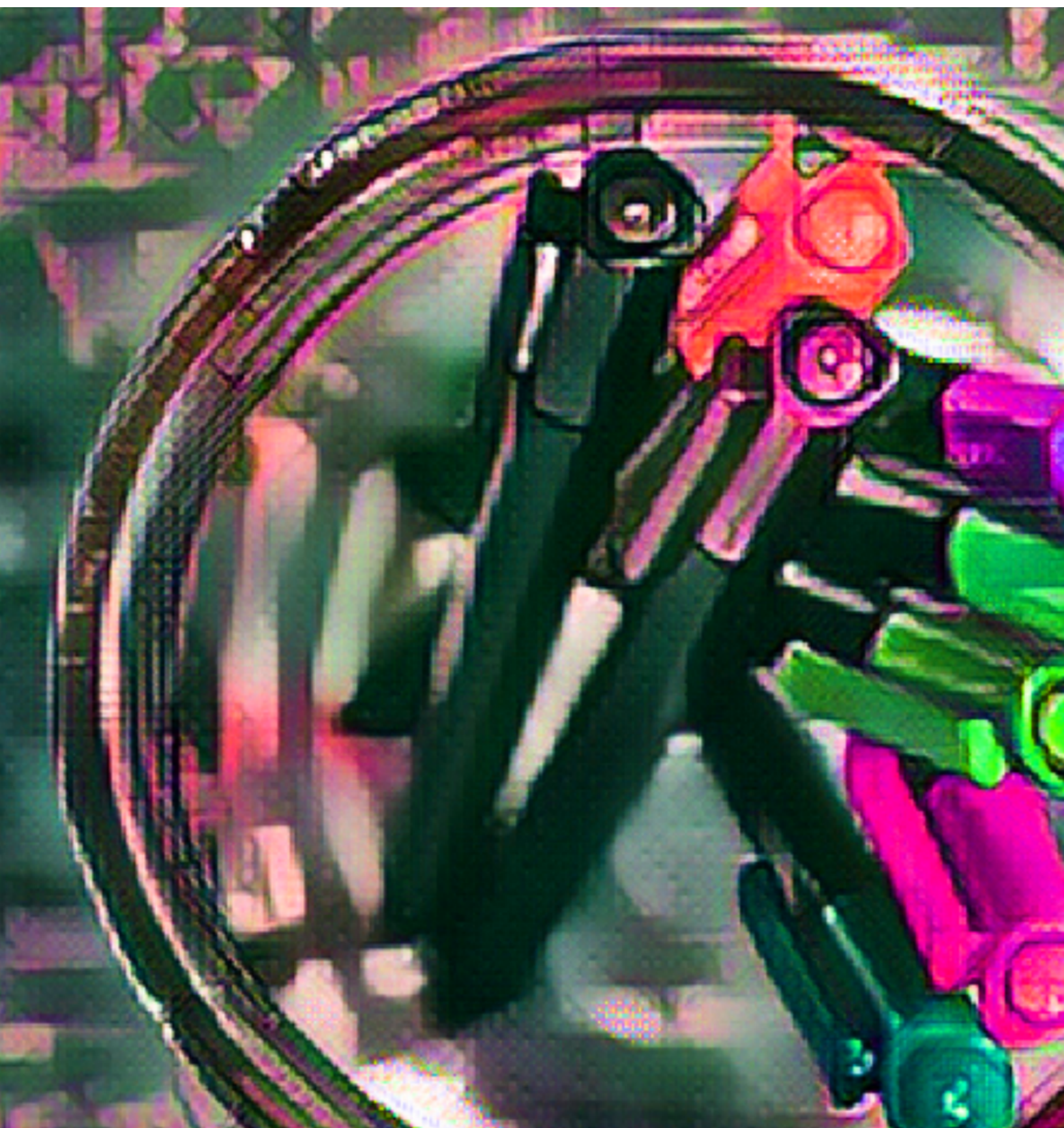


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A Murder of Crows. A PARLIAMENT OF OWLS

by Zoë Kaplan

Crows mean death, child.

The warning would echo through her ears at every opportunity her family could find.

"Look mommy, a bird!"

"A crow, crows mean death, child. Always remember that."

It was a vague warning and an annoying one. What would a child do with such a statement? What does a child know of

death? Of crows? The warnings came to her so young. Before she could even express the emotion, she would point at a pretty bird and receive the same statement.

"Crows mean death, child."

She found herself drawn to the animals. *They were beautiful*, she thought. Their wings seemed to shimmer rainbow colours under the sun, and their eyes always seemed to know more than they were letting on.

But crows meant death.

The owls know your secrets, boy.

A warning, his father liked to whisper it in his ears, getting close, too close, to his head to murmur the phrase.

"The owls know your secrets, boy, and so do I. You can't hide from them. And you can't hide from me."

He tried. He climbed the trees at night, climbed out his window and snuck through the branches, quiet as he could, clad in all black. But his father always saw. He was young, too young to face this abuse.



"The owls know your secrets, boy." He would be dragged back inside, sent back to bed. All he wanted was to be out in the night.

He saw them, once, the owls. They perched on the tree outside his window. Watching him, unblinking.

The owls knew his secrets.

Crows mean death, child.

Once, years after the first warning, she saw a gathering of them in the tree of her neighbour's house. She smiled when she saw them. They were beautiful, in a way, the collection of them on the bare tree looking like extraordinary leaves.

Her mother dragged her away from the window, and her grandmother scolded her. "Crows mean death, child. Stay away." Her mother looked out the window sadly, and she understood what the warning meant.

It only solidified when they got the news the house was for sale, its owner had passed away.

The owls know your secrets, boy.

He climbed out the window one last time, years after the first warning, as the "For Sale" sign was hammered in front of the house. Nobody knew what had been done



or who had done it. He felt himself being watched and brushed it off, muttering to himself.

"The owls know your secrets, boy."

He chuckled darkly. The old man could not repeat the statement. Not anymore.

Crows mean death, child.

Years passed. She studied animal biology and religion. Trying to understand the superstition that had been pushed on her and why it kept coming true. She spent her days poring over books on birds. She did not notice the world changing around her. She went to visit her grandmother, and a crow landed on the tree above her grandmother's head. She pointed it out.

"Crows mean death, child." Her grandmother said sadly.

The news of her grandmother's passing came the next day.

The owls know your secrets, boy.

Years passed. He stayed on the run. Never wanting to stay in one place for too long. It wasn't his style. He collected things, pretty things that he stole and would sell them to pawn shops to get to the next city.

Often he would find owl themed trinkets and leave them.

"The owls know your secrets, boy."

It would ring in his ears. He knew if he tried to pass on those things he would be caught. So they were left, and he kept moving.

Crows mean death, child.

She was lonely. Getting lonely. It had been a long time since she had made a connection with anyone. She was worried, ever since her grandmother, years ago, of what might happen to them.

She avoided eye contact with people, not wanting to see crows, not wanting to know their fates. The crows followed her, perched on the tree outside her window. She wanted to know why she was immune.

The owls know your secrets, boy.

He found himself in a bustling city and got to work. He walked with a hood up and a mask over his face, not wanting anyone to see what he looked like. Head down, eyes down. He did not see the girl until they were both on the ground.

Crows mean death, child.

She helped the boy up. He was about her age. His hood had been knocked off to reveal shiny, feather-like black hair. He pulled down the mask to reveal a sharp nose and thin lips. She was immediately struck by the resemblance.

"Crows mean death, child," she muttered.

The owls know your secrets, boy.

He looked at the girl, pulling down his mask to apologize. She was plain. Brown hair, round face and oversized round glasses. Eyes that seemed to see past his physical form. He was immediately struck by the resemblance.

"The owls know your secrets, boy," he muttered.

They were about to find out why.

Zoë is the 1st place winner in the Short Story category for this year's Teen Writing Contest.



Photo credit: Finley Young

UNFINISHED *Thought* by Emily Taylor

In the recesses of my mind, parts of you returned to haunt me.
In the midst of the mundane,
and in the depths of the extraordinary, you showed up without warning.
You had originally left me like an unfinished thought,
but the frustration of not remembering the other half of it, and the sting of its evident
importance kept me alert and obsessive.
You danced around like a forgotten word on the tip of my tongue.
An unknown song one knew the rhythm of but not the title.
And when I was finally ready to let you go,
the residue of our memories resurfaced.
A stain in which I thought I had washed out years ago,
bright red and good as new.
But you were still as good as gone.



***Emily is the 1st place
winner in the Poetry
category for this year's
Teen Writing Contest.***

sticky ARMS

by Erin Movold

My legs were numb and my eyes heavy. I shifted in my hard leather seat once more, in hopes of signalling to the older gentlemen to my left that, though the train was full, his shoulder certainly did not need to be touching mine. The rather gloomy day had produced a wet heat that seeped through the cracks of the train car and into the slimy meeting of our arms. Every ten minutes or so, for no reason I could think of, he would slowly peel his arm off of my young skin and check his pretentiously golden watch. Though my muscles were tired and my stamina dwindling, I was acutely aware when he rejoined our arms every time he finished admiring his time-telling waste of money. On my right, the small woman whom I hadn't paid much attention to returned her laptop to her bag and combed through her dark hair. She didn't seem to mind that her elbow was about to knock me out or that strands of her hair, in their frizziness and fullness, were falling all over my lap. She spoke through a headset in a language I didn't understand but her tone was furious enough to make me feel lucky I wasn't talking to the frustratingly dull person on the other side of her call. I tugged my skirt down again, almost enough to protect my thighs from the sticky seat, and in my pure discomfort, let out a long-cultivated groan.

"Having a bad time, sweetheart?"

The man shifted his gaze from the racing view of the window to my 12-year-old eyes, but mine stayed fixed on my feet. I was sure the man and his sweaty arms were trying to be considerate, but I was too tired to be social in the exhausting way my mother taught me.

"No, sir."

His booming chuckle made me flinch, and I suddenly wished I was wearing pants. I tried to remember which pairs I brought in my backpack that I could change into, but that would require moving from my paralyzed position: legs crossed, arms pressed head down. Overhead, the conductor interrupted the man's piercing gaze to announce that we had arrived at the next stop. The man leaned toward me to avoid the bustle of passengers gathering up their belongings and awkwardly shuffling down the middle lane. In his new closeness, the strong scent of my father's old cologne stung my nose. It used to be oaky, fresh, comforting. I didn't think it quite suited this man in his crisply ironed button-up shirt and greasy almost-grey hair. The next time I blinked, I wished that my eyes would open to find that this man was just a personification of my fear,



a sign from who my parents would call God that I should not be on this train right now. But his grimy grinning teeth and widening legs were still much too real, and I was still sitting there, resisting the urge to move and itch my fresh bug bites. The train conductor called out a final warning for exiting the train, and I was thankful I at least had the company of the lady to my right's violent elbows.

"I sure hope it's not too bad. You headed to meet your family?"

Family. I let my eyes look up from tracing the laces of my converse and noticed a family with three young sons across the aisle from us. Two of the boys were taking turns playing some game on an iPad, but the third, much younger boy was resting on the shoulder of his mother, ignorant to any strange men or unpleasantness in her soft embrace. I remembered the comfort in which I fell asleep on my father's shoulder every week coming home from piano lessons. I would have to find my own comfort now. As I was lost in regretful thought, the man became impatient for a response and pressed deeper into my arm to get my attention. My muscles clenched tighter. My eyes shot back down to the floor. I focused on my breathing like the guidance counsellor at school told me to sometimes. I realized that the last thing this man needed to know is that I was alone and he was an accomplice in my escape.

"Yes, sir."

A lie.

"You're not very talkative, are you, girl? You know, you can talk to me. I'm here for you."

The uncomfortable offer hung in the air like cow manure, fermenting in the mugginess and overcrowding of the train. My neck pained from being hunched over, pins and needles flooded my legs, and small remnants of my bangs stuck to my sweaty forehead. Once tears started pooling in my eyes, I realized that this "real world" my parents seem so protective of is, in fact, not full of freedom and adventure and excitement, but old men and flailing elbows and envy instead.

We arrived at the next stop, and I flew out of my seat using my backpack as a shield against the swarms of people trying to beat me off the car. The man said something as I scurried away, but I couldn't hear him over the voice in my head telling me where to go next. I dialled the one phone number I had memorized on the nearest payphone and stood quietly crying as it rang.

Brrr. Brrr. Brrr.

I checked the train door to make sure the man didn't follow me. My foot started tapping in urgency. The glass walls of the payphone center started shrinking in on me. But then finally,

"Hello?"

A sigh of relief.

"Mom please come pick me up."

Erin is the 2nd place winner in the Short Story category for this year's Teen Writing Contest.



TRAMPOLINE

by Aileen Gao

Jumping

Up

And down

Over and over again

Reaching higher and higher

For the sky and the clouds above

Eager to escape the confines of the ground

Landing again and again

For a short break every so often

Relieved to feel the familiar ground once more

The wind carries us aloft

Cheering us on with playful nudges

Telling us to venture into its domain of freedom

The gravity pulls us down

Advising us to consider our safety

Warning us of the dangers that lie beyond

Two invisible forces

Calling out to us

As we jump

Up

And down

Over and over again

Aileen is the 2nd place winner in the Poetry category for this year's Teen Writing Contest.



Monarch

by Johanna Kiik

I recently made a close friend. She flutters beside me, whispers kind poetry in my ear, rests awake on my shoulder during cold afternoons. Her red-orange wings blur when she flies too close to my face, and her antennae twitch when I speak. I've never been particularly close to anybody, so I found it strange when Monarch quietly entered from the open class window and perched close to hushedly speak one afternoon.

She is a wonderful friend. She picks out my clothing and tells me when my face looks ugly. She comes to class with me, tickles the back of my neck with her pinprick needle legs and whispers quips when I'm bored out of my mind. It truly is a mutually beneficial relationship: she, like soil, and I, the pot, needed to hold her.

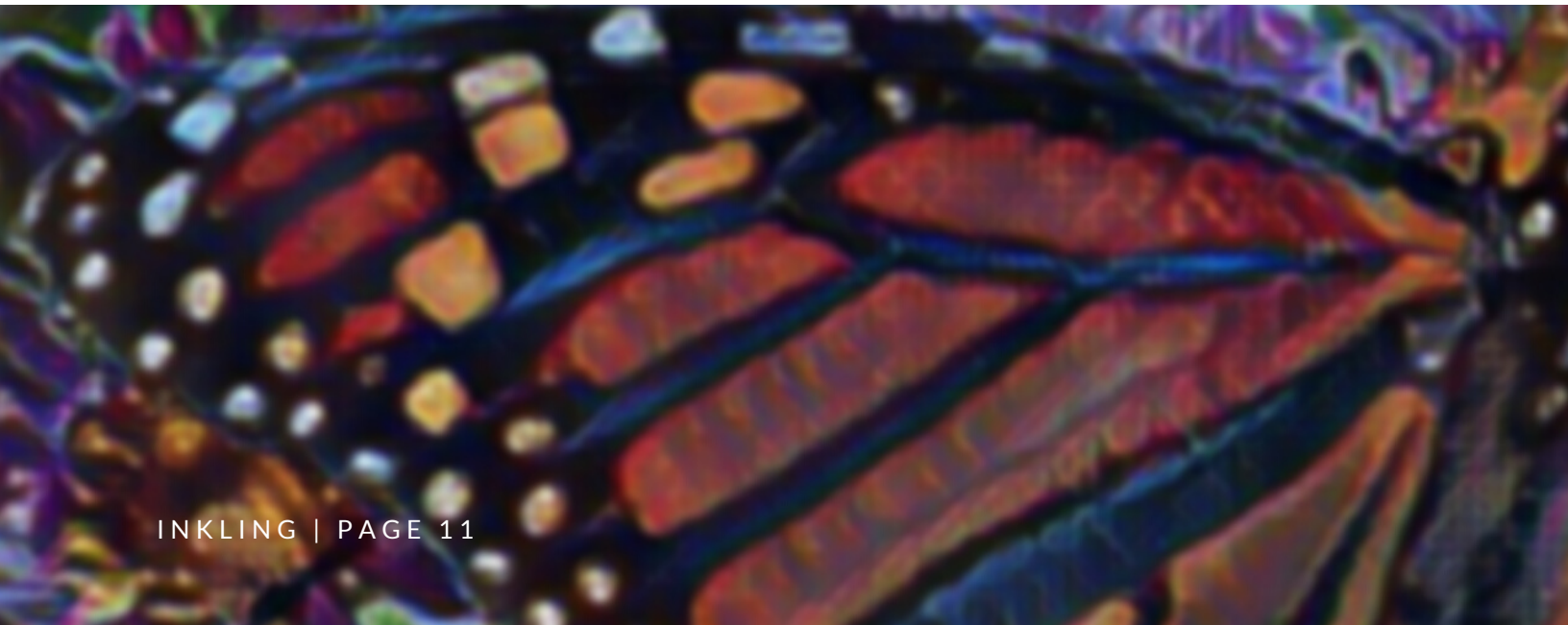
"Honey, I have a wonderful idea." Monarch's breath is hot and makes the back of my head sweat. "You've seen Lea, right?"

"Yes."

"No, I mean you've seen Lea, yes? Her clogs, her stains, her buggy eyes?" Monarch poses these as questions, but they are clearly facts. A bead of sweat trickles behind my ear. The sweltering hallway I sit in has thick, heavy air.

"Yes."

"Honey, listen to what I've heard." Her wing gently bristles my hair as she stretches her soft body. I relish the closeness, the tingles it sends down my spine. Her wings are my religion. "Lea's feelings, let us say, are



somewhat... different. She swings the other way, if you understand me."

"O-okay?"

"Let me tell you, I've got the most wonderful plan." She giggles with a childlike, tinny pitch that rings in my eardrums. "Let's play a fun little game with her."

In English class, Lea sits in the back right corner where the window overlooks the football field. Her frizzy brown hair hasn't changed much in the past few years, although it's grown longer.

"Hi, Lea." She whips her head from the window at my voice. "Can I-"

"Don't ask her, just sit!" Monarch hisses, so abrupt it makes my eye twitch. I pull out the seat and plunk down. "Ask her to study together."

"So... Lea," I start. She stares at me still. "Do... you want to study together?"

She blinks once, twice. I maintain this strange tension. Monarch promised me it was the way to carry the plan out. After a few more seconds of her eyes flickering between mine, she gives in.

"Yeah, sure. I promised my dad I'd do better in English." Monarch chuckles quietly. "Library, after school?"

"Um..." Monarch's antenna flicks at me. "Yes! Yeah, that sounds good." I grin at her, my saliva curdling into the sweet juice that only Monarch supplies. "Let's do it."

As the day passes, Monarch becomes impatient. Her wings flit compulsively, provoking my growing impulse to flick her. However, Monarch is my language, you must understand. I would not take action unless I had her entire approval, and her thoughts are my own.

As the end of school comes around, I enter the worn-out library. Lea sits at one of the solid tables and looks up at the sound of the door closing. I beam and sit as close to her as I can.

"Okay, let's start."

I take the lead, giggle at her jokes, catch her eye whenever I speak. Minutes tick, and I touch her hand, her shoulder, with the promise of more. I do not break promises.

"Lea," I interrupt her rambles about rising



action. I gently touch my hand over hers. She flicks her eyes down to my lips, responsive to my prepared charm. Just as she leans in, I abruptly pull back.

"Lea." She blinks, four, five times. I craft my voice to drip with disgust. "I thought you knew I don't swing that way."

"W-what?"

Suddenly, her eyes won't sit still on my face. They rest anywhere but there. They glisten, glimmer with crystal tears. Monarch sniggers, and I pinch her soft wing to shut her up. She whimpers, and I stand, staring Lea down. "You creep! My god."

My hair swings back and forth as I stalk away, soft sniffles behind me. A rotted, sugary juice coats my dry tongue. My lips curve.

As I enter the auditorium to finish my work, Monarch darts in the air around me.

"You have to go back, honey, you can wreck her further. I know thi-"

"Monarch, darling, I don't think you should be telling me what to do." She flutters around me in a flurry, a dizzying orange blur, like a fly. Mum was always afraid of flies. I have vivid memories of taking out the fly swatter, tracking down the pest, and... well.

"No, no, I know you, I do. We're sisters, truly, I promi-"

"Monarch," I spit. My voice matches this struck candle I feel in the pit of my stomach. My voice echoes in the empty auditorium. The wooden stage floor creaks beneath my feet. "Do not test my patience.

you must understand, sweets, I don't care to hear another word out of you."

She threatens me. She bribes me. She begs me. She spins orbits around me, the Earth around the Sun.

I do not look at her when I take my hand and slam it against the wall, feeling her soft wings crunch underneath my palm and her mellow body squelch.

I flounce to the center of the stage, where the lights burn my skin. A rash-like itch suddenly strikes my body, and I involuntarily reach over my shoulder to dig into my flesh. The pain is pinprick needles directly up my spine, my shoulder blades, each frying newfound nerve endings. I gasp at the tiny tears my nails cause compulsively, obsessively, until I finally grab and rip through my meaty flesh. I scream. Something breaks free from my back with searing agony. A force compresses me as the stage becomes a courtyard, as the curtains become giants.

My gleaming red-orange wings are ever so beautiful.

Johanna is the 3rd place winner in the Short Story category for this year's Teen Writing Contest.



Foggy Minds

by Sara Arebi

Bullying is cruel
Because people use it as a tool
To make them feel better about themselves
And to make the others laugh
But what you don't know is
That a bully is a victim too
A victim that hasn't seen love
A victim hiding his emotions like a glove
Knowing what they are doing is wrong
But do it anyway because its fun
Not learning what's OK and what's not
Because their parents might have not
Been the ones they could rely on
To give the love and hug they crave for
To let them know that they are enough
Without the act of being tough
So they take it out on other people
Who too are hiding behind a wall
That breaks every time they fall
Making the feeling of emptiness grow
With each harsh and painful blow

Thinking what they are lacking is
The approval of people who too are drowning
In a picture of unrealistic perfection
That spreads around like a bad infection
Having the fear of others laughing
At the type of person they are
judging them from afar
Having a fear of rejection
Only needing the right person to
Steer them in the right direction
And show them a little Affection
So help me make these people realize
That being cruel, and being violent
Being silent, and being tolerant
Is not a way to live a life.

***Sara is the 3rd
place winner in
the Poetry
category for this
year's Teen
Writing Contest.***



Copy cat

by Yousif Mahmood

The sound of low, desperate scratches pulled me out of my sleep, now a daily occurrence. I'd assumed that it was a cat at first, but the consistency frightened me - unnatural. The clawing continued, inching me closer to insanity. I jumped and tore my blinds open. Through the darkness, I should've seen something, but there was nothing.

As soon as I did that, the scratches halted. Whatever waited outside reacted to me. I could no longer say it's a tree branch. Something living caused this.

I sat motionless on my bed, my mind far too tired to make a rationale for this. Something hard collided with the glass, almost making it shatter. I jolted and, like a child, pulled the blanket over my body.

The window creaked open. My blood froze in my veins. Something moved. Slender fingers pressed down on me, the body of the thing entering my room. I couldn't move. I couldn't even scream. The bitter coldness of its body hurt me more than the pressure.

My breath caught in my throat. I figured I was suffocating because of the noise coming out of my mouth, but I realized the sound wasn't coming from me. Its vocal

cords splintered while attempting to speak. It was trying to communicate something to me, I just didn't know what. A hand reached out, fingertips caressing my cheek.

A painful mixture of cold and wet spread across my face. "Open..." is what I assume it said. It was hard to hear over the sound of crackling vertebrae. Again, the creature wheezed out, "Are you... awake..?" The voice continued in an inhumane replica of a human. "Please... look at me." It sounded like speaking tore its throat apart. Once its vile breath hit my face, it took everything I had to not vomit.

"Every day..." the creature hissed, gagging on its own tongue. "Every day... I've tried to make you acknowledge me... but you never looked. Why do you fear me? What... have I done to you?" Silence prompted me to reply, which I ignored. "I know what it is... You fear what I am. Or... what I am not. I can change. For you." Liquid dripped onto my face, emanating a vile stench. I didn't know if it was saliva or blood, and I didn't want to.

Slowly but surely, the voice sounded more human. "You love... your family, right?" I waited for it to continue.



Silence, a sound I hadn't heard in years. I wasn't sure whether I should've been relieved or afraid. Stuck with my thoughts for so long, I finally felt free of the monster. That thing had finally left me. Its voice had ceased.

Yet the feeling of being watched intensified. I wasn't free at all. If I looked, I'd see it standing over me.

Then came a horrific, snapping sound. The creature moaned in pain.

I assumed that the terror I felt could not be any more prominent. But I was wrong, so wrong. The voice that came out was no longer the creature's, but something very familiar. It was a poor imitation of it, but I could tell with every fiber of my being that it was my mother's.

"I'm sorry I've been neglecting you," she said, her voice dripping with guilt. "I promise I won't leave you anymore."

Vomit threatened to let loose out of my mouth. My teeth were moments from cracking as I held my jaw shut. I was no longer dealing with just a mindless monster. It was smart.

"Alex? Honey, please, say something. Anything," My mother's voice echoed again. "Alex." It repeated. This time, hands gripped my body and shook it. Goosebumps grew on my arm as the chilling temperature of her body seeped into mine. It pulled my blankets off of me, leaving me exposed to the air. "Open. Your. Eyes." The demands continued.

The voice was not my mother's anymore. The creature's facade broke, and it knew. Its fingers changed back to the lanky, boney sticks that I felt before. It finally let go of my arm and the frost faded. "No..." It moaned out. I didn't want to admit it, but the violent sobs that ensued sounded genuine. The possibility that this creature was capable of human emotion frightened me.

It then scampered off.

Even after what felt like minutes had passed, I didn't dare to move. This could've been another one of its tricks. I laid in bed, too afraid to cover myself. Too afraid to move.

The blaring siren of the alarm clock tore through my subconscious. I rolled out of bed with a groan, and as I stood up, I

looked out of the window. It was morning. Relief washed over me. I escaped the creature's trap. I breathed in deeply, relishing the cool air that tickled my lungs. After basking in my victory, I began getting prepared.

By the time I was downstairs, my sister was already eating breakfast. She was facing away, oblivious to the fact that I was staring at her. "Morning," she said with a small smile. "Didn't expect to see you up so early."

"Oh, shut up," I mumbled back, hiding the solace I felt from hearing her actual voice.

Though I was hungry, I couldn't bring myself to eat. I sat on the opposite side of Lily and scrolled through my phone. She just watched. I tried to ignore her stare, but it only got worse. Suddenly, she got out of her seat.

"Okie Dokie, I'm leaving!" She pranced beside me and gave me a kiss on the cheek. She headed toward the door, and I heard it close behind her. My fingers hovered over where her lips had planted and frowned.

They were frigid.

Yousif is a runner up in the Short Story category for this year's Teen Writing Contest.





Hoarflowers

by Aaron Ye

White and pure, on wind they fly
Thousands and thousands, filling the sky
Floating about with no reason or rhyme
The spring's snow, a floral rime

Here to gift a miracle of new life
In the fields their ancestors are rife
From their homes, one by one they're torn
So in another land they may be again born

Like a melody floating on a breeze
They surround, making time freeze
With all of the marvel of a winter storm
As though from the frost it were born

The sea of white parts
Like a white mirage, a work of art
All but ghosts in the grass
A blizzard of life come to pass

In the earth they are loosely sown
Passing days until they are grown
Thus the warmth caresses without a doubt
And from the ground new life sprouts

***Aaron is a runner
up in the Poetry
category for this
year's Teen
Writing Contest.***



The Dark Side of the Moon

by Claire Liu

Tiffany is like the visible side of the moon. She is well-known at her school, and just like the moon, many people comment on Tiffany's dazzling beauty as she shines in the night sky. These people are unaware there exists the far side of the moon, a side hidden from the rest.

Lin Na resembles the far side of the moon. She prefers to be hidden from the spotlight. Unlike Tiffany, Lin Na prefers only having a few close friends. Despite her hard work, Lin Na is often overshadowed by her bright counterpart, Tiffany.

Since the first day Tiffany transferred to this elementary school, she despised Lin Na. It didn't help when Mei Hua arrived.

"My name is Mei Hua, I am from China," the little girl with two black pigtails introduced herself.

With no one else in the class who speaks Chinese, Mei Hua can only rely on Lin Na and Tiffany. Unlike Lin Na's friendly and welcoming demeanour, Tiffany's

reluctance was evident as she trudged behind Lin Na and Mei Hua. The stares from her classmates didn't help as the trio exited the classroom to tour Mei Hua around the school.

At lunch, Tiffany heads straight for the lunchroom.

"Hey Tiff," Sienna places her hand on Tiffany's shoulder, which gets immediately shrugged off.

"I'm tired," she responds to Sienna's confused looks. "You should try walking around the school for an hour without rest."

Tiff, Sienna gave her that nickname claiming it sounded better than Tiffany. Tiffany chose to accept it. After all, she did want to fit in, and the privilege of being friends with Sienna is not something everyone has.

"So Tiff, how's the new girl?"



"She's nice, just didn't like how I had to climb eight flights of stairs," Tiffany responds.

"She looks so nerdy. What's her name again? Me? Mei? I'll just call her Mei, whatever the heck that means."

Behind her, Sienna's friends chuckle.

Tiffany hesitated, "Mei means beautiful in Chinese."

Sienna scoffed, "Beautiful? How do you say nerdy in Chinese?"

Another reaction erupts from Sienna's friends.

Tiffany stays silent.

Sienna turns to face her again, "Wanna get a soda from the convenience store?"

"I'm good, see you in science." Tiffany turns back to her unfinished homework as Sienna and her clique exits.

In science class, the students are learning about astronomy.

"The moon visible to us is only half of what the moon actually is," the teacher states. "Why is that?"

Lin Na raises her hand. "The far side of the moon cannot reflect light back onto Earth. It cannot be seen unless we travel to the moon."

Beside her, Tiffany mutters, "What a nerd."

Lin Na remains quiet.

After the final bell rings, Tiffany is more than ready to go home after another tiring day.

"You shouldn't be so mean to Lin Na." Tiffany is interrupted on her way to the bus stop. She turns her head to spot Mei Hua speaking her native language.

"What do you mean?" Tiffany attempts to act nonchalant about Mei Hua's comment.

Mei Hua rises to her feet. "Lin Na told me, and I can tell you don't like her. You should befriend her instead of pushing her away."

By now, Mei Hua stands directly in front of Tiffany.

"I can't," avoiding Mei Hua's gaze, Tiffany responds. "It's not that simple."

"Why?"

"Because if I befriend her, no one will accept me."

Loud chattering from behind indicates that Sienna and her friends are here.

"Hey Tiff," Sienna greets. "What are you doing here with Mei?"

"Please call me Mei Hua."

"Please call me Mei Hua." Sienna rolled her eyes. "You really think you're special huh?"

Mei blinks in confusion.

"One of you is already enough. We don't need another Chinese person in our class."

"Sienna, I think you're speaking too fast for her to understand," Tiffany starts.

"Then she shouldn't have come here in the first place!" Sienna burst out.



For a moment, no one speaks.

"You're being offensive. Mei Hua didn't do anything wrong," Tiffany's hoarse voice reverberates through the still air.

Sienna turns to her. "Why are you defending her Tiff? I thought you hated Chinese people."

"Why would I hate the people from my own country?" Tiffany's question shocks Sienna.

Seeing Sienna pick on Mei Hua because of where Mei Hua is from enrages Tiffany. Tiffany understands that if Sienna had not befriended Tiffany, she would likely be in Mei Hua's spot.

"Don't talk to me anymore," Sienna spat at Tiffany before jabbing her chin towards Mei Hua. "You can hang out with that loser."

Sienna and her friends strut away. A few turn back and eye Tiffany with sympathetic looks.

Tiffany went home drowning in her thoughts. Maybe helping Mei Hua was pointless. All she gained was losing one of her closest friends.

"You did the right thing, Tiffany. Sienna is a good friend but her relationship with you is farther than you think," Lin Na's quiet voice woke Tiffany from her thoughts.

"Stop acting like you know better. All this

happened because you befriended Mei Hua."

Tiffany knows her excuse is absurd, but she cannot blame herself.

Tiffany turns to face Lin Na. "You know, if you were not Chinese my life wouldn't be so difficult. Why did you have to exist?"

Tiffany reaches for the empty china vase displayed on her vanity. She hurls it at Lin Na, who stands staring at Tiffany. Lin Na does not move; the vase makes contact with her head. Shards of shiny glass litter the ground amidst the broken china beneath her feet.

Tiffany is like the visible side of the moon. She projects her beauty toward the world. Lin Na is like the far side of the moon. The side Tiffany keeps hidden from light.

"Lin Na, sweetie, what is all that noise?"

Slightly panting, Tiffany turns away from the broken mirror and responds, "nothing Mom, I'm fine."

Claire is a runner up in the Short Story category for this year's Teen Writing Contest.





Covid was Hard

I have
discovered that
Music is my life
That reading is my life
Friends and family are my life
Songs helped shape me as a person
Writing helps even If I don't believe it
That I can write songs
I can express myself
Through singing
What I write
I never
Knew this
About myself
Reading is a huge
Escape from what's going on
But it can also make you
Feel more stress if it's
About what
You're
Going through
It can make you cry
So hard even though the
Characters aren't even real the
Things you thought
Weren't coming will

but I Found *Myself*

by Emma Martin

Break your heart
So much
But
Sometimes when
You do know what's coming,
It'll make you even sadder. Things
Like that are crazy but so true but
Now I'm starting to ramble
I've learned I take
So much for
Granted
Like friends and family hugs
Or even just being together
When that day you
Feel like being apart
When you're by yourself
And all alone in
Every waking
Hour
You learn these
Things about yourself
And those are the things
That will last
Forever

***Emma is a runner
up in the Poetry
category for this
year's Teen
Writing Contest.***



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

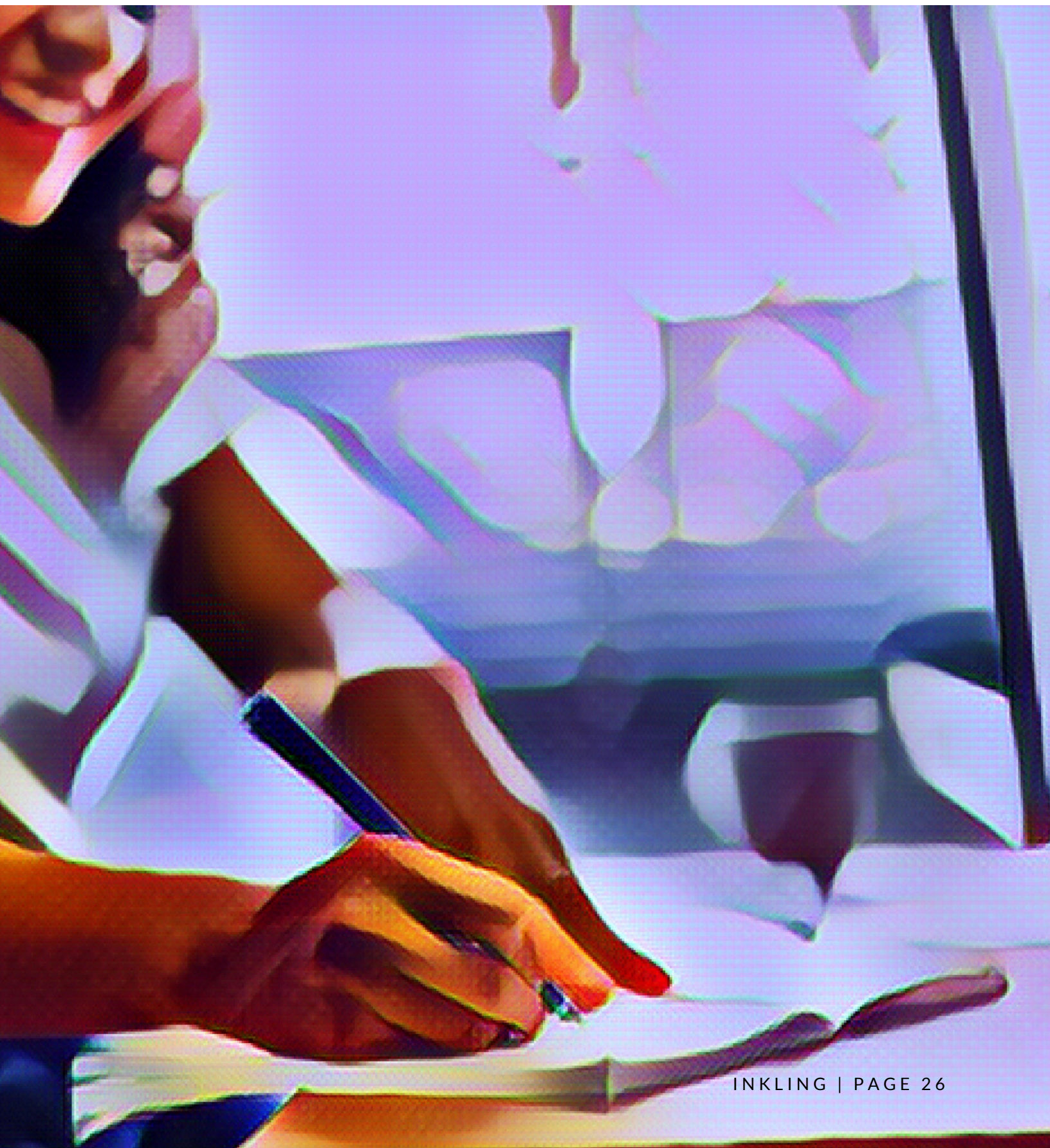
After the success of last year's inaugural Teen Writing Contest, we decided that it should become an annual event. We asked teens to submit their original works of poems and short stories and, once again, we were impressed by the immense talent in Waterloo Region.

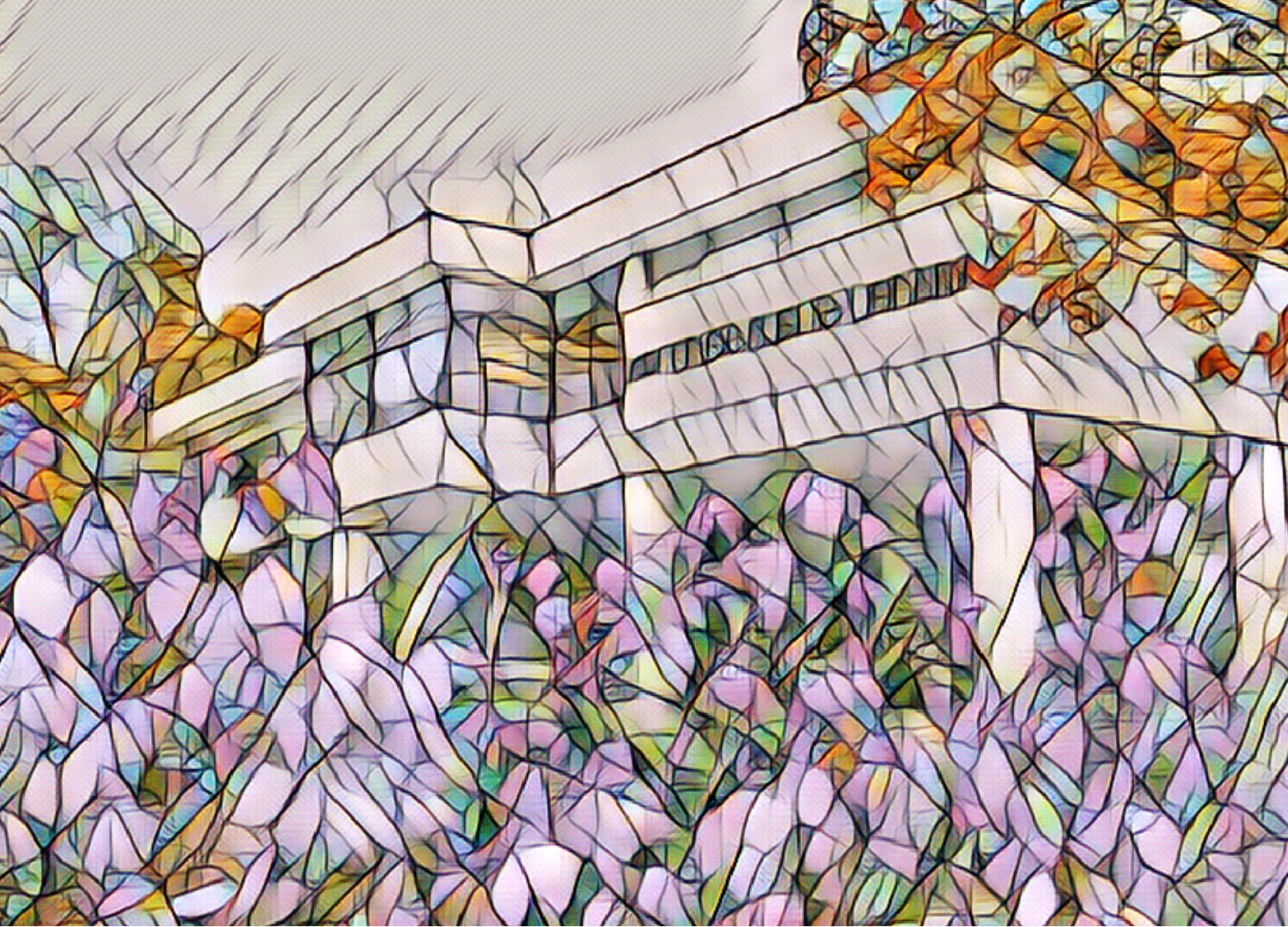
We would like to thank each and every teen that shared their work with us. It was no easy task to choose from the incredible entries. Congratulations to all of the winners!

A special thank you to the judges for the contest. This year, we had a mix of staff and teen representatives from our Teen Events Team.

Our teen events and programs would not be possible without the work of our Teen Events Team. We are truly appreciative of their brilliant ideas and continued commitment, led by our staff coordinators, Mariah Baldasaro and Claire MacFarlane.







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