

Pinnacles

2024

An anthology of English creative
writing by Hilton College boys



HILTON COLLEGE

Deeply Traditional. Refreshingly Contemporary.

Introduction

Writing is hard. It is messy. It takes time, thought, then even more time and more thought. Writing requires doing, reflecting, adjusting, and in some cases starting again when what you have written doesn't work. It calls for looking inward and being willing to be real, raw, and vulnerable. In the last two years, AI has offered us, with the click of a button, a quick fix, an instant product, a way to escape the difficulty (and sometimes drudgery) of the writing process.

As language teachers, we aim to teach our boys to love (and if not love, at least appreciate and respect) the writing process. The planting of a seed, the ability to observe life, beauty, and the chaos around you. The germination of an idea. The search for the right words, in the right order. Reflecting on what has been written, altering it, altering it again, and most importantly, being brave enough to share a part of yourself with others.

AI certainly has a place in the modern world. It can do many things that will benefit humanity socially and economically. It can also generate an essay in under 10 seconds. It can string together words in an order that sounds reasonably good. It may even fool you into thinking that its output is superior to anything that you could write.

What it cannot do, however, is write authentically and with a distinct voice, as the young men whose works are published in the 2024 edition of Pinnacles have done. It cannot explore identity, belonging, and one's purpose in society. It cannot express vulnerability, self-doubt, pride, passion, and love. It is these emotions that define us as humans, and it is these feelings that transcend time.

The 2024 Pinnacles Collection celebrates the writing process. It celebrates young men who are thinkers, and observers; young men who grapple with the messiness of life. It celebrates authenticity.

There are moments when one feels despair about the state of the world. Humanitarian crises, climate change, consumerism, and greed dominate the news. It can be easy to fall into the trap of doomscrolling and fear. However, by compiling this collection of work, I was reminded that we also live in a world filled with hope and possibility.

A world where young men write poetry is a world I want to be part of. A world where young men appreciate the beauty around them, the nuances of nature, and the imperfections of people is a world that should be celebrated.

Along with the poetry and prose in this anthology, there are two Grade 11 research essays. While these pieces of work demonstrate a different type of writing and skill set, their contribution is equally important. Research, just like creative writing, ensures that we ask the right questions, think deeply about what we observe and offer our observations of the world for others to engage with and grapple with.

Carl Sagan, an astronomer and planetary scientist, said “A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat, flexible parts (still called “leaves”) imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking, clearly and silently, inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs, who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time — proof that humans can work magic.”

I invite you to sit down with a cup of tea and this year's collection of work and celebrate the “greatest of human inventions” – writing.

Ashleigh Askew
Head of Department: English



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POETRY

SENIORS

Shailen Naidoo

Expectation

My grade 7 signed T-shirt,
Stained with the ink of distant memories.
Stained with “see you soon” messages,
That were never fulfilled.
But it reminds me,
Of a distant memory, lost in the chaos of life,
The memory of a past life.
One without expectation,
One without fear,
A life without worry.
How I wish I could sink into the arms of my old shirt,
Fit into a life without fear.
The fear of failure.



Kigen Chepkonga

Honestly? You're Embarrassing.

So many ways to describe who you are

Race, politics, the list goes on
All the way to how you listen to a song
Upbeat, energetic, fierce with rage
Or lacking personality, notes on a page

Are you right, center, or left?
Which one would you say fits you best?

Because, whatever that may be,
You're wrong.
You aren't doing it correctly,
You're actually a con.

But with that being said,
Remember to be authentic

We all hate fake
We all love pedantic

Keep one thing in mind.
Be you in the way that's comfortable for me,
Be you in the way that's honourable to see.

So basically, don't be you at all.

That would be one of your many pitfalls.

2020.

2020
In a year destined for perfect vision
We saw suffering not seen in a century
In a year promising hope and happiness
All we hoped for was the need not to bury

2020
Racial awareness at its highest in my lifetime
Yet, in real life, much stays the same
Continuing to shy away from conversations outside of Twitter
People of colour still live with horror, shame and pain

2020
The cliché is for this poem to be a dream
To wake up, with the sun high and a bright world to see
For all we've lost to awaken too
With a sigh of relief, to sigh and see no knee

2020.



Richard Eyres

Who are You?

Grit doesn't subside to defeat, it combs through the ashes of its pride to bargain victory.

Respect makes plans, not excuses.

Diligence doesn't sprint one hundred meters, it stumbles and staggers through ten thousand.

Wisdom knows that pain lazes in the solace of defeat.

Courage says, "Black Lives Matter," and "Me too."

Strength is not a man, but the single parent of one.



Robbie Hayward

So, I don't -

I want to go skydiving,
Imagine the view, the wind rushing past,
But what if the parachute breaks?
So, I don't.

I want to talk to this girl,
Imagine the spark in our chat, the laughter shared,
But what if she turns away?
So, I don't.

I want to eat a burger,
Imagine the burst of flavours, the sizzle of taste,
But what if it clings to my body?
So, I don't.

I want to tell my friends my thoughts,
Imagine the joy, the relief, the weight lifted,
But what if they mock my words?
So, I don't.

I want to go back and do everything I didn't,
Imagine the pride, the sense of self restored,
But I can't.
So, I don't.

Who were once

Once we were one—
Mistaken for twins:
Mario and Luigi
On this Little Big Planet
O' the warmest of times.

Then there was a cry—
Your stitching changed
My world crumbled
While I clung to you,
I should've seen it.
I didn't know it then
it wasn't just you.

I soon outgrew me too,
I just didn't grow with you.

Now in two worlds
Each to our own
LEGO New York abandoned
Teary eyes forgotten

I miss being a child
I miss being a child...

with you

Where to go, what to be?

Where to go,
what to be?
The world's a wild place—
Not sure where I am;
I was there
just yesterday,
but now,
I'm lost in the blur
of today.

Wilderness of doubt,
twisting paths
that lead nowhere.
I don't know
how to be.
I look at you,
steady as a star;
you know
where to go,
you know
how to be.

I hope
I join you there,
where knowing
comes naturally,
without doubting
who,
understanding
how.

I wish
I was like them,

sure
of every step.
But for now,
I just hope—
to understand
the mirror,
and like
what I see.

Small World

Blinded, attempts to wipe the tears away failing,
A ripple of joy swells and spins,
Me and you, alone in a crowded room,
A symphony, reserved just for us two.

My joyous, unfamiliar giggle fills the air,
A sound so pure, others can't help but grin,
Breath becomes scarce,
In this moment where the world spins round.

Everything fades but me and you,
Caught up in this perplexing ride,
The joke isn't even that funny, you see,
But somehow, it's everything to me.

I'm laughing so hard, I can hardly stand,
My stomach aches, my face bright red,
It's like a wave that keeps me afloat,
In a sea of joy, in our little boat.

The laughing slows, but it leaves a trace,
A grin plastered across my face,
A lingering warmth, just for us two,
A memory to treasure, a world so small.

Now, echoes long faded,
I still search for that place,
Our world, where time stood still,
Hoping to find it again,
Just us two, in our world so small.

The colour of our eyes

The eyes were a kaleidoscope,
of innocence, of curious wonder,
and sweet delight.
Eyes that shimmered with sudden tears,

a cascade of joy,
reflecting a world of endless light.

But as the years passed,
the eyes began to cool,
still a tapestry of love,
of colour and open skies.
Yet the vibrant wonder,
slowly dimmed,
leaving a lavender dusk,
a soft pink blush of dreams fading.

Time, relentless in its march,
carved paths through the soul.
The eyes, now a quieter blue,
retained all their hues,
though only the blue shone bright.
a clear winter morning,
cold yet serene,
awaiting the dawn's tender warmth.

What comes next is a mystery,
a landscape yet unpainted.
The eyes are a window,
into the landscape that is you.

Though colours come and go,
as the day progresses,
the key to it all,
to make it beautiful,
is to keep the rainbow within
each colour, whether vibrant or faint.
It just doesn't have to be all at once.

All It Is, Is a Look

A look of shared acknowledgement,
A glance of understanding,
A knowing look between friends.

Then comes the smile—
A smile that agrees,
A smile that no one else would grasp,
A smile that, between us, needs no words.

No matter how brief, this look,
A moment that feels like a mere laugh,
To those around us, just a friendly exchange,
But it's more—a bond built over time.

Those seconds, that look, that smile,
Products of countless moments spent together,
A world apart from the rest,
Almost timeless.

I hope to never lose this—
It's an uphill climb against time and change,
But just know:
This ship means the world to me.



Richard Roxburgh

Beasts of night

Out of the enveloping darkness rise hellhounds borne of night.
Dreadfully awakened beasts frothing at the mouth with spite.
Man's own demons come to haunt.
Trace terrible shadows of primal thought.
A world gone dark by its own hand,
Is darkened further by the son of man.
For they are not demons, nor hellhounds, nor beasts.
But men of the day when the sun's asleep.

Winters day

Walk with me on a winter's day.
It is cold and bitter and streaked with grey.
A world struck bare in Earth's cold grasp.
How the trees do shudder with the wind's dead rasp.
When no cloud may trace the deep blue sky,
And the world is clutched in one long sigh.
When trees are bare and the grass lies dead,
Brown leaves do crumple under man's dear tread.
When coats are donned and fires lit,
To Winter's law, we do submit.
But it's in this time we do remember.
A bright spring day in mid-September.

The average man

There was a man who lived on my street.
He was an average man, with an average life.
With average kids and an average wife.
Yes, we were good friends his name was.....
Brian or Peter or maybe even Scott
To be honest with you I kind of forgot
He would come home from work and sit and then think.
He would do this again night after night.
Until the days slipped by one at a time
And somewhere between the holidays, the birthdays, and the Happy New
Years
Time ran away from him and so did his hair.
You see he got old, so so old.
And the days stretched so long, and the nights turned cold.
And then there was time to sit, but not think.
For his mind was gone, so far gone.

The last time I saw him was in a mahogany box.
With its beautiful sheen and its lovely gold locks
They asked me if I knew him, I did you see.
Yes
That man in the box, down there is me.

Bench Haiku

To sit on a bench.
Is to give life a moment.
To catch up with you.

The Tackle

He's coming, he's coming, he's coming.
He's got the ball and he's running.
Double my size and twice my width.
He's built like a monster from ancient myth.
Our eyes lock, and my blood runs cold.
Everything stops and time is slowed.
Get low, get low, get low.

My fear is gone and so are my wits.
As I face down his almighty blitz.

I get down low and deliver the hit.
And make that mighty beast submit.
Then he's over me and on the floor
And I rise up bruised and bloody and sore.
My job is done my work complete.
As I stand up high on my tired feet.

Disappearing dreams

To stare at the ceiling for one long length
Is to discover man's own unyielding strength.
To die a million little deaths
Without a single catch in breath
To let dreams fade before your eyes.
To not even blink at their little cry's
The world may spin a trillion ways.
But this could never sway my gaze.
As I watch them march on and on
And I know deep down that they are gone.
To a little place so far from here
Where there, is no death, no hate not even fear.

Rain

Raindrops glide down my twisted face
As I accept the storm's embrace
As my heady rush begins to slow
Little rivers off me do flow.
I stop and stand and look at the rain.
Any near man would think me insane.
But no souls about and I am alone.
As God weeps down from his mighty throne
And in this downward pitter-patter
Nothing really seems to matter.
For the rain does fall like little knives.
And I for once do feel, alive.



Andre Boshoff

The Path of My Life

I don't know why I came to be
Life for me is just a big mystery
I'm lost in the woods of my own mind
Going through life wondering
If breathing really makes me living?
I walk down the path of my own life
Thinking of the past I can't change
And the future I can't control
What is my song?
How can I walk with no direction?
Life truly is complicated
A sum that nobody can solve
But maybe, just maybe
That's what makes life worth living
Life is unpredictable
A story full of twists and turns
We never know what's going to happen on the next page
But would you start reading a book
If you already knew the ending?
I don't have life figured out yet
And I doubt I ever will
But I know one thing for certain:
I'm not alive because I'm breathing
I'm alive because I'm living.

Fire – Riots in South Africa

Some Gasoline, a flame, a spark
Is all it takes to light up the dark
But through the smoke
The shadows remain
Of those who've dressed up in shame.
They've struck fear into our hearts
They come in big BMW's and carts
They are to blame
For this spreading flame.
The flame that burns
The flame that stings
The flame that turns
Love into hate
That makes us carry all this weight.
For them it's a game
A game of lives
But there's no need to cry
For the end is nigh.

We need to stick together
Together we'll awake from this dream
We can do this
We are South Africans
Now let us prove it.

Dreams

(original by Langston Hughes)

Hold on to your dreams,
They're important you know,
For without them
Life would be like a rabbit's dark burrow,
Deep in the ground, empty, lonely, and full of sorrow.
Hold on to your dreams,
They're important you know,
For without them
Life would be like a branch twisting, snapping, breaking,
Falling from the tree of life.
Hold on to your dreams,
They're important you know,
For without them
Life would unravel like a loose thread
Leaving you exposed and afraid.
Hold on to your dreams,
They're important you know,
For without them
Life would be like a sloth's holiday,
Lying about with no purpose.
Hold on to your dreams,
They're important you know,
For without them
The abundant stream of life, that once quenched our thirst,
Will simply cease to exist, leaving behind a barren wasteland.
So hold them close, for dreams are life's own breath.

But You Didn't

(Original by anonymous)

Remember last year on Valentine's Day,
When I put sunlight in the tumble-dryer,
I thought you would take your ruined clothes and leave,
But you didn't.
Remember that time when we first met,
I asked you out on a date,
We ate like royalty and had a fantastic time,
But when the bill arrived I knew my fate,
I forgot my wallet, so you had to pay,

I thought you would hate me,
But you didn't.
Remember that day on Christmas Eve,
When I forgot your present,
You gave me mine, a golden pen,
It must have cost a fortune!
I thought you would take it back,
But you didn't.
Remember that time when I got fired,
I had no money and no place to stay,
I thought you would kick me out,
But you didn't.
While I stood at the end of the aisle on our wedding day,
I recited my words in my mind,
I stood erect and proud as I waited for you to show,
But you didn't.

Mamma en Pappa

Tomorrow marks the great big day
Of twenty years that have flown by
A time of love and joy they say
And being their son, I know it's not a lie.
It's my parents' anniversary
Celebrating the years of happiness they've shared
Bonded together as if by surgery
Having their enduring love declared
All their faults known to the other
Accepted and placed aside
Their lives not grey but full of colour
Every curveball taken in their stride
My mother is crazy about my father
And he adores her too
In each other's arms they make their home
A safe place, their natural biome
They've set an example for me to follow
To choose wisely who I'll journey with
If I can have a bond even half as strong as theirs
God would have answered my prayers
Today marks the great big day
So here's to the first twenty
And the next one that's on its way



William Segar

Etchings of The Past

There is nothing I would not give,
To relive those memories of his.
I would sit and watch with splendor.
I yearn to remember.
The dog-eared pictures are not enough,
Nor my fleeting recollections.
A boy who called life's bluff,
With glee painted in his expressions.
Oblivious to its imminent hazing,
One who attacked each day guns blazing.

Life wears no façade though,
Its revenge on him was rotten.
A casualty of growing up,
Whose story fades, forgotten.
No statue built, or memoir saved,
Just a voice lost with time;
But in the distant hills an echo chimes.
These scars I find are his, not mine.

The Pond had Its Pros

With each day that flies by,
I realize they were right.
Growing up is no gift,
It deserved a greater fight.

The ocean held such an allure,
To reach it seemed a delight.
But now I miss the dainty ripples,
With sunlit smiles so bright.
Unlike the towering swells,
Whose water, dark as night.

Its vastness is quite daunting,
From afar, a better sight.
They truly were not lying,
The ocean is no bark, all bite.

My Favourite Colour is Yours Too

My favourite colour is brown,
What a peculiar one to choose
I am often met with a frown.

'Why not green, red, or the gold of a crown?'
I assure them though; it is no ruse.
My favourite colour is brown.

People's connotations drag it down,
They far prefer the ocean's blues.
I am often met with a frown.

To them, I may seem daft as a clown,
My decision appears to confuse.
My favourite colour is brown.

But as I stroll through my vibrant town,
To change my decision, I still refuse.
I am often met with a frown.

In all the gorgeous shades, my eyes drown.
Brown is a combination of all these hues,
My favourite colour is brown.
I am often met with a frown.

'leaf subsides to leaf'

As the wind heaves and sighs
Leaves rustle and trees sway.
One leaf slips his hold,
And finally breaks away.
In Autumn's breath he flies,
Reveling while floating astray.
Waltzing in the late noon gusts,
He flaunts his dance in a grand display.

Then the wind died down,
And the amber glow marked the close of day.
The leaf began to plummet,
Careening in newfound dismay.
How far this poor leaf has fallen,
Now upon the lawn, he shall decay.
What goes up must come down,
And the price of life he must now pay.

I wonder how far along I lie,
Hopefully only at his yesterday.

Almost

One trivial afternoon,
As a man strolls down the street,
The glint of litter steals his gaze,
Hinting at what he should do.
But the bin is not en route,
And he's in an awful rush.
So his stride does not waver,
And his eyes dare not glance back.
Then with a sneeze of the wind,
His good deed passes him by,
It vanishes like a ghost.

Next he sees an old beggar,
Wrapped in thread-bare, faded rags.
Before her sits a beans can,
In which a few coins reside.
Her dirt-stained hands, clasped in plea,
As she fires off looks of hope.
He has change from his coffee,
The coins in his left pocket
Press cold against his taut thigh.
But she'll surely buy booze,
And why her, not another?
So his hand retreats away
From the mouth of his jeans' pouch.
A falcon bailing mid-dive,
Except it's her dinner lost.

With the click of his front door,
A furry friend waited to greet,
And he hears his wife upstairs.
But he shoved past the wet snout,
And chose "hi" over a hug.
Sinking into the sofa,
The children's lights each die out.
But they're babies no longer,
They don't need to be tucked in.

Yet as he reflects that night,
All that appears are regrets.
He tries to excuse the guilt,
He was tired, and overwhelmed.
But you can't lie to yourself,
And although he is not bad,
Dogs know not his reasons,
Nor do hungry people care.
Almost does not clean the streets,
Or wish two young boys sweet dreams.

A euphemism for didn't,
Almost will never suffice.
It leaves all things incomplete,
Nearly there, close but not quite.
Making nothing sound just right.



Atlegang Ramutla

At What Cost

I stumbled across an image
Taken in Gaza, Palestine:
A little girl;
Her once red skirt now turned an ashy black
She sits on a swing,
one damaged beyond repair.
Her face expresses no joy
Nor does her unkept hair.
Behind her is her brother
Who looks like hasn't showered in days.
He pushes her on the swing trying to get a smile on her face
Behind them is their home
Which once stood tall and grand
But it has been reduced to rubble
With their memories in the sand.
Why should millions suffer
For a disagreement between two men?
A truce between the nations
could stop the bloodshed and the damage.
Because never again shall the boy and girl
Passionately hug their parents.
With emptiness in their eyes
and holes in their shoes,
they must move forward in life
with nothing left to lose.

Brothers Of Choice

The quiet halls where echoes roam,
Far from the comfort of our childhood homes,
We found each other, strangers at first,
But soon a bond, unplanned, unrehearsed
In the morning light, with sleepy eyes.
We'd rise together under the same skies,
Sharing dreams both big and small,
In the dorm, we were brothers after all.

Through whispered secrets in the dark of night,
And laughter that made all things right,
We built a family, not of blood, but of choice,
In every shared moment, we found our voice.
When the world seems vast and cold outside,
In each other's company, we'd confide,
Strength in numbers, courage in the storm,
In the dormitory, our brotherhood was born.
We will soon walk our separate paths one day,
But the memories of those nights will always stay,
For in that place where we all grew,
We found brothers, forever true.

Humility

No matter how high the mountains you climb,
Or how far you travel in distance and time,
Remember the roots that anchored you strong,
The place where you learned right from wrong.
When the world applauds and praises your name,
Stay humble and recall from whence you came,
The quiet streets, the modest walls
The moments you'd stumble, the moments you'd fall,
For in the soil of humility, you grew
Nurtured by hands that believed in you,
And though the future may beckon with might,
Don't lose sight of your guiding light,
Keep your feet grounded, your heart in place,
Wear your journey proud but wear it with grace,
For a measure of a man isn't what they gain,
But the kindness they carry and the love they sustain,
So walk with pride but bow your head,
To the wisdom of the past, the life you've led,
And always be grateful for each rising sun,
For the path you've walked and the man you've become

William Ramutla

Your smile was an immortal gift of your youth.
Full straight, white rows besides your golden tooth.
The stories of your childhood etched themselves in my mind.
About how your younger days were now all but left behind.
You showed me the value within myself.
When I saw average and denied my wealth.
When you gathered all your effort and showed up to my game
Though you were sick and crippled and an hour's drive away.
You believed in me when no one else would.
And when I believed I couldn't do what I could

I thank you, Grandpa, as you now rest.
Know I will continue to give of my best.



Ty Kalayamotho

Symphony of Madness

A lone figure stands in the middle of the ballroom,
Others watch in confusion and disdain,
As the figure dances to music which cannot be heard.
He dances to a symphony of madness, one in which only he can hear,
He dances, and starts to laugh, he laughs to the madness of this world,
The people take steps back,
feeling shivers from the figure's maniacal laughter.

The figure dances to the music made by an orchestra of Ghosts and
Phantoms,
They have waited from this day, for someone to hear their music.
The ghosts and phantoms are vestiges of a long-ago era,
Where their ideas and thoughts were subjected to scrutiny
and deemed as madness!

Galileo for his ideas that the earth orbits the sun,
Socrates for his idea that you should question everything to find the truth,
Michael Servetus for discovering how blood moves between the heart and
lungs,
Hypatia of Alexandria for believing that human perfection and happiness are
attainable without the afterlife!

The figure decides to stop living in a world where freedom deserves scrutiny,
Decides to embrace the madness of an innovator,
To challenge the status quo, to bring change, to bring life back to this dull
world.

As the music reaches a climax, another joins the figure,
Someone who has decided to embrace the madness,
They join hands and together they,
Waltz to a symphony of madness!

The 4 Seasons

When the sun blazes with its warm embrace,
And the river flows under the azure sky,
It is in summer when we feel the sun's grace,
And under the cool breeze, we lie.

The season where leaves become solid gold,
Where air grows crisp, a symphony of sighs,
Autumn is when colors of red, gold, and yellow stand out bold,
And when winter slowly sheds its disguise.

When a blanket of cloud falls and bleaches the sky grey,
With frosty breath from lips to air, it leaves,
With harsh icy winds leaving you cold, with no warmth left from the
now-hidden rays,
All you can do is wear long sleeves.

When winter loses its grip and also its hold,
Where flowers bloom, blossoms paint the landscape, and scents waft,
It is when life comes back with a shine and we are glad there is no cold,
That is the glory of spring, where nature is kind, caring and soft.

Summer, autumn, winter, and spring are our seasons.
The cycle whose glory goes unappreciated and unnoticed.
Thank you, seasons!

Death

What is death to you?
Is death the Grim Reaper who watches and stare at you from beyond?
Is death the one who's shadow looms above your head waiting
to claim your life?
Is death the bounty hunter who chases you for your whole life
and waits in the shadows?
Is death an unstoppable force who's slow marches you can never out run?

What is death to you?
Is death merely a time limit for you to enjoy everything you possibly can?
Is death a friend who waits for you to come into its embrace and leave this
world peacefully?
Is death something that is merely natural and is just the way the world works?
Is death a concept that sparks your curiosity
and instead of fear it generates interest?

What is death?
Is death something that happens when you lose your mortal coils?

Is death something that happens when you lose the thing closest to your heart?

Is death something that happens when history buries your name under dust?

Death is ever coming,
It is Unrelenting,
Unstoppable,
Inevitable,
It is something that if you truly want to live,
Is something you except with grace, honour, and dignity.
All you must do is live,
You must laugh,
You must cry,
You must laugh,
Experience all there is to experience while you still have the chance,
As death will come for you, whether you are ready,
Or not.

The March

The landscape is painted by figures of glistening gold,
As these figures approach some people are a bit too bold,
They find there way closer to the tide of gleaming gold,
And they run from what they've just seen.

They run back to the city shouting,
"Run and hide! Run and hide!"
"Run with haste! Hide with fear!"
"For the army of Sparta are here!"
People scatter quicker like scared Mice,
For their lives don't dare test Sparta's Might.

The footsteps of Sparta shake and quake the ground,
Their marching generates awe and fear,
The people are scared they will be found,
And children hide with tears.

The shields bearing their symbol generate an imposing might,
An impenetrable fortress this army is.
With spears that have sharpened tips which pierce through the heavens,
They are an inexorable force.
Their shimmering of golden sun, shines with a resplendent light,
It only emits awe and might.
Their hardened faces that have been forged through war,
And shouts that reverberate through the land,
They are like wolves ready to eat the lambs.
For This,

Is Sparta.
The unconquerable golden army.

Destiny.

Destiny is unpredictable.
One day it'll be your best friend,
The next day, it's your worst enemy.

It's a force with no sympathy for those who whine,
It has no empathy for those who cry,
It will ruthlessly crush the complacent,
And hide from those who wait for it.

A force that you can't run from,
Someday it'll be there to claim it's dues.
Till the day you die, destiny will always be there,
Because no matter how hard you try,

Whether you,
Dread it,
Run from it,
Hide from it,
Destiny arrives all the same.



Musa Mponda

Waterford, Bulawayo

No matter the length I travel,
or foreign regions I come to know,
my love for home is a mature wound,
deep, unkempt, and ever-lasting.
A land where the soil is rich, but its people thirst.
Where laughter is rhythmic in the face of grief,
where hope is a hushed uprising
against the weight of eternal struggle.
The gateway heavy with unspoken farewells,
where departures carry the scent of loss,
and arrivals bring forth the echoes of what was left behind.
I may have left,
but a part of me stays rooted in the telling ground,
that knows both the pain and beauty of this fallen nation.
It's scent in my breath, its sorrow in my heart.
My love for home is a quiet ghost, haunting the places I wander,
revealing stories of my picturesque home that once was.

The Eclipse of Friendship

Once the sun and moon shared the sky,
a stellar streak of ever-lasting light.
The sun blazed throughout the day,
and the moon by night.
A trusty companionship.
A star appeared, her sparkle captivating,
drawing the moon's gaze from the suns' eternal glow.
He turns away, entrapped by her luminosity,
leaving the sun to drift away alone;
only comforted by storms of grey clouds.
The harmony they once knew unwinded by the pricking farewell.
The moon complete with embrace.
The sun abandoned in shadow,
carrying the weight of a friendship lost to short-lived brilliance.
The irreplaceable choice of an orb over a loyal companion left a silent void.
Where echoes of their bond linger amid the stars that once aligned.

Mother Knows Best

"Mother knows best," she says,
her voice certain like the meeting of tide and shore.
Her words are a wall;
solid and bland, meant to protect,
but also to confine.
She speaks with conviction,
as if life's truths are wrapped in her acuity.
My thoughts mere echoes,
faint, not easily deciphered.
I try to share my heart's whispers,
the visions that frolic in my mind,
but she doesn't hear them,
caught up in the loudness of her own assurance.
Insistent she knows the path I should follow,
the choices I should make,
but her vision is blurred by the years,
unable to see the world through my eyes.
Through her gaze I am still a youth,
who once needed her guiding hand,
but I have matured, my thoughts deeper,
my desires misaligned with hers.
Yet she holds on,
Confident as ever in her decisions.
In her love, she forgets to learn,
to grasp that I must forge my own path.
"Mother knows best," she repeats,
but the words plunge deeply between us.

An eternal reminder that love, though fierce,
does not always see clearly.

A Tale of Two Sapiens

The boy sheltered by the high walls of cashmere and inheritance,
The man shaped by the hardships of poverty from Apartheid.
The boy awakens in luxury, comforted by silk sheets
and satin-lined pillowcases.

The man's journey drenched in struggle;
each tear shed another chapter in his story.
They meet for a brief moment; a solitary encounter on the road.
The boy inside a buffed car, the man walking with worn-out shoes.

Their eyes connect.
A silent understanding passes, each seeing a world they cannot touch.
The car drives on, the man walks on, but the moment stays.
That sole gaze a harsh reminder of two paths that cross
with only a mere glance.

The Unforgiving Hour

At 5:00 in the morning,
The world is a blank canvas.
The unforgiving hour,
where shadows and dreams coexist.
A time for those who wrestle with dawn, the insomniacs,
the restless seekers, the ones who greet the first light with tired eyes.
Stuck between the end of night and the break of dawn.
A profound peace that settles like a gentle mist,
where the only sounds are the whispers of early winds,
and the distant murmur of a waking city.
For those who rise before the sun,
there is a soft intimacy with the silence,
a fraction of stillness that wraps around you like a fleece,
where thoughts are unhurried, and time is stationary.
In this quiet hour, there's a rare kind of tranquillity,
A space untouched by the noise of our daily lives,
where the world feels simultaneously eternal and miniscule.
The peace of the morning, a fresh, vivid gift.



JUNIORS

Ryan Grobler

In the Shadows

In the quiet of a friend's safe space,
The peace was broken, no hiding place.
A sudden intrusion, the fear unleashed,
The shock of what was just released.

Four hours long, the clock stood still,
Bound by force, against our will.
Many death threats and weapons of harm,
They took the trust, fear blew like a bomb.

A car, some jewels, alcohol lay apparent,
But more was lost, we felt transparent.
A sense of safety, once so profound,
Now buried 6 feet deep in ground.

The mind replays the endless night,
A scar that lingers, a wish to fight.
Triggers spark, the past returns,
In short-lived moments, my fear burns.

In the shadows, never exposed
They left us shaken, we felt opposed.
For in the end, what's gained by force,
Is haunted by a dark remorse.

Yet in the cracks, new strength will rise,
A strive to heal, to clear the skies.
Although memories may still fire,
There's power inside us to inspire.

Pangolins of The Night.

In the quiet of the night, where shadows play,
An armoured creature roams away,
Protected by scales, with gentle grace,
The pangolin moves, leaving barely a trace.

In the savannah lush or the undergrowth thick,
The pangolin plays its little trick,
Curl and uncurl when dangers come and go,
Protecting itself in an armoured ball, showing not a toe.

It's many scales gleam and shine,
A natural wonder by design,
Yet it leads a peaceful life,
Hiding away from the lions' strife.

Yet danger looms with man's cruel hand,
Threatening the treasures of this land,
The pangolin, a creature so unheard of and rare,
Deserves our protection, our utmost care.

Oh, gentle pangolin, secret of the wild,
May your future be safe and mild,
For as the sun rises you hide away,
Waiting for darkness, to come out and play.

The Waterhole

I must go down to the waterhole, where the elephants bathe and splash,
And the crocodile sleeps beneath the surface
and the hippos bellow and clash;
And the impala graze, and the giraffe browse, and the terrapin sunbathes,
And kingfishers dive like torpedoes, and the wind creates little waves.

I must go down to the waterhole, where the lions stalk their prey,
And the jackals scavenge around the edge, and the vultures sit and sway;
And the leopard hides and the cheetah flies, and the serval listens hard,
And the African sun glares beneath, and the earth beats its heart.

I must go down to the waterhole, where the wildebeest rest and drink,
And the crocodile comes up from below, and attacks as fast as a blink;
And the impala dash and the wildebeest jump
and the elephants stampede away,
And the crocodile sinks beneath the surface, and his stomach is full of dismay.



Layton Stokes

A Plea of Action

In a broken South Africa,
It is up to our leaders to gather the shards left by
the collapse of the apartheid system,
It is up to them to lead the country to finer pastures,
Or is it?

Should it be up to politicians to wrap a string around the country, play puppet master,
and somehow, someway, fix it?
No, It can't be, no one man, party or government will ever be able to
singlehandedly wrestle with the remnants of apartheid alone.
South Africa is more than one individual.
Let us remember,
That it wasn't just Nelson Mandela who ended Apartheid,
It was the millions of hammered hearts of the oppressed,
Who dragged themselves as far as their chains would allow,
And spat in the face of the government,
Those people made the difference.

The people of South Africa,
Need only one thing: the courage to help others,
There is no shortage of demand for aid,
Over half of our population still require the governments financial assistance,
Our education is falling apart as 49% of our youth that are searching for jobs,
can't find it.
Yet there is no shortage of wealth to be spread,
The wealthiest 10% of the country is in control of 85% of the it's wealth.
It is up to those people, who have the means to make action,
To do that simple act of charity, and effort, which changes the course of
people's lives.
We need to support organizations that focus on uplifting communities from the
ground up,
That don't pull the needy where they want,
But push them where they need to go.

That is the simple action that South Africa needs,
That gradual change of circumstances that inspires more action.
In time, with the aid of the influential,
South Africa's needy will be influenced,
This is what South Africa needs.
Changed, guided by compassionate south Africans is what will create the
strong, unified country.
That those brave men and women dreamed of, back in 1994.

A Reflection

The reflection in the mirror stood docile and quiet,
It moved little and spoke less,
Yet in this place, I was at rest.
Its solemn figure eased my tensions,
And it's pale, sunken features completing its complexion.
It glared at me, and I at it,

It beckoned me closer, with a smile,
Making me yearn for a secluded exile,
So, I embraced my isolation,
As I disappeared in the reflection.

The Unknown Soldier

I open my eyes
To see the barrel again
It does not understand
It does not care
It just looks at my tears

The beach, the waves and wind assault my ears
Reminding me of the weapon they forced upon me
But my voice remains unheard and distant.
My vision narrows into his eyes, into his barrel
Both unchanged, unmoved
What could I have done differently?
What could I have changed?
I think
Must I simply accept?
Remain here
On this forsaken, bloody beach
Forever?

A flash,
Of God?
Of Son?
Of the Holy Spirit?
The echo unravels the skies
Kicks back the barrel
Clears my mind
I collapse to the gravel.



Rex Holdsworth

For the love of the mountains

For the love of the mountains, I need to go back to the snowy-face beast
towering above me,
With all living creatures calling it home, a place where they can see
what all that this magnificent place stands for,
With the snow, and the rushes and the fields of straw.

For the love of the mountains, they call me back.
Oh, the thrill of watching out for a crack
in the rock path, as this exquisite individual watches you
take one step further, to your goal, as it is only true.

For the love of the mountains, for the thrill of the hike,
You get to the top and you see a shrike,
You see a flying dove,
And you realize, this is the definition of love.



Heath Schwegmann

Emotions

My family say I am emotional,
And honesty, they are not delusional,
I am always smiling when happy,
And shout and moan when snappy.

I cry and sob when I am sad,
And laugh with joy when glad,
I do not like things that are disgusting,
And want lots of stuff when I am lusting.

When I am scared, I burst into tears,
And I scream when I see my fears,
I am a very emotional man,
So please, do not make fun of me because you can.

A Hot Summer Day

I wake up in the morning,
Feeling energetic as ever,
Outside it is not pouring,
Nor any stormy weather.

Today is a boiling hot day,
Unlike no other,
A time to have lots of fun,
Without horrible weather to bother.

I walk outside in T-Shirt and shorts,
To see the neighbourhood kids play,
I run over to them all,
Without any delay.

After my day,
Playing in the sun,
I lay my head,
Dreaming about another one.

And I love them all endlessly.

Autumn

Leaves turn shades of brown,
They crumble and fall to ground,
Autumn has arrived.



Otsile Moncho

New person, Same Mistakes

I can feel the new year coming around.
Resolutions are all a round,
Can't wait for what the year has bound.

Feeling like I'm brand
new, Life starts to look oh
so true,
Everything's starting to look good.
I can't see the futility in what I do.

As the year passes the more time I waste
Trying to catch up what I've missed
But I'm doing less and less.

December is about to
pass by, Next year will be
my next try,
I can feel the new year coming around.

Music

A lovely sound hits the ear,
Its Sound waves pass
through the ear canal, to the
eardrum
vibrate and create what we love to hear.

From jazz and soul to hip hop and pop,
All these sounds grace our ears and never stop.
They can be used for good or bad;
Shine light or allow darkness in
It's the universal sound we all love to hear.

Letter to myself

Dear me,
Your life is precious.
It has a best before date,
It can expire and it will be too late.

Don't waste time,
Every second
counts, The
more you idle
The more you
sorrow The more
you waste The
more you dismay.

Remember tomorrow is not promised.



PROSE

SENIORS

William Luther Ebersohn.

A Modest Discourse.

The town of Innsport was a small one, perched precariously where the wild trees met the angry ocean. Ugly squat, grey houses were common, and rough weathered-looking fishermen were too. No road dared to cut through the untamed woods surrounding the settlement, the only way in or out was by boat. And even then, the people of Innsport never left, they were joined to the land by the hip. No one knows how they first arrived, how long the town has been there for, or too much else about its history. Not even the townsfolk themselves. It's as if they just crawled from the tangled trees and thorns of the woods one day, deciding that they liked the taste of fish flesh over berries and roots. Perhaps the only one who could know anything of interest about Innsport would be the Morgan family, or Martin, the wagon driver. He drove the donkey and cart for the wagon rides from the docks to the upper parts of town.

It was on one such wagon ride that young William Tannon happened to meet Mr. Clyde Morgan for the first time. William, or as his mother affectionately called him, Will, worked the afternoon shift at the harbour, helping tie down fishing boats for the night. The Company's vessels had their own crews who did all that for their large brigs, but they had nothing on an Innsport man, they were born and bred with knots and sails ropes in their hands. Just that morning one of the Company men, cocky with a light drink, had challenged him to a knot-tying contest and Will's pockets were now four coins heavier than before. He would add one of those to his small wooden chest of savings when he returned home, the other to his father, and one towards a night at the inn with his mates. He thought of that drink now, a good old Innsport local ale, as he was bumped and knocked about on the back of the donkey-drawn wagon. The man across from him certainly looked like he could do with an ale too, or even a strong whiskey to lift his spirits. He looked to be about his late thirties, a few grey hairs were starting to rear their heads, and his face was certainly weathered enough, however not sun hewn. In fact, he was paler than most men Will had ever seen, and he was surprised he had not laid eyes on the man before. He was certainly a local like he, partly because of the unmistakable high-set cheekbones and wide-rimmed nose of an Innsport local, and partly because few outsiders lived in the town. Even the company men who, after a night's drink in the inn, resigned to their cabins on the ships for the night's duration. But then again, despite the unmistakable logic that the stranger was a local, Will had never seen him before, and he had seen everyone in Innsport... except one, that was. Therefore, by the process of

elimination, the man before him had to be none other than Clyde Morgan, a so-called recluse, and according to rumours, a madman.

"Evening, Mr. Morgan..." Will eventually hesitated, breaking the silence, which to him had become unbearable. At the same time, he was none too sure it if was truly evening yet, or simply the last of the afternoon. He looked towards the man, hoping for some form of acknowledgement. He received a good-natured nod and something resembling a grunt of recognition. It would have to do.

He swallowed against the dryness in his throat, "So, what brought you down to the docks today Mr. Morgan?"

This time he did not receive even a grunt nor nod, instead the man simply continued to look far off towards the heavy woods in the distance. Will decided not to press conversation, with either Mr. Morgan or the wagon driver, who was in fact incapable of such, considering he was hard of hearing. His was Martin, a stout elderly man who had been driving the wagon from the harbour to the upper part of town for as long as anyone could remember. He had also never charged a penny for his service in all his years, nor had he actually said a word in just as long. People presumed he was deaf as a plank of wood, and it was not worth staying up at night troubling over, even for Will. Just as one did not question why there are waves on the ocean or birds in the trees, one did not question the being of Martin the wagon driver. That was how things were. It did however mean that Will was trapped in a situation he found most unfortunate, inside a thick air of uncomfortable silence on to the last two stops on the road. The only sound was that of the wheels on the stone road. Clink. Clink. Clink. Will had never been happier to get off the wagon than then, the journey, though short, had been painfully long. He placed the fourth coin in Martin's right side coat pocket as he left, the ancient driver shot him the remnants of a wrinkled smile as he did so. It was an unspoken rule of the Innsport, you had to slip him a coin for the trip, despite not being obliged by anything other than an unspoken code. With that the wagon continued off in the direction of the last houses of the town, almost swallowed by the groping trees not far off. Will could barely make them out truth be told, they were already drowned in the growing mist that blanketed the town every night, like some phantom out of the dark woods.

Ahead just off the main street was the Tannon residence, a single-story house that by Innsport standards was just about average. On the street-facing side was his father's metalworking forge and store, small, but it brought in enough at the end of each month to live reasonably well by. There were few tradesmen in Innsport, roughly one per need of the people. One smithy, one tailor, one baker, one butcher, and so on. Most of the rest fished, and a few of the hardier townsfolk farmed on the outskirts, though the soil was barren and harsh to all but the pines that so crowded the town borders. Each role of tradesman in Innsport had been passed from father to oldest son as far back as the oldest could recall, it kept the traditions alive, and at the same time a sense of duty. One would find no bad work in Innsport, only the finest horseshoes, the best cut meat, and the toughest made boots. To fail in one's profession was to have it passed on to the next oldest male relative, and then you would have to work the fishing boats like everyone else. Like Will had to, for his

brother Tyson, who was older by three years, was going to inherit the hammer and tongs from their father. Will spat in the direction of the forge as he ascended the front stairs, then quickly swivelled his head to make sure no one had seen him do so. His father would box his ears if he saw such, if fact any passerby would do the same.

He pushed open the thick wooden door, its intricately carved knocker gently rocking as he did so. It held the image of some ancient, stern man. His features were entwined with leaves and thorns as if they protruded from his woodset skin. More wild being than man. Not the work of his family, they were not carpenters or carvers, they stuck to their trade.

James Tannon, just like his firstborn son Tyson was a proverbial brickhouse of a man, though even more so. Years of striking hammer to metal in the forge had gifted him with forearms as thick as tree trunks and shoulders that put any sailor to shame. Like any Innsport man, he had a wide nose and high cheekbones, but his were thick too and his rust-coloured mutton chops only made them appear more so. Tyson too had a reddish set, and unlike his father who had as much head hair as an egg, had a fiery mane down to his shoulders. Meanwhile, Will had brown hair and was virtually incapable of growing anything but the wispiest of facial hair. As he walked into the main room of the house, he was reminded of this fact loudly by his father.

“Lad, I think the wind’s turned again and some gull fluff has landed itself on your chin. You better do something about it before a girl catches sight of you, or you’ll never be wed.”

He burst into a fit of deep boisterous laughter at his own words, and Tyson joined in as well. Will felt the blood rush to his cheeks and quickly placed one of his three remaining coins on the table before his father. James smiled at his son heartily, not a sign of malice as per usual, just perpetually cheerful.

“Oh? It’s not the end of the month yet son, but thanks, nevertheless. None can say you don’t earn your keep.”

“And your father won’t say it, but sales have been lower than usual this month. So, every bit does really count, at least a bit more than usual,” interjected Mary Tannis suddenly, looking up from the bubbling pot on the fireplace.

Tyrone raised his voice a bit, as if a little wounded, “Nonsense Ma, business is the same as always. Steady but nothing over the top, just as Pa and I like it.” He and James exchanged a quick glance that only Will caught. Tyrone was truly growing into the spitting image of their father, and acting like him too, if a little more hotheaded and temperamental, but still jolly all the same. Will had noticed that the stews had gotten a little lighter on meat and vegetables and a little heavier on fish lately. That’s what happens when there’s only one butcher, a few farmers with low yield and at least half a town of fishermen, meat becomes a luxury. One that he would be expecting a little less of for a while, though he knew with his father and brother at the forge one they would never go without.

"I can start working morning shifts at the dock too if that'll help Pa." Will's voice broke the odd silence that had settled so suddenly.

"As I said to Ma, business is the same as..." Tyrone started again loudly, shooting his brother a look before James interrupted his eldest son.

"That's not a bad idea lad. Not that we're hard on money, but it'll teach you some independence outside of the family name. Of course, you'll never need for too much, what with the forge and all, but it doesn't hurt for you to bring in a bit more money. And it's far better than you sitting around for most of the day until the boats come in each day or distracting the Company's sailors."

Will nodded at the words. He poured his father a glass of whiskey from a bottle on a shelf against the wall, and he himself dipped a mug into the water barrel. Whiskey was one of the pricier items in the town, for the Company ship only brought two crates of it on their trimonthly goods ship to Innsport. One was almost always purchased by the Morgan family, and the other crate of twelve was sold by the bottle to the first to arrive at the harbor that day. Will had been sent to wait there since the break of dawn to secure the bottle he carefully poured from now and rewarded with a sizable tot of it upon securing it. Other than that, only James got whiskey, his sons made do with water out the barrel and ale out of their own pockets. It was his right as head of the house and the main income earner. Only Will knew that Tyson snuck a sip every now and then, replacing it with that same water from the barrel. He hoped the glass he passed to his father was a strong one, however.

"Pa, I've been thinking." He ventured as James sipped at his drink and gave a thoughtful hmmm in response.

"I've been thinking...instead of helping dock and tie boats and such, maybe I can get a job on a fishing boat?"

Tyson looked up at his brother from the book he had been reading in the candlelight. Will looked instead at his father, who continued to sip his whiskey.

"Lad, as Pa said, the business is doing fine. There's no need to go do that now." His brother decided to take the initiative, not noticing James raising an eyebrow at this. Will looked towards his father once more, "Pa?"

"Son, no Tannis has ever worked the boats. That's that, and no son of mine will be the first. We are tradesmen by nature. I will leave my forge to your brother, and you will help him work the forge when I have done so. Until then you need not worry, except to bring in the occasional coin once a month and supply money for your own ale. And when Tyson has a son and he is old enough to apprentice the forge, you will once more have not to worry about a thing. That is how it has been and will always be." James sighed, "So let me say once more, you can work the harbour twice a day, but you will not be working as a fish gutter or line watcher. Not even if the forge were to burn down and we had no place to call home."

Will curled his lip slightly, but otherwise, his face did not betray his reaction. He had expected as much. He bid his father and mother good night and went off to his room

without eating, complaining that he suddenly felt overcome by exhaustion. Since his parents only had two children, him, and his brother each had their own room. His was small, but his own space with a bed, a single set of drawers, and a wild fern he had potted and placed on his windowsill. Outside the glass, the town was dead and dark, as it always was on a weekday evening. It mirrored a feeling that he had begun to have deep inside for a while now, like a dull throb.

He pulled up the window, securing it place firmly. Then with the ease of a squirrel, he climbed through and out, landing softly on the street outside. He chided himself silently. He was a young man now, he could have easily left through the front door, even at this hour. However, this way he would not retread any tensions with his exit. Will made his way away from the house. Towards the woods.

He listened for the sound of birds or crickets. Something moved to his left in the bushes. A bird of some sort perhaps, a small rabbit or mouse. Not uncommon, and rabbits often made a good pot. But he had no means to hunt it with, nor the humour at present. Instead, he gazed beyond, drifting aimlessly through his own head. Since his childhood, he had come to a log on the edge of the forest. He sat, digging his aching fingers into the soft rotting wood. To his back the dim lights of the houses. Ahead, nothing but the twisted figures of pines, some oak here and there. Bramble, and berry bushes at their curved and arched toes. Long shadows obscured all else and wisps of fog danced in the dull light.

Once again something moved. He scanned the undergrowth lazily, seeing a small bird in the leaves. It regarded him with the same expression he gave it, then moved on with its foraging. Will's glazy eyes noticed something else.

He swallowed and then blinked a few times. He was certain there was something poking out from behind one of the thicker trees ahead. Something a few meters up, a good quarter up the trunk. It had leaves and small branches attached. Some type of bird's nest he supposed.

Then from the center of the nest, two dim red orbs faded into sight. Their dim light illuminated the rest of what, he could not help but accept, was a face of some sort. Angular and twisted, intertwined with roots and leaves, twigs adorning its dark complexion. It gazed at him with eyes he inexplicably felt held a cruel air to them. Around it the features of the woods swayed and rocked, branches creaking with almost bone-like noise in his direction. Wild trees.

Shadows of Elsinore.

Under the shadows of a large apple tree near the riverside, he stood, taking in the night in all its entirety, his senses alive and stirred. The crimson petals that littered the grassy bank, the rippling waters of the Vistula, its sides bulging and barely contained, carried a quiet intensity in their flow. The smell of putrescent blossoms wafted through the air.

Somewhere in the distance, a night lark sang, and it pleased his ears to soon hear the sound of footsteps making their way over to the riverbank. To any passersby, he would have blended into the darkness; not a soul would have been able to pick him out, even if they had walked right by. He stirred from his position beneath the leaves, making his presence known.

Lit by the dying light of the moon, the second figure was barely visible—tall and composed, swathed in a dark cloak that clung tight to the frame. The figure halted in its tracks at the sight of him, and both retreated back into the recesses of the shadow.

He ran his fingers through the brush of his chin. "How are you?" he swallowed. "How am I? You know how I am, Claudius. Do not fool yourself," she said, hushed. "Have you given thought to my offer? We could be in Stettin in a fortnight." Smiling softly, she gazed at him, almost through him, as if he was not there. "I will not flee my home, the place where I have raised my son. I will not leave him." Running his hand over his beard again, he breathed deeply. "I cannot simply stand by and wait for you, Gertrude, for the rest of my life. This has to end one way or another."

"And it shall, soon..."

Grimacing, he interjected as she trailed off, "However?"

"However, I need your help, Claud. I need you to be strong, to be the man I know you to be."

His brow furrowed, and his brows parted.

"I need you to finish this, Claud, once and for all." The sense of finality in her tone sent shivers down his spine.

"Finish this... once and for all?"

Gertrude tilted her head, staring at him. "Do you really need me to spell it out for you, Claudius?" She paused. "I need you to kill him, soon, very soon."

They were silent for a while, neither one wanting to follow up on what had been said, neither wanting to believe that it had been said aloud. And yet they had to move on; they had to act on those words, accept the fact that one of them had voiced what they had been thinking for some time now.

"He's, my king. Besides that, he's my brother," voiced Claudius, breaking the illusion of silence.

The trees watched them silently, the only witnesses to their plot. Two dim red orbs faded into the twigs and leaves. Wild trees tamed by Danes hundreds of years prior, and a few months later these same trees wilted with the change of season. In these wilting nights, it was colder and darker than anyone had ever seen up on the battlements of Elsinore Castle.

The moon, pale and yellowed, cast little light down upon the ancient inlaid stones, barely enough to make out the edge of the rampart. The mist swirled around the battlements, shrouding the castle in an eerie fog. He would have feared falling over

into the abyss of darkness below; however, he trusted his senses and the years he had spent patrolling the wall.

Around the corner he turned, the cold steel of his halberd tight in his grip, the breastplate heavy on his chest. The encroaching mist was making it harder to see; he should have caught sight of the other two guards by now. He breathed in deeply; they were new to the job, probably turned back at the wrong corner or dozed off. He would scold them later, nothing to worry about for now.

The side of the southeast tower loomed before him, rearing out of the veil, the sandstone slabs casting unnatural shadows in their wake. He moved forward, unshaken by the sight—simply another quirk of the witching hour, odd shadows, and strange sounds. Products of lack of a good night's rest and the sore missing of fine draught, all.

Something shifted in the mist ahead, just below the structure, in the midst of the shadow. It slithered and slunk against the stone, pooling from the very battlement, the air itself.

He shook his head harshly; the night was playing tricks on his eyes. It was no phantom that stood before him but one of the other guards. He could make out the halberd and breastplate in the darkness, faintly, almost indistinguishable from the fog around it.

He called out a faint greeting, voice hoarse and gruff from the dry sea air. The other man ignored him. Maybe he had simply not heard him? The wind was strong now; it could have lost his voice. He called again. The figure did not stir, and did not move a single muscle to show recognition.

He moved forward—insolent boy! Which recruit was this who ignored him? He could almost make out the face of the man now, ghostly and eerie in the dim light. Angular. It was the face of a man older than he was, by many years. Faint granite hair, parted down the middle, frayed and matted. A slender nose and a chin weakened by the years. The face was white, pale as death, and the eyes were bloodshot, but it was hard to tell in the light. The man stared straight ahead, gazing into the void of the horizon as if he were staring right through him. This was not the face of any guard he had ever met, and he knew them all.

The man moved suddenly, gliding forward with no sense of weight, nor attachment to the earth. The guard stepped back, and the man kept coming forward, steadily and without any change in expression. The guard felt his heart leap into his mouth; he felt the coldness of the night start to seep into his bones. Perhaps it was the coldness of something else altogether?

The spectral figure backed him into the corner of the battlement. He had nowhere else to go; he had nowhere left to run. At that moment, he took a stance, hefting the halberd with all his weight, swinging forward. The blade severed clean through the

advancer, cleaving his breastplate in two, and exiting out the other side, the steel separating like air.

He found himself falling, toppled over the wall, carried by the momentum of his own halberd, locked in an icy grip that he could not shake himself out of. Through the specter he fell, and into the veil of darkness below, hurtling over the castle wall, as if he had never been there in the first place.

The captain hit the stones below, and in stark contrast to the spirit he had just encountered, would never display any signs of life from behind the veil of death.

Fragments of a Broken Wind:

He tried to force himself to read a bit. There were three books in the room, and he supposed that if he asked for new ones, he would be given them. But he had never read any of the three, he had tried and failed to find enjoyment in one, a particularly dense novel about the invention of the automobile. The other two were a copy of Gulliver's Travels and the biography of Julius Caesar. It was the latter he was struggling to sink into now.

A military expedition beyond the northwest frontier of his province enabled Caesar to win loot for himself as well as for his soldiers, with a balance left over for the treasury, the line at the top of the page read. At least Caesar had been able to leave a room when he wanted, lead a legion on a march, do something, anything.

He could not bring himself to relate much to a Roman emperor who had lived thousands of years ago, and who had never experienced what he had, in much the same way he could never experience what Caesar had. They were just too different: one would be in the annals of history for as long as humans cared for the past, and the other would die unknown, with no one to mourn him.

Perhaps Linda would shed a tear, even a single barely moist one. But then again probably not. He threw the book against the white sterile wall; it fell neatly on the floor. Defiantly.

By the time dinner arrived on its steel tray, he had only managed to sleep for a few minutes. Peas, ham, and mash that night. The same as every other night, except this time he had been given water instead of fruit juice. He glanced at the three blue pills next to the mash, one of the doctors had told him were sleeping pills. There was no way he was going to be put under an artificial sleep in this place though. He had also been informed that they were impossible to overdose on, just a fun bit of information. The mash was soggy as usual, and the ham was too undercooked for his liking. He was however able to build a little mash snowman with green peas for eyes and a sliver of ham for a mouth.

He smashed it with the plastic spork, there was no point in leaving it. Next thing they would think he was losing it and give him red pills. There was no point in taking that chance. And so, Mr. Mashman had to die after only living for a few seconds.

Had he gained consciousness in those moments? Unable to move or communicate in any way? Trapped in the physical constraints of his mash and pea-composed corporeal form? Maybe, but there was no way to truly know. Maybe he was losing it. After all, he was contemplating the feelings of a mash snowman, never mind one which he had just pulverized.

He made a small cross out of peas over the remains of the mash figure, hopefully, no one would notice it or read too deeply into his newfound pea-based art fascination. The lights cut out shortly after, and as per usual his little world was plunged into its routine darkness. That signalled that he should sleep for the night. Instead, he lay and gazed at where he knew the ceiling to be, imagining that the darkness was the void. A void that wrapped itself around him and the bed, around the books, and table, and the bathroom, around the world. A peaceful void.

His mother had always told him that she had had “hiding veins”, and that when the doctors wanted to draw blood, her veins would retreat into her arm, and they would find it hard to find them again. He apparently had no such problems, judging from how quickly he found himself with a needle in his arm each day.

He had been deathly afraid of needles as a child, but whether from maturity or the regularity of his imposed routine, all such fears had quickly disappeared. In their place was more of a mundane curiosity, watching the reddish ooze travel down the needle into the vials, one after the other. Every now and then a few bubbles formed in the glass containers.

When they were finished, it usually took a few minutes, he was escorted out. A guard with a black uniform, the same patch on the pocket as the doctors. An angular image of some man with leaves as his hair and beard. Beautiful that the people here really cared about the environment.

He was taken to the other room. It was larger than his cell-room, and the blood test room, it was really more of a courtyard in size. But like all the other places in the facility, above his head was just a white ceiling. The floor was artificial grass, just a bit too vibrantly green to resemble the real thing, and it didn't cause his skin to itch like the real thing either.

There was a blow-up plastic beach ball in this room, a Cornhole set in the corner with two red bean bags, and, if he wanted to, he could use the pull-up bars in the corner. Not that he wanted to. Instead, he sat in the furthest corner as per usual. There he began another part of his daily routine.

There were three visible surveillance cameras in the room, at least the ones he had noticed. None were in the furthest corner. There was also a hundred-piece puzzle set in the room, he had never completed it. And he never intended to, despite what he feigned. He would sit and pretend to scout over the pieces, trying random ones he knew would never fit in the places they needed to. But the cameras wouldn't know that.

Every few minutes he would take the fingernail of his right thumb and scratch away at the concrete wall just a little. Small indentations, almost behind the cornhole set, barely visible and too faint to see if one wasn't looking. Over the last few weeks, he had managed to carve a decently coherent phrase into that bare cold wall. It read, "I am 31", or at least that's what it meant to say, referring to the number sown into all his clothes. He had found that it was a lot harder to carve nonlinear shapes into concrete using one's fingernail than people might imagine, so the 3 of the 31 resembled a reversed E.

The intention behind the routine scrapping was a deeply flimsy piece of logic, that he had no choice but to hope was even possibly right. It went something like this. If there were indeed other people kept in cells like his, and who underwent tests like him, judging by the number he had been assigned, then it was logical to assume that they followed a similar routine. That meant spending time in the recreation room. And on the off chance that he was not alone, and on the ever less likely chance that others did use the same room, then there was an even slimmer chance that they could stumble upon his message. It was a small chance, virtually impossible to even hope for, but it was still a chance. And it gave him something to do at the end of the day.

There was no session with Dr. Linda that day, and after a while in the recreation room, he was escorted back to his room. Down the corridor from the recreational room back through the blood test room, down another corridor to his room. He had only seen one other door or doorway other than the one to his room, the two of the test room, and the one other. It was steel coloured and set deep in the wall of the testing room. It was the only sign that a world outside of what he saw every day even existed. Whenever he was being walked back to his room through the testing room, he would look over his shoulder at it for as long as he could, just taking in the fact that it was there. Then he would find himself back in the confined space he now knew as home.

Gulliver was washed up on the shore of a strange island and when he awoke, he found himself surrounded by men and women the size of toadstools. Unfortunately, Trevor had read Gulliver's Travels long ago, his mother had been a fan of the classics. This left little excitement in the second read of the book, and this version unlike the one his mother had had, had no illustrations. Not even on the cover, but he still remembered one image in particular. That of Gulliver with many thin lines of rope pressing him to the sand of the beach where he lay, tied by the little people surrounding him. But Gulliver had eventually escaped.

The mash had a little more consistency that evening, but the ham was still undercooked. Mr. Mashman made a resurgence from the mash field on the tray, rearing his little beady green eyes and ever so slightly horrifying ham-slicer mouth. Really not the most handsome figure, staring at him with absolutely no discernible intelligence behind that gaze.

"I do feel sorry for you", Trevor said aloud, surprising himself with the sudden sound of his own voice. The mash man simply kept staring blankly at him.

He continued sympathetically, "But at least you leave this place every day, out on that tray. I can't do that you see."

Mashman's left eye slid down his formless face and across his gloopy abdomen, coming to rest in the puddle of mash he sat in. Trevor chuckled softly and returned it to its place on that stupid, thoughtless face.

"But then again, at least my eye doesn't fall off my face. At least not yet."

The mash man smiled that unflinchingly dopey smile of his.

The lights were cut out, and the smile disappeared, as did the rest of Mr. Mashman. Trevor groped around for the shape of the little person, and finding him, brought his palm down on his form. There could be no evidence, and anyway, he was sure that the little man could not feel pain in any sense, so it didn't really matter to him that much.

Wiping the mash off his hand he pulled the paper-thin blanket up to his chin and stared at the ceiling like the night before, and the night before that too. But this time staring at the void did not lull him into sleep.

Instead, he was plagued by semi-lucid thoughts. He needed to get a grip, he had been whispering to a figure made of pulped potatoes and who knows what other ingredients. They put people into nuthouses for stuff like that. At least that was one solace, the worst that could happen to him was a handful of new pills or something of that sort. But nevertheless, he needed to retain his sanity, this place could not, would not break him. There would be no conversing with mashmen, or for that fact anything inanimate.

Maybe if he just got some more sleep, then he would focus more. But focus on what...

Eaters of Ash.

A child walks to the edge of the meadow. Tall grass brushes his legs, golden and green. Its blades ruffled by silent breath, the wind. His eyes behold the sight before him.

A cavernous pit blackened, charred. As if a mighty bolt of lightning had smitten a hole through the meadow's fabric.

He gazes downwards. In its center, a puddle. Muddied water. Small ripples. His eyes widen softly.

Several figures converge outside the water. Pale and patchy white, as if painted on with clay. And dried and flaking off in the sun. They gibber and grasp, to each other, to nothing at all.

In their grip, ash from the ground. The fruit of some cataclysm. A rock from another world. Brimming within it the lifeblood of ancients.

His gaze continues to descend on them in wonder. The wind ruffles his hair. The scent of charcoaled soil, fresh, moist dirt.

The figures raise the ash to their lips, at first inhaling, then outright consuming. Like ravenous wolves. Lips soon black. Faces soon smeared with coal against dry white. Oh, what thin faces. Angular ones, with deep-set eyes. Pulsating eyes. Faces with thick, sickly veins. Black roots, twisted roots, under their skin.

The wind turns.

The eaters of the ash turn with it.

Boy eyes meet cavernous eyes.

Through his eyes all things shine, as a pair of stained-glass windows.

All things, good and bad, dirt, rock, sand.

The eaters of ash. They do not move towards him, nor change in sound or form. And yet...

He slips. Down the slope. Descending, as he grips for the grass. Down.

Cavernous eyes nought but watch.

The boy lands softly on charred ground, but a breath from pale white forms. Once more boy eyes meet endless eyes. No alarm, no discomfort in those boy eyes. For all is stained glass gold and blue.

Eaters of ash lower ash from mouths, endless gazes fixed on boy. Unison, unnerving alignment.

Pale, black streaked, thin, malignant fingers curl. Each extends a single, lonesome grasp out towards him, palms gazing skywards.

Malignant fingers curl back once more. Beckoning. All.

Boy's eyes widen, no fear inside. A few steps forward, soft, hesitant.

All white, cracking, grasps continue extending welcome. Second hands hold out, piles of ash, muddied, clumped.

The figures raise the ash to their lips. No consuming this time, then lower back down. Outstretched beckoning grasps with ashen grasps, towards the boy.

Black lips. Smeared coal on dry white, faces. Thin faces, with thick veins of ash.

Gaunt, as each pulls teeth into view, mouth corners up. Synced. Blackened teeth, discolored teeth. Smiling teeth. Pulsating eyes, the same.

Boy's eyes meet deep eyes.

Dark eyes beckon, set above gaunt smiles.

Eaters of ash.



Richard Eyres

Riffs of Resistance

I remember the way my uncle would caress his 6-string into life, his wiry fingers dancing along the neck, expertly weaving together melodies and coaxing out every story the guitar had to tell.

Twelve bitter Soweto winters had passed since the guitar was handed down to me, ten since I had mastered it, and three since my journey as a resistance musician began.

The sound of freedom is never out of tune.

I silence the crackling radio's seven o'clock news with a grimace. Makeba banned, and Clegg's latest single censored. I need to be more careful. I remember just last month how close I had been to feeling free, and just how close I had come to losing it all. I drift back to that day when my Les Paul hurled music into the night sky. A bead of perspiration sailed down my forehead, as I wrestled with the strings to produce the most defiant of melodies. I remember the feeling of pride when hearing the bantering *maskandi* guitars, as they were punctuated by an anthem of inspired voices, and the feeling of disgust when I saw how quickly the flames of hope were extinguished by teargas, and how quickly drumsticks were replaced by police batons. We struggle musicians are not famous for hanging around for an encore. A hoot from the driveway snaps me back to reality with a shudder. My bag and case collected, I clamber into the passenger seat of the new drummer's Morris Minor. I am yet to get to know him; our usual drummer has only just been arrested. I can see that the paintwork of the car must once have been a brilliant ocean blue, with electrifying chrome details smiling pompously at onlookers. Time and the elements have furiously chiselled away at the vehicle's exterior. Not even the car that I drive in could escape abuse for its colour.

The Morris's wheels kiss the tarmac as my newfound friend and I ponder the best way to dodge the latest censorship law. His thick Pedi accent is a reminder of a family forcibly removed, a family sent to a homeland far away, a family torn apart by the very migrant labour that brings him to the promised city of gold. This scatterling of Africa speaks of times when he has seen the anthems of the struggle summit mountains of oppression, and the ballads of unity kindle the most ferocious of fires. Like me, he knows how calloused fingers and weathered strings can carve through hearts of stone, the antidote to the virus of hate. My driver speaks of his youth. He describes the little boy who dared to attend the concert, the concert where they dared to say his name: Mandela. This was the concert where people dared to wash

off the grime of oppression and to paint their faces with animated defiance. These were the concerts where crowds became rainbow-coloured tapestries of unity.

The driver reminds me of a similar boy. A boy sitting on the *stoep*, listening to an uncle's music, listening to the plucking that inspires change and the strumming that soothes trauma. He reminds me of an uncle that knew that sacrifice was the payment for freedom, and did not hesitate when the rent was due.

The car chugs to a halt as we pull over at the police roadblock. The window is grudgingly lowered, and a passbook is thrust to the awaiting officer. A barbed wire moustache decorates the tired leathery face that stares back at us, his eyes probing us suspiciously. I assume that he too is infected by the hate that has chased me all my life. His pupils dart across his eyes like a cue ball on a snooker table. He is uneasy, scared of us maybe. Scared that we are different. When he interrogated us as to where we were planning on heading, a defiant nod between myself and my comrade affirmed our courage.

"We are playing a concert in Kliptown," I said. "You should come."

The sound of a shot never fired

The cold Flanders earth quivers as another shell tattoos the distant landscape with muddy destruction. The bitter autumn wind of this French November kisses my exposed forehead, as boredom drives me to drag the leather-bound journal from my tunic. A weeping willow of barbed wire hangs from the rut near my sniper's nest. Barren trees, stripped of their foliage and dignity, stand as mere sentinels, witnesses to the horrors that unfolded beneath their leafless limbs. Empty cartridges decorate the floor next to me, each one a remnant of the last hunt. My burlap camouflage wriggles as I free my writing hand from its grip on my rifle, and my inky black pen stabs at the cream-coloured page as I finish pondering the date. It is the 11th.

I begin the day's diary entry the same way that I had for the last four years, with a lacklustre description of the surrounds, and complaints about the breakfast the mess had provided. I was a much better marksman than writer. A lick of icy wind flicks my journal a couple of pages back, the words on that page remind me of the fixing of bayonets and the shriek of a captain's whistle. I think back to that day, where a dash across no man's land meant each step was a calculated gamble. My spine chills as I remember the malevolent whispers of the bullets as they whizzed past my head and the cries of my comrades as they one by one were engulfed by the labyrinth of mud and decay. I remembered huddling, shellshocked, behind what was left of a horse that had carried its last officer. Right before my eyes was a theatre of ultimate terror and destruction, and as I shivered and convulsed the chilling reality of my situation set in. This theatre has no curtain call.

I drag my eyes away from the page. The trauma follows me more closely than my own shadow. I decide to stare through the scope of my rifle. I learned to do anything to distract myself, to shield my mind from the rabid dogs of terror that have chased at my ankles for the last eternity. I see a bed of small blood-red poppies smiling back at me from a distant field. I hardly ever see the Huns anymore, there were rumours that

the war was ending, and coincidentally, some even seemed to think that the war had taken its final bow this morning. I assumed that they were just delusional, this Great War had by now chiselled away at the minds and spirits of most of its survivors.

My journal sits staring at me on its burlap pillow. Its leather arms coaxing me to open it, to delve into another page, another reminder of an eerie tale from the last four years. Like the bloodlust of the onlookers at the Colosseum, my mind wanted another hit of the sick Adrenaline that came with remembering these moments. As hard as I try to ignore its evil presence, I find myself opening it up again, randomly. I skim the first few lines, and a whirlpool of emotion takes charge as yet another trauma-suppressed memory explodes into colour before my eyes.

I remember the warm shards of sunlight that ticked my neck as I strolled through the Verdun summer, away from camp. A brook meanders through meadows adorned with wildflowers and ancient willows, and I stopped for a much-needed bath. Along its banks, honeysuckle sways in the gentle breeze, their vibrant petals nodding in agreement with the playful dance of the stream. Kaleidoscopes of butterflies flutter past and have a pitstop on my clumsy leather boot, as I lug the other one off. I know that I will be sent back to the front in a fortnight, but just for a moment, it seems that not every drop of life and virtue has been squeezed out of the world. As if I was struck by lightning, my moment of solace is shattered as I hear a voice behind me spit out the words *"Hände in die Luft."* The voice bubbles and trembles in symphony with the gurgling river, and I am unsurprised when my gaze meets with eyes full of youth and innocence as I swivel around. Unthinkingly, my hand launches for my hip, as my palm collects my revolver and draws it out straight before me with the lightning speed any cowboy would envy. Locked in a stalemate, neither of us dare move. His hand quivers like the engine of a tank, a bead of diamond sweat slides from his daisy-blond tufts of hair, and the tattered insignia on the breast of his grey tunic suggested that he is a downed airman. Our eyes meet in this tug of war of morality, each one of us able to exterminate the other instantly, as we dance on this cliff's edge. My trigger finger tightens like a boa constrictor under the pressure of my duty, but I release it as a crystal tear of innocence simmers in the eyes of my foe. I hesitate. An eternity passes, as each of us barter between survival and our consciences.

My eyes become heavy with tears, and a nervous smile is painted on my face as the black fading words etched into my journal remind me of the day that humanity extinguished the flames of war.

"Nobody pulled the trigger."



Archive

“What does Monday hold for me, Jill?” echoes in his wake as he walks down the passage – almost 20 minutes late. A reply follows promptly but is drowned before reaching its destination. It is not like any schedule matters to him, nor did he intend on hearing what was on his today. He takes a glance at his name on the frosted glass, before allowing an elbow to rest on the cold aluminium handle. With a drop in the knees and a nudge of the shoulder, the door quickly sucks at the contents of the room as it opens, and the familiar smell of latex meets his nose.

An in-stride flick of the light switch wakes the room. The plastic lid of his coffee cup finds its shape again with a pop, followed by a sigh of satisfaction. The knuckle of a bent middle finger approaches the control panel on the wall, and two well-rehearsed clicks of the buttons simultaneously wake the electric blinds and air conditioner. Beeps and hums fill the room, while the squeak of rubber soles on the vinyl floor echoes from wall to wall. He follows the familiar route towards the helm of his large oak desk, correcting the misaligned model hearts and prescription papers as he circles the vessel. His eyes briefly glance at the wall behind the desk. “It’s difficult to heal a soul, but I can mend a broken heart,” reads a quote amongst the framed Harvard diplomas. Artworks of veins and capillaries decorate the space beneath the clock – ironic, as those paying a visit tend not to have time on their side. This room intimidates all who enter it, apart from him.

His leather briefcase hits the floor with a thud and slouches against the leg of the desk. Wheels rattle as he rolls the chair out from the cave beneath the dark oak. A few impatient taps on the space bar wake the computer while his left-hand finds the armrest of the chair. He surrenders to gravity and trusts the seat to catch him when he falls, as it has many times in the past. He extends his legs and anchors his heels in the ground, captaining the vessel of diamond-stitched leather towards its docking point behind the desk. A shake of the mouse helps him find the cursor. He allows an index finger to summit the wheel of the mouse, where a quick descent enlarges the image on the screen. Knees bent and legs wide apart, he leans in and clicks his tongue in response to what he sees.

“Jill, won’t you come here for a second,” he calls, eyes still scanning what is on the screen. In a swift motion, he swings himself away from the desk, rests an ankle on his knee, and reclines in his chair. The clacking from down the passage grows louder in his left ear until a climactic silence announces her arrival. While perching his elbow on the armrest and with a finger on his chin, he exhales - “call the family.” His gaze remains fixed on the image.

He navigates the cursor to the drop-down menu in the top left corner of the screen and selects *archive*. The file soon disappears, and a new one takes its place. A double click reveals a more pleasing image. Gripping the edge of the desk, he pulls himself towards the door. He leans over the edge of the armrest, sticks his head out into the passage and looks down it to the other end. “Mrs. Jones, please come through!” he says with a smile.

God's Waters

"Run!" a woman screamed; her voice laced with hysteria. But somewhere between the tremor and the retreating water, a chilling certainty had settled in my gut. Running seemed futile. This wasn't a rogue wave - it was the ocean itself rising in righteous fury. It was a supernatural force, the deliberate awakening of a Leviathan, and to outrun it was akin to outrunning the sunrise - hopeless.

I felt the last bit of warmth peel over my forehead as the wave eclipsed the sun. Cries around me amplified as its height was realised. My heart hammered against my chest, urging me to flee, but my legs were leaden weights. My breath caught in my throat, and I could only manage the shallow gasps of the thick, corrosive air. I was completely paralysed.

Teasingly, my eyes allowed a glance to the right. A couple stood together, hands in each other's and heads bowed in prayer. Their faces were scrunched in pain, and tears ran down both their cheeks. I couldn't understand how they thought God would save them from this. What baffled me more was why they would seek solace in Him after having been so blatantly endangered by His doing. I saw it preposterous how their faith detained their mammalian will to survive; how their agony reflected a command to give up – to stand still and accept death. This is why I'd never believed in God. Religion always seemed like a flimsy shield against the harsh realities of life, a comfort blanket for the weak-willed. But, when faced with this wall of blue, a lifetime of ingrained scepticism seemed to melt away, replaced by an urge to plead, to beg for some unseen mercy. My lips moved of their own accord. "God," the word came out a raspy whisper, foreign yet somehow comforting in its desperation. "Please..."

My body, however, still refused to respond to the impending danger. I grew light-headed as panic began strangling me. The world was tilted on its axis, time seemed to warp and stretch. The familiar rhythm of the waves was replaced by a constant, deafening roar, softening in volume behind the crescendo of a high-pitched whine. I could feel the frantic attempts at escape around me, and a sickening sense of helplessness washed over me. A part of myself was hoping to drown in it before the ocean reached me. The sheer size and power of the approaching wave dwarfed any human effort, and I was merely a pawn in a game I couldn't win.

As the whine slowly faded, replaced again by the roar, my torso was the first to regain motion. Pivoting at the hips, I turned around and saw, for the first time, the chaos that had broken out. My attention was drawn to the one clear subject among the blur - a man, struggling to propel himself in his wheelchair. A woman, whose epaulettes bounced on her shoulders as she ran, had abandoned him. She was well on her way to safety, while he was left for dead. I'd thought there were few individuals more selfless than a nurse, but the scene unfolding in front of me proved man's inherent selfishness. Man, who was created in God's image. My guts boiled at the sight, and the slither of faith I'd gained - out of fear - was replaced again by my justified denial of God's existence.

Drained after this internal battle, I felt like resigning to the inevitable, but as the enormity of the situation began to sink in, my innate sense of mortality sent a late,

but welcome, jolt of energy. It threw me in the direction of the city, and my vision locked in on Q1 Tower.

Seconds stretched into eternities, each footfall a victory against fear and exhaustion. My primal will to survive overpowered the pain. Fuelled by a raw, visceral urge to outrun the orchestrated danger at my heels, I ran. And ran. And ran.

Family, Fame and Fortitude

As a doctor, I knew the prognosis of his pancreatic cancer. Stage four and certainly terminal. I apologized to my PA and patients in the waiting room, then hastened down the hospital corridors to the underground parking lot. He lived in Clifton, a seventeen-minute drive from my rooms in Cape Town CBD. I did it in half that.

Maddy's customary glow was drowned by the tears pouring from her eyes. Our anguish postponed conversation, and we rushed through the front door into the living room. Sitting lifeless in his Chesterfield, was Jack, my brother. Before I could examine him, Maddy had me in an embrace that hinted not at a deep sadness, but rather a subtle hesitance towards me approaching my deceased sibling. I did not question it, but instead returned the gesture. Her pregnant stomach separated us. My dad passed away two years ago, and my heart has remained tender since. His role in my brother's death is something I would only understand later. Maddy and I wept together but mourned apart.

With no tears left to cry, I reached for my phone in my pocket. A crack ran the length of the screen, owing to its drop in my office after receiving that phone call. I rang the coroner, then instructed Maddy to pack some clothes and come stay with me for a while. "I'll miss you, Jacko. I truly thought the comeback looked positive," I whispered to his corpse in her absence. I lay my hand to rest on his. His cold fingers becoming entangled in mine. My attention was drawn to his forearms, where pools of bruise-like markings escaped from beneath his sleeve, calling to be investigated. I traced it up to his neck, where it spilt onto his cheeks. I'd seen countless lifeless figures, but this was abnormal. Cancer is debilitating; however, this body does not tell the tale of a natural passing. Maddy returned with a duffle and new tears.

I acted on my hunch, demanding that Jack's every inch be analyzed, from blood to bone. The pathologists turned their noses up at the request, insisting my personal ties to the case were clouding my judgment. I would ordinarily agree, but there was an itch that needed to be scratched.

I was right.

Jack was undergoing a breakthrough clinical trial developed by Kleinschmidt Pharmaceuticals, in Stuttgart. He was in the fast lane on the road to remission. Benzodiazepine was found in his blood, an antiseizure medication that he was prohibited from taking whilst undergoing his cancer treatment. To receive both simultaneously meant death by internal bleeding. The trial was seizure-suppressive in nature, which meant Jack was freed from the chains of this drug. In fact, I had personally terminated his vials of BDP in celebration. As protocol, both the epileptic

patient and their caretaker held some medication independently. Maddy was Jack's wife. His caretaker. Maddy's share of Benzodiazepine had not been discarded.

Jack and I inherited a large portion of my dad's wealth. My share went towards the establishment of my private practice, while Jack had purchased numerous stocks on the NYSE. He'd been hugely successful in this endeavour, amassing more profit than God has sheep. Maddy had eyes for Jack's fortune. With twin boys on the way, it was only a matter of time before he put pen to paper and included them in his will. Going into remission meant a healthy family of four. Six-hundred-and-twenty million dollars split three ways was evidently less appealing than being the sole heir. She'd packed a bag that day, but not with a toothbrush and underwear. Instead, her passport and sunglasses. Her remorse was as genuine as the tears cried in the living room.

She did it.



Shailen Naidoo

Rewinding the Tape:

The old man sat, looked at me, and said, "Let me paint you a picture, filled with the motions of life." He continued, "Imagine the scorching sun raising lonely memories of life, sucked up from the ground, drying the already cracked lips of the earth. Dust collects and swirls, dragging the solitary droplets down, submerging them in the erosions of past rock, delaying their inevitable return. Images of dried remnants pass by like a film of the past, the downward journey replayed, yet somehow reversed, not in imagery, but in the life cycle.

A film of the past, the tape ticking like whispers of thundering shocks. Clouds of them, precipitation, and the life-giving form brew over a luscious scene, props of trees and vegetation mixed with extras of animals and fellow companions of the sky. If only you could see the world that was—a world that could have been. Droplets once danced freely, cast from the heavens in a grand performance. They splashed upon leaves, kissed the petals of flowers, and ran down the trunks of ancient trees. Each raindrop played its part in the grand narrative, nurturing roots, filling rivers, and creating a tapestry of life. They were the unsung heroes, the silent actors in a song littered with their presence.

In their descent, the raindrops transformed barren lands into grassy paradises. They whispered life into seeds buried beneath the soil, coaxing them to sprout and reach for the sky. Rivers swelled, carving their paths through valleys, bringing sustenance to every creature in their wake. The earth, rejuvenated, flourished under the tender care of these celestial tears. It was a symphony of existence, where every note was a drop, and every drop a promise of life. The valleys sang with the laughter of

streams, and forests swayed in the rhythm of the wind, their leaves glistening with the memory of the rain.

Every raindrop carried with it a fragment of the past, a film of its own. The once tumultuous storm clouds that birthed them were like scenes from an epic saga, filled with roaring winds and flashing lightning. These memories were etched into their very essence, an indelible part of their identity. As they fell, they shared these stories with the earth, imbuing it with the history of the skies. Each droplet was a storyteller, a keeper of the chronicles of the clouds.

Memories are a double-edged sword, slicing through the present with both nostalgia and longing. The droplets, now trapped in the soil, yearned for the days when they were free, a part of something bigger than themselves. The reality of their current state, absorbed by roots, locked in the intricate dance of underground rivers, was a stark contrast to their glorious past. They felt the weight of the earth's embrace, a grounding so confining, the pressure of past missions crushing the perceived essence of themselves.

But the sun's rays intensified; the droplets began their ascent. This journey back was not as dramatic as their fall, but it was a process filled with a kind of poetry. The sun, a relentless director, called these droplets back to the stage. They rose from the ground, a slow, deliberate ascent, like actors drawn back to the spotlight. Heat embraced them, transforming them into wisps of vapours, ethereal and free. The cracked earth relinquished its hold, and the droplets ascended, merging with the air, and drifting upwards. The film tape runs, and the once lush scenes fade, replaced by the stark beauty of the open sky.

Up there, in the rarefied heights, the droplets felt a kinship with the stars. They drifted through the night sky, mingling with the cool, quiet air. The stars, like distant ancestors, watched over them, silent witnesses to their eternal journey. A sense of timelessness as if they were part of an unending cycle, a story that explains you and me.

As the sun set, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink, the droplets prepared for their next journey. They gathered together, ready to descend and bring life to the earth once more. The film of their journey was far from over; it was an ongoing saga, a story of transformation, of life and death, of memories and reality. The once great storm may have passed, but its legacy lived on, written in every drop, every cloud, every breath of wind.

In the grand theatre of the sky, they awaited their cue, ready to fall again and breathe life into the world below. As they drifted through the heavens, they carried with them the essence of their journey, a testament to the eternal cycle of life"

"I Did Not Choose"

24th January:

To the Shailen of the past,

I did not choose to have the potential to be great, the gift and privilege of talent. I did not choose these expectations. I did not choose the pressure, the agonising fear of failure. I did not choose to be viewed as a leader. I did not choose to have the pressure of expectation to mould the person I was, attached to achievement, inseparable from praise, and crushed by the distant laughter of a joke that had nothing to do with me. I was told to do my best always, which, to me, meant "be the best." I did not choose, Shailen, please understand me. I'm climbing through the wreckage of all my twisted dreams. Dreams mangled by the expectations of others, dreams that have to be fitting of my awards, but not fitting of the person I am. Their burning questions about my future prospects print holes of self-doubt. They are kindly intended, yet fuelled my own worries of where I was going and whom I was going for. It is just easier to tell them, that "I have always loved the stars, I would love to be an astronautical engineer." My response dissipates their noise, extinguishes my burns, and a resulting symphony is played to my ears.

I did not choose for my music, my happy place and my escape to be disillusioned to lines on a CV. I did not choose the competitions, the medals, and the hours of enjoyable playing to be turned into tedious practice.

I did not choose to have supportive parents who want me to be happy, and who I am petrified of letting down. "Wise beyond your years, Shailen, you have everything figured out, I wish my son was as organised as you." They do not understand that when that study door closes, yearnings, longings, and needs emerge, the need to just be, the longing to be alone, the yearning to be lazy, and the want to get to know myself. To be myself without being measured by all the things I have achieved. That is why I loved the stars, their vastness brings perspective, the expectation of greatness is not so important, and the need to just become acceptable.

I did not choose the blessings that God has given me, and do not think for one minute that I am ungrateful for any of this. I chose to make others around me proud, I chose to thank my parents the best way I knew how I chose to impress. As much as my heart races, my stomach twists, and my chest pounds at the sight of marked tests; I chose to be competitive. I chose to hold myself to a high standard, I chose to sacrifice "growing up" to be grown.

Shailen, I am sorry, please understand me. I am climbing through the wreckage of all my twisted dreams. Shailens of the past, I chose not to give you the time to discover who you are. I chose to live for others in all of our individual worlds, I chose not to take that basketball shot because I was certain that I could not be seen to fail. Please understand me.

The concerto of silent claps

The curtains draw, taking the scent of a lingering nervous cigarette with them; and the familiar warmth of the stage lights illuminates his face. The familiar crescendo of claps is replaced with a nervous static, and the pounding of an overworked heart fills his ears. He takes his first steps towards the podium, baton in hand, and turns to face the lifeless crowd.

The allegro tempo seems to be beeping in his ear, nearly drowning all other sounds and coming close to silencing the nagging itch pressing on his eardrum. It seems to be in accordance with the music, it is not a surprise; he knows this concerto as if he were the composer. He raises his baton, foreshadowing the volume of the pizzicato violins. He takes one last breath, and having indicated to the first violin that her time is arriving; she skips into the staccato rhythm, starting the melody.

The concerto starts with anxious violins, emulating his own feelings. He looks to his first viola; the vibrations of her melody are in perfect time with the rest of the string section. This gives him the confidence to signal to the brass that their grand entrance is all but a bar away.

The brassy trumpets fill his chest; euphoniums join in, jolting the conductor's heart and oscillating the rest of his organs, building upon the timpani, which has started to rumble the ground as if it were a violent eruption in the distance. Each one starts to crescendo with the elevation of his baton. The subsequent vibrations echo further in the conductor's mind. With a sudden drop of his hands, the vibrations retreat.

Yet the constant alarm of the tempo still fills his ears, reminding him that the second movement is arriving. A pair of aching, over-practiced wrists spring to action; alerting the cellos that it is time to play Vivaldi's anodyne movement. The quiver of their bows seems to drown their sombre tones. The oboe player licks her reed in anticipation of her solo, creating a familiar feeling of serenity for the conductor.

The oboist's head movements simulate the wondrous, composed melody, seemingly played in the perfect A minor key. A bead of sweat trickles down the conductor's neck, possibly the result of the sense of warmth created by the oboe. The conductor finally lets a smile summit the crest of his anxiety, and with his baton, he signals to the symphony that it is time to conclude with the all-known *Summer* movement.

The cautious conclusion starts with a piano-forte introduction of a collective string section, with each of their bows moving in unison, reaching a climax following the conductor's indication of a crescendo. The next chord played, with a sfzozando emphasis, creates a sudden shockwave through the concert floor, which is soon replaced with the calming adagio tempo, ultimately resonating with his calming heart.

As the conductor signals to ease into a slower tempo, an all-consuming emotion of accomplishment fills his heart. With one final elegant gesture of his baton, the piece is concluded, and he turns to face the lifeless crowd. The crowd looks to be erupting

with arrhythmic claps, however, nothing but spectral static and a constant beep are played in the conductor's ears.

He bows, steps off his podium, and strides past the velvet red curtains to the safety of the backstage area. Finally able to satisfy the itch in his ear, he removes his malfunctioning hearing aid. The eerie static turns to a deafening silence.



Kigen Chepkonga

Dear god -

Even when no one else is watching, I remain on my best behaviour. But you know I still fail. I fail to live up to the expectations and standards to which you hold me. The fact that you have your life picture-perfect – I mean, not once have you made a mistake – invigorates me to strive for the same. But your almighty integrity makes me feel small. Your shadow is a realm I cannot escape. Your powerful presence imprisons me in inferiority; I yearn to break free.

As you look down upon me, I pray that you can be proud of me. I dream of the day that you will approve of what I do, and who I am because every day being Judgment Day has sapped me of the colour of life. Every action I perform is criticised by you, no matter how small. I guess that forms part of your gig – making sure we're the best we can be. But still, I wonder: is that truly your goal? I often doubt you actually care at all, judging by the heartless execution of your brash forms of punishment. All for not acknowledging you as my true god. There truly are no reasons for your acts of "love" to be so cruel. I don't want to believe that you hate me; that's not what you said in your words. Faith tells me that we have a special relationship, one that has a happy ending. I know you're waiting for me to escape this evil world so we can live out the days together in a place where we can both just be.

However, even as I try to make the best out of the worst situation, you struggle to award credit where it's due. The master of humility certainly seems incapable of showing any. You're both blinded by and blind to, all I have been able to achieve under the shackles of our love. Since those frosty winter mornings turned into nights spent next to you bid us goodbye, I've spent torturous summer days searching for the puzzle piece making me whole again. Your verses of lies have led me astray, with no good Samaritan to save me.

As our time appears further and further away in the rear-view mirror, your misguided attention away from who I truly am makes you seem far less godly than I once thought. So much so that it makes me wonder, who are you after all? Because my God lives by His promises to care and love me. He is consistent, and I doubt I have ever caught him in a bad mood. Thank goodness I haven't, because I'm sure his slaps would sting far harder than yours. And most especially, my God fearlessly expresses his unwavering desire to keep me close. No prying nor force is needed to have my presence on this Earth even just slightly appreciated by Him.

I wasted my time worshipping you, Bradley. I'm still unsure as to who you are exactly, but at least I now know that you are a far cry away from being a god. You had my whole world in your hands, manipulating it to your desires; making adjustments to the fibres of my being and molding it to whatever suited you best. But now the chains are broken, and my mind is free from your tricks and games. I may still have to look up to you, but David had to look up to Goliath at a point too – before David brought him back down to Earth. I pray for God's hand of protection over your next romantic prisoner. I thank you for leaving. I repent for allowing you to stay as long as you did.

Finally, I'm free. Amen.

Wreckage

Business is booming. "Brad!," I hear early customers call out in friendly greetings as they stream in. The running club mafia seems to love this place, religiously gaining their expression fix after a morning run. To this day I have no clue how I am getting away with selling R72 iced vanilla lattes, but if someone's willing to pay for it, then it's not overpriced. I bet no one called the last owner of this place the Frappachino Man of the Southern Suburbs, and judging by the turnaround this place has had, it seems his biggest mistake was trying to open up a coffee shop in the first place. I mean, with his sales, he might as well have sold drinks out of his bathroom. If my profits were any indication, this joint is probably ready for a sister location in Johannesburg. Perhaps that might just give me the courage to show face in the City of Gold again.

"You have been logged out. Tap here to sign back in." The notification taunts me as I shiver through my Patagonia-embezzled parka beneath the bank's towering skyscraper. The familiar Sandton skyline now seemed to whisper secrets I could no longer understand.

Outlook.

Dropbox.

Teams.

Delete.

With one click of a button, my career has become a jagged edge in a world of smooth surfaces – impossible to ignore, but better left avoided. I doubt my email service would be of any use to me now, recruiters want nothing to do with me. Either way, IT plans on destroying my laptop. By the end of this whole ordeal, the slab of metal had become the symbol of everything that had gone wrong in my life – the same with my estranged wife and daughter. At least my computer loved me until the end. I still wonder why the company isn't keeping it though. One would think that

knowing more about what I did was worth more than R20 000 smashed into pieces, I guess not.

“The next station is O.R. Tambo International Airport.” It’s strange hearing the voice of the Gautrain call this station out when I usually get off in Rosebank. My calendar offers no helpful explanation for why I’m at the airport on a Tuesday morning in July, other than its void detailing the fact that I’m unemployed now. Considering I dedicated what feels like my entire life to being a man in finance, I would’ve thought I’d be slightly more emotional right now. Perhaps getting on the next flight out of Johannesburg is a spontaneous act of emotion. But not the soppy, knee-deep in two-ply Twinsavers kind of emotional though. It’s the kind of emotion that makes you feel like you’re at the top of the world, even when conventional wisdom would have you think you’re in the pits of hell. For the first time in 25 years, I’m free. And I hear freedom is just another word for having nothing to lose.

“Derek, what do you mean you left my Van Cleef at the Paarl house?” is the first thing I hear as I touch down at Cape Town International Airport. My word, do I hate Cape Townians! I don’t understand how any can be even more insufferable than my crop from Sandton. At least we actually generate some value for this country – all these Constatia moms-in-waiting do is carry around Fieldbars and tan on Clifton 4th. The beach is overrated anyways, the waves make for bad acoustics for those conference calls with the London office. Well, they *made* for bad acoustics. If any of my colleagues decided to move from Johannesburg to Cape Town on a whim, I suspect they would choose Bishopscourt over Bo-Kaap upon arrival. But then again, none of them signed a plea deal with SARS yesterday so perhaps I left all precedent when I left Johannesburg.

Standing in my new apartment, the Airbnb owner instructed sharply, “No house parties, no smoking, and no empty Zyn’s down the toilet! Enjoy your stay.” Whichever spoilt UCT student preceding me must’ve taken this owner’s soul with them when they left. This lady should just be glad that I’m not still on the run – from her sunken eyes and wrinkled forehead, it’s clear that the last thing she needs right now is the Hawks at her gate. But beyond the strange stain on the couch that I’d rather not question and the Cape downpours of July, this new life feels like it could be a hymn for the weekend.

Sitting in the back office of Wynberg’s most underwhelming coffee shop, I find out that my CV isn’t quite cut out for work at this place. Being South Africa’s most trusted M&A managers - at a certain point in time - comes with all sorts of wonderful exit opportunities, from fugitive to divorcee. But service worker? Not one of them. As I pick up my Hermes satchel and stagger towards the door, I realise that this place could use a bit of work. The vinyl couldn’t be a more infuriating colour, the drinks menu would’ve rocked the market in 1982, and this manager in front of me is both ugly and stupid – I always thought you had to pick one.

I may not be cut out to be a barista, but corporate turnovers are who I am. Besides, I've facilitated enough illegal acquisitions to know how to handle an above-board one. 48 hours ago, a transaction of this size would have been thrown out of my corner office and landed with the green intern, but again, I left any tethers to my past when I left Johannesburg.

"How much are you selling this dump for?"

The owner of this wreck should have his money by the morning. That didn't take much convincing.

I'm pretty sure that Frank Lloyd Wright said, "Tip South Africa over on its side and everything loose will land up in Cape Town." Well, maybe not in so many words. In fact, he was talking about Los Angeles when he said that, but close enough. They say that home is where the heart is, but for me, it's where the FSCA isn't. The sunshine on my life may have set back in Gauteng, but the best part about nightfall is knowing that the sun will rise back up again the next morning. And in Cape Town, the horizons are golden.

A Letter To The Person I No Longer Want To Be

You've possessed the best of intentions, but have chased the worst of outcomes. Your benevolent ambition has quietly shifted towards malicious design. But the excuse of ignorance can only go so far, and there's a point where accountability needs to come before your perceived negligibility of your actions - which hurt, deceive, and manipulate those whom you claim to love.

But don't worry, you're still a good person. Or at least you endeavour to be. After all, you're only cryptic and Machiavellian because you care.

But perhaps it's there that the problem lies. You care about every aspect of your life, from your desired tax bracket to the length of the shoelaces on your flip-flops. You've attempted to hold life with a deadly grip, etching your nails into the fabric of the world believing that it is the method to make your mark.

But that's not how it goes. It isn't the way you aim to be remembered. Leading your actions with a cunning conspiracy only demonises you, and best believe you aren't the anti-hero we're all cheering for. And it may be that a heckle may resemble a cheer from where you're standing, far out afield. But of course, there's a difference. The crowds want a character who loves, or maybe even who hates. The point is, that it's essential to feel anything at all. And your contrived emotions hold no weight, simply floating in the sea of the human experience, not moving anywhere at all.

The inauthenticity speaks volumes. And even if others don't see it, for you it's 20/20. You know that you've disassociated yourself from honourable people who don't fit the narrative you are trying to paint, viewing relationships as bridges of self-interest

taking you to the destinations you yearn to reach. For years, the people around you are numbers in a phone log, herding them like cattle. Yet whenever the tides turn and you need someone to hold on to, it's open seas for kilometres; nobody there to your rescue.

But a case can be made that your savvy political tactics are the reason you are where you are now. Justifying your deceit with receipts of success, on the path to your dream university in the United States of America and a career on Park Avenue in New York City. Sure, your track record of strategic long-term planning and undivided focus towards a goal has done you well so far. It has allowed you to excel in fields you set your mind towards, not allowing even the Great Wall of China to stop you from landing at the most desired outcome. And you pick your battles well, choosing to dedicate your might and "connections" to the highest of priorities and leaving what you can't be the absolute best at in the dust.

Perhaps you aren't immoral.

Maybe just self-destructive?

But is that how you want how you would like things to be? Do you want life to just be a 9-bit video game where you're the only playable character? Because I'd like to share that those around you are far more valuable than you might anticipate. And not simply the ones that provide the highest return on investment to you at the moment, but rather those you think you least. There lie your floating devices when your ship sinks. And the greater you choose to allow your self-importance to inflate, the greater you agree for your fall from the top to be. And you want those you pay little regard to your social standing and accolades to surround you when such things decimate.

You don't need duplicity to lead the life claim to desire. You're capable of achieving your never-ending list of goals cleanly. And it may take a little longer, but that's okay; you shouldn't trust anything that rises fast anyway. You're only cryptic and Machiavellian because you care, now just try to care a little more about the relationships worth cherishing, they won't be there forever (especially if you keep pushing them away). Loosen up, buckle down, and love all around, it's more real after all.

I believe in you.

I'll Remember This, All Too Well

"Could you hurry up, already?"

I've never liked Starbucks, or getting coffee at all. And even when I'm here, I rarely go inside. This location is far too close to my neighbourhood, anyway.

Casey leaps into my '94 Silverado, the same way my mother would've done back when the bumper was still snug to the rest of the car. The coffee floods my truck with an aroma of roasted espresso. It's unclear whether it's the overrated Seattle scents

or the risk we're taking on this supposedly holy day that's making me as sick as I'm feeling, but I know that my phone's chirp showcasing Anna's latest vacation update doesn't make things any better. I forget where she is, except that the destination is two layovers away – perfect. The further away she is, the less risky this rendezvous remains. But nothing matters when I'm around Casey, even though everything should. These clandestine meetings and stolen moments may be the only thing keeping me going, while also having the potential to bring my whole life to its knees.

I purposefully didn't make the reservation at *Snooze A.M. Eatery*, even though it's the only place open before everyone I know streams out of Mass. The thought of roaming Uptown with Casey led by the scent of beignets stemming from a market I'd never heard of was too exhilarating to pass up. It's the sort of quest I'd never venture on with Anna, seeing as one can never find anything in this world until they've found themselves. As Casey and I explore neighbourhoods I thought I knew so well, I'm alerted to artefacts I'd never seen before. Both in the city, and in myself. Our conversation runs like the river flowing by our side, although topics revolving around the former owners of my car, my girl on the other side of the world, and my liturgy of Southern values separate our point-of-views on just about everything. Not all of us have had the privilege of growing up as a coastal elite.

Such differences smother my brain while Casey rambles on about summer's glamorous adventures through South Africa. Throughout my life, every character in my one-act play has always showered me with love and affection, if only such attention were shown towards the person I truly am. But now my future, in their eyes, is as unclear as who will be paying for the traditional Alabama feast we've just devoured. "The man always pays," feels quite unhelpful today. No reason to worry though, Casey always has it. The same way Casey always has me (or whoever it is I'm told to be on any given day). It's the way all these East Coast aliens work. But that's not how it is in my country. We'd need to get out of this city, this state, and maybe even this world if we wanted any of this to work out.

But we can't.

And we never will be able to. I will never be open enough to overcome the incompatibility dividing our love in my world. I see no future with this person who'd never be accepted here. The environment dictating my every decision since birth won't allow for this to happen. So the same roasted espresso becomes the scene for my final goodbye. It is a farewell to the light inside me that yearns to be set free.

I love him more than anyone knows. But the story of us sounds a lot closer to a tragedy than a love-filled fantasy. Nobody would understand though; there wasn't anyone else there to experience it. But I'll remember this, all too well.

o o o

"Can't wait for you to come home, Anna! I've missed you so much."



The Calm Before the Storm

I look up to see an oval-shaped ball flying straight at me. It starts off high and slow, but then, arching its way towards me, speeds up, and like a rocket ship coming in to land, thuds at my feet. Studying it carefully, I see the countless seams and the number 3 on the back, having no idea what it means. My senses heighten as I pick up the ball, feeling the rough leather and beautiful craftsmanship. The smell of grass, hope and sweat is everywhere. This is the first rugby match of my life, my first game of bulletjie rugby.

A movement up ahead catches my attention. Fifteen boys are sprinting towards me, drawn to the rugby ball in my hands by some unknown force. I start panicking and glance at my mom on the side of the field, hoping for some reassurance. But instead, I look into frightened eyes. That was when I started getting scared, and when I'm scared, I do one thing: run! I turn and run, oblivious to the shouting around me, having only one goal in mind: survive. When you're small you think like that; if you don't do something you are going to die. And that was how I felt, if I didn't escape, I was going to die.

The thought of dying just made me run faster, and soon I was nearing a thin, white line with two big sticks in the ground. The sight brought back a memory from before the game when our coach was talking to our team. "Jy moet die bal agter die wit lyn druk om te wen," he had shouted at us, emphasizing the importance of this rule. "OK," we all answered, "But why must we pass backwards when we want to go forward, it makes no sense?" our so-called captain asked. "I didn't make the rules," he shrugged, limping away. And as an afterthought shouted "Good luck!" over his shoulder. Why would we need luck?

Like a broken record, my coach's words echo over and over again in my mind: put the ball behind the white line to win. As I run faster the white line draws even nearer. After what feels like an eternity, I finally reach my destination. I jump and fly over the white line, wind whipping my hair in every direction. 'Thud!' I fall heavily onto the ground, my breath knocked out of my lungs. Damp grass covers my entire body. Panting, I turn towards my teammates, knowing that I had just fallen in love with this crazy sport. My coach storms onto the field, "Great run Andre! Next time try to score on the opposition's side."

One More Time

My father was a military man. Tough as they come. Hard as nails. He spent over 30 years of his life devoted to the service of our country. A country that forgot his name the moment he was lowered into the ground. Colonel James Henry Thompson. Only one of the thousands of men who left home to never come back. Who left a wife without a husband, and a son without a father. The man responsible for who I am today.

As sudden as it was, his death didn't really affect me much. He was so absent from my life that I was growing up without a father long before he stepped on that landmine. Work was his mistress, dragging him all over the world except home, where I needed him to be. Trading birthdays and anniversaries for conferences in France and Spain. I longed for the days when he'd come home, and I could look deep into his brown eyes and shake his callused hand, trying to forget that he was ever gone. But even then I could feel the distance between me and the man I knew nothing about. The man I despised every time he left, and whom I loved when he came back. My mom told me to be strong, but even she couldn't hold back the tears when he said goodbye. I knew that his job was very important, but my heart ached for a father who could tuck me into bed every night. I started acting out, and blamed my father's absence for the path that I was walking down. Life started off as a blank canvas ready to be filled with beautiful colours. But, without my father's guidance, my hand slipped and ruined the picture.

Despite all these things, I admired my father. And the older I got the more I wanted to be exactly like him. I wanted people to know that I was in charge by the way I walked into a room, have all eyes turn to me and my Christmas-tree military uniform. The medals on my chest shining like the stars in the sky. Men waiting hours just to shake my hand. My smile, a precious gift, desired by all but not bought easily. I wanted to be respected by everyone who knew me – just like my father. I became oblivious to his flaws and only saw his strengths. Where there was a drunk and violent man, I saw a powerful military leader who could do whatever he pleased. I started blaming myself for being the reason he had to leave, and did everything I could to try and impress him: learning how to shoot straight, how to fight, how to win, and how to lose. Lessons a father should be teaching his son. But I was left alone to make my own mistakes. I even wanted to join the military, follow in the footsteps of what caused my childhood such great pain. Every night I dreamed of working alongside my father, finally getting a chance to spend some time with him. Finally being able to prove my worth.

But then one day my father told us that he was going to retire from the army, his one true love. Nobody could've expected it. He told us that the war in Afghanistan was ending and that he thought it would be a good time for him to come home to his family. He had never called us that before, but for the first time in my life, it felt like we really were one. I cried tears of joy as the three of us embraced, never wanting to let go. It was the best day of my life, my smile infecting others as I walked to school. I was finally going to live a normal 15-year-old life. One that my father would actually be part of. It seemed too good to be true - he was coming home.

But now, six years later, that sentence still haunts me. A harsh reminder of what could've been. It was too good to be true. He was coming home, but like everything in life, there was a catch. He had to go to war just one more time. And that one time was all it took.

Masked Pretenses

Whilst standing at my post I'm listening, but not hearing. Listening to the wails and cries all around me, but not giving them any thought, not giving them a chance to

wrestle with my conscience, because I know I will lose. I know I can't hold out for much longer. The protective wall that I've built up around my mind was once strong, but with every terrible day I can feel it crumbling, and soon I will be left defenceless to the attack from my own mind. I can feel the wall crumbling now, every scream tearing it down brick by brick. And I know once it's gone, I won't be able to save myself from myself.

I start walking to clear my mind. The cool breeze gave me a pleasant relief from this afternoon's scorching sun. I follow the path I walk every day, trying to distract myself from my surroundings. But it doesn't matter how fast I run, I can't escape my own thoughts. I start thinking about my future again. I know that what I am doing is bad, but I need to force myself to believe the obvious lie, that Jews are the ones who started this war. And even though I know this isn't true, it's what I've been told, and to stand up against the Nazi party is a death wish. I carry on walking, my mind struggling with my conscience.

I don't even think about what I do every day, I just do it. I've adapted to this mindset because I know that if I really think about what I am doing, I will realise the extent of the pain and suffering that I have caused. By not thinking about my actions, it's almost as if it's not really me doing them. It's like the person going to work isn't the same person as the one sleeping in my bed. In my messed-up mind this makes me believe that I'm innocent from myself and everything I've done, and even though I know that I am far from innocent, it's not the real me. I can hear the screaming now, but I know I can't listen to them, for if I let them penetrate my heart, I won't be able to do what I do every day.

I turn left and see some commotion coming from the dining room. I start running, my hand automatically reaching for the butt of my pistol. I reach the fight and am surprised that some other guards haven't broken it up yet. I can see them standing around, an amused expression on their faces as they watch the gruesome display of violence in front of them. There's nothing I can do as the fight unfolds. Just a few minutes later there are 3 bodies lying motionless on the floor. "What happened?" I ask one of the spectators. "They started fighting because there wasn't any food left," he replies, a neutral expression on his face.

Just another day at the camp.

A Game of Lives

For the past ten years of my life, I've been doing the same thing. My passion – the reason I was put on this earth. The only thing that makes me feel alive. Many people would frown upon the thing that I love, so I have been forced to keep it secret. But today I will be freeing myself from the pain that I've been carrying on my back for the last ten years. The weight that forces my whole body to sag, the pain that often clogs my mind and makes me make mistakes.

Oh, how I hate mistakes.

I start cleaning my instruments. The instruments that make the most beautiful music in the world. Making sure that each piece is completely spotless, meticulously going over every detail. I have done this many times and my hands know what to do. I can smell the polish in the air, feel the smooth metal on my skin, and as I wipe them clean, I remember everything that they stand for. I remember everything that they've done for me. But I still feel nothing. I know that this will be the very last time that I will be doing this, and even though the pieces of metal in my hands are the only things that have ever brought me joy, I know that I won't miss it.

Done.

Every inch of leather has been polished and every blade has been cleaned. There's no sign of what they've done. No living person besides myself will ever know their story. And I'm pretty much dead. But I haven't bothered with wiping my fingerprints from the blades, because it's time to give up the game, it's time to make them think that it's all over. That they've won. I know that I've never made a mistake before, but I must, even though it hurts me so much. Because if I don't, they'll never find me. And for them to find me is the only way I can win. The only way I'll be remembered.

I stand up, leaving the instruments where they lay. There's no turning back now. I walk out of my house, up the driveway, past my car, and out through the gates. I carry on walking until I reach the edge of the forest that surrounds the little town in which I live. I've walked here many times and I know my way. As I walk on the soft moss, feeling the gentle breeze on my skin, memories start flooding my mind. I remember everyone that's ever played a part in my life, and everyone I've outlived. I hear the music that I'm famous for, I feel the joy that my job gives me, and I can only imagine how I will feel when I win. I might even, for the first time in my life, feel something.

I sit down and wait.

I hear the sirens before I actually see the cars and the faces in them. The flashing red lights come down the winding road and the cars stop right next to me. The men get out, smiling as they walk towards me, thinking that they've finally won the game that we've been playing for the last ten years.

"Mr Simons, you have the right to remain silent. You have the right to..."

And as the policemen read me my rights, I slowly stand up, offering up my wrists to one of the men who isn't pointing a gun at my face. He chains me up and leads me towards the many cars standing in front of me. I follow, head down, knowing that my name will be forever eternalized for what I've done.



William Segar

The Butcher, the Baker, the Pancake Maker

I am a pancake - or a series of many attempted pancakes, to be more precise. Not in the sense that I am sweet or fluffy, but rather in terms of the types of pancakes one can cook. Instead of flour, eggs, and milk, my batter is made up of work, sports, and goals. Every day I pour my efforts into the pan, striving for the perfect balance.

There are days when I spread it too thin, stretching my focus across more tasks than I can handle, and aiming for too many pursuits. Then when I can no longer hold it together my edges turn crisp and cracks marble through my core. The heat beneath me is unyielding, and a constant reminder of the weight of expectations. Then, as the pancake begins to bubble, bits stick to the pan and burn out from under—all that batter, for just another blunder.

Then I overcorrect, holding back as I pour, pooling the batter in the centre. The thick puddle is now hesitant to reach the edges, so the exterior browns yet the middle remains raw. Too much focus on a few things and too many others receive none. An illusion of completeness, a mask shrouds its flaws, but as you cut deeper the truth will seep out.

At times I find myself stuck, I become so obsessed with one task, all else fades away, like a burnt pancake on an unbuttered pan I burn myself out. The edges cling on, refusing to release, and share the efforts around. All that remains is a partially burnt mess, a stark reminder of a life without balance.

My diary is the kitchen, where I plan and record the various lives I have attempted to cook up. It holds the memories of each failure, each pancake that was tossed away. But with each burn-out or uneven spread, there were lessons learned. Everyone likes their pancakes differently, be it thick or thin or stacked with toppings. No recipe fits all, each balance is unique, mine is just a work in progress – though one thing is certain: mine will never have bananas.

A Million Mes

Down the bustling streets, where each passerby becomes a blur, I catch a fleeting glimpse of a friendly face. One whose eyes glint in the morning sun; whose lips turn up in a gentle smile. Time froze for a second, and through the stampede, we held one another's gaze. Then the moment moved on and we never met again, but I wonder if in another world, we were friends.

I know who I am, at least to myself, but who am I to everyone else? To myself, I am an intricate mosaic of experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Yet to the nameless faces I meet, or the family friends whom I greet, I am only a mere surface shard from a brief interaction.

To the barista at the corner coffee shop, I am a brash and fussy person, who cannot manage hot drinks. That label is now glued on, from one hasty earlier morning. Yet to the children in the park, whose ball was lodged in a tree, I am the giant saviour, who rescued their match. To the old lady for whom I held a door, I am a reminder of the world's kindness. Like a man between a million mirrors, a million reflections exist.

To the world I am a collage of people, only I see the same person at my core. To all whom I have come across, whether they remember or not, a different version of me was present; whose exact personality even I forgot. I may never know how they view me, be that for better or worse. But to myself, I am simply me.

Breaking the Surface

Submerged in the darkness I lay under a suffocating shroud of water, my body molding into the filth that encompassed me. Shivering uncontrollably my body protested its torment with vicious convulsions. The flow of the murky water tickled against my frail figure, making me quiver with its icy touch. My mind is awash with frightening thoughts of the terror to come if I dare rise for the sweet relief of air. I feel the sludge slide under my fingernails as I sink further into the riverbed. Curtailing my urge to rise, one thing circles over and over in my head...I cannot break the surface, I cannot be found.

As the golden glow of dawn seeped through my window, I eased myself out of bed and began my morning routine. Once I had thrown on my tattered old shirt and threadbare trousers, more rags than clothes, I headed off to the plantation. Beneath my feet, I felt the damp grass cling between my toes, and the cold soil stuck to the calloused soles of my feet as I trudged through the palm oil trees. Gazing up through the leaves mindlessly my attention was grabbed by the sound of a familiar voice. "Fahmi! Over here Fahmi!" - Leena was hurtling towards me with her usual toothy grin stretching from cheek to cheek radiating warmth. Leena and I were around about the same age, and both lived alone in the local plantation settlement. We had grown close throughout the years, forging an unbreakable bond amidst the harsh realities of our lives. When she finally caught up to me, I was enveloped in a tangled mess of arms, legs, and long brown hair. After reciprocating our customary bear hug, I strolled through the trees with Leena, chatting about anything and everything for what felt like hours on the way to our sections of the fake forest.

Today, however, the tranquillity of the plantation was shattered as the thunderous crack of a rifle permeated the trees, tearing apart the fragile peace it once knew. If only we had known what the shot heralded, we would have dashed away without delay, but our petrified bodies froze as our hearts lurched inside our chests. Crouching behind the trunk of a palm oil, I felt Leena's hand clasping my own. Rasping breaths hissed from my mouth and trying to control them only made them louder. I glanced at Leena and mouthed the words, "Three, two, one," before we both exploded from our cover and into the labyrinth of trees. The air was thick with the acrid smell of smoke, a scent that had gone unnoticed before.

Racing through the undergrowth, the sound of pounding footsteps shadowing our own crept closer with each breath. Leena's eyes were burning red, and her cheeks stained with tears that poured down uncontrollably. I wanted to console her, but the

words would not flow off my parched tongue, and with each gasp for air they were swallowed back down. We could hear a river churning ahead and hope burned in our hearts.

Then, she disappeared.

I looked to my side; Leena was nowhere in sight. I heard a thud followed by an agonizing cry behind me, sending shivers through my body. Turning around, I saw two armed men dragging her backwards. Her lifeless body slumped behind them as others turned to pursue me further.

I ran relentlessly, adrenaline surged through me as I propelled my aching body onwards until I reached the edge of the river near the border of Brunei. I stood paralyzed, staring down into the deep brown abyss beneath me. The thudding of boots advanced and I snapped out of my daze before plunging under the surface. The men halted at the riverbank, baffled by the disappearance of their prey. Although I heard muffled words that pierced through the water I could not discern what they were saying. I knew one thing for sure though, I was going to be holding my breath for a long time.

The Lives I Have Lived Looking at Dead Trees

The gentle ripples flaunt their beaming smiles as the morning rays plunge into the Mediterranean. A balmy breeze erects goosebumps on my warm, golden skin as I stride out onto the deck. After lying face down on the mesh trampoline, I gazed down, mesmerized by the rainbow of creatures racing beneath the swells. Yet, even as I lay in paradise on earth, there was still something missing, a sense of fulfillment, a feeling of inner peace. Something I have only ever found while lost in the stories inked onto dead trees.

I taught myself to find serenity and joy in what most found boredom or irritation, I taught myself how to live inside a book. Growing up I barely read, and when I did it was more often than not an assigned Afrikaans book by Jaco Jacobs; or one of those children's books like "How the Zebra Got It Stripes." The first life I lived through a book was Kensuke's Kingdom written by Michael Morpurgo. It was something I had never experienced before, but as Mrs. Cahill read the first page my mind drifted off into a new existence.

I was hooked.

Upon my discovery of these magical worlds, I yearned for nothing more than to explore every tale locked within these paper treasure chests. I ploughed through piles of them, series after series, and the days melted away. Beginning with Percy Jackson and veering off into novels such as Goodnight Mr. Tom, an assemblage of vivid lives began to build up, brick by brick, in my mind. As the years went on, I constructed a whole castle of narratives and experiences.

On a cold Sunday night in grade 8, while the house was bustling with the sounds of running in the hallways and boys frantically folding clothes, I would slip away under the cover of my duvet. Brandishing a flashlight in one hand, and a tattered –

probably fifth-hand – copy of *The Power of One* in the other, I would read for hours. Completely engrossed, my eyes raced across the lines, my brain working overtime to produce an Oscar-worthy film on show exclusively in my head, (which I have no doubt is drastically different from how the author imagined it). Whenever life at Hilton seemed harsh or overwhelming, I switched off, changing from my life to that of Peekay. Tragically even the best stories have an ending. However, my tutor happened to be an English teacher. After uncovering what led to my sudden, sullen attitude, he took it upon himself to introduce me to every great novel he could think of. As he rolled them out, I was like a puppy being tossed new tennis balls. From *Noughts and Crosses* to *I Must Betray You* I delved into each with pure passion. Venturing into a divided society and the struggles of love within it to teenage life in a communist hive, infested with bitter leaders. Each branding my mind with their perspectives and journeys.

What I extracted from my escapes into the endless pages began to morph as I grew older. From merely relishing the story and unique characters I began to peer deeper into each book I read. My awe shifted toward scrutinizing the personalized palette of words equipped by each author and the messages they were used to deliver. As a pickpocket would nick watches and wallets, I snaked any word or phrase that caught my eye from the seas of black scribbles, relocating them onto my fresher sheets of paper. From this adjusted view, the books revealed their deepest secrets, truly dragging me inside their narratives and guiding me through.

Over time, my perspective on the world around me was altered. Each novel changed my life's course with the slightest nudge of the wheel. Emulating traits of characters, I became, in the slightest ways, a collage of the people I was reading about.

I taught myself to do more than just 'read', I taught myself to discover life between the covers, to find solace within each story. Reading for hours on end in a trance, muscle memory flipping the pages as I zoned into whatever realm I pleased. I learned that every book was merely a portal to a place without stress or expectations, a place where the grass is truly greener. By stepping through, the boulders roll off your shoulders, and the toxic clouds in your mind burn away. Leaving behind just, you.

The Dark Did Nothing Wrong

His trembling fingers clutched the plastic switch, the colour draining from his fingertips as he squeezed. At the sound of that click, his body lurched backwards into a dash. With each breath, the air grew thicker, heavier, and colder. Leaping onto his mattress, his hands raced to adjust the duvet, tugging it over his head and releasing a sigh of relief before the flood of raspy gasps could take over. The race marked the commencement of a restless and trepidatious night.

The fear of darkness, a top contender on most children's lists, potentially only second to mistaking a stranger for their mother. I attributed my phobia to the uncertainty of what lurked, veiled by the darkness. Irrational perhaps, but to a young boy, vision shrouded by the tenebrosity of night was deeply unnerving. In retrospect, however, the fear never involved the dark or my lack of sight. The fear was the

sensation of being enveloped in darkness, of not standing out. I became a ghost with the flick of a switch.

Too scared to confront it, I submitted to its demands, pledging every fiber of my being to a coherent effort toward perfection. Forced into unwavering devotion to the god of victory.

It worked.

With each clinch, the light returned, and the tremulous boy peered out. The warmth seeped into his skin, and the chill in his bones drew blunt. Hope cascaded into him, washing away the sullen thoughts, but the cold is inevitable, and when it returns, the light is chased away. As weeks passed, the “well dones” ebbed away and the limelight began to flicker. With the waning attention, the eyes shifted their gaze, taking with them the colour and warmth from the little boy’s room. He would watch in horror as his flesh assumed a pallid grey, his eerie veins glowing hues of blue. His life fell back into winter, a gloomy, frigid one.

With no choice but to retreat beneath the sheets, he clamped the shackles of validation around his wrists. Cursed to slave away, chiselling at his next marble masterpiece, futile hopes of it standing in the centre square to be admired for thousands of years to come swamped his thoughts. Denying its destiny of being relegated to the confines of a basement, left to decay with an audience of rodents. Shrouded in cobwebs, the dust-laden castoff shall sit alongside the harrowed boy, in a place so isolated that the light may never again reach.

Thus, each statue grew taller, grander, and more intricate than its predecessor in a vain attempt to keep up with the rising standards. The dark was never his fear; it was the feeling of being left in it. With dreams snatched from his mind, and hands calloused and raw, there was little trace of the boy. His nailbeds receded, casualties of relentless anxiety, alongside the glint in his eyes. He despised the sculptures for their failed efforts, and even more so the hands that moulded them.

Yet, when his arms felt feeble, he pondered on his insipid life. Those eyes were pervasive, and the spotlight far too bright. It was exhausting with the switch on, and everyone needed to sleep. The dark did nothing wrong; he began to miss its impartial embrace.

Something to Read

On dark winter eves, entangled in the enveloping grasp of my fleece blanket, I plan ahead. Stretched languidly on the timeworn couch, marbled with cream cracks snaking amongst the umber leather, my mind meanders through labyrinths of thought. It ruminates on what was, is, and will be for this ship it commands. The seas have been seen, and vast islands traveled, but some oceans remain uncharted, and most countries are still unexplored. I am far from being scrapped though and refuse to furl my sails. What shall I do when my hull tears down and I make my final dock? Will my tales live on, or sink alongside their vessel? So, I bottle up my stories and toss them into the blue, memories to keep me company on those lonesome days, when I too wash ashore.

My pen waltzes on the page as the words pour out. To tell my story to someone who will dare not judge, but rather reminisce on a life once their own is uniquely fulfilling. Now no longer on the couch, dragged back to the past, I am 12 again. Perched high in the oak tree, on the fringe of the woods outside the boarding house. I kept watch for guards as my friends clambered out our dorm window. As the last guy toppled out and brushed himself off, I clambered down in muffled giggles before we set off. You forget how loud everything is until the night is shrouded in silence. The stick snapped with a sharp crack, its sudden fracture echoing throughout the trees—our evening stroll morphed into a frantic dash. The shrubbery was a blur, as my eyes locked in on the treacherous path my feet weaved protruding roots and loose stones. Arriving at the fence line, burning with each gasping breath, we stood in awe of the moonlit pastures bordering our forest. Warm gusts tickled our faces as the grass undulated like the gentle waves on the shores of Greece. The aromas of damp undergrowth now collided with the earthy, fresh scent of the dew-laden blades. We were steadfast about staying until the lids of our eyes grew weak, I am sure we would have slept out there if we had a choice. Then the swaying, verdant fields faded into crackling flames as I dotted the full stop at the foot of the page. This was a story I never wanted to forget.

Unwinding the blanket, I slipped my legs out, shuffled my feet into my warm, wool slippers, and wearily stood up to make a cup of hot chocolate. Flicking the kettle on I waited patiently, listening to the rising bubbles. My hands squeezed the heat out of the mug and as I sipped, the steaming liquid coating my tongue. Its rich taste is complemented by the molten, pink and white marshmallows bobbing up and down like ocean buoys on a calm noon. Even in an ever-moving world, the simplest joys stand their ground, isolated from change like an anchor preventing us from floating too far with the tides. This cup is a replica of all the ones before it, guarding the memories of its predecessors, and hinting gentle reminders with every drop. Reminders of times worth writing down, times too precious to just be forgotten.

I write myself letters, but not to self-reflect or unburden my worries. No, I write them for those frigid winter eves to come, nestled by the fire. When my mind draws blank as I gaze at the mahogany shelves, they will harbour a thousand stories for me to read under the amber glow. And I know some are already lost, and there are not enough hours or trees for me to jot down all the rest. Yet I find peace in trying for that old man, that old me. The sole flaw is that he cannot toss bottles back.



Musa Mponda

When the Sun Fades: A Storm's Hunger

The air carries the sharp, briny scent of salt, blending with the earthy undertones of seaweed and the crisp ocean breeze. A striking sun slowly lowers, painting the sky a vivid saffron. Countless lively souls mingle along the golden shore. A colony of gulls

coo in harmony, their silhouettes decorating the atmosphere with specks of black. A symphony of laughter and chatter, like a chorus of waves, crashes joyfully against the shore, each voice rising and falling like the tide, merging into a concord of youthful energy.

A soft mist touches the heavens, but there's a sense of familiarity, like old foes greeting before battle. A single tear caresses the shore, simultaneously, a low bellow roars in arrival. The soft mist sluggishly turns to a thick grey hue, enveloping the jovial saffron in its monochrome tone. Few luminescent rays claw through the deep fog; an unruly competition. Another bellow echoes, but more forceful this time, like a warning for the few remaining youths. Then without mercy, a jolt of electricity burns through the grey. The once-relaxed 'coos' turn to desperate 'squeaks. Numerous bodies rush in search of a haven. Now only a single beam of light struggles for its life, and the once high-spirited beach is devoid; except for one.

A low figure stands on the grim beach a sole watcher of the storm. The once vibrant sunset, a tapestry of gold and crimson, swallowed by the sudden squall, leaving the sky a sinister swirl of greys and blacks. The wind howls around him, whipping the sea into an untamed fury, but he stands firm. The sand beneath his feet shifts with the gusts, and the previous tears are now sky shrapnel, cold and stinging. Yet in the midst of the storm's carnage, he appears untroubled, a silent witness to the battle between light and dark, a final remnant of the picturesque day that once was.

With the dominant grey ruled as the victor, all that remains is the echo of a murdered warmth, engulfed by the storm's relentless advance, leaving only the frigid water.



Callan Kenmuir

The Lake

In 1916, as the sun began to set, and the chill of night crept in, chaos ensued. Riddled by the effects of a bloody war, a once peaceful and prosperous countryside nestled deep in French territory became a battleground. The thick stench of smoke, death, and gunpowder lingered and festered in the air, spreading across the vast wheat fields that had become engulfed in scattered fires from artillery shells. Farmhouses provided the only sanctuary and cover as shells devastated the area around, making noise like thunder as they crashed onto the floor. A midnight smoke swirled around and consumed the area, making it possible to see only the brief flashes of gunshots lighting up the atmosphere like fireworks.

Pvt Ludwig, a young, German, blue-eyed, blonde and frail 16-year-old boy scarred by the horrors and bloodshed of war, found himself in this area, diving for cover behind one of the farmhouses. They had been trekking through the French

countryside, returning after a long, drawn-out battle in the trenches. Without as much as a warning, his platoon was ambushed by the French; his friends in the platoon dropped into the cold, moist mud like flies, slowly sinking deeper into it, almost as if death were beckoning them into its embrace.

Clinging behind the walls of the farmhouse like a small child hiding behind its parents for protection, Pvt Ludwig was filled with an overwhelming sense of fear and anguish as he watched his friends die and heard bullets whizzing past him. More now than ever, he craved to go home; he so desperately wanted to be in the embrace of his family one more time. As his heart pounded out of his chest, he began to cough and splutter when the smoke filled his lungs. Peering out into the distance, he spotted a lake.

The lake was inviting, almost begging him to run towards it. It stood out, shrouded in a specific sense of peacefulness and mystery. Feeling cornered like a lamb being led to the slaughter, he ran towards it.

As he ran, he shot aimlessly, desperately into the black smoke; shells exploded, destroying the world around him, and bullets pierced his skin like needles. Finally reaching the lake, his scarlet blood ran deep onto its banks as he entered the water. The water was cold, but he had never felt warmer. Wading deeper and deeper into the water, he finally collapsed into it, and as he sank into its depths, the world around him went silent. So utterly quiet. Serenity filled him as he closed his eyes and allowed the lake to consume him in its entirety.



Atlegang Ramutla

Happy Birthday, Siphosethu

Mandla woke up to water dripping on his face as if nature had decided to mock him again. The water in the house had been turned off because Mandla was late on his payment. He arose slowly trying to not wake his little brother, Sipho, on the other side of the bed. Mandla looked at the calendar and saw that the eighteenth of June, Sipho's birthday, was approaching. Sipho had been begging Mandla for something called, 'Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows', which Mandla believed was some sort of book. Never had he met a child so devoted to reading books. Mandla looked at his broken watch, though an hour behind he could deduce that work was not for another 3 hours.

He decided that a walk was the best thing to pass the time. The town of Soweto was quieter at this time of the day, Mandla looked at familiar sights as he walked through

the city, Mr. Malapo returning drunk from the local tavern, Oom Justin gambling his inheritance away, Fifi helping her 7 siblings get ready for school and Ms. Ntuma making biscuits so that she can send her daughter to school. Mandla was in her class before he had to drop out to help his mother with the bills.

Mandla then saw a sight he had not seen in years. The appalled look on his face resembled that of a child eating broccoli for the first time. Though unshaven and filthy, he was still recognizable. His yellow-toothed smile was like a grotesque mask. Mandla approached slowly as if a predator stalking his prey. The man then spotted Mandla. The look on his face shifted from joyful and carefree to unsure and confused. The cold air did not comfort the man as Mandla approached slowly but instead, to his chagrin, gave him a feeling he could not describe. As if every sin he has ever committed was about to be repaid by this mysterious spirit that had come for him. Mandla showed no emotion, he just kept approaching. It was only when the man looked deeply into Mandla's eyes that he felt true fear. For the eyes he was looking into were his own. Though 5 years older, the man could not deny that the boy walking towards him was his son.

The son of a man he had once abandoned and forgotten, the son of a man whom he had sworn to never look back on. "Mandla", the man uttered softly. It was then Mandla charged at him, the look in his eyes resembling that of a wild predator. Mandla let out a scream filled with detest and disgust. And with pure rage and hatred, he punched the man.

AGAIN

AND AGAIN

AND AGAIN.

The crowd that had formed looked on and stood still and quiet as if they were sculptures.

Mandla remembered the day as if it were yesterday. The broken glass reflecting the light like diamonds. His father shouting in anger, His mother crying whilst she was bleeding, and his brother's screaming. Mandla was too young to know what was said but he knows that when his father walked out the door his heart was filled with sadness, grief, and anger.

"Don't move!" said a mysterious voice.

Mandla then snapped back to reality. When looking up he saw a barrel of a gun, when looking down he saw his father's bloodied, mutilated face.

The cell they threw Mandla in had at least a dozen other men in it. The cell was dark, cold, and filthy. The rats moved around as they pleased with none of the men making so much as a sound when one touched them. Mandla felt sick to his stomach and the vomit on the floor did not help his situation.

Mandla did not know how long he had spent in the cell before his lawyer had arrived. The chains he wore were tight and compressed his hands. "This is the most expensive thing I've ever had on my wrist," he thought to himself. When arriving Mandla was surprised, his lawyer was a muscular, white man, around six foot in a nicely tailored suit far above Mandla's pay grade.

"Quite an interesting story you have, Mandla Morojele. Single Mom, little brother, dropping out to support them both."

Mandla stayed silent.

"I do wonder if sacrificing them for your own pride and ego was worth it."

Mandla then looked at the man with the predatorial eyes he had given his father not so long ago.

"What? Will you beat me up too? It will only make the mess you caused for your family worse. 10% of cases like these end up being dismissed. So go ahead, take away the only chance your mother and brother have to survive or else consider what I just said as a fact."

Mandla took the man's words to heart and lowered his head slowly in shame, guilt, and embarrassment.

"The trial will be on the 18th of June. Rest up, sir, you have a long week ahead of you." The lawyer said.

"That's my brother's-" Mandla then stopped suddenly.

"What was that?" the lawyer asked.

"Never mind"

The Day of the Trial had arrived. There were at least 50 people in the courthouse. The room was larger than Mandla's entire house. Everyone took their seats, and the trial began. Mandla could not follow a word being said the entire trial everything moved at such a fast pace. They called up many people, most of whom were in the town square that day and saw the crime being committed. Mandla was then called to the stand.

"Mr. Morojele, what drove you to assault your father?", the prosecuting lawyer said.

The man was of average build, black, around 5 feet, even shorter than Sipho.

Mandla remained silent

"Silent, are we?"

Mandla remained silent

"It must have been traumatic when he left 5 years ago. Forcing you to drop out and help your mother. That was very noble of you I might add."

Mandla then flashed back to that moment 5 years ago.

"But you then got tired, you were hammered at work, behind on your bills and you were stressed. In your anger, you looked for something to blame, a scapegoat, and there it was. An opportunity ripe for the taking."

Mandla's breathing then became heavier, with each breath becoming heavier and needing more effort than the last. His heart became louder and louder each beat speeding up and pounding like an engine.

"Am I wrong?" asked the lawyer.

Mandla struggled to speak, all attempts to speak were just met with stuttering.

"Am I wrong?" exclaimed the lawyer.

Mandla was frozen in place unable to move or speak.

"AM I WRONG?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"No", Mandla said softly, tears filling his eyes.

Mandla could not hear anything but the high-pitched ringing in his ears.

"Before the verdict is announced does the defendant have any last words", said the judge

Mandla then snapped back. He quickly stood up and after a moment of silence. He looked at his brother, probably for the last time, and uttered a few, quiet words.

"Happy Birthday, Siphosethu."

"The jury finds the defendant guilty of all charges and sentence him to 3 years in prison." Said the judge

And that was it. The trial took a mere 2 hours, 2 hours to decide the life of a child, his brother, and his mother.

2 hours.

Mandla sat in his cell, feeling the weight of his guilt and regret pressing against him. He could not believe how quickly his life had changed, how easily he had let his anger and frustration consume him. As he lay on the cold concrete floor, he thought about what he had done and what it had cost him.

His mother and brother now had to fend for themselves, with no one to support them. Mandla felt like he had failed them like he had let them down in the worst possible

way. He could not imagine how they would survive without him, without his income and his help.

But as he lay there, feeling sorry for himself, he realized something. He had been so focused on supporting his family, on being the provider, that he had forgotten how to be a brother and a son. He had forgotten how to be there for them emotionally, how to show them love and affection.

He had been so consumed by his own struggles that he had neglected the people who mattered most to him. And now, because of his mistakes, he was separated from them, unable to be there for them when they needed him the most.

As he lay there, he made a promise to himself. When he got out of prison, he would dedicate himself to being a better brother and son. He would make up for lost time, for all the moments he had missed because of his own selfishness.

He would do whatever it took to make things right, to make sure that his family knew how much he loved them and how sorry he was for what he had done. He could not change the past, but he could shape the future, and he would do everything in his power to make it a brighter one.

Not Meeting Expectations

My parents both grew up in the township during Apartheid. They both challenged their circumstances and created opportunities for themselves that built the life they have today. I, as the eldest son, am always expected to get A's and be one of the strongest academically. My teachers are always commending me on how diligently I work. However, they always say that I have "the potential to do better". This constant phrase in the report comment always seems to add salt to the sweet report my parents expect to receive. It suggests that I'm not going 100% and I am wasting my time on other meaningless things.

They are working as hard as they can to send me to this school and it's only fair that I do the same for them here. But it seems despite my best efforts, I can never "bring out the best" according to my father. No matter how many hours spend studying, no matter how much writing, reading, and arranging my schedule, I can never do what everyone thinks I can do. I don't know what people see in me, but it seems as if I am the only one who can't see it.

My friends, cousins, aunts, and uncles describe me as a genius, as a man of future success and prosperity, hence my name, Atlegang, meaning prosper. It seems that these expectations were thrust upon me in the womb. The pressure of meeting them gets to my head at times and I often see myself wondering if I will ever achieve greatness, if I somehow will claw my way to the top, just as my father and mother did, or if I will fail and end up many before me, average, unimportant, forgotten.

The bullet train that is my sister does not comfort me either. An expert at everything she sets her mind to, yet she somehow cannot crack academics. For this, she looks to me for guidance and inspiration. With all her sporting and music achievements, with all her leadership positions in school, she named me as her role model during

her St Anne's interview. She says that every time she wakes up and is faced with a challenge, she asks what I would do and how I would deal with it. I feel that if I fail at academics and don't achieve something greater, my worth and my value go away. I will waste my parents' investments and disappoint those who look to me for guidance.

6 years of my life have been spent trying to uphold this image. To drop the image now would be to drop my life's work. You might say that I am exaggerating or that I am still young, but the world is changing. The sun still rises, and the world is becoming more competitive every day, if you are unwilling to make sacrifices, you will never get ahead. I will continue to try as hard as I can to make my parents proud, but I regretfully cannot guarantee it will be enough.

Ruthlessness is Mercy Upon Ourselves

The battlefield reeks of death and bloodshed, it's a sharp smell only the experienced can recognize, these green boys don't know anything of it. I haven't eaten since daybreak, the constant bomb shells and shooting haven't done anything to cease the constant growling of my stomach. We have just finished taking the village of Marcoing. The date is the 18th of September 1918, 4 brutal and bloody years of war but rumors are that it will end soon. Us and the Germans have fought each other to the last leg but I truly think we'll come out on top soon. My medal reflects the sunlight as fewer shots echo in the distance; the Germans have begun their retreat. I think to rest my legs and sit down till I see a German come out of a hiding place. I aim my rifle at him, and he stops dead in his tracks. He's a young lad, not much older than me I'd wager, his thick moustache fails to cover his quivering lips, his right arm is in a sling and his left arm is raised to the sky. As I look into his eyes, I see the fear of death and the regret of a life wasted. I don't know what spell his eyes put on me, but I decide to take pity on him and signal him to go, he mouths a thank you and runs away with the rest of his company. I lower my rifle and sit down to watch him run away. What's the life of one German boy? What threat could he possibly pose? What does one act of mercy mean to the World?

August 1938. The threat of war with Germany is looming again, bloody hell. I gave 4 years of my life to fight them, I was the most decorated soldier in that war and now they come back for Round 2. That darn treaty was too harsh on them, me and the lads knew it, we knew that a soldier's ambition, his flame, never goes out. Give them a reason, and they'll be on the battlefield ready to fight you to the death and that treaty handed them that opportunity on a silver plate, it was only a matter of time. As I open the newspaper, I see this alleged dictator everyone speaks of. Hitler is his name, and he has managed to convince all of Germany that they can redeem themselves from the last war. There are many things to notice first about the man, his fine suit, his comb-over hair, his armband, or his small moustache but what I notice, is his eyes. Eyes, I haven't seen in 20 long years, eyes I only ever hoped to see again, as an old man long after the days of war. Thousands of Jews have died, and the threat of war looms, all because I couldn't pull the bloody trigger, all because I allowed those eyes to weaken me. How could I allow those damn eyes to trick me, he was meant to go home and live in peace. But those were the eyes of a boy, these eyes I look at now are bitter and cruel, hatred seeps from them instead of the fear

and regret from 20 years ago. I pray to God in heaven, to forgive me for my sins and forgive me for what I've released into the world from that one, stupid act of mercy.

What is Freedom?

What does it mean to be free, to have no responsibilities?

To be free from mental and physical anguish? To me, freedom is a state of being, something we fortify within ourselves. It separates us from the many things and people that this life contains, while also allowing us to be invested in each one. Through life, you will realize that our identity, is merely a mechanism to experience the infinite, you realize that you truly own nothing. It is from this point of view that we can connect and involve ourselves with the people and things in our lives. We take every moment and every person and appreciate them, knowing that they will eventually be gone. But, rest assured, the feelings from the memories we've experienced will never be lost, each connection is ingrained in your memory forever. Each moment of happiness, sadness, anger, regret. Each person you love and hate they are always with you. Because what freedom is, is acknowledging that the physical doesn't last but building a connection with it anyway. To look upon the world in all its flaws and all its beauty and realize what you have been given is yours to do with. That this is the gift God gave us when we were created, that this is freedom.



JUNIORS

Arjun Wadhwani

Reflective Writing Task on Ethical Leadership

I think ethical leadership involves guiding others with a strong sense of values, integrity, and a clear understanding of right and wrong. A quote that resonates with ethics for me is from Warren Buffet: "Ethical leadership involves taking responsibility for the consequences of your actions and decisions." This quote is important because it tells us the importance of accountability, which I think is the most important value.

The principle that I believe is most important in ethical leadership is accountability. Taking ownership of the consequences of your actions is important. This principle teaches us to take responsibility and not blame others when things go wrong. Without accountability, people may continue to make mistakes and repeat doing things wrong until they are eventually caught, leading to more severe consequences. For example, if you break someone's window, owning up to it immediately is

important. If you don't own up it can create a habit of avoiding responsibility, which can have a significant effect in the long run.

The case study that got me thinking about ethical leadership was life science where we talked about, how scientists are getting closer to being able to alter people's traits through DNA modification, a costly technology likely accessible to rich people. This could create 'superhumans' and widen the gap between rich and poor, raising ethical concerns about fairness and inequality. Even limiting modifications to one trait per person may not reduce this inequality. The ethical dilemma continues: is it right to change DNA if it could create a bigger gap between the rich and the poor?

When I was younger, I had to make an ethical decision. I once threw a rock over the fence and accidentally shattered my neighbour's window. I faced a tough decision: whether to blame my brother or someone else and try to avoid responsibility or to own up to my mistake. After much thinking, I chose to confess to my parents about what had happened. Although I received a loud shouting from them, deep down I felt good because I knew I made the right choice. To say sorry, I went to my neighbours and apologized sincerely, and then gave them a box of chocolates as a token of apology.

In conclusion, reflecting on ethical leadership, I have learned the importance of accountability in guiding our actions. Warren Buffet's quote, "Ethical leadership involves taking responsibility for the consequences of your actions and decisions," resonates deeply with me, highlighting that taking responsibility is central to maintaining integrity and fostering trust. From discussions on DNA modification, which raises ethical concerns about fairness and inequality, to personal experiences like owning up to breaking a neighbour's window, accountability and many other principles are crucial. Ethical leadership is vital today to ensure fairness, equity, and social harmony. I believe people have lost sight of these principles, so we should focus on restoring and upholding them to positively impact society.

"Rethinking Education: Why Schools Need to Teach Beyond the Basics"(aka why schools are pointless 2.0)

"F stands for failure," a letter that some believe determines our entire future. We spend years in classrooms, dedicating hours each day to an education system that many feel is outdated and often irrelevant. While education is undeniably valuable, it's time to question whether our current approach truly prepares us for success. Today, I argue that the way schools teach needs a significant overhaul.

First, let's examine what real education should be. The term "education" derives from the Latin word "educere," meaning to "bring out." But how can we bring out a child's true potential if our schools are focused on cramming information rather than nurturing curiosity and a genuine love for learning? Instead of inspiring a passion for discovery, the current system prioritizes memorization and testing. Students are trained to remember facts rather than to understand concepts deeply and think critically.

Take the example of essays and abstract algebraic problems. We spend countless hours on these tasks, yet how often do they come into play in our everyday lives? Meanwhile, essential skills like financial literacy, how to manage a budget, understanding interest rates, and saving for retirement, are rarely covered. Imagine if, instead of focusing so heavily on complex algebra, students learned practical financial skills. This kind of education would better prepare them for real-world challenges and empower them with the knowledge to make informed decisions and secure their financial futures.

Moreover, the current system often imposes a lot of stress on students. We are overloaded with large amounts of homework but are not taught effective time management skills. Many teens struggle with insufficient sleep—not due to late-night phone use, but because they are swamped with assignments from multiple classes. The focus on grades and deadlines overlooks the importance of students' well-being, punishing them for minor lapses and failing to support their overall health and academic balance.

Finally, the school environment can sometimes feel more like a prison than a place of learning. Students lack personal freedom, are subject to strict rules, and face consequences for even minor infractions. We're expected to memorize facts for tests, even though we live in an age where information is readily accessible online. This emphasis on rote memorization and grade accumulation does not encourage true learning or personal growth; instead, it often limits our potential and discourages genuine achievement.

In conclusion, our schooling system is in need of reform. It fails to deliver real education, does not adequately prepare students for the real world, and often overlooks their emotional and physical well-being. By rethinking our approach to education, we could reduce homework loads, alleviate stress, and create more meaningful learning experiences that truly prepare students for their futures. I hope this speech inspires you to consider these necessary changes, particularly for the teachers who, once students themselves, understand the need for a more effective and compassionate educational system.



Bradley van Loggerenberg

Stuck between TWO Worlds

Imagine being trapped. Trapped in a world where no matter what you do, you are always stuck. Stuck between two beautiful women, both of whom you care for deeply. Stuck because you don't want to let one go, but you know you must. Well, this is my life. I am stuck, stuck between two worlds. One world far from where I live. This world's name is Rachel. Rachel is a beautiful, brunette and my first love. She is a talented horse rider, she's sarcastic but is still very loving and I will always have a soft spot for her in my heart. The other world's name is Serena. Serena is kind, loving, funny, beautiful, blonde and has the most gorgeous eyes. At this current point in my life, Serena has more space in my heart than Rachel.

I met Rachel seven years ago and ever since that day, I have believed in love at first sight. I met her at the city's Ferris wheel. She was wearing a white crop top and a short pair of blue jeans. We started talking for a while after this and I thought she was interested in me, but I was wrong. I knew that I was as soon as I introduced her to my best friend, Derek. Derek never knew that I liked Rachel, No one did, so it was not really his fault. Soon after I introduced them, they started going out with each other and not long after, they started dating. Rachel and I did not speak to each other for about 4 years after this incident. We both went on living our lives, Derek broke up with her for reasons no one truly knows, and I moved to another city.

This is where my other World lives. Serena. I was at a swimming gala, sitting in the tuck shop and I heard this laugh. A laugh that changed my life. Serena had a beautiful laugh paired with a beautiful smile. She was beautiful. After a while of building up the courage to go up and talk to her, I did. I got her number, and we started talking. We went out a few times and I could not be happier that we did. Just last year, we started dating.

Just as I started to become happy with Serena, Rachel decided to send me a message saying, "Hey, I really miss you and I really want to see you again." This was two years after I last saw her. Yes, we did have a little thing two years back, but I'm happy now and this message had to come through. The worst part is that we were back at square one for reasons I didn't even know at the time. This was when everything started to come rushing back, all the memories, the laughs, the sad times, the love, It was at this time that I realised, I had to make a choice. A choice that could change my life for the better or the worse.

I go through a long process of thinking about what I should do. I lie, it was not a long process, it was more like a week or two of thought. Serena is just as weird as me. She has distinct ocean eyes that stand out in a crowd of many and our personalities have clicked ever since we met. She is kind, and loving and doesn't accept the fact that she is wrong. She will always fight for what she thinks is right. This was the day that I made my choice, this was the day that changed my life for the better.

I chose to stay with Serena and I am finally in a clear headspace and can focus on what is right. Choosing Serena was by far the best choice I have ever made in my life. I soon realised that home is not just four walls and a roof. Home is a nice girl that you meet unexpectedly with the purest heart, the most beautiful eyes and an immense beauty that cannot be explained.



Rex Holdsworth

The musical abduction

Whilst the man was screaming and shouting, he was being taken away, but no one heard his cries.

This is a story about an affectionate man from Conakry, Guinea named Jube Athleyo. Jube is a very eccentric man who has a deep passion for music. His loving and caring attitude resulted in him becoming very popular.

Some say that Jube was “the founding father of the R&B world” because he created a captivating musical instrument called “the guitar”. Jube created this instrument by accident, because when his father was brushing his horse, Jube took some hair, put it under pressure, and realized that it made a delightful sound. He then made a frame for it, with holes in the middle and it made an even better sound.

The Western world did not know about this impressive invention. Other people from Conakry didn't know what was happening westward from their homes. Like the Western world didn't know what was happening in Conakry. The East and the West were living two completely different lifestyles.

One day, Jube took a stroll down to the tide and sat on a rock. He brought his guitar down and sang a chorus about his wife, Namé. He could hear something going on in the distance, but he thought nothing of it because it was a communal beach. Suddenly he felt a woolen bag being thrown over his head. Jube was very disorientated. Out of self-defence, he started kicking, punching, and screaming. But this wasn't serving any purpose. He could hear men, talking in a foreign accent. They told Jube to keep quiet because if he made any more noise, they would kill him. So, Jube did what he was told to do and kept dead silent.

A few minutes go by and Jube finds himself being hoisted onto a beam, with his hands and legs tied together. A man pulls the bag off Jube's head, and he gets a chance to look around. He notices that he is on a ship, because of the polyester sails or the crow's nest. He sees hundreds of other people, tied up to the same beam that he is tied up to. He is told by some of the other people on the ship that this is a slave trip that is heading northwest to the USA.

Jube spends a fortnight on this stinky, rotting ship with one hundred other people. All Jube desired and wanted was his special guitar. He feels so destitute on this ship as he doesn't know anyone. He wants to go home and play his guitar for his friends and family in Conakry.

15 days after Jube was abducted the ship docked in Alabama port, on the south coast of Alabama, USA. In the distance, he notices a sizable billboard reading: “Alabama Slave Auction”. After he sees the billboard, his hands get tied behind his back and he is escorted off the ship onto the sand, where about fifty people are standing around the ship.

All the slaves were told to stand in a straight-forward line, as the farmers who were at the slave auction could investigate the slaves. Jube was very afraid because he couldn't speak or move a muscle. A farmer named George Landsmann II, an obese man with grey sideburns and a pipe in his mouth, saw Jube and he knew straight away that he was the one George wanted. He paid the auctioneer 50 gold coins, told Jube to get in the horse carriage, and went.

About an hour later, they arrive at George's farm. It is the most beautiful house Jube has ever seen. A huge white mansion with a neatly trimmed front lawn, with roses growing all around the house, and a direct view of the ocean. He sees a sugarcane field and a small wooden hut to his left. This hut did not have a door or a proper roof. George ushered Jube to this hut and gave him a machete and a saw. Jube has to live in this hut, with signs of asbestos and rat and termite damage. He told Jube to get to work. Jube had to cut the top of the sugarcane plant and pull it up from underneath. He had to do this for the whole field. If he did twenty kilograms a day, he got a piece of bread and a bottlecap of water.

Jube was so lonely. He decided to go and find materials to make his invention, the Guitar. Over two days he managed to find them, the sugarcane pulp and some old wood from the trees surrounding the farm. He also found some old, ragged clothes in a bush outside of the property.

Jube had finally had enough. One night, he took his guitar, put on his clothes, and ran away. He ran as far as his skinny, malnourished legs could take him. After running the whole night, he ended up in Alabama Port, where he came from. Some people were walking around and swimming in the ocean. He knew that he needed money to buy food, but also to get out of the town before George realized he was gone.

He started to play his guitar and sang a song with his angelic voice. An aged man came up to him and was fascinated by the guitar. He introduced himself to Jube as Robert Marley. Robert said he was looking for people to play in his R&B band, and he wanted to hear that crisp sound from the guitar in the band.

In the end, Jube joined the band. He loved playing the guitar and started teaching it to the people in the village. He managed to gain enough money to go and visit his family in Conakry and support them in all their struggles. He built all of them houses and paid for all his family member's healthcare and education. His family and friends know him as Jube, but we know him as the founding father of the R&B world.



Reflections on ethical leadership

The ethical lessons I learnt in the past months are firmly linked with honesty and empathy. Honesty, in particular, acts as the key to many things, namely empathy. Without truthful thoughts and actions, one cannot empathize, reflect or be humble. Harth Jestly's thesis of morality is that "honesty is the cornerstone of ethical behavior".

Regardless of the ethical leadership course's lack of focus on any moral principles, I have come to the conclusion that honesty should be the guiding principle in our society. Truthfulness isn't just not telling a lie. The truthfulness I talk about is the skill of being able to have thoughts and conversations without the need to make excuses, tell lies, or justify immorality to protect yourself or your self-image. As Harth Jestly stated with such poise, honesty is indeed the cornerstone of ethical behaviour. If you can be truly truthful, you then have no barriers to making ethical decisions. If you are honest in every choice you make, then the best action will present itself to you.

An illustrative example of honesty's influence on empathy and its importance in ethical decision-making goes like this: A CEO of a pharmaceutical company withholds one-of-a-kind cures for a fringe disease as it worsens profit margins. Upon questioning the CEO's morality, a unanimous decision declared him an immoral man, a simple question answered as one would expect. This leads to a trickier question, why would someone make such an obviously wicked choice? In my view, a lack of honesty and empathy. Had the CEO attempted to honestly empathize with those being affected, he would have been forced to confront the reason for his decision. Upon reflection, he would understand his greedy motives, and ultimately realize the error in his ways.

In my life, I see one major flaw in the way I conduct myself. I often lack the ability to understand others. It's very easy to judge and question people for their mistakes, quirks, or emotions. This tendency to take the straight and beaten path is a trap that my peers and I often fall into. In order to force myself to take the objectively better option of empathizing with someone, I need to confront myself with the facts of the matter. It is a skill that takes effort and humility, though ethical leadership is something I am committed to mastering.

As much as the course was scattered in its messaging, it forced me to create my own "moral guiding light", which is far more impactful than any force-fed message. The importance of truth is my sole takeaway from the course. It is something that I believe is only growing scarcer in our society. Especially honesty with oneself, as we are living in a culture of selfishness where empathy is a dying trade. Truthfulness and the doors it unlocks are the only things protecting us from a lawless, free-for-all world.



Grade 11 Research Essay

Prize Winners

Daniel Askew

To what extent do night terrors in teenagers within a boarding school environment impact their social and emotional well-being?

Introduction:

Night terrors are a phenomenon that typically occurs in 6.5% of children aged from 4 to 12 years old, however, in some rare cases they can occur in teenagers (Leung, *et al.*, 2020). Night terrors pose little to no harm to those experiencing them, however, this study aims to explore whether there is a social and emotional risk for teenagers who experience night terrors in the context of an all-boys boarding school.

According to Leung, *et al.*, (2020), night terrors peak at around ages 5 to 7 and may occur because of developmental, environmental, organic, psychological, or genetic factors. During a typical night terror, the person will sit up in bed and scream and shout in fear and immediately go back to sleep without recollection of the event (Leung, *et al.*, 2020). Whilst the event can cause distress, night terrors within themselves are harmless and most children outgrow them by age 12 (Leung, *et al.*, 2020).

One of the primary causes of night terrors identified is increased anxiety (Lennings & Roberts, 2006). Schredl (2001) found that night terrors were more likely to occur at moments of stress in a young person's life. Within a boarding school context, this can create a negative cycle where the anxiety of having night terrors causes them. It is therefore important that the young person feels comfortable in their environment so as not to increase the occurrence of night terrors.

Mander, Lester and Cross (2015) report that boarding school students reported higher rates of emotional difficulties, depression, anxiety and stress when compared with non-boarders. Therefore, a possible increase in anxiety can lead to higher incidences of night terrors in young students transitioning to boarding. This study aims to explore the factors that can lead to students experiencing an increase in night terrors in a dormitory environment and the effect this has on their well-being.

I have chosen to do my study on the social and emotional effects that night terrors have on boys in boarding school as whilst there is a vast amount known about night terrors, little is known about them in this particular context. Having had the experience of night terrors I understand the worry and anxiety that come with them, especially in a boarding school environment. When starting Grade 8, I was concerned about what my dorm mates would think or do if I experienced a night terror whilst in the dormitory. This research has allowed me to find out more about

both the cause of this phenomenon as well as reflect on my own experience. This study is useful to housemasters as it provides them with guidance on how to support students in their houses who might experience something similar as well as students who might also have similar concerns.

Definition of Terms:

For this essay, the following terms are defined as:

Night terrors: A disturbing or strange behaviour or experience that occurs during sleep. Usually shouting or screaming.

Boarding school: An educational institution where students live and study on the school's premises.

Anxiety: Feelings of tension, worried thoughts or physical changes like increased blood pressure.

Methodology

Using secondary research, such as medical articles and journals found through Google Scholar, I investigated the causes and treatment of night terrors and other parasomnias. To gain an understanding of night terrors in a boarding school context, I chose to conduct qualitative research by interviewing relevant people. Table 1 below outlines the research participants:

Participant	Role
1	Housemaster
2	Housemaster
3	Peer
4	Peer
5	Dorm Leader Grade 8 2021
6	Self

Table 1

Qualitative research was an appropriate methodology for this study as it was important to understand the participants' knowledge of and experience of night terrors. Qualitative research allows for a deep understanding of individual experiences and interviews allow for an exploration of this. In addition, I have used my own experiences to gather data when writing this essay, which could be considered autoethnographic research. Autoethnographic research is the analysis of personal experience to understand an aspect of society. Given the personal nature of the study, I felt it was important to include my own voice to provide evidence.

Causes, symptoms and treatments of night terrors

Night terrors are caused by a variety of different factors, namely environmental, developmental, psychological and genetic. They can also be triggered by a high fever, inadequate sleep or periods of stress and emotional conflict (Roberts &

Lennings, 2006). Some symptoms include waking up abruptly typically after at least three hours of sleep and sitting up or jumping out of bed and shouting in a panicked or fearful manner. In some instances, the person experiencing a night terror can unknowingly leave their beds potentially placing them in danger. The excerpts recount what has been witnessed:

“A boy will wake up at random times in the night and will possibly shout and scream and walk around then will go back to sleep. They will also talk in their sleep but will do this aggressively.”

(Housemaster 1)

“I would generally see you sitting upright either shouting or mumbling to yourself or standing or walking looking confused or lost.” (Peer 1)

“...what I have experienced is he usually screams and at times even climbs out of bed claiming something is in his bed and then climb backs in.” (Peer 2)

In most cases children grow out of it by adolescence and medical intervention is not necessary however anticipatory waking, waking a child at a certain point of their sleep cycle, can be effective in controlling night terrors (Leung et al, 2020).

Factors in boarding that affect social and emotional well-being

The study explored the occurrence of night terrors in the context of a boarding school therefore it is important to understand the range of factors that can influence the social and emotional well-being of a student in a boarding school. According to Mander, Lester and Cross (2015) the social and emotional of adolescents are influenced by social factors such as a sense of connection with peers and school as well as emotional and mental health factors such as anxiety, depression and stress. In addition to these factors, a housemaster at Hilton College reports other influences.

“The family background plays a massive part in this. What values are boys coming into a boarding house environment? What is home life like, and will the boy bring some of his home issues to school? Various beliefs that a boy brings to the House, do clash with the school and House values. If a boy has academic challenges, this will affect his time in a boarding House. Medical conditions will also have an effect.” (Housemaster 1)

This interview excerpt suggests that family background, academic challenges, medical conditions and values can all have an impact on a boarder's happiness and sense of belonging in a boarding school.

Understanding the social and emotional impact of night terrors

Night terrors can leave the person experiencing them feeling distressed and anxious. They may worry about how others will perceive them and may feel different from

those around them. They may also worry about what they may do or say during times when they are asleep. This can affect their social and emotional well-being.

The excerpts below reveal how different people in a boarding environment view the social and emotional impact of night terrors:

“This would cause the dorm to think of the boy as being different or possibly even weird. He may get teased and ostracised. This would then cause the boy to feel excluded. Teenage boys would, for the most part, not have the emotional intelligence to deal with these types of night terrors. The knock-on effects of this.” (Housemaster 1)

“I did not see any repercussions that this situation had on your relationships between your peers and was not ever alert to anything that would have indicated otherwise.” (Housemaster 1)

“Yes, I think it may affect a boy emotionally in the beginning and it is embarrassing. One would hope that he would be given help and guidance around it and the dormitory. Intern this I think would also affect the boys' social connections in the beginning.” (Housemaster 2)

“Yes, my overall confidence and self-esteem were dented by my experience with night terrors and it would cause me to view myself lower than others as well as making me nervous whether I had a night terror and what people would think of me.” (Self-Reflection)

According to those who interviewed night terrors in a boarding school environment will likely have a negative social and emotional impact on the person having them and according to Housemaster 1 may “cause the dorm to think of the boy as being different” and may “cause the boy to feel excluded.” This was also applicable in my personal experience as “my overall confidence and self-esteem were dented by my experience with night terrors, and it would cause me to view myself lower than others.” Thus, it is shown that having night terrors have a negative impact on those who have them.

Impact of night terrors on peers in dormitory

Given the communal living of a dormitory environment, a person experiencing night terrors will no doubt impact those around him. The impact on others can lead to loss of sleep, fear, annoyance and concern. The interview excerpts below refer to this.

“It would disturb my sleep slightly, but I would generally fall back asleep quickly after and the effects on my personal sleep were minor at most times.” (Peer 1)

“Besides the initial fright, Daniel calms down pretty quickly and so it honestly hasn't affected me much.” (Peer 2)

“In terms of how your peers responded, I felt that they would often not be awake when this occurred because of the times that I was aware that it was happening, they stayed asleep. I do, however, remember a specific time when I heard you and some of the others were awakened. They asked me what was happening, and I told them that it was nothing to be worried about as you were not in any danger. I told them that they should not wake you because there is a chance that that could wake you in a confused state which would be worse for you.” (Dormitory Leader)

The peer responses suggest that the impact on others is minimal and whilst those interviewed report some disturbance, this was not significant. However, this can vary from person to person depending on their own sleep patterns. One peer reported that on witnessing a night terror, he would experience a moment of initial alarm but the overall effect on him was insignificant. The dorm leader reflected that peers responded primarily with concern as opposed to annoyance. The findings suggest that for the person experiencing night terrors, the fear or expectation of how others may respond is greater than the actual responses themselves.

Coping mechanisms and support currently in place

In a boarding school, there is a lot of support for students battling with different types of problems however not much is known about night terrors, so it is usually up to the person dealing with them to use their own coping mechanisms to deal with it. These interviews refer to how participants believe they should be dealt with as well as what is currently in place.

“I would encourage him to speak about it to his peers to help them reflect and understand what it is about and why it happens.”
(Housemaster 1)

“seeing a psychologist, another person to talk to and a professional who may have specific plans to deal with them.” (Housemaster 2)

“I didn’t receive that much support from the housemasters as far as I can recall they did not come and talk to me about it.” (Self Reflection)

Both Housemasters 1 and 2 believe that it is important to speak to both peers and a psychologist however there seems to be a lack of support coming from the housemasters themselves when dealing with problems like night terrors and other sleep disturbances. These responses suggest that whilst there is support available in the form of psychologists there is not enough understanding and support from the housemasters themselves and that could be improved.

Conclusion

Whilst night terrors can have a negative impact on the social and emotional well-being of someone in a boarding school environment it is not guaranteed and is rather dependent on whether the person experiencing them has strong support around them as well as good coping mechanisms to deal with them.

The findings of this research essay show that there is very little information on the problem of night terrors as it is a relatively rare condition as well as showing that it is not viewed by others in the way the person having them views them. Meaning that many people do not find it as much of a disturbance as the person who has them thinks they do. The final important finding of this essay is that housemasters and other house staff would benefit from a better understanding of the condition to support students who experience this. It would researchers to further explore the reasons why night terrors sometimes persist in adolescence.

The process of writing this essay has helped me to understand how my peers felt about my issue with night terrors as well as helped me further understand what I could have done differently in dealing with this problem. Perhaps in future when I am a matric leader, I will be better equipped to support younger boys who may experience similar difficulties, therefore making me a better leader

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Appendix A

To what extent do night terrors in teenagers within a boarding school environment impact their social and emotional well-being?

Interview Data

Housemasters

Question	Answer (Housemaster 1)	Answer (Housemaster 2)
What are the key factors within a boarding house	The family background play a massive part in this. What values are boys coming into a boarding house	In don't think it has a massive effect on all the boys in the hostel. I think in the first few weeks the boys

that affect a boy's social and emotional well-being?	environment? What is home life like and will the boy bring some of his home issues to school? Various beliefs that a boy brings to the House, do these clash with the school and House values? If a boy has academic challenges, this will affect his time in a boarding House. Medical conditions will also have an affect.	who unfortunately has the night terrors and the dormitory, and the hostel aren't used to it unless someone has had it before if not then it takes time for all to understand. The housemaster and Deputy Housemaster has a huge role in helping to educate all the boys about it.
How common are night terrors (or other strange sleep behaviours) in a boarding school environment?	I have not come across many boys who have night tremors. For me it would be rare for a boy to have this condition.	They are not that common. I only know of one in my time being in education/boarding as well as student and in hostel which is 24 years. They are only other strange behaviour is sleepwalking.
Describe these behaviours (either if you have witnessed them or if other boys have reported such incidents to you).	A boy will wake up at random times in the night and will possibly shout and scream and walk around then will go back to sleep. They will also talk in their sleep but will do this aggressively.	The other behaviour is sleepwalking. I have witnessed it, and it was a matter of managing it and looking after the boy. Making sure the house is locked and no dangerous things can happen, or he can do.
How might night terrors affect a boy's social connection in the dormitory and how might this affect his overall emotional well-being?	This would cause the dorm to think of the boy as being different or possibly even weird. He may get teased and ostracised. This would then cause the boy to feel excluded. Teenage boys would, for the most part, not have the emotional intelligence to deal with	Yes, I think it may affect a boy emotionally in the beginning and it is embarrassing. One would hope that he would be given help and guidance around it and the dormitory. Intern this I think would also affect the boys' social

	these types of night terrors. The knock-on effects of this would be a lack of confidence and a knock to his self-esteem which could play out in the classroom and other areas of the school.	connections in the beginning.
What strategies or advice would you give to a boy in your care to manage this?	It is very difficult to manage but really just to assure the boy that he is not strange or weird. I would encourage him to speak about it to his peers to help them understand what it is about and why it happens.	I think a lot of chatting and talking about it in the beginning would be key to the boy and the dormitory and hostel, as well as seeing a psychologist, another person to talk to and a professional who may have specific plans to deal with these terror.

Peer Responses

Question	Peer 1	Peer 2	Peer 3
How frequently was your sleep disturbed as a result of my night terrors?	Around twice a week at the beginning of the terms but then less frequently as the term progressed.	I've never been woken up by Daniel's night terrors however on a few occasions when I have struggled to fall asleep and just hearing a sudden scream is startling.	Well I remember in grade 9 when I slept next to you it was about maybe 4 times a week I would be on the verge of falling asleep but didn't sleep then I would hear you shout something
Describe what you would see when watching me have a night terror.	I would generally see you sitting upright either shouting or mumbling to yourself, or standing	I've never been close enough to see him have one however what I have experienced is he usually screams and at times even climbs	You would do a sit up on your bum and shout something so random like really random and one time in grade nine you came up to me

	or walking looking confused or lost.	out of bed claiming something is him in bed and then climbs back in.	and said something extremely random but most of the time you would sit up and start shouting and speaking as if you were having a convo with someone(that's just what I remember)
What effect did this have on you?	It would disturb my sleep slightly but I would generally fall back asleep quickly after and the effects on my personal sleep were minor at most times.	Besides the initial fright, Daniel calms down pretty quickly and so it honestly hasn't affected me much.	nothing really, I never really made it deep because after you did it once it was over, so almost no effect so I was always fine with it

Grade 8 Dormitory Leader (2021)

Questions	Dormitory Leader
Describe your experience with witnessing (seeing/hearing) the night terrors that I experienced in Grade 8. (what would happen?)	I remember hearing noise in the dorm when I would be up working on a few occasions. I remember that the first time hearing you I was very confused as to why anyone would be making noise at that time, so I went out to investigate. Upon realising that it was you speaking in your sleep I vaguely remember saying to you "Hey, Daniel. Its alright. Its ok" or something along those lines. I did this because I knew that sometimes some of your senses are alert in sleep and particularly in REM sleep. So I did try to calm you down in that way, but I also knew that I should not wake you because that could be worse for you in the long run. I regrettably only heard this

	<p>happening a couple of times because I would often listen to music when I worked. In terms of my experience with hearing you, I was not particularly concerned because I had also used to talk / shout in my sleep particularly in the junior years of high school. I believed that it sometimes is a way of processing the new stressors of being away from home and getting used to a new environment. Upon reflecting on it now, my own experiences possibly clouded how I could have supported you in that time because of the manner in which I experienced this was possibly very different from yours.</p>
<p>What effect did this have on the other boys in the dorm and how did they respond to this?</p>	<p>In terms of how your peers responded, I felt that they would often not be awake when this occurred because of the times that I was aware that it was happening, they stayed asleep. I do, however, remember a specific time when I heard you and some of the others were awakened. They asked me what was happening, and I told them that it was nothing to be worried about as you were not in any danger. I told them that they should not wake you because there is a chance that that could wake you in a confused state which would be worse for you. Regrettably, I do not recall going any further into explaining how they could support you in day-to-day life to help you with these disturbances in your sleep. This, admittedly, was an oversight on my part.</p>
<p>In your opinion, did this have any impact on how I interacted with the other boys in the dorm and how they interacted with me?</p>	<p>I did not see any repercussions that this situation had on your relationships between your peers and was not ever alert to anything that would have indicated otherwise. But I would like to know if you</p>

	experienced any impact on your relationships.
Can you recall whether you offered me any advice or support or offered the other boys in the dorm any suggestions on what to do when this happened?	<p>I do not recall personally ever giving you any advice on the matter but as I have said, do remember having a conversation with your peers when they did get woken up about how they should not wake you but I cannot recall if I told them to console you as I had detailed or not.</p> <p>This was a long time ago for me and I may not have remembered all the details about the events. I would like to hear from you about what you experienced during this period if you feel comfortable with sharing that with me because it is important for me to reflect on the time spent with you guys and to see what I missed in my attempts to manage and help a group of boys to adapt and thrive in that space while also being young and naïve.</p>

Personal Reflection

Question	Self-Reflection
How have your experiences with night terrors shaped your overall sense of self-esteem and self-confidence in the boarding school environment?	Yes, my overall confidence and self-esteem were definitely dented by my experience with night terrors and it would cause me to view myself lower than others as well as made me nervous about whether I had a night terror and what people would think of me.
Has the fear of experiencing night terrors influenced your participation in social activities or academic pursuits within the boarding school?	No, as I would only have them in the dorm thus it wouldn't affect anywhere else.

How do you perceive the support and understanding you received from others regarding your night terrors?	I didn't really receive that much support from the housemasters as as far as I can recall they did not come and talk to me about it.
Reflect on any insights or lessons learned from your experiences with night terrors in boarding school, and how they have influenced your personal growth and resilience.	It'll eventually stop, and you'll be okay as well as people won't judge you as much as you think they will.



Shaka Buthelezi

Being the most natural resource-abundant continent, why have Sub-Saharan African countries failed to develop economically and socially at the rate of other countries, and remain underdeveloped?

A case study of natural resource wealth and abundance, and reasons as to why African nations lack in this area.

Introduction

The 'Paradox of Plenty' or the 'Resource curse' is a phenomenon that refers to countries that are abundant in mineral resources not being able to amass wealth and gain economic growth and prosperity compared to countries in which mineral resources aren't as prevalent. Despite having great mineral and natural resource abundance, many African countries have struggled with economic growth and have underperformed in areas such as GDP, GINI Coefficient, and HDI when benchmarked against European, American, and even Asian counterparts in this area. This study aims to explore this 'paradox of plenty' and the reasons why Sub-Saharan African countries suffer from this.

This study aims to investigate the mineral abundance in Africa, wealth accumulation from mineral abundance in theory as well as wealth and economic development of a mineral-abundant country in practice. By researching and comparing a wealthy mineral-abundant country to Sub-Saharan African countries, one can start to explore differences in governance and infrastructure. These factors are likely the catalyst for underdevelopment and slow economic growth.

Lack of Infrastructure because of ineffective leadership/government and corruption which are prevalent in many African countries as well as the social and economic

impact of colonialism and post-colonial expansion are widely believed reasons for the lack of economic growth in many African countries. This study additionally aims to unpack these reasons as justification to the lack of economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Wealth from mineral abundance in theory and in practice

1.1 Mineral abundance in Africa

African countries possess various essential minerals and natural resources of significant value, which are traded worldwide, thereby contributing substantially to global wealth generation. African countries hold 30% of the world's mineral reserves (Chandler, 2022). Countries such as Namibia, Niger, and South Africa account for 18% of worldwide Uranium production, A metal essential in producing nuclear energy (Appendix A). Cobalt is another metal primarily used in the production of batteries. Investopediaⁱ puts Cobalt among five notable rare earth metals that are rising in demand and value(Srinivasan, 2023). The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the world's leader in cobalt production, accounting for 70% of the world's cobalt production in 2022 (Srinivasan, 2023) . Furthermore, Platinum is key in the creation of a myriad products used worldwide. Its scarcity and wide range of uses account for its immense value. Platinum is used in the production of electronics, jewelry, and dentistry equipment and the biggest use being as a catalystⁱⁱ in the production of a myriad of fertilizers and plastics. South Africa alone accounted for 120mt of platinum production in 2023, making it, by far, the largest platinum producer in the world with Russia being the second with 23 metric tons produced in 2023 (Appendix B). These figures are vital in understanding the extent of mineral abundance that African countries possess.

1.2 Wealth from natural resource abundance in theory

Natural resources are key in the functioning of many economies and the wellbeing of people. These resources are constantly being extracted, traded, refined, and distributed worldwide. As before mentioned, there are a myriad of natural resources and minerals that are used in the production of goods and services, consumed every day, and have become essential to living. Due to the essentiality of these goods and services and great demand, companies and governments worldwide can exploit these natural resources to provide for numerous needs and wants and amass profit from said natural resources. In theory, countries with the greatest abundance of natural resources should be the most economically prosperous nations. Tim Marshall, Author of *Prisoners of Geography*ⁱⁱⁱ, (Marshall, 2015) as cited by (Whitworth, 2023) argues that there are cases in which countries possessing more natural resources are simply richer. Whitworth suggests that “Resource-abundant nations can generate more wealth through extraction and then use that wealth to develop faster than their neighbors.” (“The Master Guides: The Global Wealth Gap - Shortform”) Whitworth also adds how the latter can occur and speaks on how resource abundance can make nations poor. (Collier, 2007) in *The Bottom Billion*, as also cited later by (Whitworth, 2023) argues that, “modern economies reliant primarily on natural resources are often more likely to be poor.” The duality of these two different theories is prevalent in the modern world so it is important to

understand the trend in countries that thrive economically off natural resources and countries that have had the alternative outcome.

1.3 Wealth from natural resource abundance in practice

Russia is a modern example of how a nation has been able to turn resource abundance into economic prosperity and wealth. Investopedia ranks Russia at number 1 as the most resource-abundant country with an estimated natural reserve value of \$75 Trillion (Anthony, 2023). As of 2022, Russia's mining output alone accounted for 14% of global mineral production (Vidal, 2023). It is evident that Russia is a country that has been heavily reliant on its exports and has been able to amass incredible wealth as a result of its abundance of natural resources with the value of its natural resources amounting to 60 percent of its GDP^{iv} as of 2019 (The Moscow Times, 2019). Natural resources along with other factors have proven instrumental to the nation's economic success. As of 2022, Russia was ranked at the 6th position in terms of Purchasing Power Parity^v, the sum value of all goods and services produced in the country valued at prices prevailing in the United States, (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022) (see Appendix C). The Center for Strategic & International Studies suggests that the decade of economic growth in Russia was fueled by rising commodity prices and cheap foreign credit which helped it establish itself as an attractive destination for foreign investment (CSIS, n.d.). However, Schmidt 2024 suggests that "The defense industry is currently the most important pillar of the Russian economy (Schmidt, 2024). This research still leaves the question, what factors have held African countries back in terms of economic growth and what are they currently doing wrong?

2. The extent of Sub-Saharan Africa's economic underperformance

2.1 To what extent have Sub-Saharan African countries been underperforming economically?

To understand why Africa's economies are so unsuccessful it is important to understand the extent to which they are underperforming. Economic indicators such as HDI and GDP provide adequate insight into this. Economic growth in Africa has continued to be slow and stagnant, and further slowed down by global economic uncertainty (The World Bank, 2023). GDP is a globally recognized indicator of the economic growth in a country. According to Statista, 19 of the 20 countries with the lowest GDP per capita are in sub-Saharan Africa (O'Neill, 2024) (see Appendix D). However, Though GDP is globally recognized to benchmark the economic growth of countries against each other, It does not necessarily give one the full view and understanding in terms of development, thus HDI, would be a better indicator of development in a nation. The Human Development Index^{vi} is a measure of average achievement in central areas of human development. The HDI considers the following factors: life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling and gross national income per capita^{vii} in a country. An HDI score of .800 or higher is considered to be adequate development. South Africa, the largest producer of platinum, the 8th largest gold producer and the 10th largest uranium producer globally, only ranked 109th out of 191 countries in terms with an HDI of .713 in 2021 (Africa Check, 2022). According to Investopedia, the following countries

ranked in the bottom 5 in terms of HDI globally: Burundi, Chad, Central African Republic, Niger, and South Sudan with their HDI scores all lower than .500. (Investopedia, 2024) (Appendix E). It is important to note that all 5 of these countries are African. By understanding this, we can now begin to investigate factors that have led to this drastic economic underperformance.

3. Why have African Countries underperformed economically?

3.1 Colonialization and Post-Colonial Exploitation

From a social and economic point of view, the negative effects of early-age colonization and exploration can be observed throughout Africa. It is argued by Ocheni and Nwankwo that the major impact of colonialism^{viii} in Africa is that it brought about the under-development of African territories in many ways (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). In Southern Africa alone, there is a majority living in immense generational poverty, unable to afford a basic standard of living and displaced communities due to numerous segregationist laws that have since been abolished. Many laws and regulations established during the era of colonial expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa repressed the development of the African majority at time through enslavement, inadequate education given to these people, labor exploitation, displacement into rural settlements and the unfair taxation of this marginalized majority. Apartheid, one most infamous products of the post-colonial expansion era in Africa and saw the integration of many laws that suppressed the development of the black majority with approximately 3.5 million people being removed from city centers into rural townships (Fogel, 2019). The underdevelopment and lack of education of these people caused for many of them to be stuck in cycles of poverty unequipped with the skills necessary to escape this generational state of destitution or develop the country at the rate of others. As of 2022, 34% of the African population lived below the poverty line. The lack of technological advancement and development in African states is a result of poor foundation of education from colonialists (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). However, Settles also argues that policies during colonialism, “forced the demise of African industry,” and thus caused for reliance on goods imported from Europe (Settles, 1996). This as a result is a cause for economic underperformance as a lack of technological and intellectual advancement and development inhibits African nations from advancing economically at the rate of more developed countries.

3.2 Lack of development and Infrastructure because of Corruption and Ineffective Governance

Corruption is a major challenge that many sub-Saharan African governments and economies face. It is referred to by social and political commentator, Tafi Mhaka, as “Africa’s undeclared pandemic”. Mhaka further elaborates in suggesting that corruption is the root of economic devastation across Africa (Mhaka, 2022). Examples of large-scale corruption can be found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In a study done by Transparency International, 58% of Africans said that corruption had increased in their countries, in particular South Africa had four-in-five citizens (83%) say that they had noticed a rise in corruption recently and, according to the SAICA^{ix}, in the years between 2014 and 2019, South Africa had lost an estimated R1.5 trillion

due to corruption. In Namibia, former Justice Minister Sacky Shanghala stood accused of taking bribes worth millions of dollars. (“Corruption: Africa’s undeclared pandemic - Al Jazeera”) Additionally, in Zimbabwe, a central bank deal is alleged to have resulted in \$90 million to be found in the hands of a businessman allied to President Emmerson Mnangagwa (Mhaka, 2022). The FATF Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring list is a list of countries that are being investigated by the Financial Action Task Force to mitigate and counter financial crimes such as money laundering, the financing of terrorists and proliferation financing^x. 12 of the 21 countries on the list as of 2024 are Sub-Saharan African countries. Being grey listed as a result can be greatly detrimental to economies and bare a myriad of consequences. Grey-listing can result in restriction of cross-border transactions, difficulties obtaining credit and limited foreign investment, thus decreasing a country’s economic activity, and limiting output. (Anderson, Cohen, Arellanes, & Roger, 2023). This as a result causes for less revenue available for developmental infrastructure projects and government expenditure to be spent on subsidies and curbing unemployment to create a better standard of living for citizens. Corruption can result in the exploitation of the greater working class for money that should be used for infrastructure and social development to be used in other areas not beneficial to the greater population and economy. Additionally, this would cause a lack of infrastructure being available in these countries causing for them to outsource and import equipment and resources further increasing dependence on other countries for economic growth in these economies. Sy (2016) states, “Africa’s inadequate infrastructure limits the continent’s economic progress.” Furthermore, according to (Mills, Obasanjo, Herbst, & Davis, 2017) “Functioning infrastructure – the roads, railways, ports, electricity and water networks, and other basic systems that make a country run – is an absolute precondition for development and growth in the sectors...” While Mills, Obasanjo, Herbst and Davis emphasize the importance of functioning infrastructure for a stable economy, they also argue that the fundamental challenge to improving African economies is to develop structures and incentives through democracy and development for the enrichment of the population. By eliminating corruption, public trust in governments is no longer undermined, the waste of public resources and money that can be used on developing infrastructure is reduced and injustice through the advantaging of some over others no longer occurs. African states already started off lesser developed than most other countries in other continents and the widespread presence of corruption is inhibiting their ability to develop and relieve many from cyclical poverty. Therefore, it can be withdrawn that the prevalence of corruption in Sub-Saharan African nations is an impediment to the growth of their economies and curbing of said corruption can lead to further and more stable development in these countries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mere abundance of natural resources does not simply make a nation wealthy and cannot be solely relied on to create wealth and grow an economy without effective governance. Other factors such as intellectual advancement and education, decreased corruption and, governance and infrastructure are essential in the advancement and development of nations.

Though sub-Saharan Africa holds a myriad of mineral resources of immense value, this large part of the continent still faces issues of inadequate education and immense impoverishment of the majority due to colonialism and the widespread corruption throughout their governments which in turn results in the stagnant development of infrastructure on the continent. Until Sub-Saharan African countries can address these issues, almost stagnant and slow economic growth and development is likely to continue.

Hence, based on these findings it can be concluded that Sub-Saharan African countries have failed to grow and develop economically through their vast mineral resources due to education levels and generational poverty due to colonialism and post-colonial exploitation, widespread corruption and as a result underdeveloped and inadequate infrastructure is prevalent.

Appendices

Appendix A



World Uranium Mining Production

(Updated April 2024)

- About two-thirds of the world's production of uranium from mines is from Kazakhstan, Canada and Australia.
- An increasing amount of uranium, now over 55%, is produced by in situ leaching.

In 2022 Kazakhstan produced the largest share of uranium from mines (43% of world supply), followed by Canada (15%) and Namibia (11%).

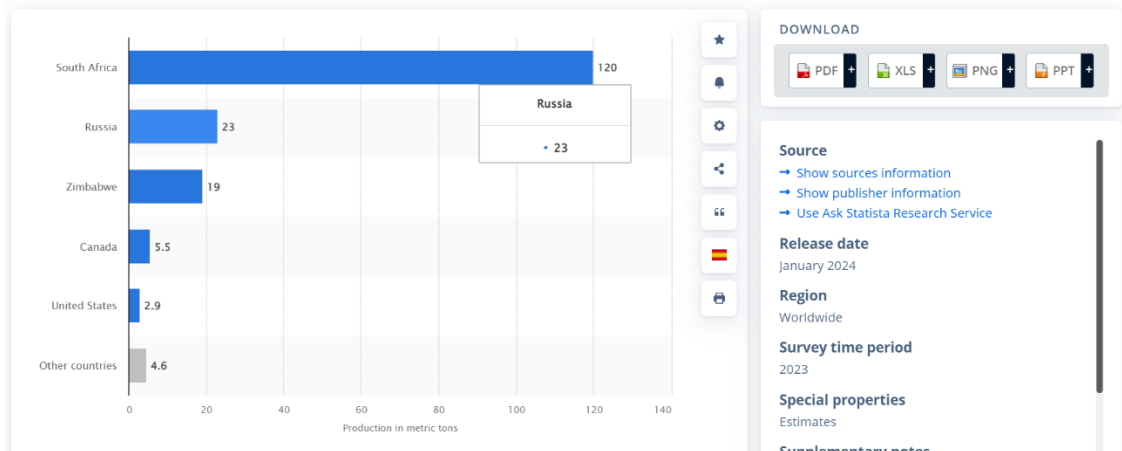
Production from mines (tonnes U) 2013-2022

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Kazakhstan	22,451	23,127	23,607	24,689	23,321	21,705	22,808	19,477	21,819	21,227
Canada	9331	9124	13,325	14,039	13,116	7001	6938	3885	4693	7351
Namibia	4323	3255	2993	3654	4224	5525	5476	5413	5753	5613
Australia	6350	5001	5654	6315	5882	6517	6613	6203	4192	4553
Uzbekistan (est.)	2400	2400	2385	3325	3400	3450	3500	3500	3520	3300
Russia	3135	2990	3055	3004	2917	2904	2911	2846	2635	2508
Niger	4518	4057	4116	3479	3449	2911	2983	2991	2248	2020
China (est.)	1500	1500	1616	1616	1692	1885	1885	1885	1600	1700
India (est.)	385	285	385	385	421	423	308	400	600	600
South Africa (est.)	531	573	393	490	308	346	346	250	192	200

Appendix B

Leading countries based on mine production of platinum worldwide in 2023

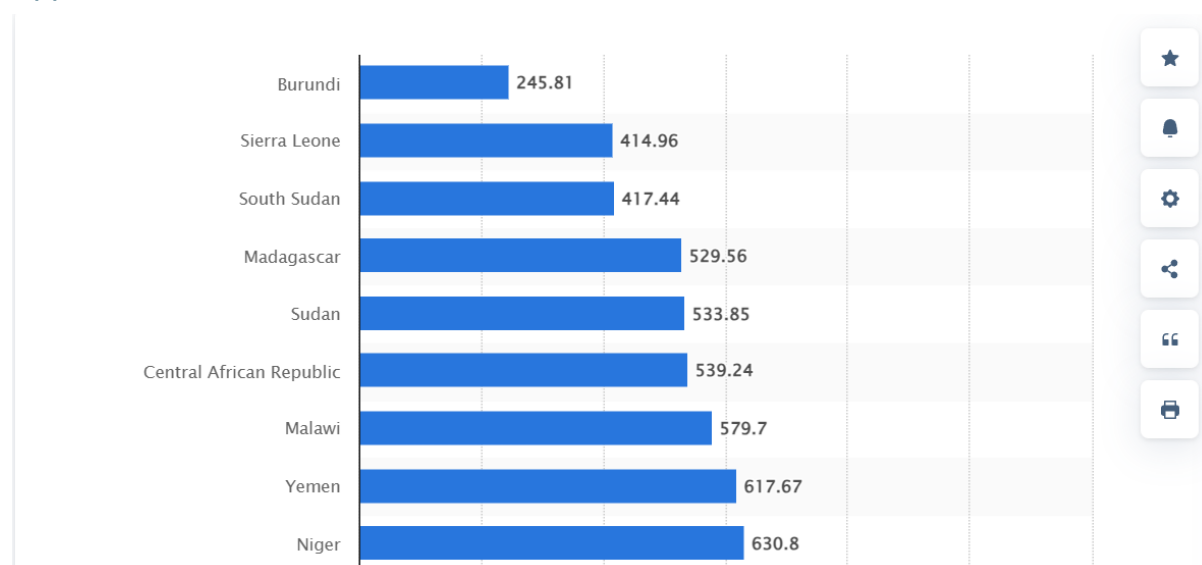
(in metric tons)



Appendix C

Rank	Country		Date of Information
1	<u>China</u>	\$25,684,000,000,000	2022 est.
2	<u>United States</u>	\$21,538,000,000,000	2022 est.
3	<u>India</u>	\$10,079,000,000,000	2022 est.
4	<u>Japan</u>	\$5,210,000,000,000	2022 est.
5	<u>Germany</u>	\$4,523,000,000,000	2022 est.
6	<u>Russia</u>	\$4,027,000,000,000	2022 est.
7	<u>Indonesia</u>	\$3,419,000,000,000	2022 est.
8	<u>Brazil</u>	\$3,250,000,000,000	2022 est.
9	<u>United Kingdom</u>	\$3,187,000,000,000	2022 est.

Appendix D



Appendix E

Bottom 5 HDI Rankings

Rank	Country	HDI Score
187	Burundi	0.426
188	Central African Republic	0.404
189	Niger	0.400
190	Chad	0.394
191	South Sudan	0.385

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ⁱInvestopedia is a financial media website headquartered in New York City.

ⁱⁱCatalysts are materials that speed up chemical reactions and reduce the energy needed to convert a substance.

ⁱⁱⁱ*Prisoners of geography* is a book by Tim Marshall

^{iv}GDP – Gross Domestic Product

^vPurchasing Power Parity refers to the economic concept that compares the relative value of currencies by equalizing the purchasing power of different currencies for a given basket of goods and services.

^{vi}Human Development Index (HDI) – As explained by the UNDR, The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions (UN Development Programme, 2022).

^{vii}Gross National Income per capita is the value of a country's final income in a year divided by its population.

^{viii}Colonialism is the strategy or custom of gaining complete or partial political dominance over another nation, settling it with inhabitants, and utilizing its resources for economic gain.

^{ix} SAICA is the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants

^x Proliferation financing is defined proliferation financing as "providing funds or financial services which are used, in whole or in part, for the manufacture, acquisition, possession, development, export, trans-shipment, brokering, transport, transfer, stockpiling or use of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery and related materials (including both technologies and dual use goods used for non-legitimate purposes), in contravention of national laws or, where applicable, international obligations."
(As defined by FATF)

