

## 2nd Place

Time Loop

Y.S. (JH 3)

The curve of the wall is prominent. It's made of glass. I let my feet drag through the sand as my hand trails the cool, continuous surface. Not a single fracture, not a single crack. As I come to a slow stop, I tilt my head back, just to observe the scene I've seen countless times. Tonight, a shade of dark aegean blue selfishly claims the entire night sky for itself.

Such irony, glass. Granting you visual freedom whilst physically restricting you.

The area of glass parallel to my lowermost collarbone curves out just enough for a person to lean against comfortably. The upper area of glass, no higher than the top of my skull, starts to curve inwards. My eyes follow the contour of the transparent surface until I stumble upon the hole, where none of us can reach during this hour of the day. It is the entrance and exit to both sides, so small that I am barely able to pass through the opening. Someday, I won't be able to.

I trudge through the dehydrated dunes of sand. At a certain angle, the moonlight reflects off of the small fragments of weathered rocks. Mother often recalls her time spent back to back with the endless shoreline of a tropical beach. The sand there is not the same as the sand here.

"The sand over there is so pale; our sand is bright orange in contrast. And the texture is so, *very* fine. Like liquefied silk trickling down your fingers," she recalls in vivid detail. It's impressive how much she remembers, considering how she's never been out of the barricade.

I arrive at the house. All the windows and doors are meaningless frames implanted into the walls. The windows are void of glass, the doorframes void of doors. Except for one. A door is hanging on by a thread, latched onto a white frame with loose hinges and aged nails. We try not to rush its inevitable fall by avoiding the doorway. We walk around the house, desperately trying to conserve it. It's a reminder of when this house was still fully intact.

"Jade, it's almost sunrise," my brother calls out. "Let's get going."

I close my backpack, making sure to string a piece of twine through the small holes in the zipper and tie a very secure knot so nothing goes missing. My eyes roam the now empty house, blue walls and all, and head towards the edge of the barrier. From the horizon, a saturated orange seeps into the canvas of the sky and slowly makes its way towards the faded moon and dimmed stars. My brother finishes securing my mother's belongings into her satchel.

"Ready?" he asks.

"As ready as I'll ever be."

The hand reaches out towards us, and without warning, our world is flipped upside down.

I fall into the other side of the hourglass.