

Junior Division (16-20), Prose  
Teresa Sheng, St. John's  
**Afterlight (an excerpt)**

I drag a body across the concrete. My hands shake – not from fear, but hunger. God, when was the last time I ate? Day bleeds into night, and night back into day. I open my mouth to try and breathe but the air tastes like rust – Like something's been dead for too long. Scents of oil and metal linger around. My mask does little against the dust in the air – it clings to my lungs. I use my staff as a cane, my hand gripping the rough carbon-fiber shaft. Every step is too loud. Every breath could be my last.

A city looms above me – giant towers of broken glass and steel – like teeth biting into a colourless sky. A ghost town. I spot the faded sign of a convenience store ahead. Hope flickers and cuts through exhaustion. Staggering, I shove past the splintered frames of what used to be the doors.

Boxes. A ton of boxes. Through the hazy air within, groceries and delivery crates scatter the floor, some ripped open. Everything has a thick layer of dust, some places more than others. The same floor is buried under layers of gray – dust thick enough to swallow footprints whole – as if walking in freshly fallen snow. I trek through the dust, careful to not lift the whole layer into the air, I cough as I breathe in a whole breath of soot.

Desperately, I crouch down and search the boxes for anything I could eat, ripping open packages and turning over crates. Nothing. Everything is rotten. But my hand finds a cardboard box. Gingerly, I pick it up. Cereal.

I thought they didn't make these anymore.