

Anjali Rao

2nd Place, Secondary Division

2020 CFUW Writing Contest

### **The Separation**

"When did it all go wrong?" the headline read above a picture of my face. The breakfast croissant half-chewed in my mouth turned to ash, and my heartbeat began to thrum in my palms. Suddenly, standing there on my front stoop holding the paper, I felt eyes on me, from every window lining the street. I thought I would have more time.

I must have stood there for far too long until the sound of my neighbour's dog barking out a doorway shook me out of my trance. Still off-balance, I entered my house. My own things seemed strange to me, the furniture tripping me up and the art on the walls appeared psychedelic and grotesque. I knew that soon I would leave all this behind, and it seemed to me at that moment that I had never belonged there, to begin with.

Sitting down by the fireplace, I knew I had to take stock of my situation and form a plan. I had to leave.

Instead, I began to read the article. "Constant tremors. Cracks in the ground. Who's to blame? New evidence points to the most promising tech company of the last ten years. Yesterday, the young hotshot visionary CEO was sacked from her post. What does it all mean?"

It wasn't supposed to be like this. It was about energy. It was about disruption.

We found new metal, so new we hadn't named it yet. It was beautiful, black but bright, muddy but glowing. It was pure power. The only problem was it was deep underground, far too deep. We bought every drill we could in our part of the world, but to get to the good stuff we ended up with a lot of molten equipment and OSHA lawsuits. I made the choice to send down teams. We sent them in with space grade suits and titanium axes. We sent men and women who could afford to be that deep underground. The people who wouldn't be missed if they never came back. Looking into that tunnel was like looking up at night. The blackness felt forbidden, but we pushed on. In the name of innovation! In the name of money.

I hired experts. Energy experts, mining experts, money experts. It was always going to be a risk, but what is success without risk? There was unease in the air, there were always going to be doubters. At the time I thought pessimism was the enemy of progress. Now I wonder whether it pays more to be a pessimist.

They were underground for two months, digging tirelessly. That was when the crack appeared. Of course, I pulled out then, I am many things, but I am not foolish. We halted everything, we pulled out of the area, we agreed on secrecy. It wasn't enough.

Within twelve hours, the crack had spread across the country, neatly dividing buildings and roads, halving cities and farms. A hairline fracture, at first. It was almost a week before the tremors began. Just slight, earthy rumbles without fanfare. Natural feeling. Later, we would all wonder why we didn't know then what was going to happen.

The day of the Separation, I had almost forgotten my part in all this. The crack had become a landmark of daily life, the tremors become a weekly weather event and source of

irritation. It was easy to pretend this had always been the way things had been. I was on vacation, content and unbothered at my lakehouse. The rip changed everything.

The sound could be heard all over the country, deafening as the train tracks that ran perpendicular to the chasm were pulled violently apart and cars piled up on either side of the break. I remember sitting on my dock on the lake as the water rushed out into the nothingness. I saw the rift widen before my eyes, my hand automatically reaching out in front of me. I saw the trees fall into the blackness. The canyon was wide and terrible, and deeper than any that had existed before. Later, people would tell stories of houses disappearing, and the sound of a person's scream sustaining for over half an hour before they were fully gone. Magma burst in from the sides, creating a lake of fire straight through the middle of town. A school torn in half, children on either side, separated by kilometres.

I took a gamble. I lost. I called my lawyer