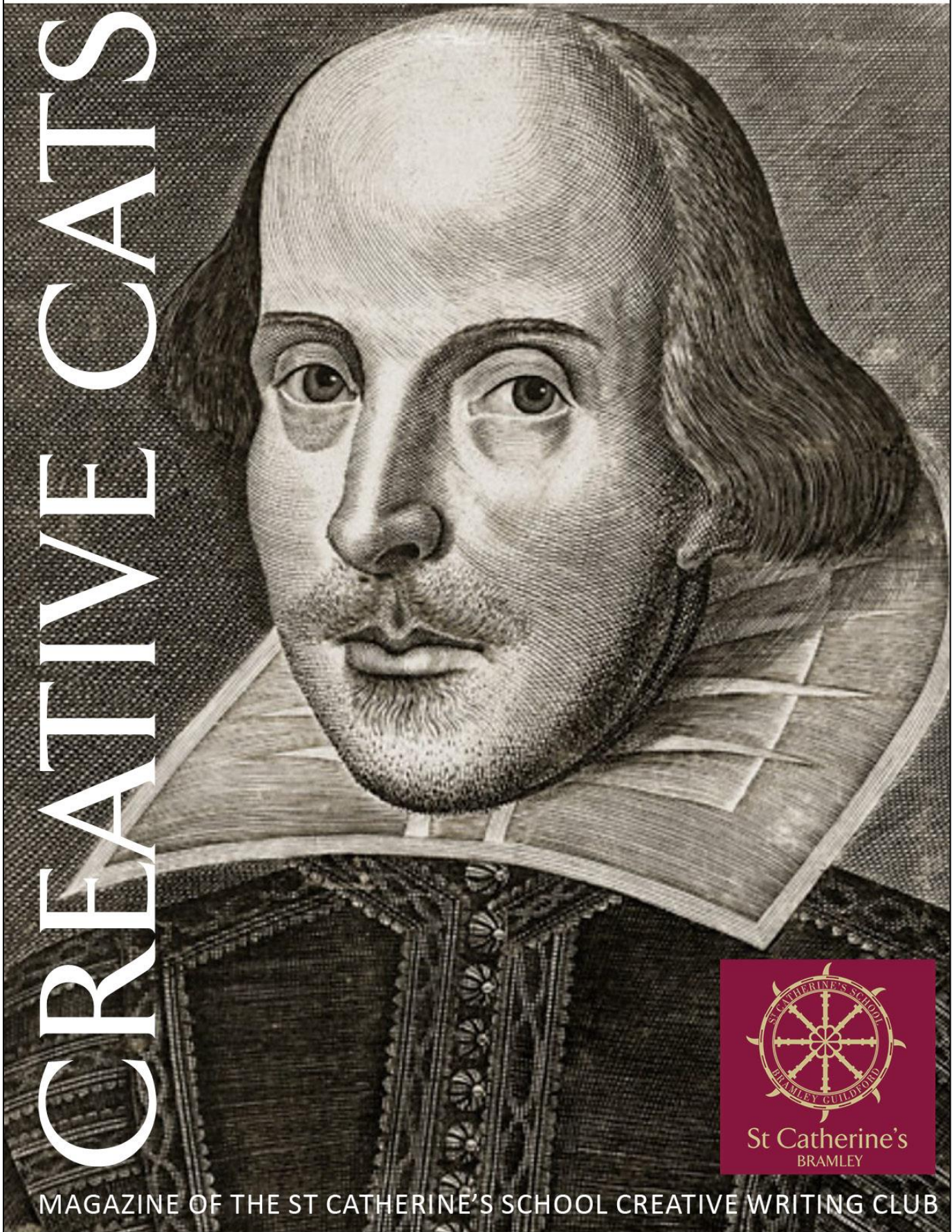


# CREATIVE CATS



MAGAZINE OF THE ST CATHERINE'S SCHOOL CREATIVE WRITING CLUB

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Welcome to the second edition of *Creative Cats*, our Creative Writing Club magazine.

We meet once a week on a Monday to discuss ideas, gain advice on writing skills, and to play literature-based games. Through Mrs Whittingham's expertise, and Hannah Wei's (U6) excellent presentations, we have developed our characterisation, style, and plot-lines. Our club was founded in the Autumn term of 2021, and I am delighted to say that due to popular demand we have expanded our club into two meetings: we have one for middle school and one for senior school.

I would like to express my utmost thanks to Mrs Whittingham for giving up her entire Monday lunchtime to run this club, for all the work she does behind-the-scenes to provide us with activities, and for putting together this annual publication.

This edition is an accumulation of writing that our members have written over the past academic year. We hope you enjoy this publication, and we hope that it will inspire you to pick up a pen and write your own pieces, whether that be a novel, poetry, short story, or script.

We are always willing to take new members, and we hope many of you will join us next year. I am delighted to announce that Olivia Healey and Alice Turner, our Creative Writing Prefects, will be helping Mrs Whittingham to run our meetings next year. I wish them every success for the year ahead, and I would like to thank them for their contributions and help over the past Summer term.

From all of us at the club, we wish you a pleasant summer, full of rest and preparation for the year ahead.

**Lucy U5**



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## Creative Writing Competition Winners 2023

The theme for this year's whole school Creative Writing Competition was 'Borrow From the Bard'. Entrants chose one of three quotations from Shakespeare as either inspiration for writing their own poem, short story, screenplay or play, or used the quotation within their entry.

*Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* provided the three quotations:

"The game's afoot"

"Murder most foul"

"I'll drown my book"

### First Prize and winner of the Creative Writing Cup

#### murder most foul

they found him dead the next morning.  
the sadness had run him through  
clean — not a speck of blood

on the floorboards,  
his skin spotless and stark  
white as the sheets.

they found him lying there  
half covered, half-risen,  
as if about to wake,

before he changed  
his sleeping mind.  
they could not see

that seven inch silent gash in his chest,  
the invisible stitches;  
austerity hanging on

by a single thread.  
this they did not see.  
they saw only

empty bottles on the ground,  
empty pill packets on the dresser.  
the scattered papers on his desk—



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all the contents of his heart  
buried by the contents of  
the filing cabinet from his london office.

the police found no outside involvement.  
the coroner shrugged.  
it must have been his liver, all that drinking,

his heart must have finally given out.  
it was a good way to go,  
in any case, they said.

peaceful.  
they took him away then,  
buried him the day after,

and all the strangers at the wake  
hung their heads and sighed.  
all the while the great crow

sorrow spread its wings  
black with guilt  
over the ones left behind.

**Hannah U6**



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## Second Prize

### I'll Drown My Book

He still flicks through the pages even though her body is six feet under.

They're a certain type of balm to his hurt, the letters she scribbled upon her father's old notebook, the stories reviving the most mundane of her days, and her poems, one a week, to try and keep her creativity alive. She read them out to him when he visited her, pride passing in little moon phases across her face, joy at the words she'd written, her sole focus in her later years, the thing that was still undeniably hers to create. Occasionally, she'd stumble on a 'd' or a 'b', a 't' or a 'p', the phonemes merging together in her mouth, but she'd pick herself back up again before he could dwell on it, and continue her lively recitation of her favourite works.

He remembers one of them now as he sits, forearm resting across his leg, his thumb the bookmark to one of her earlier journals. He'd never be able to properly recall her spoken words in his head, but his memory of her actions while she told the stories spoke a million of the words he couldn't hear himself.



This story was a funny one, he remembers that. She was living in rural France then, sitting on the back porch with one little terrier, Shake, on her lap, and the other, Speare, at her feet, sipping pink lemonade out of a small mug. The drink was all the rage at the time, a pungent mixture of chemicals that left an aura of strawberry scented fingerprints in its wake. She herself had left many of the little trails around her house, drops of pink liquid stained into the carpets and curtains, permanently stinking up the sink and sticking to furniture, capturing your sleeve when you rested an arm against a surface.

It was 7pm in the middle of the summer, afternoon wilting into evening, grasshoppers chirping between grass blades and a wash of colours on a steady, muted decline in the oversaturated sky. He was swiftly running out of conversation topics, and she wasn't in the mood to speak. Silence had run for several minutes.



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He was starting to shift uncomfortably as he grasped for another subject, when she turned to him, and asked, "Do you remember what happened to the Christmas tree?"

He frowned, confused. "The Christmas tree?"

"The Christmas tree. The one you set on fire."

"I set a Christmas tree on fire?"

He tried not to scoff the words, but her expression still waned into quiet irritation.



"Yes. In 1987. Peter gave you a candle to hold, and you dropped it on the lowest branch. Half of it burnt before we managed to put it out."

He had a vague recollection of the smell of burning pine, but nothing beyond that.

She could tell he didn't believe her, shaking her head and looking out into the garden again. "Ask Peter. He'll tell you it happened."

His heart constricted a little. "I will ask him."

She nodded, satisfied. "Next Christmas."

He didn't say a word.

That Christmas had passed without a word from Peter, along with the many others that followed, and the many prior. It was only at his mother's funeral that he finally caught a glimpse of his brother's freckled face, creases starting to line the harsh edges of his eyes, his strong nose and thin lips just as stony as he remembered. They talked once, a brief exchange of words, before moving to their respective sides of the aisle. Accepting the divide their mother's heritage came with.

He breathes in deeply, pushing away the scent of roses on his mother's grave. That was probably one of the last times he'd ever see his brother. Neither had a place in the other's life.

Again, he turns to the book in his hand, the sheafs of paper starting to decay, the ink already fading on some of the earlier pages. She never wanted a computer or even a typewriter, refusing any technology for her simple pen and paper. It never made sense to him. It still doesn't. Now her writing would disappear with the passage of time, unattainable for the future generations of her family, only preserved in the memories of those who knew her. He's wondered several times if his future children would believe in her works when he tells



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them. If they would blame it on old age too, when he tries to tell them stories of their childhood, when he tells them stories of their grandmother, if they'll believe him when he says she was the most undervalued writer of her generation. A budding flame denied her wildfire.

He takes the book, turns it over in his hands. *It's just a book*, he reminds himself as he brushes the gathering dust off the cover. *It's just a book*. He holds it close to his chest, wishes the others are close enough so he can hold them too. Hold all of those pages, those pieces that make up the ghost of his mother.

One of the most distinctive memories of her in his mind was on a family holiday when he was just four or five, him a small, impish creature with muddy brown hair and an appetite for mischief, her almost god-like in demeanour, words, height and punishment. Peter was just an aloof thirteen year old rather than an algebra-wielding sceptic, but already lacking a general empathy for his surroundings and a fast-growing passion for things that could be absorbed from a textbook.

The trio were sitting in the overheated and under-furnished living room of their holiday house, the boys on the floor while their mother looked down critically from her threadbare throne. There might've been some other masculine figure in the back, some friend of Peter's perhaps, but those details have merged in his mind over the years.

Mother took a long sip of her Irish coffee, and let her eyes wander over the two with pursed lips. They quickly snagged on the elder brother, narrowing like a shrivelling leaf. Both boys shifted slightly away from her.

"Peter, dear, when was the last time we cut your hair?"

No papers on the unemployment rate could save him from that question. "Uhm..." he stuttered, his chapped lips catching on his braces, "a few days after the swan attacked Socrates."

Socrates, Peter's worst enemy, their Mother's beloved Jack Russell, with constant tears leaking from his eyes and claws too thick to be cut with pliers. The dog perked his ears up at his name, his head lifting up off the mat, before shrinking back into his position at the blistering look exchanged between the two.

"I asked for a *date*, Peter, not a memory."

"I don't know. Check the calendar."

A wooden-soled slipper followed his sentence into the bedroom, and when he was at the beach the next day, a giant shoe-shaped bruise was etched into the pale skin of his back. That was the day we learnt to fear Mother. Mother had supreme authority over all beings in the house.



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His childhood perspectives weren't the most rational of course, but now they feel like some kind of missing puzzle piece, a key to his understanding of her that he hadn't appreciated before, the prologue that helps him begin to fathom the woman she was. Degeneration in old age is the curse of his family, so all he can really hope for is that the intertwined mix of her journals and memories of his youth will be the things that stand the test of decomposing brain matter, the trinkets he holds onto until his time comes to pass.

He stands, the journal tightly gripped in his hand, pushing his whiskey glass away with a sharp flick of his finger. Each step from his desk is clipped, impatient, irritated by the time it takes to navigate through moulding cushions, antique furniture, half-rotted artwork and other titbits his mother took a fancy to. Loose bills and receipts flutter angrily between the gaps in the cramped space, but none of their complaints snatch his attention away from his one, singular purpose.

Reaching the office's corner, he stops in front of a tall, cylindrical barrel. He lifts the lid with a gentle reverence, and a warm, smoky smell permeates the air in a mass of sticky, orange liquid. Indistinct shapes of objects deep within cast shadows across the base of the wood, and with a deep breath, he drops the journal in, using a long stick to push it down till it joins the swarm of the other papers, the other works of his mother.

So while her ashes may journey from her vase, and her name may fade upon her grave, her writings will be drowned, unreachable, in a cask of amber.

## Alice L6





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## Third Prize

### I'll Drown My Book

There are few things which frighten the girl as much as *you* do. In fact, there is nothing. *You* bring on a visceral feeling within her; all logical intellect has been lost. The water lapses onto the sand. She has been told to write *you* down. This act of chirography does not bring her solace. It makes *you* stronger; it fuels *you*. She contemplates tossing the notebook into the sea. She wants to drown *you*; She wants to crush *your* soul as *you* have crushed hers. She wants to crunch her teeth through *your* flesh and bone until she bleeds with exultation.

She has not run from *you* quick enough, it appears. She is caught in *your* web; She is strangled by *your* lattice of words; she am choking on *your* potency. *Your* nails are clawing at her insides. Blood froths in her mouth with the disgust *you* have emulated inside of her. She scratches down *your* lattice onto the paper. The words are barely legible; she can fit merely three words on a line. *You* are so big, so powerful, so transient.

She is running out of paper;

"You are running out of time," *you* tell her.

There is nothing left of her but *you*.

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We are at the battle stage now. She must repeat things a certain number of times. Number of times. Number of times. She flinches when *you* speak to her. She must make sure nothing could possibly suggest that she agrees with *you*.

She glues herself to the sofa. She must not move; She is in danger. *You* are back, not that *you* ever really leave. *You* chain her up again, laughing. *Your* words echo around the bedchamber; she can hear nothing but *you*. *You* crunch through her bone. She cannot breathe. She tells *you* this as she convulses on the bed.

I hate *you*, I hate *you*, I hate *you*, I fear *you*, she says. The girl fears *you* as Cupid fears chastity, as the retina fears the sun, as the oppressed fear the autocrat.

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The girl does not write in that book anymore. She drowned it in flame earlier this week. The girl is not scared of the autocrat. The girl does not convulse on her bed with fear.

The girl burned *your* chains. She went back to where the water lapses on the sand. She resided there for days. She killed the autocrat with her bare hands. She is no longer tormented; she is no longer afraid.

The lattice of words was smashed by her. Words no longer layer in her mind, compacting with pressure and time. She sliced through the wire that *you* strangled her with. She cut every bit up, mindfully, relishing the exultation she felt. She set the pieces on fire and bathed in the incense, catapulting every last bit into the sky. They say she is seen sitting on that beach, creating firework displays out of barbed wire.

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The girl read many books on *you*. She was told what *you* really were. Day by day she cut through the lattice of words. She reads books on *you* for fun. The girl laughs at *you*. The girl still hates *you*, *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*. The girl hates *you* for planting your abhorrent word lattice of thoughts in her head for years. The girl hates *you* for making her nothing more than the sum of obsessions. The girl now believes in justice, that the autocrats never win. The girl is educated; the girl is potent. The girl is me. *You* are not.

**Lucy U5**



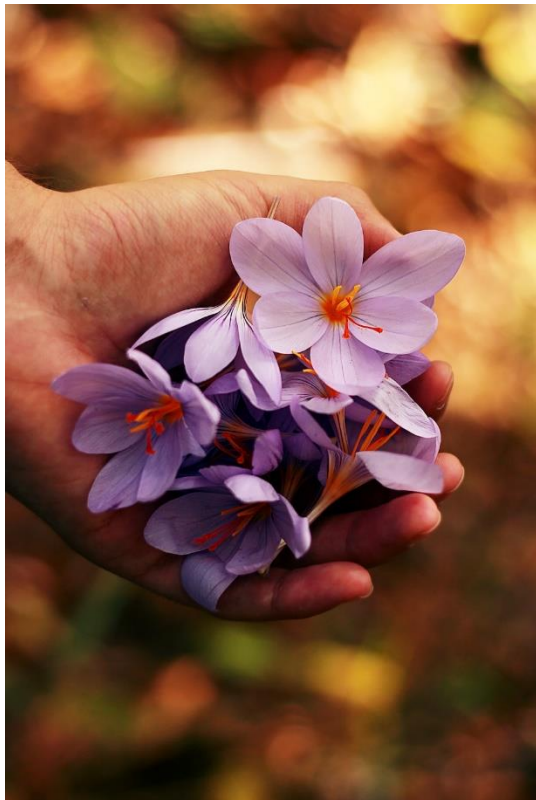
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## Highly Commended

### Escape? (Murder Most Foul)

They whispered from the flowerbed, demanding attention by waving tiny leaves in the air, crying out for more water, more food, more love. She shushed them with a watering can, tending to the blinding purple blooms she had so carefully created from seeds found crushed in an old book. They had matured slowly, draining her energy with endless nurturing and growing and giving. She felt a duty to care for them for she had committed to helping them grow. She had persevered, knowing this moment would come, the moment they bloomed so brightly, full grown and open to the world. The moment she could finally fix things for herself.

The door slammed against the wall. She jumped, cutting her hand on the rusted edge of the windowsill. A man's voice called for attention. She returned inside, leading him back to the sofa and encouraging him to lie down and sleep for a little longer, rest his aching limbs and tired mind. "Where were you?" he demanded, resisting her suggestions to slow down, ease his urgency, relax a little. "I have work. What day is it?" He's confused, she tells him, he's been sleeping peacefully for a small while, not too long. He's been inside, patiently lying on the sofa while she's been in the garden, tending to the pretty plants and flowers. He likes the garden, with the birds, the trees and the pond with its shimmering, smooth- "But you- " he stumbled, his words, his...as she rested a gentle palm on his cheek. She's going to the garden now, but when she returns, she'll have some lovely flowers to show him. He loves the flowers, how they present their rosy cheeks to the garden, blushing in red, orange, pink, and purple.



Their stems snapped as they escaped the soil. A glint of milky-green shone from under the cut, retreating in disappointment at the gloved hand that gripped them tighter. She couldn't delay any longer, they told her, it had to be now. Her eyes locked on a drop of sap collecting at the end of a stalk. The corners of her mouth lifted slightly as she watched the light infiltrate its cloudy mist, trapped inside the bead of liquid as it grew, perfectly balanced on the edge of up and down. Then it fell. The ground beneath bristled, waiting for impact. The grass shivered, suddenly wishing it wasn't so firmly rooted in the soil, that it had chosen to make its home in some other garden, any other garden, a garden far, far away.

Her strides followed the steady beat of her heart. The door opened and she entered the kitchen. Her body was still and neat. Her hair was perfectly in place. Only her eyes flickered to the living room door, to the garden, to the soft,



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yellowed pages of her only book, with the purple petals imprinted in her brain. She exhaled. For a moment, her breath felt warm and reassuring, familiar, almost like she should stop and...but the feeling was gone.

Two mugs. One for her and one for him. The book called her across the kitchen, and her arms reached out, catching the curved handles of the mugs, pulling them from their hiding place. The kettle boiled slowly, whining under the heat until steam was released from its mouth, breathing a sigh of relief as the cloud of droplets dissipated, invisible in the air.

Her finger underlined the instructions, checking every detail. Liquid oozed from their stalks as she crushed them, gathering in a small, circular bowl, glowing in the half-light with a pearly iridescence. Her eyes were fixed on the petals as they fell, unwavering, unblinking.

The distant growl of an engine starting, like an animal preparing for a fight, disturbed her focus and fought the thin walls of the kitchen. The headlights of the car cast shadows on her face, and for a moment there were dark circles under her eyes, red and raw, a maroon colour, weighing down her heavy eyelids. She blinked. This was what she wanted. What she had waited for, yes, for many years now, and she had found the book and could finally escape. Her head nodded in agreement as her hands poured the gleaming liquid into a mug, sprinkling the petals on top.

The handle turned and the door crept open. Her silhouette carved into his eyes as he squinted between lashes, creasing his forehead in concentration. In her hands were two pale mugs, the vapours peeling off the surface and dancing in the air, their celebratory pirouettes halted by the cold window which turned them to tears. He scowled, "You're back." She twisted her neck, her face obscured in the shadows, standing so stiff and so straight in the doorway. Eventually, her head nodded, her feet taking her to him, planting her next to his seat. Her gloved hand reached for a mug, twisting around its handle and slowly, painfully, extending it towards his closed fists. He peered over the rim, and ripped the drink from her grip. She held one herself, feeling its heated surface against her fingertips that were tainted with a sickly stain. She watched, paralysed as he brought it to his lips, as the liquid travelled down his throat. Her feet were rooted to the floor, unable to move. She took a sip from her own mug. He stared at her, waiting for something. What was it? Why was he just sitting there, why wasn't it working? Then she saw it, the sprinkle of petals, floating in her cup, laughing at her while her vision skewed, the colours of the room twisting together, greens to yellows, oranges to pinks, leaving only purple.

**Ella U5**



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## Murder Most Foul

### Chapter one – Tina

I hate these kinds of parties. Every year, Mum hosts a big family gathering at our house, where our family will come over and make small talk over a meal. It doesn't sound too bad, right? Well, it wasn't! That is of course until Nathaniel arrived. Ever since he darkened our doorstep, it's been hell. Our 'Family dinners' haven't ever made it to the main course, primarily because he believes he's here to stay, and can't take the hint that he is here to make my dad jealous, despite it being yelled at him many times. I hate him.



He's stupid as well. Or in denial. I honestly don't know which one is worse. He thinks my mum asking him to live with us ten days before the party is a "coincidence and nothing more", and he makes it very clear that he thinks he's here to stay. My plan was to shut myself in my room this year and maybe even sneak out to hang out with my friends, but perhaps I was a little bit too open about my hatred towards Nathaniel, because last night Mum made me promise to keep an open mind about him and "try as much as he is", but I don't know how that's going to work, seeing as I don't believe he's even trying in the first place. If he wants me to like him more, he should leave. Forever. That would be trying.

### Chapter two – Chase

I look out my window. Yep, three extra cars parked in our driveway. I love my family, but this is going to be hell. They have no idea what's coming.

"Chase my god, you're so grown up!" Aunt Jennifer exclaims as she pushes past Nathaniel to



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give me a hug. Nathaniel isn't surprised. He's aware she hates him. My heart warms as I smile and lean in. I love Jenni. She's that cool aunt you can always turn to; we even share the same colourful opinions towards Nathaniel.



My sister comes down the stairs and launches herself into Jenni's direction, forcing me out of the way. Liking Aunt Jenni isn't an unpopular opinion. Even Mum has admitted many times that she prefers Jenni over Angelina. Jenni's just very easy to like; Angelina's very easy to hate.

There's something about her though; that mystery factor you just can't explain.

"Hi darling" Angelina pushes herself and her four bags through the door and leans in for a polite hug with Nathaniel. Apart from mum she's the first person to speak to him all day. As she trunks towards me I catch a glimpse of an eye roll. Like us, she hates Nathaniel, but for some reason she always keeps up the illusion of friendship with him. I'm not sure why.

### **Chapter three - Laura**

The room is so silent you could hear a pin drop. You would think seven people in a room would have something to talk about, but no. It's so quiet I can hear my own thoughts; I almost want some drama.

"Five more minutes on the potatoes and we should be good to go," I lie. They're ready now. I just need to break the tension in the room.



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"I'll go get Nathaniel, " Angelina says, standing up from the table and walking slowly to get him. I don't even think she likes him: She's probably just trying to be anywhere but here, even if that means having to talk to him. I don't blame her. I nod and turn back towards the counter, to avoid awkward eye contact.



I'm usually good at these kinds of situations; my PTA is always taking in new members which usually means there's some awkwardness in the air, but I'm usually able to dilute it and make conversation, but this. This is so bad there's nothing to be done; I just have to wait it out.

Angelina walks in at a faster pace than before. Her face is horrified and her hands are shaking. I see a tear roll down her face. I'm concerned; Angelina never cries.

"He's dead," she says laconically.

"Who's dead?"

"Nathaniel. Nathaniel's dead."

Chapter four - David

"We got a call about a murder"

"Come in," I say flatly. I almost say 'no, not us, wrong house', but it was us. It doesn't feel real. I keep thinking I'm going to wake up and this will all just be a bad dream, but it's not. It's not a dream. Nathaniel's dead, and one of us killed him.

The police officers have been in the room where it happened for over thirty minutes. My hands are sweating badly. I'm scared. As they finally come out and the door knob turns, I half expect to see Nathaniel walking out looking good as new, with his usual smug face. I hate his face. I hate him.



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“Ok, I know you are all very scared and sad, but here's what you need to know. At five forty



six Nathaniel Smody was found dead in his study, with a knife impaled in his chest. He was last seen in the corridor, by all of you.” Shock runs through the room. Hearing it said out loud is terrifying.

“Seeing as this was no accident, I will be conducting interviews as of right now. No one is to leave the premises until further notice. If you are seen trying to exit, I will assume you're guilty. Is that clear?” everyone nods straight away. Now it feels real.

### **Chapter five - Jennifer**

“Tell me what happened.”

I feel as if I'm in a movie. What am I meant to say? There was no blood curling scream, ear piercing screech or bloody fingerprints anywhere. It was so, ordinary.

As I am telling him, his expression becomes more and more underwhelmed. I think he was expecting something more. He picks up his notebook and writes something down. My palms start to sweat.

“How long was she gone for?”

“Around one minute or so,” I deliver. The officer sighs deeply and leans forward on his chair, closing his notebook.

“Do you know how long I've been on the force Jennifer? Seventeen years. I know this is probably going to be the biggest thing to ever happen to you, but for me, this is an average Tuesday.” I nod. I don't know where he's going with this.

“I know these types of cases backwards and forwards. I know that things are hidden.”





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“Why are you telling me this?” I say bluntly. I don't mean to be rude, it just comes out. I don't understand what he wants.

The officer slightly smiles.



“I just want the truth. I'm not even saying you did it, but is there anything you want to tell me? Any details you may have missed out? Anyone acting off today?” He takes a long pause. “Do you have anything to say at all?”

I stare at him. My mouth feels like it was sewn shut. I don't know what to say. What should I say? What's too much? Do I even know anything?

### **Chapter six - Angelina**

“So, at the moment we have the information we need, but now we need to understand your point of view. So, in your own words, tell me, why do you think he was murdered?”

I pause. It takes me a second to gather all my reasons.

“Nathaniel was a very annoying character, to put it delicately. From what I hear, he constantly reminded the kids of how he was here to stay, and he never truly listened to Laura. He had zero respect for me or Jenni, even when we drove four hours to get here. He



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didn't care about his impression on anyone, except David. He cared so much, but only to create a bad relationship with him. I feel bad for the guy; divorced, alone, being tormented by his ex wife's new idiot." I chuckle, "I don't blame the guy for killing him."



I freeze. It just slipped out. I can't believe it. How could I have done this? When David broke down to me a couple of months ago about how much he loathed Nathaniel, and how he had never felt this kind of hatred before, I told him he should do something cathartic; slash his tires, catfish him, that sort of thing. But then, he mentioned murder, and I couldn't tell him not to do it. If I was in his position, I would have killed myself by now, just from the pain. I just, I couldn't tell him it was a bad idea. So, he took my silence as advice to go through with it, and he told me we shouldn't discuss it anymore so I'm not involved. But now, I think it's too late for that; I just admitted two things to the police officer. Number one, David is the murder. Number two, I knew.

**Veronica L5**



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## The Game's Afoot

"The game's afoot, my friend. The magical night of the triads is beginning," I whispered to the friendly barn owl, eyes sparkling in the moonlight as I lay on the soft grass. It was my favourite place, a sanctuary where a vibrant emerald blanket stayed fresh and green all year round, surrounded by swathes of thicket, and in the Spring, an array of sweet-scented, multicoloured flowers.

Every night, at exactly midnight, I crept from my bed and out into the garden, carrying piles of half-drawn star charts, astronomy books, and my beloved pocket telescope. I loved stargazing, and liked to think of it as a game the stars were playing, trying to cross the sky without being seen. I always won the game, always witnessed every little detail.

Soon, a shower of light danced out of the darkness, flew joyfully across the sky, and burst like a firework before being swallowed up by the distant trees. A couple of minutes, or what seemed like a couple of hours later, another spark of white amidst the blackness stealthily slithered its way from east to west, and faded before disappearing below the horizon.

Transfixed, I watched more stars, some bright and some dim, racing each other playfully. Taking out my compass, I began to track exactly where the stars dropped below the horizon, and drawing them into a map.

Suddenly, I heard a panicked shout from back down the winding path along which I had struggled, weighed down with equipment, some hours before.

"Down here!" I yelled back guiltily. It must be one of my parents. I had completely forgotten! We were leaving at 4 a.m., so that we'd arrive in the city in time for my dad's meeting.

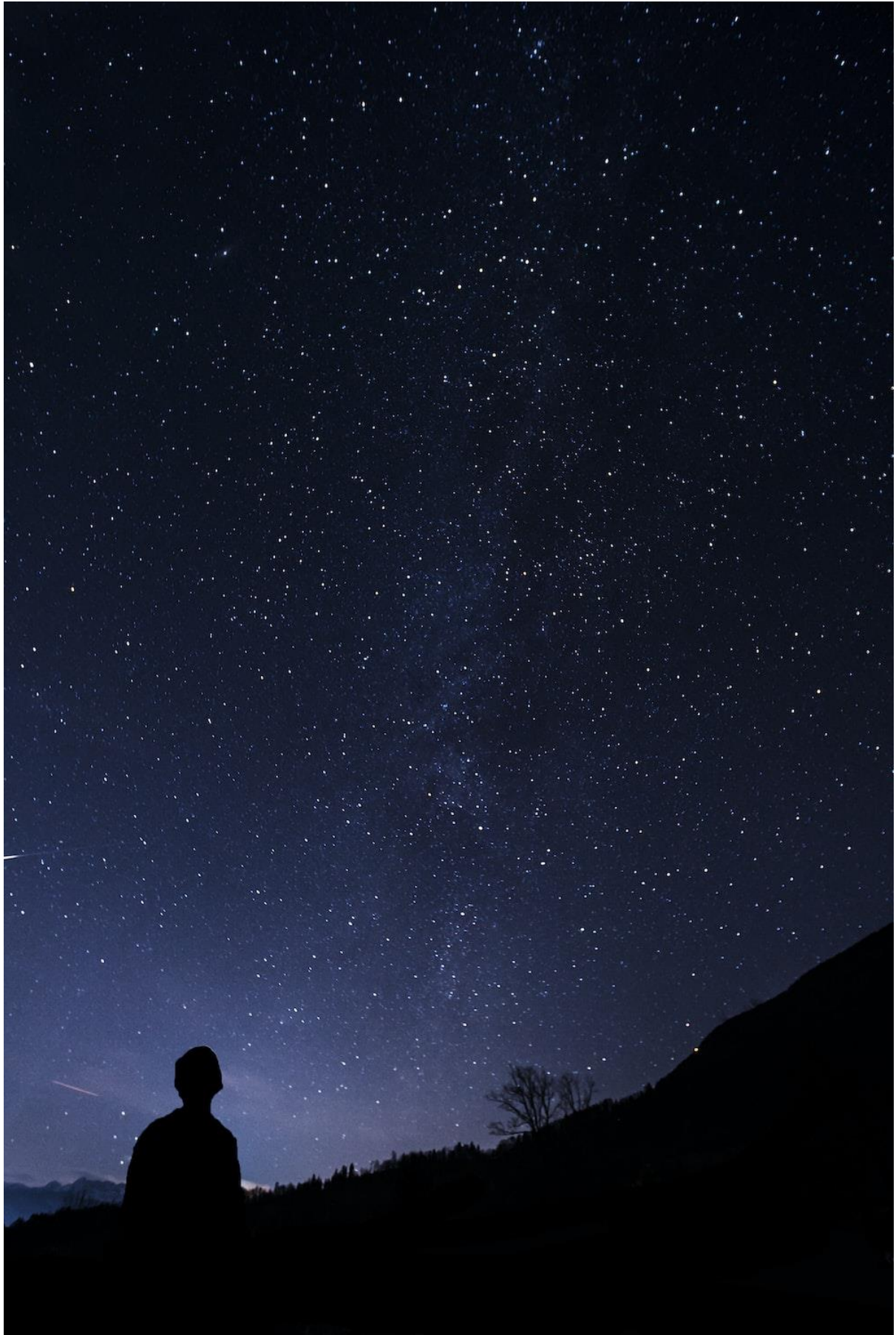
'Had I really been here that long?' I wondered. Sometimes, I lost myself for hours, comfortably submerged in the sky. Sometimes, the stars disappeared and I realised dawn had struck.

However, it was time to go, so, with huge effort, I dragged myself back to the present. Gathering up my things, I heard the owl whoosh past my ear, and felt a prickling sensation behind my eyes. This was my last night of stargazing here, in my cosy retreat, my special place. The owl settled amicably on my shoulder, sensing that I was upset. A hot tear slid down my cheek before I could stop it.

Just at that moment, I heard footsteps coming down the path. A sharp voice cracked in my ear out of nowhere, and as I jumped the owl hooted and fluttered away in terror.

"Whatever are you doing out here in the cold?" it was my dad, and the note of concern in his deep voice made me cringe with guilt. Another tear squeezed itself out through the corner of my eyelash, though I stubbornly shut my eyes.





St Catherine's School  
BRAMLEY

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Struggling for an explanation, I gazed off in the direction of the owl, seizing the moment, as dad anxiously glanced back down the path, to wipe my wet cheeks with a tear-soaked sleeve.

“Well,” he was saying kindly, “We should really get back, whatever it is you were doing, it doesn’t matter for now. We’re leaving this morning, remember?” I felt grateful to my dad for brushing aside the strange circumstances in which he had found me, so, rather reluctantly, I took a last look at the patch of grass, and turned to go.

I ran straight up to my room as soon as we arrived home. I couldn’t face my mum, knowing the terrible panic I had caused her when she found my bed empty. She wouldn’t be angry, not today, but I would feel angry with myself, and that was the worst thing of all.

I looked around at all my equipment, books, star-charts, compasses and telescopes which I had painstakingly collected and kept in perfect condition over the years. Now I had to leave it behind. All that work, that commitment. For nothing. To be left to rot in our dusty old house.

Our dusty old house... it was then that the glimmerings of an idea stealthily crept into my head.

Fully packed, I crept downstairs, praying that none would creak, to find breakfast. No one was in the kitchen, which was lucky, since I was still anxious to avoid the cold glare my mum would cast upon me when she had the chance.

Squinting into the almost empty cupboard for some bread or cereal, I was surprised to find a pile of dust-blanketed tins with faded, peeling labels. Then the idea started to claw away at my head, squeezing it from all directions. No one could go hungry in this house.

Although hunger continued to eat away at my stomach, I soon gave up on my attempts to find fresh breakfast, fearing, as a tin of pineapple dated over 20 years ago crashed to the floor, that I would be heard and cause my parents yet more worry and irritation. I crept back up the stairs, scurrying hurriedly into my room as the sound of footsteps echoed from down the hall.

Then, suddenly, as I glimpsed the headline of my favourite light-pollution article, the idea took hold of me. I wouldn't go, I couldn't leave the place where I had lived, loved and grown my dearest passions all my life. Any fool knows you can't see the stars in the city, and what would I be without stars? I would stay in the musty old house, it would be me and the stars together, and the beautiful barn owl to keep us company.

Engrossed in this daydream, I slid into my plotting mood, and, mindful that there were only fifteen minutes left before I was supposed to climb into the car and drive away forever, and that my parents were already suspicious of my sneaking out of bed at night, I filtered through my brain, trying to think of a way to stay here without my parents noticing, at least until it was too late to come back.



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Six minutes. Six minutes to go. Six minutes to carry out my plan. Six minutes until... Until I was free. From now on, I wouldn't just be a spectator in the stars' game, I would be a player.

A bolt of excitement shot down me like lightning.

With trembling hands, I pulled out my huge rucksack, which I had regretfully decided to leave behind, and covered it with a blanket. I lugged it downstairs, glancing to see that my parents were still in the kitchen, which they were, packing food for the journey. Stage one of my plan complete.

Four minutes. Four minutes in which my plan could still go wrong. Four minutes in which my heart beat faster every second, so that by the end it would break out of my chest and be free to go its own way. Four minutes until my heart could sing as loud as it wanted and no one would hear it. A sliver of doubt wormed into my carefully weaved plan. What if my parents realised and came back for me before there was time to hide? No, no they wouldn't do that. If Dad was late for his meeting, he wouldn't get the promotion he was hoping for.

Carefully, I laid the rucksack, covered with the blanket, in the back of the car, and belted it in. Next, I flew to the kitchen and scooped up as many tins as possible in my arms, silently shrieking as a spider tickled up my arm and settled underneath my elbow. I didn't dare shake it off however, for there wasn't time, and I heard the sound of my parents slamming car doors, checking one final time. Hopefully they wouldn't check too hard.

Two minutes. One and a half. One minute left, and was I really sure I could do this, stay here, *alone*? I had climbed up my favourite tree. A place I felt safe, and where, ever since I could remember, the tree had allowed my agile body to shin up it's hefty trunk, and along sprawling arms right the way to it's leafy fingertips.

Now, my parents consulted their map, looking round affectionately to see 'me' sleeping under the blanket. In this way, they started slowly down the lane, rust-spotted car creaking under the weight of all our belongings.

As the car gained momentum, I found myself springing fearlessly off my high perch, leaping recklessly over the deep bank and sailing down the lane as if I had wings. The car stopped, the door was flung open and I dived gratefully inside. Stargazing was magical, but my family was even more important. But I'll never drown my book, because it's my special thing, playing with the stars, and I will never waste a night. Not ever.

My parents stared at me, and then at each other. My mum's lips twitched humorously, whilst my dad rolled his eyes in exasperation. *Best not to ask.*

## Scarlett U4



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## The Game's Afoot



I marched onto the battlefield, pride rushing through my peaky face. I knew my goal and where my loyalties lay: in my family heritage. As a royalist, it was my duty to uphold the King's honour as he had once helped my family by employing my father. I didn't know much about war, especially a war that had torn our own country apart and had left everyone in despair; both royalists and parliamentarians. If I am honest, I did not want to hurt the opposing team. I hated conflict in all senses and did not understand why all men had to fight. My father convinced me that it was my duty and that I would become a disgrace to our family if I did not choose to fight alongside King Charles; so, naturally, here I am now, trying to look proud and courageous and ignore my sweaty palms, which almost made me stumble with sword.

The battle commenced and immediately I noticed we were outnumbered: 9,000 to 13,500. I froze, paralysed in fear, my eyes only managing to squint over my comrades' shocked expressions. At least they ran, they ran and charged, hacking and slashing and defending our king, ignoring their fear and overcoming their shock instantly. My 'courageous' face was no longer there. My smile drooped at once at the sight of the slashing of the spears and the sounds of war cries from each side. My face was slowly turning white, all the worries I had cast away were slowly creeping out onto my skin. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Out of all of the things I had worried about and taken so many precautions against, being outnumbered was one I surely did not think of. I would have assumed almost everyone would have gone with the king and... and... I opened my eyes again. Staying still was not a good move. A parliamentarian had charged at my arm, his eyes wild and merciless and his carbine aloft. I do not know what overcome me now, as I look back. I ran. I ran and did not look back. I do not know how I barely missed the whole war, breaking through the crowds.



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The carbine has speared my arm, and throbbing, blood seeping out. I blinked back my tears, and kept running relying on my awful stamina to lead me to safety. The war cries rung in my ears and the close misses from people chasing me flickered before my eyes. I crouched beneath the small hill that was the only barrier between me and the danger, my fear. I tore off my sword belt, tossing it away, hilt down. I took off my knapsack, opening the top carefully. I grabbed some bandages and ale, and tended to my arm, still sobbing my heart out. I did not understand why I was crying, all I knew was I did not want to go back, not ever, never again. I ignored the guilt that lay at the back of my brain, I firmly shut my eyes blocking out all my memories. My bandaged arm throbbed still, and I rocked back and forth my hands wrapped around my knees. I needed the courage to go back and fight for my side, I knew that. But, I just didn't have it...

I woke up with a start to war cries and marching footsteps that scared me. Each footstep made me picture my team, hobbling back, clutching the wounded and reminded me of my selfishness. I wept, and tried to stop, knowing I had no real reason to cry as I had left men who were probably just as afraid as me, yet still fighting. Still fighting. I knew it was about time for me to go back, that, I had been hiding for long enough. Again, I did not know what kept me, but I simply ducked under the cover of the now damp hill and opened my knapsack fervently.

I picked up a book that had brought me so much joy in the past and immediately began pouring through the first chapter. I stopped my nervous chatter about my abandonment towards the Royalists and stroked the embellished spine which read 'Henry V,' in embossed golden letters instead. I forgot everything of my past and simply dived into the world of Shakespeare. I could practically imagine I was Henry V with the responsibility and stress of the monarchy dumped on my shoulders at such a young age, could picture Katherine, Fluellen, Falstaff rushing through my mind... I was stuck with my head in the book unable to escape. As soon as I put it down, an urge which wiped away my guilty conscience drew me back in, lured me into my book. It was almost a curse, yet a great comfort. For, it is easy to think everything is swell when really nothing is. With my attentive reading, I had finally gotten to my favourite bit, a passage that had made me volunteer for the army and let go of my worries. I wondered if this would work now. We were so outnumbered I doubted anything would get me back in battle. My flask and loaf of bread we're getting sparser. I knew I did not have the spirit to fight just yet, nor did I want to die from starvation, so I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, casting the rest of my life on Henry V's shoulders. I wanted to work but a small part of me knew no matter what I did, I would fail once again.

Finally, I mustered my senses to read on to the Battle of Agincourt. I could imagine myself as Henry, once again, boiling with fury at the French Dauphin's betrayal. I could feel the stress prickle up my spine as I realised we were outnumbered by the French. Yet Henry could not run like a coward, he had to keep going, he was the leader, their king. And, no matter what his pounding heart said to do, he followed his noble instincts. He went into battle commandeering his team so excellently that he managed to lead them to victory. In all my despair, I had forgotten the noble and strategic man Henry was, and had lost all sense. But, reading this passage once again gave me the urge to fight for my life and my side no matter the costs, as Henry once did. I closed my book with a sigh and felt my nervousness creeping up my skin once again. This time, however, I felt different despite the worries I had. I could





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do this and lead my teammates to victory with the help and hope of Henry V. Even if I didn't win, I could do this together with my team and fight for our King's life. As Shakespeare so famously stated in my now favourite book, the game's afoot. I would now die a soldier, just as I had hoped...

**Gabrielle L4**



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## Murder Most Foul

The only thing worse than the sight of a dead body, is the stench. It cakes your nostrils like a suffocating bag and plays in your heart until you gag.

And then, of course, is the dead body itself. It's cold and stiff, with misty, white eyes, and pale blue lips. If you've never experienced the death of a loved one, it feels frightening to gaze upon a corpse. If you have experienced it, then it's just a sad reminder of their life.

"Crystal!" yells my father, and I gently replace the sheet over the poor man's face.

"Coming!" I call, swallowing my nausea. I scale the stairs from the basement, my heart beating wildly. As I reach for the door - open it, slip through, and close it - I catch sight of my father's stifling glare.

"What were you doing down there?" he eyes me suspiciously.

"I-" Catching my breath, I swallow guiltily.

"Don't tell me you were looking at Frank Hardman's body again," he says.

I remain silent, biting my lip.

"That's not healthy, Crystal. He's dead, and ogling at his body is not respectful."

"But I think I can find out who the murderer is!" I blurt out desperately. He fixes me with a hard expression.

"No. You are to stay out of this, you hear me?"

I nod miserably, staring at the ground. "Now go, tidy your room, before the family get here to discuss arrangements," he orders.

Wandering away, my eyes begin to search the house for something interesting to look at. I find nothing, so I turn away, and scamper to my room.

It's filled with newspaper clippings, murder mystery books, and scribbles in notebooks every time I think I have a lead. The floor is scattered with *things*, things I ought not to have, but keep anyway.

In case you were wondering, my father owns a morgue, and he is in charge of storing bodies until the funerals, which is why we happen to have dead bodies in our basement. We don't go around *murdering* people.



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Or so I thought...

*Dinner the next night.*

I swirl my fork around my plate, without hunger or enthusiasm. My father sits at the head of the table, my mother adjacent to him.

“Are you going to eat that?” my mother’s sharp voice pierces through the stale air. I shrug. I couldn’t be less interested in eating. A question sits on the tip of my tongue, but I can’t bring myself to voice it.

“Well, eat it before it gets cold, or give it to one of us,” my father commands. I stay still for a few seconds, before pushing my plate away from me, disgusted. He takes it, and begins to gobble up the food. I watch him for a few seconds.

“How did you find his body? Frank’s, I mean,” I burst, suddenly. Breathlessly, I feel my eyes begin to shine with newfound curiosity.

My mother slams down her fork. “Crystal! We save more pleasant topics for meals like this. How can you talk so carelessly about that man?”

I bite my lip. “Sorry,” I mutter quietly.

My father slows his eating, apparently losing his appetite. When he has finished, he swallows thickly, and lays his cutlery on the tablecloth.

“Please, Crystal, go to your room. Your mother and I have things we must discuss this evening,”



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I nod miserably.

“We do?” my mother says, lifting her head curiously.

“Yes.”

Dragging my plate along with me, I rise from the table with dignity. Tiptoeing into the kitchen to load the dishwasher, my mind begins to spin with theories.

My father had said he had had a call from the local police station, asking him to come and collect a body. When he returned home, he called Frank’s family to inform them and offer his condolences.

My mother’s voice is raised, and I can hear her yelling at my father. Or maybe it’s my father yelling at my mother. I try not to listen in, but I am a curious soul, and catch snippets as I place my plate on the side.

“How could you?!” yells my father.

“How could *you*?!” yells my mother.

“You betrayed me!” my father replies angrily.

“You want to talk about betrayal? You- it- how could you? And why are you telling me about it now?!”

I shiver, knowing this isn’t a conversation I should be listening in to. I run away, but not to my bedroom; I run to the front door, and open it carefully. As I shut it on the other side, it makes a timid clicking sound, but my parents wouldn’t have heard it anyway. They are too preoccupied shouting about whatever they’ve done wrong recently.

The winter air nips at my nose, and I instantaneously regret not bringing a coat. The police station is just down the road; I shake my hair out of my eyes and begin briskly walking to keep warm. The cold gnaws at my flesh, and I my hands shake. I wipe them against my thighs, and continue.

The building looms in front of me, the blue logo shimmering like an opalescent jewel. I sprint up to it, and hammer on the door frantically. A policewoman jogs up to the glass and tugs the door open, her face full of consternation.

“What’s the matter?” she says with concern.

“It’s *cold* out there,” I reply emphatically, before stepping inside.

“Can I help you?” she begins with a stern voice.

I nod. “I wanted to ask a few questions about Frank Hardman’s murder,”



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Her expression darkens. "That's classified. And what would a little girl like you be doing asking about that anyway?"

"Please," I plead. I can be very persuasive when I want to. "I just want to know how you found him,"

She glares at me. "You're the morgue owner's daughter, aren't you?" she sighs. "Your father phoned us, saying he had found a body. We came to take a look at it, and concluded he was murdered through strangulation, before letting him take it home. The rest is classified, so get back before your parents start wondering where you are,"

I freeze, and I can practically hear my heart thumping frantically against my chest. "He lied to me. Why would he lie?"

She frowns. "What are you talking about?"

"He told me that *you* found the body, and phoned him to pick it up. Why would he lie?" I repeat, the words scratching in my throat.

She stares at me for a few seconds. "I think I'll take you home," she decides eventually. "What? No, you don't understand! I- he-"

I can feel speculations twisting around in my mind, each one worse than the last. Never mind. He's quite old, he could have just forgotten. Couldn't he...?

The policewoman grabs me by the wrist, and marches me down the street. I squirm in her grip, but fruitlessly, for she is too determined to let go.

I'm not cold anymore. No, I'm far too energised to be cold. But a feeling of dread is spreading throughout my bones like ice, a cold drip of sweat running down my back.

As we reach the door, I am now shaking with tenacity.

"No," I shriek. "Let me go!"

"This is for your own good."

Shouts emanate from inside the house, and the policewoman pauses.

"Why did you do it?! Just tell me why!" screams my mother. Worry clutched my stomach, and I stare at the unopened door.

"You know very well why," growls my father.

"Fine! I loved him. I admit it. That's no reason to murder an innocent man!"

"He committed adultery. That is far from innocent."



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“No. I committed adultery. He did nothing wrong.”

“Yes, but...” my father struggles for words, and I can hear the crazy anger in his voice. “but I couldn’t kill you. Never. But he deserved it!” he spat.

The policewoman stares at me in shock, before forcing open the door.

“Hands up!” she yells. “Anything you say can and will be used against you; I’m recording this entire conversation.”

“I-” my father begins.

“Oh, shut up, Simon.” snaps my mother. “You’ve had this coming for a while now. Arrest him!”

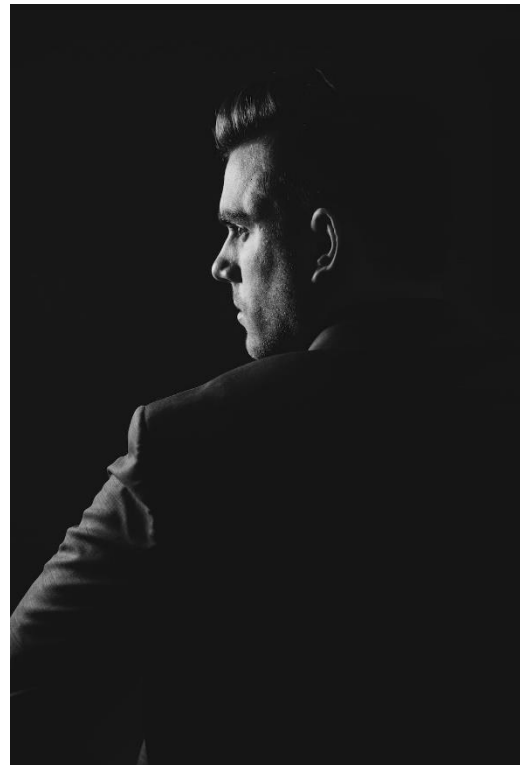
“This is all just a misunderstanding,” replies my father, his voice shaking, “I’m sure if we talked about this-”

“No,” I interrupt, and I my cheeks feel wet, though I don’t know when I’ve been crying. “I don’t want to talk to you. Ever again.”

He hangs his head low as the policewoman handcuffs his wrists, and I see his eyes fill with tears. A glimmer of sympathy sparks inside me, and I clench my fists to snuff it out. He doesn’t deserve sympathy.

And that is my story of a murder most foul.

## **Rosemary L4**



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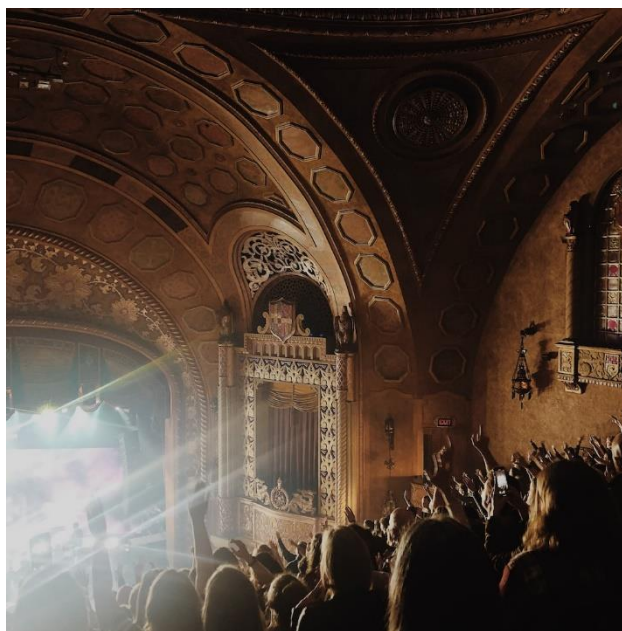
## The Game's Afoot

As soon as I enter the theatre, a warm ember lights in my heart and tingles through the rest of my body. I can feel my mother's soft hand resting on my shoulder, and when I look back at her, she gives me a gentle smile. We are both amazed that we are finally here to watch *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the theatre for the first time. I have seen what theatres look like before, but only in pictures and videos, so I cannot wait to see what this exciting experience will hold.

After my mother and I find our way to our seats, we sit down and I take off my coat. There are jolly families all around us, snacking on chocolate and opening sweet wrappers before the play begins. The scent of caramel and toffee apples drifts its way over to me, and up my nose. My mouth waters, just when I remember my mother and I had previously bought some popcorn for us to nibble on throughout the performance. "Can you pass me the popcorn, please?" I sweetly ask and mother grins and hands the large tub of popcorn to me. An explosion of flavour erupts in my mouth as soon as my teeth crunch into it, and a few crumbs fall onto my lap.

All of a sudden, I feel the lights around the theatre go from an enticing shine to a warm glow. The tuning of violins and cellos covers the entire audience in a blanket of silence. My mother grasps my slightly sweaty hand, and we smile at each other with ecstatic energy. As the silence begins, a harp sweetly plays a scale, and when the large, red curtains begin to part, I know that it's finally time. The wait is over. The game's afoot.

## Isabella U3



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## Girls' Schools Association Creative Writing Competition

Congratulations to Annabelle Duggan L6 whose poem *Dahlia Jaune* was the winning entry in the years 10-13 category of the GSA Creative Writing Competition. Her trophy was awarded by GSA writer-in-residence Karen McCarthy Woolf at the GSA Summer Briefing in London. Annabelle also took part in a writing workshop run by Karen.

### Dahlia Jaune

it starts like this when emerging from her wintery freeze:  
she feels a foxglove,  
but acts a white lily.

but i remember  
those days in the languid summer air  
laying on the tatty trampoline  
over stained blankets.  
a blossoming pairs' fingers caressing  
the keys of her family piano in the height of the heat.

now with each passing annum, the passing seasons of her self:  
white lily, foxglove, bleeding heart, white tulip;  
everchanging, ever the same in changing.

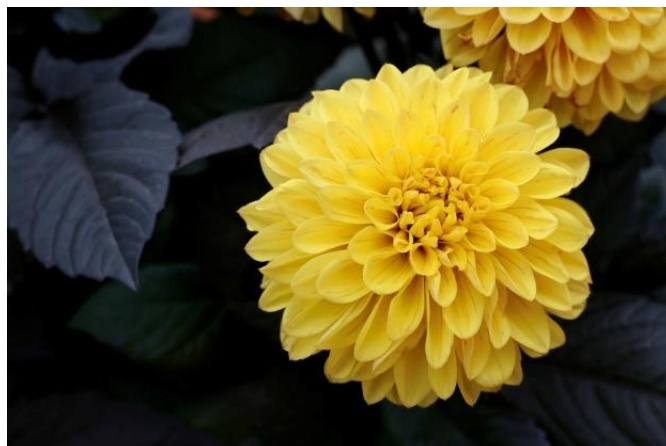
yet  
i'll wait for her

when her wintery crystals  
thaw and her petals are true  
a dahlia jaune is she and  
oh, how she blooms!

i beg us not talk of such folly as family,  
i beg us reconnect with what is always ours.  
memory is how we rekindle,  
memory makes for love, reflowered:

'Anais, do you remember...'  
Yes, she voices. Revenons à la faune.

**Annabelle L6**





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## On Our Graduation

It's summer still, scorching summer,  
but I'm already counting the days. This time next year  
I will step through these arches for the final time and then  
I will never see you again. We'll talk, of course,  
or we say we will; we make all sort of promises,  
link our little fingers like children. *I'll call you.*  
I'll send you pictures of old church organs but it's not the same.  
Things fall apart, things always do,  
and someone's saying it's only natural  
that the leaves turn brown in autumn,  
that the flower falls away to form the fruit, but  
what if I don't want this? What if I don't care?  
What if I reach inside the bud and pry the petals open,  
paint the old leaves green?

Suppose I forget you, the way one forgets  
the warmth of a fire when it burns out.  
Suppose we go our separate ways, live our lives  
in parallel harmony, two lines that never meet—  
Will I look down one day and find a hole in my chest  
where you used to sleep?  
You've shaped me, you see, I don't know how,  
but look close and you'll find your fingerprints on my heart.  
Will I find something of mine in you? I don't ask you  
but I think you'll understand. Still, I'm writing this  
on my own, thinking whoever said  
*words are only ever an approximation* was right—  
I don't think I'll ever be able to tell you  
how much I'll miss sitting here with you,  
even in silence. All too soon  
it will be September again, and I'll be in  
a stranger city, tracing the shapes of clouds alone  
and you under a separate sky.

**Hannah U6**



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## Declined

The monster under my bed has green eyes  
That glow in the dark  
I don't remember when it arrived,  
Only that it stayed.  
A quality to boast about,  
Since it's clearly lacking.  
Still back and forth we play a game  
But  
No audience is clapping.  
The monster inside me has a sharp tongue,  
Not easy to control.  
It pushed you away until you pushed back,  
Then had something to say when  
you were gone.

My voice a void.  
The monster in the cage  
Taken to the circus,  
Forced to the stage  
A wail in the dark  
An urge to disengage

I try to speak  
Stutter  
Breathe.  
Open  
A line  
Sigh.  
Declined.

**Lottie L5**



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## The Lost Melody

I like music  
I like the way it flows through your mind  
The way it stays calm and unsigned, yet nourishes your soul with its beauty and bind'

There's nothing more than the comfort it brings  
That lasts over an eternity  
It smooths out the rough edges of your life  
And pieces together the problems you have in mind

So let the bridges sink and the mountains fall  
Till this melody echoes over country yards  
Tell the story of our land, whose beauty exists in  
Mills, hills, and individual bills  
Every second, minute and hour it goes

I sat by the roaring river  
Staring at a sight of horror  
Its majestic life and dulcet melody gone  
Shred to pieces by a single spark

Places destroyed, hopes gone  
Families outlived and stories wronged

There's nothing to see but an empty space  
Where the birds stayed and the animals played  
Within their thick branches stood their cosy homes  
Now destroyed, lost, and unknown

I love music  
I love the way it made the flowers bloom and the sun smile  
The way it made the birds twitter and tweet, sending rapture pulsing over a thousand mile

There's nothing more than the life it brings  
Intertwining with the hearts and souls of the barren land  
In which once stood the towering giants  
Overlooking and cherishing its magnificent, wild band

This song *once* echoed over their branches  
As their leaves *once* danced to the beat  
Now they lay silently  
Awaiting their tragic endings...



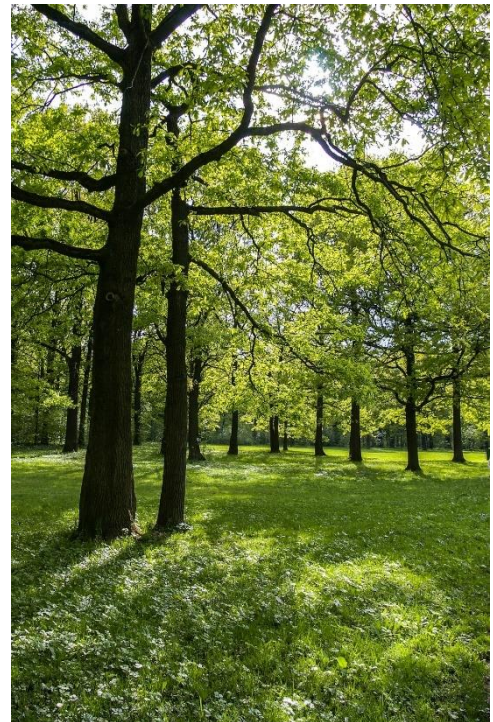
**Hannah U4**



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## Spring

New coats of emerald green,  
Blanket the tree in parts that's seen.  
Dotted here and there it glitters,  
The wings of young fly flitters.  
If one of us wants to roll over,  
Then the mossy bed of clover,  
Imprints our daisy dresses and  
Lightened hair.  
Rows of purple on grandpa's lawn,  
We'd play and pick there until dawn.  
Green cherries hang waiting there,  
Our eager gates open wide.  
As the sky turns bloody red,  
The biting bugs come get fed.  
Grandma beckons with a creaky  
Hand,  
Lovely fruit pie waits as planned.

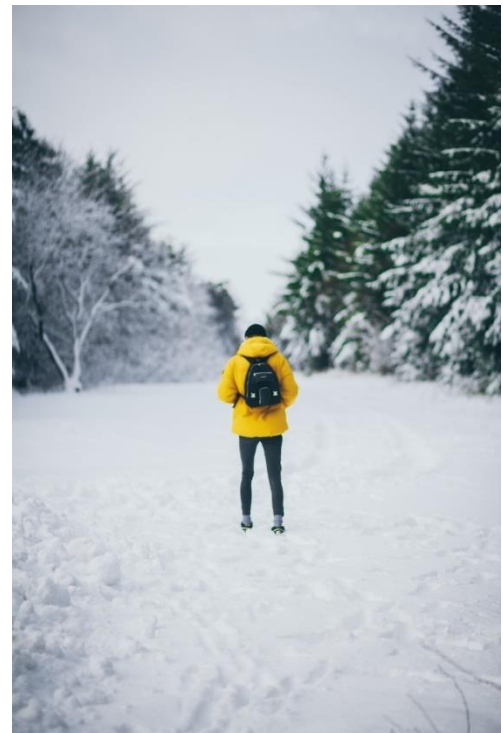


## Luna L4

## Winter

Wind blowing fierce and strong  
Ice forming along  
New snowdrops stretching up at the roots of  
Tall trees, wellies and boots  
Emerging from the forest  
Ready for the season of joy and rest

## Elizabeth L4



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I can't remember the last time I hugged a friend,  
or went to the shops  
or to the school hall.  
What happened to cafes like Costa and all?  
All the money they earned has had a great fall.  
Thousands of people dying every day. It started in China and spread a long way.  
We have to wear masks wherever we go,  
Oh what shall I do?  
I really don't know.

Now I remember,  
I remember that hug;  
The hug as I left to go to the school,  
The hug as I left to go to the pool.  
A hug means more now,  
Every single one counts  
Because people only live for a certain amount.  
I know that now and I know for sure,  
Nothing can be taken for granted anymore.

### **Amelia U3**



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## MISS PAUPER'S GREAT ESCAPE:

I was awoken at four, like always, to the sound of other apprentices chivvying themselves to the wash rooms gloomily. Fatigue urged each and every one of us to lie in bed for just a few more hours. I dared not to, however, remembering, instead the memory of poor Billy Sparks' ear being nailed to a wooden bench for tardiness at the factory. I shuddered at the thought, and got up reluctantly deciding to double my pace to ensure that I would be able to eat breakfast, and avoid my food being fed to the pigs again.

The night shift workers began trailing in, heads drooping, sweat trickling down their foreheads, lethargy overcoming them as they collapsed onto the threadbare beds. I knew I ought not to be jealous of their day to day routine as it was just as tedious as mine, if not more, but as I saw each worker toss themselves into the bed, groaning as they clicked their knuckles; I longed to go back to sleep too and revel in the warmth of sleep. We queued up at the outdoor privy, elbowing the other paupers out of the way, all hoping not to be last. If we were, we would mostly likely have to miss our meagre breakfast and get a scolding from the vexed Mr Hampshire, and even a nailing of ear to a wooden plank for the especially naughty ones.

I barged through the tired stragglers, determined not to get my ear nailed to a plank, and pushed my way towards the front whilst the elder children mocked and pulled faces at me. I was scrawny and slighter than the others in the queue which gave me an advantage allowing me to miss the insults and kicks hurled and the children pushing to the front. I snuck past the weary eyed children, helping one of the new little coal miners of only 5 or 6, Mary Allen, sneak past the big boys and use the privy first. I was second after Mary, securing our spot in the queue by nagging the fiercer girls at the front to let me first in exchange for my lunch when the time came. It wouldn't matter too much anyway, I often missed lunch due to punishments from Miss Lesley our landlady. I didn't have a big appetite for factory food. Miss Lesley often gave me a beating and a sly word to the overseers' to ensure I would be punished for my big mouth.

At last it was my turn and I scrambled in the privy quickly, worried the older girls would change their mind at the last second. I slammed the privy door shut. A mistake. Five spiders as large as my hands fell down from the privy door, scuttling angrily away and clicking their pincers from being separated from their webs. I hid my eyes in my hands, and sluiced a large draught of water on my face, trying to ignore the scuffling on the narrow privy floorboards. I hoped it was just another spider and not a rat coming to get me. I pulled on my ragged patchwork dress and pinafore, scrubbing at the dark brown stains of oil in vain. I barely had enough time to hitch up my large boots, the soles flapping comically, as one of the big girls hammered on the door. I opened it reluctantly and ran out, gulping in the fresher air, and twitching at my boots self-consciously.

Mary took me by the hand upon sight at the door and we made our way towards the breakfast room, our chins aloft in hope to look as hard as nails and as awake as possible so the overseers would not dare nor have any reason to pick on us. As we walked hand in hand, my mind drifted astray from the everyday routine, the toiling, the danger, the mad overseers, I imagined myself as a grand Victorian girl, daughter of a Lord with my very own



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bedroom. I pictured a wooden dolls house with real furniture in each room, and real miniature china dolls flourished wonderfully with painted demure expressions, a dusty rose chaise longue that I would recline on with a King Charles spaniel at my heel. Mary would be my real sister, and we would have private tutoring from our governess every day and help Cook out in our kitchen. One big happy family. I sighed at this thought, relying more on Mary to guide me through the dusty corridors than my own conscience.

A sharp pain throbbed at my cheek as we neared the doorway. "Bertie Gibbs!" Lavinia shrieked, her hair matted from working at the sauce factory. A rubber penny ball whipped past my head. I looked up, Lavinia, one of the oldest girls in the apprenticeship started towards us, hands on hips. I often saw Lavinia start many fights with other girls. She had once slapped a seven year old girl for stealing her tokens to the factory owner's shop. I thrust my shoulders back as she approached, trying my best to look dignified as if I were not scared of anyone. Mary beside me did the opposite, sticking her thumb in her mouth and shying away, rubbing her hair across her nose like a cuddle blanket. "You. Little girls," Lavinia said, pointedly, peering down at us.

"Excuse you. I'm twelve," I said, pronouncing each syllable with dignity, hiding my shaking hands behind my back as I drew myself to my full height, trying my best not to slouch. Lavinia smiled at me mockingly and continued,

"I have no time for dillydallying now, Miss Mature Lady. You two haven't seen Bertie have you?" I raised my eyebrows. I had never even heard of this Bertie! To be sure, I didn't know most of the apprentices except from the girls on my side of the room but Lavinia was holding up our time for breakfast, and I would not put up with her silly games. I wasn't even sure there was a Bertie! Time was short and soon we would have to make our way to the factory to avoid a scolding. I wanted to get to the breakfast room as soon as possible. I was already missing my lunch and hence with scarcely any food to ingest, I would barely make it through the day without toppling face first on the stairs on the way home from the factory.

"We have to go now. It was nice talking," I said after a moment's hesitation, abruptly walking past before Lavinia had finished surveying us sceptically. I grabbed hold of Mary's hand and we scuttled off, trying to look nonchalant. We were stopped at the entrance to breakfast, the overseers watching us blatantly, tapping their watches and pointing towards the pig's sty shoved in the corner. I glared back at them, vexed. A boy with short sticky up hair made our way towards us, smiling nervously at my expression. Not again... "You can go and start on breakfast, Mary. I'll hopefully join you later," I murmured into her ear, smoothing down her plaits.

"But what about you, Megs? You'll be hungry..." she whimpered, nibbling at the hangnail on her thumb.

"It's no problem. You need your strength, you'll be pushing the coal cart again. I'm just tidying up. It's easy really and besides, I'll have a big big lunch!" I lied, smiling. I held my tongue as Mary looked up at me anxiously, worrying that a frog would come leaping out of my throat as the older girls always said would happen if any of us 'young 'uns' lied. Mary smiled wanly and trailed over towards the breakfast counter, sniffing the air with a strained



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smile on her face, glancing back at me every now and then whilst I smiled in what I hope was a reassuring manner. The boy dawdled as he saw me talking to Mary before advancing with a huge grin on his face, his step bouncy and happy-go-lucky as if he were not here in a dark dank factory.

“Scuse me! You’re Megs ain’t you?” the boy beamed, his voice bright and cheery. I nodded, perplexed. How did this strange boy know my name? “Ah! Perfect! I just wanted to thank you for covering for me back in the room. I was in a little tight spot with Lavinia and couldn’t help overhearing whilst breakfasting,” he grinned, wiping sweat from his brow with the back of his hand.

“Er. No problem. How do you know me anyway?” I asked, still puzzled.

“I work in the same department as you in the factory. I’m one of the machine boys!” Oh, so that was Bertie Gibbs. It rung a bell now upon mention of his status in the factory. He was The Bertie Gibbs: the machine boy who was constantly getting dunked head first in the water bucket for tardiness and fatigue. He seemed usually so jovial and energetic that I couldn’t see why.

“So, why were you hiding from Lavinia anyway?” I asked.

“Oh. I uh.” his face flushed bright red right down to his ears.

“Children! No talking. You are already almost late to your factory shifts. I’ll dock your pay Mr Gibbs, you already know better. And Miss Hall, I’ll make sure the overseer makes you work over hours at the factory. Come along now,” Miss May clapped her hands and all the children filed into a line, glancing at us both apologetically whilst I pondered upon what Bertie had said.

Work was tedious as ever. I moved between the machines swiftly, trying my best to keep my eyes wide open, darting in and out ever so quickly to ensure not to trap myself in between the machines. Jemima had got stuck in the textiles department last year due to her ‘poor timing’, and had ended up in the san for ten days with a bleeding neck before dying three days later to what the doctors said was an unfortunate blockage in the lung. I plugged my nose, trying not to inhale the dust myself and develop ‘cotton lung’. Every so often, I nodded my head in Bertie’s direction, whilst trying my best to keep focus on the task at hand. Mr Andrews, the overseer, walked in between each of us, shouting crass comments about our work incentive and every now and then pulling a worker aside to give them a quick dunk in the water or occasionally a beating. The workers often kept an eye out for Mr Andrews and would slacken their grip on the machines and rest on the sides whilst he was not looking. The injuries received during the periods of unseen tiredness were far worse than any beating that Mr Andrews had even given. Even when he used the cane!

I worked harder than the rest, labouring on with my mind fixed on the one goal that kept me going but that often led me astray from the task at hand. This meant my timing was often off and I ended up with several long wounds across my arms and a large surging pain pulsing on my leg with every move from scratches of the machine. I had got several pieces





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of stuck fabric and cotton remnants from under the machine by this time, so with any luck, the overseers would simply dismiss my work and allow me to head home meekly without having to do any overtime. My thought of one day finding a fallen wallet of a gentlemen and them rewarding me greatly with enough shillings to rent myself lodgings, if unpleasant ones lingered on my mind. It was unlikely but with the money I would no longer have to work in the factory for a bed and some food and Mary and I could live all by ourselves and get new jobs. I would send Mary to school with the other posh girls and I would work. I was 12, old enough to get work. I could easily get myself hired as a nursery maid. I was good with the little ones in the factory, chivvying them to bed and soothing their wounds from work, making them laugh with an imaginative story. I could even, perhaps, work in the drapers alongside Kitty, my poor dead mother's best friend and sell charming bolts of satin and silk to ladies. Maybe Kitty would even teach me how to embroider as beautifully as she did! Perhaps I would even learn to read or write.

I got lost in these hopeless dreams for a few moments and failed to notice the workers crowded round in huddles, pointing at the overseers who were now looking through the windows, engrossed, instead of watching us work as they normally did. The workers all craned their necks to see what they were watching and I was awoken by jostling from the girls next to me. I crept over towards the crowd formed by the window and nudged Alice next to me, asking silently what everyone was looking at. She shrugged and looked excitedly towards the window gasping alongside the others. The overseers flung open the factory doors and ran out, adjusting ties and trying their best to look as if they were wearing their Sunday Best. We all clung to the window in shock, the taller ones shielding the view. I was hitched onto the shoulders of Emily to have a peek out of the window and saw something straight out of a fairytale in which children danced and pranced eating sugar plum pudding and twisted sugars all day.

"It's the 28<sup>th</sup> of June," someone whispered from behind me, gasping for breath. A murmur of agreement echoed through the hall. I didn't care what the date was. My eyes were fixed on the golden object. It was large and stately even grander than the hansom cabs driven by horses with glossy plumes that I had often seen rich folk sit in. It was embellished and embossed with beautifully carved statues that were all golden. Large paintings depicting beautiful art were across the sides where the doors must have been. A man, with quite white hair was walking alongside the carriage, a whole troop of knights walking alongside him.

"That's Lord Melbourne," a voice gasped, "I read it in a old newspaper from the owner's shop." We all pressed our faces against the glass panes staring at this Lord Melbourne in his fancy uniform, ignoring the annoyed churning of the abandoned machines behind us, eager to see what was inside of the golden chariot of glory. The overseers seemed beside themselves too, appearing to be kind, gentle, God-fearing folk, sweeping curtsies and bows to the carriages and screaming with delight at the lady in the carriage. I caught a glimpse of that very same lady as she smiled at the overseers, waving an elegantly gloved hand. She was beautiful, like a fairy Princess from the stolen nursery book that Violet had nicked from a jumble stall on one of our walks back to our homes. She sat erectly on the plush seats smiling and waving, her hair coiled up in several twists with a large bejewelled diadem upon her head. Her gown was long and white and trailed on the ground. Furs adorned her neck



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and she wore an exquisite red dress. I stared in shock. I had always longed to have beautiful dresses, but I had always imagined pretty Peter-pan collared dresses in soft pinks, baby blues, lilacs and primroses. I had never even dreamt about a gown this exquisite, though I knew it was way beyond what anyone I knew could ever have. I hoped she would notice me when she was sitting in her carriage. I knew Mary would have been delighted to see her. If only she were not in the coal mines working but here too. She would gawp and chatter delightedly at bedtime about the fairy Princess lady. I resolved that I would fill her in with all of the details at bedtime.

We all waved and smiled and simpered too, though I doubted she would see us from inside the old factory. I expected she would never even dream of setting a foot in a building this out of order, the smoke around me seemed more pungent than ever as I stared into the depths of her glorious carriage. Of course she wouldn't! She was a fairy Princess and I was an ogre in a smelly swamp, wading away in muddy bogs. I looked straight at her, sure that we had just kept eye contact, even if it were just for a few seconds... She beamed at me. Smiling even brighter than she did at the overseers. I was sure she was smiling at me. Almost 100 percent certain. I smiled back until my face hurt, my eyes watering with emotion. I waved alongside the rest of the children in the factory until the carriage disappeared and the overseers rushed back inside in a flurry, their faces pink, chiding us and shepherding us back to work.

We all worked as usual for the rest of the day until after hours, but with a new spring in our steps. We had all just seen a beautiful fairy Princess. And, I was sure she had just smiled directly at me! I would never forget that date: June 28<sup>th</sup> 1833. Never never, never.

## **Gabrielle L4**



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## Chris Sanders' Monologue

*The monologues below came out of a writing session where we read Carol Ann Duffy's poem Education For Leisure. We created a frame of negativity around the speaker in the poem by imagining characters who had affected him detrimentally. We named the speaker in the poem Chris Sanders and decided that he had been rejected by a young woman called Marilyn for a man called Nelson as well as berated by his teachers and starved of affection by his mother. We then wrote his thoughts as he prepares to carry out the violence in the poem.*



When I killed that fly, the cacophony of voices in my head went quiet. Only for a moment. A brief but incredibly valuable moment. I want it to come back. I realise suddenly how much I need the silence. I drowned the goldfish in the toilet. The silence returned. Then my teacher's voice echoed through my head, "Are you an idiot? Why aren't you working?" It is ironic because she has no idea just how special I am.

**Rose U5**



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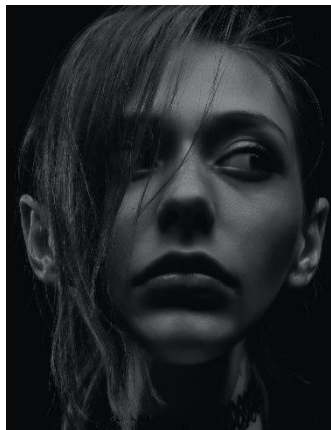
I will prove them wrong.  
They are wrong.  
I have a voice.  
A voice for me to use.  
Maybe I don't need to use my voice...  
My actions will convey the message.  
I am special, yet why  
Does no one respect me?

### Paris U5



I think today is the day. Nelson reflects Marilyn, his cold outer shell mirrors her face. Her sleek, glossed hair smiles at me through the window. I touch her arm. I rip out her hair; strand by strand, piece by piece, thread by thread by knife. Knife. Knives. On the ceiling, on the door. Everywhere I turn there's a knife, on the floor the goldfish is dead now, the cat has run. Marilyn will surely be undone.

### Lucy U5



I flushed my goldfish down the toilet yesterday. It was hers. I'm going to prove her wrong, I'm going to prove everyone wrong. She was the one person who gave that to me. That sense of love and security. Mother was always selfish. She never cared about me. No matter what I did, she only pandered to her own selfish desires. The only reason she kept me around was so I could suffer. I would trade her in a heartbeat. The allure of death is what entices me; seeing her pathetic gravestone makes me retch. It appears that the kiss of death graced her early. I am a superstar. Nobody realises that. After all, they're all brainless sheep. Those feeble idiots. I want to do something bigger. Something special. This is my manifesto. The cat's going next.

### Luisa U5



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## Poetry Inspired by Tennyson's *The Brook*

### Where Life Takes Me

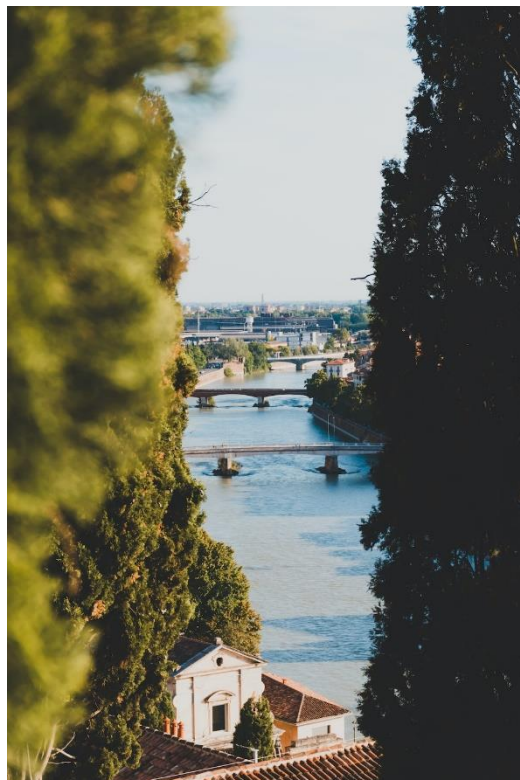
I go from north to south flowing from place to place  
I start up high touching the sky  
I end down low where fishes don't go

Down the valleys I rush  
Giving boats an almighty push  
I have seen the world many times  
But I'll never get bored

I couldn't imagine a better life  
People playing  
Hanging trees swayin  
I couldn't ask for anything more

My life seems perfect but that isn't right  
I can never stop to enjoy what life gives me  
I can never wave back to the trees that wave  
I can never stop to enjoy what I see  
I always seem to flee from the things I love most.

**Olivia U4**



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## The River of Life

I start at the beginning,  
A path towards the sun  
I flow further than the horizon  
For the journey has just begun

I seek nutrition, Just like you  
I get illness I have needs  
For the difference between me and you  
Is only a difference if it tries to be

If I swallow and erode The cliffs  
that stand beside The banks  
If I flow and carry the rocks  
That build up in my hands

Then surely the difference  
my cliffs are your worries  
And the stones I keep become  
The burden in which you carry

If you slowly step back watch me  
glistening, i am proud Of my surface  
Your arrogance and humbleness  
Merge and become face.

## Hattie L4



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## **Journey's End**

My journey starts as high as I could be  
Where birds fly, always passing by me  
I run down and weave through trees  
Until my mountain I do leave.

I grow steadily in strength and speed  
There are hundreds of creatures that I feed  
But I don't always do good so please take heed  
Sometimes I can cause you to bleed.

I travel innocently through towns and plains  
Some of my kind are prone to fame  
I have watched small children play small games  
But I do not stop for them, I can never be tamed.

My trek ends here, I can see  
And out I rush to flee  
From the land to which I never believed  
That I could belong to but now I'm free  
For it's a rivers ambition to reach the sea.

## **Elizabeth L4**



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## The Yukon

I start as a trickle,  
A droplet of snow melted by the summer heat  
Still very little  
weaving my way through icy Canada

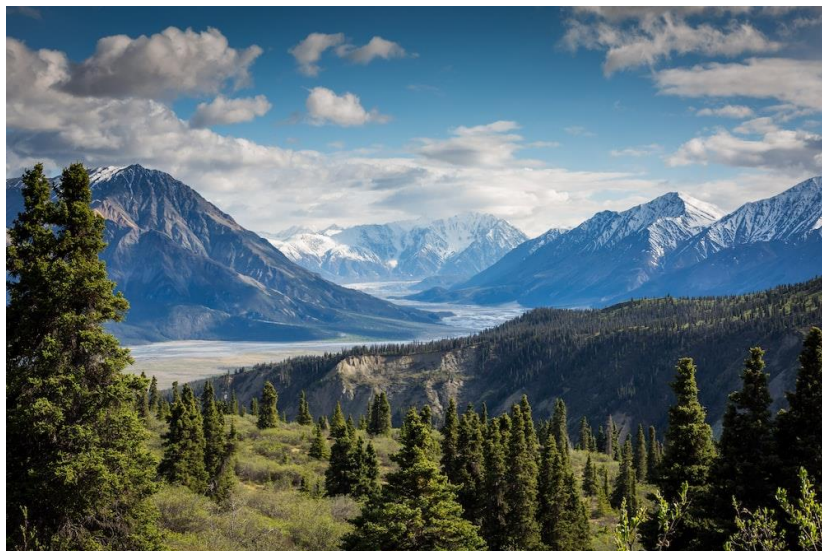
I watch husky's pass  
And When they stop for a rest  
I lend my water to their grass  
Then their journey will carry on

I grow and grow as the summer goes on  
Hearing tales of young and old  
Rushing through villages, towns, cities  
My waters swirl and rush

And I never tire  
I never stop to rest  
Because being a river is hard  
You must always be the best

For I am the Yukon  
A river great and strong  
And man can cause destruction  
But I will always live on.

## Nina U4





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## The Ganges' Epiphany

Ganges – goddess, tortured.

I am a goddess.  
A swirling vortex of water.  
Though I'm not modest,  
I have all the right; I'm slaughtered.

Worshippers will gather around,  
And I could splash them to the ground,  
And I could relish in the sound,  
But I don't.

They chuck their rubbish into me,  
For I'm the method that is free,  
And I could drown them easily.  
But I won't.

There are stories for me alone,  
A sad pool, in one zone,  
And I could moan and I could groan,  
But I won't because I am me,  
A great role model of liberty,  
I can breathe in and count to three.  
I can do this, I am free.

(Pause for a break of a few seconds)

I am the one and only.  
I am the Ganges.  
And I am a dumping-ground.  
But I don't care; I'm still me.

## Rosemary L4



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## The River

I started out on mountains high  
Where snow and ice prevail  
For I once was a river of might  
But then I was a stream hidden from sight.

It all happened so fast  
I had not a second to think  
But now my might is in the past  
And I wait to end up in a kitchen sink.

For I was taken from my bed many a year ago  
Cast from bucket to bucket without a care in the world  
Many a year ago I would flow and flow  
Now I must sit in your sink and think of long ago.

For I once was a mighty river  
Who towered above you all  
And now merely shake and shiver  
And from your taps I fall.

For I once held you on my top  
You kayaked and swam all day  
And now I'm in a picture shop  
Thinking of what I threw away.

And now I run right down your drain  
For I can be a river again  
And join my friends my pain will end  
It's just a matter of when.

**Sophie U4**



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## The Amazon

I began a long long time ago,  
Nobody's quite sure when,  
From the sea through mountains and trees I flow  
Then back to the sea again,

On my journey I travel far and wide,  
There are eight countries I've travelled through  
There's Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil  
then Colombia and Peru.

My water swirls and flows and rushes  
But very often it moves in gushes  
It can travel quickly, slowly or in between  
In many spots, swimmers will never be seen

People have ventured in my depths before  
And often they try to swim  
But if the current catches a hold  
They'll wish they never jumped in.

My beautiful waters lure you in  
With promises of relaxation  
But the waters don't want you here  
And all you cause is vexation.

## Isabelle U4



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## The Painter

They say love is only for two genders,  
The strong man and there's the humble woman.  
They abide by this rule and surrender.  
Staying with the rule that he had given.

Like how a goldie would stick to her chicks.  
No one dares to defy the simple rule;  
We constantly make sure this law sticks  
this rule sticks. Nonetheless many find it cruel.

But what if one questions this very rule?  
Although our bodies are painted this way,  
It seems the painter was quite some strange fool.  
He forgot to paint our minds to obey.

The painter leaves a blank canvas in us.  
He puts no paint on the top of our heads.  
Our emotions and feelings paint it thus.  
Freedom to have who we want in our beds.

The fated pretty princess is not correct  
For the handsome strong prince but someone else  
Many feel this thought is wrong and reject  
The hypothesis is conspicuous

And is too audacious to comprehend  
Like A Monstrous malevolent motive  
To kill order. No control in the end.  
But this poet, implores you to notice

That there are two sides to every story  
Maybe it's just love in all it's glory

Love is the blankness in our mind.  
Which the painter leaves purposely for us to fill.  
For us to decide what colours we should use:  
What paints, what textures  
What people, What genders.

Perhaps it kills order but in a way  
It embraces creativity for a new awaiting,  
For maybe a much more colourful painting.

**Audrey L5**



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## Wonder Bread

Work-table, paper, ink the hue of nightshade.  
I scribble insanities,  
the vagaries of the malleable mind stretching beyond their limit, on and on and on and on.

But Their lines feel hollow, devoid of any substance,  
simply a husk of what was  
robust, nutritious, nourishing.  
Food for the lonely soul.

Like white wonder bread,  
they leave a saccharine taste on the tongue;  
the tang of aspartame encircles  
my tongue like these lines as they roll  
off the tongue,  
masquerading as  
"precious, valuable, a work of art."

So I eat my wonder bread like a  
good little child  
with the mind of a sponge  
absorbing anything and everything it is taught  
and spewing it right back out  
after all there is no room for any bumps in the road  
"Eat your wonder bread!"

Unless, of course, you want to turn out like  
"The little boy who lives down the lane"  
who didn't eat his wonder bread.  
Instead, he guzzles down  
little green capsules of lithium  
to satiate the hunger.

There lies no place for  
defiant little children  
in this world of our own.

I eagerly gulp down my wonder bread.  
Excess of it, surfeiting  
until I am too bloated to breathe,  
another hypoxic carcass in an endless sea.  
They feed me wonder bread in  
the media, the papers, and on the big black screen,  
and suddenly their  
wonder-bread-world  
does not taste quite so saccharine.



**Luisa U5**



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## make-peace

*Make-peace (noun)*

*A peacemaker; one who reconciles persons at variance with one another; a composer of strife; an adjuster of differences.*

*“The civill ufes whereunto the Birch-tree ferveth are many, as for the punishment of Children both at home and at School, for it hath an admirable influence upon them, to quiet them when they are out of Order, and therefore some call it Make-peace.”*

— William Coles, *Adam in Eden: Or, Natures Paradise*

### 1

the door didn't slam. i made a point  
of shutting it gently, of smiling,  
*i'm going to go on a walk,*  
*i'll be right back.* i didn't wait  
for an answer and she didn't reply.  
didn't look up.

i killed the cry in my throat  
and shut the door gently.  
she didn't look up.

### 2

the sky is static black and swaddled in silence.  
i'd rip it apart if i could,  
split the night open with a scream  
i could

keep my head down,  
they'll just blame some beast;  
it's a quiet neighbourhood and  
it's a quiet girl that's walking down the street,  
but can you see that ugly creature in her chest,  
the blackened heretic  
trying to claw its way out?

here is a girl  
who has wrapped her heart  
in tissue paper to stop it pounding,  
staring through the windows  
of someone else's house. it's too much,  
the amber light, these soft voices,  
the four plates laid out for dinner,  
but she is still here,



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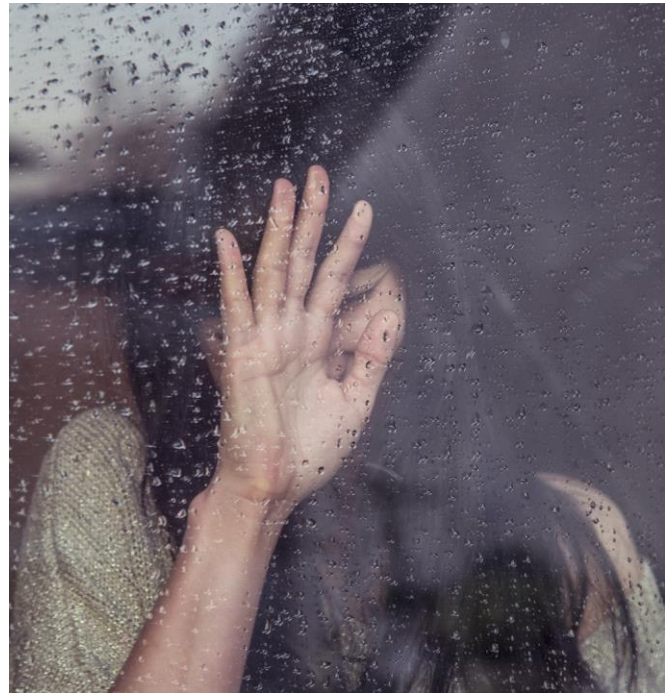
still grasping at the warmth  
that leaks through the walls.  
here is the girl, still and silent  
screaming *hit me,*  
*somebody hit me anywhere*  
*please.* please,  
i need it to hurt,  
i need something to hurt

—something, not someone; the soft  
of someone’s flesh against hard fists  
makes you gag unless it’s yours;  
but you keep painting bruises,  
keep punching mirrors pretending  
it’s her. it’s you. it doesn’t matter.  
you’re hers but she isn’t yours,  
not anymore, so you can do anything.  
you can tear this house down  
brick by brick,  
you can tear this heart out  
of your chest and set it free.  
you can wash the blood off your hands  
and walk back to the house  
that isn’t yours.

the house is still standing.  
the beast is dead or dying.  
none of this matters anyway.

### 3

after eight minutes i took my coat off  
and carried it. kept  
going, feeling nothing, saying  
nothing. it’s half past six  
and three degrees from freezing but  
i needed something and i found  
the cold, and then  
i found myself thinking  
*if you really wanted to hurt*  
*you’d take your jacket off*  
*too,* so i tore it off.  
the hairs on my arms pull up like pins,  
but it’s not enough.  
my breath is crystallising in my lungs  
but it’s not enough.  
i look to the sky



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stretched out like a sheet of plastic.  
there's nothing here.

4

if you really wanted to hurt  
you'd take your shoes off too  
and walk barefoot until you bled.  
if you really wanted it  
you'd climb up to the second floor balcony  
and swing one leg over the railing,  
and if you really wanted it  
you'd have done it already,  
but you didn't, so here we are.  
here we are in the dead of six pm,  
trying to hurt without hurting,  
trying to run without leaving.  
here we are tearing up this house  
trying to stitch it together.

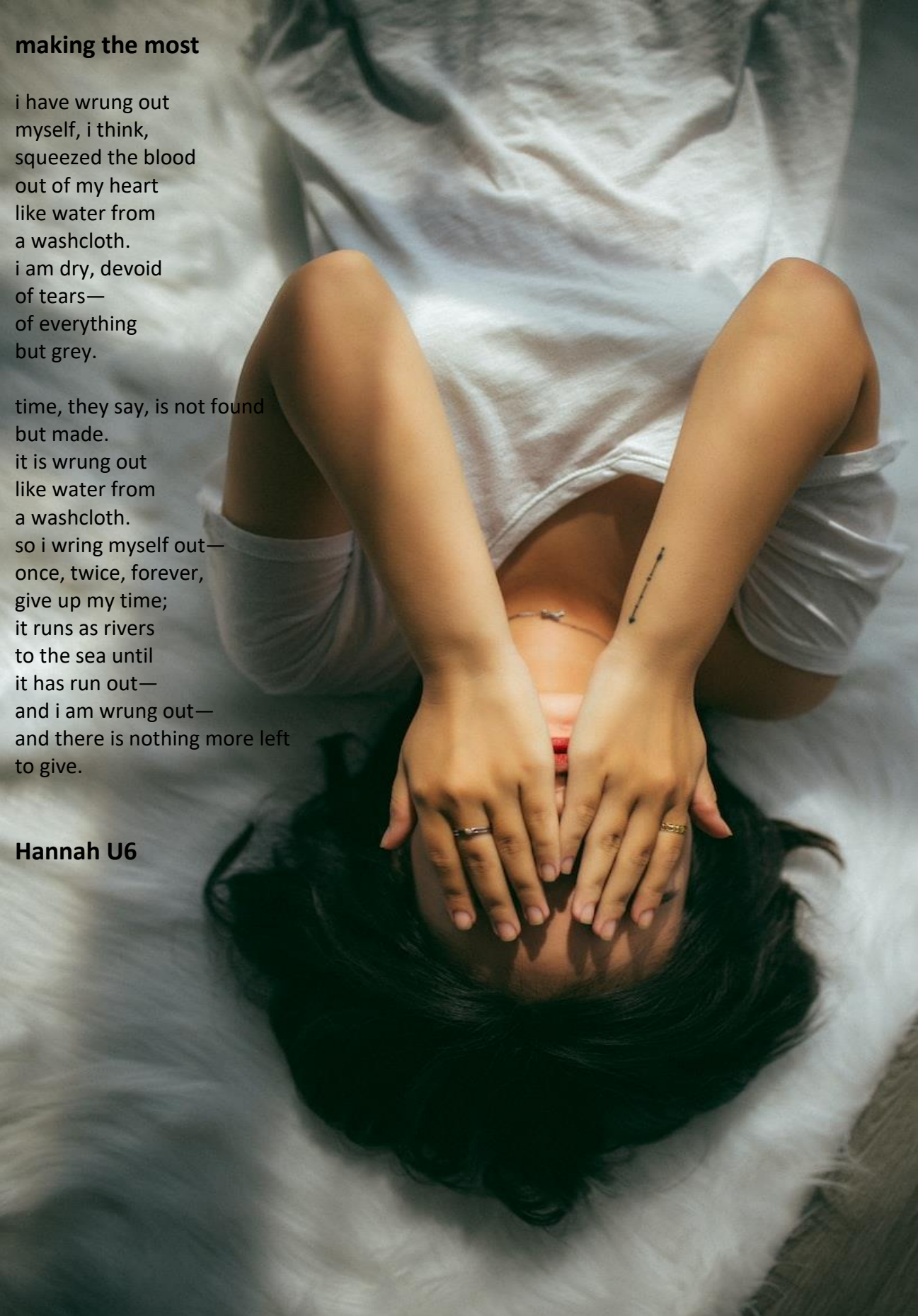
you put down the needle and ran out  
without your keys, without anything—  
silly girl, don't you know  
there's nothing for you here?  
your hands are covered in crescent moons.  
your heart, wrapped in tissue paper,  
is still taped to the box of your ribs.  
it wants to fly.

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climb up and put your ear to the drop;  
can you hear it calling? the buzz,  
the beating of a thousand wings?  
that's the sound of your heart  
soaring out of your chest.  
it wants to fly, but it's been twenty-six minutes,  
so you're turning, pulling damp clothes  
over frozen skin like slough.  
listen, that's the sound  
of the thread pulling through,  
the rustle of rough hands  
brushing up the patchwork peace.  
and that? that's your body  
coming back through the door;  
your heart landing *splat*,  
a bloody pulp on the floor.







**making the most**

i have wrung out  
myself, i think,  
squeezed the blood  
out of my heart  
like water from  
a washcloth.  
i am dry, devoid  
of tears—  
of everything  
but grey.

time, they say, is not found  
but made.  
it is wrung out  
like water from  
a washcloth.  
so i wring myself out—  
once, twice, forever,  
give up my time;  
it runs as rivers  
to the sea until  
it has run out—  
and i am wrung out—  
and there is nothing more left  
to give.

**Hannah U6**



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## Song of the Diamond

I lie beneath the dirty earth a shining ray of white  
My uncut surface, the strength I wield & yet I shine so bright  
I'm worth so much to you, the human race, yet from whence I came  
Is a hollow hole beneath the earth, and I still get so much fame.  
The truth is darker, so gather close and you'll be told  
The dark and dangerous story of the diamond miners old.

The locals are uprooted and thrown from these ancient lands  
To make way for foreign western man and all his wicked plans.  
When precious stones like me are found beneath the ground  
People from far away come to dig around and round.  
But the government will intervene and soon the screams will sound  
But no one is listening because they're buried deep beneath the ground.

But what of human rights you say to that I answer we have none.  
For who in this corrupted world cares when miners are dead and done.  
When someone cries they see a glint, a speck of white, a shiny thing  
The people gather around the mining hole and to your rope you'll cling.  
As they pull you up towards the sky clutching the object bought by kings.

But remember in your heart that no human life is worth  
the risky, dangerous journey to what lies beneath the earth  
There is nothing more to me than what early man discovered  
I'm a sparkly vulgar thing that should remain uncovered.

## Helena U5



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## a year ago tomorrow

it was a year ago tomorrow,  
that your phantom hands held mine.  
your phantom kisses were on my neck  
and your phantom eyes were bright.  
it was a year ago tomorrow,  
that my heart burst in my chest  
it spilled with pink confetti,  
the fibres tangled with regret.  
our dance swelled to a waltz,  
and rippled to a tango  
as we tallied across the silver screens  
and wrote of bravery and passion and anger.  
I dreamt of our future days,  
but you weren't in the past.  
you were living life in the present moment, I shouldn't have even asked.  
I felt that fire stoked,  
a year ago tomorrow.  
they say the greatest love affairs  
are always tinged with sorrow.  
but we weren't even that great,  
I was just a passing thought.  
a hookup and a hangover  
that your little schemes had wrought.  
so in a year and yesterday,  
I won't think of you anymore.  
you'll be like mercury in my mind  
my only scars your acid sores.  
in a year and yesterday,  
I'll find another lover.  
maybe they'll be in Greece or Paris  
maybe they'll be your brother.  
but the important point is,  
you were never my choice.  
you'll be an afterthought in my head from now, and in your absence, I'll rejoice.

**Alice L6**



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## Anger at Modern Society

They plague me, they pound me,  
the prickly pitfalls of other people's perceptions: I question them  
day in, day out, ruminations rotating onerously round my head,  
unanswered and unanswerable questions tripping my thoughts.  
The people around me twist their tales too, testing them in different dress,  
pretty lies the anodyne to my insecure appetite.  
Even their body language is manipulated to appease my anxiety,  
a soft hand on my fragile arm. They treat me as if I'm boneless,  
spineless, as if I'm less because I share what I feel  
when I feel it, instead of conjuring a luminous mask  
to obey society's strictures. I apologise,  
I apologise again, for not wanting to adhere to your foolish social hierarchy,  
for my clipped comments and sharp words,  
for my disinterest in your dismal daily life,  
for my wish simply to be left alone.

## Alice L6

### Scheduling Conflict

You want to cry? Alright,  
just book it in: here's the pen  
and here's the calendar; Let's see  
if we can find some space here between  
all your classes, catch-ups, club  
meetings, mealtimes, messages  
you forgot to send, messages  
to apologise for forgetting, and  
oh, don't forget that essay, and  
what about that practice you said  
you'll do for once— Yes, I know,  
we're working on it, I'm  
only saying— Well, I suppose  
if we push it a bit, we can take  
these five minutes on a Thursday lunchtime to  
snatch a breath before  
you rush off to rehearsal, but  
it's a bit of a squeeze, are you sure  
you can't wait until next week?  
There's a lovely half-hour slot  
just after choir where *she* might—  
No? A shame, I'm sure  
you used to be able to last



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much longer, so— Alright, if  
that's what you want. Are  
Tuesday evening talks not enough  
anymore? Enough to talk,  
I guess, though I'm not sure  
about crying. Tears were always  
inefficient; they take too long  
to well up and too long again  
to dry. You've got to find  
the right time for it, the right  
place, too, for them to glance over  
and see you brush them away,  
and maybe then they'll ask— *she'll* ask  
and maybe you'll finally answer—  
but we both know how it goes.  
There's always something,  
someone else  
to look out for. But  
what's that you say?  
You've changed your mind?  
After all that, it's a shame;  
but I can't say I blame you.  
You don't exactly have the time.

**Hannah U6**



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## three year anniversary

The number 'three' tops the cupcake.

Encapsulated by a ring of fire,  
the glittered buttercream dancing in the light,  
each sugar pearl and crushed candy pressed perfectly  
into the skin of icing, it sits before me,  
the dim lights in the kitchen enchanting the small creation.  
Not even two hours old, bought impulsively from beneath the garish lights  
of the county supermarket. £4.99, but the guilt cost more.

The cake yields to the harsh press of my fingertips,  
the meringues of icing cracking quietly with my compressions.  
Each dent in the foil, each bruise in the cake, each break in the icing,  
my doing. Blood spills out of its centre,  
jam on porcelain, red on white. My movements cease.

Three years have gone past.  
Three years since my fourteenth birthday.  
Three years since I almost lost myself.

**Alice L6**

