

**WIMBLEDON
BOOKFEST**



THE LIGHT

**Senior Young Writers
Competition 2026**

Collection of Poems & Short Stories

WIMBLEDON BOOKFEST

Young Writers Competition 2026

Collection of Poems & Short Stories
By Secondary School Pupils, Age 11-18



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Notes: School names have been abbreviated in some places; a list with schools' full names can be found at the back of this book. Special Educational Needs categories and schools have been abbreviated to 'SEN' in some instances.

All the poems and stories are published as students submitted them. Only minor and essential spelling, grammatical, and punctuation edits have been made.

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Young Writers Competition 2026

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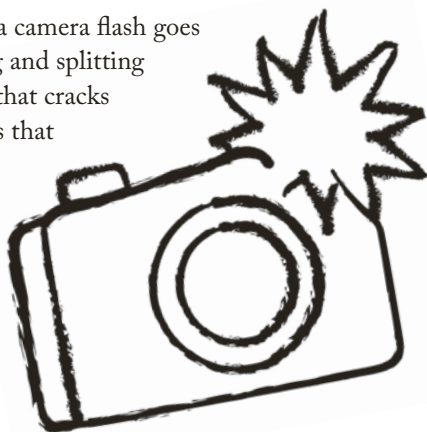
Letter from the Chair of Judges

Light is so easily broken. And so readily stolen from us.

It scatters, fractures and splinters. Sometimes it fades slowly; other times, it extinguishes in the blink of an eye. For the most part, we are used to it, expect it even: night stealing day and seasons surrendering to one another. But every now and then something catches us by surprise and forces us to confront light's wreckage or absence in a new, unsettling way. At the end of this rare and blazing summer, for instance, we witnessed - in collective awe - a total solar eclipse.

It speaks to the enormous talent of the young writers included in this anthology that they have managed - through the rigour of prose or dexterity of verse - to capture so many of these breaking-points; to depict the various nuances of light as it waxes and wanes across our lives.

Whether it is the instant a camera flash goes off, simultaneously stilling and splitting time. A fork of lightning that cracks the sky in two. Headlights that illuminate what's ahead all-too-late. Or the spark in someone's eye that -on the toss of a coin - flares or dies. This anthology contains it all. The entire spectrum.



But perhaps what these writers show us most convincingly, what certainly moves me the most about this collection of work, is the way in which these violent fractures and breaks in light so often offer - in their spectral wake - moments of curious and unexpected beauty.

Kaleidoscopic patterns. Sudden rainbows. Dazzling coronas and haunting auroras.

Light might break easily, yes. But, with this new generation of writers on the horizon, I feel confident that the pieces leftover - the shards and splinters and glinting fragments - are in very good hands indeed.

*Dr Amy Waite,
Chair of Judges*



WINNERS

OVERALL WINNER

KS4

Headlights

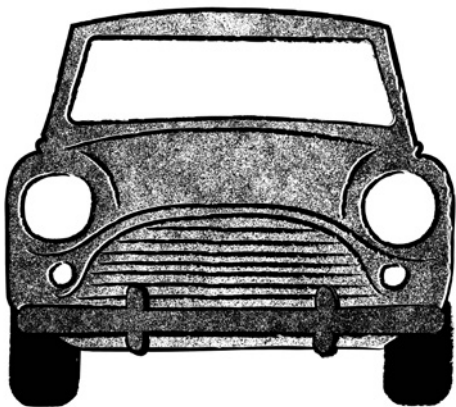
Ada Onur, Wimbledon High School

OVERALL WINNER - Headlights

By Ada Onur

Wimbledon High School, Year 11, Age 16

I see them before the world turns off.
Juddering like a jammed projector,
spluttering out the final lines:
a proposal, at midnight
under a moonlit New York
sky. I hear it before I do-
the screech of brakes buckling,
the engine coughing up
metallic plumes
like an asthmatic. As
I fall, the concrete exhales to
catch me, and suddenly
I'm that little girl, with nail polish
and ribbons around her
bunches, before she slips,
chuckling, into a pile of ash.
The beams carve the
tilting reel into lifelines, until
I'm tracing yours
sloping, forgotten, across
the cracked palm
of your hand.



THE WINNERS

KS3

The Last Lantern

Alexander Lueth, King's College School

KS3

The Light

Alice Williams, Ursuline High School

KS5

What We Cannot Have

Emilia Lygonska, Ursuline High School

SEN Senior

The Light

Jonathan McAnuff, Cricket Green School

KS4

Capturing a Moment

Mia Nijs, Marymount International School London

SEN Senior

The Beach

Olivia Porter, Cricket Green School

KS5

The Light We Learn to Carry

Santhosh Thirukumaran, Harris Academy Wimbledon

SEN Senior

The Light in Saudi Arabia

Shahana Kirupakaram, Cricket Green School

The Last Lantern

By Alexander Lueth

Kings College School, Year 8, Age 13

The power had gone out again.

Mara sat by the window, watching the storm clouds swallow the last bit of afternoon sunlight. The house felt small and heavy in the dark, the kind of darkness that made you forget what colour the walls were. She pulled the thin blanket tighter around her shoulders and reached for the old lantern her grandfather had given her.

It was dented, brass fading to green at the edges, but when she turned the knob, the soft flame flickered to life. The light spread across the room, chasing away shadows that had begun to creep up the walls. Mara sighed - somehow, that tiny flame felt like company.

She remembered what her grandfather used to say: "There's no darkness thick enough to put out a determined light." He'd told her that when she was seven and afraid of thunderstorms. Now, three years after he was gone, the words still felt like a promise.

Outside, the wind shook the windows, and rain splattered the glass. Somewhere down the road, lightning flashed, bright enough to show the neighbour's tree bending under the storm. For a moment, the lantern's glow looked dim compared to the white glare of lightning - but when the flash faded, the small flame seemed steadier than ever.

Mara picked up the lantern and wandered through the silent house. The light revealed family photos along the hallway: her parents laughing, her brother with ice cream smeared across his cheek, her grandfather holding her as a baby. The glow turned their smiles golden. It felt like the light remembered everything she missed.

A loud crack came from outside - the power line had finally snapped. The neighbourhood fell darker than before, and only

Mara's lantern remained glowing. Her chest tightened. For a heartbeat, it felt like she was the only person left in the world.

Then she noticed something - across the street, another faint light blinked to life. And another. Windows began to shimmer like stars appearing one by one. Neighbours were lighting candles, torches, phone screens. The street, once swallowed by darkness, was slowly lighting up again.

Mara grinned. She walked to the front door, opened it, and placed her lantern on the step. The warm light poured out into the rain. It wasn't much, but it joined the other lights spreading down the road - soft, human, alive.

Somehow, the storm seemed smaller.

When her parents finally returned home, soaked and tired, they found her still by the door, guarding the little lantern. Her mum smiled and touched her shoulder.

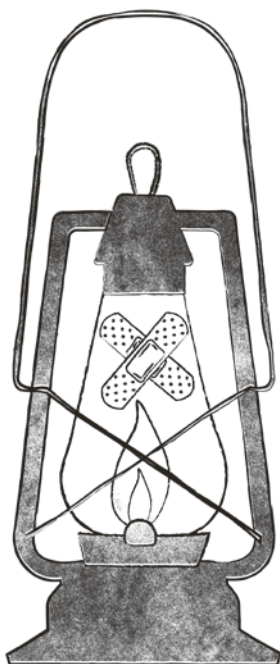
"You kept the light," she said.

Mara nodded. "He told me never to let it go out."

The storm rumbled one last time before draining into silence. A pale dawn crept over the clouds, painting the horizon silver. Mara watched the first sunlight reach the lantern, making its flame shimmer like it was greeting an old friend.

For the first time in a long while, she didn't feel alone.

The light had stayed - and so had she.



The Light

By Alice Williams

Ursuline High School, Year 7, Age 11

I like Diwali
not because it is mine,
but because I see it
where I live.

In London,
light appears in windows,
quiet at first,
then everywhere.

Golden lamps line doorways
Steady and warm
as if darkness
is gently pushed back.

Fireworks rise suddenly,
colour breaking open
across the sky-
green, gold, violet-
alive for a moment
then gone.

I pass by houses
lit with something I
don't fully understand,
but still recognise
as joy.

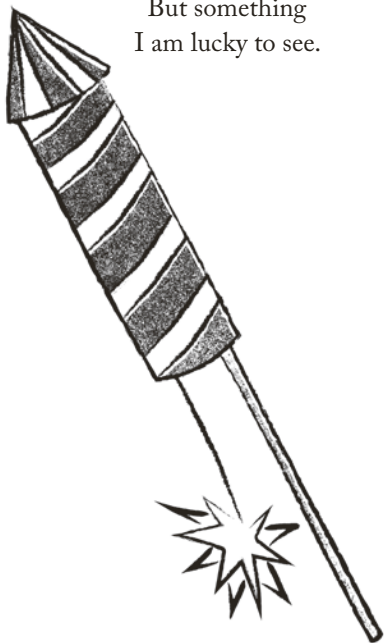
Red Kumkum powder,
bright against skin,
marks of meaning
I can't quite name.

Gifts passed between friends
and family,
hands meeting hands,
light shared.

They say it is light over darkness,
Good over evil

And I stand outside it,
watching,
not part of it,
but not untouched.

Because even here,
In the streets I know,
It glows.
Not mine-
But something
I am lucky to see.



What We Cannot Have

By Emilia Lygonska

Ursuline High School, Wimbledon, Year 13, Age 17

“You know, my first word was ‘lampa’, actually.”

“No way, really? Nothing like ‘mama’ or ‘papa’?”

“Well, I am the light of everybody’s life, after all.”

She scoffs light heartedly. “Sure. More like the light on the wall of Plato’s cave.”

“What d’you mean?”

“I mean that you see what you want to.”

She pushes the buggy back and forth as the kid inside it coos. It already has a head full of locks like its mum. I try not to let my gaze linger for long.

“Another on the way, then?” I gesture at her abdomen.



She smiles warmly, a smile not so different to the one I remember from our schooldays together, save for the cropped hair that now frames it, and the bags under her eyes. "I'm hoping this one says 'mama' first. Got to level the playing field, since dad's one point ahead."

A bus comes to a stop in front of us. "This one's mine." she says, heaving herself up from her seat. I offer to help, but she refuses. She waits for the platform to lower from the bus onto the pavement and wheels the buggy in. We exchange a final glance as the doors close. "Say buh-bye, buh-bye now," I see her mouth to her child. The bus pulls away.

I check the message again. "Appointment with Dr Echeverria, reproductive endocrinologist. Tap the link for more information." The glare of the screen stings my eyes.

How many chances do I have left?

The Light

By Jonathan McAnuff

Cricket Green School (SEN), Year 7, Age 12

Funeral
Upset
Go to bed
Can't sleep still upset
A light shines on you
I hear a voice say
"Everything is OK"
"Aunty I hear you"
I am now happy.



Capturing a Moment

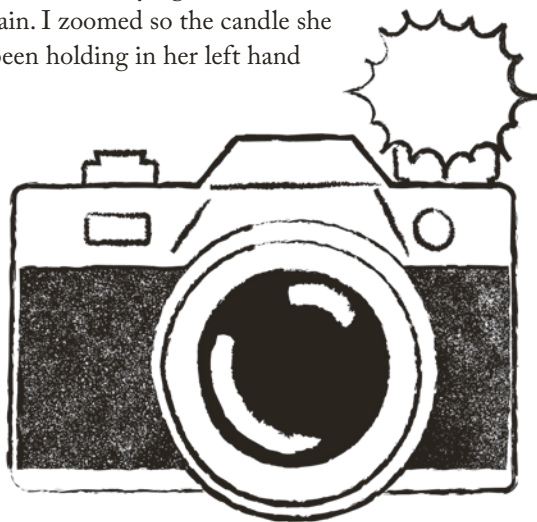
By Mia Nijs

Marymount International School, Year 11, Age 16

I clicked my lens cover open, careful not to cause any sound, not wanting to disturb. I placed my eye to the viewfinder, tracing my lowly lit surroundings. My eye landed on a subject. A small child, silhouetted by the soft light of the surrounding candles. She was saying a prayer. What to me, had simply become a wish. I wondered to what or to whom she directed it to. Possibly to the one above, possibly for health or even possibly for peace within herself and the world. When I was in her position, I made a wish to the one above-one which asked for Him to be kind, sparing, and merciful. I had then been curious to find my own faith.

I distanced my eye from the viewfinder, the girl blurred.

The girl spoke; a pained “ow” came from her mouth. The candle she had been using to light her own burned her. She shook her hand, trying to rid herself of the pain. I zoomed so the candle she had been holding in her left hand



was the only thing in frame. The youthful features on her hand were now once again distinctive.

I lowered my shutter speed and crept deliberately from my hiding place behind an inscribed pillar. I closed my eyes partially not to draw attention to myself, but the girl displayed no notice of my presence. Through my blurred movement, her features once again became unclear, leaving only a simple glow from the distant candles.

My hands, aged with experience, once again found themselves on my shutter speed dial. I turned it up, steadying myself, and steadying the shot.

She finally manages to light her candle. The flames of the two disconnecting. The girl placed the other person's wish down, returning it to its resting place. My lens observed her hands, now woven together cupping the candle close to her chest - her belief was true. To her, the one above was true. She kneeled, and my camera found the floor. We both stood still together, our breathing in sync as though we were one.

The girl stood up, her head flung forward and for a moment I feared her hair would get caught in the flame. As my eyes left my viewfinder to rush to warn her, her image dissolved. I found myself standing where she did, where she had placed her wish in a place of forever stillness.

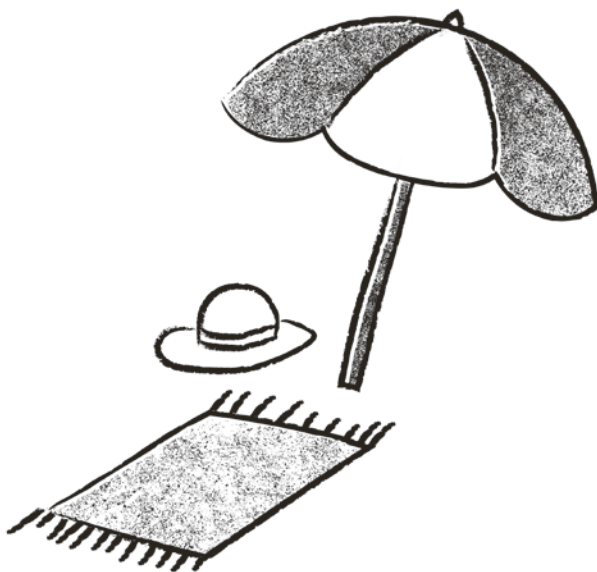
I stood surrounded by the wishes of those who had not yet been burned by the one above.

The Beach

By Olivia Porter

Cricket Green School (SEN), Year 7, Age 12

Today is a good day to go to the beach, thought Ellie. It was sunny, warm, and perfect for watching a beautiful sunset. Ellie packed her beach bag and walked to the beach. The walk wasn't that long, maybe 5-10 minutes. Ellie finally made it to the beach. The sand was so hot it burned Ellie's feet. Ellie thought it was the sun shining down. She lay down on the beach towel, looked at the sky, and had a minute of peace. She could see the blinding sun and hear the ocean waves.



The Light We Learn to Carry

By Santhosh Thirukumaran

Harris Academy Wimbledon, Year 12, Age 17

Light arrives
Quietly-

slipping through the blinds,
a thought I wasn't ready to face,
touching the room
before I do.

It lifts the corners of objects
I let fall
into shadow.

In the schoolyard,
light gathers
in shallow pools on the concrete
where our footsteps
cross,
separate,
fade-
a reminder that even brief paths
leave marks
we don't always see.

Some days
light is a teacher:

no raised voice,
no sharp command,
yet the whole room listens.



It reveals
dust on my ambitions,
cracks in my confidence,
truths I keep
behind my ribs.

Other days
light walks beside me-
a patient friend,
steady,
unbothered,

letting my half-formed thoughts
untangle
until I recognise
my own voice again.

And when the world
presses down,
light doesn't argue.

It stays.

A thin, persistent line
beneath a closed door-
waiting
for me
to open it.

I used to think light meant
certainty.

Now I know
it means
possibility-



the space between
what I fear
and what I might become.

A quiet promise
that even the smallest glow
can redraw a room,
or a life,
if I let it.



The Light in Saudi Arabia

By Shahana Kirupakaram

Cricket Green School (SEN), Year 11, Age 16

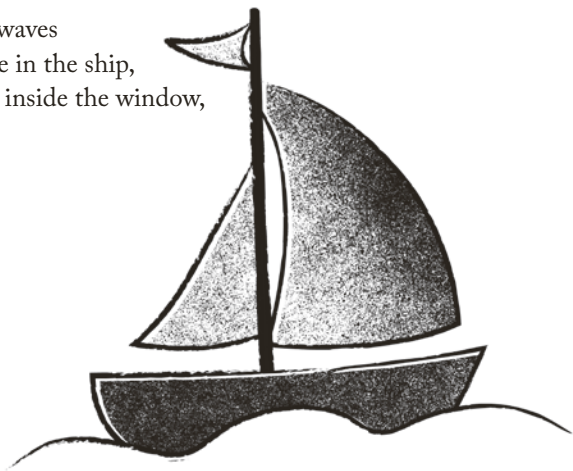
In a bright sunny day in Saudi Arabia
The scientist researching what is a light and nobody knows,
In a soft cold breeze in the middle of the night
where people rest and look at the shiny bright sky.

In quiet sky without no sound,
quiet and bright.

And in that light sky I am thinking of you all the time,
I see you my brother Agash
You are very brave not just my brother to me
You are brave and a bestie to me

You are a bright light shining
Your name and your hug is warm and safe to me.

There is sound of waves
You're always there in the ship,
Like light shining inside the window,
you can trust me.





RUNNERS UP

KS4

Moth to a flame, Man to the light
Amber Leahy, The Holy Cross School

KS3

The Light
Cara McHugh, Ursuline High School

KS3

Dancer in the Spotlight
Linda Nanes, The Holy Cross School

KS3

The Light
Lola Wise, The Holy Cross School

KS5

By the Nightlight/ By Candlelight
Luke Fletcher, Rutlish School

KS3

Blue Light
Noah Crew, Wimbledon College

KS4

The Lady of the Lamp
Sophia Salviato Cesar, Ashcroft Technology Academy

KS5

Blinding Light
Sylvana Earl-Carrera, Ursuline High School

SEN Senior

TV Light
Terrell Moraghan, Perseid Upper School

Moth to a Flame, Man to the Light

By Amber Leahy

The Holy Cross School, Year 11, Age 16

Hush now, you unburnt things. Fold your painted wings and prayer books.

Why do you beat your hearts against the walls?

Can you not see the open windows?

Look up.

The sky is wide enough for all you restless souls.

Was it not what you wanted?

The grass is always greener,

Though the sun shines on the lilies and the thorns with the same indifferent grace?

There is no rank in open air, no purity to wind.

I do not want your hummings.

Do not bow your heads and flutter wings to shed your pride;

A plume of dust speaks only to the ground it chokes,

And you are smothering the meadows.

Do you find no symbol in your symmetry?

Are your colours too dull?

Would you prefer it if I gave you technicolour coats, or would you fight too over the value of the rainbow?

You trickle down a single piece of rotting fruit and expect the lowly to be fed?

No wonder you crave the wrong things. Your greed is no longer satiated by my sweet nectar, and I wash my hands of your dead.

The ash of the brave is not the same as incense.

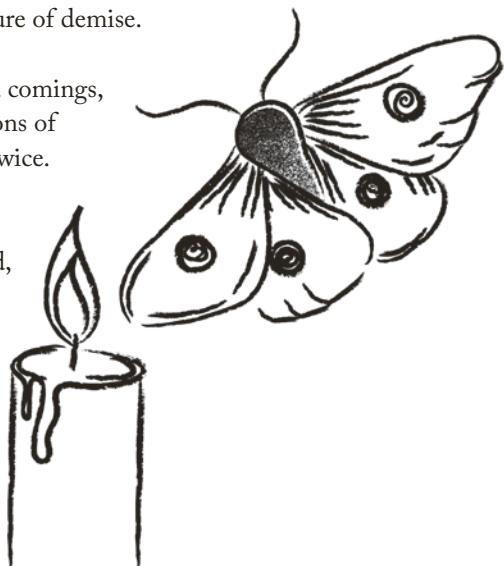
To singe is not to sanctify,

and I did not ask for martyrs.

Are you dizzy?
From the circles you trace along the sharp edge of
destruction,
always counter,
never clockwise.
I do not chastise;
Victimisation is not a form of prayer.
Stop searching for a crucible.
I did not weave your silks to see them blackened,
and I will not read the words you write in soot.

So go;
Uncle your tiny, frantic feet,
unhook them from the rims of the lamps,
the night stretches farther than you care to admit,
and a pilgrim travels further on legs intact.
You have traded silver linings for a golden cage
and mistaken the spark of flint for a guiding star.
You may scream “hallelujah” as you melt,
but antennae were never made
to measure the temperature of demise.

I am tired of your second comings,
your unyielding processions of
those fooled more than twice.
In your fever, you forget
yourselves.
The more you are blinded,
the holier the light.



The Light

By Cara McHugh

Ursuline High School, Year 9, Age 13

That light; that low, gauzy light was back again, the girl thought from her mattress. It was a faint spot, a stippling of light blurred across the auburn sky. Grime sat against the thin windowpanes, scattering starlight across the threadbare rug in a senseless pattern. The light flickered, uncaring.

Silence wrapped around the house, the air dull with unspoken words. The family slept-it was early morning after all- except for the eldest girl, her breathing shallow with fear of waking the others.

No more than a fingers-width across, the brightness refused her any rest. Softly, the child moved her sister's arm away, sat up on the harsh straw bed. No sibling reached out for comfort, no infant's cries rocked the glass-fragile silence, no parent scolded through a clenched jaw. Lacy hemming trailed the floor as the girl crept towards the door. She covered the cloth of her nightgown with her father's sailing coat and was gone.

The field was slippery with rain as she came closer to the fence. Gnarled beams sat misaligned at their rotting joints. The girl hopped over with ease. Stars flecked the sky like pockmarks on a sick child, cast shadows over the wooden huts. They seemed to huddle for warmth against the northern cold, quivering foundations in the gales.

The hill was lush with greenery against the earth-stained doors of the houses. A peasant's ritual. Starting up the hill, she trudged through tall grasses knotted with wind, slipped on cool mud. Iron spiked against the shining of her teeth and she spat blood. Licked her split lip. Continued onward.

Little pockets of light leaked from the horizon. The girls gaze wandered, until- there, that was it.

It was a speck of brightness, not far. It was dim, yes, but she knew that rhythm, in the depths of her flesh she could feel it clawing for a rise, thundering like a heartbeat. She took a breath in. Let it out. Let memory wash over her in a thousand tiny rivers.

There! She caught the memory by the tail; it writhed in her grip. Closer, she brought it close like the salmon of knowledge. She raised it to her lips, the slightest touch. Nerves fired behind her eyes.

Her father, elbows printed with the oak grain of the table, hunched over an oil lantern. Flame fluttering like a bird's wing, delicate enough to crush. Sailors code, he had called it, a language to communicate with others at sea. The only call she would ever need, he said, was SOS. A last hope for rescue, a plea for salvation. Three short, three long, three short. SOS.

The girl jerked herself back to the present, squinted into the early dawn. It was hard to make it out, harder still to see where it came from. Taller than the rickety buildings around it, vaguely oblong. A lighthouse.

The lamplight waxed and waned like the tides. She squinted. Short, short, short. Long, long, long. Short, short, short. SOS. Save our souls.



Dancer in the Spotlight

By Linda Nanes

The Holy Cross School, Year 8, Age 13

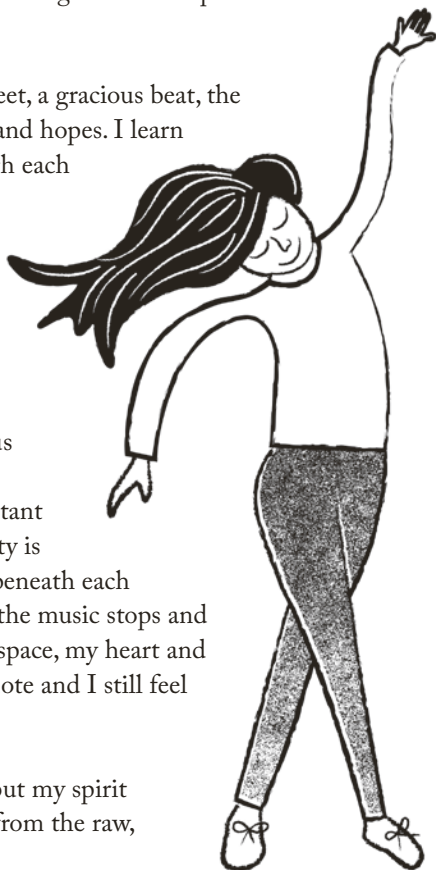
I move not to escape the world but to find myself within its flow.

My body speaks what my voice cannot express, a story told within every shift of weight. Sometimes I glide in lyrical grace, a flowing waterfall of contemporary art. Other times the beat drops and my body hits the ground-an explosion of Hip-Hop in my heart.

The wood knows my feet, a gracious beat, the mirror reflects a thousand hopes. I learn to know myself through each gesture, each pop and lock a new discovery, each leap and beat a dance waiting to be uncovered.

The rhythm and performance; a precious language. The costume and makeup are important although the real beauty is the meaning that lies beneath each dance. For even when the music stops and silence fills the empty space, my heart and soul remember every note and I still feel the dance's grace.

The music guides me but my spirit leads, creating beauty from the raw,



To move with purpose, to feel the art, is to be released from every flow,

My limbs are brushes and the air is my canvas, painting the scenes.

The body can express the pain; the burden that the soul has kept; the dance becomes a cleansing rain, a reason why the spirit wept. It is the chorus of my life, through its language I am seen and the world is so clear. The stage is where I unburden my fear, the stage is where I project a message, the stage is where I show my passion throughout every single step of the way.

The passion lives, lighting a constant flame, a fire burning ever so bright. It is a life that lives within me, in darkness and shining light. I will dance for ever for in this motion I am whole.

The beat, the breath, the endless floor, the sacred rhythm of my soul.

The Light

By Lola Wise

The Holy Cross School, Year 7, Age 12

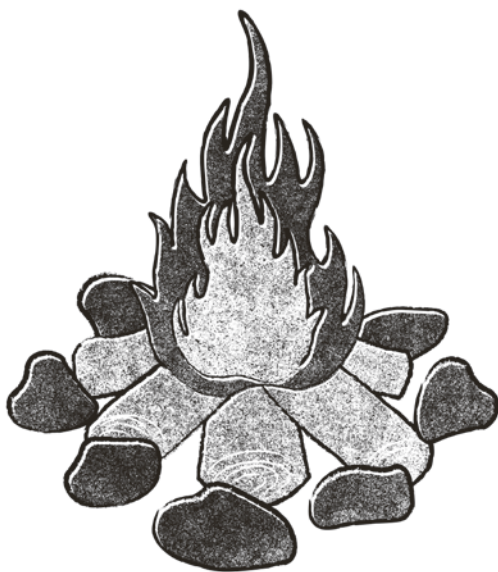
I ran as fast as I could. Away from it all: the stormy troops, the ear-splitting sound of rifles, and the screams of terror coming from my own people. My heart was pounding in my chest as I jumped over yet another dead body. I had to keep running for her. She had a future, unlike the rest of us. I tucked her in closer to my chest, tightening my grip on her swaddle to keep her precious face shielded. I passed what was once a synagogue and then scrambled through some withered bushes. Ahead of me stood an abandoned shed, a relic from the days I played here as a child. It wasn't the safest refuge, but it was a shelter.

There. I had made it; now I just had to pray my matches hadn't got soaked when the freezing water surged up over my pockets earlier when we were being chased by soldiers. Slowly, I opened my damp canvas bag. Yes. We had hope; there, unharmed, was my box of matches my mother had given me. They were one of my only possessions but they were worth more than gold; they were the difference between freezing in the shadows and warmth for both of us.

Ignoring the rhythmic thud of the distant shelling, I turned intently to the debris-strewn floor, my eyes scouring for sticks. I foraged the ruins until my arms were full of snapped twigs and the splintered remains of what used to be a kitchen chair. I carefully placed each branch against the next, constructing a fragile wooden skeleton to contribute to the only light left in this derelict town. I struck a match and I felt a sudden force in the air that would combat darkness. Maybe we will get through this. I ignited the wood and held my sister towards the flicker of hope and warmth and we bathed in its comfort.

Later that night - after the blazing sun had melted away through the sky - a sudden chill seeped into the air, penetrating my bones. But the little light of the fire kept burning; bright and unwavering, not even flickering when the thunderous shells landed nearby. Above us, I could see fighter jets zooming across the ink-black sky, painting white trails that seemed to stain it. It reminded me of when I used to paint artwork and mama would hang it on the walls, before things became dark... before the war.

I stared at my sister's angelic, perfect face; not a scratch or mark in sight. She breathed softly whilst she slept and I made a silent promise to her. I promise to take you where the sun doesn't have to fight the smoke to find you, and once we are there I will fight for peace in our homeland. I lowered my head and gently kissed her forehead. I stared at the glowing fire again; it warmed my soul and gave me hope. We would survive and beat the darkness.



By the Nightlight / By Candlelight

By Luke Fletcher

Rutlish School, Year 12, Age 16

My parents would always tell me stories about them. Reluctantly, my mum would lie behind me on a late night, her face barely lit by the nightlight, and would read aloud.

“Their teeth protrude from their mouth like the devil’s horns, and shine in the candlelight like knives. A pair of blood-red eyes rest in their skull, the bones of which are visible under their pale skin, white as a funeral pall. Hair the colour of the moon flows along their stick-like figure, contrasting the long black coats they always wear.”

I always assumed that’s what the crosses were for, that’s why we said a little prayer every night before dinner, that’s why on the first day of school, she placed a rosary over me and said, “never take this off.” It was all to keep them out, and it was my sacred duty as her daughter to never let them in.

I’m glad I didn’t listen to her. If I had, maybe I would’ve stayed there, stuck in place.

I had snuck out one night, fake ID in one hand, mum’s rosary in the other, and made my way into a club. A crimson light guided me inside, and there she was, sitting by the bar. Her skin was pale like a fallen angel’s wings, her hair shimmered silver in the spotlights of the club, and her eyes glowed as red as roses. I quietly sat next to her, exchanging glances here and there. Eventually she turned to face me, her dress as dark as the void and her necklaces shining like torches. “So, what brings you here?” She asked, revealing teeth sharp as diamonds. I didn’t respond; I wouldn’t dare.

“How old are you anyways?”

“E-eighteen...”

“Yeah, me too.” She said with a little chuckle, taking a drink from her bloody Mary.

“Tell you what, have a drink on me.” She whistled melodically, and the bartender, seemingly in a trance, prepared a flawless cocktail. I took a little sip. It was the best thing I had ever tasted. “What’s in this?” I asked.

“Don’t worry, darling.” She said, winking.

I woke up the morning after in a castle, one that appeared to be empty, lit only by candles that turned the walls the same colour as her eyes. I patted down all my pockets and the only thing missing was my rosary. When I arrived back home without it, and without an excuse for where I had been all night, I was grounded. I was used to this; the crying and the moaning and having to pretend that not going outside bothered me. But this time all I thought about was that night, I thought about her.

I’m walking along the beach, bathing in the darkness. Her castle stands on the horizon, the candles pulling me closer. I should feel scared. I was taught to feel scared. But when that door opens and I see her, I think I’ll finally be happy.

“Welcome home.” She said, smiling.



Blue Light

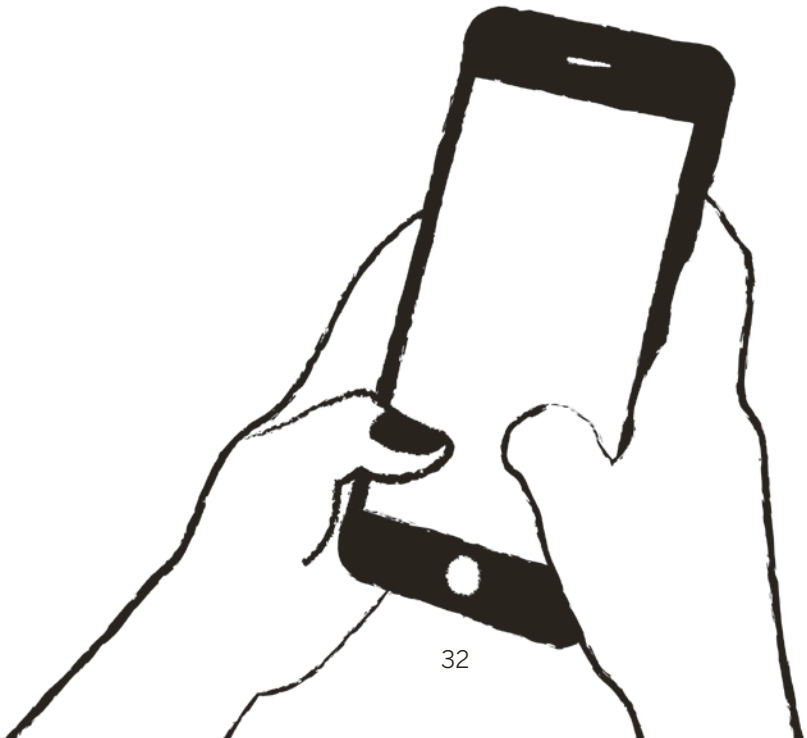
By Noah Crew

Wimbledon College, Year 7, Age 12

Screenlight hooks with gentle ease,
A quiet tug we aim to please.
It hums, it waits, it pulls us near,
And suddenly, we're living here.

A thousand scrolls, a thousand more,
Each one less than the one before,
Yet still we chase that fleeting spark,
A glow that blooms against the dark.

Time slips soft between the swipes,
We trade our hours for worthless bytes,
Eyes held fast in borrowed sight,
Bound to this unblinking light.



The Lady of the Lamp

By Sophia Salviato Cesar

Ashcroft Technology Academy, Year 10, Age 14

Seven scrapes echoed in the darkness.

Well, they didn't exactly echo—the room was much too small and much too full of bare blankets covering bare bloody bodies for the sound to bounce around like that—but their vigour in the quiet made it seem so.

The eighth scrape crescendoed into a whoomph and a little flame was born from the blackening nib of the match, crying out light which danced and licked with life. The rays were weak but illuminated what they reached in a pale glow the colour of the morning.

Her face was lit up from the quivering fire below, her chin and nose painted in a wonderful sunshine yellow while long purple shadows were cast over her eyes and forehead like deeply gouged etchings in the white marble of her face. She looked almost ghostly, yet somehow still beautiful in a peculiar painterly manner.

The light smile that flitted over her face reminded me of her tangibility. She was no painting, for the women in paintings never smiled, and certainly never spoke.

“Let there be light,” she breathed. How a sound so soft could simultaneously be so honey-sweet was beyond me, but sent pricks of wonder darting throughout my synapses.

As she lowered the candle, her face was plunged momentarily



into darkness once more, and for that instant I missed it terribly, longing to see the thin arches of her brows and plump curve of her lips again.

I almost sighed in relief when she reappeared after tampering with the lantern's knob so that the light flooded out richly, bringing the entirety of the dank room into view. The lamp squeaked and dripped oil as she picked it up and swept away to tend to some crippled soldier or other. I felt the pang of loss once more as she turned her back and leaned over him, cooing words of reassurance as she examined his wounds.

In his pain-woozy haze, that soldier could never remember the name 'Florence', and so he dubbed her 'Lady of the Lamp'. It wasn't fair of me, but I resented him, for she was anything but forgettable. I resented him for all the vulgar compliments he murmured to her in his drowsy suffering, which she brushed off for being the throwaway last words of a doomed man. Or perhaps the true reason I resented him as he lay there dying was because all he had to do was lay there and die for Florence to whisper to him and run a delicate hand through his bloodied hair and treat him so tenderly, while I trailed after her and collected the yellow bandages she removed from his rotting flesh, wishing all the while for the affection he so effortlessly earned from her.

She wept his death, just as she wept every man who died in her care.

She'd never know how I wept and yearned in silence for her.

How a nurse wept for another woman.

Blinding Light

By Sylvana Earl-Carrera

Ursuline High School, Year 13, Age 18

Please, sir, please!
Wouldn't it be worth just a try,
To see the effect it'll have
If we let that bomb fly?

No, private, no
It's a too high a risk;
Who's to say who will die
And which ones to live?

But sir, understand me
We need to make them realize
What happens if you push us:
It shouldn't be a surprise!

Private please,
you speak like you understand
the chaos that follows this plan.
Cease!

I promise you sir, they won't feel anything at all.
Because when that bomb soars high,
The light won't be different
To the sun that shines in their sky.

Private?

Sir?

Your words are pungent with malice
But it's nothing education can't fix.



So here,
Think about this:
Imagine all around
Heaps of people stuck above ground.
An indiscriminate attack on their existence!
Itching at their seams,
Broke into a fiery dance,
With their hair singed clean.

Is this the future you see?
People scraping the remains of their community?
Mothers, fathers, children
So many dead you start to forget
But we haven't met the crux of it yet.
You're too foolish to see
The carnage that comes next:

You don't realise it
Your retribution has already started
The minute you let it explode, it's stops at nothing.
Hordes of people
United by terror
Come for your throat
Seeking your pain
You've destroyed their lives
So they will make you pay.
They'll cross seas to find you
Boat, car, plane.
I beg you
Private,
Don't think of this again.



I see that future, sir,
I loathe it.
A whole country after me?
I forbid it.
There's no threat if nobody survives
Since the resistance would only come with enough lives

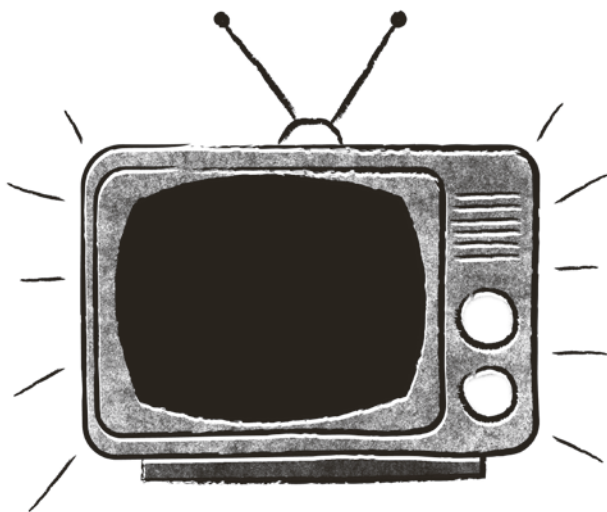
Send in two bombs,
Or four,
The number would not be a significant loss
Because there won't be any retribution for me
Sir,
If we just wipe out the whole lot.

TV Light

By Terell Moraghan

Perseid Upper School (SEN), Year 13, Age 19

I turn on the TV
The room becomes brighter
I feel excited!
Room light off
Colours on the wall.
My favourite show.



AWARDED DISTINCTION POEMS & STORIES

Key Stage 3

Years 7-9

Age 11-14



POEMS

The Light Maze

Adam Santamaria, Shrewsbury House School

Malignant Rays

Aiden Mawani, King's College School

Everyone Wants a Little Light

Alexis Stewart, Saint Cecilia's C of E School

The Light

Ansheka Jindal, Wimbledon High School

Untitled.

Bella Fearn, Tolworth Girls' School

What Light Remembers

Ben Masselin, Wimbledon College

Two Fates

Iman Harith, Ricards Lodge High School

Sunlight on the Other Side

Iris Amalia Bryant, Harris Academy Wimbledon

Sunrise

Lali Doake, Chestnut Grove Academy

The Light

Lena Arias Bagge, Ursuline High School

Flicker

Leo Brass, King's College School

Seeing the Light

Lucy Minchin, Ursuline High School

The Street Lamp Lighter

Marina Jovanovic, Ricards Lodge High School

Sun-Stained Icarus

Milly Davies, Raynes Park High School

Northern Lights

Moiz Ahmad, Southfields Academy

Flicker

Olivia Lima, Putney High School

The Girl From My Dreams

Paisley Tam, West London Free School

The Magnificence of light

Rana Sena, Ibstock Place School

The Light

Serin Kim, Marymount International School

The Light

Yebin Park, Marymount International School

The Light

Yeeun Lee, Marymount International School

STORIES

The Unseen Dawn

Aarjav Jean, Tiffin School

Natural Light

Bella Ritson, Wimbledon High School

The Day I Saw the Light

Chinua Ugbor, La Retraite RC School

Too Young to Understand

Coralie Morton, Chestnut Grove Academy

Light

Emily Rodger, Woodmansterne School

The Travelling Light

Francesco Malerba, Wimbledon College

Lights

Grace Williams, Nonsuch High School

Journey of the Sun

Imaan Abdi, Streatham & Clapham High School

Will-o-the-Wisps

Joseph Emmanuel, Rutlish School

The Lighthouse

Katherine Pang, Nonsuch High School

Bunny in Wonderland

Lois Hickey, Ursuline High School

The Light

Maggie Hayes, Streatham & Clapham High School

Eryndor

Maryam Abdur Rahman, La Retraite RC School

The Computer

Nattkanya Alice Chanweerathum, Ashcroft Technology Academy

Dawn

Nicholas Bailey, King's College School

United

Rayan Kaghat, Ashcroft Technology Academy

The Starry Night

Reuben Adu, Ark Walworth Academy

The Guardian of the Night

Sophie Woodford, Wimbledon High School

Embracing the Light

Stella Naidoo, Wimbledon High School

30-Second Love Story

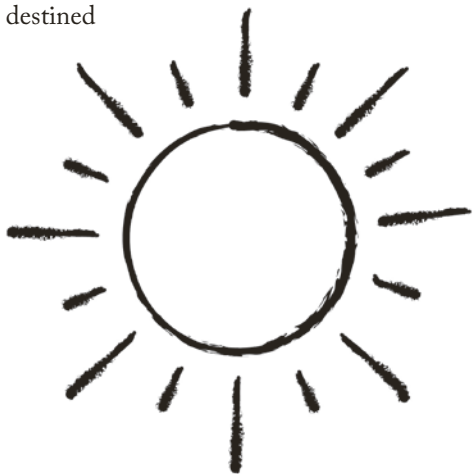
Thomas Sealey, Shrewsbury House School

The Light Maze

By Adam Santamaria

Shrewsbury House School, Year 7, Age 12

A plant, finding itself in the depths of a dismal box,
Bathed in inky darkness.
Immersed in a science experiment,
Straining to reach the light.
Oblivious children laugh at my gloomy, melancholic figure
As I make no progress.
Desperation has fallen upon me;
I know what I must do.
I must grow through this bewildering labyrinth.
I race through the murky maze; I can sense the warmth of sunlight
Guiding my way.
I can feel it-the light-illuminating the coffin of bleak darkness.
Why is the light running out? Why can't I see it?
I am descending into darkness; I do not know if I can recover.
I need to rise, to find the bliss of the dazzling light awaiting me.
I shift and swivel swiftly, destined
to find the glow.
My body is dishevelled
and curled,
But suddenly, I see it:
twinkling, glistening
light winking at me.
I have finally reached
the light - so bright.



Malignant Rays

By Aiden Mawani

King's College School, Year 9, Age 14

A barrage of light engulfs the stars
slaughtering my soft slumber.
The dream world disintegrates,
I am assaulted with comprehension.

The cosmic battle is over,
the victor, light, demands my attention,
persisting when I close my eyes,
disallowing me denial.

My duties are maliciously illuminated,
with stabs of rays to books and pens.
They are constant like the light,
threatening to submerge me.

I am judged by beams of harsh purity,
glares of a disapproving overseer.
I cannot look it in the eyes,
for its immense nature shadows me.

I feel its disciples flooding my home.
Imitations of a celestial whole:
neon signs and billboards tall,
Lampposts, laptops, lit candles holy.

Overwhelming in its sterility,
mocking with its insincerity,
a hospital room of pain and blood, this
illumination is instability.

Wherever I look I see a blue sheen,



imprinting on my mind, giving no mercy.
Malice radiates out of the devices,
compounding my fatigue and illness.

When night timidly begs to return, light
insists on clinging on, staying on.
I am impaled by stabbing headlights,
an unforgiving, blinding assault on my eyes.

I run from the battle, retreat to my bed, but
lights continue to invade, seeping in.
Insidiously infecting my safety,
with electronic sparks on my devices.

Even the moon, too, is captured,
forced to display a billboard for its enemy, to
an audience of laughing stars, unforgiving in
their relentless reflections.

But somehow, I find and succumb to the dark,
I forcibly forget about every spark,
I begin to drift, feel myself fall into bliss,
finally, I approach that abyss.

Yet then the creeping predator of light
splinters out of the cracks, forcibly
opens my eyes to its relentless, grating
barrage once more.



Everyone Wants a Little Light

By Alexis Stewart

Saint Cecilia's CofE School, Year 7, Age 12

Everyone wants a little light,
A place where they can stand,
But nothing ever comes for free,
You have to take a stand.

It isn't fair to just receive,
You always have to fight,
You push and shove to get ahead,
Even when it's not right.

You can't achieve a single thing
Without a sacrifice,
And people turn on one another
Just to prove they're right.

That only happens when the bond
Between them isn't tight,
I had that once, those friendships failed,
And slowly lost their light.

Maybe we were all confused,
Each thinking we were right,
We didn't see we shared the same-
need for warmth and light.

It took so long to understand,
To finally see it right,
It wasn't pride that drove us all,
We were just chasing light.

The Light

By Ansheka Jindal

Wimbledon High School, Year 7, Age 12

There is a light
that lives in ordinary places
not in the sky or far away suns,
but in the flicker above a bus stop
on a chilly evening.
It hums.
It stumbles.
It almost quits.
But it doesn't.
It paints the pavement bright yellow,
draws a small shape in the night sky,
as if to say:
Here. I am still here.
Cars pass without stopping.
Windows glow, then disappear.
Somewhere, laughter overflows from a doorway
he does not enter.
The light does not follow.
It does not fix anything.
It does not pretend the cold isn't real.
It simply remains.
Because the dark is spacious
it stretches into corners of thought,
into the spaces where doubt grows loud
and silence grows heavier.
But the light
even this weak, wavering thing
fights back.
Not with force,
but with presence.
Not with answers,



but with evidence
that darkness is incomplete.
The boy's chest tightens.
The bulb above him pulsates again,
threatening to go out.
It doesn't.
And when the bus finally arrives
late, sighing, half-empty
he steps forward,
out of the shape,
into whatever comes next.
Behind him,
the light keeps burning.
For no one.
For everyone.
For the simple reason
that it can.
And maybe that's what light is
not grand,
not perfect,
not even strong
just stubborn.
It refuses to leave
even when nobody is watching,
even when it wouldn't change anything,
even when the dark
is simpler.
And because of that,
because it stays
we do too.

Untitled.

By Bella Fearn

Tolworth Girls' School, Year 7, Age 12

I feel like I'm in the milky way
Surrounded by the stars
But yet I feel so lonely
Because I am so far

A ghost among the satellites
I drift in the glow
Searching for a friendly light
With nowhere left to go

The planets spin in silence
Across the endless deep
I watch the silver galaxy
While all the others sleep

And now every time I lay my head
And dream of the stars
I am once again reminded
Of the milky way that seemed so far.



What Light Remembers

By Ben Masselin

Wimbledon College, Year 8, Age 13

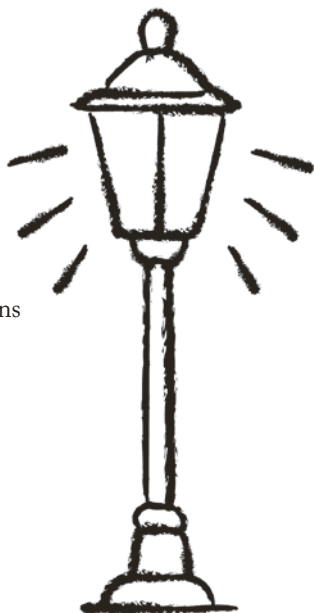
Light enters like it's always known
To the quiet places I call my own
Spilling across the edges of things
Unfolding what the darkness brings

It settles in places I try to ignore
Between every thought I leave unsure
Like it's reading the lines I never write
Finding shape in the absence of light

At night it fractures thin and small
Caught in the glass of a glowing wall
But even then it does not leave
Just changes form so I believe

Morning arrives and it speaks too clear
Pulling the hidden into the near
Lifting shadows from where they stayed
Proving truth they almost made

I think light keeps what I forget
Every doubt I haven't said yet
And though I don't know what that means
It stays unchanged behind the scenes

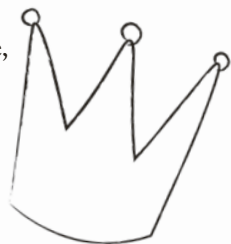


Two Fates

By Iman Harith

Ricards Lodge High School, Year 7, Age 12

We were born in the same sudden rush of flame,
Twins shed from a single, blinding spark.
But while he claimed a throne of golden fame,
I was banished to the hushed and hollow dark;
A brother cast of his own desire.



He rests in state, crowned by an iridescent halo,
And treads where the world is turned to look.
While I must haunt the corners, drab and void of glow,
The unread page of his bright and open book.

He strides in silk, a king of daytime glare,
When I am the ink spilled beneath his radiance.
He does not feel me breathing in the air,
Trailing behind his aureate cadence.

He is the sun that reality craves,
The celestial, ringing harmony that the skies sing of.
And I am the stillness his orchestra abandons,
A burden dragged down as his morning expands.

He rules the sky, sacrosanct and isolated,
Overlooking the debt that a master must owe.
For he cannot hold the honour of the throne,
Without the brother he has bound to the ground below.

As I am Shadow.
And he is Light.

Sunlight on the Other Side

By Iris Amalia Bryant

Harris Academy Wimbledon, Year 7, Age 12

The searchlights sweep the frozen mud,
A rhythmic, cold and searching eye,
To track the pulse of bone and blood
Beneath a black and hollow sky.

The wire is sharp, a silver snare
That glints when electric impulses run,
While we crouch low in shadows there,
To wait for light that isn't sun.

For there, beyond the watchtower's reach,
A different glow begins to wake-
Not the white glare that guards the breach,
Or burns the skin for malice' sake.





It is the light of stars and grace,
A silver path through forest deep,
Where those who fled that hollow place
Move while the weary shadows sleep.

The fence is torn, the hounds are far,
The heavy dark begins to fray.
Led by a single, steady star,
The light of hope creates the day.

Beyond the wire, the sun is different-
A golden warmth that does not judge,
Falling soft on fields where no one watches,
Touching every wild and living thing.
No longer a searchlight meant to capture,
But a wide, morning sky where we can breathe,
Healing the scars of the artificial glare
That we finally manage to leave.

Sunrise

By Lali Doake

Chestnut Grove Academy, Year 7, Age 12

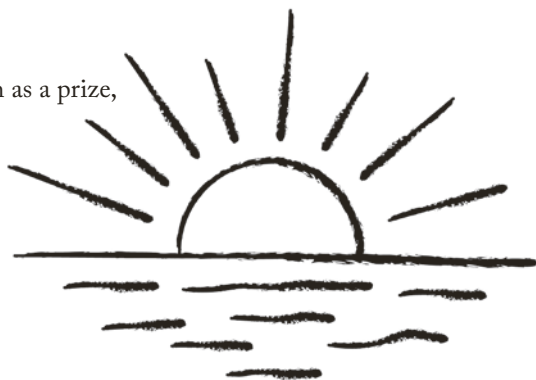
A dark cold night,
Not a star in sight,
A mist of sadness,
And just a sprinkle of madness

But a slither of gold,
Banishes all cold,
Erasing the blight,
Casting a wave of light

As it rises above all land,
The glowing sphere shines majestically grand,
It claims the sky as its throne,
Radiating its orange tone

A sense of calm,
With relaxing charm,
Light nestling on the mountaintops,
Glistening on dewdrops

Vanishing away,
Not here to stay,
Leaving its warmth as a prize,
That is sunrise.



The Light

By Lena Arias Bagge

Ursuline High School, Year 9, Age 14

Maybe Identity's like a light?
Leading my brain and my decisions,
And illuminating the darkness surrounding me,
Like a star, guiding my journey with precision.

My identity's lost inside an unilluminated labyrinth,
A sick game, where I'm trapped with my minotaur,
I'm forever chased by some fictitious musts,
Like knowing who I am, what I stand for.

Society has created a scaffold,
Like the sentence builders we get in school.
But no formula for a person will ever help us,
As you don't learn who you are by conforming to every rule.

In some ways, I am a seed in a sewn field,
Farmer ready to neglect me if I don't grow,
They don't give us light, so I've got to find my own,
And yet, when asked what went wrong, it's just, 'I don't know'

In other ways I am a miracle Olympian,
It's always, 'she seized her one opportunity'
And when I'm stood, gracious, in my spotlight,
They whisper it's all because I got lucky.

Or maybe I'm just a young woman?
As I'm told good girls should wait patiently,
For when it's my right time to shine.
But like a light, I can only take so much until my fuse blows,
irreparably.

Flicker

By Leo Brass

King's College School, Year 7, Age 12

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
Light begins to grow.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
Light brightens the room.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
Expels all thought of gloom.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
Light begins to dim, and lo!

It bounces back, begins to fight
For all it's worth, to duplicate
To fill the room with joy and laughter
To guarantee happily ever after.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
The power of Light.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
Can expel gloom with great might.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
It bounces to and fro.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
To try to find the places, where only Dark can go.

And flush it out, destroy it all
So that all evil things will fall
Then Light will bravely guard the spot
From which Darkness was removed.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
A switch is pushed and Light disappears.

Flicker, flicker,
Flicker, flicker,
The lightbulb glows no more.



Seeing the Light

By Lucy Minchin

Ursuline High School, Year 8, Age 13

I walked along the street as if I were in a dream,
The streetlights lighting the way.
Casting flickering shadows over the tiles
That would be hidden by day.



The moon was high in the sky
Spreading a glow across the street.
I saw a window in a house brightly lit,
Though most others had gone to sleep.

There were fairy lights draped across a fence,
Their bulbs like fireflies in the night.
They stretched all the way down the street,
Making a beautiful sight.

I found myself drawn to the woods
They were dark and silent and still,
My footsteps crunched on the leaves
I had never before felt this thrill.



The feeling of being alone and free
And able to do what I choose,
Yet it didn't feel exactly real
As if I had lost control of my shoes.

In the distance I saw a house
My gaze was drawn to the door -
I seemed to know where I was going
Like I had walked this pathway before.

I slowly walked up to the doorway,
And carefully turned the handle.

The door suddenly creaked open
I found myself surrounded by candles.

The only sources of light in the room,
Each of them flickering and bright,
Like trees blowing gently in the breeze
Silhouetted against the moon's light.

I had lost control of my feet now
As they walked me along the floor,
Leading me down passages and corridors
Until I came to another door.



This one was slightly ajar
I could hear muffled noises from inside,
Through the gap I could see a faint light,
I pushed the door open wide.

I found myself inside a cinema.
It was empty, but the screen was on.
I went and sat down in a seat,
And I watched the screen as it shone.

With someone strangely familiar,
Showing snippets of their life
It showed the good and the bad,
The laughter, happiness and strife.

The I realised as I was watching it
That the person on the screen was me.
And suddenly I understood everything -
That light isn't only the thing you see.

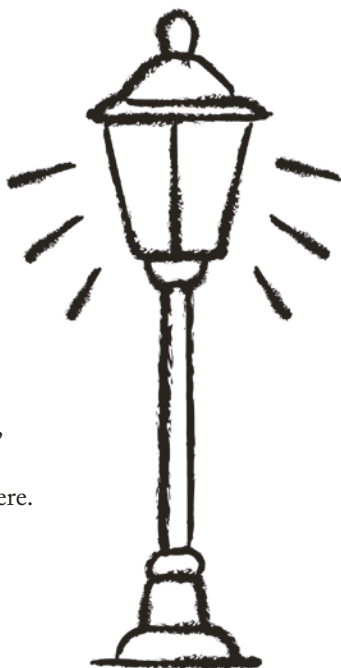
It's the people in your life who matter,
Who light things up and show the way,
And the laughter, the joy, the happiness
Of looking forward to another day.

The Street Lamp Lighter

By Marina Jovanovic

Ricards Lodge High School, Year 7, Age 11

At night, just before I lay my head,
Just before I go to bed,
I hear a clomping of footsteps outside,
The clomping stops and I hold my breath,
As mother comes to read Macbeth,
Do you hear that, I say,
My mother replies,
Don't be silly, don't tell lies
I'm not I say,
But then I lay
my head and start to listen,
To stories full of witches
and queens that fall in ditches,
my mother leaves me to my bed,
And my head begins to swim,
My dreams begin to spin,
Stories of the day,
But from somewhere in my daze,
I hear a ladder being raised,
Again I hold my breath,
I see a flicker from my sill,
I see a soft light spill,
From behind my curtains thick,
As a sliver of light peeks through,
I feel a comfort, warm and new
The lamp lighter man has been here.



Sun-Stained Icarus

By Milly Davies

Raynes Park High School, Year 9, Age 14

I am a sun-stained Icarus

The sun goes stagnant
Basking on monoliths
Staining the skin.

People begin to swarm like
fire ants in the mid-summer
heat.

Idyllic in its monotony
Great fire in the sky
Burning holes in my back.



Yet I am hurtling towards the sun.

Bird of paradise held captive in my arms.
Its feathers bound
With molten wax.

I begin to fall
Euphoric tears on my tongue.
I am a sun-stained Icarus.

Let it be known: I fell smiling.
I have escaped this modern age isle of Crete.

Northern Lights

By Moiz Ahmad

Southfields Academy, Year 8, Age 13

The silence here is loud, frozen breath,
Where starlight has shimmers on silver snow.
Then comes the host of lights, defying death,
A vibrant curtain of universal neon glow.
No human man could paint this scene,
This emerald and amethyst, beauty stream.
It twists and turns like ribbons sky high,
Only appears when the light hides.
An arc of heaven merging in the sky,
From a glimmer to a cold dancing light.
The spirits are walking across now,
Upon the silence, mountain brow.
With jade they dye the night,
Then fade to a whistle.
And hide when the sun shines bright.



Flicker

By Olivia Lima

Putney High School, Year 7, Age 12

'The light in the darkness'. I read that line, over and over again.
It didn't sit in my mind. My eyes wandered,
Back and forth, back and forth across the seemingly simple
Five printed words. My lamp flickered off. I turned it back on.

I kept reading. There came that phrase again.
'The light in the darkness'. Questions filled my mind,
Like parasites, crawling through my thoughts and memories,
Searching for something that could've never been there in the
first place.
My lamp flickered off. I turned it back on.

I flicked the page, and of course, there it was again.
'The light in the darkness'. The phrase felt more familiar,
Like a word everyone says but doesn't know how to describe.
I had heard it before, maybe even understood it.
So why didn't I understand it now?
My lamp flickered off. I turned it back on.

I flicked pages after pages,
The words skimmed, left alone inside the book, with no one to
read them.
My mind was full anyway, full of echoing voices, muttering
Over a simple idiom, a phrase with no meaning,
Yet I kept searching for meaning within it still.
I dropped the book.
And I rested my head to my pillow,
Leaving my thoughts to think about tomorrow.
My lamp flickered off. I left it.
Maybe that was my light in the darkness.

The Girl From My Dreams

By Paisley Tam

West London Free School, Year 9, Age 14

there was a bright void that appeared casually in another world
a brightness fitted perfectly like the sun to the earth
but has sewn itself into the world I reside
a glow that makes me wish for a future that will never exist
a darkness that has me constantly chase a want I can never achieve.
I do not remember what she looks like anymore
the threads of her appearance have come loose
my polyester memory has been washed over and over
it has been many dream light-years since I saw the tailor of
my heart.
but I remember we were holding hands on some kind of ledge
she had a smile that stitched itself into my soul
one that bore the fruit to my eye
apparently the faces in your dreams are people who you
have seen, stored away inside a safe coded to only remember
reoccurring appearances
so even though I may have not acknowledged it before
I am happy to have seen her
our realities overlapping into a scene that will never play again.
there was a bright void that appeared casually in another
dimension
a star I loved dearly
and I hope she saw me the same way.



The Magnificence of Light

By Rana Sena

Ibstock Place School, Year 7, Age 11

Light bursts into morning with confident sway,
sweeping the darkness and clearing the way
It races across walls with unstoppable drive,
announcing the start of a world coming alive

Outside it darts quickly through branches and air,
Shimmering on puddles without a care
It brightens the pathways, the stones, and the ground,
leaving a trail where its brilliance is found

By noon it expands with a warm, steady glow,
lifting the colours wherever they go.
It slips into windows and brightens the gloom,
stirring the dust that drifts through the room

The sunlight comes and makes things bright,
It gently pushes back the light
And when the day is warm and true,
We see what light can simply do.



The Light

By Serin Kim

Marymount International School, Year 9, Age 13

Oh, blinding child,
What is your dream?

Will you become the sun
that brightens the streets?
Will you become the moon
that illuminates the dark path?

Oh, innocent child,
What is your future?

Will you become someone's dream?
Will you become someone's vision?

Or perhaps,
be only an ember
slipped quietly into the dark

But don't be disappointed

Even an ember
can light the night.



The Light

By Yebin Park

Marymount International School, Year 9, Age 13

My child,
the day after the rain,
when sunlight slowly seeps through the cracks in the window,
the sky seems to welcome it-
the blue sky and the red glow of sunrise blending together,
and people often call it beautiful.

We who say that what shines is beautiful,
why do we not say the same about ourselves?

My child,
you are one of countless lights.
When the sky gradually reveals its beauty to you,
and they say that light recognizes light,
tell yourself:
“I, too, am light.”

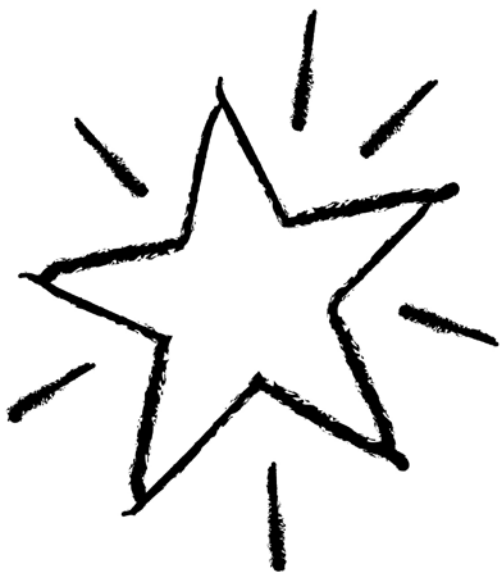


The Light

By Yeeun Lee

Marymount International School, Year 9, Age 14

I miss seeing your face, Mom.
Every night when I look up at the sky,
the brightest star in the sky looks like you,
Mom, and it feels like you are shining on me.
I miss you, Mom. When I look at your photos,
it feels like you are alive and moving,
and it feels like you are hugging me.
I miss you, Mom.



The Unseen Dawn

By Aarjav Jean

Tiffin School, Year 7, Age 11

The blue light of her phone was the only reality Maya had ever known. In the 22nd century, the intranet dictated truth. Every scroll through her feed showed the same “horror”: a surface world choked by fire, a scorched wasteland where the sky was a radioactive orange. This was the gospel of Helios Vance, the mogul-turned- “saviour”. His smile was projected on every flickering billboard in the subterranean city of The Hollows, promising that as long as they remained beneath the Bedrock Shield, they were safe from the sun’s lethal wrath.

Maya adjusted her pack, feeling the weight of a jailbroken device against her hip. Beside her, Sniffy’s paws clicked against the damp concrete. Most residents of Sector Zero never looked up from their screens long enough to notice the rust on the ventilation fans or the way the Gilded managers-the corporate elite-watched them with a pity that felt like a threat.

For seventeen years, Maya had watched the “State of the Shield” addresses, staring at Helios as he lectured them on the necessity of shadows. But today, she was more than just a girl with questions. She was a glitch in the Helios’ perfect machine. As she slipped past the biometric sensors of the maintenance wing, her heart hammered a frantic rhythm. She was hunting for the root of the lie.

Inside the server hub, Maya found a physical data-port-a relic in a world of cloud encryption. She jacked her device into the terminal, her fingers flying over the screen’s glass. Beside her, Sniffy let out a low growl, sensing the tension.

“Stay quiet, boy,” she whispered.

She bypassed the security layers, expecting technical specs about the Shield's maintenance. Instead, a file titled SATELLITE_LIVE blinked on her screen. She opened it, and the breath left her lungs.

The world on the screen didn't burn. It breathed. She saw a horizon so blue it made her eyes ache, stretching over ancient forests of impossible green. The sun wasn't a weapon; it was a gentle gold wash over a vibrant world. This was the world of her 21st century ancestors, a paradise, an Elysium, where she was from, from where her forefathers' blood had fallen on that very land in the Uprising, but had never seen. She checked the news app on her iAxiom. It was still broadcasting a loop of digital fire.

Helios Vance hadn't saved them from the sun; he had patented the shade and sold them the dark.

The whine of a Solis-Global drone, Helios' tech echoed in the vent above—a snarl of approaching corporate justice. On Maya's screen, a progress bar flickered: 98%... 99%... Tactical boots thudded in the corridor. Maya looked at the image of the blue sky one last time.

"Let there be light," she whispered.

As the door hissed open and red lasers locked onto her chest, Maya pressed SEND.

Across the city, a million phones vibrated. The lie was over. The dawn had arrived, and Helios couldn't turn it off.



Natural Light

By Bella Ritson

Wimbledon High School, Year 7, Age 12

The map did not promise treasure. It promised *light*.

Elena almost laughed when she first read it. In a world full of electricity and light pollution, some nights if she looked up she could only see murky hazy fog, the stars above fighting to be seen. Natural light was no small thing. The note beneath the map was precise: *Not created. Found*. That was why she followed it.

The coordinates led her beyond the abandoned outskirts of the city, where glass towers stood hollow and silent. By the time she reached the country path, the sun was a dull blur behind the haze.

The entrance to the cavern was narrow, easy to miss. Inside, darkness settled quickly, thick and complete. Elena paused, letting her eyes adjust, but there was nothing to adjust to just dank murky black.

She switched on her lamp. A controlled beam cut forward, revealing stone walls that seemed to swallow light rather than reflect it. "Absorption," she murmured, recalling old lessons. Most surfaces scattered light, but these drank it in. She moved deeper. After a while, the tunnel widened into a chamber of jagged stone. The air shifted somehow cooler, almost electric. Elena swept her lamp across the walls and stopped.

Crystals.

Hundreds of them, embedded in the rock. At first they seemed dull, but as her beam passed over them, something changed. A faint glow lingered even after the light moved on.

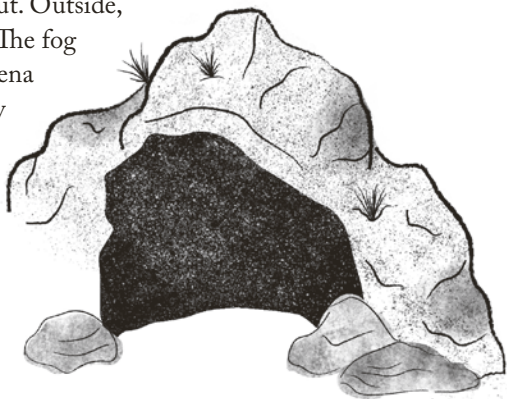
“Phosphorescence?” she guessed, she wished she played more attention in class. The crystals were storing energy, releasing it slowly. She turned off her lamp. For a moment, there was darkness again. Then, gradually, the chamber awakened. Soft green and blue light seeped from the crystals, growing stronger until the cave shimmered like a clear night sky.

Elena exhaled slowly. The light wasn’t harsh or blinding—it was steady, persistent. Alive in its own quiet way. She stepped closer. The glow intensified where the crystals clustered, overlapping into something brighter. Not sunlight, not electricity, but something natural and enduring.

Not created. Found.

She understood now. The light had always been here, hidden in the structure of the cave, waiting for the smallest spark to reveal it. Elena sat for a while, letting the glow surround her. In a world obsessed with generating more power, forcing brightness into existence, this place offered a different idea: light could be uncovered, nurtured, shared.

When she finally stood to leave, she didn’t try to take a crystal. It would miss the point. Instead, she switched her lamp back on and traced her path out. Outside, the sky was still dim. The fog had not lifted. But Elena looked at it differently now. Somewhere, beyond the grey, light still existed waiting, as it always had, to be found.



The Day I Saw the Light

By Chinua Ugbor

La Retraite RC School, Year 8, Age 12

I was walking to the drug store by myself, neither aunt knew where I was cause she will start nagging at me saying “Nathan, why can’t you understand that you can’t go by yourself?”

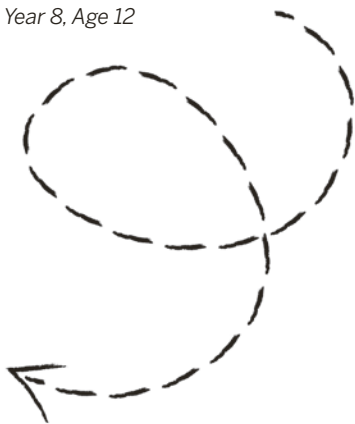
I just wanted to tell her, ‘Chill, Auntie. I got this.’ But I knew better than to talk back. “The wind was whipping down the block, that cold Chicago breeze that cuts right through your hoodie. I kept my head down, dodging the cracks in the sidewalk I’ve known since I was five.

Although I was turning 16 next year, she still treated me like a kid even though I experienced my ma and pa die in front of my eyes.

I waited for the car to stop moving so I could cross the road when I saw a toddler walking towards the road, and guess what fam? The woman wasn’t even noticing! She was busy pressing her FLIPPLING phone!

I decided to help. I ran over, scooped up the kid, and stepped back to the sidewalk. I heard a shout come from a few meters behind me

“Oi, whot u doing with me kid!?” The Mom of the kid said looking me up and down like I was some trash she cruelly threw away.



“Well ‘ma’am, I was just trying to help the ki-” I said

“Well I didn’t ask for your help did i?” she said snatching my hand away from her kid. If only Ma and Pa hadn’t taught me to have manners, I would have slapped her right there but I couldn’t afford to bail myself out of jail or make Ma, Pa or Aunty upset. So I did the opposite.

“I am so sorry ma’am, next time I won’t help your kid anymore” I said smiling at her. She looked up and down again and she spat out the word I heard when I was 5 years old.

“Black Fool” she said before I felt a slap run across my face. I felt angry rise through my face, if I was white (no offence, praise to white people) I would have been red all through my face.

I felt so angry! I am tired of all this people trying to outwit black people, we are the same people except for the colour of our skin.

I raised my hand and before I could even touch her, I heard a scream that I even felt sorry for my ear drums. The police came and she started ratting on and on about how I slapped her. I didn’t touch her!! Like fam!



Lots of people started coming to see what the commotion was all about and then a group of boys trampled over me, I raised my hand to shove them and I heard a lot of shooting, I tried to run away but then the next minute I heard my name in the distance and then all I saw was a white light.

Too Young to Understand

By Coralie Morton

Chestnut Grove Academy, Year 8, Age 13

“Light is electromagnetic radiation visible to the human eye.”

But there’s another way to talk about light.

“Light at the end of the tunnel.” I’m guessing you’ve heard that saying. When you die you go into this dark tunnel with a light at the end.

That Light is me.

I can see people’s lives, how they lived, how they died, whether they lived a good life or not. Over time I have seen many come towards me. Elderly who have accepted their fate, others crying because they were “Too young” but the hardest of all are the children. The ones who don’t complain. The ones who timidly walk towards me.

There’s a girl at the end of the tunnel. She’s 7. She’s looking for her parent’s love, for her siblings’ tease. She won’t find them here. You need to hear how the innocent die because of you, because of war. I dream of a day I don’t see children walking towards me. Today though, I tell her story.

Her name is Emily. Her mother and father fell in love with her at first sight. Her brother and sister teased and loved her. She didn’t have a grandfather; when she asked why, her parents said she was “Too Young to Understand.”

Emily’s looking towards me now. She knows she must begin her walk, looking up at me with fear. I wish I could comfort her.

She went to school with her siblings. She was walking home one day and a bus sped across the street. Her brother held her back. Emily asked what could've happened if it had run her over. They said she was "Too Young to Understand."

Emily is coming closer. It isn't fair. But death is cruel and I am just The Light. I can only tell her story.

Her parents were looking at the TV, scared. She heard loud bangs. Her grandma played with her all night. At bedtime, she asked about the explosions. Grandma shook her head and said, "Too Young to Understand".

Emily has accepted her fate now; that's the most heartbreaking bit. She knows what's happening, she knows she must go.

One day, Emily's parents took her and her siblings to an area underground. Her sister cried. Emily began comforting them. The next day her dad got a call. He said they wouldn't see Grandma anymore. She asked why. "Too Young to Understand."

She's close now, a few more steps and she's dead. She freezes in front of me.

Loud bangs everywhere; Emily's parents were shouting "RUN!" Emily ran but she was the slowest. She sprinted, everyone's hands outstretched towards her. Close. So close. BANG. The world went black.

I give her my hand. She's crying now. I wipe her tears as I lead her towards me. The girl who was "Too Young to Understand". The girl who will never grow old. The girl who was too young.

Light

By Emily Rodger

Woodmansterne School, Year 8, Age 13

It's hard being a vampire.

Always correcting false rumours that we hate garlic (we don't, it was just an annoying relative who made up those rumours because he was allergic to garlic); that silver kills us (it really doesn't, that was just a little prank we played on April Fool's Day, but you humans always take things too literally), or that we hate sunlight (Well, I do!)



You see when a vampire gets injured, we scar. Although some scars might not be visible to the human eye, those vampires who are over a hundred years old can have up to 1,000 scars on one arm. When we go into sunlight the scar illuminates and it's like having little stars all over your body, as my boyfriend would describe it.

"Zayden. Hey! Can you hear me?" A velvety voice spoke over my intertwined thoughts. I spaced out again.

"Yeah-uh-I can hear you." I stuttered, embarrassed that I spaced out. This was my third time this week.

I was shaded under a tree, my head resting against the bark as it slowly dug into the back of my head. Bruises covered my knuckles from the fight yesterday as I looked up finally relieving the tension from my neck.

His face was shining in the sunlight; he patted the grass next to him signalling that I should sit next to him. My face creased with

worry; he was the only person I could trust with my identity.

It was as if he could read my thoughts (which was the one thing I was certain of, I just didn't have the proof).

"Don't worry, there's nobody around this place for miles, so your good; something only the best boyfriend would think about considering." Felix spoke; the soft melody of his words echoed around me sending my stomach into knots.

I couldn't resist.

Jumping up onto my feet I skipped slightly to the edge of the shaded canopy. Looking at him, he nodded slightly. Pulling my hand out in front of me I felt my fingers tingle slightly as the sensation filled my whole arm. My skin danced, glistening in its beauty that I hated. Holding my other arm out the same sensation happened, as it danced even more brighter than the other arm.

It was like a galaxy was sprawled across my skin.

Letting my whole body ignite in this sensation, I stepped fully out into the sunlight, my hand reaching to shield my eyes from its intensity.

"You know it never ceases to amaze me how beautiful scars can be". I complemented myself, spinning around in the grass as laughter escaped my mouth.

Stopping, I looked down my legs and arms glowing and sparking like fireflies in the moonlight. Smiling, I fell back into the soft grass as Felix came to join me, his smile beaming as large as mine.

I don't think I despise the sun now, even imperfections can contain beauty.

The Travelling Light

By Francesco Malerba

Wimbledon College, Year 8, Age 13

Such a blinding and hot light, coming from the sky, reflected in the calm water, I couldn't resist a minute more in my diving suit. Mask secured and tanks ready, I plunged into the depths. That was what I adored: exploring the unknown in the deep ocean and discovering new life. But this time something was different. After thirty minutes the light from above wasn't reaching me anymore, surprisingly I had just entered the aphotic zone. Suddenly, mysterious, intermittent flashing lights reached me from underneath. What was it? I went deeper. I felt attracted by an unseen force, my curiosity was pushing me further down. At once I identified it: a plane, though a model I'd never seen despite my deep passion for aviation. It was rusty and was hovering, surprisingly not sinking. Some algae were hiding the model's name: Airbus ZeroE H-2. Never heard of it! Underneath it: "Production date: 2083". And beneath: "Warning!: Test aircraft, no passenger loading". Stunned and fascinated, I kept inspecting it. It had H₂O engines under the wings and three more on the tail, like an MD-11. Then the lights increased the flashing frequency. The energy released from the light became a massive explosion that shot me out of the deep water like a bullet. I lost consciousness. My first memory after that was an old-man, taking me on his boat and bringing me to the coast, but I didn't manage to thank him. The hospital found no injuries, only confusion. I felt haunted by that explosion of light, but a government expedition found nothing.

Years passed, my adventure became a memory locked in my brain. However, science and progress are never locked, they move society forward. The decades flickered by like blinking lights: first the hydrogen engines in 2032, then the ZeroE

H-1, and finally, the H-2 began its doomed construction in 2081. However, on its first flight on March 28, 2083, only two days ago, something went wrong, it was on all the news! Mid-flight the aircraft disappeared from radar and became untraceable. I knew that its hydrogen supplies couldn't last that long. I was just reading the newspaper and watching the breaking news, when suddenly a flash got into my brain. I closed my eyes and saw myself as an 18-year-old diver, getting blown out of the sea. On the second page, I looked closely at the plane model and ... I recognised it! I knew where it was! I remembered it, rushed off willing to dive again in my seventies. When I reached the ocean spot, a deep-sea diver was already there. He muttered that he had been shot out of the water due to an explosion of light, speechless after discovering something massive and rusty. I looked into the young diver's mask. I didn't need to ask his name. I just watched as he shivered, I knew exactly what was going on. The light hadn't just travelled through the water: it had travelled through me!



Lights

By Grace Williams

Nonsuch High School, Year 7, Age 12

There. There it was. Positioned right on the horizon, flickering slightly against the deep blue water of the sea. It wasn't a buoy, or some item a tourist had dropped into the ocean, she was sure. No, it was something else. Something... ghostly, she thought, silently watching if anything else appeared. Nothing did. Ghost hunting had been in her family for too many generations to count, but Mona hadn't even seen one yet. But, she thought as she pulled on her knitted cardigan and sprinted down the stairs, better late than never. When she would tell her mother about the spirit she would surely find, the judgemental woman just might even be proud of her, this time.

"You're getting ahead of yourself," Mona muttered under her breath, snatching one of her ghost hunting torches from the hallway cabinet, grabbing her keys weighed down with keychains and throwing open the door. "Find the ghost first."

Mona's cottage was near the highest point of her coastal hometown, meaning she could see almost everything when she went outside. In the dark, the village seemed to be asleep itself, with no lights on in the houses except for her own. Mona ran down the uneven cobblestone road, past the inn, the greengrocer's, the post office where she worked. When she reached the beach far enough away from the sleepy cottages, she switched on her torch and turned 360 around, assessing every little thing she could see. She looked back at where she had seen the light and her breath caught in her throat. No. It was gone. Nothing was there. Just the usual endless black ocean for miles and miles, broken up by nothing but jagged rocks and the occasional buoy. Maybe she had just been seeing things. Or...

“No, Mona,”

Mona turned around, already knowing what was coming.

“There’s nothing there. No ghosts. Stop. Looking.”

Mum. Even at 60, Mona’s mother had a commanding presence. Her eyes seemed to glow like a cats, and right now, they were narrowed in frustration. Mona closed her eyes and breathed out.

“I know this looks like what happened last time,” she began, and her mother frowned at her even more. “Fine. Last time, and before, and before... but this time, I’ve got something. Something that for sure means there’s a ghost... We’ve just got to...”

She stopped. Suddenly, something seemed to be glowing from behind her. Mona turned slowly, and she saw would stay in her mind forever.

Lights. Just like the one she saw before. But hundreds, no, thousands of them, blinking and twinkling together against the night-sky blue of the water. Ghosts. She’d found ghosts, for sure. The lights bobbed up and down and shone like the matching stars in the sky. Mona heard her mother whisper next to her.

“Ghosts. You’ve found them, Mona. The lights. They’re here.”

Mona’s heart swelled with pride as she gazed across the ocean, marvelling at the beauty at she was seeing.



Journey of the Sun

By Imaan Abdi

Streatham & Clapham High School, Year 7, Age 12

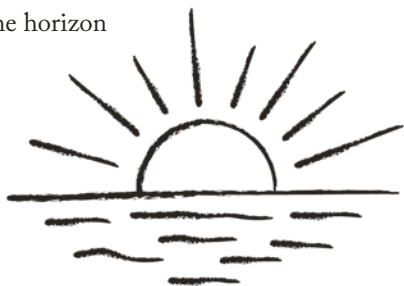
A fiery orb ascends gracefully above the horizon, gently unfurling its rays across the landscape. It pierces through the lingering night, awakening those that lie within it.

As it strides further above into the azure expanse, its brilliance intensifies, overcoming the darkness that had lay there before. As nightfall wears away the zephyr starts to soften as it gently shakes the leaves. Silently, shadows start to shrink retreating into the sheltered arms of cold walls and the elegant, luscious trees.

Now it lingers majestically in the centre of the ocean emitting relentless heat. As its radiance saturates the landscape with light, it casts long, shimmering reflections across the water. Shadows fully withdraw along while intensifying the humidity. The air starts to boil on your skin as well as carrying the aroma of sweet, smelling buds and freshly baked bread.

As it starts to descend into the bottomless depths, it is deprived of its luminosity and goes through a stage of metamorphosis. A radiant shade of red overlays the sun healing it from the burns and scars of the exhausting temperature. Soon silhouettes merge into the world maturing for the darkness which is to come next...

Now it further descends onto the horizon and vibrant shades like rust and merlot transform the sky into a vivid display of colour. Slowly and silently, the blazing orb drifts from our eyes going into a stage of hibernation, leaving the world in quiet shadows.



Will-o-the-Wisps

By Joseph Emmanuel

Rutlish School, Year 7, Age 12

Anna stood at the edge wood. Behind her, the village she once called home was alight with fire, greedy, orange tongues devouring the buildings and reaching for the inky sky. Anna knew she could not go back; she plunged into the woods. Thorns caught on her clothes and drew beads of blood, but she couldn't stop now. She ran faster until the trees began to thin and she burst into a clearing. She knew of a neighbouring village that lay on the other edge of the forest. She just didn't know how to find it. As she panicked the memories of the last hours came flooding back.

Her father was sitting on her bed telling her that if she was ever lost in the wood to look for purple flames, the Will-o-the-Wisps, she was nodding along but knew it was just children's tales. That was when the screams began. She looked out her window and saw her village in flames. At her parents' command she ran out the house and into the wood.

As she stood in clearing, she looked for any paths. That was when she saw



them: three floating balls of violet flame. Their ghostly light illuminated the clearing. Anna put a hand to her forehead.

“How am I going insane already, those can’t be Will-o-the-Wisps, they are just childish stories,” But, as if in response the flames shone brighter. She might as well follow them, it was the only thing should could do. She took a step forward. The light moved back, she took another step. The light moved back again, she broke into a run as the flames spun away from her. She chased them until suddenly they stopped. She paused, confused but the lights suddenly shone impossibly bright. Anna shielded her eyes and when she looked back, they were gone, but there was a cloud of glowing purple butterflies. Just then, a hand grabbed her shoulder, she spun round and saw a man with kind eyes.

“You must be one of the refugees from the next village over, heard there was a terrible fire, you can shelter in our village,” the man pushed aside some bushes to reveal a large village. “I can’t believe you found us through that wood, it’s so thick,” the man said then chuckled “Some say its enchanted.” Anna forced a smile.

“I must have been lucky,” she lied as she stepped inside the old man’s home. With a little purple butterfly resting in her hair. The next day Anna heard the news that her village had been burnt to the ground by the fire. She decided to look for the glowing purple fires again, their cold light sharp contrast to that which destroyed her village. Under the cover of collecting berries, she searched the forest near the village. The midday sun streamed through the leaves but the forest still looked eerily dark. She returned to the village. Unaware of the flash of purple that was behind her a moment ago.

The Lighthouse

By Katherine Pang

Nonsuch High School, Year 8, Age 13

The sky was ashen grey that night. Thick clouds blanketed the scattered stars and full moon, blocking the light that may have provided some comfort. The jet-black waves of the ocean hurled around violently in the icy winds, and daggers of torrential rain stabbed into Scarlett's skin. Shivering in the cold, her palms drenched with sweat, she yelled out in effort as she just about steered clear of a pile of jagged rocks as dark as a raven's wing. She was alone-her small crew had been swept off deck one by one-and despite the ear-splitting noises of the storm around her, the silence, the lack of human voices, seemed just as deafening. Hands gripping the steering wheel so tightly that her knuckles were white, she spluttered as a salty wave of seawater invaded the ship for what seemed like the hundredth time. She had completely forgotten where she was even heading-only her survival instincts were working as she refused to give herself up to the greedy, ominous hands of death. She had to get out of this alive.

As she grunted with effort to avoid yet another clump of seaweed-entangled stones, she gasped at the sight of something she felt like she hadn't witnessed for years-light. It was only a faint beam of golden illumination, and she considered the chances of it being a hallucination of her mind, crazed with fear and desperation. Despite this possibility, she pushed away her doubts and began steering towards it. Her heart rate began to gradually slow as she neared the glistening glow. The shine was being emitted from a lighthouse-it stood tall and brooding on the edge of a sandy island, striped vermillion and chalk-white. She tilted her head back as the light engulfed her drenched face and hair, clinging to the powerful illusion of safety that is only to be expected

upon discovering luminescence after spending hours in the impenetrable darkness of a storm. She reached the shore, and cautiously climbed down onto the aureate beach, and immediately felt dizzy with the relief of having land under her feet. As she made her way to the lighthouse, she felt as if she was in a different world-the saline scent of the seawater seemed to have faded, a rosy sunrise could be seen in the distance, and she wasn't aboard a ship being thrust around like a ragdoll above a void of water. She felt safe-and that was her biggest mistake. Every time an ocean storm occurred, this was the owner of the lighthouse's plan. To take advantage of lost sailors' sense of protection. As he caught sight of Scarlett and the dazed look on her face, he knew he'd hit the jackpot. He lunged at her with his knife, which was stained with the rusty blood of countless past victims, and she hardly had time to scream before she'd lost her life to trusting the light.



Bunny in Wonderland

By Lois Hickey

Ursuline High School, Year 9, Age 14

Grey had always been told not to follow his father.

“Not tonight,” the White Rabbit would say, holding his pocket watch, eyes flickering like sparks of worry. But Grey noticed something strange - every time his father left, the room seemed to dim, like he had taken the light with him. One night, curiosity burned brighter than fear or worry.

Grey followed him, paws silent against the grass. The moon hung low, glowing silver and white, but as his father leapt into the rabbit hole, the moonlight seemed to bend and stretch, pouring into the darkness like liquid. Grey hesitated only a moment before jumping in.

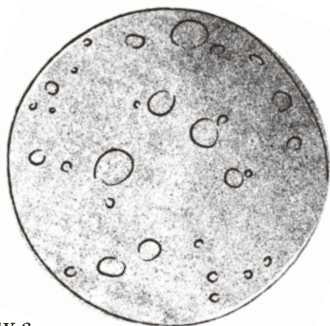
The fall was not just a fall - it was a drift through light itself. Light danced around him, golden and pale, as if he were swimming through a sky of broken stars. The deeper he went, the brighter it became, until suddenly his paws were on the floor.

The bunny blinked. Before him stood six doors, all glowing faintly, each marked with a symbol - a sun. A crescent moon. A flickering flame. A single star. A mirror. And one door that shone with pure, blinding white.

The air hummed softly, like light had a voice.

Grey stepped forward. The star door pulsed gently, its glow soft and inviting, like a promise. He reached out, his paw brushing the symbol, and instantly the door swung open. Light spilled out - not harsh, but endless. The world beyond was made entirely of twilight. The sky shimmered with millions of stars,

but they were close - so close he could almost touch them. The ground beneath him glowed faintly.



Grey moved slowly, mesmerised. The light here wasn't just brightness - it felt alive, like it was watching him, guiding him. He saw a small, star lay on the ground ahead, flickering weakly. Grey hopped over as fast as he could. "Are you okay?" he asked, his voice echoing in the glowing air.

"I'm fading," the star whispered. "Without light, I can't stay."

Grey looked around. There was so much light-but somehow, it wasn't reaching the star. Then he remembered the way his father carried light with him.

Maybe light wasn't just something you saw but something you gave.

Grey closed his eyes and focused, thinking of the moon, of each bright thing he had ever known. Slowly, a soft light began to shine from him - gentle but steady. grey leaned closer, letting the light touch the star.

It flickered... then was bright. Stronger. More alive.

The whole sky seemed to glow in response, brighter than before. Grey opened his eyes, heart racing. For the first time ever, he understood. This place, wonderland wasn't just full of light.

It was made of it
And now, so was he.

The Light

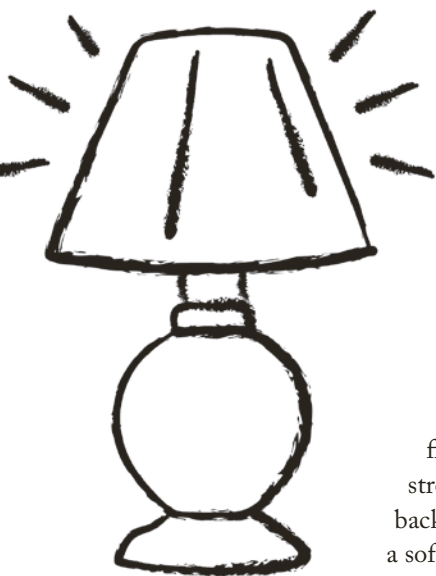
By Maggie Hayes

Streatham & Clapham High School, Year 7, Age 12

Music from my alarm blares into my ears, and I jolt awake to an eerie darkness.

I test the floor with my foot, as if I'm dipping it into ink. Bristly carpet brushes my toes, and I carefully slide off my bed, my favourite toy clutched in my sweaty fingers. Arms stretched out in front of me, I shuffle over to where I think the curtains are, and my hands meet scratchy fabric. I tug them open, expecting light to stream in. It doesn't. I feel for the handle, push it, and swing the window wide open.

Stinging air rushes in and coats my face. The sky above is a blanket of black, enveloping the town. No light.



I trace my fingers along the wall, searching for the solar switch. When my hand meets it, I hear a satisfying *click*. Nothing. If anything, the darkness seems to only become more menacing.

I feel something soft brush against my leg, and yell in surprise.

My cat, Casper, screeches. Relief floods over me, and I bend down to stroke him. His fur is spiky and his back is arched, but I soothe him into a soft purr. Dropping the toy, I scoop

him up in my shaking hands, and shift him into the nook of my right arm. As I awkwardly tiptoe across the floor to the door, I shift Casper up to my shoulder. When I find it, I give it a small shove, and it replies with an eerie creak.

“Mum?” I call, making my way to the stairs. Suddenly, the floor underneath me gives way, and I fall into the sea of black. My eyes widen. I’ve reached the top of the stairs. Gasping, I yank myself backwards, stumbling until I hit a wall. Claws drag down my arms, and two furry legs kick off my chest. I hear the quiet tap of his paws. The place in my arms where he sat moments before feels like a gnawing gap.

I take a few cautious steps forward, crouch, and slowly lower my leg until I hear the thud of my foot on the top step. I lower myself down, breathing sharply at every drop.

When I finally reach the bottom, I give a sigh of relief, and turn the corner. A bright light illuminates the darkness, making my eyes burn. There’s a man on the pale, glowing square, urgently giving instructions. I only catch a few words, like “Evacuation,” and “Government,” but I can tell whatever he’s talking about isn’t good. A silhouette leans against it, her head buried in her sleeves. She turns to me, and I faintly see my mum’s haunted face.

“You’re here,” Her voice quivers. She runs forward and hugs me tightly, then whispers in my ear, “they’ve covered the sun.” I finally understand. Anger bubbles up inside of me. They’ve taken away the only thing that belongs to all of us. It’s just so wrong... and now we’re as good as dead.

Eryndor

By Maryam Abdur Rahman

La Retraite RC School, Year 7, Age 12

The polar night stretched endlessly over the international research station. A Cathedral of ice and humming machinery perched at the top of the world; Dr. Yusra Laddie with husband Micheal, stood before a bank of scientific monitors.

As government physicists, they spent years studying atmospheric anomalies, but nothing equated the looming crisis few were made aware of. Two years! That's all NASA's model gave humanity before a catastrophic, cosmic event making Earth uninhabitable. Mercury was out of alignment causing the once perfect system to fall into chaos, destabilising Earth which was cooling down rapidly, triggering an ice age.

Behind them, brilliance took smaller forms. Their daughter, Ayla, sixteen, held certifications in nanotechnology-pathology and neurology. She reviewed cellular models related to radiation exposure. Her mind moved quickly, diagnosing problems before others could articulate them. Her younger brother, Aaron with an Engineering IQ dwarfing most adults, crouched beside a dismantled drone, reconfiguring its circuitry.

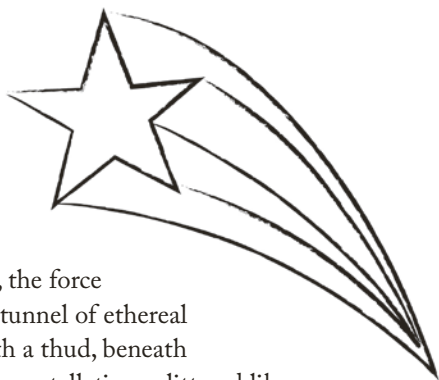
"We don't have time for theory," snapped Ayla, "We need a survivable alternative!"

Micheal rubbed his temples, "We are!"

Fate accidentally intervened. Experimenting past midnight with his overactive mind, Aaron started to burn Magnesium to test atmospheric interference patterns. The flare erupted, a violent white blinding bloom. The aurora above surged, twisting unnaturally as if pulled by an unseen hand.

The fire didn't
extinguish, space
itself seemed
to tear open! A
luminous vortex
spiralled outward,
swallowing light and

sound. Instantaneously, the force
seized them through a tunnel of ethereal
colour. They landed with a thud, beneath
the lavender sky. Alien constellations glittered like
VR simulations. The air was breathable, cool, tinged with
metallic sweetness. Rolling plains stretched towards jagged
mountains, twin Suns hovering low on the horizon. Aaron,
speaks, mesmerised!



“We are not on Earth.” Ayla knelt, analysing the soil texture.
“Microbial life is compatible! This place can sustain us...I call
it Eryndor!”

“I like that!” smiled Yusra.

But it wasn't empty. The ground trembled. Fear consumed
them. From beyond the hills came a fiery behemoth, skin
burning like molten metal. Land blackened instantly, life
reduced to ash, air itself seemed to recoil.

“Thermal output is extraordinary!” Micheal muttered.

Ayla's eyes narrowed, “Magnesium.”

Aaron looked up “What?”

“Aurora ignited the fire...Magnesium triggered the worm hole
like portal...interacting with energy fields!”

Mining raw Magnesium from Eryndor's crust, with hydraulic pocket tools Aaron engineered containment charges, while his parents calculated dispersal patterns.

Ayla observed its actions, identifying neural rhythms beneath chaos. The Magnesium charges detonated in a blinding cascade, disrupting its fiery structure. Bellowing a roar like collapsing stars, before imploding into a storm of fading embers. A transparent opening appeared. Ayla sighed, as her parents held them tight.

"I can see our station beneath the Aurora!" Exclaimed Yusra.

Standing once more beneath Earth's Aurora, proof in hand; data, samples and hope.

Humanity mobilised for a mass exodus to Eryndor, the unexpected miracle. A chance for humanity written in alien skies. At the centre of it all stood an unrelenting family who had stepped through fire and found a future.



The Computer

By Nattkanya Alice Chanweerathum

Ashcroft Technology Academy, Year 8, Age 12

I jolted awake suddenly. I've just had another nightmare. I lie still in my bed, staring into the darkness.

My throat felt dry, and I decided I should get some water. I told myself to move, but my body refused. Five minutes passed, maybe more, before I finally forced myself upright.

The wooden floorboards groaned softly as my feet touched the ground; the sound louder than it should have been in the silence. Step by step, I made my way to the door. My hand hovered over the handle, but before I even touched it, light flooded the room.

I turned around and realised it was coming from my brand-new computer that I got a few days ago.

I squinted against the brightness. The screen glowed harshly in the once-dark room. My chest tightened as I took a cautious step closer.

A notification sat in the corner of the screen. I hesitated, then clicked it open. One word appeared.

Prepare.

My stomach dropped.

Prepare? For what? I didn't even know the sender. I stared at the screen, waiting for something else to happen, but nothing did. The word lingered in my mind even after I turned the computer off.

I opened the door and grabbed some water, just as I had intended to do in the first place. I didn't sleep that night.

By morning, the feeling was still there. I immediately checked the doors and quickly locked them. I even shut the windows. I pulled the curtains closed, which was something I never really did, because I usually enjoyed the blinding sunlight and the way it filled my room.

By the time I finished, night had already fallen. And when night fell, the darkness returned.

I sat in the hallway, a torch clutched tightly in my hand, its thin beam cutting through the shadows like a blade.

Then there was a knock. And then another, louder this time. My hand shook so much I nearly dropped the torch. I stood slowly and moved towards the door.

I reached for the handle and unlocked the door.

I gently open the door.

“TRICK OR TREAT!”

The sudden burst of laughter and colour hit me all at once. Children stood on my doorstep in costumes, their faces glowing under the streetlights. Light spilled into the hallway, pushing back the darkness of my barricaded home.

I blinked, confused. “What?”

“...It's Halloween,” one of them said slowly.

Halloween. It was Halloween.

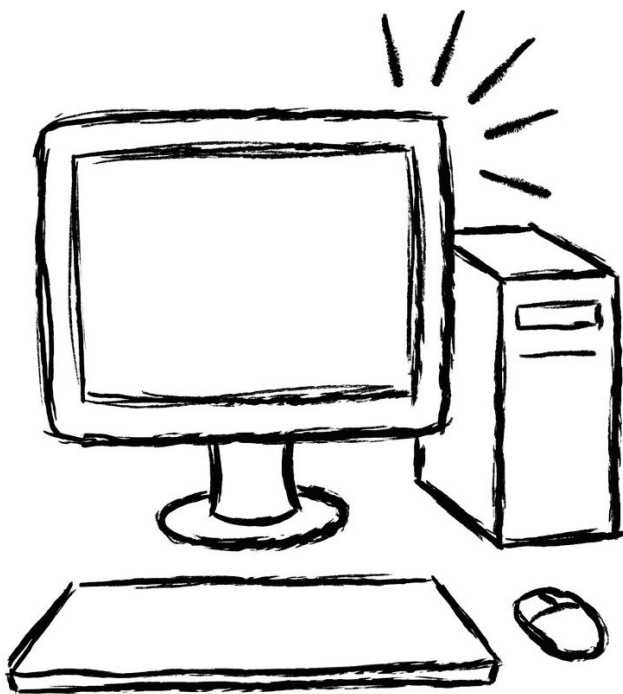
My grip loosened slightly.

“Oh,” I muttered. “Right.”

As I handed them chocolates, they ran off giggling to the house next door. I sighed. The silence returned. I closed the door and locked it.

As I went back inside, the computer lit up again.

But I didn't remember turning it back on.



Dawn

By Nicholas Bailey

King's College School, Year 9, Age 14

We detest the light.

It sears our skin and makes our blood boil. And so we reside deep underground and wait for the last rays of light to disappear over the horizon. We wait for THEIR dusk to become OUR dawn.

For a few seconds, silence. Then one pale, withered hand bursts from the ground, claws curled. Then the head, oily black hair and bared fangs. Then hundreds of us, marching to where the last twinkling lights of the houses wink out.

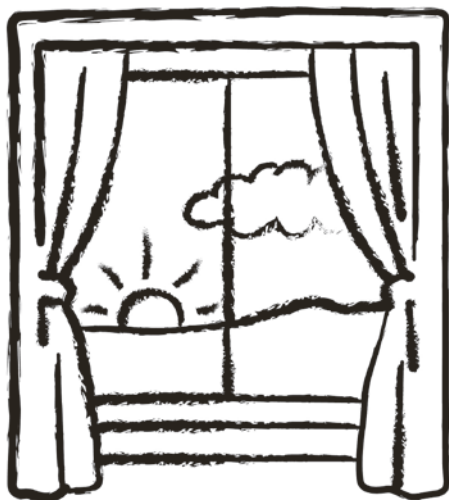
We see them. Standing in ranks, their bows and light arrows raised. They appear battle-hardened and impregnable as a wall of stone. But their faces betray their emotion. Nervous glances and wide eyes. The Vampire Defence Unit fear us. And we know it.

As we approach, one lets loose an arrow. The projectile cuts through the air, basking all around it in light, then thuds sickeningly into one of our brothers. We see the light ripple through him, a volcano erupting in his stomach. He cries out and falls, pulsing, to the floor. And so the battle begins.

My brothers and sisters race towards the Unit on all fours, tearing viciously with claws and teeth while bolts fly around like a thousand tiny shooting stars. I lunge and bite-waiting for the sweet blood to nourish my veins, then fill my storage vessels to feed our families waiting eagerly underground.

I catch sight of an unguarded house and rip the door open with a flick of my wrist. I relish in the power. Inhaling the scent of fear, I stride purposefully upstairs, crush the door, prepare to pounce onto the bed, and.... stop.

That silhouette
standing in the
doorway is enough
to send anyone
running screaming
in terror. She lunges
for my bed and I
see her sharp teeth
and the pitch-black
holes of her eyes.
But I am not afraid.
For in those eyes I
also see beauty and
wonderment and,
somehow, innocence.



And so, somehow, even though death awaits me, I am not afraid.

I want to kill him. I really do. But I cannot. His eyes look at me, they see me. He has no fear, just curiosity and something else, an emotion I do not know, that I do not recognise.

And so we look at each other, our gaze as strong as wire.

I want to break the lock but it holds firm. And yet slowly, the divide that keeps us apart begins to thaw. And we smile. And we talk. And we explore. And I am joyful and something else, something I still cannot explain.

In the distance the first rays of light appear over the horizon and MY dawn turns to HER dusk. She looks at me as the morning sun transforms her pitch-black eyes into light. And just for a moment, her whole face brightens before she drops lifeless to the ground.

Light-for centuries OUR salvation but in that moment, MY curse.

United

By Rayan Kaghat

Ashcroft Technology Academy, Year 7, Age 11

I open my eyes to see nothing but darkness and small parts of debris falling onto my rough skin. The last thing I remembered was Mum bringing down the plates of food, the king of stews that she had spent 3 hours on. The first spoon made my tongue tingle and dance in joy, the stark and citrusy taste from the dried limes and earthy herbs; a deep flavour.

I wish I was there again. I try to move, stretching my in the hope of getting some sort of comfort but I can't. I can't move whatsoever, and I lay there uncomfortably, curled up in a ball, just like the homeless, melancholic cats on the streets. I try to call for my parents but the hard limestone above me absorbs all sound and ignores me no matter how loud I scream. I only hear people recklessly running away without me. Leaving me here all alone by myself to die. Where are my parents? Are they dead?



Frequently, I hear screams and wails of young innocent babies. My lungs quench for any amount of clear and true oxygen and my tongue is as dry as the Sahara Desert. I need water. I need food.

Without warning, a glass-breaking sound thundered from what it seemed to be the centre of where I was. A deafening silence followed. My ears were in an immense amount of pain, and my hands were trembling and shaking constantly. Surprisingly, this explosion cracked open a large opening of light and a hole, big enough for my slim hands to reach through. I could see the hope and joy that I longed for in the light. All was silent and nobody seemed to be near me or alive even though a few hours had passed since the explosion. I threw my hand up the hole and waved frantically, wishing for someone to notice me. For someone to rescue me out of my beloved, shattered flat.

I held my hand there for what it seemed to be an eternity, starting to lose hope. I began to give in the sad reality that someone might not come and save me and that the broken, old walls of my flat could be my deathbed, at the age of 10 years old. I wonder how the rest of the world is. I hope it's not like this, full of sheer hatred, rage and war. Why does it have to be like this? I hear a group of muffled voices that makes my broken heart jump a bit like an adrenaline rush, created by a rollercoaster of emotions.

The sound gets louder and louder. As I realise they are close, I rapidly put my hand up the hole. Finally, they notice me, and I hear quick footsteps rushing towards me. A man in a pearl-white and red attire safely crushed the limestone above me and a beam of light hit my skin. I am at peace again.

The Starry Night

By Reuben Adu

Ark Walworth Academy, Year 7, Age 12

According to Antoine Lavoisier, matter can never be destroyed or created, only transferred. Leo knew this law by heart because he broke it every single day - or at least that is what the scientists at the Institute told him. He stopped listening to them. To Leo, energy wasn't a formula in a textbook or a conservation law. It was a rhythmic humming in his marrow, a relentless gold aura sitting behind his ribs.

The world was starving for power, and Leo was the only meal in town.

He figured out he was different at seven, when he touched his dad's dead truck and the engine roared to life. By twelve, he was snatching static out of thin air during storms, rolling it between his palms like a ball of yarn. By sixteen, he lived in a lead-lined box built by the government, spending his days plugged into the city's heart.

The alarm cut through the humming in his head.

The heavy steel door of the sanctuary didn't open-it buckled inward, blown off its hinges by a pulse of concussive force. Three men in tactical armour stepped over the wreckage, their rifles aimed at Leo's chest.

They weren't Institute guards.

They were collectors.

"Easy, kid," the lead mercenary growled. "You're coming with us. There are people willing to pay a lot more for a walking sun than this city can afford."

Leo didn't stand up. He reached into the "Elsewhere" and pulled.

The copper wires taped to his wrists didn't just carry power-they twisted into whips of white-hot plasma. As the first mercenary fired, Leo flicked his wrist. The bullets didn't hit him - they vaporised mid-air, turning into harmless clouds of lead steam. The second guard lunged with an electrified baton, but Leo grabbed the metal rod with his bare hand. He didn't just take the shock - he absorbed it. The baton shrivelled into a blackened stick as Leo drained every joule from its battery.



The room began to shake.

The “Echoes” surged, shadows twisting around Leo’s chest as the cost of his powers began to mount. The walls of the lead room started to sag and melt.

“Get him!” the leader yelled, reaching for a flash-bang.

Leo looked him in the eye. He stopped being a battery and became a storm.

He threw his arms wide, releasing a blinding wave of kinetic force. It wasn't a shockwave - it was an explosion. The mercenaries were tossed back through the hallways like ragdolls, their gear short-circuiting in sprays of blue sparks.

But as the dust settled, Leo felt the weight of Lavoisier’s law.

His vision blurred. His left arm began to change, the skin shimmering like heat haze. He had won the fight - but he was literally burning himself away to do it.

The Guardian of the Night

By Sophie Woodford

Wimbledon High School, Year 7, Age 12

I stand like a guardian at the side of the road and survey the scene around me. I have existed for almost one hundred years, and I have seen a lot of changes during that time. However, I remain constant and focused on bringing the little light I can offer into the world.

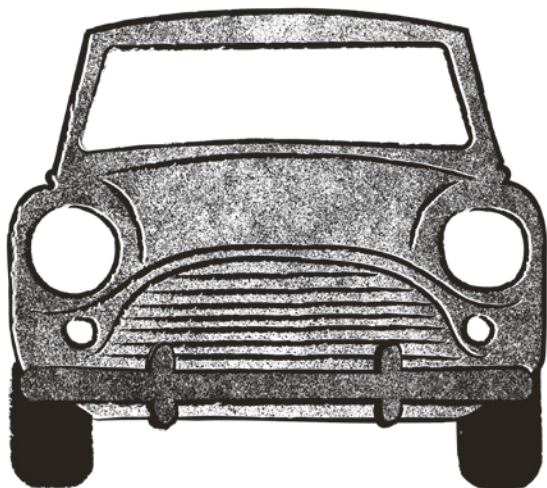
One change that I have noticed above all others is how fast life now happens for those that pass me by. Boys and girls dash by with their eyes glued to their phones; cyclists block out the sounds around them with music blaring through their headphones. Cars drive too fast and without thought of others. People don't take time to stop and chat like they used to but instead drop rubbish on the streets as if the whole world was their personal rubbish bin. I observe all this from my lofty perch and try not to judge or allow it to divert me from my task. My role is to shine light into the darkness and make life a little easier and safer for mankind.

Whilst my light has dimmed a little, I still provide a service to society. I have not lost hope in the humans beneath me, and it is the small gestures that give radiance to my light; a child stopping beneath me to observe a flower, an old man adjusting his shoes in my warm glow, a woman returning home at night who looks up at me to reveal her gratitude for the light that I bring. No one ever stays long, but for a moment, I feel valued.

It is true that during the day I simply stand and observe. I am merely a decoration. It is as dusk hits the city streets that I come alive, full of anticipation of what the night might reveal. Tonight the air is cold, and the darkness is like a black cloak

that covers the street, which is mostly empty and quiet.

Out the corner of my beam I see the cyclist emerging from the darkness. I observe the car, with its headlights on full beam, going too fast and taking the corner without care or concern. The next few moments are as if time has slowed, and each frame is played out with horror and noise. Suddenly the street I've been illuminating becomes an accident scene. Blue lights arrive, brighter than mine, drowning me out. The bike is a twisted and crushed and its small light has been extinguished. The car's headlights slowly start to fade as it rolls to a complete stop. The driver climbs out looking shaken, guilty and concerned but no injuries. There is a lot of activity but eventually the blue lights fade into the distance. I remain, shining on the same stretch of pavement as if nothing ever happened.



Embracing the Light

By Stella Naidoo

Wimbledon High School, Year 8, Age 13

The sound of gunshots, rang throughout the field as soldiers were battling to resemble formations, presenting their formal glory. And he, an unfortunate victim of generations of conflict, was left struggling for coverage and clawing the dirt trying to get up.

The world quieted before he understood why.

Just a moment earlier, the earth had been trembling beneath his boots, the air thick with the potent smell of blood and smoke. People were screaming incoherent words competing with the sounds of booming and clashing. Pain vibrated through his whole body, tingling with exhaustion and adrenaline. Then, the noise began to thin, as if he were being pulled out of a chaotic room and watched the door slam shut. The cold wind stilled, the ground softened and the crushing weight on his shoulders vanished. Colours drained from the dilapidated trenches around him.

That is when he felt a presence.

At first, it was miniscule ripples crashing against his numb body. Soon, a brightness presented itself, no larger than a lantern's flame, yet warmer than any blaze he had felt. It glowed calmly, pulsing in a rhythm resembling a heartbeat. Suspicion blared alarms in his head as, he tried to find a conclusion to how something so foreign felt so familiar. Like their souls were intertwined and took on different forms. The mere thought of it was mind boggling.

Invisible forces beckoned him towards it, apprehension

subsided and before long he followed. The radiation caressed rough skin, smoothing out the scars and purifying his mind. Each stepped brightened the light until everything was consumed in a blinding abyss of warmth.

Cotton blankets and smiling parents, the tenderness of his mother's hands and the roughness of his father, summers in the grasslands of his village, winters near the fire, his friend's contagious laughter, the first day of training, hours upon hours of hard work and labour, the paranoia of the battle to come.

Memories flooded his mind, clouding his thoughts. Slowly as they faded, he was left in the same distant place, the flicker of light still there. Realisation dawned on him and instincts kicked in. Embracing the light he succumbed to the peace it offered.

30-Second Love Story

By Thomas Sealey

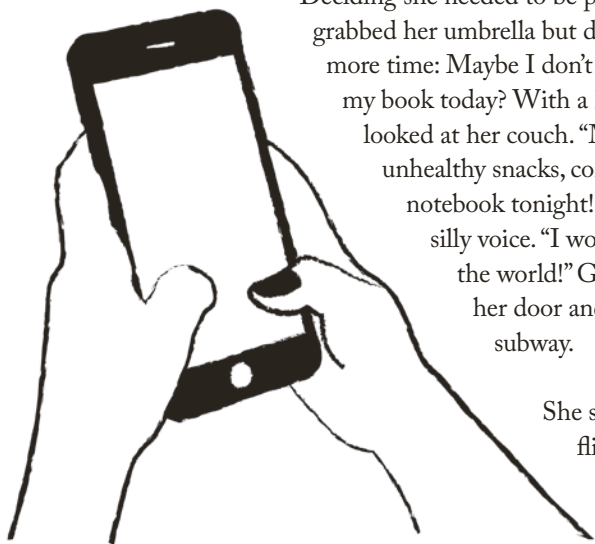
Shrewsbury House School, Year 8, Age 13

Gracie jolted awake, flustered. Sitting up, she squinted across the corridor of her tiny New York apartment into the kitchen. She saw the mountain of paper and her rose-gold MacBook on the table and groaned. Why hadn't her lightbulb moment come yet? She had been wrestling with this book for three months without a single spark. She had tried everything: science fiction, fantasy, children's literature and even a biography!

She flopped back onto her mattress and flung the baby-blue gingham duvet over her eyes. Curling up like a little armadillo, she grabbed her phone to scroll through Instagram. There they were: photos of perfect lattes and perfect hands with perfect nails typing new (undoubtedly perfect) books. She looked down at her own overgrown, dirty nails. Why couldn't she be like them?

Deciding she needed to be productive, she grabbed her umbrella but debated one more time: Maybe I don't need to "write" my book today? With a heavy sigh, she looked at her couch. "Me, you, some unhealthy snacks, comfy PJs and the notebook tonight!" she said in a silly voice. "I wouldn't miss it for the world!" Grinning, she shut her door and rushed to the subway.

She sat down and flipped open her laptop. What started as a



promising moment of literacy quickly turned into an “accidental” shopping spree for Yankee candles. Suddenly, a voice cut through the carriage: “G, is that you?”

She turned her head. No one ever called her G except... “Jonathan?” she said, far too loudly. She sank into her seat. “I thought you moved to Austin?” She had carried a crush on Jonathan since fourth grade, back when they were just two nerds with glasses and a stack of books.

“Yeah, that didn’t work out. What about you?” he said in that buttery tone that made her heart melt. She forgot to speak, far too invested in his deep blue eyes. “Oh! Um... I’m an author! I’m headed to the museum!” they said in unison.

They wandered into the grand hall and sat in front of a huge Diplodocus skeleton, chatting for five minutes before Jonathan started leaning towards her. This is it, she thought, it’s finally happening! In a flash, she saw images of their wedding, a house, a child and eventually grandkids. She even imagined them in a luxury care home that probably cost way too much, sitting in wheelchairs with their hands intertwined.

Ding. The bubble popped. Jonathan looked down at his phone and stood up abruptly. “It’s been great seeing you after all this time. Uh... bye!”

What? Who, when, why, how? She had a thousand questions. Was he seeing someone? She stopped herself. This was stupid; she didn’t need this. Then, she lifted her head. There it was - the lightbulb moment. She whipped out her laptop and typed as if possessed.

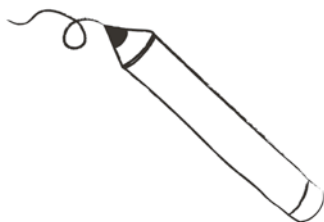
Her book was called 30-Second Love Story.

AWARDED DISTINCTION POEMS & STORIES

Key Stage 4

Years 10-11

Age 14-16



POEMS

Light Hours

Angel Ghumdia, Saint Cecilia's CofE School

The Boy Who Flew Too Close to the Sun

Brooke Hopkinson, Putney High School

Shedding Light

Florence Ashton, Putney High School

'Boy at the Back'

Marisa Shand, Wimbledon High School

Mother, My Light!

Marwan Elmanroukey, Coombe Boys' School

Ember

Nishka Raghavendra Mithare, Nonsuch High School

Candle and Missile

Yusif Daoud, Wimbledon College

STORIES

The Fairy Glade

Abi Newcombe, Nonsuch High School

The Light and The End

Alfred Somorjay, Wimbledon College

A Crack of Light

Alice Watson, Wimbledon High School

Empty Plains Hold Memories

Axie Oteh-Nowak, Lilian Baylis Technology School

The Light

Eliona Kurlberg, Saint Cecilia's C of E School

The Light

Giada Stramazotti, Ursuline High School

The Sun's Warmth

Imogen Parkes, La Retraite RC School

The Light

Jay Grech, Ursuline High School

No Witness

Liliana Rawlence, Nonsuch High School

The Light in the Darkness

Lisa Isiakpere, La Retraite RC School

They Choose

Nishi Ponduri, Raynes Park High School

The Light

Noa Gardner, La Retraite RC School

The Blood-lit Sky

Sophia Austin, Wimbledon High School

Flickers and Fades

Tilak Patel, Ashcroft Technology Academy

The Lamplighter

Tyron Ryan, Coombe Boys' School

Light Hours

By Angel Ghumdia

Saint Cecilia's CofE School, Year 10, Age 15

There's no such thing as an absence of light
Not when the city shines throughout the night
The midnight whispers - it has secrets it won't keep
But I couldn't care less, I just want to go to sleep.

Music trickles gently from an app on my phone
While tiredness continues to burrow through my bones
I look through the window as the moon glimmers and shines
Her beauty is stunning, she's truly divine.

Cheep cheep - the night is done.
Beep beep - the day has begun
But only now has sleep chosen to come.

As the sun filters in and kisses and bites
I realise I need to rub the sleep from eyes
I'd much rather lay there with thoughts that pour like a stream
The day will be unforgiving, and I do not get to scream.

Time sticks to me like honey or glue
As dark mixes in and starts to dilute
The terrors of the day wash away with the night
But tomorrow will come with as much of a fight.

The Boy Who Flew Too Close to the Sun

By Brooke Hopkinson

Putney High School, Year 10, Age 14

The story is one that gets passed on

the boy who flew too close
the boy who flew too far
the boy who didn't listen to the
warning signs of
scarred imagery of melting wax drip
drip
dripping

down the generations

It falls and lands in the
sea like a
boy

told and retold

who flew, floating, flipping,
frantic, feeling
falling
falling
falling
free

as all good

the boy who flew free
the boy who flew famous

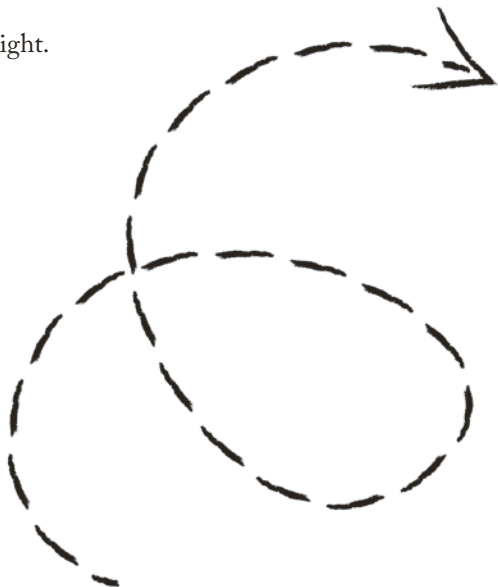


stories

the boy who flew and
the boy who fell knowing what it was like to

do.

touch the light.



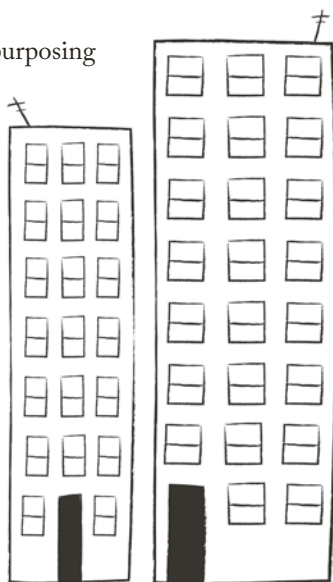
Shedding Light

By Florence Ashton

Putney High School, Year 10, Age 14

Even though the last time we played
Poohsticks over Wandle Bridge we
were prisms,
or oil barges
slicking the metal railings with rainbow
light,
when you come back to
me it's monochrome:

The fleshy white belly of a
conch shell
I pick up while 'not thinking
about us' in Cornwall
becomes your arms haloing my
brother's wall,
that April we spent repurposing
his old room.



I breathe into it and the grey air thrums
like it did when we were small enough to be
stuffed into muggy underground carriages,
early mornings dedicated to stitching up the
holes we'd spent last night poking in
each other
with Northern Line thread.

The city gets sticky with the stink of Jasmine,
and when I brave the Thames again it hisses at me
like cream soda cans, ripped open with reverent fingers
whenever you wanted your mouth buzzing
with your mother tongue again.

That night the city shut on me like an eyelid,
Stinging all over with remembered light.

‘Boy at the Back’

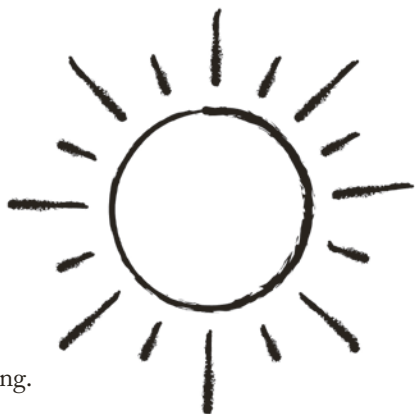
By Marisa Shand

Wimbledon High School, Year 11, Age 16

In the classroom
Armed with pencil case
Laden with heavy face
Boy at the back.

Shoes, bloodied and bruised
Head, spit ball bombsite
Eleven
He's only eleven.

From the window, the sun is setting.



His eyes are blue
His mind is green
Greener than grass
He wants to sit outside and sit in the green, green, green
He wants to splash in buttery puddles of sunlight
And press the fingers of daisies into each other.

Teacher speaks
Class sleeps
Air dribbles stickily out of the room through
The open window
Like parted lips releasing a sigh.

He's waiting at the back of the classroom
Boy at the back.

Bell rings
And students gush into corridors
And boy at the back is no more.

He is
Boy at the school gates
Boy at the bench
Boy with the dream.

Sun oozes
Warm caramel coating his cheeks
Trickling through leaves and blossoming on his shirt
Sunflowers jerk and twist, hips swaying.

His mother in the kitchen is humming
Swaying.

In the classroom
Armed with pencil case
Laden with heavy face
Boy at the back.

But in the green
That pistachio green
Armed with bare feet
Laden with liquid heat
the boy plays with light.



Mother, My Light!

By Marwan Elmanroukey

Coombe Boys' School, Year 10, Age 15

Growing apart we are,
I wish you will never be far
Yes, I am growing
In wisdom and in length
But never will I stop needing your strength.

For nine months we were one
Eager for the sunlight, to meet your son
But now I am here
And from the darkness I fear
So I hold your guidance close and dear.

From my first breath you were in my sight
You gave me my power, my might
Consistently you have been my light
Steering me through what's wrong and right
Forever I will look up to you, just maybe not in height!

At the end of the day I am only fifteen
Not yet an adult merely a teen
When I feel alone, your love is near
An always shining light
Getting brighter year by year.

Mother, may you forever be in my sight
My power and my might
To tell me what's wrong and right
I will forever look up to you, my mother, my light.



Ember

By Nishka Raghavendra Mithare

Nonsuch High School, Year 10, Age 15

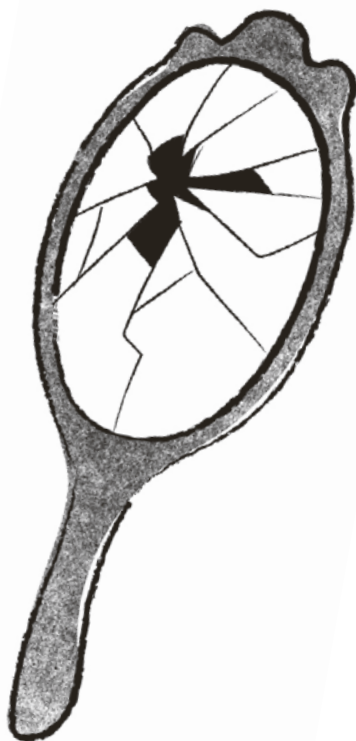
When Ember was five, she loved the light.
It was warm and special, loving and kind.
It was sparkly and glittery like stars at night
Special like fairies, but not so hard to find.
She loved to walk, amongst the honeydripping leaves,
or burrow within the gilded sand beads
But most of all she loved how it made her cheeks wrinkle
Her voice giggle and eyes kindle.

When Ember was twelve, she kept seeing the light
She found it in rooms, in microscopes, computers
it was inescapable. like her sister's barbies.
Ugh.
And because she was older now
It followed her day, and night.
Life was there. It was exhausting.
But... IT was fun. Sometimes.
amongst the grass
It cut through the glass
and the paper was dust.

When Ember was 25 she took the light.
wore it around her neck
danced at parties and rocked the night
It was her treasure,
her secretive pleasure.
She could harness it.
the pink she wore
the stares she stole
the light was the reason
of why she glowed.

45 now, but time raced on. Ember's light
and glint of the eye had dwindled on.
Her eyes shook. Lips quivered
She'd only realise the light when
she'd ask for consolation, and then...
And. then. the. mirror. would. s h a t t e r.

Now Ember was older, much older.
A wise woman, one would say.
If only they were wiser.
The light has always existed,
and with it she slept and drifted
Away, and away.



Candle and Missile

By Yusif Daoud

Wimbledon College, Year 10, Age 15

Suddenly, Missile exits the fog, spitting
Embers and bright flames from its exhaust-
Strikes their succumbing pupils.
Wet with tears and blood
Seeping from their corpses like melted wax.

Lives.
Potential scattered across the dirt;
Children apathetically tossed
Away like the toys they once played with.
Light fading from their innocent faces-
Their skin grows cold. Hollow corpses linger,
Staring haplessly in reverie.

A candle is set alight in a hushed room-
Its flame burns, radiant.
And for a time, it will remain
Burning brightly. What if the flare persisted
a little longer Outside under the harsh Wind,
I wonder?
Its flame burns, radiant.
He melts away his very will to live.



The Fairy Glade

By Abi Newcombe

Nonsuch High School, Year 11, Age 16

As the sun settles behind the forest, the sky painted a bright orange that bathes us in its soft glow, we wait. The glade is silent; even the birds have gone to sleep now. But it won't stay this way for long.

Soon, they will emerge. You and I know them as fairies, but that's a rather crude human shortening. Their true name cannot be spoken by mortal lips, nor written by one of our hands. Fae language is for the fae, after all. The best I can tell you is their name, whatever it is, translates as best as it can to 'the bright ones.'

There's a reason we call them fairy lights. Those pinpricks are as close to glimpsing a fairy as most humans will ever come. They nestle behind the rusty glass of streetlamps, dance within the beams of lighthouses, and sleep in the plain bulbs that live in all our homes. They hide, for they do not want us to see them.

But I did. Once, when I was barely more than an infant, hiding in that same spot you're in now. It was as if the lights strung around that huge oak tree over there had broken free and were fluttering around in the cool night air. Each creature was barely the size of a pinhead, but from everyone came a beam of golden light that spread, further and further, setting the whole clearing aglow. Thousands of tiny sundrops came together, engulfing every leaf, every tree, and every creature scurrying around the woodland in its comforting glow.

In my darkest moments, I shut my eyes and return to this glade. I remember how their gentle heat licked my skin,

wrapping around my young body, a blanket of warmth. I remember how they flew around each other, in their own world of magic. I remember the brightest, most beautiful light you could ever imagine, and how, when bathed in it, I felt as if the world would never go dark again.

Since that night, I've returned here many times. At both dusk and dawn, I come, hoping to catch just one more glimpse of that divine light. They've evaded my view every time. Perhaps they aren't here anymore. Perhaps that magical moment I witnessed was a once in a universe experience that I was fortunate enough to stumble on.

Or perhaps they can only be seen by the young. By those whose minds are unblemished by the real world. By those who still believe in magic. That, my child, is why you are here.

When the sun goes down, I hope you see them. I hope they fill your heart, the same way they filled mine. I hope you carry this memory with you, until you are as old and withered as I. Most of all, I hope that no matter how dark the world gets, you never stop believing in magic.

Now, wait with me.

They'll be here soon.



The Light and the End

By Alfred Somorjay

Wimbledon College, Year 10, Age 15

My eyes flew open. My vision seethed. I drew in a ragged breath, and coughed in the stale air. I rolled over and wretched on the dusty floor. My head pounded savagely as I tried to sit up.

It was only then I noticed the darkness. It pressed itself against my body; its dark tendrils of shadow curled and slithered up the walls. The room seemed to swell and churn, pounding in time to a constant rumble of shouts and cries that oozed through the cracks above my head.

Squinting revealed shapeless forms that littered the floor, and the ceiling hung low with beams blacked with generations of grime. I stumbled forward in an attempt to stand, slipping on the cobbles. They were slick with a sticky liquid. I struggled over towards the nearest wall, I was surprised when my hands made contact with cold, unforgiving metal; the wrought iron was cast into a tight lattice that latched itself to the huge bolts on each wall. I shook it, but my arms just juddered pathetically.

The chanting and cheers continued above. A gurgling scream suddenly split the air. It sounded nearby, and the chanting intensified into shouts and jeers that echoed eerily throughout the chamber. I shivered, and the darkness seemed to press itself even closer around my rags.

My heart began to pound faster, and my palms slickened into a clammy writhing mess of nerves. A distant, more authoritative voice sounded from what must have been a corridor, but still I couldn't make out another exit from the

room. Then the eerie sound of boots pounding on stone drew closer and closer.

I tried to reach for something, anything in the dark, but it was too late.

Two soldiers burst into the room and thrust a sword and shield into my hand. The entire cell then groaned and shuddered, as the gate at the opposite end heaved itself open.

Brilliant, blazing, burning light cascaded over me, spilling into every crack, banishing the shadows that had once hidden the chains, spears and swords that decorated the walls. The chanting and cheers roared and crescendoed as I timidly crept into an arena, shielding my eyes from the golden rays. Enormous stands stacked with arches and marble gleamed in the radiance of the clear sky. A glimmering bronze helmet caught my eye as I edged forward. The rest of the body lay a few meters away in a pool of beaming crimson. The light proved everything. The light revealed what I had dreaded the most. The light shone on my imminent death.



A Crack of Light

By Alice Watson

Wimbledon High School, Year 10, Age 15

A piercing light strikes through my body, as a great roar rumbles above my decaying head. The black shards of undergrowth that have stiffly bound me for centuries, slowly creeping further towards my precious rags each passing decade, and tightening their menacing grip, have instantly withdrawn in an almighty crash, destroying my many centuries of lonely silence.

A feeling of fear sweeps through me, because a crack of light has finally uncovered my precious darkness, and I know not of what it has uncovered, but only of what it has destroyed.

But just as I have been freed by the almighty grip of nature, my dishevelled rags are forcefully dragged through the undergrowth, while a roaring machine sinks its teeth into the earth, spitting me out onto a strange and foreign land.

What is this strange land? Is this what it was like before? Is this gentle furry bed, the grass that has lied above my head, for as long as I can remember? And is that far-off stretching sea of blue ...the sky? How I have dreamt of these things for years!

A sudden pain jolts me back to reality, a sharp and burning stab that pierces my bedraggled cloth, which dies in its agonizing heat. Oh, I remember what this thing is called, this burning orb that lies on the peak of the sky's blue mountain. It is the sun. The cursed sun that has destroyed my blissful darkness. How I long for that decrepit yet heavenly darkness.

There was once a time I did not long for darkness, a time in which I enjoyed the kiss of the sun, under the hands of the girl who nurtured me with her sweet and milky hands. How

I have longed for those hands, each moment, those hands which brushed my golden locks, and treated them like the ambrosia of heaven. She treated me like I was a goddess. She worshipped me, in all my glory, as if I was her sun.

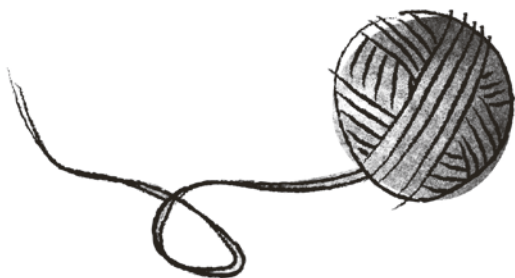
I feel an overwhelming rage capture me. Rage, at my measly existence. Just a poor little rag doll, a small fragment of the past, uncovered after many lost centuries peacefully floating in the ground's deep sea.

Suddenly, I am scooped by a strangely familiar thing. In fact, so familiar that a gentle wave of pleasure ripples down my cracked spine, and I desperately ponder for the names of these sleek and papery pieces. Ah, they are hands.

Though these hands are not milky or sweet but cracked and broken. A sting of sadness rushes through me, while I realise these hands are different to the ones of my beloved.

There is something soft and caring about them however, with the way they stroke my wool as if I am the lamb it came from.

Suddenly, they shout in some foreign language that I do not understand, while I lie helplessly in their strong palms, wishing to be a goddess once more.

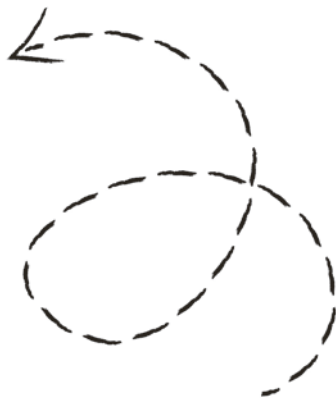


Empty Plains Hold Memories

By Axie Oteh-Nowak

Lilian Baylis Technology School, Year 11, Age 15

His body ached. Liu had been walking aimlessly for hours. His knees felt like faulty door hinges with how they locked every now and then, making him trip over his own two feet... And the fact that he wasn't wearing shoes wasn't doing him much justice either. However, the calluses on the soles of his feet were so thick that he wouldn't feel it if he ran through hot coals.



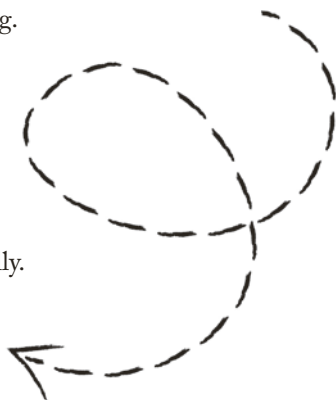
He didn't know where he was. There was nothing in all directions; nothing but grass and the occasional bush. It was cold too. And windy. His hair was being blown in all directions, obstructing his vision. Nothing was going right for poor Liu... and just when he thought it couldn't get worse, he felt a pain shoot up his leg. He collapsed onto the damp grass, curling into a foetal position as he groaned in agony. He didn't even have to look down at his leg to know that his ankle was either sprained or dislocated. He stared in whatever direction his head landed in, tears running down his face as he didn't even have the energy to sob properly.

He didn't know what to do now. He had no means to contact anyone, and he was literally in the middle of nowhere. He didn't know... He really didn't know anything. He didn't even remember how he got there. He felt his consciousness slipping before he could even try thinking of any sort of solution. His ankle was throbbing, twisted at an unnatural angle and clearly beginning to bruise.

Worst case scenario would be that he died out here, and that seemed to be extremely likely given his situation... But what could he do? He was all alone. His vision began to swim as the sun rose, beams of warm, golden light covering Liu like a fuzzy blanket of sorts. For once, he relaxed. His body went limp as the gentle caress of the sun warmed his cold body. It was comforting in some strange way.

He turned onto his back, exhaling a breath he didn't even know he was holding. He looked straight up at the barren sky for a long time before turning to you. Yes, you, my dear reader. He was looking at you as if you had something to do with his current suffering. He opened his mouth to speak, to say something. Anything... But his eyes began to roll back and close before he could.

And so, there Liu was, left unconscious in this... seemingly endless field. What a shame, really.



The Light

By Eliora Kurlberg

Saint Cecilia's CofE School, Year 10, Age 15

The sky was unusually bright for a winter's day, coating the city in a film of gold. The streets were buzzing, the sound barely audible through my heavily insulated apartment walls. Opening my balcony door, I took a bare-footed step out onto the sun-heated tiles. My eardrums were immediately hit with the familiar cacophony of morning traffic. Nightgown fluttering around my ankles, I stepped further away from the doorway, moving to peer over the balcony railing. I watched as hordes of people rushed through the city centre. Suit-clad men and women weaved their way through the crowd, commingling to create a diverse ocean of colour, noise and cultures.

A chilling breeze pushed wayward strands of hair into my eyes. Shivering slightly, I laid myself down on the floor, welcoming the waves of honey-tinted sunshine that rushed over me. I closed my eyes, sighing with contentment. The last thing I heard before I drifted off was the sound of a lone bird, singing sweetly.

I was pulled back into reality by a soft voice, calling my name. The voice moved closer, accompanied by the nauseating stench of cheap perfume.

“Kiara?”

I groaned, and angled my body away from the sound.

“Kiara?”

The voice's owner crouched beside me.



“Kiara, sweetie? I need you to come inside”

She placed a slender hand on my shoulder. I shrugged it off.

Slowly, my eyes fluttered open. They were met with the sight of the crescent moon, emerging in the fiery pastel sky. Below me, the streets were coming to life, reborn in the last dwindling rays of sunlight. Partygoers began to appear, flooding the streets with the sounds of music and lightly drunken laughter.

“Kiara, honey? It’s cold out here love. We can’t have you getting worse now, can we?”

Sighing with frustration, I rolled over to face her.

Her frail form was crouched beside mine, the look of concern in her face exasperating.

In the distance, I heard the jazz band begin to play. The soulful tune lit up the city with battling sorrow and sunshine.

“Come on now.”

She stood up, slowly, her movement slightly stiff. I noticed the dark circles beneath her butterscotch eyes. She looked like she hadn’t rested in days. My irritation began to dissipate, and with it, my resolve.

Ignoring her offered hand, I rose to my feet, barely masking the bolts of pain that rattled my body. An onslaught of coughs racked my chest, bringing tears to my eyes. I doubled over in agony, my knees slamming hard against the polished marble. Droplets of blood escaped my lips, embellishing the pearly white slabs with a constellation of crimson.

Shaking, I headed inside. My nurse helped me into bed. I was overcome with gratitude. For my life. For the woman by my side. For the light that brought hope to my aching heart.

The last thing I saw before succumbing to sleep, was the pure, bright moonlight, shielding me from the foreboding darkness.

The Light

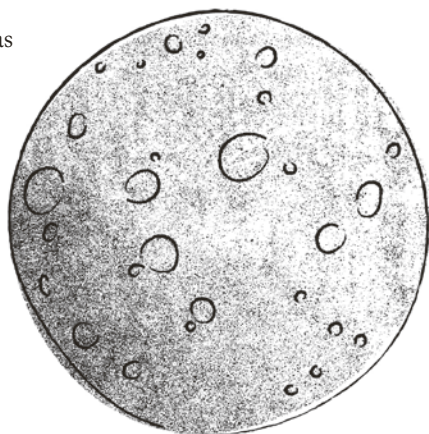
By Giada Stramazzoti

Ursuline High School, Year 10, Age 15

At last, the moment he had been waiting for arrived; with a final tick of the clock, it was midnight. Darkness stretched over every single building, street and park as if a blanket, too huge, too thick, too suffocating had been dropped on the city. The sun was now hidden, and its light did not have the power to overcome the night.

In a particular home, a young boy like many other is up to a little bit of mischief. He lifts his dinosaur blanket and dives out of bed, immediately inserting his small feet into his fluffy slippers. Slowly and steadily, he watches his steps for the usual creaky floorboards as if he were walking on a minefield. Minimizing his leaps of faith, he stretches out to reach the handle of his bedroom door which seems further than ever before. Upon his success, he pulls the door towards him only to be disappointed by its creaking sound of betrayal. He stands deadly still like a mouse hiding from a savage cat long enough to conclude that his personal police are not awake. A sigh of relief. The return of a normal heartbeat. Reminders of the precious reward that awaits him on the unreachable kitchen shelf. Determined, the boy tiptoes down the stairs; luckily, they are covered in carpet, his ally in this plan. He feels a smile stretching across his face at the realization of how close his long-awaited treasure is. It was almost time to try the tasty goods he could only ever dream about during the day. The only obstacle left was the inability to reach the shelf...but that was nothing a little problem solving couldn't fix. The boy trusts that the old wooden chair could hold his weight and extended his long skinny arms towards his prized possession. As soon as he lays his fingertips on the glass jar, he nudges it towards him, victoriously grabs it and presses it against his

chest. The sweet odour was irresistible and before he could have any second thoughts, he instantly digs his hands inside and greedily stuffs the first cookie into his watering mouth.



The delicacy of the cookie along with the perfect amount of dark chocolate chips gives the boy indescribable happiness. Too busy enjoying every bite and allowing the taste to settle on his tongue, he unconsciously ignores the sound of his mother's outraged slippers biting the floor. The kitchen light is rapidly turned on and with an angry click of the switch, he is exposed. The sudden bright light is unbearable! His eyes shut in shock, as he hopes to become invisible and avoid his mum glaring at him with a cold snarling expression.

The Sun's Warmth

By Imogen Parkes

La Retraite RC School, Year 10, Age 15

The world had forgotten the colour blue. For generations, the sky was a heavy, blanket of charcoal grey, and the sun was nothing more than a rumour whispered by the elders. They spoke of a warmth that didn't come from a fire, and a brightness that made the world shimmer. Now, only shadows existed, and the people lived in the muted, damp depths of the valley, harvesting glowing mushrooms for light.

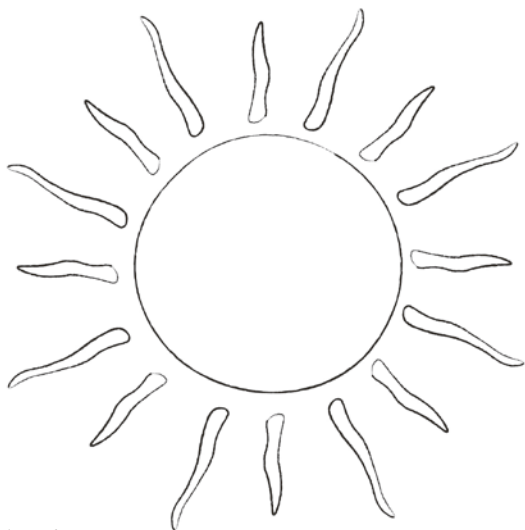
Loreli was different. She was obsessed with the stories of the Sun's warmth. While others stayed in the caverns, she often climbed the obsidian cliffs, seeking a glimpse of something beyond the gloom. Her grandmother used to say, "The light is not just in the sky. It is a promise. It waits for someone brave enough to believe it is still there."

One morning, or what passed for morning in the gloom, Loreli climbed higher than ever before. The mist was thick, tasting of rust and cold metal. Her fingers were numb, her breath coming in short, frozen gasps. The air grew thinner, the silence heavier. She had reached the veil a thick layer of clouds that no one had ever passed.

She stopped, leaning against a rock face. Despair, cold and heavy as the darkness tries to swallow her up. *'What if they were wrong?'* she thought. *'What if this is all there is?'*

But then, she heard it. It wasn't a sound, but a feeling; a gentle pulse, like a heartbeat. She looked up. High above, a pinprick of white appeared. It was impossibly small, a tiny hole in the iron-grey, but it was there.

Loreli pushed herself up, ignoring the exhaustion. She climbed faster, the pinpoint growing larger, shifting from white to a blinding yellow. Her heart hammered in her chest. She reached the top of the highest peak, the wind screaming around her, and she pushed her hand through the top layer of the mist.



It was warm.

She pulled herself up, out of the darkness, and onto a barren flatland above the clouds. And there it was.

The sun.

It wasn't a rumour. It was a golden orb, massive and magnificent, hanging in a sky that was a breath taking, intense blue. The light was almost painful, blinding her eyes, but she couldn't look away. It felt heavy on her skin, a comforting weight that chased away the damp cold of the abyss below. The air was crisp, clean, and alive.

Below her, the sea of grey clouds was motionless, hiding her village in the darkness. But above, she was alone in the light. She realized then that the light hadn't left; it had simply been waiting for someone to climb high enough to see it. She sat down, letting the warmth seep into her bones. Loreli laughed to herself, knowing she had a magnificent story to tell.

The Light

By Jay Grech

Ursuline High School, Year 10, Age 14

The glow of the sun chariot peeks above the mountain range, painting the sky with the watercolours of dawn. The wind blows gently, a tranquil breeze cups his face, running its fingers through his brown curls.

He smiles, a soft, knowing smile, and turns to his father, who nods at him. The signal. He takes a couple steps back from the ledge. And as the winds pick up, a rushing crescendo enveloping his senses, he takes off. He throws himself off the ledge, complete tryst in the wings his father crafted especially for him. There's a moment where his heart sinks, as he plummets, he closes his eyes, accepting the seemingly inevitable, before a gust of wind takes him soaring upwards. His heart settles and he slowly opens his eyes to take a gander at the scenery unfolding below, the vast expanse of sea stretching out. His breath is caught, left speechless at the sight. 'it all looks so small, so insignificant from up here' is the only thought his mind manages to conjure. A smile paints his face, and he lets out a triumphant howl as he finally tastes the freedom he'd craved throughout his lifetime of captivity

The wax tugs at his skin, leaving red marks where it stretches, the feathers itch his back and arms, irritating the skin, the harness tightens-not enough to cause pain, but just enough to restrict each breath just a bit, but Icarus couldn't care less, the only thing he could focus on now is that sweet sense of freedom that wraps around, carrying him upwards.

He could see it all, every little thing, he used to dream of the land outside of that gilded cage. And there, so high, casting its radiance all over the spread of antlike structures below.

The sun chariot.

Lord Apollon's sun chariot.

He'd always wondered what the god would look like. Would he have golden hair, glowing skin, a figure impossible to even comprehend as a human? Or would he look human, skin pale from years of captivity, brown curls framing his face?

His arms flap, feathers pushing him upwards as he battles against the breeze. Up he climbs, higher and higher, the heat beating down on him, stronger with every push of those mechanical wings. The sun scorches, the wax begins to slip and drip, feathers cascade down in a whirlwind on the breeze below. He struggles to climb higher, muscles burning, whether from the heat or the effort he doesn't know. And just as he reaches it, arm outstretched, at the peak of his climb, his stomach drops, he falls. The wind bites at his back, his heart pounding, stomach doing somersaults, heart pounding. Yet even as his back crashes against the waves, and everything turns black, he feels calm. Because Icarus saw that god, he saw the golden-brown skin, the golden curls reflecting the light of the sun, that impossible figure, the curve of his nose bridge.

And that god looked human.



No Witness

By Liliana Rawlence

Nonsuch High School for Girls, Year 10, Age 14

I wasn't there the day the sky split open. Heaven cried for everyone else - it forgot about me. Oh well. I could cry about it; I can't say that I haven't. But I won't. Not anymore. Because then I would slip off my ladder. Slip slip slip from slippery tears. I would fall and land with a silent thud on the ground, with no one around to hear my lament. No one to see me.

So I am climbing this ladder, this endless ladder. It reminds me of being at the beach, painting pictures of joy and sorrow in the sand. But those marks are immediately stolen back by the tide. Leaving smooth, pure, untouched sand-like no one was ever there. Only hollow ghosts.

That is why I am climbing and climbing and climbing this ladder. Because they say at the end lies eternity. Eternity hung up on the wall - a masterpiece everyone can admire. Not just a whisper of a memory nailed up in the dark. Eternity remembered.

And it feels like everyone around me is almost there. They have reached the end of their endless ladder and at the top the sky is splitting open for them. Light is pouring out of the cracks in the fabric of the heavens, they are reaching out, feeling light slip through their fingertips. I need it. I need that light I need someone to see me I need to make that mark in the sand I need to be remembered I need to be a painting on the wall I need eternity I need I need -

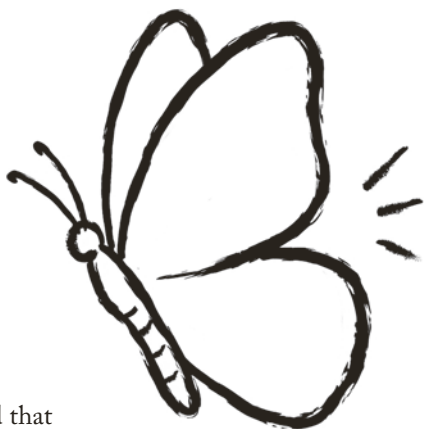
But all I can see are clouds. Dark, ominous clouds. Not one fragment of light breaks them. And I'm scared. I'm so, so terrified. Because what if I can't.

A voice calls down from below. It says its better on the ground.
Safer. Less scary. So for the first time in years, I cry. My tears
coat the rungs of the ladder in a slick sheen, and I slip. I let
myself fall.

When I reach the ground,
there are paintings all
around me. Fallen paintings.
The voice says that no one
really gets eternity.

I know that's the truth.

So I stand in front of my
ladder. I don't climb today.
Maybe I will another time.
Maybe I won't. But I've found that
there's a different light. It's not some
gift from angels, it doesn't last eternity.
Sometimes it's the most fleeting thing, crossing your vision
like a butterfly that flutters past suddenly. But it's stunning. It
is colours that you cannot even imagine and it feels like home.
And it's right here, on the ground.



The Light in the Darkness

By Lisa Isiakpere

La Retraite RC School, Year 11, Age 16

The first thing I
learned about
darkness is that it
doesn't always wait
for night; sometimes
it slips quietly
into your life in
broad daylight,
that darkness
followed me to

London long before
winter did. I learned that
it doesn't always come from fear or danger, sometimes it
comes from the quiet daunting pressure of trying to belong,
the cold mornings when the sky is still grey at 6 a.m., the
way your accent makes you repeat yourself in class, and the
constant reminder that you have to work twice as hard just
to be in the room, and every day on the bus ride to school
I felt that crushing weight, clutching my backpack my feet
unconsciously tapping their own beat while revising biology
notes because everyone would reverberate saying that GCSEs
would "shape and mould my future," as if my whole life could
be reduced to a set of grades, numbers that would dictate
the rest of my life, and even though I studied late into the
night with my tiny desk lamp glowing faintly, I still felt the
loneliness of the immigrant girl, the girl who missed the
familiar chaos of home.

In London, the cold felt personal, slipping through my coat,
settling into my bones, reminding me that I was far from
everything I knew.



The strange thing about darkness is that it forces you to search for your own light or it can swallow you whole. I found my light arrived in small, unexpected pieces. It came from the long evenings at my desk, when the world outside my window was silent and I could finally hear my own thoughts, the soft glow of my lamp turning my notes golden as I studied. It came from the city itself -the way the lights along the Thames shimmered like they were cheering me on, the way the wind on Tower Bridge felt sharp but alive.

Slowly, I realised that light doesn't always come as success or praise.

Sometimes it's the discipline of waking up early even when your body begs for sleep. Sometimes it's the courage to ask for help. Sometimes it's the pride of understanding a topic that once made you feel small. And the more I leaned into those small lights, the less the darkness controlled me. One day, I looked around and realised I wasn't just surviving London, I was growing into someone who carried her own brightness, someone who could walk through the cold without retracting.

Life still throws shadows across my path, but now I know how to walk through them with my books in my hand, my breath steady, and my light burning quietly inside me.

They Choose

By Nishi Ponduri

Raynes Park High School, Year 10, Age 14

The lights weren't supposed to move.

Everyone in the village knew that. They stayed deep in the forest, glowing softly between the trees. People said they helped lost travelers find their way home, but I didn't believe that. Most of the time, they were closer.

I started by the window, looking into the dark. The lights were slowly moving between the trees, like they were looking for something.

For a moment, I told myself to stay inside and not go out.

But I didn't.

I took my coat and followed. The village was quiet. Everything was calm. There were no voices, no footsteps. I felt like I was the only one who was awake.

The forest was in front of me.

As soon as I stepped under the trees, everything felt different. The forest was so quiet I could hear my own breathing. Even the wind had stopped. My footsteps were too loud, like I wasn't meant to be there.

The lights moved deeper into the forest.

I followed them.

They moved slowly and stayed just ahead of me. It felt like they wanted me to keep going. I knew I could go back anytime.

But I didn't.



As I went deeper into the forest, it got darker. Soon, I could only see the lights. There were more of them now, shining softly in the dark.

Then I saw it.

A clearing.

The lights gathered there, close together. And in the middle, someone was standing.

“Hello?” I called.

No answer.

I walked closer. The person stood still, facing away from me. Something felt wrong. Not really scary... just empty.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

Slowly, they turned around.

I stopped.

Their eyes were glowing. Not very bright, but enough to see. Their faces were calm, too calm, like they didn't feel anything.

“How long have you been here?” I asked quietly.

They looked at me for a long time.

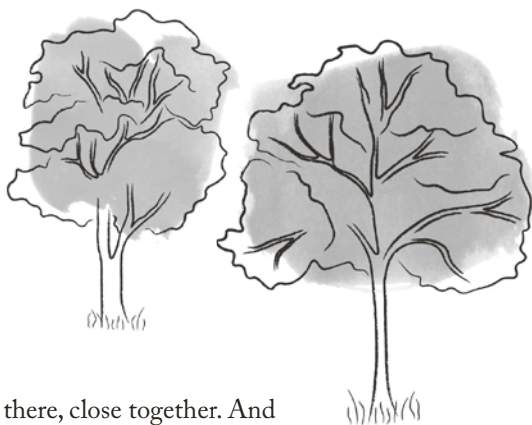
Then they said,

“I was you.”

My stomach dropped.

“What?”

“I was you,” they said. “And now... you will be me.”



The lights started to move.
They moved away from the person.
And towards me.
“No...” I stepped back, but the
darkness behind me felt endless.
“They don’t help people,” the
person said. “They bring them
here.”



The lights came closer and closer.
“They choose.”
I tried to run, but I couldn’t. My body wouldn’t move.
The lights touched my skin. They felt cold, and in that moment,
I understood.
They weren’t random.
They were waiting.
For me.
The person stepped back slowly. The lights didn’t follow them
anymore.
They followed me.
I looked at them one last time. Their glowing eyes watched me.
I was no longer myself. I was no longer free.

The Light

By Noa Gardner

La Retraite RC School, Year 10, Age 15

It slides through the cracks in my floorboards, begging to be seen, to be acknowledged. Like thin, golden fingers, swimming on the rough wood floor. Close, but not close enough to where I lay on the floor, in the corner. Tentatively, I reach for The Light. It reaches for me too. We interlock fingers, and it pulls me to itself, as if inviting me to something. It would be impertinent to refuse. I collapse to the ground, suddenly overcome with a need for something. That something.

Desperately, I begin to pull and yank at the floorboards. I scrape urgently, splinters piling up beneath my fingernails as I release board after board from its decades long compact prison, heaving it behind me clumsily. Finally prising it away, I discover another layer to the ground, beneath my timber. But by now, a hunger has arisen within me. A terrible, aching hunger. One that sought to destroy me if I didn't destroy it first. I must find it. I must find The Light. With the recklessness of a beast, I tear away with my human fingers on the floor, ignoring the scraping of the wood and dust under my nails. But there's always more. With every layer, I feel closer, I can almost taste it. Was it sunlight? Electricity? A mere torch? I didn't know, but I wanted to. So, so badly.

Finally, I collapse, energy gone, now feebly beating the ground with my bleeding fists. I feel the tears well up in my eyes. What even was that thing? Was it worth it? Was it... dangerous? Like a parasite, I feel fear now coursing through my veins like a thousand freight trains. I look up at the pit I've made for myself, and move to escape, but it's too late. The darkness is closing in fast. It's hopeless. I fall, letting the absence of light cover me once more.

The Blood-lit Sky

By Sophia Austin

Wimbledon High School, Year 11, Age 15

As the light fades, it looks like the sky has been bleeding. Not big, dramatic gouts of blood: that would be too perfect. No, the sky has been sluggishly oozing rusty orange like sap from a tree, gluey muck that pours over the mountains and plops into the lake in front of me where it sits there, too concentrated to mix. The rusty light of the dying sun paints everything a dull orange: even the lake, which some say used to be blue and bright, barely has the energy to reflect the mountains. It's become so thick that not even the strongest wind can move the water, and insects hover in their millions above the surface: mosquitos, pond-skaters, flies, gnats, all pumped full of disease, waiting to infect the nearest living thing.

They're only trying to survive, I remind myself as I sit on the pier, dangling my feet over the water. Only trying to make the most of what they've been given in this strange, rust-lit world. They buzz around my legs, inspecting, examining the pale flesh, the outline of mud marks circling my calf like a handprint. They don't bother biting, almost as if they know there's no point.

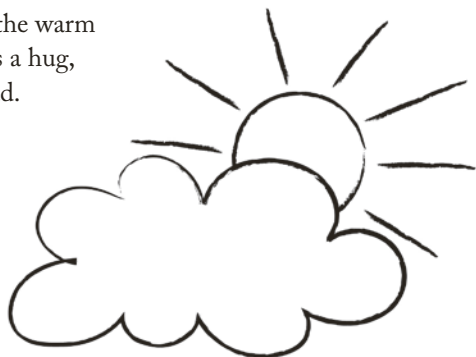
I only have a few more hours until the disease starts to take hold: until my muscles seize up and my head swells and my prefrontal cortex shuts down and my eyeballs bulge out of my head.

I might be dying, but this isn't the worst place for it. A memory comes to me, sudden as a shove, bright as white light. It's laughing and smiling so much it hurts, it's prancing up and down the pier, small feet on wood, it's blue sky and bluer water and a feeling that everything will turn out just

fine. I remember the sun: the warm
yellow light, comforting as a hug,
soft as a freshly made bread.

That blue sky and
summer light is hard to
remember now. So long
has the Earth been
covered in these thick
clouds, the sun's dying
molten glare blocked
only by the same

clouds that now paint our world orange. If it weren't for them,
everything here would be nothing but ashes, the water in the
lake vaporised into steam and smashed particle-by-particle
into atoms in milliseconds.



Soon, the sun will become fed up with us insignificant little
humans, bored of this strangely round planet, and it'll expand
outwards into space in a world-ending exhale that will
instantly fry everything we've ever known. Because providing
light for us for millennia is a fruitless, thankless job.

The sun is finally taking its revenge for all the light we stole
from it.

I'll be long gone by then. I'll be grains of sand on the beach,
splinters of wood in the pier, pebbles in the lake. I'll be the
sky-blood that drips from the clouds like agonising tears, never
to settle, never to mix, floating forever, falling into eternity.

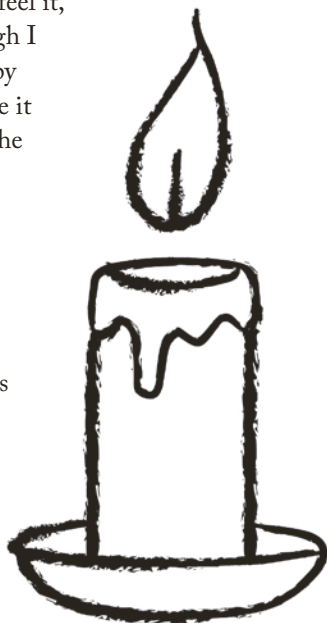
Flickers and Fades

By Tilak Patel

Ashcroft Technology Academy, Year 11, Age 15

I notice light the way other people notice the weather. A strand of sun in her hair catches out when she walks in. It's liquid gold. It slides, wraps around itself and slides again. The warmth of the cafe pools into the corners of her blue eyes. Yes, they're blue, but they're more than that. It's light. Light in them. Not from the cafe or from the sun. Light has settled there, thick and sweet. Something that has made itself at home behind her irises and refuses to leave. At first, it skims just under the surface, as though it had been there, beneath the curtain all this time, and you had been looking through it without even noticing. but when she laughs, the world stirs.

Light spills out over her shoulders, its fingers reach toward my hands, toward my chest. I can feel it, the pulse, the warmth, it's as though I have stepped onto stone warmed by the sun after a long winter. I notice it whenever she speaks about what she loves, it gathers and gathers inside her, brightening the little corners that I didn't know she had. And when she listens, it steadies, it holds to her like a candle flame in a draft. The air leans toward her. It's after enough of those moments that I start to notice her not as just a person, but as a room I can enter and feel the fragile warmth that makes me weaker, a light so bright I could shatter the world if I breathed too hard.



And then she impossibly turns it on me. It doesn't flare. It finds me. It pools over my shoulders. Tangles with the pulse in my veins. Her eyes hold me a fraction too long, and the world becomes dusk and hills. Threads of light and coolness stretch between us, brush against my thoughts, my words, my name, and she makes me.

I live in it. I breathe it. Light does that - it tells you that it's yours just by touching you. But light is fragile. Light moves. First, it flickers, and then it goes away in threads, leaving dark gaps. I step back, assuming it will come back.

It doesn't.

Later, I see her again - on an empty street with lamplight. It touches her hair, her shoulders, the corners of her eyes - but it never reaches me. It reflects the world - beautiful, alive, but contained. Self-contained. Speaking a language in which I am no longer spoken.

And in that quiet, mundane moment, I realize that I never held her light. I only stood in it. Fragile. Shivering. A moth on the edge of a flame, knowing it wasn't mine.

The Lamplighter

By Tyron Ryan

Coombe Boys' School, Year 10, Age 15

Chris sat on his chair and slumped over, his eyes were raw from staring for hours at the unblinking monitors, "God, I hate this place," he muttered, his voice thinner than paper. He was a cog in the machine of individualism, a lonely sentry guarding a world of scrolling shadows. He got out of his chair and walked around in the seemingly bright room filled with cold light and losing his sense of path. As he walked about he discovered a tattered ledger in the corner of the storage room. The pages smelled of ancient winter and woodsmoke.

"October, 14, 188," the ink breathed. "The fog was a beast tonight, but I cut its throat with a single match!" The book was written under the name "Elias." As Chris read the book, he realised that him and Elias were almost the same. Elias was a lamplighter providing light in the dark for his community whereas Chris worked with data, managing systems so as people have access to what is happening in the world and subsequently not living in the dark.

Conversely there was a big difference. Elias wrote about the warmth of the crowd that gathered under his lamp. To him the light was a golden thread weaving the neighbourhood together. Chris looked at his glowing screen, a cold blue wall and felt a sudden sharp pity for his own perfection. Elias had a tiny flame, but he had a vision. However, Chris, who was living in the ideal era, was blind.

The epiphany was punctuated by a violent metallic crack as the city's heart failed. The perfect light was executed instantly. In the suffocating, velvety black, Chris did not panic as he

reached out to the matches he found in Elias's book. Scratch, scratch, the flame was rebellious, a swaying dancer in the dark. As he walked to the dead data server the shadows finally had room to breathe. The amber glow warmed his skin more than any LED light could.

Chris fixed the power and the cold distant light came back to life. He was now surrounded by light but the isolation lingered in his heart. "Have we really evolved, or in fact devolved? Was technology and its pretend light really worth our unity as humanity?"



AWARDED DISTINCTION POEMS & STORIES

Key Stage 5

Years 12-13

Age 16-18



POEMS

The Miner's Cave

Ellahé Safaei Keshtgar, West Hatch High School.

Light Through Life

Isabelle Eva Sophia Verhaaren Offergaard, Ursuline High School.

Souvenirs of Life with Hitler

Theo Sheaf, Tiffin School.

Remember Her Light

Yaa Asante, St Mark's Church of England Academy.

STORIES

One Strange Light

Azaria Indira Rain Logan-Jones, National Extension College.

The Winter After

Evie Insall, Wimbledon High School.

The Light Amidst the Darkness

Isabella Dallolio, Ursuline High School.

The Light

James Son, Tiffin School.

Delivering Fuel

Max Latif, Nonsuch High School

Lightning Paradox

Neriyah Anderson Bailey, Raynes Park High School.

The Soul's Reflection

Siobhan Woods, Wimbledon High School.

The Miner's Cave

By Ellahe Safaei Keshtgar

West Hatch High School, Year 12, Age 17

Tears of paraffin droop down. From ribbons of cobalt ore,
As the flickering flame of the candlelight shuddered at what
it saw.

Rivers of salty suffering came running down his face,
The fiery flame of the candlelight now shift with glowing grace.

To outline the pools of sweat. And the tears the miner went.

Diamonds look from above with abject fear in their eyes,
As they watch right down with a steady gaze as the miner digs
and cries-

The glittering gems are afraid.

Covered in soot, the miner walks on gripping tight to
Prometheus's flame
New cracks and crevices he does perceive
with dew's drop and rain.

This burning beacon is his only guide,
To seek the buried treasure that flee
and hide.

Yet. The miner sighs with a
downcast grin,
He dislikes the light and prefers
it dim.



Light Through Life

By Isabelle Eva Sophia Verhaaren Offergaard

Ursuline High School, Year 12, Age 17

My first breath arrived in borrowed light,
Surrounding me in something soft and white,
Letting my eyes wander, unaware
In a quiet room, lit soft and fair.

The soft glow from the windowsill, turned pale,
Replaced by harsh screens I could not curtail.
Every glance in the mirror put me back on the scale,
Dimming lights became my blinding bail.

Seasons changed, and I knew,
A new leaf had turned over.
Echoes of insecurities grew sober,
And I was starting to find what was true.

The light returned, at the sight of your eyes,
A warmth that lived where the darkness lies.
Not harsh like before, nor hard to face,
But something I found in your quiet grace.

You were the yin to my yang,
My safe place.

Suddenly my light was passing,
Folding and thinning, my love everlasting.
No harsh goodbyes, as I was close to death,
My gentle light faded as I took my last breath.

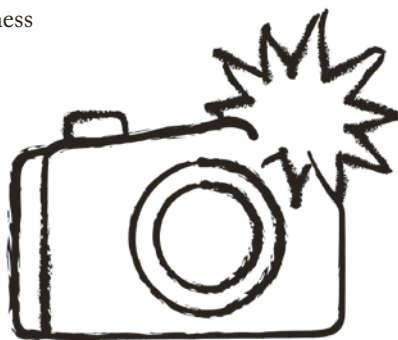
Souvenirs of Life with Hitler

By Theo Sheaf

Tiffin School, Year 13, Age 17

She strides out
Into the bomb-shattered blackness
Camera at her hip
A shield against the shrapnel
The hate

She meets them
On the high ground
Ranged against the enemy
Armed only with
Light



This
The first day of four weeks
Crouched in the dark
Camera weaponised
Against the Nazis

The Auxiliary Territorial Service
Searchlight Operators
Painting the sky
In strokes of light
Illuminating German bombers

Gunners pound the sky
The senses
Breath pools
Against the flank of light
Women's profiles
Vogue's models
Of a world at war

She seals it all
In rooms of dark and light
Careful
Precise

Later
These girls will seem tame cats
To the roaring horrors of Europe

She will photograph

Faces obscured by blood and bandages
Blank stares of the dead and doomed
Whole train carriages filled with bodies
Now sacks of flesh
Mountains of skin and ash and coal

Survivors' skin drawn taut with
Hunger
Desperation
The stench of hope destroyed

Dachau
Napalm
Saint Malo
Buchenwald
Hitler's bathtub

All will annihilate

Those neat
Tidy
Photographs
Of good and evil
Light and dark

If only humanity was so simple

Remember Her Light

By Yaa Asante

St Mark's Church of England Academy, Year 12, Age 16

Remember her
when the mornings felt too early,
when the sky was still dark
and the world had not yet begun.
Remember her
rising quietly,
so no one would hear
how tired she really was.
She did not speak of it,
the weight of waking,
the ache in her bones,
the way rest never stayed long enough.



Remember her
leaving before the sun,
returning only to leave again,
at twelve,
when her day should have ended
but never did.

Remember,
she never called it strength.
She simply lived it.

Remember her
as she once was,
nine years ago,
standing between what she knew
and what she had to become.

She left home
with more courage than certainty,
more hope than safety.
But it was not distance
that tested her most.



Remember
how the hurt came from familiar places,
from sisters,
from cousins,
from voices that should have protected her.
She did not fight them.
She did not break.
She carried it.
Remember the debts
she never named,
the silent calculations,
the nights she chose not to rest
because something had to be paid.
And still,
she gave.
Money sent through banks,
through sacrifice,
through love that asked for nothing back.
Remember,
she was never alone,
yet she carried everything alone.
A mother,
and more than that.
She worked.
She gave.
She kept going.
Even when she lifted others,
even when she brought them closer,
even when it cost her
more than they would ever understand.
And if you remember her tears,
remember them gently.
They were never weakness.
They were truth.
Truth of what she gave,
of what she endured,
of what was taken



and never returned.
But do not remember her
only for what hurt her.
Remember her now.
In the way she stands,
quieter,
stronger,
no longer asking
to be seen.
In the way she protects her peace,
in the way she has learned
to say no
without guilt.
Remember,
she knows her worth now.
Not because the world told her,
but because she survived without it.
And her light,
it was always there.
In every early morning,
in every long shift,
in every moment
she chose to continue.
It was never given to her.
It was never taken away.
It lived in her
when no one noticed,
when no one thanked her,
when no one stayed.
So, remember her
not as someone who struggled,
but as someone who endured.
Not as someone who waited for light,
but as someone who carried it.
And now,
at last,
she sees it too.



One Strange Light

By Azaria Indira Rain Logan-Jones

National Extension College, Year 12, Age 17

Rippling gently, the Venetian Lagoon distorted the orb-like gleam of the streetlights, making it manifest as some strange, transient glitter. Mr Wright felt that the shimmering surface was menacing him, rising surreptitiously with every twinkle; up, up, up with every groan of a gondola. He had a chilling feeling that had spent the evening creeping through every declining limb of his diminutive frame; a feeling that something truly dreadful was going to happen.

“Pull it together, Frank!”

Mr Wright started. “Sorry, Elizabeth dear,” he mumbled to his wife.

His shuffling footsteps quickened; if they could just get back to the hotel, maybe they’d be spared from whatever terrible thing was happening tonight. He wondered if the labyrinthine streets were the means by which it would come about. After all, every passageway was haunted by the restless spirits of those who had died in the ancient city. The small gusts fragmenting the late summer mug felt like a chilling intrusion; he was being stalked, encroached upon by the elusive shadows of the buildings that were being slowly subsumed into a watery tomb - and they were going to drag him with them.



As they stepped into the hotel lobby, Elizabeth felt her husband let out a shaky breath.

“Buonasera. Did you hear about...” the receptionist made an ambiguous gestured, “what is in English? La tempesta...”

Elizabeth felt Frank tremble. She put a hand over his, patting it benignly. “I’m sure it’s nothing-.”

“Most lightning in ye-“

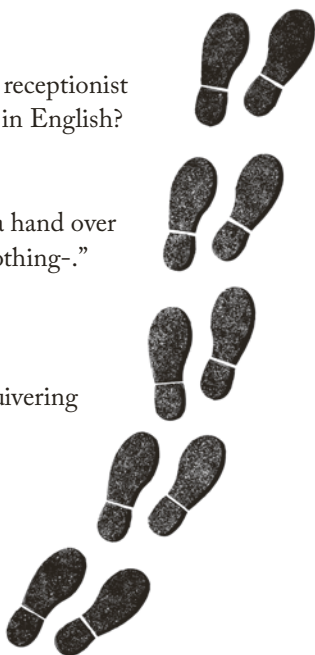
“Buonanotte!” Elizabeth steered her quivering husband across the lobby.

The first thunder had started as soon as they’d arrived in their room, but it had diminuendoed for now, and in this calmer spell Elizabeth had finally gotten Frank to lie down.

“Get some rest dear.” She donned him with an eye mask and ear plugs.

Frank couldn’t see the lightning through the veil of the mask, and the anxiety of the day came crashing down into a wave of fatigue; he was asleep within the minute.

A rumble of thunder piercing through her dream, Elizabeth woke with a start. It was past midnight. Another assault of thunder sounded, close enough that it could’ve come from within the room. Elizabeth clamped her hands over her ears. Frank’s anxiety had taken over her day, and now this was taking over her night. She willed silence.



The Winter After

By Evie Insall

Wimbledon High School, Year 12, Age 17

Tony had bought Mum a lamp when he moved in with us. It was an ugly old thing; long and bony, shaped like a dejected buzzard with its winding walnut body reaching imposingly into the room, searching for freedom beyond its designated living-room corner. Its base was wonky; the left side jutted out higher than the right in a manner that caused the whole thing to tilt as though looking at us quizzically, and the only way I can think to describe the colour of the lampshade is that of a jaundiced frog.

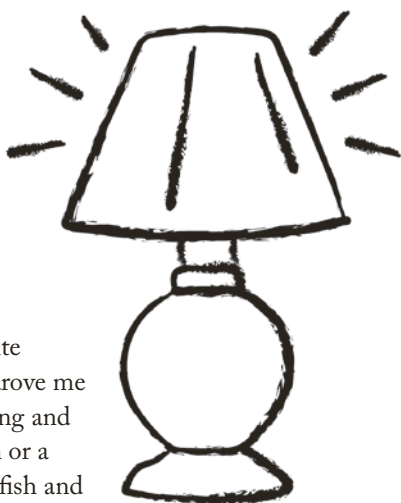
But when Tony stood in the doorway and sheepishly presented it to Mum, she beamed as though it was a diamond ring or a winning lottery ticket. She squealed and hugged him, then rushed to find it a space on the living room carpet between the TV and the cabinet of special-occasion crockery. Tony shuffled up next to me,

“Alright, Freddie?” He asked.

“Yeah, alright.” I gave him an awkward smile.

He handed me a Mars bar behind Mum’s back and put a finger to his lips, grinning.

After that, I decided I really quite liked having Tony around. He drove me to football on a Saturday morning and came back holding an ice cream or a coke, and once we even bought fish and



chips before dinner, 'long as you don't tell your mum.' He'd stand and watch my games and I swear I could hear his individual clapping when I scored; every time I looked over he'd wave and shoot me a thumbs-up. Mum was different, too. I could hear her singing from the kitchen, classic 80s tunes that wound their way up the stairs and filled the house with music like rays of sunlight streaming into an empty room. She stopped crying in the evening when she thought I was asleep and got up before midday; she even started making me toast before school.

Tony was, as Grandad says, a 'doer'. He didn't sit still for long, always moving, always fixing things - soon, the tap wasn't leaking, the back door locked properly, the light stopped buzzing. Our house stopped creaking with the effort of inhabiting us.

But that year we had the kind of February that makes you forget summer exists. The air was grey; clouds hung imposingly in the sky, constantly threatening rain. The tips of my fingers throbbed a dull pink colour from forgetting my gloves as I walked home from school one Thursday afternoon. My eyes were red from rubbing sleep from them all day. Mum and Tony had been shouting last night. Again.

I opened the front door; the house was cold. Mum must've forgotten to put the heating on.

"Mum! What's for tea-" I faltered.

My mum was sat in the shadows on the floor of the living room making a dull groaning noise, shoulders shaking with tears. The lamp was missing from its place in the corner. Tony was gone, and we were in the dark.

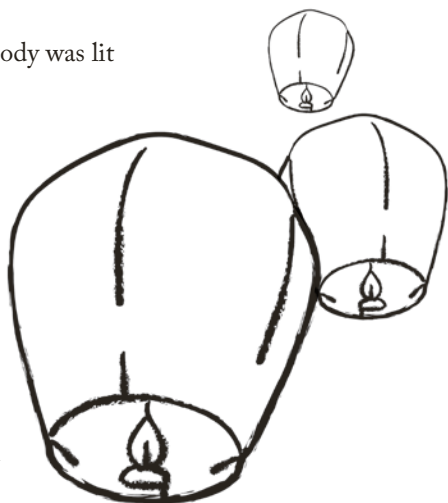
The Light Amidst the Darkness

By Isabella Dallolio

Ursuline High School, Year 12, Age 16

Light filled my vision; my body was lit
with electricity.

The luminous array
of lanterns drifted
rhythmically across the
sky, joy flooding through
my being like a tidal
wave flooding towards
shore, bashing against
the azure, blue waves.
I gazed intensely at the
multitude of lanterns which
shone contrastingly against



the jet-black sky, the body of
light acting as a blessing against the
dark which attempted to conceal its beauty, stripping them of
their hope and promise of eternity. Their crimson red facade
sent hope reverberating within me, floating towards salvation
like a dove floating towards the crystal-clear sky. My soul felt
encapsulated of fascination at the dazzling depiction which
seeped my vision—a multitude of gold, sunshine yellow, burnt
orange—their fire illuminating the despair within me.

“Over here!” my mum called out, my siblings rushing past me.

“I want to put the lantern up!” cried Emma, her pigtails flying
wildly in her hair as she wailed at my mother.

“No, me!” my brother called, shoving past my sister.

“Hey, no shoving, we can do it together” my mum smiled at my
siblings, her smile one which could illuminate a whole town
devoid of light, her forest green eyes the epitome of tranquillity.

"I'll help", I called out to them.

"Okay, you ready?" my mum asked.

"I can help as well", I called out again.

No reply. Only silence.

"Mum?"

"Okay, together, we do this in memory of her."

The crushing of my footsteps against the cobbled ground evoked nothing but the cacophony of silence, my once still heart beating wildly like the roar of a ravenous beast, its rhythmic ticking mimicking the ticking of a clock counting down the seconds until my fate.

I reached to touch my mother; my hand was invisible against her touch.

"In memory of Rebecca."

Rebecca. That was my name.

I reminded myself once more, I was dead.

My presence was no longer there, only one of a walking ghost roaming the earth.

Listening, waiting.

Silent but pervasive.

Slowly, they released me into the night sky.

Taunting me with the memory of my life.

My presence nothing but a ray of light which shines invisibly amongst the darkness.

Darkness filled my vision, my body nothing but a roaming soul devoid of light.

The Light

By James Son

Tiffin School, Year 12, Age 17

Flashes of neon lightning blitz across the sky as a tapestry of silver-slated clouds maraud overhead. The horizon bleeds black, while a dim red cross flickers weakly against the suffocating night. Battered and broken, dark and desperate, the hospital stands like a dying beacon beneath the storm, its crumbling bricks trembling beneath the wrath of the erupting malevolence. Cuts and cleaves, slashes and slices, the hail of rain knives the shuddering windows.

He holds her hand tighter.

The outside beckons with natural explosions, but the room is deathly quiet. A world of deafening echoes outside, but he hears nothing. The silence presses. Enclosed by darkness, her hand is cold to the touch and her breath is fading into the smothering shadows. The room is momentarily brightened by a streak of fluorescence. On the bedside table are photographs bleached soft by the passing sun, while chrysanthemums sag beside them, brittle-stemmed and thirsty, as though the room had long stopped trying to keep them alive. Her eyelids are heavy, she cannot see his face. Only the brief fragments of forced light that flash like shattered stars.

“I’m still here,” he whispers, though he is no longer sure she can hear him.

Another flash whitens the room. For a moment, he sees her as she once was, laughing beneath summer light, gold caught in her hair, her eyes squinted against the sun. Her smile was wide enough to crease dimples into her cheeks, though he had not seen them in so long he had forgotten they belonged to her. The darkness folds back over her again.

He reaches over her frail corpse, flicking on the switch of a lamp. Nothing. Again. The lamp hums faintly between them.

He watches its amber glow tremble across her face. It softens the hollow illness carved into her. Over the thunder he tries to remember the sound of her laughter properly. Not the photographs. Not his dreams. The real thing. Warm and sudden and alive. But every memory feels a stake in the heart as he is impaled by the cruel reality displayed by his eyes. Every time the darkness returns, he prays the light will return differently. Return and illuminate an elaborate illusion, like this is all some cruel joke. Return and see his daughter again.

He holds her hand tighter.

"Please..." he whispers, though he is no longer sure what he is asking for. He knows her time is coming to an end.

The lamp flickers once.

Twice.

Then stills.

Outside, the rain finally begins to ease. Saline drops tear across the windowpane.

Morning light spills weakly through the fractured windowpane, catching the droplets left upon the glass. Colours bloom softly across the room, fractured reds, blurred violets, trembling streaks of gold.

For a moment, the room is full of light again.



Delivering Fuel

By Max Latif

Nonsuch High School, Year 13, Age 18

Just in case the soldiers were out listening, she got off her rattling bicycle once she neared the station. She couldn't ride down to the construction site, what with all the mud, so she abandoned it before entering the quagmire.

Even stepping slowly with her feet angled sideways didn't stop her slipping. Five times she reached out to steady herself, caking her palms in wet slop which she had to remember not to wipe on her clothes. Not that it really mattered: every time she jerked her heel out of the sodden ground, specks of brown sludge would splatter her calf and, often, the hem of her dress, dirtying it anyway. Of all the difficulties she faced delivering supplies, this one got her mother the most worked up of all.

"Hardly worth it for all the extra washing I have to do," she'd say, without fail, every time Aleksandra returned in the middle of the night.

She wondered sometimes, too, whether the fruit she'd picked off the ground was worth the trouble she went through to deliver it. The commandant and his son trampled over so much of it, clip-clopping on their horses.

Would've been nice to lob a few apples at them, she thought when they'd ridden past. Much more exciting than pushing the fruit into mud or emptying her sacks into wheelbarrows, only to be left wondering whether the people in the camp would even be able to get the food down their throats. After all, when her dad had come back from one, he hadn't been able to eat anything other than some bread and soup for ages.

But it seemed like some people were still able to stomach more, because whenever she returned, the fruits of her labour had vanished. So she would return with more sacks slung over her shoulders, leaving food lodged in muddy ditches, piles of wood, or behind shovels dumped in mounds of coal.

That was where she found it, actually. A small treasure sitting among the black rocks; even in the dark, it stood out. She fumbled for the torch in her bag.

Click.

The light bounced off the small tin's surface in an instant, almost blinding her (which would have been hard to explain to her mother, she was sure). But she couldn't resist a look.

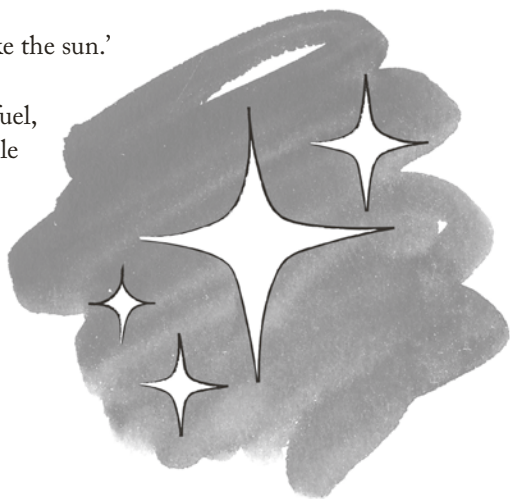
Digging her nail under the lid, she prised it open.

Inside, she found paper. Meticulously folded, but revealing some staves, some notes. There must've been a musician in there, somewhere. She could even make out a line of text, if she squinted.

'Our souls burn just like the sun.'

To burn, they needed fuel,
those who were still able
to live.

So Aleksandra
would not stop
coming back to
deliver the fruit.



Lightning Paradox

By Neriyah Anderson Bailey

Raynes Park High School, Year 12, Age 17

A bolt of lightning passes through the middle of my frame, illuminating my body.

That familiar shrill pierces my ears as my surroundings blur together, reality falling in on itself. Not again, I thought, although I shouldn't have expected otherwise. As the colours blurred together like a child's view of a fast-spinning merry-go-round, I felt myself detach from my body. I felt the last parts of me let go of that life, and a slow-rising pain start to spread through me. I guess I could say, it feels like being slowly skinned alive, but that sounds dumb with my current lack of a physical body. The pain spread to every part of me that remained; it's always that same familiar pain.



Slowly, everything starts to get brighter. Still a blur of colors, but the remnants of that dark field slowly start to brighten. Those dark greens of nature became light greens, and the navy-blue sky became light blue like water swaying against a beach. Then suddenly, it all turns white.

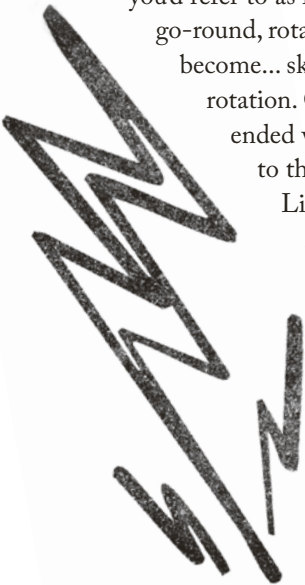
It hurts. It always hurts. The noise of shouting and beeping and screaming. The bold blinding bright white light, which causes that familiar sharp pain to stab through my head. The feeling of being unwillingly moved and handled like a doll. I try to hold it in, I always do, but the high tensions, the noise, the sticky stain feeling, I couldn't take it anymore. I let it out. I let it all out. I try to speak but there's just screams and cries. I shouldn't be

surprised; it's nothing new. I feel a cover of warmth that does little to soothe me, and I slowly descend into what is meant to be comforting protection.

"Do you have a name?"

"Louis. Louis Thompson."

Louis. That's a new one. The pain in my head slowly dies down, allowing me to adjust to my surroundings. Whilst conversation flows around me, the colours and lights of the room become less painful. I can make out the vanilla walls and the blue cover of warmth that surrounds me. Rotation number fifteen, I thought. I guess if anyone else was in my current position, they may be feeling a slight sense of panic. Fear maybe? But after rotation number five, I realized the futility of feeling such emotions.



Rotations. The name I attached to the endless cycles that you'd refer to as life. As I spin endlessly on this Merri-go-round, rotation after rotation, the memories become... skewered. I don't remember my first rotation. Only that it, just like all the others, ended with a bolt of light and circled back to the start. Sounds like a blessing, right? Like you have endless chances? Multiple lives, so many opportunities. I thought so too. Yet it became clear that this wasn't a choice. I am a child on an endless Merri-go-round, and the ride instructor has no intentions on letting me go. I'd say it's not fair, but that's just the way life is, right?

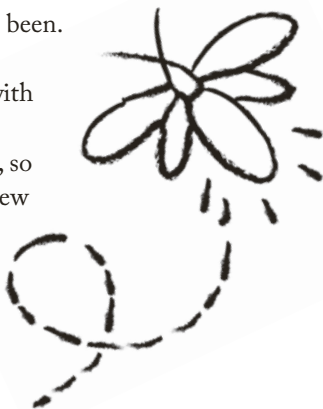
The Soul's Reflection

By Siobhan Woods

Wimbledon High School, Year 12, Age 17

It was the light in her eyes - it always had been.

That tantalising grey light that flickered with each thought that passed through in her mind. The delicate weakness of the colour, so far away yet so close to hand, was what drew him to her. Like the final years of a star twinkling in the heavens, her eyes pulsed with an energy that refused to dim. It was like a beacon, calling to your very being, or a substance unholy to man, a desire you couldn't help but to indulge. Occasionally, when pleasure disturbed it, that grey light would be consumed by the eye of the storm, the black iris in its centre. Her eyes would dilate, and suddenly that light would shrink into the depths of her soul... like now.



He stared into her eyes, confused as to why that light had chosen to disappear. Why, when she was fighting for life itself, would that light decide to retire? The greatest enigma in the world couldn't compare to the nonsensical light of her eyes, the one that drew you in, the one that captivated you, the one that made you want to steal it for yourself. He had... he'd tried to take it, and yet, as he withdrew the knife with a sickening squelch, he realised how worthless it was.

She lurched upwards, blood gushing from the abdominal wound. For a second, just a second, the light in her eyes expanded. Like a scroll unravelling, producing the glint in a scholar's eyes when they acknowledged the truth, no matter how it fought against their every understanding of the world. It

was pure, unconditional, and so heart wrenchingly beautiful, as if the Gods themselves had imbued her eyes with their blood, letting it coagulate in her socket to shine with reckless abandon.

But then it faded like a timid spider crawling away and losing itself to the black ichor of her iris. That grey light slipped away into the abyss from whence it came, whispering out taunts of failure. He snarled, watching that light retreat to the depths of the unknown. Chaos followed, inspired by the claim of power, and her eyelids fluttered over her eyes, trying to steal away that light. Dropping the knife, he reached for her face, refuting her head from lolling to the side. He needed to see that light. Tugging on her eyelashes for her drowsy eyes to open again, he desperately tried to pry into the light within.

Except what he stared at was his own darkness, the one he'd created. It writhed with sinister intentions, reflecting the black of his soul. The light he yearned for... it was no longer there. With each litre of blood that melted from her corporal body and each ragged breath that tore out of her lips, that light dimmed inevitably.

Fading, retreating, dying, until everything was engulfed in a darkness he was familiar with.

AWARDED DISTINCTION POEMS & STORIES

*Special Educational Needs
(SEN) Schools*



POEMS

The poems and stories in this section include entries from SEN units in mainstream schools.

The Light

Ameria-Leigh Smith, Cricket Green School.

Life Light

Hasaan Rehman, Perseid Upper School.

Poem About Light in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

Izzad Hossain, Cricket Green School.

Light

Kallum Jones, Perseid Upper School.

Darkness

Tate Nolan, Cricket Green School.

The LIGHT

Yana Kostenko, Ricards Lodge High School.

STORIES

The Night Light

Amber Ahmad, Ricards Lodge High School.

Orbit of Three Hearts

Asvika Ragulan, Ricards Lodge High School.

The Light

Connor Sibson, Cricket Green School.

The Light

By Ameria-Leigh Smith

Cricket Green School, Year 7, Age 12

My sister is in a dark room.

The light was broken.

I found a bright light in the kitchen draw.

I turned it on and it was really bright.

I turned it off again and put it back in the draw.

I left my sister in the dark room.



Life Light

By Hasaan Rehman

Perseid Upper School, Year 12, Age 16

The light is so beautiful!

Without light there is no life.

Without light we could not have many things...

Like cars.

Poem About Light in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

By Izzad Hossain

Cricket Green School, Year 11, Age 16

The glistening light was shining bright
The kite was pointing to the right
The light was far in sight

The girl's eyes were darkening with fright
As the light was getting darker as it approached night.

The girl was feeling alright.
She saw a rickshaw that was bright in sight.



Light

By Kallum Jones

Perseid Upper School, Year 13, Age 18

Light is bright
Bright as the sun.
The sun shines...
Light angel comes through the sky
The light has many sparkles.

Darkness

By Tate Nolan

Cricket Green School, Year 7, Age 11

It was dark; maybe it's a room with no light?
Maybe my eyes aren't even open, or maybe it's night?
Who knows...

Darkness may be scary, but in the end it won't always be dark.



The Light

By Yana Kostenko

Ricards Lodge High School, Year 7, Age 12

The light can be pretty.
The light can look nice.
You may have felt silly or sad before.
You may also feel ice and harm on your back before.
And before, the will for life would sadly lessen.

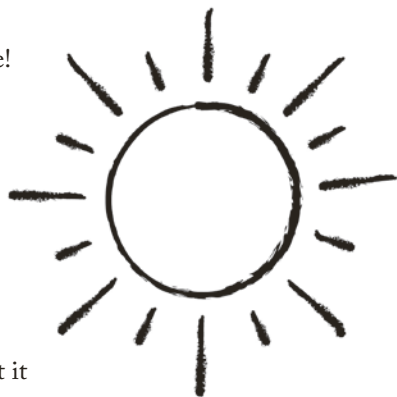
Suddenly you see a glimmer of hope.
It is the light.
Luckily it is here to save you.
You might feel happy at first, but remember there is more.

The light can be your future, friends, family and anyone!
The light can be you for someone.

And for you and me, we can be the light too for even one
person, two or more.

But the light can be even more!
It can be your dream.
And that dream is your
personality. Don't give
up and don't let the light
go away.

Everyone, follow your dream!
And NEVER let yourself or
the hopeful light down, and let it
shine in your heart.



By Amber Ahmad

“Ok class, turn in your papers!”: Miss

“Hey Seana, do you want to go

“Cool,”: Jenny

"Good night, Nutmeg,": Mum

“Should I enter?": Seana

thinking in her head

“Where am I?": Seana thinking

"Sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooannnnnnnnaaaaaaa!"

“AAHHHHHHHHHH!”: In Seana’s head

“Who are you?": In Seana's head

“I am the balance of good and evil, I am the light!”: Light

“I don’t understand,”: Mimed Seana

“Then come with me,”: Light

(Ok)

“Grrrrrrrrreeeeeeeeceaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat, off we goooooo,”:

Light

“This is the embodiment of magic, the magic realm. You can come here with any vessel,”: Light

"Oh! The nightlight," Thought Seana

“Yes, the nightlight. I was stuck in that thing for hours. A vessel can bring someone to the magic realm if it has magic,”: Light

“You can read my thoughts?”: Thought Seana

“Yeah, duh! Anyway, we’re here!”: Light

(Where?)

“Moonlit Island!”: Light

“Ok, so what is wrong?”:

Light

(Nothing!)

“Look kid, I can read
minds AND I SEE
EVERYTHING!”: Light

“Oh, you want to enter
your school’s singing
competition,”: Light



(Yes)

“Well, I’m going to tell you about a song called ‘The Voice.’
You don’t need a sound to be special, and hey, didn’t they forget
to add ‘other more tolerant’? You need to keep the weirdness
and hope in balance. Are you worried that everyone will laugh?
Well, don’t worry, it’s a big graph! Sorry, bad at rhyming but
you get the song,”: Said the Light.

“And you’re about to wake up,”: Light

(What!?)

“Seana, time for school!”: Mom

“Next up, Seana Luner!”: Principal

Tuesday night: Talent show

Dear Diary, I won 2nd place in the talent show and I thought,

“Hey, it’s good.” And I told my friend Jenny about the magic realm and we started going there nearly all the time. And I learned that just because I can’t sing doesn’t mean I can’t do other things. Also, the Light was actually a purple ghost. And we went there by the purple nightlight, and there were so many places to go to like...

Black Market

Lava Falls

The Theatre

And that’s all that happened today. Oh! And Light gave me this machine where I type what I want to say and it says it.

(Back at the magic realm)

“Hi guys,”: Recorded the recorder

“Uh kid, we have a serious problem!”: Light

“What is that!?”: Seana recorded

“The Voodoo King!”: Light

“Well, I’ve dealt with worse,”: Seana recorded

“Are you guys ready?”: Seana recorded

“Yeah!”: Light and Jenny

(AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!)

To be continued...

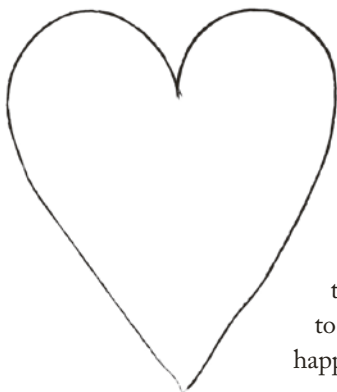
Orbit of Three Hearts

By Asvika Ragulan

Ricards Lodge High School, Year 9, Age 14

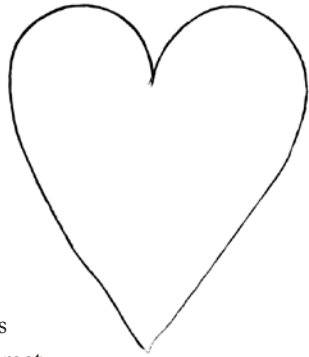
Long ago, there lived the Royal families called Izarras and the Qamars. These families always had disputes and disagreements with each other since the beginning of time. They travelled into the light of the Milky Way to get away from the tensions, only to find out both families were here and it led to a big brawl. Lord Izarra and Lord Qamar wanted to join the fight, but they couldn't because it would only make matters worse. So their wives stopped the battle by shooting a flare for peace. Everyone stopped and returned to their homes, wishing for this rivalry to end and for both two families to work together.

Meanwhile Arcturus was trying to find his sister Capella. Before the battle started she ran away crying in sadness. He found her in the Andromeda Galaxy talking to one of her friends about what happened. Turns out that Capella loves him but Rigel only sees her as a friend, what's worse, Rigel likes someone else and is engaged!



In order to cheer her up Arctutrus told her that the Qamars are throwing a party to celebrate the glory days. Arcturus said, "Forget about him and find someone else." Capella said, "Fine I'll go. Are you happy now?" So they went to the House of Qamar and found many people talking about their daily lives, many people went to the dance floor expressing their happiness and excitement.

That's when she saw a man who gave off an alluring vibe, he had heterochromia, one eye that's blue and the other was green. His eyes shined like a beautiful, transparent marbles. Capella asked the servant, "Who is that beautiful crystal?" the servant said, "What are you talking about?" and Capella said, "Wait, is he Rigel's cousin?" She remembered that they met when they were little children. Io noticed her and asked her, "Will you dance with me Miss..." "Capella" she said. Io said, "That's a beautiful name you have." So he took her hand and went into the spotlight, the crowd was watching them as they danced away in the harmonious melody.



Io quickly ran outside while holding Capella's hand, they were in the Garden of Life underneath the tree in a starry night. As they gazed into their eyes they knew, they finally found their equal. But they were interrupted by the daughter of the Suriyans, her name was Kanali, she said, "What are you doing to my fiance?" Capella forgot that the Qamars and the Suriyans made an engagement pact to unite them as one. Kanali immediately took Io's hand and slapped Capella on the face for her behaviour. "You think you can do whatever you want don't you?" Kanali said. Then Io said, "You know what screw this I'm calling off our engagement Kanali. The truth is I don't like you because of your arrogant behaviour! Come on Capella, let's go to the light of the Milky Way." What will happen to our lovers? To be continued...

The Light

By Connor Sibson

Cricket Green School, Year 11, Age 16

There once was a boy called Frederick Cross who lived in a small town in the 1870's, 10 years before the light bulb was invented. So Frederick decided to go and look and try to make light. He was walking out in the old muggy Victorian street, he saw an odd-looking rock on the side of the walkway so he picked it up just because that's what Frederick did.

Once he got home he looked more closely at the rock and found out that it glowed and had magic powers! So he somehow harnessed the power from the rock and then he could make light come out of his body whenever he wanted it to. So he made a business where people paid him to light up and he was the first ever person who had superpowers.



Participating Secondary Schools 2026

Ark Walworth Academy	Putney High Senior School
Ashcroft Technology Academy	Raynes Park High School
Chestnut Grove Academy	Ricards Lodge High School
Coombe Boys' School	Rutlish School
Cricket Green School	Saint Cecilia's Church of England School
Greenshaw High School	Shrewsbury House School
Harris Academy Wimbledon	Southfields Academy
Haydon School	St Mark's Church of England Academy
Ibstock Place School	Streatham & Clapham High School
Jo Richardson Community School	The Holy Cross School
King's College School	Tiffin School
La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School	Tolworth Girls' School & Sixth Form
Lilian Baylis Technology School	Ursuline High School Wimbledon
Luton Sixth Form College	West Hatch High School
Marymount International School London	West London Free School
National Extension College	Wimbledon College
Nonsuch High School for Girls	Wimbledon High School
Perseid Upper School	Woodmansterne School & Sixth Form



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WIMBLEDON BOOKFEST

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THE LIGHT

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