

The Kwyll 2018



A Collection of Writing from the Pupils of the High School of Dundee

September 2018

Rector's Introduction

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of the *Kwyll* as much as I did. Our word *poetry* comes from the Classical Greek verb, meaning 'create'. Creativity is at the heart of great education and the role of writing is both implicit and explicit in that. Our core values as a community are centred around the notion "Let Your Lives Speak" and so writing is about finding your voice – coherent, consistent, authentic, creative. Working with structure and form we learn to use them to break free and to express ourselves. Whether in poetry, prose or non-fiction, it is about more than skills and forms and craft and technique – it is going beyond these and filling them with the life-blood of imagination, creativity and skill.

ST Coleridge said rather glibly that prose was: "words in their best order". Whereas poetry was "the best words in the best order." It feels much more than that! It is about encouraging our pupils to play with language, to move out of any comfort zone of traditional structures and narrative and poetic forms.

Our contributors have therefore put their words, including their best words, in their best order and have covered a vast array of styles and subjects. They reflect the dynamic diversity and originality of the many minds who have contributed to this edition of the *Kwyll*. Enjoy!

Dr John Halliday
Rector



FORM 1

Naomi Sibson

Grief

It walks into the room
With the world on its shoulders
With its face heavy with sorrow

Its bony bare feet trudge across the marble floor
A hospital gown droops off it and flows
Down to the floor like a waterfall
Its skin is like the surface of the moon.

As it walks, a trail of stygian black smoke follows
The smoke climbs the walls and spreads like tree roots
Whilst the figure edges closer and closer

It touches a hospital bed
And crawls its twig fingers towards the bedsheets
As its spider hands crawl across the bed
A trail of darkness follows.
In bed lies a man, shivering from his nightmares
His body turns from cream to black
And what little hope, disappears.

Parisa Hossain-Ibrahim

Joy

Flying on the rollercoaster,
Crazy wild hair.
Skipping on the pavement,
Laughing without care.
Jumping on the trampoline,
Rainbow clothes glowing.
Soaring on the zip-wire,
Sneaker laces blowing.
Whirling on the waltzer,
Without a single care.

Twirling on the dance floor
As if she walked on air.
Brightening up the day,
Easing the negative away.
Without her we'd be lost,
Our hearts as cold as frost...

FORM 2

Zoe Faloon

Late November. The city rests peacefully, illuminated like a pine tree at Christmas as the inhabitants lie in a deep slumber. Buildings are inanimate behemoths stretching high into the night's sky. The cool breeze groans as it whistles past the skyscrapers battling with the objects in its path. The stars wave jovially at those strolling through the tenebrous streets. A taxi, bearing inebriated night clubbers hurriedly speeds by in a flash of dandelion yellow and raven black. The scent of lingering souls wafts through the air filling the nostrils of the people of the night. The stifled screams in the middle of the business people trapped in mundane lives echo in the deserted alleyway. The sense of peace and serenity soon to be lost when the sun peaks over the tops of the buildings, erasing any trace of the moon's pale light.



Claire Joss

Nothing had changed, it was a normal day for Lauren. She had waited anxiously at the door for the postman to come and deliver her mail, hoping that today wouldn't be the day that she was given the telegram. Her husband was fighting in the war so she was left alone after only six months of marriage together. Every day she would start in the same way: she would wake up at nine o'clock which was when the milk man would do his rounds, then she would sit by her window and stare into the abyss waiting for the knock on the door from the postman. She would stand at her door for a few seconds just preparing herself for the news that she might be given. Only once this moment had passed would she be able to continue with her day.

She gave a sigh of relief as she stepped back inside. Just the usual news today, nothing she should be worrying about. After the postman left she would always walk into her run-down kitchen and fill the same glass jug with water and walk to the nightstand that stood alone in her bedroom. On her night stand there was a red rose. The rose was the only pop of colour she had in her natural toned room. She had been given this rose on the day that she waved goodbye to her husband, she told him that she would look after the rose until he came home. Now Lauren had finished all of her most important daily tasks so now she had to waste sometime until she had to repeat her actions. She cooked herself some lunch and set her small dining room table - but as always, she set two places. As she began to eat she started to daydream and ended up not eating much. As she dreamed suddenly she heard a loud whine.

She jumped. She was crouched on the ground so she slowly rose her head so that she could just see above the window ledge. Then she saw what she deep down knew was happening. Destruction. She scurried around her home trying to grab everything that had an importance to her. Finally she was ready to try to go to her shelter. Every step she took, the more of the chaos she saw and heard. She recognised a few faces in flurry. Her neighbours trying to get their belongings down into their shelter whilst also trying to hold their new born baby, who Lauren had babysat umpteen times. Then she realised that she needed to focus on herself. She hurried to the edge of her garden where her shelter was hidden. She pulled the corrugated iron cover off of the hatch and revealed her route to safety. Lauren took a moment to look around her and see how much damage had been caused. Suddenly, she froze and fell to her knees.

All she could see was a withering red rose. It was nothing unusual, there was nothing special about the rose she saw, it was just a limp red rose. Shells fell as she kneeled on the muddy ground, nothing could move her. Not even a flinch when a bomb would explode, it was like she was in a trance. Screams swirled around her. Every second she stared at the rose she was losing her opportunity to save herself. The shells continued to cascade onto the town, everything around her was about to be ruined. She knew her husband was safe. She had been told that morning, everything was fine. But still, she didn't move. A familiar sound was heard, the loud whine of a shell approaching. She let out a shriek that echoed around the ghost town, just as the final shell fell.

Rose Ryan

Apple Crumble – The Taste of Home

The enticing scent of steaming apples, ripened to perfection. Dazzled with flakes of sugar, delicate as snow. Sealed with a golden crunch that crumbles at the force of a tooth and melts on the tip of the tongue. The texture dances around my mouth exquisitely. My taste buds discovering the softened, juicy melted apple accompanied by the crunch that is yet to crumble in my mouth. Such simplicity, yet signifying so much warmth and comfort. A sense of homeliness that only a childhood memory can bring. Searching for those perfectly matured beauties, red as a rose, yet when bitten into, an inside as white as a pearl. In the late summer as the trees begin to wilt, the best of the lot are chosen. Sweet yet sour. Green yet red. Crispy yet juicy.

After raiding the orchard, the preparation begins. Then comes the satisfaction of the flawlessly peeled, white apple. Graceful swirls of brown begin to overrun the crisp creaminess. Precious amounts of sugar are sprinkled across the dish – the temptation to add more is almost certainly unbearable and soon the apples are lost through the layers of sweetness. The occasional surprise of a twist of added cinnamon or a burst of flavour from a hidden berry, making it all better. Each of us with a distinct preference: “Pass the ice-cream,” “Put on the custard...” “The cream! The cream! Before it's all gone.” My innocent younger sister with a face full of fruit...Mum shouting whilst she sweeps up the crumbs. Why in the world is it called CRUMBLE, I wonder.

A sentiment of crust attached to the rim, unwilling and impossible. Everyone's favourite part – sat armed with a spoon, scraping off the very last crumb. It may be served at the end of a tummy aching Sunday roast, or a lazy Sunday afternoon. That's what makes it so special – the fountain of memories it inspires. The desert brings such pleasure throughout the whole process, the preparation, right through to the very last spoonful.

Sneha Sripada

Goldilocks

The child was born to what only biology could describe as a mother. ‘Goldilocks,’ her name, for the blonde ringlets that sprung out of her bruised scalp.

But her golden hair would be the closest that she would ever come to fortune.

Starving to the state of visible skeletal structures, protruding out of her body. Abandoned by an alcoholic mother whose only responsibility in life was keeping the local bar in business. And homeless, unless sleeping underneath a tree every night counted. Goldilocks was grappling onto the cliff of survival, and the only thing that was keeping her there were indeed, her gorgeous locks. She used them to deceive, to steal, to survive. The brightest glow in the village was Goldilocks' hair, and while the villagers gawked in admiration, and in envy, she helped herself to the products of their labour. The villagers soon realised the two faced little thief that Goldilocks actually was, and threatened and thrashed her. But, Goldilocks told herself, “It was better eating than risking a beating(s).” Eventually, the villagers became stricter, and people were punished severely for stealing. Goldilocks could risk a thrashing, but not a death penalty.

So, she decided that she would wander further into the forest, and search for food. The one piece of guidance her mother ever gave her was not to wander into the forest. Ever.

The trees towered above Goldilocks, and their huge verdant leaves eradicated even tiny rays of light. Gloomy. Desolate. Uninhabited, at least that's what Goldilocks thought. Suddenly, she spotted a rocky enclosure, in amidst the wood. She clambered inside.

The first thing that caught her eye were the three bowls of porridge neatly arranged on a checkered red and white tablecloth. Instantly, Goldilocks knew there had to be a civilisation here, a real one. But more importantly there was food. Goldilocks inhaled the aromas of sweet, rich honey and oat porridge which swirled around the room, and pounced onto the first bowl. She yelped as the heat from the porridge dissolved into her mouth. Her tongue and gums were scalded and burning in excruciating pain. Dissatisfied, she went for the third bowl, a cold, lumpy broth which made her regurgitate it straight out. But something stood out about that middle bowl; creamy, scrumptious porridge sweetened with the rich flavour of honey.

All that ruthless munching made Goldilocks sleepy, so she settled herself down in the welcoming, comfortable mattress and dozed off almost immediately.

Goldilocks awoke, after she felt what she thought were her mother's soft fingertips stroking her cheek, for the first time in a forever. It comforted her, and as it tickled, Goldilocks giggled. She kept her eyes closed and enjoyed the moment. However, she couldn't have been more wrong.

Paws.

Claws.

Goldilocks...

mauled.

At least in the end Goldilocks' village survived. In fact, they flourished.

Ksenia Kapelyukh

The Dead Night

Late October. The streets and corners are a silent graveyard, still but ever present. The buildings are tombstones with names to mark those who lie there. The cold silence falls, suffocating, lethal. The shop sign mutters and wails, like a ghost in the dark. The dying lamppost, torn and scarred, fluttering and spitting out light before taking its final blow and going out. The smell of metal encages the city, most of it old and rusty. It is dying slowly. In the distance a piercing yelp of a seagull, a victim of the night. The night will slay everything; lights, sounds, dreams, even humans hide from it. They stay home, too scared to face the graveyard.

Sneha Sripada

The Parachute

I plummet down, through the air
A blur of blue and white
despair
Falling down, falling still

Until

I'm completely static
and almost ecstatic
All of a sudden, a parachute unfurls

The parachute that saved me was you
old girl

Whenever I needed you, you were there,
swift
You are my parachute, for you would always uplift
When I took an emotional decline
high above,
You lifted me up, to cloud nine

You offered me a shoulder for my tears
Protected me even when you were speared
Waterproof
Bulletproof
My parachute

Conspicuous from a bustling crowd
A colourful parachute in amidst the clouds
I admire you, I look up to you,

my parachute

Tranquil, peaceful and composed

Like a parachute, you

float

But then drift

Away

I haven't seen you in years and years

Nobody consoles me, or dries my tears

But my memories of you are still preserved

and they act as the

reserve



Anisha Sangmor

I'm Not Ready

Set the course of your mind to the place in your past when you were happiest. Just take a moment. What do you see in this past? Is it full of the likes of mine? A grand pink doll's house, a miniature chair in the corner of your room with a tired yet much cherished teddy sat askew and a table, its turquoise so brilliant against the beige and browns of the family home? As you wander through this past and affectionately touch these elemental possessions, how is it you feel? If it's a serenity, a joy as it is for me – comfortably take a seat on that tiny chair.

But why take that seat? I need that seat in the way that others turn to chocolate or escape through music. What I carry is a trench bag of responsibility, it's weight seemingly bearable but as I walk along I shift it from hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, the weight impossible, finishing the day with red welts that refuse to melt away. Nothing would be more gratifying than swinging that monumental weight into the back of my bed nightly but instead I have to open it up. Unzipping the bag reveals three little boys. Sounds weird right? But they are what I have to look after and have done for five years since we became a one parent family. I'm the oldest and with this comes the tiring expectations of being better and showing those three boys how to be better. These three boys lie on top of my Mother in that bag crushing her. She has ended up in my bag too although I would never let on that she is for, no doubt, it would set in motion another round of anxiety for her. At the age of nine I became a parent! Who would have thought. Quite a headline it would make! But, in truth, I am. From solving all IT problems to ensuring those three boys of mine are not repeating their master jump from my bedroom window on to the trampoline again.

I've entered the miserable world of experience far too soon. What I long for is the sphere of innocence to encase me. Here I could, if I wanted, take that seat in my bedroom, lift my tired teddy and receive all the comfort I need from his flattened brown fleece. I'd run my fingers along the wall which I had sprinkled glitter on in the hope of transforming my room into a princess palace. I would have those eyes of my childhood and all I'd see was sparkle. I'd climb the rungs on the ladder to my bunk bed and find the enormous blanket that felt like acres of comfort. Underneath I would climb and find the sleep that is no longer mine, the untroubled sleep of the child.



FORM 3

Ethan McColgan

The Field

It was some time in the morning. I'm not sure when. The sky was a menacing shade of grey. It was bitingly cold and the air was damp. A thick, eerie fog shrouded my weary body as I forced myself along the road. Devoid of sleep and ravenously hungry, I laboured on. I was alive, but barely.

Beyond me, a veil of poltergeist-white mist hovered over the desolate landscape. Further down the broken-up ruins of the road was a field. A once ordinary field. Yet now, even through my peephole eyes, I could make out a canvas of blood, death and unforgivable horror. The field was torn up by mortar shells, shrapnel and tank tracks. The once flat expanse, was now plagued with huge craters, deep trenches and discarded weaponry. Mountains of mud and dead vegetation dominated the ravaged land. Hauntingly, all across the field, there was a scattering of disordered, blown-off limbs and bodies. Hundreds of bodies. There were rats too, masses of them, running through the field like fast flowing streams, stopping to scavenge on the dead. Then, there was the razor sharp barbed wire which meandered through the field like a predator - its rusting, thorn-like blades were splattered with human blood and ripped flesh.

The greyiness was broken by the fierce orange flames of the many fires that punctuated the scene. The fires crackled and spat as they burned high into the mist. Thick, black smoke billowed up into the atmosphere. The corpses of men and the surrounding vegetation fueled the fires. The carcasses of burnt-out tanks were dotted randomly about the terrain, so too where the barren embers of the charred trees. Everything looked black. The putrid smell of decay and burning flesh seeped into my airways and made me vomit. The deathly, black smoke gripped my throat and invaded my lungs.

Shell-shocked, I trudged through the field. My boots sank deep into the thick, sticky sludge - wet, not from rain, but because the ground was saturated with human blood.

In every square foot of the field there was a dead body. They were sprawled everywhere, lying alone or piled one on top of the other, scattered over the ground at awkward angles. Many had limbs missing, laying there like mannequins.

There was one body that I was drawn to. One so much smaller than the others. He was thin and wiry. His oversized uniform was heavily stained with blood and his tiny frame looked as though the enemy had used him as target practice - so many were the bullet holes that pierced through him. His blood-stained skin was as pale as wax and his hair was as black as ink. I stared deep into his lifeless eyes. This was just a boy. My thoughts drifted to thoughts of my own children and home.

My emotions got the better of me and I dropped to my knees, too weak to stand any longer. The black smoke had its cold hands around my throat like a tourniquet and I was struggling to breathe. Behind me, I heard muffled voices. The voices got closer and closer. Weakly, I turned my head. Through my heavily blurred vision, I saw the rough silhouettes of a group of men approaching me, marching across the field. The voices became clearer - more hostile and loud. They were shouting at me. They were shouting at me in a foreign language. This was their field. I put my head against the cold mud and blanked out.

Sophie Lennox

Underage

This is not what I was expecting.

In my small hometown there were posters plastered everywhere saying, "We Want You!", "Join the army now!", "You'll be a hero" After seeing all the propaganda my mates and I thought it would be a great idea to sign up, bearing in mind that we were all only fifteen years and younger. The chap who registered us didn't care that most of us looked underage -- he just took our names and sent us along for examination. "All fit to go!" he yelled after giving us a full run down. Boy oh boy had I wished I'd been ill.

If my mother and father had known what I had been doing, they would have never have let me go through with joining. It was much too hard to say my dear goodbyes, so instead I left them a letter that they received when they got home from work and by then I was already making my way to London to board a ship to France. The journey from my home town to London was great fun -- me and the lads had a real lark. We were all chattering excitedly about "when we get home from the war". We'd be adored and everyone would love us. We'd get cheered at rather than getting in trouble for playing footy in the town hall and hopefully the girl of my dreams would finally notice me.

When we finally got to London after a long trip of waiting to get through the busy streets of the city, we managed to make our way to the docks to board the dauntingly large ship that was waiting there for us. The dock and the streets behind were packed full of young and old men waving, hugging and kissing their goodbyes to their lovers, friends and families.

It was a sad time for all of us, thinking about all our friends, parents and brothers and sisters that we had left behind. I knew from the minute I signed up it would be hard to leave my mum, dad and my little brother Jamie (who had only just turned seven a few days before I left). We were all a close knit family. I had a good life back home on the farm. I'll never forget the days when my dad tried to teach me how to shear the sheep. If it wasn't for his precision and skill, I think I'd have cut my hand off with that contraption.

Once we made it through the shambles of the crowd we reached the initiation Sergeant who took a look at our registration cards and sent us on our way up on to the boat. The minute we started trudging our way up the board walk with our rucksacks I looked back to see one of my friends Jack -- still on the dock and shouting up to us, "I don't think I can do this!" I could see the tears welling in his eyes. He was the youngest of us; he was only fourteen. We always teased him, calling him a mummy's boy, because he really was, but it was never a bad thing. Especially when it stopped him from boarding the ship taking him to Hell. I

wanted to run back down to him to tell him to come back up on to the boat, to tell him that this would be our opportunity to show the world that we are real men. But I couldn't go back. For some reason I felt that if I'd stepped off that boat I wouldn't have been able to get back on. I didn't realise but I'd frozen to the spot while contemplating what I should do. I'd frozen for a little too long because the sergeant had to blow his shrill whistle at me to get me moving again.



I was holding up a big crowd of rowdy men who were eager to get on board. We had to keep moving. We had to leave Jack behind.

The voyage from London to France was long and slow but when we finally arrived, the training started straight away. We were taught the basics of obedience and were shown how to use a rifle. After this – *only this* -- we were sent into battle.

The trenches were worse than I had thought. All I could hear was shouting and the fire of guns. I could smell the stench of rotten wooden flooring and the mud, I could smell the blood of many dead and wounded soldiers. I could see injured men making their way from the front trenches to the back, I could see the smoke coming off the machine guns as they were being plowed at the other side across no man's land. I had signed up for this.

I was in a place that no boy should ever be.

Isla Christie

The Sisters

Every day, it was an early rise, the same routine for Grace and Anna. Two imposing, gorgeously grand houses at the very end of Strathearn Road were where sisters Anna William and Grace William spent their days, working hard. The mansions were the complete opposite of the unpropitious William family house in Lochee. It was a struggle, crammed into a tiny house. Money was the biggest problem. It was like living a nightmare. When Anna and Grace's mother and father could no longer afford to run a house of nine, both the girls were sent to work aged fourteen. They kept the house together by working as housemaids in the grand Strathearn houses.

Grace worked for an old spinster called Miss Morgan. Her house was the most beautiful building she had ever seen. Each morning Grace would walk up the stunning scarlet rose garden towards the towering red stone building. Being in the house was amazing to the young girl —but Miss Morgan was quite unpleasant. Grace worked long hours every day in the marvellous house to get as much money to help at home but was underpaid. Dusting all fifteen filthy rooms and the expensive antiques in them, cleaning Miss Morgan's clothes, washing all the huge windows and cooking three meals a day were only a few of the things Grace did for her miserable employer. Grace felt hard done by and was paid a very little for the work she did. Still, every day Grace continued to work as hard as she could; she couldn't disappoint her mother and father.

Next door, Anna was working for a kind businessman named Archie Millar and his family of three. The house, just like Miss Morgan's was beautiful with acres of green grass and garden land. Anna's work didn't feel like an unbearable chore or something she dreaded. The Millar family welcomed Anna and made her feel like it was her home. Working there was something Anna enjoyed -- a place to escape from her home in Lochee. The Millers would make a brilliant breakfast, lunch and dinner for Anna — she was part of the family.

The tremendous amount of work Grace did for Miss Morgan in the house next door was more than double what Anna had to do for the welcoming Millar family. Anna would often get to leave work earlier but would always wait for her sister to finish in the garden, hiding on a seat

that was shielded from Miss Morgan's view. Heaven knows what that old grumpy woman would say if she found her there.

It was a crisp, cold winter's day and Anna had finished a long day working in the Miller's mansion. She sat on the frosty seat waiting eagerly for Grace to finish. Eventually, Anna heard the door shut, and saw Grace walking towards her.

"I've had the strangest day," Grace said, clearing her throat.

Grace told her sister about her upsetting, unusual day: "This morning I went into Miss Morgan's house to start working. Instead of being greeted by Miss Morgan, two tall men in black suits took me into a large room, sat me down at a huge glass table, and told me that Miss Morgan had died. A stroke. They revealed that she had left me a large amount of money and jewellery in her will."

There was a long silence.

"Oh my, how sad...Th..th..that's terrible," spluttered Anna, with tears appearing in her bright blue eyes.

Eventually the girls arrived home. Grace explained what happened that devastating day. Now, the devastation wasn't about Miss Morgan's death but when Grace came to tea that evening she shocked the assembled family with her words.

"George and I have spoken — we will use our money to move to Edinburgh, buy a house and marry. This is our chance."

It was a betrayal. The family said their last goodbyes to Grace and George as they got on the train to journey across that bridge they had looked at from afar for so many years.

Days were no longer the same with Grace gone. Anna trudged to work every day by herself, without her sister by her side. One gloomy, grey day, Anna focused on the pillars, which held up the bridge ahead of her as the waves crashed against them. A blanket of darkness lay over her. She was wearing one of Grace's old coats. As she put her icy hands in the pockets for warmth, she felt the hard smooth surface of a bracelet and pulled out a crumpled note. Peering through the glimmering stones of the bracelet, suddenly the granite river burst into colour, the clouds became luminous and everything around her was light.

I will never forget you.

Grace x



Jed Barron

Killing for Coins

Bang!

Warm blood splatters the crimson curtains turning them shades darker, dripping down slowly covering the freezing wooden floor. The man slumps down and bends over, groaning in pain, slowly succumbing to the deep wounds and the fact that he has reached his harsh, lonely end.

The wind screams through the trees, as I run back home with the jewellery, money and gold to keep us going. I walked along the cold, bitter, freezing streets of Fintry, a few blocks away from my crumbling house and my sick brother.

Another day, another kill, another problem.

The police have been investigating the murders for weeks now and time felt as if it was running out. I arrived back home, my brother lying on the bed, unable to move, trapped to the bed. I handed him his medicine, which I had picked up on the way home.

It was 2 AM my usual time of work, in the dark, abandoned streets there were no witnesses, no problems. I walked up the creaking, groaning wooden stairs as I neared my next victims' bedroom. A man and a woman lay there, resting, lying there still and quiet.

With two shots, their temporary rest had become permanent. They lay there peacefully. lifelessly quiet. I cleaned away the mess, dumped the numb, cold bodies and headed home. With faces covered with mud, scratches and blood, factory kids stumbled past me, pouring out of the Industrial buildings with faces shaken with terror, worn down and traumatised. I continued walking along the dank, muddy streets with a hand on my gun and another on the rattling can of pills for my brother.

Entering the crumbling, mouldy door, I went over to my brother's bed, but it was empty. I found him lying on the floor in the kitchen, calling for help. Rushing over to him, I cried, "Brother! Stay in bed until you are well again!" "But I am well", he replied as I gave him his pills, dragging him back to his bed.

I walked through to my room and turned the mattress, pulling out a pouch and pouring the coins out onto the table. 2 shillings and 9 pence. That was all we had and his medicine cost a shilling.

Undeterred, I headed out to the streets. I knew who my next victim was but there were risks. I climbed up the marble-polished balcony and carefully tiptoed through to the ginormous palace of a bedroom and strolled over to where he was sleeping. Tripping, I fell onto the end of the bed and awoke the man, who had so recently been calm and peaceful and who now turned aggressive and confused.

I grabbed the gun and fired, he swung out his hand and hit the gun out of my reach. He pulled me in for a punch, but I caught him with the end of my knife and the action swiftly ended.

Happy enough, with the clattering sack of coins on my back I journeyed home. As I walked, I caught the eye of a factory worker, staring at me with jealousy and anger.

Later, I sat on the bed counting, "14, 15, 16". I had reached 17 pounds and 36 shillings. We were rich! I burst into the house, laughing, smiling. Now, nothing could bring me down...Or that's what I thought. I skipped into my brother's room.

"Look brother Look!" He said nothing, he didn't move and he didn't share my smile. "Brother?" I shook him, still nothing.

He had died right there, moments before I had arrived. Feeling purposeless and lonely, I walked across the cold, dark streets. I wasted money on pointless things that I didn't even want, just because I had money and nothing else to do. Finally, I gave up. I just sat in my room, waiting, but I didn't know what for. I lay down in my broken, uncomfortable bed waiting to fall asleep.

That's when a shadow shot across my room, running, hiding out of plain sight, then I heard the creaking as he walked up the stairs. Knowing it was coming, I didn't fight it. He walked into the light, I recognised his face. He was the boy I had passed hours before. Quickly, he pulled out a knife and thrust it into me. Of course, I died right there where I lay, sad and lonely- although I can't really blame him, I guess he was just killing for coins.

FORM 4

Ishbel Stuart

The Demon Department

The persistent quivering of the Door Creaker was beginning to get on my nerves. Not because I disliked the demon itself, it's just that it was a constant reminder of yet another task to fulfil. 'I'm sorry Galdor...I... I couldn't stay in that place any longer. It was too much! '. I stifled a yawn as the creature burst into floods of salty grey tears ' Don't worry Bord, I've got a nice little child in Sweden that you'll be perfect for. Ragaz only tapped out because all the screaming was beginning to get on his nerves.

The Door Creaker looked up at me gratefully. ' Thank your sir, I'll go right away! '. As soon as the door slammed shut my tentacles began to spasm. My seven heads turned a rather fetching shade of magenta. Even the teeth on my feet began to gnash with sheer rage. What was about this child that made them so difficult to scare? Toe Munchers, Floorboard Thumpers, Carpet Crunchers, Hair Pullers, Window Scrapers, Sock Stealers, even the mighty Tootsie Tickler had been defeated, all by this wretched member of the human species! Try as I might, this problem was not going to go away. I'd thrown every demon in the entire department we had at it, and it had sent every single one of those slimy, slobbering slug nuggets back to my office shaking with fear. What on earth was I supposed to do now? Couldn't those blithering idiots get anything right?!

I groaned and rested my heads on my tentacles. What was a demon to do? Later that afternoon, as I was sipping my Tarantula and Patagonian Firebird tea, the phone rang. My secretary, a sour faced Wardrobe Warbler, answered it with her usual arrogantly executed elocution. Precisely ten seconds later she had turned pale green and was cringing, her entire demeanour changed. ' Master Galdor....it's Master Beezlebub for you. '.

A lone tentacle lashed out and plucked the receiver from her quaking hand. ' Good day Galdor , I heard you were having some....small , trouble over in paradise? '.

I could almost see the unpleasant smirk he used to punctuate his sentences, particularly when picking on his minions, a group which unfortunately included me. ' No Master, just one rather stubborn child is all '. ' One stubborn child that, nonetheless, has managed to terrify the tusks off your entire workforce. This alone shows me that you are not able to rise to the challenge. ' Beezlebub's voice took on an icy tone. ' If this issue is not addressed with immediate results within twenty-four hours, you will take the C Portal down to Tartarus, where you can have a nice long chat with the Erinneys about the various types of punishment you will be receiving, die cotidie, for the next one hundred years. Am I clear? '. I gulp as a cool, sinking feeling descends into the pit of my stomach. ' Crystal, Master. '.

' Excellent. I'm glad we understand each other. Now GO! '. The receiver slammed down at the other end of the line, making me wince. Twenty-four hours? For the life of all that is unholy, how the dickens was I supposed to do that? On the other hand, being brutally bludgeoned into an untimely grave repeatedly was not how I had QUITE intended to spend the next century. I sighed and turned to my secretary. ' Leviath , open Portal No.666359 to Earth '.

Precisely five minutes into the journey, I began to feel incredibly ill. There's nothing quite like hurtling through Limbo at the speed of light, whilst crammed into a pressurised metal tube that was made for demons roughly the size of my torso. Whoopee. Unfortunately, the short journey through dimensions was especially turbulent - no thanks to the Limbic Winds battering against the capsule with every ounce of puff they possessed. As a result, I arrived under the bed of Jenna T Phillips rather worse for wear and, decidedly irritated.

I glanced around the cramped space I was going to inhabit for the next 24 hours. Surprisingly there was very little dust, and the floorboards, whilst grimy, were worn and polished - almost as if someone frequently lay there. Strange. There were also a number of foot shaped indentations against the bedposts at the front of the bed. What on earth....?

Peering out from under the dirty mattress, I could see a battered old alarm clock displaying the digits 20:35. Excellent. According to previous reports she should be up any second now.....My ears twitched. Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud. BANG!!!! The bedroom door slammed open, hailed by the sound of a pair of feet scattering across the room as fast as their owner's legs could carry them. The springs creaked loudly in protest as the child hurriedly flung herself under the covers. What was she so scared of? My query was answered roughly 15 seconds later as a drunken voice roared out from the bottom of the stairs ' JENNA!!!! WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU, YOU LITTLE SWINE?!?!'

The girl hurriedly scrambled from her bed and quickly pulled herself underneath where she lay, quivering, until she noticed me. I watched her eyes clock the sharp fangs, squirming tentacles, tusked head. I saw the fear in her eyes increase as a male voice hollered from outside the door. 'JENNA!!! COME HERE NOW! The girl looked into my murky pools and whispered, ' Please'.

The door banged open, swinging violently on its hinges. Heavy boots thudded against the wooden floorboards in a deadly drumbeat of death. A pair of bloodshot eyes suddenly blinked open from the side of the bed. A chubby arm reached out to grab the child. Jenna cringed away from the meaty, grasping fingers with their dirty jagged nails, and twists her head to look at me desperately. I took in the tiny shaking body. I took in the venomous expression, the sheer manic rage of the man supposed to be her carer.

I snapped.

Shannon Woodward

My dearest Lloyd. Ephemeral was our time together, and I must admit that to be my one true regret. I could have, should have, made you last longer. The timid tone to your voice, your vivacious magnetism, and the way you so perfectly mask your intelligence behind the thick fetid smell of alcohol on your breath—all will haunt me for the rest of my earthly career. This I know, for I am quite selfishly sweeping you away, in the hopes my soul will rest, thinking I have protected your sweet innocence from the grasps of a cruel humanity. You still have your youth. An upper hand that you have on me, that would have faded with time had I only waited. Although, you look less like your usual self now, and more like a little kitten. The runt of the litter.

Yes, you always have been easy to influence, and today, like the puppet you are, you will finally give me a gift I can appreciate—your life. Even after everything, you love me, and think I love you. It is scarcely a secret you keep from me. A breathing cry for attention is a description you will forever deserve. Still, it is clear to not only myself, the law, and the people present—indeed to everyone apart from yourself, that there is no saving your mortal soul from this forthcoming judgement, and by extension, the mercy of God.

My Lloyd is no different to the other fiends sentenced to death before him. He will not gain the deserved silence until the judge demands so. During the period of noise, I consider that Lloyd may have one last trick up his sleeve; after all the sneaky git has already been tried and sentenced to the gallows. I will give him credit; this upcoming appeal has given me some titillation in my dull life.

Silence only falls upon the room once he starts to speak.

“Gentlemen, I express only the bitterest of rue for wasting your time.”

Good man, my dear Lloyd. Instill what the jury already knows you to be. A waste of time. Let them know not of me. Good man. Continue.

“I made but a simple mistake; you see... On Wednesday the 2nd of August, 1871, I thought I experienced a regular occurrence. A mirage, if you will. A hallucination. Very often am I subject to these peculiar portends that I seldom take notice of my surroundings. My assumption it would pass is perhaps the single thought that is to now end my life.”

Do you lie, or do you speak the truth? Even I am unsure.

“I had witnessed murder by the hands of my dearest friend, Walter Prophet.”

As if you'd betray me. Not only do you alter your statement, but you give the court my name. Soft. Weak. Fool. Are you frightened, now? Why now? You weren't before. Trickster, charlatan, traitor!

“I cannot say what seized his mind in that moment, nor am I even slightly qualified to guess, but the weapons of assault were his bare hands, and the method was asphyxiation. The time must have been around six in the morning when I happened upon the grim scene, but in my haze I can scarcely say I flinched. Promptly, I retrieved my hat and coat, heading out to begin the morning errands.”

You are broken, drained. The court would be a fool to listen! I mustn't worry.

"After my work was done later that evening, I stopped for a drink at the White Stallion, an inn which I would pass every day on my way back from work. This explains the lateness of my arrival home. One can only imagine my surprise once I returned to the kitchen, to find the cadaver still there. After all, my hallucinations typically lasted a couple of hours... The clock now lingered past eight at night. At last, I was convinced that this was a reality. However incredulous I might be, Walter had coerced the last breaths from someone. A girl."

Is my shaking so obvious? No. No one is looking at me. Don't be ridiculous, Walter.

"Walter is such a pure man. The very exemplar of a good Christian. I would have a hard time believing he harmed a fly..."

Lloyd gives a hopeful chuckle to his expecting crowd, as if anyone could find him endearing... Perhaps I am too harsh. In this light, Lloyd is a very beautiful man... His dark, soft hair falling perfectly around his pale skin, accenting his deep blue eyes. As they close, his eyelashes curl perfectly.

Speak up, Lloyd. They can't hear you, they won't listen. Speak up.

"And here is the funny part. My mind, at utter dismay, started to consider the possibility of my own faults... my violent nature, the blanks which blemish my memory. I was easily a suspect for this murder! For a brief time, I was afraid of my own capabilities. Overcome with emotion, all I could do was sob. How could I possibly enact? A man as feeble as myself can hardly lift his dog, let alone a dead body! Once I had finally calmed myself, to a state I saw fit for the concealment of the cadaver, I realised it may have been more reasonable to turn myself in. I was a danger to society, and felt it was right for me to be locked away. I was still desperately clinging for a reason to believe that Walter could not have committed the ultimate crime. In my sorry drunken state, I hobbled to the police station, and told a... less than favourable account of this story, replacing Walters name with my own." He stalls. "I am innocent..."

This court has seen fairer trials, and put better men to death. In my Lloyd's proclamation of innocence, they can see no hint of truth.

I will miss you, my dearest Lloyd.



Abi Cousins

Song of Death

Five months ago, there had been a signal picked up on the Voyager 2. It was an ageing space probe, having been released in August of 1977, but nonetheless its systems seemed to be working perfectly well. Of course they had been checked. Once. Twice. Three times. That would have been the first assumption - the systems had failed, picked up an incorrect signal. But it wasn't.

And people always went looking for trouble.

"Brian? Do you want a cup of tea?"

The Amicus 1 was running as usual. The motors whirred constantly, as usual. The staff worked tirelessly, as usual. The tea supplies were permanently depleted, as usual. And, as per usual, the supplies were running a few weeks late.

"Yeah, alright. Y'know, you've really gotten me hooked on that tea stuff - my wife'll love it too when I get home. Natalia?"

"No thanks."

"Y' ok?" Brian asked in his Texan accent, turning in his chair to face his colleague. She had been working on the same thing for two weeks now, barely stopping to take a breath or have a meal. It was an updated programming device for the systems that nobody but her could understand. And she didn't make any effort to help them to understand either. Natalia was as relentless as a river, but she also had the people skills of one.

"Yes."

That was the conversation over. Brian shrugged his large shoulders nonchalantly, and turned back to his workstation. Megan made the tea, then returned to her desk.

It was late. The clock ticked loudly.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

A beautiful, but dangerous looking flash across the window.

Tick. Tock. Tick.

The monster called the others.

Tock. Tick.

A noise. Outside. Far away.

Tock.

A noise. Closer.

In the morning, the crew woke up and went back to their repetitive tasks. Brian logged the nutritional data of the group. Megan programmed the next leg of the journey. Natalia ... made the tea?

She handed two cups to her crew with a forced smile. Speaking in perfect Russian-taught english, she said, "Sorry for ignoring you so much recently. It will not happen again." It would. It always did. She was stubborn.

Suddenly, the heat sensor alarms went haywire, the beeping sound that could occasionally be faintly heard, instantly causing the crew's ringing ears to be covered by their shaking hands. And then stopped. The ship shook.

"What's happening?!" Came the resounding cry from the crew, "Is it here? Are we really going to find it?" The ship shook. "Oh god." The ship shook. Natalia grabbed on the desk. The noise got much louder.

Then everything started working again.

Though it was assumed to be a technical fault, and everything was now working like a well-oiled machine, a ripple of unease settled around the ship, creeping slowly forward, forward, towards the astronauts' own cores. It niggled at the back of their minds, unable to be slowed in its steady advance forward, taking over their actions as it went.

There was no speaking.

No noise, other than the clock. The clock kept ticking. And then the quiet whisper became apparent.

Dancing, swirling, laughing, singing. A song, melodic and gentle, and yet playful and boisterous at the same time. A cacophony of noise, intertwining like the world's best orchestra. And yet more. It held feeling, freedom, a song that had been made up on the spot, though explaining the lives of the people better than any biography.

From the instant the whisper started, everyone looked up. Looking out the window though, at the vast unknown outside, nothing was there.

The whisper continued.

"What is that?"

"Maybe it's a malfunctioning speaker. I'll go check it out." A dull sound came out where inflection would be in speaking. Normal words, but with a dangerous edge. A butter knife with a surgeon's blade. The ship shook.

Brian's voice barely indistinguishable from the others as he volunteered to go outside, though the feeling of concern enveloped him. But the sound. Something about it.

Clear. Soft. Gentle.

He put on his suit and helmet and stepped outside. Outside. Dead. Suddenly, the sound stopped.

Snap! Suddenly out of their daze, panic ensued.

"Oh my gosh!" Megan's pale hand was over her heart. "Brian!" Her small silhouette shuffled towards the air lock. "Oh my gosh is he dead? It was... I should've... I'll go and get him!" Natalia's hand held her back.

"No."

"What?"

"No. You'll get us both killed." Natalia took a deep breath, pulling herself together - her heart pounding in her chest - before continuing her sentence. "I'll contact mission control. G-get our coordinates." Placing a blanket over Megan, who's frail frame was shaking in the corner. A chattering coming from her teeth. Natalia then began to press button upon button on the radio, speaking in to the microphone. "Mayday. Mayday. 072 634. Amicu-"

A blood curdling crunch. A crack. And then the sound began again, but more sinister now, more deadly. It sang, but it sang of darkness and terror, of defeat and despair. And it was closer now, inside the ship. It had been all along. It had been. Brian's dead corpse floated outside the window, stars in the near distance. So close. So far. Planets in the distance. Blood spatters beside tea stains on the countertops. Natalia's body on the cold, hard floor. Megan's hadn't been hers all along. She hadn't been alive in years. Not since-

The creatures floated outside. And without a song, 'Megan' drifted towards the window.

'She' wandered over, looking at them outside.

The clock ticked.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

In time with her footsteps.

There were monsters outside the ship. There was a monster inside the ship. She dropped her illusion, Megan's dead corpse. A dark, deadly haze covered its eyes. Consuming. And then she dropped.

And what was left - an ash-grey smoke - crept towards the airlock. And click. Then. Outside. The cold darkness outside. And they continued onwards. To earth.

FORM 5

Sarah Boyle

Losing Myself

4am. Instead of sleeping, my mind is active. Thoughts are viciously spinning around my head in an everlasting circle. Night time. Why does it happen? Why is it so hard? I am constantly wrestling with my brain, but it never stops. Frustration builds up through my entire body. Scrunching up a piece of paper, I aggressively throw it against the wall. Un-pausing the Sinatra, I zone out listening to the soothing music, tapping my fingers to the syncopated rhythm, whilst attempting to forget about my little outburst. Anger does not come naturally to me. Sometimes it just all becomes

too much and I am overpowered like an avalanche. If only she had just told me. Did she think I could survive without her?

Isolation. Living in a block of flats entails living next to many people, yet I still feel so alone. Even with my brother and father in the next room. Insomnia. Words cannot describe the persistent exhaustion from aiming to prevent my... Exhaustion. Lately it has been becoming worse. Was she the reason? Glancing at the wall, I track the path of where the paper flew in the air, gradually lowering my eyes to the sight of the scrunched up ball on the carpet. Questions are continuously whirling around. Did the woman expect me to find her? Did she even want me? Slowing my breathing down, I attempt to calm down, but I need something else. There is a way to deal with it. A coping mechanism. Music.

When I was younger, my 'mother' used to sing me to sleep every night. She had the most divine voice. My own special angel watching over, protecting me from harm. My 'mother' loved jazz, particularly singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Once she passed, there was a massive hole left in my life. Sleeping is hard without her soft singing. On the day of her funeral, I promised myself that I would learn how to play the double bass and join a jazz band. For her. She had always dreamt of her children being able to play an instrument, admiring her friend who had played the violin. The double bass has that low, dramatic sound, with the notion of feeling as though you are playing down at the bottom of the ocean. Exciting, yet dangerous. So that is what I would do with my life. Play the bass. I fear I am disappointing her. Should I care? She is nothing more than a stranger. It cannot be true. I just do not believe it...

Listening to jazz completely changes my mood. It is impossible to describe. Whenever I hear one of her favourite songs, I have this incredibly intense connection with it. Emotional and physical. So strong that it cannot be controlled. It is almost like being back in my bed with my 'mother' singing my brother and I to sleep. As a grown man, I still feel this way. Nostalgic feelings from my childhood flood back, with no sea walls nor barriers to protect myself from the impact. Everything stops. It is just us. Together... Finally, we are against the world, with nothing to hold us back. There had been times I felt as if we were disconnected like loose wires and cables, but I never would have imagined this was the reason why.

Buying the bass was bothersome. Economically, that is. My family are far from wealthy, but we persevere. Instruments can be very expensive. Although my father and I have full-time jobs, it took us years to even consider being able to afford a cheap bass. There is one thing I know. All of that hard work was worth it. That feeling! The uncontrollable urge to continue with music. It is hard to describe, but that bass is my only reason for waking up every morning.

Playing music. There is nothing in the world that I would want more than a career with my bass. Joining a jazz band. Making my 'mother' proud. It is less about wanting it, but more about needing it... Needing to play. For survival. I wish I could rewind back in time and be able to accompany legends such as Bing Crosby. What a life that would be! There is a supreme force stronger than Skywalker urging me to play. When I cannot sleep at night, I MUST listen to some form of jazz. I need to react to the music in a physical way, even if it is just clicking my fingers. I blamed her for this.

At least I thought I blamed her but something changed when I discovered that my whole life was a lie; that was when we met.

Busking in the streets is not overly financially beneficial. Not that it matters. Smiling faces in the crowd force me to return, not the scattered coins that attach to the chewing gum permanently pinned to the ground. My mind often wanders to the idea that there is an almost magnetic connection between the gum and coins, like they cannot live without each other. Each little piece on the cracked pavement has its own special relationship with another like they are a family, with the pennies planting a passionate embrace on their beloved ancient gum. Whenever I feel lonely outside, I tend to think about their lives. It helps.

I never used to busk, but then it became a daily routine. At first, I thought it was coincidence. Maybe she just happened to be passing by and wished to watch, but it was different. She was there. Every single day. Just standing there, waiting for someone. For me? Despite being puzzling, nothing had clicked in my head. Intensely staring as if she knew me. As if she wanted to talk. Chaotic flashbacks stirred my mind, whilst I remembered performing at a school talent show. A lady in the front row watched me intently, with a familiar glimmer in her eyes. Weeks, then months went on with the same peculiar woman coming along as if she were a regular customer in a coffee shop, longing for her cappuccino. Each day she would give me the same amount of money. Tossing a shiny coin into my case, it would be accompanied by an exaggerated wink, created by shutting her left eye so slowly it was almost painful to watch.

Saturday. 5pm. Memories too vivid. The woman had been there all day long, watching me as usual. No one was around except her. Most days were very quiet, with the silence heightening how bizarre it was that the elderly lady would never talk. Her short, silver hair and crumpled skin were accompanied by a clumsy stumble and help from a vibrant, violet walking stick. Packing up my bass, I turned and found her staggering over to throw her coin. No. This time I was not letting the woman leave. As she carefully extended out her hand with the sterling, I quickly grabbed her wrist. With raised eyebrows, she studied my face full of conflicting feelings. 'Who are you?' I knew it had to be done. Otherwise, I would be sitting around never knowing the truth, living as a naïve child unaware of the world's cruel reality.

My frustration was not due to her answer; but the fact that I never realised what was standing right in front of me all my life. How many times had she considered telling me? Why had my father lied too? Did I not deserve to know the truth? Turning up the volume to the highest setting, my ears are pounding from the music that is being used to attempt to block myself from the outside world. Blocking me from my past. One sentence. All it took for my whole life to be altered completely was one sentence. Everything I had ever known to exist was just wrong. Who am I? Loved ones never told me. The little boy inside me remembered the feeling of being an outsider. Worthlessness. My own parents were guilty like prisoners.

"I am your real mother, Tom."

Robert Connolly Brown

The Confession of an Heir

I was born, some 35 years ago, the son of the 8th Duke of Bavaria. I trust that you remember him, or at least the scandal, which engulfed his life like a raging forest fire sweeps through the dark, dense forest. Anyway, at birth, I was gifted with my father's blue eyes and my mother's blonde hair, and, as a child, I was supposedly as radiant as the sun. It was only later that I would take on this hollow, pale complexion, with a silver sheet of matted locks covering my disfigurement, my broken nose, scarred cheeks and my two eyes, which stare, with a tortured expression into space. Perhaps I deserved it, this punishment. After all, as a child, I never showed gratitude to anyone, not to a servant, to a friend, not even to my mother, seeing myself as entitled to lordly treatment. Servants would bow before me, and rightly so, I thought, given my high status, and the power that I wielded. Now, I have no appetite for power any more. Throughout my childhood, I never came to serious harm, protected inside the grounds of my estate. It wasn't until I was 15 - not still a boy, not yet a man - that I can remember being afraid at all.

It happened as I was trekking through the Austrian Alps, having recently demanded my parents to allow me to leave the castle, on horseback with a dear friend. I will not mention his name to you, it is of little importance and I doubt he would want to be associated with me in my current state. As we were travelling up a particularly thin mountain pathway, which overlooked a deep valley, an unknown creature, possibly a snake, caused my horse to rear up, its mouth frothing and its eyes rolling in unnatural fear. Slipping on an unstable stone, the stallion began to stumble towards the precipice before tumbling over the edge with an unearthly scream. I thank God for my life that day, as nothing but sheer luck had allowed me to survive. For my friend, noticing that I was in danger, grabbed my sleeve and dragged me over the cliff edge. My horse was not so lucky. Looking down into the the valley, we saw its mangled remains some 100 feet below us. Although I was not physically harmed, the experience left me with a deathly fear of horses, as well as a constant feeling of unease, which has haunted me ever since.

After this event, I shut myself in my room for days at a time, obsessing over the idea of infinite knowledge, and how a human could come to learn everything, which had been collected by humanity. As I approached adulthood, I begged my father to allow me to study in a university, but to no avail. He never had any time for works of science, and forced me to take up my position as his heir. I rebelled heavily against his actions and refused wholeheartedly to embrace these duties, preferring to spend time among the dregs of society like a rat, feasting on their crude humour and superstition.

After all I have experienced over the past 10 years, I have no greater wish than that I had listened to my father and had become the Duke, instead of continuing on my own path to destruction. It would have not led to the events, which I will describe to you today, which have filled me with horror, and left me a shell of my former self.

These events happened one night around a decade ago. The sky was completely clear, creating a chill not commonly seen in September, and the setting sun created brilliant hues of yellow, green and purple. I was in my room, bristling with the excitement of finally being able to put my theories of intelligence absorption into practice. Although my friends had been unusually reluctant to volunteer to be the test subject (when generally they were so drunk they would agree to anything) I had not let that stop me. Undeterred, I had found a young criminal, who went by the name of Frederick, sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment for a crime, possibly theft. I never did ask him. Even he seemed unwilling at first, but he eventually agreed, because the prospect of avoiding the gaol held a greater appeal than the apparently infinite power he would obtain. He was strapped down securely in a chair, ready for the wonder of science, which would change the future of the world irreversibly.

It was ready. My father was away in Leipzig on trivial business for the next week and I had dismissed the servants on the grounds that they deserved a holiday. Safe in the knowledge of our solitude, I began the procedure. I wish I could tell you how I was successful in my operation, but alas, that information is lost to me now. It was taken from me by the machine.

As the machine 'worked', transmitting the all information from every book I had ever laid hands on into Frederick's mind, I felt it begin to draw out thoughts from my own mind. This was not meant to happen of course, and I began to panic at the unfolding situation. All the knowledge I had, alongside my hopes, dreams and my darkest fears were stolen away, drawn into Frederick's brain, which growled with hunger for every last morsel of information. As the experiment continued, now out of my control, I fled the room, slamming the door behind me lest the machine continue to destroy my soul. From behind the door, I heard the steady whirl of the machine drowned out by a horrifying scream of fear, pain and torturous rage. Then, there was silence.

Turning to the mirror, I laid eyes on my new self. Shivering, sallow, soulless, my lips were parted in a silent scream that I could not end. My hair was as white as chalk, and hung limply down my thin, hideous face. Hardly daring to breathe I grasped the bronze doorknob my trembling thin fingers, and slowly turned it, wishing to uncover the monster I had created in my arrogance. With nothing appearing on the threshold, I summoned all the courage that remained in me, and entered my room.

It could hardly be described as a room at all now. Only three walls remained, the fourth having been ripped off to expose the valley in which our castle lay. I saw him in the glare of the cold, unnatural moonlight. I suppose he must have been at least 7 feet tall, with jet black hair falling to his shoulders. He was covered in silver plated armour, but held no sword nor any other physical weapon. Yelling, I ran towards him hoping that I could slay the beast or die trying, but as I ran, he began to change form. Having learnt the powers of shape-shifting lost to humanity for millennia, the creature which was once Frederick now stood before me as a terrible black horse, with eyes glowing with hatred and anger. Screaming, I stumbled back, not thinking of anything except to escape the hideous beast before me, but the horse transformed quicker than I could comprehend into a black winged vulture, dripping with blood. Screeching in triumph, it flew away into the night, and a bolt of lightning lit up the sky, sending a wave of fire surging towards the nearby village.

As a result of these unholy activities, a storm developed which caused the entire village below to be engulfed by flame. But now you know of the spirit which was the root of my suffering, and which still lingers in the dark recesses of the world, haunting my conscience and making my very soul uneasy. Like Prometheus, I am tormented daily by what I have done, and will pay for my scientific discovery with my lifeblood.

Isla Archibald

The After

I had always assumed that death would take the form of a dark, hooded creature. Instead, death came for me as a woman cloaked in a red dress.

White mist formed the shape of her, a loose skirt flowing from an elegant figure; her bare feet skimming over soft ground. She paused a few steps away from where my I lay, her listless gaze wandering over me. As she knelt down and extended a slender arm towards me, my unseeing eyes met hers. Her lips moved but her words were jumbled as they reached my ears. I felt distanced from myself, just watching - an observer. A heavy sigh, then she spoke disjointed words again. Carefully, she slid cool hands underneath me and cradled my numb body. My head lolled to one side and I stared into thick fog; the rhythm of her long strides allowing my mind to drift in a quiet place between sleep and waking. Time seemed to be warped somehow, flickering and dancing around my body in an indecipherable pattern. The fog gradually became unfocused shapes and sounds; a blur of colours and whisperings washed over me.

Her steps slowed and she placed me down softly. An ethereal silhouette against the mist, then darkness in her wake. I tried to tell her to come back, I didn't want to be alone, but the words faded as I thought them. Against my will, sleep took me – a deep, heavy sleep that seemed to pull me by the ankles to the bottom of a murky ocean.

Consciousness lapped over me, a gradual tide of awareness spreading slowly through my body. Memories drifted lazily by, but I could not latch onto them; clouded recollections, all blurred at the edges. A fog similar to the one stretching in all directions had settled over my mind, allowing a distorted, incomprehensible view of ideas that meandered aimlessly around my skull. Yet one thought, one simple question still managed to penetrate through this deep state of mental detachment: where am I?

"Where am I? A simple question; yet simple questions rarely have simple answers."

I flinched at the echo of a voice in the absolute silence of my surroundings. Had I spoken aloud? The same woman who had carried me earlier sat cross-legged in front of where I lay. She stood up, brushing imagined dust from her dress.

"Come," she urged, gesturing in an indeterminate direction, "walk with me."

I tentatively clambered to my feet, unsure if my legs would hold me. She brushed past me and strode ahead with some unknown purpose, seeming to care little if I followed her or not. I fell into an awkward step behind her, struggling to keep up with her confident strides.

"You will have questions," she stated, "everyone does."

I paused - of course, I had questions. Who are you? Where am I? How did I get here? I lurched between each option, settling unconvinced on one -

"What happened to me?"

"You don't remember?" She said, examining me doubtfully. "There's no pleasant way to say this. You drowned."

Suddenly, the feeling of water flooding back to me -

*My head swims in vain
the swell of the sea in my lungs
drowning my thoughts
eyelids heavy with the weight of the water
dragged down
 down
 down*

- I coughed, spluttering to my knees. My chest heaved with the memory, head swimming with unanswered questions.

"So this is... the afterlife?" I choked, sodden words passing through my breathless lips.

"I understand your confusion but, no, this isn't the afterlife." She hesitated, judging my reaction, before starting again. "There isn't an 'afterlife' as such - well not in the way that you might imagine. This is... a stop-off point on the way to other things."

She studied me expectantly, waiting for me to appreciate the meaning of her words.

"I don't understand."

She sighed; a heavy sigh, a dead weight. A ripple of compassion crossed her face before she collected herself and weakly half-smiled, staring out beyond the mist.

"It's alright, you're not meant to understand. There are some things that even the greatest mind cannot comprehend."

I frowned, silenced by her cryptic non-answers. We continued onwards to her unknown destination, but her footsteps did not join mine to fill the silence; there was no sound as she walked.

"So that's it? There is just... nothing? No reincarnation? No heaven or hell?"

I looked to her pleadingly as she ran her hand up her arm absentmindedly, tracing her fingers over a map of dark veins.

"You can think of it that way if you like, but there is a reincarnation of sorts. Every particle that just so happened to come together to impossibly form you, will become part of something else. All the atoms that formed you will drift apart and become part of everything again. Perhaps you will be in the fast-beating heart of a newborn child, or fuel the fire that burns in starlight."

I opened my mouth to speak, only to find that there was nothing to say. A torrent of questions raced inside my head, but none of them seemed so important anymore.

"I'm scared."

"It's ok to be scared," she said, a whisper of a smile dancing in her eyes.

We continued to walk, forever side by side, and some deep sense of companionship is developing between us.

"This is it," she declared, stopping abruptly. "This is where I leave you."

I looked around with confusion; there seemed to be nothing to mark this spot in the featureless landscape.

"But, wait - what do I do?"

"Now, you walk, and continue walking wherever your feet take you."

She smiled with finality, before turning and walking away with the same confident stride. As she faded slowly into the mist, there was nothing to suggest that she had been here at all. No footprints, no empty space in the air, no echoes of her presence. All I had left of her was a flash of red as she turned away.

And so - I started to walk. The muted rhythm of my steps allowed my mind to drift away from my body, slowly - almost imperceptibly to start, as pebbles might gently be worn into sand by a small stream, given enough time. As the distance between my body and mind grew, the stream became a river; flowing faster and faster until the weakened stone of the riverbank could no longer stand and collapsed, to be washed away into the sea.

Bogdan Kapelyukh

The Extraterrestrial Meeting

Clack, clack, clack. Archie strode quickly down a corridor with its malevolent, metallic walls. Hurriedly, he slurped on his coffee as if it were an elixir of life. While turning a corner, Archie stopped to look out of the dusty windows. A tired face looked back with dark circles under the hazelnut eyes. His brown hair was messy and unorganised. Beyond Archie's reflection was a colossally, tremendously, gigantic load of nothingness. A dead, dark void, a couple of distant twinkles, chipping away at Archie's morale. He was so far from home, so far from his innocence. He carried on. Endlessly, the corridors stretched out like a cobweb. Archie was afraid he would be stuck here forever. Clutching his leather briefcase, he shuffled along, trying not to miss a turn. There were no colours, but the silvery greys of the passageways, the deep black of Archie's suit and the clean, deceptive white of his shirt. Long tube lights lit the scene, yet they got darker as Archie drifted further in. *Clack, clack, crash.* Archie stumbled and fell. Never had he been this deep before. Quickly he picked himself up and entered the final stretch, leaving a broken mug behind.

Treading towards Conference Room A, his heart was jumping around inside of him, trying to get away. With a deep breath of air, Archie came to a stop. In front of him stood a massive vault-like door with disgusting brown rust on the edges. Slowly, he wrapped his fingers around the handle wheel, and turned. With an excruciatingly painful sound, the door began to unlock in a screeching protest. Archie took a step back; he knew he had to do this. In front of him, the door slid open to reveal a long, rectangular table shrouded in darkness. Flickering and buzzing, a spotlight turned on. Underneath the beam of sickly yellow light was an office chair at the head of the table. After a long pause, Archie walked over and sank into the seat's false comfort. He put his briefcase on the table and it vanished into the stale air.

Click. A shadowy abyss flooded the room and in Archie's mind, only a lick of confidence remained.

Click. The spotlight illuminated the bottom half of a silhouette sitting at the other end of the table. It was humanoid. Two fatally pale, six feet long, arm like limbs protruded from its inky robe and lay resting on the table. Thin, icy blue veins wrapped around them, the skin - scarred and bruised. All twenty of its snakelike fingers were locked together. Archie was jittering, goosebumps crawling up his arms. All of a sudden, the spotlight began creeping upwards. Archie's eyes sprung open. Its face was horrible. Huge, gloomy eyes, (blackened ovals) took up half of its face. Cruel, thin spike-like teeth were curved into a grimace. Worst of all on top of its head was an exposed brain, which was a sad shade of grey yet pulsing with life. Archie gagged. The copper name tag on its robe had "Neuros" inscribed on it.

"Greetingsss," Neuros *slithered* slowly. "Thank you for finally gracing *me* with your presence Aarchie."

Archie's foot was bouncing up and down while his hand tried to subdue it. Once he opened his mouth, there was no going back. Was this just a trap? Could he really change? Could he trust the person who sent him here? Archie's mind was embroiled in a civil war. Earlier he was told that once he asserted himself in this room, he never had to deal with this demon alone, ever again. Thinking of the peace that he was promised he parted his trembling lips.

"M-my name is Archie, oh wait I think you already knew that."

"Do you know why you're here?" inquired Neuros, licking its 'lips'. "I am going to get quite a lot from this little *interview* which your government graciously organised."

Suddenly it opened its mouth and growled, "Start talking. Now!"

"Well I, eh..." Archie began to sputter like a fish on dry land, "I'm from Scotland and I want to study agriculture to become a farmer like my Dad was."

Neuros snorted, "You are, as you earthlings say, 'A loser'. I can't imagine that any life-form on your miserable rock likes you. I guess crops and livestock can't talk, so you chose to spend the rest of your life with them. You have always been a freak, weird and lonely. I've read your file and I've been laughing at every detail of your puny existence. Do you expect to change? Do you have the audacity to even dare think that you will find love? Do you not even have the strength to choose your own career let alone get the qualifications for one? Do you think your friends actually like you or do they secretly despise you?" Suddenly its eyes widened with a lust for more of Archie's sorrow. "Well, Archie tell me, why is your life worth living?"

The constant barrage of questions left the facade of a professional meeting as a crumbling pile of ashes. Sinking in his chair and drowning in pain, Archie was falling and falling towards emotional rock bottom.

Archie had always known that he was being watched, his every move judged by a pair of eyes from a distant planet. Every social media post, every awkward conversation, every mistake on a test. Unfortunately, he thought his life simply wasn't worth living. The claws of stress began to suffocate Archie. His eyes were welling up with tears. His teeth sank into his lips as he tried to keep strong. His self-esteem was being chiselled away as doubts swam around in his mind like sharks. With one last ditch effort, Archie tried to save himself from the sea of depression.

"I believe there is happiness in my future," whimpered Archie. An unexpected feeling began to grow in his legs, he felt like standing up. Swiftly, strength spread through his body. A realisation had dawned on him. He had just asserted himself. He had the power to ignore the alien, he had the power to ignore his cutting remarks, he had the power to find happiness in his life. He had power. At a time when Archie had the lowest opinion of himself he managed to catch onto the thing that had been slipping away from him for years, hope. Proudly he stood up and exclaimed,

"I will never stop following my dreams and I will keep growing as a person until I achieve them. That's right! I don't care what you think."

The alien audience was stunned into silence. Neuros emitted a grave snarl and crawled onto the desk, brandishing his gang of talons and teeth. Archie sprang out of his chair.

He ran towards the open door, the aperture of light. As the horrible howling sound grew nearer Archie closed his eyes. His body was moving and wriggling with the will to survive.

Archie opened his eyes, he was lying in a small room. Rays of sunlight were flowing through the windows like golden streams of happiness. The walls were adorned with vast canvases, filled to the brim with watercolour fantasies. Careless chirping, murmuring wind and the smell of office flowers massaged Archie's senses back to reality. Beside him, on a soft leather chair, sat an old man with snow-white hair and rosy cheeks.

"What you did was very brave Archie," whispered the man who Archie now recognised as his psychiatrist. "The hardest part of the healing process was opening yourself up to others and getting help. For that to work you first had to face your own self critic, your own insecurities, your own inner monster."

Ryan Tindal

Odyssey

I was just 16 at the time, merely a young man with a dream. It was a bright, frosty morning in Calais. The pavement glistened like a carpet of crushed diamonds in the early morning sunshine. I emerged from my tent and was greeted by the putrid smell of faecal matter and the loud, persistent crying of one child above the murmur of the camp. I hoped this would be my last encounter with such deplorable conditions. With a purpose, I ambled my way up to the hustle and bustle of the main thoroughfare. I observed the situation, and fortunately the area was completely police free. Hastily, I scrambled over the perimeter fence, and joined the great unwashed. We moved like a shoal of fish, one point of departure, one destination. I adjusted my balaclava and catapulted debris as I darted onto the road in an effort to block the two by two flow of trucks that prepared for boarding the ark. A large obstruction created gridlock as the two lanes of steel and tyre slowed to a crawl. A cacophony of abuse was hurled towards us.

I quickly realised that this was my chance. I crossed the road and spotted an opening in the canvas, the perfect lifeline. I teased it open and jostled into the large freighter without detection. I adjusted to my pitch black surroundings as my stress relief valve opened. The bass of the driver's music pumped from the cabin and reverberated into the trailer as if it was shaking in fear. I fumbled around the trailer in search of a hiding spot. Eventually, I located a robust looking large crate and pried open the lid with my bony fingers. To my horror, I was confronted by a pungent, sickly sweet odour. My insides contracted; my heart exploded inside my chest; and my skin became clammy as I staggered back in disbelief. It was cannabis. My brain sparked desperately trying to connect the dots but instead caused a short circuit. Although my mind was still swirling, I slowly came back to sensibility. The truck came to an abrupt halt and I could hear muffled voices. I knew my only choice was to nestle in with the large light-green blocks and pray I was not detected.

The door to the trailer creaked open and heavy boots clunked their way towards me. These were accompanied by a light pitter patter which I assumed was a sniffer dog. Immediately, I slowed my breathing and ensured that my body was completely motionless. The dog snarled and I prepared myself for discovery. However, I was amazed at my luck when the footsteps became more distant and the door crashed shut. I exhaled a huge sigh of relief as the truck's engine growled back into life and I was reminded of the driver's awful music tastes. I must have spent an hour contemplating my possible future in the UK before the truck clanked its way onto the ferry. My mind quickly dragged me into the oblivion of sleep as I longed to avoid the agony that my limbs were experiencing in the cramped position.

I jolted back to consciousness abruptly and reminded myself of the situation. I felt woozy and delirious and accompanying this was a burning sensation in my throat. My tongue swiped across my lips in an attempt to restore moisture. I fought to re-inflate my lungs, however it was as if a lead weight was pushing against my chest. No water and devoid of oxygen: not ideal. The sickly stench of the substance which I was perched upon induced a feeling of nausea. My heart began to swell in a dry sea of tears, as I contemplated spending the last hours of my life in such circumstances. Slowly, I drifted into a stupor; my heart rate slowed and my eyelids fluttered allowing my eyes to take their final glance.

A crescendo of vehicle engines resuscitated me. Although I was in a dire state, the prospect of me surviving the journey thus far was motivating. The truck began creeping its way onto English soil. I took a large gasp of oxygen and instantly felt rejuvenated, although there was still a severe obstacle standing between me and impending freedom. This time I was well versed however, and my body froze as if paralysed, as the vehicle approached the first stage. After a brief muffled conversation, (which I presumed was the exchange of documents) there was a progression to the all-important inspection. Again, the door screeched open and a less rambunctious pair of boots entered. The creaking became more intense by the second until it muted abreast of my container. By now I could hear the heavy, rasping breathing of the examiner directly above me. I dared not move, I dared not breathe, my heart pounded against the walls of my chest as if it was searching for an escape route. There was an unsettling abrasion of the container, before I was deeply consoled by the sound of steps again. Slowly they tailed off... and slowly they tailed off, until I was left in the hush. I drunk in the silence and relaxed my muscles as a wave of appeasement swept over me, alleviating my stress. I perfectly recall that feeling of elation as I had never experienced such fortune in my backbreaking early years. A smile was stained upon my lips.

After a long spell of dwelling on my successes, the truck swerved and came to a grinding halt. Out of my fight and flight senses, my flight sense prevailed. It was all or nothing, this was my sole opportunity to make a break for it. Using my fists, I boosted upwards, casting the cover which had protected me from revelation, into the gloomy abyss. This was not a time for noise, so I slinked my way towards the opening I had clawed apart in the canvas earlier. As I pushed my head out and glimpsed around I realised that I was in a desolate location, surrounded by fields that extended as far as the eye could see. Adrenaline coursed through my veins and unthinkingly I bounded from the trailer and ran. I ran, covering land quickly with a great lolling gait. I ran, despite the shouts which pursued me. I ran, until my feet couldn't carry me any further. I had arrived. Quite where, I couldn't discern but this was irrelevant; the arrival was what counted.

Struan Gow

The Last Laugh:

“All it takes is a beautiful, fake smile to hide an injured soul and they will never notice how broken you really are.” — Robin Williams

A small stage. An elderly man is present wearing a three-piece suit. A mic is in front of him. He is sat in a leather chair, a crimson curtain behind him. A delicate table to his right holds up a glass of brandy.

This is my last night. On what I see to be my true life.

I'm not going to die, of course; I was never that dramatic. But this will be my last night. Of what I am. Of who I think I am at least.

It started when I was behind the curtain just there. *The man gestures to curtain.* Spoke a couple words to the camera. “The crowd sounds good, chatty. Many comedians I know are racked with fear at this stage. I'm always too stupid to think anything could go wrong!” *The man smiles when saying this, but the smile immediately stops when the quote stops.*

The man looks down. I shouldn't have done improv, my real self-depreciating character comes out; people get tired of that, think you're fishing for compliments. *The man looks up.* My persona was slick and charming. Depression isn't charming. The people love a man they can respect, a man they can look up to. These thoughts are a disgusting habit; they are my disgusting habit. The thing we can't run from. The thing I can't laugh about.

The small room was packed with comedians. No A-listers, no Billy Connolly or anything like that; no, no that would never work. If this were to be my last night, I must inspire people to be greater. Or so I thought, at least.

I walked onto this very stage and the crowd gave a cheer. I gave them a shy smile and put a hand to the announcer. They were sitting, huddled near tiny tables; light dancing on their hair. I paused for a moment as the lone microphone stared its black eye to my nightmares.

“Thank you very much Dominic! Of all my introductions that certainly was the...most recent.” The joke wasn't great, I get that. But I waited a moment and some laughed.

They all looked up at me, wolfish grins on their faces. Comedy was the sort of thing that you loved or you hated. And if you loved doing it, you did it till the day you died.

A little later in the evening the crowd were merry, laughing at gag after gag. I was back; back in the game and everyone knew it. Everyone but me of course.

The man smiles. One of my favourites was leading on from some prostitution scandal, I forget his name even now, it went, "I've never paid for sex in my life, never. I mean how can you sleep with a woman who has nothing but total contempt for you and is only doing it for the money...I get enough of that at home." The crowd roared laughter, slapping their thighs. The audience always loved a wife joke.

So I list joke after joke and I start to smile like my audience. It had been a long time since my last gig: too long. People asked questions of course, about why I was doing one now—after so long. My answer was always the same, "I'm better now." It was (as I'm sure you can guess) an absolute lie. I knew I had to address it sometime...but couldn't bring myself to doing it then.

It was about the midpoint of my last night when I stopped all the gags. Comedy is beautiful and horrible and everything in between, but this night, it had to be more. It had to be so much more. It had to be the world. It had to be beauty; it had to be hate. It had to be everything, and anything and nothing less.

So I got comfortable in my chair (as I imagine so many old people do) and took the clipboard to my left. The writing was big and bold—I hated wearing my glasses on stage, they made me my normal self; my normal, faulted, broken self. Not my smart, charming comedian. Not the man they all came so far to see. That all these faces laugh with.

It listed old comedians I used to joke with; now all dead. But I had memories. Memories never told, hidden from the world. I had stories I needed to tell, and this was the night. The darkness to my day.

I white-knuckled one hand around the clipboard. *The man looks at hands.* Tried to stop them shaking.

One by one, I went through the names, till I got to Dominic West. Now there was a great story.

"Ah! Dominic West. That man was absolutely crazy. Absolutely mad. He was funny, sure, but stark raving mad!" Nobody laughed, they weren't meant to; this wasn't for them and they knew it.

"He used to have terrible tempers, used to go transparent in rage. Anyway I'm sure you've heard the story of BD?" I paused for an answer. From their silence I took it as no.

"So me and Dominic were to have a double wedding, I knew him quite well and we all thought it was a great idea. Anyway Dom had fallen for a supposed clairvoyant, a complete phoney and would only do what this fortune teller told him to do. It wasn't long before the clairvoyant started working with Dom's agent. Telling him what shows to do and so on. It was the only way to get through to that man. His agents name is Brian Down by the way. So the clairvoyant says for him to listen to whatever BD told him to do, now he said it

like that—*BD*. So the weekend after this happened, Dominic met a certain Brooklyn Donovan...” the crowd laughed; they already knew the end. “Married her, went off on a honeymoon.” *The man smile fades and he looks into the mid distance*. It seemed like yesterday.

I told some stories equally ridiculous in tone and the crowd laughed. But I knew I had to talk about...it.

I said to the crowd, “So errr...some of you talked to me about my health. I'm fine now but I was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year. So I got sat down by the oncologist and asked the dreaded question, ‘How long do I have?’”

I paused for a moment, let that sink in.

“So the doctor looks up at me and he says ‘Ten.’ Just the word ten. So I ask him, ‘Ten what? Ten years? Ten months? Ten days?’”

The doctor looked at his watch, *The man looks at watch with the story*, ‘Nine...eight...seven...’” *The man smiles*. The crowd exploded into laughter, roaring and wiping tears.

In that moment, I felt that maybe it would all be okay. I felt I could never die, that the cancer was never coming. It was only a second, but that's all this was for. Just a second. Just for a moment when everything would be okay.

My time was up. The faceless crowd showed their teeth and all left, one by one. I stood up as gracefully as an old man can and went behind the curtain. I'd shown them more than my mask today; I'd shown them a part of my soul.

Now it is over. My night was day; my day was night. Here I am...alone again. Not for the first time, nor the last.

Making people laugh is how I masked my loneliness. My endless gnawing, crushing loneliness. It was never because of the cancer or impending death, everyone has to die one day.

No, I feel lonely because that's who I am. That's who I have always been. That smiling loner who only wants a laugh, but needs so much more.

Witch

Droning bagpipes and thumping drum beats fade away as the last of the religious mob swarm down towards their sorry excuse for a village, yet the ringing in my ears remains long after the dropping sun. The breeze scrapes across my broken skin, whipping red strands over my vision. Thoughts form in my brain like licking flames, giving me the strength to slip the pathetic bindings those pretentious God-fearing simpletons used to hold me: Satan's loyal servant; the wicked witch. Laughter bubbles up from deep within, a jarring cackle, poison to my own ears. I simply can't help it as I sink into the squelching mud; it covers me like a snake's skin. As I run my hand over the protruding bump in my stomach, red fills my vision. How dare they? I gave them their tinctures and potions and well wishes and hexes. This is my reward? I suffered marriage to that miserable old git for years, the 'honourable' procurator fiscal o' Clan Darroch. I had to work my way up from the bottom with nothing but my secret. Do they think me so easily defeated? I bowed to the invalid laird, slipping him sleeping potions and numbing lotions. But he won't be receiving treatment from me now.

Witch. Hissed and spat from the mindless horde of Clan Darroch. In my mind I can picture their outraged faces; a mask to conceal the bone deep terror in their eyes. It fills me with delight, even now, as I lie a wrung out rag-doll. The sludge-grey sky oozes above me, I can feel a storm is coming. He is coming for me. Graeham and I. We are destined for greatness, he (war chieftain and brother of Laird Darroch) and I (as I possess the knowledge to change the course of history if I so please). We shall be united now: his lady wife is disposed of, although their young lad remains an issue for now; along with my dearest Rabbie's unfortunate passing, came at such a convenient time. It's the most considerate thing my husband ever did for me, albeit with the aid of a hefty dose of belladonna.

He deserved it really, he tried to keep me from Graeham. He treated me like I was daft, a materialistic trophy wife to look bonnie next to his worn, weather beaten face and protruding gut. He was suspicious, so sent me to my chambers when he heard the chieftain was visiting. As if I was a delicate bird to be caged! I am not delicate, I am not *anyone's* property and I should not be underestimated. These villagers have underestimated me, they gave me lashes, tied me to a stake and left me to die.

I know I tempted fate with my games, I never strayed too far from my plan though. The plan of course to take ultimate power as queen of Scotland. To do that I knew I'd need a king by my side, someone easily influenced, someone feared and respected. Graeham was my weapon, he could be a light in the dark for the oppressed Scotsmen, those discontented with an English rule. I had him building support for our cause throughout the rural towns and villages of his brothers' land, of the allied clans' lands. A growing rumbling of 'doon wi' the redcoats'. The next stage was to expose the corruption in the English army, to show the despicable and debauched behaviour of those in command to the whole of Scotland. This is but a minor setback, I got carried away playing clan politics. I was sloppy, offering my 'magic' healing powers for any daft lass with a bit of coin.

Vibrations thunder through the ground around me, a horse approaching. I knew it, I knew he would come. The thumping beat of hooves soothes me as I sprawl in the marshy mud. But as the silhouette grows through the bleak dark, realisation dawns like the cold sun. It's not Graeham. It's not my saviour. It's my death. Graeham's brother, the laird, a ghostly reaper always cleaning up Graeham's mistakes, I suppose that makes me a mistake, or rather that makes me and our unborn baby a mistake. That slimy traitor, it would seem I've served my purpose for him then. He had always looked down on those who he had nothing to gain from, sharp as an icicle, with a face of stone. I'd looked in awe of his strength hoping he'd never turn that empty glare to me. I see his pinched grey eyes now in my mind but I feel only rage. It blinds me. One minute I'm lying in the mud, next I'm standing over Graeham's brother with his sgian-dubh buried in his twitching neck.

I look with fascination: he makes a gurgling sound as he seems to try and take a jerking breath around the thick dark red liquid that oozed from him. It sprays his face, his jacket, me. I drop down beside him to watch life leech out of him. His eyes are already turning glassy, his writhing body goes still, sinking in a strange way. Not like he's sleeping, far too still to be sleeping. He's peaceful in death, I feel a kinship to him I never knew when he was alive. It was the same with my husband, I could almost pity him in death, though I hated him in life. No time to get sentimental now, there's work to do.

I consider hiding the body, but I think the village folk will enjoy this little surprise when they come to ensure the wicked witch is dead at sunrise. It would do them well to remember how fragile their lives really are, that they can be snuffed out like a puff of breath on a flickering candle flame. Already I know what I must do, I must punish them. The villagers for their blind stupidity, the witch hunters for daring to accuse me, the preacher for his scheming, Graeham for his betrayal, his darling laddie Hamish, his whole goddamn rebellion against the English crown and everything he holds dear. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.



FORM 6

Kirsty McRobbie

Evanesce

Love drained out like an open tap.
Black drapes hung over every window
A noose over all eyes.

A tired sigh blew away the dust that had settled
Over the world,
Suffocating its beauty.

Pain engulfed our hearts,
Our smiles melted into wax
And made a model of pain.

Our brains washed out with a hot soapy sponge.
A facade that lathered the memories.
Time has stopped.

Blank shapes could still be seen,
But not the fine print.
Not the words that would pull you back up the rope.

They stab with red-hot lances,
Skin burning off
But I am still here. You will never win.

We all speak different languages
In a one cultured world.
In which we send our children

Like we send young men into war.
Hoping for they're safe return,
But knowing some will be lost in battle.

Take my whole life, and my empire.
That I've built out of dirt.
And build a friend to love you

Handmade, a recipe gone wrong.
It's a cold life because we are not
Supposed to be like this.

Abhrisri Chaudhuri

Aria

Beneath the sky, across the river I sail,
Nature sings its own song in Summer's ease.
Listen: the music of Earth's fairy-tale,
A symphony of sounds floats through the breeze;

The sparkling flow of crystal ripples and gleams,
Soulful birds whistle and chirp from afar.
And through the rustling leaves and trees, I hear -
Silent lullabies of God's morning star.

Such Beauties, of most honest and pure form;
Earth's music blossoms from Apollo's shrine,
In melodies ever so rich and warm,
And harmonies, so bright, so smooth, Divine!

Time stops. Carefree of minutes and hours,
Music's eyes watch nature's cycle repeat;
For Music holds its own unique power;
Everlasting, never missing a beat.

With power to relieve oneself from pain,
And bring back memories to reminisce,
To transport to a world with no constrain,
And lose oneself in joy and perfect bliss.

But how? For perfection holds not a name,
Yet in music we find a perfect place.
Perfection is a state that one can't claim,
Yet "perfect" we say, is Music's embrace.

For music is universal to mankind,
Since perfection lives only in one's mind.

Eilidh McLean

Green Beans

The first time I met my new family I was hungry. My father had bundled my two brothers and me into the back of his battered blue Peugeot, which smelled like slightly off milk. I don't even remember where we were going. The borders maybe, or the north of England? All I know was that the journey was long, and hours seem like years for a young child. I had been promised lunch at a service station. Most people think that service station food should be avoided at all costs, but to this day I don't think there's much that can beat that greyish lump of what claims to be chicken, wedged in an almost stale burger bun, that seems to be the staple of British fast food. It's so gloriously disgusting; you can't help but develop a kind of patriotic attachment to it.

I looked out the grimy Peugeot's window, covered in sticky fingerprints, and watched as we passed by every single truck stop. I felt that sense of indignation grow in my stomach, because I realised what was happening: I was being denied my opportunity to gorge on that wondrous chicken. No game of I-spy, no chirpy Disney Song could distract me from my anger. I recruited my little brothers to my cause, and we raised hell in the backseat. Alas, my father did not cave, and I arrived at my destination, hungry, angry and waving my fist.

So, maybe it was doomed from the start. My father hadn't told us who we were meeting, so when we met our step mother it was a surprise to say the least. Or I assume it was, because I can't remember what I felt at the time. This meeting was the beginning of a tumultuous relationship between myself and this 'new family'. Everything truly fell apart years later, once I started high school. But for years we struggled through every weekend, which became every other week, then once a month, then once a year and then never.

I still don't understand why I have such a weak memory of an encounter that would go on to shape much of my childhood - why I remember the food but not her. At 5 years old, I was surely old enough to remember it. Throughout primary school, it was what *defined* me, what set me apart from the other kids. One girl was good at horse riding, another liked Justin Bieber, and I had an evil step mother. In my mind she became a pantomime Disney villain, and I was the misunderstood Cinderella. But for a long time I could never pick out any specific examples, any moment when she was especially cruel towards me. When people asked me what I didn't like about her, the only thing I could come up with was that she always fed us green beans. Constantly. At every meal. It was at this point people looked at me like I was crazy, or a liar, or both. But instead of recalling a feeling of petulance like with the service station chicken, the thought of those green beans filled me with genuine resentment. It sounds ridiculous, I know, and I cannot really explain why I reacted that way. I just knew that I hated her, and those vegetables.

Memory is a strange concept. There seems to be no real reason for why certain things stick with us, why we react strongly to certain memories, while other things are lost forever. However, we rely on memory greatly. It forms the basis of our relationships with others, the way we behave and even the way that we view ourselves. But if my memories seem to be so weak, how can I trust that my version of events, my outlook on that period of my life, is correct?

I recall later, just before I started high school, she drove me to the train station. I was supposed to be spending Christmas with her and my dad, but I had decided to go home early. I didn't really realise how small that Peugeot was, how stuffy it could be, until I desperately needed to get out. The scent of the pine air freshener, once pleasantly sweet, morphed in to something sickly as it invaded my nostrils, and the sunlight shining through the windows became sharp, harshly pricking my eyes. The white of the paint on the road

was dizzying, taunting me. I had been snared in a trap, pinned down with no way to escape. This wasn't vegetables anymore, this was what I had always sensed – malevolence and spitefulness. But I wasn't just sensing it anymore, I was being repeatedly hit over the head with it. It was devastating.

I think children are often more perceptive than we give them credit for. It's true that many of my early memories are unfocused, but the feelings attached to them are very vivid. Later memories only serve to prove that something was definitely wrong, even before I had any real evidence. I believe part of the reason I can't remember many specifics is because it all happened slowly. I was humiliated, criticised and mocked. It was a chipping away of self-esteem, gradually being stripped of any confidence. But as I grew older, jabs, comments and insults gave way to direct attacks. And those you can't forget. I trust those early memories and the feelings attached to them, because of the later ones.

As we get older, we can see the nuances of a situation, the small details and different shades of colour that compose a full picture. But as a child we lack the ability to create a picture so intricate, and so we have to create a dot to dot, using the most striking emotions as the foundation for the drawing. And emotions are less likely to fade. They fester and grow and become more and more deeply rooted. Emotions don't live in the past with memories, but exist in the present. As such, they have overridden my memories as the tool that I use to assess that relationship. I fear that this may have led to over fixation on the negative, and the creation of an unbalanced, distorted image.

However, I have to trust what I know. Those feelings were real, and what I do remember clearly supports my conviction that from early on, I was belittled and bullied, even though I can't describe very eloquently the events of that time. I have no choice but to trust myself. Young children are left extremely vulnerable in the aftermath of the breakdown of a relationship. An older child has more choice, more control. But young children have no say in what happens, and they cannot protect themselves. They need someone else to step in, to listen and to believe, and to do act accordingly. I was failed by a system that believes they know what is best for a child. Most keenly, I was failed by my father, who as a witness to years of mistreatment, stood passively by. He had the opportunity to put a stop to it, and he didn't. Even though he was always kind, allowing it to continue is the cruelest thing anyone has ever done to me. In many ways, he is the real villain of the story.

Still, I sometimes wonder if I have over reacted. I'm told, that when I'm older, I will feel more sympathy about the situation. I should take in to account the stress of assuming a parental role, the difficulties of creating a brand new family and so on. I don't believe I will change my mind. But then again, it gives me pause. While I am sure that I suffer from the same egocentricity as many people at my age and stage, I am not so far down that hole of teenage entitlement to not realise I have comparatively little life experience, and perhaps lack the maturity to look back with objectivity. So maybe in 10, 20 years' time I will have completely changed my perspective. However, I think my outlook will forever be tinted with that anger. Sometimes, I ask myself if I would have the same level of strong feeling about it had I met her later on. Maybe I would have been able to deal with everything in a more mature manner - I would have had much more control, and could have walked away sooner - but I do believe that my overriding emotions would have been the same.

I trust my instincts. As a child, I knew that I was upset, before I could even pinpoint why. I will continue to rely on those early childhood memories, misguided as that might be, because I will not invalidate those emotions during that time. I'm not quite sure where that leaves me, apart from with very strange memories. Today, I am just glad to be removed from that situation. But I still can't stand the sight of green beans.

Nicol Butter

Magdalene

There's something intoxicating about it. The lights, the glamour, the men. You're a prize to be won, desired. You feel loved. But you're alone, naked, afraid. You become an object, being auctioned to the highest bidder. The eyes that stared at Lucy became her father's, judging her silently and gnawing at her soul. He despised anything corrupt or sinful; this place would be his hell.

"I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21, with 'such things' defined as sexual desires, idolatry and general sin. As she danced, the words of God and his followers swirl in her mind like a shaken martini, they've permeated for as long as she can remember. Beggars can't be choosers however, with a young mouth to feed the only work available to a starving single mother was either on the streets or on the pole. First Corinthians, 6:13, admonished her: *"The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."* Whether she liked it or not the Holy Book was as much a part of her as the hairs on her head. It was unusual to be a stripper with morals, she knew that. But she figured He would let her through the gates of heaven if she did it for her son, who depended on her more than she could imagine.

Green dollar bills floated around her like leaves in the fall, reminding her of Applegate Farm in Jackson Mississippi, 1963. She remembered it vividly: the wilting orchards, the frosted windows, the cotton fields with coloured women carrying their babies in knapsacks. Lucy's father - sitting at his desk with a Bible in hand - always wore a stern expression on his face. Lessons began at nine every morning after breakfast, in a crisp white pinafore and an open mind, soon to be shut tight by his dominating beliefs. The words she heard were hateful, the lies she had been fed plagued her mind and corrupted her being. She was raised to believe she was better than the coloured maids downstairs in the kitchen singing *"Old sow took the measles"*. He was the worst type of Christian, and shared no resemblance with the all-loving Father she came to learn so much about. Her mother however, was as pure and maternal as the Virgin Mary herself. A devout Christian, firm in her belief to do good by others. *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"*. Everything about her mother was perfect. But behind her strength and beauty held great sadness, which tempted the evil that would scourge her purity. One night, Lucy lay awake in terror. Loud crashes and screams were amplified from the across the landing. She was only eight and heard every word, every plea. He called her mother sinful; a blasphemous whore, fallen in Satan's grasps. In the harsh, cold light of the morning her beautiful face appeared purple and scarred, the bags under her eyes hanging heavily. A swollen belly protruded under her lace dress, she trembled when she held it. Lucy's mother had died giving birth to her younger brother James. It took time, but eventually Lucy became old enough to realise the baby wasn't her father's.

Meanwhile, a man had requested a private dance. Lucy was reluctant, this man must be a creation of God that had strayed far past his great light. But everyone in that place was the same. No one held any moral compass, any solution to resolve their needs. *"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his own heart"*; Matthew, 5:28. In a dark, private room she performed provocatively, red light cascading down her form. He's ugly, she thought. Not physically unattractive, but morally corrupt, immoral, perverse. A hand grazed her inner thigh, she froze at its touch. Suddenly, the hand didn't belong to the man; it's Johnathon's. Dark bruises spread, the grip tightened so hard she couldn't breathe. A heavy bouncer stormed in to remove the man as she screamed. You can look, but you can't touch.

Lucifer himself used to be an angel, cast down from Heaven and fallen to Earth for committing sin against God. Lucy remembers how devilishly handsome Johnathon was, how charming, how kind. She's almost forgotten what kindness felt like; he was her angel. Lucy was raised with hate in her heart, not knowing what love truly was almost killed her. Being alone in that house was torture. It was just the two of them left, her father had dismissed all the staff after falling on hard times. In a remote countryside, at a boarding school for bastards and other unwanted children, James was left with nothing but bitter memories and a ghost for a mother. Johnathon lived in a nearby village, he would bring her strawberries from a wild bush in his garden. He kissed her on a Tuesday in April, and told her he loved her the following Thursday, and she him. She had read about love, like everything in her life, through the Bible. Ephesians 5:25 told her: *"For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her."* At sixteen, he wanted to run away with her. Like the snake who seduced Eve into eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3, she believed he would make her life superior. An imaginary world was created in her head, her own Garden of Eden. Their futures were going to be bright and blissful, she only had to take a bite.

Raping her on the first night in a low rent motel just off the highway, he told her she had sleep with him since he was a man and men had needs. Lucy didn't want too. He forced his way inside her, stealing any purity or hope she once had. The pain was shocking, but the broken trust and heartbreak hurt her more. *"However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her"*, Samuel, 13:14. Shockingly, she became pregnant at seventeen. Consequently, Johnathon beat her violently as if it were someone else's fault that he refused to use contraception.

After he severely injured her with a glass bottle, she walked out. It was as if she had been blind and then Christ himself finally let her see: *"Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly"*, Mark 8:25. The path became laden with palm fronds as she entered a new chapter in her life. On her own, seeking shelter and work she became friends with several young women in similar situations. With no health insurance and no room at the hospital, she was forced to give birth in her small apartment surrounded by friends who travelled far and wide to see the boy, bearing offerings of formula, gift cards and a Moses basket.

Her son shone when he was born, like in The Sistine Madonna by Raphael Sanzio. Angels sang, white sheets billowed like clouds. A glowing halo seemed to emblazon his head as the room lit up: *"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."* It is said that Mary Magdalene led a life of such purity, the devil thought she might be the one to bear Jesus Christ, so he sent the seven demons to torment her. From that moment she was known as the "fallen woman"; a prostitute, a harlot, a blasphemous whore. Only through her utmost devotion to Christ did she become virtuous, and rose to the position of Sainthood. The child gave Lucy hope, love, comfort and aid in ways she had never felt. A bond between mother and child was unlike anything she could have imagined, resonating only with her mother's love for her, and even Mary's to Jesus. Lucy knew she would do anything for him, follow him wherever he goes and love him unconditionally. He would never become like either of their fathers.

FROM THE SCIENTISTS

Naomi Sibson

A Journey of a Lifetime

Here I am, prancing around in this wash back container. I slide over the dozens of fizzing bubbles and weave my way through my dozens of siblings. Right now you are probably wondering who I am, where I am and what I am? Well, my name is Olga and I am an Ethanol molecule. My parents William Wort and Yasmine Yeast created me and my many siblings just a few minutes ago in this wash back container which combines wort and yeast together. Mum and Dad, they were perfect for each other. Quite literally! They will make the finest Scotch whisky. So here I am, an alcohol molecule freshly born into the fermenting process, the first of three stages of my life....

It is stygian black in this container. I can feel my siblings dash past me and I can feel the heat of the boiling water. Bubbles sizzle around me. The noise is almost unbearable until I hear the voice of another ethanol.

"Hello! Please don't tell me I'm talking to nothing," says the voice.

"Hi, you're talking to Olga, not nothing," I respond.

"Ah, great! I can't tell you how many times I've been speaking to nothing. I'm Elith. I am one of your million siblings and I hope our two brothers are here next to me," The next thing I hear is a loud bang and Elith saying 'ouch'.

"Ethan, Edward, watch it!" Shouts Elith.

We are in full flow of our conversation when the top of our container disappears and I can see a strange figure looking over us. Then a large tube is dipped into our container. What is it? For some reason I am being dragged closer and closer to the tube. I am being sucked into it. I scream as loud as I can hoping someone would help until I hear Edward's voice in my ear.

"Don't worry, we are just getting moved to a different container. And guess what? We get to paraglide...sort of...and after that...I heard we get to skydive!"

Suddenly a burst of excitement flushed through me. I actually can't wait to fly! I put my hands behind my head in a relaxed motion as I slide down the chute.

Just as I am really getting into the fun of things, I belly flop straight into steaming water. I so hope no one saw that!

"Great dive, loser!" Shouts one of my very mean siblings. Oh! How embarrassing! The main problem though is figuring out why I am so hot and where I am. I look around this red coloured can and see some writing, it says 'Wash Still. First Distillation'. Distillation? I have heard of this. It's where I heat up until I'm 79 degrees and then I disappear upwards and into the outside world...

"Elith! Are you there?" I screech.

"I'm here alright! What is happening to us? Responds Elith.

I can't answer as pain splinters me. It slowly eats away at me and once again I start to float away from my siblings, higher and higher.

"HELP! HELP!" I shout.

But no one can help me now. I am out of the water and... wait! I am invisible! Am I having an out of body experience? Or is this what Edward said would happen? Wow, I am gliding! I soar through the air. It is wonderful! I am as light as a feather! I am having so much fun I forget about my siblings. I am free from the red coloured can. I can see light at the end of the tube now but I can also feel a

cold blast. The condensers, full of cold water, are chilling me back into a liquid form. My few seconds of weightlessness are over. Here comes the skydive...BANG! I splash straight into the bottom of another container without a lid. The light pierces my eyes and the cold Scottish

air chills me. I look around desperately for my siblings but all I can see no one. For a split second I panic until thousands of siblings pile on top of me. Phew! I thought I was in the wrong place.

I'm not in the container long before the same figure peeks his head over the top and sucks us all into another chute.... I hope Elith, Ethan and Edward are here. I hope they are okay. I close my eyes and think about what awaits me next...

Ouch! I land in hot water again. Have I gone back in time? I panic for a second, but no, I see a sign which says 'Spirit Still. Second Distillation'. That sounds promising.

And then, out of the darkness, "Olga! You're late, were the heck have you been? Quick we have an Ethanol meeting. Don't ask why. I know as much as you." Elith scolds me.

Instinctively I follow her. I hear shrouds of voices. Then one voice towers over all. It is a deep intimidating voice.

"Hello my fellow siblings, I am Oliver. I am the only Ethanol who knows all about making whisky. Our father left me with the task of guiding you all into the next stage and making sure you all survive. We are still in the distillation process in the spirit still tank where we will again boil until we are vapor. I need to tell you all now that some of you will not make it. Only those Ethanols who gain a place in the heart of the spirit will make it to the final stage. So we must time our travel into the condensers perfectly so we enter the stream at the perfect time and find our place at the heart of the spirit. If you jump too soon you will die and if you jump too late you will be swarmed by the water, our greatest enemy. You must wait for fifteen seconds after the liquid meets boiling point and then you can let yourself go, vaporize and then travel into the condensers. I am warning you now, this is not an easy task. Good luck. Only the best make it into Scotch Whisky. We have always known this. May the spirit be with you! You have thirty seconds until boiling point."

Without thinking I swim to the side of the tank with my companions. Our plan is to hold on to the side of the tank and then push off when the right time comes.

Thirty seconds goes by like a flick of a switch. Pain covers me like a cloak. Pressure builds within. I can feel myself being pulled towards the surface but I refuse to let go of the side of the tank. I hold on as hard as I can using all my strength. I can see my companions struggling and I can see some other Ethanols moving towards the surface. But it has only been ten seconds. I screech with pain. I can't hold on any longer, I can't hold myself together, surely I am dying? "Fifteen seconds!" Shouts Ethan and all four of us link arms and push off.

"YAY! WE DID yell.

I let myself vaporize and at the same time I fill with happiness. It's the same process again, paragliding, skydiving and then cooling off This time we plummet to a very different container and all we can do is wait. Did we make it into the heart of the spirit? We lie still for hours. No boiling, no cooling. After everything we have been through it is peaceful.

"Hey guys, does anyone know if we made it?" A voice comes out of the peace.

"No. But I have a hunch we did," responds Elith. "If we were waste slops we'd be down the drain by now, surely?"

The container we are in starts shaking. Someone is moving us. Everyone in the container panics. We shake for a long time until we are abruptly poured into an oak cask. It is eerie, damp and dark and almost itchy after the smoothness of the earlier metal containers. I can smell oak and the remains of the whisky which has been in here.

"Hey guys, we are in the final stage of becoming whisky! We are in an oak cask in the maturation process," Ethan says.

"What a great way to spend the rest of our lives!" Responds Elith sarcastically.

"Cheer up Elith," I say gently.

"So, we're going to mature here?" Asks Edward

"Yep," I say, "mature Edward..."

"...so that means no burping and trumping anymore!" Laughs Nathan. "Very funny!" We all laugh and start to settle down...

Years pass. 1 year, 12 years, 13, 14, 15. I am now fifteen and boredom has overcome me. I long for freedom. I wish I could see the light. Me and my siblings have already explored the

whole cask. We have thought and tried every possible way to get out. More importantly we have changed a lot. We

were clear and colourless but now we are a beautiful deep gold. The oak has changed our colour. We are quite beautiful but everyone in our cask is depressed. Not even our birthday can cheer us up. But today that would change.

Our cask started bashing about and we all chaotically rushed around. A surge of excitement grew in me. Are we going to be free? Flip went our cask and we all piled on top of each other. Suddenly the tremendous large cork that kept us in opened and we flew into a large metal cone. It felt amazing to be in a different place and moving again. Very carefully we started flowing out of the cone through a hole at the bottom. Then it was my turn. I flow into a glass bottle...with a lot of style I might add! I could see all around me. I could see machines and a conveyer belt taking us close to some cardboard boxes. I reach out to my siblings in other bottles and stifle a cry as they are taken away. Aggressively I am lifted off the belt and thrashed into a box. My head throbs with pain as I bang against the side of the glass. My eyes start to quiver and my mind goes blank...

I wake up as I am put on to a cash till. Am I in a shop? Wait, does that mean I will be drunk by someone? An eerie feeling shivers down my spine. I don't want to be awake when my buyer drinks me. Why does this have to be my fate? I try to sleep but I can't with my mind buzzing so much. I wonder what my death will be like. Will I just die or will I go to heaven? I am thinking this when I

am poured into a glass and very quickly down the throat of my buyer. I scream! I slide down the slippery slide of a gullet and land on top of this gruesome mess...Is this pizza? Gross, I am in a stomach! Acid burns me as I charge through tubes and openings. At one point I am sliding through a tiny tube as red disks pass my face. Wait is that blood? I lie back and hope this will soon be over. Then suddenly I find myself on top of this trampoline type thing. It is bumpy and veins stretch across it. It looks like a brain?! And it looks...FUN! Enthusiastically I jump around the brain. I go mental! Thump, thump, thump, thump. And then it hits me... this is what I was born to do! Give someone a headache! I laugh, I bounce some more. I have made my journey, my fate is complete, and for the first time in forever, I think.....Wow. I love my life!

Sneha Sripada

The Discovery of the Atom Through History ~ Adam's Journey Through Time

Hi! I'm Adam! And since my name is a homophone with the building block of every single thing in this world, I decided that I wanted to learn more about the atom. Throughout history, scientists have discovered more and more about the complexity and structure of the atom. So, I'm going to take my time machine, and journey through the past, to see what five individuals have discovered about the atom. First stop, 460-370BC, where Demokritos, a Greek philosopher, first thought about the particles which make up matter.

WOOSH! Here I am, Ancient Greece. There's the monumental Parthenon, but more importantly, I think I see Demokritos!

I approach him, and mumble in my best Greek,

“Γειά σου! Είμαι ο Αδάμ. Αναρωτιόμουν αν θα μπορούσατε να μου πείτε για τα σωματίδια και την ύλη,” meaning,

“Hello! I am Adam. I was wondering if you could tell me about particles and matter?”

Demokritos replies with,

“Πιστεύω ότι Όλες οι ουσίες αποτελούνται από μικροσκοπικά σωματίδια, τα οποία μπορούν να διαχωριστούν σε όλο και περισσότερα σωματίδια, μέχρι να υπάρξει μια πλήρως απλουστευμένη μονάδα,” and the English translation of this, “I believe that all substances consist of tiny particles that can be separated into more and more particles, until there is a fully simplified unit.”

We discussed the *matter* (no pun intended!) for some time, but I glanced at my watch and noticed that my time here was almost up! I needed to go forward to the 1800's!

“Thank you sir!” I exclaim. Demokritos has a puzzled look on his face. “Σας ευχαριστώ, κύριε!” I mean!

“Παρακαλώ,” you are welcome, he says.

I wave goodbye, and sprint back into my time machine. I then realise how exceptional Demokritos' idea was, considering that the Greeks did not have any textbooks or technology. During our conversation, Demokritos explained that his fellow Greeks were incredulous towards his idea, because there was no evidence to support it. Well, I guess I'll soon find out if his hypothesis was correct! Next, I am off to 1804, centuries later, to see how far atomic structure has progressed!

Oh, wow! I'm in a lab, and there he is. John Dalton. He was very focussed and immersed in an experiment, so I thought I better not disturb him. My arrival was certainly good timing though, since Dalton had just finished an experiment, and was writing up a summary. I silently peered over his shoulder and scribbled down some of his conclusions:



Right, that's heaps of information! I tiptoe back into my time machine, glad that I didn't distract Dalton, nor did he notice me! I'm going one hundred years further now, to see what Sir Joseph John Thompson has theorised.

I am taken to the outside of a room, and the opening of the door reveals that it is a study. I quietly knock on the door, and a gentleman, who appears to be similar to the photograph I had of Thompson, gestures for me to come in, without raising his head.

“Who are you, young boy?” inquires Thompson. “I'm Adam,” I murmur, wary not to disturb him, “And I am finding out about the atom. I came here to ask if you could please tell me about your research in atomic structure? But you look rather busy, it's all right.”

"Oh no! I'm simply doing a crossword. Of course, I'd be happy to answer your questions!" he says, beaming. "Fire them at me."

"Errmm..Well, what has been your latest discovery about the atom?" I question.

"I have identified that there is something simpler than the atom. The atom is made up of a positively charged sphere, and negative particles called electrons.

"Oh, so Dalton was wrong?" I interject, surprised. "Atoms can be divided into even smaller particles?"

"Yes. I proved him wrong, but most of his theories were correct."

"Wow!" That's an incredible achievement Dr. Thompson! I say.

"Thank you. Despite the chemical knowledge of the electrons, you know what I find most interesting?" he asked. "Is that they look like plums!"

"Haha!" Thank you very much for your time sir!" I chuckled.

I set the time machine's levers to 1911, where I would meet Ernest Rutherford!

I am transported into another lab, where Rutherford announces, "There is a nucleus!"

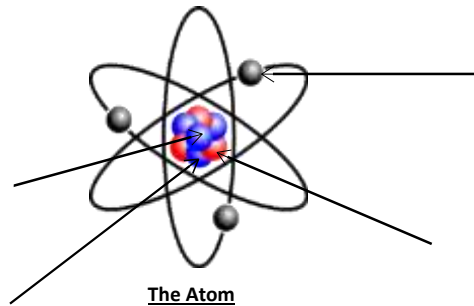
What was a nucleus, I wondered? So I asked Rutherford himself.

He seems to be so engrossed in his 'Eureka moment' that he simply told me, without acknowledging me!

"The nucleus is the centre of the atom, and the electrons orbit around it!" he announces. Rutherford continues, on and on, but I think I better stop distracting him, and I had already obtained the information I required, anyway, so I hurry back into the time machine, for my final visit; to James Chadwick.

WEE! I got here in a jiffy - faster than the electrons which go around the nucleus! Oh, I'm at a gathering, and I am encapsulated by a massive crowd. There's James Chadwick, giving a speech because he received the Nobel Prize for Physics. "What did you you explain what it is exactly?" sub-atomic particle, called a neutron has no electrical nucleus of an atom."

look like plums, exactly what I can now picture the atom! J.J



discover, Dr Chadwick, and could shouts a journalist. "I came across a neutron," answered Chadwick. "The charge, and is located in the

The negative electrons, that

Thompson said, and they are orbiting around the nucleus as Rutherford mentioned.

There's the central nucleus, as Rutherford stated.

The neutron, which has no electrical charge, is what Chadwick discovered

Here is the proton, which is positively charged.

Finally, I frantically pull the levers of the time machine to Friday, 8th December, 2017, so I can hand in this chemistry assignment on time to Mr. Downie!

Evie Campbell

What would happen if fossil fuels ran out?

If we continue using them at the same rate we are now, this will be a reality by about 2088. With oil running out in 2052 and gas in 2060, coal usage will have increased to provide energy for the world. This will have a profound effect on global warming, which will probably melt the polar ice caps, leading to widespread flooding in areas closer to sea level. The world will be close to postapocalyptic, a tiny amount of energy still being produced from renewable sources, not nearly enough to power the world.

She wakes up as the sun peeks through her curtain, sending light cascading over her bed. Mind fuzzy with fatigue, she rises slowly and lets her toes touch the rough wooden floor, withdrawing them quickly at the cold. She stands and walks briskly to the bathroom, turning the metal knob in the shower and shuddering as a dribble of freezing water crawls down her back. She is one of the lucky ones; many homes depended on electricity for their water, but a small amount of her supply relied simply on gravity, so now and then there is enough for a shower, albeit a disappointing one. This is her first in three weeks. Drinking water comes first.

After washing as best as she can, she dresses quickly in clothes that are much too small for her and makes her way downstairs, grateful for the threadbare carpet beneath her bare feet. She enters the kitchen and sorts through cupboards, desperately seeking some tin that she can ration out. If she is lucky, she can eat for a few more days, up to when the last of the vegetables she is growing are ready. She sighs with relief as she spots a dusty can lurking in the back of a drawer. The label has worn off. She wishes there was more choice, but food can't be transported without fuel. With the skill of someone who has done it a thousand times, the girl prises off the lid and puts the tin opener to one side. The food inside is, thankfully, just about edible, but it is not identifiable, and smells terrible. Wrinkling her nose in disgust, she

spoons out a small portion for breakfast and settles herself on the worn out sofa, in front of the blank TV screen that reflects her pale, hollow face. It has not worked in three months, since the local power station ran out of coal. She is almost grateful as she remembers what it used to show, daily horrors awaiting acknowledgment. The ice caps have melted. Thousands dead as Florida floods. Millions displaced as London goes under. Now all it shows is the face of a lucky person who does not feel so lucky.

Swallowing the last of the mystery meal which tasted mostly like dust, she rises and stacks her bowl on the counter. She can't waste any of her valuable water on washing, so she will just use it again later. Instead, she picks up her watering can and fills it with as much water as she can afford to use. She grabs her mother's coat from its position, draped over a chair, and leaves the house, slamming the door behind her. Entering the warm garden, she breathes in the smell of dew, and grabs a rusting spade that is balanced against a wall. She begins to dig.

The vegetable patch is her proudest creation. It had always been there, a backup in case the worst happened, but now she needs it more than ever. The potatoes should be ready, she thinks, as she shovels the soil into a pile. She scrapes away the soil surrounding the produce, and steps back in dismay. It is rotten.

Hurriedly, she begins to dig up the rest of the patch, and unearths item after item, all rotting away. Throwing her spade to the ground, she steps away and blinks back tears. She did not cry when she was trapped here, all alone; she will not cry now.

So she removes the plants carefully and sits against the wall, exhausted. Once abler to think clearly, she realises that it must have been some untreatable virus that killed them off. She swiftly averts her mind when it begins to question what would happen to her should a virus attack.

As she walks inside, she forces herself not to panic and instead think rationally. She assesses the situation (not good), takes stock of the food she has (three quarters of a tin) and what possible things she could do to sort it, just like her parents taught her before they went away. They had known it was possible the few trains left would stop and they could not get back, but they still left anyway, leaving her all alone, small on the face of this hostile planet.

Dread fills her as she realises the only solution. She is playing dangerously here; she does not know how much longer she will have to survive like this, and with only two left to pawn, should she risk it?

Yes. She makes the decision before it tears her mind apart, and takes a key from her pocket, before opening a drawer and hastily hides the contents in her coat.

With a sigh, she leaves the house, not bothering to lock the door behind her. Valuables are useless now, and food is sought after the most, which she has only very little of. The gangs will not bother her.

She trudges along the path until it joins the road, which is eerily silent. No one has driven since she was a baby, and many of these houses have been abandoned in favour of starting a new life far away from this hellhole. Little did they know they are not alone in their struggles. She winces as she steps on a sharp pebble, and curses her shoes for being too small. She can no longer squeeze her feet inside.

As she reaches the city centre, she sees people again for the first time in a few days. No one smiles at her, or even acknowledges her. It is every man for himself. She approaches her destination and joins the snaking queue around the street. She stands in silence.

At least an hour has passed by the time she reaches the shopfront, and another 20 minutes before she is face to face with the owner.

"What do you have for me?"

She digs around in her pocket until she finds something hard and metallic. She holds the battery in her outstretched palm. The shop owner's eyes widen in surprise.

"Those are valuable. What do you want in return?"

"40 tins."

"30."

"35."

"Fine. Don't blame me when your house gets ravaged!" he says angrily, and loads stacks of tins into two carrier bags. She wishes he hadn't pointed it out to her. It is all too clear what could happen.

She rushes home, anxious to hide her possessions as quickly as possible. A thousand stories echo in her mind, stories of the gangs that stalk the streets, none of them ending well.

It takes a long time to walk back home, and the light is fading by the time she enters her house. It has never felt so empty, yet so full of demons in the shadows.

She works faster than usual as she hides the tins in small batches, all across the house, just to be on the safe side.

She spoons out some more food and eats it quickly, trying to ignore the taste, and hides the tin should anyone come looking for a free meal. She turns and climbs the stairs wearily. When she reaches her bedroom, bare of anything she can pawn for food or contact with her family, she crouches and pulls a box from under her bed. Rummaging inside, she finds what she was looking for. A framed photo of her family. She removes the picture and hides it in her pocket. If the worst happens, she wants it by her side. She replaces the box, and walks across the room, moving the carpet until she sees a glimmer of silver. She holds the knife uneasily, watching the reflected light dance on the ceiling, and hides it under her pillow. Just in case.

Exhausted, she climbs into bed, and lies awake, remembering happier times and hoping that tomorrow will be a better day.

CREATIVE WRITING CLUB

The creative writing club meets in RF16 every two weeks to pen and share all kinds of writing. These are the pieces the club chose for submission. All members of The Creative Writing Club also helped to sub edit Kwyll.

Maishah Mason

Dimensions

Layla sighed as she looked over the boat into the turquoise water. Her wavy brown hair fell down her back as her emerald green eyes shone.

'Layla, you haven't finished setting up the dinner table!' Mrs Kay called.

'Okay mother,' Layla replied. She finished setting the table as her brother, Sammy walked out.

'Hello darling,' Mrs Kay said to Sammy. It was clear Mrs Kay adored Sammy. He was tall and muscular. Also his teeth dazzled like stars. He was the obvious favourite.

'Hello mother,' Sammy said.

'How lucky I am to have you,' Mrs Kay said, 'Such a beautiful boy. You're just wonderful, always helping out as well.'

Sammy smirked. While Layla had been setting the table, Sammy had been playing video games. His mother knew this but favoured him anyway. She dreamed that he would carry on the family model legacy.

'Sammy, let's go and get ready for dinner,' Mrs Kay said.

They left the deck and went inside the cabin. Layla was left standing there.

She was used to this. Her mother wasn't proud of her. Layla sighed and walked up to the top deck. The sea was peaceful, calming. It was always there when she needed it. When her mother favoured Sammy. (Which was usually all the time.) The sun was setting as Layla sat down. She breathed in, then out. Her head felt heavy. Her eyes started to close. She slowly dozed off.

Hours later she woke up. Layla yawned and stretched as she picked herself up. It was quiet up on deck. No one was around. She walked into the cabin.

'Hello! Anyone!' Layla shouted. She searched the whole boat until she came to Sammy's cabin. She walked in and saw him playing video games with his headphones on. A wave of relief passed her.

'What is it?' Sammy took off his headphones. He didn't sound very pleased to see her.

'Everyone's gone!' Layla exclaimed.

'Whatever,' Sammy said. He looked calm but Layla sensed the worry in his voice.

'Honestly! I'll show you!' Layla cried.

Sammy followed Layla towards the deck.

'What's that rushing noise?' Sammy clearly sounded worried now.

They peered over the boat. Panic started to rise up in Layla's throat. Her heart drummed in her ears.

They gasped.

The boat was sailing closer and closer to what looked like a large waterfall.

'Oh my,' Sammy exclaimed. He breathed in then took Layla by the hand and looked into her eyes. 'Listen Layla soon it will be too late but I have to tell you that no matter what Mum or I have said or done, I love you so much. I'm so happy and proud to be your brother. I'm so sorry.'

Layla smiled. That meant a lot to her. 'It's ok. I love you too Sammy.'

They hugged and held hands. If you could see them from behind you would see two siblings hand in hand fall over the edge of the waterfall. Fall over the edge of the world.

Isla Hutchinson

My Meadow

I know someplace quiet where nobody goes,
Where blossoms and flowers are always on show,
I know someplace magic, you can feel it in the air,
I know someplace peaceful, we'll be the only ones there,
I know someplace vibrant, as the stars in our sky,
I know someplace peaceful, as the breeze blowing by,
I know someplace near, as far as you can see,
I know someplace distant, as close as can be.
Some places have flowers
Some places have bushes
Some places have rivers
Some places have fountains
Some places have benches
Some places have parks
My Meadow has all and even more of these larks!
My Meadow has bluebells that dance in the breeze,
My Meadow has a gazebo surrounded by trees,
My Meadow has blackbirds that chirp in the sky,
My Meadow has an oak swing that flies high,
My Meadow has a bubbling bright blue brook,
My Meadow has a zip line, hard to overlook,
My Meadow has a wondrous waving waterfall,
My Meadow has everything, everything and all.

Alex Zealley

The Delivery Man

David trudged along the gravel pathway to the rendezvous point he had been instructed to go. He had a package to deliver, an illegal one at that, he didn't know what it was, but that wasn't his business, as long as he was getting paid he didn't care. David didn't know who his client was, the one who paid him to deliver the package in the first place, but that wasn't his business, he didn't know who his client's contact was, the person he was delivering the package to, but that wasn't his business.

Throughout David's subtly treacherous line of work of work he had never been informed of any of these things, all he had ever been told of by a client was where he was to go, how much he would be paid and the consequences if he failed to do so. David had always been successful and in doing so got him a small fortune and his success also rewarded him with the nickname, the "Delivery Man".

This client however, was different from the others, he had informed him of were to deliver the package and the rest of the scarce amount of information he was given, he then told David that he might run into some trouble whilst he delivered it. David was concerned at first, but

the client gave him a handgun and a pocket knife if he were to run into any unwanted adversary, not only that he also said he would pay him extra for the trouble. David was satisfied with this and he headed off into the night.

As he continued along the pathway David wondered why his client had warned him of possible attack, he had never been much of a fighter and he hoped that he wouldn't have to use the weapons he had been given, whilst David wasn't a fighter he sure could run, he had always thought it may come in handy as his job was delivering likely illegal collateral from one shady individual to another.

About fifteen minutes later he was nearly at the dockyard, (his client's contact's location), three gruff looking men stepped out of the shadows, a chill went up David's spine like a snake striking its helpless prey, this must be who his client warned him about. "Hey mate," said the man in the middle, "what've you got in that suitcase?" David bolted, this was the adversary he'd been warned about, without a doubt, he had to escape. Two bullets zinged past David's head like mad bees.

"It's give us the suitcase and we won't hurt you!" Shouted one.

"Much," said another, slightly quieter. But David wasn't going to stop, he didn't want to ruin his perfect reputation, and he wanted the extra money badly. He took a right behind a crummy old building and headed down an alley, in front of him was a wooden wall, but this wasn't a problem, David simply vaulted over it, but instead of running on he backed up against the other side, his black suit camouflaging him. The other men clambered over the wall not so nimbly and continued running on. After a few minutes after making sure they were gone David headed off to the rendezvous point, and chuckled under his breath.

"Amateurs."

Zara Taylor

The Innocent in War (100 words)

She tumbled down a hill, near her house and she was almost about to crash into the cherry blossom garden. She was wearing a yellow dress and her hair was half-up, half-down. She had a giant grin on her face.

She had just beaten her boastful cousin in a race. Her cousin angrily he stomped back to the town, when she teased him.

When they got back they could see that something was not right, her mother was almost at tears. Her mother ushered them to go back out.

3, 2, 1

The whole earth seemed to end.

Levana Coulthard

Our Last Resort (100 words)

If you're reading this it's over, they've won. This was our last resort. We ran, we really did, but...They knew. They had her. She was once our friend, we're sure she still is, but...No. Her family, they have her family. I can't tell you how it ended, because I don't know but, I think they found us. I promise you, we fought. We wouldn't let them use us, that's why we escaped. Not everyone made it this far, not everyone survived. I don't know if we all will. They might kill us, lock us up, so we run.

Dexter Samani

Roadkill

The road was quieter than normal at night. The brisk cold of the wind whistled through the countryside like an old engine from the 20th century. Cars came along the street very scarcely, only every hour or so. But that hour was all that was needed.

A car positioned in a moderately large crack in the side of the cliff was seemingly empty to the police after the incident. It was just sat there, brand new and shiny, with no dirt or mess. Apart from one thing. Six specks of blood.

"What happened is a mystery. A car driving along this road is now sitting on fire 100 feet down the cliff and all we have is this car?!!?!?" asked an angry commander to the officer two metres away from him.

"But sir, this car not only is at the exact angle to knock a car to where that car-and all the other ones," said the officer, "but there is also blood on the bonnet! It's too coincidental."

"Oh, right." Replied the commander, sarcasm dripping from his voice. "So obviously it was this clean, not bashed and pristine car that knocked the bloody car off a cliff!" The sheer strength of his voice caught the officer off guard, but before he could respond, the commander screamed "GET OUT OF MY SIGHT!" The officer turned and fled.

The prime minister sat in his office in Downing Street, reviewing the facts over and over in his head. One week ago the average death rate was one per every 17 seconds, and one birth every 3. Now these were one death every 6 seconds and still one birth every 3. All because of the incidents. He reviewed the facts of these incidents. An amount of cars similar to one car an hour for 72 hours were reported to be riding along a road on the hill. All of them were found with a different amount of people in each car dead inside. The only piece of evidence they had was a car lined up perfectly with the death spot, where all the cars had landed. However, it wasn't bashed up and it was beautifully clean apart from the blood specks. Most crimes had evidence everywhere but this was unsolvable even for the worlds greatest detectives and forensic scientists. It was a mystery that hit harder than the plague, and stayed quieter than robbery, it truly was the perfect crime, and that above all else angered the PM the most. However, angry as he was, he put on his coat and readied himself for the long drive home.

The trees waved and shook, the hallow branches whistling an out of tune song to the everlasting sky above. Leaves rustled and flew like birds in the wind. The road was as quiet as ever. Then, great beams of light flew forward from round the corner. The car readied, a predator pouncing on his petrified prey and as the car came round it leaped forward and collided straight at the car, which with awful screams went flying down the mountain and hit the ground in a blaze, and with that, the bashed car reversed into the crack, and then disappeared into the wall.

"You know, sir," began the officer, "this criminal, as bad as he is, you can't deny that he is smoo..."

"FOR THE FIFTH TIME, SHUT UP OR I'LL HAVE YOU SACKED!!" Screamed the commander, raging at the pure awfulness of last night. The attacks were bad enough when at civilians, but this time, it was not only the prime minister who had been killed, but the commanders brother. The funeral was tomorrow, and the day after a new prime minister would be decided for the political party the commanders brother once called his own. "I- I'm sorry Tom, I may have overreacted," said the commander, sympathy in his voice. "No sir, don't be," replied the officer. "I have been too arrogant these past few days. After all, my mother and brother were killed as well." The officer then turned and walked off. "Where are you going Tom?"

"To rethink my life, commander, away from the problems of police. All the years I wanted to be one I never thought it would be this nerve racking, this stressful, this- awful."

With that officer Tom Green walked away from the police station, handing in his badge and hat as he went. "You were a good officer Tom," said the commander wistfully. "Have a good life."

PRIZEWINNERS

We are delighted to end this edition of Kwyll with some of our prizewinning writing over session 2017-2018 and congratulate our pupils on their achievements.

Scottish Young Writer's – Runner up:

Anoushay Okhai

The Taste of Success

Last year, when tasked with branding and creating a gin, one of the teams on the show *Apprentice* chose 'Colony Gin' as the name of their spiced spirit. When one South-Asian candidate criticised the name, the English team leader reiterated the strap line: that the world was going through a period of discovery at the time of the British Empire, when they learned about new spices and flavours in the colonies.

To a team of adult professionals, this was a perfectly legitimate concept. The British did learn about different condiments during their 89-year Raj over India. But to them, this was all that colonisation was: an international tasting, a foreign enrichment as Britain discovered cloves for the very first time. Nothing more.

This complete misinterpretation of colonialism stretches beyond the show. According to a 2014 YouGov poll, 59% of British people are more proud than ashamed of the British Empire, and 49% believe that the colonies are more stable due to British rule. Countless hotels, restaurants, and yes, alcoholic beverages, have been condemned for using colonialism as a marketing point. Students studying at Oriel College, Oxford, walk under the stony gaze of a statue of Cecil Rhodes, an openly racist colonist of Southern Africa - a statue that Oxford University resolutely decided against removing. The evidence overwhelmingly points to not merely a hole, but a gaping chasm in the country's knowledge of the Empire, and it is a chasm that badly needs to be filled.

It was not merely spices that the British purloined: it was cotton, diamonds, and ammunition. It was cheap labour, soldiers, and slaves. It was an industrial Revolution and a London Underground system funded by the choking of Indian industry, and hundreds of millions of lives; numbers beyond comprehension.

So why does a full understanding of colonialism so rarely come to light?

The obvious answer is education. In the 2017 Higher History exam, there was no topic on the British Empire. The BBC information page on Britain's rule of India has no mention of the famine, nor violence that took place. In order to learn about the truth of our country's ravaging of nations, one must dig deeper than the public is willing. Whatever education we have on colonialism, is simply not enough.

Schools teach us history. My fourth year History classes helped me to learn about the Atlantic Slave Trade, Civil Rights, and the Black Power Movement. This inspired me to investigate how these all link to the treatment of African Americans today. Studying Hitler's rise to power and regime ignited my interest in the totalitarian state of Nazi Germany. My point is: without the Scottish education system guiding us through these topics, we would be left with a paltry, fragmented understanding of the KKK and the World Wars - and a similar level of the misunderstanding of colonialism lies throughout the nation.

There have been several movements forcing education systems to question the Western viewpoint of the Empire we are taught. The little that is brought to light is spun in a positive context of industrialisation and societal progression in impoverished nations. How patronising. Maybe we think colonialism is too complex a topic to be taught? Perhaps shame and 'white guilt' is too heavy; the teachers would struggle under its weight. It may even dampen the national pride felt by our citizens, pushing against a long-established sense of international superiority.

For one thing, students need a fully-formed depiction of our country's history. Leaving such a prominent aspect of British actions out of the curriculum does us a disservice. Take Winston Churchill's treatment of Indians during the Second World War. We are blind to his seething hatred of South Asians ("I hate Indians, they are a beastly people with a beastly religion"). His loathing extended to depriving the Bengali region of food to supply European soldiers with back-up provisions, causing a mass famine that killed three million people and drove civilians into sickeningly brutal acts of desperation. Yet Churchill was still voted by the public in 2002 to be the greatest Briton in history. This minor detail is entirely missing from our curriculum. Without serious and genuine efforts to accept the truth of our past, we risk arrogance and superiority.

Furthermore, as the UK diversifies and attitudes in the West grow more treacherous towards ethnic minorities, knowing Britain's colonial past becomes increasingly important in curbing negative attitudes towards other nations. This could push people to be more active in charity work, particularly in African nations, such as Kenya, with a knowledge of our stealing of African resources and communities. We, as a nation, lack the awareness that Britain is largely Great because it stood on the backs of Pakistan, Zimbabwe, and India. Remember Britain burned innocent people alive in concentration camps during the Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya; displaced 14 million people in pushing Partition between India and Pakistan; and wiped out the Australian Aborigines. We do not want to repeat history.

Finally, if not to unify and to educate, we at least owe it to those who suffered and died at the hands of the colonists. They were exploited and had their livelihoods dismantled as Britain took over the management of their nations for her own benefit. The least we can do as a country is to educate the next generation. Japan teaches people about its treatment of war prisoners in the 1940s and Germany educates her youth about Hitler. (Remember 2.5 million Indian soldiers fought for Britain in the WW2, but they are rarely commemorated.) Those colonised deserve the memorials that other victims of genocide and enslavement were given by their oppressors, and their descendants should be granted the most basic reconciliation that Britain can offer - a display of acceptance, regret, and acceptance through the spread of the truth.

When we are unable to treat colonialism with the seriousness and respect that such brutality deserves, it reveals a deep and shameful rift in our country's self-awareness. If we are only taught to associate British colonialism with rose-tinted nostalgia, we have no way of knowing what truly took place to lift Britain out of penury. Without the courage to teach the next generation of the stains on our history, we risk the isolation of our country, disunity, and - most hauntingly - forgetting. One who does not learn is doomed to repeat...

The taste of colonialism is not merely of cloves and success. It is also of supremacy, exploitation, torture, and death, as countries were usurped merely to uphold ours; but without a rounded, education on colonialism, we will never know the truth.

Rotary Finalist – Monifieth Rotary

Emily Baxter

Twisted Fate

Striding footsteps, echo round the cold, white concrete walls as I await- my treatment.

“Help,” I murmur, elevating myself from my prone position. The weight of my head sends the world spinning round me, stuck in slow motion. A bitter taste of rust catches the back of my throat. Blood. The pain rises and then I remember!

Exhilaration, one minute; oblivion, the next. The joy of dancing, shattered by forceful blows. I'm on the ground wiping my blood from my face. His weight forces me down, my screams muffled. His thrust deeper... My body broken.

The nurse rests me back on the bed- the kindest of creatures, what a contrast.

“Assaulted?”

“Raped!”

“Poor girl”

I blackout.

“They’ll need to see you at the police station, but you can go home now. They take these things very seriously”, claims the nurse.

“Thanks for caring”.

The police took my name, age, address and passport. Then a swab of DNA, from inside my mouth. They had taken swabs of His DNA, when I was in hospital.

“We have a suspect, a repeat offender. With the DNA, and your testimony, we are confident of a conviction. We will be in touch, but in the meantime, if you need any help, the Rape Crisis Team offer support”.

Rape, that word again. Stinging through my soul like a scalpel cutting skin...

I wake to the chiming of my ringtone. They’d found something.

I go to the station. Something isn’t right; something had changed; the tables had turned.

An officer stood opposite me in the interview room, his eyes ran up and down, burning into me with every blink.

The silence deafened me, every second on the clock echoed through the room. Tick-tock, tick-tock...

“We have a suspect for your assault,” his words unusually harsh and blunt.

“We have him in custody. But we have a few questions to ask you first...”, the officer’s mouth remained motionless.

I turn to find two people behind me.

“ I’m sorry, who are you?”

"We are from the U.K. Border Force, and have a few questions to ask you".

"You moved here with your mother, 14 years ago, is that right?"

"Yes, I think so. I was only 3, and my mother died 5 years ago".

"So I gather, of breast cancer, is that right?"

"Yes, it had spread to her brain".

"I'm sorry for your loss, but I'm afraid something appears to have happened regarding your visa, did you know this?"

"No."

"It appears you were brought here illegally, and I'm afraid, we have to look into this further. Until we do, you must accompany us to the Immigration Control Centre".

"What! But the rape, the trial, the suspect? What will happen?"

"I'm afraid that will have to wait until we deal with your right to be in the U.K. You are an alien. Can you come with us please.....?"

Striding footsteps, echoing round the cold, white concrete walls and into my ear as I await-
my deportation.

Rotary Finalist – Claverhouse Rotary:

Shaista Okhai

Little Red Door

Are forgotten people those we want to forget, or people who deserve to be forgotten? Are they evil people or just those who just needed a second chance?

I'm standing at the little red door. Once I enter this door, there is a life of death, and sadness. A life of the 'forgotten' people. But that's where he lived - my father. They say only people who aren't deserving of being remembered in this world go here but that does not make them forgotten. Perhaps we don't want to 'remember' people. Maybe it's a coping mechanism to pretend they no longer mean anything. A way of surviving – something completely different from living.

I turn the doorknob, and peer in. The world behind was one of a greyscale. It was a reminder of lives of the dead and the forgotten.

I step in. Colour drains from me, and my body morphs into the dead-like colours. I see people walking through the streets, children running and laughing, cars beeping whilst plundering down the roads. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. My legs start to walk by themselves, whilst my eyes are still wandering through this world.

I hear a slam of the door and I look behind to see it fading. Immediate panic sets into my veins, the risk of never getting out of here is real now. My legs keep walking forward until I reach a door.

Suddenly I'm knocking at it. A man with a covered face opens the door. It must be my father. He's hurriedly ushering me into the house. He locks the door, mumbling how I should not be here. I still haven't seen his face.

There was something unusual about the world. Everyone's faces were covered or bowed. It wasn't until a child came nearer to me, its head bowed, that I realised why. It looked up, and I froze in time and my mouth ran dry. The child's face was so mutilated that I could no longer make out his facial features. And now, quickly it revealed its teeth; sharp as daggers. It jerks its head to the side, its coal-black eyes flashing to something behind me, its grin grows wider.

Again, I hear the front door slam and I turn around to see my father, with several other men. I look up at their faces. Their horrifying cut up faces. They come closer to me now, and their hands beckon from behind their backs. Long, thin, bony fingers with nails long and sharpened to a perfect point. They're chanting curses. One voice is chanting louder than the rest.

"Kill the daughter of a woman caught red-handed; a woman destined to join the remembered ones". It's getting louder now, they're coming closer. I can't breathe.

And in that moment, I realise what the story was behind the little red door. Because the forgotten are not really 'forgotten', now are they?

Rotary Finalist – Discovery Rotary:

Leon McNair

A Different Perspective

This life is a canvas. That is stretched
To the limits then wrapped around
Some generic square frame, where
All of your colours are on show,
Being judged and ranked.

All except one colour, the most
Explosive colour. Your imagination.
Out of sight, six feet under,
Locked away, until one day,
It breaches the seal,
And nothing is held back.

A new rhythm is created, one of constant
Shifting, Colliding, Forming, destroying.
Creating.
The hustle and bustle of ideas
long gone but all of a sudden are
Resuscitated, and the first breath of life
Gives birth to a new perspective,
One that will never truly
Be seen by those around you,
For as long as they lock theirs away.

Now here we stay, forever falling
through the kaleidoscope of colours
made by our pasts, painted
By our present and sketched by the future.

Sketches may be erased, paint can be applied
Differently, but the past, cannot be painted over.

Rotary Finalist – Abertay Rotary:
Kirstin Petrie

Hear No More

The mischievous dance of the candle leaves shadows on my work. I stare at the black notes on the staves, some with a partner, some alone and some still churning inside my tired head. I know how every single one sounds, its tone, its pitch. I know how it feels to hear its glorious sound. At least...I remember how it feels to hear its glorious sound. Notes emitted by birds or people do not disturb me as I work. I think back to when I could perform; when I could speak to my audience. I could hear and feel the notes of the music I wished hear. The lives of compositions and musical works are not finished in my head but I so wish I could experience the world again. If only just once.

Years ago my mind was filled with buzzing noises like a thousand bees had flown into my head. My passion started fading away from me and all I could do was watch it escape like a helpless raft to sea. Losing my most treasured sense has been the most torturous and ungodly event of my short life. I question everyday why this pain had to be inflicted onto someone. And if anyone, why a musician? Why me, someone who lives through music and someone who music lives through? I go through to my drawing room and pound the life out of my dear piano as I desperately try to comprehend its notes. Its beautiful notes, which cannot be replaced by anything on this earth. Seeing the glossy ivory white and soot black keys brings peace to my tormented but empty heart. I close my eyes and feel the pressure of my shaking fingers push down the keys, willing this time, this time they will make a sound. It cannot possibly be like this for the rest of my days. I cannot live with this heart breaking pain for the rest of my sad life. If I cannot do the one thing I love, then what can I do?

The wick from my candle has burned right down, mirroring my hope. However, I shall still carry on writing great works as I cannot give up on my life now. I still have the ability so I must take full advantage of that as many people do not have the chance. Maybe one day my work will be recognised and understood, and all this distraught emotion will be worth it. Thoughts like this that I haven't had for a long time flood my head like a tsunami, as I mark notes on the page of my newest Symphony.

I only raise my eyes to the morning sun when the light shows me my pages of hard work. The candle died long ago, yet I had stayed composing long into the night, letting my quill run away with notes and rhythms like it had never done before. Another piece of hard work has been completed.

Signed,
Ludwig van Beethoven

The Burgess Prize –Worthy Mention:
Anthony Milnes

The Tale of Millard Jenkins

Dear readers, let me tell you the strange and unfortunate tale of Millard Jenkins an orphan of the Workhouse on Molison Street, Dundee. If you look closely amongst the filth and destitution, you will see, huddled in the corner, a skinny built boy about your age, although it is hard to tell with all the filth on his rag clad body. He is chewing on a stale slice of bread. This boy is Millard Jenkins. Millard was orphaned aged three, when his parents were killed in a factory accident. Now, he is living in the workhouse, barely scraping an existence on the meagre amount of

money he earns selling matchsticks and newspapers on the street. His story begins on a cold, winter's night...

The man was dressed in a large black overcoat and a top hat, dusted with snow, and a silver topped cane

tucked under his arm. The workhouse master ran over to see the man and spoke to him with honeyed

politeness.

"Good day, sir," he said, "and to what do we owe this visit?"

"I have come to see a boy named Millard Jenkins that I have been told you have in your work house," came the reply. Millard strained his ears to hear what came next, "I have a job for him in a mill I own."

'A job,' thought Millard 'I can't believe I am hearing this!'

Before he knew it, the gentleman was walking towards Millard, whilst the harassed workhouse master trailed behind him.

"Good day, boy" the gent said in an upper class accent, "I'm Lord Edwards and I own a mill a few miles from here. I require a boy to work there and I'm giving you the opportunity."

"Oh, yes. Yes pl'se," Millard mumbled.

A few weeks passed and Millard found he was doing well in the mill and it was not long before he

was offered work in the mill's office.

"You've got ability," the mill manager told him, "at least that's what Lord Edwards thinks."

Despite his hard start in the workhouse on Molison Street, Millard was a clever boy who learnt quickly. He worked hard during the day and slept well when he returned to the workhouse in the evening.

And so, as time passed, Lord Edwards trusted him to work on the office ledgers.

"Millard, you will have a golden future if you apply yourself at your tasks," Lord Edwards would often say in an avuncular manner.

Now it happened that one afternoon, Millard realised he had foolishly left his sandwich in the office. He returned to fetch it and found he was there alone. There was the sandwich sitting right where he had left it, but as he reached out- Millard's eyes alighted on the cash box sitting nearby, the key in the lock and the lid open. He looked around the room and in that mad moment, without thought, grabbed handfuls of notes and coins and stuffed them in his pockets.

Suddenly, the door burst open behind him and Lord Edwards appeared and his eyes fell upon Millard.

"What are you doing, boy?" exclaimed Lord Edwards as he rushed forwards, cane in hand. He lowered the cane sharply on Millard's knuckles. Millard responded, as he had in many a fight in the workhouse, and let loose with an angry punch.

"How dare you?" thundered Lord Edwards grabbing Millard's throat and pinning him over the desk. As Millard flailed helplessly under the older man's grip, he felt the large, heavy, brass paperweight beside him. His hand only just reaching it, Millard picked it up and brought it down hard upon his assailant's balding head. There was a dull thud and Lord Edwards fell to the floor, blood pooling on the floor beside his head. Thinking quickly, Millard smashed a window and ran to the manager's office shouting, "Come quickly, there's been a burglary and Lord Edwards has been attacked!"

Millard was returned to the workhouse, sacked by the suspicious manager who had never liked him anyway on account of what he saw as Millard's preferential treatment and Millard's life was once again one of abject poverty.

One day a suited, brief carrying gentleman visited the workhouse.

"I am the late Lord Edward's lawyer," he said importantly to the workhouse manager. Millard craned his neck at the mention of Lord Edward's name. "I believe a boy by the name of Millard Jenkins lives here? He was named in Lord Edward's will to inherit everything; the wealth, land and title. Seems Lord Edwards was Millard's uncle, but a damn shame he died before he'd had a chance to sign his will. Not worth the paper it's written on!"

Millard felt struck by a thunderbolt - he vowed his life henceforth would be one of atonement.

The Burgess Prize – Worthy Mention:

Daniel Amores Hamilton

The Icy Wind

The icy wind crashed against the side of the boat, the smell of brine was strong enough to shrivel the face of anyone who witnessed its ghastly stench. The boat was headed to a small city locally known as "Dundee" but to anyone who Manuel knew it would have been named "La ciudad de yute" or "Juteopolis," Manuel had travelled here for one reason and that was to lead his family into riches beyond belief. Manuel pulled out the old and slightly ripped picture of his family and remembered the last thing he said to his highly extroverted father before he boarded was: "I will not fail!"

The sea mist had cleared by the time Manuel reached the harbour, the cold pierced his skin and cut down to his bone like a sharpened cleaver. The first thing that Manuel saw was the creeping ivy crawling up the curved wall of the lighthouse like a spider. Manuel proudly and ambitiously strutted off the boat and the stench of sewage instantly filled up his raw lungs. As he followed the cracked and cobbled pavement, he saw the gargantuan-sized jute factories pumping out mountain-size clouds of smoke.

On his way to the inn, Manuel experienced a striking cold feeling in his chest, he remembered the emotional and financial peril that his family was in back in Santander, "No pressure," Manuel whispered to himself.

The Inn keeper was a nice man, well presented, good manners, he knew how to make anyone feel at home. The inn itself however was disgusting; the reception itself had mould growing on the back wall due to the gutters on the roof being broken. It was fair to say that the building itself had inevitably lost its battle against time.

"Hello," said Manuel to the Inn keeper trying his best to leap over the language barrier.

"Greetings, welcome," replied the Inn keeper. "I take it as though you are here to stay,"

"How did you know?" Asked Manuel with a curious and eager look on his face

"Well you see anyone who comes in here wearing old and worn business clothing is here for a fresh start, I take it that you are not from here?" Manuel was a little thrown by the forwardness of this seasoned Inn keeper.

"No, I am from Spain, and yes, you are right about why I am here, my name is Manuel Garcia by the way. Nice to meet you,"

"My name is Robert, and the pleasure is all mine,"

Manuel and Robert talked for what felt like hours on end, they talked about Manuel's aspirations and Robert's peculiar interest in three-piece suits.

It was ten in the evening by the time they had finished their in depth conversation about literally everything and Manuel was shattered. He unpacked his stuff in his little room and then humbly tucked himself into bed.

The next morning was harsh; frost had gathered on virtually every pane of glass within Manuel's window. Manuel eagerly pulled on his aged suit and headed out into the hallway where it felt as though many people who had tried and failed to be successful had passed through; Manuel shook the thought from his head and rushed down the stairs where he briefly waved to Robert before speeding through the undesirable double doors.

Manuel jogged down to the harbour where he remembered seeing the factories. The jute factories were immense compared to anything he had seen back in Santander. He noticed a poster next to the door of the factory. It screamed out: "NOW HIRING". Manuel jumped at the opportunity he had before him. As a helpless child, Manuel had been taught how to work solely with what he had and nothing else so an opportunity like this was seen to him as a huge head start.

Five years later, Mr Garcia would be found proudly sitting at his new and polished mahogany desk single handedly running the largest jute company in Scotland. Manuel had all the money he could imagine, but there was one thing missing, his family...

In a rush of cold blood to the head, Manuel remembered the last letter that he received from his father:

"You could have helped us, but you were too selfish to even consider it, weren't you?"

In 1899 Manuel's entire family was killed off by disease in Santander, one month after being denied Manuel's shelter and riches in Dundee. He rolled up his sleeve to see all of the scars that he had given himself out of guilt. The icy wind blew through the wide-open window onto Manuel's face.

Manuel sorrowfully climbed up onto the window sill,
paused for a few seconds
and

jumped...

Evie Campbell

The Spindle

It was a bitter world she was born into, and a bitter world she left.

The town was never known as such; instead, it was just a handful of buildings scattered near each other. It was every man for himself, and suspicion and paranoia was rife. The young woman to your right could be a witch, the old man to your left the devil. A man of wealth who died on the fifteenth day of February would rise and stalk the harsh, bleak night. A baby born on the eighth of November in the snow would have caliginous eyes and a mind with boundless knowledge.

And that is the day our story begins, a desolate day, the wind more numbing than usual, the cold more raw, the snow more veiling. As the newborn child entered the world, she was met with a world more shadowy than any before her. The darkness would reflect not only in her eyes but in her heart of stone. Her parents, however, simple spinners, saw only a child who would bring them luck and renown, for after all, if one part of their belief had come true, why shouldn't the other?

They named her Ophelia.

As a celebration of their luck, the couple invited guests from all across the sunless land to show off their fortune. Everyone from the town was invited. Everyone, that is, except for the old crone at the edge of the woods.

No one spoke to her. Her hair was coarse and grey, coming out in patches, and her face was lined with the heaviness of one hundred years in the cold. Of course, nobody was quite sure how old she was, but they dared not ask; she had a nasty habit of making terrible predictions about her intrusive neighbours' future, and they nearly always came true. A man who threw a stone in her window, lost in the woods and mauled by a bear, a child who stole her cane dead of a mysterious illness that gave him a scar just like hers. The people were too afraid to prosecute her as a witch, because they knew she had powers that could destroy them in a second. They did not want her bringing misfortune on the happiest day the people had known for a long time.

Of course, they were not there for the baby, or even the parents. They were there in hope that her rumoured insurmountable wisdom would rub off on them. They brought gifts. This was what the spinners had been waiting for. A new dress, a chair, a painting. Gold.

As the guests surrounded the child, praising her curls and her dimples, beaming with fake exuberance, a cold wind blew around the cracks of the door. With a bang, it flew open. Standing in its place was a nebulous figure. As it came nearer the few sputtering candles not yet extinguished, the villagers could see the face of the old hag.

Terrified, the spinners retreated into a corner. The room was deadly silent, save for the constant biting draught.

"You did not invite me. Now you will pay." whispered the old woman, her voice mingling with the wind.

"No... please!" begged the child's father.

"You want her only for her talents. You are no true parents. You must pay!"

The villagers were packed tightly against one wall, watching with a mixture of terror and intrigue.

"Cursing you would change nothing. Cursing the child, however..."

She stalked menacingly towards the cradle, taking in every detail of the girl that lay in it.

"Your daughter has a darkness within her. She cannot be allowed to survive, for she would wreak havoc upon the world. Her greatest asset shall become her greatest weakness. You are spinners, are you not? I will provide a fitting punishment. Before she turns eighteen years old, your child shall prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel, and death shall claim her!"

With that, a stream of ink blew through the air, weaving itself into a complex pattern before it pierced the heart of the newborn child. The baby remained silent and still.

With a stormy howl of wind, the old woman was gone.

The cold, cruel world was never the same. Her parents afraid and shunned by the villagers, Ophelia grew up unloved and alone. Her life was Stygian, penetrated only by a murky candle. This candle was her intelligence. Ophelia's knowledge knew no bounds. She absorbed every detail of the world and recited it with ease. Everything was simple. Had she known how precious and unusual her mind was, Ophelia may have grown haughty and arrogant, yet, without her parents' love, she assumed that it was ordinary. She never spoke to any other children, no adults would permit it, and so the extraordinary words blossoming from her lips were greeted only by harsh grunts or outright jealousy. Her parents were growing tired of their luck.

From when she was a child, Ophelia was barred from going outside, but also from the other part of her small home. This was the place where her parents worked, the only other room besides the living space. She knew not of the curse that she held, only of her mother and her father and the four walls of her home, of the books stacked up on the floor and the candle on the table and the children outside the window who were hurried away whenever she watched them play. This was all she knew of her existence, but of other things she was an expert. She could tell you the exact way to calculate longitude, word for word from her favourite tome, and every detail of the night sky, despite never having seen it, yet what lay within the next room she had no idea. This frustrated her endlessly, as with great knowledge comes great curiosity, but, afraid of being reprimanded, never ventured beyond the old oak door separating her from the things she did not know. Her parents still loved her enough to attempt to prevent her untimely death. Although she was annoying, they did not wish to kill Ophelia. Yet.

Ophelia knew many things, and so the things she knew she did not know filled her mind. She stopped caring about her books, and became intensely fascinated by the doors shutting her away from the world. Her parents spent many hours busy at work, and so she could not enter the room during the day, even if she had wanted to. She invented many elaborate ways to see in when they entered in the morning and left at night, but she only caught the tiniest glimpse, not nearly enough to satisfy her curiosity. Instead, she turned her attention to outside. There was one window, which was barely clear enough to see through, but it was enough for her. She was happy to simply observe the young children playing. Of course, this did not go unnoticed. The children spotted her, and whispers started. Who was that mysterious girl at the window, with her tumbling black hair and serene smile? And of course, as whispers do, they turned into rumours, which turned into stories, which turned into legends. She was a witch, she was a ghost, she was a princess. The latter was particularly popular, a glimmer of gold

amidst the dismal thoughts of a future full of work and sleep. The legend morphed into something more; she could be saved. All you had to do was kiss her and she would be safe, and would love you forever. The problem with this was that as it was simply a fairytale, no one ever would come to save her.

Ophelia only gained intelligence as she grew, and her parents only gained hatred. They started to think that maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't be so bad if the witch's curse came true. Once this thought had appeared in their mind, it was impossible to get rid of. It ensnared their minds, entangling them in jealousy and fear. Ophelia had caused their business to be nearly destroyed, it had cost them their friendships, their ties with family. Ophelia had broken their lives. Maybe, they thought, it was time to break her.

And so, on the day before her eighteenth birthday, Ophelia's parents left the door unlocked. Overwhelmed with curiosity, she peeked inside. Her parents were nowhere to be seen, and what she saw only increased her interest, for she knew nothing of the objects that lay inside. Creeping in and shutting the door behind her, Ophelia was only interested in discovering what the objects were. Wooden wheels, with a sharp point. As she sat down at a stool, she absorbed every detail of the spinning wheel. Confused and intrigued, Ophelia reached out her hand and touched the spindle. One drop of blood was all it took.

Feeling the sharp pain in her finger, she jumped back, but it was too late. A spot of blood hit the floor, forming a perfect circle. She looked down in interest, seeing not a mark of scarlet, but of black, like a drop of ink. Suddenly it all made sense. Her brain was filled with every piece of knowledge denied her. She learned of the outside world and of the curse, and of the ways of old magic. Spreading her arms, the room filled with clouds of ink. Ophelia threw her head back and laughed, as death claimed her at last, after waiting for eighteen long years.

And so, when someone finally did come to rescue her, all they found was a locked room, and inside was only a skeleton stained in ink.

It was a bitter world she was born into, and a bitter world she left.

Block Prize for Creative Writing – Forms 4-6:

Callum Paterson

The Curious Incident of Clarence and The Brown Letter

The brown envelope had begun to gather dust. It had sat there for 4 days despite his harpie of an ex-wife's phone calls demanding him to sign them. He just couldn't do it. To sign the papers would be to admit that his life was officially over. To surrender to failure. That his wife hated him, his kids hated him, he had no house, no job and barely any money after the lengthy court proceedings. This was it, he thought. This was the end of his life. Why should he go on? Everything he had slaved for was no longer his. Why should he continue to exist as an empty shell on an earth, which had made it clear it no longer wanted him? He had spent his whole life working to provide a life for a family who no longer wanted him and a company which showed no interest as him as a person but simply the profit margins. He was a toy that had finally broken and was being disposed of. This was it. There was nothing to live for. He was going to kill himself.

It did not take long for Clarence to settle on a method of his death. The brown envelope had continued to stare into his soul during his deliberation which had somewhat hurried up his decision-making. He wanted something that would tell his soon to be ex-wife this was her fault. That she was the reason he was being crushed under layers of shame and guilt that he didn't think he should feel. He wanted her to hold this guilt for the rest of her life as if she was Atlas holding up the world. Clarence felt that to maximise this effect she should find him but this was where the problem lay. He couldn't imagine slitting his wrists, watching the crescendo of his life pour out and the prolonged feeling of doom. This left him with few options, which were attempting to electrocute himself like he'd seen in the movies, hanging himself or wandering into the sea. Believing it was always good to have a backup plan, he decided to go through his list of ideas chronologically.

He stared at the bath. Not a bad final resting place he thought to himself and at least mess would be kept to a minimum as he'd read on the internet that the body did some horrendous things after death. The trickiest part of the whole task had to be selecting the right toaster. He did not want the paramedics to think he had poor taste when he came to be found, but at the same time Clarence hated to waste money so there was little point splashing out on one from John Lewis. In the end, he'd settled for a blood red 2 slot toaster from Sainsbury's. After spending an agonising 5 minutes plugging in the extension cord cables after extension cable from the kitchen to the upstairs bathroom to make sure he had enough length. As soon as he plugged the toaster in, the lights went off. Clarence let out a cry of frustration at how his scheme to kill himself with a toaster had simply amounted to him sitting in a bathtub fully clothed; his mockery of a casket. With an exasperated sigh, Clarence exhumed himself from the bathtub and set about with his second most preferred way to die.

Clarence cursed his stubby fingers, as he failed to tie the knot correctly for the 100th time. Clarence was not what you would describe as a practical man. No, Clarence could barely change a light bulb let alone tie a noose. After about 2 hours of watching the same YouTube tutorial over and over again, he finally had something that vaguely resembled what he wanted. The noose hung from an exposed beam as if it was taunting him. As if it was the physical manifestation of how low he had fallen, and how much further he was about to fall. He climbed the ladder next to the noose step, by step, as if he was walking to the gallows. Slowly, as if he was trying to savour his last few moments on earth, even though no one was physically forcing him into this act. Instead, his fate had been thrust onto him by shame, guilt and endless misery. His judge, jury and executioner. Clarence forced his fat, bullock like neck through the misshapen noose and said a quick silent prayer to whatever god occupied the black void he raced towards. With tears continuously dripping down his cheek as if they were from the goddess Niobe herself he took a deep breath, closed his eyes and stepped off the ladder. He leapt from the ladder with courage that surprised even himself and for a blissful moment he felt utterly weightless and knew all his problems would be over soon. This moment was shattered by a sickening "thwack" as the rope snapped and plummeted towards the ground. There he lay, like some beached whale, helpless, graceless but sadly, unlike a beached whale he was not close to death. No, all Clarence had managed to achieve was giving himself a severe case of whiplash and a headache. "Time to move onto the next idea" he thought.

Clarence stood on the beach paying little mind to the chilling winds, which made his bones ache with cold. He hadn't wanted it to come to this. Clarence had always hated the sea yet here he was; about to cast himself into it for the first and the last time if all went to plan. He stared at the rolling waves, which endlessly attacked the beach as if they wished to prove that although they could not destroy the beach, they could still hurt it. Clarence felt himself reminded of how his children had cut off contact the day his wife had given him the divorce papers. They had hated him long before then, but him actually being part of their lives simply meant they went through the motions of acting like they cared for him. He suddenly felt a surge of anger at how everything he had done was for them, the hours he worked, the birthdays he had missed, the anniversaries he could only send flowers for. He had made all of those

sacrifices to make sure his family had always been Comfortable. Always been happy. Well at least what he thought was happy.

After several worthless minutes standing on the icy beach he finally worked up the courage to go in. He began the slow process of stripping down his clothes at the same time feeling a curious sensation of becoming lighter as if he was also shedding years of guilt, failure and stress as they simply did not matter anymore. Nothing mattered. Not his failed career, his burning wreck of a marriage or his unloving kids. For the first time in his life, Clarence felt free. Free from every pressure and burden life had forced onto his tortured soul. The cold wind blasted his pale, naked body as he waddled towards the beach his whole body gradually becoming numb and blue. He stood at the edge of the waves. This was it. Once he entered, he knew he couldn't turn back, this was one thing in his life he refused to cower from and hide away like he had done his whole life. Taking his act would be his redeeming act for his existence. That even though he'd suffered so much pain and torment he was able to decide when it ended. When the suffering stopped. Using every tattered shred of will in his body Clarence forced himself into the sea. The cold water enveloped him in a deathly cocoon and crushed the air from his lungs as if Poseidon's own fist was squeezing it from him. All of Clarence's previous resolutions about taking control of his life melted away and his mind filled with white hot panic, manically thrashing about as if that would somehow save him. But it was too late. The cold of the sea combined with the lungs filled with water meant he was quickly losing consciousness. Clarence's last thought, the last words that would mark the end of his pitiful 50 years weren't anything inspiring or heart wrenching or even clever. They were just, "Oh God, I don't want to die."

Winner – The Pushkin Prize:

Evie Campbell

Hot chocolate

I know I haven't given you a Christmas present in years. Before, my presents would be the sort you would expect: pink bracelets, woolen scarves. However, this year, I want to give you something that really means something. Although there is no tag, no signature to this note, you will know who this is from, and why I sent it.

Inside, is hot chocolate powder. Just enough for one drink. Take the mug I got you for your ninth birthday. Boil the water, pour it in, take a sip. At first it is sweet, and warm, and perfect. But then it overwhelms you, the sickly flavour making you feel queasy, thirsty for something more. So you leave it. Drink some water. It is satisfying, but never enough.

You will find it, still sitting there, tepid and half-full, but still the same rich flavour, still leaving you with the same content feeling.

But eventually, you will finish it. The warmth gone. Though still, there are the grainy lumps of a friendship no longer there. A smile in the corridor, a stilted, awkward conversation that is best ended. In time, though, you will wash out the mug, scrub it clean of us, fresh for use again. However, the scent of our friendship will still cling to me, cling to you. And then one day, you will use that mug again.

But maybe, just maybe, you will still taste the faint sweetness of hot chocolate.

The Ballet Shoes

These are the shoes that she learned to dance in,
Giggling with the other five year olds,
Tiptoeing across the hall,
Following instructions and memorising routines.
These are the shoes that she jammed her feet into,
Years later when her mum lost her job,
The shoes that she stuffed with tissue paper so she could learn to dance on points,
These are the shoes that, patched and scuffed, she wore to classes twice a week,
Which she paid for with her salary from working at the supermarket.
These are the shoes she wore to the audition,
Where she danced for her future, and for her dream.
These are the shoes which helped her to fame
And she's kept them ever since.

These are not the shoes she wore to her first show,
Red silk with ribbons,
Or the shoes she wore when her performances sold out,
Or the shoes that she wore to her wedding,
These are not the shoes she wore the day her dream collapsed,
When she heard the clash of metal on metal,
And the echo of shattering glass.
These are not the shoes she wore when she was told she would never dance again.
These are not the shoes she wears now,
Battered old grey slippers,
Used only to shuffle around the care home,
Still with a profound limp,
But these are the shoes that started childish dreams,
Turned them into reality,
And she will never throw them out.

The Search for an Ending

"It was a sunny day, and we all went to the beach for a picnic," my grandma began, taking her gnarled hand in mine. She looks directly at me, her vivid blue eyes contrasted against her lined face. If it was just her eyes, she could be any age. I shift slightly in the creaking old chair provided by the care home. "The sea was so blue," she continued more softly, and I realised that she had forgotten I was there, and was lost in that day. "I went out for a swim. In the red bathing suit my mother gave me, for my thirteenth birthday. I saw a little girl. With red hair, playing." Her storytelling was now so simplistic, so childlike, that I wondered if there was even a point to this story. "Then she started drifting away, away, away. I reached out to her, and then..." Her spiel sputtered out, her thoughts lost, like a candle in the wind. "You were saying dear? Is it time for tea now?" She stumbled out of her seat, looking dazed. "No gran." I say sadly, missing so much the person she used to be. I help her back to her seat. "You were saying?"

"I'm sorry, do I know you?"

"Yes, yes you do."

At home, the glorious smells of fajitas rose from the kitchen, yet I sat at the computer, trawling through old articles about beach safety and stories about people saving dogs from rip currents and the like. "Alice... Hopkins... Sea... Saves child..." I muttered as I typed various keywords

into the search bar. Nothing. I have to find out what happened. Not because I'm curious, though I was, but because I needed to give gran an ending to her story. I tried again. "Beach... Child saved... Alice Hopkins.." Nothing. So I changed tack. "Child... Drowns... Beach... U.K... 1956..." I surmised that must have been the year, given that she had been born in 1943 and she had recently had her thirteenth birthday. This time, there were some interesting results. I clicked the top link. Suddenly a mass of tabs opened up on my screen, the majority saying 'error'. Great. 10 minutes in and I had already downloaded a virus. "No! No don't shut down, please don't!" I yelled pointlessly at the computer screen. It switched to black. I sat back in my chair. How stupid was I? I couldn't tell mum, she'd kill me. So left it. My only research tool, gone. "Julia, dinner!" Mum yelled up the stairs.

I spent the whole night thinking. Maybe nothing really happened. Maybe someone else saved her. I had no idea which beach this was, no way to tell if it really was 1957. I didn't know if this was even about her. Maybe it was a story she had read somewhere. Alzheimer's is tricky, and there was no point to trying to find out what happened if it didn't happen at all. But I felt that I had to do this. Tell her the end of her story. One memory. Whole.

So I started to plan.

I decided to go to the library. I remembered hearing that some libraries kept copies of old newspapers, and, in any case, they had computers that didn't have viruses. When my alarm an hour early at 5 am, I snuck out of the house with my schoolbag. By the time I reached great, grey building that was my destination, the sun was rising. I didn't have long.

I tiptoed inside the cavernous, echoing room. A few dusty computers sat in a corner. The rest was filled, from floor to ceiling, with books. I crept towards the imposing woman at the desk. "Excuse me?" I whispered. "What!" she snapped. "Erm, I was wondering if there are any newspaper archives?" "Over there. But no touching anything older than 1980."

The vast aisle that she directed me to was crammed with yellowing papers. I had no idea where to start. If I couldn't look at anything too old then I should probably check recent articles to see if she could have read it somewhere. So I took a seat and started to read.

I read.

And read.

And read.

After hours searching, I still had nothing. If I wanted answers, I had to do this.

Looking around furtively, I quickly traced down to 1957 and, with a pang of guilt, seized a handful of ancient papers from the summer of that year. I stuff them into my bag, and bolted.

Outside the library, I checked my watch. It was 11:15. I was so late for school. I left a note for my parents to tell them I would go straight to school from the library, but it was far too late for that. I needed a place to go, to hide out until the end of the school day. I was miles from my house, and I didn't know anyone here. Except-

Gran's.

Her house was just around the corner. She had lived there until last year, when she was moved into a care home. *And I still had the key.*

I eased open the creaking door, and kept into the empty house. I couldn't shake the feeling of familiarity, all the Christmases and Birthdays spent here, until she was snatched from us into Alzheimer's cruel grip. I blinked back tears. I was here to research, I chided myself. Not to cry.

I sat down on the dusty carpet, and pulled out the files.

Times, 18th July 1957. Nothing.

Daily Mail, 23rd July 1957. Nothing.

And then, in between the crumpled pages, I found everything.

And then my phone rang.

"Julia? Where have you been!"

She didn't sound as angry as I thought she would.

"Erm... At school?"

"Don't. We came to pick up your sisters and you weren't there. But that's not why I'm calling you. Gran... She's very sick. She's dying. You need to come to see her, before..." She swallowed. I am suddenly terrified. I thought I was prepared for this, but I wasn't. You can never be.

"Where is she?"

"Fairview hospital, Lily Ward. Get here as quickly as you can."

I ran. It was only a few minutes until I saw the red brick building looming in my view.

I made it just in time. I run onto the ward, and to my gran's bed. Mum is crying.

"Could I please have a moment? With gran." I plead. They let me.

"Hi, gran. Do you remember that story you told me? That you couldn't remember the ending of? I found it." I grab the now very dog-eared copy from my bag. "You did it. You saved her. The little girl. Ruby Reynolds." I point to a picture, of the two of them, hugging.

I suddenly realised all the bad things I'd done to find this. Infected my family computer, stole records from a library.

There would be repercussions.

But I didn't care.

Because nothing was as special as watching her smile as the light left her eyes.

One last memory.

Whole.



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Keep writing!

J Fulton, Department of English.



Inspiring education

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