

# Spark

## Young Writers Magazine

Featuring writing by young writers in the West Midlands



Issue 19 March 2020





# Spark Young Writers Magazine

Surely the best thing about editing the Spark Young Writers Magazine, and I'm sure you will feel the same as you read it, is the way the stories and poems transport you to other worlds, other lives and other times.

Reading the magazine, I'm no longer sitting at my desk hiding from the rather grey, rainy afternoon outside. Instead, I'm on a battlefield (of which there are several in this issue), escaping monsters (be that ones that slither in the shadows or lurk in your dreams), and watching cute candy gnomes take caramel baths (my advice: don't read on if you're hungry).

In this issue, you will be taken on a journey full of unexpected twists and turns, into castles, crumpet cottages and sprawling forests, all through the words of the incredible young writers. I won't tell you more, I don't want to ruin the surprises that lie ahead! All I will say is that I was thrilled and, quite frankly, hugely impressed by the quality of all of the submissions, and the poems, stories and snippets gathered here showcase some of the best new writing in the West Midlands.

It has been a real privilege to read the pieces submitted, and I'm so excited to share this issue with you. I hope you have as good a time reading these pieces as I have.

Matilda Blackwell  
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](http://www.writingwestmidlands.org).

This magazine features writing from children and young people aged 8 - 20 who live in the West Midlands of the UK and across Europe. It is also available to read online at [www.writeonmagazine.org](http://www.writeonmagazine.org).

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Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
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Supported using public funding by  
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ENGLAND**

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## Maryam Alatmane

it's almost comforting-  
the droning rain  
falling,  
the world wrapped  
in its lilting beat.

cold sinks into my veins  
like a tap drips,  
slowly  
slowly;  
it weighs my body  
down  
until  
my bones are  
clay.

they refuse  
to be moulded.

constant pounding  
drills through my ears;  
its staccato is  
the only music i know.

the sky is an ocean;  
it collapses and  
water pounds  
with a vengeance,  
hits the ground  
roaring,  
beckons me out  
to the cold.

i tilt my head up,  
feel wet pinpricks;  
they are confetti  
and a melody.

the rain  
slams like timpani  
as i dance;  
the  
beat  
slows  
and speeds up;

the rhythm of it drugs me.

i twirl again, dance  
to its drumming  
against the pavement;

i can make  
my own sunshine.

# I Have a Dream

**Iona Mandal**

Mother used to tuck me in bed every night, folding me up into the depths of the duvet like one of those sushi platters on the 'best deal' racks of a superstore.

Bedtime for us was somewhat a luxury. A hot mug of some liquid left on the bedside table (of whatever was left in the fridge shoved into the microwave for a minute) that I drank senselessly, but with greed.

Then, either a warbling Swahili lullaby I could only half make out the words of, and one of the same three traditional folktales passed down from what seemed like countless generations.

The lightbulb usually did not work, flickered like a flame for about a couple odd minutes and then, when saturated, turned off into a void of oblivion.

No matter how many times our self-acclaimed next door electrician neighbour popped in, the overhead lighting always seemed to get worse, with each screw of the bulb.

Circumstances were bleak, but my dreams were always vivid.

Mother, who had been to nursing school for a few months before colour was worth more than skill, told me that frequent dreams were not a sign of good health. She would chant nonsense phrases into my ears, feed me perplexing spice blends and do anything to stop my dreams.

Poundland dream catchers were always her sought after item. It was not even as if I had nightmares either, it was just that my dreams were realer than life itself and that I was always completely aware of them.

Scientists called it lucid dreaming, my mother said it was bad luck. I remembered each and every one of my dreams well enough to spill them out into a notepad each morning. And they never grew monotonous.

The best way I could describe them was like having a thermal camera for normal vision, heat-sensing eyes, being able to feel all five senses and even a sixth, some would say scarily vivid.

At school, we had been learning about famous activists. Each one of us had to make a poster about our favourite one. I did Martin Luther King, his 'I Have a Dream' speech particularly catching my ear.

I would play the video on repeat, his distinct voice making my eardrums buzz with an inexplicable clarity, his words like a blunt knife.

It was a particularly touchy subject, being practically the only one with melanin in my class. None of the kids would sit next to me at lunch; scrunch up their noses when I opened my lunch box, gagging at the contents of my 'ethnic' food.

They say your dreams are nothing but a distorted reflection of your thoughts.

That statement made most sense that night as my eyes fell shut. I could hear the speech replaying in my head, like a broken tape recorder. Particularly the last line: "...free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

That line seemed a labyrinth to me.

Free? Was I free yet?

# Ravenloft

## Jasper Page

Once again as the mists circle the kingdom,  
The soul of every Angel cries,  
And the dark black walls of the dark one's  
castle,  
Seem to enjoy when a good spirit dies.  
An icon, a sword and a book,  
Are the last hope for the black cat.

And the mists seem to fear the black cat,  
For it's hope lies in the middle of the kingdom,  
To wield the sword and read the book.  
And as the last word of the seer dies,  
The hope for the life of the dark one dies.  
And the moon still shines on the remains of the  
castle.

And it is now ruin what was once a castle,  
The crowds see the cat,  
As the spirit of the great mage dies.  
But as peace returns to the people of the  
kingdom,  
The honest knight of the dragon dies.  
As words flow from the pages of the book.

Then the next author of the dark one's book,  
Puts pen to paper as the castle,  
Blocks out the sun when the dark one cries.  
And on his lap is the black cat,  
Which has been all around the kingdom,  
Even before the good king dies.

But the mists still smile as the people's hope  
dies,  
Faintly replaced by the words of the book.  
Twisted by the killer of the last black cat of the  
last kingdom,  
As the hopelessness descends from the castle,  
For the heir to the throne of the new black cat,  
She sits in her room and cries.

But no god hears the noble's Cries,  
Fearing the day when her brother dies.  
And then the seer summons the black cat,

Reading the pages of that very same book,  
Watching the walls of the dark one's castle,  
As mist again circles the kingdom.

As the noble's cries seem to give in to the book,  
The vistani dies as she enters the castle,  
For the cat senses new blood in its kingdom.

# Guardian Angel

**Lilli Davies**

10...9...8...

Every muscle in my body tenses as a hail of bullets pelts down on me like a deadly rainstorm. The small piece of cover protects my trembling body, but only just. If I move even so much as an inch, I will die. If I stay here for even so much as a minute, I will die. The inevitability of the end washes through me with the force of a tsunami and warm tears spring to my eyes, causing the hellish visions before me to haze slightly.

Except for the single white feather that glides elegantly down through the battle and bloodshed.

7...6...5...

The sight of such a pure, delicate thing transfixes me, instantly wiping the grim thoughts from my mind. As if the whole beach was suddenly doused in treacle, the world around me slows. Sound fades away. The watery morning light dims. A bizarre sense of calm blossoms in my chest. How? How could anyone find solace in a place as terrible as this?

Distantly, as if it happens in a separate universe, I register the dull thud of a body collapsing to the sand by my feet. I tear my eyes reluctantly away from the feather, still winding its way slowly down through the curtains of bullets, and look down.

4...3...2...

The man flails helplessly on the ground; a crimson puddle rapidly forms around his head from the gaping hole in his throat. One of his blood-soaked hands feebly reaches out for me, but too late. He draws in one final, gurgling breath and goes limp.

I look back to the feather and the tranquillity it granted me turns sour. It isn't a good omen, it never was. Just the mark of a coward: the mark of a man who sits crying behind meager scraps of cover while his comrades die nobly around him. The sourness turns to determination.

That will not be me.

1

The feather lands. I rise to my feet.



# I, the Monster

**Niccolo Horton**

In the sorrowful mourning streets of this town,  
The desperate cries of mercy echo shrill  
From the banks that soak up red tears and bleed grey  
That was born from the flowing graves, to afar  
Where refuge bears a fatal end to those few;  
Those few crumbling in despair, struggling a visage  
Of trickling paint, anger in colour, aloft  
Their broken bones that held a succulent taste,  
Sweet on my tongue but sour in my weak eyes,  
I could glimpse no markings of bliss around me,  
Sadness seemed to be the one friend in this town  
That I could have; it on its throne of solace,  
I another stain to these troubled people  
Who in another world could have been happy  
In their long lives. Alas, darkness has reached them,  
Too early in truth, and I am the sole blame  
Because to them, I am that blighted monster  
And I shall wear that brand for eternity.

# When a Man Comes to Power

**Aarav Desai**

As many people's hope is entrusted,  
On a singular priceless being,  
A transfer of good occurs,  
With caution imminent,  
For all know what happens,  
When a man comes to power.

You see privileges,  
Which are dearly given,  
Spark gruesome greed,  
To a once-helping soul,  
At times it seems unexpected what happens,  
When a man comes to power.

The sway to evil haunts,  
Only as greed asks for more,  
And with power you will get more,  
This is when the once saviour,  
Will perform a show on what happens,  
When a man comes to power.

Yes - he will cling,  
To what he calls his throne,  
What he once called a mere chair,  
Has now turned all grand,  
For this transformation only happens,  
When man comes to power.

The heroic leader he was meant to be,  
Is lost in the mist of betrayal,  
And what is found is a monster,  
Covered in a cape of callous change,  
That type of change only happens,  
When a man comes to power.

The plague of false trust creeps out of spotlight,  
And arrives in the painful spotlight,  
Which shines through the closed-secretive doors,  
The mutated sly creature is wrestled down,  
As the people united - in despair - see what happens,  
When a man comes to power.

# Harrying of the North

**Safi Mbarushimana**

The smell of smoke creeping into my room  
Mother left last night to build...

I swiftly look outside,  
the fields are barren and only a bright red flower sits there

I left,  
not knowing where to go,  
I saw our former kings head,  
hung on a Norman door...

The fields are barren and only a bright red flower sits there

Corpses lay on the field,  
The air smelling of salt,  
Our food scarce

The fields are barren and only a bright red flower burns there...

# The Creature

**Daniel S Martin**

It could have been a creature. I'm not too sure.

The thing grew and shrunk, moulding itself into different shapes. At one time it was a slimy eel, which slivered along the grimy floor, inspecting small cracks and unusual changes in elevation between floor boards.

Another moment, the creature was a black mass of hovering smoke. It took this form for an extended period of time, usually between animals. The dense, shadowy fog floated a couple inches above the floor, changing the proportions of its shape, but never its form.

Of course it took the form of animals, like the aforementioned eel, but only very occasionally. I watched it do this, cigarette in hand, transfixed. I didn't move when it came closer, or follow when it disappeared round the side of a bag.

A cycle of hovering as the black mass, to roaming the filthy room as some strange animal, before returning to that black, shapeless form. It began to regularly take its black mass form before the door and, in the shape of an animal, just sat in the same spot, peering across the room at me.

After the cycle had repeated a few times, and as I took a long breath of smoke, the creature took the form of a gentle looking black and white dog. The dog's eyes were the brightest blue I'd ever seen, shining out from deep within endless, hollow caverns. It just sat, watching me slowly exhale.

As I looked on, through a hazy cloud of smoke, the dog's features began to melt and fall away. The dog's flesh piled up before it, pulsating in rhythm to my own runaway heart. I put the cigarette to my lips. Don't panic, I thought. It will all go away if I just don't panic. The flesh became a brighter, crimson red, burning my retinas. A permanent imprint of that dog's flesh, mingled with the now changing creature.

The crimson died away, becoming a darker version of the same colour, until it was an endless black. Strange and unnatural movements vibrated through the pulsating pile of flesh. But it was that form no longer. It was the eel, once again, slivering round and round the floor, following its tail. Round and round it went. I held the cigarette to my lips one final time, before putting it out. Abandoned by the cigarette, I watched the eel alone. After hundreds of laps, the eel slivered around the side of the door.

I didn't dare follow it. All my mind would allow me to do was stare, as if the spot where that pile of flesh had been would give some answers. No answers came. Possibly, because no questions were asked. Snatching up my coat, I timidly opened the door. No dog. No eel. No black mass. Slamming the door, I ran from the house. I ran until my breath escaped me, but still that crimson red was in front of me. Stained upon my retinas.

# Human

## Bridey Bingley

Our world -  
Once a perfect world  
But now it is marked  
Marked by the pain we have put in this world  
Marked by the suffering we have put in this world  
Marked by the destruction we have put in this world  
Marked and scratched and flawed with imperfections

We hide them  
Bury them  
Forget them  
Yet I fear they are inked on us.  
No hiding  
No burying  
No forgetting  
Can stop them from being

But  
All these imperfections  
Make me wonder  
Whether all these imperfections  
Make us human?  
Whether it is not our intelligence  
Or the way we love  
Or our conscience  
That make us human -  
But all the marks  
All the scratches  
All the imperfections  
We put on this earth  
That make us human

Can a blood-stained sword ever regain its innocence?  
Can a flattened forest ever be reborn?  
Can all these marks  
All these scratches  
All these imperfections  
Ever fully heal?

Maybe  
If we took off our rose-tinted glasses  
And saw the imperfect world -  
Our imperfect world  
As it really is  
If we did not hide  
Bury  
Forget  
These marks  
These scratches  
These imperfections  
If we wore them on our skin  
Not in pride but in understanding  
If we accepted  
That these marks  
These scratches  
These imperfections  
Make us human  
Then we could make them heal  
But then,  
Would we still be human?



# I Dreamed a Dream

**Anand Kaur Bharath**

I dreamed a dream, in bed last night,  
Oh my, it was quite a sight.  
Perfect, image, puzzle, paths,  
Cute candy gnomes having caramel baths.

Magnificent, mingling fruits all around,  
Crush they went without a sound.  
Candy land I was here at last,  
I had dreamed of this in the past.

Fountains crying chocolate tears of despair,  
With fondant mountains, causing an affair.  
Toxic waste polluting the sky,  
Making innocent little baby birds cry.

Garnet gum drops were happily dancing,  
And fuchsia flamingos elegantly prancing.  
Trapped in an enormous aero bubble,  
I don't know why but I could sense trouble.

With an explosion the bubble went pop,  
Jumping for joy out I hop.  
Perfect pancakes with delicious whipped cream,  
Together they made a mighty team.

Gracious gummy bears having a fight,  
I thought to myself that's not right.  
A plethora of sugar-coated custard creams,  
It was like all of my dreams.

Scrumptious crumpets were neat little houses,  
They were filled with jelly and roses.  
Rainbow drops were falling from the byzantium sky,  
Landing on the beautiful birds as they fly.

Suddenly I awoke with a jolt,  
Then I came to an abrupt halt.  
My mind was engulfed with confusion,  
Oh my! That was such an illusion.

# The Greats

## Grace Neech

Anyone who was there that day, no matter what side they fought on, swore there was an almost eerie glow surrounding the two enemies. A girl with hair black as soot, and eyes as blue and as unrelenting as the ocean. A boy with dark brown hair covered in ash, and eyes as green as grass.

“Just give up the throne: you’ve no hope for success now!” the boy yelled from across the battlefield.

The girl narrowed her eyes and clenched her fists.

“Do not challenge me.”

Her voice was a whisper but the whole world fell silent, as if hoping for an end to the war that destroyed everything they lived for.

Silence.

They took the bait.

Every soldier that had set foot on the field lunged at her thrusting weapons into flesh and hoping they found their target. The boy stared at the discord unfolding in front of him. Sympathy and a desire for justice battled for supremacy over his actions. Sympathy won.

“Stop”

As if a thread had pulled them back to the earth, the soldiers stepped back, dazed, revealing the girl standing there wearing her cuts and bruises like a crown. She smiled.

“Was that supposed to hurt?”

Murmurs swept across the field. The murmurs gave way to shouts of alarm. The girl was gone. Vanished. The boy heard a soft laugh behind him before she whispered:

“You really have no idea what I am, do you?”

The soldiers lunged at her with the force of the gods, but she ran anyway. They dragged her in front of him, her hands bound behind her back. He looked down at his opponent, bloody and broken. She struggled against the soldiers, but they dragged her off anyway. She whipped her neck round and screamed two words...

“They’re coming!”

He watched as fear flooded her face as she continued to scream at him. He knew. He was ready. While she was planning battle tactics, he had been pouring over every inch of folklore the massive

town library had to offer, and he found them. The lesser ones, the half-ghost, half-human ones who were the puppets of the Greats. Half-shadow, half-something else, they could shapeshift, teleport and all who disobeyed them were killed. There was one “good” Great with black hair and blue eyes, the girl. Too bad she didn’t recognise him. Humans and Greats had been sworn enemies since the beginning of time until the girl, Tessa, betrayed them. One thing was for sure, the Greats had far worse punishments than death, all they had needed was a captive, and now they had one. He smiled and muttered under his breath:

“Watch out Tessa...”

# The Mount

Sayandeep Das

Cresting sprawling sloping pines,  
Rough rushing falls  
Slicing through the open rolling mountains,  
Bright blinding twisting lines...

The Mount.  
Ancient, dominant, all-wise  
It watches with submissive eyes,  
Never heeds nature's cries,  
Never falls on human lies.

He has envisioned the past,  
and glances the future.  
We ourselves have made the wounds,  
The mount himself will stitch the suture.

Living, breathing, trees of air,  
Slashed down or ravaged bare,  
Pleads to the mount,  
Who is cruel but fair.  
He shakes his head,  
He doesn't care.

The ocean's breath,  
Curses and spits and swears  
to any man who ever dares,  
to put the devil's oils in its lungs.  
The last sea song,  
it has ever sung,

The desert's gifts have been prematurely  
snatched.  
An infant seized from a mourning mother,  
a terrible pain,  
such as no other.

The cautionary tales have already been told,  
spread far and wide,  
from word of mouth,  
North to South.  
But being dampened,  
Soaked by ignorant fools,  
Who see mother nature as their personal tools,

They will be extinguishers of our human race.  
The world is dying.  
God give us grace.

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Supported using public funding by  
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Co-funded by the  
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**For more information about the work Writing West Midlands  
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