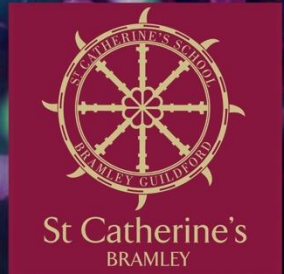
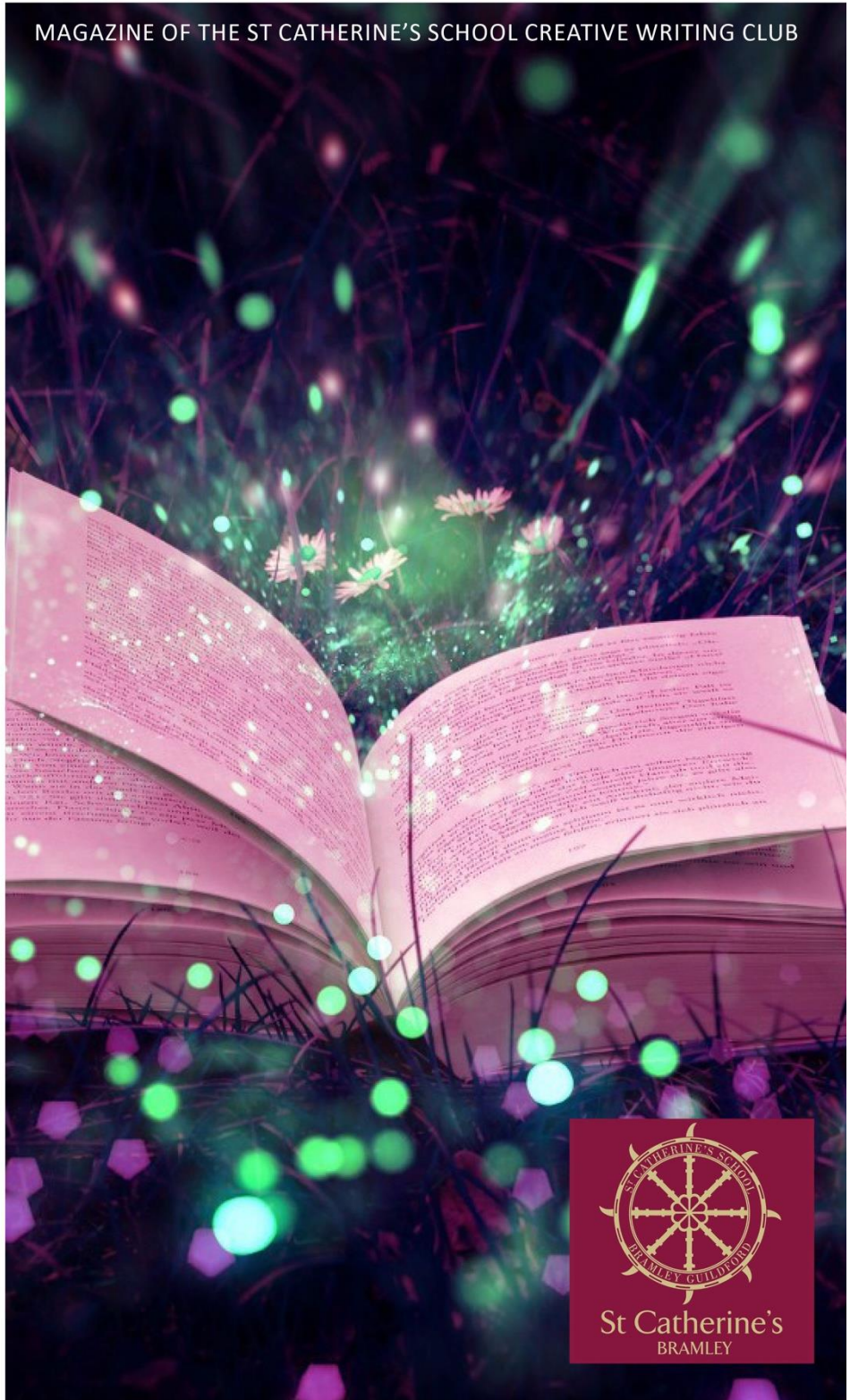


CREATIVE CATS

MAGAZINE OF THE ST CATHERINE'S SCHOOL CREATIVE WRITING CLUB



Welcome to Creative Cats

On behalf of Creative Writing Club, I am delighted to welcome you to our first publication, *Creative Cats*. We are a relatively new club, having started our meetings in November 2021. We meet once a week to write, discuss ideas, and to take part in writing-based activities. This publication is an accumulation of our writing throughout the past academic year. Enclosed are the winners of our Short Story Competition, our “Tree of Hope” poems that we wrote in response to the Ukrainian invasion, and any independent pieces that our members have asked to be published. Some of the club are working on their own novels and their opening chapters are included here. I would like to sincerely thank Mrs Whittingham for helping me set this club up and for running all our meetings. The feedback you have given throughout the past 7 months has been invaluable and has helped us to all grow as writers. On behalf of Creative Writing Club, thank you for picking up our magazine, and we hope you enjoy reading our work!

Lucy L5



Creative Writing Competition Winners 2022

The inaugural Creative Writing Competition had **inspiration** as its theme. It was open to all year groups. Any type of inspiration could be used as the starting point for a piece of writing of any genre.

First Prize and winner of the Creative Writing Cup

Hannah was inspired by the photograph

wisteria

before the summer, they lie sleeping
nestled snug in clefts and crevice
leaf overlapping verdant leaf.

then, the buds awaken,
swell in sunlight, drink in its warmth;
unfurl slowly, bloom by bloom,
and clothe the wall in its cascades.
soon, it is a curtain spilling out
with fragrance; lavender haze, swaying
with the sound of laughter
and children running by

lilac wanes to languid mauve,
and the winds send them aflutter—
showers of petals, dancing wild
in storms of violet spray. and then,
when the world is still with snow
they fall away and dream:
of dappled shadows, soft and grey
of footsteps feather-light —

of wisteria, hanging sweet and heavy
and low like grapes on the vine.

Hannah L6



Runners Up

The Grim Reaper

Inspiration: I've always found death rather intriguing, and I hate the fact that it is so taboo in common conversation. It is as natural a part of life as birth is, and I believe should be celebrated as such. The Grim Reaper is a symbol of death in many different cultures, and one that is perceived as terrifying and grim. But what if he was a saviour, and not an omen?

I stand in a barren land.
So dead, so empty,
the life sucked out of it in hungry gasps.
Death has ridden like fruit-flies upon the wind,
I can almost smell it on the air:
the pools of blood, the shredded skin,
the bones ripped clean and snaked carelessly from their flesh,
the funeral pyres and the ashes buried in the masses.

As I step forward, herds of carcasses blow past my feet,
beetle exoskeletons, beetle talons.
They cling to me, their lifeless forms still not sated in death,
wrapping round my skin, clawing at my tired face.
The earth is dry, there is no water,
the ground is cracked, the ground is jolting,
the rumbles of titanium muscle sound through the earth.
I fall down, and my skin splits across the cracks of the cold earth.
Yet, I never flinch and I could never, ever abate.
So I stand up,
I continue walking, until my feet are falling off, and my mouth is
bleeding
leaks from my eye sockets, leaks from my ears
I cannot stop, I cannot start.
I stand in limbo, close to tears, which shred me apart.



But alas! I see a figure in the distance
approaching me like gold in a mine
a diamond in the rough. They are, I think
another face like mine.
They wear a black cloak that coats Their head like a hat,
the folds flying down like a bird's nest
but as They get closer, I realise this is a trap.

They stand tall, like a tower, but more imposing still.
Their lips are a line of chaps, a map of veins and skin-silk.
Their hand clenched, there is no skin on Them
But what is most terrifying again, is Their eyeless stare:
the two holes where eyeballs should be, viciously gouged out in Their luminous head.
They glare down at me, all bones and terror and hate,
but still do not move to chop me off dead.

They hold a long scythe that hovers across Their back,
a menace, a warning, a hint of attack.
but I do not stop, I do not abate,
because if I die now, then it is fate.
so I shut my eyes, and let my thoughts turn to dust
the words fall out of my head and crumble on my grave.
I feel myself slowly slipping away
and as my body is split in two,
I know it's the way that I've been,
always.

Alice U5



Marley A Screenplay

INT. AUDIOLOGIST'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Two teenage girls and their parents sit opposite DR MANN. MARLEY, 15, dressed like a typical high-school cliché, shuffles nervously. Her sister, VIKI, 17, a celebrated actress, waits expectantly. KAITLYN and MARK, their parents, concentrate on the leaflets in their hands.

Conversations in Italics are signed in BSL.

DR MANN

You're eligible, Marley.

VIKI breaks into a wide smile.

DR MANN

We'll need to know within the next fortnight if you would like to proceed.

DR MANN returns to shifting through paper work. He is a stark contrast to the family's buzz of excitement.

MARLEY

(Speaking to get his attention)
Dr Mann?

DR MANN

(Resumes Signing)
Yes, Marley?

MARLEY

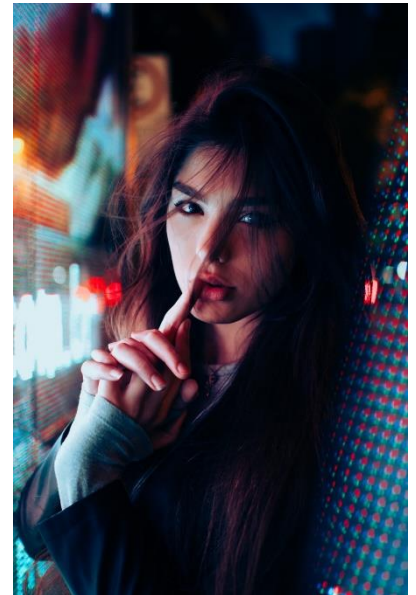
I would like to proceed.

The rest of the family expects this answer. DR MANN shows the hints of a smile.

DR MANN

*We will be in touch.
Congratulations, Marley.*

DR MANN stands up. Everybody shakes hands. The family begins laughing softly and MARLEY is swept into a hug. VIKI looks down at her phone and then, clearly upset, walks out of the room. MARLEY does not notice. If her parents do, they do not show it.



EXT. A STREET IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA.

VIKI, MARK, and KAITLYN walk down a very unkept street. Lamp posts lean, and telephone wires can be seen above them. It is raining.

They try to walk down several side streets, but each time get met by a member of the paparazzi. VIKI appears more stressed with each confrontation.

VIKI gets surrounded by paparazzi. The scene is chaotic. People shout and camera flashes blind onlookers. VIKI stumbles several times, and then falls over.

INT. NEW YORK COURTROOM, A SKYSCRAPER.

A court case with many spectators. VIKI is the defendant. The spectators gasp in response to something just been said by the judge. VIKI jerks her head up to face the judge. Her shock is paramount.

JUDGE

The Court is adjourned.

The Court rises, and then exits. VIKI remains stock still, until she brings herself to rise. She exits the courtroom. Paparazzi swarm her. They shout out, asking for statements. "Plagiarism" is mentioned several times. VIKI pushes past them.

The voices are cut off as VIKI walks out into the street, and attempts to avoid more paparazzi. She climbs into a car waiting for her.

INT. THE TAXI

MARLEY and VIKI sit side by side.

MARLEY

You didn't copy it.

VIKI throws her hands up.

MARLEY attempts to ask many questions, none of which VIKI answers.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT.

KAITLYN is on the phone to DR MANN. She is in the hotel room



where the family is staying. It is messy. Clearly nobody has time to tidy the place up.

DR MANN speaks.

KAITLYN
I'll ask.

KAITLYN walks into MARLEY and VIKI's shared bedroom, and taps on MARLEY's desk.

KAITLYN
(Smiling)
What colour?
MARLEY
(sitting up)
Red

This is repeated into the phone.

DR MANN resumes speaking to KAITLYN.

MARLEY
When will it be ready?

KAITLYN does not see this, and walks out of the room.

KAITLYN walks back into the other room. She takes a pen and paper and begins scribbling down notes. She is concerned by what DR MANN says. Something shocks her, and she sits bolt upright.

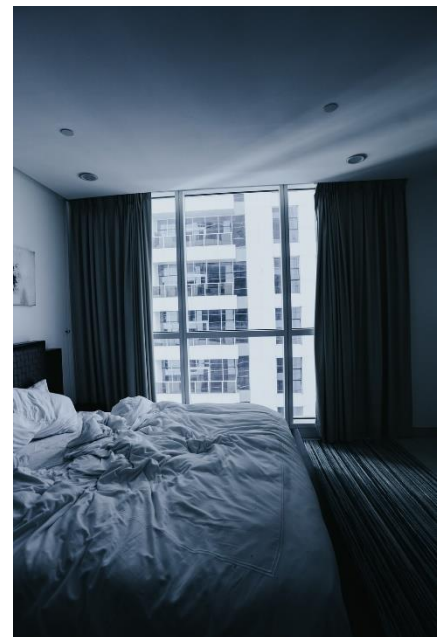
KAITLYN
(shouting)
A year! You put her through all those tests for - for what, then?

DR MANN tries to soothe her, which only heightens her anger.

KAITLYN
(beginning to pace)
We've enrolled her in a school. She thinks she's going to a school.

DR MANN speaks, louder this time; it can be heard by the audience. It seems he has forgotten his professionalism, and his anger takes over.

DR MANN
As I have told you before, she would not have the implant and be able to



hear again straight away. It may not even work for her! And if it did, you're looking at 12 months of speech therapy at least. Why are you going around enrolling her in things? You haven't even confirmed to us that she'll have it.

KAITLYN

You told us she was eligible.

DR MANN

She is eligible. I would like to try her on another type of hearing aid first, though. I am not putting Marley through surgery if there's the slightest chance it is not needed.

Silence. KAITLYN throws the pen down on the paper.

KAITLYN

What do we tell her?

There is no response.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The family have gone for a walk. VIKI and MARLEY lag behind KAITLYN and MARK.

MARLEY

What's school like?

VIKI

(Short, trying to avoid the conversation)

I don't know, particularly. I never stay long

MARLEY

You've been more than I ever have.

VIKI

It's - you'll enjoy it, if you were to go.

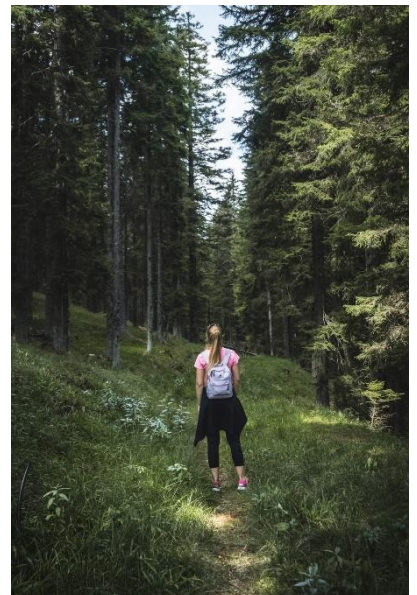
MARLEY

I'm enrolled.

VIKI

You - you don't have to go.

MARLEY



(confused)
You know I want to.

They come to a stream. The awkwardness subsides as MARLEY mimes pushing VIKI in, showing a clear sense of fun between the pair.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM BALCONY. - NIGHT

The family sits on the balcony. MARLEY has a selection of printouts next to her. She highlights things she likes the look of, and discards others into the empty chair next to her.

MARLEY taps MARK's chair.

MARLEY
(Holding a leaflet for a school)
They do Volleyball.

MARK
I got knocked out doing that.

MARLEY
You're soft.

MARK
Why thank you.

KAITLYN turns around in her chair. VIKI pre-empts the upcoming situation and leaves the balcony.

KAITLYN
I think it may be an idea to - wait a little to enrol you.

MARLEY
I want to go. I'm not scared. I'd tell you if I didn't want to.

KAITLYN
We know you're not-

MARLEY
It won't stress me out.

KAITLYN senses that the conversation is futile.

VIKI bursts into the balcony, excited. MARK shakes his head at her, as if to warn her off interrupting.



EXT. A BEACH.

VIKI and MARLEY are on a beach. They watch kite surfers out on the sea as MARLEY tries to teach VIKI to skim stones. VIKI is not very good at this, and continually fails.

MARLEY

(The two turn to face each other)
I could handle going to a school.

VIKI

I don't doubt it.

VIKI goes to skim her next stone and then stops short. She taps MARLEY.

VIKI

I don't think it's going to be a quick process.

MARLEY

We knew that already.

MARLEY picks up a stone and, making no effort to skim it, throws it straight into the water.

MARLEY

I see what it does to you.

VIKI skims a stone successfully. The girls shake their fists in victory.

MARLEY

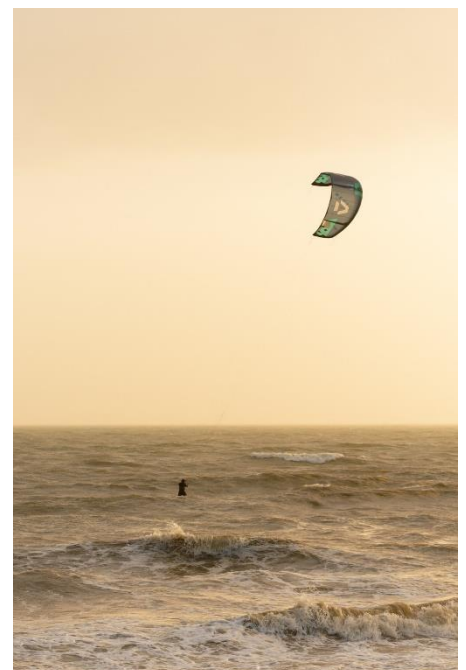
You are proud of everything until somebody criticises it. You won't just accept that you like a project and move on.

The kite surfers come back to shore. The light slowly dies away.

MARLEY

I don't want to go through surgery and speech therapy just to-

Pause.



MARLEY
(gesturing to her ears)
Hear.

VIKI
You don't want it.

MARLEY
No. Actually, yes, I do want it. But I also want to help design costumes for you, and I want to sit on a beach.

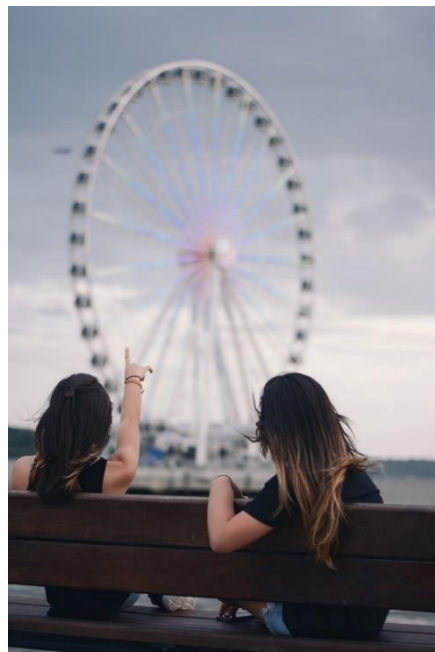
VIKI
(Almost aggressively)
I know you don't like change, but you would still be able to do that. He just wants to try you on another hearing aid. We're not giving up-

MARLEY
I don't mind giving up. I don't see it as giving up. I like what I've got.

VIKI skims another three stones successfully. Several young teenagers walk down the beach, playing loud music. They come and sit near the two sisters, and wave. They seem friendly. They start jumping to their music, and VIKI and MARLEY join in, MARLEY feeling the vibrations.

End.

Lucy L5



A Swallow's Journey

My inspiration for this story was a book called Dear Olly by Michael Morpurgo. I read this book when I was eight years old and loved it. I've always been interested in swallows. I have had many bird books in the past; I would set myself the goal of trying to find all the species that were listed. I picked the name Solus for the main character of my story as I think it really relates to him and where he ends up on his journey. I also love Latin so decided to add a touch of classics. I think we've all experienced journeys, although not migration, of course, like Solus's. We have all felt like we have to make it alone. But the tunnel always ends and we may, like Solus, find ourselves in a warmer, sunnier and brighter place.



Introduction

My name is Solus. I am a swallow (a barn swallow to be precise) and if you decide to read this story then you will go on a journey with me all the way to South America. This journey is called migration and nearly all birds undertake it but we face many dangers along the way and, through reading the events in my diary, you will understand just how perilous it can be...



14th September 2016

Dear Diary,

It's 11:00p.m. I'm restless. I've attempted to sleep but it's too hard. I just can't. The idea of tomorrow haunts me like a nightmare. It has for several weeks now. The knot in my stomach tightens every day and all I can think about is The Journey. I have to leave England, leave the place where I learnt to fly, leave the place where I met my friends. Leave the oak tree which I have spent my entire life in. I feel sick with apprehension and my mind is spinning with a kaleidoscope of cloudy thoughts. I'm falling down a hole of emptiness. A hole of darkness. When I reach the bottom I will find I am in a new world. I imagine myself as that girl in the stories my mother used to read me. The one who fell down the rabbit hole. What was her name again? Oh, Alice. That was it! I start to drift away as I remember how the story ends. She wakes up to find herself back in the real world and realises she was just dreaming. And as my vision blurs, I wonder if I might awake in the morning to find that this is all one big dream.

15th September 2016

Dear Diary,

Nope. Not a dream. I wake up to find warm light oozing into the tree like honey. It seeps through the bark and spills onto the ground, flooding the place. The day is beautiful and bright; yesterday it was drizzly and grey. It's almost so beautiful that all my worries nearly escape my mind. Nearly.

Flying out of my tree, I take in the surroundings of my home for the last time. The twisting, gnarled trees make a canopy overhead and the sunlight pokes through their leaves creating a dappled spotlight on the forest floor. Youngsters soar over magenta chrysanthemums, searching for their friends. The elder birds wake up any late-risers and guide them outside.

Swords of sunlight cut through crimson-red leaves and, although it is a bright day, a sharp wind slithers through the long grass sending a tumble of amber leaves cascading over the thick roots of a willow tree. Suddenly, the elder swallow calls us and we all gather in a big clump around him. He lectures us on safety precautions and then tells us the route we will be taking. Some of the youngsters are excited to go to South America but I find it daunting. Everyone knows that we're not all going to make it. It's a treacherous journey lasting 40 days and some of us will die of starvation, dehydration, exhaustion and in storms.

A few hours later we're on our way. There are some stragglers but I'm determined not to be one of them. In the middle of the flight, I feel safe. The day drags on and the once young, white and puffy clouds grow old. They shrivel and turn grey and I know what's coming before I can see or hear it. Huge drops of rain start to fall and there's a flash in the sky. A storm is coming. Over the next few minutes, the weather deteriorates. We swoop down and fly lower. Thunder booms and rolls through the grey misty sky and the wind howls so loudly that I can't think straight. I look up to try and find any remains of the beautiful weather from this morning. Very bad idea. The last thing I can remember is slamming into a tree.



16th September 2016

Dear Diary,
Lights. Woman. Mask. Blood.
Bright Lights. Female Doctor. Surgical Mask.
Concussion.

As my eyes adjust to the glaring lights above me, I take in my surroundings. There's a doctor standing above me. A surgeon maybe? Or a vet? She's speaking in some sort of made up language which I don't understand. Then I remember the storm. The tree. The fall. We were above France at the time. She must be speaking in French.



The woman places something on my nose. It's like plastic but heavier. It sinks into my skin, tickling my glossy blue feathers. Time slows. My breathing seems to get heavier. The woman's face blurs into a faded painting that has been ruined by water. The two lights above turn into four and then eight before slipping out of view and leaving me in petrifying, unknown darkness.

19th September 2016

Dear Diary,
I've been unconscious for a few days. I can feel it. Dull but menacing metal walls seem to close in on me. I start to panic. Where am I? Am I heading to South America? Or back to England? Something breaks my thoughts. There's a low droning sound coming from underneath me. I peer around trying to find the source. Apart from metal walls, there's a puddle of water and a small window. After sipping from the small puddle that has leaked across the floor, I make my way over to the window. My head still throbs and every now and then I feel sharp pangs of pain sear through my brain. But when I peer out the window my heart stops.

Below me lies a rainforest, a sea of green sparking leaves that stretch out past my view. Emerald green snakes slither up twisting branches of the monstrous trees. Gorgeous multicoloured birds soar across the sky making me feel rather insignificant. The sky is so blue that I'm in awe and the sun blazes so ferociously that I may as well be in space about five feet away from it. Then we start to fall, slowly at first but then rapidly, and as the sun melts away into the sky, I near the rainforest below.

Then I realise I'm on an aircraft. I've been travelling from France to here. Maybe I'm in South America! In Brazil, Peru, Ecuador? Who knows! Maybe I'll meet my flight here! Hope floods through me bringing tears to my eyes. I've missed my family and it would mean the world to live with them here in this beautiful and extraordinary place. The aircraft lands with a thump and I'm thrown back into the room. A woman enters the cabin. She looks



oddly familiar and then I remember that before I passed out, she stood in front of me. She must have brought me here! She must know where I'm supposed to go!

Rattle. Rattle. The woman pulls out a cage. I step back, grasping for the walls. But before I can get past her she grabs me and puts me through the rusty, iron bars. Surprisingly, she has a gentle and light touch; not the strong, hard grip I was expecting. My mind relaxes slightly but my body's still rigid and stiff.

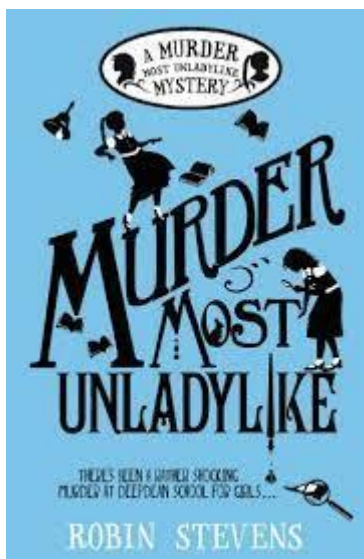
The woman picks up the cage and inspects me. She has delicate facial features: hazel brown eyes that lie between short eyelashes that curl at the tips. Her frizzy brown hair reminds me of my oak tree at home. They're the same colour. Her teeth remind me of the remainders of snow from a long, dreary, bleak winter we used to get in England.

We walk down a long corridor that seems to go on forever before finally stepping outside. The warm air comes as a shock. I'm so used to the cold, wet climate of Britain that I hadn't realised anywhere could be this hot. She releases me from the cage and points to the rainforest ahead. That's where she wants me to go. I nod my head in a sort of thanks and appreciation, hoping she knows slightly what I mean and then fly off into the distance knowing that in a few weeks I will be reunited with my flight once more.

Evie U4



Next Detective



My inspiration was a series of books called 'A Murder Most Unladylike' by Robin Stevens. The books are about two teenage girls in the 1930s who solve crimes. I decided to do my story in the modern times about the granddaughter of one of the girls. Enjoy!

Po Po, my grandma, was turning 70 and the whole family were going to Edward's (Po Po's step brother's) place, Wong Manor, to celebrate.

Have you heard of 'The Wells & Wong Detective Society'? It was created by Po Po and her 'fabulous, fierce and female' best friend, Daisy.

Arriving was like watching a sunset slowly drift beneath the horizon. Magical.

Edward and Lavender, his wife, stepped outside their luxurious house. "More Guests!" cried Lavender, annoyingly high-pitched. Edward gave her arm a gentle pat. He's far younger than Po Po (55), he looks like her too.

Where was Po Po?

As soon as I heard a screech of wheels, I dashed outside, to see a sports car slot dangerously in-between two four by fours. What? Po Po owned an ordinary Volvo and had motion sickness. But it was her who started yelling at a figure with royal, blue eyes and shimmering, blonde hair, "I've told you to be CAREFUL!"

"Don't be wet Watson, you can't possibly expect me to be slow!" The voice was unrecognisable, but there's only one person in the whole world who calls Po Po, Watson...

Daisy Wells!

I was so excited!



Later in the library, everyone was listening to the detectives' stories.

"You've got pretty good cliffhangers nowadays Ying Ying!" Edward chuckled. "Come on, presents!"

The best present was a pink, leather notebook with **HAZEL** on the front and in matching font on the back;

**Everyone needs a Watson
A friend,
A partner,
And a fellow mischief maker.**

'One small gift to a friend, one big leap for Daisy' (She's not sentimental).

Edward had given her a wonderful necklace though, it was designer and diamond encrusted.

Then, Mary (Rose's daughter) put Grace to bed while everyone else tucked into a delicious dinner. When Po Po's favourite starter was finished, a few people left the table to get five minute things done. After the main, Po Po asked;

"Please may I get my camera?"

"Use my phone!" Lavender smiled sweetly, fluttering her mascara-heavy eyelashes as she handed Po Po her mobile.

"I prefer... um... proper pictures."

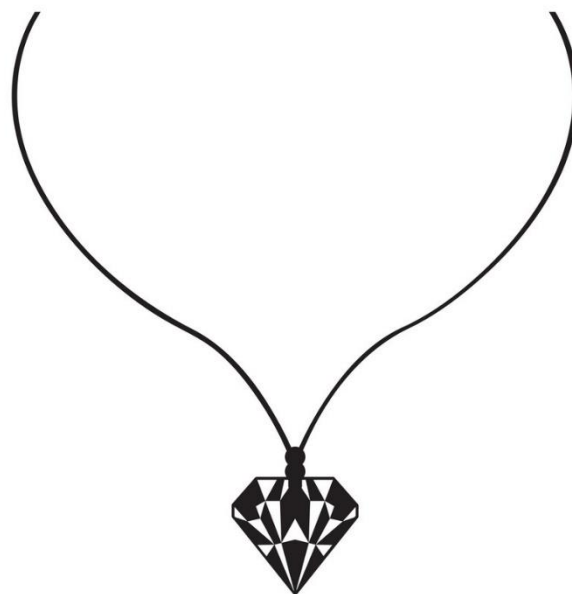
She came back, rummaging through her belongings. "Where is it?" She muttered, "the necklace is gone!" Everyone looked mortified except Daisy.

"It's... Gone? No, it's stolen!" Daisy exclaimed excitedly. "Who's not left since sitting down?" I didn't realise I had raised my hand until Daisy pounced on me, "Jess! Help Hazel and I with the case."

"Daisy? You left the table, your brother called!" Lavender murmured sadly.

"Ugh! Uh! W..what?" Daisy stuttered. Lavender carried on.

"Hazel you probably misplaced it and you can't investigate if you're the victim!" Lavender made a sympathetic face. Unhelpful contribution. Daisy grumbled and Po Po sighed.



“I guess we’ll call the police but until then...” I would investigate like Po Po and Daisy used to.

The first person I wanted to talk to was Edward. I snuck up on him in the hallway. “Edward?”

“Call me Teddy”

“Teddy, why and when did you leave the table?”

“Interrogation!” He chuckled stupidly. I rolled my eyes. “I helped with the main in the kitchen.” Brief!

“Any reason you’d steal from Po Po?” I asked. He chuckled again.

“I’m the son, the favourite, Hazel was jealous. She got over that though.” A simple no would have worked. I asked a few more questions. I spoke to some others too.

Then I checked the library. There wasn’t much evidence except a credit card, slid in between two books on the table, sticking out in a perfect position. Someone must have planted it to frame somebody. I identified the signature on the back written in fine, black biro as Lavender’s. I was still looking at the card, when Daisy came in.

“I really can’t help?” She sighed.

“I don’t think so,” I replied.

“Oh! But I can!” She changed her tone.

“What do you mean?”

“I can give you a piece of advice; don’t assume the obvious, expect the unexpected.” She smiled. What use was that? Sometimes obvious was the answer, but I thanked her all the same. I looked at my notes and thought.

Po Po’s bag was in the library and so the people who went to the kitchen couldn’t have done it without crossing back through the dining room! I crossed those people off the list.

Maybe a practical approach would be more effective: re-enacting the crime. A logical tactic that would mean starting right where I was. I was time travelling just without a fancy machine.

“Po Po started here and then placed the necklace in her bag, then we all walked out using this exit except Mary who used the other one to shortcut to the staircase. We walked through this hallway passing the...” I saw the cellar trap door under my feet and smiled.

“The culprit could have used the cellar without anyone seeing during the meal. I lifted the



latch and climbed inside the dark space. A torch was sitting on a box by my feet. Convenient! I shook it a bit and let the flickering light lead the way. I saw another few trap doors on the ceiling, one to the library, the drawing room and another to the kitchen which I opened. "Unless you know it's there, the door is invisible from the kitchen." I muttered to myself. Who knew that the cellar door was here? No-one unless Teddy or Lavender had told them. So someone must have found the door. Someone in the kitchen. I couldn't rule out anyone who had been in here, but I had a lead. They would have found the trap door by needing to go to the cellar for something, maybe... I peeked inside... a vase of flowers. The same vase that had been on the table during the meal. Lavender would have had to show someone where the trap door was for them to have got the flowers! I had it! All I needed to know was who had retrieved the vase. But how was I...

"Excuse me," came a voice from the hall. I slammed the trap door shut. "I need everyone who was at the scene of the crime in the sitting room. Now!" The police! Oh no, now I would have to sit through tiresome interrogation whilst itching to get back to my own investigation. I suddenly understood why Daisy and Po Po hated the police so much.

I sat reluctantly in the sitting room listening to Officer Greenworth interrogate us all. It was a painful experience but maybe I could use it to my advantage. I stuck up my hand and Greenworth nodded.

"Sir, why did Lavender need so much help? Couldn't she have just taken multiple rounds bringing out the dishes?" Mum shot an angry look at me. I smiled to myself as Greenworth fixed his gaze on Lavender and asked her the same question.



"Um there were some bits I needed help with..." her eyes swerved frantically around the room. "May helped with the drinks and Rose took in the plates while I went to the cellar for the flower vase..." she trailed off. What? How? Lavender had been framed by the thief; she couldn't be the thief. Unless... she framed herself. She would've counted on the police finding the badly placed evidence and have known they wouldn't suspect a thing. She had done it. But why?

Once again, I stuck up my hand. Greenworth nodded.

"May I go to the loo?" The officer frowned then gave another sharp nod. I crept into the hall, spying the officer's bag sitting on the bench. I rummaged inside until I found it. A fingerprint kit. Tip-toeing down into the

cellar, I read the instructions. There was the vase, time for action.

To prove my theory I had to match up the finger prints. This wasn't hard. I simply returned the kit and waited for the policeman to take everyone's fingerprints.

He did.



I slipped the print I had taken from the vase in with the others and watched Greenworth do lots of computer stuff, stop, then look rather puzzled. “Lavender, did you take your fingerprint twice and only register one with a name?” The officer murmured.

“NO!” I cried, “Lavender stole the necklace.” Lavender looked outraged. “I know she did, I have proof.”

“Go on...” The officer insisted.

So I did. I told everyone about the card, cellar and vase. No-one was happy that I took the print kit but they didn’t really mind.

“Why Lavender?” Po Po asked.

“I was jealous. My husband should spend more on me than his silly stepsister. I regret nothing! I guess you want it back now that I’m probably going to jail. My handbag.” She spat the words out.

Po Po and Daisy were proud of me and so was I! I had solved my first case and been hugged to death! Even though Po Po had decided to not press charges against Lavender, maybe one day I would be a great detective too.

Harriet U3



In one of our meetings, we read Michael Morpurgo's short story about the Ukrainian invasion: *The Tree of Hope*.

These poems are our expression of hope for Ukraine.

Our Tree of Hope

Our whole world changed,
Hardly recognisable,
Deranged.

As I walk through the rubble,
Through all the destruction,
I walk to the tree,
Left last standing.

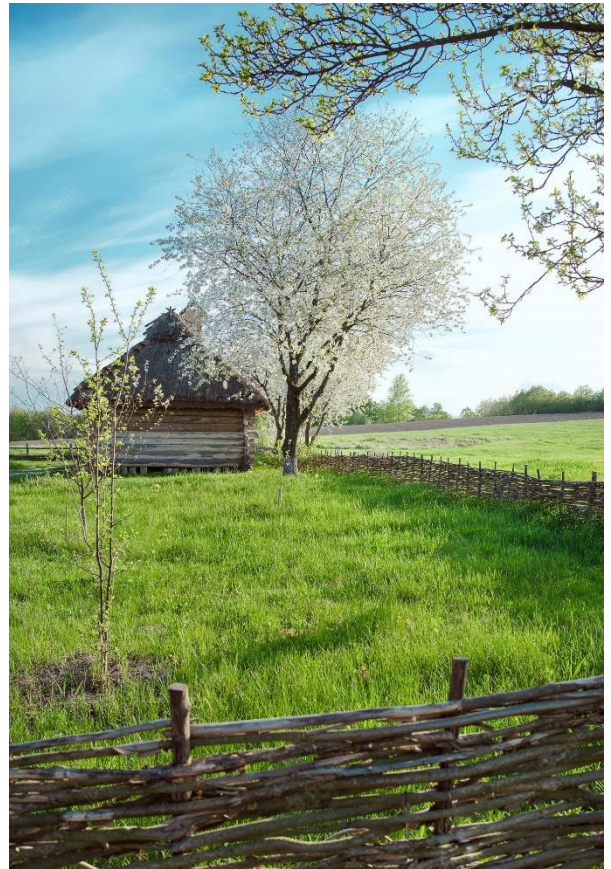
Paris L5

Tree of Hope

The lights are centred in halos;
As the bridge curves,
I walk through the red
And into the black box.
It has become apparent that it is a landmark;
Something that we never knew.
The Tree of Hope grows ever greater,
And stretches out to somewhere new.

The Christmas lights are brighter here;
They stretch right across the street.
My eyes hold reflections of snowflakes;
What I missed came back to me.
The Tree of Hope reaches ever higher;
It propelled me through London, and then back home.
We don't cry anymore,
And we don't have to melt the snow.

Lucy L5



The Tree of Hope

'tis time, he said,
to set the branch
into this mound of earth

so gentle was he
with this stick
caring as if
it happened to be a new birth

the whine of sirens
in the land
would set the trees ablaze

and mother's cows
would flock back home
not given time to graze

as a child, was I afraid
I dreaded missiles; I dreaded raids
the countries around are bleeding too
with their wounds seeming new

words are drugs; they fill the air
filling hearts with despair
lonely footsteps in the snow
but my hopeful tree continues to grow

and one day I may return
to the land which has survived
turmoil, bombing, raids,
but had been re-born.

Luisa L5



Our Tree of Hope

Sunshine calls every day,
To will the darkness of the night away.
The birds still sing, flowers grow,
When it seems there's nature we can go.
The tree has been planted, it will reach for the sky,
Even if the time comes to say goodbye.

It is always cold, the air is crisp.
Every second outside is the greatest risk.
And yet through the danger faced
every day,
The sapling in the garden will not go
astray.
The bark travels up, holding out its
leaves,
To blossom in the sunlight, and
rustle in the breeze.

Olivia L5

The Tree of Hope

This tree stands tall, rather proud
In the middle of our field.
If you look close enough, you notice
The shimmering branches and twigs
That fade into the clear blue sky.
It is so sunny now, golden rays
Wash across the landscape.
Warm.

The background drifts into focus
And as you notice the clouds
Roll over the horizon,
You can see the other trees in the field.
Planted firmly into the ground.
This tree oozes darkness and pain,
As the storm begins.

Wind and rain lash the bark
Branches fall and twigs break.
The tree bends in the chaos.
Stay upright. Don't Fall.



The darkness looms ever closer
And thunder clashes.
Lightning strikes.

Suddenly light claws its way through the clouds,
Emerging and struggling off the rain.
The cold, dark clouds flee.
The blue spreads back across the sky,
Centred far above the tree.
The tree of hope glows brighter now.
It will never dim again.

Rose L5



The Farewell

Day 208. July 28. 1944. Chania. Greece. Popular Jewish town.

Morning

Grey light filters in through the ripped blinds, searching the walls of my ragged room, burning my eyes. Dust floats in through the broken window, I would get it fixed except there's no one left to fix it.

They took them, that's what they did. The Germans. They took the baker, his wife, the carpenter and his sons, all the teachers and burned all our books. Whoever was left, was left to burn with the bombs they dropped on our unguarded heads, left to perish among the ruins. They took everything, and now, nothing remains.



"We are here to help you," they said, as they packed up the women and children on a boat teenagers who had no idea of what was happening as they left on that tiny little ferry with the red sign on it. "We are here to help you," they said, as they built shelters underground. "We are here to help you," they said, as they took the food off of our shelves. But they were here to finish up the last of us, the last of the Jews.



They locked themselves in the shelters. “We are here to get rid of you,” they shouted. Victorious, when they came out of the shelters to a town of ruins, with triumph on their faces, they looked at the perished bodies on the ground, while the survivors cowered petrified behind ruins. We ran, up up up the hill at the edge of the town, facing the sea. Watching, always watching, as they took Mama and Papa, and the baker and his wife, with the carpenter and his sons, and all the teachers.

Mama and Papa did not like these men who came. They argued continuously. Refused to tell Leo and I. They glared at the men when they came to the doors, grimaced as Leo and I asked them who they were. “Quiet!” they’d whisper. But we listened, Leo and I. Listening, always listening, to everything in this town: the sounds of the officers’ boots when they told us to stay in our houses, the whispered rumours amongst the children and the whine of the bomb as it cut through the sky, breaking and killing everything in sight. There was no mercy. It left us here, to listen to the cries of the now orphaned children as they searched through the rubble for their parents after the officers had gone, to listen to the sea breaking against the rocks, a constant reminder of the once peaceful town we had. The once flourishing town, with bakers and barbers, with shops and schools, carpenters and fishermen was all gone, perished, dead, ruined. Because of them.

I stood up from my bed, swaying like a drunken man, drunk maybe, not with alcohol but with defeat, with sadness, with grief, the ache of loss still burning in my heart.

I left the house, stumbling over the ruins towards Leo’s favourite spot, the bottom of the mountain, where the thorned roses guarded any access. I looked regretfully down at my grey dress, it was already covered in holes anyway but it would’ve been nice to say farewell to Leo in something cleaner, he was always the tidier of the two of us. He was always the smarter, always the wittiest and always the one shouting with laughter at people’s jokes, even when they were not funny. He had that easiness about him. I was the emotional one, the shy one, the one eager to please. He was the light to my darkness, the optimist to my pessimist, the full glass to my empty one.

Despite our completely different personalities, we understood each other in the way that no one else could. We had a bond thicker than just blood holding us together. The loss of Leo would always hit me with a staggering grief, but, after that grief, happiness would creep in. It would shine through the memories I relived again and again; smiling to myself as I remembered the time he helped the baker with bringing out the bread to his stall but making the mistake of picking one up to brandish the “fresh- as -a-daisy” texture to passers-by but obviously mistaking the temperature. The memory ended with him shrieking and juggling the loaf between his hands before passing it to the baker, then sprinting to the fish stall and plunging his hand in the fish-smelling ice. Grinning goofily at me with red hands and a squid’s tentacle wrapped around his pinkie tenderly, almost as if the dead squid was just as adoring of Leo as everyone else in Chania.

He would laugh at me now, as I crouched digging in the only clearance between the rose bushes, digging, digging, digging, the perfect hole. I made it tidy, in remembrance of Leo's extreme tidiness. I knew he detested the feeling of moist earth on his back, I remember that



from our many walks to the hill, laying on the grass, with a sheet under us on Leo's insistence.

I tucked in a dark sheet, pressed the soil so it wouldn't crumble, the dampness of the mud helped. Now, burying Leo, I piled his belongings and shoes.

"Goodbye Leo," I said to him, to what was left of him. I only recognised his shoes between the ashes.

When I finished decorating his grave with roses, I kissed the last rose tenderly and laid it on the large pile. This was it. My best friend, my other half, my brother, my twin, gone.

I heard some movement behind the bushes. I looked closer. A little boy was sitting cross legged on the grass, his shorts tattered and his shirt covered in dust, dried blood and soil. His hair, as black as Leo's, was dusted with debris. He widened his green eyes and stood up, He was quite young I thought, only about five and likely orphaned. A burst of rage fired through my heart, as I thought of the war but it was quickly replaced by the usual numbness.

He looked at me, his eyes wide with fear. "Hello," I said cautiously. I noticed, with a quick beat, that he resembled Leo. He resembled me, it was almost uncanny.

"Hello," he replied, "I'm Alec."

I recognised him when he spoke, the baker's son. Left behind of course, while his parents were put on a ferry most likely to their deaths.

He stopped for a beat, then burst into tears. I dropped to my knees then and held out my arms, he stumbled into them. Tears began to stream from my eyes too. Tears that had been waiting to come out since Mama and Papa left, since Leo had been killed in the last bombing. I felt in my heart what I had been missing, comfort, human comfort around me. We were bonded by our losses.

After a while he detached himself.

"What were you doing?"

"Burying someone."

"Who?"

"My brother, my twin."

"Why?"

"It was time for him to take his place in the palace in the skies."



“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Is that where my parents went?”

“Maybe, or maybe they are somewhere safe, waiting for you to find them.”

I looked at him then. I saw the hollowness in his eyes. He experienced what no child should have, I saw grief, loss, fatigue and defeat. No child should be exposed to such horrors.

“Do you want to come with me?”

“Where?”

“Away, away from here.”

“Yes,” he said, looking up at me, despite what I saw in his eyes, there was innocence there too, and trust and most importantly, hope.

“Here, take my hand,” I said, and he gave me his small, little hands, nails bitten to stubs. I led him around the hill, to the shore, where golden sand stretched out for miles and miles. The bright sun winking on the wet rocks, while the sea broke against them, a constant reminder of the once peaceful town we had. The once flourishing town, with bakers and barbers, with shops and schools, with carpenters and fishermen. An opportunity for a new beginning. Somewhere far away from here.

“Say Farewell Alec.”

“Farewell.”

And we walked, on and on and on, listening, always listening.

Aliya L5



Before Now

Protests clang and holler with their might,
Blue plastic mesh;
I crumble at the sight
Satirical attempts to make a bad deal better;
Blue floors, blue masks, blue-hued knit sweaters
I don't believe this will get better.



Now

I found a sweater upon my floor
I took scissors to it
What a lengthy chore
The thread would not budge
The pockets came undone
I found a blue-mesh mask
And a ticket
To a hospital
Car park.

I placed them all in a box
It was shut and padlocked
I took a match to the wood
The grass was bathed in soot
Blue-mesh masks now cease to exist
I threw my sweater
At the fire
But I missed.



The box is now dust
That floats amongst the stars
I make my own luck
So I took my sweater to the park
I got out the matches
I dropped the box
I picked up the sweater
And tried to rip it up.

The thread would not budge
The pockets came undone
I found a pen and some paper
And this is what I wrote,
And screamed,
At the sun.

We now spend longer with those whom we love;
We cherish the moon, the stars, and the sun.
We learnt to smile with our eyes,
How to pause time,
Because even now there are things that I would like to feel twice.

I picked up my sweater
I wore it through December
I bought a blue-hued knit scarf
And prayed for cold weather.

Lucy L5



I turn to Descartes

First Dream

The night of November 10 –
I am in a room of heat and stench
Watching taunt backs
Covered by sweaty fabric
Growing shy of their names –
Media has a face.
In the late hours
I walk through the high-street
The town clock staring angrily
With its buzzing eye
At the stomping parade.
Yet quicker, quickly –
Do not fall behind!
Front – oh, to get in front
Squash and squeeze through
And silently strangle those you surpass
Before they do it to you.
How icy the breeze.
Uninvited, a stream of consciousness
Warms up the city
And a clamour of voices cackles behind –
I do not want to turn.
But wailing, crying, sobbing,
As if I am hunted by terrifying phantoms
That tramp my feet – I must speed up –
Still, how do we ignore the voices
Of injustice past?
“A writer,” they yell at me, “no – word-slayer.”
Their words like daggers
And yet everyone else goes on
And yet my right side is weak.
I have to bend to the left
Even if it slows me down
Even if it poses a radical change –
But I take it back,
Oh, please let me stand!
Faces stare at me from this angle
Of those who were weak like me –
Corpses, walking on corpses!
Trying to straighten up
Undermined by the wind
And the clock – why did it fall asleep?
The corpses bite my feet



Not a word-slayer anymore
But only a slayer unsure on my feet
Whose skin became soggy with blood –
Maybe my blisters opened up
Maybe it is all the faces I have stepped on.
Somehow, despite the time stopping,
The parade goes through a gate,
Our hands holding knives
And a voice whispering now
That stealing is always a crime
That killing is often justified
That we should pray for good fortune
That we should see the knives as our extensions –
On my way to prayer
I pass someone I know
A familiar stranger
But I turn a blind eye
On his golden watch
That ticks without stopping.
The way to the chapel
Is through a courtyard –
Petrified, I remember I do not know
How to pray – I do not have
A God who is not out of the newspapers –
Do They know?
Indeed, They greet me, a man
Tells me “Monsieur N”
Has something to give me –
I imagine it is a melon
From a foreign country –
Imagination is a privilege
And I am still leaning to my left side.
N gives me a mirror and –
What a shame! What a shame!
My naked, hunched
Body
On display – embarrassment – between
All those firm on their feet and dressed
My body like a lumpy eraser
With random patches of hair
Pitiful and condemned
But sinful – most of all.
This was the night.
Did Descartes dream like this?
No.

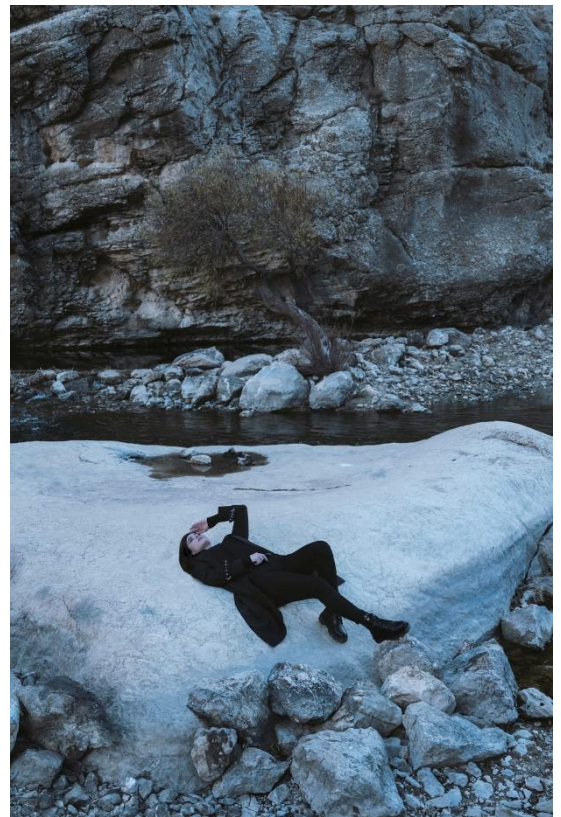


Second Dream

Midday.
Snow, frost, we are wearing gloves,
Only twelve.
From here, there, and everywhere
A piercing noise occurs
And echoes our ears –
He stayed twelve.
A voice, as loud as the explosion:
“Back here, queer runt!”
Didn’t mean me. Meant Ana.
The bizarre way Francisco Franco smiles.
Opening my eyes makes me see
A large number of fiery sparks.
This is only natural –
I am not resilient
So I remember.
Did Descartes dream like this?
No.

Third Dream

After an eternity –
Trapped like a bug in amber
Slaying word after word
Bending them to my will –
A table.
Remember how, an eternity ago –
how fast the sound
how high the taste
how deep the smell
how long the look
how soft the touch –
Now, a Dictionary.
Quod vitae sectabor iter?
Did Descartes dream like this?
I turn to him –
Est et non.
He did. He did!



Katarina L6



Opening Chapter - *Silverback*



My legs still ached from the daily walk from home to school. We were all sitting in a small room filled with nothing but desks and an irritated teacher. My eyes wandered to the window, I was met by the piercing eyes of a beautiful cream bird, speckled with black dots. I was mesmerised by the low hoot coming from the elegant creature. She was probably wondering what we were doing on the fifth floor of a giant building. A low, cross grumble awoke me from my thoughts.

“Ivy Warewood!” That’s me, Ivy Warewood. It’s quite a stupid name but I like it. “Can you tell me what the answer is?” That’s Miss Herby, and as you can probably tell, she hates me. Well, she despises everyone, but she just absolutely hates me for no reason. “Daydreaming again, are you?”

“Oh- um- I’m sorry Miss Herby.” (I had to stop myself from sniggering at her name.) “The answer is....”

“It’s a transitive verb,” whispered Heather.

Heather James was the girl sitting next to me, she wasn’t just any girl, she was the best girl in the world. Heather James is my one and only friend. We have known each other since we started school all those years ago. She is like family to me.



“It’s a transitive verb,” I said with confidence, knowing that my best friend ever won’t let me down.

“Hmmm..... well done Heather, but Ivy, next time I expect you to actually be listening to my lessons instead of staring out of the window being in your own little world!”

“Sorry miss.”

I could see the anger radiating from her. Talk about *me* in my own world, *she* is always in her own bubble of anger and hatred. Her, old, brittle bones are nearly visible through her pale skin. If she got any more angry, then I swear she would explode (which would probably be the best moment of my life).

“Ivy, stay behind at the end.”

A deafening ring filled the room, indicating it was lunch time. Everyone rushed for the door to freedom, tripping over one another as the stampede of classes filled the corridor. Everyone left with big smiles on their faces. Apart from me. Anxiety filled me as Miss Herby gave me one of her death stares.

“Do I have to give you another detention?” Miss Herby gave me a type of stare where you just know she’s not going to let any silly excuses go.

“Sorry, I won’t do it again.” I tried to sound confident, but it’s not true. I don’t even know what I did wrong. It may be because I wasn’t listening in her boring lesson, or that she just loathes me.

“Good,” the old lady gestured to the door on her left, beckoning me to finally leave this horrible beast’s den.



I stepped out, onto the grubby floor of the school hallway. Over the years these poor corridors have had many excited children running through them, breaking the school rules. I took two, bouncy, filled with excitement steps and wondered what was for lunch. I was met by a broad shouldered boy, Troy Datie. Standing in front of him was his twin sister, Hanna Datie. She has the brightest red hair I’ve ever seen. They were

known commonly as the ‘Devil Duo’. If I hadn’t been so paralysed by fear of these, the school’s most malicious pair, then I would have shielded my pale grey eyes from Hanna’s bright hair. I slowly turned on my heel and paced back down the safety of the corridor, only to be blocked by a rough hand on my shoulder.



“Where do you think you’re going, weakling?” growled Troy. His mud brown eyes were hungry for fear, just like his sister’s.

“Are you going to cry?” Hanna questioned in a patronising voice.

I stood there in the middle of the corridor, wondering where to go. Should I shout for a teacher? No, they would never forgive me for getting them into big trouble. Maybe I could make a run for it? No, last time I did that they chased me all the way back to my little grey thatched cottage. My mum was out so I had to hide in my room listening to the Devil Duo banging on the door, shouting something about how dumb I was.

“Awwww, do you want a tissue for your little nosie?” Troy pretended to blubber; tightening his grip on my arm as I slowly retreated from this horrible scene.

“What shall we do with her now?” hissed Hanna giving me a wicked stare, “I was thinking of the Dirty Box.” The Dirty Box is one of the “best” things they can do to you. They mock you and then push you into one of the freshly filled bins. They would hysterically laugh and then close the bin lid, enclosing you in a tight space that smells so bad you want to vomit. The only time when you ever see the sun again is when someone comes to put their mucky banana peel in, only to find a beaten up child where their banana should go. If you knew the other stuff they do to you then you should take this as a compliment. It basically means they like you.

I kept my mouth shut. I couldn't say anything. If I did I would never see the light of day again.

“C’mon Troy, drag her to the alley around the back. Make sure it’s got lots of garbage in it,” Hanna threatened. I tried to break free of the painfully tight grip of Troy, but he was stronger. He dragged me down the hallway without even looking back to see if I had tripped over. We made for the wooden white door at the end of the corridor. Hanna told me to shut up as I said, “Ow!” when I stubbed my toe clumsily on the door frame.

The fresh, midday atmosphere filled my lungs. I would have appreciated it much more if I wasn’t being hauled along by the meanest humans alive across the springy mint shaded grass. The brightly coloured flowers smiled at me but I didn't smile back (like I usually do). The birds were tweeting a welcome to the world’s sanctuary, but I didn’t say hello back. In fact, I was in such a bad mood I didn't even smile at the sight of Mr Davidson putting up the spring fair huts. My feet were being forced to move by Hanna and Troy.

We finally arrived at the grotty little alleyway at the side of the school. The concrete was covered in white dots due to irresponsible people spitting out their gum. There was one, dirty brown bin, just waiting to gobble up its latest treat: me.

I shivered, staring at the looming banana peel creeping closer to my face. Why do they do this? Why does everyone hate me so much? I have never done anything wrong (well apart from stealing a sweet from the cupboard like everyone has done.)



“Say hello to where you’re destined to stay,” Hanna grinned, and began to shove me closer.

Uh oh.

My fingertips burned, and my mouth tingled. In a flash nearly not memorable, I turned, anger churning in my stomach. Swiping my hands at her face, Hanna screamed and turned her face away from me, one hand cupped over her eye. I stomped up to Troy and bared my teeth like a wild beast.

What was I doing? I couldn't stop.

I pounced on him and prepared to bite. Saliva getting ready to have a party in my mouth. I could taste the flesh in my mouth even when nothing happened. It was like seeing a nice fat roast chicken on your plate and licking your lips. Troy shielded his face protectively.

“Ivy!” A strict, surprised and angry voice called.

I turned to see Miss Herby coming around the corner. Panic filled me. I wiped off the drop of dribble drooling from my mouth. What had I done?

I glanced at Hanna, and was astonished to see scratched, fresh red lines, dripping down her face. Guilt enveloped me, and I turned around and sprinted towards the woods before anyone could say anything else.

Sophie U3



Opening Chapter *Far, Far Away*

I could not contain my excitement. It was my first time sailing and the sun was slowly setting by now. I wasn't afraid of the dark. At least, I hoped I wasn't!

I steered the ship carefully, acknowledging the rest of the ship sleeping in their cabins. Grandpa told me not to, but I didn't care. I was going to prove myself as the best sailor in our family! I was getting nearer and nearer to the illuminated building, I smiled; we would arrive in only about thirty minutes, Grandpa would be so proud. I swerved past the rocky cliffs and peered up at the building in what seemed to glow beneath the star-strung sky. The cliff that held this lighthouse was old and crumbling, moss curling down the nooks and crannies of the rock, entwined with overrun buttercups. I massaged my hands, releasing them from the steering wheel as I took my hat off and bobbed my head at the lighthouse as a sign of respect. Legend has it sea monsters would engulf the sailors who did not show respect to this 'sacred' building. I paused a moment too long. I had, of course, not consulted the tide like Grandpa and it was rolling in faster than I had expected. The waves catapulted themselves upwards, sea foam bubbling as the waves rocked the ship precariously.

I jammed my hat on my head hastily, and tried to steer the ship, my hands felt weak and tired as they slowly lost control of the boat. Screams and cries filled the ship and women and men charged out of their compartments in pyjamas and night caps, demanding to know what was happening. I sunk back on to the steering wheel; looking at my feet, not wanting to see my families' disappointed faces. I kept trying to yank the steering wheel in the right direction as other sailors barged through the crowds pushing me away. I had done something wrong so I had to put it right. I looked up at the glow of the lighthouse and started waving my hands widely above my head for help. I doubted anybody would live in a great glowing dome but it was worth a shot.

I saw a flicker of a lantern inside the lighthouse and I edged towards the ship's decking, leaving Phineas in charge of the ships' wheel...

Gabrielle U3



Opening Chapter *Thirteen*



I was born knowing that I would die a premature death. We all were.

In my world, thirteen is an unlucky number. All the others like me, they die on their birthday, but it's always a birthday that's a multiple of thirteen. I knew someone recently that died at twenty-six. I never even knew that they were one of us.

It's just potluck. We are born, branded with a mark imprinted on our palms. On our thirteenth birthdays, we hold our breath, never knowing if we'll ever let it out again.

One in thirteen. Why did I have to be the thirteenth child?

The cockerel crowed, and it sent a shiver down my spine.

Three times, I thought. Never let it be three times.

It didn't matter. It wasn't my thirteenth birthday yet, so even if it crowed three times, it wouldn't kill me. Still, just hearing the empty call spurred on a cold flame rushing down my throat, causing me to taste bile.

Thirteen days to my birthday. That's when it all starts to go downhill.

Clenching my fists, so no one could see my mark, I hurried down the town square, attempting to spot my family in the crowd. I should never have stopped to watch the buskers. Now I would never find them!

But soon enough, my twin brother's unmarked hand waved above the sea of heads, followed by his unmistakably unique voice, "Ophelia! Over here!" Pushing people away (much to their distaste), I sprinted towards him.

"Angelo, thank God!" I hugged him briefly, before pulling away quickly.

"What happened?" One of my little sisters wondered. The three triplets stared up at me with wide eyes. It was almost funny.

You see, in my family, I had three, identical, little six-year-old triplets for little sisters, and a non-identical twin brother. Lucky for him, he didn't have an eye emblazoned on his palm, carved in like a curse. He was a medium-height, bright boy, with short, black hair, and a solemn attitude to life. He occasionally had a sense of humour, but it was hard for him when he knew my dying date was set in stone. We shared few aspects of our looks and



personality, but we both had the same hair, though I wore my charcoal hair in a single French braid down the back of my head, while he let his lie loosely over his eyes.

My three little triplet sisters were identical in nature and appearance, with very slight differences. They all had brown pigtails, though Tilly had a fringe. The other two were named Kate and Ariana. Kate and Tilly had dimples, and they all cheekily laughed at my jokes, even though Ariana was the naughtiest.

Three pairs of baby blue eyes gazed up at me expectantly.

“I stopped to watch the musicians and got lost,” I explained, watching their eyebrows go up as they listened to me.

My parents looked on at us grimly, knowing that in thirteen days, I could die. Of course, there’s a chance that I wouldn’t, but most people like me didn’t make it past thirteen.

My mother’s black ringlets covered her chocolate eyes slightly, hanging over her face to hide it. My brother and I took after her, though both our body builds were more like our father’s. He had straight, hazel hair, and emerald eyes which sparkled when he was excited.

“Let’s just go to the museum now, shall we?” Mum continued, in a forced, happy manner.

“Ok,”

My dad grabbed the hands of Tilly and Kate, who held onto Ariana tightly. My mum put her arms around Angelo’s and my backs, nudging us forward.

We often visited places like these at the weekend. All of us loved to sight-see, so we made frequent journeys to monuments and nationally famous attractions. Infatuated with the belief that I had to see everything before I died, my father insisted that we had to travel all the time.

Wandering up to “The Museum of Our Worlds and their Histories”, our parents hushed us in, and sat us down on the stools outside as they queued up to get tickets. I hung my head, leaning against Angelo sadly. “Thirteen days. We all know what that means...”

“Don’t say that, Ophelia. I won’t let you ruin your own birthday,”

I rolled my eyes. “There’s no birthday to be ruined. It’s just a day of being huddled up in my room, wearing ear defenders so as not to hear the cockerels.” I shivered. “They always find us anyway,”

He put an arm around me, and I swallowed the lump in my throat. There was no point in crying about something I knew would happen my whole life. It was so highly anticipated



that most families bought mourning dresses and suits in advance, but not my family. Dad believed that doing something like that would pre-curse the birthday sleepover to be my deathbed. Not that I was having one anyway.

Our parents returned, clasping four tickets in their right hands, flapping them at us excitedly, “Look, everyone! Kids six and under go free!”

My three little sisters squealed like the three little pigs, twirling around. Dad gave a deep, rumbling, laugh, and grabbed their hands, dragging them into the museum. Ariana tried to pull away and hide, but Dad just grabbed her by the waist and hurled her into the air, before catching her with gusto.

I sighed. In thirteen days, this could all be over. Fear choked me like a girdle, pulling at my waist and trying to jostle me into falling over. And I wouldn’t let it.

Swallowing thickly again, I stood up, shaking, and wobbled forward towards them. Angelo ran to catch up.

Later, we were wandering through an exhibit.

Ariana had her face squished to the glass case of a skeleton. It belonged to an animal that we were evolved from, with large bones, a hunched figure, and a horribly deformed skull. I shivered just looking at it, imagining myself at the claws of that beast. I wouldn’t stand a chance.



I turned to the other side of the room, attempting to distract myself. That side wasn’t much better either. A few other families were staring at it, in awe.

I looked a little closer. On the wall, a modern art piece thrived. It consisted of the number thirteen papier-mâché-d to the exhibit, which was a human skull mounted on the wall. Below it was a plaque, that read:

Ever since aeons ago, this legend has been known, and spread far and wide. Every thirteenth child is born, branded with a mark on their right hand. And what’s really interesting, is that it is exactly thirteen. See, in most statistics, the number you see is actually rounded up or down. In this one, it is exactly thirteen, and has always been. Exactly every thirteenth child is born with this mark. Many people believe that these children are cursed for the rest of their lives, and the evidence would suggest that these people are right, if you believe in such things.

I wanted to stop reading.

But I couldn’t.



Every thirteen years, that child has a chance of disappearing. Vanishing. A very high chance of disappearing, as scientists have worked out that it is two to one. Two times out of three, these children disappear on their thirteenth birthday. And likewise, in another thirteen years, on their twenty-sixth birthday, two times out of three, the remaining adults alive will disappear of the face of this planet. And how do we know if they will disappear? Well, it may seem unlikely, but if they hear the cockerel crow three times on said birthday, they go missing, and presumed dead. Many families lock their children in their rooms on those days, and plaster ear defenders on them, but the children are always tempted by fate, and take them off, only to face their last breath.

I stumbled as I read that last sentence and caught my breath. Why was I reading this? It was horrible, just plain horrible.

Now, why do people believe that they are cursed? Other than their disappearance, of course, their bad luck does not seem so bad. See, these children cannot die in the years between. Immortal, if you will, or as if their gravestone is already planted in place. Well, to answer that question, we must go back to thirteen days before a marked child's thirteenth birthday, or a marked adult's twenty-sixth, or thirty-ninth, etc. The bad luck begins to kick in.

A popular children's tale consists of Johnny, the-

I stopped reading abruptly, my breathing quickening, my pulse racing, feeling sick to my stomach. I didn't want to hear the story about Johnny again. Not now, not ever.

Not in this museum.

Rosemary U3

