

# Stylus

Student  
Magazine

St Margaret's





Welcome to the first issue of *Stylus*, a student magazine showcasing the creative, literary and artistic talents of our St Margaret's students in Years 6 to 12. *Stylus* aims to encourage and celebrate our talented writers and artists within our school and provide them with an opportunity to have their works printed and enjoyed by others. I would like to thank all of the students who have contributed their work to be included in our first issue. It was tremendous to see the rich variety and talent of our students' works. Thank you also to our student editors, Lily Alford and Amelia Gearing, for their assistance in launching *Stylus* 2024. We invite you, our St Margaret's community and families, to enjoy these works created by students of St Margaret's in 2024.

**Rhea Barber**

*Stylus* 2024

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# The Last Breakfast



Lily Alford  
Year 12

CATHERINE STARED AT the scrambled eggs. They lay there, cold and congealing: a metaphor for her heart. She checked her watch. Nearly 8.00am. Almost time to go.

Once, her mother had made her breakfast; she had set it before Catherine every day, carefully placing the China plate, the knife and fork, the condiments. As a toddler, she remembered the joys of egg soldiers, smiley-faced pancakes, and French toast piled high. As she grew older, the breakfasts evolved, but the care never wavered.

A time in her teenage years, not long after her father had left, Catherine announced she was now a vegan. Her mother's response was swift and creative: tofu and legumes cleverly disguised as sausages and eggs. Each mouthful had been a testament to her mother's love for her. In the later years, long after Catherine had moved out, breakfast became a standing Saturday morning ritual. How could she have swallowed those breakfasts so carelessly? She had gobbled the toast, chewed the bacon, gulped the coffee, never realising that each serving was bringing her closer to the time when there would be no more.

Catherine pushed the plate aside.

It had been a gradual decline. First, burnt toast. Then raw sausages, eggs flecked with pieces of shell. Then one Saturday morning, Catherine arrived at the table set for three.

'Are you expecting someone else this morning, Mum?' she had asked, her stomach knotted in anticipation of the response.

'No, Darling, it will just be the three of us,' her mother casually replied. 'Your father has just ducked out for the paper.'

That had been the final straw, the indicator that something had to be done.

In the care home, the breakfasts had been basic. Toast, corn flakes, the occasional treat of muesli, 'to get the digestion going'. Her mother had stared at the spread in bewilderment, not understanding such barren, thoughtless fare. It was a new world to her: one she had been imprisoned in.

She had thrown her bowl one day, repulsed by the slimy mess of cereal, so far from her carefully prepared plates of bacon and egg. Catherine picked it up and apologised.

'No harm done,' said the unsmiling nurse. 'They're made of plastic, see?'

She placed it back onto the table, her heart aching for the delicate trailing-rose patterns of her childhood. Catherine looked into her mother's eyes, and she could see she remembered, too.

Just for a few seconds, and then it was gone.

Another time, she had hurled the toast rack at the wall.

'Breakfast in her room might be better,' explained the nurse. 'We don't want to upset the other residents.' Catherine looked around at the dining hall full of empty shells: like eggs, cracked, broken, and then scrambled, sitting in their plastic chairs, staring into space. She wondered what it would take to upset them in their distant worlds. More than a toast rack, surely.

Then the final visit, last week. Catherine was directed to her mother's location – not in her usual room. She continued down the hallway, each step heavy and uncertain, past the nurses at the desk with their sympathetic eyes; past the decrepit old man wandering aimlessly through the foyer; past the grieving woman who sat hunched in her chair; past the sign labelled 'Memory Care Unit'. She found her mother in bed, her wrists strapped to the metal sides.

'We can't have our staff attacked,' explained the warden, his eyes stern while his mouth smiled. The accompanying doctor stood mute.

The sharp scent of disinfectant stung Catherine's nose, each breath a reminder of the room's sterile emptiness. Her eyes traced the faded yellow walls, lingering on the posters that commanded proper hand washing, their cheerful cartoons failing to lift the oppressive atmosphere. In hindsight, it was exactly the kind of room where you'd expect to receive bad news.

The geriatrician found his voice: 'I'm so sorry.' His weary eyes looked at Catherine with a mixture of compassion and resignation. 'The dementia is advanced and well ... there's really nothing we can do except make things as comfortable as possible for the time that remains.' They'd left them to it then, closing the door softly behind them.

The room was still but for her mother's chest rising and falling with the same cadence that once soothed Catherine as a child.

Catherine enclosed one of her mother's small hands in both of her own. A small collection of personal items—a single wilting flower in a vase, a worn magazine open at the cooking section, and a framed photograph faded by the sun—captured a young mother and daughter. The toddler's cheeky grin, unmistakably Catherine's own, even now, stood as a feeble defence against the encroaching walls.

Catherine sat beside her mother, awake now, and talked to her of her favourite breakfasts. The muffins she'd made, the pancakes on her birthday, the eggs benedict at Christmas. Her mother stared, unseeing as Catherine watched for some glimmer of remembrance, some flicker in her mother's eyes.

Nothing.

As she kissed her mother goodbye, she could feel her forehead against her lips, paper-thin, guarding a life-time's recipes inside a scrambled brain.

The soft chime of the wall clock announcing 8.00am broke Catherine's thoughts. She stood up and took her untouched plate to the sink. She paused to adjust her funeral brooch in the mirror, before heading out of the front door.

THE HOMESTEAD STOOD sturdily, deep in the valley.

The classic Queenslander was camouflaged from view by large eucalyptus trees, if not for the candy-striped awnings, which alternated between faded ivy-green and dirt-coated white. The stairs, framing, and front door were all accented with the same deep green colour, starkly contrasting the dry, lifeless fields that had been trampled by lean cattle as they scrounged for food. Behind the garden, dusty water dribbled quietly down the creek and into the depreciated river, which longed for the rain to return.

Inside the homestead, a woman scaled a rickety, pull-down ladder. The air was thick and dusty in her nose as she pressed her body through the small attic hatch. Her feet left the safety of the ladder as she gingerly placed her weight upon the unstable flooring. She had not entered the attic in years, and after three children, the floor seemed to bow more effortlessly than it had prior.

The brown boxes that flooded the attic floor brimmed with folded children's clothes, the bright colours softened by the layer of dust that had settled on top of the clothes. Besides the boxes, labelled with scrawling letters of vague descriptions of their contents, were piles of drawings and paintings, filed neatly by date of creation.

She bent down, admiring the colourful creations that had been crafted by her children in frantic attempts to cool off on scorching summer afternoons or warm up on bone-chilling winter mornings. But the dark grey of granite pencil caught her eye, the sketch perched neatly on top of the furthest pile.

The woman reached down and plucked the crumpled paper from the pile, a cloud of dust particles dancing to the ground as she studied the drawing.

The lines were delicately sketched on the paper at flawlessly straight angles; the granite charcoal of the pencil perfectly contrasted the white of the paper. The floorplan would have been a perfect replica of the homestead, if not for the scribbled extensions with rigorous measurements that had been faintly erased and re-written over and over.

A discreet signature floated in the corner, the date scrawled below it:

12/03/1973

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The woman's hand hovered shakily over the old, peeling door, which seemed to loom over her slim, meek frame. *Just knock.* She told herself. *What is the worst that could happen if you just knock?* She grasped the paper in her other hand more tightly and knocked on the door.

'Come in,' the voice boomed from within the room, making the woman jump, the hairs on her arms pricking at the sound of the reply.

The study was the most eloquent room in the homestead. On one side, a floor-to-ceiling bookshelf towered over the woman, the countless account books and encyclopedias covered in the same slim layer of dust that enveloped the entire house. On the other wall hung a beautiful depiction of the homestead in all its past glory. The stark white of the painting was a brighter version of the dust-coated, drought-ridden house she had begun to know.

'How are you settling in?' The man's prominent crows-feet and permanently sun-hardened cheeks reflected the summers he had spent out in the yards as he delicately gripped a fountain pen, his initials intricately embellished onto it.

He raised his other hand, calloused lines prominently etched onto his palm from years of work, offering the antique desk chair that sat solemnly across the desk from him.

'Fine,' she replied, taking a seat in the uncomfortably upright chair, the carved oak protruding into her back as she attempted to find a somewhat comfortable position. 'Sorry! Yes, it's good.'

'Good,' the man remarked, his tired eyes glancing back down at his paper before settling back onto the woman. He placed his pen onto the desk beside the paper, his hands going to his greying hair as he leant back in his grand armchair, the vivid floral pattern that covered the chair contrasting starkly with the arid countryside out the window behind him.

'And life after the wedding? Any trouble in paradise?'

On the desk in front of the man sat a framed photo of the woman sitting joyfully beside a tall, lanky man with dark curly hair and deep green eyes. The son. Their pride and joy. Now, hers. She remembered the moment. You could see the love on their faces, him whispering in her ear, her face broken out into a large smile as she leaned in closer. A tuxedo jacket wrapped around her shoulders, partially covering the pearly white satin of her dress.

The wedding was in late August of the year prior. It was beautiful – everyone said so. Pristine floral arrangements were sported around the garden of the homestead, the bouquets bursting with bushy bottlebrushes, colourful banksia and delicate lillypilly. She thought the rural setting was so romantic.

The entire property was enveloped in vibrant shades of green thanks to the miraculous return of the rain the week prior. She had walked down the aisle in a beautiful white dress, which donned a high neck and long sleeves detailed with fragile lace and shiny ribbon, lovingly handmade by her mother.

Her dearly beloved, death-do-we-part, had since been away on business. He'd left not long after the honeymoon, his side of the bed still cold months later.

It had always been the woman's dream to go on a grand trip for her honeymoon, maybe see the building styles of the great cities such as Paris or Rome. She would even be content with Sydney.

'How about Rockhampton?' her fiancé had asked as they sat in front of the Sunday roast she had tiresomely prepared all afternoon.

The woman avoided her husband's glance, looking down at the al dente broccoli and lumpy mashed potatoes, pressing her lips tightly together.

'Rockhampton?' The soft butter on top of the dishes slowly melted to the sides of the plates, creating pools of oil around the food. 'Why on earth would we go there?'

'I have some business in town,' he said, not even glancing up from the slab of meat he was slicing. 'It would be convenient.'



Alice Baxby  
Year 12

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'Oh yes!' she said, glossy eyes gazing out the window into the falling daylight. 'Everything is great! You all have been so lovely, welcoming me into your home!'

The man cleared his throat loudly, drawing the woman back into the conversation.

'Yes,' the man said, deep-brown eyes squinting slightly as he sat up in his chair. 'So, what do you need from me today? As I am sure you are aware, we are finalising a big deal this week.'

'I apologise for interrupting,' the woman began, hands grasping her paper harder as she sat up, acutely aware of the harsh, ruby-red blush that appeared on her face as she stumbled over her words. 'As you know, before the engagement, I studied a degree of architecture at The University of Queensland and I-'

The woman hadn't even finished her sentence before the man was leaning forward, his boisterous voice booming over her explanation.

'Oh yes! I was hoping you would mention that! I think the homestead needs a bit of a freshen-up, wouldn't you say? What did you have in mind?'

'Well, during my studies we did a course on architectural styles around the world and how to include modern designs into older houses like this one. I was thinking maybe an expansion of the sunroom, as well as extending the veranda out so we can have more entertaining space.'

The woman placed the now-crinkled paper on the desk, her eyes glancing down at the paper, the designs glinting up at her supportively.

The man's eyes didn't even glance over the paper before he said, 'Do you really think that is appropriate? I'm not getting any younger, and you are an extra pair of hands to help around the house.'

The woman felt her stomach drop as the man continued.

'This isn't just a normal house where we can afford to have our women running around changing up the place. The reason why we survived these last few years is because we spend money on the business not the home. Your husband doesn't need

a bankrupt property and an expensive, fancy house to sit on it when he takes over the company.'

The man reached for his pen again, his eyes focusing back on his document as he began to list suggestions for the homestead.

'I was thinking maybe some green paint on the outside of the house, especially on the stairs and veranda railings. I feel it would bring out the colours of the stained-glass windows.'

The woman raised her gaze from her lap to face the man, then down at her drawing. Strewn to the side. Ignored.

She reached forward and grabbed her design, mumbled a thick 'thank you,' and hurried out the door.

The large house now seemed claustrophobically small, the inherited antiques and stiff family portraits towered over her as she stumbled through the maze of rooms and hallways to the front door. Light reflected through the stained-glass windows, each square casting a different beam of vibrant colour onto the wall, the delicate pattern broken by the woman's fragile frame frantically racing along the walls.

The woman's hand clasped the tarnished bronze door handle. She pulled open the grand front door with the peeling white paint tainted by red dirt which blew in flurries up from the yard.

The air was cooler on the verandah as a breeze blew through the eucalyptus trees up from the barren creek. The wind blew the door open wider, urging her to step past the threshold of the homestead.

The woman ran into the falling daylight, her apron hiked up above her knees. Away from the study, away from the homestead, away from the expectations.

Cold, dusty air bit into the woman's lungs as she continued forward, her legs propelling her down the dirt road, the homestead descending into the distance behind her. The spooked cows glanced up at the woman sprinting past, concerned mothers quickly hurrying their calves away from the fence line.

The woman would have kept running all the way to Brisbane.

But as she approached the merging roads between the property's main strip and the highway, she stopped. A large, metal sign loomed across the road, shading the woman from the falling sun as she read.

*Brisbane – 711 km*

The dusk was settling within the bushland around the woman. She watched as the sun dipped below the mountains, the warmth of the rays replaced by the bitter coolness of twilight.

The woman looked down, finally noticing the crumpled design she had carried with her from the homestead.

She took one final look at the crooked sign before turning and walking back down the dirt track. The homestead sat hazily in the distance, calling her home.

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The woman was still gazing at the drawing when a small voice pierced through the silence.

'Mum! Mum, come look at my drawing,' the voice called from behind her. 'I drew our home! See, there's you and Daddy and Zoe and Will and Puppy!'

The woman turned to look at the small child, her luscious blonde curls bouncing up and down as she excitedly flung a colourful, crayon-covered piece of paper at her mother. She hadn't even heard her daughter scale the ladder to the attic.

'Wow,' the woman said, taking the drawing into her other hand, 'this is beautiful!'

The little girl looked up at her mother happily, but that expression soon turned to confusion at the crumpled design in her other hand.

'What did you draw, Mum?' she asked, reaching on her tiptoes to take the paper.

'I drew the homestead as well,' the woman replied, smoothing out some of the wrinkles to show her daughter, 'do you like it?'

'Yes, I do!' the girl said, already distracted by her own drawing once more.

'Can mine go on the fridge?'

# *I Was Only Nineteen*

THE SUN DROPPED low behind the flowering jacaranda, casting dappled shadows across the lawn, where the hum of conversation mingled with the sizzle of sirloin on the barbecue. Juice jumped up from the grill, hissing as it made contact with the exposed skin on Mike's wrists. But he didn't flinch.

Guests trickled in, dragging eskies, their weekday white collars exchanged for thongs and colourful button up shirts. Aggressive handshakes were exchanged and resounding 'G'days' were accentuated by the cracks of XXXX cans. Mike stood solitary beside the barbecue, silently observing the swarm beneath the Hills Hoist. He gazed down at his beige shirt, hanging limp on his body, eluding a musty odour from a year hanging desolately in his cupboard.

Recycled jokes, dragged out again and again, like the fold-out camping table from under the house now propped beneath the jacaranda, never failed to prompt laughter from the yard. He knew those laughs. The pitch, tone, volume, he knew them by heart. He'd yearned for those laughs.

*Mike had pinned their stained photograph above his swag: school uniforms unbuttoned, arms entwined, grins bared, battered hats dipped low. He'd strain to replicate his own wide grin as he stared at it each night, faint gunshots ringing out across the paddy fields. Their smiles released no laughter, rather the taunting silence was broken by the constant cry of cicadas, their sporadic language vibrating through the bamboo. A foreign language, the static soundtrack of his new life.*

*God help me, I was only nineteen.*

01/02/1947. The date Susan Blake welcomed Michael Blake into the world at the Ipswich General Hospital. The very same date printed in block letters in *The Courier Mail* nineteen years later. If her water had broken just three fateful hours later, Mike's life would be no different than his mates. Mike had never ventured beyond the barbed wire fence that marked the outskirts of Darra. His most exotic culinary experience was Que Huong's Chinese on Highland Street. He'd imagined his furthest venture would be catching the 460 City Council bus into the CBD. In fact, he'd never heard of Vietnam

– 'How do you spell that, Mum?' he'd asked the day he was conscripted.

That very morning, over mugs of English Breakfast, his mother had urged: 'You should go, love. It'll be great fun to see your mates.' Hoping to dampen the hushed whispers, tinged with worry, that had drifted periodically into his consciousness the last few nights, he'd caught the Ipswich line, just one stop down, to their share house in West Darra.

Mismatched chairs were sprawled across the browning grass. Trestles bore a kaleidoscope of greasy goods spread across tartan tablecloths. Footy highlights droned from the stereo. Mike rotated slabs of meat on a round cast-iron barbecue, precariously resting atop three thin legs.

During a lull in conversation, the figures tipped their cans upwards, undersides glinting, a silent salute to the sky. He scoped the lawn – *ah*, there it was – a bulging esky's contents sweating in the afternoon sun. Nestled neatly in the ice, their pastel packaging taunted Mike. Straight off the ship at the Port of Brisbane, a taxi had taken him to the Regatta for a cold one. Merely a 'respite' from the heat. No beers today, he told himself.

'Got a good tan, there, mate!' A sweaty hand jutted out before him. Splattered with tropical flowers, Mike scanned the man's almost sickening shirt, tucked decidedly into his jeans, pointed collar, small moustache. Sam. The papers called him a conscientious objector. Refusing to present for service when his own date of birth was printed in *The Courier Mail*, he was dragged into the backseat of a Ford Taurus police wagon as the Ekka winds whipped through Station Avenue. Sam merely stared at the steel iron bars of the Darra police beat for a few days. How could Mike shake his hand, clink their cans together? But he'd played with Sam in the sandpit at Darra Primary, shared a durry with Sam behind the bike sheds. Mike forced the corners of his mouth to tilt upwards.

His fingers were squeezed slightly too hard, shaken for slightly too long. The handshake was accompanied by a slap on the back, reverberating through Mike's body and sending goosebumps up his spine.

'Been out in the sun have you, mate? Your hair's all blonde, too!' The tug at Mike's dark brown strands made his eyes sting. He grazed the stubble creeping over his chin, catching a bead of perspiration.

*He remembered dripping in sweat, like he was standing out in December rain.*

*It was otherworldly. They were suffocated by the scrub, pierced by thorns, and pointed leaves. Exotic bugs crawled beneath their collars, unperturbed by any scratch or slap. They could not march, as each tread became glued to the squelching mud.*

*God help me, I was only nineteen.*

'So, mate... how are things?' Mike's gaze slowly drifted upwards. Avoiding eye contact, his eyes remained locked on Sam's nauseating shirt. How were things, Mike?

*He'd gone down to the Bowls Club last Sunday afternoon with his old man. He didn't last five minutes. The resonant collision of the ebony balls was identical to the scraping of shovel onto bone, resurfaced from the soil.*

*'Found an arm, here!'*

*'I've got a leg!'*

*The memory was instilled in him, etched in his mind like graffiti on the concrete corridors of Darra Station. Trying to piece together body parts like a jigsaw puzzle, sifting through the scrub for a head, a torso. Sweat burning his eyes, acrid hints of gunpowder and blood lingering on his tongue.*

*God help me, I was only nineteen.*

As he opened his mouth to offer a weak response, he looked up to see Sam's brows furrowed.

'Have a beer, mate.' Sam extended a gleaming XXXX can under his nose. Seal already flicked off; its sweet caramel notes wafted into his nostrils. Oh, one can't hurt, Mike decided. His hand trembled slightly as he reached up for it, then grasped it vigorously. Its icy surface steadied him, anchoring him. A gentle sip at first, followed by a swig, and a gulp. His entire being sighed with relief as the sweet liquid flowed down his throat.

Another bellow from his left, 'Oi, Mike, mate, have you seen the price of petrol down at the servo? Bloody ridiculous.



Rose Brown  
Year 12

All our tax money off to Vietnam and now this? Costs more than my granny's dentures!' Chuckles rang out, beer bellies jiggling. Mike was frozen. Any instantaneous anaesthetic his drink had provided had vanished. The buzz of the stereo itched his neck. The smoke suffocated him, choking him with each inhale.

He noticed a creased *Courier Mail* discarded in the firewood basket to his right. Mike squinted at its headline through the smoky air. It was dated a few weeks back.

'1,000 MARCH IN VIETNAM WAR PROTEST.' Mike's blood coursed through his veins. He clenched the steel tongs, their scalloped edges piercing into his calloused palms. His eyes could not be drawn from its words beneath, speaking of genocide, murder, betrayal, stamped below an image of hand painted signs, held high above the heads of Australians. His people.

The static, humming radio drowned out the backyard's discourse. His heart echoed in his chest, veins enlarged and visibly pulsing. With a trembling arm, he released the meat from the tongs' grip and decidedly speared the sharp nose of his instrument into the centre of the article. He twisted it, around and around, tearing the thin paper. Breaths in and out. His brows furrowed, his pace quickened, grinding the metal into the image until it scraped the splintering wood beneath. Flecks of paper floated up with the smoke, carrying words up into the blue sky.

Mike attempted to ignore the hiss of the barbecue, spluttering onto his shirt.

*An identical hiss. This time, from behind him. Pain shot like spears of lightning in a summer storm, up each vertebra of Mike's back. Gunshots punctuated the air, skimming his olive-green bucket hat.*

*Red all around. Red billowing up from the rubber fields, red smeared on his fingertips as they returned from delicately pressing his own lower back. That was the hiss. The shrapnel bubbling, spluttering beneath his skin. Mike felt a grip on his shoulder, wrenching him up from the ground.*

*'Get behind him, mate.'*

*A burly figure pushed Mike down, now guarded from the gunfire by a wide mess of torn canvas propped up before them, the perfect shield. Mike choked back a sob in realisation. The canvas barrier between him and the enemy was Davo's still body. His second lieutenant, only five years his senior. Eyes open wide. They would never blink again. A deafening crack reverberated through the rice paddies, red splattering up onto Mike as a bullet pierced Davo's uniform. Eyes squeezed shut, trembling uncontrollably, Mike imagined Davo hanging his army duffel on a hook in the hallway and kissing his wife in the kitchen. He imagined Davo sharing stories of sweat, strength, and spirit with his daughter. He would never blink again.*

*God help me, I was only nineteen.*

A thundering belch sucked Mike from his thoughts. Before him now lay a blackened lump: dry, charcoaled, inedible. Bits of torn paper, carried by the smoke, had settled on the charred meat.

A scruffy looking man, who'd clearly had one too many, belched again, then bellowed, 'Good one, Mike! Must've thought it was one of the Viets, hey? Burnt them to a crisp!' The yard went silent. Even the kookaburras noticed the shift and silenced their laughter. No one dared to raise their beer to their lips or ash their cigarette. Mike's eyes were glazed, staring absently into the yard. He felt the heat of their glares, each figure anticipating a thrown fist, a spat insult. But Mike was still.

'So, who wants a snag?' And the chuckles resumed, kookaburras continued, reaching their initial volume as though nothing had happened at all.

The scruffy man chortled and shoved an amber can before him. 'Have another, mate. Anyone woulda thought you'd gone to a real war with that look on ya face!' A real war. First and second. They were real. British rifles, hand grenades. Those were real weapons. There were men worse than him. They would never come home. Gallipoli rolled off the tongue of any kid down at Darra Primary. Dien Bien Phu? Dak To? Not so much.

Davo's eyes flashed before him. They would never blink again.

Mike took deep gulps of his beer; its contents were sour now. The sun was too bright, too hot. Each nauseating floral shirt made his stomach turn. Each chortle was too loud, too enthusiastic. Mike was surrounded by people he knew, loved even. Only the barbecue and its plumes of ashy smoke between them, yet they were a thousand kilometres away.

Without warning, Mike discarded the tongs onto the lawn and snatched his almost empty can. He squeezed past two bulging beer bellies blocking the hallway and strode to the front of the house. He plonked on the front steps, prying a pack of Winfield's from the pocket of his jeans. Loyal Street was quiet for a Sunday afternoon. Faint echoes of laughter and music drifted from the backyard. A bush turkey scratched leaves up over the white picket fence that lined the house.

Mike found peace in the solitude, the silence of dusk. The November sky bore a seamless gradient of hues, sprawled behind pointed Queenslanders. A sight he had yearned for. Home. He had yearned for his mates, too.

Mike took a drag of his cigarette, closing his eyes as the fumes billowed up into the afternoon sun. His shaky breath sliced through the hot air, and he looked slowly up to the sky. It looked back at him, now his only mate.

*God help me, I was only nineteen.*

# Darlin' Over the Fence Line

'THE NATIONAL WEATHER Service is issuing a tornado warning for the greater Oklahoma region. Meteorologists predict an EF4 with winds exceeding 170mph and advise immediate evacuation.'

The rooster weathervane atop the barn turned on its rusted hinges slowly, emitting a pained caw into the wind which was beginning to pick up speed as it crossed the corn fields of Oklahoma in the early summer.

The man stood against the white wooden arch of his front porch, his right hand in his pocket and his legs crossed over one another at the ankles. He looked out at the green expanse of paddock in front of him.

'The tornado's flight path is predicted to cross the following counties: Osage, Pawnee ...' the radio murmured in the grip of his calloused left hand.

His eyes followed the circle of his herd of horses, varied in age and colour, tracing the fence line nearest the house. A grey dust stirred in the air as they swarmed on anxious hooves that kicked up the dirt from hardened meanders that snaked through the thickets of crabgrass and dandelion hemming the paddock's fence. Their ears fractiously wavered back and forth, their shoulders tensed to a rhythmic pulse, and their coats rippled down the length of their legs as each step drummed against the solid ground.

'Payne, Logan, Lincoln ...' The wind carried the dusty haze through the herd to the east, where a light bay mare stood still, parallel to the gates rattling with rusted bolts in the wind. She shifted her weight agonisingly between her hips, buckling each knee in turn as she carried more weight, brimming with milk for the foal that tucked itself into the safety of the familiar curve of her side.

He shuffled his way down the few stairs of the porch, his boots caked in mud, unravelling at their square toes. Meeting each oak step with a heavy thud, he made his way toward the tired wooden gates marking the entrance of the yards.

The last of the clouds holding onto pale blues and yellows beamed beyond the reaches of his county's skyline. The silhouette of his family home luminesced in the fleeting light, and the nuances of

the Victorian style porch that encased the house cast dynamic shadows over the yard that was kept greener than the bordering paddocks riddled with thickets of weeds. A sign swung to an aching rhythm in the arch of the house paddock's white gated entrance, burned into it with a poker after its initial construction; *Carmine Family Farm Est. 1860.*

A black smog overwhelmed the last hopes of raw sunlight as the brewing wind carried the smoke from the last steam engine leaving town into the mass of ominous storm clouds congregating to the north.

He made his way over to the fence line, tucking the pillars of splintering wood under his arms and the coarse grain latched onto the creases of his flannel. He cooed in the direction of his herd a distance away from him, spooked by the metal rattling of the fence's hardware. Only the mare and foal followed the click of his tongue toward the open embrace of his worn, tanned hands. The light bay mare wandered up to him with trusting familiarity, and the foal in a darker colour followed her every step. His wedding band caught on the brass hardware of the mare's halter as he stroked his palm flat under her chin.

'Hey Darlin.' He stroked the white star atop her head, rustling the tangled forelock plaited with grass seeds above his hand. Her eyes closed and she exhaled a heavy warm breath into his chest.

'The news people are sayin' a tornado's comin' again,' he whispered into the depths of her wide brown eyes.

'It's the same time every year ain't it sweetheart,' he said, pressing his wrinkled forehead to the rope of her halter, hairs shedding onto the oil of his cheek as he straightened himself to look back at her.

'Again, the Bureau is advising immediate evacuation ...' the radio interrupted from where it was latched onto the buckle of his belt.

'God dammit,' he let out.

'They can keep saying all they want, I ain't goddamn leaving!' His words were caught in the whip of the wind and fell on the wavering ears of the fractious herd behind

him. He walked further from the fence toward the shadowed face of the barn, lashing his thighs with his hands to rid them of the hair and debris that clung to the rough of his forearms.

He stood in the darkened mouth of the barn, dust and chaff circling him in the current of the breeze.

'I ain't goddamn leaving,' he muttered to himself with his chin to his chest, intent on the rotation of the ring that tremored between his ageing fingers.

The storm was gaining speed, and inside, the barn lay in shadow as the wooden slats cast stripes of grey and black across the dirt floor. The remnants of hay in the loft whisked through the central aperture and carried into the anticipating churn of the windmill. The metal of the blue-tipped blades reflected through the window in which it was framed, a picture of the permeating unintelligible haze of torrential rain.

The gravel ground under the heel of his boot as he turned into the seclusion of the tack room to his right, an addition to the barn, sturdier but darker than the rest of the structure from which it was separated with one of the only silently opening doors on the property. He looked up with mild expectancy at the chain link cord where his hand hovered, pulling it with resolute futility, and proceeded to let it brush over his shoulder as he furthered into the room. The blue-grey gleam of the rain peered through the one small square window frosted over with cobwebs and dust, casting the wood panelled walls, lined with mounts of embossed leather saddles and bridles, blanketed in a similar frost, in overwhelming indiscriminate shadows that lurched toward him.

The wind shook violently at the seams of the walls that sheltered him from the storm outside.

A picture frame fell to the floor to his right.

Glass shards fractured in geometric fragments stirring a plume of dust around the frame. He crouched to inspect the photo, faded in a greyscale monochrome, weathered in patches of yellow, aged in the light of day from the small window. A rosette, a faded fragile blue, was pinned on



Amy Clark  
Year 12

the frame below the couple who had won it. A woman behind the bay mare stood with reins tightly grasped in her hand and a beaming smile across her face, which was cast in shadow by the brim of her best hat.

He ran his finger over the caption, unperturbed by the serrated glass with which the picture was now hemmed.

*Mrs Lola Carmine and 'Darling', overall best in competition breeding mare, AQHA 1949*

He shuffled his hands under the remnants of the frame, ridding the picture of dust with a careful blow.

A clipping from a newspaper fell from the back.

He manoeuvred it out from underneath the debris that littered the dirt floor, brushing away splinters of glass in the process. The article was crudely torn from the corner of a daily paper and the print was fading, but the date remained legible, *Obituaries - 18th June 1950*.

The thin paper wavered between his thumb and forefinger. What was left of the ink beneath his fingers was saturated by the oil that lathered his hands from the coat of the mare.

He folded the article inside the larger photograph and tucked them both into the chest pocket of his worn denim overalls. He dropped the frame with disregard and the wood fractured at its joins as he got up to leave the barn. An unsuspecting sliver of glass had managed to slice the tender skin that creased at the knuckle of his forefinger and blood brimmed quietly in the torn pocket of his overalls at his side.

The rain came in lashes as soon as he walked out the door.

His flannel wrapped to the silhouette of his torso and clung to his forearms like the unruly hair that grew on them. The denim of his overalls stiffened and turned as dark blue as the sky above him and blackened where they were stained. His boots turned from a tan to a deep brown and the soles even more so drowned in the mud of the meander that led to the paddock's gates. He wiped his face, pointlessly, with the inside of his arm, and beyond the water cascading over his eyelashes, he saw an old apple tree uprooted at the other side of the

pasture, overturning a great length of the paddock's northern fence line.

He called to his herd over the sudden wails of tornado alarms, and they followed, headed by the light bay mare, following her with the same implicit trust she had for the man.

'Hey Darlin.'" He traced his palm along the length of her nose and held his head to hers, as she reciprocated the embrace in shifting her weight as comfortably as she could into his chest. A smudge of bright crimson red centred itself at the top of her blaze.

'The tornado...!' He looked into her eyes, squinting in confusion, her ears swivelling like satellites, 'She's a comin'. Not for you though. It ain't takin' you, too.' Her ears turned back to the comforting sound of his voice.

He stroked water into the hair of her neck and grabbed a chunk of her mane.

He forcefully pulled the ring off his left hand and threaded it onto one of the three sections he had fashioned in her drenched hair. He knotted the ring onto a plait and the hair threaded through the coarse creases in his hands. He willed the plait to turn into a crude mat.

He looked into her eyes for one last time hearing the frightened stirs of the herd behind her at the blaring rhythm of the alarms. But she was still.

'Now you gon' take this, and that sweet baby you got there,' he curled his peeling lips inwards over the jagged hem of his teeth, 'and you're gonna run like the wind, Darlin', you're gonna run for me,' he said with tender assuredness, bowing his head with his hand planted firmly at the nape of her neck. The muscles rippled down her mane but stilled where his hand offered warmth in the icy abrasion of the storm.

'You're gonna run like you did wi' her ... you hear me?' He funnelled the threads of her halter through the buckles and coughed while the siren was its loudest to smother a cry. He rubbed his palm into her star, and he felt her weight lean into his hand reddening the blaze under his forefinger.

He hung the halter over his left shoulder and stood still with his hands at his sides

for a quiet moment despite the impending cries of the storm raging around him and the siren's pleas for evacuation.

'Now get! The lot of you! Get.' His begging grew quieter, fighting the cracks that plagued his voice. The mare was the first to leave, as the rest would follow. She swayed to her right for a brief moment before taking off.

Her foal looked at the man with wide wet eyes.

He looked the same way back at her.

'Get gon dammit!' he cried one last time, his voice as fractured as the picture frame on the floor of the barn.

He crooked his left arm and cupped the bottom of his face with an empty hand; he held the other to the pocket at his chest and droplets rolled over the back of it.

The black spots in the distance faded further into the hazy blue of the sky, overwhelmed by the debris, and rain drops whipped across the blackened line of the horizon in the westerly winds at the edge of the property.

He stood, a pace away from the fence line, blinking rapidly as water pooled above his pale cheeks.



**Amy Clark**  
Year 12



***Burning Man***

2024

Mixed media installation

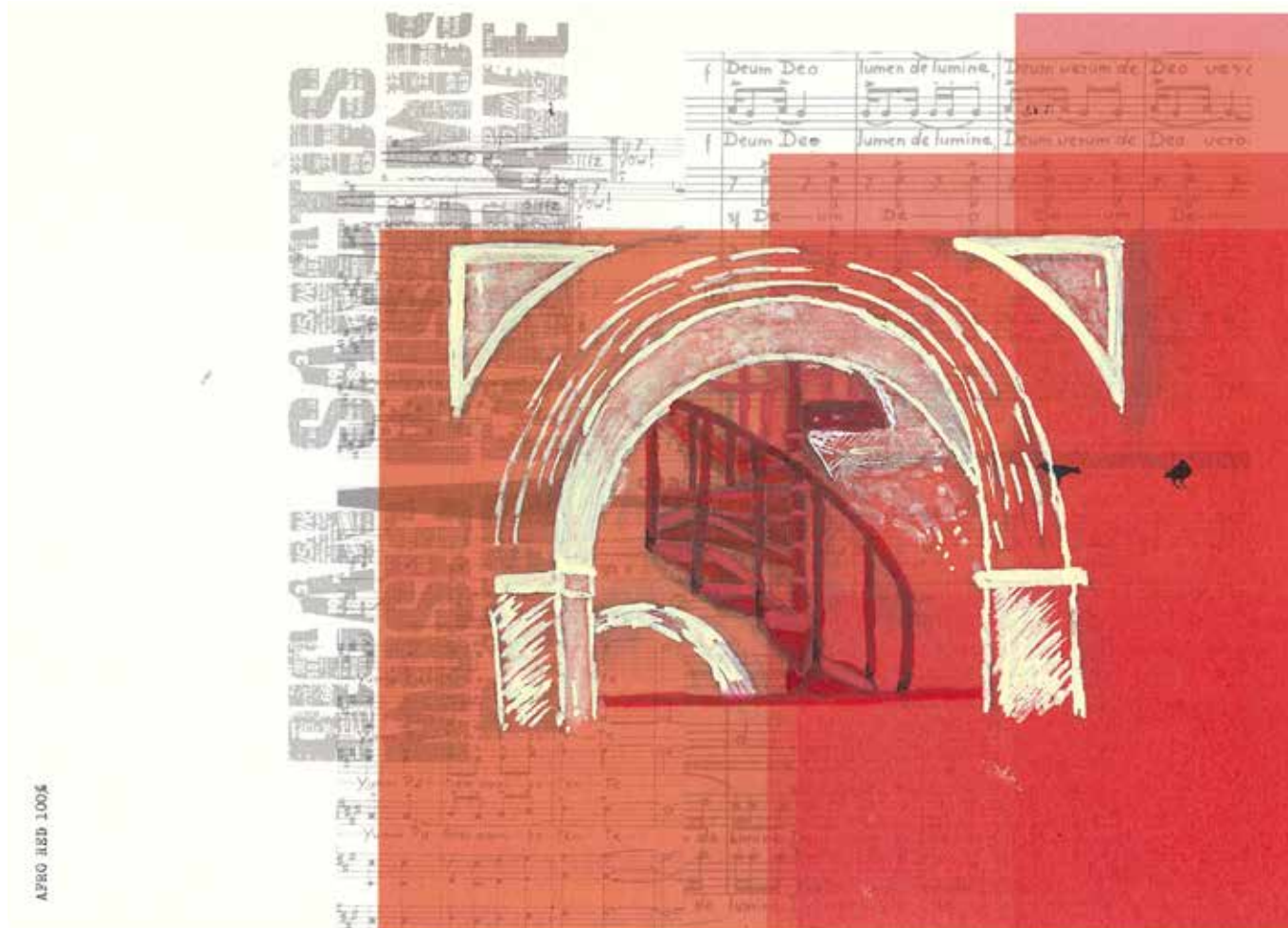
Wire sculpture and animal skull on clay base, with video display  
200 x 150 x 30cm

Escapism is inextricable to the fundamentality of human nature, and that remains true to approximately 19.8% of young Australians who regularly abuse cigarettes and vapes for the purpose of the momentary neurological escape nicotine provides. Therefore, where escapism through objectively harmful vices is possible, a proliferation of what is detrimental to the human body occurs. My mixed media installation aims to confront the audience's concepts of mortality in respect to the bodily degradation that is incurred with sustained smoking. The ephemerality of the work perceived through digital projection conveys the impermanence and fragility of mortality and that which is 'natural' burning away to reveal a crude and brutalist skeleton as the only tangible proof of mortal existence. The mixed media and digital components are contemporary, alternative, and dynamic in a nature to capture audience attention, where depth and texture are concerned to ultimately engage in a visual discourse with the social comment.





Skye Burrows  
Year 11



## *Community House*

2024

Mixed Media

18 x 13cm

In this sketch, I have captured a key architectural feature of Community House – the staircase. The staircase is a key focus of Community House, and a central part of the history of the space. I hoped to capture this rich history of all the comings and goings of students and the Sisters in my piece.

CURLEW CRIES ECHOED across the still surface of the bay, the dark waters hiding the teeming life beneath.

Richard shivered as a southerly wind swept up and towards the stormfront forming above. A cracked plastic bucket and Styrofoam esky bounced against his leg as he descended towards the mangrove shrouded shore. Glaring at the brand-new pontoons where his former neighbours moored their tenders, his worn thongs slapped the sand. He avoided the spiky emerging mangrove shoots. His thongs were wafer thin, one plug held in place by a bread clip.

These tenders, and the yachts and catamarans they serviced, were paid for with soft city jobs. Cushioned by family trusts, their owners hadn't done real work. Richard's cracked and calloused fingers clenched the rusted metal handle of his bait bucket as he passed his old house. That waterfront location had cost him decades.

Countless late nights he had ventured out to take a living from Moreton Bay, returning to a sleeping house. His children were strangers and his wife often nothing more than a weight in his bed. Barbara slept heavily and slack-jawed after her shift at the hospital. He would get to know them better once his work was done. That's what he'd promised.

His chippie and trawler fishing money should've settled him and Barbara beachside for their twilight years. Back then, trawler fishing meant netting fish and flake alike faster than many other fishermen could in a day. Of course, it was only once he bought his own trawler that those hippie marine biologists were worried about marine diversity. Regulations had shot down the boat's resale value and insurance would only cover the cost if it just so happened to sink. His white elephant rusted next to his shed house. Barbara unhelpfully suggested he find a living that gave to their bay community rather than took away as he grew more and more bitter and desperate.

Now he was banished to the street behind with the other 'help' on the island.

Fish scattered where torchlight hit the water, taking refuge amongst tangled

mangrove roots interlocked in a dark embrace below the water. Richard hacked his way through low hanging branches that clawed at his face, pulling up suddenly when a treasure revealed itself, surrendered by the ebbing tide. Fluorescent orange twine wound its ways around the mangrove roots leading to an enormous crab pot teeming with entrapped prey. It had been years since crab pots had been this full, and it was the hatcheries that had the best haul. Before the fishing, even before the regulations, there had been pots like this all over the bay. The owner's white Styrofoam buoy lay in the mud beside the pot demarcating the details of his old beachfront neighbour, Mark, who had bought his house for a song. That greedy yuppie could buy his fresh seafood, and fortunately, he wasn't up at 3am to know what he had missed.

The pot's contents of blue swimmers and mud crabs fell unceremoniously into the battered plastic bucket. No need to check whether they were legal size or gender – no one would know by the time he was finished with them. Richard watched them scramble over each other to get the best vantage point for escape. Still slick with clay-like mud from the flats, each tried and failed to climb above the other in a vain effort.

They turned on the smallest first.

Legs were torn from sockets, baring soft white flesh as the sheet lightning above illuminated the high tide line. Flesh was forced into clicking mandibles. Colossal claws cracked through hardened shells. Brown brine leaked through crevices, blending into the mud coating the base of the bucket. The muddy closest to the bucket's rim snapped at Richard's fingers almost catching them. It should have been faster.

One last muddy he had missed in the dark clung desperately to the opening funnel of the pot, two spindly legs scraping at air as she hung suspended above the bucket. Peering up at her from his kneeling position, Richard saw she was a jenny brimming with the bright orange eggs of next season's crabs. Taking out his pocketknife, Richard scraped the jenny clean, the roe splattering and smearing his legs.

Hefting the now much heavier bucket, he made his way towards the hatchery in the next bay, stooping through the cover of the mangroves. This part of the bay was protected marine park so off limits to the great unwashed such as himself. It even protected him in a way. Far from any campsites, roads or trails, the only building with any view of the hatchery was the one at the top of the hill. Behind the paperbark trees.

Barbara watched from that big house. He could feel it. She'd always wanted a view of the hatchery and loved the rays he was now harvesting. Even when times were good, they couldn't afford the asking price the retired developer wanted. That palliative playboy at the top of the hill wouldn't take his money but was happy to take his wife. Richard had been handling the fishing business and she was lonely once the kids stopped visiting. The old fella had needed help and having a nurse down the street seemed mighty convenient. Richard never thought Barbara could fall for someone whose catheter she'd changed. After all he did for her, for their family. Now she could watch him work from her beach view house.

At night, the shallows would be home to thousands of stingrays lying dormant. The countless diamond shaped indentations of their resting places could be seen at low tide along with the outline of their barbs.

He had seen plenty of other fish and chip places pass off stingray for scallops. He just needed to test it. The idiots that came to his store couldn't tell when he'd replaced all the battered white fish for flake cut against the grain. Charging market rate for scallops made from ray meat would rake cash in. What difference would one more stingray scallop make?

Winds picked up above and thunder rumbled to announce the flash lightning that illuminated and pulsed in the night sky. The small, sheltered bay had a gradient of sand turning from yellow to grey, with the sand retaining some of the warmth of the summer day. The rays were beige circles barely visible after burying themselves in the seabed, only given away by the reflections of their eyes and spiracles.



Zara Fraser  
Year 12

Despite the hatchery's supposedly protected status, Richard had never seen anyone policing the area. It was unlikely the coast guard themselves knew the borders between the marine park and the permitted fishing areas, focussing on the bommies and other areas with burgeoning fish, turtle and dugong populations. When it came to rays, they didn't pay much attention. When the marine park status was extended to the hatchery, the populations had risen back up without being of use to anyone. The regulations were, in his opinion, more like guidelines.

Leaving the bucket and esky, he took off his thongs and entered the water. The rays' peaceful home in the shallows had made them complacent, and the smaller stingrays felt safe to settle into only a few centimetres of water. The closest one to him was no larger than a dinner plate. Laying still, their locations were only given away by the shifting sand expelled from each gill.

Barbara had talked about how docile they were, their barbs taking a year to regrow if used to defend themselves.

Richard's bare feet sent thin ripples echoing across the nesting rays. Turning the flashlight off, his shadow was absorbed by the darkness, but moonlight remained. Knife in hand, he positioned it between the ray's eyes just above the surface.

*Crunch!*

Cartilage gave way to stainless steel as the water billowed with crimson. For a second, the young mother ray thrashed. Her barbed tail momentarily flicked up, before sinking back down harmlessly into the sand. Richard pulled her body up the shore using the knife between her eyes; waves of water washed away the tidal sand that had been camouflaging her small wings. She had a yellow back speckled with blue, a spotted eagle ray.

Holding her spine down on the sand with his knees, Richard dug his hands heavily into her exposed sides, feeling for where the organs and flesh separated. Finding the area with the deepest flesh, he carved out a circle in a similar shape to a scallop using Barbara's scone cutter. She'd missed it when she skulked out the door. He briefly imagined her face if she knew what

use he had put it to – making money from her beloved rays after she left him no other choice.

Beneath the tough leathery top layer of skin, the rays wing yielded white-pink tender meat laced with thin lines of cartilage. But as she stopped struggling beneath his hands, Richard realised the useless little thing hadn't given him enough meat to properly yield a serve of scallops. But there were plenty of rays for the taking. He'd have to go back out.

Pushing through the shallows, the water splashing away from his calves sent the small rays retreating to the safety of the depths. The sea floor beneath him turned from sand to mud as he moved further out, sucking at the gaps between his toes and making his movements sluggish. A flash of lightning lit up the small cove, revealing what he needed to his right. Barely visible in the water, a metre wide ray lay dormant, not yet disturbed by his movements or just not afraid. They really were quite stupid. Richard brandished his knife and positioned it as best he could between the eyes of the great ray.

*Splash!*

Soft thigh flesh was cleaved apart and his femoral artery severed as the ray's sharp barb flayed upwards from the shallows. Collapsing to his knees in shock, Richard sensed rather than saw his life blood clouding the water. He struggled to rise using his one good leg and fell sideways. Richard's head sank back down into the muddy shallows, and he just held his lips above the water lapping his half-submerged face.

Sheet lightning lit the scene, but his view was obscured as the ray brought its two toothy plates down on Richard's legs. A hoarse scream scraped his throat and in response the ray dragged him further out until salty tidal water and his own warm blood flooded his mouth. Richard's chest tightened and his heart lost rhythm, beating in a panicked cacophony.

Rolling over and clawing at the muddy seabed, he tried to haul himself back towards the shallows. His hands gouged at the shore, making ground as he choked up water. He grabbed the old bucket to lever his body up and away from the attacking

ray. The *crack* of the old bucket splitting under his weight sent his face back down into the water.

More blood steel barbs plunged into his legs as he kicked at the rays' flapping wings. Awakened from their slumber, the school now swarmed him in the shallows. It took all his effort to keep his eyes open as he fought unconsciousness, but he could see holes where the barbs had punctured his leg.

Richard's femoral artery pumped the last litres that sustained him into the shallows. Turning his head skywards his final breaths became underwater bubbles that reflected multiple moons – the last thing he saw.

The rays retreated – their diet was otherwise.

Scuttling out of their confinement and all along his arm, the crabs made their way to Richard. Skin was torn from sunburnt forearms – baring raw flesh. His eyelids grew heavy as the tide exsanguinated him of his life blood.

It took less than a week for the crabs, bacteria and sea lice to take everything Richard could surrender to the bay. Finally giving back.

# Santarossa

2024

Mixed media (prints, textiles)

177 x 163 x 80cm

Although a doily's traditional purpose is to protect furniture from ornaments, in *Santarossa* they shield the feminine silhouette of the mannequin from the stark reality represented in the backdrop. The harrowing statistic that 97% of women globally are subject to sexual abuse serves as a juxtaposition to the hand-woven doilies and draped lace created by both myself, and generations of women in my family, now forming a delicate toile. The utilisation of women from my family in composing the form of the numbers underscores my intimate connection

to this issue. The nuanced artistic contributions of both Yoko Ono and Leigh Schoenheimer have significantly influenced the direction and depth of my composition, reshaping my personal understanding of feminism and its broader cultural implications. *Santarossa* serves as a voice for every woman whose stories have been silenced until now.

This artwork has been submitted to the Creative Generations competition to be displayed in GOMA in 2025.





Amelia Gearing  
Year 12



## *With Grace and Guts II*

2024  
Acrylic on Canvas  
61 x 61cm

In many cultures, it is often thought that humans and nature hold the same roots, that they are intertwined in a deeper way than by 'science'. My work exemplifies how human vulnerability and mother nature are linked through their fragility, but also, in some ways, their strength. We are one with nature, with everything.

AS SHE CLOSED the garage door, the cool winter air nipped at the small gap between where Rose's pants ended and the dew-covered grass began. She took a deep breath as the still silence surrounded her, a necessary break from the constant drone of the TV which filled her ears inside the house.

*'Dad always forgot to turn it off,'* she thought to herself.

The setting sun cast pitiful rays over her, attempting to provide her with some kind of warmth as she looked out to the soft hues of pink which painted the sky. She'd always loved this time of year. It was a sort of in-between where nothing was set in stone; the sky could simply do as it wished.

As she walked towards the trash can to discard the bags which had begun to pile up in their kitchen, she hummed to herself, as customary, a tune which sat right on the tip of her tongue, yet just out of reach.

Lifting the bags into the bin, a fragment of white caught her eye. A thin pile of 10 papers stacked almost perfectly amongst the layers of filth. Looking closer, she noticed the canvas of sound which lay dormant, each delicate ink stroke flowing into the next as they danced across the page. She held her breath and reached down to retrieve them. Hastily removing her arm from the bin, she looked down to see the top left-hand corner of the page emblazoned with a bold 'OLIVER SMITH'.

His handwriting was just as precise as she had remembered, although it had been almost half a decade since he wrote it on these sheets. Each note marked cautiously on the lines, never a mistake, never a B-sharp out of place. She thought back to the excitement that would radiate off him when his mother would arrive home each night to listen. The love hearts they had once drawn together around the title, faded but never gone. Sometimes, he would even let her help – add a note here, or a lyric there. She never really cared though, as long as she could watch, usually nestled tightly in her mother's lap, as they listened to him create.

She almost tripped over the front doormat as she flicked through the sheets now clutched tight to her chest. Her eyes darted back and forth across the room as she seated herself at the kitchen bench,

looking at the pile of dishes stacked high in the sink. Taking a deep breath in, she stared at the cold metal doors which stood before her, her gaze impenetrable. Its harsh reflection glared at her, taunting her with the magnets, and drawings, and pictures which had once protected its exterior. The way her mother had beamed as she tenderly placed them up, now replaced by the blinding glare of the kitchen light. She had hardly noticed at first, thought that maybe her father had just been tidying; yet now, all that remained as even a remnant of what had once been sat tucked away, a portrait of her mother which rested just left of the coffee table by the couch.

Her fingertips whitened with tension as she gripped the music tightly in her palms, her eyes slowing peculiarly as she looked toward the cupboard under the stairs. With a deep breath she stood and made her way towards it, twisting the doorknob, and letting out a sigh of relief as she saw it, still sitting where it had been left years before. His guitar.

Carefully, she picked it up, blowing the layers of dust back and examining the beauty hidden underneath. Its smooth, polished body gleamed under the light, seemingly desperate to shine after its years of concealment, tuning pegs sticking out proudly like jewels in a crown.

As she sat down on the couch, she was suddenly a little girl again, returned to watching his fingers dance across the strings. It was as if they were begging her to play. She let herself strum freely back and forth, fingers stretched across the fretboard in a careless way that she knew her brother would be disappointed in. She began to hum gently, now remembering the tune that had earlier escaped her, and as her jilted melody filled the living room, she couldn't help but think back to the songs they had once shared.

The way his fingers had swayed across the strings, each movement precisely calculated and rehearsed, yet so fluid, it felt as if he'd come up with it on the spot. More than his skill, though, she couldn't help but think of his illuminating smile, perfectly mirroring the one plastered across their mother's face, too. His melodies worked effortlessly to envelop every corner of their home with a gentle glow of warmth.

Her father had never really understood the fascination though. Maybe he had thought no one noticed his rolled eyes as Ollie began to tune, turning the already-blaring TV up a few notches more. But she did, and, even worse, she knew Ollie did, too. The cold war between droning football commentators and the delicately strummed guitar raged on, even though there was only ever one winner.

She remembered when Ollie had learnt Dad's favourite song one year on Mum's birthday, attempting to lift his spirits. Months of practice, driven on through finger calluses and off days by the thought that maybe this time he would be impressed. Of course, our grandparents had fawned over him as Ollie softly smiled in appreciation, but Dad could never muster up the praise, not even a 'good job mate', and without that, Rose knew his smile would never quite be full.

She had never comprehended Ollie's desire for his approbation. Instead, she would hopelessly observe his smile fade away when he entered the room. His gentle grin replaced by lips pressed into an unmoving line. Shoulders back and buffed, standing much taller than before, not daring to betray even a flicker of emotion. It was as if, instantaneously, his spark had been suffocated, and she knew that only one set of hands held the extinguisher.

She had laboured tirelessly in attempts to keep Ollie away from choking in the smoke, yet she could only bear witness as each layer of defence was painstakingly laid. At first, just one less song after dinner or a few less strums after school, as a solemn hush descended upon his flame. The wisps of smoke rising deliberately as he bid farewell to the warmth he once embraced, slowly whittling away into nothingness.

No longer on her bedroom floor with his guitar, his newly assigned seat lay next to their father on the couch. Never more than a meter from each other, yet never daring to speak over the drone of the TV. His eyes, which had once lit up so brightly, now merely reflecting the artificial light. His smile, which had once shone, now distorted by the fluorescence that beamed from the screen.



Grace Marchant  
Year 12

The slam of the kitchen door rung through her ears. Cordially, she swung her head and watched him slump towards the stairs, his mind already logged on to whatever videogame awaited upstairs.

She had heard him outside, laughing with his mate, and had hoped fleetingly against hope that maybe for once he'd bring that same warmth back into the house. Turning back reluctantly, his eyes shifted from hers down to the music and guitar which lay in front of her.

'That's my guitar,' he asserted hastily.

'Well, you never use it anyway,' she said, 'saw you threw out your music.'

With a dismissive shrug, he was back facing the stairs. 'I don't play that anymore,' he murmured.

The sound of discordant notes now rung through the house again as Rose strummed, watching as his shoulders tensed following the first chord, yet loosened with each strum further, as if lowering himself gingerly into ice-cold water. As he stood, fidgeting with his jacket's zipper at each missed chord, she wished desperately he would take the plunge.

'It's out of tune,' he muttered. 'Give it here.'

She watched his stiff frame soften as he took hold of the guitar. Its curves nestled naturally into his rugged arms, his rough fingertips softly caressing the strings as he went. It was just one at first, followed by a gentle hum to confirm the note was now in tune. And then, one turned into six as his flame began to flicker. His melody rung through the still house, lingering as if even it had been waiting for this moment.

She could sense his desire, yet the uncertainty clouding his thoughts seemed to diverge off him. With a deep breath in, she watched as his fingers embraced the fretboard, beginning to strum.

She looked at him, holding back tears as she finally saw her little brother peeking through. His usually hunched posture relaxed, and his breaths deep and steady. He was no longer fidgeting, no longer averting his gaze. She saw a glint in his eyes that she had missed for years as his fingers danced effortlessly across the strings, weaving a tapestry of what had been and what was now.

'Do you remember that one song?' she said to him as he looked up and exchanged a faint smile, which she knew meant she didn't need to say more, gently reminding her of the one he had once shared with their mother.

She could no longer hold back the tears. Her eyes drifted closed as the notes reverberated through her being. They were lost in the rhythm of his guitar, but they didn't care; they were together once again. She felt a soft trace over her hand as his fingers interlocked with hers. Looking up, she noticed the red outline which now emphasised his waterline as he continued to play.

She could practically hear their mother's gentle voice echoing as she sang with Ollie once again, although it had been too long since they had truly heard it. She lifted her hand and brushed through his golden strands, just as her mother had, his solaced eyes looking up at her. Ever since she had left, any remnant of a flame that remained within him trying to catch alight, fought a losing battle with the man he so desperately wanted to become. The man who had given life to them, yet it seemed simultaneously suppressed his. Tears streamed down their cheeks, yet she had never felt more at ease as she listened, each chord bridging the bitter gap towards the boy she thought she had lost forever.

The palpable resistance between the key and lock on the front door rang through the house as silence once again surrounded them. Its slow rotation seemed to taunt Ollie, as he once again stiffened, an undeviating line now smeared across his face. Rapidly, he raced to lay his guitar back in its coffin, the creaking protests of the hinges on the door causing his heart to palpitate. His head hung low to the ground as the front door swung open.

She watched as her father completed his usual routine: trudging to the fridge for leftovers and two golden cans labelled 'XXXX' before making his way to the left-hand side of the couch and turning the TV onto whatever he could find to stare mindlessly at, the volume always a notch too high.

Within moments, she watched Ollie stand and shrug his way back into that same routine. Taking occupancy on the right-hand side, eyes locked intensely forward at the screen in front of him. Almost no space between them, so close that with an accidental movement their limbs may intertwine, yet not once would they dare look each other in the eyes.

Turning away, her eyes glanced fleetingly at the sepulchre below her as she made her way up the stairs, the hum of the TV filling the silence that so comfortably seemed to rest between them.



Millie Maunder  
Year 12

IT WAS THE first week of many that the sun was hidden. Its heated stare was obscured by bitter purple clouds, threatening to spill at any blink. Thunderous ripples resounded throughout the lean country with the tease of rain. With each rumble, spooked cattle would scatter across the paddock before crashing into the tall electric barrier. Jack listened to the clang of the titanium fence echo in the distance – a soft mimic of the sky's drum. *Mindless creatures.*

He ignored their hungry, ungrateful groans.

Land – shattered by the merciless hand of drought – stretched all around until it was swallowed by the horizon. The soil's cracks mirrored the wrinkles etched into Jack's forehead. In the distance, the silhouette of an old windmill stood tall against the bruised sky. Its blades, worn and weathered, groaned in protest as they turned with each gust of air.

For days on end, brewing clouds taunted the hollow gums and the empty creek, yet the ground remained dry. The sky's only gift was the thunder. A hidden, murderous force.

Jack's calloused hand trembled on the cold iron handle as it turned. A bucket of oats rattled against his thigh as he moved into the stable.

Half-buried horseshoes peaked out from the red soil, a memorial of the horses who had stood there before. As the wind whistled, faded camp draft ribbons swung about their rusty nails. Yet, it was a shotgun on the wall that stole his gaze.

Rosie lay quietly in the corner, a dark silhouette against the muted light that filtered through the stable. Her figure resembled a grand mountain range that moved with each laboured breath. An uneaten pile of hay lay beside her.

Jack removed his tattered Akubra before kneeling before her. The crevices of his face deepened.

He ran a brown hand through Rosie's still mane. Just a day ago, the wind danced through it as she galloped freely through the sorghum. Jack's eyes trailed to her twisted leg. He winced at her blood-stained coat.

'Hey, old girl,' he whispered.

The stable walls were lit by a dim candescent lamp. His eyes traced the tapestry of Rosie's life.

Her saddle, which he had fallen out of many times.

A faded newspaper clipping, yellowed with age. 'Local mare wins Sydney Royal Camp Draft.'

The well-worn bridle, a faithful companion through a decade and a half of mustering.

At last, his eyes moved to the dust-ridden sign that clung to the wall by a single rusty nail.

'15.'

Freshly twenty, Jack sat nervously, engulfed in the echo of eager chatter. For the first time in a year, the clouds were heavy with the promise of rain. His mind, however, was occupied by the yard below. His callous-free hands clung nervously around a thin cardboard sign; the number '15' etched onto it. His knee bounced with anticipation.

The salesman strode forth. Behind him, a majestic chestnut horse followed with graceful confidence. Her luminous coat danced beneath the hand of the wind and shimmered under the stadium light.

The old man beside him chuckled. 'Don't be fooled by that one,' he remarked. 'She's a handful. Last draft she bucked her rider. No wonder old mate's trying to sell her.'

His words slipped emptily past Jack's ear as his eyes remained fixated on her thunderous stride. With the raise of his paddle and the slam of a gavel, the salesman screamed, 'Sold to 15!'

As Jack made his way to greet his newest companion, a few subtle taps echoed from the stadium's seats. He paused in his tracks. The buzz of chatter ceased. Hats tilted to the sky.

Rain poured through the mouth of the stadium, dampening shirts and soil. The crowd mirrored its cry in ecstasy. Jack removed his newly bought Akubra and opened his smiling mouth. The drought was over, and the horse was his. It was a blessed day.

Now, a muffled sound emerged from above the dim stable. A few light taps hit the corrugated roof – the first glimpse of rain.

Indifferent, Jack snatched Rosie's cover forward, shielding her from the cold substance as it trickled through the crevices of the rusty iron.

He held a handful of oats to her mouth. A gust of air brushed his hand as she grunted in defiance. She had always been a stubborn horse – the old man from the sale had told no lie.

In their early days of droving, she had bucked him. He remembered the searing pain that roared through his leg as he hit the ground. He had always hated the mark left behind from the surgery.

Now, he traced the subtle scar. Its shape not unlike that of a branch. Its paleness a contrast to his tan skin. A symbol of his body's ability to heal, to walk again.

Unlike Jack's, Rosie's leg would never heal.

The rain began to scream for attention, enraged at Jack's apathy to its arrival. The sound only maddened him.

He shouldn't have mustered during the thunder. He should have known the cattle couldn't handle it. If he hadn't been such a bloody fool, the spooked steer never would have jumped in front of her. She never would have fallen.

Jack's chest began to heave. The tears he had been resisting spilled like a broken dam.

Rosie gently moved her head toward him and he placed his hands against her neck, watching the rise and fall of his fingers slow. Her chestnut coat darkened under the blend of tears and rain. Her large brown eyes, filled with quiet resignation, stared into Jack's. A silent goodbye.

After the tangle of mane around his fingers slipped from his tender touch, he rose to his feet and dried his eyes.

Jack pulled the gun from the wall.

The rain held its breath.

# Rising Tides and the Shadows of the Past



Sara Jo Smare  
Year 12

IT WAS A dark night. The room was humid but cooled every so often from the sea breeze that occasionally crept its way through the broken flywire window. By the window there sat the small, chipped wooden table and its two cheap plastic chairs. One string bag and one small cane basket lay on the table, the bag heaving with possessions and the basket filled to the brim with ashes. Across from the table was a hammock hung low from two rusted nails on the wall. A head of dark curls was sprawled across the hammock. That head of hair belonged to Jude who was peacefully asleep in that bundle of string, till now.

It wasn't the cold of the water that lapped at the tips of her toes dangling out the hammock she slept on that woke her, nor the buzz of the growing numbers of mosquitoes that had somehow made their way into her house. In fact, she hadn't noticed them at all. It was an ominous chill that interrupted her sleep and shook her to the depths of her core that startled her awake.

Rudely awakened, she quickly swung her feet down onto the now water-covered floorboards. She stood up purposely, grabbed the items on the table, and walked to the door. Her bare feet ignored the cool stream of water that rushed from the large gap under her front door as her dark slender fingers surely unlocked the rusty hinges of the door's lock, which then instantly swung open towards her. Without another thought she walked through the doorway and walked down the watery muddy path in the dark of night. Amber eyes never wasted a single glance to the hamlet around her, but the path she walked on and the shadow that accompanied her.

Jude didn't need to look to remember what it was like back then. Back before the sea started to rise.

Jude recalled the village aunties who lounged under the shade of the mango trees during hot sweltering mornings and gossiped as they wove their baskets and mats. She recalled how green the grass and leaves of the trees used to be when she and the other children of the village would play at midday. She recalled the bounty of fish the fishermen of the village would bring

back for the village feasts. She recalled the fragrance of blue fin, sago and bananas generously cooked on stones on the fire. She recalled the endless stories and warnings Bubu-Meri, her grandmother, would whisper to her as she weaved Jude's hair late at night.

But Jude knew the only thing she'd see now in the darkness of the night was the shadows of abandoned waterfilled homes, piles of ashes, and the figures of dying banana trees and fallen coconut trees.

All she heard now was the creak of doors hung off their hinges and the movement of the few coconut trees that still stood tall as they flailed their leaves back and forth in a dance to the whispers of the wind. She heard the water rush in and out of abandoned houses, and the moans and groans of timber as those unstable homes shifted back and forth ready to succumb to the hungry sea.

The island had grown silent since everyone, apart from Bubu-Meri and her, had left in one way or another. Since the trees and plants started to die. Since the fish had readily stopped coming. But most of all since the sea rose. And Jude knew by then, that when the sea started to rise it would never stop.

There was never a moment in her life when she ever saw herself leaving that island. Her island, her home and her birthright. The matching bulged dark scar on her and her Bubu-Meri's shoulder was proof of that, and proof of the chains that tied her to that land. That was proof along with all the never-ending lessons and customs on tending to the land ingrained in her mind, and the acknowledgements of all the people who used to live on that land. But now with them gone and the former chief's, her Bubu-Meri's, ashes in her hands, what more was there to be said? Who was Jude now, but the chief of an abandoned island. A deserted, dying, sinking island.

Once she reached the canoe, she placed the bag and basket carefully inside it. Then Jude slowly dragged her hands to the rope attached to the vessel and untied it from the mangrove. Her arms then pulled the canoe and guided it further out till the water reached her knees and her dark

meri blouse was wet at the edges. Then she lowered herself into the canoe and started to paddle.

As Jude drove the canoe closer towards where the kelp forest met the edge of the sea cliff, seaweed tendrils clung onto her paddle as if it was the island's final plea for her to stay. But she only reached down and broke them off the wooden stick with her bare hands and carried on. Jude continued till she saw only shadows dance on the edges of the island and felt the rhythm of the waves knock into her canoe and the strong current that pushed against it. Tired, teary eyes closed, and a long deep breath was drawn. 'Goodbye Bubu-Meri.'

Then with one handful of the dark ashy remains from the basket she leaned forward to the bow to release it. But as she opened her palm in that very moment, the water surged and struck. Her vision blurred and she was enveloped in darkness and tucked into the waves as if she was a small child in bed once again. It was a dark night.

HOW SHE CONFESSED her love to him that night was what was compelling about her. How she marched into the room. How her confidence suddenly diminished as she began. She was powerless and wanting. Her small frame shivered in desperation. Her gold locks hung free, dishevelled from running to him, but beautiful, nonetheless. It would've been ungentlemanly to not put her out of her misery and accept her feelings. He got down on one knee. She said yes. He embraced her, and she became his forever. It was the night he gifted her the pearl choker that now hung around her neck. Today they are taking the final step. She would now be his in the eyes of God.

Echoes reverberated with each step he took down the aisle. It was unconventional, but so was their love. Empty pews exited his line of vision as he neared her. He scanned the sight before him: her pale, angelic figure, how it outshone the biblical deities that lined the limestone walls. It was as if she was Eve, and he was her Adam. Candles surrounded her, the light dancing and reflecting upon her neck, exposing the opulence that sat around it. Wax dripped down the sides of the candelabras and hardened against the floor.

A thin veil covered her face. The mesh, however, was sheer so he could see her doe eyes. He admired her. Her pupils were wide and unblinking. Of course they were! She was staring at her one true love. The hem of the fabric rested against the floor, the excess wrapping around her like a shawl. It was tied into neat bows that cascaded down her front to expose her figure.

She leaned against a mahogany structure. The surface bore intricate carvings that wove together in delicate arabesques and floral motifs that had been scuffed and chipped at the base. It was an important reminder of what initiated this matrimony. It was essential that it was the centrepiece of their union. She stared at the ceiling as she waited for him to greet her. Old, worn oil paint coated the plaster. Brushstrokes of dull colours formed romantic depictions of Adam being exiled from the Garden of Eden, condemned by God for his sins.

He met her at the front of the aisle, pushing the back of her head away from the ceiling so that her eyes were on him. He grabbed her hand and lifted her up from the structure. They were together. Bride and groom. He held onto her, one arm around her waist. He couldn't help but brush his other hand against her cheek, his fingers lingered for a moment upon her neck. The sensation of the mesh could not conceal how cool her flesh was. He cursed the cold weather, but he could not wait for summer to marry his bride, that would be too late.

'A love like mine can never be overcome,' he vowed. 'Fate bound us together at the altar!'

He was met with his passionate voice bouncing off the apex of the cupola, echoing for the heavens to hear his love. There was no response from his bride. She did this sometimes, so enthralled with his words, his passion for her. She was truly beautiful like this. He knew what she was thinking, and she did not need to speak. The fact that she was standing before him was enough for him to know she was captivated by him.

He placed the sapphire ring on her finger. The cold band slid against her pale skin, but she did not react. He pushed the metal band on, forcing it to sit at the base of her finger. It fit tightly, unlike when he measured before he proposed, but that didn't matter. She didn't complain. She didn't mind, as long as she was his. He kissed her hand and let it fall limply by her side.

Now it was the moment they were eager for. He untied each bow that held the veil around her frame. He began from the base of her neck to her knees. The fabric unravelled itself, falling off her slumped shoulders to reveal her face.

Her locks were tied neatly in a bun so as to not interfere with the veil, but now it was off, and he preferred it out. So, he reached past her neck and unravelled her hair so that it fell to her waist. It reminded him of that night when she came to him. Strands fell to the front of her face, resting against her cheek bones. He could not resist

the wide-eyed look that the golden hair framed. Her pursed lips compelled him to pull her closer. She fell forwards onto him from the force, landing in a passionate kiss. Her cool lips were warmed by his breath. His hands snaked up the base of her neck to pull her closer, his palm resting against the jewels. They did not – could not – part for even a mere moment. That was okay though; she did not mind holding her breath if she was close to him. That was why she was perfect; why she was made entirely for him. When he finally parted his lips from hers, her head hung low.

His heart ached from disappointing his bride, but he had a brilliant idea. It was the most tremendous idea he could have, and it would absolutely cheer her up. He grabbed her hand and dashed out the door. Her feet dragged as she complied with his sudden movement, scuffing the top of her shoes. She was surprised, but a good surprised – she loved his spontaneity. Her head flung back, carefree, as they ran.

Wind wrapped against the doors that they had passed, blasting their bodies with a fresh breeze. The rising moon could not penetrate through the clouds, causing an absence of light that was welcomed by him – no prying eyes and no judgement. Just him and her forever, excited for their life together, like giddy, eager kids blowing out their birthday candles. Luckily, he made sure no other kid could blow these candles out for them.

A small enclave behind the church was suitable for their celebration. Thick scents of damp leaves and brick mingled with the faint smell of incense from the church. The only sound was the wet grass that squelched beneath their feet.

But this was enough for him to begin to dance, to move to a rhythm. He placed his hands on her waist pushing them side to side as he rocked. They swayed for a moment. Slowly, he brushed his right hand down her hip, to her hand and extended her arm out whilst his left snaked around her waist. He took a step behind him, and she leaned towards him in response. He stepped forward, pushing her back so that they were in their original position.



Arnika Di Bella  
Year 11

The movement continued at a faster pace, beginning their first dance. Her dress dragged along the ground, staining the once white fabric. Her feet were heavy as they waltzed. Their movements were stiff and awkward. Slow and inharmonious. Regardless, he raised her arm and spun her around. The heel of her shoes swirled around the soft, damp grass beneath it, digging a hole into the earth. They sunk further into the dirt, tearing up the land when he dipped her, allowing her to fall into his arms. Her head rested against his arm. His leaned down close to hers, his breath dancing on her face. He reached his hand across to cup her cheek, stroking her firm skin lightly. Admiring the pearl choker.

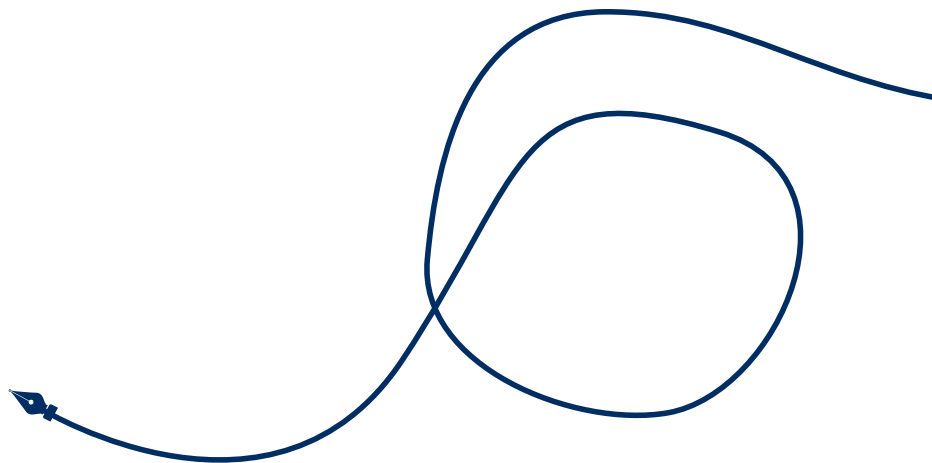
Finally, they were husband and wife. God agreed, he said that he can have her forever.

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The reverend made his way through the large oak doors of the church, his eyes fixated by the words in the gospel. He walked down the aisle briskly whilst flipping through the pages to find the correct page. Matthew 11:25-50. There was much to prepare for tomorrow. He placed the silk chord between the paper and placed it on the lectern.

Until now, he hadn't noticed the flickering lights that surrounded the altar. They were not supposed to be lit. He warily walked towards the flames to see small candle stumps nearing the end of their lives. Their remnants coated the floor.

A familiar fabric piece lay in the centre. His eyes shifted to the coffin behind it. The base was destroyed, and dark drag marks that contrasted against the blood red carpet led down the stairs to the front pews. He lifted the lid, praying to God. The top creaked back on its hinges as if it had been opened many times. His worse fears were confirmed. The darkness of this act bore weight upon his soul. He had to pray for the family. As if their loss was not great enough.





The photograph *Burnett Gold* is a depiction of the sunshine creating a variety of orange hues reflecting off the cold, winter fog of the early morning. This photo was taken at our family farm. It showcases the sunrise hours over the cattle yards. The crisp air highlights the golden daybreak in Queensland's South Burnett.



Fran Evans  
Year 11



*Australiana Afternoon*

The photograph *Australiana Afternoon* showcases a Moreton Bay Ash, a singular tree standing tall on a hill surrounded by the vastness of the Australian landscape. It reflects the light and shade of a Queensland afternoon.

## *The Climate Crisis*

2024

Acrylic and impasto on canvas

76 x 50 x 5cm



My artwork is intended to communicate the dangers of climate change and the little time left we have to turn this around. I have chosen to paint a surrealist, realistic piece consisting of two flying whales, with oil factories over both whales and oil dripping down their bodies to the ground. There's a billboard emerging from the swamp of oil with the words 'climate crisis' and the symbol of out of time on the billboard. I have weathered the billboard to show that it is old to represent that this issue has been here for a long time already. I chose to use a billboard because it is something used to communicate a message. It is big, clear, and hard to miss, symbolising that we are not blind to the issue of climate change, rather, we are simply ignoring it. I have painted two whales in the sky flying with oil factories

on their backs to show how damaging this is to the wildlife. I have chosen to paint whales because they are the largest animals on earth, and we are causing them and so many other animals to suffer. Furthermore, whales are highly intelligent and have feelings the same way we do. They feel the same emotions as us and can communicate those feelings, which is why they are crying. I have painted the oil factories on their backs to show that they are the ones carrying the weight of the consequences of our actions. I have used impasto mixed with black acrylic to create my oil and make it thicker, add texture, and stand out. The artists who have influenced me are Banksy, Theodore Géricault and Paco. I have adopted features, techniques and ideas from each artist and incorporated them into my own art.



## *The Girls Before Us*

2024

Ballpoint pen and highlighter on paper

18 x 12cm

In this sketch of Community House at St Margaret's, I aim to encapsulate the essence of a building that once stood as a cornerstone in the lives of students. It was a place where students spent their childhoods, friendships were forged, and countless memories were etched into the hearts of those who called it home and school. The sketch is drawn with the intent to evoke the warmth and nostalgia of growing up within its walls. Through this artwork, I invite viewers to reflect on their own cherished memories of places that have shaped them, recognising the profound impact of our environments on our personal journeys. This building stands as a testament to the enduring connections and stories that live on in our hearts long after we've moved on.



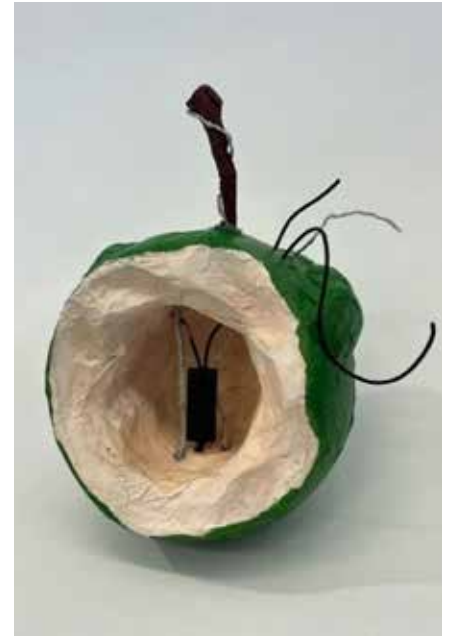
Sophie Frecklington  
Year 11

## *The Fall of Men*

2024

Acrylic on canvas, with wire cords,  
papier-mâché, styrofoam  
40 x 51cm, 1.5cm, 12 x 17 x 9cm

The *Fall of Men* is inspired by three artists: Van Gogh, Rene Magritte and Gordon Bennet. Through the use of post-expressionism, the background symbolises the spiralling reality of mental health issues inflicted by our reliance on phones and electronics today. Temptation and hidden identity are two aspects of technology use that contribute largely to the negative impacts of the digital age – temptation through phone addiction and hidden identity through online masks. Through Bennet's use of appropriating art, I have used Van Gogh's and Magritte's artworks to construct *The Fall of Men*. My art creates new meanings and interpretations through a 21st century lens and sparks deep thought in viewers of how technology affects them. *The Fall of Men* depicts how people in the 21st century have fallen to the temptations of technology, our ultimate downfall.



## *My Journey*

2024

Watercolour and acrylic on tissue and paper  
25 x 22 cm and 24 x 28 cm

Each person embarks on a unique journey, and my art, influenced by Jacqueline Scotcher, charts the course of my experiences both as an expat and as a student of St Margaret's. Through a deliberate choice to emulate a map-like aesthetic from a bird's-eye perspective, the distinct land masses represent the various places I've called home. The curve of brown planks in my artwork pays homage to the Barley Sugar Garden arches, a cherished St Margaret's landmark, adding a personal touch as a St Margaret's girl and connecting my narrative to specific memories and landmarks. The Barley Sugar Garden is a dominant feature as it is extremely significant and seen as the heart of the school. I created two pieces, and when put together, the work is in the shape of Australia. By presenting them apart, I invite the audience to piece together my journey themselves, underscoring the reality of my overseas relocations.



# St Margaret's Day 2024 Speech

WELLNESS. A NOUN. It is defined as the act of practising healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes, so that instead of just surviving, you're thriving.

Good afternoon, Sister Gillian and the Society of the Sacred Advent Leadership, Bishop Sarah, Ms Curtis AM, past patrons, distinguished guests, staff and students. It is with great pride and joy that Luci and I welcome you all to our annual St Margaret's Day celebration. Today provides an opportunity to reflect on our school's 129 years of rich history, appreciate the present, and look forward to a future filled with excitement and promise.

Since our school's beginning in 1895, a few things have happened. Two World Wars were fought, seven major global pandemics occurred, and the federation of Australia came into being, just to name a few. However, throughout all these global events, the strength and spirit of St Margaret's have been and continue to be unwavering.

I've had the privilege of attending St Margaret's since Pre-Prep, and it is safe to say that this school has grown and developed in a myriad of ways over my thirteen years here. For example, when I was in Year 2, I was a part of a cohort with a grand total of eight students. Fast forward to today, where the Year 2 cohort has increased six times to now cater to 48 students, with St Margaret's, as a whole, educating 1427 girls.

Despite these numerical changes, the St Margaret's values have been a constant within our school, allowing girls to flourish to the best of their ability, their transcendent nature allowing for very little alteration to be made, apart from the apt switch from Faith to Inclusivity a couple of years ago. Nevertheless, they create the strong, fortified foundation upon which our day-to-day lives rely.

That's not to say St Margaret's hasn't undergone any physical changes. Alongside several primary school expansions, we've seen an endless number of much appreciated bathroom renovations and the development of many

integral parts of our school such as the Eunice Centre, the Year 7 precinct, the Barley Sugar Garden and even the very space we are in right now. The school's growth knows no bounds and does not plan to stop any time soon. In fact, after interviewing Ms Surtees, who famously taught here for over forty years and is currently our very own school archivist, we were surprised to learn just how much our school campus has evolved.

In past times, St Margaret's has been in a few different places and our buildings have had many different purposes. It all started in 1895 in Nundah, where the Sisters first began 'Eton High School for Girls', which was the very beginnings of the school we know today. Realising they needed larger premises, the Sisters moved to Toorak House. This was a short-lived location for the school as, in Ms Surtees' words, *'Toorak House was on far too high a hill for the St Margaret's girls to walk up.'* Instead, the Sisters purchased what is now known as Community House on the mountain that is Lapraik Street.

With 47 students and the Sisters all squeezed into the upstairs dormitories of the house, it is easy to appreciate the Sisters' need to expand the school campus to accommodate their rapidly growing community. And so, Mooloomburram was purchased in 1919, followed by their first large building project in 1928 known as the 'West Wing', which now comprises part of the boarding house.

Currently, more growth is taking place with the Canopy Café in the works and taking great shape with the new gardens located near our previously beloved Tuckshop and expanding past the Sister Helen Orchestra Rooms and weaving its way into Avoca courtyard. Alongside this, in 2020, the new and state of the art Philip Harris Gym and Sports Precinct was opened, which looks a lot different to what previously resided here. In the past, we would be standing on what were four sandy green tennis courts and right behind me was a hall where everyone but the Year 12 girls sat on the floor.

Evidently, there are a few main constants that have always been a central part of the

St Margaret's community. Even through all these physical changes to the campus, St Margaret's has always had a strength and spirit fortified by the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Advent. During their 114-year long association with Community House, their presence was cherished and deeply appreciated by all campus students and staff. While the Sisters no longer reside on campus, their values continue to deeply influence the trajectory of St Margaret's, as they always have. It is their philosophy that has allowed thousands of women to graduate with not only an excellent all-rounded education, a well-developed list of musical and athletic abilities but with a sisterhood of other women supporting them. This is a privilege that is, unfortunately, not afforded to hundreds of thousands of young girls worldwide. Being able to be a part of a community with such a rich history and a promising future ahead is something for which we are eternally grateful.

It is inspiring to think that this legacy, one focused on educating young women to be inclusive, courageous, respectful and have spirit, integrity and passion, all started with one building. One house. Indeed, Community House is a shining example of a rich history and a promising future.

Early in 1886, Patrick Durack welcomed his guests for a lavish housewarming party that spanned over several days in his new mansion, named 'Maryview'. Guests were awestruck by its architectural splendour, the intricate details, the sweeping views of lush new lawns and gardens that rolled down towards the river's edge.

In 1910, the Sisters purchased that same house, and its doors were opened to 47 young St Margaret's girls, staff and the Sisters. It became their home, and it was the very first building the school owned. The building was renamed 'Roslyn' and then 'Donatello' by successive owners before it became 'St Margaret's House' and was appropriately referred to as the heart of St Margaret's.

In 1928, with the rapid expansion of the school, the Sisters claimed St Margaret's House as their home. Amidst the bustling school campus, the house became a deeply



Ruby Reynolds Campbell and Luci Sprott  
Year 11

spiritual and peaceful place. As this was the home for a community of sisters, it was named Community House, and this name will never waver.

We, ourselves, toured Community House at the end of last term, and we believe that no adjectives or metaphors can truly encompass the feeling of stepping into a building that is overflowing with history, joy, laughter and peace. However, we're going to try to the best of our abilities. With tall floor to ceiling windows lining the front of the house, the rooms are basked in the warmth of the afternoon sunlight, lighting up the entirety of the lower level, blanketing the hard-wood floors in a golden hue. The original fireplaces are nestled safely within most rooms, all with grand arched wooden door frames.

As you ascend to the upper level of Community House, you're greeted with a beautiful stained-glass window, one of many that will be completely restored to reflect their full beauty. Upstairs holds the previous dormitories as we mentioned earlier, with names including Prudence, Felicity, Patience and Fidelity. And last, but not least, the beautiful ornate verandahs that surround both levels of Community House, offering breathtaking views of Brisbane, and putting into perspective how St Margaret's is a local school with a global outlook.

It is with the building's history of peacefulness, spirituality and warmth in mind that we look forward to the future of Community House as a Student Wellness Centre. All students will be welcome to take the time to be silent and calm in this space, or alternatively visit our school psychologists and Reverend Jazz, whose offices will be relocated to Community House. While the exact details of how this centre will look are yet to be revealed, it is, without doubt, the perfect place to cultivate wellness and feel at ease. It is the place that will help St Margaret's students not only to strive but also to thrive.



ANUSHKA WAS COLLECTING bottles. They were thin, warm, and almost flimsy with age. She put the last few in her sack, and she slung the mass across her body, leaving its weight to rest familiarly on the abrasive band of red rash from the plastic on her skin. She had collected a day's worth.

The ground was unforgiving underfoot; its cracks used to prod at Anushka's feet, carving its dry, geometric pattern into distinct markings on the soles. She had grown used to this now though, so she instead focused her attention on the readjusting of her sack every few metres, to minimise the advancement of the patchy red that threatened to crawl further down her shoulders and back.

It was then, when Anushka had just switched the bag from her right shoulder to her left and back again, that she saw it.

It was small. Fleeting.

Unmistakably magnetic.

A yellowed slip of paper, with 'Oz Lotto' stamped in bright letters across the top.

The wind must have plucked it from elsewhere, a wealthy elsewhere, for such a ticket was entirely out of place against the dark, dehydrated dirt surrounding Anushka's home.

Tin rooves. Mud walls. Mothers selling fruit and handmade goods on the sides of the roads.

The wind seemed to flaunt its stolen prize, carrying it just entrancingly above the heights of Anushka's reach. Her eyes were trained on it nonetheless though, and after it had travelled some distance across her usual path, the ticket finally landed itself down on top of a brick wall. One that reached high enough above her head to block out the remnants of the day's late-afternoon sun.

Anushka hadn't looked away.

The wind picked up one corner of the yellowed paper again, only slightly, beckoning her upwards.

Anushka decided to climb.

She relinquished herself of her plastic sack's weight and set the clunking bottles down against the wall. She steered herself as it loomed above.

Her fingertips were pressed white as she gripped into the crevices between each brick. It was only the length of half her finger. She looked back down at her sack and mouthed a silent prayer for it staying there for when she returned.

Left hand, right foot, right hand, left foot.

Anushka stuck to her pattern.

*A lottery ticket.* She had almost let herself smile.

\*\*\*

Perhaps it was her anticipation at nearing the top that had tainted her focus or the sickly birds cawing across from her, but at two bricks from the ticket, a protrusion in the wall managed to evade Anushka's sight. It was directly above her left shin, so when she went to bring it up to her left leg, she dragged the brick's sharp corner over her skin. It drew a long, thin thread of blood that snaked down to her ankle.

Anushka grimaced and gritted her teeth.

She checked below her for her bottles, slouched limply against the wall. A viscous red droplet hung from her heel and splashed on them below.

She was so close.

Anushka pushed herself onwards and finished her climb to the top. She sat there now, legs hanging over the side. Light warmed the back of her neck and shone on the slip of paper.

She reached out, pinched its corner and –

'Get out!'

She missed it.

'Get out! Private property!'

There was a moment where Anushka didn't process what had happened. The light from seconds before had disappeared and instead she felt cold air pushing at her from behind. There was a voice, a distant, violent voice that reminded her of a dark place somewhere in her mind, and she was looking somewhat upwards. The day's fading colours mixed with the dark clouds. Wind whistled past her ears.

Tin roofs. Mud walls. Mothers selling fruit and handmade goods on the sides of the roads.

Anushka hit the ground. Hard.

'That's right! Out!'

The air had been knocked out of her lungs so abruptly that she had to consciously wheeze in shallow breaths. Her eyes were wide, her vision blurry. Another drop of blood fell into the dirt from her heel, this time onto the dirt, where specks of brown floated at the very top of the small splatter.

Anushka stared upwards; a red face hung over hers. The mouth was moving. Anushka wasn't listening. Her ears were ringing.

Her eyes flicked left, and she watched the ticket instead, behind him.

Floating on the wind, tinged-yellow and fluttering, coasting from the wall.

Too high it soared, too quickly fleeing.

The sun hid itself now, and the night set in with the cold. Clouds blocked the beginnings of the moon.

Anushka sat up and nodded to the face before her. The owner's face.

Still dazed, she stood.

Anushka looked at the tin roofs. The mud walls. The mothers selling fruit and handmade goods on the sides of the roads.

Anushka returned to her bottles.



Ellouise Tkaczyk  
Year 11

## *A Love Letter to the Near Silence of Nighttime in Nature*

It's 12:43am and I'm outside. The darkness sits on  
my shoulders,  
hangs off the curve of my chin,  
has settled on my spine and engulfs the whole of  
my body.

I have always thought that the nighttime was  
inherently intimate –

the way it coats the world in a thick blanket,  
like a lover to a worn-out partner,  
finally slowing its business, its noise, its chaos,  
all the way down,  
as its expanse settles over the horizon.

It's then that I love,  
when the buildings, the people, the trees have all  
settled gently to rest.

That near-silence of the nighttime in nature when  
not much stirs:  
when one can hear the cricket's song,  
and the bird rustle in his nest,  
the lizard scampering sideways,  
and the moth's wings as they float on a small breeze,  
that one can now hear too,  
whispering through the trees.

## *Tassie Tiger*

There's one, in the dark, where a foreign white wall  
blocks out some faint light.  
In an hour, the sun will look both ways before rising,  
and this tiger will heighten its senses.  
She steps forward now though, in the thinning  
remnants of the night,  
and her four feet multiply.  
A cub, weeks old,  
lifts its level head behind her.

The two look up  
at the fading stars  
in their sky together,  
and count twice as many as yesterday.

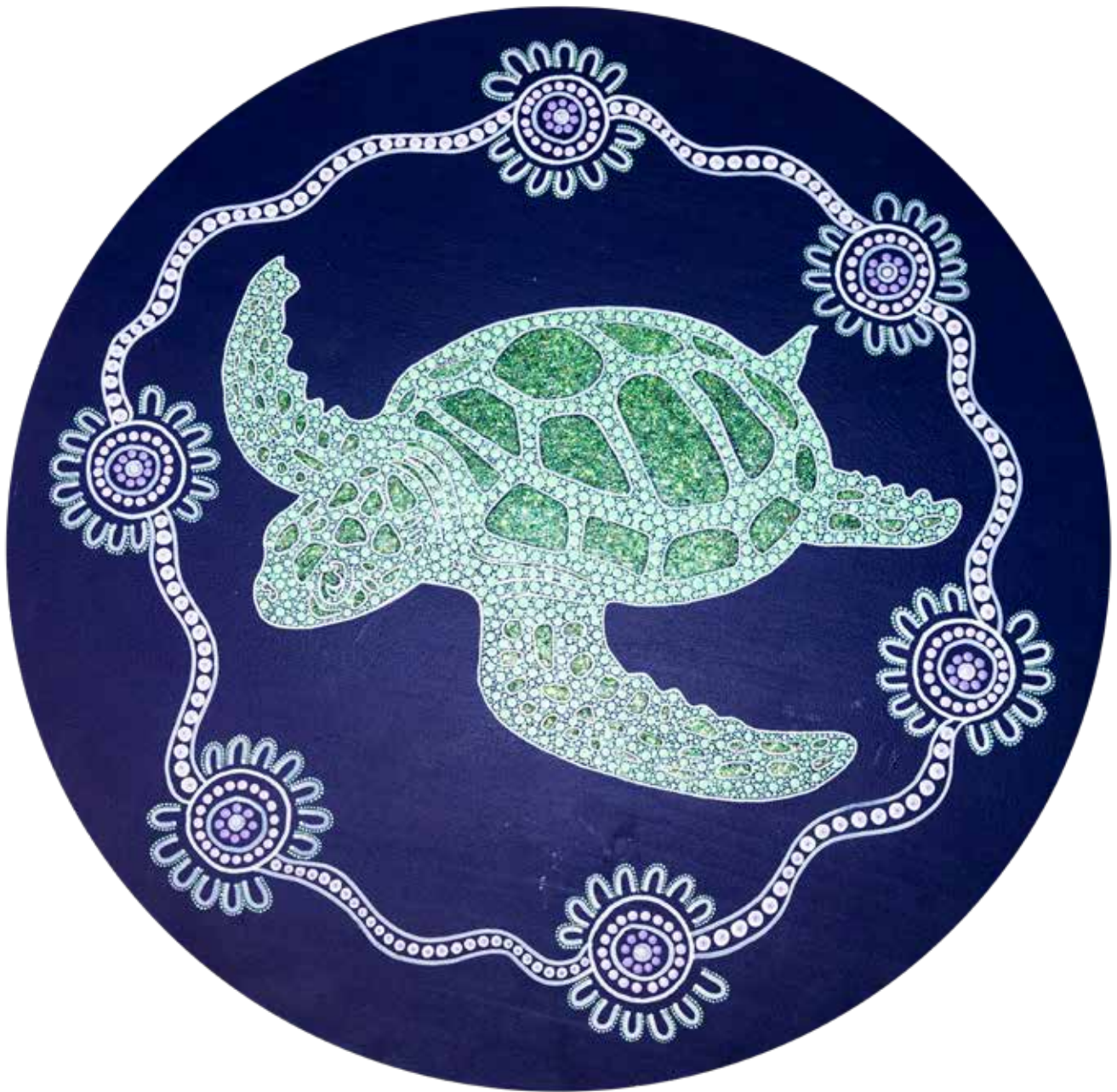
In half an hour, her cub will crack a twig.  
Or maybe it was the crunch of some leaves.  
Or her yawn.

It won't matter -  
Heavy, hurried boots will take over the sounds in  
the air and  
she will be carried away.

But for now,  
she licks her baby,  
and wanders through the thinning grass,  
where rabbit traps and railway lines have replaced  
the fires and the freedoms  
of the first people.



Chelsea Bashforth  
Year 10



*Turtle Totem*

2024

Acrylic paint on wood

58cm

The turtle is a sacred animal to Indigenous people: it brings with it the knowledge of the ocean and land. Surrounding the turtle are groups meeting to share in that knowledge, to keep it strong, to be able to pass down to the next generations. The colours of various green and blue show the variation of colours that are reflected in the moonlight and sunlight in the ocean.



Elysia Li  
Year 10



## *The Beauty of Chinese*

2024

Pencil sketches

40 x 30cm

The series of artworks *The Beauty of Chinese* consist of two sketch artworks. The first is of a girl wearing the traditional Chinese robes (Hanfu) standing in front of Chinese architecture. The second is a girl whose hair is done up in the traditional way. I have used 2H, HB, 2B and 4B sketching pencils to create the two artworks. Both artworks represent my Chinese background. They illustrate the traditional hairstyle, clothing, and architecture. The artworks highlight the beauty of classical Chinese culture. I am very proud of my culture and heritage and would like to share this through my art to a broader community.



SUMMER HAD ENDED, and everyone, or rather everything, sensed its departure. From turbid streams that carved through the terrain like veins of ice – cracked and treacherous – to a few trees strewn alongside the dirt path, their gnarly limbs clawing out frantically against the wind. Where the barren landscape, suffocated by sheaths of snow, melted into the cool, earthy tones of tree-tops stretching beyond, a hare was sprawled at the end of the road. The plane soaring overhead wouldn't have noticed its feet kicked back and snapped at an unnatural angle. Or those watercolour eyes, the huge fiery orbs, diluted with blue, that were glued shut with frozen blood. But perhaps the fighter pilot would have noticed the bitter taste of sorrow beneath the bite of the December frost – for this was something that seeped into every crevice of Molching.

He watched as the plane's metal wings sliced through the ribbons of orange curled across the sky. The harmonious cacophony of the engine spluttering, clearing plumes of smoke from its mechanic lungs, filled his ears. Each blinding flicker of the control panel amplified the urgency surging within him.

The pilot's knuckles were leached of colour as he clenched the joystick. When his gaze wandered through the frost-framed glass, a patchwork of worn buildings appeared. The thatched roofs sagged under the weight of years as clotheslines strained between them – threadbare undergarments of all shapes and sizes, flapping with the wind. He traced over the slender streets, snaking his way to the centre of the township.

The wireless crackled into existence. A voice on the opposite end transmitted commands and alerts, synchronised with the rhythm – each pound of his heart echoing like a marching drum heralding an awaiting battle.

The fighter pilot wrenched the yoke upwards, temporarily escaping from the prison of his own thoughts. While hovering over the cobblestone square, he strained to hear the ghosts of brown clad soldiers, shoulders broadened and chins pointed upwards, steadily clomping along to hails shouted from German onlookers.

A burning sensation climbed up from his arms, and the pilot thrust open a latch guarding the button, its red glow slicing through the weak trace of darkness settling around him. This was supposed to be a target, a mark to be hit with exact precision. But his finger was weighed down by something heavier than the payload he carried.

Children. German children. They flooded uncontrollably onto the street, their silent squeals and giggles echoing around the cockpit. A short, blonde boy used his elbows, sharpened by the cruel embrace of winter, as weapons to fight his way through the crowd. And then everyone stopped – hung on his every movement. He drew out a tired football that was nestled beneath the shreds of his coat. The boy took off, his feet a blur beneath him as he artfully weaved towards the end goal. Darting, dodging, ducking through the defence. When he began to stumble, and his dribbling grew wider, the football glided across the frost-covered cobblestone to his teammate – a girl. She swung her spindly leg forward with all her might.

The fighter pilot's hand trembled as he guided the plane into a dive. He could even the scales. He could destroy another family for every one that was broken and shatter another future for every one that was robbed; what were hundreds of graves dug anymore but figures on a never-ending scoreboard?

The football flew over the faded propaganda posters and Nazi flags nailed to 33 Himmel Street. Over the stack of stolen books stowed underneath the bed. Over the cold and lonely Jew hiding in the cold and lonely basement.

When it finally stopped at the neighbouring street, he sensed the stifling silence being lifted. The boy threw his hands up and launched into the air; a signal for the other children to join the celebration. Everyone swarmed towards him as he reclaimed the new-found trophy. He directed the crowd towards the girl, closing her hands around the football and raising them high above her head.

A solitary tear pricked at the corner of his eye before slipping, slipping, slipping across his cheek. The fighter pilot

watched as it fell, bleeding into his slate grey clothes.

He couldn't do it.

The yoke screeched metallicly as he smashed another hand down, using both to desperately yank upwards.

He wouldn't.

And then the cockpit ignited. He was enveloped by a sea of flashing controls which blended into a colourful soup as the plane spiralled around and around. The fighter pilot was slammed forward with an abrupt jerk and swept into a maelstrom of jagged glass shards – opening a gateway for the ruthless roar of the wind.

The grid of orderly streets rushed towards him at a terrifying speed. As the plane hurtled past strips of brick buildings, a vast expanse of white stretched out ominously in front of him. A blanket of snow waiting to cover him in frigid coolness.

The metal bird skidded to a halt, igniting a trail of sparks and scattering smouldering shards of steel across the ground. It lay lifeless.

Between the breaths of wailing sirens, he could hear approaching whispers. There were hushed murmurers lurking just out of reach, just beyond the veil of darkness.

I think this time, what I noticed was more of an absence of colour than an actual one. It was a concentrated black – not even a trace of midnight blue or a faint glimmer of stars. This left a certain feeling of unease amongst the crowd, a sort of disturbing tingling sensation. But, of course, they were already well aware of how this story would conclude.

### A Brief Sidenote

The fighter pilot wasn't particularly afraid of me, but perhaps simply of crossing paths alone.

The encroaching smoke stifled him, hanging heavier than the anticipating silence. As the acrid stench of burning fuel grew stronger, the band around his torso tightened; he noticed each sharp breath. A warm, gooey fluid trickled from his cheek, gashed deeply by the serrated window. When a dull glow of



Hudson Crombie  
Year 10

candlelight sliced through the shadows, he was confronted by hundreds of piercing eyes that punctured his chest – watching warily, waiting.

Not that he wanted them to know what he had done. What he had sacrificed to protect the children, the German children – Hitler’s future army. Because who was he to be spared from this time of judgement? The fighter pilot didn’t want to appear anything than the monster he knew he was, a predator willing to kill. That was enough.

A short blonde boy bustled through the herds of onlookers, who were huddled together like sheep underneath the thin blankets. He had a faded toolbox, with paint flaking away at each corner, hanging by his side.

I’d like to think I caught a fleeting glimpse of recognition there.

Each of his steps became a negotiation with strewn refuse as he walked closer to the cockpit. Just when he started fumbling with the rusted latch, a girl appeared from behind him, gently shaking his arm.

‘Saumensch, why are you here? I told you to go wait with Frau Huberman,’ he muttered angrily, trying to conceal his furrowed brow and lips pulled in a tight line.

There was no response. She slowly relieved the weight of the toolbox from his unsteady grip. The hinges groaned in indignation as she opened it, offering him the contents. He carefully drew out a little teddy bear.

The fighter pilot squinted to cut through the blurring surroundings. He watched feebly as the boy rested it against his starched uniform. A beaded eye lolled from the teddy bear’s socket, while the sour scent of dampness and mildew stung his nose. It smelled like sad happiness.

‘Danke Schön,’ he strained hoarsely. His accent was terrible, and watery blood gurgled at the back of his throat with each syllable.

I knew he was just another pawn knocked off the chess board.

### A Four-Letter Word

Hope – A  
promise worth  
dying for.

Rudy gave the fighter pilot hope that night, underneath the starless void. The promise of forgiveness, redemption. He kindled his long-frozen heart with compassion, and filled his open, empty embrace with kindness.

It wasn’t until many years had passed that I understood the significance of what happened. Understood why, as I grasped his soul with both bony arms, that his mouth appeared to be smiling. At first, I had just assumed it a final, pointless display of superiority. An arrogant attempt to cheat me; countless others had desperately tried and failed.

He was content – with the promise Rudy gave him, with himself; it was a second chance. Hope was his salvation, and hope would be Liesel’s too. It was what kept the mechanical cogs of the world grinding away. What ended wars, and what started them. A necessary balancing tool.



# A Mother's Sacrifice

## FEATURING:

*a martyr*  
*2 swastikas*  
*an arrival*  
*a child's untimely death*  
*Mein Kampf*  
*a broken oath*  
*a dead communist*  
*a screaming doll*  
*a mechanical beast*  
*2 ghosts*  
*the final child*

## A PORTRAIT OF THE HUBERMAN'S DOORSTEP:

The doormat of the Huberman's home lounged outside, dusty except for that bright red swastika.

Soup steamed through the windows – a mother's recipe for a child that would never be hers again.

A minute of silence and a prayer. A rattling breath and the shuffling of thin black coats.

And when there was nothing left to bask in but a frigid sun and the guilt beating down from that great grey sky, Paula Meminger let herself ring the doorbell.

A hopeful chime rang out, before smouldering in the empty street.

\*\*\*

Three figures boarded a train. Daybreak yawned above and fell into slumber under the station's shroud.

The mechanical beast offered no warmth. The cold morning tracked Paula's heels like a desperate hound, kept at bay only by her children's heat as they nestled close. It reeked of cold cigarettes and drunken engine smoke; the train lit with thin sanatorium light.

Sounds of grinding bones came from its cast-iron wheels. Train whistles were weary howls, like a mother crying for her lost kin.

Only inside did Werner look up at her with those wide, questioning eyes. Liesel buried her face into Paula's coat, seeking warmth and comfort that Paula was no longer sure she could provide. She held them close, hands trembling, trying to imprint the feel of them into her memory.

Hold them. Hold them tight before your arms are empty.

A cry choked in her throat.

It had been there for weeks. It was there when the radio blared Horst-Wessel-Lied. It was there when the Gestapo took her husband for communism. It was there when the sky taunted her with rainbows on their window's ruins and their suitcase lumped by the door, warning that they were next.

She couldn't help but despise the Hubermans for fostering the two. How could Rosa, all stern lines and bony embraces, squeeze any maternalism from herself? And Hans? That man was made of

silent hurt and a dangerous reluctance to Heil-Hitlering.

If motherhood was a blood oath, she questioned, what right did she have to leave them with no warning and throw them to God knows what faced them in Himmel?

'Ma?' Liesel tapped her shoulder. 'I wanna go home.'

'Bit too far for that now, my love.' Paula forced a chuckle.

'Can't he turn the train around?' she pleaded, eyes verging on tears. 'I can ask, Ma, he'd do it for us.'

There it was again. That stubbornness. That brain and heart bursting out of her body.

'Ma?'

'We'll be home soon, darling.' A lie.

Paula watched Liesel ripping through her dog-eared copy of Mein Kampf. Several uniformed men nodded in approval.

'A suitable read for a young lady.' One smirked and nudged her.

Hitler grinned wickedly on the cover. Tell them, woman. Your children can either call you communist scum or a wicked coward of a once-mother.

Her eyes shifted to Werner beside her. Was it truly for the better to tear herself from him?

That slither of chance was adamant in her head. Maybe, by some miracle, the Gestapo would forget to break down her door and whip her blind in front of the children. Maybe, just maybe, they'd permit her to hold her kids like this, forever, till this war was over.

Werner lay fixated on the wreckage outside his window. It was an endless roll of film, only changing to a different horror, a different bomb-stricken neighbourhood, a different mass of grimy children and men in brown uniforms.

Trümmerfeld. Rubble field.

Would her children face the same fate?

She rustled Werner's hair. His father was right – he was her spitting image, with his sweet little head of blonde-white feathers. It was cruel how the purest of things got stained by the messiness of the world, how mankind shot at ducklings and sullied christening gowns.



Elspeth Dyce  
Year 10

Poor boy. A haystack in a world of needles.  
'Mein kleines entlein.' Werner's grin took up half the train. The words came from her mouth, syrupy heavy, but they weren't hers.

**TRANSLATION:**

**Mein kleines entlein – my little duckling.**

His grin descended into a violent coughing fit. It was a nasty, guttural sound that keeled him over hot and wheezing, stopped only when Paula poured him the last of her water flask.

He gave a toothy smile and his eye caught something. Werner rose to his feet and pointed outside.

'Look, Ma!'

Holes littered the ground outside, gaping mouths of black dirt and bomb matter. From the defeated branches of a gallow tree hung a cotton doll and a child's shoe. Stuffing spilled from the doll, its mouth wide in a silent scream. The shoe hung from a noose of its laces.

Paula yanked him back.

'Dammit, don't look!'

His face fell and she regretted her scolding instantly.

'Shh, don't worry my darling,' she reassured, tucking his hair behind his ears. 'I'm just being fretful, that's all.'

Werner opened his mouth to blurt out a what's-that-and-where-are-we-going-Ma, but Paula was wise enough to cut him off before he could.

'Ducklings need to sleep, ja?' She squeezed his chubby fingers and giggled with him. 'Especially sick ones.'

He started to protest, but his vicious cough drew him to a halt.

Schlafen wie ein Toter was what mother and daughter called his slumber.

**TRANSLATION:**

**Sleeping like the dead.**

Silence haunts a restless mind.

The weight of judgment once again pressed down on her.

Trees sneered and cocked their heads. Rain spat at her window. The cold metal shunned her rest. Passengers seemed to eye her up with thin, pursed lips. Even

the flickering overhead lights seemed to whisper their disapproval.

The inanimate and the living alike were all condemning her, screaming: 'You call yourself a mother?'

Sorry lingered on her tongue.

No. It wasn't her fault.

It seems only right to point out now the swastika carved through the train's wooden flesh. It stretched above Paula's head, wide and boastful like a self-proclaimed god.

She regained focus when the sound of a harsh cough hit her ears. Werner was slumped across her lap, asleep.

Paula broke into a smile.

'Mein kleines entlein,' she whispered once again.

Her brows furrowed deep. His lips were as brown and cracked as a crushed beetle, and his eyes seemed stuck halfway. The entirety of his body drooped, thin and hollow, like a paper boy.

She shook him.

Cursing loud in German: 'Child, this isn't funny!'

A frantic shake. Another mother's infant wails – it can sense me here.

Several eyes bore into her back, and madwoman ricocheted off the walls.

Werner didn't smile. His mouth was ever so slightly ajar, waiting for an exhale that never came.

**A NOTE ON TAKING WERNER:**

*His soul is a damp washcloth.  
I swaddle him tight.*

*I don't like taking children. I don't like how they try to make their mouths move, to scream, to cry, to crawl to their mothers. I don't like how their mothers claw at my arms and scramble to me in a rabid amble, how their tears boil and spit like manic geysers. They glower at where my eyes should be and 'take me with you' comes foaming from their mouths.*

*Werner's soul seeps onto the train floor. His mother is soaked with his unused tears.*

*I didn't want to leave my scent, but I had no choice. It was a noxious mix of saccharine rot, faeces, and rancid guilt.*

*A scent so thick, Paula would lament, that it seeped around them like blackened sap.*

The engine grew to a high-pitched scream—or was it Liesel's?

The metronome of clicking wheels heaved to a halt.

Her time was up.

Pull yourself up, woman. Retch. Stagger. Carry your dead.

Even when her heart ripped from her chest and dragged beside her heels, she forced herself to move.

Disembowelled, exposed, but staggering through that blackened sap.

I will never understand humans.

Two figures exited the train.

The darkness swallowed the matchstick people. Their eyes bulged and hair stuck in feverish wads.

Paula pulled her cold, cold child into her.

Nothingness is heavier than all the sky. Take it from me.

And God, how her arms ached.

**A MOTHER, A CHILD AND CRYING GHOSTS:**

The swastika on the doormat grinned.

Himmel Street resembled no less than hell, or at the least some purgatory.

Paula bent and cupped her child's face. Her eyes throbbed all red and wet. The mother spoke:

'My sweet child. Don't forget how much I love you.'

She paused, and in thick German:

'Und wenn du die Geister siehst, lieben sie dich trotzdem.'

**TRANSLATION:**

**And when you see the ghosts, they love you just the same.**

Then that doorbell screamed out and Liesel was torn from Paula Meminger in a wreck of skin and flying arms.

This is an extract of Sienna's short story which received *Highly Commended* in the 2024 St Margaret's short story competition. It follows the lives of an immortal (Nariana) and a time traveller (Alaric), whose paths cross randomly and at varying points in time. They first met when Alaric was a young child and Nariana a few thousand years old. Alaric quickly disappeared, only reappearing 453 years later at Anne Boylen's execution, where he had become an old man. This cycle continued for billions of years, with visits increasing and their time together growing.

I SIT ON the park bench, diary in hand. Since 1849, I've kept up with writing all the times I've run into Alaric:

1101, 1536, 1849, 1900, 1934, 1975, 1989.

It's been 23 years since I've seen him.

1989 was my favourite; we went to a Nirvana concert. Musical bands of such manner were my favourite invention. Oh, maybe telescopes; the worlds one can see with them are quite amazing.

'I know you,' a young voice spoke. I lift my head in surprise to see a teenage boy.

I always know those eyes.

'Yas, yas, you do,' I respond.

'I met you in 1934 when I was a kid,' he said.

'Are you going to keep stating things we both know to be true?' I mock.

'But how? You haven't even aged?' he questions.

'I'm immortal, Alaric,' I answer. 'I feel like you should know this by now.'

He sat down next to me, staring in amazement. I guess that wouldn't be too hard to believe considering he can time travel. I quickly close my book to avoid spoilers.

'What's in the book that you don't want me to see?'

'Spoilers. We've met many times before; or I guess for you we're going to meet many times,' I respond.

'How many times?' he asks.

'Spoilers.'

He grunts and gets up.

'Wanna get lunch?' I suggest.

'Sure.'

I put my book in my bag, and we begin walking over to a local café.

'What year is it?' he questions.

'2024. They have some really cool stuff nowadays. I am truly impressed by humanity,' I answer.

'I was born like 16 years ago.'

'I was born about 11,573 years ago.'

'Damn you're old,' he says in amazement.

That... that really hurt. I guess I am quite old, but still ... Ow.

A blink and he's gone. We had just reached the café.

That's alright.

I walk in the café and take a seat. I take out my book and pencil.

*My dearest Alaric,*

*Today, fate bestowed upon me the most wondrous of encounters: I met you once more, though this time, you were but a young version of yourself, untouched by the ravages of time, in the year 2024.*

*The ability to see you again, my cherished Alaric, was a vision that stirred my soul to its very depths. Your visit, radiant of unspent years, was a poignant reminder of the inexorable march of time, the eternal waltz to which we are bound. Yet, within this dance, there lies a promise – a promise that one day I shall present to you this book, a testament to our timeless connection.*

*Until that blessed day, when time's relentless tide shall see fit to bring us together once more in the middle, I shall content myself with the knowledge that our paths are inexorably entwined. Each encounter, each fleeting moment serves to strengthen the invisible threads that bind our hearts across all of space-time.*

*Until the day we meet again, I remain forever yours, my dear time traveller.*

\*\*\*

The sky becomes overtaken by the red sun's miasmic nature. The window cracked and the alarms were almost deafening.

'Heat shield integrity: 61%.' The alarms sound.

The end of the world has finally arrived.

The Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies colliding and the sun expanding into a red giant. It always seemed so far away – so far in the future – but now, the final sands of time fall through my fingers.

'Nariana?' a man spoke.



Sienna Lofaro  
Year 10

'Alaric,' I respond.

'Heat shield integrity: 53%.'

'Why didn't you go off world?' he asked.

'I'm old Alaric, older than you could ever imagine. I have lived for billions of years. I have watched empires rise and fall, and their creations freeze and burn. I have knowledge of which men could only dream of – knowledge and secrets that must never be spoken. I have seen all humanity has to offer. I ruled and was ruled by humanity. I have walked where men still know not of – both on earth and off world. I am content to die.'

I turn to see a man withered by time for something over 70 years. Through all these years, he retained his childish eyes.

'I see we finally meet in the right order,' I joke.

'Yeah,' he giggles.

'Come, sit with me.'

'Heat shield integrity: 39%.'

He sits next to me and a wave of comfort washes over me. One I have not felt for a few decades. Over the billions of years, we met more and more.

The window cracks deeper with every passing minute. The once-ocean is now no more than a dried-up lake during a drought, and the once-green vegetation now charred black.

'Heat shield integrity: 21%.'

Through all this death, there is beauty. Denying all odds, the human race survived and overcame every challenge they faced. They truly have unparalleled potential.

Through their mishaps, there is beauty.

'I think my favourite time with you was 1989. You were there for a whole week,' I mention.

'That was the time we went to a Nirvana concert,' he chuckles.

'That time in Andromeda was fun too,' I snicker.

'I nearly died!'

'Yeah, good fun... maybe not for you but for me it was; besides, you were fine,' I tease.

'Heat shield integrity: critical.'

'I love you; you know that, right?' We turn to face each other.

'I know. I love you, too.'

After all these years, I finally see his eyes have a bit of green in them.

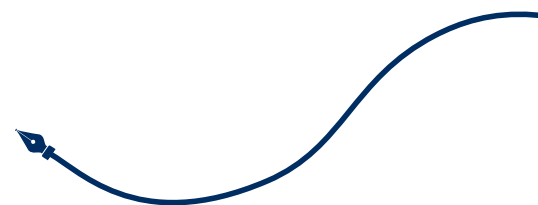
In a blink, he vanishes one final time.

I turn back to the window. Its cracks stretching to every corner.

'Heat shield failing.'

Visible heat waves smash into the window, the cracks quickly expanding to the walls.

My own death does not frighten me, but Alaric's ... That is my greatest, deepest fear.



# Condemned to Self-Love



Pippa May  
Year 10

I told myself that I'd write a poem from my friends' perspective of themselves,  
and describe the disgust for her reflection, a warped and wretched thing.  
(My anxious friend struggles to look a mirror in the eye.)  
And I force myself to type it up, even though I think her eyes and hair,  
(milk and dark chocolate respectively),  
are the perfect things to photograph.  
My loud friend would wish away her stomach,  
if she could only look like the models on social media.  
I think she already does, and I draw her figure often when I sketch,  
my model, a Greek goddess in human form.  
Smart friend would mould her nose and jawline to fit the ideals of pretty.  
I wouldn't, I would miss them too much.  
Because the shape of her chin creates dimples when she smiles,  
and the shape of her nose makes her eyes crinkle at the corners and then I know she's truly happy.  
'I would change my smile,' says the friend I've given a million trinkets to. 'Because it's crooked.'  
I understand, having spent hours in the mirror trying to fix my grin.  
I wonder who taught us our smile's not perfect,  
but in reality I know the answer,  
because my phone lights up in my pocket.  
Happy friend said she would change her skin because it's oily and blemished.  
That's probably what I would have said too.  
Even now my face is red and sore from picking at it,  
but I never noticed it on my friend, just how smiley and kind she is.  
The stretch marks on her hips and chest make the friend I sit with in English feel self-conscious,  
but I couldn't care less, because she gives the best hugs that come with the best advice.  
And I have never looked at her and seen the stretch marks,  
only the way she lights up when I do something particularly stupid.  
These women can look at their body and pick it apart with criticisms,  
and I can only see the people behind the flesh,  
because when we die and we are nothing but bones, we will all be the same,  
but the photos I took, and the drawings I made, and the memories I keep, they will remain.  
For the mirror in my eyes is much kinder than the mirror in their rooms.  
and if I have to spend the rest of my life telling my friends their worth,  
until it is engrained in their minds like social media has engrained their imperfections,  
then maybe that's not such a terrible fate to be condemned to.

## Halted

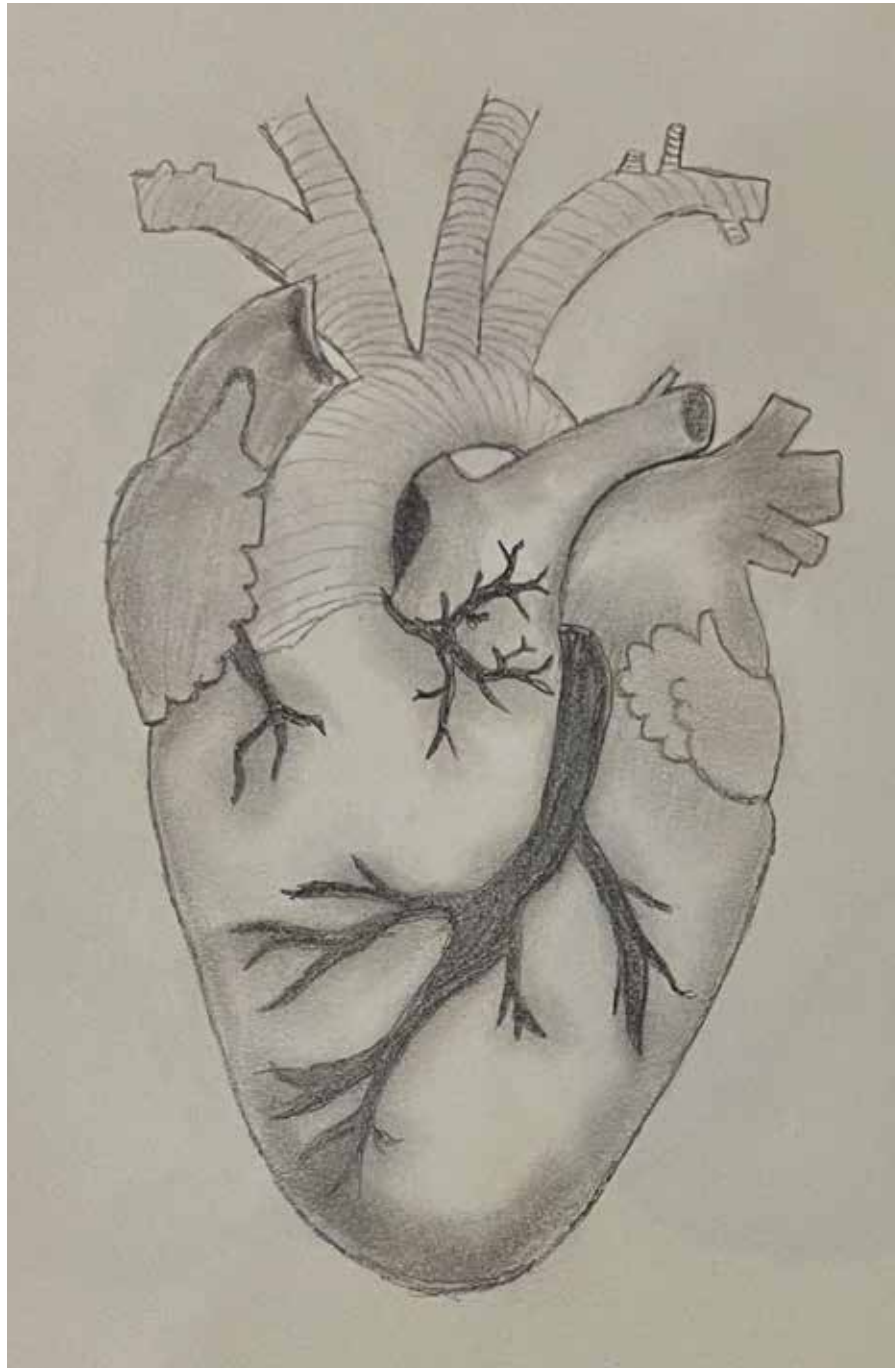
Sometimes, I feel like my life is a daydream.  
Not all the time, only sometimes.  
The kind of sometimes you feel at 10pm when you're waiting for  
the traffic light to turn green.  
No, not waiting.  
Watching.  
The watching you do when you  
know something will change,  
momentarily,  
but Time feels halted,  
and fragile.  
And so, you cradle Time in your palms and tell it,  
for in these moments you know things that afterwards you don't,  
you tell it that you regret nothing and wouldn't wish to turn back  
Time for even one last goodbye.  
It hurts, saying it aloud, but you know it is the truth.  
And then the light turns green, and you have to let Time go again.

## The Beginning of an End

The beginning of an end started when I stopped.  
We were walking home from the bus,  
and I looked back to make sure my sister was following.  
She was standing still at the gate of an elderly man's house,  
talking to him as he weeded his garden.  
He was smiling.  
She made him smile in thirty seconds.  
My sister and I are from different planets.  
She feels comfortable talking to strangers,  
while I feel alien with friends I've known for years.  
Her mind is full of constellations made from ideas,  
so she stumbles over the words and worlds in her sentences.  
She hates it,  
but I think her words paint starry nights in the sky.  
So I say to her,  
Keep on stuttering,  
let it create the meteors that rain down on  
those who aim to hurt you.  
Take as long as you need to finish your sentence.  
Because when you do it will change lives,  
beginnings and endings.



Sofie Wehl  
Year 10



## *The Beat of My Heart*

2024

Pencil sketch

14 x 21cm

The heart symbolises the centre of our emotions and love but is always hidden from the world. Our hearts are complicated bits of flesh that people find gross and yet they are so fragile. Despite this fragility, people still treat others with hatred, forgetting they have a heart themselves, almost as if it's frozen over. Our hearts are so small yet so important. The first thing a mother hears when her child is born is the beat of the heart, and she in turn feels hers grow with warmth and happiness. Our hearts are quite light, but this will be the heaviest weight someone will ever carry. A heart can be as broken as smashed glass but will never be seen as broken by anyone but yourself. It makes us question, why is this little piece of flesh that echoes inside of us so important that we can't physically survive without it and yet mentally it's a burden that we all have to carry as one?

# The Maroon Walls

**'I put my hands over my eyes because it's dark suddenly, and a man is standing there with a candle, blocking the stairs that go up; and the cellar walls are all around me, and I know I will never get out.'**

– from *Alias Grace*  
by Margaret Atwood

THE WALLS ARE white. White is good, white is new. The doctor is in white too. He holds a candle and walks slowly down the corridor. The floor is white. I follow him. I didn't resist when they had grabbed me when they told me I was unwell. I'm not sure if I am. I don't feel unwell, if anything I feel more free than ever. Freedom is a fickle thing though. Perhaps I am unwell, and this feeling is not freedom. Either way, I like it more here. I like the white. The white is new.

\*\*\*

*The day had yielded to the cool embrace of the night long before John arrived home from work. I sat in the living room, beside the maroon walls in the light of the fire, I held the knife in my hand, and I waited for John to enter. The shards of glass lay at my feet.*

*It was not unusual for John to arrive home late; he had to prioritise his work of course. It would be wrong to scorn a man for such a thing.*

*I often wondered why a man like John would stay with someone like me. John was well-spoken, a man of great intellect. And though perhaps he was overly confident at times, to the point one would think him arrogant, he was kind enough. He was quite handsome, too, for an older man. His face bore the marks of age, his silver-streaked hair framed his sharp face, and his attire bespoke a refined taste – a waistcoat adorned with intricate stitching and a cravat tied neatly.*

*I was not as educated and rather naïve. I was not as neat nor as refined, and my features were far too simple to be of interest. And I was far too outspoken; I was unwell. I was ungrateful.*

*A wife was to be silent and loyal. I was not. In our first year of marriage, I had begged John to let me accompany him on his errands, to let me accompany him to work. I had told John that I loathed my domestic chores, that I loathed the company of the poorly lit fire, of the maroon walls and gilded mirrors. I had told him that I didn't*

*want for children. What woman wouldn't want for children?*

*I thought my requests were quite fair. John got to leave the house, and John didn't need to have children. But of course, such requests were far too outrageous for a woman to say. John was quick to assist me, he explained how unwell I must have been to be thinking such awful things. He was very intelligent, John. He knew many physicians whom he promised would come and help fix me. They told John it was female hysteria. They said I would have to remain home permanently, no overexertion. They advised that I should be as dutiful as possible in order to overcome such mental challenges, and that John would have to help watch over me as I did. He would act as a supervisor during his time at home. A supervisor to his own wife. I suppose then, that in the end, what made John stay with me even through my illness was my youth.*

\*\*\*

But youth doesn't last forever. Men grow wiser and more handsome with age. But women grow ugly and unappetising to the likes of men. Perhaps that is why he locked me away for so long. Inside the maroon walls of that house. I hated the colour. I hated those walls. I hated the mirrors, and I hated the rugs. I was suffocating. But now I am free. Now I am walking down a hallway. I am walking within white walls. White is a much better colour. It is much cleaner. It is new.

\*\*\*

*I had spent weeks in that house. Months. And whilst John promised that my captivity in there was for my wellbeing, I only felt more longing for freedom. My thoughts became more vivid. I wanted to run, I wanted to shred the maroon walls, I wanted to throw the mirror across that rug, and I wanted to watch as the glass shards shattered against the floor. More than anything, I wanted to be free of John. Of the maroon walls of that house.*

*I know it was wrong of me to have those thoughts. It was even more wrong of me*



Bronte Tavener  
Year 10

*to lie to John. To tell him I was recovering. Perhaps, when he disagreed with my claims of mental competency and told me I was to remain resting indoors, it was because he knew I was lying. Or perhaps he was just threatened to let me go free, for it would risk him losing his favourite toy. That was all I was, a toy, a pet. Something to pat and to show off and then to tuck away into a corner of the house. He was a kind man John, but all men have faults.*

\*\*\*

When they asked about the incident, I didn't give them an answer. They looked at what had happened, they looked at my diagnosis, they saw me as broken. A broken girl, a deranged girl, a hysteric girl. Perhaps I am. Perhaps I am just a girl.

I can't help but feel as though they have misjudged my character. I may not be of complete sanity, but I am sensible. I act only with reason. I couldn't stay in that maroon house. In those maroon walls. I just couldn't bear it. It was worth it though. I like this place more. I like the long hallway, though it feels as though we have been walking along it for miles. I like the new walls. I like the white.

\*\*\*

*When he entered through the door, I ran to greet him placing the knife in my pocket. I adorned him with kisses, and I took his coat. And I loved him as any pet would. He ran a hand down my hair, and he smiled. He petted me like any owner would. But once our initial greeting was over, he simply dropped his hand and his smile, and he walked upstairs leaving his briefcase next to me. I walked back to the kitchen.*

*I was quite excited. See recently John bought me a set of kitchen knives. They were sharp and beautiful, and they worked very well. I had spent the day preparing his dinner. I had spent every hour chopping the meat so very finely. And I had used those gorgeous knives. I took the best care of them. It had been months since anything new had entered my home. I was so very happy to have something else to play with.*

*When John left this morning, I had used those knives. At first on the meat but then I began using them on the walls and the mirrors and the rug. I brought my hand to those hideous maroon walls. And I dragged the knife along. And I dragged it across again and again. It was so smooth I didn't need to apply any pressure. And then I brought it to that mirror. This time I needed more force. I started with the frame. And I cut through the gold-painted surface until I reached the gilt wood. And I cut a deep slice through it. And then I slashed the front of the mirror. And I hit it again and again and again with the knife. And its glass shards shattered against the floor. And then I brought my knife to the rug. It was an ugly patterned Persian rug. I ran the knife against its geometric design. And I ran it across again and again and again until its patterns were unrecognisable.*

*By the end, my knife was still sharp.*

\*\*\*

I do not regret what I did.

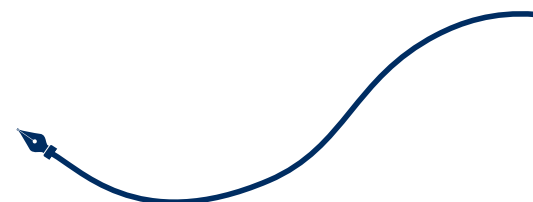
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*I had just pulled out the very same knife from my pocket when John came into the room. He looked at me. It was a look of horror, of fear, of disgust. But he finally looked at me and saw more than a doll. More than just a body. He saw me. And I saw my freedom. I saw my escape from the maroon walls.*

\*\*\*

They said that his blood covered me. That it was in my hair and on my clothes. I don't remember what happened. It was only when they grabbed me, that I knew I was out of the maroon walls.

And now the new white that I had loved so dearly faded to a black. The white was covered by long shadows. I put my hands over my eyes because it's dark, suddenly a man is standing there with a candle, blocking the stairs that go up; and the cellar walls are all around me, and I know I will never get out.





Edie Barber  
Year 9

*TICK, TICK.*

An ominous ticking filled the room.

*Tick, tick.*

It drilled into the young girl's mind.

*Tick, tick.*

As the hour crept past four, she continued to keep her pen to paper. Fixated on the blue lines.

'I will not disobey the Sisters,' she traced.

'I will not disobey the Sisters.' This time more rushed, the writing curling off the page.

Outside, winter break was nearing. Sleet perched atop the branches where birds crowded together to keep warm. One window lay open, held up by a wedge of timber. Crisp air stung at her face, blowing her professor's coat open like the wings of a bat spreading. If last winter was cold, this winter was going to be worse.

Through the open window, the young girl noticed it was beginning to turn dark; vermilion hues spreading across the sky. Soft murmurs of families heading home hung in the air. Porch lights and streetlamps began to turn on.

*Tick, tick.*

*4.30pm. She was going to be late.*

Hurriedly, she left the front stairs of the college, a blistering breeze striking her cheeks. Shadows seemed to lengthen over the colourless sleet. It was too late to walk the usual way home through the village. By then, the curtain of night would have fallen; her worrisome parents would become furious. Creatures would lurk around, perhaps even ghosts lingering behind. Although, those 'things' were fiction anyway. Weren't they?

Fog fell upon the forest up ahead. The forest: a shortcut home. She could make it home before complete darkness enveloped the sky.

Should she risk venturing through the forest? Into the darkness? Into the shadows ...

Resolved, she cut along the edge of the church yard, past the crumbling

graveyard, and entered the forest. An eerie silence descended around her, and the temperature dropped. She pulled her hood over her head, venturing deeper.

There were shadows. They lengthened and stretched around her, seeming to dart sporadically around. It was too late to turn back now. The air hung heavy with the scent of moss, bracken and damp. The noises of unfamiliar beings reverberated around her. The cracking of feeble branches. Distress calls from unfamiliar beasts. The ticking of a clock?

Her heart beat in her ears as the darkened forest deepened and the shadows lengthened. There really was no turning back now. Shadows gathered into gaggles, surrounding her. Frantic, the young girl was unsure if the darkness was starting to play tricks on her mind, a haunting game of tag perhaps. She could see behind her, in the far distance, the point at which she entered the forest, and beyond that the familiarity of the school and surrounds. Ahead, however, she could only see black – an inky abyss. The young girl stumbled forward, one hand over her eyes as she attempted to navigate through the thick stumps, low hanging branches and slippery moss. It seemed a nocturnal wind whispered through the trees.

'Run,' it almost said.

Moments later, a peculiar, low sound rumbled through the canopy above. Branches cracked behind her. She held her breath. For now, the only protection that remained was her coat. She pulled it around her and began to run.

'Go away!' she yelled into the darkness.

Her breaths came in ragged gasps as she darted between gnarled trees, their twisted branches reaching out like skeletal fingers. The shadows, however, clung to her like a malevolent spirit. Perplexing sounds of the forest reverberated through her head in distorting and menacing patterns.

'Come closer,' it seemed to say.

The girl's hair billowed behind her as she ran, once impeccable, now dishevelled. She desperately attempted to elude the

persistent shadows, yet her cloak snagged on the outstretched arms of a twisted branch. She dared not delay, nor try to untangle, but instead ran on, yanking herself free from the branch.

Finally, a beacon of village lights could be seen in the distance ahead.

With exasperated gasps, she hurtled down the darkened forest's path, her lungs burning. The shadows seemed to extend, to reach for her arms, to take her back.

Yet, she could see it, see home.

She ran faster, stumbling out of the forest and down the embankment. She ran to her home nestled beside the forest. She flung the iron gate open, signalling her return. A soft light emanated from the front porch.

Suddenly, a sinister howl released from the shadows of the forest behind her. The girl's eyes darted back to the blackness. Then she noticed it.

A long length of thread, extending from the edge of her coat all the way back up the bank and into the forest, into the blackness.

A long line of thread, leading directly to her.



Bella Beasley  
Year 9

AI. WHAT IS it? When did it become a thing? And should we be embracing it, or should we be eliminating it?

The term 'artificial intelligence', more commonly known as AI, refers to computer systems capable of performing complex tasks that historically only a human could do. It has been around since the 1950s and is ever evolving. Its use by people feeds it with knowledge and data, growing AI's network and capability. AI may seem great, but is it really as good as it seems, or are there hidden dangers behind it? I believe we should be limiting the capabilities of AI before it is too late. Artificial intelligence should be either stopped or limited in what it can do as it is making humans too dependent on it, as well as the fact that AI holds the potential to take over the world.

When you have been writing something for school, doing your homework, or completing an assignment, have you used ChatGPT to do it? Has ChatGPT or something similar become your go to thing when having to complete work? Whilst it is a very helpful tool, concerns are growing as to whether we are becoming too reliant on AI. The use of such things like AI and ChatGPT is causing people to lose skills like creative thinking and problem solving. Microsoft Regional Director Christian Buckley (2023) has stated that 'if people rely too heavily on AI and ChatGPT for decision-making and problem-solving, they may become less skilled at these tasks themselves, which could limit their ability to innovate and adapt to new situations'. Digital life is affecting the way humans think and is disrupting our natural way of working things out for ourselves. When we choose to let AI do our work for us, we are missing the opportunities to exercise our brains. Unless we want to become lazy, mindless zombies, we must stop relying on AI so much, or even stop using it all together.

Another reason we should be limiting the capabilities of AI is due to its dangerous potential. AI is highly advanced and continues to evolve in what it can do. Artificial intelligence will get to a point

where it is so advanced and cheap that hiring humans to do work will simply be too expensive, which will lead to mass unemployment. Researchers believe that by 2030, AI will be able to, and may already have, replaced the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs. Additionally, more advanced countries like Australia could see figures as high as 60 per cent. There will be higher demand for jobs and people whose jobs will be replaced may not have the skills or training to do other work.

Furthermore, the growing power of artificial intelligence may put humans at risk. A report by the Pew Research Centre (2023) has shown how many dangers AI may hold, and that we humans are just going along with it, oblivious to what issue it could cause. They say people hand over some control of their lives because of the perceived advantages they gain via digital tools – efficiency, convenience and superior pattern recognition, data storage, and search-and-find capabilities. They also believe that, in the near future, AI will be controlling our lives. Futurist and former director of digital at The Onion Baratunde Thurston has said 'that's why I say in 2030, most people won't be better due to AI. We won't be more autonomous; we will be more automated as we follow the metaphorical GPS line through daily interactions. We don't choose our breakfast or our morning workouts or our route to work. An algorithm will make these choices for us in a way that maximizes efficiency'. Is this really what we want? A future where our lives are controlled, where we work like machines, following a program every single day of our lives? Unless we either limit what AI can do, or stop using it all together, this is what our futures will look like.

There are also concerns that AI will advance to a point where it will act beyond human control, potentially in a bad way. Once artificial intelligence becomes self-aware, there is no telling what it will do; its behaviour is unpredictable. If self-aware, AI would be able to re-write its own algorithms, resulting in it evolving into a superintelligent entity, something

no human would be able to control. The effects of this would be detrimental and would raise existential risks for humanity, maybe even resulting in our extinction. If we want to prevent this from happening, it is pivotal that we act now. If AI sees humanity as a threat, it will have no issue in eliminating us. This is why we must put boundaries on what artificial intelligence can do.

Although AI has so many short-term benefits, there are so many more issues that it will cause in the future. Artificial intelligence is making us too reliant on it, and it also has the potential to become very dangerous in the future, with the chance that it could even wipe out humanity. For now, AI can't do everything. It doesn't have feelings or emotions, and it still lacks true understanding and common sense. But at the rate at which it is evolving, anything's possible, and this is why we must take action against artificial intelligence before it is too late.

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Abigail Burke  
Year 9

HOWLING. THE SOUND of trees coming alive echoed through the darkness. A flash of light. Darkness again. Thunder rumbled as the storm raged outside. Aura felt the hairs on her arms prick up as the wind was carried in through the stained-glass window, the scent of fresh rain and damp decay following it. This had been the fourth storm this week. As Aura reached forward to shut the window, a chill ran down her spine. *This had been the fourth storm this week.* Confused, she continued to brush her hair, staring at the reflection in the mirror of her vanity. It was probably just a wet season. Everything was fine. Just go to bed.

Blowing out the candle, she shuffled toward her bed, her nightdress ruffling as she blindly groped through the darkness. Wax dripped from the tray she was holding onto her thin hand. She sighed. She still couldn't shake the feeling of emptiness; it seemed as though the hole in the pit of her stomach had been torn open wider tonight. Like the constant shadow of grief that followed her all these years was growing. It had been three years since that terrible night, but even now, Aura's stomach lurched when she thought about the death of her sister. Imagining the innocence of her messy plaits and big blue eyes as she played outside, unaware of the fierce storm that was to follow, made Aura's whole body churn with guilt. She could have protected her. She could have saved her. If only she was there. If only.

The wind swept through Aura's thin brunette ponytail and carried her back to the present. *Don't think about that.* She breathed in the musty scent of the dark room. *Settle.* She focused on the furniture, straining to see the dust-filled day bed, her deep red bedspread, the grand brass handles of the wardrobe, down to the creaky floorboards. *What is that?* Amidst the pitch-black of the room, something even darker stared back at her. A shadow. Her stomach dropped.

*But how?* The words rang around her head, clear as day. But it was night. The moon was blocked by the storm clouds. It shouldn't be possible for her shadow to be visible. But it was. It stared back at her like an old friend. Someone she used to know. A sudden gust of wind again washed over Aura like a cold wave. She sighed, breathing in deeply the scent of the rain that had just been brought in. She exhaled. She was tired. She could just be seeing things. She glanced uneasily back down at the shadow that followed her as she climbed into bed. *Just go to sleep.*

However, Aura was doing everything but sleeping. Her mind was racing, and her heart was pounding faster than the rain outside. It seemed as though the wind was coming to life, and the sound of it howling and whirling outside made Aura's skin prickle. She needed a distraction. *Go for a walk.*

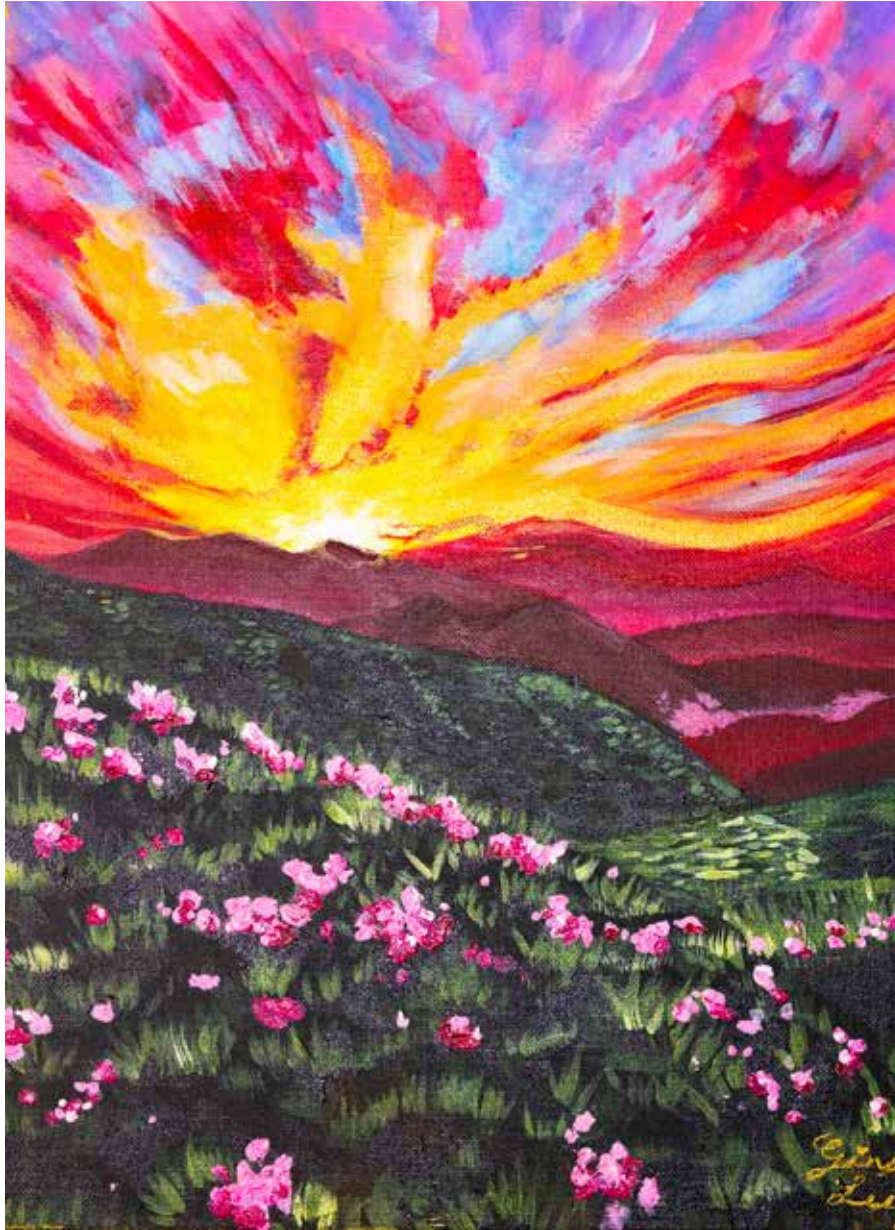
As she shut the door silently behind her, the sound of it echoed through the still air. The wind wasn't as loud out here. *Don't look at it. Don't look down.* She moved forward silently. Only the sound of her nightdress rustling echoed now. It was as though the violent storm had been put on mute. *Don't look.* Aura stopped. It was too quiet. Too dark. She had to look. *Was it still there?* Her head slowly rotated toward the floor. Staring back at her like an old friend, there it was.

But it looked different somehow – a faint sense of familiarity. Aura squinted, trying to make out what it was that seemed different. As she scanned over it for the fourth time, her heart caught in her throat. It was as though the wind had stopped. All the ticking clocks must have shattered because time was frozen. Aura was frozen, mouth still hanging open from her first sight of the shadow: the shadow that had once mirrored her now mirrored someone short, wearing messy plaits, an innocent presence. Her sister. Frozen in time, just like Aura was now.

A tsunami of wind slammed her and left her shaking. A whirlwind whooshed past her in all directions, dragging her numb body along with it, only the sound of the wind in the air. Rain bucketed down on her, like a storm. Drowning her. Taking her away. Into the void. Aura opened her eyes, spluttering out water as she looked around the darkness desperately, splashing the puddles around her. A snickering laughter of her past filled her ears, rocketing over Aura's drenched body. She felt herself falling. Falling into the darkness. Falling into the shadows. Falling into the shadows of her dead sister.



**Gina Lee**  
Year 9



***Dawn***

Acrylic on canvas  
40 x 50cm

This acrylic painting of a sunrise over a mountain landscape is my interpretation of the theme 'vibrant.' I hoped to capture the beauty of awakening and new beginnings embodied by a sunrise. The flowers represent the delicate joys of life, reminding us to cherish the small moments of beauty that bring us happiness. The contrast between the dark, monotone mountains reminds us that amidst monotony and challenges, there are always small joys to appreciate. Together, I intended to remind viewers to celebrate every new day.



Yssy Matricardi  
Year 9

ON THE NIGHT of these unconventional events, no moon hung from the constellations, and no constellations scattered the sky. The cobblestone streets that wound between unearthly buildings of stone gargoyles and spires held only the tapping footsteps of one individual who should not have been promenading through town at this time of night. As the clock tower struck the tenth hour of nightfall, Gertrude Gray made her way from her previous job at Oxford's heart of books, the Bodleian library, to the Ashmolean Museum.

She had always been the picture of scandal: singing and skipping down streets, dying her skirts the unusual colours squeezed out of fruits and vegetables. Even here, she danced her way in between Ionic columns and twirled through the doors of the museum, tapping to the rhythm of the orchestra of winds that chorused past the window. Up the spiral staircase she sang, as the gales outside could no longer be heard. Mopping as she went, she left a trail of polish behind her. It wasn't the usual place that one might host a solo performance, but Gertie wasn't concerned in the slightest. The rain pummelled the roof and angular shadows stretched as the grandfather clock struck midnight.

The floors were now polished, and only the basement remained. The corridors were closer here, and the stone floor had a downwards tilt. Shadows gathered and a sulphuric breeze tickled her nose. Her knuckles turned white as Gertie clutched her mop like a weapon.

'This is no place for dancing,' Gertrude whispered.

Only the breeze replied. Forever curious she continued, subconsciously pulling her plum purple shawl tighter around her as she turned to the first door on her left. It was made of brass and rusted like a dungeon room door, and just as stiff. Inside, unlike all the other rooms she had cleaned tonight, neither books nor artifacts decorated the chamber. Instead, strange potions, mixtures, and specimens lined the shelves and open cedar chests.

There were some books, or rather, manuscripts, that crowded the centre table. A peculiar maze of tubes, funnels, and flasks formed a unique display in the centre. The walls were covered in vibrant paintings of eerie images and bizarre events – enigmatic dragons, peculiar weddings, suns and moons, wind, and fire, of odd anatomies and patterns of shapes and lines. It called to her. Like a sailor spellbound by a siren call, Gertrude Gray entered the alchemist's room. Her blood now pumped harder. A warning of the uncanny. She was unaware that her eyes now shone out into the dark room that held no candles or torches, unlike the corridor before. Unaware that the wind and shadows had retreated. Because they knew what would come.

It was then that she saw it. Though the room was so dark, her eyes focused solely on the object. A manuscript. Resting on a wooden stand, next to the maze of experimental tools. It was relatively old and battered, but the colours on the pages shone brighter than Gertie's clothing. A rainbow of dyes that shone even through the obscurity of the darkness. It was as if the volume held the centre focus for the entire room. The book held power. Power that throbbed through Gertie's veins, calling her closer, until the volume lay in her hands. The pages were smooth under her calloused fingers. Smooth like skin.

Just then, the pages fluttered, shaking violently in Gertrude's hands. As abruptly as it started, it left, leaving behind a page left open to the ceiling. Unlike the others, no colours shone from the vellum. Only black inked across the page forming letters, methods, and ingredients. A puzzle of steps that she knew she must follow. Unsure why, unsure if she should, but somehow continuing to rummage the walls in search of the unknown ingredients that lined the page. A jar of copper, a drop of silver, a sentence of ink, a handful of dirt, and one string of jet-black hair. Creating more mess than she was first hired to clean.

One thing led to another, and without the knowledge of passing time, a shadow lay before her. A black fog monster circled. A mutation of liquid gloom that only grew larger. A pitch-black smoke that brimmed over the edge. Over the table it crawled, and onto the floor it spilled. Encircling the table in endless, suffocating darkness. The kind of darkness one could only imagine. Where light could not penetrate, where hope could not grow, where even nightmares would not dream to go. Stepping back with a stumble, she crashed to the floor. Crouched into a ball, Gertrude Gray whispered one last plea before the darkness suffocated her.

On the night of these unconventional events, no moon hung from the constellations, and no constellations scattered the sky. No lanterns lit the cobblestone streets, and no symbol of hope rose from the corner of the sky.

# A Shadow of the Past



Lilly O'Brien  
Year 9

*CREEAAK...*

The creak of the heavy wooden door echoed off the arched cathedral ceilings like the pained, crooked wail of a banshee. A chill ran down Mary's spine as she hesitated on the cold stone threshold of the old building. Its imposing form loomed above her, cutting its way through the canopy of the forest almost like it was surveying it from above. Wide-eyed she stared into the shadowy blackness of the inside, its cracked marble floors illuminated only by the thin shaft of light from the entryway and the faint glow distilling from the cathedral's filthy windows. Attempting to shake her fear of its watchful presence, Mary stepped forward into the abyss.

Although it had been so long, the echoing clank of her shoes against the marble floor felt familiar, but she didn't recall it being so dark in here. Even the fragmented shards of sunlight that reflected off the stained glass, with its odd composition like the eyes of a fly, did nothing to dispel the suffocating force of the darkness. She drew a box of matches from the pocket of her coat and lit one of the candles that hung from the wall. By the glow of the light, she could now see the barricade of rotten wood that cut off the main altar from where she stood. Despite the discomfort she felt, Mary put on a brave face; she had come for something, and she was going to find it. She noticed one of the passageways that extended from the room and walked hesitantly towards it. The darkness felt so thick that the shadows seem to rush through the church like blood pumping through its veins. Mary shivered. It was these thoughts that had always put her in such unease here as a child. Somehow, she never quite shook the feeling that something about the wretched place was alive and human. Watching her through

its own windows like a fish in a bowl. But these were nothing more than the imaginings of a frightened child. Mary was an adult now, and to let her childhood worries get to her would be beyond silly. Still, she could not shake the feeling that something was wrong here.

By the faint glow of a match, Mary continued further down the hall. It was long—strangely long—and she wondered if it even was the altar she was being led to. She slowed her walk to ponder the angelic statues that stood either side of her. They had been carved into white marble, so realistic in their beauty, it was almost like they had been real women preserved in stone.

But they were off. Wrong.

Their eyes held a kind of bewilderment, like they had seen too much. Mary remembered gazing into those eyes as a child, feeling their fear seep into hers as she walked past, clutching the hand of her mother. A warm, safe hand. She missed that hand. Mary reached out, uncertain exactly of why she felt so compelled to do so, and laid her hand in the outstretched palm of one of the angels. It felt cold, dead, inhuman, but she couldn't help but stand there, transfixed and staring into its eyes. She felt its terror, overwhelming as it was, and tried to jerk her hand back, but it was stuck. The angel's grip tightened. Mary pulled her hand back once again and ran further down the passage. She was just being delusional; her fear and the light were playing tricks on her, she was sure of it. She had to be. Mary saw a light at the end of the hall. She was close to finding it. Close to finding that little piece of her mother. She walked through the doorway and out into the main room, face to face with the altar where she had lost it.

Mary shrieked. Louder and more piercing than anything that had ever come out of her mouth. She saw the blood dripping down the altar like spilled church wine. She saw a man. His eyes, rolled back in their sockets to eternally gaze at something only he could see. Mary shook, sobs escaping from deep in her constricted throat as she moved towards his body where it lay, doubled over on the prayer-bench, its hand outstretched in a last attempt to reach for salvation. Something was clutched in his lifeless hand. She reached for it—a small, heart-shaped pendant carved out of red ruby. Mary yanked it from his lifeless grasp, shaking with weak sobs as she fell to the floor.

'Mother's necklace.' Somewhere in the darkness, a heavy door slammed shut.



**Madeline Renwick**  
Year 9

A seed. A sprout. A flower.

Change is happening everywhere.

Not just our skin sagging or teeth decaying as years pass us by,  
but how the glimmer in our eyes disappears, our window  
to childlike wonder vanishing as reality erases happiness.

The way a stranger becomes an acquaintance, a friend, an  
extension of your own being. And as quickly as your teardrops  
fall, they are a stranger once more.

How kindness is infected and engulfed with the hope to be liked.  
Popularity luring in generosity and loyalty, grasping and pulling  
them deep into a sinkhole of regret, the corpses of  
friendships and joy watching.

Humans grow. We bloom into beautiful creations.  
But, inevitably, our petals wilt. They crumble.

We fall.



Ella Wright  
Year 9

*Mayhem*

2024

Gouache painting on canvas with  
watercolour pencils  
40 x 30cm

My painting *Mayhem* depicts my friend's Golden Retriever of the same name. Mayhem is an extremely happy dog who likes to laze around, play with other dogs, and is inquisitive in nature. I hoped to capture all these wonderful qualities of Mayhem in my painting of her.

'Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole.' – Roger Caras





Sophie Heffernan  
Year 8

'OH, FATHER, PLEASE stay. It's dangerous outside.'

Her father hugged Marilyn and her mother. He took his coat and turned to his daughter.

'I'll be careful, my dear. I promise to be home before you wake,' he said calmly, though sweat beaded his forehead and his hands trembled. 'Besides, I have the safest job in the army. I don't even man a gun, just a spotlight.'

Mother squeezed Marilyn's hand, reflecting their shared worry.

'Please, don't go,' she pleaded softly.

Father smiled, though it didn't reach his eyes. 'I must,' he said firmly, with a hint of dread. He gave his family a weak smile and stepped out into the night.

**November 2nd, 1940**

**Dearest Diary,**

**Today marks 56 nights of German bombers devastating Britain. The newspapers are calling it 'The Blitz,' however Churchill remains adamant that Britain will overcome Hitler's onslaught. The familiar sound of Big Ben striking through the night is a small comfort amidst the chaos. Here in London, food and clothing rations are scarce. Today, Father was delighted by the arrival of our bacon ration. Tragically injured in the First World War, Father is not fit to fight the Germans in Europe. Instead, he operates a spotlight each night to track German bombers for the anti-aircraft guns to target. Despite my pride in his bravery, I worry about him constantly, aware of the dangers lurking in the night sky.**

**Please Father, come home tonight ...**

**Marilyn**

Marilyn awoke to the wailing sound of an air-raid siren.

Her mother burst into her room. 'Quick Marilyn, it's time to go!'

They grabbed their coats and raced out onto the street. Marilyn spotted her elderly neighbour, Mrs McKenzie, hastily shuffle down her front stairs, her trusty cavalier

clutched firmly to her chest. Neighbours spilled into the street, desperately seeking safety from the terror looming above.

Up ahead, an Army Marshal stood at the entrance of the shelter, and waved his hands over his head.

'We're full! Find another shelter!' he shouted, his voice barely audible over the distress of the frantic gathering of desperate families.

Marilyn felt a surge of panic as she realised they have nowhere else to go. Her mother glanced around frantically and searched for any sign of refuge amidst the chaos. She gripped Marilyn's hand tightly, her face a mask of worry.

'We need to find somewhere safe, sweetheart,' she quivered, trembling with urgency.

Marilyn clung to her mother's side as they navigated through the throngs of people; each step brought them closer to an uncertain fate.

Fear turned to panic as the roar of engines filled the night sky. The ground shook brutally as the first bombs hit their targets. Looking up across the horizon, Marilyn watched as spotlights swept the sky, their beams like desperate fingers searching for unseen threats. She thought proudly of her father: 'Good job Father – keep going.' But for the first time, pride mixed with dread. She knew he was out there. Somewhere. Risking his life. Planes dodged the anti-aircraft flaks and barrage balloons. Marilyn felt a sinking dread; 'Will we make it to safety on time ... or will we not live to see another sunrise?'

Marilyn tried to be brave to match her mother's courage, but the overwhelming fear made her legs feel like lead. A menacing whistling grew louder and louder. It echoed through the city. A wave of rippling fear coursed through their bodies. The bombs were getting closer. They hurried through the winding streets, desperation quickening their steps as the ominous sounds neared, each moment stretching in the face of danger. Bombs rained down, their blasts highlighting the haze and illuminating the sky with bursts of fire and smoke – a scene of devastation beyond comprehension.

At last, safety. A serviceman waved them towards a Tube station, urging them to take cover from the relentless explosions. They hurried down the steps and joined others seeking refuge in the underground shelter. In the crowded tunnels, the ceilings shook with each blast. Her mother's heart raced. Women wept. Children sat silent and motionless. Men shared silent, solemn glances. Then, after what felt like an eternity, silence.

As the sun rose the next morning, it revealed the stark reality of the devastation wrought upon the city. They joined the sombre procession of weary survivors navigating through the rubble-strewn streets, each step a painful reminder of the night's horrors. Firefighters doused lingering fires from bomb sites, while children scavenged through the ruins. Returning home, her mother tucked her back into bed after their restless night.

Later that morning, Marilyn woke to the sound of her mother's scream. She raced out of her room to find her mother in the kitchen, head in hands, with an Army Captain and Chaplain seated beside her. Her mother looked up through tear glazed eyes and choked out, 'Honey, sit down; there's something I need to tell you.'



**Georgie McGrath**  
Year 8

You find love where you least expect  
People's hearts beating in their chests  
    Newlyweds posing on the fence  
    Girlfriends talking at a bench  
    Mum and baby gazing lovingly  
The harmonic birds singing in the trees  
    Man and dog going for a walk  
Boyfriend, girlfriend having a talk  
    Besties perching on the ledge  
    As the sun begins to edge  
    Down the sky  
    A pair of pigeons gracefully fly  
Father and daughter having food  
The ambient atmospheric mood  
Watching the people stroll below  
The dimming sun begins to low  
    To find the love around you  
    Just pause and look  
Because there is always love to find  
    In every nook

# A Glimpse of Hell



Danielle Mhlanga  
Year 8

THE TANAKA FAMILY lived in Katia, a small town next to Hiroshima. It had been simple and sufficient enough to accommodate the family's needs. However, year after year, month after month, resources and supplies were decreasing substantially. The Japanese government was selectively recruiting soldiers to fight the war relentlessly.

'Do they realise what they are doing to their people?' sighed father with a heavy heart.

When Akari awoke, she had an unsettling feeling that something drastic was going to happen that day. There was a disturbingly eerie silence that contrasted a usual day. From her window, she could see nothing in the streets, no squeak or a squawk from the birds and no honking cars that created the bustling atmosphere. The streets felt void of life like the aftermath of a bombing. She called for her brother and woke him up.

The children's mother woke up earlier than expected, coughing horribly. The lack of hygiene caused diseases to spread like wildfire. When Akari entered her mother's room, her heart raced as she saw blood cupped in her mother's hand as she wheezed uncontrollably. Akari screamed frantically as she tried to find her father who had already left for the markets. Akari's brother, Akio, knew that he had to take charge and stay strong so that they could have food for another day. 'Akari take care of mother, and I will try my best to come back with more rations for her,' Akio instructed.

'Ok please be safe,' Akari replied.

'Of course,' Akio said.

Akio set off to the town's community centre, desperately hoping that he could feed his family. Whilst Akio was walking, he could see the detrimental impacts of the war. Shops were run down, and glass was scattered everywhere, like a constant sign of danger. When he reached the centre, there was already a long line of people.

After thirty minutes, he finally got to a table where he picked up some stale bread, wilted vegetables and water. The guard asked for his family name, registration number and family size. But, when

Akio asked for extra rations, the guard's demeanour changed immediately. A loud scaping sound echoed through the hall, and everyone fell quiet. Akio took a step back as he watched the guard slam his rifle on the table whilst yelling frighteningly. Akio tried to remain calm as he was scared to further provoke the guard. However, when he thought of his sickly mother in desperate need for food, he screamed back. In retaliation, the guard chased Akio near his house, which caused Akari to come running out panicked. As the guard raised his rifle angrily towards Akio, their attention was diverted.

WEEEEEOOOO.

Another seemingly normal siren blared through the town, but little did they know this time it was real. An American fighter pilot was flying nine kilometres above to drop a bomb over Hiroshima. The fighter pilot locked target for the Aioi Bridge where he released the bomb. Just as the guard was about to shoot Akio, a bright light followed by a deafening clap, like thunder, filled the area, before fire engulfed the town.

'Duck!' screamed Akio as rocks and debris started to fly everywhere from the impact of the explosion.

'Watch out, Akio!' shouted Akari as she saw a metal beam hit Akio on the head before he was knocked unconscious.

Akio watched his life flash before his eyes, but he was quickly jerked awake when Akari pulled him up and hid them between two large boulders. He took a deep shaky breath as he realised they were safe. He hugged her tightly and he felt her rapid heartbeat. The wailing of distressed mothers and children filled the area as the blanket of death settled over the town. As Akari and Akio stumbled out of their hiding spot, their eyes widened as they saw the collapsed buildings. The stench of smoke filled the air, reeking of waste. They gripped each other's hand tightly before they turned to see what was behind them.

'Not my home, not my home, please,' Akari chanted.

Their worst fear was confirmed as they saw nothing but rubble. Distraught, and exhausted, Akio felt the despair in his

sister's gut-wrenching tears as both knew their mother could not have made it out.

As they walked down the street, they saw the marketplace in complete ruins, a large statue shattered and piled. They saw a lifeless body and realised it was their father's still holding the supplies. Both children fell to the ground crying, as they exchanged comfort through their tears. They knew that no one could make it out of this situation they were in, all by themselves with no parents to help them.

'When will it end?' Akio stammered out between breathless cries of anguish.

# The Constellation Seamstress and the Sea Glass Stars



Anjelica Owen  
Year 8

ON THE FIRST day of the end of the world, the fires started.

On the second day, they ran out of things to burn.

On the third day, the sky bled with stars that streamed to the scorched ground like tears across the heavens' ashy face.

On the fourth day, the earth was swallowed by the sea, all its burnt land buried under an endless ocean.

On the fifth day, everyone stopped counting how long it had been since the world was normal. I say 'everyone.' Really, it was only one person who could have kept track. But the last Seamstress – and, in fact, the last human – didn't.

That night, she stared up at the starless sky.

It had been weeks since that night. Or years. Perhaps even a millennium could have passed. The Seamstress didn't know how she had survived, nor how she kept surviving. But she had, and she did.

The world was once a large place, but now nearly all land was cleaned from it, replaced with seas that shone bright, their foam sparkling with stars in a sombre echo of what once was. The deep blue skies watched on, unable to reflect the glittering mass.

The Seamstress witnessed this sorrow endlessly from her room, her glass walls running with tears as the sky sobbed, its rain reaching for seas that roiled with light, waves throwing stars into the air before they crashed back into the reef.

For days, she watched as nature fought with itself, bucking like an animal ridden with pests.

The Seamstress felt sometimes as if she was one of the parasitic creatures Earth was so desperate to rid itself of. Supposedly, one who remains alive even as all is dead should have a purpose. Perhaps fate found her story fit to be continued. But when she stared up at the empty skies, she couldn't think why.

Her days passed in monotony. She tried to fish but found the animals to be too elusive. Even without food, she never hungered. She sewed until all her clothes had been made and re-made too many times to count. She read all the books in

her shelf, then read them again. Without boats, her lighthouse home had no need for the light its name spoke of. Instead, *she* stayed in the lantern room, spending her days staring out at the star-filled sea.

The Seamstress wished for some respite to be found, something more entertaining than walking the two steps from her door to the sea again and again.

Alas, the only difference that came was cruelly ironic, as she only ever wished for it to end when it began.

Every night, the wind howled as the seas and skies pounded at her window, demanding she pay attention for even as she buried herself under her blanket, nothing could hide the sound of nature screaming in agony outside, like it was burning once more, and she wouldn't – *couldn't* help, nor extinguish the flames.

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Then one day, upon the beaches of her small island, she found a star.

It was a little thing, wedged deep in between two rocks. The sea lapped across its silvery surface, water slipping fruitlessly across the worn edges. The Seamstress picked it up, brushing her fingers along its cool face. Like sea glass, this star was rounded and murky, algae creeping across its form.

She walked around her island – it took only a few steps, for the island was small, with only enough space for her lighthouse, and a crop of grass that waved rather ferociously when the wind howled at night – and found more and more little stars, all faded from the ocean's loveless grasp. She scooped them all into her arms.

It took two trips up the ladder to get all the stars upstairs, where she threw them onto her bed.

The Seamstress threaded a needle with golden string and pierced the first star. It flinched in her hand, its light quivering in pain. Stars were shy things, and they didn't much like people.

She worked fastidiously, as she always did, piercing the stars through their centre and creating a string of them, forming something she knew only from a time long past. The Seamstress had never cared for

constellations, but now she felt tears pool in her eyes as she watched one come to shape by her own hands.

That night, she went outside and held her constellation to the sky in gentle, cupped hands. The wind brushed against her fingers, stoking the fire of the stars' heat, which was beginning to radiate from their core. Each star's rounded edges began unfurling slowly into new, sharp points that dug like needles into the Seamstress's hands.

It felt as if hours had passed before the wind stilled, and the weight of the stars in the Seamstress's hands abated. She looked up, and saw in the sky a twinkling constellation, the stars swimming in the inky black, shining bright and sharp, no longer weighted down by the sea's waters.

A reverent silence settled over the Seamstress, her eyes filling with tears. For the first time, she knew what she must do.

She spent weeks hunched over piles of waterlogged stars, forming new constellations until her bed was covered in the soft, glistening shine of them. And in return for her work, the sea washed troves of stars draped in lacy sea foam onto her beaches. She took them with thanks, working tirelessly until every last one was sewn into the sky like a brocade of silver and gold.

On the last day of the end of the world, the Seamstress's life came to an end as she watched every star shine in its rightful place in the sky.

But it wasn't the last day. Not really. For mankind, all was lost. But for the sky and sea, the night was new, and they had all the time they could want.



Allegra Pople  
Year 8

AS THE MIDDAY sun filtered through the window, Madeline arranged the final flowers of the bouquet in a worn pitcher. Delicately, she adjusted the vibrant lilies, irises, and petunias, their colours shining against the sunlight like stars in the sky. With a finishing touch, she placed the remaining iris in her chestnut braid. As Madeline stood to admire her mother's teachings, the vase began to shake. No, not only that, the counter quivered, the cupboards moaned, and the lace curtain drawn over the front door's window began to withdraw, revealing hundreds of men storming the street with trucks and convoys. Their angled faces would have given Madeline the impression of princes, but her father taught her otherwise; these fellows adorned in royal blue with steel firearms were the *les militaires, une armée*, or the violent men, likened to only the devil himself. Her father had shown her similar pictures of German princes and angry moustached men decorated in pistols storming the country of Poland only two days ago, appearing nearly giddy at the apocalyptic state of the country.

Madeline's breath quickened as one soldier approached the house. As he loomed, she saw his stern expression and uniform adorned with medals and badges. *Le Préfet de Police*.

'Pierre!' Madeline called up the staircase before warily letting the officer into their cramped kitchen. Pierre rushed down into the room, his steps slowing as he approached the soldier, scrambling to shake his hand. The soldier spoke in a deep, cold voice.

'Monsieur Louis Laurent?' he barked.

'Father isn't home, monsieur.'

Madeline's heart dropped as the soldier held out a rough manuscript stamped with a rhododendron.

'You and Monsieur Laurent must be at the Gare du Nord train station by no later than 1600. We will be sending officers to Monsieur Laurent, who is ..?'

'A ... At the florist on Rue Saint-Jacques, monsieur.'

The soldier nodded. For a split second, Madeline could have sworn his stern face softened and whispered, 'I'm sorry.'

The officer handed Pierre the paperwork and left without another word. Pierre's hands trembled as he stared at the paper, his face pale and pupils dilated. Shaking, Madeline slowly unfolded the manuscript: 'M. Louis Laurent and his son M. Pierre Laurent have been called to fight for France.' Pierre opened his mouth to speak, but his voice came out as a meek cry. They both sat, re-reading the document again and again and again, Pierre and their father's names in ash-black print, the ink splattered across the page like blood from the midnight sky. Or blood from a war.

After an eternity of silence, Madeline stood up, held Pierre's arm, and led him to her room. They stood still speechless. Her mind raced and rushed through her countless memories with her father, nights wondering the Bois de Boulogne, yarrow he would tuck in her hair. Safety. Love. In her mind's eye, she saw the loving face of her father, deep wrinkles from his smiles and warm green eyes like her and Pierre's, a booming laugh that would echo warmly into cold nights – she knew why everyone loved him so dearly. He was like a real prince. His spirit was a warm fire, not the ash from firing cannons.

'He can't go,' she pleaded.

'I know, but Maddy-'

'Listen. If... if you say you are father, and I pretend to be you, then father and mother are safe.'

'You? Sure, it's for the 'd-duty of France' and whatever ... but ... you know ... it's war. Blood. Guns,' he whispered.

Madeline nodded.

Pierre's eyes flickered like a dim light between Madeline and the photo of their parents adorning her nightstand. He eventually landed on the iris tucked in her braid and hugged her tightly.

'We n-need to leave soon, or Father will be home ... ' he tossed a satchel from beside her bed. 'Quick!' Pierre ordered, rushing from the room.

In a hurricane of madness, Madeline tossed socks, water, food into her satchel, scanning her room for the last time, reminiscing on her trinkets. A stuffed rabbit, pot of chrysanthemums, photos, memories. Pierre finished first and came in, eyes blood-shot, to help her pack.

Just as Madeline and Pierre buttoned her satchel up, the soft voice of their mother rang through the house. They heard their parents' footsteps coming up the iron staircase, exchanging a glance now. As their father reached the top of the stairs, he saw a chopped chestnut mane woven with an iris at his feet and two figures rushing like a cascading waterfall from his first-storey window. However, as he ran to the frame, he only briefly saw his beloved children running towards the booming voices of officers. He let out a cry, reverberating throughout the entire house, and perhaps the last sound his children would hear before they returned ... if they returned.

## Glossary:

Les militaires:	French for 'the military'
Une armée:	French for 'an army'
Le Préfet de Police:	French for 'The Chief of Police'
Gare du Nord:	Northern train station in Paris, France
Rue Saint-Jacques:	Old main street in Paris, France
Bois de Boulogne:	Old, large public park in Paris, France
Monsieur:	French for 'Sir'
M. :	Written abbreviation of Monsieur, similar to English Mr.

## Floral Glossary:

Lily:	Innocence
Iris:	Hope
Petunia:	Comfort
Yarrow:	Love
Chrysanthemum:	Devotion
Rhododendron:	Danger



**Jennifer Wang**  
Year 8



***Fields of Vibrance***

2024

Acrylic paint

40 x 50 cm

This piece represents the beauty and wonder of childhood, set against a vibrant, colourful landscape of flowers. The bright, smiling figure in the foreground embodies innocence and happiness, while the girls in the background explore a path through nature, symbolising growth, curiosity, and the journey of life. The radiant sunlight and lush scenery evoke feelings of optimism and boundless potential.

## Leap of Faith

MY HEART THUDDING, threatening to burst out of my chest. I looked down at the massive body of water, looming below me. Shouts from my classmates taunted me, ascending louder and louder. Nerves ricocheted throughout my body. My stomach, a toy boat, sailing in an unforgiving storm. I couldn't back out. I had to do it. I had to be brave.

'James, James! Hello!?' My best mate, Harry, stood next to me, attempting to gather my attention.

'It's your turn on the dive board.' Instantly, my blood froze.

'No-o, I'm fine. Th-thanks,' I stammered uncertainly, as I waited for the anticipated reaction.

'What a wuss!' I heard one of my classmates proclaim.

Harry leaned down to whisper in my ear: 'James, if you want to be cool, you have to

do it. These kids could ruin your life with a click of their fingers.'

I stood there, staring at my classmates. I was too afraid. It was so high. But I knew what would happen if I didn't obey. I uneagerly walked towards the ladder, the board towering over me. Regret filled my every step, as I progressed higher and higher. Every time I looked back down at my classmates, the smaller they became. Why was I doing it? Unfortunately, I couldn't go back now; I had already come too far.

After some time, I reached the top. This was it. I glanced down, instantly regretting my actions. My classmates were tiny birds, fluttering around, chirping things so distant, I couldn't understand. My heart thudded, threatening to burst out of my chest. Droplets of sweat rolled down my forehead. I had to do it. I had to be brave.

Cautiously, I took slow, unsteady steps towards the edge. Trying my best to ignore the fear-filled thoughts, I took one last deep breath and jumped.

My body tensed with fear, awaiting the predicted consequences. Air slammed against my face, as the water below me edged nearer every second. I had accepted my fate; I was ready for the pain. But the pain never came. The water engulfed me, a wave of reassurance washed over me, I was safe. I floated there for a while, taking in the previous events. A strong hand pulled me up, out of the water, interrupting the moment, which was filled with pure shock and astonishment.

I was engulfed by a chorus of proud shouts and comforting pats, celebrating my achievements. With this newfound pride and fulfilment, I repeated the now-familiar steps back towards the diving board.

## Brisbane River



### *Brisbane River*

2024

Watercolour on paper

60 x 20cm

This artwork, *Brisbane River*, is an artistic interpretation of the Brisbane River and the land surrounding it. It includes the very popular parts of Brisbane, including the city, Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane City Hall Clock Tower, the Channel 7 Wheel of Brisbane (the Ferris wheel), Brisbane Airport, the Story Bridge, and the very popular Brisbane sign at South Bank. This artwork was created using watercolours and watercolour pencils. The idea for this artwork was to create a 'Brisbane' from my perspective. This can be seen in the vibrant colours I used to show how much happiness Brisbane gives me. However, I have also included a polluted part of the river, near the city, to show how much impact the city has on the environment.



CJ Chapman  
Year 7

I SEE IT. The wave. It's hypnotising call tempts me in. This could be my one big chance. I start paddling forwards, ahead of the other competitors. The wind slams against my wet, sandy face. The cries and cheers of those supporting their family and friends compete with my sharp, adrenaline-filled breaths.

I bend my knees and struggle to get up on the board. I quickly glance up at the wave; it seems much larger and daunting than before, inklings of regret leak into my thoughts. What if I fail? What if everyone sees me lose? What if my career ends now? What if ... A vigorous force slams into me. Water engulfs me, as salt pierces my eyes. Gushes of ice-cold water surge up my nose. I had hesitated, missing my chance for glory.

The relief washes over me, as sea air fills my lungs, yet it was too good to last. I gasp as the sea swallows me whole. A hard, obstructing object, slams into the back of my head. I let the water pull me down, and drift away from reality.

My eyes slowly flutter open. I suddenly panic. My hands clench into fists full of ... sand? Reassuring whispers and smiles surround me as I lie there. A sharp pain pierces my head. My hand wipes it and I notice blood. I realise I nearly died. The faint sound of witnesses, rushing around in distress, and the blare of an ambulance siren engulf me. Hesitantly, I let my eyes close, knowing I was now safe.





**Audrey Chun**  
Year 7



***Summer in Washington***

2024

Mixed Media

30 x 20cm

This painting is inspired by the time I spent in Washington before moving to Australia.

# The Flow of the Ruthless River



Isabella Goodrick  
Year 7

THE QUEENSLAND 2011 flood will remain forever etched in my memory. Even the months of preparation with Queensland Fire and Rescue Services did not prepare me for what I experienced that day. Why the worst flood in thirty years had to occur on my very first day on the job is a question I have asked myself for years.

We flew at 200 km/h as rapid rockets of water gushed and surged. My eyes searched the streets of Grantham below, praying there was no one left to save. Torrents of water from Sandy Creek flowed violently down the streets like a monster hell-bent on destruction. Cries and shouts came from the liquid creature below. Two families of five stood on a roof pleading for help as they held their children tight.

'Can't we get any lower?' I asked in a panic. 'We can't, Catherine. Otherwise, the water will sweep us away,' pilot Rowan abruptly stated.

I pushed the maroon button behind the pilot's seat. The automotive ladder was slowly released from the hovering helicopter. Relief flowed through my body, but it was short-lived. Abruptly, a humming alarm reverberated around me, signalling the automotive ladder had malfunctioned. I wracked my brain for a solution while staring down at the unfolding catastrophe.

'Why don't you just use the backup rope?' pilot Rowan said absently while navigating the helicopter. I nodded and gingerly sat at the back of the helicopter and tied a piece of rope tightly around my waist, securing the bowline knot to a handle behind me. I forced my fake confident look even though every part of me was desperate to scream.

My legs shook, threatening to collapse. I maintained a vigorous grip on the rope as I slowly raised the drenched kids up into the helicopter. My hands burned from the rope rubbing into my skin, and my arms ached. *I had been through worse.*

I continued to rescue them, lifting them up one by one into the helicopter. I hastily pulled up the last child with all my might, rescuing them from the beast writhing below. My nose wrinkled at its foul stench of sewerage and garbage.

*Six down, four to go.* I steadied myself,

prepared for a harder time ready to pull up more weight. Just as I started to lower the rope again, the helicopter swerved like it was dodging a missile. The children screeched as we were flung along the cabin. I grasped anything I could and screamed in agony as my face slammed into the wall. I tried to get back on my feet as a metallic taste filled my mouth.

'What happened?' I screamed over the deafening roar of the blades.

'The wind is too strong; I have to ascend,' he shouted back.

A large blur of colour floated down the river towards the parents who were still waiting to be rescued.

Even more rattled than before, I bellowed: 'Rowan! We must get to them before the cars take them out!'

Pilot Rowan looked back at me from the controls. I could see panic in his eyes, even with his years of training. 'I will readjust as quickly as ...' he trailed off, focusing on the job at hand.

My attention was quickly drawn back to the rescue. I heard an awful scratching sound, like nails on a chalkboard, as parts of the cars started to divide and float down the cruel waters. I dashed to the open door of the helicopter to see the parents waving their arms frantically, begging to be saved.

'Help us!' one parent screamed.

'Us too!' another one shrieked, desperate to live.

The monster rose and a wall of water pushed the cars closer and closer, ready to swallow them. They shielded each other, preparing for the worst, as a blue Toyota was launched onto the roof sending the parents into the river of death ...

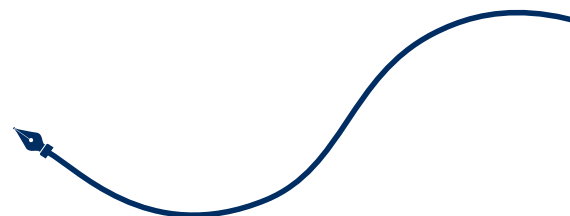
My heart stopped.

The beast was satisfied.

Four lives were taken away in a matter of seconds.

I turned around heartbroken to look at the children's frightened faces.

The hardest part would be breaking the news to them.



*Petal Portraits*





Mia Hixon  
Year 7



*Petal Portraits*  
2024  
A series of colour photographs

The series of photographs *Petal Portraits* capture nature's delicate beauty in vibrant hues and intricate details. Each bloom tells a story of growth, resilience, and fleeting elegance. As such, I love taking photos of flowers and capturing their beauty. Whether close-up or in sweeping landscapes, flower photos are unique and striking. Each flower is different with bold colours or intricate shapes.



Ashley Jarrett  
Year 7

We exit Toorak,  
Past the noisy locker rooms,  
Through the breezeway,  
With gusts of fresh, cold air.

Past the boarding rooms,  
and the house boards,  
in yellows, reds, oranges,  
purples, greens and blues.

Past the dining hall,  
Where we have the opportunity  
To feast during  
Night-time study sessions.

Past the exam room, Eton Hall,  
Where the scratches of pencils  
Can be heard,  
Faintly throughout the day.

Through the tunnel,  
Past the rumbling aircon units,  
Cleaning the used air,  
Recycling it.

We enter Circular Drive,  
With its vast lawn,  
The concert and rehearsal room,  
Where the choir sings.

Through the gardens,  
Past the uniform shop,  
With the door *everyone*  
Forgets to close.

And, out to the spectacular view,  
Where we see the city with skyscraper buildings,  
Stretching to reach the blue, azure sky,  
Glinting in the sunlight.

Don't forget the boats drifting,  
Through the Brisbane River's murky water,  
And the old,  
Dilapidated school pool below.

As we exit Circular Drive,  
We pass the Principal's office.  
But the best part,  
Is the Barley Sugar Garden.

Its arches,  
Covered in deciduous leaves,  
With flowers flanking the path,  
In pinks, purples and whites.

The stained-glass windows of the chapel,  
Peak through the trees,  
With tranquil light  
Shining through.

And, at night,  
The garden lights up like fireflies  
That shine in the cool,  
Nighttime sky.

Its fountain, trickles crystal clear water,  
From the abstract structure.  
What it's supposed to be,  
Still remains a mystery.

Past the lunchtime queue  
At the health centre,  
Into The Forest,  
Only a recent project.

It has plenty of places to sit and relax,  
With arching umbrellas  
The size of an old,  
Grown tree.

In the distance  
I can hear the clanking of machinery,  
But closer, nearer,  
The chirp of birds, sounds through The Forest.

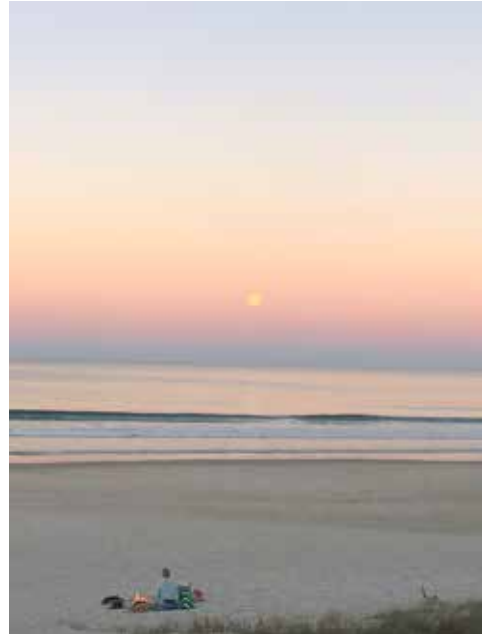
Through the Avoca corridor,  
Chattering grade 8s and 9s  
Bustling at their lockers,  
Getting ready for lunch,

Back at the Year 7 Precinct,  
Getting ready for our next class.

# *Sunrise on New Brighton Beach, NSW*



**Darcie Marshall**  
Year 7



***Sunrise on New Brighton Beach, NSW***  
2024  
Series of colour photographs

As dawn's fingers brush across the horizon, New Brighton awakens in a symphony of colours. The sky, a canvas of pink and orange hues, gradually melts into the tranquil waters below, casting a golden glow upon the sandy shore. The rhythmic melody of crashing waves provides a soothing soundtrack to nature's masterpiece. As the sun emerges, its brilliance ignites the horizon, painting the world with warmth and promise. In this tranquil moment, amidst the gentle embrace of morning, New Brighton's beauty shines brightest, welcoming a new day.



Madison Newland  
Year 7



**Enchanted Petals**  
2024  
Acrylic on canvas  
20 x 20cm

This painting was inspired by a work by artist Christine Beard. It features a single tulip in an enchanted forest, surrounded by bright fairies flitting through the air. The vibrant colours of the tulip symbolise new life and renewal, contrasting beautifully with the deep greens of the trees. As the fairies dance around it, their sparkling wings add a playful touch, bringing the scene to life. I wanted to evoke a sense of magic and wonder, capturing the joy that comes with new beginnings. The enchanted forest serves as a backdrop, inviting viewers to explore this whimsical world where nature and fantasy intertwine. Through this piece, I aimed to celebrate the beauty of transformation and the hope that blossoms with every new season.



**Kitty Pan**  
Year 7

## *Wonders of Childhood*

2024

Acrylic on canvas

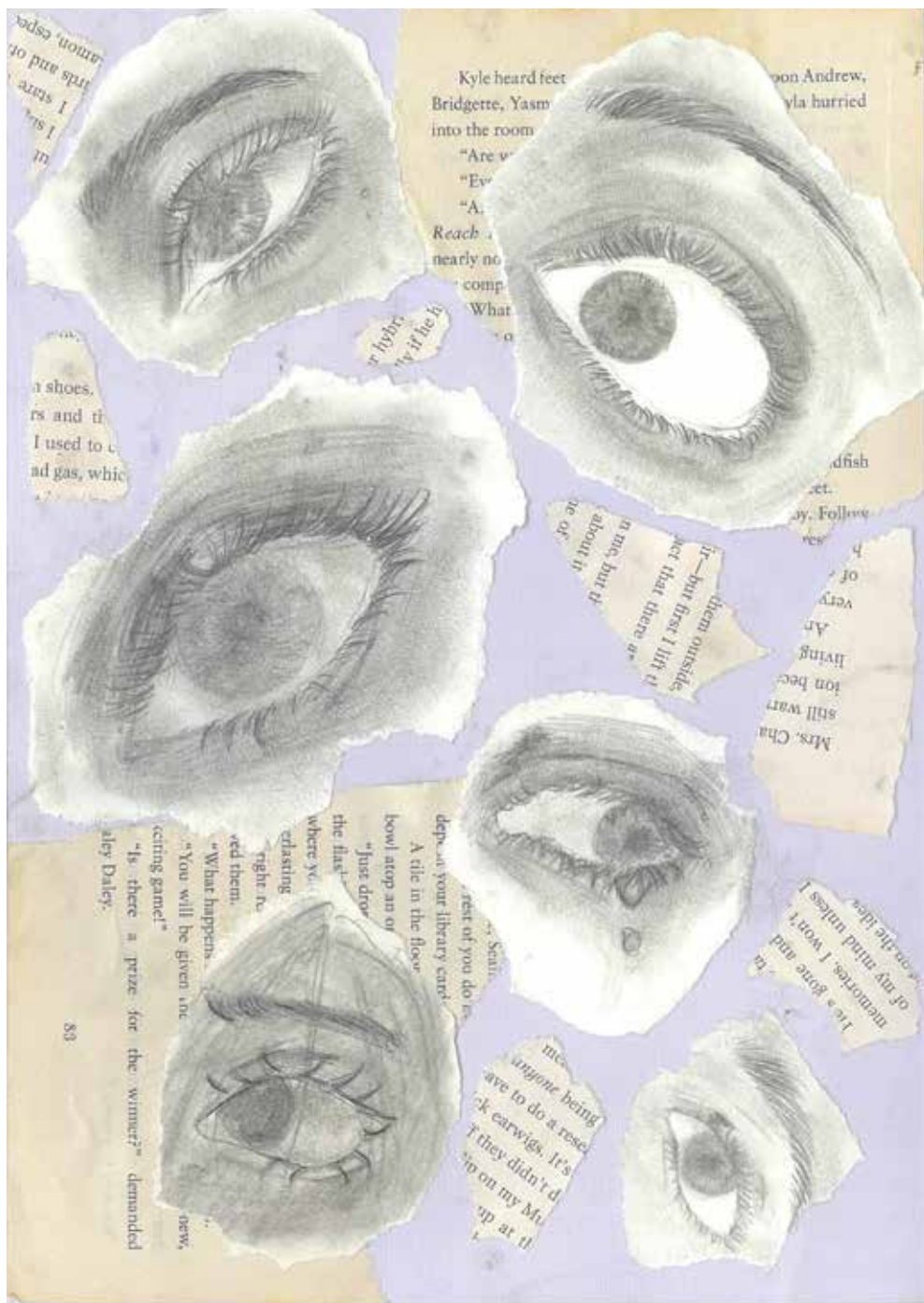
40 x 30cm

This piece shows a curious six-year-old girl looking sideways. Dressed in blue and white, she connects to nature. The textured ocean-themed circles in the background represent different experiences and feelings, reflecting the ups and downs of childhood. Each texture invites viewers to explore her journey and the colourful world of imagination. Overall, the piece captures the magic of discovery and the happiness of growing up, encouraging us to see the world through a child's eyes.





Isabella Swarbrick  
Year 7



*Window of a Universe*

2024

Pencils and collage

29 x 21cm

I love reading and chose to do this idea for an artwork to convey the emotions in books such as love, boredom, thinking, fear, and sadness. Using references of my friends and family, I wanted to show how the imagination can run wild and how reading a book is like a window into another universe, another person's story, their emotions good and bad.



Lily Williams  
Year 6

A PAIR OF old eyes gazed upon the sky. The wonders of the night presented its beauty to the pair of eyes, showing them its miracles and light. The old eyes watched the wonders. Watched how it presented a light show of colours and sounds. It was truly a magnificent sight, but one thought plagued the mind of the old eyes. *Where are the stars?*

These old eyes belonged to a new face. The new face stood by the road, right next to the entrance of a small village. The face hadn't been there for long, but its presence caused a suspicion among the villagers. Villagers gathered outside the gates and watched the face or asked it questions as to why it was there. But despite the villagers' attempts, the new face never twitched nor moved. It just stood, staring into the heart of the world. The villagers were confused by this; never had they received a visitor who was unresponsive to the tiny wonders of the village. The face hadn't even entered the village properly. It just stood, silently greeting newcomers to the village as they passed through the gates. This deeply bothered the villagers; they wanted, needed, to know why the new face was there.

Despite this, the new face took no notice of the villagers, and just like the beginning, the new face gazed into the heart of the world. Some of the scientists of the village, some of the most curious of them all, tried to line up to see what the new face was looking at, but alas, their efforts were in vain, as there was no 'thing' the new face was staring into, just a wide and empty space.

What seemed to be seconds turned out to be years, and the new face had soon turned to an old face, yet now familiar to the villagers. The village had learned to accept the mystery around the old face and just let them be. The soil upon which the face stood rejoiced as it was the time of spring, sprouting colours of happiness and hope. However, the hope and happiness that surrounded the old face seemed to fade away at its feet, losing all purity it had left. Again, the old face took no notice of the wonders around them. Spring continued, and so did the rest of the year, but the old face was stuck in one moment of time. The world grew, the small village turned

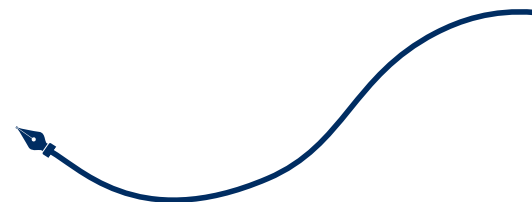
to a big village, but not once did the old face change. It still gazed into the same empty space it had been looking at since the beginning.

The sun shined its rays on a familiar road. The old eyes gazed into the sky, watching as the day showed off its wonders, showing the eyes the gift of life and the miracles of the sun. The old eyes watched through all of it, but one thought remained in the corner of their mind. *When was the last time it rained?*

The old face soon caught the attention of multiple tourists who made their way to the village. They asked multiple questions about the face, many of which the villagers couldn't answer. The tourists would always be left disappointed by the fact that the villagers couldn't answer their questions, but the mystery of the old face also intrigued more tourists to continue coming to the village. Soon enough, the village didn't have enough room to fit all the tourists, so, they expanded. But the more they expanded, the more tourists came. So, the village just ended up expanding, and expanding, and so on. Tourists came from all over the world to visit and settle in the village. After some time, the village had expanded and advertised so much that the title 'village' could no longer be used. And yet, the old face still waited outside, standing upon the polluted soil of a large and busy city.

Familiar places had brought all their wonders to the old eyes, but the best parts of them had always changed, or disappeared completely. After years, the old eyes were at the end of their journey. Standing upon a familiar landscape, the old eyes looked beyond the horizon, to see a new place. It was busy and plagued the area with large clouds of black. The old eyes gazed upon this new, unfamiliar place, secretly mourning the loss of the place he protected with his life. Amongst the crowded and loud city, a familiar face emerged. A familiar face the old eyes once talked to every day. A familiar face who longed to go home.

That night, the stars overcame their anxiety and shone brighter than anything else in the sky, and that same day, the clouds finally let go of all their emotions they had been hiding in for years.



# Crochet for the MAYO Arts Festival



This photograph showcases my three months of crochet work in preparation for a stall at the MAYO Arts Festival. Crochet has uplifted my life in many ways, and being able to do what I love in making unique crochet items to become another child's treasure makes me so happy. For the festival, I made a range of items such as stuffed turtles, dinosaurs, jellyfish, birds and scrunchies so hopefully everyone was able to find something they loved. I have been crocheting since before COVID, but my skills hit a new level during COVID as a way to pass the time. My love of crochet requires a lot of persistence and perseverance but also brings immense joy. I am so glad that I pushed through the frustrating times as I cannot imagine my life without it.







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