## WYNG Philomathia Student Essay Contest 2016/17

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He was his father’s son, in every way. He mucked about in the dirt, play-wrestled, and didn’t complain when he bruised himself. Whining was for girls. He read action comics and occasionally dressed up as Batman; not too often — that was for geeks. He liked playing with toy cars, and he did that as often as he wished, and that was normal. He raced ‘em and crashed ‘em and every now and then the rough play would scratch the paint. He hated scratching the paint, but it couldn’t be avoided. Lots of stuff could be avoided if you worked the right magic: low grades, bad friends, forgetfulness, stomachaches, babies, stupidity. But then there were the things that couldn’t be avoided, even if they could, and they outweighed the ones that could be avoided a million to one. These were what people called “Obligations.” He had a vague theory that life was nothing more than a series of Obligations, and the final obligatory task was death — but he was a good Christian, which meant he tried to like his Obligations, even when they went hand in hand with sacrifice. Theories belonged to the realm of cultists and conspiracy theorists.

Father, you will never read this letter, but I felt it was something I had to write, a cathartic confession.

He was an all-round chap, well-read and sporty; the apple of his father’s eye and the pride of his family. Like any good simulation of society, the school spawned cliques by the dozen. Everyone was a stereotype. He was a Jock, a Nerd, and a Popular Kid, a tried and tested combination. He was a chameleon with strict colour coding: all pastel blues, bleached whites, smart blacks. His father liked field hockey, so he was field hockey captain as well. He was good at it and he loved it in his own way, a hard, hating kind of way, like he loved most things, and it made him competitive. He learnt how to dribble, how to push, slap, hit, how to do aerial maneuvers. He honed the skills of endurance, tricks he had picked up since childhood: how to speed up time in duress when he willed it, only checking his watch when he knew enough time had elapsed, how to partition his mind and quarantine stress, how to gain perspective on problems, to see them as they were, soon-to-be-gone illusions. The flesh was weak but the spirit was willing.

I used to have the same dream over and over. In the dream, I approach your bedroom in the middle of the night. You are fast asleep. You don’t stir, even when I climb onto the bed and straddle you. Not until I start to throttle you. Then your eyes fly open. My knee is pinning your chest down, and I can feel each quick beat of your heart, like the fluttering wings of a bird. I feel it when it slows, when it inevitably...stops. I look down at your face and I feel the sweetest relief. Then I wake up. When I do, I am breathing hard, excited, and the sheets are sticky.

He was the type of boy who always kept up with trends, so when romance and sex became all the rage among his schoolmates, he found a new girl every month to hang off his arm. He always picked the same type: pretty, ambitious little creatures with lawyer and doctor fathers and no intention of abandoning their career paths to be domesticated. It was a smart precaution, but even so he understood each moment he stalled was only a step down the aisle towards the marriage altar, where his suburban lifestyle lay in wait for him — picket fences lining a yard, dishes waiting to be done in a sink of soapy water, sleepless nights beside the stiff limbs of his woman, shackled to her by the thin band of metal on his ring finger. As if he needed anything more chaining him down.
I still think about that dream, all the time. It sneaks up on me every now and then, its insidious tendrils taking root in my mind. I think about myself living under your shadow. The doubt, the stress, the panic attacks. I think about the worst question of all: who I am. I think about it long and hard, Father, but I never recognize the man I see in the mirror.

When he was twenty, he attended his father’s funeral. He was the spitting image of his father in somber black. He navigated the fine line between a son’s grief and a man’s stoicism with great finesse; at times appearing suitably withdrawn, at others bravely comforting his mother. It seemed to him there was no shortage of grieving relatives who accosted him at every turn. In a corner of their own, children too young to understand the fuss were playing with toy cars. Mid-funeral, he ran out of tissues and patience and had to physically restrain himself from going for his mother’s throat. He turned away from her tear-stained face and kept his eyes on his father’s gravestone, where he saw his future staring back at him boldly – Beloved Husband, Father, Friend; six feet under the soil or leagues above the sky, depending on who you asked. He waited for the letters to rearrange themselves into new configurations, but the words were set in stone, and it occurred to him that nothing had changed. Beneath his eyelids he saw the flicker of a billion hues before evanescence: the crimson of a cardinal’s crest, an orange-gleam of light on a persimmon, the clean tan lines of shifting sand, the dusky green of four leaf clovers, the lapis lazuli feathers of a blue jay, a lavender bud in bloom. Vivid, brilliant colours that set his world on fire.

Sincerely, your son

All the colours that didn’t belong to him.
Ivory Masks
by Natalie Ha (4X), Diocesan Girls' School

Inspired by “Girl In A White Shirt With Ponytail” from He was lost yesterday and we found him today by Leung Chi Wo + Sara Wong

She walks among a crowd of strangers. They make no sound, and give no indication to acknowledge her presence, but step aside to let her pass, heads lowered. The silence is shrill and harsh against her ears; through the slits in her mask she can see her destination ahead of her, looming above the grey clutter of decrepit buildings and cutting the bleak skyline like a white needle.

“Day number three hundred and seventy since the beginning of the Faceless Crisis,” states the news anchor from the television with a tone that matches the bland colour of his mask, as she enters the office lobby, her hand automatically moving to hold down her black skirt as the fan threatens to blow it upwards. “It was one year and five days ago that a large portion of the population was targeted and killed in a horrific incident that was found to be involved in the corruption of facial recognition systems, leading to the implementation of the No-Face policy.”

The news anchor stops. She turns to the screen to see him wearily run at his temples before continuing, “Citizens should remember not to remove their masks under any circumstances, and especially not when they believe themselves to be alone. Failure to comply will result in severe punishment... in the event that they are still alive.”

There is a ding behind her. She enters the elevator, pushes the button to the correct floor, watches the lift doors close. Then, in the polished reflection of the doors, she examines her mask as the elevator sounds with a metallic hum.

The domino mask is white and unpatterned. It is fascinating, she thinks, how the mask can cover only the upper half of her face, and still make it completely unrecognisable. She can still see her eyes through the holes in the mask, but they look different from the last time she saw her face uncovered; she looks and feels older, more tired. Hollow.

With a ding, the lift doors open and her reflection disappears. In its place stands a man with closely cropped hair and widened eyes that dart around behind the confines of his mask, clutching a large briefcase in one hand with whitened knuckles. It is not her floor, so she steps aside to let him into the lift. He does not enter immediately, eyes flickering to hers and fixating there with an intensity that nearly makes her squirm. He opens his mouth to speak, but just then the lift doors begin to close and he startles, darting forward just before they slam shut.

They stand side by side in uncomfortable silence as the lift ascends, a silence which is broken in a few moments when the man says, his voice shaking a little, “Can’t really believe it’s been over a year.”

She glances at him out of the corner of her eye. His lips are turned upward and his teeth are bared, yellow against the stark white of his mask. He continues, his voice raising in hysteria, “Where were you when it happened? No, not the attack,” he adds before she has time to formulate a response. “The signing of No-
“Face.”

She doesn’t remember.

He leans in, his breath hot and wet against her cheek. She can see the veins in the whites of his eyes. “Where were you when they took our faces? Do you remember the last time you ever saw yourself? The last photo you saw of yourself, of your loved ones, before they burnt every last photograph into ashes?”

She doesn’t remember. The man’s free hand moves about with fervour as he speaks, and she casts a quick look at the surveillance camera in the corner of the lift behind him. He doesn’t notice, too wrapped up in his impassioned speech - until he stops, his hand freezing midair.

He says, almost calmly, “I don’t remember.”

She doesn’t realise that she has been backing up until her back hits the wall of the lift. The man looks away from her, at his reflection in the doors. His eyes have gone still. “I don’t remember my face. I can’t remember who I am.”

His lips twist upward again, contorting themselves into something ugly. “Care to remember with me?” He asks, and his hand moves towards the strap behind his ear.

Ding!

The man falters as his reflection disappears, giving the police officers enough time to burst into the lift and tackle him to the ground, making the elevator shudder from the impact.

There is a lot of shouting outside; she can see at least half a dozen police lined up. One of them places a gentle hand on her shoulder. Dazed, she lets him usher her out of the lift, as the officers on the ground press the man against the floor of the lift harder, forcing his hands away from his face.

She reaches her cubicle with no further trouble. Her coworkers seem curious about the commotion, but their curiosity is well hidden - even if their eyes wander towards her, the masks of marble hide their prying gazes well, and of course, no one would dare to speak out of line.

She spends the morning in a daze, unable to concentrate. Finally, after an hour, she gives in and hurries to the washroom.

Her eyes stare back at her on the other side of the mirror, framed by ivory. Her eyes, rimmed by long black lashes, brown irises around dilated pupils.

Where was she, when they took her face?

Care to remember with me?

“Yes,” she breathes, and her shaking fingers find the elastic wrapped around the soft part of her ear, and pull.
"I am sorry." Dead weight in my heart, I let my feet carry me out of the room, head hanging low. Breathe, rushing out of my lungs; words, wandering in the midst of the abyss, stuck in the pit of my throat; mind, slowing slipping away through my fingertips, drifting away. I wonder what they would have thought of me, "The girl who ran away in the middle of an interview?" Sounds fitting. Everything was going so smooth but they just had to put in the question of the century: "Who are you?" Who am I? Well, I am Kristen, but no there’s more to this. There is much more to this that you can't possibly answer. A simple interview question.

Words got around and the next thing I remembered was people asking "How do you not know who you are?" Because how can anybody claim to know you if you don’t even know yourself? You, you are the girl that lost it during the interview. You, you are the girl that spent so much time stuck in your head that you almost let your thoughts consumed you. I always found myself replaying the montage like a broken cassette tape, keep on wondering just how I can answer that question.

I started by asking "What are we not?" We are not an object, some tables and desks lying around, and we are not animals, cats and dogs per say. Each one of us is a living organism made up of cells, a species called Homo Sapiens. While we identify ourselves as humans, what truly makes us human? What differentiates us from one another?

This leads me to basic self-introductions. When people ask who we are, our common response is to just introduce our name: "My name is Kristen" for example. Yet, a valid point is raised in the book Sophie’s World where the character questioned the authenticity of this introduction. If we were to change our name from Kristen to another, let’s say: Sarah, then would this Sarah not be the same person as Kristen? The answer is: No, we are still technically the same, we just have a different name. Yes, it is a fact that I am called Kristen, it’s just that Kristen is not who I am. There could be thousands of Kristen out there and I could easily change my name into Sarah another day. Names are only temporary, same as occupation. We often add our occupation behind our name when we introduce ourselves; however, these introductions still doesn’t identify us as this introduction is they are solely based on our current situations: As a student, if I suddenly quit school one day, then I am not a student anymore., Who am I then?

Confused as I was, the society has already answered the question "Who am I," for me: The Social Identity Theory. A person’s sense of who they are is based on the social group they identify themselves with. Different races, social classes, sexual orientations and more. But this identity we have is what causes diversity and discrimination. Diversity is not necessarily a bad thing, in the society nowadays we welcome diversity as a symbol of us finally acknowledging one another as unique and different self. The problem afloat when people start to undermine differences and think that themselves they belong to the majority is are better than those who belong to the minorities. Racial discriminations often show its face in the news, people are often looked down upon for their race which is something they have no control over. It’s childish to think that one is more superior than others at birth because of one’s their skin colour. It is the same with social class, people of the lower class don’t have less right to live as people from the upper class. Just because they have fewer resources and money, it doesn’t mean they don’t deserve the same as others do. The roots to discriminations can present, themselves in a number of different reasons, it might be due to inferiority, a
difference in numbers, stereotypes, or prejudice. But to me, the reason for 'Black Lives Matter' or 'Immigration ban' to occur is solely due to us confining ourselves to a social identity that is nothing more than a label. Asian. Teenager. Female. Catholic. These though true are not all that I am.

Notice how we often say "Identify yourselves with", this is because identity is what you want others to perceive you as. A label that people can associate you with, same as your name. While the society might think that you are your social identity, that's not really the case. Me, the girl who lost herself, spent months living in names thinking that they are who I am. What I fail to notice is that these are just labels, that there are much more to us than these petty labels that are cast upon us.

Whoever you are, if you are in the process of figuring out who you are and your purpose in life, let me leave you with this: Your name, colour, creed all don't matter as they are only labels. You are not confined to those labels. They don't define you; they're most definitely not what you're made up of. You are your dreams and hopes, you are your own will and freedom. If there is one thing that is unique about us is that we all have our own will, what makes us human is that we are capable of choosing how we live. So in the end, you shouldn't try to fit into other people's view of who you are, rather decide for yourselves what you want to be and what not. Most importantly, you are yourself and you should never forget that. Who you are is more than just your identity.
He, She, I, We
by Eunice Lui (SC), Holy Family Canossian College

Feeling as though life has befallen him, “Who am I...?” He whispered in a brittle tone.

She stared emptily at her journal and murmured, “Who am I...?”

I placed my phone on the wooden desk, then caught sight of the haphazard piles of papers in front of me. Something was stuck in my mind: Who am I?

He groaned in melancholy. Half-a-century-old now, still, failing to make ends meet is something he has to go through on a daily basis. Feeling as though life has befallen him, “Who am I...?” He whispered in a brittle tone again. After a while, “next!” He yelled. He poured the soap water out of the basin in between his thighs and watched it flood the filthy, dirt-encrusted and dilapidated floor. He squeezed the worn-out cloth in his palm as he rubbed it against a plate. He whispered to himself, “I will get through this, I will.” The alabaster dish sparkled in his eyes as his lips curled slightly to form a grin.

“Another property!” She snickered as she wrote another name onto the list of property she has acquired in her journal. As a Shanghainese who lawfully immigrated to Hong Kong with her family at a young age, she has been constantly picked on for her nationality as well as her destitution. Hence, she has always dreamed of being rich one day. “But, what now?” She asked herself as her mind got lost in the distance. She stared emptily at her journal and murmured, “Who am I...?”

“Congratulations on this successful transaction!” I hung up. I placed my phone on the wooden desk, then caught sight of the piles of haphazard files in front of me. Something was stuck in my mind, “Who am I?” Suddenly, a series of footsteps pierced through the serenity confined within the room.

“What now?” I groaned as I turned around.

“Hey, how was today?” A familiar voice vibrated in my eardrum; it was dad.

“Uh! Don’t you just hate these mainlanders? The way they speculate in property - the housing prices of Hong Kong have been skyrocketing. This is just so unfair to us! They are using up our resources!” I grumbled in utter agitation.

“Why did you take the job then?”

“Um...It’s just that sometimes I don’t even know who I am anymore... I do anything I’m told to...”

“Fancy a walk?” He asked, almost sounding like a plea amidst his unusual enthusiasm.

A quarter past seven—off from work, he sat by a Dai Pai Dong in Ha Pak Lai, wolfing down a bowl of Wonton noodles, savouring every bite. Small talk with hawkers, the flurry of air upon the coast and Chinese chess
playing with neighbours have never ceased to please him. The local ambience of Ha Pak Lai, the place he has been living in ever since the day he first reached Hong Kong grounds amid illegally immigrating here, has long become a part of his soul. He would do anything, even if that means having to suffer from tight budgets and poor quality of life, just to stay in this place where he calls home. After dinner, he wandered to a coast nearby.

A quarter past seven—she entered a cab and chanted the name of her very own safe haven. A while later, she stopped by the shore where she used to run around and throw pebbles in her early teenage years. She ambled along the waterfront as she gazed at the scattered constellations beaming in the serene night sky. She picked up a pebble under her heel and tossed it into the water. She contemplated the ripples formed and recalled her childhood memories as the seawater hummed a cordial tune. Albeit the hardships in getting accustomed to the city, her love for this place remains unyieldingly rigid since this is where her favourite memories belong.

A quarter past seven—I got out of dad’s car and followed him down a sombre lane.

“Let me show you something.” That being said, dad wrapped his shoulder around mine as we walked together in the darkness.

We then reached a coast. I gaped at the breath-taking picturesque view before me formed by the lights beaming beyond the horizon, the soothing smell of the ocean and the scattered stars shining in the ebony sky. I recalled living nearby as a child.

“Daughter, I was an illegal immigrant.” Shocked, I widened my eyes at the unexpected commitment. “Actually, most of us are immigrants. We come from different homelands, and only a minority rooted here.” The ocean breeze howled as a couple of footsteps echoed behind me. I turned around to see a man and a recognizable woman lingering by the waterfront. They spoke in different accents.

“In the 1840s, there were barely over 7000 people in Hong Kong…It was only after the 1850s that a large number of mainlanders immigrated to Hong Kong. However, at that time, having to face apocalyptic natural disasters, people have become united in order to overcome these roadblocks as a whole. Unfortunately, now that our values are in conflict, we seem to be incapable of tolerating one another.”

I nodded in agreement.

“We started identifying ourselves as locals and non-locals…” I mumbled. “Sometimes, we are too focused on differences, and we forget who we intrinsically are.” Dad said with a sigh.

“Dad, who am I?” I asked.

“You are a daughter, a friend, an employee… And most importantly, you are you.” My dad tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Just like everyone else, we are who we are. Yet, we are different but similar at the same time—we are all in love with the same city.” I twinkled.

“We are just different individuals dreaming the same dream.” We both smiled.
Identity
by Nikki Wong (5G), St. Paul’s Coeducational College

Inspired by “Sha Tau Kok” from InsideOutland by Siu Wai Hang

In the budding hours before dawn, the sky co-mingles with the sea, a union of raven black. The vast darkness is only split and fractured by the speckles of light, the glowing buildings— the city on fire across the sea. There are two worlds, the one above the sea, glowing with the captivating lure of civilisation; the landscape beneath, through the looking-glass, into the raw world of auroras.

It was one hour before daybreak, and a family of seven settled on the edge of the land, waiting for the eventual sunrise. The eldest of the family rummaged through his gear and took out a fishing rod. In a smooth motion, he dropped his line; the hook suspended in the waters, seducing its prey. Not long after, he felt the hint of a tug on his fishing line, dragging him closer to the murky waters. He hauled the oblivious fish with all his might, the precious prize breaking through the water’s surface.

And streams of memories, fluttering images, rushed through my veins and reached my very soul. The hazy water cleared as memories of a past life aligned themselves and revealed themselves to me.

I swam here. That’s how I first got here.

“I swam here once.”

“Grandpa? Isn’t it another city on the other side of the water?”

“The other side of the water?... That’s where home used to be.”

I was born in Shenzhen in the fifties, I don’t quite remember the date. My father was a construction worker and my mother a housewife, he worked long hours and she was always looking after us. Food was scarce and resources limited. I lived with brothers and sisters whose faces were blurred silhouettes— all the mouths that my parents could not feed. Deep down, I had always known that if I continued living in this provincial town, I would follow my father’s footsteps and wed a woman like my own mother, raising children to become replicas of me. It was a black hole of ambition and I had to escape, I had to.

Predetermined fate. Nothing could change the courses of our lives, not unless we escaped to the lights that never stopped shining, my lighthouse in the night — Hong Kong.

On nights that warriors warred against fate, the sea raged against them, wind whipped and rain splattered on their exhausted bodies. They were all gamblers, wagering and winning lives. But this game of gambling came at a price, the price of losing. Those that successfully climbed ashore lost their homelands, their families, their memories. They forgot their roots, the blood in their veins ran with a renewed vigour that belonged only to Hong Kong. Those that didn’t reach it, lost their lives in the hungry and cruel mouth of the ocean.

“But I thought Grandpa was a Hong Kong man.”
“Child, what’s a Hong Kong man?”

Living in Hong Kong for over fifty years, I have witnessed the colonial governance, the handover, and the SAR governance. In the sixties when I had just arrived, Hong Kong was still a growing manufacturing hub. Later, Hong Kong became the door that connected China with the world. Yet another decade had passed, we were then an international financial centre, the Pearl of the Orient. Times have changed, just as the sun rises and falls and powers shift. However, our core values and virtues have prevailed, passed on through the generations, bound together by our joint affection for Hong Kong.

Our origins were diverse, indeed. I myself came to stay here because I sought another future. Yet, our lineage would not divide us: the values and virtues that are shared among Hong Kongers are what define us. Looking at the shadows of struggling fish in the dark sea, I peer into the very core of a Hong Kong person, our persistence, our hard work, and our professionalism. We are always swimming upstream, against the current and any obstructions. Together, we battled SARS, we withstood the financial crisis and market breakdowns, we endured great woe. We have lived in integrity, always respecting others, free to forge our paths and make our own choices.

Yet, in recent years, voices have spoken of how such core values are being infringed and trampled upon, the colours and virtues that painted us fading to dull monotones, lacklustre. The water became dark, opaque, we could no longer pride ourselves on this clarity as nets and weeds entangled us. Suffocation. Our love for this pearl turned into obstinacy, as the fixated minds wheeled themselves against anyone who spoke a foreign tongue. Respect and tolerance dwindled to a trickle. Riot. Words shouted and hatred sprung.

Heartbreaking.

Worse still, on either shore is a place that I would call home. I was orphaned and torn...

“Grandpa, sunrise!”

Yes, sunrise. Orange tints the far horizon, birds chirp and breezes caress us. Orphaned? Torn? No, connected, empowered. Love flows within my blood and runs deeper, to my roots, running in the virtues that I uphold and in values that reign over my very being. I am a man of Hong Kong, as much as I am a Chinese man. Alive as I had never been, proud and assured.

Gently, wrinkled hands retrieved the fish swimming in his bucket of water, and returned it to the channel, free. When did you last submerge yourself in this water of separation, the void and barrier between two lands? You haven’t forgotten how tough it is to swim as though your life depended on it, have you? But you seemed to have forgotten, my friend, that a fish is free in water, his realm. He can swim across, back and forth, in this lukewarm fluid-- two lands, in the eyes of the fish, are not too different and unreachable. So swim against the current, as you travel through the water of time, timeless. Be brave, be proud, be dignified, for you are a carrier of our collective identity, our past, present and future.
The girl is 3 when the teacher stops her from choosing a blue folder. ‘Pink for girls and blue for boys,” she says, cheerily. The girl thinks of the pink blankets on the pink bed in her pink room, and asks the teacher “Why?” “Pink is a girl colour, sweetheart, and you’re a girl, aren’t you?” The reply comes with a toothy smile and a teasing pinch to the cheek. “Why can’t I be a boy?” The smile doesn’t dull. “We have a curious one here, don’t we?” The smile seems frozen on the teacher’s face, and the girl wonders if it hurts from stretching so much. “Ask your parents, kid, I don’t know.” “But Mommy says teachers are supposed to know everything—” A pink folder is pressed into her arms, and she is given a harder than gentle push towards her desk.

The girl is 11 when she questions her beliefs. It happens when everyone around her falls to a kneel and a solemn bow. Her legs refuse to bend and the girl can only stare at the cushioned kneelers at her feet. A sombre dong sounds, bouncing off the walls, and the girl’s mouth forms into practiced murmurs. Her voice melts into the chants of the congregation, and she looks at their adoring faces, wondering if they know the meanings of the words they are speaking. She watches as they sing songs of praise and unsuccessfully tries to mimic their serene expressions. Her mother turns to her with an equally tranquil gaze that hardens when she sees the girl’s contorted profile. She finds herself kneeling in a confessional booth after everyone else has left. The voice opposite asks her to state her sins, and the girl’s head hangs as she lists her misgivings. The lecture that follows her monologue is taut and disapproving, and she is given her sentence. The girl complies with a bowed head and a raging mind.

The girl is 16 (she is actually 14) when she makes her first internet friend. The girl posts 10 facts about herself to her 8632 followers. Online, no one knows her. Online, she can be someone else.

1. I am 16 today! (she is not)
2. I like the band Artic Neighbourhood. (she does not)
3. My favourite TV series is Grey’s Philosophy. (it is not)

@lightweight comments on her post and introduces herself as Noah. Ten minutes of conversation reveals that the two have extremely similar interests. Noah is 16 years old, and Noah listens to Artic Neighbourhood and watches Grey’s Philosophy. Noah is Swedish, and so is she (she is not). Noah does not believe in a higher power, and the girl doesn’t either (the girl prays every night). Noah isn’t looking forward to Thanksgiving because she doesn’t like to eat, and the girl—

22 Nov 2016
@justnoah: i feel like we have the same mind and i can tell u anything. u get it right?

The girl’s fingers hover above the keyboard.

(@randomgirlxox is typing...)

The girl places her finger on the delete button and holds it there until the textbox empties.
@justnoah: ahhh im so lucky to have met u, ive never met someone so similar to me! it’s like ur me from a parallel universe...are u even real haha :p we’re going to be the best of friends!!! :) 

(@randomgirlx is typing...) 
@randomgirlx: i know what you mean, i feel the exact way :( im glad we found each other though! crazy how similar we are right? :) 

At 18 the girl finds her lips on another’s. The world is spinning and she can’t remember her name and her age and what’s right or wrong. Pink is for girls and blue is for boys. Pink goes with blue, and nothing else. She is so close that she can see her own terrified reflection in the other’s eyes. The voices in her head scream sin, and she thinks of her mother and teacher and Noah. But the girl cannot stop looking, appreciating, marvelling at each ethereal detail on the other’s face, and she wonders when she became the poetically cliché girl that falls for the first person to make their world explode.

The girl is 22 when she has an existential crisis. One minute she’s staring at her textbook and the next the words are blurred in front of her, shifting, merging and dissipating—why did she choose law? The answer comes instantaneously and automatically, like a salesperson trained to recite the same product information every day. Because “Law can secure a good job with a high salary” and Law is the “Way to Success”. Law law law-law-law-law-law-law-law-law-law. The textbook spins in front of her, and suddenly the whole room is gyrating and the walls are crumbling—is she still alive? A panicked glance around the room and a self-inflicted pinch tells her that she is. But if she’s alive, why does she feel so translucent? Why is everything so unreal? Is she real? Who is she? Who is she?

The girl finds herself with half a leg slung over her balcony when she is 24. For a millisecond, she asks herself if she is really going to do this, if anyone cares. The girl realises it doesn’t matter because no one knows her. She doesn’t even know herself. She pushes off the balcony. There is no frozen lull in the air. There is no slowing down of time as her body aligns with the ground. The girl just falls.

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24 years old. My name is Kali Bennet and I am a daughter/questioner/believer/online friend/lover/university dropout/survivor/Kali.