

2023

The following works are written by writers aged 12–17 years old who live or study in Darebin.

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*Content warning: The content of some of the pieces in this publication deal with themes that young people engage with that may be triggering. Parents are advised to review the works.*

## YOUTH WORKS

### FOREVER CHANGED

Emily Findlow

We are who we are. No one can change us. We stand for those around us or meticulously criticise every detail about them. Those beginning, or years into their transition; their journey; their new lease on life. Those fighting on the battlefield, or those staying at peace in their homes. We stand tall and empowered, or we crumble down like a piece of paper shrivelling. We are valid, yet we fight day and night. Everyone grows up in different ways.

I gaze at the spark in my grey eyes, flickering on and off. Waiting patiently to be ignited, the fire waiting to be fuelled. They carried a mixture of longing and barely contained anger. The voice inside my head screams for me to listen, but self-denial takes control. Minutes soon turn into hours and before I know it, I've been studiously scouring half of Google forever. I notice one thing after the next, a never-ending cycle and eventually, it consumed me. Reaching into the realms of discrimination, criminalisation, conversion therapy and gender-affirming health care, I become lost between the darkness and light. Stories of those who experienced discrimination and hate. Me. Those who fought and survived. Also, me.

I think about the girl I'm supposed to be a lot. The one who never hesitated before wearing a dress. The one who was perfectly comfortable with long hair. The one who wasn't filled with gender envy around the boys at school. But the girl I'm supposed to be is gone. While she walked freely, I was stuck in quicksand, struggling to catch up. While she reached her ambitions, I could barely dream of doing the same.

I was hiding under a mask, one I so desperately needed to get rid of. An image I needed to change. I have sunk to the lowest points in my life and rose to the highest. There are people who have been living with asserting change for years, whilst there are others without the access and rights to do the same. They can envision who they are, there's no doubt about it. It's the first thing they think about when they wake in the morning and the last thing they think about before drifting to sleep, yet they cannot make it happen. It grows a void in their soul, expanding as they are denied the transition they so desperately have been praying for, looking at others and wishing they had what they have.

These people are among the toughest we know. The ones who become activists and fighters and enact change across the world, because they could never bear the thought of someone else ever going through what they did. Even with a one in a million chance, we will never give up. We will never stop fighting and never end the conversation for our trans siblings.

There is a reality I never thought I'd experience, and now I'm seeing it every day. This is the person I am supposed to be.

### ROOFTOPS

Scarlett Clare

From the rooftops, everything below you looks small. The cars, the people, the trees, all appear like model miniatures.

From below, the girl on the rooftop also looks small, a delicate figurine, invisible to all beneath her, forgotten by those she once knew. She stands still, watching and observing.

When she first sees the boy, the girl on the roof does not move.

He walks across the flat expanse of concrete, his pace slow and meaningful, eyes glued to his feet. The boy's hair is a thick brown mop, dirty and unkempt.

The girl moves closer. There she can see the tears streaming down the boy's face. He looks up and straight into her eyes. He feels her presence, but she knows he cannot see her.

The boy stares. The girl reaches out, grasping for the boy's hand. As her fingers touch him, the despair etched into his face falters for just a moment, the hope her touch has implanted in him rising for just a second. But the girl sees that there is little hope for the boy, because as she pulls away, the moment of relief drains from his face, and his eyes dull.

The girl stands. The boy moves. The girl waits. The boy's feet reach the edge of the building.

If you were on the ground, looking up at the top of the building at exactly the right moment, you might have caught a glimpse of the boy, a glimpse of what he looked like before his body fell through the sky, and what used to be the boy was no more.

The girl stood, and the girl watched.

The traffic around the building screeched to a halt, but the noises of people did not die out. Through the busy chatter of city noises rose screams, shouts, gasps.

The girl moved. Slowly she drifted, down the side of the building, down and down, until she reaches the ground.

The boy is there. But it is not really him, he has been twisted and changed into something unrecognisable, a mess of limbs and features covered in a blanket of blood. The boy has transformed into simply *a boy*, for anything that once defined him as himself is gone.

The girl kneels. The boy lies. Her hand reaches out and touches him, and she feels a tear of her own slide down her cheek. Now she feels him, truly feels him, and it hurts, because no longer can he feel, and no longer is there a chance for him to heal.

The girl holds the boy.

The girl begins to rise. The boy follows.

A boy's body is left on the ground, but *the boy* comes with her.

He is ethereal. His soul is no longer weighed down by his reality. The boy is changed. He is finally free.

His body is broken, but the boy is healed.

*Up.*

*Up.*

*Up to the rooftops.*

### THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE MUSICIAN

Victor Liang

*It's not about teaching the Person to be a Musician but rather turning the Musician back into a Person.*

– Leah Amory

The sway of the pendulum gently rocks side to side like a hypnotic trance. Its swing has a heartbeat, and if one listens closely, it can reveal the essence of time. Time is a fundamental force, and if there is time, there must be space. As musicians, we must turn space into art and time into rhythm. And with our will, we must converge art and rhythm so that music can be born, yet we musicians pay an unparalleled price for our virtuosity.

We are born human, but some people die without humanity. I know this as a fact, but I wish it was nothing more than a myth. Despite this knowledge, I am cocooned in a claustrophobic room where I practise and refine my art, my music. My technical prowess over my instrument is near perfection, yet I feel I lack control over myself. My 'friends' have been calling me names like 'freak' and 'mad' and saying that I should stop my cultish behaviour before it 'consumes' me. However, I can assure you, dear reader, that I am enlightened.

My life was normal before the ticking of the metronome, the nostalgic memories of play and the dance of childhood faintly remain in the reflection of a rippling pond. It is hard to believe that the person I see in the reflection of the pond is really me. I saw myself as a seedling for humanity, ready to bloom, but as I approached this imaginary image of me, I was dragged back into my reality.

The dissonance and clash of harmony from a singular wrong note sent shock waves of offence to my ears. I stopped playing. How could I perform such a sin? I was too focused on reminiscing about the past, which caused an impure disease to spread. I tried to continue my sacred ritual, but my vexation seemed to cause a peculiar phenomenon to occur.

The notes and chords on the pages that I was reading started to move, yes, they moved and jumped and danced to form an arrangement of themselves. I found my hand no longer playing the music of Bach, but a strange sound that possessed the lyrical qualities of music, but which still lacked something. The notes on the paper arranged themselves into words, and I believe the words were: 'Are you playing music?'

I heard the beating of the metronome become slower, and when I listened to myself playing the music, I started to hear noises instead, and I walked out of the practise room like a butterfly finally breaking free from its cocoon.

The purpose of music is to connect to humanity. Music that isn't free is meaningless. All this time I was not making music, and the clicking stopped but the prelude of rhythm and art has only begun.



# CONTEMPLATING MY TRANSITION, AND YOU, IN THE BATHROOM AT A PARTY

Alice Lumsden

*Darebin Mayors Writing Awards 2023 Winner 15-17*

Bathroom door latched. Eyes closed. It's almost quiet here.

I think of my future as a cloth, cut down the middle and embroidered in two separate fashions on each side. There is one where I am calm, I can sleep, am loved and have time. There is softness and warmth. There is you with that smile, and those big dark eyes, where I am safe in a steady embrace. The other side is reality, not without a likeness to its counterpart but with the true history of my life, of how this slow burning metamorphosis baked me from dough to bread, crisping the edges and solidifying me and allowing me to stand on my own.

I think of that little boy whose little eyes cried too many tears onto those round red cheeks and who had too many promises sworn to him that were never to be fulfilled. That boy never hardened, never hated, but also never fully loved. He transformed into me: the young woman I am now, cursed and blessed to love and want and try.

I'll go back inside soon, into the sea of slender-shouldered girls in their glittering dresses, where I will have to face you. I'll have to try not to look at your warm smooth neck, thick hair and big dark eyes which will flicker up to stare blankly at me. I'll look away too quickly and turn from you.

Sometimes when one changes or metamorphoses, they must sacrifice parts that any other person would be allowed to have. If I were "normal", perhaps it might have been different. Perhaps you wouldn't just stare. Maybe if I had their slender shoulders you might think I was lovely. I'd have long hair and big eyes, like yours almost, and I would have the confidence to walk out there and live my life, because hiding isn't living. Hiding is weak, it is selfish to those who want to be there for you and need you to be there for them. I think too much. I care too much. I know I'll never have their shoulders or have you. I wouldn't make you happy.

I'll always want. I live in a world of wants, in a chasm of hope, with that little boy and his red cheeks. I know I must still change, like how the murky brown storm waters flowing through the creek behind our school in winter resolve into the crystal ripples that rush past in spring; for if I don't, these waters will grow stagnant and stale, and I'll remain without love. I don't want to be the me I am now forever. There are so many words to say with not enough breath to give.

Eyes open. The lights are still bright. The bathroom door will unlatch, and I will return to the sea. I'll try not to meet your gaze. I'll try to not think of my shoulders. I'll try to seem ok.

# THE AFTERMATH

Amber Bruce

Crowds shove me along, yelling and screaming. A riot. I try to fight the current of angry people shoving their way towards the end of the pier. I hear a scream. Someone has set a building on fire. Everyone pulls away from the fire, streaming towards the ocean. I find my chance. I swim through the mob, heading toward the burning building.

I get into an open space. Then burning timber covers my path. I grab onto a pole and swing onto a person's head. I jump onto a crumbled building and walk along the roof. I jump over the rooftops, looking at the rioting people. I make up my mind and go to my den on top of a house and grab my belongings. I can't stay here, it's too dangerous. I turn and leave. And my building goes up in flames.

Tears run down my face, and I rush with the crowd to the pier. Getting a little rowboat, I row out into the ocean. Pumping my arms against the ocean, I go on through the night. My only belongings are chucked in the corner of the boat. My heart burns at memory of my den going up in flames. Soon I fall asleep, shivering in the bottom of the boat.

I wake up to the sounds of people arguing. My rowboat has been tied to another boat; a ship. I stand up, making the boat rock. The arguing people turn towards me. 'Oh, great,' says the older person, 'Now they're awake.' She throws her hands in the air and walks away, leaving the girl with me. I get out of the boat, looking up at the ship's sails. I gasp. 'Oh, yeah, we're pirates.' She smiles sweetly. I glare at her and follow her to the other side of the ship. Down below, rocking with the waves, is a lifeboat. 'Get in.' she whispers. I jump into the boat, making it rock. Then she jumps in with me, and her eyes catch the light. I fall in love. She is beautiful. I smile and we set off into the ocean.

As we row, I feel her bumping my side. In the distance, I see a big wall of mist. As we pull up to it, I gasp. A city is sprawled out over the ocean, clinging to a small bit of land. A beautiful palace is perched up on the land, looking over everything. We bump the docks, and people come to look at us. We join the crowds, smiling secretively. As we look up, we see tall buildings and trees. And then we come across a small shack. A blanket and food are on the ground. So, we curl up and go to sleep, in a warm, safe place.

# INITIALS ON THE CLIFF FACE

Darcy Griffin

The path off the main track went down to a small rocky bank by the creek, an unsuitable reward for the walk the two had taken to reach their spot. It did give full view of the track on the other side of the river where all the dogs passed by with their owners.

The small cliff face was made-up of a sediment rock that had streaks of chalk in it, and on it was an old carving of the initials 'DG+ZP' which had been put there when they arrived the first time.

*So then came rain and our hair gets soaked!*

*-and we end up running back to my place to escape the worst of it-*

*Not before having to jump the creek and getting our shoes wet-*

*That's only because you doubled back on yourself though!*

The pair had taken a turn earlier on to arrive at this certain bend in the river, it had a tree on the bank which protected them from the afternoon sun. Cups were laid out on a rug with a bottle of apple juice and containers full of carrot cake. One pulled a book out while the other veered off to look at the flowers growing on the bank.

'Look! The yellow flowers over here, I think they're weeds, so it won't matter if you pick them.'

'Do they have long stems?'

*That can't have been your favourite one though, what about the picnic when I read the last chapter of We Were Liars?*

*Of course! And I made flower crowns while the plot twist hit you like a freight train.*

The two walked for hours just talking about anything. They would go on to tell friends they didn't remember what they said. They just liked being in each other's company - daring each other to jump parts of the steady-flowing creek or climb up sheer cliff faces. What came from these private rendezvous was wet shoes, tired feet, and a handful of blurry photos along with the faintest memory stored in the back of each of the two's brains. A soft feeling enveloped them as this memory re-surfaced.

*-What about the walk where we recreated Monty Python on the big pile of tanbark?*

*The southern goose skit? Of course!*

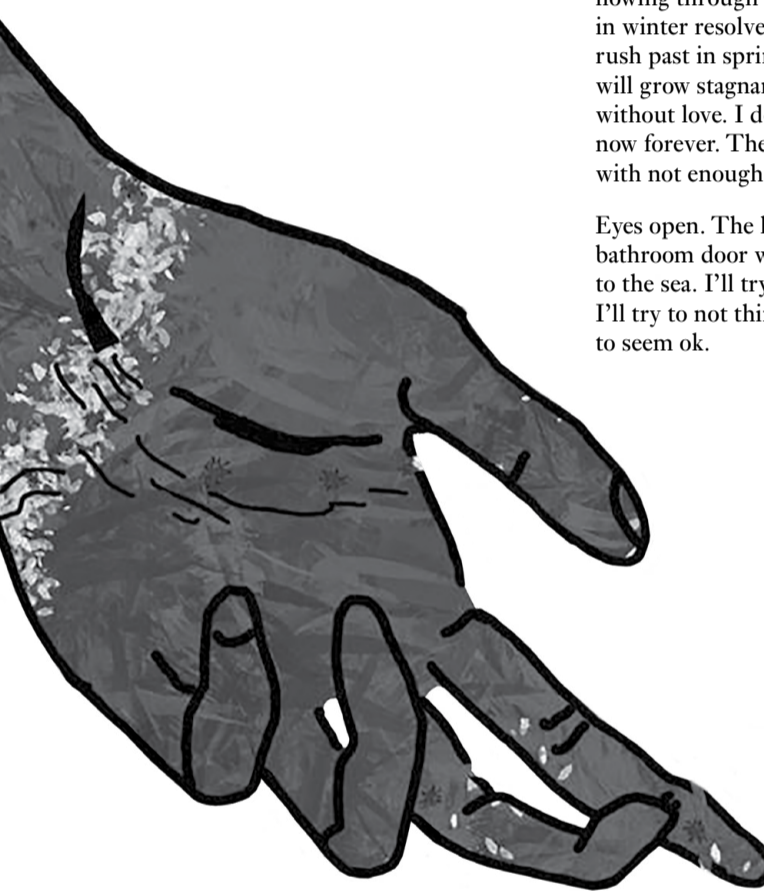
*We kept walking further, but I had three hours to get home and had used two and a half to get to your house and walk as far as we did.*

*You didn't get home for another three hours! Your mum was mad!*

*That the one where I got us hot chocolates and you spilt yours all down yourself on the first sip! The lid never came off and -*

The next visit consisted of one of the girls getting down on her knee with a ring box and the pair finding that first carving and correcting it.

A heart can now be seen on the cliff face with the initials 'DG+ZG'.



## KINGFISHERS AT MERRI CREEK

Meadow Rodriguez-Butterworth

*Darebin Mayors Writing Awards 2023 Winner 12-14*

They came down to nest at this very creek. For thousands of years, it gave them the food in their beak. But not long after that did the transformation begin. As the town began to change, factories started to fill-in. Not long after, the kingfishers flew away. And so, the creek faded to grey. But then the people of Darebin decided, To restore the creek to back when it provided. And so, the day came, that the kingfishers returned.

## METAMORPHOSIS

Edith Jiricek

Oh, little one  
Cracking, fracturing  
Hatching  
Oh, little one  
Munching, gnawing  
Eating  
Oh little one  
Changing, growing  
Chrysalis  
Oh, little one  
Emerging, changed  
Transformed  
Oh, beautiful one  
Flying, fluttering,  
Soaring  
Metamorphosis

Artwork by Eleanor Sutherland

The Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people are the traditional owners and custodians of this land. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture, and their powerful storytelling traditions. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.



Darebin  
Arts