

Enfield County School for Girls

Anthology



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Foreword

It is with great pride and excitement that we present to you the Anthology of Enfield County School for Girls, a collection of creative writing and illustrations that showcases the remarkable creative writing talents of our students. This anthology presents the diverse voices and imaginative spirits within our school community, offering a glimpse into the unique perspectives and creative minds of our fellow students.

The Anthology of Enfield County School for Girls has been produced by our very own students across all Key Stages, from Years 7 to 12. This is a product of our creative writing competition, where all students had the opportunity to devise pieces of literary fiction for publication in our school Anthology. Each Key Stage was provided with their own theme, tailored to their English Curriculum:

- Key Stage 3 students were inspired by 'Reality vs Imagination'.
- Key Stage 4 & 5 students were directed with the theme 'Control and Conflict'.

We received 56 entries in total, across all six year groups. After much deliberation, these entries were whittled down to the best 31 pieces of prose and poetry, judged by us, and two of our Deputy Head Girls. Throughout the judging process, the varying age groups and abilities were taken into careful consideration. Therefore, to celebrate the achievements of all our students, we selected winners from each year group.

This initiative began as a way of celebrating the creative talents of our school. In doing so, we have also brought our students closer together by sharing their creative abilities across all year groups. Moreover, through the interest of extending our students' creative skills, we were able to further unite the school community through the collaboration of A Level English Literature students and pupils in KS3 & KS4. Our Year 12 students gave personalised feedback to a student from Years 7-10. These 'mentoring' sessions are part of a larger initiative, called the 'Big Sister Programme', where we aim to encourage communication between students across the different Key Stages. Our anthology also contains several illustrations that accompany some of the written texts; these were also illustrated by our students from various year groups.

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The cover of our Anthology has been inspired by the student-led school magazines that were written in the 1900s. Not only do we want to bring our current students together, but we also want to celebrate our alumni, as well as the vast, rich history of Enfield County School.

As you turn these pages, you will journey through a myriad of stories and poems, each crafted with passion and creativity. These not only reflect the dedication of our authors, but also highlight the nurturing environment that our school provides for artistic expression, which we, as Head Girls, would like to promote.

To our older students, we commend you for your perseverance in honing your craft. Your contributions to this Anthology are a testament to your growth and maturity as writers. We encourage you to continue exploring your artistry and using your talents to inspire and lead others. Remember, your words have the power to make a difference, to provoke thought, and to evoke emotion. Keep writing and keep sharing your unique voices with the world.

To our younger students, we want to remind you that the journey of writing is one of endless discovery and joy. Your voices are fresh, vibrant and full of potential. Keep writing, as every word you put down on paper brings you closer to finding your own style and voice. Never be afraid to express your feelings, and always remember that your stories matter. The world needs your creativity, and there truly is no limit to what you can achieve.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks and congratulations to all our contributors: our writers, our illustrators, our mentors, and everyone behind-the-scenes who made this Anthology come to life. May it inspire you to continue writing and exploring the endless possibilities of your imagination...

Akshaja Narendra and Mia Clifford
Head Girls 2023-24



Key Stage 3 Contributors: Years 7 - 9



Key Stage 4 Contributors: Years 11 - 12



Untitled

Ezra Givens 7SP - winner

In the quiet corners of a bustling city, there existed a girl named Abena. With a heart as fragile as glass and dreams as vast as the sky, she navigated through life's challenges with a smile that masked the turmoil within. To the outside world, she appeared to have it all – a loving family, devoted friends, and a future brimming with promise.

But beneath the facade of normalcy, Abena bore the weight of a devastating truth. Cancer had woven its cruel tendrils around her, robbing her of the vitality that once defined her. Each day was a battle against the relentless march of the disease, a struggle she fought in solitude, unwilling to burden those she held dear.

As the shadows lengthened and the whispers of mortality grew louder, Abena's world crumbled around her. The once vibrant hues of life faded into a sombre palette of grey, leaving her drowning in a sea of despair. Her dreams lay shattered at her feet, taunting reminders of all she would never become.

Alone in her anguish, Abena searched for solace in the arms of those she loved. But their embraces offered little comfort against the crushing weight of her reality. With each passing day, her strength ebbed away, leaving her gasping for breath in a world that seemed determined to swallow her whole.

And so, as the final curtain drew near, Abena found herself standing on the precipice of oblivion, her once bright future reduced to a fading memory. In the silence of her final moments, she clung to the fleeting fragments of joy that had illuminated her path, finding solace in the knowledge that though her time may have been brief, her spirit would endure, a beacon of light in a world consumed by darkness.

Imagination and Reality

Marianne Diop 7LO

In the heart of a bustling city, there lived a young artist named Maya. Maya saw the world through the lens of her vibrant imagination, where colours danced, and shapes morphed into fantastical creatures. Her paintings were windows into her mind, where reality and imagination were intertwined in a beautiful symphony. One day, Maya stumbled upon an old, dusty canvas hidden away in the attic of her apartment building. Intrigued, she decided to bring it to life with her brushstrokes. Unleashing a torrent of creativity that blurred the lines between reality and fantasy. As Maya painted, she found herself lost in a world of her own making. She conjured lush forests, towering mountains, and cascading waterfalls with each stroke of her brush. But as her masterpiece neared completion, Maya felt a strange sensation.

As if her imagination was seeping into the very fabric of reality. To her astonishment, the world she had painted began to come alive before her eyes, trees rustled in the breeze, birds sang sweet melodies, and the air hummed with the magic of her creation. Maya had unwittingly bridged the gap between reality and imagination, giving birth to a new world that existed somewhere between the two. At first, Maya revelled in the wonder of her creation, exploring every corner of the enchanted realm she had brought to life. But, as days turned into weeks, she began to long for the familiarity of the world she had left behind.

Despite its flaws and imperfections, Maya missed the chaos and complexity of reality. Determined to find her way back, Maya embarked on a journey through the painted world, searching for a way to undo what she had done. Along the way, she encountered strange creatures and mystical beings, each offering cryptic clues to unlocking the secrets of her creation. Finally, after much trial and tribulation, Maya stumbled upon the key to returning home. With a heavy heart, she bid farewell to the enchanted world she had created, knowing that she could never truly leave it behind. As Maya stepped back into reality, she was filled with a newfound appreciation for the world around her.

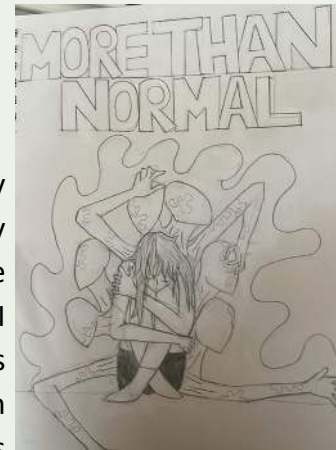
She realised that while imagination could take her to incredible heights, it was reality that grounded her and gave her purpose. And so, Maya continued to paint, capturing the beauty of both reality and imagination on canvas, for all to see. In the end, she knew that the true magic lay in the delicate balance between the two.

More than Normal

Eliza Karim 7FI

Reality 1:

I gulped. My heart racing despite the stillness of the cool night. A shaky breath escaped my lips as I held back tears that threatened to blur my vision. Shadows embraced me, my flickering eyes flinching at the shards of light piercing through the curtains. My eyes widened once I heard the familiar thud above me, a figure melding into the darkness then collapsing it, to my horror. A blinding force swept across my room as I hurriedly closed my eyelids to block out the army of goosebumps skipping gleefully alongside me. I clutched my blanket covers hoping it could provide me with shelter. I despised how easily my shield could be peeled away. I began wishing back the confidence I once held, although now it was just a fragment of my imagination, whisked away like a fragile leaf to a ferocious wind. Then, it started. It was if the air was closing in on itself, the space around me was tighter, the ability to breathe frailer yet my sudden urge to scream and shout growing stronger. My ears pricked at the small sound of distant mutters gradually fading away. Click.



Illustrated by
Barin Biyan 7FI

Darkness flooded my room, pools of light sinking into the floor, slinky shadows crawling back into the crevices of my room. Black spinning into a tightly wound ball only to unwind frantically; black spiralled up the walls, springing and leaping like an over excited child. The blackness diminished flecks of light trying to scramble out of the nights grasp. Then: calm. The only visible light now just tiny specks of fire in the dark sky. I let go of my breath, greedily gasping for air, clawing at the edge of the wood as if I could touch the air and bundle it all inside me. I relished the silence, while it lasted. Just then, I glimpsed a figure standing above me. My head hurt. It crouched down to face me, head tilted. Shaking fingers reached out to me and then suddenly, ripped away my covers.

Reality 2:

I didn't know what to expect when I ripped away the covers but it sure wasn't this. Mum said it was all going to be ok and dad said it's just my imagination but the huge, shivering figure beneath me didn't look fake. In fact, it looked scarily real with ribbons of dark all over it. I missed the sparkles of light that radiated through my window in the daytime. I wanted to bring back that soft, warm glow and welcome it with open arms, but instead I was surrounded by eerie darkness. It felt like I had a thousand beady eyes on me, just waiting to jump out. The blackness diminished flecks of light trying to scramble out of the nights grasp. I could only watch as the comforting haze of golden disappeared beneath a blanket of dull, scary black. My gaze ran back to the thing before me. I started at intensely at the thing, noticing the... fur? What was going on? It slowly stood up and edged towards me, a shard of light from the curtain grazing the surface of its face. A shocked whimper echoed through my room, but I couldn't tell if it was from me or the huge thing. Big, glossy green eyes framed by wisps of long, frazzled fur stared cautiously into mine, a certain barbarity hidden behind them. I had so many questions banging at the walls of my mouth but all I could seem to whisper was the word "monster."

Reality 1:

“Monster?” I wasn’t a monster. Although the small thing in front of me could be, with its slender, sharp blue eyes piercing into mine. It held itself with a certain defensiveness although I guess that was expected coming from a monster. I wanted to back away from it; to crawl back into my covers and shut out the blaring light along with the monster but it seemed like that wasn't an option anymore. Why was this happening to me? I wanted this monster to run far away from me and not come back. I needed it to go and leave me alone, but it seemed the monster was not aware of the loud sirens inside my head. My head was hurting.

Reality 2:

It was difficult to believe what I was seeing, a monster...a monster! I always knew they were there, hiding idly in the shadows and plaguing me every single night. I remembered the clawing I heard under my bed earlier and the faint sound of a gasp when mum and dad switched on the lights. It all made sense, now I could finally prove to them that I wasn’t lying. They never listened to me, but they said that's because I was a ‘special’ little girl, but I'm not sure if I believe them. “Mum, dad!” My parents ran into the room, their faces wearing worn and worried expressions. I pointed at the scared looking monster, frozen in its tracks, “Look, it's the monster, I told you it was real, I told you it was coming to get me! You have to do something. You have to help me,” I screamed. My parents just stood still, watching me as if I was completely crazy, I wasn't crazy, my mum crouched down beside me and just started talking, “honey, I know this is hard but we’re going to get through this together, remember you’re safe here. This is your home, remember when you went to school in the morning today, and you told me you played football. Remember when you had that nice playdate with your friend?” Everything else just seemed to fade away, my dad crouched down too, trying to steady me. Everything looked foggy and I didn’t know what to do, why didn't they listen to me? Where am I? I didn't know what to do and my head was still spinning, help me, why weren’t they helping me? I didn’t know what to do and my head hurt, and I was tired, and I was really tired. What's happening? “B-but the monster...” I began but when mum began speaking, I stopped, confused, and scared and more confused. “Hun, there's nothing there.”

Reality 1:

It is there, the monster is here, I cried. Why did no one listen? Where am I? I pointed at the monster but then there was nothing. Nothing. I stared down at my hands, shaking and covered in wisps of long, frazzled fur. Why was there fur? I was angry. I stared back down at my hands, pinpricks of water tearing at my eyes. There was no fur. How? Where am I? I reminded myself I was at home; I was me and I was normal. I am normal. No, I am a monster, I am angry, I have green eyes and I feel angry. I’m not a monster, I am me. I am normal. I took deep breaths, I am normal. I opened my eyes, and the world came rushing back. I am home, I am with my parents, there is no monster. I let mum tuck me back into bed, dad kissed me goodnight, I was ok now. My eyelids drooped but my ears pricked at the sound of small mutters between them, I only caught one sentence before sleep overtook me. Mum said my ‘D.I.D episodes were getting worse,’ that sounded funny. What was that? It didn’t matter anymore, I am safe, I am home.

I was normal.

The World of Alexis

Diviya Thavakumar 7KA

Mentored by Rihana Farah 12FI

It was 2098.

The sky was dark as slate, filled with thick smoke. A consequence of the Sun's extinction was constant gloominess. No sapphire skies or white clouds. Mr Davies had taught us about the sins that humans had committed in the past, hurting the environment through deforestation, littering plastic in the ocean. Those images he had shown us of Before lingered, even in this dream...

...Four shiny walls surrounded me like a prison as I examined my surroundings. I was boxed in; I was right in the middle of a trap. I turned around, a tall figure stood behind me, his hood covering his face. Where was I? I looked for something that could get me out of here.

But the room was empty.

I woke up in a cold sweat, looking for the cloaked figure in front of me. I was in my bed, beneath the striped, comfortable covers. I climbed out of bed and pondered; I couldn't help but think about that nightmare. A haunting, dark alleyway, a mysterious person following me.

"Urgh... I need to focus.... Come on, Alexis! It's just a stupid dream." I tried to comfort myself.

"ALEXIS!! Time for breakfast – it's your favourite!" My sister yelled from the kitchen. Jane hated it when I didn't come on time. My parents were on a business trip in Kyoto. The case they were working on was confidential but, as always, they were likely saving the world from another disaster. I looked at the time. 8:07! The bus was going to leave soon. I raced down the creaky stairs, wolfed down some golden pancakes with delicious syrup, and bolted outside. With my school bag hanging onto my back for dear life, I sprinted towards the isolated bus stop. Just as I turned around the corner, I saw the towering bus overtaking the bus stop. I'd missed it. Now I'd have to walk the 20-minute journey.

I dawdled past the bus stop, the chip shop, the grocers. The cracks of the pavement peered up from the litter covering the floor. I wondered what a world without pollution and litter would look like. The world was not going to suddenly recover from all the damage humans have done.

Before I knew it, I was at the rusty gates of Castleland High School. I scanned my pass and the gates creaked open. Stepping into the front yard, I had the honour of Miss Kraker lecturing me about punctuality. She warned me of my detention.

"Yes Miss Kraker!" I chirped.

Drained of all my energy, I trudged to detention and knocked on the door. No reply. Impatiently, I banged my fist on the door, and it swung open. An auburn-haired girl lay on the floor, wearing a strange costume and clutching a fluorescent orb. Who was she? But, most importantly, what was she doing here? She didn't look like somebody from around this place. I helped her up and she looked at me, quite dazed. Something was clearly wrong.

"Are you alright?" I questioned, noticing the scars and bruises she had on her face. Abruptly, a bright flash erupted, and she was gone. Where did she go?!

Miss Kraker burst into the room. "ALEXIS! WHAT DID YOU DO WITH HER?!" She screeched, flinging her hands into the air. I shrugged. What could I say? That she vanished into thin air?

I nervously thought about it. Should I confess? Or keep it a secret? Either way, it wasn't my business to tell everyone about the girl's condition. "No, I didn't see any girl. It was just me. I had dropped a pen onto the floor," I lied, fidgeting. Miss Kraker shot me an outrageous look. I gulped and pretended to focus on my workbook. I peered over at Miss Kraker. Something wasn't right. She was pacing across the room, pondering about something. Then, out of the blue, she stood in front of my desk, holding a glowing pen. What was going on?!

All of a sudden, she injected the glowing pen into me and my vision went blurry.

Where was I? I slowly adjusted my eyes to the bright light coming from above. It was beaming amber, and awfully familiar. It dawned on me, all those photographs from Before - I was staring at the Sun. I tried to focus my eyes on the blue sky. Wait... how was the sky blue? There was a sharp tap on my shoulder. Goosebumps formed onto my skin; I met eyes with a young girl, who looked around ten.

"Hello, I'm Diane. Nice to meet you. What's your name?" She held out a hand.

I accepted it and got to my feet. "Alexis... Sorry to ask, but what year is this?"

"What? This is 2024 of course!" she smiled, holding my hand.

2024?! How did I get here?! It must've been Miss Kraker's pen! I thought, panicking. Was there a way to return to 2098? Turning around, I noticed a mysterious man. He looked exactly like the one in my dream! "Wh-who are y-y-you?" I trembled with fear.

"Look at this world, 2024! The Sun, the sky, nature... It's all still here!" he announced grandly, "Who would want to go back to a dullness of 2098?"

Clenching my fists, I thought about what I saw. It was such a beautiful sight! And I certainly wanted to explore more of 2024...

“What do you mean?” I asked, cautiously. He stared at me.

“It doesn’t matter what I say, because the gateway to 2098 is now SEALED! And you will never go back there!” he cackled. My eyes widened.

“WHAT?!” I examined the room I fell into. There was a giant portal, a jar of strange-looking water and piles of rubble. “Now I will end of line of the Edwards!” He cried, and vanished. But that was the least of my problems, as the walls started to cave in.

“Alexis! Alexis!” Jane shook me. I looked around the room, frightened. “Oh Alexis! You fainted in the detention room!”

Now I started to realise what the familiar glowing lights were. So, it was all just a crazy dream, right?

“Oh, and Miss Kraken is missing.”



Illustrated by Aseel Arusi 12SP

A Hand to Hold

Florence Murphy 7KA

A chill snaked through the tangled curls of Ava's hair and snuck into her boots. The inky blackness above twinkled with pin-prick stars, and the moon was a perfect sphere in the night sky. She checked her wristwatch; three minutes past eleven. The night train was not due until quarter-past, but there was nowhere Ava would rather be tonight than sat on this freezing station bench. She imagined her best friend sat in a warm train carriage on her way to the station. It had been so long since they were last together; so long since her friend's diagnosis. Peering along the tracks from her position, she thought she saw flickering headlights. She stood and walked closer to the edge of the platform. Lights were indeed approaching the station, however far too fast to slow down enough to stop. Alarmed, Ava backed away from the platform edge. The points were not aligned for an express train! At the last moment however, the charging train slammed on its brakes and impossibly squealed to a stop. Ava gaped at the machine. Instead of the modern, electric train she expected, this beast was puffing great clouds of smoke from its chimney, and the boiler was round and old-fashioned. Shocked, Ava stayed rooted to the spot, sure that a steam train hadn't been due tonight. The engine was rich green in colour, with golden stripes wrapped around the boiler and lining the cab and tender. The three carriages were made from polished oak, carved with intricate leaves. She still didn't move a muscle when a carriage door opened, and a strangely familiar figure stepped onto the platform. They beckoned for Ava to come over and, unwillingly, her legs began to carry her towards them. Their face was comfortingly beautiful with green eyes, freckles and long ginger hair, braided in a way that reminded Ava of a fairy. It was tauntingly familiar but, for some reason, she could not quite place it. The girl took her hand delicately and they boarded the train. Somewhere, in the back of her mind, a little voice told Ava not to interact with strangers but, no sooner than it had popped up, Ava brushed the thought away. This girl somehow didn't feel like a stranger.

As Ava sat on the cushioned carriage bench, a name popped into her head: Fern. It felt right.

"Fern, I don't remember a steam train on the arrivals board tonight, are you sure you have the right station?" At first, Fern didn't answer, but kept smiling, her eyes fixed on Ava's own. Then, Ava felt a tingly feeling wash over her brain. A moment later, she heard a voice.

'I am quite sure I have the right station if you are here.'

Though the voice in her head was as clear as day, the girl was silent, lips unmoving.

Taken aback, Ava tentatively asked another question.

"And do you know where you're going?"

The voice in her head whispered again; 'What do you think?'

Slightly unsettled, Ava decided not to ask another question just yet, but instead gripped the edge of her seat as the train pulled out of the station. She gazed out of the window, watching it slip away into the night. All the time, Fern stared at Ava, silent and still. Suddenly, the scenery was replaced by a blinding white light and Ava drew back from the window, squinting in pain. Fern did not seem the slightest bit alarmed.

“Fern, please, what is going on? Where are you taking me?” The tingling resumed in her head and the voice whispered;

‘Do not worry. We will reach our destination soon enough. Then you will see.’ Ava reluctantly settled back in her seat.

Moments later, they emerged into a beautiful natural haven. Trees adorned with emerald leaves caught the rays of sunlight that cut cleanly through the canopy like knives. A bubbling brook wound its way through the scene, ending in a waterfall that seemed to have no end. Brightly coloured creatures that looked like enormous scaly birds soared above the treetops and large feline shapes slunk between the trunks below. Ava was spellbound. It looked like something out of a fairy tale. She turned to look at Fern, but the girl was already at the carriage door, looking at her expectantly, eyes twinkling with excitement.

‘Welcome to Fortaris.’

As they stepped off the train, an overwhelming scent of dewy forest and sweet flowers descended over the pair. Ava stopped to take a deep breath, inhaling the delicious freshness. Fern didn’t wait for her, instead she gravitated towards a quaint cottage sitting snugly between the station and forest.

‘Come. There is much to discover.’

The girls were soon walking up the cottage’s cobbled path. Made of rustic red bricks, the cottage walls were covered by flowers in full bloom that scaled the uneven surface, clinging to crevices.

‘Isn’t it beautiful Ava?’ the voice whispered.

“Yes, it’s glorious!”

‘Would you like to come inside?’

Ava nodded and Fern opened the front door to reveal a cosy living space. There was a fireplace on one wall with an armchair beside it, a neat kitchen and a set of stairs leading to the upper rooms.

“Is this where you live?” Ava asked, looking around.

‘Not exactly.’

Fern walked over to the kitchen counter and began packing bundles into a wicker basket.

'I'll prepare a picnic; we can enjoy it while I show you around.'

Ava nodded gratefully, suddenly she was hungry. Fern proceeded to open a side door that Ava hadn't noticed before.

'Come...'

Outside, she was surprised to find two horses waiting patiently. The girls each mounted, Ava upon the white stallion and Fern the dapple-grey mare. They rode around Fortaris, Fern showing Ava the creatures and plants that called it their home: dragons with iridescent scales, huge jaguars with glowing purple eyes, weeping willows and huge oaks. Later, as the girls ate their picnic, the horses grazed nearby on the lush grass.

'I hope you enjoyed your tour.'

"Yes, thank you, Fortaris is beautiful."

'I must ask you one thing however; please stay close to the cottage.'

Ava still had many questions but sensed that Fern did not want her to ask them just yet. She nodded and leant back, gazing up at the clouds dancing on the breeze.

Ava woke up. She blinked, her bleary eyes failing to pick up shapes in the darkness.

'Ava?'

The voice sounded urgent.

'Look out Ava!'

Ava rolled to one side just as an enormous pincer stabbed the ground beside her. Now very much awake, Ava leapt to her feet.

'Are you alright?'

Ava snapped her head around to see.... Fern! But the girl was limp and lifeless. Her beautiful face was pale and thick patches of her hair were missing.

"No!" Ava cried, "Who did this to you?"

As if in answer, a shape loomed out of the darkness. Two enormous pincers attached to a body supported by eight legs clicked against the floor. Horrifyingly, its head was a grotesque mirror of Fern's however, its eyes were hollowed, empty, and the mouth stretched into a menacing smile.

'Ava...'

Ava's head began to throb, and the voice no longer whispered but hissed; 'I wasn't expecting visitors.'

"Let her go!" Ava screamed. Ignoring her, the crab-like monster turned away. Ava ran to Fern.

"What is that thing?" The girl didn't answer but allowed Ava to heave her to her feet.

'Carcinos, stop.'

The crab-monster paused, then, without warning, shot out a pincer, grabbed Fern around her middle and began to squeeze.

'Had enough?'

Ava's head was searing, the voices were merging; one moment Fern's whisper, the next Carcinos' hiss. She sunk to the ground, overcome by pain. Through blurred vision, Ava watched the beast clench tighter. Fern seemed to shrink. Her hair began to fall out in dramatic clumps, her face paled, and bones began to show through her skin. The beast on the other hand, grew in strength and size; filling the cavern. Ava struggled to her feet, charging at the beast, trying to prise the pincers open but was tossed roughly aside. Again and again, Ava kicked at Carcinos' legs, willing it to give in. Eventually, realising her efforts were hopeless, she stopped, took Fern's limp hand and held it gently.

"I'm not leaving you."

Carcinos chortled and though Ava's head screamed with discomfort, she did not let go.

'Well, do you give in?'

Ava squeezed her eyes shut, resisting the urge to do as the monster wanted. Just as she thought she could take it no longer, Fern's quiet whisper cut through;

'Never.'

'This is the eleven fifteen service to Hazelwood. Calling at...'

Ava opened her eyes. The sky was dark, and a train was pulling into a platform. Her platform. The doors opened and a familiar figure stepped out. Her eyes were a sparkling emerald, freckles lined her pale face and thin ginger hair fell to her shoulders. She held out her hand.



Illustrated by Christabel Adjei 7PA

Untitled

Keziah Amponsah 7SP

Within the woven tapestry of night and day,
Reality and imagination dance and sway.
Whispers of truth meld with lies untold,

Imagination's brush paints the sky above,
With hues of wonder, infused with fallaciousness
Each star dimmer than the last,
Until all hope fades with the infinite void

Reality's grip holds us in its earthly embrace,
Yet, with that same hand, crushes humanity, no mercy shown.
Together we question what is and what is not,
But to no avail, the answer is lost; Reality strikes once more.

No matter how hard we try to deny,
This world cannot exist without the two.
Both contrast one another, both co-depend on each other
Where harsh truth meets sweet fraud, intertwined

And so, we walk this fine line between actuality and perception,
Where reality and illusion are together, hand in hand.
For life itself is a blend of what is seen and unseen,
A wondrous mix of chaos and serene.

The Divine Tree of Trees

Izzah Fatimah 8KA - winner

THUD.

A loud thud ricocheted like a gunshot in the hallway, causing its ear-splitting noise to startle me, waking me up from my sleep. Frantically, I stand up and furtively shuffle towards my room door. My heart is palpitating anxiously, my legs trembling in fear. Cautiously, I open the door, wary not to make any noise. As I'm about to step outside, I feel a raging headache kick me in the head. I clutch my head in agony, squeezing my eyes shut. Vibrant, flashing colours are dancing around my vision and my breathing becomes irregular. I stumble against the doorframe as my surroundings begin to blur. The world around me begins to fade away.

"The Darkness consumed the world as I witnessed the fate I was destined to see." I hear a voice echo vaguely.

I feel myself falling into an endless abyss. I notice that everything around me has changed as realisation hits me. I'm not in my room anymore. I'm plummeting down what seems to be a network of portals. Through each portal I see various realms connected to one another. My heart drops: I'm drowning in a sea of kaleidoscopic stars, struck by a thousand thunderous lightning bolts. Suddenly, I feel my back slam against hard ground, the intensity of the fall sending a throbbing pain pulsating down my spine. Slowly, I stand up and observe my new surroundings.

ALL I SEE IS CHAOS. DESTRUCTION. DEVASTATION.

The grass beneath me is burned and downturned, the flowers that looked like they once bloomed with the essence of nature are now nothing but remnants of a forgotten life. The trees bare no leaves, their branches creek dejectedly, hoping silently for their leaves to return. A town that looked like it was once bustling and lively now left in nothing but ruins, houses that once belonged to families now embedded into the dry soil, crumbling into pieces. The earth that once sustained living cells now split open, revealing the boiling magma beneath. Lava seeps from the ground, engulfing anything it comes into contact with. Colossal, crimson cubes come crashing down from the ashy sky, colliding with the ground. Bright, blazing flames flicker beneath the crimson cubes, igniting an amber wrath of heat. My heart sinks into my stomach acid, dissolving it. If humanity even existed here, it's been cloaked by pure evilness overshadowing this dimension. My mind screams at me to turn back and run, to escape this treachery, and I listen. I run like the wind without a destination, like prey evading from nothing. Tears spill from my eyes like a river freeing itself from the dam it's been confined in. My lungs collapse, my throat encloses. Wearily, I grasp my knees and desperately gasp for air. Clenching my fists, I dare myself to look ahead, however, something peculiar catches my attention. A small glint of light hovers above my head, like a firefly in the darkest of nights. As I reach out my shaking hand to touch it, rays of different shades of green spark and the tiny light transforms into a glowing portal to a new realm.

Astonished by the experience, I stagger backwards. Hesitantly, I walk towards the portal and gaze at the breathtaking scenery inside of it. Rosy petals flutter in the cool atmosphere, landing atop the branches of a tremendous, dazzling tree trunk. The tree's golden aura radiates, effortlessly illuminating the entire dimension. Large, steep mountains surround the tree so that they are intimidating giants protecting it.



Unlike what I had previously witnessed, this world blossoms with the essence of nature and life, the glow of the tree revitalizing every fibre of my being. The realm entices me; it invites me inside its majestic world of peace. Captivated by its beauty, I enter the portal and feel myself falling into the same abyss that sent me to the previous nightmarish dimension. However, as I plunge down into the starry abyss, every realm surrounding me vanishes one by one. I land in a black void of space with nothing but a smaller version of the tree I saw in the portal.

Illustrated by Sophie Mercer 9PA

Standing in front of the tree is a small girl with sleek, angelic white hair that sways without the need of wind. She wears an emerald-green silky dress that flows down her tiny back, glistening like a diamond held in front of the sun. As she holds out her hands, a thousand leaves swirl around her like a tornado endlessly gyrating around a fixed point.

“World, forget me”. The girl speaks softly.

I feel a cold gush of wind blow over my face, waking me up. Startled, I sit up to find myself in the same exact spot where I had passed out. Everything I witnessed felt like a fever dream and yet I'm so convinced that it was real, that there is some kind of symbolic meaning behind this. My bones still feel weak, my legs still quivering. Where was I? Who was that girl I saw? Everything happened so fast I still feel my head spinning. The world feels abnormally silent. The birds have stopped tweeting, the cars have stopped honking, the conversations between people outside have stopped. I still feel an ominous presence nearby yet so far away.

Lethargically, I stand up and amble towards the kitchen to grab some pills when I notice something strange placed on the counter. A bundle of leaves are piled on top of each other and beside the leaves, a crumpled note lies. I pick up the note and as I read it, I freeze in terror. I want to scream until my vocal cords strain, until my blood stops flowing from a lack of oxygen, and I die, because I'd rather be dead right now than see what I'm seeing.

“This is only the beginning.”

The Woman in the Nightmare

Riya Juggoo 8LO

Another night, the same usual concept I had to deal with. That figure, a gloomy, ominous creature of some sort, visited me in my sleep all the time and the doctor said it was normal for this to occur. But that pestering sensation denied that feeling.

My sleep paralysis went on continuously with no closure to it, until this one night everything changed. Every night, I visualised the silhouette in the corner of my bedroom, its eyes fixed and glaring at me, inanimate, as if it lingered to suddenly leap on me. I always got the feeling that one day that figure would come for me and that the sleep paralysis was just a warning.

Whilst I couldn't move, my body felt like a heavy force was being pushed onto my chest, which almost proceeded to snatch the living soul out of me. Suddenly, the sinister figure ducked down and began to crawl towards my bed in an unsettling manner. A huge grin began to spread across its face and stopped at its ashy cheeks. It came closer and closer, and I got a glimpse for a second to see the creature's true appearance. The creature's face was covered with its ebony hair that swung mildly from its face. Aghast, I allowed my eyes to look the other way. I sensed that I swallowed an orb of dread and uneasiness. My hands started to tremble in an act of convulsion as I looked back at the creature obligingly. Now, it was right in front of my face exactly four inches away whilst I could make out a few features including it glaring into my eyes, its eyes bloodshot, its mouth opened with its yellow, triangular teeth, patiently waiting for the right time to have consumed me whole. What was peculiar and quaint about this night was when a gush of relief unfolded as I recalled what the doctor had told me to do to escape from this event. He told me to wiggle my toes as hard as I could, it felt strange because this was the one and only solution that I evoked for the past two years. With all my remaining strength that I had left, I began wiggling my toes as hard as I could, I prayed that this would all be over. The creature slowly began to crawl backwards but not to the corner of my bedroom but into my locked wardrobe, the one that was strictly forbidden from being opened...

'How bizarre,' I thought to myself and brushed the feeling off, well at least it had worked, or so I thought.

Next morning, I awoke and breathed a sigh of solace, I rubbed my eyes and sat up. I pulled the duvet off me and the nightmare from last night rushed down as I got up and conquered my mind and my emotions commenced tormenting me. Curiosity got the better of me, and I instantly knew I had to discover what had been hidden for so long. Since the door was locked, I couldn't get in, but I remembered keeping a lockpick in my desk drawer just in case. I grabbed it and thrust it into the padlock, I twisted it around until I heard a click. Eagerly, I tugged the door open only to see an abnormal figure, covered with a long, discoloured cloth... A putrid, foul odour followed, it reeked of a rotten corpse. I vigilantly proceeded to pull the cloth to see what it concealed exactly. Up tightly, I started pulling it away gently however that same foreboding feeling managed to prick me like a needle... I paused, then pulled it off in one go. My heart skipped a beat, I felt I couldn't breathe.

I took a closer look at it to only discover that it looked awfully like the figure in my dreams. Like my mother...

The memory dawned on me. I screamed and slammed the wardrobe door shut. How did it arrive here? I swear to God it wasn't present here at the time of the murder. Recalling the memory, I had gotten rid of it with Father a long time ago, he must have placed it here before anyone discovered anything, since no one had the key except for my father.

I grabbed the phone off the table and dialled my father's number. Luckily, he picked up.

"Hello, Joanna. What is it?" he said in a raspy voice.

"Hey Father, look I'm sorry but I used the lockpick to open the locked wardrobe in my bedroom. Why did you lock it? Why's Mother's body in the locked wardrobe, you told me you buried it, what if they find out it was us?" I screamed in rage.

"Joanna, I told you not to open the wardrobe, you weren't meant to touch it, I gave you the lockpick for another reason not for unlocking the wardrobe! Relax and stop asking me questions for goodness' sake, I told everyone that knew your mother that she committed suicide remember? You played your role at the funeral and so did I. Do us a favour and keep your mouth shut about this. I don't want to talk about this anymore don't call me back if it has anything to do with this unless it's extremely urgent. Ok? Got that?" my father shouted back.

"Fine, I guess we'll just have to leave it like this then," I replied softly, tears threatening to flood my cheeks, but I did my best to keep them at bay and declined the call and slammed the phone on my desk behind me. I picked up the padlock from my desk and turned around to see the figure right at my face with that same glare, its presence towering over me now its hair out of its face. Was it alive? No, it wasn't alive, I comprehended it was a vengeful spirit. It hit me that the figure and the creature I saw in my sleep paralysis and the one that stood right in front of me was my dead Mother, the one my father and I with our bare hands...

Then, my mother let out an ear-splitting screech in my face.

I can't remember anything after that. All I know is that my neighbour came to check on us after a few days after not hearing anything from me. He had a spare key, as I gave it to him since he lived just next door, and I trusted him more than the other neighbours because they were friends with my dead Mother. When he came to check on us, he found me unconscious.

So here I am, laying here in the hospital pondering with many thoughts going through my head. About what happened that night and the message it finally delivered to me over the past two years. An occurrence returning as a deed of revenge.

That's my story, the neighbour never found out about the body, but he did notice the smell, he didn't check it fortunately, I regret opening the wardrobe, but I don't regret what I did. Everybody has dark secrets that they'll do anything to keep from coming to light...



Illustrated by Christabel Adjei 7PA

The Escape

Precious Mwema 8FI

Mentored by Maia Waller-Sanchez 12FI

Lucas stared out the classroom window, his pencil tapping idly against his notebook as Mrs. Perkins droned on about the French Revolution. Outside, the sun was shining brightly, and he could see the other kids playing football on the field. He sighed wistfully, wishing he could be out there with them instead of stuck inside listening to another history lecture.

Suddenly, an idea began to form in Lucas' mind. What if he could escape the confines of the classroom and transport himself to a different world entirely? One where he wasn't bound by the strict schedules and rules of school, but free to explore and adventure as he pleased.

Closing his eyes, Lucas let his imagination take over.

Lush vibrant forests flooded his mind, the sound of rushing water and leaves surrounding him. Tall, ancient trees reaching up to a brilliant azure sky, and the chirping of exotic birds filling the air. He could almost feel the warm breeze on his face and smell the earthy scent of the foliage. Slowly, the drone of Mrs. Perkins' voice and the familiar hum of the fluorescent lights began to fade away, replaced by the sights and sounds of this imagined paradise. With a small smile, Lucas opened his eyes, half-expecting to find himself in the magical forest.

But instead, he was still sitting at his desk, the classroom unchanged. "Lucas? Is everything alright? Mrs. Perkins' voice cut through his reverie.

"Uh, yeah, sorry. I was just...thinking," Lucas replied, quickly jotting down a few notes to appear engaged.

For a moment, disappointment washed over him. But then he realised - the forest, the freedom, the adventure, it had all been real. Just not in the physical sense. As the lesson continued, Lucas found himself drifting off into his imagination once more. This time, he pictured himself soaring high above the treetops, riding on the back of a majestic, fire-breathing dragon. The creature's powerful wings carried them swiftly through the sky, and Lucas felt an exhilarating sense of freedom. Sure, this world existed only in his mind, but to Lucas that was what made it more wonderful. Here, he could escape the monotony of the classroom and the constraints of reality. With the power of his imagination, he could be anyone, go anywhere, and experience things far beyond the limits of the physical world. When the bell finally rang, Lucas gathered his things, a newfound sense of purpose bubbling within him. Who needed to be stuck in a boring old classroom when the vast expanse of the imagination lay before him, waiting to be explored?

As Lucas made his way to his next lesson, his mind was racing with ideas and possibilities. He thought about the fantastical realms he had already conjured in his mind—the lush forest, the majestic dragon - and wondered what other wonders he could create.

Maybe he could imagine himself as a brave knight, embarking on a quest to slay a fearsome dragon and rescue a beautiful princess. Or he could envision a futuristic city, complete with hovercrafts and advanced technology that defied the limitations of the present day.

The more Lucas contemplated the power of his imagination, the more excited he became. It was as if the physical world had suddenly become dull and limiting, while the worlds he could craft in his mind were endlessly vibrant and full of potential.

During his lunch break, Lucas found a quiet spot in the schoolyard and settled down under a large oak tree. Closing his eyes, he began to focus his mind, allowing it to wander and explore. Within moments, he was transported to a sprawling desert landscape, the hot sun beating down on him as he navigated the endless dunes. As he walked, Lucas could feel the coarse sand beneath his feet and the warm wind rustling his hair. In the distance, he spotted a shimmering oasis, its lush palm trees and glistening pool of water beckoning him forward. Driven by thirst and curiosity, he picked up his pace, his heart racing with anticipation. When he finally reached the oasis, Lucas knelt and cupped his hands, scooping up the cool, refreshing water and taking a long, satisfying drink. As the liquid quenched his thirst, he felt a deep sense of contentment wash over him. This was his world, his creation, and he was free to explore it as he pleased.

Suddenly, a loud bell shattered the peaceful silence, and Lucas' eyes snapped open. He was back in the schoolyard, the familiar sights and sounds of reality rushing back to him. Letting out a disappointed sigh, he headed to his next class, his mind still lingering in the desert oasis he had just experienced. Over the next few days, Lucas found himself increasingly drawn into the world of his imagination. During lessons, he would close his eyes and visualise himself in fantastical realms, escaping the monotony of the classroom. In the hallways, he would imagine himself as a daring superhero, leaping across rooftops and battling villains. His teachers noticed a change in his behaviour, remarking that he seemed distracted and disengaged. But Lucas couldn't help it—the real world had become dull and uninspiring, a mere shadow compared to the vibrant and limitless worlds he could conjure in his mind.

One afternoon, as Lucas was walking home from school, he passed by a small, unassuming bookstore. Something about the worn, wooden sign and the cosy-looking window display caught his eye, and on a whim, he decided to step inside. The air was thick with the scent of old books, and Lucas found himself drawn to a shelf in the back corner labelled "Fiction". Scanning the spines, his gaze settled on a worn, leather-bound volume with the title "The Never-Ending Story" etched in gold lettering. Intrigued, Lucas pulled the book from the shelf and flipped it open, his eyes immediately captivated by the vivid descriptions and imaginative world that unfolded before him. As he read, he felt a sense of kinship with the protagonist, Bastian, who also struggled to find his place in the real world and longed to escape into the magical realm of Fantasia. With each passing page, Lucas' own world began to expand, and he found himself transported to the fantastical landscapes of Bastian's imagination. He could almost feel the wind in his hair as he rode atop the mighty dragon, Falkor, and could hear the soothing melody of the Childlike Empress' voice. For a brief, magical moment, time seemed to stand still. As the sun began to set, the lines between reality and imagination blurred.

When he finally emerged from the book, Lucas found himself feeling both exhilarated and contemplative. The world of Fantasia had resonated with him on a profound level, reminding him of the power and beauty that could be found in the depths of the imagination. As he made his way home, Lucas couldn't help but wonder about the nature of reality and the role that imagination played in shaping our perceptions and experiences. Was the physical world truly "real", or were the worlds we created in our minds just as valid and worthy of exploration? These questions continued to occupy his thoughts, and as the days passed, Lucas found himself becoming increasingly drawn to the realm of imagination. He spent hours upon hours lost in his own mental creations, weaving intricate stories and scenarios that allowed him to escape the limitations of the physical world.

Another day, as Lucas was walking through the park, he happened to glance up at the sky. To his amazement, he saw a familiar, magical creature soaring overhead – Falkor. The creature's scales glimmered in the sunlight, and its powerful wings carried it gracefully through the air. For a moment, Lucas was uncertain whether this was real or another figment of his imagination. But as he watched the dragon disappear into the distance, he realised that it didn't matter. The line between reality and imagination had become blurred, and now, they were the same.

From that day forward, Lucas embraced the power of his imagination, using it not just as a means of escape, but to enhance his understanding and appreciation of the world around him. As he continued to lose himself in the pages of "The Never-ending story", Lucas began to apply the lessons he'd learned to his own life. Lucas came to understand that the worlds he created in his mind held just as much validity and meaning as the physical reality he encountered every day. He started to view the mundane aspects of his life through a new lens, finding beauty and wonder in the most ordinary of moments. The simple act of walking to school became an adventure, as Lucas imagined himself navigating treacherous landscapes or soaring high above the rooftops. His teachers, who had once expressed concern about his disengagement, now marvelled at the depth of his understanding and the creativity he brought to his assignments. They couldn't help but notice the transformation that had taken place, as Lucas' once listless demeanour gave way to a vibrant, imaginative spirit. Sometimes, he would even share these imaginative visions with his family and friends, delighting them with the vivid details and captivating narratives he had brought to life. They marvelled at the way he could transport them to these imaginary worlds, and many of them expressed a desire to join him on his journeys.

As Lucas grew older, he began to recognize the profound impact that his imagination had on his life. It had enriched his perspectives, expanded his understanding, and ignited a deep sense of creativity within him. Just as Bastian had learned, Lucas came to understand that the line between the imagined and the real was not as distinct as it might have seemed.

As he looked back on the journey that had led him to this point, Lucas couldn't help but feel a profound sense of gratitude for the power of imagination. It had opened a whole new realm of possibilities, and he knew that he would continue to explore and harness its potential for the rest of his life.

Echoes of Lost Voices

Mehnaz Alam 8PA

She sat at the heart of the once quiet suburban town, meticulously gazing at the iridescent lights that flashed upon her frosty face. The sharp snowflakes raucously pierced into her skin like daggers; penetrating down into her brittle bones. Underneath the bench she was resting on lay a once crystal, calm river that now had become an endless stream of the blood of innocent civilians who wanted nothing more than peace. An unsettling mist crept into the area, shrouding the place in a blanket of grey. The tumbling clouds alone provided her shelter. Who? You may ask. Iyra Awad. The impenetrable shroud covered the naked trees, sparing them from embarrassment, whose colossal branches reached out towards Iyra, as though they had a desperation to catch her soul. On and on, and on, and on, the cannibalistic winds ate away at Iyra's freckled tanned skin as if waiting for the perfect opportunity to engulf its next victim whilst matting her curls into an everlasting ball of thick hay. The brew stirred away once more, and another for good measure. Time stood still.

On and on, and on, and on. A deafening silence passed over the never-ending expanse. This place, once a home to many, and now just a lifeless graveyard. Every moment of their life had led to this very moment where everyone is seen as equal. No matter man, woman or child, this was the only place where everyone was just the same. Just a dead body. This was a place of murder and loss but yet somehow still a community, where all the hundreds of lost souls lay.

The sky sent down a swarm of rain which gushed down salty, resentful tears- holding back no mercy. Iyra couldn't help but cry too. The laughter of naive children in the distance splashing in the puddles filled the air. Iyra cupped the water and drank it whilst using the rest to wash the remaining smoke from the bombs off her face that her tears hadn't cleaned already. It was only source of clean water they had seen in weeks. Suddenly, a glowing medallion in the sky beamed down and wiped away the tears of Earth. Iyra looked up to see an almost blinding fireball of golden illumination. It looked as if it were the gates of heaven. And that's when Iyra saw her, her Maa. Walking down the stairs of eternal paradise, the bright amber light bounced off Iyra's Maa's glowy skin. She was beautiful as ever.

Iyra felt a warm embrace of comfort wrapped around every inch of her. It was a feeling she had never felt before and still the best feeling she had ever felt. Her breath was stolen- not from the embrace but from the realisation that her prayers had actually been granted. That her Maa's arms were actually around her once again. Her Maa pulled away and stroked Iyra's wet cheeks whilst planting a kiss on her forehead.



Illustrated by Khadeeja Ghafori 7FI

Then, a sudden darkness covered the sky. Iyra peered up to see the glowing gates had vanished. She then looked down to see her Maa slowly dissipating into thin air. Frantically, Iyra tried to grab her with all her might, but she was gone. It was like losing her all over again. But then Iyra realised that this was a gift. A gift sent down by God to show her that she had to couldn't give up, she had to keep fighting, she had to have hope. For Maa.

The Ghost Mansion

Javeria Ahmed 8FI

In the heart of the night, I found myself lost in a fathomless labyrinth of vast trees grimacing at my countenance. The moon, a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas, casted an eerie glow on the forest floor. The ominous silence was insinuated by my own footsteps echoing through demoniacal canopy.

Suddenly, out of the inky blackness, a mansion loomed, an unexpected apparition. It was a monolith from another era, its stone walls weathered by time, windows like hollow eyes staring into the abyss. My feet were obliged to go forward into the mysteries of trepidation like a moth drawn to a flame.

As I ventured around the mansion, the air grew denser, heavy with the scent of age and secrets long forgotten. The mansion breathed a heavy gust, its walls pulsating with a strange life of its own. Doors creaked open of its own accord, revealing rooms shrouded in darkness. Shadows danced on the walls, taking on grotesque forms that made my heart pound in my chest.

Then, whispers crept around, growing with each passing moment. They seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere, a symphony of voices that filled the silence. I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, a convulsion of terror running down my spine.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw it - a shadow, darker than the surrounding gloom. It moved with an unnatural grace, a spectre in the periphery of my vision. I could feel my pulse quicken, my breath hitching in my throat.

And then, I felt it. A terrifying black hand, cold as death itself, creeping onto my shoulder. It was a touch that promised despair, a chilling caress that froze my blood. I could feel the darkness closing in, the whispers growing louder, the mansion's secrets threatening to consume me.

Dear Imagination

Ruby Hopkins-Newland 8SP

Dear imagination,
You gift me dreams of falling in love,
Dreams of a sweet release.
Where I am treated like a precious dove,
my fears and doubts simply decrease.

The reality is merely a fraction of that.
It is barely even a smidge.
In real life you must be ready for combat,
be prepared to be pushed off a bridge.

My imagination runs loose and wild,
Giving me a life I long for.
The reality is at best mild,
Where all true issues go untouched,
Left to rot in a drawer.

Don't dare to unleash what is hidden,
It likes to hide behind a mask.
Perfectly crafted to keep thoughts forbidden.
People are forced to lie and say they're 'fine',

But do you accept the task?

Dear imagination,
Why do you never wrong me?
Never set me up for failure.
Why don't you realise you can never be?
You are not reality's saviour.

The Line

Rosie Price 8PA

Reality the world we change every day,
What we see is true.
A picture of events we see through our eyes,
The memories in the past cannot be changed,
While the future can be varied through the path we take.
The positives and negatives we battle through day to day
Reality the love and the hate, the hopes, and fears.

Imaginations the escapism of real life
The big dreams what we want to achieve,
Where anything is possible.
A world which can drift you away from what is happening,
Which distracts you from the worries, woes, and fears.
Gives you a chance of what may come true
Imagination which may lead to a happily ever after for reality.

The line that borders imagination and reality,
How we live our lives can be driven from fantasy and desires.
Can they ever cross over?

Between Reality & Reverie: A Journey with Jane Austen

Hilal Karani 9FI - winner

In 1813, I was in the country of Hampshire, deep inside a grassy environment when I, Jane Austen got lost in the labyrinthine of my mind. At my desk with my quill, I could easily change myself into Elizabeth Bennet's persona, whom I loved so much. Longbourn's vast drawing room appeared around me and there I was, engaged in a heated debate with the arrogant Mr Darcy. His severe expression was at odds with my quick wit but there was something besides that we joked about which made things tense. In every word spoken between us, a flame burned brighter and fiercer within me in an adrenaline rush only known by creationists.

Naturally, I woke up from this trance as the sun set behind mountains bringing back to reality the study where I sat alone. The transition from the lively corridors of Longbourn to the empty shell of a cottage seemed abrupt and confusing. But it didn't matter because all the Actors' true lives started here; in silence.

Beneath the long-awaited arrival of the glaring sun, the morning came softly illuminating dew-kissed petals on flowers grown in my verdant garden. Walking outside allowed me to bathe fully into the beauties of nature cascading gleefully around me. Without a doubt, as much as I admired what was happening beyond my windowsill, I couldn't keep away thinking about what had occurred – a world full of love, mystery and endless possibilities...

Strolling back through the Meryton market square once again embodying Elizabeth Bennet as I did during ordinary life. The stalls were colourful; the traders' calls were loud – an image from my dream. Still, as I haggled over the price of ribbons, a kind of fear started creeping into me. The lines between reality and make-believe became fainter, so that I felt a bittersweet thrill and confusion ran through me.

Later on, once starting to feel at home in my cottage, in front of a fireplace - where warmth defeated cold evening airwaves. At least that's what I thought when I saw flames cast moving shadows across dark walls. Viewing all this, something kept whispering to me deep inside about how much I yearned for my imaginary world to be true. My characters breathed within me since they were always there, even though their voices reverberated in the quietness around.

Each night folded over me like a velvet blanket of darkness when I stretched out in bed. Each event played over and over again in my mind during reminiscences, with each scene etched vividly in my memory. It seemed as if the world of Longbourn was more real to me than it had ever been before with its residents lodging themselves somewhere deep down my imagination and taking on personas.

With the first light of dawn, I awoke to find myself once more in my own bed, the morning sun casting a warm glow across the room. Reality beckoned, pulling me back from the depths of my deceitful imagination. Yet, as I rose to face the beckoning day, I carried with me the echoes of another world – a world where love and laughter reigned supreme, and anything was possible.

When I emerged from the comfort of my bed, the rope between reality and fantasy snapped. Every heavy step I took felt like treading the delicate balance between the world I lived in and the universe I had created. My imagination intertwined with me tangling like DNA strands, its atoms binded with mine in ways

I could barely comprehend. Throughout the day, as I went about my work and responsibilities, snippets of dialogue and lines from my novels played like clear canvases in my mind and it was like the mundane tasks of daily life, pale in comparison to the vibrant and unpredictable macrocosm of my imagination.

Even as I connected with endeared friends and family, a part of me remained attached to the prominent images that captured my heart. In the quieter moments of the evening, I sat back at my desk and found comfort in the act of creation. With the crash of my quill, I breathed life into people who became as real to me as flesh and blood. Longbourne, Pemberley, Meriton – these places existed not only in the pages of my novels but also in the spaces of my imagination, waiting to be explored and inhabited by those who dared to dream them. As the night wore on and the candles flickered dimly, I once again surrendered to my fantasy world. In the darkness of my studies, surrounded by the ghosts from the past, I found a sanctuary from the trials and tribulations of the outside world. Here, in my own mind's eye, I was free to roam landscapes of my own incarnation, guided by the whims of my imagination.

And when the clock struck midnight and the outside world went peacefully to sleep, I awoke lost in a world of my own making. For in the realms of fiction, reality and imagination were not so easily distinguished – they were merely different facets of the same wondrous tapestry, waiting to be unravelled and explored by those with the courage to dream.

As midnight whispered deeply into the misty night's air, her solemn breaths echoing through the silence of my cottage, the peace was shattered by a sudden knock at the door. My pulsating heart clenched in my chest, torn between the distractions of my mind and the overwhelming unconscious. I got up from the table with convulsing hands and walked to the door, its grating hinges sending shivers down my spine. Who can be present here at this hour? With a deep breath, I opened the door, and was met by a figure in black with sparkling eyes of unspeakable mystery, and in that moment, I realised that the threads between reality and fantasy were far thinner than I had ever dared imagine.



Illustrated by Sathini Siriwardena 9SP

Time Passes by Me

Mayza Abdulkadir 9SP

A consuming feeling of my destiny being set in stone is suddenly latching onto me, as I see no way of escaping my cruel fate. Despairing for life before death, waves of echoes of my laughter and past joy bounce off the blank white canvas of a lonesome void I find myself in. In this moment, I feel nothing but severe anguish and a distant slowing down thudding in my now glacial, lifeless heart. The ground beneath me starts to tremor and thin as it tears like fabric, its macabre hands dragging me under, asphyxiating me. Half-sunken, I see an older version of myself, unbeknownst to what fate holds for them. An extra-terrestrial presence passes by me, and, in the fullness of time, it dawns on me what has occurred, too late to stop it, too weak to try, too solemn to prove it. Time passes by me.



Illustrated by Apollo Frade 12AN

Eleven at Night

Kaylah Broomes 9SP

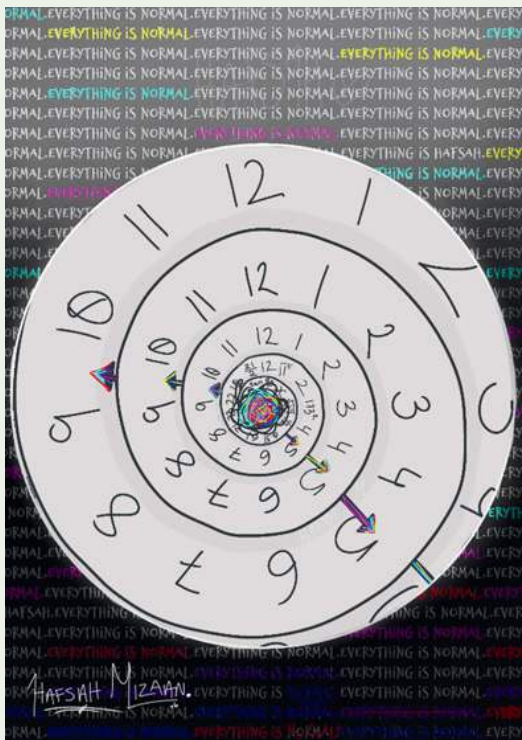
Mentored by Mia Clifford 12FI & Heike Ghandi 12 FI

11pm. My grandfather clock chimed.

Nothing but a melancholy, shadow black sky outside, with the glimpse of the neon glowing moon, little to no reflection off my diamond eyes. A sign that the once glimmering and sunshine day was done. I shut my eyes, seeing nothing but pure darkness as my thoughts of that day swirled around my head.

An eternity had passed. A familiar chime caught my ear's attention, 11pm on the grandfather clock. Strange. I had fallen asleep at that time. That didn't seem right. I forced myself out of my cotton, mint green, soft bed. Silence. Creak. Creak. Creak. No sound going or coming out of either ear, except the slow creaking of my footsteps treading on every floorboard. Without a second thought, I sprinted downstairs to check the calendar. It had fallen onto the cracked floor, almost piercing through one. April 11th. My already racing heart began pounding at miles per hour. How did I end up back to yesterday?

Everything seemed exactly like yesterday, apart from one crucial detail.



Illustrated by Hafsah Mizaan 9KA

From feeling extreme panic from my nerves, all I wanted to do was sit down. It felt like I was spinning in a continuous loop for minutes if not, hours. Nothing was in my view apart from the fallen calendar and the cloudy grey coloured room that felt it had been closing me in with every passing second. Everywhere seemed bare. Empty. Far too still. A chill went up my spine as an echo went in my ear.

“Wake up, time to get up!” it yelled. Where was it coming from? Who was there? Why was it here?

Suddenly a soft feather touch wrapped around my entire body. Sage green walls, cotton green weighted blanket, it seemed like it could be my room. Creeping out of bed trying not to make a sound, I turned to the grandfather clock one more time. 11am, it chimed. Where did all that time go? What about downstairs? Furniture filling the cloudy grey coloured room to the brim as normal.

The wooden table where we spill all the juiciest details about our days at dinnertime, the cobalt blue sofa that we watch game shows on every Friday night. April 12th. The calendar hung up on the wall as normal. As normal.

Subconscious

Stephanie Mapalagama 9SP

I took a long, hoarse deep breath, contemplating my whirlpool of thoughts. I can't remember too much; I am not even aware of the reason I am here in the first place. They told me they would only take me in for questioning and they said it would be they would let me go but despite it all... I have been Isolated. Surrounded. Accused.

"Now Miss Elista, you know that you are being recorded at this moment and being viewed by your attorney, I hope you realise saying a false statement has serious consequences and therefore you must refrain from lying."

My breathing abruptly stops. I try with every morsel of my being to keep my nerves intact...well at least on the outside. Almost paralysed to my seat, eyes shot down and I find this exhilarating feeling rush through my body and seeping into my veins and poisoning my blood.

I am only aware that I am seated in a small, enclosed room, familiarity taking its form in the tainted white paint of the hallway, I can see through the crack in the door. A tall, thin male, whom I recognise immediately from a prior interview, sits directly across from me, his eyes accusing. I don't allow myself to meet them in the fear that I'll face my reality all too soon. I'm not ready. At least not yet. His rough course voice entrances me in a way I can only describe as surreal, I know what he thinks I did, I can hear it in the way he communicates his disdain as if I'm worth less than nothing.

My thoughts further solidified as my eyes find their way staring at a pair of leather, dusty brown knife-like shoes. Two thick slabs of leather sewn tightly together by a slithering lace winding through small holes and entangling themselves just below his ankles. I believe he is as stern as his choice of footwear. He begins to talk once again, and I find my hands curling up by my sides whilst I further cave into the shell I've delicately crafted over a lifetime.

"Please refrain from slouching and maintain eye contact at all times," he breathes out. I swallow my fear and lean back against the chair as I allow it to support me, my eyes cutting him in half as they pierce right through a fake persona. I am disgusted at the very idea that these people have pegged me for a murderer and yet I sit here allowing them to think I had committed such a heinous crime. Why? You may ask...I can only respond one way. I don't remember. So, when he asked, "You claim you were witness, the only one, what were you doing." I remained silent.

I had only been to a police station once before. I'd reported him. He'd single handedly ruined my life, beyond what I could have ever comprehended, and yet he wasn't the one sitting across for this man. It was me.

I was sure I was innocent. That was until they showed me the tape. The same tape that encapsulated a very incriminating image. I was stood there holding a knife covered in blood seemingly...happy.

My voice trembles struggling to find the right words. I could see his smug face glaring back at me as if he had slumped me on my wild killer shopping spree. However, I was in shock, a million questions zooming through my head, but I only really wanted the answer to one question. Had it really been me?

I scramble to begin telling my story, because I know the man in this video, I know him all too well.



Illustrated by Aseel Arusi 12SP

Keith. I had been dating him for two years or so, we had been going on and off again every so often because he kept distancing me gradually from my friends. From my family. A single icy tear breaks way, paving meanders down my cheek, as I carefully recall the memories, I'd worked so hard to keep under lock and key, within the cage of my heart. I didn't realise it at first, how could I? he was so good at whisking me away to this fantasy world where he had promised me a better life, he made me believe...But. I gasp for the mere hope of an exhale. I couldn't, I just couldn't anymore. These memories encapsulate the darkest moments of my life, ones I don't wish to rehash, but as I stare back at the image of me looking cynical, I realise something isn't right, I am not right. I'll tell you who broke me. Keith Bennet. Now he's dead and I face a life of imprisonment. I laugh at the irony; I had always known he would be the end of me.

Rancorous

Esosa Edwards 9LO

I was always told that attention can be poison and indifference can be remedy. I felt those words be muttered mutely in my ears, filling my thoughts like the smoke of a cigar. Those worlds, I took to heart. Letting the humanity slip from my fingers like sand; the weight escaping me, making my soul lighter. Feeling light – tasted sweet. Not being weighed down by society's want of me and being who I am, was the ultimate freedom. My wings spreading out feather by feather, preparing for flight with the stars.

The voice from below was what inspired me to be a bird. My caretaker, a paunchy, pear-shaped woman always brought me back to earth. I'd be gliding, free of my cloth and mind; then she'd poison the water and I'd be back in the room. It was a clean room small and unwelcoming. However, I believe it was home. My parents, a rich couple from Poland, put me there - not wanting me to glide like I used to. They'd call me crazy and say that I need help and I'd always ask why. Why did they believe that I needed help? Was I not flying to their expectations? Then one day, I woke up in this room. I woke up to a puffy floor, my arms tied around me like a snake and my wings clipped back.

After an hour of waiting there, jumping around and being unable to soar, due to my wings' condition, a doctor came to see me. He talked to me, his voice was low and comforting. As if he understood me, I knew that this bird cage would only contain me for so long, before I broke out, before I was free. He smiled and my heart fluttered like my wings, I was hooked on his worlds like a fool. He slid me a cup of pills, without hesitation I took them, gulping them down like soup. I'd do anything for him.

That's how the week continued. I'd see him every day at 12:00pm and take the pills. Then many things changed around me, my vision distorted: the floors I realised were padded, my arms tied back with an elaborated coat, my wings gone. When I had informed him of my sudden condition, he smiled and tried to explain to me that it was all fake. A figment of my imagination, that I was human.

I was a defiant child, irritable and a downright wretch. From my earlier years, I picked up rather feral reflexes, lashing out when told something I disliked, I've always shown my actions indifferent to my others, if I do something wrong there's no need to punish myself. The only one that can punish me fairly is God.

I unhinged my jaw and bit into him, my teeth sinking into his forearm with ease.

Now that I took in his appearance, he was a rather skinny man, scrawny like a worm. He was pulling me backwards, trying to escape me, he remained my prey.

Crack!

My lips formed into a wide grin; it was an uncontrollable feeling. Ecstasy flew through me. It was felt good to hurt people. To have the power to hurt them to the degree of not being able to control their reaction to pain. To be superior in the only way that mattered. Brutality.

He screamed, a clamorous, petrified scream. I was not able to house a bird to tame, but neither was I an idiot. I was a wild bird. A primitive, primal winged beast. It was my fault to trust someone that was kind to me; I should've known better. Just as a snake has no arms to scratch you with, it doesn't mean it's safe: this doesn't exclude mankind.

Instantaneously, I feel the air be knocked out of my lungs. I was held down by two big men, both heavy and broad. My lungs burned, my teeth aching from being ripped from their target and the cooling sensation of his blood on my face made me feel sick. I was coming down with a fever, the weirdly warm but cold blood confusing my senses even more.

One of the men put his knee on my chest and then all I remember was the rabid struggle for breath.

When I woke up, I was gagged. My once talkative mind always chirping, was left reticent with no way to communicate. If my thoughts were not spoke aloud, I could not think at all. I was left like a broken, no one to listen to me – not even myself, now I understood what the quote meant. I tried to zone out, not wanting to recognise my current circumstance. It was embarrassing and felt pathetic, however at some point I'd slipped out of consciousness, a temporary remedy.

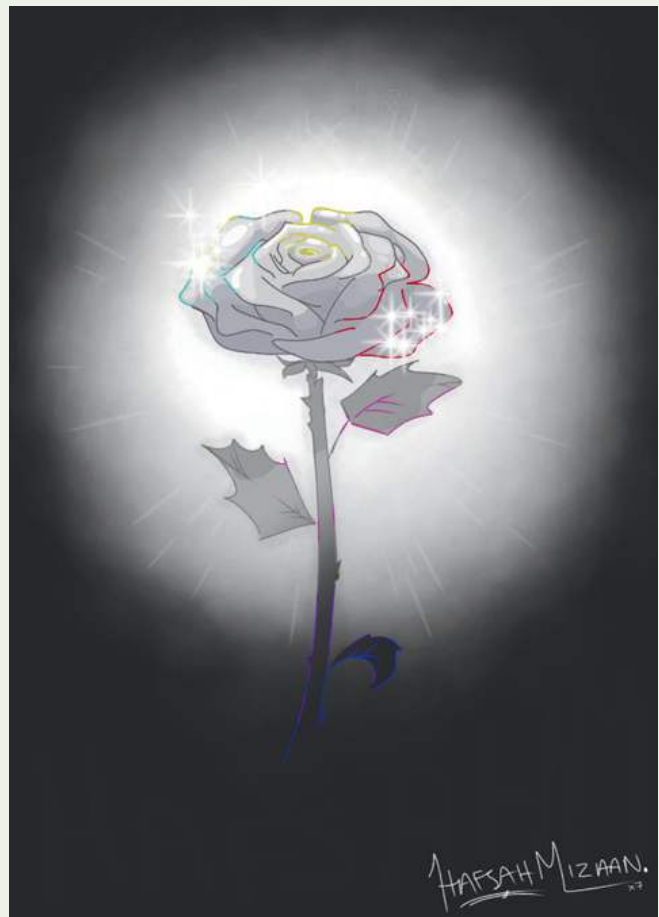
The Rose

Alev Kaylan 9SP - winner

Have you ever loved a rose,
And watched her slowly bloom;
And as her petals would unfold,
You grew drunk on her perfume.

Have you ever seen her dance,
Her leaves wet with dew;
And quivered with a new romance;
The wind he loved her too.

Have you ever loved a rose,
And bled against her thorns;
And swear each night to let her go,
Then love her more by dawn



Illustrated by Hafsah Mizaan 9KA

Balancing Worlds: Reality and Imagination

Princess Osei 9LO

Reality is a harsh truth we cannot deny,
Imagination is where we often choose to fly.

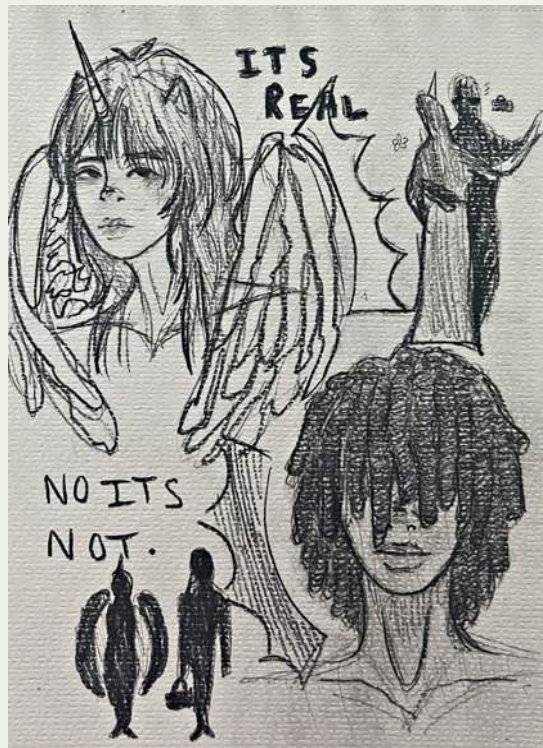
In the realm of dreams, we find
solace and Peace,
But reality reminds us, it's all just a tease.

Imagination lets us escape from the pain,
But reality brings us back again and again.
We long for the world of make-believe,
But reality is where we must live and breathe.

So, we dance between the two, reality and dreams,
Balancing the two extremes.
For in the end,
we must face the truth.
Reality vs Imagination, the eternal sleuth.

In the realm of dreams, where fantasies reign,
We find respite from life's relentless strain.
But reality's grasp is firm and true,
It calls us back, bidding dreams adieu.

Yet within our minds, imagination thrives,
Where limitless possibilities strive.
We sculpt worlds of wonder, free from strife,
Where we are architects of our own life.



Illustrated by Kainaat Yusufzai 8KA

Yet reality's demands cannot be ignored,
Its weighty presence cannot be deplored.
For amidst the dreams, we must tread with care,
Navigating the truths we must bear.

So, dance we must, in the space between,
Where reality and dreams meet.
For in this delicate balance we find,
The essence of being human, intertwined.

In the fluidity of movement,
We express our deepest emotions,
Our joys and sorrows,
Our hopes and fears.
With each step, we connect
To something greater than ourselves,
To the rhythm of the universe,
To the heartbeat of existence.

So, dance we must,
In celebration of life,
In defiance of despair,
In unity with all that is.

Behind the Scenes

Val Foshuene 9FI

Girls, girls, girls,
Filters, filters, filters,
Afraid, aware, watching,
All the people online.

Trying to set new trends,
Or match beauty standards all the time,
Always wanting more,
Trying to push us to explore
More things.

Telling us to change our looks,
Our personalities, and much more,
I always wanted to be one of those girls online,
With slicked back glossy hair,
And always shining with a smile

But I didn't know it would become toxic,
And soon, I realized it was all a show.
Nothing lasted, nothing worked,
Why couldn't I just be like them?

Makeup, makeup, makeup
I was always trying to cover up myself
Afraid of my insecurities
That always worried me tirelessly too
No natural beauty was left to shine
It was covered up, like it was a part of demise
But to online it did seem perfectly fine
But to me it just didn't seem right.

Every single day, every single night,
It felt like I was stuck on rewind,
Walking to school, trying to mirror those online,
But it never worked,
And soon, I was not myself.

Trapped, insecure, identity crisis,
I just didn't know what to do,
Frustrated and humiliated
Is what I felt.

I'm ugly, I'm ugly, I'm ugly,
continuously ran through my mind.
Can't you see?

I was constantly blind from all the new things set online

Oh, my word, I don't know who I am anymore

Help me, help me, help me,
What do you want me to do?
To become beautiful like you?
But they never answered,
Never replied,
And I was left as a broken mess.
With unseen dreams.
And I still wondered all the time
Why they even bothered to deceive us online.
Behind the scenes

God(s) of Destruction

Saambave Thileepkumar 10AN - winner

It was 2030. Ever since February 2022, America and her fellow allies had invariably been involved in Russia's affairs. He banged the desk raucously with his sausage-like hands.

"Sooner or later, we must attack!" declared the president of the United States of America. "Before Russia launches with something unexpected!"

Another politician blew his cigar. Silk creases of a thousand curved lines complemented his pale face as a sooty snake slithered out from his mouth. Peering over the president's response with his oceanic eyes, he replied. "Our nation must never be defeated by Russia! Several drops of our most domineering nuclear weapons, we will annihilate these communists within lightning speed."

Everyone in the conference room roared triumphantly for their patriotic nation. 'We must prevent the spread of his desire to bring back the Russian empire,' cried the president. 'And to do so, we will utilise our nuclear bombs! For America will forever hold victory!'

The roaring continued. An assembly of jet-black suits, ties, and leather shoes gathered around the table; gold watches, necklaces, and rings glowed with unassailable power. One swipe across the air, layers of blue surf lines advanced expeditiously from left to right until a magnificent screen gleamed. Their intrigued eyes. All tempting eyes. All mouth-watering eyes. They all knew. A spherical globe covered with data and information emerged from the blue screen. Yet, the only colour which gratified them were the two bright red dots on the globe. One flared in the west whilst the other blazed in the east. The president's deceitful mouth danced exquisitely whilst showcasing his future plan in front of his hypnotised audience. 'What consequences will it bring?' he asserted. 'If we know who will never give up for the right thing?'

There, a stopwatch at the corner of the screen counted down. Tick tock. Tick tock.

Fast forward to 2045...

BANG!

A tsunami of sheer brightness sizzles my eyes with prickling agony. I squint my eyes. High pitched frequency pierces my ears. The familiar sound of my mum singing through the congested corridors disappears. The laughter from my siblings upstairs vanishes. The incessant dissonant melodies of cars honking outside my house evaporate.

Everywhere I apprehensively peek, my family seem to have gone. Shooting stars of poignancy suffocate my rusty throat. I do not know where they are? I try to observe my arms. Nothing left but bones and veins. Waterfall tears onrushes down on the face that I can scarcely feel anymore. I gather the strength to scream, but why does it just feel impossible?

Within the next two or three seconds, a potent blast erupts...

And an indescribable force flings me into the air before I can even catch my breath. Suddenly, the relentless assault of luminosity dissolves into dust, and my vision returns. Lying on the concrete floor immobile, I gaze at the ceiling. With cataract eyes, I realise my family is gone from every corner. The bricks, unable to withstand the invincible pressure, releases their agony through the wall; then leaves scars. As it begins to collapse.

I close my eyes.

'M-Mom! You never told me where you went!' I cried with joy. "I was looking for you everywhere!"

Glaring at her with discernment, she replies, 'I was always here, my dear! D-Did something happen to you?'

No, not at all! Just a bad dream." Questioning the location I am in, I ask, "But mum, why are we so high up in the sky?"

She attempts to smile like the vibrant colours of the sun setting; we both know what has happened to your child. My mom runs up to me and tightly envelops her satiny arms around me; why does it feel as if she had also never seen me? Sound waves of the sniffs, cries, and tears travel through my ears. Her penetrating gaze when she looks at me. The flooding eyes overflowing in torrents. She rubs her face onto my minuscule hands. I feel the broken sculpture of her picturesque monument.

Grabbing onto my hands, she finally arises from her crouched position. With one glance at the celestial sun, we walk up. Together.

And there, the child's life drifts into the sky. With her mom.

The house the family was in twenty minutes ago, has turned into the outro to a Jenga game. Outside, dead bodies piled on top of each other endlessly, like a landfill site. Assortments of skeletons and bones exposed to the defying radiation blew into ashes. Nothing was left alive. Not even nature.

Silence was at its optimum point.

Enormous than ever before, the only thing left cultivating was the mushroom cloud. The answer to our human instinct: greed.

'The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.'

Georg Hegel



Illustrated by Sathini Siriwardena 9SP

Le Grand Joli menteur

Anisa Rajbusseea 10FI

She didn't quite stand out,
Yet the whispers of her name lurked in every corner.
With a flick of wrist and blink of the eye,
Everyone glared
None, dare stared.
She didn't quite stand out and her words were disarmed
I didn't notice her but rather each gesture was a stroke of artistry, she was masterpiece in motion.
I didn't notice her but,
Her presence commands attention,
Like her skin I felt before.
Her aura suffused with the essence of prosperity.
For she is not merely adorned in pearls, but adorned in the dreams of kings and the
Treasures of enemies' past
Everyone's past life's depriver
Not that I'm one to assume

I'm only here for a while
At least an afternoon
She didn't quite ring a bell
She didn't have a ring on that finger
Stern and lean she stood
Unaware
Arrogance or confidence?
A question that bloomed in the back of my mind.
With the flick of her wrist the whole table danced,
Her hand like feathers,
I only flared and was startled
Unable to budge
With the assumption of doubt, they'd dismissed her account
We were the same and yet only one would complain
"I didn't kill him" she said with a smirk painted on her red lips
While with blood all over her white gown.

Everyone believed
I was the only one whom doubted her sincerity
We were the same yet
Her value
Was far more
Then mine ever could be.
I guess, it's just the way it'd always be.
"But I saw you, I saw it"
My words weren't wrong yet every shut and stared at me.

I wasn't wrong for saying what I knew.
And yet they treated me like I couldn't.
"There's blood on her hands" I cried
Why is that we are the same and she can dismiss me
She continues to say I can't
But it's too late
My word which feels in vain

catch an eye
a blink of eye.
and they all danced for me
I said as I looked down at my dark dress covered in dirt.
light stains of red
with a flick of my wrist the whole world spun
"I've got blood on my hand"
"I'd never dare get it on my dress unlike her."
But at least my new ring's Diamond ruby red.

The Endangered Tigers

Shinthavy Thileepkumar 10PA

Greed and power are what kill people
It is what torments them to death

Tiger like the trigger of the lacquered gun, but was weak as a stick
Looks down
Underneath the tiger was the shadow
It was imprudent of the near extinction of the tigers
From Hungry to starving
It engulfed their path mercilessly

In one mouthful gulp

Death was invincible in the tiger's red-rimmed Kaan(eyes)

Concealing the mass genocide of Eelam Tamilians
Wiping away the crimson blood that spilled drastically on Sri Lanka with that white cloth
Burning that cloth with searing flames
Until the ashes were just sand
Enough to be swept away by the ocean's hands

Shooting the innocent tigers
Killing young, innocent tigers
For the competence of the small island

The family members of the tigers went on to catch its prey
For its forlorn family who were starving
Tigers did not return
Vanished instantly
With no farewell
Hoping that they would come back

Only just left memories....

They went to fight for our land but returned nothing
Not even themselves....

Amma (Mum) waiting for her child
Urgently picking up any phone calls
In hopes of her child being found
Crying.
Begging.
Praying.
Yelling.
That one phrase
Repeatedly...

“Where are you, Enn thangamae (my gold)?”

Tigers left their home
Where they are able to survive
Where they are now able to call it “home”
In this zoo where they take care of
Endangered tigers

But why does this not feel like home?

Because it's not

Why are the people glancing at me?

Because you are not one of them

But why am I so different from them?

Because of your story

My Revenge Body

Emmanuella Levy-Braide 10FI

Mentored by Mia Clifford 12FI & Heike Ghandi 12FI

Just like the wind it keeps rushing,
And like the rain I cry,
Why?
Why?
I ask myself,
Like a new journal I have no answer, no story and nothing to relate to

Even in silence I hear the voice,
Your body! Your body! Your body!
My body? I ponder
It's starting to take over my label,
Putting a price tag on a priceless gem,
Oh, I desire to cast aside the tag and bloom like ethereal flowers.

At every step, watch it I hear,
In the crucible of resilience, where determination takes flight,
My body, a metamorphic gem, awaits its triumphant ascent.

With every step, I shed the weight of the past,
Emerging, relabelling, reborn, as a phoenix from ashes.
Muscles sculpted by the strength of my mind,
In the orchestration of sweat and dedication,
My revenge body blossoms, radiant and bold.

With each stride, I reclaim my worth,
A priceless gem, masterpiece of resilience.
I am no longer confined by the echoes of doubt, I stand, powerful, in every embrace.

Let my journey of transformation unfold, as I forge a body that mirrors the fire within me,
In my dance of self-redemption from strife.
My questioned body soon to be my revenge body!

Untitled

Joanna Samuel 11KA - winner

Duke knew he was a dead man the instant he left the shop.

As he stepped outside, the frigid December air struck his skin; the ice in the atmosphere did his anxiety no favours. He imagined they would leap out of twilight's deceptive shadows and seize him as he stood- persecuting him for his psychological mutiny alone. They would find out. Whether it be this day or the next. They were seldom unaware of their civilians' endeavours. Constantly watching, observing, waiting for the slightest indication of heresy to eradicate a person's entire existence without a second thought. Duke acknowledged that this eternal surveillance would become his ruin. Perhaps he would be given away by the flicker of an eye, or the flare of a nostril. Perhaps it would prove to be something far less incriminating. It made no difference. It was simply a matter of time.

The entire journey home, Duke could think of nothing besides the weight of his impending doom in his pocket. Despite his erratic heart palpitations and incessant sweating, he maintained a composed disposition, revealing nothing to potential onlookers. Approaching the city centre, he gazed upon the melancholy string of charcoal buildings which flooded the entire area. Rows of concrete apartments could be seen for miles. Four residents per block. One hundred square feet per person. At last, he reached the spot behind his building that he knew to be concealed from cameras or watchful eyes. Reaching into his pocket, he retrieved the purchase that would inevitably cost him his life.

A pen.

A simple black fountain pen with a delicate silver rim circling the centre. It resembled one his mother used to own years ago, when he was just a boy. The feel of the cool metal in his palm was reminiscent of a time long ago- before the reformation. A time before the authoritative rule of the new government had indoctrinated the masses into accepting such a despotic regime as natural. A time when self-expression was encouraged rather than punished so severely. Around three years after the new government came to power, any media consumption aside from their own propaganda became a criminal offence. Harboring radical ideas became punishable by death.

Duke clicked the pen, engulfed by an unorthodox sense of adrenaline, shooting through his limbs, and inciting a shudder. This was not just a pen. It was an emblem of an era of freedom, a reminder that life had not always been like this. The metal casing the manacles of totalitarianism- the ink the unattainable prospect of liberty amidst a world plagued by restrictions.

Pen in hand, Duke knew with absolute certainty that he was a dead man.

What shocked him was that he was perfectly okay with it.

Our New World

Amelie Vaughan-Rees 11FI

Her blue eyes were not the blue of the ocean nor were they the blue of the dazzling night sky, but an unnatural blue, a blue as false as the skin she wore to cover the cold, metal clockwork emulating the organs that make us 'normal' and tick tocking in an attempt to fill the empty silence left behind by the absence of a beating heart. And yet where others saw malice and danger in those false blue eyes, I saw sadness in the eyes of the woman I loved. Despite my unconditional love for everything that made her what –who-she is. I couldn't help but falter in my belief from time to time: when the loneliness of being alone in the majority became too much and the overwhelming fear of the fury that others could-would-direct to me if the treason I am committing –a treason worse than murder-ever came to light. I grew up in a world of beginnings, of development and hope. I grew up in a world where machines were just that-machines.

AI and robots were the subjects of jokes about robots ruling the world and taking over humans. AI was simply a tool, something to play around with while you procrastinate doing your homework. The world of today is both a changed world but also very much the same. Where there were dictators controlling the lives of people and wars between countries, there are now us the dictators who control the robots and the ongoing conflict between man and robot. We thought our world was improving and it was until it wasn't. We were taking a step forward with laws beginning to finally be globally in favour of both equality and peace.

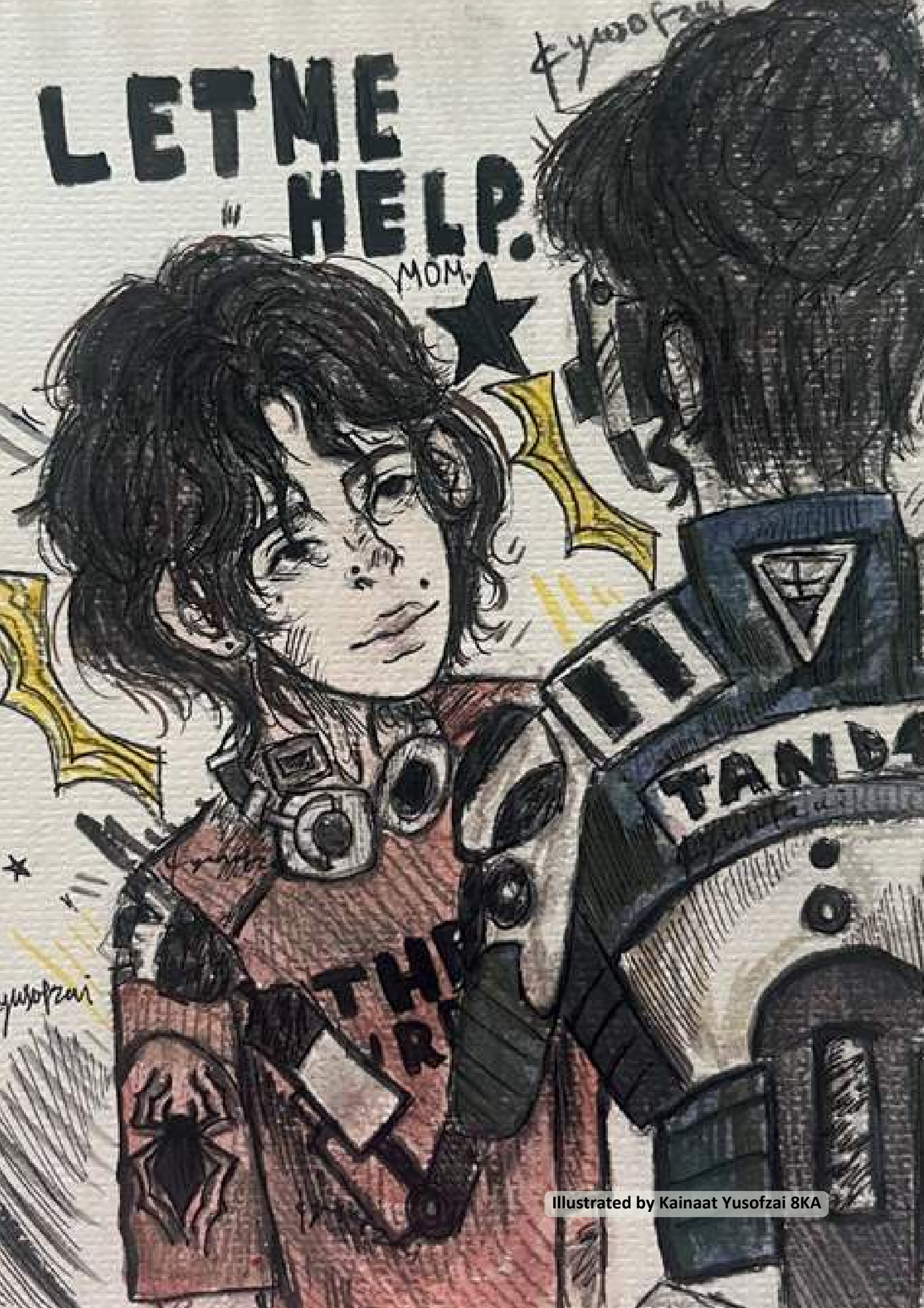
The world was better, not perfect, never perfect, but better. And yet like a drunk going back into bad habits after 20 years of sobriety the world found a new target. Robots. Technology continued to develop and just as everyone had feared it became sentient. For a while we lived in harmony in a relationship of mutual interest. But then it happened. In everything there is both good and evil and they were no different. A group of robots used their superior strength and ability to commit a mass murder so horrifying society's opinion of robots would be forever changed. It took one incident to change the world forever; it took an instant to change mine. When I walked home that evening, I was just like everybody else. So consumed in my dull, everyday life that there was no room to ever question the world that had become normal. She lay there and I saw her. Her unnatural blue blood mixed with the human red blood of the child she held in her desperately protective, robotic arms. I was horrified at this raw image of the effects of the conflict caused by a society driven by hatred as their hatred of robots causes a human child to be hurt simply for associating with them. I was even more horrified by the blatant truth thrown at me like a grenade to shatter my reality. Something stopped me from walking away. Something stopped me from returning to the life I once knew. Whether that be the pained look in her eyes or my sense of morality as a man whose job it is to save lives but either way I turned around. The more time I spent with her, the more I realised that she wasn't all that different from us. All her little actions carried an emotion with them. Her eyes that filled with gratitude as I dressed the wounds of the child she had so desperately protected; the pain in her eyes as I tugged and twisted at her dented metal limbs. I was well aware of the rules. I was even more aware of the consequences. But none of it mattered. I joined her in the shadows-a place where we could escape from the chains that

bound us to our shared agenda and the signs of the devastation caused by the war that raged on at every corner.

I wonder what world we live in, where one heart beats for all and once means always. Where different is wrong. They fear the unknown because they cannot control it. Their heart beats with the sound of bombs and agony and the faint smell of blood mixed with the rust of metal. But I found my heart. My little corner of the world and I swore to protect her. From the bombs and their wary eyes. And in my little corner of the world, I looked at her. At her blue eyes. Her blue eyes were not the blue of the ocean nor were they the blue of the dazzling night sky, but an unnatural blue, a blue as false as the skin she wore to cover the cold, metal clockwork emulating the organs that make us 'normal' and tick tocking in an attempt to fill the empty silence left behind by the absence of a beating heart. And yet where others saw malice and danger in those false blue eyes, I saw sadness in the eyes of the woman I loved. Despite my unconditional love for everything that made her what –who-she is. I couldn't help but falter in my belief from time to time: when the loneliness of being alone in the majority became too much and the overwhelming fear of the fury that others could-would-direct to me if the treason I am committing - a treason worse than murder - ever came to light.

LET ME
HELP.

MOM.



Illustrated by Kainaat Yusofzai 8KA

Change Forever or Change for Them?

Tara Tilakaratna 11SP

Finally, there was a moment of hope where she thought they'd set her free. But their grasp only tightened.

Their coarse and callous hands wrapped firmer around her mind, gripping any deviant thoughts; thoughts they could not, or would not, understand.

That's what they were made to do; invade every private thought you ever had and reconstruct it to fit their own perfectly flawed ideas of what a human should be.

Why be different when we can just be all the same?

For a second, only a second, she thought she could escape their grasp. Thought she could be free of what was forced on her since she entered this world, destined, and doomed to be controlled. But, as I said, it was only for a second.

Their eyes followed her, observing all, and she lowered her head. She walked away, the world screaming at her, grasping at her shoulders to stay and help. She had no hope. It's what they're best at; destroying what you're born with and teaching you to be hopeless. They break you down and build you up until you match what they crave.

Because what's the point of living if we aren't all the same?



Illustrated by Apollo Frade 12AN

Fragments

Victoria Mba 11SP - winner

A dark reality comes to light in the shadows,
where honour is twisted into a weapon.
A story that has not yet been uttered,
a futile act committed to dictate the liberties of
Women

Families are riddled with apprehension about
what is to happen to their reputation and
Name.

But what is to happen to her?
Her future dreams snatched from her feeble
grip; gone are her aspirations.

A shattered soul hidden behind a curtain of
tradition yearns for justice, beseeching to have
been handled with a sliver of care.
However, she was now at standstill, just
another line in the tally of the number of
victims.

Her last memories of betrayal by her supposed
protectors plague every inch of her being.
Never to be seen again, never to be heard
from again, never to be hugged again.

Death has intervened; it has hugged and
caressed her, tucking her into a never-ending
slumber.

But what is to happen to her?

Her future dreams poached from her feeble
grip; gone are her aspirations.
Now death is her bittersweet comforter, her
protector.

Her means of escaping her harsh reality.



Illustrated by Sophie Mercer 9PA

Normalcy

Bazile Adomaityte 12AN - winner

There are enough people on the street to couple with every cobble lain into the ground. There's no occasion to cause the cluster, just megacity buzzing that hasn't ceased for more than thirty minutes at a time. Even in those moments of emptiness, London isn't still; the action has meandered into a neighbouring area where the traffic won't dissipate. Sometimes, this makes me ill. The pollution rises and settles around my middle and compresses everything into a hazy blanket.

The heat doesn't help. There's not a single cloud, white or grey, above us. This is not unusual for London, but the perfect blue, like a cornflower trapped underwater, is profound. It almost makes me crave the summer, as if it hadn't been bleeding us dry for the better part of the last month. If I could look straight at it, the Sun would be in perfect view. The sun, I think to myself. The sun, the sun, the sun, sun, sun, sun- It doesn't do it justice. The word ruminates until it's just a sound whirling down the drain. Such a timid little word for something of that scale. Say it as it is! But I suppose it makes sense. A colossal blazing star! It's breath-taking. Flaming so far away and yet so close. It's dystopian.

Once I work out the source of the crowding it's easy to manoeuvre around it. There's a small alley that cuts between the two high streets, tucked from pedestrian view. It's clearly for the restaurant and bar either side of it, either to leave waste or, like now, for the employees to resentfully stoop. I almost decide to risk walking the length of the street for the thrill of being jostled around by mothers and their children, the occasional day drinker, and other teenagers loitering around the stall in hopes of nicking food when the staff turn their backs.

One such riotous man leaps out with joy at his mate who does the same thing in return. The force nudges me into the shade of the alley and my decision has been made for me; the cool shade is bliss. The door of the bar opens meters away. A tall and thin waiter steps out. He can't be older than nineteen, but he looks much older. His brow furrows and smooths again, squinting. Hugo's eyesight is abysmal, but he spots me soaking in the cold of the brick wall and snickers.

"Are you done yet?" I attempt to sink into the wall behind me. "It took me an hour to get here."

Hugo throws me a two fingered salute, but his head gestures for me to join him, anyway. There's some awkward shuffling as he props the door open with a brick and peels his uniform tags off. As the door settles, the sound of 'Time of the Season' by The Zombies floats into the alley. It's sly and all wrong for the time of day, but so wonderfully familiar I almost gasp at the sound of it. Not that anyone would hear it with the thrumming of the streets on either side. It's loud in my head, though. Practically pulsing through the walls and reverberating against the metal door. Colin Blunstone sighs dreamily into the air.

What's your name? (What's your name?)

Who's your daddy? (Who's your daddy?)

(He rich) is he rich like me?

The alley is narrow – claustrophobic. The steps jut out and take most of the space. The restaurant has only a worn looking slab, which makes the shoddy railings of the bar's landing look far more welcoming. It's probably a breeding ground for tetanus, but my grandmother never let me hear the end of sitting on an icy piece of stone. A sure way to get a bladder infection. I'm a little embarrassed by how long I believed that one. A quick internet search disproved that. But naturally, we all want to believe that our grandparents are superheroes. It takes time to understand that age is no indication of wisdom.

Tell it to me slowly

Tell you what

I really want to know

It's the time of the season for loving.

Complete and utter sap. The good kind, though, because the instrumentals are simply too good not to enjoy. The final rounds of drums end, leaving the area to be permeated by the voices on the street again. I want to push them out so I can have the quiet left behind by the music. The quiet that isn't really quiet because your mind is still playing the notes for a few minutes.

Hugo reappears, looking miffed. He doesn't speak but the way his eyebrows have stitched together again is a good enough indication. There's a cigarette crumbling in his left hand because he can't keep his right hand still enough to not drop ash all over himself. Hugo doesn't play sports and he hasn't been injured. The tremor is an unwelcome guest. In fact, it develops into a full-body tremble soon enough, one that might go undetected in a windy November. But it's the middle of August and it's forty degrees out here.

The sound of Marc Bolan starts up inside and I'm overwhelmed with a displaced joy. The door is still propped open. Deep lights of orange pour out into the shade like honey. Bolan continues to croon.

Is it strange to dance so soon?

I danced myself right out the womb.

"I love this song," I tell him, and I want to slam my head back into the wall with how lacklustre the statement is. Everyone says they love every song. But I love 'Cosmic Dancer' in a way that makes me want to peel myself from my skin and start anew. But I can't say that, so I don't, and it makes me feel pathetic that I can't find the words. All I can think of is all the basic adjectives that don't cover it. That don't even scratch the surface. It's not the way we speak anymore.

Hugo isn't even looking at me. It looks like he didn't hear me, either. The railing creaked against the weight of his elbow, which is what yanked me from my reverie. The smell of smoke is sharp, cutting now. He's turned away from me, inky hair slick with sweat at the nape of his neck. Even with his face out of sight, I know his features are scrunched up.

It's time to wait on him again, but I don't complain anymore. My eyes follow his gaze and I'm looking at the dreary little slab outside the restaurant again. Except, this time, a figure has settled on it. Exhausted but with a charming face that reminds somewhat of all those paintings in the museums amalgamated together. I could appreciate it better if I was less distracted, I'm sure.

I, I, I danced myself into the tomb

My favourite part of the song is coming up, I know it. But I can't stop looking at the boy on the slab, typing furiously away at his phone. His face is damp, partially from sweat but what looks more like tears. His own hair is pulled back by a headband that must do little but cloud his judgement from the pressure. It doesn't matter though, not in the slightest, because he's in hysterics. Even Hugo trembles again, as if jolted by a current. The cool of the shade is quickly becoming biting cold. He looks as though he might crawl over the railing and over to this man, this boy rather, who cannot cease his crying. He wants to, but he doesn't. Instead, Hugo watches for a little while longer; waiting for something.

Hugo is good-looking, too. Others see it. Mostly girls his age, some women, too. But despite being a few months shy of twenty, Hugo has truly little interest in their advances. He's more interested in the others, in the men who tip him too much only to ignore him the rest of his shift. The boys he introduces to me as his peers at school but clearly matter more. But he would never tell me that.

Sometimes I think Hugo isn't ready to grow up. He's still a boy at heart. A boy, still coming to terms with the fact that what he wants is 'unnatural'. That what he desires is not an expression of love but an indication of sin.

Is it wrong to understand

The fear that dwells inside a man?

Bolan is streaming through the last part of the song. The tearful boy on the slab makes me want to cry, too. It's all too rueful, now. No dancing out the womb, just to the tomb. Hugo kicks the brick out and the door closes. Bolan is silenced, only humming through the cracks.

I think of the pretty girl Hugo will inevitably be forced to settle with. He'll love her, in the way that matters. But not in the way he could love that boy on the slab over there. No, not in the same way at all.

Piece by Piece

Naailah Dinally 12AN

I wake up in my bed, but a different world. This world feels cold.

It's nothing more than a vacuous space devoid of any sense of life or energy. It feels like something is missing, but I can't quite remember what.

Something isn't right. I must escape this world before it's too late. How do I escape?

My body refuses to move. I lay paralysed in my bed as a sense of dread cascades over me, as the little energy I have left in me begins to get sapped out, the day ahead of me playing out in my head like a long, monotonous film, before...

...my alarm goes off. While I want nothing more than to just passively stay in bed, where it's warm and safe, I force myself to sit up and get out of bed, one mechanical movement after the other.

I check my phone. No new messages. These days I check it more often, perhaps too much. While I don't exactly know why I'm checking it, the only guess I have is to fill some sort of void. Most of the time it works. I try to avoid opening the album with you in my gallery. It feels like looking through a window at something I'll never be able to reach again.

I get ready for school, before catching the bus just in time. I check my phone again, this time to check the time. The familiar disappointment washes over me as I realise, I'm going to be late again. While disappointed, I can't say I'm surprised. A lot of things suddenly seemed meaningless after my world changed. Things lost value, and I stopped caring.

Despite the fact that I've been trapped here for what feels like an eternity, I still find myself clinging onto the childish hope that one day I'll be able to escape.

Maybe I will soon. Someday. But right now, it feels like I'm living the same day over and over again, like Groundhog Day. A part of me has grown numb to the wearisome, plodding nature of the days going by.

I suddenly get yanked out of my thoughts as the bus arrives at my stop. I quickly get off, heading into school.

The day with the same mundane activities passes. Classmates and friends laugh and joke around like normal, which I naturally join in on. While at times it feels like their laughter is instead a chorus of deafening shrieks, a part of me is grateful for it - it gives me a sense of "normality" that I desperately crave at times. The day seems to brighten slightly, as a glimpse of my old world trickles in. The rest of the day consists of the same old recurring activities - work, eat, converse.

The day finally ends, and I get back onto the bus taking me home, leaning my head on the cool glass of the window. The soft, orange glow of the sunset coats the flowers outside the window in gold.

You would have liked this.

I don't think I truly realised the beauty of the sky before. Nowadays I'm more pensive and staring at the sky often places me into a reflective state.

It reminds me of when I watched the sunset with you at the seaside. You sat there, staring out at the sun setting against the ocean and I watched it with you. I'd chat with you about such minor topics, such as how my travel was, or how your day was, what we ate. Those small moments made me so happy; they were filled with such bliss.

Maybe if I pray hard enough, wish with all my being, I can escape this world and return to my old one.

My mind traces back to fragments of the old world, a reminiscence of what used to be.

I take a detour. Rather than heading straight home I find my feet taking me...to that place.

I want to see you; I want to talk to you.

Then it hits me. I remember now.

Kneeling in front of the grave, my mind races, struggling to find the words. I had so much I wanted to tell you, but my throat closes up, denying me any way of talking to you.

You left me four months ago, on one cold morning in November. My world, everything as I knew it, had changed from that day on as I was inevitably hurled into a new world of sorrow and loss, without you.

No matter how much I pray, how badly I want to change the circumstances, my pleas fall upon deaf ears. The unrelenting ache for reality to be different always remains.

I often wonder what you're thinking. I wonder what it would be like if things were different. To feel the warmth of your hugs, cook with you again, watch the stars with you again and simmer in the bliss of our quiet memories. That's all I need.

I wasn't ready to say goodbye.

The new world suffocates me.

I think I knew all along. This "new world", my current reality...is something I'll never be able to

escape. No matter how hard I try.

But maybe...I don't need to.

I didn't even notice the moon; and the stars. The stars are scattered throughout the sky, while the moon rests high above, softly illuminating the grass. The more I stare at it, the more a bittersweet hope grows inside me. While you're not here to watch it with me, somehow watching them still brings me a sense of relief.

I know I'll never be able to return to the old world, and while there are things I can never have control over, no matter how much I desperately try...perhaps over time, the world will grow. Become brighter.

I'll grow.

You would have wanted me to keep living, to keep surviving, and thriving. While it'll be difficult, and often painful...I'll grow into the person you would have wanted me to grow into.

So, I'll keep watching the sunshine hit the flowers, and the moonlight hit the ocean.

I'll live with the treasured memories you gave to me, until the day we can meet again.



Illustrated by Khadeeja Ghafori 7FI

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May these pages remind us all that creativity has no boundaries and through our words we leave a legacy of courage, inspiration and hope.



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