

Spark

Young Writers Magazine

Featuring writing produced by young people living in the West Midlands



Issue 13 December 2017

WRITING
WEST
MIDLANDS

Welcome to Spark Young Writers Magazine

Every magazine has its own house style and every magazine editor has their own criteria for what he or she picks to publish or chooses to reject. Spark Young Writers’ Magazine is no different but actually the one thing that matters to me is whether a piece is good and whether it is the best it can be.

So, yes, there is a 500-word limit and, no, I’ll never run a two- or three-part story spread over different issues.

Other than that, I’ll look at anything and actually this isn’t limited to poetry and prose. Over 13 issues now, the giant majority of pieces published and even submitted have been stories and poems but I will eagerly look at non-fiction too. I’ll also look at scripts but no one has ever submitted a script. If you’ve just taken that as a hint for getting published in a future issue, good.

We have had quite a few non-fiction pieces submitted but I’m struggling to remember our ever publishing one. Until now. In this issue you will find a personal piece about home education and the key word is personal. It’s written with attitude and life and verve. That’s what made it right for Spark Young Writers’ Magazine and it’s what I believe marks out every piece in this and every issue.

It’s a privilege to get to edit this magazine and to see how this energy is focused on such a range of topics and spent in so many different ways. I hope you enjoy reading these as much as I did.

William Gallagher – Editor

Spark Young Writers Magazine is a publication of Writing West Midlands. We support creative writers and creative writing across the region.

More information about us can be found on our website: www.writingwestmidlands.org

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Peaches

Iona Mandal

You always reminded me of peaches.
I remember how you opened your mouth
To devour one
Your lips awakening sleeping cities
Where cannibals wrote poetry
About pomegranate necklaces
And crows waited on rooftops
For dusk to dawn upon them

Your rusty metal wind chimes in the garden
Where we used to eat peaches on deck chairs
Still remind me
Of our bones clashing together in a fight
About some petty thing
Like forgetting
To take blood pressure pills

When you had cancer
I bought you those double cotton pillows
With money from your niece's old piggy bank
To prop you up high
So I could keep refilling the bowl
We bought before marriage
With peaches

You even coined a phrase
I say every day to myself
To cheer me up
Instead of "I'm over the moon!"
You said "I'm over the peaches!"
And I cried when you said that
Because, I thought,
I thought, you meant
You liked apricots more.

The Jury of the Dead

Hannah Tilt

He sits under the chestnut tree,
His hood pulled up against cold,
He carries a slip of paper,
That nervously he fold,

He looks around and finds himself,
A world away from home,
He searches the barren landscape,
His hungry eyes that roam,

He knows he cannot win his aim,
But still he presents his case,
Love etched on his skin,
Tears pouring down his face,

"Do not take her – she will not come!"
He pleads upon the jury,
Indifferently they watch,
As the man's love turns to fury,

"She is but 2 days old!" he cried,
"Surely you have pity?!" said he in rage,
But still they stared merciless,
The scribe scribbling on his page,

They reached a verdict:
"We will take her!" they cried in joy,
"NO!" he screamed,
"YES!" they gasped "OH BOY OH BOY OH BOY!"

And hopelessly the man now stood,
With the paper that he fold,
In front the jury of the dead,
The child he never got to hold.

Total Invasion

Chyenue Linton

I’m Judy and I’m nine. You know how parents always tell you to never lie, don’t be rude and all that stuff? The biggest rule in our house is: NEVER ENTER YOUR SISTER’S ROOM! Well, you may be able to go in your sister’s bedroom freely, but me, if I go in, I might not come out alive!

My older sister has always described me as a despicable creature. As far as she is concerned, I stole the affection she had when she was an only child aged seven and for that she punished me. I’d had enough, I needed to find out my big sister’s thoughts and fast, she needed to be stopped! I wanted to read her diary! I thought and thought about it, and the only real consequence was to find out how to think like a moody teenager. ERRRHHH!

I had to think carefully and prepare.

Listen, I know the title of this story is kind of dramatic, but, well, my sister thought of it and she is really dramatic! Seriously, she really overreacted, but you’ll find out why.

Jane and mom went shopping for Jane’s birthday party. This was my opportunity and I seized the moment. I tiptoed into Jane’s room. I stopped and looked up longingly at the pile of clothes sitting on her bed. “Judy! Juuuuudy!” they called to me.

I could not go into Jane’s room without trying something on. Other than “no midnight snacks” which is a rule I distinctly ignored on purpose – don’t tell mummy – and the Jane’s room thing, it was the only other rule that mattered to me. I had to!

I smothered lipstick on as neatly as I could. It didn’t work! I looked like I had poured a tin of tomato soup on my face. Before long, I had raided the whole of my big sister’s wardrobe, the room was a mess, suddenly, there it was.

The diary. Hooray, my mission was complete! “Don’t look!,” I told myself.

The temptation was too strong. I flipped off the lock and gazed longingly up at the hand-embroidered diary, held it up to my face and studied each word...

“Dear diary, Judy is quiet. She has barely spoken to me and even let me hog the TV! I tried to argue but she refused and smiled. I’m really missing our daily arguments, it is the highlight of my day. I’ll have to up my game if I want to have any fun in this house! Jane xxx”

OMG! I’m mouth-wide-open shocked! She enjoys our arguments? I can’t believe it. I... I... I ... can’t think... She loves me? The shock was exhausting! I was ready for my glass of milk, a hug from my mummy and a nap

OH, NO! The door creaks...

The Prodding Stick

Chinemerem Ikwuanusi

A tumorous slab of rotting wood was dubbed ‘the prodding stick’ by a group of rowdy, yet harmless children. Unlike many sticks, it had the great honour of having an array of prodded objects to its name, all of which had different consistencies. Jelly, one of the shared owners of the stick, could vouch that the piece of rot had had a good run in the prodding game, albeit a short one.

It was a sultry summer’s day, which stirred the masses on the streets in a mess of sweat and agitation. The forest nearby was particularly quiet on days like these—the trees trapped the heat and stench of the wilderness beneath their thick foliage.

Today was different, however. The smell was denser and fouler and the forest was in upheaval—creatures screeching in indignation at being jammed with a filthy stick. The children were more unruly than usual, as if intoxicated by the heat of the sun and the fumes of fresh decay, eager to flee from the cloud of palpable stench.

On the way out of the forest, they stumbled upon a rotting carcass, riddled with flies and doused with green filtered light. The children were thrown into a fit of giggles, heaves and vomiting. The flesh was rancid and bloodied, too disfigured to distinguish. It might have once been a deer.

“Prod it,” Jelly demanded to no one in particular. She had only gagged once.

Everyone turned towards Dessy, the one currently holding the stick, smirking and expectant.

Dessy was the smallest and newest on the troop, and yet seemed to have taken control of the others upon his arrival. He threw the stick at Milo, who was just across from him, without any warning—knowing he would not argue. Dessy turned to the corpse with eyes of maggots, a small smile playing on his lips. Milo knew what he had to do.

The group formed a circle around the heap and Milo, taking caution to keep their distance and covering their noses with their hands or arms.

Milo got a close up view of the stick submerging into the infested flesh, all the while a victim to the repulsive attack of hot decay on his nose. He stifled a gag as he felt the stick sink in so easily before meeting a thick and gooey substance that took hold of the stick and refused to yield. Milo pulled but the prodding stick was firmly stuck in place and pulling harder only caused the mouldy wood to run rough against his palms.

The carcass was moving. Something inside was pushing against the remaining skin, trying to burst free from the cage, like hands beneath a table cloth.

The corpse gave birth to a deformed creature, bursting from the stomach, ripping through flesh—sending chunks of rotten meat and bugs flying in all directions. Its face was melting and its eye sockets were hollow.

Train Journey

Maisy Mansell-Warren

Ughh!
What am I even doing here?
The ringing sound of wheels on rails,
The never-ending sea of legs,
The rushing scenery outside the
dirty window,
The dizzying smell of strong coffee...
What is the point?
There are buses, after all.
Why is it all so...
...close up?

The iPads and laptops
silently screaming dramatic movies in my face,
The migraine-causing stench of the engines,
The dull, nauseating grey seats
glaring at me.
Why does it always have to be
me
feeling sick?
The laughter, the chatter, the coughs and the sneezes,
And me praying the dizziness
won't make me see
my lunch again
My knuckles turning white
as I clench the edge of the slightly worn seat.

The woman's electronic voice
announcing the next stop.
The scrabble of passengers reaching for
belongings and
desperately pushing their way through
the aisle,
knocking everyone's elbows.

The sudden lurch of the stopping train,
Mum grabbing my arm; pulling me up,
guiding me through the claustrophobic crowd
of people taller than me.
Stepping out and...
Fresh air makes its way into my nostrils.
Thank goodness that's over.
It won't be happening again any time soon!

We Read

Nayantika Chaudary

She reads about places she will never go, adventures she will never have, people she could never be.

Yet she reads.

Lost somewhere between the pages of a book,

He reads to escape to another world, to embark on odysseys so much greater than those in his own insipid little world,

To venture to a faraway galaxy, to fly away with the fairies, to battle away the giants, and save the world in a flurry of resolute boldness,

To gaze upon the palest silver moon, atop the highest mountain under the the blanket of a billion twinkling stars,

To delve into an ancient era long past, or soar into a broken utopian future,

For each story is brimming with a new kind of magic, that brings his soul to life.

She dreams to be those she so relentlessly reads of, to be fearless, gallant, grand and courageous, dauntless in the face of fear.

Our souls yearn for another life in a another world, of magic and mystery, adventure and action,

Of crusades that bring down the veil between reality and illusion.

Heads stuck in clouds, forever trapped in a pleasant reverie, we are the lost souls that belong to another galaxy, another realm, another world, another life.

We are proficient wizards, valiant heroes, lionhearted dragon slayers and so much more, because we are readers.

Remember

Willow Gregory

In Flanders field we lay
On a bitter cold day
Our bodies are lost
In the frost
War flashing through our heads
Like memories of the dead

We were at war
We were sacrificed so others could live
We are the past
And we were innocent

We still live on
In others' hearts
Soon to fade
Soon to die in vain

Remember them
Remember their death
Remember their innocence
Remember, the sacrifice they made

It

Tigerlily Blakeway

It's been an hour; the footsteps have stopped. I really don't want to open my eyes: it came into my room about 20 minutes ago I think. I know that it's in here because I left my door open and saw it come in. It walked behind me and did something to the wall but it never came back around. I did the stupidest thing I could and turned over.

That's when I heard it laugh, loud enough for me to hear but quiet enough so that I didn't know if I was imagining it. I have to look, I know that it will get me but I really have to look. I open my eyes and on the wall in big black letters is written "I KNOW YOU'RE AWAKE"

I hold my breath trying not to scream. I glance at my clock 5:30 AM. If I can wait until 6 the sun will come up. 6:04 AM I hold my breath as I get up, I don't hear anything.

Did it leave?

I walk to the door suddenly it slams shut and locks. I scream and rattle the door. Laughing.... It's behind me: "I knew you were awake."

Home Education

Laurie Archer

People think that home educated kids have no exposure to the outside world. As a home educated child who has never been into school, I am here to clear up that misconception.

The first misconception I would like to clear up is that we have no exposure. People think that going to school is “Going out into the world” but it couldn’t be more different. Going out into the world is going into the community, interacting with other adults, speaking up for yourself, getting along with other people younger and older than you, and being able to direct your own learning. I am 12, but I socialize with kids aged 2-16 and a lot of our learning happens when we’re taking part in projects and activities with other home edders.

The second misconception is that it is like having a weekend every day. If you are a child who goes to school, don’t think that home education is doing nothing. When we have a day at home (which isn’t as often as you might think) we get up between 7.00 and 8.00am, eat toast or something, and do some learning. The only difference is that we get to choose what we learn. For example, I started this yesterday evening. It is now the next morning. This is my learning for the morning, writing to you! Please don’t think that we get to stay in bed until 10.00am. We don’t. Some do, it’s a free world!

Another thing I have had kids say to me is “Oh, I would never get out of bed!” Oh, yes, you would: home educating is intense! Directing your own learning with only a bit of input from your Mum, Dad, or tutor when you need it is no mean feat. I get up every morning and think “What shall I do today then?”

The third and final misconception is how we are educated at home. So, if you are thinking of starting Home Education just be aware that it is a tough job and that it’s not just sitting in bed and doing nothing, it’s the opposite! In some respects we have more variety than kids who are in school.

The reason I say this is that schools have to work within the constraints of budget, but in the Home Ed world, we can mix things up! Schools were great in the Victorian times, but life moves on. There is so much expert knowledge and information available now online that we can do it all off the internet.

I would like to finish with this: my experience of never going to school has been a great one. Everyone’s Home Ed journeys are different, but I would like to think that the sense of freedom stays the same throughout most.

Struggle

Chinemerem Ikwuanusi

It is more than the warmth that burns across your face and body. More than the sheen that builds on your forehead and the tip of your nose, or the beads of sweat gathering on your arms and legs. You can feel your heart hammering in your chest.

Your throat tightens and everything is stiff and achy. The words come out strained and nervous, pulled out from between your quivering lips like rope.

You’re conflicted: should I look down and risk the chance of falling – clumsy legs entangled and arms sprawling – or do I look up to meet the thousands of eyes, who don’t notice me, but who you think do. It’s not vanity, it’s paranoia. Like a viscous, portentous and black liquid oozing into your view, your mind and every thought. It’s thick like treacle and yet moves like water and consumes everything.

The crowds are closing in on you. A mod of throbbing faces, contorted and sneering. Your hands are jittery and your breath is shaky, eyes watering. The wind is still.

No, it’s much more than this. It’s something that incarcerates you. It becomes your life. It keeps you on a tether, agonising, like an out of control animal, generously given enough rope to hang itself.

The Lone Wolf

Aliya Waseem

Dangerous. Unpredictable. Evil. That's all I'm known as among these ignorant people. Wandering these lands, confined within a body that does my real beauty no justice. Cursed and robbed of my birthright; I roam these lands in hope of finding myself and freeing us all.

I am standing beside a tree tonight, just looking at the things around me, clad in a black, lacy dress that slides down to the floor and spirals up to my neck. The collar at the top of my dress held the rest of the material in place. There is a gentle breeze tonight that's lightly pushing my unbound hair in front of me. Holding a wilting rose in my hands, I study it with an intensity that I thought I was incapable of. The way that the dying petals just flutter off the stem and allowed themselves to be taken by the wind seems to intrigue me. A dying soul that has given up chances of survival. But not me. I will fight this accursed realm to the very end!

Chuckling the now empty stem out of my hand, I let out a sigh of frustration. So many nights spent searching, with all of them gone to waste. Nights are wasted with pointless hunts and I cannot move in the day as the people will try to kill me, and in this form I cannot fend for myself properly. Last time I hunted during day, I returned to my walking home with many injuries; I barely managed to stitch them up before losing too much blood. After that encounter, I never tried to search in the day again.

Placing one foot in front of the other, I slowly began walking to an area that I had not yet searched. It is likely to be another lost cause but I may as well cover as much ground as I can before the sun comes up and mortals begin to awaken. I quickened my pace to a jog to fully explore the grounds before the sun comes up.

When I reached the land, a faint light shone upon the mud. The moon's shimmering rays gave the place more of a serene look in the dark than the awfulness that it is during the day: quite ironic considering that the dark is meant to symbolise treachery and fear.

Stepping closer, I reached out my hand to enter the ray of light. When my hand touched the ray, I felt my hand burn as it began to... shift! I just watched, gobsmacked, as my hand became furry and razor-like claws shot out of my fingers.

I was shifting back into the form of a wolf! These rays... they have some kind of magic attached to them. When I pulled my hand out of the light, it immediately returned to the despicable human state it was previously in.

Well, at least I know where the lock is kept now. Better watch out, dear curser.

The Journey of Ups and Downs

JD Ikolo

There was once a little boy named Peter who had a pair of unappealing parents. Peter's dream was to be a footballer but unfortunately for him his parents didn't believe that he could be one because they didn't think he was good enough. But he didn't give up.

Two years later...

Now Peter is 7 and has thought of a way he could get them to let him play football. So one night he went up to his parents and said "Mom and Dad, if I do well in my school work, will I be allowed to play football?"

"Maybe," they said. And as soon as they said that Peter sped up to his room and started studying but he couldn't understand the multiplication or even division sums so for now his dream was crushed.

But he persevered. So one cloudy morning, Peter stole money at least £100 from his father's wallet and bought all the football equipment he needed and had just over £5 left. So then Peter went to a football club for trials and after playing his heart out for a place, he left with the unfortunate news that he didn't get through. But before he got home he had to keep it to himself so that his parents wouldn't notice.

However, he got a wonderful surprise when he got home. He had two people looking for him all over town. And those people were his parents. "They really care about me," Peter thought. And as soon as Peter's parents saw him they were elated "Where were you?" they asked him.

Then Peter said "Do you guys actually care about me?"

"Of course we do." Peter's parents said.

"Then if you do, show it by letting me play football."

"Ok, we are going to let you play football."

"YAY!" said Peter.

Amphitrite's Rage

Isobel Russell

Softly, she calls to me,
Her fingertips caress the sand as she sings in lilting whispers;
Ethereal, silvery fish slip between their mother's fingers,
Stirring her elegant turquoise robes.
A mess of blue-green kelp hair drifts on the surface,
Adorned with anemones
And seashells that shimmer pink in the dying sunlight...

With every word of sea-tongue that she sings,
Orb-like bubbles stream from her blue tinged lips.
Pearly eyes gazing, she murmurs secrets of eternity.
Her serene, enigmatic beauty stirs something deep inside me.

Suddenly, she rises out of the shallows,
Up, up, up,
Her jade jewellery strewn on the water, forgotten.
An unforgiving storm tears the night sky apart,
Vicious daggers of moonlight illuminating her face,
Making her once-pearly eyes malignant jet black.

Shrieking mercilessly, she gouges the cliffs,
Claws raking violently.
The tide heaves madly, in time to her shallow breaths,
She thrashes wildly.
A tornado of tangled black hair whipping in the bitter wind.
Her inky lips twist themselves into a serpentine sneer.
Lurching forward, ready to engulf me...
Closer, closer,
I recoil in horror
Closer, closer,
I ready myself for the final strike,
Closer, closer,
And it never comes.

The sea smiles at me gently, serenely,
Inviting me towards the calm shallows,
Like she has forgotten.
Oblivious to my stunned face,
She reaches a glistening star from the night sky
And fixes it fondly in her hair.
She closes her eyes, breathing slowly, as if she is asleep.
Waiting.
Waiting for the sunrise.

Embers

Jess Sandhar

Floating down from the sky.
Lighting up the surrounding darkness.
Fluttering, swirling, gliding
Down.

Flickering on and off like a switch.
Burning a vibrant orange,
And then immediately turning into a dusty grey.
Falling.

Soon they no longer flicker.
They only descend.
Dark and silent.
Fallen.

They lie on the ground.
Not seen anymore.
But still hated.
The spectacular hue of orange a distant memory.

We remember the scars they left.
The hate we spare for them.
Never forgotten.
Never lost.

But they are always falling.
Ever silent.
Ever despised.
Ever embers.

Cold Morning

Kirby Chiu McCrea

On a walk with my family I saw a basket
Floating on the beautiful blue waters of the lake
A tiny head pokes out
My brother!
I run to him and he gurgles happily,
Clutching my hand softly
Walking back with him, the lake does not make me wet,
His warm smile dries me
I cry out to my family
Why do they not hear?
My eyes open
I am awake.

Silence

Benedict Christmas

A great day at the beach.
The sun shining through the empty blue sky.
Strawberry ice creams melting gradually on the cement floor.
Silence was all absent.
Mark and Kate lay together on the warm sand.
Sun reflecting off their bare backs.
Gulls squawking and swooping down to them.
Slurping up their melted ice cream.
Joined by the heavy cacophony of other people.
The sand darkened,
Mark's queries joined their puzzled looks.
"It's the clouds Mark."
Oh, yeah. The clouds.
The clouds from the empty sky.
Their mound of ice cream shone heavy rays onto the couple, their backs rapidly turning scarlet.
"Ow, ow!"
"So hot!"
As it got darker and blacker.
As the sun died, melted and vanquished.
As the ice cream shone.
As the noise muffled.
The silence was so absolute.
It was like you could reach out and touch it.
The silence of no people.
The silence of no waves.
The silence of no seagulls.
Silence.

The silence was interrupted suddenly -
"And then there were 2."
"Finally."

A great day at the beach.
The sun vanquished like flames.
Dark black sky.
Strawberry ice creams shining, melting on the cement floor.
The silence was now completely absolute.
No noise
No people
Just ...
Silence.

Nocturnal Bliss

Jess Sandhar

Soaring high above the endless clouds.
A gentle zephyr raising me.
The radiating sun turning into wisps of cold air.
Solemn winds whispering into the shadows.

The clouds halted abruptly
Letting the golden stars twinkle and wink mischievously at every trespasser.
Whilst the moon left a silver trail of light on the dark oceans below.
I felt my worries and angst slip away into the starry night.

Galaxies and galaxies beyond the rim of beaming stars.
Glittering lakes and seas followed by an azure blue horizon
Which emerged into the limitless sky.
I cherished the peace and serenity.

I glided staring at what I had in front of me.
The silver moon peeking out behind clouds like a timid mouse.
The vast sky that was decorated by stars that sparkled like diamonds.
Everything was perfect.

I knew the night was ending.
I watched the pale orange light spill over the darkness transforming a perfect night into a new day.
The sun had begun its journey up into the sky that was laden with stars flickering off like switches,
Whilst the moon crept down full of envy as the sun took its place.

I couldn't watch any longer.
If only the night had gone on
If only my wish came true
But wishes don't come true.

To me none of the realism matters.
My wishes rock me to sleep.
Unwind me as I close my eyes.
So I have a solitary night's rest in peace.

The Sky

Maisy Mansell-Warren

It's a wonderful, mysterious thing.
Sometimes it's a perfect
deep sapphire, the sun piercing
through it like a beautiful
laser.

Other times, it's hurt and bruised
with grey and green,
crying dull, cold tears.

It could be filled with rage,
storming angrily
through a grey canvas,
a billowing mass of dark magic.

Or maybe a gentle,
watery blue,
thin,
wispy white clouds
floating lazily around and whispering
to each other on a serene breeze.
Changeable, unreliable, unpredictable.
The sky

Up in Fire

Maryam Alatmane

Strong gusts of wind race along the moors howling. I march on, a heavy fur coat wrapped around my thin frame, snuggling deeper into a feathery soft scarf. Fiery tendrils of hair blow onto my face and the wind buffets me forward, like a dinghy in a storm. Gloved trembling hands grip the suitcase.

Slate grey fog crawls, its tendrils reaching forwards. It seeks me out in the gloom. Squinting, I move on, stepping tentatively on rocky ground. I glance down at my watch, the minute hand ticking dangerously close to time up, but the bleak landscape has been obliterated by a wall of grey.

Then, I see it. The tree stands like a beacon; its limbs rise up, coal black against a darkening sky. Walking with purpose, and then running, running, running until I reach it. Gently placing the suitcase down, I rip off my gloves, extending my hand towards the rough bark and striding around the tree. Behind me, the feeble fence creaks; wooden posts desperately clinging to loose soil. I stop randomly, but the patterns turn foreign beneath my fingers and I move on. Finally, I find it. Following the familiar looping lines dug into the tree trunk, I smile shakily. But it's not over yet.

I reach into my pocket, flipping out a rusting Swiss knife. Pushing the blade into the tree, I watch as a viscous crimson substance oozes into the indentations. Light flashes suddenly through the gloom.

Moving soundlessly, I inch towards the suitcase. Numb hands fumble with the latches. Indistinct voices become clearer, coming closer. Time is almost up...

From a distance, he watches as they find her. Too late, they notice the flaming match she drops by her feet.

The world is ablaze. A monumental burst of light, flames rising up; vines wrapping around the tree and the girl and the suitcase. As the flames climb towards her face, she turns to face him, smiling.

And then she is gone.

Why I'm Cross

Tabitha Ritchie

Hi. Yeah you can come and join me, I don't mind. Look, you're probably wondering what has got me in such a bad mood. Well, you see those people over there? Yeah? Well they are just so mean. Honestly, I'm not joking. I know they look nice, kind, caring and la di da but once you know them, it's torture. When I first met them I made that mistake too. Literally as soon as they see me in the morning they start making fun of me, calling me names, treating me like I'm a baby!

It's so unfair and the thing is no one tries to stop it, they just say things like: "Come on, we need to go!" or "Look, I'm sure he likes you but you need to do your homework." Which by the way I do not like them, no I hate them! I know, strong words, but trust me, sometimes you just get a feeling about these things and right now I'm having a pretty big feeling that I don't like them. They treat me like a toy, like they own me, which they don't by the way. All I've ever been is nice. Treating them like a friend, asking for food nicely, what more do they want?

So now I just sit here, on this wall waiting for the day to end, a clock to chime twelve times in the dead of night. Hoping so bad they won't see me during tea and endlessly shout at me, snapping their fingers as if I'm a servant treating their every need. I know my tale is well, slightly worse than boring and not as tragic as it sounds in my head but thank you for-

Oh, no! Here they come, quick, hide, save yourself! It's too late for me! Run, save yourself whilst you can! They'll be so awful!

"Oh, who's a cute cat!!"

This is Going to Hurt

Francesca Sowerbutts

‘This is going to hurt,’ he says, ‘but it will be quick.’ Sweat beads roll one after the other down the curve of my spine, staining my pale blue t-shirt with fear. The man wields the gun in front of my face, smiling cheerfully. The girl next to me rolls her eyes. ‘You look like you’re going to pass out.’

‘You’re not the one about to die!’ I yell and the sound slaps her in the face.

‘You have got to be kidding,’ the man sighs, ‘I’ve done this thousands of times. Soon it will all be over.’

‘You’re a murderer!’ I cry and try to struggle out of the chair.

‘Can you-’ he gestures to the girl beside me, and she puts two firm hands on my shoulders to trap me. Bile rises up in my throat, scorching my flesh as the man brings the gun up next to my head. My fingernails dig deep into my soft palms, leaving crescent-shaped wounds. ‘On the count of three,’ he says.

‘One.’

My head is spinning.

‘Two.’

I’ve lost the ability to breathe.

‘Three!’

A loud pop bursts out of the barrel. I scream and put my hands up to my head. ‘NO! Don’t touch them!’ he says firmly as I attempt to fiddle with my freshly pierced ears.

‘Ok! My turn. Finally.’ The girl snarls and shoves me roughly off of the chair. Later as I walk home, I call my mother to tell her about my near-death experience. She just laughs and says ‘You really are prone to exaggeration.’



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