with respect and honour, your KING CON the mighty!"

Just then, they heard a shout from outside! "Hurray! The great gold rush is over! We are rich!"

"Ohhhhh," exclaimed Con in dismay. "Why did the humans have to say such annoying things?"

The other jewels suddenly leaped closer to Con and shouted in his ears. "You! You told lies to us, see! The great gold rush is over! Maybe now you'll forget about it and never brag those lies to us again! Hmmp! You deserve to be our servant! To help us wear our beautiful coloured cloaks."

Poor Con was terribly frightened, "But I don't want to wear cloaks for you, I don't even know how!"

"Oh it's high time you learn how," cried many indignant voices. But before the surprised jewels could grab Con, he was no longer there! He had disappeared! They could find no hide nor hair of him. "Good riddance!" Said Amethyst crossly. And the rest of the jewels agreed with shouts and cheers of joy.

Do you want to know where poor Con disappeared to? Well! But that's a different story, I'll save it for another day. 🏔️



Sarah Anne Chou, 9

Art: Hopeful Turtles

(Mixed Media: Soft Pastel, Water Colour, Air Dry Dough for turtles)

Julie and the Sparrows

Julie Anne Chou, 11

“Chirp chirp!” Chirped the mother bird to her baby. Julie watched the mother bird feeding worms to her babies. The babies were very cute. The mother bird then fluttered away to get more worms.

From the balcony top, Julie watched the mother bird pulling a fat worm from the soil in her garden. Suddenly, Julie was aware of an orange shape creeping towards the bird. It was a fat cat! Quickly, Julie shouted, “Shoo!” The startled cat tried to pounce on the bird, but the mother bird managed to fly away.

The cat angrily glared at Julie. Julie walked down the balcony stairs to the garden. She picked up the worm that the bird had been trying to get, and reached it out to the bird, “Here’s your worm.”

The bird knew that Julie would not harm her, so she took the long juicy worm from Julie’s outstretched arm. She handed it to her babies.

That night, there was a big storm. It rained very heavily and the cold wind blew the mother bird out of the nest. The wind forced the mother bird into the cat’s house. The mother bird managed to struggle out, but not before the cat had wounded her wing. The wind was not very strong now. But the mother bird’s wings were hurt, she could not fly away now. So, she was an easy prey for the cat. The fat, orange cat crept over, and pounced. He happily dragged the bird to his house. Then, he settled down to play with the bird, and ate up the bird.

The next morning, Julie came out to check on how the birds were. To her surprise, the mother bird was

not there. She looked around the place, worried. But the bird was nowhere to be seen. The Julie saw the orange cat next to her feet. It was eyeing the baby birds hungrily. The moment Julie saw the cat, it quickly leaped away, but Julie saw feathers on the cat.

“Oh, it was you who ate the mother bird right? And now you’ve come for the babies!” Cried Julie. She decided to rescue the babies. She looked around for anything that might help her. Then her eye fell upon the big ladder leaning against the balcony wall. She picked up the ladder, carried it with much difficulty to a place under the bird’s nest. “It’s alright, little birds. Don’t be scared, I’ll soon rescue you.” Julie carefully climbed up the ladder to try and reach the nest.

Just as she almost reached the nest, the ladder wobbled, then fell off the balcony. Luckily Julie didn’t fall along as well. She climbed down the balcony stairs to see what was left of the ladder, it was broken into two pieces and she surely could not use it to rescue the birds. She looked at the babies, they were very hungry. If she didn’t feed them soon, they might starve and die.

So Julie decided to try something else. She went into the house and asked her mother what she could use to feed the babies. Her mother gave her some pieces of bread and Julie broke them into smaller pieces. Then, she brought them up the balcony and started to throw the pieces of bread up to the bird’s nest. What she didn’t know was that the cat was standing right behind her. She tried to throw the bread up to the nest, but the wind was blowing the other direction.

So all the bread pieces fell behind her. The cat ate them all.

Julie turned around to pick up the pieces that fell behind her. But she couldn’t see any but one. She decided to pick that one later and she went down the balcony to find the other pieces. When she came up, Julie was just in time to see that robber cat eat up the last piece of bread. She glared at the cat, then chased her out of the balcony.

She decided to go down the balcony to find some worms to use. Unluckily for Julie and the baby birds, she couldn’t find any. All of the worms had hidden because the storm had blown more birds over. So the birds had eaten up all the silly ones. The smart ones had all hidden.

Julie looked up at the baby birds. They were now very weak. Normally, they were fed more than twice every hour. They hadn’t been fed for four hours. They were even too weak to chirp. If they weren’t fed in another hour, they might die. Time was running out!

At last, Julie decided to climb up the wall to reach the babies. She carefully hauled herself up the wall, she was careful not to bump the wall too hard, in case the nest shook and fell. Then, she carefully stood up and tried to reach the birds. She could touch the bottom of the nest But! She could not reach high enough to reach the babies. She decided to get some bricks to pile up the wall so that she could be higher. She quickly ran down the balcony and came back up carrying 8 bricks. She carefully arranged it on the wall top. She knew if she fell down from there, she might drop the baby birds.

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Then Julie climbed up and found that she could reach the nest and take the nest down. There were three featherless skinny babies. Julie painstakingly carried them down, being careful not to drop them. Soon, she had all three babies safe and sound on the balcony floor.

She carried them down the balcony stairs, through the garden and into her house. In the house, Julie fed them beetle larvae, putting it into their outstretched beak.

Three months later, they grew into some nice handsome sparrows that loved Julie very much. They always came when Julie tweeted to them. And what's more, one of them even made a nest in Julie's room. But we'll hear that story another day. 🏠



Youngest!

Hannah Anne Chou, 5

Who am I? I am Hannah! My sisters are Julie and Sarah. Jon and Ethan are my brothers. Papa and Mama are my parents. I used to be the youngest, but now I'm the second youngest. All because of good baby Ethan. Before baby Ethan came, I was the youngest for the longest time.

One good thing of being the youngest, is that, you can take out as many books and toys that you want and you don't have to keep it back! Cause your siblings will keep them for you. Unless you're the only child.

Being the youngest, you have lesser homework to do! Oh yes, housework too! I do not need to wipe table, wash dishes, sweep floor, wash clothes, hang clothes and harvest the clothes back in. All I need to do is simply arrange chairs and sort dishes. That's all! So easy!

Would you like being the youngest?

I don't like being youngest because Tajie calls me mei mei. It makes me feel sad. It makes me feel small. Being youngest is always the smallest. Ice cream time, you will only get half an ice cream Potong. You won't have 48 pieces of colour pencils, and you get lesser stickers.

Last time we had only six people, but now we have seven people, counting baby Ethan. That means I'm not the youngest anymore. How good! The difference is that I also get to call someone mei mei or di di.

I love baby Ethan. Ethan is super cute, I can tell you that. Ethan is chubby, Ethan is the best. Ethan is the youngest!

Background information, Hannah is of Chinese descent Malaysian.

*'Tajie': direct phonetic chinese 大姐, meaning eldest sister

*'mei mei': direct phonetic chinese 妹妹, meaning younger sister

*'di di': direct phonetic chinese 弟弟, meaning younger brother

*'ice cream potong': Malaysian specialty ice cream, cut into rectangle shape, usually in local flavours (cendol, durian, red bean, etc).

The word 'potong' means cut in Malay language 🏠

Lazy Little Woman

Hanna Law, 11, from Malaysia

That lazy little woman didn't like to do anything.

People asked her, "Don't you sweep the floor?"

And she will always say, "No no no."

People will ask her again, "Not even wash the dishes?"

And again, she will say, "No no no..." "But why?" people asked.

She will answer, "Because I'm a lazy little woman!"

That lazy little woman didn't like to do anything.

People asked her, "Don't you ever refill the bird feeder?"

And she will always say, "No no no."

People will ask her again, "Not even cook for yourself?"

And again, she will say, "No no no..." "But why?" people asked.

She will answer, "Because I'm a lazy little woman!"

That lazy little woman didn't like to do anything.

People asked her, "Don't you ever comb your hair?"

And she will always say, "No no no."

People will ask her again, "Not even brush your teeth?"

And again, she will say, "No no no..." "But why?" people asked.

She will answer, "Because I'm a lazy little woman!"

That lazy little woman didn't like to do anything.

People asked her, "Don't you ever pray?"

And she will always say, "No no no."

People will ask her again, "Not even think?"

And again, she will say, "No no no..." "But why?" people asked.

She will answer, "Because I'm a lazy little woman!" 🏠

The Accident

Sarah Anne Chou, 9

When you tear your shirt, you stitch it up. When you tear your skin, you stitch it up too! Imagine with me, stitch by stitch stringing into your skin..... eeeeeee ouch!

One day, Papa came home from market. We helped him to unload, he bought mango, dragon fruit and vegetables. We kept it in the fridge. I was so excited, I ran back and forth from Papa at the door to Mama by the sink. But I slipped!

I fell forward, banged the corner of the wall opposite from the sink. I screamed my lungs out and started to cry. Papa grabbed some tissue and placed it in the wound. Papa suddenly said, "Let's go!" I didn't know where he wanted to go, so I thought that he wanted to go market again, or something like that.

We went to the car and Papa drove to the clinic. He carried me to a room. I wondered why we needed to go to a clinic. Then I realised there was blood on my head! They placed me on a table that looks like ironing board. The doctor poked a needle in, I screamed again. I pressed my head down on the table because the needle felt like a bee sting. There were about 7 people all hovering about me! So I cried my lungs out.

After about 10 hours, or maybe forever, the doctor finally finished sewing my wound up. They banded my wound by putting cotton on it, taping it there. We drove home. I slept in the car. When we arrived home, I woke up and laid on the sofa. Papa took photo of me on the sofa. Then, I slept on Mama Papa's bed, hooray!

I recovered slowly, and when I realised that the scab had come out a bit, I wanted to keep the scab. So I waited until I saw in the mirror, a white ring around the scab. So I peeled the scab off! When I recovered fully, I remembered the accident and was more careful. But! I still like to run from Mama to Papa. But! I never ran so fast and so carelessly again.

Friends, I have learned an important lesson out of this. My papa encouraged me during my recovery. What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger!! It is true, the bump didn't break my head, I now think I have a very hard head! 🏔️



Madison Eastburn, 15



The Queen's Coronation

Maddie Wray, 12

At a coronation everyone is joyful. For what could be a bigger honor than to see a boy become a man, a prince become a king? At a coronation, everyone has the honor of witnessing their kingdom be re-born with a new king, like when a pine tree comes to life after a great winter's sleep.

But at my coronation no one was joyful. For what could be more horrifying than to see a girl become a woman, a princess become a queen? To the people, there is nothing more terrifying than to see a woman hold the highest position in society.

I know my reign will be a hard one, if not for the ways we humans find to feud with one another, but due to the small-mindedness of the human race. But I will face the prejudices brought upon me by my people with the honor and valor of someone with the royal blood that I possess, proving, not just to my people, but to myself that I am worthy of the royal blood pumping through my veins. 🏔️

When I Grow Up

Jonathan Chou, 7

When I grow up, I want to be an insect keeper. I will keep a lot of insects, but not cockroaches, because I hate them. I'll just keep insects like Goliath Beetles, Stag Beetles, Hercules Beetles and similar kinds of beetles. I just love these shiny armoured bugs.

Perhaps, I may also keep a colony of ants but I cannot let them come out. If not, they will be too annoying. The aquarium lid must ALWAYS be closed, I'll just open a tiny door and I'll put in a lot of bread for them to eat. But they cannot have any butter, because they are just ants!

And then, I'll keep a lot of butterflies! I'll plant a lot of flowers for them. I'll catch all the birds so that they won't eat my insects. The butterflies will be happier,

especially the caterpillars. I can keep even more butterflies and I'll be happy.

I want to keep some scorpions and tarantulas too. And then I'll play with the scorpions and tarantulas. Do you know how to play with them? This is the way to play with them. You take a cricket and then use a pincer to clip it. And then, you put it near the scorpion for the scorpion to eat it up. You watch the scorpion sting it and eat it up! You can do the same with tarantulas too! That is the way to play with them.

So, that is what I want to be when I grow up because I like bugs and I like to keep bugs. Bugs! Not birds because I like to eat birds, yummy—— by the way, chickens are birds you know? So, bye bye! 🏔️

The Secret Agent

Joel Teoh, 13

I grew up in a very peaceful town with very few robberies or murders. It's such a peaceful and safe place filled with trustworthy people. I once saw an old lady leaving a hundred dollars to a tall, skinny stranger for him to take care of, and that man did wait patiently there until the old lady returned to retrieve her money. Living in this kind of place, I slowly made the habit of trusting everyone I met. But of course, such a fantastic place doesn't exist everywhere.

When I grew up, I moved to America where I successfully became an agent. I was given a certificate tag and a black pistol, along with my first mission. I was ordered to bring back a stolen treasure from a robber's house. I did that easily and impressed my boss so much that he clapped his hands and exclaimed, "Well done! Brilliant young man." He immediately gave me my wages and gave me another mission. I have to confess that I actually did not do the whole mission by myself; I had a secret helper. This mysterious guy, who insisted that I called him Grad, got me all the single information I needed, and all I had to do was to waste some strength to knock down the alarmed robber and bring the treasure away. Grad did not ask me for a large sum of money or any information in return – he simply helped me. I thought he was just helping me out of kindness or he's just like one of the guys in my hometown.

A strangely peculiar crime happened in Texas and it's my job to investigate this mystery. This is the information I got: a man named Glucotini was murdered on a moonless night and hanged up-side down on a tree. I quickly got Grad to come over and help me in this puzzling mystery.

Three days later, Grad came to Texas and told me to meet him at Tele-Tale Street. I put on a brown suit and got there by taxi. Standing under a coffee shop was a tall guy with light yellow hair. A pair of black sunglasses rested perfectly on his grim face, covering his brownish grey eyes. Thick brown hair covered his body, but wasn't visible because of his long sleeve suit and jeans. He gave a smile and waved at me as soon as he saw me.

"I have found something related to the crime," whispered Grad. "Follow me." Grad led me into a large building behind the coffee shop. The building had an unusually small door that opened to a long passage. Following Grad with my gun ready, we twisted and turned till we reached a red door. It was an old wooden door filled with cracks and dust, with something like an eye looking out of a hole. I immediately realised that something was wrong, I pulled my gun out, but it was too late. The door burst open and thousands of bullets fired at me, shooting past every inch of my body.

And now, my soul is in heaven while my body lies in pieces. All because of trusting a traitor. 🏔️

adolescence

Macie Jones, 14

the adolescence of summer, fast and impatient, moved on quickly, without us, waiting for no one. didn't you love me? i asked. warm memories of august lying in the grass with no shoes on can only last as long as the sun decides to stay up. while he will always open his eyes again in the morning (we wake early because we are young) there is no place where she can escape us, her white lunar face there somewhere in between the late hours and the early hours. she will smile and look through the windows at us while we are still awake (we do not sleep because we are young, there are things to be done) yes the moon in her wise old age will smile and shake her head at us as because she knows what we do not know, that we are naive. our innocence will fade with the summer. she knows. she has seen many of us and knows we are all the same. she remembers all that used to be young. and all that used to be young have realized that their ambitions that they have passed on to us will fade. the flowers will wilt, the young and new will give way to what is old and used. and what she knows that we do not know is that summer's successor will be less forgiving, but it will teach us more. summer's romances were lovely and wild and precious and shapeless, only to allow september to come with a shape which is there but we cannot discern because we, the young generation do not know what to feel when the song is over, when the cell signal goes out for but a few seconds. discipline is a word we, the young generation despise as it inspires lectures and words we will never understand from the ones who came before us, the ones who tell us they know more, the ones who will never understand. we are young. we don't want to believe you are right. but she in the dark sky knows you are right. so why doesn't she tell us? does she want to watch us fail? does she possess an indifference beyond what we, the young generation can comprehend? or is there something else we do not know? tell us, how many things do we not know? there can't be much else, can there? (or are we tragically mistaken because we are young?) the trees and flowers nod a response to this question every one of us screams at the sky as the autumn wind carries their remains, what is dead, to bury them in the leaf blanketed dirt, which may someday be where the beginning of new potential, new ideas, will be. and when the new life passes on, there will yet be more new life. the crimson of the old and sad which we know as october goes away. it will feel as reality is showing us how thoughtful the world can be. someday when we, the young generation are old there will be new life, more for the moon to smile and shake her head at. perhaps we can join her in her mysterious career of knowing? if she does know. because even that is above what we can believe. God is up there somewhere controlling the sun in his sleep under the wide oceans and the moon in her midnight waltzes. is it through He Himself that the moon in her majesty is to watch over us as we lie awake? we lie awake because we are young. for now we are young, and for now we do not know. 🏔️

Lamentations of an Unfortunate Infestation

Grace Evans, 17

I gritted my teeth as I dove behind my couch and prayed for more time. I checked my gun and almost wanted to wail in despair at how little ammo I had remaining. I fingered the last grenade I had tied securely to my belt loop, enjoying the foolish rush of reassurance it gave me. Why does this kind of thing always happen to me, I wonder? I mean, out all of the houses in the galaxy, this spider chose to come live here. I knew that once a spider had chosen your home as its nest, then you were basically a dead man walking, but that sure as heck wasn't going to stop me from trying to live. I was close to the door, and yet so far. I allowed myself one more steadying breath before diving behind the kitchen counter. As I looked into the cabinets, I had a crazy hopeful thought. Maybe, I pondered, wasting precious seconds, I could fit inside these cabinets. That spider would never know, he could walk right past me, and then I could make a break for the door! This hopeful optimism seemed to be all that my sensible brain was filled with right now, and before I could think through what I was about to do, my hand reached and opened the cabinet. I was greeted with a sight that made my heart drop even farther into my chest as I realized the full ramifications of what this spider would do to me. The reason for my sudden oncoming depression was because inside, scurrying around as happy as they could be, was a nest full of baby spiders. Already as big as my hand and round as a baseball, they ran back and forth and into each other, making screeching noises the whole time. I felt a shadow loom over me and wanted to sob. I shut the door as fast as I could, understanding that I had made the worst mistake possible. I desper-

ately whipped around and pulled my grenade out of my belt loop. The bomb grazed the spider's side, only serving to enrage the beast further. Out of pure terror and sheer desperation, I hooked my finger around the trigger and pulled for all I was worth, backing up slowly as I did so. The sound of ammo escaping comforted me but the multiple bullet holes did not seem to slow the monster down. I gazed up as the monster bared its fangs and advanced quickly. I dove but not before it sunk its teeth into my leg. I screamed as I limped for the front door, doing my best to ignore the fact that the spider would not let go! It hung onto my leg, pulled along purely by my determination and will to survive. I felt the razor-sharp teeth tearing apart all of the tendons and I knew that I would never be able to walk normally again, even if I did make it out of here. In a last-ditch desperate attempt, I brutally brought the butt of my gun crashing against what served as the spider's head, forcing it to let go of my torn leg. I flung the door open and hobbled towards the sidewalk, screaming for help the entire time. Suddenly, I heard a horrendous noise emanate from my house. I stood still for a second, not wanting to turn around and see what was happening. Finally, compelled to face my doom, I slowly twisted my battered body to see thousands of baby spiders bursting from every possible opening in my house, doors, windows, cracks in the walls, and in the middle of them all, the mother spider squeezing its way through the front door. The sight reminded me of a volcano, erupting and flowing, destroying everything in its path. I felt like crying but I refused to go out like that. I was going to stand my ground and die like a real man. 🏔️

The Three Trees

Maddie Wray, 12

Many years ago, there were three friends. Their names were Ella, April, and Sara. At the beginning of the summer, the three girls went to the county fair. While at the fair, the girls went to the fortune-teller's tent. The fortune-teller was an old woman whose wrinkles had wrinkles! She told the girls that by the end of summer, the threesome would become a twosome. The girls just laughed and went about their way. Not long after going to the fair, they were out hiking when they came upon a massive, old tree. What made the tree special was the fact that there were three trees connected at the base. The girls decided that they were destined to find it and claimed it to be theirs. Each girl carved her name on one of the trunks. As the summer wore on, things began to change between the friends. Ella began to drift away and, a week before summer was over, the friends had an intense fight at a party. In the end, April and Sara went home furious at Ella. That night a storm broke out. The next morning the girls went to the tree only to find that one of the trees had been struck by lightning and separated from the other trees. They discovered that the tree that Ella had carved her name in had been struck. After that fateful morning, April and Sara never talked to Ella again. They all married and had children of their own, April and Sara staying friends till they died. But even as decades passed, they never forgot the fortune-teller's warning.

The End 🏔️

Smoke Free

Nathanael Lye, 13

As we all know, smoking always comes with groups of problematic friends. Some of these friends are cancer—especially lung cancer, pneumonia, as well as damages to the heart and blood circulation system which causes coronary heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

Smokers are wasting money to buy various kinds of health problems. More importantly, their friends and family members become victims of secondhand smoking. Sad to say, smoking is a type of addiction that keeps many smokers and their families in bondage.

As citizens of one country, instead of pointing fingers to the smokers, I feel that we all can work out something together to create a healthier Malaysia. In school, teachers can penalize students that smoke, but the government cannot use the same method to make people quit smoking, can they? Hence, we need some innovative ideas to encourage smokers to stop smoking. That is why, I would like to suggest a few solutions to our government.

My main idea is to implement some kind of smoking license. Only adults 18 years old and above can apply for it. This license is required to buy cigarettes. There is also a compulsory health check and health talk for those who want to apply for the license. The key point is that no new licenses will be given after 6 months of implement-

ing this policy, and those who want to continue smoking will have to renew their licenses every year. Heavy fines will be given to those who smoke without a license; people who sell cigarettes to unlicensed people will be rewarded with an even larger plate of fines. That way, the number of smokers will “increase” temporarily, but because no new licenses will be given to anyone after this, the number of smokers will reduce over time.

I also suggest that since everyone needs encouragement and motivation, we can have “Quit Smoking” campaigns and competitions, as well as some rewards for those who quit smoking.

I am sure that cigarette selling agents will curse me for this suggestion, so I would like to suggest to them to change their business direction 180 degrees. They can change from selling cigarettes to setting up rehabilitation centers to help people to quit smoking. The government can also encourage this kind of business by giving attractive incentives to those that set up the rehabilitation centers.

If this system is implemented, I am sure that the number of smokers would be greatly reduced after 10 years. After about 60-70 years, most smokers would have completed their life journeys on earth. Then, we can ban cigarettes and Malaysia would be smoke free! 🏔️

The Hunter and the Doves

Lucas, 10

In a warm Sunday afternoon, a flock of hungry Doves spotted some seeds scattered on the ground, and they flew down excitedly to eat the seeds. While the birds were fighting for the seeds, a Bird Hunter hiding in the tree above dropped an enormous net upon them. The birds were trapped!

Keeping his head up, the King Dove said, “Keep calm, everyone. We can escape this as long as we are united. Each one of you, lift up a string of the net and flap your wings with all your might.”

The doves followed the King Dove’s instruction, and by doing so, the Doves were able to lift the net together and carry it off as they escaped through the air while the Hunter witnessed the whole scene with his jaw drops.

Moral: In unity is strength. 🏔️



Gideon White, 12

abOUTFITing in

Grace Evans, 17

A car sits parked on the side of the road, headlights blaring into night.

Inside the car, HOLDEN is sitting, holding his phone in his hand and casually pressing the call button for someone.

Closeup of car system displays that he is calling LUCY <3.

After three rings or so, she picks up, obviously expecting his call.

HOLDEN (casually)

Hey babe, are you here yet?

LUCY (fast paced, lots of background noise)

Holden, I'm so sorry! I got stuck at the office. I swear I'll be there in 10 minutes.

HOLDEN (panic filling his voice)

What!?! You promised you'd be on time! This is YOUR work party! I don't know anyone!

LUCY (reassuring)

Just go in. You'll be fine. I'll be there in ... 20 minutes. I swear.

HOLDEN (still panicking)

I can't do this. I'm waiting in the car for you.

LUCY (condescending)

Don't be silly. Just go in and I'll be there soon. I already told everyone you were coming. You'll be fine! You know what they say, if you feel nervous just imagine everyone in their underwear!

HOLDEN (sarcastic)

Ha. Ha.

LUCY (laughing)

See you soon! Just go in!

Closeup of HOLDEN's hand as he turns off the car.

Wide shot of car headlights powering off.

HOLDEN sits in the dark for a minute, steeling himself.

HOLDEN opens car door and walks up to the front door.

HOLDEN (internal voice)

Come on, Holden. You can do this. She'll be here soon. Just a few minutes of chit chat. You've got this.

HOLDEN repeats his mantra as he rings the doorbell and anxiously adjusts his clothes.

The door swings wide open and PERSON 1 looks out with a smile on their face and a plate of food in their hand.

HOLDEN

Umm...hi? I'm Holden, Lucy's...

PERSON 1

Oh, Lucy's boyfriend! Come on in! Make yourself at home. Foods over there, drinks are in the kitchen.

PERSON 1 looking around for Lucy.

PERSON 1

I don't think Lucy's here yet, but you know that girl! Punctuality is not her thing. (laughs)

continued on next page

PERSON 1 walks off, leaving HOLDEN no choice but to come in and shut the door.

HOLDEN gulps, steps cautiously in and closes door behind him.

HOLDEN (internal voice)
You're okay, you're okay, you're...

Vertigo shot of people talking and laughing in dining room. Vertigo shot of HOLDEN.

HOLDEN (internal voice)
I'm not okay.

HOLDEN shakes his head, reprimanding himself.

HOLDEN (internal voice)
Grow up, Holden! Do what Lucy told you to do! Do it for Lucy!

Resolutely, HOLDEN marches towards the nearest person, talking with RANDOM PARTYGOER and sipping from a SOLO cup.

HOLDEN (boldly)
Hi, I'm HOLDEN.

He holds out his hand but the woman just stares at it, then him.

PERSON 2
Yes? (long pause as she looks him up and down) And?

HOLDEN
Well, I, uh, I'm just...

LUCY (VOICEOVER)
Just imagine everyone in their underwear. Just imagine everyone in their underwear. Just imagine...
HOLDEN squeezes his eyes shut and envisions PERSON 2 in her underwear.

HOLDEN
(internal voice, horror crossing his face, then quickly averting his eyes to the floor)
That's way worse.

PERSON 2 (has turned back to continue their previous conversation)
...it was the most boring thing in the world. It felt like a hundred years and I thought for sure I would fall asleep through it all.

HOLDEN lifts his head and a smile crosses his face. Cut to a shot of PERSON 2 dressed like Maleficent.

HOLDEN
My name is HOLDEN, ma'am, I'm Lucy's boyfriend.

HOLDEN (internal voice)
Now that's more like it!

PERSON 2(smiling)
Oh, Lucy's boyfriend. So nice to finally meet you.

Time lapse shot of HOLDEN talking to people and as he does, they change into different costumes. When he leaves, they're back in their regular clothes.

HOLDEN (internal voice playing over timelapse)
Ok. You've got this. This is going good. Wow, this really works. I can do this!

Cut to a shot of HOLDEN smiling and nodding like he's talking to someone. He hears something and looks over.

continued on next page

HOLDEN

Excuse me just a minute. I think LUCY'S here.

LUCY walks towards him, smiling. He gives her a big hug.

LUCY (quietly)

Sorry I'm so late. How's it going? You doing alright?

PERSON 3 (Walks by and high fives HOLDEN)

HOLDEN! My man!

HOLDEN high fives him back and laughs. They point at each other and mime handgun shooting at each other.

PERSON 3

Don't forget to log on tomorrow!

HOLDEN

You got it! (turns to LUCY) It's going pretty well, actually!

LUCY (laughing)

Great! 'Cause there's one last person you need to meet. My boss just got here. (Pulls him through the room) I really want you to make a good impression.

Camera tilts, informing the audience that HOLDEN is nervous again.

MR. LORDE has just walked in the front door. LUCY leads HOLDEN up in front of MR. LORDE.

LUCY (her arm looped through HOLDEN's)

Hey, MR. LORDE! I wanted you to meet my boyfriend, HOLDEN.

MR. LORDE

Ah, HOLDEN. We've all heard so much about you.

HOLDEN (looking nervous)

Uh...Nice to, um, meet you, sir.

MR. LORDE

I hope people haven't been boring you tonight. (laughs with LUCY)

You know how we can all be. Business, business, business!

Cut to HOLDEN, looking confident.

HOLDEN

Not at all. I've had a great time.

Cut back to MR. LORDE now dressed as Lord Business.

MR. LORDE

Good to hear! Well, I need to go make the rounds. See you two later.

MR. LORDE/LORD BUSINESS walks across the foyer, just as he is about to walk into the lower ceiling, HOLDEN blinks, and shot changes to just MR. LORDE walking into the dining room.

LUCY (turned to HOLDEN)

That went great! I'm so sorry I left you alone so long, but you seem to be fitting in just fine.

HOLDEN (takes LUCY by the hand. Shrugs)

Yeah. You know were right. Sometimes all it takes is changing your point of view.

HOLDEN and LUCY walk off together. 🏠



Verity Evans, 15

Where Words Run Dry

Joseline Penn, 16

As I peered over the bushes, my heart fluttered. There she was, confident, bold, daring. Her eyes searched for the enemy as she held up her bow and arrows. Seeing a special sack by the side of the road, I could tell that the arrows were probably poisoned, as the sack was the type to hold magic plants such as Poisonous Geranium. These plants could be crushed up and then rubbed onto weapons such as arrows. As soon as the arrow would hit its target, the plant's powers would do the rest of the work.

As a quick breeze passed through, her beautiful, brown hair flew up and made her look like a heroine. Of course, she was. She's my hero. She's perfect.

I sighed as I looked down at the ground, fingering my sword. She was perfect and I wasn't. There was no way I would ever be as cool as she was. Never could I be like her. I was too far gone.

I wasn't worthy of her.

Those words pierced my heart like a million daggers. I could feel a tear slowly fall down my cheek but, instead of wiping it away, I let it come. I couldn't hide the truth any longer. She had been right. I thought back to our argument and I felt my heart shatter once again.

Then, a whizzing sound reached my ears. I quickly looked up at the action. The enemy had come.

I gazed in awe as Joan initiated her plan. She took out a match, quickly lit it, and threw it towards the ground where the enemy stood. Immediately, a blaze of fire shot forth, consuming anything in its path. Three monsters down, many more to go.

The Oglins kept coming, standing six feet tall with fat, ugly bodies. Their dark gray, rock-like bodies lumbered to Joan but she shot them down with such speed and accuracy. With each arrow that pierced the enemy, the monster would fall to the ground and fade away with a slight whooshing sound.

Then came the men, riding fiercely on their horses. Their pointed helmets glinted in the sun and their eyes burned with a bloodthirsty look, their swords raised high. Joan wasn't intimidated. She simply shot them down too. At one point, three men got past her, and I was sure Joan would lose. She proved me wrong when I saw her toss a lit match onto the grass-filled road. Once again, a fire blazed up, and the men were no more.

I kept watching as Joan shot arrows, lit fires, and gave the element of surprise to her opponents. She was working so hard to protect the camp. I couldn't help but smile at that thought. I knew she was brave and selfless, but I didn't know how so till now.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the action stopped. The last man had fallen, and Joan had conquered them all. I was practically beaming. I knew she could do it.

Just as I was about to get up and head back to camp, I heard a roar and some stomping. My heart stopped as I looked back and saw the biggest Oglin I had ever seen. He was twice the height of Joan and five times her weight. I gulped as my body shook in fear. I looked at Joan, and I could see a slight twinkle of the same fear in her eyes. She must have pushed it away, though, because she charged forward with

her sword, ready to battle the enemy once and for all.

Once again, all I could do was gaze in awe as Joan went here and there, up and down, over and under, slashing everywhere. The monster tried to keep up, but his weight made it impossible to keep up with her movements. I thought it would never end until Joan swung her sword hard and cut off one of the Oglin's hands. The creature roared in pain as liquids came gushing out from his arm. He looked up, rage filling his face. Before Joan could react, he had pushed her down with his right hand. I stared in terror as her slim body flew back quite a few feet and hit the ground with a thud. She lay there motionless as the monster started walking towards her, ready to finish her off.

She was going to die, right before my eyes.

No, I couldn't let that happen. My mind raced back to the day when Joan's words had changed my life:

"Love is selfless and giving. True love is sacrificial."

Joan had sacrificed enough for the camp. Now, it was my turn to surrender myself, for the army, for her.

Before I had a chance to think, I grabbed my sword and yelled as I leaped from the bush, flying through the air. I landed right on top of the hideous creature and sent it sprawling to the ground.

I hardly know how I did it. I rolled here and there, swinging my sword all around. I got up and ran around the monster, slashing my sword across his rough, dry body. He kept yelling in pain, his head swinging around violently as he searched for me. For a moment, I

continued on next page

was able to glance in Joan's direction, and I saw her running to get her bow. I just had to distract this guy for a moment longer...

As I kept fighting, I felt beads of sweat drip down my face, mingling with the dirt plastered on my body. I tried to ignore the burning heat as I kept fighting. I couldn't stop now. I had to keep going. For Joan.

Suddenly, I saw an arrow pierce the Oglin's chest. He once again roared in pain, and I glanced at Joan, heroically holding up her bow. I smiled and sighed. The fight would be over soon.

Suddenly, a sweaty, rough hand grasped my body, and I felt my feet leave the ground. I struggled, but the enemy's grasp was too tight. I heard a frantic voice cry out, "No!" before another arrow came whizzing, hitting its target. This time, it hit the beast's right arm, and he cried out in pain. His fingers left my body, and I fell to the ground, hard. I felt the impact sear through my body as I lay helplessly on the ground. My whole body ached, and I begged myself not to move. My eyes closed tightly, trying to push it away. I shook my head and looked up.

The next thing I knew, an arrow from above pierced my body. I wanted to yell out in agony, but my voice caught in my throat. I felt the poison shoot through my body like sharp, icy needles. I tried to stand, to roll, to move in any way, but I felt weaker and weaker every second. Eventually, I couldn't hold myself up anymore, and I fell back to the ground, my whole body limp.

I blacked out for a few seconds until I realized someone was moving me. "Please, Jimmy, no! No, no, no, no, don't leave me!"

"Joan-" Every word I spoke felt strenuous.

"It's okay, I'm right here. Every-

thing will be fine." Then my head was moved from the ground and placed in her lap. She lifted me with such gentleness and care, her fingers delicately pulling me close to her. I groaned a little. Every movement was agony.

I had no idea what to say. I knew what was coming. We had so little time and so much to say. "Joan, I-

"Jimmy, listen to me." Joan's eyes were starting to get watery as she leaned closer to me and gazed into my eyes. "I'm so sorry about everything I said to you. I was wrong. You're not worthless, you're not useless, you're not anything I ever said about you. I should never have said any of that stuff, and I'm so sorry." She choked, and her voice fell. "I never meant any of it."

"I know you didn't," I managed to whisper. "I'm sorry too."

"You have nothing to apologize for!" Joan gently retorted. She slowly shook her head then looked back at me. "But, why are you here? You should be back at camp."

"I followed you. I knew you chose the most dangerous job and I knew you wouldn't-" I choked for a second before continuing, "make it out-" I couldn't go on. Tears started flowing from my eyes, and I gave up the energy to explain everything. She would never know the whole truth.

"Oh, Jimmy," she seemed to breathe, her face filled with a bittersweet look. She smiled ever so graciously at me, and I could feel my heart skip a beat. All the pain seemed to cease under her gaze. If only I could have done more for her.

"You didn't have to do that for me," she continued.

"I couldn't just let you die! And you would have too, without me. I'm

the one who deserves to die."

"Jimmy!" her face turned to shock. "That's not true!"

"You're the true hero, Joan. Everyone loves you and cares about you. No one notices me. No one cares." I looked away and broke the gaze between us.

Her face fell, her eyes searched mine. "I- Look at me." Her hand caressed my cheek and held my gaze firmly with hers. "There are people who care for you. You just don't see it. You see, I care for you. Why? Because I see something in you, something that others might not see. I can see your true worth. I can see your true beauty. Other people may look at you from the outside and despise you, but I look at you from the inside, and do you know what I see? I see a kind, caring heart who's ready to follow others. You're ready to serve others, love others, listen to others. You give everyone your full trust and you give them your attention. I've been begging for attention from everyone and you're the only one who has given it to me, really and truly. You mean so much to me because of that. Please believe me!"

I weakly gulped. Could it be true? Was she really saying this about me? I had never heard such kind words from someone like that in a long, long time. My heart had been quietly aching to hear them, but I could never have imagined how it would feel. I felt even more tears stream down my dirt-stained face. "You really mean it?" I managed to choke out.

"With all my heart," she smiled. I could see there was no lie in her eyes, only pure honesty.

I smiled back, and for a few seconds, we just stared at each other as if we were having a silent conversation.

continued on next page

Then, I felt the pang of the needles again, and I yelped in pain. My body felt so limp and weak. I groaned, knowing the end was near. I had so much more to say, though. I wanted to tell Joan how much she meant to me. How I truly loved to be with her, in her presence. How she made me feel warm when she would look at me. How I longed to be just like her. How she had changed me for the better. I started gasping for breath and knew there was only one way to sum it all up. "Joan," my voice croaked out. "I... love you." My whole body shook as I desperately hoped against hope that I would be able to see her reaction.

Joan just gazed at me as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing. Tears rolled down her face like a rapid waterfall. She closed her eyes tightly for a few moments, then looked back at me. She beamed so brightly, her entire face lighting up, the tears glimmering gracefully on her face. "I love you too," she gently responded, her fingers brushing my cheek.

I can't even describe the immense happiness I felt rising in my soul. All my fears, worries, pains, and sorrows from the past disintegrated as this new realization dawned on me: I was lovable. I was loved. I blinked back tears, smiling back into her angelic face.

Then, she leaned down, and I knew what was coming. I just lay there in her lap, waiting for the moment to come...

Her lips gently pressed against mine, and I felt my heart jump out of my chest. I put all my energy into this final act, this act of love. I savored the moment as much as I could, butterflies swirling in my stomach. My wish had finally come true.

And then I breathed my last. 🏔️

To a Wild Goose

Joanna Malone, 14

No parting words you said to me,
Merely spread your wings and climbed the air
Sought your brothers flying across the sea,
Left the land of snow and the branches bare.

Long you dwelled with me and happily,
Then your wild heart knew it was time to fly,
Now I grudge ye not your new-found wings
But have I nothing to remember you by?

Have you left no gift to your faithful friend?
Ere you flew across the wide oceans blue?
No pinion brown or snowy down
By which I should remember you?

Now the winds sigh low in the leafless boughs,
And I stand alone by the maple tree.
Ah, cold and grey was the autumn day
When you flew away from me.

And I pray one day, when the sun returns
And the snowmelt swells the dear rills and springs,
There will come a hail from the sky's blue veil,
And the longed-for sound of returning wings. 🏔️



Julie Anne Chou, 11

Art: Straits Settlement

(Mixed Media of Water colour, Colour pencil, Cardboard)

Shop houses in Georgetown, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. It is part of a UNESCO Historical Site. These 100-year-old shop houses have eclectic influences from Chinese (carved timber door, air vents) and European (columns and arches).