
YEAR 7-8 CATEGORY

Year 7-8 Winner: Amelie Schubert [Trinity Anglican College]

Title: *Two Red Marks*

My eyes were wide with shock. Maybe even bigger. But They were big and that's no doubt. They were so big I felt like they were tearing my skull to stay into their sockets. That would explain why my head ached so much. I felt sick. Sick with worry, sick with fear, And sick with what was going to happen. That was what I was desperate to know. I wanted to know what this all meant I wanted to know what was going to happen to me. I stared into the dirty, fingerprint encrusted mirror, hanging on my bathroom wall. Staring at my neck. My sore, aching neck that kept me awake all night. And right now, I had discovered why. I had discovered why I was completely restless last night and I was looking at it right now. And it was looking back. There, lying just below my left ear were two red marks.

They looked like eyes, staring at me and into my soul. They weren't bleeding, they were almost like a bruise. Two small, red bruises lined up vertically along my neck as if intended. I was scared out of my wits. What happened? How did they get there? What did this mean? There were too many questions and not enough answers. I adjusted my grip on my collar as I continued to stare at my neck. They looked like bites. Like an animal bite. Like maybe a spider, or a snake, But I would've noticed if a snake bit me, and we only just had our house sprayed for insects! So it couldn't be a spider either. But then... What was it?

I didn't remember seeing them yesterday night when I was brushing my teeth. So then, IT must've bitten me while I was sleeping. I rubbed my finger back and forth along the surface of my skin. The marks felt like little bumps, like a hill on a flat landscape. Maybe they were blisters. I didn't know anything. All I knew was that the marks hurt BAD! Argh! I slapped my hand over my neck, covering the marks completely. But the feeling of my skin against the marks only seemed to increase the pain. Argh! What was I supposed to do? I began frantically scurrying around the bathroom, looking for a band aid. I didn't know if it would help, but I didn't have much of an option here! I sighed with relief as I spied a small brown bandaid lying under the basin.

My fingers fumbled between the materials of the bandaid as I carefully slipped it onto my neck and over the two red marks. The pain stopped almost instantly. I sighed with relief. I had some time to think and discuss with my thoughts about what the two marks were. And how they got there. Maybe it was a mosquito bite. I knew that they usually came in the middle of the night. But mosquito bites are itchy. These marks weren't itchy. They were just sore and painful.

My throat suddenly went dry. Not because I was scared, but more because I was thirsty. VERY thirsty. I reached out my hand and grabbed the glass of water that was next to the sink and swallowed the contents in one gulp. It didn't help. I was still really thirsty. In fact, the water had only made it worse. I was still desperately thirsty. But not for water... I didn't know what I was thirsty for. Some sort of liquid. But what liquid? I was just going to have to ignore it for now. I was going to be late for school! I stepped outside the bathroom and began walking towards the main entrance. I was about to pick up my school bag when I felt a short sharp pain in two of my front teeth. I slapped my hand over my mouth. Ow! Ow! Ow! My teeth were hurting bad!

I felt like someone was pulling them out! Like someone was digging their invisible fingers deep into my gums and ripping out my teeth! Only, they weren't coming out. It was as if my teeth were stretching. This was agony. Complete and utter agony! What was happening to me? Why does this have to happen to me?

I ran back into the bathroom to look at my teeth. My heart skipped a beat. There in the place of where two, normal human teeth should be, were two, bloodthirsty fangs sticking out of my gums!

This was crazy! I must be dreaming! This must be some crazy stupid dream! There was no way this could be reality! I pinched the skin on my arm hard. Argh! It hurt that was one thing! But I didn't wake up. No. This was a dream I knew it was! I pinched myself again. Still nothing. I pinched myself over and over again until there was a red blister mark on my arm. I guess I'm going to have to accept it. I'm a Vampire.

That explains the marks. That explains my unusual thirst. A thirst for blood. And it also explains the fangs! How was I going to tell my dad about this? He'd never believe me! He'd think I'd gone mad! And what am I going to do about my thirst for blood? This was bad. I rested my head in my hands. This was going to be a crazy day. I ran back into the main entrance and picked up my bag, hiding my fangs inside my mouth and pulling my long brown hair over the band aid, covering the two red marks. I couldn't do anything about the blood thirst though. I was just going to have to deal with it.

There was no way I was going to be feasting off peoples necks and draining their blood drop by drop. I shuddered at the thought as I stepped outside. And as soon as I did, I realised how stupid I was. Almost immediately my skin turned a bright red and began to blister. Ow! Ow! Ow! My skin was hurting bad! I slapped my hand over my head. I am so stupid! I'm a vampire! Vampires can't go out in the daylight; the sun burns their skin! I raced back inside, my whole body in complete agony. I felt the tears beginning to form in my eyes. I couldn't live like this! This isn't the sort of thing a twelve year old girl should be experiencing. This is way beyond some crazy nightmare!

I raced into my room, collapsing onto my bed in a sea of tears. As I calmed down, I realised that my sobbing wasn't the only noise in the room. I could hear a squeaking noise. Not like a mouse or rat squeak. I didn't know what sort of animal it was. It seemed to be coming from behind the curtain. It sounded like the THING was dying! I had to see what it was. But what about the sunlight? I gulped. I was going to have to risk it. I ripped open the curtain hissing as the sunlight shone upon my skin. Agony! Pain and agony flooded my skin like a shower with only the hot water turned on. I squinted in the sunlight to see what IT was. There, lying on the floor against the window sill, looking at me with its small beady eyes was a small, furry bat.

I screamed. That must've been the bat that bit me! I threw the curtains back over the window and scrunched up into a ball on the carpet, my skin still burning and blistered. Something was strange about that bat. It didn't look normal. Its skin looked red and blistered like mine. But bat's skin doesn't blister in the sun, they just prefer darkness. I slowly approached the window, examining it carefully. Could it be another vampire? I had to rescue it. *In and out* I thought. *I will put my hands in through the curtain to retrieve the bat and then pull them straight out!* But what if it wasn't another vampire.

What if it was just a normal bat, carrying some sort of rabid disease! I was beginning to have second thoughts. But I didn't have a choice. I shoved my hands into the curtain and pulled out the blistered animal. The bat seemed to gasp with relief on realising that it was no longer exposed to the sun. The bat looked at me and smiled. I blinked. This was definitely not a normal bat. The bat began to grow and recharge its shape in my hands. It grew and grew until I could no longer hold it. I dropped the bat onto the carpet. Only it was no longer a bat. But a young woman, smiling at me with fangs identical to mine.

"I knew you were ready." She said to me with a broad smile. I blinked. I could tell that this was only the beginning.

Year 7-8 First Runner-Up: William Walsh [Xavier High School]**Title:** *Change in Syrian Refugees*

My name is Бюдет (Will). I am 16 and living in Syria. I needed to flee my country in fear of persecution. I needed a new place to live so I decided to go to Europe.

I needed to choose whether or not to go to Europe via Turkey and continue my journey by land in good living conditions or go through Egypt and continue my journey by boat and suffer the harsh living conditions. I decided on going through Turkey and continuing my journey by land because I had the luxury of better living conditions than I would have had in Egypt.

Turkey was a dusty country. The smell of the food was mouth watering and the taste was indescribable. It was that delicious! The city streets were busy and the shops were filled with angry customers wanting refunds on their yogurt and their quote unquote “stupid, broken toasters.” I could see all the people on bikes riding by and others carrying food on their heads! I couldn’t sleep most nights. I thought that this was just my brain releasing dopamine so I don’t die due to the rubble I’m crushed under. Yet when I do fall asleep I wake up, still in Turkey safe and sound. I think about my family and friends sometimes. Are they doing okay? Are they still safe? Are they dead!? I keep thinking that they are but I keep reassuring myself that they made it to Europe and that I would meet them there.

Whilst traveling through Turkey I met a man named Ama. Ama was a smuggler who had smuggled many people to Europe and other countries. He said he could also smuggle me for a price. I had a decision to make, I could pay him the money to smuggle me to Europe instead of walking, or I could refuse his offer because he could be a fraudster lying to me to get easy cash. I decided then and there that I would refuse that no good fraudster. As I walked away to get ready for my journey he shouted at me “Leave I was going to abandon you anyway!”

I made my way through Turkey, the journey was very long. As I approached the shore I could smell the salty air scratch at my lungs and could hear the sound of waves crashing against the rocks. I came to another choice between whether or not to get on a boat and risk myself drowning from the boat capsizing, or by continuing my journey via the land hoping I won’t get captured or lost. I looked at the old wooden boat, it looked like it had suffered damage and it would surely capsize if a wave came by. I had made up my decision and decided to go by land, I wouldn’t trust that rickety boat with my life.

I was coming to the end of my journey. I could feel the hard gravel seeping through the bottom of my shoes painfully poking me with spears. I could smell the tall pine trees as I passed by them standing tall and proud. I had the feeling I would be in Europe soon starting a new life in a brand new place. Meeting back with my family and making new friends no matter what. As I was walking I came across a mother and daughter who fell off their boat and had started to drown. I had to be quick with this decision. I could save the mother and daughter like the absolute hero that I was, or walk away like a bully and act like it’s not my business and let them drown. I knew I had to save them because they were suffering what most people don’t suffer. I jumped in and scooped them up in my arms. I carried them to shore like the absolute hero that I was. Even though I had saved them We were caught and put in a refugee camp somewhere in a different part of the country. I had escaped my own country but at the cost of being put in a refugee camp. It was boring there and nothing really happened. It barely rained and food was sometimes limited to the scraps that the dogs eat. Sometimes new people would come in, they couldn’t speak our language and they had no respect for us. I had hoped that I would make it to Europe and find my family but all I could find was a letter from my family saying they missed me and wished I was in Europe with them. I couldn't write letters to them because the guards took them and threw them in the bin without a care in the world. Sometimes they would hurt me and other people in the refugee camp if we did the wrong thing. I had heard that some people escaped and others tried and ended up on the wrong side of the bars. I wish I was in Europe. It will get better as the years go by...right?

Year 7-8 Second Runner-Up: Caitlin Parker [Xavier High School]

Title: *Why do things have to change?*

Someone screamed, their lungs bursting out high-pitched wails as long, missile-like bombs crashed against the buildings and roads. Debris was flung through my window, a large chunk of wall smashing through the glass. Electrical wires thrashed through the air, distressed. One wire flung itself around more violently, like a hose with nothing holding it. I huddled further under my blanket, my knuckles aching as I clutched my soft toy rabbit tightly. Tears fell from my eyes and dripped into its soft blue fur, its fluff growing stiff as my tears stuck it into clumps. The wires noticed me. As the wall threw its weight against the floor, a single wire lunged at me, digging its metal teeth deep into my skin. I felt the energy run through me, the tremor of shock running through my veins. My vision swirled, reality blending into pinks and purples. Trickle of water meandered down my cheeks, my eyelids collapsing under the weight of the burning pain. My vision darkened - the greatest sign of danger.

My eyes flickered open. In a daze, I glanced around. Before me was a meadow, pink and blue star-shaped flowers sprouting from the grass. A large number of people appeared out of thin air, zipping from place to place. Within a second, tall skyscrapers had exiled the beautiful meadows. There was this one man, standing completely still the whole time. His jet-black clothes gave me an odd feeling. With a jolt, I recognised his sly grin and shadowed face. It was Assad. A tremor of shock sprinted down my spine. Assad flicked his fingers, as though swatting away a fly. The familiar, long, missile-like bombs showered upon the defenceless city. Civilians streamed out of buildings and raced to mount boats, trucks and planes. I was a ghost, the colour in my arms fading to a pale white. My arms were so bright that I looked like a piece of paper. Invisible smoke swallowed my lungs, making me cough harshly. My throat burned as I longed for some sweet honey, knowing from experience that it would soothe my throat.

My eyes leapt apart, revealing faded flames through a thick cloud of smoke. I stood up as quick as a jack in the box, unhesitantly racing out of my bedroom with my shirt pressed against my nose and lips. I felt like I was on fire, my feet hopping along like I was running on hot coal. I fell out onto the street, my knees and elbows scraping across the footpath. I realised something. I have to escape, I can't live like this anymore. I may be twelve years old and I may be alone... but nothing will stop me from reaching safety. My mother's last words echoed in my head, "I'm so sorry... but you must escape." she had coughed harshly, rasping out more words against the blackened fog. "Live for us." A tear rolled down my crimson cheeks as I remembered her lifeless body. I'll make you proud, I thought to myself, pushing myself off the ground and racing to the distance, the sun falling from the sky in front of my meagre eyes. As my bare feet thumped rhythmically against the icy concrete, I remembered the first bomb that had fallen on my city.

I had glanced around at the faces, my eyes wide as I blew out my candles, wax raining down upon my cake. "Happy birthday!" my mother had cried happily, her face contorted into a proud smile. "Thanks, Mama!" is what I had wanted to say, but instead everyone had giggled as I actually babbled "Tanks, Murmur!" Suddenly, a strong tremor had run through my body, a deep rumbling sound had filled the air. Tears had fallen down my smooth cheeks, I had been too young to understand if I was safe or not. I remembered trembling in my mother's arms as my father had peered out of the window. He had gasped, his eyes were wide with shock as he faced us. "We're being bombed!" he wailed. He had winced, making a small sound as he gazed at my shocked face.

I wiped away small tears. The memory still scored scars across my heart. I sniffed. My body trembled, my legs buckling under me and planting my face in the dirt. I faced the quickly darkening sky above me, rolling onto my back. *Why did things have to change?*

YEAR 9-10 CATEGORY

Year 9-10 Winner: Amelia Spinks [Albury High School]

Title: *Starling's Flight*

Otto Starling stepped up onto the balustrade and the crowd watched, unmoving. They knew this was futile. He pulled down on the machine on his back and two giant paper wings spread out from his sides. He paused and swept his gaze across his audience. Commoners clothed in collars, newsboy caps and dirty leather boots stared back. He took a step into the sky, and it let him go like a trust fall with an enemy. It pushed him around, off course and into the side of another building. His whole body burned with the friction as he slid to the ground. The wings were supposed to flap like a real bird, but something had jammed them... again.

Otto composed himself. He looked at the ground purposefully and made his way through the dispersing crowd. He had just entered his house when there was a loud knock at the door. Otto sighed, but he opened the door anyway.

He was greeted by a smiling dark skinned face, topped with messy chocolate hair. The boy was wearing a pine-coloured cloak with goggles nestled in his ruffled bird's nest. Underneath the cloak, which was fastened by a string near the neck, Otto could see bandages wrapped tightly around his torso, and a gold pendant on a necklace. The boy raised his hand to his head in a greeting and spoke.

"Ahoy! Otto, right? I'm –"

"It's Mr Starling, please. Listen, I've just fallen off a balcony - I don't have time for this. If you're here to... you know... then forget about it."

"Yes, I saw you on the balcony... but did you know about the upcoming showcase?" His eyes sparkled with excitement at the anticipation of Otto's reaction. But soon the sparkle died.

"I don't think any showcase can help me, boy." He glanced defeatedly at the ground.

"Oh, well... Name's Skip. And I..." But Skip didn't get the chance to finish, because the door was shut in his face. Otto took his hand off the handle and paced to his outdoor workshop. He passed through the garden, briefly glancing at the roses before reaching the shed. He stopped at the door. A loud crash, the rustling of leaves, then someone yelping from behind him.

"Otto," It was him again. Skip picked a thorn out of his arm and threw it away.

"Mr Starling. For heaven's sake!" He corrected the boy.

"Please listen to me. I know how we can win this showcase. If we did, we could..."

Otto lurched forward. "There is no 'we'! There never was and never will be even the slightest form of what you call 'we'!"

Skip gave him a look. He then smiled and began to chuckle, which made Otto question himself. What did this boy know that he didn't?

Then in one swift motion, giant graceful wings rose up by Skip's side, shades of mahogany brown and beige, like an owl. The leaves and rose petals flew in the air, taking a breath in and releasing with the wind he created. Otto stepped back, almost falling to the ground in his stupor.

"How..." he gazed up at the young boy, doubting his very existence. "You figured it out?" He said almost inaudibly. Skip looked back from the new height he had found. He grinned knowingly and adjusted the goggles on his head.

"Well, I said I could help you."

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Days later, the showcase had begun. As Otto and Skip entered the building, the flood of laughs and snide comments came like usual.

“Why don’t you fly outta here, Starling?”

“Why can’t you make it five feet off the ground? Isn’t the starling a bird?”

They walked straight on past, and up to their podium where they would show their invention.

One of the judges silenced everyone.

“Next we have Otto Starling and the Amazing Flying Machine!” He said proudly. Obviously he was new in town. “Afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,” Otto said cautiously, appearing at the podium. “For many years I have been trying to invent a machine that will take humanity into the clouds. Now, with my final test, everything will change. You shall see this was not all for nothing.”

He beckoned Skip onto the stage and the crowd murmured. Skip came running out with his wings tucked underneath his cloak, invisible to someone who wasn’t looking. “My assistant will demonstrate.” He gave a nod to Skip.

Skip poised himself, paused for dramatic effect, then took off, his wings pushing through the air. It was like he was swimming through mud, taking all of his strength to lift off the ground. When he reached a few metres from the ceiling, he lurched forward into a glide. His sleek feathers ruffled with his speed, stretching out to their full wingspan. He spread his arms by his side and enjoyed the wind slinking past his face.

The audience had been winded with shock. They watched Skip circle the rafters of the tall open building with wide disbelieving eyes. One upper-class lady had fainted and was lying sprawled on the floor.

But as he was preparing to land, one of his wings hit a rafter on the ceiling and it threw him off course. He fell haphazardly to the ground and landed in a heap.

When he struggled to get back up, his cloak untied itself. He rose with his back to the crowd, wings sticking out of his jacket, and they all gasped at the boy.

“That’s no machine!” Someone called out. “Boy’s a freak!”

They exploded into a rage of insults. Otto and his winged colleague hurried out of the building, Skip covering his face in embarrassment, and Otto with an arm surprisingly around his shoulders. The people’s words thundered down like hail, pelting at the pair relentlessly.

“I’ll bet Dr. Squire’ll pay handsomely to have a look at you!” Someone yelled, and it caused a new outbreak. They grew louder, now trying to grab Skip by the arms and wings.

Otto stepped in front of Skip and paused, letting this situation take a moment to register in his head. His heart was pumping blood at full speed and his mind was rushing over thoughts like a galloping horse. Thinking fast he pulled his companion away from the groping mass of greed.

“Come on,” he said, though it was a whisper over the noise. Skip followed the inventor, running, stumbling. They entered the backstreets dodging litter and discarded crates as they ran. When they came to his backyard they slowed. They’re real?!” Otto exclaimed to the boy, his eyes lighting up.

“Mr Starling,”

“Please, call me Otto,”

“I want to thank you. No one I’ve met in my life has ever liked me, let alone care enough to try and save me, except you.” Skip smiled, “Now you know my secret, I guess I should explain myself. My mother gave me this necklace,” he pulled the pendant from his neck, “and it made these wings grow from my back. She said if I kept it on long enough, they’d stay there forever.”

Otto’s eyes widened as he stared at the gold and emerald pendant swinging from Skip’s hand. This piece of jewellery... gave him wings? How could a simple decoration... change a person?

“When I was little I wore it everywhere, and it made my wings permanent. I should have realised how much it would completely change my life, but...” He held out the necklace in front of Otto.

“You... you want me to take it?” He stuttered, taken aback at this sudden offer. Skip paused for a second before replying, and glanced at the ground. A look of disappointment flashed across his face, but it was quickly replaced by sympathy – his smile softened as he gazed up at the inventor.

“No one else wants to fly as much as you do. And like I said, I owe you one.”

Otto Starling took the pendant and ran his fingers over the owl engraved into its surface. It was cold and metallic, a rust-coloured tint beginning to erode the intricate carving. But then the owl disappeared in the blink of an eye, and was replaced by a smaller, crow-like bird.

The Starling.

He tied it round his neck and waited, the tension in his back building slowly, as if somehow his subconscious had anticipated this hours before. He felt a burning sensation and looked over his shoulder, almost dying of fright.

There were two magnificent black wings with dappled red folded behind him, waiting for the rush of the wind in their feathers. His eyes widened and his heart stopped for a moment. His mind seemed to float up and away into the sky, and he rose on his feet, feeling lighter with every breath.

He slowly grinned and excitement bubbled up inside him like boiling water – he stretched his wings out to their full wingspan and knelt down on the cobblestones as if he was preparing for a race. He looked to his side where Skip had positioned himself in a similar stance, and he shot off into the sky, the roses taking a beating and the shed creaking in the wind.

He worked his way up to the clouds, sending cold shivers down his spine the further he went. Then he just stopped. He let himself fall through the sea of clouds, and told himself this would never happen again. He would never fall, and never fail, but fly instead. He steadied himself in the fading pink sky, and his friend came to join him. Otto thought about how only a few days ago he would have refused anyone wanting to help him, but it was clear to the inventor now that focusing on changing himself was more worthwhile than changing the world.



Skip Ready to Take Off (Original Drawing)

**Year 9-10 First Runner-Up:** Maddi Cook [Catholic College Wodonga]

**Title:** *The Devil's Grip*

Powerful gusts of howling wind slammed a door shut somewhere behind Gordon Kerr. He did not glance up as he was preoccupied with hauling his art piece onto the rickety black trailer. This was a difficult task for any old man, particularly one with only one hand.

The piece in question was around two metres tall and compiled of mixed driftwood and metal haphazardly sculpted into an elegant black horse.

The man made one final heave, fuelled by determination and hatred. The artwork dropping onto the trailer with a heavy, metallic *THUNK!*

Gordon let out a half-wheeze half-sigh as he turned to sit on the edge of the trailer. He took out a cigar and lighter and scrapping his thumb roughly against the lighter he took a long draw from the cigar.

The cigar was fastened between two curved metal rods that protruded from under his sleeve. A home-made replacement for the hand that he had lost so many years ago.

The moment came back to him without warning... playing before his eyes as he gazed absently at the marshes of the highlands...

"Gordon? Mate? Do you think the stick's too weak for the fort?"

"Gordon? Bud? Don't tell me that you're off with the faeries again, ya ninny!"

His mind snapped abruptly away from admiring the beauty of the day and turned to his friend.

"Sorry, Kenneth," he apologised sincerely. "What was it that you were saying?"

Kenneth rolled his eyes and flashed him a toothy grin. "I was askin' if you thought that this stick—" he waved the two-pronged piece of bracken in his hand "—was strong enough for the fort that we're gonna build."

"I don't think strength will be a problem, but the length might be..." Gordon considered. "You should have gotten a longer one. Like mine."

Kenneth scoffed. "It's far too thin! It'll snap the second we try to drive it into the mud!"

"So? We won't even be able to get into the fort with a stick as small as that one holding it up!"

"My stick is the superior stick!" Kenneth waved the stick above his head.

"Whatever ya say, Kenny."

The Swiss army knife that Gordon's Pa had insisted he take weighed heavy against his leg. He had questioned the necessity, but Pa shoved it into his pocket hissing "Eight children have gon' missin'! Eight! You cannae go out on yer own un-armed!"

Once again he was broken from his thoughts when Kenneth flicked some mud at him with his foot and scampered away.

"Hey! Get back here you wee scunner!"

His friend grinned back at him and shouted: "That's what you get when your away with the fae!"

Gordon growled half-heartedly.

"I said get back here, you Nyaff!"



He waited for Kenny to bark a tinny laugh and challenge Gordon to make him, but nothing came. Instead, boy was turned away from him staring at something in the distance.

Gordon's breath caught in his throat as he saw it. A beautiful white horse grazing elegantly on a bush that had sprouted out amongst the marsh. The horse's long white mane draped over its side like a shining curtain made of stringed diamonds.

It reared its head to face them and let out a loud whiny.

Kenneth and Gordon shared a look before throwing their sticks into the mud and racing towards the magnificent creature.

The two oohed and aahed in awe over the beast as they stroked it softly. Gordon gazed into the eyes that peeked out from under the stead's luscious eyelashes.

"Whaddya think it's doing out here?" Kenny asked.

Gordon shrugged his shoulders. "It's probably wild. Ma and Pa say there are plenty of them hanging around the highlands."

Kenneth stopped beside the horse and turned to Gordon. "Help me get on it."

"Did ya miss the part where I said "wild"?"

"Aw come on, Gordy! Don't be a spoilsport!"

Before he could protest, Kenneth grabbed him away from the horse's head and yanked him over to where the boy had been standing before.

Gordon reluctantly put out his hands and boosted his friend upwards.

Kenneth hoisted himself into a comfortable position and gazed down at Gordon, who was shaking his head fondly.

Gordon watched a smug grin creep onto the boy's face.

"What's a matter, Gordy? Jealous?" He trumpeted. "I get to ride this wonderful creature while you have ta mope down there with yer muddy hands!"

Gordon chuckled. "You wouldn't be up there if it weren't for my muddy hands!"

"And I thank them for their service."

Kenneth brandished an imaginary sword. "I am King Arthur. Saviour of England!"

The shout must have alarmed the horse because it shifted suddenly, almost sending Kenneth plummeting into the mud.

Gordon quickly stuck out his left hand and began rubbing the horse softly.

"Whoa!" He exclaimed. He looked up at Kenneth whose amber eyes were wide. "I think it's time you get down from there."

Kenneth nodded his head in submission. His arms twitched, but he made no attempt to get down from his mount.

Gordon frowned up at him. Hand still running over the horse's shoulder.

"Come on, Kenny."

"I'm trying!"

Gordon's hand suddenly felt as though it had been dipped in mud. He twisted to look seeing his fingers slowly being pulled into a black patch of a tar-like substance that had appeared on the horse.

He tried to pull his hand out, but it was trapped, slowly sinking.

He looked up at Kenneth. His hands and legs were sinking into the black goop.

Gordon turned to look at the horse, only to see its once amber eyes turn white and cold and its face melt into a corpse-like appearance. Its two back legs had morphed into a long tail that should have belonged to a monstrous fish.

Its nose disappeared and its teeth could now be seen jutting out from its mouth. It raised its head and let out a thundering, croaky neigh.

His gaze hardened and he pulled out the pocket-knife. He hesitated for a moment and then jabbed it into his left wrist.

He let out an ear-piercing scream that prompted both Kenneth and the horse—no—*Kelpie* to look at him. The creature started towards the lake, dragging the boys with it.

Gordon looked away, tears streaming down his face and mud splattering his clothes as the knife worked its way around the bone.

“Stop! Stop! You’ll die!” Screamed Kenneth over and over again. “*Please, no!* You’ll die of blood loss! No, Gordy!”

“But I might be able to pull you off, Kenny!” He screeched back at his wailing friend.

The Kelpie had picked up speed and Gordon screamed as cold water splashed against him.

Gordon’s legs kicked at the water in an attempt to free himself from the last piece of flesh that was keeping him from pulling away.

His mind clouded, his eyes glassy as he felt himself rip free.

The Kelpie swung back to face him then angled its head towards the deep of the lake and disappeared. Through his hazy mind, he could see Kenneth smiling weakly up at him.

Gordon’s eyes snapped open and his heart began pummeling. He kicked towards his slowly disappearing friend and screamed into the water.

Kenneth shook his head slightly and closed his eyes.

Gordon tucked his bleeding arm into his drenched shirt and began screaming. His throat raw, his eyes stung with tears, and his heart wailed for his friend.

“KENNY! NO! PLEASE, NO, KENNY—*Why, why, WHY, WHY!* — COME BACK, KENNY!

He knelt there screaming. His head touching the ground, his tears soaking into the mud... and that was how they found him.

He remembered the following events as a blur. The police officer handing him a sketch pad whilst he lay in the hospital bed, asking that he “draw Kenneth McKay’s killer...”

He remembered sketching out the horrid face of the Kelpie and receiving disappointed glances from the two detectives. He remembered hearing the murmurs of “crazy... mental... childish...” when the nurses thought that he was asleep.

He remembered returning to that bush on a rainy day after being released from the hospital, his left arm slung up, his right holding the two sticks from that day. He threw them into the ground and walked away to gather driftwood from the lake’s edge. Glaring into the rippling water as he did so on the off chance one of those creatures would see him.

He had linked the sticks together and it slowly began forming. In an hour or two, it was done, and he stood there staring, glaring at it.

A sculpture of a horse rearing out of the mud...

No...

A *Kelpie* rearing out of the mud...

That was how he lost his hand... and Kenneth.

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**Year 9-10 Second Runner-Up:** Jessica Wicks [Trinity Anglican College]

**Title:** *A Different Perspective*

As I awaken from my sleep, I notice that something doesn't feel right. The room feels different. Cold. I try to stretch, but my back is stiff and sore. I realise the surface I was sleeping on is hard. Nothing like my own, soft bed, but hard like concrete. I slowly open my eyes, and as I do, I realise a very shocking fact.

I am not in my house.

I don't recognise this room. Everything is old, rotted and dark. The walls are a cold, gloomy grey, unlike the soft blue painted walls in my room. Instead of the soft, fluffy carpet, there is cold concrete. The door is slightly rotted, with a steel frame around it, like an old castle door. But this is not a castle.

There is no colour, no windows, no comfort, and no life.

But there is one thing.

Fear.

My life has always been the same. Same school, same house, same loose hairstyle, same friends. No change, apart from the small necessities. My life has been this way since I started school twelve years ago. I can remember almost every day since that time, particularly what happened over the last year, except... I have no recollection of the last three days. When I try to think back, it's like it's been locked behind a misty, brick wall.

Emotion begins to overwhelm me. I can feel the anxiety slowly creeping in, twisting my stomach and clouding my judgement. But I need to stay sane. There must be some way to escape... right? Or maybe this is just a dream. I just need to wait until I wake up, and it will all be over. Well, I could pinch myself. It's the classic test to see if you're dreaming. Ouch! I definitely felt that. I feel the panic now. I sit down in the cold corner and try to think but am blocked by a cloud of anxiety. If I am not dreaming, then...

"Where am I?"

I can't tell exactly how long it's been, but it seems to have been about four hours of worrying. Where am I, and how do I escape? I need to think of ideas to escape. I glance down at my wrists, and fiddle with my gold bracelet, with its small green clover pendant. It was a gift from my mother for my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. She said to me "Alison, keep this with you, and whenever you are in trouble, it will show you a way out." Some charm. I've been here for about five hours and am no closer to figuring out how to escape. In defeat, I forget the fear and anxiety, undo the bracelet, and throw it onto the floor. It slowly hits the ground with a clink, that echoes in my ears.

As soon as it does, I hear a small, long creak from behind me. I lean back further against the wall, only to fall backwards as it gives way. Confused, I stand up and look around. Behind me is the room I was stuck in for the last five hours, but more importantly, in front of me is a hallway, dimly lit by candles. There are no doors except for the one behind me, and one at the other end of the hallway. With nothing to lose, I pick up my bracelet, drop it in my jacket pocket, and quietly begin to walk down the hallway.

As I walk, the wooden floor groans with each step that I take. Every few steps, I knock on the wall to see if there is something hidden behind it. There is definitely something behind the walls, but no way for me to access it. I am now nearing the door at the end of the hallway. In most stories, this is where the character's heart races from emotions like fear, anxiety, and anticipation, but not me. I don't have much more to lose, and I can only go forward.

I reach out and twist the doorknob open, to find a kitchen, with a window. I hurry over to it and find a folded note on the windowsill. With steady fingers, I unfold the note, which reads "Look how much you have changed". Confused, I look out the window, and there I see my life so far played out before me. As I watch, I realise that my life looks boring. Everything is pretty much the same, I am just getting older. I hold the note up again, but this time, something falls out. A small, black, elastic hairband. I bend down to pick it up and drop it into my pocket. I might need it later. After spending about ten minutes looking for more clues, I decide to see if anything has changed back in the room where I started.

Back in the room, I find a small change. Nothing major, but still, a change. The previous old, rotting wood ceiling has been replaced with a pearl white plaster ceiling, much like the one in my own room. I suddenly spot another note on the ceiling corner, above the slab of stone that I awoke on. I step up on the slab to reach the note, but my loose hair gets in the way. I realise that I need to use the band to tie my hair back. I needed to accept change. I pull the band out of my pocket, grasp my hair, and wrap the band around it twice.

As soon as my hand leaves the elastic, I remember some more of the memory I forgot. "Allie, can you come down to the table please? We need to talk about important business" calls my Dad. I remember walking to the dining room, with both of my parents sitting at the table, looking serious. When I sat down my Mum started with "Ok, so Allie, I have just received a promotion for work..." After that, I can't remember anything.

I think that I am starting to understand why I'm here and what's going on. I have never changed in my life, and I must learn how. But just realising it won't be enough. To escape, knowing how these kinds of situations go, I'll need to do something. Or in this case, change some of my lifestyle, become less boring and more spontaneous. But keeping some things the same is still alright, isn't it? It's not like I have to change everything about myself.

Lost in thought, I don't notice the room is changing around me. As I realise, I see it isn't just a room that it was turning into. It was my bedroom, but with no door to exit, just the secret door. The silky sky-blue curtains, the big window, the soft comfortable bed, the polished wooden desk, the mirrored wardrobe... Hang on. I hurry over to it and slide open the panels, to find my clothes. An idea begins to form in my mind – a makeover. But I need sandpaper.

I run down the hallway, which now has doors. I open the first door, revealing a bathroom. The next doors reveal a bedroom, and then a lounge room. Behind the fourth door, I find all sorts of tools. Perfect! I

scramble towards the drawers, and rummage around them until I find the sandpaper; then run back towards the room to get started.

I trim and sandpaper my shorts and jeans and rip my shirts. I get changed into winter jeans, and a summer shirt, something I have never done before, and tie a hoodie around my waist. I tie my ponytail into a bun and put on a pair of sunglasses. I then begin to consider new things I could try, when the mental brick wall collapses, and I remember what happened.

“Allie, I know you don’t like change, and if I take this promotion, we will need to move away. And...” I didn’t let my mum finish that sentence. I ran up to my room, and somehow fell asleep and woke up here. Looking back now, I realised that I should be a more supportive daughter and be more open to possible changes that will come in my life.

I suddenly hear a final, loud creak. I turn around, and there, before me, is my bedroom door. After over twelve hours, freedom! I sprint out the door, to find myself back in our dining room. My parents are still sitting there, like no time has passed. “Mum, I’m sorry for running out. It was such a shock, but I think that if you want that promotion, you should take it.” I tell her. Mum and dad looked at each other surprised. “Allie, where did this attitude come from?” Mum asks me, shocked. “I’ve changed, Mum. And it’s time for a fresh start.”

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## YEAR 11-12 CATEGORY

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**Year 11-12 Winner:** Elise Lancaster [Catholic College Wodonga]

**Title:** *The Beach*

The wind is bitter this time of night, harrowing. It batters against me, it’s strength echoing reminiscent of false men and their false laughs. False men. That’s what I am regarded as now, a man of false of heart as I am of tongue. That’s what *you* regard me as now.

I was never false, especially not to you. Never to you.

The blood upon my hands is heavy, weighing me down. I hope this beach can wash it all away, the blood and the sins, the loyalty I had shown only you.

I see you now, approaching from the corner of my eye. You are mad and you are frenzied and your movement is disjointed. You scream my name.

*Christofer!*

Not now.

*Christofer!*

Her words were not for me. I swear it.

You never saw how she looked that night, eyes bright as she followed your form around the room. You didn’t see how she flowed and ebbed, how she traced your every move with her eyes.

When she touched my shoulder so gently and brushed the hair from my eyes, she was looking at no one but you. When she placed her lips near my flushed cheeks and whispered into my ear, her words were not for me. They were never for me.

The blushed placed upon my cheeks set up the conviction in your eyes, and I,  
I never loved her. Not her. Never her.

You are upon me now. I can see the blood covering your hands. Unlike the blood covering mine, yours is not heavy and it does not weigh you down. Yours is cracked and dry and *dark*, creeping up your arms and onto your face. Onto a face that does not belong to you. The face you wear is twisted and bitter, full of malice with a brow furrowed further than I have ever seen it. You have had poison to the brain and it makes your eyes foggy, your judgement cloudy, it hides your true intentions.

Maybe these are your true intentions.

Upon your hand is a knife and it glitters in the moonlight. The tip is tinged and there is blood, so much blood. The air is suffocating in it and it weighs down on my chest or maybe it is you, maybe it is both, for you have pushed me down and the knife lies flat between our chests. Our hearts beat as one, frenzied and leaping. It hammers out of my chest and I can feel yours do the same. They are next to each other but maybe they are one and maybe it is one heart, a rabbit's heart, beating into eternity. We are both rabbit-hearted.

Our lips are dangerously close and I can feel your breathing fanning across my cheeks. Your eyes are not yours and your growl is more beast than human.

*You have stolen her from me.*

Oh, but it is you that has stolen her from this world. I push you off me. I never take my eyes from yours.

*I have never stolen her. Not from you. Never from you.*

*Lies!*

*When have I ever?*

This silences you. I scramble to my feet and you still hold the knife in your hand but it is pointed to the ground, tip driven into the sand.

Your expression is conflicted. *You* are conflicted. Your breathing is still frenzied and I am scared because I am stuck in a Lion's den and I am Daniel and I have no way out.

*You took her away from me.*

*I have not.*

*They said you did. They said you took her and you slept with her and you wiped me from her mind.*

*She still loves you.*

*Not anymore.*

*What have you done?*

*What had to be done.*

No.

*It had to be done.  
Just as this has to be done.*

No.

*My reputation, Christofer.  
Your reputation. They are gone.*

*But we are not gone.*

*There is nothing left in me.*

*There is still love in you.*

*Don't talk to me about love.*

You lunge at me and I try to run and I can't. There is blood and it is weighing me down and now there is fresh blood on my side and running along your hands, tearing at the old. The dried flakes mix with the new and the blood on my hands turn solid but I am disappearing and you are gone and I can see that now. You pin me down and I struggle but the blood makes everything slippery. The knife is out of your hands and you are dangerously close and I say all I can say, what I should have said at the start before we had gotten into all of this mess.

*I still love you.*

You stop and I cannot take my eyes from yours. My heart is in my throat and your eyes are clearing and I say,

*He has deceived you. I never loved her. Not her. Never her. I loved you and she loved you and you loved her and it wasn't true. None of it was ever true.*

*What did she say to you that night?*

*That night? That night, she said how lucky she was to have you.*

*Lies!*

*She wanted no one but you. She took her love for you to her grave.*

You pull me up and I am in pain and I am standing and then I fall to my knees and you call my name and I know you feel regret because I can feel it in your voice and in the way your hands touch me. They are no longer full of malice but they are still dried with her blood and wet with mine and the promise of theirs.

You press the blade into my hands and I know what you want me to do but I cannot do it. You beg me and I see it in your eyes and you kneel next to me and you say your reputation is gone. What you have done cannot be forgiven and what you were yet to do cannot be ignored.

*Reputation? I have no reputation. Not anymore.*

*Don't make me do this...*

*Oh, but you have to.*

*I love you.*

*I know. That's why I ask no one but you.*

The knife lies at the bottom of the ocean, cleaned of the blood that covers our bodies. I want to get up and run. You are lying still, so still next to me. I am getting to my feet and I am running and there is red on me and on you and we are bleeding and but maybe we're not anymore. I am running but maybe I am dying and maybe I can't feel the difference. Maybe we are both already dead.

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**Year 11-12 First Runner-Up:** Paul Hicks [Catholic College Wodonga]

**Title:** *The Young Author's Event*

It happened on a beautiful autumn day in the year 2011, in the playground of my primary school. I was sitting on a bench eating my lunch while reading a book, and Jack my best friend was eating his lunch on the monkey bars like a monkey. Then out of nowhere Jack asked "Say, Emma. Have you ever made a story before?"

"Huh?"

"Have you ever made a story before? Like, you know. A Novel?"

"Um, no. I haven't, why?" I replied in an awkward tone. Jack then jumped down from the monkey bars, walked over and sat down next to me.

"Because I find it quite interesting to know what it's like to make your own story out of your very own imagination. I mean, you thought about that haven't you?"

"Not really." I replied "Anyway, why are you asking me this all of a sudden?"

Jack got up on his feet & turned in my direction. "Well, I heard that there was going to be an event happening in town next weekend." said Jack while pulling a smile.

"An event?" I queried.

"Yeah! It's a 'Librarian Event'. Who can write the best story in town!" said Jack like he was cheering. It was at this point that I wanted to burst into laughter at how ridiculous he made it sound. But I managed to hold it in, and I took a breath in and out and responded.

"Ok, so. Are adults participating in this event or is it just kids like us?"



“Yup, it’s just kids only who have to be around 7-12 years old to participate in this event.” said Jack “Say, why don’t you and I compete in it together!”

“What, why are you dragging me into this?!” I replied shocked. “I mean. Jack, I don’t know how to write a novel, nor do I know how to start a chapter!”

“Oh, come on, you’ll be fine. Besides, it doesn’t matter if our stories are good or bad, all that matters is just having a go.” said Jack. “Say, why don’t we make a bet.”

“Huh?”

“If I win, you’ll have to buy me that new Marvel comic at ‘*Bob’s Comics & Novels*’ store” said Jack. After hearing all that betting Jack made I drew a long big sigh, closed my book and got up on my feet and looked at Jack.

“Well, I suppose I could give it a try,” I said. “But this will be the one-time thing right!”

“Really!? You mean it!” said Jack in a surprised-happy expression.

“Yes, I’m sure.” I replied with a smile.

“Oh man! This is going to be the best event ever!” Jack screamed.

Later after school when the last bell rang. Jack and I started walking home together talking about what type of books we’ve been reading. Jack was into Action, Fantasy and Sci-Fi books, and I was into Comedy, Action and Fantasy books. He would sometimes bring up video games more than books that he would be looking forward to playing on the weekend, I mean. Boys will be boys after all!

“Hey. Emma, I’ve been thinking about two things lately...” Jack asked.

“Hmm? What could those two things be?”

“Well, Have you... Have you come up with a story yet?”

“No, not yet.” I said.

“Oh, Ok.”

“Have you come up with one yet, Jack?” I asked

“Uhh... No, I haven’t either.” said Jack while making an awkward laugh.

“Well, aren’t we even.” I laughed.

“Ha-ha..Yeah I guess so. Also, what’s your bet?”

“Huh?” I said. My bet, now that I’ve thought about Jack’s bet back at lunch I’ve never thought about what my bet would be. So, I simply responded with: “You’ll just have to wait until I win the event.”

“Whaat?! that’s not fair, I can’t just be the only one who shares *just* my bet with you.” Said Jack with puffed cheeks like he was being teased.

Later after arriving I went upstairs into my room getting ready to come up with a story to write and get over with. After spending 45 minutes of coming up with a story. None of them made sense, none of them had a good start or a good end.

I was beginning to lose hope, beginning to give up and I started to feel like this was all pointless. Why did I agree to do this, after thinking about this I decided to head to bed early, wanting to forget about everything that I heard and saw today. When I dozed off into a deep sleep slumber I started to dream something, it was like a story, with characters, with... Everything! It all made sense from start to finish, it was all just... Perfect! This was the story I'd been searching for.

It has already been a week since I wrote the story and handed it to the sign ups of the library event, I was sitting in the section of where the kids participated with Jack sitting next to me and the parents would be sitting in the back, after a bit of a long wait a man in a tuxedo suit came on stage and did his speech, after he was done he started announcing the names of the kids who came in first, second, and third place.

"In third place: Barry Moss! With his Action, Fantasy story '*Dragon Tears*'."

"In second place: Jack Fretz! With his Sci-Fi, Action story '*Runner-Way Drones*'."

Everyone started to clap including myself. "And now, the moment you've all been waiting for. The winner of the librarian event is... Emma Tilver! With her Action, Comedy and Fantasy story '*Reincarnation in another World*'."

After hearing my name, I gasped and felt the tears-of-happiness flowing out of my eyes. Everyone started cheering and clapping. even my friend Jack started doing the same. I got up, approached the stage & got my medal that says, 'Young Writer' and this was just the beginning of my Writing Career.

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**Year 11-12 Second Runner-Up: Elise Lancaster [Catholic College Wodonga]**

**Title: *Old Bones***

Life, like all moments, was lived in a common complacency for most people, stuffing the mouth of freedom with cheap cotton and party tricks, hoping that would fulfil it when all it did was smother it.

She knew they were the same. She could sense the complacency in those old bones; the hunger that had yet to cease. The need to live. The feel of being weakened by cheap tactics in the hopes the need for life was met.

The detective had left her 'to her business', as he put it, almost an hour ago. Now, only she was there with the dripping leaves and greyed bones. She had scouted the area, a small valley in the middle of the forest at the base of a hill where the body had been found. If you could even call it a body. The sky was spitting, a fine mist that annoyed more than anything, turning the ground slightly damp and the black leather of her boots shiny. She had kept mostly to herself, chewing the metal at the end of her pencil solemnly as she wandered through the bracken where the forest began. It was small, only about a hundred meters in size. *It's funny*, she thought then, *how a valley so popular turned up a body so old*. When she mentioned this to the detective, he laughed. The laugh was haunting, bitter.

"Carmen", he had said, "there are a lot of funny things about this. A popular picnic spot in summer turned graveyard in winter."

"There's only been one body." She pointed out, and he gave her another stark laugh before turning away.

"I have a feeling it won't be the last."

She crouched beside them now, thinking the same thing. It felt as though both she and the bones knew, they would not be the last. They would never be the last. Her gaze took in the pink carnations entwining the bones as they grew. Tied around the limbs, the flower stems looked as though they were pinning them down, looked as though they bloomed from their ribcage like pink blood. Gently, her fingers traced the stray flower growing around their left arm, looped several times like bandages. She suddenly pulled back. She could've sworn she felt it move. As if a faint pulse in the vein-like stems. She cursed herself. Of course it didn't move! A childish fear, she reasoned, for feeling as though she wasn't alone.

She reached into her pocket and grabbed the black box she was to record her thoughts on. The sooner she was finished here, the better. She didn't like the feeling of company in this barren place.

She lifted the recorder to her lips, her thumb turning it on in the swift motion in which she struck her lighter. She wasn't an avid smoker; more a way to think. She felt as though she should be, however, with the reprieve to think she was so accustomed to of late.

Though she knew it wasn't, she couldn't help but wonder if maybe these bones were him. Would he too, become one of the dead that she knew would find their way to this valley?

She wanted a cigarette now. She imagined herself later, on the edge of the plateau of the hill. Cigarette between her red-painted lips. As she breathed out, she'd watch the grey smoke entwine in the grey air and float away, pierced by the gentle mist. She'd imagine it waft to the old bones, a spark catching the flowers alight. Maybe then, at least, the bones would see life.

Maybe then her father would see what it was like to burn too.

*"Preliminary indicated a young adult, male." Not my father, She wanted to add, these bones are far too young, too full of life, to be that bitter.*

She paused briefly before continuing. She felt like she wasn't here for work. She was here to listen. "There is no obvious sign of fracture or previous broken bones, though it should be noted a small, round nick at the base of the third left rib." Her fingers brushed over the spot she spoke about, dipping at the indent. "It is likely this is the cause of death. My best thoughts are a gunshot wound, possibly a stab wound, but I cannot be sure." She paused.

*How did you get here, she wanted to ask, what is your story?* A chill ran up her spine as a small breeze came, and on it, a whisper;

*Come closer.*

It was echoing, frantic.

*We have a story to tell.*

She glanced around, scanning the valley. She cleared her throat. It prompted a silence. She shook her head, forcing her eyes back on the small chip in the rib. Her voice shook as she continued to record.

"I'll know more once back at the lab. Although I can conclude that however these bones were placed here, someone took great care to do so. The grass under the bones is still green, indented, plausible with the theory these bones were only placed here last night, the night before last at the latest." She placed the recorder next to her. Glancing to the horizon, out of this small reprieve of trees, the clouds were tinted grey. *Like cigarette smoke, she thought.*

Once again, her eyes were drawn to the bones so mysteriously placed in the middle of the field. Why this field specifically? And once again, she found her fingers tracing the flowers growing in its chest, thinking of her father. How had things gone so wrong, so quickly? They had never much gotten along. He was always like a bitter cloud following her. But now that he was so newly gone, she wondered if the cloud had ever been purely him. Maybe it was a mixture of both of them.

*Sadness, it's been a while since we tasted anything but melancholy.*

She jerked away, hand stalled on the ribs when suddenly the flowers grabbed at her, circling her wrist, pulling her in.

*Come here, child.* They seemed to purr. *We have a story to tell.*

She jerked away, panic ripping at her throat.

*Leave us be, then.* The whisper seemed to bark, a laugh stuck in a throat. *Or join us. Oh, you have such pretty sadness about you.*

She grabbed at the stems around her wrist, tearing at them with her other hand. They began to circle that one, too.

“Leave me alone!” She screamed, “let me go!” Finally, her wrist was free. She fell back, rubbing her wrist as she moved back further. A bitter laugh seemed to fill the air as her body filled with panic. Her heart was in her throat. A silence settled in.

She reached out and grabbed the recorder, hoping that would save her. Finally, she got to her knees and leant forward. With a shaking hand, she reached out and gingerly touched a flower petal. She held her breath.

Nothing.

Letting out her breath in a soft laugh, she lay her palm flat against the ribs, head bowed. She laughed again as relief flooded her.

“Tangled,” she reasoned, more for herself, “just tangled.”

She reached for her phone, and, hand still on the ribs, she dialled the detective.

As she walked towards her car, the bones being bagged behind her, she swore she heard the whispers echoing in her ears:

*And so I shall die the same way I lived, with melancholy etched on my bones and flowers blooming from the beating call of my heart.*

*Never again, shall I be filled with the taste of life.*

A week later another body was found, pink carnations entwining the bones.

