



# Years 11-12 Category Highly Commended

GRACE CAMPBELL – ST MARY'S COLLEGE

## Inner Peace and Self-Acceptance

I thought it was normal to hate myself: to detest every inch of skin, the thickness of my hair, how I spoke, and who I was. I don't remember a life when I was in harmony with myself; that life would be unnatural. Harmony, before, was like donning an identity that resembled nothing of my authentic self. I was dressed in synthetic fibres, with nothing to protect my sensitive skin. On alert every waking moment, I felt like the disadvantage I was-a woman, walking the grim street at night. I couldn't see my own hand before my face, and I was frightened of myself.

Your body is a temple, spiritual beings tell you, but I felt like a dilapidated structure. Just a faulty shell that had potential but was never pursued. The architect wasn't very good at their job, neither were the craftsmen. The systems inside me failed to metabolise my emotions and stress was leaking out of the wires. I was a hoarder, bringing too much into my body so that it began to inundate and show as fissures in my framework. The floorboards of my beliefs and values were brittle and indecisive. I couldn't figure out what made me happy. The corrugated roof of boundaries was warped by the invalidation of others. The attic was ominous, cobwebs knitting the edges into a cycle of habitual self-destruction. Neurons from a foreign electrical system had their cords cut and laid limp on the damp, spongy floor.

The exterior of the construction was what made the poor job so predictable. The paint on the crumbly wood was wobbly and rippled, swollen with water and fleshy matter. Streaks of white clawed down the pale canvas, and circles of brown rust peppered its body. The spots of rust were in bizarre locations.

The garden was malnourished, unkempt-absolute carelessness. There was no mutual company here, except toxic weeds that sucked up the remaining energy. The framings and decoration on the balcony did their best to supplement; a flawless layer of paint on the door, a heavy black tint lining the structure's edges, wispy curtains fanning the only hopes of original beauty. The stained-glass windows-the eyes of the shabby building.

The windows were the one thing they did manage to conserve. They were, actually, quite beautiful. I don't exactly remember when the surveyor came through and identified the hazards. However, I vividly remember the urgency, and the quick draft of letters that went to the neighbouring dwellings. A week later, demolition services came and knocked down the dank walls, turned the soil, and fixed the cables. But they handled the windows with care, preserving them, ensuring not a fingerprint tainted their beauty.

A new house was built. It took a long time, and it still isn't completed. A black and white commercial sign warning CONSTRUCTION IN PROGRESS stays fixed to the fence.

Scaffolding bolsters the skeleton, reminding residents of the fragility. If they took the supports away, anyone would have said the house was liveable, but a storm would knock the framework as it would toothpicks and Blu-Tack. I'm glad they decided to rectify the house. Yes, it is much nicer to look at: the sturdier walls, the fertile garden. It still has a crack here and there, but that is okay because every house in the neighbourhood does. And it still has those stained-glass eyes. I stare at those eyes in the mirror, and I smile at her.