



2nd prize
14-16 years age
group

Name: Jacinta L

Age: 15

Title: Past Lives

Judge's notes: "This story seems like typical teen writing at first but it quickly morphs into a series of well chosen and thoughtful reflections and vignettes through which she finds purpose and takes action. A well written, really well structured piece with a very satisfying conclusion that feels like a complete story."

"Jacinta's story reads as if it was written by someone a lot older with years and years of life experience. Very well written and moving."

"This moving story left me with a haunting sense of sadness as well as hope."

"Moving story from a much older perspective, cleverly written in changing the timelines."

Past Lives

I don't want to be remembered like that.

The warmth of the deep fryer emanates through the air. Trepidation lingers as vinegary odours swallow its surroundings - arms wide, yet threatening to engulf anyone who enters the shop. The selection of battered and crumbed fish on the menu board are deteriorated by the afternoon light and fade into the white tiled walls that contain grime between the gaps. With each tick of the clock, the bottomless pit inside my stomach grows larger.

I am 15 years old, and all that is there for me to do is to wrap fish in newspaper. There is nothing else laid out for me next. I am paralysed with the fear of not doing enough, not knowing what I want in this life. The uncertainty of each day haunts tomorrow, but tomorrow seemed like light years away.

Then I am 8 years old, and remember my teacher's voice echoing, "Not all those who wander are aimless". I still don't know what she meant by aimless, but I could only imagine a place reached by aimlessly wandering - a place where I had everything figured out.

The clock then strikes five and it's time to go home. As I sit on the train, the evening is bathed into an orange hue as the horizon fades away into the distance. To the left, there are houses with windows consuming the entirety of one's loneliness when looked through, houses where the façade is consisted of nothing but artificial plastic turf.

Houses where, from a bird's eye view seemed perfectly fine, but when inspected closer, were as flimsy and brittle as paper. I wonder what my life would be if I were to live in one of those houses. I am tempted to trace the outlines of them with my fingertips, but I know I cannot succumb to a life that measures success in square metres and capital growth.

At each train stop, I look at the strangers that get on and off. How many lifetimes would I have briefly locked glances or crossed paths with them? Do they wish upon themselves another life to live? The frantic rattle of the train causes my head to spin, and after the abrupt halt, I get off.

Now I am 0 years old, and my mother has just given birth to me. I wonder, did she envision the many versions of myself branching out, an Olympic athlete, a director, or perhaps, a writer? Would she still love me if I were previously lived in a different body?

I am 15 once again and realise that the days will blur into one, and soon the years will be taken from me - the same way a tide approaches the shore, then retreats suddenly. Ever so capricious, ever so fickle. Occasionally, I wish the tide could have swept me in as well. I walk down to the beach and see a fish suspended into air before it makes its way back into the ocean. A sliver of scales. A sliver of hope.

I hand in my resignation.

Today, I don't look back along my past life, but sometimes it comes back to the surface relentlessly. The seasons will change, memories will try and make you feel worthless, but in this life,

I don't want to be remembered like that.