



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2018

Junior Runner-Up: Floria Gu, Age 13, Canada.

Inheritance

1.

once, my mother said

they called it

a city.

jagged silhouettes

of long gone giants; wire frames

embedded in heat-soaked stone

they claw at the ashen sky

metal monoliths piercing

coal clouds that smother

my world in darkness.

with each step, dust stirs

and collects in swarms

over deserted skeletons,

each heave of my lungs prey

to their scorched invasion.

2.

i find emerald bliss
in the ribcage of some
skeletal apartment
where cradles line the wall,
chipped ceramic and thin earth
nourishing frail stems.
an impossibility in each
timid shoot, yet i coax them
toward life, like infants
finding their way.
damp earth, metallic water —
i inhale the sharp fragrance
of nature: grass, rain
sea and forests, from
an imagined home
i did not inherit.

3.

wrappers, bottles, bags:
they form colourful knots
that bob on dark sea,
like drowning masses
the current pulls
in orbits around open water,

endless processions
along the coast.
some careless
fingers dropped those
ubiquitous synthetic shards
to whirl around the world
choke river mouths
and be picked up
decades later
by someone like me.

4.

across the river hovers
a thin girl, whose eyes
seem too large
in her wan face
that shadowed creases
scar — the mark
of fate's second victim.
i ask her name;
"summer," she whispers.

we trudge together,
each step parting
the next layer of refuse
in a bottomless mountain.

5.

as sun bakes our concrete prison

i tell her stories:

long ago, our ancestors

chased danger with blatant

disregard, and forged

toxic nets to trap

the ocean's treasures

pillared spears to drag oil

from the depths, and

enterprises for gain

that billowed charcoal

clouds, sealing heat

until cataclysmic beasts were

roused from sleep

to challenge us.

their watery maws snapped

our steel supports

and the child's tower

of civilization

crumbled.

"did we fight back?" summer asks;

i smile and do not say

that desperate screams

rung unanswered, til distance

swallowed them
and children woke to claim
the promised world
but found it orphaned.

6.

sometimes i see others:
the shriveled woman
who clutches a child
in meager shade;
they turn dull stares to
the future, bow their heads
accept fate's mistakes.
sometimes i listen
by a rotten wood frame
that shakes
from a family weeping —
water-borne affliction
kills their youngest;
the eldest scour
miles around
and find no cure.
sometimes, i visit
the hunched man
whose hateful eyes simmer

beneath his hood;
he speaks of elsewhere
healthy children, who go to school
and learn to keep
their own family standing.
his words hiss unspoken
in clouds of spit:
“it’s all their fault.”

7.

a storm begins as rain.
sheets of it
split ashen haze;
i press summer to a corner
and squeeze shut eyes.
we drown
in nature’s vengeance:
wind’s battlecries
drums of thunder, and the storm
that sweeps black wings,
its icy lances hurled at
this graveyard
of wind-lashed buildings,
skeletons in shreds,
to snap clothes
and tear our bodies.

i cower and wonder:
how many of us will die
today, in the crossfire
of our ancestors' war?

8.

we approach our clay pots, spared
by miraculous hesitation, as if
the storm parted, unwilling to
end fragile life.

like jewels alight, summer's eyes
lift with astonished glow
to open skies, through which pierce
shafts of light; the birth of sparks
that rise in dance ever higher.

and possibility sings
in my blood, as it sings
deep within earth's womb
waiting to hold
a future, that i will forge
and someday —
give to her.