



THE CROMER PEN 2024

FOREWORD

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Cromer College community,

A warm welcome to The Cromer Pen 2024. You are invited to engage in a vibrant collection of stories, poems, and reflections crafted by the talented members of writing club members. At Cromer Campus from dystopian worlds to Whitlam What Matters submissions. We hope you will find a rich tapestry of voices, each one echoing the passions, experiences, and creative ambitions of our writers.

The journey to this publication has been one of discovery, growth, and collaboration for our students. Our writing club serves as a sanctuary where writers of all levels come together to share ideas, provide encouragement, and challenge one another to complete these compositions. It is a space where the spark of an idea transforms into a polished piece, through determination, revision, and a community of supportive peers.

We hope that you can laugh, dream, and reflect as you engage with these pieces. Allow the words to transport you, to spark your imagination, and to remind you of the beauty and complexity inherent in the art of storytelling.

These tales are a snapshot of who we are becoming as writers, a stepping-stone in our collective and individual creative journeys. Thank you for joining us on this path.

Happy reading and best wishes to you and your families!

The Writing Club at Northern Beaches Secondary College Cromer Campus.

*Ms Nicola Brough
English Teacher*



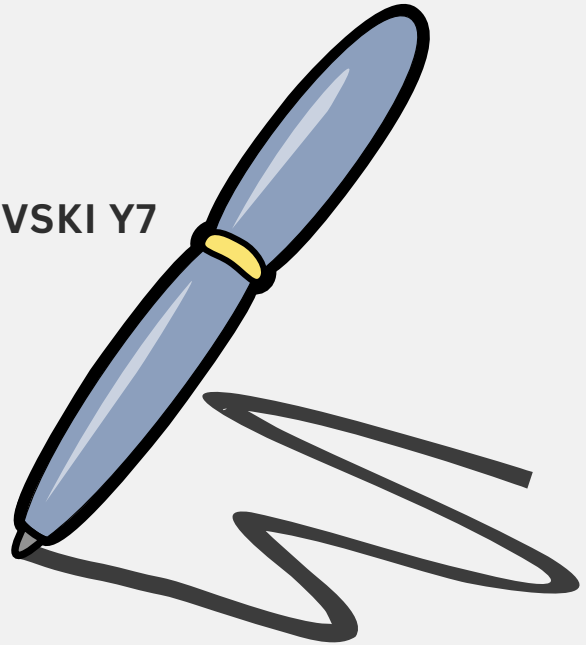
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ARTWORK

KINDLY PROVIDED BY THE ART CLUB



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PART 1



Notable
Writing

AN ESSAY ON THE USAGE OF AI IN AN ENGLISH EXAM

Max Giles

I am mildly annoyed about how AI was used in my English exam.

Some quick background information;

- This was originally just an email expressing how annoyed I was but then turned into an essay.
- The reason I wrote this, however, was because in my English Year 10 Half Yearly we had to analyse an image generated by an AI and explain how it represented 'Living the Dream'.

But before I go into that I would like to say that I don't really have any qualms or objections towards the use of AI to write boring multiple-choice questions or even any exam questions for that matter (even though its lowkey cheating).

But what I instead have a problem with, is having to analyse a text written or in this case an image created by an AI which is supposed to represent 'Living the Dream', and this is for a lot of reasons. For example, what does a piece of programming that is just numbers and logic strung together know about 'living the dream', how can Dall-E have a deep or even any understanding of how or what 'living the dream' even is and how can it then create something to represent it.

What it created is an empty image that only we can provide meaning to.

However, you could also argue the same for a piece of art that a human created, and to that I say you are wrong as there is always some thought or motivation behind what humans do that in itself is also driven by some experience or moment in their life or maybe even a subconscious thought. Furthermore, I think that even a work meant to have no meaning represents just that itself, like what drove the artist to want a work to have no meaning? Therefore I would say that all art has at least some meaning or something it is supposed to represent or some other kind of purpose. But AI does not have that and instead just learns to associate certain words with certain looks through the dataset it was trained with. It literally just creates an image through trial, error and correct association. This links back to the concept that for AI images the only meaning they have is what we give them and without it, they are empty, shallow reflections with no depth or motivation.

Another reason why I think having to analyse a text created by an AI is just quite frankly 'wrong' is because the creator of the paper could have just

instead found an actual piece of art done by an actual human that represents the same concept. We have visual arts teachers. Why not just enlist one of them to try and find one? Or just find one yourself? The only reason I can think of to not use an image created by a real person is that maybe some students may have seen it before with a quick scroll through Google images, but I counter that with the reasoning of how that is the same for anything 'unseen' really, and its unlikely to happen as long as the first image that comes up with a google search isn't used.

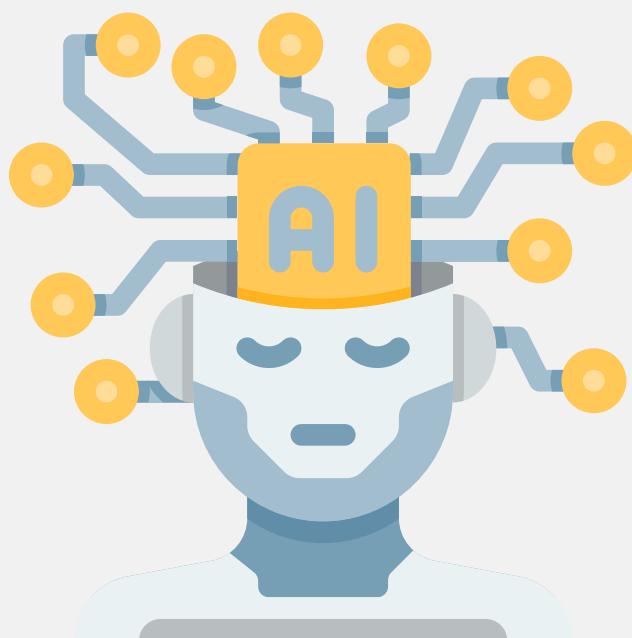
Additionally, another reason why the use of AI in this specific situation is a crime against the entire subject of English is that AI has no human experiences. AI is not human and does not build up experiences along with perspectives and a worldview unique to them, and instead just learns through association, going through datasets, getting not a unique view tailored to their personal identity, but instead 'learns' from pattern-based algorithms and models gaining a purely statistical, emotionless and unbiased view. This may be good for subjects like science or maths but that is just not the case with English where your personal voice and interpretation matter a lot more, as someone with a unique worldview based on their experiences as a human being will see something completely different to someone else. So I ask this, how can an AI represent 'living the dream' if it fundamentally doesn't understand human experiences or learn that way?

And the answer is it can't. To echo previously made statements, the AI merely just associates something with another something over and over again in an algorithm until it comes up with something that is tagged or associated with the keywords 'living the dream' or whatever else was used as a prompt. But, even then it could be kind of said that through its statistical outlook, it provides a unique view into living the dream, however, I disagree and think that this is just wrong as I could understand looking at something through a statistical, unbiased view but then to show the meaning of that view and the implications does require emotions along with human experiences and expressions. Machines at this point are not sentient or self-aware enough to employ the nuance and unique outlook that each individual human uses differently to bring a piece of art to life. Art is all about how someone's perceptions of life, something AI cannot do.

I think it is clear that the question asked in the exam is impossible to answer correctly as AI cannot represent 'living the dream' as art is the product of our humanity, experiences, expressions, emotions and individual worldviews and outlooks, all characteristics an AI just doesn't have. Furthermore, even when and if robots do ever gain sentience I do not have any problems with analysing their art or whatever, but I think it can and will only represent their views on life which I think will be different from humans.

Again making the question unanswerable as they still might not know what living the dream is as it is an inherently human concept and they are not human. I also, however, think it is relevant to bring up a point made in Do androids dream of electric sheep? Which is that they don't dream of electric sheep, which is again an inherently human dream. They instead have different dreams and experiences and are not 'human' but have their own separate identity and are just as human in some aspects but also fundamentally different in a lot of ways.

So, in conclusion, I am still annoyed at the way AI was used in the Year 10 English Half Yearly. This is because it doesn't understand the human experience and isn't human and therefore, cannot represent it. There are a lot of alternatives to using AI, some of which I go over but I assume that there are many more. And finally AI even if it ever becomes sentient would still never be able to represent a human concept as it will still not be human but something else.



An Essay on the Usage of AI in an English Exam

LISTEN MR HONG, I HAVE AN IDEA

Ella Knight

Listen Mr Hong i have an idea,
We need solar panels on the roof of
every classroom block,

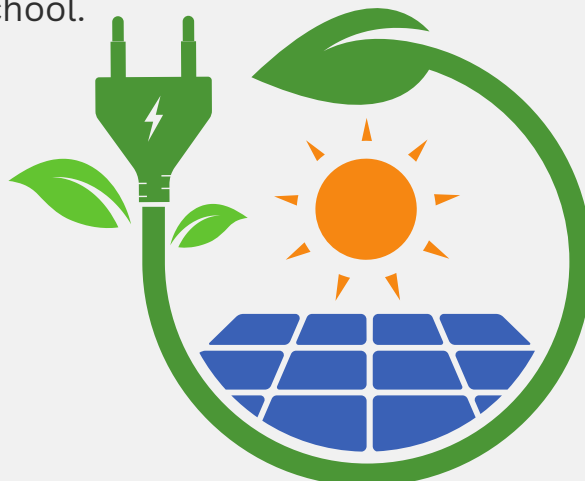
We need them because it is really hot
in the classrooms,
It affects me because i have to swipe
away my sweat,

And also it a affects my learning when
i work,

The fans in the classroom don't do
anything,

And i think it would be a great idea for
the whole school,

Since we don't have a lot of money,
I think we could do a fundraiser,
where we do a fun run to raise money
for the solar panels, for all around the
school.



IT WON'T LAST FOREVER

Aaron Wilson

The axe shakes in Bjørn's hands as he approaches the cave with Espen trailing behind him. The awful stench of rotting carcasses grows stronger and strange noises murmur from within the lonely ambience of the forest. Both are slightly shivering as visible mist leaves their mouths with every exhale of the chilled air. With each step carefully placed on the soft snow covered grass, they edge closer to the entrance where their friends lie trapped inside.

SNAP! Bjørn looks down at his feet where a broken twig lay.

He looks up and sees big blood orange eyes staring back at him. A large figure emerges from the darkness and stands up looking down upon him with shining crimson eyes. This monster, it's so familiar. Its features are all scrumpled up, and include a long nose and bald grey head with very fine white hair around the sides. Bjørn stands there, looking blankly into its face. He swears he's seen this thing before. It dawns on him- It's his father. Suddenly Bjørn is seven years old again, cowering amongst the filth and grime in the corner of the living room. His dad stands in the doorway grasping a beer bottle.

The troll lifts its hand in the air just like his dad did. Bjørn knows what comes next, he just has to take it.

He stands completely still, squinting and looking away, as the troll's fist draws near to his face. He doesn't bother fighting back, for he has done this many times before, but has never been strong enough.

All of a sudden, a powerful force smashes into his body. As he falls to the side, Bjørn opens his eyes to see Espen just knocked into him. The troll's fist slams into the ground, sending shockwaves through the air, shaking the trees, but missing them both. "I've got you," Espen reassures him.

Bjørn feels a kind warmth from within, a warmth that has always told him that he is never alone. It's almost like a loving embrace wrapping around him like the hugs his mother used to give him.

Then, the beast comes running at Bjørn, knocking him back into reality. It goes for another hit, raising its hand in the air and extending it towards him. Bjørn ducks and the troll hits a tree behind him. Lying on the dirty and wet ground, he feels the tree snap, and fall on the ground, echoing the sound of plaster cracking under his father's fist.

"I have an idea, go distract it!", Bjørn yells. Espen holds a thumbs up and starts waving and yelling. Bjørn gets to work making an angle in a tree, as the troll scurries after Espen.

“Run back this way!” hollers Bjørn, crouching behind the tree stump. Espen pivots around a large bush and hurries back as earthquakes reverberate behind him. He waits until the troll is close enough and then, WHACK! Bjørn cuts the tree and it begins to fall. As the twisting trunks topple over, Espen slides underneath as the troll follows. Right as the tree contacts the ground, the troll becomes caught. Bjørn jumps onto the log and runs to the head. He jumps off and slices at the neck. The troll becomes limp and ceases resistance.

The sound of sirens bounces off the trees in the distance as red and blue lights flash between their trunks, just as the lights had bounced off his dad’s face that one fateful night, the last time Bjørn ever had to see him. A sense of relief washes over him, as he knows what the lights mean. He will be saved from the monster again, only this time, he was strong enough to beat it.

Sunlight engulfs the troll and it fades into dust.

Bjørn and Espen hurry into the cave where their two kidnapped friends lie unconscious. Scratches and bruises cover their entire bodies, wrapped in tattered clothes. They hoist them up onto their backs and carry them toward the sirens. With the sun slowly rising in the distance, the cold air subsides.

The golden rays reflect off the low lying mist and dew drops.

After a few minutes of dragging their feet through the snow, they make it to the old bridge where the police and ambulance have parked. Bjørn and Espen hand them their injured friends.

As cold gives way to the warmer sun, snow melts revealing the lush flowers underneath. Bjørn is once again chopping wood. He looks into the sky. Not a cloud in sight, just clear baby blue.

He goes back to splitting logs in half with a smile on his face and a mind like a serene, azure sky.



IT WON'T LAST FOREVER

TOBY AND ME

Tiara Vichemont



“I do”
and this is how our story began...

I can't even hear the priest talking. My heart is louder than the syllables that leave his tongue. The fluttering is so loud I fear my heart will explode. But then his lips cover mine and the fears fall away. A fading memory. We are married, he is mine and I am his.

The comfort of his arms surrounding me keeps the voices at bay. I could feel the vibrations of his voice bringing me back to his presence. The warmth of his body pressed against mine and the soft and steady beating of his heart resurrected what I thought was gone forever.

“I want to have a baby.” I say in a nervous tone.

I see the smile on Toby's face falter before replaced with an overjoyed whoop. He smiled then his whole face lit up.

I was going about my day like usual-until... a wave of nausea swept through my body. Then I can feel the regurgitation forcing through my throat. I tasted the bile on my tongue as it spilled onto the floor. My body knew before my mind. Toby and I have been trying to conceive for the past six months. The constant crushing of hope, taking pieces of my heart every time the one line shows up, my mindset now is expect disappointment and you won't get disappointed.

I nonchalantly went to grab a pregnancy test from under the bathroom sink. I had a feeling that this was it. My heart thumped out my chest in anxiety as I awaited the results.

Shock. My eyes widen with fear and happiness. Two bright pink lines. I try to keep myself together not knowing how to feel. My heart pounded not knowing how Toby was going to react. I thought to myself how am I going to tell him? I can't believe I'm actually pregnant! Excitement took control of me. I sprint over to tell Toby the news. His disbelief quickly turns into happiness. So many emotions rushed through my head. His eyes filled with tears upon realising we were going to become parents.

2 months later....

A pool of crimson stains my shorts. Tremors cover my body. My vision goes blurry as tears spill from my eyes. My body shakes, a memory that left me scarred. My stomach starts to cramp up.

“Toby!” I scream in panic.

I was speechless. I felt my words got taken away from me. He rushed me to the hospital. In the car I felt alone. Like a piece of me left my soul.

The constant beeping of the machines, nurses talking and people crying and screaming awoke me. I was confused . I thought to myself- where am I? Why am I here? I couldn't open my eyes.

The vibrations of hurried footsteps run over to me. Hearing my parents and Toby's voice made me feel comforted.

"Hey you ok?" Toby says quietly

He placed his warm hands on my cheek and gave me a kiss. I slowly opened my eyes and Toby's not there. My stomach drops. I felt like I was in a dream. Everything went silent, my body felt like it was floating. I thought this was it for me.

My eyes slowly started to open. I immediately noticed the strong smell of stainless steel and the bright white walls. I had no memory of how I got there, and panic broke out. My last memory was travelling to the hospital drifting off to sleep lulled by the sound of Toby's voice. Now I just find myself in a strange, cold room feeling watched every step I take. I sit up, trying to figure out how I got here and calm myself. A nurse walks into the room explaining to me that I was in a psychiatric unit that my parents had taken me to. I tried to keep my cool as my memories started coming back slowly. Trying to piece together what even happened. I start to get teary eyed. Where's Toby? I think to myself. I ask the nurse where Toby is, she gives me a lifeless look. Toby who? She responds as she hands me a container of pills.

The most significant person in my life was Toby. I used to tell everyone how caring and supportive he was, and I would often talk about him. I would talk about how he always supported me in my hour of need and assisted me in making critical decisions.

His presence was like a cosy hug that made me feel safe and loved. I was certain that he was there to encourage, uplift, and guide me through any obstacles I had encountered. He was always there to listen, and to tell me that everything would be alright whenever I felt irritated and stressed.

I sit down on the corner of my bed fidgeting with my fingers waiting for the nurse to come give me my daily pills. The nurse walks through the door empty handed, inhaling deeply and sits down next to me, empathy shining in her eyes. I don't know why she's come empty handed.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but based on the tests we ran, and looking at your actions, it appears that you have schizophrenia."

A sense of disbelief sweeps over me. Schizophrenia? I had heard of the disorder, I never thought it might be anything I was experiencing. The nurse continues to describe the symptoms and available treatments, my head is racing. I experience a range of feelings. A sense of feeling lost. The nurse tries her best to comfort me reassuring me that I'm not alone and that I can get the support and resources I need to get through this.

All that time, he wasn't here? But it was so real. Our wedding, all that time. I imagined it all. No. No this is a dream, I'm going to wake up and Toby will be here. This is all a big mistake. I pinch my arm but nothing changes. But if he was real why is he not here, in my room? Toby isn't real?

TOBY AND ME

DESTINED DEATH

Dylan Taylor

It comes without being told. It takes the only thing you have. Like how a raven always watches so does it. It knows your every move and all it has to do is wait. Wait for you to come to your end. Your Destined Death.

Death is like space you can't see or feel it but it's always there. Its life stealing touch takes and never gives. When it's after you, you will know. Its long fingers grip you and will never let go, not until it takes you away to the place you have always wanted to know. It might be dark or it could be light but no one knows and no one will know until death takes their birth given right.

Destined Death is different; it's yours and only yours. You were destined to death the day you were born but not everyone has the same death. Like a lucky wheel you were given the way you will die before you were born. Some will die in a car whilst others will die of old age. But in the end everyone will die. You can't prevent it, no one can. Only death knows when, you die, how you die and why you die. Destined Death is almost like your shadow; you'll never be able to get rid of it. Even if you can't see it, it is always there. But without death there is no life. Death comes with time. But with it so does life.

Destined Death takes your life after you have done what you were always meant to do. It's not random even though it might seem like it. You may have already done what you were always supposed to do and death might be following close behind. Some people may cry and try to stop death with everything they can but no matter what happens you will always die the way you were supposed to do.

Death... how it took from me. Everything I ever had. Stolen, erased. Gone like the dinosaurs. All that remains is my memory of them. As time goes by you forget their voice their face but never what they enjoyed, their hobbies and whenever you do what they enjoyed you picture them next to you hoping that they are actually there. But the more time that passes the less you can picture the less you can hear until all that is left is a blurry face and screaming the same screaming from when they died. When they were destined to death, death stole from them. You are always scared of death until it takes everything from you. All you have left to do is wait, wait for what death is supposed to do. take from you. It hides in the shadows haunting me, reminding me of everything it took from me. It doesn't speak but yet it is so loud.

Everything echoes in my head. Just waiting for my end. My Destined Death.

Most nights I wake up. Unable to move. Standing above me, is the most unimaginable figure. Almost like my shadow it has no real features. No mouth yet screams at me. No eyes yet it steals my soul with its stare. It might be the depiction of death. Coming to hunt me. Making me the most miserable as possible before it finally releases me from this living hell. Life is a gift, but living isn't. I wonder why death didn't take me when it took from everyone I love. It left me with a shard of me. The explosion killed everything but me. Shredding my face. puncturing my lungs but yet I still live. Leaving me with half of the person I am. Unrecognizable. My happiness stripped away. All I have left to do is think. Think about life, but nothing good. Just a replay of the day. The day my ears won't stop ringing, the day all I could smell was my face burning. The day all I had left to do was think. Think so much that all I have left to think about is thoughts.

Sometimes I think it's my fault if I never stole money. Money that was never mine. I thought if I took it they would never know. Never be able to find me. I could leave the country will billions. My grandkids would never have to work no one in my family will never have to work for generations. I was blinded by money. We would have been fine if I never started flashing my money around buying every expensive thing possible. Cars, houses and boats everything and finally they found us.

Who are they? I don't even know myself. All I know is that they are the most feared drug gang/ cartel in the world. I used to be a part of them. But I wanted out. I needed to leave, and I couldn't do that without money. I didn't need to steal as much as I did but yet I still did. The money it called out to me. It was supposed to be the best thing that would ever happen to me, but it ended up being the worst. Maybe it's just karma and death just weren't enough instead my family was at stake. My everything. So much for my family never having to work again well I guess they never will. There gone because of me, my mistake. And when we were all asleep an ear bleeding bang echoed through my mansion killing everything but me. Lucky I would call it the opposite what would have been lucky is if I died with them. I wouldn't have to live with the fact that I am the reason my family is dead and now I am stuck with this ever-living dread.

Everyone is scared to die until you realize that your destined death is worse for other people than it is for you. Every single person you love will have to deal with having to see you die. And if they never did then you had to mourn, wonder remember everything they did before their Destined Death. But knowing that everyone knows you, loves you and remembers you, has died before they could watch your last days, leaves you with nothing.

Knowing that nobody cares for you, nobody can talk about you teaches you something. Something you should have never been taught. That having to wait for your Destined Death will always be worse than it coming without cause. Waiting for death's tight grip to take you into the unknown, as how could it be worse than where you are now.

I hope I will finally be able to see death, face to face. As he gives me death's touch, as my destined death finally removed me from this hell, we call life. As the clouds go and the rain stops I will finally know that I have been freed. My Destined Death. My freedom.



**DESTINED
DEATH**

THE PRESENCE

Harrison Bucknall

Sometimes people feel a presence, but don't know where to look. Sometimes they do know where to look, but don't know what to expect. The presence may be welcoming. It may be anxious. Or it may even be threatening. But the thing is, you never quite know how it truly feels.

When most people feel some sort of a presence, they might think somebody is looking down on them, like a family member or friend. Some are curious and wonder if a fresh start is arising. But some people know that they are moments away from death.

When people know that they are about to die, they panic, and wonder what they can do. And if they don't act quick enough. They die. The presence of death hits them, punches them in the face. It hits them like a truck. And they never know what was, or could have happened next.

The presence was hungry. It has been hungry for a long, long time now. And it needs to eat, needs a new victim, someone who won't expect it, someone who won't know what hit them. But eventually and after a countless amount of time, and such a long period of insufferable hunger, the presence found someone unsuspecting, someone easy, and someone who would never know what just happened.

The Presence would eventually find someone, but if it didn't, nobody knows what would happen, as it's never gone this long without a victim, and it hasn't felt like this in forever. The Presence needed to haunt someone's life briefly, around once every 6 months, and it had been 5 months and 16 days, it needed to act soon, but then it found someone.

His name was Adam. Adam was a good man, he paid his taxes, had a lovely wife and beautiful children, drove a nice car, had a nice job and got paid just over six figures a year. Adam's life was great; he had everything he wanted. Until recently.

Recently Adam's life went downhill and quickly his perfect life turned upside down within days. His wife divorced him. His kids became distant from him. He got fired from his job. And he has debt and a lot of debt. Adam had nothing.

The Presence saw Adam, vulnerable, weak, upset, and confused and what he did to deserve all this. The Presence knew he was perfect, he wouldn't expect a thing. One night, Adam decided to go for a little drive. The Presence haunted, and lurked within Adam in his car along the highway and up near a bridge. Adam saw the bridge and saw the ground, 100 metres below him so he climbed.

As Adam decided to ascend this tall bridge with no intention of ever getting back in that car he loved but couldn't afford, he sat at the top awaiting the time. He waited and waited, and suddenly something changed. He felt something. Like a little voice telling him differently, telling him to drive back home. Almost like a presence telling him to climb down and carry on with his life. But little did poor Adam know, this decision might have been the wrong one.

So Adam, after being persuaded to not end his misery and gruelling suffering, gave his life one more shot, one more chance, and all because of this presence which he could not even see. So he got in his car and drove home, and after not thinking he would ever even see his car or anything ever again, he felt good, relieved in a way, but little did Adam know that his life was about to change, and about to go from bad to worse, and all because of this presence. Just because it was hungry.

So Adam got home, and he felt good, the best he had felt in a while, and was now even more determined than ever to get his life back on track. He went to sleep with good intentions for tomorrow. He wanted to find a new job, and restart his life, start a new chapter, but the presence was not going to let that happen, it's hungry, it needs to eat.

As Adam woke up, he was still going to change his life, turn it around. He woke up early, went for a nice run along the

beach and saw the beautiful sunset he hadn't seen in a long time and it brought a sense of freshness to him. He got in his car and made his way to a job interview, he was well dressed in a neat, slick black tuxedo, and his hair was freshly cut. He was ready to make this interview flawless as ever. Driving along the highway in his car, Adam was reminded of the incredibly low times in his life, and how he almost let himself end his own life. But he was still determined and locked in to start anew for himself, we wouldn't let a few dark patches affect him again.

Adam arrived at his job interview, looking good, feeling good, knowing the job was his. He walked into the building, found an empty seat in the lobby and patiently waited for his name to be called out for the interview. Adam was called in. And as soon as he took his seat in the interview room, he felt weird, nothing could describe it just different. His interviewer asked his first question, and Adam, still feeling weird, decided to not answer, just pour some water over him and his interviewer's head and was immediately kicked out of the interview, ruining his chance.

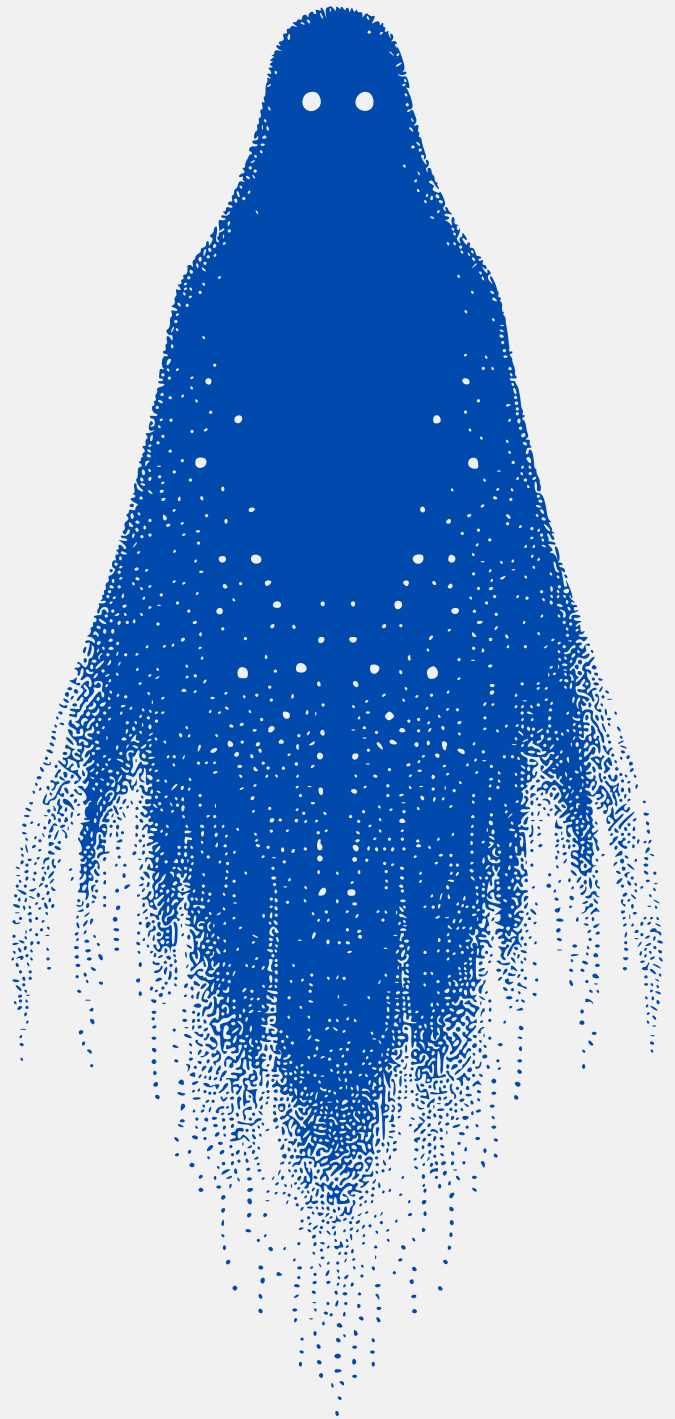
On his drive home, he wondered what just happened, he didn't even know what he just did, he wasn't controlling himself, he almost felt as if he was haunted by something, but he didn't know.

Adam felt horrible on the way home, and suddenly felt all weird again, he

felt as if he was being threatened by something, but he couldn't tell what it was.

As he got home, feeling as unmotivated and depressed as ever, he had a deep thought if his life would ever become what it used to be again. If his life would ever become as happy as the day his kids were born, or the day he was married, he wondered if that sensation would make a return. It's all he wanted.

So he tried to get some sleep, not being able to escape what he did today at the interview, what was he thinking, why did he feel like that. So he shut his eyes and slept, he slept like a baby and forgot everything else. But the presence never sleeps, and knew if he wanted to eat, it was now, so Adam died. The presence took him. The presence killed Adam in his sleep. Adam would never wake up again.



THE PRESENCE

A SPECTATED DRIVE

Cayden Chamberlain Herd

Deep, dark, where foot does not tread, an unnerving draft of a sea breeze, except there is no sea. In a forest where everything seems to be normal, but an unsettling feel rises amongst those that trespass. The foliage, trees, grass and bushes, all frozen, inanimate, stagnant. A deafening silence, it makes everything feel fake, artificial almost. It's dread fatigues them, but their curiosity drags their soul in, bewildering them.

I'm driving through a densely populated area, through a busy main road, bumper to bumper. Travelling home isn't always this much of a nightmare. I find myself coming on to an exit to find a quicker, less hectic way home. Work was genuinely horrible after today's shift, I really do not know if i want this job anymore.

The petrol light turns on, not a big surprise since i haven't been to the petrol station in a bit. I keep driving, figuring out where this exit leads, hopefully to a backroad. The weather is getting less and less desirable for driving, the rain gets heavier, it's slowly turning into a sleet. The engine starts to cough, like it's running on pure life support, which is strange because the petrol light didn't come on not long ago, but luckily a petrol station is in the distance.

Pulling into the service station, I filled my car up, and waited, and waited, waiting, like the engine was grasping for it. I turn up to the convenience part, walking up to the register, except no one is here... I rang the bell, nothing happened. I rang it again, a rustling came from the back. The employee comes out from the backroom, he really should be doing his job. I paid for the fuel and made my way back to my car.

As soon as I left the building, a door slammed inside, a startling slam, shivering right down to my tailbone with a cold breeze coming by. Turning back the place was empty, I crept towards my car, I felt like something terrible, god awful would happen. I tried to start the car, i just kept turning, turning, ticking, it eventually started.

I headed the same way back onto the backroad where I assumed it would lead me back to home. I passed a few houses, a jarring detail is that they were all boarded up. The area gets more suburban, more boarded up houses, corner shops, even an entire school was all locked up, I had just gone through a fairly large ghost town. It was completely empty. As I drove past the school, there was a notice board, all faded and rusty.

Its text was unreadable, it was like a foreign language, something inhuman. The date read "8/12/1996", as if this marked it's last day of operation. The once sprawling suburbia that is now laid to rest starts lessening, less housing and such. More trees, a forest grows. The strange conversion from suburban to straight foliage. I thought nothing of it, maybe it was just how the town was planned. My car stalled, it had me by the neck, I had a rush of fear throughout my body. I had to pull over, there would be nothing I could do.

I get out of my car and pop the hood open. I don't even know where to look, I'm not an expert and I certainly could make my situation worse. But thinking about what's happened, something feels very off, disturbing, I feel like I'm being set-up, like I'm being watched, like I'm being spectated.

I had the curious feeling to look behind, and so I did. A void, a Black mass. I walk deeper, into the void. It reels me in like I'm its prey. The fear in me encapsulates an odd and truly unexplainable feeling.

The silence was broken, I heard a distant, very faint wail. I'm so very sure I heard it, but I can't trust myself. While I'm contemplating whether to go deeper but I'm already strolling through it, I can't even control myself.

I found myself in a forest, cold, and mentally fried, this constant fear of being watched. I saw a shelter, I went over to inspect. Nothing was there, I sat down and tried to think, what is going on? How in the hell did I end up here? I don't even know where I came from, and then I saw him...



A SPECTATED DRIVE

LOST AND FOUND

John Enriquez

She finds herself stranded in the middle of nowhere, unsure of what to do. She can hear the strong breeze since it's so silent. She finds a cover for herself from the rain as soon as a big thunderclap and heavy downpour begin. What brings her here? What is her goal in this situation? What does she intend to accomplish? She is the only child in her family; her parents had already separated, and she was made to live with her brutal and addicted father.

Her father was just hiding her from her mother's attempts to contact her. She attempted to defend her rights in court, but her efforts were unsuccessful. She yelled loudly, mumbling words, shivering in pain, and looking terribly sad and angry all at once. The daughter was experiencing depression as a result of inadequate supervision and communication, as well as being isolated in a remote location with her father frequently spotted drunk. She was fed up and ran to a dark area without really knowing how to get there or what was inside because she was so sick and weary of what was happening to her. After stopping, she gasped and was having trouble breathing before she unexpectedly went out. When she woke up, she felt as though someone had punched her in the face and was unsure of what to do.

She investigated the area by walking on some mud slumps. The scent of the area is unique—it smells like flowers everywhere—and she had the impression that she was approaching something lovely. However, as she approached, she began to feel anxious and hysterical—she was screaming all over the place, becoming more and more dizzy, and there was a loud bang that woke her up. She is still unsure of what is going on with her.

What is the current plan? Given that she is alone in the middle of nowhere with no resources other than herself, how is she going to survive? She kept exploring the area and searching for the location of the loud bang when all of a sudden, a man who resembled her father emerged from the bush. She fled right away, fearing that he would harm her again, not realising that it was not her father but rather a creature that lived there and imitated their loved ones to help them remember where they came from and to serve as a guide to help them feel great and learn to appreciate. She stops running and sits in the bush. She begins to cry, and it starts to rain. She was devastated by her father and believed that everything was ending for her. She was unable to cope with her emotions. She was so consumed by her grief she forgets about the outside world, including the rain.

That disruption really had a big impact on her sense of loss, making her uninterested in everything, including the weather, she felt the weather is always blurry dark as mist. Her tears and every drop of rain simply got carried away in the flood of sorrow, She felt the rain in her heart like drumming every second , still she is still here. Her world is weeping, a distance of sobbing that is close to her wall of suffering. she finds her comfort alone, Neither the sound of the rain and its chilling can't comfort her. She felt empty inside, a big gap where she could feel her fathers absence.

The creature reappeared out of nowhere, only this time it was her mother. She went straight into it, broke down in sobs, and vanished again as soon as she was close to it. She is still reflecting on her life and her goals for getting better from this. She was only peering through a lengthy passage, wondering what was inside and if it was the exit. Then, she saw the creature again close to the dugout, so she started running like a cheetah and laughing like she had just won a marathon. She smelled something burning as soon as she was close to the bright sunshine that seemed to be glaring at her. She had never felt this way in her life, yet she sensed something was off. As soon as she looked around, she understood she was in the world of reality since, while she had grown up in the woods with her father, she had seen a long highway full of vehicles emitting smoke, a shore full of ships, and tall buildings everywhere.

Knowing she had just emerged from the woods and was coated in mud and had an unpleasant odour , The girl walked to the busy city streets, she couldn't help but feel a sense of embarrassment, Persons around her stared at her with curiosity and gossiped amongst themselves. The pressure of the speculations and the unbearable words became to much to tolerate, and she began to run, But before she could get far, she saw a women looking like her mother but she was unsure and stayed their waiting for her to turn around the women turn around and went to the girl who is sitting sobbing remembering her mother, When she approached the woman who was crying, she realised that the woman was actually her own daughter. She had been moving slowly down the hallway, inhaling deeply with each step, trembling uncomfortably. However, upon realising the truth, she burst into tears helped her daughter home, bathed and fed her, giving medication, and tending her wounds with great care.



LOST AND FOUND

SHADOWS OF HOME

"A JOURNEY THROUGH MUNDANITY AND MEMORIES"

Harper Wilshire

A thud woke him up, it's been almost six hours of travelling yet all he sees are tall grass and plain land. Nothing exquisite, nothing worthy of seeing, all but ordinary. The weather has been the same, sun is out, a cloud or two. It was not a day to put on a jumper nor a day to don sunnies. He reflected his surroundings; ordinary, mediocre, and nothing special. He would often look in the mirror and take note of something that might impress him, but the list remained unwritten. As he would say, "I'm not that tall, not that short, average weight, brown hair, with a forgettable face." He might add that a wallflower is better because they choose to be within the perimeter of the walls while he didn't choose to be bland, it's just the way it was.

He was struggling to find clothes to pair to look a little different even for just today. Rummaging his monochrome closet of black, white, and grey- one might say a closet out of 50s black and white tv- he found one coloured short and wore a miserable blue shirt, pants, and a generic white tired shoes; thinking this might make him less mundane.

As he stepped out of his apartment, he sensed the wind dually blowing, baffled yet not surprised how he saw another man wearing the exact same outfit. He shrugged it off and hurriedly went to the bustling city. He quietly observed and took everything in. The city was loud and busy. The city screams loud extravagance and chic. He felt everyone's eyes with disgust locking into his little self, looking deep in his normality. A sudden thought dawned to him, how can he live within this city who's more alive than he is. While pitying and becoming more anxious, a woman with an enormous red bow so chic and bright it turned his blue shirt a shade of grey and her dog, a puffy white poodle with a diamond neck chain was walking towards him. The lady stopped and asked him if he was lost or just a tourist travelling in the city. This made him even more down that he already is. Everyone's an eye catcher, everyone's gleaming and glistening. The city that is bright and sunny made him feel cold and lonely. A bus was parked by the road waiting for people to get in. "Is this going to White Plains?" he awkwardly asked the bus driver.

“Indeed, this is going forth to the province of White Plains.” the bus driver eloquently replied.

“Even the bus drivers here are of different classes” he thought to himself.

Six hours of travelling back to his hometown felt like forever. He used to enjoy travelling to that place where everything for him was just perfect. White Plains used to be the “it” place. It used to be the place where the glitz and glamour blasts whenever the sun is stretching its golden arms. The wind blows differently, the birds sing more glorious, that city used to be the epitome of fun. For him, it is his home that does not compare to anything he went to before. Everything changed in the year 2015, when the people slowly passed by the city going directly to another place. The city used to be blinding with lights, restaurants are open, music is booming, and cups are filling. Little by little people realised how this place is not out of ordinary, they found a city near the coastline that has the same vibes, has the same feels but bigger, better, and brighter. Slowly, the bars closed, few people were coming, the magic had run dry. Jaq was born here, he really liked his name because no one was named like him in a school of 300 students. “Hi! I’m Jaq with a Q!” that was how Jaq enthusiastically introduced himself. He felt unique with his name, everyone knows him and that name bedazzled him and his confidence.

He was the life of the party, a force to be reckoned with. He knew that he was different, a mystery to those who look, a gush of fresh air to breathe.

Jaq always thought that he was the best and extraordinary and a little challenge from others are nothing but fuel that he needs for his ever-growing fire. Until all those challenges and self-expectations exhausted him. He flipped a switch to seeing the best in him to seeing a guy. He is now just Jaq not with a Q but just Jaq. Everybody moved on, everybody matured, but not everybody can cope with change. The seasons passed and changed, once a bright city was now engulfed with sad skies and withered leaves. White Plains never came back to its glorious days, the citizens just accepted that this city will just be a city with nothing to give. So was he.



**SHADOWS OF HOME
"A JOURNEY THROUGH
MUNDANITY AND
MEMORIES"**

TO BE WITH THEM



Tenzin Gawa Jhandaksha

As the sky split open and clouds wailed all their sorrows upon the earth, I stood by the cliffside, solid, unfazed. I can still hear the voices of drowning and dying people as they tried their best to survive the onslaught of waves whilst avoiding the sharp rocks waiting at the base of the cliff. The furious winds blew my drenched hair past my face I closed my eyes, and I saw them. All reaching out to me, yelling for help as 2 people sank in the background. I let the hurt and pain flow through my body as I see them disappear one more time.

That day started off like any other day, I woke up with my wife and son lying beside me. The sunlight bouncing off her skin making it seem as if she was made of gold. I stood up shirtless and rubbing my scruffy beard as I pulled on a shirt. My wife woke up mumbling with her gruff morning voice “good morning honey” as she walked to hug me from behind. I turned around with her arms around my waist and pecked her on her forehead leading her to the table where I had already prepared breakfast. Like usual she talked about how her prior day had gone. She complained about her lazy boss who did no work only pretending to do some when the supervisors came around. When they appeared, he would suddenly become very busy, issuing commands whilst treating everyone like they were all his best buddies.

The workers played along as the boss was in charge of their payments and the only person who would ever go up against him was my wife. She may be small in size but makes up for it with a strong sense of justice and an engine of a mouth which did not stop until it ran out of fuel. And that day she had a ton of fuel, that morning the boss had been even lazier than usual made her busy workers bring him coffee, take out his trash, buy him things and even helping himself to their food commenting on how good it looked. This built up frustration within my wife and it all boiled out when the supervisors came to check up on their work. Her team were working on a very important project which could potentially make her business go international. They were making a plan to trade with the global leaders of WPO (World Piece Organisation) which housed all the nations and global leaders. They’re a very powerful Organization, holding resources from all around the world in hopes they can prevent worldwide problems like world hunger, clean water, currency etc. My wife’s company were one of the leaders in the push to get a universal currency and were competing to create a a single universal currency. For all practical purposes, she was the Head of Operations as her boss did nothing, so when she saw him taking credit for everyone’s hard work she reached her boiling point.

Her engine roared as she told the supervisors what the boss had really been doing. Her boss quickly tried to shut her up, but the supervisors stopped him and listened in. Others saw her and with every word that she spoke, their courage grew and grew until they joined in as well. The supervisors listened in and with every passing second, they understood more and more of what was going on. The Supervisors became enraged at the boss as the boss had been reeking in the rewards whilst he forced others to slave away. He brought the boss into his office and with everyone watching fired him on the spot. He had apologized to everyone and told them that he was going to hold a boat party for them the next day and invited them to bring their families with them.

She had no time to tell me the day before as I was fast asleep by the time she had come home. I was excited to go, so we woke up our son and got ready for the fancy event. I put my suit on, as my wife dressed in her most extravagant eveningwear before dressing my son in his own little suit and they looked stunning. We quickly drove to the dock where I greeted all her co-workers as I had met them from time to time. We looked in awe as the yacht approached, I held my families hands firmly as we stood on the deck where we were greeted by multiple butlers and maids. My wife were standing at the bar watching our son play in a playground with the kids of her co-workers when it started raining. We all quickly ducked inside the yacht and continued talking as the storm

grew outside. Excusing myself, I went out to check how strong it was getting but the moment I stepped out I got flung through the sky with my head landing on a small rock. Drowsiness took over as I heard voices screaming for help. I quickly shook it off and with adrenaline pumping through my veins went to see what had happened. It turned out that the boat had crashed into the side of a cliff and now was sinking with people trying their best to stay afloat in the stormy weather. I saw my wife with my son and was about to go help them when I saw other people struggling and screaming for help. I trusted my wife to stay afloat as she was a strong swimmer and began to save the people. It was hard for them to climb as we were at the base of a rocky cliff but with my help they were able to get up. Others saw me helping and swam towards me. I tried my best to keep them calm and help them all, barely noticing the 2 pairs of hands sinking below the waves. I tried my best to get past the crowd of people screaming for help but was held back as there were just too many of them. During that incident 7 people died, I was awarded the heroes medal by the mayor for saving 30 people but I could not save the ones most important to me.

Now I slowly walk to the rocky edge and into the sea. As my head sinks below the sea I feel at peace, as the water floods my brain I hear their voices in the light. Water fully envelops my brain as I sink deeper and deeper smiling. I am with them again

TO BE WITH THEM

THE PSYCHO KILLER

Ariana Lealaiauloto

Walking through the dark hallways with only a spark of light in the corners of the cracked walls only enough to see where you're walking. It's 3am and I'm pacing up and down the hallways feeling stressed. I can't fall asleep. Every time I close my eyes I have horrible, terrifying nightmares and flashbacks from which I can't wake myself up. It feels like someone is holding me down, choking me till it's hard to breathe. Why do I still feel this way?

Memories from my past come flooding in. Why is it still happening? Is it from all the abuse and neglect I endured for year from my parents? I tried to hide away from all the sorrow and pain but really, I was just going insane. Everyone I see becomes an evil threat who doesn't deserve to be alive. To my delusional mind they are like animals. When a guest comes over. I'm always hiding a knife in my shirt. The urge to pull it out and kill someone overcomes me all the time. I'm like a vampire with an insatiable thirst for blood. I pace around the kitchen. I'm biting my nails and scratching skin off my fingers till they bleed, dripping blood. I'm grabbing my hair scrunching it in distress I'm about to lose it, I'm going insane I try to step back from the knife, walking backwards shaking my head saying no to myself. My back hits the wall, I slide down with my arms covering my face.

I'm on the floor rocking back and forth, back and forth laughing like a mad woman. A flashback takes over me, my dad has tied me to my bed while I sleep. He has a red box full of knives and weapons which he uses to slash my body. I wake screaming and turn to look to the shiny sharp knife, grabbing the knife my hand shaking, I crack a smile while I'm crying and screaming I walk out of the kitchen and I see a shadow moving I hide the knife behind my back and go to check who it is. It's one of the guests that's awake I walk up to them smiling, adrenaline filling my veins as I contemplate on what I'm about to do to them.

They try to asked what the noise was but I don't let them talk, slashing their throat, blood splatters everywhere as they drop to the ground. I laugh and look over them before placing my foot on their neck and stomping down. They turn blue, and become cold as ice. I drag them into the room, close the door and walk away as if nothing happened. I walk slowly towards the next door of the guests. I touch the doorknob, shaking it trying to open it. I hear them wake up and yell "Who is it?"

I ignore them, continuing to shake the doorknob trying to open it. I hear footsteps coming towards the door and their breaths coming out in loud terrified pants. I laugh and say "I can smell your fear".

As they scream I take the key to door number five, inserting it into the lock and turning the handle. But it won't open. They've wedged something behind the door. I scream out of frustration, banging the door, yelling to open up they scream in fear and yell out "Leave us alone".

Crying their eyes out I start kicking the door, trying to force my way in but its no use. I walk to the storage room where I keep all my weapons, smiling as I grab the axe. Walking down the hall I let the axe drag and screech as it the friction generates sparks. I make it to number five, swinging the axe it hit the door denting it. I hit it again, hearing their screams I swing the axe again breaking the door. Ripping the door open I push through their barricade. They are standing there shaking in fear I swing the axe, it slices their neck, blood is everywhere. I yank the axe from their neck. The other person is trying to run away, so I run after them. They are running frantically down the hallway.

They get to the lift and start desperately hitting the button to go down in the elevator. I'm dragging the axe on the wall making a high pitch sound. They are screaming loudly. I swing the axe and kill them. I let out a giggle. I kick them in the head and spit on them. I grab their legs and drag them to their room where the other body is lying there lifeless. I walk out of the room and lock the door. I walk over to number 10. With my knife raised, I knock on the door, as it opens I hear footsteps behind me before a loud bang, and it's lights out for me.....



THE PSYCHO KILLER

THE FOREST

Nicholas Ozerov

These two men Robert and Alfred are planning a camping trip next week for 3 days in the Sierra National Forest in America. But they don't know about the creature and what it looks like. At 5:00 am, at Robert's house, Robert and Alfred are packing their bags, eating breakfast, and about to head on the road. Alfred was eating his breakfast, and the news was on it was talking about the creature in the forest but Alfred ignored the news because he thought was a rumour. So both of them headed on the road and drove for 6 and a half hours.

They stopped at a petrol station for a toilet, while they were in the petrol station Alfred was looking for a snack, the news was on and talking about the creature again and Alfred was getting a little concerned about the creature, but he still ignored the news. They headed on the road again. While they were on the road, there was a sign saying to beware the creature, Robert laughed at the sign, but Alfred wasn't laughing at the sign, he was getting more concerned and terrified. Robert looked at Alfred and was confused. Robert asks him if he is okay, and Alfred says no and tells him that the creature is real but Robert laughs at his theory about the creature Alfred is getting more scared now because of the creature and Robert not believing him so now he thinks about the creature.

After 14 hours of driving, now it is 7:00 pm, and they finally arrive at the campsite. The campsite was old, smelly, crooked and strange and Alfred and Robert had a bad feeling about this but there was nowhere to go and it was getting late so they camped there. After they got out, they looked around for any dangerous area and go find wood for the fire. Robert asked Alfred to chop some wood for the fire. Alfred got the axe and a torch and went into the forest to find some wood. Alfred found a dead tree and started to feel the wood if it was good for the fire. As he felt the wood he felt the smooth, bark-free patches on the trunk and then he grabbed the axe and started swinging the wood like he hitting a home run with each strike. While Alfred chopping the wood, he heard a scream in the distance and wondered who screaming, the first thing he thought was the creature and his mate Robert so he dashed through the forest like Usain Bolts.

When he got back to the camp spot, Robert was missing and shouting his name, there was no answer but then he saw two red eyes inside a bush, growling at him and slowly walking towards Alfred. It had a gigantic muscular ripped body like a gorilla and sharp, long claws like a katana sword and the face was so disgusting that if you saw it, it probably make you sick, holding Robert's body in his hands then the creature's claws

pierced Robert body and the blood starting going everywhere like a foundation. Robert screams out loud like the whole forest can hear him so then Alfred runs as fast as he can into the forest where he can't see the creature. Then he found a cave went inside the cave and tried to hide from the creature. Alfred goes to his pocket and his phone but there is no service so can't get help the only way is to get out of the cave and look for a building or town that has service or people to help. While he thinking of finding a way to escape the forest, but then he smelled something but it wasn't good, and the scent was rotting of death then after he started to vomit everywhere because there was a big pile of dead bodies in the corner of the cave. So he ran out of the cave and saw the creature walking to the cave and Alfred didn't know what to do so he had to think quickly or he would be the creature's dinner then he had an idea so went back to the cave and went into the pile of dead bodies and act dead. The creature went to the cave and went to sleep. Alfred saw the creature go to sleep so waited for the creature to be fully asleep. 2 hours later, the creature was fully asleep and Alfred had the advantage to escape, so he crawled out of the dead bodies and slowly walked out of the cave and sprinted into the forest.

After 3 hours of walking in the forest, Alfred finally escapes the cave and runs to the nearest building when sees one. 1 hour later, Alfred finally found a building and it was a police station he went in and started screaming and told them about the creature but none of them listened to him and started laughing at him but Alfred was telling the truth and no one believed him so he went outside, run to a town and start telling everyone about the creature but no one believes again. So now Alfred had nothing to do so he went to a tall building and sat down and thought about what he should do but all he thought about was suicide because he had nothing to do and no one believed him. Then he made up his mind and jumped off the building killing himself to join his best mates in heaven.



THE FOREST

IT'S THOSE TIMES

Imran Phu

It was those times like these where couples lived in a joyful and broken life. They will sing and thrive, others will argue and fight. These couples lived such an adjacent life— but there are other times where togetherness ain't dead-end forever.

It happened to me of course. I was once a happy man with the cheeriest girl right beneath me, where we lived in a street of Blecker, and had an enjoyable life. We were bound like a tethered rope, we never broke out. We play games, cherish ourselves while sitting on our favourite couch when she sleeps over.

Sure we may fight, but arguments usually slide for these unlikely two. We love our times as a happy couple; this time, it's only me who is sitting on this two-person couch.

I'm overwhelmed— and I still can't stop thinking about that day. She's the only one for love, and I'm incapable of shaking it out. I need to refresh, so that's where it hit me. It was only to imagine the times where I spent my girl extraordinary times that meant importance to us. So I've decided, I need to step out and turn out.

As weakly and woken, I slouched off the couch and walked by the collared corridor, I was at the front door. I need to know why I truly love her. Out of the house I go, I'll walk through the places that we have been.

I walked the old streets and remembered the buoyant joys and wonder.

It was Saturday the 9th at Blecker Street. It was her favourite day of the week because we embarked freedom through the glazing roads and cracked-off paths. Guarantee my girl will be wanting to spend our lives non-stop enjoyment.

"Where's our first stop, my girl?" I asked her, and she immediately knew where to rush in.

We went to our first stop. Where whipped scoops bizarrely plaster on waffle-crust cones, and flavours in many combinations that lanes in strings of rainbows. The breeze melted on her tongue, and freezes to her nostrils in snowflakes. We're at the counter desk, picking our first go.

"Stephen, the strawberries please," She asks her choice. I picked the white plain cream afterwards. Pink reminds us of our passionate togetherness, that felt our hearts lit in pinkish glow.

Our second stop taught us when we're young kids back then, we would adventure uphill and slide down with stolen food trays or thrown-off cardboards. But as adults now and then, we decided to just pleasurable rest, condensed on the soft but prickly grass, and assured tight to our sides. We daydreamed until dusk. My girl questioned me:

“Don’t you ever think that you can live in a world without me?”

That question intrudes me. What can I do without her, if I have to continue living the craziness that happens in this world, and have to survive for myself? I didn’t really prepare for that moment until that day happened. But before it, I replied:

“Well, I don’t know. You’re important to me, and I love that girl who’s charming and curious like you the most, and I couldn’t imagine that.”

My girl wasn’t intimidated much, but she’s glad to be with a man side-by-side in hand when things get down. I’m with her for life.

“You’re the one who keeps me going forward.” She said to me, I was relieved.

Our last stop ended up us walking down the crossroad, down straight back to her home. As night time happily covers the street with its black sheets, it wouldn’t stop us down gleaming our own pink light.

“See you next week, Stephen.” My girl bid farewell. A peck on the cheek then, and the memory ends there.

The day ended amazingly, I could think of more adventures and happy times to pass for the both of us, and I thought we could do this forever. Well, I thought.

It was Saturday the 16th in Hilly Park. Clouds assembled amusedly beneath the hills, unpleasant timing.

Never planned, but not supposed to happen— we fought.

“Stephen, I’m sorry. My parents wanted to move out without agreement. And we’re not coming back.” She told me.

“But why?!” I yelled in appalled.

“It wasn’t my decision, but you have to know, you can do this.” She insisted that I should carry on the things we love, all by myself.

I knew I didn’t accept it, and I didn’t accept that day at all. Tears shattered in my eyelids, as blindly I ran through the path, as well as my girl catching me behind to unfix my broken heart. Grey clouds thickness— as it relates to my dark times preparing to haunt me. Before I knew it, on that one step to descend, I killed her.

“Watch out!” She screamed. The lights strikingly stunts down to her, time’s out.

I don’t know why I’m thinking this. The day lights flashed her last life, the sounds of clouds and darkness awakened me, tears shallow from my pupils. My heart is pink to blue. I’ll know how life will die out without the special someone, and now without her, I feel empty and grey. I let it happen, she’s gone.

But then, I’ve forgotten why I was remembering those deepest times that harmonised to her and me. So, sitting by the highest hill in the presence of Hilly Park, I remember the moment that we were together for the last time.

Saturday the 23rd, the last time I saw her. she was up laying in herbed— so innocent that I can't bear to unsee this. Beeps stroke the monitor, pumping its last straw. All the times we spent together were lively and lovely, it all comes to the end. I don't know what to do, I'm scared— scared of the darkest times is upon me. And then, she gripped my arm.

“Stephen, it's not your fault.” My girl weakly spoke to me one last time.

“I know that you didn't mean this, and you feel scared... but I brought you to the happiest times we had, we brought us the happiest times.

As the only light shines through the window seal, it shines heavenly for the both of us. She glared happily as she grasped her final breath.

“You're important to me... keep going on and live for me...”

I couldn't ask anything better. The last saddest time to let go, turning into remembering why I exist for the unlikely couple we are, and to keep continuing living our love, even when the world provides the chaotic struggle that wouldn't stop our passionate togetherness.

My heart grew pink one more time; loving her one last time.

“I will. For you.” I said to her back while letting our tears combine one another— tightening in our final hug. Memory ended.

Saturday the 30th in my own house. I was sitting on my once two-person couch, thinking about those times where I was once a couple who lived the happiest and the most broken times together, which accepted me to thoroughly live life. For her. I'm deep in taste now, I wanna pick now — this time it's the pink cream.



IT'S THOSE TIMES

THE BEAST

Tyrus Taufa

Within the heart of the Everglade Mountains, where the darkness dances with the murmurs of ancient trees where beautiful creatures lay but dark things follow not far behind them. There is an ancient beast in the mountains, a creature of myth and legend, a thing of nightmares and gigantic proportions. The creature has ripped villagers and animals apart creating scenes of horror that would give the devil himself nightmares. There were stories spread within different villager and kingdoms, of this beast that embodied pure chaos and fear. Its name was lost to the effects of time, for those who saw the monster never survived their encounter with the ruthless beast.

Two warriors named Khan and Lock, brothers and sons of a legendary chieftain in their village, were both carrying the weight of their destiny on their shoulders. They stood at the edge of the forest, their eyes fixated on the dark abyss that lay before them.

Khan, the oldest brother, possessed the heart and physical strength of a grizzly bear, his axe shining with the promise of victory and glory. His younger brother Lock, the cunning and knowledge of 100 scholars, his bowstring programmed to put down all of his foes. Together, they had made a promise to end the beast's rampage on the land and carve their name into its skull.

As they persist deeper into the unforgiving forest, the air becomes thicker with a potent scent of dread and fear, their footsteps echo through the forest like thunder in the silence and peace of the night. Dark shadows dance upon the leaves and branches, twisting and turning them into disgusting shapes, which seem to mock the idea of life and happiness. The brothers although faced with trials and tribulations they persist and press on. They showed no fear and kept their resolve, their minds filled with thoughts of vengeance on the putrid beast.

Then they caught sight of it, a monstrous colossus, it took the form of a foul fusion of fear and nightmares. Its eyes, pitch black and full of rage and death. They were so dark they could engulf even the brightest light, each breath was a violent commotion of fury and rage. With the roar that would shake the heavens themselves and horn that could skewer even the biggest of elephants, the beast charged towards them, its claws ripping the earth with each powerful stride.

Khan meets the beast head on with his bare hands wrestling the beast and is able to match its strength and then he gets thrown, khan then grabs his axe and delivers a barrage of perfectly placed hits on the beast showcasing his skill and courage. Even though

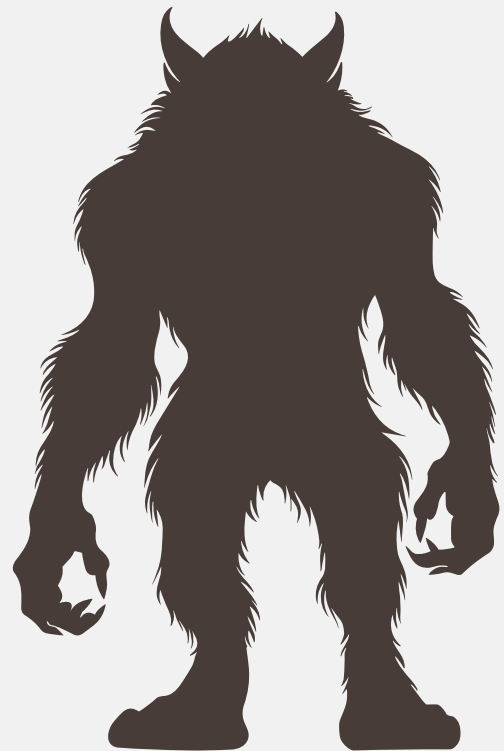
Khan tried to subdue the beast by himself, he was bested by the colossal beast's completely overwhelming ferocity. His strikes barely have effect on the titan as if it was someone was trying to destroy a strong oak with a dead tree branch.

Lock out of oblivion sent a barrage of arrows at the foul beast with aim that could rival the gods, each shot a one-way ticket to heaven. Even though his skill and strategic shot placement was enough to put the beast down, the monster's skin was as hard as steel and as rough as sandpaper. As the altercation pressed on the brother grew tired and their strength was diminishing by every passing moment. But in their predicament, they found hope, they realised that their individual skills wouldn't put this beast down but their unity will.

The brothers fought in unison to best the monster in combat, their movements were a dance of death and chaos. Khan held the beast down just by his physical prowess as Lock from the trees he shot a barrage of arrows at the beast that landed into the beast's skin softened by Khan's physical blows. As time passed, the beast grew tired and weak; its roars of defiance moved aside to howls of pain and fear. Even as it got closer to death it fought in desperation and clawed at anything it had its hand on.

And then in blistering flash of light, the battle had come to an end. The beast lied there lifeless at their feet its body turned to ash on the green forest floor. The brothers stood there as their bodies were engulfed in pride as they slay the treacherous beast and although their bodies were battered and bruised, their spirits were stronger than ever before.

As they left the forest the villagers were praising their heroic act of bravery and their dad prouder than ever, held a feast in their name. The brothers went into the battle with uncertainty and maybe even a little bit of fear, but they came out with a brotherhood bond that called last the test of time even in the darkest and toughest battle of evil.



THE BEAST

PART 2



Whitlam What
Matters Entries

WHAT MATTERS TO ME

Erin Burke

Friendship is what matters to me because it defines who I am. Friendship is like a secret handshake that goes beyond just being pals. It's like having a built-in cheer squad made of mutual love, respect, and a sprinkle of inside jokes. Friends are like life's GPS, pointing out our strengths and nudging us to level up. They're the fluffy pillows in life's roller coaster, making the ride smoother and way more fun.

Friendship is like a cosy blanket in a world of cold shoulders. It starts with common ground but blooms with different quirks, hobbies, and viewpoints. This mixtape of personalities makes the bond even stronger as friends swap stories, explore new horizons, and dive into wild escapades, creating a patchwork of memories that shape who we are.

But wait, there's more! Friendship isn't just a one-person show. It's like a magical potion that brews up trust, teamwork, and kindness, which are the building blocks of a warm and fuzzy society. When things get rocky, friends step in as peacemakers, bridging gaps and spreading good vibes. So, nurturing these bonds isn't just about personal joy, it's about painting the whole town with shades of happiness and unity.

Friendship is like a magical quilt sewn with threads of love, trust, and giggles. It's a bond that laughs in the face of distance and time, a lifeline through life's roller coaster. Friends are the cheer squad in our wins, the shoulder in our losses, and the reminder that we're never solo on this crazy ride.

In a world where differences often draw lines, friendship waltzes in as the poster child for unity in all its colourful glory. It shows us that despite our quirks and viewpoints, we can still rock out, grow, and thrive together. Each friend brings a sprinkle of magic, layering our adventures with depth and sparkle.

So, let's nurture our friendships, sprinkle them with care like precious plant babies, and watch them bloom into something truly epic. In this garden of togetherness, we not only find joy and comfort but also the seeds of a brighter, more connected world. Let the friendship fiesta continue!



WHAT MATTERS TO ME

AN UNFIXABLE PROBLEM

Pippa Aitken

Fight. Don't fight. Problems. Fix them. Too late. Try again. Finished. Why? Why, is a question that has haunted me for a long time. Why did this have to happen? Why did the problem have to get bigger? Why can't they work together? Why couldn't they try again?

I've grown up here in Sydney Australia, with my mum and two cats we adopted when I was in year 2. I don't really know what happened when I was 4 that made my life much harder. What I do know is that when I was 4 me, my mum and my dad took a trip to England, near where my dad grew up. We had plans to come home after a year, but those plans went sort of wrong. My mum and I came home, but my dad stayed in England.

Now I'm 12 years old and ever since then I've never really known my dad and I've been separated from my family for most of my life. This has led to not knowing them and the few times that I've recently seen them it's been so awkward and weird.

Lately if I could have 1 wish it would be somewhere between having my parents get along and getting to start over again from the age of 4 and do my best to fix this, even though it may not be fixable.

Even though I've never really known my family, mum and I have made a great life for ourselves here.

We have many, many friends and people who we call "Framily". This means friends who are like family and we have lots of them.

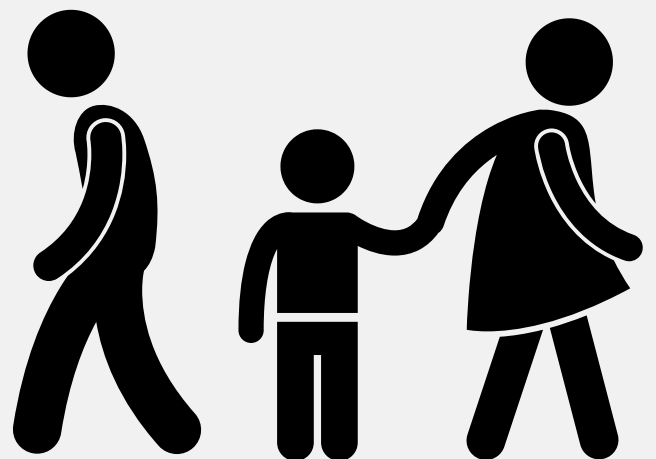
I've lived here since I was in kindergarten and last Easter mum and I flew from Sydney to London Heathrow and Ireland, all the places where we have mostly close family. This trip was the first time in 6 years that I had seen my family therefore it was all of the emotions. Exciting, scary, happy, awkward, tense, new and weird. This trip was also the first time I'd ever seen my little cousin Norah who was only 1 at the time and quickly formed a liking to me as her big cousin.

Later that year we went back to spend Christmas with them for the first time since I'd finished kindergarten. I haven't had a white Christmas in over six years so for me it was very different and kind of weird as it didn't even snow when I was in England but it did about a week later when I was in Ireland, to see my Nana and my Irish family.

I have 3 cousins, 2 aunts, 2 uncles and a dad, all living in England. 2 cousins, 1 aunt and 1 uncle, as well as 10 cousins, 4 aunts, 4 uncles, a Nana and a Grandad, all living in Ireland, and I've been separated from them for roughly 7 years.

This separation changed my life, but right now I'm still separated from them, and I want to know them. However, I've grown up on the other side of the world and have no immediate connection with them. This is what I wish I could change.

My family is an issue that to me that I don't yet know how to fix. So right now, what I want to do is what I can do and I'm going to do it. For now, I'll do my absolute best to fit in here and have a good life.



**AN UNFIXABLE
PROBLEM**

A NEW SOURCE

Eden Barfield

Earth I'm certain that you've heard of it before it's the place where we live after all.

Though it breaks my heart to see that we humans are destroying our own planet, we are ruining our own future and the future of generations to come

Though if you think that I'm going to say something along the lines of "Oh we need to only ride bikes to work" or "we should drop all fuel and use electric cars" then you're wrong. Because while it may sound all eco-friendly, we are being greenwashed into believing that this will make everything good, due to the fact that in order for things to be made they need to go through the manufacturing process of those things also have a negative effect on the environment. Countries like China that generate far more CO2 emissions compared to countries around it due to the fact they still have all those oil tycoons.

So if we really want to make a real difference then we have to get rid of fossil fuel globally. Think about all the oil and coal being burned and used, it's bound to run out someday therefore we need to switch to more sustainable and eco-friendly energy sources. Some examples are windmills, solar power and hydropower.

Though all those may be nice it still can't do things like properly fuel a car. So, we should be the ones to bring it upon ourselves to create a brand new energy source that is completely sustainable. This could be food. When food is left it ultimately rots and causes this radiation of sorts which could possibly be a sustainable energy source. This would also solve the problem of shopping establishments throwing out their stock and leaving it to rot, this way it would be solving both problems.

In conclusion, if we want to make any change for the betterment of our future, we are the ones who must come together and make a change a new source of energy, a new source of hope.



A NEW SOURCE

PART 3



Dorothea Mackellar
Poetry Competition
Entries

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Harmeem Kaur

In the quest for equality, we stand tall and strong,
women's rights, a chorus of voices in song.
From shackles of injustice, we break free,
Empowered and fierce, we demand to be.

Braving centuries of silence, we rise,
Our spirits untamed, reaching for the skies.
No longer bound by societal chains,
We reclaim our voices, breaking old remains.

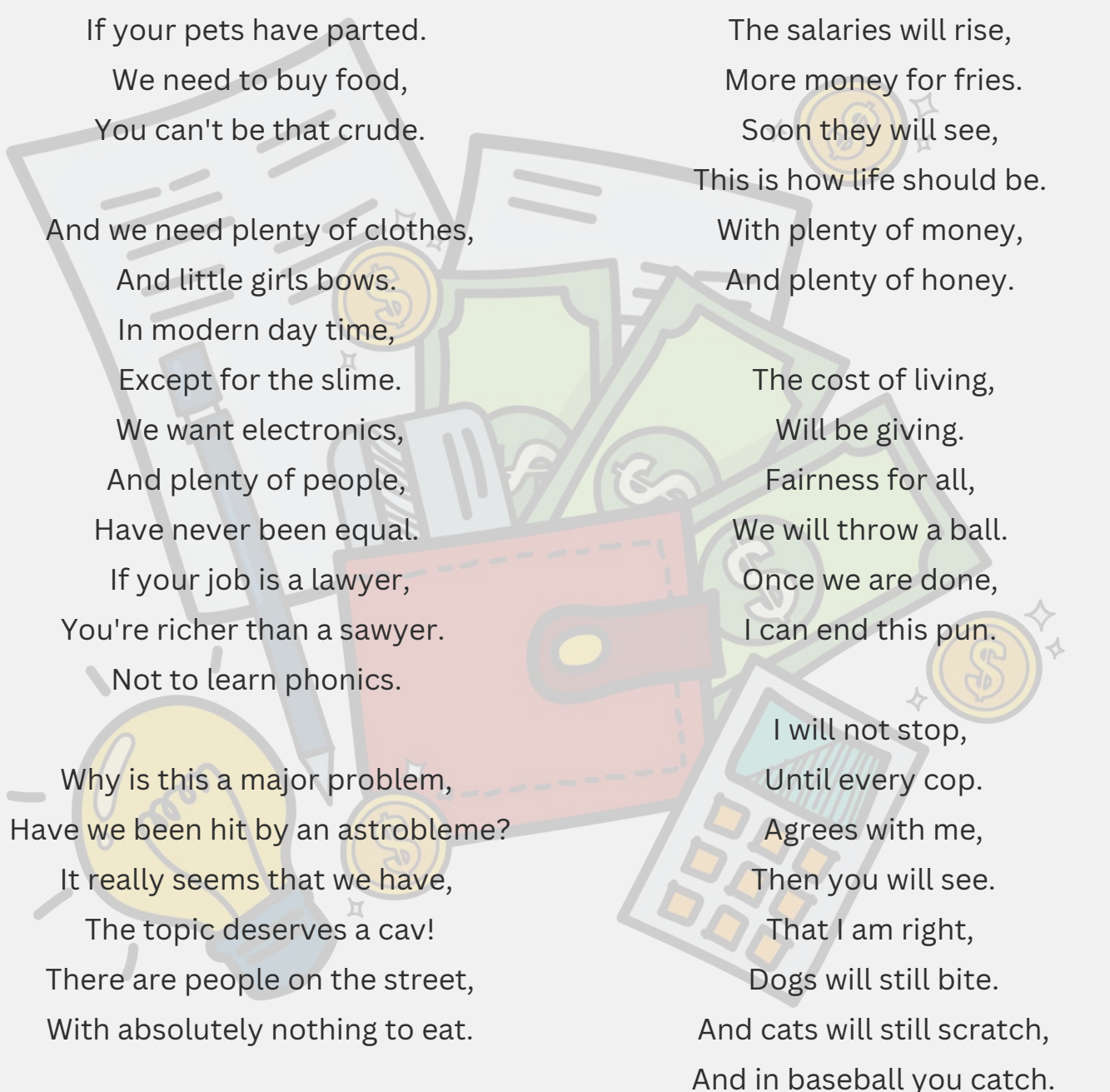
In boardrooms and battlegrounds, we take our stand,
Defying norms, reshaping the land.
Equality our anthem, in every fight we wage,
In the echo of our unity, ignites a righteous rage.

In every stride toward justice, we pave the way,
For daughters to dream in the light of day.
Together we march, in solidarity, we unite,
For women's rights are not a privilege, but a rightful fight.

So let our voices soar, in a chorus bold and clear,
For in the realm of women's rights, we hold dear.
In the symphony of equality, we find our might,
A world where every woman shines in her right.

THE COST OF LIVING

Carmella Archer



The cost of living,
Is really beginning.
To raise up high,
It's getting harder to buy.
Trying to pay the bills,
Will give you chills.
Don't get me started,
If your pets have parted.
We need to buy food,
You can't be that crude.

And we need plenty of clothes,
And little girls bows.
In modern day time,
Except for the slime.
We want electronics,
And plenty of people,
Have never been equal.
If your job is a lawyer,
You're richer than a sawyer.
Not to learn phonics.

Why is this a major problem,
Have we been hit by an astrobleme?
It really seems that we have,
The topic deserves a cav!
There are people on the street,
With absolutely nothing to eat.

How can we stop this?
Creating national bliss.
WE WILL PROTEST,
WE BEAT THE REST.

Government will lower the Price,
They won't think twice.
The salaries will rise,
More money for fries.
Soon they will see,
This is how life should be.
With plenty of money,
And plenty of honey.

The cost of living,
Will be giving.
Fairness for all,
We will throw a ball.
Once we are done,
I can end this pun.

I will not stop,
Until every cop.
Agrees with me,
Then you will see.
That I am right,
Dogs will still bite.
And cats will still scratch,
And in baseball you catch.

But at the end of the day,
No matter what I say.
It will be the same,
When I thought my glory came.
It was just my dream,
Covered in whipped cream.
This isn't reality,
It's still a catastrophe.

I can not change the wind,
I can not change who sinned.
All I can do is...
Share my voice like this,

Tell the world through my poem,
Whilst Tay Tay will sing and hum.
Her words are strong and fierce,

I want to be like Abstrom Bierce.
Both of them spoke their mind,
Whilst I begin to find.
Who I Am in the world,
As my life spun and curled.

I finally realised...
“Why am I surprised?”
Poetry is my passion,
I don't like hair or fashion.
But poets don't make much money,
No money for honey.
If I choose career in fashion,
I would not follow my passion.
But I would have more money,
More money for honey.

To help me with Mortgage and bills,
I can finally afford my medical pills.
In the end, The cost of living,
Is really beginning.
To raise up high
There is no more money to buy.



**THE COST OF
LIVING**

SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Chloe Dyer

Look around, all you can see is rubbish!

I believe that we need to. I am writing this to change that. Personally I think we should stop using harmful gasses and plastics and start using all electric things to help the environment.

PLASTIC! This man-made substance is ruining the world, but it doesn't have to be. If we all stop littering plastic it would

not be as much of a problem. When we litter rubbish it sits on the surface until it rains, and when it does rain the rubbish gets washed into the ocean which harms and potentially kills native sea life. So now we can agree that plastic is a pretty bad substance.,

However, I will tell you some alternative options to plastic include, Paper. It is a great option because it is biodegradable which means it deconstructs into the earth's natural soil. Meatal is also good too because it is reusable which means there is a reduced level of rubbish that can damage the environment.

My second idea on how we can change the environment is to stop using machines that produce harmful gases that are ruining the environment every second we use them. So instead we should all use all electric cars or just walk or ride a bike instead of letting all of the harmful gases that come from cars into the environment

Overall gases and plastic are bad for the environment and I hope you can agree that we need to start making a difference to save the environment.

My name is Chloe Dyer and I really hope that you will start making a difference too.



SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

PART 5



Imaginative pieces

OBSCURITY

Savannah Waights

I used to love my home. Like every old Victorian house it once used to creak, groan and cackle in the gentle breeze that brushed its skin, its unique architectural design consisting of oak, chestnut and southern pine, alienating it from the rest of the houses on the street as they had all been redeveloped into fresh modern homes. That's the reason I bought the place. I liked to think the rest of the houses on the street had ostracised it, yet it seemingly continued to stand tall with style and grace, a ghost from a time long gone. No longer appreciated by our modern civilization. I guess I saw a piece of myself in that house, like a misfit puzzle piece. A bit of damaged history that no longer fits within society's dictatorial confines.

'The body is over here.' I hear one of the policemen firmly announce. I watch as they tear my home apart, pulling up the pale wooden floors, throwing the pillows off my couch and scattering them on the floor and hearing them aggressively opening and shutting cupboards. I watch them as they pull the lifeless body out of the house and take it out to the van, I felt content with myself. More than content, a sense of happiness flowed throughout my body and tugged on my face, painting a smirk across my face.

Although I didn't get away with it, I



pulled off my scheme for long enough. My moment of euphoria faded away as metal clasps tightly grip my wrists whilst a police officer held my hands behind my body steadily. Standing outside of my home, I take one last glance at the beautiful home as I knew it would be my last. The white wooden shutters with chipped paint, the beautiful black door with a circular window, the romantic garden surrounding the exterior. Whilst capturing one last glance, I feel the texture of the policeman's hairy arm rub against my body as he escorts me away and shoves me into a police van.

After a brief investigation and questioning, I enter the courtroom.

Disgusting green coloured carpet beneath my feet as wooden walls border my vision. I took a deep breath as I waddled up to the court stand, placing one foot in front of the other as I levered myself up onto the nicely finished timber. Glancing at the audience peering straight back at me, I felt alone, like a hand-made toy in a toy store full of manufactured toys. 'Ma'am, we have firm evidence that you murdered this man.' the judge exclaimed. I sigh and stay quiet. Another sentence pours out of the judges mouth 'Is there any explanation or reasoning behind your actions?'

Oh, how I hated my husband.

THE FOREST

Liam Craughwell

If you're hearing this now it may be too late but, if there is still time leave this forest and it might not decide your fate.

The last of the daylight faded into night, as rain fell heavily from the night sky landing onto a man's seemingly lifeless body. The harsh splashes from the rain caused the man to zip up from his coma-like state. Shocked by his sudden awakening his eyes darted around his surroundings, discovering he was in the heart of a forest but, what concerned him the most was he couldn't remember anything other than his name. Ken. His instinct was to run and try to find his way out of the forest, but he knew that searching the area could probably help him remember who he was and why he was in this forest. Ken began to search around the area. The spot he was located in was strange, everywhere around him was crowded with trees except for the patch of dirt where he stood. The only direction he could go was down a dark unmaintained dirt track that appeared to lead further into the forest.

First everything goes eerily silent, you could hear a pin drop. It's so quiet, this lack of noise gets to you after a while.

Ken took a second to take in his environment before stepping onto the path, he listened to the noises of birds singing, rain pouring and rustling leaves.

As Ken stepped onto the path something peculiar happened, suddenly all these noises stopped. The birds abruptly finished their songs, the rain didn't fall anymore and the leaves, which had been moving with the breeze, were now as still as a statue. It became so silent that the loudest thing in the forest was Ken's mind and his heartbeat pounding through his body like a drum. Nevertheless, Ken tried to ignore this sudden, deafening silence, brushing it off as a freak occurrence that shouldn't worry him and began to cautiously creep down the path.

Next a whistle in the distance breaks the silence, almost confirming your fate and the forest's victory over you. Before you know it the whistle sounds as if it is directly in your ear.

The silence was unbearable. He focused on the path trying to distract himself, willing himself to take each step, when he suddenly caught a glimpse of something partially covered by leaves. He moved closer, bending down over it. Upon further inspection he realised that it was a photo. It was hard to see in the dark of the night so he picked it up and held it towards the soft, silver glow of the moon. The photo was of him in a black suit with a woman in a wedding dress. The woman's face was obscured by a smear of blood. As Ken was focusing on the photo, trying to study every detail, a faint whistle broke the forest's

empty silence. He didn't pay much attention to it at first but it started growing louder and closer with every passing second. In a fit of fear, Ken dropped the photograph and ran.

Suddenly there's a horrible rotten smell that takes you by surprise, similar to the smell of a decaying corpse, at this point it's too late to run.

By now, the whistle sounded more like the murderous scream of a woman right in Ken's ear. Ken, who was still running at this point, was now desperate to find salvation. The image of the woman and the fear of the forest tormented his mind, who was she? How did the photo get there? Why was it covered in blood?. These questions had to wait, Ken felt the sudden compulsion to stop, as he came to this sudden, jolting halt he was immediately hit by a rancid, deathly odour filling the air. The smell was obnoxious. He felt nauseous and began to heave. Then his throat felt like it was being shredded by razor blades as he started violently throwing up. As the last wave of bile passed through Ken, he peered down at his vomit, narrowing his eyes and trying to focus. Instead of vomit it was a bloody pool with little slivers of flesh from his throat. If this wasn't disturbing enough, there was a rather strange glistening coming from the middle of his puke. After closely examining the shining object he realised that it was a diamond ring, an engagement ring. He picked up the ring and wiped the blood off using his shirt, the diamond reflected the moon's glow into Ken's face.

A tear rolled involuntarily down his cheek as he finally remembered why he was there.

It was as though he was watching a movie on the big screen, he saw himself and his wife laughing as they left their children at home snuggling up in their pyjamas with a babysitter. They drove to a bar where one drink led to another and before long they were both feeling warm and dizzy. By the time they were ready to leave Ken struggled to walk in a straight line. He remembered his wife wanting to call a taxi but despite this he insisted on driving them home, he was 'fine'.

Ken drifted between lanes, ignoring any sign that he was not fit to be driving. As he gripped the steering wheel, the roads began to narrow and twist in a hazy blur that eventually found them hurtling down an old dirt road alongside a dark forest. But not just any forest, it was the one where he stood now. The road was poorly lit and unpredictable and Ken was drunk and tired. Ken lost focus on the road when an abrupt bend caught him by surprise, not being able to react in time in his drunken state he smashed through the foliage, the car was tossed between the trees as if they were playing catch with the vehicle. The car finally screeched to a halt, Ken released his seatbelt slowly and turned his pain riddled body towards his wife. Her lifeless eyes met with his, blood rolled down her face staining the seat below her corpse.

Ken fell to his knees on the dirt path, as the memories flooded back to him, pain and guilt consumed him. The whistling began to get louder, the smell got stronger and the wind became intense, but Ken didn't move, he stayed on his knees with a stream of tears pouring from his eyes onto the muddy soil below. The earth began to tremble and the snapping of branches broke him out of his trance like state. Shadows engulfed him as he looked up, trembling and helpless. All he could do was watch as the trunks of the trees inched closer and closer, the forest rapidly closing in on him. It all became very clear, he knew his destiny

You can try and run, but by now the forest has already won



THE FOREST

IMAGINATIVE PIECE

Isaac Boeck-Hopley

The bed squeaked as the child tussled in the blankets.

The wind howled through the window as the wind flung the tree branches, and then, a loud SNAP would echo through the neighbourhood.

The floorboards thump as the unknown man walks around the house unbeknown to the little boy. As the door slowly creaked open both locked eyes for no less than a second, as the man shuffled towards the child's bed. Not blinking once as he stared at the boy, slowly kneeling down, the man's shivering breath caught the boy's nose and it smelt of rotten meat, his eyes as red as blood kept slowly descending till he could not hear or smell anything.

The boy rolled over to the edge of the bed and looked down but said nothing, not even a trace of the mysterious man, the boy discreetly getting out of his bed and into his slippers crept over to his open door but with a faint feeling he was being watched.

The boy trudged down the corridor looking for his parents door, slowly opening it as the hinges squeaked, he looked over to their bed seeing his mum's body drooping over the end of the bed with blood flowing out of her body like a river, with the last strength of the mother she tells the boy to 'run'.

With panic in the boy's head a massive shadow crept up behind him, the boy turned around to see a man with a grin from ear to ear, his teeth sharp like daggers and eyes screaming death into the boy's soul.

The sun rises and birds chirp. The smell of freshly chopped grass fills my nose, as I walk outside to collect my daily paper, I bend over to grab it as my attention is drawn to a news line heading saying 'wife and child slaughtered with father gone'. My eyes widen as my mouth drops, I keep on reading it describing how the father was nowhere to be seen and that the child was found dead ripped in pieces, mutilated and the mother hunched over the end of her bed.

When I notice that there is a face on the wall with a devilish grin from ear to ear behind where the kid was found with no one in the newspaper talking about it like I was the only person seeing it.

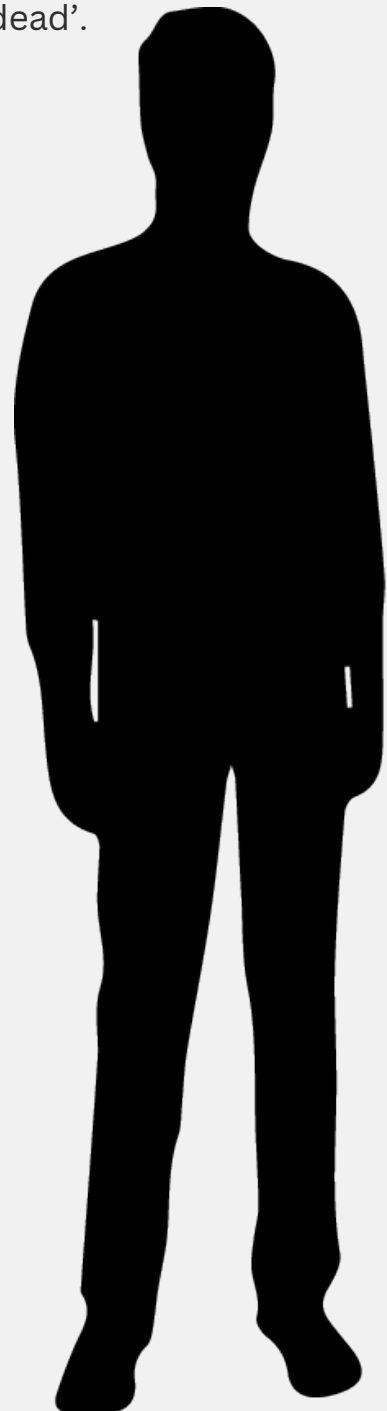
Whilst I kept on reading a faint shiver when down my spine like something was looking at me as I look up to see across the road a tall black figure staring at the ground not moving an inch, as cars drive by my gaze not weakening the figure vanishes like sand in a desert, I blink rapidly as if it was just a hallucination telling myself to wake up.

As I get in the car and head down to the supermarket, I see glimpses of the figure I saw earlier in the day as it feels like it's getting closer and closer to me. Whilst I'm in an aisle looking for something to snack on, a breath of air hits my neck telling me "DEATH". I instantly turn around and see the same figure as before looking into straight at me, into my soul. I try to run but my legs turn to jelly, I try to scream but my voice is gone, as it's scaly hand touches my shoulder. I suddenly awake to a horde of people surrounding me as I ask what had happened and someone speaks up and says that I had dropped to the floor and started shaking and screaming uncontrollably.

As I stumble out of the supermarket my hands shaking and my mind racing, my surroundings start to twist and turn, as I start to panic. My ears start to bleed as a loud 'SCREECH' echoes through the parking lot. It suddenly subsides I slowly walk back to my car nearly falling over from the pain of my ears, to see scratch marks all across my car with writing ' I WILL KILL YOU LIKE I DID THE BOY' and a grin from ear to ear. As I process the writing and face I start to remember the newspaper and the face and I start to crumble on the spot as I recollect the state the newspaper described the boy in.

As I drive home in a panic, I pull up into the driveway as I remember my wife and child but it was too late as I hear my wife's scream and the hideous screech from that thing. I start to cry as I turn away and get back into the car.

The clouds gloom over, as rain starts to pour down my feet tiptoeing out to the curb as I grab the newspaper from the mailbox. I quickly tiptoe back up to my porch as my neighbour screams out to me. "Have you seen what's in the newspaper?" As I lift my hand up to show him the newspaper, I said "Just about to". As I sit down and open the newspaper, I look over at my neighbour but he has disappeared. I shrug my shoulders and look at the head line as my mouth drops. I read the headline 'Another wife and child found dead'.



SHADOW

Claire Bamberry

It's always with you. It never leaves, always following, you can't escape. As Darcy walked through the dark cobbled street every step she took it would follow. As the ends of her jeans frayed from the dishevelled and wet stones beneath her beat up converse. Her black long sleeve pulled over her thumbs.

Darcy always felt like an outsider. She always felt followed even when know one was around.

“Im behind you, you can't escape”

“Im always with each step you take”
Darcy can't break out of the voices inside.

It all started when I saw my father hit my mum. I was in my room music blasting through my headphones so I couldn't hear mum and dad arguing. Then all of a sudden the house went silent. I peeked my head around the corner of my room door. I couldn't see anything. I slowly walked down the hall, praying the floorboards wouldn't make a creek. Once I got to the end of the hall I glanced my head around the corner. I saw my mum sobbing quietly on the floor. She had blood dripping down from her face and had bruises all over her body. I ran into her arms and just sat on the floor with her. Mum didn't say much. She told me my dad left and we need to leave home before he comes back.



I stood up and put my hand out. She reaches for my hand. She was shaking. I stood her up and took her to her room. We started gathering all our stuff in plastic bags. We just wanted to leave. We ran into the car and got out of the town as fast as we could. We found a little motel to stay in for the night.

Now me and mum are staying in a 2 person hotel on a back street of the main road. My life is still not perfect. I'm in a bad place at the moment. Every Step I take I feel like I'm being followed. People tell me not to be afraid and it's all in my head. It's always with me it never leaves even in the darkest of night even the ray of light shining on me. At school it's with me and home it's with me and I don't know how to escape.

It freaks me out. I lock myself in my dark room and shiver in the corner. As I look around I see it. Running around my room coming closer and closer. It sits in front of me. I take a look and it just looks just like me. I try to scream but it doesn't come out . At the top of my lungs I try again but not a peep of sound. I chuck my blanket over my head and close my eyes. I can see it but I feel it still lurking in my room. I feel trapped. I feel like I'm stuck in this little box and can't get out. I stayed in my little corner of my room all night then I saw a light shining through the corner of my blind.

Mum came and opened my door. I feel like weights have been lifted off my shoulder when she opened my bedroom door. She sees me in the corner of my room with my eyes bloodshot red with my blanket wrapped around me. She looks at me in complete shock. She runs over to me and wraps her arms around me. We sat there in silence for a little bit. She stands me up and runs the bath for me. I sit in the bath looking around and can still see the shadow. It climbs up and down the walls just watch me. "Will it ever leave" I whisper to myself

Why me?" I say in a soft voice. I wait for some response but it doesn't say anything back. I sob in the bath for hours and hours. The bath water becomes cold and all the bubbles have gone. Mum comes back from work and calls out to me. I can't respond, I just can't talk, I feel stuck. I hear her footsteps walking up the stairs. She opens the door and sees me shivering in the icy cold bath water. She pulls a towel down from the railing. Mum put out her hand and I reached out to grab it. She helps me out of the bath and wraps me up in the towel. She walked me to my room but I just can't go in there I will feel stuck. She goes into my room while I stay out in the hallway and She grabs my pjs. We go down stairs and mum puts on the tv. I sat on the couch but still can see it. Mum in the kitchen putting the kettle on. She looks over to me, very worried. She grabs her phone and starts to call someone. She's on the phone while passing up and down the hallway. She gets off the phone and comes to sit on the couch with me. She pauses the tv and faces me.

"Look I'm really worried for you" She starts to say

"I think you should go to therapy," She exclaimed.

I just sat and looked at her. I know I should go but I really don't want to. We chatted about it for a little and decided to go in tomorrow.

I slept in Mum's bed that night. I still saw it. It's still watching me. It's climbing and descending the walls. I closed my eyes but still knew it was around. I didn't get much sleep that night.

The following morning mum got me out of bed but put the shower on for me and got me changed and fed me breakfast. We get into the car and start to drive. I still see it. It's still with me. Mum pulled into a driveway and parked the car. We hop out of the car and start to walk to the therapist. It's still following me, it won't leave my side. My name got called and we went into this bright and colourful room with big windows and two couches. The therapist was very nice. Her name was Jess. She had long silky brown hair and a nice flowy dress on. She asked me a few questions about me and what I see and told me that it's all in my head. I know it's all in my head but it feels pretty real to me.

I go to therapy twice a week now and I feel better and better after every session. I still see It sometimes but it doesn't feel that realistic now. I am slowly getting out of this tiny box I feel stuck in. I'm getting better and understand now that it's just a shadow.

FORTHGALES FALLEN

Russell Adler

The fierce winds quivered my planted knees, as the sun's embrace became more familiar.

His axe wove the light, striking my eye, blinding me to the fate I was dictated to face.

My body scarcely clings to the lip of the tallest spire within the kingdom, exposing me to the scenic view of what was once mine. Pandemonium emits from the streets below, with knights and peasants arm to arm, chanting hymns pridefully in unison. Maybe just nudging myself forward, and thieving the satisfaction the new one will claim; would be more honourable. I peer hesitantly down at the shadowed river and swiftly tilting my body away from harm. The hinges behind creak as the new king with his escort emerge. The king eyeballs my perilous state and disapprovingly announces.

“ King Thomas of Forthgale you have been tried with being an unfit leader by the Forthgale Rebellion, do you have any final remarks if so make them swift”.

“ I will return, and I will be the ruler of my home again”. I murmured.

“Very well”. He smirked and his executioner raised his single edged axe.

It came down thunderously, deeply grazing my arm, the pain was enough to make me plead for the next strike; I scurried to the edge of the podium

My limp body plummets like I had stone filled pockets. My eyes sleep, and my dreams are clouded with his face, until my body strikes the stone like water. Waves swept me through the town's water drains; while my soul was leaking from the slit in my arm. My sight grew faded and my head became light as I drifted into the embrace of the Lord's arms...

My eyes rise in agony from the running red water, clumpy and sour. My legs twisted and timid, raising the limp limbs lacerated and corroding. The bitter smell of burnt flesh brushes my body. As I briskly skulk through the blossoming craters and infested structures, staying alert for any oddities; yet the only stand to make, would be with the mangled limbs actively withering away. Searching every arrow chest, and satchel, for anything that would delay the inevitable infection, to no avail. The discolourment darkened as the sun began to descend, and the frost of the moon begins to provoke the torture. I gather kindling shedded from snapped arrows and cracked sword hilts, with split logs from the decimated artillery. Wood stacked, and flint struck, the need to cower to the cold concludes. The wafting smoke moulds the moon's beam, casting his light on the damned. The smoke becomes overwhelming, drowning me in a sea of grey. From the pool emerges a silhouette laced blue.

The sounds of rubbing chainmail and clinking of steel boots emerge from the haze.

“ MY FORMER HIGHNESS! ” bellows through the resting warzone. The towering smog forms a face, slim cheeks, and flowing hair oppose the bleak battlefields decaying scene. My voice whimpers

“Arthur?”. The smoke rises and he stands before the wafting ash. I mutter

“ I witness your disembowelment, yet you stand”. Confusion painted his face. Observing, he questions.

“Do you not know the lands you take refuge upon, do you not remember the blood dyed in the tearful soldiers' tunics, the hate ingrained in the soil, running from those churches to the rivers... You... You are reckless, you thevied mothers from their sons. Created widows. You were no king, you never cried as the blood of boys coat your rotting wounds, and rusted blades. You never had to eat the mouldy, stale bread, and sleep in the humid tents. You forced the unwilling to exceed their capacity, now you succumb to the same fate you dictated them to undergo.”

My sight casts over the entire field. The odour becomes unbearable, seeping from the charred corpses. Each disfigured face becomes more apparent, the eyes of every body cling to my own, their glance is pleaful. They hold the shimmer only spawned when blades are drawn near. Yet they are soulless. Motionless. The pleas they cry are only company to the comrades facing the same peril. His eyes cast over me, they too plead, yet weep in a different tone. The reflective gaze

clouds the prying eyes' judgement. His mouth opens

“Your heart still beats. mine doesn't. Your blood can still pulse throughout the parched plains, flowing into the mouths you've purged the breathes from. Your blood does not need to seep into the same craters their body's rot in. let it bring vitality, prosperity...Love.”

The vignette spawning from his glance fades. countless eyes remain prying. He points out a blackened body. My eyes darted to the disintegrating corpse. Springing back to the boots of Arthur; only for a pile of blue ash to be seated at his former foot. My body's agony continues, but my eyes do not stray from the slim, sizzled frame of the boy's corpse. I drag my frail feet to the potent torso, rolling the heavy heap of rotted flesh over. Under the boy, tucked in his coat pocket a bandage dyed red and a travel vial of dated ale. Applying the supplies slowly, my lacerations live. My legs, pinned and needled, inflate and the treacherous travelling back to my kingdom commences.

Emerging through the moisture-laden treeline, the shaded limestone gates tower into what seems like heaven itself. The blood spotted fabric reinforcing my arm loosens, gliding into the palm of my hand. Shaking, I grew closer to the colossal doors, ballistas line the towers trim, tilting their bolts. Quaking radiates from the rapidly rising portcullis, the hooves of horses and boots of men peer from the foot of the door. The cloth catches the wind as I drop to my sapped knees.

The new king approaches upon horseback, commandingly gripping a gold ingrained claymore.

“ You return. Do you expect me to take mercy?” He inquires.

“I deserve no mercy. They did. The blood soaking my clothes and hair are not my own. This blood I let spill was never my own. The castle I lay rest in was never my own. The people I let die were not my own to sacrifice. I may have killed thousands, but I'm no good rotting like them. I can't breathe new life without the winds winding in my lungs. Let me breathe a new life into the lungs I allowed to be pierced. Plant a new seed for the soil I soured. Birth new life for the ones I let be lost. “

I bow my head before his stead, laying the cloth at my knees. His blade burrows in the coarse dirt, and my fists unclench...

The final droplet rolls from the steel mugs lip, nourishing the nature engulfing the moss covered stone wall. The sun singes the straw roof, expelling the rain from my drying garments. I sit affront the circular window peering at the sprouting cabbage, and potatoes. I pull from my breast pocket a vile of ale, pouring the poignant liquid in a metal mug. I raise the cold cup, bringing down the burning brew. The sun's mundane embrace is more familiar than ever, brushing my stubbled face, as my eyes lay in the warm picturesque pumpkin patches.



FORTHGALES FALLEN

PART 5



Dystopian creative
pieces

DYSTOPIAN CREATIVE

Emilia Reade

Charlie walked through her former life, past her school and her favourite coffee shop on 5th Avenue. The once-bustling streets were now eerily silent; all she could hear was the sound of her breath as she tried to seek help.

Memories flooded back of the day when the creature emerged from the waters of Long Beach. People's curiosity about these giant tentacle-looking things turned into a catastrophe of deathly screams and chaos as they tried to escape.

She was in her favourite coffee shop before school, her iced coffee and raspberry muffin in hand, watching through the glass as people went by. Suddenly, military jets ferociously flew to the coastal line of New York ten of them. Five minutes later, it was the police and the fire brigade, and more and more. She watched in horror as her city was transformed into a war zone. She could only hope but wonder what was going on. Hysterical people were driving on the road, and there was a surge of humanity. People were running through the streets, some tripping and falling, and others were pushing through with complete survival instinct. Then sirens were so loud it was drumming in Charlie's brain, only to know this may be end game.

Two minutes had passed, and New York was aroused to a shake. Charlie knew this was the start of something so great. This great, prominent force shook New York. Suddenly, a giant tentacle grasped onto tower 28. Seen through Charlie's eyes, this was more than just her future fate. Her raspberry muffin dropped onto the plate. Everyone in the coffee shop ran to "safety", but curiosity stopped her so ever greatly.

Charlie had shaken herself from these more nightmares, forcing herself to at least try and focus on the present. The air was thick and cold with this eerie feel and scent of salt water and decay. However, you could also feel this beast's presence through the air, lurking around like it'll make a grand entrance.

Charlie approached the church she used to attend, where she knew she could call for help.

A movement caught her eye, and her heart pounded as she believed there were more. Suddenly, a voice called out to her, breaking New York's silence. "Hey, I am over here! I need help."

Charlie slowly and cautiously approached the figure. It was a girl her age with blonde hair and fear in her face. It was Lily, a girl from when she went to Sunday school.

Charlie felt a rush of relief as she realised she wasn't alone.

"Is it safe?" Charlie asked, looking for the creature, expecting its giant tentacles to emerge from behind her

"For Now, I think," Lily replied, her voice shaken but in relief. "I was hiding in the church because my dad was here earlier when this bookshelf fell onto my leg. But we must get out of here and find proper safety, as it will return, Charlie."

Charlie agreed, and together, they went off to find proper help. As they walked the streets of New York, a flickering light reflected off the window. As they made their way through the streets of what remained of New York, they realised something that made them sick. The creature had ruined more than just the buildings of New York—it had ruined and taken 39 people's lives, dreams, and all they had.

"Do you think anyone else is left?" Lily whispered, breaking the heavy silence.

Charlie shrugged. "I don't know. But if they are, we have to find them. We can't just hide."

Lily then sternly replied, "Then we can't stay here. We need to come up with a plan."

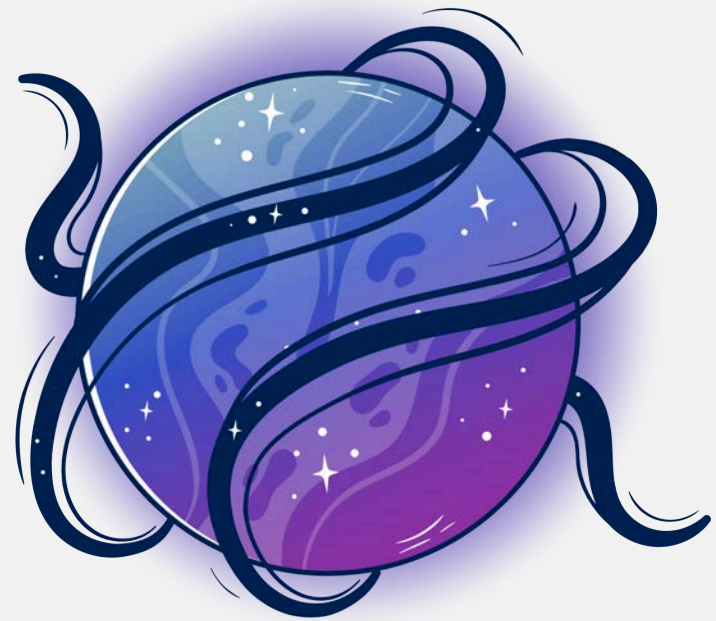
As they strategised, anxiety held its grip on Charlie as she realized that time was running out. They needed to make a move and find a way to fight back against the horror that had taken their city.

Then, through the trembling darkness, a ferocious roar echoed, sending a chill down their spines. The creature was close—much closer than they had anticipated.

"Run!" Charlie shouted, her voice piercing through the fear.

With that, Charlie and Lily erupted into motion, hearts pounding, each step mattering. In the ghost town of New York, survival was not just about escaping the giant tentacle creature—it was about reclaiming their lives, and in the face of terror, Maya felt a spark of hope ignite.

They would not let the city fall without a fight.



DYSTOPIAN CREATIVE

CREATIVE PIECE

Mahlia Basely

The sun hung low over the jagged horizon, its red glow casting long shadows over the desolate wasteland. In the distance, what remained of a once-great city stood in ruins, its broken towers reaching futilely towards the sky. It had been years since the Great Pulse—a catastrophic solar flare that wiped out Earth’s technology and shattered the fabric of civilization. The year was 2150, and the world had been reduced to scattered tribes, lawless regions, and pockets of humanity struggling to survive.

Near what had once been the eastern seaboard, a small band of survivors made their way through the scorched land. The group was led by Kira, a former soldier before the world fell apart. She had seen the collapse of civilization first hand—the riots, the wars, the hunger.

She had lost everything, but her resolve had not broken. With her tattered coat and rifle slung over her shoulder, she cut a figure of grim determination.

Beside her walked Ash, a scavenger and an expert in navigating the dangerous new world.

He was lean and quick, with sharp eyes that darted constantly, searching for threats. In this world, danger came in many forms: marauding bands of raiders, mutant creatures warped by radiation, and the treacherous terrain itself.

Behind them, two others followed. Reyna, a healer from a cooperative tribe in the north, was soft-spoken but capable. She carried a small satchel of herbs and rudimentary medicines, offering whatever relief, she could in a world where hospitals were nothing more than crumbling monuments. And finally, there was Finn, the youngest of the group. Barely nineteen, he was new to this harsh reality, having grown up in the relative safety of a hidden enclave deep in the mountains. But even that safety had eroded as the enclave fell to starvation and infighting.

“We need to find shelter before nightfall,” Ash muttered, scanning the horizon. “Raiders have been spotted near this region. We don’t want to be out in the open when they start hunting.”

Kira nodded, her eyes narrowing as she looked ahead. A dilapidated structure, half-buried by sand and debris, lay just a few miles away. It had likely been a warehouse or factory before the Great Pulse, but now it was just another hollow shell in the endless wasteland.

“We’ll camp there for the night,” she decided, adjusting the strap of her rifle. “We can fortify the entrances and keep a watch.”

The group trudged on in silence, the weight of survival heavy on their shoulders. The ground beneath them cracked with each step, dry and brittle from years of exposure to the sun’s unrelenting heat. It was a reminder of how fragile the world had become, how close they were to the edge of extinction.

When they reached the structure, Kira led the way inside. It was dark and musty, the air thick with dust. Old machines, long rusted and useless, lined the walls. Broken windows let in shafts of fading sunlight, and rats scurried in the corners. It wasn’t much, but it would do.

Ash immediately began fortifying the entrances, using debris to block the most accessible points. Kira checked her rifle, though she knew ammunition was precious and limited. Reyna set about tending to Finn, who had twisted his ankle earlier in the day. She worked silently, her hands moving with practised ease as she wrapped his foot with strips of cloth.

“I’ll take the first watch,” Kira said once they were settled. “Ash, you’ll relieve me in a few hours.”

Ash nodded, though his eyes flicked nervously to the darkening sky. “Do you think the raiders are close?”

Kira’s expression was grim. “They’re always close.”

As night fell, the wasteland became eerily quiet. The only sound was the faint wind whistling through the broken windows. Kira sat by the entrance, her rifle across her lap, her eyes scanning the shadows. She had seen what raiders were capable of—brutal men and women who thrived in the lawlessness of the post-apocalyptic world. They took what they wanted, killed without mercy, and left nothing but death in their wake.

Hours passed in silence until a faint noise stirred in the distance. Kira stiffened, her hand tightening around her rifle. Footsteps—too light to be human. She motioned for Ash, who crept up beside her.

“It’s not raiders,” Ash whispered, his voice tense. “Something else.”

Kira nodded. In the years since the Great Pulse, new dangers had emerged. Mutated creatures, once harmless animals, now roamed the wasteland, their bodies twisted by radiation. They were fast, strong, and unpredictable.

The noise grew louder, and a figure appeared in the doorway. It was hunched and misshapen, its skin a sickly green. Its eyes glowed faintly in the darkness as it sniffed the air, searching for prey.

Kira raised her rifle, steadying her breath. She couldn't afford to miss. With a sharp crack, the bullet tore through the creature's skull, and it collapsed to the ground, twitching once before lying still.

The others rushed to her side, their eyes wide with fear.

"We need to move," Kira said, her voice low but firm. "It won't be alone."

Without another word, the group gathered their things and slipped out into the night, their hearts pounding as they moved swiftly through the shadows. The wasteland stretched out before them—endless, unforgiving, and full of danger.

But as long as they had each other, they would keep fighting. Because in this broken world, survival wasn't just about strength. It was about hope, and as long as they had that, they still had a chance.



**CREATIVE
PIECE**

LUNAR ECHOES

Haley Rayner



Humanity had colonised on the Moon, modifying its isolated surroundings into a labyrinth. What had begun as a distant vision rapidly changed into a dull reality.

In the year 2187, The Earth was now a vast memory, its vibrant tone had quickly been replaced by the emotionless greys and the cold glare of the stars. The tight fitted domes, quarters where the villagers slept. Many people had never known what the earth's sky looked like. The lives of the villagers were full with mandatory jobs to keep them occupied while the obnoxious broadcasts played in the background motivating and spreading promises of prosperity.

Danger and isolation. The unexplored surface of the moon enforced fear over each of the citizens. The risk of the space vacuum or exposure to radiation is what causes no one to stray from the safety of the domes.

Elena, the biologist facing the challenge of genetically engineering crops in one of the larger biodomes, had dedicated her life to ensuring the food supply of the labyrinth is fit for nutritious standards and sustainability. The Lunar Authority sought to see the food as delectable while Elena saw it as a reminder of what they had lost.

As Elena was working away as usual, she heard murmurs from the breakroom. "The echoes" she heard as she went to listen closer. A group of workers were describing a secret cause to rebel against the colonists. As she got closer, she felt intrigued in what was being said.

"The Echoes have found a way to communicate with Earth," one man conversed, his voice low. "Hoping someone will hear them, they have been transmitting signals". The more she listened, the tenser she became. Earth was her goal, but the echoes muttered as forbidden tales that couldn't yet be understood.

"What if someone's trying to lure us in?" another girl worryingly uttered. All the workers brushed it off out of curiosity.

Days passed and Elena's curiosity got the better of her when she thought about the echoes. It was like a weight on her shoulder suffocating her. She had enough and couldn't ignore the thought of there being something beyond the tragic distance of oppressive thoughts for any longer. As she thought of the unknown, she made her way to the outskirts of the labyrinth where she could peacefully answer her questions.

There, hidden behind the outer dome, she found a small gathering of men and women, their faces blurred over by the soft glow of a portable screen. It was a convention of people who had been yearning for change in societal ways. The sharp echoes were being assessed.

It looked as though there was a group leader who answered by the name Raven, she had announced her findings as she said shakingly spitting out to the group “We are not alone.”

The faces of the men and women surrounding Raven lit up in hope of humanity. Elena’s nerves were filling up her mind, but she swallowed and stepped forward “How can we trust this? What if we get caught?” She announced this with great worry.

The following weeks were a whirlwind of meetings and shared plans. The Echoes worked rapidly to create a communication transmitter, a beacon to reach Earth. They scavenged parts from the biodome’s machinery, as they pieced together a device that could send signals across the extensive void.

The surveillance of The Lunar Authority had been upgraded meanwhile tension grew. The slightest hint of rebellion was met with punishment. Still, hope blossomed among The Echoes.

Under the cover of darkness, it was finally time. The group huddled around the makeshift beacon, its lights flickering nervously. Raven activated the device, echoes became slight voices throughout the lunar night.

“We are the Echoes of Luna,” Raven’s

voice rang out, shaky yet comfortable

“We seek contact with our home. We are still alive, still fighting. If anyone hears us, please respond.”

Hours passed, and just as despair began to creep in, the transmitter crackled to life. A voice, faint but unmistakable, emerged from the static. “This is Earth. We hear you. Hold on.”

The disbelief on the people’s faces made Elena feel like she wasn’t hearing things. She had never felt so connected through the dull stars. The response hit her like a wave.

The moment had suddenly come to an end. The sound of footsteps emerging from the tunnels. The Authority erased the smiles off the faces of those who finally thought it was over.

Chaos broke out as the people fought back. Elena’s heart felt like it was coming out of her chest, they had to hide or they would never find a way out. They ran through the maze of domes and tunnels as they finally reached the biodome.

Elena turned to Raven and howled “We need to find another way!”

Raven quickly calmed her and reassured her it was just the beginning.

In the depths of the Moon’s cold surface, a spark had ignited, a rebellion that started a new chapter, a reminder that humanity’s spirit, even in the dullest of places, would always aspire for freedom.

CREATIVE PIECE

Tyson Butler



It came from the sea, calmly at first. An enormous, slithering tentacle slowly oozing its way over the top of the sea wall, exploring the metal and concrete shapes with suckers the size of your front door. Then, as more and more people came, and shrieks and cries of alarm filled the air, the creature became angry. All hell broke loose... In an almighty tangle of limbs and water and buildings and people, the beast exploded violently out of the frothing water. The ordinarily sturdy metal supports of the buildings groaned under the extreme weight of the gigantic tentacles crushing them. Panic. Complete panic set in. But where had the creature come from? What did it want? How could anybody stop it? There wasn't time for people to think. Only to run...

The streets erupted into chaos. People abandoned their cars, leaving the twisted heaps of metal in the road as they scrambled over one another, desperate to escape. The creature's massive form loomed over the skyline, each thrashing limb causing more destruction. Debris rained from collapsing buildings as they crumbled under the beast's weight. Sirens blared in the distance, but there was no sign of emergency responders. What could they even do against something so monstrous?

Above the noise, a chilling roar echoed across the city—an unearthly sound that reverberated in the bones of those unfortunate enough to hear it. In that moment, the creature revealed itself fully. From the ocean's depths, its body emerged—a mass of slimy, writhing tentacles, each one as thick as an ancient tree trunk. Its eyes, glowing like molten embers, scanned the horizon, taking in the devastation with a strange intelligence. It didn't just destroy—it targeted. Shouts of confusion filled the air.

"It's coming this way!" "Run, for God's sake!" Nobody knew where to go. Nowhere seemed safe. The city, once thought to be an impenetrable fortress with its towering sea walls and heavily armed security, was now reduced to rubble by a single entity from the depths. The sea walls had been built as a precaution against rising sea levels, but no one had anticipated anything like this. As night fell, the once-vibrant city of Havenport was shrouded in darkness. The power grid had failed, plunging the city into an eerie silence, punctuated only by the sound of collapsing buildings and the distant cries of the injured and terrified. Somewhere in the chaos, Leo and his younger sister, Mia, hid in a crumbling alleyway.

They had been separated from their parents in the initial panic. Leo's heart raced as he tried to comfort Mia, who clung to him, trembling. "What is it, Leo? What's happening?" she whimpered, her voice barely audible above the surrounding destruction. "I don't know," he whispered, trying to sound calm, though fear gripped him. "But we have to get out of here. Stay close, okay?" They edged cautiously along the alley, avoiding the main streets where the creature's limbs still crashed down viciously, demolishing anything in their path. As they reached a narrow corner, Leo spotted a group of survivors huddled together, trying to formulate a plan.

They were people from all walks of life—office workers, students, construction workers—now reduced to frightened refugees in their own city. One man, his face smeared with dust and blood, was speaking urgently. "We've got to get to the underground tunnels. The creature... it hasn't reached that far yet. If we can make it, we might stand a chance." Leo's mind raced. The tunnels! They had been built to transport goods quickly beneath the city but were later expanded into evacuation routes when the sea walls had gone up. His father had mentioned them once, during a conversation about the city's emergency plans. Maybe, just maybe, they could find safety there. "I know where that is," Leo said, stepping forward. "We can lead the way."

The group quickly rallied behind the idea, and with no better options, they set off into the ruins of the city, moving swiftly but cautiously.

Every distant sound—a crash, a roar, a crack of metal—made them flinch. The creature still roamed the city above, its tentacles smashing through streets and buildings with terrifying precision. It was as if it knew where people would hide and was systematically tearing the city apart. As they neared the entrance to the tunnels, Leo heard something that stopped him in his tracks. A deep rumble from behind. He turned, heart pounding, and saw it. A massive, slithering limb was heading their way, pulling itself closer, searching. "We're not going to make it!" someone screamed. But Leo didn't stop. He grabbed Mia's hand and bolted towards the tunnel entrance. The ground shook as the creature's limb smashed down, barely missing them by inches. Dust and debris filled the air as the tunnel entrance began to collapse behind them. They just made it inside, the last few members of the group diving in as the entrance caved in completely, sealing them in. For a moment, everything was still. Leo could hear nothing but the sound of their frantic breathing in the darkness. They had made it—but just barely. The underground tunnels were cold and damp, illuminated only by the occasional flicker of emergency lights. The air was thick with the smell of mildew and decay. They moved cautiously through the narrow passageways, stepping over abandoned supplies and rubble. The tension was palpable, but there was also a brief sense of relief. They had escaped—for now. "What... what was that thing?" Mia asked softly, her voice trembling.

“No one knows,” replied one of the survivors. “Some say it’s a result of the pollution in the sea, mutated by decades of waste and chemicals. Others say it’s something ancient, something that was disturbed when we built the walls. Either way, it’s here now.”

As they walked deeper into the tunnels, the survivors began to notice something strange. The walls were shaking slightly, and a low hum seemed to be emanating from below. Leo felt a growing sense of dread.

“Do you hear that?” he asked. Suddenly, the ground trembled, and the distant sound of crashing rock echoed through the tunnels. The creature wasn’t done with them. Its massive body was tearing through the underground, breaking through the earth itself.

“We have to keep moving!” Leo shouted.

The group ran, stumbling over uneven ground, as the creature’s relentless pursuit continued. It seemed there was no escape from this monstrosity. Everywhere they turned, it followed, destroying everything in its path. Just as they thought all hope was lost, Leo saw it—a small, rusted emergency door at the far end of the tunnel. Beyond it lay the open sea. They had reached the city’s final emergency exit. But as they burst through the door, the horrifying realization dawned on them.

The creature had been waiting. The sea churned violently as the colossal being emerged once more, its eyes glowing with fury. This time, there was no running. No hiding. It had come for them all. The last thing Leo saw was the creature’s glowing eyes as the world collapsed around him.



DYSTOPIAN PIECE



Mia James

The sound of the gavel echoes throughout the candle lit courtroom, her fate and heart drop. She sat there, eyes widened, in a dissociative state. All this for trying to save her mother?

The year is 3000, and technology has been long banned, with the dark ages returning. Years of posters and books being carefully crafted to manipulate and twist what technology was has altered society's perception to that which the government pleases. We now live in harmony with the Earth, and nature is flourishing, but nobody seems to mention how the life expectancy is plummeting and herb oils can't cure cancer, diabetes, heart failure and many more illnesses.

Ella shook her head, in disbelief that they would not understand her. She pleaded with them once again, repeating how she only did it to save her mother. The leader's face did not move, his cold expression seeming to be set in stone. It's the one he wore every poster, the one that was written about in every book and accompanied him each rally. That face had a name, General Blackstone, and he sat and watched the child finding out her life was over before it even began, it seemingly acted like his own technology free television.

"How do you plead under the charges for breached code 142: Stealing

government equipment. and code 156: Development of prohibited technology.". Ella scoffed, for a society controlled by the idea that they could not return to electronics, the Judge sounded just like the AI she had read about in books. "Not Guilty" Ella stated to the court, a room full of people trying to light more candles so they could get a better view.

Ella began to get lost in thought, thinking about her mother, and how if she had been more sneaky, they would be peacefully eating dinner right now. Her thoughts had been disrupted by sounds of shackling handcuffs being clasped against her wrists. She frantically waved her arms about, causing the guard to shout and order her to stop immediately. Begrudgingly, she did, and the guard came down and squatted next to her.

"Hello inmate 567, I've been assigned to watch over you, and reading over your case was fascinating. If you want to pass some time, I'd like to hear about why you did it."

Ella's face stiffened, unsure if this was a trap to make her spill, but the guard's eyes were an almost exact resemblance to her mothers. They were a deep brown, trustworthiness and understanding hiding beneath the surface.

“My mother was sick, very sick”. She began. “She was also smart, very smart, smart enough to keep textbooks explaining the logistics of technology, teaching them to me as a young kid”.

“I was 12 when she fell ill, and the day was like no other. It was a simple headache, but by the time it came to my 13th birthday, she could barely keep herself up”

“I blew my candles out with the hope she’d recover, but I knew the only miracle that could happen was getting access to ‘Life Support’, a machine that I had read about in books.”

Ella took a second to pause, and the guard repositioned himself to now be sitting next to her.

“I had a friend. I’m not telling you who, but he had access to an old machinery deposit outside of the state. I went there with him, and found the materials I needed for my mother. We brought them back without anybody noticing, in my bedroom I had created the unthinkable.”

Ella choked up.

“I was so close. It was almost ready, and then one night I forgot to close the blinds, and I guess the neighbours had seen unnatural light. They obviously reported it, and the next day my machine had been destroyed and my new bedroom was a holding cell.”

“I had failed my mum.”

She stopped to wipe a tear that had come out without her realisation. The guard gave her a solemn look, and reached a tissue out of his pocket.

“I’m sorry.” He began.

“But under the 312th constitution act, you just admitted to committing a crime.”

He stood up abruptly, before Ella had time to react.

“Your mother was sick, but that gave you no reason to put society in danger like that”

He turned to face the door, Ella now screaming relentlessly.

“You’re a liar. You’re sick. Do you not have a family yourself!”

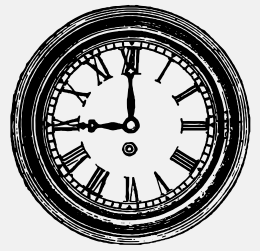
The guard walked further towards the door, paying her no attention. He struggled to open the hulky, iron door.

“Look at you! You can’t even open an iron door! How are you cut out to be a guard!” Ella yelled out in a fit of rage.

But the guard still did not look back, and the sound of door closing echoed throughout the candle lit room. The candle illuminated the empty room, and in the corner Ella could just make out another object.

A broken control box, with wires loosely hanging about.

DYSTOPIAN PIECE



Kaitlinn Dunne

In an almighty tangle of limbs and water and buildings and people, the beast exploded violently out of the frothing water. The ordinarily sturdy metal supports of the building groaned under the extreme weight of the gigantic tentacles crushing them. Panic. Complete panic sets in. But where had the creature come from? What did it want? How could anybody stop it? There wasn't time for people to think. Only to run..

A few days before...

There was an old antique clock at the back of the classroom. It had 12 roman numerals instead of numbers. The sharp sounds Eliza heard every second created suspense as she waited for the clock to strike 4. 5 minutes left. Bags started to unzip, chatter started to get louder, however Eliza just sat there. Not a distraction, she stared at the clock. Waiting and waiting. 4 minutes left. Everyone around her starts lifting up from their seats. 3 minutes left. Eliza quietly starts tapping her finger on the table in front of her. 2 minutes left. She places her notes in her bag. 1 minute left. She slowly rises from her seat, still keeping her focus on the clock.

"RING, RING, RING"



The loud bell echoes across the room. Everyone decides to leave. Except from Eliza. She strolls over the messy teacher's desk.

"Here." Eliza places down an envelope.

"What is this?" Her teacher asks.

"What you wanted." Eliza replies. The teacher slowly opens the envelope while giving Eliza a confused look.

"Why are you giving me this?" The teacher asks. Before Eliza could answer her phone rings. It's an unknown number.

"I've got to go." Eliza walks out into the voiceless corridor. She picks up.

"Who is this?" She asks.

"No one you need to know" An unknown voice replies.

"You have something of mine." Eliza is confused.

"I don't know who you are? How do I have something that's yours?" Eliza asks discreetly.

A few moments later she hears something over the phone. Voices. She couldn't understand what they were saying. Eliza knew it was men though. A lot of them. The phone hangs up.

"Weird."

THE WHISPERS OF TOMORROW

ANON

In the year 2145, the sky was always a dull grey, covered by the thick smog from the factories that always operated. Giant buildings stretched toward the sun, but always lacked warmth. Below, the streets were filled with people moving like shadows, their faces blank and their eyes always looking down. This was the city of Verenthia, a place ruled by the government, who controlled every civilian under their watch.

17 year old Clara walked through the crowded streets, holding her worn backpack to her chest. The government had forbidden individuality, making everyone wear only grey, dull colours. But Clara had a secret—a bright red scarf she had hidden in her bag, a piece of nostalgia from when colours existed in the world. She always wished to wear it, to feel something vibrant against the darkness of her gloomy life.

As she passed the local markets, a massive screen displayed the government's latest propaganda. "Unity is Strength! Dissent is Treason!" echoed in robotic voices. People glared over at the screen, accepting that this is what the government has set as normal. Clara felt a wave of anger. How could they force this life upon all the civilians?

Suddenly, a group of loud voices caught her attention. A group of rebels, known as the Brights, had gathered near the fountain, their bright coloured clothes and loud voices contrasting to the grey, quiet surroundings. Clara had heard rumours about them—rumours of people who dared to disobey the Council and spread happiness. As she watched, one of the leaders, a boy named Leo, stepped forward.

"Citizens of Verenthia!" he announced, his voice loud and clear. "We have the power to change our fate! The Council lies to us! We deserve a life filled with colour, laughter, and freedom!" His words sparked something deep in Clara. For the first time, she somewhat felt hope.

But then, government enforcers, dressed in dark uniforms, emerged from the shadows. They moved swiftly, clearing the crowd and pushing people out of their way. Clara's heart raced, she knew she had to act.

"Leo!" she shouted, her voice rising above the chaos. He turned, as his eyes widened with surprise. "I want to help!" He hesitated for a moment, then nodded.

"Quick, follow us!"

Clara felt a rush of determination. She followed Leo and the Brights as they bolted through the backstreets of Verenthia. They led her to an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of the city, a hidden sanctuary where they planned their next move. Inside, the atmosphere was electric. The walls were covered with bright pictures of all of them having fun together, nature and happy people smiling - images that seemed to be filled with life. This was the world Clara longed for.

“Welcome, Clara,” Leo said, a grin spreading across his face. “You’re one of us now.”

As the night went on, Clara learned about their plan to stop the Council’s propaganda broadcasts. They had gathered technology they had stolen and created a device that could project images of their dreams—a world filled with colour and laughter. The Brights were determined to show the citizens what life could be like if they fought for it.

“Tomorrow, we’ll broadcast at dawn,” Leo explained, “when everybody is waking up, we’ll show them the truth.” Clara felt a mix of excitement and fear. What if they got caught? But she knew she couldn’t go back now.

As the first light of dawn broke, the Brights set up their new machine on the rooftop of the warehouse. Clara helped connect the wires.

“Are you ready?” Leo asked, confidently.

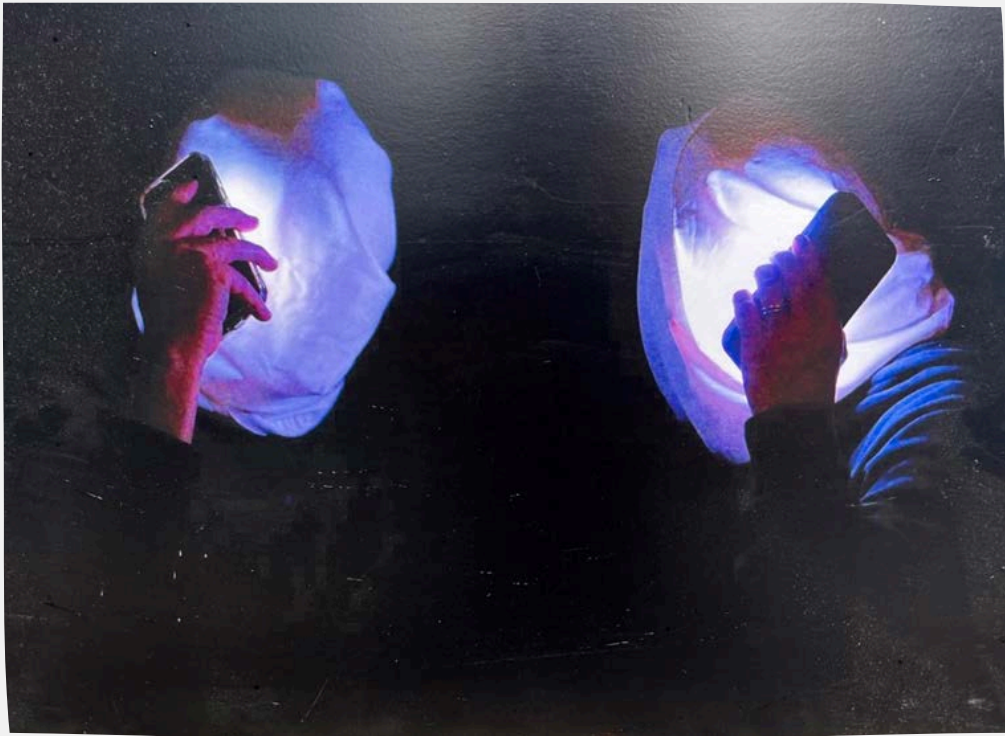
Clara nodded, determination taking over her body. They hit the button, and the screen lit up, illuminating the grey sky. Images of colourful gardens, joyful gatherings, and children playing filled the air. For a moment, silence filled the city as people stopped to watch.

Then, the Enforcers arrived, their boots stomping against the pavement. “Shut it down!” one shouted, raising his weapons. A rush of panic hit Clara. But Leo stepped forward, shouting back, “This is our message! We are not afraid!” The crowd began to grow, people stepping out of their homes, curiosity and confusion sparking in their eyes. For a second, the dullness of their lives went away, and for the first time, Clara saw glimmers of hope in their expressions.

And in the heart of Verenthia, the whispers of tomorrow became a powerful roar.



THE WHISPERS OF TOMORROW



CROMER PEN

2024

