Izzy Srivastava

Submission 4

It’s winter

We’re making our way up a long, winding street, pinned to the edge of thriving thoroughfare

Clad in our school uniforms

I’m wearing a bulky red sweater, a long plaid skirt, and tights

You shoot by in your scarlet car

And shout and whistle at me

Because my attempts to walk to my home and have a conversation with a member of my family

Are obviously a desperate cry for you to notice me

How else will my self-esteem survive?

You haven’t reduced me to nothing more than an object that walks, talks, and exists for your enjoyment

Why did you drive away?

I can wait to jump into your car and ride away with you

I was thirteen

It’s spring

I’m in New Zealand, exploring the sights with three generations of my family

I’m walking down the street

I’m wearing jeans and a hoodie

I graze your arm with mine, mutter an apology, keep walking

And so do you

You follow me step for step

And your muttering has gotten louder

Loud enough that I can hear what you’re saying to me

You are threatening me, scaring me, chasing me

And I am in full flight

For anywhere public, anywhere I might be safe

And even after I’ve gotten away from you

I still can’t remember how to breathe

I was thirteen

It’s spring

I’m back in school, hitching the train to and fro, often on my own

I’m wearing a billowing button-up and a long plaid skirt

And what do you know?

There you are

Demanding to know about my life

How old? What school? Your name? Getting off here? Live nearby?

You stand too close, you smile with cold eyes, you won’t step away from me

And I run all the way home

Checking over my shoulder

Afraid that you haven’t left me alone

And sure enough, I see you again,

Hovering at my train station,

Day after day

So I keep running

I was thirteen

It’s summer

I’ll be across oceans in less than a week, and this is one of my last days with two girls who have come to mean so much to me

And we are walking up a hill

Four lanes of traffic beside us

You two come along, shouting at us from your truck

“Hey, girl!”

Isn’t that a brilliant thing to say?

It’s so terribly thoughtful of you, you know

How else would those fifteen-year-old girls be able to live with themselves?

Fortunately, they have you to yell at them

Aren’t you a national treasure!

We really did need you to interrupt one of our last chances to say goodbye

I really can’t thank you enough

I was thirteen