

Years 11 & 12

2nd Place: Lee-Ann Tosen

Year 12, Dale Christian School

### The Mind of a Painter

The moon rose gracefully as the sun dropped dead in the red hot ombre coloured sky. The sky was painted roughly with streaks of midnight blue, dark black and, lavender purples. There were twinkling white dots of stars in the sky, splattered on as if someone had thrown their paintbrush at the canvas in frustration.

*I can't remember the last time I had painted a picture. I can't remember the last time I had any idea what to paint.*

I sat upon the birch wooden fence surrounding my house like a prison, overlooking the pine tree forest below. Maybe I could paint the forest? I could use subtle lighter brushes for the leaves and more quick careless strokes for the rough terrain. Or maybe . . . I could paint my house?

I looked back analytically. I scanned my house carefully. I could use bold reds and pastel yellows to get that tinted mango orange colour of the bricks. Perhaps I could use emerald and deep pine green for the grass and make sure that it sprouts over the bricks like a crazy lady's hairstyle.

Maybe I should first focus on actually being able to pick up a brush. *That's a good start.*

My phone buzzed quietly. It buzzed again until I picked it up, the screen illuminating my face. I skimmed the message covering my screen with fear in my eyes. *Worst timing ever.* My grandma wanted me to go over to her house to paint a picture with her. Her idea of a grandmother and granddaughter spending quality time together. To be completely honest, I never wanted to paint again. It was a day I would never forget. I never wanted to paint again ever since the day my mother had painted that man, posed like a knight. She was painting at the National Art Gallery in Sydney on the night of a terrifying storm. Lightning struck the building, the roof above where she stood. The roof broke and collapsed onto her. She was killed instantly. The storm laughed at that red paint that was splattered so intensely across the floor. The red paint that stained the floor with every passing second. The red paint that flowed in my direction. *It was a day I would never forget.*

Again, I stared at my phone. *Why now? Out of all the moments in life, it had to be now. The wrong moment when I had no idea what to paint, I was given the opportunity to paint but I have no idea what. Though, I know mum would have encouraged me to go. She would have suggested gathering inspiration from nature around. I suppose I could force myself to do that.*

Guess I should go see if Betsy starts. The fender was hanging on by a thread, and the windows were smeared with squashed bloody bugs. I forced the jammed car door open, yanking it back with a sudden 'groan.' I ducked my head beneath the rusted door frame, getting into my un-sturdy rusting car. Betsy may be old but she always got me everywhere I needed to go. But would Betsy survive this long 100km journey to my grandmas? Without further questions, I shoved the keys into the ignition. Betsy creaked and groaned a couple of times before she roared with power,

her engine humming beneath my seat. She squeaked as I pulled out of my driveway and down the narrow charcoal road towards my destination.

The forest appeared to the left and the sun kissed the pine trees that stuck straight up into the sky. The forest seemed to stretch for miles and the only thing that I saw was trees. Halfway there and Betsy began to hiss, and all I could see was steam coming from the bonnet. She bumped along the road, trying so hard to keep going but her engine stalled and she suddenly came to an abrupt stop. Betsy had it, she was overheated. I attempted turning the key again, but no noise came from her. She was tired.

Out of frustration, I slammed the car door. Betsy creaked in response. I winced, apologizing to her in my head before I took my phone out from my pocket. I checked the signal bars on my phone. No bars. No signal. I shook my phone violently, hoping it would somehow pick up a bar or two. Nothing . . . no bars appeared. I groaned, feeling the horrified presence of someone watching me. Slowly I lifted my eyes and made eye contact with the dark forest before me.

The pine trees loomed over me, their shadows casting black ghosts on the ground, ghosts that liked the moonlight, that didn't shy away from the light. Maybe if I find a hill in the forest, I can get a signal? In all the movies I've watched, people always got signals the higher they are. Hesitating at first, I wandered into the forest, hearing sounds of chirping birds and bustling beavers. A squirrel the colour of chocolate scurried past holding its acorn tightly in its paws. I could smell bark and the fresh moist scent of overnight droplets.

A faint trickle of water caught my attention. I followed the sound. How could a sound so graceful be in a place like this? The darkness disappeared as if it was being forced away and the light replaced the empty spots. The sound grew closer and I arrived at the origin of the sound. A waterfall. A fresh fountain of clear, crystallized water flowed from the mouth of the jagged rocks. The mouth was ajar and big enough to swallow me. The sun shone relentlessly on the water, following its perfect flow as it cascaded down the rocks. *What a beautiful picture to paint. Grandma would love it.*

Without warning, the rocks holding me upright cracked beneath my feet. In that sudden moment, I remembered the fear I had experienced on the ice rink when I was just five. The ice had begun to crack beneath my feet and my knees began to tremble. What do you do in a near-death situation? I didn't move. I remained where I was with my body shaking. I didn't want to move. I was rescued by my dad; he swung me up and safely caught me in his arms, reassuring me that everything would be alright.

The rocks crumbled like stone, falling apart beneath me. I slipped into the river connected to the waterfall. The current pulled me in. It dragged me along in its flow, it took me downstream. The water roared, and I couldn't see what was happening beneath the waves of water. I was being consumed, dragged down by the strong currents as if they had hands. I needed help. I wanted help. But nobody was there.

My arm scraped sticks sticking out of the water, and I kicked my legs at the seaweed that brushed my legs beneath the water. I cried out in pain as my head collided with

a rock. I didn't faint. I kept my eyes open and I kept splashing around in the water to stay afloat. It was as if it had ended as fast as it began. The water current was slower, and the river seemed to hug the sides of the banks. I squinted my eyes shut once and once I opened them again, I was on land.

The soil crumbled beneath my feet and I tumbled forward on uneven land. I reared up, surprised as a dark shadow was cast over my head. I looked up, glancing at the cave that was sited before me. Its mouth was gaping open, and it seemed to be roaring at me with anger so rational, it made me want to sprint for my life. Never had anything in life made me feel so cold and dark inside, like claws ripping at my heart.

I was curious, it pulled at me and I wandered in, placing one foot in front of the other. The darkness remained above me for a long time until I descended further into the cave. Something seemed to change in the atmosphere of the cave. It went from a chilly atmosphere of black ghosts to a brighter, unnatural atmosphere. Rocks of all shapes and sizes were sticking out of the jagged rock walls. I glanced closer at the rocks only to discover that they were crystals embedded into the cave wall. I ran my finger across an emerald crystal. It had texture so detailed, it made my fingers feel pricked and it had rough edges that were straighter than paper. There were crystals of ruby, emerald, sapphire, diamond, and gold. The colours mixed in a painter's mind, in my mind, creating an image, piecing it together just like a puzzle.

I heard a faint trickle of water as I heard before. I glanced into the depths of the cave, spotting a small circle of rippling water. The water glowed colours of the rainbow and it glimmered and rippled like the waves of the ocean. I studied the cave, soaking up the colours that illuminated from the crystals. I closed my eyes and breathed in through my nostrils before sticking my wounded arm into the pool of clean water. My blood spiralled around in the water. Contaminating it. Poisoning it. It almost looked like paint being washed off a paintbrush.

My reflection glowed back at me. The red streaks of blood spiralled around my face in the water. My reflection smiled back at me with squinted eyes. I studied my reflection. My face was flawless with eyes as green and hair as dark as my Mothers. I was the spitting image of her. *Even if she is dead, I still live on in her footsteps. I must follow her footsteps. Become a painter. Paint for the world. Inspire others. I want to do that. I want to change the way people see the world. I want people to look deeper and realize that there is more meaning behind a simple painting nailed onto the gallery wall.*

I sucked in a deep breath. *I know. I know. I finally know what to paint again.* I pictured the painting of the beautiful waterfall covering the entrance to a magical hidden cave. I'll paint this very place. My paradise. I'll paint it so full of colour and puzzling meanings, that it would scream confusion and cause tears to stream down my face. Proud tears at that. The cave will have a hidden message, a message that I want people to work out for themselves.

I would never have figured it out by myself. That message from my grandma was a sign. A sign that I had to let go of my past and to open my eyes to the nearing future. To look at the world around me. This unexpected journey had helped me to realize that there will never be nothing to paint but that I must open my eyes to everything around me.

With my arm submerged in the water, the red paint continued to flow from my scratch. I looked at the gold embedded in the cave walls, the pure golden strokes on the endless brown rocks. I smiled at the place I'd been searching for my whole life. My inspiration, I finally found it.

"Thank you," I whispered down to my reflection. It thanked me back.

"Now I finally know what to paint."