

Years 12 & 13

First Prize

In The Summer

by Laura Nucinkis (Taunton's College, Southampton.)

Prologue

The island.

Lissie had a picture of it, a watercolour by Jacob, that travelled with her, the only link from hostel to bedsit to rented flat. The walls, apart from this one painting, were always bare – she needed no other, not when one look was all she needed to take her back to the pebbly shore, bare feet crunching on shells and shingle, leaping to reach the soft warm pine-needle floor. The sun beat down, browning neck and back, shifting to dappled gold as the dark green branches swayed to catch the blinding light. The sound of children, scores of them, their shouts of laughter floating down from the houses on a light, deliciously cool breeze. It was all so *clear*...Lissie could almost taste the ice-cream melting on her tongue, smell the fresh earthy smell of the forest, feel the light hot pressure on her hand.

Everything lives, and everything dies – no one knew this better than the daughter of two Caran operatives. Part and parcel with this came the bittersweet knowledge that everyone changes, everyone has to grow old, and nothing is ever quite the same the second time over.

But Lissie couldn't help willing the days away, couldn't help staring into space for what felt like days on end, couldn't help wishing for time to speed up and bring her the summer.

Those three words seemed to hold such promise, such sweet simple joy that it was all Lissie could do not to burst out laughing with sheer happiness:
In the summer.

Second Prize

The Mischievous

by Joel Stanley (Treloar College, Alton.)

I came down the creaking stairs and someone was in my house. My ageing uncle's new girlfriend, Linsie, clad in black from head to toe, was sitting, legs twisted, on the sofa, sipping tea. This was the first time she had set foot in the house and immediately she gave me the impression she had an ugly streak to her. There is something about you I don't like, I thought.

At home I crawl on the floor to get about and I felt she was looking down on me. I felt uncomfortable, that she was going to say something and stroke my head. I hate people

who say “Oh, isn’t he sweet” and speak to Mum and Dad or whoever is next to me. I think they are scared to approach someone in a wheelchair. All these thoughts had run through my head and at the time I just reproached myself for that and smiled at Linsie politely.

The only other thing I remember about that evening is her giving me a kiss on the forehead as she left dropping

“Aw, aren’t ya sweet, darling.”

She sighed with laughter, turned towards my uncle, hinted secrets at him, and staggered out of the house.

Joint Third Prize

The Unobserved

by Elizabeth Harvey (Alton College)

(Elizabeth adds that this is the opening to a psychoanalytical portrayal of Mary Bell.)

The dusk drew in, unusually quickly for a May evening. Mary sat at the window, cutting and sticking. For a ten year old she used vast amounts of concentration as she meticulously cut round the pictures with her yellow scissors. In the next room she could hear her mother...her mother breathless...her mother earning the rent. Minutes later the door opened, and a black shadow exited, her mother walked to the front door. Mary heard the door shut. *Mary you best be ready. Now get in there lie on my bed, and remember there is no such word as no.*

Some girls could cry themselves to sleep; she could not. The shadows came almost every night. They took over her, there wasn’t a part of her that could be secret. All the other girls at school had secrets, she had no secrets. They all had things they whispered about to each other and giggled over. All she had was the shadows to whisper in her ears, no-one giggled at them!

Late at night she lay tossing and turning. Her bed itched, her nightgown itched, she itched. She scratched raw at her arms and legs, the dirt under her nails mixing with the bloody grazes being made on her skin. She was thinking was this what it was like for that Howe boy, was his pain like this? You can’t feel pain when you’re dead...can you? As she thought this she scratched deeper, the itches were nothing now but the blood was flowing, she could feel it warm and sticky between her fingers. But then she remembered that Howe boy never spilt blood, no red just blue. She giggled, that was her secret, she had something to keep as a secret.

Joint Third Prize

Box

by Mat Power (Alton College)

He unfastened the second button of his polo shirt. He slackened and carefully retied the right shoelace of his black brogues, before doing the same with his left shoe. He loosened his watch strap and checked his reflection in the screen of his phone, before fastening the second button of his polo shirt.

Matthew Box was a wreck. The people passing him in Fulham High Street that morning would have thought him to be a calm, confident young man on his way to work, if they bothered to notice him at all. The other six interviewees that lined the uncomfortably tight reception knew differently. Despite the fact that these seven men were all directly competing against one another, most had a level of compassion for at least one other man in the room. They could all tell how long the others had been out of work, and all ranked themselves in terms of their prospective chances of being the one to be handed a lifeline. Each one sympathized with those below themselves in the pecking order.

Every man in that room pitied Matthew Box.

Twenty seven minutes later, and he was back on the street, the level of perspiration on his brow somewhat higher than an hour previous. There was no need to wait for the text to confirm it, Matt had blown another one. The pack of Marlboro Lights in his back pocket was empty, but he checked it anyway, as if a cigarette, a salvation, had somehow worked its way in there since his last check. His agent was ringing him, but he ignored it.

Matthew Box skulked off down the street, a broken man.

Highly Commended

Distant Tracks

by Madeline Joint (Alton College.)

The train hammered along the track, worn suits hanging blankly onto walls and crumpled in its seats. Each was battling quietly the mad game we must all play on trains – simultaneously studying every face, body and movement around us in the release of tension and boredom, whilst invading no one’s space; staring at no one long enough to become ensnared in the uncomfortable awkwardness that comes with eye contact between introverts.

Again the train rumbled, jerking its passengers in their seats; the unwary and unbraced. The girl found herself floor space of some description and wall enough to lean on. She smiled absently at the elderly man on the seat next to her perch. Matthew noticed her, and was interested briefly by the cut of her jacket and the interesting fluffed lining on her boots, though without concerning his long-term memory, which was now busy pondering the tastes of different foods.

He felt a flicker of irritation as her phone vibrated loudly, and he smoothed the back of his dark hair with the palm of his free hand, fussing quietly over the constant worry of thinning. He scowled inwardly at the certain hypocrisy of his disapproval; he worked freely on the train, and answered his phone at will on the tube – he reasoned that he was not alone; oneself is always an exception because you are inclined to be empathetic of the circumstances.

Highly Commended

It's Like Broken Glass

by Rebecca Scivier (Taunton's College, Southampton.)

Everything in my life seemed flawless, as though it was hand-shaped and crafted from the finest of glass. Even if you were to look closely upon it, the diminutive faults would appear too insignificant to notice. I had two of the most affectionate and doting parents anybody could ever wish for. I was doing well in school, getting good results and could almost grasp my anticipated future into the world – but then it all came crashing down.

Suddenly I found myself wearing an attire of all black and receiving kisses from people I neither knew, nor cared for. The sweet smell of white lilies and black roses filled the air, comforting the soft whispers of these strangers who now occupied *my* house. I hadn't cried. I had to be strong; I knew it was what they would have wanted.

Once the funeral was over there seemed to be a lot of uncertainty about my newly 'orphaned' position, the uncertainty of the situation was basically – I had nowhere to go.

I've never felt so alone in my life.

The social services swarmed me with adoption possibilities, my heart sunk, it was as though the most imperative part of my life had faded away, leaving me the only one to keep my parents alive, with my dearest memories. How would anyone know about my father's laugh, so infectious it was impossible not to also fall about in loud hysterics? Or how my skin would shiver as I heard my mother's melodious lullabies as she soothed me to sleep?

How would I ever be able to pick up the futile, fragile pieces that were left?

Years 10 and 11

First Prize

Dreamfire Girl

by Clodagh McSweeney (Perins School, Alresford.)

Arowyn sat beside the icy water, staring at her reflection. It was night. Rainbow threads of Dreamfire, The Northern Lights, shimmered and whirled above her head, cold and magical, giving the world a beautiful, lonely sheen. She touched her hand to her latest bruise, a shadowy patch of purple-black on her cheek. Why? She had done nothing. But she knew her father, like the rest of the village, blamed her for the death of her mother. Drunk, with the anger seizing him, she always ended up with more bruises, more fear. There was no escape, no one to turn to. She was bad luck. Her mother had been weak and unwell for weeks before her birth. How could that be her fault? But it was. Everyone said so.

She turned, gazing at the endless frozen sky, looking for comfort in its eternal mystery. The Dreamfire appeared almost close enough to touch tonight. Arowyn longed to join it, to be part of that infinite, mystical ribbon of hope. The dreams of all living things were up there, dancing through the darkness. Waiting for her, it seemed. Waiting for her to rise up, away from the cruelty and fear of reality into a world of wonder, warmth, friendship and happiness.

‘Arowyn!’ The harsh yell from Gaara, the village Wiseman, dragged her back into the mortal world. ‘How many times have I told you? Stay indoors when the Dreamfire is out! Do you want to bring even more bad luck on your household?’

Standing up, she glared at him. As she walked back to her hut she glanced back into the night.

‘One day,’ she promised herself ‘one day I’ll escape. Somewhere. Anywhere.’ Then a thought hit her. She knew exactly where she would go. To the only one who could help her.

Second Prize

The Vagabond

by Eleni Kolios (Lavant House School, Chichester.)

The pavements make the most wonderful sounds. The whole world is on the pavements, alive and breathing, beating, making a rhythm. I play to that rhythm, I feel it, and it keeps me alive. Only most people can’t feel it anymore, they’ve closed off their minds and never look outside their eyes. So the rhythm doesn’t reach them anymore. I might just be the only person who reaches the rhythm because I search for it. It allows me to not just see the world but feel it, listen to it. I can experience the colours of the world, it talks to me and I respond. And I know the perfect place to listen to the world and observe you, the people. Because in truth you are what makes the world so beautiful; what you can do and what you do, sometimes what you don’t do. What you should do. And I live in the human factory, the city; I live on the streets. You might call me a hypocrite, I am part of the earth and I live in the place that helps to destroy it, but the beauty is harder to see, to feel and that is what makes it so profound and powerful. But I have a question for you,

what do you see when you look at me? Homelessness? Madness? Pity? But I chose this, freedom from humanness. So I have a gift for you humans, the most beautiful of all the earth's creations, it is the only thing I have. My story. Of you.

Third Prize

The House

by Hettie Taylor (Surbiton High School.)

My first memory was in that house. That typical, redbrick townhouse. It was exactly the same as every other house surrounding it; but this house wasn't just any house, it was my home. It had bay windows with peeling paint, a rickety gate I would swing on as a child, and a large mulberry tree in the front garden. There was a petite girl standing in the bedroom window, staring at me. She had narrow shoulders and dark features. Her face was covered by the shadow of the curtains, but I could still see her gawping at me. A smirk spread across her face. She still recognized me after all these years. That should have been me, standing there, looking out at the world, watching the postman deliver letters, the children playing with a skipping rope and the neighbours walking the dog. She replaced me over night. What did I have that she wanted so much? I had a mother, a father, and a sister. We were a typical lower middle class family living in Surrey. We had just about enough money. Our house needed renovating; it was falling apart. But that house was special to me. It was where I died.

Highly Commended

Solitary Revolution

by Theo Chevallier (Robert Mays School, Odiham.)

She was alone. No one talked to her, no one listened to her – no one cared. The rest of the pupils chatted and laughed with the euphoria of breaktime; yet around her, there was a complete sphere of silence. She turned a page in one of her ever-present books, seeking an escape from the dullness of life in the adventures and romance of others. But reality seeped through; occasionally she saw herself, shunned, deserted, and abandoned. It hurt: underneath her emotionless, cold exterior, she was ashamed – ashamed of failing to find someone, ashamed of being at the bottom of the social hierarchy, ashamed of not having one friend.

It was not that she was unpleasant or weird. She just lacked the veneer of immature confidence necessary in secondary school society. There was an uneasiness in her manner: she would never quite return eye contact, and never seemed comfortable in a

group of people. Her hands were never still: they twisted and rubbed together, making her look perpetually terrified. Her eyes were open slightly wider than they should be, giving her a look of restless fear and anxiety. When she spoke, her voice was distant, as if it came from a long way away.

What made someone like this? Was she damaged, traumatized, diseased? Was some demon lurking in her past, sapping her personality, destroying her confidence? Did her parents love her? Was she as alone at home as well? Or was it that she saw what secondary school society offered – the merciless struggle for power, the endless gossip and rumours, the pretending, the acting, the lying – and rejected it all. I did not know. And perhaps it was this – this defiance of the social order, this futile rebellion, this solitary revolution – that made me love her.

Highly Commended

Behind Beautiful Faces

By Rozie Benyon (Regents Park Community College, Southampton.)

There are some people in my life that I have tried my hardest to completely erase from my mind. At least that is what I tell myself, but isn't it the people we meet in our lives that make us who we truly are?

It was summer when I first met Grace, and it was the kind of summer that produced the kind of heat that creates delirium. Especially in a town as small as New Grensville, and with teenagers as bored and rebellious as Grace. People often tell me that I could have stopped her, instead of following her like a sheep, but they were never acquainted with anyone like Grace. She was beautiful and formidable, and I was young, with a mouldable mind.

I've never been someone of any interest, just your average teenager, fading into the scenery. After my mother gave birth to my sister just a few months ago I became even more invisible, so I began roaming the streets of New Grensville, looking for something to occupy my time. I remember wandering down the high street, the heat of the pavement burning through my frayed flip-flops. Then I saw Grace. People had mentioned a new girl. She was leaning against a café window, oblivious to the world around her. Her auburn hair curled down to her collarbone, and she had the greenest eyes I ever did see. I thought she was captivating, but little did I know it was this very girl who would shake the foundations of this tranquil town.

Years 7, 8 and 9.

First Prize

New York

by Eleanor Gray (Talbot Heath School, Bournemouth.)

I can't bring myself to say it. The thought of spending the rest of my life with him terrifies me.

Everybody's looking, waiting for the two simple words that could change my life forever. My mouth is dry; my body is stiff and wooden. Tears fill my eyes as I slowly step back. I think he knows. I can see the terror in his face. My head is spinning in confusion so I turn around and walk away.

I hear footsteps running behind me, but I can't look back. I've destroyed every chance that I had being with him, and somehow I feel relieved and free.

Walking out into the cold, bustling street with my red duffle coat wrapped around my long sleek white wedding dress, it hits me. I'm in the middle of New York City, all alone, standing outside the Hilton Hotel getting strange looks from every person who walks past. I've never seen New York in daylight before. We only arrived here last night in the pitch black and even then it looked pretty, with all the lights and shop windows twinkling.

Suddenly a taxi driver pulls up in his bright yellow car, just like in the movies, and asks where I'm going.

I stop and pause a moment and then finally reply
'Everywhere, I want to see it all.'

Second Prize

Living Life To The Stick (Man)

by Jack Aling (Aldworth Science College, Basingstoke.)

I didn't want to be a Stickman, it's just how God made me, I guess.

I was artificially created in a lab, I was meant to be the world's smartest person to be created in a laboratory. But something went wrong during the process and somehow I was born a fully functioning alive and well Stickman. I wasn't the smartest person to be created in a laboratory, but I was the world's first Stickman, so I guess that's something to be proud of.

My name is Frederick Palmer. (My friends call me Fred.)

I'm 11 years old and my story is not for the faint of heart so if you easily get squeamish run away now...

For you people who decide to stay – Good Luck.

We begin my story at the Stormchaser Laboratory on August 8th 1998. That was the night when the world changed forever, but the world didn't know that yet. After hours of the decontamination process I was made, born, nope made, but I was born, everyone is born, but technically I was made, born...

WE INTERRUPT THIS STORY FOR A BREAKING NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT!!!!

At the Stormchaser Laboratory Frederick Palmer, the world's smartest person to be created in a laboratory has just been born. Wait **MORE BREAKING NEWS** Frederick appears to be a...a what? A Stickman??? But that means he was made, born, nope made, but he was born, everyone is born, but technically he was made, born...

Third Prize

I'm Just Me

by Maria Reynolds (Bitterne Park School, Southampton.)

Hello. Actually, can I start again? That sounds so boring and normal. Actually, don't worry. Dad says that we shouldn't attract attention to ourselves. Or else they'll take me into care, where you get beaten if you don't do what your foster mother or care worker says. That's what Dad says. And he knows because he's been in care. He said that once he didn't flush the toilet, so his care mother shoved his head down it. I didn't believe him, but he said it in such a way that made me. He does that sometimes. He looks at me in that way and tells me stuff, and no matter how ridiculous it sounds, I always believe him because of the way he says it. He looks all sad and swears that every bit of what he's saying is true. But he gets mad if I don't believe him. He shouts at me, saying that I don't trust him or respect him, by not believing him. It's scary. Especially where we live, because it echoes, and sounds even scarier.

I like it when I go to school, because he doesn't come with me. I can be me there. I can not be scared. Does that make sense? I can be not afraid there. Because nobody wants to hurt me. Nobody really talks to me. But I don't mind. It gives me time to be by myself. Have some 'me' time. I wouldn't mind a best friend. I've read loads of books and all the characters always seem to have a wonderful best friend to confide all their secrets to. And they have sleepovers and play together at break-time and giggle about boys. But nobody at school would do that with me.

Highly Commended

Smoke Rising

by Tamzin Barnett

You can call me Tyllah if you like. That is what I like to be called. Otherwise you can call me something different. I don't care anymore. I've been called too many names to care.

It happened at night time. After the last drum beat. Nothing stirred. Only the faint hum of mosquitoes disturbed me. Next to my brother I felt safe.

Saumon slept calmly, but I knew every one of his senses was alert. He was tall, well built and muscular. He was young.

I heard something – voices, hard and steely. Curiously, I peered out of the hut. My eyes caught something, a light illuminating a face. A dozen faces, of white men. We'd been warned before. They came and took our neighbours to an unknown land and tortured them. They were back for us.

In shock, I woke Saumon. He was quickly by my side, scanning the forest with his dark, mysterious eyes.

A white man shouted and suddenly the camp was awake with panic. The settlement was on fire! White men flooded the village filled with hatred. Saumon ran past me.

'Stay Tyllah, hide yourself!' he shouted as he entered the blur of black and white flesh. Trembling with fear, I hid in the doorway of the hut.

It all happened so quickly. Sauman came back.

'Run! Flee away,' he cried. 'Hide, I must fight these people. Pray Tyllah, I will find you. Now go.'

He was insistent, I'd turned and fled. But he never did find me. It is my job to find him.

Highly Commended

Tom

by Billy Trinkwon (Ditcham Park School, Petersfield.)

Tom squinted as he fumbled with the crumpled paper – struggling to make out the barely legible, spidery text in the faint glow of the candlelight. He pressed the lenses of his glasses hard into his eyes in an attempt to simplify the contents of the note.

Finally after five long minutes of puzzling, he was able to decipher the words: 42 Evergreen Terrace. Tom allowed himself a wry smile; he had the address.

'Mum, I'm going out!'

Tom threw on his hoodie and strode out into the night, taking care to close the front

door behind him. Turning out of Wembley Close and into the churchyard, he suddenly began to feel the unearthly chill of the cold evening air; he shivered and drew the folds of his garments tightly around him.

His eyes darted wildly left and right, skin crawling at every sound. Even before the iron gate slammed shut behind him, he broke into a run. Tom's heart pounded as he charged past the gravestones, his heavy legs spurred on by the raw fear gnawing at his insides. He ran until his burning lungs could take no more and he fell limply to the ground, gasping for air.

I have to get to the church, he told himself, and, drawing on his last reserve of energy he forced himself to continue. It felt as though, with every breath, a metal vice was being wound tighter and tighter, constricting his oxygen intake like a deadly serpent crushing a mouse; yet still he kept going, not daring to look back, until he reached the small Norman chapel that stood alone in the centre of the churchyard, flanked by a pair of tall conifers.
