



HAMPTON SCHOOL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS

Creative Writing Awards Evening
28 March 2017

Artwork: **Matthew Hamilton** (Lower Sixth)





Creative Writing Awards Evening

Welcome to the inaugural Creative Writing Awards Evening, an event which celebrates the talent of Hampton Boys from First Year to Sixth Form.

The Creative Arts is a very important aspect of our School and we are excited about this opportunity to showcase our students' creative writing. This new event is one of a number of initiatives to encourage Hampton Boys to enjoy the Creative Arts across different genres and in various media forms.

We invited boys to enter the first Creative Writing Awards Competition by writing prose, poetry or play-scripts with the theme of People and Places. There were many submissions of a high standard and the finalists' work is published in this programme. It will also be reproduced in this summer's annual edition of Lion Print, Hampton School's Creative Writing Magazine which was launched last year.

We are delighted to welcome published author Saci Lloyd to Hampton School. Earlier today, she led Creative Writing Masterclasses for competition finalists and other invited students in three different age group categories:

Junior: First and Second Year
Intermediate: Third and Fourth Year
Senior: Fifth Year and Sixth Form

As the judge of our Creative Writing Awards, Saci has also selected the overall winners and runners-up from the shortlisted finalists. Tonight she will present prizes in each age group category. Within the Junior Category there will be both Prose and Poetry prizes, due to the number of outstanding entries. The winners will read extracts from their pieces after the prizes have been presented.

We hope that you enjoy the evening.

Mrs Bartholomew (English Teacher)



Saci Lloyd

Saci Lloyd was born in Manchester, but raised in Anglesey where she spent a lot of time lost in nature or down by the shore.

Saci returned to Manchester as an undergraduate, but soon quit University for a life of glamour. At various points in the glitz she has worked as a very bad cartoonist, toured the States in a straightedge band, run an interactive media team at an advertising agency, co-founded a film company and finally wound up as head of media at NewVic. She's now stepped down from that post, but continues her association with the college.

Saci's first novel, *The Carbon Diaries* 2015, was shortlisted for the Costa Book Award and her third novel *Momentum* was longlisted for The Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. She has also written *The Carbon Diaries* 2017, *Quantum Drop* and *It's The End Of The World As We Know It*, a comedy set on a parallel Earth.

Saci is very aware of the market she writes for. She understands their day to day lives and that translates over in the voice of her novels. She is a very strong and vocal advocate within the education sector. Her experience of working with teenagers in East London has given her a very real and valid insight into how education policies affect the next generation.

Fear the Man

Fear the man who speaks in hands,
His arts are dark and deadly.
Fear the man who speaks in hands,
His marks have petrified already.
Beware of the men who talk in signs,
They know you're already here,
We used to fear the men who speak in palms.

By **Daniel Clarke** (First Year)

A Clash of Ages

Amidst rolling hills
Within the matrix of trees
Is the dappled stone

It lies in ruin
A ghost of its former might
Blood shadows its past

Three queens once were here
One grey, one white, one yellow
Shades of history

Flames shattered its mirth
It suffered to live again
Revived from the ash

The stones are now bricks
Glass replaces wrought iron
The sun shines anew

In the hush of dawn
Present and past are combined
A clash of ages

By **Sam Colvine** (Second Year)

Change

Uncharted waters loom, like ominous thunderclouds, pillars of the unknown,
Casting shadows of anxiety across the land,
Yet peaceful fields beckon beyond these shadows of darkness,
And as old gems are lost, new ones are found,
For inside the unknown, lies the yet to be discovered,

A new world emerges amongst the ruins of the past,
The yet to be sprouting, fresh and improved from the old,
Creating new landscapes, possibilities and potential,
Where there was only shadow before,
As the world unfurls, ready for the future,

And then it comes,
Sweeping all before it in a tremendous wave,
Both destroying and creating with the same one force of age,
As time ticks on, regardless of what is steadily unfolding around it,
And leaving the fresh and cleansed behind in its wake,

So the old retires, its time long gone,
Retreating beyond the horizon,
Having sculpted new futures for those who are yet to come,
As plants flourish and thrive, then wither and die,
And bid farewell to all that has been.

By **Tom Flenley** (First Year)

The Trenches

Pacing up and down in their ghostly walks.
The Soldier's feet sloshing through the stagnant lake of mud,
And below, the officers pouring over their maps,
Looking for the lightest flaw in the enemy they were to attack.
How silent it was with guns at the ready,
Tension tangible in the air,
Until the inevitable bombardment came
Crash! Bang! The bombs exploded
Each one seemingly more destructive than the last.
Throwing great clouds of mud into the air
With disconcerting ease.
And below the mice scurried through their tunnels,
Not knowing or caring the slightest bit
About trivial human ordeals.

By **Ben Wix** (Second Year)



EmPower

Inspired by 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell

The purest of heart,
The least sinful of men,
Their souls became marred,
Blackened and rotted when,
A mere drop of power is acquired,
And an unending supply is then desired.

The iron fist used,
Where once mercy was shown.
Responsibilities abused,
Care only for your own,
Such is the fate of he who chooses,
Power over morals, which he loses.

Death, terror and lies,
Become the tools of choice,
Fighting for good is your guise,
When you really restrict all voice.
An ideology of equality,
Corrupted by a selfish policy.

By **Nayaaz Hashim** (Second Year)

Joke of the Day

A jolly clown bounces into an inn
That leaks firelight and sinning gin
He becomes lost in a maze
In telling jokes in a day
When dragons were king.

A lonely man trudges into an inn
His face masked by paint and a feigned grin
But no one pays him any heed
As they are filled with greed
For screens - not for laughter to begin.

By **Alex Upshall** (Second Year)

What the Animals Would Say

Have you ever looked up in the sky seeing a butterfly in the breeze?
Fly up so high and fluttering with ease.
Or a swallow flying in the sky,
Looking down on Earth watching it go by.
A small worm moving safe and sound,
What he had seen so deep underground.
Or a lion in a place so barren and bare,
What he'd seen in his scorching lair.
Or a cluster of bats in their homely cave,
Creating such a noisy rave.
Think about the stories an animal would say,
If they knew the human way.
If you think an animal boring when you are there,
Think of the stories that happen when you aren't with them.
From bird to worm or a lion the rightful heir,
Look after all animals with the same amount of care,
As you don't know the tales that happen when you're not there.

By **Lucas Cairnes** (First Year)

Alone at the Campfire

Ethan wondered why he had ever agreed to come. The teachers were leading silly songs at the campfire that he didn't know. Then he remembered. Yes. That was it. It was all because of his mother. She was always trying to get Ethan to 'make friends', and thought that this sorrowful camping trip would be the perfect opportunity for this.

Ethan always preferred to be alone. His classmates didn't take much notice of him anyway: to them he was invisible. Sitting in the corner of his classroom he could think about whatever would cross his mind. This or a good walk wherever his feet would take him would always clear his head and allow him to fantasise about Greek gods and mythical creatures. "Join in, Ethan! Have some fun!" Mr Baxter said cheerfully. Ethan looked up and stared into his eyes trying to tell what his feelings were about this trip. He looked genuinely pleased to be here, which Ethan couldn't quite get his head around. He muttered to himself, "This is not fun. I hate this," and got up from the disintegrated log that they were sitting on and started to walk towards the toilet block.

Exiting from the toilets, Ethan caught some movement from the corner of his eye. It looked like a squirrel, but surely that couldn't be right because squirrels aren't nocturnal? Wondering what it could be possibly be, Ethan decided to follow the creature through the woods. He was curious to see what the animal was and where it was going. Maybe it was a mythical creature, scurrying back to the Underworld?!

Ethan hurried quickly after the 'squirrel' through the thick bracken, enjoying the exhilarating chase. No one would notice that he was gone: they never noticed him anyway. He thought he was like Orion the hunter chasing down his prize. Catching up to the creature, Ethan was getting extremely excited. He would find out what this animal was! Suddenly he felt himself flying through the air and fell flat on his face. He had lost his prize and was very angry at himself. But then he thought about all the times Artemis and her hunt would fail at hunting down the fiercest of monsters. This consoled Ethan, that even the Goddess of the Hunt sometimes failed – supposedly the best of that profession. Even though he was reluctant to go back and join the campfire, he didn't like to think that the teachers were worrying about him. After all, he was their responsibility. He had to do the sensible thing and head back before it got too dark.

Ethan had wandered for about ten minutes, and soon realised that he was lost. He couldn't hear the campfire songs anymore. The towering trees suddenly seemed to loom over him like the Giants of Greek Mythology. The bracken seemed to snake around

his legs, trapping him where he stood. Ethan looked up. The sky was black. Ethan trembled. The hairs on his arms were standing up. Sinister shadows surrounded the area where Ethan was nervously standing. A twig snapped. Ethan whipped his head around in alarm. Nothing. Nothing but darkness. Ethan's heart was beating hard, very hard. He could hear it thumping against his chest. But what could he do? Call out? Wait where he was until someone found him? Surely the teachers would know that he was missing by now. But what if no one found him? What if he was stuck here forever, without ever seeing his beloved parents again? Ironically, he wished he had joined in with Mr Baxter's silly songs at the campfire. Even that would be better than this. Anything would.

Another few minutes passed. Surely they would have set out searching for him? Ethan was beginning to think that he was alone. All by himself. No food. No water. Suddenly, he could hear a rustling in the trees. His palms were sweating. He was scared out of his mind. He had to run away from this noise.

Bolting as fast as he could, Ethan wished he had gone to sports practice like his mother had told him to, as he was quickly tiring and running out of breath. He could still hear the rustling of feet just a few metres behind him. In the distance, he glimpsed a flicker of light. It was the campfire! He had found his way back! A new surge of hope ran through Ethan as he made a final attempt to put some distance between him and his pursuer. Just to make sure, he risked a glance behind him to see that the mysterious pursuer had vanished.

Relieved, Ethan carefully studied his surroundings. To his dismay, this campfire looked completely different to the one before. There were no disintegrated logs; instead there was lavish Greek furniture. That was odd. What's more, there was a winding staircase leading into the ground. Ethan rubbed his eyes to make sure that he wasn't imagining things. As he opened them, the campfire was still flickering; the furniture was still there and the staircase was still present. Ethan widened his eyes with shock. He suddenly remembered that maths lesson a few weeks ago in which, as usual, he was fantasising about Greek Mythology. Ethan had dreamed of this place. He couldn't quite put his finger on where it was though. He surveyed the area again: Greek furniture, winding staircase, flickering campfire. With a sickening realisation, Ethan suddenly knew where he was. A dark mist surrounded him. "Welcome to my domain, Ethan," echoed a sinister voice. This confirmed it. Ethan had found the entrance to the Underworld.

By **Timothy Lee** (First Year)



The Lighthouse Keeper

One gloomy night, the thick, grey clouds covered the silvery moonlight, while the waves were crashing fiercely against the steep, rocky cliffs. On the overhanging cliff, there was a stone bricked lighthouse and it had a powerful beam that spun around and around. It stood strong and tall protecting the village, like a king protecting his kingdom. Near the lighthouse was a little village in the middle of a valley.

That night, the villagers were having a party. They were cheering and celebrating and everyone was in high spirits. Everyone, that is, except the anti-social lighthouse keeper, who was sitting in the gloomy lighthouse on his half broken table with a little candle, writing. The old man had a pointy nose, large ears and squinting eyes. He wore a big heavy waterproof jacket and a flat cap on his short grey hair. Perched on the end of his nose, was a pair of semi-circular reading glasses. When hearing the villagers cheer, he slammed closed the open window and grunted: irritated by their happiness.

Unexpectedly, the grumpy man heard a thump and the light screeched to a halt. Then, the old window blew open. A sharp gust of wind blew out the little candle, which was sat on the desk and had been providing reading light. The room was suddenly thrust into darkness. The lighthouse keeper pushed his chair back, making an ear piercing screech across the tiled floor, and rushed to light a lantern. Hurrying frantically up the rickety wooden stairs, he felt his heart racing. Meanwhile, across the valley, the shocked villagers stopped their celebration and stared in disbelief at the lighthouse: in all their lives, they had never known the light to go out. The sudden darkness hung heavily over the village, creating an eerie, almost ghost like feeling. With their eyes, they willed the light to return but nothing happened.

The lighthouse keeper reached for the frozen wheels and clogs of the lighthouse. He hastily tried to find the cause. What on earth could have stopped it from working? He couldn't understand and he couldn't find the problem. He continued up the long winding staircase, which narrowed dangerously with each step. When he got to the top he checked the light. A domed glass cover encased the large bulb and metal bars ran uniformly across it. He carefully picked it up. He walked backwards not noticing the toolbox. He tripped over. The light smashed. It was at that very moment when he heard a horn from a nearby fishing boat. The blood rose in his body like a furnace. His cheeks grew hot and his heart beat like a drum in his chest. He gulped. Then he heard another horn from

the fishing boat, but this time, it was twice as loud. The boat was nearing the sharp rocks at the bottom of the steep grey cliffs. The lighthouse keeper sank down on the floor in both anxiety and desperation. He looked at the glowing windows of the village and thought, this is my only hope; I have to ask the villagers for help.

So he ran hastily down the creaking, old, rickety stairs with his lantern swaying precariously from side to side. When he reached the bottom of the lighthouse, he ran to the huge, wooden door. He unlocked the rusty, metal locks and swung the door wide open. A biting, cold wind slammed into his face, catching him by surprise. However, even more surprising was what he saw rising up over the valley. An enormous glow of lights were approaching him and the lighthouse. When he looked closer, he saw that the light was in fact all of the kind villagers, each holding a bright lantern. A surprised grin spread across the lighthouse keeper's face. Relief and happiness forced all the anxiety and tension out of his body. Everyone stood holding their lanterns high at the top of the cliffs and at the top of the tall, stone, bricked lighthouse. Together, everyone made a wall of light that the sailing ship could see. The ship's horns could be heard, but to everyone's relief, they were getting quieter and quieter. It was then that the villagers allowed themselves to cheer happily, safe in the knowledge that the ship hadn't crashed against the huge rocky cliffs. The lighthouse keeper looked around. He felt completely overwhelmed: all this time he had loathed the villagers and their noisy parties. At this moment he realised just how wonderful they had been. Together they had prevented a catastrophe. For the first time, he felt a part of them, when he'd always felt so separate. As a bright faced, young man, with a broad grin and sparkly white teeth, beamed at him, he realised the importance of working together.

Over the next two days the lighthouse keeper, with help from some villagers, fixed the light. His life was very different now. Rather than just visiting the village for essentials, he now visited out of choice. He made pleasant conversation in the local ale house and became friendly with the baker and butcher. From time to time, he even joined in if there was a party.

By **Leanesh Sivakumar** (First Year)

Dear Diary

Dear Diary,

I have been captured. Taken from my home, shackled to wood and other men, like wild animals. With no room to breathe, I was stuck underneath the deck of a boat just because of where I am from and what I look like. I stare at all the worried people, people just like me. Death and disease is all around us but all the 'Kidnappers' (as we call them) do is leave them next to us to rot or if we are lucky they throw them over board. How selfish were these people? Can't they put their selves in our shoes (if we were wearing shoes). I could hear the blood pounding in my ears like the roar of the ocean. Packed so close, we lie in our own filth. Suffocating all those below, the air is thick and foul and putrid. I cannot escape it. The horrors of the screams and then the whimpers. Nobody seems to care. They just cover their ears and tell us to 'Shut up!' and 'Man up!'

We always sing songs, in the rhythm of our work to pass the hours by. We sing in a call and response style and we sing until our bodies almost collapse. I like singing the songs a lot as they help me take my mind off the threat of death around every corner. All I feel is melancholy and trepidation running through my veins. Just now, as I'm writing, a lone tear crept down my delicate cheek onto the page. Every day I have to hold back a thunder storm of tears as they think crying makes you weak. The world is not right! This is not right!

They treat us as if we are dirt. When they need to be entertained, they play with us like dolls; they pull our hair, they rip our clothes and they act like 5-year-olds. Our dreams fall away like water evaporating from a cloud and our hope and dignity disappears. But I won't give in. That is exactly what they want. Fear overwhelms me. But why would they chain us like dogs if they did not fear us? Whenever they look at me, I must put on a fake smile; a thin, sad smile. The old man next to me is weary. His light is coming to an end. He asked me to squeeze his hand. One last glance and then he was gone.

I will find a way to put the world right, to end racism once and for all. The stinging cuts and bruises are like everlasting nightmares of the white man's brutality except, unlike nightmares, these will

haunt us forever. I used to dream of uprising, a revolution against the people who kept us captive abroad. But what is the point? No one cares. We will need a miracle to win. I am destined to die rotting, if not my body but my soul and mind.

Right now, I hate my mother. I hate my father. I hate my homeland. I hate everything, everyone! Why am I here? Black, dirt, darkness; these words all haunt me. I hate who I am. The colour of my skin has destroyed my happiness. The guilt of my thoughts hits me hard in the stomach and I feel the rising of vomit in my mouth. I start to shake uncontrollably, clutching my heart trying to calm myself but the tears keep falling. Giant, silent sobs. I am numb with fear. I feel like I am losing my mind. I am too young for all of this. Please is there anyone who will save me? Will anyone save any of us?

I miss my family so much. What are they doing right now? Do they know where I have gone? I long to be back in my mother's arms. I remember a moment in my childhood when we are laughing together; family together. Now I will die alone, surrounded by strangers. Sleep feels impossible but somehow, I do. It feels like moments later but it could have been days. I have lost all perception of time in my grave. Stormy seas have kept us below with no sky, no sun, no hope.

The waiting is unbearable. Maybe tomorrow will be my last day. Would I be better off committing suicide? All I do now is sit and regret. The torment is like a twisted knife through my heart each and every day. Wish me luck for another day of slavery and misery with the Masters.

See you tomorrow. Be prepared for more anguish.

By **Sam Wooldridge** (First Year)



The Assassination

My world is a world of shadows, the shadows are where I feel safest. Darkness is my friend. These thoughts raced through my mind as I sat in the corner of my damp, dark, cell. Shadows flitted across the wall and I could hear the drunk guards eating in their quarters. Red, malevolent eyes peered at me from the corners of my cell; I dared not think what they could be.

I recalled a flashback of the assassination. The man's look of pure fear as I injected him; my face, hard and focused on the job in hand. The hand clamped down on my back as I was dragged away towards certain death. Perhaps it would be the same injection I had used; maybe it would be something more macabre such as being hung or death by firing squad. These deeply disturbing thoughts distracted me from the crimes I had committed. For some this would be like a cure for the heinous crime I had committed, but I had been a North Korean espionage agent, a trained killer. An assassin.

I had always dreamed of having a family. Thanks to the one child rule in China, I had never experienced the warmth of a family and had been part of the Zhejiang children's care home for as long as I could remember. The endless torment by the other orphans, the lack of warmth and empathy and the bleak, dull world outside was all I knew and the only friend I thought I had was our window cleaner Kim Lee Jung. Little did I know that Kim Lee Jung was actually part of a top secret North Korean espionage unit designed to handpick the most intellectual, quick witted and fit boys and girls from orphanage across China and turn them into modern assassins, capable of anything from suicide bombing to sniping.

From the tender age of eight to ten years old, I was groomed into becoming his trusted disciple. On 17 March, 2010, I was approached by Kim Lee Jung and was asked if I wanted a life of adventure in a land far, far away. I was a bored, naïve schoolgirl who had never experienced any fun and of course I agreed. At the dead of night, me and three other girls of a similar age were whisked away and taken over the North Korean border, to an elite training camp in the remote mountains. For five years, we were trained on the promise that after our assignment, we would be rewarded with a new identity and life. A life of light and hope. A family.

At the tender age of fifteen, I was selected for my first assignment. I was to pose as a secretary in the lower rankings of the Workers' Party and whittle out any traitors. Little did I know that I was effectively signing their death warrant. The most notorious

individual I uncovered was Jang Song Thaek, the dictator's uncle and former close aide. Due to my outstanding performance, I was chosen for the most high-profile assignment since Korean Air flight 858 bombing in 1987. My target was Kim Jong Nam, Kim Jong Un's brother and critic of North Korea.

Over the course of a year of planning, I had begun to figure out how I would conduct the kill. Kuala Lumpur airport did not have the tightest security checks. I knew that with fake medical documents, I could carry a syringe of liquid ricin, the poison used to kill George Makov. I knew that six bodyguards also surrounded my target but using the element of surprise, I could get close enough to inject him. The regime assured me that they would get me out but looking back on the incident, I was too blinded by the hope of a new family to see their true colours. I was but a pawn in a complicated game of chess. Why should it matter if I died, if I took out the opposition's Queen?

As I stood outside the airport, I had a moment of procrastination as I wondered what would happen if everything went wrong. I knew that to prevent this I had to concentrate on my training: stay confident, be positive and just try to keep calm. I breezed through security and caught sight of my target moments later. I ran up, pretending to be a panicked tourist running for my flight. I knocked over the bodyguard walking behind him and inserted my syringe firmly into the back of his neck. His bulbous vein protruded as the syringe went deeper. A rough hand clamped down on my shoulder and, knowing that it was all over, I crunched down on my cyanide capsule. Blackness and shadow enveloped me.

'Boom, Boom, Boom!' I drifted back into consciousness and was surprised to see a burly guard kicking down the door to my cell. I finally realised I was minutes away from my execution. I was escorted through a labyrinth of winding corridors. Suddenly I was outside. The sun was like a dagger in my eyes as I looked around, embracing the last moments of my futile life. I was tied to a wooden post and asked for my last words, 'Freedom to the enslaved people of North Korea' I yelled, as a bullet embedded itself in my heart.

By **Jack Farthing** (First Year)

The Cloaked Phantom

Reader, my tale is one of death and darkness. It was the autumn of the year of 1889 and my story begins in the bustling centre of London. The biting weather meant everyone, from the rich to the poor, was wrapped up in their winter clothes. I, being a doctor, was visiting the lavish townhouse of one of my aristocratic patients, when suddenly a maniacal carriage hurtled around the busy street corner at breakneck pace.

A young couple were strolling into the centre of the road, trying to visit a luxurious clothes shop where colourful silks garnished the windows, and were viciously mowed down by the flailing legs of the horses and the madly spinning wheels. Calls for a doctor were bellowed by a noble elderly gentleman, and, hearing those calls, I sprinted into the centre of the street. The carriage rushed off in the opposite direction, leaving all eyes on me, and on my attempts to resuscitate the mangled young couple. Desperately, I tried to help the stricken young people, but all of my best efforts were in vain. The couple were dead.

Then, from out of the frenzied crowds, a figure appeared. He had a stunning air of calmness about him which greatly contrasted with the seething mass of people. Even though he was on the other side of the street, my eyes latched onto him. From the very moment I caught my first glimpse of him, I could not look away from this compelling and mesmerising figure. Although I studied his appearance very thoroughly, I could not catch sight of his face, as his collar was turned up against the wind. Instead I was transfixed by his bizarre clothing; he was dressed completely from head to toe in black. He wore a tall black top hat, with a long dark, silk ribbon tied tightly around it and a flowing cloak which was turned up against the wind, preventing me from glimpsing his face. Around his neck he wore a tight necktie, and over his shirt, he wore a pinstriped waistcoat with gleaming brass buttons. His jacket was as black as the deepest abyss. On his feet he wore shoes that had been polished so much they glinted as if they were stars in the darkest night.

Slowly and purposefully, he raised his gloved hand towards the dead couple. All of the little colour that remained in their motionless faces drained away, leaving them looking sickly and pale beyond belief. Then, still facing away from me and the dead couple, he raised his leather clad hand towards me.

"Sir?" I inquired petrified, "what do you want?" He continued to point menacingly at me. It was as if everyone else was completely oblivious to this transfixing presence. To my overwhelming relief, he lowered his spidery hand and strolled casually into the distance as if nothing had happened.

My next encounter with this strange man would come just a few months later. The thick fog shrouded the London night with a sense of mystery, and the gas lamps burnt fiery holes in the hazy darkness. The streets were dark, dingy and completely deserted. As on the first occasion, I was visiting one of my patients, Lady Taggart. She was an ancient lady and was very seriously ill. Nervously, I knocked on the huge, white front door, and waited patiently for the reply. After no time at all, an exquisitely dressed butler opened the door.

"I am very sorry to say sir that your patient, Lady Taggart, has sadly passed away in your absence," proclaimed the butler. "Thank you sir." And with that, he bid me farewell and slammed the colossal door in my face.

It was then that I saw him. He was stood dead still, as if he was waiting for me, but he was facing away from me. Ever so slowly he started turning around. My mind was telling me to run, but something in me told me to stay; I was compelled to see what this strange man, who had dominated my thoughts for the past few months actually looked like. It was a decision I have regretted ever since. Where his face should have been, there was a skull, as cold and white as the harshest blizzard.

As I look back on these mysterious events, my memories become more and more vivid. Still I am deeply tormented by the image of that man's snow white skull, and as I write these very words, I begin to wonder in my mind; will he ever return?

By **Luca Parrish** (Second Year)

Intermediate Finalists



I Guess I'll Never Find Love

Boy, she's boring. I mean, look at the ways her eyes just stay the same. Exciting bit, eyes don't change. Sad bit, eyes don't change. Oh god, sad bit. What do I do? Look around to find an exit. No, don't look around, that would seem rude like you don't want to hear her life story. Well, you don't, but just act like you do. Okay, how do you do that? Nod? No then you would be agreeing with what the person who broke up with her saying. Say I will always be there for you? No, she may get too attached. Well, don't just sit there, think, think. Oh good. The sounds gone, time for the next pair to move to you. Wait, she's walking towards the door! She looks around. Does she want me to follow her? I don't want to follow her, but saying no would just be rude, wouldn't it? What if I never saw her look at me? Yes, that's good, just look forward. Dammit, I looked. Do I stay seated or stand up? Stand up. No sit down. No stand up. Oops, too late, the next person has already sat down and the other has left. Was that the right move?

Wait, this one's pretty. Okay, okay, you got this. Don't mess up, don't mess up, don't mess up. Say hi. Dammit, I already messed it up. How could I have messed it up by saying hey. No, no, she's looking around. Got to make conversation, preferably something we have in common. She's playing with her hair. I have hair. Perfect. Wait, no that's stupid. Too late. Why did I tell I liked her hair? Okay, well she said thanks not thank you. I guess that's good enough. Gosh, so many questions to ask, so little time to do it in. Okay, how about what she does? Oh, a policewoman. Okay, now it's your time to make a joke, take centre stage and perform. If you get this joke right and she likes it, you could end up together forever. Here it goes.

I don't think she liked the joke. God, I think she hated it. Wait, how do I know that she hated it. Perhaps her job has disabled her to laugh? Should I ask her whether she liked the joke? No, that would come across as desperate. I guess I'll never know. She seems to be looking awkwardly around. Yep, she hated it. God, she hated it. Never should have told it, worst decision of my life, now I'm going to be lonely forever. Wait, she just asked me what I do. There is still faith.

She could like me, or just trying to waste time so she can leave quicker. Which one is it? Maybe, I could read her and see which one it is. I wish I had the power to look inside her head. NO! Did I say that out loud? Oh God, she thinks I'm weird, I'm done for. Okay, just answer the question. Oh, she seemed pretty impressed that I'm a salesman. Let's talk more on the subject. Nope, okay she looks bored now. What do I do? What do I do? I'm sitting next to this pretty girl and I'm blowing it. There must be a link between us, I can feel it. Maybe if I tell her I feel a force between us then maybe she'll agree.

No! No! I told her there was a force between us and she asked me if I was a Star Wars fan boy. Gosh, I'm sweating, I can hear my heart beating, please, the sound, the sound, play the sound signalling a change. Finally, there it is. Now quick as you can, get your stuff and leave. Go on, yes like that. Okay, now no one's looking, the door is ahead. Run for the exit, run.

Gosh, the wind is cold today. I guess I'll never find love.

By **Charles Maddox** (Fourth Year)

The Symbol

'POLICE LINE – DO NOT CROSS'. Another one of those. D.I. Shepard sighed. This was the fourth case they had found that week. He walked away, and as he walked, lit up a thick cigar and felt the vanilla flavour unfurl on his tongue. He cursed. He had been trying to quit. He ran his hand through his salt-and-pepper hair. It was a cold October night, cold even for Boston. The trees were becoming ever thinner, ever naked. They looked like tall skeletons with seizing claws, threatening anyone who walked under them. These streets used to be so friendly, so kind to him as a child. But now? They were just another murder scene. He was lost in his thoughts, as he smoked, standing on the sidewalk. An icy gust of wind snapped him out of it, and he dropped his cigar, before stamping it out. The embers died out, and the ash was scattered by the angry wind.

"Shepard," a soft voice called in the distance. That was his partner, D.I. Alenko. A supremely intelligent woman, with a photographic memory and a knack for investigation. She was durable, and seemed usually unfazed, but like everyone at the station, these murders were sapping her of enthusiasm.

The body was white, like a husk, and lifeless eyes looked back at Shepard. It was a young woman. Her now gaunt face was once pretty, and she looked like she had been brimming with youth. She had a lovely face, but a slit throat. There were gashes all around her body, all of the same length, width and depth. As he heard the flash of the crime scene photographer's camera, he noticed a faded black mark, half of it obscured by her hip. He put on his gloves, and crouched by her side. The mark appeared smudged, and looked like someone had attempted to remove it. As the photographer finished, Shepard rolled the girl over. He saw the mark was small and faded. It was some sort of strange symbol – perhaps a letter. Was it a tattoo? The ever-knowing Alenko would identify it. As she approached, Shepard started to recognise it. It seemed...Greek?

"Omega" Alenko told the Chief, with Shepard beside her. They were all intrigued. The forensics had come back from the other three bodies, they had learned as they'd returned to the station. All of them had traces of ink on their bodies. After further analysis, it was determined that that all of them had the same symbol: Omega.

After, a long and tiring argument, Shepard finally persuaded the stubborn Chief to allow them to organise a sting. Shepard walked out of the office. It was warm and light inside, and it smelled like coffee, but Shepard felt like he was going to collapse with fatigue. He needed to go home. His vision was blurry. Why was he tired? Shepard had felt energetic before visiting the crime scene; now he felt barely conscious

It was nearly 3:45 and Shepard was the only one on the train when he got off the D-Line subway. It didn't matter. He couldn't sleep if he tried – the thought that as he walked another young woman could be getting brutalised, sent chills down his spine. In a semi-conscious trance, he stumbled into the elevator. The dull music didn't bother him – it matched his energy. He approached his condo, and fumbled with the key trying to open the door. He managed to open it eventually, and turned on the light. He yelled.

There, written in blood, was the symbol, the last letter of the Ancient Greek alphabet. Omega...

The officers who arrived at the scene were equally shocked. The chief himself had come out for this.

"Shepard, your apartment is no longer safe. You can stay at the station until the scene is secured." Shepard didn't answer, or even hear the chief. In the dark hallway, Shepard felt the air rushing towards his face and sensed that he was falling.

Shepard recovered back at the station. He was out of his strange trance. It felt like he was on autopilot, that he wasn't controlling his body. He was suspicious and angry, but decided to channel his anger in to catching this damn psychopath. The whole station were zombies; they'd been up late labouring over these crimes. What seemed like the whole department were gathered around the table, eager to contribute to the sting.

"Alright guys, the plan is simple. We'll have the bait, a female officer." Shepard hesitated. He knew that Alenko would volunteer. She had huge potential, Shepard had insisted that it wasn't worth the risk of her being hurt, or worse, killed. Her optimism was the glue holding the fragile PD together, and Boston would crumble with crime if not for her skills. Alenko also had a boyfriend who loved her – her death would devastate everyone. But stubborn and selfless as ever, Alenko insisted that she would be the bait.

The streets were cold and dark. They were always cold and dark. Alenko walked along the street; she was wearing a silk blue shirt, and a short skirt. She carried a leather purse, its strap slung over her shoulder. Her long black hair was down, and fell across her collarbones. She turned into an alley. The other half of the team was on the other side of the alley, and should intercept the perpetrator. Shepard, observing from behind a car, heard a scream. He rushed into the alley, to find Alenko, in agony on the ground. On her left arm, a black mark was searing into her skin, as if by some dark magic. She tried to scream something, but suddenly she gurgled. A long claw was protruding from her neck. It was black and razor sharp. Her eyes rolled back into her head, and she slumped. From behind her emerged a strange demon. It was impish, short and hunched. The imp was a monstrosity, its flesh seemingly falling off its bones. It was dripping with blood, the crimson slime matting its fur. It had pitch-black eyes, and stared blankly at Shepard. He stared back, briefly, in horror. Its red, sword-like fangs curled into a grin. Shepard bolted out of the alley.

The wind rushed past his face, and he ran then faster than he ever had before. He passed where the rest of the team should have been, on the other side. They were all scattered, their throats mangled and the black mark burned into their faces. Shepard ran past them, ran for what seemed like years. Suddenly, he collapsed in enervation, and pain. He looked at his hands. The black mark was being seared his skin: the Omega.

By **Ben Green** (Third Year)

Touch



Standing across freezing ice and boiling sand,
cooling friends and heating enemies,
preserving magnificence and casting down the wicked,
creating and destroying the wildest dreams,
you have been with humankind ever since they ascended,
beyond apes

Was it not you who has held the branch struck by lightning?
The branch which brought things both fascinating,
and frightening beyond all reason.
Held the sword falling on treason,
made from sparkling bronze.
Let fall the hammer of the labourer,
sweating in the charring mid-day sun,
gazing upon what you've done,
the gleaming temple of pure beauty,
paid for by heavy duty

Was it not you who upon hearing:
"Awye! The wages for my workers are nearly nigh,
my costs already are so high!
There has to be a better way!"
jumped heartily into the fray,
as the foreman up above has said:
"Let's make machines to toil for us,
or else we shall all stay in the Malthusian trap!",
sweated heartily with your 9 cousins,
making a rope to pull mankind,
onto greater heights,
allowing them to fall even further

Was it not you, you heartless monster,
that cut the life of this innocent Forster?
A man of extraordinary wisdom and diligence he was,
until you dashed all hopes with a fiery rose.
Left his children hanging on a thread and his wife,
twisting sorrowfully in her bed,
moistened with tears of loss and grief,
you gutless mongrel,
it is a shame you cannot speak
or else I'd make you feel the hate

The unbridled fury of all men,
torn from limb to limb on the altar,
first of inhuman and most vilest greed,
raging across the once unstained map of a once innocent world,
plundered with the fervent help of your siblings,
lead on by yourself,
pointing to the sanguine sky,
singing papers that ensure more widows

They passed you down from human to human,
in hushed whispers they spoke of your holy power,
awesome spite,
you are the greatest weapon which existed,
the deadliest of plagues,
some born with you,
some not,
you are that which signs,
you are that which builds,
you are that which tears down,

Was it not you who brought your siblings to your heel?
Operated on the cancer created by those who do not see
that they have indeed a gift intended for human gain,
for arts and crafts and all things nice,
to accept unity by gilded bands,
to pass on love,
not hate,
not spite

Was it not you who was the hose with which,
the world became a gilded rose,
fine music flowing as weary eyes,
took comfort in evil's demise,
depicted on paintings of great beauty,
It was also you, who was scarred
as the people pulled down monuments you have erected,
screaming: "Tyrant!",
demanding to liberate the means of production,
with which they want the reduction,
of capitalist might,
painfully unaware of their lack of sight,
they used you to decide,
and learned once and for all that
you are a dumb tool
And now my dearest friend,
my most hated enemy,
you show your true colours to a veiled world,
where few people can see what you truly are,
creator and destroyer,
lover and hater,
you are the primordial machine,
poised like a hawk over whatever we will you to fly towards,
incapable on its own,
deadly with an owner

In our eyes we see fire,
in our eyes we see salvation,
charred ruins and burning meadows
grand marble palaces where nothing is lacking
life,
suicide,
in our eyes we see you gripping a scarlet button,
clutching a bandage,
What are you?

By **Egor Kaygorodov** (Third Year)

Memories

The sights, the smells, the sensations, the sounds, the emotions, the friendships, made and lost, the feelings, of elation and of despair, the people, dear and distant.

And the places.

If memories are the treasures of our lives, stored away in a precious chest, then this house deserves a kingly place among them. Nowhere has been so influential as this house, nowhere were so many memories made.

And now it is time to go.

Standing in the hallway is like travelling back in time: me and my little brother scurrying past, out through the kitchen into the garden, like excitable cubs desperate to play. Adorning the faded, cream-coloured walls are snippets of the past, of glorious yellow beaches and sparkling crystal sea; rolling hills of green velvet under perfect, azure skies. There were first days of school through the generations, all seeming so different, yet all with eyes filled with unbounded optimism, a beaming grin displaying the eagerness to explore, to discover, to live.

Strolling up the creaking wooden stairs creates a cacophony of onomatopoeias, all jostling to be heard; the musty smell of well-trodden carpet bearing the aromas of years of service, all wafting gently upwards; they are in no rush. Running one's hand along the wall, as so many muddy paws have done before, the house speaks to you, comforting you, reassuring you as a grandmother would, sitting on the verandah in the late-afternoon sun in those warm, easy summer days.

Out in the garden, the great, leafy sentries eternally watching over the soft, lush grass, the stage of world cups won and lost, books read and re-read, stories told, jokes shared, memories made.

Walking through the sturdy, blue wooden door, I enter the front garden, now a dense jungle of weeds soaring up through the cracks in the paving stones. Bushes line the short path to the small gate, intricate in its spirals and patterns, with the flaking black paint dressing the framework like the uniform of a veteran soldier, relieved of its duty but wearing it with pride.

Finally, the great cherry blossom tree towers over the front of the house; when springtime comes it will be bursting with colour, an explosion of pink which is a wonder for the eye to behold. But, now, framed against the sombre grey sky, it is bare, its branches swaying in the light breeze.

It may not always be there, things can change, but it will always stay in the same one place, where it will never grow old, or be knocked down, or die.

In my memories.

By **Alex Fagan** (Fourth Year)

The Dilemma

It was a sweaty, humid night. The street was deserted – nothing could be heard apart from the continuous chirping of crickets. Somewhere, a dog barked, the sound reverberating around the moonlit streets.

Suddenly, footsteps could be heard, each step echoing through the warm night air. Two men, one tall and athletic, the other short and thick set, came into view. They walked with purpose, not speaking as they marched up the cobbled path.

'They said he was next door to the café. This must be it.' The smaller man spoke with a strange accent, his words sounding distorted as they passed through his lips. He had an ugly scar across his mouth – the sign of a gang-member who had betrayed his colleagues, and paid the price by having his face slashed. The scar stretched from cheekbone to cheekbone, and caused him trouble with speech. It made him look horrific, yet the man was inclined to deal personally with anyone who dared laugh at him.

The second man nodded. He had learnt that talking was a dangerous habit, and only spoke when absolutely necessary. He had the look of an ex-boxer; had it not been for his beaten-up nose and displaced jaw, he would have been good-looking. Muscles rippled beneath his sleeveless vest, yet the man moved with the weightless grace of a ballet dancer.

Crouching down to peer through a gap in the window, the tall man could see a dimly-lit room. A small television was broadcasting the Olympic 100 metre final, a race that was taking place not five miles away. On the opposite side of the untidy living room was a stained white sofa. A boy, no older than fifteen, was sprawled across it, sleeping.

'That's him,' murmured the man. The smaller man wiped a bead of sweat from his creased temple; the humidity enveloped the night like an unforgiving blanket. He walked up to the door of the dingy apartment, and rapped with his knuckles. The sudden noise echoed like gunshots down the street. Inside, the boy jumped up with a start. He scrambled around for a t-shirt, before sprinting to the front door.

'Hello?' came the nervous voice, the door only open an inch.

'Guys – Luis, Dani! I mean – sorry, I wasn't expecting you to drop by this late.' The boy rubbed his bleary eyes with the back of his hand.

'You'd better get used to it, chico. When we need you, we'll come. Now – get a move on.' He turned to the taller man. 'Have you got the tools, Dani?'

Dani reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out two 9mm pistols. The boy's eyes widened.



'OK. But... I've never shot a gun before.' He glanced uneasily at the two men.

'It's easy. Just aim, pull the trigger and...' He imitated an explosion, grinning toothily at the boy.

The boy pulled his shoes on and followed the men out of the door and down the street. What was he getting himself into?

They turned a corner, and the world-famous Maracana stadium appeared on the horizon, illuminated by brightly-coloured fireworks. The boy could hear the roar of the crowd, mixed with booming pop music from the stadium's loudspeakers. It seemed a world away from the run-down, forgotten favelas that the boy called home.

'Stop. It's here.' muttered Dani, a note of tension now in his voice. 'Take this.' He handed one of the pistols to the boy. The boy turned it over in his hands, the metal cool against his slender fingers.

'Only shoot when we say so,' said Luis, the shorter man. The boy nodded, not trusting himself to open his mouth in case he was sick.

'Right. These people offended our boss pretty bad last week. We kill the man and the woman, and anyone with them. No witnesses, ok?' He turned to the taller man. 'Dani, if you'll do the honours.'

Dani adopted a fighting stance, his weight distributed evenly between the balls of both feet. He approached the door to one of the run-down favelas. In a flash, he turned to the side and kicked out with venom, his heels slamming into the door with unbelievable force. The door flew right off its hinges, leaving space to pass through.

'You can lead, boy,' Luis gestured with his gun. The boy gulped. His hand tightened around his weapon as he stepped carefully over the fallen door.

There was silence.

'There's nobody here,' hissed Dani. 'We must be at the wrong place.'

'No – I'm certain this is it,' replied Luis. 'They're probably hiding. Come on, search!' The boy bounded up the stairs, and found himself in a small bedroom. There was a crashing sound followed by a curse. Luis was clearly losing his temper. Determined to find the man and put himself in the gang's good books, the boy dropped to his hands and knees and checked under the bed. There was nothing.

'Anybody there?' The boy jumped. He had not heard Dani come up behind him.

'No, there's no one. I'll keep looking,' replied the boy. Luis crashed into the room, his face a dark shade of violet. He was sweating profusely and was in a foul mood.

'I can't believe it. What a waste of time!' he spluttered.

'How about ... up there?' said Dani, pointing up at the entrance to an attic embedded in the ceiling.

'There's no way either of us are fitting through that gap.' Both Luis and Dani turned to look at the boy simultaneously. Luis spoke first.

'I knew you'd come in handy.' He grinned nastily at the boy, revealing a golden front tooth. 'We'll lift you.'

With no choice but to do as instructed, the boy allowed himself to be grasped by the strong, rough hands of the men. He pushed open the entrance to the attic, and hauled himself up. He looked around, straining his eyes in the dark, trying to sense any sort of presence. He glanced the right ... and locked eyes with the most terrified person he had seen in his life.

Staring out from the corner of the room was a wide-eyed woman surrounded by her family. They were frozen in terror, not daring to move a muscle. A mother, a father, a young girl and a tiny baby – all of their lives were in the boy's hands.

The girl stared straight back at him, her chestnut eyes filled with silent tears. She was wearing a tatty shirt – the boy could just make out the Rio 2016 emblem printed behind a layer of dirt. It was the same shirt the boy's own little brother was always wearing.

'Is there anyone up there? Come on kid, my arms are aching!'

Luis's words snapped the boy back to reality. If he gave up this family, they would all be killed. But if he lied, and was found out ... they'd shoot him, and them, on the spot.

'Kid?'

The boy made up his mind.

'There's no one here.'

By **Joseph Helm** (Fourth Year)

This story is based upon a ‘real-life’ disappearance. In the introduction to his book *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, Chris van Allsburg talks about drawings he first saw in the home of Peter Wenders. In 1954, Peter Wenders had worked at a children’s book publisher; one day, a man known as Harris Burdick arrived. He brought with him fourteen pictures, titles and captions to accompany stories he had written. Fascinated by the pictures, Wenders asked Harris Burdick to come back the next day with the actual stories. However, Harris Burdick was never seen or heard from again.

Psychosis

Harris Burdick, a relatively-unknown and unremarkable man with a flair for writing short stories, is walking back from the book publishers, contemplating how lucky he is to be granted the opportunity to have his own narratives and images in print. “I really must be dreaming all of this; surely this only happens to the rich or the famous? Have the publishers made a mistake?” he wonders. Deep down he knows that his stories have the power to change the way people see their world, however, as a quiet and modest person he does not want to openly admit this.

At 2:30 p.m, Harris Burdick arrives at the gate to his house. Nobody else lives this far up *Maple Street*; it is almost as though the house does not wish to draw attention to itself. Unlatching the gate and weaving through a broken path littered with chickweeds, he notes that he has let his garden deteriorate, no flowers, no colour. It is unkempt and out of control. Harris eventually reaches the worm-eaten door, and opens it using his rusting key. After closing the door with considerable difficulty, since the hinges have stiffened up over the cold winter, he dashes up to the library where the stories live. Even though it would officially be known as *the third-floor bedroom* for guests, he has not entertained people for years.

It all began when someone left the window open. The manuscripts are scattered across the dusty floorboards, so Harris bends down and picks them up, smiling as he glimpses the titles of some of his stories, such as *‘Under the rug’* and *‘The third-floor bedroom’*. He shuts the window, checks to make sure none of his stories have been blown away, and then hears a voice, whispering in his ear. *‘If there was an answer, he’d find it there... Two weeks passed and it happened again... She lowered the knife and it grew even brighter.’* Everyone hears whispering when they are alone, Harris tells himself, everyone does. Of course they do.

Harris attempts to tidy up the room, returning the stacked books on his desk to their respective shelves and forcing all his original story drafts into the paper shredder. Then... something moves. Beneath him. Looking down, Harris sees something moving under the rug. Confused, he decides he must do something about the matter, so he picks up a poker from the fireplace and touches it to the rug. However, whatever is under his feet vanishes. “Most unusual; we will have to investigate,” says Harris, reassuring himself that there is no need to give this incident any attention.

He moves over to his worn-out chair, onto which he lowers himself. He notices a tattered book on the arm of the chair, a book which he has not seen (or noticed) before. Blowing the dust off the cover, he reads the title: *‘Memoirs of a Madman, by Gustave Flaubert’*. Flicking through the first chapter, he reads about the various symptoms of madness, including talking to oneself and hallucinating. He turns to a page with the corner folded down, before he drops the book in morbid horror. The words of the book cannot be read through the piles of ivy growing seemingly out of the pages themselves; as Harris watches, the ivy creepers attach themselves to the armchair and gradually weave down onto the floor. In an instant, the whole library turns to chaos in front of Harris’ eyes: the ivy engulfs the room; the window opens and shuts of its own accord; the books fly off of the shelves and are enveloped by the increasing mass of weeds.

He frantically escapes into the hallway, panicking and hyperventilating. “Just my imagination playing tricks on me,” he tells himself. The whispering walls have become louder. *‘She knew it was time to send them back... He swung his lantern three times and slowly the schooner appeared... He had warned her about the book. Now it was too late...’* explain the voices. Harris tentatively puts his ear to the wall, displacing angry spiders and their webs in



the process, and begs for answers. Yet the walls are laughing now, and they seem to be closing in on him; he is moved backwards towards the top of the rickety staircase.

Harris looks back into the library, an asylum of books. The ivy is now pouring out of other books as well, ripping out the happy endings, replacing them with regret and sadness. Even his own stories are corrupted by the onslaught; Harris is hopeless, and he realises he must give up and admit defeat. The walls are howling and screaming now. He tries desperately not to listen, tries to block out the shrieks of terror. Rushing down the stairs, he only pauses once to look at a framed photograph on the wall. Harris has a vague recollection of the scene: it is of a happy family on a sunny day. He wonders whether one of the people could be him.

What little light he had coming through the boarded-up windows was disappearing; dark clouds were descending. He hears the rain becoming more persistent, and begins to weep, dragging himself to the front door. He then goes to open it.

But the door does not open. The latches are bolted shut, the doorknob too stiff to turn. Harris Burdick cannot get out. Harris Burdick's work will never reach the publishers the next day; for Harris Burdick is locked in with his stories.
So it's true, he thought, it's really true.

By **Matthew Cresswell** (Third Year)

We

We like
We hate
We love
We date
We ask
We wait
We commit.

We do it all for a while
Through rough
We're tough
We watch them grow
Then pick them up.

Through thick and thin
We lead our kin
Then hold
'Till old.

Then fly
Through the skies,

We sigh,

And watch.

By **Josh Carmody** (Third Year)

Senior Finalists

The Rat With the Gold Tooth

Pete trudged through the darkness, his footsteps echoing throughout the enclosed space. His feet splashed in the water underfoot. Pete outstretched his arms in front of him grappling into the pitch black of the sewage pipe. The moist air felt close and disorientating. Beads of sweat trickled down the nape of his neck. An amorphous cloud of smoke enveloped him causing him to cough and splutter. He took off his coat and covered the smoke spitting pipe.

There was a small light in the distance, a lonely flame dancing in the light breeze. He scuttled quickly towards the glimmer of hope and could hear the wax dripping gently on the floor. He had cleverly lit the candle to guide him home, if you could call it that. Home was a box rotting into the darkness, barely recognisable as a box anymore. Pete sat and ran his fingers through his grey hair filled with disease and fleas, rummaging around in his damp pocket for something to nibble on. Finally he found it, a large, almost inedible nut. He gnawed on it, chipping his teeth. He had half the teeth of the average human because of his diet.

He hadn't seen the light for a long time now and had a sudden craving to see the world. He scurried up towards the side of the sewage pipe and clawed at the wet surface with his gnarled hands. He grabbed at a pipe and pulled himself up, the light now visible through the grid. He could feel the fresh air against his pallid, grubby face. His face moved into the light of day, his eyes wrinkled up, the light caused him to squint, the banging on the concrete above him thundering in his head. The freshest air he had ever smelt filled his nostrils. He was tired of hiding in the shadows. Slowly he lifted the grid, struggling underneath the immense weight of the chunk of metal. His gold tooth glistened in the sun. He looked back on the way he lived and wondered why they called him the rat.

Lucy had struggled to leave her suburban house since the incident 5 years ago. She had her linen curtains permanently drawn across her almost opaque windows. She hadn't caught a glimpse of the sun since that day. Her wrinkles had deepened with depression and anxiety, forming deep canyons in her otherwise gentle complexion. Her hair was thinning with little left, her scalp reminiscent of a barren grassland. Her frail hand shook violently at the thought of him.

Her grandfather clock stood in the corner of the room, its endless "tick, tock, tick, tock" irritating rather than comforting. Dust gathered on the face of the time piece, disguising its inner beauty, masking the fine details laboured over many years ago. The clock reminded her of herself, it resounded isolation and loneliness, the fine craftsmanship of the clock worn away over time crumpling and revealing the ugliness within. It since hid in the shadows in fear of judgment and exposure.

Her therapist had told her what a mistake she was making by going back to that place again. But it had been long enough hadn't it? Even though she knew he was still out there, she needed closure.

The tired door yawned open; a beam of light shattered the stillness of the hallway. Lucy tentatively shuffled out shielding her eyes from the unknown, each step plummeting her further into reality. She started to walk down the narrow street, the trees on either side stood to attention, looming over her, slowly swaying in the mid-morning breeze. She cast her eye up towards the sun, a furnace hanging in the hazy sky. Despite the hesitancy, she was determined, this was her opportunity to put everything behind her and finally carry on with her almost forgotten life.

As she approached the spot, her legs leadened. Sweat started to form on her brow, her heart beat increased, becoming violent, pushing on her ribs.

Pete peered over the edge of the drain catching glimpses of passing humans giving him scornful looks. He felt ugly. His eyes fixed on one familiar looking woman, a tired old woman with lank hair and pale features. It took him a second to realise who it was. Struck with panic he swiftly retreated back into his drain, his mind flooded with images of that day. She was the reason for his underground life and home ... Lucy Adams and it was all going to happen again.

By **Joe Inglis** (Fifth Year)



Little Soldiers

A boy is sitting in the living room,
Playing with his soldiers,
Making noise and gunfire,
Louder – and much bolder
Than any child should understand,
For he is so content,
That he can't fully appreciate
The state of their lament

The courageous soldiers that he moves,
Risking all their lives,
Fight for the child's merry sport
With guns and bombs and knives.
The charming simulation's made –
He includes the sweltering heat;
And the boy does not forget
The blisters on their feet.

In his room he sits and plays.
Imitating their every thought and fear,
He throws them down, to the ground,
And they lose all that they hold dear.
The dirt goes flying through the air,
Until the light gets dim;
The sun is enshrouded by smoke
As men get torn limb from limb.

And the darling boy. A prize of life,
Who's never rude or lies,
Remembers also to include
The stifled tears and cries
Of the families – and friends
Of the soldiers he's deformed;
Yet the noble warriors stand on by,
They can do nothing but conform.

His twisted game goes on and on,
Till no more men are standing;
His daddy calls for him to finish,
From the room upon the landing.
Whilst his fighters are buried away,
The boy runs to his room.
For he has things he needs to do,
Because it's bedtime soon.

By **Jonny Fryer** (Lower Sixth)

The Confession

At a quarter past nine in the evening, when we had pitched our tents, produced and consumed an almost industrial amount of chilli and rice, and were sitting around a gently crackling fire, Blake arrived. Blake, eighteen year old Blake, Joe's older brother. It was all very exciting. 'How was the row down, guys?' he asked.

'Why the hell are you here?' Joe spat, acid on his tongue.

The rest of us were pleased to see him. From a Lidl bag he conjured coal to fatten up our fire, and Pringles and Mars bars all round. He sat, we spoke. He was amicable and an excellent conversationalist. Joe sulked.

Half past nine brought another arrival. Blake leapt up to greet her, kissing her on the cheek. 'This is my friend, Sophie. Don't worry, she won't bite.'

We laughed nervously, at the deliberate ambiguity of the word 'friend', at Blake's awkward attempt at humour, at the presence of a girl in our midst. Sophie was tall, her face masked by makeup and darkness.

Joe did not laugh. The flickering flames danced maliciously in his pupils. 'You two can't be here. This is our Duke of Edinburgh expedition. Do you want us to fail? Why on earth did I mention where we were going?'

'Lighten up, mate. We were all having a nice time before you got here,' Blake said.

Failing to recognise the joke, Joe shot back that he'd been here the whole time, thanks very much, and that he was actually welcome here, unlike some people.

The rest of us were enjoying the extra company, and democracy allowed them to stay. Half past ten sent half of us to one of the tents to sleep. Three of us remained with Blake and Sophie.

'I'm dying for a smoke,' Sophie announced as soon as they had gone. Blake reached into the bag and tossed a box of cigarettes in her direction. Joe opened his mouth and closed it again.

'Look, if you're gonna be such a killjoy, why don't you just go to bed like the others?' his brother asked.

'Because,' Joe breathed, as though it pained him to say it, 'I need to make sure you don't cause any trouble. Since you've already made it clear you're not going anywhere.' Blake lit up.

At eleven in the evening, Blake opened the plastic bag for the third time. This time from the bag came five green cans. 'You didn't...' Joe began, with no intention of finishing. Blake raised his eyebrows.

'If you want any you're really gonna have to change your tone,' he responded, punctuating his reply by emphatically shoving another cigarette between his teeth. He started passing round the cans.



Cold and metallic. I squinted down and read the label, the moon and the dying embers of the fire my only light. Gin and tonic. I heard pops around me as the others opened their cans. Briefly I considered leaving and going to the tent. I turned the can in my hands. I thought.

I couldn't go now.

Pop. Bubbles fizzled and danced on my tongue. The liquid slid down my throat. Against myself, I took another sip.

Blake and Sophie were smoking again. The smoke drifted up and mingled with the ashes' final breaths.

At quarter past eleven, Blake produced a clear glass bottle. 'Who likes drinking games?'

At twenty-five past eleven, it crossed my mind that we were by a weir. We were on an island, intoxicated, by a river, next to a weir. In my mind, danger seemed surprisingly insignificant.

At half past eleven, Joe was laughing along with the rest of us. Time slipped more and more easily past, like the way a drink with a burning taste and a pungent smell slips more and more easily down the more you have of it.

At twelve, Sophie turned to Blake and kissed his lips, fast and hard. His eyes widened in mock horror. 'Sophie!' She gazed at him, as if expecting him to return the favour.

'No, seriously, Blake's gay,' Joe said, and laughed his abrasive, high-pitched laugh with which we'd all become so familiar in the last half hour.

Three minutes past. Four minutes past. At six minutes past midnight, someone came out of the tent. Someone who we'd thought was asleep.

'Blake,' they said. He turned to them, alarmed. They handed him a phone. 'Diane wants to speak to you.' They retreated into their tent. They had called the co-ordinator. They had snitched on us.

The euphoria flooded out. The pleasant light-headedness gave way to a sickening dizziness. Joe swore repeatedly. I joined him. Blake had walked off to talk into the phone. Sophie's head was in her hands.

'Are we stupid? There's a weir there. A weir. We could have died.'

'I'm in so much trouble I'm in so much trouble I'm in so much trouble,' Joe spouted.

'So am I,' I mumbled, as much to console myself as him.

'No,' said Joe. 'You don't understand. Blake. I invited him. I told him to come.'

By **Felix Elliott** (Fifth Year)

The Lost Umbrella on the Bus

The air was bitter and the darkness was draining from the sky. Icy air saturated my lungs as I smelt a damp, musty odour spreading across the deserted street. I walked briskly to the desolate bus stop, watching the dancing ghost like plumes, expelled by the never ending stream of cars hurtling past me. Fastening up my coat, I wrapped my scarf tightly around my neck and looked up to admire the swaying silhouettes of leafless trees like bizarre skeletons waving their branches in the brightening sky as if to welcome morning's arrival. I was trying to expel the impending exams from my mind. An impossible task. Finally, I heard the rumbling Diesel engine of the bus pull up to me and smelt the resulting fumes as I reluctantly mounted the steps.

It was early on a Monday morning and the bus was heaving with downcast students and woebegone commuters, looking despairingly out of the windows for inspiration and hope, wishing for a few more hours of sleep. In an instant, the bus violently halted and hurled the standing passengers forwards without respect. Impatiently, we all turned to see the cause of the disturbance.

A flamboyant old woman hobbled on. Her lack of mobility displayed vulnerability but her expression was quite the opposite. She defiantly glared around at everybody with a haughty expression and a superior thin smile, daring anyone to complain at her entrance. The garish clashing colours of her dramatic outfit captured her audience and her striking red lipstick alluded to her younger days. She fumbled and bumped past the driver, clutching her large leather bag and her leopard print coat. A small, anxious woman followed her, calling to her that the driver had not been paid. Too concerned about her appearance, she obviously did not need a hearing aid. The driver bellowed after her and she finally turned around to look at him.

The elderly woman, in a heavy Italian accent, declared to the driver and the entire bus,

"I'm not taking the bus, you stupid man. I'm looking for my umbrella. It's purple, verrry pretty and so expensive. So pretty, I believe someone has stolen it. Who has it? Now where is she? Carer? Carer?"

The old woman continued to growl and shriek, backing up her calls with exaggerated gestures.

"Lydia. Lydddddiaa. For goodness sake."

The carer scrambled towards the hysterical woman looking forlorn and oppressed. The old woman's face clenched tight now in

disapproval at the perceived ineptitude of the carer before her. Her skin creased like a paper bag and her eyes disappeared inside. Frustrated by this hiatus, some passengers called to the driver to move on but at that moment the woman's gravelly voice broke through the commotion splintering the conversations. She was the centre of attention and having regained her position in the throng she had absolutely no intention of giving it up again without a tussle.

"I need my umbrella. I'm not leaving until I find it. No one is. Not leaving I say. No one."

Realising that the commotion was not going to end until this umbrella was found, the passengers began to look for it. The whole bus stood up and scoured the area for the precious umbrella. At this united action, the woman's face lit up with delight,

"Thank you my darlings! I always knew the English were kind. Hah!"

The old woman cackled in pleasure and satisfied, she surveyed the flurry of activity about her. Until, peering about the bus, she spotted a businessman sitting down still, scrolling listlessly through his phone.

"My love, what are you doing?" she aggressively questioned, despite the term of endearment, waiting for a futile excuse. The man looked up at her and muttered, realising his utterances would make no difference, feeling the intensity of her stare like a naughty child viewed by an accuser, he belligerently raised himself up off his seat and participated in the search.

Suddenly Lydia stumbled up to her and nervously stuttered,

"Umm ... the umbrella's outside against the wall Maria.... I think you.....um...ur..."

The elderly woman, not at all flummoxed by the situation, hastily announced without hesitation, "I've found it my darlings! Arrivederci!!"

She swept off towards the exit, shouting for Lydia to follow her, whose face was grimacing in embarrassment.

By **Toby Tolson** (Fifth Year)





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HMC INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FOR BOYS, FOUNDED IN 1557

Hampton School, Hanworth Road, Hampton, TW12 3HD

Tel: 020 8979 5526 **Email:** admissions@hamptonschool.org.uk **Twitter:** @HamptonSchool

www.hamptonschool.org.uk

Cover Artwork: **Joe Flanagan** (Lower Sixth)