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School

WRITE

Poems, short stories and reviews



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A FRESH START

Peace. That is all I'd ever wanted.

Chaos settled lively in my life. My younger sister leaped over each sofa; I gritted my teeth. Screaming, my little brother sprinted through the house while my mother trailed along behind, carrying her eye bags with her. *Slam*. The door swung on its hinges as my egotistical older brother sauntered in, hands in his pockets, chewing loudly on a piece of gum. Maybe silence was what I truly needed.

The smell of damp wood diffused through the air as I tried to safely place myself on the sofa. Breathing calmly, I flicked through my ideas of peace. Reading? Not in this house. Running? I don't have the lung capacity for that. As I thought to myself, the sound of screaming children deafened my ears. Feeling the sofa dip, I snapped out of my thoughts, making eye contact with the human alarm clock better known as my sister. I decided where I wanted to go.

The beach.

Grabbing my coat, I whistled my fluffy best friend along with me. As I stepped out the bitter wind hit me. Leaves were falling as I began my trip to the land of sea and sand.

Seagulls screeched overhead as I observed beautiful amber leaves drifting gracefully to the floor. Dark clouds threatened to cascade into the dusty blue sky as the colours of time painted its empty canvas. I reached the piles of pebbles that made my walkway, feeling them crunch under my feet. A bark rolled from my dog's mouth.

In awe, I made my way to the meeting of land and ocean. The ocean's blanket escaped into cracks in the earth as I wobbled across the pebbles. The salty breeze stroked my glowing face, wafting through my hair. Trying to keep my footing, I wandered further and further -

'Oi!' bellowed a young boy, 'pass us the ball back!'

That's when my attention was drawn away from the beautiful shore and I realised I was not alone. People surrounded the area, screaming and giggling as they carried on with their evening. People throwing balls, people making sandcastles, people screaming as the freezing waves slapped their bodies. This wasn't calm! Head pounding, I balled my fists to the sides.

I huffed through the crowds of people, kicking rocks aside. Why did they have to be here? I focused on the stunning colours that washed our sky, then looked down and picked up a rock. Its orange skin protected the ruby red that tried to escape, trapping its life in a shell. I skimmed it across the water, only to be shoved over by a bustling family. Apologising, the eldest child offered a hand.

This wasn't peace. I expected graceful waves that trickled up the coast and smooth curved pebbles that shone in the evening sun. All I got was screaming kids and busy parents.

Calling my dog, I edged nearer a clearing of stones. I sat down, my dog's panting tongue sending slobber everywhere. I peered around, finding a rough pebble. As I ran my fingers along the cracks, I noticed the unique pattern. Rotating it, I followed the textured, bumpy ridges and curly shape. It was definitely not just a rock. Time's permanent grasp on the pebble made me smile.

I released a sigh I didn't know I had been holding and untensed my shoulders. Slipping the fossil into my pocket, I pushed myself up and started to head home.

I needed this; it felt like I had been restarted. Peace. That is all I'd ever wanted. Now, I had found it; in the most peculiar place.

TERMINAL

100 millilitres of shower gel, 100 millilitres of shampoo, 100 millilitres of mouthwash, no sharp objects, no more than 65kg. I had packed to perfection and followed all the rules, now I only had to get through security, make sure I got to my flight by 8 o'clock and then try and get through the journey. "It's perfectly safe," I kept telling myself. "It's perfectly safe. Everything's going to be fine." This was the only way I was going to see my Dad again. I had to face my fears; I had to fly.

I easily got through security without setting anything off. Duty free was quiet, ominously quiet. "No, you're just trying to scare yourself now, don't be stupid." Carefully, I laid my suitcase against the floor and sat down. My palms were starting to get clammy, and I felt my face turning lobster red. "Thousands of people fly a day, follow the rules, trust the process", I murmured my mantra. I thought about getting up, but my legs felt like jelly. I looked over at the family closest to me. The youngest child was playing with a little toy airplane, presumably a present he had just received from the shop. The tiny toddler launched it along the table as a runway, and it shot off the end and into the air. Suddenly, it started to go downwards at speed. Bang! It smashed into the ground and the boy burst into grubby tears.

Slowly, I managed to pull myself out the chair to see if the gate number was up yet. I needed to be there on time; the rules said you had to be there 20 minutes early. The board flashed up with 7:40, Mumbai, terminal 5 then 7:45, Houston, terminal 2. I continued to look out for my flight: 8:00, Paris. The board seemed to have glitched. Terminal, terminal, terminal, terminal, terminal. The same word kept flashing up. Terminal, terminal, terminal ...gate 13.

I'd never really been superstitious but now I was worried, very worried. My legs quivered as I hobbled down to gate 13 which luckily wasn't too far away.

I stood up, not wanting to sit down in fear I would struggle to get up again. In an attempt to calm myself down, I tried focusing on the radio. One of my favourite songs, 'Lucky' by Radiohead, started playing, I relaxed and was singing quietly along to the chorus when I heard the line 'pull me out of the air crash'.

I was jolted back into reality and was now only more nervous. My stomach lurched like a fish flipping on a fishing line, my mouth felt like sand, my shoulders prickled with sweat.

I was now on the plane. The flight attendant had asked me if I was anxious, but I just smiled and shook my head. I was sweating through my t shirt by now but I just closed my eyes, thinking to myself that I could get through this.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

I let out a gasp as tears started to stream down my face. I thought of all the little coincidences, the little signs, the little signals; this flight was doomed, I just knew it. Hot bile rose from my stomach and I launched myself out of my seat.

"I need to get off!" I screamed.

"I'm sorry but I can't let you do that, it's against the rules at this stage, the door is closed", a flight attendant said.

"I don't care about the rules," I sobbed. I started bashing my fists like hammers on the plane door. 'I've got a weapon!' I hollered at the crew, pulling at the emergency door handle.

It was very embarrassing being escorted down from the plane by the airport police. Details taken. Caution given. No weapon found of course. My weapon was fear. I was now being marched back towards the terminal. I had broken the rules and I hadn't even been allowed my perfectly packed bag back. I had wasted all my money and I wouldn't see my Dad again. I had failed to face my fear. I had failed to fly. Agonised by my failure, I turned around to watch the plane take off.

As it soared away from the ground, I looked up. A crescendo of noise built and then peaked. Boom! The plane burst into a massive orange cloud, and I stood open mouthed as the fireball ripped through the lapis lazuli sky.

Tom E

THE BETRAYAL

The passersby were perturbed by the thumping coming from the crammed terraced building. Loud bellows and chuckles were the only other noises able to penetrate the wall of music. Jack was forced like a grumpy child through the swinging door and into what he considered to be the 'dreaded' barbers.

It was an intimidating and unfamiliar place to him and no wonder he resented ever having to go there because it was repulsive. A thick carpet of discarded hair lay over the barely visible black and white chequered tiles. Immediately Jack began to feel itchy just looking at the hair. The great, burly barbers all looked the spitting image of each other, their weapons for shearing and slicing glinting from the aprons at their waists.

Jack's mother had finally come to the conclusion that he had to get rid of his long curly hair; she couldn't bear the shabbiness he carried around with him "like some homeless man". Jack opposed this for two reasons: one, he loved his hair and couldn't imagine losing it; two, he had no intention of setting foot in a barber shop. Unfortunately for him, there was no way of changing her mind, so here he sat, in the one place he resented the most.

There was a sick pit in his stomach as he was whistled at to come and sit in the great black chair of doom.

"What can I do for you today?" asked the barber.

"Ummm--"

"ACTUALLY," interrupted Jack's mother, "just... a really good cut."

Above Jack's head she made a shaving gesture and gave a meaningful look at the clippers that passed Jack by completely. He assumed he was getting no more than half of his beautiful locks cut off. How wrong he was. The barber's wide-eyed reaction did not bode well for Jack, but he remained oblivious to what was about to happen, staring down in despair at his feet.

A great assortment of various gels, lotions and instruments surrounded the clogged sink and it looked to Jack more like a medieval torture table than something you would use to cut hair. A vast mirror was mounted on the wall, displaying the misery covering Jack's face. The blaring music appeared to be coming from a speaker hidden in the back room which just added to the discomfort of the whole situation.

Clip! Clip! The first chunks of Jack's thick brown hair fell to the ground and water filled his eyes. He wasn't sure if it was the sadness or the yanking of his hair causing it. Out of the corner of his eye, Jack spotted a smug smirk spread across his mother's face. Never in his life had he thought of her as being such a villain, but this just looked evil.

The clipping came to an end and Jack couldn't bring himself to look at the mirror and stare at his new appearance. He pushed himself up to get out of the chair, but a firm hand clamped him back down.

"We aren't finished yet, boss," chuckled the barber.

You would have thought Jack had seen a ghost as all the colour and happiness rushed from his face. A new wave of sickness overcame him.

BZZZZZ.

The clippers ate away like a fierce predator, leaving behind a pathetic stubble of hair. Frozen with panic, Jack stared at his near bald head and couldn't bring himself to blink or speak. His fists clenched the arms of the chair as he anchored himself in place. It took the force of two big men to lift his body out of the chair, then his mother began trying to drag him out the door. He felt naked. He felt incomplete. He felt betrayed.

Adam H

A MATTER OF HONOUR

It was a battle for the ages.

Standing on the crenellations at the top of the gatehouse was Sir William Marshal and below stood his adversary Sir Edmund FitzAllan, known as the most skilful knight in England. They stared at each other with rancour as they prepared to fight to the death. The crowds were cheering and jeering from either side. Then there was silence and the fight began...

Sir William rushed in to strike with haste, but Sir Edmund blocked the attack and pushed him away. He was not going to give up that easily; he was devoted to winning this battle.

07.

Sir Edmund then swung at Sir William whilst he was down. He rolled out of the way and countered the attack. The two combatants exchanged blows until Sir Edmund knocked his challenger off balance, and he fell off the side of the gatehouse. Somehow, Sir William grabbed onto the edge of the portcullis but was barely still able to fight.

Sir Edmund swung his sword over his head, ready to deliver the final blow, but then came the ultimate betrayal.

A crossbow bolt pierced Sir Edmund's chest from behind. The crowd screamed in horror. His blood sprayed over the castle walls in a red mist. Sir William clambered back, bold and bloody, and saw his enemy sprawled on the battlements. With one powerful stroke of his broadsword, he cut off Sir Edmund's head. He threw it into the crowd who gasped in horror and enjoyment.

Was it immoral and unchivalrous? Yes, it was. Yet it was not Sir William who had bribed the archer on the battlements before the duel had begun. It had been Edmund. But Sir Edmund had been betrayed by his own men.

Victorious, Sir William turned to the crowd and lifted both of his arms up in the air as a salute. He had won the battle against his arch-nemesis. Now it was time for the rule of Sir William Marshal.

Bertie E

A VISIT FROM THE PAST

Bill Blunt was reading a book next to the warm fireplace when the gunshot sounded. His window was slightly ajar, and the sound of the gunshot found its way in, flooding the room, like a tsunami of noise. The sound of the single bullet seemed to shake his entire house violently and made the walls vibrate faintly.

Small specks of grey dust from the ceiling began to descend slowly onto his lap. A flat ringing noise filled his ears, seeming to disconnect him from reality, for what seemed to him like hours. The sound quickly subsided and was replaced by silence.

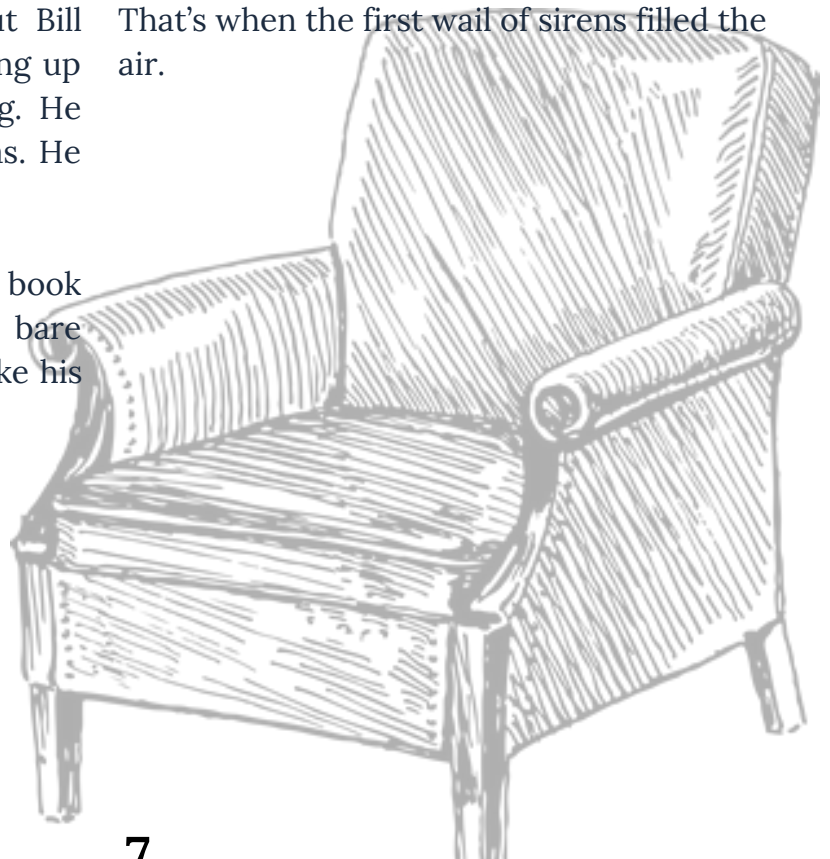
Apart from the chirping of a distant cricket, or the crackle and pop of the fireplace, it was as if nothing had happened. But Bill knew that it wasn't his old age creeping up on him, playing tricks on his hearing. He had heard it, and he knew what it was. He knew he had heard a gunshot.

He stood up carefully, placing his book down onto the armchair. He slid his bare feet into his slippers and began to make his way to make his way to the front door.

As he neared it, he reached out for the key, which was already inside the keyhole. Turning it, he heard the distinct click of the door unlocking. He turned the handle cautiously and opened the door slightly, revealing the street outside. The evening breeze washed over his face, and he felt cold straightaway. He adjusted his footing to see further down the street, squinting.

Instantly, adrenaline and fear shot through him, like a hot liquid intruding into his veins, and the ringing in his ears returned once again. There, collapsed in the middle of the street, was a silhouetted body of a person, lying motionless. A sudden rush of wind whipped at Bill's face, snapping him out of his trance and back to reality.

That's when the first wail of sirens filled the air.



Novel opening
by Aleks G

MAD WITH MONOTONY

A single crystalline droplet. It falls, the only noise in the place. Without the water, there is nothing. Without it, the cave would be flooded with an alien silence: haunting, melancholy, ethereal. Yet oppressive and... empty.

As empty as my heart.

The water shimmers for one moment as it catches the brightness radiating from the one stream of light. The illusion of a gilded waterfall slipping down from above is given before it falls into my hands. It's followed by another, and another. Hardly any water; any more would be too tempting. Nothing can quench the pain until my task is finished. Until the bowl is full.

I glance over at it, at the only thing that is lit up in the dark emptiness of my prison. The bowl is the only thing that gives the tedious cycle, the monotonous drag of boredom, a beguiling sense of importance. It's the only thing that keeps me collecting the water, keeps me dragging myself to carry on. It's the only thing that is illuminated, set apart from the brooding depths of tangible darkness... the only thing that gives me hope. I study its golden glints. They flood my mind with images; so many undulating intonations of dawn and dusk, the indescribable depths of colours and beauty that I will one day see again.

"More water... more, and more. Eventually..." I mutter, trying to keep the bitterness and the longing out of my voice. Trying to keep my mind on the task. To stop it wandering. To stop it thinking of my emotions or my thirst. I just have to accept it: I'm trapped here until I fill the bowl.

I stumble forwards, travelling the few steps towards the bowl, wincing at the pain that rushes through my feet. I let the water go, and feel a slight smile wash across my face. "Just a few hundred more times," I laugh sarcastically. "Then..."

But it's not long before I stop smiling. As I move to collect more water, I feel the pain. I feel the thirst and the hunger inside me. I feel the weight of my crime, the shame from the bittersweet thrill of revealing the truth. Even if it was the right thing to do. It had a cost. But revealing what I did... what *he* did, our ruler, our 'God'... It had to be done. Even gods can be murderers.

I still feel the agony. But I know it's worth it. It has to be. I'm doing my part for humanity. It's simple: fill the bowl every day, only stop when the whole empire has drunk. When the whole empire has been saved. Down here, down in the caves, it's all for a reason.

Or so I tell myself.

Emily L

FAIL TO PREPARE...

I was at my desk, fixing my eyes onto the textbook like a stone statue. The thought of the exam the next day invaded my mind relentlessly, making it was impossible to concentrate.

"I'm gonna fail," I muttered half with resignation, half with apprehension. My mind scanned through the million other things I would have rather been doing.

Then I remembered a truly terrible thing.

Frantically, I began flipping through the book. Frantically, my eyes darted between the words, desperately searching for any hope. Frantically, I began pacing around the room.

There were two tests the next day, not one.

That night, I worked so tirelessly, so relentlessly, so unbelievably tenaciously, I became drunk with fatigue.

I raced through the night whilst the rest of the world faded to a tranquil sleep. As I violently scribbled notes, the cars outside yawned past. As I ripped through the textbook pages, the clock quietly counted itself to sleep. As my heart pounded at my ribcage with impending doom, the placid clouds drifted over the moon, fading into its quiet light.

"Don't stay up too late," my mum suggested innocently.

I didn't reply. The thought of not putting myself through this night of restless revision and hair-tearing and dread was out of the question (as perverse as it sounded to everyone else).

After taking a break, I returned to the murder scene: pages were strewn across the floor, pens were snapped like bones, shreds of hope lay shattered on the floor.

My mind was a sieve; every fact and figure seemed to drop so effortlessly through. Nothing was going in. Nothing!

When my eyes, damp and red, turned to look at the words they dodged and danced like small fish from a predator. The stupid words! Why couldn't I just stuff them in my head?

The clock now quietly ticked away in its sleep. Each tick was a tick closer to my exams. Each tick closer to my exams was a tick closer to my doom. How was I going to survive?

"6:00 AM", my alarm clock glared menacingly at me. I had just a couple of hours left of revision. In the last hours of this painful night I was half-asleep and half tingling and pulsating with adrenaline. I was exhausted beyond humanly possible. By this point, my mind's sieve had become a great gaping hole of emptiness. It was a blank void.

Then the morning came. The alarm clock cheerily chimed the morning's arrival, as if to remind me of its soft and sound sleep.

"You didn't stay up all night revising, did you?" My mother's face showed disbelief and genuine motherly worry.

"Didn't I?" I sighed. I wasn't joking. My mind was so empty that my brain may as well have been dead. "I'm gonna fail."

WILDERNESS

A million stars twinkled in the jet black canvas of the night. The full moon was a glowing orb of light, a lantern to any weary travellers, casting an eerie torch on woodlands and creating warped shadows at the edges of paths. The sun had crawled back from the world and was lighting the opposite side with warmth and happiness while its twin, the moon created a safe haven for darkness and shadows.

The round sphere of the world was decorated with great feats of nature. Towering mountains jutted up from smooth fields; meadows were dotted with glittering fireflies at night then splashed with the colours of millions of flowers in the day. There were seas that raged with the fury of a million armies, stretching for miles in every direction with waves that could drown the sun itself. Then there were the calm lakes, rivers, and streams that shone like gems in the green landscape, their water rippling and reflecting like mirrors.

There were dense woodlands, treasure troves of many strange plants and quaint natural orchards growing millions of different fruits. The ground was rich with nutrients, a heaven for all plants. Great storms would rip through the wilderness, watering the ground and clearing any dead or weak foliage. They filled the rivers and lakes with rich supplies of water, causing them to burst their banks and flood the surrounding meadows and fields.

Then there were the humongous deserts with sweltering heats and sandstorms that could blind you if you found yourself in the middle of one. The weather sculpted the sand into towering sand dunes, like mountains themselves.

Animals roamed every stretch of the planet, with all varieties of mysterious aquatic life in the oceans, lakes, rivers and streams. Majestic creatures and elegant equestrian life roamed the fields and meadows. Animals that had adapted to the harshest climates explored great stretches of the deserts and grasslands. Birds and insects flitted throughout the globe, discovering new wonders every day.

The world flourished, letting the nature it contained sustain itself, with the weather sculpting the landscape and eliminating weak creatures and plants. The remaining plants and animals provided care for the beautiful world. Everything maintained itself in a wonderful harmony of nature.

That was until a particular creature sprung apart from the rest.

This species believed itself to be superior, destined for greatness. At first, they took resources from the world in small quantities, only meaning to provide for themselves, but greed and a desire for knowledge led them to become ignorant to the destruction they were causing.

Emma T

They spiralled out of control, warring and reaping havoc on the world. Other species were killed in the crossfire, a massacre of nature. These destroyers of the world called themselves Humans.

Eventually, after centuries of meaningless horror, another creature rose up against them. A species so advanced they made the humans look harmless. This creature had lurked in the peaceful corners of the globe throughout the reign of the humans.

However, a time came when nature couldn't take the onslaught any more and awoke the great beasts from their slumbers.

In the past a handful of these animals had awoken and some humans had even spotted them. However, they soon drifted into myth, stories told by humans, thought to be fantasies made up by some attention seeking nobody. Throughout history they were depicted as creatures of great wisdom and power.

The humans called them Dragons.

The day the dragons arrived began like any other. A warm summer day with a slight breeze, causing the trees on the outskirts of towns and cities to rustle. By late afternoon the wind had picked up and now whipped the trees into a cacophony of creaking and rustling. A storm brewed out at sea, great waves rose and fell as the sky darkened from a light blue to an ominous grey. As the storm broke great creatures emerged from seemingly nowhere.

Across the world, human civilisations were ravaged by huge beasts breathing great plumes of fire. As the storm raged on, the dragons harnessed the elements, causing the earth to quake and a wall of water to crash down on coastal areas. As lightning split the sky in jagged bursts of light and thunder rumbled like a thousand roaring beasts, humans desperately sought safety.

After the storm ceased, the lucky ones that had found refuge emerged and tried to salvage what had once been great civilisations.

That day became known as The Reaping. Thousands of humans had died in the onslaught and most buildings had been reduced to rubble. However, after this day nature felt that humans had suffered enough. And so the dragons withdrew, roaming the wilderness in case humans ever dared to rise against nature again. After The Reaping, the remaining rulers pulled together and led the human race to recovery.

And for a while the world was peaceful.

Emma T

NEW

Passing through the steel gates, past everyone with their array of different backpacks, he finally reached the building. Its towering walls leaned toward him, each window peering down on him like hundreds of vast watchful eyes. These great walls were wrapped in a block of deep blue which invoked a feeling of claustrophobic panic comparable only to drowning in the boy.

All around were children huddled together in unknowable conversation. Their uniforms were more smartly and comfortably worn than his own, but they were also more used. For him the prospect of approaching even the smallest and most welcoming groups was an overly daunting concept. He fled alone to a corner, away from the unfamiliar voices originating from foreign faces.

Gingerly he lifted his tattered backpack from his heavy shoulders. He opened the bag and looked past his new pencil case, neatly packed lunchbox, and where his books used to be for the paper map he'd been given. He removed it from its hiding place and unfolded it so he could learn the unknown passageways. Then he looked for the location of his first room of the day.

He put the map away and felt the tug of memories from his lost house. It had been filled to the brim with monotonous beige boxes, tombs for the mementos and furniture of his childhood. He was brought to memories of lost friends and farewells obscured by sorrow. He remembered packing those boxes; memories of his friends faces sitting alongside his accolades.

Suddenly a piercing sound produced by the bell lanced across the courtyard. Everyone froze. Everyone turned. Everyone stampeded through the vast structure. Suddenly torn free from his recollection by the activity, he was bombarded with worries and doubts and nerves. The boy quietly and cautiously beheld the river of students as they flooded the corridor with a noise that drowned his thoughts. Where once there was comforting silence, there was now a cacophony of voices.

Gradually building his confidence, he moved to join the crowd but was instead washed directly into a larger student. The student bellowed insults at him. He just absorbed every syllable of every word silently, without moving. Left trapped in a prison with thoughts, his doubts, reinforced by the insults, fought to send him home. Defeated, he turned his gaze to the floor. With his desires conflicting he constantly failed to move, as if his emotional burdens were made of concrete. In an attempt to regain control of his body he focused his breathing: in and out; in and out; in and out.

He slowly turned to look at what was around him. In turning he saw another boy, who gently questioned whether he was okay. After a moment of consideration, he quietly replied that he was and asked how to get to his first room of the day. Generously, the boy pointed and offered the necessary directions.

Book Review: *November 9* by Colleen Hoover

The heart-wrenching story of a novelist and his muse.



Colleen Hoover, New York Times bestselling writer, has never disappointed me yet and this book is no exception. It may also be my new favourite of CoHo's yet, depending on how her thriller, *Verity* ends. However, even with a history of amazing books to her name, Hoover will always produce characters who make questionable choices, whom we sometimes love to hate.

November 9 is a book about love, lies and Hoover's favourite: the past. When her main character, Fallon O'Neill - ex child star and actress - can't seem to move past the unexplainable fire which took her career, confidence and burned 30% of her body on the dreaded November 9th, she is thrown into the arms of Ben Kessler, who could help her learn to love herself again, whilst falling for her simultaneously. But like every CoHo novel, the past and the lies that correlate with it could replace love with soul ruining heartbreak, and maybe for Fallon, a new view of herself forever.

After reading this, I might've experienced one of my biggest book hangovers yet. Despite the gut wrenching twists which happened near the end, the romance between Ben and Fallon was surprisingly beautiful and dreamy with great journeys of self love, moving past grief and regret. Books where the female main character values the male main character's view of herself more than her own have never been something I've agreed with. Especially when characters don't do things for themselves. Let's all agree - there are times where we're selfish and make decisions that will benefit us. This trait is something Fallon harbours which helps us, as an audience, to relate to her and makes her that bit more realistic. Colleen Hoover is great at creating relatable main characters, even if we despise them a bit.

Ben and Fallon were both likeable characters and I thoroughly enjoyed Fallon's path of self discovery, pushing past the barriers of society's view of 'pretty'. Ben's support and guidance through Fallon's journey definitely put him in my good books, even if my opinion was slightly altered nearer the end. As a character that was full of regret, anger and guilt, I believe we, as the audience, resonated with him as a flawed but human character.

From the yearly layout, to the absolute hardcore shockers, this consistently incredible book has definitely earned five stars from me. After looking for flaws, minus the heartbreaking storyline and the truckload of tears that came with it, I was going to give it four stars due to the miscommunication between Ben and Fallon. After thinking about it, I determined that without the shocking amount of miscommunication, we would not have been gifted with such gripping plot twists derived from them. *November 9* truly sucks you in and spits out your heart; I don't think I've ever read a book like it. If you're a romance lover in a reading slump, this book will rip you right out of it with its thrilling, addictive and consistent storyline of love, loss and life as it moves on. If I haven't yet convinced you to read this dangerously beautiful book, I will leave you with a quote that will.

"It took four years for me to fall in love with him. It only took four pages to stop."

Book review: *Throne of Glass* by Sarah J. Maas ★★★★★

"I'm reluctant to admit that the Throne of Glass is one of those novels where I committed the ultimate book-lovers crime and judged it by its cover...but I'm glad I did."

American fantasy author Sarah J. Maas kicked off her 2012 debut series "Throne of Glass" with a bang! The novel follows the story of 18-year-old assassin, Celaena Sardothien - "beautiful, deadly and destined for greatness" - as she becomes enslaved in the filthy salt mines of Endovier. Her freedom (a matter of life or death) is offered through a deal: to win it she must represent the prince in a to-the-death tournament against the most gifted thieves and assassins in the land. This thrilling novel has captured the hearts of many bookworms like me and granted Maas the title of Number 1 Bestselling Author in the New York Times for this series.

I am reluctant to admit that the Throne of Glass is one of those novels where I have committed the ultimate book-lovers crime and judged it by its cover...but I am glad I did. Its fierce and striking cover is particularly enticing as it depicts a beautiful and powerful female lead. As I flipped over the first page, though, Maas challenged this by creating the image of Celaena as a young, helpless slave, who had formerly been known as "Adarlan's most notorious assassin." This would only result in a flood of questions from any reader as they anticipate the reason for this sudden downfall.

Heroine of the novel Celaena Sardothien became a personal favourite of mine, thanks to the author's careful crafting of the character. In contrast to her previously headstrong and typically "teenager" attitude, she develops into a more complex character with a more caring and loving nature, one that had been previously hidden through her flawless public façade. This makes the book more relatable to a wider audience of readers. Maas is also highly skilled in developing in-depth characters who are presented attractively, even if not initially; for example, the crown prince, Dorian, is a character I unexpectedly became attached to throughout the series.

My only issue with this series would be that, although the romance is subtle and does not take over the plot of the story, I feel as if Maas changes Celaena's love interests slightly too fast. I would have preferred a more in-depth representation of her feelings, not only to explore her character but also to have enough time to get over the breakup of couples I had been loyally rooting for.

Overall, Sarah J. Maas' debut novel "Throne of Glass" is an intriguing story that appeals to fans of the fantasy genre. However, opposed to a child-like plot, the story line involves sophisticated characters and events more than suitable enough for its young-adult readership. I would highly recommend this series to those who are fond of powerful female leads, for example readers of "The Hunger Games" by Suzanne Collins.

Book review:

***She Gets the Girl* by Rachael Lippincott and Alyson Derrick**

Whilst ‘She Gets the Girl’ may be a cliché trope, I was surprised that it had me close to tears more than once.



The young adult sapphic rom-com ‘She Gets the Girl’ is written by Rachael Lippincott, co-author of the famous novel turned film ‘Five Feet apart’, and her wife Alyson Derrick. This delightful dual point of view story follows two girls, Alex and Molly, who team up to help each other get the girls of their dreams but end up falling in love in the process.

The structure of the novel is particularly enjoyable, as the chapters alternate between the two main characters' point of view, subtly cementing the opposites attract dynamic between them as the story progresses. Likewise, this style allows the reader to deeply understand and connect with both characters as well as learning their heart-breaking and complex backstories. From alcoholism to deep-rooted issues with one’s heritage – this book has more to it than you may expect.

Whilst ‘She Gets the Girl’ may be a cliché trope, I was surprised that it had me close to tears more than once. The character’s personalities were portrayed very effectively and Molly, a chronic overthinker with “crippling social anxiety”, is a character I find particularly relatable. This paired with Alex’s “emotionally unavailable” nature creates a unique dynamic that leads to a plethora of emotional, tear-jerking scenes. Another aspect that I greatly appreciated was that themes such as ‘coming out’ and homophobia were not major plot points. It’s refreshing to read a LGBTQ+ novel where the fact that the characters are not heterosexual is not a big deal.

My only qualms are that a couple of plot points felt slightly rushed. For example, Alex’s mother’s issue was tied up too neatly in my opinion and I would’ve loved Molly’s feelings about Alex to have been explored more in depth. However, the rest of the storyline flowed seamlessly.

Overall, ‘She Gets the Girl’ is a delightful read that I devoured in one sitting. If you like romantic, emotional yet comic page-turners, this book is for you. Run to your local bookshop and grab yourself a copy now!

Run

“Run” (2020) is a psychological suspense thriller starring Sarah Paulson and up-and-coming actress Kiera Allen. Originally released by US streaming service Hulu and quickly becoming its most streamed original film, “Run” was later internationally released by Netflix and received critical acclaim. It is directed by Aneesh Chaganty and is also co-written by him and Sev Ohanian, the story taking inspiration from the real life Gypsy Rose crime case.

The film follows 17 year old wheelchair user Chloe (Kiera Allen) who has a very close and controlled relationship as an only child with her single mother (Sarah Paulson). One day while checking her mother’s groceries, Chloe finds that her medication is prescribed to her mother – and not to her. The plot thickens from there. While the plot is fairly predictable, the intensity of the narrative and individual scenes provide a thrilling emotional roller coaster.

The big reveals throughout the film as the narrative unfolds are done in a dramatic way that doesn’t leave the viewer bored with the holding of tension. I think this is supported by the movie’s short 90 minute run time, making it not have the need to drag the plot out. The predictable plot can be figured out, roughly, within the first 30 minutes of the film’s run time. Despite this, the unique, simplistic and innovative style of story-telling makes a gripping last 60 minutes.

There are heavy themes of child abuse and parental derangement that are dealt with in a serious way that doesn’t go too deep, meaning the film isn’t too much of an uncomfortable viewing experience. The acting is top notch, expressing a familiar mother/daughter relationship that doesn’t get overshadowed too much by the threat of the mother’s dark secrets. I’m impressed by the fact a wheelchair using character is being played by a real wheelchair user, opening roles for more actors with disabilities.

Overall, “Run” is a simplistic film that is made better through the handling of scenes and acting performances. I would recommend it to people who are new to thrillers because of how easy to digest it is, despite being entertaining. Because it doesn’t go too far into the strong themes, it doesn’t deter a lot of casual viewers like other movies in the thriller genre. I rate it a 4/5 because it’s good, but it doesn’t try to be a masterpiece.

Bruce L

Pretty Little Liars: The Perfectionists

This show is set in Beacon Heights University where the students are under constant pressure to be perfect, leading to a murder. Three friends - Ava, Caitlyn and Dylan - try to find the murderer. The victim is a boy called Nolan Hotchkiss, an unsavoury character who unexpectedly meets a grisly end. The crime solving trio have their suspicions about a few suspects including Dana Booker, a former FBI agent who interrogates the students to find out who killed Nolan.

The show explores each of the three main characters' backgrounds. Ava is a style trendsetter who is an IT and fashion genius. Her father committed an embezzlement crime and left her alone. Caitlin is the senator's daughter; she is intelligent and ambitious. Cellist Dylan was bullied in high school because of his sexuality but now has a boyfriend called Andrew. The original *Pretty Little Liars* is about Alison who is also in *The Perfectionists* but goes missing. The two shows are pretty similar because they are both based on secrets and lies.

The show is a thrilling crime drama; the storyline is suspenseful and will leave you hooked on each episode. All characters are portrayed very well. The actor who stood out the most to me is Sofia Carson, who played Ava Jalali. She showed great emotional range, especially in the scene of Nolan's funeral. Ava was in love with Nolan so she obviously very upset when he died and I think Sofia portrayed Ava very well.

The show was nominated for the Teen Choice Awards in 2019. It is a spin-off from *Pretty Little Liars* and contains two of the same characters so if you like that, then you will love this. Overall, I think this show has you on the edge of your seat and leaves you wanting more.

Grief

hits you
like a speeding truck
when you stepped off the kerb.

It hits you
like a loose tile in a storm
flying straight at your unsuspecting head.

it hits you
like the moment
you realise the true meaning
of life

it hits you
as suddenly as
a bullet going through
your heart
quick, sharp pain
and then nothing.

You feel nothing.

Ben H



Here

Coming home from the market they placed their
keys on the hard wooden side.

Blushed pink sunglasses were thrown here too,
And a small purse filled with silver pennies.

Cream colored eggs fluttered with brown dots found
their way here,

While a lime covered with slick waxy skin was laid
here.

An antique clock with ornate brass and gold
finishings was placed down here,

Near a vase made of blue glass with white flowers.

Their aching feet clumped here,

The time they were covered in mud from head to toe
splattered here,

Piled high were the minutes they spent anticipating
his phone call.

Worn and scarred hands tired here,

Their hopes of success settled,

While worries of his return home loomed here.

All this piled high on a side which couldn't even hold
their keys.

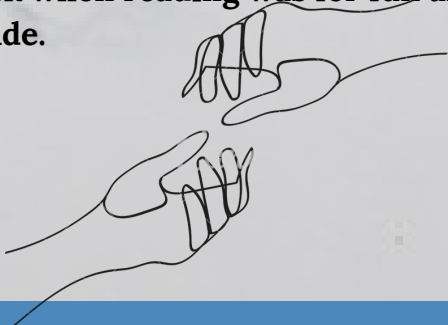
Thomas H



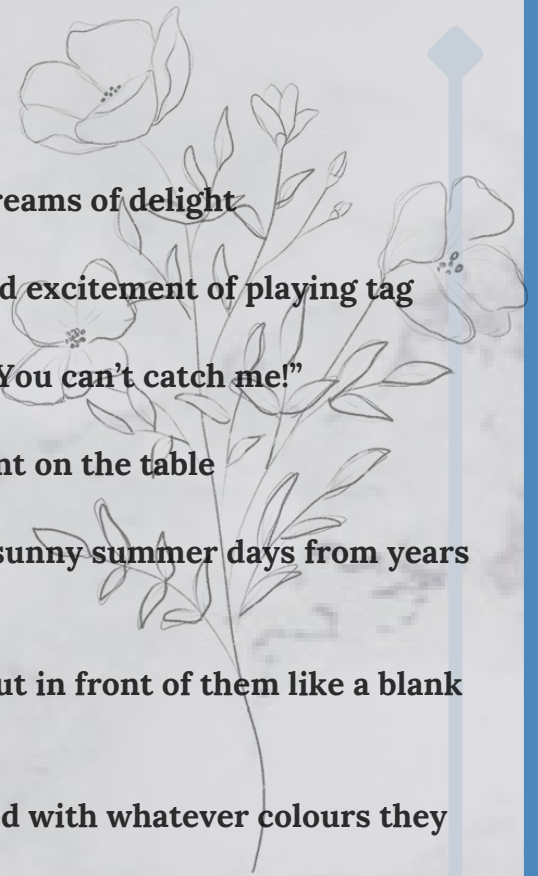
The table

After Edip Cansever

A teenager full of exhaustion
came home from school
and put their backpack on the table.
They hauled the thick, heavy textbooks out
and set them on the table.
Their rainbow of coloured pens,
their plastic water bottle and empty
lunchbox
creased notebooks, one for each subject
All were spread out on the table.
Novels full of annotations from English were
placed there
And the memories of other books
which took them on adventures far away
to Hogwarts with Harry
Narnia with the Pevenses
and infinite other worlds and lives
back when reading was for fun and not for a
grade.



Childish screams of delight
the panicked excitement of playing tag
squeals of "You can't catch me!"
They all went on the table
along with sunny summer days from years
ago
stretched out in front of them like a blank
canvas
to be painted with whatever colours they
chose.



Today's to-do list went on the table:

Maths homework, Media coursework,
English essay.

They put all their anger and stress and
frustration

on the table

which seemed close

to collapsing

under it all. But stood

strong, defiant,

as the teenager sat down to start their work.

Lauren H

Loneliness

Loneliness is a creator

A seed that sprouts like a rose, beautiful

but full of thorns.

It is a blank room.

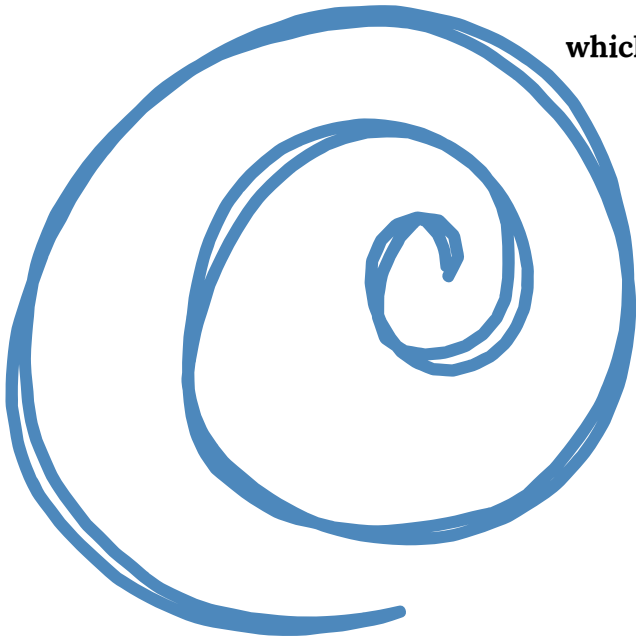
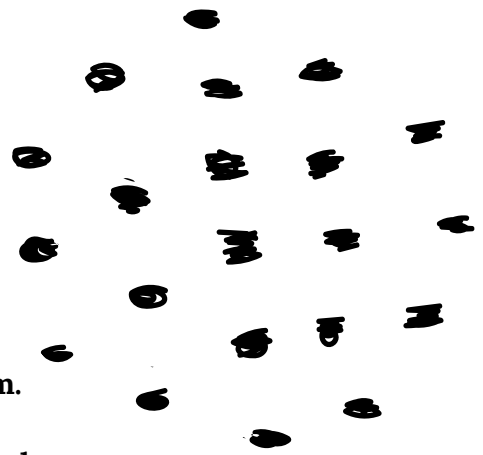
It starts fires in wooden houses

which never stop burning.

It moulds easily, like brick that when fired

is hard to crack.

Dillon F



Satisfaction

Putting a disc in a DVD player

pressing the numbers on a card reader

watching a plant grow on time lapse

hearing the fizz as you open the Coke can

the candle melting all the way down to the holder.

Satisfaction is a matter of your mind -

you can't change what makes you satisfied.

Evan S

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