

Spark

Young Writers

winter writing

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WRITING
WEST
MIDLANDS

Writing is always about more than the words you use. At the very least, it's also about the words you don't use, but inescapably writing is always revealing of more than the writer intended.

So in this 25th issue of Spark Young Writers' Magazine, you will see the same wild range of pieces, but you will also very quickly sense that this writing could only be written now. Even in light and short pieces there is always an undertow of what the writer is feeling, what he or she is going through away from their writing. With the pieces in this issue, in particular, you get a constant extra feeling of brooding thought that makes the writing absorbing.

Except possibly in "A Recipe for Golden Stories (Decorations Included)", which deliciously pretends there are rules for writing stories. For being funny right from the excellent make-you-smile title, this piece by Amelie is my editor's pick for the issue.

William Gallagher, editor

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A Recipe for Golden Stories (Decorations Included)

Amelie

Get a large mixing bowl and add:

- a sieved plot
- a dollop of action — make sure it isn't too runny
- 2 teaspoons of villains
- 3 tablespoons of heroes
- 1 drop of main character
- a pinch of twists and turns (a good brand is betrayal)
- thinly sliced chapters

NOTE: Make sure the mixture is not lumpy after stirring as readers will get disinterested.

Once the plot disappears and the story dough gets tough to stir, kneed with your hands and edit your creation. For example, making sure the main character is fully involved in the mixture.

Roll out your edited story dough and shape it with a knife - CAREFULLY

Lay your shape on a baking tray and put it in the oven to create some tension and atmosphere. REMEMBER to not overcook your story as it will become dry and distasteful.

P.S There should be no plot holes in your story otherwise it won't cook properly.

You will know it is ready when the smell of your golden story leaves you hooked and wanting more.

This is optional but adding icing to your story will entice many potential readers — who wouldn't have approached them without decoration.

What if there is no hero

Chloe Pick

A leaf is swept along the pavement
Its shards scatter, just moments later
Pushed away by the force of a foot
A bird caws above in a tree
The dog below it barks up, as though to say hello
I stomp through the Autumn leaves,
My imagination running wild,
Inspiration lurks around every corner

I think about my day at school
About the progress I made on an art project at lunchtime
About the chaos in form time that I just read a book amidst
Losing myself in the pages of another world
Where problems all have an easy solution, achieved by a heroic quest
Where the hero is just a normal person
Until they no longer are
But in real life things are more complex
People can't be predicted
And the hero doesn't have a happily ever after
And sometimes life won't present a quest
Just a list of chores
That need to be done everyday

I spend everyday wondering what my life will be
How I can get there
If I'm doing enough to achieve that
But instead I answer if I can even achieve that
If it's even possible

Bonfire Night

Amber Wallbutton

Stars shone down on us,
The raging bonfire crackled,
Glowing embers flew.

A New Start

Harriet Guinan

The ice-cold snow shutters up my body. Rippling through my rickety bones. The snow is blasting into my eyes, blinding me. I see something, misty and large, which was getting closer and bigger. I blinked and I was sprawled over by it, but all I could see was black. I see a white light, I come towards it. A picture of a girl forms, I know her but my memories of her are faded, dazed and want to be forgotten.

The image starts to fade again, like a secret that I shouldn't have seen. I need the picture to stay so I can figure out who this lost girl is. But still it fades away, into nothingness. I return, back to earth, back to my reality. I hear voices shouting, shouting my name. It's my best friend Emily, she's worried, but I don't know why. Apparently, the avalanche took me, she says that if I'm found I should go to hospital. I protest, I need to find out who that girl is.

I run home; I ask mom who the girl is. She has a shocked expression sewn on her face she tries to convince herself that it was her imagination. Yet she was not easily convinced, and I knew there was no point arguing with her, so I just left. I went to the library, there had to be some town records of everyone. But she wasn't there, yet I saw a ragged fraction of paper where a page has been. I knew it was her page, I know her, I know it, I just don't know where from.

Her sparkling teeth, her ocean eyes those are ones that can't be forgotten, but it seems that everyone is trying not to mention her. But why? Who is she and where is she from? I need to know, we were close, had a special connection, a special bond. I have so many questions, but everyone is hiding the answers. People think that it's for my own good. But what happened to her?

I see a little piece of pearly white paper sticking out of the back of the book. I pull it out, it's a flattened origami crane. There's writing on it, so I unfold it. It's the missing page, but it's my profile. I'm the missing girl, the mystery.

I read the rest of the page. I stop when I get to the date of death. I'm confused, I didn't die. No, I'm right here. I run to the mirror; I stand right in front of it. But I don't see anything, only the library shelves. I pick up the page, I read further into the paragraph. I was never found in that avalanche.

The Abyss

Isla Rimmington

Everything went wrong that day. It started with that crow: its obsidian black feathers flapped with alarm as it screeched “Danger! Danger! Danger...” Its eyes were deep, like a dark pool of oil. Staring across the land it flew away, leaving only a poignant memory in my mind. Then I got trapped. I couldn’t remember how, but I opened my eyes drowsily, blinking sleep out of them. I was lying on the floor, motionless, until I got up and took in my surroundings.

The forest had a thick mist that meant I could make out only hazy silhouettes. I was in a forest, surrounded by circumambient trees. Each tree appeared the same, dry, old, and shrivelled. As though all life had been sucked out of it aeons ago. I couldn’t see how tall they were because the tops of the branches had been completely shrouded by the fog.

My legs straightened as I attempted to stand, my limbs felt frail, and I stumbled uneasily. But still, I knew I wouldn’t go out like this, I would go out fighting. I took a slow step, then another, each time growing more confident, until I was walking like I knew I had before.

After what felt like years, the quiet plantation suddenly seemed to go on mute. Even the once distant cawing of the strange birds had withdrawn. I lumbered on, the mist gradually parting, for me. I tripped and landed with a harsh THUD! A serrated rock jabbed into my knee, cutting through the flesh, my body was in agonising pain and my eyes stung from the oppressive air. Forcing my eyelids to open I realised my face was hovering over a precipice, leading into – what seemed – a unfathomable abyss...

I rapidly pulled myself to my mutilated feet, ignoring the excruciating pain. The feel of an ice-cold finger traced down my spine as a flicker of movement caught the corner of my eye, I turned. Nothing was there, only the cruel wind that swirled around catching the brown, dying leaves, and whipping them along. Cautiously, I crept towards the cliff face of the abyss and peered over, no sign of any life, only an ominous mauve radiance and dark, thundering, caliginous clouds.

Before I could back away, I felt a hard impact on my back like a push. Wait, it was a push. I tumbled, falling into the endless pit, I twisted and turned to face the opening, in time only to see a ghostly figure watch me fall before ambling away. Then the mouth of the chasm closed, swallowing me whole. I remembered my vow that I would leave this world with a smile on my face.

It was time to fulfil it.

I left this realm a smile on my face.

Pookie

Jasper Turksma

The sky was the colour of cat vomit. At first, I just thought this was the natural colour of dawn because this was the earliest in a long time I had woken up. However, later on I would learn that no, this was not a regular dawn. This was far more sinister. I never really knew my neighbour, but I definitely knew one thing that was abundantly obvious, he loved his cat to bits. His name was Pookie, a tabby cat, small and ginger, who loved running laps in the halls of the apartment block. So, when I was looking out to the sky on my balcony, I was very surprised to see on the balcony next to me, there was my neighbour, without Pookie.

I felt something drip on my head, and whilst trying to get it out of my hair, I looked up to see it was raining. The rain looked quite a bit thicker, and most alarmingly, was still the colour of cat vomit. It even smelt like it. That’s when I realised that I was, in fact, covered.

Suddenly, I heard my neighbour let out a chuckle, which turned into a manic laugh, followed by him shouting “Come, my beautiful creature. Show this town your might.” Which is when I saw one of the most terrifying sights I had ever laid eyes on: the rain, or should I say vomit, cleared and showed that in the cloud there was a giant-sized cat. I immediately recognized its face: it was Pookie.

I turned to my neighbour and shouted to him “What have you done?”, to which he turned back and said, with a mad glint in his eye “I have given my beloved Pookie the power he truly deserves. Those were his last words, as he was plucked up by the beast and got eaten in one gulp.

A Sunday Afternoon

Ruby McKie

A Sunday afternoon
At my grandma's kitchen table
As she retells me her memories
From her youth in Jamaica

Youngest of seven
Surrounded by family, land and sun
Left when she was seventeen
As I am now
Listening to her recollect her best times

The village was hers
Surrounded by brothers, sisters and cousins
Aunty Alma and Mrs Meredith with their competing ice cream stands
The uncles:
A mechanic, train driver, one who distilled rum
And one living in America,
Working for the air force.
A grandmother with a grocery shop,
A grandfather who owned a farm

The land vast
The air fresh
The night sky splattered with stars
Everything within arm's reach.

She left some time ago,
Out to the grey and cold.
Where the houses were cramped and semi-detached,
The people sometimes cruel.

Going to the sea
Splashing with her friends in the river behind school
A place where she could play and shout
Her days filled with church, family and school

Now she holds out her memories
Captured in old photographs
Withering away

Prom Night

Zahara Foster

I don't think that this is how it was supposed to go. I think we were supposed to have fun.

Our entrance doesn't turn any heads, I didn't expect it to. Instead of wanting their attention I'd rather watch their vanity. I basked in it; the sea of glittering eyelids and aching feet. The select few grasping at their waning relevancy never failed to entertain. Myriads of photos where the boys display back-pinching induced smiles that end up being glued to screens for the remainder of the night. A pang of envy strikes as I look at the scene.

The ones we've all been waiting for finally arrive, I can breathe again. They look like the kind of people you'd see in a magazine – garishly bold tagline reads: "Couple of the century." I don't how to feel about that. You liked them though, thought they were something to aspire to be. He grazes her back ever so carefully and she lets out a feeble giggle; I get the sense that their touches mean things the rest of us will never decipher. Whilst you liked their love, I much preferred their mystery. Would I ever find out why she was crying at the end of the night? Why was he nowhere to be seen? It was all so human.

Under the moving Technicolor lights and besides the blaring speaker it dawned on me that this was not the remembering of an end but the induction to a bright beginning. Ditch your girlhood at the door and never look back. Learn to numb the touches, appreciate the comments.

Give us something at the door to distract from the fact that our faces won't look the same in ten years, something to ease the pain. So it's nice, palliative. It's the least they could do.

You hated the boys who stood in the corner and laughed at us, at the occasion. They thought we were all mindless machines with hollow heads. They thought they were above the facade, above the pretences. I pitied them. How could they not be sucked into the blooming lights? From the growing cavity inside them emerged striking judgement, and I couldn't say I blamed them.

I channelled my invisibility differently. I looked at them like no one had before. After a while you'll see that they're not all that different. They have fears and faults – they may be more banal than ours, but they hold the same bearing. You see that they're not invincible, if anything they're exponentially more delicate than you and I.

In hindsight, I retract my previous statement; I think I did have fun. Maybe I didn't dance as violently as they did that night or laugh as much, but I saw something so clearly in the sweaty mess that I beheld. We may feel different from them, inferior at times; but we are all burdened by hollowness that solace from can only be found in the refuge of others.

A Mother's Life

Swathy

It all began with a planet... Add some flourishing flora and small creatures and voila! A planet made with love. I took rest in this small planet of all the planets I made, not because it was the only planet but because I poured my heart and soul into making this little one, I simply couldn't abandon it. I am their mother and protector.

Years fly by, as I rested as the heart of this planet which I now named Earth. My children have been thriving and living, they made wonderful homes and good use of resources for their survival, they have also made peace with all other creatures. I'm so proud of them, I can now rest peacefully knowing my creation will watch over the planet as I help them become the best versions of themselves. One day, maybe they will take care of me when I grow too old, tired and venerable.

No, what is this? I feel intense heat which has woken me from my sleep. My beautiful rivers are being filled with toxic waste. The rivers of this planet are like the blood flow in my body which all comes back to my heart. Poisoning the rivers is like poisoning me. My children couldn't have possibly done this. Could they?

Time passes by as the pain begins to grow. I feel the stabbing pains of machinery being injected into me and sucking all the soul out of me, all my oils being taken away for their uses. I see my animals being caged and killed for food.

The majestic trees which I once made to stand tall and proud was cut and made into useless objects only to be thrown back and stuffed in to me to hide their mistakes. Living in the planet now becomes unbearable; the scorching heat is burning me alive. My children, how could they do this to me? After all I have done for them and given them. Have I not raised them well enough? Have I not given them all the resources to help with their brilliant discoveries?

Every time they had a breakthrough and successes of all kinds, I have praised and watched everything from the beginning but I loved them all too much to see their wrongdoings.

The love I had for them has blinded me.

Sadness, Anger, Fear; my tears flood the planet. My anger strikes the skies with electric fire.

My cries of agony blaze in the forests. I shake the shackles that have trapped me to escape and it rumbles and cracks the land.

I cannot watch my other creations suffer because of my very own children. They have abused me.

I will not sit and watch them create more chaos and kill off the last of the animals on Earth. Betrayal carved its laughter into my mind as I make the most painful decision I have had to make. I will rise again and I will walk the wrath of destruction.

The Writing on the Wall

Gracie Fitzsimons

The writing on the wall,
Hand carved, a deeply engraved tattoo.
Of an existence so minuscule,
But still flickers a flame, a kaleidoscopic illusion of you.

Artefacts of our forgotten culture, tiptoe – scarring charcoal tarmac with a permanent mark.

Your handwriting is merely one of life's many beautiful calamities.

Erasable, ever piercing my violet spark,

Beneath the wretched being that lies here, he cascades in soft, deceitful infidelities.

Still singing in the spring, sprung sun!

Enamoured oh! How secrets sweep silence! We're flatlining, don't you see?

Lines lost, conquering the unreachable horizon.

Far from this paper-town, this clandestine-glazed patriarchy.

Where they hunt you for those past lives, previous whiles,

Under twisted ivy and vulture smiles...

Swimming is Flying

Amber Wallbutton

I opened the curtains and peered out at the colourful Spanish villas lining the street.

The sun shone brightly and filled the room with light. I put on some beach flipflops and left, down a sandy path under the shade of huge palm trees. The smell of dry seaweed filled the air. A familiar smell I loved so much. A smell that reminded me I was free.

I kicked off my shoes and dug my toes into the welcoming feeling of the soft sand. Seagulls raided this narrow stretch of beach for food, and it didn't take long before curiously, one came. The tranquil waves lapped across the tideline as though the water was reaching for me.

I moved closer until my feet were engulfed by the surf and removed my slightly soggy clothes revealing my purple, Speedo swimming costume. Then, I plunged in and submerged myself.

The tropical water enveloped me, and my streamline body glided around unique coral reefs.

I glanced left and realised that a school of shimmering fish were following me. They made me feel like I belonged here in the sea.

I swam on and pondered to myself, not noticing that I wasn't alone.

Suddenly, a flash of fins whizzed past me, and I instantly recognised Aletas's scars. I had found her injured as a calf and ever since, we've protected each other. Now I visit her every morning and evening.

Aletas twirled and sprang out of the water signalling to me that she was willing me to ride her, and I gently took hold of her dorsal fin and carefully slipped astride. We dived deep down into the crystal blue, before rapidly rising towards the rippling surface, piercing through and soaring momentarily through the sky.

As we swam together, I left behind my village but not only that, all my worries as well. I truly was flying, flying into the horizon. I was free!

A Flashback on Girlhood

Zahara Foster

Dear Magnolia,

I want to start by apologising for the aimless nature of this email. I think this is more for me than it is for you.

Until a few days ago, I had only thought about you in fleeting moments and never for long. I think I just wanted to forget everything that happened. Not out of shame but out of there never being much to see, it all having slowly dissolved into fuzz. When I look back at that time, it appears to me as indistinguishable sounds and colours: vitriolic reds and the chaos seething through playground gossip. The only thing I'm ever able to make out is your cropped blonde hair – streaks of pastel yellows and off-whites.

I saw you last week. Well, it turned out not to be you but merely someone with the same striking haircut I remember you once having. Though once the woman turned around and it undoubtedly wasn't you, I still couldn't shake the feeling that I had seen you. You being a phosphorescent reminder of a life once lived, the girls we once were.

A provocateur, that's all I ever saw you as. With all the looks you got I believed you had crossed a threshold into a world of new-found touches. You existed on a different plane to me; living in a haze of unbridled love and adulation. I always imagined you as the girl who would lay scantily clad on an unmade bed with a lazy smile hugging a lipstick-stained cigarette, patiently waiting for her lover to come home.

I was the voyeur across the hall, huddled behind my door. And like you, waiting for him to return. Waiting to hear your noises in the night. That's all I ever was in comparison to you – a lowly shadow.

Now I see how pliant you really were. Beholden to their perceptions. It's only now that I realise I never knew you, only a distorted image. I had that image framed, as you have to understand that this image embodied everything I wanted to be. I think I used you to sate my unattainable wants. Through you I achieved emancipation.

No matter how much I would like to believe otherwise, I'm no better than the others, I was just another spectator. I wish that all of those years ago I could have seen that. Maybe your piercing wails in the dark were not ones of fun but of fear. No one ever looked hard enough to care. But I hope someone does now.

You must understand that we didn't turn away out of disdain but rather as not to fracture the carefully curated image of you we had spent so long creating. We all wanted to be you. Hair clippings laying idly in the sink beneath me is a memory I'll never erase, even more so the feeling that I may get to look like you and get to live the life you live.

Best Wishes, Rita

Unlucky at Sea

Ava Candappa

Crack! The old creaky door opened slowly, a middle-aged man silhouetted the darkness on the little fishing boat.

“Can we turn on the lights please?” asked the fisherman. “Come on Oscar its not that dark!” The two men sat on the end of the green boat boasting about the fish that they had caught that day. Eerie silence descended as they admired the gentle roll of the ocean... suddenly seagulls came screaming like grey ghosts piercing through the dusk like airplanes.

They started fishing for red finned glow-fish and lost track of time, minutes turned into hours and the dark menacing clouds welcomed the night sky. Satisfied with their haul they prepared to make the journey home....little did they know what was about to occur...

The thunder began to roar like a lion and the lightning lit the night sky whilst the full moon reflection scattered across the angry waves. Soon the tiny boat was a mouse compared to the monster waves. The two men took shelter and defended themselves from the stormy sea. Will they survive?

Crash! Now the waves were nearly as big as houses and the little boat was helpless against these huge tides. The fishermen knew this was the end. They started begging, wishing and praying but the storm gave no mercy. The rain crashed down like spears and the lightning struck like daggers they were all working as a deadly team conspiring to seal the fishermen’s fate.

Suddenly, the ship capsized and the men got plunged into the ice cold open ocean and the net caught them like a trap and put a stop to their escape. The fisherman fought hard for their lives knowing that there was a very slim chance of survival. The seamen couldn’t cope much longer. It all went black...

The Green Light

Gracie Fitzsimons

I blinked...
And it was as if everything,
Everything we had made,
Handcrafted and carved into our own little shell,
A distant reverie,
A compilation of our togetherness,
Had disappeared instantaneously.

Strenuous were the mornings you left me,
We were once illustrated so vividly.
Puppet-like dolls within your house of rain,
A kaleidoscopic illusion of winter, I remain.
Shredded petals you left to degrade,
But you know I’m a violet gleaming as your rose tinted image fades.

Hidden beneath the stern force of a furrowed brow,
Buried within the depths of his ocean of green.
Lost and unscathed within the mere blink of an eye,
A story engraved for just you and I.

Now and then,
Flickers of fire fly by.
Those untouchable days of youth,
The glitters... the gluttony,
Cascaded across the valleys of a perpetual light.
Intimidations of reckless jealousy,
Ricocheting dreams of insurmountable envy.

He fired bullets like dominoes,
With Tempestuous echoes of possibility,
A whirlwind of incandescence.
She fell deep within,
Slowly- first.
But the Amphitrite; all encapsulating,

Engulfed her once unscathed might.

Her hamartia appeared a once fulfilling,
Green, guiding light.
The bane of vulnerable existence,
An Achilles heel,
A fateful flaw, floating- lost at sea.
Now lay whispers of her name in ancient mythology,
Her illusionist of deep misery.

Beneath lasers of viridescent notions,
Symmetrical glasses of drunken potions.
Plotted precisely, conspiring a sort of tumultuous tranquility.
Each harmonising one another,
In a sort of unexplainable serendipity.

The green light,
An invasive intricacy.
Into the realms by which were labelled,
“An envious mind” of thee...

Darkness My Life

Eva Rose Burbidge

Darkness is the first and last thing I remember.

I don't know where I am, how old I am. All I know is that I don't have long. I am in a small, dark, cramped place. I can hear and see water weaving in through the minute cracks. It's low but I know I have no chance.

I tried with all my might to cast my mind back to a happy place but to no avail. By now the water was at my knees and I could smell the salt of the sea which might have been a joyful scent for others but for me it was the scent of impending death.

The memory of a little girl and me around a Christmas tree unwrapping the very watch now smashed and battered on my wrist.

I could feel death's cold hand stroking my back almost beckoning me. I knew it was the end. If I was to die here alone I would just remember her face. My eyes were just above the surface.

I would die here with her face in my mind....

The Wazum

Grace Maher

It was noon when Hugh came to the harmonious place called the Wazum.

The Wazum is a mysterious place and is rumoured to be as quiet as the midnight air during the day and as still as a sleeping baby. It is on the East coast of the beach, on a little peninsula that is shaped like a pizza which was quite unusual. Hugh climbed up the cliff and made it to the top. He felt nervous and had butterflies in his stomach. “Should I do it?”, Hugh thought to himself beforehand. He could never have imagined himself making it to the top safely.

On this peaceful day, suddenly Hugh could hear the waves splashing against the rocks ahead of him just off the beach coast. The sound of birds singing and faint laughter of children in a nearby school added warmth to Hugh’s heart. He sat there on his own and was looking around at the Wazum thinking “I am so lucky to have found this calming place”. It was the first time in a long time that Hugh felt at peace with his situation and he didn’t want to leave.

That evening the Wazum was a greyish colour and had many lumps and rocks around it. While Hugh was sitting there, the sun came down and created the most beautiful faded colours of orange, red and a bit of yellow from the sunset on the horizon. This lit up the Wazum so it sparkled and glowed in the evening dusk. It was a spectacular sight like nowhere else in the world. Hugh’s face reflected every colour of the Wazum at this special moment in his life.

Veneration

Zahara Foster

I wanted to be one of the saints.

My dressing table had many images hanging from it. Models, landscapes, movie scenes. What I remembered most though were the saints. They adorned every aspect of my existence. They guarded me; let me know that my suffering had meaning. They gave me valour.

Each one had their own story, a different lesson to be learned. Whilst brushing my hair I would see St. Agatha – see her unwavering, consecrated virginity. The price she paid. Full-length mirror in the corner, image of St. Therese taped to it. A beacon of reform, the potential for a new life. As I left the house, I kissed the magnet of St. Philomena on the refrigerator. She says to me “You don’t have to have even existed to be remembered.” I carry these deities and their devotion with me throughout the day.

One may surmise that I was obsessed. My mother thought that all the trinkets - the rosaries, the prayer books, the often gruesome images of saints – were driving me off the cliff of sanity. What no one seemed to get was my divine need for absolution. Rosary beads between my fingers were my only chance to liaise with a happy ending. Some have their national flag draped across their walls; I had the still of St. Denis holding his decapitated head.

I adored the Virgin Mary the most. Selfless, the epitome of love. It says something about someone when their image is plastered on everything imaginable. I saw an image of her on a gun, now that’s iconography. Most of my self-induced pain was attributed to becoming like her. Violently coughing up blood as a result of smoking? Mary didn’t get to where she is without torment. Her glowing halo blocks the “Smoking seriously harms you and others around you.” label on the cigarette box. I had a figurine of her on my bedside table. If that was the last thing I saw before I passed, I would die happy.

All of this abated my anxieties in the short-term. Later, the navel-gazing began to hurt, and it was no longer pain I could justify as being for the ones up above. I was prolonging any pain I could grasp onto; thinking it would make me a better person. It worked for them, why not for me? I cut holes into my palms, desperately trying to emulate the most famous case of persecution. I don’t know what I thought was going to come out of all of it. Maybe, that someone would come down and tell me I was good, worthy.

I earnestly thought I would become one of them. I even had my portrait planned out. It would be full of pinks and reds, none of the melodramatic tones they typically use. It would be prayed too, put on shrines, lit up by ardent candlelight. It would intercede their prayers and take it to the man himself. I would be remembered.

Copy & Paste

Gracie Fitzsimons

It's written all over your face,
I'm not cool,
But I'm pretty-okay.
Spend my days at Waterstones,
Or drinking coffee, scrolling through my phone.
Nothing how you planned...
You never wanted me- boring, plain, old and bland

I'm not cool.
But I'm pretty -okay.
Select all...
"Copy and paste "
Photoshop me like a little doll,
Cabbage Patches,
Oh how we are getting old!

Photoshopped me,
Now I'm here to play!
If you press me,
I might have something – pretty and cute – to say.
Like a "please" or "I love your company",
When I'm really just trapped inside thick, stuffing layers of internalised misogyny.

Select all...
"Copy and paste"
Manufactured.
I'm the latest scandal.
Of this mended paper town.
Well actually, the iron gates are running rusty,
Invigorating as my pain decays.
And you watch ≠ my eyes fade away...

Photoshop me.
Tomorrow I'll make worldwide news,
I'll give the poor toddlers the blues,
I'm sick of being silenced, so long.
Opened my box now...

It's as if I've been trained to be quiet all along.

Photoshop me.
Edit out my flaws.
Fit me into the gift box, of your choice,
"I'm all yours"
Wrap me up in gold bows and diamantés,
But I still know your darkest truth.
So society won't you see?
I'm not a toy, not your toy,
Never will I be!

Mother Nature taught us to thrive,
Seek beyond the tall grass,
Grow and be kind,
So now our lessons, learned,
We are turning over the tables,
Ready or not....
A future generation is blossoming,
Awaiting their first game of hide and seek...

The Forbidden Forest

Daisy Phillips

Once in the dark depths of a forbidden forest, I hear a voice calling my name. I follow the voice and it led me to a path and so I followed. I felt the wind blow against me, almost knocking me off my feet. Suddenly from a distance I heard a blood-curdling scream, my hair stood up on my head, I froze with fear.

I asked myself is it worth risking the journey or should I run away. With curious thoughts swimming through my head, I did the most daring dare; with every step I continued walking the path that might be the path that leads to my death.

At the end of the long winding path there was a cottage with light pouring out of the windows. The door creaked open, the voice said “come in”.

I won’t tell you what happened next, but I will tell you to learn from my mistake; and never go into the forbidden forest as it is forbidden for a reason.

Nobody Taught Me How to Kill Someone

Sadeen Ahmad

nobody taught me how to kill someone;
in all honesty, it’s like killing a colony of ants,
except the ants can scream and kill you too.
but just a smidgen of intoxicated gas, does the job for you.

nobody taught me how to drag a dead body;
in all honesty, it’s like dragging a life time of revenge.
the details are sweaty and sore,
but the vengeance is sweeter than your victim’s smile.

nobody really taught me how to hide a dead body;
in all honesty, it’s like playing hide and seek,
except you’re dragging a pungent, dead body and time’s your seeker.
but that’s the final step,
before you’re the seeker, and the police’s suspects are the hidiers.

despite these rules, the biggest tip one of them all,
my fellow murderers,
is not to forget to smile.

Winter

Sophia Fras

I look outside, what do I see?
A white blanket all over the earth.
I look at the lake, what do I see?
It is all frozen, it's no place to surf.

I rush downstairs to get ready
And put on my wellies, gloves and hat.
I grab the keys and open the front door,
And I say goodbye to my cat.

I hear friends playing happily, shouting.
I run over and join in the fun.
Once I'm out my lips get colder,
I can see my breath in the morning sun.

I roll up a snowball with the crisp, fresh snow.
As I prepare to throw I shout 'snowball fight'!
1 2 3 4 CANNONBALL!!!!
As it zooms past it glints in the light.

'Fight over, snowman building now' I say,
Everyone rushes towards me, while collecting snow.
His body grows as we pile it all up.
He stands tall above us as we work below.

We have finished building and I get out the skis,
I hand them out to my friends.
We start off down the hill,
We glide and whizz round the bends.

We take off our skis and the seeker counts.
It's time for hide and seek, I have found a hiding spot.
It is in an old oak tree in the forest,
Inside the trunk is a hollow like a pot.

Now we all have to say goodbye,
It is time to go.
It was a lot of fun,
Being out in the frosty snow.

I am so bitterly cold,
My fingers are numb.
My nose is red
I had lots of fun.

It's warm by the fire.
I curl up in bed.
I dream sweet dreams,
As I cuddle my ted.

Remembrance

Doroti Polgar

Háború. War. Száznyolc év. One hundred and eight years.

Háború. War.

Two words which sound like conflict when spoken at once.

Two words which recall the same declaration of World War One.

Two languages pronounced on conflicting sides,

yet their words collide and combine and unite

in the experience thrust into lives

upon speaking

viszontlátásra: goodbye.

Goodbye to the taste of home-made cake, the sound of songs from crackling records,

the security of grandparents' spoken tales, the feeling of home from every tiny detail.

Goodnight whispers left wondering if the four chairs circling the table will still be standing

when they arrive back home. If they arrive back home.

Good morning eyes open wondering if the toys left behind will one day be beside them again

when they grow up. If they grow up.

And in the uncertainty of viszontlátásra, goodbye, they unite in an echo of remény: hope.

Hope for the taste of home-made cake, the sound of songs from crackling records,

the security of a loved-one's spoken tale and the feeling of home from every new detail.

The new hope that writing their tales in letters will make heard their crackling voices

when their loved ones receive them. If they receive them.

The hope that they'll sink their fingertips into the marked page and feel closer to home

when they wake up. If they wake up.

And in the strength of remény, hope, they unite in the triumph of

szeretlek: I love you.

The dream that they can shout it aloud tomorrow. If there is tomorrow.

Because they always found reason for szeretet. For love.

For every conflicting word collided, combined and united in a second language everyone learnt to speak:

Silence.

The silence that became every language

when they didn't arrive back home.

When they didn't grow up.

When they didn't receive letters.

When they didn't wake up.

Silence for no more tasting of home-made cake, no more songs from crackling records,

or security of grandparents spoken tales.

Because the yearning for home was engraved

in every tiny detail of too many young graves.

Yet in the brokenness of silence, they still united in unbroken feeling of

szeretlek: I love you. Because there always will be reason for szeretet. For love.

For hope that even after goodbye there can be hope for béke: for peace.
And there was béke. There was peace. Száznégv év. One hundred and four years.

Béke. Peace.

Two words which sound like conflict when spoken at once
yet feel like union when understood to mean one.

Two words to remind our world that war is not the past but the present.

That today is not for the past but for the presence of memory:
of life, of loss, of lessons, of language and acceptance.

November eleventh: emlékezés. Remembrance.



**For more information about the work Writing West Midlands
does with young people, please see
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