

3rd Place (High School, 2022): Esme McInnes, Huanui College, Ruined

His screams take over my body, shaking and breaking the place he used to own in my heart. The words circle around my head, some reaching my ears, others completely missing. His words hurt but not as much as his hits. I remember when we used to be happy, in love – when we were inseparable. Now we are broken, attacked, ruined.

Steam fills the room as the hot water pours from the shower head. I strip my clothes and examine my body in the mirror hanging above the sink: imperfect in every way (as always). My body is weak and pale. Like a canvas, deep blues, browns and purples are splattered all over me. What used to be hickeys, marks of his love, are now fingerprints, placed by his rage. I step into the shower, feeling my tears mix with the hot water that stings my skin, hopeful that this time it will burn off my insecurities.

Just after I'm out of the shower he knocks on the door, with the same hands he used to strike me. I quickly cover up before he enters, and when he does I know exactly what he's going to say, and I know what I'm going to say back, no matter what he does.

He walks over to me slowly, his face covered by one of the many masks of emotions he constantly changes, this one sympathy. "I'm so sorry, Sophie, I wasn't thinking properly. I was just so angry and all of a sudden I lost control. Please forgive me, I never meant to hurt you."

I look into his eyes; they're filled with comfort and solace. His eyebrows rise a little as if re-asking the question. I step forwards and move my hands up his back and around his neck, pulling myself into him. I only feel comforted by him, I only want to be embraced by him, I only want him.

He sighs, knowing I have answered his question and hugs me back.

Maybe this time he means it.

Maybe this time we'll be okay.

Maybe this time my wounds will have enough time to heal.