



**WRITE  
AROUND  
THE  
MURRAY**

**RIVER OF STORIES  
WINNING ENTRIES  
SECONDARY SHORT STORIES  
2022**

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## CONTENTS

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### Year 7-8

**Winner:** Sienna Lawler, Victory Lutheran College – *When the Clock Struck Twelve*

**Runner-up:** Abigail Karlake, Albury High School – *Stories in Plain Sight*

**Runner-up:** Rachel Wyer, Murray High School – *Hunger*

### Years 9-10

**Winner:** Melena Wallace, Trinity Anglican College – *Welcome Home*

**Runner-up:** Amelie Schubert, Trinity Anglican College – *The Fairytale Game*

**Runner-up:** Jaz Tutt, Catholic College Wodonga – *A Silent Night*

### Years 11-12

**Winner:** Amelia Spinks, Albury High School – *The Pianist*

**Runner-up:** Yolanta Guthridge, Trinity Anglican College – *Light Bulb Moment*

**Runner-up:** Judah Trevaskis, Trinity Anglican College – *Faceless*

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**YEAR 7-8 CATEGORY**

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**Year 7-8 Winner:** Sienna Lawler [Victory Lutheran College]

**Title:** *When the Clock Struck Twelve*

Stealing silently down the hall towards the library, I jumped at every shadow. I felt eyes watching me even though I knew everyone else in the manor was asleep. I wasn't supposed to be out of bed, let alone in this part of the house. My job was to cook, not to sneak around the manor at night. If Sir Charles woke and discovered me, I was at risk of losing my job and, as undesirable as it was, I wasn't going to get another anytime soon. I slipped quietly down the main staircase, a rarity I only experienced at this time of night. As I padded across the floor towards the large door marking the entrance to the library, I heard a creak somewhere in the house above. I froze, and the creaking ceased. I let out a shaky breath and quickly scurried into the library. I made a beeline for the fiction shelves, the made-up worlds drawing me closer. The books were leathery beneath my fingers as I trailed them over the spines. Slowly and quietly, I tiptoed down the aisle until I reached the correct shelf. Reaching up, I slid *Pride and Prejudice* off the shelf and tucked it under my arm. I made my way to the uncomfortable couch in the corner of the room before sitting the book on my lap and cracking it open. Something seemed off about the pages tonight, but I couldn't quite place my finger on it. I sat in the dark library, minding my own business, until something extraordinary happened. A breeze brushed over the pages of the book, ruffling them. A light began to shine, appearing to come out of the book. Suddenly, I could no longer see the library around me, but instead, a projection of some sort. The book was coming alive before my very eyes. The room filled with the chatter of a ball, and I began to make out shapes amongst the light. The shapes became figures, and the figures became characters. There was Elizabeth Bennet, dancing with Mr Darcy, and Jane, dancing with Charles Bingley. I spotted Mary in the corner of the room, trying her hardest to blend in with the wallpaper. Mary's eyes roamed the room, as if searching for an escape route, and landed on me. I felt my palms go sweaty and my heartrate picked up as Mary pushed off the wall and made her way across the room. When she reached me, she spoke.

"Balls are pointless, don't you agree?"

I nodded, because I was dumbstruck and unable to do anything else. Mary tilted her head to the side and frowned.

"You don't look right. Sort of, pale and ghostly."

I blinked, taken aback. That was not what I was expecting. Now that I think of it, however, she looked a bit the same. Mary slowly raised her hand and pushed it forward. Instead of moving straight through the air and touching me, like I was expecting, it stopped abruptly, as though held back by an invisible pane of glass. My hand trembled as I raised it to meet hers. As our hands made contact, Mary tumbled forward and knocked me flat over. She helped herself up and then bent over to assist me too. When I was standing safely on my feet again, Mary turned and glanced around the library.

"Oh. Well, that is certainly a surprise."

"Come with me." I grabbed her by the hand. "I want to see if this works with other books too."

Mary grinned and we ran off towards the shelf where I knew the fairy tales were stored. Mary let go of my hand and plucked a book off the shelf. I took it from her hands and glanced at the cover before opening it and setting it on the ground. It only took a moment for the same process to begin, first the breeze, then the lights, and finally the image. This time, as the image developed, I saw not a ballroom, but the woods instead. Birds flew overhead and deer ran in one side of the frame and out the other. Then, a young girl with black hair ran into the frame, looking scared.

"Snow White!" shouted Mary. "Over here!"

Snow White turned her head in our direction and ran towards us. Mary raised her hand to prevent Snow White from running straight into the weird barrier between the book world and the real world. As Snow White collided with Mary's hand she was sucked out of the forest and into the library.

"What is this?" Snow White yelled in distress. "Are you working for her?"

"No!" I held up my hands in defence. "We were trying to save you."

Snow White calmed down a little. "Where am I?"

"A library." I spoke calmly. "In the house I work in. This is Mary."

She seemed to accept that as an answer and fell quiet.

"What now?" Mary asked.

I shrugged. I heard the grandfather clock out in the hall chime midnight, and Mary let out a rasp.

"What?" I snapped my head around.

She was fading. That is the only way I can think to describe it. Mary was fading. When I looked at Snow White, I found she was in the same situation.

"No!" I screamed, reaching for them.

Mary moved her hand to grab onto my arm, but it slid straight through. They were slowly fading away to nothing. I blinked, and they were gone. The projections were gone too. I walked around the library and picked up both books before placing them carefully back onto their shelves. I plodded back upstairs to my room and flopped down on my bed. It had been an exciting night of adventures, and I was already planning who I was going to bring to life tomorrow. Maybe Alice in Wonderland, or perhaps Cinderella. At least now I knew I had to let them go as soon as the clock struck twelve.

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**Year 7-8 Runner-Up:** Abigail Karslake [Albury High School]

**Title:** *Stories in Plain Sight*

I tried listening to the teacher, babbling about hyperbowl, hyperbley or something but my attention kept drawing to the blank spot in the margin of my exercise book. I started with the head, then the hair and then the facial features. When I finished, it looked pretty good so I wrote a note on my hand to redraw it in my sketchbook at home. I didn't even pay attention to the time which was why our strangely loud recess bell scared me so hard I nearly fell off my chair. Apparently our teacher wasn't paying attention either because he yelped and toppled into his desk.

I watched the ambulance drive away from the school and hoped we wouldn't get Mrs Dohning as our sub the following day. To my relief, Mrs Dohning was not there, but a woman with long brown hair in a ponytail, a pair of jeans and this really cute top that I really wanted to ask her where she had bought it from. I didn't recognise her but she was really young so I guess she only just finished her teaching degree or something.

I walked into the room and sat in my regular seat at the back. I found a blank margin in my book and started working on a drawing of an elephant, trying to get its anatomy correct when my desk was covered in shadow. I looked up at the teacher who smiled kindly at me.

"Hi there, my name is Miss MacDonnel. I'm going to be your teacher for the next few months as Mr Geraldson has broken his leg. What's your name?" she asked.

"Lily." I replied as blankly as possible.

"Really?!" she exclaimed. "That's my first name! I think we're going to be very good friends.

I beg to differ.

"Now Lily, do you usually sit in this seat?" she asked. Like seriously?

"Yeah." I mumbled

"Well today I think I'm going to move you to the front. Is that ok?"

I agreed and packed up my things before shuffling to the front and swapping seats with Penny. I could see it was not just me as a couple of other "regular back rows" moved up front too. Finally the teacher started the lesson.

"Hi everyone, I've just finished coming around the room and having a chat with you all so thanks for your patience. I know this is going to sound boring but I think we should do an assignment to start so I can get to know you better"

There was a collective groan.

"Don't judge too quickly, this will be fun." she continued "What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'story'."

I was thinking about boring books and boring writing. The class agreed on this but Miss MacDonnel had a different opinion.

"But what if I told you that photos and art and food are stories too? Stories are everywhere."

She clicked a button on her little remote and the smartboard came to life. A fair haired man in a dark green uniform was on screen. In the background we could see lots of dry and dirty areas and people with their children crossing a bridge nearby.

"What do you think is happening in this photo?" Miss MacDonnel continued. There was a quiet murmur before she flicked to the next slide. It was an abstract artwork that I immediately recognised.

"That's The Scream!" I blurted.

"Very good Lily, you know your art. Do you know the story behind it?" she asked.

"He was experiencing an overwhelming sense of sadness which compelled him to create the piece." I explained.

"Good job. Now, for your assignment. I want you all to create a story in a form of your choice with an accompanied 800 words that tells the story. I would like you to hand it in two weeks from now. The bell is about to ring, so good luck and I hope to see some amazing creations."

The rest of the day sped by at an unusual rate. I raced home and sat at my desk with a granola bar hanging out of my mouth. I began to sketch out the design and then moved on to painting. I added bright yellows and greens and some brown in the hair and eyes, before using the darker colours. I was excited when I finally finished, until I remembered the paper.

I procrastinated for a week, but, with little time left I sat down at my laptop and tried writing. Annoyingly, I only managed three words before getting distracted, until something caught my eye.

On my shelf was the painting. I thought about the story behind it and wrote it down. I started adding a bit more description and depth. I changed around the words until it made sense and made it sound put together. I even searched *hyperbole* up on the internet and added that too. I had a read and it kind of sounded like a book. I checked the spelling and grammar and handed them in on Monday under the title *Stories in Plain Sight*.

The due date came and passed and about a week later, we got our marks back.

"I was absolutely proud of everyone's pieces and when I compared a couple of them to some previous marks on other assignments I was impressed with how much this task brought some of you out of your shell. I do have some honourable mentions as well. For Skylar scoring the highest with 29 out of 30, Ashton for the most creative piece and Lily for most improved." Miss MacDonnel announced.

A week later, Mr Geraldson came back limping around in crutches. His classes were still boring but I started listening more. The next time a creative writing assignment came round, I based it off of one of my drawings and got my best mark yet. I think I might write another.

**Year 7-8 Runner-Up:** Rachel Wyer [Murray High School]

**Title:** *Hunger*

You often think that you are the only one who hurts, the only one to ever feel this way. Like you are alone, but you are wrong. You were never really alone, because I am always watching.

I may not be something you can see, but I am there. I enjoy your pain, your suffering. Was it really you suffering?

Hunger is more like a desire. A need that must always be fulfilled, in most cases you desire food, right..?

I wander the streets of Brooklyn, seeing the depressing state of the world on Monday fills me with joy as I search for my next victim.

I pull up a chair at a cafe, I quickly scan the surrounding area as I spot a college student, stressed about grades. How gullible she must be.

"You're going to fail your essays anyways, why are you even trying?"

She quickly flicks her head up, looking around frightened. Of course she is, I would be too if I heard a whisper in my ear and now one was there. A smile creeps across my face. She quickly packs up her laptop and tucks her dirty blonde hair behind her ear. While her hazel eyes scan the room once again, nothing. She quickly departs from the cafe, speed walking while looking dazed.

"You are nothing without perfect grades, without perfect grades you'll never succeed."

She whipped her head around, to an empty street. The cold wind howled around her, as snow began to fall. You could see the panic fill her eyes, it was no longer a speed walk it was a run.

"How could you let your family down? You're a disappointment to them all, your mother must be embarrassed to call you her daughter."

Tears fill her eyes as she runs across the street. Not watching where she was going in a blur, a car turned the corner. Headlights shining brightly, that would be the last thing she ever saw.

I laugh, "How unfortunate." I tilt my head watching the panicked driver flee the scene. I sigh, and dial 911 and drop the phone.

"Hello 911, what's your emergency?... Hello?.." The dispatcher's voice slowly fades as I wander away. How delightful. I feel quite fulfilled, but I could always go for a little bite to eat.

I wander the streets once again, I hear the sirens from the 'accident' that had happened, I peer through the foggy windows at families, giggling and smiling away. How disgraceful.

I put my face near a window, my breath fogging the window. Just kidding! Who has time for breathing? I look into the living room, I see a happy family just perfect for my next target.

"Are you excited for tomorrow sweetheart? It's Christmas after all!"

The littlest one giggled and nodded, as she scrambled upstairs with joy. While the mother and eldest daughter sat in silence. The daughter seems stressed, what a perfect opportunity.

"They don't love you, why should they? They have a replacement daughter, why should they care about you?"

She just stared blankly at the wall. She wasn't shocked, seems as though she was messed up before I got here, just makes dinner easier!

"They never truly wanted you, you were a mistake."

"Goodnight Mom." She began to mumble as she walked up stairs staring at the ground. Her mother just sat in silence, perhaps she doesn't really care.

"It's all your sister's fault, if she wasn't here, you would be the center of attention. All you have to do is get rid of her..."

She stopped in her tracks, halfway up the stairs. Crazy seemed to flash in her eyes. She smiled and skipped down the hallway and into her room. Her smile progressively grew wider. It seemed to be stretched ear from ear, as her house grew still, she opened her door mumbling under her breath.

"Your mother will be proud of you, your sister is just a pest she'll be glad they're gone."

She wandered in the darkness. She stumbled down the stairs to the kitchen, and slowly opened the cutlery draw. She rummaged through the drawer, to pull out a serrated kitchen knife. She held it by her side, still grinning but also humming a slow melody. She began to scale the stairs.

I walk into my office, "Hello, welcome to the team Miss Elizabeth Sullivan."

"Thank you, Mr Caine. Have you figured out what caused the death of the poor college girl?"

He shakes his head in sorrow, "Seems like a hit and run."

"Then who dialed 911?" Silence filled the room.

"No one knows, I'm sorry Miss Sullivan there are no leads. It's a dead end."

I stand in silence, I don't want my first ever case as a detective to be an unsolvable case. I sigh, I have to find out what happened.

She stumbles down the hallway under the cover of darkness, she slowly opens her sister's door, she creeps towards her bed, where her sister is sleeping peacefully.

"It's so easy, just a quick poke then voila! You're the favourite child."

"AAAHHH!" Her sister's scream echoed in the empty hallway. A deranged look came across her blood covered face. There's blood everywhere, pouring out her sister. She was most certainly dead, but she kept going.

She suddenly stopped when she heard a voice behind her, it was her mother. She looked... disappointed. She must have decided they didn't understand, she plunged the knife deep into her chest, as her own mother fell to her knees. Hilarious, she's completely unhinged!

I walked inside the room, "Recognize me?" I said.

"You..You made me do this" She wept, her cries echoed through the hallway.

"It is a shame, but now you know too much. But no one will ever believe you." As I fold into the shadows.

I pick up the home phone and dial 911, I walk out of the house not realizing I dropped my earpiece.

"Why do you think they're doing this Mr caine?"

"I don't know, Detective. But we found an earpiece, and arrested the girl."

I wonder what led her to kill her own family. I grab the earpiece and put it up to my ear, "Hello I don't know if you can hear me but, I know you're behind this we won't stop looking until we find you."

I heard what she said and decided to have a little fun with her. "Sure you will, Miss Sulllivan." I dropped the earpiece and wandered down the empty street of Brooklyn once more. Searching for my next opportunity.

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**YEAR 9-10 CATEGORY**

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**Year 9-10 Winner:** Melena Wallace [Trinity Anglican College]

**Title:** *Welcome Home*

People described to him the thrill of returning home. The giddiness from stepping off that train and once again walking down the streets they used to walk down every day. The serotonin-overdose of nostalgia as they reminisce with old friends about childhoods, cringing at things they said and laughing at their stupidity. The *joy*-  
Yeah, right. Bull\$@#.

Going to his sister's funeral tomorrow - really screams '*Welcome Home!*' party, doesn't it?

Stepping off that train felt like Mufasa's death from *Lion King*; he couldn't avoid the hyenas forever. Much as he wanted to stay, ride to a new city - or town, or *anywhere else* - he reluctantly allowed himself to get swept away with the crowd, '*onwards and beyond*' to the hyenas that were the scraps left of his childhood.

Damn, making kid's movie references to himself? Two minutes in, and he was getting soft. As if his life could ever be a Disney movie.

The town square stretched in front of him, a mess of smoke, sweaty teens, and police with eyebags so dark they could probably fall asleep where they stood. Backs hunched, eyes stoner-red.

Attractive.

Nothing had changed since the night his brother passed. From that night Marco up-and-left, abandoning his little sister the moment their lives went to S#^%, all the time in between and yet... it was as though he never left.

He sighed, backpack strung over one shoulder, phone in hand while the other fished for a ciggy. The black jacket, leather shimmering in the sunset, chafed with every slight movement. He almost threw it away - damn thing talked more than his ex - but kept it as a reminder of home.

Home. Funny word, innit? He had a home. An apartment in the middle of the city, surrounded by neon blue-purple lights, with a kitchen he made coffee in every morning, and a couch he sat on every day, and a bed he slept in every night.

Yet, the word 'home' didn't feel quite right.

He shuddered, flicking the lighter and inhaling deeply, groaning in relief at the familiar feel of ash and smoke settling in his lungs. He held it too long and fought the urge to cough as he breathed out a hazy cloud.

Damn. He really shouldn't've come back - he'd grown softer than he first thought. It wasn't like he had anything for him there, anyway. What if Liam hated him? After his... *abrupt* departure, Marco wouldn't blame him.

*Hated...*

He shook his head, scolding himself.

Yeah, he could understand why his sister had hated him. Why his brother-in-law did. He would - does - *always will* - hate himself for it.

Now, she's dead, too. One sibling to a drunk driver, the other to a drunken brawl. How's *he* going? Heart attack? Overdose?

F#\$%\*!. His head hurt.

"You shouldn't smoke, y'know. Bad for the lungs."

He turned to the voice, eyebrows raised. "And redbull isn't?"

His brother-in-law smirked from where he stood lopsided against the railing, eyes dull despite the grin. "Not unless you inhale it. Liquids tend to be like that, though."

Marco snorted. "Smartass."

"Twerp."

The two stared for a moment, matching glares on their faces. Then, like the oh-so-mature kid he was, Liam strolled over and ruffled his hair.

"Come *on*." He whined. "I drove all this way, and *this* is how I'm treated?"

Marco scowled. That, however, morphed into a grin as he elbowed his sister's fiancé (and definitely did *not* laugh at Liam's grimace). "Ashamed to say this, but I missed ya, Big Man."

Liam's face broke into an identical smile. "I missed your sorry ass too, Little Man."

"I'm taller than you!"

"Keep dreaming, Little Man."

Marco huffed, taking another drag of the ciggy and looking *down* at Liam. "Shuddup and show me the car. I'm hungry."

"You're paying."

"For myself! I'm broke, buy your own food!"

Liam paused.

Thank God.

"I'll send Darco the video from that race at Jasy's sixteenth."

Marco wasn't religious. "Ten bucks."

"Fifteen."

"Ten." He huffed when Lee slowly pulled his phone out. "...Thirteen

"Pleasure doing business with you."

Sitting in the dusty ute, picking at the stitching and bantering again with his sister's (ex?) fiancé as the sky went dark, he felt a twinge in his chest. There was an empty space in the backseat, one that should be filled by an energy overload of a twenty-five-year-old woman. She was probably finishing up with her hair appointment at the morgue by now. He voiced his thoughts, and they shared a small laugh.

Maybe the week here won't be so bad.

"She was ugly as *hell*, bro, F@#\$%' oath!"

Marco snorted. "Like you can talk, Squidward-ass." He winced at the wheeze he used to relate to a car's exhaust. *There it is*. "You good?"

"Ye-yeah, I just-!" Liam slapped a hand repeatedly on the bar, wiping his eyes.

"I can see it - you've dyed your hair so much, it's a wonder it's still there, Lee!

Literally a comic character!" The Bartender, Nelly, grinned, shaking another drink for the already-tipsy blue-haired man. She rested on the bar as she poured it, her breath the familiar reek of burnt cannabis.

"Haven't seen you boys together in a while, eh?" She winked at Marco. "Nice to see you're in good shape, *gym freak*."

Marco scowled mockingly. "You'd be if you ran as much as your mouth, *Gossip Girl*."

They shared a laugh at the old joke, nostalgia clogging Marco's throat. Their mirth died down. Nelly's face fell. "I- ahem. I heard 'bout 'Lyssa."

There was a moment of silence.

"I was with her the night she died, y'know? One of my most entertaining customers - hell, she's - was - more friend than customer." She sighed, setting down the glass and rubbing her eyes. "She was talking about you, Marco. A lot."

He paused. It'd been years since he spoke to her - hadn't so much as texted her after hitchhiking to the city. Jordan's crash - their brother, their lifeline, the one that raised him and Lyssa while their mother drank her grief, left them broken. No, - it *shattered* them.

Their bond.

Jordan was walking to the shops because Marco was upset that he didn't get a cake. So what if it was his birthday? Even as a spoiled nine-year-old, he should've realized how sparse money was.

Idiot. It was his fault fate took Jordan.

Marco's a fool.

Nelly cupped one of Marco's hands in her own. "She said she forgives you. *'Tell Marco, if you ever see his ass... I forgive him... t'was alcohol's fault, not his'*". Her exact words."

Marco froze.

Even now, she could hear her screams, see her tear-flushed cheeks, mascara running down like something outta Hollywood.

*"I hate you!"*

*"I'll never forgive you, y'hear?! NEVER!"*

*"'Twas the alcohol's fault, not his."*

His glass shattered against the floor, and the dam broke.

The sky was dark as the sounds of pub music and glasses clinking faded, washed away by the night's air.

"You shouldn't smoke, y'know. Bad for the lungs." A familiar voice said. A mop of curly blue hair joined him, arms on the railing, eyes to the sky.

Marco raised an eyebrow. "But redbull is?"

"Touché."

They stood in comfortable silence, enjoying the icy breeze. "What was it Tazza used to say? 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' or some cheesy shit?"

Lee smiled. "Ah, Mr. Tate. Reckon he forgot we were a bunch of teenage boys. Our diets consisted of burgers and 7/11 slushies."

"Between a beer an' 7/11 slushie, I'm choosing the slushie. S@#% slaps."

"An apple a day keeps the doc away, but a slushie a day keeps him 'ere to stay."

Marco snorted. "I'd drink to that one."

His friend huffed a laugh, and they once again lapsed into silence. Liam was ignoring his flushed cheeks, traces of tears still showing in the moonlight. Marco was grateful.

"I'm gonna talk to Mum."

Liam paused. "You sure? You don't gotta forgive her, y'know."

Marco shrugged. "Yeah. Live now, not the past. It's been years."

Liam snorted. "Your life is like some random fifteen-year-old girl thought of a traumatic backstory at four am while eating cold McDonald's fries on her skateboard and thought 'hey, let's give him an angsty-bad-boy Hollywood personality'."

Marco paused, thinking. Giving up, he elbowed Liam in the rib cage. "That was, uh, weirdly specific?"

Liam snickered. "You could say I have a *very* vivid imagination."

Marco rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. He forgot how much he missed, well, *there*. How he should've valued his time. Valued friends, family.

"Y'know, I might stay another week." He murmured. Lee looked up.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Liam rolled his eyes. "Gonna live your 'Happily Ever after'?"

"Bull\$#@%. Happy ever after, my ass."

But...

Maybe, just maybe, he can finally find a way to be content.

He looked sidelong at his brother with a smile - small, but real. "This sh#%hole *is* home, after all."

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**Year 9-10 Runner-Up:** Amelie Schubert [Trinity Anglican College]

**Title:** *The Fairytale Game*

I breathed a silent sigh of relief as my heart thumped loudly in my chest for a short while. He was gone. For now. But I knew he would be back. The wolf I mean. He wasn't supposed to, but he had been chasing after me for hours.

This wasn't supposed to happen. This wasn't how the story went. I was only supposed to deliver a couple scones to my grandmother! I didn't want any of this to happen! And now, somehow the wolf was chasing me, trying to rip me apart! I knew I was in a story. That witch of a librarian had sentenced me into 'Little Red Riding hood.' And now the wolf was chasing me. I didn't know why though. I knew that once Red refuses to give the Wolf any of the food she has, the wolf then leaves her and goes to her grandmother's house! So why was he chasing me?

I watch as the wolf dashes by the tree I'm hiding behind as I reach into my basket and pull out a pie my mother had given me. I had to distract him. Even if it meant using the food!

"HERE! YOU WANT THIS!?" I yell, my hand shaking as I tossed the pie at the wolf's nose. The wolf paused, staring at the pie as it bounced off his nose, landing on the ground in front of him. I stared intensely at the wolf as it slowly poked and prodded its nose through the pie before pouncing on top of it, swallowing it whole. But I could see in its cursed eyes that it was still hungry. And I was going to have to make a serious sacrifice.

"Here!" I yelled fearfully, throwing the basket in the wolf's direction. "Have the rest of them! Just leave me alone!" But the wolf didn't move. He just stood there with glassy eyes as I breathed quietly and fearfully, feeling my heart sink deep within my chest like a stone being dropped into a lake of water. What was wrong with him? What was happening?

Suddenly, the wolf's body completely dispersed, deteriorating completely like a pile of dust after it had been blown by a gust of wind, the wolf's image fading into mere pixels that slowly vanished into thin air. What. What just happened?

"Very good child..." Mumbled a familiar voice behind me. I froze. I knew who this was. The librarian.

"You!" I scream, feeling my blood turn cold as I turned to stare at her old, horrible wrinkly face. A face of evil. "Take me back! I'm not playing any of your games, you witch!"

"Oh! Come on!" She cackled, waving her long bony fingers around in the air as she hovered around me, her bright golden monocle shimmering from her unnerving sinister glow. "Isn't this fun? You being the main character in all these amazing stories?"

No. This wasn't fun. The librarian at our local library had invented this little 'game' where kids of all ages have to QUITE LITERALLY complete a certain fairy tale and win! And she had chosen me to go first. All of the fairy tales the horrible librarian had made me take part in, I was one of the characters. Just before, I was Gretel in Hansel and Gretel. But... All of these little kid stories were... wrong. Stuff was wrong about them. VERY wrong. In every fairy tale I was in, something was wrong. Like something went wrong that caused me to do what the character wasn't supposed to do.

Like, in Hansel and Gretel, the witch in that story was some sort of vegetarian so I didn't have any chicken to feed to Hansel, so he didn't have a bone to pretend to be his finger, and within half a day, the witch had eaten him completely! Like, the librarian was playing with the story to make it harder for me to complete the fairy tale! Like just now as instead of going to my grandmother's house after I refused to give the wolf anything to eat, the wolf instead decided to chase ME! Obviously, I had no choice but to give in and give the food to the wolf. I never had a choice! I would've DIED otherwise! I wanted to complete the fairy tale, but I didn't want to DIE doing it! But I knew that's what this witch wanted me to do. That's why she was meddling with all these fairy tales. Playing with the story. She WANTED to see me die. She WANTED to see me gone.

"Do you really think playing with the story is going to provide you with some sort of advantage!?" I scream, my throat hoarse from all the panic built up in my throat like a dam for a river.

The horrible librarian laughed a sinister laugh as she slowly floated down to the ground where she was just about eye level with me.

"Yes! I in fact do!" She remarked, sinisterly. "Playing with the story is always so much more entertaining than just letting it go to the same boring tale! It's much more exciting this way!"

"And what? You ENJOY turning me into your little puppet that you can throw about whenever you want and WHEREVER you want?"

"Yes indeed!" She chirped, bearing her horrifying teeth. "Now! What shall it be next? Goldilocks and the three bears?" I froze, feeling my entire body grow cold and stiff with shock. Goldilocks gets eaten at the end of that book. Doesn't she? What was this old hag planning now? But before I could ask I suddenly found myself all alone. In a forest. In another forest different from the one before. I looked down at the clothing I was wearing. A bright blue dress. And I could feel my head ache from a tight black headband that was holding the many blonde curls I had in my hair. I was Goldilocks. I spied a small cottage in the distance, and I knew that was the house of the three bears. I knew that's where the witch wanted me to go. But the story wanted me to go there too. So... What choice did I have?

I slowly advanced towards the direction of the cottage, feeling myself grow quiet and numb with every step I took. I was scared. Terrified even. But as I silently opened the front door, all that fear suddenly melted away as the scent of porridge reached my nose. I didn't even like porridge, but that smell. It just made me feel like I was happily melting from its goodness!

I found myself wandering over to the bears dining table where three bowls sat. one of them, smaller than the other two. I knew that was the baby bear's bowl, but I couldn't eat it. I had to stop myself. I had to fight the temptation or else I was bear food!

"Come on now!" slurred the librarian's voice from behind me. "Just take a little bite! It won't hurt you!"

"No!" I hissed, scrunching up my fists. "You're planning something! I know you are!"

"And why would I be planning something?" The librarian questioned sinisterly. "There is no happy ending for Goldilocks! I don't NEED to play with THIS story!" I froze. This witch WAS planning to do nothing! She was just going to sit there and force me to go along with all these fairy tales, and then FEED ME TO THE BEARS! I could feel the temptation growing stronger and stronger to eat the porridge, but I held on.

'Remember how much you hate porridge!' I was thinking to myself as my eyes began to water. 'Remember how you ate it once when you were five and threw up all over the kitchen floor because it tasted like lumpy milk!'

It was working. Sort of. But the librarian was still there, pushing me and trying to make me eat it. But I couldn't eat it. I had to hold on.

"Eat it!" The librarian was chanting in my ear. "Eat it! Eat it! Eat it! Eat!"

"STOOOOP!" I screamed, suddenly losing it, and shoving her backwards. But what I didn't see were the three hungry bears standing behind her, looking hungrier than ever.

I didn't have time to see what happened next, as I could suddenly feel my surroundings fade into nothingness, almost like I was falling into an abyss. Suddenly it all stopped, and it took me a second to realise where I was. I was back in the library! And the librarian. She was gone! And that fairy tales book she had used to play that little 'game' was sitting on her desk, opened up to the final page of goldilocks and the three bears where it showed a little old woman with a golden monocle screaming while half hanging out of a bear's mouth.

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**Year 9-10 Runner-Up:** Jaz Tutt [Catholic College Wodonga]

**Title:** *A Silent Night*

I remembered that moment like it was yesterday. The moment Father burst through the door with the most incredible smile on his face. He kissed me on the forehead and spun Mother high in the air. Father spoke, barely drawing breath.

"I got the job!" He took hold of Mother's hands. "We're going to New York darling! New York!" She gazed deep into his eyes and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"You're being serious John?" She gasped in utter disbelief.

"Never more serious in my life." He laughed. Father drew his attention my way, approaching me and kneeling to my height. He spoke in a voice so gentle and genuine, telling me that he, with his friend William, applied for and successfully received a new job situated on the outskirts of New York.

"You're telling me we're moving to America?" I squeal with delight

"Yes, Audrey my dear! Yes, we are!"

I had always wanted to go to America. Sarah Cornwall had been telling all us girls at school about her splendid holiday there, it was enough to make any of us envious. I couldn't wait to see her reaction when I announced I'd be living there! I had never travelled anywhere beyond my hometown in England and can admit I was quite nervous to leave all that I had ever known.

That night as my father tucked me in, he spoke about the magnificent big ship that we would have the privilege to board; The R.M.S Titanic. It had made itself quite the attraction and Father told me it was the largest and most luxurious ship yet. When he spoke, he performed, spreading his arms out like wings as he told me its great size.

"And I read in the newspaper today, that this 'ships unsinkable!"

"Unsinkable? Nothings unsinkable!"

"Not until today!" His excitement was contagious.

"It's getting late, Goodnight, darling," He kissed me on the forehead. Mother leant against the doorframe. I wanted to hear more, but I found myself shutting my eyes.

"Goodnight, Mother, Father." And with that father blew out my candle and my room grew dark. That night I dreamt the most marvellous dreams of that ship and where it would take us.

With everything happening so suddenly, there was short notice for packing our luggage and securing ourselves a place in New York. My once ordinary life was growing into a life full of much excitement. My Father thought so too, though Mother found herself quite frantic. I asked if there was anything I could do to help, but Father just gave a small smile and said, "No dear, you leave it to us adults." He ruffled my hair, "You just worry about finishing packing your clothes, okay? We'll be leaving Wednesday." I nodded as I watched my mother in the distance pacing from room to room. I hoped she could figure out her adult things soon, it was upsetting to see my mother so stressed.

The few days passed quickly, and before I knew it, we were sitting in a cart heading straight to Southampton. I could hardly believe that in moments, I would be boarding it. I watched from my window as we came closer to our destination. Four huge cylinders soon appeared over the thousands of heads and verticals swarmed around the departure area. I sat up instantly.

"Mother! Father! There It is! I see it!" My parents seemed as astonished as I was. The sight of those cylinders alone revealed the monstrous size of that ship. The nearer we came the more the ship revealed itself.

"There she is. The unsinkable ship." My Farther rose from his seat.

"Look at the size of her!" Mother chimed in. I was speechless.

The cart came to a halt, and we all hopped out with the most dazzled expressions, none of us able to take our eyes off the ship.

"Well, I never," Father murmured. He grabbed me from under my arms and lifted me into the sky. I sat on his shoulders, getting the most spectacular view. It was everything and more than I could have ever imagined. Mother joined us, our luggage stacked in her arms. Letting me down, Father assisted her. As he did so, I heard Father's name being called from within the crowd. Father heard it too.

"John! John over here!" A face emerged from the huge gathering.

"William!" Father bellowed, the two welcoming one another like brothers. "Amelia dear, this is William and his wife Rosemary," Father announced, his hand showcasing a beautiful young woman, linking arms with a tall, solid man with a slight stubbled beard. The lady and Mother exchanged greetings, whilst the man looked my way. "You must be Audrey." His voice had a slight huskiness to it, but it was just as gentle and nurturing as Father's. I watched William reach out his arm. Hesitantly I took hold of it as we shook hands.

"I am your Father's friend from work, we are heading to New York together" He gave a warm smile. I instantly liked William, he spoke to me maturely, as if I were a young lady rather than the 8-year-old child I am.

Father pushed us through the crowd as we approached a group containing many third-class passengers, much like us. We stood aside as we watch those in first-class boarding the boat. I was mesmerised by their beauty. The dresses and hats were divine and looked exactly like the clothing on my doll, Lucy. My Father got her for me for my 6th birthday, he told me to take very special care of her as she was very fragile and expensive. I felt proud my father trusted me with my precious doll, I wanted to prove to him how responsible I was. To this day she is in perfect condition. She's my most valued possession.

I watched as a few people from our group began to climb onto the ship. I tug on my father's shirt.

"Father, is it our turn? Can we go on now?" I cried impatiently.

"I think it might be."

"Really Father? It's our turn? Come on then! We can't miss it!" I gasped excitedly as Father linked his arm around Mother and took my hand.

"Calm down Audrey, we won't miss it. I promise." I knew when Father promised, he really meant it. Father escorted us into the tight crowd spilling onto a ramp, William, and Rosemary close behind us. My feet soon touched the tip of the gangway, and I began to rise over the heads that remained on the ground.

Soon, the opening to the ship was merely a meter away. Though before we could reach it we were stopped by a man in a black suit and funny hat. "Tickets please." His voice was deep, and his expression was blank. Father dug into his coat and carefully retrieved the 3 pieces of paper.

"Thank you, Sir," He responded, stamping our tickets. Soon the doorway was directly in front of me. No one standing in the way, no more waiting, no one stopping me. I observed the Titanic from the outside for the final time, before holding my breath and stepping inside the ship.

At first, I was overwhelmed by the buzzing noise of where I had entered, but before I could lose myself Father took my hand and guided us to where we needed to go. My first days on the ship were a blur of excitement. I remember it all. The incredible dinners, the wonderful music, the fabulous dancing that wouldn't stop until late night struck.

Yet those memories were soon drained by the vivid sights of what happened on April 14th. What seemed like a dream, quickly spun into a nightmare.

"Audrey, Audrey, get up sweetheart."

"John, what's happening?"

"Stay calm Amelia, William has gone to find out... Audrey, get up now." I rub my eyes, the room still dark. I hear hurried footsteps outside our room, following the appearance of William. It seemed that many were up at this late time.

"John, get yourself and your girls up on that deck. They're not telling us what's happening exactly, but I can see it in people's eyes. They've been told something we haven't." William's

eyes were wide and after receiving that news Fathers were too. He and William exchanged a few more words that Mother and I were unable to distinguish before William disappeared from my sight. Mother looked up at Father, waiting for instructions.

"Amelia, grab your coat darling." He rushed over to me and scooped me up as if I were a newborn, wrapping me in the sheet of my bed.

"John, I felt a subtle jerk of the ship, I can't help but think..." Father was quick to shake his head and gesture to me, putting a finger over his lips. The paleness in Mother's face told me there was some understanding between them that I was unaware of. It frightened me to see the panic my mother was unable to hide.

Father swung open the door of our room, stripping away the barrier, which the noise hid behind. Yelling drowned the hallways; I watched in awe as fellow passengers scurried around like wild rodents.

"Father, what's going on?" I whimper. He didn't respond, instead, he took Mother's hand whilst I were still in his arm.

"This way." I'd never seen my father so serious. We turned into many entrances; each one looking identical to the last. At first, I believed we were lost, but we took on a final turn into a swarm of people. I see a man around Father's age turn to us.

"Get outta here mate. The exits are locked. We're trapped in 'ere." Father took interest in the man and what he had to say. "I'm boutta take the one down in the 3rd hallway. I'm gettin' my wife and kids onto one of them lifeboats, no matter what." Father nodded, seeming to understand. We didn't stay with that group of people for long, instead, with the point of the man's finger, we bolted for another exit. By now I believe I understood what was going on, yet I wasn't afraid for our lives as I know with Father nothing bad could come of us.

As we turned a tight corner we collided with a woman and her baby, both crying. "Please I don't know where to go." Her voice was breathy as she paused for air.

"Come with us." Father led us into a small stairway leading up to the top deck. I could only wonder as to where William and Rosemary were. I hoped they were ok. We reached the top and Mother fumbled with the door handle.

"It's locked, John." Mother's forehead began to sweat. Under his breath, I could make out Father's words.

"Those bastards." The woman with her child took another step closer to us.

"They haven't really left us locked down here? We're people too. We're people too." She began to cry again, though Father kept his composure.

"Step back." Father passed me into my mother's arms. Taking a few paces back, he charges at the door, heaving his full weight against it. Without results, he tries again.

The door gives way as it flies off its hinges, hitting us all with the hard slap of cold night air. Nothing could prepare me for what I witnessed on deck. The best way I could compare it to, is to the time Father took me to a quail farm. I wasn't even able to take a step without one being beneath my feet. I felt suffocated and the noise was simply deafening. Officer's whistles blared as I heard the hammering thuds of lifeboats being pulled onto the deck, yet I could still make out an angelic hymn playing from the band.

The magnificent light of fireworks was sent off, giving a moment of harmony with everyone onboard. We all looked up as it lit up our night sky. It was one brief moment of bliss before the screaming and havoc returned. Father collected me back into his arms as Mother followed him to the ship.

"Excuse me! Excuse me!" Father grabbed the attention of an officer

"Where can I get my wife and child on a lifeboat?" I dug my face into Father's chest, the chilli air biting at my nose and cheeks. I wanted to go home.

"There's no more on this side. Your last hope is the left side of the ship!"

"Thank you! Thank you!" I look over Father's shoulder, horrified by the sight of people jumping off the deck.

"Father!" He couldn't hear me. I watched the lowering of a lifeboat as it became swarmed by people climbing on top of each other like animals. I hid my face back into Father, this time, it wasn't the cold that was bothering me. As I was taken to the other side of the ship, we were relieved to find William rushing our way.

"John this way! I've gotten Rosemary in, come on." Father was never a runner, but I believe with all my heart that that night he could have beaten an athlete. We stick behind William, who's now pushing himself into a gathering. Mother tries to get her way through as Father lifts me over his head.

"My friend's wife and child sir, they're small things they'll take up no weight at all." William grabs Mother's hand to pull her through.

"What about Father-" Father covers my mouth. It was at that sickening moment, I realised something was wrong. I zone out of my surroundings and the noise turns to muffled ringing. I look into my father's eyes and rest my hand against his beating heart. Which boat was for him? I'm pulled out of my thoughts as I'm taken by Mother. I felt as if I were ripped off like a band aid.

"Father!"

"Audrey, get in the boat, a different boat is coming for all the dads, ok?" I could tell when Father wasn't truthful, his eyebrows raise up.

"John..." They reach out to grab each other, as he takes her hand and places it close to his face.

"I love you, Amelia." He takes off his coat and places it over us. He refrains from shivering.

"No Father, you keep it." I see his head shake.

"Audrey, you be good for Mother, ok? I will see you soon, I love you, dear." I feel the boat begin to lower. I refused to look away from him. At that moment it was just us, and through his eyes, I knew he was scared. I try to climb out, but Mother pulls me down. I think this was the first time my father couldn't promise me everything would be ok.

Our lifeboat splashed and I felt the sickening motion of lapping waves beneath us. I didn't take my eyes off that ship, I felt it wasn't right to do so. It wasn't until the final lifeboat was gone that I truly heard the real panic of those screaming on deck. I watched as the lights flickered and died as the engines fell quiet. My doll, Lucy crosses my mind. I can picture her in my mind, left lying in that bed. At first, I when to cry out for her, but I realised that I was glad to leave part of me with my father, maybe she will bring him comfort as she did to me. A gift that he gave to me that I can give back to him. Oh, what I would do to swap my place with him.

I strung onto the draining hope that someone would be there to save him. Another ship, some officers. Someone. Something.

My boat fell silent as we hear the colossal snap of the R.M.S Titanic. I will never see such a thing ever again in my life. People that were now tiny figures were thrown around like rag dolls, I couldn't bear to think of my Father being one of them. Mother tried to cover my eyes, but I refused. I prayed for my Father as I watched everything submerged into the ocean below. I wanted to scream, I wanted to take the oar and row straight back to him, but Mother just held me firm in her arms, weeping uncontrollably.

Women in the boat began to look around. One eventually asked what was to come of us? It was a question our leading Officer was unable to answer. I could make out small splashing in

the water from where the Titanic had sunk. It was people. There were people in there. I look around, to see everyone looking at the same thing I was, yet not a single person asked that we go back for them. Our Fathers, our Husbands, our Brothers. No one spoke for their behalf. It was only then I let myself cry. To accept what I had just witnessed within the past few hours. To accept something that didn't feel real at all.

It was on April 14th, that I saw that ship go down. I saw as it broke in two, as it sunk to the depths of the Atlantic. But what was most awful were the screams of the people we left behind. Mother disagrees with me. She says that the worst of it all was the silence that followed it. She told me that during that night, the whole world stood silent.

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## YEAR 11-12 CATEGORY

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**Year 11-12 Winner:** Amelia Spinks [Albury High School]

**Title:** *The Pianist*

The dim yellow light from the lampshade warmed the room like a steady fire, illuminating only half of her Grandma's wrinkled face. Grandma looked down on the little girl tucked into the blankets, her frizzy hair messy and tangled, framing her face and giving her the appearance of a bird in a nest.

Grandma's vein-wrought hands and bony fingers held loosely onto a picture book, with bright pink lettering and a cartoon figure in a gown on the cover. The book had not yet been opened.

"It's my favourite," Isabelle, the bird in the nest, mumbled.

"Is it, now?" Grandma's husk of a voice replied, the corners of her mouth fitting into the lines on her cheeks – a smile that had been smiled many times before. "I'm sure you know it inside and out, then, my sweet."

The book remained unopened. Isabelle said nothing, eyeing her Grandma with a growing suspicion that she was not about to hear the story she wanted. She wriggled her arms outside of her blankets so she could tidy her hair out of her face.

Grandma placed the book on the bed with little concern, her still young eyes focused on her granddaughter. She folded both her hands and legs, leaning back into her chair with a creak, not knowing if it came from her back or the old wood.

"It's time I tell you a story of my own," she said wistfully, watching Isabelle's reaction with a knowing gaze, fully expecting the sigh and the roll of her eyes. "Hush," she responded, holding a knobbed finger to her creased lips. "If you never listen, you'll never know what you never knew."

"Grandma – you don't make any sense," Isabelle whined, slumping down against the bed head. Grandma hushed her once more, and began, in a calm, low voice, hiding millions of words behind it.

"My father knew music since before he was born. It was his own mother's proud claim that all the classical music she'd played for him, even before he'd seen the light of day, had turned him into a great composer.

"Now, this was a long time ago – before we had the internet to spread stories around – but his name was known by all. My mother told me he played unlike any other pianist that had ever lived: he didn't touch the keys – his hands danced about as if they were waltzing, his fingers gliding effortlessly across the black and white bridge.

"Even as he grew old, and he became weaker – frail and wrinkled like old Grandma - his hands never stopped dancing, and the stories we heard of him were always full of excitement. My mother always painted a picture of a confident yet humble piano man playing to whoever needed it most, with his gliding hands and weightless fingers. That is how I remember him."

"Did he play songs for you?" Isabelle said quietly, still entranced by the words of the story.

"I don't know, my dear - I was too young to remember," Grandma replied, her eyes sad but content. "He was always travelling – and sickness took him away before I was old enough to play along with him. But that doesn't stop me from hearing his music."

Isabelle's eyebrows creased and she searched Grandma's face for an answer before even asking a question. She brought her own hands up in front of her face, imagining them running across the keys of a piano.

"It's time for you to sleep now, dear," Grandma said, pulling the blankets up and tucking her in. She planted a kiss on Isabelle's forehead before turning out the light.

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The morning sun shone through the curtains in rays, like light through the clouds, but it wasn't the glare that woke Isabelle. She sat upright in her bed, eyes still sleepy and head still full of dreams, and she registered the sound in her ears.

Musical notes bounced off the walls, echoing up the corridor and into her room. Beautiful, graceful notes – she could almost see the flowing hands of that famed pianist Grandma had loved only through a story.

Isabelle crept to the door, swinging it open with the inevitable creak of the hinges that Grandma always jokingly compared to her knees, and she peered down the hallway.

The piano sat square and brown at the end of the hall, and despite being old and out of tune, every note Grandma played fit perfectly with the last. It was as if the piano was stuck in another time, and Grandma was the only one old enough to match.

As Isabelle tiptoed quietly down the hall, her Grandma's dancing hands came into view, waltzing over the keys.

Isabelle thought she could see him – her great-grandfather, the man from Grandma's story. He was there in Grandma's aged hands, in the antique piano, in its ivory keys. Grandma's smile grew, and Isabelle knew she was thinking not of the notes she was playing, but of him. Of the stories her mother had told her.

"Grandma?" she asked when the last note had drawn out. "Can you teach me how to play too?"

**Year 11-12 Runner-Up:** Yolanta Guthridge [Trinity Anglican College]

**Title:** *Light Bulb Moment*

*noun*

**INFORMAL**

noun: **lightbulb moment**

1. a moment of sudden realization, enlightenment, or inspiration.

*'Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if only one remembers to turn on the light.'*

*-Dumbledore*

*'I made not one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking.'*

*-Einstein*

*'Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle...'*

*-Lewis Carol*

When Thomas Edison supposedly invented the lightbulb in 1878, he cast the world into the electric glow of carbon filaments and hurried the world along into the future. The Industrial Revolution, already well on its way, could now power forward; faster, further. In a way, this realisation was just like the act of flicking a switch, and igniting a bulb; it made so many things possible, as the way ahead was illuminated. A realisation indeed; what fantastical thoughts flickered to the forefront of his mind, as the switch was flicked and the glow of his imagination illuminated an invention. Perhaps this, then, was the reason such a phrase; 'light-bulb moment' has been attributed to sudden realisations; they allow us to forge onwards through the river of time and make things possible, which makes us want them more. So how best to do this? To experience...

*epiphany*

Is this phrase really the most suitable for such epiphanies? I know, that in my past, there has rarely been such a moment of certainty, felt in a single heartbeat, except for things that were small; remembering where I left my keys, or deciding what I should cook for dinner.

*Flick-flick.*

*Flick-flick.*

The lightbulb goes on, the lightbulb goes off.

In truth, the important realisations are the ones that are less like the simple flicking of a switch, but more likely to occur in any way imaginable. They can be like waves on the shore, approaching and receding, just close enough to dampen your feet, but not adventurous enough to come closer and invite you in, or like a cool and misty forest, waiting for the moment in which you decide to proceed.

Some are a building pressure; a kettle on the stove, accumulating steam.

*I can't keep living like this.*

A smile at school, pretending to laugh with friends, while inside, you are dying and their words bury deep inside you, playful butter knives that have turned into swords and impaled you with your lack of tolerance for even the smallest of friendly jibes-

*I can't keep living like this.*

-and the bated breath as you go home, a quiet nod to keep up the air of normality, wishing there were arms that you could fall into-

*I can't keep living like this.*

-and the steam builds up until it is inside you, pushing, begging to get out as the pins prick at the corner of your eyes and you know that it is only moments until you cannot hold it back anymore and everything will collapse and-

*I CAN'T KEEP LIVING LIKE THIS*

-and it's a screaming, shaky hand around a half-full glass as it spills over and you struggle to breath until your feet are pounding the pavement as you run-

*I CAN'T KEEP LIVING LIKE THIS!*

Until somebody takes the kettle off the stove, burnt hands gasping against the scorched metal. The pressure is released. The words will still echo inside your head, of course, and the burns on your hands will hurt. As will the realisation; what you have learned, what you now know. It was slow, and over time, but it is there now.

*Flick-flick.*

It's a kettle, not a switch. You can try to turn it off, but the water is still boiled.

It has even been a rare occurrence in my life, for a realisation of significance to occur in a remotely straight-forward way, like the waters of an ancient river, cold and slow-moving. It just doesn't happen that way for some; they realisations come all out of order, almost as if they were a short-circuited wire. It is in the way that some realisations cannot be told; the linear structure is almost there, just on the edge of my memory, but it is clouded. What did I feel, and when? Did I know, by then, or was I still connecting the dots? My thoughts are constantly recalled, examined, as I try to know.

*'If I could have a friendship like this, maybe I would never need a romantic partner.'*

*'I don't feel that way, but I need them to feel that way about me.'*

*'I've never met a person like them.'*

*'You may want to be their favourite person, but would they be that favourite person for you?'*

I think that they already are.

It is in the secret whisperings under the cover of darkness. It is in the new roads of possibility, as your heart beats that little bit faster. It is in the way that by the next day, you are convinced that your smile has nothing to do with what you overheard, with the secret that you should know by now. It is in the way that you believe your beauty is for yourself, but the next day, you wonder... was it, really?

Had I realised by then? Did I know? Or was I still in denial, pushing away my epiphany, for the better, and for the worse? Or had the possibility not even crossed my mind? Or had I done all of these things, one after the other, or all at once?

*Flick-flick-flick-flick-flick.*

The light buzzes, and flickers, as the wire shorts and snaps.

And some realisations just don't occur;

like insects, the scurry, just out of sight,

only to dart away, once you turn on

the light...

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**Year 11-12 Second Runner-Up:** Judah Trevaskis [Trinity Anglican College]

**Title:** *Faceless*

Officer Collins pored over the file;

*Male, 38 years of age, 6 foot 1, Employed at the welding company Shoemark industries, no criminal record and no family or any relations to speak of, apart from his girlfriend who had tragically passed away in a car accident. He was reported to have been in a state of distress when arriving at the station.*

The officer flipped the file closed and neatly placed it on his meticulously organised desk. He walked over to the waiting room, passing the blaring television screaming about the latest heavy rainfall. It was nothing but a distraction Collins thought as he approached the man sitting alone. He was a short gentleman. He had dark hair with the odd grey, speckled around the temples. The man had a pointed nose and long narrow fingers that wiped the beads of sweat collecting in the creases of his forehead. As Collins marched towards him, he noticed the state of the man's clothes. His suit jacket was filthy, his pants looked as if it had gone through the blender and the man was drenched from head to toe.

"Jadston Michaels?" Collins asked. The man looked up and grinned nervously, rubbing his fingers.

"Come with me."

The officer led Jadston toward the interrogation room.

The door closed with a click, as Jadston and Collins sat opposite each other. Plain concrete walls surrounded the dim room with a lonely one-way window reflecting the door they had just walked through. Officer Collins opened his notebook and clicked his pen. He noticed once again the man was fidgeting with his fingers and was still wearing a nervous smile as he shifted in his seat. Collins cleared his throat.

"So tell me what happened."

*"I... was on my way to work..."* he said to the officer *"...and as I sat in my car at the traffic lights I looked at the person next to me."*

Collins sat back and stroked the stubble forming at his chin. He watched Jadston closely as he told his story.

*"The person's face was blank. Literally blank. As if someone had sanded their face to be completely bare of features, but only for a split second. When I refocused on them, they looked completely normal. I convinced myself I was just tired and went on with my day. Arriving at work, I signed in and sat at my desk just like every other day, organising the mountain of files my boss had so generously dumped on me. It was mind-numbing. But it was the kind of task they give to newbies like me. I put my head down and got to work. After a couple hours, I decided to take a break and try to get to know my colleagues. As I headed to the break room, from the corner of my eye I noticed another figure with no face coming directly for me."*

Jadston became more animated as he explained.

*"I know what I saw, even if it was for just a second. So I made a run for it. Sprinting as fast as I could, away from that place. He was gaining on me, then there were other faceless creatures following me."*

Collins Frowned. There was something off about Jadston but he couldn't place what it was.

"And where do you work Mr Michaels? Where did this incident occur?"

*"Shoemark industries,"* Jadston replied.

Collins raised an eyebrow then nodded, gesturing to the man to continue.

*"I jumped on my bike and rode straight here."*

"And have you had any experiences similar to this before today?"

Jadston hesitated.

"No."

He once again began nervously fidgeting with his finger.

"I understand you suffered a loss a few years ago?"

The man's face darkened. Although he was still hiding it with a smile, his body language completely changed. He sat deathly still staring intently at Collins. The officer noticed the man had dried blood stains peeking out from under his jacket.

*"What does that have to do with anything?"* Jadson said, eyeing him. He was dangerously quiet.

"I am simply trying to get as much information as possible." The officer stated calmly. The sudden hostility surprised Collins. In fact, this whole case didn't add up. Jadston truly believed this insane fantasy. Not to mention the inconsistencies surrounding this strange gentleman. The file said that Jadston Michaels was 6 foot 1 but he was noticeably smaller. He said that he drove to work in his car but then left on his bike and Shoemark industries had reported that Mr Michaels had not been to work since the Accident. There was something very wrong with this case.

"Mr Michaels, why is there blood on your shirt?"

Jadson froze, all fidgeting ceased. He was about to reply when the door burst open.

"Sir, you need to see this." Officer Davis looked at him intensely.

"Davis I'm in the middle of an inter--"

"It's important"

Exasperated, Collins sighed and excused himself from the room and once out of earshot Davis explained himself.

"I looked over the car crash you asked me to and I noticed a few details missing from the report. So I decided to go down there and take a look for myself"

“And?”

Davis hastily flipped through a folder containing a number of pictures of the site of a car crash, stopping and pointing to one labelled, “Item #16”.

“I noticed a few metres outside of the radius of the car crash there an abnormally large dirt mound. When first looking at the mound you would have assumed the car threw up the dirt.”

Officer Collins nodded, stroking his speckled chin.

“But when I looked closer, I saw a limb, missing a left ring finger poking out of the mound. It was a second body. The rain from the past month must have moved the dirt concealing it. I had the coroner look over it. His face had been melted flat, to the point that all his features were missing. It was done with what I’m assuming would be a blowtorch of some description. Even with his disfigurement, we’ve just ID’d the body. A guy by the name of Jadston Michaels. Ring any bells?”

Collins' stomach dropped. Goosebumps formed at the back of his neck. He turned to look through the glass window. At the small unassuming man, innocently sitting alone rubbing his left ring finger and grinning from ear to ear.

