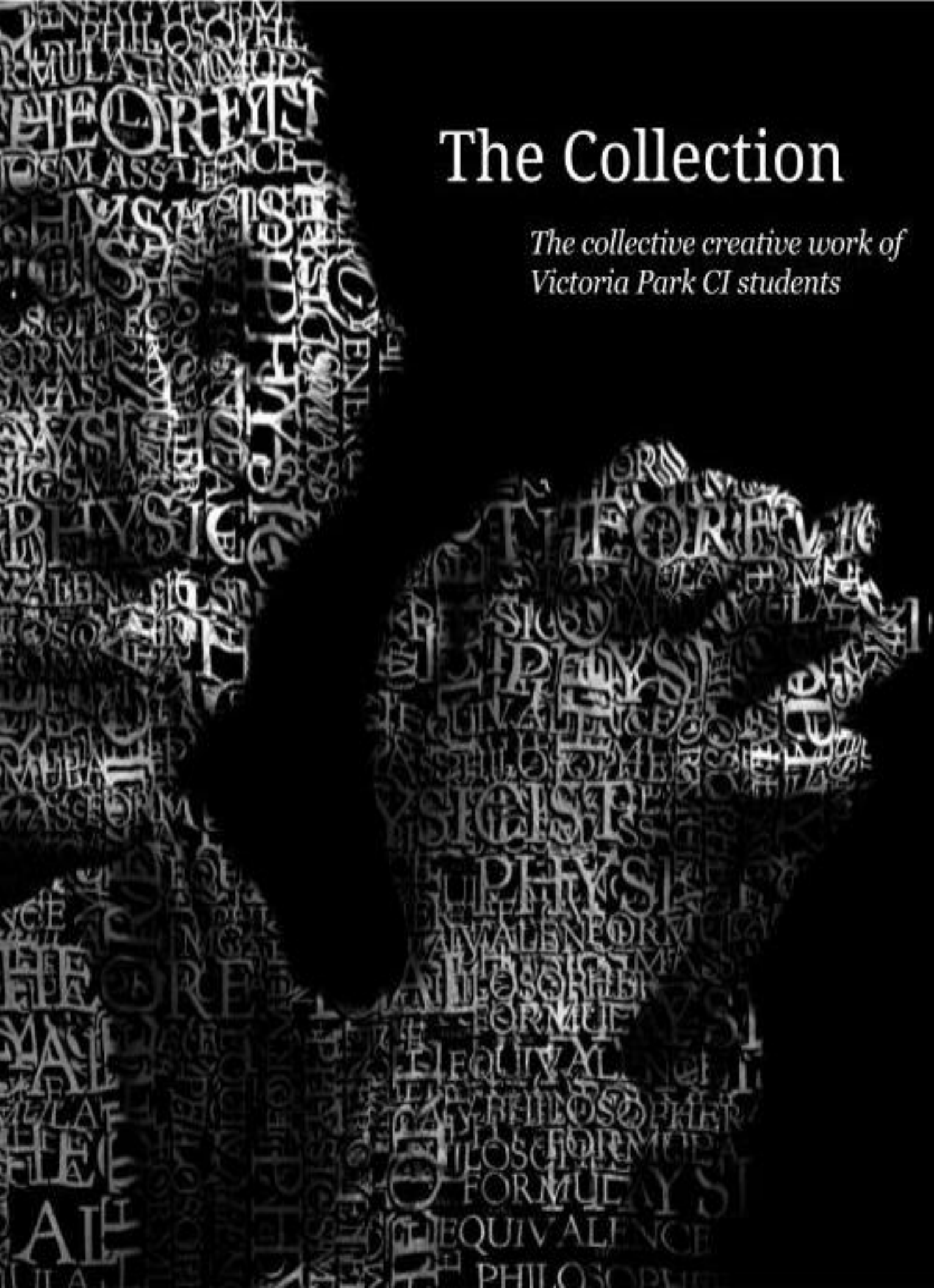


The Collection

*The collective creative work of
Victoria Park CI students*



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Cover page by Jane Li

The Rest is History

Serena Zhang

“Am I obligated to fix things if I had the power to? Is it doing justice, or am I just playing God?” The man sighs to himself, taking his hat off and tossing it onto the ground. He takes a deep breath and smiles faintly, his expression relaxing. “What a wonderful thing it is, to be here. I’ve heard stories, but it’s still very much a fantasy to me.” Finally, he casts his attention to the figure who sat beside him. “Joseph?”

Joseph looks up. “Who are you?” he seethes. “Get out.” The man merely chuckles.

“The important question isn’t who I am, but rather if you’ve realized what you’ve done?”

Joseph doesn’t respond and only turns his head away. The man observes silently and nods. “I thought you’d react that way, but I fear I may have come too late. Or perhaps not. I need humanity to learn from its mistakes after all.”

“What. Do. You. Want.” Joseph shifts in his spot.

The man stares at him for several seconds. “Answer the question first.”

“What question?”

“Am I obligated to fix things if I had the power to?”

“I...I don’t know the answer to that.”

“Of course you don’t,” the man scoffs, “I don’t expect someone as powerless as you to understand.” The man approaches Joseph and leans closer. “You’ve done something horrible,” he says darkly, “something I hate you irrevocably for. But don’t worry, I can fix it. I’ve fixed things like this before.”

Joseph shakes his head. “I don’t understand.”

The man puts his hand on Joseph’s forehead and purses his lips in concentration. There’s a quiet buzzing sound. “You will experience a stroke on the fifth of March.” The man rises to his feet and then picks up his hat. He casually dusts it off, and places it on top of his head.

“No stop!” Joseph pleads. “You need to explain this to me. What’s going on? Who are you?”

The man smiles calmly, raising his arms to adjust his watch. Suddenly, and swirling mass of blue light appears beside him.

“This isn’t about me. This is about you - Joseph Stalin - and the rest as they say, is history.”

Another

Katrina Fedorova

My left foot touches the ground, rolling from heel to toe, then pushing off the road. My right foot continues the pattern.

The winds pick up, sending my hair in different directions. Golden tentacles float around my face, reaching for the cloaked sun. My shadow hides within me, no longer trailing at my feet.

I hear a song.

It flits through my head, dancing out of reach. My mind grasps at the words; a will of iron. I hear a grinding screech, the sound of force against thought.

The tangible and intangible collide. All is quiet.

I wait.

Silence reigns.

A long breath turns to liquid droplets, an expression of my disappointment. My hands retreat further up my sleeves, seeking warmth. My feet carry out their melancholy rhythm. Time passes.

I hear the song again.

This time, I follow the call.

The song beckons, enticing me. It tells of a young hero, destined to change the world. A hero unaware of her power, the promise her future holds.

My voice answers with a song of my own. The tale of a child trapped in her world, a meaningless existence. Her desire for rescue a subtle yet omnipresent thought. Her constant yearning to surpass mortality in an unprecedented way, to find an escape.

My voice quiets, the story ended.

There is no pause this time, the messenger returns.

Their song promises to grant my wish.

My feet no longer maintain a steady rhythm; they spring, leaping ever closer to the source of the song. A misty cloud obscures my face. My fingers tremble with excitement.

Blinded by need, guided by sound, I find a meadow beneath my feet.

The smell of frost, crisp and clean, infects me. My knees buckle, my senses absorbing the new environment. Trees sway, their dying leaves tenderly embracing air. The grass hardly moves, turned stiff by frozen dew from last night's rain.

A lonely path leads further into forest. The shadows cluster there; mine calls for me to join them. I oblige.

The song is louder now, more desperate. It begs my caution.

I ignore the warning. My destiny awaits me. My legs push ever onward, drawing from my boundless strength.

The path leads me further into woods. The sky grows darker, thicker with menace. The messenger denies me their song once more.

My nose hints at a foul presence. My feet stop their hurried assault of the ground. My breathing quiets, fear ensues. The unknown threatens my existence.

I see the messenger for the first time; a quiet shape huddled in its trap. Their breathing ragged, song run dry. The presence lurks, trapping them.

The smell of decay grows nearer. Moonlight illuminates a grotesquery. Brutish limbs, hooked claws, dripping fangs all make up the same creature. It guards the frightened singer, the messenger, the herald who bravely called me to their aid. Hope flashes on their face; the beast prowls on, unaware.

I am the hero.

I must fight.

My fingers search for weapons, grasping a sturdy stick to my palms. The messenger starts up a frantic song, emboldening my advance. My throat lets loose a piercing cry. My feet applaud my entrance.

The beast is slow. It shifts in my direction, its eyes fogged over by this sudden disturbance. I leap, plunging my noble lance into the creature's maw.

My foolish hands, they miss.

The ground drags me down, my body splayed onto its surface. The messenger urges me to rise, to continue the fight.

My hands push me into standing. My fingers find my weapon.

The beast rumbles, mocking my attempt. The earth shakes as it charges, roaring. I brace myself, holding the pointed wood outward.

The monster plows on. My heart pumps frantically, begging me to run.

I stand my ground.

Too late, the beast's sluggish thoughts catch up.

Branch pierces hide. A dying wail rings out. The creature slumps forward, black liquid pouring from its heart. The messenger sings of glorious defeat.

The beast stops screaming, its strength subsides. My voice declares a victory. I turn to help the messenger escape their bonds. My hands grant freedom.

I hear a fleeting noise, a warning.

Time slows.

I am in flight.

The ground greets me once more. The messenger runs to my side.

A growl rips through the woods. The beast hurls the branch away, its wound mending. Its heartless fist lies at its side, unaware of the damage it had caused. The monster lumbers toward the spot it aimed for.

I urge my sluggish limbs to stand. They disobey my order. My mind slows, exhausted. My shadow sleeps in moonlight, unaware of any threat.

I hear a song.

The beast is dead, the song tells me. A noble hero slew the menace. Harmony is restored, the plague wiped out. Good lives on.

Foreign tears trail down my face, the messenger mourns.

My ears detect a roar of triumph; my nose smells the putrid air. My thoughts swirl, dull and useless. My hands rest on my chest, warm liquid collecting in my palms. My eyes close, my mind content with the messenger's sweet lies.

Their song erases my fears.

I greet a hero's fate.

Anomaly

Serena Zhang

“T-These results,” I stuttered, “don’t make any sense.” I looked at the sheet of paper, and then back to the screen. “This simply isn’t possible,” I breathed, “such an anomaly should be classified immediately as a scientific breakthrough.”

I punched in the numbers again.

And again.

The results didn’t change.

Immediately, I went to the phone and dialed a number. “Sir,” I yelled, “You have to come to the lab right away.”

“What is it?”

My eyes darted frantically around the room, looking for the research notes. Once I found them again, I grabbed the slip of paper and recited the numbers on them. “Sir, these subject’s behavior and sudden speed increase means that we’re onto something huge.”

I could hear the professor thinking behind the phone. “No, there’s a variable we forgot to input.”

My throat suddenly felt dry. “What. What did we forget?”

“The subjects were induced to something.”

He took a deep breath.

“Dubstep.”

Disillusionment

Nathaniel Johnston

Beep... beep... beep...

The methodical sound filled my ears as my eyes opened groggily. I dragged myself away from the warm and inviting bed as I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes. I opened the blinds and squinted as the bright light of dawn poured in.

I turned to make my way towards the washroom and jumped at the sight of a man in a silk suit sitting in the chair in the corner, watching me as one would watch an animal at the zoo.

“Who the hell are you?” I screamed in what was supposed to be a threatening tone but came out more like a scared whimper.

“Please, do not use that word. It is not exactly... appropriate in the current circumstance.”

“You gotta be kidding me. Some random man comes in my room while I sleep but I’m the one who’s inappropriate.”

Beep... beep... beep...

I slam my hand on the alarm and bring my attention back to the man. He was standing now, his hands buried in his pockets.

“Please, come with me,” he said calmly, as if his presence was the most ordinary thing in the world. Yet even though I recognised that the situation was completely absurd, I was intrigued and somehow compelled to do as the man asked.

He waited outside the front door and I was forced to come out in the cold in just my pyjamas. He stared at the sunrise with a strange nostalgia.

“I remember when my father painted these skies. It was ages ago but it just seems like yesterday...”

“Right...” I replied, continuing the act that everything was perfectly normal. “So, um, did you just drag me out here to look at the sunrise?” I hugged my arms, the cold November air was starting to make me shiver and my thin pyjamas offered little protection against its harsh bite.

“Not quite, we are going to see someone very important.” He began to walk off and I followed him without a second thought, as if I were just along for the ride and didn’t really have a choice in the matter. “He has been watching you for a long time, Jason.”

I opened my mouth to speak, how did he know my name? who was this man we were going to see and why has he been watching me? I shut my mouth again, figuring the man wouldn't give a straight answer anyway. Everything he said only succeeded in confusing me more.

We approached a high-end, black car and the man took out his key and pressed the unlock button twice.

Beep... beep... beep...

Strange, usually cars only beeped twice when unlocked. I shrugged as I stepped into the car, he probably just pressed it twice.

I chuckled to myself. There I was, stepping into some stranger's car and the only thing I was worried about was how many times the car beeped. I didn't even know his name! It wasn't some white van though, so I was fine... probably. Maybe.

"So, where are you taking me?" I asked as he turned into the street from his parking spot along the curb. He didn't respond and continued driving as if I hadn't said anything. I nodded my head and pursed my lips. "Just great..."

The initial shock of meeting a stranger and getting in his car began to wear off and I started to realise how tired I still was. I didn't have school to go to that morning so I figured I might as well get some rest before we arrived at wherever we were going.

It felt as if my eyes had only been closed for about five minutes before I felt the car lurch to a stop and heard the driver door open and close, telling me that we had arrived.

Beep... beep... beep...

The sound woke me. It felt as though we had only been driving for maybe five minutes but we had already reached our destination and the man was stepping out of the car. I followed suit, my mouth agape. There was an enormous mansion that looked as if it belonged to some billionaire. The outside of the house looked to be made largely of grey stone bricks and it seemed to have more windows than I could count. Perfectly carved hedges lined the perimeter of the house, and vines were climbing their way up one of the walls, giving it a very natural look. A large golden gate blocked our entrance.

Except for the house, we were surrounded by empty field as far as the eye could see.

As we walked toward the gate, it opened automatically, allowing us entrance into the grand house.

The inside of the house was even more remarkable than the outside. A large chandelier hung over the foyer casting little rainbows throughout the room. Most of the house seemed to be made of hardwood and even from where I stood, I could already see more rooms than my entire house.

“Come. He awaits you up the stairs,” said the man, the stairs creaking under his weight. I followed him up to the second floor and through a maze of hallways before he finally led me into a room which looked like study. A man was sitting at the desk and upon hearing us enter, he looked up and smiled.

The man didn’t have anything particularly odd about his appearance, simple short white hair, a little messy if anything, a white beard, and wrinkles around his eyes, as if he had been around a long time but enjoyed every minute of it. He flashed a smile and in that moment I felt a wave of relief and happiness wash over me; I felt at peace.

I opened my eyes. I was laying on an uncomfortable mattress, a thin blanket covering me.

Beep... beep... beep...

And then I remembered. I looked around at the white walls and floor. The smell of chemicals and the sounds of people rushing by surrounded me. I sighed and looked to my right and saw the familiar monitor with the broken line flashing up and down periodically.

Beep... beep... beep...

I closed my eyes and felt a single tear run down my cheek. I wished I were back in that dream, even if it was strange, anything would beat where I was at that moment.

I gasped and shuddered as I heard the beeping stop to be replaced by a single high pitched tone. I opened my eyes, but I wasn’t in the same position as I had been just a few seconds ago. I was standing by the bed, staring down on my body, I could already see the colour begin to fade from my skin.

“Hello, Jason. Are you ready?” I turned around to see the man in the suit once again. He offered me his hand, and I gladly took it, smiling for the first time in what felt like ages.

the fish that climbed a tree

Leo Liang

i know how to add
i know how to subtract
but on tests i seem to do really bad
i can divide
and i can multiply
but my marks only make me want to cry
i do all my practice
i fix my mistakes
but quizzes seem to give me headaches
i study the operations
i always use bedmas
but there ain't one exam that i can pass
I'm good at art,
I am the fish you see,
But I'm not taught to swim, I'm forced to climb trees.

The Huntsman

Leo Liang

Mag; reload; cock; fire.

Steady my hands stay through the recoiling vibrations

Hunting wildebeests are my desire,

In this season full of migrations

Take aim and shoot, I hit its head.

And down it falls, dropping dead.

I take this trophy, bring it to my family

With its meat we will be well fed.

My Red
Napas Thein

My red exists as a symbol of love

It is the passion that desolates humanity

It is heart

It is blood

It is hurt

It is death

It is anger

The symbol of greed that desolates humanity

My red exists as a symbol of hate.

Lost

Kevin Feng

In life's outlandish cycle she drifted,
Embarked to discover the break of day.
A girl caged in identities that shifts,
Until she neared a gem of lustrous rays,
For she ponders; thee was the shining sun,
Who illuminates injustice you clench,
But, thy crooked deeds proved a foul joke's pun,
Like a faint shadow consumed by wealth's quench.
Oh, can love be defined through men's semblance?
For beauty is to veil thy burning heart,
A knife that's drowned in greed and malignance,
Whose teeth shattered her looking glass apart.
Oh Bertha; striding a cave of false dreams,
Too mad and wretched for divine light's beams.

Dark.ness

Napas Their

Following the sky in deafening darkness
Evokes my need to explore the jungle
Seeing the stars in a humbling starkness
Kills fear of spores of origins fungal

Because if the jungle is my false freedom
Then to live my life, I have no reason
Because if this fungus is my happiness but frail
Then the evil and my heart will begin to embale

But in fact my heart and my evil don't blend
And my life doesn't come to a tragic young end
Maybe you can be trapped but still roam the skies
Maybe there's no need to be always happy to live our lives

So find yourself a reason to live
Even the stars, if that's what they give
And find yourself a way to be free
Even a jungle, if that's what you see

The Nine (Excerpt)

Anonymous

It was a beautiful sunny Saturday afternoon and I was spending it with my mother and father. It could have been like any other afternoon, I was carefree and happy. We were strolling through the park; my mother's finger's laced through mine. Birds were singing and flowers were blooming; trees were towering over our heads and there were children playing in the grass. I was sent to go over and join them.

As I played with a few toys, I noticed that my mother and father went over to a few odd men and had started to talk. Their conversation grew louder and louder and it eventually grew into a heated argument. I couldn't tell what they were talking about but they seemed extremely angry. I don't think I've seen them so angry ever before. I decided to go over and see what it was all about.

On my way there, a thin man came from behind me and a cloth was draped over my mouth and nostrils. I yelled out to my parents while at the same time inhaling the sickly sweet smell of the cloth. The sound barely escaped my mouth before I slumped to the ground unconscious. I was eight then.

I woke in a small crowded room with about fifteen other kids. They seemed to be just as frightened and as confused as I was. Which, in a way, was a bit comforting, it meant that they weren't only kidnapping *me*, they were also interested in other children and I wasn't alone. That may not seem so great to you, it might even seem worse, but if I had woken up alone in some alien room with no one else around me I would have reacted a lot worse.

We were all locked in clear plastic containers curled into balls without any room to move. Small holes were placed in the roof and sides of the containers to allow us to breathe but even then it was difficult, it couldn't allow enough air in to be comfortable, but then, I didn't really think comfort was their top priority.

Two well-built men stepped into the room through a large metallic door. One was light skinned with jet-black hair while; the other had bright brown hair and golden skin.

They started to approach us slowly and I started to cower and hide. The brown haired one stood in front of a crate, than brought his fist down hard and barked at the trembling boy in the box. I closed my eyes and winced as his fist came in contact with the clear plastic. The poor boy yelped and started to cry as he laughed at his pain.

“Hey, man. Cut it out. They're supposed to be in top condition, mentally and physically. The boss said so himself,” said the black haired man.

“Yeah? Whatch ya gonna do about it?” retorted the other as he puffed out his chest trying to look tougher.

“I'm gonna drag your skinny little a** to the boss's office and let him deal with you himself!”

“I'd like to see you try,” The golden skinned man said through clenched teeth.

“Don't mess with me, you know what I can do,” the black haired one's voice growing louder and louder. His skin was turning red with rage and I thought I could see his nails grow a little and darken; I even thought I saw the tips of horns poking out through his thick curly hair. The other frowned as the colour drained from his face. He slowly started to load us onto metal carts, without saying a word. Although, I thought I could still see a hateful gleam in his eyes.

I didn't know what he was so afraid of, but if he could make the colour drain from his face like that then I did not want to get on his bad side.

They placed us all in separate rooms with nothing but a metal table that I guessed that I was supposed to sleep on, a metal cube and a novel. (I guess they didn't want us to die of boredom.)

The room wasn't much. The walls were made of wood and the floor was laid down with sheets of wood that gave you splinters every time you took a step. A metal door took up the far wall from the bed and multiple locks secured it. An air vent was placed in the top right corner of the wall to the left of the metal table.

There was no high-tech security or anything. I guess they thought that we were just kids and we weren't smart enough or strong enough to be able to escape.

I lay down on the cold metal wondering what in the world was happening. A tear rolled down my cheek as I reminisced about my parents and the wonderful things we did together, now all of that was just wrenched from away; everything that I ever loved.

I was sobbing, no kid should have to go through something like this, yet there I was, locked in a small room like a prisoner. But I had done nothing wrong.

Love Kills (Excerpt)

Nathaniel Johnston

I stood outside and breathed the fresh, cool air. The sun had just begun to set over the horizon, painting the sky a bright orange, reminding me of the sweet taste of fruit. The birds were singing their beautiful melody from the trees, and the trees swayed with a slow and steady rhythm, like a metronome keeping the beat of the universe, and for that brief moment everything was peaceful.

The moment was suddenly interrupted by the sound of the car door slamming shut and my fiancée, Amelia, yelling at me to help her unload the car. I reluctantly peeled my eyes from the beautiful sight before me and struggled to pull our supplies from the back of our Dodge caravan. I never understood why we needed such a big car for just the two of us and occasionally our dog, Ralph, but she had insisted, saying we never would know when we might need something larger, and it was better to be safe than sorry. I didn't argue too much, all that mattered was that she was happy.

"Come on, Ralph!" I called as I gathered the last of our belongings and headed to the cabin we rented which lay near a pond a fair distance from the edge of the forest. Some people would argue that we weren't truly camping since we were using a cabin, and I'd be inclined to agree, but it was mid-February and things were still too cold for staying outside. It was much more comfortable, to say the least, to stay indoors with a cozy fire where we cuddle up together and keep warm.

I had always loved camping, even as a small boy. Some of my best memories were from my camps: the outdoors, the sounds of the birds' songs, the way the fish leapt out of the river, even the smell of burning wood from the campfire. I even met Amelia at camp.

We were both camp counsellors in the summer of 2003, I was seventeen, and she was one year younger than me. It wasn't love at first sight like in the movies, but we quickly grew to become close friends. As time passed and we spent more and more time with each other, I began to see her in a way I never had before. Her long, black hair flowed and fell perfectly along her back, her dark eyes glistened, her smile compelled my lips to mirror hers, and the way she brushed her hair behind her ear made my butterflies take flight in my stomach I realised I was hopelessly in love with her. I thought about her all day and she occupied every single one of my dreams. I had no choice but to tell her.

The confession of my love was a horribly terrifying experience, but a necessary one. I had everything planned out. I would take her out for a picnic on a beautiful sunny day, and we would sit on a small hill and run our fingers through the grass. I would take her hands in mine, look deep into her eyes, and ask her, "Amelia, will you be my

girlfriend?” Those words were pivotal, I had to say them with enough emotion to show I truly cared for her, and yet I had to be nonchalant enough to show that I was confident and her response wouldn’t affect me too much, which obviously was not true.

When the day finally arrived, it was not sunny, but rather cloudy, and the ground was far too wet. Several opportunities to ask her arose and passed individually. My heart seemed to be leaping from my chest and I could barely carry our conversation. She must have sensed something was different because she seemed concerned for me, which was not ideal, to say the least. During a rather long period of silence, I decided to muster up my courage and ask, nothing would come of nothing.

“Amelia...” I said quietly. I blanked, completely forgetting everything I had planned. “I think you’re really amazing. And, Um, I was wondering if... well, you see...” I took a deep breath, this was going terribly.

“Shh, I know what you’re going to say,” she whispered. She leaned in close and whispered the magical word that made my heart feel like it was a thousand doves that were finally able to fly, “yes.” She placed a gentle kiss on my lips and from that moment on we were hooked.

Even after all of these years, she still grew to be more amazing with each passing day.

Keeping it Casual with Devi

Serena Zhang

A single candle lights the dim room. In the corner, a figure hunches over an old wooden desk, her hands moving sporadically up and down a sheet of parchment. The sleeves of her shirt are pulled up, revealing the spots of ink sprawled across her skin. She leans back, and adjusts her cracked glasses. “What do you think?” she asks, shoving the pile of papers into your arms. Behind the lenses, there’s a maniacal look in her eyes. A shiver runs down your spine.

Hesitantly, you take a look at the papers. The edges are worn and ripped, and several words have already been scribbled over and smudged. You look back up. “You can hardly read them...”

She crosses her arms and scowls. “I didn’t drag you down here to criticize my work.”

“But you just asked me –“

“Enough!” She fixes you a withering glare and snatches the papers back. “You’re the hundredth person I’ve brought here in this week alone. Every single one of you, say the same thing.” She clutches her heart. “Can’t you at least show some decent human kindness?”

“What heart?” you scoff, “I doubt you even have a soul.”

Her eye twitches and she pinches the bridge of her nose. “Do you like any other of my works then?” She gestures to the massive bookshelf that covered the opposing wall.

You frown. “They’re all depressing.”

She points to book with a red spine. “Do you like the Black Plague?”

“Hate it.”

“What about the War of 1812?”

“Disgusting.”

“What about something more recent...Um...Ebola?”

“I rate it -1/10.”

She throws her arms up. “Fine. I get it. Everything I write is horrible. It’s not like I have a choice!”

You sigh. “Can I leave now? I want my memory wiped clean.”

Finally, her head slumps down. “The exits on the left. You’ll forget everything in a few hours anyway.”

You get up from your seat and walk towards the exit. Just as your hands touch the doorknob, you stop. “Hey um, your sign has a typo.”

She perks up. “What? I just got it fixed a week ago!”

“Yeah. It says Devi, instead of...You know.”

“Go. I’ll fix it myself.”

Once you leave the room, she sighs and snaps her fingers. Slowly, the letter L engraves itself onto the plaque.

