

Think In Ink 2021-2022

Around



YMCA of Hong Kong Christian College

港青基信書院

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FOREWORD



Ms Diana Lo

THE LONG AWAITED THINK IN INK HAS MARKED ITS RETURN THIS YEAR! IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO ANNOUNCE THE PUBLICATION OF THIS YEAR'S ENGLISH PUBLICATIONS ANTHOLOGY, CONSISTING OF A WIDE COLLECTION OF OUR STUDENT'S OUTSTANDING AND CREATIVE WORK IN LITERATURE.

THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S ANTHOLOGY IS "ARDOUR", WHICH MEANS ENTHUSIASM, PASSION, AND LOVE. I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT OUR CORE VALUES, "SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE", AND "BUILD A COMMUNITY THAT CARES", ARE DEFINITELY REFLECTED IN THE TALENTED LITERATURE WORKS OF OUR STUDENTS. THE THEME ECHOES ONE OF OUR SCHOOL'S CORE SCRIPTURES "SO IN EVERYTHING, DO TO OTHERS WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU." (MATTHEW 7:12), AS IT IS VITAL TO REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF PASSION FOR THE THINGS WE LOVE, WHETHER IT IS LITERATURE OR THE PEOPLE AROUND US, ESPECIALLY DURING DIFFICULT TIMES IN THIS EVER CHANGING WORLD.

I AM BLESSED TO SEE THAT THE ENGLISH PUBLICATIONS TEAM HAS MADE THIS HAPPEN THROUGH ENDEARING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS IN BOTH LITERATURE EDITORIALS AND ARTISTIC DESIGN, TO CREATE THIS WONDERFUL ANTHOLOGY. I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO ALL THE STUDENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORTING STAFF, AND ALUMNIS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE PUBLICATION PROCESS.

I WHOLEHEARTEDLY WISH ALL OF YOU AN INSPIRING AND ENCOURAGING READING EXPERIENCE. FEEL FREE TO SIT BACK, RELAX, AND ENJOY THE GREAT PASSION OF LITERATURE SHARED BY OUR STUDENTS.

MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!

MS. DIANA LO
PRINCIPAL

THINK IN INK TEAM EDITORS

Chief Editor



Oscar Seyau

It was a great honour to be the chief editor of this year's publication's team. When I was put to the project, it seemed like a difficult and challenging task to begin with.

To set a theme this year, I have chosen the word "Ardour", which might be an unfamiliar word to many. The word "Ardour" not only means the passion and enthusiasm one has for something, but also the love and intensity one is able to possess. This book is to share the passion of literature and art from our schoolmates, but with hopes that through this literature, you are able to feel the love and spread this enthusiasm into our daily lives.

I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all the editors, designers, contributors, and members of the Publications Team, who dedicated their time for this book to happen. A huge thank you to Ms Yuko Kanna and Ms Katia Dionisio for giving me this opportunity to be in charge this year's edition of Think In Ink, and through their continuous guidance in leading the whole team.

As Stephen King once said, "Books are a uniquely portable magic," without further ado, allow me to proudly present...this year's Think In Ink!



Back: Harjot KAUR 5M, Mumpi CHAKRABORTY 5M, Gabriella BROOKE 4C, Komal GILL 5M, Oscar SEYAU 5K
Front: Stephanie HONG 4Y, Fathima BUHARY 4A

To be part of a team full of talented people, and work on such a project is such a memorable experience. A few months ago we didn't know each other, but over the constant effort and time put into this book, we have not only grown personally for our skills and abilities, but also as a team as we feedback on each other's work and accomplish this together. From writing, to collecting, to editing, to drawing, to compiling, it was not an easy task. But all of us persevered and are nothing but proud of our very own Think In Ink - Ardour!

THINK IN INK TEAM DESIGNERS

Chief Designer



Ishita Mittal

It was a whole new experience for me to be a chief designer for this year's Think In Ink publication. I have always been interested in sketching and graphic designing, and this was the perfect chance for me to showcase my skills! At first, I was completely out of ideas of what to design, and what the template should look like. But after skimming through all the writings, I realised that the cover wasn't supposed to show much - it was the writing that was going to create the cover! All of my schoolmates' pieces have shown their passion for creative writing, thus coming up with the theme "Ardour". Their wonderful poems, essays, and short stories encompassing creativity just made the book ever so outstanding!

I would like to thank Ms. Yuko Kanna and Ms. Katia Dionisio for giving me this exciting opportunity and supporting me throughout the whole process. It was great working with all the editors and illustrators together, and I am glad that they have put so much effort into the production of the book.

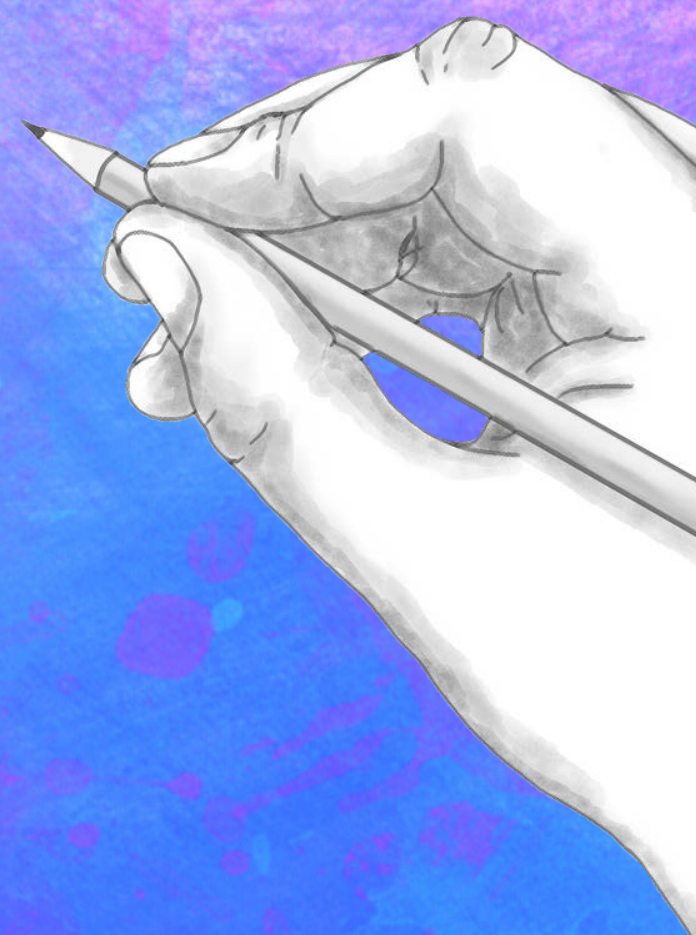
Last but not least, I hope you all enjoy reading this book and share your love for literature together!



L-R: Stephanie HONG 4Y, Harjot KAUR 5M, Aesha SHAH 4A, Komal GILL 5M, Soma GURUNG 4M, Ishita MITTAL 3C

Working together as a team has been an exceptional experience. It wasn't easy to come up with illustrations for every piece, but through teamwork we were able to illustrate with a lot of inspiration and showed our creativity and designing talents through our work!

Poems
with
Passion



Anton YIP 2Y

YOU LEAD ME THE WAY

**WHEN I AM IN SORROW, I NEED YOU TO CALM ME DOWN;
WHEN I AM IN TROUBLE, I NEED YOU TO SUPPORT ME;
WHEN I AM IN MISERY, I NEED YOU TO GUIDE ME THE RIGHT WAY.**

I AM WAITING FOR YOU TO COME.

**YOU LEAD ME THE WAY, YOU LEAD ME THE WAY,
SO I CAN STAND ON THE HIGH PEAK, AND I CAN WALK UNDER THE RAINY STORM.
I AM SO STRONG NOW BECAUSE YOU LEAD ME THE WAY.**

**WHEN MY LIFE IS LONELY, YOU GIVE ME LOVE;
WHEN I FEEL SCARED, YOU GIVE ME COURAGE;
WHEN I AM DISAPPOINTED, YOU GIVE ME FAITH AND HOPE.**

I AM WAITING FOR YOU TO APPEAR.

**YOU LEAD ME THE WAY, YOU LEAD ME THE WAY,
SO I CAN PASS MY LOVE TO OTHERS, AND I CAN GIVE HOPE TO OTHERS.
I AM SO STRONG NOW BECAUSE YOU LEAD ME THE WAY.**

**YOU LEAD ME THE WAY, YOU LEAD ME THE WAY,
I AM CAPABLE NOW BECAUSE YOU LEAD ME THE WAY.**



Gabriella Scarlett Chloe BROOKE 4C

HOW WE PERCEIVE OURSELVES

WHY DO WE PRETEND WE UNDERSTAND
THE ADORATION OF POIGNANTLY PRETTY?
PRYING THE PAIN OUT OF OUR PALMS
THAT SHOW OUR PAST

OUR HANDS,
THAT HASTILY POP OUR PORES
AND PAMPER OUR PALE PORCELAIN FACES
PRAYING FOR RECIPROCATION FROM OUR FELLOW PEERS

OUR MIRRORS,
THE GATEWAY TO PINPOINTING
AND PICKING APART EVERY LITTLE IMPERFECTION
WE SEE IN OUR REFLECTION

CLEARLY, WHEN STRUCK BY DOLONIA,
WE HURL OURSELVES AT THE AGONIZING PROSPECT OF NOT BEING WORTHY
WE BLAME SOCIETY, BUT WE ARE WHAT MAKE SOCIETY
PLEASE PLACE YOURSELF AS A PRIORITY TO ATTAIN SOME SORT OF CLARITY

PERFECTION ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN ACHIEVE
IT'S A MYTH OUR MINDS MADE US ALL BELIEVE
WE MUST HAVE PURE PATIENCE TO TRULY LIVE
BUT THE ASTIGMATISM OF THE HEART, THE BODY.

MY BODY,
PINING FOR A PLATITUDE
WHICH I MIGHT NEVER HOLD.

Pranavi GAUR 1M

FRIENDSHIP

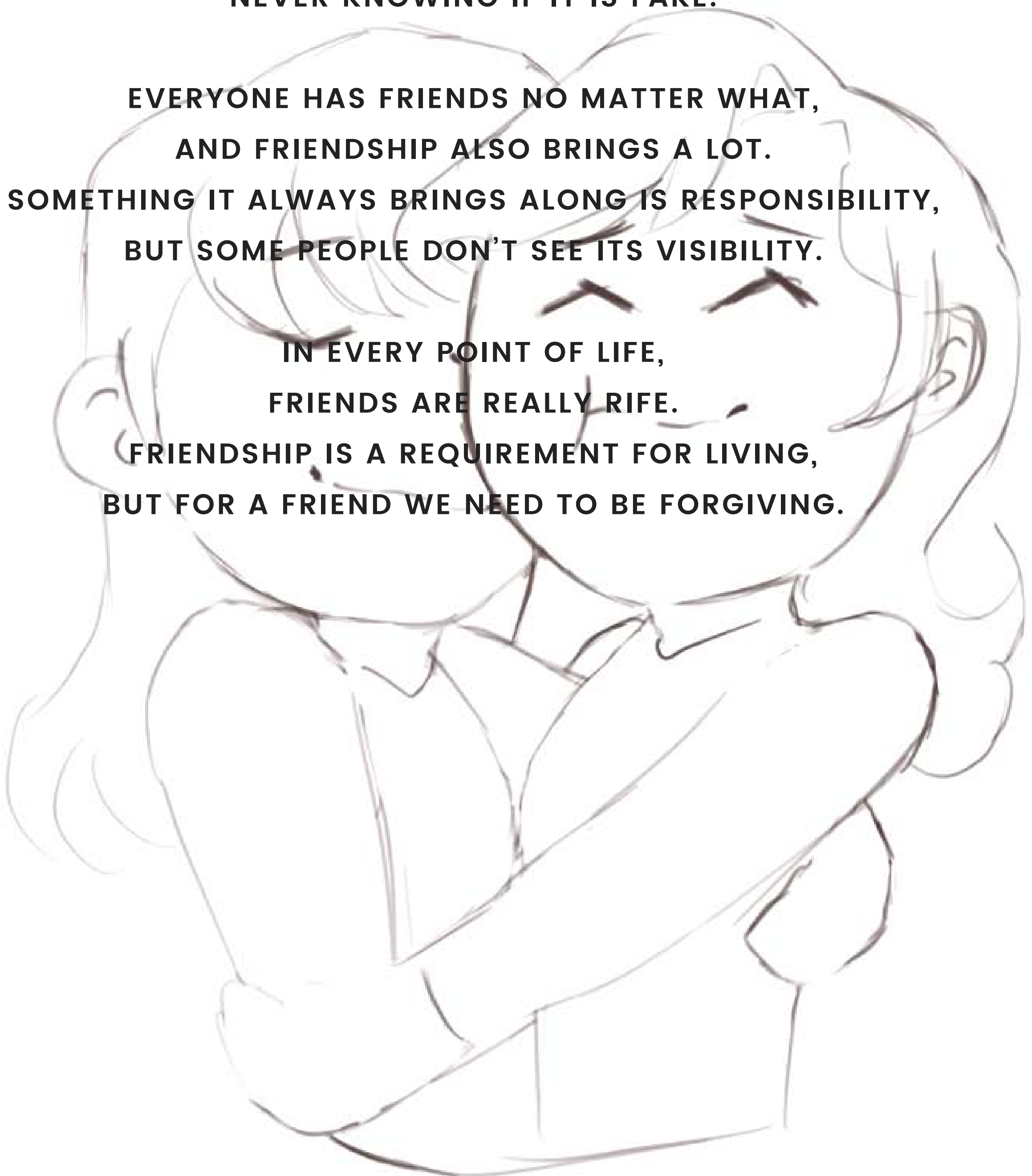


**FRIENDSHIP IS SOMETHING HARD TO MAKE,
BUT IT'S EASY TO BREAK.**

**SOMETIMES IT'S ALSO A RISK TO TAKE,
NEVER KNOWING IF IT IS FAKE.**

**EVERYONE HAS FRIENDS NO MATTER WHAT,
AND FRIENDSHIP ALSO BRINGS A LOT.
SOMETHING IT ALWAYS BRINGS ALONG IS RESPONSIBILITY,
BUT SOME PEOPLE DON'T SEE ITS VISIBILITY.**

**IN EVERY POINT OF LIFE,
FRIENDS ARE REALLY RIFE.
FRIENDSHIP IS A REQUIREMENT FOR LIVING,
BUT FOR A FRIEND WE NEED TO BE FORGIVING.**



Komal GILL 5M

TO BE A PAINTING

TO BE PAINTINGS,

TO BE STILL.

TO LOOK ANGELIC, AND PURE.

NEVER TAINTED.

OH, WHAT I WOULD GIVE,

TO STOP TIME,

TO BE THE MOST MAGNIFICENT OF SKIES,

OR EVEN BE THE LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT,

PERHAPS, TO BE THE LETTERS THAT ARE NEVER TORN.

AND MAYBE THE WATER THAT IS ALWAYS CALM,

OR TO BE ITS BOATS THAT NEVER SINK.

OH, BUT MOSTLY WHAT I WOULD GIVE,

TO BE THE WOMEN IN PAINTINGS.

ALWAYS LOVED,

AND NEVER TAUGHT THAT THEY ARE LESS THAN A MAN.

ALWAYS VALUED,

MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE THAT HAS EVER EXISTED ON THIS LAND.

TO LOOK ANGELIC, AND PURE.

NEVER TAINTED.

TO BE TIMELESS,

TO BE PAINTED.

Tamira SHOKO 4H

SOAR

A BABY IS BORN. NEW LIFE CRIES OUT
A FRESH WHITE CANVAS THAT GLIMMERS WITH HOPE
AND ARRAYS OF CHOICES AND VISIONS AND WORDS TO BESPOKE.
ALL OF IT, ALL THAT COULD CHANGE THE GLOBE.

A BABY IS BORN. NEW PARENTS CRY OUT
NEW LIFE IS GIVEN, ITS LIFE IS PANNING OUT
BE GOOD, BE STILL, ALL IS PLANNED,
ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE YOU UNDERSTAND.

THEY SIT STILL, DON'T CRY OUT,
DON'T CHOOSE WILL, BE DEVOUT.
TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH.
NO NEED TO FIND ANSWERS TO INNER QUESTS,
AFTER ALL, WE GET THEM ALL AT BIRTH

NEW LIFE LONGS TO SOAR, DANCE WITH THE CLOUDS.
LOOK DOWN ON THE WORLD AND MESSY CROWDS.
HERE, THEY CHOOSE FREE WINGS,
ANY DREAM, IDEA, THEY CHOOSE, THEY FULFIL.
THE PURE, WHITE CANVAS, VIBRANT, NEVER DULL.
THE SOUL YELLS OUT, TO THE STARS
TO SKIPPER THE FATE OF ITS SOUL

BUT ALAS, THESE WORDS, THEY FALL FLAT
FALL SHORT OF ESCAPING PAST THE WORLD OF THOUGHT,
THE WAKE UP TO THE REALITY
THAT NO LIFE BORN BENEATH THE CLOUDS
COULD CHOOSE FREEWILL
AND ESCAPE REALITY

English 4.4

SPIRIT

UNCERTAIN DEBUT OF LIFE ON THE FIRST DAY,
SOOTHED BY THE TEACHER'S WORDS, A RUSH OF NERVES SWEEP AWAY.
WERE SWEET BEGINNINGS TO THE STRESS, SOURNESS, AND BEAUTY'S FORM,
A QUIET CALM SLIPPING AWAY BEFORE THE STORM.

THOUGHT WE'D BE SERENE, A VISION TO BE SOUGHT.
BUT SOON IT BECAME APPARENT THAT VISION WAS FOR NAUGHT.
FIRST SOUND YOU HEAR, COUGH! COUGH! COUGH!
LET MS. KANNA TALK! LET MS. KANNA TALK! ENOUGH!
ALL YOU CAN HEAR IS KARL'S MIC GUAK!

SCREAMED AT EACH OTHER'S FACES LIKE WE WERE KANGAROOS,
DEVOLVING INTO ANIMALS BELONGING TO THE ZOO.
SO THE TEACHER PROPOSED, PLEADED WE ACT PICTURE PERFECT,
WE WERE MEANT TO BE THE CLASS'S PRETTY PORTRAIT.

LET MS. KANNA TALK! LET MS. KANNA TA- DON'T YOU DARE SCORN HER
MORE SHOUTING! MORE SHOUTING! MORE SHOUTING!
JADEN AND HANA COWERING IN THE CORNER,
MIKA'S MINUTE HANDWRITING HELD BEAUTIFUL STORIES WORTH QUOTING.

KANAN AND SARTHAK BEING PARTNERS IN CRIME,
BEING CALLED RASCALS ALL THE TIME.
ASHTON'S HAIR GETS SEVERED WHILE NEELESH CONCEALS,
WE SEE SOMETHING WE COULD NEVER FATHOM.



TSOU AND WU WERE THE CLASS'S TWIN NAMES,
BUT PERSONALITY PROVED THEY WEREN'T THE SAME.
STILL, TOGETHER WE ALL BONDED OVER WATER NOT BLOOD,
THAT OF THE CHEERFUL TEARS WE FORMED, PUDDLING INTO A FLOOD.

TWO PASSIONS OF LITERATURE SHOWERED THE ROOM WITH WORDS,
ANNABELLE NEEDED TO BE CALLED FOR BACKUP.
WHILE A STUDENT TAUGHT THE CLASS WITH AN OWL'S WISDOM,
HUMS AND MELODIES OF A TOY BUT OUR GAME WAS STILL AFOOT.

WITH PAINED HANDS WRITING FINAL PAPERS OF THE PAST,
WE CREATED MEMORIES THAT WOULD FOREVER LAST.
PATTING CPRCAT AND WORSHIPPING RAPGOB,
INCITING OUR FUTURE SELVES TO SMILE AS THE TEACHER SOBS.

English 3.5

IN YOU

"I'LL BE HERE TO STAY WITH YOU" SOUNDS LIKE A SONG
JOINS IN ~I'LL BE HERE TO STAYYYY... WITH YOU...~

I WON'T LET MYSELF GET AWAYYY FROM YOU...~

I WILL ALWAYS SPEND TODAY... WITH YOU

I BELIEVE IN YOU, I HAVE FAITH... IN YOU...~

NOTHING'S MORE TRUE TO ME THAN YOU....

MY HAPPINESS IS BASED... IN YOU

WHEN I SEE YOU MY HEART MAKES CARTWHEELS

MAKING PROMISES THAT I CAN'T KEEP

I CRY TO MYSELF TO GO TO SLEEP

EVERY TIME I STAY TO WEEP

ALWAYS TREASURED MEMORIES I WANT TO KEEP

YOU ARE ALWAYS THERE TO SEE

I KNOW YOU BELIEVE IN ME

CAUSE YOU ARE, YOU ARE MY HONEYBEE

HOUGHN E. BEE~

YOU COLOUR MY LIFE OUTSIDE THE LINES

YOU CONVINC ME THAT EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE

IF I WERE TO HAVE JUST A LITTLE MORE TIME

I HOPE THIS LINE WILL MAKE ITSELF RHYMEEEE

I WOULD SPEND IT WITH YOU

I DON'T CARE HOW FAR I'LL GO

I'LL ALWAYS FIND A WAY TO KNOW

I..I WILL ALWAYS SPEND TODAY WITH YOU
BUT WHEN LEFT ALONE,
MY MIND TURNS STRAIGHT TO YOU.

TOGETHER WE WILL ALWAYS BE,
UPON THEIR WINGS ANGELS FLY HIGH,
I SIT UPON THE ROSY THRONE
MY MIND TURNS STRAIGHT TO YOU.

BEATS SLOWLY EMERGE

I LIKE TO HANG OUT WITH ME,
YEAH WE KNOW 'BOUT CPR GT

3.5 NEWTONS OF FORCE

KICK BACK

SIT BACK

WE NEVER LACK

IT ONLY STACKS

JUMP BACK

I WOULD LIKE TO KICK BACK WITH 3.5

NO AUTOTUNE, WE LIVE

DOUBLE STACK

THAT'S WACK

WE WILL NEVER BE FAR AWAY

WHEN TIME COMES OUT TO PLAY, WE WILL TREASURE THE WAY

WE WERE TOGETHER

WE WILL BE FOREVER, TOGETHER

WE WILL ALWAYS STAY WITH EACH OTHER

NEVER GO AWAY MUCH FURTHER

NEVER APART, AT LEAST IN OUR HEARTS

TILL DEATH DO US PART

Gabriella Scarlett Chloe BROOKE 4C

WHO AM I?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MYSELF?
THEY SAY THAT IT MEANS TO LISTEN TO YOUR GUT
TO STOP TRYING TO BE SOMEONE YOU'RE NOT
THEN THEY SAY THAT I'M TRYING TOO HARD

TO BE YOURSELF,
TO BECOME YOURSELF
IS NOT TO LOOK AT YOURSELF AND SAY
I AM THIS AND I SHOULD BE THAT

TO BECOME YOURSELF ACTS AS AN ACCEPTANCE,
AND ACCEPTANCE OF MY TARNISHED MIND
AND ACCEPTANCE OF EVERY MOLECULE THAT MAKES UP MY TARNISHED BODY
TO ACCEPT THAT I AM NOT THE PERSON TODAY THAT WILL BE ON MY DEATHBED

TO UNDERSTAND,
THAT THERE IS KNOWLEDGE AND PARTS OF MYSELF
THAT CAN ONLY BE REVEALED WITH TIME
WHEN, WHERE, WHAT, AND WHO I AM
ON THE SCALE OF SPACE IS SO FINITE

TO ACCEPT,
I'M NOT THE SAME PERSON TONIGHT AS I WAS THIS MORNING
BY THE MILLISECOND, WHO I AM IS UNRAVELING
AND THE PERSON I WILL ONE DAY BE-

SIMPLY,
DOES NOT EXIST
JUST YET.

Fathima Zareena BUHARY 4A

TO YOU, WHO PLAYED WITH MY DELICACY

THIS WORLD, CRUSTY, GRAY, AND SOULLESS,
STRANGLING ME AS IF I'M WORTHLESS.

THE VEIL THAT CROWNS ME, THE BEAUTY THAT'S WITHIN,
AND THE SMILE THAT CONCEALS BEYOND LIMITS,
CLEARLY, THE ONE YOUR SIGHT NEVER DESERVED

THAT'S ME...

LOOK ME IN THE EYES, STRIKING WITH MAGMA
SHUTTING YOUR 'SECOND CHANCE'
BLINKING ONLY TO REALIZE I'VE WALKED AWAY

FAR, VERY FAR FROM YOUR SIGHT
MAKING YOU REALIZE,
SHE'S NOT AN ERASER LIKE NONE OTHER,
THERE TO ERASE YOUR FLAWS
ONLY TO BE ERASED FROM YOUR HEART

SHE'S A WOMAN OF PRIDE, HONOR, AND DIGNITY
AS SHE GAZES UP UPON THE MIRROR,
A FLAWLESS WOMAN SHE IS.

BACK ON HER HEELS, HEADS UP WITH CONFIDENCE
SHE'S NO LONGER LINGERING BEHIND YOU,
SHE WOULDN'T TEXT YOU ANYMORE,
PIN YOU AMONG OTHERS,



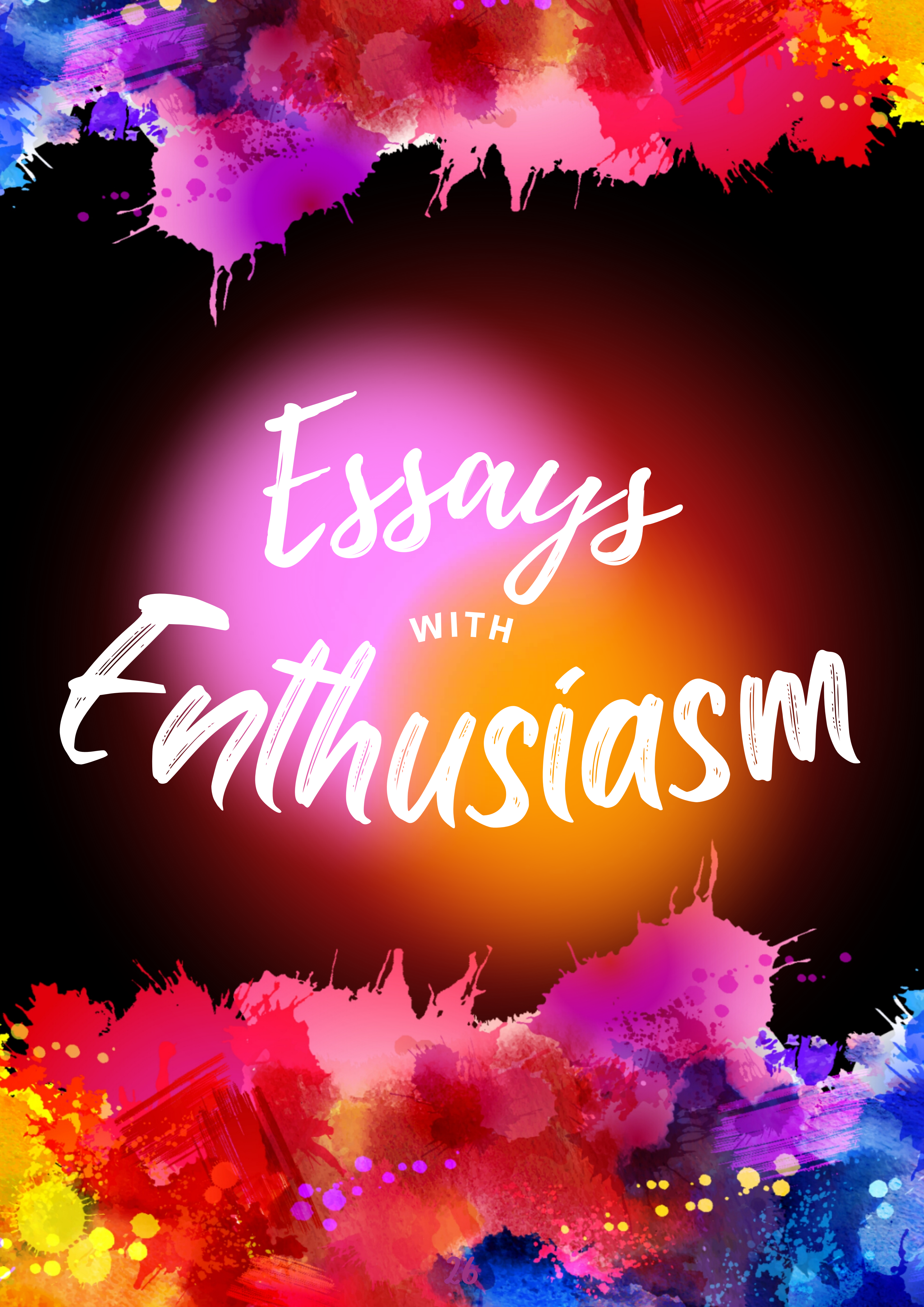
SCROLL BEYOND LIMITS TO SHED A TEAR OR TWO
DOZE OFF WITH EVAPORATED TEARS,
THAT ROLLS DOWN HER CHEEKS,
LEAVING IT TO STAIN BRIGHT RED

ONLY WAKING UP TO REALIZE THAT DUSK HAS OVERTAKEN DAWN

DID YOU LOOK BACK?
TO THE TRUST, YOU BUILT UP FIRMER THAN CONCRETE,
YOUR GAZE THAT FED HER EYES OF PURITY,
THE TWINKLES YOU DELIVERED, SHIMMERING ON HER CHEEKS,
THE STROKES BEYOND HER TREMBLING HAIR,
YOUR WARMTH THAT DIFFUSES BETWEEN HER ARMS,
THE EPISODES OF BEATS OF YOUR RIGID HEART,
THAT YOU GRANTED HER TO ABSORB.

WHY TAKE IT THIS FAR?
ONLY TO MASSACRE HER WITH THE WONDERS YOU OFFERED
LEAVING HER STRANDED IN SOLITARY
EXPECTING HER TO PULL YOUR ANKLES WITH HER WEAK HANDS
BEGGING YOU ENOUGH FOR YOU TO BURY HER ALIVE
ONLY FOR YOU TO STEP ON HER SICKLY CONSTRUCTED BODY
AND WALK AWAY...

YET, I UTTER, THIS ISN'T ANY TEARS OF FEAR,
IT IS OF THOSE I SHED WITH PRIDE,
PRETTY PLEASANT PRIDE.



Essays
WITH
Enthusiasm

MEDIA FACILITATES SEARCH FOR TRUTH OR SPREADS FAKE NEWS?

“MUSLIM PLAN TO KILL POPE”, “FREDDIE STARR ATE MY HAMSTER”, “ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS A WOMAN!”. WHEN YOU HEAR THESE TITLES, YOU’RE THINKING, “BIZARRE!”, RIGHT? I’M SURE YOU’RE QUESTIONING WHERE I AM GOING WITH THIS. THE GLOBAL DIGITAL INSIGHTS STATES THAT OVER 59% OF THE WORLD POPULATION HAS ACCESS TO MEDIA OF SOME FORM, AS TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES AND GLOBALISATION CONTINUES TO IMPACT HUMANITY, WE’VE NEVER BEEN MORE INTERCONNECTED AND TOGETHER AS A GROUP. WITHIN HUMANITY, THERE ARE SO MANY TRUTHS AND LIES BETWEEN US, EVEN THE DEFINITION OF MEDIA SEEMS BLURRY, WITH THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION WE ARE ABLE TO RECEIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA, ALONGSIDE THE ONES FROM TRADITIONAL MEDIA SUCH AS MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPER OUTLETS, AND TELEVISION STATIONS, IT’S EASY TO TAKE THE TRUTH FOR GRANTED WITHOUT QUESTIONING WHERE WE GET OUR SOURCES FROM. AS SOMEONE LIVING IN A FIRST-WORLD COUNTRY, NEWS IS SO COMMON AND ACCESSIBLE, WE SIMPLY WATCH IT AND GO “OH,” AND MOVE ON WITH OUR DAY.


SINCE THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, PRINTINGS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED IN MASS QUANTITIES AND BECOME THE WAY OF SPREADING THE NEWS. FRANKLY SPEAKING, THE MEDIA HAS HELPED HUMANITY TO REVEAL, EXPOSE, AND SPREAD THE NEWS OF COUNTLESS UNLAWFUL ACTS, CONTROVERSIES, AND EVEN SCANDALS. NOTABLY, THE PANAMA PAPERS OF 2016 IS A GREAT EXAMPLE. THE PAPER LISTED MILLIONS OF DOCUMENTS OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND CLIENT-ATTORNEY AGREEMENTS, INCLUDING SETTING UP OVER 200,000 OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS FOR THE PANAMANIAN FIRM TO COMMIT FRAUD, EVADE TAX, THE LIST GOES ON. WITHIN MONTHS, THE COVERAGE OF THIS SHOCKING SCANDAL WAS SPREAD THROUGH MEDIA OUTLETS IN THE LIKES OF THE GUARDIAN, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, AND SO MUCH MORE. GOVERNMENTS TOOK ACTION AND THOSE WHO FAILED TO ABIDE BY THE LAW WERE PUNISHED. WITHOUT THE HELP OF THE MEDIA, THOSE WHO COMMITTED SUCH A HATEFUL CRIME WOULD HAVE GONE UNNOTICED AND UNPUNISHED. THE TRUTH WAS ABLE TO BRING BENEFITS TO PEOPLE AND MORE IMPORTANTLY THE JUSTICE OF COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD. IN MID-2020S, AMIDST THE START OF ONE OF THE DEADLIEST VIRUS, THE HUMANITY WAS ONCE AGAIN ABLE TO CONNECT AND DISCOVER THE TRUTHS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENT,



#BLACKLIVESMATTER, IT WAS ABLE TO BRING THE PREJUDICE AND RACIST OFFICERS INTO PROSECUTION, AND WAS ABLE TO REVEAL A DEEPLY-ROOTED ISSUE WITHIN HUMANITY WHICH EVENTUALLY TURNED INTO ONE OF THE BIGGEST ACTIVISM MOVEMENTS FOR THE BIPOC COMMUNITY. THE POWER OF HUMANITY WHEN THEY COME TOGETHER AND DECIDE TO GO AGAINST AUTHORITY, OR EVEN FINDING THE SNEAKIEST WAYS FOR THE PUBLIC TO UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE DEEPEST, DARKEST SECRETS OF A SCANDAL.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE MEDIA HAS MANAGED TO DO THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO. WHEN THE COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMS ROLLED OUT IN AMERICA, THE MRNA VACCINES, INCLUDING THOSE CREATED BY MEDICAL GIANTS PFIZER-BIONTECH, WERE CLAIMED TO HAVE "MICROCHIPS" IN THEM TO TRACK THEIR CITIZENS DAILY ACTIVITIES. ANTI-VAXXERS AND THEIR PROPAGANDA TAKES THIS TO SPREAD FAKE NEWS ABOUT VACCINES. THERE WERE EVEN CLAIMS THAT BILL GATES PLANS TO USE A VACCINE TO "MANIPULATE" OR "ALTER" HUMAN GENOMES. RACKING MORE THAN 300,000 VIEWS ON YOUTUBE WITHIN JUST A FEW WEEKS SINCE ITS PUBLICATION, THE IDEA OF OUR VACCINES BEING "SPIKED" WITH AI (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE), DNA MODIFIERS, OR EVEN MICROCOMPUTERS WAS SPREAD AMONG THE PEOPLE, CREATING MASS FEAR AND EVEN RESULTING IN SOME NOT TAKING THE VACCINE. DESPITE OTHER MEDIA OUTLETS SUCH AS THE WASHINGTON POST, BRITISH BROADCAST COMPANY (BBC), AND EVENTUALLY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO) DEBUNKING THE MYTHS OF THE VACCINE, MANY EGOCENTRIC OR IGNORANT INDIVIDUALS HAVE CHOSE TO SPREAD THE FALSE NEWS, AND A SIMPLE MATHEMATICAL EQUATION OF, IF ONE INDIVIDUAL TOLD ANOTHER PERSON, AND THEN BOTH OF THEM TOLD ANOTHER TWO INDIVIDUALS, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE BEING MISINFORMED IS INCREASING EXPONENTIALLY.

SO, WHAT REALLY IS THE ISSUE? THE ISSUE LIES IN THE FACT THAT IN A CAPITALISTIC SOCIETY, ALMOST EVERYONE THINKS FOR THEMSELVES. MOST MEDIA OUTLETS OR NEWS AGENCIES ARE RUN AS A FIRM TO EARN MONEY, PUTTING THEIR REVENUE AND PROFITABILITY ABOVE TRUTHS; AND THOSE NEWS AGENCIES WHICH ARE PUBLIC WILL PUT THE GOVERNMENT'S INTEREST ABOVE ALL, AS AFTER ALL, THEIR FUNDING COMES FROM THE GOVERNMENT TOO. WHILST THERE ARE NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS WHO SEEK FOR THE TRUTHS,

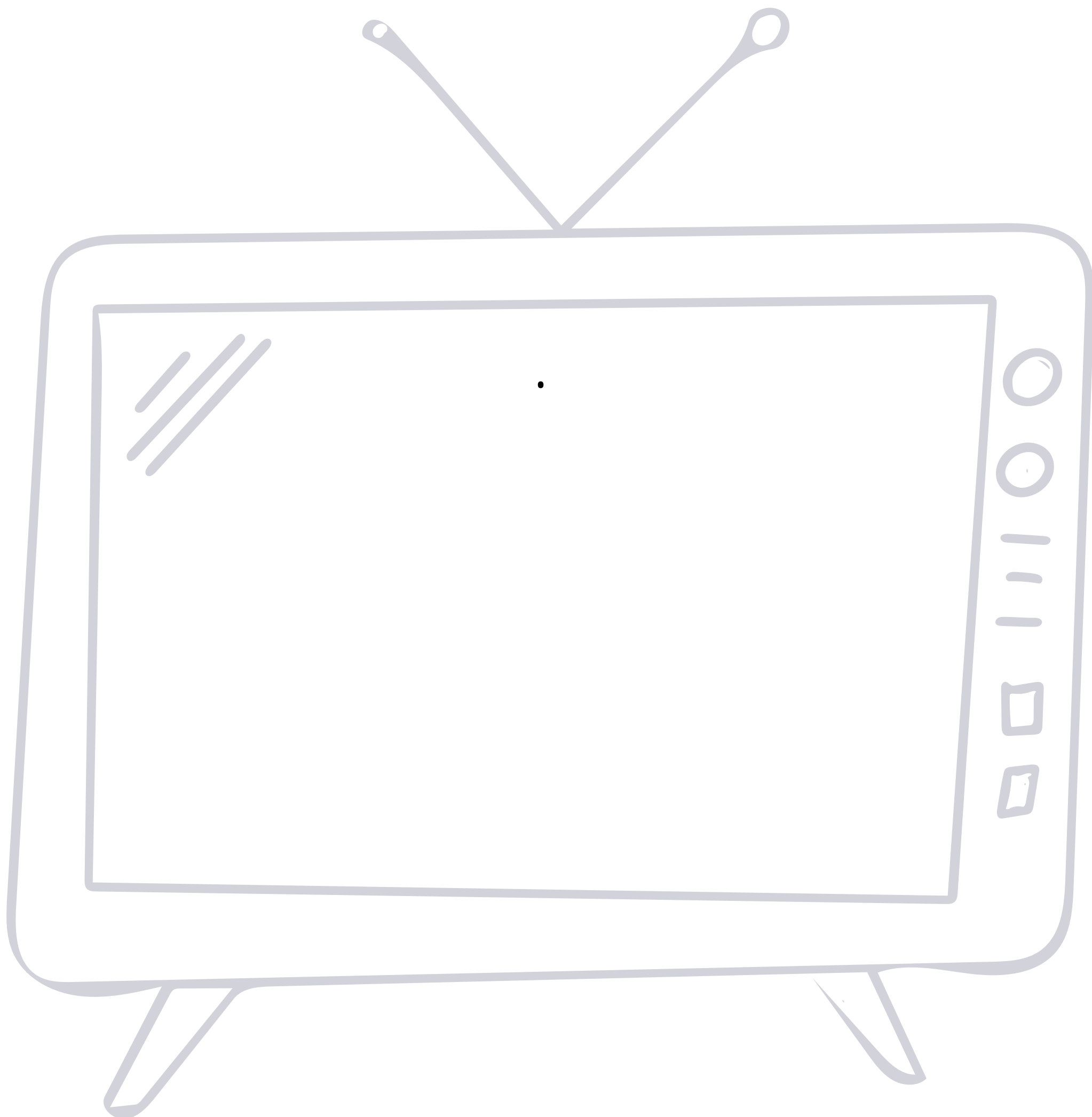


THEIR RESOURCES LIMIT THEM FROM REVEALING EVERY TRUTH, ONLY RESULTING IN SMALL-SCALE FUNCTIONALITY. FOR THE MAJORITY OF NEWS OUTLETS, SUCH AS THE BRITISH BROADCAST COMPANY (BBC), THE NEW YORK TIMES, WASHINGTON POST, ETC., THEY NEED THE VIEWERSHIP, THEY NEED THE MONEY, AND THOSE COME FROM THE PEOPLE. FRANKLY SPEAKING, THE PEOPLE ARE NOT VERY INTERESTED IN INFORMATIVE TITLES, BUT RATHER THOSE WHICH PROVIDE ENTERTAINMENT PURPOSES. WHEN YOU COMPARE “IF YOU SNORE YOU COULD BE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE OF CORONAVIRUS, DOC SAYS” (THE SUN, 2020) AND “THOSE WITH LOUD SNORING CONDITION, OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNOEA, SHOULD TAKE MORE PRECAUTIONS IN MIDST OF COVID”. YOU WOULD BE LYING TO SAY THE LATTER TO SEEM MORE INTRIGUING AND CATCH YOUR ATTENTION. IN A DEMOCRATIC NATION, A PUBLIC MEDIA AGENCY IS ALMOST UNHEARD OF, ONLY IN LESS AUTONOMOUS NATIONS, SUCH AS MYANMAR, HAVE ITS NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY, MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY, AND THEY WILL OFTEN WRITE IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND CAN BE SEEN IN THE FORM OF PLEASING THEIR NEW POLICIES, WRITING AGAINST ACTIVISTS, AND FORMING SUPPRESSIONS. EACH NEWS AGENCY, NO MATTER HOW TRANSPARENT AND FACTUAL THEY ARE, HAS AN AGENDA. HUMANS ARE INCAPABLE OF READING AND WRITING WITHOUT EMOTION, EVEN READING AND WRITING A SIMPLE TEXT WILL IMPLY THE SLIGHTEST OF EMOTIONS. THAT IS THE REASON WHY OFTEN NEWS HEADLINES AND ARTICLES ARE MORE MISLEADING THAN YOU THINK AND DON'T SEEM SO UNFAMILIAR WHEN YOU LINK TO THE WORD “CLICKBAIT”.

THE RECENT NETFLIX HIT, “DON'T LOOK UP” DEMONSTRATES JUST THAT PHENOMENON. THE SYNOPSIS STARTS WITH A DISCOVERY OF A COMET WHICH WOULD DESTROY HUMANITY. THE TWO SCIENTISTS, PLAYED BY JENIFER LAWRENCE AND LEONARDO DICAPRIO, WHO MADE THE DISCOVERY AND DECIDED TO TAKE IT TO THE LOCAL MEDIA, BEFORE RESULTING IN A FRIVOLOUS ATTITUDE FROM THE HOST AND EVENTUALLY A SERIES OF TERRIBLE JOKES, HASHTAGS, AND MEMES FROM SOCIAL MEDIA. THE COMEDY YET DYSTOPIAN FILM IS AN ODE TO HOW, EVEN IN SPITE OF A CRISIS THAT COULD ELIMINATE HUMANITY, THE MEDIA, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY HUMANS, WOULD STILL TAKE IT AS A JOKE AND DISREGARD THE FACE OF THE TRUTH.



AMERICAN WRITER MARK TWAIN ONCE SAID, “IF YOU DON’T READ THE NEWSPAPER, YOU ARE UNINFORMED; IF YOU READ THE NEWSPAPER, YOU’RE MISINFORMED,” BUT WHAT SHOULD YOU AS A NORMAL CITIZEN DO? I WOULD SAY THE EASY SOLUTION IS TO READ MORE ARTICLES FROM DIFFERENT OUTLETS AND REACH YOUR OWN JUDGMENT, AFTER ALL, WE ALL HOLD DIFFERENT VALUES AND OPINIONS ON THINGS. HOWEVER, THE ISSUE OF FAKE NEWS IS INEVITABLE, THAT’S HUMAN NATURE TO JUDGE, LIVE, AND THINK WITH OUR HEARTS. TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, DOES THE MEDIA FACILITATE SEARCH FOR TRUTH OR SPREAD FAKE NEWS? THE SIMPLE ANSWER IS, BOTH. IT IS OBVIOUS FOR A JOURNALIST TO REVEAL THE TRUTH AS PART OF THEIR JOB, BUT IS THE SO-CALLED TRUTH WHAT EVERYONE WANTS TO HEAR NOWADAYS?



Rakshita Senthil KUMAR 3C

IMPACTS OF INTERNET ON THE SOCIETY

TECHNOLOGY IS PROGRESSING EVERY DAY AND PEOPLE DEPEND ON THE INTERNET FOR MISCELLANEOUS THINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, SCIENTISTS, DOCTORS, SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS, EVERYONE WORKING IN IT, ETC USE THE INTERNET EVERY DAY FOR THEIR WORK. SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA CAN HAVE BAD IMPACTS, THEY ARE WORRIED ABOUT GETTING ADDICTED TO IT, WHICH MAY CAUSE A LOT OF DISEASES SUCH AS DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, AND EVEN SUICIDAL THOUGHTS. PEOPLE ALSO SAY IT IS A BAD INFLUENCE AS MANY CAN LOSE A HUGE SUM OF MONEY. WHILE SOME PEOPLE DISAGREE WITH THIS, THE INTERNET PROVIDES MANY BENEFITS. I BELIEVE THAT THE INTERNET IS EXCESSIVELY BENEFICIAL TO HUMANS AS IT HAS MADE MANY THINGS EASIER AND MORE CONVENIENT FOR US. THERE MAY BE BAD IMPACTS, BUT THERE IS A WAY TO STOP THOSE BAD IMPACTS FROM TAKING PLACE. WITHOUT THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA, PEOPLE MAY NOT GET INSPIRED ENOUGH TO CREATE SIGNIFICANT AND EXCEPTIONAL INVENTIONS.

IN MY ESSAY, I WILL FOCUS ON WHY THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE TONS OF BENEFITS SUCH AS EASILY CONNECTING AND FINDING NEW OPPORTUNITIES. I WILL ALSO TELL THE REASON WHY THE INTERNET ISN'T A BAD INFLUENCE AS THERE ARE WAYS TO CONTROL GETTING AFFECTED BY THE INTERNET.


ONE REASON WHY THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE A GOOD INFLUENCE IS THAT IT ALLOWS PEOPLE TO EFFICIENTLY COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER. FOR EXAMPLE, DURING THE SPREAD OF OMICRON, SCHOOLS ARE SHUT DOWN AND ALL THE LESSONS ARE ONLINE. THIS CAN ONLY BE POSSIBLE DUE TO THE INTERNET, AND ACCORDING TO UNESCO, 14 COUNTRIES HAVE SHUT SCHOOLS DOWN NATIONWIDE, 290 MILLION STUDENTS, WHILE 13 COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN ON ONLINE LEARNING. THIS SHOWS THAT THE INTERNET GIVES US BENEFITS, STUDENTS AND ADULTS CAN DO THEIR WORK FROM HOME, WHICH PROVIDES WONDERFUL CONVENIENCE. STUDENTS CAN ALSO LEARN EFFICIENTLY AS TEACHERS CAN ASSIGN HOMEWORK ON ONLINE WEBSITES SUCH AS GOOGLE CLASSROOM, KOGNITY, ETC. APART FROM WORK, PEOPLE CAN CALL THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS ACROSS THE WORLD, WHICH WILL HELP STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS. THIS CANNOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE INTERNET.



ANOTHER WAY THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE A GOOD INFLUENCE IS THAT IT HAS PROVIDED PEOPLE WITH INFORMATION AT THEIR FINGERTIPS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, SAYS THAT ACCORDING TO THE SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER AND THE AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT, 94% OF TEENS USE THE INTERNET FOR SCHOOL RESEARCH AND 78% OF THEM USE IT FOR HOMEWORK. IN THEIR INTERVIEW, A 15-YEAR-OLD TEENAGE BOY STATED THAT “WITHOUT THE INTERNET, WE HAVE TO GO TO THE LIBRARY AND WALK AROUND SEARCHING FOR BOOKS WITH THE ANSWER YOU REQUIRE, AND NOW I CAN SEARCH FOR WHAT I WANT ON THE INTERNET, EITHER SCHOOL-RELATED OR NON-SCHOOL-RELATED”. 93% OF PARENTS BELIEVE THAT IT HELPS KIDS LEARN NEW THINGS AND 96% OF TEACHERS SAID THAT KNOWLEDGE ON THE INTERNET WAS ESSENTIAL. THIS SHOWS THAT THE INTERNET CAN HELP STUDENTS WITH THEIR PROJECT WORK AND PROVIDE THE ESSENTIAL MATERIAL TO SUCCEED IN THEIR ACADEMICS. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET CAN HELP EVERYONE WITH LEARNING PRISTINE THINGS AND STAYING UPDATED ON DIFFERENT PROBLEMS ACROSS THE WORLD (GLOBAL WARMING, CLIMATE CHANGE, DISEASE SPREAD, ETC) AND MORE PEOPLE CAN TAKE A STAND AGAINST PROBLEMS!

IT HELPS IN ALERTING PEOPLE ABOUT THE WORLD, PROVIDES A HUGE BENEFIT FOR PEOPLE TO BE MORE CURIOUS, AND ALLOWS THEM TO HELP WITH NEW SITUATIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE!

ANOTHER WAY THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE BENEFITTED PEOPLE IS THAT THEY PROVIDED MANY GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO SHOWCASE AND FIND THEIR TALENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, SITES SUCH AS PINTEREST AND LINKEDIN HELP PEOPLE FIND THEIR PASSIONS AND GET JOBS. ACCORDING TO A NIELSON STUDY CONDUCTED BY PINTEREST, THEY FOUND OUT THAT MORE THAN 250 MILLION PEOPLE USE PINTEREST EACH MONTH, AND 98% OF THE PEOPLE WHO USE PINTEREST, TRY THE NEW AND INNOVATIVE IDEAS THEY FIND ON IT. IN A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY LINKEDIN, THEY FOUND OUT THAT 122 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE HAD A JOB INTERVIEW ON LINKEDIN AND 35.5 MILLION PEOPLE WHO HAVE ATTENDED AN INTERVIEW ARE SELECTED WITH 3 PEOPLE EMPLOYED ON LINKEDIN EVERY MINUTE. THIS SHOWS THAT BECAUSE OF SITES LIKE PINTEREST, LINKEDIN, INSTAGRAM, ETC, PEOPLE CAN SEE DIFFERENT IDEAS CREATED BY OTHERS AND THEY CAN TRY THEM, WHICH WILL INCREASE THEIR INQUISITIVENESS AND IT CAN HELP A PERSON FIND THEIR PASSION AND TALENTS.



IN OTHER WORDS, THE INTERNET GIVES PEOPLE A STARTING PUSH TO ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS. THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE ALSO ALLOWED PEOPLE TO FIND A JOB EASILY, INTERVIEWS CAN HAPPEN ONLINE AND PEOPLE ARE OPEN TO A WIDE RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CAN BE THEIR BEST IN THE FIELD THEY FAVOUR. IN THIS WAY, MORE PEOPLE CAN DO THE JOB THEY LOVE!

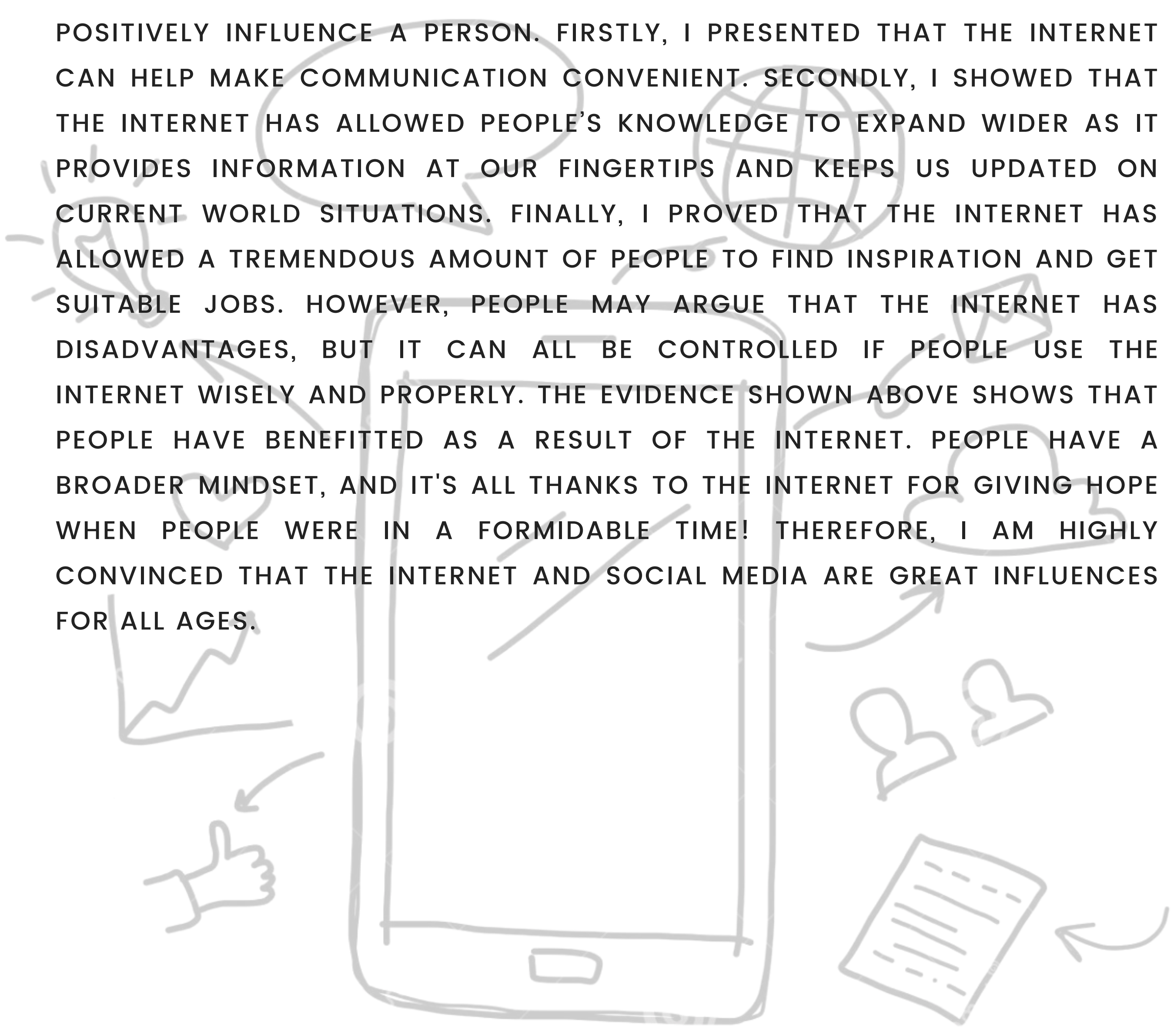
EVEN IF THE INTERNET HAS PROVIDED A VARIETY OF BENEFITS. SOME PEOPLE STILL BELIEVE THAT THE INTERNET HAS MANY DISADVANTAGES AND IT CAN ALSO LEAD TO SEVERE AND DANGEROUS DISEASES AND MENTAL ISSUES. FOR EXAMPLE, PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT IT IS EASY TO SPEND HOURS AND HOURS ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA, AND IT'S EASY TO GET ADDICTED. THIS MAY LEAD TO ISSUES SUCH AS DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, INSOMNIA, LONELINESS, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND EVEN SUICIDAL THOUGHTS. PARENTS ARE ESPECIALLY SCARED THAT TEENAGERS COULD GET ADDICTED TO SOCIAL MEDIA OR THE INTERNET, WHICH COULD MAKE THEM GET DISTRACTED EASILY, RESULTING IN LOW GRADES AND POOR PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL. FEARS OF GETTING ADDICTED AND VARIOUS SIDE EFFECTS CAN BE CONTROLLED. PEOPLE OF ALL AGES CAN GET ADDICTED TO THE INTERNET, BUT DIFFERENT APPS AND SETTINGS CAN LIMIT THE TIME ONE STAYS ON THEIR ELECTRONIC DEVICE AND MANAGE THE TIME FOR DIFFERENT TASKS.

FOR EXAMPLE, SOME APPS WHICH CAN HELP ARE FOREST, HELP ME FOCUS, KASPERSKY, ETC. THESE APPS CAN LIMIT A PERSON'S TIME ON THEIR SCREEN. THIS WILL HELP PEOPLE FOCUS AND NOT GET ANY HEALTH ISSUES.

ONLINE SHOPPING AND PURCHASES ARE GETTING MORE AND MORE POPULAR AMONG EVERYONE, BUT SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT IT IS A DISADVANTAGE. THIS IS BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE LOSE A LOT OF MONEY ONLINE AS THEY GET CHEATED BY THESE PURCHASES. PEOPLE ALSO DON'T LIKE ONLINE PURCHASES, AS THE QUALITY OF THE PRODUCT DELIVERED COULD BE LOW. ALTHOUGH ONLINE SHOPPING AND PAYMENT MAKE IT VERY EASY TO PAY, PEOPLE HAVE ALSO BEEN HACKED MANY TIMES, WITH PEOPLE LOSING MONEY OR HAVING THEIR VALUABLE INFORMATION LEAKED. ALTHOUGH THESE SITUATIONS OCCUR, IT IS BECAUSE PEOPLE MAY NOT BE CAREFUL ENOUGH BEFORE TRANSFERRING MONEY TO THE SITE. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO NOT GET CHEATED, SUCH AS CHECKING IF THE WEBSITE IS SECURE. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS A LOCK SYMBOL AT THE TOP OF THE USER BAR WHICH SHOWS IF THE

SITE IS SECURE. PEOPLE SHOULD ALSO SEARCH FOR BACKGROUND DETAILS ON THE SITE, TO SEE IF IT IS TRUSTWORTHY. THERE IS ALSO LOTS OF INFORMATION ONLINE ABOUT HOW TO CHECK IF A WEBSITE CAN BE TRUSTED. THIS WAY PEOPLE CAN'T GET TRICKED!

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE VERY BENEFICIAL FOR PEOPLE, AS IT HAS ASSISTED PEOPLE THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES AND IS AN ASSERTIVE TOOL FOR PEOPLE TO DEVELOP MORE SKILLS! IN THIS ESSAY, I HAVE EXPLAINED THE REASONS WHY THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE HELPFUL AND CAN POSITIVELY INFLUENCE A PERSON. FIRSTLY, I PRESENTED THAT THE INTERNET CAN HELP MAKE COMMUNICATION CONVENIENT. SECONDLY, I SHOWED THAT THE INTERNET HAS ALLOWED PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE TO EXPAND WIDER AS IT PROVIDES INFORMATION AT OUR FINGERTIPS AND KEEPS US UPDATED ON CURRENT WORLD SITUATIONS. FINALLY, I PROVED THAT THE INTERNET HAS ALLOWED A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF PEOPLE TO FIND INSPIRATION AND GET SUITABLE JOBS. HOWEVER, PEOPLE MAY ARGUE THAT THE INTERNET HAS DISADVANTAGES, BUT IT CAN ALL BE CONTROLLED IF PEOPLE USE THE INTERNET WISELY AND PROPERLY. THE EVIDENCE SHOWN ABOVE SHOWS THAT PEOPLE HAVE BENEFITTED AS A RESULT OF THE INTERNET. PEOPLE HAVE A BROADER MINDSET, AND IT'S ALL THANKS TO THE INTERNET FOR GIVING HOPE WHEN PEOPLE WERE IN A FORMIDABLE TIME! THEREFORE, I AM HIGHLY CONVINCED THAT THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE GREAT INFLUENCES FOR ALL AGES.



SHOULD CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS BE ABOLISHED?

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WAS FIRST USED DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, PEOPLE WHO HAVE COMMITTED SERIOUS TYPES OF MURDER WOULD BE EXECUTED AS A FORM OF PUNISHMENT. THESE PUNISHMENTS WERE USED ON PEOPLE WHO COMMITTED TREASON, MURDER, LARGE-SCALE DRUG TRAFFICKING, OR ANY SORT OF ATTEMPTED MURDER OF A WITNESS, COURT OFFICER, OR ANY WORKERS WHO SERVE THE GOVERNMENT. AS WE BEGIN THE 20TH CENTURY, PEOPLE STARTED TO QUESTION ITS ETHICALITY AND MORALITY. SOME BELIEVE THAT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO SERVE JUSTICE, DESPITE THE MANY ETHICAL ISSUES IT MAY CAUSE. THEY THINK THAT IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE JUSTICE FOR ALL. BUT SOME PEOPLE MAY DIFFER, THEY THINK THAT THERE IS NO "HUMANE" WAY TO KILL. THEY STRONGLY ARGUE THAT IT IS WRONG TO KILL SOMEONE DESPITE THE HORRIBLE ACTIONS THEY HAVE COMMITTED. IN MY OPINION, I BELIEVE CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED DUE TO THE MANY VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND ALSO THE ETHICALITY OF THIS PUNISHMENT. HUMAN RIGHTS WERE ESTABLISHED FOR A REASON. ALTHOUGH THIS MAY NOT BE MADE AS A LAW, WE SHOULD STILL FOLLOW THE ESTABLISHED RIGHTS SINCE IT IS MADE FOR US. IN THE FOLLOWING ESSAY BELOW, I WILL CONTINUE TO PROVE WHY CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED BECAUSE IT VIOLATES HUMAN RIGHTS. ACCORDING TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, THEY STATE THAT DEATH PENALTY BREACHES HUMAN RIGHTS, IN PARTICULAR THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND THE RIGHT TO LIVE FREE FROM TORTURE OR CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT. BOTH RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED UNDER THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, ADOPTED BY THE UN IN 1948. UNDER ARTICLE 3 OF THE UDHR (UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS), LIFE IS A HUMAN RIGHT, ALL HUMANS HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE AND NO ONE CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM THEM. UDHR (UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS) WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE UN ON THE 10TH OF DECEMBER 1948. HUMAN RIGHTS WERE ESTABLISHED DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THEY HOPED THAT THIS COULD HELP PROTECT THE PEOPLE FROM HARM, THAT THEY COULD BE FREE, AND THEY COULD LIVE A PEACEFUL LIFE.



WITH THE KNOWLEDGE SHOWN ABOVE, CLEARLY STATES THAT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IS BREACHING AND VIOLATING THE HUMAN RIGHTS. PEOPLE OWN THE RIGHT TO LIVE AND THE RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM TORTURE. WHEN CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IS BREACHING HUMAN RIGHTS, IT ANGERS PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY. THEY WOULD SET UP RALLIES, PROTESTS, TO TRY TO ABOLISH THIS UNETHICAL PUNISHMENT. ABOLISHING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, WOULD MAKE THE CITIZENS IN THE COUNTRY FEEL MORE SECURE.

ANOTHER REASON WHY CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED IS BECAUSE PEOPLE COULD BE INNOCENTLY ACCUSED. PEOPLE FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD HAVE BEEN INNOCENTLY ACCUSED AND HAVE DIED FROM THIS FORM OF PUNISHMENT. THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXAMPLE OF A CITIZEN WHO WAS FALSELY ACCUSED AND WAS EXECUTED. CARLOS DELUNA, HE WAS CONVICTED IN 1983, AND EXECUTED IN 1989. CARLOS DELUNA WAS EXECUTED FOR THE FATAL STABBING OF TEXAS CONVENIENCE STORE WANDA LOPEZ IN 1983. REPORTERS MAURICE POSSLEY AND STEVE MILLS CAST DOUBT ON CARLOS DELUNA'S GUILT. THEIR EVIDENCE POINTS TO ANOTHER MAN CALLED CARLOS HERNANDEZ. TURNS OUT, CARLOS HERNANDEZ HAS A SERIES OF CRIMINAL RECORDS INCLUDING MURDER. BECAUSE CARLOS DELUNA AND CARLOS HERNANDEZ HAD SUCH IDENTICAL FACES, EVEN THEIR FAMILIES MISTOOK PHOTOS OF THEM FOR EACH OTHER! THIS PROVES THAT THE EYE-WITNESS COULD'VE POSSIBLY MISTOOK ONE FOR ANOTHER, AND IT MAKES HER TESTIMONY DOUBTFUL. THE POLICE ALSO FAILED TO INVESTIGATE CARLOS HERNANDEZ WHICH THEY SHOULD'VE DONE BEFORE EXECUTING CARLOS DELUNA. ACCORDING TO DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER, SINCE 1973, AT LEAST 186 PEOPLE WERE WRONGLY CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO DEATH IN THE U.S. WHEN THE US SUPREME COURT HELD THE ADMINISTRATION OF DEATH PENALTY TO BE CONSTITUTIONAL IN 1972, THEY BARELY MENTIONED THE ISSUE OF INNOCENCE. CARLOS DELUNA WAS SOMEONE WHO WAS FALSELY EXECUTED, HE WAS SOMEONE WHO WAS JUST TRYING TO BUY HIS FOOD OR HIS DAILY NECESSITIES IN THE CONVENIENCE STORE. HE WAS AN INNOCENT MAN. THE STATE WRONGLY EXECUTED HIM WITHOUT FURTHER INVESTIGATION OF THE MAN CARLOS HERNANDEZ, WHO WAS ALSO THERE AT THE CRIME SCENE. SOMEONE WHO HAD SIMILAR CRIMINAL RECORDS SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY OR AT LEAST TRY TO INVESTIGATE HIM. THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE POLICY HAS CAUSED AN INNOCENT MAN TO BE EXECUTED. THE LIFE OF THIS MAN COULD'VE BEEN SAVED, HE COULD BE LIVING A HAPPY LIFE RIGHT NOW IN THE US BUT SADLY NO. HIS LIFE HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY AND THE REAL



MURDERER IS OUT THERE LIVING HIS LIFE. THIS IS UNFAIR TO THE INNOCENT MAN WHO WAS JUST TRYING TO BUY FOOD.

I BELIEVE THERE ARE NUMEROUS CASES IN THE WORLD WHERE PEOPLE ARE INNOCENTLY ACCUSED, INNOCENTLY SENTENCED, AND INNOCENTLY EXECUTED. THE LIVES OF PEOPLE ARE NOT A JOKE. I BELIEVE THAT THE SOCIETY, THE PEOPLE, WOULD DEMAND AN EXPLANATION FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WERE INNOCENTLY EXECUTED.

THE LAST REASON WHY CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED IS THAT NO ONE HOLDS THE POWER TO EXECUTE SOMEONE. ACCORDING TO ACLU, AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION, "WE BELIEVE THAT THE STATE SHOULD NOT GIVE ITSELF THE RIGHT TO KILL HUMAN BEINGS – ESPECIALLY WHEN IT KILLS WITH PREMEDITATION AND CEREMONY, IN THE NAME OF THE LAW OR IN THE NAME OF ITS PEOPLE, AND WHEN IT DOES SO IN AN ARBITRARY AND DISCRIMINATORY FASHION." ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT PROTECTS THE COUNTRY, AND GUIDES THE COUNTRY TO A BETTER PATH, IT DOES NOT GIVE THEM THE AUTHORITY TO EXECUTE OR END SOMEONE'S LIFE. IT IS NOT THEIR DECISION ON WHETHER TO END SOMEONE'S LIFE OR NOT. TO BE FAIR, NO ONE IN THE WORLD HAS THE POWER TO EXECUTE SOMEONE. GIVEN THE FACT THAT NO ONE HAS THE POWER TO EXECUTE SOMEONE, IF THE GOVERNMENT EXECUTES SOMEONE, IT WOULD MEAN THAT THEY MURDERED SOMEONE. WHICH WOULD MAKE THEM, MURDERERS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ITS LIMITS IN AUTHORITY AND POWER, THIS IS A LINE THAT THEY SHOULDN'T CROSS.

SOME PEOPLE MAY SAY THAT THIS FORM OF PUNISHMENT WOULD ENSURE JUSTICE FOR ALL. BY INFLICTING DEATH ON THOSE WHO DELIBERATELY INFLICT DEATH ON OTHERS, WOULD BE AN EXAMPLE OF ENSURING JUSTICE FOR ALL. THE MURDERER/OFFENDER WOULD BE DEALT IN A SERIOUS MANNER, WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES TO MAKE UP FOR THEIR SINS. OFFENDERS WOULD BE TORTURED IN DEATH ROWS, SO THAT THEY CAN REFLECT ON THEIR WRONGDOINGS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO U.S. CONGRESSMAN EARL BLUMENAEUR, IT STATES THAT "CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IS ALSO APPLIED UNFAIRLY AND DISPROPORTIONALLY TO PEOPLE OF COLOR, LOW-INCOME PEOPLE, AND THOSE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS. WEALTHY PEOPLE WHO CAN AFFORD EXPERT LAWYERS ARE RARELY SENTENCED TO DIE" THIS CLEARLY SHOWS THAT IT DOESN'T ENSURE JUSTICE FOR ALL AS SOME JUDGES COULD BE RACIST, RESEARCH SHOWS THAT COMPARED TO WHITE PEOPLE, BLACK PEOPLE



WERE MOST LIKELY SENTENCED TO DEATH. IN ADDITION, PEOPLE WHO ARE POOR OR THOSE WHO ARE DIAGNOSED WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS WOULD ALSO HAVE A HIGHER CHANCE OF SENTENCING TO DEATH. WE CANNOT BE 100% SURE IF THE JUDGE IN THIS CASE STEREOTYPES PEOPLE WHO ARE POOR, PEOPLE OF COLOUR AND PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS. ABOLISHING THE CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT INJUSTICE IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES.

THEY SAY THAT BY KILLING THE PERSON WHO KILLED THEIR LOVED ONES, WOULD BRING THEM A SENSE OF COMFORT, WHICH WOULD ALSO MEAN REVENGE. THEY BELIEVE THAT BY TAKING REVENGE WOULD ALLOW THEM TO NOT ONLY FEEL BETTER, BUT WOULD ALLOW THE VICTIM TO REST IN PEACE. BUT HAVE YOU THOUGHT THAT ONE MOMENT OF COMFORT WOULD COST SOMEONE'S LIFE? YOUR SADNESS, YOUR ANGER, IS NOT A REASON TO TAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE FOR REVENGE, HOW WOULD REVENGE HELP YOU? CAN REVENGE HELP YOU REVIVE YOUR LOVED ONES? CAN REVENGE RELIEVE YOUR PAIN? PERHAPS IT CAN RELIEVE YOUR PAIN MOMENTARILY, BUT TAKING SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE WOULDN'T DO YOU ANY GOOD. ACCORDING TO ABC NEWS, "PEOPLE WHO SEEK REVENGE ARE DRIVEN BY ANGER AND VIOLENCE AND HAVE NOT THOUGHT ABOUT HOW TO CHANNEL THEIR NEGATIVE FEELINGS INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE." TAKING REVENGE IS DEFINITELY SOMETHING PEOPLE WOULD DO WHEN THEY ARE ANGERED, ESPECIALLY WHEN SOMEONE THEY LOVE DIED. THEY WOULD EXPERIENCE ANGER, AND DURING THIS TIME THEY WILL HATE THE MURDERER. IT IS NOT WRONG TO DO SO BUT BEAR IN MIND TAKING REVENGE IS NOT THE BEST WAY TO PUNISH THE MURDERER.

ALTHOUGH THE VIOLATOR HAS MADE A HORRIBLE MISTAKE, WE SHOULDN'T TAKE THEIR LIFE AS THEIR PUNISHMENT. WE SHOULD NOT TAKE AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND WE SHOULD GIVE THE PERSON ANOTHER CHANCE TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IN JAIL. THE MURDERER WOULD STILL RECEIVE SERIOUS PUNISHMENTS FOR SUCH TERRIBLE ACTIONS WITHOUT SENTENCING THEM TO DEATH. WE KNOW THAT THE VICTIM'S FAMILY WOULD BE IN A LOT OF PAIN AND THAT SENTENCING THEM TO SEVERE PUNISHMENTS ISN'T ENOUGH TO MAKE UP FOR THEIR SINS, SO THE VICTIM WOULD HAVE TO PAY A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF MONEY TO THE VICTIM'S FAMILY. THIS ACTION IS NOT DONE TO FORGIVE THE MURDERER, BUT TO HOPEFULLY ALLOW THEM TO RETURN TO THEIR NORMAL LIVES.




IN CONCLUSION, CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS MUST CERTAINLY BE ABOLISHED DESPITE THE DIFFERENT ARGUMENTS OTHERS WOULD MAKE. IN THIS ESSAY, I HAVE STATED THAT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT VIOLATES THE HUMAN RIGHTS, EXPLAINED HOW INNOCENTS COULD BE FALSELY ACCUSED TO CERTAIN ALLEGATIONS AND MOST IMPORTANTLY EMPHAZIED ON THE FACT THAT NO ONE HAS THE POWER TO EXECUTE SOMEONE. ALTHOUGH SOME PEOPLE MAY THINK THAT CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS WOULD ALLOW THEM TO GET THEIR REVENGE, BELIEVING THAT THIS IS THE ONLY FAIR PUNISHMENT, I HAVE PROVEN THAT TAKING REVENGE IS DEFINITELY NOT A WAY TO PUNISH OFFENDERS AND THAT TAKING AN EYE FOR AN EYE IS NEVER THE BEST WAY TO PUNISH SOMEONE. THE ABOVE CASE SHOWS AN EXAMPLE OF AN INNOCENT PERSON'S LIFE BEING TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF INVESTIGATION AND A WRONG DECISION FROM THE JUDGE. CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS ARE SERIOUSLY VIOLATING OUR RIGHTFUL RIGHTS AS HUMAN BEINGS, THEREFORE I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS SHOULD CERTAINLY BE ABOLISHED.

Haleema Hashim MUNAWAR 3C

HOW GOVERNMENTS AND THE MEDIA CREATE XENOPHOBIC FEELINGS AMONG PEOPLE AS WELL AS HOW PEOPLE SUFFER FROM IT

IN OUR BROKEN WORLD, PEOPLE WITH POWER SUCH AS GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS CAN DECEIVE MILLIONS BY SPREADING XENOPHOBIA IN THE FORM OF USING THE MOST ROBUST LANGUAGE AS WELL AS PROVOCATIVE POLICIES DUE TO THEIR NARCISSISM AND HATRED TOWARDS TARGETED SOCIETIES. THEY USE THESE TACTICS TO JUSTIFY SEVERAL CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AS WELL AS TO SILENCE SOCIETY ABOUT IT. DESPITE THESE ATROCITIES, A LOT OF PEOPLE SEE IT AS A FORM OF GOVERNMENT PROTECTING THEIR PEOPLE FROM THREATS TO THEIR NATIONAL SECURITY, AND TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM TERRORISM AND SUSTAINING THEIR ECONOMY, AND PROTECTING THE CITIZENS OF THEIR NATION AND THEY SEE THE MEDIA AS A FORM OF SPREADING AWARENESS TO THEIR CITIZENS ON WHAT THEY HAVE TO TAKE PRECAUTION ON TO PROTECT THEMSELVES. AFTER POLICY AFTER POLICY AND BIASED MEDIA REPORTS, I COMPREHEND THAT GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS DO INFLUENCE PEOPLE TO BE SPITEFUL AND RACIST TOWARDS CERTAIN ETHNIC GROUPS. THIS IS BECAUSE SOCIETY IS MASSIVELY INFLUENCED BY THE GOVERNMENT AS THEY ONLY SEE IT FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW WHICH IS A DECEPTION OF REALITY. IN THIS ESSAY, I WILL INVESTIGATE HOW GOVERNMENTS SPREAD XENOPHOBIA THROUGH POLICIES, THE POWER THE MEDIA HAS IN SPREADING THIS XENOPHOBIA TO THE MASSES, AND THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS SPREAD XENOPHOBIA BY ENACTING DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES TOWARD CERTAIN ETHNIC GROUPS. ISRAEL'S LAW OF RETURN ALLOWS JEWS WORLDWIDE TO SETTLE IN PALESTINE, DESPITE HAVING NO CONNECTION TO THE LAND WHATSOEVER YET THEY EXPEL MILLIONS OF PALESTINIANS - WHO ARE ALSO AS A SOCIETY INDIGENOUS TO THE HOLY LAND WHILE MOST JEWS ONLY HAVE LINEAGE TO IT. THEY ALSO HAVE POLICIES SUCH AS THE ABSENTEE PROPERTY LAW AND THE LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS LAW WHICH ALLOWS ISRAELI SETTLERS TO LEGALLY STEAL A PALESTINIAN'S HOUSE LIKE IN SHEIKH JARRAH. THE GAZA STRIP IS ALSO THE LARGEST OPEN-AIR PRISON IN THE WORLD AS ISRAEL TORTURES THEM WITH HUNGER, MISSILES, AND BOMB ATTACKS CLAIMING THAT "HAMMAS" IS CONTROLLING THE TERRITORY. THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT BOMBS GAZA FREQUENTLY YET WHEN HAMMAS AS A MOVE OF DEFENSE DOES SO, THE ENTIRE ETHNIC GROUP IS DEEMED AS TERRORISTS.



THESE DEHUMANIZING POLICIES ALLOW ZIONISTS AND SETTLERS TO LEGALLY DISCRIMINATE AND TORTURE THE PALESTINIANS MORE BY THROWING THEM ON THE STREETS AND FLEEING TO SEVERAL PLACES AS THEY DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE TO GO, ESSENTIALLY TREATING THEM THE WAY THEY AS JEWS WERE TREATED IN HISTORY, THESE ZIONISTS COMPLETELY IGNORE THE FACT THAT TO JUSTIFY BEING XENOPHOBIC TO EXILE AND PERSECUTE AN ETHNIC GROUP IS OKAY AS THEY ARE DOING IT TO HAVE A HOME OF THEIR OWN WHERE THEY WILL NEVER BE EXILED FROM AGAIN. THESE POLICIES MAKE THE STATE OF "ISRAEL" APARTHEID AS THEY ARE SEGREGATING THE PALESTINIANS BY TORTURING THEM IN GAZA AND THE LOSS OF THEIR HOME IN THE WEST BANK IN CONTRAST JEWS WHO HAVE ALL THE BENEFITS SUCH AS TO EASILY TRAVEL WITH NO CHECKPOINTS. ALL THIS ESSENTIALLY CREATES XENOPHOBIC ACTIONS, FEELINGS, AND THOUGHTS TO IMMERSE IN PEOPLE.

GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS SPREAD XENOPHOBIA BY THE MEDIA WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT TO SPREAD XENOPHOBIA TO MILLIONS UPON MILLIONS OF PEOPLE. CERTAIN MEDIA OUTLETS SUCH AS THE BBC OR CNN WHICH HAS ROUGHLY HALF A BILLION VIEWERS WORLDWIDE WEEKLY, CLAIM TO BE CAREFUL IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE THE CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY OF VLADIMIR PUTIN. YET THEY SAY THAT UKRAINE IS A CIVILIZED NATION IN EUROPE -NOT A DEVELOPING "THIRD WORLD COUNTRY", IMPLYING THAT WAR SHOULDN'T BE IN EUROPE BUT STAY IN THOSE WAR TORN COUNTRIES OR THAT WATCHING EUROPEAN PEOPLE WITH BLUE EYES AND BLONDE HAIR IS HEARTBREAKING TO WATCH, IMPLYING THAT BECAUSE OF THAT THEY ARE MORE IMPORTANT. THEY ALSO USE THE MOST ROBUST AND STRONG LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE THESE CRIMES, YET WHEN PALESTINIANS FOR INSTANCE ARE BEING OCCUPIED BY THE ZIONISTS, THEY DEEM IT AS TABOO, THEY DON'T USE THE WORD APHARTHEID, ESSENTIALLY DENYING THE PAIN THEY ARE GOING THROUGH. THIS VIEWPOINT HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO MILLIONS OF PEOPLE, SOME OF WHO ONLY SEE IT FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, ESSENTIALLY BRAINWASHING PEOPLE TO EVEN BECOME SUBCONSCIOUSLY XENOPHOBIC AND HAVE PREJUDICES WITHOUT REALIZING IT BECAUSE THE MEDIA MAKES IT SO GENERALIZED IN SOCIETY TO BE OKAY WITH DEHUMANIZING ANOTHER ETHNIC GROUP. THE FACT THAT THEY ALSO HAVE A STRANGE INFLUENCE ON PEOPLE TO MANIPULATE WHAT THEY CAN OR CAN'T TALK ABOUT DESPITE IT BEING MORALLY WRONG, WHICH AGAIN MANIPULATES PEOPLE AS PUPPETS TO IGNORE THE SUFFERING OF PALESTINIANS AMONGST SEVERAL OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS AND FOCUS MORE

ON THE SUFFERING IN EUROPE AS IT IS MORE CONCERNING BECAUSE THEY HAVE CERTAIN FEATURES THAT MAKE THEM MORE SUPERIOR.

GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS SPREAD XENOPHOBIA BY VIOLATING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF SEVERAL SOCIETIES FOR THEIR OWN SELF-INTEREST. THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT HAS ACTIVELY BEEN SILENCING MEDIA OUTLETS AND ITS PEOPLE ON THE ONGOING GENOCIDE OF THE UYGHUR PEOPLE IN XINJIANG WHERE THEY PLACE THE UYGHUR PEOPLE INTO CONCENTRATION CAMPS, AND THEN SEND THESE PEOPLE TO WORK IN FACTORIES OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES SUCH AS NIKE AND AMAZON AGAINST THEIR WILL, ESSENTIALLY DISENFRANCHISING THEM. AS WELL AS HAVING FORCED STERILIZATIONS, DESTRUCTION OF MOSQUES, AND ARRESTS MADE FOR OWNING A QU'RAN, WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY AN ACT OF ETHNIC CLEANSING WHICH GOES AGAINST THE BASIC UNITED NATIONS LAWS OF EVERYONE HAVING A RIGHT TO HAVE THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION, SPEECH AND LIBERTY. THE ETHNIC CLEANSING PROCESS IS A MAJOR VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO BRAINWASH THE ENTIRE POPULATION TO ALSO SEE IT AS A TABOO, XENOPHOBIA ENSUED ALLOWS THE BRUTALITY OF THE SUFFERING TO COMMENCE AS IT IS GENOCIDE DONE IN SILENCE. THE FACT THAT THEY INSTILL FORCED LABOR, AND FORCED STERILIZATIONS IS ANOTHER DISGUSTING ACT WHICH IS DONE BY THEIR OWN SELF INTEREST TO CONTROL THE GROWING POPULATIONS AND HAVE MORE LABORERS IN THE MANUFACTURING COMPANIES TO ASSEMBLE PRODUCTS AS FREE LABOR, JUST SO THEIR ECONOMY CAN THRIVE AT THE EXPENSE OF DEHUMANIZING THESE PEOPLE TO THE REST OF THE POPULATION. NOBODY CAN CONDEMN THESE ACTIONS BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT FORCES PEOPLE TO LOOK AT IT IN ONE WAY AS WELL AS HEFTY PUNISHMENTS IF THEY DON'T. THIS IS DECEPTION BROUGHT BY A GOVERNMENT'S SELF-INTEREST WHICH ENLARGES THIS STIGMA ON CERTAIN RELIGIOUS GROUPS TO BE DEEMED AS DANGEROUS, WHICH IS FORCEFULLY INSTILLED IN A LOT OF PEOPLE.

DESPITE THE PAIN AND SUFFERING A CERTAIN COMMUNITY BROUGHT BY GOVERNMENT BRUTALITY, THERE IS A MASSIVE POPULATION ALONG WITH GOVERNMENTS THAT JUSTIFY THEIR ACTIONS TO BE FOR THE BEST FOR ALL PEOPLE LIVING IN A CERTAIN REGION. THESE PEOPLE SEE IT AS A WAY OF PREVENTING ANY THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY SUCH AS TERRORIST ATTACKS AS THEY SEE THAT IT IS MAINLY CONCENTRATED IN A SPECIFIC REGION WHERE MOST PEOPLE MAY HAVE THE SAME MENTALITY. SUPPORTERS

OF DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES AND ACTIVE HATERS TOWARDS OTHER COMMUNITIES, SEE IT AS A FORM OF JUSTICE FOR THEMSELVES AFTER TERROR BROUGHT BY THESE COMMUNITIES AS WELL AS TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF TERRORIST ATTACKS TO ZERO AS THEY WANT TO LIVE THEIR LIVES IN PEACE AS THEY ARE BETTER THAN THAT.

THEY SEE THAT IF ONE PERSON FROM A LESS DEVELOPED PERSON COMMITS A TERRORIST ATTACK, IT REPRESENTS THE ENTIRE POPULATION BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF EDUCATION THESE PEOPLE MAY HAVE, MAKING THEM STRONGER IN TERMS OF PROTECTING THEMSELVES YET NOT XENOPHOBIC. THERE ARE TERRORIST ATTACKERS OF VARIOUS ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS ACROSS ALL INHABITED CONTINENTS, SO ONE CAN'T STIGMATIZE THEIR CHARACTERISTICS TO A WHOLE COMMUNITY. A LOT OF GOVERNMENTS MAY ONLY CARE ABOUT THEIR OWN POWER AND SELF-INTERESTS INSTEAD OF THE PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT HAVE AS BIG OF AN INFLUENCE, IT MAY BE A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY TO ACCEPT REFUGEES FROM A LESS ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPED COUNTRY DUE TO THE MASSIVE AMOUNT OF TERRORIST ATTACKS YET THERE ARE MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE, THERE ARE ALSO BAD PEOPLE IN MORE ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, YET THESE NATIONS MAY SEE THEM AS MORE IMPORTANT DUE TO THEIR STATUS BUT NOT FOR THE FACT THEY ARE HUMAN AND ACCEPT THEM WITH OPEN ARMS. THESE GOVERNMENTS HAVE A DOUBLE STANDARDS, MEANING THAT THEY MAY IMPLY THAT IF YOU ARE RICH AND WHITE YOU MAY BE IMPORTANT AND MATTER YET IF YOU ARE POOR OR OF COLOUR OR MUSLIM YOU MAY BE THE ENEMY.

DESPITE ALL THESE FALSIFICATIONS, PROPAGANDA, BIASNESS AND MANIPULATION OF REALITY BROUGHT BY MEDIA OUTLETS, THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO SAY THAT THE MEDIA IS A TOOL TO SPREAD AWARENESS OF HOW HORRIBLE CERTAIN PEOPLE OR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CAN BE, BECAUSE THEY ALL SHARE A CULTURE - MEANING THAT THEY MAY HAVE A SIMILAR THOUGHT-PROCESS TOWARDS THE WORLD. THE ROMA, FOR INSTANCE, WERE DEPICTED BY THE MEDIA TO BE VIAL, ILLEGAL AND UNINTELLIGENT BY THE MEDIA AS ONLY 20% OF THE ROMA POPULATION ARE ILLITERATE WHICH MAY SHOW THEM TO DO HORRIBLE THINGS DUE TO THE LACK OF AWARENESS. MEDIA IS SUBJECTIVE AND IT DOES DECEIVE PEOPLE TO ONLY LOOK AT A SCENARIO A CERTAIN WAY WHEN REALITY SAYS OTHERWISE, IF THEY WANT TO VILLINISE MUSLIMS FOR INSTANCE THEY MAY GENERALIZE THE ENTIRE MUSLIM POPULATION WITH IT BEING A BELIEF TO INSTILL THE IDEA OF A SHARED

IDEOLOGY OF TERROR IS IN ALL 1.8 BILLION MUSLIMS WORLDWIDE, TO THE MILLIONS OF VIEWERS WORLDWIDE, AS IT MAY BE THEIR ONLY SOURCE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD. THE ROMA PEOPLE WERE HEAVILY DISCRIMINATED AGAINST TO THE POINT THAT THEIR GENOCIDE DURING THE HOLOCAUST WASN'T EVEN RECOGNIZED - AND THEIR DIASPORA AND PERSECUTION CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR LOW LITERACY RATES AS NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE MAY WANT TO GIVE THEM AN OPPORTUNITY. THINGS THAT THE MEDIA HIDES.

THE MEDIA CAN BE DECEPTIVE AS IT HAS ALREADY BEEN SILENCING VOICES AND USED AS A TOOL TO SPREAD HATE BY MANY PEOPLE AS SHOWN BY THE LANGUAGE USED TO DESCRIBE MUSLIMS IN CERTAIN MEDIA OUTLETS AS WELL AS IMPLYING THAT CERTAIN ETHNIC GROUPS MATTER MORE THAN OTHERS BECAUSE OF THE COLORS OF THEIR EYES, SKIN, AND HAIR. THESE REMARKS MAY SEEM TO BE TRIVIAL YET IT HAS A POWERFUL EFFECT ON HOW PEOPLE SEE OTHER PEOPLE OF VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS, THEY MAY EVEN HAVE SUBCONSCIOUS PREJUDICES TOWARDS OTHERS WHICH SHOWS HOW MUCH POWER THESE MEDIA OUTLETS AND GOVERNMENTS HAVE TO EVEN INFLUENCE THE THOUGHTS OF PEOPLE.

GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS WERE GIVEN SIGNIFICANT POWER AND INFLUENCE MAINLY BY THE PEOPLE, YET THEY ABUSE THEM AND DIVIDE OUR WORLD AND INCITE SUFFERING AND PAIN IN SEVERAL WAYS. IN THIS ESSAY, I HAVE EXPLORED THE METHODS WHERE GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR BITTERNESS TO ESSENTIALLY MINDWASH A LARGE AMOUNT OF A POPULATION'S MINDSET AND HOW THEY MAY FEEL TOWARDS DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS, THE INHUMANE POLICIES SET BY GOVERNMENTS TO TORTURE AND VILLAINIZE CERTAIN ETHNIC GROUPS DEEMED AS TERRORISTS, AND THE IDEA THAT BY GOVERNMENTS VIOLATING SEVERAL HUMAN RIGHTS ALONG WITH THEIR OWN SELF-INTERESTS SUCH AS FORCED LABOUR AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS WHICH ESSENTIALLY EXPLOIT AND TORTURE THESE ETHNIC GROUPS. WHILE SOME PEOPLE MAY ARGUE THAT IT ISN'T XENOPHOBIA, BUT IS A SPREAD AND ACTION OF PROTECTION AND AWARENESS FROM TERRORIST ATTACKS AND WHAT THE SIGNS OF AN EXTREMIST PERSON WOULD BE. BUT THERE IS NO LOGICAL CONNECTION TO THIS BECAUSE EXTREMISM CAN COME FROM ANY ETHNIC GROUP OR COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, IN FACT, HISTORICALLY WESTERN NATIONS HAVE COMMITTED THE WORST UPON THE WORST CRIMES OF HUMANITY WITH GENOCIDE AFTER



GENOCIDE AND LOOTING OF RESOURCES, APARTHEID, SLAVERY, AND THE LIST GOES ON AND ONE. WHILE THESE WESTERNERS COMMIT SEVERAL ATROCITIES AND BOMBS AND MISSILES, THEM AND THEIR PEOPLE ARE NOT DEEMED AS TERRORISTS YET WHEN A PERSON FROM THE MIDDLE EAST OR AFRICA DO SO, THEM AND THEIR ENTIRE POPULATION ARE GENERALIZED AND DEEMED AS EXTREMISTS AND HORRENDOUS, WHERE IN VISE VERSA GET DESTROYED MORE AS A NATION. GOVERNMENTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS HAVE DEMONSTRATED OUTLANDISH BEHAVIOR ON HOW THEY ARE ABLE TO JUSTIFY THEIR USE OF LANGUAGES AND POLICIES AGAINST TARGETED ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS GROUPS, WITH THE MOST UNREASONABLE AND VIAL EXCUSES TO DEHUMANIZE AND INSTILL A CERTAIN MINDSET OF XENOPHOBIA TO THE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.



*Noteworthy
Novellettes*

Tamira SHOKO 4H

ELYSIAN FIELDS

PEACE, TRANQUILITY, SERENITY, A UTOPIA ON EARTH HIDDEN AWAY EXCEPT TO A FEW. A BOUQUET OF BRIGHT OPTIMISTIC FLOWERS OUT FROM THE OVERFLOWING, GLOWING GREENERY, A BABY DEER'S TEARY SNOOT EMERGING FROM HIBERNATION. LIKE A MOTHER FONDLING THEIR PRECIOUS CHILD TO PROTECT IT FROM LIFE'S PROBLEMS, ONE CANNOT HELP BUT FEEL EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT IN THE HOLY PRESENCE OF THE ANCIENT VINES. EVEN THE HARSH SUN'S RAYS CANNOT PENETRATE THROUGH THE SHIELD, THE CANOPY OF THE GIANT WISE TREES. THEY STAND LIKE GIGANTIC HULKS AND OVERSEE THE VAST EXPANSE OF THE EARTH, FILLED WITH KNOWLEDGE OLDER THAN TIME ITSELF.

THE TREES - LOOK DOWN OVER THE VAST LANDSCAPE, IN HARMONY WITH MOTHER NATURE'S WORK OF ART. FROM THE FOGGY MOUNTAINS THAT STRETCH TO THE TIPS OF THE HEAVENS, TO THE MINUTE, RADIANT LADYBUG FLYING MAJESTICALLY ABOUT, EVERYTHING FALLS IN ITS PLACE, TAKING PRIDE OF PLACE ON THE TAPESTRY. ANYONE ONE OUT OF PLACE AND THE PUZZLE WILL BE INCOMPLETE. THE DULL GREY ROCKS SCATTERED IN THE CLEAR STREAM COMPLIMENT THE RADIANT MOSSY GROUND, WHILE THE CRASHING THUNDER OF THE WATERFALL FILLS IN THE SILENCE OF THE ATMOSPHERE. A PICTURE-PERFECT PORTRAIT.

THE QUICK BREEZE BRUSHES PAST THE BROAD LEAVES. A LIFELESS LEAF FALLS TO THE MOSS ON THE GROUND. IT HAS RUN ITS COURSE. SOFTER THAN A GROOMED LION'S MANE, THE TOUCH OF MOSS IS ENCHANTING. THE NATURAL OPULENT VELVETY CUSHION HAS A HYPNOTIZING AROMA. A THOUSAND YEARS OF LIFE HAVE DIED AND BEEN RENEWED HERE. DEAD, NOURISHMENT AND ALIVE AGAIN. THE BODY FEELS AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER LAYING ON A CLOUD. THE BODY IS IMMEDIATELY REJUVENATED.

IN THE DISTANCE, ONE CAN HEAR THE INNOCUOUS, DELIGHTFUL, SOUNDS OF CHILDREN PLAYING FURTHER DOWN THE STREAM. SHRIEKS OF COLD SHOCK EVERY TIME THEY SPLASH EACH OTHER LINGER BRIEFLY ON ONE'S EAR, TELLING TALES OF NOSTALGIC CHILDHOODS OF HAPPINESS AND THRILL. IT IS ENOUGH TO DROWN OUT THE THUNDERING CRASH OF A WATERFALL CRASHING INTO THE EARTH, THE WATERFALLS SMOKE AND THUNDER RELENTLESSLY ONTO METHUSELAH'S ROCKS WHOSE BARREN HEADS CAN BE SEEN ABOVE AND BELOW.



A FEELING OF BITTERSWEET CANNOT HELP BUT RISE AS YOU TAKE IN THE CRISP, FIRM, FRESH AIR MIXED WITH THE HUMIDITY FROM THE WATERFALL. IT IS A REMAINDER OF THE NATURAL WORLD BEFORE ANY IMPURITIES AND POLLUTION COULD DARKEN THE EARTH. YOU CAN TASTE EACH ELEMENT IN THE AIR, THE OXYGEN, THE HYDROGEN, EACH INHALE, AND EXHALE LEAVING THE BODY DESPERATE FOR MORE. THE CANDIED NECTAR FROM THE COLORFUL FLOWERS KISSES YOUR LIPS; THE TASTE AND TOUCH SWEETER THAN ANY WINE LEAVING YOU DRUNK ON THE LINGERING SCENT.

ONE MORE LOOK AROUND YOU AFFIRMS YOUR BELIEF THAT THIS FOREST'S BLOSSOM REMINISCES A WORLD THAT CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN FROM THE MIND.

Stephanie HONG 4Y

THE CRIES OF A SONGBIRD

I HEARD A FAMILIAR FAINT SOUND OF BUZZING AS I FELT MY LIMBS GO LIMP. MY VISION CONTINUES TO BLUR. I FELT BETRAYED.

HI. I'M 1304. OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THE HUMANS CALL ME. I WOULD TELL YOU ABOUT MY LIFE BUT THERE'S REALLY NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT IT. YOU KNOW, THINGS LIKE WAKING UP, BEING BROUGHT TO THE LAB, HAVING WEIRD INJECTIONS THAT MAKE MY WINGS TWITCH, GOING BACK TO BED COLD AND BY MYSELF, AND FALLING ASLEEP TO THE UNBEARABLE SOUND OF BUZZING. YOU KNOW, LIKE NORMAL THINGS. THAT'S HOW IT'S BEEN FOR AS LONG AS I COULD REMEMBER.

TODAY IS ANOTHER DAY. ANOTHER DAY I WOULD BE TREATED RELENTLESSLY. THE MAN REACHED OUT HIS HAND TO GRAB ME. CLOSER AND CLOSER, HIS GRUBBY HANDS INCHED TOWARDS MY DIRECTION. TO MY SURPRISE, A LOUD BOOMING VOICE CALLED OUT FROM ANOTHER ROOM. THE MAN STOPPED IN HIS TRACKS AND WALKED TOWARDS THE VOICE LEAVING THE CAGE DOOR OPEN. WITH ALL THE STRENGTH I HAD, I LIFTED MY WINGS AND FLAPPED THEM SWIFTLY IN ANY HOPES OF ESCAPING. BUT AT LAST! I DID.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I FELT RELIEF, WHILE THE BURDEN OF CONFINEMENT VANISHED. THE COOL AUTUMN BREEZE WHIPPED THROUGH MY FEATHERS. I COULD HEAR THE DELIGHTFUL SONGS OF SPARROWS AND BLUE JAYS FROM THE TOPS OF THE EVERGREEN TREES. EVEN SO, MY BONY BODY SHOOK. ALL OF A SUDDEN I SAW FLASHING LIGHTS ALL AROUND ME. I FELT MY BODY PLUMMET TO THE GROUND. PERHAPS IT WAS FROM THE LACK OF NUTRIENTS OR DEHYDRATION. BUT I KNEW THAT THIS MAY BE THE END OF ME. MY EYELIDS FELT HEAVY AS I DRIFTED OFF TO WHAT FELT LIKE DEATH.

I OPENED MY EYES IN SHOCK. IS THIS HEAVEN? IF SO, WHY ARE THERE PEOPLE DRESSED IN TAN BROWN UNIFORMS HERE? THEY REACHED THEIR HANDS TOWARD ME BUT INSTEAD OF GRABBING ME, THEY FED ME. NEVER IN MY LIFE WOULD I EVER TRUST HUMANS. HOWEVER, HERE I AM NOW, UNDER THE CARE OF A NUMBER OF THEM. I SAW MANY OTHER SMALL BIRDS THAT LOOKED VERY SIMILAR TO ME IN THE SAME ROOM. FOR WEEKS, THESE PEOPLE WOULD COME INTO THE ROOM AND GIVE US FOOD AND WATER. NO MORE INJECTIONS OR BUZZING NOISES. I WAS IN PARADISE.



YET, I WAS NOT SATISFIED. I MISSED THE BREEZE I FELT WHEN I ESCAPED. THE ONE THAT GAVE ME HOPE. MY LIFE IS BETTER BUT I STILL FELT STUCK. DAYS CAME AND LEFT UNTIL ONE DAY A HUMAN CAME INTO THE ROOM AND GENTLY PICKED ME UP. IS IT FINALLY THE DAY I WOULD REENTER THE WORLD?

I WAS FINALLY OUT AGAIN! I WAS EXPLODING WITH EUPHORIA BUT THE AIR WAS COOLER THAN BEFORE SINCE WINTER WAS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. I HOPPED OFF THE HUMAN HAND AND SAID MY FINAL GOODBYES BECAUSE FROM NOW ON, I WOULD BE A FREE BIRD. I LOOKED AROUND AND SAW VINES AND TALL TREES. A NUTTY SMELL FILLED THE AIR. THE HUMAN HASTILY WALKED AWAY. ALL OF A SUDDEN, I HEARD THE SOUND OF RUSTY METALS RUBBING AGAINST EACH OTHER AS IF IT WERE A FENCE OR POSSIBLY A GATE. I FELT A CHILL GO DOWN MY SPINE LIKE SOMETHING WAS ABOUT TO GO HORRIBLY WRONG.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, I HEARD A LOW GROWL. I SLOWLY TURNED MY HEAD WHILE I FELT MY BODY FREEZING UP. I LOOKED BACK TO SEE A LARGE BROWN BEAST WITH POINTED EARS. SALIVA WAS DRIPPING FROM THE CORNER OF ITS MOUTH LIKE IT HADN'T EATEN IN DAYS. THE LARGE BEAST SWIFTLY POUNCED ON MY FEEBLE LITTLE CHEST AND DUG ITS TEETH INTO MY WINGS. HE PULLED AND PLUCKED MY FEATHERS ONE BY ONE IN A PAINFUL MANNER. I FELT NAUSEOUS FROM THE PRESSURE OF THE BEAST'S BODY WEIGHT. I COULD NO LONGER BREATHE. I HEARD A FAMILIAR FAINT SOUND OF BUZZING AS I FELT MY LIMBS GO LIMP. MY VISION STARTED TO BLUR. THE LAST THING I REMEMBERED WAS THE SMILES ON THE HUMANS IN THE TAN UNIFORMS' FACES. I FELT BETRAYED.

THE ACCIDENT

SOMEONE WAS TUGGING HIS SHIRT, AND A TINY VOICE WAS SPEAKING. EVERYTHING WAS MUDDLED AS IF HE WAS DROWNING UNDERWATER, HIS VISION BLURRY LIKE A PAIR OF CAMERA LENSES TRYING FRUSTRATINGLY TO FOCUS. HIS LEGS WERE DRAGGED AWAY (OR WAS HIS BODY CARRYING HIS LEGS?), DESPITE HAVING NO RECOLLECTION OF SIGNALING THAT ACTION.

THE BLURRINESS OF HIS VISION SOON VANISHED, AND SUDDENLY HE FOUND HIMSELF SITTING DOWN INSTEAD OF STANDING UP, HOLDING THE STEERING WHEEL. AND HE WAS ALREADY HITTING THE ROAD.

WAIT, WHEN DID HE GET INTO THE CAR? HE TRIED TO QUICKLY BROWSE THROUGH HIS MEMORY, BUT THE FILE WAS BLANK; HIS MIND FUZZED LIKE A BROKEN TELEVISION SCREEN FILLED WITH STATIC.

GOD, HE SHOULDN'T HAVE DRUNK TODAY, WHAT MORON WOULD DRINK BEFORE THEY DRIVE? BUT IT'S TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW.

HIS EYEBALLS DARTED TO THE REARVIEW MIRROR, AND DAISY APPEARED AT THE REFLECTION, SITTING AT THE BACKSEAT AND FIDDLING THE ARMS OF HER TEDDY?

(“HEY, UM, MICHAEL?” BRANDON SPOKE THROUGH THE LINE, “SORRY IF THIS SOUNDS ALL OF THE SUDDEN, BUT BOTH MARY AND I ARE BUSY TODAY. CAN YOU HELP PICK DAISY UP?”)

AH RIGHT, HE WAS DRIVING DAISY HOME. DAISY, HIS BEST FRIEND'S DAUGHTER.

“UNCLE MIKE,” SAID DAISY, “WHEN CAN I SEE MOMMY AND DADDY?”

“OH, UH, NOT MUCH LONGER,” MICHAEL MANAGED TO CROOK OUT, “WE'RE *HIC* WE'RE ALMOST THERE.”

“WHY WERE YOU DRINKING EARLIER? MOMMY SAID DRINKING IS UNHEALTHY.”



GREAT. NOW MICHAEL WAS BOMBARDED WITH QUESTIONS BY AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD, AND HIS HEAD STARTED TO ACHE. HIS CONSCIOUSNESS SHIFTED AGAIN AND HIS MIND IS GOING FUZZY AGAIN.

SEEING NO RESPONSE, DAISY UNCOMFORTABLY SHIFTED AGAIN, AND TIGHTENED HER GRIP ON THE TEDDY, “UNCLE MIKE, CAN YOU DRIVE SLOWER? I’M SCARED-”

“DAISY FOR THE LOVE OF GOD CAN YOU SHUT UP FOR JUST ONE SECOND?!” MICHAEL BURST OUT YELLING ALL OF THE SUDDEN. HIS HEAD WAS EXPLODING IN SHARP JARRING PAIN AND THOSE STUPID QUESTIONS ARE PIERCING THROUGH HIS BRAIN ALL THE WAY FROM HIS EAR. “I PROMISE YOU THAT I WILL GET YOU HOME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, SO PLEASE WILL YOU STOP INTERRUPTING ME AND-”

IT WAS TOO LATE.

A HORN ERUPTED FROM THE FRONT, AS TIRES SCREECHED AGAINST THE BLACK ASPHALT PAVEMENT. A PIERCING SCREAM ECHOED AND THE TIRES SCREECHED, AS THE CAR COLLIDED HEAD-ON TOWARDS A TREE. GLASS SHATTERED AND METALS WERE CRUSHED.

THEN SILENCE.

MICHAEL’S HAND GRIPPED TIGHTLY ON THE STEERING WHEEL, SHIVERING, HIS MIND SNAPPED AWAKE AS ADRENALINE RUSHED THROUGH HIS VEINS. BREATHING. HE WAS STILL BREATHING. THERE WAS RED HOT BLOOD DRIPPING DOWN FROM HIS FOREHEAD AND SMEARING HIS RIGHT EYE BUT HE WAS STILL BREATHING. AND THEN HE GLANCED AT THE REARVIEW MIRROR-

A CHILLING, NIGHTMARISH SCREAM BROKE OUT FROM HIS THROAT. THE ONCE YOUTHFUL, INNOCENT CHILD HAD MORPHED INTO A GROTESQUE BEING OF LIMBS, BONES, AND FLESH. POOLS OF BLOOD OOZED FROM ALL OPENED CUTS AND DRIPPED DOWN FROM THE LIMBS ALL THE WAY TO THE PASSENGER SEAT, SPLATTERED ON THE CRUSHED METAL.



DAISY, THE SWEET, LOVING CHILD, AND DAUGHTER OF HIS LOYAL BEST FRIEND LAY DEAD IN HIS CAR.

“WHY?” MICHAEL SOBBED, THE LAST WORDS AND THE BLOODY IMAGERY OF DAISY HAUNTED HIS MIND,

“WHY TAKE HER LIFE, BUT NOT ME?”

BUT NO ONE ANSWERED, AND HIS QUIET SOBS WERE SOON MUFFLED BY THE DISTANT ECHOES OF SIRENS.



FIRST DAY I ARRIVE AT A NEW PLACE

THE CEMENT PATH BROKE OFF ONTO THE UNDIVULGED COAST. MY BARE FEET SLID OFF THE CRAGGY PAVEMENT AND ONTO THE GLAZED SAND, I WIGGLED MY TOES WITHIN THE SAND, ALMOST AS VELVETY AS SILK, ALMOST. THE LITTLE SEASHELLS HIDDEN IN THE SAND RUBBED AGAINST MY FEET BUT DIDN'T BOTHER ME THE SLIGHTEST. I WAS TOO ECSTATIC TO FINALLY SENSE THE SAND BETWEEN MY TOES, THIS BEACH WAS UNFAMILIAR TO ME, BRAND NEW. IT WAS HIS BEACH. HE TOLD ME TO MEET HIM HERE, HE KNEW I HAD A FONDNESS FOR BEACHES.

I SHIFTED MY GAZE TOWARDS THE ENTITY OF THE BEACH. WAVES WERE CRASHING AGAINST THE ROCKS ON THE RIGHT, AN OLD DAME CONTINUOUSLY DIPPED INTO THE TIDEPOLS WITH A RED PLASTIC BUCKET FULL OF LURING SEA URCHINS, SEARCHING FOR MORE. SHE GLANCED AT ME, HER EYES CAPTIVATING, PULLING ME IN. LIKE LUMINESCENT ALGAE, A SPIRITED ETHEREAL GLIMMER. THE CENTER OF THE BEACH WAS CERTAINLY NOT CONGESTED, A FEW RED STRIPED UMBRELLAS SCATTERED LIKE LITTLE CRABS SPRAWLED ACROSS THE BEACH, AND AN INVIGORATING ROUND OF BEACH VOLLEYBALL TOOK PLACE A FEW METERS AWAY. THE MUSIC FROM EVERYONE'S SPEAKERS CREATED A CACOPHONY. TOWARDS THE END OF THE BEACH, THE SAND DISASSEMBLED INTO A LUSCIOUS GREEN RAINFOREST AND A JARRING MOUNTAIN, WHICH SCRAPED THE TIP OF THE SKY, SLICING INTO IT LIKE A SWORD.

LANTAU PEAK, I REMEMBER READING ABOUT IT IN A GUIDEBOOK. THE PEAK EXPANDED OUT LIKE A WALL OF GREEN. SLOPING SIDES CREATING MANY DISTANT VALLEYS. OH, TO GORGE AMONG THOSE VALLEYS ONE DAY, TO TAKE IN THE WHIFF OF FRESH RIVER WATER, AND BURST INTO THE ROCK POOLS AND WATERFALLS. THE BLACK KITES GLIDED AROUND THE DISTANT HEIGHTS, ELEGANT BLACK DOTS DECORATING THE BLUE SKY, SOARING AMONG THE PARAGLIDERS.



I STARTED TO TROD ALONG THE BEACH, BARNACLES ON THE ROCKS GAWKED BACK AT ME. THEY WERE EVERYWHERE. TORMENTING ME TO RUN AWAY FROM THEIR ACICULAR SURFACES. GULPING IN MY TRYPOPHOBIA, MY ANXIETY BIT MY TONGUE CAUSING A RUSTIC TASTE TO INVADE MY MOUTH. I LOOKED AWAY FROM THE PESTERING BARNACLES, FINALLY BEING ABLE TO CATCH A BREATH.

I OGLED BEHIND THE BARNACLE DEFILED ROCKS AND TOOK IN THE TRANQUIL OCEAN, SO STILL, THAT A SINGLE PIN COULD CAUSE A COLOSSAL RIPPLE. THE WATER RAN TO THE SAND AND THEN SLOWLY RETIRED TO THE GLISTENING AZURE. SPECS OF WHITE LAY THROUGHOUT THE OCEAN, SOME HAD BIG NETS TRAILING THEM, AND OTHERS HAULED GREAT WHITE SAILS. FLYING FISH WHIZZED ALONGSIDE THE BOATS, SPLISH! SPLASH! SPLOSH! THE WAFTING SMELL OF SALT FROM THE SEA BREEZE DANCED UNDER MY NOSE AND TINGLED MY THROAT.

BIGGER SPECS OF GREEN WERE SITUATED ON THE HORIZON, SPOTTED WITH TREES AND MORE CRASHING SHORES. I WONDERED WHAT LAY BEYOND, WHERE THE SEA MET THE SKY. FISH? PIRATES? THE END OF THE WORLD? THE HORIZON WAS ENTICING ME WITH OPEN ARMS, I WANTED TO FLEE TOWARDS IT, AND EXPLORE IT. BUT WE ALL ACKNOWLEDGED IT WAS NEVER-ENDING. NO MATTER HOW FAR I WENT, I WOULD NEVER REACH THE HORIZON.

I BOLTED BACK INTO FOCUS WHEN AN UMBER-HAIRED BOY CALLED MY NAME. HIS HAIR WAS IN KNOTS FROM THE BREEZE SURFING THROUGH HIS CURLS. CLUMPS OF SAND WERE VISIBLE FROM THE ROUGH SURFACE OF HIS HAIR. HIS SMILE WAS AS EXTENDED AS AN OPEN CRESCENT MOON, HIS TEETH ENDURED THE SAME COLOR AS THE PEARLY SAND. HIS ARM INFLATED UP AS IF HE WAS JOINING THE SKY, PIROUETTING ALONG WITH THE OCEAN WIND, WAVING ME OVER. HE BEAMED AT ME WITH HIS DEEP AND LURING CAFFÉ AMERICANO EYES. HIS LIPS, BRITTLE FROM THE SEAWATER. HIS SKIN, TURNING A DARK SOFT SHADE OF TAWN. HIS CHEEKS, SUN-KISSED AND CRIMSON. HE WAS LEANING ON AN IRIDESCENT BEACH TOWEL, HOLDING A THICK, CERULEAN, FLIMSY BOOK TITLED "CALL ME BY YOUR NAME" ENTWINED BETWEEN HIS SLIM FINGERS. IT FELT LIKE OUR OWN ELIO-OLIVER MOMENT, IN OUR OWN MINUSCULE ITALIA. UN SOGNO.



I WAVED BACK. MY LIPS CURLED INTO AN UNPROMPTED SMILE, MY STOMACH FLUTTERED TO THE POINT WHERE I FELT LIKE I WOULD DRIFT AMONGST THE BLACK KITES. HE MADE ME FEEL LIKE IT WAS JUST THE TWO OF US IN THIS UN-DESOLATE UTOPIA. LUI E IO. I SAUNTERED TOWARDS HIM, TOO CONTENT TO FEEL THE BOILING SAND SCORCHING MY TOES. "CIAO, IL MIO AMORE".



Lauren LEUNG 3A

THE BIG BUDDHA

THE AIR WAS WARM. A GENTLE BREEZE COMES FROM THE GREEN, DISTANT MOUNTAINS. I WAS SITTING OUTSIDE A STARBUCKS, BEING SHELTERED BY THE DARK GREEN UMBRELLA FROM THE HARSH RAYS OF THE SUN, CREATING STRANGE-LOOKING SHADOWS ON THE SLIGHTLY UNEVEN TILED FLOOR BEHIND ME. IN THE BRIGHT BLUE SKY, THE VERY FEW FLUFFY WHITE CLOUDS LAZILY DRIFTED IN THE WIND. AS I LEANED BACK, I TOOK A DEEP BREATH IN. THE AIR SMELLED OF FRESH OXYGEN FROM THE NEARBY TREES, WITH A FAINT HINT OF THE GREASY CHINESE FOOD FROM A SMALL SHOP NEARBY. THE EDGE OF THE ICONIC GREEN STARBUCKS-COLOURED UMBRELLA WAS SLOWLY BLURRING TOGETHER WITH THE LIGHT BLUE SKY. I QUICKLY BLINKED MY EYELIDS TOGETHER TO REFOCUS MY EYES. I DECIDED TO STAND UP. AS I PUT ALL MY BODY WEIGHT ONTO MY FEET, THE WORLD SEEMED TO SPIN FOR JUST A SECOND. MY EYES FELT HEAVY AS I SLOWLY REGAINED MY BALANCE. A GRATING SOUND OF THE LOOSE PEBBLES UNDER MY FEET.

OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE, I SPOTTED SOMETHING. THE BIG BUDDHA GLISTENED IN THE SUNLIGHT, PEACEFULLY SITTING WITHIN THE LUSCIOUS, GREEN TREES. I STOPPED BY A LITTLE WELCOMING-LOOKING ICE CREAM SHOP. THE WALLS WERE A LIGHT TURQUOISE AND ON THE LARGE WINDOW NEXT TO THE FRONT DOOR, IT WROTE - "ICE CREAM PARLOR". AS I PUT MY HAND ON THE GOLDEN DOORKNOB AND OPENED THE DOOR, A PLEASANT-SOUNDING BELL RANG. DING DING! I WAS QUICKLY FILLED WITH A SENSE OF CALMNESS. THE CLASSIC SONG FROM AN ICE CREAM TRUCK WAS PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND. THIS PLACE FELT JUST LIKE A WARM HUG FROM A LOVED ONE. THE FLOORS, WHICH APPEARED TO BE MADE OF PLATINUM, WERE IN A CHECKERBOARD PATTERN OF BLACK AND WHITE, WITH THE WALLS THAT SAME TURQUOISE COLOR. THERE WERE PICTURES OF THE BIG BUDDHA ON THOSE WALLS IN SIMPLE GOLDEN FRAMES. I WALKED UP TO THE COUNTER AND ADMIRERD THE SIXTEEN DIFFERENT FLAVORS TO CHOOSE FROM. I ULTIMATELY DECIDED ON A SINGLE SCOOP OF COOKIES N' CREAM IN A CUP. AS I TOOK THE FIRST BITE, THE COLD AND SWEET SENSATION SLOWLY MELTED IN MY MOUTH. I HAPPILY EXITED THE PLEASANT STORE AND BEGAN MAKING MY WAY TOWARDS THE BIG BUDDHA ITSELF.



I SLOWLY WALKED TOWARDS THE COUNTLESS STAIRS THAT LED UP TO THE GLORIOUS STATUE, ADMIRING ALL THE INTERESTING-LOOKING STORES ON THE WAY, AS I QUICKLY ATE MY ICE CREAM TO AVOID IT MELTING. THE FUN AND COLORFUL TOY SHOPS, THE REMARKABLE SOUVENIR SHOPS, AND THE AUTHENTIC-SMELLING RESTAURANTS. MOST WERE PLAYING DIFFERENT TYPES OF MUSIC, RANGING FROM PLAYFUL TO ELEGANT SONGS. AS I ARRIVED AT THE STONE STEPS, I BEGAN TO CLIMB. AS I TRIED TO GRAB THE RAILING, I FELT A BURNING SENSATION ON MY FINGER. I QUICKLY PULLED AWAY. THE METAL RAILING WAS SO HOT YOU COULD COOK AN EGG ON IT. THE SUN SLOWLY BEGAN TO SET. AS I REACHED THE TWO-HUNDREDTH STEP, MY LEGS FELT LIKE TWENTY-POUND EXERCISE WEIGHTS WERE TAPED TO THEM. I CONTEMPLATED WHETHER OR NOT TO KEEP GOING, BUT THERE WEREN'T MANY STEPS LEFT. AS I REACHED THE TOP, I LOOKED OUT INTO THE DISTANCE. THE SKY LOOKED AS IF THE SUN HAD SET IT ON FIRE FROM BELOW AND THE GREENERY WAS ALMOST COMFORTING.

Kate Nicole LAI 4C

BIRDCAGE

IT WAS A REGULAR DAY, WHERE I WAS ISOLATED IN MY OWN CRAMPED, TINY LITTLE CAGE. IT'S BEEN A TORTURE IN HERE STARING OUT OF THE NARROW HOLES OF THE CAGE WHILE LOOKING OUT TO THE FREE WORLD WHERE I AM FORBIDDEN TO BE.

I LOVE MY OWNER JOHN, HE TAKES GOOD CARE OF ME AND HE HAD PICKED ME UP FROM THE ROAD WHEN I WAS AT MY LOWEST, INJURED. I WAS SO CLOSE TO DEATH AND HE HAD RESCUED ME. I COULD NEVER THANK HIM ENOUGH FOR DOING THAT FOR ME, CONSIDERING THAT I'M JUST A STUPID BIRD. THAT'S WHY I'M SO GRATEFUL FOR THIS SMALL OLD CAGE EVEN IF IT ISN'T AS IMPECCABLE AS ANY BIRD WOULD WANT IT TO BE.

"BLU! BLU" JOHN SAID AND THEN HE WHISTLED. "YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL YOU'RE LIKE NO OTHER BIRD I'VE SEEN, I'M GONNA MAKE SO MUCH FROM YOU." I HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT MEANT THAT I WAS SO IMPORTANT AND SPECIAL TO HIM

LATER ON DURING THE EVENING, THROUGH THE BEAUTIFUL EASTSIDE WINDOW, I HEAR KIDS SCREAMING AND SHOUTING AT THE TOP OF THEIR LUNGS AND RUNNING AS FAST AS THEY COULD. THEY ALL LOOKED SO HAPPY OUTDOORS AWAY FROM THIS CRAMPED OLD CAGE. I WISH I COULD BE OUT THERE WHILE THEY PLAY AND I CAN WATCH THEM FROM THE TOP OF A TREE, BUT I CAN'T. I CAN'T LEAVE JOHN. HE SAVED ME AND I OWE HIM EVERYTHING TO STAY, I LOVE HIM. MAYBE I COULD TRY TO FLY OUT OF THE CAGE AT 6 AM EVERY MORNING AND RETURN BEFORE EVENING. I DON'T KNOW, WOULD HE LET ME...? I GUESS NOT. I JUST WANT TO BE FREE, IT'S MY DREAM BUT I CAN'T JUST LEAVE HIM LIKE THAT.

DAYS PASSED BY AND THE SUN WAS SETTING, AS I WAS STARING THROUGH THE SAME BEAUTIFUL EASTSIDE WINDOW, I HEARD A GUNSHOT. "BANG" THAT THERE WAS THE MOMENT WHERE MY SWEET, SWEET JOHN HAD BECOME NOT SO VERY SWEET ANYMORE. I COULDN'T BELIEVE MY EYES. I SAW JOHN SHOOT A BIRD, A NOT-SO-BEAUTIFUL BIRD. NOTHING COMPARED TO MY NEON BRIGHT WINGS AS JOHN WOULD CONSTANTLY TELL ME. IT HURTS TO WATCH SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPEN BEFORE MY EYES. WHAT IF IT WERE ME? IF HE KILLED THAT BIRD WHY DIDN'T HE KILL ME? HOW COULD HE DO THIS TO ME? HE KILLED ONE OF MY KIND. AT THAT MOMENT, I KNEW I HAD TO LEAVE HIM. I COULDN'T BEAR THE PAIN.



I NEEDED TO MAKE AN ESCAPE PLAN. THERE ARE TWO DOORS AND ONE OF THEM IS LOOSE. ONE THING JOHN DOESN'T KNOW IS THAT ONE OF THEM DOESN'T CLOSE PROPERLY WHEN OPENED. I'M GONNA PURPOSELY START TWEETING ON THE LEFT SIDE TO CALL FOR HIM AND PRAY THAT HE OPENS THE DOOR. THEN, SNEAK OUT AT NIGHT. IT'S GOING TO HURT. I KNOW, BUT IT'S WHAT I HAVE TO DO.

IT WAS 12 AM AND THE TIME WAS NEAR, I WAS GOING TO TWEET TO CALL OUT TO JOHN. I WAS READY TO LEAVE, I'VE DECIDED IT'S FOR THE BEST. I'M NOT LETTING HIM HOLD ME BACK FROM MY DREAMS. HE ISN'T WORTH IT ANYWAY, HE BETRAYED ME.

SUDDENLY, I HEAR JOHN APPROACHING THE ROOM. THIS WAS MY GREAT TIME TO TWEET AND HOPE FOR A HAPPY ESCAPE! WHEN HE APPROACHED THE DOOR TO THE ROOM I HEARD HIM SAY "I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY I WILL MAKE IT HAPPEN SOON!" WITH A PANIC TONE. OUT OF CURIOSITY I SLIGHTLY ALLOWED MY BEAK TO FIT THROUGH THE CRACKS OF THE CAGE TO GET A GLIMPSE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PHONE LINE, I HEAR SHOUTING. "I SAID TODAY, I PAID YOU THOUSANDS FOR THAT BIRD". AGAIN AND AGAIN, JOHN SAID, "I'M SORRY! PLEASE CALM DOWN, I'LL MAKE SURE TO GET IT DONE!". THAT'S WHEN JOHN GRABBED A TORN, GREY, ANTIQUE BAG FROM THE CORNER OF THE DUSTY ROOM WITH A GORGEOUS BLUE PENDANT AND STARTED APPROACHING ME AGGRESSIVELY. "IT'S TIME BLU" WITH AN EVIL GRIN ON HIS FACE. HE SLAMMED OPEN THE CAGE AND GRABBED ME WITHOUT CARE AND SHOVED ME INTO THE BAG WHERE I COULDN'T MOVE. WHAT SHOULD I DO? I RISKED MY DREAM AND LIFE FOR HIM AND THIS IS WHAT I GET? IS THIS IT? IS IT OVER? DO I EVEN HAVE A CHANCE AT FREEDOM? THERE'S NO CHANCE. IT'S TOO DARK TO SEE, I BARELY HAVE ANY AIR TO LIVE ANY LONGER. THAT'S WHEN I THOUGHT IT WAS THE END UNTIL...

IT HAD COME TO ME THAT THERE WAS A HOLE NEAR THE BOTTOM EDGE OF THE GREY OLD BAG. I HAD NEVER BEEN HAPPIER TO REMEMBER ANYTHING. I FOUGHT AND FOUGHT THROUGH THE CRAMPED DIRTY BAG. I DIDN'T KNOW IF I COULD MAKE IT. AS I WAS FIGHTING MY WAY THROUGH THE BAG TO THE END OF IT, MY LIFE FLASHED BEFORE ME. THE LIFE THAT I COULD'VE HAD. THE LIFE WHERE THERE WAS PEACE, FREEDOM, AND NO SORROW. IT FELT AS IF I WERE IN A RACE AND THAT ONE SMALL HOLE IN THE BAG WAS MY DESTINATION. COULD I MAKE IT? OR WAS JOHN GOING TO BEAT ME TO MY DREAM?



THE CLOSER I GOT TO THE HOLE THE HARDER IT WAS TO MOVE. BUT AT LAST, FREEDOM. I FINALLY ESCAPED THROUGH THE BAG. I FLEW AS FAR AS I COULD. FLAPPED THE BEAUTIFUL WINGS THAT I HAD AS HARD AS I HAD EVER DONE BEFORE. I'VE NEVER FELT BETTER. MY DREAM HAS COME TRUE, OR AT LEAST I THOUGHT IT WAS.

SUDDENLY, MY WINGS STARTED TO FLAP SLOWER AND SLOWER AND SLOWER, UNTIL I COULD BARELY EVEN MOVE. THE CLOSER TIME PASSED BY, THE CLOSER I WAS TO THE GROUND. MY RIGHT WING GOT TORN BY THE BLUEBIRD PENDANT THAT JOHN HAD PUT ON THE BAG TO SYMBOLISE HIS LOVE FOR SELLING EXOTIC BIRDS.

I FELT FREE, FREE FROM ALL THE ISOLATION. MY DREAM WAS INCHES AWAY FROM REACH, AND I COULDN'T MAKE IT ALL BECAUSE OF THE LOVE I HAD FOR JOHN. HE HELD ME BACK FROM MY DREAM.

ROLLING WITH IT

HE WOKE UP TO AN UNUSUAL SILENCE. THE BLANK WHITE AND STUFFY ROOM FELT UNFAMILIAR. THE HOUSE WAS USUALLY LOUD IN THE MORNINGS. HE DECIDED NOT TO WORRY ABOUT IT TOO MUCH AND CARRY ON WITH HIS DAY. HE WENT TO THE ADJACENT ROOM TO CHANGE INTO HIS BLUE NYLON P.E UNIFORM. AFTER HE CHANGED HE PUT HIS COLD GRAY LAPTOP IN HIS RED BACKPACK AND WENT DOWNSTAIRS TO EAT BREAKFAST. HE EXPECTED TO SEE HIS HELPER DOWNSTAIRS COOKING BUT NO ONE WAS THERE. HE DECIDED TO MAKE BREAKFAST HIMSELF. HE COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING IN THE FRIDGE EVEN THOUGH THE FRIDGE WAS USUALLY FULL. HE WENT UPSTAIRS TO GET SOME CASH FROM HIS OLD CRACKED-UP PIGGY BANK. HE WENT DOWNSTAIRS AND PUT ON HIS OLD TATTERED SHOES AND SHOUTED "BYE MOM, BYE DAD!" AS HE USUALLY DID. THERE WAS NO RESPONSE, SO HE OPENED THE CREAKY DOOR TO GET THE BUS.

HE WENT DOWN TO THE BUS STOP AND WHILE HE WAS WALKING DOWN IT STARTED TO RAIN. ONCE HE GOT TO THE BUS STOP IT STARTED TO RAIN HARDER. HE WAITED FOR 20 MINUTES AND THE BUS STILL DIDN'T COME. HE DIDN'T SEE ANY CARS OR TAXIS ON THE ROAD SO HE DECIDED TO GO BACK HOME.

WHEN HE GOT BACK HOME HE SAW HIS FAMILY EATING A FULL ENGLISH BREAKFAST. HE WAS CONFUSED, BUT ALL HIS PARENTS COULD ASK WAS "WHERE WERE YOU?", "WHY DID YOU LEAVE THE HOUSE SO EARLY?".

"I USUALLY LEAVE AT THIS TIME." HE REPLIED "WHEN I WOKE UP IT WAS QUIETER THAN USUAL AND THERE WAS NO ONE DOWNSTAIRS AND NO FOOD IN THE FRIDGE, SO I TOOK SOME MONEY FROM MY PIGGY BANK TO BUY SOME BREAKFAST IN TUNG CHUNG" HE EXCLAIMED.

"ARE YOU INSANE? YOU HAVE BEEN GONE FOR TWO HOURS AND IT'S ONLY 6:30!" HIS DAD SHOUTED.

"WE TOLD YOU TO BE BACK BY 10 O'CLOCK YESTERDAY," SAID HIS MOM.

"DID YOU FORGET YOUR SCHIZOPHRENIA AND AMNESIA PILLS AGAIN?" WHISPERED HIS BROTHER.



HE WENT TO THE BATHROOM TO TAKE HIS PILLS. HE TOOK THE BLUE PILLS AND WENT DOWNSTAIRS AND SAW NO ONE THERE. HE THEN REMEMBERED THAT HE WAS A 30-YEAR-OLD MAN WHO LIVED ALONE AND HAD FORGOTTEN TO GET THE GROCERIES YESTERDAY. HE BEGAN TO CRY ON THE COLD STONE FLOOR. HE WEPT FOR HALF AN HOUR ON THE COLD DUSTY FLOOR. HE WENT UPSTAIRS TO GET SOME ROPE. HE TIED IT TO THE CEILING AND PLACED A CHAIR UNDER IT. HE STOOD ON THE BLUE FLIMSY CHAIR AND PUT HIS SCRAWNY NECK ON THE ROPE AND KICKED THE CHAIR. AFTER A MOMENT HIS LIMP BODY WAS HANGING THERE, DEAD.

20 MINUTES LATER, HIS NEIGHBOR KNOCKED ON THE DOOR TO MEET HIM AND SAW HIS FRAIL DEAD BODY HANGING. SHE SCREAMED AND IMMEDIATELY CALLED 999. THE AMBULANCE AND POLICE ARRIVED IN 30 MINUTES. THE PARAMEDICS SAID HE HAD DIED 50 MINUTES AGO.

“I WAS 20 MINUTES TOO LATE TO WISH HIM A HAPPY BIRTHDAY,” THE NEIGHBOR SOBBED, DROPPING THE CAKE ONTO THE FLOOR. SHE CRIED AS SHE FOLLOWED THE PARAMEDICS WHO PICKED UP THE LIFELESS BODY AND PUT IT IN THE DULL AND COLD BODY BAG WHICH THEY PUSHED INTO THEIR YELLOW AMBULANCE.

THE PARAMEDICS WOULDN'T ALLOW THE NEIGHBOR ON THE JOURNEY IN THE AMBULANCE TO THE MORGUE SO SHE TRIED TO BLOCK THE AMBULANCE FROM MOVING BY WEEPING ON THE GRAY PAVEMENT. SHE WEPT FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE HOURS UNTIL THERE WAS A TRAFFIC BUILD-UP EXTENDING FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER. THE WEEPING LASTED SO LONG THAT PEOPLE WERE GETTING OUT OF THEIR CARS TO GET SOMETHING TO EAT FROM THE NEARBY TUCK SHOP. SOME KIND SOULS OFFERED HER FOOD BUT SHE WAS SO BUSY WEEPING SHE COULDN'T BREATHE.

AFTER SOME TIME, THE AMOUNT OF TEARS WAS SO GREAT SHE WAS UNABLE TO SHED ANY MORE. SHE STARTED GASPING FOR BREATH. SHE THEN STOOD UP AND WALKED ONTO THE SIDEWALK. SHE STOOD BY THE ROADSIDE WAITING FOR THE CARS TO PASS. SHE COUNTED THE NUMBER OF CARS AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE 31ST CAR SHE WALKED RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE MASSIVE WHITE HAULING TRUCK. AFTER JUST A FEW SECONDS, THE TRUCK WAS NOT WHITE BUT RED. BLOOD SPLATTERED EVERYWHERE, AND BROKEN BONES WERE STREWN ALL OVER THE PLACE BUT ONE THING STOOD OUT... A SHINY DIAMOND RING IN A BLACK BOX WITH A LONG AND NEAT NOTE SAYING...



WE'RE NO STRANGERS TO LOVE
YOU KNOW THE RULES
AND SO DO I
A FULL COMMITMENT'S
WHAT I'M THINKING OF
WE KNOW THE GAME
AND WE'RE GONNA PLAY IT
I JUST WANNA TELL YOU HOW I'M FEELING
GOTTA MAKE YOU
UNDERSTAND
NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP
NEVER GONNA LET YOU DOWN
NEVER GONNA RUN AROUND
AND
DESERT YOU
NEVER GONNA MAKE YOU CRY
NEVER GONNA SAY GOODBYE
NEVER GONNA TELL A LIE
AND HURT YOU.

Ines N'DONDA GNOROL 3A

WEDDING BELLS

WHAT A WONDERFUL MORNING IN LONDON. IT WAS SUNNY, BUT STILL QUITE COLD. GEORGE BERRIE, A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN, TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE HIS BELOVED GIRLFRIEND, CHARLOTTE DARLING, OUT ON A DATE. THEY DECIDED TO MEET AT THE PARK. THEY WERE QUITE THE COUPLE.

“WHERE ARE WE GOING? OH PLEASE, DO TELL ME BELOVED!” CHARLOTTE’S EYES TWINKLED WITH EXCITEMENT.

GEORGE WAS USED TO NICKNAMES. YET, HE ALWAYS HAD A HINT OF BLUSH ON HIS CHEEKS WHEN DARLING’S BEAUTIFUL SOOTHING VOICE CHANGED HIS NAME EVERY SINGLE MINUTE. IT WAS ROMANTIC, APPARENTLY. “YOU’LL SEE WHEN WE GET THERE...”

“HMPH! YOU KNOW VERY WELL I DISLIKE SURPRISES.” SHE GRUMBLED

“AH, COME ON LOVE. WHAT’S WRONG WITH SURPRISES?” HE CHUCKLED AS HE SAW HER POUT. HER PASTEL LIPS REFLECTED THE SUN’S GAZE. THEY HELD EACH OTHER’S HANDS AS THEY RAN FROM THE PARK TOWARDS THE ROAD, AVOIDING THE PUDDLES.

THEY WENT TO A DINER. CHARLOTTE FLUSHED WITH EMOTION. THEY HAD FIRST MET EACH OTHER IN THIS VERY PLACE. THE DINER OF LOVEBIRDS, THE DINER OF FAMILIES. SHE WIPED HER EYES WITH HER SKY BLUE HANDKERCHIEF. SHE HAD FIRST WORKED THERE WHEN SHE WAS ONLY SEVENTEEN. HERE SHE IS, ELEVEN YEARS LATER. THE PLACE HASN’T CHANGED AT ALL. THE BRIGHT BLUE WALLS, THE BLACK AND WHITE CHECKERED FLOOR. THE MOUTH-WATERING SMELL OF FRIES COOKING AND THE SOUND OF THE STEAKS SIZZLING.

CHARLOTTE’S MIND FLOWED WITH MEMORIES, AND SO DID GEORGE’S. “THANK YOU! OH, YOU ARE AN ANGEL!”

“IT WAS NOTHING CHARLOTTE, MY BEAUTY, ANYTHING FOR YOU.” HE REPLIED



THEY TOOK THEIR PLACE ON THE SEATS THEY USED TO CLAIM ALL THE TIME IN THE PAST YEARS. THEIR INITIALS WERE STILL ENGRAVED ON THE WOODEN TABLE. THEY ORDERED A BURGER AND ONION RINGS TO SHARE WITH TWO CHOCOLATE MILKSHAKES, BUT GEORGE WAS NOT IN MUCH OF A HUNGRY MOOD.

HIS STOMACH WAS TIED WITH KNOTS. HE HAS BEEN WANTING TO PROPOSE TO DARLING FOR SEVEN YEARS NOW. AS THEY ATE, HE KEPT FIDDLING WITH THE RING BOX THAT WAS PLACED IN HIS JACKET POCKET.

“ERM, MY ONE AND ONLY..” HE MUMBLED, AS HE FINALLY BROUGHT UP THE COURAGE TO ASK HER. HE HAD THE RING, HE HAD THE SPEECH. HE HAD PLANNED TO PROPOSE TO HER THIS VERY DAY, AND HOPEFULLY NOT CHICKEN OUT.

“WHAT IS IT, SWEETIE?” SHE LOOKED AT HIM WITH HER ASTONISHING GOLDEN EYES. SHE WAS PRECIOUS. THE SILENCE GREW. GEORGE WAS NOW STARING AT THE TABLE LIKE A FRIGHTENED LEMUR, HIS NEATLY CUT BROWN HAIR NOW DAMP WITH SWEAT. CHARLOTTE THEN SPOKE, “HONEY? ARE YOU ALRIGHT? YOU’RE VERY SWEATY!” SHE GASPED

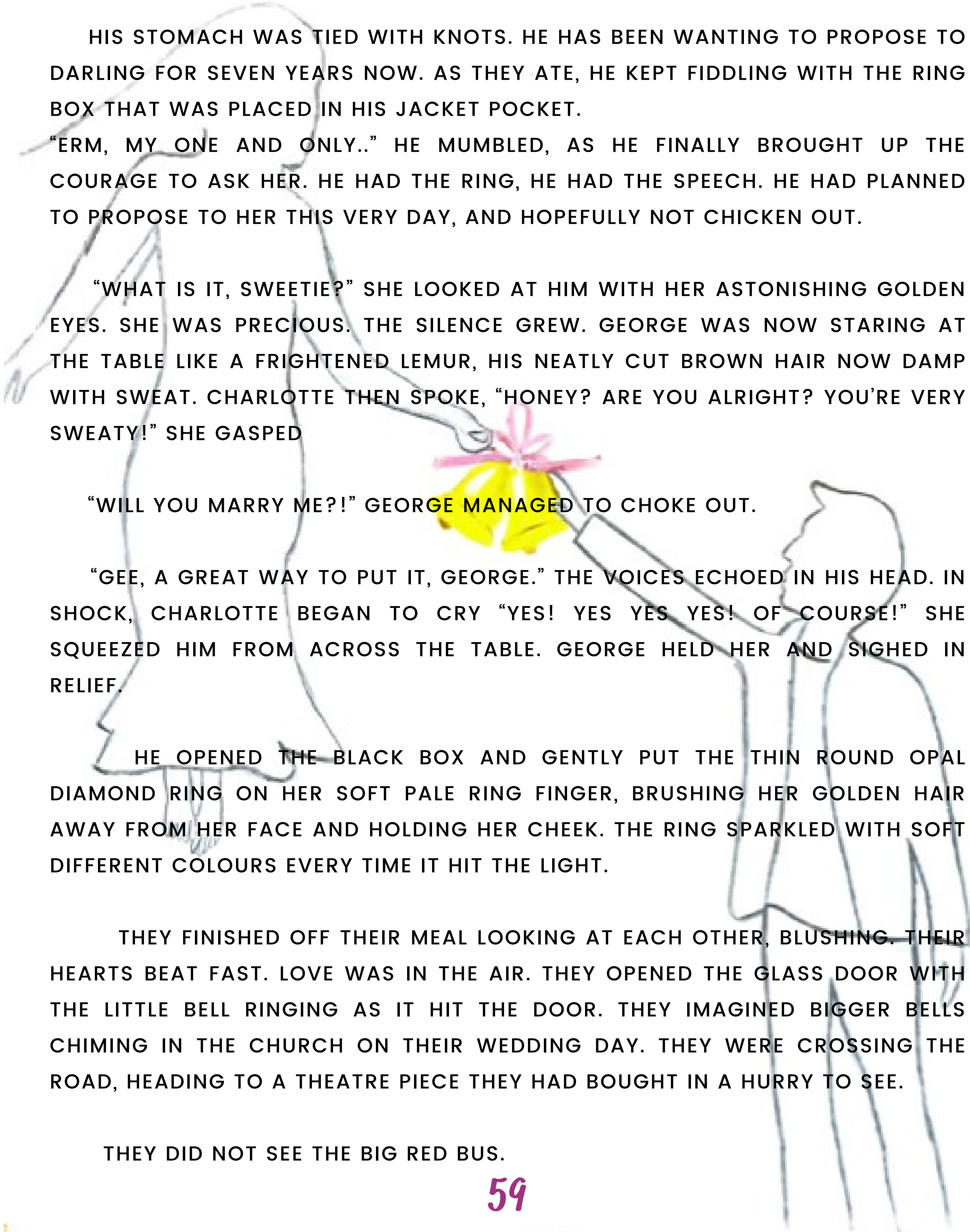
“WILL YOU MARRY ME?!” GEORGE MANAGED TO CHOKE OUT.

“GEE, A GREAT WAY TO PUT IT, GEORGE.” THE VOICES ECHOED IN HIS HEAD. IN SHOCK, CHARLOTTE BEGAN TO CRY “YES! YES YES YES! OF COURSE!” SHE SQUEEZED HIM FROM ACROSS THE TABLE. GEORGE HELD HER AND SIGHED IN RELIEF.

HE OPENED THE BLACK BOX AND GENTLY PUT THE THIN ROUND OPAL DIAMOND RING ON HER SOFT PALE RING FINGER, BRUSHING HER GOLDEN HAIR AWAY FROM HER FACE AND HOLDING HER CHEEK. THE RING SPARKLED WITH SOFT DIFFERENT COLOURS EVERY TIME IT HIT THE LIGHT.

THEY FINISHED OFF THEIR MEAL LOOKING AT EACH OTHER, BLUSHING. THEIR HEARTS BEAT FAST. LOVE WAS IN THE AIR. THEY OPENED THE GLASS DOOR WITH THE LITTLE BELL RINGING AS IT HIT THE DOOR. THEY IMAGINED BIGGER BELLS CHIMING IN THE CHURCH ON THEIR WEDDING DAY. THEY WERE CROSSING THE ROAD, HEADING TO A THEATRE PIECE THEY HAD BOUGHT IN A HURRY TO SEE.

THEY DID NOT SEE THE BIG RED BUS.





UNTIL TOO LATE.

THE WEDDING BELLS STOPPED RINGING IN GEORGE'S HEAD, AS HE SNAPPED BACK TO THE PRESENT. IT WAS TEN YEARS AFTER THE ACCIDENT. HE STOOD IN FRONT OF A CROWD, PATTING HIS CLEAN-SHAVEN FACE, WEARING A NEAT BLACK TUXEDO, FACING A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN A WHITE DRESS AND VEIL. WEARING THE VERY THIN OPAL RING.

THE PRIEST ASKED GEORGE AGAIN. "MR. GEORGE BERRIE? WILL YOU TAKE MS. LAURA RÉNÉ AS YOUR WIFE?" GEORGE LOOKED, FACING HIS BRUNETTE FIANCE. SHE HAD BEAUTIFUL PALE BLUE EYES AND GORGEOUS FRECKLES ON HER PALE FACE.

THE WOMAN HE WAS STANDING IN FRONT OF WAS NOT BLONDE. SHE DID NOT HAVE GLITTERING GOLDEN EYES AND CERTAINLY DID NOT HAVE THE SOOTHING VOICE GEORGE REMEMBERED. HER LIPS DID NOT SHINE IN THE SUN'S GAZE AND HER CHEEKS WERE NOT PALE PINK.

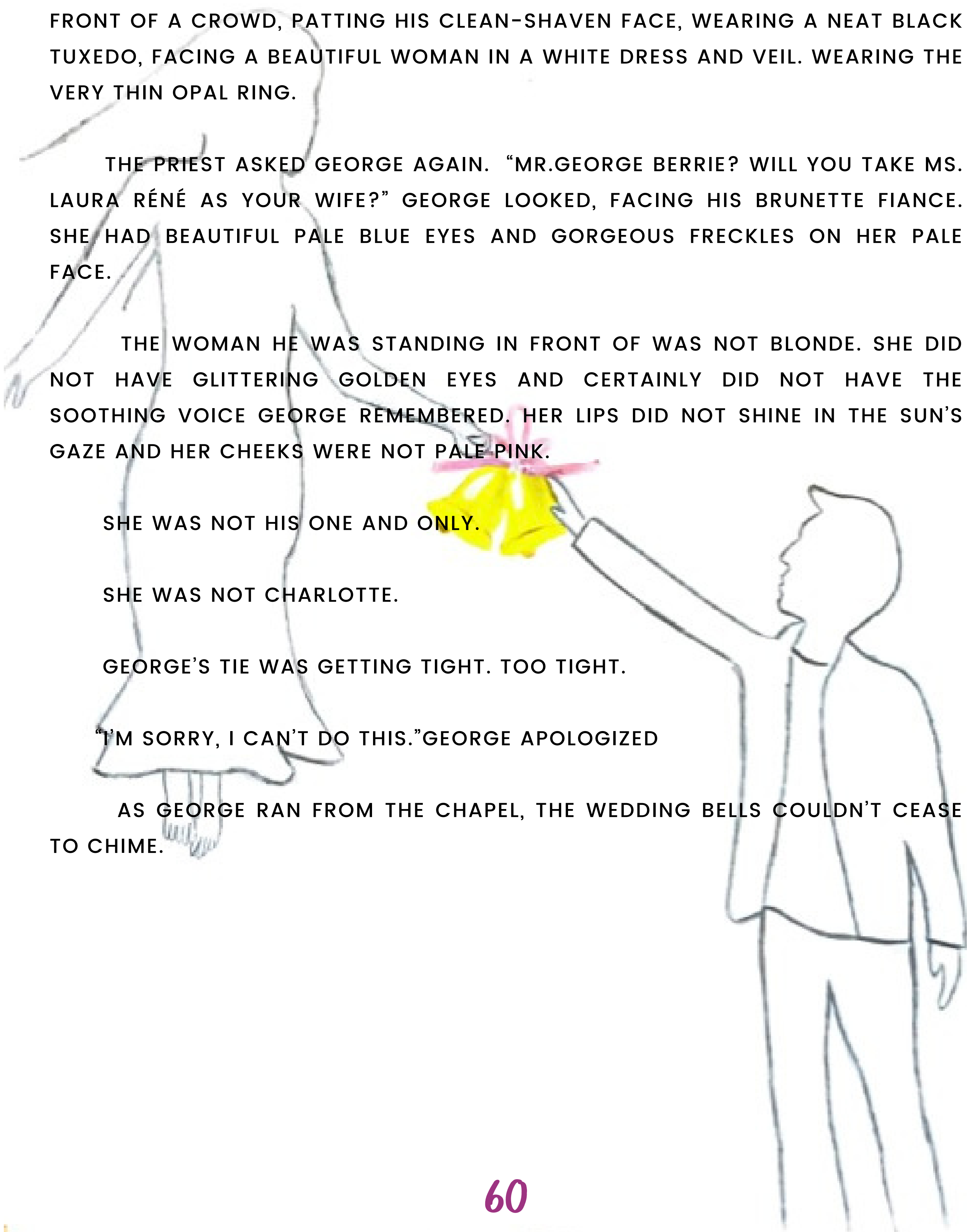
SHE WAS NOT HIS ONE AND ONLY.

SHE WAS NOT CHARLOTTE.

GEORGE'S TIE WAS GETTING TIGHT. TOO TIGHT.

"I'M SORRY, I CAN'T DO THIS." GEORGE APOLOGIZED

AS GEORGE RAN FROM THE CHAPEL, THE WEDDING BELLS COULDN'T CEASE TO CHIME.



Hebe WONG IY

THE LOST NOTEBOOK

DAYS AFTER DAYS, IT FELT LIKE THE SAME DAY REPEATED ITSELF. MY NAME IS ISHEL, PEOPLE CALL ME ISH. I AM A SHOP OWNER WITH MY BEST FRIEND KYU. WE HAVE BEEN BEST FRIENDS FOR 10 YEARS. WE SELL ARTS AND CRAFTS IN OUR SHOP BECAUSE WE ARE BOTH INTO ARTS. I STILL REMEMBER WHEN WE USED TO DRAW TOGETHER EVERY DAY, BUT WE STOPPED WHEN I WAS 12 YEARS OLD. KYU IS A LITTLE TWO YEARS OLDER THAN ME. I WAS AN ORPHAN BECAUSE MY MUM AND DAD GOT INTO A CAR CRASH AND LOST THEIR LIVES WHEN I WAS 6. AND GUESS WHAT? I'M STILL AN ORPHAN. KYU'S MUM DIDN'T ADOPT ME BECAUSE KYU AND I WANTED TO STAY AS BEST FRIENDS AND NOT SIBLINGS. NOW I LIVE WITH KYU, WHICH IS IN AN APARTMENT ON TOP OF OUR SHOP. I ALWAYS PLANNED TO BE MARRIED TO HIM BUT I NEVER KNOW WHEN.

TODAY WAS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER DAYS BECAUSE I DECIDED TO GO TO THE PARK AND BREATHE SOME FRESH AIR. KYU NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING IN THE SHOP SO I WENT THERE MYSELF. I SAT DOWN ON THE BENCH. SUDDENLY A HANDSOME YOUNG GUY DRESSED IN A SUIT SAT DOWN NEXT TO ME. WE STARTED TALKING. HE TOLD ME HIS NAME WAS ELIJAH AND HE WAS A MILLIONAIRE. WE TALKED AND TALKED AND WITH A BLINK OF AN EYE IT WAS ALREADY DARK. HE GAVE ME HIS NUMBER AND WANTED TO MEET ME AGAIN AT THE PARK TOMORROW. I WALKED BACK TO MY SHOP AND WENT TO BED. ON THE SECOND DAY, I WOKE UP AND WENT TO THE PARK AGAIN. AND OF COURSE, ELIJAH WAS THERE. WE WENT TO SO MANY PLACES THAT DAY AND BOUGHT SO MANY THINGS, DAYS TURNED INTO MONTHS AND I THINK I STARTED TO LIKE HIM...

AFTER A LONG DAY OF PLAYING AROUND AND SHOPPING WITH MR. ELIJAH, IT WAS TIME TO GO HOME. "WHERE DID YOU GO? I THOUGHT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE IN THE SHOP? AND ALSO HOW DID YOU GET THE MONEY FOR SHOPPING?" KYU ASKED. I WAS A LITTLE NERVOUS TO TELL HIM THE TRUTH SO I SAID, "I WAS IN THE PARK GETTING SOME FRESH AIR, THEN WHEN SHOPPING..." BUT FOR ME, IT LOOKED LIKE KYU WASN'T BELIEVING ME.



AH, ANOTHER DAY TO GO MEET MR. ELIJAH AGAIN, KYU WAS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN SO I THOUGHT HE WENT TO HIS MUM'S SHOP. I MET MR. ELIJAH AT THE PARK ONCE AGAIN AND SUDDENLY I SAW A SHADOW COMING TOWARD ME. IT WAS KYU, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LOOK AFTER THE STORE." "EXCUSE ME? I WAS SUPPOSED TO LOOK AFTER THE SHOP WHILE YOU'RE HERE CHASING SOME RANDOM GUY? ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?" KYU SAID ANGRILY . "WELL, I HAVEN'T BEEN GOING OUT THAT MUCH AND I JUST WANNA HAVE FUN! TODAY WILL BE THE LAST TIME OK?" I SAID. KYU ANGRILY WENT BACK TO THE SHOP. "OH WOW, ISHELL I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD A STORE." ELIJAH SAID, "YEAH BUT IT'S NOT REALLY DOING WELL," I SAID SADLY, "WELL WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TO ENGLAND WITH ME? I HAVE LIKED YOU SINCE THE FIRST DAY AND... I WANNA..." I STOOD THERE IN SHOCK! ME GOING TO ENGLAND? IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY DREAM! BUT LEAVING EVERYTHING I EVER HAD BEHIND, WAS A HARD DECISION.

I WENT BACK TO THE SHOP EARLIER TODAY AND RAN TO KYU'S BEDROOM. HE WAS LAYING ON THE FLOOR WITH SOME BEER BOTTLES. MHM, HE WAS SLEEPING, TYPICAL KYU. I SLAPPED HIM ACROSS HIS FACE AND HE IMMEDIATELY WOKE UP, "ISHELL YOU SCARED ME!" HE YELLED. I STOOD THERE LAUGHING AND CRYING TEARS OF JOY. "OK KYU, MR ELIJAH WANTS ME TO GO TO ENGLAND WITH HIM, SHOULD I GO?" SUDDENLY KYU'S FACIAL EXPRESSION CHANGED. "WHAT? SO YOU'RE JUST GONNA LEAVE ME HERE BY MYSELF WITH THIS SHOP? YOU KNOW WHAT? YEAH, GO RUN OFF WITH "MR MILLIONAIRE" AND LEAVE ME BE!" HE TURNED AND STARTED CLEARING THE BEER BOTTLES ON THE FLOOR. "KYU YOU'RE NEVER HAPPY FOR ME! HE IS A GOOD PERSON! I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND, WHY WON'T YOU CARE FOR ME?" A DROP OF TEARS ROLLED DOWN MY CHEEK . "NO NO, I AM SO HAPPY FOR YOU. YEA GOES RUN OFF AND BE HAPPY I DON'T CARE." SARCASM MUCH. I HAVE NEVER SEEN KYU LIKE THIS BEFORE... WHY ISN'T HE HAPPY FOR ME? WHY IS HE ACTING SO WEIRD? DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG? I HESITATE.



KYU DIDN'T TALK TO ME FOR A FEW DAYS AND I WAS SO LONELY WITHOUT HIM ANNOYING ME AND HIM BEING SILLY. IT WAS ALMOST HIS BIRTHDAY AND I BAKED A CAKE FOR HIM. WHEN HE CAME BACK TO THE SHOP, I GAVE HIM A PIECE OF CAKE. "WOW, I NEVER THOUGHT YOU COULD COOK," HE SAID WHILE LAUGHING. "I COOK FOR YOU EVERY DAY." I REPLIED, "I SAT DOWN NEXT TO HIM AND ASKED, " SO, DO YOU THINK I SHOULD GO TO ENGLAND WITH ELIJAH?" KYU SHOUTED," YEAH GO! I DON'T CARE. GO AND FOLLOW MR SUGAR DADDY AND LEAVE ME BE!" I THOUGHT HE MIGHT HAVE CHANGED HIS ATTITUDE BUT HE DIDN'T. THE WHOLE NIGHT I WAS THINKING ABOUT WHY HE IS SO ANGRY ABOUT ME GOING AWAY.

THE DAY HAS COME. IT'S TIME FOR ME TO GO TO ENGLAND. I GOT MY BAG AND LEFT WITHOUT SAYING GOODBYE TO KYU. I SOBBED WHILE WALKING TO WHERE ELIJAH PLANNED TO MEET ME. I WAS GETTING A LOT OF DIRTY LOOKS FOR CRYING BUT I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY THOUGHT. I KEPT THINKING "WHY IS KYU LIKE THIS? WHY CAN'T HE BE HAPPY FOR ME ONCE IN HIS LIFE? WHY DIDN'T HE..." SLOWLY WORDS BECAME BLABBERING. SUDDENLY A GUY ON A MOTORBIKE DROVE NEXT TO ME SLOWLY. I SHOUTED," WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT, MOVE! " HE TOOK OFF HIS HELMET AND IT WAS ELIJAH. HE THREW A HELMET AT ME AND TOLD ME TO HOP ON. THE WIND BLEW MY HAIR AS WE DROVE OFF TO ELIJAH'S HOUSE. "DO YOU KNOW YOU LOOK VERY UGLY WHEN YOU CRY? DON'T CRY ANYMORE MY DARLING" I LET OUT A GIGGLE. WE ARRIVED AT THE MALL AND STARTED BUYING GIFTS FOR PEOPLE BEFORE WE LEFT. I BOUGHT A BOX OF CHOCOLATE FOR KYU AND PLACED IT INTO A BIG PAPER BAG. WE DROVE OFF TO THE AIRPORT WITH ELIJAH'S LIMBO. THE CAR STOPPED NEAR THE SHOP AND I GOT OFF TO DELIVER THE GIFT TO KYU. WHILE I WAS WALKING TO THE SHOP.



I SAW KYU'S MUM CRYING AND I QUICKLY RUSHED TO HER AND ASKED HER WHAT HAPPENED," KYU WON'T LEAVE HIS ROOM, HE IS ALREADY THERE FOR THE WHOLE DAY! HE DIDN'T EAT, DRINK OR SHOWER. YOU'RE HIS BEST FRIEND, YOU GOTTA HELP HIM!" SHE SOBBED. "I RAN UP THE STAIRS TO HIS ROOM AND BANGED ON THE DOOR. "KYU... WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? WE WERE BEST FRIENDS FOR 10 YEARS AND NOW YOU ARE NOT EVEN GONNA SAY GOODBYE? YOU KNOW THIS WILL PROBABLY BE THE LAST TIME I'LL SEE YOU... I LEFT A GIFT AT THE FRONT DOOR. YOU KNOW AFTER I LEAVE I'LL PROBABLY REGRET MY DECISIONS. MY WHOLE LIFE YOU WOULD HELP ME DECIDE ON THINGS. YOU WILL ALSO PROBABLY BE HELPLESS TOO WITHOUT MY HELP TO FIX THE HOLES IN YOUR SOCK AND YOU WON'T HAVE ME, HELPING YOU MAKE CHOICES... I DON'T KNOW HOW I'M GONNA SURVIVE WITHOUT YOU..." I SAT IN THE FRONT OF THE DOOR FOR A FEW MINUTES, THINKING OF MY FUTURE, HIS FUTURE... OUR FUTURE. "I LEFT YOU A GIFT AT THE DOORSTEP... KYU, THIS IS THE LAST GOODBYE..." I RAN AWAY QUICKLY. MY VISION SLOWLY BECOMES MORE BLURRY DUE TO THE TEARS I WAS PRODUCING. I RAN TO ELIJAH'S CAR AND DROVE AWAY.

I BROKE DOWN IN TEARS WHILE LISTENING TO ISH. HOW STUBBORN WAS I, "WE HAVE BEEN FRIENDS FOR 10 YEARS AND NOW SHE IS LEAVING AND I DIDN'T EVEN SAY GOODBYE." I SOBBED AND QUICKLY OPENED THE DOOR. THERE I SAW A BAG AND A POOL OF TEARS NEXT TO IT. I OPENED THE BAG AND THERE WAS A BAG OF CHOCOLATE AND A SKETCHBOOK. IT LOOKED KINDA FAMILIAR.

I OPENED THE SKETCHBOOK AND IT WAS FULL OF THE DRAWINGS WE DID WHEN WE WERE YOUNG. SHE'S GONE FOR LIKE A FEW SECONDS AND I ALREADY MISS HER... I WISH THERE WAS A WAY TO GET HER BACK. THAT'S IT! I SHOULD PROBABLY CATCH UP TO HER AND MAYBE I CAN CHANGE HER MIND! I WORE MY SLIPPERS AND RAN OFF. I RAN FASTER THAN I COULD EVER RUN. FINALLY, I SAW ELIJAH'S CAR AROUND THE CORNER, THAT STUPID MONEY BAG.



I SAW KYU CATCHING UP TO ME SO I TOLD THE DRIVERS TO USE THE SHORTCUT. "YOU SHOULD SLEEP FOR A FEW MINUTES, IT'S A LONG WAY," I SAID TO ISHEL. SHE SLOWLY WENT TO SLEEP. LOOKING AT HER SLEEPING REMINDS ME OF MY DEAD WIFE, THEY LOOK SO ALIKE. SUDDENLY I SAW KYU NEAR THE QUARTER GLASS WINDOW. I TOLD THE DRIVERS TO DRIVE A LITTLE FASTER SO THAT KYU CAN BACK OFF AND STOP TRYING.

IT WAS TOO FAR... I SLOWLY RAN OUT OF BREATH AND STOPPED. MY HOPES ARE GONE... IS THIS REALLY THE LAST TIME I'LL SEE ISHEL? AFTER 10 YEARS AND ALL OUR FRIENDSHIP WAS GONE... BUT ALMOST ALL STORIES HAVE A GOOD ENDING AND THIS ONE HAS TOO. SUDDENLY MY MOTHER CAME AND SHE BROUGHT HER MOTORCYCLE! COME ON, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? I QUICKLY HOPPED ON MY MOM'S MOTORCYCLE AND WE DROVE OFF. WE WERE ON THE RUN! WE QUICKLY CAUGHT UP WITH THEM BUT SUDDENLY THEY DID A TIGHT CAR TURN AND... WELL, WE FELL OFF. MY MOM AND I WERE ON THE COLD HARD FLOOR LOOKING AT MONEY BAGS CAR. HOWEVER, THEY STOPPED AND ISHEL RAN OUT OF THE CAR.

SHE STOPPED ABOUT ONE FEAT AWAY FROM ME AND ASKED ME," HEY! I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T WANT ME, WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?" SHE SHOUTED. "OH COME ON! I'M HERE BLEEDING AND YOU'RE STILL GONNA TALK ABOUT THIS?" I SAID. SHE SMILED AND RAN TO ME, SHE HUGGED ME SO TIGHT THAT I COULD BARELY BREATHE. TEARS OF HAPPINESS WERE STREAMING DOWN MY CHEEK AND JUST LIKE THAT. ELIJAH THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BETTER IF HE WAS LEFT ALONE, HE WASN'T SUCH A BAD GUY AFTER ALL.

Hannah FOREMAN 4A

FLIGHT OR FRIGHT

THERE ONCE WAS A BIRD, SMALL AND BLACK WITH WINGS THAT EXPANDED THROUGH THE CLOUDS. SHE WAS PREGNANT AND LAID HER BUNDLE OF EGGS ON A TREE THAT HAPPENED TO STAND TALL JUST OUTSIDE A NEIGHBOURHOOD ALONG A PATH.

SUMMER, AUTUMN, EVEN WINTER PASSED, THE CRACKS STARTED TO FORM ALONG THE SHELLS OF HER EGGS, BUT THEN YOU HAPPENED, YOU STOOD TALL WITH SHORT BROWN HAIR, STRONG PHYSIQUE AND LARGE HANDS. OFF SHE WENT TO GET HER CHICKS FOOD, BUT YOU COULDN'T WAIT, YOU SNATCHED THE NEST WITH ME AND MY SIBLINGS ALL BUT ME STILL TRAPPED IN THEIR SHELLS. BEFORE I KNEW IT, I WAS TRAPPED IN THE CAGE WHICH SAT ON THE MANTELPIECE NEXT TO THE OPEN WINDOW. THERE I WAS TRAPPED ON THE BRANCH FOR WHAT FELT LIKE AN ETERNITY, I WATCHED YOU GET OLD AND HER GROW UP, YOU WERE ALL I KNEW BUT YOU DID NOT KNOW ME .

I SEE BIRDS FLYING CONSTANTLY OUTSIDE, DOGS RUNNING AROUND EVEN THE FLOATING LIGHTS OCCASIONALLY FALL.

SAME ROUTINE, DAY IN DAY OUT; FOOD, PET PLUS THE OCCASIONAL CLEANING EVERY FORTNIGHT. BUT THEN THERE IT WAS, A DIFFERENCE, MY CAGE LEFT A GAPE, IS THIS MY CHANCE TO ESCAPE? THE WINDOW WAS INCHES AWAY, AND INCHES AWAY I WAS FROM FREEDOM. YES. I'M GOING TO DO IT! 3, 2, 1.

THEN I REMEMBERED HER, YOUNG AND HOPELESS, BARELY OVER FOUR, LONG HAIR NEARLY DOWN TO HER THIGHS WITH BRIGHT GREEN EYES. COULD I LEAVE HER WITH THIS HEARTBREAK? THE SOFT STROKES WE SHARE THE ONLY COMMUNICATION I KNOW IS WITH HER, AM I THE ONLY COMMUNICATION SHE KNOWS? I HEAR THE SCREAMS AND THUMPS, SHE'S COMPLETELY DEFENCELESS OVER YOU, SO AM I THOUGH. WHAT IF I LEAVE AND YOU FIND ME, AND IF YOU FIND ME, WILL YOU HURT ME?



NO, STOP! THIS IS YOUR CHANCE, TO BE OUT THERE TOUCHING THE FLOATING LIGHTS THAT APPEAR AT NIGHT AND THE BIG ONE THAT STAYS IN THE DAY. THIS IS MY TIME, YOU DIDN'T LOOK BACK, YOU GAVE ME THIS.

I'M READY, 3, 2, 1. THERE I WAS! FLAPPING THE WINGS GIVEN TO ME BY MOTHER, WEIGHTLESS I SOARED, I'VE NEVER FELT MORE ALIVE! ONE MORE INCH AND...BANG!

THE WINDOW WASN'T OPEN, IT WAS JUST GLASS. FROM FLIGHTLESS TO WEIGHTLESS AND NOW ON THE BRINK OF LIFELESS. THE WORLD WASN'T MADE FOR ME TO BE IN A CAGE, BUT THAT WAS THE HAND I WAS DEALT WITH. MY ENTIRE LIFE WAS GLASS. THERE I WAS LOOKING UP FROM THE FLOOR TO THE MANTELPIECE.

INCHES AWAY FROM FREEDOM 1, 2, 3. 'FLATLINE'

FROM LUNA'S POV:

MY FAVOURITE THING IN THE WORLD IS MY BIRD. SHE IS SO SOFT AND REPEATS WORDS BACK TO ME. I USUALLY FEEL SHE'S THE ONLY ONE THAT LISTENS, SHE'S ALSO THE ONLY THING THAT MY DAD HAS EVER DONE TO MAKE ME HAPPY.

MY DAD IS NOT A NICE MAN, HE LIES. HE LIED ABOUT MY MUMMY NOT SENDING LETTERS, HE LIED ABOUT HIM NOT DRINKING, HE LIED THAT ALL THE OTHER KIDS GOT HIT BY THEIR DADS, HE LIED THAT HE LOVES ME. HE DOESN'T LOVE ME, HE DESPISES ME. I REMINDED HIM TOO MUCH OF MY MUM, OUR EYES, HAIR, EVERYTHING AND HE HATES ME FOR IT. I SOMETIMES HATE ME FOR IT TOO, MAYBE HE WOULD LOVE ME IF SHE WAS STILL HERE, MAYBE TWEETY AND I COULD BE HAPPY IF SHE TOOK US WITH HER. THANKS FOR LISTENING TO ME, TWEETY. HERE, I'LL PUT YOU BACK IN THE CAGE NOW, I LOVE YOU, SEE YOU SOON!

"WHERE ARE WE GOING DAD?"

"TO YOUR GRANDPARENTS'," HE SAID. IT WAS A LONG CAR RIDE, NEARLY THREE HOURS JUST TO WATCH MY DAD LEAVE THEN COME BACK DRUNK. I HATE BEING ALONE WITH MY DAD. IT'S TERRIFYING, I FEEL LIKE HE WOULD RUN US OFF A CLIFF IF I SAY ONE WRONG THING. I DON'T KNOW IF THAT IS SUCH A BAD THING, BUT TWEETY IS AT HOME. I CAN'T LEAVE HER.



THEN WE FINALLY ARRIVED, MY DAD LEFT ME WITH MY GRANDPARENTS, AS USUAL. I DON'T MIND THOUGH, IT'S WAY BETTER HERE THAN IT IS AT HOME. ONE DAY, I'LL TAKE A KNIFE, KILL THAT MAN, TAKE TWEETY AND RUN HERE OUT OF THIS HELL HOLE.

THE DAY WAS NICE. WE PLAYED CARD GAMES, ATE FOOD, AND WENT TO THE PARK WITH THEIR DOG. TWEETY WOULD'VE LIKED THE DOG. HE WAS AN IVORY COLOUR JUST LIKE HER, WITH EYES OF THE SAME SHAPE. EVERYTHING WAS SO SIMILAR, I CAN'T WAIT FOR TWEETY TO MEET HIM!

BUT EVERYTHING SWEET HAS TO COME TO AN END AND THAT'S WHEN MY DAD RETURNED. I FELT EVERY OUNCE OF JOY GET SUCKED OUT OF THE ROOM, EVEN THE DOG'S TAIL STOPPED WAGGING. HE CAME IN AND SAID, "GET YOUR CRAP WE'RE LEAVING."

I COULDN'T WAIT TO GET HOME, TAKE TWEETY AND GET OUT OF HERE, AND GO RIGHT BACK TO MY GRANDPARENTS' HOUSE. THE CAR RIDE FELT LONG, LONGER THAN USUAL, BUT THE ANTICIPATION HASN'T WORN OFF YET.

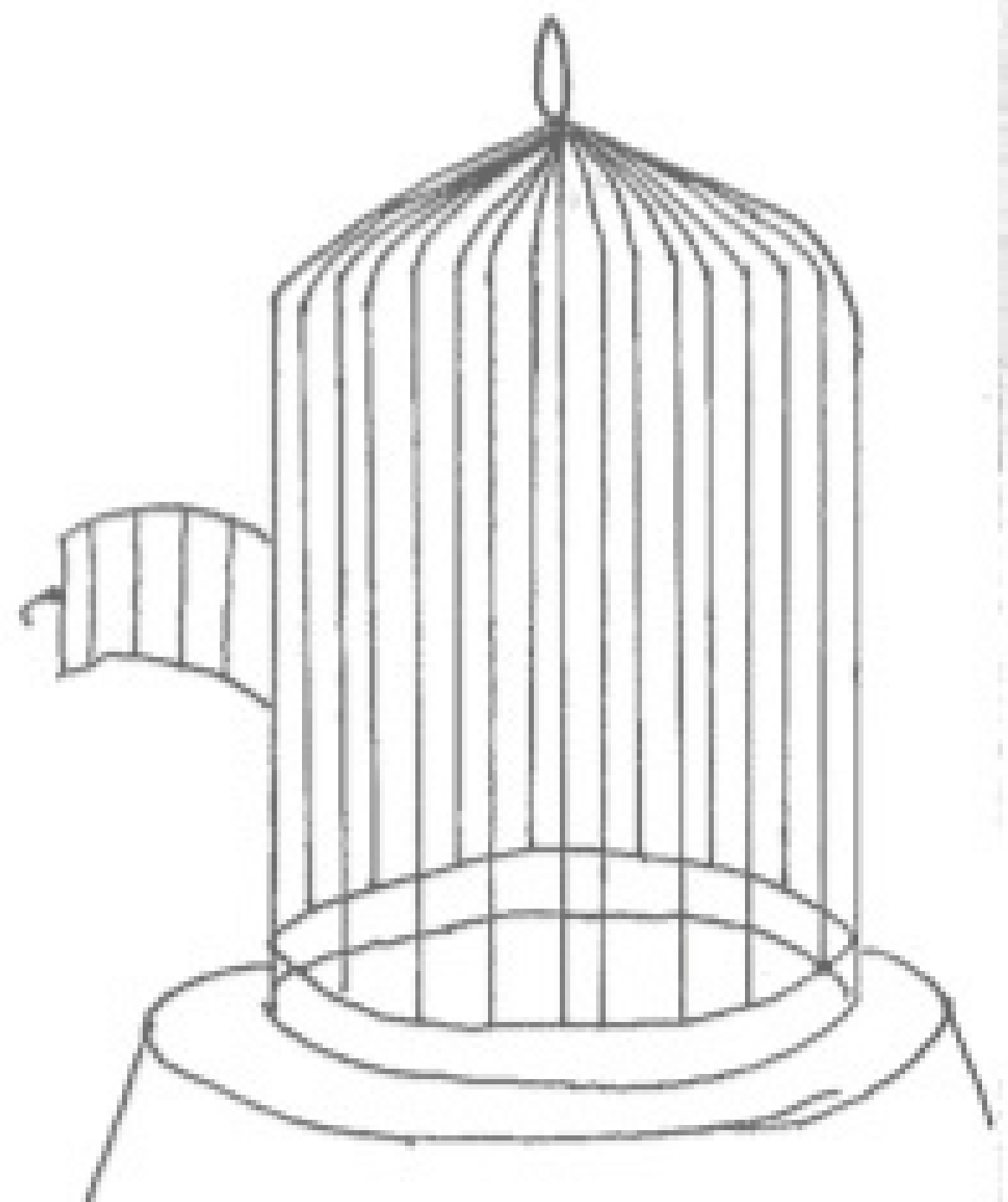
YAY! WE'RE FINALLY HERE. MY PLAN WILL START ON 3, 2, 1...

(AGONISINGLY CRIES AND BREAKS DOWN)



IN THIS MOMENT HER PLAN HAS CHANGED, THAT SAME NIGHT SHE TOOK TWEETY TO THE TOP OF HER HOUSE, SHE LOOKED DOWN AND SAID, "YOU WILL FINALLY BE ABLE TO FLY TWEETY,"

COMPLETE FREEDOM IN 1, 2, 3. THUD



Gia ANAND 4M

AT THE CROSSROAD

“AHHHH!”

A LOUD SHRIEK FILLED WITH AGONY RAN THROUGH THE DARK CORRIDORS OF THE 4TH-FLOOR HALLWAYS. 3 HOURS AFTER EVERYONE HAD LEFT THE SCHOOL CAMPUS, THE INITIAL SILENCE SO QUIET THAT YOU COULD HEAR A PIN DROP WAS SHATTERED BY THE CRY. AFTER SCHOOL HOURS WERE CLOSED OFF AND THE DARK NIGHT BEAMED THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL. THE BROKEN CEILING LIGHTS BARELY SHIMMERED OFF THE CRACKED TILES ON THE FLOOR.

I WAS NOT ALONE. THE HAIR ON MY ARMS RAISED, AND MY FINGERS STARTED TWITCHING AS MY LEGS WOBBLLED TRYING TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE HALLWAY IN ONE PIECE. NO BULLIES WERE HERE SO I SHOULD BE SAFE.

“NOTHING IS REAL, I AM HALLUCINATING. I’LL BE BACK HOME AND EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT.”

I REPEATED THIS TO MYSELF AS THE SOUND TORE THE SILENCE ONCE AGAIN. THE CRIES AND SCREAMS FROM A ROOM NEARBY WOULDN'T STOP, THEY WERE ONLY GETTING LOUDER TRICKLING THROUGHOUT MY EARS. I WANTED TO RUN, SCREAM, CRY AND JUST LEAVE. BUT THE SOUND OF THE WAIL WAS LIKE A NAIL BEING DRAGGED THROUGH A CHALKBOARD AND MY EARS KEPT RINGING. MY STEPS EVER SO SLOWLY MADE MY WAY PAST THE JANITOR'S CLOSET AS I FIDDLED AND FELT THE STITCHES IN MY SCALP.

“HELP ME!”

THE CRY WAS BACK AND LOUDER THAN EVER. MY COMPELLING URGE FORCED ME TO PEEK THROUGH THE TINY WINDOW ON THE JANITOR'S DOOR NEXT TO THE BATHROOMS THAT WERE UNTOUCHED. THE ONE LIGHTBULB INSIDE WAS FLICKERING OFF AND ON AS THE DARK SHADOWS IN THE ISOLATED ROOM REFLECTED ON THE COMPACT AND SUFFOCATING WALLS. THE FLOOR WAS COVERED IN A VIBRANT GREEN LIQUID, DISMANTLED BUCKETS WERE ON THE FLOOR, AND CLEANING SUPPLIES AND TOOLS WERE HUNG UP. I BROUGHT MY FACE UP CLOSER AS MY NOSE TOUCHED THE MIRROR AND SMELT A FAINT TOXIC SCENT.



I NEEDED A CLOSER LOOK SINCE THE OUTSIDE WAS COMPLETELY DARK AND I COULDN'T MAKE OUT WHAT I WAS SEEING EXCEPT SOMETHING LARGE LOOKING IN MY DIRECTION. A FACE. THE LARGE PRESENCE OF THE SUBJECT IN THE ROOM PIERCED ITS EYES AT ME IN DISBELIEF AND SORROW. IT WAS BARELY MOVING AND WAS COVERED IN THE SAME BRIGHT LIQUID AS THE FLOOR. AS SOON AS THEY LOOKED AT ME AND OPENED THEIR MOUTH I KNEW EXACTLY WHO THIS WAS.

“MEREDITH.”

HER NAME ALONE MADE ME FLINCH. MY PALE HANDS SHOOK PROFUSELY AS MY FRAGILE ARMS MADE THEIR WAY TO THE DOOR HANDLE. INHALE EXHALE INHALE-EXHALE. I PULLED THE DOOR, PUNCTURING MY EARDRUMS WITH AN EAR-BLEEDING SQUEAK.

THERE SHE WAS, MEREDITH CHOI. HER BODY WAS ON THE GROUND TWITCHING, HER SKIN WAS SIZZLING AND BARELY HOLDING ON AS HER BRIGHT RED EYES HAD WATERFALLS FLOODING DOWN THEM, CRASHING ONTO HER UNIFORM. SHE KEPT HAVING HICCUPS AND TRIED TO SHOUT FOR HELP BUT NOT A WORD WAS SAID, SHE HAD SO MUCH TO SAY AND EXPLAIN HOW SHE GOT INTO THIS MESS BUT NOTHING, NOTHING CAME OUT. FROM HEAD TO TOE SHE WAS COVERED IN ACID, HER BODY THROBBED AND HER LIMBS FELL NUMB WITH THE CHEMICALS SEEPING THROUGH THEM. IT WAS THE SAME CHEMICAL THAT THE JANITORS WOULD USE IF A LAB EXPERIMENT WOULD GO WRONG, USUALLY USED TO CLEAN UP BLOOD OR BODY FLUIDS. BUT WHY WAS SHE HERE SO LATE? THERE WERE WEAPONS AROUND HER BUT FOR WHAT? WAS SHE GOING TO USE THEM AGAINST SOMEONE?

“PL-PLEASE HEL *HICCUP* HELP ME”

SHE WAS BARELY ABLE TO SQUEEZE THOSE WORDS OUT, EACH SYLLABLE SPOKEN SOUNDED LIKE SHE WAS FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE. MY LEGS GAVE OUT THINKING ABOUT HER MISERY. FALLIN' TO MY KNEES GRABBING THE FLOOR, ALL THE MEMORIES STARTED TO CRASH DOWN ON ME. EVERYTHING THAT SHE HAD DONE TO ME, ALL THE ABUSIVE WORDS SHE CALLED ME, ALL THE PUNCHES WERE THROWN INTO MY STOMACH, ALL THE TIMES SHE SMASHED MY HEAD AGAINST THE LOCKER, THE TIMES SHE TORE MY SKIRT AND STOLE MY LUNCH MONEY, THE TIMES SHE BEAT ME UP IN FRONT OF MY CLASSMATES AFTER SCHOOL, ALL OF THE HORRIBLE THINGS SHE DID TO ME CAME FLOODING DOWN LIKE A TSUNAMI THROUGH MY HEAD.



I LIFTED MYSELF AND LOOKED AT HER HELPLESS SELF WITH MY HAZY AND BLURRY VISION, TO SEE HER BEGGING IN DESPERATION FOR HELP, AS HER SKIN CRACKLED LIKE POPPING CANDY FROM THE ACID AND HER MOUTH STARTED TO FROTH UP SLIGHTLY FROM THE LIQUID DRIPPING INTO HER MOUTH FROM HER TALL AND SHARP NOSE TO HER NATURALLY CHERRY STAINED LIPS, THE THINGS I WANTED SO BAD. BUT NOW IF I CAN'T HAVE THEM, THEN SHE SHOULDN'T EITHER.

THERE WAS A WAR GOING THROUGH MY HEAD. WHAT SHOULD I DO? SHOULD I HELP HER? NOBODY DESERVES TO GO THROUGH THIS... BUT SHE CAUSED MY TRAUMA AND PAIN! SHOULD I GET CLOSER TO HER? I WAS STRUGGLING TO THINK CLEARLY AND I GROANED IN AGONY FROM MY HEAD ACHING WITH THOUGHTS. I HAD AN INFINITE AMOUNT OF OPTIONS THAT I COULD TAKE, AND THAT WOULD ALL ONLY LEAVE ME WITH TWO CHOICES. I COULD EITHER SAVE HER OR WALK AWAY AS HER PUNISHMENT FOR ALL THESE YEARS OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TORTURE THAT SHE CAUSED ME. THIS WAS MY CHANCE TO REBUILD HOPE THROUGH A FRIENDSHIP THAT WAS ONCE LOST MANY YEARS AGO, OR IT WAS FINALLY MY CHANCE FOR HER TO GET WHAT SHE DESERVED, I COULD MAKE HER PAY FOR WHAT SHE DID TO ME FOR SO LONG, I COULD FINALLY GET MY SWEET SWEET REVENGE THAT WAS LONG OVERDUE. I COULD ALMOST TASTE MY VICTORY. I HATED HER WITH EVERY INCH OF MY BODY, MY BROKEN, BRUISED, AND BEATEN BODY, IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO FINISH WHAT SHE STARTED.

A LARGE GRIN SPREAD ACROSS MY FACE AS I BRUSHED MY THUMB AND GRIPPED MY CHIN SMUDGING MY LIPSTICK. I STARED AT HER INTENTLY AND CHUCKLED. CONFUSION AND CONCERN GREW OVER HER FACE AS HER MIND RACED WITH THOUGHTS. I CRAWLED CLOSER TO HER AND PLACED MY BODY ON TOP OF HERS.

“WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”

I GRABBED HER THROAT AS SHE FORCED OUTCRIES IN MISERY, PINNING HER DOWN GRABBING HER AND CONTINUED BANGING HER HEAD ON THE CONCRETE FLOOR UNTIL SHE STARTED TO TURN PALE LIKE A GHOST AND HER BLOOD GUSHED OUT. SWISH, SWISH THE BLOOD-COVERED MY HANDS AND WASH TOGETHER WITH THE ACID. YANKING HER HAIR I DRAGGED HER UNCONSCIOUS BODY INTO THE CORNER OF THE ROOM NEXT TO THE CLEANING SUPPLIES. I TIDIED MY HAIR AND TRIED TO BRUSH OFF THE BLOOD FROM MY SKIRT AND SCHOOL TIE AS I GIGGLED. I FIDDLED WITH MY TIE GLEAMING WITH HAPPINESS, WALKED OUT OF THE JANITOR'S CLOSET, AND LOCKED THE DOOR WHILE HUMMING A TUNE. KARMA BITES BACK, DOESN'T IT?

Fathima BUHARY 4A

GAZE OF LIBERATION

AS THE DUSK DEMOLISHED, DAWN GAVE ITS COMEBACK. "WHAT'S SO REMARKABLE ABOUT THIS? " I QUESTIONED MYSELF WITH ANGUISH, WISHING I WAS COLORBLIND ENOUGH TO ONLY ENVISION CANDLES LINING UP AROUND ME IN WHICH AMONGST I SHALL LAY. SAME OLD THOUGHTS RUNNING ACROSS MY SKULL. YES, I'M USED TO IT. HOW NOT? FROM THE GREASE AND RUST OF MY LUXURIOUS PALACE, SQUINTING MY EYES AND ALLOWING THE CONCENTRATED SOLUTION I EXCRETE, I GLIMPSE MY ANCESTORS FINDING LIFE HIGH ABOVE MY HEAD. EVERYTHING AROUND ME FLEETS WHILE I AM MEANT TO HOWL FOR WHAT'S KEEPING ME AWAY FROM MY TOMBSTONES. AFTER A LONG, "LOVE" IS SOMETHING I HAVE DIED TO BE TAUGHT THE DEFINITION OF. AND YET I KNOW WHAT THE ABSURDITY IS.

MORNING IT IS, THE OLD LADY IN BLACK GETS UP, FEEDS HERSELF, RUNS ERRANDS, AND MUCH MORE THAT I FORCE MYSELF TO BLOCK IT FROM MY SIGHT AND FINALLY LOCK MY WEAK EYES WITH HER WRINKLED AND HALF-OPENED ONES. SPLASHING PARTICLES FOR ME TO INTAKE. WITH A DELIBERATE MOTION, SHE TURNS AWAY. UNLIKE USUAL, SHE MISSED SOMETHING QUITE BASIC, PROBABLY FROM HER PERSPECTIVE. BUT MY WHOLE LIFE DEPENDS ON THE RUSTY AND BRINY-SMELLING LOCK THAT ALLOWS THE SWEET TASTE OF FRESHLY GENERATED AIR TO GUSH ONTO MY FACE. IT WAS THE STATE OF THE OPENED GATE OF HEAVEN THAT USHERED ME FORWARD WITH ITS MAGNETIC FORCE. WITH NO THOUGHTS, I ARCHED MY BACK GENTLY REMOVING MYSELF FROM MY MAGNIFICENT PALACE WHICH I REMEMBER SINCE THE DAY THE WORLD HEARD MY CRY. WITH COMPLETE SILENCE, I RELEASED MYSELF TO OUTER SPACE, PREPPED MY WINGS WIDE-AWAKE, ALLOWING MY CRAMPS TO UNBIND, AND SET MY WAY OFF TO THE NEVERLAND.

THE VIVID AND LUMINOUS COLORS STRUCK MY EYES WITH A FLASH, DRAGGING ME INTO THE UNKNOWN. THE COLOSSAL BUILDINGS WHICH COVER THE SUN BLAZING WITH GLORIOUS COLORS, AND THE VERDANT TREES BEING VANISHED FOR CEASELESS ROADS FINALLY MADE ME GRATEFUL FOR THESE EYES WHICH ONLY DARKNESS WAS VISIBLE, UNTIL NOW. I VERILY DOUBTED WHETHER THESE MOMENTOUS PLACES EVER-PRESENT THEMSELVES. IMAGINING MYSELF STANDING ON TOP OF THE HUGE MOUNTAIN WITH PATCHES OF SNOW. THE SOUND OF MY KIND HUMMING AND CHIRPING SWIRLS AND HITS STRAIGHT INTO MY EARS. THE SOOTHING FRAGRANCE OF THE RAW GRASS AND INFINITE FLAT MEADOWS. AND OUR EYES WHICH SHALL GO BLIND BY GLIMPING THE DAZZLING COLORS WHICH GLOW VIGOROUSLY AND ELECTRIFYING MY EYES EXPRESS A DEFINITION OF LIFE.



“GLANCE OVER THERE!” I DEMANDED MYSELF TO CATCH SIGHT OF MANY WONDERS THAT ARE YET TO BE EXPLORED. A BUNCH OF EBULLIENT KIDS CHASING AROUND AND PLAYING HIDE AND SEEK. THE BUOYANT LAUGHTER SURE IS WORTHWHILE FOR MY EARS. MOTHERS WERE CAREFREELY CHANTING EACH BEAT AND FARMERS HARVESTING WITH GLEE AS IF ALL THEIR BURDENS WERE FAR FROM LIGHT. THE WINDOWS HAVE NOW OPENED WIDE FOR ME TO FIND LIFE AND SIGHTING THIS TREMENDOUS PANORAMA OF LIFE PROVES IT ALL. THIS SHOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY ACKNOWLEDGED AND CHERISHED. TAKE A SECOND TO REALIZE THE HUMONGOUS DIVERGENCE IN LIVING AMONG THE EXCEEDINGLY POLLUTED METAL OBSTACLE WHICH DEMOLISHES THE ATMOSPHERE AND LEAVES NO MARK OF LIFE AND THE LAND OF PEACE AND FREEDOM FILLED ABUNDANTLY. IN FACT, I FEEL GIFTED TO RELISH THIS AROMA WHICH SHOULD NEVER BE REPLACED.

WITHIN FRACTIONS OF SECONDS, MY SIGHT FELL UPON A HUGE BIRD, THINKING IT WAS PROBABLY ONE OF MY KIND. AS I ENLARGED MY PUPILS AND FOCUSED ON ITS FIERCE MOTION IN A VERY INTIMIDATING MANNER, I NOTICED THE BOLD SQUEAL THAT MADE ME SHIVER AND DOUBT ITS NATURE. NOT AWARE OF WHAT LIFE IS, I WASN'T COMMANDED TO DEFEND MYSELF, I WAS HARSHLY GRABBED BY A VERY LARGE CREATURE, HANGING MID-AIR. I WAS DEVASTATED AND REALIZED MY LIFE WAS ON THE CLIFF'S EDGE.

WHILE PROCESSING MY DILEMMA, I PICTURED MYSELF FROM APPROXIMATELY 10 YEARS BACK, BEING HELD WITH SUCH LOVE AND CARE BY THE SAME OLD LADY IN YELLOW WHO WAS ONCE A CHEERFUL LADY WITH HER OTHER HALF. THEY SHARED WITH ME THEIR LOVE, WHICH THEY HAD IN ABUNDANCE. THEIR CONNECTION WAS PICTURESQUE, IT WAS THE LIFE THAT I ONCE RELISHED. THEY SHED CARE AND PROTECTED ME AS IF I WAS THEIRS. MAKING ME FEEL COMFORTABLE, SPREADING WARMTH AND IMPORTANCE. FROM WHEN I FIRST ENGRAVED MY EXISTENCE TILL THE LOSS OF EXISTENCE OF HER LEADING LIGHT, MY LIFE WAS AT ITS PEAK, I ONLY MET HAPPINESS AND GRIEF WAS OUT OF SIGHT. I DIDN'T GET TO KNOW WHAT THAT BRINE-SMELLING CAGE WAS, I WAS ALLOWED TO ROAM AROUND WITH A CEASELESS SMILE. AND ONLY WHEN THE MAN WAS RAISED HIGH SINGING WITH THE ANGELS FROM A DREADFUL ACCIDENT, THE LADY INTERNALLY DIED, SHE WAS LIFELESS NOT KNOWING HOW TO PROCESS AND ACCEPT THIS. SHE SUPPOSED I DIED AS WELL, THINKING THAT I ONLY DESERVED TO BE A PART OF HER CONTENTMENT BUT NOT AGONY. SHE BROUGHT UP THIS WEIRD-LOOKING OBJECT IN WHICH I BARELY HAD ROOM TO UNFURL MY WINGS. SINCE THEN, THE AFFLICTION BEGAN.



JUMPING OUT TO REALITY, MY INTENSE FEAR WAS BUILDING UP MAKING MY PULSE RATE REACH ITS SPIRE. AS THE INTENSITY COMES TO A MODERATE LEVEL, THE HUGE CREATURE SLOWS DOWN ZOOMING ACROSS AN UNFAMILIAR YET FAMILIAR HOUSE, IMAGING A LADY WITH PANIC IN HER EYES STANDING ON THE DOORSTEP OF A DILAPIDATED HOUSE. AS SOON AS SHE LOCKED MY EYES FILLED WITH FEAR AND SURPRISINGLY, I FELT A SIGH OF RELIEF FROM SOMEONE I HAVE ONLY HAD TENSE EMOTIONS AND AGONY TOWARDS. WITH A SWIFT MOTION, SHE GATHERED A FEW ROCKS AND SLAPPED THEM ON ITS ABDOMEN, A VERY VULNERABLE ORGAN, AND WITH A BLARING SCREECH, IT LOST ITS FRICTION AND GRIP THAT HAD BEEN TIGHTLY SECURING ME. I FELL A FEW FEET BUT MANAGED TO FLY MY WAY DOWN TO THE HOUSE THAT GLOWED IN FRONT OF MY EYES. WITH A SMILE OF CONSOLATION I LANDED ON HER FIST, WE BOTH GAZED IN THE LIBERATION, BRINGING ME DEJA VU OF HER SMILE WHICH SHE COMPOSED 10 YEARS AGO. PROUD OF HOW I MADE HER FEEL LOVED ONCE AGAIN, OUR LIVES TAKE A TURN, FOR THE BEST, AND TOGETHER WE BELIEVE THERE'S MORE TO INDULGE.

Ethan CHAN 3K

DON'T LET GO

DO YOU EVER GET SO FRUSTRATED THAT YOU JUST FEEL LIKE GIVING UP? IT WAS A GREY FRIDAY MORNING DURING THE STUDENT BRIEFING. EVERYONE WAS TALKING ABOUT THE REPORT CARD SOON TO BE ANNOUNCED. DESPITE THE AWFUL WEATHER, MOST OF THE CLASS ARRIVED EARLY. MATT WAS SITTING AT THE BACK OF THE CLASSROOM PEERING THROUGH THE WINDOW INTO THE GLOOMY SKY. THE SKY ABOVE WAS FULL OF TUMULTUOUS, DARK, RAGGED CLOUDS. AS CURTAINS OF RAIN BEAT DOWN AND WINDS THRASHED ONTO THE TREETOPS A BOLT OF LIGHTNING TORE THROUGH THE SKY FOLLOWED BY A DEAFENING BANG. FOR A MOMENT, THE CLASS CEASED AND A SUDDEN PAUSE OF SILENCE BROKE IN.

GROWING UP WITH A SINGLE MOTHER IN HONG KONG WASN'T EASY. YOU'LL HAVE A LOT MORE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT PEOPLE FROM NORMAL FAMILIES NEVER REALIZE. MATTHEW JUST TURNED 15 AND THIS WAS HIS FIRST YEAR IN HIS SENIOR FORM AT HIS SECONDARY SCHOOL. THE SCHOOL HAS BEEN ROUGH FOR HIM ESPECIALLY MORE RECENTLY. HIS TEACHERS WERE ALWAYS UNHAPPY WITH HIS RESULTS, THEY KEPT ENCOURAGING HIM TO STUDY BUT HE DIDN'T BELIEVE IN HIS ABILITIES AND EFFORT, SO HE NEVER FOUND A REASON TO WORK HARDER. GROWING UP, MATTHEW STRUGGLED WITH MAKING CONVERSATIONS. HIS ONLY FRIEND ALEX, ALSO HIS CLASSMATE, LIVED NEXT DOOR TO HIM. THEY'VE GROWN UP TOGETHER AND HAVE SLOWLY BECOME BEST FRIENDS. UNLIKE MATT, ALEX WAS ALWAYS TOP OF THE CLASS FOR EVERY SUBJECT.

AS THE TEACHER ENTERED, EVERYONE RETURNED TO THEIR SEATS PROMPTLY AS SHE BEGAN TO SPEAK, "GOOD MORNING CLASS, AS YOU KNOW, TODAY YOU'LL RECEIVE YOUR FINAL REPORT CARD. YOUR AVERAGE SCORE FOR ALL YOUR EXAMS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER YOU WILL ADVANCE TO THE NEXT YEAR'S GROUP IN THE FOLLOWING SCHOOL YEAR. I'M GLAD TO ANNOUNCE THAT EVERYONE PASSED... EXCEPT FOR ONE STUDENT. I WILL BE SPEAKING TO HIM AFTER SCHOOL."

WHILE THE TEACHER CALLED UP THE STUDENTS TO RETRIEVE THEIR PAPERS, THERE WAS A LOT OF CHATTERING IN THE CLASS. ONE AFTER ANOTHER, MATTHEW WATCHED AS EVERYONE IN FRONT OF HIM SHUFFLED INTO THE FRONT OF THE ROOM. HE STOOD UP RELUCTANTLY, HIS HEART THUMPING AGAINST HIS RIBS LIKE A DRUM AND HIS MIND WAS FILLED WITH A MILLION THOUGHTS. AS COLD SWEAT Poured DOWN THE SIDE OF HIS FACE, HE STARTED TO FEEL LIGHTHEADED, AND HIS BRAIN WAS SPINNING IN CIRCLES.



ALL OF A SUDDEN, HIS BODY WAS PARALYZED AND HE THOUGHT HE WAS GONNA THROW UP. WHAT IF IT'S ME? WHY DIDN'T I STUDY HARDER? NO, WHAT AM I THINKING? MATTHEW, FACE IT. HE STRUTTED FORWARD A STEP AT A TIME, INCHING TOWARDS THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS WORST NIGHTMARE. FACING THE TEACHER, MATTHEW REACHED OUT HIS ARMS AND LOWERED HIS HEAD TO HIDE HIS FACE. HE HELD THE PAPER FACED DOWN, NOT DARING TO TURN IT OVER AS HE HURRIED BACK TO HIS SEAT.

"MATT, WHAT DID YOU GET?" ALEX QUESTIONED, APPROACHING HIS FRIEND.

"I WORRY MIGHT HAVE FAILED THIS TEST," HE WHISPERED

"WHY? DID YOU STUDY?"

"N-NOT REALLY, IT WOULDN'T HELP ME ANYWAY."

"MAYBE YOU SHOULD TRY DOING SOME REVISION. THIS TIME AROUND, THERE'S NOTHING YOU COULD DO BUT, GOOD LUCK," ALEX PATTED HIS FRIEND'S BACK AND LEFT WITH A CURT NOD AND FAINT SMILE. MATTHEW TRAVELED DISCREETLY TO THE CORNER OF THE CLASSROOM AND METICULOUSLY CHECKED IF ANYONE WAS WATCHING. GRADUALLY, HE FLIPPED OVER HIS RESULTS PRINTED ON A PLAIN, UNCUT, PERFECTLY WHITE THICK SHEET OF PAPER. HE CHECKED HIS SCORE...

HIS CHIN TREMBLED. HE LET HIS TEARS FALL SILENTLY AS HIS EYES BECAME SWOLLEN. STILL UNAWARE OF WHAT HAPPENED, ALEX CAME AROUND. HE JOKED, "WHAT'S YOUR SCORE? I BET YOU DID FINE, YOU'LL HAVE TO BE DUMB TO FAIL." HEARTBROKEN, HIS WORDS ONLY ADDED TO HIS TORMENT. "I DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT," HE SPOKE IN A DISTANCED, FLAT, LIFELESS VOICE. HIS VOICE BROKE WHILE HE TALKED.

REALIZING HE MADE A SCANDALOUS MISTAKE, ALEX TRIED HIS HARDEST TO APOLOGIZE, "I'M SO-SO-SO SORRY, I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT YOU. ARE YOU OKAY?"

"SHUT UP!" HE EXCLAIMED, A LONE TEAR ROLLED DOWN HIS CHEEK AND HE DASHED OUT OF CLASS AFTER SMASHING A CHAIR.

"SCREW MY LIFE," HE THOUGHT, "AT LEAST THERE'S NO WAY TODAY COULD GET ANY WORSE."



SOON AFTER, MATTHEW WAS CALLED INTO THE SCHOOL OFFICE. THE STAFF, AN OLD LADY AT THE COUNTER, MENTIONED TO HIM THAT HIS DAD WAS ON THE WAY TO PICK HIM UP FOR SOMETHING URGENT. WAIT, MY DAD? THIS COULDN'T BE REAL. WHAT'S HAPPENING? MATTHEW HAD NEVER ACTUALLY MET HIM. HE ONLY SAW HIM FROM PICTURES HIS MOM SHOWED HIM LONG AGO. IN LESS THAN 5 MINUTES, A MAN WEARING A SUIT RUSHED IN, HIS WHOLE BODY DRENCHED IN THE RAIN BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE LOOKED STARTLED. IT WAS HIS DAD. BEFORE MATTHEW EVEN HAD TIME TO REACT, HE BROKE THE DREADFUL NEWS TO HIS SON.

“J... JUST NOW YOUR MOM GOT INTO A CAR ACCIDENT AND NOW SHE'S IN THE HOSPITAL. I'M PICKING YOU UP TO GO SEE HER RIGHT NOW,” HE EXPLAINED AS HE LOOKED INTO MATT WITH AN EMPTY STARE.

THE SITUATION WAS GENUINE. HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN ALL OF A SUDDEN? THIS IS ALL MY FAULT. THEY BOARDED A TAXI. ALONG THE JOURNEY, HIS EYES LOOKED THE LONG DISTANCE WITH VACANT EYES. HE TRIED TO CONTAIN HIS EMOTIONS AS EVERY SECOND FELT SLOWED DOWN. WHEN THEY REACHED THE HOSPITAL, MATTHEW WAS REDUCED TO TEARS THE MOMENT THE DOCTOR INFORMED THEM THAT IT WAS TOO LATE. HIS HEART SANK. HIS MOTHER HAD DIED, HE NEVER HAD THOUGHT THAT THE LAST TIME HE'D SEE HER WAS WHEN HE LEFT IN THE MORNING. FEELING ABSOLUTELY POWERLESS, HE LOWERED HIS HEAD INTO HIS HANDS, SHOULDERS QUAKING AS HE FOUGHT BACK THE GRIEF. THAT NIGHT, MATTHEW CRIED HIS EYES OUT OVER HIS MOM. HE REMEMBERED THAT EVERY TIME HE FELL, HIS MOM WAS ALWAYS THERE TO COMFORT HIM. IT WAS WHEN SHE WAS GONE, THAT HE FINALLY CAME TO REALIZE HOW IMPORTANT SHE WAS TO HIM. WITHOUT HIS MOM, HE HAS LOST ALL HOPE.

THE FOLLOWING DAY IN SCHOOL, NOBODY KNEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO MATTHEW. EVERYONE WONDERED WHAT HAPPENED TO MATTHEW, BUT HE KEPT IT TO HIMSELF EVEN FROM HIS BEST FRIEND. THERE WAS A GEOGRAPHY TEST IN THE 4TH PERIOD. DURING THE TEST, HE SLOUCHED IN HIS CHAIR ALREADY GIVEN UP, RECALLING EVERYTHING FROM YESTERDAY. OUT OF NOWHERE, CARTER'S HAND SHOT INTO THE AIR, SIGNALING THE TEACHER. MATTHEW WAS SUMMONED OUT OF THE CLASSROOM TO BE INTERROGATED. HE WAS RELEASED WITH A FINAL WARNING BEFORE THE TEACHER WOULD CONTACT HIS PARENTS FOR CHEATING.

MATTHEW HAS BLOCKED HIS BEST FRIEND ON ALL HIS SOCIAL MEDIA AND REJECTED HIS NUMEROUS CALLS.

“MATT,” ALEX GREETED HIM IN AN UNINVITING TONE. MATTHEW TRIED TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF, “YOU KNOW I WASN’T TRYING TO COPY YOU IN THE TEST JUST NOW,” “THEN WHAT WERE YOU DOING?” HIS FRIEND OBJECTED, “YOU WERE STARING IN MY DIRECTION FOR WELL, OVER A MINUTE. IT ISN’T MY FAULT SINCE YOU NEVER CARE TO STUDY.”

“FINE! I DON’T NEED YOU TO BELIEVE ME. I SHOULD’VE NEVER TRUSTED YOU!”

ARRIVING HOME, MATTHEW HEADED TO HIS ROOM AND SLAMMED THE DOOR. HIDING UNDER THE SHEETS, HE TOOK A DEEP BREATH, PEEKING THROUGH THE SLIGHT HOLE HE CREATED. THE ROOM REMAINED UNCHANGED AS A RAY OF LIGHT SHONE THROUGH THE WINDOW.

IN THE EVENING, THERE WAS A HEAVY KNOCK ON HIS BEDROOM DOOR. IT WAS HIS FATHER, WHO CAME OVER TO CHECK UP ON HIM, BUT HE IGNORED HIM AND SHOUTED FOR HIM TO LEAVE. AFTER HE LEFT, MATTHEW SNEAKED INTO THE BACK STAIRWAY, CLIMBING THE STAIRS UNTIL HE FINALLY REACHED THE TOP.

MATTHEW CLENCHED ONTO THE COLD, METAL RAILING, STEADILY CLIMBING OVER IT. A COOL BREEZE BRUSHED GENTLY AGAINST HIS FACE. HE LOOKED HESITANT AT EVERYTHING BENEATH HIS FEET. THE BUSTLING STREETS WERE GLOWING AND THE DISTANCED CHATTERING FROM BELOW. WHY DOES IT ONLY HAPPEN TO ME? THIS IS UNFAIR, EVERYTHING IN MY LIFE IS WRONG. WHY DIDN’T I DO ANYTHING TO SAVE MOM? CLOSING HIS EYES, HE LEANED FORWARD AND LET GO OF ONE HAND, HE COUNTED DOWN INSIDE HIS MIND, “5-4-3-2...” WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE HEARD RAPID FOOTSTEPS AND PANTING APPROACHING, HE TURNED AROUND...

ALEX WAS STANDING THERE, STUNNED. HE GATHERED HIS THOUGHTS AND SPOKE TO HIS FRIEND, “MATT! WAIT! I’M SORRY. I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL BUT YOU HAVE TO THINK THIS THROUGH. WHAT ABOUT YOUR MOM, DO YOU THINK SHE WANTS TO SEE YOU GIVE UP. IT’S NEVER TOO LATE.” A BRIEF MEMORY FLASHED THROUGH HIS MIND AS HE RECALLED HIS MOTHER’S LAST WORDS: WHEN HE WAS IN HIS BEDROOM, HE CHECKED HIS PHONE. THERE, HE SAW AN UNOPENED MESSAGE FROM THE PERSON HE MOST CHERISHED. HE RUBBED HIS EYES IN DISBELIEF. STEADYING HIS FINGER, HE PRESSED ON THE NOTIFICATION WHICH LED IT TO A VOICEMAIL. “M-MY SON, I LOVE YOU SO MUCH. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, DON’T STOP TRYING AND REACHING FOR YOUR DREAMS. DON’T WORRY ABOUT ME, WE’LL MEET AGAIN SOMEDAY.”



“MATT!”

HE WAS BROUGHT BACK WHEN ALEX YELLED TO GRAB HIS ATTENTION. BURSTING INTO TEARS, HE CLIMBED BACK ONTO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE AND RAN INTO HIS ARMS, AND EMBRACED HIM.

THE MOVEMENT THEY SHARED MADE HIM FEEL LOVED. IT RELIEVED HIM FROM EVERYTHING THAT WAS PRESSURING HIM. HE FINALLY REALIZES HOW EASILY HE HAS GIVEN UP. FROM THAT MOMENT, HE PROMISED HIS MOM THAT HE’LL PUT HIS BEST EFFORT TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING.

AFTER THE INCIDENT, THE TWO FRIENDS RESOLVED THEIR CONFLICT AND MATTHEW WENT ON TO WORK TIRELESSLY TOWARD HIS NEW TARGET. WHENEVER HE FELT DEFEATED BY HIS FAILURE, HE ALWAYS REMEMBERED WHAT HIS MOTHER TOLD HIM: NEVER GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAMS.

MY ONE AND ONLY HOME

I GUESS I WILL STAY HERE AFTER ALL. THINKING ABOUT HOW I USED TO THINK, I NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT I WOULD GET TO THIS CONCLUSION.

A WOMAN AND MAN WALKED INTO THE PET SHOP A FEW YEARS AGO. THE WOMAN HAS LONG AND WAVY BROWN HAIR, DARK EYES GLIMMERING UNDER THE LIGHTS, LOOKING AROUND IN EXCITEMENT. SHE THEN TALKED TO THE MAN WITH BLACK HAIR AND A GENTLE FACE NEXT TO HER, POINTING AT ME. "WE SHOULD BUY THIS CANARIE. IT LOOKS SO CUTE AND CHUBBY." AFTER A FEW MINUTES, THEY DECIDED TO BUY ME FROM THE SHOP.

'WHY? WHY DO YOU WANT ME FROM ALL THE OTHER PETS FROM THIS SHOP?' I THOUGHT TO MYSELF.

THE NEXT THING I KNOW, I WAS IN A CAGE IN A COZY ROOM. THE COLOR THEME IS VERY COMFORTING, BROWN, GRAY, AND WHITE. WHILE LOOKING AROUND, I SAW A PICTURE OF MY OWNERS IN A GOLDEN FRAME ON THE WALL. 'OH, SO THEY ARE MARRIED.'

I THEN LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW, AT FALLING LEAVES FROM THE BIG TREE IN THE BACKYARD. WIND CARRYING THE LEAVES, BLOWING IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. IT IS LIKE THEY ARE FINALLY FREE TO GO AND EXPLORE THE WORLD. BUT, WHY AM I CAGED? WHY AM I NOT THE BIRDS FLYING FREELY OUTSIDE? I WANT TO BE FREE. 'WHY?'

EVERY DAY, THE OWNERS WHOSE NAMES I NOW KNOW ARE EMILY AND FELIX, GIVE ME FOOD AND LET ME OUT FOR A WHILE EVERY DAY PLAYING WITH THEM AND IT HAS BECOME SOMETHING USUAL FOR ME. I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT MUCH BUT I LIKE THE ATTENTION THEY ARE GIVING ME. 'WHY ARE THEY SO NICE TO ME?'

BUT ONE DAY, MY LIFE HAS COMPLETELY TURNED UPSIDE DOWN. AS THE ANNOYING SOUND OF WHIMPERING AND CRYING FROM A CERTAIN LITTLE 'DEVIL' HAS BEEN CONSTANTLY RINGING IN MY EARS LIKE AN ALARM, I RECEIVE A LACK OF ATTENTION COMING FROM THEM. EMILY, WHO IS BUSY FEEDING OR HUMMING LULLABIES FOR THE BABY TO SLEEP, AND FELIX HAVE BEEN BUSIER AT WORK AND THE REMAINING TIME ALSO GOES TO THE BABY. BEING IGNORED WHEN I HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY CHIRPING FOR 10 MINUTES AND ALL THEY RESPONDED WAS TELLING ME TO BE QUIET OR SHUT UP WHEN THEY ARE IN A BAD MOOD, IS WORSE THAN BEING INVISIBLE. 'UGH, WHY? I SHOULD FIND A WAY TO ESCAPE, BIRDS SHOULD BE FREE, NOT BEING BOUND TO A STUPID CAGE...'



AFTER 8 YEARS, THE BABY HAS GROWN UP. AND TO BE HONEST, SHE IS QUITE A BEAUTIFUL AND CUTE GIRL. THIS GIRL, JENNETTE, HAS DARK HAIR LIKE HER FATHER AND BIG ROUND DARK EYES FROM HER MOTHER. THE INNOCENT LOOK ON HER FACE, JUST LIKE AN ANGEL. I ALSO GET TO KNOW THAT SHE IS A VERY SHY AND KIND GIRL AND I LIKE HER COMPANY. IT IS COMFORTING AROUND HER WHEN I WAS SPENDING TIME WITH HER EVEN THOUGH SHE BARELY TALKS. BUT NOWADAYS EMILY AND FELIX HAVE BEEN EXTRAORDINARILY BUSY, I HEAR SOMETHING LIKE BANKRUPTCY AND COMPANY ALONG THE LINES OF A STRESSED AND EXHAUSTED TONE DURING THEIR CONVERSATION AFTER JENNETTE HAS GONE TO BED. AS THEY SAY, IGNORANCE IS BLISS IN HER CASE. I REALLY SHOULD LEAVE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, I HAVE NO INTEREST IN WITNESSING HOW THEY WILL GO BANKRUPT, THEY BARELY EVEN CARE ABOUT ME ANYMORE. BUT WHY DO I HAVE THIS UNCOMFORTABLE FEELING?

TODAY IS THE DAY, JENNETTE OPENED THE CAGE DOOR BUT SHE LEFT BECAUSE SHE WENT TO GET SOMETHING. BUT WHY AM I HESITATING? I SHOULD LEAVE. WHY CAN'T I MOVE? TOO LATE, JENNETTE CAME BACK, WITH A BRIGHT SMILE ON HER FACE, SHINING LIKE A SUN. I GUESS TODAY IS NOT THE DAY AFTER ALL...

DAY BY DAY PASSES, AND I MISS A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES TO ESCAPE, AND JENNETTE IS REALLY CARELESS. EVEN SO, I AM STILL HERE. WHY? I DON'T KNOW ANYMORE, BUT SOMETHING IN ME IS TELLING ME TO STICK AROUND LONGER, EVEN JUST FOR ONE MORE DAY. NEVERTHELESS, TODAY IS DIFFERENT. THE WHOLE FAMILY WENT ON A PICNIC AT A PARK, BRINGING ME ALONG. THE SUN IS SHINING SO BRIGHT THAT IT GIVES ME A BAD VIBE, LIKE SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN. NOTHING CAN GO WRONG, RIGHT?

WHEN WE ARRIVED AT THE PARK, THEY WERE CHATTING AND EATING HAPPILY ON THE MATTRESS, NOT FORGETTING TO GIVE ME SOME NUTS TOO. BUT THEN THEY OPENED THE CAGE DOOR AND SAID SOMETHING I NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT. "LEAVE, WE DON'T WANT YOU ANYMORE," STATED FELIX WITH A STOIC EXPRESSION. BUT IT SEEMS LIKE JENNETTE DID NOT KNOW ABOUT IT AND STARTED TO ARGUE. MY EYES WIDENED AND I LOOKED AT THEM IN SHOCK, TOO STUNNED AND SURPRISED TO THE POINT WHERE I DIDN'T EVEN CARE WHAT THEY WERE ARGUING ABOUT, 'SO TODAY IS THE DAY, HUH?' COMPLETELY THINKING, COMPLETELY LOST IN MY OWN WORLD.



THOSE WORDS ARE LOOPING IN MY HEAD LIKE A BROKEN RECORDER. IT SHOULD BE A GOOD THING THAT IS EVEN WORTH CELEBRATING. IT IS WHAT I USED TO THINK AND WHAT I ALWAYS THINK, BEING FREE, BUT WHY AM I HESITATING WHEN THE CAGE IS LEFT OPEN RIGHT NOW? I CAN LEAVE ANYTIME I WANT NOW, IT HAS BEEN THE DREAM I ALWAYS WANTED. WHY CAN'T I LEAVE? AT THE MOMENT OF REALIZATION, I ALREADY GOT ATTACHED TO THEM DURING THE YEARS WE HAVE SPENT TOGETHER, THE FUN TIMES AND MAYBE THE SAD TIMES. 'RIGHT, SAD TIMES, I SHOULDN'T THINK TOO MUCH ABOUT IT, IT'S BEST I LEAVE NOW.' I THOUGHT AND FLEW OUT OF THE CAGE IMMEDIATELY, LEAVING THE FAINT CRYING SOUNDS COMING FROM JENNETTE BEHIND.

'I'M FREE, I'M FINALLY FREE. BUT WHY AM I NOT SATISFIED AT ALL?' HAVING FLASHBACKS OF HOW NICE THEY WERE TO ME, WHY DO THEY NOW WANT ME ANYMORE? AND THE MOMENT I MISS THE MOST IS THE BRIGHT SMILE JENNETTE USED TO GIVE ME EVERY DAY. IT IS SO COMFORTING THAT IT IS LIKE SOMETHING TO FILL UP MY LONELY HEART BEING IN THE CAGE ALONE FOR YEARS, WITHOUT IT NOW IS LIKE SOMETHING BEING TORN AWAY FROM ME. 'WELL, THIS IS DEPRESSING, I SHOULD GO BACK.'

I THEN FLY TOWARDS THE DIRECTION OF MY ONE AND ONLY 'HOME'. EVEN IF THEY DO NOT WANT ME, I WILL JUST STAY ON THE TREE IN THE BACKYARD AS LONG AS I CAN STILL SEE JENNETTE, THIS IS ENOUGH. THAT IS WHAT I DECIDED TO DO FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, MY LIFESPAN IS GOING TO END SOON ANYWAYS AT THE MAXIMUM OF 10 YEARS, WHICH IS PLENTY FOR ME.

Derrin SANG 4M

PRACTICAL JOKE GONE WRONG

FARMER JOE WAS A MISCHIEVOUS MAN. HE OFTEN PULLED TRICKS ON HIS OLDER BROTHER, STEVE, WHO WAS THE ONLY PERSON THAT LIVED WITH HIM IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

ONE DAY, JOE WAS WASHING SOME PANTS IN THE HOUSE. USUALLY, STEVE WOULD DO MOST OF THE CHORES, BUT HE WAS BUSY FEEDING ANIMALS THAT DAY AND FORGOT. JOE DIDN'T ENJOY WASHING. HE THOUGHT IT WAS A BORING JOB. HIS RIGHT LEG BOUNCED UP AND DOWN VIGOROUSLY AS HE SOAKED THE PANTS.

"THIS SUCKS!" JOE EXCLAIMED, "I SHALL NEVER DO THIS AGAIN."

WATER SPLASHED EVERYWHERE AS HE GOT MORE IMPATIENT. HE THEN BROUGHT THE PANTS TO THE BALCONY, WHERE THEY'D BE HUNG AND DRIED. STARING AT THE PANTS, A THOUGHT ILLUMINATED IN JOE'S MIND. "HOW HYSTERICAL WOULD IT BE," CHUCKLED JOE, "IF I WERE TO PULL STEVE'S PANTS DOWN IN FRONT OF THE ANIMALS!" HIS IMAGINATIONS ALONE WERE ENOUGH TO AMUSE HIM, BUT HE COULDN'T CONTAIN HIS PLAYFUL NATURE.

ABANDONING THE REST OF THE CLOTHES, JOE RUSHED OUT OF THE HOUSE AND CHEEKILY HID BEHIND A LARGE TREE CLOSE TO THE FARM. HE PEEKED TO SEE HIS BROTHER FEEDING THE BULLS. JOE FIGURED THAT IF HE WERE TO PULL THIS PRANK ON STEVE SUCCESSFULLY, HE OUGHT NOT TO ENTER THE FARM IN CASE THE ANIMALS' REACTIONS TO HIS PRESENCE WOULD GIVE IT AWAY. SO HE WAITED AND WAITED. A GOOD 10 MINUTES HAD PASSED AND STEVE FINALLY WALKED OUT. JOE'S CHANCE HAD COME.

AS STEVE CAME PAST THE TREE, JOE LOOPED AROUND AND STEALTHILY SNEAKED BEHIND HIM. HIS BACK HUNCHED OVER, ARMS REACHING OUT LIKE A ZOMBIE, HIS FACE DREW A GRIN MORE SINISTER THAN THE JOKER. HE WAS READY. STEVE'S PANTS DROPPED SWIFTLY.

THE COUNTRYSIDE WAS NO LONGER QUIET, AS IT WAS PRIOR. FROM A MILE AWAY, JOE'S CACKLING COULD BE HEARD. HE CACKLED SO HARD THAT HIS EYES SQUINTED AND HE FELT AS IF SOMETHING WAS PRYING HIS MOUTH APART. HIS LAUGHTER ENDED WHEN HE LOOKED AT HIS BROTHER, WHO STOOD COMPLETELY STILL, NOT MAKING A SOUND. HIS SKIN HAD TURNED PALE AND HIS NAKED LEGS WERE SHAKING.



“YOU ALRIGHT, STEVE?” ASKED JOE, “IT’S JUST A JOKE.”

STEVE COULDN’T ANSWER. HE WAS IN A STATE OF IMMENSE FEAR AND HIS BODY DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO REACT.

“STEVE! ARE YOU O-”

HIS SENTENCE WAS INTERRUPTED BY A LOUD BANG THAT CAME FROM THE FARM. A BULL HAD CHARGED THROUGH THE WOODEN FENCE AND WAS HEADING STRAIGHT TOWARDS THEM. THE BEAST FUMED IN HEAVY EXHALES. ITS FEET DUG INTO THE EARTH AS IT PROPELLED ITSELF FORWARD. AND BEFORE JOE COULD REACT, THE BULL HAD ALREADY CRASHED INTO STEVE AND HAD LAUNCHED HIM INTO THE AIR. HIS FRAGILE BODY MADE A THUD AS IT FELL BACK DOWN. MOST OF HIS BONES WERE BROKEN, AND MOST OF HIS SKIN WAS SMEARED IN BLOOD. NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE DIED.

AS JOE COLLAPSED ONTO HIS KNEES, HE WONDERED WHY THE BULL ATTACKED HIS BROTHER. THEN HE HAD REALISED STEVE WAS WEARING RED UNDERWEAR.



Charlotte TSANG IK

ONCE UPON MY HOPES AND DREAMS

AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF HESITATION, EMMA FLIPPED HER REPORT CARD.

FINALLY, IT WAS HER CHANCE TO PROVE SHE WASN'T SO STUPID AND USELESS AFTER ALL.

SHE LOOKED AT THE COLUMNS CAREFULLY, HER EYES SCANNED FROM THE TOP TO THE BOTTOM, THERE WERE NO AS FROM WHAT SHE HAD SEEN. SHE CONTINUED EXAMINING, NO BS, NO CS... THE LETTERS D AND E COVERED THE PIECE OF PAPER. THEY WERE WRITTEN IN BRIGHT RED INK, IN FACT, SO BRIGHT THAT EMMA COULD NO LONGER LOOK AT IT.

THE VISION OF HER REPORT CARD BECAME BLURRY, DROPS OF WATER DRIPPED ONTO THE PAPER. SHE TRIED TO WIPE THE TEARS AWAY, NEVERTHELESS, IT DID NOT STOP.

“HEY EMMA, WHAT GRADE DID YOU GET IN YOUR TESTS?” ONE OF HER CLASSMATES ASKED CURIOUSLY, WITH A NOTE OF SARCASM IN HIS VOICE.

EMMA DID NOT ANSWER. HER CLASSMATE TOOK THE REPORT CARD FROM HER SHIVERING HANDS AND LOOKED AT IT, THEN BURST INTO MALICIOUS LAUGHTER.

“OH MY GOD! ARE YOU SERIOUS? HOW CAN SOMEONE POSSIBLY FAIL THEIR TESTS SO BADLY LIKE YOU? AND YOU GOT A D IN ENGLISH?!” HE READ, UNAWARE OF HOW MUCH EMBARRASSMENT HE CAUSED EMMA “AND WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOUR STUDENT PHOTO? DID YOU GET HAUNTED THE NIGHT BEFORE PHOTO DAY?”

“GIVE IT BACK!” EMMA SHOUTED FURIOUSLY. SHE SNATCHED HER REPORT CARD AND SHOVED IT INTO HER BAG, THEN RAN OUT OF THE CLASSROOM.

THAT VERY MOMENT, ALL SHE WANTED TO DO WAS SCREAM, AS LOUD AS SHE COULD. THE HOPE SHE JUST HAD A FEW MINUTES AGO VANISHED, WHAT REPLACED IT WAS DESPAIR, LOADS AND LOADS OF DESPAIR. EMMA RECALLED THE ENDLESS DAYS AND NIGHTS SHE SPENT REVISING; THE CONCENTRATION SHE PUT IN ALL HER LESSONS; AND THE MOUNTAIN-LIKE PILE OF EXERCISES SHE HAD COMPLETED.

THERE’S NOTHING SHE COULD DO NOW, NO MATTER HOW HARD SHE STUDIED AND HOW MUCH EFFORT SHE PUT INTO HER WORK, HER RESULT DID NOT CHANGE.



EMMA WALKED OUT OF THE SCHOOL GATES, EVERY STEP WAS HEAVIER THAN USUAL. SHE HAD TO LEAN FORWARD TO MAKE SURE SHE WAS ABLE TO BALANCE WITH THE PONDEROUS ROCK ON HER BACK. THE LITTLE CHATTERS AROUND PRICKLED HER EARS LIKE NEEDLES.

THE WALK BACK HOME WAS EXCEPTIONALLY EXHAUSTING, HER BRAIN WAS AS EMPTY AS HER MOTHER'S HEART. BEFORE SHE REALIZED IT, SHE ARRIVED BACK HOME, THE PLACE WORSE THAN HELL.

EMMA STOOD MOTIONLESSLY IN FRONT OF THE DOOR, MINUTES PASSED, YET SHE STILL DID NOT ENTER.

SHE TOOK A DEEP BREATH, THEN PRESSED HER FINGER ON THE DOORBELL.

A SHARP VOICE CALLED OUT,

“MIA, OPEN THE DOOR FOR ME.”

AT THIS, EMMA IMMEDIATELY OPENED THE DOOR WITH HER KEYS. A TEENAGE GIRL WAS WALKING TOWARDS EMMA'S DIRECTION, HER WAIST-LENGTH BLONDE HAIR FLOWING GRACEFULLY BEHIND. SHE HAD A PAIR OF GLISTENING EMERALD EYES, A POINTED NOSE, AND FULL LIPS. THE FACIAL FEATURES ARE SO PERFECTLY PROPORTIONED ON HER BEAUTIFUL FACE.

“HEY EMMI, HOW WAS SCHOOL?” THE GIRL ASKED.

EMMA DID NOT REPLY TO HER OLDER SISTER, HER MOUTH WAS TOO DRY TO SPEAK. SHE WALKED UPSTAIRS, BUT BEFORE SHE REACHED HER ROOM,

“EMMA HOLLAND!” THE SHARP, HIGH VOICE YELLED.

“DAMN, NOT AGAIN...” EMMA MUTTERED, THEN WALKED DOWN THE STAIRS RELUCTANTLY AND STOOD IN FRONT OF THE WOMAN. SHE WORE A KHAKI-COLORED DRESS, HER DARK BLONDE HAIR WAS TIED INTO A TIGHT BUN. OTHER THAN THE SEVERAL WRINKLES ON HER FACE, SHE LOOKED EXTRAORDINARILY LIKE EMMA'S SISTER.

“YOU GOT YOUR REPORT CARD BACK TODAY, DIDN'T YOU?” ASKED THE WOMAN.



“YES, MOTHER.”

“GIVE IT TO ME THEN! AND HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU ABOUT YOUR MANNERS WHEN ANSWERING MY QUESTION? DON’T CALL ME ‘MOTHER’, ADDRESS ME PROPERLY!” ORDERED THE WOMAN.

“YES, MA’AM.”

EMMA WALKED TO HER SCHOOL BAG SLOWLY, PULLED OUT THE SHEET OF PAPER SHE DIDN’T WANT TO SEE AGAIN IN HER ENTIRE LIFETIME AND HANDED IT TO HER MOTHER. THE WOMAN’S EYES WIDENED IN FURY AND SHOCK AS SHE LOOKED THROUGH IT. WITHIN SECONDS, THE REPORT CARD WAS TORN INTO PIECES.

“I REVISED SO HARD!” EMMA PROTESTED.

“OH! DID YOU? THEN PERHAPS I SHOULD TELL THE SCHOOL THIS CHILD IS HOPELESS AND DOESN’T DESERVE EDUCATION ANYMORE. FROM THIS MOMENT FORTH, YOU DON’T NEED TO GO TO SCHOOL UNTIL YOU SHOW YOU ARE CAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING EVERY SINGLE THING FROM YOUR CURRICULUM SO FAR.” THE WOMAN SAID COLDLY, “AND NO DINNER FOR YOU TONIGHT, GO BACK TO YOUR ROOM AND FIGURE OUT HOW YOU CAN GET PERFECT GRADES LIKE YOUR SISTER.”

TEARS WELLED UP ONCE MORE IN EMMA’S EYES, HER HARD WORK WAS ALL GONE.

EMMA STORMED UP TO HER BEDROOM, BANGED THE DOOR BEHIND HER AND COLLAPSED ONTO THE BED.

IT WAS AN OLD AND TINY ROOM, CONTAINING MERELY A BED AND A WOODEN DESK PUT AGAINST THE DUSTY WALL. PHOTOS AND NOVELS SCATTERED MESSILY ON THE SWEAR WORDS-COVERED DESK. THE ROOM WAS DARK AND GLOOMY, JUST LIKE HOW EMMA WAS FEELING.

IT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT TEST IN HER LIFE, THE TEST WHICH DEFINED HER FUTURE, THE TEST WHICH DECIDED WHETHER SHE COULD GO INTO UNIVERSITY, THE TEST THAT SHOWED THAT SHE ISN’T THAT STUPID EVEN WHEN COMPARED TO HER PERFECT SISTER, AND SHE SCREWED UP. EMMA ASKED HERSELF THE QUESTION SHE HAS BEEN REPEATING A HUNDRED TIMES YET: “WHY AM I SO STUPID? WHAT WAS I EVEN BORN FOR?”



SUDDENLY, THE DOOR CREAKED OPEN,

“MIA, THIS IS MY ROOM.” EMMA SAID, HARDLY LOOKING AT THE PERSON ENTERING.

“EMMA, I APOLOGIZE FOR MOM, YOU KNOW SHE’S ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT. SHE DOESN’T MEAN IT.” MIA EXPLAINED.

“SO NOW YOU’RE STANDING ON HER SIDE? WELL, NOT SURPRISING, SHE TREATS YOU LIKE A QUEEN AND TREATS ME LIKE A MONSTER.” EMMA SAID IRONICALLY.

“NO, IT’S BECAUSE-”

“YOU’RE BIOLOGICALLY RELATED TO HER WHILE I’M JUST HER HUSBAND AND ANOTHER WOMAN’S DAUGHTER?”

“EMMA, IT’S NOT APPROPRIATE TO TALK ABOUT OUR PARENTS’ MARRIAGE-”

“WHEN MY DAD DROPPED ME HERE AFTER MY MOM DIED YEARS AGO, SHE AGREED TO TAKE ME IN AS HER OWN.” EMMA INTERRUPTED, IGNORING HER SISTER.

“AND SHE DID. YOU GET TO LIVE HERE IN A NEW FAMILY ONCE AGAIN, YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL!” MIA BLURTED.

“GRATEFUL? GRATEFUL?” EMMA ASKED OUTRAGEOUSLY, “FOR LIVING IN A PLACE WHERE I’M ALWAYS HIT VIOLENTLY, FED ONLY LEFTOVER OR EXPIRED FOOD, GIVEN AN INFINITE AMOUNT OF CHORES, FORBIDDEN TO EXPRESS EVEN THE TINIEST BIT OF MY OPINION OR EMOTIONS? DO I HAVE TO MENTION THE HUGE DIFFERENCE IN HOW SHE TREATS YOU AND ME TOO? IT’S A MIRACLE SOMEONE SURVIVED LIVING HERE.”

FOR A MOMENT, MIA SEEMED TO BE AT A LOSS FOR WORDS.

“PLEASE DON’T SAY THAT, EMMA. SHE’S STILL OUR MOM-”

“OH FOR GOODNESS SAKE SHE ISN’T MY MOM AND SHE NEVER WILL BE.” EMMA REPLIED COLDLY, THEN WALKED OUT OF THE ROOM, LEAVING HER SISTER STANDING BLANKLY ON THE SPOT.

PURPOSE? OR FATE?

OH, WHAT A FOOL IT IS! SITTING AT ITS CAGE UPON THE DARK SKIES ABOVE, WHISPERING BREATHS OF SCREAMS WHILST THE TREES WAVER BY. THE CAGE CREAKS OPEN AND THERE IT WAS, A WINDOW OF CHANCE TO ESCAPE ITS DOOM... OR WAS IT DOOM? HE WONDERED. PERHAPS IT WAS AN OVERSTATEMENT. HE TREATED HIM WITH LOVE AND GAVE HIM A SHELTER TO LIVE UNDER, THE OLD MAN WHO HAD KEPT HIM FOR 15 YEARS WAS SLOWLY WITHERING AWAY, AND THE BIRD KNEW OF IT. 'WOULD IT BE SUCH A CRUEL ACT TO ACT ACCORDINGLY TO THE CALLING WITHIN?' HE HAD WONDERED WHILST STARING AT THE OPEN GAP. HIS FRIENDS HAD WARNED HIM OF THE TREACHEROUS DANGERS TO LIVE IN FREEDOM, WOULD HE TAKE THE RISK TO FOLLOW THE CALLING FROM WITHIN? 'YET I AM ALSO WITHERING, JUST LIKE HE IS! SHALL I?' THE BIRD PONDERED FURTHER, AND HE RECALLED THOSE MOMENTS WITH THE OLD MAN BEFORE HE WAS UNABLE TO MOVE FROM HIS REST. THE MOMENTS OF CONTEMPLATION TURNED INTO HOURS OF REVERIE TO THOSE OLD MEMORIES.

'EVEN IF I FLY, I SHALL FALL SOON FOR MY WINGS WILL GIVE IN... FOR I WILL WILT.' HE HAD CONSIDERED. HIS EYES LAID UPON THE RESTING MAN, HE LOOKED AS IF HE WAS NOT GOING TO WAKE SOON. 'TIME WILL RUN OUT EVENTUALLY, WHAT SHALL I DO?' HE CRIED, AND SO CHIRP HE DID.

THE DAWN WAS BREAKING THROUGH THE EARLY MORNING SKIES, THE BIRD HAD TIME RUNNING THROUGH HIS MIND. AND SO HE JUMPED, JUMPED OUT OF THE CAGE, AND HOPPED TO THE TOP, WONDERING IF HE WAS GOING TO FLY AWAY. HE STARED INTENTLY AT THE MAN WHO OFFERED HOME, WONDERING WHETHER HE SHOULD FLY.

'FLY MUST I NOT? FLY HIGH I MUST!' WITHIN HIM CREPT AN UNBRIDLED DESIRE FOR FREEDOM, BUT TO HIS DISMAY HIS EYES LAID ON THE WRINKLES OF THE MAN'S FACE, HIS SCARCE HAIRS SLIGHTLY SWAYING THROUGH THE GENTLE WIND FROM THE WINDOW.

'YEARS! YEARS IT HAS BEEN! I CANNOT... IT WOULD BE MORE THAN CRUEL OF ME TO DO SO!' THE AGONIZING INDECISION LEFT THE POOR BIRD IN MISERY, LOOKING AT DAWN RISING ABOVE THE DARKNESS, AND WITH A SUDDEN SOUND, THE BIRD'S ATTENTION TURNED TO THE MAN ONCE AGAIN. THE MAN GROANED, WITH TIREDNESS IN HIS VOICE, AND THE BIRD WATCHED WITH CAUTION.

"PIYA..?" THE MAN LET OUT A GROAN AGAIN, AND THE BIRD CHIRPED.



“AH.. THERE YOU ARE... WH-WHO LET YOU O-OUT?” STAGGERING IN HIS BREATH, PIYA SENSED THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG.

“SILLY OLD BIRD, FOR WHY DID YOU COME OUT..? HAVE...YOU DECIDED TO.. LEAVE ME?” HE GROANED ONCE MORE,

“COME HERE, WILL YOU NOT?” AND PIYA UNDERSTOOD, SO HE FLEW THERE WITHOUT HESITATION, FOR HE HAD TREASURED HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OLD MAN TOO.

“I ALWAYS KNEW YOU U-...UNDERSTAND WHAT WE SPOKE.. FOR EVEN THE LESSER BEINGS.. HAVE..A MIND..” HE CROAKED AND COUGHED INTO THE USED TISSUE THAT WAS BESIDE HIS BED PLACED UPON THE TABLE WITH PILES OF MEDICINE ON IT. PIYA HAD CAUGHT SIGHT OF WHAT HE HAD COUGHED OUT.

“GOOD GOD!” HE MUTTERED AND PAUSED TO RECOVER.

“I’M SURE YOU’VE MADE YOUR DECISION THE MOMENT YOU’VE STEPPED OUT OF THAT CAGE OF YOURS... PIYA... I KNOW YOU SEEK FREEDOM-” HE PAUSED, FATIGUE AND TIME CHASING AFTER HIM.

“FREEDOM COMES WITH A PRICE. GOD...GIVES US...A CHOICE. WE ALL HAVE A PRICE WITH CHOOSIN-” HIS COUGH INTERRUPTED ONCE AGAIN, “WITH CHOOSING FREEDOM. GO NOW PIYA. MY TIME HERE ON EARTH WILL BE DONE, I SENSE MY LEAVE SOON BY GOD’S WILL...” HE SAID WITH AN EERIE PEACE, PIYA CHIRPED IN PROTEST BUT TO NO AVAIL. THE MAN LET OUT A SIGH, ONE LAST SIGH AS IF THE SOUL IN HIM HAD LEFT TOO WITH IT AND HAD STOPPED ENTIRELY. PIYA CHIRPED ONCE MORE AND HAD NO RESPONSE, HE DECIDED TO LAND ON THE MAN’S RESTING SHOULDER, THEN HE KNEW THE MAN HAD LEFT. THE SUN FULLY BEAMING ON PIYA AND THE MAN, HIS BRIGHT GREEN FEATHERS LOOKED VIBRANT IN THE WARM SUN WHILST THE MAN’S SKIN LOOKED PALE AND DEATHLY COLD, THE SOUL DEPARTED FROM THIS MATERIALISTIC WORLD WHAT’S LEFT OF HIM IS THE SICKLY, APATHETIC VESSEL OF A ONCE COLORFUL CANVAS. PIYA DECIDED TO STAY WITH THE OLD MAN FOR A WHILE, STARING AT THE SUNRISE. THE AGONY WAS STRANGE, TO HIM THE MAN WAS A DIVINE POWER, ONE THAT HE HAD LOOKED UPON THE MOST, ONE THAT HE HAD LOVED THE MOST, PRODUCING ALL SORTS OF MIRACLES SUCH AS HEALING PIYA OF SICKNESS, FEEDING HIM, SHOWING HIM TRUST AND LOVE. NOW IT GLOOMED OVER THE OLD BIRD THAT THE HOME HE KNEW OF ONCE, DID NOT EXIST ANYMORE FOR IT HAD DIED ALONG WITH THE OLD MAN.



'FREEDOM COMES WITH A PRICE... MY REASON TO STAY EVAPORATED WHEN HE TOOK HIS LAST BREATH.' HE THOUGHT, THEN A SIMPLE QUESTION POPPED INTO HIS MIND.

'WHY WAS I RELUCTANT TO LEAVE? GIVEN I HAD THE FREEDOM TO DO SO? I RESISTED.. THE NATURAL CALLING FOR FREEDOM?' SUCH A SIMPLE QUESTION GIVEN TO THE INTELLIGENT MIND OF A BIRD LEFT HIM WITH THE CURIOSITY OF HIS OWN BEING, AND SUDDENLY, A TYPE OF DREAD THAT HE WASN'T FAMILIAR WITH BECAME DOMINANT AND PROMINENT, HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND NOR DID HE WANT TO. FOR HE KNEW UNDERSTANDING OF SUCH FEELINGS WOULD GIVE HIM NO PURPOSE IN STAYING....IN LIVING. WITH THAT, HE DECIDED TO FLY. FLYING THE HIGHEST HE COULD AND HAS EVER BEEN, THE BLUE SKIES EMBRACED HIM JUST AS A MOTHER WOULD TO HER SON. THERE TRULY WEREN'T LIMITS.

'DON'T FLY TOO HIGH BLIND BIRD! THE LIGHT WILL BURN AND YOU WILL FALL JUST AS ICARUS DID!' THE OLD MAN WOULD LAUGH AS PIYA FLEW IN HIS HOME FREELY BUT LIMITLY HE HAD RECALLED.

PERHAPS PIYA WAS FLYING TOO HIGH, FOR HE COULD NOT BREATHE IN SUCH HEIGHTS, HE BEGAN PUMMELING DOWN, HIS WINGS WERE GIVING UP YET THERE WAS NO PANIC BUT CONTEMPLATION, AND BELOW WAS A TREE THAT HAD IMPALED THROUGH HIS BEING. DEATH EMBRACED HIM AND HE HUGGED DEATH BACK. STARING UPON THE BEAUTIFUL, COLORFUL, WORLD WITH HIS VISION FADING, HE FELT THIS UNEXPLAINABLE DREAD THAT OVERCAME HIM EVEN IN HIS LAST MOMENTS, AND HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHY. HIS COLORFUL FEATHERS BATHED IN HIS OWN CRIMSON BLOOD, AND HE HAD NO CONFLICTS IN THE END, BUT HE STRUGGLED TO UNDERSTAND WHY THIS DREAD? FOR ONE HE WANTED TO DIE IN PEACE, YET HIS DESPAIR HAS YET TO CEASE. SUCCUMBING TO HIS FATE HE COMES TO CONTEMPLATE, WITH THE WEIGHT ON HIS MIND HIS EYES HAD TURNED BLIND.

'FREEDOM COMES WITH A PRICE. YET IT WASN'T CONCISE... FREEDOM..... IS THE TRUTH.? OR A MERE LIE..? FREE WILL..IS...A..CHOICE OR..DOES..IT..DESTROY.....?' PIYA HAD THOUGHT BEFORE THE VERY BREATH OF LIFE CARESSED HIM ONE LAST TIME AND LEFT HIM ENTIRELY TO THE HANDS OF DEATH. THE TIP OF HIS WINGS SHED THE VERY DESIRE, THE LONGING FOR THE FREEDOM TO FLY YET THE CORE OF HIS BEING SHED THE VERY MELANCHOLY FOR THE CAGE HE CALLED HOME. ALAS WAS HIS CHOICE TO DIE FOR THE THINGS HE KNEW, THE FREEDOM HE LONGED AND THE HOME HE HAD.

Brittany CHAN 4Y

SOMETHING BEYOND THE WALLS

THE CREAK OF THE FRONT DOOR IN THE SILENT HOUSE MADE ME JUMP - MY OWNER WAS BACK FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. HERE SHE COMES AGAIN WITH HER HIGH-PITCHED, BABYISH VOICE, TALKING TO ME AS IF I WAS AN INFANT.

“HI RENA, DID YOU MISS ME WHILE I WAS GONE FOR MY MORNING RUN?”

SHE PICKED ME UP FROM MY CAGE, WALKED TO HER BED, AND PROCEEDED TO TALK ABOUT HER DAY. IT'S INFURIATING TO HEAR HER KEEP RATTLING ABOUT HER WORK PROJECTS - WHAT DOES SHE THINK I AM? HER EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL? HER THERAPIST?

SOMETIMES WHEN I AM ALONE, I WONDER ABOUT THE WORLD BEYOND THIS METAL CAGE, BEYOND THESE COLD, HARD CONCRETE WALLS. I LOOK AT THE PARTIALLY HIDDEN WINDOW BEHIND THE FRILLY ROSEWOOD-COLORED CURTAINS, I SEE FEARLESS PIGEONS ROAMING AROUND HUMANS LIKE THEY OWN THE STREETS, FLUFFY WHITE CLOUDS THAT COMPLEMENT THE ANGEL BLUE SKY. I LONG TO GET OUT THERE EVERY DAY, BUT THERE WAS NEVER A GOOD OPPORTUNITY.

SUNFLOWER SEEDS CLANGED AGAINST MY GLASS BOWL. “EAT UP, YOU MUST BE STARVING.” SHE SAID AS SHE PUT THE BOWL INSIDE MY CAGE. AS SHE TURNED HER BACK TO PUT THE JAR OF SUNFLOWER SEEDS BACK INTO THE CUPBOARD, I NOTICED THAT SHE MISTAKENLY LEFT THE CAGE OPEN, AND A DANGEROUS THOUGHT CAME OVER MY HEAD IN AN INSTANT - WHAT IF... WHAT IF TODAY IS WHERE THE OPPORTUNITY TAKES PLACE? WHAT IF TODAY'S THE DAY MY DREAMS FINALLY COME TRUE? IT'S NOW OR NEVER, I GATHERED UP ALL MY COURAGE, FLAPPED MY WINGS AS HARD AS I COULD, AND FLEW OUT THE WINDOW.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I FELT FREE. I COULD FEEL THE WIND TOUCHING MY FACE, THE CARS UNDERNEATH ME HONKING IMPATIENTLY - THERE WAS SO MUCH SPACE ALL AROUND ME. UNLIKE THE CRAMPED LITTLE SPACE BACK AT HOME, THIS OUTSIDE WORLD FELT SO STRANGE BUT SOMEHOW ALSO FAMILIAR. I WAS ENJOYING MYSELF PEACEFULLY WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN SOMEONE SHOUTED.



“WHO ARE YOU AND HOW DID YOU FIND ME?”

THEY SOUNDED FURIOUS SO OUT OF FEAR I REPLIED,

“ I... I’M RENA, I DON’T KNOW HOW I FOUND YOU, I DON’T EVEN KNOW YOU. I JUST ESCAPED FROM MY OWNER.”

“YOU’RE A DOMESTIC BIRD? WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO ESCAPE FROM SUCH A COZY HOME? DO YOU KNOW HOW ROUGH IT IS HERE ON THE STREETS? GO HOME, CHILD.”

“WAIT! CAN YOU TAKE ME UNDER YOUR WING? I COULD BE USEFUL TO YOU, I COULD HELP YOU FIND FOOD AND BUILD NESTS, AS LONG AS I DON’T HAVE TO GO BACK THERE.”

AFTER A BIT OF PERSUADING, THE STREET BIRD FINALLY AGREED. HE WAS FEISTY AND IMPATIENT AT FIRST, BUT AS TIME WENT ON, WE BECAME GOOD FRIENDS AND I LEARNED THAT HE WAS NOT GIVEN A NAME, SO I GAVE HIM ONE, SKIP. SKIP WOULD TAKE ME ON LITTLE TRIPS TO PLACES ALL AROUND THE CITY. TODAY, SKIP WOULD TAKE ME TO THE FORESTS, TO EXPERIENCE THE LIFE OF THE PURE WILDERNESS. I AM SO ECSTATIC. AS WE FLEW OVER THE ENDLESS FIELD OF GREEN TREES, WE SAW DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANIMALS TOO, CREATURES THAT I DIDN’T EVEN KNOW EXISTED, CREATURES THAT I HAD ONLY KNOWN IN FAIRY TALES. JUST AS I WAS STARTING TO THINK THAT MY LIFE WAS AT ITS PEAK, “BANG!” THE SOUND STARTLED ME AND SKIP.

“WE HAVE TO CUT THIS TRIP SHORT, WE HAVE TO LEAVE, NOW!” SKIP SAID FEARFULLY.

I HAD NEVER SEEN THE VULNERABLE SIDE OF SKIP BEFORE, HE WAS ALWAYS SO STRONG AND BOLD, HE SEEMED INVINCIBLE, WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE SO FRIGHTENING THAT MADE HIM THIS SCARED?

“WHY? WHAT HAS HAPPENED, WHY ARE WE LEAVING?”

“YOU DON’T GET IT! SOME HUMANS* HERE WANT US DEAD FOR THEIR OWN ENTERTAINMENT, IT’S NOT ALWAYS FLOWERS AND RAINBOWS YOU KNOW!”

SKIP WAS FLYING AWAY FROM THE FOREST, HEADING BACK TO OUR NEST, BUT I JUST REMAINED WHERE I WAS – I FROZE, PARTIALLY BECAUSE I WAS ALSO SCARED, BUT ALSO BECAUSE FOR ONCE SKIP WAS BEING UNREASONABLE. IT’S JUST A LOUD SOUND, WHAT IS SO THREATENING ABOUT THAT?

“COME ON CHILD! LET’S GO! WE DON’T HAVE TIME!”

I IGNORED HIS WARNINGS, THINKING HE WAS A COWARD, BUT I DIDN’T HAVE MUCH TIME UNTIL ANOTHER “BANG!” A SOUND CAME ALONG, THIS TIME IT WAS MUCH CLOSER TO ME, TOO CLOSE, THAT METAL BALL WOULD’VE HIT ME, BUT IN FRONT OF ME APPEARED SKIP, IT HIT HIM, HE WAS HURT. I PANICKED, I CRIED, I SCREAMED FOR HELP, BUT I WAS HELPLESS, I WATCHED HIM FALL ALL THE WAY TO THE GROUND, LOOKING AT ME WITH THOSE DYING EYES. I COULDN’T STAY FOR LONG TO GRIEVE FOR HIM, I HAD TO LEAVE, TO ESCAPE, BUT WHERE WOULD I GO? THE NEST WOULDN’T BE HOME WITHOUT SKIP AND I DIDN’T KNOW ANYBODY ELSE IN THE CITY. AT THIS TRAGIC MOMENT, I SUDDENLY THOUGHT OF MY ORIGINAL OWNER, MY CAGE, MY FIRST EVER HOME.

I FINALLY REALIZED THAT ALL THOSE “ANNOYING” HUGS AND CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MY OWNER’S LIFE WERE ALL EXPRESSIONS OF HER LOVE FOR ME, AND NOT ONLY DID I TAKE THAT FOR GRANTED, BUT I GOT MAD AT HER FOR IT AND LEFT HER, SHE MUST’VE BEEN JUST AS DEVASTATED AND HEARTBROKEN AS I AM FEELING NOW, I FEEL TERRIBLE. I FLEW BACK TO THE PLACE WHERE THE WALLS WERE, FLEW THROUGH THE WINDOWS THAT I HAD ONCE LONGED TO BREAK OUT OF, AND WALKED BACK INTO MY CAGE.



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WE HOPE YOU'VE ENJOYED THE PIECES CREATED BY OUR YHKCC STUDENT BODY!



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