

2014 Winners
of the
3rd Annual
Teen Writing
Competition

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About Our Judges

Our Judges had different backgrounds in writing and Teen Literature. We're so grateful that they volunteered their time to read all the submissions and came to the library last week to discuss the winners. Our thanks go to **Gare Thompson** (YA author of *In Hitler's Backyard*), **Jenny O'Connell** (YA author of *The Book of Luke*), **Sam Paradise** (published fiction writer and finalist in the 2012 World's Best Short-Short Story Contest), **Jeff Adair** (editor of the Sudbury Town Crier, managing editor of the Community Newspaper Company, and an award winning journalist), **David Yoo** (YA author of *Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before* and *Girls For Breakfast*), **Diane McKamy** (high school librarian) and **Cathy Rosenstock** (former middle school librarian) .

6th-8th Grade Poetry



Summer by Preeti Nagalamadaka

I sit crouched low, near my doorstep
As my hair blows along with the howling wind
As the sun smiles at me while sharing his warmth
Summer has arrived

I imagine myself biting
Taking that delicious first bite of a ripened mango,
As my teeth slowly sink into it
Eagerly tearing apart it's flesh,
Like a lion that has not eaten in months
Devouring every piece that is deposited in my
mouth
The juice squirting and bursting in my mouth,
The sweetness of the fruit that lingers on my tongue
Summer has arrived

The noise of motorcycles honking
Rings in my ears
They gain speed,
The people riding the vehicles
Dodging the vibrant colors being thrown at them
As the children coated in vivid colors laugh guiltily
As the color coated children enjoy the time of Holi
Summer has arrived

I wake up startled my eyes open wide,
They start to relax and shift their position
A small smile starts to creep up onto my face
One gets such joy thinking about
The simple pleasures that await them in
Time yet to come



Black by Rianna Jakson

Black
When the moon is up, on the dawn of
the night sky
Black is the tuxedo, worn at night

Black is the color, when the penguins fly
Black is the opposite, when the sun is shining bright
Black is the emptiness that fills the night sky
Black



I Have a Dream by Daniel Abadjiev

I have a dream
Where everything
Is perfect, yet is not

Does not perfection say
That danger
Must not at all exist

That danger is something
That must not be
That we should keep away

And yet danger
Has to exist
For human life perfection
For what is a book
Without a climax
And does that not seem wrong

And what is life
Without adventure
But a long and dreamless sleep

For surely each soul yearns for it
A dab of color
In a hue-less world

So in my dream
It would not be
A tedious perfection

Instead every soul
Would have a good heart
And never be unkind

Yet there would still be adventure
A wondrous adventure
For each and every soul

9th-12th Grade Poetry



Two Stars by Carly Pusateri

Photographs torn from
their frames; left unwanted
by the person who once
loved them the most.

The Holy Grail of marriage
now sacrificed for
new happiness, though
aching hangs in the air.

A Tapestry, weaved delicately
like a spider's fragile web,
lies in tatters on the floor--
Unmendable.

Nevertheless, its design
still distinct to the
weaver's eye:

A night sky littered with stars, and
planets adorned with rings
as if worn with undying love.

Constellations that used to shine
bright, now fade into the night.

6th-8th Grade Fiction & Memoir



Another Place, Another Time

Raya Keir

SLAM! The door banged shut. “What took you so long?” Vladimir Rousseau slurred. “I’m paying for school so you can get an education, not just run around the streets!”

Conrad, his son, rolled his eyes. “You spend all your money on liquor.”

“Silence!” Vladimir bellowed. “Get out! To think, your mother named you Conrad because it means ‘smart’. More like stupid!” This would’ve been intimidating if it wasn’t for the fact Conrad’s father was facing a lamp when he said this.

“Don’t mention my mother! You’re the reason she is gone!”

“Now you listen to me son,”

“NO!” Conrad roared as his father fell. “I have to spend all my own money for food. I don’t have to deal with this!” Vladimir finally got up, and tried to smack Conrad. Conrad grabbed his arm and looked his father straight in the eye. “I go to public school. That means it’s free.” He dropped his father’s arm, turned and walked out, slamming the door shut.

The night was cold; fog covered the streets. He stomped down the street, and sat on the stairs to the beach. All of a sudden, he heard something. He leaned forward, and grabbed a frying pan from underneath the steps to protect himself. *Chuga-chuga Chuga-chuga*. Conrad pushed himself off the steps and walked closer to the water. He could hardly see anything through the fog. The noise got louder, and louder still, and the wind swept through Conrad’s auburn hair. Unexpectedly, all sound and wind ceased, and the mist parted to reveal a bridge through the ocean, covered in rails. A cart with a sail billowing from it rested on top of the rails, with three passengers inside.

A portly lady bustled out of the cart. “Hello darling! We come to take you from your troubles. What is your greatest desire?” Conrad blinked back tears and said, “I wish to find my mother. She is the only one who loves me.” The woman smiled sympathetically. “At the Castle of Dreams, anyone can find what they want. Once you find the Mirror of Vision, you must think of what you want to see. It will show you this, but you must think carefully. You only will get one chance.” If there was an answer, he’d find it there. Conrad pulled himself up and on to the cart. A hefty man turned from the front and shouted, “All aboard!”

The wind started to blow, and the chubby woman hoisted herself on to the cart. *Chuga-chuga Chuga-chuga*. The noise started again. The sail flowed and started to push the cart forward. A young girl next to him was asleep. Conrad followed suit.

“We’re here! Welcome to the Island of Hope; on this Island you will see the Castle of Dreams, the Fountain of Health, and many other attractions.” The fat lady shouted. Conrad jumped off the cart, and tapped his toes in to the sand. “Let’s continue the journey son.”

turned to see his Vladimir, smirking at Conrad. “You think about me so much, even your imagination creates me.” Vladimir took a swig out of the bottle and leered at Conrad.

“I don’t have to deal with you! I can do this, and I don’t need your help. Go away, you’ve caused enough damage,” Conrad retorted angrily. Vladimir’s smile dissolved (literally), and the rest of him soon followed. All that was left of the illusion was a bottle that fell on to the ground.

Conrad smiled and turned back to the castle. He walked away, leaving his uncertainty behind. He had surpassed one obstacle, but he knew there would be more to come. He started down the path. He strolled down the trail happily. He didn’t stop to think that his happiness wouldn’t stay for long.

Quickly, Conrad got to the castle. He looked at the immaculate emerald palace. It seemed to reach outer space, and wrapped around the Fountain of Health and its glistening azure waters. Unblemished windows covered the walls, and gold trim decorated each turret.

Guards defended the castle, their armor was covered with green and a gold heart. Inscribed a ribbon wrapping around, *a place where dreams come true*. However, they wouldn’t let Conrad in. “State your business,” one said gruffly.

“Please let me in!” Conrad begged. “I just want to see my mother, I love her so much.” The guards looked at each other, and quickly moved back.

Conrad smiled appreciatively and rushed through. He darted from room to room, trying to find the mirror. He hurried up the stairs, and down every hallway, but he couldn’t find the mirror.

“I can’t find it!” Conrad sobbed as he slid down to the floor. “Where is it?” He wailed. “Where could it be?” *Look up, child*. Conrad slowly glanced up, and saw a glowing door at the end of the hall. He dashed towards it, and pulled open the door. Inside on the floor was a small, humming, mirror. Vines wrapped around the golden frame of the mirror. Conrad strode over to the mirror, swept it up and peered into it.

I wish to see my mother, he thought. The mirror dissolved into a cloud. It showed a petite middle-aged woman laughing as she flipped her fiery red hair. She held a young girl’s hand, who smiled brightly as they walked down the city streets. As she blinked you could see her clear, cerulean eyes, identical to Conrad’s.

Conrad blinked back tears. She had moved on, and seemed to have forgotten him. Conrad jumped off the floor. He smashed the mirror, and it shattered into a million pieces. He ran out of the room, down the hallway and out of the castle. He ignored the guards’ shouts, and fled down the lane. He sprinted to the beach and stood, waiting. *Chuga-chuga*. He climbed on to the rails. *Chuga-chuga*. He stood still. *Chuga-chuga*. He waited, and as the wind swept through his hair, the last thing he saw were headlights.

Release.



The Time Machine

Jaelyn Kassoy

When I was a younger girl, probably around five-years-old, I warmly remember loving a wonderful little white, minty, individually wrapped token from heaven. The loud crinkling from the plastic wrapper painted a HUGE smile on my face, and made my heart beat a mile a minute. My mouth started watering instantly. I cannot believe that something as simple as a little, round, piece of sugar with a hole in the middle could bring so many joyful emotions! Just unwrapping it was not enough for me, though.

Pinching my fingers on each side of the wrapper, I carefully pulled the top apart. I would push it out of the top of the wrapper and into my mouth without even touching it with my dirty tiny fingers. I popped the round candy onto my moist tongue and let my taste buds enjoy it before pushing it over to the right side. Always the right side first, then the left, and then back to the middle so my taste buds could enjoy it evenly. The refreshing and cool flavors danced around in my mouth. Before it was gone, I would expertly put the tip of my tongue through the middle. The mint burned boldly, but I did not mind. This was my own little paradise!

Paradise can be very hazardous though. My own special place to eat my treasure was in the back seat of my dad's black Honda. On a terribly bad day while switching my mint from right to left in my mouth, it disappeared! I started coughing viciously and my pink face turned bright purple. Immediately my worried father slammed on the brakes, quickly yanked me out of the back seat and started forcefully hitting my fragile back, trying to get the **LIFESAVER** out of my throat. Can you believe it? My dad saved my life, from a wintergreen Lifesaver. Even though I faced death, I continue to eat them often, begging for them every time I got in the car.

As I have grown older, my tastes have changed. Life is not as simple as it was. The innocence of being young, slowly disappears, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year. My responsibilities grow and grow. Adulthood is coming fast. Whenever I want to travel back to a simpler time, I reach for my perfect little token from heaven. Although I never eat one alone, just in case I need my precious life saved again from the amazing and tasty wintergreen Lifesaver!



Dreams Do Come True

Kandice Belcourt-Monteiro

“Get those windows down and cruise aww, yeah!” Austin dragged on the last note of ‘Cruise’ by Florida Georgia Line. It’s basically the band’s go-to song. Bayleigh let her fiddle hum to a stop. Bayleigh Autumn was an unusual girl. If you were from the north. In Nashville, Bayleigh was fairly normal. She was sixteen and in a band. (No surprise there.) She could play just about any instrument, and could sing so beautifully, the Mona Lisa stopped smiling to listen. Austin looked over at her and said “Dig Two, The Band Perry.” He had to shout over the noise of the crowd. Knowing that he was addressing Bayleigh, she began playing her fiddle, and once Austin strummed the first note on his guitar, she began to sing. “I told you on the day we wed I was gonna love you 'til I's dead...”

At the end of the song, the band was overwhelmed with cheering and applause. The lights dimmed and the band jumped off of the stage. The four of them then went around back to load the instruments into the van. Cooper, the drummer, pushed his short spiky hair up and opened the side door. Putting my fiddle in its case Bayleigh went to get our money from the manager of the restaurant. He handed her a wad of twenty dollar bills. She separated them equally four ways and handed one set of \$60 to Cooper, one set to Talia, the spunky 17 year old always wearing bright clothing. Then she handed a set to Austin and climbed into the back seat. As she leaned against the cool window she thought about her life. All it has been is a crazy messed up torture. After an abusive childhood, and being told she was never going to make it, Bayleigh left a note on the kitchen table with a quote from her favorite song, ‘Pink Guitar’ by Reba McEntire. The quote said, “She’s closer to the bottom, but she’s headed for the top!” Bayleigh felt connected to this song, as not only was her first guitar pink, she felt she WAS headed for the top. Her sister, Ally, probably thought she was living the dream in Los Angeles California. That was originally her plan, but she got sidetracked. After her plane stopped in Nashville, and Bayleigh heard some people singing country rock, which was when she fell in love with country and decided to stay in Nashville. After she arrived in Nashville, she got in touch with her mom’s dad, her grandfather, who lives in Nashville. Visiting him, she found out he makes fiddles. She asked him about living arrangement and he agreed. That was when Bayleigh saw the ad for a female vocalist who can play instruments. That was when she met Austin, the male lead for his band UnDfined. Of course Bayleigh tried out and immediately got in. Then a few gigs later, they are here. Playing clubs and restaurants in Nashville.

“Hey, Bay?” she was shook awake by Austin. Bayleigh mumbled something about dreams and looked up. “We’re at your grandpa’s.” Bayleigh uttered a quick thank you and gave them all hugs. “See y’all tomorrow!” (Yes, in the few months Bayleigh lived here, she had picked up the accent and the slang.) She grabbed her fiddle and ran into the house.

~~~~~  
Bayleigh

“Hey Bayleigh,” Grandpa said as I enter the house. “You hungry?” In response, I sit at the kitchen table and grinned. Grandpa handed me a plate of fried chicken and cornbread, our usual Sunday night dinner. After we ate, I went upstairs to catch up on some homework. I went to high school here in Nashville, just so I can graduate and go to Julliard in New York. I’ve

been called crazy and immature but a dream is a dream no matter how farfetched. After I finished my homework, I get into my pajamas and go to bed.

That night I dream about singing at the CMA's. They call me on stage and I begin to sing the song that I wrote.

The next day we have a gig, so Austin picks me up in his pickup and we go to Cooper's garage to practice until five, when we plan to go to a restaurant for some girl's birthday party. After we had rehearsed so much I thought my throat was going to burst, Austin announced that it was four thirty so we piled into the van and drove to the restaurant. When we arrived, after a special country version of 'Happy Birthday' we began our usual run of 'Cruise' and then 'Dig Two' I told Austin we should do some pop. He agreed so I switched my fiddle for a guitar and began. "Maybe it's the way she walked," I paused wanting someone to yell the next part. The birthday girl happily yelled, "OW! Straight into my heart and stole it!" I grinned. Then I went right back into the song.

At eight o'clock all of the kids had gone home and other people were coming in. The owner yelled up to us, "You guys are great! I'll pay you extra if you keep going!" We agreed and began some older songs.

After a few songs I looked at Talia, and then Cooper and finally, after my eyes lingered on Austin, I looked back at the crowd and smiled. "*This is where I'm supposed to be.*"

## 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade Fiction & Memoir



### *The Boy Who Flew*

*Anna Read*

I sit on the couch, examining the darkening sky. The hum of the furnace and the scratching of my daughter's pencil as she does her homework break through the silence. I sip a mug of hot chocolate, still fresh from the pot on the stove. I sigh, breathing in the sweet aroma of coziness, contemplating the how warm a winter day can be.

Emma speaks up, exploding with thoughts so fresh and young. "Mom, have you ever met someone truly special?" she asks, her turquoise eyes meeting mine. She's a dreamer, her bedside piled with teen romance, movie posters lining her bedroom walls. She likes the idea of love, she always has.

I think back, to before Emma was born. Here, some twenty years ago, I pause on my timeline, remembering the tail end of my own teen years, and the boy I met on the cliffs, on that dark evening in November. "Yes," I say, my eyes glazing over as I sink into memory, my heart throbbing in recall of loss long faded. "I once met a boy who could fly.

"When I was eighteen, I used to walk along the cliffs by my parents house, fantasizing about their history, the ships broken on the rocks, the shadows which came at night. Or, on sadder days, just watching the stars and wondering what was beyond. There were no

lights there, no lights except the moon, which cast its shimmering light across the water. It was late November, the temperature in the high thirties, but I wore no coat, preferring to feel the chill run up my arms. I walked along the cliffs alone, my eyes squinted against the gentle but frigid wind. I saw a boy, standing on the edge of the cliff, peering towards the rock below. His feet were bare, and despite the stinging chill he wore gym shorts and a tee. I walked faster. I had heard stories of a girl who, 14 years before, had jumped off these cliffs to escape her life. The thought was horrible, and it definitely wasn't something I wanted to witness.

I walked up beside the boy, looking him up and down. His strange skin tone made me look twice; skin white but somehow tinted a purplish hue. I tore my eyes from his strange coloring, knowing it's rude to stare, and looked down to examine the rocks already enduring his scrutiny. "It's not worth it," I said, imagining his purplish body spiked by a stone spine, his white tee soaked with blood. "Don't jump."

He looked at me, his mouth twitching slightly at the corners, his face calm. "One shouldn't fear jumping," he said, "but should fear an uncontrolled landing. I don't fear the jump, because I know I won't land."

"I'm sorry—What?"

"I can fly."

"Nobody can fly," I said, but I found no lie in his mesmerizing eyes.

"Where I come from, it's normal to fly," he said nonchalantly, gaze returning to the jagged stone.

"Where do you come from?" I asked.

"Jupiter," he said solemnly, his eyes turning mournfully to the stars, breathing in their unreachable coldness.

I said nothing, not knowing what to say to so bold a statement.

"I'd love to show you the solar system, but you're human." He thought for a moment, then asked, "Want a ride?" a true smile appeared on his face.

I backed away, shaking my head. "I'd like proof first."

He chuckled, jumping off the cliff and flying— well, more walking— into the sky. He turned to me, arms outstretched, standing on thin air, then jumped down, gliding along nothing back to the cliff's edge. It was amazing to me that someone who had no wings could fly. Still a bit unsure, I took another step back, forehead creased. "It's fun!" he smiled, seeing disbelief in my face.

I was young, a lover of fantasy. I accepted his offer, and climbed onto him. He flew off the cliff and swooped around, sliding upon the air about us. I breathed deeply a scent I cannot describe, silken and sparkling, like magic. It seemed to radiate from him, unfamiliar and amazing. Warmth was left behind as the wind lashed through my hair. I felt like I was drifting as we plummeted and rose. I wanted to scream with joy, but all I could do is grin, clinging his back, grip growing ever tighter as gravity attempted to wrench us apart. I felt like I could touch the stars, and they were no longer cold but smiling as I was, eyes stinging with the force of the breeze. The moon made the shadows of the world seem to dance about us as we were dancing in the air, wild with happiness. This was a wonder I never forgot.

He put me back down on the cliff, smiling, cheeks flushed. "Thank you. Most treat me like a monster," he said, and then walked off, leaving me there to imagine the other wonders that might exist. And I had proof, at least for myself, that he existed."

I smile sadly to Emma, who stares dreamily back. "Wow," she whispers. "Did you meet him

again?”

A tear slides down my cheek. There is a deep memory resurfacing. It burns in me. I grip hard at the handle of my cocoa mug. The war took so many lives, caused so much pain. He left a chasm in my heart when he fell, dead on a planet where he didn't even belong. “Many times. We were best friends for all his life. He died in the war.”

She looks at me, forehead creased, eyes wide. “Oh,” she whispers, an almost imperceptible sound. “Did he know dad?” she asks, perking up. Poor child. Never met her father.

“Of course he did. Emma, he was your father.” I smile, clutching my cocoa close to me, tears running full force now, and hope that wherever he is, my husband is happy.



## Like lightning

### Erinn Farmer

“You’re a coward.”

It echoed in his ears, filling his lungs with poison threatening to swell up, past his throat, lying fallow in his mouth alongside his limp tongue. Conceit pulled at the crest of his lip, marring his face with his disgust. Even though his mouth remained full of words unspoken, he still managed to grind his teeth, pulverizing the curses between the silver-filled ridges.

He opened his mouth, breath reeking of his mistakes, and promptly closed it.

“What? Can’t speak. Good to know you’re such a Chatty Cathy,” His tormenter jibed, seemingly without malice, “The whole fish out of water look must be a hit with the ladies.”

Never before had he swallowed so many ill words, choking them down as the man in front of him devalued all that he had worked for, years of his life and his blood that he had invested into the purpose of avoiding *that* word.

He stepped down from the chair, untangling himself and letting out his line, tentatively reaching towards a new kind of storm.

“Why am I a coward?”

The other man smiled bitterly, grabbing the back of the chair and swinging his legs over the seat, motioning to the supposed coward to sit on the couch opposite. He moved them far from the elephant in the room, which was actually small and innocuous, hanging from the ceiling and clouding the air between them with tense realization. His fists clenched tight, he forced himself to relax them, leaving little half-moon impressions behind.

“What’s your name?”

The coward cleared his throat without answering, still filled with ire and shame.

“Alright then, let’s look.” Grabbing one of the many unopened bills on the table, the man read off the name: “Reginald. Yeesh. So that’s why you’re here? One too many pokes at your name?”

“Not exactly.”

The man scoffed, eyes surveying the room and pointedly ignoring the new ceiling ornament, “So, what exactly is it? You clearly live alone, since the last time this place felt a woman’s touch was long before your time, but you don’t exactly seem like the type.”

“The type?”

“Yeah,” he shrugged, “The kind with poetry lining their bookshelves that doesn’t watch sports and spends his time listening to ‘Dust in the Wind’ on repeat.”

“Which version?”

“Well, definitely not the Kansas one if you’re at this point.”

Somehow, the coward bared his teeth in a shy smile despite the complete absurdity of the situation. The storm raging inside him abated, his eyes closing in relief, but his brow furrowed at the shock still coursing through him.

“Final guess: too many soap operas? I know Henrique didn’t marry Gloria and that she’s pregnant with his father’s baby and her sister’s in a coma, but there’s still hope, man. They’re racked up for another season and I’m sure that it’ll all work out.”

“I don’t think that’s even a show,” The coward said, eyes flashing with humor to meet his unlikely companion’s. The other man felt the little hairs rising on the back of his arms, electric and unknown. He shivered and turned back to the man he had called a coward, ignoring the pills and the pain in his eyes and looking for something. A key he could put in his hand and somehow open the door to happiness for the man in front of him. A lightning rod.

“It could be, though.”

And that was the key. He felt it shock his hand, almost physically, as his fist clenched in reaction to the potential in the air. No longer was the space between them charged with the aversion to looking at the ceiling or the abrasions decorating the other man’s throat.

There was a way to fix him and it wasn’t ill-timed jokes or covering the jarring almost-deed with humor and awkward, stuttering laughs.

“That it could be,” The coward conceded, mouth twitching at the corners as he sucked in a deep breath, as if coming up for air after the jolt of one’s heart skipping a beat. He nearly expected the half-numbness and half-agony of a lightning strike sinking into his bones, sparking galvanized currents of pain behind his eyes. But the electric pressure he had felt of choking down his every thought for so long simply lifted, leaving him light-headed and almost giddy.

Clenched tightly to the arm rests, the man’s hands grappled with the urge to rip down the damned rope and flush the pills and labor towards the man and glue him back together through sheer will.

Just as he had made up his mind to do just that, the damn kamikaze started cackling, dense peals of laughter struggling past short, shallow breaths, white teeth peeking from behind pink lips and eyes crinkled at the corners like fulgurite. And he was laughing too, hands clutching his chest as he fought to find breath between each desperate sound.

“I’m—” he gasped for breath, “Sorry.” Tears leaked out his eyes, but his expression was open; his throat was finally clear of the normal constriction of sobs. These tears were not the storm, but the calm pitter patter on the roof after the children were done counting how far away the lightning was, as it had become more miles than their fingers and toes and they could no longer hear the thunder. All was quiet. Their laughter faded.

Calmly, the man stood up on the chair and pulled down the rope. He dumped the pills in the kitchenette sink. The rope was unknotted, cut up. Thrown in the trash. He held out his empty hands. The coward-no-longer smiled, final tears drying on his cheeks.

“Thanks. I know it isn’t much, but...”

“I didn’t mean what I said,” the other man apologized over him, “You’re not.”

“I know,” he assured, smiling gently.

And thus with open eyes and hands the two found solace in the quiet, glad to have stowed away their key and rope after the storm.



## *Ara and the Sea*

**KD Zagzoug**

*Jump, Ara.  
Don't be afraid.  
Just dive in.  
Don't be afraid.  
Jump, Ara  
Jump.*

The waves ebbed and flowed and whispered her name as she stared at them from high up on the bridge. Droplets from Ara's stringy, shoulder-length hair speckled the stone wall, making a quiet hissing noise when the water hit the hot pavement. The wind blew and she tremored, but it didn't bother her. She was content with the way she felt up on the bridge, above the water—powerful, strong, and brave.

She had already jumped six times—four *more* times than Todd McIntyre, the oldest boy in the neighborhood. The first time she'd jumped, her knees knocked together and the boys laughed. The fourth time, her hands shook and the boys were silent. This time, her lips turned purple and the boys cheered. Ara laughed at them.

The house Ara and her parents had moved into two weeks ago was small and beach-like—it was more of a cottage than a house. It had a screened-in porch and a big deck and an outdoor shower. Ara could hear the waves crashing against the shore from her bedroom. The street they lived on was long, curvy and covered in a thin layer of sand. The neighborhood was thought to be, in the eyes of a child, governed by a large group of boys who lived in various small cottages up and down the streets surrounding Carcan Beach.

The boys spent their time riding their bikes, wrestling on the beach, fishing, building tree houses that always seemed to collapse immediately after being constructed, and jumping from the bridge down by the boardwalk.

Ara met the boys on her first day in her new home.

"Go look around," Her mother said. "Go for a swim." So she strapped on her sandals and set out to see what this place was all about, when she came across the boys standing at the bridge.

"Hello," Ara greeted them plainly—she wasn't intimidated, she never was. A long time ago, Ara had convinced herself that she feared nothing. The boys spun and glared at her. Todd, being the oldest, found his way to the front of the group.

"Who're you?" He asked.

"I'm Ara." He began to laugh at her.

"Kay. Well, what're you doing here?" Ara shrugged.

"What do *you* think you're doing here?" Todd laughed louder, and the other boys joined in.

"This is where we hang. We jump off this bridge."

"Into the ocean?"

"Yup. Scary, huh? It took Bobby here a month to be able to do it without pissing himself on the way down." Todd pointed to one of the larger boys, who blushed. Ara rolled her

eyes and slid her sandals off of her feet. She climbed up onto the edge and dug her toenails into the concrete. Spreading her arms out wide, she took a deep breath in and sighed.

*Jump, Ara.  
Don't be afraid.  
Just dive in.  
Don't be afraid.  
Jump, Ara.  
Jump.*

“Ara?” She turned around. Ara was just about to fall in for her seventh time when she felt a small, shaking hand tug at her shirt. A boy stood two feet below her, with white-blond hair and eyes the color of caramel. His chest was as pale as the moon and his huge glasses slide down the front of his pointed nose. “Hi, uhm, I’m Owen.”

“Lovely to meet you.” Ara said, and stuck out her hand. The boy, Owen, shook it timidly.

“Uhm, well, Todd says that if I don’t jump in he’s gonna throw me, so I was uhm, wondering if I could jump in with you.” Without answering, Ara stuck out her hand a second time. He grabbed it and she pulled him up, and then they were both standing with their feet against the concrete and their faces towards the sea.

“I’ve never been much of a swimmer,” Owen said, clinging to Ara’s arm. “Do-does it hurt?” Ara shrugged. Owen’s fingernails dug deep into her bicep.

“Not too much, really.” Owen nodded and took off his glasses, placing them gently on the pavement.

“Ready?” He turned back to Ara. His pale chest heaved up and down and up again.

“Ready.”

“One...two...three.” And they jumped.