



# Fresh Ink



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## **Short Story Judge – Elspeth Cameron**

Elspeth Cameron is a biographer and profile journalist who specializes in Canadian cultural figures, such as: poets Irving Layton and Earle Birney, sculptors Frances Loring and Florence Wyle, ballerina Veronica Tennant, novelists Hugh MacLennan and Timothy Findley, singer Anne Murray, and many others. She has won or been shortlisted for numerous awards, some national, and some regional. She is retired from her long career as a university professor of English, mainly at the University of Toronto and most recently at Brock University.

## **Poetry Judge - Keith Inman**

Keith Inman's poetry has won a handful of awards and grants, and can be found in libraries across North America. His favourite lit class was in Ireland; best reading, an outdoor cafe in Spain; coolest invite, LA; most interesting editor, from Malta (NY based). Locally, Keith has judged contests for students and peers, and presently runs *The Banister*. His faith in writing comes from teachers who taught literature through art (He's spent a lot of time in galleries). Canlit compared his poetic style to Atwood, Boyden and Itani (issue #223). Home is Thorold, Ontario, where ships climb the continent. His volunteer hours run well over four hundred per year. He has published five books of poetry.

## Winning Entries for 2021

### Short Stories

Winning Short Story – Age Category 12 – 14  
Our Voice, by Naya Akande

Runner-Up – Age Category 12 – 14  
The Dragon Master, by Alex Hart

Winning Short Story – Age Category 15 – 18  
The Boy Witch by Samual Papenfuss

Runner-Up – Age Category 15 – 18  
Call it a Stripe, by Sofia Rodriguez

### Poems

Winning Poem – Age Category 12 – 14  
Seasons, by Ambar Foster

Runner-Up – Age Category 12 – 14  
Rainy Day, by Jonathan Vasilyev

Winning Poem – Age Category 15 – 18  
God is Greater, by Cole Reid

Runner-Up – Age Category 15 – 18  
Family Portrait, by Alexa Wijnands

## Our Voice

What? Man was killed by a police officer. When? Monday, November 23rd, 2012. Where? San Jose California, Wilbert Road. How? Police officer shot him in the chest. Who? My Dad! Why? Because he was BLACK!

It's been exactly one week since Daddy died. I know I should be sad that he's dead, and I am, but I'm glad he doesn't have to suffer with what the world gives him, anymore. I'm glad he doesn't have to re-experience what he did that day.

"Yo, Lyric! What's up?" Ty and his boys stop me in the hallway on the way to the gym.

"Ty! I haven't seen you in so long, when did you get back?" I walk over and hug him.

"I flew in three nights ago, and dang, girl, you look so different! What's it been? three years!" Ty hugs me back.

"Yeah, man, three years was too long. Momma wanted to buy a plane ticket for me to go see you, you know, I felt lonely after Daddy-

"Ay Lyric, how is your Daddy, anyway?"

Oh shoot, shoot, shoot! I can't tell Ty! "Oh Daddy? He's great. Awesome, actually."

Ty raises his left eyebrow and crosses his arms, "Nathen, Miles, Isaac. Please give Lyric and I a moment alone." The boys leave with a small nod and wave.

"What, Ty?"

"Lyric, ay, you don't think I don't know when you're lying? We've been best friends since when? Fifteen

years ago! You're seventeen, and now you decide to lie?"

"It's not like that Ty" I can feel my curly hair sticking to my sweaty forehead.

"So, look me in the eyes and tell me that you're not lying."

Ty and all of my classmates know that I'm terrible at lying, so now they all use it against me. "My dad is really okay." I didn't lie, Daddy's probably having a blast in Heaven.

"Yeah, yeah, okay, Lyric, whatever." Ty pulls up his basketball shorts and pats the top of his small, dreadlock ponytail. "But I know you're leaving something out."

It sucks when your best friend knows you that well. I pull up my backpack on my right shoulder, "How dare you criticize me."

Ty just cracks a smile and lightly punches me in the arm. "Criticize? Nah, that ain't coming from me." That makes us both laugh because, he always tries to take the blame off of himself.

It's now midnight and I stare at my phone, flipping through the latest Instagram posts when something catches my eye. It was posted four hours ago and had already reached 100,000 views. The title is written in big bold letters: Local Black Man Was Shot in The Chest by A White Police Officer. Without thinking about it, I scroll down to the video posted underneath. It's been taken from live CNN: "Today CNN has gotten more information on the fatal shooting of Mr. Aio Huston and the gunman, so we'll get Mrs. Analia, a witness to the whole situation, tell us more."

"Thank you, Erin Burnett. I'm happy to be here

today to share what I've witnessed. I was shopping at the Convenience store across from where it all happened, when I heard a police siren coming down Wilbert Rd. It was 7:42 pm when I finished shopping and left the store."

"Sorry, Analia, was there anyone else in the store or on that street?"

"So, when I was in the store there were five people, not including the two cashiers. But no one seemed to hear the sirens or gunshots."

Erin leaned closer to the camera, "And what about on the street?"

"No one was there. I only saw Mr. Aio standing on the sidewalk and then after two gunshots, he was lying dead on the ground."

Tears form in my eyes and my heart skips a beat when CNN changes cameras to show an up-close picture of my Daddy lying dead on the road. His black face was pale and showed no sign of life. His eyes were open, and his mouth was covered in dried blood. But what really catches my attention is his empty hands. His empty hands. His empty hands. His hands were EMPTY! No gun. No knife. No weapon. Nothing. So why in the cruel world was he shot? WHY, WHY, WHY!

I can't stand it anymore. My confusion has now turned to fury, those few tears are now rivers and oceans of tears. My cheeks are burning with anger and I throw my phone across my room with a mouth full of curses. My bed used to be where I found comfort, reading under the covers past my bedtime, but now I can't find comfort anywhere. "Ahhh! It's not fair!" My crying hurts but I can't stop.

Momma rushes in through my door, "Shh, Lyric, you'll wake up your baby brother." Then she notices

me and rushes over to my bed. She wraps me in a hug saying, "Shh, it's ok baby girl, I'm sorry, shh, it'll be ok." With snot running down my face, I hug her back and cry more. "What's wrong sweet pea?" Momma brushes my hair out of my face and kisses my forehead.

"It's not fair!" I sob.

"I know sweetie. I know." She lets me go and walks over to the phone, picking it up gently and resting it on my bed. I cry more and I hate it because I sound worse than Jaypal. "I'm sorry, Momma. For the cursing and waking up poor little Jaypal." I bury my face in my hands. "I'm sorry Daddy!"

Momma sighs and sits on my bed, "Lyric, sweet pea, you know this wasn't your fault."

Momma's eyes begin to shimmer with tears. I get up from my bed and look Momma in the eyes. "I know this isn't my fault but that don't mean I'm gonna sit around and watch as that officer gets away with this." I storm out of the room leaving Momma speechless and Jaypal in tears after a disturbed nap.

The next morning at Tifton High School, I pulled Ty away from his locker. Ty looks me in the eyes, "So, you just gonna pull me out of the hall and not even say anything like, "Hey, Ty. Can we talk?" Or "Bestie, I want to tell you something." Or"

I stop Ty from blabbing on, "My daddy's dead."

His face goes serious. I wait for an answer, but he just stares at me. "He was that man who was shot by that white officer," I say.

Ty walks over to a nearby hall bench and sits down, emotionless. I sit down beside him, "Do you believe me?"

He nods, "How? How did your daddy die?" I don't want to talk about it, but if I want his help he's going to have to know. "He was tired when he got back from work that night." I pause. "He said he was going to buy something at the convenience store. He wanted to get away from his racist boss."

"How do you know his boss was racist?" Ty rubs his soft brown hands together. "Because he told my daddy to go back to his own country. His boss said He couldn't be the head chef of the restaurant because his skin colour wouldn't look good on the newspaper or TV." I gulp down my tears and look down at my own black hands. "I can't imagine someone saying my skin colour was ugly." A tear rolls down my cheek. Oh, how I hate all this crying!

"That's because your skin colour isn't ugly. White skin colour ain't ugly too. Mexicans, Asians, Canadians, Russians, Africans, none of them is ugly. So, don't care a smidge about what people say about you. What do you believe?"

I hug him. "Thank you." He hugs me back.

"That's what friends are for." I laugh. "That was cheesy."

Later that evening, Ty and I go around to each class sharing our new idea. "4:30pm, at the park. Bring justice posters, bring peace signs, and most important, bring your voice." We announce.

The protesters meet up at the park, all of the school's here, white, black, teachers, and students, all here to speak for my daddy, and I'm thankful for each of them. We start our march down Wilbert road, Ty and I lead, our signs saying, "justice for Aio" and "He was killed because he was black." We walk for six hours yelling "Justice for Mr. Aio!" Ty holds my hand the entire time. Each street we pass more people join in yelling "Hear our shouts! Black lives matter

too!" Halfway through Ty walks over and wraps his arms around me in a big bear hug. "Lyric, you're doing something great today." Tears roll down my face. "You're giving your daddy justice. You're making his name known all over the world, Lyric."

I look out over the many faces, and for the first time in days, I smile. "It's our voice."

by Naya Akande

## The Dragon Master

I wake up to the sound of the villagers greeting each other. I see my dad cooking in the kitchen, but I cannot find my sister, Jenni, anywhere! I already lost my mother when I was young, I cannot lose my sister too. An old, wise villager tells me that Jenni has been kidnapped by the Dragon Master. She is guarded in a castle by a fire breathing dragon, with a pool of lava surrounding it, and I have a limited amount of time to save her.

I embark on my journey and leave my village. Shortly after, I encounter a winged dog. I know I cannot do this alone and I need help, so I take him on my journey. In a nearby swamp, I see a bright light coming from an old hut in the distance. The sun is starting to set, and I know that my chances of surviving are slim. I decide to enter the hut and find an old wizard that looks oddly familiar. I ask if he's seen me before, but he says no. He says that he knows about my sister being captured and threatened by the Dragon Master. The wizard shows me a magic ball that lets him see everything in the Forgotten Lands. He shows me my sister, then asks if he can come and help me. I must trust him.

I come across two paths leading in different directions. From above on my dog, I can see what is at the end of each path. I notice that the path on the left leads to the mushroom forest, home to the elves and the legendary Elf King. The path on the right leads to an Assassin Raider's camp. Although the wizard tells me that the path on the right is the safest, my mother told me to always stay away from Assassin Raiders, so I decide to run from the wizard. I am able to outrun him through the pathway to the mushroom forest. I continue on my journey.

I find the elves and they are under attack by the vicious Ogre King. My mother used to read stories

about them to me, but I never stopped for a second to think they were real. An injured elf walks past me and introduces himself as Jared, the royal protector of the Elf King. He asks me if I can stay and help defend their village from the Ogre King. I agree.

Finally, after many hours of the two sides fighting, I hear it calm down and peek over the window of one of the houses. The elves have won the battle and Jared introduces me to the Elf King. I explain my situation to him. The Elf King's son, Elwin, offers to help me on my journey. Elwin and I sleep in the village before we head off. We find a spot where we can camp for the night. He shows me his amazing bow and arrow skills. He says that I cannot defeat the Dragon Master without a weapon. He gives me a sword and a bow and arrow, so I train with him throughout the rest of the day.

In the morning Elwin leads me and my dog to a pit of lava. I remember the wise villager saying something about a pit of lava surrounding the castle grounds. I try to find some way around, but I find nothing. I cross the lava on my winged dog, but as soon as I reach the middle of the pit, giant magma monsters grab me! I jump on the back of one and start hitting them with my sword. I finally think I have the upper hand, but one of the magma monsters knocks my sword away. At the same time, one spits hot lava at my dog's wing. He is falling towards the lava fast! I leap off the magma monster and grab my dog, rolling onto the ledge as my sword falls into the lava. Elwin follows and lands beside me on the ledge. Elwin tells me that my mother was a famous warrior, and her sword is hidden in an underground dungeon inside the boundaries of the castle. The sword was forged in the pits of lava and enchanted by the Elf King's grandfather.

I enter the dungeon and find some goblins immediately inside a poorly lit hallway. They start calling me an intruder and raise their knives. I try to

talk with them and tell them why I have come here. As soon as they hear that I am the son of Hyra The Great, they lower their weapons. The leader comes towards me and tells me that if I want my mother's sword, I need to prove myself worthy. He holds my dog and Elwin back and tells me to follow him. Then he asks me to answer a simple riddle: I am a stick, I have two legs, and a pointy head. You may think I am made of wood, but I'm made of metal instead. Turn me over, what do you get? I trust my gut and tell the goblin that my answer is a sword. Everything fits. It has legs, it's made of metal, and it has a pointy head, but I wonder why it says turn it upside down. It doesn't make sense to me, but then I realize that the sword is in the ceiling. I pull it from its place and wield it in my hands. I never thought I would make it all this way, wielding the sword that my mother once did.

The castle is upon me. A dark misty wall of black standing still under the evening sunset. It is time. My heart is racing, and I don't know what to do. I see nothing but black rock and lava. I can hear the dragon from inside and it sounds massive. I notice some orcs that are coming my way. I can't be spotted, not now. Elwin says that he will fend them off while I sneak into the castle. I ride up on my dog and go through the open roof of the castle. The dragon is flying near the cage, and I need to be careful not to get spotted. I drop on a narrow ledge near the cage where they are guarding Jenni. Luckily, most of the guards aren't there and are distracted by Elwin. The Dragon Master doesn't see me yet. I tell Jenni that I will come back for her later and then stare at the massive dragon in the air.

I pull out my bow and arrow and head up the north tower. I start shooting at the dragon. The dragon heads right for the tower I'm on, but I jump out of the way as he crashes into it. I shoot him 5 more times, dodging his fire breath and leaping to different surfaces. He takes one final dive at me before I shoot him with an arrow to the eye and he crashes

into the side of the castle. The debris crashes over my sister's cage and the whole left side of the castle topples, killing unlucky orcs down below. Then out of nowhere the Dragon Master zaps me and I tumble into the lava pit below. Luckily, I land on a rock stopping me from going into the lava, but the fight is not over.

The Dragon Master leaps down and tells me that I have fallen for his trap. He is the wizard. He is the person at the village who told me to come here in the first place. He killed my mother, and now he wants to kill all her relatives. I jump onto a closer rock, and my sword collides with the forcefield he created. I dodge the Dragon Master's blasts until I fall back onto another rock. I waste no time in using my magic to throw boulders at him. Blasts shoot from the sky and we both give it everything we've got until we both fall back onto separate rocks. The Dragon Master gives one final blast. Desperately I fight to keep going and our blasts collide. I think of my family and all the people who helped me get here and then the light from the blasts stops. I open my eyes and see the Dragon Master on the ground with a hole in the middle of his chest. I have defeated the Dragon Master.

I return to the elves with Elwin and my dog. I tell the Elf King that I have defeated the Dragon Master and all the elves jump in joy. The Elf King himself walks up to me and tells me that I have saved the entire Forgotten Lands. The King rewards me with a statue in the village with my name on it. Garth, written in gold letters. My sister is safe, and I saved the whole realm! Peace is restored, for now.

by Alex Hart

## The Boy Witch

Varden:

I take the limp body of Prince Rupert into my basement. He stirs when I place him on a wooden chair. I take off the black hood that was around his head. His blond hair fluffs from the friction, making him look like a tanned, poofy, blond dog. He grudgingly opens his blue eyes and looks around.

"Oh crap you're awake. I mean," I clear my throat and regain my composure, "So nice of you to wake up."

"Where am I?" he asks in a daze.

"My basement, I am holding you for ransom."

"I'm supposed to stay in this dingy basement like some peasant prisoner? I am a Prince! I demand better housing." he demands

Wow, what a pompous brat, I think to myself.

"Well, it's the only guest bedroom I have, unless you want to sleep on the couch."

His face scrunches up in disgust, "A peasant couch? Absolutely not."

"I'm a witch." I say flatly

"That's worse."

"I think I liked you better unconscious,"

I pull out a bracelet from my satchel, and quickly put it on Prince Rupert's wrist.

"Don't touch me!" he exclaims

The bracelet glows green and then turns black.

"What-"

"You can go anywhere in the house, but that bracelet will prevent you from leaving."

I immediately bolt for the door, "Well, good night!"

Prince Rupert:

He just kidnaps me and expects me to sleep in a basement? How rude. I want to leave, but the bracelet he gave me was definitely hexed. So I'm stuck here until my parents pay the ransom. That's probably not going to happen. I sigh and try to get comfortable. I must've fallen asleep at some point because I awakened to the smell of pancakes.

I got out of bed and went up the stairs. I walk into what seems to be the living room, and I can see the witch in the kitchen flipping pancakes. I walk up to the glassless window that's part of the wall. He turns around to look at me while holding the pan. He has dark skin and short black curly hair. His deep purple robe and hat really brings out his hazel eyes. He's quite stunning.

"Good morning." He says as he adds the last of the pancakes to his small stack.

He seems to be in a better mood, "Your royal prisoner is hungry."

"Okay, just take whatever you want from the fridge. There should be oatmeal in the cupboard."

"Are you suggesting that I should get my own food?" I say, skeptical

"Um, yeah?" he sits down and starts pouring the syrup

"You are the worst kidnapper. You drag me here, you don't even torture me and I can go anywhere I want? Why even kidnap me at all?"

He stops pouring, "Wow, that's one way to start off the morning"

"Don't avoid the question."

"Look, just eat some breakfast, and then we'll talk."  
he says calmly

"No."

"Why not?"

I pause and look away embarrassed, "I don't know how to cook, or even get my own food."

He giggles, "Is that all?"

I glare at him.

He walks over to the kitchen and pulls out a bowl,  
"I can teach you how to make pancakes if you want."

I nod reluctantly.

It's a disaster. I can't find anything in this mess of a kitchen, and the stove is impossible to figure out. But he's surprisingly patient.

"No, that's the wrong kind of flour. I mean this," He picks the bag of white powder, "Please put down Maria, she's fragile."

I put down the potted rose, "You name your plants?  
That's so weird."

He glares at me, "I'm sorry, am I weirding you out, your Majesty." He bows sarcastically

He gets flour all over his clothes while he is bowing.  
I hold back a laugh, "Oh witch, you've got flour all over yourself, how improper."

"What?" he looks down, "Oh, ha ha. Also, you can call me Varden."

"Um sure."

"Can I call you Ru?"

"Rupert's fine."

"Whatever you say Ru."

He dusts off his clothes but it makes it worse because of the flour on his hands. I start laughing, he tries to glare at me but he's smiling.

I didn't know that cooking could be this fun.

Varden:

Months have gone by and it's obvious that the ransom won't be paid. Rupert seems to like cooking and doing things himself. I guess being in the palace was more of a prison than here.

"Hey Varden, did we run out of sugar?" he asks as he rummages through the cabinets

I stop stirring my potion and think. The potion starts to fizz in a bad way and I keep stirring.

"I'm a bit busy right now. Did you ask Callie?"

"Who?"

"My familiar."

"How didn't I notice her before?"

"She's shy."

I whistle and a grey cat with yellow eyes comes in from the window. She comes to me and sits at my feet and meows.

"Hey Callie, did we run out of sugar?" I say to her, and she meows quietly, "We did. You should get some soon."

"Thanks Callie." I rub her little head

Rupert is staring at me all confused, "You can understand her?"

I glance up briefly from my cauldron, "Yes of course, she is my familiar after all."

"How come she isn't black?"

"That's a hurtful stereotype. Witch familiars can be whatever we want."

He stops and stares at me. It's really unnerving because he has these beautiful eyes that you just can't look away from.

"I didn't want to ask at first but, how can a guy be a witch? I thought that male born witches are warlocks and have completely different powers. But here you are, with the same skill set as a female born witch. I mean, you even brew potions."

I pour the potion into a bottle. I pretend that this action takes all my concentration and don't answer his question.

"Well," I take a breath to prepare myself, "You see, I was born a girl."

His eyes widened with shock. "Oh." he says

"I'm sorry, I didn't know it was that personal." he actually sounds sorry

"It's okay," I look away, "You probably hate me even more now."

"Why would I hate you? Besides the kidnapping, you have been really kind!" He is genuinely upset

"Because nobody accepts witches, let alone trans people."

"That's absurd! My mother is trans, and my other parent is non binary. People are just stupid."

I smile at him, "You really think so?"

"Absolutely, I accept you no matter what."

"Even if I butcher your favourite song with my terrible singing?"

"No, absolutely not. Stay away from my song." He looks serious, and then he laughs.

I laugh too, and he is so beautiful when he laughs. I hope this moment lasts forever.

Rupert

That moment would have lasted forever. But then we hear some barking and I know that it's the hounds. Guards flood the house. There are so many, and I don't want to go home.

"They found me." Varden whispers as he pulls a potion from his satchel, "But I'm not going down without a fight."

He is clearly outmatched, I have to surrender. Maybe they will not harm him.

"Give up witch, you don't stand a chance." Says my mom as she emerges from the shadows

"Never."

I turn to my mom, "If I go with you, will you let him go?"

"Go with me? You were kidnaped Rupert."

"I was, but then I realized that I was a pompous jerk in a prison! I was never allowed to explore my interests or do anything on my own. I was blind to my own pain."

"And he helped you grow as a person?" She asks

"Yes." I say with utmost certainty

"But he doesn't care about you, he just wants money to save his shack."

What?

I turn to Varden, "I knew you needed money, but are you really going to lose your home?"

"Yeah, I am. It's true that I didn't care about you. But I do now. That's why I am going to fight for you."

"No. I never asked for you to fight."

"Is this what you really want? To stay here, with him?" She asks

I smile, "More than anything."

"Wow, you've really loosened up. Okay, you can live together on three conditions: 1. You will still go to fancy events, and you will bring him. 2. Both of you will visit me and Lake on weekends 3. Get rid of that hexed bracelet, it's not healthy."

I shake my head, "Hexes don't last long. The hex on this ended weeks ago. I really do want to stay."

I look at Varden, "If you'll have me."

"Absolutely." he smiles

At first, I wanted to go. Now I can't imagine leaving. I know with him by my side, everything will be okay.

by Samual Papenfuss

## Call It A Stripe

Her searching fingers ran over the thin, rubbery scar as she craned her neck to see the unpleasant view of her exposed back in the full length mirror. She had made a spur of the moment decision to try on a bikini top attached by flimsy strings; it covered approximately 1 millimeter of her back, providing her with a decent view. The hot summer sun had offered countless opportunities to tan, but her pale back was evidence that she hadn't taken advantage. Full body tanning required limited amounts of clothing, and that idea was so unappealing that she would rather be Casper the ghost's twin.

The sight of the scar that marked the center of her back had become embedded in her memory, yet she still chose to closely examine herself every day. Despite the inevitable discontentment, she had made it a habit to take a mental picture of her back. Initially it had been necessary in order to track the healing process, but it would be a far-fetched lie to deny that she had developed an unhealthy obsession with the flaw.

"It could be worse," her mother's failed attempt to uplift her wounded confidence chastised her as she scrutinized herself.

"It really doesn't look that bad," her sister's assurance had done little to improve her sour attitude after she had sharply refused to wear her halter top bikini; a bikini that she had practically lived in the past summer.

"If you cared less about what others think then you wouldn't be as insecure," her father's advice played like a broken record in her head, more so than any other comment that had been said within the past year. She had attempted to convince herself that he had meant no harm, but she couldn't help but wonder if his tone had been accusatory.

She hadn't anticipated that her scar would become a big deal to her. Not once had the lingering mark crossed her preoccupied mind when she had been recovering from the surgery.

She had categorized her appearance as a superficial concern that didn't deserve the time of day, but back then she had also felt as though she had been hit by a bus; a scar seemed minor in comparison to that pain, but now that lousy scar was among her only concerns.

She could still vividly recall those vital days that she had spent on bed rest. She had been tempted to jump out of bed and put her limp legs to use, but a stern warning from her doctor had taken away any desire she had to move, let alone walk. Truthfully, it had been for the best; if she had seen herself in a mirror, that mirror wouldn't have been left intact. Her knotted hair had been so greasy that it was plastered to her shiny forehead, her ghostly face had been swollen from lying face down on an operating table for six hours straight, and she had worn the same pyjama set for days in a row. Despite how horrid she looked, her busy mind had experienced a whirlwind of consuming thoughts that swept up the reserved energy that she had left. The motivation that she needed to change or shower had been non-existent.

During that time that she spent hopelessly lying in bed, she questioned whether surgery had been the preferable treatment option for her scoliosis. She had been so desperate to fix her posture, to have aligned shoulder blades, and level hips; that desperation had led her to naively looking past the potential difficulties that waited for her across the finish line.

She couldn't figure out for the life of her why her scar bothered her more than her hunched back had. A thin scar seems invisible compared to curved shoulders, and this was a fact that she was reminded of constantly by her mother.

"You'll never be satisfied with yourself if you continue to nitpick at your appearance," her mother had told her, shaking her head in blatant disapproval.

"You don't understand." That blunt statement had been the only response she could muster up the courage to say.

"Then make me understand. If you want my help, you need to learn how to communicate with me because I'm done trying to read your mind." Perhaps the comment wasn't intended to be condescending, but in her mind her mother had spoken to her in a manner that is used when conversing with a 5 year old.

"You can't understand. How could you possibly understand if there is not one scar on your body?!" She hadn't meant to snap, but the leash that she had kept on her anger had been worn down to the point of breaking that day.

She hadn't exaggerated. Both her mother and sister had flawless skin. Not even acne scars were visible on them. She had been blessed with those genes too, but unfortunately she hadn't lucked out with her spine structure.

She stiffly blinked, refocusing on the scar tainting her back. She couldn't tell if it was a flaw that she could come to love. She had been close to attaining her goal; so close to having a body that she could be content with. If only there wasn't a scar left to spell out the imperfections that had existed.

"It's just a stripe. It doesn't make you any less beautiful." she sharply turned, surprised to see her mother leaning against her bedroom doorway. It was a miracle that her mother still attempted to comfort her after the numerous harsh comebacks that she had received.

"I don't want a stripe down my back. What am I? A skunk."

"Do you always have to be like this? I offered you a compliment, and somehow you turned it into an insult." She could sense the hint of amusement laced in her mother's tone, and she nearly grinned in response.

"Well, I guess it can be called a stripe," she maintained a neutral tone, but a subtle raise of her eyebrow indicated that she was in a teasing mood. Judging by her mother's beaming smile, it was an indication that she managed to pick up on.

"A stripe doesn't sound so bad." Her mother voiced the silent thought that had already crossed her mind.

"Sure," she attempted to appear nonchalant by dismissing the thought, and barely offering a shrug. In truth, it didn't sound so bad. A scar was known as a defect, but a stripe was known to be a distinctive feature. If she couldn't come to love her scar, she could at least try to love her stripe.

by Sofia Rodriguez

## Seasons

Bright nights,  
Winter lights.  
Seasons welcoming,  
Spirits lifting.  
Brisk winds  
turn into warm swims.  
Moons in the night sky,  
turn into ice cream as a treat.  
Working day and night,  
Not seeming to grasp time.  
As it slips by,  
Like sand in your fingers.  
Don't be in the zone,  
Realize the flow.  
Living, enjoying.

by Ambar Foster

## Rainy Day

Oh rainy day, take me far, far away.

To a place with sun where I can play.

Where I'll love it so much, I'll want to stay.

No more clouds and gloomy days

A place where there is only light

A place where it's quiet at night.

No thunder no storms.

A place that does not fit the norms.

I think I've found this place

And it is here to state its case

Here's what it said

This place is home, in your bed

You'll enter it when you close your eyes and fall

asleep

And when you will fall down very deep

Into the kingdom of your sleep.

by Jonathan Vasilyev

## God is Greater

It was 1994 Afghanistan felt the earth  
shake  
Bombs falling overhead made an earthquake.  
When the Roussi left, we'd reclaim our empire  
We were out of the frying pan, but into a bonfire

The men were slaughtered, the women,  
slaves to their own home  
A woman couldn't raise her babe unless another  
man said so.

Children crying, families dying in body  
littered streets  
Men mangled, recognition...  
Too hard.

With nothing left but God and heads  
heaven raised, we pray,  
Allahu Akbar

God, you are greater, you are our saviour,  
we pray you keep our families safe.

Destruction is our decoration, God don't let us go  
forsaked.

We are birds scraping for seed, with bombs a  
hawk's screech

In life of calculated chaos, safety is sacred.  
But you are greater

So guide the souls that died at today's speech.

The Taliban cause terror, yet I bow my head  
to their ebony turbans,  
woven from the black powder they use to smog  
my home.  
I'll cry, their glancing glares a gift given by the life  
of a neighbour.

My people are dying too soon, their hearts  
heavy with lead  
I pray to find myself in your good graces when a  
stray bullet grazes my-

by Cole Reid

## Family Portrait

The layers of paint cover up the real people

The pushing and shoving

The arguing and shouting

Here they stood

Pristine and perfect

Hung on the wall

A display for all to see

We are perfect

by Alexa Wijnands



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