

Spark 
Young Writers

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Magazine

Featuring writing by young
writers across Europe



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Welcome to Spark Young Writers Magazine

One of the things I like most about reading Spark Young Writers' magazine, let alone editing it, is that there is always a world of stories in it. You see such a range of pieces and they're all looking outwards, all exploring, and yet every single one is also telling you a giant amount about the writer.

I think that's even more apparent, even more striking this time as issue 17 literally contains a world of writing. Alongside young writers from the UK and West Midlands, we have stories and poems by writers in Ireland, Portugal and Norway.

They are exceptional. There are pieces here that have made me laugh aloud and there are others that are going to stick with me. As you read these, you'll see the writers: you'll see them reaching for something within themselves.

This issue is also the work of more people than usual. Alongside Writing West Midlands' Emma Boniwell, this time we also have editors across the READ ON project plus designer Keith Dodds and Norwegian to English translator Nancy Langfeldt.

There is just one thing. We've never done this before but I would like to dedicate this issue to Lindsey Bailey. I don't believe she worked with any of the writers who are in this edition but she did work extensively with Spark Young Writers across the region. She died suddenly in January and even as I type those words, I'm thinking no, that can't be true, she must still be doing all she did, I can't be right.

We'll all miss her. And I think it's just right to dedicate this particular issue to Lindsey when it is full of exactly the kinds of writing that she brought out of the young writers she knew.

William Gallagher
Editor



Spark Young Writers Magazine is a publication of Writing West Midlands.

We support creative writers and creative writing across the region. More information about us can be found on our website: www.writingwestmidlands.org.

This magazine features writing from children and young people aged 8 – 20 who live in the West Midlands of the UK and across Europe. It is also available to read online at www.writeonmagazine.org.

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They Call Me Different

Francesca Dix (UK)

They call me different... but aren't we all?

Aren't you tired of the way society is treating us, the way they mock us for our individuality, our uniqueness? We are the brave ones, the ones who look stereotype in the face and bring him down, crying on the ground.

They call me different... but is there really a problem with that?

Sure, we all have insecurities, but don't they come from the reigning pressure inside us that threatens to break us down if we don't become carbon copies of the typical queen bee? The cheerleader with only enough braincells in her whole body to compose an outfit for the day, which is usually the same crop top that falls so far down her... well let's not go into that.

They call me different... but shouldn't we be proud of that?

We need to make a stand and take down the writhing emotions that spell failures with every wrong move you make. There are two roads in life. One is uniform and the same all the way down. The other is bursting with life, laughter and personality. Which would you rather take?

They call us different... but that's something to embrace.

You are you, I am me. And whether you're a unicorn-loving super nerd or a geek that chooses to spend most of her day playing with friends instead of shopping at the new Primark or standing in front of mirrors, obsessing over their butt- and waist-size, remember we are born this way, we are who we make ourselves.

Anger

Iona Mandal (UK)

Anger is a single red geranium,
on an unkempt lawn;
beautiful in its wildness.

Anger is a burnt red leaf,
rubbing against a mossy wall;
battling to restrain against unfamiliarity.

Anger is the last red cherry,
on the sole surviving tree;
drooping in pain, uncared and unnoticed.

Anger is a stray grey cloud,
hovering over the winter sun;
hiding insecurities for convenience.

Anger is an unopened envelope,
left on a doorstep;
blown by the gusty wind, best forgotten.

Anger is an old childhood lullaby,
tangled in vines;
of seemingly mundane memories.

Anger is the realisation,
that once in a while;
it needs courage to let go.



The Sun on a Cloudy Day

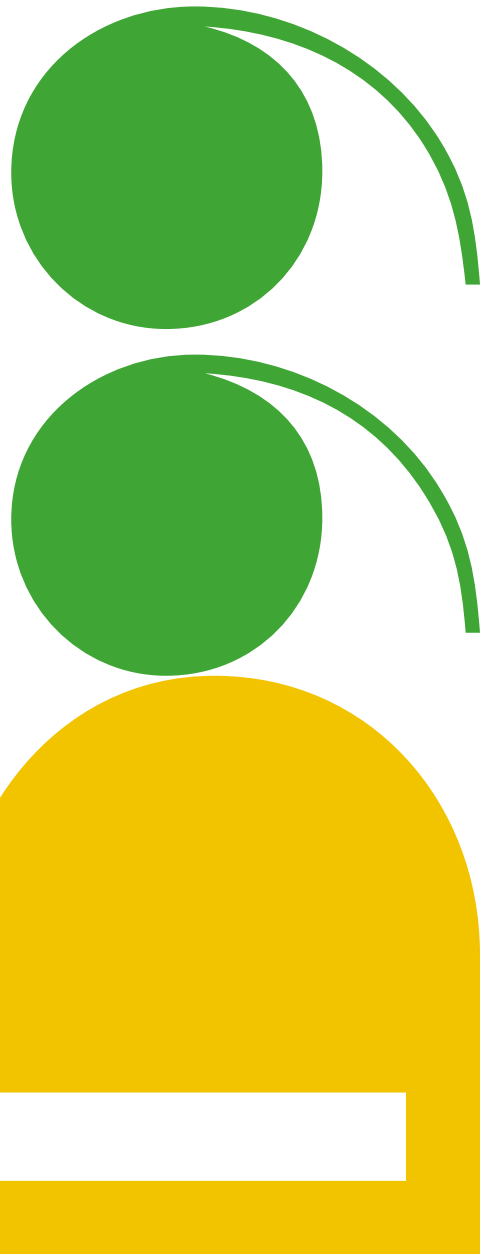
Mathias Sundberg (Norway)

One text message away
The sun on a cloudy day
We laugh until we're both happy
You are my way

The world is cold
And you are a flame
If I was a picture
You would be a frame

The days are grey
Stain my white paper with a mark
You get me back on the straight and narrow
I am a tree and you are my bark

You are the sun on a cloudy day.



The Little Candle

Sofia Lopes (Portugal)

I am looking at the sky and I cannot avoid being dragged back that night, remembering that endless dark sky when the stars seemed like little knives to me. Again thinking that only they had the courage to reap darkness no matter how big it was. I like to consider that maybe I was one of those knives.

My hands were shaking as always, I was trying to convince myself to face truth. I was just a simple resident; it was just a simple surgery; I wasn't the signature in a beautiful masterpiece, I was that little blank space that no one ever sees and the ones who do, just criticise it.

I remember that weak cough, I recall looking at the small room thinking that there was a huge mistake, they've put a little child at the terminal diseases place.

So, I walked into the room, I sat side by side with the little girl and I looked deep into her eyes, they were dark, hopeless, I held her little cold hand and so I squeezed it.

She murmured something, I wasn't able to understand what, maybe because I live way more outside life then in it, but still I put my hand on her hand and closed my eyes. I was late for the surgery.

Life is a candle. We just realize that the candle is actually burning when you see it shimmering, when you notice how small it is. Hope! Hope is what keeps that little candle burning.

At that point, supporting that lonely and helpless girl meant more to me then the assisting spot at the surgery. So, I could give that little girl a little more warmth, a little more hope and maybe a little love. Courage is like a fire that is burning out in your chest leaving nothing but pride on you.

Would I miss the surgery to be with the lonely girl, to hold her hand for a few more seconds, when her little flame was about to extinguish? My career was at risk although sharing the little girl's last seconds meant everything to me. A part of me knew how she felt, or maybe wanted to know just to release a little, the pressure we were feeling.

She was receiving morphine, a drug, when I was giving her love, also a drug. But I like to think that love was releasing a pain no meds can... and so I missed the surgery.

I was there when her little flame was replaced by darkness. I closed her eyes, then I heard those angry footsteps stopping at the entrance of my room.

I jeopardized my career on that cold and dark day... The sky was just as dark as it is today, but there was something heating and lighting my way home, maybe those little stars, maybe the flame that was burning in my chest.

Knock Out

Bernardo Nobre (Portugal)

I don't really know much about life, but in my 15 years of existence I've had good and bad moments that made me the person I am. I have no regrets of anything I did so, if someone gave me the opportunity to go back in time I just wouldn't go.

But let's head up to the important theme, the reason why I'm writing this text.

I was thirteen when my life drastically changed. I was at home, in Instagram, scrolling through the latest feed when suddenly my mother arrived in tears. In the beginning I was pretty confused, because my mom usually never cries, so I thought whatever's happened, it must have been bad.

I ran into her and hugged her – (it was the fastest thing I thought of) – and she told me that my grandpa was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

I was shocked, as you might think, but unlike innocent people think, problems happen to everyone and not when expected.

I couldn't believe it was true, my grandpa with Alzheimer's... What if he doesn't remember me? I couldn't stop questioning my mom for hours, because I really love my grandpa, he is my inspiration, the one that used to play with me when no one did. So he was super special to me and I could not imagine him not remembering me. It would be a knock out in my heart.

Anyway, when you think that it can't get worse, you are an innocent person. I'm not, because life has taught me how to grow up in the hard way. It got worse, but I'll keep telling you the story.

A day has passed since I received the unfortunate news about my grandpa and I had to visit him so, that day me and my parents were going to visit my grandpa.

On the way to his house due to the rain and slippery floor, my dad couldn't avoid the massive truck next to us...

Those were probably the worst two days of my life

I woke up in the hospital and the nurses approached me and told me my parents had passed away in the car accident. Firstly, I didn't believe, but then I realised I wasn't dreaming, my life became my worst nightmare.

And because no one could take care of my grandpa, I had the courage to take care of him. Surprisingly, when he saw me, he recognized me, and through the one and half year with my grandpa he has recovered his memory, not fully recovered but the important stuff is there.

Life hasn't been easy for me, but through those years I started to give importance to things that are so simple that no one notices. I'm doing what I can and it is hard sometimes to see that he can't remember what I told him minutes ago, but we've gone through the hard phase and now I hope it gets better.

Baby Cakes

Emma Muldoon- Ryan (Ireland)

A stray dog toddled alongside myself and my friend, Sinead. The poodle's paws were mottled with mud. But it wasn't the paws that caught our attention. The fur had been removed and the skin as pink as its tongue. I felt sorry for the dog not having very good owners from my glance. Sinead's pupils dilated. She cooed as though the mutt was a baby, all prim and proper. She gasped as she saw the marks. "Oh no! Look!", she exclaimed. I thought it best to acknowledge her discovery. "Aw. Poor thing".

I had all intentions of heading home. But Sinead had other plans. "Can we take it to the vet?" she pleaded. I stared at this prancing pooch. My eyes looked towards its neck. It did look a bit sore. Sinead was determined not to leave him behind.

As she began the hunt, I stood at the side of the road. My job was to mind the bags. I watched her waddle towards the dog, astounded by her courage to care. I would have happily continued on without even passing the thought of taking this stray to the vet. But no, this wouldn't do for Sinead. She had the balls to point this out without hesitation or fear of being judged. I was looking at a woman who we all want to be like, but don't act on it. We see a stray dog, we see people struggle, but somewhere in our brains tells us "it's not your business, don't interfere". And we do as we're told.

Eventually, she captured the little lad. She hauled him up into her arms, carrying him like a baby, all the ways across town to the local vets. Meanwhile, I carried three bags. No gym could prepare either of us for the strain. As we sat in the waiting area, which consisted of a long bench, we observed animals come and go. Jack Russells, huskies, cross-breeds, we had them all. They took "baby cakes" to get photographed for the Facebook page as we had introduced him as a stray.

While Sinead eyed up more dogs, I sat questioning. What were we meant to do with a dog? I didn't have any room for a dog and I doubted my father would willingly adopt a stray for the night. Sinead lived in the country. Although a great place for a trained dog, the fear he would run off is something one does not take on with ease. The vet handed back the thing and told us he was fine. Absolutely fine. I could have felt a variety of emotions at that moment, but adrenaline seemed to fuel me now. Only when we got outside did I laugh.

This one dog managed to charm my friend into a glorified carry about town. But it was also the courage to care that got us here in the first place. Care willingly, I tell you, but always be aware of the strays!

It Just Takes A Moment

Elizabeth Ijaopo (UK)

It was yet another glorious summer day at the Wilsons 10-million-dollar mansion in New York city. The day was interrupted as usual by Olivia's demanding calls.

"MOOOOONNNN COULD YOU GET ME ANOTHER GLASS OF COLD WATER?" she bellowed.

"No, darling, get it yourself, you need to learn how to do things for yourself!" said her annoyed and frustrated mother, Emma Wilson.

"Fine. You're so unfair!" Olivia whined. She got up from her comfy deck chair – dressed in an expensive, flawless bikini – and walked into their opulent kitchen to make herself another serving of water.

She was stopped midway by her father, James, who told her to be seated in the living room for a little chat with her mother. Olivia rolled her eyes. "You better not make it too long," Olivia demanded.

James sighed deeply but said nothing.

As she walked into the living room, she could see her mother shifting about in her seat uncontrollably. That was normally a sign that they were going to tell her something she wouldn't like.

"Listen," James began, "I know you won't be happy with this but..."

"Can you just get to the point and not waste my time?" Olivia crossed her arms.

"What your father was trying to say was that, he and I will be going on a missionary trip to Africa for two weeks," Emma replied.

"So, what? Since when did that bother me and why do I need to know?" Olivia interjected rudely.

James and Emma exchanged worried glances and simultaneously echoed: "We're bringing you with us."

"You know what? Lately, I've hated been in this house and think it's about time I got some fresh air somewhere else," Olivia lamented.

"Well, that wasn't the usual response your dad and I had anticipated, however, we'll be leaving in two days, so hurry up and start packing your luggage."

The moment Olivia left the room, her parents looked astoundingly at each other.

By the time they landed in Africa, Olivia became fascinated with a number of beautiful attractions in the cities.

However, as they made their way to the remote village for their missionary work, Olivia began to see what she had never seen before, a lot of underprivileged children who lived in small huts with their families, yet they appeared to be breezy and sparky.

They later headed to the local hospital where Olivia saw her parents attend to the needs of many ill children. She noticed that the children, rather than being despondent and dispirited, were happy and grateful for the care shown to them – unlike her, who has never been grateful for her privileged life in her multi million-dollar mansion.

That moment became a turning point in Olivia's life and she felt sorry for her disorderly conducts and naughtiness.

James and Emma were thrilled on how a short trip to Africa brought about the desired transformational changes to Olivia's life.

Two years later, Olivia got admission to study medicine and soon graduated as a medical doctor. About half a decade later, she started an international charity organisation called 'Courage to Care' to give free medical assistance to many sick children in developing countries.



The Family of Foxes Who Lose Their Home

Lottie Hall (UK)

One bright, summer's day a family of foxes were sleeping in their burrow beneath the damp, soggy soil. When a loud, piercing noise was heard, the family suddenly awoke.

"What was that noise!" whimpered Tuffty.

"Don't be afraid my dears there's nothing to worry about." Mother Fox said reassuringly.

She was wrong. There was something to worry about and that thing was getting their home destroyed. She had heard this noise before when she escaped at three years of age, but her parents had been left behind buried in the depths of twigs, leaves and the ruins on her old long forgotten home.

"Mommy, what's going to happen tell us, mommy please," whispered Toffee.

"Okay, my dears, this noise is the sound of humans yes humans, humans that might destroy our house, but we must stay calm and silently but quickly escape." Mother Fox sighed.

"Well then let's get out before it's too late," suggested Taffy. "Okay, then I'll go and tell your father," muttered Mother Fox.

A few minutes later they were out in the open and about to watch their home collapse in front of them, but at least they had each other and their favorite things with them.

The family felt very unfortunate. Why had it just been their family not any others?

"Mommy, what shall we do? Will we have to search for a home?" Taffy questioned.

The family stood out in the dark, eerie, ominous woods. The family thought and thought of the things they could do but it wouldn't be safe, so they had to think of other ideas. They stood there silently until the silence got broke by Toffee, the oldest of all the cubs.

"I know, we can search for a home or ask the other animals if we could sleep in their home," stated Toffee.

"I don't think so, I'm not that certain about the other animals letting us sleep in their burrow. They're far too argumentative I mean, look at our neighbours. I bet they're laughing at us now because our burrow got destroyed," Mother Fox explained.

The family stood there in silence, once again thinking what they should do. An hour had gone by, two hours. Suddenly Taffy appeared to have an idea.

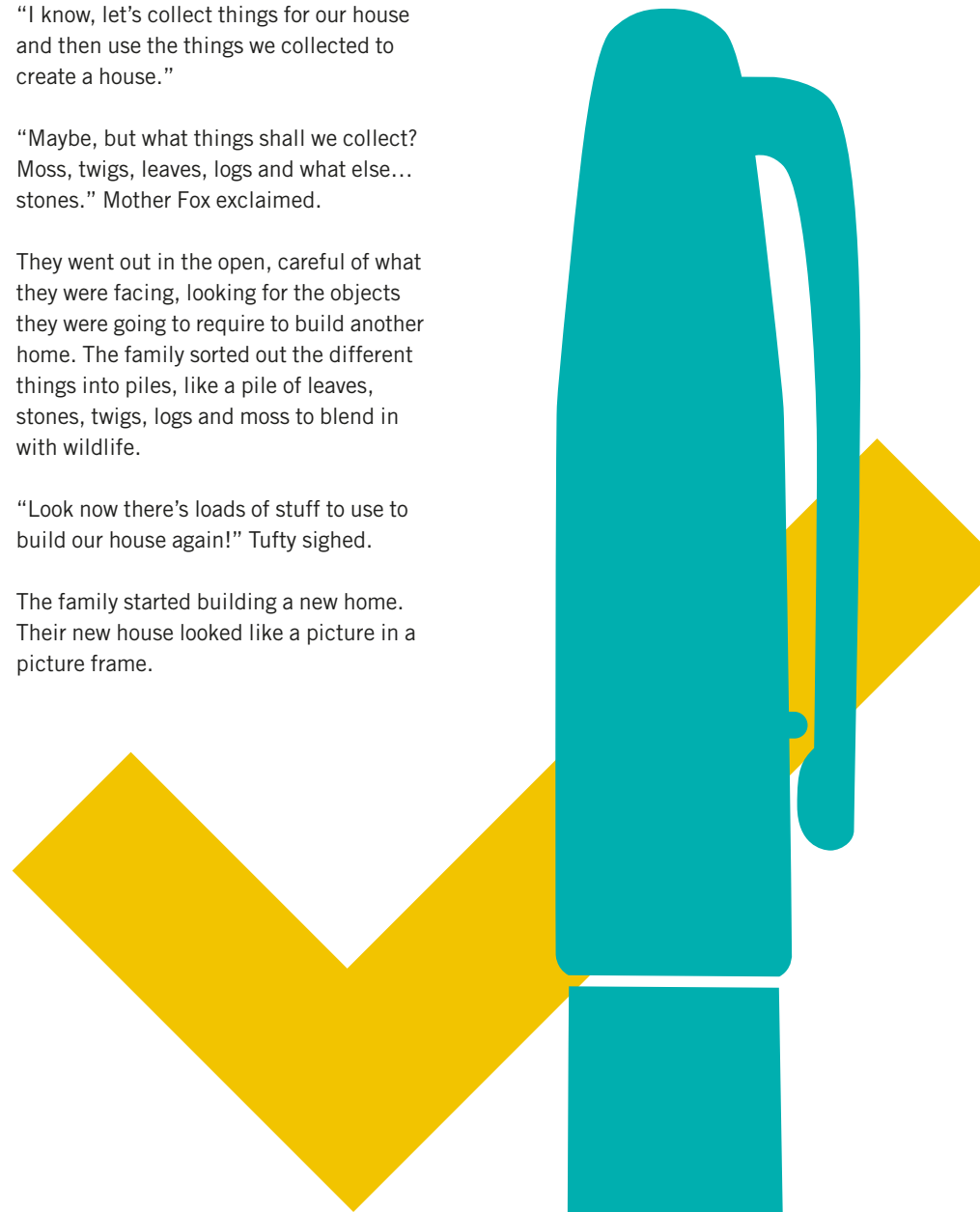
"I know, let's collect things for our house and then use the things we collected to create a house."

"Maybe, but what things shall we collect? Moss, twigs, leaves, logs and what else... stones." Mother Fox exclaimed.

They went out in the open, careful of what they were facing, looking for the objects they were going to require to build another home. The family sorted out the different things into piles, like a pile of leaves, stones, twigs, logs and moss to blend in with wildlife.

"Look now there's loads of stuff to use to build our house again!" Tufty sighed.

The family started building a new home. Their new house looked like a picture in a picture frame.



The Sabre

Abel Neto (UK)

December 1914

Treading through the high, misty mountains that were covered in a white mantle, a squad of war heroes made their way up to the cabin, carrying wounded comrades on their backs. With refuge close, Lieutenant Tolmeron was sure that he and the team of experienced warriors would make it with no more casualties.

The mercury was falling lower on his thermometer, already on five degrees or thereabouts. The squad consisted of 21 ground troops, experts in combat, absolutely patriots for their country. Each one was equipped with a Sabre, heavy but manoeuvrable 3cm thick swords with large hand guards to protect their wrists. They all needed full head masks, available in their rucksacks, carrying small pistols strapped onto their belts.

Ahead a wooden cabin was in sight, only about thirty metres in front, motivating everyone to speed up their pace. The door slammed itself, stretching its hinges.

Brr...so cold inside, spacious, where the soldiers arranged all the beds in one place, placing each already-healing body on a separate bed, dressing and bandaging the wounds. They were lucky, they knew that. The snowstorm had begun its fury, raging winds that threw anything in its path, blinding any human who attempted to bypass it.

“Just in time, folks! Another half an hour and we would have been finished for good” – started the Lieutenant. “Never give up. Any man left behind, is a man

lost. How good is a comrade who gives a man’s life up for himself? A warrior who wants to fight, strong and courageous to whom isn’t given a second chance?”

Sighs were heard around the room. Tolmeron was reminded of his squad’s defeat earlier that month.

The German tanks and cavalry had forced them out of France into Switzerland, but though outnumbered, his men acted swiftly on the new German technology. They slashed through men with metallic muskets on horses, surrounding tanks and blowing them up with nothing more than revolvers. It seemed a bit ironic that a single elite squad armed only with revolvers and swords could out-skill giant gun-machines on wheels.

Lieutenant Tolmeron was a reference figure for the Allied Forces, a master strategist who played major battles, winning against the odds. Darkness was falling fast, whilst two soldiers ran around the cabin, closing the curtains and lighting candles. The Lieutenant looked at his fellow recruits on the ten beds that had been set out. They were recuperating well.

One was looking at him, having a tear in his eye. Tolmeron smiled, as he knew that Thomas Watt would have died out there in the cold, his wounds would have frozen... It was the Lieutenant’s duty and honour to save him, even under heavy fire.

Something outside caught his eye. A paratrooper, maybe? Yes, a lot of them. Tolmeron blew out all the candles, signalled to his men to charge out – “Now!”

Understanding What Cannot Be Understood

Laurie Archer (UK)

I stand, shivering, on the earthy knoll, an old leather notebook in my left hand and a dull wooden pencil in the other. They’ll be here soon, silver armor and milky talons. Dragons – supernatural beings beyond our control.

I was set the task of understanding – caring for, loving and embracing these animals we fear so; deciphering the code that makes up their world and becoming a friend.

If I fail, our tiny village will be gone by the next full moon, and so will everyone I love, probably. I have to do this, muster the courage to stand up for the things we have and care for our future.

Soon the dread filling my insides will become a part of me. A shiver of fear trickles down my back and I go to turn away.

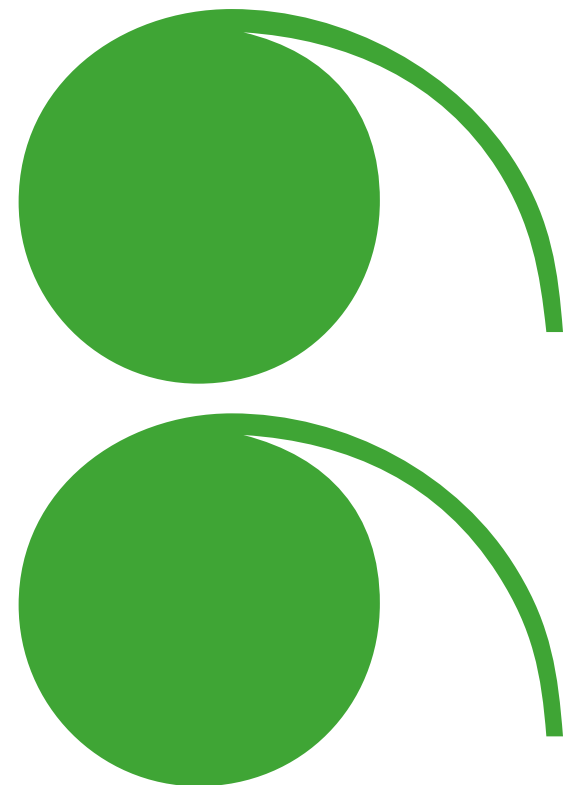
Too late. I see them, appearing one by one in the star-infested sky. Tails encrusted with iridescent scales and eyes filled with the memories of a thousand battles, they rise, like ghostly silhouettes, towards the shining moon.

Unworldly beings scream, shattering the serenity of the crystal dark. The temperature drops and I’m shivering spasmodically, yet I keep watching.

The beat of wings, whistle of death as these translucent stories collide in the sky.

I have trouble believing I’m actually seeing them. The way they flip, turn and blunder, jagged wings and fiery breath. The after-product of their roars a shower of saliva that looks like engine oil, feels like soap.

Gradually, silence begins to fall. I crane my neck up towards the quiet sky – these deadly fighters fading seamlessly into nothing. “And still I don’t understand,” I murmur. “I still I can’t decode you.”



The Big Day

Monalisa Tayong (UK)

Scene 1. EXT. HOME – DAY

(Lisa and Lily are best friends and it would take a lot of fight to separate them – until Mona came.)

LISA: Hey, wait up.

(She runs to Lily)

LILY: Hey, how is your mum?

LISA: Good. She wanted to know if you could come over.

LILY: Sure, you know I would love too.

NARRATOR: The bell ring and they go to class.... at home

LILY: Hi, Mrs Machin. Hi, Mr Machin.

MR AND MRS MACHIN: Hi, Lily.

LISA: Hi, mum. Hi, dad.

MUM AND DAD: Hi, sweetie pie.

LISA: Stop, not in front of my BFF!

MUM: Okay.

Scene 2. EXT. GARDEN – DAY

NARRATOR: In the garden when they stopped arguing...

LISA: Let's build a den in the woods.

LILY: Great idea.

NARRATOR: They built a den when a girl named Mona appeared.

MONA: Can I join in?

LILY: We're finished.

LISA: Sure, we can find something new like tag.

LILY: Okay.

MONA: Thanks.

LISA: You're welcome.

NARRATOR: Lily doesn't like Mona, but Lisa has a strong feeling about her.

NARRATOR: They play until Mona wants to show them something. [CACKLE] Little did they know it will... send them to the underworld.

LISA: (AMAZED) Wow.

LILY: We should be going now, your mum will be worried.

MONA: Nonsense!

LISA: Rubbish. Let's stay a little longer!

LILY: (SCARED) Can I go home now?

LISA: (BEGS) Please stay.

LILY: (WORRIED) Fine.

MONA: Enough! Who is going in?

NARRATOR: They played a game. Lisa lost and had to go in... Lily felt she had lost her brain and she didn't know what to do.

LILY: Don't do it, please, Lisa!

LISA: I'm sorry I have to.

(Lisa slowly walks to the door)

LISA: Bye, Lily.

LILY: No, no, no. Lisa, you left me!

She falls to the ground in tears.

NARRATOR: With Lisa gone, the portal closed and Mona had disappeared. Lily couldn't move.

Scene 3. INT. UNDERWORLD – NIGHT

LISA: Where am I? (REALISES) Welcome to the Underworld. Mona, you sly dog, I hate you. I hate you!

(Lisa drops to the ground in tears.)

LISA: Oh, no, I should've listened to you, Lily.

NARRATOR: With both best friends in tears on the ground and Mona disappeared – what had happened and why was Mona missing?

Sink and Stove

Andrea Dragan (UK)

Hi there! My name's Stove, the one and only, and the family which own me have left the house to go on a trip. YES! This is the perfect time to perform my fire taming show. It is a spectacular show I pull off in only a matter of seconds in which I use to make my magical patterns using fire!

Now, you may be thinking, "What does a cool fire show have to do with a stove?"

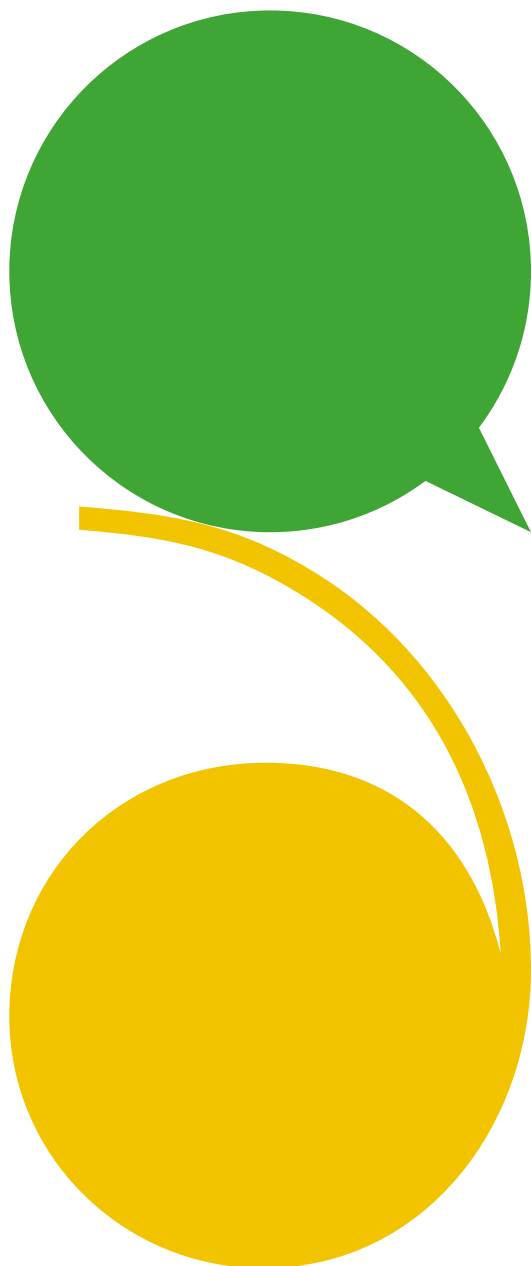
Let's just say that it's a long story, but last time the family was out, sink was all the attraction. He put on a 'cool' fountain show, remote told me.

Ever since that day, I've always wondered how he always gets such a crowd. I mean, think about it: it's just some water being thrown in the air, there's no glow or twisting and turning flames, just... water.

You see, sink and I are not alike, you may or may not get why, but every time the family leaves, sink and I always compete to see who can get the biggest crowd by performing shows.

So, as soon as I hear the click of the door, it's showtime!

I charge up and burst out a flame, everybody's heads turn, and then another one, then let out a gasp. Followed by countless more flames and flares, a colossal crowd gathers up, now sink is out of business...



Shooter

Bronwyn Hayes (Ireland)

I looked down. I was trembling. The gun, small but lethal, lay in the palms of my hands perfectly. Blood underneath and around the gun while tears dripped onto it. The school was on lockdown, an alarm going off. The sound ringing through my ears, everything blurry and slow motion. I looked around the room. A mass of bodies covering the wooden flooring. Books and papers that had fallen during the chaos now soaking up the blood.

Did I regret what I had done? No, I regretted nothing, I didn't believe in regrets. I thought learning from wrong doings was much better than wasting time regretting things. I did what had to be done.

The day had come. I had decided to become a better person. With the world falling apart in front of my eyes - over population, global warming, terrorism and racism - I said to myself that I should do my best to help improve it, even just a little. I usually took the bus, but I felt like walking this morning. Helping the environment as well as my mind.

By the time I entered the school my daily dose of maths class was over. Thank god. There was also a scheduled talk about gun safety and to how protect yourself from a shooter. I always felt lying on the ground anticipating a shooter to come in and kill you was stupid. But that was just me.

The shriek of an alarm went off and rung throughout the school. The teacher ran to lock the door. She slammed onto the

ground, I saw an ocean of blood stream out of her left eye. She looked like a fish that had just been caught, lifeless and floppy. Shattered glass surrounded her like a tangled hair mosaic. A hand reached in the hole of the absent glass and turned the doorknob very slowly. We all lay lifeless and silent.

I heard shrieks, screams and roars. Then silence. The booms louder than a nuclear explosion. I opened my eyes to see the shooter's back turned. I stood up silently, one breath and I was also dead. He turned around eyes blood-shot and wide open and he pointed the gun at me. He had a look of emptiness on his face. I said nothing and stayed still. He backed away and, in that brief, second I grabbed the gun. As I closed my eyes I gave one exhale and a body dropped to my feet.

I looked down. I was trembling. A small gun, a lethal one lay in the palms of my hands. I was sobbing, tears dripping on the gun. The sound of the alarm ringing through my ears. Everything felt like it was blurry and in slow motion. I looked around the room. A mass of bodies covering the floor. Paper and books soaking up the blood of somebody's loved one.

What They Tell Me

Maisy Mansell-Warren (UK)

I was drifting in the middle of longing to know and dreading the answer. What is this anger and injustice that fills me? How do I dilute this emotion? How can I make my eyes see the world how I want to see it? How can I stay asleep to this feeling, this earth, this hatred and blatant mockery that is somehow acceptable, this pain people are forced to believe they inflict on themselves, the words which are used against them and not for them, telling them: “crying just makes you seem weak,” telling them: “take a joke,” telling them: “it’s your own fault for letting them make you vulnerable.” All these jeering fingers hidden behind their pathetic excuses turned to you as soon as you open your mouth. And then I wake up to the reality of life, that no, it is not fair.

But that is not enough for me. I seek justice, I seek power, I seek a way to thrust open minds and scream into them. And I seek space for my words and actions to soar high, and snap others into consciousness about how this life isn’t enough for everyone.

I’m Not Hungry

Rita Patrício (Portugal)

Funny how a few words can change your entire life. When I woke up on that morning with my typical smile, I never thought I was about to listen to something that still haunts every time I close my eyes.

As I walk to school, I feel so confident in my new sweater that not even the rain can steal my happiness. I see my best friend, Katherine, and my heart gets full of joy.

“Hi,” I smile as I hear her sweet voice.

Kat analyses me from head to toe. “Elizabeth, what have you been eating? You’re getting fat.”

I instantly stop walking. Everything spins. Those words slap me like a tsunami of emotions, drowning me in it. Suddenly, what I’m wearing doesn’t fit and it accentuates all the imperfections that I wanted to hide.

My pen rhythmically hits the table, my head is everywhere except the English class. The word “fat” floats around my mind. Me, the girl who has always defended that everyone is beautiful in their own body, is now facing the pain of hating every single part of herself.

I get home. I’m alone again. My mom is at work like always, my dad is drunk in a bar and my brother hasn’t been home for days. The tears are inevitable. I glimpse the mirror and everything seemed to widen up. My belly isn’t flat. My thighs and arms are excessively big. My face is too round. I

feel disgusted, unloved and not capable of looking at my repulsive body.

My life turned into a routine. Get up. Weigh myself. Eat a carrot. Drink water whenever I feel hungry. Throw up if I eat something. Work out. Skip dinner. Weigh myself once more. Sleep. Repeat. Not eating was a victory.

I became my own prison, trapped inside a cage made of tears and my only company is the voice in my head that tells me not to eat.

The number on the scale kept dropping, but somehow that didn’t show my weight, it showed my self-worth. Years passed by without anyone caring enough to do something. I didn’t care if I died as long as my bones were visible. Katherine said I looked good. I didn’t believe her. The happiness I thought would come with being skinny never arrived. I felt so tired, so dizzy...

The lights almost blind me when I open my eyes. I realize that I’m in hospital and I see my mom.

I’m not sick, why is she sobbing? She says that I have an eating disorder, one more day and I could have died.

Like the day Katherine told me I was fat, everything spins. As Malala Yousafzai once said, “When the world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.” And for the first time, that one voice is my voice. I’ll recover, not for my mom, not for my friends, not for society, but for me. Because I have the courage to care about myself.

Righting my Wrongs

Eoghan O'Mahony (Ireland)

"That's it, I've had enough," I said to myself.

It was 3am in November. The clouds hung above the mountains, dead still, and I could see my breath in the frosty air. At that moment it didn't matter how cold it was. My mind was elsewhere. I couldn't sleep. It all had become too much; it needs to stop.

It had started in September, the start of a new school year with new students. One of the new guys was James. He was a quiet boy. I had my own friends in school. There was a gang of us, but Jack, my best friend, was our leader. He called the shots and we followed.

In the beginning, Jack made comments towards James and I didn't think much of it. Looking back, I should have intervened. I helped steal his pens and pencils, hide books and I jeered at times. I felt bad but didn't want to let my friends down. Jack said it was just a bit of fun. Like a fool, I believed him.

After a few weeks, I started to feel uneasy. If it was just a bit of fun, it seemed over the top, so I tried to exclude myself.

Jack soon caught on.

"Why are you ignoring us? We called you over in English, why didn't you come?" he whispered in my ear.

"Sorry, I just didn't feel like it, I want to be easy on James," I replied.

Jack gripped my arm, squeezing it. "You're weak! Do what I tell you. You don't want to let me down, do you?"

I apologised, hoping he would loosen his grip.

"Connor, very good" he said and walked off.

So, I did what he said because he was my best friend, there was no way I could get away with disobeying him.

I followed his orders until I was walking past the bathrooms and I heard sobbing. Instantly, I knew it was James. The sound was gut wrenching. It all hit me at once, like I was being tossed around like a rag doll mentally. My head pounding, I realised how much we had hurt this person.

That evening, I could hardly eat my dinner I was so conflicted. If I stood up for James, I risked losing my friends. I was at a crossroads. I went to sleep early; I was worn down.

When I awoke at 3am, I had reached my decision. I needed to right my wrongs. I headed into school and mustered up the courage to approach James.

"James, I'm so sorry--"

He cut me off. "Is that supposed to help? Torment after torment and you expect me to accept your apology?"

He was close to tears.

"I really am sorry," I told him.

He wouldn't accept it. "You can keep trying, Connor, but until the others apologise, I won't accept this."

I saw Jack glaring at me. I didn't care. By freeing myself, I could be a better person.



The Struggles of Growing Up

Mariana Bernardo (Portugal)

If being a black woman in this world wasn't bad enough, Katrina has just come to terms with her sexuality. Yeah, she definitely isn't straight.

Ever since 7th grade she had been feeling different from the other girls. All her friends did was talk about boys, but she really didn't see any interest in that. And now, in 9th grade, she finally had to face it. The problem was... what now? Who was she going to tell? Her friends? Her parents? No one, perhaps? She was really scared of what would happen if she revealed her secret. All her life she had to deal with malicious comments from her classmates or even random people on the street about her skin colour and now adding this to the things people could make fun of her for.

But she knew she had to tell someone. It would make it easier for her to let off steam with someone about what she was feeling. So, she decided to go to the people who care about her most. Or so she thought. It was probably one of the most terrifying things she's been through, and she had been through a lot. Never did she think she would hear such hurtful words coming out of her parents' mouth. But at the end of the day, it could've been worse. "I mean at least I still have a roof over my head," she thought.

At school she felt so alone. She had her friends of course. But the loneliness came from inside. She felt as if she was the only one feeling this way and she felt... lonely. That is, until one day, her friend Felicia, a beautiful young African American girl told her she needed to talk to her.

As they were walking home after school, Felicia told her. "I know this might come out of nowhere for you, but I needed to tell someone and you're the person I trust the most." That's when she told her "I'm bisexual," and suddenly the world didn't feel as lonely as before. After that Katrina felt a sudden happiness that just made her share all her problems and thoughts with her friend.

A few days after this event, Katrina's parents walked into her room one evening and apologised for their harsh words and promised to be more considerate parents from then on. All you ever need in the world is someone who cares.

"Is This Love?" (EDITOR'S PICK)

Rita Pedro (Portugal)

I close the door and run to my bed, covering my ears hoping not to hear the terrifying cries... Why is this happening again? Why is my mom crying again?

I get up and try to peek through the little groove at the door to figure out what's going on and I see my father grasping my mother's arm with all his strength.

Mommy says that when we love someone, we have to treat them well. But if that's true why is she screaming for help? Is daddy not treating her well?

But he loves mommy, right? They are married and had me, and we only get married and have children when we love someone.

But then why is daddy throwing things and hitting mommy?

I also have a girlfriend; her name is Alicia. I like her, should I treat her like that, too? After all, daddy always says he loves mommy after yelling at her.

I do not understand... my mother tells him to stop, why does not he stop? I should go there but I'm afraid. Is mommy afraid of daddy?

Suddenly I stopped listening to my father's screams and my mother's not crying anymore so I run to the kitchen and I see my mommy on the floor without moving and my father with hands on his face.

"Call 911 " he says. It was not the first time I did it, so it would be an easy task for a seven-year-old.

When my mother woke up in hospital, I heard my father apologise. "I will never do it again," he promised.

My mother seemed to think twice. She was used to hearing apologies like this but she accepted it.

When we got home my mommy whispered in my ear "Grab your favorite toys," while she was packing some clothes in a suitcase. "Do we go on vacation?" I asked. Sometimes Daddy took us for a drive after screaming at mommy.

But I don't think so this time. I see my mommy hurrying for the car keys and we leave the house without daddy. I'm confused so I ask my mother where we are going and she answers me: "Listen to me my love, daddy cannot live with us anymore and that's why we have to leave."

Why cannot my daddy live with us anymore? They love each other, right? and that's why I ask my mommy...

"Mommy, is this love?"

Betrayed

Aksel Vikse Olsen (Norway)

I thought we were friends,
you were a brother in my eyes.
How could it all be destroyed
as one of Amor's arrows flies?

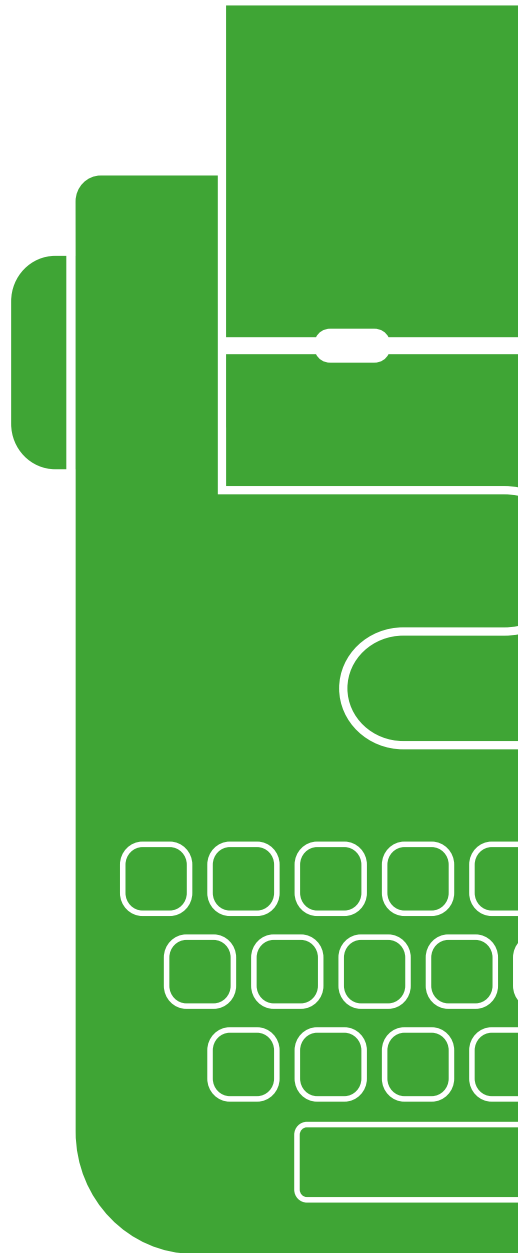
I knock hard on the door,
as the day quickly fades.
I came here for an answer,
to all the trouble that you've made.

When you at last open the door
the lion awakes in a fable.
If my anger spills over
you'll be a victim just like Abel.

You stand there in your toga,
it turns red with the passing of time.
If you look closely at my body
you can see all these scars of mine.

Then you begin to realise,
all the harm you have done.
Thirty pieces of silver are not enough
to heal all that is gone.

So I go home alone,
every chapter's last page must be read.
I hear a shout behind me.
It won't make me turn my head.



Friendship

Christopher Vea (Norway)

Jon is my friend and I can't stand it. He
knocks on my door when I would rather be
on my own, he bursts in through the door
and forces me out of bed. I want to be
alone I say, he answers playfully: "Super,
you can be on your own with me." He
pulls off the duvet and I get dressed.

He either comes round several times a
week, or he rings me. He invites me to
join in on his plans for the day, something
I generally don't want to do. Most days I
don't feel so good, and I need to be alone.
I want to lie in bed and think, I want to feel
my harsh thoughts. I politely say no thank
you to Jon, but he always convinces me
and at the end of the day I never regret it.

One day I get worried, he hasn't come by
or called me for a week. I don't want to be
on my own anymore and I'm starting to
get bedsores.

Jon was pale and his eyes looked tired, he'd
been in the hospital for too long. It was
hard for him to have a conversation without
losing his breath. When it got too difficult,
he had a machine which helped him. I
tried hard not to make him laugh too much,
because if I did, he couldn't breathe.
Sometimes he stopped mid-sentence, he
was a bit like a computer turning itself on
and off. He was in pain, but he was always
smiley and happy when I visited.

The days when Jon was happy became
few and far between, he could hardly
speak and for the most part just stared
out of the window. One day Jon wanted
to be on his own, I suggested that I could
keep him company. All I got were cruel
words and objects thrown at me. I stood
outside, powerless as I heard him fall
apart, crying.

So now I don't feel so good. I'm on my
own but I don't really want to be. I lie in
bed, brooding, the harsh feelings from
before are worse now. It's impossible to
get me out of bed, I lie there, lifeless, and
stare out of the window.

Jon was my friend. Now I'm alone and I
can't stand it.

If only...

Clodagh Delahunty-Forrest (UK)

A ferocious flame
Secretly bubbles away
Amber embers melting
Into charcoal decay
The warmth disappears
Into smokes of grey
Dissolving into the sharp features
Of your sculptured face of clay

Grief makes you timid,
Deathly pale, bedridden
Stinging: your eyes
Burn with tears forbidden
Your emotions, precious jewels
Locked away, hidden
In a treasure chest, thoughts
Of freedom remain unbidden

Chiselled and raw
A heart of a cold stone
Masked by the deep
Musk scent of your cologne
Diminishes feelings
never to be shown
Unable to be shared
Forever alone

In your eyes I see
A dying flare
It disappears making me
Doubt it was ever there
Replaced by a blank
Dangerous glare
If only you had
The courage to care



My Dad

Ali Sumar (UK)

Every night my dad goes out,
and I try to ask why,
it's none of your business he would shout,
and slam the door behind.

Every night he comes back,
back with something new,
A leather bag,
a shiny tusk or two.

Where does he get them,
I think in bed,
this will give us money,
my dad once said.

Until one night,
I crept behind him,
hiding in the bushes,
not moving a limb.

Then in the moonlight,
that sliced the sky like a knife,
was a majestic sight,
A wonder, an elephant?

Then came the bang,
the fatal determined gunshot,
the dying call that it sang,
to my dad the poacher.

My heart stopped
at the terrible sight,
as my brain locked,
On thinking of a plan.

I must stop my dad,
from this evil act,
does he not feel bad,
What a heartless crime.

When the Sun rose again,
it seemed all was normal,
Dad was the same,
like nothing had happened.

Yet again the sky darkened,
and my dad stepped outside,
I waited in the tree,
then followed behind.

Suddenly I had an idea
But I would have to be brave
The time was here
I saw him raise the gun.

My dad reached for the trigger,
and I kicked the gun around,
I heard him scream in pain,
BOOM! A single sound.

Had my love for the elephant,
let me astray,
had I killed my dad,
on this fateful day...

For Myself

Eleanor Dart (UK)

It's hard enough for you to say, 'I love you,'
Even more difficult to say when it's not true.

I bled your name once,
As you controlled me with your strings,
The ragdoll you created,
Who was forged by your gaze.

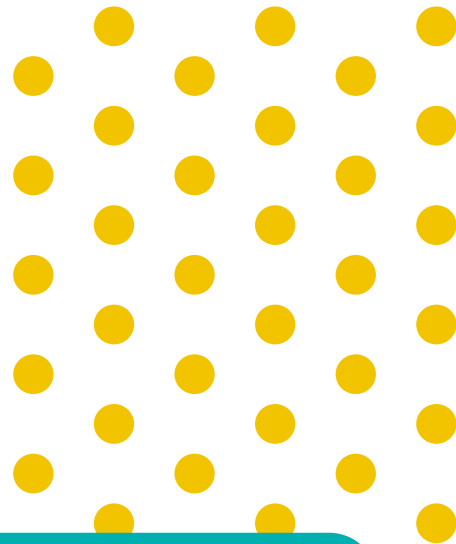
I would have ripped those stitches apart,
But that's what you'd want, I know,
The sympathy, the sob story,
Your prize.

Don't take me for a fool,
You're no god, no friend, no family,
A mere manipulative man,
With seam rippers for teeth.

I tried to leave you some rope,
But you cut it in two.

Cut in two like I'd thought you'd do,
When I said I was through,
With the lies, the torture,
Your torment.

Because I learnt, to care for myself,
I had to cut my own strings.



Risk

Kavain Raja (UK)

Have courage to care for a person,
For it comes from the heart.
Caring is what we all do,
Even, if we're apart.

Your mind gives you the courage,
Care if you're in danger.
To never give up,
Even, if failure strikes,
Like spice from ginger.

So, next time you see someone,
Who needs help,
Have courage, to help them out,
Even, if it's a risk.
And you'll be remembered forever.
Pig the Star
Leah Renee Norrie (UK)

Pig was a pug
And I'm sorry to say
He was rude and selfish
In all and every way.

Now Pig was a star
It was his dream universe
But it wouldn't be better,
It made Pig worse

His movies were famous
Loved by everyone in school.
He was excused from maths
And he broke every rule

But the headteacher told him
"this school comes first,
Your new stardom obsession
Will make everything worse!"

"no! you're just jealous
That I'm the star!"
Pig scoffed
And his problem went too far.

Next door to pig's house
Was a dog called Trevor
And was Pig nice to him?
I'll tell you-NEVER.

He was at the studio
Dancing whilst wearing a tutu
And all the tv workers
Yelled "that's cute!"

"NO!" Pig shouted
"I'M THE STAR OF THE SHOW!"
I'll fly to the moon
In this spaceship, you-WOAH!

"Watch out!" yelled Trixi
"That was just fixed by Mabel!"
If you were here, I'd have told you
This is highly unstable!"

These days it's different
I'm happy to say
These days it's different
In all and every way.

Pig wants to perform
But it's never the time
Because though he doesn't want to,
He lets Trevor shine

A Better Place Now

Tonje Stavland Dahle (Norway)

I have many conversations with the moon,
about what we think is beautiful.
He tells me about the sun,
I tell him about you.

About how you always cared,
you were selfless beyond reproach.
About how your eyes shone,
like the light on a bunad* brooch.

I have many conversations with the moon,
about the things we can't take.
That Mum and Dad are arguing,
and about war and heartbreak.

About children starving in Africa,
missing hope and faith too.
About depression and mental health,
and losing someone like you.

I tell the moon everything,
when the grief digs a hole.
Then he lets me know,
I have to find another goal.

I miss you so very much,
I still miss our laughter now.
But I just have to remember,
you're in a better place now.

**bunad is traditional rural Norwegian costume*

Purple

Reviel Meyer (Norway)

It all started so innocently. Another May
day when we used to roam the gathering
of trees behind your backyard and call it
a forest. We were explorers and hunters,
knights and dragon riders travelling
through. I didn't know what to think of
you at first, but Matt adored you and I
adored Matt, so two became three. We
were inseparable.

All was still well when we rode our bikes
through the neighbourhood and waited for
the gentle evening breeze. We would lie on
the short, hard grass by the lake and wait
until the night got purple and full of ancient
sounds. Moths dancing around our heads.
All of us feeling so alive, our heads buzzing
with the first hormones, our bodies eager
for a world unfolding far beyond our forest.

We were fine, even as the strange waves of
puberty hit us, and with that an itch in the
back of my mind. Matt still adored you,
though now in a different, more joking
way. I followed him blindly.

Beyond the pages of schoolbooks and saying
goodbye to our childhood dog, we made it
through school without too many scratches.

Then Matt left for University and we were
left alone together. I was just coming to
terms with being gay, a dark cloud that had
hung over my head for years. The summer
heat kept us indoors, killing time. The
world was ours, we didn't know what to do
with it. So, we went back to the places we
came from, strolling through the backyard
woods, the nails we once hammered into

the trees were still there. We decided to go
to the lake once more, for old times' sake,
open a cold one, send pictures to Matt.

The air around the lake was heavy with the
smell of summer. A dark purple sky giving
two young men more than enough cover
to enter the water, still warm from the day.
Everything felt so beautiful I could have
cried. I did, remembering the moment later.

That moment I decided to try and kiss
you. I didn't even think about it that
much, it wasn't you. I really wanted Matt,
but Matt was gone. You were here, and
you were wet and warm and laughing with
me, it felt perfect.

Your punch came quick and that was
good. Because it made me draw my
breath before you pushed my head under
water. Deep under water.

The cold made me numb, I remember
thinking you were joking, but you wouldn't
let go of my head. Seconds passing by
like aeons. My vision clouded from pain,
darkness and murky water, my body
writhing in panic, much more aware than
my brain.

I was limp when you let go.

When I somehow got to shore you were
gone and I was coughing up so much
water I thought I would die there and then.

But the sky above me was still purple,
with a heavy scent of flowers in the air.

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