

I REALLY LIKED IT

(or ‘it was a bit clunky.’)

edited by
Laura Davey

The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.

WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

For Jane Bluett, our dash of inspiration.

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Introduction

Once upon a time, in 2006, the then Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, attended a meeting in London to lend his support to the idea of an A Level in Creative Writing. For the next 7 years, there was much hard work and gnashing of teeth until, finally, the A Level was born. There was much rejoicing. What nobody knew however, was what would happen when the brand new course was introduced to real live students? Fortunately for us, Bilborough College was prepared to accept the challenge. In September 2013 our pilot group of year 13 students met for the very first time.

At the risk of using a cliché, they're an eclectic bunch. Sixteen young men and women brought together through a love of writing. Some of them had already cut their writing workshop teeth on lively Wednesday afternoon enrichment sessions. Others had been writing for years but had not yet had the chance to share their work. Within a few weeks everyone was writing and sharing and tearing each other's efforts apart, in the nicest possible way.

They have worked with script writers, novelists and poets, won competitions and been published themselves. They have produced a huge range of work and supported each other throughout. They have turned a classroom into a creative space and made the course their own. They are scriptwriters, novelists and poets. Above all, they are writers. The writing in this anthology represents the best of their work this year, but it is only a smidgen of what they have actually produced. It has been skilfully edited by Laura and Shy and is a testament to the talent of the group. Back in 2006 the A Level was an abstract idea, our students have made it a concrete reality. Working with them has been an inspiration and really good fun. I thank them all for giving this teacher a very happy ending.

Enjoy. I think you'll really like it.

Jane Bluett

2014

I Come From

I come from the Queen's Medical Centre hospital, bright and clean and abundant with Nottingham accents and "Ey-up m'duck!" I was born to loving parents who will care for and nurture me until I can stand upright and survive alone.

I come from a caring and comforting homey home, into which my sister joined me one year and seven months after my own arrival.

A well-documented life told in baby photos and video tapes, birthday cards and old drawings, past school work and fond memories.

I come from the late nineties world of Barbie, Lego, Polly Pocket and Playmobil and, later on, Skoobies, Tamagotchi and 'Tom and Jerry' on VHS.

"Half an hour on the computer and no longer!" because I had heaps of toys and nine years old is too young to be glued to a technologically-enhanced screen display, on which little people annoy each other and build houses ('The Sims').

I come from the not rich but not poor. The "That's too expensive" but "You can have that as a treat."

A sheltered, almost too protective environment. A well-meaning but sometimes smothering childhood of "Don't go ahead!", "Come in as soon as the sky goes dull." and "Make sure you wear a coat!" (Even though the temperature is above fifteen).

I am badgered and fussed over, but loved and safe.

I come from the knowledge that tomorrow I will wake up secure and warm, to the familiar sounds of a family who value and cherish me as much as I do them.

Hannah Williams

"Hannah has been a frequent writer for 4 years and particularly enjoys writing prose fiction and nonfiction, especially in an article format. Hannah's favourite book is Shock of the Four by Nathan Filer because of how it depicts mental illness in a realistic and emotional way."

Where I'm From

I come from a place where thunderstorms brew,
Red sand on the ground and nothing to do.
Sun in the morning and books in the night
Wishing on the second star to the right

I come from TV shows, marbles and dolls,
Then we'd best go to church to save our souls.
'Don't talk to strangers!' and 'Never go out'
Spot the spider crawl up the water spout.

I come from a place of looking away
From beggars and thieves and bright sunny days,
From dogs and friends and the place I was born
And a boy too asleep to blow his horn.

I come from a flight alone in the night,
Hot chocolate, music and dwindling light.
Tamagotchis, bracelets, Pokémons too
A strange old lady who lived in a shoe.

I come from big hills and walking alone,
Red buses, bikes and a desolate home
Songs in the church and food in the

cupboard,
"Be grateful" teaches Old Mother Hubbard.

I come from school plays and songs in the dark,
A sideways look and a stupid remark.
Skipping classes just to lounge around town
Atishoo, Atishoo, we all fall down.

I come from an answer, a high stone wall,
Makeup and heels so that I can be tall.
Adventure parks and a shiny new phone
Knick-knack, paddy whack, give the dog a bone

I come from pen lights and old chapel songs,
Key-rings, candles and recordings of wrongs
Insomnia, tablets, and a few close calls
Watch how Humpty Dumpty is pushed and falls.

I come from forevers, 'We'll keep in touch'
Arguments, lies and then eating too much
Acting and singing and friends that do try.
Four and twenty blackbirds, baked in a pie.

I come from five places, neither my

home.
The place I come from is solely my own.
Don't focus too much on where you come from
Just don't forget the old nursery song.

Cheyenne Meyer

Her name is Shy but she certainly isn't! She explores the depth of even the oldest of nursery rhymes, confidently putting it back into a modern concept. Born in South Africa and surrounded by people, she became interested in different cultures. Wanting to find out more, books is what fulfilled her free time.

Radford

Different religions, beliefs and races
Invited to the streets of Radford.
Polish, Asian and Caribbean food
Are the aromas that welcome you .

Asylum seekers and foreign neighbours
Work day in and day out,
To do what the average British man won't do.
To be bin men, clean the floors and public toilets.

It's hard work but it's some work.
At least they're paid. Others mock
And look down their noses at them.
Migrants pay taxes unlike other men.

Their children are taught that education comes first,
Told that this will take them out of poverty
So they strive to be all that they can be,
In all the world's difficulties.

But then here comes the food.
Cooked by industrious mothers.
A taste of hometown delicacies
Makes Radford home.

Safina Mahmood

"The Radford Poet that puts Nottingham on the page in a powerful way. Her prose is gothic in flavour and has a real 'bite'. She may be quiet, but she's sharp as a werewolf's tooth when it comes to workshopping."

EIGHTY NINE
by
Laura Davey

“This theatrical genius is the string that ties the class together. Queen of the class, Laura Davey’s work forever satisfies the reader without disappointment. From prose to poetry, no pen can stop her creativity. An outstanding writer, it’s always a delight to divulge into her work.”

Act One, Scene One

Cast:

JACK JONES: twelve, the leader, a Nottingham Forest football fan

JOE: twelve, puny, played by actor who also plays BOY

ROBBIE: thirteen, arrogant and ambitious

DEAN: twelve, brash, a troublemaker

CHRIS: twelve, loyal, the sidekick

SPECS: twelve, inquisitive and sensitive

TOM MATTHEWS: thirteen, sheltered, a stranger

Setting:

The playing fields and kitchen-diners of 1980s Nottingham, England.

Time:

Nottingham, 1988/89 and Nottingham 1999. A few months before and ten years after the Hillsborough Disaster.

Act One

Autumn, 1988. A football field somewhere in Nottingham. Early evening. **Chris**, **Robbie** and **Dean** watch **Jack** prepare to shoot the final goal in a penalty shootout. **Jack** and **Joe** are shown via a video projection (PROJ.) throughout the goal sequence on a screen facing the audience. None of the boys wear a football kit.

Jack: (on screen) Jones places the ball. He's lookin' good. Confident. It's 2-0 to the Reds. Will this be goal number three for Forest's top striker? Only time will tell. Jones is looking strong. Stronger than Smith in goal...

((PROG.) The video cuts to **Joe** whose goal area is a giant stretch of mud.)

Joe: (on screen) Oh come on, Jack. Hurry up, me feet 'r freezin.'

Chris: (shouts) Yeah come on, Jack.

Robbie: (annoyed) Just 'cause your side's winning Chris.

Chris: Shurrup

Robbie: - What's that? Do I sense some tension on the pitch? Say that again and I'll give you a card. I'm the ref.

Chris: Ye' might be playing ref, Robbie. But this ain't a real game. We're playin' shootout -

Specs: - Only because we don't have enough players.

Chris: Yeah, whatever Specs. What I'm sayin' is it's not a real game.

Dean: S'never a real game.

Specs: It's real for Jack, all right.

((PROJ.) **Jack** steps away from the ball.)

Jack: The crowd roars as Jones prepares the shot. He shoots...

((PROJ.) **Jack** kicks the ball, **Joe** winces.)

He...scores?

((PROJ.) **Jack** watches the ball sail through the air, missing the goal. **Joe** stares up in amazement. A boy (**Tom**) stands in the distance where the ball eventually lands, rooted to the spot.)

Chris: What the -

Joe: (on screen) Whoa.

Specs: He missed. He actually missed.

((PROJ.) **Jack** and **Joe** walk out of shot.)

Chris:

Shut up, Specs.

Dean:

Shut up, Specs.

(**Jack** and **Joe** enter wearing the same outfits as on the screen. Jack is stunned, fumbles for an excuse.)

Jack: M-My foot slipped. It's muddy up there. Right muddy.

Joe: (looking at the state of himself) Yeah... yer telling me.

Dean: Yer still a shit goalie, Joey.

(**Dean** and **Chris** laugh.)

Chris: Yeah... it must be summat, Joe. Having all them balls in yer face all the time.

Joe: Shurrup.

Specs: Leave him alone.

(**Chris**, **Dean** and **Robbie** tease **Joe** as **Jack** moves towards the screen.)

Jack: (shouts) Oi!

((PROJ.) In the distance, **Tom** turns. **Jack**'s football is on the ground at his feet.)

Jack: (shouts) Can we have our ball back, mate?

((PROJ.) **Tom** picks up the ball in both hands. On stage, the boys gather around **Jack**.)

Chris: Oh god, he's gonna throw it...

Dean: If he throws like a girl, I'll punch him.

Joe: I've never seen *him* out before.

Jack: (miming the appropriate actions) No! Don't throw it. Kick it!

((PROJ.) **Tom** drops the ball.)

(Pause.)

Dean: I'm gonna go get it meself in a minute.

Joe: If he kicks it like a girl, will ye' still punch him Dean?

Dean: Might do.

Specs: No, you won't. You've never punched anyone in your life.

ALL (except **Jack**): Shut up, Specs!

(The boys turn to face **Tom** on the screen (PROJ.) **Tom** steps away from the ball and proceeds to kick it in a perfect curve over the goal post and onto the pitch. The group stare upwards in awe and turn as the ball 'lands' and appears in a spotlight on the stage. Fade out (PROJ.) and spot.)

Robbie: (to **Joe**) Yer fired.

Joe: What?

Dean: You 'eard him. Yer off the team.

Joe: I'm what?

Robbie: Jack. Get after 'im. Quick.

(**Jack** exits.)

Robbie: Yer off the team Joey.

Chris: Yeah, we need a player who can actually.. ye' know, kick a ball.

Dean: And who ain't scared of balls in his face. (laughs)

Chris: (to **Joe**) Face it, mate. Ye' spend more time moaning about footie than actually playing it.

Dean: (mocking **Joe**) Oh my feet are all wet. And look at all the mud. Wah, wah, wah.

Chris: Admit it, mate. Football's never really been yer thing... Even Specs is better than ye.'

Specs: - Hey.

Joe: Well I won't miss all the mud, I guess...

Chris:

Exactly.

Dean:

Exactly.

Joe: But who else are ye' gonna get then? To replace me? No-one else from school dares play against Jack...

(**Chris, Dean, Joe** and **Robbie** turn to the football on stage.)

Robbie: Him.

(Blackout. A whistle blows.)

Sunday Shift

It's half-past three and she leans on the counter, polishing a wine glass that already looks as though it's been the subject of several cloths and cleaning liquids that afternoon. Sandy, having been a waitress in the Bridgeford Arms for a little over a year now, knows that Sunday afternoons are quiet. The pub sees few patrons between the hours of two and five- they're all down at the pub a few streets along (The Horse's Face? Sandy can't quite recall). People want good-value-for-money Sunday dinners at this time of day. With a choice of succulent freshly carved roast meats, a crisp Yorkshire pudding and thick flavoursome gravy poured in generous quantity over the top. The Bridgeford Arms' version of this is beef or nothing- and not much of it at that- for £6.99.

Sandy is the only waitress at the bar. Being one of the youngest members of the serving staff in the pub, with the least power and a strong need for any money she can get her hands on, she's once again been left to watch over the bar and restaurant. She assumes her colleagues are in the kitchen drinking wine and sharing desserts, or perhaps out the back passing around a cigarette to quell their boredom.

Having grown tired of organising and re-organising the glasses- lining them up in neat rows according to size and type- Sandy peers under the counter and into the bucket of discarded bottle tops. She observes the shiny pieces for a while, spots one she doesn't recognise, plucks it out and then places it in the pouch of her apron. She understands that this could be deemed as strange for a second year university student, but since moving fifty-seven miles away from home she's been prone to feeling sentimental and nostalgic. Her father collects bottle tops and as a child she'd spend many evenings rummaging in their box with small excited hands, occasionally pulling one out to admire it- a peculiar fascination that she's never really grown out of.

After placing the bucket of bottle tops back under the counter and pouring herself a Vodka and Coke, Sandy resumes her earlier leaning position. A man who appears in his mid-thirties approaches the bar and orders a pint of Fosters. Sandy's attention follows him as he returns to his table in the far corner, sitting down opposite a petite woman of a similar age to him. She has paprika-red hair cut into a bob and striking green eyes. From the awkward, slightly withdrawn postures of them both, Sandy comes to the conclusion that they must be on a first date. The woman seems disinterested in whatever he's droning on about. In the opposite corner to the awkward couple is a table of seven pensioners. All of them wear glasses and one of the three men is squinting at an iPad, attempting to decipher technology two

generations his junior, clumsily navigating the world-wide-web with apparent apprehension. Sandy stifles a giggle and glances around the room. A young family are sitting with a smiling, fidgeting toddler who is wiggling about in a yellow plastic highchair. At the back of the room, a girl in her mid-late teens sits writing in an A5 jotter, her brow furrowed. She breaks from her activity only to sip her diet coke or check the time. She seems reluctant to leave the warmth of the Bridgeford Arms to return to the cold, damp outdoors.

Sandy is so bored.

She pays for her drink, but before closing the till she removes from it a single penny, rubs her thumb over its engraved surface, and drops it into her purse. She does this every shift and now has nearly £2.10 saved in a piggy bank in her room at university. Pennies for charity, her gift to those who need it most every Christmas.

It's four 'o' clock. Sandy Smiles. Her shift has ended.

Hannah Williams

Right

Many consider the male right hand invaluable, therefore you can understand my frustration when a ravenous hound crudely severed all ties with my greatest ally. In a flutter of disarray, my precious tool was mere cannon fodder in the daily battle of delivering Major Stern's newspaper. "Sorry old chap, but keeping in touch with world affairs is vital for keeping the brain in check" he'd declare every morning. His fight against the inevitable purged my ears every morning, without fail. "I'll be damned if I let myself slip into old aged decomposition!" His defiance was admirable I must admit, although his tut and grunt as a response to my shortened arm ended our working relationship. Permanently.

As my beloved Mother will happily inform, I have never been a 'whiner' or 'moaner', the type that plagues the London Underground and the supermarket checkout queue. However I began to realise the unfair hand that I had been dealt. No longer could I acquaint pen with paper effortlessly. No more could I enjoy dinner without inadvertently role-playing a primitive barbarian. Heck I even struggled to grip a particular body part, thus I'm now essentially subscripted to lifetime membership at the eunuch club.

Despite my demise, I refuse to hold wither away. One weapon remains. My left hand. I can still wilfully flip my middle finger at any nearby gawker and politely indicate that the noisy swine should piss off.

Jake Hevness

"Jake is a young and dashing, neo-communist revolutionary. When not highlighting the ills of capitalism, Jake indulges in playing video games; the next great art form. From the hit flash fiction "Goddess" to the revolutionary novel "Dollar", Jake has received worldwide acclaim as the greatest subversive writer of all time."

The Art of Apodyopsis

An ‘Apodyopsis’
is a complex procedure
I’ve been able to
complete since I was adolescent.
My intentions sure
and perception pure
the end result being one rather
pleasant.

Implications are an essence of the
future
and the present
that are divided into segments
of incessant weapons, that when
utilised in a sentence
abandon one’s mind
at the entrance
to either acceptance or repentance
or disparity and resentment.

I would often tell tales, after bathing
in ales
of how all of us men
were dogs chasing tails.
I’d also brag about my ability
as an artist, since ‘Apodyopsis’ is a big
word.
Certainly not the largest.
But the men down at the pub aren’t
the smartest.
They often do battle over ‘who is the
hardest’.

When they realise what the word
defines
their misconstrued beliefs
will be set aside and
turned to the disgust that

does reside, deep inside, that did
deride
and casts aside my swelling pride.
While they stare me down with
judgemental eyes, which force
impressions to subside and turn
what I had then implied
into something considered
taboo and snide.

‘The act of mentally undressing
someone’
is its literal definition.
Still a thorough and delicate process
which requires the power to envision.
In the end it’s only an image.
Since I am no magician.
It’s no different than painting a
person
just without asking for permission.

Josh McCalla

“He has introduced us to his many mind bending words from ‘Ultracrepidarianism’ to ‘Colposinquanonia’. Josh has vocabulary that’s so extensive; it’s the best thing since slice bread. His use of long words greatly compliment his comedic style.”

Ultracrepidarian
So...

You're giving me advice?
on how to live my life
but in reality you actually
know nothing.

Your insolence and
incompetence and overwhelming
self-confidence morphs your voice
into nothing more
than buzzing.

You continue to contribute your huff-
ing
puffing and bluffing
even when its value is less
than nothing.

The constant pushing and shoving
of your advice
is slowly crushing
an optimists desire to live
which is stunning.

'Ultracrepidarianism' is the word
for the pointless and absurd
pieces of advice that you offer
without knowledge.

I'd suggest that you invest
Some time into
filling your head.
I'd recommend maybe
a trip back to college?

You confuse 'your' with 'you're'
making your grammatical advice
a farce
which quite frankly makes you
look like an arse.

You give relationship advice
when you're single
you lack the conviction
to even mingle
if no one wants you
shouldn't that at least
be a signal?

You reek of self proclaimed
profusion,
seclusion and delusion so much
that your extrusion
gives birth to an illusion
of invalid conclusions that
in transfusion creates confusion
stimulating your redundant intru-
sions.

Josh McCalla

"Alex has a tattoo. That's all Danielle knows.

He always sits in the corner. Everyone knows that.

On my exclusive interview with Alex to find out more he told me to stop bothering him. Truly he is the epitome of a mystery wrapped within an enigma trapped inside Russian dolls."

ALEX

IDLE PLEASURES
by
Kieran Spiers

“Writing is a journey. To truly succeed, you need to know when to travel, and when to sit down with a cup of tea.” – Kieran Spiers

“Born and raised in Nottingham, Kieran Spiers is a passionate and enthusiastic playwright, poet, and prose writer. Since an early age, he has paved the way for his works with inspiration from Sarah Kane and Samuel Beckett, while adding his own unique twist to characterisation and staging. A loving friend and intelligent young man, Kieran’s work is definitely something to watch in the years to come.”

Act One, Scene One

Cast:

RICH – thirty, arrogant, repulsive, Northern, rude

LIZ – mid-thirties, childish

JOAN – mid-twenties, introverted, resists indulgence

DAVID – forty, big headed, etonian

Setting:

A stately home in Wycombe, England.

Time:

A stately home in Wycombe, England.

Act One

Lights up on a dining table and chairs, centre. The table is decorated with filled wine glasses, a tablecloth, a central vase filled with flowers and a bowl of grapes.

A ticking clock can be heard.

Enter **Liz**, **David** and **Rich** talking (**David** smokes a cigar.)

Liz: - So I told Frankie to go swing his wang elsewhere

(**David** and **Rich** laugh.)

To which I replied, sling your hook.

(They laugh again.)

David: I say Liz, I may call you Liz yes? Yes good. I say, that is the most exquisite story of perpetual sexual prowess I have ever had the fortune to hear. 'Go swing your wang', I shall have to remember that and tell that exact story to Susanna.

Liz: Please sit down, taking up room the pair of you.

(They sit. **Joan** enters.)

Rich: Phwoar that's a lavelly piece of tender meat.

Liz: Excuse me Rich!

Rich: You're excused. Don't flatter yourself darlin' you're good looking and that, but by God you screech like a cat on sandpaper. No, I'm talking about your friend here. A nice tender arse, scrumptious thighs...

Liz: - Eve may have allowed her flowery sanctimony to be breached by Adam, but her virginity (at Joan) is locked and sealed from you, you vile boar! (to Joan) It's okay Joan, men like Rich tend be a tad, audacious.

Joan: (looking away from **Rich**) Oh I know.

Rich: Virginity! Virginity! Cor blimey she's a virgin! Then I must have her, wait till you see how I charm her with my good nature.

Joan: I am here you know!

David: Yes, I must say that you have quite an astute figure. I say **Liz**, I may call you **Liz** yes? Yes good. I say that you have a most beautiful friend. My friends tend to be utter tarts. You see one of our established committee must have a friend who would perform tasks to a level of esteemed quality whilst looking a tad beautiful on the side.

Liz: She's not my bloody maid David. Joan, help me fetch some more wine, we're running thin.

(**Joan** and **Liz** exit.)

Rich: Wise words David my good man, we'll make a philosopher out of you yet. Say how's the wife?

David: Well, well. She is well.

Rich: What's this now the seventh, eighth?

David: Sixth. Yes, Geraldine was a bit too... rigorous for my liking so I decided to unleash her as it were.

Rich:(aside) She was feisty I'll tell you that. (to David) Any road Harold Wilson looks like he's getting all the popularity don't he?

David: (sighs) The labour party will bring this country back down to its knees. We was okay with that nice Macmillan fellow. All that dastardly Wilson will do along with his band of merry men is make sure that every rich fellow has a reduced sum in their wallet and would give all the pounds to the poor. (lights another cigar)

Rich: They've been saying that he will usher in a new era. A white heat of technology he calls it. He's been sighted with The Beatles you know. The Beatles David. The Beatles!

David: To be quite frank with you Rich. I couldn't give a rat's arse.

(The ladies return, bringing forth a few bottles of wine placing them on the table.)

Liz: What are you men on about now?

Rich: Harold Wilson is going to win the next election.

David: Poppycock.

Liz: Politics Joan. Another subject men like to revel in. I like that Barbara Castle though. Isn't she lovely. I'd vote for the party she's in. Which party is she in Rich?

Rich: Labour dear.

Liz: Are those fresh grapes Joan? (pulls at a bunch)

Joan: Fresher than the fresh air that blows outside.

Liz: That air is not fresh. It is polluted by the sins of human existence, that wang

- there

(**Liz** points at **Rich** who in turn gives a hearty wave.)

- reeks of it, go near him and you get infected by the sin plague.

David: I say, Liz. I can call you that, can't I?

(**Liz** stares at him.)

As I was saying... Liz. I must scarper now for I fear Susanna is waiting for me to pick her up. It has been a most exquisite evening, do not forget Rich, you will be dining with Susanna and I tomorrow. Do not be late.

Rich: Righto, guv.

(**David** exits.)

I can't be arsed to go to his bloody 'social gathering'

Liz: Oh cheer up Rich!

Rich: Don't get shirty with me.

Liz: Sod off.

Joan: Will you two just shut the hell up! You are both acting like a pair of kids and causing up a palava.

(Pause.)

Liz: I'm going for a bath ta-ra.

(**Liz** exits.)

Rich: Hear, Hear, on yer tod! (beat) Nice one sugar tits.

Joan: You ill brought, repulsive, selfish, arrogant, big headed, hurtful dick.

Rich: No need to be salty. (Pause) You got guts girlie I'll give ya that. Maybe we can go for a drink sometime.

(**Joan** turns away)

Rich: You know you wanna!

(**Richard** grabs **Joan** by the arm, she tries to swing with the other. **Rich** counters.)

This cat's got some fight in her. (to **Joan**) An expression of love in any honest suit. Now run along. Tahtah.

(**Joan** gives him a cold stare and exits. **Rich** walks over to the table pours wine into a glass and gulps it slowly.)

Rich: Was any woman in this humour won? Was any woman... ah fuck it. She is a rebellious shrew with which I aim to tame. Ah good old Will Shakes he knew how to control a woman or two, perhaps even a man. It's funny because **Joan** has the banter of Beatrice and the vivaciousness of Viola. (Pause) She may be a complete and utter bitch but she will be mine. Women are like royalty... They need to be looked after, to be cared for... what I'm trying to say is that I am not a money man, I am not a classy man; but what I do is a whole lot of foreplay, which many lovely ladies love me for. I represent the idle pleasures of a man who seeks nothing but sex, drink and a nice juicy, scrumptious steak. Nothing more, nothing less. This is my life and I will live it indefinitely to the brink of my death. You do not have to like me, but it looks like you are stuck with me (Pause) You know what my mother, always said

Rich: (cont.) to me? She said, 'Richard you vile, pool of putrid excrement. Sort your bloody life out, because I won't be here forever' and she was right. She left with some fat, wealthy man whose business enterprise exploits the workers in Africa, Asia and somewhere else I personally, couldn't give a toss about. She didn't even leave a note. But, what do I care? They pay me, as a sort of 'pocket money.' The step-dad thinks, 'oh it will build up a nice father son bond.' Piss head. How can I build a bond with a man who forced my mum to run away with him, doesn't once call - mind you neither does my poor mum, they only send money and a letter in a nicely sealed envelope marked mum and Craig. There he lives half way across the globe in a nice capitalist country called; AM-E-RI-CA. Here's me stuck in a world entirely of my own doing with a bunch of tarts, piss heads and arseholes. I think I'll 'borrow' one of these bottles for a little while, I'm sure Liz won't mind. (to audience) You won't tell her. I know you won't. (Pause) Any road I'm off.

(**Richard** exits.)

Realisation

I admit it, I was excessively early. That always looked good to a girl though, right? Besides, I had nothing else to do. I desired the day to be perfect; unlike any other day that rained upon my chances. Today, the sun watched my back. The heat calmed my senses and I tried to lose the tension. It was just nerves, it happens to everybody. So I assumed this was normal before a first date and sat on the edge of my seat, ready for that heart stopping moment when my date would stroll around the corner.

Trying not to look vain, I had a casual glance of my reflection in my phone. A single strand of hair rebelled from the others to purposely agitate me. I tried smiling. I changed my mind. I returned my hands into my pockets and sat there glum, watching strangers pass by absentmindedly.

She'd been the one to ask me, surprisingly. She knew I liked her, but I didn't have the guts to ask her out. So one day she walks up to me, barely able to hold her laughter in. She asked me if I wanted to go out some time with a huge smile on her face, constantly checking over my shoulder to see her mates, giving them the look that things were going well. I said yes of course and here I was. I was excited, yet I regretted coming so early. Maybe it would have been cooler to arrive late. She seemed into 'cool' people. Did that make me cool?

I hunched over my watch to witness the seconds slowly slipping past.

"Hey, you look great!" I muttered quickly under my breath.

"Hi, looking forward to our date?" I cringed at my incapability of starting a sentence with this girl. "Hey! I didn't see you there."

I cried a little.

I tried to imagine her, strolling around the corner with a graceful smile.

Should I hug her? Shake her hand? Or look the other way and pretend I haven't witnessed her arrival yet. I stretched my legs, strolling up and down the path to ease my mind.

I really liked this girl, everything about her! And I thought she liked me too! She always pointed me out to her friends when I was nearby, she constantly poked me in class to get my attention and she even let me do her work for her! I checked my phone for the time – five minutes left. Then I noticed a message, probably still my fellow school mates teasing me. My heart skipped several beats; I'd received a text from her! My finger raced down to touch the screen and I opened the message.

“safe josh
Soz but im not comin, u do no that rite?
It was a dare lol
I thought it was pretty obvs :p
Oh and dont forget my homework 4 tomoz yeh?
You supposed to be doin it.
laterz :D”

Johnathon Weston

“Johnathon (AKA Johno) Weston has been writing since he was fifteen years old and is most proud of a piece of his short fiction, ‘Final Moments’. His two preferred forms to write in are prose fiction and script. Johno is a fan of J.R Tolkien’s ‘Lord of the Rings’ saga. (HIS PRECIOUSSSS.)”

Flowers

He picked up some flowers. Flowers say a lot... right? He wasn't actually sure what flowers say, but they say something. Girls like flowers. They're romantic. They're a bloody rip off. Maybe that is what flowers say. Hey, I bought you something which will be dead in a week and it cost me a bomb. Very romantic. It's traditional to buy a girl flowers, it shows you're trying to be romantic. He never really did anything romantic. He always ended up doing what he wanted to do. She didn't think it was cute watching football matches down at the pub with all the lads. She would probably have preferred to go to a posh restaurant than sitting in and ordering a take out. Even when they went out for a walk they ended up chasing after his dog for a good fifteen minutes. He felt he had to start doing something different before he lost her, and he definitely didn't want that. She had been distant lately; maybe she wasn't feeling the same anymore. But she has to feel the same. Perhaps if he does something to make it more about her she will feel the way she used to. Or there was a chance he was being paranoid.

He bought the flowers and drove to her house. Parked up outside he gave her a call. Girls love surprises but she might not want him to turn up uninvited. No answer. He tried calling again. No answer. He decided to go to the door, the lights were on she must be in. Three knocks and he walked over to the window to see if she was in there. She was. There she was. And there was also someone else. Someone else kissing her with his hands around her waist and hers were holding his hair. The same way she holds his hair.

He left the flowers on the doorstep.

Abby Montgomery

"Abby Montgomery lives in Chilwell, Nottingham with her dog, Bella, and her loving mother. She spends her time writing in bed and daydreaming of travelling the world and spending time in the sun. She may seem quiet but under the surface is a social butterfly with ambition and dreams of taking off into the sunset."

She and Her

"Life's short but it's the longest thing we'll ever do, ironic isn't it? That's why we should live and do what we like, never look back!" She was screaming, laughing, her arms lifting into the air, the bottom of her dressing gown sweeping the floor as she drifted up the stairs, "I just want to live, dear" she paused as she reached the top and turned. "And this is the only way, you see... it's simple isn't it? I've cracked it. To live we must die, that's when the real living begins. We're not living John. Don't you get it?! We're not living!"

I just didn't understand her; to this day I could not see past the wall she had built around herself, she was so detached she could have been anywhere. Standing at the top of the stairs, I could see her, I could hear her, but there was nothing between us, I could not touch her, or empathise with her. I opened my mouth to speak but nothing came out and although there was only silence surrounding us, she heard a thousand words, to her I had said more than enough. Her face dropped "Why do you do this to me? Why is it so hard for you to help me? I ask for one thing John, one thing!" She then collapsed into a ball; her delicate fingers clung to the staircase, her face buried in her arms. Watching her was like watching a play, her voice and movements seemed so rehearsed they were as far from reality as she felt.

Her dressing gown was silk, the colour of champagne, her almost white hair in rollers and a face full of makeup, lips as red as anger. She began making sobbing noises and this was my cue. I made my way up the stairs and as I sat down beside her she turned and clung to me, "oh why?!" the sobbing noises continued. Slowly she raised her head and sat staring into nothing, her makeup still immaculate and her face dry. I took hold of her chin and raised her head, her glazed eyes stared through me, I loved her, but she wasn't living to feel it. She had become so obsessed and fixated with what it meant to be alive; she had forgotten how to live in the process. The only thing I could do was play along with this fantasy life she had created. "Love looks not with the eyes dear, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind." At this she smiled, it was extraordinary, the way her mind and emotions were controlled only by what she wanted to hear, what she expected; like a child. "Oh, John!" she exhaled and waited two counts before kissing me.

It was picture perfect, but underneath it was hollow and empty. She jumped up and floated to the bedroom, sitting at the dressing table she began releasing her rollers. Her hair fell like tears down her back in perfect curls bouncing as they dropped. I sat down on the edge of the bed and watched her, she was fascinating. Her porcelain

skin without a blemish glowed in the morning light. She turned the radio dial and Henry Burrs – Always began to fill the room, she got up, dancing, taking steps that were almost angelic. Her dress spreading as she pirouetted around the room, she stumbled to the balcony doors and swung them wide open. Her grin widened as did her eyes as if seeing the world for the first time and the curtains and her hair began dancing with the wind. She ran over to the balcony and leant over, the wind was strong, stronger than ever, she began to laugh and laugh and laugh. She turned and beckoned me over. “Come on John, it’s amazing” her teeth glistened, her smile as inviting as ever. I went over to her and we both howled, dancing and skipping around our patio, kicking over plant pots and falling into chairs. I picked her up and she threw her head back screaming.

For the first time, it felt genuine, I could feel her happiness, I could feel her heart beat, I could feel... her. She was herself. “You’re crying” she smiled. And I was, uncontrollably. Tears streamed down my face, tears of absolute joy. She sang the end verse and caressed my cheek. “I’ll be there, always. Not for just an hour, not for just a day, not for just a year. But always.” The song ended and another began but we couldn’t hear it. Not anymore. I saw a single tear roll down her cheek and her expression changed, she walked over to the balcony wall, and climbed up. I was so engrossed in her I just stood still; I just stood still and stared, like always. “Always” she breathed before she spread her arms to the side and leant forwards. I ran frantically to the edge, reaching out towards her. But she had gone. I watched her sink through the sky. Her dressing gown flew behind her like wings.

But as I looked closer it seemed she disappeared before my eyes. I looked for a body, I looked for a crowd of people, I looked for something, looked for her... But there was nothing. A bunch of people going to work, billboard signs, taxis, the usual.

Ella Parchment

“Stories are very similar to human life- the memorable parts revolve around conflict”

As a writer, Ella shows a great interest in both poetry and prose. Based around issues close to home, like death, marriage, relationships, and family tribulations, Ella’s prose is an enjoyable outlook on modern life, and has much to say about the younger generations. With relatable characters, the issues she expresses in her work can be universally discussed, demonstrating her keen ambition to establish a connection with her readers through the medium of writing.”

Full Stop

Hello. I'm glad you could come. How're you? That's good to hear. I'm fine thanks. You look lovely. Would you like a drink? A coffee perhaps? Tea then? Well you should, your mouth looks as dry as an African riverbed. Right to the point then. I need to get something off my chest. No, It's not an infection. And no I do not want a cough sweet, very funny. Just. Just listen please. I've been thinking. Go on laugh, I know that it's rare. Look, the thing is I'm been seriously thinking. About you. About us. It's over. The End.

Jake Hevness

Oven Timer

Tuesday 12th February

It happened on Saturday night. Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire was on Film Four and we had a pizza cooking in the oven. Ham and pineapple. Twelve inches. We'd got caught in the rain on the way back from the shops. We thought we would make it back before it started, but we didn't get back in time. We were soaked.

So there I was, sitting on the settee, watching Harry Potter and waiting for the pizza to cook. I'd tied my hair back and put dry joggers on. Honestly, I hadn't done anything at all that day but I felt drained. Getting caught in the rain is pretty draining. And there was Sam, sat next to me. He'd changed his t-shirt into an old one of his I usually slept in, but kept on his wet jeans. I didn't really get the point but he never kept spare bottoms here anyway. And he wouldn't fit into a pair of my joggers.

And I couldn't wait for him to go. I always felt like that to be honest, I would constantly check the time wondering when the hell he would be going home. He would stay really late even if he was tired, even if he was nearly falling asleep, even if I said "you can go if you want Sam." And I wondered if he didn't want to go home or if he thought I didn't actually want him to go home. But I did. I wanted to have the whole settee to myself. I didn't want to be able to hear him breathing. I wanted to be fully relaxed. And I wasn't completely relaxed around Sam.

I wasn't unhappy. But I wouldn't have described myself as happy. We were a couple and we did all the things couples are supposed to do. But I didn't feel like we were together. I couldn't remember a time in our whole relationship that I was excited to see him or felt nervous when he was around.

I guess it was just natural that we ended up together, having been friends from such a young age. Everyone had always said he'd liked me, and he did really sweet things like walk me all the way home. Even that time it took us over an hour to get home once and he walked me all the way to my door.

But on Saturday, he was sat next to me in his wet jeans and breathing through his nose so loudly that I wondered if he was doing it to wind me up. But he always breathed loud. I could always hear him breathing. He got up; I didn't know why he got up because the pizza wasn't ready. And he wasn't going to the bathroom. He went into his coat pocket. He came over and stood in front of me for a few seconds. I knew he was waiting for me to look at him so I lazily rested my head back so I could

see his face. He looked scared and my heart sunk. I still didn't click on.

Then I saw the little black box in his hand and my heart sunk even further. I felt weak and my hands were shaking. He got down on one knee and I was mentally screaming at myself to say something, to stop him. But I forgot how to talk and my mouth just opened and closed again pathetically.

“Alice Louise, will you marry me?”

He was trying to be romantic but it wasn't romantic. It was awkward and embarrassing. His hair looked awful. He could hardly move in his wet jeans. I didn't feel I was the right person to make this decision, I wished I could ask someone what to do. I knew what I was supposed to say, and it felt like I could see our entire future. We would live in my apartment for a few years until I eventually fell pregnant then we would have to get a house because there just isn't enough room for a baby here. We would probably live in that house for the rest of our lives. And I would never be unhappy, but I wouldn't ever be able to describe myself as happy either.

It was probably the most difficult thing I've ever had to say. But I did have to say it, how could I answer with anything else? I didn't love him. I didn't want him around all the time. He didn't look at me while I tried to explain how I felt; I've never been good at that. He just hung his head and the colour drained from his face, but he didn't cry. And he didn't interrupt me; he just listened to what I had to say. He mumbled something about being sorry and it being best if he went. I just slowly nodded and didn't get up. Then the oven timer started to beep. I got up.

The pizza was ready.

We haven't spoken since.

Abby Montgomery

“Who am I?”

“Who am I?” he questioned as the cold, stained train window pressed firmly against his cheek. With only a ragged, worn overcoat there was little resemblance to the businessman of his aspirations. In fairness, the world is regularly cruel and often the dreams of the common man are crushed under the suppression of the ‘White Collar’ slave trade. To answer his question, or possibly to avoid it, he locks down his wary eyelids, shutting out the outside world. Be it an escape, a brief respite or simply a rendezvous with his thoughts, he was alone. Undisturbed. And for once, free.

Goddess

I love her. Uncontrollably. Eternally. As I turn, I run my tense fingers down her bare, tender thigh. I steal a glance at her innocent face, she is biting down on her bottom lip, attempting not to squeal like an infant pig in fresh mud. I gather courage and treat her young cheek to a leathery kiss. If emotions were to be denied I would forever be ashamed, overwhelmed by desire and consumed within a whirlwind of lust. A sudden movement from my goddess startles me so I give her a puzzled look. She responds, “It’s time for school Daddy.”

Jake Hevness

Some Of Us

Some of us can still feel.

We drift through a pre-packaged life;
They fill our heads with pre-programmed ideas, instruct us on how to think,
But some of us can still feel.

Pumped full of drugs to numb the senses,
Minds hooked up to artificial connections, they decide what we see,
Yet some of us can still feel.

The same ideas are rehashed and rehashed
While the same scenes play out in all the same ways,
We're doomed to repeat every single mistake
Like stock characters in a poorly written sitcom.
Despite it all, some of us can still feel.

The truth is an illusion that we scramble towards
In vain hope that, perhaps this time, the distant oasis is not just a trick of the light.
The rest turn their electronic heads, Too distracted by their second lives to see past the falsehoods of their first.

The pop-up on their screen tells them everything is okay, For whatever reason they believe it.

Struggling to make a difference we scream our hearts at an indifferent world,
But all we can ever amount to is an indefinable ripple
In the growing pool of apathy we dare to call humankind.
We risked it all to stand out, but our flashes of colour are lost amidst the greyscale.
It comes to the point where we no longer want to feel.

It's like cold blooded murder to give up when we've fought out,
But the cosmic coincidence of life amounts only to degeneration
So us free flying sparks no longer want to feel.

We stop clawing against the norm. Because the truth has left us jaded, because our conviction and hope has faded, Because we no longer want to feel.

Shove the cables in my head.

Dylan Butcher

“Despite his name he is a gentle-man of literature. He enjoys writing Haiku’s, 5 and 7 are his favourite numbers. He worships grammatical accuracy. He’s not a man of poor writing, in fact he despises it. His eyes are bad; he wears glasses but he still has the power to envisage.”

Part One

Murderer, killer, freak
encased in glass
snap goes the camera,
let the flash invade the naked eye.

Murderer, killer, freak
those words,
play a continuous recording
Invading the darkest recesses of the
so-called
complex mind.

Murderer, killer, freak
I won't waste a good smile though,
nobody died that night,
that tragic September,
I never touched anyone,
my skin against theirs
my smell against theirs
Impossible.

Murderer, killer, freak
I beg of you just purge me,
let me perish at your hands
this curse, it penetrates
every organ.

Please you wanted this
nobody died,
because
I died that night.

Part Two

Calm serenity of the ocean,
The water my messenger
I hear Ganga.

I beg of you,
Wash away my sins,
Wash away the truth,
Cleanse me.

Seems like a heavy choice ,
The opaque sky reveals
Mixed emotions, tethered to,
Our very essence.

Can you see the blood?
It leaks,
I want every drop,
Of dirty blood
To expel, out of my shell
I want fresh blood.
Bless me Ganga

Bless me, for
I am the messenger of the saints

Gavon Toor

“His creative work is filled with passion, the content of his work is certainly one to be read and highly regarded. His poetry contains beautiful and poetic images which certainly has been inspirational as a fellow writer. Gavon is the master architect of his own worlds.”

The Act of Giving Up

Never, never, never, never, never give up was what she said. That was before she killed herself of course. It was easier said than blah blah blah, but it's true. Life is a ballet performed on thin ice, this I know.

“Alex, please listen!”

Words are words until they are actions. I should have remembered this before she misstepped, before the ice broke and she crashed through. Now the show is over but the unsatisfied audience never left, they simply turned their collective gaze on me.

“You’re worth so much more than this.”

Which pill was the one that killed her? At which point did she realise she had gone too far? Or was she only ever doing exactly what she wanted to? “Stop this. Please.”

Maybe she was sick of dying slowly and wanted to speed up the process. Maybe she was tired of addiction, indigence and trying to look happy. Maybe she was done with being a disappointment.

“Alex, please, you can’t solve anything with this.”

The simple fact is I could love her until the end of this universe and it would still not make up for the pain she felt, for the shit she was living through. All her life she was a falling star just waiting to burn up. “This is insane. Oh God, please, put the gun down.”

I never could have saved something that burned so fiercely. She was a black hole and a million suns all rolled into one, I was nothing but a spark in her fiery void. I was not enough.

“Alex don’t turn one tragedy into another.”

The audience gasps, all goes quiet, they know that the conclusion is at hand. If you want a show I’ll give it to you. “I’m not going to,” I say, pulling the trigg-

Dylan Butcher

Winter

We find ourselves confined within these wicked months, consumed by this desolate season. Mother prays for mercy, her knees mauled by the bedside carpet. In truth this brand of devotion accomplishes little, plea after plea acknowledged only by passing woodlice. Blistering wind serves as an efficient educator, regularly reinforcing the syllabus of penance. I adjust my grip, although laboured by my father before me, the exit remains; the stench of malt whiskey still radiating from my strained saviour. The promise of salvation has worn thin, hope tastes stale. I crack a relieved, reassured smile. Spring has come early for me.

Pleasure

My nose erects as a sweet aroma filters through the otherwise stagnant air. Vigorously my tongue caresses the chapped surface of my lips. I slither forward clawing at the rusted dinner tray before me. “No time to waste” I reassure myself as each tooth continually rains down fatal blows upon my defenceless prey. An above movement catches my eye, “What’s this?” I hiss. A stone-like figure inches forward. His pristine uniform is utterly hideous to my eyes. I pause in recognition of my inevitable slayer pushing away the remnants of this final pleasure.”I enjoyed my last meal Officer, I’m ready.”

The Rainbow

“I was only a child when it happened, when my life was so unexpectedly ripped away from me.” That’s always the first thing the reporters want to hear. They want none of this “Well, it was so long ago now...Oh I can barely remember...It was nothing, it was probably all just in my imagination” bullshit. No, they want bold, fantastical statements that will strike fear into the hearts of the British public, which will terrify grown men into hysteria and cause an outbreak of social and political anarchy. Essentially, they want a big story, and it’s my job to give it to them.

“I didn’t always live in Britain” I say to the reporter sat opposite me. “Thirty years ago to the year, my mother gave birth to me under the dusky skies of Venezuela. A country I haven’t seen in twenty four years and a country I never want to see again for as long as I live. For you see, this is where my story begins; upon those very same unsuspecting shores of Southern America.

I was only 6 years old at the time. I recall the sensation of my skin prickling uncomfortably as I sat in the back of my parent’s car as my father drove me and my mother to the capital: Caracas. I remember the car was very old, the ventilation system was broken, which caused the car to become swelteringly hot. Not that I cared, I was too busy fiddling with my left shoelace to mind very much.

The drive had been pretty uneventful, the rain poured lightly down through the scorched air as my parents chatted to each other and I sat in the back, lost in the twisting knots of my brilliant shoelace creations. That was when I saw it; an arch to heaven. I could see every colour imaginable: vivid reds to passionate oranges and cheerful yellows and everything in between and beyond. It was beautiful, my first rainbow. I stared at it in awe, wondering how such an enchanting vision was possible. To my 6 year old mind, it was completely incomprehensible, a magic charm sent from God.

I was snapped out of my spell of admiration when my father braked suddenly, I lurched forward, almost hitting the seat in front of me. Everything fell silent, but eventually I dared myself to look up.

In front of us was a man; an ordinary man on an ordinary day.

My father unbuckled his seatbelt and got out of the car. My mother and I watched him walk

towards the stranger. I felt incredibly uncomfortable; I could just sense that something wasn't right. My father spoke to the man for a couple of minutes until eventually it looked like he was retreating to return to the car. That was when everything changed. The man pulled out from behind his back a fence-post that had barbed wire wrapped around it. He struck my father across the back which caused him to fall and cry out in pain. I heard my mother scream as she bolted from the car.

I saw the man pull out a lighter from his pockets and flick it before lowering it onto my father. In seconds, my father was ablaze, I could hear him scream in agony, smell his burning flesh as I watched it char and burn from his bones, the fat melting off his muscles as it pooled on the floor, my father screaming the entire time. My mother was next. The man pulled out a knife and thrust it between her eyes, my mother fell to her knee's screaming. The man lifted up his weighted boot clad foot and brought it swiftly down upon her skull. A loud, cracking sound filled the air as he did so. Then all was silent. I watched as the man approached the car, he leaned down so that he was eye level with me, so that I was looking into his deep black eyes. He smiled kindly down at me before he vanished, and I was finally left alone."

The reporter is writing down notes frantically, her notebook is precariously balanced on her knee which is covered by her long white coat. When she looks up she smiles at me; but the smile is cold and unreal before handing me a glass of water. All the reporters do this and I accept it graciously, gulping it down thirstily. When I have finished I see she has now stood up.

"Thank you Miss Greyson, you have been most helpful," she drawls, and I shake her hand.

"But there's just one more question Miss Greyson, if I may?" she asks. I nod my permission for her to continue. "How is it you know so many details of your parent's murders with such clarity, when you were sat in the back of a car and looking through the rain?" she asks. I open my mouth to reply but find I have no response. My head is swimming and I feel drowsy, I lean my head back as I feel the journalist leading me away, this is the last sensation I have, before the darkness embraces me once again.

Fiona Murdoch

"Murdoch's fascination with war provides a realistic image of days gone by as a result of her impressive imagination as a groundbreaking female writer. Her moving images and invested characters remain a tribute to her historical style whilst treating her readers to stories from a not-so different world."

Final Moments

Watch a feather fall; watch the delicate descent towards the ground. It chooses a silent path, complying with the gentle breeze that knocks it sailing forward like a ship on water. It lightly skims the air and glides closer and closer to the floor, taunting gravity as its flight comes close to its soft end.

Now watch a man fall – the difference will be unmistakeable. A speck of black in the empty sky of blue paints a blur. With every second the mass is magnified, until a majestic figure of a man is revealed in free-fall. He flaps his wings aimlessly as he plunges messily into a final descent, the wind carries his scream. His eyes are bloodshot - full with fear. You stop. You stare. “Oh my God” you scream, your mind struggling to keep up with your eyes. Gravity taunts his victim, the fall escalates. Not long left. Still you watch. There’s nothing you can do. He knows his life is soon to an end. His final view of the world is through the eyes of a wingless bird. His face is contorted, bracing for the hard impact. He cracks like an egg.

Johnathon Weston

The Dying Man

Three minutes.

We have to get in, get the gear, and get out in three minutes. My palms are clammy, my throat is dry. There are three pigs with me. They are absolutely silent. Snouts still. Not a sniffle. I narrow my eyes and prepare. In a moment, we'll burst into action. The pigs look mean. Ready. We're all ready. And it's time.

Three minutes.

I sit on the bonnet of my car with a cigarette in my mouth. The smoke spirals off and dances under the stars. In my other hand, I hold a duffel bag. I look at my wristwatch. Three minutes till my sanity snaps. I was sure of it. After finishing the remains of the cigarette, satisfied and content, I throw the bud into a murky drain, and start off towards a small block of flats ahead of me. I'm not in a friendly mood.

Three minutes.

I am holding the woman I love. I think she loves me too. I'm not sure. There's sparks of affection. Moments when she relies on me. Yet still, I have doubts if she needs me. Wants me. And yet, we are still kissing.

Little do I know, in three minutes, we'll be in bed together. I'll be trapped in a beautiful moment.

There's a myth that when you're dying, your life flashes before your eyes. This is not true. Not entirely. Death is the end. The last chapter of a book. And no matter how short or long that book is, one can't help but consciously flick back through the pages and smile, or sulk, or wish, or regret. When you die, you are not forced to relive the experiences of your life, but you choose to. It's an elevated state of thinking. One cannot help but reminisce and wonder if they really fulfilled what they wanted in their allotted time. I know this because I am dying.

I am lying on the floor of a hotel room. It's my hotel room. I can't remember how long I've been here. It's small. Two rooms. Bedroom, bathroom. In the bedroom, there's a television set, boxy, simple, I remember it having only five channels. It faces a single bed with red sheets, accompanied by a little bedside table. On the table is a circular tray, bearing several

round stains. Previously, a glass of scotch was perched on its edge, but now, it is shattered next to me on the wooden floor. Strands of liquid ran from a central puddle amidst the glass shards. It must've been in my hand when I fell. I probably dropped it. I'm not sure. My memory of the last few minutes is hazy.

Everything is very still. There's not a sound, even though the room door is wide open. Silence is inside and outside. I can't see anyone, either. Only people in the pictures of days- long gone- running around in my head. Motionless, my body is spaced out like a star jump, arms and legs sprawling. My limbs can't move. I'm pressed down by the weight of my own body. And, although I can't see it, I know my face is stuck in a permanent droop. It feels numb and cold. I try to twitch a cheek or an eyelid. Try. It's to no avail. Best to stay still, I think. I'm losing a lot of blood. I know this because my head is to the side, and I can feel it running down my nose from my forehead in streams.

I've been shot in the head. I don't remember who did it, and I can't fathom why. All I know is there's a hole on the right side of my skull, and blood's pouring out. Must've been a dud shot. It hit, but didn't kill instantly. Lingering on, I'm still breathing, barely. I'm calm. I don't see any point in panicking. I'm going to die soon. I've accepted it. No surgery or magic pill is going to save me. My head's a mess. Physically and mentally, I suppose. It hasn't crossed my mind to try and remember the events preceding this. Instead, I'm perusing the leafy pages on my life story. Most paragraphs are covered in blotches of black ink. I can only recall things in bits. I spy a smashed glass next to me. It must've been in my hand when I fell. I'd probably dropped it. I'm not sure. My memory of the last few minutes is hazy.

Déjà vu.

A bright light blazes overhead. My vision blurs. There's a figure. A white figure. No, not quite white. Cream. It's a cream-coloured silhouette of a man. I gain some focus. He's not a silhouette, but he is wearing a cream suit. A very dapper, sharply-cut cream suit over a regular physical form. And aviator sunglasses. For a moment, I ponder why he's wearing sunglasses in a dark hotel room. There's no sun, of course. I soon realise this should be the least of my concerns, but I can't help but be transfixed on this question. Why? Why is he wearing these sunglasses? Why? Why? I feel my mind slipping. I'm still losing blood. But the question remains, rolling around, on and on; why are you wearing these sunglasses, stranger?

"Why am I wearing these sunglasses? You tell me..." He says. His tone is sombre

and calm, nulls my pain, but I'm somehow surprised. I don't think I expected him to speak, let alone for his voice to be as crisp and pleasant as pork crackling. Almost golden. I imagine him to be a speaker on the radio, or a news reader. His voice is that mellow. These are silly thoughts about this... this Cream-Suited Man.

As his lips move, I narrow my eyes and peer at his facial features, smacked onto the front of his head which is cranked down to look at me. It is an unremarkable face, I must declare. If in a crowd, it would blend away with ease. It was forgettable. Not special. A nobody. A ghost. He has nothing specific I can identify. His hair is plain, his cheekbones are normal, and his eyes are constantly hidden behind the black glare of those perplexing sunglasses. Why is he wearing them?

"I told you, only you can answer that question!" He speaks with some joviality, "But is that really a question you'd like to ask, this very moment? I don't think it is. There are a thousand better questions you could choose to ask in a thousand more orders! Think really hard, okay? So far, you've failed to comprehend anything that's happening!"

I do as The Cream-Suited Man says. Why resist? Struggling, I squeeze each question I choose into a methodical script.

1. Who are you?
2. Why are you here?
3. Are you reading my thoughts, or am I just imagining things?
4. Did you shoot me?

I'm satisfied with these four questions.

"Very good. That's more like it. You've got your head screwed on now, even if there is a lead bullet stuck in it!" He bends his knees and claps, chuckling. I don't find this funny. The chuckling stops. The Cream-Suited Man is no longer above me. Now, he's lying on the bed. He must be fast, I think, to be able to appear there so swiftly in so little time. My thoughts are slapped aside.

A new list bubbles in my brain.

1. Who am I? I am The Cream-Suited Man. You named me this.
2. Why am I here? I am here because you want me here.

3. Am I reading your thoughts, or are you just imagining this? Yes.
4. Did I shoot you? I don't know.

These answers tell me very little.

"You asked, I answered!" The Cream-Suited Man shouts, every syllable perking my ears. He now has a lit cigarette pressed between his lips, and rants through smokey breaths, "I answered as specifically and to-the-point as I possibly could. Take a second, sit back- no, sorry, that's insensitive," He grins, "Lie back and just think. Think about those answers. They tell you much more than they first seem to!"

I do as he says, and go over the answers in my head, again.

He is The Cream-Suited Man. I named him this. He is here because I want him here. Yes, he is reading my thoughts, but I am just imagining things. He doesn't know if he shot me.

It still doesn't make sense. But then I remember what The Cream-Suited Man said. A thousand questions, a thousand more orders. A thousand more orders. Order. The answers were perfect. The order was not. Quickly, I rearrange them in a new fashion, change some words around, and slowly try going over them again.

He is here because I am imagining him. I have chosen to name him The Cream-Suited Man. He is my thoughts, so he doesn't know who shot me, because I don't either.

It's all clear now. I'm losing a lot of blood. It's pouring out. My head's a mess. Physically and mentally, I suppose. I'm hallucinating. The Cream-Suited Man is a vision. He embodies my thoughts.

I'm aware. For the first time in the last few minutes, I'm aware. He's wearing those sunglasses because that's what my mind has chosen for him to wear. It's all clear now. It's all clear now.

"Well done. That's step number one to solving this... predicament," slyly, he smiles, and stubs the cigarette out on the bedside table, "Now we've established who I am, we can get to the meat of the matter: who shot you?" I don't know.

"It was rhetorical!" He snaps, "Anyway... I'm going to act as a detective, of sorts. I will help you figure this out. We're going to go step by step, piece by piece, start to finish, and I guarantee, by the end of it all, we'll know who shot you. Who shot US!"

From the start? There's a bullet in my brain. I don't think there's time to read through my entire life. And I don't think it's possible. In my condition, I can remember very little. Barebones snapshots of four or five life events, at the most.

The Cream-Suited Man materialises next to me, sitting beside the television, and whispers softly, "Time is stagnant, my friend! You're dying. Your body doesn't have long to live. Judging by the blood loss, I'd say, oh, three minutes? But your mind... different story. A thousand questions, a thousand more orders, a thousand thoughts, every second. Rapidly going. Bambambambambam. Time's not an issue. We'll get to the bottom of this, don't you worry. We'll get that one answer you're after, and you can die a content man..."

Three minutes.

With only a few blinks of an eye remaining, I and The Cream-Suited Man must dig deeply into the novel of my past, tearing through page after page until finally, in one climatic swoop, we find the extract we're looking for. But where do we start? We can't just dive in half-way through and expect to achieve our goal. Of course, we must begin from the very start, as The Cream-Suited Man dictated. But we need to hurry. With three minutes to do this, we've got no time to waste.

Charlie Jones

"Charlie's interest in theatre and acting translates into his ability to tell stories when in creative writing lessons. His prose writing and poetry is interesting and often unusual. His inspirations and favourite works show through his work in his ability to keep a reader captivated. His charisma and charm additionally make his writing colourful and enjoyable. His chapters and short stories take drastic and intriguing twists that leave the reader mystified and ever in anticipation, yet never dissatisfied, a truly talented writer in the making."

The Funeral

I had been to way too many funerals recently. Yet here I was, dressed in black, trousers, shirt, and my trusty backpack. I curled my hair because I heard that was proper, but I tied it back the moment it flew into my mouth. I didn't even know the family. The mum, probably, stood outside dressed in a black mood and clothes to match. I walked up to her and bowed my head, respectful like.

"Sorry for your loss," I kept my head down, my hands shaking as she gave a mutter of a reply before wiping a sad looking tissue under her nose.

The church itself was almost beautiful. My whole view was taken up by its bright grey tones. The large, vintage looking clock at the front was 43 seconds behind Big Ben. The steeple swirled up into the sky but several of the tiles were missing or stolen, I had heard they worth something. Inside was religious. It was very barren; no plush seats instead ancient tapestries of Him being murdered and Him murdering others. Beautiful really.

The casket wasn't open so I wouldn't be able to see his face, I didn't really care. I knew what he looked like. I saw the shock on his face as the bullets entered his stomach and the blood seeped out. I wonder if they erased the shocked expression or left it, knowing no one would care to look.

I sat at the back, away from peeping eyes and those who would ask how I knew him and other awkward questions. At 10:36 the service started with the priest looking at his watch hurriedly before My Chemical Romance kicked in. It wasn't even his favourite song. His mum didn't know any better. She was shoved into the deep end, organising a funeral for a son who had moved out and wanted nothing to do with her.

I dozed off for a bit, these things usually bored me. I woke with a jolt to the stereotypical closing song, Angels by Robbie Williams. His mum was sitting at the front crying crocodile tears while some man held her close. As I looked around I could tell that a lot of people had sneaked in late but, the chapel was still half empty, he was never very popular, bit of a dick really.

I held back while everyone went home to eat cake and chat about how it was 'such a shame'. I needed to go and see him one last time before the earth reclaimed his skin

and maggots crawled inside to eat the soft bits.

“Excuse me, sir,” I asked the priest as he began to set up for the next one.

“Sorry luv, got another one naw, can this wait?” I was mildly surprised by the Yorkshire accent.

“No,” I said, showing him my ID, smiling.

“Try not t’ be t’ long, ‘kay?” He whispered as he opened up the back room where all the unwanted bodies of the day were stored. I guess it was lucky that no one really cared where he was buried. If luck was such a thing.

Before I could make a witty comment about it being a secret I would take to the grave, the priest had ushered me inside and shut the door. I was surprised by how cold it was, it made sense to prevent the rotting flesh smell but, surely Febreze would work just as well. The coffins were organised, in lines but with no names.

As I stood there, surrounded by the dead, I got thinking, how do we know if that when a body is buried that it’s the right person? They might get it mixed up? They don’t know what he looks like, not when they’re all pale and dead. They might just put any old body in and just stick a name on the case and pronounce them dead. James could be off in Tenerife for all we need know and there was just some imposter in his casket. He wasn’t like because I saw him die. But, he could have.

Danielle Revill-Crookes

“Danielle developed her interest in creative writing the summer before beginning the AS course. She enjoys reading dystopian fiction, which influenced her piece ‘The Funeral.’ She feels that a lot of people have clichés about mental illness, a running theme in her work, and so writing allows her to combat these stereotypes.”