



Winning, Highly Commended &
Commended
Entries

8-11 (Junior) Age Category

The 18th Elmbridge Literary Competition 2023

The Road

Some are long and winding and some lead to nowhere while others to Hell, even if paved with good intentions. From the ones less travelled to those that go ever on and on, roads and the journeys, real and symbolic, taken along them have always been a common theme in literature.

2023 is the 30th anniversary of The R C Sherriff Trust. Much of Sherriff's writing involved journeys, some literal; the charabanc day trip of his first play, A Hitch In The Proceedings, the family heading off for their annual holiday in his novel, 'The Fortnight in September', or the journey home taken by David Preston every night, except one, in 'Home By Seven', some metaphorical; Harry Faversham in 'The Four Feathers', Johnny McQueen in 'Odd Man Out' and the journey undertaken by Stanhope, Raleigh, Trotter and the soldiers in Sherriff's most famous work, a journey that leads to a fateful climax in the trenches of the First World War.

For the 18th Elmbridge Literary Competition, The R C Sherriff Trust and Elmbridge Borough Council, were looking for short stories and poems on the theme of 'The Road'.

Previous Competition Themes:

2005:	Cook Up A Story
2006:	On My Way
2007:	A Life In Colour
2008:	Once Upon A Time
2009:	A Symphony of Life
2010:	The Elmbridge 100
2011:	Breaking The Barrier
2012:	A Dickens of A Christmas
2013:	One Act Radio Play
2014:	Dear Diary
2015:	Flights of Fantasy
2016:	Love
2017:	Luck
2018:	A Shiver Down The Spine/Things That Go Bump In The Night
2019/20:	New World
2021:	Music
2022:	Enigma

Category: Short Stories

1st Place: The Road

Rosie Norvill

There I am, on The Road. Sweat dripping from my soggy face. My hands and legs quivering. I'm panting like a shattered dog after a tiring walk. Crowds of people are screaming my name and cheering my name. A short, stubby man climbs a ladder onto a landing. He lifts a checkered flag. I clutch the wheel. Then, I place my foot on the pedals. The raucous sound of the crowd disappears. I take a deep breath; the man throws the flag down and... I'm zooming at a lightning pace down the winding track. I've started off with a BANG!!! All the technical movements are just coming to me. I'm right in the lead and I'm like a cheetah in the savannah! All the crowds' pestering is blanked out and I'm cautiously taking the sharp corners. 1 Lap. Like a lightning bolt, I strike and bring the thunder! Other sedate racers are miles behind me and I'm getting closer and closer to Lap 2. Almost there and, 2 Laps. As fast as I can go, I take a rough corner. I almost tumble over but I keep my balance and carry on going super-fast. I'm about to WIN the race!!! All I need to do is finish this last lap. My eyes are attached to the finish. I'll WIN in 3, 2, 1 and... I wake up. Suddenly, I'm not a Formula One racer but ME, a girl in a wheelchair.

You see, my dad used to be a car engineer at Formula One and, every Saturday, I went to watch some of the races, then see my dad's new cars. He always asked me for advice and what he could do better next time. My dad and I were very close because we were both big petrol-heads. Each day, he promised he would make me a car which is right for me but none of them were suitable. He was a tall, needle-thin man with huge round glasses, which highlighted his emerald eyes. The only difference, I was in a wheelchair, and he was normal. My legs and back were severely damaged in a car-crash when I was ten. Dad said that I was lucky to have lived, unlike my mum. She didn't make it. It's still awful, though. Every Saturday, I had to stare at The Road. The Road where millions of drivers rode there hearts out, and I just stared at it. Whenever I was there, I felt like I was sinking into a puddle of squelchy mud. Even though I was disabled, I loved cars to the end of the planet, and, on my every birthday, dad would get me tickets to see the racing final but one year it was different, very different.

When I woke up that morning, I was beaming with excitement. A bubble of elation was growing in my stomach and my hands couldn't stop fidgeting. I threw myself into my wheelchair and sped to the hallway. Once I had gotten to the end of it, I flew out the door of my dad and I's bungalow. Using my own bare hands, I moved the wheels to and fro across the street. After I had gotten to the other side, I was greeted by Mrs Patricia, from next door, and her lovable dog: Cecil. They were the friendliest neighbours you could ever have! Every morning (on my way to school), she would give me a lemon sherbet and a little wink.

Because I wanted to get to my destination as quick as possible, I carried on rolling. Then, I (once I had exited my road) knocked three times on the door of my dad's workshop. It was a titanic, ramshackle-old thing, which was all higgledy-piggledy inside. Slowly, I rolled into the building, to find my dad grinning like the Cheshire Cat. His bleached white teeth, which was like a sheet of snow, were almost falling out of his mouth, he was smiling so much! Abruptly, he just started sobbing and then almost squeezed me to death. He handed a little cupcake to me and then tiptoed over to something, which was covered up, then threw the cover off. Underneath it, was a car, but not any old car, a car for a disabled person. The pedals were

buttons instead and me and dad carefully took it onto the track. Sweat was dripping from my soggy face, my hands and legs were quivering, I was panting like a dog but there was absolutely NOTHING between ME and THE ROAD.

2nd Place: The Pathway Leading Home

Lee Wei-Ning

It was a warm summer's afternoon, and the shop was flooded with customers going in and out. I stood at the door, hearing the bells ring. In a green and black tunic, Daddy squatted down, faced me and whispered, "Stay here, Max. I'll be back soon. I promise." I saw tears lingering in his eyes as he reached to stroke me.

I nodded. *I'll wait for you, Daddy.* Then, he turned to the door and walked out, jingling the bells.

I've never seen him wearing that uniform, so why is he wearing it today? I wondered what was going on, and why he was leaving me. As I watched Daddy slowly disappearing from my sight, I whimpered and a wave of sorrowness washed over me.

Ever since I was small, people had taken one look at me and decided that I belonged in the trash can. I was abandoned near a filthy factory, flies flying all around me. I starved and shivered through the winter. Until one day, Daddy came along, adopted me, fed me, gave me shelter and most importantly, a home. Every day, his warmth and love for me was indescribable. Now we were like two peas in a pod as we were the only family each other had. He meant the world to me, and I had never left his side before—until now.

I couldn't remember how long I had been here. Gazing outside wistfully, the leaves had turned from green to gold. Bored, I started to daydream, thinking that Daddy would suddenly appear at the door, hugging me and walking me back home. But there wasn't a trace of him.

Has something happened to him? A tiny voice in my mind whispered. I shuddered, tears were forming in my eyes. *No! Daddy must come back for me. He will. Of all the promises he made, he has never broken one.*

Soon, snow fell into heaps outside, turning the world white. Feeling depressed, I started to bark fretfully, annoying the shop owner so much that she blamed me for being a nuisance. She kicked me out, leaving me alone on the streets. My mind flashed back to when I was small. I felt helpless and abandoned, again. Few people attempted to adopt me, but I refused. Daddy was the one whom I wanted to go home with, so I stayed right in front of the shop, trying to keep my promise.

After what felt like eternity passed, the weather turned bitterly cold. I started to suffer despite my thick fur, growing weak and weary. That day, the wind was howling, covering everything in snow, including me. Lying outside the shop, I was slowly slipping away. I closed my eyes and whispered, "I'm sorry, Daddy. I think I could not keep my promise..."

But as my body went limp, I felt a familiar, warm presence. It was Daddy! "Max," He extended his arm to me. "Come, let's go home."

Feeling weightless, my paw reached out to Daddy. Together, with smiles plastered on our faces, we walked towards the pathway formed of bright light ahead of us, leading us home.

3rd Place: The Fork In The Road

Blossom Miller

I have a road. Everyone has a road. But not all roads are the same. However, I didn't know that back then.

* * *

I was running through the bushes. Chasing him. Until he finally stopped - collapsing on the ground with exhaustion and laughter. We walked a bit more, having fun like always, until I said that I needed to head home. He paused, looked shocked and ran out of the trees shouting "See you later!"

I never understood why he never took me to his house, nor showed me to his parents. To me he was a mystery waiting to be solved.

* * *

It was school time. I did this every day. But *this* wasn't a normal day. I got to school

looking around for him, the busy crowd engulfing me. My vision was blocked by many tall children standing in groups chatting about a new iPhone, or Xbox or bragging about how big their houses were. I might have joined in if he was there, but then... he doesn't have any of it...

I snapped out of it, suddenly alert, rushing around panicking wondering where he was. He wasn't there all day. I was starting to get worried. In his whole life he had never been absent. Every day I offered to walk home with him but he always said no. I couldn't go to his house to find him. I didn't know where he lived. It hit me in an instant. My best idea yet. I knew it. I sprinted down the corridors past many teachers nagging at me to slow down. I threw the lady in the office aside and found his name on student files.

'Ajay Waters'... Location : Forest... House : homeless...

Five teachers had to drag me off the keyboard, sobbing and crying. How could I have been so stupid. His clothes. His non - existent house. *HE* wasn't as fortunate as me... I had been so selfish, showing off and all that. Everyone else who is actually sane would have realized way before me.

* * *

The next day I woke up like it was a normal day. But then I remembered. Yesterday after I found out, they sent me home in a state of grief and depression. Also after I got home, I found out my mum got fired from her job. I guess if you boast, there really are consequences. I knew I would find out some way. I learnt the hard way...

My mum didn't send me to school the next day, said I was too upset to focus. I didn't mind, he probably didn't go either. Instead of going to school I wandered the woods we used to

wander together. I didn't even know if he had parents. All I knew was that I *needed* to help him. I suddenly realized that I had never known where he lived, so if he was homeless and his location yesterday had been the woods... that meant that he was probably there *now*.

* * *

I walked into the woods breathing heavily. The usually deafening birds fluttered away. Maybe scared that I would hurt them like I had hurt him. I had only been in here with him, relying heavily on my memories of us.

The familiar trees waved and wondered in the absence of him...my best friend. I saw him dancing around me in a silvery mist and my five year old self joined in. Five years ago, in this spot we had summoned the fairy gods. The mist swirled and fluttered like fairies. I laughed. Hastily, remembering that he wasn't there. I must keep looking.

After years of being in these woods every day, I knew them

like the back of my hand. Or so I thought. Immediately, I found a small den-like thing but it looked like it hadn't been inhabited in ages. I spent hours looking through the woods but all I found was a rabbit burrow. I returned late at night after a full day of looking with no luck. I thought my mum was going to be worried and at home, but she wasn't there. The only thing there was, was a note saying 'going to find a job, find food in the fridge.'

Now I knew what it felt like to be alone. Never in my life had I been alone. I had always been surrounded by praise and money. Every day when I got home, Mum was always there. With cake and food. Now all I had was cold broccoli and stale crisps. I curled up on the sofa. Cold. On the arm chair. cold. I was well and truly alone. Like him. Like the boy who I thought I knew. Like the boy I hurt. Like the boy I wanted back.

* * *

Now my road is as rugged and rutted as his road. Now I have a fork in my road and I'm going to make the *right* choice and try to help people. Because you never know if someone is knocking at your door but you're just ignoring them. I learnt *that* the hard way as well.

* * *

I have a road. We all have a road. But not everyone's roads are the same. I know that now. I'm not going to make the same mistake again.

Highly Commended: The Many Roads

Sophia Coville

I sailed across the sea as the sky darkened. While the clouds became dark grey, the waves grew bigger and bigger. Water poured onto the deck of the ship. My heart skipped a beat. The waves grew so big that it towered over the small sail on the tiny wooden boat. I was frozen in fear. The waves swallowed me up in one bite. The sail snapped on my boat and flipped over while I plunged into the icy water. I fought to swim up but every time I went up the waves pushed me back under. The air left my lungs.

I woke up, panting. It was just a nightmare. "Jim come on, you are going to miss your dentist appointment," called out my mum. I quickly scrambled out of bed. I totally forgot about my dentist appointment. Mum would be mad at me if I missed my slot especially since this was a new place that we were trying out. My mum doesn't like to set a bad impression in their minds. I brushed my teeth and ran outside to our grey Volkswagen. I did not even eat my toast! That was how late I was! Mum was already in the car waiting for me. "It's about time!" mum said crossly. I said nothing as I would have upset her if I replied so instead I just put on my seat belt and pulled at the loose strings on my shirt. I hated when she got angry at me.

Now before we continue let me tell you that this is a time before sat-nav (I know that's hard to believe) so we had to use a map and I was terrible at reading maps. Got that? Ok now we can continue. Wait. One more thing you need to know is that we had just moved to a small town in the countryside after my dad had died and when I say just moved I mean we have literally just moved here a couple of days ago so we do not know the roads or anything. My dad used to be amazing at navigating and driving (my mum not so much) but now everything has changed. Now we can continue and I mean it this time.

The dentist office was miles away! The car started to move. "Take a right turn here and then a left turn here and then another left turn here." I guessed. After about ten minutes, we were totally lost physically and mentally. Just like my dream. Lost without my dad. "I hope we are almost there. Your dentist appointment is in five minutes," she said, hoping that if she turned the corner they would be there. However when we made that turn, the dentist was not there. In fact nothing was there, just a long winding road. As I said this was the countryside so there were fields on either side. That was what it was like here. There was just one narrow road (just enough to fit one car) and there were massive fields on either side. Of course it was not just a field. No, that would be silly, so it was lined with a prickly, overgrown hedge around the side. The grass was as green as it could possibly be. There was cattle in them. Some were sleeping, some were grazing on the grass and others were just standing around having a chat (not in human language of course.) "I cannot do this without your dad!" she shouted slamming on the car horn. Suddenly, sadness engulfed me as I remembered how easy it used to be to get to the shops or to the dentist. Tears welled in my eyes. After a few seconds, she pulled the car over. Opening the car door, she got out of the car and took a deep breath. "Jim, come out here for a minute." I listened to what she said. Stepping out of the car, a cold breeze of air slapped against my face. "And bring out the map please." she requested in a gentle, calming voice. I grabbed the paper map and rushed out to where she was standing. "Can I have that?" she asked, "Yes." I replied while handing it over. My mum showed me how to read the map a little bit better and after a little while we were back in the car.

You know the twisting and turning road that they were on. You remember I told you that? I certainly hope you do. Anyway, back to the story.

Onwards and onwards we went through many twisting roads that we thought were never going to end. We went down some short straight ones and then we went down medium straight roads. Basically, every road we drove through was different and after what seemed like forever, we made it to the dentist.

It turns out that I did not miss my dentist appointment. I was actually early and you know how I told you that I was terrible at reading a map and that my mum was not that good at driving? Well, it happens that I was wrong at both things.

Highly Commended: Cat of Stardust

Amber Xin Ti Wang

The stars glimmered set into the blue marble of the setting sky, as they had always done in myriads of colours over millennia past. Blues and pinks, all blended together into a regal haze. Rising from the horizon, a gilt silver snake meandering across picturesque rolling hills, was something that could only be described as a stairway, yet as soon as you saw its stairs, became flat and spacey, and turned into a railway- or when you thought that it was indeed a railway, it smoothed out again and became a faint road.

No human did see that listless trail of white light spiralling up into the sky- no human, no animal. Except for Nova.

Nova's step was light as a feather, her whiskers thin as a thread or a human hair, her eyes a mix of soft marble grey and deep navy blue. Her coat was bluish white, her soft pads punctuated with sharp claws extended in hooked fashion., all of which made her an easy-sight to see basking in patches of catnip and sunbeams.

In the night, when Nova stalked her prey, chasing through fields of wild-flowers after a darting tail or a flap of wings, she was invisible. Night folded around her, gave her a natural coat to wear, made her pounce silent, her ears velvety and sharp.

Waking up anywhere where Nova's pursuits of prey had brought her in the mornings, sleeping at night only when she had eaten and her belly was full, Nova lived quite a few happy years on Earth as a wild-cat.

One warm Spring night, when Nova was contemplating the idea of becoming a flight-enabled cat (those dastardly finches had been laughing at her from the skies) , her eyes strayed up into that brilliant canopy of stars, when they caught sight of the pathway afore mentioned, and she sprung at the road.

Those finches will have been lying to me- she thought. *They probably have been hiding in their own little celestial tree-branch , for all I know.* Hind legs kicking off from the ground, a repressed strength reverberating from her launch, Nova felt the fur on her hind legs bristle, the wind around her pick up, as she lifted both front paws and landed on the road.

Moving her head side to side, aware that a mob of jeering birds could set in upon her at any moment, Nova tread softly on the starry path. She recalled to that afternoon, when, having caught sight of a clump of finches nesting, Nova had had the courtesy to not eat the birds, for that would be rather impolite. They? Well, they screeched and jeered and pelted her with acorns they had most likely stolen from the squirrels. Impudent.

Even so, Nova mewed with pleasure at the light grit of the dust beneath her pads as she sprung from one glittering patch to another. She thought, *this is better than catnip.* And somehow, as she frolicked her way up the dome of the sky, Nova felt like that path had been made for her, even though, as a small voice in the back of her noggin reasoned, *I will most likely come across some other group of oh-so-high finches and they'll say it's their road. Ah, well.*

With a whoosh and a bang, something , something solid and gritty, smashed straight into Nova's back and sent her cartwheeling through the sky, falling, falling, falling from her unstable position on the stardust road, until she landed with a sickening crunch that told of innumerable broken bones.

Pain.

Red, blinding Nova, making her vision blurry, her mewl half-choked, that pain which seared through her back like a million blades stabbing at her all at once, like something furious. She had no recollection of when or how she fell asleep, but when she awoke, it was under that comforting blanket of Night.

Her back, aching as before hindered her, made her unable to hunt, and only able to reach a nearby shrub of black-berries. She had to consume something, after all. And she slept. There was almost nothing else to do, but sleep, eat , recover . When she attempted to fall into sleep, she would dream of the path, the light star-filled path, that crunchy surface, that glittering stream. Oh how she desired to leap among the stars, perhaps to some distant land of comfort, some land full of fields where she could lie unperturbed by finches and unharassed by broken backs.

How often did she dream of this vanishing path? This road which with every passing night became fainter to Nova's eyes? Why reader, every time she fell into disturbed sleep, of course.

You must know that Nova recovered, that she went back to an age-long feud with the finches. But when she paused in her day to sniff clumps of catnip, or to gaze longingly up at the sky, Nova's thoughts often trickled back to that luminous road. A road which could have led her Somewhere, anywhere.

Years passed.

Years, with the autumnal leaf falling every turn, the bursting of lilac buds signalling the coming of spring, an onset of snow declaring Winter's arrival. Nova, aged and bent, saw again the road in her dreams. When she awoke one night, decades later from her first encounter with the road, it was there, beckoning. Almost instinctively, she pursued the shining trail up into the skies.

We shall not follow her there, for it was her dream and heart . Reader, you too must leave this page, as Nova has, and venture to the stars, no matter what they are. The stars, dear reader, illuminate all of our own roads- so at this we shall collect all of our wanderings and conclude this tale.

Commended: Storm At Sea

Miles Timmis

December 1606

It was a wonderful day to be by the sea. As snow fell, everyone fell silent as Nathaniel Peacock's father stepped forward to christen Master Thomas Smythe's ship, *Discovery*. "God bless ye and all who sail within ye!" Nathaniel's father prayed. While everyone said "The Lord's Prayer", nine-year old Nathaniel noticed his naughty cat, Storm, edging closer to the ship. The mouse Storm was chasing leapt aboard, and Storm followed. In a panic, Nathaniel jumped aboard to retrieve Storm.

"Storm, stop!" Nathaniel cried out as he pursued Storm down to the hold.

Suddenly, he heard the trap door close, the shrill sound of a bosun's whistle and the command, "Hoist the main sail!" Alone in the dark, Nathaniel felt lonely and helpless. Storm came close and fell to sleep on Nathaniel's lap.

After a frustrating week in the hold, the trap door finally re-opened, and someone came in. Nathaniel jumped to his feet. "What's this?" the sailor bellowed. Nathaniel and Storm were taken to the Captain. "Stowaways," the Captain said. "John Smith," he extended his hand. "Nathaniel Peacock, sir, and Storm. We didn't mean to go to sea." Nathaniel explained. "Well, you're headed to America now." Captain Smith beamed.

It took 5 months to get across the rough Atlantic Ocean, the road to the new world. When they arrived, they were all relieved, starving and ill. Kindness came to them in the form of a little Powhatan girl called Pocahontas. She brought food and provisions for them every day. They all wished they had something to give her in return to say, "Thank you."

Pocahontas had never seen a cat before and she fell in love with Storm. Watching her with Storm, Nathaniel knew what he should do. He decided to give Pocahontas his precious cat. Smiling, she gave Nathaniel Storm's silver collar, as a reminder.

July 1607

Nathaniel returned to England on the *Susan Constant*, it returned with a load of timber from the new world. As Nathaniel stood outside the gates of Westenhanger Castle, he was so happy to be back home. He ran swiftly to the Vicarage to find his parents. He found them in the garden. His mother ran to hug him, as she burst into tears. "Nathaniel!" shouted his father.

The next day was a dull, misty morning. Nathaniel silently tiptoed into the Castle, climbed the wet steps of the Tower, drips of water fell to the ground and echoed around him. He clambered on, up the steep steps. Suddenly, he saw a dull light up ahead. He saw a door, stepped through it and spied a gap in the wall. He looked through it to make sure it wasn't hollow.

Thoughtfully, he pulled from his pocket the old telescope Captain Smith had given him. Inside it he put his ship's papers and the tiny, silver collar that had once belonged to Storm. He carefully place it inside the gap between the stones, imagining one day it would be a treasure found by a child just like him.

Commended: Are We Nearly There Yet
Alanna Malhotra

“Are we nearly there yet?”

Silence. No person moved. Everyone in the car was pretending not to have heard and to be absorbed in the picturesque and not so picturesque scenes that lay on the other side of the car doors. At the time the question had been asked, there was a vast field full of yellow rapeseed.

“Are we nearly there yet?” came the persistent whine from the back seat of the car.

“Oh, be quiet,” said Ed, the girl’s brother, not moving anything but his mouth.

The whining was coming from Angelina, the youngest child in the family. There were two parents and three children (although four if you count the dog). Ed was the eldest of the children, and the only boy. He was quite short for his age but the height was made up for by the width of his waist. The middle child was called Julia, and she was by far the nicest of the three.

It was half term and the children were going on holiday. The three children always loved the holidays, but not the travelling to get there. This time the problem was that the journey from their house in Leeds to the Cotswolds was too long. Julia was looking forward to the holiday greatly as she had never been to the Cotswolds before but had been told that it was brilliant.

“Come on, stop whining,” Ed had said after the fifteenth moan had come. “You could earn yourself a world record for the most whining in four hours. Actually, more like a universe record, if that’s even a thing.”

Julia laughed to herself. Something bad is going to happen, she thought.

And it did.

The action seemed to move in stages. First, Angelina gritted her teeth and she lowered her eyebrows. Then, her breathing sped up. Finally, Angelina’s face went purple with rage, and she suddenly punched Ed, smack-bang on the nose.

“Bull’s eye,” she whispered, and started to calm down.

Julia was enjoying herself a lot. She knew that whenever Angelina hurt anybody, they would always fight back, not wanting to be beaten by a small person that should be respecting their elders. Ed, therefore, did not calm down. All he did was do the opposite. He, as well as being dreadfully hurt, was now angry too.

Oh no, Julia thought. This is not good. She, from her past experience, had found out that an angry brother was not good. But angry and injured was even worse.

Julia quickly shut her eyes and fell limp, just as she would if she was asleep. That way maybe she wouldn't get hit or punched. If it worked for snakes, it might just work for me, she thought.

Slowly, Julia's eyes began to close, and the shouts and screams of "ow" and "he pinched me" grew softer and softer until they were not there anymore.

Julia opened her eyes to find herself in a room, a very large room, with very large walls, not like the car at all, very spacious with blue metallic walls and fairy lights on the walls. The next thing she saw was a microphone, with Angelina standing behind it. Then Julia spotted a lady with a badge that said "GUR". It had a star on the arc of the U, as if it was lying down inside it.

"What does 'GUR' stand for?" asked Angelina.

"Oh, this," said the lady, "this stands for 'Guinness Universe Records'."

So it's true, Julia thought, there is such a thing as a universe record.

Then the weirdest thing happened. Angelina started to whine again. "Are we nearly there yet, are we nearly there yet, are we nearly there yet?" The weird thing was, she was saying it incredibly quickly.

"This must be what Ed was talking about," Julia said, without thinking that she was interrupting Angelina, which was against the rules.

"Julia," shouted Angelina, "you've just ruined my life. I could have got the universe record and earned millions of pounds, then I wouldn't have to slave away with years of maths homework."

Angelina started to glide towards Julia, an angry expression on her face, and then –

"Julia, wake up, you lazy thing. We're in the Cotswolds."

They were. All Julia could see were the green fields and a meadow full of flowers.

"How long was I asleep for?" Julia asked.

"Only about three hours," Angelina replied, laughing a little. What do you mean *only* three hours, Julia wanted to ask, but decided to keep her mouth shut.

"Now it's just a short walk to the lodging," said their dad.

After the family had gathered up their possessions and had been walking for a few minutes in silence, Angelina said something.

"Are we nearly there yet?"

Commended: The Quest

Charis Chan

The frosty air chilled me to my bones, nipping me like a ferocious dog. I wrapped my coat tighter around my trembling shoulders. The tunnel was ancient, fingers of dust curled around my neck, choking me.

Last week, Old Master Wong explained the perilous situation facing Atlantis. The legendary bridge of illusion, which protected the citizens had been attacked, rendering merfolk powerless and hopeless. The only way the spell guarding the secret city could be resealed was for the descendant of the of Five to go and retrieve the Stone of Merlin, which was lodged Orredon, guarded by the Mystics.

It was because this threat I was shuffling my way through the Road of Erised's tunnel alongside my soul sisters, Lina, Henri, Juliette and Bella. "Lina, what do you sense?" I asked questioningly.

"Nothing currently." came the soft response. Lina's face, which bore sightless, clouded eyes, tilted towards me.

We plodded on, dragging our tired tails across the hard, cemented floor. I fidgeted with my moonstone necklace, it was the talisman of Nia one of the creators of the bridge of illusion. Juliette's voice broke into my train of thought, "Are you alright, Nora?"

"Yes", I replied, my voice thick with weariness. Then, descending into eerie silence, I pondered our road to either victory or failure.

It was Lina who broke the silence. "Merls, there are swamp ghosts along the way: draw your weapons. I sense hundreds of them, coming back with bitter vengeance." she said her voice tinged with worry. With a metallic clang, Bella drew her weapon: a shimmering sword studded with emeralds. We followed her; Juliette unsheathed her sword, Henri drew her mace, I retrieved my bow and arrow and Lina pulled out her bag of Deter Pellets.

Sucking in my breath, I readied myself for the swarms of ghosts. It did come without the slightest hint of warning. Silvery transparent bodies lunged at us, resentful. Henri's mace whirled in the water and hit home: instantly five ghosts toppled onto the sandy floors. This prompted us to raise our weapons and charge. Suddenly, a savage ghost with a gaunt face, displaying a set of hollow, vicious eyes caught me by surprise. She launched herself on me, trying to rip my necklace off me. Telepathically, I bellowed at Bella *Ayúdame hermana* which was Spanish for help me, sister. I could feel Bella thinking, and knew help was on its way. Quick as a flash, she swiped at my ghost; her aim was true. The phantom screeched, attempting to deflect the blow, yet, she was in vain: she tumbled onto the floor, unconscious.

"Thanks, sis." I exclaimed, slapping my tail against Bella's.

"No problem." she responded weakly, for she had suffered several gashes along her tail. " One down, one to go."

Mentally, I made a note *Halfway through the Road of Erised, one half to go.*

We swam through the suddenly murky depths of the sea, clinging on to each other's hands and forming a chain of mermaids with unswerving expressions. Light was beginning to dim; we were planning to take sanctuary in the abode of Celestite, the keeper of knowledge. We were greeted by steaming tureens of food, a heavenly aroma and the wise face of Celestite herself.

The following morning, we ventured out to the abysses of the deep. We were to face the Mystics who were the guards to the Stone of Merlin, the trinket we desperately needed to ensure the safety of Atlantis. In order to successfully claim the amulet, one must pass a test

given by the Mystics. Old Master Wong's warning clear in my head: *Only the noble and pure hearted can possess the charm. Those who choose evil will suffer a slow, painful death. Beware, for the gods, whose wisdom is found in the Stone of Merlin, are always watching.* Soon, we had arrived. The second our tails swished through the waters of the abyss, three slender, resplendent figures appeared, their eyes piercing and sharp. "What brings you here? " asked one of them, her voice like dripping honey, though it had a thoroughly concealed edge to it.

"We seek the Stone of Merlin, and wish to claim of it for the sake of Atlantis, which is in danger." replied Henri boldly.

"Very well." answered the second Mystic, intensity of the expression in her eyes bore into my soul, like an X-Ray.

The three Mystics circled us, like a school of catfish ready to lunge for its prey.

Then, a Mystic spoke, "What is the lightest treasure?"

The words courage, compassion, love and friendship were uttered, but none of them were the right answers. Casting my mind back to the Halls of Knowledge, I saw the answer, glimmering as clearly as crystal.

"It's wisdom." I said. The Mystics' faces flickered with shock, then regained their stiff composure.

"Correct." they said in unison .

They snapped their fingers and the precious Stone of Merlin stood in the middle of the room. The stone emitted a dazzling light, causing me to shield my eyes. It was a smooth, pearly stone with a jagged edges, sitting serenely in a satin cushion, woven out of seaweed and coral reef. Levitating into the air, it was still stubbornly perched on its velvet seat. It hovered for a moment, then zoomed towards us.

"You have deemed yourself worthy of this stone. It holds great powers; it only functions for the noble and true, evil shall not triumph over good." the Mystic said. Her eyes raked over me carefully, "None have succeeded in taking the Stone from its vault."

They began to intone in a solemn voice:

O great ones of Atlantis,
give strength in dark times.

Prevail over evil, reject the sins,
cleanse your hearts of all darkness.

Atargatis, hear me out,
I bound their magic tight and hard.
May their spirit and soul serve for the righteous,
succeed and rise to the thrones of justice!

Commended: The Road To Life

Abigail Lau

Here's a theory. Everyone has a road. Some are straight some are wiggly. Some collide with others and some are faded at the beginning, where your memory has disappeared. Some are loop the loops and some are tied in knots where it gets a bit confusing.

Somewhere, two roads are colliding. They stay together for miles. Then, they diverge, but parts are still stuck together. They meet other roads, and once, even almost graze each other again. At the very end, they are together when they fade from existence.

I hesitated at the gates, and gulped. I wished that I had my mum with me. My heart was twisted in knots as I took my very first steps into school.

There was a little girl in my year in Year 1. She was alone on the playground when I found her crying. I gave her a tissue and told her it would be alright. She gave me a small hesitant smile. Her name was Emma.

We became best friends and shared everything from our sweets to our darkest, deepest secrets. Every moment we could, we played handstands, wrote stories and made origami.

We even scared ourselves by creeping into the haunted lair of the school ghost hound, and played pranks on each other by sticking homemade slime into each other's pockets.

We went on long, sweltering hot hikes and made up our own confusing detours, stopping for shared sweets and treats along the way, and not bothering to wash our sticky hands afterwards.

But then everything changed.

I left Hong Kong. I was going to the other side of the world, and I was going to leave the place I had lived in for my whole life. Even Emma.

After settling down, I messaged Emma like I promised we would. It turned out she was online, and soon, we were chatting away like we normally would at school, but different. I felt a bit disconnected, like something big was missing in this form of communication. A missing puzzle piece, as some books I had read sometimes said. Maybe I was just missing her. I went to bed.

On my first day at my new school, I was determined to make some new friends, settle in and do my best. I bounded through the gates. Then, at that very moment, my heart dropped into the large ravine of my dislocated stomach. I gripped the straps of my schoolbag tightly and squeezed my eyes shut, wishing that my best friend was at my side to comfort me and go through this with me together.

Just like that, I started school and life in the UK. I still kept in contact with Emma but still had that small feeling that just messaging her wasn't enough, so I started video calling her. This cast away a bit of that unsettling thing in there, but it still wasn't enough.

On my first birthday in the UK, I invited some friends from my new school to my party. I wished that Emma was able to come, and even sent her an invitation, though of course, she could not come. I had a fun time at the trampoline park, but could not help imagining her laughing along with all my other friends.

The months went by, and soon one and a half years passed, when one day my phone buzzed. Emma was trying out for the school I was in! I almost jumped in joy! For hours on end, we studied hard, sharing techniques and swapping ideas. She was determined to get in and I hoped beyond hope that she would.

The result slammed into me with force. She had not. It took one whole month to process the fact that she would not be coming. I still ploughed on through the ever-resisting wind that

had already shattered my hopes of being reunited with my friend. It was one of the biggest moments of my life.

Then? Then, we lost connection. That big moment was the last spark of flame before only the glowing embers remained and then even that was gone. Eventually, the messages stopped altogether. Not even a small, "Hi."

On my graduation day, I thought back to all my memories and remembered Emma. All those events in my life had made me forget about her. I don't know why, but suddenly, I desperately wanted to talk to her, but I could find no way.

I was employed by a space company, and to my surprise there was a person named Emma on the list with me.

The first time I met this new Emma, I realised she was nothing like the Emma I had as my best friend. We started with small talk like, "The weather looks interesting." And, "Hello. How are you?" Then, we asked each other more personal questions. We clicked like puzzle pieces.

Like a long forgotten memory, I hoped beyond hope. I asked, "What school did you go to?" She politely replied. I hardly dared to speak. Could it be? The thought seemed so far away but it was shaping into reality. I looked at the Emma in front of me. Did she suspect a thing? Surely this was all a dream?

I looked again. She was smiling and in that smile came the small smile I had seen on the first day of school.

I asked her if she had a friend named Abigail. She seemed stunned and whispered, "Is it you?"

I threw myself into her arms as joy touched our faces which widened into broad smiles. We had found each other again. Our roads had collided once more.

Commended: Waiting
Summer Hsieh

Helen was alone again. Her father was always late from his job at the farm, leaving her by herself in her small, dingy house. As Helen waited, she swept the floor, which was always coated in dust, and scrubbed the dining table, which was always dirty from the last meal. After Helen cooked dinner, she sat at the table and stared at a small, grimy picture tucked under the windowsill: a picture of her mother. Helen had never known her. She had left right after she was born, and Helen hadn't seen her since. Countless times Helen had asked her father about her, but instead of answering, his expression would become heartbroken and he would turn away. After a few years, Helen had learned that asking was a waste of time. But she had always dreamed of finding her mother again.

As soon as she turned six, Helen was burdened with the responsibility of a woman. She had lived six years of this life, and could bear it no longer. Every night, alone in bed, Helen would yearn for a nice, simple life, with both of her parents, enough money to spend, and a sibling so she wouldn't be lonely again. So that night, Helen gathered her belongings, and left the house to bring her family together again.

It was cold and windy. Helen trudged downhill towards the only telephone booth for miles around. Her hair whipped in her face as she made her way down slowly. In her mind, she was repeating the only information she had: her mother's name, Eugenie. Since it was not a common name, Helen figured it would not be hard to find.

Once inside, Helen traced her finger down the list of people that lived nearby.

"Evans..." Helen murmured. The only sounds were the wind lashing against the window and her own frantic heartbeat.

At last...

With trembling fingers, she copied the address onto a small slip of paper, and stepped back into the night.

Helen had to admit, it was strange having to find her own mother. It was even stranger that she was on her way to meet her mother for the first time. Helen didn't even know her face! No matter what, she had to be prepared. Her heart had to be.

She stood on the edge of a steep hill. Below her spread a city, its boundaries stretched farther than Helen could see. Helen had never seen a city before. It seemed big, too big for Helen's liking.

Determined, Helen descended. Whatever it took, she **would** find her mother, and they **would** become the family she had dreamed of.

Helen wandered through the grey streets and roads with a nervous clench in her heart. She had never crossed busy streets before, and had a big fright when a giant car zoomed past her, narrowly missing her face, and honking loudly at her. Helen hurried past apartments and buildings, the sky above her a hazy grey from smoke billowing out of a giant tower built close by. Helen gagged and coughed, the pollution making its way into her lungs, making breathing difficult.

Every so often, Helen checked the numbers of her mother's address.

As she found it, her heartbeat thumped.

Helen gasped. Her eyes welled with tears as she stared at the large impressive mansion, nestled right in the heart of the city. High fences surrounded the place, roping off the area. But Helen couldn't process what she was looking at. It didn't make any sense.

“Hey!” Helen turned towards the voice. Running across the pavement, was a girl dressed all in black and holding a garbage bag.

“Who are you? This is a restricted area. You have no business here!” The girl sneaked a look at Helen’s clothes. Helen glanced down too. She was wearing her street clothes: a brown dress. Clearly, Helen’s clothes weren’t appropriate around this mansion.

“Who are you?” the girl repeated, edging her fingers towards something black hanging from her waist. It was connected to an earpiece.

“Who lives here?” Helen asked.

“I’m warning you—”

Helen somersaulted right over the fence. It wasn’t hard; she’d practised jumping over small trees.

The girl screamed into her wrist: “Unauthorised girl inside!”

Instantly, a pair of guards marched from behind the mansion. Patrol guards on duty? Helen barely had time to think before the two guards grabbed her arms and tried to restrain her. Helen bit one of them and slipped between them as they lunged at her, but Helen was faster. She dodged them and ran across the pavement, towards the door. The guards raced after her. Helen seized the doorknob and tugged at it, but it wouldn’t budge.

“Come on...” Helen gritted her teeth and pulled harder, but the guards were already blocking the way out. In identical movements, the guards placed their knees on Helen, pinning her down. As Helen struggled, trying to throw them off, the door opened. Two other guards flanked the doorway, looking down upon them.

“Take her inside.”

The guards hauled Helen to her feet, keeping their distance from her teeth.

“Let go!” Helen squirmed.

“Take her to the Lady for interrogation.”

“Who’s the Lady? What’s her name?” Helen demanded, as she was dragged along. “By any chance, is her name Eugenie Evans?”

Everyone froze.

“Who **are** you?” hissed the guard holding her.

“I’m her daughter,” Helen said.

“No way,” he muttered.

“Take me to her,” Helen ordered. “She will confirm.”

Her mother’s mansion was as grand as a palace. A royal red carpet was laid on the bare floor. Paintings lined the walls. They passed dozens of rooms, with polished bronze doors and elaborate golden etchings. Just when Helen was about to ask when they would arrive, they reached the topmost level and halted at an extremely impressive door. The guards stood to attention as the doors swung open. And there, Helen set her eyes on the mother she had been waiting for her entire life.

Commended: Sat Tyre

Olivia Miller

Prologue

Home is an interesting thing. What is home? Is home a place made of brick and wood? Or a place where you can come back to? Many people argue about this one question, what it means and what they want it to mean. I found the answer the hard way. My way.

Chapter 1

We are on a family trip; Dad is humming, Mum is busily reading the map, May and Sam are kicking and shoving each other. And just like the grey streets that pass by the house, everything is exactly the same. I sigh and watch as the world around me turns and turns again. But just as I start to enjoy the warm sun, a sharp stone appears suddenly on the road. POP! FFFPPPTTttttt....

“What happened Dad?”

“The tyre seems to have popped!”

“Egh! Steve get a new one from the back! Stupid pebble on the road!” “When will we get there!!!!!!”

I watch as the family bickers and shouts. To be fair I don't mind it so much- I feel deflated and tired- all I really want is to get back home. So I decide to wait. And wait. And wait some more, until May says something that struck me like lightning to a tree.

“Let's just leave the tyre and go! Come on, it's fixed!”

Just like that, my family left me. Just like that, the cold streets were all that I could see. Just like that, I was alone. I hobble down the street with my rubber being dragged along like a long, black robe, unsure what just happened. After that I don't know how long I traveled for. Maybe only a few minutes. Maybe hours. All I know is that it was dark by the time I got to a pump. I press the button on the screen and it asks me for £1.50.

Hmmm £1.50? I have only heard of things like that (I think people call it money) but I've never actually seen it. Puzzled, I look around to see if it might be hiding somewhere.

This proves quite hard with my flat rubber being a stubborn burden, making me stagger as I search. JACKPOT!!!! Two coins with £1.00 and 50p engraved in it were placed on top of the pump screen and I happily inserted them into the coin slot. *But who would have left their money (I think that's what it's called) just on the pump?*

Suddenly I hear a noise that catches my attention.

“Hey, why did you leave your change on the pump?” “Well, you'll never know who'll need it.”

I smile a long rubbery smile and pick up the pump.

I feel the air breathe me back to life and I roll over to a bench to think about my situation.

Why did they leave? Where am I? Where should I go? Home? Do I still have a home?

Questions whizz around my head like a racing car doing flips. I look over at the cold stone path half hidden with moss, half hidden with things meant to be left unknown. *Well, I thought, I guess that's where I'm going first.*

Chapter 2

It is early morning when I get to a strange city overflowing with towering glass buildings. Neon signs clash with the bright morning sun and I have to squint to see properly. Huge, oversized metal beasts twice the size of my car zoom past the accompanying grey streets. As they do this, they sing out a low humming sound that back-tracks the loud stampede of feet that constantly stomp on the slowly crumbling concrete. I have never seen anything like it. *What is this place?*

Before I could even think about this a foot lurches over and I have to quickly swerve out of the way. This city is big. This city is dangerous. And this city sure is intimidating. All I feel like doing is rolling away. Rolling away as fast as I can. But a strange force keeps me stuck to the spot like melted bubblegum. I look solemnly at the road winding into the horizon. *I don't have a choice.*

The noise only gets louder as I weave my way through the sea of charging bodies storming to and fro to what seems like nowhere. *Where are they in such a rush to go?* At least they have a *somewhere*. I have nowhere. I shift into an alleyway and, making sure I haven't been noticed, I gaze into the sky. It's clear- pure and (even over the roar of the city) I can hear the faint song of a blackbird.

Chapter 3

I roll down the pathways idly, looking for somewhere, just *somewhere* to go. Then I spot a long, rectangular building with a looking glass tower at the end. *Maybe I could live there?* Two men open the door and I swiftly slide in. A great hall of green sprawled with men and women in bulky suits that were so grey that it neutralized the bright emerald green. I watch closely as they take to their seats. A man stands up and clears his throat. I lean in. Intrigued. "... V DGN JOF!!!"

"GTBETS ANMOLL!!!!!"

"KKJHGFYHBCDZZEFG!!!!!"

I jerk backwards at the great rage of the people. "YHGF BJJ JKNC!!!!!"

A bolt of words hit me once again and I can't help but wince. The hollering bounces from one side of the room to the other like a ping pong game, but none of it makes sense.

Like they're shouting over... *nothing*. I shake off the thoughts and leave. These people don't seem too homey and I'm getting itchy feet.

When I get outside, it's raining. I've been through so much, but one question is still not answered. *Where is home?* I smile at the long road winding into the sun-lit horizon. *Now I know.* Home is where the road takes me.

The End.

Inspired by the song: 'Take me home, country road.'

Commended: The Road

Anya Englis

The road is always empty, only filled with dust and more. It was always haunted, by a ruby-red dragon called Sophia. No one dared going on the road, as she was as fierce as a god. Her ruby-like scales always shimmered and glittered during the sunlight hours. In the evening, her red scales turned a midnight blue, glimmering in the moonlight. Her scales changed with the day, from the brightest red to the darkest blue. Sophia's fierceness guarded the road, but from what?

Day 1: Preparing to check out what was so bad about this road.

This road has a name; Sophia's Volcanic Road, and many say myths about how there's a dragon named Sophia there. Now, dragons are just a myth, as everyone knows, (except the little kids, they believe they're real) so I'm deciding to pay a visit to the "haunted" road.

Nothing can go wrong, right?

Day 2: I arrived.

I finally arrived, after 16 hours in my caravan. I brought my pet cat to keep my company, Skittles, is his name. I'd be alone for the whole journey, as I had no relatives nearby and none of my friends wanted to come with me. I plan on staying here for a week, as I have my university coming up again in a few weeks' time. I've got important exams coming up. Anyways, I just got outside. There was nothing special, but I loved the roses surrounding the area. It looked so beautiful, why would anyone not come here? There were cherry blossom trees too, but one thing that intrigued me the most out of everything here was the dragon statue. The paint was wearing off, but it was painted in maroon, and was made out of marble. It was still glittering in the light perfectly, but I had so many questions about this statue. Who made it? Why was it here?

Day 3: I brought my cat with me.

Like the title says, I brought my cat with me out on this empty road. Suddenly, I heard a great roar in the distance. I wondered what it was- was the dragon true? Or maybe not, the road was so empty anyways. It might've just been my imagination, as I've been alone for a few days. The road was completely empty, but I only have 4 days left to prove that there's no dragon and that everyone is overreacting. Now, in the middle of the road, I set up a picnic between me and my cat. If I was alone, why not enjoy it? My cat was eating happily, and he looked so happy to be out here, Skittles even loved the air. I loved the red trees all around! Then suddenly, Skittles started meowing cautiously. A loud roar was heard in the distance. What was it? Suddenly, a figure of-

Day 4: What was day 3?

I had passed out yesterday. Luckily, my cat was okay. The last thing I saw was a shadow of a dragon, and a ruby-red actual dragon. Maybe the road was actually haunted by a dragon. Maybe the dragon was just misunderstood about me? No, it had to be my imagination. Right?

Anyways, today, I saw the dragon again. But this time I didn't faint. In fact, I stared back at her. She was glaring at me, with her ruby-red eyes...

I couldn't hold it in. I started to hug Skittles and I cried on the road. I was so sure this was the end of me. This ending was inevitable. I can't escape. I made a foolish mistake. This was the end of my life, tears dripping down, I can't finish the story if I cry too hard- wait, what? It was a friendly dragon? Sophia the dragon was friendly? She looked terrified that I was here. Maybe she just didn't know how to act around huma was soothing. On the other hand, Skittles was absolutely terrified of Sophia. She meowed in fear, which made me have to

soothe her with some treats. She quickly fell asleep. Now, I was in eye contact with the giant beast. And then she burned my hair to a crisp. The end. I'm just joking, I'm still petting her.

Day 5: I befriended... a dragon?

I'm still not used to this dragon just sitting on the road while I sit and read with Skittles. It purrs like a cat, soothingly, and maybe she'll get used to me petting her too. Today, I plan on trying to ride her, as how people ride the dragons in books, movies and whatever there is with dragons. It also seems fun, but I'm scared that I could fall off or Sophia the dragon won't co-operate with me. I hope she does, and maybe I could always visit her again on this same exact road once my week is over. I have to keep her a secret though- poachers, scientists and more might test on her and that'll be a great problem. I really don't want her gone, she's so sweet! (She actually isn't, I just haven't tamed her yet.)

16:07- I'm on her back right now.

I'm trying to teach this dragon how to fly while I'm on her back. Poor Sophia doesn't have a clue on what I'm trying to do, so I might take a break and try this again tomorrow.

Day 6: I taught Sophia how to fly, and Skittles is no longer afraid of her.

Skittles now purrs when she sees Sophia and always is friendly to her. They're like, best friends now? Too bad I can't bring Sophia back home with me. Her home is on this road, and I don't have much to say for this day.

Day 7: Packing away.

Today is the day I leave, and I packed up the caravan and picked up Skittles. I said my final goodbyes to Sophia the red dragon, as I drove off the for the final sixteen hours, back to home.

Commended: A Road Far From Home

Eva Mepham

It was early in the morning, right before dawn when it happened, the country announced that we had to move and become refugees. Despite buildings crumbling to their knees and the sound of crashing bombs, Syria was still home and a place that I would never want to leave. I would do anything to be back snuggling in my bed, my mum kissing me goodnight. Now I don't know if that will ever happen again but I have just got to hope.

My mum, my dad, my brother and I started traveling through Turkey. This was the beginning of a journey along a road which would take me far from home. I would be lying if I told you there were only a few others, but there were seemingly hundreds if not thousands of people trudging alongside us. As I was walking through Turkey, I was already homesick. I missed Syria so much, and knowing I may never go back was the worst feeling ever. After 15 hours straight of just walking, we finally camped at our first stop. Although I was exhausted from travelling, I didn't get much sleep there, I don't think anyone did.

As we were crossing the border through to Bulgaria, I got separated from my family and was forced to travel on my own. I was only 11, I had no clue what to do. I didn't know how to set up a tent, make food and I had no money. The only thing I had left was a teddy that my parents got me when I turned one and I treasured that dearly. I cried every day wondering where my family was and if I would ever see them again.

Still with great utter sadness, I travelled through Serbia and Hungary. My backpack felt as though I was carrying a car on my back, it was extremely heavy. My legs were aching so bad, but I knew that I needed to keep on going no matter what. I tried to distract myself from the fact I was all by myself with no help whatsoever, but it didn't work. I had never felt more alone in my life.

As I followed the road through Switzerland, I was further from home than I had ever been but our final destination was France and so I knew the journey was almost over. These last nights were rough, it was pouring it down with rain, making my tent soggy and wet. Most nights I wouldn't sleep, I would just lay down and think about my memories with my family, they would sometimes make me laugh but mostly cry. I had run out of food, and I didn't have any money, my stomach was roaring with hunger.

This brings me to where I am now, I just stopped in France. I don't know where this journey is going to take me next but I'm alive, I did it! I should be happy, but all I'm thinking about is my family and if they are okay. I believe that one day I will reunite with them and when that happens, I will be over the moon.

Commended: The Road To Acceptance

Jess Andersen

Only some people know what it feels like to have your entire life snatched from you. I am one of those people. Here is my story.

My eyes flashed open and closed again as a bright light entered them. I swung my legs around and pulled myself up. Still groggy, I slumped down the stairs lazily. The sight that I met shook me. Suitcases, ready packed lay against the wall. "Mum!", I shrieked. She bustled in out of breath, "What is it?" "Oh," she said realising what I had seen. "Darling, we must go, must evacuate. Oh sweetheart! We're leaving war." My mouth dropped open.

I ran upstairs and flung myself onto the bed, kicking my feet and punching the pillow- what my grandma would've called a hissy fit. Obviously, I heard the door open and mum creep in but I didn't care. "Darling," she pulled me into a big hug and wiped away my tears with her sleeve. I sniffed and looked at her. "Now how about you get dressed. Everything will be ok."

Once dressed and picked the sleep out of my eye, I realised that my room had been stripped bare. My whole life, put into mere suitcases. I slid down the banister and expertly jumped onto the landing. "Let's go, let's go, let's go," dad stopped singing and looked at me, "If it isn't my favourite son!" "I'm your only son," I said putting on my not-impressed-face and the developing into peals of laughter.

I sat leaning against the side of the car, a wistful expression on my face and my head on my arms. Eventually, we arrived at the airport and sped to security, Dad racing me on the luggage trolley. Giggling, I took off my shoes and got scanned by what my Dad calls a tickling machine but what is actually a security sensor.

Finally, we were actually on the aeroplane. "Oo, I dibs the window seat," I sprinted to seat 3, row 28. "Slow down," Dad shouted half-heartedly. "Mum, Dad, look!" I showed them the accommodation packages that had been left for us.

The rest of the journey was a breeze. Apparently, I practically slept the whole time. When I had woken up, Dad commented that I should join a basketball team when I get to England. According to him if I can dribble with my mouth, why shouldn't I be able to do it with my hands!

We soon arrived and I was pushed around on the luggage trolley yet again with my eyes closed and my head drooping over my knees.

Outside, the cold air hit me like a bomb which is very appropriate for the current circumstances. "Puppy!" I shrieked and ran over to a cocker spaniel. The owner gave me a dirty look and walked off with her head held high. I burst into tears and ran over to Dad. He said, "Let's not worry what snobby people think." I giggled.

I was picked up onto Dad's shoulders and I flung my arm into the air. A taxi screeched to our aid and I hopped inside. I saw the London Eye, the Houses of Parliament and the River Thames on the road to our new place to call home. "I learnt about that wheel in school," I

point at the London Eye. "Good memory," Mum said approvingly. And very soon indeed we were there. A block of flats with the outside appearance of a skyscraper of cottages. Honeysuckle fell down the walls, twisting in with the ivy. "Wow!" I exclaimed.

Many months passed and Dad received a letter telling to report back to Ukraine at once to serve the military. I was too young to know what that meant back then but I knew it must've been bad because at night I could hear Mum's muffled sobs and Dad's muttered words of comfort. I had nightmares about Dad's limp body being carried on a stretcher. Even though my brain was small, my imagination was vivid. The very next day Dad departed us leaving us as wrecks, Mum's mascara running down her red cheeks. "Be strong, Liam." And he left.

A year of silence came between Mum and I. As I turned 8 my birthday wish was for Dad to come home. Games were dull where laughter had been driven away. Not long afterwards, we received another letter similar to the one Dad had received a year ago. This time we were more cautious, expecting the worst. And out the worst came. Dad, dead. In battle. Mum fell right onto the armchair. I sat on her lap, tears pouring out in floods. I guess not everyone gets a happily ever after.

Another month passed and the war was finally history. Mum and I walked sullenly through the airport, remembering how Dad had always described them as an adventure yet to be awaited. I sat on the aeroplane staring at the clouds, each one reminding me of Dad. How he used to play football with me - one in the shape of a ball. How he loved the outdoors - the shape of a tree. I put my head on Mum's shoulder lost in my thoughts. Awaiting us at home was a surprise we could've never imagined. Dad. He greeted us at the front door. "A week ago," Dad explained, "they healed me, I knew you'd be coming back soon so I waited to surprise you."

We embraced, spilling tears, this time for joy.

Category: Poems

1st Place: Travel Along The Seasons' Road Through My Dreams

Esme Alice Blue

first full sun of the year

reflections of mine,

starry windows brighten skies as

I dream of spring nights with a

hot wind on cold cheek,

memories of summer warmth and

harmless peace of spring

in a break of summer the

playful sun whittles

shadows, shapes, skins, shaves and melts the

last of winter frosts

as an

autumn ballerina

when

I dance peacefully

with autumn's balance and grace

like leaves on water

the winter horses

as if they are

skewbald heavy rains,

some dark chestnut mares, warm colours

the winter horses drink.

the wind

wind whips your hair as
winter's waves grow ever great
until it dies down.

drifts

Snow-feathered whiteness
fairy footprints lead us from

nowhere to nowhere.

2nd Place =: The Road
Sanaa Singh

The road...the road...the road, what to say about the road?
Well, it's tar, It's grey, but did you know ...
it is awake?

When everyone is sleeping,
when the children are snoring,
and the parents are scrolling,
and no one is out for a stroll...

When there are no car blinkers,
house light twinklers,
or police patrolling with heed,

One small empty road opens its eyes,
and sings the night away,
until the sun rises,
and leisurely arrives the day.

When everyone is sleeping,
when the children are snoring,
and the parents are scrolling,
and no one is out for a stroll...

For the poor road,
it gets trampled and trampled upon day after day
so, it is important, that a small empty road,
has the chance to sing a song.

A song that's bright.

The road, the road, the road, what to say about the road?
Well ...it is tar...it is grey, but did you know...
it needs a break?

So, when you are out,
late in the night,
listen...listen
can you hear the song?

2nd Place =: The Migration
Tehilla Woolfson

The V faced south,
The birds defended each other,
From the monster.
The monster roared,
With thick black clouds,
And strong hot lightening.
But they kept going.

Past the green fields,
Past the blue lakes,
Their wings ached,
Their eyes stung from the cold bitter wind.
But they kept going.

The young ones groaned,
The old ones creaked,
As they passed wind, rain,
And then a small crack of sun.
But they kept going.

They had to hurry,
Time was running out,
They opened their beaks and drank,
Still flying.
No time to rest,
No time to sleep,
The hunters were looking for prey.
But they kept going.

Through snowstorms,
Through blizzards,
Over thick vast jungles,
They kept on going.
And they got there.

Highly Commended: The Road
Jessica Fuchs

Above the road the moon hung
and I just watched it glisten.
Beside the road the trees swung –
the silence made me listen.

City lights in the distance shone –
they danced in the sky so bright.
The rush hour traffic was almost gone
on this peaceful summer's night.

Through the windscreen all I could see
were fields with horses and sheep:
the stars sparkled above me,
I felt I was ready for sleep.

I turned around a sharp bend,
not knowing where it would roam.
How I wished the journey would end –
please let this be our home!

Commended: One Journey: Many Choices
Elsie Eyre

A life that leads to success,
is a life full of mistakes.
Every choice you make,
could lead to a break.

When you start your journey,
the roads are clear.
But as you get older,
you start to steer.

The roads get busy,
the roads get rough,
and when you come to a roundabout,
the decision is tough.

Which way do I go?
Left, or right? High or low?
Which way do I choose?
I cannot stop, I can't refuse.

What would happen,
if I choose a direction.
I could summon a dragon,
or cause rejection.

But at the end of the day,
you are what you choose.
And the decisions you make,
are what make you, you.

Commended: The Road
Alexandra Potter

The moon hung proudly in the sky,
And bathed me in a pool of light.
The fox I saw it, it looked so sly,
And the birds above me took to flight.

In front of me the quiet road lay,
Surrounded by fields of green.
From the road I dared not stray,
Escaping the place where I had been.

Darkness fell and obscured my sight,
Breathless fear took hold of me.
Suddenly, the day became night,
And the road ahead, I could hardly see.

Commended: The Road
Sienna Richardson

Beneath the moon the long road bends
And never seems to end.
Leaves scattered on the ground
As owls hoot all around.
Ahead of me shines a welcoming light
In the darkness of the night.
Silence falls around,
Frost glitters on the ground.
As I walk nearer to the light
A cottage appears in my sight.
In the garden I sniff the ground
To see if there is supper to be found.

Commended: The Road
Frankie Lindemann

The road has been shut
For a very long time.
About two decades ago, soldiers passed by.
The only thing that's left is an old hut.

Overgrown with grass
We watch grow and grow.
It looks dead, deader than ever.
The only thing that's left is an old hut.

Animals have claimed it.
Yet nobody sees it
As the sun goes down.
Still, the only thing that's left is an old hut.

Nobody remembers it.
It is a forgotten road.
It is old and decayed.
The only thing that's left is an old hut.

The R C Sherriff Trust is an independent charitable trust, established through the terms of the Will of playwright, R C Sherriff. It has been promoting and developing the arts in the Borough of Elmbridge, for 30 years. Further details about the Trust can be found at www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk

Elmbridge Borough Council's Arts Development seeks to increase opportunities for people to engage in the arts, culture and heritage of our Borough, either individually or through partnerships, such as those with the R.C. Sherriff Trust that make Elmbridge Primary Schools Festival possible. With the aim of engaging residents, Elmbridge Borough Council's Art Development supports arts organisations and presents arts-based activities that improve the physical and mental health of people who live and work in Elmbridge.

