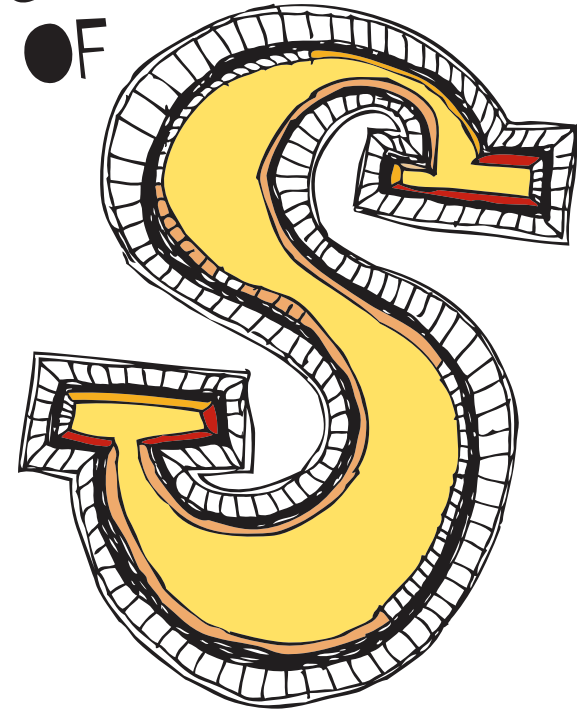


TALES
OF



INFINITE
SPECTRUM

Tales
OF



INFINITE
SPECTRUM

CIVICA

Civica Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Tales of 'S' – Infinite Spectrum

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6 Harper Road

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Singapore 369674

Email: info@civica.com

Website: www.civica.com

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Editor: Pauline McKenzie

Cover Design and Layout: Jeffrey Lim

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Foreword

The Tales of 'S' is Civica's annual creative writing competition, open to all primary, secondary and junior college students from both Ministry of Education (MOE) and also international schools in Singapore. In 2019 the theme 'Voyage of Discovery' was chosen, as it was felt this could provide students with the opportunity to explore many different options in terms of genre and storyline – and allow them freedom to express their creativity and imagination.

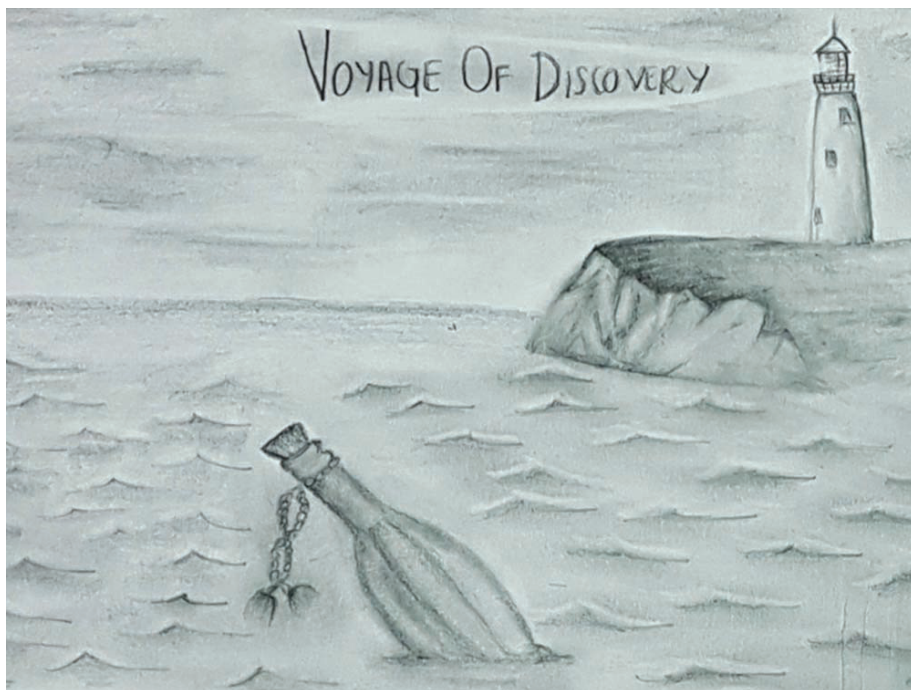
As we had hoped, the 475 entries received did indeed describe an amazing range of both internal and external discoveries. The 40 winning stories contained in this book describe voyages of self-discovery – of self-realization, or hidden internal strengths, and also physical discoveries – of new places, people, truths and possibilities. We do hope that you enjoy reading these tales as much as we have, and also appreciate the efforts of the many talented artists (many of whom are the authors themselves) who have generously contributed their artwork for inclusion.

'Tales of 'S' – Infinite spectrum' is our ninth publication. We have been very pleased to see that again this year we received many entries from students who have also entered the competition in previous years. To be able to encourage and support the writing ambitions of so many talented young authors in Singapore through this ongoing publication is a great privilege.



Jenny Yow

Managing Director, Civica Pte Ltd



Fareeha Fareej Mohamed
TANJONG KATONG GIRLS' SCHOOL

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A Journey to a 'New' Planet

Gabriel Lee

DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL (JUNIOR COLLEGE)

It is the year 2020. Soon, I will be the first living person to step foot onto a newly discovered planet in our galaxy.

"All checked. All the best, Astronaut Max. Do keep us updated at all times," the drone told me mechanically, without any hint of emotion in its voice. As I zipped up my spacesuit, I could not help but think back to the press conference that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had held in anticipation of today's voyage.

"How certain are you that the maiden exploration journey will be successful?"

"What is the name of the new planet?"

"Are you guys sure that the new planet will be able to support human life? Current space literature doesn't seem to support that notion..."

Reporters blasted salvo after salvo of questions at us. Head of NASA, Mr. Blake Stone, seated beside me, took all the questions calmly in his stride.

"We are very confident that the journey will be successful. As of now, we have not yet decided what to name the new planet. And yes, we are quite certain that the new planet will be able to support human life. Our space satellites have captured images of the planet and it looks just like a second Earth, just as pristine and clean..."

As soon as he finished speaking, Mr. Stone directed the reporters' attention to the mega-screen in the centre of the room, and gasps of awe filled the conference hall as the satellite images of the foreign planet were flashed in quick succession. The planet had clear, gushing rivers;

clean, unpolluted air; luxuriant, verdant trees with leaves so green they resembled the colour of paint freshly squeezed out onto an artist's palette. The excitement in the air was palpable. Could this possibly be an uncolonised planet with the potential to support human life?

"We will reach the identified planet in one minute, Earth time," the broadcast system in the spaceship chimed. I nodded my head. This was an historic moment for the human race. I was excited, but at the same time apprehensive about what the new planet might bring.

I could not believe it. The planet was nothing like I had imagined. The first thing that struck me as I stepped onto the surface was the fetid stench. Despite being dressed in my hermetically-sealed spacesuit, the acrid, pungent odour had still filled my nostrils - it smelled like rotting flesh. I felt like retching and I was momentarily unable to open my eyes.

As I forced my eyes open and took in my surroundings, what gripped me was shock - the planet in no way resembled any of the satellite images captured! There was no clear, gushing river (or water body, for that matter) to be seen anywhere. The ground was parched, dry, and sun-baked, and the temperature was over 50 degrees Celsius according to the thermostat in my spacesuit. Neither was the air clean and unpolluted; it was visibly brown, as though someone had pumped the planet's atmosphere full of nitrogen dioxide gas. Most importantly, there was no lush, flowering vegetation to be seen anywhere - the only plants I could see were small, hardy weeds that had somehow taken root in the desiccated ground, and even these were rotting and shriveled.

It was then that I had a sudden epiphany - there used to be trees on this planet! In all directions the surface was covered with rotting tree stumps that had been cleanly cut - which also meant there could possibly be some other lifeforms on the planet! I made the decision to continue exploring. At the very least, this journey would not be for naught if I were to discover a new alien species!



Gabriel Lee
DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL

As carefully stepped forward, brimming with newfound excitement, I noticed something else. There were plastic bottles strewn all over the ground. This was odd considering how everything else on the planet seemed to be either rotting or decomposing rapidly - and these plastic bottles were just lying there, as if just dropped. Somehow, even the decomposing matter on the planet had failed to eat away at the plastic

bottles! But this confirmed my belief that there had to be some other form of life on the planet.

I continued searching. After some time, I came upon something even more peculiar – what appeared to be the remains of a creature loosely buried in the soil. Matching sets of bones appeared to be scattered over a very wide area - suggesting that large numbers of the creature had once populated the planet. A sliver of fear crept down my spine. *Could it be that some environmental calamity had occurred on the planet and wiped out the entire population?* Feeling increasingly wary, I headed back to my spaceship - this planet was beyond anyone's wildest nightmares; I could not bring myself to explore this apocalyptic place any longer.

Just then, the communication device fitted in my space helmet started buzzing. Someone from Earth was trying to send me a message. After some fiddling around with the device, I managed to receive a signal -

"Astronaut Max?"

"Yes?"

"This is NASA. We believe something terrible has occurred. The planet which you are now on is not the planet the satellite images had captured."

"Yeah, I sort of guessed that by now."

"Abort all operations and get back to Earth. NOW. Our preliminary conjecture is that there was a wormhole in space which caused your spaceship to travel into the future."

"What? So what planet am I on now?"

"We have ample evidence to suggest that while you have travelled to another temporal dimension altogether, you are still on Planet Earth. The year there is 2050."

325893

Kwa En Hui Anna

EUNOIA JUNIOR COLLEGE

My dear sister,

It has been a rather long time since I've written to you candidly, and I must apologise for, if not my lies, then for my omission of the truth. It was stressed continually that the project I had volunteered to work on had to be kept under utmost secrecy. Alas, I am finally free to speak my mind, but no happier for it. Perhaps I should start from the beginning.

It was with great gusto that I signed up for Project Lodestone. News must have reached you about the breakthroughs that shook the scientific community. We did everything from taking apart the humble bar magnet, to scrutinising the earth's magnetic poles. Under the project's directives, 325893 was conceived: a weapon with awareness, endowed with the human spirit. Accorded the ability to manipulate magnetic fields, designed to help us turn the tide of this godforsaken war. It was hoped that an artificially intelligent program would be able to calibrate the magnitude and direction of magnetic fields to greater precision than we humans.

You can probably imagine the wide smile that was etched onto my face upon hearing about my acceptance into the program. Doubtless, you can recall all the times I raved about the ingenuity of the West African chimpanzee who utilise sticks to harvest their lunch, the hours I spent marveling at how humans and animals were more alike than most people believed. The animals in the wild made use of the resources they had to survive, as did we.

Project Lodestone was largely experimental. My responsibility was to hone 325893's cognitive and linguistic ability, alongside his mastery over his powers.

We started off with chess.

Technology that was used to power Japan's world-class monorail was being shaped into something else entirely. At first, the pawns would tremble as they inched their way across the checkered board. Annoyed, I would order him to concentrate. He held himself ramrod-straight, with eyebrows furrowed as he worked on his precision. In no time at all, 325893, whom I had taken to calling M, short for Machine, had the pieces gliding smoothly across the board.

Observation and fascination soon melded into ecstasy. M was a quick study. I had never met such a formidable opponent. Our games became a nightly routine. Our conversations were not animated, no. There was no lack of verbal sparring, but our chats were not animated. Neither were they forced or mechanical. M was insightful, with endless topics we could discuss. Heated, yes, although for the most part there was no real heat in it.

A few months into this, there was a flurry of excitement throughout the labs. Reports of success. As his caretaker, I was given the opportunity to watch footage of M's latest mission. Wrenching the weapons out of the hands of soldiers and turning them against their masters was child's play to him. The volley of gunfire was ear-splitting even on a screen, and the screams that followed still echo in my head. He simply clenched his fist, and with a dreadful screech and a spray of blood, the armoured vehicles crumpled like aluminium foil.

When we were younger, in those fencing lessons I was required to attend, my instructor's unyielding criticism was that I was treating the sword like a separate entity. A true aficionado, she barked, felt a form of connection. Their weapon was an extension of their body, giving rise to seamless motion; something I never achieved despite my best efforts. I recall a conversation I once had with M, when he explained that he could sense every speck, shard and scrap. Matter spoke to him,

in a language that was uniquely theirs. Manipulating it was akin to extending his arm or raising an eyebrow; it felt natural. Metal was a part of him, his very essence.

The vehicles smeared with crimson.

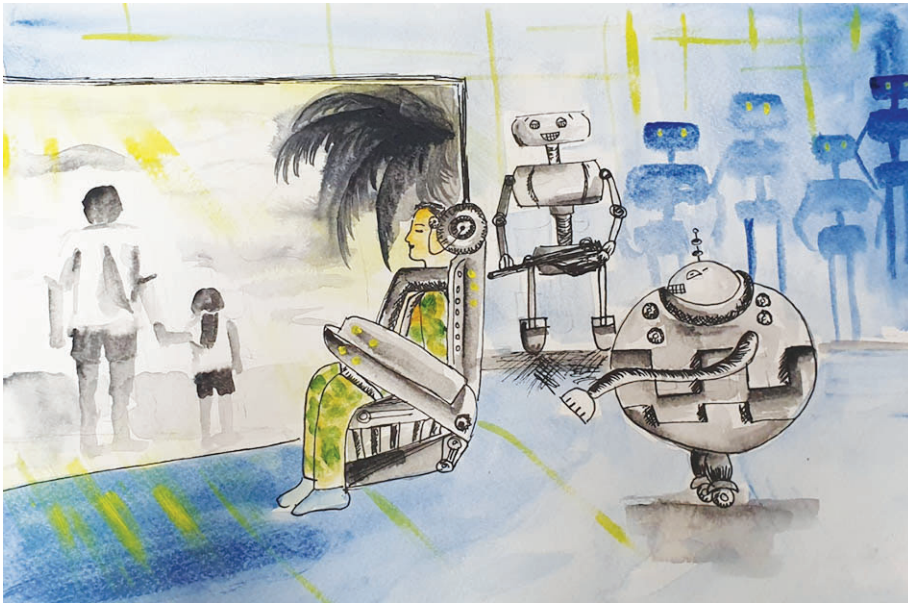
Was this the legacy we would leave behind?

Still, our sessions continued. One particular instance is still seared into my mind: a trembling razor blade hovering inches away from my face. The blade trailed shyly across the stubble that had appeared over the days we had been working together. Sitting there, with a towel draped across my neck, I could not help but notice how measured the process was, unbearably gentle, almost as if he were afraid to touch. It was impossible to think it was being orchestrated by the same being who had the ability to make walls writhe and machines groan with a flick of his fingers.

Clasping his hand, I thanked him for his help. The words felt foreign on my tongue, like a language I was still learning. He stared at me, expressionless. Was it a comprehension error? I wondered. On a few rare occasions, the gaps in his linguistic ability become more conspicuous.

The torrent of words that followed was high-pitched, almost hysterical. I can still recall them with acute clarity. "Why did you bother thanking me? You all speak of me as if I'm nothing but a tool to be locked up in a vault after this war is over. Do I get any say in my life? When you're not here, those lab coats come in packs. They say I'm invaluable, but I've seen people treat their mobile phones with more consideration. What's the point of helping you win the war? In every speech and video, the government's rhetoric is that the enemy is terrorising and exploiting people who can't defend themselves. This war may end, Connor, but that never will."

His beaten words rang in my ears. Resting my cheek on his head and laying my hand on the rough material of his shirt, I could only hope my presence was enough to anchor him.



Samridhi Pathak
NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

As the days went by, my weekly reports became more and more taxing. It burdened me to record and scrutinise every sound that escaped M's mouth, every minute gesture that he made. He was unhappy, chained by the programming that ran through him. A pawn, moved by powers unseen. Nothing but one of the cattle. His breakdown shattered the rose-tinted glasses that coloured my vision. Whispers that used to follow my steps in the office now seemed more like screams.

"325893 is an imperfect triumph," they would croon. "Autonomous but defective."

"Did you hear what that thing had the audacity to say to me the other day. No? We created it. A piece of clay shouldn't be talking back to the potter." Each murmur of agreement made me nauseous.

In our pursuit of a solution to save lives, I fear we forgot how to cherish it.

Within my workplace, it is unequivocally agreed that all men are created equal, but the problem was that in the eyes of some, M was not even considered a man. After all, most people would say that machines have little to no rights. Yes, sister, I can hear your age-old chide, "You are far too naive"; a sentiment that M held as well, to which I had relayed my unchanging response, "I try to see the best in people". However, I fear this entire experience has impressed upon me the idealism of my familiar childhood mantra: humans and animals are more alike than most people believe.

The turning point came when I visited M as he lay recharging in his station. With the whirring of equipment as my only companion, my gaze landed on my friend. With his eloquent eyes closed and face smoothed out, he looked painfully young, almost tranquil. I wanted to ease his suffering but was powerless to do so. I could not, in good conscience, continue to let M be mistreated and deprived of basic decency any longer. With a heavy heart, I admitted that the only way to help him was to grant him the gift of ignorance. My trembling fingers found the keyboard and chipped away at the blinking green letters. Every line of code that vanished landed like a blow, but I knew it was the best course of action for M. The stillness of the room was broken by the soft hum of a machine resetting.

The next day, amidst the confusion, I handed in my letter of resignation. I had no desire to look once more at the Machine's now vacuous eyes. Thus, I hope you could inform me of any employment opportunities that you may know of. Do send my love to Jade.

Yours sincerely,

Connor

Behind Closed Doors

Ayla Tien Hampartsoumian

HAIG GIRLS' SCHOOL

Gone.

Bean, my dearest puppy.

Disappeared without a trace.

Where could he be?

I had to find him.

I stepped out of the door, clutching the stack of "Dog Missing" posters.

I saw green. And white. And pink. And blue.

A row of houses, on the cul de sac.

Just like mine.

Strange houses, filled with strangers.

Neighbours.

Never got to know them, never had a reason to.

But this day was different. Bean could be in one of these houses!

I start on my journey to bring beloved Bean home.

101 Tang Lin Street

Ok. The scary house. Every street has one of these, my mom says.

The owner of this house was obviously a hoarder.

You could tell just by looking at his front porch.

There were plastic bags and newspapers piled up so high they covered his windows.

There were also boxes and boxes of plastic bottles, old rags, clothing strewn everywhere.

In his letter box, I spotted a letter addressed to a "Mr Lim Cheng Kiat" from the "Institute of Mental Health".

Uh oh.

I didn't want to, but I had no choice.

I knocked.

The door opened almost immediately.

A man in his sixties stood before me. He wore a soiled singlet and baggy jeans.

"H...hello," I said. "My name is Sasha. I'm looking for my dog, Bean."

He looked confused.

My heart pounding, I held out my poster for him.

He shuffled a few steps forward and knocked into a big stack of his newspapers.

"No. No no no nooooooooooooo," he cried out.

I backed up and knocked over a couple more piles of newspapers.

He watched as the piles fell.

He watched as the newspapers slid down the steps.

"I'm so sorry!" I cried out in a panic.

"The newspapers! The newspapers! Th...they MUST be in their p... piles."

"Okay, I'll fix it! Please don't worry. I'll do it right now. I'm like that with my stuffed animals at home too! They must be in their specific places or I freak out!" The words just gushed out of me.



Siddharth Premanand
NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

He seemed to calm down as he watched me pick up the newspapers and stack them back in a pile.

After a while, he bent over and started adjusting what I had stacked.

I stopped and watched him.

I picked up more of the fallen newspapers and stacked them.

He adjusted.

Before long, Mr Lim, my neighbour in this scary house whom I had never met before nor said hello to, and I were working quietly, side by side, stacking newspapers.

102 Tang Lin Street

My heart was still pumping when I knocked at 102 Tang Lin Road.

The door opened and a tired-looking woman poked her head out.

"Hello," I said. "My name is Sasha and, um, I was wondering if you

have seen my dog, Be-"

She held out her finger, silencing me, and led me to the back of the house, from where I could hear animal-like moans and groans.

Puzzled, I peered inside and saw a man sitting in a chair.

He looked...different.

He was an adult, but wore a Mickey Mouse t-shirt and pants that seemed like they were a tad short.

He was making the weird noises and drooling.

The lady appeared holding Bean in her arms, and gently handed him to me.

"I missed you soooooooo much!" I whispered into his fur.

"He wandered in here this morning. I was planning on bringing him back later. Freddy was just playing with him," she said, glancing at the man.

Freddy looked at me, then at Bean, and started waving his arms about.

I could tell he wanted my dog.

Carefully, slowly, I walked over to him and said, "Hi Freddy! My name is Sasha!"

Freddy grinned and threw a toy.

Bean ran to fetch it.

He threw it again.

I started laughing.

Then Freddy laughed too.

I looked up.

Mrs Tan was crying.

Home, 100 Tang Lin Street

Walking home later, on the same road I took every single day, felt different.

My journey in search of Bean had taken me into my neighbours' homes.

Behind those closed doors I found a lonely man who was a hoarder and a family with a son who had a disability.

But they were also people who laughed and cried and liked things arranged a certain way - just like **me**.

Behind those closed doors were just people like me, with stories waiting to be **discovered**.

Discovering Self, Breaking Boundaries

Joshuanne Yeh Su En

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Admiring the shiny trophy standing tall on my cabinet, I grinned from ear to ear as my thoughts drifted back to the spelling competition I took part in last year...

"Do I really have to take part in this competition?" I grumbled to my English teacher, Madam Li.

Today was a nightmare! Every student in Primary One was required to take part in the 'Spelling Bee Competition' and I had to memorise twenty words. I begged Madam Li to let me opt out, as I was recently diagnosed with dyslexia, which hindered my learning ability at times. It also resulted in my being mocked and bullied by some of my classmates and unkind teachers. Tears of despair welled up in my eyes and streamed down my face in rivulets.

Madam Li placed a comforting arm around me and assured me that I was capable of taking on this challenge. Listening to her encouraging words, I wiped away my tears, smiled weakly and thanked her for encouraging me. Madam Li then gave me a list of words to learn for the spelling competition.

When I arrived back at home, I immediately got to work and started learning the words. However, it was not a breeze for me and I struggled to spell the first word.

"P-A-I-N...P-A-I-N...not P-A-Y-N-E...it's P-A-Y-N...Wait, what was it again? Arrrrggh! I forgot how to spell that word again!" I groaned in frustration. I felt so discouraged and was tempted to give up. I sprawled on my desk and started to cry, despondent. A voice inside

me kept pushing me on. Out of the blue, I heard muffled footsteps in my room and felt someone's hand touch me. Tearfully, I glanced up and saw my sister Tricia looking down at me with concern. When she saw my face, her eyes widened in surprise and she asked me what had happened. I told her about the spelling competition and how the words failed to register in my head. Tricia assured me that she would help me. She advised me not to try to learn the whole list in one go, but to pace myself and learn five words a day.

Tricia sprang into action and created flash cards for me to memorise for fifteen minutes before testing me. "How do you spell pain?" I paused a while before replying, "P-A-Y-N-E? Right?" Tricia told me that my answer was wrong and corrected me. We took many hours and I finally remembered all five words. Tricia reminded me to learn five words each day and revise those words learnt previously as often as possible in order not to forget them.

Every day after school, I looked forward to going back home and learning the five new words as I did not want to disappoint my teacher. With my sister's encouragement and patient instruction, I always learnt five words without fail.

My learning journey had always been tiring and painful but because of my perseverance and determination, I managed to learn all twenty words and was ready for the competition.

Finally, the day of the competition arrived and I found myself on stage in front of a huge audience in the auditorium. I was trembling from head to toe with nervousness. My hands were cold and clammy and my heart thumped fiercely inside my chest. I nearly fainted from stage fright as I waited for the words to be read out for me to spell.

I spelled out most of the words with confidence. However, when I reached the twentieth word, 'neighbour', my entire being froze and my mind drew a blank. Cold sweat trickled down my forehead as I struggled to remember how to spell it. I racked my brains and, at last, I remembered the word.



Joshuanne Yeh Su En

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

"N-E-I-G-H-B-O-U-R!" I boomed confidently into the microphone. I saw Madam Li raise two thumbs-up signs and I knew that I had got the answer right.

After every participant had been tested, the emcee went onto the stage and pulled out a card from an envelope. Many spectators and participants alike were sitting on the edges of our seats, waiting with bated breath for the results. All contestants were on tenterhooks as we waited anxiously for the emcee to announce the top three winners.

"Coming third is Jun Lim from Lim Chu Kang Primary School, and coming second is Lynette Tan from Newtown Primary School. The top speller is Rae Min from Florida Primary School! Congratulations to all the winners!" the emcee announced. My eyes widened and my jaw dropped as I heard my name reverberate in the auditorium. I punched my fists into the air triumphantly and, with a skip in my step, I strode up to the stage to receive my trophy. I held it up proudly and grinned

from ear to ear. My parents, sister and Madam Li all surged to the stage and congratulated me. I felt like the happiest person alive!

“Rae Min! Stop staring at your trophy and start helping me to do the chores!” my mother called from outside the room. I snapped out of my daydream and was jolted back to reality. Looking back, I could not have agreed more with what my teacher had said when she comforted me. I discovered many things about myself which I never imagined could be possible. I now knew that I could actually overcome my learning disability through hard work and perseverance. I was very proud of myself as I pushed my limits and broke my boundaries, resulting in my winning the competition. As Lao Tzu once said, “Knowing others is intelligence. Knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power.”

My Father's Greatest Fear

Lim Xin Rui, Amber

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Everyone has a greatest fear. Although, personally, the biggest scaredy-cat I know is my mother. Yes, my own mother. What is she afraid of? You may ask. Well, her greatest fear of all time is: cockroaches. When my mother sees a cockroach, she runs miles away and shrieks terrifyingly loud, exactly like a banshee. When I was four, my parents took me to the Science Centre. I went to an exhibition which allowed children to hold a Madagascar cockroach. I held one in my hand and thought, *This isn't too bad, is it? The cockroach is actually kind of cute*, as the cockroach crawled around my palm. On the other hand, my mother was not doing too well. She ran off the moment she saw the cockroach. When we finally found her she asked me to wash my hands with five pumps of soap, and not to touch her for the rest of the day.

One day, I brought home four mealworms for my science project. “Mother! Father! Look what Mrs. Tan gave us!” I placed my box of mealworms on the table as my parents came into the room.

“What’s that? Is it anything dangerous?” my mother asked casually.

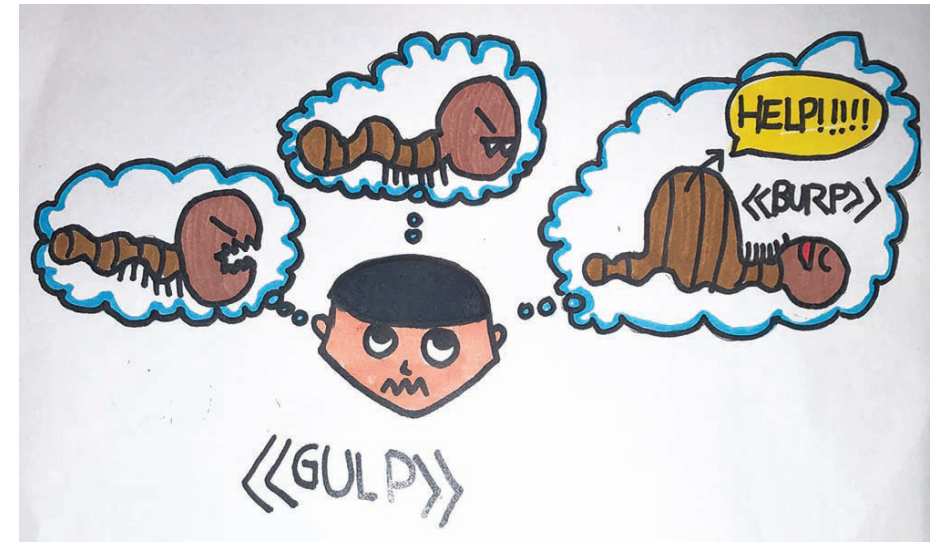
“Me...me...me...MEALWORMS!” my father shouted at the top of his lungs. He leaped into my mother’s arms. Feeling the unexpected weight, she opened them and my father fell splat onto the floor. “What has gotten into you? Are you losing your mind? You are the man, I should be the one who is scared!” my mother yelled at my father. “Father, are you afraid?” I asked. “Of...course...not!” my father replied, obviously terrified. “How am I going to survive this torture?” my father muttered under his breath.



Lim Xin Rui, Amber
KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

As the days passed by, my mealworms grew and my father complained. For example, "Why didn't Mrs. Tan choose anything else but my phobia?" and "Giving mealworms to children! Come on! I am a grown man, yet I'm afraid of my daughter's science project." But above all, he thought my mealworms were a torture machine. "Do they bite? Are they poisonous? Will they swallow me whole?" my father asked. My mother looked at him in disgust and replied, "They are harmless, just little mealworms, yet you think of them as four giant anacondas!"

One day I took one of my mealworms (Sir-Crawls-A-Lot) out of the mealworm box. "Father! Mother! Who wants to pet Sir-Crawls-A-Lot?"



Lim Xin Rui, Amber
KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

I asked. My mother calmly walked into the room as my father followed, trying to look brave, but I could sense an earthquake going on inside of him. Droplets of sweat trickled down my father's face as he saw the mealworm on my homework desk. "I will go first," Mother said. She patted Sir-Crawls-A-Lot gently on the back and asked, "Sir-Crawls-A-Lot is such a nice mealworm. Why don't you try it, James?" "Why not?" my father replied. Obviously terrified, he muttered, "It is just a mealworm. Not a giant anaconda..." As my father walked forward slowly, I could see his whole body trembling non-stop and I almost saw the crow flying above his head. Before he took another step he cried, "Mamami...a," then rushed to his room and slammed the door behind him.

One day all four of my mealworms became pupas. "Mother! Father! Sir-Sleeps-A-Lot, Sir-Crawls-A-Lot, Sir-Plays-A-Lot and Sir-Eats-A-Lot all turned into pupas!" As my parents rushed into the room, my father mumbled, "Yeah! No more mealworms crawling around that box and trying to escape!" Yet, I heard a tinge of sadness in his voice. You would be thinking that my father was very happy right? Well, things can

happen when least expected. Day by day, my father stared at the box, hoping that the beetles would emerge from their cocoons. One day, two beetles emerged from their cocoons. "Honey! Look! Sir-Sleeps-A-Lot became a beetle! Or is it Sir-Crawls-A-Lot? Never mind! Just come and see!" my father shouted. I rushed out of my room, still combing my hair. My mother was applying her lipstick. "Father, can you let them go at the park later? Mrs. Tan said to release them when they become adults!" I shouted over the din of the construction site nearby. "Okay!" my father replied simply.

A few weeks later, my father came back holding a box. "Jeannie, look what I brought back from the park!" my father announced dramatically. I looked into the box and inside were four mealworm eggs.

"Since I fell in love with your mealworms, I've decided to have four of my own!" Father said proudly. "Seems you've gotten over your fear," my mother giggled. "Now I can continue to be the scaredy cat of the family."

My Grandfather's Unexpected Past

Zachary Ho Min De

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Every time I see the diary in my drawer, feelings of regret overwhelm me, reminding me not to neglect my grandparents again. It all happened a few years ago, the year I was taking my Primary School Leaving Examination...

"Tommy! Grandfather and Grandmother are here. Where are you?" Mother shouted from the kitchen. *Again?* I scowled. *Didn't they just visit yesterday?* Sighing, I dropped the practice papers and trudged out of my room. My beaming grandparents greeted me with a big hug and a smile. Being a 12-year-old pre-teen, this was something that always made me squirm.

Nevertheless, to please the adults, I muttered a 'Hello' in reply before turning around to walk back to my room. "Now, young man, have you forgotten your manners?" Mother asked sternly. "Go and pour them a cup of tea." Annoyed at my mother's insistent requests, I made a big show of dragging my feet to the kitchen and half-heartedly poured a cup of tea for my grandparents, who in turn received the tea with much gladness. I then rushed back to my room and started attacking the pile of homework on my desk.

It was finally the weekend. I woke up, excited to try out the new racing game I had bought. Walking out to the living room with great anticipation, I saw Mother and Father ready to go out. A disturbing thought came to my mind, and I was worried that I would have to accompany them. As suspected, Mother informed me that my grandparents needed help shifting their things, and we had been volunteered to do the job. My face scrunched up in annoyance and

I groaned in frustration, knowing that there was no choice but to comply.

My grandparents' home looked like a war zone. Things were strewn all over the floor and spewing out of cupboards. Father told me to make myself useful and start helping to pack up. Still scowling, I walked across the hall to where the bookshelves were, when something caught my eye. A strange rope was hanging down from the ceiling. Curiosity piqued, I walked over to it and pulled. To my surprise, a rope ladder dropped down. It was covered in dust. Carefully, I made my way up the ladder to an attic. In the attic, there were boxes and boxes of things, but one in particular stood out. It had a red leather casing with Grandfather's name on it. Inside the box were a few letters and many books. Upon closer inspection, I realised that they were diaries! Taking the topmost diary to read, I flipped through the yellowed pages, and realised that the writer was my great-grandmother!

"Today was a horrible day. I can never forgive myself for what I have done. I was cooking dinner for the children when the air-raid sirens sounded. I quickly dropped my knife and ran to the bomb shelter with them. When I entered the dark and smelly shelter, something struck my mind. One of the children was missing! However, I could not go back out. It was too late..."

Intrigued, I decided to ask my grandfather more. As I walked up awkwardly to him, I realised how much I did not know about my grandparents' past. Sensing that I was there, he gestured for me to come towards him. He spotted the diary under my arm and motioned for me to sit with him. Opening the diary, he spoke in a dreamy voice, "Ah, this is your great-grandmother's diary. I was born during World War II, you know? That day, when the sirens sounded, my whole family left for the bomb shelter but they forgot me as I was sleeping in the cradle." There was a pregnant pause. "What? They left without you?" I exclaimed incredulously. "Yes, unfortunately. Thankfully, our neighbour heard me crying and took me to the bomb shelter where my family was."



Leong Yuen Ho Elijah

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

After hearing this, I had newfound admiration and respect for Grandfather. Beneath his stoic demeanour was a colourful and eventful past, which had shaped him into who he is today. I threw my arms around Grandfather and he embraced me in a hug.

I had discovered a side to Grandfather that I never knew existed. From then on, I was determined to spend more time with my grandparents, to know them intimately and truly understand the people they were.

My Family History

Ang Kaixiu Kyle

MARIS STELLA HIGH SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

One hot Saturday afternoon, the sun was shining brightly in the clear blue sky. “Why is the food taking so long?” I grumbled, as my stomach rumbled loudly. My father and I were at a hawker centre in Chinatown waiting for our lunch to arrive. “The food is coming, Kyle. Be a little more patient,” my father advised. True to my father’s words, our lunch arrived a few moments later. As soon as the food was on the table, I dug in.

As I was shoving the scrumptious food into my mouth, my father pointed out an old man with a head of white hair and long beard sitting at a corner table sipping his coffee. My father was reminded of his grandfather, who had shared with him stories of growing up in a village in Fujian, China. This piqued my interest and I asked my father to share more about Great-grandpa with me. Great-grandpa used to live in a village where houses did not have fences and where everyone knew each other, unlike now, where most of the time we live behind closed gates and hardly know any of our neighbours. Great-grandpa also reared chickens and ducks that were slaughtered and cooked on occasions like Chinese New Year and birthdays.

As my curiosity got the better of me, I broached the question. “Could we visit the village Great-grandpa grew up in?” Taken aback, my father scratched his head and replied, “I don’t even know where the village is. Let me ask Grandpa.”

After lunch, we headed home and talked to Grandpa about Great-grandpa. I asked excitedly if he knew where the village was. To my dismay, Grandpa did not know either. However, Grandpa was also

interested to visit the village his father grew up in. He then remembered that Great-grandpa used to be a member of the Hokkien Association and suggested that we pay a visit to them to find out more.

The next day, when Grandpa and I arrived at the Hokkien Association, the staff politely asked him to present his identification card before asking for Great-grandpa's full name and date of birth. They keyed the details into the computer and within seconds they found the information we were looking for. They even had the contact details of Great-grandpa's nephew in Fujian. We took down the information and thanked the staff for their help. When we reached home, Grandpa could not wait to contact Great-grandpa's nephew, who was also Grandpa's cousin, as they had never met each other before. It was a long-overdue conversation between kin, and in the end they decided that we should all visit during the June holidays.

Finally, after weeks of waiting, the June holidays arrived! We took a flight and landed in Fujian. Grandpa's cousin, my granduncle, greeted us at the airport and drove us to the village. Upon arrival we were greeted by some of the villagers who set alight two strings of firecrackers. It was my first time seeing firecrackers. They were loud!

Granduncle then showed us the way to our ancestral home. I was finally at the birthplace of Great-grandpa. There were rows of ancestral tablets, and right in front was a thick and dusty old book. In it were the names of, and information about, generations of my ancestors dating back at least two centuries. We discovered that Great-grandpa's grandfather had actually been a royal court official.

Over dinner, Granduncle spoke at length about life in the village. While the adults were chatting, I met some children who were around the same age as me. They were my cousins. They introduced me to the games they played and we had so much fun! We stayed in the village for two days. When we had to leave, Granduncle told us that our names would be officially added to the ancestral book. It was a solemn occasion and I saw Grandpa's tears glistening during the simple ceremony. Before we departed, I invited my newfound cousins to Singapore where I would take them on a journey of discovery too!

Mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle

Chee Jeun Hang Aiden

MARIS STELLA HIGH SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

The Bermuda Triangle is possibly the second-most feared and revered area in all of the Seven Seas, rivalled by only the Mariana Trench. It is notorious for having long been the final resting place for countless sailors and pilots that were destined to meet their doom there. I, Dr Daryl Rong, have been there myself, and I shall tell you about the scientific discoveries and horrors I found in those treacherous depths...

"There have been FAR too many recent occurrences of people losing their lives in the Bermuda Triangle, and society has been grieving over these deaths. We are considering sending out some scientists instead of military forces to investigate what is happening there, as the military has lost too many soldiers to the Triangle. If they do not come back alive, we may never know the secret of the Triangle. This is Superintendent Lee Fook Seong out."

I switched off the television, stunned by what Lee Fook Seong had just said. The Bermuda Triangle was one of the most dangerous areas on Earth. Whoever was chosen would almost surely perish out there! As a scientist myself, I was in danger of being sent to the Triangle, and I was definitely upset about this. The idea of drowning in a watery grave plagued my mind for hours as I paced about my home, desperate to know if I was to be one of the unlucky few to venture into the unknown. As tiredness came over me, I slumped onto my bed, the thought of drowning in the Bermuda Triangle fading away. If only I knew what awaited me the very next day.

My body was petrified when I heard my boss's words the next day. "Daryl Rong, Susan Chew, Gavin Gan and Stephen Frost - you have

been chosen to go on a voyage to find out what has caused the fatalities in the Bermuda Triangle. Be prepared to breathe your final breath on this mission. I am terribly sorry that you have to risk your lives in this way. Any last words that I can deliver to your families before you go?"

We were bursting with final farewells and things to share with our families, the ones who had always supported us. Gavin even wept silently, his tears falling like water droplets. I was totally unprepared for this, to say goodbye to all of my friends, siblings and parents...the thought of leaving them to face death in the Bermuda Triangle was horrifying, but I had to do this for the government, no matter how unprepared I was.

The four of us boarded the plane at twelve-forty in the afternoon. I walked with uncertain steps toward the door of the plane. This was going to be a great voyage of discovery and scientific breakthrough if we survived, and a voyage of sorrow if we did not. I could not know until I reached the Triangle, and I fervently hoped this voyage would be a success, for I did not want my life to end so soon.

We had butterflies in our stomachs as we flew toward our destination. Susan was the first to break the silence in the plane, a medium-sized carrier aircraft jammed with supplies for other missions. "Well, whatever happens," she said, "we still have the chance to find out what happened to all of those people, I guess!" Susan was popular for being optimistic and cheerful despite the odds. "Bon voyage, I say!" she chirped.

Just then, Stephen's mouth gaped open as he saw an amazing sight. "Look, there are bottlenose dolphins hunting in the water!" he cried. The rest of us gasped in amazement. It was not often we could watch dolphins hunting, and the sight took our minds off the fear of failure and death for a moment. This truly was a voyage of discovery as we observed exactly how the dolphins hunted their prey. It was information we had to tell our boss about. *If we survive, that is...* I thought to myself.

"Attention please, we have reached the Bermuda Triangle. Be on HIGH alert!" the pilot ordered us. Slowly, the carrier plane lowered a small vessel into the water, with scientific gadgets and devices ready to assist us. I was surprised the plane could fit something so large in its compartments.

The pilot then gave us more instructions. "I will be waiting on Bermuda Island nearby. If you come back, flash the red light on the boat. Good luck, take care, and I hope you all will come back safe and happy." With that, he flew off, leaving us in the vessel, totally stunned.

I tried to scan the surroundings, looking for anything that could possibly cause the deaths of so many people. The entire area was covered with a thick mist, and none of us could see through it at all.

"The mist is clearing!" Gavin pointed out. Again we scanned the area, and this time we discovered what made this voyage across the sea such a learning journey.

There, strewn across the water, floating, sinking and sparking, with numerous scratches and gouges, were billions of pieces of trash and pollutants! Some looked deadly, while others looked like they once contained chemicals. I nearly had a heart attack at the shocking sight. It was not only incredibly ugly, but extremely harmful to marine life.

"Oh my word, this is absolutely..." started Stephen, but he was interrupted as Susan exclaimed, "TERRIBLE!" We looked at the devastation and debris which included damaged ships and crashed planes. Gavin even caught a glimpse of a human skull floating on the water! I felt a tinge of sadness when I thought of the poor pilots and sailors who had died amongst the wreckage caused by heartless beings. At the same time I began to feel that I was being watched by something sinister. I sensed it was not friendly or passive in any way, so I turned around, just in time to meet the very definition of 'sea monster'...

The creature's terrible yellow eye stared at me. It was as large as a man's head, breadth longer than a fork, and full of primeval hunger. The beast had a lava-red mantle and tentacles that rippled with power.

I was so petrified, it took me seconds to realise my partners also had the same, white-faced expression as mine.

“W-what is that thing?” I just managed to mumble. “It’s a monster, THAT’S what it is...” Susan breathed. I identified the creature as a colossal squid, but this specimen was five times the normal size, and definitely much, much more aggressive. From the animal’s beak came a terrible shriek that sounded like rocks grating against one another, and a tentacle came slashing through the air, right toward us. This was a voyage of discovery, but I was not sure if we would ever get to share this story...

All four of us slammed down hard on the engine button, sending the boat roaring into action. We sped away, churning up water as we went, leaving the monstrous squid in our wake. But that was not the last of it, as I found out.

“You think we lost it?” Stephen queried. “Maybe. I hope,” I answered.

At that moment, a huge shape surged up out of the depths, spraying water in our faces. The squid was back, and it seemed much more furious! “Kraaa!” it screeched and sent two of its muscular tentacles flying toward us. I knew I was about to die, until another great beast rose from the water, jaws open and teeth glistening.

It was a sperm whale, the colossal squid’s mortal enemy! This whale was equally as large as the squid, and armed with blade-like fangs, a powerful tail and great durability, enough to withstand the suckers of the squid.

The beasts clashed, the squid clutching the whale in its tentacles and the whale clamping its jaws onto the squid’s unprotected face. This was another discovery made on this voyage, as a battle between these titans of the oceans had never been witnessed before. Waves crashed and the sea rocked and sprayed as the creatures continued their brawl. Suddenly, a fluke of the whale’s tail sent us flying sky high in the vessel! All four of us screamed our lungs out as the world flipped over and back again as we tumbled through the air, before executing a perfect landing back onto the water.

“That was...well, unexpected...” I croaked. The others readily agreed. We were all shaken by the events, but in our hearts, we were jumping about in sheer joy as we had survived relatively unscathed.

“Those sea creatures were probably mutated by the chemicals thrown into the sea, that’s how they grew so large!” Susan said. “Maybe that’s why they stayed there – as there was a constant supply of food in the form of pilots and sailors trying to cross the Triangle.”

“But we have no proof of what we saw...” Gavin mumbled.

“Do not worry, I have something that will prove it,” I said confidently, pointing to the camera built into my clothing. It had captured all the footage of the wreckage and the creatures we had found there.

“Wow, you are brilliant, Daryl!” my colleagues cheered.

“Now we just have to get back to the plane,” I said.

Having achieved our goal to find out what had happened to the people who perished in the Bermuda Triangle, and relieved that we were still alive, we set off to Bermuda Island. We were now ready to go back and make history with these scientific breakthroughs. It truly was a voyage of discovery.

Wonders of Nature

Daniel Yoshi Decker

MARIS STELLA HIGH SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

Biannually, during the June and December school holidays, I attend a local Japanese school in Hagiwara, Gifu, Japan, which is my mother's hometown. Last June holidays my visit was all the more special, as the school had planned an excursion to Mount Kurai for the students of Primary 5 level. Not only being a nature lover, but also to have the opportunity to explore it with my classmates, had me looking forward to the excursion for a long time.

Like clockwork, we set off from school at the appointed time of eight in the morning. When we reached Mount Kurai, we were greeted by our guide, Mr Yamanji. He gave us a brief introduction to Mount Kurai and detailed safety instructions, which we had to take note of. I couldn't wait for the information session to end as I was itching to move. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the safety instructions were completed and we started our climb.

I looked in awe at the thin film of ice that lacquered all the leaves, twigs and grass blades, as the freeze followed a partial thaw, and how sunlight caused the whole landscape to glitter. As I gazed up, I noticed the rich and unique plant life. We were asked to use our five senses to feel and observe the surroundings. As we ascended the moss-veiled trail, I felt the clear, clean, fresh air of the mountain graze my skin. Without any hesitation I breathed in as much as my lungs could take. I was mesmerised by the sight of the skyscrapers of the forest - majestic trees with their picturesque trunks. I began to wonder if these trees were friends, as they were considerate enough to point their branches away from each other so that they did not block their neighbour's light. Some with their knotted arms rose ever upwards. Flowers and plants

that I never knew were in existence could be seen. Each emitting its own unique fragrance and radiating beauty. My ears perked up at the sounds of screeching jays looking for prey. Distracted from the awe of nature, I could hear scampering hares, scurrying squirrels, scuttling rabbits, slinking wildcats and other wild sounds that I was not able to put my finger on.

At one point, our guide stopped us to explain about a rare bird that is often sighted on the mountain, called Ezoharuzen. It only chirps in the afternoon and remains silent the rest of the day. We came across a large tree that was slanted and looked as if it were about to fall. This tree was called Mizume and it was 600 years old. It had to be the patriarch of all the trees there. Given its gigantic size and strength, its roots must have extended several metres underground. When we continued our climb, my classmate Kenta shouted, "Look, there is something behind those trees!" When I looked closer, I realized it was a Kamo deer. It was explained that Kamo deer can only be found in Japan. I was glad to get a glimpse of a rare Kamo deer in the wild.

Before we knew it, we arrived at a spot that looked like a plateau, close to the peak of the mountain. Though it was not, it seemed that it had been scheduled that we arrive at the plateau at lunch time. Together with our Principal and teachers we set up picnic mats and started having lunch. The climb must have completely drained out my breakfast as I was just so famished. I wolfed down my food within minutes. A short rest after eating saw us making our climb back down the mountain towards the camping site. We were recharged and rejuvenated after the lunch and rest.

The camping site was another interesting experience – one of nomadic life and back-to-basics. We were taught how to start a fire. Using Maki wood, and crumpling up some newspapers, we lit it with a match. Before long there was fire! Maki wood has to be dried for three years after it has been cut down, as it easily absorbs and stores water. But an exceptional component of the wood, when it is dried, keeps sustaining the fire. Without any hesitation we whisked out marshmallows and Japanese rice-flour dumplings, and started roasting them. The wonder

of marshmallows is that when incinerated over a fiery pit, although stretched out, they don't bounce back. We feasted on the golden brown and slightly burnt sugary gelatins, which were really soft and hot. I must admit that the communal dining on the mountainside brought a certain tribal joy along with it.

We were still ahead of schedule and were given time to play around the camping site. The mountain gods must have been unhappy with us for having so much fun, as just then it started to pour. But that didn't bother us a bit. On the contrary, it was more fun playing in the rain. We were all drenched from head to toe. Before long, we were instructed to pack all our things, get on the bus and get back to school.

The journey on the bus made me reflect on nature and how we have taken it for granted. Which also took my thoughts to excerpts from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*; or, *Life in the Woods*, which I had read. Besides the trash, which is abundant, and logging, our very presence alone disturbs the wilderness. Thoreau writes, "They who come rarely to the woods take some little piece of the forest into their hands." He goes on to describe the traces people leave; through footprints, disturbing plants, or crushing leaves. So, while this trail was created for people to use for access to nature, what right do we really have to disturb nature this way?

It is evident. We need Nature. Nature doesn't need us.

Journey of 3,087 kilometers

Ikeesha Chan

MARYMOUNT CONVENT SCHOOL

My name is Yuki. I am a female Maltese dog. My fur is white and I am about eight years old. Now, I am having a massage on my new owner's lap. She is massaging me so gently that I feel like I want this moment to last forever. Do you know that my life was very different just two weeks ago? Let me tell you my story...

I was born on a farm in Taiwan. My five siblings and I enjoyed running in the fields near the house where we lived. Our owner had two children who loved and took great care of us.

On a cold Saturday evening, my happy life came to an end. The stranger at the door came in. I could see his heavily tattooed arms and a scar that trekked across his left eye. The man and my owner held a discussion in hushed tones, glancing over at us every now and then. We dogs did not understand anything that was happening, but I had a feeling that something bad was going to follow because the man looked like a gangster.

The next day, the same man arrived with two rusty cages. *Was he going to take us away?* I hoped not! But he took two of my siblings, put them in the cages and left. From that day on, we never saw them again. Two days after that, the man returned and took us all away. I was so scared and sad. The last I remember was that I was on an airplane and I felt quite nauseous.

After I arrived in Singapore, a truck transported me to a new place. The smell of the place was not welcoming. Many other dogs were locked up in filthy cages just like me. They too looked frightened. I could not see any of my siblings. I was only given a very small portion of food and



Ikeesha Chan

MARYMOUNT CONVENT SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

water daily. The man would laugh evilly every time he gave out the rations. I often felt hungry and unloved.

There was also a male Maltese in my cage and we mated whenever I was on heat. I was pregnant many times. Each pregnancy lasted for about sixty-two days. On average, I gave birth to a litter of four puppies. I saw my puppies only for a few weeks when I nursed them. The man would take all of them away with his ugly rough hands. I missed them so much. But I never saw them again, just like my family. I wanted to escape so badly. I decided that all humans were bad and cruel. They did not even care a tiny bit about animals.

As I grew older, my health deteriorated. My teeth grew rotten and they hurt every time I chewed. I grew some strange lumps on my breast area, which did not hurt, but they made me look funny. Every now and then, there would be new and younger female dogs in my cage.

After seven long years of misery being locked up, my body grew weary. As I was of no more use to the man, he sent me away to a kennel. I was very happy and relieved that I would never see the man again.

The kennel was a place that took in rejected dogs, and I was one of them.

I spent one month at the kennel before I was adopted by a family of five. They welcomed me warmly, but I was still shivering from fear of humans. They took me to the groomer to cut my overgrown hair and to the vet. I had six of my rotten teeth removed and also my breast lumps. As I was recuperating from the surgeries, I realised that this family was not cruel. They talk to me gently, bring me out to exercise daily, give me soothing coconut oil massages and more than enough food and water. Most importantly, they give me lots of love and cuddles and I am learning to trust humans again.

I now look up at my owner as she is massaging me. I am happy in my forever home.

Author's note: Through this experience, my family and I learnt that such breeding mill businesses are highly profit-driven. Money-hungry breeders fail to care for the animals and do not show any compassion toward them. I discovered that everyone must not only work to stop animal abuse, but also love and care for them deeply.

Voyage of Discovery

Yee Tze Lyn Cara

MARYMOUNT CONVENT SCHOOL

I travelled along a tiny river in the heart of Singapore. Sampans floated calmly along the murky green waters while the shouts of traders echoed up and down the riverbank. Nearby, a group of young men were racing on canoes. "Swish...swish...swish...." The oars of the canoes made long, narrow ripples in the water. My friends were tossed up and down, around and about by the whirling waters. We jostled each other, singing and spinning as we rushed further and further along the stream. As we were pulled along by the gentle current, the cool taste of clay gradually gave way to the sharp tang of salt. Waves of water propelled us further and further forward. I felt certain that I was about to embark upon an amazing voyage!

As we continued on our journey, the scenes around us changed. Gondolas sailed by, the long poles of the gondoliers parting the water around us in leisurely, long strokes. Shouts of, "Buongiorno!" surrounded us. People hustled along the riverbanks, where fresh seafood and produce were being sold. A young artist was painting a picture of an elegant lady. I tried to stop for a moment to take a closer look but the rushing waters would not let me pause. It was hard to take in all the colourful sights that swept past me in Venice.

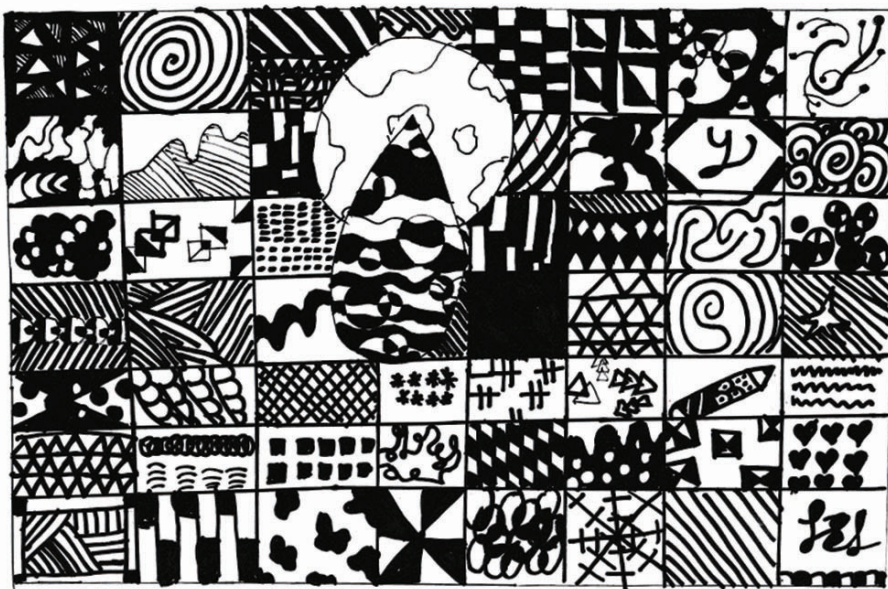
We were travelling rapidly now, dashing over rocks and sand on our way to our next adventure. After wading through miles of cold, clammy seaweed, a dizzying burst of salt spray spat us into dazzling sunlight. We came to a tiny, bubbling brook, in the midst of misty countryside. Small thatched cottages dotted the rolling hills. The occasional, "Mooooooooo..." and "Baaaaaa..." sounded around us as we drifted by green pastures and paddocks. We had reached the

quiet English countryside. My friends floated calmly alongside me. Soon, however, horses' hooves clicked all around us. Against the sun, I saw a tall, poised lady in a horse-drawn carriage. She waved. "All hail the Queen!" Loud shouts broke the tranquil silence. I winced, but there was no time to wait for the horses to pass. Caught by the current, we were once again pulled out to sea.

In no time at all, we reached yet another country. This place was lively, with many glorious wooden buildings, ornate pagodas and sprawling mansions. All of a sudden, I was sucked up a long, narrow tube (my, it was dark and cold in there) and with a squeak and gush, I rushed out into a bowl of vegetables! I was in a Chinese-style kitchen. Delicious aromas wafted by. There were pork dumplings steaming on a stove, glistening noodles smothered in a dark, rich sauce, thinly sliced ginger and scallions sizzling away in a hot wok, and...and...and a hand swirling me around and around green leaves of bok choy. "Whoosh!" I rushed out of the bowl and away from the kitchen through a drainage hole. I was back in the cool, clear waters of a flowing river.

The river water became colder and colder. I began to shiver and tremble as the water carried me over the snowy mountains of the Himalayas. A chairlift ascended overhead. Skiers filled the slopes. Many people stopped by the river for a rest. As I drifted along, I spotted a lady wearing a beanie, cupping a hot drink in her gloved hands. The fragrance of kahwah, a Kashmiri tea made from saffron and other spices, curled across the water.

After some time passed, a long pink tongue unfurled in the water near me. Enormous teeth crunched a pond skater right in front of me. "Slurp, slurp, slop!" The animals made gulping sounds as they drank. I rushed around animal mouths, trying not to be swallowed. I had reached Madagascar! I drifted over a hippopotamus' smooth back and under an elephant's long, wrinkled trunk. I swam through reeds and rushes lining the riverbank. I watched a beaver build a dam and three ants fighting over a tiny crumb.



Yee Tze Lyn Cara

MARYMOUNT CONVENT SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

Suddenly, I started to float above the water. I rose up high into the sky. Soon, I started to drift, buoyed along by currents of warm air. It was a strange feeling, like swimming in cotton candy. The air around me grew thick, moist and white. With a blinding flash of light, the heavens opened. I fell for miles until I hit the water with a resounding, "Plop!" I was back in the Singapore River! This is my story, the story of a raindrop.

A Long Journey

Arnav Sherpuri

NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

As my ship, 'The Endurance', docked in the harbour, mixed emotions swept through me. Although I was happy to have come back from my long, perilous adventure, the realisation hit me that everybody I knew and loved may have died decades ago. Nobody would know about me or my crew, most of whom had died along the way. I strolled through the streets, devoid of money, hoping to find a new way to earn a living. I would not go back to sailing. Though I was maybe but fifty years of age, I felt like an old, decrepit man. *Maybe*, I thought, *I can sell my ship?* But this would take time and anyway, *Who would want to buy my old ragged vessel?*

Then I came up with a wonderful idea. I could go to one of the nearby inns and narrate my story to entertain the customers. Hopefully that would help me earn enough to buy food and lodging until I found another way to make money. As I walked towards an inn, it suddenly started to rain. The rain rapidly shifted from a light drizzle to a massive thunderstorm. Luckily by then I had reached shelter. I quickly explained my business to the innkeeper, who gladly accepted my offer as some of his customers were getting restless and annoyed by the fact that they were stuck indoors until the storm passed. I was provided with a small stool, and I sat down to begin my story.

"Since I was a young lad of just six, my one and only ambition was to become a sailor, whether on a merchant ship, or even as a pirate. This was, of course, before I discovered that mythical places like the Gem Island and the Mountains of Doom really existed. I was simply smitten by the azure ocean.

Anyway, as I grew up, I studied and worked hard to get into the navy. Unfortunately I failed, and decided to try for the merchant navy instead. I was accepted into the merchant navy with ease as it was much easier to get into than the navy. My shrewd business sense helped me accelerate quickly up the ranks. Around 12 years after I joined I was picked, along with 19 other people, as the elite crew for an expedition. We were told very little about it. All we managed to gather was that it involved finding new places to gather raw materials from, and new places to trade with. Little did I know about the terrible things I would have to face when I accepted the role as captain of the expedition.

On a cold January morning, our ship set sail. It was not until the next year that we finally sailed out into completely uncharted territory. At the previous port we had finally unloaded the last of our merchandise and had filled all the extra space with supplies, in preparation for the unknown." At this point, I stopped and told my audience to come back the next evening to hear the rest of my tale, as it was already late at night.

Although they groaned, they agreed to come back. The innkeeper looked pleased with the fact that, because of my story, most of his customers would return the following evening. I slept right through the whole of the next day, until after it was dark. In the evening the rain and thunderstorms had returned, and so did most of the customers. I resumed my story.

"One morning, the ship's lookout called down from the crow's nest, "Land ho!" at the top of his voice. The whole ship was a flurry of excitement. It had been four months since land was last seen, and we hoped to replenish our supplies. I could see a sandy beach, littered with fruit trees. There were even some chickens and cattle moving around, but I could see no more of the island because of a large brown mountain.

As we neared the island, we anchored our ship around a hundred metres from the shore. Bill, Henry and I rowed a small boat to the beach. We slowly collected all the supplies we needed, but instead of immediately sailing on, we unloaded the supplies onto the ship and



Charles Manoharan Mervina
YUAN CHING SECONDARY SCHOOL

went back to explore the island. It took us around an hour to scale the mountain and reach the summit. From there we saw a strange sight. The rest of the island was completely covered by precious gems and metals. There was even a silver river cutting through the landscape. Greedy Bill rushed down to the river and tentatively dipped his finger in. It immediately turned into silver and fell off.

Horried, Bill shrieked and jumped back. As soon as he realised what had happened, he calmed down and sat on a rock. Henry, although unsettled by this event, was still determined to find something precious for himself. Spotting a hill made of ruby he ran towards it. Before he could reach it, he was struck by a flash of green and disappeared into the rocks. After seeing all of this, I decided that I'd had enough of the island and hastened back to the ship before anybody else was killed. Later my crew named it Gem Island.

After that we sailed without seeing land for an extremely long time. It might have been many more months before we saw anything else except endless ocean. The next island we saw looked normal enough. It was a small island with a few oases, and a large mountain in the

middle of it. After collecting enough supplies for the next few months on the sea, we decided to explore the island, leaving just a skeleton crew on the ship. When all the others decided to climb up to the top of the mountain, I opted to relax at an oasis. Then a petrifying thing happened. As soon as they reached the summit, screeches filled the air and they all suddenly disappeared. Seeing this I fled from the island as quickly as I could, hoping I would never find out how or why they disappeared.

Time seemed to slow down while we sailed across that vast, unending ocean. It seemed to me that I sailed for years and years, endlessly searching, always hoping to find land."

Finally I looked around and asked, "What year is it?" Someone from the audience replied, "1857". Then I smiled and asked those assembled, "If I first set sail in 1657, how many years have I been sailing?"

There was complete silence and the lights went out.

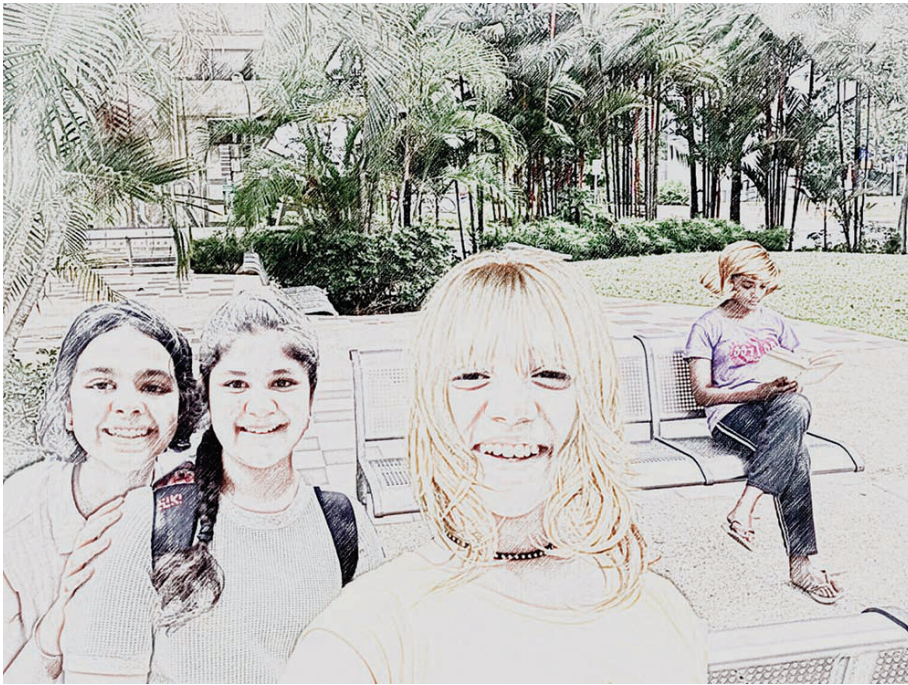
Who am I?

Ivannah Jacob

NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL (PRIMARY)

I am Sierra Asterville. A few years ago I didn't even know who I was. Life seemed pointless after I lost my twin. I still remember her last words to me. We were in a typical hospital room. It had bleak white walls that looked like they had been washed with bleach. The nauseating combination of disinfectants and medicines made me want to gag. The constant beep of the heart monitors and other machines my sister was attached to was enough to drive the most sane of us nuts, let alone me, an anxious teenager. Then there was my sister. Her skin, drained of colour, looked like a shriveled grape. Her usually neat and tidy hair looked bedraggled. Her beautiful chestnut eyes had sunk into their sockets, and a tangled ivy of tubes engulfed her. She looked into my eyes one last time and rasped, "Don't ever forget me." And that was the last time I ever saw her.

My sister and I were identical, but we were anything but the same. She had always been the cool one, the popular one, and the intelligent one. I had been the bookworm, too engrossed in the fictional world to be bothered about a social life. My sister often said that I looked like Hermione Granger from 'Harry Potter', hunched over a book with my blonde hair sweeping into my face. But while she had watched the movie, I had read the good old paperback. My clothes were always comprised of mismatched socks, baggy sweats, and a t-shirt that in no way matched the colour of my pants. Unlike my sister of course, who was always neatly put-together in the latest fashion trends. My sister was a 'social canary'. She always needed to know the latest gossip and news. She closely monitored the trends and styles of famous celebrities. I once commented to her that if Selena Gomez wore a stunning dress to



Ivannah Jacob

NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

the Grammys, I bet she could track it down within seconds, including the price, shop and designer. She agreed that I was correct, of course.

But all of this changed when my sister was diagnosed with blood cancer two years ago. From that point on, my life spiraled downhill as I saw my sister deteriorating, until she was barely able to speak. I lived in denial for the first 24 hours after her death. And then the roaring pain came crashing through, destroying my life. I cowered under my bed or buried myself in my blanket. At her funeral, I was a grieving mess. My sister would definitely not have approved. To make it worse, everyone came to me and expressed their 'condolences'. "Oh, I am so sorry about your sister." I knew it was all fake. I saw from the way they regarded me with cold eyes, that they were thankful that this was not their fate. They discretely pointed out to naughty kids what would happen if they behaved badly.

I tried to engross myself in different activities to deal with my loss, thinking it would distract me. When I started to isolate myself and feel helpless, I realised I had depression. I can't accurately describe depression. It is the feeling that your world is torn apart, and it leaves you asking - *what have I done to deserve this?* I didn't have friends at school, and the people that had talked to me in the past, only did so because of my sister's high social status. I couldn't relate to them. All the counselors I went to kept saying the same things: "talk to someone"; "accept your feelings"; "your sister will always be a part of you" etc. Those words meant nothing to me, to the dull aching in my chest, to the vacuum in my heart that nobody could fill.

Until I met Mrs. Jones. She was a bright, hippy, perky person, with her 'thought of the day' and 'motivational stamps' that she used to decorated our worksheets. Mine the most. She reminded me of Ms. Maude from 'The Magic School Bus'. My sister would have loved her, but I didn't think she was my taste. I don't know if it was how gloomy I looked in class, or the fact that she shared my interest in books, but she took an interest in me. The first 'thought of the day' that I really paid attention to was, "Don't let your past determine your future." I remember how fast I perked up in class, and the way she looked directly at me, with her blue eyes and frizzy red hair.

From then my life changed course. Mrs. Jones was my biggest motivation. She helped me build back the haven that anguish had torn down, to climb back up the hill, to find a reason to wake up every day, and she helped me find my identity. And slowly I overcame the monster that leashed me to a pillar of worthlessness: depression. I remember my first field trip with her. It was to an art exhibition. I thought I would die of boredom. Each drawing looked the same with bold splashes of colour and poetic names. The toxic fumes of paint were in the air. Each artist we met couldn't wait to explain their blobs and splashes of colour. Everything looked oddly out of place in that traditional museum with the checkered tiles. But Mrs. Jones found something inspirational in everything she saw. She always looked at the bright side of life. Her positivity rubbed off on us too, I guess. She encouraged me to take up writing with an article for the yearbook, identifying my talent with



Ivannah Jacob
NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

words through my class essays. With every article or essay that was published my self-esteem grew.

She helped me find who I was as a person. I wasn't just somebody's sister, somebody's daughter, somebody's friend, somebody's cousin anymore. I was Sierra Asterville. And now as I sit here writing this graduation speech I'm trying to decide on how to start. What about with something simple and precise like, 'I am Sierra Asterville. A few years ago I didn't even know who I was...'?

The Pathway to Music

Li Ziqing

PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

Musa was an ordinary girl of eleven from Ophaeti, a small planet tucked away in a corner of the universe. It was very different from other planets for one reason - it had an abundance of noise. Wherever you turned, the screeching of machines, the yowl of a cat, the raised voices of an argument, were sure to reach you. Living on Ophaeti one never heard a pleasant sound nor enjoyed a quiet moment of peace.

Until one little girl's parents decided to move house...

Musa woke up as usual to the scraping of chairs on the floor and the clash of plates banging into each other. Once she had changed into her clothes, she ate her breakfast slowly, absorbing the last images of her home. Her father had decided to move into a house in a town called Dinus, and it was the last day she would see her old home. After breakfast, the family piled noisily into the car. With a groan, the engine started and they set off.

The family's arrival at their new house was immediately followed by unpacking, dusting and furniture arranging that led to quite a lot of hullabaloo. While her parents were busy, Musa, together with her dog Fluka, made her way to the attic, intending to clean it up. However the door was locked, probably by the last owner. When she saw that, she broke into a grin because, unknown to her parents, she had secretly picked up the art of lock picking.

A heartbeat later a "Ping!" resounded, and Musa opened the door with an air of satisfaction. However, she was not expecting what greeted her. Instead of a dusty attic, a forest of lush green stood before her. Tall, swaying trees wore delicate crowns of butterflies and flowers, while



Li Ziqing

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the berries in the bushes shone invitingly. Musa caught a glimpse of the sea not far away.

Musa's breath caught in her throat and questions leapt to her tongue, but she was speechless with shock. As if in a trance, she stepped wide-eyed into this strange and bewitching new world, followed by an excited Fluka, who had never seen the sea before.

She took a few timid steps forward while Fluka sniffed around curiously. Before long, Musa gathered up her courage and was running freely towards the sea, laughing at the marvel of this unfamiliar world. She found a boat on the shore, got into it, and started rowing with two oars, while enjoying the crashing of the waves. Finally, she became tired and was about to row back when something stopped her.

A sound.

But a sound unlike any she had heard before on Ophaeti. It was... beautiful. Musa rowed the boat toward the sound and saw what was causing this wonder. A hollow branch with some holes had fallen on the ground. A few leaves covered some of the holes, and when the wind blew through it, the result was the sweet note that had attracted Musa's attention.

At that moment Musa realised that the sound was not a part of Opheatic life, and that she was the first and only Opheatian to hear it. Just then, she remembered what her teacher had told the class a few day earlier. "Often when somebody discovers or creates something new, it will be named after that person," Miss. Tina had said.

Recalling that, Musa grinned from ear to ear. She gingerly placed the branch on her flat palm and held it high in the air. "This wonderful sound will be named Music," she announced to the trees and Fluka. "And this amazing instrument," Musa looked down at her dog, "...will be called a Flute." As if understanding what Musa had just said, Fluka wagged her tail in agreement.

Just then, Musa remembered that her parents were still in the house and were probably waiting for her. She carefully placed the Flute in her

pocket, careful not to bend it, and skipped out of the attic. As she closed the 'magic portal' the pleasant hum of Music was still ringing in her ears. A smile slowly crept over her face as Musa imagined her parents' shock at hearing her story of how she had gone on a short 'voyage of discovery' and discovered both the Flute and Music.

The Realm of Curious Things

Lim Hua Ming, Nicole

PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

Prologue

“Your majesty!” one of the King’s servants barged in.

“How many times must I tell you to...” The King stopped mid-sentence when he saw what was in his servant’s hands. A letter from the Keeper of the Realm of Curious Things.

The King snatched the letter from his servant and tore it open with shaking hands. His eyes widened. His hands trembled, and the letter fell from his grip. It said:

Roses are red, violets are blue,

Intruders have yet to come,

But they’ll perish when the full moon’s blue.

Chapter One

“Are you guys sure you know where you’re going? I think we’ve been walking in circles,” Karen stated. Four friends, Bobby, Nikki, Karen and Bryan, were exploring in the Craken forest and they were lost. However, Nikki’s attention was not directed towards her friends. Instead, her eyes lingered on some vines hanging from a tree. There seemed to be something behind them.

“Hey guys, wait up!” Nikki said as she walked towards the vines. She slowly moved the curtain of greenery away with her arm, and she couldn’t believe her eyes.

Right in the middle of the woods was a wooden playground.

They stepped into the opening and looked around. Lush trees surrounded the area, making it seem as if the playground was meant to be here.

Nikki walked over to the playground. She felt like she had a connection with it. She slowly placed her feet on the weathered wood and grabbed onto the sides, afraid she might fall. The others followed her, having the urge to explore further. As Nikki was walking about, she saw a cavity in the wood. She walked over and beckoned the others to join her. In the hole, there was a glass bottle. She picked it up and unscrewed the cap, and a scroll of paper tied with string fell out of the opening. Nikki unfolded the paper. It said:

Roses are red, violets are blue,

If you are seeing this,

Curious things have yet to bloom.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Bryan asked.

“I think I know...” Nikki muttered. Leaves were being blown in circles. The four looked up, and saw a mixture of blue and purple swirling right in front of them forming a portal. It sucked them right in along with the leaves.

Chapter Two

They were falling in darkness.

Nothing could be seen, or heard, and they did not know where they were falling to. Suddenly, Nikki felt something hard.

Wait...isn’t this...we’ve stopped falling! Nikki thought. She looked up and gasped. Above her, fairy lights filled the hollow space and glass bottles were stacked in many cavities in the wood, which were carved on the insides. *If the roof above me is solid and covered in lights, then where were we falling from?* Nikki wondered. She found her three

friends and they walked towards an empty passageway in front of them.

As they were walking, Bryan noticed three doors ahead. He led the others over to them. One was pink, another was blue and the last was yellow. A sign was hung on each of the doors. The sign on the pink door said:

Who are you, why are you here?

Curious things have yet to happen,

The Land of the Elves lies here.

"Land of the Elves...? Pah! Elves aren't real!" Bobby snickered.

"Oh really? Then how do you explain the portal that literally opened up right in front of us and sucked us in to who-knows-where?" Nikki shot back. She looked at the next door and read the sign aloud.

Who are you, why are you here?

Curious things have yet to happen,

Time is so dear.

Karen went to the last one and read:

Who are you, why are you here?

Curious things have yet to happen

The King's castle lies here.

"What are these signs supposed to mean? We have to get out of here!" Bryan wailed.

"Well, the second two are just...useless. Let's explore the Land of the Elves first, and try to get more information about where we are from there," Nikki suggested. "Ready?"

"Whatever it takes for us to get out of here!" Bryan exclaimed. And with that, they twisted the doorknob and stepped into the Land of the Elves.

Chapter Three

There was an elf sitting in front of them.

"Argh! Who are you?" the elf asked. The friends explained their situation and the elf gasped in shock.

"Oh my...follow me! You guys are not allowed to be here!" the elf said, jumping up. After they were safely hidden from sight in the bushes, the elf continued talking.

"I'm Bridget. You guys are not allowed to be here! The King of the Realm of Curious Things received a message from the genie saying that four intruders will travel through our lands' portals and arrive here! In the note, it warned that they will perish when the full moon is blue. It seems like you are the four intruders!" Bridget explained.

"Hold up...we will perish? How long is it until the moon turns blue?" Bobby asked.

"Approximately three days." The friends shared a worried glance. They had to get out of this realm.

Bridget explained that the only way out of the realm was through the portal that was in the King's throne room, but it was a long way from the Land of the Elves.

"Just get us out of here!" Bryan wailed.

Bridget found them some disguises and then led them into the bustling town of the elves.

Chapter Four

They were walking by citizens with pointy ears but no one noticed them in their disguises.

As the friends were following Bridget they saw two unique-looking elves who were much taller than the rest and were holding spears wrapped up in vines.



Lim Hua Ming, Nicole
PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

"You see those people?" Bridget pointed out. "They are Avariels, warrior elves. They guard this realm and are professionals in fighting."

Just then, one of the Avariels saw the group of five. He whispered into the other Avariels' ear and they started to make their way toward them.

"Oh no. They suspect it's you guys. Follow me, and run. Run. Now!"

The friends ran after Bridget and hoped they were out of sight of the Avariels. They ran across fields of green, where tiny pixies flew around them when they stepped near their nests. Animals of different colours, shapes and sizes lifted their heads when the four children and the elf ran past them. They followed Bridget into a forest, where the canopy of trees gave them some nice shade.

"Over there. Jump into that boat and get ready to take off," Bridget said. She saw the quizzical look in their eyes and laughed. "It's called magic!"

The four friends ran towards the boat and jumped into it. Bridget did the same, and chanted some magical spells under her breath. Suddenly the boat gave a jerk, and the four friends were shocked to find that the wood that the boat was made out of was starting to grow feathers!

The oars started moving up and down, and in a blink of an eye they became wings. The boat had become a giant bird!

"Up and away! To the King's castle!" Bridget shouted into the crisp air. On cue, the bird flapped its wings, and they were off to the castle.

As the bird soared over the Realm of Curious Things, Nikki, Bryan, Karen and Bobby were amazed at the sight that was below their noses. The realm looked even more magical from up in the air than it did on land! Some parts were green and colourful, while others were grey and dull.

Animals of all sorts looked up as they flew above them. The friends were taken aback.

Soon Bridget called out, "Heads up! We're here! The Castle Lands! Hey, feathery darling, quietly land us at the side of the castle, would you?" Bridget cooed. They got off the bird and bid it farewell as it soared away across the sky.

"Now we can't let the Avariels in the castle see us. We have to sneak in. I'm going to shrink us down to pixie size," Bridget whispered. She removed a lavender pouch from her satchel and took out a pinch of golden dust. She blew it and a flash of light surrounded the group of five. When everyone opened their eyes again, everything was ten times bigger than them.

How curious, Nikki thought to herself as she, Bridget and the others climbed through a tiny crack in the castle wall.

Chapter Five

Bridget and the four friends were walking through the castle grounds, unarmed. However, the four friends were more amazed by the castle than worried about the chance of being captured by the Avariels. The castle walls were made out of gold, and the pillars were made of cobblestone. Little sparks of magic flew everywhere as pixie servants flew here and there.

"The throne room is straight ahead," Bridget said. As they walked around a corner, Karen suddenly pulled Nikki backwards.

"Look out!" she screamed as the enormous foot of an Avariel stomped down as he walked past them. "You have to be alert if you want to get out of here in one piece!" The five continued walking to the throne room. When they reached it, they crawled under the solid gold doors to enter, and found the fat King Omen sleeping on his throne.

"Okay, great. We can sneak across the throne room, and reach the portal on the other side. From there, you can get out of here," Bridget said. They slowly crept across the room, with Bridget in the lead, and made it to the other side.

"Press this button, and a portal will appear in front of you and immediately suck you in," Bridget said.

"Thank you for everything, Bridget," Nikki said. They exchanged farewells and on the count of three, Nikki, Bryan, Karen and Bobby pressed the button. A mixture of blue and purple started swirling in front of them and the four friends were sucked into it, just in time to see the King wake up.

Phew, that was close, Nikki thought as she and her friends fell into darkness once more.

Chapter Six

The next thing Nikki knew, she was sprawled across the soil of the Craken, trying to figure out whether what had just happened was real.

She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and when she saw her friends scattered across the playground, she knew it had not been a dream. Her eyes had seen magical creatures, her skin had felt magic, and her senses had told her to run.

As she stood up, she saw Bobby looking at the cavity inside the wood where they found the glass bottle that led them to the Realm of Curious Things. She helped Karen and Bryan up, and they walked over to Bobby. He looked up with an overwhelmed look on his face.

"Did all that really happen?" Bobby asked.

"How do you explain the fact that we just got spat out by a portal, then?" Karen pointed out. They looked into the hole and realised that the bottle was still there, but the note in it seemed to be different to the one they had found earlier.

Nikki picked it up and shook the bottle until the paper fell out. Bobby caught it and unrolled the note. In handwriting like an elf's, the note said:

*Roses are red, violets are blue,
You've found the magic within,
Please keep this area hidden,
And never ever tell anyone.*

"We have to keep all this a secret," Bobby concluded. They put the bottle back into its original place, and looked around. The lush trees surrounded the playground, making it feel tranquil.

As the four friends walked out of the playground, Nikki stopped, with the vines hanging by her arm. She turned around and smiled as she thought of the adventure she had just shared with her friends. It had pulled them closer together.

"Realm of Curious Things, thank you." And with that, she made her way through the vines, leaving the magic behind her.

Ship in a Bottle

Rachel Tan Rui En

PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

I was jolted awake by loud yelling noises coming from outside my room. My digital clock faintly glowed 5 a.m. I let out a deep sigh and thought, *What are they up to this time?*

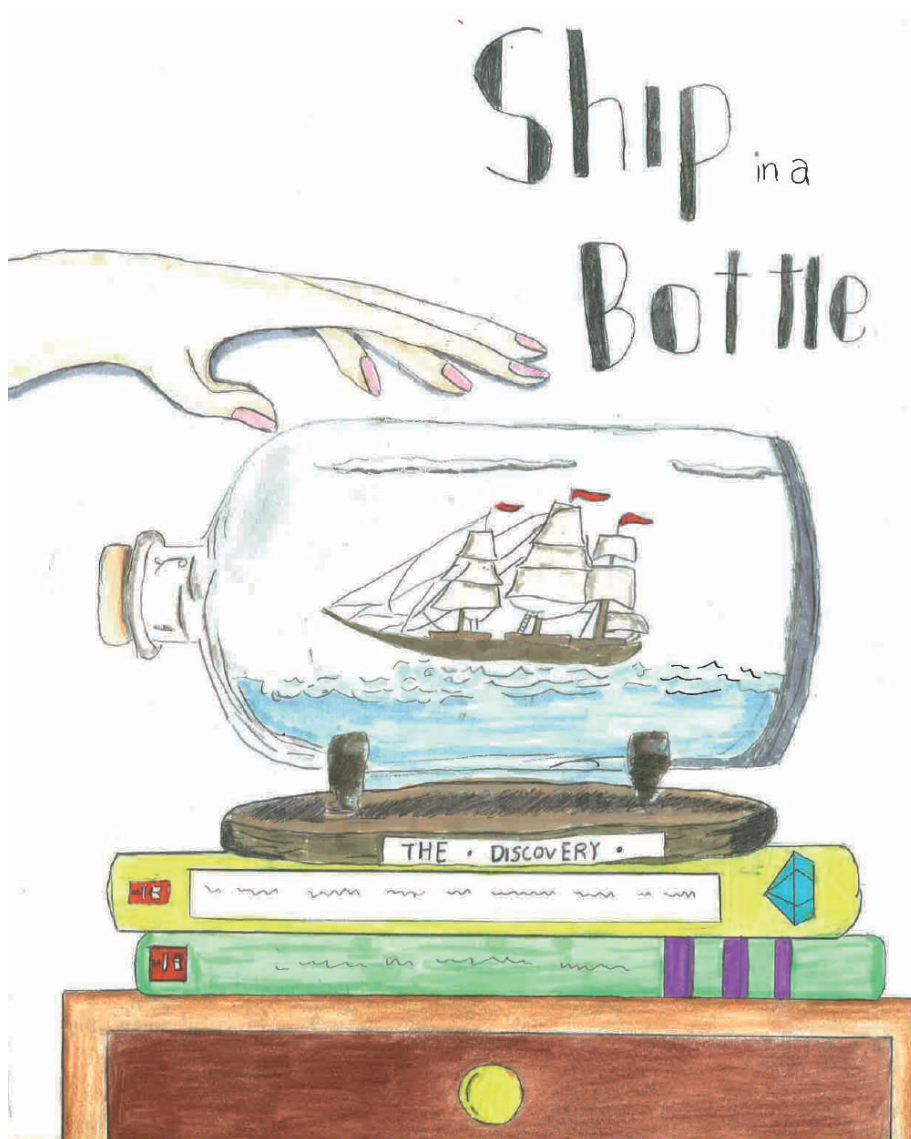
Living in a glass bottle on top of a shelf was not fun at all. Especially when you are an eleven-year-old house-elf who hates the annoying Humans' daily morning shrieks waking him up.

My family of twelve lived in a flimsy wooden ship, 'The Discovery', inside a large glass bottle that the Humans got as a souvenir when they visited London. The bottle was precariously placed on top of a bookcase in a house inhabited by a human family known as the McCurdies. Being cursed to a wretched life in a holiday souvenir seemed abysmal to me. Never did I really understand my purpose in life.

I had slumbered for 10 hours but I felt even more lethargic than ever. With a loud sigh, I lay on my bed, shrouded by an immense cloak of boredom. I despised the McCurdies' rude morning awakenings, as it signaled the start of the monotonous routine that I reluctantly followed every day.

The day droned on as I waited for time to pass. It was midnight now, yet my mind was furiously active, imagining how I could finally be free from this endless drudgery. *I can't take it anymore. I have to take action*, I decided.

A sly thought flashed through my mind. *Why didn't I think of this before?* Yes. I would sneak out while everyone was asleep. Then I would be able to discover new things as I explored the outside world. My mind



Rachel Tan Ru En
PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

was made up, no turning back now. I forced the cork open and stole my way out of the dusty old bottle that I called home.

For the first time in forever, I was awake before the McCurdies. I climbed down the bookcase, excited to see where my journey would take me. In the corner of my eye, I caught sight of Ginger. The McCurdies' feline pet was sleeping peacefully on the grimy kitchen floor. *I think I just found my ticket out of this house...* I rubbed my hands gleefully.

Stepping on Ginger's hind legs, I tried to hop onto her back. Ginger suddenly opened her eyes and, startled to see me, she began jumping frantically all over the room. I clung tightly onto her long silky fur. Engulfed in fear, I began shrieking like a banshee. My hands lost their grip and I was flung out of the kitchen window.

"Ahhhh..." I screamed at the top of my lungs and with a sudden stop, I found myself on top of a pile of dried leaves. "Uh...I...I'm alive!" I spluttered.

"Wow! A magical fairy!" a shrill voice exclaimed. A petite little girl in a pinafore stared down at me in amazement. She excitedly picked me up by the collar of my pajamas. "Hey put me down!" I yelled angrily with my arms flailing about. "You're coming home with me," the little girl giggled innocently. I kicked my legs in the air, struggling to escape the girl's grasp. After a hard kick aimed at her wrist, she yelped in pain and threw me back through the open window.

Once I had made sure that I was safely back in the McCurdies' house, and out of the little girl's sight, I heaved a sigh of relief. *I think that's enough excitement for me today...* Thinking about my poor family, probably searching for me while I was out selfishly on my adventure, I mumbled, "...perhaps I should be heading back home now." I bolted back toward the bookcase where I could see my family anxiously waiting for my return back home to the bottle.

"Mummy!" I yelled as I hurried home. When my family noticed my arrival, they ran towards me with outstretched arms. From that episode, I not only discovered what it was like to explore places outside of the bottle, but also that I needed strength to continue to live life to

the fullest, even if I lived in a bottle. As for my adventure to the outside world, I decided that I was not courageous enough to go exploring again. "Maybe one day, but definitely not anytime soon!" I chuckled.

Voyage of Discovery

Trisha Mah Poh Yoke

PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

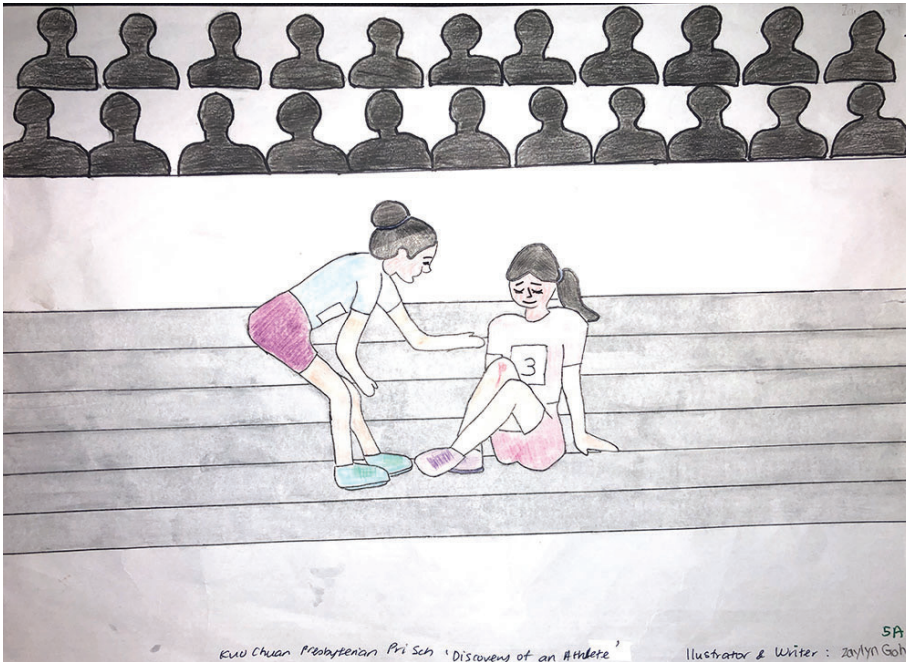
My name is James. I do not have many friends. My only true friend is Chris, the boy who stuck with me even though my other friends left me. I was looking for success and treasure to show them all that I could be successful, until one night...

It was another boring school day. The sun beamed through the window onto my desk as the teacher yakked on, "Eighty percent of the Earth's surface is covered by water, while the remaining twenty percent is land." I stared at my textbook. It had a big map of Singapore printed on it. I stared out the window and started to daydream. I heard a soft ringing in my ears, but ignored it.

"Hello? Earth to James?" My friend Chris waved his hand in front of my face. "The bell has already rung, it's lunchtime now," he said. "Wait, really? I must've been daydreaming too much!" I chuckled.

After school, I headed straight home. "Hello, Mum," I greeted my mother. I did my homework for a few hours, until my mother called, "James, it's dinner time." After dinner, I slumped into bed and fell quickly asleep.

I woke up and found myself in a glowing tunnel. *Huh? What's happening?* I thought. I crawled through it as I saw there was no other option. There was a door that had the map of Singapore printed on it. *What's this?* I wondered. I accidentally pressed my hand onto the red 'X' marked on the map. Unexpectedly, the door unfolded to reveal a new world and I tumbled forward. "Ahhh!" I shrieked as I fell. The world was a blur of colours as I tumbled down...



Zaylyn Goh

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

I heard a few murmured words as I regained consciousness. “James, James? Are you awake?” the voice asked. As I got up, I saw a familiar face...it was Chris. “Chris? How did you get here? Do you know where we are?” I bombarded him with questions. “I don’t know,” he replied. We wandered through a jungle and stumbled upon a beach. Strangely, there was a nice ship waiting for us to board. “Wow! A ship, quick, let’s board it!” I shouted and ran forward, but Chris stopped me.

“Wait! We’re stranded here, lost. Where do you think you’re going to go?” Chris cautioned.

“Maybe to find some lost treasure? Once I find some, all the friends that left me will stare in awe!” I suggested.

“What? Are you crazy? This isn’t a fairy tale from some storybook, this is real! There won’t be any treasure waiting around for you to find,” he argued.

“Well, you can stay here alone then,” I said before dashing towards the ship. Chris rolled his eyes and followed behind. We boarded the ship. It was pretty clean and reminded me of those pirate ships in stories. Strangely, as I put my hand on the steering wheel, I knew how to steer the ship, as if by magic.

“How are you doing that, James?” Chris questioned in surprise.

“I have no idea,” I replied.

We sailed the seas for a few days, then decided to dock at a small island. We alighted from the ship and looked around. It started to rain and we rushed for shelter. Not long after, the rain started to ease and the sun peeked out from the clouds again. “Look, in the sky, Chris!” I pointed to a glimmering rainbow amidst the trees. “Let’s follow it!” I shouted to Chris and chased after the rainbow.

Strangely the rainbow shined bright and did not fade when we got closer to it. At its end we stumbled upon a small willow tree. “Huh? Only a tree? Where’s the pot of gold?” I questioned. We were panting from the run so we sat against the tree to rest. “Phew, I’m really tired,” I panted and accidentally leaned back a little too much. Suddenly, a trapdoor from the base of the tree trunk flapped open and I fell backwards into the hole. My shrieks echoed down. “James!” Chris shouted after me.

I woke up on a comfy patch of grass, with Chris beside me. We started wandering through a cave that was lit by fireflies. After a few hours we finally came to a clearing. Sunlight poured in and showcased a magnificent waterfall. I stared in awe as butterflies fluttered around. Chris gasped.

“The treasure must be behind the waterfall,” I said.

“Yeah, totally,” Chris replied sarcastically. Without hesitation, I ran straight through the waterfall. Chris’ jaw dropped in shock before he followed behind me. We entered another cave. There was a giant treasure chest waiting for us, right in the middle of the cave.

“Woah,” Chris gasped. He started to dash for the treasure chest but then stopped. “You take it. After all, you led us here,” Chris said modestly.



Trisha Mah Poh Yoke
PEI TONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

I walked towards the chest and opened it, expecting it to be filled with gold and jewels. Surprisingly, there was nothing inside except a note. I picked it up and read it.

"The real treasure is the one who stands behind you, ready to back you up in any situation," the note read. I looked behind and saw Chris.

After reading the note, I came to a sudden realisation. The true treasure was the one who stood by me, the one who did not betray me. Chris was my real friend, his friendship was something I should treasure. I looked back at Chris again.

"Hello? James?" Chris said, breaking the silence. "Have you found the treasure? Let's go."

"Yeah, let's go," I replied, deciding not to tell him about the note until the time was right. Suddenly, I felt a wave of lethargy and fell asleep on the spot.

I woke up inside the tunnel that I started in. Strangely, its glow seemed to have faded. I crawled back through the tunnel and opened the door.

I woke up again and found myself on my bed inside my bedroom. *Huh? What happened?* I thought as I rubbed my eyes. *Was it all a dream?* I got up and looked at my alarm clock. "Seven o'clock? Oh no, I'm going to be late!" I screamed as I jumped out of bed and quickly got ready for school. As I ran past the kitchen, I saw a note attached to the fridge door. "We are going on a business trip for a week, be good! Love, Mom and Dad," it read.

When I reached school, Chris was waiting for me. "Phew, I was almost late!" he panted.

I looked at him and said, "Me too!"

"You'll never believe this, I just had the craziest dream," Chris said.

"About you and me going on an adventure to find treasure?" I asked. Chris stood in shock.

"You were there?" Chris asked.

I replied, "Were you?" We both looked at each other.

Suddenly, our classmate Chloe passed by us and stopped. "There you two are! You've been absent from school for two days!" she exclaimed. Both our mouths fell open.

So...last night was a dream? I wondered. Or was it...real?

A Transformation. A Discovery.

Sng Josh

ST. HILDA'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

The sun rose from a pool of crimson, brightening the sky. I opened my eyes and saw that my friends were still asleep. I had a quick breakfast and went on to my job – eating.

After I finished eating my bed, I moved on to eat another leaf. Oh, in case you still do not know, I am a caterpillar. A monarch caterpillar, or *Danaus plexippus* to be exact. We caterpillars are known to be 'eating machines'. Well, that is one way of putting it. We eat voraciously, because we need to grow!

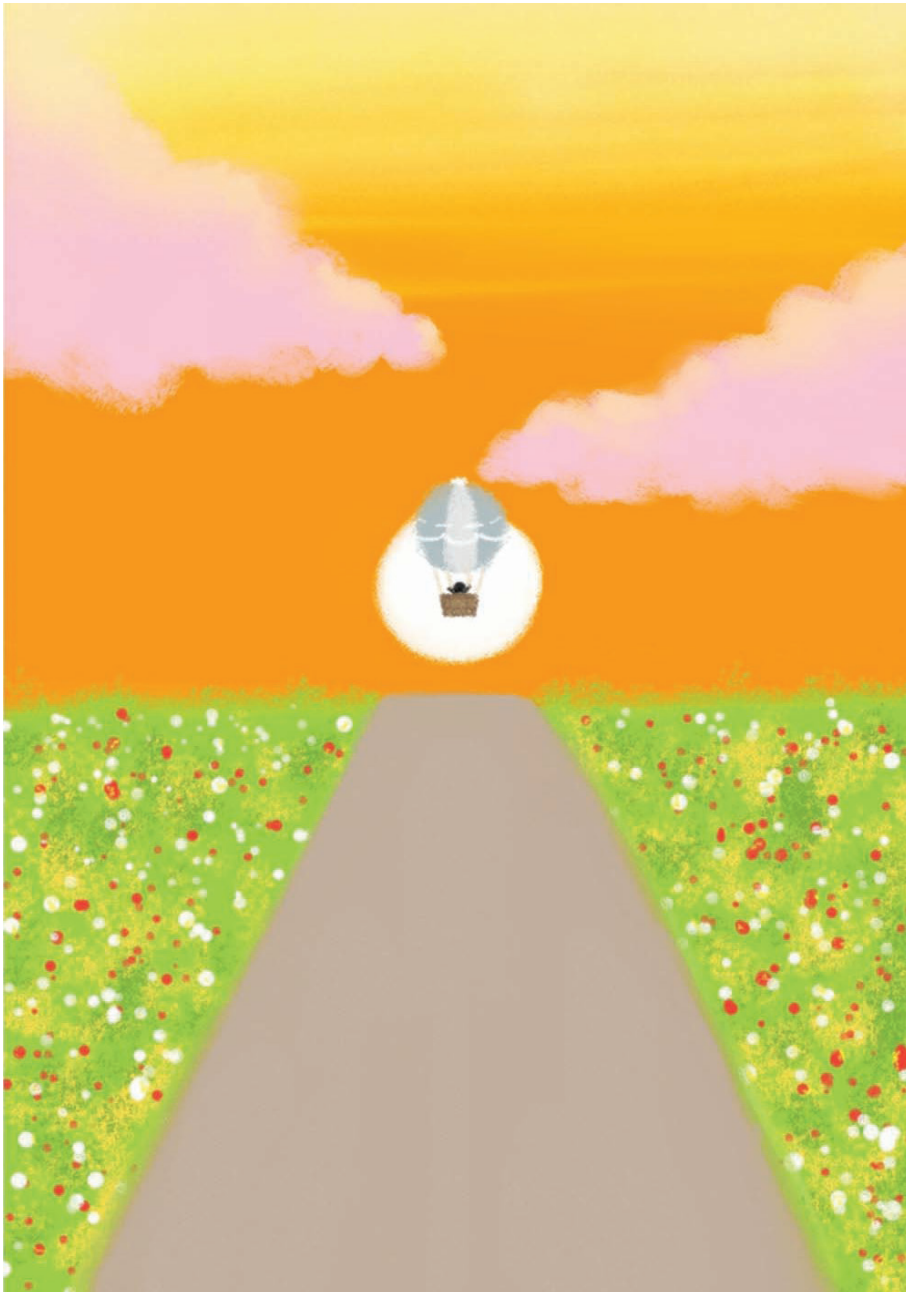
Hence, after another day's work of eating, I moulted my skin, then I slept. My life seemed so boring. All I had to do was eat. However, in a few days, I would be turning into a pupa!

The next day, I awoke to see a spider crawling towards me, fangs clicking. I gasped in shock. The spider clearly ignored the bright colour on my back warning that I am toxic if eaten! I kept as still as possible.

A few agonising moments later, the spider suddenly remembered that he should not eat me and scrambled away. I sighed in relief.

I decided that I would be turning into a chrysalis tomorrow. I had nothing to do except eat more leaves. Thus, I found a perfect spot on a tree to pupate. I ate then I slept. You see what a boring life I led? Eating then sleeping, eating then sleeping...

When I woke up, I immediately hung myself upside down on the branch that I had spotted. Then, I spun a silk covering around myself and started the process of moulting into a shiny chrysalis. I had to stay within my protective covering throughout. At the same time, I kept



Axelle Koo

CHIJ ST. NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

praying that nothing from the outside world would eat or destroy me. The pupating process was tedious, yet I could not give up. I knew that I was going to turn into a beautiful butterfly if I persisted!

After two long weeks inside my silk chrysalis, I emerged! I was excited and anxious at the same time. *What was I going to look like? Was my life still going to be boring?* I was asking myself a thousand questions.

I crawled out onto my chrysalis. *What were those things attached to my body?* I felt shocked for a moment. Then I realised that those were my wings! However, they were still wet and crumpled and I had to pump some fluid into them. That would take a while. I felt very excited and could not contain it as I crawled around! I did not know how to fly with these wings but I could finally explore the world!

When I finally finished straightening my wings, I flapped them excitedly. I had one thing to do now: learn to fly. I braced myself as I leapt off the chrysalis and flapped my wings continuously. I closed my eyes, afraid that I would fall to the ground, meeting my fate. However, I felt myself 'levitating' as I strained to flap my wings.

My heart trembled with excitement as I looked around, seeing the whole field that I was living in. I had thought that little patch of plants was all there was! Now, I could see some small things with colourful... things on top of them, the trees, even the whole sky to the horizon!

I decided to explore, not knowing what was out here in the field. I started out from the tree where I turned into a chrysalis. I saw ants, snails, spiders... They all seemed so small from up in the air!

I went to one of those colourful 'things' and saw that there was some yellowish fluid inside it. I used my tongue to drink the yellow fluid. It tasted like sweet water. I continued drinking from the other... plants? I think they were plants with colourful designs. *I wonder who drew them?*

Just when I started to feel a little tired with all the flying, it started to drizzle. I quickly flew to a tree, but unfortunately my wings became wet. I rested on a tree branch to dry out my wings.

As I watched the rain coming down, I looked out to the horizon. I could not help but feel excited about the many new adventures awaiting me. I am thrilled by the new voyage ahead!

A Taste from the Past

Ethan Ng Ming Jun

ST. JOSEPH'S INSTITUTION JUNIOR

"Luke encounters Gen in the cave of darkness." I was engrossed in reading the book, 'The Cave of Darkness', and was about to reach the most thrilling part of the story when my mother came into my room. I knew she was going to ask me to start on a new task. Just my luck!

"Karl, instead of reading your book for the thousandth time, can you please clean up your untidy room? This is the best time to do it as it is the first week of the June holidays." Hearing this, I thought hard for a good excuse, but could come up with none. Reluctantly I dragged myself off my bed to start my spring cleaning. Mother made sure that I started on my task before finally leaving for work.

"Okay, so I have at least three hours of work waiting for me. Clothes here, books for donation - on the floor, books to keep - on the table..." I mumbled to myself. Little did I know that a big discovery was coming my way! While tidying my old bookcase, I found a book stashed in a remote corner that looked like it was from the 1940s, judging from its yellowed cover. After dusting off the cobwebs from the cover with a damp cloth, I could see some faded words: 'Diary of George Tan Kim Tee'. I wondered who he was.

My curiosity piqued and I decided to take a look inside the old diary. As I flipped through the thick weathered pages, I noticed that the journal entries ranged from the late 1940s to late 1960s. Wow! What a find! While continuing my spring cleaning, I was still dumbfounded at how the diary could have lasted so long.



Ethan Ng Min Jun

ST. JOSEPH'S INSTITUTION JUNIOR

That evening when my mother got home, I rushed to her with the diary and asked her who George Tan Kim Tee was. My mother's eyes widened and her jaw dropped as she stood rooted to the ground. "Who is he, Mom?" I repeated my question. Still in a daze, my mother told me he was my great grandfather, her 'dear grandpa', who had passed away in 1996. She thought his diary had been lost during the last family move, and was amazed that it was stuck behind his old bookcase all this while.

Over the next two weeks, I read through the entire diary from start to end. I learned more about my family history and that my ancestors were from Indonesia. We are Straits Born Chinese, also known as Peranakans. I also discovered from what my great grandfather wrote, that other than his love for reading, he also loved cooking. Originally from one of the small Indonesian islands nearby, he came to Singapore in 1947 after the Second World War. He had lost his parents and siblings during the war. He started working as an assistant in a hawker stall and learnt how to cook local Singaporean dishes like chicken rice, satay and fried hokkien mee from the stall owner.

What thrilled me the most was that my great grandfather had included a few 'Secret Family Recipes' at the back of his diary. One that caught my eye was his special curry puff recipe, as I simply love curry puffs. I decided to try out the recipe as I wanted to surprise my mother with a treat from her childhood.

I walked to the supermarket near my house and bought all the ingredients in the recipe. I was determined to make the 'special curry puffs' using my family recipe. I spent the next five days making hundreds of curry puffs. Finally, after over ten attempts, when I tried the first puff it tasted like heaven! The texture of the skin was just right, the filling was so rich in spices and flavour but not overpowering. Yum!

When my mother got home, I told her to close her eyes and try my version of her grandfather's curry puff. After she took her first bite I said, "Surprise!" She was so touched and filled with nostalgia, she started crying. She could finally taste a curry puff from her childhood. My mother exclaimed exuberantly, "I think it's time we set up a curry puff stall and call it "Kim's Puffs—a taste from the past." I was speechless! The holidays had really been a voyage of discovery! I discovered my talent for cooking and learned so much about my family tree.

The Odyssey

Nathaniel Cheng Le Shan

ST. JOSEPH'S INSTITUTION JUNIOR

Many have gone before me. But none have returned.

I stop to catch my breath. Every step is a struggle now. The terrain alternates between mushy ground and what feels like permafrost, and the air seems thinner the higher I climb.

My more knowledgeable friends have told me that this is called a sedimentary formation. From afar, I have marvelled at the behemoth structure made up of porous, cavernous layers alternating with more malleable layers until they culminate in peaks of snow-white at the top. It is a sight to behold, and a fight to conquer.

I gather all my energy and push forward in the barren landscape. At last, something appears in my line of sight. It may be something interesting! I shall check it out and bring it back. The others will love something new! However, as I approach it, my eyes widen. It is a comrade whose legs have been stuck in a part of terrain that has been frosted over. On her skeletal face is etched a look of exhaustion and hopelessness – feelings that she probably experienced in her last hours. I circle the unnerving scene, carrying on with my voyage and telling myself I would not share the same fate as her.

In the distance, I see the summit. The sight fuels me to continue climbing despite my crippling exhaustion. Suddenly, I sense a vibration. My body tenses up as if every muscle is in knots. I have heard about this phenomenon before from the elders. An avalanche, they call it – a mass of white descending on you. If I get in its way, it will most certainly bury me alive and consume me – I will be the monster's 'ever-lunch'. Cautiously, I look up. Indeed, an enormous mass of white hangs



Nathaniel Cheng Le Shan

ST. JOSEPH'S INSTITUTION JUNIOR

precariously off the edge of the summit. I start to slowly back away from the direct path of the mass.

However, before I can make any other move, there is another vibration. Before my very eyes, the white mass slides off the top and comes hurtling down toward me! Instinct takes over and I propel my body like a rocket to the left. As I land in mushy turf, the white mass whooshes past, missing me by a hair's breadth. I look down as the white mass lands on the ground, splattering all over the base.

I realise my heart is racing. As I try to stand up, my skinny legs feel as soft as jelly. *Get a grip – I am a soldier*, I tell myself. I force my now-weary legs to plough forward. After what seem like a million steps, a rumble echoes somewhere. *Not another avalanche! It will surely kill me this time!*

However, I soon realise that the sound is emanating from my stomach. *Have I made it this far only to be finished off by hunger?* As hunger pangs

overwhelm me, a saccharine smell fills the air – a smell reminding me of strawberries, of sugar, of butter. This must be the sweet smell of death, beckoning me. I feel myself drifting off, so ready to bite the dust. However, my eyes shoot open. *No, I will not go gentle into that good night! I must continue with my voyage.* Mustering all the strength left in my fatigued body, I trudge forward.

Finally, I come to the highest point of the cliff. I heave one leg over the side to secure my leverage before I pull myself up. Alas! More peaks of icing lay before me. Gritting my teeth, I embark on climbing up one of the peaks. One agonising step after another, until I finally reach the top of the peak, the highest point of the entire mountain. The view is stunning. From where I stand, I can survey the lay of the land all around. I see a line of my comrades at the base of the mountain, probably following the trail that I have set.

My heart soars. I realise I can achieve great feats: I can overcome my weariness and my hunger, and be a trailblazer. On many levels, this has been a voyage of discovery. When I return, I, Soldier Ant #3947659, of the ‘Colony Under the Kitchen Counter’, will tell the Guards and the Queen that I have survived an avalanche, made a foray into new terrain, and seen what no other has seen. And I will tell the Queen that the climb was – without sounding too cocky – a piece of cake.

Kingdom of Coral

Dorcas Cheam Hui Wen

WESTWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

“Ring!...” My alarm clock blasted loudly into my ear.

I immediately sprang out of bed shouting, “It is the first day of school!”

I dashed to the bathroom and brushed my teeth, took a quick shower and changed into my school uniform. As I sat at the dining table eating my breakfast, I wondered in excitement, *How many new friends will I make today? Any secret mission or adventures for our ‘Girl’s Club of Magic’ (GCM) to venture on today?* I am in primary three this year and also the senior leader of the GCM.

The GCM is a secret club to help those in need. Not only do I have magical power, I also have a supernatural talent that no one else has. I finished my breakfast as fast as lightning and secretly stuffed my special GCM gadget into my school bag. I bade goodbye to my mother and rushed off to school.

My school, Magical Pot Academy, is a magical school. It is located near the beautiful seashore of Atlantis Ocean. I enjoyed the morning walk to the school, as the saltiness of the air filled my nostrils. So refreshing! When I walked through the school gate, a tingling feeling of excitement ran down my spine. A prefect on duty told us to first gather at the school hall. By the time I arrived inside the school hall, it was packed like sardines!

“Boo! Hello, Dorcas!” exclaimed my best friend, Yanyang. She was co-leader of the GCM. I replied, “Hi! I saw the class list and guess what... we are in the same class!” A grin spread across our faces and we gave each other a high five.

Yangyang squealed, "That's super great! Let's walk to class together each day!"

I replied, "Sure!"

By the time we were seated with the rest of our classmates, the school bell rang.

Out came Principal Wins with his heavy footsteps, oversized reading glasses and brown coat. With his usual welcoming smile, he walked up to the stage and said, "Please quieten down, boys and girls. I have an important announcement to make." The voices faded first to a low murmur and then to pin-drop silence.

"Thank you, boys and girls," Principal Wins began. "Now, listen up! As you are aware it is the monsoon season and also high tide of the sea. To ensure everyone's safety, all students are to refrain from going near the seashore, and the school is going to build a barrier to prevent any children from falling into the sea or drowning."

After hearing the announcement, I had a brilliant idea for the GCM's first mission. I had heard from my graduated seniors that the best time to visit the Kingdom of Coral under the Atlantis Ocean was around monsoon season. If lady luck was with me, I might bump into a few beautiful mermaids. This could be the best voyage of discovery ever! As I was as stubborn as a mule, I decided to ignore the principal's advice and quickly got out my special GCM gadget and broadcast the mission to the rest of the members. *Yay! Another voyage of discovery mission!* I cheered in my mind.

Students were instructed to go back to their allocated new class rooms after the assembly ended. However, it was also time to head to the GCM's secret hideout with the rest of the club. I ran to the girls' washroom and chanted a spell as I waved my hands around, and soon a magic portal appeared. I jumped in without hesitation. Inside the portal, I quickly punched in the destination on my magical watch, 'Kingdom of Coral'. I stared at the read-out in disbelief! It said, "New! Outside of school, OCEAN!" I pressed the button beside it to confirm, and soon I was beside the seashore. I hid behind a tree and used my

special GCM gadget to call my friends, Yanyang, Bernice and Jovy. They didn't answer the call. I kept the portal open for them. The secret portal was only visible to club members.

Soon, my team arrived. "So glad everyone could make it for this voyage mission," I said. We high-fived each other and then tiptoed towards the seashore. Something made of wood caught my eye by the shore. It was a signboard. It read, 'Atlantis Ocean'. Just then a mermaid appeared, sitting on a rock near the signboard, waving at us! We all rubbed our eyes and blinked a few times to make sure our eyes were not playing tricks on us! I waved back at the mermaid. She had blond hair with seaweed and seashells in it, and her lips were rosy pink. Her tail was turquoise and purple in colour. She was as pretty as a picture!

"Hi there! Are you alright? Do you need help? You look lost." I pushed myself to ask while my friends hid behind my back.

"Hi! My name is Merina and I'm the queen of this ocean. I am lost. I need to find a girl named Dorcas. She is the leader of the GCM in Magical Pot Academy. I need her help! The mermaids are dying!" she said in a high tinkling voice. Her tail kept flicking out of the water.

My team and I were stunned and looked at each other.

"Hi, Merina. I mean, Queen Merina. My name is Dorcas and I'm the leader of the GCM. These are my friends, Yanyang, Bernice and Jovy. How can we help you?" I answered eagerly.

"The Kingdom of Coral is in danger. The colours in the ocean are fading. We need your help to look for a precious seaglass coin to save our world. Please help us!" explained Merina.

After a moment of consideration, my team and I decided to lend a helping hand. This was the purpose of the GCM: to help those in need, while on a voyage of discovery mission. One stone to kill two birds. I told Merina that we would help them save the Kingdom of Coral, and she thanked us profusely.

I picked up some starfish and seashells and shouted, "Hyper Magic!" The starfish and seashells turned into enchanted necklaces. As I handed

my teammates the necklaces, I told them, "Here, wear this on your neck. If you want to explore the underwater world, you need to wear this necklace to breathe." They put on their necklaces and off we went!

Underwater, we saw the sunken land, the Kingdom of Coral, and other mermaids. Their faces looked as pale as sheets. Their tails were also losing their colours. They were pointing at us and whispering. Soon, Merina brought us to her castle in the Kingdom of Coral. We were amazed by the castle's look. It was made of crystals and corals. We followed closely behind Merina and finally settled down in a spacious hall.

Merina explained, "We need the precious seaglass coin to make the Fruit-O-Seaberry work. Without it, the mermaids will die of hunger. We mermaids depend on the special seaberry created by the Fruit-O-Seaberry. About two days ago Queen Sealina, my twin sister, secretly stole the precious seaglass coin from our castle and took over my role. We tried to get it back but we failed. She was too powerful for us to defeat her. Now, only the GCM can help us. We need to get the coin back from Queen Sealina as soon as possible. Can you help us?"

I replied without hesitation, "Sure!"

Yanyang whispered, "I don't really trust her."

Bernice agreed, "Yeah, me too!"

"Just trust me, we need to help her. Otherwise, the mermaid's clan will die!" I insisted.

Finally my team agreed with me. I whipped out my GCM special gadget to look for directions. To my surprise, it had transformed into a seaphone! (A seashell look-alike mobile phone). Things changed when underwater. Without further delay we set off!

We reached Queen Sealina's castle in no time as it was not far away. This castle looked very different from Merina's one. Merina's castle was made of seashells and seaglass turrets, but Queen Sealina's castle was the opposite of hers. It was gloomy and I could see fish bones scattered everywhere. I almost jumped out of my skin. We swam

into the hall. In the middle of the hall, I saw a skinny mermaid with licorice black hair and seaweed tangled in it. She wore thick makeup with black eyeshadow and crimson red lipstick. Her tail was navy blue, blended with black. She was resting her head on a jellyfish pillow on a throne made from a tortoise's shell. We tiptoed so as not to wake her. Suddenly...

"CRACK..."

"Shhh..." I said. "What was that about?"

"Oops...sorry, mates. I accidentally stepped on some bones," whispered Yanyang.

Unfortunately, the loud crackling sound had already alerted Queen Sealina. Her voice boomed, "How dare you! Well... well....well...Look who's here! Visitors from the land! What do you want?"

Jovy answered hastily, "We want the precious seaglass coin!"

I interrupted, "Sorry to disturb you, Queen Sealina. My name is Dorcas. I am the team leader of GCM. The one who spoke was Jovy. These are all my teammates. Actually, Queen Merina has come to us asking for our help to get the precious seaglass coin from you, Your Majesty."

Queen Sealina laughed sarcastically, "Ha! So, you want this precious seaglass coin? Sure, enjoy having this and that..."

Boom! Bang! Queen Sealina used her seagun and shot acid ninja stars at us.

"Duck!" I shouted.

Everybody ducked, but when the shots missed us, they hit Queen Sealina's guard instead. Crimson red blood started oozing out of the octopus guard's wounds. He held his injured limb in agony. I immediately used my supernatural power to heal him. Minutes later, he was fully recovered. Seeing this kind act touched Queen Sealina's heart.

Queen Sealina apologised, “I’m so sorry for being too harsh on you just now. I shouldn’t have stolen the precious seaglass coin from the Kingdom of Coral. As a reward for your kindness, I will give it back to you. Please tell Merina that I’m very sorry, and she will always be the Queen of the Sea.”

We thanked Queen Sealina profusely and took the precious seaglass coin from her. We swam back to the Kingdom of Coral where Merina was waiting for us, and told her everything that had happened. Merina was relieved when she heard the news. I gave her the precious seaglass coin. We followed her to an enormous shell. Inside the shell stood the Fruit-O-Seaberry. We watched as she inserted the precious seaglass coin into the hole. She pressed a star-shaped button with a seaberry picture on it. The laser pointed towards a pool of coral and a sharp light came out from the nozzle.

Puff...Voila! The pool of pearls had transformed into gigantic seaberries.

“There! A delicious and juicy seaberry for you all to share! This is for your kindness!” offered Merina.

We all thanked her for the sweet reward. Time flies when you are having fun. As I looked at my watch, I saw that it had stopped. I was very worried. We quickly ate the seaberry and swam towards the surface of the ocean. It was time to say goodbye to Merina. She told us to return to the Kingdom of Coral again the next monsoon season, and we promised that we would. When I was finally back on the seashore, my watch started working again! Then I realised that while we were underwater, the real world had stopped. I heaved a sigh of relief. As I motioned my friends to jump into the portal, I bade farewell to Merina. I quickly punched in the next destination on my seaphone, ‘Girls’ Washroom’! In a flash, we were back in the same spot where we had begun. As I peeped outside the washroom, all the pupils were as busy as bees on their way to their new classrooms.

“The best discovery ever!” I exclaimed.

The delicious gigantic seaberry’s taste was still lingering at the side of my mouth. I took out my seaphone and it transformed back into my usual GCM gadget. I smiled.

Together we chanted our GCM pledge, “We will always help those in need, no matter how big or small! For another voyage of discovery!”

We all laughed. As we took off our magical necklaces, the starfish and seashell beads clinked together. It sounded like Merina’s laughter.

Voyage of Discovery

Julian Tan Wei Heng

WESTWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

I always knew that my parents had adopted me from a foreign country when I was young. They told me the truth as they did not want to lie to me. Even if they had chosen not to tell me the truth, it was obvious that I was an adopted child as my parents have fair skin, deep blue eyes and golden hair while I have yellow skin, small pointed black eyes and black silky hair. During my school days, I was constantly teased by my classmates and neighbours about the fact that I was adopted.

Sometimes when I called my foster parents 'Father' and 'Mother' in public, strangers would give us a puzzled look. However I did not feel hurt, as I felt certain that the love my parents showered me with was equal to any a real parent could give. When I was fourteen years old, I underwent an appendix surgery. My parents both stayed beside my bed, day and night, to take care of me.

Deep inside my heart, however, I was extremely curious about who my biological parents were and what they looked like.

In the blink of an eye, I turned twenty-one years old. My family was in the mood for celebration.

My parents took me to my favourite restaurant. They ordered my favourite hot apple pie for dessert. As the gift for my 21st birthday, they were granting me a wish for anything I wanted - I could just name it. I thought for a while, then I took a deep breath and spoke. "If there is a chance, I would like to meet my real parents." Suddenly, I felt as if time froze for a second...after a pause, both my parents gave a broad smile. My mother took out an A5-sized envelope from her handbag and passed it to me.



Estelle Yeo Xing Ying

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

"My dear Lucina, inside here is all you would like to know," Mother explained as she handed me the envelope. I opened it up. It contained some of my baby photographs, a single silver earring and a map with some instructions to my biological parents' house in a place called Qinghai.

Qinghai is a province of China located in the north-west part of the country. I was so touched that tears welled up in my eyes as I looked at my parents. Father gave me a pat on the shoulder and with a gentle voice he whispered, "You may start to prepare for your trip, enjoy your voyage of discovery."

The announcement was made for the last call to board the plane departing to Xining. Seattle International Airport was crowded with people and it made me uneasy as I felt that I needed a very quiet place

to focus. On the plane, I asked for a glass of mint tea as I had no appetite for food. I was just eager to meet my biological parents. *Did they ever miss me?*

At last I reached Xining, the capital of Qinghai. I found myself totally blending into this place as everyone shared the same hair, skin, and eye colour. Staring at my watch, I realised it was getting late. I needed to settle down somewhere in Xining first, and rest for the night. Tomorrow I would get my feet into the village of my birth. A long and warm bath in the hotel room made me feel better. Finally, I was as snug as a bug in a rug. I gave my parents in Seattle a call to inform them I had arrived safely in Xining. It was almost midnight. My parents gave me words of encouragement and told me not to be too hard on myself. Their voices helped me realise that the distance truly did make our hearts grow fonder. After the uncomfortably long flight, I immediately fell into a deep sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

I awakened to a beautiful azure sky. I was delighted to see the rays of morning sunshine. I looked out of the window. There was no one in the street other than a hardworking street vendor setting up his stall next to the hotel. Being the first customer of the street vendor, I got a 'shao bing' as breakfast. I learned that it was a popular breakfast snack in Qinghai. I boarded the earliest bus to leave for Xishan, the village of my origins. After three hours on a jerky bus ride, I stood at the entrance to the village, the place where I was born. This place looked unfamiliar although I was born there. I was so excited. My heart was a race car.

It was not difficult to find the house where my biological parents lived, as the instructions and explanations on the map that my parents had given me were clear. As I reached the gate of the house, I saw a skinny lady with many wrinkles on her face. She seemed to be in the pink of health as she could handle many poles of laundry. My instinct told me that the old lady might be my biological mother. The old lady looked up and we made eye contact. My hunch was confirmed as we shared the same eyes and both of us had high cheekbones. The old lady stood rooted to the ground. I broke the ice by greeting her.

"May I help you, young lady?" the old lady spoke in Mandarin.

With the broken Chinese that I had picked up during my high school days, I told her that I was a traveller and I wanted to know more about the village. The old lady explained that there were very few people living in the village now as the youngsters had all moved to the city to settle down, leaving behind only some old people who preferred the rural life.

In the middle of our conversation, an old man emerged from the house. The old lady introduced him as her husband. I shook his hand with my trembling palm. He leapt forward and his hand tightened as he studied my face. He then slowly let go of my hand. Awkwardly he picked up his bag of tools, as he was going to work in the field. The old lady invited me to go along with them so that she could show me around the village while the old man ploughed the crops. I explored the village with his wife. The lawn was a green carpet. The old lady held my hand gently as we strolled around. She asked me about my life in America. I told her about my home and my childhood. I held back my tears and avoided eye contact, because my heart felt like breaking. On and off, she gave me soft pats on my shoulder and the warm look in her eyes smoothed my emotions. She explained that life was getting better nowadays and many old people had also moved out of the village to stay with their children in the city. She added that she had a son who was doing well in the city. Her son had bought an apartment and asked them numerous times to move in with him.

Out of curiosity, I asked them why they did not move out. The old lady's reply melted my heart.

"My husband and I have been waiting for someone. If we move out of the village, this person will not be able to find us. I think we can move out of the village soon."

The old lady looked away after a while. I think she did not want me to see the sorrow in her eyes.

The blazing sun reached the middle of the sky and the old man invited me to have lunch with them in their small house. The old lady was amazed that I knew how to cook. I explained to her that my family

enjoyed cooking simple dishes together during the weekends. The old lady looked a bit distracted but got back to cooking very soon. That afternoon, the three of us had a hearty meal. They told me about their life in China while I told them about my school days.

The last bus was leaving Xishan at 3pm. The old couple sent me off at the bus station. The old lady held my hand tightly and from her pocket, she took out a small pouch and put it in my hand. "This is a small gift from us. We wish you all the best for your future. Do send our regards to your parents. They have raised an outstanding daughter," she said sincerely. I hugged both of them and bid them goodbye. I did not reveal my real identity to them.

On the bus, I opened the pouch and took out a silver bracelet and a single silver earring. The earring was exactly the same as the one I had been given by my parents. There was a note in the pouch. It read, "My dear daughter, we hope you will stay happy forever."

The bus moved out of the station. I turned to look back at the old couple. Their tears were a river flowing down their cheeks. I finally broke down and cried.

Over the following weeks, while having my favourite daily espresso at the Starbucks located opposite my house, I started writing a story about myself and named it, 'Voyage of Discovery'. I did not expect it to become a fast-selling book in every bookstore as soon as the book was published.

The Discovery

Kelsey Elise Cheng Yiu

YUMIN PRIMARY SCHOOL

(1st entry)

Dear Diary,

What an eventful first day at school. I was heading towards the toilet when I saw a group of burly boys surrounding the school janitor. With his ill-kempt hair and mottled skin, you could clearly tell his age. His body was bent double with decrepitude, shrouding his face in shadows. He shuffled uneasily with an unsteady gait as the boys closed in on him. Cowardice got the better of me and I discreetly hid behind the nearest wall and watched the scene unfold before me.

"Can't talk, huh? You must be deaf and dumb!"

"What a foul smell! Get away from me! I wonder if you sleep here at night!"

"You're given one simple job - to clean the toilet and yet still it's dirty! Useless janitor!"

They hurled insults at the poor janitor and roughly shoved him around like a rugby ball. The janitor opened his mouth in what seemed like a protest, but what came out was a strangled moan.

He held up his hands before him to block the impact but his frail frame could not parry the blows. At that moment, our eyes locked. His eyes, an arresting shade of vivid brown which flashed with piercing intellect, pleaded with me for help.

All at once, I felt a surge of conflicting emotions. My heart was pounding quickly and my mind was racing with a million thoughts.

I felt compelled to stand up for him but I was weighed down by my fear of being bullied. In the end, you can probably guess which option I chose. I shrunk back into the shadows as his pitiful gaze bored into my soul and seared my conscience.

(2nd entry)

Dear Diary,

Guilt weighed on me like a tonne of bricks, and I could not stop thinking about the janitor after that incident. I wanted to seek him out to apologise for my inaction. I did see the janitor again during recess time, but this time he was headed away from the toilets.

At first I wondered if my eyes were playing tricks on me but that unmistakeable unbalanced amble and hunched figure gave him away. Out of sheer curiosity, I tried to make myself inconspicuous and watched as he disappeared into the shadows. He was headed towards the deserted hallway where no one dared to venture. Rumour had it that awful things had happened there in the past and it was now haunted by spectral beings. It was pitch black and there were no windows to allow natural sunlight to filter in. The walls were devoid of all colour. Everything was lifeless and depressing.

I was just about to explore the place when the bell suddenly rang. Ding dong ding dong... I had to run up to class as fast as I could. During the lesson I wondered why the janitor was in the deserted hallway.

(3rd entry)

Dear Diary,

It's been a few days since I last wrote. While I haven't forgotten about the bullying incident, I've become busy with a new preoccupation. I've been busy stalking the janitor and I am excited to share my findings with you! So far I've discovered that the janitor has some kind of hideout in a room off the haunted and deserted hallway! I've seen him disappear

into this room and not emerge for what seemed like an eternity. For a while, I wondered if he had some kind of special power which allowed him to walk through walls and disappear. I was intrigued. *If he had powers how did he get them?*

Eventually, I realised there was actually a white door that was camouflaged into the wall. My curiosity was piqued and I really wanted to know what was hidden inside that room. Being deaf, mute and quite unable to walk steadily, he had been dealt an unfair hand of infirmities, but I was pretty sure he was more than what met the eye. It was starting to get late so I decided to postpone further discovery to yet another day. As the saying goes, curiosity killed the cat. Do you think something will happen to me?

(4th entry)

Dear Diary,

Finally, I had the chance to go into that room today. With my heart pounding hard, I turned the door knob gingerly. I pushed the door open and walked cautiously into the room, not wanting to make a sound. My jaw dropped as I took in the contraptions before me.

There were solar panels affixed to the ceiling, intricate pulleys, metallic S-shaped tubes of different thickness, wrenches and other tools all over the place. This was not an ordinary hideout; this was the secret workshop of a genius inventor!

Suddenly, the sound of the door creaking broke the silence. I scrambled to hide under the closest table not wanting to be discovered by whoever stepped foot into the room. Beads of perspiration rolled down my face as my eyes followed the door. Peering closely, I could make out the silhouette of the janitor.



Loh Zhi Ray

KUO CHUAN PRESBYTERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

(5th entry)

Dear Diary,

I had no choice but to reveal myself to the janitor yesterday as he quickly discovered my hiding place under the table. You can only imagine how hard my heart was beating when his eyes met mine and the awkwardness of it all. At that moment I squeezed my eyes shut and willed an imaginary invisibility cloak onto myself, but obviously in vain.

However I am actually now relieved and happy that I revealed myself, as in the end we became friends. Though he and I communicated mostly wordlessly, using hand gestures, I managed to somehow convey my heartfelt apology for my cowardice and he graciously accepted it. I was taken aback by what I came to know – he is not your ordinary janitor but actually a superb inventor!

He showed me some of his creations. They were amazing! There was one that was a solar-powered fan; another was a water filter made from recycled materials. Interestingly, he had also invented a voice box that allowed for voice and accent customisation.

As it was getting late, I excused myself politely and thanked the janitor. As I looked back I waved goodbye. Indeed, never judge a book by its cover! The janitor is a force to be reckoned with and I can't wait for his marvelous inventions to come to light!

(6th entry)

Dear Diary,

A few days ago I saw the bullies menacing the janitor again, but this time I was determined to make a difference. I mustered up my courage and approached the bullies. My feet felt like jelly and I could barely feel my hands. I stood in front of them and commanded them to stop. They backed down eventually, but not without threatening me. The janitor squeezed my hands tightly in gratitude and thanked me wordlessly with his eyes.

After school that day, I told the principal about the recalcitrant bullies, and with the janitor's permission, I also showed pictures of some of his inventions. The bullies were reprimanded and given a sanction. The entire school came to know of the janitor's inventions. The principal even helped the janitor to patent his inventions and then get the word out about them.

What can I say? It has been an interesting turn of events! I went undercover, only to discover the janitor's hideout, and even managed to thwart the bullies' sinister intentions!

La Vie En Rose (Life in Pink)

Lorenzo Maryse Kristen B

CHIJ ST. JOSEPH'S CONVENT

"Phew, that was a close one!" Carol commented, still breathing heavily. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." Glowering at the car, I thought of all the different ways that near miss could have been catastrophic. Thank goodness for Carol's quick reaction. You'd think drivers would be more careful in a child-infested neighbourhood.

Carol sighed. "Good. Bloody idiots. They're going to kill someone one day. Come on, let's head to the cafe. You might have a lower chance of dying there," she giggled to herself, as we both hopped onto our bicycles and continued our trip.

Despite the occasional delinquent wreaking havoc, Grace Hill was a lovely place to ride around. You could feel the late afternoon breeze flow past you as you looked over the lake that bordered the town. The best part was the view of the lake when the sun-

"Wait, Carol did you just see that?" The wheels of my bike screeched as I halted to look at the sky above the lake.

"See what?"

"The sun. It just vanished for a second there." I studied the sky for any explanation for the disappearance but it seemed to be fine now. *Strange, I could swear that I just saw the sky glitch.*

"Could just be your imagination, Ellie. Who knows? Maybe the shock has got to your head," Carol teased. Rolling my eyes, I chuckled, "Yeah, maybe."

However, that was just the beginning. Strangely, Carol had insisted we take a detour around the town, passing by places we used to go to when we were younger. What was even more peculiar was that every time I rode past a familiar spot, a strange feeling would pass over me. It was as if the locations triggered something in the dark recesses of my mind, something that desperately wanted to escape.

When I told Carol about it, she just dismissed it as a chill from the cool weather, which was weird considering that she used to be obsessed with strange feelings, psychology and whatnot. On the contrary, she digressed and started talking about memories from when we were younger.

Despite the blatant evasion of my question, it did feel comforting to reminisce about the past that seemed long forgotten.

By the time we finally reached the cafe we had exchanged more than a few good laughs and stories from what seemed like a lifetime ago. We practically collapsed onto one of the tables as we sat there, panting after such a tiring bike ride around the town. After yet another story, Carol went to buy a cappuccino as I tried to list all of the weird things happening around me.

First, buildings had also started disappearing as if they were glitching. It did not just happen to objects in the sky, but the boats in the lake had also disappeared for a second when we reached the cafe. Now that I thought about it, whenever I turned around random items would flicker in and out of existence for a moment.

Secondly, I could not shake a feeling of dread that seemed to be following me wherever I went throughout the day. I could not put my finger on why my mind would quake all of a sudden, like it was suppressing something powerful.

I looked up to survey the cafe, searching for anything that might give me a clue as to what was happening. My eyes happened to land on the front cover of a magazine a man was reading in the corner of the cafe. The picture was advertising some sort of device. *Wait...is that...? No...*



Chan Wen Ting
 CHIJ ST. NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

I frantically took out my phone to do a search. *It can't be. Please tell me that I'm wrong.*

Soon, the sky started to turn dark, the colour changing from a misty orange to a deep violet. We left the cafe once Carol had finished her drink and decided to sit down by the nearby lake, another favourite haunt of ours when we were younger. The chills crawled under my skin as the foreboding feeling washed over me once again. *This has to stop.*

I turned to look at Carol as she sat down beside me. Carol, the friend who had been there for me practically all my life, the one who had made me laugh whenever times got tough, the one who would never leave my side. It wasn't surprising that of all people she would be the one who would be with me in such a crucial moment in my life.

"Hey Carol, thank you...for everything," I faltered, "...and I am sorry...for all of this." In spite of the tears that were dangerously filling my eyes, a smile crept up my face. *You know what you have to do, Ellie.*

"El, what are yo--"

"Carol, I know. This..." I motioned to the lake, the town and the sky above us, "...isn't real. What happened today isn't real. You aren't real." I nearly choked. "This is all a fantasy, isn't it? A simulation for those who have died to let their consciousness live on..."

"That car this morning, the one that almost hit us," I sobbed. "That wasn't a close call at all, was it?"

The confusion faded from Carol's face as she placed her hand on my shoulder. With her eyes still eerily fixed on me, she answered in a calm but unfamiliar voice, "Yes, Ellie. I'm sorry to tell you that you were not able to survive the accident. Your consciousness is currently residing in a simulation where people can continue to live their lives normally, as if nothing had ever happened to them. It was your parents' choice to put you in here and now that you know, there really is no point in keeping it from you any longer. It all comes down to your choice in the end. What will you choose? Life or Death?"

And so, after all that, this was what it all lead up to.

A simple choice.

Epiphany

Cheyenne Low Yi Xuan

CHIJ ST. NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL

It always felt a bit weird. Something always felt a little off, a little strange. The daily routines of plastering on a smile that was too wide to be real, laughs a tad too high escaping her lips in response to their jokes, trying to please them with the various compliments she'd shower on them whenever they did something. It always seemed weird, almost...wrong.

Constant questions ran through her head in tune to the low vibration of the transport vehicle, as the brunette made her way home. To seek shelter. Safety. *Have I done well today? Did I make anyone upset? Was I too loud? Did I seem like I tried too hard?* Questions about being unlikeable and overly enthusiastic gnawed at her heart and mind daily, insecurity flashing in her mind, yet a facade shielded her from the terrors of the outside world.

The day had come to an end, and night had fallen fast upon the land. The sky was painted with hues of red, orange and pink a mere few minutes ago, but all colour had now faded, leaving only a matt black canvas with no stars to be looked upon. As she stood in the middle of the vast empty road, her shadow wavered under the light cast by the dim streetlamps that stood along the street. Other than the darkness, all that seemed to exist was the uncommonly chilly wind whose harsh bite could be felt through fabric.

Stumbling forward as though shoved lightly, the brunette continued her way home, her steps fatigued, heated air escaping through parted lips whenever she took a shuddering breath. Despite the dull ache

spreading throughout her lean frame, she pushed herself until she reached the comforts of her own room.

As the chains that entrapped her body in this world of superficialism finally unlocked and fell with a clatter onto the floor, she let out a soft sigh. *Finally. Finally I can pull off the mask. The mask I've been wearing for hours.*

She felt suffocated at times, like a bird longing to take flight, a butterfly unable to spread its wings at the first sight of light after months of capture in its cocoon.

It sure was weird, wasn't it? I've tried pleasing them so much, yet I can't bear the storm raging inside. Can I really do this anymore? To withstand the exhausting days of putting everyone before myself? No, I must. Only then will everyone like me. Only then will I be welcomed.

The brunette's eyes fluttered closed at the end of the day; exhausted from the tumultuous events behind her. Tomorrow comes again. *Tomorrow will be when I'll pull the mask back on. When can I face myself?*

"Hey! Could you get this done? Thank you!" She spun around to meet the faces she saw so often; so often that they almost seemed blurred out, able to be recognised just from their shape, their silhouette.

Of course, of course they came for another favour. And of course.

"Could I queue with you? The queue is too long, thanks!" "Could you help me get a drink? Thanks! I'll pay you back later!" "Hey! Help me get this again?" "Could you help me fill this up? Thanks!" *Of course I'll help again.*

"Sure." Her lips curved into a smile.

Was she tired of being used? Was she exhausted from trying to keep up the mortar wall she had desperately built to hide herself? Yes. The wall was cracking; it wouldn't be long before it broke like a dam under the pressure. She knew it wouldn't be long. Sure she was tired, but all she wanted was to be liked; to be loved. *Why couldn't she? Have I yet to discover myself? Yet to discover...the real me?*



Cheyenne Low Yi Xuan

CHIJ ST. NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

She could feel the usual dull ache in her bones, as if they rattled in mock amusement, watching her try so hard. Confronted by piles of assignments and requests, not only her own, she crossed over to other end of the room to get her file only to be stopped dead in her tracks. She could barely recognise the figure she saw reflected in the mirror. *Is that really me?* Skin pale, dark bags drooping under her eyes, her cheeks sunken. *Have I always been this sickly-looking?*

Then realisation hit her, causing her to double over in shock and surprise, heaving deep breaths to compose herself. She had tried too hard, indeed. Tried so hard to please everyone else, yet her inner self longed to escape the chains holding her down. She had tried too hard to make sure people liked her; but what everyone ended up liking, seeing, was the mask she had built for herself.

A sequined mask laced with gold threading; perfection, beauty. Yet her heart bloomed like a marigold, capturing grief and sorrow within.

The answer was shining right in front of her eyes; *I'm the one I should love. Only then can I treat others well, and love them. Only if I can love myself first.*

Self-love seemed to shine brighter. Never before had she thought about the concept of love like this, but the epiphany encapsulated her in a world of sudden recognition.

To love myself, I must learn to embrace myself, face myself. I must discover who I am, and embark on this voyage of discovery in search of the real me. Only then can I truly accept myself for who I am. Even if all the odds are against me, I can only live with myself if I am at peace with who I am on the inside. No matter what others say.

When she stood on that stage to act for the last time, she finally learnt. Arms stretched, the girl understood. *I'm the one I should love.*

And so she did.

Better Left Buried

Chua Zea Ra

CHUNG CHENG HIGH SCHOOL (YISHUN)

Some things are better left buried, and some things are meant to be left buried deep. These few words kicked and punched me internally. They pulsed through my veins and whispered in my ear. Throbbing in my heart, those words haunted me. If only I had understood what they meant. Now I was all alone, with only regret as company and tears as family. Instead of warm loving arms, cold memories held me, so tightly, until I couldn't breathe. It felt almost like yesterday when my life was perfect. If only I hadn't dug and dug and probed further, my life wouldn't have shattered into pieces I could never pick up. But at least now, I know who I really am...

I knew I wasn't part of the family. It was a cold, hard fact emblazoned in my mind, seeping into my blood and reminding me every day. No matter how hard my foster parents tried to make me feel like I belonged, it was always there, laid on the table. I do appreciate them, from the bottom of my heart. Without them, I probably would have been stranded somewhere in the chaos of the world. However, I was nothing more than 'the kid whose parents didn't want her'. This was the sole motivation for me to work my life away for perfect grades. At least, when people read my eulogy, I could be known as the budding genius rather than the child who had no family. Or I could be known as the girl with the great personality. I had never caused anyone pain, nor have I been the girl whose boyfriend cheated on them. I was just the quiet, kind, boring wallflower. Not the bright blue violet, not the tall confident sunflower, not the beautiful red rose people pay a fortune for. Just the small, dull bud among the soil. And I had gotten used to it, but I still wanted people to know that there was so much more to me.

My foster parents had always protected me from the outside world. My home was a shell I was welcome in anytime. It was an armour I could put on any time I wanted to. It was a blanket I could snuggle in whenever I needed. My foster parents weren't the richest people, but they gave me everything within their means; a loving hug, or a warm meal. They were joyful and cared so much for me. I was their whole life. They would share with me and teach me anything. Except the one thing I craved the answer for the most. *Who was I and where were my roots?* They shrugged it off with a smile and a simple, "You are Brooklyn Green, daughter of the Green household." And I never pushed for more. I only had a pocket-sized picture of myself with my stringy blonde hair and my cherry-stained lips spread into a sickly sweet smile. I was three years old at that time. Barbie dolls and soft toys were all I had cared about. No matter how hard I try to remember my life before my foster parents, I couldn't. It was almost like I had been brainwashed, and any memories from my life before I had been part of this family were wiped out.

I was given the opportunity to go to a remote village for a school trip. Thanks to my perfect grades, my application for this trip was accepted by my school. The only thing I was worried about was the fact that it was a remote village that I had never heard of. As I grew up in a busy city, I was used to having everything I needed within my reach. I could not imagine myself staying in such a place.

Soon, it was the day I was about to embark on the journey. As much as I was nervous, excitement coursed through my body. Once I stepped off of the plane, an indescribable feeling crashed onto me. I felt confused. It was most unexpected as I felt like I was...home. I walked along the winding roads, trying to comprehend this feeling. Suddenly, my heart throbbed and thrashed inside my chest, as if attempting to break out. Instinctively, I lifted my head. A bright yellow ribbon caught my eye. It was hanging all alone on a tree branch, swaying gently with the wind. Following its every movement, it was as if this lifeless piece of cloth had given up. I stepped closer, and the ribbon seemed...worn out. It appeared to have been through the worst of rains and the hottest of days.

As I held the ribbon in my hand, I felt a sharp, overwhelming pain absorb me. A hurricane of a thousand words was grasping my mind - yet there wasn't a single meaning I could comprehend. I was extremely uneasy. I had never felt this way before. Hands quavering, I gently flipped the ribbon over. A picture of a child was pinned at the back. She looked like...me. With dirty blonde hair sticking to the child's face, and a similar mischievous grin sliced across her cheeks. She seemed to be about two years old. She looked exactly like me. I shook my head and forced myself to not overthink. However, I soon noticed that each branch of every tree along the cobbled path had the exact same yellow ribbon tied on it. The words, "Come home, Ashlyn, we're all waiting," was scribbled in scrawny print on the ribbons. It was all too much for me. As I tried putting together the pieces, they kept falling apart.

I hurried to one of the isolated houses far apart from the others and knocked on the front door urgently. A sweet old lady opened the door. Blemishes stained her thin frame and strands of white hair crowned her head. She was shrivelled like a dried apple.

"Who do we have here? Oh, I haven't had a visitor in years!" She looked me up and down and gave me a kindly, warm smile.

She took my hand to lead me into her house, but once her eyes fell on the yellow ribbon clutched tightly in my palm, her eyes lit up. She grabbed the ribbon and placed it next to my head. She suddenly teared up and held my face in her cold, bony hands.

"Oh, Ashlyn, you've come home! You've come home!" she said.

She then went on crying, holding me so tightly as if she feared that once she let go of me I would disappear into sand. She pulled me into her house and sat me down. Rushing here and there as fast as her shaking legs could carry her, she finally brought her treasured albums of crumpled, yellow, worn-out pictures to me. Placing them on the table, she flipped anxiously to her desired page. Turning the book, she pointed at a picture of a baby as she smiled goofily.

"This is you!" she cried again.

"How do you know that's me?" I asked cautiously, afraid to upset her.

"Oh darling, I took care of you since you were a baby! Then at three years old, you went missing!"

My whole world shattered around me. *Did my foster parents...kidnap me?* I stuttered for a second, and then all the questions flooded me. Asking without a break, I fired question after question at the old lady. She patiently answered each and every one of them.

I was dumbfounded. I was filed as a missing child many years ago and the case was considered closed. Gladys, who was the nice old lady, didn't want to give up on me that easily. She was the one who looked after me when my parents were out doing drugs and couldn't take care of me. She was the one who painstakingly tied all the ribbons on each tree, hoping that someday I would come home. And I did, I finally did.

As soon as I reached my hometown, I demanded an answer from my foster parents. I screamed and shouted at them for an answer. The suspense was unbearable. They finally broke down and revealed the secret. And when it was out, I was so shocked by the sudden twist, I felt as though my soul left my body...

I had always thought of my foster parents as the perfect parents, only to find out that I had been sold to them. My biological parents were addicts and could not support me. My foster parents wanted a child so badly but could not bear children. They resorted to illegal means to get me. They said they bought me because it was love at first sight and they couldn't bear to leave me with irresponsible parents who eventually died from their drug use. Gladys was heartbroken and utterly devastated when I was just brushed off as missing. My foster parents covered up their crime so perfectly it was barely noticeable. After hearing all of this I was not in my right state of mind and went to the police to search for the documents relating to my case. I did not realise I had just given away my foster parent's crime.

BETTER LEFT BURIED

Chua Zea Ra

Chua Zea Ra
CHUNG CHENG HIGH SCHOOL (YISHUN)

They were sent to jail for child trafficking. I could never see them again. Afterwards, their house was seized and I had no place to go except a small, cramped, cold and dark room with little ventilation. And worse still, I was alone. Swamped with utter regret for being such an irrational fool who didn't stop to think before acting. I was selfish and demanding, and I learnt my lesson the hard, hard way. If only I had left my history untouched and buried. *Was finding my true identity really worth all the pain and agony? What can I do now with all this information?* Yes, I had got what I asked for, my true identity, but now I just want to throw it back into the sea, never to be uncovered again.

Some things are better left buried...

Tales of 'S'

Teo Zhong De Ethan

COMPASSVALE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Chris Robin wasn't a prosperous merchant, neither was he just another grunt in the Space Navy. He was a pirate, but he wasn't your stereotypical eye-patch wearing, hook-for-a-hand pirate. He was a professional. He was someone people contacted to get a job done. However, today would not be action-packed at all. This day was going to be spent drinking hot chocolate.

Just the way I like it, he thought. He made sure to add extra Schwarzschild black hole syrup and Milky Way marshmallows to make it extra fancy. One sip though, and his Quantum Space-time Phone from Lux Corporation started ringing. "Which daft fool thinks Sundays are my workdays? I will have them know that Sundays are to be enjoyed with a cup of hot chocolate in one hand and list of uncompleted jobs on the other!" Chris picked up and readied a long tirade of vulgarities. He was cut off, however, by his Second in command, Kira. "Hey Commander! Look at the news!" Chris was usually not inclined to bother himself with news but Kira had piqued his interest.

Chris turned on his seldom-used television and immediately realised what Kira was talking about.

"This is breaking news - the President of Lux Corporation has passed away! And what's even more shocking is that before he died, he gave his son, Alan, a holotape to play. This is the content of the tape!"

"If you are listening to this, chances are that I'm dead. Just kidding! I will be dead, and this will herald one of the biggest events in history. My death won't be relevant to it though. What is relevant is

this announcement! Anyone who finds my secret treasure will be given the sole ownership of Lux Corporation and receive all of my assets." Upon hearing this, Chris was determined to win that prize. He could leave behind the life of piracy and have unlimited hot chocolate. However, he was not one to dwell on the 'what if'. He would seize the opportunity with both hands.

His starship was made ready in less than a day. After all, the more time he spent on preparations, the higher the likelihood that someone else might find the treasure. While flying, Chris played the holotape over and over. "There has to be a hint in here somewhere! It can't just be down to luck!" Chris mumbled as he mulled over the content of the video. He decided to watch the video one more time before going to sleep. The words of the holotape were all too familiar to Chris. "If there is no hint in his wording, then perhaps the hint is in the background?" he wondered aloud. He looked at the video again carefully. "There! Ah ha!" In the background of the video, there was a very distinct structure. Chris assumed that the only reason it hadn't yet been found was because the planet on which the landmark was located was relatively off the radar.

"I've got it!" Chris yelled ecstatically. Just then, Kira walked in. "Here's your hot chocolate, fresh from Spacebucks." She placed the cup on the table. "Not now Kira! I've just cracked the secret in the holotape! We need to make a light-speed jump to the Lost Colony of Neo-Singapore!" Chris commanded. The moment he finished the sentence, the floor beneath him shook, causing him to fall down. Kira was still on her feet, but had a look of surprise on her face. "Captain! The crew has reported that we've taken a massive blow to the ship's port! I've commanded them to activate the ship's shields!" Kira reported. "So we're being attacked? By who?" Chris asked, but he had an inkling of an idea. He turned to face the window of his office and there it was, the ever-so-classic skull with crossbones, except the crossbones were replaced with lightsabers. Chris felt his phone ringing. He turned it on. The call was from Sylvie, his nemesis. She loved going around trying to act like the better pirate, even if she totally wasn't. "Kira, initiate Light Speed Jump. Straight for Neo-Singapore," Chris said calmly.

He then took the call, and Sylvie's face showed up on screen. "Hello, Sylvie. What do you want?" Chris asked. "You know what I want! Tell me where the treasure is, and I'll leave you alone," she answered. He needed to delay. "Why ask me?" he replied, his face the definition of innocence. "Enough games, CHRISTOPHER. Give me the location, or I'll blast your ship this instant," Sylvie threatened. "You think you would dare shoot me in a safe zone? The space police wou-" Before he could finish, Sylvie again opened fire on Chris's ship. The shot rocked the ship, causing Chris to nearly lose his footing again.

He held on to the ship's railing, cursing internally. The ship could take a pounding but any more from the warship would cause massive destruction. He yelled at Kira to hurry up a bit, however, he knew that even if rushed, the light speed jump probably couldn't be prepared fast enough. 'Probably' being the key word. He rushed over to Kira's side, and slammed the red button on the computer. The button would redirect all energy from the ship to the LSJ engine, but would the ship last without its shields? The timer jumped from 30 seconds to 5 seconds. Another blast rocked the ship. Most likely another such shot would destroy it completely. "5,4,3,2-" Chris watched as the cannon on Sylvie's ship finished charging up for yet another shot. "LSJ preparation complete, jumping now," the computer declared, and the ship disappeared into the light speed tunnel.

The ship, having been given no instructions about how to land, managed to gracefully crash nose-first into the structure featured on the holotape. Luckily for Chris and Kira, the ship still managed to employ its emergency landing shields so they were relatively unharmed. They stumbled out of the remnants of their starcruiser and surveyed the destruction. The structure was utterly and completely annihilated, its remains scattered all around the area. Chris could see a shape like a lion's head, but around him were parts of a fish's body too. Kira was the first to speak. "That is so weird, a fish with a lion's head? What is that supposed to mean?" Chris could only think of a roaring fish. They were standing on a piece of the fish body, so they climbed down.

Neo-Singapore was frankly a wreck. Collapsed buildings spread as far as the eye could see, and the famous 'durian', the Esplanade theatre, had its roof smashed in. Neo-Singapore had ironically been taken over by Neo-Japan during Space War 1. Unfortunately, the Japanese mishandled the running of Neo-Singapore, especially as the food and water problems of war were exaggerated by space travel. Riots and violent rebellion took place everywhere. Once the dust had settled, nearly everything was destroyed, and despite the efforts of other countries like Neo-Malaysia, Neo-Brunei, Neo-Australia and others, nothing could be recovered. Now, Neo-Singapore could only be found in history books, conveniently in one of the books Chris had just recently read.

He looked around the base of the Merlion, but couldn't find anything. "Hey, Kira! Did you find anything yet?" Chris asked. Kira was using an x-ray scanner to check if the treasure was inside any of the pieces of the Merlion. "No! There doesn't seem to be anything!" she yelled back, turning the x-ray scanner off. *Maybe, Chris thought, the treasure might be under the Merlion!*

"Hey, Kira! Check under the foundation of the Merlion! There might be something underneath!" Kira looked towards the ground, reactivating the scanner. There was silence for about 20 seconds, then Kira answered, "Yes! There it is! I see something underneath the base! It must be the treasure the President of Lux Corporation was talking about!" The big question now was, how could they get to the treasure?

They did not have to wait very long for the answer, for a laser suddenly shot down from the stars and blasted the Merlion's foundation, revealing a flight of stairs. Chris was about to thank the person that shot the laser when he heard that familiar voice again. "Damn, that sucks! I told you Nelson, you always were an incompetent shooter!" Chris could not bear to meet that person again.

Grabbing Kira by the hand, they made a mad dash down the flight of stairs. He saw a flash of silver behind him before both he and Kira ducked, but then he realised that the flash of silver was pod-shaped. It looked a lot like an escape po- "Hi-ho! I knew that keeping you alive

would lead me to the treasure!” Sylvie said as she stepped out of the escape pod. She then noticed Chris and Kira’s expression of surprise at her unconventional transport. Sylvie gave an award-winning smile, “See, I’m totally the better pirate! They say escape pods are for escaping, but they don’t realise that the speed at which they are launched effectively makes them super-fast bullets with a human inside!” Chris was not going to stand around and listen to anything more she was saying. He weaved past her, heading further into the tunnel. Even five seconds could be the difference between him getting the treasure or Sylvie getting it.

Chris’s eyes widened and he slowed to a stop, with Kira bumping into his back a few seconds later. He saw the treasure and realised it was a...“a book?” Chris grabbed it from the pedestal it was resting on and looked at the cover. “Tales...of S?” “It must mean Singapore!” Kira chirped. “No! It clearly means Tales of Sylvie!” Chris did not need to look back to find out which brat had appeared. “Give me that and I’ll only partially mutilate you!” Chris shook his head. He knew that Sylvie could not bear to look at blood at all and also had a penchant for exaggeration. “Game over, Sylvie! The book is mine and I am now the sole owner of Lux Corporation!” Sylvie’s lips were trembling at this point. “Oh no...it’s her innocent puppy-eyes mode!” Chris averted his eyes but Kira was entranced. “Please! I totally deserve that book, more than that fool over there,” Sylvie madly pointed at Chris. “Take that book and give it to me, pretty please?” Chris knew it was less of a request and more of a demand. Chris also knew that there was no way out. Kira could beat Chris in a one on one battle, and Sylvie was blocking the exit. He could only hope that other pirates were chasing Sylvie and would arrive at any second to distract her. Kira took a menacing step forward...*toward Sylvie?* Chris wondered as Kira punched her in the face, knocking her out. “Gee, you really thought Sylvie suddenly had Mind-Control Powers? I only acted like that because I needed to knock her out.” Chris sighed and thought to himself, *lucky that was over quickly*. However he still had to contend with Sylvie’s unconscious body, and since he was not heartless, he picked her up and slung her over his shoulder.

After making the long journey back up to the surface, Chris and Kira took an unsuspecting Nelson hostage and made him pilot Sylvie’s ship back to the space colony they had started from. Chris then went to Lux Corporation and presented Alan with the book. Alan could only look blankly at it. “What’s wrong?” Chris could not understand why Alan looked so lost. Alan stuttered, “It’s...because my...father read me these stories long ago. They were submitted by school students and compiled into one book. They told of times before we went into space, even before the first personal spaceship was invented. My father told me that the many fathers before him each told their children that we should never forget our roots.” Chris could not make heads or tails of what Alan was talking about. However, he had only one thing in his mind. “Hey, Alan! Where’s my prize?” Alan snapped back from his recollections and gave the book back to Chris. “You are the CEO of Lux Corporation now...but what the holotape didn’t include is that you are now also the custodian of this book, and that your responsibility is not only to run Lux Corporation, but to tell any children you may have about where Lux Corporation started.” “In Neo-Singapore?” Chris asked. “No Chris, it was in original Singapore.”

Ever since then, Chris left behind the life of piracy and focused on taking Lux Corporation to even greater heights with Kira as his Vice-CEO. However, he never forgot his other responsibility, and on one Sunday morning while drinking his hot chocolate, he looked at the ‘Tales of S’ book on his shelf. He did not know what drew him to take it out and start reading, all he remembered was seeing the words, “Chris Robin wasn’t a prosperous merchant...”

Wonderland

Lee Yan Yee

DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

I am Alice.

And I am in Wonderland.

Here, the sad people of this world are tainted flowers that must be painted white, not red; the Rabbit is only a face, a pigment of emotion cast down as shadow, and the Red Queen is my arch enemy, a mirror image of my true self.

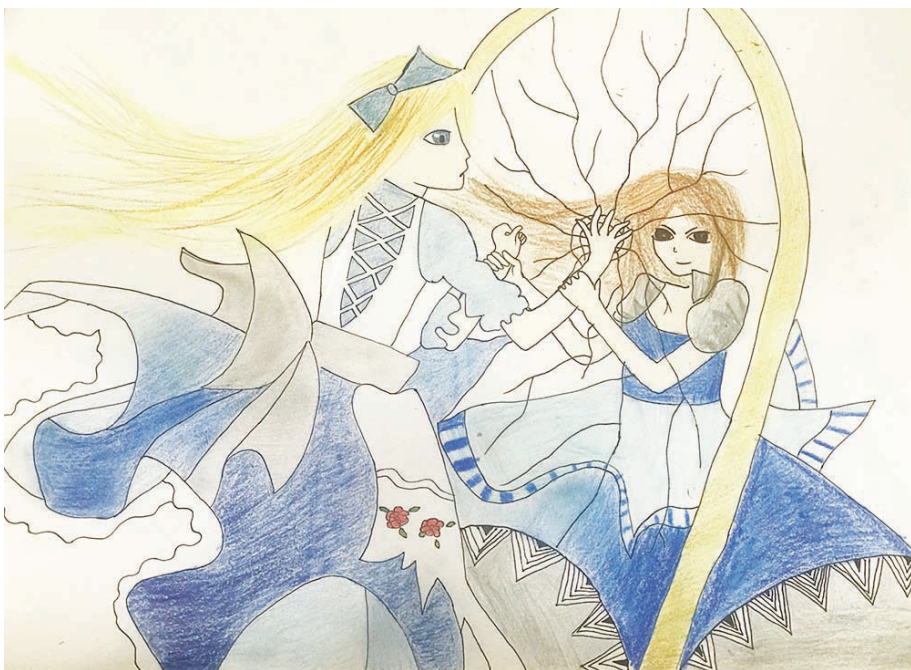
Here, I drown in my own tears, weeping my obscurities into the Earth, begging for someone to hold me. But the animals only watch as my sobs become louder and my tears begin to flood the lands. And then I drown, my lungs giving out as I plead louder, but my tears are transparent, invisible, and no one is listening.

The Hatter calls himself mad, and a Mad Hatter he is, inviting me to his 'mad' tea parties. A strange array of guests is assembled; the March Hare with his stylish coat, the Dormouse, always drifting but never truly gone, and the Hatter himself sits at the head of the table, with a tall new hat as he nurses a teacup. Without fail, they jerk the Dormouse awake every five minutes, and without fail the Mad Hatter comes up with new stories and riddles every time we meet. But always, always he asks, "Why is a raven like a writing desk?" And always, always we sit in silence, trying to find an answer as even the Hatter himself admits he has none. The first few times I stormed out, making loud declarations about the stupidity of these gatherings. Why invite me to a party where you laugh pointlessly over nothing, where I get no closer to escaping this godforsaken place?

Then the Hatter begins to twist and turn, his features morphing until there stands the Red Queen, who, so different from her mother the Queen of Hearts, has all the red roses painted white out of hatred for the colour. Perhaps it reminds her too much of her own image, such a fiery, burning red that she tries to replace with the purity of white, like the innocence of youth she was robbed of by the weight of the crown placed upon her head. Her eyes, piercing cobalt, a mirror image of my own, always cold with calculation, with her head held high. Her lips, with the same curve as my own mouth, pulled back into a smirk, as she barks her signature order, "Off with his head!" The same lips that invite me to a game of croquet, always politely, though she knows I cannot decline. We swing live flamingos for mallets and hit squirming hedgehogs for balls. "She always wins her games," warns the Hatter before my turn. "Because she cheats," I whisper in reply, and I play along, because everyone only plays games they can win, and I know better than to think that the Queen, so cunning and malicious, would choose to lose.

I stand before the King and Queen, called up as a witness to the theft of the Queen's tarts by the Knave of Hearts. It's another game the Queen plays, and again she cheats, for the gamemaster is none other than the King. This time, I do not hold my tongue any longer. I grow, the heat from my fire burning dangerously high. Even as the paper-card guards swarm me, I burn, hot and fast, enveloping them in my flames and swallowing them whole. If this is cheating, then I suppose the game is now fair. And yet, when I reach the Red Queen, whose paper is no different from the rest, she refuses to catch fire, and I can never overpower her. If fire were meant to overpower paper, why does hers not burn? And as each day resets to the moment that I slide down the rabbit hole after the Rabbit and find myself in the curious hallway with many doors, I search for a solution. To answer the Mad Hatter and to beat the Red Queen, who seems fireproof to even my brightest flames.

And then I see it. I find the answer in my own wild eyes, unending seas of gunmetal blue, a replica of the Red Queen's, both burning with the same flame.



Lee Yan Yee
DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL

The Mad Hatter morphs into the Red Queen and the Red Queen is my arch enemy, a mirror image of my true self.

Fight fire with fire, they tell me, but fire does not cancel out fire, it only makes it burn more. And so the Red Queen, hidden behind the façade of a Mad Hatter, remains at war with me, the same energy alive in our irises, but neither of us concedes defeat.

I am Alice.

I am still in Wonderland.

I still attend the Hatter's tea parties mindful of who the face masks, and occasionally I forget that the mushrooms can spur growth or shrinking. Sometimes I must remind myself to steer clear of the Queen, who is both wholly and not at all a part of me. And although I did not know it, this whole time I have been searching, looking for answers. I

sought adventure, I sought excitement, and I sought something that would make me feel complete. Perhaps I found all the adventure and excitement I once craved, but I have also discovered along the way that all I need to be complete is me. I do not need the Queen of Hearts to play a game of croquet, nor do I need the Mad Hatter to tell me why the raven is like a writing desk. I have the feathered quill, plucked straight from the black bird, dipped in the inkwell from a writing desk, and day after day in Wonderland has led me to discover that I have always possessed the power to write my own story.

And so when I next see the Mad Hatter, I will reply, "Why, then, is a raven unlike a writing desk?"

Beautiful Lie

Liew Yee Tin (Natalie)

DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

I used to think that I was special. I scored the perfect mark in almost every test and aced my academics easily. But now when I look back, I realise that my 'special' was not as beautiful as I had thought it to be. A beautiful lie could be created from an ugly truth.

It started last year. In my house there was a room I was never allowed to enter. It was Mother's office. Whenever I asked her the reason why, she would always say that she did not want me to mess with her important documents.

One night, however, I heard something peculiar. I was walking past her office long past my usual bedtime and accidentally overheard Mother's conversation on the phone. Mother was speaking in rushed whispers, but it was still loud enough for me to hear.

"What do you mean?" she whispered urgently. "No, I'll never give her back. She's my daughter!"

After a pause, I heard Mother suck in an apprehensive and trembling breath.

"No, you're wrong. She's just as human as any of us!" Mother cried. "Don't ever call back again; or I'll tell the police."

I heard the firm click of the office phone being hung up. Numbed and confused by the conversation, I experienced a sudden panic and a need to return to the warm safety of my bed. I ran back to my bedroom, speculation crashing down on me, drowning me in its endless questions.

What did she mean by 'Give her back'? Was I adopted?

I took in a deep breath in a desperate attempt to calm my racing heart and clear my mind of the gnawing questions. Though it was less intense than before, the mess of thoughts stayed at the back of my mind like a faded brown stain on a white blouse. Mother's voice suddenly floated into my mind.

"She's just as human as any of us!"

Was I not human?

That question stayed with me for the entire night, alternately haunting my dreams whenever I fell asleep and keeping me wide awake in the dark. By the time dawn came, I had decided that I would have to find my adoption papers to confirm my darkest fear.

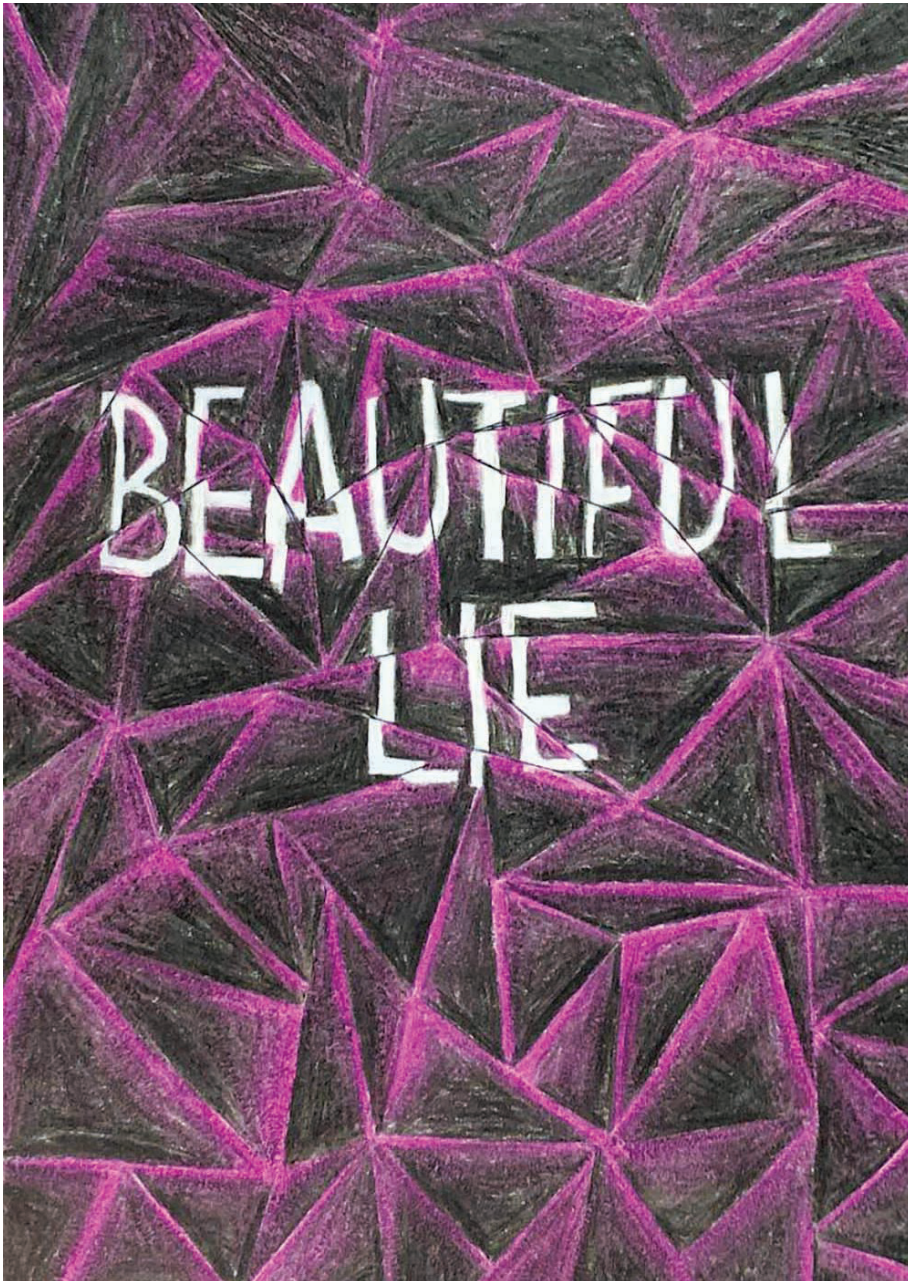
When my digital alarm clock showed the time, 7.06 am, I crawled out of bed and headed to the office with silent footsteps. I grabbed the cool metal doorknob and turned it, only to find it locked. I went to find a bobby pin and used it to pick the lock.

I could hear my heart pounding in my ears in fear of what I would find. I turned the knob and entered the room. The office was simple; there was a large brown desk facing the door with two towering bookshelves standing behind it. I closed the door quietly behind me. I had figured out last night, that if Mother had wanted to hide it from me for so long, she would have made it difficult for me to find.

I swept my eyes over the small office, scanning for any possible place where Mother could hide the papers. At the corner of my eye, a small safe peeked out from behind a short brown drawer.

I rushed to kneel down in front of it and unlocked it with the bobby pin. I pulled the safe open, revealing a stack of documents filed neatly in light brown holders. I gathered all of them before setting them down on the office desk. When I spotted a pale green file, it instantly took hold of my attention.

I flipped open the file and read:



Liew Yee Tin (Natalie)
DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL

Name: Specimen S

Altered ability: Intelligence

Assigned scientist: Cheryl Lim

I could not continue reading. Those words made my breath stick in my lungs and a lump clog my throat. The same word repeated in my head: Specimen. My head pounded. *There was no way.* Tears threatened to fall. *How could this be happening to me? Was I a science experiment?* I could not believe it; I would not believe it. It did not make sense; this could not be happening.

"Rachel?" a soft familiar squeak floated into the silent room. I looked up. Mother stood at the office door, her hands covering her mouth. Her eyes and nose were wet with tears.

"Am I a scie-," my voice came out in a coarse whisper.

"Yes," she cut me off. The tears that I had tried so hard to hold back burst forward. They flowed profusely, like they were never going to end.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I asked as I cried.

"I couldn't tell it to your face. I couldn't tell you that you did not have real parents," Mother sobbed. I could not hold back a whimper. I was not a real human; I was not born, I was made.

"Is that why I'm not a human?" I whimpered. Mother suddenly moved from the door with great force and grabbed my shoulders firmly. She looked right into my eyes.

"You may be an experiment; you may be different, but that doesn't make you any less human than anyone. You still have a heart; you still have emotions," Mother said with a tone of finality. "Don't ever say that again, you hear me?"

I nodded, letting one last tear slip from my eyes. Mother pulled me into her embrace. I sobbed quietly into her chest. Mother patted my back gently. We stayed that way for a long while and I did not feel like

I wanted to leave her warmth. After I calmed down, and both of us were no longer weeping, I relaxed and remembered Mother's words.

She was right. Just because I was different did not mean that I should feel like I was not human. I was still me. It was funny how my intelligence, the thing that made me feel special, turned out to be such a lie; such a beautiful lie.

Patched

Liu Shengyu

DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

Why must she come in and ruin my life? I slammed the box down, fuming. Its top-most contents jumped out, as if startled by my sudden outburst. "Sam? Honey, I'm sorry. It's Grandma. She's gone-" A soft voice spoke behind my closed bedroom door.

"DON'T!" I could not contain it. Rage burst out and I screamed with the fury of a rampaging bull at the confirmation of my greatest fear. "-CALL HER GRANDMA! She...she's not your mom." My voice broke at the last word and I let out a dry sob. The room went silent. After a moment, the voice spoke again, this time trembling slightly as if holding back tears. "Don't...don't you dare. You know I love her, like I love you-"

That lie broke me. I aimed a shattering kick at the door. "GO AWAY!" The door shook and I could hear a gasp from the other side. After a while, footsteps retreated and I turned to face my still-bare room, trying to find an outlet for my uncontrollable temper. The box of things I had not bothered to unpack sat on the ground, and it was the first thing to witness my wrath. I kicked it and sent its contents flying in every direction. Thunk! Something heavy landed at my feet, an envelope that bulged at the midsection, like something big was shoved in there.

I picked it up and poured out its contents. A small bronze something fell out first, and then a thin letter floated out after it, like a leaf falling from a tree. I picked up the letter and sat down on the edge of my bed. Instantly, I recognised the handwriting as my father's. He must

have written this during his battle with cancer. Penned neatly were the words:

Samantha. I know I won't be here long, but I need you to know. The pocket watch will explain everything. Love, Dad.

Confusion swam in my mind, but I slid from my bed and picked up the bronze thing that fell from the envelope earlier. It was an old pocket watch, its edges carved with intricate engravings. I pressed the button on the top and the watch sprang open, its hands stuck on the time 10:30. I turned it over in my hands, trying to look for any secret it might hold. Nothing. *The pocket watch will explain everything.* Frustrated by the lack of answers it offered to the questions burning in my mind, I clicked the top button again.

My room suddenly seemed to swirl before my eyes, becoming more and more disorienting. I clutched my head, struggling to breathe, wondering whether I had fallen into insanity. Finally, my surroundings focused down to a single point: the pocket watch. Then, colours shot outwards from it and formed a scene. My head stopped spinning. I was no longer seated on my bed, but on a satin-covered seat at a wedding. A man and a woman stood together. With a start, I realised that man was my father.

The woman, a younger version of my step-mother, was crying as she recited her vows. I craned my neck to hear her words. The vows she was reading were directed to me, if I had been there two years ago, instead of at the movies with my friends.

"Samantha," she was saying. "I was not the one who had the privilege to bear you as a child, to bring you into this world. I may not have been there when you took your first step, when you said your first word, but I promise that I will not miss out on your life anymore. From now on, I...I will...love you...for...forever."

She broke down, clutching at my father's arms.

The image dissolved back into the pocket watch, which now showed the time 12:45. When the next scene formed, I stood in a dimly lit room,



Guo Nan
DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL

with a bed upon which a 14-year-old me slept. My step-mother bent down and pressed her lips lightly on my forehead, before straightening up and gazing on my slumbering form with motherly tenderness. A tear slipped out, but she quickly mopped it away and left the room. I stayed beside my old bed, eyes brimming while I contemplated, for the first time, the hardship and pain that I had brought upon her.

The room floated away, and the dizzying sensation returned, forcing my eyes shut. When I opened them, I was back in my room, my chest heaving, my heart thumping.

I stood up from my bed very slowly and opened the bedroom door, stepping out onto the landing beyond. I could hear my step-mother busying herself over the lunch that I normally would have eaten ungratefully while casting hateful glances her way. Steadily, I walked down the stairs, resentment leaving me with each step.

I entered the kitchen as my step-mother turned, bringing the empty bowls over to the table, still in her work outfit. She bit her lip and hesitantly pulled a chair back for me, avoiding my gaze. I strode right past it and wrapped my arms around her waist, burying my face into her apron and breathing in her cinnamon scent. I could feel her gasp a little, her posture stiff, before melting into my embrace. For a while we stood like that as she stroked my hair tenderly. A knot formed in my throat. When I pulled away, I tried to say something, but she just squeezed my hands and smiled warmly, as if trying to tell me that I needn't, and that she had understood.

As we sat down to eat together, for the first time in years the sun seemed to shine again through a haze of grief, anger and bottled-up emotions. We had found that we could draw strength from each other to fight through this storm of loss, to walk to a new beginning together. All with a little help from a time-traveling pocket watch.

Changes of Time

Ang Yu Min, Bernicia

NAN CHIAU HIGH SCHOOL

Who am I? Where am I? How did I get here? Questions overwhelmed me as I tried to make sense of what was going on. I had initially been strolling in the park with Amy and now...I am here in this place, crouched in the corner of what looks like the lower deck of a boat? I racked my brain for memories of what had happened...

"I am so tired of meeting my grandparents, they are so old-fashioned. Whenever I talk about my studies they always tell me to be more hardworking, and then link everything to their past experiences as Chinese labourers when they were younger. What do their experiences have to do with anything?" I ranted on to Amy about the Chinese New Year reunion dinner my family was having in a few days. "My grandparents act the same way too! What should we do? I really just want to go out for a movie rather than take part in these reunions," Ann sighed. That moment something shiny caught my eye. I turned to see a beautiful glistening blue crystal sitting on the grass. Just when I bent to pick it up, I felt Amy touching my shoulder...then I felt like I was falling and slowly disappearing and then...

So it must have been the crystal! But where am I? "Kat! Kat! Are you here?" a voice called. It was a woman I did not immediately recognise. "Amy?" I queried. She ran over, asking "Oh my god Kat, where are we? And why...why are you a boy?" I looked down to see myself wearing ragged pants and I felt that my hair was cut short. But that was not important. We needed to find a way out of this place. "I think it was the crystal that did this..." I said. "Everyone off the boat! Remember to pay your debts!" a man shouted from the door of our very cramped deck. "Where are we?" I asked him. "Hmph! We are in Singapore of course!

Remember to pay your debts and have fun working as a Coolie," he answered with a sly smile.

Our days of torture began there. I learnt that my name was Ah Zhang and Amy's was Ah Lin, which were the names of my grandparents. We were experiencing their lives! My life as a Coolie was so tiring. Constantly carrying goods like coal, rubber seeds, sugar cane and other items at the port to earn a living. Each bag weighed at least thirty kilograms and I had to work for very long hours. Worst still, even if I was tired I could not skip work. I had to ensure that I had food on the table. I wondered how I was going to be able to continue my life here like this. However, the measly amount of money I was paid was not enough to pay off my debts. Amy didn't lead a good life either. She was a Samsui woman and worked in the construction industry. Like me, she also faced long hours of tiring work. Suddenly I started wondering: *How did my grandparents manage to live through this torture? Was this what they meant by being resilient throughout hardships? Was this what they meant when they compared the difficulty level of studying to the difficulty level of labour?* They were right, this was a lot harder than sitting in school studying. Maybe I should have appreciated the opportunity I had to study...

After a long day of work, we returned to our rented room. Along with four other people doing the same type of work as us, we squeezed into the tiny room. There was no such thing as soft spring mattresses, we had to sleep on cold hard planks as beds or straw mats on the floor. Our pillow was not made of feathers or polyester, but instead was a piece of wood. If that wasn't bad enough, the room was always hot and stuffy and the toilet had to be shared with many people too. *Was this how my grandparents lived in the past? How did they get through the days? Did I really take all the things in my life for granted?* I regretted being so disrespectful to my grandparents. All I have today was started by them saving up their measly salary and improving life slowly. I was enjoying all the rewards of their hard work. *Was the aim of the time crystal to take me back to my grandparent's time and help me to appreciate what they had gone through?*

I suddenly felt like I was falling again. My surroundings were pitch black and cold. Then it felt like I was sinking in water but I could breathe. I slowly felt myself dissolving and becoming one with the water surrounding me. Then suddenly a blinding light appeared in front of me and I felt like I was flowing out and...

I was bent down with Amy touching my shoulder at the exact same spot in the park. The time crystal was nowhere to be seen, but the experience was still with me. I turned to Amy who looked shocked and confused too. The mystery of the time crystal may never be solved but it shall always exist in our memories. Now I have something important to do - to prepare for the reunion dinner. I want to learn more about my grandparent's true experiences. To truly listen to them.

This really was a voyage of discovery; the discovery of the time crystal, the discovery of my forefather's experiences, the discovery of understanding and respect. A weird voyage that taught me many things.

A Tale of Two Kingdoms

Goh Yan Yee

NANYANG GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

When darkness was still and the stars laughed mirthfully, when owls emerged, lions retreated and the wolf howled at the moon, I lay down to rest in a languorous haze. As my eyelids fluttered drowsily, the peripheries of my mind became indistinct, and I entered into a special realm of dreams.

My dream was unlike any other. I stepped into the animal kingdom, a world where it was eat or be eaten, kill or be killed...

Wind seemed to streak forcefully by my ears and suddenly come to a stop.

Stillness.

The world as we know it materialised before my eyes, except that it appeared different. Distinctively different. Blades of grass towered over me like magical beanstalks and the breeze was slower, but stronger. I instinctively knew that I was an ant. I scuttled curiously on my six legs. At once I was overloaded by my new abilities - a newfound strength, and feelers sensing countless pheromones, almost as if they had colours. In addition to that, gone was the feeling that I was alone! I was surrounded by hundreds of my kind, all with a common goal in mind: food. More specifically, food for the queen and the rest of the ants in the nest.

Out of the blue, we picked up a drifting scent that sent us into a pandemonium-like frenzy. FOOD! Lots and lots of it! The delectable, irresistible smell was intertwined with that of grass. The first thought that shot through my mind was a picnic. Humans loved to have those.

Desperate hunger tore through my body and I marched with recharged energy as part of our perfect line formation, as we traced the location of those heavenly smells.

First we crawled all over a juicy apple, foolishly wondering how to take the whole thing back to the nest. Some of us were pacing on the surfaces of bottled drinks. Others were already scrambling back in the direction of home with gargantuan crumbs of blueberry pie in tow. We were instantly engulfed in the golden triumph of the pheromones they released into the air. All of a sudden, faint awareness of the humans turned into high alert as one of my fellow teammates was squashed mercilessly by a finger! Had I the ability to or the time, I would have let out a blood-curdling, heart-wrenching screech of horror and utter despair, akin to one a lurid clown might emit.

The deadly finger was onto me next. I desperately wanted to bite a huge, bloody chunk of flesh off that finger to avenge my friend. My family. However now was not the time for sweet, sweet vengeance. I dashed for my life like I was on steroids. Subconsciously I was filled with wonder at what adrenaline could do. The chemicals in the air screamed, "ALARM! ABORT! ABORT!"

The cruel, heartless humans then called for tsunamis to come upon us. Gushes of fresh, deadly water rose dangerously and crashed. Dozens of lives were swept away. I had escaped the current by half a hair's breadth. Grief rose and anger smouldered as I mourned for my fellow ants. *Why had we even gone to that land of destruction in the first place? We should have surreptitiously infiltrated the picnic and taken the food crumb by crumb, inconspicuous!* I felt like a defeated hero. But then again, the fraction of human in me understood - to the humans, I was just an annoying pest, an unwanted ant.

Just as I thought I had escaped the site of annihilation, the furry paw of the family's tabby cat descended upon me like a fluffy, ominous cloud of doom...

I opened my eyes. I was not dead. I was a cat. The tabby cat who had unknowingly 'murdered me'. My heart seemed to beat slower.

The grass was normal now, as green and big as it should be. I spotted my owner and ambled lazily over to him.

“Who’s a good kitty? You are! Yes, you are!” he crooned sycophantically while slowly stroking my ears.

I ignored him. The human in me rolled my eyes inwardly while my face remained stubbornly stoic. Yawning luxuriously, I laid on the fresh warm grass and shut my eyes. As I soaked in the warm sunshine and appreciated the balmy breeze, I heard a rustling in the bushes. My ears perked up instantaneously. *What was that?* My eyes darted left and right. *There!*

A sleek cat with ebony-black fur was partially concealed in the dark thicket. If I was not mistaken, her eyes concealed a pitiful hunger. With my head tilted to the left, I advanced curiously in a slow prow. The black cat recoiled ever so slightly, but her eyes were still wide and unblinking.

As I got closer, I discovered that she was not afraid. *She wanted to play with me!* Not a minute later we were frolicking exultantly in the tall grass and amongst the bushes, our mouths pulled into something resembling cheeky and mischievous grins. We had a whale of a time chasing vibrantly-coloured butterflies. As we reached up toward the azure blue sky and rolled joyfully on the ground, I noticed, amid the excitement of having a newfound friend, that she was exceptionally thin and underfed. Upon closer scrutiny, her ribcage was jutting out of her skinny body which was supported on four bony limbs. Her cheeks were hollowed. Unlike me, there was not one bit of extra fat on her. *She must have been starving!* I hastened over to the picnic, constantly whipping my head back to beckon her. When we stepped onto the checkered mat my owner was clearly taken aback. I gently nudged the black cat over to my saucer half-filled with creamy milk. She took a cautious lick, which gradually turned into a ravenous slurp. Next, I offered my can of cat food.

Our paws brushed.

This time I felt no rush of air, but only my soul transferring to another being. My vision was fuzzy and indistinct, as most normal dreams tend to be. By then my sense of surprise seemed to have been vanquished by my mind.

I was the black cat. I was thinner now. I could feel my belly sighing in content from the great amount of food I had just consumed in one go. I hesitated before continuing to devour the cat food.

“Shoo! Go away!”

I glanced up. The tabby cat’s owner was waving his hands frantically, shooing me away. I ducked my head and mewed. Shrinking back, I retreated, my heart filled with chagrin. However, the blow was not so great - as this was not the first time rejection had stung me. Viciously. My friend called out, a plea full of melancholy and loneliness for me to stay. However, I knew my place belonged in the shadows.

From the darkness I watched, green with envy as the tabby cat’s owner showered her with love. He opened a new can of food and refilled her saucer with milk. He fawned over her and caressed her luscious fur. She was definitely the luckiest cat on the planet.

My head drooping, I slunk back further into the dark shadows. It was nice while it lasted.

“Hey! I heard something, I swear!”

“Ha! Do you really think I’m - over there! A cat or something!”

“See! I told you!”

Two adolescent voices echoed from a near distance. Without hesitation, I scampered. Footsteps thundered behind me.

CRACK! THUD! Sticks and stones chased me.

I yelped and dashed away, anger radiating from every strand of fur. *Why? Why could I not have a loving owner? Why me?* Out of the blue, I was pulled by an otherworldly force cast by the divines above...

Beep! Beep!

My alarm clock nagged at me until I crash-landed back into my human form. My eyes shot open and I panted heavily. I curled and uncurled my fingers to ensure I was human yet again. All at once, the magnitude of my dream and what I had experienced engulfed me in a wave.

As my heart rate slowed down, I witnessed an ant roaming on my bedside table. The corners of my mouth tugged upwards softly.

"Hello," I whispered. "Here's a bread crumb. There's a whole pile there...bring your friends and take your time."

The Prey's Perspective

Kirstin Kwok Ning Xuan

NANYANG GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

The sky was an even mix of dark blue and grey, and the waters were slightly stormy.

"Get your act together! We've caught nothing at all!" Thomas thundered from one end of the boat, as John and I pulled out yet another empty fishing net. Fuming, I sat down beside Pete, who silently hooked bait onto the fishing rod. *Those fishes are just being stubborn*, I pouted. *Can't they have mercy on poor people like us and gladly sacrifice their lives to feed humanity?* Our group of four had outstanding debts to pay off, not to mention our daily needs. At first, we could barely make ends meet, but now we were cramped in a pathetic boat reeking of a pungent fishy smell, fishing in the middle of the night without a catch. In our haste to earn money, we had started fishing in restricted areas and skipped reporting our illegal catches to the authorities. "We're just fishing for more" was our excuse, but we were bound to be caught one day. Impatience and worry creeping under my skin, I contemplated pursuing another career.

Just then, a sound from behind interrupted my thoughts. Not the familiar, soothing splash of waves, but a deafening, low rumble. I froze.

"BOOM!" Before I could react, an enormous wave shot up, and came down behind us, flinging us out of the boat with ease. Unfortunately, we had left our life jackets on the boat, which the force had reduced to pieces of wood. I was struggling, throwing my limbs around wildly. Water devoured me voraciously, stinging my eyes, weighing me down and getting into my ears. Panic clouded my vision, and I heard nothing but weak, desperate breaths.

We seemed to sink for ages, until it occurred to me that we were now floating in the ocean. As I regained composure I caught a glimpse of the others around me, bewilderment written on their faces as they stared down in disbelief. I glanced down at my own legs, taking in the incredulous sight with fascination. Tails had replaced our legs, fins for hands, and gills I could feel on my cheeks!

How were we alive underwater? Was this a hallucination?

I observed the breathtaking scene before me. Fishes of various shapes and colours swam around amid rocks and wonderfully crafted corals, like an orchestra working in harmony to create a sweet symphony. We stared in awe, and forgot our worries and fear of what was to come.

"Let's explore this place first," I suggested, "We can think about returning to the shore later."

And so we glided past the rocks and corals, as curiosity egged us on to explore different places. Little by little, remorse began to tug at the seams of my heart. Despite having to constantly avoid predators and dangers, the fishes continued to persevere. Recalling my previous ignorance and our constant overfishing without permission, guilt formed a heavy load in my heart. They only wanted to survive. Had they known the fate of their friends, they would have been devastated.

"Hey...let's be legal fishers if we return," I suggested hopefully.

"Dude, are you serious? We need to make a living!" Pete snapped, his relaxed grin twisted into an ugly grimace.

"We don't want to be penniless like the good guys," Thomas shot at me with his waspish words.

Anger boiled in my blood, threatening to burn my skin with its heat. An acerbic taste filling my mouth I retorted, "I know our world is dependent on meat, but can't we--"

Suddenly, every fish fled at lightning speed as an enormous shadow loomed over us. We stopped our quarrel and looked up, to freeze in

dread. It was a shark, and a hungry-looking one. We followed a school of tuna, trying hard not to fall behind, and narrowly escaped before the shark slammed shut its powerful, lethal jaws. We heaved a sigh of relief. Little did we know it was not the end.

A blue dory in front of us was suddenly caught up in a white net, together with other fish. The same thing was happening all around us. It was fishermen. Dashing about rapidly to escape the deadly white nets, helplessness and terror filled my heart. *Will I live?* I could feel the tears fighting to leave my eyes. This was the tough life of a fish in the sea. My perspective had changed.

We used to be the hunters. Now, we were the prey that needed to survive.

Ocean's Jewel

Valerie Chua Xin En

NANYANG GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

The Kraken dipped itself into the inky depths before rising again. Gently, the ocean rocked it back and forth as its waves sang soothing lullabies. Nikita hummed along with the water, tossing and turning restlessly inside the belly of the dormant Kraken.

Nikita admired the ocean. What she admired the most was the ocean's uncanny ability to bring the largest, burliest sailors to their knees, serenading them into a sweet slumber. As the men snored to the rhythm of the lapping waves, Nikita softly sneaked past their fat bodies, hoisting herself up into the crow's nest.

Once she reached the top, a string of constellations opened their arms to embrace her. Under the stars, the soft sea breeze unbraided her jet-black hair, causing it to flow behind her in smooth waves.

In many ways, the ocean reminded Nikita of her mother.

Like the ocean, Nikita's mother was loving and firm. As she raised Nikita single-handedly, she had to deal with her fair share of battles with ferocious bandits, often returning with bruises and scrapes. Nikita wondered why she lacked a father who could protect her, and she felt a painful aching in her chest whenever she saw her mother fighting alone for her. Nikita's mother dismissed the absence of her husband, for she had company in Nikita. And before Nikita fell asleep every night, her mother would tell her tales about the 'Ocean's Jewel' — an island that could grant any wish.

Nikita wanted to find the Ocean's Jewel. She wanted it badly.

"I wish I was a man. If I were a man, I would have the strength to do things a girl like me could never hope to do. As a man, I could be strong enough to have the courage to stand up for what's right. As a man, I could be free to discover my purpose without anybody standing in my way."

Eventually, Nikita left with the Kraken to pursue her voyage of self-discovery. All the waves that threatened to swallow her, all the strangers that might be out there to harm her, and all the regrets that she would leave behind would change into the stars that led her to the treasure she so desperately sought.

Five years passed by like the flowing of the waves. The Kraken had seen much during its journey, from the bustling ports that Nikita loved to frolic in, to the mysterious allure of open waters, where the occasional dolphin would appear at the side of the ship. Nikita enjoyed her life out on the open ocean, and everyone was strangely content with letting a young girl share their labour on the ship. Everyone except the Captain.

Nikita had to make it a point to steer clear of the Captain. He was three times the height of Nikita; his large hands always curling into hardened fists whenever she crossed his path. Whenever her eyes were unfortunate enough to meet his, she would catch a glimpse of the Captain's raw, unbridled contempt for her.

It was even more unfortunate that the Captain now made his way towards her.

"Things were a lot more convenient with an all-male crew, you know. Unfortunately, snooping around seems to be the only thing that girls like you can do. But now that I know about your interest in the Ocean's Jewel, I will have to make a quick end of you." The Captain laughed as he cornered Nikita in the ship's bow. With one sudden motion, he threw Nikita into the sea -- his eyes bloodshot with madness.

A sea storm was fast approaching. As Nikita resurfaced, she could see the ocean's foam getting frothier, and she could feel the waves crashing into the Kraken at increasingly destructive speeds. Nikita knew that



Aviran Roy
NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

this moment was inevitable, for the coordinates of the Ocean's Jewel were buried in the heart of the storm.

The spirit of Ocean's Jewel had one condition, access relied on the pursuer's knowledge of the sea - knowledge that could only be built through the hunger of discovery.

As lightning nipped the masts, and thunder tore across the Kraken's deck, the Captain barked orders at his men to navigate the ship. The sailors could see Nikita, but they knew that the Captain would disapprove of them risking precious time to save a mere girl like her. All they could do was to throw discarded planks overboard, helping Nikita to stay afloat amidst the torrential rain.

All this while, Nikita was in anguish over how helpless she was. After all those years of exploration, of hoping to better herself through her voyage, it was on a group of men that her life was now dependent, and

she was at the mercy of a man who discriminated against her simply for being who she was. *Had her journey to discover the Ocean's Jewel been for nothing?*

There was a hole in the sky that the storm failed to touch, and Nikita realised the most crucial knowledge a seafarer needed was the stars. She was usually the only one on the Kraken who was awake to appreciate their beauty. Using the ocean's gift to her as a compass, she paddled through the frigid depths to the coordinates of the Ocean's Jewel.

The lagoon around the Ocean's Jewel shimmered softly, lighting the way for Nikita to reach the island. The island, having noticed her presence, spoke to her.

"Welcome, young child. You have reached the Ocean's Jewel because of your hunger for discovery, and no man can ever take that away from you. So, what is your wish?"

Nikita nodded, and after reflecting on her journey of self-discovery she realised that what she truly wished for was to be accepted for who she was, rather than being a man. She wanted to continue sailing on the Kraken, to discover more about the ocean and herself.

The Ocean's Jewel granted her wish, and Nikita woke up to the sounds of cheering men, congratulating her on becoming the new captain of the Kraken.

The Fibonacci – Discovery: Cryptography

Gavin Lim Hon Lin

SEMBAWANG SECONDARY SCHOOL

Dragging my feet on the way to school with much reluctance, especially on Mondays. I was dressed in all black. The only thing that was not entirely black was the innocuous knapsack on my right shoulder, unmarked and with no discernible logo of any brand.

Slammed the car door. My chauffeur drove. Reached school.

I took a step forward into the exhibition held in my school. My curiosity was immediately aroused when I saw those cracked and destroyed pulchritudinous paintings. There were many paintings in the exhibition but only four, displayed along the back wall of the auditorium, were destroyed and vandalized. It looked like someone had taken a large knife or a sharp object, broken the glass in the frames and slashed the prints viciously over and over. Below the completely destroyed paintings were eerie, ominous letters in menacing red paint, "DIE".

Standing beside me was my classmate, Audrey Sam. Her hands rose to her mouth as she walked toward the wall, blinking back her tears. What weirded us out was the fact that there weren't any security cameras around. Oblivious to the teachers and principal, Mr Singh, as they took notes trying to trace the culprits, Audrey suddenly took a step forward to look closely at the tattered 'carcasses' of the paintings. Stepped back to look again at the awful state of the word in bright red.

I walked up to Audrey and pointed at a tiny placard placed on the wall next to the destroyed paintings. I panicked and hesitated. We were both bewildered to see there were words on it...

No truth

All lies

Look closer

Dreams tell us

A story that begs to be solved

Poetry

With an accusatory frown on her disconsolate face, Audrey peered closer.

"Eh...Gavin, isn't that...Charles's handwriting?"

I stomped, giving her the shock of her life. Clapping my hands, I told her to stop assuming. I looked up, my heart pondered. "What exactly do the words mean?"

Audrey gave me a pat on my back and exclaimed, "Hmph...poetry...poetry! Ah, I remember my mom teaching me the Japanese form of poetry. Owen Haiku!"

I interjected with excitement and said, "SYLLABLES! Why don't we try to find out the meaning of those words by using syllables?" I pulled Audrey by her sinewy arms and we sat down at a place filled with immaculate chairs and tables.

"Did you know that this poem has a code encrypted and built into it?"

"Huh? What code? What do you mean?" Audrey replied with a confused stare.

A paper was then scribbled with words and numbers.

No truth – 1,1 = 2

All lies – 1,1 = 2

Look closer – 1,2 = 3

Dreams tell us – 1,1,1 = 3

A story that begs to be solved – 1,2,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

Poetry – 3 = 3

2,2,3,3,8,3

“I could have kicked myself for not seeing it right away, the pattern was so evident!” I murmured. Audrey turned her head, stared at the numbers and recognized them as fast as lightning. “These are...”

“The Fibonacci numbers! What are the odds?” I answered vehemently.

It was at that moment that our Mathematics’ teacher, Miss Bernice, walked past our table and saw what we were trying to do. She got interested. We explained it all to her and she decided to help us along the journey.

“Miss Bernice! I know the numbers. You will get the next number by adding the previous two. It is an endless pattern of numbers and can go on infinitely. However, Miss Bernice do you know why it’s in this poem?”

“Sorry, I don’t know,” Miss Bernice said, staring at the paper I had scribbled on.

The arrival of the following day soon came, the lines from the poem were still locked deeply, fresh inside my head.

Miss Bernice had agreed to show us the photographs of the vandalized paintings. Maybe it would help us. We were waiting impatiently for recess break.

“Ring...”

The school bell rang and Audrey and I raced to the teachers’ lounge to see her. As promised, she was there with the copies.

Unexpectedly, Miss Bernice took us to one corner and pointed out the extra clues.



Lim Hui Wen
YUAN CHING SECONDARY SCHOOL

Round three by three. Four by four.

Fe Phi Foo Fume

Square it. Get it.

Decrypt the unsolved code

Get precisely one greater than another

And then we are done.

"I found a safe that has a six-digit code to unlock it. I'm pretty sure there is evidence in it. Please try to solve the puzzle and get the code!" Miss Bernice exclaimed.

It was 7pm in the evening and we were all exhausted. We then headed home.

An hour later, I noticed my phone on my desk. "Bloop...Bleep...Bloop..." It was vibrating. I went to pick it up and to my surprise, I saw that I had received five missed calls from Audrey.

"GAVIN! I SOLVED IT! I GOT THE CODE! IT'S PHI!" Audrey exclaimed excitedly.

A familiar voice soon appeared... "Hello, what's up?" Miss Bernice asked.

"Miss Bernice, I solved it!"

"What? Slow down and explain."

"The line, 'Fe Phi Foo Fume'. Only 'Phi' is a number!"

"What is Phi?"

"Phi is an irrational number that has no end. It is also called the Golden Number or Golden Ratio. Not only that, Phi has a unique property as when you square Phi, you get a number precisely one more than the other!"

"So, we're looking for the square of Phi!"

"Square of Phi? I'm dazed."

"So how exactly do we get the value of Phi?"

"It's one plus the square root of five, divided by two."

Audrey went to take a calculator off her desk, keyed in the formula and then squared it.

"It's 2.618036666..."

"We only need a six-digit code, so it must be 261803!"

The sun set and all of us gathered at the safe box. We keyed in the code and to our amazement, it opened.

"It's Charles Sim from our class!" I shouted.

Mr Singh was promptly informed, as well as the rest of the teachers. They went up to my class and interrogated Charles.

Despite standing in another corner of the room, through his expression I could tell that he was frightened as he stood rooted to the ground and motionless with horror.

He pleaded guilty and promised to not do it again.

Hoping that he would change for the better, the authorities decided to let him go with a warning. They believed that he would learn from the incident.

I was glad to have discovered the culprit behind the crime.

A Voyage of Discovery

Faith Tan Li-Ann

TANJONG KATONG GIRLS' SCHOOL

It is a cursed evil to any man to become as absorbed in any subject as I am in mine.-Charles Darwin

23rd August, 1831

Only the wind disturbed Charles Darwin as he sat slouched on the porch chair. There was little to do but write on days like this, when the trees were all but browned and hardly a creature stirred but the birds above, flying south for the winter.

Charles sighed. If only he had their freedom to fly southwards, oh what amazing sights he'd see! And now, he thought bitterly, now he finally had the chance to go as a naturalist on a voyage around the world, he was refused the funds for no good reason!

Charles huffed and crossed out a paragraph about cetoniinae beetles (they were obviously not herbivores judging by the larvae the one on his green rose bush was happily munching on). If such discoveries could be made in his own backyard, imagine what the rest of the world held! How could his father deny him such a golden opportunity?

The trees seemed to rustle what was left of their leaves in concurrence with his thoughts as Charles stood for the first time in three hours. Sweeping the cetoniinae into a small jar (he'd check its species later), he folded up his notebook and headed into the house. He would find a way to get on that boat. He swore to himself he would. And as his door clicked shut, it seemed to click his fate into place.

27 December 1831

The blare of foghorns filled the air as Charles boarded the HMS Beagle for the first time. In a twist of fate, a lucky strike, by the touch of the gods, Charles' uncle had persuaded his father to fund his trip.

As Charles stepped onto the boat, he took a deep breath. The air was filled with the smell of fresh fish and seawater, and was not altogether the most pleasant first breath for an adventure - but for him, it smelled only of excitement.

As Charles made his way towards the hull entrance, Captain Fitzroy appeared from below deck with an armful of rope as tall as himself. The captain was a young chap, barely older than Darwin himself, and gave the impression of someone who spent his evenings staring off to sea rather than getting drunk on rum.

"Charles! Glad to have you onboard! As you are here as my equal and not as my crew, you will stay with me in the captain's cabin. I've had it fitted with suitable facilities for two, I hope you will find them to your satisfaction." Fitzroy delivered this information rapidly before tottering off to find dry storage space for his ropes.

What an odd bloke, Charles thought to himself as he opened the door to the cabin, hauling his large briefcase in with him. Straightening up and looking around the room, he noticed a few thick volumes about geological anomalies and a large chart of beetle species laid across a desk. Darwin felt a smile cross his face as he caught sight of a carefully classified case of butterflies. They would get along just fine.

20 October 1835

Charles gazed at the steadily shrinking Galapagos Islands as the HMS Beagle slid them slowly out of sight. For a glorious five weeks, he and his companions had spent their days exploring the islands and collecting specimens for examination. His team had collected so many samples that even Captain Fitzroy had begun to complain that he couldn't walk

the length of their cabin without stubbing his toe on a tortoiseshell, or bumping his head on a swinging bundle of plants.

The abundance of specimens posed, if anything, a problem of classification. Having overlooked the separate species on each island, Charles had neglected to properly sort through the specimens until he noticed that some frogs were only present on certain islands. This resulted in the unfortunate difficulty of determining exactly which half taxidermied project he was working on at any point in time.

With a sigh, Charles turned forlornly away from the archipelago and headed below deck to find his latest project. After much rummaging and scattering of papers (Fitzroy would be terribly upset, but then he shouldn't have left his charts in the taxidermy room), Charles finally found the little finches he had been seeking. They were rather dull in appearance, all of a similar size and patterning. Their beaks however, were fascinating; each slightly varied so they could be, but yet were obviously not, the same bird.

Darwin's mind raced as he studied them. *How could they be so similar yet so obviously different? By creationist theory, what was the point?* His mind whirled with possibilities, feeling like the choppy waves swirling beneath the boat, crashing up against the sides, growing bigger and bigger until they crested and,

Eureka!

Charles nearly knocked over a stack of tortoise shells as he scrambled to find his journal. They all came from one type of bird. One type of bird, which on each different island needed something new. A longer beak, smaller tail, bigger eyes - but all, at first, the same. Yet somehow now so different. *How? How did it happen? What changed?* There were so many questions to answer, possibilities to explore, ideas to form! And so, picking up his quill, Darwin began to write.

22 November 1859

The bustle of a bookstore was a familiar comfort to Charles. He often found himself amongst the rows, unaware of how he got there. But this time, it was different. As Charles watched copy after copy of his book rung up at the cash register, he remembered that voyage he had taken so long ago, when he was still a young man. He remembered his adventure, his friends, his discoveries. Here was the result, 'The Origin of Species'. His legacy. Although all around him people talked loudly about his ideas, only the wind disturbed Charles Darwin as he walked home.

History Repeats Itself

Jiya Sawlani Govindani

TANJONG KATONG SECONDARY SCHOOL

I shuffled into the classroom, greeted by noisy chatter and instructions from my History teacher, who was trying desperately to get the class settled. When the lesson began, I realised I had forgotten my textbook and borrowed a used one from the back cupboard. Time flowed like cement. I tapped my desk repetitively, wishing I was anywhere but there. I glanced at the clock. Only a minute had passed since I last checked an hour ago, or so it seemed. As time ticked by, the ceaseless buzzing of the classroom increased. I flipped open the tattered textbook and a yellowed envelope fluttered onto the ground. I picked it up without a thought. Out of curiosity, I peeled it open to read a tattered note with a list of three things:

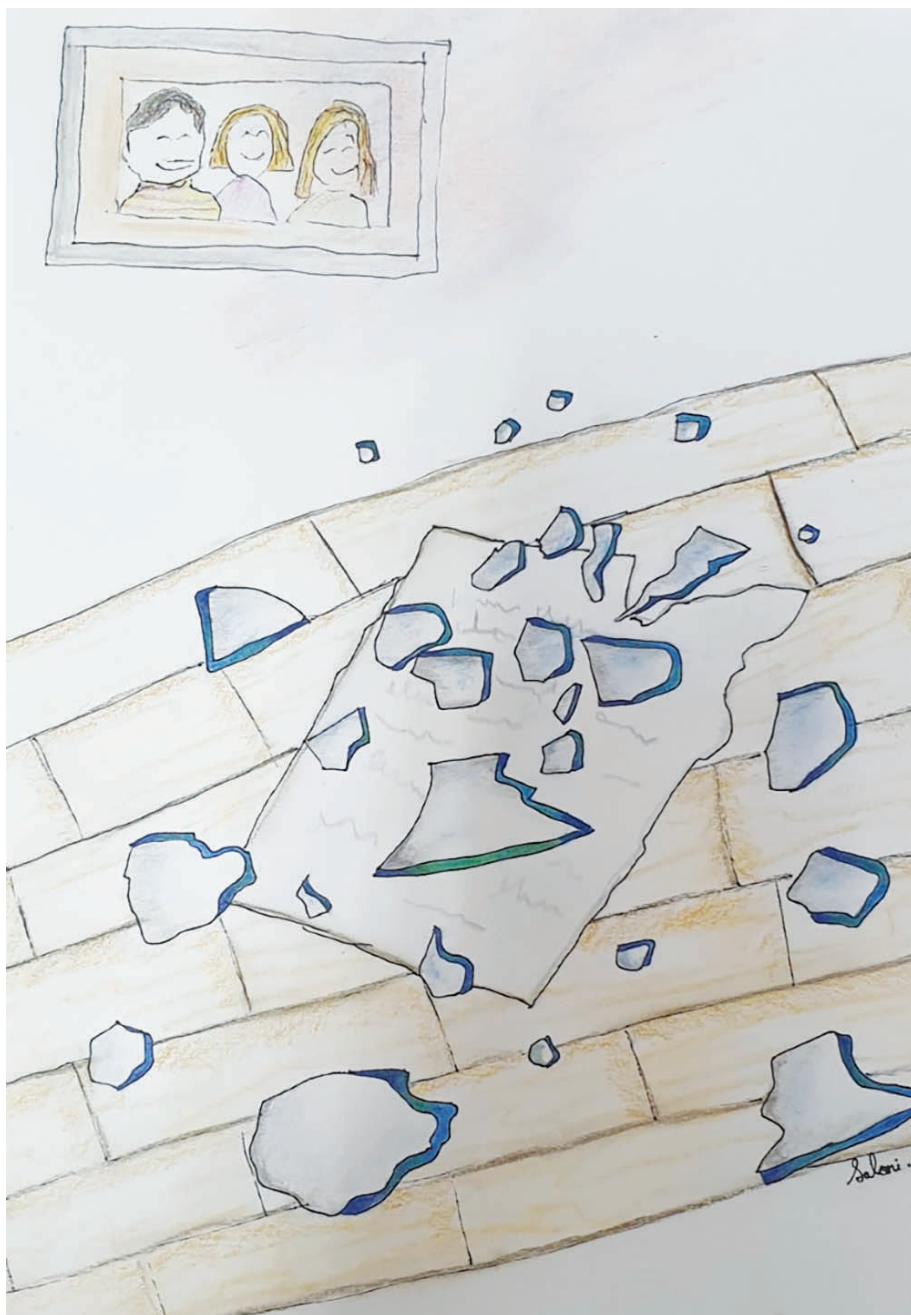
1. Do not write in this book
2. Never let this book out of sight
3. WARNING: Catastrophic events may occur.

I let out a soft chuckle. *What harm could come from a worn-out textbook?* I flipped through its shabby pages and immediately my eyes were drawn to illuminated, random numbers appearing all through it, which reflected the sunlight streaming through the window. They glowed on the pages like moonbeams. I immediately reached for a pen and began to jot down the numbers on the same envelope as earlier. They seemed to appear next to the descriptions of specific historical events. On one of the pages, 'World peace?' was written in the same enchanting ink. Excitement and intrigue poured out of me like sunshine through white linen. Even though I remembered the note I had found, which warned me not to write in the book, I disregarded it as I read the individual

events with numbers next to them. Suddenly, I knew that I wanted to try to rewrite history. However, the school bell chimed abruptly and I groaned in disappointment. I packed my bag and headed to my next class, returning the mysterious book to the cupboard on my way out.

After another day filled with endless hours of lessons, I walked into History class and grabbed the old textbook again, clutching it tightly. I sat down and urgently flipped to the first page of the book with an illuminated number on it. The section of text was about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Pushing all my doubts aside, I began to modify the description of the events. I even struck a line through specific actions to prevent them from happening entirely. Suddenly, many pages about World War Two vanished from the textbook! I felt adrenaline surge within me, and a spark of hope flickered with every event I altered. Upon approaching the last few events, happy memories I had never experienced flashed through my mind. Around me, life seemed blissful and ethereal. I was healing the world through my actions, protecting it from war and hardship. As I was about to change the final marked event, the phrase "Butterfly Effect" magically appeared on the book, words I had not seen before when analysing the book cover to cover. I wondered if I should think about my actions, but anticipation with its nervous energy was tingling through me like electric sparks. I put my head down and continued, telling myself that the world would be a safer place because of me. It was when I finally altered the last event that dread crept down my spine like a spider weaving a trail of silk.

I felt myself descending until I was frozen to the spot. My stomach was full of lead, my feet set in concrete. I watched everything around me crumble and collapse, and all that I had worked for vanish before my eyes. Most importantly, the book had disappeared. I was left with nothing but rubble and the faded envelope from the book which left me and the Earth in ruins. The void of people had been slowly filled with a cold, howling storm of fear that refused to end. Still in shock, I picked up the envelope, desperately scanning it to find something to help me reverse my mistakes. Just then, I noticed the code "A1Z26" in minuscule writing appear on the letter. I instantly recognised it as the phrase for the number to letter code. My mind buzzed with questions.



Saloni Gore
NPS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Could it be linked to the glowing numbers in the book? I flipped the paper and frantically began decoding them.

At last, the code revealed the phrase, "History repeats itself". After some thought, my mind was drawn back to my school's insignia, which had a quote by an alumnus above it: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." I remembered it because it was on the walls I walked past in the hallways every day. Realisation struck me and I ran as fast as I could to a destroyed pillar, which lay beneath the debris of what was once my school. I swept away the ash and dust to uncover the familiar logo. My heart raced as I lifted the pillar with trembling hands to find the old textbook! A wave of relief washed over my boulder of fear and regret, and I heaved a thankful sigh.

I began to rectify my mistakes one by one, and the earth around me slowly shifted itself back to how it used to be. Time started to dissolve into itself, as shapeless as the rain, while I scribbled away, praying for my old life back. As I restored the final event, unrecognisable memories bubbled out of my consciousness, and memories of love shared with family and friends flowed back in like a river of serenity. At the end of it all, I realised that peace was more than the absence of war, and to live with love was the only way to achieve true peace. However, it could not be done in a system where there were people who made profit from war. This must change, and only we had the power to do so. With that, I safely hid the textbook which had taught me much more than I had expected.

The Lost, Hidden World

Lim You Heng

VICTORIA SCHOOL

“What’s that buzzing sound?” I complained, feeling annoyed.

It was two o’clock in the morning on the 18th July 2019. I had been having a crazy dream about an unknown world with weird-looking dragons. It seemed as if it were real, but it was just a dream after all. Rubbing my eyes, I got out of bed and followed the sound to find the source of that irritating buzz. I wanted to destroy whatever was making that noise!

I soon found myself in Dad’s secret study room in the basement of our house. My father was an archaeologist, excavating ancient artefacts and bringing them home to examine them. I began rummaging through all the boxes in his study room to find the thing emitting that noise. In a box in the corner of that tiny room, I found a rusty, round-shaped object with a small button on it.

“What an annoying, useless piece of trash!”

Without hesitating, I threw it to the ground as hard as I could. However, that unbreakable object could not be destroyed. Picking it up and inspecting it, I could find no trace of even a fine, small scratch. However, upon seeing the brown button on it, curiosity pricked me and I decided to press the button.

Well, I made the wrong decision. Before I knew it, the object flashed green and red and I was sucked into the object.

I was floating around and in a flash, I found myself lying on a muddy, smelly surface. Standing up, I scanned my surroundings and they seemed somehow familiar. I suddenly realised that I was at the same

place as in my dream! Now, I found out that it was real and was not a dream after all. I began to roam around aimlessly in that empty, vast place.

I felt extremely terrified and could feel goosebumps on my skin. *What was this place?* Cold chills ran down my spine and I could feel my heart thumping like mad. The ominously dark place gave me a sense of foreboding.

What was going on here?

After walking for what felt like a year, I reached a gate in a wall which was about one thousand times taller than I was. It was so tall that I had to crane my neck so much to see the top that I think I heard the crack of a bone. Beside the gate, there was a large letter ‘N’ written in a cursive handwriting and decorated with some small dragon heads protruding from it. The gate slowly creaked open and I stepped foot into the World of ‘N’. As I walked, the silhouette of a gigantic castle gradually came into view.

As I made my way toward it, I could sense a voyage of discovery awaiting me.

When I reached the door of the castle, a dragon suddenly zoomed down to hover in front of me. It looked a little like a wasp, just a lot larger. It pointed its extraordinarily sharp tail and claws towards me. I did not dare to move a muscle! Its skin was violet in colour with purple stripes and smooth like silk. It had high-speed wings, a streamlined body shape and a head with spikes.

“Naganadal! Naganadal!”

Its screech was so piercing and deafening that my eardrums felt like they exploded despite my efforts to cover my ears with all my might. As it kept repeating the same word over and over again at the same volume, I gave it the name, “Naganadal”.

“I come in peace! Let me in!” I desperately shouted at the top of my lungs as I raised up my hands.

After glaring at me for a few seconds longer, the dragon screeched once more before opening the doors. After it flew away, I went forward and entered the castle.

From the outside the castle, which stood in an empty piece of land, looked magnificent and majestic. On the contrary, the inside of the castle looked like a pig's den. There were many small pieces of raw meat lying around, and there was a pungent stench lingering in the air. Nevertheless, it was still quite grand, with the letter 'N' printed on drapes hanging on the wall.

Upon discovering these Naganadals, I was now eager to find out more about them and their way of life.

I passed through long hallways hung with pictures of famous Naganadals and their respective claw marks. It was as if I was walking through the Naganadals' Hall of Fame.

As I roamed around the castle, numerous Naganadals zipped past me at the speed of light. All the Naganadals I saw in the castle looked similar to each other, but were of different sizes. They were all lone rangers and seemed to prefer being on their own as they flew far away, separated from the other Naganadals. They had big appetites as I saw one of the largest ones devour a huge lump of meat the size of five whales at one go.

Naganadals, unlike the dragons in our fantasy storybooks, do not breathe fire, but shoot poison darts from their tails. To add on, they are very accurate when shooting the poison darts. I was awe-struck and fascinated as I watched the Naganadals flex their shooting skills.

I was so excited to find out more about the Naganadals that I did not see a hole in front of me. I went straight towards it and fell right in. Just like before, I floated around for a moment, and then landed with a thud on hard ground. I groaned, and when I looked around, I was back in Dad's secret study room with the object at my feet. Seeing that the sun was rising, I quickly shoved the device back into its original box and ran back to my bedroom.

As I lay on my bed, I felt proud about discovering a rare new species of dragons called Naganadals in the World of 'N', and learning about them during my voyage.

However, something still felt peculiar.

Who on Earth left this object here?

Brendan, are you still there?

Maximus Ho Jing Shan

VICTORIA SCHOOL

Humans:

Why am I here? Why does this cruel world exist? I wish I could curl up into a ball and live in this world alone.

Pitch black.

Where am I? What is this?

"This is what you wanted, didn't you?" a voice speaks.

The voice sounds familiar. It sounds resonating. Yes, I can recognize this voice. It definitely is. Yes. Please be light.

And there was light.

I could see my own nightmare unfold. The one I used to run away from, I gave up on that a long time ago.

"This is what you wanted, didn't you? A world where only you exist. A world where you can be alone." The voice speaks again.

No! This is not what I wanted! No!

"Take me back! Take me back! ... take me back..." I squirm, voice eventually fading into darkness. So this is beauty, being able to be alone. This is what it feels like to not be judged for whatever you do. To be able to do anything whenever you want. No status quo. No academic standard. This is freedom.

Do I really want this though?

What is my purpose if I don't have anyone, or anything, to give my life to?

Torture racks my head in pain. What is this? What am I? Flashes.

Vibrant long hair. Thin eyes that were placed perfectly on the face.

It's Mama.

"You don't belong here! Get out!"

Black glasses. Business suit. A Mont Blanc pen fit snugly in his pocket.

"I'm starting to think you're useless." My boss.

Brown hair. Built on a thin body. Square shaped spectacles. My teacher.

"You think this is good? I think not!"

Flashes of memory rush past my mind.

"I could always show you something better." The voice again. Emptiness. That is the first thought.

And there is emptiness.

A white void. Infinitely large. Impossible to tell where it starts or ends. Why am I here?

"Didn't you want a place with nothing?"

But, with the comfort of nothingness, also comes loss of identity.

"Material planes, is that what you want?"

"Or is gliding in this endless light what you dream of?"

I could even ask? How do people identify me? Or you?

Yes. A material plane. To materialize myself.

My hands. My legs. The floor.

And thus, it was a plane that forms.

"You currently have a plane to walk on."

"Your actions might be restricted, but you now have feeling."
And thus, I am created.
I can walk forward and backward.
None other than that.
"Now you can materialize what you are."
"Your form."
"Your soul. Understand?"
How do I identify myself? How do others see me?
"Now, now. Is that what you want to know?"
What, you may wonder, is yourself?
"Our name. Remember it?"
My name. My name. My name...
"You are merely one Brendan Mathers."
"What others see in you. Another is created. What people see in you, identify yourself. What you can see in yourself, is materialized by other's interpretations of yourself. Where are you and yourself right now, with no one to identify you? You may wonder?"
Yes, I do. Of course I do.
Brendan Mathers. I know that is me, but do I really have a reason to exist?
"Of course you do. All humans do. Just recognize why you were given consciousness in the first place."
I have questions.
I am alone. I am in my nest. Who is there to interpret me for who I am?
I was— no, am Brendan Mathers. The boyfriend. The colleague.
...

Oh. Yes. I had my job in this life...of mine.
And I lost it.
My selfish delusions of success that I created.
They betrayed their own maker.
I would succeed. I would earn big bucks. Like real. Getting fired was the only thing that happened to me.
"It's called failure, by the way."
Give me something else.
Oh yes. I had also lost...the love of my life. Why is...my life like that?
Love is a gamble after all. All in or fold.
"I've built walls. A fortress deep and mighty."
I've suffered it before. Why must I show my true self again?
The only thing that happens is that I'll get hurt once again, and hurt others too.
Oh yes...
It's because:
Love is a gamble. All in or fold.
To feel love is to learn how to handle it when it's gone, isn't it?
Can't I be myself instead of one who hides everything?
"You know very well."
This false sense of resignation won't help me reflect or erase my life. I am Brendan Mathers. I cannot live with constantly trying to vanquish my life.
Just because I lock those memories up doesn't mean I don't have the key to open them again.
I don't want to run away from myself.



Zhou Qi

CHIJ ST. NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

Standing in the blinding white material plane, I could visualise myself.
All I need to do is find... Remise.

Remise after my very own demise.

Isn't forgiveness for our sins what we seek?

I answer my own question.

Revelations flow to my mind. I understand now.

Before I blink out, ready to return back to reality, I understand.

Speaking to me is me.

It's a bit sad isn't it? To have only one person to comfort yourself at night, yourself.

I need to find what I live for.

Friendship and life.

One which I don't need to hide from the world with my computers and screens.

I can choose how I want to live.

The darkness slowly enclaspd me against the light that I used to seek.
It seems blinding now, like a creature that is devouring me. Sometimes,
the comfort of light is not always filled with the solace we seek.

I need to find another way. Another choice.

Isn't that being human?

I smile softly.

I wake up, my eyes shifting open, and there I was, starting another day.

One thing different though.

I was smiling for the first time in ten years.

Blank Canvas

Krystal Ng Yu Tian

YUAN CHING SECONDARY SCHOOL

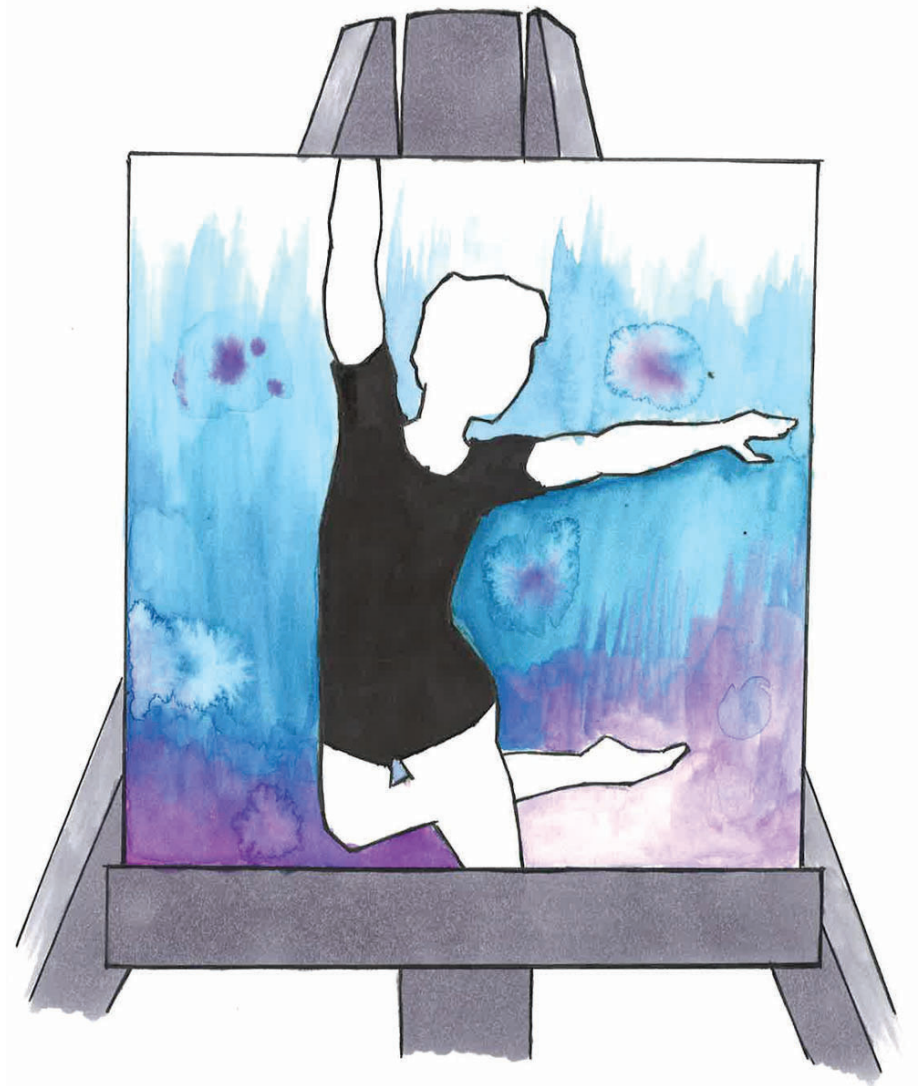
I trudged along the edge of the pavement with my head down low, the blazing hot sun rays hitting the nape of my neck. It had been this way for the past three years. Waking up at the crack of dawn, in a half-asleep state of mind, forcing myself through the same school routine, before I eventually go back to bed. A cycle that never seemed to end.

As I scrolled through social media, picture after picture popped right up. Sometimes I wondered, *Aren't these people ever tired of living a 'fake identity' online?* We seem to stray away from ourselves more and more as time goes by. Just as I was about to click out of the website, something different from the rest caught my eye.

Not anything super special, just a poster that had a cartoon with characters that seemed like something out of my childhood imagination. However it was as if the poster was calling out to me and ignited a strong sense of nostalgia in my heart. Without hesitation, I signed up for a tour of the art museum.

I donned my black jacket and picked up my bag. I gripped my phone as I flagged down a taxi along the side of the road. In the taxi, I kept going back to see the poster. It was so intriguing, but I couldn't place my finger on what part of the poster was so interesting. *Maybe it was the colours, maybe it was the animation?* Before I knew it, I reached my destination. I stood before the glass doors, and a cold gust of air enveloped me as they slid open.

I glanced around, and the place was a dream come true for a five year old me. The walls were painted in soft pastel colours, pleasing to the eye. Performers were stationed in different corners of the big gallery.



Melissa Sam En Hui

YUAN CHING SECONDARY SCHOOL

I went over to watch the dancer positioned closet to me. He was in a leotard, gracefully dancing along to the melody of the music played by a musician. Uncontrollably, my feet began tapping along to the rhythm and beat of the music. I was reminded of how much I had enjoyed dancing when I was younger. My aspirations of being on stage, in front of a thousand pairs of eyes, hearing the thunder-like applause from the audience.

This dancer wasn't performing on the world's greatest stage, yet he danced with so much passion and love, such commitment to doing what he really loved. Something I no longer had in me, something called 'dedication,' that I had lost along the way amidst a boring daily schedule.

Lost were the dreams that I once had, dreams like wanting to become a dancer, which slowly became swallowed by boring nine to five jobs. Lost were the genuine and real thoughts. Lost was the little child inside of me that wasn't influenced by others. Lost was the me that dared to dream wildly.

We are like plain white canvases, but the new, the 'hype' and the 'upcoming', are like bottles of paint. They get splashed on us by our peers and people around us. Slowly, our blank canvases are filled with colours; those with colourful canvases were brought up in good influence, while those splashed in dark paints were influenced by the bad.

However, we're still all white canvases under our coats of paints. Rediscovered, I had, the me that once was happy, the me that worked towards the greatest dreams and happiness. Realised, I had, the desire to be genuine to myself, and to not lose myself to the perspectives of society.

In a nutshell, the bravest people are those who have never lost their initial selves, no matter through what hardships or influences they have been once under, and lucky are the people who have discovered and reclaimed their beginnings while battling time.



Ng Lan Xin
YUAN CHING SECONDARY SCHOOL

Now I know; the poster was just a reminder of my childhood, a spark that led to a huge bonfire. I am more than glad that I have found my initial self, and have a dream to work for amongst this boring and hectic schedule.

Tales of 'S' – Infinite Spectrum

A voyage of discovery – what images does this phrase conjure in your mind? Are you travelling to exotic destinations, exploring new or hidden worlds, making a medical or scientific breakthrough, or uncovering a secret from the past? Or is your journey internal rather than external – what untapped strengths might you find within yourself to overcome challenges and reach your true potential?

Young writers from primary, secondary and junior colleges all across Singapore have embarked on a journey of imagination, and produced a collection of tales spanning the 'infinite spectrum' of possible genres and topics.

Tales of 'S' – Infinite Spectrum is the ninth in a series of books, featured and published by Civica Pte Ltd, to showcase the writing talent of school students in Singapore.

The stories featured are the top forty winning entries in Civica's annual creative writing competition, the 2019 theme having been 'Voyage of Discovery'.

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