



KS4 WINTER

# Showcase

THE MARLBOROUGH SCIENCE ACADEMY  
THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

## *Karl Beirne - The Woods.*

His heart raced as he sprinted through the forest trying not to trip on snow or other small objects. He had never run so fast in his life. As the adrenaline kicked in, he wondered if he would get out alive.

He ran, not caring he was covered with snow and freezing; he was desperate to find civilization even though he knew no one could help. What was chasing him was a beast – a monster unlike anything he had seen before.

He started to realise he was freezing but that just encouraged him to run more "what if I don't make it?" he thought over and over, the worry he was going to die was overwhelming as he was filled with dread for what was to come.

Finally, to his astonishment the trees started to thin. He sped up hoping to see anyone – anyone who could help but his heart sank as he saw a seemingly endless field, he was empty inside.

He had never felt this helpless in his life "surely if I run, I will not make it. I will make it. I must.. It will catch me on the field." he thought to himself as the field approached. He did it anyway, running faster than he had ever in his life, he bolted as fast as he could across the field and made it back into the treeline.

He didn't know he could be so happy to be back where his worst fears thrived. Finally, he saw light through the trees. He ran to the light as he arrived at a small village, he looked back in the light of fire the winter cold almost killed him as he stared into the treeline, he heard a rustle, but nothing was there.

## *James Roux - A Night To Remember.*

On the first Saturday of the Christmas holidays, a group of Year 11 boys trekked to the woods to build a bonfire and share Christmas tales. They set out just as the dusk was setting with only a phone for a torch, a bag of marshmallows, backpacks and a bottle of coke. Everyone was laughing and joking as they crunched over the autumn leaves on the forest floor. All except Charlie, who was even afraid of his own shadow.

He was silent and the first of them to notice that small snowflakes were falling. He tugged at his best friend's coat, "Sammy, Sammy, it's beginning to snow! Look!" Charlie begged but Sammy was too busy kicking sticks across the ground. John had gone ahead to look for a good place to build the campfire, whereas Jack was trying to climb a tree which had branches sticking out of it.

"Guys, guys I can see a weird building over there. We should check it out!", shouted Jack from the high branch of an oak tree. The boys below shook their heads and ran over to where John had found a clearing with logs to rest on. Jack soon joined them and together they built a reasonably successful fire. Their weekly meetings at Scouts when they were young was beginning to pay off. The fire lasted long enough for them to toast their marshmallows but as more snow fell, the cinders started to sizzle. Now there was a fine blanket of snow covering the whole clearing.

John noticed, "The flakes are getting bigger hey! I think they're falling faster too." Sammy suggested they should head back home before the snow got too thick.

Shivering Charlie moaned, "I'm freezing over here. Let's get out of here". As they headed back into the forest, they realised their phone's torch didn't have a very long radius, so they could only see one tree in front of them. By then the snow was so heavy the tree's canopy could not hold it any longer and soon the forest floor was white as a snow leopard. The boys started to run to dodge the snow bombs falling from the sky.

After a few minutes Sammy shouted, "Guys, I'm knackered. I can't keep running" Charlie agreed and all four slowed down. Now they were all freezing and soaked to the bone. Through the trees, Jack spotted the old building he had seen from the oak, and he pointed breathlessly for the others to see.

"Look, let's go in there for a bit to warm up and rest," he declared and headed towards it without waiting for their reply. As they approached, the building became more daunting. There was barbed wire around the building and a threatening sign over the entrance. "St Michael's Asylum: Private. No Entry". Sammy realised all the windows were covered in bars and there was no visible light inside. But that didn't stop Jack from waltzing into the building.

# *James Roux - A Night To Remember.*

Everyone walked inside the Asylum except for Charlie. He was a bit hesitant, but it was freezing in the snow, so he opted to go in anyway. "Wait for me!", he shouted as he quickly darted into the deserted building.

Despite it being cold and dark inside, it was still better than the plummeting temperatures outside. As they moved through the hallways, it seemed very ominous and eerie, but they decided to set up camp here and stay for a bit. Fortunately, as they walked in, they used their phone flashlights to see and look around. There was a huge hallway right after the entrance, so they decided to start a campfire with the leftover sticks John put in his backpack if they needed a second fire.

Everyone was getting warmer and stopped shivering after a while. However, there was still a problem, the whole hallway was still dark and gave an unsettling feeling because it was pitch black and seemed to have no end in sight. So as expected, Jack decided to search and explore the hallway with his phone torch to find a light switch or an electricity source. "Anyone wanna join me to go find a light switch?" he said, but everyone was too scared and kept silent. Jack took the uncomfortable silence as a no and without hesitation - again - he walked off into the abyss.

A few hours passed and the wind was howling through broken windows and soon they couldn't hear his footsteps anymore. When he didn't return, the group started to get increasingly worried. Did he get lost? Did he get hurt? Perhaps his phone battery ran out because he wasn't answering. So, they all decided together to go look for him.

They inched down the ghostly passage, huddled tightly together. Charlie was visibly petrified and shook uncontrollably. It was like his worst nightmare come true. John noticed his friend's distress and tried to reassure him, "Don't worry, Charlie, I bet Jack is trying to scare us. He is always pulling pranks like this". Sammy frowned but nodded his head in agreement just for Charlie's sake. The truth was, John also had a bad feeling about this, as it has been such a long time since Jack left them.

Suddenly their flashlight reflected off something shiny and sticky on the floor. John bent down to touch it. To his horror he realised it could be blood, but he didn't want to cause panic until he knew for certain. They edged forward and the sound of gnawing was growing louder. John lifted the light and what they saw didn't make sense at first, but the longer they stared at the harrowing scene, it became unsettlingly clear. Hunched over Jack's mangled body was a human-like figure devouring his victim's torso.

Charlie let out a blood curdling scream and didn't wait for any cues to start running. John and Sammy joined him instinctively...and so did the attacker. They could hear his heavy, fast-paced footsteps behind them catching up far quicker than they expected. Simultaneously they burst through the doors leading into the asylum. Not even the deep snow was going to stop them from running for their lives. After about 10 minutes, John dared to look back and realised

# *James Roux - A Night To Remember.*

that they weren't being followed any longer. He called out for them to stop, and they struggled to catch their breath.

What just happened? Did they just witness a murder? Is Jack really dead? All they knew was that they had to get to safety. Charlie could feel a panic attack brewing, his body was shaking, his heart was pounding, and he couldn't control his breathing. John grabbed his shoulders and said over and over "Charlie, Charlie, Charlie!"

Charlie bolted upright, sweating, and scanned the room. Everyone was staring at him, when Sammy said "I think you were having a bad dream, Charlie. Are you OK? You must have fallen asleep while we were telling all our favourite Christmas tales". A wave of relief flooded Charlie's entire body as he realised none of it was true and across the fire sat his friend, Jack. They finished the marshmallows, put out the fire, packed up and made their way out of the derelict building. Trudging through the snow, Charlie looked back at the sinister asylum and saw a figure staring at them from a top window. He shook his head and looked again, and the figure was gone. Was he just imagining things, or... was the dream a warning?

# *Lindsey Hagger - The Tale Of The Christmas Ghoul.*

“What have you done!”

This isn't any ordinary Christmas story, I learnt that the hard way. There were no Christmas carols, no turkey, well not the kind you would imagine and no fun. The date was the 22nd of December - only three days till Christmas when...

“Jack, get down here now!” Jack grumpily plods his feet slowly down the stairs.

“Breaking news, boy goes missing.”

“Jack, don't you know that boy? Doesn't he go to your school? “

“Isn't he the farmer's boy? “Utters mum

Jack nods slowly before leaving the room. Unknown to what perks right underneath his nose.

Suddenly, a car screamed to a halt. Jack ran out the house ,there was no driver. Jack had never seen a ghost but, there's always a first time for everything. Jack's neighbours, the Johnstons, are always out at night they have a son about Jack's age he only goes to school when it's cold and wet never when its sunny everyone calls him weird and says he's probably at home asleep in his coffin.

It's only a joke but, what if it is not. A phone rings distracting Jack from his chain of thought as he ran into the house to answer it. “Hello?” one was there. “Hello?” Jack hung up suddenly and all the lights began to flicker.

“Whoosh!” a

A strange sound appears from nowhere sending shivers down Jack's spine. He can smell a lit cigar; a figure emerges before disappearing into the unknown. Jack steps back, he falls far, far down further than anyone has ever fallen, deeper than anyone has ever dug.

Goose bumps forming all over his arms and legs. He's been grabbed; it's the same man who held the cigarette. He has long sharp pointy fingers, he's tall and skinny. Jack screams. something grabs him by the arm. There's no one there, his hand was floating.

All Jack can hear is music as he enters the room ,there was a violin, lay there on its back on the bare floorboards.

“Bong,Bong.Bong!” A clock stood tall alerting Jack of the time. He must find a way to go home. Jack wished he could go back, back to the neighbourhood where Christmas is the same every year.

He was thrown into a chair. A girl appears her eyes glow showing Jack's parents. Dad just sat there and cried Jack had been missing for three days. His face was blotchy and his eyes where red. Mum was talking to the police. The police think the missing boys and Jack's case are connected.

# *Lindsey Hagger - The Tale Of The Christmas Ghoul.*

In a blink of an eye, Jack found himself in the most unpredictable of places, the Johnston's house. How did he get here when he fell down a hole? A boy emerges; it's the missing boy from the farm. He seems lost Jack whispers "help". The boy turns around before hearing someone's feet scuffing down a long corridor and running.

Will they ever find Jack? Or, is this the worst Christmas story around?

# *The Tremendous Toad- Archie Sparshott .*

Once upon a time there was a young boy. He lived in the middle of the forest with his mum and his dad. He was an inquisitive and curious child and was home-schooled; he didn't have many friends. In his free time, he would always go out into the snowy wilderness.

He woke up one day feeling especially adventurous, so he jumped out of bed and stepped into his slippers. He sprinted downstairs whilst snatching his thick winter coat of the banister and throwing his fluffy scarf around his neck. He arrived at the front door, kicked off his slippers, and placed his feet into his tough winter boots. The boy bounded out the door like a kangaroo, touching the trees with his freezing fingertips and the snow crunching underneath his feet like bubble wrap.

He discovered a stone bridge sprinkled with snow and a luscious river flowing below. The child grasped a small twig in his hand and threw it high in the air, then he watched it flow down the stream faster than a spooked deer. He then carried on his stroll deeper and deeper into the frosty flora, eventually discovering a tiny pond layered with thick ice. He then gathered various sticks and stones and wandered back to the pond. First, he tried to throw the sticks, which didn't work. However, he then tried the snow-covered stones, he was successful! Although he realised, he was only making small holes and was losing his stones. So, he held the rock tightly in his hand and pounded the ice numerous times until he made a big, gaping hole.

To his surprise the pond was filled with life despite the fact it was frozen over. A big trout leaped out the pond onto the ice, he rushed to pick it up and hold it, he was exploding with excitement. He had caught a huge fish with his bare hands, no rod, no line, no net, just his hands. He dipped it into the water for a few seconds then quickly realised it would probably die over the course of winter so walked over to the river, careful not to drop the slippery fish and watched as the monster of a fish swam downstream with immense power.

He returned to the pond again to see if he could find anything else, as he was taking a closer look at the pond, he realised a humongous eye staring at him he took a few steps back in panic and a beast of a creature leaped out, scampering across the ice. He decided to help it as it was stuck trying to get off the wet cold ice. The way he chose to help this toad was to make a leash type item using vines plucked from the trees and his ability to tie strong knots. He slowly and warily stepped over to the metre high toad and placed the leash around its neck and pulled as hard as he could, with all his power, all his strength, all his might he pulled it out of the slippery ice with a stumble. He was in utter awe at the size of this gargantuan amphibian, he walked over to its huge snout and slowly pulled the leash of the beast and stroked its snout with his cold hand. Its snout is warm and bumpy covered with warts and different shades of brown.

He ushered the toad to follow him as he had an activity to do with this amphibian utilising its tremendous power. He gave an example to the toad and crafted a snowball by rolling it on the ground. The toad understood and started pushing the snow around with his head like a bulldozer, eventually creating a snowball twice the size of the boy. Whilst the toad was rolling



# *The Tremendous Toad- Archie Sparshott .*

around the second snowball, the intelligent young child thought ahead and gathered big logs and vines. He returned to the half-completed snowman again and put together a ramp and pushed it onto the abnormally large snowball and the toad and he thrust the snowball on top of the other. The boy then made a running leap onto the snowman holding onto it like a koala, then placed two branches on either side of the snowman and a carrot (which he found while gathering logs). Finally using a vast range of pebbles in the shape of a curve to form a smiley face.

It was getting dark. However, he wanted the toad to have a warm shelter for the rest of the winter months where he could come and visit him. The two spent hours pushing logs, sticks and twigs against a straight low tree branch, then they gathered multiple types of soft leaves and placed them at the bottom of the shelter. Finally, the boy said his goodbyes to his newly found pet toad and laid logs on the way home so he could find the shelter once again

# *Winter by Oliver Tomlins.*

I feel his forehead. Cold. Another victim has been infused; not dead yet, just suffering.

"He's cold" I say looking up at Onyx.

"It's too late to do anything for him now. He's in pure torture and it'll only get worse 'till he dies."

"We should put him out of his misery. Shouldn't we."

Onyx gave me a slight nod of assent.

"It feels so wrong though - Killing them. You know what I mean" I choke trying to hold back tears.

"I know but at this stage it's nothing more than killing a primal, wild animal whose suffering. It's the best for them."

"C- Can you, do it?" I ask, holding out my knife.

He takes it from me. I take a couple of steps away from the body and divert my eyes. I may not see anything but if I make it through this, I won't have a peaceful night again. I wait for Onyx to come over to me after he's finished the deed. I hear a squelching sound and then the boy's moaning ceases with a long sigh. Onyx slowly makes his way over to me wiping my knife as he goes. He puts it back in my sheath and pulls me into an embrace.

"It's going to be ok. Don't worry. We'll get through this." He wipes the tears from my cheeks with his thumb and plants a kiss there. "Right now, we need to find some food and supplies, or we'll die before the frost gets us." He takes my hand, and we start down the street towards the next town.

The frost has been here for a fortnight now. A cold wind blows through a group of people and within seconds one of them is on the floor and their body temperature rapidly starts dropping. Many victims of this have said it feels like they have been stabbed through the chest and feel like the cold is spreading from there; therefore we call it getting infused. Unless you manage to keep their temperature high enough, they will be past the point of return in about 3 minutes. Most people start groaning and moaning from the pain they are experiencing. From there it just gets worse and worse; first they lose any sensation in their body, then they lose their smell, then their hearing, then their sight. Finally, their tongue feels like it turns to ice; at this point all of their bodily fluids become poisonous to everyone else - by this I mean that if you get any of it on you, you will become infused with the frost. After this, they lose all sanity and become uncontrolled and more animal than human.

After about 15 minutes of walking, we reached the next town. Onyx knocks on the door. We get no response. We look at each other; both of us thinking the same thing. We both shove our shoulders into the door, breaking the lock and getting us in. I can hear some indistinct moaning in the house.

"More victims in there who are obviously suffering" I say what we are both thinking.

"I'll put an end to their suffering. You stay here. I don't want you going through more of this than you have to."

## *Winter by Oliver Tomlins.*

I offer him the blade again. But he pushes it away.

“Don’t need it. I have my gun,” he says tapping his belt. “And I want you to have the blade for defence.”

“Ok. Stay safe” He kisses my forehead and goes in.

Not long after he’s gone, a little girl comes towards me - dragging herself along the floor - obviously cold. She is in buckets of tears and starts begging me to help. I felt her head. It was too late.

“I’m sorry. I can’t help you,”

“Pleeeeeease!” she cried between sobs.

“I- I can’t do anything. It’s too late. Y- You are going to die”

“I’m cold. Please can you do something” her eyes stop rapidly darting around me and settle on my knife.

“Please?”

I pull out the blade and think for a second. She looks at me longingly. I close my eyes and push the blade towards her. Squelch. A sigh of relief.

I slowly crack open my eyes and see her in a pool of blood on the floor and my bloody knife in my hand. I drop it in fear and regret. Any slight chance of a good night's sleep has gone forever now. I hear Onyx call me from the house, so I run in - trying to get as far away from the corpse as possible - and find him in the kitchen. He can see the obvious trauma on my face, so he pulls me into his arms on the floor and asks about what happened. I explain between my fits of crying. He holds me and rubs my back reassuringly.

After a while in each other's arms, the shutters on the house start rattling and the door blows open. We both get to our feet and look at each other. Then it comes. The frost wind blows through the house and surrounds us.

“ONYX!” I scream. I can’t see him. The wind leaves the house, and the shutters go silent. We both grab hold of each other. He’s cold.

“I got you Onyx. Please stay with me. We can keep you warm. PLEASE!” I grab him and try to hug some warmth into him.

“Ow. The blade. It’s no use.” he mumbles to me, his teeth chattering. I don’t want to admit it to myself, but he’s gone too far; it’s too late. I hold him for a few seconds as he gets colder and colder.

“Go. Please save yourself.” Onyx pleads.

“I’m staying here with you.” and go to kiss his mouth but he pushes me away.

“Don’t. You’ll only kill yourself too.”

“I don’t care. If you die, there is no point in me staying alive in this dystopia without you.” We stare into each other's eyes for a moment and then we kiss. His tongue goes cold and then I feel it. Cold.

We’ll sit there for eternity now - Locked in each other’s arms, lips interlaced, eyes staring at each other. The sensation in my body goes. I feel my control going. My thoughts slow. My brain power fades. I’m gone. The cold infuses me; His cold infuses me.

# *The first snow - Robyn Goh*

The brisk wind roars against my ears as I stand here alone, no one in sight. I reminisce how I lived, how I listened and watched the world wasting away to the grasp of greed. I have been waiting for something to tear me out of this trance that I'm stuck in, it's a whirlpool pulling me under, I'm losing my breath, reality slipping through my fingers. My mind is foggy, the silence rings in my ears. The emptiness of the world around me draws me in closer, closer, closer.

I feel like I'm being pushed out of a plane, no parachute falling faster, faster, faster. I can't breathe. I'm being swallowed by the unknown.

My body tingles, a familiar sensation. It brings me back to before, before I had nothing, when what feels like, everything now, was right in front of me, my friends, my family, my home, my own existence. I feel like a blank piece of paper, I constantly question myself.

I feel the same tingles on my face, they resemble snow.

I haven't felt something so real in what feels like aeons.

Is it real?

I close my eyes and wait for something, GIVE ME SOMETHING, I have been here for so long I am losing my mind, my eyes are deceiving me.

A warm glow hits my face, a light is being shone at me. A bustling sound is found around me. Constant chatter. A siren rings in my ears.

I'm scared.

I fade in and out of consciousness; what's happening right now!

I feel like I'm being pushed on some kind of bed, it's rolling. The tingles hit my face once again, but this time it hurts, I haven't felt pain in so long. It feels like a foreign substance is being injected into my body, it's refreshing. It pulls me out of the water. Maybe this is real.

My mind is foggy, my ears are ringing, I am actually alive for once.

The fog clears and I remember it all. It was cold, I was with my family. I saw the first snow of the season. I went outside and crossed the road.

Marielle Pollard - Bright lights came rushing toward me.

## *Winter by Marielle Pollard .*

Mary sat by the frosty window in her kitchen, it was Christmas Eve, and she wasn't excited for the day after. She knew nobody and nobody knew her. It was just her and her thoughts celebrating Christmas together this year.

She reminisced about past Christmases' when she had family and friends to spend it with. A tear trickled down her face and she shivered. 'Anything,' she thought, 'anything and everything I would give to have my life back.' She looked towards the weakly lit fireplace and sighed; she would have to restock the wood. A breath of cold air tickled her face from the gap underneath the front door, she pulled her coat on and started walking in the wintry night.

Further down the road, she knew there was a friendly house - she didn't know the people who owned it but maybe they would be kind enough to let her in. Just five minutes longer than she'd get to her destination. She reached into her pocket and found the purple quality street. Mary carefully prised open the wrapper, ate the chocolate and twisted the purple plastic around her finger and it resembled a miniature wine glass. 'Cheers,' she said to the wind, and it whistled in reply.

The pleasant cold air was turning into bitter cold air that ate away at her warmth. Soon, she would freeze. Her walk changed to a jog, and she made her way down the road fighting the unexpected blizzard. The house was just in sight, and she could smell the sweetest smell of home baked mince pies and she couldn't resist quickening her jog.

'Ouch,' she exclaimed. 'What the hell was that?' Looking towards her feet, she saw that her ankle had been trapped in a tree root attached to a rope and that the only way to set it free was to find where the rope began, which led into a forest. Her foot wriggled free from under the tree root but the rope had somehow gotten tied around it. Whilst cutting her hands on a couple of dead rose bushes, she clambered through the trees to find the beginning of the rope. Ten minutes had passed until she realised, she had gone too far, she couldn't see where she had come from nor the lit-up house. Exhausted, she sat down, shut her eyes, and tugged the rope once more. It came loose. The branch it was attached to hit her with such force, it nearly knocked her out. When she regained the strength to sit up, she examined it and to her surprise it said something.

It told her that she was living in a vicious cycle of lonely Christmases in the year 1967 and that this is how she died 23 years ago. It told her that all the people she knew plotted to send her here to the lit-up house and set up this trap and that each time the cycle starts the Christmas spirit rewrites and changes last cycle's note. It told her that her killers didn't write a note because when the branch hit her head 23 cycles ago in 1967, it killed her. It told her that she had once been a very spiteful person who hated Christmas and didn't deserve anything, but the people she knew treated her with fake respect to keep her alive until the day came: Christmas eve of 1967.

She glanced up at the night sky and she swore she saw a winking face. Seconds later, she was gone, ready to start her fatal journey all over again.

## *A Winter Mystery by Freddie Law.*

Darkness. Mystery. Trust. The vast, towering trees loomed over him like a demon in disguise. He cowers, in fear of the terrors in the darkness, solitary and afraid. A single, cold bead of sweat trickles down his spine, the hairs across his body standing tall in formation like soldiers ready to fight. Tim's heart beats at incredible speeds, echoing throughout the desolate forest. Then something changes, too quick for him to see, something bright and beautiful, but overpowering and controlling of all. He shivered. Blinking the mixture of sweat and tears out of his eyes, he started doubting everything he had done so far. His journey. His purpose.

Tim awoke one bright and crisp morning as the sun peeked over the clouds, exposing itself to the rest of the world. He loved this time of year - not too cold that it's snowing but warm enough that he can still go out and do normal things with his hat and gloves. When they let him out. Life had been tough since the day he lost his sister - she was the only thing that made him happy, his parents certainly didn't. If only he knew where she was, what she was doing, when she was coming home. If she comes home. He stepped out of bed, trying as hard as he could not to fall backwards and go back to sleep as tempting as it was.

The smells of pastries wafted around the house, the kind of smell that can instantly give a person happiness. Unless you know you won't be allowed to eat any. Wandering down the stairs with half shut, sleepy eyes, he tripped on a shoe. "OUCH!" , he cried in pain holding his shin. The one thing he hated about wooden stairs - they hurt the most to fall on as a child or in his case 15-year-old lazy teenagers. But that's when he noticed it. Something he'd never noticed before, something that was pulling him closer, reeling him in like a fish. A single wooden panel. A different shade of beige, smoother and not something you could sell at an antiques auction like the rest of the house.

That night crept by. He couldn't sleep- well he didn't even try to but that was the least of his worries. What was a strange wood panel doing on the side of the staircase and, something even more baffling to Tim, how had he never seen it before? Sitting up, he put on a T- shirt and headed for the door. Tiptoeing across the creaky floor, he reached the panel. A shot of nerves fired through his body shaking every cell on his skin. He put a hand between the two pieces of wood and pulled as hard yet quiet as he could. Tugging and yanking with all his strength for five minutes at least, he heard a sound. At the time he couldn't identify it; it was too discrete for most to hear. But not Tim. His eyes darted around the house; he couldn't let his parents know what he was doing - what if they knew the truth? His shoulders relaxed and he took a deep breath, assuming it was just a mouse. With one final heave, he opened the gap. Reaching for his pocket for his phone, his only source of light, he took one final check for anyone. Still fumbling in his pocket for a light he felt something, a hand from someone pushing him. He fell into the gap.

The moon glistened through the gaps in the trees. What was this? A hidden forest inside of the house. Slapping himself across the face and throwing snow at himself he trembled with fear. Where was he? Why is this in his house? Deja vu struck. He remembered something, what he was seeing, he always thought of it as a dream he had as a child. But was it a dream? In fear, he started to walk, trying to find anything to help him. Then he heard it. A scream, a cry, a human, or animal - but it was a noise, and a noise gave him hope. It sounded strangely familiar, almost as if he knew the sound before but had no recollection of where and when. That's when it clicked. His sister. He ran as fast as his legs would carry him towards the direction of the sound - towards hope. A fast-flashing light nearby shone, quickly lighting up a figure. A person, a creature he didn't know. But nothing could be any worse, so he slowed his pace and walked on towards it.

# *How The Grinch Stole Christmas by Austin Bone.*

It was the night of Christmas eve. Children anxiously wait for the morning, parents hoping for more than 6 hours of sleep and an evil soul living at the top of the tallest mountain for the eye can see. This heartless being is a green, furry creature. He goes by the name of the Grinch. At a young age he was forgot about Christmas. As an orphan his adoptive parents forgot about him. Not even spending any time with him. This left him heartbroken, hating anything to do with Christmas. That night the Grinch came up with the idea to steal Christmas from Hertfordshire.

The Grinch planned all night to ruin everyone's Christmas. Many impractical ideas. His first idea was to dig under all the houses and take all the presents and decorations. The next was to set all the houses on fire, however he didn't want to hurt anyone. The next pay for others to steal and destroy people's presents. The grinch didn't have much money. Finally, he decided to sneak in through chimneys, take what he wants then to leave. Finally, a plan to ruin Christmas.

At the strike of dawn, the Grinch left to complete his master plan. He visited every house taking everything from under every tree, every stocking, and every decoration. He got back to his lair by 6am. Mission accomplished. Every family came downstairs to find no tree and no presents. The grinch was thrilled that he had finally won.

The grinch decided to visit Hertfordshire to see what people thought. When he arrived, he was surprised to see families laughing and joking with each other. They don't look upset in the slightest. This made the grinch wonder what he could've done to destroy Christmas. Then it finally hit him. Christmas isn't about the presents or the decorations. It's about spending time with family. The grinch went back to his mountain never to bother anyone again

# *Short story on the theme of winter by Matilde De Sousa.*

Winter is a very significant time for families, not only because of the main holiday of all year, but also because of the great time it is for families to bond and spend quality time together at Christmas gatherings. That's what all Christmases are like with my family, spending all winter together feeling cosy and eating all our traditional Christmas foods. However, this year was different, grandma and grandpa didn't come round, the neighbours did not bring round their delicious desserts, it all just felt so different, and i wasn't enjoying it.

That year everything had felt off, even my birthday. I was at my friend's house all day long on my birthday, which was strange since it's always been the other way around. I wasn't sure what was going on, I waited for Christmas to see if things were truly wrong, they were. Mum didn't have that huge smile from ear to ear, and dad didn't make his amazing food. It was New Year's Eve, and I still didn't know what was wrong, I didn't want to ask either, it may cause trouble for my family. I had spent all year long watching my family change and drift apart, I couldn't take it any longer, I had to ask what was going on. So, I did, and no, I didn't get the usual response, 'Oh there's nothing wrong, why?', I got the "Oh we've been waiting for you to ask." Which worried me even more.

We were in the car coming back from watching the New Year's Eve fireworks, the whole car ride was silent and there was so much tension in the air that I felt as if I was getting pushed to the ground. I would have spoken to clear the air, although I knew I wasn't going to get any answers until we were back home. Once we finally got back home, I surprisingly didn't sit down for a 'talk', I went to bed as if nothing had happened. I didn't think anything of it as I thought they may not be ready to tell me yet, however looking back I should have questioned it more. The following morning, I got up and noticed a note on my bedside table. I decided to look. On the piece of paper there is a number and some writing that says, 'only call this number if you're in danger'. Everything felt so strange. My head was starting to hurt only thinking about what this meant. I then decide to get out of bed and walk out of my bedroom. I go downstairs calling my parents, who aren't here. My head starts thinking more and more each second, thinking of the worst, thinking of the impossible, there wasn't one thing I hadn't thought of happening.

I knew, I knew I shouldn't, but I did. I ran up the stairs, grabbed my phone and called the number. It rings. And rings. And rings some more. Until it stops, a deep but quiet voice says, "Do not worry you are not in danger." And ends the call.



# *Poppy Neill by A Christmas.*

The flames flickered as I sipped my hot chocolate and peered through the half adjacent window to see the snow that seemed to settle in such a beautiful manner. The Christmas movie had just finished, and I had never felt so relaxed, and I was so looking forward to Christmas day which was only 3 days away. As I was reaching for the remote, the tree took my breath away with its glistening tinsel and elegant decorations.

My family and I were so proud of it this year, as well as my family on the other side of the world when I posted it on the family group chat! Gifts upon gifts were stacked on top of each other waiting to be ripped open at any moment: and Father Christmas had not even arrived yet!

My younger sister kept getting caught having a sneak peek trying to see what I had got her, but she never knew! Scrolling through all the festive movies felt like a chore as I could not pick, yet I decided to watch elf as it was a comfort movie for me as I had grown up watching it: Maggie the puppy came trotting into the living room and felt the massive wave of heat and decided to curl up on my lap, meaning she soon fell asleep and snored. By the end of the movie, my marshmallows have completely melted and now I was on my favourite part of my hot chocolate, which was the chunky bits at the bottom!

Starting to become chilly, I grabbed the nearest fluffy blanket and pillow and decided to have a nap. Hours later, I woke up by wiping my eyes to find out that snow had entered the house through the window! Despite the fact it felt like a dream, I personally thought I was in a winter wonderland; maybe I was? I gazed around the room, Maggie was still there, the TV and tree were still there; yet the air felt cooler, and the smell of cinnamon made my nose trail my legs out the living room, out the door and into the hall; well, what I thought was the hall...

The door to the hall started to swing vigorously with the wind and when I finally caught the handle, my eyes widened what stood before me. Icicles, snowflakes and festive trees upon festive trees created a pathway to another door which had a large red bow and a sign. Should I go in? Should I bring Maggie with me? How did I even get here? You know what I am going in...

## *A Winter's Tale by Francis Lawrence.*

It was a cold and delightful winter's eve. Christmas was coming up soon and the mood was one of joy and cheerfulness. We had tried to stay cheerful this whole time, trying to stay strong for our friends, loved ones and husbands away. But something in the air was different that day. It's like people had just forgotten all about the war. Forgot the constant threat of bombs and that evening it was especially quiet. There was no sound of howling planes and rattling of gun fire. No whistle of dropping bombs. Just the idyllic peace of birds chirping and people having fun.

As I was wondering about these things a letter nestles slipped through the door. The odd thing was that it was a Sunday, "there's no post of Sunday" I thought. And as I curiously pondered myself with what it could be I saw that the envelope had a quite pristine looking emblem stamped into purple wax.

"Purple because that's the royal colour" I squealed. I rushed to the rood to see if any postman was there so I could inquire. But nothing...

I cautiously opened the envelope. Crack. The wax split in two and...

Nothing? I double checked to make sure my eyes aren't deceiving me. No sadly not, I wondered "is this just some kind of sick joke. People know how desperate I am for any type of news from my husband and the war. I was expecting a letter from him anytime now. Alas I slumped down in my chair in front of the fire. I stared deeply into the flames yearning for something. When suddenly. A person? For a moment I saw a man in the flames. My husband! I blew on the fire and fed it all the logs I had, I needed to see him again. Then I saw, in the envelope was a message. "Burn me and you shall see". I threw it in as fast as possible, the moment the paper touched the fire red flames burst out and engulfed me. I saw my husband standing there.

'Come with me' the voice shrieked. I reached out my hand and grasped his. There was fire everywhere. The pain was quick and then darkness. I woke up and saw a field of rubble with one little flower stitching out of it. A bombed house I guessed. A miracle that i survived. My eyes turned to the lone sun flower. Not all of us were so lucky, I guess. But there he was. My husband beckoned for me to follow. I did and that's the last that I can remember...

# *Lindsey Hagger by The Tale Of The Christmas Ghoul.*

“What have you done!”

This isn't any ordinary Christmas story, I learnt that the hard way. There were no Christmas carols, no turkey, well not the kind you would imagine and definitely no fun. The date was the 22nd of December - only three days till Christmas when...

“Jack, get down here now!” Jack grumpily plods his feet slowly down the stairs.

“Breaking news, boy goes missing.”

“Jack, don't you know that boy? Doesn't he go to your school? “

“Isn't he the farmer's boy? “utters mum

Jack nods slowly before leaving the room. Unknown to what perks right underneath his nose.

Suddenly, a car screamed to a halt. Jack ran out the house ,there was no driver. Jack had never seen a ghost but, there's always a first time for everything. Jack's neighbours, the Johnstons, are always out at night they have a son about Jack's age he only goes to school when it's cold and wet never when its sunny everyone calls him weird and says he's probably at home asleep in his coffin.

It's only a joke but, what if it is not. A phone rings distracting Jack from his chain of thought as he ran into the house to answer it. “Hello?” one was there. "Hello?“ Jack hung up suddenly and all the lights began to flicker.

“Whoosh!”

A strange sound appears from nowhere sending shivers down Jack's spine. He can smell a lit cigar; a figure emerges before disappearing into the unknown. Jack steps back, he falls far, far down further than anyone has ever fallen, deeper than anyone has ever dug.

Goose bumps forming all over his arms and legs. He's been grabbed; it's the same man who held the cigarette. He has long sharp pointy fingers, he's tall and skinny. Jack screams. something grabs him by the arm. There's no one there, his hand was floating.

All Jack can hear is music as he enters the room ,there was a violin, lay there on its back on the bare floorboards.

“Bong,Bong.Bong!” A clock stood tall alerting Jack of the time. He must find a way to go home. Jack wished he could go back, back to the neighbourhood where Christmas is the same every year.

He was thrown into a chair. A girl appears her eyes glow showing Jack's parents. Dad just sat there and cried Jack had been missing for three days. His face was blotchy and his eyes where red. Mum was talking to the police. The police think the missing boys and Jack's case are connected.

In a blink of an eye, Jack found himself in the most unpredictable of places, the Johnston's house. How did he get here when he fell down a hole? A boy emerges; it's the missing boy from the farm. He seems lost Jack whispers “help”. The boy turns around before hearing someone's feet scuffing down a long corridor and running.

Will they ever find jack? Or is this the worst Christmas story around?

# *Winter's Air by Callum McCloy*

“Sneaking out of my hideout I gazed at my surroundings and took in the fresh morning air, an opposite to the familiar snow-covered wasteland. What stood out from the crisp white blanket that encircled my feet was the demolished skyscrapers miles away, once titans in the sky and now reduced to rubble. I took off towards the once beautiful city that now lay barren, only host now to wildlife and brown plants that survived the attack. The colourless, huge trees that marked out the edge of my usual path stood broken, broken by the horrors of the night and typical screaming of an unknown creature. Probably human, probably not. As I walked, I took note of my war clothes, as I liked to call them, not too anyone else though. My large black trench coat kept my frail, weak body protected from the elements and completed my cosplay. When the bomb fell I was taking part in an annual convention and decided to wear a trench coat indoors, something I regretted at the time, but treasure now. Large, mud-caked boots hid my unusually large feet which I like to think is due to radiation damage but anyone who knows me that is still alive might tell you otherwise.

Now that I had cleared the forest I got yet another good look at my once home, now the Badlands, almost as if it was snatched from a movie. The air got thicker, and my throat tightened as I stumbled along the main road. The most annoying thing about the apocalypse was that nothing worked, and I could have really imagined myself driving down country lanes in a Humvee. Another thing about me is that I like cars, and that is a fact. A faint black figure, almost a flicker crossed the corner of my eye dragging me out of my thoughts and almost a second later a screech sounded, and I snapped my head so fast I left the rest of my body behind as I turned to see the perpetrator. Suddenly, I could not move, like my body was not listening to my brain. A scratch sounded behind me, and my eyes rolled to the left and right, in search of my captor. During this time my subduer snuck its way around me and made its appearance and stared into my eyes as if its mental hand was reaching into me and taking my soul. Something which I very much need. Yet still it watches my eyes as if looking for any sign of movement that could threaten it. Smart creature.

I opened my eyes, head ringing as if it took a beating it couldn't take, with no idea how long I was out I looked at my new surroundings and gasped. Thousands. Thousands of creatures, just like the one who I had an encounter with before, were looking at me, almost surprised, which made me surprised. What a confusing world! The air was swept away and was in turn taken out of my lungs, my organs shut down, the only thing left working, my eyes. “It's always the eyes” I mutter, my final word. All at once they rush at me, defying gravity, like stars, with nothing to stop them. Then I close my eyes and it's all over.

## *A Forest by Lois Punter.*

“The damp, dark and gloomy forest lay ahead of me as I slowly walked through the undergrowth of the forest floor. Whilst I was trying not to trip over the arm-like roots of the trees, squelching brown mud covered my brand-new shoes. A vicious snowstorm grew around me and a huge amount of snow piled up on my coat. It is like a swirling hurricane of blinding whiteness. The tiny snowflakes got into my eyes, ears, and mouth as I tried to shield myself from the powerful blizzard. Tall, towering trees were almost audibly groaning as the snow piled down from on high. As I peered through the spiralling gust of white powder, I could just about make out the skeletal shapes of branches and fallen trunks that seem to be closing in on me. The wind was howling, freezing, biting; it was as if there was ice forming inside my very bones. A strong wind was deafening my ears and soon enough, my whole body became as cold as ice. In the corner of my eye, I noticed a dark, shadowy building; a strange, foreboding, dark, dank, grey shape sucking the life out of the surrounding area. Every single time I blinked; snow covered my eyes making my vision all unclear so I couldn't properly see this mysterious structure. Was it changing shape? It was difficult to tell but visibility was so poor, it seemed like it was! Feeling perplexed, I walked towards the building; it was slowly getting larger every step I took closer to it.

Finally, I was right in front of it; an abandoned, derelict, and broken, old house. How did it get like this, I wondered. Where did the inhabitants go? What stories could this house tell if it could speak? All these thoughts were rushing through my brain as I pushed the front gate and gingerly walked up the overgrown garden path.

The old, creaky, brown door was hanging off the side of the wall to get into the house; the window was smashed into pieces and the frames almost destroyed. Bricks from the house were scattered across the dead, spikey grass. Slowly, I walked towards the broken door, and my hand turned the rusty handle. CREAK. CREAK. When the door was open, in front of me was a long, dark corridor, stretching ahead into almost total blackness. The corridor had a wooden floor covered with smashed Christmas decorations. On the wall were ghostly portraits of a long-forgotten family. There was a young boy who looked about 10, a teenage girl of around 15 and their parents. However, one of the parents wasn't visible because they were covered in black. It was hard to describe what I mean ... the picture was complete, but their face just wasn't there. Why is that?

At the end of the corridor, there was a dark, gloomy room with a dim light bulb flickering silently and a dead Christmas tree in the corner with very few decorations. Why is this house so empty? How long has it been abandoned? As I was looking around this deserted room, I could hear quiet footsteps coming from upstairs. Suddenly, the footsteps got louder and louder; faster, and faster. Soon, they would be right round the corner. My heart was beating so fast, and I was frozen in fear. Who is it? What are they going to do to me? Being so frightened, I ran as fast as I could, down the pitch-black corridor; gasping, panting, pounding. Whilst trying to escape, the family portraits felt like they were reaching out, and grabbing onto me, making me stay in this haunted house. Finally, I got to the door. As quickly as I could, I tried to break free, but the handle wouldn't move. I was trapped...

## *From Dead Eyes by Dhruv Sonigra.*

“The last memory I had before I went into the hut was those people that wore gas masks, with their empty eyes, in coal-black jackets as they sauntered away in the cold winter snow. Looking up I saw the cradled stars that gleamed like pearls in the sky as I felt the chill of the arctic frost. I unlocked the door. I should have known by the way they looked at me on that dark crisp night that they knew it was going to be the last time they saw me; the snow-covered trees were whipping back and forth almost as if they were warning me about something. I should have turned back! Looking through the tiny gap, I saw a frozen lake that surrounded the hut that I was in. I was left secluded. As I looked deeper into the ice, I could see the carcass of something, it looked freakishly like a human, it looked as if it was screaming. Every now and then icicles smashed on the ground as if they were screaming at me to turn back, but from what?

On the first night, I knew something was wrong. Constantly, I could hear somebody whispering in my ear about all my deepest fears I had, it wouldn't stop! There was also a putrid smell that reeked and made my senses distraught, it was like festering corpses were being cooked for breakfast beneath me. Every hour the doorbell for the hut rang. Through the window, I thought somebody was there but when I opened the door, there was nothing except a post card that read 'begin death'. It was like a phantom was watching every move I made. At the time, I knew that nothing could freak me out more than that - it turns out I was wrong.

As I dashed to put my jacket away, I noticed that under a rug a few floorboards creaked. While I removed the rug, my spine rattled like a snake warning me about something, but as usual I went against my instinct. I noticed a latch of a secret compartment. I unlocked it without hesitation as if something was attracting me like a bug to a Venus flytrap. What lay beneath me I couldn't believe. It was a tunnel that I couldn't seem to see the end to, but it had a ladder that I could climb down. However, there was an intense feeling of macabre as if what lay beneath me was capable of incineration.

I began the descent; the bars of the ladder were covered in dry crimson blood that looked as if it had been splattered. It was so claustrophobic I felt my own lungs were going to collapse while my rib cage squeezed in agony as it ripped my very own flesh from the inside. What made it worse were the blood hand markings. It looked as if people had done this many times before me, many people had ventured down this tunnel from the very same hut, while what lurked beneath was a creature with unpredictable capability. Surely that couldn't be true, or could it?

As I took the last step down the ladder, I slipped on fresh blood and found myself in a bunker made of skeletons. Some of the skeletons were creatures that probably existed millennia ago. The weapons were all glowing with some sort of azure acid or radioactive liquid that seemed to be sealed to the edges of the weapons that were made of bone. Suddenly, I stumbled across a jade cloak that seemed to be covering something. Gradually I walked towards it and uncovered what was beneath. I was flabbergasted! It was a corpse! Her blood was dripping out of her mouth, one of her arms was missing and she had an axe that had penetrated her chest. While I was processing this, I realised that the azure liquid that covered the edges of the axe was rapidly dissolving the flesh like ice in hot water. I hastened...

I had to get out of this place! My heart began to beat like a drum. Instead, I met death.

This creature had piercing titan eyes that could see through your soul; its head was plated with bone to absorb any shock; it had pale reptilian skin that was ripped by its own bones that acted as a body armour; it had carnivorous sharp teeth that were thin and long as if the beast ate flesh for food. It smiled at me while tilting its head on one side and slowly picked up an axe and darted as quick as lightning. I crippled to the floor like a broken toy while blood curdled out of my chest. The creature looked down at me with nothing but dead eyes.

# *Snow by Carly Ager.*

“Snow crunched beneath her feet as she waded through the deep, dense snow. Rebecca knew the noise would tell him exactly where she was, but she wasn't going to let him take her most precious possession. Rebecca didn't know who the man following her was and he wore a coat, a scarf covering his face and dark sunglasses so she couldn't recognise him. However, the voice sounded familiar. Rebecca couldn't tell for sure who it was, but she knew she'd heard his voice before.

Rebecca was a 25-year-old girl who had a special secret that no one knew about. She was the owner of the snowflake sapphire, an extremely rare gemstone enclosed into a silver necklace and passed down her family for generations. It was called a snowflake sapphire because every year when Christmas arrives, the sapphire turns a blinding white and changes colour. Therefore, each year the stone is a different colour, which keeps it more hidden and safer from dangerous people because it is unrecognisable.

No one knew of this secret until three days ago when Rebecca received a terrifying text message from ‘unknown’. Rebecca knew she had to be careful with the necklace because Christmas was in a week, and she needed to keep it safe. However, the horrifying message she received read “give me the necklace or you will never see your baby boy again”. Rebecca had a seven-week-old baby who was the most important thing in her whole world. She immediately knew this message was serious.

Three days later, Rebecca was still worried because she hadn't heard anything else from the unknown person, but she knew she had to keep her baby safe. She decided to let him stay with her mum for the next few days until everything was sorted and safe. Rebecca went to work as usual and finished her shift around 5:30pm. She decided to walk home because she needed some fresh air, and the exercise would do her good.

It was December which meant dark evenings so by the time Rebecca was walking home, it was pitch black. She knew it wasn't safe to be out alone in the dark so she decided to take a short cut through the woods, forgetting how dangerous woods could be. As she stamped through the shimmering snow, she left behind a perfect footprint trail behind her. The snow was so deep that walking took her a long time because of the resistance as she walked. Rebecca thought she could hear a noise behind her, so she stopped in her tracks to listen, but the noise stopped immediately. Rebecca was very wary recently of a potential necklace thief, but she told herself to stop being paranoid and just get home.

A few minutes later, she heard more footsteps and knew she should listen to her gut: Rebecca had a bad feeling about these woods. Just as she was debating where to go next, a hand grabbed her shoulder and attempted to pull her back, but Rebecca was prepared, and she quickly ducked out the way before the man could get a proper hold on her. She sprinted through the snow towards the sound of a busy road. At that moment, snowflakes started softly drifting down and she could also feel raindrops landing on the tip of her nose. The weather was not working in her favour today.

## *Snow by Carly Ager.*

“After what felt like miles of fast running, Rebecca was almost completely out of breath, but she couldn't hear the footsteps of anyone too close, so she slowed her sprint to a fast jog. The noise of the speeding cars rushing to get home and see their families was getting nearer and Rebecca wasn't going to lose hope that she would get out of these woods without being buried in snow, soaked with rain, or captured by the necklace thief.

However, she had begun to calm down now that she couldn't hear any louder footsteps and she lost her focus and agility slightly. The thief realised this and had come out of the woods and run along the road to catch Rebecca off guard and with quiet footsteps. He was extremely clever and had thought about what he should do if she were to escape. Instead of chasing her from behind, he was chasing her parallel. Therefore, just before she reached the main road, he ran at her from the right and rugby tackled her to the snowy floor.

The thief had won. She had no way to escape. The only thing she could do to save her own life was to give up the snowflake sapphire. But was her life worth that much to risk losing the necklace which was so important to her family? She didn't want to let down all the previous generations who had worked so hard to keep it safe and secret. Should she sacrifice herself to save the family heirloom?



## *Enchanted by Lottie Andrews .*

“Two young children, a boy, and a girl, ran aimlessly around me, tightly wrapped up in cosy knit clothes, their cheeks stained a rosy red. Fascinated by the white blanket that surrounded them and the fragile flakes fluttering onto their faces, their enchanting giggles filled the air. Another two people followed, these two significantly larger than the first, watching the children with glimmers in their eyes, and one of them suggested something that made the little ones light up even more. They started dashing around, gathering bundles of the white and placing them on top of each other, and I felt a sensation of hope, that this was my beginning.

They swaddled me in their snug hats and a toasty scarf that made me feel warm and safe, they gave me arms, a long orange nose, and eyes that enabled me to see all the wonderful things in the world around me. They stayed with me, joyfully playing and chuckling with one another until the sun set. It was magical. I felt like I had a family.

But when they left, the darkness enveloped me; the snow no longer shimmered, it became cold, and I was left lonely. To make things worse, I heard a rowdy group of monsters, menacingly making their way towards me. I could feel their evil intentions, but I was defenceless, there wasn't anything I could do. They trampled on me and kicked me around; I was isolated and deflated, in pieces scattered around. The night dragged on and dreaming of the bliss I once lived when time seemed to fly by, I wished and wished that the sun would finally rise, and my family would come and put me back together. I tried to call out, but I was paralysed and I knew no one could hear me. All I could do was wait.

Eventually I saw a glimmer of light, and the warmth slowly came back to me, however there was no one to be seen. I waited, and waited, nearly losing hope, until I heard once more the familiar giggles and laughter. I was overcome with joy! They saw what happened to me and rushed over, gently shaping me back into the snowman I once was. I never should've doubted them; they will always return to help me. My family saved me multiple times, they brought me warmth, love, showed me how enchanting life can be, and always pick me up when I am down.

# *A Heavy Silence by Ilona Fitzpatrick.*

I'm greeted with heavy silence. The snow sits upon the branches of narrow trees and drifts past my forehead. The cold air stings my palms and fingertips as I reach to touch the zip of my backpack. Sunset beams stretch through the gaps of the woods, illuminating the settled snow. I squint up at the sky, an ominous shade of dark blue. The presence of peace enlightens me, but the woods seem somehow unalive. The branches droop at the heavy weight of snow and the grass suffocates under the thick layer of whiteness. The bluebells do not stand straight and welcome me like they usually do, and there are no signs of rabbit footprints. I take my phone out from my bag and check the time. In the distance, I hear the soles of boots trudging against the snowy pathway. Hurling towards me is Nathan. My best friend. We had planned to go camping, here in the middle of the woods, just the two of us. I started running toward him, relief washing over me. A hint of a smile pulls at the corners of my mouth as he envelopes me in a tight hug. I am hit with the familiar scent of gingerbread. Nathan always smells of gingerbread. Together we stroll along the snowed-in path and find a spot to set up our tents.

"Did you bring the hot chocolate powder? You know I can't go camping without a hot chocolate, Sarah!" He calls from across his tent.

"Yes I did, but did you bring the mini marshmallows?" I called back.

Nathan nods in reply and plasters a big smile onto his face. We finish setting up the tents and eat some marmite sandwiches for dinner.

"I hate marmite," Nathan moans.

I give him a side glare and continue to eat mine. The sun sets beyond the trees, and we are left in darkness. Nathan goes to collect sticks for a fire, and I stay in my tent. Minutes enrol themselves into hours. My palms trickle with sweat as I unzip my tent and take a step into the cold air. It's been an hour since Nathan had left. I hesitate, the woods are silent and there is no sign of him.

Genuine worry flickers across my face and fresh tears brim in my eyes. I walk deeper into the trees. The eerie silence pushes me backward, but I continue to shout for Nathan. Fear starts to uncurl in my stomach and doubt ripples through me. The flashlight from my phone brightens the snowy path beneath my feet. Paw prints descend into darkness and without hesitation, I follow them.

"NATHAN!" I shout, but my words strangle and die inside my throat. It aches to speak.

The paw prints stop, and I realise I have no idea where I am. Panic engulfs me as I turn back. Tears are now streaming down my face and my cries echo the woods. I can suddenly feel the heat of a gaze. Behind some bark, I see a pair of red-blood eyes boring into me. My heartbeat bolts to the top of my ears as the creature ascends into view. A wolf stands before me. Fresh blood drips from his mouth onto the snow, staining it a vibrant red. My disbelief stales to fear. I run. My stitch rips deeper with every step I take and sweat drips down my face, but I don't stop running. My vision blurs as panicky tears sting my eyes, and the woods darken around me. The wolf sprints behind me and I can hear every movement it makes. Blood rushes to my head and my legs ache with the weight they carry on each step. I run until I no longer can. I collapse over some sticks and sink into the bitter snow. It swallows and suffocates me as I struggle to reach for air. It entwines my neck and ties me down to the damp floor. I can't see anything. It's got me. The woods have caught me. I can't escape.

## *A Heavy Silence by Ilona Fitzpatrick.*

Slowly, Nathan unzips my tent and ushers me to get up. My eyes open and the frosty air rushes through my nostrils and out of my throat. My vision brightens and I see Nathan before me. A look of unconcealed happiness clouding his face. I sit up and stare at him. My heart is pounding in my chest.

“Are you okay?”, he asks with an expression of confusion forming on his face, “how did you sleep?”

My breaths ripple through the morning air. My stare focuses on Nathan and then to the pile of sticks behind him. I clamber out of my sleeping bag and Nathan serves me some breakfast. I'm too stunned to speak so I stay silent. Nathan begins to talk but I don't listen. I can't help but still feel the terror I felt last night.

It had all felt so real. Calmly, I told Nathan everything. The two frown lines between his eyes deepen with every new detail I reveal. Concern floods his face as he tells me I must have dreamt it all. Nathan explains how I had fallen asleep before he returned with the sticks for the fire. My shoulders slump with uncertainty and I realise he must be right. Soon after breakfast, we begin packing up our tents. Sunlight beams fall through the gaps of the slim trees and cling to the branches.

The woods are so silent. I turn around and stride back up the path with Nathan, our hands entwined. Nathan continues to talk about his dislike for marmite and that we must have ham next time. I nod to him but I'm not fully listening. Out of the corner of my eye, I thought I could see the slow movement of an animal. It's legs trotting behind the piles of snow, it's ears poking up at the sound of silence, it's mouth-watering for food, and it's red-blood eyes drilling a deathly hole into my scalp. I freeze whilst I let fear strangle and swallow me whole.

## *The New Winter by Emily Harris.*

This winter was the first winter where all the lights were up in the newly built town of Twinkleberry and everywhere was sparkly and full of decorations. All the restaurants were open and full of Christmas food including the classic turkey, mince pies and Christmas puddings and people filled up the restaurant with joy and there was Christmas music all around. Everyone was excited and happy for it to be Christmas and people were outside their houses decorating for the wintertime. Children helped put up the tinsel on the trees outside, wearing their gloves and scarves as well as their woolly hats. There were snowball fights outside where children used the paper white snow. All the little ones were shouting and running, having fun.

Lucy and her friend were putting up the decorations on their outside tree and her little sister Julia was making a snowman with her friend. Lucy was adding the top decoration whilst her friend added a few brightly coloured decorations on the tree. Then they were all called in for dinner. They walked into Lucy's cosy family home smelling of winter spices and warm food. They sat down on the table and tucked into their dinner. The TV was on, and Lucy's mum was tidying in the kitchen. Once they had finished, they went outside to finish by playing in the snow and having a snowball fight all together. "Lucy, time to come inside!" sitting on the table in the living room were two hot chocolates topped with marshmallows and cream. Both sat down on the dark green sofa and tucked in.

"Lucy breakfast!" She came running downstairs to be greeted by pancakes and juice. She sat upon a soft chair and started on her pancakes which sat upon a dark plate filled with syrup and fruit, her sister was also having them just a smaller portion. The dark oak table was set out with all the placemats. It was time to get ready for the day, so she quickly brushed her teeth, got dressed and ran back downstairs to get her shoes on. 'Let's go Lucy' shouted her dad as they were about to go Christmas food shopping. They both hopped in the car and drove into their twin centre. Around them were icy trees and people wrapped up warm. The radio was playing Christmas songs as they drove along. as soon as they got out of the car the cold air hit their faces. Lucy picked out her favourite sweets 'dad can i please get this for us to share' 'yes i suppose so lucy that is a good idea' she excitedly skipped around the supermarket admiring all the new Christmas food like the chocolate logs or even the new crisps that are Lucy's favourite. Once Lucy collected and put most of the supermarket into her trolley they headed to the checkout.

"We're home!" Lucy shouted. Her sister came running up to her asking what they brought. Lucy showed her favourite chocolates before my sister snatched them out of her hand and ran off. Taking her shoes off, Lucy thought about what she would do next and decided to sit on the sofa and eat chocolate and then invite her friend, Sally round to come over and do some baking. A beautiful sunset was emerging, and Lucy quickly went next door to get her friend and obviously she said he's and put her snow boots on and went back to Lucy's. It was snowing outside, and the kitchen was warm, and they were about to bake some cakes. "It's in the green cupboard" Lucy replied to Sally when she asked her where the flour was. They finished making the cake and they ended up with ingredients scattered everywhere and it being a mess. Beep, beep! As the timer went off, they took their cake out to decorate with fluffy icing and little decorations which were freshly made. Giggling, they added all the icing and then took a slice and sat down. They watched a tv show as they ate. Sally told Lucy so they both decided to walk back to hers. As Lucy walked back from her friends, she went something brush against her.

## *The New Winter by Emily Harris.*

She decided it was nothing and just carried on and went back to her house. Running upstairs to her room, she heard a quiet noise just outside, but again ignored it. It was getting dark now and she was sitting in her room doing the usual. She listened to music whilst eating her warm lasagne dinner. Her walls glowed with light, and her music was loud, but she could still hear noise downstairs. She was cosy. The snow fell gently, and the soft wind blew the snowflakes from side to side. Lucy's alarm went off and she decided it was time to get up. As she walked to the bathroom, there was another cool breeze. But what could it be this time?

“

# *A Poem by Seamus Van Der Pyle.*

Cold. Dark. Silent. The forest of dead trees - left standing lonely without the lush green leaves that once accompanied them - loom over the white, snowy landscape. I am a now lonely junior pilot, accepting the fact that I may never achieve my dreams of piloting the greatest ships known to man.

I felt like I was walking for years, with no way out of the situation; the seemingly endless suffering I- no, those... creatures put me in. My mind was corrupted with confusion as I trudged my way to what seemed like void, hoping for something, just something to appear, though I knew it would require a more than a miracle.

Abruptly, a violent bright blue light arose from what looked like nothing. Too many questions to ask. What was that? Is it safe? Am I a dead man walking? Whether it was out of curiosity or a desperate last ditch for life, I instinctively walked towards it. Closer and closer I got. A weird humming sound became present to me. No way this was something from here; from Earth. This could be something that ends my existence here or something that ends my unbearable pain.

"...No turning back here. I either survive or die trying." I tell myself. The humming gets louder and louder until... \*BANG\* I carelessly hit my head on what looks like a futuristic space ship, in the same blue as the light, hovering slightly off the ground (but high enough for my head to get bashed in).

Inscribed on the ship read:

'KAN-Y カン - ワイ : HIGH PERFORMANCE RACE-CRAFT'

"Wow. Isn't anything I've seen before. Let's get myself outta here!" I exclaim. With the sense of danger leaving me, and the subsequent replacement with adrenaline, I climb into the ship ready to find a way home.

Though, a thought crept into my mind. "Surely, that couldn't have been it, right? A ship I haven't seen before, just zapping into existence, exactly for my convenience?" Seems off. But nevertheless, I try to get the ship started. Nothing like a big green button practically screaming 'this is how you turn the ship on!' among all the small buttons around it, looking more complicated than a plane cockpit. Pressing the obvious green button, the ship hums even louder in anticipation, whirring as the engine warms. This was it. I'm finally getting out of this mess. \*BANG\*

# *A Poem by Seamus Van Der Pyle.*

That wasn't the ship. Somehow I'd failed to realise that there was a huge industrial building behind the ship. Talk about being blinded by ambition. Whatever it was, it just exploded. Instantly, I stepped on the pedal, devoid of thought. To say I underestimated the term 'High Performance Racecraft' would be an understatement. The ship takes off at nearly the speed of sound – 700mph of pure speed. The screen in front of me – which was now clearly a radar – showed 2 red dots in hot pursuit of my blue dot. Everything now would come down to the ship's ability and my skills as a junior pilot. No pressure here, right?

“

# *Winter Story by Florence van Huet.*

Sigh. The last forlorn leaf fell just between my boots: the start of our eternal winter. Something in the chilling wind told me this would be an especially long one. I continued crunching through the glistening snow, impurifying it with my dirty footsteps. The snow had already been falling for about a week and the sky grey since September first. The dense clouds engulfed the last signs of sun and the busyness of last summer. I took no notice of ruining the snow, I knew it would cover over almost as soon as I took my next step. The large pile of wood I was carrying seemed to gain about a tonne as the snow thickened and the howling gales intensified. I walked on. I pledged to myself that nothing would distract me, not like last time, all I knew was that I needed to reach, like every week, the heart of the forest. Readjusting my load, I spun my small satchel around to grab my compass and figure out where the heck I was heading. I flinched as a large log hit the ground with a loud thud. It sounded as if the snow beneath it had disappeared, like it didn't absorb the sound. I'm not sure why it startled me so much, though I knew there was an unfamiliar feeling in the air this morning. Maybe it was the vast blanket of fog hiding the horizon from my watery eyes or that

I barely got a wink of sleep last night. I violently shook my head and leaned to pick up the frosted log, as I reached with my red, icy hands, the log disintegrated at my touch. I swiftly drew my hand back, dropping my whole pile of wood, carefully observing the small patch of stained snow, just in between my boots. I inhaled a burst of cold air sharply and held it there for a while, contemplating how sleep deprived I was. It was just in my head, right? With a slow breath, I crouched and fumbled inside my bag, frantically searching for my godforsaken compass.

Luckily, I found that I was heading the right way, towards the forest, though the fog made it seem as if I was the last thing on earth, like nothing surrounded me. I frantically picked up my scattered pile of logs and carried on walking for a little while. I stopped for a moment, trekking in the deep snow was draining and my head started to spin and feel like empty space... It was quiet. The howling wind took a rest, and everything felt still.

All I could see was the slow rolling fog and miniature reflections dancing off the snowflakes. A grey and white desert, dazzled with snow and enticed me into the distance, into the bleached void. As I took a step forward, a chilling breeze swept down my back, I flinched as my hairs stood on end and my whole soul shivered. That 'off' feeling returned, accompanied by that familiar feeling of being watched, being deceived and like I was going the completely wrong direction. I glanced out the corner of my eye, no one. Nothing. I shook my head frantically and took out my compass again. I was sure it was the right direction, completely sure, the compass pointed to the north-east, I was going the right way. I knew it was just my head, so I continued my way.

With every step, time stretched. I can't explain it, but each step felt longer, each snowflake fell slower, and my destination felt like it was running away from me. The 'eternal' winter was always hard to deal with and made everyone a little crazy, but this was a new extent. Was it dizziness, overtiredness? But it felt so real. Somewhat out of spite, I kept moving forward huffing and sighing as I went. It was like I was running, but in a dream when you need to run, and your legs are either moving at lightning pace and you don't go anywhere, or your legs don't move at all. I felt stuck, I should be at the wood by now! What if people were worried?



# *Matheus Vieira Coelho*

On that cold November night,  
The night in which my hopes were shattered,  
Your kindly cruel words in moonlight,  
My young, foolish heart had battered,

Home that night did not feel such,  
Nor did I meet Hypnos' touch,  
Day after day I saw Aurora wake,  
Night after night I felt my heart race,

That new, young feeling which had lit my dreams  
Now just as volatile as steam  
Yet cold as ice heavy as lead  
As pungent as stings. yet all in my head.

Despite your words being cruel,  
I still don't know what happened.

“

# *Winter by William Young*

Winter is here, rain freezes into fluffy drops from heaven. Parents and children playing like robins that have found the early worm. Diving into a sea of misty coldness .

A Fox stands proudly in this white blank wonderland that's icy and unforgiving leaving perfectly formed tracks , searching a never-ending landscape of snow .

The frightening parade of frostbite daggers at your skin, like millions of mosquito bite committed their sins. Taking in the biting numbness of air, wishing for the sun to appear.

Its winter what a magnificent white glow of the crunchy powder , constructing a new piece of art .Robust and alive, captured in our imagination.

# *The Fallen Leaves by Ashmi Bhatt.*

The leaves are gone now. I watch them fly away in the same way I watch my hair swirl down the drain. It's gone now. The ground that I once felt beneath my feet is now dry and cracked, like my lips. The dull sky is reflected in the hollows that shadow my eyes. The seasons have changed again. Moved on again. Left me. Again.

I stay here, alone in the same way a buried body is: put away and eventually forgotten about.

I miss the warm embrace of summer's love. I crave the comfort of autumn's glow. I wish I could again feel the excitement of spring's possibility. But still I stay here. Alone.

"It's just a change in weather," they say. It's a change in myself. "Winter is not ever long," they say, "and it will pass." The cold that surrounds us may pass, but I fear that the thorns wrapped around my heart will not.

What if I stay here in an eternal winter? What if it stays here?

I know that spring is beyond my grasp. Autumn is far behind me. I can only dream lucidly of summer. Where I am now is where I will be forever.

Winter will not pass.

## *Child by Ellie Law*

I gazed into the fire, observing it crack and spit prior to hissing into life. Incandescence flames of intense-orange licked hungrily at the chimney as they clambered higher and higher whilst its lucent light stole away the burglar-black shadows extending across the walls. Meanwhile, I perceived scintillate tinsel and ribbons pirouetting around the emerald tree before my eyes gradually drifted upwards to see an angel placed at the top. The sweet, cedar fragrance of the Christmas tree wafts around the room, and it conjures up a recognisable memory, but I can't quite put my finger on it. Outside the window, a featureless scenery of snow and ice lay at the earth's surface with the occasional trace of footsteps from exuberant children playing at the crack of dawn patiently awaiting the awakening of their parents. Tranquillity...

Moderately, I arose from my armchair and placed my book upon the mantelpiece where a variety of ornaments perched. As of yet, the day had been more than conventional with nothing anomalous about it, well that was before a singular envelope elegantly cascaded down from my letterbox like exquisite snowflakes. That's atypical, I thought to myself, fully aware that I haven't received a card from anyone for as long as I can remember. Placing it in my palm, uncountable questions began to spiral in my mind "where has this come from, who sent it, why did they send it?" and I couldn't quite bring myself to simply just open it.

But I did. And I'd never felt more disorientated and inarticulate in my entire lifetime. In my bare hands lay a specific letter which I can vividly recall writing during the Christmas period several years back. The fireplace was lit, the pleasant sound of presents being unwrapped beneath the tree, Christmas crackers being pulled left right and centre yet I'm currently sitting alone in what's intended to be my "home." Where did I go wrong? I stood there in complete and utter shock as to how this letter had suddenly appeared at my front door years after it had been written. A tear gradually streamed down my face whilst the distant sound of bells chiming, and choir singers echoed throughout the neighbouring villages.

Oh, how I'd missed being a child with no worries in the world. Life was so much easier back then; I wish I'd appreciated it more as it can all disappear in the blink of an eye.

# *Christmas Eve by Katka Punter*

It was Christmas Eve, and I was heading home on the train to the north of England. I was so looking forward to it! There would be a Christmas dinner, presents to give and family to see. And the best part is that it was snowing! I arrived at Kings Cross and there it was, standing in front of me, the shiny, black locomotive huddled between the busy people holding Christmas presents wanting to claim their seat. Snow was settling on the edge of the train, and it made me more and more excited to arrive in the warmth of my family. The adrenaline rushed through my body as I thought about making paper-white snowmen with my cousins and seeing the joy in my parents' faces as they opened their gifts on Christmas morning. Running a bit late, I ran towards the train as it started to move, hoping I wouldn't miss it as it gave a powerful HEAVE! Steam soared through the chimney whilst the pistons ran around in a circle as I jumped onto the train and claimed my seat for the journey home.

Looking around my carriage I noticed rose red chairs, but they are all empty. I was alone, alone on this vintage carriage on Christmas Eve. "It's strange, not one person is here, just before Christmas?" I thought as the train picked up speed.

I decided to walk further down the train to find more people on this carriage and to find a drink in the restaurant carriage. But I opened the door to the next carriage, and it too, was completely empty. I picked up my pace but carriage after carriage had not a soul to be seen. I eventually came to the restaurant carriage, but it looked abandoned; it seemed not to have been used for several months. There were cracks, dirty cups and broken plates lying around the tables and the floor. I seemed to be the only person on this train on Christmas eve. I felt, for the first time, a prickling of fear at the back of my neck. Where was everyone? Is this train really going to my home? Trying to not think about what could lie ahead, I headed back to my seat wondering if I should leave at the next stop. I knew the next station would stop in ten minutes, so I silently waited. I waited. Waited for ten minutes but then ten minutes became fifteen and fifteen became twenty, it just didn't stop! Now I was really starting to panic. My legs started to shake, and my heart started to pound faster and then I heard a loud BANG.

"What was that?" I said under my breath as I turned quickly round wanting to see someone, wanting to not be the only one on this empty train. Weird things started to happen after I heard that bang, creepy noises, and mysterious movements became more and more pronounced on this terrifying train. After five minutes of holding my head in my knees, wanting to be home, the wind howled outside the train, and I jumped out of my seat. I started to look around the carriage more closely; I noticed spiderwebs in the corner of the carriages and many of the chairs were torn. Walking through the train, the curtains on the windows danced with the wind and the door to exit swung open whilst the train was moving at a fast speed, and I froze in fear. I finally moved towards the door wanting to feel slightly safer, and the wind blew in my face causing a shiver run down my body as I closed the heavy door. Things suddenly got even worse; the train instantly slowed down causing me to fly forward into the next carriage, which as I dreaded, was empty. I wandered towards the driver's carriage to ask why we had stopped and why I was the only person on this haunted train but as I knocked on the door, the door creaked open revealing a deserted carriage. The palms of my hand started sweating, my chest was tightening as though someone had squeezed my heart inside and out and I quickly glanced to the corner of my eye to check that no-one was behind the door. It was all clear, no-one was going to jump out of the door and scare me but then suddenly, I heard footsteps. The footsteps were becoming louder and louder so I sprinted to the nearest door wanting to be free of this horrific train but when I put my hand on the handle, it wouldn't open, I could not get out!

# *Christmas Eve by Esme Dickson*

All was busy on Christmas Eve  
in Santa's North Pole home,  
presents all loaded on Rudolf's sleigh  
by Santa's favourite gnome.

But where is Santa Claus tonight?

That's what they all ask.

He's snoring loudly in his bed  
ignoring this night's task!

But it was not a peaceful dream  
that he was having that night;

In fact, it was a Christmas Ghost  
giving him an awful fright!

With fearsome eyes and formless shape  
and nondescript attire

a candle he did wield around  
to set the house on fire!

Aghast old Santa truly hoped  
the whole thing was a joke!

But this he never did find out  
because he then awoke.

"Get out of bed, you lazy man!"

It was his dear old wife  
who noisily did wake him up,  
and scared him out his life!

"My word my reindeer I must fetch  
and hitch them to the sleigh.

With all the children's presents on board  
We'll then be on our way!"

# *The Ghosts of Christmas by Max French*

It was on a cold foggy night on Christmas day,  
Where the ghosts decide to come out and play,  
They terrify the folk of the old town,  
The town called ratchet down,  
First it was the ghost of King Henry VIII  
who decided to play with a woman called wraith,  
He shouted: "Who is the fine work of art?  
Please take my heart.  
You won't regret it,  
although the other eight did, I shall admit."  
"No you horrible old man.  
Please, you look like my old gran."  
she replied  
"How dare you. Do you know who I am?  
I have travelled so far just to see you, although you are fairly wham."  
She slapped him across the face.  
He then walked off with disgrace.  
The ghost of Michael Jackson was next seen as he walked past singing "hee hee."  
It seemed that not all the ghosts came out to play,  
but next time it could be you who is their prey.

# *Counting the Days until Christmas by Alexis Manyangadre*

## Day 1

“Jingle bells, jingle bells jingle all the way, oh what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh HEY” is just one of the many songs that were sung on December the 1st and everyone knew that Christmas was right around the corner and this is where the rush began. The malls in Manhattan were packed and there were lots of cheers of joy.

## Day 12

The roads of New York have never been so busy on a normal day and schools are out so you can imagine the amount of traffic: full of busy parents looking for winter family activities to keep the children busy. Markets selling homemade sweet potato pies and mincemeat, but in the corner of your eye the Christmas tree displays are being set up - but did you know in New York the tree displays are the best part of winter, when you can go buy a fresh tree of your choice to add to your home whether big or small?

## Day 16

There's a sort of excitement passing through the town but a worry because the weather is not looking the best so far due to heavy snow, at least it's going to be a white Christmas. Church bells ringing in the distance and singers roaming the streets spreading the Christmas spirit to all. As they welcome a new season the hot chocolate shop attracts more customers, and everyone sits down enjoying the company of others on a cold evening.

## Day 18

On this day most of the shops had closed due to the holiday season but that did not stop people from pursuing their last-minute planning to make this Christmas the best one yet. The town was decorated, and it began to feel a lot more like Christmas in Manhattan. The city was getting busier, and the weather is colder but that's okay because with Christmas around the corner what could go wrong?



# *Counting the Days until Christmas by Alexis Manyangadze*

## Day 24

It's finally Christmas Eve and three children that live on Mable Street are excited for that day that awaits but for now they are patiently watching their mother make Christmas eve treats for Santa Claus and the reindeers, milk for Santa and carrots for the lazy but hard working reindeers. Looking at the empty lit tree knowing that tomorrow that empty tree will be full of presents waiting to be opened, their mum and dad hurry the children upstairs ready to sleep knowing in the morning their favourite day will finally arrive. With their eyes closed and dreaming the night away the day will come sooner than expected.

## Day 25 – CHRISTMAS DAY HAS ARRIVED

The day has finally arrived, and the impatient children jump in excitement waiting for their parents to wake up and allow them to hurry downstairs to where Christmas awaits, but 10 minutes later they are surprised with a gift each from mum and dad entering the room and they know its time so with taking their gifts they look at each other and run.

Running and thumping the three children make their way carelessly down the steep stairs and open the door to reveal a winter wonderland and a huge pile of presents, the look of everything is complete and from afar the church bells chime telling New York the day has finally arrived and that's when everyone sings joyful songs and Christmas has started.

## *Edinburgh Castle by Archie Garcia*

On a cold crisp morning my family , friends and I drove to Edinburgh Castle in the snow. When we arrived, we found that there were not only tourists but also a group of children from the local schools.

The journey took so long but was so worth it. We had never seen so much snow before, in our town we only ever got a few inches but here it was at least 3 feet deep. My brother (being the idiot that he is) jumped out the car and just buried himself face first, and the rest of us swiftly followed.

As we walked towards the castle, I felt a thud on my back. All of a sudden, a huge snowball fight had broken out in the streets of Edinburgh. I noticed my friend John (whose family also came up for the winter) was hiding behind a mound of snow that a plough had left. I ran over to join him and his older brother Sean whilst being bombarded with snowballs.

I picked up a handful of snow and flung it across the road at the opposing team of school kids. As the minutes passed by it was clear we were going to need help defeating the horde of school kids. And that's when it hit me: in the car we had a dog ball launcher. If I called for my brother to join us with the ball launcher, we may turn the tables on the battlefield.

I turned to face him and shouted 'are you just going to stand there or are you going to join us like a ma...' turns out he was one step ahead of me. He rushed over with the launcher and instantly filled and flung over and over at the opposing team. Straight away John and I saw the difference. Their defences were weakening.

Their attack slowed and oh how the tables had turned. With the launcher in our possession, we were able to move across the road and finally we did it. We had them right where we wanted them. Our bombardments were too much and so they surrendered. After the longest hour of our lives and some very cold hands we were finally victorious. It was truly amazing what we had accomplished that day and we will remember this day forever.

# *The Tradition by Maya Nassari*

Hi, it's 22nd Dec, my name is Jayla. I'm 11 years old and the middle child. I am sandwiched between my older brother Jayden and my younger brother, Jake, both by two years. Yes, I know, my parents thought it would be cute to give the three of us 'J' names but they're not the ones who have to live with it.

I don't know about you, but my family is big on tradition. Every year we spend the Christmas holidays in a cabin in the middle of nowhere, I mean literally nowhere. We go the day after school break. This may not sound like a problem but here's the thing; I was born on December 23rd, complete suck fest, it's such a nothing date. Now this wouldn't suck so much if I could at least hang out with my friends, but I don't know if I mentioned we are in the middle of nowhere, meaning no neighbours and no internet.

Let me give you some jealousy context.

My brothers were born in the summer. Jayden's 13th, my parents threw him this awesome paintball party with all his friends. Jake's 9th, they hired an inflatable obstacle course on this lake. I know I sound spoiled right now but basically, I've never had anything like that. I get presents and cake obviously but it's just not the same. Anyway, I'm going to bed.

"Jayla! Jayla! Wake up! Hurry! You need to come downstairs!" I open my eyes, irritated.

"Jake!" I whine, "What do you want?"

"Just come, trust me you're gonna wanna see this."

I wrap the duvet around and drag myself out of bed. I sit at the top of the stairs blinking, adjusting to the light and bump myself down reluctantly step-by-step. The light outside seems brighter than usual. I think I must be seeing things, so I squeeze my eyes tightly shut and open wide to look again.

I'm not mistaken. The window and the front door are completely white.

"Oh, my God, is that..?" We have been snowed in. I drop the duvet and take the last few stairs on foot.

Mum and dad walk in with hot chocolate smothered in whipped cream and marshmallows. I hear this loud thud. Jayden jumped the banister and landed behind me.

Jake whispers far too loudly

"How are they going to get in?"

My head whips around

"What?"

Jayden moves swiftly towards the front door, and to everyone's horror swings it open wide. You can hear the gasps echo. To my surprise the snow didn't move. It's a sparkling white wall.

"How cool is that?" says Dad

"Let's make a tunnel!" says Jayden

"Oh pleeeeeease mum!" cries Jake.

## *The Tradition by Maya Nassari*

There is a moment of silence. Mum and dad look at each other. The corners of mum's mouth twitch, dad winks and shrugs. Oh my God this is happening.

Jayden rushes forwards.

“You first Jayla!” and pushes me into the snow. With everyone laughing we start taking handfuls and throwing them at each other. One hits mum on the back of the head; everybody freezes. Mum turns around slowly. No one dares to breathe. With both hands she grabs for snow and lobs it at dad. We fall about laughing. There are muffled voices from the other side of the snow wall.

“Hello? Is anybody there?”

Wait, those voices sound familiar. That’s Lilah and her mum. Hang on, I hear Brooke.

“Jay?” Calls Cristina.

The snow starts to crumble in front of us and my best friends. I look at mum and dad grinning like an idiot.

Best birthday ever!!!

## *The Battlefield by Ryan Tandy*

It was cold. A cold winter's day. There were trenches and coves have been built to the left and right of me. behind and in front of me. Around the field of battle there was an eerie silence where it almost all stopped, and no one spoke a word. It was just like time stopped and the earth just stopped. looking over the field there were snowballs piled up to head height splattered all over the grounds ready to be launched.

Then it just erupted into chaos. Everyone hit the floor as hundreds of snowballs flew overhead like a barrage of machine gun fire in a war. As the enemy had reload and grab more snowballs and make some, we took the perfect opportunity to rain hell down upon them in the form of hundreds of normal snowballs being launched at them at once. As it carried on, we had many losses of people getting hit ,but so did they. We were getting ready to do one final 'Hail Mary' (as the parents would say) but we were distracted by an ear-splitting scream from a lookout screaming "INCOMING". There were almost all their soldiers running up to our barriers welding snowballs. We opened fire.

After the attempt was raised, we looked over the battlefield and saw the aftermath of what had just transpired and what we had just done. There were about 25 people lying on the battlefield not moving. They had been hit. We lost about 10-15 soldiers in that battle. The mounds of snowballs had been reduced to only about 100 balls overall. Most of the barricade had been either knocked over or destroyed in the battle.

But overall, we were the victors and that was the important thing and that meant even though we lost some of our troops it shows that we were the better side and were stronger. But after what we had just done, none of us could celebrate or cheer so that eerie silence had arrived again, and you could hear a pin drop. This was broken by the shout of the moms saying, "dinner ready" and everyone got up and ran inside so they could eat dinner , have pudding and ultimately open presents which is the reason we do this every year.

## *The Lake (Excerpt) by Scarlet Sanders*

“A ghost girl, you say?”

“Ay, child. Not much older than you are now if I had to reckon a guess.”

“Why does she still wander?”

“No one knows. Spirits like that out to die a quiet death. But this one- this one is different. Fell through the ice and refused to rest.”

“Is she still there? Lost in the lake?”

“In the lake, yes, but she’s hardly lost. Every winter, when the water freezes over and it’s not far till Yuletide, she comes a’knocking. It’s slow and steady and never ceases and she bangs on the ice much like your ma did in our old looking class ‘fore the fey got into her head”.

“And no one’s tried to let her free?”

“God’s above, child, what a flight of fancy! No one would dare. That girl, there’s a fire in her spirit. People say she’s looking for some poor soul to steal away and, well, I wouldn’t discount it. It’s why we pass the story down - so you don’t go skating on that like and have her drag you into the depths.”

“D’you really think she’d do that? Drown someone?”

“That I do. Wayward spirits get desperate. You don’t want to know the lengths they’d go to to get their deliverance.”

The feeling of misplacement must have been weaved into the very fabric of that like; or at least, that was how I felt. Perhaps it was just the stories, the ones that weaselled their way into the crevices of her head like the mice when the fox was out to hunt, but Elwyn felt a distinct chill drag its fingertips along her spine. She was somewhere she shouldn’t be, like she had fallen into the horizon and hung, still and waiting, over glassy ice.

Danger lurked in the shadows at the bank, bared its teeth in a knowing snarl and eyed her as it prowled with bated breath. She didn’t quite know why she was here if she was honest with herself. There was just something about it, something simultaneously electrifying and lullaby-like. Elwyn had simply been drawn to it, as the tides to the moon and had ended up on the edge of an adventure with her skates laced and heard Aunt Cassie in her.

“Curiosity killed the cat.”

But satisfaction brought it back.

# *Winter Story by Melayna Chiklia.*

Three.

Two.

One.

As everyone counts down, droplets of lights spiralled up into the sky. Each of them is like a man-made star, glistening in the looming darkness. As the lights reach the tip of the tree, there it is. Again.

Crystal lake - the town I grew up in - is an isolated place. The outside world doesn't know us and we don't know them.

Christmas is at the heart of our town; every Christmas is like the heartbeat keeping the town alive; I am part of the town, and it is part of me. But I couldn't stop the doubt and suspicion creeping up on me and fighting against everything I believed in.

Years ago, my grandmother moved with nothing but hope in heart and determination in her soul, and with that, our family's roots were replanted, and our tree began to blossom.

Although I've never met my grandmother, I feel like I know her. All I know about her is her passion for painting, she made such intricate and creative artwork - each stroke of paint meant something - you can spend hours and hours looking at these paintings, searching the most perplexing thoughts.

Thousands of heart-warming memories fill my head, but all are being set alight or blown away in the gusts of winter, the wind and fire burning. They are symbolic. All of them.

*What's it Like Outside? Inspired by The Book Thief and encouraged to make the words ours by Sarah Kaya..*

Wind ruffled the thick ripples of heavy clouds as luminous shades of blue saw glimpses of the monochromatic world below. Thin and spindly grey trees swayed meekly in the frosty breeze. It weaved and wrapped like ribbons around our twisting cobbled roads, trying to breathe some life into the streets. The day felt lost and unfamiliar; this weathered town no longer felt like home.



*Inspired by 'The Book Thief' by Bernard  
Hornsby.*

The day was like a window with raindrops dripping slowly down. The clouds were like puffy grey sheep flying across a great sea of mud as brown and sloppy as chocolate pudding. Rain flickered on and off like a broken light, with barely enough power to keep itself functioning, while the air was on the cusp of being visible, as if it had been grabbed by a hand and dunked into a vat of warm water, humid and clammy. The atmosphere of the day felt almost disappointed, slightly ashamed.

# *Inspired by 'The Book Thief' by Mariandrea Vargas .*

A day with no sun to give warmth. There was no peeking through the grey-filled clouds as they covered the whole sky, even the usual bright gemstone gave out. Whenever you went outside, the icy breath would hit your face and the trees alongside. With each punch, a couple of drops would fall from the branch and join the grass. Occasionally, you could hear a bird's cry and its fluttering as it left from the nest to the colourless yet vast emptiness. When looking at the street, a reflection from above filled your eyes.

*Inspired by 'The Book Thief' by Lily-Mae  
Coulman Lenderyou.*

The day feels like a snow globe when it's freshly turned. Yet it can also feel like a volcano freshly erupted, followed by semi-blinding stripes of sun peeking through the clouds when it's warm. Outside looks like a crisp, white bedsheet when it's covered in the pale snow. Other days, the ground looks like it has been scattered with crushed emeralds and jade. When the clouds are glued shut, not letting any sun struggle its way through, the day is still beautiful. Even if the sky is stained in a deep, dark black, the stars compromise for the lack of sun rays. The tranquil, calming, and relaxing sense this day gives off feels rewarding. Even though it can be chaotic, fun, and fast paced.

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