

Wednesday, April 29th, 2015

Fighting Words

Young Irish Writing

FIGHTING WORDS Providing free tutoring in creative writing for students of all ages in Ireland.
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THE IRISH TIMES



Issue five – going strong and moving on

The stories in this year's selection by young writers include one from new workshops in Belfast

This year's *Irish Times* supplement of new writing by children and young adults is the fifth edition of this award-winning publication. Once again, the imagination and craftsmanship on display is wonderful. It is important to emphasise that the stories we have included here are just a small selection taken from many hundreds of impressive submissions.

When we set up Fighting Words, we were looking to address the absence of outlets for children and teenagers on the north-side of Dublin to engage with creative writing, and the lack of space for creative writing in the school curriculum. Now open six years, we quickly discovered that absence is not just in north Dublin.

Children come from every corner of Ireland, and we have hosted more than 50,000 students in free creative writing workshops and programmes. We are espe-

cially delighted and proud to say that Fighting Words Belfast is now up and running, with workshops at the Skainos centre in east Belfast. You'll notice a story included in this year's supplement written by a young student from Bloomfield College in east Belfast – the first of many, we hope. For those interested in finding out more, getting involved, booking workshops for their students, volunteering, helping with funding, just go to: youngatart.co.uk/projects/fighting-words-belfast.

Those who read this publication every spring will be tired of hearing that we are constantly booked out, oversubscribed and, that if we had the capacity and resources, we would host five times as many children every day, such is the demand. But it's true. We are not state funded, south or north.

A small number of private individuals and organisations fund our work, and we receive colossal amounts of support from many arts and media organisations, such as *The Irish Times*. Most of all, we have 500 volunteer tutors, and they are the lifeblood of Fighting Words.

Our purpose is to provide the opportunity to engage with creative writing for as many children as we can reach – for every

■ **Novelist Jennifer Johnston with contributor Jimal Kelly at Fighting Words, Dublin.** PHOTOGRAPH: DARA MAC DÓNAILL

child in the country if possible. If you'd like to find out more about Fighting Words, about volunteering or to help fund our work, the contact details are below.

As always, we are immensely grateful to *The Irish Times* for providing such a prestigious platform for Ireland's young writers.

**Seán Love and Roddy Doyle,
Co-Founders**

The Fighting Words editorial committee who chose the stories for this selection: Laura Cassidy, Roddy Doyle, Catherine Dunne, Jean Hanney, Joanne Hayden, Helen Seymour, Gerard Smyth and Alex Tierney

FIGHTING WORDS
Behan Square,
Russell Street, Dublin 1
Tel: 01-8944576
fightingwords.ie

Edited by: Kate Holmquist
Production: Sorcha Hamilton

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Chatting with writers my age taught me more than any book

Hannah Gilmartin (20)
English literature and classical civilisation, TCD

There were days I didn't want to go and days I played minesweeper for two and a half of the three hours. There were days I pretended to have written a short story that day when I had actually written it two months before, just to have something to show off. More often, there were days I couldn't wait to get there and days I didn't want to leave. Write Club taught me that writing was something I could actually do, and I think it's probably a big part of why I'm still doing it now.

Cassia Gilmartin (20)
English literature and philosophy, TCD

Before I joined Write Club at Fighting Words, finding the motivation to complete a long-term project seemed impossible. My experiences there gave me the confidence I needed to finish my first novel. Thanks to Fighting Words, writing has stopped being something I just think about and become something that actually happens, as often as I can find the time. More than that, though, our weekly meetings made writing less solitary. Chatting (and usually procrastinating) with writers my own age taught me more than any book on writing I've ever read.

Samuel Oyediran (19)
Advanced technology, University of Twente, Netherlands

Between 3rd and 5th years I attended Fighting Words regularly, especially during the school breaks and holidays. Whenever there was a short course in creative writing, film-making, drama, etc my mum encouraged me to try it out. A particular highlight was the Charlie Chaplin film festival and my group's video was nominated. Looking back on Fighting Words it was a lot of fun and also taught me to always bring a creative aspect. This is still a trait I use in university, especially when working on a project.

Shannen McGrane (20)
Health Sector Studies, Ballsbridge College of Further Education,
plans to study psychiatric nursing

My experience at Fighting Words began as two weeks' work experience I did in fifth year in November 2012. Fighting Words has and still does have a big influence on me both creatively and academically. I remember being given essays in English in school and I would try to be as creative and imaginative as possible. Fighting Words has taught me a lot about creative writing and how to simply tell a good story. A year or two ago I was very lucky to be chosen by Fighting Words for a series of workshops they were running with The National Print Museum, which resulted in a published book of poetry which as a group we dedicated to the late Séamus Heaney.

Mario Ivanov (21)
Independent film-maker/writer/actor with Mario Unpredictable Productions

In 2010 I wrote a short story in Fighting Words with Roddy Doyle for the book *Fighting Tuesdays*. The whole experience was unbelievable, as it was an amazing opportunity to write and at the same time get expert advice on how to improve.

I have always liked being a creative person and Fighting Words activated my creativity even more, by motivating me to write what is on my mind, and sharing my world with the world. Fighting Words definitely had a big impact on me and nowadays I



■ Top row: Hannah Gilmartin; Cassia Gilmartin; Samuel Oyediran; Shannen McGrane; Mario Ivanov. Middle row: Conor Bulman; Sarah Merriman; Conor Sweeney; Eoin Moore; Jemma Bayley. Bottom row: Joanna Siewierska; Freya Gillespie; Kevin Bird; Gerry Dunne

Fighting Words: grads have their say

make short independent films for Mario Unpredictable Productions.

Conor Bulman (20)
Computer science, Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock

I found Fighting Words a fantastic place. It helped me come out of my shell because beforehand I hadn't found anyone else who had my love of writing. The friendly, welcoming atmosphere meant even a very nervous 12-year-old like me could feel like he belonged. They helped me at my pace and let me know that my decisions when it came to my writing were the most important, while still helping me with structure and pacing, which I'd struggled with.

Sarah Merriman (20)
International business and Chinese, DCU, currently studying in Beijing

When I first set foot in Fighting Words during my Transition Year work experience, I wasn't sure what to expect. Fighting Words was only a few months old and, while my expectations were high, I never anticipated the amazing experiences I would have, or that Fighting Words would still be such a big part of my life five years on. At 18, I saw a play I had written at a Fighting Words workshop in the Peacock Theatre, and at 21 I still volunteer regularly at workshops. Thanks to Fighting Words, I have made lifelong friends, and, I like to think, a difference.

Conor Sweeney (20) Film production, DFEI
My first experience with Fighting Words was in a film-making summer workshop. I had at that point a few childhood experienc-

es with creative writing, but never thought of myself as going down such a career path. A few months later I received a kind offer to return and do a more intensive scriptwriting workshop. For me, this is where it clicked, and today I'm studying film in college, using writing for screen as the most personally suitable form of self-expression and having the time of my life because of it. For that I owe Fighting Words a great deal.

Eoin Moore (20) English, TCD

What I remember most about my time in Fighting Words is the atmosphere of the Wednesday Write Club. Unlike the summer camps, Write Club wasn't designed around a particular task or learning a style of writing. It was just a quiet space to come in and work on your own projects. It's where I figured out that behind all of the techniques I'd learned about and the advice I'd received, that's how real writing happens: putting the hours in, every week.

It's been a great experience volunteering for Fighting Words, and getting to help other kids in the same way. I'm currently studying English literature and writing for some student publications, and that experience has stuck with me throughout.

Jemma Bayley (19)
English and history, UCD

I had not originally wanted to join Fighting Words. When my school librarian suggested that I attend Write Club I was reluctant as I feared that I was below their standards. During my first session there, I realised that the focus was on creativity, not criticism, and that my writing had a style rather than a deformity. The volunteers guided

me through my novel, and its sequel, while helping me to reflect on what I had written at each session and improve. Without their help, I would have abandoned my dream of writing before anybody had seen the first draft.

Joanna Siewierska (18)
Hopes to study law and social justice, UCD

Fighting Words made me feel more confident with my writing. It showed me that we all have great ideas, although they often result in messy first drafts. The truth is, all ideas need to be given the right amount of patience and paper, and if we do that we can transform them into something worth sharing with the world (or even just with your mum). Realising this was probably the most important lesson I got out of Fighting Words, and I wouldn't have learned it if it wasn't for all the wonderful volunteer writers and my friends who were discovering this with me.

Freya Gillespie (19)
Drama studies and sociology, TCD

I spent six years attending workshops, programmes and summer camps in Fighting Words, doing everything from photography to monologue writing. It was always hard to explain Fighting Words to other people as it is such a distinctly unique place. It allowed me to be my most creative self while at the same time I learnt so much about self-discipline and the creative work ethic.

When choosing CAO courses this time last year my time in Fighting Words definitely had an impact; after thinking about how much I enjoyed all those workshops I

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It was an amazing opportunity to write and at the same time get expert advice on how to improve

ended up choosing Drama and Theatre studies in TCD. The skills I learnt in Fighting Words have never been more useful. Fighting Words also introduced me to one of my best friends and for all my experiences there I am so grateful.

Kevin Bird (20) English, TCD

I first stepped through the doors of Fighting Words in September 2010 as a Transition year student and have remained there since. In those years I've been given a place to do something I love and get great opportunities from it.

I've got the chance to get short stories published in a book and in *The Irish Times*, have a play performed in the Peacock Theatre and simply meet people with a similar interest in writing. Since then I've gone on to study English at Trinity College and volunteer for primary school workshops at Fighting Words.

Gerry Dunne (19)
Hopes to study Music performance and technology at Kylemore College, Ballyfermot

I've been very lucky because I have done both a film-making course and a song-writing course and also volunteered for a week's TY work experience with Fighting Words. I loved everything about being at Fighting Words and especially liked using the foam finger to point to the kids who peeked during the secret vote. Thanks to the song-writing mentors, I am still working on composing my own music and have just achieved grade 4 on the guitar. I learned a lot but mostly I had great fun. Thanks to everyone at Fighting Words.

How To Train Your Fly

**Lindsay Road
National School,
Glasnevin, Dublin
5th and 6th Class**

Illustrations by Yvonne Geraghty

Ralph woke up to his alarm clock going off. He was having a bad dream – the homeless man in the park was kidnapping him.

He threw on his grubby shorts and T-shirt. Ralph didn't have a matching pair of socks so he wore odd socks under his sandals.

Ralph grabbed a doughnut and his backpack and went out the door. On his way to school, bullies started to chase him so Ralph took a shortcut through the park.

He turned back to see if they were still chasing him and he bumped into the homeless man from his bad dream.

Ralph recognised the man and gasped. He dropped everything and ran. Later that day, he was walking home from school and the homeless man approached him.

"Here's your bag back," he said in a very Batman-y voice. "But I kind of ate your doughnut because I was hungry."

"Oh thanks!" Ralph said, surprised. "I'm Ralph. Are you Batman?"

"I'm better than Batman, I'm Jeffman!" the man replied.

Ralph nearly wet himself because he thought Jeffman was a real superhero. Ralph skipped home excitedly, delighted with his new discovery. He had just met Jeffman, the most awesome superhero of all time. Ralph's parents were away on a cruise. They had left Ralph's irresponsible older brother Bill in charge. Bill had gone to his friend's house and left Ralph on his own. When he got home, he took out his old gym clothes. He heard a buzzing noise from one of the pockets. He put his hand in the pocket and withdrew it quickly as a fly ferociously flew out and released its wrath.

Ralph grabbed his sleeping bag and

his emergency bag of doughnuts. He jumped out his escape route, out the window on to the trampoline. He bounced off the trampoline, slid down a slide (really slowly) and skidded across the grass into a hedge. By the time he pulled himself up it was dark.

It was time for bed so he went to the park as he had nowhere else to sleep. Ralph found a park bench and lay down in his sleeping bag. He lay awake for a couple of hours. After eating his last doughnut, he finally fell asleep.

Ralph woke up to Jeffman poking him with a stick.

"Ow! Go away!" Ralph said.

When Ralph realised it was Jeffman, he offered him his last doughnut crumbs and his sleeping bag.

Jeffman said, "No, it's okay. You're sitting on my bench, though." Jeffman had been on his midnight wander and found Ralph on his bench. "Why do you need this bench in particular?" asked Ralph. "Just move over for a second and I'll show you everything," Jeffman said.

Jeffman twisted the rubbish bin beside the bench. The bench opened and stairs appeared leading underground.

"Oh my doughnuts!" exclaimed Ralph.

"Follow me," said Jeffman.

Ralph followed Jeffman cautiously down the stairs to Jeffman's underground caravan. "Doughnut?" Jeffman offered. "Yes!" said Ralph. "How did you get this place?"

Jeffman said: "This used to be a caravan park until it was covered over with grass. I refused to sell and they built over me."

Jeffman and Ralph talked for a while, including the topic of fears.

"I'm afraid of flies and bullies," said Ralph. "But since you're Jeffman, I bet you're not afraid of anything."

"Back in the day, I worked with flies at the RFA (Royal Flies Academy) and trained them to fly in formation," Jeffman told Ralph. "But it closed down for health and safety reasons. I can help you with your fear."

"Yes, please!" said Ralph. "This is a really comfortable chair."

The room was very dim. "Can we turn on the lights?" asked Ralph.

"Uh, okay," stuttered Jeffman.

Jeffman walked over to the light switch. "Are you ready for this? This is the first stage of you conquering your

fears."

Ralph did not know if he should be excited or scared – he was a bit of both. As soon as Jeffman turned on the lights, Ralph screamed and then fainted. When he came round, Jeff asked him, "Was that too much?"

When Ralph woke up, there was a swarm of flies holding him down in the chair. Ralph fainted again.

Jeffman called off the flies. When Ralph woke up the second time, the flies were massaging him.

"Don't lean back or you'll squish," Jeffman said. Ralph turned around and saw the swarm of flies massaging his back.

"You've passed Stage One! You didn't try to run away," said Jeffman. "Now it's time for Stage Two."

"I surrender," said Ralph.

"Before we go on to Stage Two, you need some serious training," Jeffman said.

Over the next few days, Ralph trained in advanced fly-whispering, teaching flies to do tricks like chores

and homework and even making doughnuts.

After completing his training, Jeffman told Ralph, "You're ready for Stage Two. For Stage Two, the flies are going to help you stand up to the bullies." Ralph said: "I don't think I am ready. But I'll try."

The next day, Ralph saw the three bullies who had chased him in the park. "You're bullies and I'm sick of it!"

The leader of the bullies said: "You're cruisin' for a brusin'. Give me your lunch money."

Ralph whistled his secret call and summoned the flies. The first wave of flies poured a bucket of raspberry jam on the bullies. The bullies looked at each other in confusion and embarrassment. After a few minutes, they started to laugh. "Is this the best you can do?"

Ralph said, "No. Do you want more?" He summoned the second wave of flies.

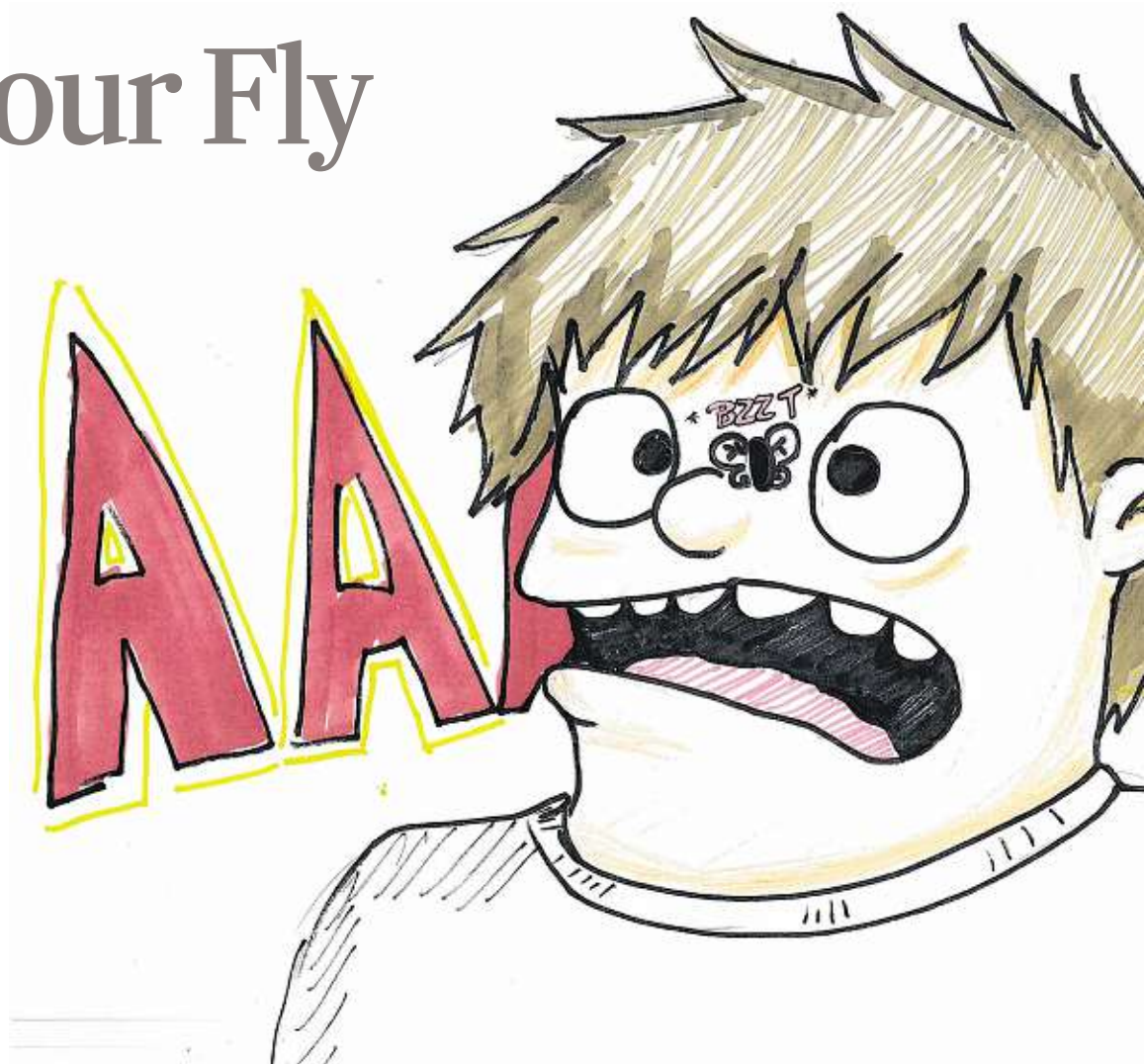
The second wave of flies covered the

bullies and lifted up them up into the trees.

The bullies were scared but tried to act brave. They started laughing at Ralph. "We can get down from here, easy," said the leader.

"Yeah," said the other two at the same time.

The bullies tried to move but they were stuck to the branch by the jam. They heard a creaking as the branch snapped and they fell in the mud.



Larry and Unitayto: The Quest to Find the Golden KFC Bucket

**St Canice's Boys
National School,
Finglas, Dublin
6th Class Room 14**

Illustrations by Edel Gelston

One day Larry was sitting in his tree house eating KFC with his best friend, Unitayto, the unicorn potato. Larry noticed on his KFC bucket an advertisement for the Golden KFC Bucket competition. The winner would get free KFC for life and own a KFC store. Larry was desperate to find the Golden KFC Bucket. As he was climbing down from the tree house Larry asked: "Unitayto, will you help me find the Golden KFC Bucket? I'll share all the chicken with you and give you a job!" "Yes, but I want to be assistant manager," replied Unitayto. "I'll pay you a decent wage," said Larry. Larry thought to





**“I’m
afraid
of flies and
bullies,
said Ralph**

“Okay, okay,” the bullies pleaded, trying to hide their tears. “What do you want? We will do anything!”

Ralph said, “I want you to stop bullying people like me. I want you to stop bullying altogether.” The bullies got up and tried to brush off the mud and jam. Just to show them what kindness was, Ralph helped to clean up.

Ralph started to walk home. Jeffman jumped out from behind a bush. “You’re ready for Stage Three!” he said. “What is Stage Three?” Ralph asked. “I have conquered all my fears.”

“A celebration, of course! The doughnuts are on me,” Jeffman said. They went back to Jeffman’s underground caravan.

The flies carried in a big dish of ice cream-covered doughnuts.

“Thanks, flies!” said Ralph.

Later on, Ralph went home and his parents were back from their cruise. They were very tanned. “What did you get up to?” they asked him. “Nothing much,” said Ralph with a smile.



Sparkle’s Magical Adventure

**St Patrick’s Girls
National School,
Dublin Road,
Limerick
4th Class**

Illustrations by Nessa Behan

Once upon a time there was a unicorn called Sparkle. Sparkle lived in Rainbow Land.

She always wanted to get wings, but her wish never came true.

The only way she could get wings was to meet Buttercup the butterfly.

On the way to meet Buttercup the butterfly, she saw spiders and ran away.

She also saw some birds, but they were too high up to call them.

Sparkles looked all around, but she

couldn’t find anything to get over the spiders.

Out of nowhere, a magical wolf with wings popped up and helped her with the spiders.

“Hello, my name is Black Storm. I could help you with the spiders if you want,” said the wolf.

“Okay!” said Sparkle.

“First you have to do me a favour, then I’ll do one for you. I want to be reunited with my family,” Black Storm said. “Wait – you haven’t told me your name yet.”

“How do you not know me?” asked Sparkle. “I’m the only unicorn in this village. And, of course, the prettiest. Anyway, my name is Sparkle. How can I help you find your family?”

“I know their scent. But I was fighting another wolf and I lost my sense of smell. I have a bit of my son’s fur. If you could smell it, then you might be able to find him,” Black Storm told Sparkle.

They searched the woods and the mountains, but they still couldn’t find Black Storm’s family.

“I see a bit of black. That could be my family!” said Black Storm.

“Let’s check it out,” said Sparkle. “It is my family!” Black Storm shouted out.

He got really excited and ran over to them. “Okay, let me help you with your problem now. We’ll go find Buttercup.”

“The spiders are more scared of you than you think,” Black Storm told Sparkle.

“But they’re so crawly!” said Sparkle.

Suddenly, Black Storm fell from the sky because he was weak from fighting his enemy.

Sparkle’s horn had magical powers and she saved Black Storm.

“Thank you for saving me,” said Black Storm. “Now I will bring you to Buttercup.”

They found Buttercup, but she was busy crying because she lost her teddy bear, Buttons.

Sparkle used her magic horn to find Buttons.

Buttercup was happy and they became best friends with Sparkle. Buttercup gave Sparkle wings.

And they lived happily ever after in Rainbow Land.

himself, “If I win the Golden KFC Bucket I will deep fry my own tree house mansion.”

Unitayto flew down from the tree house and they started on their journey. Larry and Unitayto knew they would have to go under the waterfall at Mt Krushem and into the cave at the top of the gravy volcano. The cave was guarded by the evil Chonkey, the chicken donkey – Chonkey was the arch enemy of Unitayto and Larry. Chonkey liked McDonalds and Larry and Unitayto liked KFC. Chonkey had been trying to close down KFC. Apparently, Chonkey claimed that they grew their own fake chicken. Larry and Unitayto knew this wasn’t true. “We will have to sneak in during the night,” said Larry. “You’re right Larry,” replied Unitayto.

So they walked through the town from where they lived. And when they reached the end of the town, Larry hopped on Unitayto and they flew

away. While they were flying Larry spotted something down below. It was McDonalds and Chonkey was there, getting a Big Mac.

Larry knew they should get to the cave before Chonkey returned. They hurried and in the distance the two friends saw Mt Krushem. Icecream was pouring down from it. Larry and Unitayto went down to have a little taste of it and just then, Chonkey popped out!

“You shall not pass!” shouted Chonkey. He was angry and started throwing chicken nuggets at them. Larry and Unitayto dodged the chicken.

“The only way to beat me is to get the Golden KFC bucket,” roared Chonkey. “I’ve hidden the KFC bucket... oh wait I wasn’t meant to tell you that.”

“Larry, you distract Chonkey while I go and search for the bucket,” whispered Unitayto. Larry threw ice cream in Chonkey’s face and the two friends raced towards the gravy volcano. In-



side the volcano there were rocks and along a path there was a circle made of diamonds.

“We must be getting close,” the friends thought. At first Larry tried to remove some of the diamonds but they had no luck. They couldn’t pick a winner! Suddenly they heard someone coming. They thought they heard splashing, like someone was swimming up the gravy river. “Quick, hide behind this rock,” said Unitayto.

They were on their hunkers, hiding.

Unitayto lost his balance and fell over, hitting a rock. Just then a door opened! “You’re a genius Unitayto!” said Larry.

He walked slowly through the door and saw two things – the KFC bucket on a chrome pedestal and in front of it a strange looking puzzle. “Beware, there might be a booby trap,” said Unitayto. Larry looked at the puzzle. There were three buckets and inside there was a piece of chicken. They were all different. There was a sign above the buckets. It said: Choose wisely!

To claim the Golden KFC Bucket you must taste each piece of chicken and decide which one is the KFC one. The two friends looked at each other. Larry decided to take the challenge.

“Good luck!” said Unitayto.

“Thanks, but I don’t need it,” replied Larry. He stepped up and took a bite of the first one. “That’s homemade,” he said to himself.

He took a second piece. “That’s not even chicken!” he said and he spat it out. Then he took the final piece of chicken. “Mmm!” Larry said, rubbing his stomach, “This is the one, this is KFC!” Larry put the chicken into a tube in front of the Golden KFC Bucket. The bucket came flying up and Unitayto grabbed it. “We did it!” Larry screamed. Just then Chonkey appeared.

“Congratulations,” he said. The two friends were shocked and confused.

Chonkey explained that he was a secret KFC agent and he had been undercover to find the most loyal fan of KFC. He had found Larry and Unitayto.

“I’m so happy that this is over,” said Larry. “Hey Chonkey, do you want to come live with us?” “Yes, I do,” Chonkey replied. He was really happy. When they got back home Larry and Unitayto and Chonkey deep-fried their tree house and lived happily ever after.

Smelly Elly Strikes Again

**St Attracta's
National School,
Charlestown,
Co Mayo
4th-6th Class**

Illustrations by Joanne Harold

One cold morning, Mr Dingle was reading the newspaper and drinking onion juice in his cramped apartment. "SMELLY ELLY STRIKES AGAIN!!! Robbery at the Museum of Country Life!" was the front page story.

Marcus the Monkey burst into the apartment, throwing sparkles all over the room.

"Smelly Elly strikes again!" he cried out.

"Whattttt???" said Mr Dingle in a very high-pitched voice. "I have to get on that case right away, before any of the so called GOOD detectives get there before me. Come on Marcus!"

Mr Dingle ran down the stairs with Marcus following behind him, spreading sparkles. They squeezed through the door and hopped into their cherry red 151 Ferarri.

On the way to the Museum of Country Life, they stopped to get some popcorn and an onion-flavoured 99.

While they were in the shop, Smelly Elly flew out of the gas pump and stole the cherry red Ferrari and Mr Dingle's detective badge.

Mr Dingle walked out of the shop and saw that his beautiful car was gone.

"What happened here?" said Marcus in shock, dropping his ice cream.

Mr Dingle lay down and started licking the ice cream off the ground. He said: "That was a waste of food, Marcus!"

They "borrowed" a 1987 Land Rover Defender. As they drove off, Mr Bob, who owned it, shouted: "Don't get any disgusting onion-flavoured ice cream on my seats! I just cleaned the car."

Mr Dingle and Marcus zoomed off and finally reached the Museum of Country Life. They wandered around trying to find the entrance. When they did, they tried to get into the crime scene but one of the other detectives (the so-called "good" detective) asked to see Mr Dingle's badge.

Mr Dingle checked his pockets. "It's in the car!" he said. "Sorry buddy . . . if you don't have your badge you can't get in," replied the detective.

Meanwhile, Marcus had been sneaking around the museum, trying to find rope. He found a hangman's

rope in one of the exhibits and a police baton. He ran back up and knocked the so-called "good" detective out!

Mr Dingle and Marcus tied the detective up with the rope and put him in the lift. They took his badge and made a run for it.

Mr Dingle and Marcus walked around trying to find some clues. They found a bit of yellow cape.

"Smelly Elly, I can smell that a mile away!" Mr Dingle whispered to himself.

"Do you want to check the tapes?" suggested Brigid the curator.

"I'm thinking, I'm thinking, I'm thinking . . . I got it! Let's check the tapes!" exclaimed Mr Dingle.

"No one ever would have thought of that. You're a genius," said Brigid sarcastically.

When they viewed the tapes, they saw a little speck moving quite fast across the room, taking all the valuables.

As soon as they zoomed in, they knew for sure. Smelly Elly had stolen all the priceless, precious items.

Mr Dingle's and Marcus' first task was to find Smelly Elly. They left the tape room to search. They went downstairs and Marcus stopped to take a mugshot. On their way back, they found a curious room that no one had ever found before – hidden behind a bookshelf.

They tried to open it without success. Marcus took out a book about sparkles and the hidden door opened. "Oh, my sparkles!" shouted Marcus in shock.

"Well done, Marcus, your sparkle obsession has finally paid off," whispered Mr Dingle.

Inside the room it was pitch dark. The only light was a gold shine from the corner of the room. They walked over to investigate and Marcus shone his iPhone on it.

It was Smelly Elly stuck on a spider web and all of the valuables were underneath her.

"We finally got you!" shouted Mr Dingle, his voice booming across the room.

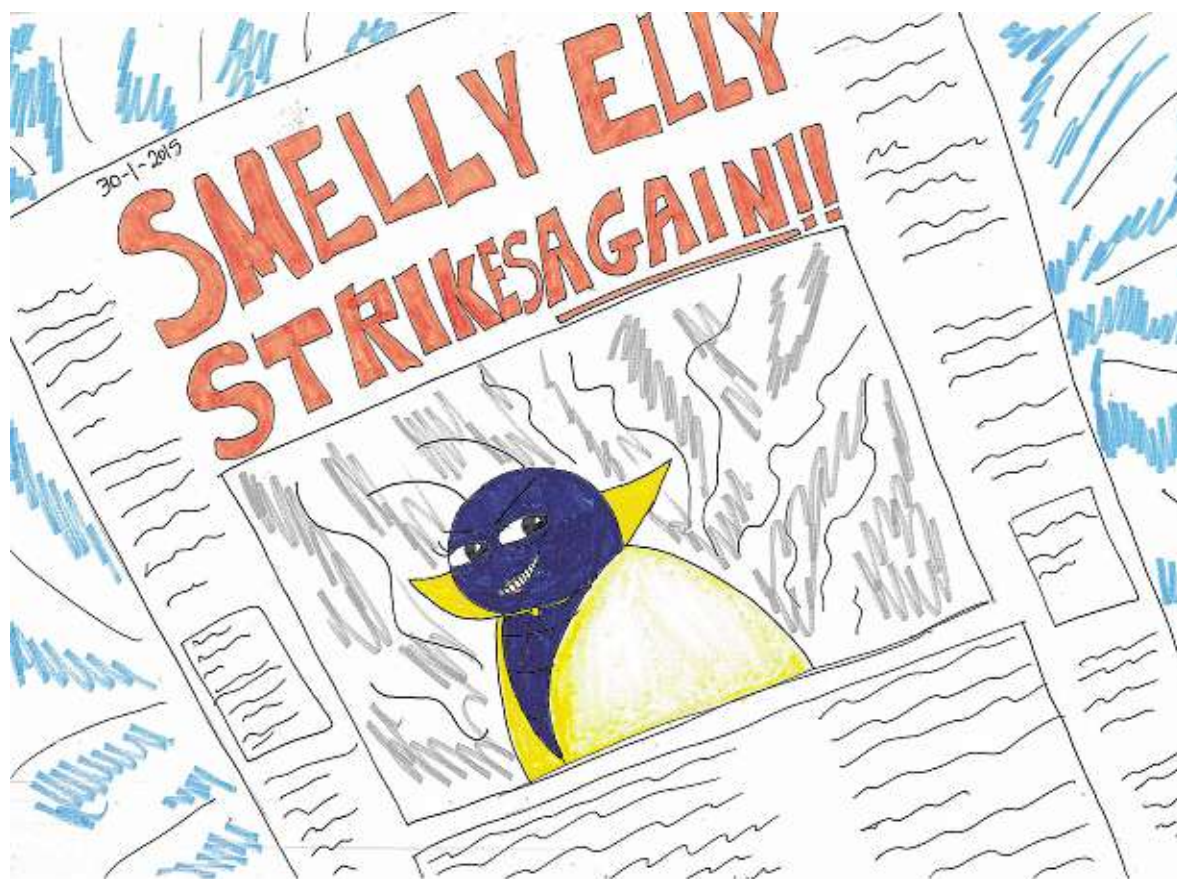
They locked Smelly Elly in a ladybird-size jam jar and took her to the police station.

To reward Mr Dingle, the townsfolk decided to contribute a lifetime supply of deodorant.

And everyone lived happily ever after!

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They stopped to get some popcorn and an onion-flavoured 99



Layla and Flame on their Magic Adventure

**Rathdown
Junior School,
Glenageary,
Co Dublin
2nd Class**

Illustrations by Kate Sheehy

Once upon a time, long long ago, there was a Great Phoenix called Flame. She lived in the jungle. It was called the Fire Forest.

Flame's best friend was a unicorn called Layla. Flame and Layla's parents didn't get along!

So the two friends ran away so that they could be together.

"Do you want to run away to London?" said Flame.

"Yeah!" replied Layla. So they spent the night in a cave. The next day, when they woke up, Layla and Flame saw an elephant and a snake, walking and slithering towards them.

Flame and Layla ran away as fast as they could. They started their journey to London. Layla thought that the snake and the elephant might be following them.

"Go away!" she shouted to the snake and the elephant. Flame started shooting fireballs at them.

Layla used her magical unicorn horn to trap the elephant and the snake into a bubble and then Flame put them into a deep sleep . . .

The snake and the elephant floated up and up and up into space.

They woke up and the snake decided to pop the bubble with her fangs.

"NO!" said the elephant, but it was too late. They fell down, down,

down and landed in Times Square, New York City.

Everybody screamed.

Layla and Flame had got lost on their way to London and they met the snake and the elephant in Times Square.

The snake was looking at dresses in the window of a shop. The elephant said "Stop fooling around, although I do like that top . . ."

"What are you doing here?" asked Flame when she saw the elephant and the snake, "and where did you get those human clothes?"

"We fell out of the bubble and this is where we landed," said the elephant, "but I wish we had gone somewhere else because the snake keeps looking at dresses."

"We're sorry that we sent you up into space in that bubble" said Layla. "We were just scared" said Flame. "Sorry that we were following you" said the elephant. "We just like playing games with other animals," said the snake.

They made friends and told each other their problems. "We wanted to go to London but we ended up

here," said Layla.

"We were running away from our parents because they won't let us be friends."

"We have the same problem," said the snake, "and we know the way to London."

The snake showed them the map that was soggy from the bubble.

The four of them went to London together. Even though they loved London they still missed their parents. Layla made a portal with her horn to talk to their parents.

"We've missed you a lot, you need to come back, we can't take it anymore," said their parents.

Layla said: "But you won't let us be friends."

"We just want to make you happy," said their parents.

"We're sorry to make you worried but London is our new home now and we're really happy here," said Layla.

"Okay," said their parents, "live your dreams but make sure to visit us soon."

And they lived happily ever after with the snake and the elephant.



Mr Carrot's Great Adventure

**Catherine McAuley School,
Baggot Street, Dublin
2nd and 3rd Class**

Illustrations by Yvonne Geraghty

Once upon a time, a Mr Carrot and his wife were going to Mrs Potato's pool party in the kitchen sink.

Then Mr Carrot's wife's eyes went red and she tried to eat him. Mr Carrot jumped out of the way and she ate his brother by accident.

"Yes! He's gone!" said Mr Carrot. "I never liked him anyway," said the evil Mrs Carrot.

Suddenly, they heard a noise. "Get me out of your stomach!" a voice said. They carried on walking and pretended nothing had happened.

When they got to the pool party, there was nobody there.

"Why are you here?" asked Mrs Potato. "I cancelled the pool party until next week."

When he woke up the next morning, Mr Carrot said to Mrs Carrot, "I want to go on *The Food Factor*."

"NO! I want to win *The Food Factor*!" said his wife. "Let's both go on the show and see

who wins the final."

Mr Carrot said, "You just want to go see Simon Carrot."

"Yes, I know. It's my dream to meet him," she said. Mrs Carrot danced with excitement.

She tripped and fell off the counter and Mr Carrot heard her say, "He's way better than yyyooooouuuuu..."

SPLAT.

Mr Carrot went to the washing machine where Mrs Potato lived, but she wasn't there. He found her in the oven, trying to get a tan.

"I need your help. I want to win *The Food Factor*," he told her. "You don't want to ask me. I'm a horrible singer!" she replied. "Aaagggghhh!"

"It hurts. So bad," he said. But then Mrs Potato said, "I know a person who can help you with your singing: Pharrell Tomato."

Mr Carrot said, "I want to meet this lady!" "But it's a man," said Mrs Potato. "His house is a

one-and-a-half minute walk. He lives in a fruit bowl on a table beside the kitchen table."

"Gosh, that's a long walk!" said Mr Carrot.

Mr Carrot found a piece of paper and a fan and he made a paper plane. He put on his veggie goggles and his veggie hat, and he flew over to the fruit bowl.

Mr Carrot rang the doorbell. The door bell sound was 'Cause I'm happy, come along if you feel like a room without a roof!'

The door opened and Pharrell Tomato was there. "What do you want?" he said, "I'm busy trying to pick a hat for my next gig."

"Can you help me with *The Food Factor*, I am going to try to enter it?" said Mr Carrot. Pharrell Tomato agreed to help Mr Carrot and gave him some advice.

"You know, there's one really good singer on *The Food Factor*, if you want to win, you'll have to beat them!"

"I have a plan to destroy the universe," said Sam. "I'm going to take over the world and go into a spaceship and then go up in space and take over the galaxy!"

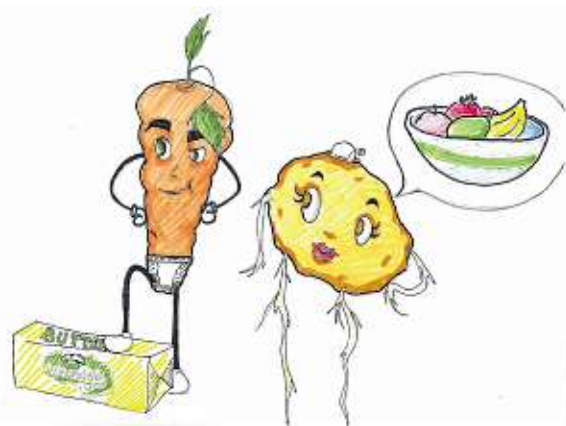
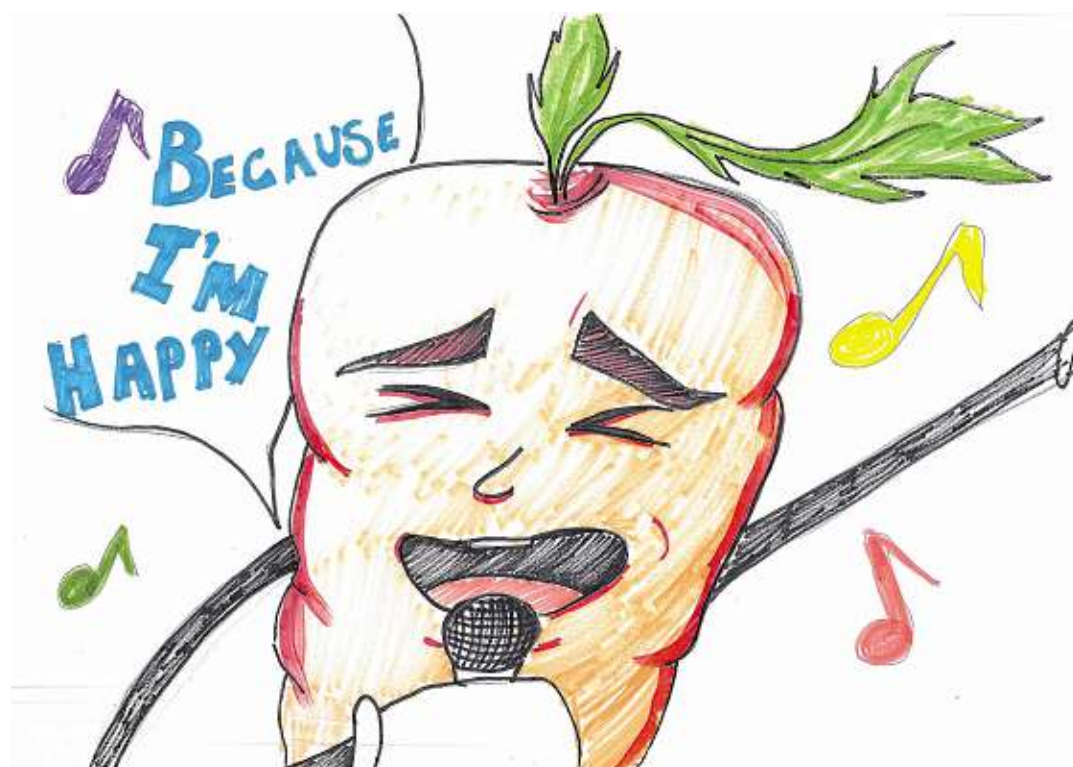
Bella was afraid of Sam's plans and by looking into his eyes she could tell that he was a zombie.

"That's not a good idea," Bella said.

"I'm thinking about building robots," said Sam.

Suddenly, a dragon walked in - Sam's worst fear!

Sam screamed so loud!...



Zombies and Dragons On Top Of The Castle!

**St Ultan's
Special School,
Navan**

Illustrations by
Nessa Behan

Once upon a time there was a zombie named Sam who loved chocolate.

He met Bella in a forest when he was a human. Then the zombies took over the world and Sam became a zombie.

Bella didn't know that Sam had become a zombie.

Sam wanted to meet up with Bella in the forest to tell her that he became a zombie.

Sam was scared to tell Bella that he is a zombie because he is afraid that Bella is going to eat him. Bella and Sam were talking in the forest.



A Terrifying Holiday



Emily Cullen

Age 12

St Michael's Holy Faith
Secondary School,
Finglas, Dublin

One day, Emily and her mam Lorraine were online looking at holidays when a "pop-up" ad appeared on the screen saying they'd won tickets to Disneyland Paris. Lorraine was surprised since she didn't remember entering any competition or answering any question but said they might as well go. They left straight away and got the last plane to Paris.

They headed into Disneyland and saw rides like Alice Curious Labyrinth, Thunder Mountain and characters like Mickey Mouse, Princess Pavillion and many more.

The name of their hotel was Disneyland Hotel and it was marvellous. It was bright and colourful and full of other people on holiday and people who worked there. Their uniforms were pink and blue with lace.

Emily and her mam raced to It's A Small World and waited in the long line for half an hour, watching the characters passing by. The same music played over and over and Emily danced because she was so excited. They finally got on the ride and it was amazing. The ride ended and Emily and her mam went outside.

Out of nowhere Emily heard people screaming. The music and the rides stopped and everyone stood in front of Thunder Mountain.

A little girl about her age was hanging from the top of the ride. She was going to fall! Emily stood under her and caught her.

She saved the crying girl. Between tears, the girl said her name was Ciara. She had long brown hair in pigtails and huge eyes. Emily put Ciara down and tried to find her mam in the crowd.

Suddenly, all the lights went out. Everyone screamed because they were panicking and worried.

Ciara grabbed Emily's hand and they tried to push through the crowd. Emily



“

**Suddenly, all the
lights went out.
Everyone
screamed**

stood on her toes and bit her lip.

"Where's my mam?" she asked herself. Ciara held Emily's hand tightly and started crying again.

"What's happening?", she asked.

"I don't know", Emily's answer was cut off by Ciara screaming.

Ciara said she saw something green, big and scary with blue eyes.

"I think it had two fingers!" she cried.

Emily turned around slowly, there it was. A big creature with a green slimy body and hairy knees.

Emily's mam came running over then. She put her arm around her and hugged her. She was so worried. When she saw the alien she screamed.

"What are you???"

"I'm an alien, I sent you all tickets to come here. You're my dinner!", roared the alien.

They ran. Ciara and Emily and her mam ran extremely fast away from the alien.

She heard a girl called Alison say someone was trying to eat her but they kept running. The alien tried to grab Emily but she ran and the crowd followed. Someone pushed Emily and she fell.

The aliens grabbed her with their green hands and Emily watched as they gobbled up her mam and Ciara. The aliens gobbled children like Ciara whole, but the adults took a little longer.

She cried and tried to roll away but one of the aliens held her.

The last thing she saw was one of the aliens on his smartphone, uploading and sending tickets to someone else so they could "win", just like Emily had.



Siobhán Walsh

Age 12

St Colmcille's
Community School,
Knocklyon, Dublin

Write a Girl

Write a girl that's happy.
Write a girl that's kind.
Write a girl that's on her own.
Write one that knows her mind.

Write a girl that's strong.
Write a girl that's weak.
Write a girl that wants true love.
Write one that's soft and meek.

Write a girl that's optimistic.
Write a girl that's glum.
Write a girl that knows she's bright.
Write one that knows she's dumb.

Write a girl with many friends.
Write a girl with none.

Write a girl that faces her fears
And write a girl that runs.

You wrote boys that were happy.
You wrote boys that were kind.
You wrote boys that were on their own.
You wrote ones that knew their minds.

You wrote boys that were strong.
You wrote boys that were weak.
You wrote the boys that found true love.
You wrote boys that were soft and meek.

You wrote boys that were optimistic.
You wrote boys that were glum.
You wrote boys that knew they were bright

And wrote ones that knew they were dumb.

You wrote the boys with many friends.
You wrote the boys with none.
You wrote the boys that face their problems
And you wrote the ones that run.

We don't want badass characters,
We want girls that are real.
We want complex characters,
Girls that make us feel.

So write a girl with fears and flaws,
One that somehow flew.
Write a girl that's her own person
Because girls are people too.



Rachel Smyth

Age 12

Donabate
Community College

Silence

I reached out and touched the pool,
Tinged silver in the moonlight.
The ripples spread out to the edge,
Everything was quiet.

The trees around the silver pool,
Cast their shadows on the ground.
They seemed to whisper secrets,
Mysterious and proud, they made no sound.

And no busy insects flitted,
No birds huddled tight in their nests,
No animals hunted their prey,

Silence.

The Great Oak

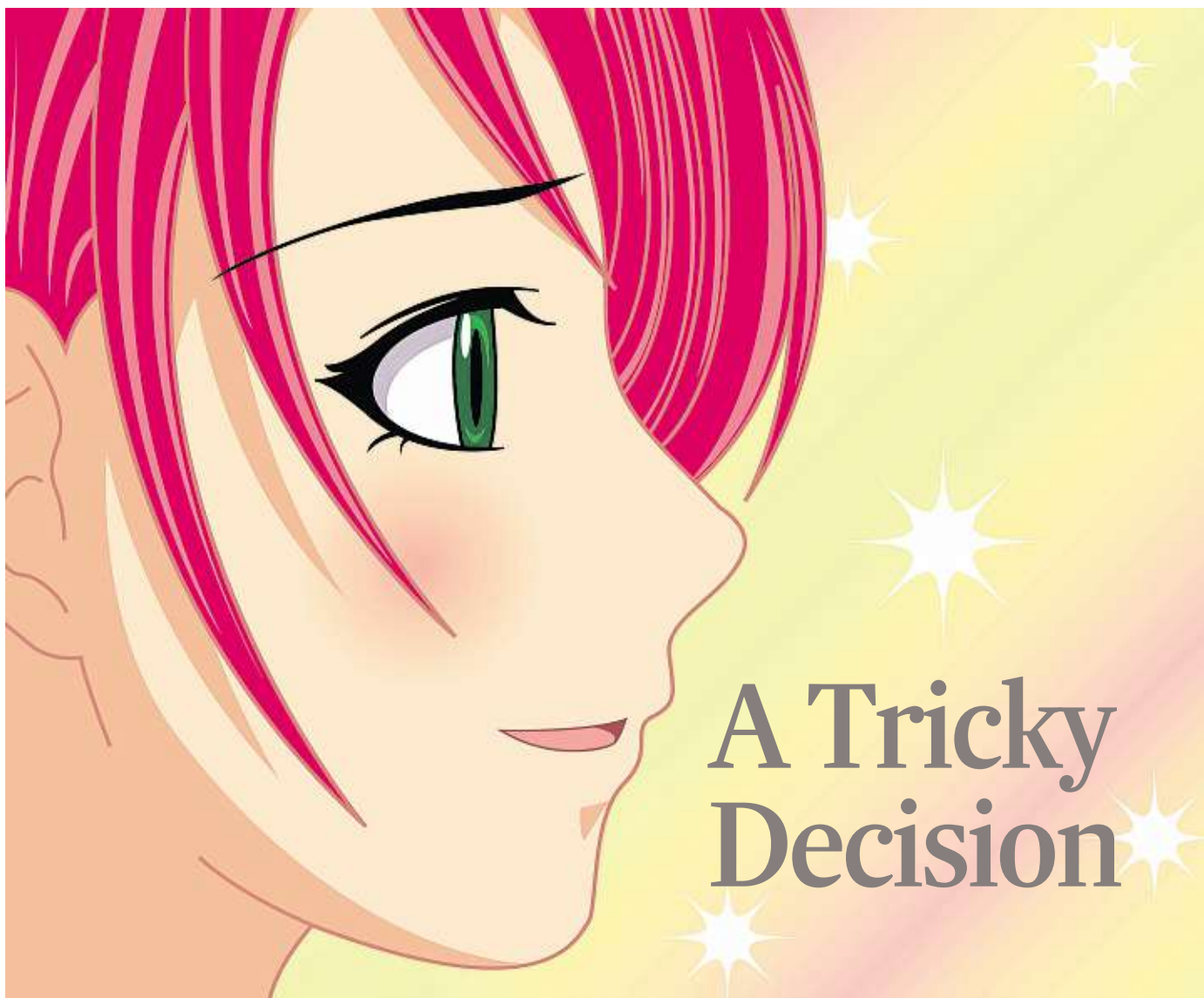


His roots stretch deep down into the earth,
His branches reach out to tickle the sky.
Buds peep out, tiny babies at birth,
His trunk creaks and his leaves sigh.

Centuries of knowledge passed down
through a seed,
His wisdom is greater than that of any one.
He knows of love and loyalty, not of hurt
and greed,
He savours the rain, he worships the sun.

The animals are his friends,
And he provides a home for the birds.
So until the evening ends,
They sing a song of no words.

The Great Oak is wise, proud and strong,
From summer to winter, all year long.



A Tricky Decision



Katie White

Age 13

Bloomfield
Collegiate School,
Belfast

It was peaceful at Konoha High School; the hallways were swarming with pupils but no talking was heard, not one person dared to speak for fear of detention and they all hated detention, or so the ones who had been to it told others. Their reason for not speaking – exams.

Exams were on and teachers were guarding the entrance doors to the many different exam rooms to make sure not one student got in who wasn't there for the exams.

The bell sounded, signalling that the exams were over and classes had once again begun. One class in particular was kept waiting and it was the same class every day of the week, history. History was the class they would be waiting for 25 minutes til their teacher arrived. The teacher was well-known for being late but unless you knew him you would find he had a reason for being late.

The class began to talk

amongst themselves to pass time and after 25 minutes the teacher came and a blonde-haired girl and a pink-haired girl looked at their teacher, "You're late!" they shouted in unison, no matter how many times he was late it was two different excuses he would use every time.

"Sorry class I'm afraid I got lost on the path of life," their teacher Mr Hatake said with a smile.

"You've said that one already," the pink-haired girl known as Sakura said and the blonde known as Ino nodded in agreement.

"A black cat crossed my path so I had to take the long way round," Mr Hatake grinned and walked to the classroom door, unlocking it.

"Please do come in," he gestured to the door as he pranced in happily to his desk.

Every student took their seat and Ino and Sakura sat next to each other smiling brightly.

"Did you hear? I got two tickets to the Black Veil Brides concert in three days!" Sakura squealed. "No way! I can't wait to go!" Ino shouted and Sakura slumped down into her seat.

"Y-you aren't going," she muttered and Ino gave Sakura a glance.

"Did you say something?" Ino asked and Sakura shook her head rapidly.

"No I didn't," Sakura nervously played with her hair.

"Alright s-", Ino began to talk but was cut off by Mr Hatake.

"Girls quiet please!" he shouted and both girls straightened in their seats.

"Sorry sir," they replied in

unison. After an hour of class Mr Hatake finally finished talking.

"And that covers everything on the bombing of Nagasaki," Mr Hatake smiled at the class who were half asleep from an hour of him rambling on.

"Now let's move on to the history of Japanese toys!" He spoke loudly, but the bell beat him and rang throughout the school, signalling the day to be over.

"Seems we are out of time class, dismissed," Mr Hatake said and went to his desk and tidied his things since he was getting to leave early today.

Ino and Sakura walked out of the class and to their lockers, gathering their stuff and walking out the school and down the forest path they took every day to get home from school.

"I heard you have tickets to the concert Sakura," a figure

spoke from the shadows.

"Y-yes I do," she stuttered and out from the shadows emerged her childhood crush, the crush of Ino and most girls.

"Sasuke," Ino said smiling happily.

"How many do you have?" Sasuke asked.

"T-two," Sakura replied.

"Could I possibly take one and go to the concert with you?" Sasuke asked and Sakura nodded, blushing madly as her crush just asked to go to the concert with her.

"Have fun!" Ino shouted and clapped her hands together happily.

"But Ino I thought you wanted to go and it is with Sasuke?" Sakura questioned Ino.

"No I'm fine, you get to go with your crush, I have my sights set on the new guy, Sai, I think his name is," Ino smiled to Sakura.

"Thanks Ino you're amazing," Sakura grinned hugging Ino.

Later that week, Sakura had been preparing to go to the concert and a knock was heard on her front door.

"Sakura dear, your boyfriend is here!" Sakura's mother called up the stairs.

"Coming! And he's not my boyfriend!" Sakura shouted from her room.

"Yes I am," Sasuke replied, a small smirk plastered on his face. "Sasuke . . ." Sakura trailed off as she walked down the stairs.

"Stunning," Sasuke muttered and they both went to the concert.

Ino was happily watching TV and both friends were happy.

“
out from the
shadows
emerged her childhood
crush

Conflict

**Rosie Joyce**

Age 13

Mount Temple
Comprehensive
School, Dublin**Mara**

I woke before dawn, much earlier than normal. The city was a dangerous place, father had warned us many times. But I knew I had to go there. Ben was dying, and the only way he could recover was if I got him medicine.

It was quiet and chilly as I made my way out of the circle of huts that made up our village, clinging onto my wooden bucket. Usually Gai would be driving to market now, with his vegetables, the men would be on their way to work . . . but the war changed everything. There were no men left, and every day more letters arrived, more women were crying.

I walked along the dusty dirt track, passing by a pair of starved, bony birds fighting over a scrap of bread. I thought of my own larder at home, consisting of a handful of rice grains and a single slice of bread, barely enough for one

person, let alone a family of seven.

My feet aching, my throat parched, I knew I could not go much further. Had I taken the wrong route? Just as I was thinking of turning back, I caught a glimpse of the shining, glittering city over the hill, its high towers rising into the sky. And that's when the bomb went off.

Emilia

Opening my eyes, I stretch and yawn. I scramble out of bed, checking my phone. There's a new message from Violet: she wants to go last-minute shopping before the state ball tonight. Something about her shoes not going with her dress. I suppose I could make it after school, only for an hour. The state ball's not til eight.

I pick out a midnight black top and skirt, slip them on, and take out my curling tongs. When each lock has been turned into a ringlet, I quickly apply some navy eye-liner, grab my schoolbag and head out the door. I'll get a hot chocolate on the way to school, and that'll do me for breakfast.

Tim is waiting beside the jeep. Its black armour glints in the morning sunshine as I climb in, plugging in my earphones. The other girls always get to school quicker than me, their drivers are much faster. But I don't really mind, because Tim allows me time to look over my notes before exams and double check my homework.

I glance through the tinted

“**I have never seen anyone so neglected and poor as she is**”

window. We are nearing a café. “Here ok, mi-“ but Tim doesn't finish his sentence. A loud explosion goes off, and the jeep starts to roll down the hill.

Mara

I cough and splutter, rubbing my eyes, then slowly pick myself up. I've still got a job to do, bomb or no bomb.

Suddenly a young girl comes running out of the city. She is dressed in jet-black and her hair is elaborately curled. Her eyes are outlined with expensive make-up and she wears silver earrings. She carries a mobile phone, something I have only seen once before, in the hands of a wealthy traveller.

A white girl. I start walking away quickly, but not before she spots me. “Did you hear the bomb?”

Emilia

I quickly unstrap myself. Tim is

unconscious in the jeep, he will be too heavy to move. The best thing I can do is seek help. The door is jammed, so I climb through the front window.

What was that? The war has never affected the city before. The closest I've come is hearing explosions far off in the distance, and reading newspaper headlines.

The usual morning traffic of the city is not there, all is quiet. I walk towards the entrance of the city, then start into a run.

I step outside, onto the tarmac road that leads to the next city. I look around, bewildered. I've never been out of the city before. It is supposed to be unsafe and unnecessary to travel. The city is supposed to have all the resources we need.

Crunch. Crunch. The sound of a light treadfall fills the air. I turn, and see a girl, about my own age a little bit away. She has bronze coloured skin and

short, ebony braided hair.

She is thin and barefoot and looks as though she hasn't eaten for days, wearing only a sandy coloured, short-sleeved dress.

I have never seen anyone so neglected and poor as she is. I didn't know there were people suffering as much as this. It is outrageous! How many more others are like her?

Am I dreaming? Am I asleep in the jeep? I pinch myself, and instead of asking is she ok? Does she want something to eat? I ask: “Did you hear the bomb?” She nods. So it is real.

“Do you know where it went off?” Just as I ask this question, a new smell of smoke fills the air. I turn around. A black cloud surrounds a circle of huts in the distance, a village. Flames rise up into the air.

“My village!!!!” screams the girl, and she runs towards the fire.

**Amber Dalton**

Age 13

Portlaoise College

Isn't it Weird?

Isn't it weird?

How a bully can change the world?
The strongest ones are really weak.
The smart ones are really geeks.
The pretty ones are ugly. Yeah?
And the big ones are pigs.

Oh, it makes the bully strong.
And it makes the bully smart.
So what if it makes the bully wrong!

It's weird -

It doesn't matter
That the black art of a bully's heart.

If she's so high
Why must she make us so low?
If she's so all seeing
Why can't she see what she's doing to me?
It's weird.

The Ghost of St Patrick



Ross Kelly

Age 14

Coláiste na hInse, Laytown,
Co Meath

Matt was an ordinary boy. Nothing special, nothing important, just Matt. 14 years' old, tall and awkward, brown eyes and styled black hair, and a pair of square glasses. He was your typical bookworm; he spent most of his time in the school library, the public library or locked away in his book-filled room (his library). He had always made sure to keep himself to himself. Always.

Matt woke up. It was early, but not school early. He looked at his alarm clock, covered with *Star Wars* stickers. 09:56am.

Crap! I'm late for school, Matt thought suddenly.

He threw aside his bedcovers and stripped from his pyjamas to his school uniform. It was a grey jumper, with a yellow rim. It was accompanied by a white shirt and black pinstripe trousers. On top of it all, there was an ugly crest for St Johns, his school. In between pouring out cereal and brushing his teeth, he scurried into his parent's room to find both of them in bed. They should've been in work.

"Mom! Dad! Get up, quick, we're late!" he shouted, shaking their bedcovers.

His mom let out an unladylike snore and opened an eye.

"Matt! What the hell are you doing up?" she whispered.

Matt gave a look of confusion. "It's 10 o'clock, and you're not in work," Matt said.

His mom stifled a laugh. "Matt, honey, it's St Patrick's Day. Go back to bed."

It was then Matt realised how stupid he must have looked. Half wearing his uniform; a toothbrush in his hand, and a spoon in the other. He retreated out of their room, and closed the door. He went back into his own room, slipped off his uniform and placed the spoon and toothbrush on his desk.

"Oops," he muttered to himself, and fell back into a slumber.

It was exactly 13 minutes after he fell asleep that he woke up again. This time though he knew he didn't have school. He opened his eyes and his room was filled with an unearthly light. Suddenly, a green, translucent figure appeared in the air. He was in robes, and wearing sandals. He had a staff in his hand with a shamrock carved at the top.

"Matthew," the ghost croaked.

"H-how... how do you know my name?" Matt's eyes were large and bulbous. Full of worry, fear and shock.

"My name is Patrick, surely you've heard of me, I rid all the snakes in this damn country. And do I get any sort of recognition? Hmm? No, never," the ghost grumbled.

"Well, Mr Patrick, you did appear in my room as a spirit, remembering about the old Irish culture wasn't my first thought. But anyway, why are you here?" Matt was prone to be sarcastic, even when something like an alien appears in your room.

"I have a wee mission for you. If you accept, you will be rewarded. If you decline, you will be killed," Patrick informed.

Matt gulped. "Okay... what's this mis-

sion?"

"Apparently, I haven't got rid of all the snakes," St Patrick told him.

Matt laughed, deliberately.

"And you have to get rid of it for me," St Patrick told him.

Matt stopped laughing altogether.

"Farewell," St Patrick said, and started to fade away. Then he stopped, as if he remembered something important. "By the way, her name is Sekra, and she can talk."

It was then that the ghost, the spirit, whatever it was, vanished into thin air.

Matt was certainly an anti-social person, but he did have one friend. Julian, a total French mathematical dork. Julian and Matt were in most of the same classes in St Johns. So he figured that Julian would be the perfect person to help him. He pulled his smartphone off his bedside locker and dialled Julian's number. He had it memorised so he called it out as he entered it in. After four rings, Julian picked up. There was a lot of background noise, and Matt could hardly hear him.

"Julian! Where are you?" Matt asked.

"At the parade meeting! You're late!" Julian sounded so pissed off.

"OK, sorry. I'll be there in five," Matt said and he hung up.

He threw on a pair of grey tracksuit bottoms, and a yellow hoodie. He slipped on his converse, and scrambled out the door, shouting a quick "bye" to his parents on the way out.

He kept his promise and arrived at the parade five minutes later.

"Julian!" he called out, and slapped his friend on the back. "You're late, again! How many years is this gonna keep happening, Matt?" Julian started to lecture.

"Dude, the parade is the least of our worries right now!"

"I need your help," Matt said.

"What now?" Julian moaned.

Matt knew he'd never believe the true story, so he came up with a lie on the way.

"My aunt's snake has run away. We need to find it!" Matt lied.

"Are you kidding me?"

“

He had a **staff**
in his hand with a
shamrock
at the top

"It's really important. It's... um... poisonous!" Julian's eyes opened wide with fear and disbelief. He paced over to a large man and muttered something. The man said something back, and Julian came running back over, zipping up his coat.

"Allon-syl!"

The ghost had told Matt that the snake would be hiding near a lot of shamrocks.

"She's somewhere near a lot of shamrocks," Matt told Julian, "I don't know, maybe she thinks they're food or something?"

"Okay," Julian said slowly.

They both thought long and hard for the next few minutes.

"Ah, mon ami, she must be in the shamrock float! Let us go!" Julian suddenly exclaimed.

Julian dragged Matt to the town hall, where all the floats were stored for the parade at midday. There were floats with leprechauns, and Irish dancing outfits, and Heineken, and representations of pious St Patricks.

Matt noticed that none of them looked like the real one. Julian spotted the Shamrock float almost immediately. They sprinted over to it and leapt onto it.

"What now?" Julian asked.

Matt looked at Julian, expecting him to answer. He thought back to the all the books he read about snakes, but no one them came across as helpful.

"Sekra," Matt hissed, taking Harry Potter's approach, and attempted to speak Parseltongue.

There was no answer.

"Sekra," Matt called out again.

Suddenly, the two boys heard a noise. Like a gasp, but quieter. Julian signalled for Matt to look in the corner. He trembled as he took the baby steps towards the curtain in the corner.

What if the snake really was poisonous?

Why did the ghost pick him?

Would he come out of this mission alive?

More and more thoughts like those were scattered through his mind, in that moment, during that day. He never quite knew what happened next. He could feel the breath of Julian standing behind him on the back of his neck.

He stuck his hand out and pulled back the curtain. There, huddled in the corner was a frail, young girl, with two slits for a nose and incredibly bright green eyes...

■ ILLUSTRATION: DEARBHLA KELLY





Lucy Reason

Age 14

Sancta Maria
College, Ballyroan,
Dublin

Lights. Sound. Pain.
The only things I
can see and feel. My
vision is blurry, my
head aches. Voices
around me echo frighteningly.
I can't move. My arms are
numb. My legs are twitching,
my eyes rolling all over the
place to try and figure out
where I am.

Things start to focus, and I be-
come aware of the blonde wom-
an sitting in front of me.

"Hello," she says. Her voice
is smooth and almost soothing.
My stomach tingles. I manage a
gargle in response.

"Do you know who you are?"

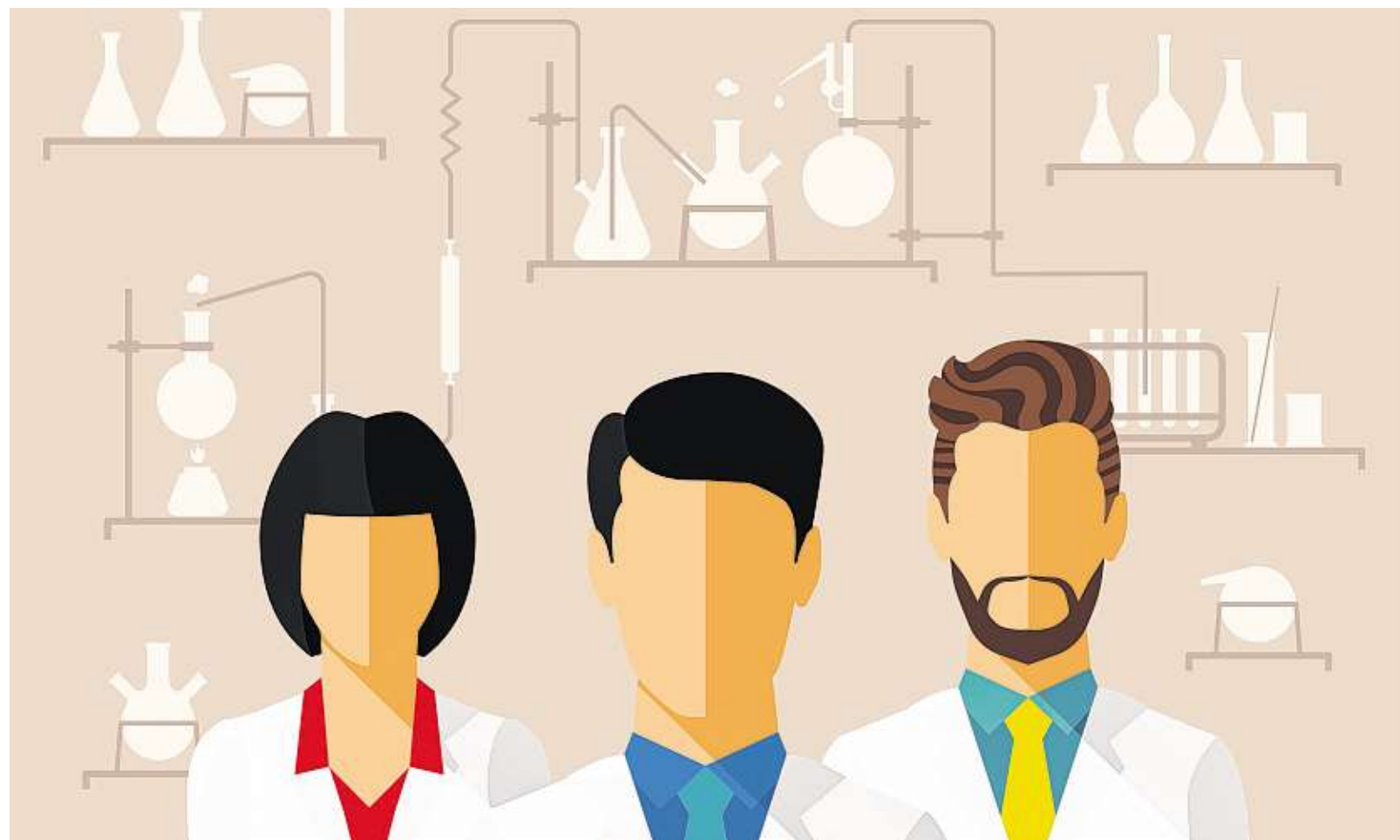
No. I don't. I stare blankly,
and she seems to get it.

"You are Experiment Num-
ber 626. You have survived far
longer than any of our other
tests."

I remain oddly calm.

"We are going to run a more
physical test on you now. It's
very basic. I'm sure you'll do per-
fectly."

A needle makes its way into
the sensitive skin of my neck.
Once again the world blurs.



Experiments

Then everything goes black . . .

I wake up in an area that is
completely white. It hurts my
eyes. I blink rapidly. My head
spins as I push myself to my
feet. There's a high whistling
sound, followed by static. A
speaker turning on?

The woman from before's
voice speaks again, somewhere
no doubt far from here. Her
voice booms around me.

"Hello, 626. Welcome to the
testing arena. What you are cur-
rently standing in is a maze.
Your test is to get to the other
side in the quickest time you
can manage. You will be joined
by a few of our . . . less successful
tests in there, so keep an eye
out. Good luck."

And she was gone again.
Well then. I looked down at my-
self. I wore a pair of white cot-

66

**Saliva dripped
from its
teeth
on to my cheeks.
Its breath held the
coppery smell of
blood**

ton shorts and a matching tank
top. Chilly, but better than noth-
ing, I suppose. I took a deep
breath, and began moving for-
ward. It was so white and bland
I could hardly tell where one
barrier ended and another be-
gan. I ended up walking into
them quite a few times. All I
could do was ignore my wound-
ed pride and hope I wasn't be-
ing watched.

I walked for what felt like
ages, before finally reaching an
open space. Its walls were
white, which was honestly no
surprise, but here and there,
there were spatters and streaks
of something red that made me
feel highly unsettled. Then I
saw the creature in the centre
of the area.

It was one of the ugliest
things I've ever seen. It was part
human, part . . . lion? It's mus-
cles were huge, too huge. The
skin over them was ripped and
bleeding. It's hair was a shaggy
mess of tangles that hung
across its shoulders. Its eyes
were pure black, no pupils. All
black. It's knife-like teeth so big
its lips bulged. On the end of its
hands and feet were huge,
sharp nails, covered in dried
blood. And the smell . . . oh,
Lord. I wanted to be sick, but
only managed a small noise of
disgust.

The creature's ears pricked
and it turned to look at me. Its
lips peeled back in a snarl. Show-
ing more of those awful teeth. It
lunged at me and I barely man-
aged to jump out of the way. We
kept going in circles like this,
him coming for me and me nar-
rowly avoiding him. Then my
bare feet slipped from under

me. The creature was on me in
an instant, trapping me under
it. Saliva dripped from its teeth
onto my cheeks. Its breath held
the coppery smell of blood. I
struggled as I began to panic,
kicked and flailed, but it did
nothing. It seemed to be smil-
ing, amused by my pathetic at-
tempt at getting away. It
opened its mouth, teeth glisten-
ing, brought its head down
against my shoulder and . . .

Agony.
Pure, unbelievable agony. I
screamed at the top of my lungs
as the creature pulled back, a
large chunk of me in its mouth.
Tears spilled down my cheeks
as I lay there. The monster hap-
pily chewed his mouthful.

I don't quite know how it hap-
pened. I don't think I ever will.
But I remember lifting my
hands, pressing them to what I
could reach of the creature. I fo-
cused all my thoughts on the an-
ger and fear I felt towards this
thing. Then there was a blind-
ing flash of light. I yelped and
closed my eyes tight, and when I
opened them again, the crea-
ture was gone. Just . . . gone.
The walls were covered in fresh
blood and I could see chunks of
the creature's hair with it. My
palms felt warm, and I turned
them just in time to catch the
last bit of glowing light fade
away in them. What?

I got up. Despite my being
mutilated, I felt completely re-
laxed. Weird. I kept walking, al-
most disappointed that there
were no more mutants for me
to make explode.

I finally came to an open
space much larger than the last.
The walls were pitch black, a

The Flavours of Jamaica



Jimal Kelly

Age 13

Beaufort College,
Navan, Co Meath

The sizzling jerk chicken
The smell of the open air.
From this hill I can see
Half way across the country.
By God I love Jamaica.

The fresh grapefruit dangles
From the leafy tree,
The scaly lizards
Swivel in the grass
The poisonous centipedes
In the bathtub
By God I love Jamaica

The marketplace like a roofless
Shopping centre
So busy and loud
By God I love Jamaica.

Grandpa's restaurant
Serving rice and peas and curry
To the locals
Unique foods
Guinips and bulla
So sweet and gingery
By God I love Jamaica.



The Suitcase



Bikem Pastine

Age 14

St Andrew's College,
Blackrock, Co Dublin

startling contrast to the pure white I had gotten used to.

Sitting in the middle of the area was a small dark-haired boy. He was chubby, didn't look more than six. He watched me, those strange stormy grey eyes cataloguing my every step. I saw a door in the wall just behind him, and gave him a small smile, stepping around him and heading for it. I never made it.

My ankle was grabbed and I was pulled to the floor. I looked over my shoulder to see an inky black shadow wrapped around my ankle.

It had emerged from a writhing mass of them that squirmed beneath the now standing child's feet. They shot at me, stabbing my arms and my ruined shoulder. I didn't scream. It was awful, but I didn't scream. I raised my hand to one of the shadows, focused, and poof, it was gone, disintegrated into nothing, taking the others with it.

The boy screeched as if he were being ripped apart, and as soon as I was dropped to the floor, I ran for him, pressing my palm to his face. It was satisfying to watch his head turn to dust and float to the floor.

I stepped through the door into what looked like an empty laboratory. As soon as I stepped in, a gaggle of scientists began cheering and whooping, one of them being the blonde woman from the beginning. They were slapping each other on the back, saying how they'd "finally done it" and calling themselves geniuses. I was being completely ignored. I felt anger boil inside me.

I was the one who had made it through their stupid maze! I was the one who had done all the work! What had they done? And just what the hell was I?

I felt someone grab me and a deep voice saying it was time to put me away so I didn't "get broken", and then I lost it. I broke free of the hold I was in, and pressed my hands to the floor. The current of energy ran through the floor, up their bodies, into their brains. They all dropped like flies. I grinned. What to do with them?

I looked around the practically bare room, and my eyes fell on a table full of syringes and bottles full of oddly coloured liquids, most of which had that toxic warning label on them. I stepped up and grabbed an empty syringe, filling it with a bubbling yellow-green liquid.

I surveyed my once-captors, coming to a stop at the Blonde Woman at my feet. I knelt down, pressing the syringe into her neck, slowly releasing the liquids into her veins. She writhed and screamed, an odd hissing noise coming from her skin.

I looked from her, to the syringe, to the other scientists, and slowly a wicked, no doubt manic-looking grin spread across my face.

Time to experiment...

I have a suitcase in my hand. It is big with flower patterns on its soft fabric. It was given to me that day when I was only seven. I had packed my seven years in my suitcase then. I have packed 18 years of living, loathing and a lot of fear in it now.

I remember our garden from back then was dotted once, twice, a million times; little red dots that filled the air with their sweet smell.

We would run around singing silly songs and picking the wild flowers. Then we would bring them to our mother who would put them in a jam jar on the window sill. They would wither and die by the next day but it didn't matter to us because there was an infinite supply of the poppies and we would just pick more the next day.

My mother would bake. She would bake cakes and cookies and make sweet lemonade that had such a taste that would stay in my mouth all day.

Sometimes, when I close my eyes I can almost touch the lemonade pitcher, cracked and overused, on the chipped table with a plate of oatmeal cookies by its side, the jam jar on the window sill, the sunlight seeping through the roughly nailed, splintery boards covering up our windows. I see my mother in the mirror crying on her mattress.

The mirror had paint on the sides. Someone had done a hasty paint job like they had something better to be doing instead of covering our precious four walls, like we weren't worth their time. Green, the colour of the lead paint on our walls. Green always reminds me of... I don't think about the colour green anymore.

In the springtime we would tie a frayed string between the tree and a hook. My mother would hang our clothes on the line. We would give her our wet clothes and she would hold up each corner and secure them with wooden pegs, her dark brown hair swaying in the breeze.

When the clothes were dry, she would fold each shirt carefully into the basket. In springtime, my mother would let us sing along to her songs.

I remember that summer. We would wake up early just so that we could swing on the used

tire tied to the tree for even a second longer and when the sun fell from its proud place in the sky, we would run back home feeling sad we couldn't swing once more.

The summer breeze carried the smells of the wild flowers. My mother would take out her guitar and sing songs she would make up as we drifted to sleep. We slept in the same room. We used one blanket. The blanket was once blue, I used to think, I liked that, blue, the colour of the home of the birds.

That summer, I had a yo-yo I found. It was painted a candy apple red with a swirl in a honey spiralling out from the centre. I spent every moment with it. It brought me so much joy. Our laughter would fill every

empty corner of our home. Every nook was filled with the special sound of pure happiness of children. My yo-yo made that sound.

In the fall, we would gather the leaves from the tree and jump in them for hours. My mother would make a soup with leeks she grew in the back garden. "Five potatoes" she would say, "keeps a family fed". The leek soup smelled like the leaves turning red. She would make bread to eat with the soup.

Our oven would never stay the same temperature and would burn the bread but it would be warm when we came back home when the sun set. My mother's fall song was sweet. She sang about love and embers but the words to the song always changed.

The winters weren't like the rest. The poppies would disappear and we wouldn't go outside to play on the swing. The cold would freeze us all the way to the bone. My mother wouldn't make lemonade. Shadows hung on the walls and the floor would suck all of the warmth out of my feet. My

socks would wear thin and there would be more holes than fabric.

My mother never sang songs. She would lie in bed and wouldn't speak in the winter. Sometimes, she would stand in the kitchen, she would just stand there looking lost. I was lost in the winter.

My mother sang one last song to us when they came. They loaded us into a car. They made us leave our mother. They made us leave the songs and the lemonade. My home was made of warm wood, decayed and splintery. They took us to a place where everything was smooth plastic. They were as cold as white plastic. White plastic reminds me of... it reminds me of the salty taste of my tears. My tears ran down my cheeks then. My tears have now run dry. And so has my fear.

I have a suitcase in my hand. It is big with flower patterns on its soft fabric. I have packed 18 years of living loathing and fear in it now. It is heavy. I put my suitcase down, force a smile and walk away. Maybe I'll buy a yo-yo.

“Every nook was filled with the special sound of pure happiness”



Different



Aoife Lyster

Age 14

Donabate
Community College,
Dublin

“So you’ll take the job?” the man’s voice carried clearly through the coffee shop. “Guess so, you have a deal, don’t forget your payment,” Ni replied.

She was incredibly bored with her timid client. He was stick thin, with large rounded glasses and wiry black hair. He had a thick accent. The man had terrible taste for meeting places. Ni always liked noisy, crowded areas that made it nearly impossible to be overheard. Of course, more sensitive business contracts were dealt in a more... discreet fashion.

The man, (Ni couldn’t remember his name) had insisted on meeting in an old cafe, New Where, which was always quiet and had few customers. The place was a dump with a putrid smell that forced Ni to wrinkle her nose.

Ni got to her feet, abandoning the half empty cup of pungent-tasting tea. She pushed her dark hair out of her pale face. The man flinched. Ni held her hand out with an aura of finality.

“I’ll get going, don’t worry, the package is safe with me,” she drawled out. The client slowly reached down beside his chair, long bony fingers grasping the handle of the black metal case. He passed it over the table. Ni grabbed the case impatiently.

“What’s your name again?” Ni asked, inspecting the metal case. It was surprisingly light.

“Conner, Conner Green,” Green gritted his teeth. Ni had asked for his name three times.

“Are you sure you can get the job done?” Green fidgeted. “You doubt me?” Ni asked innocently. Green just grumbled a reply.

Ni dumped change on the table, too lazy to count it out. She walked out, her mind busy planning her route through the city’s underground. The job was a simple one. Deliver the case to a girl called May. Collect the payment. Job done. Ni continued walking down the empty street. Even the homeless left this street alone. Something to do with the local gang war. Ni didn’t care as long as they kept their squabbles to themselves.

The sun began to set in a spectacular rainbow of yellows, oranges and reds. Ni could feel the darkness closing in. Old, crumbling buildings lined the streets in this part of the city. Only the poor and forgotten resided here. Slowing her breathing, Ni focused on sound waves. As they reached her sensitive ears, she filtered out the noise. In the buildings beside her, she could hear murmurs of conversation. Strained breathing and heavy coughing could be heard, with faint heartbeats, suggesting sleep or sickness. It was probably the latter.

“

The job was a simple one.

Deliver

the case to a girl called May



Ni heard aged doors creak open and the crunch of feet on broken glass. She could even hear the weak gurgling of dirty water travelling through underground pipes. Sharp eyes scanned the shadows. Mugging was common. Taking a left, Ni sighed, the case swinging by her side. She went right, into a narrow lane. Stopping, she turned around, irritated by her “shadow”. A pair of gold, glowing eyes peered around the corner. Ni gasped. It couldn’t be... The owner of the gold squeaked with shock, and turned to bolt.

“Wait! It’s okay, I’m just like you, I’m not gonna hurt you,” Ni spoke, softly. With slow, deliberate movements, Ni took out her coloured contact lenses. Her brilliant golden eyes matched her pursuer. The girl gasped. She was dirty, wearing ragged clothes, her hair in a clump. Ni stared at the girl. The girl stared at Ni. She couldn’t have been older than 16. As their eyes locked, Ni knew, she just had to look after one of the last of her kind. Ni didn’t know much about her golden-eyed brethren. The only thing she did know is that they were rare, so rare that one could say they were almost extinct. Hope flared through her. The girl tentatively took a step towards Ni.

“I’m not alone,” she whispered, softly.



Kerry Carroll Talbot

Age 15

Portlaoise College,
Portlaoise, Co Laois

The Upper East

Have you ever had that feeling of such great hatred and anger that it consumes you?

You know, that blood-boiling rage?

When your face flushes? And your head is reeling to the point where you almost explode with rage, your hate-filled body in parts round the room?

That’s how I feel when I go to school. I would rather be stung on the eyeball by a bee than go to that school one more time.

I would rather jump off the Empire State Building and land in a pit of plug tops and Lego.

Today, I would rather drink bleach.

The student body of Equity High, home of exemplary education, are more sickening to me than that two-fingered man who mugged me on the subway. At least, he only mugged me once.

Equity High, what a laugh! Home of Exemplary Education, how ironic! I doubt if over a doz-

en of them can accurately recite their ABCs. They’re only at this school because Daddy must have only the best for his precious Carter and darling Poppy. New York’s finest! Of course, he wouldn’t bother spending one-tenth of the time equivalent to the money it costs to make them go away. They don’t seem to mind. So why should I care?

One thing I do care about is how much these students get away with. Interestingly, what

you get away with is in direct proportion to the credits carried by your family name.

Let me illustrate. Erika Gilmore was sent home yesterday for dress-code violation. Coincidentally, this happened 10 days after her father was charged with embezzlement. Anthony Pascott was caught red-handed smoking a joint in the courtyard a week after his father was made a congressman. I saw it myself. Our admirable leader, Principal



The Gardener



Rory O'Driscoll

Age 15

Sutton Park School,
Sutton, Dublin

I tug harder on the worn edges of the fabric, wrapping myself further in my torn, patchwork coat in a desperate bid to warm myself. A fine mist spills out in front of me at every breath. The city is silent now. All the street vendors have packed up their stalls, all the busy shoppers have returned home, and the once full car parks stand still and empty. The streets are desolate, apart from the odd drunk shambling home, or a stray dog poking its nose into an up-turned bin. As I make my way slowly down the street, I feel desperately alone, despite the fact that behind those windows

and walls and doors are hundreds of thousands of people. But I am not like them.

By day, men in suits turn their noses at the sight of me, people cross the street to avoid me and tired mothers drag their children away from me. I am an outcast. It is my own fault, they say.

I am too lazy to get a job, or I spend all my money on alcohol and drugs. I am a bad person, they might say. Better on the streets than working in our schools and homes and businesses.

I bring my cupped hands to my face and blow in the hopes of preventing the dull numb feeling that is creeping through the fingers. My boots are still wet from the rain earlier and there is slight squelch as I walk. I have given up hope of keeping my feet from going numb, and simply hope I will still be able to walk at a manageable speed.

How did I get here?

It was not the highest paying of jobs, I will admit, but it was a job. It was enough for me. I could afford a little apartment and I had enough left over for dinners. I had liked it too. I was good at gardening. I had never been good at maths or writing or languages, but gardening, now that was something I was

good at it! I could grow the brightest roses and I knew the best anti-weed techniques. I knew which flowers best complimented violets and where to get the best seeds, but a gardener is just not all that important a job.

He had been nice about it, and I knew he didn't want to let me go. He had given me three weeks' wages, which was much more than he was required to, which was very kind of him. He had tried to explain that he didn't want to do it.

But with the economy and the petrol prices and everything, he couldn't afford to keep me on and do the tulips and how they really were lovely tulips but he just had to make some cuts and all that. It was okay, I didn't blame him. I could find more work, I told him.

I couldn't.

I was able to keep the apartment for a few more weeks, paying rent with what I'd got left. I didn't have much in the bank. It was November when I had to give up the apartment. It had been hard, seeing it go. I had spent a long time in that apartment. I grew my own tomatoes on the windowsill. It had been a small, slightly smelly little place, but I had loved it all the same. I went easily. I had taken

“It was not the highest paying of jobs, I will admit

my gardening boots, my wallet, my old watch, a pair of gloves, a change of clothes, my hat and of course, my coat. The nice man who owned the apartment had let me take my time, say goodbye to the old place. We had shaken hands and gone our separate ways.

That first November was the worst month. I didn't know what to do. I had been foolish enough to spend most of my money staying in a hotel until I could find another job, and within a week I had run out of money. It had surprised even me how utterly unprepared I was. I spent the first two days just wandering the city hoping for a miracle, a job application that fell from the sky with double my old wages. When I slipped on ice and almost broken my knee I had wizened up. I spent a day trying to find a good place, and I eventually settled on a pedestrian bridge over the river where lots of people pass by. So, I had sat down, wrapped my coat around myself and placed my hat down in front of me. I collected €8 and 37 cent that day.

It's January now, and things aren't any better. I had gotten a little bit more money over Christmas, when everybody was a lot more generous. One nice young man had given me

€30. But now, the magic of the holidays was gone and replaced with a cold bitterness. People don't have time for me. They are focused on their jobs and their cars and the newspapers, and that's okay. If I was still gardening I know I'd be the same. I didn't judge anybody. It would solve nothing.

I had failed in keeping my hands warm, and they're red and throbbing. I plunge them deeper into my pockets. It's much colder tonight and my legs feel like they don't belong to me.

My walking is wobbly and shaky. I know I can't go any further, so I cross the road to where there are arches in the doorways.

That will shelter me, at least somewhat. I am having trouble keeping my eyes open, and I've just noticed I'm shaking. I crouch down in the cover of the arch and make myself as compact as I can with my back the way it is. I blow on my fingers again and wrap my coat further around myself, but I do not feel the cold anymore. I do not really feel much of anything anymore, although I am still shaking. There's no point in worrying about it now. There's no way I could walk anywhere else even if I tried. I close my eyes.



Burlesconi, didn't even make a call home. What a sham! There are some boys who are a little more relaxed than the girls and there are a few who actually work hard for their grades. Most . . . well, let me give you a sample of hallway conversation over-heard yesterday

“C'mon Zachery, man. What happened next?

Well, my man, let's just say there was some high grade scotch. And what happens in the back of a limo in Monaco stays in the back of a limo in Monaco.

They all erupt with laughter and cheer. Fist pumps. High fives.

The girls are worse. Vicious. It's like they have blades for tongues and every time they

sneer, every time they open their mouths, these razor sharp weapons slice at your being, searing you.

I remember my first day at Equi. I remember walking up those smooth granite steps. It was a long walk with all those eyes burning holes in your face. There was Olivia Highwell, Queen Bee, plaid skirt, Starbucks frappuccino in hand. She has the pure and innocent look down pat; pale skin, chestnut brown hair in perfect curls, the brightest smile, pearly white teeth, but with eyes as cold as Medusa's and just as effective.

“So this is Queens,” she said with the smallest smile I have ever seen. She turned on her heels and walked away. My

heart fell into my stomach.

She started it. It has never stopped.

“Here comes Queens. Cover your face. They have diseases in Queen's there's no cure for.”

Hey Queens! You dress like a homeless. Where did you get those shoes? The thrift?”

That's how they are. You should hear the way they speak to their maids. Julia Newcomen is a junior – a junior Olivia Highwell. She delayed the start of lesson today by conducting a loud conversation with her maid. Here's a sample:

“You get me that cocktail dress for the Hope Gala. You get it, or you'll find yourself back in Russia with nothing to your name, but a failed American ex-

perience.”

When I worked last summer at Walmart, I thought I'd seen the heights of humiliation. I didn't know the half of it.

They are so spoilt. I get up at 6am every morning and eat my breakfast on the subway from Queens. I walk five blocks. They are picked up every morning by sleek black Mercedes and emerge like butterflies at the steps of the school. It's like the bloody Oscars.

The students in this school look down on everyone and it makes my blood boil.

I have never had anyone disrespect me like they do. Don't I deserve their respect? Couldn't they learn something from me?

I am their teacher, after all.



The Girl and the Cake



Alexandria Fagan

Age 16

St Colmcille's
Community School,
Knocklyon

She was 82 years old. When had the years slipped so surreptitiously past, she wondered. Her grey eyes darted around the ballroom from behind her silver framed glasses as she surveyed the scene before her.

A sad excuse for a wedding, really. Most of the guests were too old and tired to stay up late so they had limped off to bed. The remainder had decided to shuffle awkwardly on the dance floor while the groom looked on delightedly at his rejuvenated friends.

"Aren't I lucky?" the old woman thought. "How did I manage to land such a catch?" She chuckled to herself and gazed at the gold watch on her new husband's wrist. She wondered how much it was worth and wondered if it was a genuine Rolex like her first husband's.

Her eyes swept the room

again. This time they landed on the three-tiered wedding cake on the table, perfectly framed by a bay window that gazed out at the June evening. A cake. It always started with a cake. This cake was her favourite. Unlike the other three, it had been piped to perfection. Its white icing glistened like fresh snow. Its dusty pink coloured sugar flowers matched the roses in her hair.

The little bride figure perched atop the third tier didn't resemble her at all. She was new and plastic. Her plastic face plastered with a plastic smile and her plastic hair stuck to her plastic head. The old woman was certainly not new. She was wrinkled and wizened. Years of experience under her belt. She knew every trick in the book and that book, if it had ever been published, would be *How To Kill Your Husband - The Modern Day Housewife's Guide*.

Why would she kill her husband? Why would she kill her husbands? I guess the secret would die with her. She always got away with it.

The first husband was a total darling. They had met and fallen in love in the 1950s. He had the perfectly coiffed hair and the pressed suit a perfect husband should have. Every morning he would go to work with his briefcase in his hand and his coat slung over one shoulder. The waxed car would pull out of the driveway at exactly seven o'clock and its headlights wouldn't shine through the living room window till he returned at seven o'clock that evening. The door would swing

open and she would be greeted with "Put the kettle on dear". He'd kiss the top of his new wife's head and call her "Angel". She loved when he called her that. Her heart shaped face would light up, filled with the ebullience unique to newlyweds. However, in time she had come to learn that someone else loved being called "Angel" and that most offices closed at five...

When he came home one Friday evening, the house was bathed in candlelight. Perched in pride of place on the pristine kitchen table was a beautiful angel cake, which she had slaved over all day. Its cerise and snow white icing lingered in globules on the sides of the cake. He cut a slice. The sleeping pills were strong.

At the wedding, the woman gazed at her new husband's watch again. The gold plating glittered, each sparkle glinting in time to the music. It was hypnotic.

Her second husband had been like that: hypnotising. He had found her hypnotising too. He was extravagant, and had plenty of money. He didn't worry about money. Not unlike many others though, behind that polished and professional façade that he had invested so much in, the tiny cracks betrayed immense stress and worry. Rumour had it, he had had a hand in one too many suspicious deals. She discovered the problem when he tried to sell her jewellery and their house. He tried to appease her with a trip to an exotic island: an island with a name so exotic they forgot how to pronounce it two seconds after the travel agent

“

She had come to learn that someone else loved being called

‘Angel’

said it. But this time appeasement wouldn't work. The tropical tasting coconut cake was the last meal they shared together, and he had barely left a crumb.

Her second husband made her bitter, but when she learned that his body had been discovered in a hotel room under circumstances almost as shady as his business dealings, his insurance policy had been incredibly generous. So generous in fact, that she stayed a long while on that exotic island. That's where she met husband

number three.

Her third husband had been a friend of the first. She had never heard of him before their encounter on the exotic island, but was pleased to discover that at odds with his persona as the Big City Lawyer, he was actually rather charming. He bought her diamonds and an apartment in the city, and on her 40th birthday he bought her a dog. They were blissfully happy. That was until one night when they were eating slice after slice of a decadent Devil's

A Poem for a Best Friend



Emma Ronan

Age 15

Enniscorthy
Vocational College,
Wexford

Our cheeks are rosy,
We're wrapped up cosy,
In blankets,
On your double bed.
Watching sci-fi,
Wasting wi-fi,
Surfing websites,
Limbs like lead.
Laughing loudly,
Pointing proudly,
At the brothers,
On the screen.
We surf the channels,
Wearing flannels,
Like the brothers
we look mean
One of them dies.
"It must be lies!!!"
You scream, I laugh,
It happens all the time.

But we're not like that,
Sister, friend.
I'll be with you
Till the end.

Death's welcome party

“

It was
horrible
Officer! He slipped and
oh! He smashed
to pieces, didn't he?

Chocolate Cake. It was sticky and sugary and no bite never tasted like enough. They had both indulged in a bit too much wine. They were laughing and joking, hanging over the balcony of the apartment when her husband asked her what was the most terrifying thing she'd ever done.

"I killed my first husband," she said between hiccups before proceeding to break into fits of laughter. The wine tasted funny. His expression changed. He knew. He had known all along.

"It was horrible, Officer! He slipped and – oh! He smashed to pieces, didn't he?!" She couldn't continue any further.

"It's all right. It's okay. Would you like a slice of this chocolate cake? You look like you're about to faint. Miss? Miss?"

"Excuse me, Miss? Or should I say Missus? Would you like a slice of our wedding cake?"

The woman snapped back to reality. She was back sitting with roses in her hair. This husband was different. They had known each other a long time. A baker. He was kind and could bake almost as well as she could. He had baked the wedding cake. She wanted to forget her past and even share her wealth from her previous marriages.

She picked up her fork and gingerly pushed the knife into the crunchy biscuit cake. She raised the fork to her mouth. Mmm. Incredible. It could melt in your mouth and the sugar flowers were sweet and light as a feather. A few more bites were pierced by the fork... There was a strange aftertaste. This wasn't like the practice cakes. It had flavours of vanilla and something much more sinister. Her heart began to beat faster. The plastic bride figure gazed out the window. Her plastic feet frozen on this incredible confection.

"It tastes great, doesn't it?"

"Mhmm."

"I tried a few different recipes but I think this is the winner."

"Mhmm. What's that aftertaste I'm getting? Coffee?"

"Oh no dear, that's revenge."



Rachel Barrett

Age 15

Loreto High School,
Beaufort, Rathfarnham

War, Famine and Pestilence sit together around a table in silence, waiting and looking irritated. Death enters

Famine: (stands) And what time do you call this, might I ask?

Death: (sheepishly) Sorry, I know I'm late. Work was just really busy today.

Famine: That's what you say every day.

Death: Well, today it wasn't MY fault. (Looks at War.)

War: I was just doing my job. Unlike you, I have to work for it, instead of waiting for other people to do things.

Death: It might not be what you're used to, but I have to do about twice as much as you.

Pestilence: (disappointed) Whatever about working late, you could have at least phoned ahead. We would have went on without you (motions towards cards on the table).

Death: (despondently) Look, I said that I was sorry.

Pestilence: (grumbles) I was really looking forward to it too.

War: Yeah. All of us were.

Famine: You just don't get it. When we work, we work well and hard. And then there are quiet times, when there's no work for us at all. The only things that we have to look forward to are things like this. And you just ruin them.

Death: If it really means that much to you, why don't you just play without me?

Pestilence: (bitterly) We don't play without you because of what happened last time. Or have you forgotten the 2012 Apocalypse ruse?

Death: Oh, come on. That was funny. The humans were terrified.

Pestilence: For you, maybe, but not for us, that's our main purpose. That's why we're here. And you just went and made a joke out of it.

War: (angrily) It made a joke out of us.

Death: If it annoys you guys that much, then, when the time really does come, I'll confess to the whole thing.



“

War: I was just doing my job! Unlike you, I have to work for it

Famine: No, you take credit for everything. You're the only Horsemen that the humans know. If someone dies of hunger, it's Death's fault.

War: If someone dies in battle, is it War, who cause the whole thing? No, it's Death's fault.

Pestilence: And if somebody dies of the Bubonic Plague, who was it? Death.

Death: That's not my fault. It's the humans.

War: Don't try to blame the humans. We were around long before they walked the Earth. We all know that you planned this. You probably appeared to a writer and threatened them in a vision.

(Death starts to squirm at their glares.)

Famine: I knew it.

Death: Alright, so what if I did?

Pestilence: (furious) So what? They know one quarter of us. You take all the credit. This is a huge deal.

Death: I didn't think of that at the time. I thought that we were a couple of years away from the Apocalypse. If I'd known that it would take this long, I wouldn't have done it.

War: That's a lie and you know it.

Death: Prove it.

Famine: We're spending eternity together. We will (smiles deviously, looking at War and Pestilence).

Lights go down as War, Famine and Pestilence all burst into evil laughter

Tattered

**Robyn Gill**

Age 16

Scoil Chaitríona,
Glasnevin, Dublin

It started out new. The businessman slipped it on and it smelt of fresh leather and opportunity.

He had spent far too much money on it, he knew that, but he would earn it back, he was certain. As he stared at his reflection in the window of the subway train, his fingers tingled with the thrill of exciting prospects. It made him look like a somebody instead of a nobody. That's what he thought anyway. He pushed back his greased hair, smoothed his suit and straightened his tie.

He wore it to the interview, into the office on the 51st floor. It complemented his best shoes that he had spent hours polishing vigorously, until they shone. As he sat in the reception with the polished glass windows, he stared down at the city.

The great sprawling city that was so far away from home. He tried not to let his fear of heights bother him. He had never been up this far before. But he didn't let his nerves show, not in front of the other 10 people also waiting.

He got the job. He knew he would. How could they not hire him when he worked harder, and fought harder than anyone else he knew?

He wore it to work every day, into the office with the shiny desks. He wore it as he worked his way up through the building, charming everybody as he went.

Eventually, the business-

man outgrew the coat, and he barely even noticed when he left it behind at a very important meeting. He got the deal he wanted, and everything else seemed irrelevant, as he went off to celebrate with his colleagues.

It was slung over the back of the chair, in the empty conference room when the cleaner came to mop the floors. He did his work slowly and steadily because he had no real reason to get home. His son, the aspiring writer, was gone for the weekend and even though his apartment was tiny, it felt empty without him.

He picked up the coat to stack the chairs and it was heavy in his hands, thick and warm. He held it up. It was only slightly worn, still a fine coat. It looked like it would be the perfect size for his son.

He knew he should hand it in, but he also knew there was a whole pile of neglected coats that never got claimed.

He desperately wanted something to give his son, because usually all he had to offer was a bed in a small and shabby room. He wanted to give his son the world, because he deserved it.

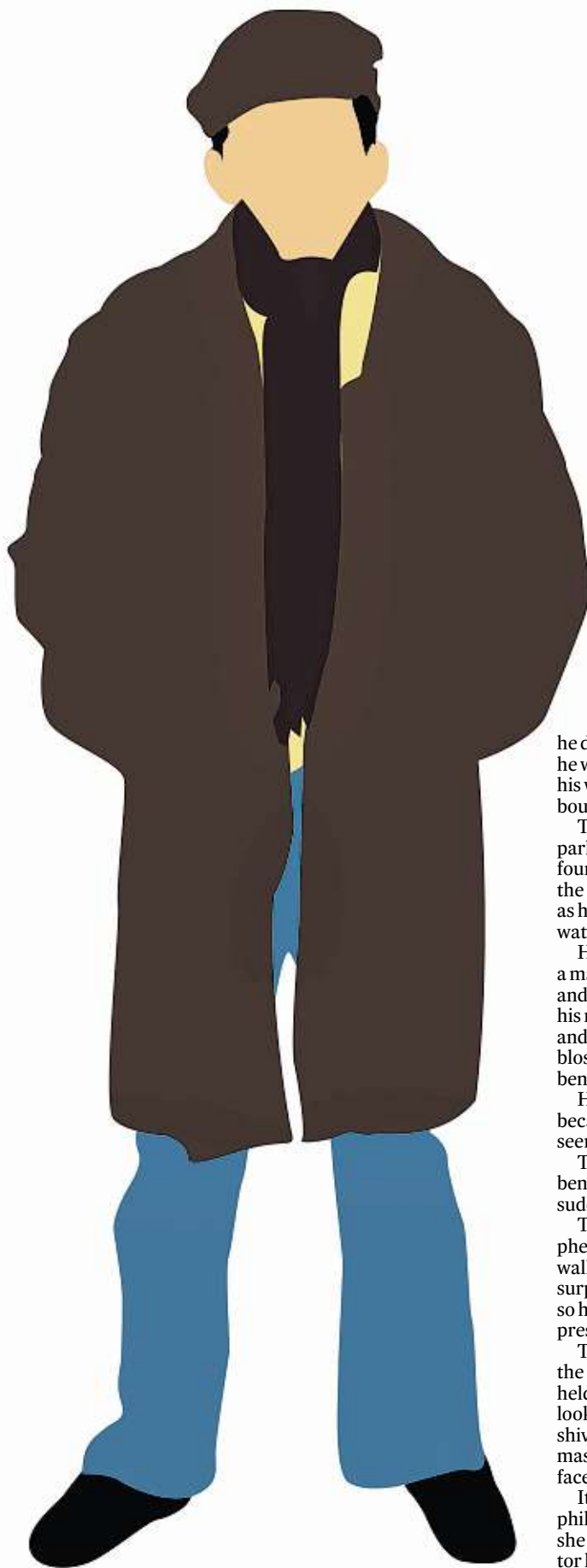
So he took it. Even though it nagged his conscious slightly, it was worth it when he welcomed his son home with it. His son's eyes lit up and he smiled that beautiful smile of his. He lied about how he got it and his son put it on straight away.

He wore it to the park, where he sat on a bench for hours, watching the world go by, and writing.

The coat kept him warm from the bitter autumn winds and he came everyday, while the seasons stained the leaves gold, and the winter sent them cascading to the ground.

He came there when spring showed its first signs of new beginnings. The pocket was the perfect size for his notebook. He wore the coat to the meeting with the publisher, the smiling woman who told him that they loved his novel.

He wore it to the printers, where it got ink splattered and



66

It was in that
moment, the
philosopher later thought . . . she fell
in love with her

he didn't even notice because he was so enchanted, watching his words, his thoughts, being bound between a cover.

The writer came back to the park the next summer and found that it was too warm for the coat, so he shrugged it off as he sat on the bench, still watching the world.

He was lost in thought when a man came up to him, smiles and nerves, asking him about his novel. They began to talk, and then to walk, a friendship blossoming effortlessly beneath the trees.

He didn't come back to get it because other things suddenly seemed far more important.

The couple found it on the bench when it started to rain, suddenly and heavily.

The rain caught the philosopher and the procrastinator walking through the park by surprise but they just laughed, so happy in each other's presence as they were.

The philosopher grabbed the coat from the bench and held it over both of them. She looked at the procrastinator shivering underneath the coat, mascara running down her face.

It was in that moment, the philosopher later thought, as she watched the procrastinator laughing, her drenched

hair clinging to her head. It was in that moment, the philosopher always thought, that she fell in love with her.

The philosopher took the procrastinator's hand in hers. It was cold and shivering. Even still, they walked slowly, the coat wrapped around them, neither wanting to leave each other just yet. They walked around past the boathouse, even though it was the longer way to go, talking and laughing.

The philosopher walked the procrastinator home, and as she left her at the door she finally was brave enough to kiss her.

The philosopher walked home in the rain, smiling the whole way.

The coat was abandoned in the street, left on the pavement, drenched and crumpled.

It was like that when the man stumbled upon it, still too sober, so that everything seemed harsh and cold.

He had been wandering all day, all evening, but he had no where to go. He picked the coat up and put it on. It was damp and ink-stained and worn but it still felt of love and hope and opportunities.

He drew the tattered coat closer around him and walked out into the night.

**Jessica Fitzsimons Kane**

Age 16

Fingal Community
College, Swords,
Co Dublin

To You

I regret not sitting down with you,
And holding your frail hand.
I regret just standing in the corner,
Watching you breathe,
And just giving the passing remark when I
needed to.
I regret not telling you just how much I loved you,
And what exactly you meant to me.

But what I don't regret is going any chance there
was to see you,

And standing in that corner for hours;
Studying your face.
Remembering your face.

But now, Saturday Mornings never happen,
And sitting in that garden feels lonely.
Even though the flowers still bloom,
And the apples are still growing;
It feels colourless and dead.
Where I once was content and at ease, is now a
place of requiem and despair.

It's coming up to Christmas now,
You said you'd be here for that;
And I looked forward to it.
But I won't have that now.

What I still have are the memories,
The secrets,
The jokes.
But it's getting harder to laugh when the best
lines came from you,
And I'm struggling to remember your voice.

Girly Locks



Aava Hearn

Age 16

Portlaoise College,
Portlaoise,
Co Laois

I don't know what I'm doing here. Come on! Really?

The jangle of the warden's key is slowly but surely driving me crazy.

I'm only two weeks into a six-month sentence. Two eventful months. I don't know how I will survive.

I don't know if I am surviving. But strange to say, I have reason to be glad I'm still here.

The day I arrived, there were four bunks in the cell. Only one was occupied.

I have trust issues. You would too, if you had my family history.

I was actually relieved to meet my roommate. Sure, she was strange. Everyone in here is strange. But she was nice and I liked her. Poor Belle!

I remember the first time I saw her. She was sitting in the corner as I entered the cell, holding my sheets and pillow close to my chest. I was nervous. Not at being locked up. I've been locked up before, but I never had to share my cell.

Belle was holding a little tea cup and singing.

She didn't look up.

**I considered myself
blessed
to be sharing a cell
with such a
gentle
soul**



“

**That first day, she just
walked into
the room like she owned it**

“Hey!”

No reply.

I looked around the room. There was a framed picture of a strange-looking animal. Half-man, half-bear. She followed my gaze. Her eyes settled on the picture and she smiled. “Hey! My name’s Snow. What’s yours?”

She just hummed to herself.

I began making my bed. A bell rang somewhere beyond the door. It seemed to interrupt her thoughts and she looked at me.

“I’m sorry. I was singing to my friend. She loves to hear me sing. She’s delightful. You’ll like her. Her name is Mrs Potts. She’s just the best little teapot”

Hold up! Did she just say teapot? NO!

She was quite talkative once she got started.

“I’m a miscarriage of justice,” she said. “I’m here because I fell in love. I got 18 months for being in love. That’s why they put me here.”

“Did you kill him?”

“Kill him. Heavens no! I love him still.”

What a whacko!

Her name was Belle. According to her, she married a beast, and will probably be moved to a place for the clinically insane. She talked to the cutlery. She talked to her clock. She had put in a complaint that they took her candelabra away. His name was Lumiere. He was French. Imagine!

I suppose she was seriously ill, but I considered myself blessed to be sharing a cell with such a gentle soul. And her chatter was distracting.

Then Red arrived. She went down for breaking and entering.

You soon learn that everyone in the joint has a story. And everyone is innocent. Red was not as crazy as Belle was, but she too saw herself as a victim of the system.

All she ever said about her crime, was that he had big eyes and big ears. He deserved what he got. She was only trying to save her granny.

The fourth guest of the state to arrive was Goldilocks. I assume it was her street name. She had unnaturally golden hair and she looked a little young to be in the system.

Young as she was, she was as hard as nails.

That first day, she just walked into the room like she owned it. She tried out all of the beds, climbed onto Belle’s and fell asleep. Pre-teens! Who needs them!

We didn’t argue with her. She was only a kid after all, and I have to admit she was kinda scary. You develop an instinct for that kind of thing in the joint.

I wasn’t wrong. It turned out they tried for as an adult. She was in for a triple homicide.

We left her to herself mostly. Sometimes, in the joint, survival is about knowing when to talk and knowing when to shut up.

Goldilocks got a job in the kitchen. That’s where she got the blade.

The night Belle died, I wasn’t there. I had called a guard. I needed to relieve my bladder. When I came back Belle’s lifeless body was lying in a pool of blood on the floor. Nobody knew who’d done it, but Red was blamed. She had a blade under her pillow.

They took Red away that night.

I didn’t do this, she said. She looked at me, and I just knew she was telling the truth.

I was left in the cell with Goldilocks.

I spent three more sleepless nights with that maniac.

I knew she’d go for it as soon as she could lay her hands on a weapon. I thought I had more time. She was confined to the cell.

I didn’t think she’d try to kill me with her bare hands.

So how am I here, telling you this tale?

Hey! I forgot to tell you my bad.

I’m in here for faking my own death.

How do you like that?

A Cuppa Tea and Papayas



Dove Curpen

Age 18

Loreto College
Crumlin, Dublin

This is one of eight short plays recently produced in a playwriting project at Fighting Words in collaboration with the Abbey Theatre.

Alex a Mauritian boy aged 11
Siobhan an Irish girl aged 10

Scene 1
In a classroom at school. Alex sits on a chair centre-stage, speaking directly to the audience. Siobhan is in the background, not paying attention to Alex.

Alex: It's so easy to watch people die. On TV of course. We've almost become numb... so desensitised when we talk about death, ye know. Like a film is crap if no one dies, isn't it?

It's like we're all waiting and rooting for someone to die. Please, anyone, anywhere, just, die. Because if no one dies then it's just boring, isn't it?

Pause.

When someone dies, not on TV, now, but in real life, no one really cares anymore. We're so used to seeing the "RIP Grandpa" or "Heaven got an angel today" on Facebook an' all. Like, that's so stupid.

Pause.

"And they, since they/Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs." Robert Frost wrote that. I don't know much about him but I know he was right about that.

No one gives a damn. It's the natural order of things. So, go on, turn to your own affairs. It's completely normal and okay if someone dies.

Pause. Looks at audience.

Siobhan approaches and Alex jumps at the sight of her. She caught him by surprise as he didn't know that she was lurking in the background. Lightning speed.

Siobhán: Eh, why do you have a girl's name? Alexandra. That's a girl's name isn't it? It is! It is a girl's name. But you don't look like a girl. Is it because you're from a different country? So like they name the boys after girls. I don't understand. That's weird. You're weird. Why are you not saying anything? Come on say something.

Can you not talk? Like what are you doing? I'm Siobhan. What's your name? Oh yeah, it's Alexandra. Sorry, I forgot. Are you not allowed to talk to me? I'm not supposed to talk to you either, but like whatever. Oh, so you can't speak English? Do you speak English? Oh okay, no. Oh well, you'll learn. That's what school is for. I still can't get over the fact that you have a girl's name. Are you gay? My da says that it's when boys hold other boys hands and kiss each other and stuff. Homos. That's just gross. I can't picture that in my head. Anyway, like, you don't talk very much.

That's weird. You're weird.

Alex: I... umm... I don't really...

Blackout.

Scene 2
Outside in the yard. Alex sits cross-legged on a bench reading The Catcher in The Rye. His diary is on the bench. Siobhan enters skipping. Lightning speed.

Siobhán: Hey Alex. Oh my god! Like what are you doing? Are you reading? Are you reading



during lunchtime? You're meant to be playing. Now, I don't wanna be mean or anything but like the kids will think you're a weirdo if you read during lunchtime. If you want to make friends, you have to make the effort. At least try to fit in. You're asking for it if you sit here, crossing your legs reading. It'll be your own fault. Like I'm just trying to be nice, telling you this. Just listen. Don't hate me. My da says only D4 people read. You're not a D4, are ye? You don't wanna be D4 around here. Da says that they're the posh ones that live in Ballsbridge.

They talk all proper and they're really stuck up cuz they think they're god's gift with all their money. And they wear UGG boots all the time, even in the summer. Don't be like them? Okay? Cuz they're weird.

Pause.

Siobhan turns to exit.

Siobhán: Well...see you later.

Alex: Wait, I haven't even....

Alex is still on the bench. He puts the book down. Picks up his diary and writes. Lights are dimmed. Although Alex is writing, he delivers this monologue to the audience.

Alex: So there's this girl at my school. At first, I could barely understand what she was on about. It's all gibberish. Well, it probably has something to do with the fact that I can't understand or speak English properly but makes no sense at all! I never really pay much attention to her anymore. Maybe it's because she speaks so fast. Everyone speaks so fast here. Everything's so different. Like the leaves, they're brown here. BROWN! I've never seen brown leaves in my life before. Ugh, I don't like it here. I miss home and I miss Darren.

Pause. Sighs. Anyway, so this girl. I can't even pronounce her name. Seeebbh-hh. Sive. SSHiiobon or something like that. Well, she seems like a nice person at first but she really isn't. Her dad says this, her dad says that. Who the

Unknown Place



Abi Adeniyi

Age 12

Beaufort College,
Navan

Surrounded by a lot of people
Curious about what is going on
I look around and wonder
Questions filling my head.

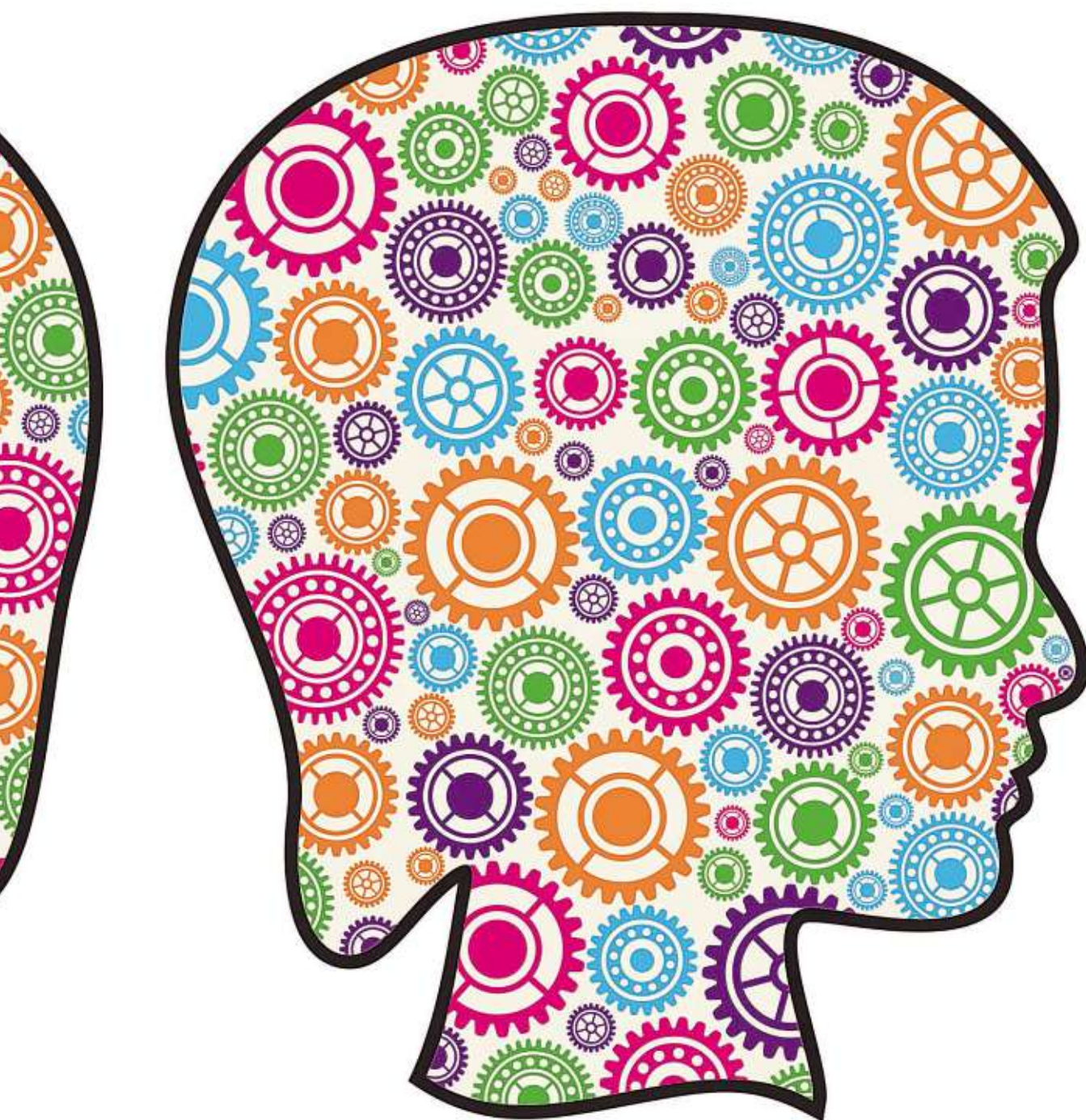
I say to myself
What is going on?
Where are we going?
I wonder.

I ask Mum
What is happening?
People with guns
Taking us to this unknown place
Everyone with their hands up,
She just sighs and says
It will be ok.

I'm scared, afraid
Of what's going to happen
At this unknown place,

I want to cry but hold it in
I close my eyes
Wait,
Hope,
Wonder.

“
Why
are you not
saying
anything?
Come
on say
something.”



Things I will never do



Shauna Crosse-Maher

Age 12

Beaufort College,
Navan

Eat a rat, chilli peppers or poison
Hot wax
Or a whole watermelon in one go.
Throw a cat out the window,
Climb Mount Everest,
Pull a donkey's tail,
Jump off a cliff,
Dive into a shark's mouth,
Buy a Range Rover,
Drink boiling water from the kettle,
Go skydiving into an active volcano,
Tear a butterfly's wings,
Build a mansion,
Get strangled by an octopus,
Sniff a chocolate scented candle.



hell cares what your dad thinks. And her dad doesn't seem ... like a good person, which means that SHE isn't a good person too. She won't stop annoying me.

Maybe she doesn't know she's doing it. And I get annoyed over the simplest things. Darren's birthday is coming up soon. It'll be interesting to see what Mam does this year. I hope she'll bake again this year. I hope I'll get to eat some before she throws it away.

Blackout

Scene 3. Classroom. Alex and Siobhan sit in their seats. Lightning speed.

Siobhán: I actually hate school sooo much. I don't mind seeing my friends and stuff but I really don't like having to get up from my comfy bed when it's cold and rainy. And always raining here. And homework! Don't get me started on homework. I hate doing homework! But I have to learn, though. My dad has a good job. Like I don't really know what it's about but

he went to school and he gets paid loads now. He says I need to be good too in school so that I can get a job when I'm older. Only people that go to school get jobs. But he says that it's not fair that other people come here and take all the jobs cuz then we become poor. But...I mean.

Alex: Will you stop doing that?

Siobhán: What?

Alex: Insulting me...but not in an obvious way.

Siobhán: What?

Alex: It's not a big deal. But it's like little comments here and there.

Siobhán: I don't even know what you're talking about.

Alex: Maybe you don't know you're doing it. But sometimes you say things that are just weird.

Siobhán: NO! You're weird. YOU! Da...

Alex: I don't care what your da thinks and says. I don't care!

Siobhán: Look, I'm just tryna help you. You don't have any friends and you look so sad all the time.

Alex: I didn't ask you to talk to me. Leave me alone. Stay on your side of the fence.

Siobhán: Ooook. Well....sorry for trying to be nice! I was just tryna help you cuz you don't have any friends. I'm not even suppose to talk.... Siobhan exits abruptly. Alex watches her as she leaves and takes his diary out from his school bag.

Alex: I know it's kinda weird for a boy to keep a diary. But Dr. Clarke says it's a good idea cuz instead of having everything up here (taps his temples.) I put it all in here (holds up journal.) That way, my brain is nice and empty. Because if it gets too full, it'll probably explode. That's what happened to Darren. He had too much stuff going on and didn't let any of it

out. Speaking of him, Mam made the cake, she did. Spent the whole day on the thing. Decorated it with Smarties. Then dumped the whole thing in the bin...again.

I don't know what's wrong with me. Maybe I am weird, like Sive..or Sibe or whatever her name said. I'm not like the others. I'm weird. And, a cup of tea won't solve anything! I don't even like tea, no 12 year old likes tea!

Pause. Sighs. Siobhán quietly enters and lurks in the background.

I don't know what's wrong with me. That's why I can't fix it. Cuz I don't know WHAT to fix. I don't think I have one massive problem, but many small little things that get to ye. If Darren were here, I'd talk to him. But he didn't have anyone to talk to, himself. And look at what happened to him.

AAaahhh, I miss him so much. I miss the sun, I miss real chicken curry, not this fake stuff they have here. I miss the cold papayas. I miss my broth-

er. But again, everyone else has "turned to their own affairs."

Siobhan walks upstage and sits on the bench beside Alex.

Siobhán: Alex, Alex? What you doing? Why are you talking to yourself? Listen Alex, I honestly don't mean to insult you. I'm just trying to be a good person.

She looks at Alex. He sees a bruise on her jaw.

Alex: That looks sore. (Pointing at her jaw.)

Siobhán: Yeah. It was an accident. Dad apologized.

Alex: Oh.

Silence

Alex: At least he apologized. I mean, he could've just left it and not said anything.

Siobhán: Yeah. My dad's great. He's amazing. He's the best dad ever.

He works really hard. He's doing the best he can.

Alex: What about your mother?

Siobhán: She passed.

Alex: Passed?

Siobhán: Yeah, she passed away. She's dead.

Alex: OH. Pause. I am so sorry for your loss.

Siobhán: Yeeeah.

Alex: I lost my brother a few years ago. He killed himself. I feel like I'm forgetting everything about him.

Siobhán: I know what you mean. We don't really talk about her anymore either.

Alex: Do you miss her?

Siobhán: Yeah. I do. I miss.

Alex: I miss my brother too.

The two sit in silence for a while. Look at each other and smile.

Blackout



Gregory Noonan

Age 17

CBC Monkstown,
Dublin

An excerpt from a longer story by Gregory Noonan, one of the stories from the collection of short stories 'Brain Storms' written by transition year students from CBC Monkstown, to be published in May 2015.

The coarse canvas sails were at full mast, eager to swallow as much wind as possible to move the heavy ship forward. HMS *The Orient* was a large Nao warship. It was clinker-built with thick overlapping planks of wood, slathered in dark pitch, to keep it watertight.

It had stark white lateen sails, triangular in shape, the design borrowed from the lithe and agile Mediterranean vessels. Lateen sails allowed for faster movement and better tacking. The Nao design was a bulkier, improved, war version of the caravel, the original hybrid of agile Mediterranean ships and the sturdy Atlantic-going ships.

The Orient was a beautiful ship, glossy white paint adorned the hull, bordered with an acrid blood red paint. It was the pride of His Majesty's fleet; the wooden deck was trimmed with gold leaves, leading to the ship's wheel. The wheel itself was extravagant, smoothed maple wood gilded with pure gold and adorned with fire opals and sapphires which cast a myriad of colours across the deck when the sunshine struck them like flint on stone.

Hanging from the bough of *The Orient* was its figurehead, an elegant carving of the winged goddess of victory, Nike, entirely made from ivory, apart from her eyes, bright red rubies, which looked like swirling pools of fire. Her piercing gaze would send shivers down the weak spines of *The Orient's* victims.

The Orient was elegantly brutal, it was equipped with 64 light cannons and 36 heavy cannons; on deck there were four mortars for distance firing. Beneath the carving of Nike were four chaser cannons to be used

The Orient's Fall

when pursuing a fleeing ship. Incidentally, that's why *The Orient* had the best chaser cannons in His Majesty's navy, as *The Orient's* enemies were inevitably always running.

The Orient had a well-trained crew of two hundred and seventy six men; two hundred men alone were used to man the cannons.

The ship was reaching the end of its long Atlantic voyage; it had departed from Dover five weeks ago and had soon reached the Caribbean where it would dock in Tortola.

As *The Orient* cut water, it left a rolling wake in its path, breaking the smooth glasslike water. The setting sun danced on the ripples of water, its fading golden glow setting the sea ablaze.

It was at this time her captain finally stumbled up to the deck, the sun stung his eyes, the stench of rum hung from him like a cheap cologne. Edward Creed was 39 years old, his best years were behind him but he was slim and tall, powerful and fierce; his fight had not left him.

But he had developed a bad drinking habit. He drank rum like water. The strain on his eyes began to ease, adjusting to the sunlight. Under his eyes were dark bags, and his pale ice blue eyes were strained and bloodshot.

Sweat dribbled down his head, his hair was slicked back in a dark black mop, the sweat

made his hair mat to his scalp in patches. Even during sunset the heat in the Caribbean was formidable. Creed wore a light linen shirt, through which large sweat stains had emerged. His light woollen breeches weren't helping in the heat, nor were his thick leather boots. His head was pounding, he needed water, instead he looked to the green rum bottle in his hand. He lifted it up and drained the last few dregs from it.

"There's a bloody hole in the bottle," groaned Creed. He swayed on his feet, stumbling backwards but grabbing on to a railing for support.

"That hole's for your mouth, captain!" called Dwyer from the wheel.

Matthew Dwyer was Creed's first mate. He was only 22, and young for the position but he had impressed Creed with his quick mind and ability, and so had been quickly promoted to first mate, much to the annoyance of many of the crew, but they soon grew fond of Dwyer as well.

Creed moaned and threw the bottle at a wall. The shattering glass send a spray of broken glass across the deck. He stumbled below deck looking for more rum and his bed, neither of which he found.

The next morning Creed awoke lying across barrels of fish. As he sat up a lance of pain shot down his back, making him wince. Surprisingly, bar-

rels didn't make good sleeping areas. Through the deck hatch Creed could see the sun high in the sky; he figured it was midday by now.

From the decks came a loud call "Land spotted", followed by the pounding of hundreds of feet as the crew rushed to the deck.

Creed groaned once more and trudged up the stairs to the deck.

The islands of the Caribbean sprung up from the vast sea of blue like tufts of grass in a field. The crystal clear water allowed for a beautiful view of the sea life. At one point a large manta ray began to swim alongside the boat which made some very seasoned sailors quite terrified.

For all the beauty of the water it was just as dangerous: if a crew member dropped their guard they could drift on to one of the many coral reefs and tear the hull out of their boat. This was evident as many wrecks sat rotting upon the reefs now, like dishevelled rulers upon their broken thrones, masts snapped and hulls destroyed, a morbid warning to other ships.

"We make for Tortola, men, for rest and food, only God knows we need it," called Creed, wiping the beads of sweat from his forehead.

"And two flagons of ale for each man before we reach port."

This was met by roars of approval as dozens of kegs were

carried up to the deck and opened. Creed retired to his quarters and toppled onto his bed, glad to feel the comfort of the pillow beneath his head. Unfortunately Creed could not sleep, the constant reminder of his task here was a constant burden on his mind.

About three months ago the admiral of the navy and the prime minister had approached Creed with a strange task. A wrecked merchant frigate had drifted into port in Tortola. Its mast had been blown off and all of the crew, save for one, was executed. When he was brought ashore and questioned all the man had said was "ship . . . terrible . . . darkness and rotten fish". After that he began to choke on water. The doctors could not explain it as he was nowhere near the sea at the time of his death.

So now here he was, with the most powerful warship in His Majesty's fleet, hunting a mystery ship, as the constant attacks on the trade routes were costing huge amounts of money. However, only Creed and Dwyer knew of *The Orient's* true purpose in the Caribbean. The crew thought they were on a surveying mission. Fortunately not one man questioned why they were using a warship.

The Orient docked in Tortola and the crew were given leave to go in to the town. Creed, however, chose to stay with the ship and get some much-needed

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**The blades of grass
tightened with each pull, cutting
into him like razors**



rest. He carried a lantern and a pillow up to the deck and laid them on the wooden planks which were cool under the setting sun. As he lay staring at the stars he pulled a small golden locket from his pocket. The light from the lantern danced on the golden case.

He clicked it open and inside was a small drawing of his wife Alison.

She was beautiful, truly beautiful, but she was intelligent as well, not a woman to be carried through life by the men around her. She was strong and independent, which is why Creed had adored her for many years till he finally asked for her hand in marriage. On the day of his marriage he felt like his life was complete: he had found his other half.

Creed smiled, clasped the picture to his chest, and drifted off to sleep.

Creed opened his eyes and he was standing in a field. It was the field in front of his manor house in Cornwall. He smiled; he was home. He began to walk up the field to his house. He moved his hands through the long blades of grass, the blades soft against his skin.

The sun lazied in the sky, shining over the house, the rays illuminating the white marble from which it was built. Creed saw Alison move in the upstairs rooms, and he smiled again.

Creed was soon to the end of the field, close to the open front

door. Suddenly dark clouds rolled in, covering the shining sun. The sky turned blood red and lightning flashed on the horizon.

The blades of grass lashed around Creeds arms, and his feet began to sink in to the soil, till he was buried up to his knees. Creed roared and strained against his bonds, pulling with all of his might. The blades of grass tightened with each pull, cutting in to him like razors, his warm blood cascaded down his arm.

The stench of rotting fish hung in the air; the stench was so rank Creed doubled over and vomited. His head was pounding; he felt like passing out. From around Creed, spectres rose from the soil, dripping water.

They all wore different assortments of clothes: some wore short shirts, some had heavy bandoliers strapped across their chests and razor sharp sabres at their waists, but they all carried flaming torches in their hands, the flames swirling around the cloth tip. The flames shone on empty faces, swirling pits of black from which tendrils of shadow rolled. All around the house, these spectres rose, encircling the house.

Creed knew what was happening and screamed "Alison! Alison, RUN!"

But she did not hear him, and soon the spectres were at the

house. "Don't you dare!" roared Creed. He kept pulling at his bonds, but it was no use: they just kept tightening. The first torch crashed through a window, setting the curtains alight, many more followed and soon a roaring flame enveloped the house, the tongues of fire reaching in through the windows and setting everything on fire. Creed heard Alison scream in pain. The flames felt the same as they had two years ago, the hot tendrils reached out, tenderly bidding him inside.

"NO!, NO!" called Creed "Please! Please stop."

The spectres did not listen, they just trudged away, silently, from the crumbling remains of the house, paying him no mind.

Creed slumped back, tears rolling down his face. The spectres sank back in to the soil, till one remained standing in front of Creed. It wore a long black coat, slashed with red, that billowed around its legs.

Its hands were rotting and grey, and long yellow nails protruded from each finger. Its face was black and its eyes were pools of blood swirling around the abysmal darkness of its pupils. Creed had to look away from its eyes as they made him sick.

It opened its mouth to speak showing its decaying teeth.

"Don't strain against em' boy, you'll only tire yourself out. Now get some rest – you'll

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Hanging from the bough of The Orient was an elegant carving of the winged goddess of victory, Nike

had dark ebony skin and piercing emerald eyes. His arms rippled with muscles.

As if he knew what Creed was thinking he said "Wearing your fashion in heat like this is pointless Capi-tan,"

"Yes, quite. And your name?" asked Creed.

"Adawale," he replied coolly. "Pleasure, I am . . ."

"Edward Creed. Even we know of your bravery during the battle of Trafalgar. You single handedly captured a French man of war? No?" interrupted Adawale.

"Yes. What do you need of me?" said Creed as he leant over a basin and splashed cool water on his face, wiping away the beads of sweat.

"I know why your magnificent ship of war and death is here. You seek the *Rookara* no? "*Rookara*?"

"In our tongue it means 'The Cursed Ones', the ones who haunt your ships, and the sailors dare not speak of them for fear of calling their wrath upon them," Adawale pointed at Creed's bandaged wrists and said: "You know of whom I speak, no?"

Creed said nothing, just wiped his face dry and turned to face Adawale.

"They were men like you once, but they were cruel men, raiders who landed here and massacred our people for their treasures. They buried their bodies beneath the sacred Ashaka tree. They built their boat from its bark.

"It is said the blood of the dead grew within that tree; the dead souls cursed the raider to sail our seas for a thousand years protecting our people from anyone who might do us harm."

Adawale walked over to the large window in Creed's quarters before continuing.

"Your skill is legendary but you will be dead within the week Capi-tan; you and your crew will be slaughtered,"

Creed slumped into his chair and stared up at Adawale. "We will blow your . . ." Creed paused sitting up in the chair and rubbing his wrists, "*Rookara* out of the water and into oblivion. I will make sure they are erased from this plain of existence!"

"As you say *vashano*." Adawale nodded and headed for the door.

"What does that even mean?" called Creed.

Adawale turned in the door to face Creed.

"Dead man," replied Adawale calmly as he closed the door.

The next morning was bright and the sky was clear with a strong breeze. *The Orient* set sail, her red sails flowing open to their full size, propelling her out of the harbour.

When they were only a few hundred metres from Tortola the wind died, the sail emptied and the heavy canvas flapped uselessly.

"We must have entered the doldrums sir," called Dwyer.

"No, this is different," said Creed.

The rank smell of rotten fish began to encroach on *The Orient*. Creed heard Alison's screams again. With a sudden realisation of what was happen-

ing Creed kicked in to action.

"Men, to arms!" he roared, clanging the heavy bell by the wheel.

Men poured on to the deck, lifting open the chests on deck and pulling out muskets, hatchets and steel swords.

Creed ran below decks and ordered the cannons to be primed and readied. He watched as hundreds of men across the three decks hammered gun powder down the gullets of the cannons, and the grating as men strained on the pulleys to roll the heavy cannons forward through the gun ports.

"Bring all the remaining gun powder up to the deck, and load it in to the cargo lift and raise it, now!"

He ran back up deck to see a hundred men armed and ready. Dwyer handed him his pistol belt and sword, which he fastened around his waist. He had seized the light Italian Schiavona from a French captain. Its edge was razor sharp and its hilt was inlaid with blood red rubies; a roaring lion with golden teeth adorned the pommel. The pistol was white gold with rivets of gold along the double barrels.

Creed stood by the wheel with Dwyer, looking at his men on the deck. HIS men, his brothers, his family.

Some of the younger cabin boys fidgeted anxiously; Cox strained to look through his dirty glasses to see Creed. Most of the crew held their weapons in sturdy hands; a few exchanged worried looks.

"Men, we are about to fight an enemy like we have not seen before; they are beasts that have crawled back from the black pits of hell. We will throw them back down to the darkness from which they came crawling. Kenway paused to draw his blade and thrust it into the air. The deck roared in approval.

"We will fight on this day: we will fight the darkness so that others do not have to. We are the shield that protects the weak!"

Another roar of approval washed over the deck.

"You should write that down before someone else uses it sir," chuckled Dwyer

Creed couldn't help it, he grinned. Even at a time like this, faced with possible death, Dwyer could make a joke.

Thomas, the quarter master ran up to Creed.

"The gunpowder is on deck, sir!" he said, breathing heavily.

"Excellent, Thomas. Be ready to fire the cannons on my command."

"Yessir," he replied.

The rank smell grew more potent; some men retched over the side.

"Ship spotted to Starboard!" called Tim from the crow's nest.

Dwyer handed Creed his spyglass. When he raised it to his eye he saw a jet black ship. Its sails were a smoky grey spattered with red. Its sails were full and it was rushing forward at great speed even when there was no wind. On the front of the ship he saw it's figurehead: a screaming skeleton brandishing a black sword. Suddenly cannons came rushing out of its sides and it fired, raking the side of *The Orient*.

**Rian Boyle**

Age 17

St Conleth's College,
Ballsbridge

I have spent far too long sitting on the old, cracked red leather couches in therapists' waiting rooms. After a time, one begins to notice they share a similar musk, as if they had all been bought from the same grimy antique shop.

The plastic benches that litter the hallways of hospitals have also garnered that same contempt. Far too often I have sat and waited to hear the same results, that their tests have shown nothing or that I'm a particularly difficult case. Difficult case, nutcase, madman, lunatic. They're all the same thing really, at least in the professionals' eyes. Perhaps that's a tad cynical of me to say, but it's what I believe. I've told my story to all the PhDs and college graduates in the world and so far not one of them have either believed me or had any decent advice to offer me. I'm completely and utterly alone in this endeavour, with not so much as my relocation to help me.

My name is Derek Randolph. I was born 38 years ago in the fine borough of Queens, New York City. I live alone, I've always lived alone, ever since I moved out of my parents' house. Sure it was lonely, but I had friends and beer and the ball game every weekend. I was fine. I stress the past tense there. "Fine" ceased to be a part of my life on Saturday, the 18th of April.

It took me a while to get out of bed, Saturday being a day off for me. Drowsily, I shambled into the shower and washed myself, unaware of what was staring me right in the face. Or rather, the lack of what was staring back at me. I got out and dried off and went over to my cracked sink to shave. I splashed the steaming water on to my face and wiped away some of the condensation on the mirror so that I could see myself. I could see nothing in that small hole of clarity but the back of the room. I stuck my face in front of it, waved my hands in front of it,

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Far too often
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Empty Mirrors

wiped down the rest of the mirror, but to no avail. My reflection had completely disappeared.

I began to panic. Surely this was a mistake. I rubbed my eyes several times, each time harder than the last, until my eyes were red and bloodshot, but still my reflection would not appear. I ran to the shower and looked in the glass of the shower door, but all that could be seen was the towel rack opposite. I grabbed the hand mirror; nothing. I lifted myself up and over the sink to see if I could catch a glimpse of myself in the stainless steel of the tap, but the familiar warped visage failed to appear. I pinched myself on the side to see if I was dreaming, but the pain answered no. Taking measures further, I slammed my head against the tiled wall to see if that would wake me up. Ironically, it had the opposite affect.

I roused from unconsciousness at half past 12. I staggered to my feet, checked myself in the mirror one last time, just in case. But no. With my head pounding and still feeling vaguely dizzy, I wandered to the phone beside my bed and called Garth, one of my best drinking

buddies. I told him to get over here, and to bring a mirror. Understandably, Garth was immensely confused, but I hung up before he could ask any questions. My head slumped back on to the pillow and I fell asleep again until Garth arrived.

My conversation with Garth was brief. He shook me awake and demanded to ask what was going on. I didn't answer, I just grabbed the mirror from his hand and held it up to my face.

"Garth . . . can you see in the mirror?" I asked. Apparently my voice sounded weak.

"Of course I can see you, Randy, what kind of question is that? Oh Jesus Christ, you've got vomit all over . . ."

I stopped listening at that point. Garth could see me; why couldn't I see me? I stared into the blank mirror for what felt like hours. Garth called an ambulance, I was admitted to hospital, and doctors came in to see me. They said things to me, but their voices blended into the background, the sounds amalgamated into one long droning hum. My thoughts were lost in the mirror. I stroked the glass time and time again, as if I thought my touch would somehow bring my reflection back.

The only words that fought their way into my ears during this time were: "Why is he staring at his reflection?"

"What reflection?" I would ask myself. "What reflection do you see?"

When I finally answered the doctors, when I finally came back to my senses, I was told I had been unresponsive for three hours. "Three hours," I said in a flat monotone. "Yes, Mr Randolph, three hours," came the reply. The sudden realisation of what was going on hit me in waves. What had felt like days, weeks even, had only been a matter of hours. The shock, it must have been the shock. Yes, that's what screwed with my sense of everything. I must've been sick, headache or something . . .

As the doctor turned to leave, I grabbed him by the end of his scrubs and pulled him back. I pulled him close against the mirror and asked him: "Do you see my reflection, doctor?"

"Of course, Mr Randolph. Why do you ask?"

Tears sprung into my eyes once he said that. "I don't see it, doctor. I don't see me."

I have told that story more times than I can count. Similar-

ly, I have lost count of my medical bill. I have lost count of all the therapists I have seen and all the doctors who have tested me. I have lost count of the days, the weeks, the years, since I lost sight of my reflection. I am yet to grow accustomed to it, the inability to see myself. It can be quite a comfort to know that when you are all alone in the dead of night, you are still there to comfort yourself. But, as crazy as it sounds, I doubt if I am truly there at all. I have also lost count of all the philosophers I have read, I have lost count of all the times I have repeated "*cogito ergo sum*" to myself while staring into empty glass. I have lost count of all the times I don't believe it.

So now I sit on those old cracked leather couches and on those plastic benches, hoping against hope that some PhD will deliver me from this unknowing. According to the tests my brain is fine, there are no abnormalities at play. My eyesight is a perfect 20-20. It has come to the point now where I wish that I was sick or insane or dying, just to shed some light on everything. But, for now, I continue to sit and wait. After all, these couches are quite comfy.

