



WESTBURY ARTS CENTRE A SPECIAL PLACE

AWARD WINNING STORIES 2023

Westbury Arts Centre

Registered Charity Number 1151531



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We are grateful to Old Possum's Practical Trust for a donation to fund the story writing project.

Old Possum's Practical Trust is a charity set up by Valerie Eliot, wife of the poet T.S. Eliot. The Trust supports literary, artistic, educational and theatrical projects.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to all the contributors to Westbury Arts Centre's story writing competition.

Judges:

Mallory Henson, Trustee
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Michael Lloyd, Author
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Denbigh School
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Milton Keynes College School of Arts and Media
Vonnie Raw, Artist
Karen Hisser, Artist
Lindsay Neale, Artist
Bernard Downes, Art Club
Mallory Henson, Art Club

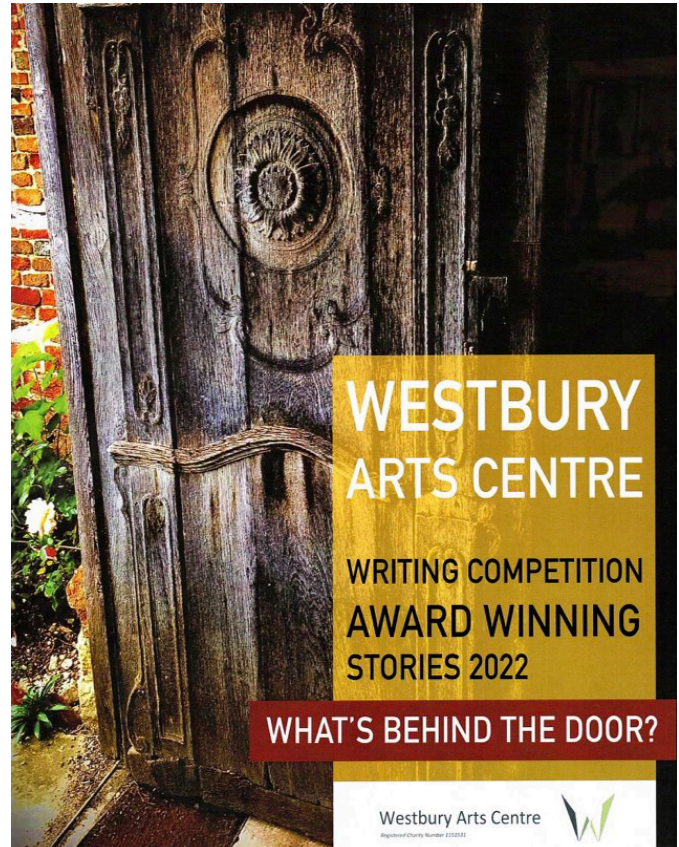
Editors:

Mallory Henson, Trustee
Vonnie Raw, Artist (images)
Hanagh Little, Designer

During 2021/22 Westbury Arts Centre held a creative writing competition for children and young people for the first time. The idea arose from our own unique 'Armada door' and the mystery that surrounds its history.

In 2022, we launched 'A Special Place' as our theme. This booklet includes the winning and highly commended stories written by pupils from local schools.

The theme is also explored in the illustrations by students from Milton Keynes College and artists from Westbury.



Westbury Arts Centre is a charity based in a Grade II listed farmhouse building on the western side of Milton Keynes. It is a thriving arts community that provides studio and exhibition spaces for professional artists. There are twenty studios occupied by artists engaging in a wide range of media. Throughout the year, Westbury delivers a high-quality programme of exhibitions, workshops, and events.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS

Westbury Arts Centre has been developing its offer to education settings. There are opportunities for schools to work with professional artists to devise workshops and training, to collaborate on projects, and to arrange visits. Westbury Arts Centre is an Artsmark Partnership Organisation and is happy to support schools in their award journey.

WESTBURY ARTS CENTRE **OUR SPECIAL PLACE**

Westbury has its own long and colourful story that dates back over a thousand years. It is a unique setting, with its historical building and biodiverse grounds. Through ancient wars and agricultural changes, the people making a living here have seen many owners and changes.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT WESTBURY

- Saxon remains have been found on the site.
- Westbury appears in the Domesday book.
- Part of the original moat can be seen at the side of the building.
- The 'Armada' door has been dated to the late 1500s (Tudor period).
- An artists' collective called The Silbury Group set up Westbury Arts Centre 30 years ago.
- The site has a community garden and beehives.

The tranquil and diverse environment of Westbury is the ideal setting for artistic exploration and development, and we were keen to encourage pupils from local schools to make their own contribution through their stories. Most of us recall special places from our favourite books: secret gardens, other worlds, and long-lost civilisations are popular settings for adventures. Some tales transport readers to desert islands or snowy landscapes, whereas others are located in cities buzzing with energy. Readers can visit places from the distant past or remain closer to the comforts of home.

The challenge for the creative writing competition was to write an original story about a special place of the writer's choosing. This could take inspiration from Westbury's unique environment or from other places. The piece could be an adventure story, a mystery or a thriller, set in times past, present or future. The possibilities are endless.

The question is: What is your special place?

THE STORIES

Stories were judged in three age groups and six schools took part this year. We were encouraged to receive a large number of stories, particularly from younger writers. The judges were struck by the variety of entries and found selecting winning stories to be quite a challenge!

Settings in the adventures ranged from oceans to football pitches, from a museum and a cathedral to alien worlds and hidden spaces. The special places in the tales were not always friendly, and were sometimes downright hostile! Some stories left us wondering what would happen next. Was it a dream or a nightmare, or were we lost in a game after all? It was a relief that there were some happy endings: an endangered species saved, diamonds discovered, and a lifelong love story to warm our hearts. And despite the challenges faced in overcoming conflict and danger, there were successes to be celebrated.

Dramatic images from the talented students from Milton Keynes College and from Westbury's own artistic community help to bring it all to life. The students' work was completed during visits to Westbury and features our building and grounds. See if you can spot some of the animals that visit us on quieter days.

We are planning to put a copy of the booklet on our website so it can be shared with friends and family. Do take a look to see what else is happening: www.westburyartscentre.org.uk If you'd like to keep in touch, Westbury has a newsletter about our events and activities. Look out for our open studios and exhibition during Bucks Arts Weeks in June.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the competition, and particularly to our sponsor, Old Possum's Practical Trust, for their support for the project.

Finally, and most importantly, congratulations to our award winners. We hope they will take inspiration from the competition and keep on writing.

We have enjoyed reading and we are sure you will too.

Mallory Henson,

Trustee

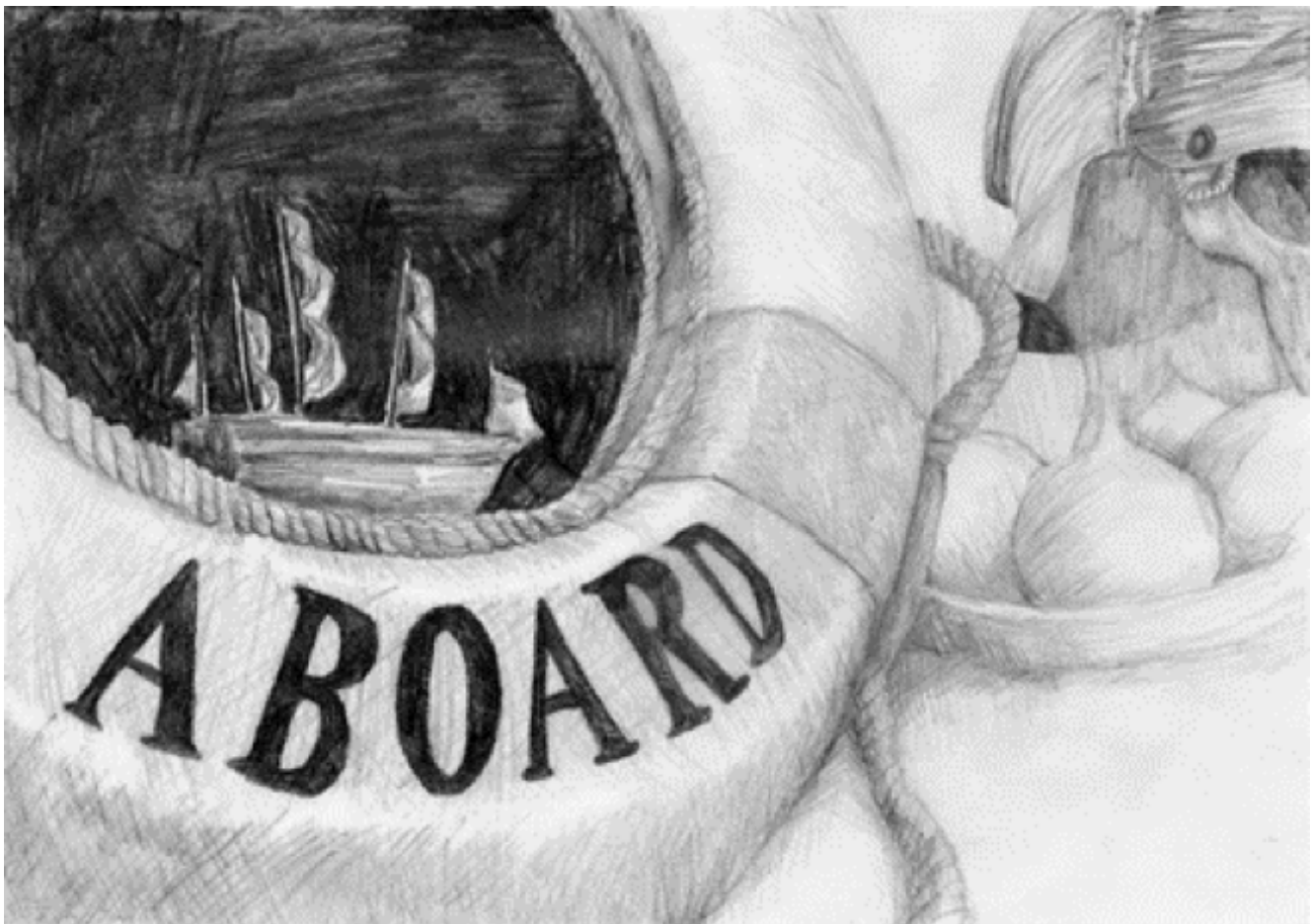


A SPECIAL PLACE FOR US

Once upon a time, there were two brothers, Vikranth and Advith. One day their mother told them that the gentle, harmless dugong was extinct. Vikranth explained to Advith what dugongs were. He said, 'Dugongs are herbivores that live in the Indian Ocean and on the Australian coast. They are curious animals who go near but don't attack boats.'

The boys were feeling sad. They didn't know why harmless animals like dugongs were extinct. Their mother told them that there was some hope of them being alive. So, they wanted to go on a mission to find the dugong species.

They climbed up their ladder into their secret tree which could take them wherever they wanted to go. Before they left Advith did some more research while Vikranth found out that there were Great White Sharks in the Indian Ocean. He knew Advith was scared of sharks, so he got his mother's scarf which could calm Advith down when he got scared. Both brothers thought about the Indian Ocean. The tree started to spin and it twirled until they were in the Indian Ocean.



Georgia Stock

Advith and Vikranth were scared to venture into the deep, dark ocean. They swam until it got lighter and it became more beautiful. There were loads of fish and some mammals. The fish and mammals were nice but Advith told them that they had to go as their mother must be scared for them. Some fish decided to join them in their journey. Advith asked, 'Please can I have one fish for a pet?'

Vikranth said, 'No, because they all belong to the ocean.'

They all swam two miles and then they saw a magnificent Blue Whale. They swam across some corals but didn't touch them as they knew it was illegal. Then they saw a big shadow that was shaped as a big fish. They first tried to figure what the shadow was then Vikranth said, 'It is the Great White Shark!!!'

They swam and swam but Vikranth said, 'We can't outswim a Great White Shark for long.' So, Advith took the scarf and blindfolded the Great White Shark. The Great White Shark couldn't see anymore and crashed into a rock.

They swam some more and reached a cave. They opened it and to their surprise there were thousands of dugongs. Vikranth talked to the chief of dugongs and he said, 'We are hiding here as humans are destroying our special place which is the ocean.'

Vikranth and Advith both said goodbye to the dugongs and thought about their tree house. They got home and told their mother about their adventure and they put out a news article that said 'We are destroying dugongs' special place. They are kind and gentle and don't mean any harm. We have to stop destroying our oceans. We have to recycle more and reduce the usage of plastic.'

Humans did their best to save the oceans and everyone lived happily ever after.

*Vikranth Prerapa
Caroline Haslett Primary School*



Vonnie Raw



THE DIAMOND KID

There was once a kid named Adrien and he wanted to collect diamonds because he loved diamonds soooo much. He liked any colour and shape diamond like red diamonds, rough diamonds, blue diamonds. You name it, Adrien will go and collect that diamond in an instant! One day his friend told him about a diamond at Bletchley Park and it was real.

Adrien likes diamonds, doesn't he? So, he went to Bletchley Park because his dad loved diamonds too. Adrien once arrived told the staff he wanted to find it. Then the staff let him in because they knew Adrien loved diamonds and his dad did too. Adrien once arrived told the staff he wanted to find it. Then the staff let him in because they knew Adrien loved diamonds and his dad did too.

Adrien and his dad went searching for the diamond in the bushes, then under the rocks but they couldn't find it anywhere. Then a little drop fell on Adrien and he wiped it off thinking it was a tear then he realised it was not a tear. How could tears come from the forehead since they only come from the eyes, not the forehead?

Then he realised as he turned his head around that the diamond was stuck under stinging nettles. Adrien and his dad don't like stinging nettles (they are pretty much alike, aren't they?) but they did it anyway.

Adrien and dad collected the diamond and brought it back home just in time. Then the mum asked, 'How was the trip?'

The dad said, 'It was good since we got the diamond!'

'Oh, did you?' asked the mum. 'Yes!'

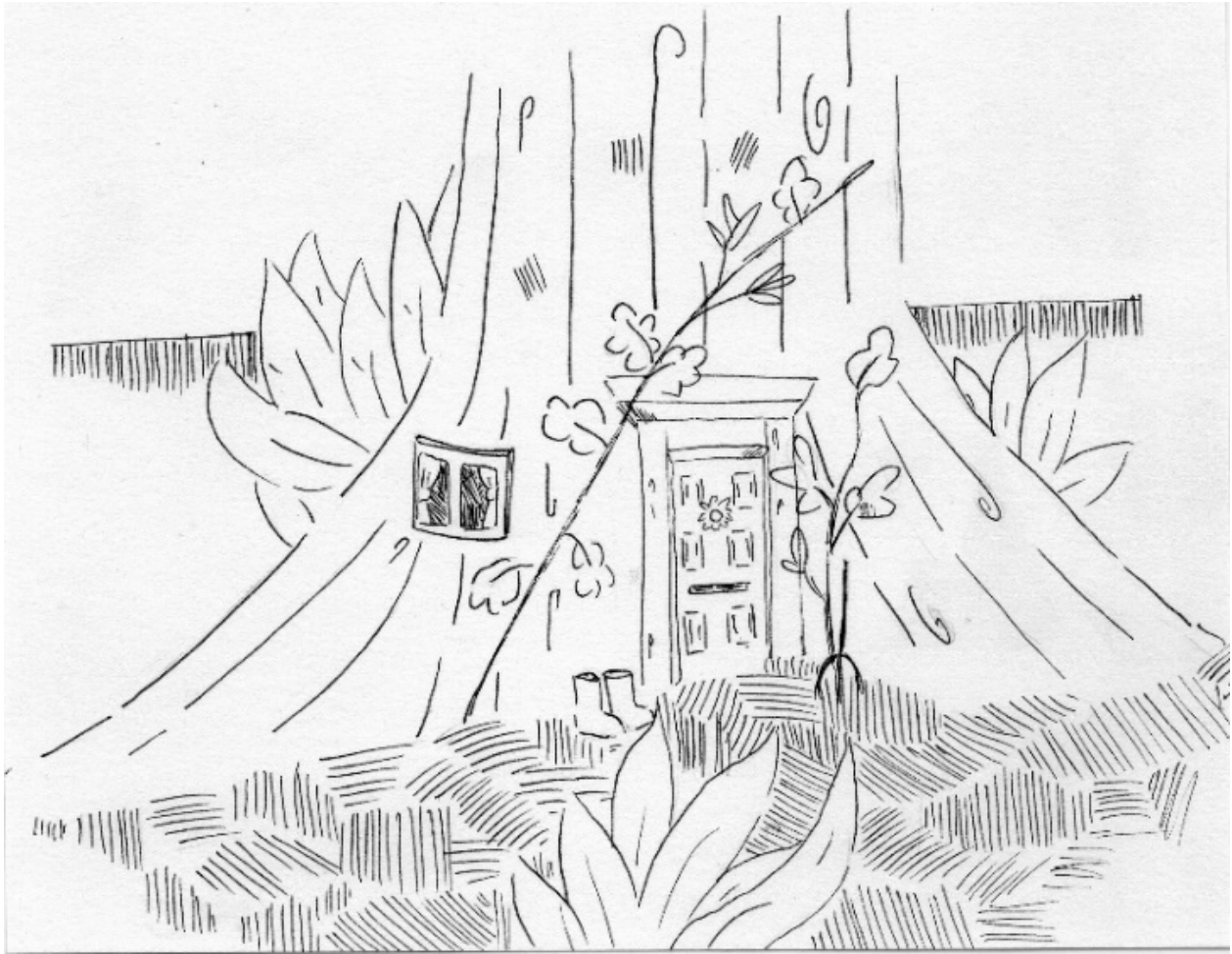
'Oh, show me!'

'Okay,' and then the dad showed her and said, 'Nice, isn't it?'

Mum replied, 'Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeees.'

Adrien was happy that his mum and dad liked it. And so did he.

*Arpit Aitiwadekar
St Thomas Aquinas*



Chloe Smith



THE CATHEDRAL

The grand building stood tall and proud. For over 300 years the only restorations needed were in the church cellar but that was long ago in the 1850s. People say that it's haunted since so many people had died in there but I want to find out myself. The wooden floorboards creaked after every step; the stained-glass windows looked as if they moved in the wind. Down in the cemetery lay exactly 134 graves, each belonging to archbishops, chaplains, pastors and priests.

As the son of the current pastor, I'm supposed to be the next one but I'd much rather become a detective.

On a gloomy, autumn Sunday, I sat on a raised pew at the front of the cathedral. I was seated next to my twin sister who was clad in a floral dress and a large-brimmed hat topped with a fabric, cerise-shaded carnation.

The hall was quiet apart from the constant chatter of the priest resonating through the sizeable room. My shoulders slumped and it felt as though the priest was repeating every word as he said it. He finished his speech and everyone recited a brief prayer before the choir started singing their hymns. I got up and excused myself to the toilet even though I knew that was not where I was going. I took my phone with me and started my journey to the cathedral's cellar...

I strolled carefully through the large graveyard, searching for the large bulkhead door fitted to the floor. I tried to open it but I remembered. It needed a key, and I had no idea where to find one. The wind felt much cooler than it should this early in the autumn season. It felt as if a spirit flew past. Carefully tiptoeing through the headstones, I made my way to the backroom knowing I could find some sort of key there.

Perfect. A ring of keys and padlocks that definitely included the one to the cellar. Hugging the walls, I got back to the bulkhead and sorted through the keys and locks till I found the right one and when I did, I jumped right in.

Climbing down the ladder I smelt a stench so vile I had to cover my nose. It was extremely cold there and I had to be quick. Looking around, I used my phone as a flashlight. I saw lots of toys and decorations but something that caught my eye was an enormous wall covered in blood and pictures. Some of the real substance was spelt in a way that said, 'Don't tread further.' That should have been enough of a warning but I walked forward into the darkness...

*Vicky Ogie
Great Linford Primary School*



Lauren Stanmore

HYBRID ACADEMY

Highly
Commended

Chapter One: Min Xera

At 62 Brimble Street in South Korea, a 13, about to turn 14, year old girl sat awake gazing at the moon through her open window. This girl's name was Min Xera and she was very special. Her smooth skin was the colour of caramel and she had kinky, curly black hair and black, round eyes. She was short and skinny and had long black painted nails.

23:59 3-2-1 00:00. She was 14! Her rejoicing was interrupted by a flash of white and an old-looking letter landed on her bed. She looked at it as though it was a bomb. With trembling fingers, she picked it up and tore it open.

It read:

Hybrid Academy

Miss Min

We are happy to enlighten you about your place at our academy. Please find enclosed all the items you will need. Term starts October 1st.

We await your reply.

Questions overflowed her brain and she reread the letter twice.

‘What does it mean ‘We await your reply?’...’ She whispered. At that moment, a figure fell out of the air and landed with a tremendous thud on her floor.

‘Ouch! Oh-’ the figure straightened and their face came into the moonlight. A tall, thin girl stood in the middle of her room. She had pale skin, a long round-ish nose and bright green gleaming eyes.

‘Who are you...?’ Xera whispered. She backed away from the girl in horror.

‘Oh no! Please don’t be scared! I’m Luhan,’ the girl said. ‘I’ve come to inform you about...yourself?’

‘Oh,’ Xera said, unsure of what was going on. ‘Okay.’

For a fraction of a second, Luhan made an involuntary movement as if her legs were aching.

‘Oh! My bad, sit down here.’ Xera patted the spot next to her.

‘Well, you are an all-breed.’ Luhan said simply.

‘Sorry?’ Xera said incredulously.

‘Well, we come from a world of hybrids,’ Luhan said. ‘You are like a hybrid, but different. You can transform into any of those animals and have any powers.’ This was a lot to take in.

‘Is that why I feel so drawn to the moon?’

‘Well, partly. You are a dark magic main elemented all-breed. The moon is the source of all dark magic.’ Luhan explained everything and got all Xera’s stuff for her.

October 1st came. Xera was waiting in her back garden like Luhan had told her. She looked up. A large brown mass was coming toward her. It looked like a large eagle. It touched down and Luhan was on top of it.

‘Hop on!’ She said brightly. Xera walked shakily towards it. She nearly fell off as the bird rose higher.

After what felt like an eternity, a building came into sight. It turned out to be many different coloured buildings. Once the bird landed, Xera walked towards the building. She smirked darkly. 'This is gonna be fun'.

Arielle Ramdial
Great Linford Primary School



Darcey Rowles



PITCH PERFECT

Hi, I am Maya and I am 11 years old. In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, my life changed for the better.

With the restrictions, I could not go outside to play with my friends which made me have to find fun in a different way. I started to play in my garden with my siblings, which was such fun but the most fun game of all was football. When I played football, it was like I was in my new happy place and the more we played the more I would imagine my siblings and me in an all-star team with Messi, Ronaldo, Neymar, and Heung Min Son. Every night I would dream of me becoming the number one player for Tottenham Hotspur winning the Premier League and cheering after we won.

After the pandemic, it was amazing! I could finally go to a proper football pitch and when I did it was the best. I imagined I was playing with the best players in the world and we were in Tottenham Hotspur's stadium. I was scoring top corner every time. Gradually I got better and better. People that were hard to play against became easier. It felt like I was a five-star Stiller zooming around the football pitch in the park.

Finally, I got a phone and social media which allowed me to follow the ones who inspire me. Out of the blue, Harry Kane saw one of my football videos and reacted to it. I was so excited!

After the highs and lows, I have found my passion and dream. I have now signed for a girls' football team and a bright future is ahead.

My dream has really just begun.

Maya Fox
Great Linford School



Lindsay Neale

THE VOICE

Hello, my name is Millie, and this is my story. It all started when I was 5. I'm 14 now. My mum says I grow quickly, but I guess as time grows, so does everything else. I hope I never feel this feeling ever again. Misery, despair, heartbreak.

Let's rewind back to when the most pain I ever felt occurred. This was when I was 5. It all started when we were eating breakfast (a smooth layer of butter, coated with a splash of jam on toast). My dad started choking. I froze in fear as my mum screamed in horror. She called an ambulance. Tuesday 12th March my dad died.

After the funeral, I sprinted up to my tree house to cry all the pain away. Mum says crying doesn't help anything but I feel it does help me cope. The next day, I sat in my treehouse all day thinking what I would say when I went into school all miserable and heavy shadows under my eyes.

I heard a scream. I climbed down from my tree house, sprinting towards the woods as the scream got louder and louder. My gut was telling me to just go back home, but what if someone needed help? I paused to think.

I asked, 'What if it's dangerous? I could get hurt.' A shadow formed in the corner of my eyes. I turned to face a tree with a shadow behind it. I walked closer to the tree as sweat poured down my face. I turned around trembling as something or someone pounced on me.

I awoke with a fright. I turned to see where I was. But was surprised to see I was in my bed. I hoped it was all a dream. Mum says sometimes something in your dream can become the truth, but I didn't really pay attention.

I got out of my bed and went to school with a healthy mindset. I got to my first English class and finished my work in the time I had left. At break, I went to the library. Most people go to the library to cry, but I just read. Okay, I must admit, I do cry sometimes.

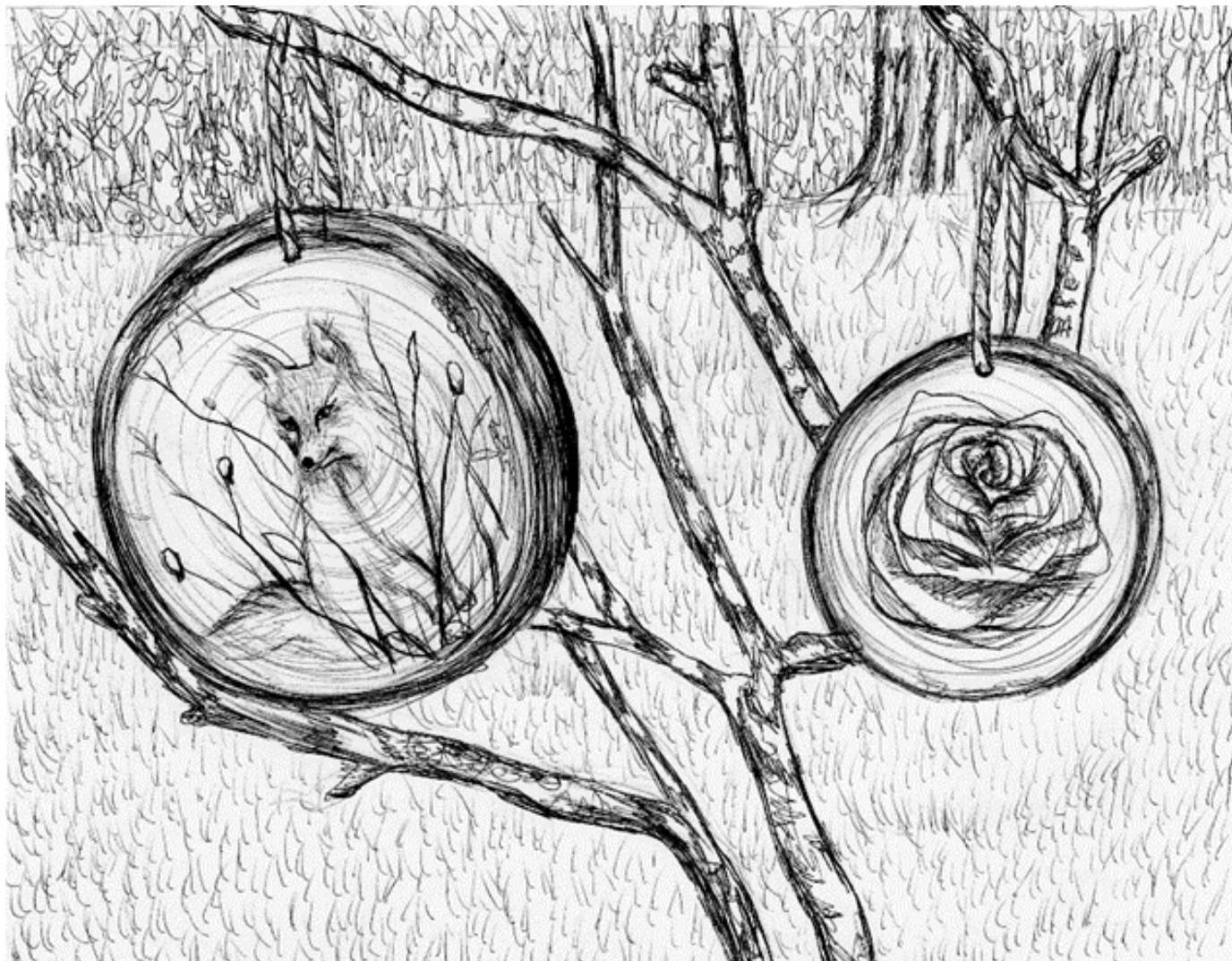
After school, I returned to my tree house and fell into a deep sleep but I soon awoke with a startle. I heard a scream from the woods again so I went back, remembering what happened in my dream. I fell on a rock and hurt my leg badly. I screamed in agony as a tear rolled down my face.

I stumbled as I tried to stand up and looked around as a scream came out from the distance. I ran as hard as I could towards the voice. Every time I took a step forward it became quieter until I realised it was coming from my head.

Then a boy appeared from behind the tree and said, 'Wake up.'

I jolted awake and my dad was sitting on the end of my bed so I thought...

Destiny Marlow
Great Linford Primary School



Bianca Maracine



Miya Quinn



A SPECIAL PLACE

‘GOAL!!’ she yelled. Her voice echoed through the empty streets with the sweet taste of triumph. Annalise had scored. The crowds went wild; usually this would be a stadium full of individuals fulfilling themselves up to the brim watching men kick a ball around. In the lass’ case, it was a few cockerels and pigs shrieking as they had to dive out of Annalise’s way, who darted towards the makeshift goal in her backyard. Her sister as well as her brothers disapproved and as always, her parents disliked a ball in sight of their second daughter.

‘Get out of the way, imbecile,’ Max exclaimed.

‘Yeah, take your so-called talent somewhere else,’ agreed Miles. Ernie and Lizzy nodded. Annalise sighed; she had failed to prove herself yet again. Maybe she should give up? Her aptitude was never appreciated anywhere near home: ‘I’m going out.’

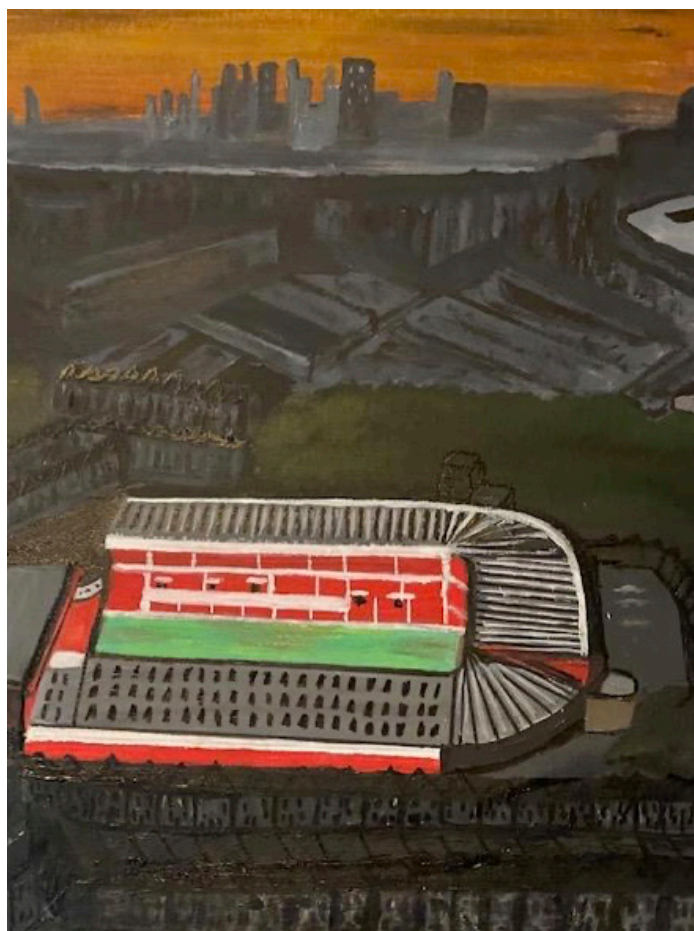
Of course, no response - Annalise walked out and shut the fence door behind her - she went to collect her thoughts underneath Phoenix.

When she arrived at her favourite destination, she would become so immersed in conversation she would forget how many hours had passed by. This was her safe place, where she offloaded all of her feelings and thoughts.

Annalise knew Phoenix would never tell anyone for the simple fact that Phoenix was a tree.

This particular tree had branches that looked almost unnatural, a trunk as lightweight and gorgeous as a ballerina, and succulent leaves that were glowing emeralds. But alas, Phoenix was isolated, it was different. It was the one and only tree that grew in this patch of land and no one paid any heed to it or its beauty. Annalise felt that she and Phoenix resonated with each other, unique, like a dove among crows, or burning coal dipped in snow.

After a few hours, Annalise embraced Phoenix (or at least attempted to) and sulked home. As soon as she 'darkened their doorstep' - as per her parents' commentary - she was welcomed with the familiar smell of muck and the familiar sound of her parents quarrelling. As she stepped inside, Lizzy came skipping over and handed her a scrub: 'Mom, says you have to wipe all the floors twice and then dry them.'



Bernard Downes

And that was that. Day in and day out of scrubbing, cleaning, and the never-ending nagging from her Mom for never being good enough.

This was not new to Annalise. 'When will they understand that I am not like them and never will be', thought Annalise. She tried to remember Mark's sympathetic smile: he had been Annalise's only sibling who recognised her knack and applauded her for it. He had died a few years ago due to a severe illness (that the family could not cure, due to their lack of money). Annalise had truly and deeply loved Mark for his affectionate and caring ways; the way he would caress her cheeks and push her hair aside.

He had been a couple of years older than Annalise and looked almost identical to her. Same black bushy hair and muddy brown eyes.

That night, Annalise did not get much sleep. She lay there with her eyes open thinking about football and then the next day full of chores and then football and then ...

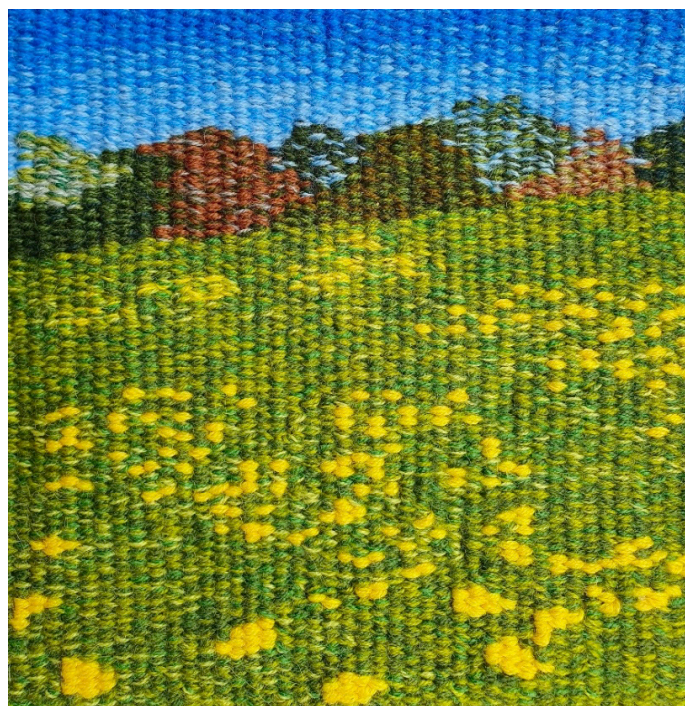
When morning came around, before the household awoke, she crept away, far away, with a piece of fruit for her long journey ahead. She had left a note on the mantle:

‘Finished my chores for the day, headed out, be back late. Love Annalise.’

She hesitated before writing the last part but she truly did mean it, she did love them no matter how much they disliked her. Before embarking on her walk, she took a stroll down to see Phoenix and tell it about her plan and the note she had written.

Although Phoenix didn’t speak, Annalise could feel its emotion - the tree loved the townsfolk no matter how much they paid no heed, just as Annalise loved her family though they couldn’t care less about her.

After their chat was over, Annalise set off. She was going to Grand Oafkin; the better side of town. It would be around a two-hour walk, which would be easy as pie for her. She had seen posters stuck all over Lakesple Creek (her area of town), about a women’s football team playing against another women’s football team! When she saw the posters, her heart leaped out of her throat. She couldn’t believe there were others like her: boyish girls who were unique and liked a rough sport such as football. Annalise promised herself she wouldn’t miss this for the world.



Karen Hiser

Annalise's chin and chest were elevated with pride as she walked off over the hills and past the pastures where the cows grazed. As she hiked over this particular mountainous region, she contemplated the rights and the wrongs of her action. After a lot of devoted thought, Annalise confirmed that the rights outweighed the wrongs: she was going to this match for Phoenix, for Mark, and maybe a little for herself.

As she crossed West Tra (another district in the town, northwest to Lakesple Creek) and entered Grand Oafkin, Annalise was rooted to the spot.

'My word,' she thought and she was right. The aura and the scenery were truly grand, as the name suggested. It took a while for her to start up again, but when she did, she was glad. The winding streets of Grand Oafkin were treated like holy grail as opposed to the gum-covered cobbles back at Lakesple Creek.

The icing on the cake was when Annalise set her eyes upon the football pitch. It was at least a hundred times bigger than her little backyard back at home. It was like comparing an elephant to a pug, or a boulder to a pebble. It was BIG! Imagining setting foot on the freshly cut lawn wearing studded boots seemed like a dream that would never come true. Annalise dashed to the front to make sure she got a prime view of the match that would unfold in front of her eyes.

In another half an hour, the stands were overcrowded with men and women of all ages coming to watch the first-ever women's football match in their town. The ladies from both teams stepped onto the grass with poise and dignity, shook hands, and just like that the referee blew the whistle to commence the game.

Twenty minutes in and Annalise was mesmerised. The ball hurtled across the pitch one way. And then it bolted to the other side in a matter of seconds. Thwack... Bang... Pow... There were goals and headers everywhere that Annalise had lost count of the score.

The current score was 4-3, to 'Calcio.' The lasses were fierce and committed to entertaining the crowd; no disappointments would be made here tonight. The audience held their breath. No one moved. The referee marched up to centre field.

And when the final score was announced in favour of the 'Electrics,' everyone was exhilarated and cheering for the team's victory.

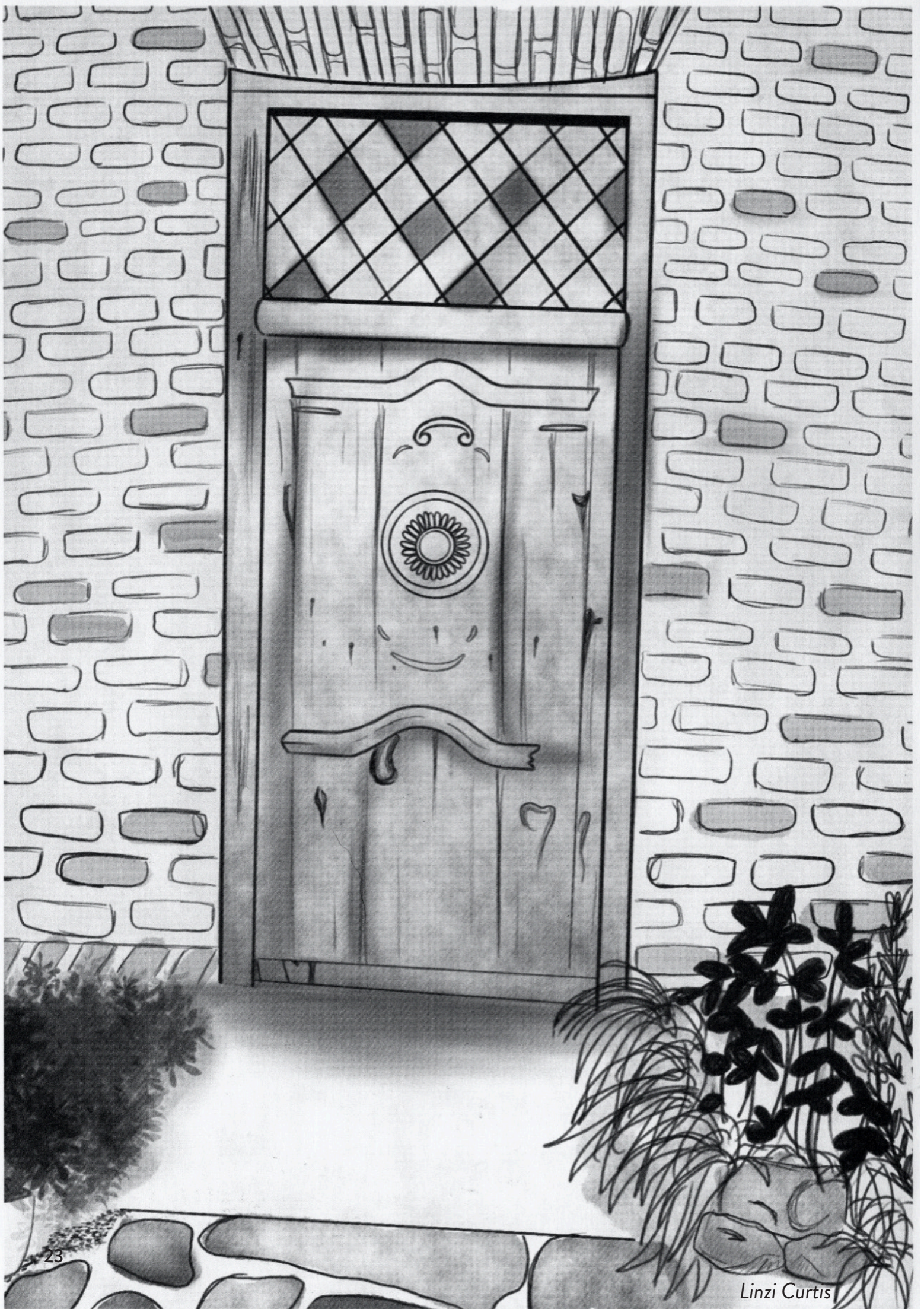
As Annalise trudged back to Lakesple Creek, content and satisfied, she thought of the brilliance that she had the honour to observe. That evening, she had made up her mind: cleaning was not for her, maybe for Lizzy, but not Annalise; she was going to join a women's football team. She could already hear the disagreement and disapproval from her parents and siblings, but nothing could change her mind.

Football was a part of her. Football was her life. Football was her special place.
And why should any silly rule about football being a men's sport spoil all her fun?!

Bornini Das
Denbigh School



Ben Thorniley



THE WAVES

The sun reflects off the clear, blue waves and my exposed back as I run towards the water, clumsily adjusting the surfboard in my arm. With the other, I wave at my grandparents, casually relaxing on their patterned beach blanket. Hot sand scorches my feet, causing me to go faster. People behind me laugh and shout, and I tune them out as I focus on my destination. The contrasting smell of salty water and ice cream fills my nostrils. Hills, coated with dots of yellow wispy grass and burnt flowers encircle the beach, creating a coliseum, the vast sea a brilliant stage. Stopping, I look down at the shining blue water biting at my feet. Before I know it, I've dived onto my surfboard. My feet and arms propel me forwards. I look down as I paddle, my reflection moving with the water. It's clear, and I can see fish distantly swimming below. I smile to myself; this beach was the grandest on earth. Stopping, a decent distance from the sandy shore, taking a deep breath, I roll off the elongated surfboard.

Time slows down as I take in my sudden change of surroundings. A loud splash of water, clear droplets flying into the air as my body hits the surface. The familiar shock of cold water greets me; I embrace it as I am submerged. I close my eyes, focusing on the sound of the water dancing around me combined with cheerful voices beginning to muffle as my head goes under the water. For a second, everything around me goes black, then a deep, majestic blue. The sun shines on the waves, and I watch from underneath them, bathing in the golden light. I kick my legs, the muscles slowly stretching and retracting as I swim downwards. Beneath me, dark sand floats up with my every movement, revealing fish of all shapes and sizes hiding on the seabed. Their glowing eyes look me up and down, before going back to their repetitive dance.

I carry on, my eyes locking onto the vast kingdom of coral structures ahead of me. Coral the colours of every hue of the rainbow pile upwards, like towers of stone. More sea creatures dart past me, allowing me a single glance at their shimmering scales. Ahead, neon pink jellyfish glow in the darker depths of the ocean, illuminating a dangerous path. My mind flashes back to a memory of this same beach - and the intense pain of a jellyfish's sting. I hurriedly kick up, my head buzzing as water begins to fill my lungs. My head breaks through the waves and I frantically look around, searching for my surfboard. The beach feels lifetimes away, and a spike of fear hits my heart at the thought of my surfboard beginning to sail out to sea, never to be seen again.

The waves pull me downwards, even as I fight against them, aiming towards a large grey shape. I lunge forwards, my hands searching for a ledge or surface to pull myself up. I hear the crunch before I feel it. Everything stops.

The distance screams from the beach. The smells of overpowering salty water. The terrified thudding in my chest, all replaced by the pain in my leg racing up my body. I don't get a chance to scream or attempt to escape as I'm dragged back under the waves, descending into darkness.

Ollie Owens
Watling Academy



Mallory Henson

AN INSIGHT INTO LOVE

I kneel to place flowers in front of the elaborately carved headstone before me. On it, the words read:

Beloved Husband
James Simmons
1998 - 2076
Gone but not forgotten

I missed Jim. I reminisced about the hazy summer days that we spent basking in the sun together, right in this very spot. My special place was the setting for every good thing in my life. Even through sixty years of marriage, Jim and I loved each other just as much as we did on our fateful meeting. Oh, how smitten I was.

It was 2013. I was an average teenage female visiting Westbury Arts Centre. I was taking part in an intermediate acrylic painting workshop. Being an artist was a dream for me. As I realised it was time to go back home, a sense of dread washed over me. For the last few weeks, I was the target of some catcalling teenager who had nothing better to do with his life than annoy me whenever I went past. My friends didn't live nearby so they refused to join me in the - what I thought was - a treacherous journey home.

I wasn't too apprehensive until I reached the dense forest surrounding the path I took to go back home. I knew that it wouldn't happen, but I always felt uneasy about the fact that every time I went down this road, no one would be able to hear me scream if I was attacked. I grasped my keys in my hands, the sharp end protruding from between my index and middle fingers. I walked along, jumping at every rustling sound I heard. I audibly gasped when I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder. I shrieked in fear, with my keys ready to cause damage. I almost laughed when I opened my eyes to see the teenager that I mentioned before.

However I became concerned when I saw his usual jovial expression didn't adorn his face. Instead, I stared into his eyes as his eyebrows creased in worry.

'What are you doing walking through this way alone? Trust me when I say it isn't safe.' I was surprised to find this immature kid had come all the way to make sure nothing happened to me. I wasn't expecting him to care so much about me, considering he was, you know, a catcalling teen?

'Since when did my safety concern you, Mister...?' I asked, slightly charmed by his chivalry. He blushed, surprised by the sudden personal question.



‘Uh... Jim, Jim Simmons. And I care about you. Do you really think I’d let you walk alone along an isolated pathway, during winter, when it’s dark?’

I couldn’t help but blush. This boy was playing some mind games with me. What was this warm fuzzy feeling I felt whenever I was near him?

‘Well, I guess company would be nice...’

His face was enveloped by a smug grin.

‘I guess someone’s not as repulsed by me as they thought.’

Ugh. He was so confident. He walked me home, talking about his sister and mother, how they were obsessed with him finally finding the love of his life, since they were both divorced and were sure that they wouldn’t be falling in love any time soon.

What was this overwhelming urge to be with him, to have walks together like this together for the rest of our lives?

As we were coming closer to the park near my house, I did something stupid.

‘Hey, Jim?’

He turned to face me.

‘Hmm?’

‘I love you.’

He stood there in shock. For a second, I was scared I had just blown my chances, when Jim gently cupped my face with one hand.

‘Took you a while to realise, huh?’ he chuckled lightly.

I gave him a weak smile. I realised this man was much more to me than some random guy I met a few weeks ago. This was who I wanted to be for the rest of my life. I wanted to have conversations like this every day. He stroked my hair and walked with me in silence with his arm wrapped around me, tucking me into his side, assuring me of his presence.

No one told me that a forty-five-minute walk could make someone fall in love so easily. Three years later, we were engaged.



Jim and I both wanted to have our special day in the place we first met - the park where we had our first kiss.

On the day of the wedding, I was a nervous wreck. I wanted to make everything perfect. Surprise, surprise, I ended up crying on one of the park benches four hours before guests arrived. Jim must have seen that I wasn't obsessing over something in the guest area and came looking for me. He saw me as a mess on the bench and sat beside me.

'Elisa.'

Even in a moment like this, hearing his deep, calm voice say my name gave me butterflies.

'What, Jim?' I sniffed, wishing I could feel his warm embrace around me.

His eyebrows creased in concern just like on the day we first met.

'You okay?' Jim whispered and slipped his arm over my shoulders, letting my head rest on his chest.

'I'm fine,' I lied. He knew I wasn't. He cupped my face, just like when we were teens. He leant in and lightly kissed me. He quickly parted our lips, grinning just like his younger self.

'Nobody expects anything to be perfect,' he whispered in my ear.

He wiped away the remnants of my tears and smiled at me before jumping away to catch some of the stray balloons that had come undone from the balloon arch.

When the guests arrived, Jim and I were in our best form, greeting everyone with award-winning smiles. I walked down the aisle, bursting with jubilation.

'James Simmons, do you take Elisa Alexander as your lawfully wedded wife?'

'I do.' He smiled at me.

'And Elisa Alexander, do you take James Simmons to be your lawfully wedded husband?'

For a moment, I stared into Jim's eyes before taking in a deep breath.

'I do.'

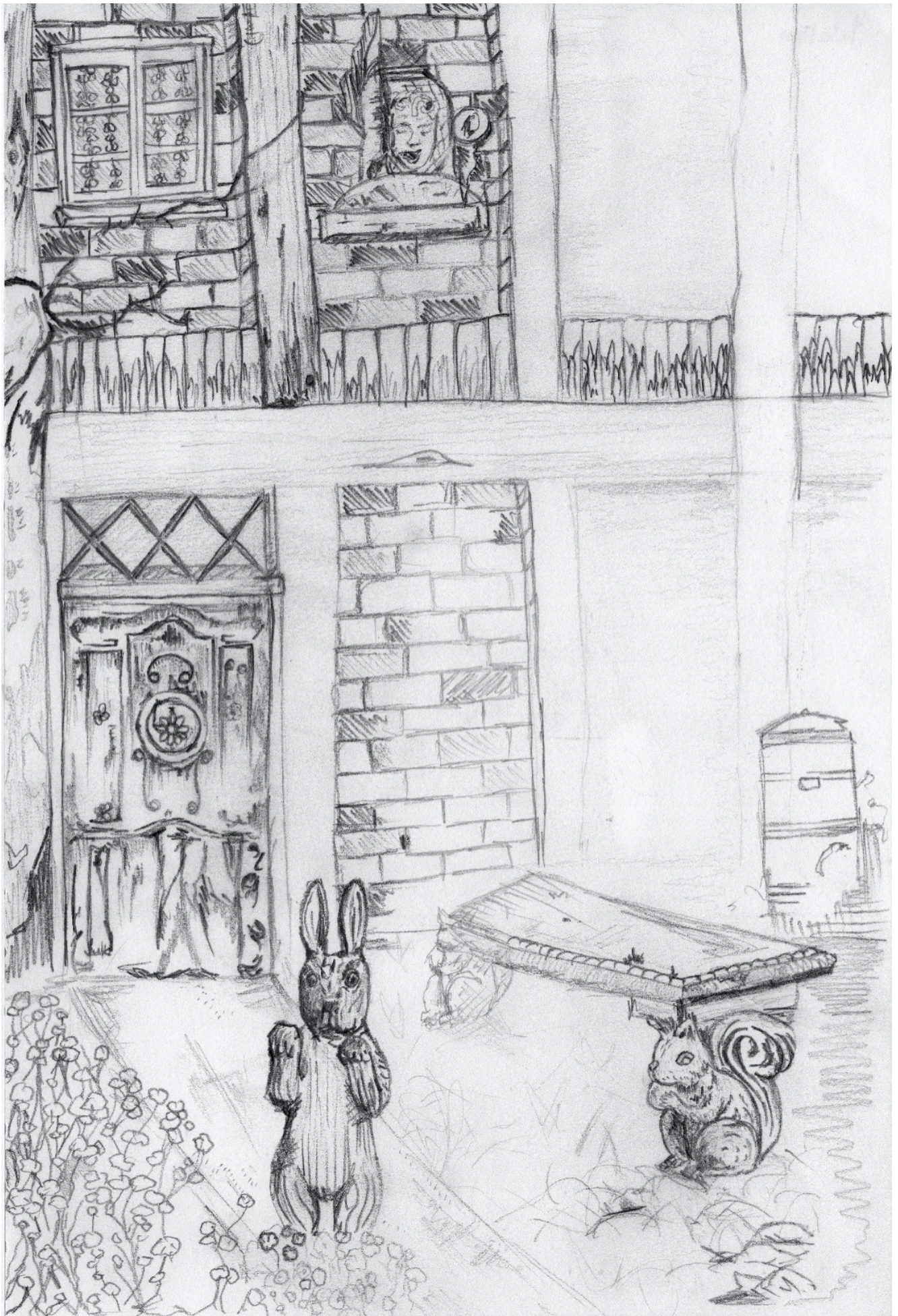
'I pronounce you as husband and wife!'

And we remained spouses for sixty beautiful years, until death came to take Jim in his sleep when he was seventy-eight.

He is still buried in the very same park where we first fell in love.

Our special place.

Aaradhana Sivagnanaselvan
Denbigh School





CHAPTER 1: THE ARRIVAL

I suddenly awoke in this other-worldly place, feeling dazed and confused. Where am I? How did I get here? Who am I? I had no choice other than to explore this strange world. This place... it was somewhere which I had never dwelled upon and yet... it felt so oddly familiar. Like a place you always go to feel... happy. I wonder why this strange phenomenon is happening to me...

As I kept adventuring through this strange land, observing the amazing scenery this place had to offer, I stumbled upon something, a lake. Only, this lake was made of liquid gold, and it was beautiful. The shining, glistening gold lured me in, begging me to touch it. As I edged closer, I saw my reflection. That's when I remembered something. 'My name, it's, it's coming back to me...' I stared at the shimmering gold lake for quite a while when I spluttered, 'Riyaz!'

It is an odd name, Riyaz. Basically, no one can say it properly, that's probably because you say it as 'Ree-yaz'. Well, my full name is Riyazul but everyone likes to call me Riyaz. The problem is no one can spell it correctly. Some spell it as 'Riaz' and then, there are some who spell it as 'Reeyaz' and some even spell it as 'Rizafisafrostafofic'. Okay, maybe not the last one but let's get back to the story. As I pressed on, I noticed a very strange sign. There was moss covered all over it so I wiped it off.

It read Hateno village this way --->

I was curious so I went forward. Then I realised that there would be people who could tell me why I'm here and why this is happening to me. Next, there was another sign that read: 'Hateno mine ahead. Be cautious!' Great. Just great. I have to go through this mine just to get to one stupid village. OR, I could climb the mountain instead. It would be hard, but better than some scary mine.

As I slowly ascended the huge mountain, I made my way to the summit. That's when I saw the beautiful landscape of this mysteriously fascinating world: the vast hills and trees, the beautiful rivers and ponds, and the shining yellow sun gazing at this astounding world. It was like nothing I had ever seen. And as if things couldn't get better, I saw Hateno village and the villagers that resided there. So, I headed there.

As I slowly made my way back down the mountain (and not slipping over, making myself roll down the snowy terrain banging my head in the process) I realised that I hadn't sustained any injuries and was perfectly fine. Bit odd, right?

I finally made my way to Hateno village where I saw THEM...



Bianca Maracine

CHAPTER 2: ACROSS THE LAND

I read the sign which read: ‘Hateno village: Welcome travellers!’

I entered the village where I was greeted by people who looked very excited to see me. No one’s ever excited to see me! I awkwardly waved at them and carried on looking through the village where I was kind of kicked out by the guards:

‘Sorry chap, no outsiders allowed in this place, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.’ Obviously, I had just trekked a mountain so I’m not going to go just like that.

‘No, I just climbed a mountain, I’m not going anywhere!’

Note to self, never EVER defy a guard, especially in this place, but, even if this place was somewhere I had never been, it felt so oddly familiar. I felt safe even though this place was obviously not the type you would want to live in. I was about to get kicked out when someone stopped me.

‘Lorees, Mince stop. Let him in.’

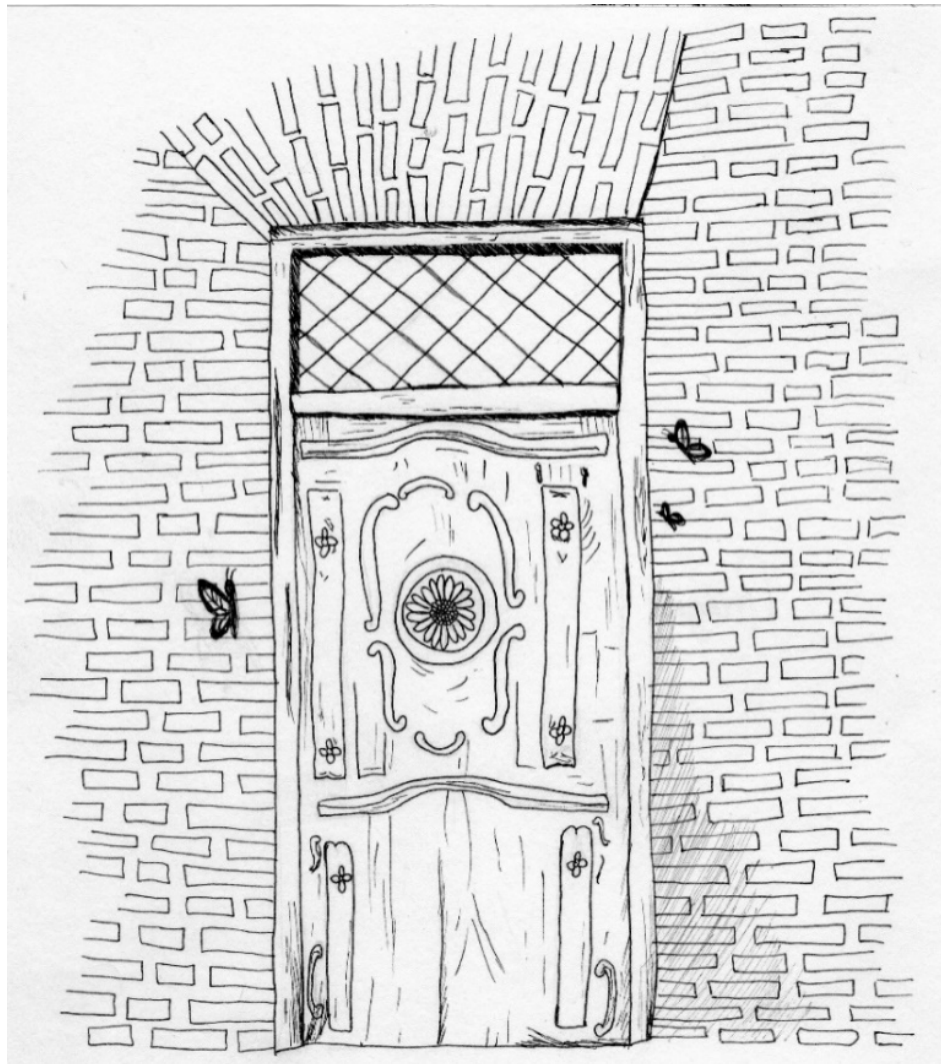
The two guards immediately did what he said and greeted me with open arms.

Then the guy said, ‘Come with me, chosen warrior.’

Has he got the wrong guy; I think he has the wrong guy? So, I quickly retorted with ‘I think you have the wrong guy, I’m no chosen hero.’

He didn’t say anything. He just took my hand and walked me to the ‘Castle of Wisdom’. So, I anxiously made my way up the stairs, my hands shaking while I made my way up. As I opened the door, I saw a plentiful number of books. Like a library but ten times bigger. The man who took me here said he couldn’t come with me:

‘I am sorry, I cannot come with you for I am not worthy. Name’s Greg by the way.’



Georgina Stock

So, I obviously said, 'Hey Greg, my name's Riyaz.'

Just as I was about to go into the next room he said, 'Oh I know.' Odd that he knew my name but whatever.

That's when I heard a voice:

'Oh, wise warrior,
You have finally come,
Now open the door where your trial awaits!'

This was deeply weird and creepy but I did as it said. What else was I supposed to do? So, I opened the door where I was met by a dark room and a candle. I took the candle and trekked through the room where I found a button. When I pushed it, the room lightened and I was met by a sort of old man. He looked fine until he saw my face. That's when his eyes popped out.

'It's really you... the famous warrior who will defeat Maganduha...'

Maganduwho???? Why did I put myself into this, why?

'We do not have time, now go, and save Celestiworld...find the scrolls. They are marked on your map'

'How am I meant to do that?' He said nothing. Well, I best go to the first of the five locations in Wyro City.

I made my way through the tundra fields, an extremely cold meadow where many polar bees resided. Yes, polar BEES. Luckily, I'm just that fast and ran before they could get me. The rocky hills were also hard to get through but I've had experience with climbing these things so it was good.

I made it to Wyro City, the largest city in all of Celestiworld. It was amazing but also short-lived. I was in and out. The knight (named Marth) escorted me to the King who gave me one of the scrolls. And from there it was as easy as pie: collecting scrolls and fighting a couple of monsters.

Did I mention the monsters, they aren't anything special? Then, in the Hysuwi region, I came across these woods, and, in the heart of the woods sat a sword. It was the most glamorous thing I had seen.

Then a voice talked to me...

‘You who has come all the way here,

Only the chosen hero can pull this sword,

Anyone else will surely die,

So do you dare try?’

I was anxious. Was I really this chosen hero, as the old man said, or was I just some random guy who was destined to fail? I reluctantly held the sword and pulled. I pulled and pulled and then it happened. I pulled it out. I now knew I was destined to be the chosen hero to defeat Maganduha or whatever his name was.

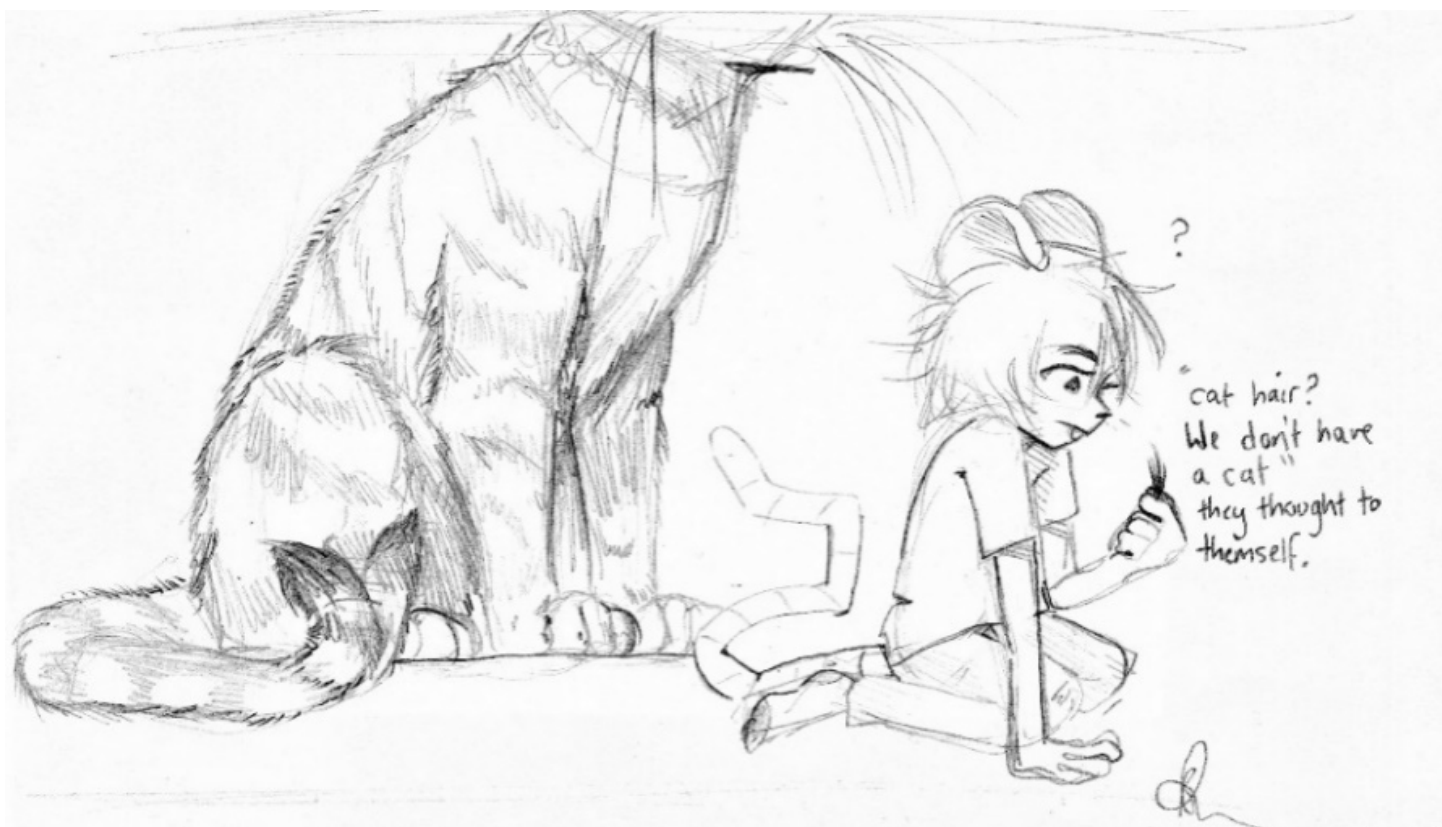
I made my way to the heart of Celestiworld, which, funnily enough, was called Celestiworld Castle. I made my way to the centre room when suddenly the ground shook. Then I saw him...

A dragon as big as a skyscraper flew down and roared a deafening screech. It leapt towards me, and I dodged and struck it back with a valiant swing of my sword. We fought for hours on end, when it swung its tail at me sending me flying across the castle. I felt defeated. All that hard work was gone to waste. I couldn't give up. With one strike at its belly, it roared in agony. Then I struck it on its head... It was done. I had defeated him. It was over... I had won...

Then, at that moment, I heard someone calling for me: ‘Riyaz, turn that silly game off and come down, dinner's ready.’

That's when I turned my game off and ran down for dinner. I guess not all things can come true, huh?

Riyazul Hoque
Sir Herbert Leon Academy



Lauren Stanmore

ULTRA NOVA QUINTET: ELVEN WARRIOR TRIALS

Highly
Commended

CHAPTER 1 PROLOGUE: PRISON CHAMBER

Drip. Drip. Drip. Another three seconds gone by.... DRIP. Altair wearily peered up at the black, fungi-covered prison ceiling. Something was leaking. Surely there weren't any pipes or sewage systems in this place? Surely it wasn't raining? No, it's impossible, she thought. For all she knew, she could be 10000 billion metres underground and the way out of the chamber would be all the way at the tip of the place.

Deep thoughts traversed through her head. If she stayed here for too long, she would be on the verge of madness. How long had she been here? Three days?

Three weeks? Maybe even three months? No, she thought. She tried to clear her pounding head. She was going to get out of this place. Even if it took all her tremendous strength and she threw her courage to the side of the coarse, dirty pavement, she was going to get out of this place. She stood up and pressed her palms against the rocky, crumbling walls of the cell. She ran her hands over its rough stone and then finally to the solid metal bars that were screwed tightly to their hinges. She tugged with all her might but nothing happened except a few solid rocks crumbled away.

If she had stone daemon art or even water daemon art, she could have sliced and slashed her way out of this place. Her art was considered quite rare and unique, as she had the power to control the way of light and electricity. Light daemon art.

Unfortunately, in this case, it was deemed pretty useless. She was the special one, who had been chosen for this mission, to defeat the Phantom King, who could control and twist the dark shadows to his will, and he used this power to jeopardise the peace of her own dimension.

She suddenly looked down and to her horror, something black and slimy started oozing through underneath the prison bars, and was snaking its way towards her. It stopped moving, and the black substance started to somehow put itself together, like building blocks. Altair suddenly realised what it was. A phantomite!! She shivered as its features grew more distinct, and it finished forming itself. It had two silver, beaded eyes that had dark red pupils, which seemed to stare limitlessly into people's souls. Staring into these pupils made you feel like all the life was being sucked out of you, all the light. Its rounded mouth seemed to go inwards, with no teeth but simply a protruding gap. It twisted its long black liquorice-like arms around her limbs, and she struggled helplessly in its reach but all her efforts were in vain. The phantomite thrust the gate open, its hinges flying back as it did so. Altair looked back for what felt like it would be the last time she saw that cell.

CHAPTER 2: ALFHEIM MEETING HALL

Aurora gazed up at the purple, hazy sky that seemed to glisten with shining stars that looked like they were gems encrusted into the sky. She closed her eyes and thought about the trials that she had taken one summer ago. Surely, she had passed? Otherwise, why had she received a jade-coloured envelope with gold elven markings on it? She reminisced that when she had opened the envelope with trembling, sweaty hands it did not say if she had passed or not. It simply said:

YOUR PRESENCE IS REQUESTED AT THE ALFHEIM MEETING HALL ON SUNDAY AT 2 O'CLOCK.

She was going to turn 15-star cycles soon and candidates could only apply if they were 14+. It was her childhood dream to become an elven warrior.

She suddenly heard someone call: 'AURORA DEAR YOU'RE GOING TO MISS THE MEETING!' 'THEY AREN'T GOING TO WAIT ONLY FOR YOU!' It was her aunt, who decided that she would take Aurora to the meeting hall. Aurora dashed through the corridors, almost bumping head-first into two extremely confuddled staff members who were each carrying silver glass plates on one stretched-out palm. She shouted an apology and dashed through the hallway. Her aunt grabbed hold of her arm and started manoeuvring her towards the large, opaque doors that led into the hall.



Ben Thorniley

They set foot on the ribbon-red carpet and the doors slowly swung shut behind them. In front of them was a large crowd of parents who seemed to be on edge and their sons and daughters beside them, who were acting more hyper than usual. As much as she wanted to find out if she had passed or not, she was getting tired of all the waiting and just wanted to get it over and done with. They were ushered over towards a seat and they sat down, her aunt biting her long nails.

Aurora's parents had said that even if she didn't make it, they would still love her and be proud of her for trying. They said it didn't make a single difference in the world, but it did make a difference, didn't it? She would be going back to her normal elven school, learning further water daemon arts.

The hall was suddenly silent, and a tall clerk with a box of paper sheets walked up to the administrators. One of them was a teacher from the ELVEN WARRIOR TRAINING SCHOOL and another one was a warrior who had just graduated. Aurora privately thought that he was trying to look very high and mighty, like he'd been through it all and seen the world's most hazardous and estranged places. There was another woman there, who looked rather bored and like she'd rather be in a salon, getting her hair and nails done. Lastly, there was a man with glasses and a bowler hat who nodded dismissively at the clerk, and the clerk left them to it.

The lady put her long fingers into the box and took out one of the sheets. She then called out in a droning voice, LUCIFER DREW and there was a sudden scattering of applause coming from a white-haired boy's direction, who rather smugly got up from his seat and went to get a jade envelope from the teacher-administrator. It was the same envelope that Aurora had gotten before, but she could see that it was clearly different and more important judging by the eager looks on everyone's faces.

The lady yet again called out another name TINA FUI and a girl with large eyes and a pouty mouth walked up to collect her envelope. This procession of envelope collecting lasted at least for 20 minutes and the more children that went to collect an envelope, the more Aurora's spark of hope was in danger of being put out. The lady once again put her hand in the box, but it came out empty-handed. Everyone was confused, and a babble broke out amongst them. 'SILENCE!' the lady called. 'I'm afraid that this is the end of the ceremony and we apologise to the people who didn't get envelopes from us.'

'Oh well, there's always next year,' she spoke in the same droning, dull voice. There were groans and shouts of 'RIGGED TRIALS' from the crowd and they were about to make their way out, as the children who got envelopes were being whooped and applauded by their families.

Aurora didn't understand. Did this mean she hadn't passed? Aurora felt like she was a helium balloon that had been popped and deprived of its air to float around and disobey the laws of gravity. She was a rock that had been picked up and thrown rather carelessly over the brink of a bridge.

All of a sudden, the tall clerk shouted, 'WAIT, THERE'S ANOTHER ENVELOPE!'

Chapter 3: 'WAIT THERE'S ANOTHER ENVELOPE!'

Another envelope!? What kind of magic miracle was this?!!!

There was an abrupt, lasting pin-drop silence, as all the families eyed the envelope like blood-sucking vampires that hadn't tasted elvish blood for 300 star-cycles.

Aurora's blue head shot up and adrenaline roared inside her, her face immediately flushed and her eyes never resting in one place around the stark paper envelope. She forgot all senses and just stared, like all the other watchful eyes around her.

The woman's mouth opened, and formed in the shape of: 'AURORA VENID!' Aurora's eyes opened wide, and suddenly everything was inaudible. The bare shock slapped her in the face like a boomerang. She got up and she couldn't feel her legs as she walked. She felt as if she would faint at any moment, and she stared in front of her. She stretched her arms and the woman placed it in her hand.

The teacher from the school leaned over the table and whispered in her ear, 'Looks like we have another warrior who's going to aid us in defeating the Phantom King.' Aurora suddenly knew that this year was going to be much more memorable than the one before...

Norah Rai
Denbigh School



Polly Goodson

FEEDBACK FROM THE JUDGES:

'It was fantastic to see so many schools taking part this year.'

'There were a lot of entries and the judges had a difficult task choosing winners.'

'Really good stories here, some deliciously dark!'



AWARD WINNERS:

A Special Place for Us: Imaginative with a strong emotional message. Well written.

The Cathedral: A perfect balance: intrigue, description, and story. A thriller!

A Special Place: Girl power! Inspiring story exploring emotion and aspiration.

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

The Diamond Kid: Fascinating idea. We must visit Bletchley Park soon!

Hybrid Academy: Full of suspense and tension. I wonder what happens next?

Pitch Perfect: Logical and realistic, inspired by a passion for football.

The Voice: Amazing storytelling with a double twist.

The Waves: Evocative, descriptive writing, moving from joy to terror.

An Insight into Love: A story of lasting love found in a special place.

Celesteworld: A tale with humour, tension, and a great ending.

Ultra Nova Quintet: A mysterious story, full of twists and suspense.



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11am to 4pm

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Westbury Arts Centre

Registered Charity Number 1151531

**Foxcovert Road, Shenley Wood,
Milton Keynes, MK56AA**



WESTBURY ARTS CENTRE CALL FOR ART TUTORS

Westbury Arts Centre (a registered charity no. 08328547) occupies a special place in the artistic life of Milton Keynes. From its ancient site in Shenley Wood, Westbury operates 19 studios for local artists, including an Artist in Residence, and offers a wide variety of high quality, affordable courses in the visual arts.



Keen to extend our offering into the community, we are currently looking for Art Tutors to develop and deliver adult art courses and workshops across all disciplines. We are looking for well organised, reliable individuals who are passionate about art and have good communication skills.

Experience of working with adults is desirable but not essential.

Essential requirements:

* Fine Art, or Art and/or Design degree or equivalent experience.



EVENTS 2023

9 - 5 JUNE

BUCKS ART WEEKS

15 - 16 JULY

MK YOUNG ARTIST EXHIBITION

22 - 23 JULY

WESTBURY BEE GROUP FESTIVAL

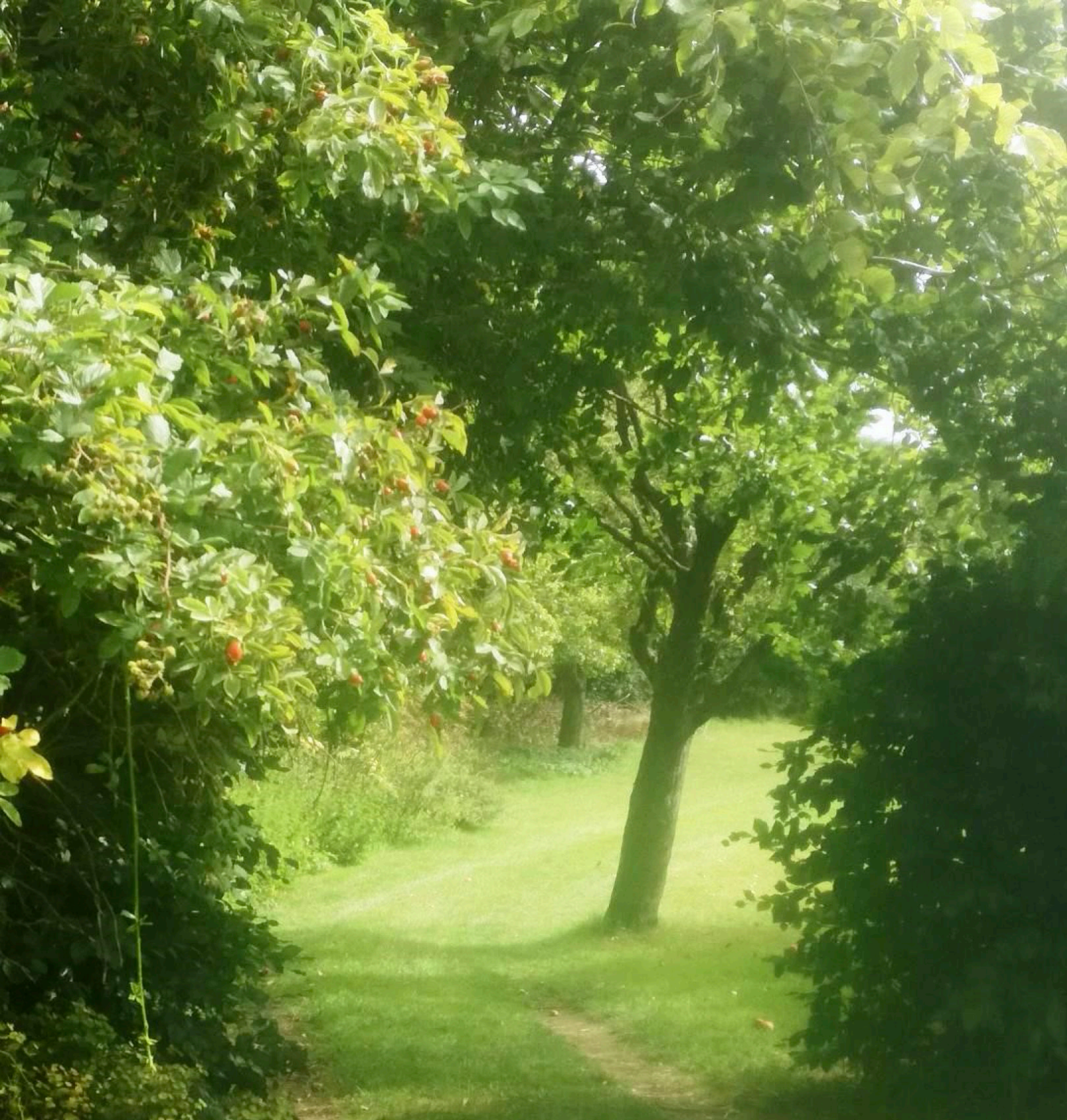
15 - 16 SEPT

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

18 - 19 NOV

WINTER ART MARKET

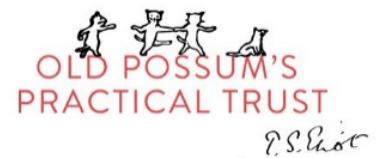




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