

Jennifer Morton

Mosaic

Ackworth School's
Creative Arts
Magazine

Issue 2

Summer 2013

Index

Gold stars * signify winners of the House Competition;
Silver stars * denote runners-up

<i>Jennifer Morton</i>	...1	"The Leopard in Cambodia", Zoe Jefferies	...35
* "Belief Encounter", Isabel Parkinson	...2	"Hellbroth", Grace Harrison	...35
<i>Maddie Day</i>	...3	"The Crossing", Isabel Parkinson	...36
* "Stars", Ellie Williamson	...4	<i>Antonia Rapley</i>	...37
<i>Sophie Green</i>	...5	"Father", Philippa Pudney	...38
* "Lily's Lilies", Sarah Roche	...6	* <i>Emily Holmes</i>	...40
* <i>Maisie Powell</i>	...6	* "Heart String Sonnet", Jake Pugh	...41
* "Death", Jake Pugh	...7	"I Hate Vegetables", Sophie Rolfe	...42
<i>JJ Storey</i>	...8	<i>Sophie Goodwin</i>	...44
* <i>Isobel Tagg</i>	...12	"Everest", Emily Arnott	...45
* "Autumn", Elisabeth Bogart	...13	"Epitome of Evil", Joe Chambers	...46
"Waiting", Antonia Rapley	...13	<i>Leo Huang</i>	...46
"Finally Home", Grace Elwis	...14	"The Journey", Daisy Squire	...47
* <i>Crystal Ding</i>	...16	<i>Kate-May Taylor</i>	...49
"Leopard in Cambodia", Hester Plant	...17	"Reminiscences", Alexander Nenov	...50
<i>Ben Raby</i>	...17	<i>Sam Brown</i>	...53
<i>Ellie Williamson</i>	...18	"The End", Hester Jackson	...54
"New York", Olivia Slater	...19	"Miss Spiderwick", Georgia Green	...55
* <i>Henry Byfield</i>	...22	<i>Tracy Gan</i>	...56
"Entering a Setting", Alice Hyde	...23	"The Garden", Oliver Hackwell	...57
from "My Journey", Sam Reddington	...25	<i>Sydney-Jay Barlow</i>	...59
<i>Katie Abson</i>	...25	* "The Small Print", Hester Plant	...60
* <i>Holly Rice</i>	...26	* "Sewn Up", Elisabeth Bogart	...61
"Sophia", Angelika Schmidt	...27	<i>Charlotte Ladd</i>	...63
<i>Grace Harrison</i>	...29	<i>Alice Hyde</i>	...64
"War Letter", Anna Ward	...30	* "My Hands Search...", Zoe Jefferies	...65
"Muddled", Elisabeth Bogart	...31	* "The Light and Dark...", Mollie Watson	...66
"The Orange Tree", Katie Parsley	...32	<i>Kiran Kaur</i>	...68
<i>Jack Land</i>	...33	* "Trinket Box", Abigail Stretton-Moore	...70
<i>Dominic Sanderson</i>	...34	<i>Antonia Rapley</i>	...72

Belief Encounter

ISABEL PARKINSON

Everything was dark when the two men met. One man was lame, only able to move forward with a few stunted steps at a time. The other was blind, and could not orientate himself without the familiar patches of light from the outside world pressing against his eyelids.

"You must find the lamp and turn it on," said the blind man, "if you are to find your way forward. I have been here for hours, and I still can't find the lamp. I can only guess at where it might be."

"I am sure that the lamp is to my right," replied the lame man immediately.

"Why do you believe that? You are almost as blind as me in this darkness, and you have barely been here for a minute."

"It makes sense for the lamp to be on my right," the lame man explained, "simply because it is the most accessible position. Move forwards to touch my hand, and support me while I walk towards the lamp."

The blind man refused, and took a seat on the ground. "I don't believe that the lamp is to your right. You can only know where the lamp is if you know where a person might put it."

"What person?" replied the lame man incredulously. "There's no person."

"If there's no person, there's no lamp."

"Oh, there is certainly a lamp," the lame man insisted. "And I suppose that means there must be a person. So if I can find the lamp, I can tell to you the exact nature of the person."

"Surely it would be better," replied the blind one, "to understand the person first, in order to find the lamp?"

"Nonsense! It's impossible to understand things you can't see!" the lame man scoffed.

A silence fell as the two men pondered their own knowledge.

"We can never find the lamp like this," remarked the lame man decisively. "You wish to dwell on the nature of the person first, while I should prefer to consider the lamp itself."

The blind man nodded. "Neither of us can move forwards if we look at it in such different ways."

So the two men sat in the dark and lost themselves in their own thoughts.

The more they created for themselves such intricate ideas of the world, the more they became certain that they were too different to coexist.

But had each one been the eyes or legs of the other and combined their understandings of the world, they would

have arrived at something comprising the lame man's logic and the blind man's faith. The lamp would have presented itself to them, and their world would have been beautifully and flawlessly illuminated.



Maddie Day

Stars ELLIE WILLIAMSON

A light at the end of my tunnel.
Guidance.
Shimmering in the moonlit sky,
Brighter than life.

Capturing the peaceful atmosphere;
A fire igniting our minds,
Giving us a sense of existence-
A purpose.
Trapped behind a beautiful image:

Unknown,
Unseen.

A thousand; all the same to the eye,
Like people.
An individual personality
For each flame.

God's candles burning brightly,
The Angel's streetlights.
A companion of the darkest night.
Dependable,

Alive and bright,
Showering us with droplets of glitter.
The spotlight of our stage,

Representing loved ones
Gone but still there.
Impossible?

Enhancing the dark sky,
A pathway to heaven.
The same stars everywhere.
A connection.
A sense of belonging,
Uniting the family,

Inspiring hope,
Silently winking within the deep breeze.
A painting by the creator:
Warm colours in his palette:
Gold, yellow, orange.

Hurtling towards us at great speed
Yet soothing.
A calm presence,
Divine,
Licking the air with force.

Some dead; but still burning.
A memory held within the sky.
An imprint on God's soul.
A footprint on the moon's canvas.
Punctured, precise perforated pinholes.

Alive.



Sophie Green

Lily's Lilies SARAH ROCHE

The wind gracefully pushes apart the petals in the moist New Zealand air.
The lilies fight back and dominate their ground.
They continue to prosper day after day, year after year.

On the railway bank he gazes into her eyes:
She innocently laughs away her fears.
A train goes roaring by:
A lone lily frightfully stands.
They are instantaneously captured by the raw beauty,
The independent nature of the flower:
The seconds seem like hours.
They turn to each other,
Both marvellously enchanted by the flower.

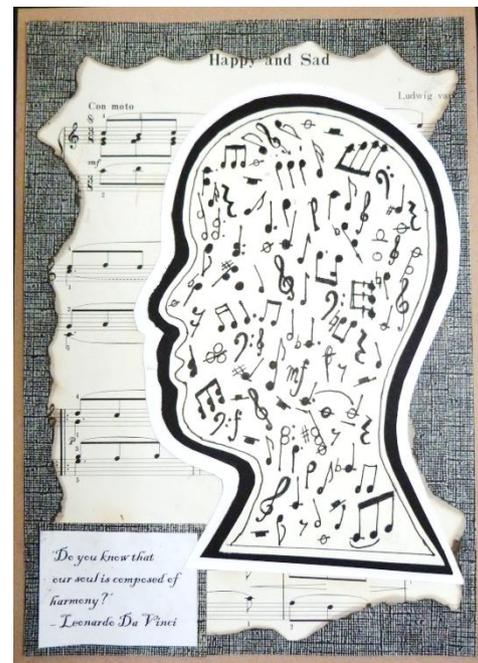
A year since they vowed to be together forever,
He presents to her a single lily,
A symbol of devotion.
It lingers in the air.

Half a century has passed,
She's showered with fifty lilies,
Accepting them with absolute grace.

Tears uncontrollably fall.

A week since she slipped from life.
As the hearse crawls past the railway embankment,
He glances up:
He notices a group of wilting lilies.
They stand comforting each other.
The memories come back,
Tears again fall,
And his smile beautifully grows...

...REST IN PEACE LILIAN



Maisie Powell (Junior House Competition Winner)

Death

JAKE PUGH

Bring your child to work day is fun for a lot of kids: they get to bleed radiators, garnish overpriced seafood, and push impressively large red buttons. I don't enjoy it so much. My dad is Death.

"Can I come to school instead?" I begged my teacher, as I do every year. "But why would you want to do that?" she replied, with one eye on the clock and her three day weekend. "There are many life skills to be gained; it is such a vital day for someone your age. Your father provides a very important social service: you too need to learn to give back to your community, and the responsibility that will be placed upon your shoulder will serve you well in your educational and personal development." The spiel of lifeless jargon droned on despite my objections, until eventually it evolved into a dismissive ballet - a permission slip was pressed into my chest and I was pirouetted out of the classroom without fuss.

On the way home I kicked and empty can of Fosters dismissively down the street. Turning past the derelict job centre I walked with my back to the sun

- it bobbed gently on the ripples of the horizon. I dreamed of a celestial anchor to moor it out of sight until tomorrow had disappeared, but I decided it would make no difference: people would stop and just keep waiting... waiting... and when the sun dawned again, no matter how far into the future it was, that day would be tomorrow.

I took the permission slip home - it had to be signed for health and safety reasons. Dad looked at me with desperation in his large red eyes as he cut an apprehensive smile, "It'll be better this year, we'll have fun I promise." And with his long skeletal fingers he plucked the biro from my hand.

It was late that night when the phone rang. Dad wasn't there: he works long and demanding hours. Mum was still up watching a documentary about the Khmer Rouge on the History Channel. "Hello?" she answered in her shrill, half-enquiring tone. I listened as I lay awake in bed. "...*They became known as the killing fields...*" the TV whispered in the background, refusing to be muted.

"Well... yes, I mean I suppose... I'm sure that will be fine..."

"...the lives of parents and children were taken forever..."



JJ Storey

“He’s not here right now, but I’ll let him know.”

“...responsibility for the atrocities lay at the feet of one man...”

My eyes were open long before my time. I sat on the edge of my bed staring at the digital alarm clock, the irregular LED blocks which formed the numbers burned through my heavy morning haze. I found it strange to think that when arranged in the correct way these little strips of light formed time. Did that mean each bright block was a small fragment or shrapnel of time itself? I squeezed my brain for understanding of their significance as individuals - those little lights seemed to regiment our existence.

The alarm blared and with my clenched fist I crushed time into silence.

At the breakfast table I toyed with my cereal allowing it to drown before I finished it off. Dad came downstairs in his dressing-gown and began reading *The FT* over a strong espresso. He often eulogised about this combination, claiming that bleak news and bitter coffee meant that the rest of the day could only go up from there.

My mum announced that the phone call last night had been from my school. Taking all things into account they

decided that rather than allow me not to go to work with my dad, it would be more productive for everyone if I was given company for the day. A girl whose dad was serving in the army would be coming with us. The school had decided it, my mum had confirmed it, it was happening. My dad barely glanced up from the article about the potential minting of a trillion dollar coin - he was in work-mode already.

The alarm blared and
with my clenched fist I
crushed time into
silence.

The door-bell rang soon after my mum had updated us on the situation. Stood on the porch was a tall slim girl - her blue eyes searched the boundaries of the door frame before realising I was waiting right in front of her. “Hi, I’m Angelica,” she chirped, rolling her heels and pushing her knees together as she peaked up onto her toes. Her hand loosely reached out towards me. “But you can call me Angie.”

Her wings spread wide. The thick white feathers shaded me from the sun.

We sat in the back seat of my dad's Prius - he was in the driver's seat tapping the wheel and singing 'Born in the USA'. I stared at Angie as she watched the world fly by outside the window. Maybe I would enjoy today.

"First stop!" my dad announced, pulling up outside a suburban retirement home. As the three of us walked down the long pathway to the front door, Angie rarely took her eyes off the sky. I couldn't decide if it was her thoughts she was lost in or simply the vast nothingness above her.

My dad leaned over the reception desk and smiled. "Morning Julie!" The overweight receptionist seemingly dressed in entirely pink knitted clothing looked up from her computer and chuckled back, "Oh good morning, haven't seen you in a while! Who are you here for today?"

"Oh good morning, haven't seen you in a while! Who are you here for today?"

"It's Joe I'm afraid," replied my dad. The joy evaporated from the receptionist's face as she nodded and

solemnly waved us into the living area. We received a mixture of friendly smiles and worried glances from the residents. A few quietly slipped out of the room in a desperate attempt to grab one more breath than they were entitled to. It wasn't their time yet.

Joe was hunched over in his chair asleep. I could tell from the fact that his toes barely stretched to the floor that he was a short, stout man. He wore a brown jumper that was slung over his wide ape like shoulders - it might have been worth something a long time ago, but now it was faded and had holes worn in the elbows from years of shuffling uncomfortably in, I suspected, the same chair he was in now.

Behind me the crackling TV spat out the ticking of the 'Countdown' clock.

"You have to make hard decisions in this job," Dad said, squatting down to the old man's eye level, examining the wild grey eyebrows that would have tickled more sensitive, less world-worn skin. "They say the best way to go is to pass peacefully in your sleep because it's painless. They're wrong though. All death is painless: after that last breath you feel nothing. I think they prefer to die in their sleep because it means they never have to face the reality of their

own end. If you are asleep then one darkness simply melts into the next, you do not get to see the sunset - for some people watching it dip below the horizon is terrifying; for others when the sky is stained pink and red there is only beauty. Who am I to know how they want to leave this world? Do I wake them, or do I let them sleep?" The old man's lips began to twitch and his eyelids fluttered. Angie whispered, "Today, it looks like you don't have to choose."

As Joe's eyes opened to meet the eyes of my Dad he smiled knowingly and nodded. "I've seen you come and go a hundred times from this place, and I knew eventually it would be my turn. How many do I have left?" My dad produced a small silver counter from his pocket and read the number as it slowly ticked down. I remember seeing it for the first time and wishing I never had, even now it made the panic swell in my lungs. "Just 25 more, Joe." The old man breathed deeply for a few seconds. "How do you do this every day?" he said, blinking tears away. "The way I see it," my dad said, glancing again at the silver counter, "is that everyone's life is just a petal on a flower. With a garden as full as ours someone has to keep it neat

and pretty. I'm not an executioner, just a gardener. Some flowers shed their petals and wither before others. Some take longer. But eventually even the evergreens become too old and heavy with days and down they tumble, ripping up their deep and heavy roots." Joe nodded and looked straight ahead. "Just one more, old friend..."

We all walked out of the home and sat in the car. Before we set off my dad took out a packet of Lambert & Butler and smoked slowly out of the window. He only smoked when he worked. We all sat in silence.

As every year, I got home that night and lay awake in bed for hours. There was always one thought that pressed on the inside of my forehead trying to burst through my skull - had my dad seen my silver counter?

For the next few weeks I flinched every time my dad knocked on my door. I practised breathing exercises, tried to increase my lung capacity through long distance cycling and swimming. I even tried to spend a few minutes every day not breathing at all.

This happened every year when my fear was renewed, but after a few weeks I'd start forgetting, or stop caring - I never could decide.



Isobel Tagg (Junior House Competition Runner-Up)

Autumn ELISABETH BOGART

Red leaves falling around her feet—
She stands sipping hot cider—treat-
ing her need for warm hands around
Her own. Soon, she's homeward bound—
Where she will switch faces and greet

Her parents. Their eyes see a meek
Little girl, not the tattooed street-
Smart one she's become. Tears drip down:
Red leaves falling.

A misfit at home she retreats
Inside herself. She can't speak
Freely in fear of breaking down
Her fragile front can't bear the sound
Of her past hitting the concrete—like
Red leaves falling.

“
Soon, she's
homeward-bound –
where she will
switch faces and
greet her parents.
”

“
Snow falls like
angels' tears.
I'm trapped.
”

ANTONIA RAPLEY **Waiting**

It's winter, Christmas eve.

Snow falls like angels' tears. I should be
home, warm, sat by the blazing fire
with my family, but they're all dead
now. I sit on a stone cold chair.
Handcuffs graze my wrists with every
inch I move. I'm trapped.

The door open slightly, screaming as it
does. A pearl of sweat is pushed down
my face. It travels down my twitching
nose and into my trembling lips. Salty.
A man steps into the room. He wears
black boots as if he had just stepped
into tar. He carries a needle. Long. Thin.
Sharp. Ready to eat me alive.

Finally Home GRACE ELWIS

Enclosed by the shimmering ocean and the rolling of the waves, my toes begin to feel the sharp pinching of the cold. The numbness begins to disperse, spreading like poison through my nerves, becoming increasingly painful. My lungs gasp for air as my arms become hurtful and worthless. My head is desperately trying to find a way to think but the cold stands, gatekeeper to my thought, freezing me into a trance. I feel my butterfly heart fluttering: it flutters then stutters. I begin to submerge, strangely calm, the current tugging on my limbs. Gasping, grasping...

Crack! My back cushions and adjusts to the crunch as the car bumps through a pothole. Suddenly awake, my eyes flash open: light bursts like an explosion through my wire-like-lashes.

The soft aroma of the car fills my nostrils, smothering and comforting me as my eyes and body adjust to the light. The warmth reaches every part of my body giving me ripples of shivers and goose-bumps up and down my spine. The bubbling sound of radio four discreetly keep my mother entertained.

I see my brother sitting quietly and undisturbed, simultaneously zoned out and plugged into his iPod. My eyes move sharply towards the smoggy, sandy window of the car.

I strain to get a snapshot glimpse of the world whooshing past the window. Sentinel trees standing like swirling sculptures tower above; reflections dart across the bonnet of the car. Dark green ivy wraps its curling tendrils around the trees, hugging them tightly.

Through the trees a slash of water: the sea, flickering in and out of the trees, black and white like an old film. The white horses are frozen in their prancing, dancing poses. A small sailing boat, its sails smiling with the wind, leaps and crashes through the waves.

My attention switches. My ears alert. Adrenalin surges. The soft sound of the engine abruptly changes to an angry grumbling sound. I look urgently to my mother for an answer. Nothing. Her eyes narrow. The road slopes upwards. Her hand swiftly moves towards the gear stick, shifting it downwards. The car returns to its gentle churning sound. In front of the car I begin to see the smooth line of the top of a hill. A stag gallops rocking-horse-like into the bushes.

Gradually over the horizon, slice by slice, the picture I longed to see begins to piece itself together. The tips of the chimneys; the smoke slithering, swirling upwards; the slates artistically arranged. My eyes are drawn to the array of colours emerging, like a child's doodle. The houses frame the bay with dazzling beams of colour, catching the rainbow's spectrum in just one glance.

The small town is alive with its day-to-day routines. The smiling parents hold their child's hand firmly as they skip and point at the colourful houses which disappointingly do not contain the promised boisterous Balamory characters. Bustling merchants hope to shear the visitors of their financial wool.

Gulls screech their welcome as our car descends the brae into the town's embrace. Houses to the left nestle safely, protected by the sea. Here the sea is my friend, my bad dream of moments ago drifts out of my consciousness. Familiar places pop into view: The Distillery, Tobermory Hotel, The Soap Factory, Chocolate Shop, Aros Hall, Co-op, Town Clock, fish and chip van... I breathe in the sea, the chips, the soap, the chocolate. I let out a long sigh. I can breathe freely again... I am home.

“

I strain to get a
snapshot
glimpse of the
world whooshing
past the window.
Sentinel trees
standing like
swirling
sculptures tower
above;
reflections dart
across the
bonnet of the
car. Through the
trees a slash of
water: the sea,
flickering in and
out of the trees,
black and white
like an old film.

”



Crystal Ding (Intermediate House Competition Runner-Up)

Leopard in Cambodia

HESTER PLANT

You step into a field. Heel then toe, before the soil parts for the claw. After being away so long, denying association and memory of this place should be easy. Home is home but only if you live there. What do you call it when your experience has been the exact opposite, the antithesis of that definition?

Your eyes wade through the hibiscus to the núi that stretch upwards, indifferent to the thick humidity. Once it was preached that suffering was bred from the illusion that we are independent beings. You arch your back at the sun, baring those marks that pulled you away from everything else. They killed you for your skin. It was here that the blemishes, the spots, were wiped from the 'New Cambodia'.

You are only extinct until you are born again. You were taught to be thankful for this eternal, relentless hope but as the left blade on your back is scoured by the right as it rises, so your new life is marked by the old.

Circling the hunting ground, you release an uneasy yet yawning laugh. It was never mentioned, never a

possibility, that you would return to your killing fields. Their killing fields. And yet, the land betrays no indication of the past.

Are these the same trees? Your next leap comes naturally and you are suddenly among those same watching, coward leaves, expecting to see the screams etched on the green.

But today, all is equal, all is quiet among the growing hibiscus.



Ben Raby



Ellie Williamson

“

The lamp would have presented itself to them and their world would have been beautifully and flawlessly illuminated.

”

New York

OLIVIA SLATER

New York. The city of dreams: a cultural contrast of ostentation and poverty. The derelict buildings that line the city are concealed beneath the bright lights of the American dream. Times Square is a picturesque scene from the postcard pictures and dazzling movies. It is like you have fallen into a dream and then the magic and wonder take over. Your feet carry on walking further and further down the star-studded streets. Your eyes are caught by televisions the sizes of planets that make you feel as small as an ant. You're not your own person anymore: you are simply part of the crowd, senseless but so aware of the mystique that the city is feeding you. It's like a drug – with every moment of this devilish delight, your addiction intensifies. You crave it.

The stars in the sky are like rhinestones; their glows strike the Hudson causing it to shimmer. Auras are changed from a silent blue to a shining silver glitter. Like when a diamond is hit by natural light, the full spectrum of colours spread over the city. Vivid yellows whoosh up and down the

bustling roads; reds and greens from strobes which seem to come from nowhere. A rainbow city, as different and contrasting as the inhabitants themselves...

New York is known for being a fashion capital of the world, so why would the night be any exception? On the main street you can spot the sophisticated young New Yorkers in the latest Prada searching for the dream they have always had. Then there is the flock of crazy women dressed in matching fairy wings and tutus with the Mother Hen celebrating her last night of being single. There are the over 50's reliving their younger days in beautiful, glamorous ball gowns. And finally the night-goers: short risqué dresses and seven inch heels. Their feet are scarred by the end of the night. They walk with glazed eyes, hearts flurrying. The walkways are mini catwalks where many a style icon has walked. There are so many weird and wonderful people. Normality is gone.

Restaurants are buzzing: enormous queues quickly form to get to those with the lucrative five star award. Rather than a feeling of anger, a buzz of excitement can be felt. Who cares if you are in a seemingly never-ending queue?

You're in New York! You have never felt as alive as you do here. Food is as multi-cultural as the city. It is cooked to standards as high as the skyscrapers. New York supersedes everything and the restaurants are no exception. They cover many square metres, reaching into the rafters and bound together by exquisite and unusual decor. Little booths are full of couples cuddling up after a romantic day. Horse-drawn carriages and breathtaking views, the city is filled for those in love. Tired business colleagues have a meal after a strenuous day on Wall Street.

Then in the evening she slips on her sparkly dress and comes alive under the pale moonlight. Lights hit you from every direction blinding those already fame-blind. The day is now a distant dull memory and after one look at the pictorial scene, the overwhelming atmosphere sweeps you off your feet. Grey giants tower over you with their glass teeth grinning down. Each building is plastered with advertisements beckoning you to buy the latest perfume or experience a Broadway show. The night sky would be as black as soot if it were not for the luminous reflection of the city below. Day becomes night: night becomes day.

Early morning coffee cups are rapidly exchanged for champagne glasses and the day's worries are soon whisked away with the music. The nightclubs are

Then in the evening she
slips on her sparkly dress
and comes alive under the
pale moonlight.

booming at the seams. The music intoxicates the crowds and keeps them moving. From just stepping through the door you feel your feet travel towards the dance floor. After five seconds you lose every conscious thought. You're not thinking. There's no space in your mind for that; it's been taken over by the power of the music. Storeys of hot, sweaty people all move to the same beat that making your mind spin. It pulsates through the building and your brain. How can something so small hypnotize masses of people? Morality and consciousness become twisted. You don't see a thing in terms of time either. Bottles of golden nectar are thrown around the filthy rich models and the filthy men that prey on them.

2am. Another tequila slammer isn't going to hurt... Drink. Salt. Lime. Bang on the platinum-topped bar. The room starts to spin and your legs stop moving one in front of the other. The beats stop massaging your head and begin to drill into it with heavy machinery; each one intensifies the pain. Arms grab you and you're flung into the glacial air, stumbling and grasping anything to keep your balance.

Drink. Salt. Lime. Bang on the platinum-topped bar. Arms grab you and you're flung into the glacial air, stumbling and grasping anything to keep your balance.

A surge of panic runs through your veins.

Your perfect hair is now coated in alcohol and makeup is strewn about your face. You laugh and hoot around the now near-empty city but inside you feel like a lost child. The bulbs begin to flicker and dim: their job is done. Rattles

of shutters and the occasional blare of a horn make the inebriated flinch. The lights that once filled you with excitement torture your eyes and become blurred.

Faces.

Buildings.

Things you could see perfectly fine a few hours ago are just fuzzy shapes. The giants still grin maliciously at the drunken mess that is wandering home across the streets below. Distant memories of old teachers that once interrogated you slowly creep back into your mind. Skyscrapers scowl and tower over you with their almighty power. The smells that once enticed your nose, churn your stomach.

The city has calmed down now and the reality is put into the limelight. It's as if the glittery smog has been lifted and the sudden reality of New York is clear. Each street is lined with mountains of rubbish. The dinner that you had is overflowing from the restaurant bins. The homeless, the ones who lost out to the American dream, are left stranded on the street blending in with bin bags. Their eyes are deadened, bodies broken. Though they are lost souls it is they who see the city for its truth, the city of 'dreams'.

Entering a Setting

ALICE HYDE

The sun rises. From the East, rays of light shine on the ancient sandstone carvings, casting shadows in the dawn's gaze. Once-important structures reach their way into the rose, fuschia-streaked sky. The dome of a decaying mosque stands out above the rest. The gold paint is unashamedly crumbling, the flakes spiralling down towards the ground and the ornate, coloured mosaics are fading away, visible from high above the city. A murmuration of starlings flutters upwards, creating an echoing sound that reverberates through the empty maze of buildings, alone in its journey. The birds split off in every direction, seeming to traverse a league in the beat of a wing. What was once a group with a single mind, that moved in perfect harmony, is now a scattered band of nomads – a parallel to the fate of the cityfolk.

One bird, the flecks of gold on its back catching the morning sunlight, diverges from the throng of black feathers soaring through the sky and takes a different route through the streets. The beating of its wings slow down so that

the individual motions are visible as its feet grasp the dusty window ledge of an abandoned building. The once-bright, polished windows, closed against the harsh sandiness of the desert, forbid the starling from entering. Through the dirty glass, a bedroom untouched for decades is visible, cobwebs hanging on the fading, crimson drapes and the ageing, mahogany fittings. A bookshelf stands in the corner, heaps of dusty volumes stacked one on top of the other; the shelves seem to groan under the weight. The rest of the room seems to be asleep.

A murmuration of
starlings flutters upwards,
creating an echoing sound
that reverberates through
the empty maze of
buildings.

The rustling of a chained fly curtain puts the bird on high alert. A cat, prowling the street below, raises its head, tail twitching at the sight of a potential meal. Its ochre eyes, as earthy as the pounded sand on which it stands, narrow, calculating the distance

between itself and its prey. Its tail's end twitches like a charmed snake dancing to the music of the pipe, and its sun-bleached fur stands on end, giving the impression of a more magnificent predator, that which has slain a thousand of the starling's kind. Yet to the starling, perched high above the sand-packed ground, the feline seems pitifully small and unable to murder even the tiniest rodent.

The muscles in its hind legs tense up like a coiled spring. "I'm ready, I'm ready," the ochre eyes say, deep and cold in their hate for their quarry. And then...

A leap.

The starling cocks its head to one side, cheekily, teasing its hunter, taunting him into making an attempt on the bird's life. Its green-tinted, glossy feathers rustle, catching the light as it spreads its wings. It seems as if it is

saying, 'Come on, pussy, have a go. If you think you're good enough that is!' The bright, benevolent, blackness of the starling's eyes, though the image of Loki is still there, seems to flare in alarm as the cat's tail starts to sway, menacingly, back and forth. The muscles in its hind legs tense up like a coiled spring. 'I'm ready, I'm ready,' the ochre eyes say, deep and cold in their hate for their quarry. And then...

A leap.

The feline's body arches gracefully as it seems to halt dead in mid-air. Like a scene in a children's cartoon, the cat plummets towards the ground, though still instinctively landing on its feet. The starling has laughter in its demeanour as it bows his head, as if bidding a sarcastic farewell and then flits off to once more join the eternally fluctuating mass of feathers to which it will always, sooner or later, return.

The cat stalks off, head and tail high and haughty in its attempt to recover all lost dignity.

Above the cat and the city, the sun is in full view. But there, in the corner of the fiery ball of heat, a small black speck determinedly traverses its way across the great, red plain.

from My Journey

SAMANTHA REDDINGTON

As the car comes to a slow stop, the tyres screech on the wet road as we come to a gradual halt screeching along the surface of the car park going through every puddle possible that we could. I jumped out of the car excited for what I might see when I got out. Just as I leaped out I could feel the change from the heated comfort of the car out into the frozen frosty world of shivering people and snowy ground. As I stood

there I could feel the sea mist creep around me all so slowly with its huge arms wrapped around me just like a suffocating hug of slow death.

As I moved along the sea front threatened by the extremely salty sea mist there was a pure smell of slippery slimy seaweed. With that sea mist still creeping up the front of the sand I quickly retreated back to the car.

Then the silence, shivers and snow. They all set in at once. It struck me like a massive bolt of lightning. I was stuck for words. I had nothing to say for the first time in my life. I didn't want to speak or need to speak.

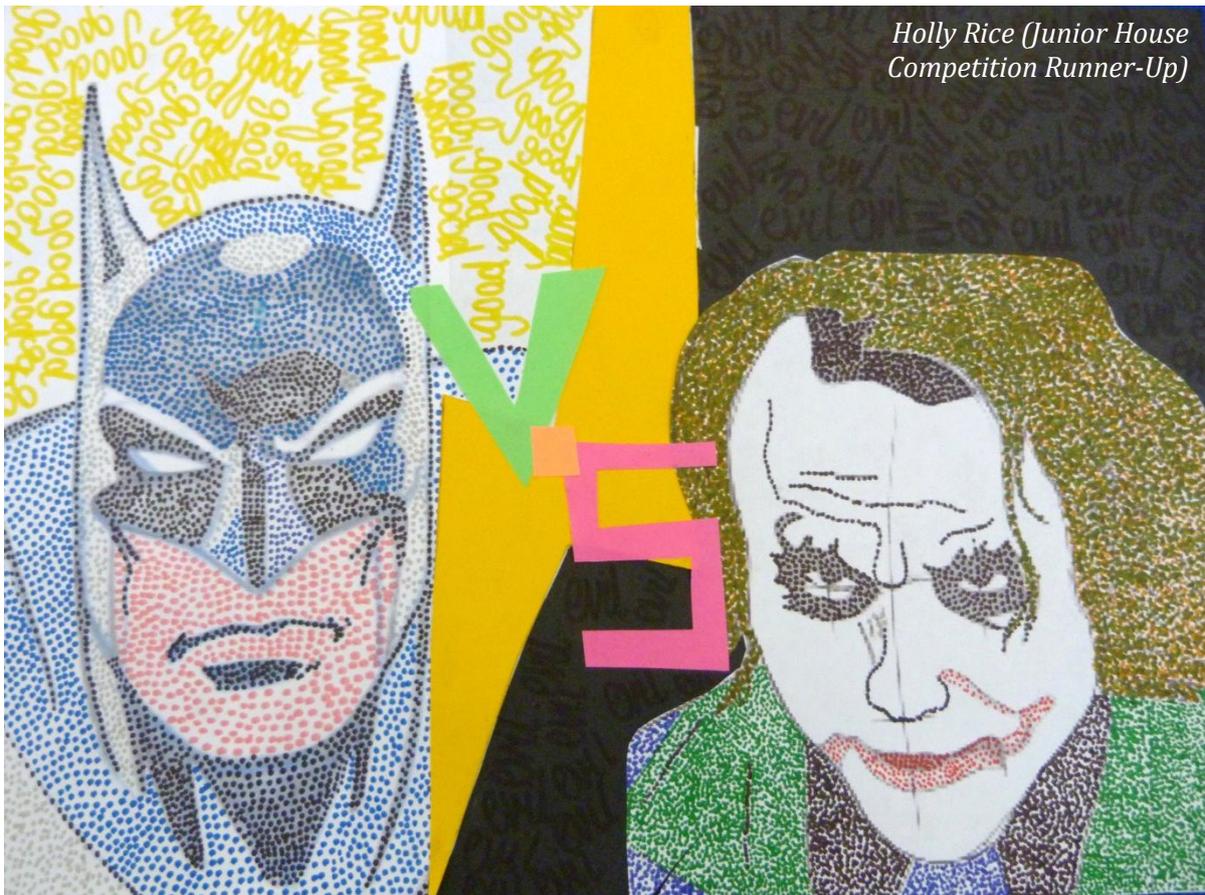


Katie Abson

“

As I stood there I could feel the sea mist creep around me all so slowly with its huge arms wrapped around me like a suffocating hug of death.

”



*Holly Rice (Junior House
Competition Runner-Up)*

Sophia

ANGELIKA SCHMIDT

Every day, a new view is displayed behind Sophia's thick-leaded window. Every day, she wakes, rises, stretches in her silk nightgown: a preserved artefact of a previous epoch. And, every day, the first thing she does is to glance, with eager, childlike anticipation, out of this window to see what spectacle she would be treated to today, watching fairy-tale scenery shape-shift and metamorphose before her eyes. Today though, it's only deep green deciduous trees which appear and recede from her view, backlit by a satsuma sunrise. She thinks only, simply because it does not compare to what she has seen these last few weeks: the Danube, almost as alive as a living organism, glittering like a diamond in the sun, the Carpathians against a topaz backdrop, the dusty yellow ochre of a Black Sea beach, dry as paper.

She enjoys a moment of stillness; it is still early, the dawn chorus has yet to break. The only sound is the brisk, upbeat clip-clop of the horse's hooves, and the occasional creaking of a wheel axle of their old carriage. Her eyes glaze over, but her mind is a wren, flying away

from the scene of her new life, soaring over a three-week wide abyss that separates her old life and her new, an abyss that is growing ever wider with time... It has reached its destination – her old life, on another planet. And it has transformed into a peacock: the glamorous, shallow peacock she once was. Then, her baby-doll-blue eyes, which were always permanently imbued with disdain, would have given only the scarcest of careless glances to what was happening outside her chamber. Then, she and the early morning had never known each other. Getting up early was for maids and servants, to prepare the house for the master and mistress – in her case, her and her father. It was not for her kind.

Then, if someone told her what was going to happen, she would have given a short, sharp, disbelieving laugh, tossed her head like some pedigree horse, said that things like that didn't happen to noble families in large, expensive houses. Her type knew how to look after their homes; these things afflicted peasants, those land-working serfs who lived lives of labour and no luck. They were the ones who caught misfortune like they caught diseases. An ironic smile sculpts itself on her lips. She had

really believed that then. Until the seed of misfortune had landed on them, in the form of a spark from God-knew-where... and reduced their home to ashes. And, incidentally, who they had been. That personal transformation had come after watching the manor – well, her life really, smoulder and curl into cinders. Amazingly, three coherent thoughts had made their way to the surface of the bubbling vat of turmoil that had been her state of mind. Ash Wednesday. Like God said. You are but dust, and you shall return to dust.

She shifts slightly in her narrow, single bed; her mattress, fattened with straw, crackles, horribly reminiscent of that dreadful night, a harsh static sound which pulls her back to the present, to remind her where she is, and what she is, now. Sophia understands. The straw speaks, it reinforces. You are no longer at the top of the pecking order. You have slipped irrevocably into the bottom of the heap. You are no better than those you once looked down on.

You will only ever have me to stuff your current cheap, coarse bed linen. The goose feathers used for the stuffing of your satin-lined four-poster will exist for you only in your memory.

Once upon a time, she would not have been able to bear this. But that Sophia was somebody else. Both she and her father have changed so much. Her father – she gazes towards the front of the carriage, where she knows he will be – has transformed from a high-minded aristocrat, into an everyday carriage driver. His transformation had happened while they had both been standing, side by side, watching all they had ever known reduce to nothing. After several silent minutes, she had told him of her Damascene revelation. He had listened silently, and she had seen the change creeping across his face. His mind-set has gone from expecting life to be handed to him on a silver platter, arranged on the plate in the way he wanted it, to him gripping the reins (metaphorically and literally), to go and seek and make it himself. Their glossy black stallion, bought primarily for show, had been swapped for a sturdy, strong, reliable Shetland. They had never before thought that they would need a horse for a long, life-changing journey. But this is what they have embarked on. This is what they both knew they needed to do. They need to find a new home, and with it, start their new lives.



Grace Harrison

“

He had listened silently, and she had seen the change creeping across his face. This is what they embarked on. They need to find a new home, and with it, start their new lives.

”

War Letter

ANNA WARD

My dear friend Georgia,

I am very sorry that I have been unable to send you any letters recently. I have been very busy and there has been no chance for any of us to send letters from the front. I have seen many things that no man should ever have to see; scenes that I know I will take to my grave. Blood oozing out of a bullet wound that will surely lead to death. Blood flying across the battlefield like a thousand red butterflies. I cannot get these images out of my poor exhausted mind.

We have all been through hell. Many telegraphs have been sent to loved ones to tell them about their fatal news; their loved ones have been killed. Shot, blown to pieces, drowned in the squelching mud that sucks you in or the blanket of gas that throws you to the ground. I fear that many more of my friends will die before this nightmare ends.

The trenches are horrible. I do not believe that I can truly describe in words the full terrifying details of what I see each day. Mud up to your waist, the crack of bones when you step on bodies,

the scream of the spirits cry. Each day seems a step closer to death. How I long for my beloved England, my parents' humble home and the fireside where I was raised. Pray that I may return.

I am very tired and have no energy left. They march us through sludge half asleep, our bodies aching, our minds heading towards insanity. It doesn't stop there though; even when we sleep our minds don't rest. Every night I am awoken by the piercing shrieks of some young boy's nightmare. Often I awake to find it is my own.

All I can think about are the unfortunate people, my friends, I had to watch fall to the ground in pain. They shout for someone to help them and you cannot imagine the look of terror on their young faces when no one comes to save them. The screams that scar you for life are like nails scraping across a chalkboard.

If I make it safely home I will never again take for granted my warm bed or the sounds of the birds dancing in the trees. I will tell everyone who will listen, as I am telling you now Georgia, that there is no glory in dying for your country...

Your loving friend Thomas x

“

Her body a
canvas,
something
to taint,

Splattered
emotions
on her face
converge –

She’s
amused
with the
pretty
colored
paint.

It is hard
to stop, to
show some
restraint.

”

ELISABETH BOGART

Muddled

She’s amused with the pretty colored paint—
Look how it dribbles between her fingers—
It is hard to stop, to show some restraint.

On her canvas colors mix sans complaint,
Making new shades—though the old still linger—
She’s amused with the pretty colored paint.

She blushes—crimson cheeks—and just almost faints
When they first kiss. He tastes like fresh ginger—
It is hard to stop, to show some restraint.

With him, she becomes awfully un-Saint-
Ly. She learns quickly for a beginner,
She’s amused with the pretty colored paint.

Love doesn’t last; she paints her face, a feint—
“Happiness” covers what he has injured—
It is hard to stop, to show some restraint.

Her body a canvas, something to taint,
Splattered emotions on her face converge—
She’s amused with the pretty colored paint.
It is hard to stop, to show some restraint.

The Orange Tree

KATIE PARSLEY

As the intensely blazing sphere streams its rays of infinity, its son looks to the sky in awe at the fire that helped him to grow. Its pores breathe in the welcome sunlight as it longs for its citrus tang to explore the taste buds of something; just to delight the senses of a tongue would be enough. Birds begin to sing sweetly in their home, their breeze of whistles swimming through the emerald treetops. Nearby beds of roses emerge from their buds like a butterfly from a chrysalis. The joyous notes of voices, a cocktail of youthful and ancient sounds, can be heard as small children run from the horizon to circle the trunk of the orange tree like hawks hunting prey. After a few undeniably energetic minutes, they give up their games, their lethargic limbs collapsing into an exhausted heap of bones, their weight almost sinking through the layers of soil. Their tiredness creates a storm of argument, with sharp darts of anger impaling each member of the family. They remember how they should be thinking about their struggling, weak mother who is slumped lifelessly against

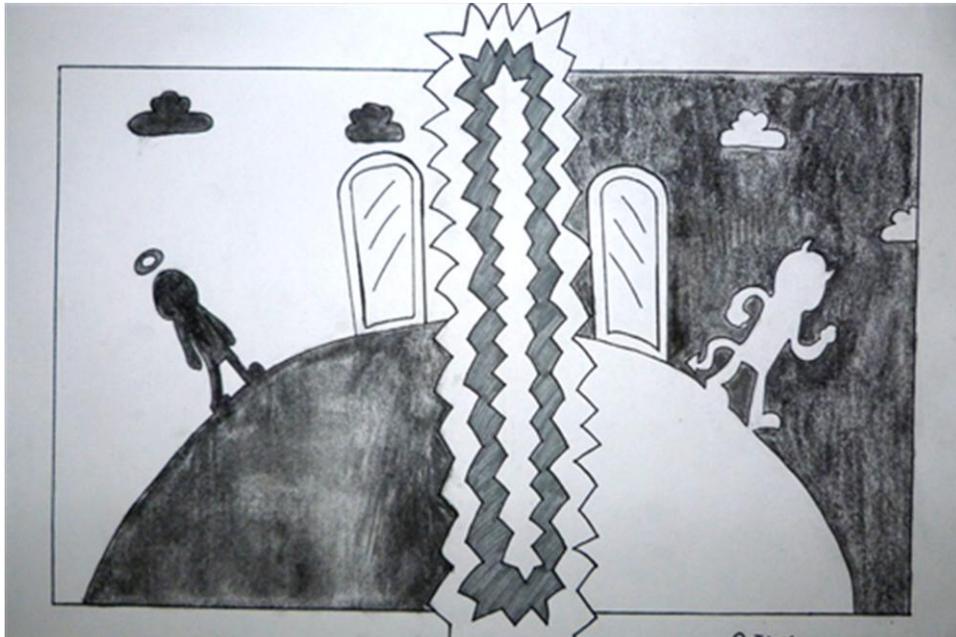
the rough trunk of the tree with her husband's arm reassuring her, unable to feel joy, rather than play carelessly without her. They glance up at the oranges on the tree for hope of life, hope of recovery, hope of regaining what has been lost, their prayers transparent droplets being soaked through roots, causing the tree to ascend, its leaves warming to a shade of green, its vibrant fruit cascading as it becomes succulent enough to eat.

The orange tree bears an admirable strength and is the centrepiece of the surrounding world. It begins life as a pip, aspiring to be a giver of flavour and barely surviving the harsh winters which it is not built to face. It grows into a thriving young tree, desperate to tower over the world and be admired for its years of endurance. One by one, its branches expand, licking the skyline and devouring the clouds. It stands tall, enjoying the season; the summer soon fades away.

The ripened man gropes an orange, peeling its dimpled skin. Its foamy pith and shy segments are exposed. The orange is sad. Unlike an apple, it has no core. It has no solidity inside. It is weak. One by one, he rips apart the pieces of the orange. He begins to feed his young,

crescent by crescent, until there is nothing left but the faint tang of citrus. The children pluck at the grass impatiently, showing signs of weariness; they are tired, but they do not want to leave the picturesque home of the orange tree. Leaves begin to crisp. Their blood morphs into a collage of fusty yellows and rusty browns. They cripple lifelessly, brittle with the unwanted arrival of the autumn. The sky sighs as it begins to smear with grey. The sun says its farewell. On the sluggish snow

remain corpses of shrivelled, dried oranges. The once-bright, waxy coats lay to rest on the ground. Again return the voices of the family in the distance, now dulcet tones. They slope towards the trunk of the orange tree. They lower themselves to the floor. They create a small square with their legs. Their spirits are as empty as the braches suspended above their heads. Salt crystals bloom from their eyes. They begin to taste a dry bitterness as they inherit a loss of love, life and hope.



Jack Land



Dominic Sanderson

The Leopard in Cambodia

ZOE JEFFERIES

You step into the field and you can sense you're not alone. The darkening footsteps draw nearer and nearer as you can hear behind. It's the slight snapping of a branch or a bustle of leaves that can cause a mad break out of aggressive combat. The forgiving fur on their coat gives them a sense of camouflage from devious predators that lurk on the forest floor. The air is damp and the forest floor is scattered with branches and leaves.

Trails of scent drive you to hunger. Sensing fresh flesh sends flooding craving to your mind. Outraged monkeys, blazing baboons and hurtling antelope are all eyed up, on the menu.

The unknown lies filled with cuisine. The thought of entering there is so tempting. You just wait for the right time to strike into that indulgence of flesh. The forest floor inside the unknown is trailed with traps ready to spring at you, right at your paws. Then all you can do is wait for the pain and suffering of being tortured to your

imminent death. Cambodian bodies sell your bones and meat for their own profit, for their enjoyment and leisure. Just one step too far and that's it: you're gone.

Just like me...

GRACE HARRISON **Hellbroth**

Muddy, greasy hair of bat,
Hairy, scary tail of rat.
Thick and muddy baby's sick,
Goosey sticky gum on brick.
Slippy wet webbed feet of frog,
Sharp and spikey teeth of dog.
Hairy smelly snout of pig,
Nit infested mankey wig.
Eye of snake, decaying skull,
Sharp and spikey horn of bull.

“

Fill me with sensuality,
A cruel, dark vitality,
Make a shadow march through my soul.

”

ISABEL PARKINSON **The Crossing**

Show me, demonstrate, I must see
How you suspend reality.
Can you first stop the bell's death toll?
Close this book, make this candle whole?
Reverse our pure, true energy.

Show me how such evil can be,
Through mischief, magic, or alchemy.
Crossing the line, that is my goal.
Show me demons.

Fill me with sensuality,
A cruel, dark vitality.
Make a shadow march through my soul.
I want darkness to take control.
Show me such sweet brutality.
Show me demons.

“

Every afternoon he would watch as light crept through cracks and lay themselves upon her pillow with the same grace she had.

”

Antonia Rapley



Father

PHILIPPA PUDNEY

The stillness that erupted onto this room felt like a veil resting atop a bride's skull, blurring what was kept behind it. He still wondered how a place could rest so peacefully whilst tormenting him so aggressively. Her bed, her mirror, her window. These inanimate objects controlled him as if they were puppeteers and he the puppet. He often tiptoed past her doorway, scared that any bold movement would disrupt them and in turn the memory of her.

Even the scents which used to dance around this room have given up – the struggle has worn them thin. Occasionally a hint of her perfume creeps up on him – but this soon is lost and he has been deceived once again. He retreats from the threshold momentarily, backing down. Now, this ache overtook everything he felt. He was clouded by desperation, to see her, to hold her.

He kept this room in just the way she would recognise it. Carpets faded. Last week, the battery in her night-light died. Now, he walked past her room and nothing replied – not the usual modest

gleam used only to keep the monsters away. He had no reason to change it other than for his own comfort. She slept comfortably with a night-light: he couldn't expect her to stop now. Gradually, time widened the gap between the room she grew up in and the room he kept. The fear of losing her paralysed him. He trapped himself in the life he once had; the life she once had.

Every afternoon he would watch as light crept through cracks and lay themselves upon her pillow with the same grace she had. That small illumination saved him, it cushioned him as he fell back into this torrent of grief. The simplicity of this room let him break it apart and rebuild it with memories. He could still see the way her toes sank into the carpet, the familiar warmth of her smile, that one dimple in her left cheek.

He used to sit with her on this bed, and trace his finger around the curves of his face. As he stood, his finger moved. He drew the slight bump of her forehead, the dainty slope of her nose, her plump, un-ripened lips. He stopped. It was just long enough to remember.

After indulging himself in her memory, he would become aggressive. He was irritated with himself for this

selfishness – he had remembered, cherished and loved her but pushed the cold reality aside. He often questioned and doubted himself. Was he missing her in the right way? She never answered him.

Her mirror stood. Dust slept upon the reflection. It was no longer able to boast as she clouded her cheeks with pink and blackened her ever-interested eyes. Useless. It was natural for him to wonder what the mirror would see now, how she would have changed. But to him, she remained frozen: she didn't get to grow up.

He sometimes caught himself drifting away from this place, becoming mesmerised by the way the rain fell or the carvings on her window pane. Guilt then tormented him for leaving her when his mind wandered elsewhere. It was at these moments that the grief felt raw.

The distance between them grew; it became harder for him to trace her footprints – he began to lose her.

Week by week he'd see her staring back at him, each time taking him a second longer to remember. She stood, 4 foot from the ground, wedged on a mahogany shelf, with just a slice of glass

sheltering her. That glass kept her from damage, persistently making him feel inadequate for that was the one thing he couldn't do.

He sometimes caught himself drifting away from this place, becoming mesmerised by the way the rain fell or the carvings on her window pane. Guilt then tormented him for leaving her.

Her ringlets had begun to fall, her eyes became weary, he found it ever more difficult to recognise her. He remembered her as a baby and as a toddler – it was the ten year old girl he had lost which he began to forget. Panic set in, usually after the first 2 seconds. Who is she? Why don't I know her? Then she returned to him.

His fingertips began to ache as her imprint faded. His shoulders jolted, craving the soft abrasion of her denim thighs. He stumbled and without her, he fell.

JAKE PUGH **Heart String Sonnet**

Gorge bulbous boxes of bitter sweetness,
 Bloated from material affection
Bursts stained seams of a distant wedding dress.
 Annually concocted '*connections*'
Signed sweetly with an itemised receipt:
I love you. (Terms and conditions apply).
Pink rounded love hearts shaped never to beat,
 So take back that mimicked movie star sigh.
 My real heart: blood, cartilage. Valentine
Valves and cavities pulled through chest and shirt.
 Tied in a bow at the end of a string,
Skyward float fell and it dragged through dirt.
 But once a year, with my heart on a lead,
I dare to look up from the trail that it bleeds.

“

So take back that mimicked movie star sigh.
My real heart: blood, cartilage. Valentine
Valves and cavities pulled through chest and shirt.

”

I Hate Vegetables

SOPHIE ROLFE

“Are you sure you don’t want some cold water in your tea - it’s far too hot for you!”

12 across, seven letters: Winning back liberals, virtuous type calls to exert influence.

I am forced to tolerate people who think you cannot do anything yourself. I choose to disregard people who feel they have pathetic authority over you, and can make all your decisions. Daily, I endure the exasperation of people who must take control of every situation, with self-righteous condescension.

“No. Thank you. That will not be necessary.”

A person with one of these qualities is as insufferable as ageing itself – being treated like a child, just because ‘he can’t react’, ‘he wants us to help him’. Rarely did one come across a person who possessed all three crippling frustrating qualities; today, they seem to be holding a convention at the hospital. I see it now – they’re perfecting their ways of demeaning me. They have the same effect on me as a dream where

you’re nude in public, made worse by my inability to run away; I’m trapped.

16 down, 10 letters: Nothing’s stopping complete poet getting beyond the limits of his craft?

Sometimes, these monotonous people leave the hospital. It is usually to cause a scene around me when I can’t pull out a chair for myself, as I’m bound to the two walking sticks which keep me upright. I do not need someone telling me that I do like broccoli really, just because I eat cauliflower – I hate broccoli. Its steamed, green mould incriminates my mouth; why taint a perfectly good piece of roast beef with these broccoli obligations? I only eat cauliflower because it intrigues me as a concept – tasteless and white, yet so nimbly shaped, like the silhouette of a cluster of bubbles. After all, it seems a shame to completely avoid this bizarre family of vegetables.

However, the worst element in their repertoire of annoyance comes in stages. Firstly: query me like a rare species, before spotting my hearing aids. Secondly: turn their head to the person beside them to make a comment about my condition - it’s not as if I’d ever have the capability to both hear and be offended by their condescension,

surely? I'm 87, which to them equals senility. And thirdly: shout at me excruciatingly loudly, enunciating each insensitive fragment of basic vocabulary, as if I'm a foreign prisoner of war. Or simply that I'm stupid.

23 down, 4 letters: Terribly sweet with no end of mawkishness.

What they don't see, is that I complete The Times cryptic crossword every day in my chair. Even if they knew this, I fear they would crowd around my bed, jaws hanging limply, as if I were one of those apes in the zoo who wears human clothes and takes spasmodic bites of an apple. They don't know that, had my parents been wealthier, I could have gone to Cambridge University. They don't understand, however superior they think they are, that the problem with my ears has nothing to do with volume, but the frequency of the sound. You could shriek each word into a megaphone an inch from my face, but apart from creating an awful racket you are achieving nothing – if the wavelength of the sound is too short and quickly delivered I will never hear you. I am partly to blame – I expect people to treat me normally. I want to adapt to them, but I have to accept that the world must now adapt to me.

So if I'm going to fall, let me. What merit is there in keeping me upright? It's like a circus act – why must the lion stand on its hind legs? That's how my wife refers to my endeavours: "performances". Last month, she had decided I should stay in my chair while she went to buy groceries, but my defiance overruled this. I prised myself out and took what, in my head, were gallant strides across the room. These steps would have disappointed a toddler. I opened the cupboard, reached forwards and retrieved what I wanted. As I stepped backwards (a unique part of my act) I caught the sole of my slipper on the rocking chair, and spun into the dresser behind me. Sitting against the pine doors, a warzone of antique crockery shattering around me, I saw my wife in the doorway. She flung her arms towards my drooped frame, and I watched the fruit and vegetables she had been holding fall through the inadequate paper bag which encased them. A carrot fell like an arrow onto its tip on the carpet. It collapsed onto its side and turned concentrically around the tip which anchored it in the centre, unable to follow the potatoes' bid for freedom; they now lay bruised beside me. My wife glanced down to see the

open album I had thrown as I pirouetted into the dresser. Pages of photos – I, tailored in black; her, illuminated all in white.

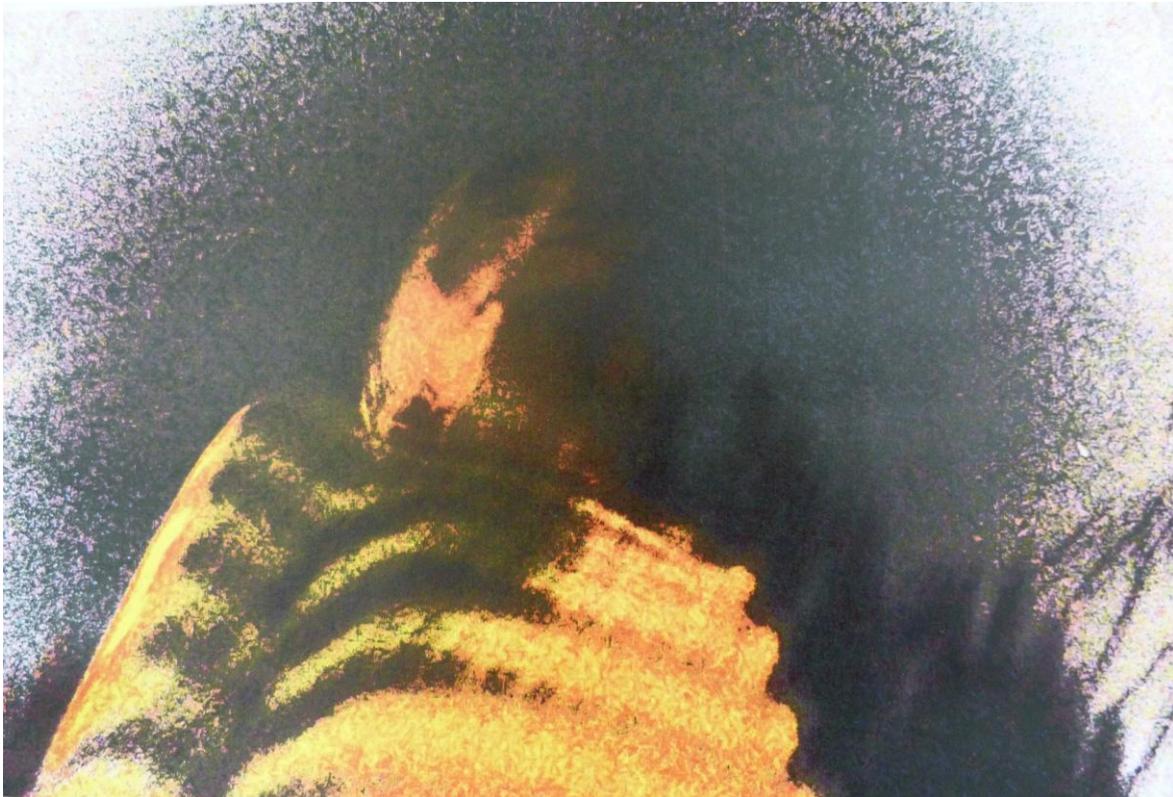
Now, the nurse stands in front of me, continuing to laboriously reel off tomes of chatter.

“Did you hear what I said to you, Mr Lee?”

“I’m sorry, dear, could you repeat that for me?”

I heard every word. But sometimes I find devilish fun in making them work as hard as I have to.

Sophie Goodwin



Everest

EMILY ARNOTT

How does it feel to be at the top of Everest?

Amazing.

My foot falls to the ground again. I have become a robot, my body on autopilot. The mind is weak: a useless rock, insecure and doubtful. I had to leave it behind long ago to face any chance of storming down the brick walls I want to overcome. I see it! The seemingly impossible-to-reach goal. I lit the fuse several weeks ago and now, at long last, I can see the spectacular fireworks bursting in the distance.

The fuel is still ignited.

My breath is drawn out in cloudy torrents disappearing into the abyss just inches from my face. Wisps of wind whip around my ankles like Jack Russells, nipping at my skin ferociously. I turn my head slowly, only to be battered by the elements, trying desperately to take in my surroundings, my achievement. Life is in high definition, magnified. The white carpet smothers the ground, Hollywood glamour for the superior. Wise eyes. Strong minds. Brave hearts.

Amazing.

I have become a robot, my
body on autopilot. The
mind is weak: a useless
rock, insecure and
doubtful. I had to leave it
behind long ago to face
and chance of storming
down the brick walls I
want to overcome.

I see it!

On top of the world – literally and emotionally. Precarious danger. The smiling society of warriors: untouched by the wicked clasp of Mother Nature. Undefeated. Smiles, little rays of sunshine, acting as a shield, numbing the pain. We are the paint, decorating the blank canvas: electric blue; sunny yellow; blood red. Every nation, uniting in this mission, and we have done it.

Epitome of Evil!

JOE CHAMBERS

He had a face like the moon, pale and somehow cold. He was not a thing of beauty. His long hair wafted around him like black smoke. His cloak shifted as if in an unfelt wind.

Madness lurked in his face; his menacing, evil eyes cut through me. He didn't blink. His lips were thin and dark. His hands were aged and coarse. He only had three fingers on his right hand and his scars were like trenches on a battlefield.

The ground shook when he walked. His heavy boots clattered like thunder. He was very tall and his shoulders bulged, almost ripping his thin shirt. To a small boy like me he was a giant. His posture was rigid and still. Never have I seen such a figure of the devil!



Leo Huang

Madness lurked in his face; his menacing, evil eyes cut through me. He didn't blink. His lips were thin and dark. His scars were like trenches on a battlefield.

The Journey DAISY SQUIRE

The sickeningly pungent car smell snaked into my nostrils, making me want to retch. It dominated my airways, mercilessly stealing my last chance to breathe.

It was a beautifully blue day. Children were scurrying around, giggling gleefully and relishing the delightful crunch of the leaves. In the distance a faint tune of an ice cream van danced through the square, magnetising the little ones. It was like heaven on Earth.

And I was in hell.

I was riding in a raven-coloured car with tinted windows, a pathetic attempt to conceal the passenger inside. That had backfired. Unfazed by this manufactured flaw, paparazzi swarmed the car, blinding me with their ridiculous camera flashes that could startle the blind. It looked so sinister; there were no faces behind those flashes, just bright lights snapping at me again and again.

I would have tried to veil myself with my hands but they were a trembling, clammy mess. The clink of the handcuffs made me flinch every time I moved, just unnerving me even more.

The car began to bump and jolt, trying to weave around the mob of cameras as they thumped and yelled at the doomed vehicle. Yet I just sat there. What else could I do? I was in no physical pain after all; the noises and sudden movements of the car just lulled me into a conscious coma. Angry shouts from police officers and the public were distorted and drowned out by the incessant banging of my heart.

Only one noise pained me: it was an excruciating, brutal ache that stabbed at me over and over. The sound of my mother screaming echoed straight through me. I could recognise her voice anywhere; even from within a crowd of thousands I could distinguish hers from anywhere.

She was begging at the people to stop, screaming at them to let me out. All it did was wrench and pull at my heart, making me feel useless.

Every now and again there would be a tiny gap in between the jostling photographers which would give me just a glimpse of the glowing orange sunset. To say it was captivating would have been a colossal understatement. Ironically, with every snippet I got to see it gave me a surge of feeling that a new beginning would soon be arising. I

never knew Mother Nature had a sense of humour. I never was religious, but at that moment I had everything crossed and was praying to every god I'd ever heard of to have mercy on me.

Tick. Tick.

I could make out its shape. That thing. That evil contraption. Before I could turn fully to properly look at the gallows and the noose, the world went black, the voice behind me was muffled and the silence was deafening.

As the driver flicked the indicator downwards every cell in my body tensed with jabbing anticipation as to what awaited me. It was only when I could taste the bitter metallic taste of blood filling my mouth that I realised I was biting my tongue.

I didn't care: blood meant life and danger. Blood was exhilarating and I needed all the excitement I could muster. I needed to have the rush and I

needed so many thoughts in my head that I might explode, just so I could have a distraction from reality. I needed something, anything, to brainwash me into thinking that this was a bad dream and I was going to be ok.

I welcomed the taste: it was a red honey and I savoured its every drop.

Suddenly the smooth tarmac under the car became a lot less smooth and evolved into the jagged and unruly surface of grass. My chest began to rise and fall so ferociously, it was as if my heart was attempting to escape from my rib cage.

As the car door to my left snapped open, the evening air flooded in giving me relief like no other. A silence blanketed the square as I stepped out of the vehicle. Hundreds of faces were staring at me in pure disgust: in every direction people were pointing and covering their children's eyes. Why bring them to a place like this?

In the corner of my eye I could make out its shape. That thing. That evil contraption, our sad form of justice. Before I could turn fully to properly look at the gallows and the noose, the world went black, the voice behind me was muffled and the silence was deafening.

Reminiscence

ALEXANDER NENOV

Sometimes in Europe you meet people who look discontented but can never explain why. This happens worst of all amongst Slavonic people: people who have been under a restrictive communist system and habitually complain about everything for no conspicuous reason and put no effort into changing things. Anything different was seen as wrong and I saw this as normal; now, in my old age after the regime fell, I realise how wrong I was.

The eastern block was a miserable place at the time: my city was no exception. The endlessly twisting streets were grey and consumed by dust. The grey blocks of flats, echoing Stalinist architecture, compressed the streets. The insulation coatings of those decaying buildings were tumbling, piece by piece, onto the ground of dust. A constant crying of crows echoed in the distance. The skies were suppressed by grey clouds and the sun could not hope to pierce such an impediment. I continued to walk, passing dusty doors that seemed to have been slashed by wild predators, becoming aware of the

shops that were open at that early hour selling Pravda, spreading the news of “the west sleeping under a red moon” and Gagarin being successful in the Vostok programme that drained our resources. The people around me had been celebrating and were reeking of Rakia: a sharp stench of ethanol that pierced the sinuses; the dusty pavement was littered with cigarettes. Like many communists at the time, I believed that educating the younger generation in the Marxist doctrine was essential and it was my job to ensure that schools were doing what was expected. I had reached the school I was supposed to inspect: no different to the rest: consumed in grey and cold concrete, celebrating Gagarin’s

The endlessly twisting streets were grey and consumed by dust. The people around me had been celebrating and were reeking of Rakia: a sharp stench of ethanol that pierced the sinuses; the dusty pavement was littered with cigarettes.

success, like many others on that historic day.

Oh, how blind I was! I can now see how we were burying our younger generation with propaganda. "Western corruption" was eradicated. Every subject was entrapped by ideology.

There was rationing of electricity. The

The educator was speaking passionately about the October Revolution. All of the students were paying extraordinary attention. I entered the room and noticed a student who was not.

lights had died out. I inspected the music department. All thirty students were submerged in silence in the shadowy room, heeding the teacher playing the dusty piano. The superb echo of Korsakov was embarrassing them, as I expected, as they were memorising the notes of our grand soviet composer. Mesmerised, and rightfully so. The next inspection was

the history class: twenty-five younger students, perhaps about 16 years old. The educator was speaking passionately about the October Revolution. All of the students were paying extraordinary attention. I entered the room and noticed a student who was not: she was humming something. She was ignoring the lesson as if it was nonsense being vomited at her. She filled me with suspicion but I decided to take no notice. Afterwards, I passed by the drama department. They were executing Mayakovsky! There was no shadow of shame in the educator: forcing the students to perform a play Stalin rightfully disapproved of. Those disgraceful satires were forbidden in order to support the students in the rightful direction of Marxism. I noted this appalling conduct and liberated the students from such inappropriate propaganda.

It is only now that I realise how appalling the attitude towards Mayakovsky was: rejecting and accusing his satirical work. I am now full of remorse for supporting his prosecution. Eventually it made him end his miserable, meaningless life. His life's work was excluded; his creativity crucified; his effort devalued. All

because of a satire which Stalin disapproved of? Even after Mayakovsky's suicide? I saw this as justifiable. It is only now, forty years later, that I become enlightened to this ridiculous maliciousness.

I went out on the grey twisting streets. I noticed the girl who had been humming: her face was covered in dust and she was wearing filthy clothes. I became enthralled: the scampering siren.

After the inspection, I went out on the grey twisting streets. I noticed the girl who had been humming: her face was covered in dust and she was wearing filthy clothes. Standing behind her I became aware of an aroma of tobacco and perfume and that she had untied her hair which the wind blew against relentlessly; both were unacceptable for a student. She looked scared and was in

a hurry, which made her suspicious. She increased her speed and began to sing in a western language and I became enthralled, not only me but others on the street as well; staring at the scampering siren. It was greatly distressing how one of them had infiltrated our society. As she went around a corner an agent from the Bulgarian Committee of State Security caught her and drove away. It was the most relief I felt in my life: she could have been a western spy.

I dare not imagine what happened to that girl. She seemed suspicious at the time but now I see that there was no reason to be apprehended by Darzhavna Sigurnost. That was the problem; anything different was seen as wrong: that is why they made sure that there isn't anything different! They made us transparent! They used to tell us how to smile and laugh, how to live and how to die. Realistically, there was no truth in Pravda and no information in Izvestia. It was always twisted by the leaders. It is only now that I realise how wrong I was to support such an ideology and shall regret it for the rest of my life.



Sam Brown

The End

HESTER JACKSON

I am lonely.

Trolleys crash and clang. The screech of toddler travels through the air. The burble of babies, as their mothers try to comfort them, makes me jealous. Walkers scavenge the bread on the shelves for their evening meal, as a hunter searches for its prey. Brats demand everything they see; stressed mothers yell in response. I am lonely...

I sit and stare out of the floor to ceiling windows overlooking the car park. Metal monsters flood the sodden tarmac and shoppers, busy as ants, crash into each other, running to and fro to get out of the rain. Trees lining the car park's perimeter look frail and black, almost dead without leaves, their branches like burnt over-straightened hair. The light outside is dull and weak, not dark enough for streetlights, but enough to feel as if I am looking through a black veil. The mist over the distant hills crumbles slowly down.

I look down and notice my faded pink boots – once bright, vivid and full of life. Now the colour is dull and flat, like our relationship. Used napkins, chocolate cake crumbs, empty crisp packets all

litter the floor, giving the appearance of landfill. Above, industrial warehouse girders support the roof. On the tables there are used mugs. Deflated cappuccino froth and cold, damp teabags cling to the bottoms of cups.

He stares at me from across the table. His eyes are dead, the colour of dry, destroyed grass. The crinkles at the corners of his eyes used to smile at me; now they are set firm in a scowl.

We sit. The silence is like another person sitting at the table. The tension between us is awkward and unwanted. Not knowing who will speak first or what we will say makes it even more uncomfortable. My stomach is churning and it feels as if my world is falling apart around me: a pack of playing cards has been built into a pyramid and has been blown over. The mist on the hills falls even lower now, enclosing the car park.

His words wind, then crush me. I try to talk but it is like choking on my own breath. The words will not come. I see his lips moving but can't hear anything. All I can see are his lips, not chattering but shattering the world around me.

He smiles – trying to be pleasant. But the smile just comes from his mouth and teeth; not from his eyes. It is empty, like a black hole.

Miss Spiderwick

GEORGIA GREEN

Piercing eyes glare back at me, framed by the thin black glasses that hung on her pale saggy skin. Her eyebrows were like dead slugs, big and greasy. But it was her triangular nose which stood out to me most. It was long and steep like a mountain. The tip of her nose was a bit like a right angle, pointy and flat. It was on that very nose that the enormous oily mud brown mole sat as still as a rock. She had prickly cactus spike hairs growing off that mortifying mole.

Her laugh was evil and devious but not many things amused her. When she opened her mouth she would reveal these few rotten yellow teeth which floated in the deep dark hole which some people called her mouth. She had dimples at each side of her mouth, but to me they looked more like full stops. You could hardly tell she had lips because they were so thin and wrinkly. She had dull dry hair which was like branches on trees. It didn't mould to the outline of her bony face like most hair, it looked more like it had been randomly glued on. It was quite funny.

She was so skinny with her scarecrow body and her long scaly legs. She was an unpleasant neighbour to have living in her large mysterious house. I have tried to help her, but what can you do with a stubborn old lady? She only ever speaks to me when she is screaming, "Get off my lawn, you naughty rascal!"

It is difficult!

It was on that very nose that the enormous, oily, mud-brown mole sat as still as a rock. She had prickly, cactus-spike hairs growing off that mortifying mole.



Tracy Gan

The Garden

OLIVER HACKWELL

The sun was alive and ready to serve another day. Dark oak doors opened to reveal acres of radiant beauty. Lone sections of pure white lilies proudly broke the overgrown greens of prickled shrubbery surrounding them. Leading past the lilies, fiery reds of intense petals breathed in the faint wind. Bushes hugged a crumbled path of pebbles leading down to an entwining river of steadily rushing fog etched perfectly into the landscape. A frail figure drifted slowly towards the stream past a strip of rippling bluebells. Agitated birds in song became suddenly subdued, as the wind increased to a howling whisper, almost trying to tell the hunched lady something. As she crept closer to the torrent of water, the breeze stopped and returned to its previous calm.

The shimmering water played with the boy's mind. The dazzling sun diverted warm rays of thoughts into his head. His reverie was extinguished when the rays were blocked by a dragonfly of rare colours grasping at a quivering rock. Its wing was twisted,

scarred and flapping erratically. The boy briefly contemplated bounding through the tranquil stream to catch it when he stopped. He listened. The once-lively birds were drowned out by a sudden gust of wind that knocked the dragonfly off balance. It plunged into the stream never to be seen again. The little child was strangely saddened by this incident: it had hit him deeper than he had expected. He sat on a smooth rock and let the cold water lap over his scorching feet. The sun had risen to its full strength, and pierced through what had once been a secluded area of mild bliss. Once again his mind wondered back into a world entirely his own.

The old woman came to a stop at the river's edge and plunged a glistening red apple she had picked earlier into the cleansing waters. She took it to her creased face and took a bite. It made a glorious crunch and flooded her mouth with an indescribable sugary heaven. Peering across the length of the river, her tired eyes rested on the small boy, enchanted by the waves enveloping his pale legs. His eyes were a startling almond brown reflecting the twirling water surrounding him. His dark black hair was messily swept to one side by his short, fat undeveloped fingers. His

feet were fractured by the fog-like water and appeared a single pale cream through it. The rock he was sitting on had been shaped since the dawn of time by the expert craftsmanship of the water. The old woman marvelled at how nature stayed so beautiful regardless of years passing, so unlike her own time-ravaged body. Her train of thoughts were suddenly interrupted as she noticed the boy staring back at her...

The rock he was sitting on had been shaped since the dawn of time by the expert craftsmanship of the water. The old woman marvelled at how nature so beautiful regardless of years passing, so unlike her own time-ravaged body.

The boy, now satisfied with his cooled feet, drew them out of the flowing fog, stood up, and stretched languidly. He was about to head back to the beautiful garden of flowers when he suddenly

stopped. As if by some magnetic force, his eyes were pulled to a stooped female figure who was watching him intently from over the bank. Wearing a flowing, floral green dress down to her ankles, he could now see she was staring into space, almost looking beyond him. In contrast her silver hair was tightly pulled back into a controlled bun perched on top of her head. However it was her withered face with ferocious sky blue eyes that sent a sudden jolt through him like a powerful electric current. Despite having never met her, her face was achingly familiar, as if a long-lost memory had suddenly been re-awoken. Before the splinters of his memory could reform, she drew back into the trees and vanished. He saw brief glimpses of her dress through the foliage as she seemingly floated back toward the garden. The boy felt compelled to follow.

As he hurried forward, the setting sun sunk gracefully behind the tree line and threw up a pale shade of pink into the blanket of clouds above. Of the old woman there was no sign, leaving the boy to wonder if she had ever been there at all.



Sydney-Jay Barlow

The Small Print HESTER PLANT

Give me a verse. The last one, I swear.
Only, let the lyrics be mumbled bare.

But The Small Print; it's carved.
You've pressed the pencil too hard
When I rub at the words,
They'll stay.

I like blurbs. Not books.
Accents. Not words.
Why number the feathers
In the call of a bird?

Counting calories of chocolates ("The last one, I swear!")
Films and car journeys, hands held. Gloveless. Bare.

Let me cross the upturned palms of mountains
Treading away The Small Print.
I'll find
Truth and resentment; Lies and contentment.

“

I like blurbs. Not books.

Accents. Not words.

”

Sewn Up ELISABETH BOGART

There's a state of mind, right before you wake up and engage in reality, where you're eternally happy. For a minute you're resting on a soft down quilt, the early morning sun pools onto the floor, warming the room while you remain in some dream world, content with the person you've become.

"This is the patient, then?"

His voice is sharp, and his question brings me into reality. I'm afraid that if I try to open my eyes, I'll find out that one of them can't open. He's not yet interrogating me, but instead some poor, judgmental old woman who'd rather be taking her cigarette break than dealing with him. Or dealing with me.

The bed is stiff, and the polyester sheets scratch at the backs of my thighs and at my right cheek.

"Yes sir, she stumbled through the ambulance entrance around 4 o'clock."

Did I? I build up some courage and manage to lift my eyelids; I get a blurry view of tan blinds across a square window. The sun forces its way into the room, and I start to feel clammy as I hear his thick-soled boots smack against

the cold linoleum. Sweat trickles down my back. It's too hot, burning, and his steps reverberate inside my skull. She follows behind him, her cheap white Keds squeaking as they approach my bed. All courage has left me. My stomach is rolling, weighed down by a nervous, guilty feeling. I try and think around my throbbing skull but my mind offers me nothing.

My right arm burns. I free my left hand from the tucked-in sheets and feel the multiple tubes stuck inside. I can feel the aching muscle underneath—my skin will be a vibrant violet by lunch.

There's a state of mind,
right before you wake up
and engage in reality,
where you're eternally
happy. For a moment
you're resting on a soft
down quilt, the early
morning sun pools onto
the floor, content with
the person you've
become.

“Miss Struck? Officer Robbins is here to see you.” I’ve barely spared a glance at the woman, but her emphasis on “Officer” lets me know that she wants me to play nice: he is a detective after all, a very important, moral, person.

I nod, sheepishly and unawares, hoping feigned helplessness will soften the grim face of Officer Robbins, even if it’s useless on the seasoned nurse. Also, I’m too tired to move much else.

Officer Robbins is thin and wiry, not in a bendable, easygoing way, but in a way where I think he might poke me with his elbow if he steps too close. His hair, coarse, but prematurely gray, is still in a barracks crew-cut. My older brother Danny had the same haircut, years ago, when he joined the force.

“Hello, Miss. I hope you are feeling decent?”

A vicious pain rips at my lips when I try and respond.

“No, no, no. Don’t even try and speak, lady, the doctor’s wired your mouth shut.”

Blinking back tears, I look up at him, his face purposefully set in a serious line, and feel like giggling. I don’t remember when I was last referred to as a lady. He’s not in on the joke.

“Last night one of the ambulance drivers found you past out in your own blood and vomit, in some party dress?”

Here he breaks off from recounting the facts to nod at a small, gory pile of sequins and black nylon.

“I am assuming that you did not do this to yourself. Am I correct to assume as such? This isn’t the nicest part of town, girls like yourself... well, you all usually travel with someone, right?”

He’s already assumed—correctly of course—but it’s disappointing nonetheless. I lay there, unable to shield my eyes from the glaring sun, let alone speak out and defend myself, unable to cut through his circumlocution and tell him to...

I wasn’t alone, he’s right. My memory starts to return, the blackened splotches of stolen time reveal themselves: I remember it all: my least favorite sequined dress, the one I wear only when working, my stupid heels that cut into my ankles, my fake fringe, all of what I’ve become in the shadow of a broken street lamp, cold.

It gets so cold at night.

And that man, the one who bought me for 75 bucks because Marc whispered into his ear, “She comes highly recommended.”

75 bucks just to pistol-whip a drunken girl in a sequin dress.

No one ever calls my job difficult or fun or legal. I can see the emotion on the officer's face, the thinly veiled pity, mixed with anger and disgust. I wonder if he has a sister, probably thanking God that I'm not her.

But I'm somebody's sister.

"Listen, Miss Struck, if you are in that sort of trouble—any sort of trouble—come talk to one of the detectives. Even

you could be of some help to all the cases we have piling up at the precinct."

Even me? A man always knows how to make you feel worthy. He leaves his card on my bedside table, and backs out of the room and down the sterile hallway. I shred that business card into fourteen uneven pieces, and then I reach for the morphine drip to send myself back to a more pleasant mentality, while I still can.



Charlotte Ladd



Alice Hyde

My hands search for the warmth ZOE JEFFERIES

My hands search for the warmth on the other side of the bed. All I feel is coldness. The blinding light creeps through draped curtains and gleams into my eyes. My feet gradually descend and find the fleecy carpet that supports my body. I stumble towards the bathroom and my hands tremble for the light switch. I wait for the one standing light bulb to flicker on. The mirror ahead is smeared with handprints. My eyes stare into it: the dark bags line my eyes. Tangles of dark brown greasy hair cover my face with horror. Before I could brush my hair away the light flickers off. I am in complete darkness.

The door slams shut. And I know I'm not alone.

I reach for the doorknob: the door doesn't open. I try again, but still it's locked. I yank on the doorknob with so much power it comes off. I try to flick on the light switch but I am left in darkness.

My eyes peer into the darkness but all I can make out is a reflection in the mirror. I study it for a second and I know it's not mine. A ghostly figure

stands behind me. I shut my eyes, hoping for it to be part of my imagination but no, it's there. When I open them again, I hear a cry from the cot. I feel an urge to scream and call for help. But a noise might not be the smartest move right now. I remain composed whilst staring at the figure in the mirror. I gradually rotate my body towards the figure but it's not there. My hand reaches to see. Yes, it is, but I can't see it. Suddenly, I'm jerked forward and am being dragged somewhere. My hand is now tightly locked: the figure's fist with its daggering nails impale my skin. I fight against it with all my power until I feel a cold fluid being injected into me. I scream and shriek for Steve countless numbers of times until I can feel my body drop to the ground. My eyes close and I know I am hallucinating.

Darkness is all I can see. Eventually a tiny white spec appears in the dimness. It grows in size and it becomes lighter until I hear the sweat sound of birds singing. Where am I, I think to myself?

I open my eyes and find myself laid in bed. My hands search for the warmth on the other side of the bed and I feel the warmth of Steve beside me. And I know I realise it was a...

Memory.

The light and dark inside us

MOLLIE WATSON

It was raining; big fat droplets of rain, that pitter-pattered on the windows. She was crying; round rivulets of salty tears dripped from her red face to the floor.

Her eyes were blood-shot and partially hidden from view by her abnormally large glasses. Her body shuddered from the very tip of her head to the base of her back where the spasm was finally absorbed by the hard material of the stairs. Footsteps, which were believed to be both female, marched simultaneously down the corridor edging closer by the millisecond. Their suppressed giggles made the little girl turn and freeze as fear paralysed her body. It was not that the footsteps scared her, only that she was not overly fond of what followed. Two skinny girls rounded the corner arm in arm together and stopped dead in their tracks as they eyed the little girl...

“Ah, just who we’ve been lookin’ for,” the blonde one said in a broad Yorkshire accent while smacking bubble gum,

which made the little girl feel quite nauseous. The second girl, a brunette, saw that she had been crying and cautiously paced towards her.

“We came to apologise for what happened earlier.” The blonde spoke again but this time the accent had died down and it sounded as though she actually meant it. The brunette came to the little girl’s side and sat down next to her, wisely keeping her distance. She gingerly placed a hand on the girl’s juddering shoulder to try and comfort her but to no benefit. The girl flinched and sent the brunette running in fear back to her twin because she knew how things could go from bad to good in a second.

“Look, I came to see if you’re alright. I know what I did before wasn’t the kindest thing I ever did, so can we shake on it and make everything go away?” The blonde’s bony hand slithered from her twin’s grip and was forced in front of her. Her pink and silver nails made the little girl shiver and back up a bit on the stairs. When she felt the wall against her back, it made her feel just a little safer. The blonde shook her hand impatiently and continued to chew her gum ignorantly. The little girl deliberately turned her head and looked

at the gaunt skull that was staring at her. The girl lifted her hand and scarcely took the blonde's only to find herself being yanked up of the steps and into an emaciated embrace. They walked away from those steps as equals.

Wait. That's not what happened.

The smile made the little girl's eyes widen with horror as the two girls grabbed each arm and pulled her up where they could see her properly. Another smile appeared on the brunette's face as she waited in anticipation for the blonde's approval.

"Ah, just who we've been lookin' for," the blonde one said in a broad Yorkshire accent while smacking bubble gum, which made the little girl feel quite nauseous. The two girls trotted towards her with an utmost confidence that sent a shudder down her spine. The brunette

stood with all her weight on her left foot and a hand on the other hip while her twin was doing the opposite.

"Thought I'd come finish what I started earlier cos' I still think it's your fault, otherwise this" – the blonde gestured to a red mark on the brunette's cheek where she had been slapped beforehand – "wouldn't have happened, would it?" They closed in on the girl who was now cowering in the corner. The two skinny girls stood so that the girl couldn't see past them and then the blonde smiled grotesquely. The smile made the little girl's eyes widen with horror as the two girls grabbed each arm and pulled her up where they could see her properly. Another smile appeared on the brunette's face as she waited in anticipation for the blonde's approval. The blonde nodded and two scraggy arms took their ready position while the hands curled into ruttled spheres and struck with an almighty blow. The little girl fell to the floor and a single tear rolled off her red cheeks to the floor as the rain continued to fall.

The girl never saw the light, only darkness...

“

He smiles – trying to be pleasant. But the smile just comes from his mouth and teeth; not from his eyes. It is empty, like a black hole.

”

Kiran Kaur



Trinket Box

ABIGAIL STRETTON-MOORE

I don't have a name. No one ever gave me a name. I live in here, in this dark box, quietly waiting. I wait until someone opens the box and then up I go. I turn around and around to my pretty music. I am no bigger than your little finger. I stand on my tiptoes and I twirl, slowly, arms poised above my head, around and around.

My dress was pretty once, frothy and sparkly pink, but the pink and the sparkles have faded because over a century has passed since I was placed in this box, on my pointy pink shoes, waiting to dance for my little girl. My trinket box, with its tiny lock and key, has held many memories which I have kept safe. Some were bright happy secrets and some were sad reminders of the harm that people can do.

Annabelle was 12 years old when I first twirled my dance. I was a gift from her Daddy before he went off to fight somewhere. She read his letters as I twirled. She kept her letters in our trinket box tied with a ribbon. After a while the letters stopped arriving. She had a picture of her Daddy too: he was

smiling but it didn't make her happy, it made her cry. Annabelle got bigger but I stayed the same. Our box became home to pretty jewels and perfume and another picture. A handsome boy: this picture did make her happy.

One day Annabelle gave me to another little girl. She was called Mary and she was Annabelle's granddaughter. Mary was a clever little girl who liked to read adventure stories. Her favourite was about a lion, a witch and a magical wardrobe. She read the story to me, over and over in her bedroom when she was allowed to keep on the light. Sometimes Mary had to keep the light off because the sky would light up with red fire and the crashing of bombs. It seems that people did not learn very much from the last war and Mary's house was destroyed by the angry fire in the sky.

Elizabeth found me next. I was lost amongst the broken bricks and smoke and only I made her happy: one lovely thing found amongst the ruins made by angry men. Elizabeth grew up too and she fell in love with a man with silly hair, called Elvis. She played his records in her bedroom and twirled even more than I did! Grown-ups can be so angry and dark while their children can be so

happy just twirling to the songs of someone they have never even met.

The years rolled by and Elizabeth grew tired of Elvis and of twirling. She became sensible and kept her treasures in the bank. Luckily her daughter Poppy didn't go to the bank so I once again had a collection of treasures. I would twirl and Poppy would bob, Her favourites lived on badges in my box, and they were called The Beatles. I think that Poppy's music was not as pretty as mine but her songs were about love, and all her badges were about flowers and Peace. I think that Poppy was good for the world.

Her favourite treasure was a little tiny man called Neil. He wore a strange puffy white suit and helmet. He didn't say very much but Poppy told me that he had flown through the sky in a rocket and walked on the moon. How wonderful that people had stopped their fighting and reached for the stars!

Poppy had an annoying toy which made her angry all the time: a block of squares with coloured sides which she twisted and turned but never managed to make all the sides the right colour. Mr Rubik must have been very unpopular.

Poppy had a favourite Princess doll called Diana and she kept newspaper

clippings of her lovely wedding and her lovely clothes in our trinket box but one day she threw them all away. She cried because the people who chased the Princess for her picture had caused a terrible accident and Poppy said she would never keep such pictures again.

Poppy's daughter is called Rose. She doesn't keep treasures in my trinket box. Her treasures live on a tiny phone. Rose takes out her phone and looks at it. Sometimes it makes her happy and sometimes it makes her very sad. She takes pictures of the world on her phone and keeps her memories there.

It's a shame that Rose doesn't keep her memories in my trinket box: I like keeping the secrets of my little girls. I have seen what makes them happy and brave and I have seen their sadness too. Light and darkness have both spent time here in this trinket box with me.

Perhaps this time I might
even be given a name.

Perhaps one day Rose might remember me and give me to her daughter and we can twirl together. Perhaps this time I might even be given a name.

Verity Rapley



Ackworth School

Ackworth, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, WF7 7LT Tel: +44 (0)1977 611401 Fax: +44 (0)1977 616225
Email: admissions@ackworthschool.com School Website: www.ackworthschool.com