

Ascham Ink



Ascham School 2020

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Foreword

This year's edition of Ascham Ink reveals a remarkable variety of written and visual texts by students from Years 7 to 12.

The visual texts are often striking and bold in their use and defiance of conventions. Similarly, in the prose and poetry one finds that students are able to achieve powerfully unconventional creative work, while other compositions are remarkable for their use, subversion and transcendence of conventions.

In many of these works, we discover young artists struggling to come to terms with a variety of emotional challenges. We must allow no adult world-weariness to tempt us to dismiss such concerns as the tediously predictable troubles of any adolescent, for youthful artists address age-old struggles with startlingly fresh inventiveness and shed new light upon our own experiences.

Thanks to all those who contributed; in sharing something of your work with us, you share yourselves.

Andrew Lane



Angellinah Guo, Year 9

A Boy and his Sister

by Alastrina Wong (Year 7)

Snow. Winter. Fire. I watched my dad rock himself to sleep on his chair. His eyes closed; his eyebrows buried together. A frown was plastered on his face. I have had the moral obligation of tending to him for as long as I can remember. And I am sick of it. I had a sister whose name was Anna. Anna was the golden child, always praised by Dad for her good grades, her smooth poise, and her beauty. She died five years ago in a boating accident. The flag pole had impaled her head one windy day, and her body had slowly sunk like a paper weight.

I was always in her shadow. One step behind her. Her life could have been mine. And I hated her for it.

I sat quietly next to him, flipping through the pages of one my favourite paperbacks. His eyes fluttered open. He stood up. I sighed. His bones were brittle and thin as paper trying to support his frail legs. His body would jolt if he put his foot down too hard on the floor, and I could only smile. Staggering, he clenched his frail, wooden, walking stick, his teeth grinding. Coming over to me, he shouted in his husky voice, "What are you doing, boy?" The scent of port and cigarettes mixed in his breath and polluted the air.

I jumped, dropping my book.

"Dad, would you like some freshly brewed coffee?" I asked in an automated voice. His eyes glared at me, ignoring the question. He staggered away, clutching his walking stick. Every time I spoke to my father, an impenetrable pain built up in my chest. I used to look up to him, but those times are gone.

It was four o'clock. Dad would expect dinner in an hour.

I pulled out the pots and pans, quickly frying the chicken so that his was overcooked. As I mashed the potatoes, I made sure I added a few extra pinches of salt. I knew Dad would hate it. As I plated up dinner, I meandered into the living room, delivering his plate. He always let out a grunt when I walked to him like this. I could see his brittle teeth trying to sink into the chicken.

I sat opposite to Dad, in our usual formation. There was only one candle in front of us lighting up the room. After he scraped half of his meal into the bin there was no good night, no 'I love you,' nothing. This table used to be able to fit four, but now only two of us occupy these seats. I heard laughter in the distance. My head turned sharply, and the laughter disappeared, now a mere memory. I too then picked up my plate, scraping off the dried-up bits of chicken into the bin. I returned to my haven. Picking up my old paperback, I decided I needed a new book. Heading out of bed, I crept down the corridor daring not to wake up Dad. I crawled up the narrow stairs that came from above as I went into the attic.

Dust swarmed my lungs as I went and found another book. I lit a candle and walked around the tiny room. My back hunching over, somebody was following my every move, scaring me as I looked against the wall. I put down the candle as I knelt against the rickety, wooden floorboard. I opened the cardboard box hoping to see any more books to add to my collection in my haven. As I looked down, my hand touched a cool metallic surface. I noticed some rusty latches. I pulled it up and I saw it gleaming in the low light of the candle. I opened it, curious for what was inside. Pictures, hundreds of pictures, all of her. Anna. I had to burn them, burn them all. I felt her face looking at me, my hatred coming out. This was my time to shine! But he would not let me. He kept me still in the shadows.

I ran to my haven carrying this tin box, not caring if I stepped on another creaky floorboard.

She was the joy in our household, the one that brought our family together. Something my dad said I could never do.

I tried to go to sleep but I couldn't. I crept downstairs, the box in my left hand and the other carrying the candle. The fire was nearly out so I put more kindling in. I gently placed the box down and opened the lid. Her face staring into my eyes once loving, now ice. I gently moved closer to the fire, the bundle of photos in my hand. Slowly I kneeled, lighting the photos one by one.

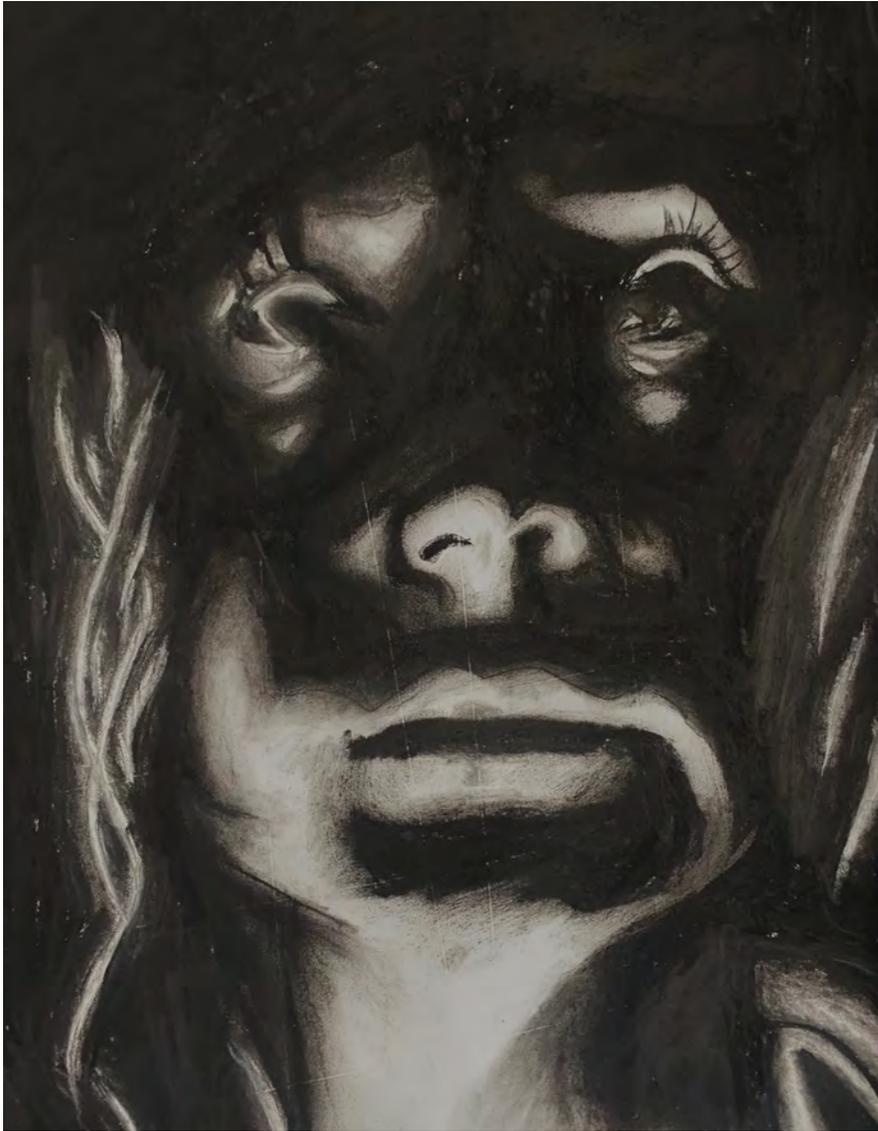
"What are you doing?" he asked. A smile crept up on my face as I predicted his reaction.

"You know I have always loved you," he said, his dark circles disappearing as he edged his way closer to me. My hand wavered above the fire.

"Really?" I said, hope in my eyes. I wanted to hug him, but I could not. Not after what he did to me. He ignored me, neglected me and now he wants me to forgive him. My eyes turned black again, my body cold as stone.

"I have always wondered what happened the day Anna died."

"I will tell you what happened. I was glad I was steering the boat that day. And I was glad I chose the windiest day to sail. And I was glad I watched her porcelain skin turn blue under the current of the water. I was glad she could not swim and I could!" I said, a deadly grin smothering my face as the edge of the photo caught flame. I am a dark soul now. This was my time to shine. I was supposed to be the golden child! Well now my time has come.



Diana Sharma, Year 8

A Sea of Corpses

By Diana Sharma (Year 8)

Be careful as you leave the sands,
Go not on a whim.
Oh gentle waters even in sleep
Are beautified by moonlight's touch and
so the heart must swim.
Shadowed by the touch of sun,
Hidden from the lover's eye.
One light step can't be undone
Smothered is the captain's cry.

Those waves which come in crashing cries,
Relieve the sailors on your shores.
And wash them to the land of God,
Your sinful ways the Lord abhors.

Suffocate the hindmost joy.
Your fingers slowly creeping,
A stretch of soldiers you do deploy
Upon the cold and weeping,
Remorse is not among your depths
Or softly would your fury rage,
The vessels they would have their sets
But in antiquity you'd have no page.

A tear went down my face

By Georgia Young (Year 9)

A tear went down my face as I trembled.
I sat on the floor and felt regretful;
Calling me back was an existing thought —
He is not a saint, just so forgetful.
I felt distant from the world around me.
Why am I always feeling so alone?
My heart sinks into a pool of sadness,
Waiting for the call on the telephone.
Is it my fault? You don't have the courage.
It feels like you are in a different place.
I stare at the same blank wall every day,
Just waiting for the day to see your face.

Bringing out the best

By Lucy McLaughlin (Year 9)

When one is lucky enough to find love,
A conventional kind of madness,
It is like an earthquake shaking above;
When it comes, the decision brings gladness.
Our roots seek to become entwined as one;
However, our love is not breathlessness;
Never beyond our future are we done,
And making our love shows no recklessness.
No excitement and no fantasising,
The truths of my showering love for you,
Each convinced of the feelings arising,
There isn't anything I wouldn't do.
When being in love has all burned away,
"I love you" is all I want to say.

Dancing with the Spirits

By Evita Abela (Year 8)

Once upon a time, in an undisturbed Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory there lived an Aboriginal girl named Waru who walked the forest collecting berries and sap from the paperbark trees that sheltered the rough bush floor. She could hear the kookaburras laughing through the thick wind. With her, she carried a small woven basket and as she collected things, she slowly filled her basket up. If she was lucky she might get an emu egg to share with Aunty. When the sun began to set, she would run back home, her thick brown curls bobbing up and down, through the winding bushes to the hut where all the girls and aunts feasted on the day's catches. Today, there was a goanna roasting on the fire and the elders were dancing around in a circle, their faces painted white with ochre. They did this every night to welcome the spirits and the ancestors into the bushland to enjoy the evening and to dance with them.

Tonight was a celebration because many of the aunts were going kilometres away to another camp to look after the children there for a few weeks. Tomorrow at dawn, the children would walk with the aunts to the final wattle bush before the creek. From there they would wait until they could no longer see them and then run back home to the elders.

A few days had passed and there was a cluster of grey clouds that quickly turned into a terrible storm. The baby birds were knocked out of their nests and the trees had all blown over, their roots pointing to the sky. Waru was sent to deliver food and leaf material to the aunts at the camp, kilometres away. She had her basket in her hand, filled with grubs and animal meat and she wore kangaroo skin on her back and head to keep her warm. She set off through the bush, the spinifex scratching her legs and feet. The bush seemed to stretch forever.

Waru laid down by a gumtree and rested for she had been walking for ages. She stood up when she was ready to complete her journey. She spotted a dingo lurking in the banksias across from her and grounded her feet in the soil, preparing for the worst. The dingo was eyeing her basket filled with tasty meats and grubs. She hid the basket behind her back as the dingo started circling her. She peered down at the beast as it snarled, showing its colossal teeth. She silently and stillly waited for the dingo to retreat into the rugged bushland.

Night was falling and the stars were shining above, the emu in the sky was visible and the ancestors were looking down on the land. She finally made it to the camp safely and delivered the food and leaf material to the main tent to be processed and found her way to Aunty's tent. Waru knew it was her tent because she always kept a special rock outside to welcome spirits and ancestors into her company. She walked in to find Aunty lifeless on the floor with gouges out of her arms and legs. A pool of blood was developing around her and flies were swarming over the corpse. Waru immediately fell to the dirt floor, desperately trying to wake Aunty but it was no use, she lay still. She looked to her right to find something lying on the leaf bed that was Aunty's. She cautiously crawled over to find the dingo ready to pounce. The dingo's teeth were smeared with blood and his eyes were focused on Waru. Without hesitation, she grabbed whatever she could from behind her and threw it at the dingo but it was not enough to stop it. By now, Waru was at her feet and was not giving up without a fight. She rapidly started throwing sticks and rocks from the ground and finally managed to scare the dingo off. With determination and courage, she sent it running, tail between legs, behind the camp. She watched it run into the bush and out of sight. Once she was certain she and the rest of the camp was safe, she bent back down to Aunty's aid. She could do nothing for Aunty was dead.

She stood outside the tent and called for others to assist. They would take her into the bush to rest peacefully amongst the gums and wattles. As they carried her away, Waru swiftly picked up the rock from the front of the tent, she clenched it in her fist. When they were lowering Aunty into the leaves, she placed the rock on her chest so that she would be with the ancestors in the night sky. A sharp wind blew from the bushes behind the gathering of people. The spirit of the dead slowly emerged and pressed on the stone on Aunty's chest. Everyone watched as the rock and Aunty began to glow amongst the leaves and plants around them. In a flash, Aunty was lying on her back with her eyes open and the once gouges out of her arms and legs were now soft skin. The spirit disappeared into thin air and an eerie calmness passed through the damp land.

The day Waru saw the spirit was one that she will never forget. From then, Aunty has passed and is now at peace and is one of the brightest stars that shines in the night sky.

Do the work do not die

By Monique Chen (Year 12)

I was convinced that my mother looked at me, really saw me, only once. I had grasped on the brink of thirteen that I did not contribute to a comfortable marriage. My father liked to joke that my mum was the typical Shanghai bitch: scornful, dismissive, curt and cold. If she was beautiful, as some people had told me – it is hard to make that judgement of my own mother – her looks were not really the kind my father admired.

Now that seems too harsh. Even I can't justify saying that in front of seventy mourners. I struggle to find anything less than scathing to write about her. Suspended in my relentless flirtations with melancholy, I'm suddenly ten again. It's pouring, thick droplets collapse against the hood of the car. I'm hyperventilating in the Macquarie Ice Rink parking compound, simultaneously yet impressively polishing my skates while crying off my performance makeup. Ma doesn't do much to help, rather, she watches me through a thinly veiled disgust that doesn't elude me.

'Bu zuo bu si' she says.
'Huh?' I haven't quite yet learnt to ignore her sayings.
'You figure out meaning for yourself'.

It roughly translated to 'do the work do not die'. I decide to jot that down in my notepad, adding to the plethora of criticisms, under the guise of brainstorming. Two rounds of ginseng tea and one cigarette later, I finally bring myself to try again.

Before Ma got sick, we used to fold dumplings together because that was all we could do without arguing. This one time however, when I was twelve, it all changed. She had ordered me to rub the edges of the dumpling skins with egg yolk, as one must when making egg chive dumplings. However, her pronunciation of 'yolk' instead of 'yoke' (the Australian way), meant that I would ridicule her ruthlessly. The girls at school had previously made fun of me for picking up my parent's mistakes and I wasn't ready to accept my foreign-ness yet. We ate dinner in silence every night for the next week.

I wipe the salty droplets that have fallen onto the page. Now I'm sixteen and I'm sitting at the piano crying and writing on my sheet music with Ma. I'm tuning her out while she's grabbing my wrist in frustration. She can hardly hide her rage, face tensing, she's running out of proverbs to scream. Her mouth opens just to close, words wilting like flowers before they can bloom. I know what is about to happen, and I'm instantly proven right as she extends her arm to the closest orchid and throws it against the wall, tactfully missing my head by inches. The porcelain shards skip across the marble floor like pebbles on a river. Interrupting the typical rhythm of our arguments, I retaliate for the first time, reaching for the metronome. It breaks with a bittersweet melodic pang.

Screams and smashed glasses culminate to a silence. We both can't remember how it all began, and yet, we both continue to scream. I argue that she doesn't care enough to talk to me more, but I know she keeps silent in fear of mockery. Mockery of the words she mispronounces, and at times, the words she chooses, the food she cooks, the clothes she wears or the books she reads.

These days I normally tend to avoid the topic of my mother altogether. Both my girls never liked her. I see that this is probably my fault. Looking back, I see that I was too harsh. Only now I have recognised her courage, her bravery. The most valuable currency innate to humans – in my opinion being words – dissipated upon her decision to learn a new language in a land of louder, taller and whiter strangers. The little power she could gain I instantly damaged with the solipsistic ignorance of my adolescence. I can now admit to the healing power of her words, and would do anything to hear her say them one more time.

The pen effortlessly glides across the page: Ma had this saying that I think we all need to hear today. Do the work and do not die.

Dry-Walls and Charcoal

By Phoebe Santow (Year 12)

When my grandfather was dying, I read *The Catcher in the Rye*. Then I studied it as a school text. I guess that book isn't just one story to me; it holds all these different meanings that I can't really extricate or mould into a singular thing.

When my grandfather was dying and I read *The Catcher in the Rye* on a train back from Canberra, it made me angry. Why was Holden so disillusioned with the world? I suppose I grew tired of his relentless dissatisfaction – he didn't provide the solace I craved; that living really meant something, and when death came it symbolised a life well-lived.

I think my sister has always understood that book more than anyone else. When she barely left her room last year it became a museum, filled with cluttered papers and failed origami attempts and unlit candles lying around because she liked the 'mingling scents'. And the walls were shrouded in charcoal – all portraits of Holden; abstracted, fragmented, pieced together in hues of brown and black and grey.

We didn't really talk at all last year beyond fragile exchanges of "how are you?" and "can you pass the salt?" Then I came home one afternoon to find a charcoal drawing on my bed: Holden. I never said anything about how she had captured herself in a self-portrait; how the charcoal dissolved into her own personal truth.

Sometimes it's hard to write without feeling like it's meaningless. The words feel static as though they die when they leave my mind and fall on the page. It's hard to express anything that rings with true meaning. But I always keep writing. Perhaps it's for my sister. She gives me charcoal drawings and I leave her little pieces of poetry. They're like coded messages infiltrating the dry wall that separates my room from hers.

My poems feel encrypted and I often feel that her drawings are too. It's as though "I love you" became lost in translation. Or perhaps it's still there, caught in ink. All I know is that when I write, the pen draws itself to paper as though it keeps me human.

The Writer

In staunching a torrent
of voice and thoughts and memories and recollection;
my pen will trace the line
between vitality and fiction –
the lost and ever-present.

Empty

By Beatrice Power (Year 7)

My town is perched on the edge of a cliff, like it might slip into the dark ocean at any moment, while no one's watching. The weather has always been melancholy here for at least as long as I can remember, but memory has a way of playing tricks. The waves hammer the cliff, splashing and crashing, the heartbeat of the town. I spend my days painting the waves as they crash and roar. They are the only thing I have left to paint. Even my paints have faded; dashing blues becoming deep greys, the emerald greens giving way to the khaki of a fallen soldier.

I don't know when it all started to fade, I can't remember. I think it began with the little things: a box of matches, a pair of binoculars, but then it got bigger until I lost my couch, until my house started to fade. I am not sad, scared or confused about the missing objects. I feel a sense of nothing like the very light within me has died. Nothing but melancholy, which I can neither hold nor shake. I want to make it vanish altogether. Without this feeling I might disappear altogether and let the nothingness take over. The void flows through me a, poisoning my very soul with its venom of emptiness. It beckons me with incomprehensible sounds, slithering and snaking through my mind, twisting the memories that hold me together.

With a deep sigh I sit on the ground of my empty house staring at the hollow rooms. I can't remember the last time I have seen someone smile or laugh or even share a glimpse of happiness. I close my eyes as the house starts to vanish fading, fading... until it is empty, until there is nothing left. The void captures me in its prison cell as I sink and then fall. All feeling draining from me. I don't think, I don't feel, nothing. I'm as hollow as the rooms in my house, everything fading. Then I start to drown, the strong rapids of the void grasping me under the waves as they whip and churn. The current takes me further under the waves, no colour, no sound, nothing. Until it all stops, everything turning into a blur of shining lights as I take a deep breath. Will it be my last? Then, out of the shallow depths something or someone grasps my hand.

I start to rise, a bubble floating to the surface, coming back from under the waves, from under the void and then I return to my hollow house still faded. With utter shock I see a familiar face. I stare at her eyes, deep brown. I know these eyes but I can't find a name. She whispers "I'm sorry dad, I should have come sooner". I smile, as she pulls out a photo. It is a picture of a lady with a green dress blowing in the wind. She has deep brown eyes, the same as hers and is laughing, as her hair effortlessly blows across her face. A feeling of pain floods through me, the empty venom inside becomes filled with grief and sorrow. "It's Mum," says my daughter. "Remember this day? You were on a picnic and she sat on the strawberries she brought and she couldn't stop laughing. That's when you asked her to marry you."

Tears come to my eyes, trickling down, dripping colour everywhere. The pain overwhelms me and yet it gives feeling again. I'm alive. The objects in my home start to appear, and so do the memories of them, everything emerging out of a dark mist. The second hand, red velvet couch we found on the street and dragged all the way home. The box of matches that she had used to light the fire, before she became too ill. I remember it all and I know what I want to paint.

Years later a group of school children will come across a painting with blotches of colour all over, titled "Catherine". They will laugh and mock the painting, however, if you study the picture closely, in the background, there is a figure wearing a green dress in the wind. If you look even closer, next to her is another figure, smiling.



Alastrina Wong, Year 7

Forest

By Alastrina Wong (Year 7)

Gloomy. Dark. Cold. I was finally alone in this ghost forest. Nobody there to see me enter. Nobody there to stop me. A slight shiver shook my shoulders but passed without any sense of fear lingering. It was time.

“Don’t enter when the sun is fading. Don’t enter when it is dark.”

My grandmother’s warnings rang over and over in my mind, serving as encouragement rather than a stop sign.

The trees were twisted morbidly around one another as I walked past them trying to get a closer look at their next prey. Their limbs stretched so high they covered the last remaining light from the sun. The dirt so black as if night had already started.

The route was difficult to navigate. Time propelled me to break into a run and my black hair flew wildly behind me when I took off. The wind threatened to blow me off track, so cold it felt like it was cutting my cheeks. It felt as if nature was trying to steer me off course. I ran, breathing in the deadly fog starting to surround me, the smell of fresh rain entering my body. It was cold; I was shivering underneath my torn clothes. My bare feet were aching as they touched the soil which was trying to pierce through my skin. There were no animals, they were all ghosts. My adrenaline was rushing around my body — an exhilarating feeling. I screamed with all my might as the trees circled me, trying to trap me. This was not the scream of fear; this was the scream of joy. I was the chosen one. I was glad to be free for once in my life. No job to earn money, no school, no one calling me the poor kid. I was labelled, I was laughed at. But now I am free.

Gang leader

By Victoria Ly (Year 10)

A frantic knock on the front door. Maddy looked up at the clock. 12:13 am. She crept up slowly, grasping firmly onto a baseball bat.

“Who is it?” called Maddy.

“It’s...it’s Rhydian.”

“What? That can’t be! What would he be doing here? Didn’t he move up to Lindisfarne for a foster placement?” thought Maddy. She opened the door ever so slightly. There stood a tall, scruffy figure; his clothes were dirty and ripped as if he had been attacked by a wild animal. He wore his beanie askew covering most of his head, and through his shredded jumper seeped a dark red. Rhydian shivered violently and looked around cautiously, glancing over his shoulders every so often as if he were a nervous bird. Rhydian shoved open the door, pushing Maddy aside. Terror washed over her, raising the fine hairs on her neck.

“It..it can’t be you, can it?” asked Maddy anxiously, whilst grasping the bat harder and preparing to swing.

“Maddy, trust me. It’s me, Rhydian.”

The bat slammed onto the floor.

“I thought you were never going to come back! What happened to you? Do you need anythi-” said Maddy worriedly.

“Maddy, stop! I’ll explain everything,” trembled Rhydian. “So, when I went to Lindisfarne, I found this gang that I joined. It helped escape the thought of not having a proper family. I loved it; they were like family to me. But, Bates, the gang leader, hated me. He hated me because I was different, because I was new. He thought I was using the gang for my benefit and nothing else.”

“And? He wouldn’t have chased you this far just for that,” uttered Maddy.

“N...No.” whispered Rhydian. “I..I tried to get his daughter to run away with me. I wanted to show her a better life.”

“Better life from what? What did he do?”

“B..Bates was abusing her...I tried to help her. Pl..please, you have to let me stay. He’s going to kill me if he finds me.”

In the past few days, paranoia had consumed Rhydian and Maddy; it was a living hell. Today, Rhydian and Maddy were walking home from school, glancing over their shoulders. The pouring rain hammered on the ground, making the concrete pathway slippery and icy. The dark clouds covered all the stars whilst the thunder clapped above. The wind tossed Maddy and Rhydian around, making each other shiver throughout their whole bodies.

“Let’s take the tunnel, it’s quicker and we won’t get so soggy,” said Maddy.

“Umm... are you sure? I don’t think that’s a good idea,” replied Rhydian tensely but Maddy rushed towards the tunnel behind the woods, ignoring him.

The yellow rows of lights flickered every so often illuminating the chaotic graffiti from a distance. She sprinted down the snowy hills avoiding twigs, branches and rocks whilst Rhydian followed cautiously behind her. The foot of snow filled her boots, slowing her. They finally made it. Out of breath, they slowly crept towards the entrance of the tunnel, their footsteps on the gravel and gasps of air echoing throughout. The fresh smell of paint and the buzzing and dimness of the lights worried Rhydian. A gust of wind blew through the tunnel, making him shiver, his instincts sharpened, and his breathing patterns quickened.

“I don’t feel comfort-” muttered Rhydian.

“Wait. Rhydian, do you see that?” whispered Maddy.

“See what?” replied Rhydian in a quiet tone.

“Look at the end.”

Footsteps echoed throughout the whole tunnel. They both felt eyes watching them like a hawk. Maddy took two small steps backwards and Rhydian held his breath to try and calm the panic. The figure continued walking closer and closer. Her spine suddenly felt chills and Rhydian’s heart started beating like a drum. The flickering light ever so slightly revealed tall, muscular man. As Rhydian’s eyes squinted focus properly on the man’s wolf tattoos but he noticed something worse. The man’s face was smeared, like an Indian with war paint on. Suddenly, the man sprinted, and the echoes of his thumps grew louder and louder. He was towards bolting towards Rhydian and Maddy whilst yelling some sort of battle cry. Rhydian’s eyes instantaneously widened. His pupils dilated. The man was holding a bloodstained knife...

“Maddy! Run!” screamed Rhydian.



Elise Havens, Year 9



Elke Simpson, Year 11

H-345-08-Z

By Camilla Toll (Year 10)

My eyes flickered open, startled at the sudden noises of which now filled the air. Yet as they opened, overwhelmingly, blurred darkness took over my vision. Agile creaks danced around the floor, alerting me with an uneasy shift. In this place creaks and crackles aren't the ones you should worry about. Yet this seemed different, like the creaks and crackles were almost taunting me. It quickened and slowly became an unbearable noise. It was like a drill, slowly piercing through my head with some sort of rhythmic vibration. They stopped all too sudden, so now all that filled my head was ringing. Sharp, defined and strong.

"Weak," I muttered to myself.

Yesterday was Monday. Day 1. I looked up, to see a red faded light flashing ever so gently. My eyes traced the light all the way back to source. 12.07am. And it starts again. Day 2. I knew what was coming next, yet I dreaded even entertaining the possibility that this was real. The one they don't return from.

I take in my familiar surroundings. The cracking paint on the walls, long iron gates and a rickety old bed frame. Before I was brought here, I was told about this place. An old hospital struck down by the increasing pressure of a global pandemic. Mum used to say they should have done something sooner, but it all came too late. Now it's an old building that when people walk past, they feel chills, like someone is watching them. Like I'm watching them. It's not just me. There are many of us, all young, lonely and scared. We were taken away when we were young enough for it not to have an impact, but not young enough to forget what we left behind. I was seven years old. I miss my mum. I'm so scared that I'll never leave this place behind and find her. I know she's out there.

I gather my things knowing what's going to happen. I put on my uniform and wait patiently for them to come get me. Sure enough, a loud knock thunders on the door.

"H-345-08-Z, please return to the lab and wait for further instruction" the voice sounded. This one was new, probably fresh out of the county jail. They liked

criminals to 'handle' us because 'they have grit and don't mind getting their hands dirty'. They're supposed to intimidate us.

"I have a name" I say back. "I wonder what this one was locked up for" I think to myself. My question was answered when he took a quick step forward. My hand instinctively reached to my cheek, freshly red and burning hot.

"G-go on now! They are w-waiting!" he yelled, with slight stutter. I had no doubt the others could hear this interaction. But they will have to stay asleep or else it's their turn. They have nothing to worry about. Let's just say I'm difficult when it comes to this process. They hate me. I tried to leave when I was younger. It was no use. There was no way out. No way.

I shuffle out of the room making sure to walk as slow as possible. I'm going to have fun with this one. I hear heavy, frustrated footsteps behind me. I follow the path, as I have a million times before. My eyes follow the symmetrical bricks in front me. Small gaps in the walls shed the soft and glowing moonlight in. "This is going to be fun" I think to myself. Last time I was called up, I didn't come back for weeks. I try to think back to the memory, but they make sure you can't remember it. They don't want the other kids knowing what happened. All you know is what the other kids tell you.

I finally reach the part when they leave you. Before lies a small hallway, completely sealed from any light. I walk down slowly, remembering the many times I've walked down this hallway before. This was the last thing I always remembered and the first thing I would see. This hallway simultaneously means both isolation and freedom. And that feeling was pushing against me like I shouldn't walk further into the darkness. I was repelled from the doorway that I knew lay in front on me right now. Somehow, I knew that this was the last time I would walk down that hallway. Last time I would go through that doorway. I knew that this time I would remember what happened in there.

It was a deep feeling, calling out to me; "Don't even try and think that this time will be different. Don't think that they'll be nice and let you off. You know better than that."

I walked deeper and deeper into the darkness, searching for at least a small patch of light to fixate on. There was nothing. I was completely and totally alone. I keep walking, my hands out in-front to stop me from running into things. I feel the hallway around me shrink slowly encapsulating me in the cold. I could feel it. I was almost there. I could feel the tension build in the air making it harder and harder for me to breathe. My hands touch the doorway. I feel the splintered wood push into my skin. I feel the wood beneath my fingertips, tracing the doorframe, finding my way to the doorknob. I feel the cold touch, vibrate through my hand. I turn the doorknob quickly, while harshly exhaling. I look in. The room changes every time I'm here. Today, it's completely empty, except for an open window. A subtle breeze floats through the window and brushes my face. I am greeted with the sudden presence of light; my eyes adjust. A smile reaches my face. My lips are restrained, because of the absence of this movement. It's time. I creep towards the window.

"This is too good to be true."

My hand touches the sill. I hear a shift behind me. All I see is darkness.



Elke Simpson, Year 11

Invisible

By Victoria Wang (Year 8)

Ten trains passed, three drinks spilled next to him, and 239 individuals came and went. Leisurely succumbing to ennui he silently oscillated his finger taps on the bench armchair, engendering pitter-patter sounds. The concrete floor shrieked in reverberation from his razor-sharp toenails, scraping back and forth. His palm supported his chin, his elbow on his knee. Yawning, he hunched back onto the putrid bench, his loose ankles rolling inwards. His shimmering, white skin, was spoiled with the multiple bite marks under his bottom lip, as far as anyone knows from his incidental inclinations of gnawing them. He was out of date in complexion, through habits, voice and features. The soil seemed so worked into his skin that it looked like writing from letters of the 1700s. His abnormal garment comprised a trailing, coal-black cape with burnt holes everywhere. His assortment of bones and blood vial pendants from his past travels flooded his pockets.

You could call his behaviour somewhat like glass: hazes when people are prejudicial of him at first glance but clears when he's segregated and alone. It's a routine in society for people like him to be called an 'outsider' or 'dissident'.

Through his eyes, the people in the station were grey checked boxes. Simply conformists to societal norms, already set in a stable path, in a comfortable home and family, moderately decent paying job, working 24/7 with their eyes glued on a glass rectangle, until they die — but they say they're satisfied.

At moments he would make complete eye-contact with a person next to him, but they would deliberately turn away, pretending they didn't see him. Echoing whispers passed between strangers recalling him as a savage Vampiran, resembled the humming commotion of the compressed sonic booms of aeroplanes, as they fly over your head. He was invisible, not like an apparition from those Hollywood movies or camp-harrowing stories. He was a man of bones and liquids, flesh and fibre — of mind. But he was invisible because people refused to see him.

Little Mermaid

By Eva Jacobson (Year 8)

When you go down to the beach, you may not hear anything at first. Just the lapping of the waves, and perhaps the crunching of salty sand beneath your toes. But if you notice the shell lying by your feet, pick it up. Hold it to your ear, and listen closely. Breathe in the siren's song, and perhaps it will tell you a tale. There are many tales to pick from, but the one the sea loves most dearly is the one of its princess – and her quest for love. Listen closely, it goes like this...

There once was a beautiful princess. Many do not know her name, but the sea called her Aliya, meaning “queenly one” in the language of the ancient ones. However, she was quite unlike other princesses. Other royal girls sat in their towers all day, sewing and curtsying and singing to sweet little birds, and Aliya did these things too – except the sewing was hunting, and the curtsying was dancing, and the singing was to sailors, as she lured them to their watery graves. Yes, Aliya was a mermaid.

Every day, Aliya had to sit through court proceedings and royal offerings, looking imperious beside her father, King Neptune. However, as soon as the court were asleep in their mother-of-pearl palaces, she would sneak past the dozing guards and swim the distance to the darkened hovel where her most trusted companion dwelled.

The Sea Witch had many names – traitor, temptress, and murderer the most common – but to the princess, she was just Ciara. Together, they would spend afternoons in her cave beneath the coral, laughing and playing seashell mah-jong, surrounded by the witch's animal friends. The multi-legged crabs and eels terrified most of the merfolk, but not Aliya. She treated them as she would the colourful clownfish and seahorses that populated her summery kingdom. Some days, the witch and the princess would swim down to the spider-crab nursery. There, sheltered beneath the legs of the giant mother crab and far out of view, they would frolic with the young crabs, who were still learning how to use their stilt-like legs. But on certain evenings, the two of them would partake in a much more dangerous activity – one that did not take place beneath the waves.

Many years ago, Ciara's great-grandmother, the first sea witch, invented a powerful potion that would be able to change one's fins or tentacles into legs. She hid it far from the Mer-King and his subjects, fearing that they would weaponise it against the humans that they held such hatred for. But her daughter found it, and used it to attend a ball hosted by the human royalty, hoping to catch the eye of the prince she'd fallen in love with from afar. He fell in love with her, and together they spent many days, but one fateful day, she chose to reveal her true form. Horrified, the prince had her killed by the royal guards, and the sea foam of her blood stained the palace square. The grieving Sea Witch took the potion and hid it where she thought it could never be found, a small cave in the depths of the ocean. But on one of their adventures, a much younger Ciara and Aliya discovered this treasure, and had been using small portions of it ever since to see the human kingdoms they could not from the beach.

It was on one of these certain evenings when one of Ciara's electric eels, Blackbeard, sped back to the cave, his sparking tail betraying his excitement. Unable to speak, he began furiously tugging on one of the witch's many tentacles. “What is it?” she sighed. The eel tried to contort his body to convey his message, but it was no use. He motioned to the rest of the animals, and together they attempted to tell the two girls what he had tried to say. “Up?” guessed Aliya. The eel nodded. The ocean creatures twisted into different shapes — a carriage, a castle, then finally a sphere. “A circle?” pondered the princess. Her companion gasped. “Oh! I know! A ball!”

The two girls were giddy with excitement. Ciara cast a spell that transformed their seaweed bodices into swathes of silk and beading that floated in the water. Clutching the potion in her hand, she swam with her friend to the shallows, avoiding the Mer-Kingdom. Lurking behind a rock, they each took a swig of the potion, and waited for it to take effect.

Ten minutes later, two fine court ladies stood on the beach, the surf lapping at silver slippers, each one glittering on a perfect little foot.

The ball was held at the royal summer residence, and the king had invited all the courtiers of the land. Many a lady spent hours in front of their mirrors, preening, primping and pulling their corset strings, for today was a day where one's looks were valued above all else: it was when the prince would choose a wife.

The entry line stretched far across the land, with princesses pouting in their palanquins, and duchesses dotting on each other's do's. But our two ladies, in their unsteady human forms, tiptoed their way right up to the gate. As Aliya practised her best curtsey, Ciara gave her a nudge. "I can handle this," she whispered cheekily. The sea princess's eyes widened with glee as her friend snapped her fingers – and shot them straight onto the dance floor, right into a shocked prince. He smiled, enchanted by the princess's beauty, and whisked her straight into a dance position. The orchestra struck up a beat, and the world was lost around her as they danced the night away. The next morning, he announced her as his bride.

Months passed, with the prince growing ever more distant. Ciara dutifully ferried messages between the Sea King and the princess, but soon contact was lost altogether. Every time Aliya would try and talk to her fiancé, he would brush her off. His moods grew more violent, with shattered glasses and broken china littering the royal halls. One night, she went to kiss him on the cheek, and he slapped her across the face. It was like something had snapped inside her. She ripped off her pearls, shredded her silk skirt, and stormed out of the palace on shaky legs. The witch, who had witnessed the whole incident through the massive windows, was waiting for her at the quayside. Aliya clung to Ciara, her whole body shaking with massive sobs. "Ready to go home?" the witch asked tenderly. The princess raised her tear-stained face and nodded. Still holding onto her, Ciara cast the spell and the two of them jumped into the waves. They swam for miles until they reached the Sea Palace. With trembling hands, Aliya let go of her friend and faced her father.

The king was furious. "Where have you BEEN?" he thundered. The seashell-studded walls shook with his every syllable, and the courtiers swam backward in fear. Aliya tried to plead her case, but the king was having none of it. "First, I find out that you've been fraternising with HUMANS, and then that cursed little witch has been by your side the whole time?" By now, the princess was sobbing on the floor. But the king continued. "You are hereby banished from my kingdom, and you can go live with your revolting little friend and her demons!"

Ciara swept into the room, tentacles blazing with black fire. "How DARE you!" she screamed. She tenderly wrapped one of her arms around the princess, glaring daggers at King Neptune. She raised her voice higher, directing her

attention towards the courtiers. "If you are tired of this FOOL, who screams at his own daughter, even as she's begging and bruised, you are welcome to follow me. Together we can begin a new kingdom, free from oppression. If you are not COWARDS, swim out these doors. See what is happening around you!" She yelled.

Still in shock, the princess gazed up at the witch lovingly. This, she thought, will be my queen. Ciara looked down at her and smiled, then her stony gaze returned. She swung around and snatched the trident from the startled King's hand, her tentacles whipping the water around her. "We're leaving."

One by one, the courtiers began to peel away from the walls. Solemnly, and with disgusted glances at Neptune, they began to follow the sea witch out the doors. Mermaids, sirens, and all manner of creatures swam out of the kingdom, through the great golden gates, and out into the big blue beyond. There, on a large expanse of rock, all the sea creatures gathered around, including those that had scuttled up from the depths. Blackbeard the eel swam around Ciara as she raised a hand, and drove the trident firmly into the rock, where it stuck. "Here," she proclaimed, "shall be where old things end, and we begin."

And indeed, new things did begin there, for that was where she and the princess celebrated their marriage a month later, amid laughter and smiles from their courtiers. And together, the two queens lived, in love, and happily ever after.



Evie Phillips, Year 7



Giselle Parras, Year 9

House

By Olivia Siegloff (Year 9)

If I was to choose a house
I wouldn't mind if it was short or tall
I'd give no notice to the colour of the paint
or the houses that surround it
I'd look inside
I'd see all the rooms
And listen to the sound of wood creaking
And as we both grew older
And our creaks got louder
through power outages
And infestations
I would never leave these walls
Because this house was made for me
And I had finally found my home

My Lady Waiting

By Diana Sharma (Year 8)

Rasping in the breath of time,
A head maturing to a sweet incline.
Of roses and of buttercups
Of meadows and of all this, such,
That my lady she would fear,
The hand of silence creeping near.
Sense it on her chamber door,
Rebuke, for she had but 24,
Of lives, of love, of pinned-up hair.

Yet death be apathetic. In prayer
in life as death you'll be death in life
If death be the proposed effect. Strife,
The crack is ever burgeoning, the clock
it ticks and light won't block
the shadow on the heart's pounding wall
Reprieve, my lady cannot call
Upon the name of whom she's wed,
Alone her cusp will come instead.

Between the sheets of warm and dry
Till cold and heavy she will lie.

Roller Coaster Love

By Nina Riethmuller (Year 9)

It's pretty rare that one can find true love,
though it may be something ordinary;
it could feel like it's as tight as a glove.
It can create sadness or madness, it will vary.

Sometimes this passionate love will subside;
It will erupt like a rumbling earthquake
taking you on a rollercoaster-like ride,
or leaving you in a hurting heartache.

Eventually our roots may become entwined;
the impossible is to stay apart
and get our crazy love out of my mind;
you took the key and unlocked my tough heart,
although our love may not be not breathlessness,
I do know, I love you, and nothing less.



Hattie Tuck, Year 10

SCP 5913

By Krista Simmons (Year 10)

The SCP Foundation (Unidentified Anomalous Creatures Foundation) is a foundation running in secrecy existing for the pure purpose of protecting the general public and humanity from SCP's and the event of an end of the world event, and if an end of the world event occurs due to an out of control SCP recreation of the human population through [REDACTED].

SCP 5913

Item Number: # SCP-5913

Object Class: Euclid

Description: SCP-5913 is a vaguely human unisex creature of unknown origin. When viewed by the human eye it will appear as a person or thing the human is most attracted to. Though, its true appearance can be viewed through electronic cameras and photographs. SCP-5913 is highly intelligent and seems to understand several languages including but not limited to English, French, German, Latin, Ancient Egyptian and Sentinelese. SCP-5913 has never attempted to start communication with personnel.

SCP-5913 has only been observed to have extremely high speed and reflexes though exact levels cannot be measured due to high risk of being in close proximity. When attacking it will lure in prey with a strange noise, survivors who have escaped its pocket dimension (SCP-5913-A) are unable to describe the noise and will appear physically distressed when questioned. SCP-5913 appears to prefer human prey items in the 18-25 years age bracket and will capture no more than 3 human prey items at one time. The reasons for this are still unknown. SCP-5913 is capable of disappearing into SCP-5913-A on demand but is unable to stay in there for more than 8 hours each 24 hours and cannot escape through SCP-5913-A.

Limited observation of SCP-5913-A (assumed to be a pocket dimension) shows that SCP-5913-A consists of rooms that can only be described as glass or mirror rooms.

Connecting these rooms are a multitude of tunnels and mazes of low light or complete darkness. SCP-5913 can exit the pocket dimension at any point but prey items can only exit the dimension if let out by SCP-5913. It is unlikely that this is a point of origin for SCP-5913 due to its inability to stay inside the pocket dimension for long periods. Prey captured aren't directly killed by SCP-5913 but are instead trapped in SCP-5913-A until 2 of the 3 human prey items have either died via the other prey item or one prey item has sacrificed itself. After this, the prey item/items are released by SCP-5913 though very few survive more than a day outside SCP-5913-A.

Addendum:

Notes on Behaviour:

SCP-5913 is not very aggressive in nature and will go through short periods of inactivity where it takes little movement in its containment and doesn't visit SCP-5913-A. The cause of this is unknown but these short periods usually occur the week after human prey items have died. After this week has passed no personnel other than 3 D Class personnel can go within a 50-meter radius of SCP-5913's containment. If within another week SCP-5913 hasn't received any human prey items its influence will expand to another 100 metres, every week expanding by 50 metres until it's received its human prey items. This has only occurred once where over 27 personnel of all ages were lost, to access further information read [REDACTED].

SCP-5913-A seems to only be accessible by SCP-5913 and those it chooses to let in. Though it appears that recording, filming, and communication equipment still work inside of the space. Other than unreliability in some areas of the darker tunnels. This ability to record and film in the pocket dimension has highlighted SCP-5913's nature further. SCP-5913 does not interact with 2 out of the 3 human prey items, other than observing from a distance but one out of the 3 human prey items will become its focus. This prey item will begin to experience hallucinations and eventually will begin to [DATA EXPUNGED].

The reason behind SCP-5913's particular choice in only 3 prey is still unknown. It is assumed that either SCP-5913-A can only host 4 entities or prey at one time. Or that the entity only captures the amount of prey it needs and doesn't indulge.

Addendum 2:

Hypothesis on origin:

SCP-5913's origin is still unknown but it is theorised that the SCP may have originated as an angel that has now fallen. This is assumed as mentions of religious beliefs seem to distress SCP-5913 as well as its idle behaviour.

Expeditions:

Authorized personnel may refer to documents 5913-I through to 5913-V for transcripts of expeditions

Document 5913-I: [DATA EXPUNGED]

Document 5913-II: [DATA EXPUNGED]

Document 5913-III: [DATA EXPUNGED]

Document 5913-IV: Exploration IV

Document 5913-V: [DATA EXPUNGED]

Exploration Log IV, undertaken on the ■■■/■■/20■■

D-6872 is a 21 year old Caucasian female of short build and slightly attractive appearance with an unremarkable psychological background. Class-D designation due to disrespect to [DATA EXPUNGED] as well as causing [DATA EXPUNGED]. D-6872 is equipped with a camera attached around their head fitted with a live connection, and an audio headset for communication with Dr. ■■■■■■ at control. They are also equipped with placeable wall cameras and batteries.

D-6872 approaches SCP-5913 slowly while glancing over at D-9867 and D-7521. Despite the proximity, SCP-5913 seems unaware of their presence.

D-6872: I think he's asleep? Do we proceed?

Dr. ■■■■■■: Yes proceed. Can you hear any strange noises?

D-6872: No, I can't hear any noises yet.

Dr. ■■■■■■: Thank you, proceed.

D-6872 continues at a slow pace for 10 metres until Subject halts at 20 metres away.

Dr. ■■■■■■: Please proceed D-6872.

D-6872: (indistinct mumbling)so....beautiful

Dr. ■■■■■■: Proceed D-6872.

Livestream is disrupted for a few minutes

Dr. ■■■■■■: D-6872 are you there?

D-6872: I...

Dr. ■■■■■■: Please describe your surroundings.

Subject seems to get agitated.

D-6872: With all due respect Doctor I have just woken up in a strange place after suddenly blacking out while walking up to a SCP I-

Dr. ■■■■■■: Please describe your surroundings.

D-6872: I- Ok, I'm in a room, the floors are covered in mirrors- oh god so are the walls I can see myself everywhere.

Dr. ■■■■■■: Are you with D-9867 and D-7521.

D-6872: No I'm alone, there are also tunnels leading out of this... box. Should I proceed?

Dr. ■■■■■■: Yes, try to locate the other personnel. Could you give us a clearer view of the tunnels?

*Subject's camera is lowered showing a long low lit tunnel.
Estimated length is 15 metres.*

D-6872: Are you sure going in there is necessary?

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: Yes, before you proceed, place a camera.

Subject fixes a small camera to the wall.

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: The camera has connected to my system. Proceed.

D-6872: Okay....

[REDACTED]

Subject remains active moving through the tunnels for the next week. Connect remains. Subject has not come across D-9867 and D-7521, location still unknown. No contact has occurred with SCP-5913 but Subject discusses a feeling of being watched. The cause of the feeling is unclear. Possible cause is long exposure to SCP-5913-A or other unknown means.

D-6872: I'm never getting out, right doctor?

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: (no response)

D-6872: I haven't eaten since I got here, I can't find any of the others I.. how many times have you done this to-

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: Please remain professional D-6872.

D-6872: Are you insane! I... I've been here for a week I.. I can barely move... I'm going to die.

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: Please proceed.

D-6872: [REDACTED]

Half a week passes.

D-6872:Doctor are you there?

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: Yes.

D-6872: Are you hearing this?

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: Please describe the sound.

D-6872: It's... a male voice... he's telling me that....

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: Telling you what? Please elaborate.

D-6872: He... he said I have to kill the others to be free, I- doctor I can be free!
But-

Dr. ■■■■■■■■: D-6872 refrain from killing the other personnel, we want to see what will happen if no one dies.

D-6872: (incoherent muttering)

Subject's camera shows frantic movements but Subject is unresponsive.

Subject comes across a body on the ground identified as D-7521.

D-6872: (incoherent muttering)

Subject checks the body for a pulse then picks up D-7521 and proceeds to [REACTED].

Dr. ■■■■■■: D-6872 are you there.

Frantic movements begin again on the live stream and harsh breathing can be heard through the microphone. Until Subject comes across D-9867. D-9867 can be heard through the microphone appearing distressed.

D-9867: Hello?

D-6872: (Incoherent muttering)

D-9867: Lucy? Is that you? Are you ok?

Live stream shows D-9867 approaching Subject. Before Subject suddenly lunges forward 50 cms. Subject proceeds to [EXPUNGED]. Audio and Recording has been redacted due to respect to D-9867 and D-6872's loss.

Dr. ■■■■■■: D-6872 are you there? Are you aware of what you have just done?

Subject's live feed switches to darkness where only harsh breathing can be heard throughout the audio.

D-6872: No... no no no no I did what you said you promised... I'd be free! I did everything you asked, I was a good girl. Please-

Dr. ■■■■■■: D-6872 Please describe what you are seeing!

D-6872: No... please No (Subject continues to beg)

Subjects live feed cuts out after a minute or 2 of progressively louder begs.

Note: Subject was recovered ■ hours after live feed cut out. Medical reports indicate Subject was physically untouched other than being physically weakened and malnourished. No other personnel were recovered. Subject has since been administered class A anesthetics and has been moved to a new site.



Jess Mulligan, Year 10



Lauren Young, Year 9



Mia Coleman, Year 11

A Sonnet: 'Skin glowing lily-white'

By Elsie Budden (Year 9)

Skin glowing lily-white blooms red under
My gentle touch. Roses lie within the
Trees, sharp as knives, wounding those who wander.
The hearts of lovers cut deep forever.
Daisy, you blossomed in the heavenly
Breeze, which swept your daffodil-curly astray.
My mouth brushed your red, rose-bud lips softly,
Soft as petals, never we part, I pray.
I wish to be melded and merge with you,
For our spirits flower yet, and glow
Incarnate in your azure eyes, so blue.
The meadow of daisies ripples and flows;
Daisy blossoms and shines, equal to none
But new petals, face haloed by the sun.

The Hand That Feeds Us

By Alice Wright (Year 9)

The Sailor remembered the first revolution. He had been there, and he had been at every revolution that followed it, and he would continue to be at every revolution that reared its head until everyone realised that revolutions never stopped, they just paused.

The world had been in turmoil the day the new one began, as it usually is when the seeds of revolt are sown. Fire. Screaming. It all comes hand-in-hand. The Sailor had been walking, alone, on a long pier on the first truly cold morning of autumn.

The pier was wrinkled; the wood panels he walked on splintered under his feet. The ocean air brushed against his face in passing, danced around the soft autumn light and lifted his hat. The Sailor could smell the whisper of rain in the air. The little hand-mirror was heavy in his pocket.

He remembered when the pier was first built. It was to replace the old dock, which had been one windy day away from collapsing, and the townspeople had decided that a change was in order. They had looked at the old, rotting dock, and had seen potential. And so, the new pier had been built from the most salvageable parts of the old, with the twist of new life sewn into the grain of the wood.

The waves against the pier were quiet when he heard the marching. Hundreds of people, thousands. They sang, voices blending together until their songs came out as roars, and they sang about freedom and evil and rights and revolution and they raised their flags and their signs and the Sailor tried to read them, but the words were blurred by the words of long-dead reflections of the old revolutionaries.

The pier shuddered. The Sailor sighed, and walked into the throng.

The crowd parted for him in waves. He walked silently, unseen, but still the people rippled with his steps. One step, and they would surge. Another, they

would recede, like a tide, always rippling, and always changing. Years passed in front of the Sailor as he walked, and the crowds changed. They fought for freedom, they fought for justice and liberation and peace and rights, and they fought for years. Their songs remained the same.

When the Sailor was tucked away in the centre of the crowd, he took out the hand-mirror. It might have been ornate, in a time long past, but it had been rusted by years of collecting the memories of the fights. It took three tugs to unstick the clasp from the film of salt that had encased it, and the glass inside had a layer of dirt, so thick that the reflection was obscured. The Sailor cleaned it with the pad of his thumb.

It was a fine little thing, delicate-looking despite the years of travel and wear. It still did its job. The Sailor smiled at it. He had been breathing his memories into it for centuries now, ever since the first revolution, and it had become more of a part of him than he'd thought. The Sailor's old eyes sparkled in the reflection, and the mirror flickered to life.

The little, rusty hand-mirror made the memories seem insignificant. The Sailor watched the mirror's picture shift, flashes of sound and colour and the songs of war. It showed the people who fought—people are always fighting—and it showed the people who died for their fighting.

The mirror showed him newer revolutions. The people got younger, men and women turning to boys and girls turning to children, and the Sailor sighed, because children shouldn't have to be in a world where they have to fight. But the children fought, and they fought hard.

The mirror barely needed to show him the first revolution. He remembered it well.

It started with a single person. She was in a paradise, blessed with enough food to never run out, enough light to never be in darkness. But she looked out from her bubble of paradise, out into the stony expanse that had never been explored, and wondered why her creator showed her a world she could change and told her she couldn't change it. Everything she needed was in her paradise: plants she could let grow out until they broke through the stone and planted their roots, enough water to create seas and lands, enough food to share with anything and

everything she could think of. If only she could use the power she had been given, to create a new, better world, for everyone and everything.

It was with these thoughts, this spark of the belief of there being something more, something Eve could do, that the Sailor with the little hand-mirror was born.

The Sailor looked at the people, with their hopes for a better future raised as high as their flags and their signs, and he remembered the next moves of the First Revolutionary.

Eve was calculating. Her creator had given her a new challenge, a new rule. The Tree was to never be touched by human hands.

So why did he put it in the middle of her paradise?

There was a puddle on the ground where the Sailor stood, next to Eve. He looked into it, and he was young. It was only the first revolution, after all.

Eve's face was stony as she looked at the tree, and the fruit it bore. Going against her creator's rules meant her own condemnation. She'd surely never feel her creator's light if she were to go against his word.

But she looked out to the land beyond the garden. Following her gaze, the Sailor saw the beauty it could contain, if only the great wall framing the garden would fall.

"Do you see that?" Eve whispered to the Sailor. "I could stay here, in this garden, forever. I could be in His warmth forever. But out there, there's potential. If I stay quiet and demure, and my children do, and my children's children all do too, then that potential of a better world goes to waste." She looked at the Sailor, and he felt as if she was seeing everything he was, and had been, and would be. She saw, in her eyes, the reflection of his own young face, and he realised he was her revolution.

Her eyes, wide with his picture, showed a sliver of fear, for a moment. "There'll be more, won't there? If I do this, I force my descendants to fight forever. They won't stop fighting."

The moment passed, and her fire was back. "But if I don't, then what? Nothing changes, and nothing changes for the better, and I'll end up old and grey and I'll die knowing that I could have changed things for the better, I just didn't."

The Sailor would never be able to forget her next words.

"If I don't bite the hand that feeds me, it'll feed me poison."

With a great crack, the little hand-mirror snapped shut, and the songs of the people grew into a palpable wave. They swept across the road, the voices leaping and dancing with the wind, long past the pier and into the sea. They were reflections the revolutionaries before them, but they weren't exactly identical; their guns and swords and spears had turned into flags and signs and carefully-picked twitter screenshots, and they didn't fight for themselves, they fought for each other. They sang different lyrics over the same melody, and the music was so like the old, but so different.

'Do you hear the people sing?'

'Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!'

'Say their names!'

'If we don't bite the hand that feeds us, it'll feed us poison.'

And the Sailor smiled.

The Traveller

By Tehya McEvoy (Year 10)

The Traveller came as all the others had before.

The sky was already dark and threatening to storm, and he had been glad to come across the small boarding house. Unlike the motels he had come across before, the boarding house was unannounced, with no neon signs proclaiming its presence. At first glance he had thought it to be abandoned, but, as he came closer, he noticed the rustling of curtains.

Standard rooming house, read the unlit wooden sign which dangled from the porch ceiling. Vacancies, it said underneath in smaller font. It had seemed strange to him that Vacancies had been painted permanently on the sign, but he supposed that not many people came this way.

As he came to the front steps, he was struck by how much older the house looked close up. The siding was warped and caked with dust, and the glass panels on either side of the door were clouded. His feet made hollow thumping noises on the wooden decking. Within the house something stirred.

The Traveller twisted the door handle. The inside of the house looked no better than he had expected; wallpaper peeled from the walls and the wainscoting was decorated with mildew. A green glass lamp hung from the low ceiling, painting dancing shadows across the walls as it spun slowly.

“One night?”

A voice pierced through the semi-darkness. The Traveller jumped.

“Uh, yes... yes, that’s right.”

The Traveller began to move towards the shadowed figure.

Although the Traveller knew that it was a woman who stood behind the narrow reception desk, he could not make out her features; her face was nothing more to him than shifting colours in the dark.

“We have the perfect room for you,” she said.

She tilted her head back, letting the faint light lay upon her face, and she smiled to the Traveller. Her frosted lipstick bled further into the cracks around her lips and her teeth shone like a house on fire. The Traveller flinched. Then he smiled back.

“Your key.” she said, gesturing to the ceramic dish shaped like two cupped hands which sat on the reception desk. Inside was a small tarnished key with a large metal tag attached. The Traveller paused.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t get your name,” he said.

“I’m Mrs. Hyde,” said the woman. She didn’t ask for his name.

“Any bags?” asked Mrs. Hyde.

“No,” said the Traveller, “No bags.”

He paused for a moment. “How much did you say it was for the night?”

Mrs. Hyde smiled again.

“We can work that out tomorrow,” she whispered. “It’s late.”

She led the Traveller into a small dining room.

“Are you hungry?” she asked, cocking her head to one side. She seemed to look beyond the Traveller. The pipes groaned from within the walls.

The Traveller was hungry. He had been too tired to think about food, but suddenly it was the only thing that could occupy his mind. Restless hunger attacked his stomach, sending growls up his throat.

“Yes,” The Traveller said.

“Yes,” echoed Mrs. Hyde. “I thought so.”

Mrs. Hyde sat him at the table.

“Let me whip something up,” she said, patting the table.

Mrs. Hyde turned back to the Traveller as she reached the door.

“I think it will just be you and I tonight,” she said, “All the others have taken dinner in their rooms.”

She smiled once more before rushing out, leaving a cloud of stale perfume trailing behind her.

Mrs. Hyde returned within minutes. In her arms she carried a wooden tray heaped with steaming food. There was soup, and meat, and gravy. There were vegetables, baked and boiled, and bread rolls piled high. Everything looked so delicious and so inviting. The Traveller felt obliged to gorge himself.

Mrs. Hyde sat in the chair opposite the Traveller, watching amusedly as he began to devour.

“They tell me that the food here is the best part,” she said, smiling. The Traveller didn’t hear her.

“Did you like the food?”

The Traveller looked up, startled; he had forgotten that Mrs. Hyde was in the room. He looked back down, even more surprised, at his now empty plates. He didn’t remember eating it all, and the strangest thing was that he didn’t even feel full.

“Yes,” he said, still confused, “Yes, I enjoyed it very much.”

The Traveller paused for a few moments more. Although the dining room was well lit by the sconces that lined the walls, the shadows still refused to leave the

woman’s face. All the traveller could make out were her crinkled lips and pearly eyes.

“Are you on your way to anywhere special?” Mrs. Hyde asked.

“No,” replied the Traveller, then pausing, “Actually, you know what? I can’t remember!”

The Traveller laughed. Mrs. Hyde laughed too.

“It’s odd,” the Traveller added quietly, frowning, “I’m sure I had a reason for coming out here, but I can’t think of what it could possibly be.”

The Traveller continued to frown.

“It’s late,” said Mrs. Hyde, “You should get some rest.”

“Yes,” said the Traveller, “Rest.”

At first, it seemed that the Traveller walked to his room alone. Then, Mrs. Hyde was standing beside him.

“Here we are,” she said. The Traveller jumped.

In front of him was a door. Mrs. Hyde snatched the key from his hand and thrust it into the lock. The door moaned as it swung inwards.

The Traveller shuffled inside and turned back to face Mrs. Hyde, who was still standing in the doorway.

“Goodnight,” she said.

“Goodnight,” he replied.

She smiled. Her teeth glinted like diamonds.

The Traveller lay down on the bed, too tired to think of anything but sleep.

The sheets felt too stiff and crisp, and the mattress lumpy, like there was a body lying underneath it. The Traveller was too tired to be disturbed by this strange thought. Anyway, this sensation quickly faded, and the Traveller soon felt himself melting into the blanketed folds. He allowed himself to drift, feeling his mind spiral into the depths of sleep.

That night, the Traveller dreamt that he had been paralysed. The sheets tangled around him, binding his hands by his sides. He dreamt that he was trapped in a cage with vicious dogs. The mattress springs prodded at his sides. He dreamt that he was being buried by sand. The pillow worked its way over his mouth and muffled his cries. He dreamt that he was falling down an endless mineshaft. The mattress split open and swallowed him whole.

By morning, there was none of the Traveller left.

“I do make a rather good dinner,” said Mrs. Hyde to herself. The pipes groaned in approval.



The Witch on Fernwood Avenue

By Rebecca Colwell (Year 8)

Drowsy afternoon sunlight shafted in through the window, illuminating the room with a peachy glow. All was silent, except for the monotonous clicking of a keyboard, and the occasional exclamation of annoyance.

“Aw, come on!”

“Yessss!”

“That’s not fair!”

And finally...

“Argh, I give up!” complemented by the frustrated slam of a laptop lid.

Eyes narrowed, Harper swung around in her chair, fuming, a pair of purple headphones still on her head. Why was it that she could never finish that level? Why? Just as she had cooled off and was about to retry the level, the screen door downstairs opened with a rusty screech. Immediately she ripped the headphones off, jumping out of her seat at the same time, and thumped down the staircase. Just as her older brother was turning around, still carrying his heavy schoolbag on his back, she barrelled into him. Owen slammed into the wall, hair ruffled and glasses askew.

He groaned. “Hi, Harper,” he mumbled, pushing his glasses back on to his nose while gently pushing his sister away from him. “Mum and Dad still at work?”

“It’s only 5, dummy,” Harper grinned slyly. “Nerd club must’ve been fun; time’s flown by for you!”

Owen shoved her and half-heartedly began to retort “Debating isn’t for nerds...”, then gave up, sighing, “Did you do your math homework?”

Harper drummed her fingers impatiently against the dining table, eyes unfocused, as Owen began lecturing her about her maths, droning on about “Oh, you’ve missed a step here” and “How on earth did you get that wrong?” All of a sudden, she slumped theatrically in her chair.

“Ugh. I am so. Bored,” Harper groaned. “Can we do something fun for once? It’s like we’ve been locked up here all afternoon!”

Owen shrugged, suggesting they went out for a walk. No sooner than the words had been emitted from his mouth, Harper raced for the door, squeezing her feet into her off-white sneakers and flinging the screen open with a crash, leaving Owen rolling his eyes at her energy.

“See ya later, alligator!”

A few minutes later, Owen had finally caught up with Harper. This sudden burst of exercise had him doubled over and panting heavily, his face shining with sweat. Just then he noticed that she had stopped outside a small, ramshackle terrace, with an unkempt weed-infested garden and peeling, rust-stained walls. He frowned.

“What on earth are you-”

“Shhhhh!” Harper’s whisper was barely audible as she crouched down, glancing furtively at the dilapidated house. “I gotta see if that creepy old lady’s around, ya know, the one who...” She trailed off, her eyes gleaming with excitement as she became absorbed in attempting to spot any movement in the cobweb-laced, tightly shut windowpanes.

Owen shuddered inwardly. He knew exactly which lady Harper meant. It was a neighbourhood legend that living in the strange house on Fernwood Avenue there was an evil witch disguised as an old lady, who once kidnapped two little kids by luring them with candy into her house, and then burnt them alive in her oven. What he had not known, however, was that his too-curious-for-her-own-good sister had taken an interest in this story.

“C-come on, Harp! You seriously still believe in those dumb ghost stories! Baby,” Owen laughed, while brushing off his inexplicable increasing sense of dread. Trying not to look in the direction of the house in case something looked back at him, he pulled his sister up, ignoring her complaints, and dragged her across the road into the local park.

A corner of a curtain moved.

Soon enough Harper was back to her spirited self, running laps around the grass and teasing Owen about his limited athletic ability. The sun was just beginning to set, the blue sky streaked with hues of orange and pink. Owen checked his watch anxiously.

“It’s nearly 7! If Mum and Dad come home and we’re not there they’ll freak!”

Hearing no reply, he looked up, confused.

“Harper?”

His voice echoed tentatively and was met with silence. He scanned the grass and trees around him, but no hyperactive 10-year-old was to be found.

All of a sudden something rained down on his head.

“Ow... Harp!” he groaned, pulling the bits of bark and leaves from his head, and looked up at his sister, who was standing triumphantly on a high, and rather shaky, tree branch.

“Okay, I get the point. You’re great at climbing trees. Now, can you please come down?”

Harper responded by blowing a raspberry and turning her back on her brother. Owen rolled his eyes. She could be such a child sometimes.

Harper closed her eyes and felt the warm wind on her face, gently playing with tendrils of her unruly hair. So absorbed in the stillness was she that when Owen

called out one more time, “Harper Robinson! Get down now!” she was so startled that she jumped.

Literally.

Her eyes flew open and she toppled precariously back and forth with one foot on the branch and another in the air, her arms flailing wildly in an attempt to balance herself.

But it was no use. Owen watched her sister fall the as if in slow motion, frozen to the spot in horror. Then she landed on the leaf-sprinkled ground, just a few feet away from him, with a crunch and a yell of pain. Owen winced as he looked down at Harper, who was clutching her ankle, her face pale and lip trembling slightly.

“Aw man... mum and dad are gonna kill us!” He sighed. “Come on sis, up you get; it can’t be too bad, can it?”

It certainly looked bad.

“Would you like some help, dearies?”

Owen spun around to see a little old lady with wizened, smoky-grey hair, and a long, wrinkled nose, complemented with a wart on her chin.

It was the witch from across the road.

The two children stiffened immediately.

“Uhh, no, w-we’re alright, th-thanks.” Owen stuttered, trying to sound polite. “I-in fact, we were just leav-”

He tried to pull Harper on to her feet, unsuccessfully. She shrieked as she put weight on her foot and fell back awkwardly onto the ground. The ‘witch’ raised her eyebrows in a surprisingly good-humoured way, her eyes twinkling. Before anyone could say otherwise, she plopped down on the ground next to Harper with surprising agility. “Let’s take a look at you, shall we?”

Owen looked on in confusion as the old lady began inspecting his sister's ankle carefully and meticulously, as if it was something that she was familiar with. Harper remained silent, her sharp pain fading away, looking interestedly at her.

"You silly girl," she shook her head, smiling, her voice light and chiming. "Luckily, it's only a little sprain, and it should be better in no time. Don't go falling out of trees again!"

Harper nodded vigorously, for once at a loss for words.

"Well then, there you go," the little old lady handed Harper an ice pack that seemed to come out of thin air. "And if you two would ever like some freshly baked cookies, Mrs Graham's door is always open!"

Then, just as quickly and unexpectedly as she had appeared, the little old lady hurried away, across the street and into her house, which seemed much less decrepit than when they first saw it.

The two looked at each other sceptically, then back at the house, then back at each other.

"Uhhh... what on earth just happened?" Harper finally voiced what both of them had been thinking. Cautiously, she tried moving her ankle. The swelling had already reduced, and it looked almost normal.

Owen shrugged. Today had been full of strange events, and he was only sure of one thing: he had had enough of strange events for a whole lifetime.

"Well... I guess as disappointing as it may be, not all scary legends are true," Harper sighed melancholically.

Owen gave her a pointed look. "I wouldn't exactly call that disappointing..."



Tom Thumb

By Hazel Jackman (Year 8)

On a remote farm, where cracks grew deep into the dry, barren soil, Nancy and Jack Smith lived a simple life. Although they worked their drought-ridden land from sunrise to sunset their pockets were empty. One evening, Jack said “What a sad thing it is that we can’t get pregnant; our home is so quiet and dull, while others are noisy and cheerful.”

Nancy responded, “Oh, I so want a child.... Even if it were only as big as my hand. We could try IVF, but it is so expensive.” Jack decided to hop online and he found an IVF deal. The providers had not been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Association but they were cheap so he and Nancy decided to give them a ring.

Nine months later when Nancy gave birth, it was very quick and almost painless but afterwards the doctors looked concerned. The baby was so small it was only the size of a thumb. For a moment, Nancy and Jack wondered if using an unregistered IVF clinic had been a good idea. Nonetheless they admired their baby and said: “Our wish is fulfilled. Because he is tiny, we will call him Tom Thumb, and love him dearly”

Although Tom was small, he was very clever and useful around the farm. One day, two robbers, Devin and Calvin saw Tom wandering around under the tractor bonnet as he helped his father fix the engine. “That little creature might assist us in our plans to steal opals” ventured Devin. They approached Jack and offered to include Tom in an NDIS advertising campaign. Jack said no as he loved Tom and was worried about sending him away at such a young age.

“We can advance you \$10,000 if Tom joins us right now. We will look after him well” Calvin offered. When Tom heard the price, knowing how poor the drought had made his parents, he persuaded his reluctant father to let him go.

“I will be fine and home again soon” Tom promised and went off with the strangers.

After travelling for a while, the threesome stopped outside a small tunnel in the side of a hill. The robbers started to place Tom on a drone. “Before filming begins we need you to fly down this hole to a cave where opals are mined. We need you to steal some of the opals and bring them back in the drone” Calvin explained.

Tom was alarmed about this turn of events but the scheming robbers were forceful with him. They emphasised that Tom needed to be quiet and not wake the guard at the cave gate. The robbers started the drone and Tom reluctantly set off on his makeshift plane into the tunnel. He arrived at the cave, sparkling with opals, and saw the guard sleeping outside the gate. Thinking quickly, Tom hopped off the drone and began to speak loudly into the drone’s microphone. “Do you want the dark opals or the light opals?”

“Shh! Keep it down” Devon reminded Tom. But the guard had already woken. The guard immediately opened the gate to locate the source of the noise. When he saw the drone, he raced towards it to destroy it with his baton. Tom hurriedly ran behind a pile of rocks and then slipped into a second tunnel which led to the other side of the hill.

It had been an exhausting day but Tom knew he had to keep himself away and hidden from the robbers. He saw a kangaroo in Farmer Brown’s back paddock chewing Lucerne. Tom considered jumping in the kangaroo’s pouch but then saw a joey pop its head out. “I’m not sure the joey will welcome sharing a pouch with me!” Tom thought, and searched the horizon again.

He saw an Uber in the distance outside the local Dominos shop and decided under the seat would be a good place to have a rest. So he made his way down to the hill side, being careful to keep in the shadows of the trees. A few hours later, Tom was woken by someone climbing into the driver’s seat. The man immediately became agitated. “Damn. Low fuel again. And I don’t know where the nearest petrol station is. And Siri is not working. Liam, it’s just not your day.” Tom heard Liam’s frustration and then had a clever idea.

From his hiding place under the seat, Tom piped up in a Siri style voice “Siri is unavailable today. Ajay will be directing you.”

Liam sat up immediately, “Eh?”.

“Where do you want me to take you?” Tom asked.

“I need petrol!” Liam said in exasperation.

“Do you want me to guide you to a petrol pump?” Tom asked.

“Yes!” Liam replied.

“Take the next left at the roundabout” instructed Tom as he began to give Liam directions.

After a little while, Liam drove up at the petrol pump behind Tom’s parents’ garage. “Cool, free petrol!” Liam said as he jumped out of the car. As Liam filled up his fuel tank, Tom crept out of his hiding place and scooted off down to his parents’ house.

When he got inside he called out to them, “Mum, Dad, it’s Tom. Come quickly.” Tom’s parents came rushing to find him. Jack and Nancy were ecstatic to see Tom but Tom had no time for chit chat. He quickly alerted his parents to Liam’s theft of their petrol. Jack grabbed his cattle taser gun and rushed off in the direction of the garage. He surprised Liam who begged Jack not to shoot the gun. Jack agreed as long as Liam paid him for the petrol. Liam agreed to Jack’s terms and then left as quickly as he could, not looking back.

After Liam had departed, Jack, Nancy and Tom had a big family hug. “We are so relieved you are safe” said Nancy. Then they all sat down for a cup of tea whilst Tom told his parents all about his adventures whilst he had been away from them. Nancy and Jack were relieved that Tom was safe but were full of remorse that they had been persuaded that money was more important than their son.

“We will never bargain you for money again, no matter what we are offered,” they said, kissing and hugging their dear child.



Sarah Fakhouri, Year 8

Unblock

By Francesca Jones (Year 12)

I lolled in my mother's wooden rocking chair out in the orchard, as liquid sunshine bathed the green fields in a honey glow. A cigarette in hand, I sat contemplating the crisp white page in front of me, smoke lingering in a plume above my head. For God's sake, I'm not even a smoker – it was all just a trusty ploy from Mr. Google to channel my inner William Faulkner and get the ink running. It had been nine days since I'd written the last page of my story. Nine days off, and I'm calling myself a full-time English scholar. Pathetic. The leaves rustled with the whispers of the wind and I caught a glimpse of my mother curled up on the sofa, reading inside. She had been so delighted when that magazine had first wanted one of my stories: finally, someone as intellectual as her. Yet there I sat, with nothing to give. A disappointment.

The sky poured down a suffocating stinking pitch, an "indefinite, indescribable, terror" a death warrant: writer's block. As an avid reader, I often forget the gruelling and discomfoting nature of writing, of grappling a whirlwind of intense thoughts and emotions only to be plagued with the riddling sense of failure. My blood curdles at the thought of anyone reading inarticulate lines of flowery, metaphorical bullshit, scribbled down the night before in a half-hearted attempt to string together my fleeting thoughts. Words have such power, but also the capacity to say absolutely nothing. The writer has got to get it right.

Throughout my childhood, I'd wake up at one in the morning with a bursting bladder, slip out of bed and plod down the corridor, only to find my mum huddled over a bitter, lukewarm cup of instant coffee thumping the keys of her typewriter in a harsh, yet beautiful cacophony. I'd whisper, "What are you doing?" and she'd wave her hand at me to go away, "The story calls," she'd laugh.

In those nightly run ins with my mum, I built up the idea that all art and literature are expressions of whimsical, sporadic moments of insight and passion, and that to break down the process of writing into mechanical stages would be simply, to destroy it. In waiting for these artistic breakthroughs, I was plagued with the inability to write, and instead, spent hours staring at the blinking cursor begging me to write something.

Mum's spontaneity and whimsicality, to me is unattainable, and I admit sometimes I hate her for it. I think my Google search history would show "how to overcome writer's block" 107 times in the past 72 hours. But yesterday, I stumbled across a nugget of gold, "habit seems to be a much stronger force than either willpower or inspiration." Ladies and gentlemen, John Steinbeck, a literary genius.

I later learned that Steinbeck crafted his acclaimed, realist novel 'The Grapes of Wrath' through journaling, jotting down strings of personal anecdotes, aesthetic visions and dialogue. He claimed that journaling was a tool of self-discipline, a pacing mechanism, an incremental daily process working towards the whole. Never before had I realised that the writing of one word could trigger an eruption of disconnected, rambling thoughts. He carried his journal in his back pocket wherever he went. No one could ever read it. "A work in progress," he'd say. It wasn't until that moment that I realised that the masterful manipulation of words isn't a gift that comes randomly, but a skill to be meticulously perfected. The writer is never in control of their words, I realised, they merely harness the power of language through practice and dedication.

Steinbeck had taught me that to unblock, is to write down every detail of the day: the colour of the sky, the aura of the people, the texture of dinner. Those words will lead us places and we will find our story. Don't wait for the words to come to you, let the words take you to where you want to go.

So, there I sat, in the scintillating sunshine, rocking back and forth on the orchard. I stubbed out my cigarette, the soft ash crumbling on the arm of my chair. So, Steinbeck, let's think, "What do I see?" The glowing orchard around me.

And just like that, I was writing.

Love is what is left over from longing

By Sabrina Stitt (Year 9)

Love is what is left over from longing,
Love goes deeper than lust ever could
Deeper into the soul, so profound that you can see everything they are made of.

To love
Is to see deeper
And seeing your love for what they are at their core.
Many people convince themselves that the desire for the skin of their love
Is seeing them and they are in love, that this feeling is law.

It is not, seeing them for their shapes and words isn't love

Love is wanting to see them at every moment, no matter if they look unattractive
as a toad or as radiant as the dew on the morning grass.
Something lust could never compare to.
When you come home to them at last.
It's as simple as sharing a space, just feeling their presence as a warm blanket
without your thoughts running askew.
Love could be put as simply as; love is just love.



Sophie Park, Year 7

‘Untitled’

By Diana Sharma (Year 8)

The sky was a crisp shade of ash, and in a way, the bulbous drops of uncanny liquid falling from its heights resembled the dusty being of ash. The remainder of a flame, the sediment of what could have once been beauty. A rose grew here, protected by a wall of papery cobblestone. It was the sort of beauty which drew you in, made you be willing to give everything, every drop of your being, every bone and brittle finger, just to protect this delicate entity. It was in this moment where she did halt, no doubt pondering the supple thing, perhaps soliloquising these thoughts. There was crimson here too, dotted precariously on a pale leg, this was unintended of course, but there was not much one could do to contradict the presence of death-it was a rather powerful thing. It was ubiquitous to her, guileless. And as they say, it takes nought but water to wash away death, there was no use for Arabian perfumes on her hands. It left its mark on the snow too, as red as strawberries, as red a life, a subtle reminder of the office and affairs of vengeance, which left its mark more often than the people would have had you believe. They weren't bad people *per se*, more so feeble-minded.

They were dangled by the idea of some egalitarian social utopia, insisting on its being their own republic. London. The republic of dreams, of carefully planned, elegant streets and saccharine gilded walkways. Enchanting corners and archaic libraries that towered with everything from “The Life of a Rose” to “The mind behind murder”. She let a breathy breeze exit her lips, she'd been holding it in for quite some. Her eyes flickered to the street lantern up ahead, which she could see was beginning to develop a glowing halo around the bulb. The thin blue bicycle which hastened by no longer cast a sickly shadow on the pavement beneath. Delilah pivoted on her heel, shaking her hands free of a slight feeling of pins and needles which had been bothering her for a decent few hours.

The remaining droplets of deep red substance blended in nicely with the striking red of her dress. Her shoes slapped the pavement, announcing her presence in a rhythmic sequence of consecutive taps. There seemed to be a lack of people along the main road, a charming normally vastly populated thing which ran along either side of an equally charming river. The streets themselves were lined with intricate black railing, curling in delicate patterns which reminded her rather a lot

of Paris-or rather what she imagined Paris to have looked like-she really wasn't particularly educated on the matter. She moved her hand to her face, examining it for a smear of that same red substance, armed with a gathering of saliva on her fingers which she hoped to extinguish the culprit with. Instead she found a few strands of cashew-coloured hair, smothered against her face by sweat.

The rain had come to a heavy splattering as of now, which, she supposed would cleanse her face and the rest of her from the oozing blood which she found herself splattered in. You see, she was a manipulative thing, clever, cunning, and terrifyingly charismatic, she did not act on the part of these traits by nature, but she found them rather useful when dealing with situations such as the current. She had anticipated the rain, anticipated the water which would wash away those crimson stains, anticipated the terribly dreary weather which would keep London's residents tucked cosily by their fireplaces, anticipated the chilling winds which would fog any window, coating it in a thick layer of disguise. It was with this sentiment in mind that a grin could be seen briefly in her eyes, a glint of pride in her abilities. A feeling of satisfaction in the clean and efficient completion of her set task. These walls were the kind that allowed her to ponder being, ponder herself, catch a glimpse of her expression in the churning river. It couldn't exactly be said that she enjoyed these roamings, that she particularly agreed with the occasionally cruel face of her being, as being left alone to oneself can sometimes have quite the opposite effect of that which was proposed. However she also recognised the goodness which came from this, in that, despite her current situation and the mentality which she found herself often forced into, she could appreciate the wide array of faces she inhabited and could grasp and cradle the goodness that she recognised as her careful brown eyes in the crystal water below. Down, down, ever growing, further, further, out of her reach.

Then, momentarily she caught a glimpse of another pair of eyes, thick black lashes and a thwarted reflection of what seemed to be a mischievous grin.

“Hey, mind you don't fall in there, I mean to be honest, it would give me a bit of amusement but... I'd really rather not have to jump in after you-this shirt has just been ironed you know.”

The boy tugged at a loose, white, collared shirt, sealed up neatly with six little ivory buttons. The grin was still there, lips turning from a pleasant pink to a

chilling fuschia in the cold. His skin was creamy and lightly freckled around the rouged cheeks. His hair was slightly outgrown, dark and thick, a few strands just brushing his eyelashes in the rambunctious winds.

“Do you mind?” Delilah said, trying to disguise her own smirk with an exaggerated creasing of her eyebrows and a puckering of her lips.

“A bit messy aren’t you?”

He grinned again, waving his hand over the splattered blood being washed down her legs in steady, slightly transparent streams-completely ignoring her own insisting of his rudeness.

“You know, usually when you murder someone you try to cover it up. Mop yourself up a bit, make yourself look a bit less.”

At this he paused, rolling his eyes with a sarcastic tinge, “Suspicious.”



Zoe Fritsch, Year 7

‘Untitled’

By Phoebe Santow (Year 12)

Fee felt strange to be leaving the Frenchman. It was a Monday and they had arrived in Binda just before midday. Her aunt would collect her from the platform, but the train had pulled in early so she had moments left of waiting.

She helped David with his bags and reached to help him with his canvas, but he swiftly intervened. “Not quite ready for public viewing,” he chuckled, avoiding her eyes.

When they were standing together and alone on the platform, train departed and bags by their feet, she said it had been a nice journey. That she had enjoyed his company.

David smiled, and Fee was brought back to the first time she saw him; when she had read his smile like an omen from her childhood.

He fumbled around in his pockets, searching for something. Fee waited.

“Ah! Here we are. Write down your address just here.” He passed her the pen and directed a pointed finger to the bottom of a torn sheet of notepaper. Fee looked confused, and he met her confusion with a laugh.

“For letters. We should stay in touch, don’t you think? I want to hear all about your poetry. I need to know you’ll keep writing.”

She wrote down the address of her aunt and handed him the paper, but not without a slight objection. “Don’t you think it’s a little outdated? Does anyone really write letters these days?”

He shrugged. “Perhaps it’s up to us to keep the tradition alive.”

She caught her aunt’s wave from the opposite platform and gathered her things. There was not much to carry, but it seemed heavier than before.

Fee turned to say goodbye, but it felt like the wrong word.

“Thank you.”

The Frenchman smiled, watching her as she left the platform, met her aunt, and descended down the station stairs. Then they were both out of each other’s vision, and she saw him only in memory.

Fee had been in Binda two weeks when a letter arrived, addressed to her in a flowing cursive script too ornate for the times. She knew before she had read his name that it was from David.

Had she ever really known him?

Perhaps she had, really, but allowed herself to become caught up in an illusion.

“I have never experienced a loss like yours.”

Art to him must have been a game without the weight of carrying something left behind, although he spoke of it like it kept him alive.

His words spilled the lines of an alternate story. An Australian, unmarried, living alone in an old weatherboard house. Faith still felt real to him; he sat in third-row pews and prayed to a God that seemed to listen.

And the beret — was just that. He never had been French after all.

So, the canvas had been completed.

Fee folded the letter neatly as it had been and returned it to its envelope. In her aunt’s kitchen, beside an open window, she drew out the photograph David had attached.

They were her hands, calloused and inky, blurred in motion, captured by David with the strokes of a paintbrush.

“Thank you for being my muse; the poet on the train.” She supposed they had been each other’s.



Taylor Underboeck, Year 7

Hands

By Phoebe Santow (Year 12)

We have been raised by hands.
Once cradled, we yearn to return into them.
Solitude is foreign,
brought with lost embrace –
echoes of feeling and being, close.

As we grow, we give our own.
Hold me, pull me in.
Speech is not spoken,
words are not disposed, but they are felt.

Into paper we transmute memory:
memories of a conjoined life, now singular.
From paper we watch swirls coalesce,
blotching to form something.
Something that rings with traces of connection.

Our hands turn pages softly, quietly.
Empty rustles substitute sound.
They are people:
they whose faces are caught in little lines,
they whose mouths cannot speak in true voice.

We cannot be still,
we are the left behind,
we keep grasping,
vainly pulling at threads to be closer, draw nearer.
We float to fill hollow spaces.

What remains is a river,
of thoughts and voice and memory and recollection.

Colour is a fine line, between vitality and fiction.



Zeebah Shahidi, Year 8



Zoe Schmidt, Year 8

