

MAYFLOWER YOUNG WRITERS  
**ANTHOLOGY**  
2017-18

**Mayflower**  
Theatre

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to Susmita Bhattacharya for assisting with the publication of this anthology, as well as her dedication in teaching the 15-18 age group.

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## PREFACE

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Theatre is born of interesting ideas to create fascinating, wondrous and sometimes challenging stories out of nothing and portray them on a stage. Without the development of new writing talents we would not be able to present these amazing stories on our stage. Our Young Writers have gone on a fascinating journey over the past two years, they have shown great commitment to writing and hopefully developed new skills. Each week the Young Writers have spent their Saturday mornings exploring creative writing with professional writers.

We are very proud that their work has risen from the page and has been seen throughout our local community via performances with our Musical Youth Theatre. One particular commission was part of our commemoration of the sinking of the *Titanic*. While we launched the UK Tour of *Titanic the Musical* on Mayflower Theatre's stage, the Young Writers' work told their own versions of the same story which were showcased at the SeaCity Museum.

I am thrilled that we can share some of their amazing words here with you in this anthology of work, so read on and immerse yourself in the fascinating, wondrous and creative pieces of writing. Who knows, you may be reading the next Tim Rice, Alan Ayckbourn, JK Rowling or Lin-Manuel Miranda.

**Michael Ockwell**  
Mayflower Theatre Chief Executive

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## PART ONE

# 11-14 AGE GROUP

## INTRODUCTION



My name is Hollie Ward. I am the Assistant Facilitator for the Mayflower Young Writers, and I teach the 11-14 age group.

The Mayflower Young Writers have worked incredibly hard to pull together this anthology for you. They have selected three themes: memory, change and reality. The anthology includes both poetry and short stories relating to one or more of these themes, all written by our fantastic Young Writers. They have been involved with every stage of the process, from designing the cover art to promoting the publication.

The Young Writers inspire me in every session. I hope that I have done even a fraction of what they have done for me. Being with them every week allows me to walk into the weekend with a smile on my face, as I see their constant energy and love for this project.

I am so grateful to them, the Mayflower Engage team, and ArtfulScribe for creating two writers groups that are so exciting, welcoming and fun. It has been a pleasure to watch each of our students grow, not just as writers, but as people. Both groups are supportive of each other's work and ideas, giving them a space where they can create and share, and that is exactly why I do it.

The students in both groups are passionate, vibrant and talented writers, who are an absolute joy to teach. I am immensely proud of everything that they have achieved since I began teaching the group in September, and I can't wait to see what the future brings for them!

**Hollie Ward**  
Assistant Facilitator

# THE ELIXIR OF ETRUSCA

*By Alex Moodley*

It was so simple. Back in the days when a fun day was just playing football in the garden, and knock-door-run on your friends. As I said, it was so simple back then.

Then it all changed.

The Forsyth Furies came, flattening everything in their path, leaving an indelible mark on the beautiful landscapes of Etrusca. Mountains, once sacred burial grounds, standing tall and proud. Now all that's left is charred remains, the cold embers of the roaring blaze it once was. Fields, once used for farming, playing and relaxing are a reminder of what we once were.

Despite our pretence of peace and tranquillity, our small community harboured a dark secret. Our mountains, sacred burial grounds though they were, the bare rock found in them was a lifesaver. Some called it Liquid Gold, some the Elixir Of Life, but we just called it medicine. Thirty years ago, a fatal epidemic swept across our village, reducing our number by half. The remaining only survived by eating the rock on the 7th of July at seven o'clock. 7 was a ghost number in our language, so it seemed only right. The furies must have gotten word, because this surely was what they were looking for.

We were happy.

The first few months were staring through bars, and rattling cage doors to no avail. We were still adjusting. We used to joke that this would be temporary, and that we would be out by Kwanza. Oh, how wrong we were. Our tall tales of the simple life fell away, over-told and worn out, giving way to no life at all. Now, we have nought but the occasional guard's lamp to light our pallid, pale faces. We were once proud; of our nation, of our heritage, of ourselves. Now we're reduced to animals, scavenging on the floor for some semblance of a meagre meal.

Of course, the nobility, led by King Alfric and his successor, Prince Harold, paint us as savage tribes. Cannibals who tore each other apart for sport. We used to covet the day someone was taken from the cells. Although we knew, in our heart of hearts, it would be punishment, or display, we would convince ourselves that they were going somewhere better.

This was the worst day, waking to a cacophony of shouts, all prisoners offering their meagre meals as pitiful bribes, in exchange for even a glance of sunlight. But I am smart. They call me weird, they call me deranged, but I just think of myself as civilised, spending my days thinking up an escape route.

The guard strode past the hagglers, the gamblers and the plain sadistic, and rapped on the bars of my cell, waking me from my saturnine stupor, contemplating my situation. He walked up to me, causing me to part my lank, greasy hair in an attempt to see him. He forced me out of the cell, into a blindfold, and hustled me outside. The wind whipped through my thin, scratchy clothes, chilling me to the bone. The hood was whipped off my head, and I was left shivering in a loose cage on the side of the road, to be goggled at like a common cat. I could easily shatter the lock if I was so inclined.

Despite my dire situation, a smile spread across my face. Free. Free to save the rest. Free to rebuild Etrusca and have the Forsyth Furies kneel at my feet.

I had work to do.

# THE NORTHERN FOREST

By Bea Darby

My daughter, Willow, heard the drums before I did. To me, they sounded like the town drunk, Bryce, being thrown out of the tavern by the 'war heroes'. They always liked to show off, but she came running in with her hands clasped to her ears and yelling for my wife, Amelia, and I to come outside. Bryce was on the floor, but this time he wasn't anywhere near the tavern.

Stood upon a block of wood, which they must've brought with them, in the middle of town was a man with a jewelled tunic and battered sword sheathed at his belt. Amelia instantly took hold of Willow's shoulders and kept her close.

"Villagers of Sanlow!" He called to the expanding crowd, "Your country needs you!"

I looked to my wife, she was shaking her head at me, careful not to be seen by the noblemen stood alongside the one speaking.

"Spirits from the Northern Forest have declared war on our kind!" He announced, one hand resting on his sword, "There are whispers of a higher being, wanting to rid us of the world – she believes we know too much about her kind, and that makes us a threat, but we will not succumb to her wishes! We will show her how much of a threat we can be!" The crowd roared, but the man didn't stop. "Seers have foretold a glorious battle to take place on the border between our land and theirs, we need a gallant army to help defend our territories!" Another expensively dressed man passed him a scroll and quill. "The battle will be one you will not want to miss!" He gave us a strange smile, "anyone to go will be deemed a hero!"

Men started talking with each other, their wives and children keeping away for fear of dishonouring them. "Tell us your names, and we will send you off to the border with a shining new sword and a pouch of silver!" By the dozen, villagers grouped around the man and declared their names, each, as promised, getting a small bag of coins.

"Don't go!" Amelia hissed, gripping my arm, "It's cursed, they've told you next to nothing and are winning you over with sacks of our own silver!" I shook my head, not letting my gaze leave the nobleman scribbling down my friends' names.

"I will not be the coward here." Willow had run off, peering over at the large mound of money. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched her, just in case she decided to pocket some for herself. "This is not about bravery, Bel," She spat, "it's about you not being a stubborn idiot for once in your life!" I kissed her, cupping her face delicately as if she would break under my touch.

"I'm doing this for you," I lingered for a moment to watch my daughter for the last time, "for you and Willow."

I stepped towards the line, not daring to look back at Amelia's face.

"Name?" I was asked eventually.

"Belmore Fletcher," I breathed. He scrawled it down and handed me my silver. It fit in my hands at an odd angle, I didn't deserve it.

"Welcome to the war, Fletcher."

\*\*\*\*

Ten thousand soldiers prepared for a battle we would not win. The heat bore down on my forehead, all I could see for miles was the land, hills breaking the surface all over, but I knew that soon the landscape would be filled with bodies of the dead and wounded.

There was a tense atmosphere hanging over the crowds of uneasy soldiers. They all knew that they would not return, even if we hadn't been told that were to die on the fields, even if we won the casualties would be the same as if we lost. In a manner of speaking, we didn't mind, every man had someone worth fighting for, it was just the matter of whether or not we were prepared to die for them.

Experienced veterans told bloody stories to some of the boys, causing them to tremble to the bone with fear. They didn't know what they were in for, and they definitely didn't deserve to be here. If we weren't fighting a war already lost, I'd tell them to go home to their parents, but what use was it?

I, however, was prepared to fight to my dying breath; I'd already said goodbye to my wife and my daughter. I refused to think that she wouldn't remember me at all, her memories lost to the abyss of

childhood. Still, I kept my darkening eyes firm on the horizon, watching the looming trees sway tauntingly. The sound of marching led to swords and shields being raised in a feeble attempt of protection, helmets were quickly strapped on and armour adjusted.

“There!” A young soldier across to my left yelled, pointing to the horizon. I could just about make out what he was seeing – an army that would surround us, filling the clearing and giving us threatening looks as some sharpened their weapons. Final prayers were muttered as a strong breeze flew through the ranks, the signal for the fight to begin.

“Alright, men!” My rank leader, a man I knew as Wake, yelled to get our attention, “Positions!”

We all held our ground as we saw their army come into view, with my aging eyes I could hardly pick out what they were - some looked like mossy boulders with limbs, others were ancient oak trees armed with spiked branches from their comrades. They kept coming. I could hear their split-trunks and stone feet stomping into the ground, drilling the sound into my head.

The battle raged when one spooked horse reared, causing the rider to grip to its mane to stop himself from falling onto the wet ground, which only caused one of the advisors from almost a mile away from us to give the order to charge. With that, I took a breath and ran with the men I grew up with; I ran with my friends.

Soldiers were falling to my left and right, the opposition seemed to be immune to our blades. Next to me, a beech tree thrust its club towards a man much younger than me, hitting him around the head. He instantly crumpled to the floor, his head hitting the back of my knee which caused me to fall too. The colour drained from my cheeks, sweat covered my forehead as I pushed the kid off of me and watched him sprawl across the sunken battlefield. The poor boy couldn't have been older than fourteen, and he'd just had his life stripped away like a used bandage. The rank leader was one of the next to fall, not many took notice, I certainly didn't; he wasn't favoured in the minds of his warriors.

Time passed, and soon half of the soldiers were dead, or dying. Most of the men on horseback were reduced to fighting on the ground like everyone else, their steeds' bodies littering the fields along with most of our army. I was still fighting, untouched where my comrades had blood obscuring their vision. I was going to go home. I had to. I dodged a swing from a boulder which held one of our swords in its shapeless hands. I didn't know how, but it was skilled with a weapon it had never seen before. I was ashamed to say I was losing.

“Fletcher!” Someone yelled my name, I spun and blocked another rock creature from impaling me. A thin slash appeared on my arm. I looked at it in confusion. My concept of time shattered. I felt something in my chest, looking down I saw a cavalry sword embedded in me. I felt a trickle of blood drip out of my mouth, my last thought was of my little girl, my baby, depending on her mother's fragile words to remember me.

As the sun started its descent; a lone, barefoot woman - the woman - stepped onto the bloodstained grass; treading delicately over the wounded and dead and letting their blood soak into the ground as she went. Her appearance changed with the breeze, but her dark skin radiated a faint green, with flowers positioned messily in her hair.

The creatures around her dropped to their knees, abandoning their weapons in a space next to them. Lost in the depths of her thoughts, she barely acknowledged her warriors, but they didn't dare rise with her still around. She gingerly touched the face of one of the dying, his memories and his pain flooding through her skin. She knew of his courage in the accursed fight. Their deaths were on her hands, but she knew that she could not let their loyalty and bravery die like they did, she wanted the world to thank them, to remember them.

Soon, each body was lifted from the position on the field, stood upright and rigid with the woman in the middle. Different shades of brown roots climbed the warrior's legs, then their upper bodies. The roots took over every blooded head, until they started sprouting green leaves; creating a new forest of trees, the first of many. She couldn't let anyone continue on from the battle. No, she needed to restart humanity. She left a little engraving on the greatest oak tree, a picture of a battle, spending hours carving it onto the trunk, silently commanding it to never fade.

Although the tree obliged, baring the portrayal on its trunk for thousands of years, it could not stop the ruthless machinery from slaughtering the forest, losing the courageous warriors' tales to the whisper of the forest.

# GOODBYE GRANDPA

By Lucy Phillips

Goodbye Grandpa.

It's happening.

What my mama said would happen.

A world war, started by Germany, then other countries, and now Italy. I was only seventeen when it happened, when we left our small flat to go and live in the mountains with my grandparents.

It was nearly 11am when we left our flat to meet Grandpa by the Town Hall. We got into Grandpa's truck, Mama sitting in the front with Grandpa, and I sat in the back (which I like). As we drove up to the mountains, I thought about all of the fighting and the bloodshed.

As we came near the mountains, I could see the town below. When we got to the house, I could see Grandma outside. She was short, with bony shoulders. When she wasn't sad, she was a very happy person and very funny. Grandpa was tall with a kind face, and when he laughed it curled up at the side, and when he cried it drooped down. Mother was the middle child of six. When she met my papa, which was at a dance hall in France. She had gone there with a friend, but after that night they saw much more of each other. But he was on the 5th of December he was killed in No Man's Land, and that was the last my mama saw of my papa. After that, I was born and Mama was very good with me when I was young.

Grandma was outside when we arrived with a shawl over her shoulders.

"So, you are finally here. You better come inside".

Grandpa came in a few seconds after me, "So, you are going to help me in the fields. We are going to work from 9am to 12pm without a break. Okay?"

I said yes with my head.

"Come on boy! Your mama and I have to wash the dishes now, and get the lunch ready," said Grandma. As Grandpa and I walked down the lane that lead to the fields, I saw a plane overhead.

"Look Grandpa, a plane! Is it one of ours?" When Grandpa turned to look at the plane, he turned pale white. He grabbed my arm and pulled me towards a shed.

"That's not one of ours, it is an enemy plane. It's going to bomb the field. Now, in the shed quickly!" He yelled. I got to the shed, it was so dark in there I could hardly see Grandpa. I called out his name but he did not answer.

After a while, I came out of the shed and wish I didn't, because I saw grandpa face down dead.

# SHUT

*By Libby Whittingham*

You're fading  
But the colours in your eyes  
Only get brighter as you go.  
You remember him like he was here,  
Remember life as it was  
At its best.

I remember how  
Your wrinkled hands enveloped my scarred  
Palms in love.  
You taught us how to live.  
You're still living;  
Living in a paradise  
With him standing beside you,  
Holding your hand and squeezing it  
Like he used to.  
You've forgotten pain  
And remembered how it feels  
To be free.

We'll give you our love,  
Our eyes waiting hopefully  
For you to look at us  
Like you used to,  
But don't.  
Keep them shut from the tears,  
Keep your future waiting for you,  
And we'll keep the truth away,  
Under a golden lock and key.  
We'll become treasure in the box  
You'll never open again.  
Shut.

You're fading  
But the colours in your eyes  
Only get brighter as you go.  
You remember him like he was here,  
Remember life as it was  
At its best.

I remember how  
Your wrinkled hands enveloped my scarred  
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We'll give you our love,  
Our eyes waiting hopefully  
For you to look at us  
Like you used to,  
But don't.  
Keep them shut from the tears,  
Keep your future waiting for you,  
And we'll keep the truth away,  
Under a golden lock and key.  
We'll become treasure in the box  
You'll never open again.

# TRATTORIA ROMA

By Tom Norman

## Tuesday 1st January 2008.

12:30pm. Every Tuesday. The bell over the door rings, and the slim man in the dark trench coat enters. It's been happening in Trattoria Roma for 10 years now according to Carlos, no fail.

After he wandered in earlier today and made his normal request for a table near the toilet, I decided the time was right to interact with him. Said conversation was very one-sided. I welcomed him to the restaurant, and he asked for a seat near the toilet and sat down. He wouldn't talk much more. I served him his peculiar request of two plates of pasta, but he only ate one, and after he had finished the meal, he called me over, paid, and left. The bell rang as he slipped his coat back on, and almost seemed to slip out the door, into the bustling city streets of Rome.

## Tuesday 8th January 2008.

He arrived again this week, 12:30pm. Sat down near the toilet, and ordered his two plates of pasta. I admit I watched him. The strange actions of the man sparked some curiosity in me, and before I knew it, I was standing at his table near the toilet.

"Luca," I said. "And you?" I outstretched my hand, presenting it to him to shake. He sniffed, ignored me and took another gulp of pasta. "You are a very frequent customer to Trattoria Roma, Signore. I take it you enjoy our food?"

"No." His heavy voice filled the room. "The bill please, Signore." I fumbled my way toward the desk, and requested the man's bill. When I got back, I found him simply staring at the wall.

"The bill," I said, and he snapped out of his trance. As his eyes shuffled over it, I decided to try talking to him again. "Signore, I am always the waiter on Tuesday at 12:30pm. If you come here at that time every week, I might as well know your name." A chuckle burst its way out of him.

"Juliano," he said. And he handed me the paid bill, got up, and left.

## Tuesday 15th January 2008.

Juliano was back, as I'd predicted. I was so eager to talk to him I met him before he even entered the trattoria, to his extreme confusion. I had prepared his table by the toilet, and sat him down. A frown flickered across his face.

"This table has always had two chairs. Where is the second?"

"I moved it, Signore. There was no point in it being there." He looked angry, fuming even, but he resisted. He looked me right in the eye and said

"Luca. Have you ever felt true love?" I wasn't sure how to reply, so I stayed silent.

"Exactly. Now put that chair back, I am having lunch with someone of great importance. Two plates of pasta, per favore." I stared at him. "Luca. Two plates of pasta."

I brought the pasta, and stepped to the door, ready to welcome Juliano's apparently prominent guest. But nobody came. "Luca," Juliano called. "Bill!" When I arrived at the table, I just couldn't help my curiosity. "Juliano, Signore, I couldn't help but notice your guest didn't turn up. Who was supposed to eat with you tonight?"

"Do not worry, she ate with me."

"No one came in!" Juliano coughed. I could tell he was trying to hold back tears, but I didn't mention it.

"No," Juliano halfheartedly agreed. "No one has seen Liliana for a long time now."

He got up. "Grazie, Luca." Gone.

## Tuesday 22nd January 2008.

Juliano came in quite dejectedly today, and my happy Tuesday 12:30pm was crushed as his character fell. I brought him two chairs and two plates of pasta.

"Grazie," he muttered, and began to eat. All I was thinking about was the mystery of Juliano, and the invisible woman Liliana, and 12:30pm, and how much more there could be. He got up and wandered towards the toilet. My opportunity was there, undoubtedly. I couldn't contain myself. I wandered over to the table near the toilet and pretended to spruce up the tablecloth. In reality, I was opening his wallet. Photos. Lots of them. The first was of a man (obviously Juliano) and a woman. They were holding hands, and the photo was marked FIRST DATE WITH LILIANA. I moved to the second image. Juliano and Liliana wandering through Rome, on a sunny day, Juliano pulling a strange face, and Liliana almost wetting herself laughing. The photo was marked ALMOST 12:30pm, WE MIGHT BE LATE! I flick through. Most images mention 12:30pm, and one even shows them eating pasta, which in the caption, is marked as their FAVOURITE DISH!

"That was a long time ago," Juliano mutters over my shoulder.

"Oh, Signore Juliano, I am so sorry, I was just..."

"You are missing something." He was so calm, like nothing had happened, like his waiter hadn't been poking around in his wallet after all. He pointed a finger at a photo captioned I PROPOSED! But he wasn't pointing at himself, down on one knee. He pointed at a sign, above their heads. A sign proudly presenting the new restaurant Trattoria Roma, opening today. "I'd like to speak to the manager," said Juliano, with a smile. I brought Carlos down from the kitchen, to his utmost annoyance, and presented him to Juliano.

"Tell me, Signore," questioned Juliano, "Do you remember the first customers in this absolutely beautiful Trattoria?" Carlos smiled, and I realised Juliano had completely flattered him.

"A young couple, I believe. Looked very happy, said they loved the food."

"I believe you have a sort of memoir book at this restaurant, do you not?"

"How do you know that?"

"Do you mind bringing it out?" Juliano was grinning so hard I thought he would explode. Carlos sprinted off, and returned soon after with an old book, titled THE HISTORY OF TRATTORIA ROMA.

Juliano's slender fingers fumbled with it until he found page one. He read aloud, "First guests at Trattoria Roma, Juliano and Liliana. They were very jokey, even sitting by the toilet 'To make a point,'

Liliana said. Juliano proposed at 12:30pm on the dot, making this a very memorable opening day. Best of luck to Mr. and Mrs. Ferrari!" Juliano had a proud look upon his face, but he was flickering. By the end of the passage, I realised something was wrong with this man. I signalled to Carlos to leave me alone with Juliano, and, defying all my expectations, he complied.

"Juliano," I whispered softly. "What happened to Liliana?"

"I think you know." I put a comforting hand on his shoulder, but he shook me off, and confidently continued. "Death isn't picky, Luca. Remember that. He can take anyone, anytime. Liliana was diagnosed with cancer a year after she became Mrs. Ferrari. She fought hard, but she realised she was going to go. In her last hour, she asked me to make a promise. She asked if every week, at the time and day I proposed, if I could order two plates of her favourite pasta, one for her, one for me. She in turn promised me she would be here, in spirit. And she, as always was right. Every Tuesday, at 12:30pm, I can see my wife again."

"You are always very brave, Juliano. You know that?"

"Oh, I am not the brave one."

He stared at the chair.

**Tuesday 29 January, 2008.**

Juliano wandered in this week beaming, and sat himself down. I walked over to him, and found him humming an upbeat little melody.

"Your order?" He grinned.

"Three plates of pasta please, Luca. Oh, and pull up a chair."

"What?"

"Well, I'm sure Liliana would like a bit of company once in a while. My art conversation usually ends up slightly boring. You might as well eat with us, Luca. I'm sure she would enjoy a change." Shocked as I was, I slid up a chair. Juliano chuckled away, talking about his old business painting, and how Liliana could always do everything better than him but denied it all, and their little flat in the corner of Rome, and his favourite subject, Trattoria Roma's opening day. And as he laughed and laughed, I looked at the empty chair, and I could tell Liliana had kept her half of the promise. That chair had never been empty. And as I smiled at the chair, I knew that Liliana was smiling back.

# HIDDEN MEMORIES

By Tabitha Phillips

A window. Sunlight, streaming in through open, billowing curtains, spotlighting a bed. In the bed stirred the form of a silver-haired old lady. She sat up and stared out of the window, trying to remember what was so familiar about the view. Just then, the door opened, and in walked a nurse. "Good morning, Mrs Littlehouse, how are we today?" The old lady looked blank.

"Mrs Littlehouse?" she asked.

"Yes, you're Mrs Littlehouse," the nurse said. With that, she bustled about the room, straightening pillows, tucking in bedcovers and generally fussing around. Mrs Littlehouse scrutinised this specimen of womanhood. She had strong, powerful arms, well acquainted with lifting patients in and out of bed. Suddenly, the door opened, and in walked two well dressed ladies.

"Hello mum, this is a nice room they've put you in." said one of them. Mrs Littlehouse focussed her attention on the speaker. She was tall and fair haired. With emerald green eyes she shone out from under heavily mascaraed eyelashes. Meanwhile, near the door, the nurse was in deep conversation with the two ladies.

"You must understand, she has had a very nasty knock. It is possible she may not remember either of you," she said.

"Then we'll just have to remind her," said the fair haired one. She walked over to the bed and sat down in one of the chairs next to it? "Hello mum, do you remember me?" she asked anxiously.

"No but you look familiar. So does she." Here, Mrs Littlehouse pointed at the other lady still standing in the doorway. In comparison to the younger lady, she was the complete opposite. She was short and dark haired. Her face was a map of wrinkles, but was the owner of a fine pair of blue eyes. Her face and body were that of an old lady, but her eyes were that of a young girl.

The nurse moved towards the door. "I'll leave you to it then," she said.

"Thank you Nurse Linche," said the young one.

"Linche. Linche is a good name for her!" Mrs Littlehouse thought. "She could lynch someone all by herself." When Nurse Linche closed the door, the dark haired lady sank into the chair. The younger one did the same. "Phew, I'm glad she's gone! She reminded me of our English teacher, Miss Crawley. We used to call her Creepy Crawley!" she said. Mrs Littlehouse stared in confusion at this old lady.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"This is Barbara, and I'm Alison, your daughter," said the fair haired lady. "I've asked Barbara to come and talk to you, because the doctors think you may have amnesia. When she had finished she nodded at Barbara.

"Well, they've done a very good job on this room, haven't they? I remember when it was whitewashed. And there was just the bare lightbulb. Now look at it: rose pink walls, pictures, radiators. A shaded lightbulb! But there were good times too. I remember the very first time we met. It was at tea. You dropped the teapot- as he will be feeling your cup- all over me! Then, of course, I started making a fuss and squealing, and you started laughing, and then we were both sent to bed. After that we were best friends. BFF's as they call them now. Strange, isn't it, we first met here at the 'Queen Anne Girls' School' and then 50 years later we meet again at the same place, only this time it's called the 'Queen Anne Hospital'" she said laughing.

'Yes it is strange. That, and the fact that they still serve the same damson jam after all these years. I remember we had it on the first day of term,' Mrs. Littlehouse replied.

Alison and Barbara exchanged glances.

'Is there anything else you remember, mum?' Alison asked, anxiously.

'Yes. Remember a big hall – maybe a church hall – with tables and chairs and boards set out. I remember playing ... bingo with five other ladies. I remember walking out of the hall, and crossing the road, and a car coming at full pelt towards me. I remember it screeching, and then I think I blacked out,' she answered.

'Well, it's a start,' Alison said. Just then the door opened, and Nurse Linche walked in. 'I'm afraid visiting time is over, ladies, and Mrs. Littlehouse needs her rest.'

Alison turned to her mother. 'I'll come back tomorrow, mum.'

She gave her mother a loving hug and walked out of the room. As Barbara got up, Mrs Littlehouse said, 'will you come back too?'

'Of course, I will,' Barbara replied with a smile. 'We've got lots to talk about, you and I.' And with that she followed Alison out of the room.

After they had gone, Mrs Littlehouse looked out of the window for the second time that day, and smiled at the memory of playing tennis on the green.

## DETECTIVE M.R

*By Tasmiah Hossen*

Rain pattered down, washing away the pine needles on the concrete ground. The sun had made feeble attempts to penetrate the clouds, but nothing could shine cheerfulness on Scotland Yard. Nothing could infiltrate the monotonous atmosphere surrounding this dreary place.

The detective had a crude sense of humour. This was his first murder case, and quite a gruesome one indeed, but that just amused Detective M.R further than one could imagine.

Shuffling the papers on his desk, Detective M.R learnt that the first witness was a thirty-seven-year-old Londoner, and went by the name of Mary Montgomery. The detective stored this in his mind. By one glance at the pulled-back hair, one-piece suit, and polished black heels, he guessed that she was the no-nonsense type. Good, reflected Detective M.R, it is hard enough to interrogate policeman with a bag full to the brim with doughnuts. Jam doughnuts. As the detective was musing, the mahogany door swung open and, momentarily raising his head, Detective M.R registered a woman identical to the photo he was studying. Mary Montgomery.

"Afternoon ma'am," the detective curtly said, whilst gesturing for the woman to sit.

She replied in turn, "Good afternoon, detective."

The detective interviewed the calm witness with no thought for politeness, but the woman took no notice. Londoners must all be like this. That was probably why she took no notice to his snide comments. After about an hour of questioning (and a cup of tea and cake. the detective is not that barbaric), he dismissed Mary Montgomery.

Exactly ten minutes had passed before there was another knock on the office door. A lady casually strode in. Her attire consisted of a bright dress, wellington boots, black gloves and a rain hat. She sat with water dripping off of her nose and chocolate hair. Detective M.R glanced down at his papers to confirm that the woman's name was Tara Malady, a Cornish woman. She was younger though, much younger than Montgomery, and according to her file, she was reaching twenty-seven in two days.

# CONVERSATIONS WITH A BUS DRIVER

*By Rohini Bhattacharya*

Tara beamed "Rainy day. It's funny, people always comment on the weather when they don't have much to say, don't- "

He quelled her with a look. He questioned her until she had nothing left to say (a relief for the detective) and no tea and cake was offered, so she proceeded out of the room speechless and hungry.

Both witnesses had described something different as the weapon of the victim. Montgomery claimed it was a bloodstained knife, but Tara had said it was a rifle. Even though Tara had many lessons to learn, Detective M.R knew not to ignore a witnesses. Behind all that chatter could be a vital clue, the last piece of the puzzle. Except the piece didn't fit.

Detective M.R had checked the CCTV cameras twice but had still not found the described weapon on any person walking down the streets where the victim was found. He knew he could find the murderer somewhere else but still pushed through the footage. He couldn't figure out how the murderer could have deceived the cameras. Then the idea hit him. A loop. The murderer could have hacked into the system and put a ten-minute loop on every camera. Enough time to kill a victim.

The victim was a lawyer, so perhaps the murderer was a criminal that he did a case against. But which criminal? He took a taxi to the City Archives where he studied every file that involved the victim until he found a case recent case against a woman. The woman was Mary Montgomery.

Slinging my bag over my shoulder, I got on the bus and handed my return ticket to the driver. "It's cold outside, innit?" he asked.

I nodded my head, "Freezing!" I rubbed my hands together and sat just behind him. There was no one else in the bus.

"Ah but not as cold as the Big Freeze in 1963!" he called out, looking at me in the mirror. "I was younger then, just a young lad. Them folk didn't get their milk delivered for weeks it was so cold! I felt so bad for them - cooped up at home without milk."

"Uh-huh!" I said. Wait, 1963... He doesn't look like someone who was alive then, forget 20!

The driver kept droning on about the 60s like it was yesterday. "I figured there might be another freeze, so I quit the milk business and joined the omnibus service. And here I am!" The bus driver threw his arms in the air but quickly swerved to avoid a car.

"Wait! Did you join in 1964?" I asked sarcastically. But to my surprise, the crazy man said yes. And if he's been driving buses for 54 years, how is he so terrible at it?

"That's the Cathedral!"

"Yes, I know. I live here."

The driver ignored me and continued giving me a history lesson, "I remember vividly when Winchester was the capital of England! Those were the days!" The driver closed his eyes and let out a sigh. I inhaled sharply as a car veered off, beeping loudly at us. "Oh yeah, that was guard position outside the Cathedral!"

I considered getting off at the next stop, even if it was nowhere near home; this man was a lunatic. How could he possibly have been alive in 1519? The big freeze had been believable, but this story went too far! I noticed a Tudor ring on the driver's finger. It looked pretty real and was engraved with the date 1509. I looked up the date on my phone while the driver was actually paying attention to the road. I spoke too soon! He looked back at me on my phone. "Ooh, very neat. Back in the day we had smoke signals!" Smoke signals?! A search finally came into my phone. It was the date King Henry VIII was crowned.

# SMASHED ON THE ROCK

By Milly Phillips

"Lemme guess, you were at Henry VIII's coronation?" I asked, obviously knowing the answer.

"Yeah, how did you...?" He looked at his ring. "Oh, you saw this, ya?"

"Yes. So, you saw Anne Boleyn and co getting beheaded then?"

"Yeah yeah, obvs! I mean anyone could go to mourn or celebrate!" he replied.

"How does he use so much slang if he was alive in, like, the 16th century?" I thought to myself.

"Yeah, and so over there was where the hospital used to be." He pointed at a house in Colebrook Street.

"Yeah, when was that?" I asked, not even interested. I was too busy researching all these facts he was stating.

"It moved in 1759." Duh, of course he remembers it from, like, some 250 years ago.

"Oh wait, this is my stop." I had missed my stop by miles listening to the bus driver's historical commentary. I got off at a random stop.

"It was lovely to talk to you," he said, tipping his hat.

"Or mess up my mind," I thought to myself. "Anyway, thanks. I have to go now, I hope you don't quit the omnibus service!"

"Bye!" the driver smiled and then I saw the wrinkles on his face instantly disappear.

As soon I got out, I whipped out my phone and told my best friend everything, ending in a "do you think he's immortal...?"

The sunny days zoomed by, and every morning, evening and afternoon was spent on the golden beach. On a particularly hot morning, Signora Christina Sonoro strolled along the sandy cliffs to the beach. She was clad in scarlet red shorts and a white t-shirt with straps. She also had with her a red wide brimmed sunhat, which was intended for sunbathing with. As she walked down. Swinging her hat carelessly she spotted a curly head halfway down the beach.

'Paulo!' she cried, as she waved her brown hand. Her brother waved back to her so furiously that he fell over backwards into the golden sand. He sprawled in the sand for a few moments, spluttered a bit and then rolled forward, gurgling. Christina rushed down the path and fell on him, ticking him fondly and then proceeded to bury him in million grains of sand. Paolo got up, stumbling as he did so, pushed his sister over and sprinted away. Christina chased after him. They had gone a little way when he turned to her and stuck out his tongue.

'Come here, you naughty boy!' Christina yelled, her emerald eyes glinting. She pushed her thick black hair behind her, rubbed her nose and ran after him, who was now halfway down the shore.

Their parents were already on the beach, Signora Sonoro was sitting on a green towel, reading 'Les Miserable', a red parasol held above her head to keep the sun away. Her husband lay beside her, sunbathing.

'I hope I don't burn,' she remarked, touching her shoulder gingerly.

The sun, as if to answer, shone a little brighter.

'I hope the children don't go off too far. The tide's coming in.'

Signore Sonoro grunted and turned over on his stomach. He patted down his moustache and pulled his hat over his eyes.

'Don't fuss, Gina. They're probably playing ball or paddling. They can look after themselves.'

'No, they can't,' she replied. 'Paulo is so small and so is Christina. They could be swept away by the tide. For all we know, they could be out there being washed in by a tidal wave. Go and find your children, Enrico!'

Signore Sonoro grunted again and sighed as he got up to patrol the beach to look for his two children. His wife had that look on her face and he knew there was no arguing with her.

\*\*\*\*

A little while later he returned to Signora Sonoro and lay down again on his red and white towel.

'Well?' she asked. 'Where are they?'

'Haven't the faintest idea, Gina.' He turned over, his back to the sun.

'What! Enrico, if something happened to those children, remember you are responsible! GET UP, ENRICO! We need to scour the beach.' She prodded him with her parasol. 'We're going to find our children. They've probably smashed their little skulls on the rocks by now, thanks to your carelessness and thoughtlessness. They could have been kidnapped by smugglers and are being tortured this very minute. Terrible, terrible things might have happened to them. Let's go to the lifeguard's station immediately.'

She got up, flustered and angry. Her husband sighed and followed her. Most of his life was spent sighing.

The life guard's station was at the end of the beach. Signora Sonoro marched briskly in through the door.

'I would like to know who is in charge here,' she demanded loudly.

'That would be me. What can I do for you?'

Signora Sonoro eyed the big, burly man in his sailor's trousers and jersey.

'Well, I would like to report some missing children. Probably kidnapped by smugglers or smashed on the rocks. One of them is a boy – five years old with black hair. He's wearing blue shorts. And a ten year old girl, who also has black –'

'Wait a minute, are they like these little children?'

He opened a door to reveal Paulo and Christina sitting on a wooden chair. They were fighting over a piece of string.

'Yes, like those children,' she replied, not really looking. Then she looked again.

'Christina! Paulo!' she gasped.

'Hello Mama,' they cried. 'Signore Stagetti's been fixing my float.'

'There seems to have been some mistake, Signore. I am so sorry to have troubled you.'

Signora Sonoro led the children out of the hut, her face a deep shade of red.

# ATCHOO!

By Nhu Tran

"Aargh!" I screamed as I spilled the substance on myself, which soaked the clothes I was wearing. Immediately, I rushed out of the chemistry lab to the nearest toilet, with the whole class staring at me, puzzled.

\*\*\*\*

It seemed like I've caught a cold. My teacher and nurse thought I was fine, because the substance was harmless, but still advised me to check up with the doctor in case I was having an allergic reaction. I decided not to, I've been stubborn since birth. What could possibly happen?

\*\*\*\*

Before bed that night, I sneezed loudly. Even I was startled! But the next morning, when I woke up, my body felt peculiar. As though it didn't belong to me. Tiredly getting out of bed, I made for the bathroom.

"Aargh!" There was a boy version of me in the mirror, staring straight through my soul. I kept blinking, but the petrifying image wouldn't disappear.

"What do I do?" I thought. "Should I tell someone?" I concluded that the best thing for me to do was take the day off.

\*\*\*\*

For the rest of the day, I spent my time researching. After reading more about different allergies and how they occurred, I think I'm allergic to something inside the substance. Also, to answer my question, my new "syndrome" appears to be that, whenever I sneeze, I change gender!

Even though it'll be a difficult situation to experience, I'm not telling anyone. They can't help me. No one can. They'll make it worse. I can cope.

\*\*\*\*

Unfortunately, the next day I had to come in as a boy. "No one will notice me" I thought. I have no friends anyway. The class wouldn't notice me if I was there or not.

My prediction was right. Today was like any other day, nobody mentioned me at any point.

Everything was fine until half way through the week. At the start of the day, a classmate called Daniel approached me.

"Do you possibly know who Charlotte is?" he asked calmly. He had realised that there were two versions of me attending university! My head is racing, I can't think of a reply.

"Yes, I'm her twin, Charlie. But we were separated at birth" I lied, hoping that Daniel didn't find me suspicious.

"Okay, nice to meet you. I'm Daniel" he reached out his hand and I shook it nervously.

"Let's be friends" he said, smiling softly.

\*\*\*\*

The more I had conversations with Daniel, the more I started to like him. He's friendly and helpful. I talked to him in both of my forms. Finally, I had found a friend.

One day, he suddenly whispers to me in class "I have a crush on Charlotte." Dropping my jaw, I stare at him intently. "Have any tips, Charlie?" He looked me in the eyes. They were bright blue... and beautiful.

"Uh... um..." I stuttered.

"Tell me more about her" he said.

To my surprise, Daniel was planning on confessing his feelings to Charlotte.

Do I like him? Doesn't my heart skip a beat when I see him?

I have mixed feelings, they're new and unusual. They're different.  
Keeping these thoughts in my mind, I still helped Daniel to confess to  
Charlotte. I told him more about Charlotte, her hobbies, her interests.

\*\*\*\*

The day I had been expecting finally came, the day I walked through  
the door as a girl. I knew exactly what was coming.

During lessons, I couldn't help but to take a quick glance at Daniel  
every once in a while. Towards the end of the day, once class had  
finished, he dragged me to a place where I had never been before, a  
place that I could have only come across in a dream. It was exquisite.

"Do you like the view?" Daniel asked quietly.

"I love it!" I replied. To help him, I had mentioned that nature was  
one of Charlotte's favourite things. Unexpectedly, he pulled out a box  
of chocolates, just like I had instructed him.

"I love you..." he said shyly, gazing at me.

I replied anxiously, "me too..."

## FLICKERS AND FLASHES

*By Grace Johnson*

A portrait in the human body,  
That flickers like light switches.  
It shows the seekers, the seers,  
The listeners, their opinion.

With one flash and one word,  
The portrait changes.  
With eyes opened wide,  
Teeth on show and her mouth stretched  
Up to her cheek bones.  
Another word comes by and the portrait  
Changes.

Eye-brows raised, wrinkled up nose,  
Eyes straightened into straight lines.  
Her sweet smile switches into a neutral frown.  
One flash goes by and the portrait  
changes.

The human portrait moves left and right.  
And again.  
Her eyes stretched open,  
With no time for blinking.  
Her mouth trembles to afraid to talk.

With a flash and a word,  
The portrait changes  
Red shows itself across her face,  
As she starts to blush.  
Her smile appears again  
With colourful emotions flowing around.  
As the words, the flashes all die down.

# DANCE

*By Cassie Wicks*

A little girl tip-toes into the village hall.  
Her pink tutu and pale slippers match the sparkly  
fairy wand swaying in her hand. She grins  
at her mother at the side of the room  
and as the twinkly music starts up, she's Darcey Bussell  
A ballerina in front of a cheering crowd  
and as the rose petals fall, she dances  
and she disappears. She fades into the music.

A taller girl lingers in the same empty hall.  
Her dark blue leotard now cuts into her skin,  
with her hair scraped into a tight, choking bun. She laughs,  
chatting softly at the back of the room,  
and as the rhythm enraptures the others, she goes through  
the motions, lagging behind, stuck in her skin,  
insecurities anchoring her. She dances  
but she can't disappear. She's painfully visible.

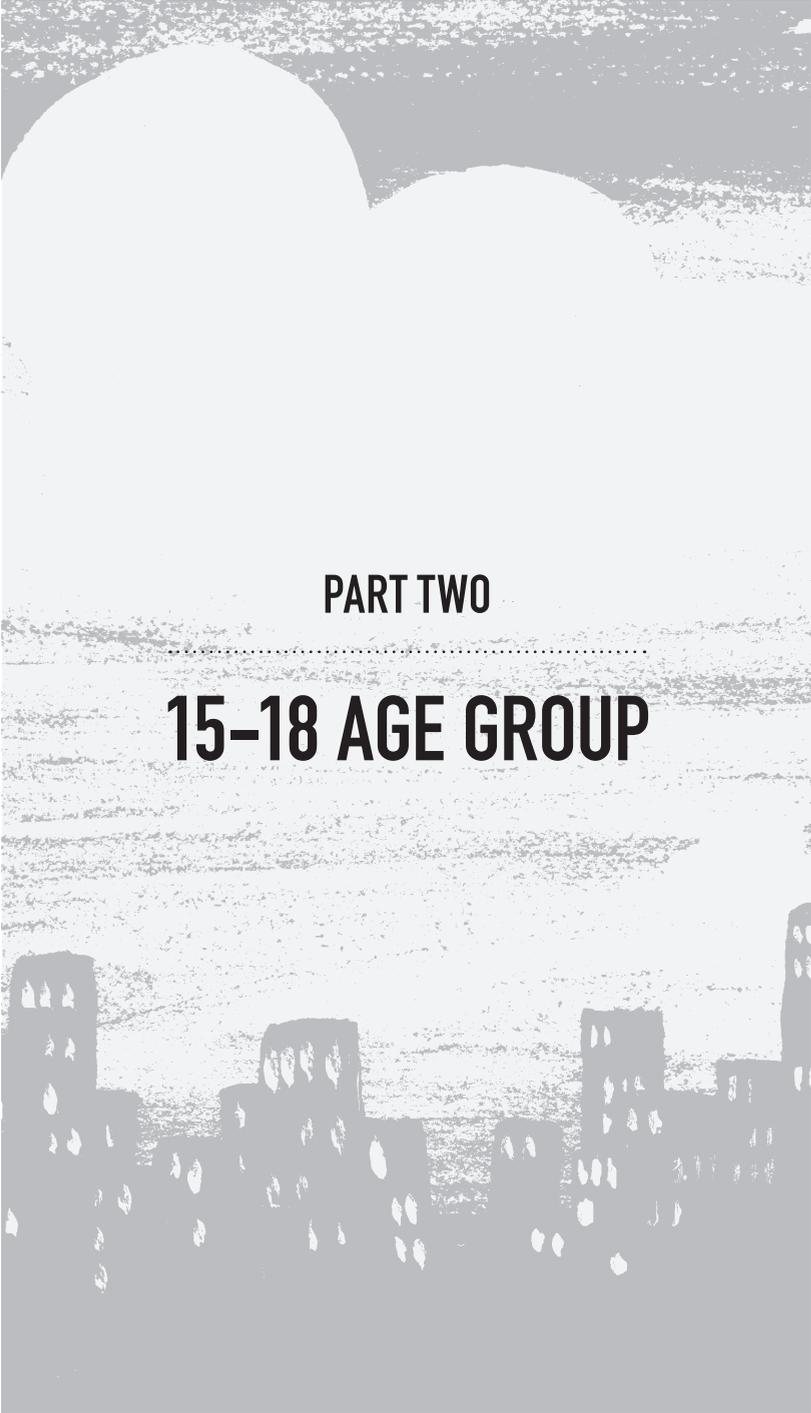
An older girl stands under glaring lights.  
She wears a beautiful old dress, a costume,  
that isn't hers. She waits  
as she follows those ahead, dancing the Charleston,  
as the orchestra deafens, overwhelms - so she waits  
for someone to show her the way. This isn't her,  
so she aches for long-gone bittersweet freedom. She dances  
but she can't disappear. She's someone else.

A teenage girl stands in her room.  
She wears her glasses as she stares  
at her abandoned book atop her desk. She tells herself  
'Homework', 'revision', 'things to do'  
but that upbeat tune leads her away from the desk  
to better, past times when she was free  
and the anchor of her worries is yanked aside. She dances  
and she disappears. She fades into the music.

# HANDS UP

*By Katie Chant*

Hands up for the people in the back,  
Step up, stand out,  
Cut yourself some slack,  
Take names, kick ass,  
Take everything thing they tell you with a little pinch of sass,  
Pretending to be extraverted,  
Actually introverted, anxious and alone,  
We can stand together,  
Stretch your arms, touch the sky,  
Spread your wings, learn to fly,  
We're on fire watch us burn,  
You lose until you learn,  
Our mistakes are what make us,  
We will never let them break us,  
Cracks the pavement,  
Cracks in the mirror,  
Cracks in the glass,  
We are free at last,  
Wave your hands, let them see you,  
Shout out loud, let them hear you,  
But never let them change you,  
Hands up for the people in the back,  
Moving forwards ready to attack,  
Put your hands up.



## PART TWO

# 15-18 AGE GROUP

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Susmita Bhattacharya. I'm the lead facilitator for the Mayflower Young Writers and I teach the 15-18 age group.



What do you get when you put together a group of young people, oodles of talent, loads of fun and a high coolness quotient in a historic theatre setting?

The Mayflower Young Writers of course!

They've come such a long way from that cold Saturday morning in January, 2017 when we first started these sessions. They have written short stories and poems, been commissioned to write monologues and duologues for the Mayflower Youth Theatre to perform at the Titanic exhibition at SeaCity Museum. They have written pieces inspired by the voices of immigrants from the archives of Southampton libraries, and read them out to the public at the Solent Showcase Gallery Stand Together exhibition. They've performed in poetry slams and Words on Wheels and also lent their voices to the 100 Voices 100 years podcast project celebrating 100 Years of Suffrage. They have retold old favourites like The Tiger Who Came to Tea, and also written poetry while watching the live streaming of the Royal Wedding. Yes, they've done it all!

It's been such a pleasure to watch them grow – in their confidence, in their writing, in their friendships, and their commitment to attend every Saturday session with a smile on their faces.

Keep going, Mayflower Young Writers, and remember the world is your oyster!

**Susmita Bhattacharya**

Lead facilitator

# PAPER MONEY

*By Della Darvill*

How can a piece of paper, small and tinted green,  
Hold such a value that we can't really see?  
Not its material worth we spend our days chasing,  
But that raw value of our innocence slowly fading.  
While we weigh our worth  
On the weight of our purse  
I remember a simpler time,  
When plastic fish and chips  
Would cost a million quid  
And that was never considered a crime.

The year my pocket money went from four, thick, gold coins  
To a single, thin rectangle of paper,  
The small smile on the crowned lady's face told me I'd made it in life.  
Folding, crunching, crumbling, smoothing,  
The joy of its gain, the hurt of its losing,  
Folding the Queen's face into various shapes -  
A glorious paper £5 note.  
The point money does in fact grow on trees being officially proven.

But then, we started chopping too many of our trees  
Yet invented environmentally friendly washing machines,  
And we - somehow - lost that piece of paper, small and tinted green,  
To a turquoise oblong of polypropylene.  
Paper to plastic; pure polluted pristine.  
The limp folds don't retain any hold,  
Yet it can't be scraped to its original shape.  
Her majesty's face is kept blandly in place  
Within that warehouse cold polymer-fibre mould.  
Now, plastic shall be placed  
Into small children's hands,  
And that feel of paper money is something else  
They'll never understand.

# I KILLED A SPIDER

*By Dominic Green*

I killed a spider.  
I drowned him down the drain,  
I didn't even ask his name;  
I didn't know it was a he:  
I didn't even ask their name,  
but I drowned them down the drain.  
I killed the spider anyway.

In an erratic, arach-nic action atoned to execution,  
I took my pail – a toothbrush holder - of cold water,  
and poured...

But alas, the spider's back again.  
He's found his way back up the drain.  
He's sweating tap water and  
his legs are all aquiver but  
he's there.  
I could give him a second chance... no chance.  
I send him down the drain again.  
I kill the spider anyway.

I brush my teeth with all the makings of  
a creepy crawly conqueror  
but what  
catches the corner of my cornea  
but

the spider, in a ball,  
no longer knowing how to crawl.  
He's drenched right through to bone,  
or whatever insides spiders own.  
He's defeated by my slaughter  
but as I run the boiling water,  
the spider's puppy-eyes are all I see.  
Let's call it quits and leave him be.

I'm sure he'll get back up again.  
I hope he doesn't tell his friends.  
Or grow big enough, I dare to dread,  
to have a go at drowning me instead.

# THREE MINUTES

By Sam Hunt

**10:57**

11:00 was the time they were coming. That meant I just had those three minutes left, three precious minutes, to fit in 18 years of feelings and emotions. It was just me now, stood in the porch, cardboard boxes all around me, the boxes all had big words on them in a big black pen - 'Books', 'Toys', 'Games' - all the hassle of moving house but instead of moving, you're throwing most of this away. You'll keep the odd 'encyclopaedia', after all doctors need these things.

Things would obviously change. Not a 'let's replace the carpet change' or 're-paint the wall change' - but a change where you're leaving and probably not going to come back. The house seems to be empty, just the sofa, the tv and the table in the living room. Just the bed and a cabinet in the bedroom.

**10:58**

I walk past the living room, and I see in the corner of my eye, the photo albums that were all laid out on the table and I couldn't resist not to have a look. I remember that, I thought. The first Christmas with the three of us, the one where the grandparents helped us decorate the tree - We all held out the fairy lights and our cat at the time kept trying to climb up it and kept pulling it down! That's the first holiday, with the rolling sand on the beach and us on the inflatables out to sea, it was pretty scary when the tide pushed us out more than we expected and us trying to get help from the French Lifeguard who didn't speak any English - I remember that too! The first time we all took a trip to the theme park! The one where we were all smiling to the camera as the log flume took us down into the water. Look at the ponchos we were wearing - we look ridiculous!

The first day at primary school. The first time a tooth fell out. The first time we saw Father Christmas. It was all captured here as a series of photographs. Memories which once were.

**10:59**

I make my way back to the door with the rucksack and the box of sandwiches for the long journey ahead. I see him standing there. The person whom it'll be hardest to say goodbye too. I look at the

mantelpiece in the hallway and see one last photo. I look at it closely one last time and I see the three of us at a wedding, all smiling - together. The honk of the car echoes throughout the house - this was it, they were here, it was time to say goodbye. It would be alright though - surely? I mean this has happened once before already, it can't be much different.

We stood looking at each other before giving each other a hug - that feeling would last a lifetime - it's not everyday where you have to say goodbye. I can feel his beard against mine as we hug - I can feel his warm hands on mine as he moves away from me.

"Good luck son." I say - "I can't wait to see you at Graduation!"

He takes his rucksack and his lunchbox from me and walks to the car where his friend is.

"See you at Christmas!" he calls back.

"It couldn't come sooner!" I reply.

With that, he was gone.

The house is empty, it's just me.

**11:01**

Time to start my new life.

# LUCKY SHELL

By Eva Townsend Bilton

Here it was once again, resting comfortably in the palm of my hand, as if it had never left. The small shell spiralled up into a point, whorls of stone smoothed over by the sea. The colour wasn't too interesting to look at, not initially at least. It used to be slightly pink, almost flesh-toned, but the sun had bleached it, robbing it of its colour the same way it'd been stolen from me. Only I knew that when you held it up to the light a pearly streak was revealed, and in it every colour of the rainbow shimmered. It was truly ethereal, the way the shell came to life, like a part of another world had somehow drifted up on the shore and I was lucky enough to see through its disguise, to claim it, even if I was to soon have it taken from me. Still, it's with me again now. That's all that matters.

I look inside and – yes, there were the glimmering salt crystals that'd made the shell seem so special to the six-year-old me that'd found it, a girl who now seems blurry around the edges, like a character from a film I saw too long ago to properly recall. The crystals sparkled as I rotated the shell in my hand, capturing the light in the room and transforming it into a thousand rainbows, soaking the palm of my hand with red orange yellow green blue purple, an intricate process of reflection and refraction and just the right amount of magic.

I put the shell to my ear expecting to hear the calming wash of the ocean, the main reason I'd carried this relic around with me all the time. To hear that noise, to close my eyes and be taken far away to a beach where I stood in solitude, surrounded by the hushing of the waves going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth like a lullaby. Alone, and at peace. Twelve years ago she'd stolen this peace from me – Chloe Wayne-Morris, the stuck-up, vapid, pathetic liar of a – well, at least she won't do it again.

I am surprised when I do not hear the ocean. For a moment there is nothing, a silence that I feel, like a slap in the face or a punch to the stomach; disappointment laced with a teary sadness. For a moment this silence makes everything seem pointless, hopeless, and then I hear it: the whispering, not of the ocean, but of me. I can hear my voice, softer, less nasal, the voice of a child who has not yet experienced stress or hopelessness, or the pain of loss. I can make out words, the secrets I used to whisper to this shell at just six years old, the wishes and yearnings that seemed so important at the time but mean nothing to me now, admissions and confessions I would tell no one,

but would sit and whisper into this shell. And now they are being said back to me, secrets spilling out of the shell, tripping over each other in their urgency to be heard, some amidst giggles, some with clear apprehension at the possible consequences.

"It was me who did the drawings on the wall."

"I hope Mummy's new baby will be a boy."

"Chloe and Charlotte are so annoying, I wish they would just die."

For a moment I forget my surroundings and just close my eyes, watching the slideshow of memories that appear behind my eyelids, relaxing as this ocean of the past carries me away, to a simpler time.

"Emma's my best friend now."

"I can't wait 'till I'm seven, I'll be so grown up."

The days I can't even remember I've forgotten come flooding back now, the fraying edges of my memory, like an ancient book or a melting ice berg, feel temporarily restored. I've always felt like I've been trying to outrun a cloud that's fast approaching, casting more and more of my life in shadow until nothing is left but the future, a huge gaping ravine of possibilities, and it's dark, so dark, but the cloud is still creeping up on me, darkness from both ends swallowing me up until there will be nothing left. But now there is light behind me and I can feel safe, at last. People tell you not to dwell in the past, but how can I not when it's so much more comfortable there?

"I stole a pencil from Miss Baily."

"I don't like Emma anymore."

The voice finally dies down, and now, content for the time being, I may leave this house, this room, Chloe's room. I look around with disdain at the pink walls that scream childhood, and the more recent decorations, like fairy lights around her mirror, the shattered plant pot that I'd broken climbing through the window, and the string of photos of friends and family that adorn the wall around her bed. She smiles at me from beneath some stupid Snapchat filter, and it makes my skin crawl. I glance down at her body by my feet, lifeless eyes staring at the ceiling, throat purple from asphyxiation, and suppress a smile. No more Snapchat filters for her. I stare at her for a bit, feeling nothing but the satisfaction of justice served. Careful not to tread on any of the uprooted contents of her room, I leave, and with my lucky shell sitting in my pocket again at last, I can finally feel at peace.

# "IT'S A SAD TALE, IT'S A TRAGEDY"

*By Sophie Lockwood*

Orpheus knew why he was sat alone at the table, in an empty house: He loved his wife too much. The emotional journey they took together when he was a penniless actor, the way they promised to stay together, in sickness and in health. He had almost forgotten she was no longer here. Waking up in the morning, he searched for her warmth in their bed, before remembering.

It is in this part of the tale that we meet Hermes, a star reporter. His double degree in human psychology and journalism meant that he could get answers, details, and stories out of even the most stone-faced, closed-off person. Now, Hermes had seen and heard Orpheus' possible upcoming rise to stardom and knew that if he got an interview with him before anyone else, he would get a pay raise.

Before carrying on, there are details the reader must know. Demeter, the Mayor, had a daughter, Persephone by name, who had fallen in love. Her lover's name was Hades and he ran one of the most detestable, reputable fight clubs in the area. After an impromptu marriage between the lovers, Demeter had been forced to accept the idea that this illegal fight club had to stay open. For her daughter. But there was a catch, a hitch in the contract: Persephone was only to stay with Hades 6 months out of every 12. Despite the legalisation of the club, stepping inside was like surrendering your social acceptance and she would not wish that upon her daughter.

With nothing at home to cure her boredom, Eurydice settled on a walk. She set out with the intention to find amazing landscapes and beautiful city centres, but somehow she found herself in some rural dystopian forest. Before she could even contemplate the numerous wrong turns she could have taken to get there, she came across frighteningly handsome man.

He had charmed her, and he knew it. It was as if she were a canary and he had a handful of birdseed. Against her better judgement, she followed him as he beckoned, traipsing even further into the dark forest. He had a way of intriguing Eurydice, she didn't know what it was but was ready to find out.

In the heart of the forest, there stood a complex of buildings. They were run-down and worn-out but seemed alive. The closer the pair got to these buildings, the louder they seemed to get. From inside there seemed to be some kind of chanting, which, instead of warning Eurydice, seemed to entice her even further. Within minutes of arrival, Eurydice had signed her life away purely to find out more about the man who had beckoned her here. With one signature, Eurydice, daughter of Apollo, would never see the sun again.

Hermes had watched these series of events unfold. His walk to the office, however, was interrupted by Orpheus, quizzing him in every way he knew possible for the whereabouts of Eurydice; he just finished work and wanted to surprise her. Hermes searched for a gentle way to tell the lovestruck man that he would never see his beloved again. But the words just slipped out and Orpheus was soon sprinting through the forest, all thoughts of professional decency and social hierarchy left behind at the edge of the forest.

The complex wasn't hard to find, and the buildings weren't too hard to navigate. Yes, Orpheus knew that just being in this building would ruin his career; Hermes had eyes and ears everywhere, but love can do this to a man's heart. And there it was, the main room with a huge 14ft-high cage. But that wasn't where Orpheus' attention lay, but rather on the beautiful woman sat uncomfortably on the other side of the room. Eurydice had discovered exactly who Hades was and she hated herself for getting trapped in his charm like a fly in honey.

Orpheus walked up to Hades, his face eerily calm and demanded he let the girl go. Hades knew if he just let them go his respect and career would crumble around him, but if he forced the girl to stay, he would be crowned a heartless king. He set forth a proposition. Fight in the cage. If Orpheus wins, he is half way to walking Eurydice out alive; if he loses, then only he would be able to walk out. The piece of paper that Eurydice signed upon entering meant that she was legally bound to Hades, she couldn't do anything without his consent.

# أسماء

By Maddie Garrett

The fight had ended merely moments after it started, with Orpheus crowned victor. Hades saw how quick the boy was to defend his wife and instantly knew what needed to happen. The final task was a simple one: peacefully walk out of the compound without talking.

The end was in sight, and it hadn't been a smooth ride. What Hades neglected to tell them was that his men would be in every corridor and around every corner, provoking them.

One more corner and they would be free, and Orpheus genuinely didn't know if he could take it. One person, however, took it too far and commented on the horrific family Orpheus had married into. And that was the final straw, no one had the right to say that about the light of his life. Blinded by the pent-up anger of this place, he took a swing at the man. In one fatal blow, he condemned his wife to a lifetime of pain and misery.

The papers the next morning had the full story, "There was a railroad line on a road to Hell. There was a young man down on bended knee. And that is the ending of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. See, Orpheus was poor boy but he had a gift to give: he could make you see how the world could be, in spite of the way that it is. But in the end, only he could see".

Last night somebody said your name.  
It was only  
the ostentatious presenter on the TV,  
naming a contestant.  
It was the name that belonged to  
The boy with ocean eyes;  
That one I use to call down the stairs to ask for  
milk and two sugars  
in my favourite mug on a  
frosty Wednesday morning,  
While Radio 4 played on our  
little WIFI speaker.  
It was that same name I repeated  
to the vicar  
When asked me if I would keep you  
To have and to hold,  
Till death do us part.  
That name I use to  
gasp through fractured giggles,  
After you told me one of your dearest jokes,  
And our stomachs would claw at us for laughing so madly,  
That name I whispered.  
The first time it happened.  
While you gripped the bathroom sink in tight fists,  
Anger in your pretty blue eyes.  
And it was that name I shouted when you  
wouldn't leave our house.  
Our room,  
the night after you did it again.  
It was the name that gave me shivers up my bruised spine, when  
the judge read it out in the echo of the courtroom.  
The pathetic collection of syllables  
I had cried over for all these months but,  
Last night  
I heard your name  
and I felt nothing.

# SNAKES AND SHED SKIN

*By Will Reynolds*

I can't see  
through wet and broken contact lenses,  
shattered fragments  
shatter  
the fragments  
of my memory.

It drops  
as I, and falls behind my face.  
Not to be seen, to hide, to run  
across those faces  
I can't see

The path  
Splits and splits and manifests into a crossword  
Of what I should have said.  
Could have said.  
Speechless puzzles cover these expressions  
I can't see

This pencil  
I give to you to fill in my blanks.  
To give me reason, only to be erased  
with a single drop  
of thought.

A vision  
Unearthed through vast thickets of thoughts.  
An aftermath surrounds, damp and dead.

Tired am I of these trivial tragedies.

This horizon, plagued as it be, is mine  
to dream. This answer, cunning as it be, is mine  
to trust. This puzzle, fruitless as it be, is mine  
to scrawl. This tear, cold as they be, is mine  
to tear apart  
as you have to me,  
For I cannot be seen.

# A COLLECTION OF SUMMERS, A COLLECTION OF FICTIONS

*By Hannah Wood*

She closes her eyes  
and counts balloons that are pulled away  
into the night sky.  
Somewhere out there  
a party is going on  
and she thinks maybe  
she hears echoes of beer cans spitting as they split-crack open,  
turning the night into something metal.

She breathes out  
to erase all the times she looked at an aeroplane  
and named it an aeroplane;  
tonight  
she will not let the magic die.  
That  
is a diving star  
a gliding spaceship  
a paper lantern that has stayed in the sky since New Year's Eve  
and aeroplanes do not exist.

Dawn erupts above.

A hungry breeze strikes at the flower petals,  
we are smelling the grass,  
fists curled up in hot soil,  
bubbling mud in the heat,  
we talk about what nobody else but the rosebush knows,  
lift the lid off summer,  
scrape our toes on dissolving plaster  
at the bottom of the paddling pool,  
where we believe tomorrow swims  
as a chlorine-fresh reflection.  
(We must believe in something.)

# THE SHADOWS BETRAY HIM

*By Morgan Storey*

We remember a mousetrap in the lobby  
and the morbid curiosity  
of the tiny dead thing lying on the sack of potatoes,  
the smell of cold lino,  
damp vegetable peelings,  
something growing older  
when we learnt how to lock the back door.

The day breaks  
and mends itself  
and breaks again;  
night descends,  
sure as anything,  
sure as the pop of a balloon.

The hallway smells sterile, like lemon and lime disinfectants. It's so strong that it chokes him and makes him feel sick to his stomach, it's an onslaught of smell and he hates it. His bare feet pad across the laminate flooring, loud in the quiet hallway; the floor is cold against his feet and sticky from the cleaning products they use. When he looks up again he finds that he's wandered to the only hallway with other people in. It is very bare, with just a few chairs and pictures of long forgotten people along the wall, fluorescent lamps dangle from the ceiling cascading white light across hallway - though it is barely strong enough to light the area up, it sucks the colour from the tiles and makes the space feel claustrophobic; too small to be comfortable. Maybe coming down here was a bad idea.

He pushes on though, taking in his dull surroundings - grey layered on grey which only adds to the claustrophobic feeling of the area. A freezing wind barrels down the corridor and bites at his exposed skin, leaving goosebumps crawling up his arms like fingers tickling his skin. He continues on and someone smiles at him as he passed by - the same fingers dig into his cheek and forces his lips into a smile, it's crooked and unfamiliar but they seem to buy it. The fingers let go once he turns away and he falls back into his lingering frown.

The corner turns on to another bleak corridor, leading onto another and another and each one of them feels cooler and cooler and darker, like a lingering something was slowly stealing the light. He guesses hospitals are just like that. Corridors eventually stop at his door, a door which is decorated with different pictures, ones of his family and friends and pictures he drew in "art therapy".

It's bitterly cold inside his room, his hand rising quickly to turn the heating up and to grab a jacket off the back of the door to keep warm. The lemon and lime smell is ten times more intense in here so he assumes they must have just cleaned. Thankfully, they've left his walls alone. (Instinctively he double checked all his paintings making sure they hadn't been scraped off.) From bunnies to a grinning dog, his walls were covered in his art. Lingering eyes in the corner watch him and watches back for a few moments too long and he has to force himself away from the hypnotising grin slowly growing there, reminding himself that it isn't real. That it was just paint. He drops onto

# MEMORY (NOUN) | RECOLLECTIONS OF A SPECIFIC EVENT OR EPISODE

By Millie James

his bed with a small huff, taking a deep breath and closing his eyes as he relaxes. The bed drips beside him but he doesn't move or opens his eyes to look at whatever it is, he just hopes it will leave before he is asleep.

He isn't lucky.

He slowly drifts off into a silent slumber, dreamless, until the terrors start to creep into his head and fill his mind with nightmares. He wakes up screaming, sitting up in fear with an outstretched hand. He sucks in deep breaths, staring at the far wall with dread. Clenching his hand into a fist he forces himself to relax, absently picking at the bandages on his arm as his head fills with those disturbing images.

\*\*\*\*

Loud, hysterical laughter echoed from the top of the stairs where he sat, waiting. Though - the voice hadn't come from him, no, it came from someone... something else, something he didn't quite understand. Slender fingers settled on his cheeks and dug in, forcing his mouth into a grin. He wanted to fight against it, his mind screaming: "No! No I'm not happy! I cannot smile I can't -"

His pleading eyes shot around the room as looked everywhere, anywhere, searching for a safe space for him to stare and forget but there was so much blood - there is too much blood- finally his eyes settled on the body at the bottom of the stairs.

\*\*\*\*

He remembers waking up like this many times since it happened. He can remember the pain that is slowly filling his empty chest like black tar infecting him. He forces himself to settle back into his pillows, taking long shaky breaths as he bottles up his emotions, locking the lid on tight. The bed shifts beside him again and again he doesn't look, he knows what is there. It is a shifting mass of shadows, a body of crawling worms- it is his depression, the source of his anxiety. It is a mismatched being made of his broken parts, made of misery poured from his soul.

It is the puppet master and he is the marionette attached to its string.

We were almost in Turkey, Alex held my hand tightly as the plane landed, I looked over to see the excited look on his face. He always wanted to travel and now we finally were doing it together. His eyes sparkled as my lips touched his following the same rhythm as if they were made for each other. People were looking as we left the airport but who cared, we were a couple in love. The car ride to our hotel was thankfully short because I wanted to be at the beach with my handsome boyfriend and spend the first leg of our plan to travel the world.

There are a few things about my Alex that made me love him even more. The way his hair would always get in front of his face and the little flick of his head he'd do to get it out of his eyes. How he used to stick his thumbs out of the pocket and rub the material whilst his other hand was occupied with mine, it was like he needed both hands gripping onto something, as he knew he was slowly slipping away. That little smile he used to give when another round of his medicine was done; the smile that seemed to get weaker and weaker every time.

One night when we were coming back to the hotel room Alex was in a bad mood, I had assumed it was from tiredness, but he wouldn't even look at me. I asked if he was alright but just ignored me, he was so different, and I didn't know why. I lay down on the bed assuming that he was going to join me but instead he walked out onto the balcony. They told me he was going to change due to the tumour, but I didn't think he would become so cold, such a different person.

It was after the fifth treatment that Alex asked for it to stop, he was so weak. There was something in his eyes that told me he couldn't do it anymore. The doctors told me that Alex had a chance and there were so many other things he could try. One thing about my Alex was that once he had made his mind up there was no changing it.

Walking out of the hospital that day, knowing that the next time we returned, if we did, would be the last time I would be able to look into Alex's tired hazel eyes broke my heart. I was trying to keep in mind that this wasn't because he wanted to die it was just he didn't want to be stuck in a hospital bed forever. I held his hand a little tighter than

I normally did, wishing that I could freeze time just to be with him longer. His eyes were heavy. Black circles surrounded them and the light that was once in them seemed to have gone. There seemed to be some excitement in them but everything was dulled by the exhaustion.

No one could have described the pain Alex went through over the first few weeks off of the treatment. He couldn't sleep due to the terrifying nightmares. I started to believe that it was a mistake when we were both sat down on the bathroom tiles most of the day whilst he threw up. My main thought through all of the drug withdrawal was why? We were traveling the world like we wanted to but it was nothing like we expected.

Through the first week in Spain, he was unable to leave the bed due to shakes and sweating profusely the whole time. At one point, he looked so pale and his face was so thin, and he grabbed my wrist, telling me he couldn't go through with this anymore. My heart broke for him. It had been a month and a half at this point and he kept on getting thinner and weaker every day; I even considered calling up the hospital and trying to get him back on his treatment, but he would stop me every time. I guess looking back I was being selfish because I couldn't imagine my life without him.

I didn't want to wake up and not smell his musky scent or the way he used to hide his face in my neck during treatment when he was feeling all drowsy. I didn't want to live without his warmth and his soft hands. I still don't like living without him, it seems like it will never get easier. I craved for all of this to be a bad dream and to wake with his light fingertips tracing patterns on my chest. I didn't want it all taken away from me so fast.

My last memory of Alex was whilst we were in Australia. He was laying on the sand next to me, our hands intertwined. I assumed he had fallen asleep as we watched the sun go down. He was always tired these days. I tried to shake him awake, gently at first. It soon became a desperate attempt to change what had happened. I laid him down, laying my head on his chest. The steady heartbeat slowed under my head. At that moment it felt as if my heart was doing the opposite.

He was taken to the hospital, attached to what felt like too many machines. My body felt numb as I looked at his skin, paler than it ever was. He had wires and tubes attached to every little bit of his body, all doing separate jobs in a desperate attempt to save him. I sat beside him, brushing my fingers through his hair trying to neaten it; he always liked looking his best. They told me there wasn't much they could do, that I should prepare myself. How could someone simply prepare themselves for what was about to happen to my Alex? I don't think I could have ever been prepared for how much this would change everything.

# MY CURIOSITY CABINET

By Charlotte Phillips

The house was silent. Through the thin walls, the rustle of bed sheets was absent, the whispering of conspiring children was lost and even the rhythmic sound of their shallow breathing had seemed to vanish. From outside the world was awake: horse hooves pounding against cobbles, cries from the work house and whispers in the alley ways.

I straightened under my silk sheets and without thinking grabbed the photo off my bedside cabinet. When I pulled him to the seaside, he'd grunted but a smile could not stay hidden. As the flash of the camera went off, speckles of light tattooed our skin. Our printed flesh remained so, as I stepped on my tip-toes and set my secret free. At first it struggled to escape; only a trickle of truth seeped through my lips. The secret was too strong, however. It cracked the dam of worry and silently destroyed it, allowing what had once been hidden to flow. From the photo I could see golden thread running from it's edges, outside my room and down the hallway connecting it and all it stood for to my curiosity cabinet. I smirked.

I was lost in thought when metal scraped against metal. The house was heaving at the cries of its own anguish. I undid the photo frame and delicately removed the knife- blood still lining the edges.

I walked down the hallway towards my study; a chorus of screeches from the floor boards evoked from each step.

Light framed the door of my study. I grasped the door knob, my other hand clenched around the knife. With the click of the lock unlatching, a squeal of adolescence echoed through the room.

Simultaneously, they turned around – eyes wide with confusion-standing in a devilish circle. "Mother", whispered little Eliza, "What's this?" She crept towards me, her little boots skidding on the carpet. She unlatched her fingers, revealing the contents. I sighed and told them a story.

A story of whispers that scattered across the floor, scurrying into each crack of the badly plastered walls. I felt empty, but the world was full. I felt caged, but the secrets were free. I felt powerless, but he felt like monarch.

I slipped down the grey painted walks, folding into myself like a scrap piece of paper.

Through the thick cobwebs cascading down the window, sprinkles of starlight shone through. Each flicker looked like bullet holes, the kind destined to leave undeniable agony. I ran my hand over the droplets.

I dug my nails into the light. Again and again until the skin of my fingertips began to peel back like rose petals blossoming. With one blast of fury, I smashed my hand against the panels- the flooring splintered with my heart.

I fought against everything: gravity; the remaining shard of love digging into my heart; mother's lessons on a woman's place; even my own self-doubt. But I got up. I left the house -leaving the children with the nanny- and got in my carriage. I found him easily enough and with one quick swipe...

I refused to tell them too much more, but I left them with a warning. "Don't share other people's secrets my lovelies or you'll end up like your father." I said, as I took his tongue from Eliza's trembling hands and placed it back in my curiosity cabinet. "Now off to bed.

# MEET THE AUTHORS

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Della Darvill



Maddie Garrett



Dominic Green



Tasmiah Hossen



Sam Hunt



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# MEET THE AUTHORS

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Sophie Lockwood



Alex Moodley



Tom Norman



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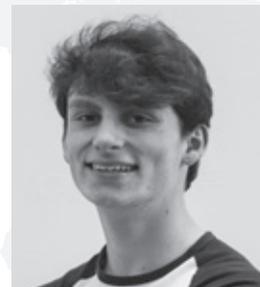
Lucy Phillips



Milly Phillips



Tabitha Phillips



Will Reynolds

# MEET THE AUTHORS

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Eva Townsend Bilton



Nhu Tran



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