

CREATIVE WRITING BY
ONEHUNGA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
2024

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THE O.H.PRESS





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Creative Writing Competition Winners 2024

We had a number of brilliant entries to the Junior and Senior Creative Writing Competitions this year. Choosing the winners was an *incredibly* difficult task.

There is a winner, a runner-up and a second runner-up in both the Senior and Junior categories. Well done to these talented young writers.





SENIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION WINNING ENTRY 2024

Sunset

Alex Johnson - 13KR

Aristo's shoes clapped as he ran. The sun was sinking fast, and if he didn't light his street before the city was dipped into night, mister Galiman would shunt him off the shift, and he couldn't lose that, else how would he get his money?

The ocean, which had been sparkling minutes prior, was now dipped into a wash of pinks and oranges as it swallowed the sun. The many sailing ships and rowboats out in the bay and in the docks, slowly rocking like ducks in a pond, were silhouetted black against the sky. He didn't have time to love the view, kicking his feet in the water on the docks with cold bread like he usually did, because he needed the lights, and he needed them quickly.

'His' street was some distance away, across the curve of the bay, across the river, one that ran down from the imposing Senatorial Chamber's marble walls the full length of Calun City all the way down to the water. Hopefully Nio had done her part of the street, and Mica, and Sirhg, which they probably had, because they didn't have distractions like him, or at least they dealt with them better. The only dealing Aristo could do was with the bread man.

The warming stone at his hip, a small orange rock with cracked leather casing, dimmed. Feeling the biting cold wind that had begun to flow down from the mountains, Aristo stumbled to a stop, wincing as his toes were thrust out the front of his shoes into the open, shaking hands fumbling for the stone. The leather had cracked when he'd been beaten yesterday by some richo for sitting in the wrong spot on docks during preparations for the Winter Moon celebrations, and now the thing wasn't holding magic as well as it usually did; not that he could afford a new one.

Lifting up some of the leather around a crack and holding it open with one hand, he held his other pointer finger over the stone and willed magic up from his core, feeling it crawl up his arm like a swarm of tiny rats inside his skin, before a small tendril, like a tiny crackle of lightning, tentatively reached out from his finger and connected with the stone's surface.

The magic's crawl became a stampede, and Aristo yanked his hand away on reflex, ripping the tendril apart as the rock began to glow a sweet, dull orange once again. He cradled it close, taking a moment to revel in the uncommon warmth it provided, the gentle comfort he'd always imagined a mother's hug must feel like. Shaking himself loose, he continued his dash.

From what Aristo could see as he came onto his street, the lower lights were being lit, twinkling points of light winking into existence in a long trail down to the waterfront, where the ocean had swallowed the sun's colours. He'd had to recharge his warming stone on the way over, and though he knew he shouldn't waste magic on something so non-essential, but he had nothing warm to wear, and his toes were freezing off, and with winter coming over the mountains with the next sun, he really didn't have much choice; if his fingers froze off, how was he supposed to power the lights?

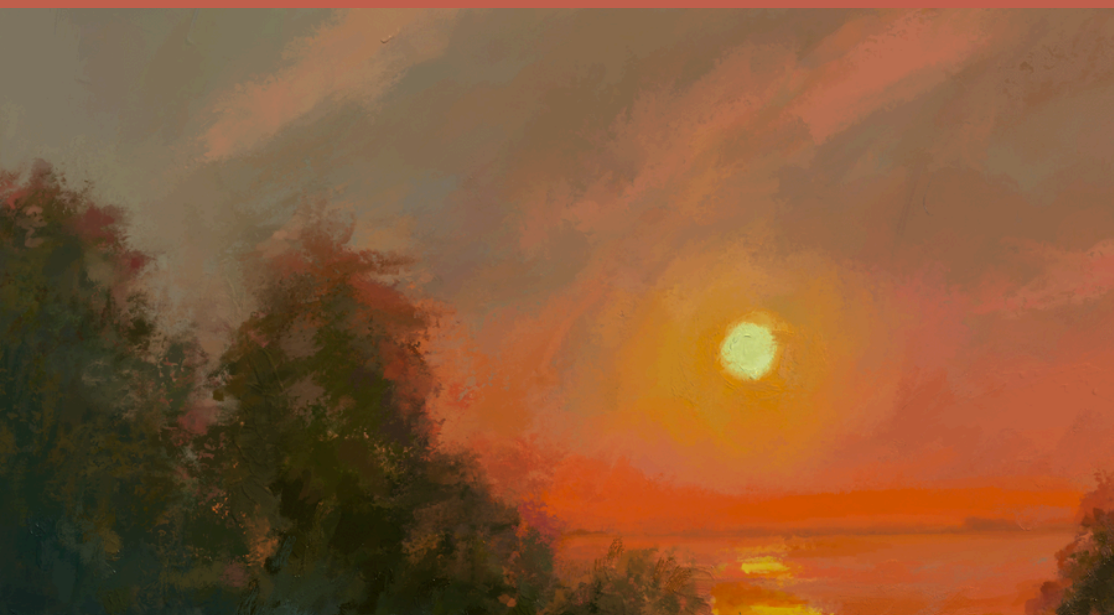
Having walked a short distance up the street to his highest light, he found a ladder already propped against the light-post. A gift from the stars, he thought, pushing away the more likely possibility as he began his work without the hindrance of needing to grab his own ladder from its hiding spot. The thing was sturdy, though not cripplingly heavy, and allowed him to clamber up, crackle a light on, clamber down, and so on repeatedly until he covered the entire street.

Continually, however, his warming stone would cool, and he'd be forced to make a stop to restart it, longingly bask in its warmth, and force himself onto the next light. Each time he lit a stone, however, he felt his strength lessen, and it gradually became harder and harder to haul himself up to the lights, like his willpower was slowly being sucked from his body, and so he began to space the warming stone out, only relighting it when his fingers got desperately frozen.

It was at the last light that Aristo met trouble. When he placed his fingers to the light stone's smooth, white surface, nothing happened. Either his fingers had frozen off, or didn't have enough magic to send; he couldn't feel anything, and so could only stare at his hand, almost dumbfounded. He tried again. And again. And again and again and again, again, again, again, again!

But the light stone didn't turn on. Aristo stiffly clambered down the ladder and... stood, for a moment. He couldn't go back to mister Galiman, not with that light off, he'd be beaten and abandoned and left for the slavers. He looked up, at the stars above, and the Winter Moon, high amongst them, and whispered a few curses to it, before wrapping his fingers around the warming stone and bringing it to his face, crackling it to life, and enjoying the pleasant heat it gave off even as his body let go and he collapsed onto the pavement. He, as the pitch-black of night washed over the final, gasping, dying rays of sunset, held an eternal vision of comfort of which he'd never had before, an everlasting joy that couldn't ever be imagined by those who passed over his still smile when winter morning came.

This piece was also published by Tearaway Magazine.





SENIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION
FIRST RUNNER-UP 2024

Don't Speak Māori.
Regan Brabant-Henry - 11LU

The pōuri still lingers.

It's all around.

It kind of feels like having your roots torn out,
leaving you struggling to find solid ground.

Like when that marae down the road,
moved to some museum, now locked behind a velvet rope.

Or the mamae you feel when there's no one to speak on the paepae.

Maybe it's the kuia that whispers her karakia,
murmuring a language that was once said without care.

Or the plastic tiki that sits in the tourists shrine,
collecting dust underneath the 'Kiwiana' sign.

Maybe it was when our reo was reduced to street names
that even the korus on that Pākehā's
skin curled in shame.

Or it might have been when that white-skinned girl,
sick of hearing about milk and coffee,
Grew tired of proving her whakapapa to someone who's not even Māori.

Maybe it was when they started ending emails with 'ngā mihi' that made it seem more like pity.

Or it could be the pounamu worn by those who don't know the mauri it carries
or the river from which it flowed.

In this day and age
Tāne's children whisper of times before the change
When Papatūānuku's face
Wasn't quite so strange



SENIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

SECOND RUNNER-UP 2024

Bad Men

Hayden Chandler - 11TR

He held the note in a ball in his hand. "They're bad men, bad men. I'm not supposed to care."

He continued to walk forward, towards the arch in the barbed wire fence, the jeep parked under it, with its owner leaning against the fence, playing with his frosty breath. He walked up to the jeep, holding the pack of cigarettes in the palm of leather gloves. The soldier's head tilted up, inspecting Augustine with suspicion as he shuffled forward, shaking the cigarette box.

"Lighter, and perhaps I'll share."

The soldier smirked. He rummaged in his pocket, digging for the little rusty dragon, asleep in its leather cave. The exchange made, the man, in a low tone asked, "Shouldn't you be on guard duty? You know there's a piggy on the loose." He flashed Augustine an evil grin.

Augustine stabbed through the soldier's laughter with icy blue eyes, his teeth pressing down against each other and his jaw clenched like a machine. The man glared back at him. Had he given himself away?

Augustine put the cigarette between his chapped lips. He could feel his stomach swirling up into his throat. Every grumble felt like someone clawing at walls of carpet, as the tips of their fingers burned and bled and their nails came away. He returned the lighter and joined the soldier on the far edge of the wall. Augustine looked to the truck, through a gap in the tarpaulin where the light from the moon illuminated a name, Heckler, a German brand of firearms.

"Shouldn't you be bringing in cargo?" The soldier stared down at the snow creeping over his boots, puffing on his smoke.

"Just wanted a break, I imagine that's why you're here too." His cap cast a dark looming shadow across his eyes, obscuring his features as his scarf swallowed everything around the cigarette. Only the edge of his cap was framed by the soft glow of the butt, burning away the night.

"What's your name, big fella?" He grinned.

"Williome, Williome Müller, And you would be?"

Augustine tried to muffle his spluttering cough, every breath like swallowing sand.

"Claus Scherzer. Nice to meet you Müller."

"You as well."

Augustine turned his head to scowl, blowing out a dense cloud. He had never been a smoker. After his father told him about his brother, Uncle Paul, who had smothered his lungs dry, Augustine hadn't dared touch one since. The betrayal to father's words hurt almost as much as the corroding, cancerous cloud now filling his chest. This guy isn't going anywhere anytime soon, I need to act now if I have any chance of getting out.

He dropped the butt on the white carpet below, watching the last breaths of the ember reaching out to him. He stepped on it, burying it into the snow, as he positioned himself on the end of the gate. The soldier's face spiked up a piercing, suspicious gaze. "Just going for a leak."

He gave a thumbs up before stepping behind the fence. The soldier's eyes followed him until they could follow no further. He walked at a steady, calm pace, stopping behind a thick, frosty oak tree. He stood behind for a short while, making sure that Scherzer did not have the means to follow him. Once he found himself in the clear, he started to walk away, picking up his pace the further he got.

Before he knew it he was sprinting. Running on nothing but cigarette smoke and adrenalin.
To where, God only knew.



JUNIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION WINNING ENTRY 2024

The Cornfield Killer Zeva O'Sullivan - 10GR

Texas, 26-10-1991

Laughter surrounded my sister and I, the sound drifting into the cool air. I moved slowly, the late-night breeze thick with excitement; my sister, Sam, thanked the carnival staff that strolled past us on our way. The blaring lights faded into the darkness of the night. I stood there, watching Sam's golden hair fly behind her. The parking lot was deserted, sending an abnormal chill up my spine; the familiar beep of my car brought me out of my thoughts. The door handle radiated heat, reminding me of my sister's hand. I thought about her and smiled. The car seat felt soft beneath me. I let go of the door as it thudded behind me. The glistening mirror held the reflection of two brown, beady eyes that stared into my soul. I shrieked; my smile melted away. His warm hands wrapped around my neck, turning my screams into gasps for air. A strong chemical scent burned my nose. My vision went black.

I awoke in a small, tight space; a suffocating feeling washed over me. My screaming echoed around me while my body rolled side to side in the cramped space. I wished I was home; I longed for my sister's embrace. A musty smell burned my nose as I crashed roughly into metal and a spare tire. My voice grew hoarse. Suddenly I stopped moving; Dim moonlight flooded the trunk and the silhouette of a large man stood before me. He raised his hand and swung at me.

Dry straw tickled my face. I opened my eyes to see two dirty boots before me. Straw bales sat next to me, animals rustled in the hay. My loose tangled hair brushed against my back. My skull felt heavy on my shoulders as I moved it. I came face to face with a rugged man. I turned my head away, scared of what he may do. His scruffy beard and warm breath grazed my skin; I cringed in disgust.

"I'm going to let you run, and then I'm going to chase you," he said. A few beats of silence passed; "run" he whispered. That was all it took for me to sprint as fast as I could to what looked like a wooden door. Hay stuck to the bottom of my jeans. Just keep running, I repeated in my head. Looking back at the chipped door, I saw him standing in the darkness of the barn, watching as I ran into a field of amber.

Corn stalks surrounded me. I ran for hours, pushing the stems of the dull amber crop out of my way. The twinkling stars looked down on me, listening to my breathing and heart pounding. Adrenaline coursed through me. The rhythmic thumping of my feet hitting the ground made me aware of my surroundings.

I stopped. Where am I? I thought to myself. Spinning in circles, I lost my way in the never-ending maze of corn. My ears tuned into the hushed footsteps following me. It was him. My breath hitched. I scrambled to run away, my feet landing on brittle bones. The lack of sleep got to me; exhausted, my legs slowed. My muscles ached; my throat felt like it was on fire. The breeze fluttered through my hair. I looked back, the corn stalks disappearing into the midnight sky. My feet caught on the material of my blue-flared jeans. I screamed as I landed on the grassy ground. I hoisted my body up to find a scarecrow. Dark gleaming eyes on its burlap skull reminded me of ones I had seen just hours before. My voice died down, my shrieking slowed to a stop. A wave of relief rushed over me.

I heaved myself off the cold ground. Standing up, I realised the footsteps that were following me had stopped. A gentle breeze of hot, heavy air grazed my neck. Turning to the eerie presence behind me, my gaze locked on a towering figure. The man stood still, and time froze. Terror filled my bones; I wondered what would happen next. I felt a vice-like grip tug at my hair, pulling my head backward to expose my skin. He raised his hand. The polished metal of the axe he held was covered with dried blood. His fingers grasped tightly onto the splintered wood as he swung. Sharp metal brutally cut the soft flesh of my neck. My warm blood splattered. My pale, weak frame slumped to the ground; the vibrant colour drained from my eyes, replaced by a vacant, glazed stare. The viscous, crimson-red liquid that once was warm soon turned cold as it pooled around me, drenching my clothes. Crimson dripped off his axe as he walked away, leaving my body to decay in the cornfield as he did to many others before.



JUNIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION FIRST RUNNER-UP 2024

Spirit of the Woods Ruby McGovern - 10PD

I heard them snicker behind me. My hand reached for my bushy, red hair to hide it in my hood. "Martha," I heard Thomas yell. My feet fell heavy, dragging on the loose gravel path. Why had I come this way? My house was still a long way down the track; running would be pointless. I felt the wind shift as the sharks started to circle. Thomas and Karen's laughter grew louder; they could now see my full face and the mud they had smeared over my cheeks. "Ratty girl!" Karen spat at my shoes. The duct tape I had wrapped around the end of the shoe was peeling back to reveal my toes, pink from the touch of the crisp winter wind. "What do you want?" The words barely escaped my lips.

They both stopped in front of me, blocking my way out. Thomas shoved me, jagged rocks plunged into my palms as they met the ground. I was submerged in a pool of pain as they pounded my body, covering me with plum-coloured bruises.

I knew it was safe to open my eyes by the silent singing of the woods beside me. I stood – the weight of my bag no longer irked me – well aware that they had stolen it yet again. The path I had been walking down mere minutes ago now seemed to be haunted by its own demons—too much of a risk to take a step towards its call. Instead, I turned to my right to see the familiar edge of the woods, the tall trees twisting into each other, creating a tunnel. *Come closer.* A hollow voice beckoned. *I can help you.* My senses numbed at the eerie feeling that followed the voice. I subconsciously passed the thin wall of trees.

When I reached the end, it felt as though I had been transported to a place of tranquility. I knew nothing could harm me; the soft sound of the song I had once heard was now like a live opera around me. Welcome, Martha. A shot of thrill danced down my spine. "What am I doing here?" I said aloud. As if, in answer, the song shifted. That subconscious feeling rose again, allowing me to follow it.

After a while of walking, I came to a clearing, and the song faded into a mist.

I swung around in circles, trying to see why I had come. "My name is Henry Grey." I stopped, my back facing the boy. *I'm not going to run,* I thought.

"Go away," I uttered plainly.

I heard the foliage crunch under his step. I turned my head to see him. "You're Martha," he nodded.

He was blonde with blue eyes; he seemed to be a few years younger than me, and his clothes were just as worn as mine.

"Martha?" he asked. I realised I hadn't said anything.

"How do you know my name?" making sure he couldn't sense the fear that I had masked. A smile started to grow, not reaching his eyes.

"Lucky guess," he lied. His eyes seemed to gleam at his response. Without letting me answer, he walked off.

"Wait!" I yelled after him, running down the small path he skipped along, humming the same tune I heard earlier. I followed him deeper into the forest, blinded by the sense of magic that surrounded Henry. When I finally caught up to him, that gleam in his eye was now dull. No, go back. The voice that had led me here was in a frantic panic. Wind picked up, forcing me to dig my heels into the leafy floor, birds louder than the sweet lullaby Henry was still humming. I glanced up at him, still a few paces behind, he seemed unbothered, as if the elements did not care to comfort him. A loud shriek of pain rang in my ears, and the spirit of the woods—I had now named it—shriveled into nothing. Henry's skipping slowed; I think he had heard it as well, but as we continued to walk side by side, the afternoon seemed to fade into a pleasant memory.

By nightfall, Henry's priorities seemed to change. As I climbed out of the chilly stream, icicles seemed to form on the tips of my hair. Henry spoke. "Do you want to say the night?" No joy in his tone, his voice hoarse as if he had just been screaming.

"I would love to, but my mother expects me home," I say. Henry turned, facing me; his eyes were dark, the light blue now a stormy ocean, his gleaming smile now a crooked grin. "Please stay the night," he insisted, grabbing my arm. I pulled back.

"No," I said, shocked, taking my features. I stumbled back, clocking the nearest exits. "I have to go now," I gasp, sliding on my shoes.

The next day, I didn't run into Thomas or Karen but instead found myself back in the woods. Reminding myself of the warm feeling when Henry was around. Trying to only remember the good.

I stumbled down the path he had skipped along and ran along the stream we had swam in, but it wasn't a stream, but a sewer. And the grass we had laid on was littered with graves. Shock took over my features. "Henry?" I called out to the many bodies that would once have heard me. The wind brushed against my ears with the sweet sound of his laugh. I took a step towards it, hoping to find its matching smile. My foot met with hard stone rather than soft grass. My eyes followed my step to see a small gravestone, grass growing tall around it. I was paralysed in place as I read his name aloud, "Henry Gray." I brushed the grass away to see the date that was written. "1941 to 1949."

Emotions took over any logic as I started to sob into my icy-tinged palms. I wished I could get that tranquil place back.





JUNIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

SECOND RUNNER-UP 2024

City Streets

Hannah Gahagan - 10KN

The sounds of the city were quiet and distant against the heavy downpour of rain. The water created a river through the streets, rushing down the sides of the road. The droplets fell to the ground like bullets from the sky, the sound of them hitting the pavement much like a hail of gunfire.

The city streets were deserted, save for a few late-night bar goers that stumbled their way home through the thick sheet of rain.

The streetlights above provided little to no light, the bulbs flickering lazily. Anastasia tugged her coat tight over herself. Her clothes and hair stuck to her from the rain. She ducked into an alleyway, the rain pelting down and obscuring her vision. She pressed her back against one of the brick buildings that formed the alley, finding little shelter from the rain.

As the rain eased, Anastasia could just make out the shape of two men. One towered over the other, the other seeming to cower in the shadows. Her curiosity piqued, she took a few cautious steps closer, mostly staying hidden. She strained her ears, able to hear faint voices.

The hulking figure of one of the men turned, his identity obscured by the shadow of his hood and the growing darkness as night set across the city. He whipped his head back around to face the other man, who flinched at the movement.

'Please... don't...' The voice was panicked and afraid, a clear contrast from the cold and authoritative tone the bigger, more menacing man used.

'You had plenty of warning, but you blew it.' The other man hissed. He pulled something from his pocket. Anastasia's breath caught in her throat when she saw what it was; a gun. The shiny metal barrel caught in the faint light from the street, creating a brief flash.

Time seemed to slow, almost to a complete halt. A loud bang erupted from the alleyway, followed by a harsh laugh. The man stepped back, letting a limp body drop to the ground in a heap. He let his hand drop to his side, smoke curling from the gun.

His cold glare locked onto Anastasia's soft brown eyes. His hand moved in a rapid, instinctive motion, raising the gun and angling it right at Anastasia.

She gulped, her eyes widening. Her feet were firmly planted on the spot, locked in place. Fear kept her from running, like a prison guard. She stood there, staring down the barrel of the man's gun like a deer in the headlights.

A second and final bang echoed around the alleyway. She didn't scream, there was no time. The bullet dove straight into her chest, piercing her heart.



Spotlight on Student Work

Each year our students submit wonderful pieces of work for their assessments that are undeniably worthy of publication.

Here is a selection of fantastic student work, refined and polished with the help of their teachers.



The Piano

Dominic Eaton - 10GR

The piano sits there in the center of the room, slowly gathering dust between the keys and deep down to the handcrafted machinery. The red paint that has chipped away over the years reveals a beautiful and natural grain. Your heart yearns to hear the sweet sounds of the abandoned yet beautifully crafted instrument. Around the back you see a pale grey colour from the once blood red paint. Over years of being untouched, the piano's back has been naturally bleached by the sun's golden rays. You glance to your left and notice a bookshelf made of once strong but now rotted oak and you can't help to ponder why someone would abandon such beautifully crafted pieces of art.

As you look through the old and dusty books, you feel warmth on your back. You turn, facing the window as you watch the sun slowly reveal itself from behind the clouds; its warmth feels like a cold hug on a warm day.

The warm embrace seems to only last a moment before the sun once again leaves behind a cloud. The darkness returns and with its return your smile slowly fades and you sink back into the emptiness of the once prosperous room.

Your mind is brought back only by the faint and eerie creaks of the floorboards. A cool breeze flows through the old and deteriorated window bringing your attention back to that old piano in the center of the room; with a deep breath you move forward and press down on a key.

You listen, but you do not hear. The old piano's soul died long ago, leaving nothing but a hollow corpse. You look outside and watch time move and yet here you are, stuck in the past. Your soul is trapped in the abandoned room, forced to watch the sands of time slowly slip away. The one thing that never changes is that blood red piano. its keys screeching like the call of a vulture awaiting its next meal. Its keys are out of tune and cracked from age and you realise something.

It's time to let it go.

You take one last look at the once colourful and blooming room, now sombre, dull and bleak. As the door shuts, you finally feel present and at peace. You look ahead and watch the sun set; the calmness of the light washes over you and around the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare.



The Art of Distraction

Stella Mahy - 10KN

Luna didn't think running a cult was going to be easy, but the number of times she had to aggressively flirt with people to avert their attention from the strange goings on in the town was staggering. On this particular instance it was two detectives that had been sniffing around, looking into the disappearance of their intern. All Luna had to do was keep their eyes and ears on her and their feet in her bookstore while her doting followers dragged said intern to the church's basement where she would deal with him at a later time.

From a teasing smile her voice flowed like the sweet nectar that grew in the forest at the edge of town, capturing the attention of the detectives who were eager enough to let their gaze focus on her. She easily fell into the role that she had played time and time again, charming enough to keep their guard down but mysterious enough to pique their interest. The lies sprung from her lips as though it was her mother tongue, prewritten clues carefully dropped between sly smiles and the batting of her eyelashes.

The detectives, who at this point had taken off their hats and put down their notebooks, thought themselves quite clever for unravelling the mystery that was the woman in front of them. Unbeknownst to them, Luna was unravelling the mystery of how long she could keep them occupied, tugging them along by their heart strings like they were ragdolls and she was their puppeteer. It was pitiful really how these supposed intelligent creatures fell so quickly for her false charms. They all did in the end, no matter what man, woman, or thing stood before her; she could always create the precise illusion of what they wanted to see, keeping them in her grasp for as long as she needed.

Well, everyone but her.

Cecile was everything Luna was not. Kind, empathetic, caring, and pages and pages of other saint-like qualities, but most of all she was good. Cecile had a heart of gold, and it shone out of her chest like the rays of Apollo himself, a glow that warmed anyone fortunate enough to cross her path. One could not find a flaw in her actions nor features, no matter how hard Luna had searched.

They had met when Luna was nothing but a young adventurer, a cleric of Artemis; god of the hunt and moon, who was in need of a place of rest whilst travelling through the forest. She had come across a quaint town buried deep in the wood of the name Elmsville and was directed towards the tavern as a place of board for the night. With not a penny in her pocket, Luna approached the bar ready to begin the usual dance, but was silenced at the sight of the woman before her.

Behind the bar stood the most beautiful woman Luna had ever seen. Strong muscled arms tied back long blond hair and soft amber eyes that looked like liquid gold in the low tavern light locked their gaze on Luna's silver speckled eyes. She was blinding but nevertheless, Luna persisted and struck up a conversation with her. But for some reason her usual charms weren't working and the more she talked the more the amused expression on Cecile's face grew.

It didn't work then, even after a few nights' stay had turned into months and Cecile had changed into 'Cece,' and Luna had become used to waking up next to her. Even after Luna had begged her to leave the church, her flowery words trying to push her out before the full moon shone high in the night sky. Cece had looked at Luna with an exasperated expression. "Don't even try that with me Lu," she had said with a soft laugh, pulling Luna into her arms.

That was the last time she heard Cece laugh.

A small sob escaped her lips before she could stop herself, snapping her back to reality. She was surprised to find tears dripping from her chin as her eyes widened meeting the confused ones of the detectives that sat before her. She jumped as a loud crash was heard outside, followed by shouting and the sound of swords being drawn. The detectives grabbed their hats and notebooks, rushing outside towards the commotion as a string of curses left Luna's lips. "Artemis give me strength," she sighed, rolling up her sleeves to expose the intricate runes burned into her arms that were now glowing with power.

The dance was over and now it was time to get her hands dirty.

My beaten-up, old, rundown car jumps as it speeds down the bumpy road. Its dim headlights barely light six feet ahead, restricting my view of oncoming vehicles. That's not a problem, though; barely anyone's out at this hour. The only sound echoing through the car comes from the rattling of my keys locked in the ignition, and my deep sighs. I wouldn't turn on the radio even if I could. Nothing good is on this late. The only other noise I hear comes from my head. The hundreds of voices talking to me, they don't ever stop. In the hopes of escaping them, I glance out the foggy window, catching the moon's radiating glow shining down on a nearby river.

I should go home, it's the right thing to do. But it's so easy to stop. Stop. My car stops in its tracks and without thinking, my legs lead me out of it. As I walk, I'm hypnotised by the sparkling stars, dancing in the dark night sky.

I reach a bridge; it's right over the river, which now as I stare at it, is quite a way down. Cool air blows on my bare legs, making each hair stick up. As I glare into the river, searching for something, anything, the water transforms into a mirror. I look for myself in that mirror, but all that stares back is a stranger. Someone I used to know, used to like.

My feet moved before my brain and in a blink I was standing on the edge of the moss-ridden bridge. I breathe in, reminding myself of the smells of life. The sound of sleeping cicadas, and the taste of misty air. Looking down one last time at the stranger in the mirror, a splash diverts my attention.

Like turning on a power switch, everything clicked. Suddenly hyper-aware I was on the edge of a bridge I jump down, falling onto my shaky legs. What was I doing?

I looked back down at the river, but the waters were rough, rippled, broken. What was disturbing its peace? Searching in the moonlit darkness, I found a slope leading down to the very river I wanted to be in ten seconds ago. *I shouldn't go*, I think to myself. It's easier if I go home and pretend this never happened. But as the trees brush together and the splashes proceed to grow, I know what I have to do.

Carefully, I race down the slope, feeling each individual blade of grass tickling my legs. My breathing overpowered the voices in my head, but they didn't give up. Like a crowd of hundreds of people, they were taking over. But then, they stopped. Frozen in my tracks, I watched as the starry night and bright moon shone down on the river. The light led me to the source of the splashes. A dog. No, too small. Just a puppy – just a baby.

“No! Help!” I screamed, but no one was there. Only me. Only I could save this poor baby. I shouldn't even be here. The roles should be reversed. I don't deserve to be the one on land. That puppy has a whole life left to live. But, I think as the water splashes on my ankles, so do I.

The cold water engulfed me, submerging me in its deep pit of darkness. The only sense I could rely on was my ears, tracking the whimpers of a cold pup. Desperately I search, now knowing what to find – not a stranger, but a soul. My hands slap the water trying to grasp onto something, anything.

Hopelessly, I call to it.

“Here puppy, I'm going to find you, hang on!”

Each wave of the river brought new wave of doubt. I was never going to save this puppy. I'm useless. But when all seems lost, there is always a miracle.

My arms are exhausted, but I pull the water underneath me, racing to find this dog. Waving my hand tirelessly across the water, something wet and dense touches me. Whimpers and barks of relief bounce through my ears, echoing through the river. I scoop up the distressed pup and make my way up the river, returning to dry, safe land.

Tightly tucked into a cozy crevice of a large tree, I warm the puppy in the sleeve of my jacket. I gaze into its happy, relieved eyes, and in its reflection, I see me. I know I've made the right choice. I save his life, and he saved mine.



In the Trenches

Eli Newby - 10PD

It was cold that night in the trenches. The air was stale, and all the men struggled to breathe. My hands shook drastically, and I could hardly hold my weapon. “Be calm. We will get through this, David,” said Peter, my older brother.
“Thank you, Peter,” I responded.

“Five minutes!” our lieutenant bellowed. Suddenly a deathly quiet came across the trenches, all the soldiers had finally realized that most of them would not live to see tomorrow's sunrise.

“You can't make me!” a voice cried.

“That's Charlie,” cried Peter. Two men and our lieutenant dragged Charlie into the middle of the trench and placed him on his knees. “Let this be a message!” shouted the lieutenant as he lowered his gun toward the center of Charlie's forehead. “Wai—” *Bang!* To most people it sounded like another gunshot amidst the chaos of war, but we were there, and we all saw the horror in Charlie's eyes. “Two minutes,” blasted the lieutenant.

“It's okay, David, it'll all be fine, I'll protect ya,” said Peter. I knew he was just as scared as the rest of us, but he had to be brave and I knew he would be for me. He's my older brother, and he's the best there is.

Without a warning, the deathly quiet turned to a thunderous roar as a Māori soldier in our regiment began to sing.

“Ka mate, ka mate! Ka ora, ka ora!” And then more began to join in. “Ka mate, ka mate! Ka ora, ka ora!”

“What are they doing, Peter?” I asked.

“Giving us hope,” said Peter relieved by the singing, and then Peter joined in, and suddenly everyone began to yell out the lyrics.

“Vahşiler! Vahşiler!” cried back the Turkish troops.

“I think we made them mad,” laughed Peter smugly as we sang. Then the gunshots surrounding us became louder, but so did the singing.

And then the gunshots got even more louder but once again so did the singing and it all got. Louder! Louder! and Louder! Until... the deathly silence returned. No man spoke a word not even a whimper for the first time in months no gunshots could be heard across the trenches. It was only a minute, yet it felt like a lifetime however it did not last.

“To your stations!” blasted the lieutenant. Men began to yell in anger at the Turks and they yelled back even though both sides were scared as hell.

“Ready!”

Bagpipes blared, and all the men began to run toward the Turkish trenches; in seconds, half the men fell to the Turkish machine guns, and in another second another half was gone, but I pushed on. Like a massive wave I crashed into the Turkish trench. Bloodied and bruised I picked up my weapon and myself. A second crash thundered behind me, it was Peter.

“David, are you alright?” said Peter.

“Yes, where's the lieutenant?” I asked.

“In a ditch probably,” he responded.

“What's the plan, Peter?” I asked.

“Take the trench at all costs.”

Bang!

I felt time stop and then pain.

“David!” yelled Peter. “You bastar—” *Bang!* A bullet ripped through Peter's eye and into his brain and he fell to the ground. I gripped my guts where the bullet had landed and raised my gun at the Turk. *Bang!* The Turk dropped dead. I dropped my weapon, and with my guts in my hands I sat against the wall slowly becoming more and more sleepy. As I took my last breath I thought to myself about what David said to me when we first landed on Gallipoli. He said: “You and I will make it out of here, but there's one thing you need to understand. In war people kill and people die, but until you've pulled the trigger on the enemy, you're not ready for war... you're only ready to die.”

Holiday House

Josh Slyfield - 10HE

As the Uber rolls up to the place I'll be staying at, I get my first glimpse of the house – slightly weathered cream walls lined with small rose bushes. The house is rather grand for a person like me, but I'm not complaining. I do get to stay here for free after all.

I unlock the wooden door and after a moment it opens, creaking as it moves. When I take a step inside the first thing I notice is the aroma. It smells both sweet and musty at the same time. Ahead of me, a spiraling staircase sits, and I make a mental note to come back to it. On the left there is a dining room, and on the right is the lounge. My body pulls me towards that as I've had a long day.

When I finally sit down, a cloud of dust rises and I realise nobody has been here for a long while. The couch is comfy, with embroidered cushions carefully placed on it. Next to the couch, a wooden cabinet sits, hosting the TV. When I reach out and pull on the handle, it opens with ease, and sitting inside are some DVDs. They look old and I've never heard of them before. I put my hand out to brush the cobwebs off, when suddenly a sharp note rings out. It sounds like a piano key, and I can remember that I'm supposed to be alone in this house. It drives a spike of fear into my heart because someone – or something – is upstairs.

I take my first step up the long staircase, brandishing my newly found stainless steel pan. Then I hear it again. This is the fifth time now and if that note enters my ears again, I think I will lose my mind. As if it heard my thoughts, when I reach the top of the stairs, the note has turned into a full on song.

Upstairs, a long hallway waits, with about three or so doors on either side. The first couple are labelled "Guest" and "Bathroom". The music isn't coming from those, so I ignore them. I move on, eventually coming to the room where the song plays. There is a door but with no handle. I brace myself and push on it. It doesn't budge. *Great.* Looking at next to it, I am relieved to find that one has a handle. I open it and find myself in a study. A cluttered desk with flocks of paper everywhere is to my left; books from a large bookshelf are scattered across the ground. I reach out and brush my fingers along the spines of the books in the shelf. My hand rests on a book with no title, all while that same song rings through the room. I've watched enough movies to know that this book is here for a reason. I take a deep breath and push down. *Click.*

My hair brushes the low ceiling of a tunnel.
The music is almost deafening now.
I step inside the room and...

The piano is playing itself.

I rush outside and call an Uber, but after driving briefly...

We end up back at the exact... same... place.

The Formula
Cleo Milne – 10KN

The courtroom is normally quiet – in Burnet, Texas, the most that happens is the occasional car crash. This case is far bigger. The defendant slouches into the booth, his grey woollen suit hanging loose over his frame.

“Mr. Gareth Edgecombe, you have been charged with the murder of Stacey Lederman. You may begin your defence.”

After some preamble, he leans on the booth, eyes empty, and begins his story.

I grew up an intelligent child. I was valedictorian, part of the National Honor Society, first chair oboe in orchestra – my future was bright. I graduated from university with first class honors, went back for a doctorate in physics, and then embarked on my professional career. I worked some computing jobs that lasted for a few months each, but I eventually found my way to teaching. There was no future in computers anyway.

I’ve worked at Burnet High School for over a decade now. The pay was bad, and so were the hours, but at least I was doing what I’m good at. I must have had hundreds of students in my class over my career. They mostly pass through uneventfully. A few students spark my interest, but they leave before they can ever become something, at least while at high school. I thought the same thing would happen with my class of ‘71. A group of average students, learning at a normal pace. I wasn’t expecting anything. This is, of course, where Lederman comes in.

She was just below the rest of the class most of the year, doing the bare minimum she needed to scrape by. When midterms came, I didn’t have any expectations for her at all. She was average, forgettable. I just marked her test when she completed it, and didn’t think much of it. When I went home that night, though, something was nagging me. Something she’d written on the test when trying to describe the movement of planets – a jumble of random numbers, I’d assumed. Certainly incorrect, and there was no process shown on the sheet. Just a formula.

I looked at it the next day. The numbers were close – improbably close – to numbers I’d seen used in equations relating to the movement of gases. I looked through the textbook, and I found the numbers, and many other formulas beside them, but there was no formula that matched the one on the page. I did some calculations – the formula worked. I didn’t know how, but it worked. I was shocked, of course – we hadn’t done any learning concerning gases yet, and I wouldn’t trust her to come up with an accurate formula even if she did. I made her stay back after class. I can’t remember the exact conversation, but it went a little something like:

Me: Can you explain to me your process on question seventeen?

Stacey: Sure. The planets rotate... which means that the rotation is... you take the Sun’s gravity and divide it by the number of planets?

Me: Did you make this up?

Stacey: Yes.

Me: Do you know anything about the movement of gases?

Stacey: You haven’t taught us that yet.

Me: Your formula proves a theory scientists have had for years.

Stacey: Oh. Does that mean I got the question right?

Me: What? No – do you even care about the formula?

Stacey: I just came up with it. It probably doesn’t even demonstrate the gas thing anyway.

Me: I’d like to publish it in a scientific journal. Would you be okay with that?

Stacey: I mean, sure. Would it have my name on it?

At this point I felt disgusted. She had printed a handful of random numbers onto a page, turned it in and called it a day. She had no more discovered the formula than I had landed on the moon.

Me: Well... no.

Stacey: Why not? I came up with it, didn't I?

Me: Did you? When you think about it, I discovered it, right? I was able to turn your scribble into something incredible.

Stacey: Did you change it?

Me: I interpreted it.

Stacey: Sir, I don't see why I can't be listed as at least a co-discoverer.

Me: Stacey, I've been working in science for decades. You're a student. You don't discover this, I do.

Stacey: But I wrote it.

Me: You're not a scientist. You're a student.

Stacey: But you only reported that my formula was correct. I wrote it.

Me: Your formula? Your formula? It's mine!

My voice reached a fever pitch. Who was this little brat, to claim my finding? What right did she have to my ticket to success? She, the random number generator, thought I, the pioneer, would let go of my formula. I tried to control myself. My voice did not quaver as I spoke to her.

Me: Stacey, I need you to understand. You. Do not. Deserve this.

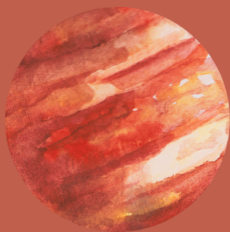
Stupid people cry when they are wrong. They cannot think of any logical argument, any rebuttal. Stacey was stupid. She had no understanding of anything, much less a complex formula about the movement of gas. As I stared at her, crying into the test paper, I knew that you would have to be crazy to believe that she had discovered the formula.

Stacey: I'll tell everyone. You won't get the credit.

I confess, I felt pity for this poor, deluded creature. How cruel would it be to let her tell everyone her lies – how low their opinions would be of her! Better to stop her from embarrassing herself. My next class walked in to see her broken body. More stupid, stupid children who didn't understand what I was doing, why I was doing it.

After his speech, the man in the booth seemed to sit up straighter than ever. His eyes, no less hollow than before, nevertheless burned with conviction. He accepted his sentence quietly.

The formula remains unknown.



Nothing and No One

Ruby Walsh - 10KN

I look at my alarm—clock, 9:00am, and I sigh. “I woke up too early. Oh well,” I say aloud to no one. I go downstairs and sit at my kitchen table. “Knock knoooooock!” I hear a high-pitched voice coming from my door. “Please let me in, I know you're home.” I silently approach the door and peer through the peephole. Through the curved glass I see a tall, long nosed, ugly man, looking at his watch. I open the door slightly and say, “I'm sorry, I don't know who you are?” But that's not entirely true. While I don't know this man, he's familiar, his name is right on the tip of my tongue, but still. I don't know him. “Oh, come on silly, of course you know me!” I look at him and try to think. Think. Think. Think. But I still don't know him. “I don't, I'm sorry.” he looks down at his feet and mumbles goodbye. I am about to say goodbye back, but once I blink he vanishes. I pause, rub my eyes and blink rapidly. He does not appear. I close my door, sit on my couch and turn on my TV.

But I can't stop thinking about him.

I look at my phone. 12.30pm. “I guess I should have lunch.” I start to get up but then my doorbell rings. *I don't have a doorbell?* I think to myself. But either way I walk up to the door and look through the peephole. Through the rounded glass, I see an ugly, big nosed man towering over my door. I slowly open my door. “Um, hello?” The man speaks in a low tone. “Hello, I know you.” “You do?” I say. “I don't know you.” But again, that's not true. I don't know him, but I remember him. He's familiar, with his name at the tip of my tongue. “I know you,” he says again. “I know that.” I look at him, stretching my neck to see his face, and I try to think. Think. Think. Think. But I don't know him. “I don't know you.” He bends down so we are at eye level, looks at his feet and mumbles goodbye. I blink. He's still there. I start to say goodbye, but I blink again and he disappears. I close my door, make some lunch and sit down to eat.

But I can't stop thinking about him. And I can't stop remembering him.

I look at my clock, 2.15pm. “I guess I should go about my day, doing work, cleaning up.” I keep waiting, but no one comes by. I look at my door – it's just a wall. No peephole, no handle, no intricate carved designs. I look at my couch – it's just the floor. No cushions, no throw blankets, no coffee stains. I look at my TV – It's just the table. No screen, no stand, no art deco paintings. I step outside and look down my street, but every house is just my own. I walk across the road to ‘my house’ and stop at the door.

Before I can even think, I involuntarily shout, “Knock knoooooock!” in a high-pitched tone. I try to cover my mouth, to stop myself from saying more, but I can't. “Please let me in, I know you're home.” I can't stop myself from speaking. I look at my watch, the very least I can do, 9:02am. I can feel my body stretch into a different and painful shape. The door opens slightly. Through the gap I see– me? But it's not me. It can't be me, I'M me. ‘I’ say something and I can feel my mouth move in response, but I can't hear. I'm not listening. We stop talking and I look down, mumbling something.

When I look back up the door is closed and the lighting around me feels different. I can hear someone inside saying it's 12:30. But, wasn't it just 9? I notice a doorbell that wasn't there before, and decide to ring it. But when I do, I begin to grow taller and taller until I am towering over the door. The door opens. It's... me? Again? “Hello, I know you.” The words involuntarily escape my mouth. Another conversation happens that I can't hear. Then I am bending down to ‘my’ eye level and saying goodbye. ‘I’ blink, and then I'm gone.

I'm gone.

I'm – gone?

Where am I? What happened?

Is this a dream?

I see nothing.

No one.

I'm nowhere.

Everything is dark.

I hear something.

My alarm is going off.

I look over at it, 9:00am, and I sigh.



Insignificant

Olivia Clark - 11GB

Many a mile off the rugged coast of Piha beach, a small spot in the blanket of the Tasman Sea rises slowly up and down with each breath of the rolling waves. The spot turns and squints into the rising orb of the sun, searching for familiarity in the endless moana, but only blue stretches out to the horizon. It clings to a long, floating board, skin wrapped in a tight black suit and face pale as a blank canvas, lips tinged with the salty breeze that slowly suffocates the dim hope of home. The spot vibrates with the chill of the wind like the glittering of sunlight on the water.

A single tear descends down his cheek into the gentle lapping waves, an insignificant addition to the great ocean; ripples circulate out, replicating the fermenting growl of his stomach. Mouth devoid of moisture like the sand from which his feet last walked, head crowded with the screams of more seagulls than visible.

Another spot. Bigger, out of place, a bold but blurred smudge of a silhouette, the gold of mango on a plate of greens on the horizon. A horn blasts – it congregates in the emptiness of piercing silence, a link to the familiar cogs of society.

Small, weak and shivering, he screams out, thrashing in the water, pleading to the salty air. The large spot, a gash in the endless blue wallpaper, grows larger with every second, slicing cleanly through the Tasman Sea like a katana. Water foams white and rolls over itself to clear way for the big spot, no longer a spot now but a metal box the length of a football field – a container ship.

It continues to churn through the choppy waters, igniting hope in the man– just a spark, but something. The ship progresses closer, glaring down upon the spot with the intensity and power of a stampede. The container ship, God’s mighty hand swiping the ocean, reaches him at last. But like the dim flame of a candle pinched between two fingers, he is crushed, extinguished. With nothing but the metallic taste of blood and small shards of plastic board left to wander the ocean currents, he drifts down to sleep at last in the open arms of the seabed.

The container ship plunders on into the fiery glow of the rising sun.



The Life Cycle of a Gluestick

Tiaki Strickland - 11TR

It's dark in here; all I can feel are pens and pencils. I can't see much. The only bit of light comes from a small hole. The laughter of children breaks the silence; it is loud and piercing. It continues and grows louder. Suddenly, whatever I am in starts to move. I get squished and smothered by the other content, the swift and dramatic movements causing me to feel nauseous.

The laughter ceases and is replaced by high, screech-like voices. A louder, commanding voice causes the others to stop. The darkness splits in half, revealing a bright and blinding light. The light is interrupted by chubby little fingers as they get bigger and bigger.

I feel the fingers cover me and grab me. They take me out of what I observe to be a fabric tube. I am finally on a flat surface; I look around to notice I am surrounded by creatures that tower over me. All of them possess fingers similar to the one that grabbed me. An eruption of laughter snaps me back as I am grabbed again. The fingers squeeze tightly around my head. I feel the most excruciating pain as they rip off my head, revealing my flesh. The creature then squeezes my feet and rotates them violently, forcing the flesh out of my body. The pain is unbearable and I don't realise that I am being flipped upside down.

A strange, white surface grows closer. My flesh is smushed against the surface and dragged along it. Is this my only purpose?

*

It's been a year since I first experienced the pain of being used. Since then, I have grown numb to the feeling as most of my flesh is gone. My first time in the pencil case was frightening, however, I now see it as a place of refuge. A place where I have no purpose. Why must these creatures torture and use me?

I use my time in the pencil case to think about my purpose. Am I only a tool to these beings?

My flesh is mostly gone. The constant use and abuse has taken a toll on me mentally and physically. I'm not the only one who has changed – many pens and other pieces of stationary are weak and withered. Some left and never returned. I feel my time is coming.

The roof opens and I know what is coming. I am present with the same surface that has been the location of my agony. My feet are turned for longer than usual. Finally, I meet the paper as most of what little flesh I have left is used.

My head is placed back on by the hands that have tormented me. This time is different – the pencil case is getting smaller. A bucket is presented before me. I understand this is my fate.

My final moments are spent wondering about my life. Why was it spent in agony? Why wasn't I allowed to live without a use? That is all I ever wanted.

I am tossed into the bucket, landing with a crash. My vision fades and my body is sore. I can finally rest, without purpose.

I finally got what I always longed for.



A Guilty Conscience

Payton Hutchinson - 11BN

Dear Justine,

It aches my heart to know that this will be the last time you hear from me. I damn those that found you guilty – as I am well aware of your innocence.

I confess I know the murderer as I am his creator. Years ago, I created a hideous monster, whom I rejected out of cowardly fear. That creature does not know love or feel remorse. It killed William, not you. Although I am ashamed I let you take the blame. Please hear my reasoning.

Upon creating this monster, I never intended to cause any fatalities – it was a passion project led by curiosity. What should have been a proud moment seeing it come to life struck me with immense fear, so I ran. I ran from the creature itself and my responsibility to care for it. I wonder if I had treated it with the affection you had for me or my mother, it wouldn't be so malevolent.

I feared that had I come forth with the truth society would reject me – that I would be labelled as a “mad scientist” which I am not! You out of all people should know how curious I am. The concept of creating my own life through science consumed me. I am sure you know how dedicated I am to my studies. This experiment was necessary. I am not ready to face the consequences. Had you been in my shoes I am sure you would understand.

I understand your conviction was a grave misunderstanding. I pray you forgive me. It is impossible for me to express my devastation knowing you will cross the threshold between life and death; your life taken from you by man. In a cruel unethical manner; the same way I created that monster. I cannot tell you this was God's intention or plan for you, but I know he will absolve you of your sins in the same way I hope you do mine.

I pray you find peace of mind in your final moments and are showered with blessings in heaven, where you deserve to be. I thank you for all you have done, for me my family and I.

Yours faithfully,

Victor Frankenstein



The Camera

Jacob Cooper - 12WT

There we stood, the four of us, Mum and Dad behind and my brother and I at the front. All dressed in formal attire, in an identical insipid shade of grey. One perfect family. “3, 2, 1” the AI automated drone announced, before producing a blinding flash and an electronic hum. My dad examined his watch, pulling up a hologram of the photo just taken, his barren expression reflected in the black and white of the image. He uploaded it to the server to be observed by the AI, to check for any discrepancies between this week’s and last week’s photos, concerning the strict guidelines on our appearances. The quality of the image was flawless, every single pixel was in focus. The image looked identical to last week’s family photo. Same time, same place, same people. Same, same, same.

I was hungry. I walked through the perfectly illuminated corridor to the storeroom, in search of sustenance. The shelves were lined seamlessly with rows of food packets. After finding the packet labelled: Sunday – Lunch, I opened it and consumed the tasteless grey paste. It had a perfectly smooth yet unsatisfying consistency. Suddenly, the outside announcement speaker broadcasted: “Attention, all individuals return to work assignments.” I met my brother in the study. We both sat down and laid our information panels before us. The usual AI hologram was projected from each panel. “Greetings, citizen 915322. For today’s lesson, you will learn about the history of this perfect society and the efforts you may execute to best contribute to its sustained success.” the AI declared.

Several hours passed. I looked across to my brother who was staring intently at the projected AI program, doing everything just like he should. He sat in his usual position, his back almost unnaturally rigid. He looked just like a robot. I sighed deeply. Low in my gut, I felt this burgeoning feeling of overwhelm. I had felt it before, but today it felt utterly unbearable. Everything around me seemed too perfect and controlled. My brother certainly had no problem with this life, why did I? Agitated, I got up and left. I heard my brother call: “You haven’t finished. Where are you going?” It was a fair question, even I didn’t know where I was going, just that I couldn’t take any more of that.

I gathered pace and headed for my grandfather’s complex, the one place that would repair my spirits. “Hello, Xavier! It’s good to see you, my boy!” said Granddad, excitedly. His kookiness always appealed to me, he exuded a sense of freedom. He was unlike anybody I had ever met and was also the only person who called me by my real name. His house was unruly unlike my own. “What’s going on?” he asked.

“Do you ever feel like you can’t breathe? Like the pressure to be perfect is... all just too much? That there is just no room for expression? I just want to do more than what they think is necessary to fulfil my role in this society. I want to actually cherish my life and live... to be free.”

“Yes, I know the feeling well... Stay there.” He disappeared and returned carrying a bizarre device, coated in a thick layer of dust. It appeared to be from a different time and I noticed the heavily worn exterior, it had obviously been well used. He held it out and I gripped it eagerly. It looked like a box with a protruding column and glass at the end. I noticed another smaller glass panel on the top of the device and put my eye up to it to get a closer look. Somehow, I could see right in front of me without directly looking there. As I gripped the device properly, my finger found its way to a button on top. I pushed on it, and a sharp snap sound and a flash of light caused my body to jump. A blank white rectangular card was released from the device and fell onto my lap.

“Oh, careful,” said Granddad... You can only take so many photos with a camera like this. A moment should be truly special if you are to photograph it.”

“What is this thing?”

“Ha ha,” Granddad laughed cordially. “Here, look.” He reached inside a drawer and handed me another card, except this time, with an image on it. Instantly, I was hit with an overwhelming feeling of wonder and beauty. I had never seen anything like this. My eyes eagerly traversed a plateau of rich, never before seen golden orange and yellow hues which gave life to the image. The colours appeared so natural, so different to my grey life. The image was of a woman, her ivory white teeth were showing and her mouth was curled up at the edges, which seemed foreign to me, but before long I noticed myself doing the same thing. “That’s your grandmother.” The image was hazy and had grainy imperfections dotted everywhere, imparting a unique sense of character compared to the faultless, crisp finish of modern photography. The image made me feel nostalgic and longing for the experience in the photo that I never actually knew. I had only ever viewed an image digitally and felt a sense of ease having it treasured safely within my grasp. The image's composition looked so unstructured, not forced, but natural, a human touch was clearly evident. Not AI, the rigid confines of AI disallowed a display of such raw, glorious emotion. I looked down at my lap and on the previously blank card was now an image.

With newfound clarity, I left my grandfather’s complex and started to run, camera in hand, back to my housing complex. I yearned to enrich the lives of my family with this divine discovery. By the time I reached the complex, it was sundown. I acted on impulse, grabbing the ladder on the side of the complex and climbing to reach the roof. With every stretch, I saw more of the sky’s fair face, a dream embedded into reality. A drone appeared beside me and barked “Citizen 915322 please return to the ground immediately.” I ignored the AI and stared in disgust at the maze of grey below me. Each building was identical in shape, height and colour. I had never before noticed just how truly lifeless the only place I had ever known was. “Citizen 915322, take action immediately, or there will be consequences.” I pressed my eye firmly to the tiny glass window, staring straight into the eye of a glorious crimson sunset, the polar opposite of the seemingly endless sea of creative suffocation and banality below. I pushed the button, capturing it forever. I had never been this high before, I felt as though I was on top of the world. Suddenly, something else caught my eye. I noticed a subtle sharp crack in the concrete on the building opposite me. The bland grey shade had been remedied by the growth of moss, climbing the side. It was at the mercy of the elements, as nature fought back against the unnatural.

I cradled the card and frenziedly swung down the ladder, practically falling to the ground. “Brother! Mother! Father!” I called. They all rushed to meet me outside, faces painted with bewilderment at the sight of the device hanging around my neck. I revealed the photo I had just captured. Silence, as we all stared at the card. I noticed I once again the peculiar impulse spread across my lips. I looked at my family and on each of their faces my expression was mirrored. This was no hologram, this was real. We all felt it, the wave of appreciation of freedom and beauty, captured in the image. And there we stayed, soaking it all up.



Sacrifice

Khushi Khushi - 12LR

The memory of that day of ripe January lingers vividly in my mind. The air was thick, and the humming of bees could be easily heard. I watched them flit from flower to flower, their pace as swift as tigers. Each movement was deliberate and purposeful. Their delicate wings caught the setting sun's light, making them shine brighter. I had always watched them from a distance, fascinated but wary, never daring to stroll too near their hive hidden within the crevice of the rotten cabbage tree. That evening, however, driven by curiosity, my friends and I, with a sense of adventurous desire, decided to confront the bees. Gloved and masked, we came prepared, like plundering desperadoes to smoke their hive and claim their honey.

The half-cloudy sky tinted with the color of dusk seemed to bleed as we moved closer to the hive. The willows swayed gently, and the air was filled with the sound of bees humming. But the humming changed with our arrival. Their sentries detected our presence the moment we moved closer to the hive. They sprang into action, defending their home with selflessness and suicidal fierceness. A final attempt of defense as they stabbed and died stinging. Each sting was a sacrifice. We had underestimated their power in the beginning. The bees' commitment and selflessness in stinging us until they died in order to protect and defend their hive amazed me. A feeling of remorse and fear overcame me. The hive woke in chaos as we set it on fire. The flames caught the tree yet the bees came at us and stung, not discouraged by the fire.

It felt like Carthage under the Roman Empire and the burning of Timber Troy with loud flames. Our plan to steal the honey turned into a complete mess. Half of it melted, and the land was filled with ashes. The bees groaned in pain. They died protecting their hive. As we walked through the destruction we made, a sense of remorse and guilt settled over me. A hive burned on a cool summer evening. We didn't get the gold we came looking for. The destruction of the city of wisdom, joy, and nature burdened me deeply.

But from this mistake, I learned something precious. The incident settled in my heart, sending waves of guilt and sorrow through my soul. The bees had shown me their commitment to their home and their selflessness. The destruction of the hive done by my friends and me was a loss for the bees but a valuable lesson for me.

The memory of that day stayed with me in the passing days and months. The bees' sacrifice, selflessness, and commitment towards the protection of their home left an unfading mark on my mind. The destruction of their beautiful city of nature, wisdom, and joy weighed heavily on my conscience. The wild bees, in their final act of defense, had imparted a lesson that would stay with me forever. It taught me a lesson of respect and the importance of all of the living beings in our nature.

As I reflected on the events of that day, our actions, though seemingly insignificant at times, can have a profound impact on nature's balance. In their final act of defiance, the wild bees had taught me an aspect that would stick with me forever: that we are all a part of this complex world, and we can either nurture or destroy it. I learned to appreciate the fragile web of life that envelopes us and to seek out beauty in all the small things around us. The bees' unwavering dedication to their hive demonstrated a deep sense of responsibility and harmony. Their sacrifice was a powerful reminder of the connection of all living beings and our responsibility to protect and preserve them.

Stained Hands

Parker Kelly - 12GA

The knight stands before the heretics, clad in chain and metal, devoid of a face. They've come for Her, like those before, their bodies skewed across the room, blood dried and eyes closed. He stands before Her altar, putting himself between Her and the battering storm of anger as the heretics charge again but there's less of them. His sword is dipped in blood but he can't find their bodies in the sea of dead strewn on the temple's stone floor. He knows why they're here; She is maniacal and cruel and destined to kill everything they know. She has slaughtered armies and taken loved ones from those who would do whatever to have them back. He recognises that in a certain cloaked man holding a cold body closely. She is desolation and death, despair and pain, but he remembers when She flinched during thunderstorms and fed stray cats on the street, when She picked flowers with soft hands that held him and soothed his wounds better than their mother's.

"Kill the tyrant!" The cloaked man cries and lunges forward, stabbing towards the knight, tears rolling down a sharp face with viscous scars.

"Why do you defend It?! It will only take!"

He cries again, dagger finding purchase in between the folds of the knight's armour. Wincing and drawing back, the knight's sword dug into the soft flesh of the man's chest, carving through it as easily as a fire carves through a forest, destroying and desecrating, the hollow sound of metal scraping against bone echoing off the cold stone walls. Trails of red, like flames, drip down the knight's sword, coating his hands, the broken body of the cloaked man shudders then lies still amongst his allies. Heretics. Friends.

The knight collapses at the altar, sword discarded and hands coated in red. He would remove his helmet, but he doesn't want It, Her, to see the man underneath. With every slaughter he feels Her, wrapping around his chest with a comfort that feels so distant in this cold temple. Her hands hold his head, heavy with burden and love. She kisses his temple and dries his eyes with warm winds that flow through the cracks in the walls. He clasps his hands in desperation; not to ask the Goddess for mercy but to know She's alright, to know She is worshipped and loved. His stained hands mix his own blood with that of the fallen as he kneels to an altar that he couldn't care less for, but he prays for Her, desolation and death, despair and pain. He prays for his sister.



A Familiar Face

Emerson Rockell - 1261

The hot water ripples gently around my ankles. The sound of the tap deafening in my ears; a waterfall chasing itself down across the white porcelain. The water burns and the cloth scrapes roughly against my skin. I pull my gaze up my leg following the water. It amuses me to see the harsh line of the bright red below the water, and the pale white above it. The water turns a weak shade of pink as I scrape off specks of dried blood and watch them swirl around on the surface. They look so peaceful, so unbothered.

The lump rises in my throat again, I try to draw a jagged breath but it won't come. How could I have done it? No one will believe that it was an accident. No one will understand that I would be completely incapable of doing it. That I could not have done it if I'd wanted to. Because I did do it. Because I am here in my bathtub washing her scarlet blood from my shins. Because I'm not lying beneath the bushes next to her.

I grip the soap bar tightly in both hands. I press my blackened nails into its softened surface until my flesh lays flat against the bar, white from pressure. I slowly turn the bar gently in my hands, round, and round, and round, and round it goes, turning with greater ease as fluffy suds cover the fists that would commit so dreadful a crime. The hot water rises still, submerging my knees beneath the pink and cloudy liquid.

Most people think that dead people look peaceful. She didn't. Her muscles stiffened like rods, her face faded to a ghostly color, and then broke out in splotchy purple like a ceiling streaked with mould. I squeeze my eyes tighter and tighter until I see a kaleidoscope of coloured dots swim before them. My chest tightens and burns, replacing my heart with hot fiery coals until I feel I must rip it out and drown it.

Now I take my hair, pulling it from its fallen bun. Some of the strands are twisted in the the hair tie and it snags as I tug on it. I pull hard and rip it from my head; pain shoots through my scalp but such menial things are now insignificant. The black knot covered in scraggly brown snakes floats along the the water joining the slowly drifting blood. I push my hair from my face, some of it sticks to my neck, still damp with a gross potion of sweat and blood. The water laps at the edges of the bath, poised to escape at the slightest movement.

Hot tears roll down my face. I did not feel them coming. I catch one on my tongue and swallow the salty liquid. A chill goes down my spine and I shiver though the water still scalds my flesh. A horrible sob escapes my mouth, a strangled little sound incapable of conveying the dreadful twisted guilt that threatens to overcome me entirely. The shaking starts as a tremor and grows until the cloudy liquid around me sloshes onto the crumpled bath mat. I do not wish that I had not done it, I only wish that she had not deserved it. A lawyer might argue that I had no other options but she is the reason I had the one left that I did.

I blink away the tears. I breathe in. I breathe out. I swallow the metallic taste in my mouth. Now I am standing. I reach below me and curl the rusted chain around my hand until it hurts. I pull it and the water stops rising. The blood and the dirt and the soap and the tears swirl together in a soft clockwise circle.

My mother's voice was not gentle or kind. It was the kind of gravelly wheeze that you wished was finished before it even started. Maybe it could have been different, maybe if when she opened her door and I looked in her eyes I had seen seen one ounce of recognition or maternal love behind her icy gray glare. But it is not different, either she went or I did, and I have come much too far to let that happen to me.

I step onto the mat and the water squelches beneath me. I push a path through the steam on the mirror and look myself in the eyes. I am ashamed to say that I recognise the woman staring back at me.

Folly

Teruta Vavetuki - 12KI

During the summer, we often found ourselves drawn to an old tarred bridge that spanned the lazy river. It was a place of whispers and secrets, where the air hung heavy with the scent of wildflowers and the gentle rustle of leaves sang the songs of the season. The bridge, worn and weathered, offered us a perfect vantage point to witness the serene beauty of our surroundings.

It was there, in that liminal space, that we first encountered the wild bees. The bees, swift as tigers, their delicate wings shimmering, worked tirelessly, clustering around the crevice of a rotten cabbage tree where their hive was hidden. We would spend hours on this bridge, watching the bees come and go, mesmerized by their hard work and graceful movements. There was something enchanting about witnessing their dedication. The bees seemed to operate with a kind of passionless industry, each one knowing its role and executing it with precision. We observed how they moved in a steady rhythm, neither slowing down nor speeding up, regardless of the world around them. There was no variation in their behavior, no pause for rest or interaction, just a constant, uniform focus on their tasks. Despite the beauty of their surroundings – the lazy river, the rustling leaves, the vibrant wildflowers – the bees seemed entirely oblivious, consumed by their work. Their lack of enthusiasm or fatigue, the absence of any individual flair, made their tireless efforts seem almost robotic. We'd admire the bees from a safe vantage point, respecting the invisible boundary that separated us from the hive. We never dared to venture too close, mindful of the bees' stingers – like tiny spears of fate, waiting silently to pierce the veil of our youthful invincibility.

But as January ripened, on a half-cloudy evening, when the air hung heavy with the promise of adventure, we made a fateful decision to steal the bees' honey. We came prepared, gloved and masked to the eyes like plundering desperados, intent on smoking the bees out. The idea was both thrilling and reckless, driven by a heady mixture of curiosity, greed, and the reckless courage of youth. This stood in stark contrast to the bees' methodical industry. Where they were passionless, we were aflame with excitement; where they were orderly, we brought chaos.

Silently, we crept alongside the stagnant river, treading on damp grass. Listening to the chirping of crickets and witnessing the light drain from the sky, casting long shadows. However, before we could approach the hive, nature unleashed its fury. The bees' sentries, ever vigilant, sensed our intrusion. They sprang forth, invisible arrows in the dimming light, their angry buzz growing louder as they closed in.

The first sting came as a shock – sharp, hot pain exploding on my arm. Then another and another. The air filled with a frenzied storm of black and yellow bodies. Panic gripped us as we fumbled with the sulfur, our hands shaking. The hive erupted in chaos, thousands of bees pouring out in defense of their home. Poisonous fumes billowed as the sulphur ignited, filling the hollow trunk. Blue flames sputtered and danced, casting eerie shadows that mirrored our fading innocence. Yet the bees still dived and clung to our hands and hair, their tiny bodies vibrating with fury. Each sting felt like a white-hot needle, but still they came, clinging to our clothes, sacrificing themselves to protect their home. The air erupted with their battle cries – a discordant symphony of buzzing and our yelps of pain. They fell by the dozens, their bodies dotting the ground like fallen soldiers, martyrs to our cause.

We retreated, nursing swollen faces and singed fingers. The meager rewards we had gathered hardly justified the destruction we had caused. The once-peaceful scene turned chaotic, reminiscent of Carthage under the Roman torches – loud with flames and falling timber, like Troy. Our raid was a disaster. Half of the honey had melted in the heat of our assault, and the rest were young grubs. Despite the battle, we managed to draw out their plunder; however, our victory was hollow. The once-thriving hive now stood silent, reduced to smoldering ashes, while the maimed bees mourned their devastating loss. Standing amidst the wreckage, our initial excitement was instantly replaced by a heavy sense of regret.

Years have passed since that fateful evening, yet the lesson of that summer evening remains vivid – a bittersweet reminder of the impact our actions can have on the fragile world around us. That summer evening marked the end of our innocence, teaching us the weight of our choices and the responsibility we bear to the earth.

Now, whenever the scent of honey wafts through the air or the gentle buzzing of bees fills a garden, I am taken back to that bridge, to the moment before we made a choice that changed everything. The wild bees, with their fierce defense of home and their tragic sacrifice, remind me of the wisdom gained through folly.



Porcelain

Briana O'Sullivan - 12WT

The bright, white moon peeked through the stormy, black night, casting its eerie light on the decrepit oak trees that violently swayed in the screeching wind, rattling the window panes as little Edith sat by the window. Cold, heavy rain poured down, as thunder rumbled like a roaring beast, ready to unleash its chaos upon the world. She had always looked forward to staying over at her grandmother's house; it was full of happy memories and bewitching stories. Yet, beneath the warmth and nostalgia, a whisper of unease always lingered in the back of her mind – an inexplicable feeling that the house had held secrets of its own, waiting to be discovered. The fire flickered and crackled, casting shadows that danced across the walls like phantoms. Edith curled up in a ball on the soft, cozy cushions, but couldn't help but feel like something was watching her. The calming, rhythmic patter of the rain began to make her emerald eyes feel heavy, when a strange tapping sound caught her attention. She hesitated for a moment, her heart skipping a beat. It wasn't the first time she heard something unusual from above – a soft, persistent sound that beckoned her. Quietly, she crept out of the chair, and made her way to the staircase.

Steadily, she tiptoed up the creaking stairs, the wood beneath her small feet groaning like an old, weary giant. The creepy, narrow hallway seemed to stretch endlessly before her, as the shadows deepened into an inky void that consumed all light. Each step felt heavier than the last, as if an unknown force was urging her to turn back. Her grandmother's warnings about never playing in the attic echoed in her mind, but her curiosity only added to the pull she felt towards it. The attic door creaked ominously as she pushed it open. A stale, musty odor filled the air, revealing a small, dimly lit room that intruded an uneasy feeling amongst the darkness. The cluttered room was filled with antiques, and forgotten relics of the past that were thick with dust and covered in silky cobwebs. Edith's breath caught as she noticed something twinkling in the shadows, two big, shiny, ocean-blue eyes staring back at her. An old, cracked porcelain doll perched on a small wooden jewelry box. Edith inched closer, the doll's beauty was undeniable – its dainty, delicate features and meticulously crafted attire gave it an air of elegance. But something felt off. The way the doll's eyes seemed to follow her every move made her skin crawl, as if a spider was creeping up her back. The doll adorned a long, white and sage-green ruffle dress, with rouge-painted cheeks and luscious, golden curls that fell to its shoulders. As Edith reached out to touch it, for a fleeting moment she could have sworn she saw a faint smile on the doll's face, but quickly dismissed it as a trick her mind was playing on her.

"Edith! It's time for bed now!" Her grandmother's voice, sharp and urgent, called from downstairs, pulling her back to reality. The tone in her voice was unusual, almost like she knew where Edith had wandered to.

She froze for a moment, her hand hovering over the doll. The connection she felt to it was strange and peculiar, a magnetic pull that she couldn't resist, almost like it was calling out to her. Her grandmother's warnings now were a quiet, distant echo that had been drowned out by the compulsion to take the doll. With a mixture of fear and fascination, she grasped the doll tightly and ran down the stairs. In her room, Edith placed the doll on a chair and reluctantly crawled into bed. A loud, blood-curdling scream pierced the still silence, yanking her from her depths of slumber. The sound was unlike anything she heard before – pure terror echoed through the small quaint house. Edith's heart thumped and palpitated as she bolted up, trying to shake the drowsiness off. The scream came again, slicing through the silence like a blade. It was the shrieking of agony and despair. With trembling hands she pushed the covers aside and stumbled out of bed. Hectically, she raced up stairs to her grandmother's room, her legs barely supporting her. The door was ajar, swinging slightly as if it had been hastily abandoned. Edith pushed it open and stood there paralyzed in terror and dismay, feeling her stomach drop to the floor. Her grandmother lay on her bed, her nightgown drenched in a pool of viscous ruby-red liquid. The sight was too much to comprehend – her body pale, limp, and ice-cold. Edith collapsed to the floor, mind blank, unable to process the horror she just witnessed. Then she felt something – a sudden uncanny presence in the room, watching her, waiting. The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end as a cold sweat broke out across her skin.

Nervously, she turned around to see the old porcelain doll she had brought to her room. But it wasn't alone. It now sat surrounded by several dolls just like it, their faces smeared with lukewarm blood, and lips twisted into grotesque ear-to-ear grins. Their eyes gleamed with a sinister and malevolent intent, as if they were reveling in the chaos they had caused. The sound of maniacal, childish laughter filled the room, and Edith's terror deepened as the dolls began to move. Their small, fragile limbs bent and twitched unnaturally as they steadily advanced toward her. Panic and fright coursed through Edith's veins, overwhelming her senses. Her eyes frantically darted around the room, searching for an escape. She stumbled out into the hallway, her feet slipping on the vintage rug. As she fled down the stairs, she caught a glimpse of a doll's reflection in a passing mirror, the image warped and distorted, as their mocking laughter rang through her ears.

Downstairs, Edith found herself in the living room. The fire still crackled, casting flickering shadows across the walls that seemed to dance with a menacing glee. Edith's chest heaved as she desperately gasped for air that seemed to slip away with each breath, as she hid behind her grandmother's chair. Her heart was pounding so loudly it drowned out all the other sounds. But, the silence that followed was unnatural. She dared to peek around the chair, her heart sinking as she saw the room was empty. *They're gone? How odd?* She thought, a sliver of hope creeping in. Before she could fully register her relief, the dolls swarmed her like a hive of vicious, enraged bees. Their voices surrounded her – a chorus of sarcastic taunts and giggles that grew louder. Their tiny hands began to forcefully drag her towards the roaring flames. Petrified, Edith tried to scream, but not a single sound left her lips, as heat grew unbearable. The fire brushed up against her skin, and as the searing pain became too much to bear, Edith jolted awake, her scream pierced the quiet early morning. Her grandmother sat by her side, a reassuring and comforting presence.

"You're safe now, sweetheart," Her grandmother murmured as she brushed her hand through Edith's long, sleek blonde hair.

Edith sat up trembling, still shaken up. It had all been a terrifying, vivid nightmare. But the warmth of her grandmother's embrace couldn't chase away the lingering dread. Edith's eyes wandered to the corner of the room, where the doll sat; its mesmerising yet unsettling eyes catching the morning light as they stared back at her. Edith shuddered, clutching her grandmother tighter, and tried to convince herself that it was just a dream. But chill ran down her spine, she couldn't help but wonder – what if it wasn't?



Damners of the Desert

Oscar Parker - 13WH

The research that we have commenced in the desert has produced extraordinary results. We have only been here for a week now, and we have already located the ancient seabed. We have discovered the fossilised bones of smaller urchins and ammonites, but most significantly the bones of a Plesiosaur as well as a Mosasaur! All exciting, intriguing finds that I am sure will make great contributions to the scientific community. However, I am not fond of the desert heat; the sun glistening off my back makes the days long and my head queasy, especially when I am used to the air-conditioned lab back at home. I can constantly feel drops of sweat plunging off my brow onto my cheek, and my body always pines for water. The sand is also uncomfortable. It follows you and is impossible to get rid of, but all of this is tolerable. What I can't stand are these god-awful flies buzzing in my ear, taunting me as they crawl around my face. They make me flick my head like I have a nervous tick, and I slap myself all day in constant irritation. It is the only thing that makes me want this amazing career experience to end. Despite this, we are travelling further into the desert next week, to what we believe was a deeper plateau of the ocean.

*

I am lost. We drove towards the ocean plateau for hours, and from what I remember, a dark cloud arose in the distance. Panic arose from our desert guides, who knew automatically what was happening: A SAND STORM! A mad rush began. We tried to outride the storm. Speeding along the dunes as the dark cloud of sand rumbled in the background. However, it was too quick; it engulfed us. We tried to protect ourselves using the convertible cloth roof of our Jeep, though the open windows built for the desert heat offered little to no protection from the high-velocity sand that was pummeling into us. The sand tore away at my skin and left me with wounds wherever my flesh was exposed to the elements. The searing pain was so intense that I blacked out. When I awoke, I was alone, covered in sand, and lying on a dune. My companions must have thought me dead. There is nowhere to hide from the heat. I am scared, and I'm low on supplies, and these flies, these bloody flies!

*

I have decided to walk through the desert in hopes of finding something or someone who can help me. The flies of the desert have found me, and they have gathered in greater numbers. They seem to follow me wherever I go, constantly attracted to me like a magnet. They could be mistaken for a cloud of locust. Like desert animals to an oasis. They crawl over the raw and weeping wounds caused by the storms blasting sand.

*

I have been walking for what feels like days. The heat is getting to me. My skin is burnt, and my body yearns for water. Any sum of it. My stomach feels like it's eating itself, and the most peculiar thing is my unbearably dry lips. I use every piece of grease and sweat that my body produces just to try and chap them with increasing pain every time. My wounds constantly scab and crack as I move my body in the heat, making it most uncomfortable. After the long hours I have spent with them, the humming of the flies around me has started to make sense. They speak an odd and peculiar language, and at times they can be mean. Though they have brought a sense of companionship that has filled the missing excitement that my academic work provided. You see, these flies are my friends, and they tell me that they are going to lead me to my help! I just have to trust them, and so I will.

*

There's water not far from me; I can see it is just over the horizon. The flies are right. A great pooling oasis. I can hear their excitement. A loud buzz is being emitted from them all around me.

*

I reached the oasis, and I plunged my hands into the cool water. I grabbed and I grabbed and I drank and I drank, but my thirst wasn't quenched; in fact, there was no water at all, but I could see it. I got angrier and thirstier and weaker and tired and slower and...

*

I lay here on the floor with no hope, and the flies are swarming me, talking to me. They are buzzing louder and louder with excitement. They are taunting me and laughing. I can do NOTHING! Nothing as they crawl over me.

*

Fossils; I hate them. They are sad carcasses of lonely souls, just like I will be. Just as I am doomed to spend eternity in this godforsaken desert. The flies are the damnners of the desert, but also the defenders of my soon-to-be ancient body.

A crash of thunder rolls across the sky. Storms were constant now, and had been for the last 20 years or so. Ever since the coronation.

Clank, clank, clank.

Feet pound across the cold stone floor.

Clank, clank, clank.

He increases his speed, then skids to a halt. Great doors stand before him. Tall, dark, steel doors. He knocks. Two sharp knocks. There is a whirring as the doors swing inwards. He runs forwards, across the length of the great chamber with its ceiling that rises far beyond the light of the ground level torches. Great pillars line the edge of the hall; tall, dark shapes that stretch from the ground and ascend into the dark abyss. At different intervals down the hall banners descend. Most are tattered and torn, but they all have the same black colour and maroon lining.

And in the middle, in bright scarlet, is the symbol.

The symbol that has brought liberation to many, and pain to others.

He kneels at the base of the throne.

“My liege, I bring urgent news,” he says, bowing his head while still kneeling.

Glowing crimson eyes open in the darkness.

The central seat of the throne was enormous, it would engulf most humans. From the base, behind the seat, rose two great black crescents. They rose above the top of the throne, looming over the centre, but didn't meet. Instead, floating between the two curves, there was an orb, beneath which were two more pairs of crescents. The final touch to the throne was an arch. Extending around – the final layer to the dark shapes above, before disappearing into the darkness.

Sitting beneath was a shape hidden in shadows and blended almost perfectly with the dark throne. The curves of its body could barely be distinguished from the throne itself. The spikes on its shoulders and arms not ruining the aesthetic, but rather adding to it.

“Speak.” The voice was deep and commanding. And while this chamber was large and echoing, it cut straight through.

On the northern border, the conquest's end was almost in sight. The enemy had been pushed back to the very edge of civilised land. What they optimistically called a 'base' was a rundown factory, barely capable of supporting basic function. A thousand strong marched to this outpost, their vast number sure to guarantee victory. Siege plan twelve had been chosen as the most logical manoeuvre, and so, phase 1 was initiated, an aerial assault. The fighters flew in, dropping explosives, and bombarding the exterior of the factory. Then phase two... it began with the cannons. The shells pierced the exterior as more and more were fired, and while they rained fire upon the factory, the catapults and trebuchets were readied. With the first round most of the vicious projectiles successfully hit, but did not break through, simply falling to the ground. But then, the ingenious savagery of plan twelve, every projectile was engulfed in hissing, hungry, devouring fire. Every one hit its target. And as the last round ended, phase three commenced. The troops moved in and took their starting positions.

The ruler focuses his attention on the kneeling servant in front of him.

“My liege, as I am sure you are aware, our attack on the enemy was unsuccessful. They were more prepared than anticipated and outflanked our attack squads with an overwhelming number we never expected they could produce.”

“Yes, I am aware.”

“Well, we have received updated information, and the enemy now marches on towards the capital.”

Silence; it sits over the room like a foul stench.

“What?” There is no ferocity, just a calm, controlled rage.

The servant's emotionless gaze remains downcast as he replies, “They have moved from their factory outpost, and now, they march down the main road. They take control of towns, battlements, cities, all headed in the direction of the capital.”

“They mean to destroy everything I have created. The kingdom I have built. They shall be hard pressed to even stand a chance.”

He pauses.

“Stand, and look below.”

The servant rises slowly and looks below, through the glass floor.

“Isn't it beautiful?”

And in a way, it is. A chaotic, industrial, beauty. Massive saws rotate at extreme speeds, clashing against each other, slicing shapes out of giant metal sheets. Conveyor belts connect platform to platform. Half built bodies slide along. Floors down, legs and arms hang from rails, flying around. In the walls giant gears turn. They shift and spark. Smaller cogs crank away in the crevasses, alternating speeds as they do so. The orange light from the forges burns bright. The glow can be seen even from all the way up in the chamber. It is utter chaos, but from above, it is a beautiful, deadly dance.

“My conquest against these humans has raged on for over 20 years. I hold the power capital of the world and I can produce warriors faster than humans can die. You were built down there, and I can produce a thousand more of you if I choose! They stand no chance.”

BOOM!

A shockwave rumbles through the ground. The servant has to steady himself, and glances around. The ruler remains impassive and motionless. Another figure sprints into the chamber. He ungracefully skids to a halt in front of the throne.

“My liege, the enemy has begun an attack on the northern border of the city.”

There is silence from the throne.

“Too long have I left my enemy unchecked.”

His elbows rise as he shifts his weight onto his hands, preparing to rise.

“Too long have I left the execution of my orders to rusty, metal scraps like you.”

He hefts himself from the throne, his feet now the only thing connected to the ground.

“It is time that I enter this fight.”

He steps down from the throne, each step slow and deliberate.

Step.

Step.

Step.

“They shall not know what hit them.”

He lowers his right hand to the scabbard at his side, and his massive armoured hand grabs the hilt. The iron gleams bright in the torchlight as he slowly drags the enormous sword from its scabbard.

He pulls forth his sword, the iron gleaming in the torchlight. The ground rumbles with the beginnings of the assault. And lightning crashes outside, illuminating the towering figure where he stands.

“Their blood shall run.”



Judgement

Detroit Stowers - 13LU

Humanity's saviours were what they called themselves, and sure, once, long ago, they may have been; now the only title befitting them is humanity's annihilators.

I still remember the day the endless expanse of blue skies parted, making way for the gods as they descended from the heavens. The Earth was trembling as we thought the world was coming to an end. How right we were. Beginning their slow descent towards us, elegant in every small movement. The gods had an unmistakably alien appearance. Their forms were bathed in a radiant golden aura, unimpeded by darkness. An ethereal hum followed their being wherever they moved. Their faces were an orchestra of convulsing shapes, moving with indescribable chaos. Their skin glowed with luminescent hues of gold and silver, fighting to outshine each other, casting an otherworldly light across our awestruck faces. We thought they had descended to help us, as they once did in tales of old. The gods of ancient folklore were here to guide us in our most trying time. An overwhelming cacophony of divine voices surged into our minds, crashing together in a chaotic frenzy. Thousands of voices blended into an incomprehensible chorus. Yet, despite the jarring disarray of voices, a single unsettling message emerged:

Humanity's imprint on Earth has been profound, to say the least. Since the earliest days of civilisation, your relentless pursuit of progress and expansion has ushered in an era of extreme pollution and climate change. Your insatiable consumption has driven countless species to extinction, leading to the collapse of entire ecosystems. You sacrificed the planet's health for your own comfort. Wars, driven by greed, have caused widespread suffering for every species. Your relentless destruction has pushed the Earth to the brink of obliteration due to your ongoing negligence. Your continued existence is a liability. We have descended to save you from yourselves. We are humanity's saviour; we are your final resolution. In response to the havoc you have caused, we are here to cleanse the blight on Earth and return it to its rightful order. Just as you have pushed Earth to its breaking point, we will grant humanity the same fate.

Then, silence.

That brief moment of silence was interrupted as the gods enacted their judgement. Blades of searing light began raining down from the heavens. With a shrieking cry, the sharp beams pierced through the clouds, impaling those unfortunately caught in their path. Unbearable heat radiated from the blades, instantly cauterising the wounds. Their skin split as if to escape the scorching heat, exposing the inner workings of muscle and bone. Victims convulsed uncontrollably, screaming in agony as the light tore through flesh. Knowing I may be next, I quickly darted into a narrow passageway, my lungs burning with each desperate step. Moving from building to building, I desperately searched for somewhere, anywhere, to spare myself from joining the dead. Suddenly, I skidded to a halt near an inconspicuous stack of rusted metal sheets, adrenaline surging through my veins. With no time to think, I quickly dove behind them, compressing myself as much as possible against the cold, jagged surface. My pulse pounded in my ears as I squeezed deeper into the tight space. Every sound seemed amplified. My breathing seemed so inconceivably loud. I could feel my heart hammering against my eardrums, threatening to give me away. All I could do was hide from the imminent death that loomed outside. I waited in darkness, until only the crackling of fat and meat remained. Faint, muffled cries trailed closely behind. I was safe here—but for how long? What if they returned? My thoughts raced as the initial urge to stay hidden waned in comparison to the growing desperation to escape. With trembling hands, I slowly pushed away the scraps of metal, my heart pounding with every movement. Each step felt like a battle against crippling fear, but I knew I had to leave before it was too late.

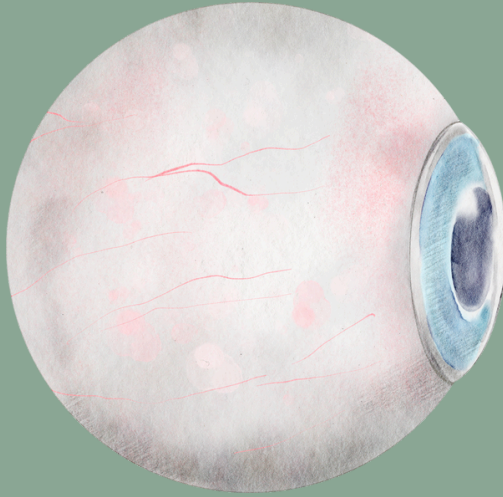
Emerging from seclusion, I was met with utter carnage. Blood seeped from lifeless bodies, staining the streets a deep, unsettling red. The air was heavy with the putrid scent of burnt flesh—a stench that was both suffocating and nauseating. The sheer number of dead was staggering—a sea of mangled, lifeless forms stretching as far as the eye could see. The once vibrant and bustling landscape had been reduced down to a desolate wasteland, a grim testament to humanity's self-destruction. As I crept through the disfigured bodies, a wave of guilt and shame washed over me. I felt an icy knot begin tightening in my chest; the weight of the destruction was nearly unbearable. The silence was deafening, broken only by the occasional crackle of the still burning remnants and the soft, haunting sobs of survivors emerging from the shadows. Their faces were pale husks of their former selves, their eyes hollow and devoid of life—a horrifying testament to the consequences of our recklessness.

I continued moving towards the streets, stepping through the smouldering remains, seeing the true extent of the carnage. The ground was covered in twisted, charred corpses. Parents were still clutching their children close, frozen in an eternal embrace. Buildings that once stood tall were now reduced to ash. Each breath was a reminder of the devastation wrought by our own hands. We were blinded by our own selfishness. We had once seen ourselves as champions of progress and civilisation, immune to consequence. We were convinced our relentless pursuit was for the betterment of humanity. Our foolishness became impossible to ignore, each step a march deeper into the abyss we had created.

Yet as we stood amidst the ashes, our hubris lay bare before us. Endless growth demands endless resources—a truth we ignored in our arrogance. Each charred ruin, each silent shadow, spoke of a greater loss. As the Earth once mourned for its loss, the few survivors now mourn for those they have lost. The very planet we had ravaged became a mirror of our own demise. The Earth's silent suffering was a haunting testament to our hypocrisy, a reminder that in our race for dominance and control, we had only hastened our own destruction. The terrain shifted under each new step, as if the earth itself recoiled from our presence. Every creak of metal or flailing of clothes in the wind filled us with a dread that gnawed at the edges of our sanity.

Among the devastation, a deep orange glow from nearby flames cast an eerie light, illuminating a lone man within a clearing. He was kneeling in the dirt, his gaze upward with a mix of despair and anguish etched across his face. His eyes were wide open, filled with a desperate plea, as if confronting an overwhelming terror. His skin and clothes were covered in fresh blood and black ash. His mouth remained slightly agape, on the verge of a painful cry—a man on the brink of collapse. Whatever horror had unfolded before him weighed heavily, a force seemingly unbearable. "Why do they hide?" he wailed, his voice cracking under the weight of desperation. "Why don't these almighty beings show themselves? Why do they prolong our torment?" His cries echoed in the stillness, unanswered, until distant booms suddenly shattered the quiet, like the first drops of a coming storm. His despair spread like wildfire, infecting those around him and drawing them into the same abyss of terror and resignation. Fear seized the hearts of those still clinging to life, turning one to few and few to many. One by one, we fell to our knees, our will to fight evaporating in the face of inescapable death. Eventually, darkness enveloped us all, consuming every last flicker of hope and leaving nothing but the cold embrace of despair.

In the depths of our sorrow, a profound resignation took hold, stripping us of any remaining will to fight. Each breath felt like a burden, each heartbeat too painful to endure, each blink a reminder of the futility of our struggle. We found ourselves sinking into a void where the desire to persevere had eroded away, replaced by an overwhelming numbness. The drive to persevere, to cling to even the smallest glimmer of hope, had vanished, leaving us in a state of hollow surrender. All that was left was to wait.



A Natural Accessory

Hazel Thrush - 13KR

Blood looked a natural accessory across her features. A red flowing bow woven through hair, a spattering of maroon freckle across blushed cheeks. She was more than stunning. Maroon rivers flowed from her full lips, dripping like luxurious words of temptation into his willing ears. The blood covered promises he gave himself at the sight of her beauty flowed to his brain, blooming twisted poppies of ideals into his addled mind. She was gorgeous. He felt he had already had this thought, eyes a swirling brown captured the very essence of his consciousness. She was gorgeous, drops of red forced the swirling, hypnotizing brown of her eyes to blink rapidly. She was gorgeous, like the life veins of a leaf – tiny rivers crossed and intersected over her elbows, down to her wrists. She was gorgeous, the shucking knife bit into her palm with a soft squelching of breaking flesh. She was gorgeous still, as she raised the tortured flesh to those full, blood slick lips. Leo realized his mistakes, the danger, all too late.

Twenty minutes prior, Leo was by all accounts a normal teenage boy. Lazy, boastful, dirty in places that should be washed regularly, and incredibly one track minded. Like a pig to slop he could not let go of anything until he had it, or at least exhausted all his avenues in getting it and angered at least four people. He held that hint of narcissism and lack of empathy so prevalent in those of his peers. It was no surprise he ended up where he did – following his selfish desires. The frost permeated everything on that fateful Tuesday morning, 6am sharp. He felt it in his socks, he felt it in the dangerous spike in his lungs, rendering all but the least asthmatic of individuals completely unable to move at above elderly walking pace, and he felt it in the crunch of his greasy hair, shining to the point of offense. However, all of these slightly uncomfortable side effects of the school commute were forgotten and banished to the very far recesses of his mind as soon as his red, wandering eyes landed on her.

Her face turned from his line of sight. His red eyes sauntered leisurely and with pleasure – as if painting a layer of sleaze over everything that caught his attention. They first landed on the ink splash down the middle of her exposed spine. The vertebrae, uncovered to the frosted morning, pimpled with gooseflesh. They traveled, his wandering eyes, to the bare shoulders, soft, he imagined – the pale skin, much like the trunk of a birch, contrasted so nicely with the splatters of red... red? Leo snapped to attention. In rivulets, it traced her frankly delicious frame. The sight of blood only piqued the interest in Leo's hungry eyes. He assessed the situation as only a man of his class would. A skeletal, naked, blood covered girl, stood stock still in the middle of an asphalt road – he noted her raw feet, not without interest – in the swirling fog and miserable temperatures. And as a man of his class only would, one who had never learned empathy, and had the world handed to him with no apparent consequences, Leo decided to run full tilt at what he clearly assumed to be a poor lost homeless woman, vulnerable against anything and everything in this cruel, cruel world of Leo's. She was desirable, she was interesting, Leo deserved to take control of the situation – his undeformed mind decreed.

Excitement thrilled through his spiky little body, pure self-centered glee. The asphalt, which looked so hard on the girl's unshoed feet, fell away under Leo's. He gained, he gained, he gained – whooping in boyish delight, harsh calls cut like arrows across the stretch of frost filled air between them. As they landed, pierced the ears of the girl – she turned faster than humanly possible, and definitely faster than her starved frame should have allowed.

In an instant the chase was on. Leo, filled with all his selfish excitement and wild instinct, doggedly followed the naked woman, his naked woman, his mind supplied – he had been the one to find her, and clearly she was in need of some type of help, standing around naked and all. Legs of twigs raced in front of him, she was much faster than he first anticipated – Leo would give her that. He thought, if he listened close enough he could hear those frail bones clatter in the wind and they engaged in their dance down the road. She twisted, she turned, here and then there, never slowing, but always just out of his reach. A rabid animal, the hunt fueled his body.

Here and there, and suddenly gone. Where? There. The open door invited Leo in warmly, a portal to the trapped women inside surely. He bounded through, past the rusted window panes, the rotting, maggoty wood, into the breathing darkness. The thud of flesh on flesh followed.

Blood looked a natural accessory across her features.

He watched her suck the flesh of her palm down her throat. She smiled, far too wide it seemed, as though her face would split into two. He could see the small morsels of flesh hang from impossibly sharp teeth. Transfixed, his red eyes followed her bifurcated tongue with entitled hunger as it worked methodically to pick each piece, to force it down her pale throat.

The girl, woman, demon laid out her hand flat. The knife stuck out of it, a pointing laser directly at Leo. Swirling brown met bloodshot red. She was so gorgeous, it really was a shame he would never have her. Finally a spike of danger pierced through his selfish desire. Leo realized his mistakes, the danger, all too late.

“I want your eyes.” The knife flicked upwards.

Lost Night (and Other Musings)

Peter Muller - 13KR

I'm bored and drunk but still I search for some sort of spiritual awakening that will free me from my spiralling habits wandering the nights' deep and cavernous streets like a martyred Messiah with no religion. Within the touch of night's darkness a sickly pressure closes in on the mind and subjects its captives to the infinite blindness of nothing, dragging them before the knowledge of the incomprehensible uselessness of every syllable they utter, the wasted time of every second they live and the sheer boredom of every thought they think. It teaches them the joyful careless embrace of the lifeless unknown nothing in the void of euphoric emptiness. Maybe tonight I will feel that embrace, my lost wandering leading me to some kind of seraphic gospel.

My eyes, glassy and dog-tired, dragged across the crowded room one last time before I made the call to split. In the fervent haze of tobacco smoke the world seemed a curtain between myself and a higher plane of altruistic being – until again I found another alabaster glass of acidic soot pushed into my hand and the tidal wave of bloated bodies pulling me under once more. Pushing against its fleshy currents (*help!*), wading past the people milling about in their own sorrowful truths I coughed up a cone of straw and saw that it was all such a drag. Keeping afloat with nothing but the raft of my trampled hat on the floor, I pushed myself to some kind of respite. A small-nosed drunk who came on strong tried to shove me under again, but I heaved him off and washed up onto the cool shore of the city street which was alive with the electric hum and a secret unknowable energy of night. 'Yahoo!' I yelled into the dark, hoping to catch it by surprise. The eyeless night stared back; it had seen me coming all this whole time. Fingering my last few coins and hoping no one would notice they were just bottlecaps – not even the expensive kind – I decided to make my way uptown and see what was happening for no apparent reason but my own. I got lost walking around this signpost and had to take respite in a diner; a real old-fashioned one where the guys from the French Revolution and the guys from the Reformation would meet up and argue over the latest stamp designs. I ordered this zinc bowl of space age ectoplasmic ice-cream and ate in silence. The big lipped waitress stared at me the whole time and I got spooked and left – I thought she might have been my mother. The night rolled on and I rolled with it.

Cowering in the fresh breeze of a gardened urban enclave, I zoomed straight down the hill and bowled right into this old hobo shimmying down the road. In a flash I got up and asked him what his deal was so carelessly walking across the street at this time of year. He replied that he was selling cigarettes and offered me one, which I took though I didn't have a lighter, taking six drags before I noticed it was actually a porcelain pen. He laughed dementedly, smiling a crazed cantaloupe half-smile before stealing my hand and pulling under the red incandescent lights, to a world so far from the one where we had just met and so deep below all traces of discernable life.

Into the dark underbelly of the dead night, where all those people's sorrows they keep hidden from dawn collect in writhing heaps and stew into a flood of suppressed day-to-day misery, melting and stinking and screaming and so strenuously breathing. It's a smell you can feel as the eyeless night stares back again and you can't look away, a feeling you can taste with bitter aromas creeping into your mouth and paralysing your mind and spine and your entire being itself. Again he laughed, and though I couldn't see him I laughed as well, perhaps to get that taste out of my mouth or just as an out or to free or to myself from the clutches of the suffocating nothingness or maybe for no reason at all. The embrace of the dark closed in and I was a lost wanderer blindly fumbling for that divine truth or sacred knowledge or at least another drink for Christ's sake. I couldn't feel myself; only the afternight, the dark, the void and its expanse of dead depravity in which I was its most insignificant speck.

During this rush I must have fallen asleep, because some indiscernible amount of time later I found myself sprawled back underneath a bed frame in some unexplored alley somewhere in between the city cracks while a carpenter played electric violin in the background. Somehow, it was still night. Somehow, the old man was still there and somehow he was still brightly displaying that moth-eaten smile and smoking his fine porcelain and having a great laugh at my expense like any old hobo would. I asked the old man what his deal was and where the hell he had taken me, though he merrily just shrugged and said; *'Who the hell am I? I'm no-one, boy, I'm only a crouched shadow stalking these alleys, another washed-up cat dragging its claws over the underbelly of everything we call life and love and all that type and drawing blood I can lap up as sustenance. And you're very much the same.'*

Didn't dawn on me what the hell he was talking about, so I snatched his pen and took exactly 9 drags before I composed myself into some form and spoke the first thing on my mind.

'What time is it?'

'Beats me. I'm not a watch-man.'

'Then what the hell are you?'

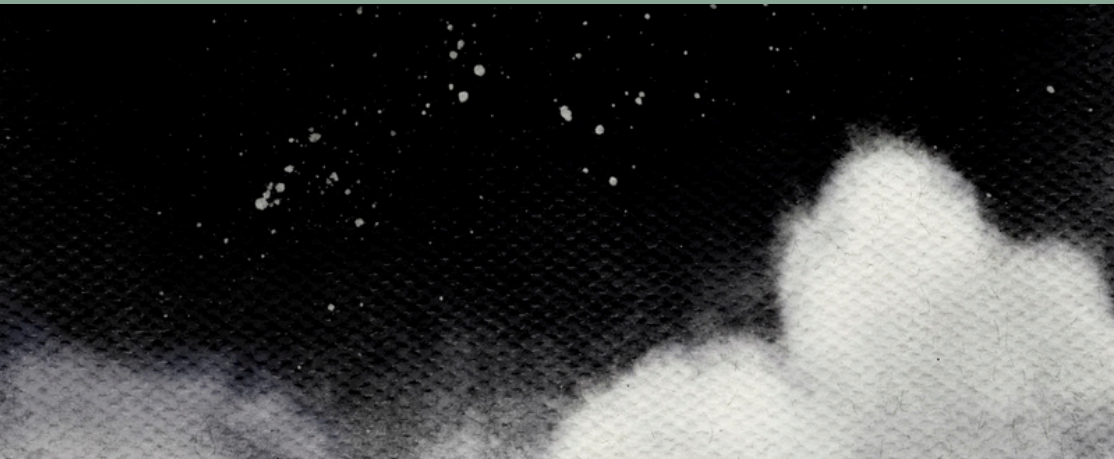
'You're coming on too strong, boy.'

'And you're putting me on, you crazy cat!'

It went on like this for a while and I got fed up and left. I never found out who he was, which suited me fine.

But maybe after a while of fruitless wandering I could start to see what he meant as the night stretched on without a single crack promising dawn. I stalked through the back alleys and the hidden rooftops that pathed the epic path towards my nocturnal salvation (free booze). In all aspects I really did feel like a cat with its tail beaten, miserably skulking around in the blackness hoping to score whatever it could in its bloodied claws. A cat that clung to the dark night like its only companion, where everything else was just a passing attraction that was as fleeting as its glimpses into anything real. I was suspended in a dream that was a waking nightmare, lulling back into the secure embrace of my own emptiness, walking on a turntable round and around and towards what I didn't even know. Man – *what a draggg.*

But then suddenly out of nowhere but time and space and the goddamn essence of the great universe itself this huge burning ball of light stood before me like a fallen angel from the invisible heavens above. I fell to my knees and cried for salvation from this divine presence. Without thinking, I blurted out; 'What time is it?' But the ball did nothing except engulfing me in its radiant glow and I surfed upwards to the black canopy withholding the light and my rebirth. Reliving the sickly pressure. *What a far out thing, man.*





Creative Writing Competition Entries 2024

It was heartening to see an increasing number of students submitting work to this year's Creative Writing Competition.

These pieces were written by students on top of their school assessments; they devised and planned these pieces independently. Read on to enjoy their submissions.



SENIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION ENTRIES

Operation: Suicide Drop

Reese Kilpatrick - 116B

Commander's Log

Day: 374. Time: 0134 hours. Entry: 4

It's been a year and a half. A year and a half since the government called in its military might and took full control, a year and a half since anyone aged 16 to 19 was forced from their homes, their families. If lucky, they could live on school grounds relatively safe; if not they were forced to live on the streets, homeless. A year and a half since we got fed up and protested; never inciting violence, always remaining peaceful. A year and a half since someone was shot dead at a protest. The protests continued with the hope we could win peacefully and no one else would get hurt... three more were killed five weeks later. And now it has been a year, a year since we formed a army of youth, a year since we declared war on the government, a year since our first battle, since we first killed, since we saw our fellow soldiers, our friends, murdered by creatures created by the government, creatures of grotesque humanoid form, beastly but with a keen intelligence. Deadly. We think they may have been humans once; no one is certain. What we do know is that they can kill us easily. To them it is second nature. The easiest way to kill them? Charge straight at them, brutally strike, show no mercy, an approach that destroys us mentally as surely as it destroys the enemy.

I remember that first battle. I relive it most nights. We had found the encampment. Five hundred of them seven hundred of us; good odds and we had the element of surprise. We charged down the hill coming at them from all sides when their gates burst open and the grotesque creatures sprang at us from all sides. The guy in front of me was dead in seconds, his arms torn off, his face ripped to shreds. Three of the creatures swarming over his dead body pulling it apart. Putting it aside for later. Panic ensued, chaos reigned, death struck from all sides, my helmet was yanked from my head and they clawed and bit at my face, trying to turn my skin into ribbons. I can still feel their jaws clamping down on my skin, still feel their claws raking my face, feel the blood gushing down my body, both my blood and theirs. We barely made it out alive; of the seven hundred we sent, two hundred returned. None of us will ever forget that night and now finally it is almost over.

Tomorrow we launch an attack on Wellington and put an end to this tyranny. I can hear the mechanics behind me adding the finishing touches to the plane. The plane that, in less than six hours, will take my squadron to Wellington. Our job is simple: we are to jump from the plane when it is roughly two hundred miles out from Wellington and then use cobbled together wingsuits to land on the Beehive and infiltrate it, to shut down the security measures and help get our ground troops into the city. Simple enough. A battalion consisting of three hundred and twenty soldiers against roughly two and a half thousand troops. 8 to 1 odds and that's not including the grotesque, deadly humanoid monsters of whom there could be anywhere from one to a couple thousand! This is of course if we aren't shot out of the sky on the way there! As it turns out, flying in makeshift wingsuits leave you overly vulnerable to being shot down. And if our wingsuits are destroyed we are dead. We only had around thirty parachutes and they went to the youngest in the battalion. If we get shot in the air we're dead; if we land on the Beehive and have a receiving party we won't have time to unclip the wings and get out our weapons, so we will be dead. If none of that happens and we infiltrate the Beehive, I know some of us, maybe all of us, will not come out of it alive. But I will do everything in my power to protect my soldiers, my friends, and keep them alive even if it kills me. I will see the security system shut down and our troops safely into the capital. Even if it is the last thing I do.

Commander Cameron Burgess

302nd Squadron, 7th Battalion

The Wellby Residence

Sadhana Singh - 12GI

15th June, 10pm
Wellby Residence

"I would rather indulge in this ruthless night than regret it tomorrow."
A knife swung, splashing blood and snatching the life out of his body. The blood flowed, filling up the bathtub.
"I promised you a relaxing bath, darling."
The light brown, almost red-haired girl smirked as she stood up tall and left the room.

16th June, 7:30am
Wellby Residence

"The police are investigating the murder of the Wellby family's youngest son, Alex Wellby. The 29-year-old millionaire was found bathed in blood this morning by the housemaid at around 6:00 am."

The mansion is filled with the sound of weeping. Alex's mother and his wife, Julia, are sitting on a backless, velvet chair. His mother is pale and frozen in fright while Julia sobs quite loudly.

"We would like to have a word with you, Mrs. Wellby."
Julia snuffles and turns her gaze upwards slightly, rubs her mother-in-law's back and slowly stumbles to stand.
She walks over to the main study of her father-in-law with the policemen and detective.

"We have a few questions for you Mrs Wellby."
"Y-yes..." She broke into an ugly cry.
"Control yourself, Mrs Wellby. Hand her a tissue, Robinson."
Inspector Robinson handed Julia the tissue box and separately offered a tissue as well. She silenced herself and wiped her face.
"So, where were you yesterday?"
"I've been away with my friend all week and only came back this morning."
"I heard you went to Australia?"
"Yes."
"It must've been a long flight."
"Yes, we had a connecting flight from Sydney to Honolulu, then here. Our flight landed this morning at seven."
"Okay. You may go now."

"We've asked everyone in the family and servant group but found nothing," the detective defeatedly said.
"What should we do now?" the inspector asked hesitantly.
"We'll ask a few of his friends, and known people, but this case is a dead end." the detective said to the inspector, and he nodded in agreement, gathering papers and a laptop.

A week later, police closed the case.

The same day, an isolated cabin.

The brown, almost red-haired girl sat in a spinning chair and crossed one leg over the other. She wore a black dress that reached just above her knees, a black fur cloak over her shoulders, and black toe covering stiletto heels. She wore a perfect smile with bright red lipstick and incredibly perfect teeth. She leaned back into the chair and chuckled a bit.

"He really thought he could betray me like that, huh?" her voice echoed through the room.
"Julia?"
The woman stood up and smirked ear to ear.
"Well, of course, who else?"
"You-"
"Yes Ben, I took the life of your lover," Julia said unbothered as she lit her cigar. Her lips wrapped around it as she inhaled.
"But-" Ben was lost for words. He broke into tears and fell to the ground.
"I called you here because I think it's fair that you know. But now that you do, there's no trusting who you'll tell." Her sharp gaze looked into Ben's teary eyes. She took the cigar back to her mouth then let out a thick cloud of smoke.
"The police, of course," Ben said, attempting to assert his manliness in the naturally strong presence of Julia.
"Will you?" she grinned.
She reached into her hair, grabbed and flicked a sharp metal hair holder and it landed perfectly centered in Ben's neck. He gagged as blood flowed out of the deep wound. His lifeless body collapsed back on to the dark wooden floor.

Possible
Jessica De Silva - 12GI

Eight–thirty, my eyes are held hostage by Phillip, leaning so nonchalantly against the picnic table his family is sitting at. 1976, the 200th Fourth of July, and the fireworks haven't started but the barbecuing has. The smell of charcoal and charred meat dominates the area, but not enough to mask the scent of pine needles and aged bark. It smells like Sundays after church, evenings spent together in the woods, at the edge of town and reason.

Can he smell it?

His eyes are fixed on the silhouette that gazes in front of him. Clara's fringe spills into her eyes, barring her vision. The nauseating smell of her perfume starves Phillip of the nostalgia that haunts the air, that haunts me.

They're speaking. His Adam's apple clings to his fair skin when he tilts his head back to laugh.

My looming daydreams lined her lips, I know they did. She even left a mark on him, pale pink shamelessly smears his cheek. My now sweat–soaked singlet is concealed by the boxy plaid shirt my old man warned me not to wear. It loosely brushes my shoulders, cuffed at the sleeves.

Phillip owns one similar.

I can't stand to watch them, but my eyes are prisoners to my compulsion. I have to walk away to break from them, from him.

I sit on the steps near the park entrance, where fumes bred from barbecuing are replaced with the smoke that now escapes my mouth.

I hear footsteps coming up behind me. I don't need to look around to know it's Phillip. I would never need to look to know when he's near.

"Hey," I exhale.

"Having a good time?" he says as he sits on one of the concrete steps below me.

"Boy, am I ever."

I can feel the sleeve of his corduroy jacket brush against my leg.

That's when he asks the question he knows I would never deny, a temptation I can't turn away, "Wanna ditch?"

I pause before opening my mouth, even though we both immediately knew what my answer would be.

"Sure. Walk me home?" I say with a crooked smile as I stand and walk up the steps.

"How could I not?" he replies, reaching his hand out to me for help up. His palm is rough and calloused, lingering too long in my hand.

It isn't just walking me home, it never is.

My singlet sticks to my skin like sin, the burning heat of Georgia suffocating me with my own guilt.

The dirt paths guide us through the woods and to our truth. Branches shatter and snap beneath our feet but all my ears notice is Phillip's breathing. There is an intensity in his eyes, straining his view as he glances around the area. His eyes fall on mine, and the pine trees surrounding us seem to lean in even closer, the outside world barely fathomable in my vision. The sparks of fireworks going off flash at the edge of my sight, and yet not for a moment do I look up.

It rained for a few days, washing away the dust on the dirt paths we wandered, and cleansing the woods of human traces. Phillip knocks on my front door, asking if I want to skate. I say yes, but neither of us have our skateboards when we leave.

No rain has fallen yet but the clouds still hang lowly above us as we walk down the nearby streets.

"Wanna go this way?" Phillip asks as he steers off in the direction of a small muddy footpath, guarded by a dingy wooden gate.

"Sounds good."

The old gate barely resists my push but screeches at the touch. As we walk down the widening path, the distance between us narrows. Our footsteps sync as we venture further into the woods. A large shadow looms over us once we take a left turn. The path splits into two, one thin and winding, steering off in the direction of a barn, drowning in the overgrown greenery around it. Scattered bark litters the ground, decomposing beneath their indifferent guardians.

"Let's go in there," Phillip says as soon as he sees the faded barn.

"What? Why?"

"Why not? Doesn't seem like anyone visits that place very often." He chuckles, bumping my shoulder as he walks past me and up to the elongated barn door.

I follow him, no longer looking at the ancient structure ahead but instead at Phillip's dark disheveled hair, barely brushing the back of his neck. His island–shaped birthmark peers out under his crew neck.

Once I catch up to Phillip at the entry of the barn, the door is slightly open. The little paint left on the door chips away and onto the ground once Phillip pushes it further open.

he barn is agape and empty, the air thick and heavy on me. Phillip starts walking around the right side of the barn while I steer to the left where splatters of red trail to the wall. A tattered mattress on the ground catches my eye, laid out in the corner of the room and against the wall. I walk closer to it, stunned once I notice the dark red I saw on the floor is soaked into it. A metallic smell escapes from it and overtakes the side of the area. I look away from the bloodied mattress to call Phillip over, when writing on the wall summons my eyes. Sprawled out against the decaying wooden walls read the message 'REPENT OR BURN.' I freeze. The writing wraps around my throat and steals the words that were coming out of my mouth.

“What are you doing over there?” Phillip asks, his voice getting louder as he approaches me.

His voice snaps me out of my paralysis, and I turn to him before his eyes fall on the horrors arranged behind me.

He sees it.

His eyes jump from the wall to the mattress and back to the wall again. His face is painted with dismay.

“Let’s get out of here,” I say as I start walking away, unable to look at it any longer.

Phillip’s eyes are still glued to the words plastered along the wall, and he stays in place for a moment before he follows me out.

We walk in silence for a few minutes, the gap between us widening with every step.

“So, what now?” I ask, trying to break the silence.

He looks down at his feet before he speaks.

“Uh, I think I better head back home now, actually. I can’t be out long... And it looks like it might rain... And Ma doesn’t want me to get soaked and then uh, catch a cold or something, y’know.”

“Oh, right on,” I say quietly.

I spend the rest of the walk listening to Phillip’s unsteady breathing, a sound I used to find comfort in hearing. Once we reach the road again, Phillip steers away from me as quickly as possible. I watch as he walks with his hands in his pockets and his head down at the ground.

Mom, Dad, my sister Lindy, and I are going out to The Colonnade for dinner. My cheek stings where I cut myself with my razer while shaving. My chinos feel stiff around my legs, they scratch at the surface of the car seat.

My parents talk over Bob Dylan’s new song.

“The Braves have to get more onto it—”

“Oh, make sure to get gas on the way there, hon.”

“I know, dear. Anyways, as I was saying about The Braves—”

Dad pulls into the next gas station, getting out to pump the gas. Lindy and I get out of the car to check out the convenience store. She skips along the road, her Oxford shoes clanking against the concrete.

Lindy swings her arms back and forth until one of her rings flies off her finger.

“Oh, shoot—”

I sigh, waiting for her as she goes to grab her ring.

I look around, my eyes then stopping on heartbreak.

Phillip.

His arm fits perfectly around Clara, leaning into her as they laugh.

He said he had to go home.

He told me he couldn’t be out for long.

He and Clara look like a couple on *Seventeen*.

They are so open together, so casual. No one would judge them, they can flaunt their relationship to every passerby. The only person batting an eye to them together is me.

I wanted to walk away, to let them be. But my eyes remain devoted to their interactions. The only thing that stopped me from remaining stuck in time was Lindy tugging at my arm to help her find that ring of hers.

I wish she didn’t drop that ring. I wish she never chose to wear it today. I wish she never bought it in the first place.

Once we come home from dinner, I rush to my room to shower and get changed. I want to go to bed immediately, to leave this godforsaken reality and experience a life I may actually be able to bear, even if it’s just for 8 hours.

I walk to the kitchen to get water before going to bed. I see Dad lying on the couch, watching the news.

“Authorities are continuing to investigate the deaths of the two men in Marietta, Georgia.”

My eyes shoot up from the sink to the television.

“Near the scene of the crime, in an abandoned barn, a disturbing phrase was written across the walls.” A grainy photo of the words ‘REPENT OR BURN’ pops up on the television, a phrase that has rung in my mind since noon.

“This may be connected to the murder of the two men, though it is yet to be confirmed.”

My father smirks before taking another sip of his beer.

It’s been a week since I’ve hung out with Phillip. He doesn’t stop by my house anymore, even Lindy’s noticed. The times I’ve seen him out in town, he’s been with Clara. The only conversations that we’ve had have been through quick glances, his eyes flickering on me before darting elsewhere, afraid to hold my eye contact.

It has to be because of what we saw.

I know it is.

I need to see him.

I skate over to Phillip's house and knock on the door. I hear yelling from inside before his dad, a tall, overweight man with a scruffy beard, answers the door. He's clearly out of it and annoyed to see me.

"It's you."

"Yeah, is—"

He cuts me off before I can finish my question, and starts walking off as he yells "Phillip! Your little friend is here for you."

I fidget with the fabric in the pockets of my jeans while I wait. I see Phillip walking down the hallway to the door, with a grin on his face until he meets my eyes. I can tell he hasn't shaved in a bit.

He rushes outside before closing the door behind him.

I begin speaking, "Hey—"

"What are you doing here?" he asks erratically.

"I wanted to talk to you. Can we go somewhere?"

He pauses for a while before he answers me.

"Sure."

We walk through the woods, but in a much more formal way than normal. He stops us before we go in as deep as we usually do.

"So?" He says.

"What?" I ask, confused.

"What did you want to talk about?"

"Oh. Right. I uh, wanted to talk about what we saw... in the barn."

Phillip takes a deep breath as soon as I mention the barn.

"Look, I don't want to talk about it. It was nothing—"

I'm stunned. "Nothing? Are you kidding?" I scoff.

He stays silent for a moment again. He keeps taking long pauses before speaking. Like he has to plan out what he is going to say before he says it.

"Phillip—"

"What do you want me to say? What we saw was awful so stop making me relive that moment. Let me move on for God's sake!" He lashes out.

"Move on? Is that why you've been spending so much time away from me and with Clara? To move on? How does avoiding me mak—"

"This is why! This right here is why I've been avoiding you!"

I look at him, confused.

He sighs before continuing to speak. "She's easier. She's possible."

"Possible? What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

He looks directly at the ground as he speaks. "We will never be possible. Not in anyone's eyes. Not in His eyes."

"Don't tell me you're talking about—"

I don't need to finish my sentence to know.

Phillip turns back in the direction of town. "I should go. I have nothing to say to you anymore, all I can do is pray for you."

I start walking behind him, not letting him escape my voice or the lies in his words. "Don't even say that."

"It's all I can do."

"Stop. You can't mean that—"

He turns to face me and finally meets my eyes. "I do."

I stand still, stunned, unable to utter a word.

He continues speaking, "Think of your faith and—"

My shock turns into anger in a second, I can't believe what I'm hearing come out of his mouth.

"Is this faith to you? Hiding under the trees as if God can't see through the branches!?"

Phillip grits his teeth as he speaks again, "Think of your family!"

"All I can do is think of you!" I plead.

"And I'm sorry for that," he pauses. "But I need to go. Just let me go."

He looks at me with grief. We stay in silence for that moment with our eyes locked, taking each other in one last time, before he turns from me and walks away.

He leaves me alone in the woods we once yearned to always be together in. He willingly walked away from the haven we created for ourselves, from the heaven we brought to each other.

The silence is deafening and the trees seem to be closing in on me. I feel like I can't breathe, but even if I step out of these woods, I can't regain the breath of life I had every time I was around Phillip.

I can't regain who Phillip could have been, if not for the judgment and hatred that forced him into hiding.

I knew who he truly was.

I just wish everyone else could have too.

Will I serve as the judge, jury or witness?

During the bleak early morn, the door was painted cinereous grey. The brickwork run down – patched in sealant, scarred caulk, and chipped ceramic remnants. Adorned with simple wooden trim, soaked in a rich brown, the illuminating sign offered the only contrast between old and new.

Navigating the shadowed streets, one would have to follow the slither of streetlight. In the chilling empty darkness on the left, a quaint little shop stood in sharp opposition to the vibrant activity of the stores closing for the night. There, at the end of a no–exit street; was disarming, nestled between neighbouring boutiques.

The shop wasn't unlike the movie *Monster House*; descriptively accurate, though nothing quite so grisly sentient. Actually, the shop was quite adequate; not rich and exquisite, or humble and enthralling as some shops lean towards. I created this shop. It was popular in its youth. I can admit now at 18 years old, it's become worn, sluggish and lazy. Jon Davis, a boutique owner next door, and real estate agents who resemble squawking seagulls see potential as well as I do – except in dollar bills, full bellies, and cheap, lifeless, concrete jungles designed to bleed the colour out of your hair and skin. Now, I see less buildings nearing, old and quality shops disappearing and making way for the new, lesser, generation. My shop could – would never. It is history, it is proper, and it fit well in our dwindling community of sentient establishments.

The shop is a whirl of constant whispers, murmurs, chatters. I hardly listen; you see, I love my shop ever so, but recently it has fallen into delusion. Mised thoughts. Sometimes misunderstood hysteria. Not feeding into it will surely fix this, begging to be something it's not. How could it know? How could my shop know? It holds too much potential, it is too pristine to be tainted, to be making such a decision to be different, to change. Therefore, it was a reasonable decision to simply ignore it.

In an attempt to close for the night, following the outstretched arms of the trees behind the moonlight, I kept finding myself having to fix disordered objects. This was for attention, a consequence of my blissful ignorance. It was getting ridiculous at this point. Behind me I heard even more books fall, a vase clashed to the ground, and with that so did any patience I had had. With a deep breath, I kindly, if not loudly, reaffirmed that this was not proper behavior, throwing a tantrum like a toddler, how it was disgraceful to even think of being anything other than a normal, pristine shop, and if this foolishness were to continue I would simply be rid of it. I had stated that the shop should really be grateful to have me, how patient I am towards it. Unlike what a reasonable person would do, simply tearing it down to be reconstructed properly. Stillness followed afterwards, and it felt like every speck of dust had frozen in place.

A tap on the glass window felt like a gunshot. To this day, I remain conflicted as to if it was what I had said or if it was Jon appearing that caused such an irregular reaction. Turning around revealed Jon Davis standing there; behind the glass he looked utterly disgusted and almost thoughtful. My body felt like dust, still, until an overwhelming tidal wave of dread crashed through my body. I watched as Jon Davis slipped away, no doubt to tell the people.

My careful choices, my careful obedience. This would not only destroy my perfect reputation, it would put me in danger. For anything less than perfection is simply wrong. No, this wouldn't do. I rushed towards the door, the pristine, cinereous gray door. It held resistance when I tried to open it. The shop too seemed to panic, it's whispers and pleas – don't leave it alone, don't leave it to suffer – harmonising with the roar of my heart. The shop is afraid, and I am as well. I shouldered the door and ran.

By morning I was dragged out of my house and placed in front of the crowd. They said the universe has a way of correcting itself and this is how it will be done. To cure the disgusting sickness or to build anew. Perhaps the shop really did deserve bruises, wounds and broken shards of glass. I know that the smell of gasoline will always stain my nose, and I felt the heat on my face.

The damage had been done. The shop was stripped bare, it was ripped open through the skin, muscle and ribs from its chest. It was still, and quiet. Paper, rocks and garbage laid spread all over the floor. Dirt blanketed the floor, and I scratched at the dirt, the shop cried to me about home. Whined for safety. It wailed for one last time, fading to a whisper.

Perhaps the crowd had done my beloved shop a service. They asked if I were to be the judge? The jury? Or the executioner? Am I to follow them? I was once good and obedient; will I remain so or face the consequences? Will I continue to follow those who hurt mine because they do not obey their expectations? I am a witness to a crime.

The Silver Crown

Wynter Looker - 11KE

A stumbling heartbeat
has brought you to me,
despite my eyes being blinded by fright.

In the dark,
you heard a lonely madman's plea—
but will you listen
at the end of night?

While the sun and stars
count the hours down,
I'm meant to watch
their pictures frozen still,
until they let me wear
their silver crown.

However long I need to wait,
I will.
And you, with me, shall wait—
or so I pray.

To watch the ribbons of my breath dry out,
I know that though we are apart,
you stay.
And though I'm far,
my soul will come about.

Until the end of time you will flow the same,
And if I'm gone, do know,
I am to blame.

if the moon should fall from sight,
if the stars lose all their light,
if you love, truly love me,
let it happen, i won't fight.

if the world should fade away,
if the dawn forgets the day,
if you love me, truly love me,
let it happen, come what may.

shall i bring the stars to you?
shall i chase the morning dew?
if you want me to, i will,
you can ask the wildest dream,
i will make it real, however extreme.

if the sun should lose its flame,
if the world forgets my name,
if you love me, truly love me,
i will face it all the same.

if you love me, truly love me,
then whatever happens, i won't fear,
for your love, my dear, is all i hold,
in a world so vast, you're my treasure untold.

truly love me
Wynter Looker - 11KE

JUNIOR CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION ENTRIES



Birthd**ay** Celebration Harley Taufelila - 9LL

As the birds begin to find their way home, the sun begins to set.

The old woman hobbles towards the house which once had lively chatter echo throughout; now it just sits all alone, attracting creatures that yearn for shelter. She walks into the kitchen dressed in a greasy apron, which long ago sported a floral design. Her black hair, tainted with streaks of grey, cascades behind her slender frame.

Following closely behind, the chicken she had come to know as Jemima crept stealthily in hopes of finding scraps to peck on.

She heaves the sack of freshly picked potatoes onto the counter, inhaling the scent of hard work mixed with a nostalgic earthiness.

A smile grows on her face as a wave of memories washes over her.

Her father would come home smeared in dirt, with a hog he had just finished wrestling. She could still feel his toned arms enveloping her small stature.

Snapping back into reality, she begins to pull out a thick metal blade before quickly grasping Jemima in her hand.

The chook squirms beneath her, but she is no match for the old woman, and she lets out one final crow before the blade brings that crowing to brooding silence.

A masterpiece of crimson feathers is splayed across the kitchen, and a dark pool spreads across the counter.

She lets out a deep breath, feeling the tension ease as she prepares the chicken.

Slowly, she starts to peel the potatoes quietly as the pot sings in the background.

Today, her son would have turned twenty-six, and when he arrived home, a feast of his favourite dishes would be waiting for him.

When the woman is finished, she pulls out a yellow tablecloth with intricate lace patterns and cutlery specifically left for this moment. She grabs the red wine, aged to perfection.

Her stomach growls as the aromatic scent of roast chicken spreads throughout the kitchen.

As she takes her seat, the old woman lets out a little grunt before whispering, "Happy birthday, son," while gently caressing the photo frame that sits across from her. A singular tear rolls down her face as she begins to plate her dinner.

A Night to Remember

Lily Schultz - 9LV

All the lords and ladies drink in the view of the extravagant, elegant ballroom. It was lit luminously by hundreds of identical candles that sat high upon the lavish sparkling chandeliers. What seems like hundreds of doors line the never-ending room. A glass dome bathes the opulent room in natural moonlight. Arched windows give a romantic look to the window seats. A grand staircase leads down from the royal quarters and straight onto the dance floor.

Dresses of great grandeur are worn by ladies like medals from a battle. Layers of intricate lace cascade down bodices. Romantic, princess-like fabric shimmers with every movement. Puffy skirts and flattering necklines, each dress a majestic masterpiece.

The long sound of a violin bow running along the strings erupts through the muffled voices and echoes of laughter. A melodic swirl of crescendos rises out from the piano. The rest of the orchestra joins in, weaving chords and notes together, creating enchanting melodies. They were joined together by music.

Men in velvet suits stride confidently towards giggling gaggles of girls intending to take their hand to the dance floor. Dance cards begin to fill up. Once partnered up they take their positions, ready to dance. The first notes officially begin the ball. Partners dance as though they are connected as though they are one, the movements are fluid and intentional.

But showered in darkness, tucked away in the corner a girl displaying a linen dress. Her chocolate locks framed her flawless skin. Her piercing green eyes contrasted with her hair giving her a look of effortless beauty. Many would be envious of her looks. Perfectly placed freckles dotted her features, her lips a soft pink.

Anger and jealousy wash over her like waves on a beach. These flamboyant rich people prance around and waste away by drinking alcohol until they're wrong in the head. They wear dresses that would buy enough food to feed their whole family for a year. She had so much anger towards them. How could the world be so unfair? She had never met a lord or lady who had shown an ounce of kindness towards peasants except one. They would never have to lift a finger in their life.

Her once soft hands were now littered with callouses from various chores. She was a maid of the palace. Along with her two eldest brothers they only brought in just enough to sustain the family.

Her name was Evangeline Dwight. She lived with her mother Iris and her five siblings. Her older brothers – whom she was closest with – Henry and Arthur worked on the farm of their neighbour. Her twin sisters Clara and Alexandra were far too young to find work and her baby brother was still in a crib. They barely managed without their father who had died in the war less than a year ago.

She never thought she would be here, watching wealthy fools dance themselves silly, of all places. Maybe it was jealousy or perhaps something else that had brought her here to stare and wonder what if.

A single salty tear ran down her face leaving a trail of wetness on her cheek. Evangeline sometimes wished she could show weakness and how tangled and ruined she was on the inside but. But she couldn't. She would be eaten alive. Evangeline raised her shaking hands to her face and her freezing hands chilled her hot red cheeks.

“What might a pretty little lady like you be doing round here?” called a cold deep voice.

“Leaving” relayed Evangeline in a malicious tone. A forced smile pinched her lips as she turned her back to the man and strode off.

“Don't come back” ordered the man in an authoritative but slurred voice “Your kind doesn't belong here.”

But leaving was the last thing on Evangeline's mind. Her mind wouldn't be swayed by those who think they rule the world. She would finish what her father started.

Modern Akrasia
Keeley Leavasa - 10FR

Alas,
Let me burrow in your weary arms
Iron bones,
And stones in my heart,
I've melted metal through my veins I have not the power to hold myself up,
Greedy eyes, saw stars die,
Empires fall, and cities rise
Wish it not mine that observed with apathy
(that feeling is just human nature)
But my spine now falls limp at the slightest whisper of wind,
Even my supporting trees abandoned me,
Chanting silently; they do not accept akrasia

As I lay withering in your grasp,
Count my infinite pennies and some that have piled in the stomach of the beast; me,
Lack of will, and human desire
Stay pitted within me,
(I come first, I come first, I come first,)
turn a blind eye, you reap what you sow

I plead, I've consumed all the evil,
And now it's consuming me,
Lays heavy like the hand of death
Guilt is the hand of death...
I did something I was not supposed to
(Yet I didn't do anything at all)

Oh, metallic whispers,
We both have crimson blood
(It's only me who has crimson eyes)
I argue,
Can one forgive the doings I never did?

I beg you and you and me to remember,
I was born from nature's womb
From mountain peaks,
And cities gloom
I am but only human too

How much sorrow can I take?
Rip me from your comforting hold,
Pierce needles and drain my metallic blood
End the chains that stay shackled to my weary heart
Oh, tell the trees, my dear,
'The lessons from a tree have been learned'
They'll intertwine my veins with their vines
(And then maybe, I might be able to hold myself up)
Gracious eyes, see stars die,
Empires fall, and cities rise,
It will be mine that'll observe philanthropy
And my spine will uphold against the strongest wind
(How nice of the trees to help me)
Chanting silently; they will only accept enkrateia.



Drink This
Ellen Chen - 10FR

As I ventured deeper into the woods, I felt a sense of unease that I had never experienced before. I was in shock when a bright flash of lightning lit up the sky followed by heavy rain. Seeking shelter, I hurried into a small, eerie, abandoned house filled with spiderwebs and roaches. As I cautiously looked around, I noticed a partially open door and leaned in to listen; I heard very subtle breathing. Something was telling me that something bad was about to happen, but curiosity got to me. I just had to see what was behind that door.

I slowly opened it; it was squeaking and dusty to the touch. I peeked my head in and I saw a little girl in distress. Her back was turned to me. She was panting, and her breathing got heavier and heavier by the minute. I tried to stay calm and not scare her. I slowly walked up to her and tapped her shoulder. She turned around and her face was all burnt and there were open wounds all over her body. She smelt like old, rotten eggs. I wanted to throw up but I backed away slowly. It was like I was in a horror movie; I felt like my guts were getting ripped out from freaking out. I didn't know what to do at that moment. All I could think about was getting out of there, so I decided to run to the door but *SLAM*, the door shut on me. I tried and tried to open it, but nothing worked. I didn't know what to do.

When I turned my head back, I saw the girl crawling towards me. My instinct was to stay still on the floor and be quiet, hoping nothing would happen. It worked and she started to head to the kitchen. She grabbed a lighter and began to burn her body with it. I knew I shouldn't have gone with my curious thoughts. I had been on the floor for ages; I didn't want to risk moving a single bit. My legs and back were killing me; I had to stretch them out. I slowly and quietly moved my leg; the floor squeaked so loudly I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I just had to close my eyes, hoping for the best. After a while, I ever so slightly opened them and in the corner of my eye I saw her burnt, wounded face right over my shoulder, with blood dripping down on me. I was panicking; I looked down and saw a piece of paper. I opened it and it read *drink this or you're dead*, written in dark, red blood. There was the drink on my right. I had no choice but to drink it; before I knew I was feeling dizzy and unable to think straight.

I woke up in a dark, secluded place. I felt my face and there was a sharp pain when I touched my cheek. I slapped my face, hoping it was a dream, but felt a sharp pain and realised I was bleeding. My first thought was that someone had burned me, and I was terrified of what would happen next...

