



Winning, Highly Commended &
Commended
Entries

11(Secondary)-13 Age Category

The 19th Elmbridge Literary Competition 2024

FAME

Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving.

William Shakespeare

For some, it is a lifetime's pursuit, often slipping through their grasp while others see it fall into their hands by mere chance. However achieved, through talent or luck, Fame, can be an ill-fated prize.

The 19th Elmbridge Literary Competition, run in partnership by The R C Sherriff Trust and Elmbridge Borough Council, asked for short stories and poems on the theme of the double-edged sword that is 'FAME'.

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
2023:	The Road

11-13 STORIES

		Page No
First	Montague Pailthorpe – The Musician and The Devil	4
Second	Sofia Harvey - The River Runner	7
Third	Camille Polyakova - The Net of Fame	10
Highly Commended	Jasmine Baxter - Most People Think I'm Lucky	12
	Florence James - The Tranquility of the Storm	14
Commended	Choksi Khadijah - Lily's Lyrical Journey	16
	Zaaim Chaudhary – The Price of Fame	18
	Finlay Lehunte – The Man on Mars	21
	William Pascoe-Watson – Be Careful What You Wish For	24
	Florence Ritson - The Fall from Fame	27
	Felix Ingle - Final Dance	30
	Olutoni Fasina - A Fame Affair	33
	Yuna Kim - Pride and Doubt	37

11-13 POEMS

First	Elaina Wang - I Am Red, White and Blue	41
Second	Harry Farrow – Fame Is Not A Game	42
Third=	Jet Pariera-Jenks - Reflections of Reality	44
Third=	Thanh Theerapasiri - The Blood Red Carpet	46
Commended	Mary Lane – Leaves/Fame	47
	Ahi Lloyd – Am I Ready For This Day	48
	Libby Harrison - A Name Dripped In Fame	49

Category: Short Stories

1st Place: The Musician and The Devil

Montague Pailthorpe

There was once a passionate musician who, more than anything, loved to play his old father's harp under the old cypress tree just outside his town. Sometimes people passing would stop and listen to him and he always enjoyed sharing his playing with them.

One day, after several visitors had left, he found himself wishing he could play his harp for more people. The more he thought about it, the more the idea started to form; he wanted to share his music and perhaps even become a renowned harpist.

As he started to strum another piece on the aged harp, a tall stranger ambled towards him. The stranger's face was partially covered by the shadow of the tree and a long hood he wore over his head. All he could see was two thin eyes which twinkled red. The stranger spoke with a hushed voice which sounded like the snow falling in winter and the leaves blowing in autumn. The musician shivered despite the warm summer's day.

"What a shame that people aren't listening to your incredible musical talent"

"Do you not wish to play for everyone?"

"Yes, I do`" answered the musician in a hesitant voice.

"Then take this harp; When you play it, you will become the best harpist in the world and everyone will want to hear you" said the stranger in a coaxing voice as he took a glittering gold harp from his charcoal black cloak.

"I am sorry," said the musician "I have no money to pay for this magnificent harp"

"This harp has no price," said the stranger. "Only if you should stop playing it, you will pay dearly."

"That is a reasonable price" Thought the musician. "I will not have to pay anything if I keep this harp"

The musician reached out and took the harp with an eager hand. In his excitement he did not notice that the harp was unusually light for its size. Nor did he see the stranger turn and walk away, leaving hoof prints in his wake.

The next day, the musician took out the golden harp and started to pluck a melodic folk tune. A group of passing peddlers with their wagons stopped and sat down in front of the musician listening intently.

As the hours passed, more and more people stopped to listen to the musician. As the day went on, the small clearing became crowded. When a circus troop travelling out of town stopped, there was no room for them to listen. The musician looked down at the glistening harp and noticed three intricate golden tendrils growing out of it with each passing note. When the music died, the crowd went silent. Then suddenly they burst into applause and the musician was showered with coins and flowers. He laughed for joy as they all cheered him and his harp.

The musician stood up and began to stroll over to his cabin. There were shouts of protest behind him and people began to get up and run after him trying to pull him back to the clearing. He began to run as the crowd of impatient spectators flocked after him. He rushed into his cabin and slammed the door behind himself. He felt a twinge of pain and he looked down at the harp and was horrified to see that the tendrils had grown and coiled up his arm. He began to pull at them but felt a searing pain as they gripped tighter.

Suddenly, the harp began to play by itself playing the most outlandish but beautiful piece of music the musician had ever heard. Outside, the crowd began to bang on his windows and kick his door as the music crescendoed. The tendrils wrapped themselves around his shoulders reaching for his neck.

He heard a crash as the crowd broke through one of the windows in his bedroom. He threw open the door and ran for the tree. He ran like he had never before. He reached the tree and collapsed. He then felt unbelievable agony in his chest, and he realised the tendrils were reaching for his heart. He tore at the tendrils and pulled them as hard as he could. One by one the tendrils began to pull back and wither away. Suddenly all the tendrils were gone but the musician felt empty and half dead. With a sudden sting of realisation, the musician knew that the harp had taken his soul. As his world went black, he found his old father's harp in the grass beside him. With his dying breath, he played one last song on his harp, finally at peace.

A tall stranger in a charcoal black cloak appeared from behind the tree and took the golden harp and tucked it into his cloak. He gazed down at the lifeless body in front of him and smirked. People can be very foolish he thought as he walked away with yet another victim's soul.

2nd Place: The River Runner

Sofia Harvey

Explorers are all boys. Or so I was brought up to believe. Shakleton, Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus. Generations of male explorers, and yet female explorers were always so rare. Why? I had asked myself from a young age. Women were just as strong and powerful. Just as fame hungry. When were adventurous, ambitious, thrill-seeking girls like me going to get a role model?

Those were my thoughts as a young girl but, as a 22-year-old I was ready to put myself on the map. All throughout my childhood I planned an epic exploration. But it wasn't easy. Touch the deepest point in the ocean. Check. Climb the highest mountain. Check. Sail around the world. Check. It had all been done. Finally, I had found my expedition. The Salween River. It crosses through Tibet, China and Burma. It's 3,289 kilometres long. A father and son team had tried and failed to conquer it, but I would succeed.

July 2nd, 2023. My starting date. Long and glorious, my crimson kayak awaited the challenging journey ahead. Securely attached to the bow was a GoPro that would be recording and broadcasting my journey and hopefully bring fame to my risky expedition. A bundle of dehydrated food rations was stored away safely in the stern and a lightweight stove would allow me to cook and boil water. Intimidating and powerful, the great green canopy towered above me watching my every move ready to attack me. Butterflies swirled in my stomach. I was either about to become famous or hospitalized or worse. Finally, I set off into the infamous river.

Alone.

Days later, I was tired, and sleep deprived. In front of me, the river meandered and quickened. As the water raced so did my pulse. This was it. My first taste of the Salween that was yet to be tamed. The waterfall that would make me famous. Ahead of me, the river dropped off. Every kayaker's Everest. The Salween Drop. As I neared, I saw it. The river cascaded down in a kaleidoscope of colours. Cobalt and indigo mirrored the twilight sky. Praying silently, I remembered my training and kept an upright posture, so I didn't injure my back. I fixed my gaze on the spot I was hoping to land in, took a deep breath and paddled hard. As soon as I was in freefall, I stopped paddling and kept my eyes on my landing spot. With my heart in my mouth, I landed with a thud in the turbulent water and sent ripples cascading to the

riverbanks. With a relieved sigh I thought of how this journey would send similar shockwaves throughout society.

Still shaken, I moored my kayak on grassy patch on the edge of the river. It was 8:45pm, no wonder I was starving. I set up my camera and tripod so that the picturesque view was visible for my followers and pressed 'RECORD'. I waved at the screen and started to speak.

"Hello! Thank you for watching me throughout my expedition. Hopefully I'll see lots of you tomorrow at Mawlamyine in Myanmar. Today was amazing, but scary. As you saw, I kayaked down the Salween Drop, and since I was unable to talk you through it in the moment, I thought I'd tell you about it now. The Salween Drop is 192 ft tall and is situated in Myanmar. The world record for the highest waterfall kayaked over is held by Tyler Bradt who kayaked over the Palouse Falls a 189 ft waterfall in Washington, so by successfully completing the Salween Drop I have officially set a new world record. Although that's incredible, what I am more excited about is the fact that I have achieved my childhood dream and become, not only one of the most famous kayakers, but also one of the most famous female kayakers. It isn't lost on me however, that by achieving fame for myself, I have brought unwanted fame to the Salween." As I said those last words, tears welled in my eyes. Like the waters I had conquered, they cascaded down my cheeks. Beautiful and desolate, the Salween had become my home and I hoped that I hadn't exploited one of the last unexplored places on the planet.

After I had packed away my equipment, I made myself a quick meal and crawled, exhausted into my sleeping bag. Glistening gorgeously, the stars covered the night sky and shone brightly through the canopy.

After a good night's sleep, I packed away my things and set off to cherish the last of the Salween River. Unlike the other parts of my journey, the last bit was slightly calmer although still unnecessarily violent. 'Nothing compared to the notorious Salween Drop.' I thought with a grin. As the river grew, it dawned upon me that so had my confidence. Here I was at the end of it all as a celebrity and a role model. In the distance I saw a crowd bubbling with excitement. However, as I neared the mouth of the river, the crowd seemed to grow. It stretched out for miles along the

bank of the river. Thousands upon thousands of people cheered as I paddled closer. Huge cameras filmed me, and reporters stood with their microphones ready to bombard me with questions. Smiling, I thought of my younger self, hungry for adventure and fame. Finally, I was the role model I had always wanted and hopefully in years to come, female explorers will become just as common as male ones, venturing deeper into space and jungles and I could know that I had played a part in their fame.

3rd Place: The Net of Fame
Camille Polyakova

5 April 1850

I detest it, had not my sisters and I solemnly promised not to let our identities be known. But my sisters were gone, and I was left to bear the burden. True, I had asked Mr Smith and all those who knew my identity, to keep it secret and they hadn't told anyone. Gossip and rumours, however, spread fast, especially in London. Wherever I go, whenever I am introduced, people stare at me, their, inquisitive eyes boring holes into my face. The characters in my books are drawn from life, I realised that it was more than likely that the people I had featured in them, had recognised themselves and so linked up my books to me. So far no one has asked me outright, though, no doubt, they soon will.

7 April 1850

I was right. Today, some old pupils of mine invited me to tea. After we had told each other all that had happened in the past 5 years, since we last saw each other. They asked me if I had written 'Jane Eyre' and 'Shirley.' I, of course denied it and after that cloaked myself in a protective silence. I left soon after. Some people may like fame and renown, but I am definitely not one of them. After reading all the reviews on my books, more than ever I don't want to be known as the author of them. My books have been described as 'coarse' and my characters as 'immoral', my characters, who I portrayed as Christians, who always did what was right and acceptable. But the worst insult of all came today, in the Quarterly Review This one didn't just attack my books; It attacked me. I have been accused of 'moral Jacobinism, of trying to start a revolution.' All my friends urge me to turn a blind eye to this, to not let it affect me, but they don't know how hard it is. The worst thing is that they only attack me like this because I am a woman; because I am a woman I cannot write about human nature, about relationships. I feel like a bird caught in the ensnaring net of society. If I were a man, I would challenge the writer of that review to a duel.

10 April 1850

The entirety of London must know who I am. Only this evening, I went to a dance, escorted by George Smith (my publisher), and as we walked in, every head turned towards me and I could hear the whispers of 'Jane Eyre' hovering around me.

Almost everyone tried to engage in conversation with me, but as always, I submerged into a defensive silence. I settled myself on a sofa, conveniently placed in the corner of the room. All eyes were on me, and the wisps of conversation I caught were all about me too.

A woman approached me, 'Are you Currer Bell, the author of Jane Eyre?' She didn't give me any chance to reply, 'I would like to inform you that I find your books very immoral indeed!'

I flushed and stood up. I strode away leaving the woman staring after me indignantly. Fame is something many people spend their whole lives trying to achieve, but I have no need of it. So far, my experience of it has been one wholly of unpleasantness. Emily was quite right when she made the decision to remain anonymous, if only I had listened to her.

14 April 1850

I do not understand why people chase after fame. There is nothing likeable about being stared at, nothing pleasant in the way people whisper and point when you are at hand. Many people, I dare say, delight in it because of the money and enjoyment which come with it. These things, though good to have, do not, in my opinion, make up for all the prying eyes and spiteful looks which one must be subjected to. I do not believe that there is any way to be famous without these uncomfortable practices. If there were, I should not be quite so against it. It is not as if I were pretty. I am short, with ungainly features. I am missing several of my teeth and my face is unusually out of proportion. People say I would give all my knowledge and fame just to be pretty. Maybe I would. The fact that I am so plain and unattractive gives people all the more reason to scorn and flaunt me. I should prefer it if only my books were famous and not me.

Highly Commended: Most People Think I'm Lucky

Jasmine Baxter

Most people think I'm lucky. The spotlight has been on me since I was young, the world watched me grow up. The camera following me everywhere I go. People tell me I'm lucky; lucky to live in a big house, lucky to be wealthy, most people could only dream of my life. Instead of going to school I went to work on set. Instead of worrying about bills and how I'll pay for college, I worry about the colour of my walls and what I'll have for dinner. I am treated like the sun in my parents' solar system, their life orbits around me, I brought them fame and wealth.

Most people think I'm lucky. When I walk down the street I'm chased by paparazzi and fans. When I go into the shops I am asked for autographs and pictures. When I meet friends I have a bodyguard follow me. Whenever I complain I sound ungrateful. Most people would kill for a life like mine. So I stop complaining.

Most people think I'm lucky. When I express my views I get hate mail. My opinion must agree with everyone else's. When I post a photo older men flirt with me, I can't complain though, it's just what happens. When I post about my insecurities, I am told that I make other girls insecure and that I shouldn't have insecurities as I am so pretty. I stopped using social media.

Most people think I'm lucky. I never had real friends. The people around me are self-centred. I've never been to a sleepover or a birthday party. I've never had a real relationship; guys just see money and looks. The only relationships that feel real are the ones I play on set. I've never been to the park; I've never played on the swings. I watched as other kids played outside while I had to redo my scene for the fifteenth time. I watch other girls get boyfriends, wondering if I'll ever find that kind of love. But I can't complain. So I smile and continue watching.

Most people think I'm lucky. I don't feel lucky. I feel drained and tired. A little girl came over to me today. She took a picture of us and as I signed my autograph she told me "One day I want to be famous, just like you," I looked at the little girl, the light in her eyes. For a moment, I wished I could be in her shoes. I wish I could have played at the park and met kids my age. I wish I could have gone to a sleepover or a

birthday party. I wish I could post my views on social media and people respect them. I wish I could meet a guy and get married without fear of him cheating or using me. I wish I could walk down the street without being chased, I wish I could go to the mall with friends, or the cinema, or a cafe. I wish I could have my childhood back. But I can't complain, because I'm lucky.

Highly Commended: The Tranquillity of the Storm

Florence James

In a glorious explosion of pink and gold, the sun fell like a sinking stone, drawing an inky starry cloak across the sky; rippling waves from a shimmering blue sea stretched for miles. There was only one boat, one sail and one girl left on the ocean...

As the night was pierced in thousands of places by a sparkling light, I lay watching candyfloss clouds conceal the moon. Frigid air rapidly ran down my back sending shivers tearing down my body as if I had one hundred spiders scuttling up and down me. This, surprisingly, didn't bother me because all my heart was drenched with the feeling of happiness.

Tiredness soaked me as I slowly drifted off to sleep on the deck, dreaming of home. A rim of pale pink had formed on the eastern horizon, while a hazy mist appeared in the sky; the sun was finally saying, "Good morning." One day to go, ten miles away. This was it, the last push. I would make it home, my dream was soon to be complete. There was only one thing in my way.

From the western horizon, dark, grey clouds were twirling their way through the air. A storm was brewing, this was not looking good, but I was too close, I couldn't give up. The waves rose higher and higher; thundered nearer and nearer; broke into a roar of boiling foam and raced to the side of the boat like galloping foam horses. Rain started to pour while thunderous roars began to rule the sky. This was a battle, me verses nature, who was going to win?

A fearful heart filled with nerves; a brain filled with worry and blood soaked in terror. I couldn't let this stop me. Mountains waves rocked the boat from side to side while gusts of wind aggressively blustered into my face like a bullet letting nothing get in its way. I was trapped in a nightmare. The storm was becoming more vigorous; this was no battle, this was war. Water attacked the boat, drowning the deck; a waterfall of tears darted down my face. I was hammered to the rigid surface, rolling one way then the other.

Alone.

No Mum. No Dad. Just me and the ocean.

Numb and soaked, I laid on the deck watching a minute golden light fill my eyes.

Hope was sent throughout my body as I could feel the swaying of the boat becoming

under control. Perhaps war was almost over, could I actually win? Just three miles to go. This was tight, only an hour of daylight left. The first sign of land (which I had seen in months) was forming in the distance, with all I had left in me I rose to my feet.

A cyan blanket was slowly stretched across the sky.

Once again I was off, I had been released from the horrific nightmare. The waves were gently rippling once more while a gentle breeze flew into my face. My boat raced along the water like a flowing river, I was picking up speed, the feeling of possibility was spreading into the atmosphere. One mile from home, thirty minutes of daylight left. In the distance, I could make out the shapes of figures standing on the deck. I zoomed along the water getting closer to land. Instantly, I realised it was not just family on the deck but a nation, all waiting for me. The feeling of fame engulfed me, I had just sailed around the whole world. Faintly, the sound of cheers crept through my ears making me shake with excitement. I was home!

Slowly, the sky was darkening as I was secured to the dock. Swarms of people were barging through the crowds towards me, a banner hung freely saying the words world's greatest sailor. Was this true? Cameras were flashing wildly at me, the faint sound of cheers had become loud, deafening noises. Like colourful kites on windy days, fireworks lit up the sky in one place, then the next. For some reason I missed the tranquility of the storm, the peacefulness. For two-hundred days it had just been me, my boat and the elements. Would my life be the same again?

...There was now no boat, no sail and no girl left on the water. Her adventure was complete.

Commended: Lily's Lyrical Journey

Choksi Khadijah

In the heart of a bustling city, a street musician named Lily strummed her guitar beneath the glow of streetlights. Melodies, like secret tales, escaped her fingertips. Unbeknownst to her, a talent scout named Max lingered in the shadows, captivated by the raw beauty of Lily's music.

Max, driven by an intuition that Lily's tunes held an untapped magic, approached her with an offer. "Let's take your music beyond these streets," he proposed. Hesitant yet intrigued, Lily agreed, unaware that her life was about to transform.

The first notes of Lily's debut single echoed through the airwaves. Overnight, she went from a hidden gem to a name on everyone's lips. Fame embraced Lily like a long-lost friend, and her journey from the streets to the stage captivated the world. As Lily navigated this newfound stardom, she encountered the exhilarating highs and daunting lows. The applause of thousands became her daily anthem, yet the quietude of her humble beginnings whispered in the recesses of her mind.

Amidst the whirlwind, Lily formed a connection with a fellow musician, Jake. Their collaboration became a symphony of emotions, resonating with fans worldwide. However, as their duet climbed the charts, the dynamics between Lily and Jake shifted. The spotlight, once a shared glow, began casting shadows on their relationship.

Caught in the tide of fame, Lily's authenticity teetered on the edge. The industry's demands, like a relentless tide, threatened to wash away the genuine notes that had first captivated audiences. Lily, grappling with the dichotomy of her past and present, faced a crossroads.

One night, in the quiet of her dressing room, Lily stumbled upon her old guitar, worn and weathered from the streets. As her fingers embraced familiar chords, a realization dawned – the essence of her music wasn't in the grand stages but in the connection forged on the cobblestone paths.

With a bold decision, Lily announced an intimate acoustic tour, returning to the raw simplicity of her roots. The news sent shockwaves through the industry; critics questioned her move, but fans celebrated the authenticity that had endeared Lily to their hearts.

The acoustic tour unfolded like a poignant ballad. Lily, armed with just her guitar and vulnerability, connected with audiences in a way the grand stages had never

allowed. The tour, a testament to the enduring power of genuine artistry, became a beacon in the sea of manufactured fame.

During this transformation, Lily reconnected with Jake. Together, they crafted melodies that echoed the wisdom of their journey. The intimate settings allowed their music to breathe, each note telling a story of resilience, love, and the pursuit of an authentic passion.

As the acoustic tour reached its crescendo, Lily stood on a small stage beneath a canopy of stars. The applause that followed was not just for the artist on stage but for the journey she had undertaken. Lily had rediscovered the heartbeat of her music, and in doing so, had inspired others to seek authenticity in the noise of fame. In the quiet aftermath, as the tour concluded, Lily found herself on the same city street where her journey had begun. With a grateful heart, she strummed her guitar under the familiar streetlights. Passersby, unaware of the global sensation in their midst, paused to listen to the soulful chords that echoed through the night.

Lily's story, a tale of fame's allure and the rediscovery of self, became a testament to the enduring power of genuine artistry. As the city slept, her music lingered in the air, a reminder that sometimes, amidst the grandeur, the most profound moments are found in the simplicity of a song.

Commended: The Price of Fame
Zaaim Chaudhary

As I stood on the dimly lit O2 stage, on the 31st concert of my world tour, a single fluorescent spotlight directed its glow towards me, my heart was thumping like a drum going thud, thud. I gulped hard and suddenly my mind raced back to the start of my journey and a time of betrayal. Fame can be a double-edged sword, it can allow you to achieve the success you dreamed of, but it can also make your life miserable...

My friends Connor, Dave, Andy and I formed a band during our GCSE years at school. We played together in school concerts and other events; we created a social media page and shared our talent with the world. Although we had many followers, we were not able to get the contract with a music company that we desired. During one of our performances three years ago, a talent hunter approached us saying that a famous music producer from America was looking for young, talented singers and is currently in London holding auditions. Dave jumped with excitement "Thanks for telling us, would it be possible if you could put in a good word?"

Our appointment with the producer was in the following week. We were so excited and spent hours practicing. Picking the right song was a challenge, in the end we chose the song that Connor had written. It was about friendship and was the perfect song to perform. Arriving early on the day of the audition we climbed the spiral staircase full of mixed emotions of excitement and nerves. Anxiously, we headed towards the audition room and were met by a stern Mr Martinez. He informed us that we had fifteen minutes to complete our performance, so we began immediately. Our hearts and souls were poured into each note, striving to show our talent and dedication. After our performance, Mr Martinez told us that we would get a call advising us if we had been selected.

With anticipation we awaited the call, finally it came, and we all huddled around listening on the phones speaker. Mr Martinez told us that although we gave a great audition only one of us had been selected, he wanted a solo singer not a band. Our smiles faded, we all stared at each other in disbelief and disappointment. Martinez went on to say that I was the one he had chosen, my heart stopped, and it felt like the ground was shaking, should I be happy or upset? We put the phone down and

stared at each other in silence. Connor broke the silence and shouted “It was MY song! How did you get chosen with my song, surely, you’re not accepting this, we are in this together right?”.

The next day I called Mr Martinez back, saying “we auditioned as a band and if we don’t get through together, I will not accept the offer. Mr Martinez stated calmly “You are missing out on a life changing opportunity to work with one of the best producers in the industry. You’ll be famous and travel the world and can do so much for your friends and family with fortune. Think about it and get back to me.”

Over the next few days, I was in a confused state of mind and hardly slept, deliberating over the matter. Finally, I decided to tell my friends that I am going to take this opportunity and say yes, I will do whatever I can for them. My friends were disappointed and felt betrayed, not understanding my point of view. We had a heated argument and in rage I said some horrible things, saying the band was only a success because of me as the lead singer.

The following week I travelled to America to meet Mr Martinez to sign a three-year contract for a record deal. As I embarked on my solo career, my album sold out, I travelled the world, performed in sold out arenas and received praise from fans and critics. I was on top of the world basking in the glory of my newfound fame.

However, as my fame grew so did the pressures and expectations. Cameras and reporters surrounded me all time, they would watch my every move, making comments on my behaviour and personal life. I had to be perfect all the time, any wrong move or word and there would be a frenzy on social media with viral memes and comments. There was no time for my family, and I had already lost my closest friends due to my behaviour. I felt a deep sense of loneliness. At times I wanted to quit and go back home, but I knew that I needed to pursue my dreams.

Now on the O2 stage it dawned on me that I had lost the most precious things in life, despite all the glitz and glamour there was an empty void. I gulped again and blinked softly. The crowd was electric, waiting for me to start and I felt like I was in a dream. After my performance I ran through the doors backstage struggling to catch my breath. A mixture of guilt and regret ran through me. I had to make peace. I grabbed

my phone, my shaking fingers dialled Connor, Dave and Andy, to my surprise they answered, and we arranged to meet up with each other the next evening.

As we reunited, I shared my struggles and the emptiness I felt despite my fame, hoping to make amends, and apologised for my actions. We decided to put our past behind us, realising that our friendship was stronger than our careers. We decided to make music together again, I had six months left on my contract with Mr Martinez and I would use the money I made to promote our band.

So, we reunited and were stronger than ever, making music not for fame or recognition but for the joy it brought to our lives. Our music touched the hearts of the people around the world reminding them and us of the power of friendship and the pursuit of happiness.

Commended: The Man on Mars

Finlay Lehunte

Part One: The Journey

I had always wanted to go to space since the age of 5 when I got my first telescope and saw thousands of stars staring back at me. Now I was sitting in the cockpit of a Rocketship about to leave Earth to travel to Mars. Over the growling of the engine, I could hear the faint cheering of people who had come to watch. I got a message through from ground control "Permission to launch." I heard the countdown booming over the crowd "10... 9... 8..." I put the engine on full. The crowd joined in, "3... 2... 1... Blast off!". I was away, there was no turning back now!

Even though the seats were cushioned, because of the extreme g force, I could feel the metal supports painfully digging into my back . The ship began vibrating uncontrollably as it I passed through the atmosphere getting further away from Earth by the second. I couldn't believe it I was in space! This happy thought faded from my head as I remembered how Ground Control had told me the journey would take 10 years to get there and back. I was kept going by the thought of crowds of people waiting for me on my return.

Looking back at Earth I felt a cold chill of loneliness pass through me, but ignored it because of my determination to reach Mars. It was when I passed the moon I began to realise how hard this journey would be as I was the only person on the ship. The messages from ground control kept me going but I still missed my friends and family. I began wishing I could be back on Earth with them but knew there was no aborting the mission now.

It was not long before I began to lose track of time. Days felt like weeks and weeks like months. I was getting less messages from ground control and was beginning to wish I could turn back. I still longed to see my family and could not bear the fact that I wouldn't for almost 10 years.

Nearly 5 years later, just when I thought I might die of madness I saw it! In the distance, the outline of the Red Planet glaring back at me. After so many years I had

finally made it. I was going to be the first person on Mars! As the ship descended, I experienced excitement for the first time in so many years.

I felt a light thud as the ship landed. I rushed to put my space suit on and open the hatch to get outside and stand on solid ground for the first time in 5 years. As I stepped out, even in my suit, I could feel the freezing cold wind of Mars. Even though I had been without gravity for years, my legs quickly became used to standing as Mars's gravity was only a fraction of Earth's. It felt so good to be on solid ground, even if it wouldn't be for long. I knelt down and surveyed the gravelly surface of orange rocks and sand.

As I knelt there, the feeling of loneliness crept back over me like a predator never giving up the hunt, and I thought of the 5 long years that lay ahead. I climbed back into the ship to tell ground control I had made it. I waited hours for a response until the speakers suddenly turned on. "Congratulations on being the first person on Mars and the most famous person on Earth." I picked up the microphone and responded "But I am the loneliest person on Mars."

Part Two: The Return Journey

I wished this could be the end of the journey but it was not, I had to get back to earth. I climbed up into the cockpit and prepared for take-off. I flicked the ignition switch and was off. I was going home! I knew that it would be a hard journey but the thought of crowds of people cheering and seeing my family kept me in a good mood.

The return journey felt even longer and the solitude was driving me mad. It felt like I would never get home. Then one day, when I was half asleep, the speaker sprang to life. Like a sudden gunshot, it boomed, "Welcome home!" The moment I heard these words I jumped up so fast that I bounce off the ceiling like a champagne cork. As soon as I was on my feet again I rushed to the cockpit window and there it was: Earth!

I imagined my family and crowds of people coming to meet me. However this thought was snapped out of my head as the very real worry of landing safely

replaced it. At first, I thought it couldn't be too hard but that was also wiped from my mind when I re-entered the atmosphere at almost 20,000mph and immediately started plummet down to Earth!

As I got close, my eyes frantically scanned the ground looking for somewhere to land until I saw a lake not that far from ground control. I began to steer the ship towards it. Descending rapidly, the dials on the dashboard were spinning out of control, when suddenly, "Splash!" I had landed. With an immense amount of effort I climbed out the hatch and fell into the water. I drifted to the edge of the lake and tried to get out. As soon as I stood, I collapsed in a heap on the ground.

In the distance I could see members of Ground Control rushing over to help me. They helped me back to the main compound, but there were no adoring crowds, no family to greet me, no one. I said to the team, "Where is everyone? I thought I was the most famous person on the planet!" A young team member replied "You were... 5 years ago."

Commended: Be Careful What You Wish For
William Pascoe-Watson

Andy South was a global singing superstar. His music was streamed by millions of obsessed fans from all over the world. Despite being British, his main fanbase was in America. After years of trying to make a breakthrough, Andy released a number of successful songs over a three-year period. Each one topped the global charts.

Fame and recognition for his talent were all he craved. With the fame also came a fortune. For him, this symbolised success. He could hold his head high and show the doubters that he'd made it big.

The singer songwriter was married to a loving wife and they had two small children. The family was thrust into the spotlight after Andy's recent success and things couldn't get better for him. They all enjoyed the adulation.

Fame came with its upsides. He enjoyed the privileges of being a VIP as well as the luxury and comforts that his newfound wealth could buy. Andy bought his parents a new home, as well as a vast mansion for himself in an upmarket area. He relished dining in the fanciest of restaurants and wore the smartest of designer clothes. He bought his children horse riding lessons and the newest toys.

As well as gaining recognition for his work, Andy could see the benefits of the power and influence that his fame gave him. He decided to put this to good use and wanted to help people who were struggling in life. He campaigned to help homeless people and wanted to assist them to construct new lives off the streets. Andy supported many charities that would raise awareness to help the homeless.

His popularity skyrocketed on social media too, due to his charity involvement making everyone think of Andy fondly. However, behind all the flashing lights and all the spotlights, things weren't all that they seemed.

On the surface, his life was amazing, but it was dramatically different behind the scenes. Andy's family was finding the fame suffocating. They had become public property and found they couldn't go out of the house unnoticed. This caused them to

feel that their lives were spiralling out of control, as privacy was suddenly stripped from them. Being famous also meant that he was a prime target for robberies and crime. The sick and the poor bombarded him with begging letters. He struggled to live with the heavy weight of guilt.

Both Andy and his family struggled to trust people. They would question whether people really liked them for who they were, or for their fame. It became hard for them to mix in their local community and make genuine lasting friendships. His children felt isolated and sad.

Andy always wanted to be famous and for people to know his name and see his talent, but as time passed, he realised that the bubble of fame wasn't a healthy way to live. When he was on stage or at a public event, he always managed to bare a smile on his face, but on the inside, he didn't enjoy being known wherever he went. When alone he was often miserable, as the responsibility that stardom brought was too heavy for him to bear.

He learned that fame came with a costly price. To make matters worse, he was unable to see his family due to him being in America a lot of time. This was because he had to keep entertaining his most important group of fans.

Andy felt lost. Jealous people began to troll him on social media and he struggled with their negative comments. People gossiping about him added to the pressure he was under to maintain his positivity. This was the key to his song writing. He felt afraid that he would lose his talent and with it, his ability to write new songs. He began to feel quite despairing and desolate. He knew his star of fame was beginning to wane and questioned whether he'd ever achieve chart-topping success again.

The rock star's sense of self-worth had become bound up in the external affirmation that fame brought. In the past he thought fame would make him and his family happy and that it would buy security for the future, but he realised it could disappear at any time. So, he decided to take back control of his life.

Andy faced the tough dilemma of having to decide a way to still have enough income to support his family, but he didn't want to be as famous as he was. It was taking a toll on him.

After much thought, he eventually set upon an extremely clever idea. Andy could still be able to write songs, but he wouldn't perform them himself. He would write songs for other artists and be paid for them but he'd be out of the public eye and would not be so overwhelmed by all the popularity. He began looking for some artists to work with.

Andy still wanted to help homeless people as it was something he took pride in. And because he wasn't performing any more, there was far more time to help charities and see his family.

He soon found artists in need of help and they discussed terms. They decided that working together was the best option for them all. Andy knew that fame wasn't for him, but he could still follow his passion.

He realised that he didn't need the fame as affirmation any more. As long as his heart was fulfilled by helping others he'd be happy for the rest of his life.

So, out of the limelight, Andy got to work and thrived writing new songs. He was being paid and making a successful living. Happiness replaced his isolation and sadness as he no longer toured the world. Now he rejoiced in seeing his family every day. He had been taught a valuable lesson: everything isn't always as good as it seems. Be careful what you wish for.

Commended: The Fall from Fame

Florence Ritson

The clicks and whirs of the camera accompanied by the bright flashes gave Pearl a rush of excitement. The blinking lights burned white spots into her vision, but she didn't care.

This was all she'd ever wanted since she was a child, and she savoured every precious camera flash and shout of adoration that came from the mob of fans. The fact that she was finally getting the recognition she deserved was thrilling.

Pearl was walked into the theatre by Jane March, her manager. She'd be performing tonight in-front of thousands of spectators, all of them there to watch her daring trapeze act. Pearl's act had a reputation for making one's heart stop momentarily. Audiences would watch in awe as she flew from one bar to another, her tasseled dress becoming a blur of sparkles and danger.

Pearl stared at herself in the mirror. She was in her dressing room now, just 10 minutes before show time. She peered at her ridiculous makeup and costume, Jane said that she had a certain image to live up to. That was code for "she needed to look pretty to please the wealthy men". She had made quite an impression on the young men of London. She frowned at the thought of only ever being that pretty girl in the short dress. She wanted to be remembered for the way she made people hold their breath in anticipation, how she made them question the impossible and how she wowed them with her skills.

5 minutes till show time and now she was adding chalk to her hands in order to prevent them slipping. She wouldn't slip though, that simply wasn't an option.

2 minutes till show time, Jane March gave Pearl the usual prep talk.

"Ok Pearl remember this; in case anything goes wrong make sure to-"

"Pull on the emergency rope I know."

There was a rope near the side of the stage, when pulled, it let loose a net to catch the performer. It was the first step in her training, yet she was reminded every time.

"Good kid, now get out there,"

With a firm slap on the back Jane exited the stage.

The curtain went up and there came a rapturous applause from the audience. The bar swung towards Pearl and the show began.

She gripped onto the bar, getting a feel for the metal. She kicked off from the stage and swung into the audience. Heads turned upwards to see Pearl flying above them like a kite soaring in the wind, being pulled through time and space by an invisible breeze. She flipped and twirled madly like a tasselled monkey in a bejewelled jungle. The theatre was one of the fanciest Pearl had ever performed in. The red velvet chairs were accompanied by gold trimmings and decorative jewels. Pearl swung as far as she could, all the way to the gallery, which was the highest point in the theatre. It was where all the important lords and ladies sat. She came mere centimetres from their faces and watched their startled expressions with a smirk. Then, she let go of the bar.

She flew freely like a bird released from its cage; Pearl felt her heart soar. The pure adrenaline mixed with the sickening drop deep in her stomach was a unique sensation. It was a feeling that Pearl lived for.

All fell silent. Women fainted and men clutched their hearts in panic. A crew member released another bar for Pearl to grab onto. It was all a big act and Pearl had done this stunt many times before. Reaching out a slippery hand, she focused on the piece of metal, which now had the power to change her life for the better or the absolute worst; there was no in between. She missed the bar.

Pearl's heart dropped quick; her body fell quicker. The last two things she saw consisted of the safety rope hanging untouched on the wall, almost taunting her, and Jane March's disgusted face as she watched her young star's career go down the drain.

Pearl was so close. What would have happened if she had touched the bar? Perhaps a contract with a bigger, better company. Maybe her future husband was in the audience that night. It was possible she would have gone onto being the most successful performer of her time. Pearl was buried that week, and none of these maybes had the chance to become reality. With her, lay her ambitions and dreams, a

young star that had their flame extinguished too soon. She worked hard to get to where she was. Some people work their whole lives for their five minutes of fame, but that's all it is really, five minutes.

Soon the world moved on from this tragedy. Jane March found a new prodigy and the flowers that lay at Pearl's tombstone wilted as time passed. The daily mail realised they had found a more exciting scoop to replace her spot on the front cover and the people found a new star to obsess over. The sun rose and set and with each passing second, everybody forgot about the daring Pearl.

Commended: Final Dance

Felix Ingle

I ran onto that field to a cacophony of sounds echoing through the stands. Lacing up my boots I felt that liberating feeling I had felt since school. The Webb Ellis Cup smiled back at my astounded face. Ever since Coach Steve got me into rugby, I knew I would one day lift that legendary cup. I glanced at Eben and was met with a determined look, tonight was the final dance. We all looked at the referee, knowing our fate lay on his shoulders, and waited for the shrill cry of victory whilst remembering where it had all begun....

I was excited when I woke that day. South African charities had finally raised enough money to fund a public school for black kids in Johannesburg and we were all eagerly awaiting our first day of education. It was something white people took for granted, schooling, but we knew worse hardships than homework. My friend Eben practically skipped to school that first day, both as excited as each other.

The lessons were a pleasure and we collectively felt empowered by a days knowledge but were all admittedly waiting attentively for sport that afternoon. After a tiresome day, it came. We were given the option to play rugby or football. Football was naturally the popular choice, as the school had a sand pitch so no travelling was necessary. If rugby was chosen however, an hour long cycle was required to get to the grass pitches at the white school. Eben and I had always found comfort in rugby, no matter the scenario and so a leisurely cycle wasn't a burden for our enthusiastic hearts.

Blacks weren't permitted to be in the Springboks and so when we arrived at the verdigris playing fields, I received an assortment of judgemental glares. We weren't deterred by the condescending glances however and pedalled towards our dream of fame. Coach Steve, treated us no differently to the other rugby applicants. As soon as we had our mouthguards in and boots on, we knew our destiny. We dominated the field darting between the angered opponents, embracing our equality on the field. Not long after, Eben and I were sitting at a table in his father's inn when the TV before us flickered onto a crowd of South African fans. It was World Cup time, 1995 and the first time Springboks could compete. Interested, we looked up at the screen and saw beaming smiles from the faces of the players. In the background, the

historic Webb Ellis cup supervised the field. “That will be us” an inspired Eben remarked – one day we’ll be famous. In return I said “Depends on whether we performed well enough at try-outs.”

Thankfully, the results were given to us at the next training session. Eben and I had both obtained a spot in the school team. Steve regretfully informed us however that it wouldn’t be easy and the other teams may not make it easy for us. This was it, our first sense of recognition, one day we would make it onto that screen and hear a united South Africa yell our names. That night we sauntered home, overridden with glee.

This stroke of happiness was soon squandered and at home I was met with a daunting prospect. My father wasn’t well. When I walked into his room, his gaunt face looked back at me as his situation deteriorated. His influence over my life was incredible, he had taught me everything to that day, and losing him was going to change my life completely. I thought of whether I could continue rugby without his income but quickly changed my focus back to him. With a raspy tone, he told me “follow your dreams son, make me proud”.

I struggled for many years with the loss of my father and sometimes didn’t have the courage to get out for my rugby sessions. Many times I was tempted to quit, but one factor stopped me: I remembered the words of my father and put on my boots. At the age of fifteen, I was at a regular training session when I noticed an unfamiliar weathered face on the sidelines. He was a stocky man, who had clearly played a lot of rugby in his time. The training continued and I played surprisingly well considering my form at that point. When the final whistle went, the man called me over, at first I was nervous as Johannesburg wasn’t a safe space to be approaching strangers at the time. I looked at my coach and he nodded me towards the man, I walked over. After complimenting Eben and my skills, he took a clipboard out of his bag. At this point I didn’t know, but he was the coach at Grey College, a leading rugby school not only in Africa, but the world. When I saw the emblem of the school, I straightened my slumped back and greeted the man respectfully. When we were offered to try out for our national team, The Springboks, our ecstasy could no longer be contained.

Needless to say, we impressed the decision makers.

Manager Rassie brought us in before the world cup final 2011 and readied us for battle. His words stuck with all of us when we went out onto that pitch. This was bound to be a gritty game against the reigning champions New Zealand but as the united south Africa chanted in the stands, all worries disappeared. The whistle blew, and we flew up the pitch as a line of equality – a feat we never thought possible, and under the gaze of Madiba..

Eben and I smiled as we thought of our humble beginnings, we had made it to the hall of fame. The whole world knew our names, Kolisi and Etzebeth.

I ran my hands up and down the smooth, iridescent trophy, still in disbelief at our victory. I lifted it above my head and looked up to the sky, meeting my father's tearful eyes.

Commended: A Fame Affair
Olutoni Fasina

I often close my eyes,
Remembering the flashing lights,
Paparazzi on me for miles,
For my poses, pouts and smiles.
That was the life I had with Fame,
And his funny fancy games
That I continued to play,
and play and play...

I remember the first night we met. How he'd greeted me casually, almost unaware he was already paving a way to my heart. He eased his way into the room like syrup.

Hot syrup for that matter.

"You're Haylee, right?" He'd asked but I could tell it wasn't a question, his deep voice naturally being absorbed by the atmosphere in the room. He stepped forwards and it felt like all the air in the world had been squeezed into my lungs.

"I'm Fame." He explained, replying to my sheepish nod as he extended his arm for me to take. When he shook my hand, my fate was sealed. I had sold my soul to the devil incarnate.

Fame was hot, new, and exciting,
And for me he was inviting,
His all-seeing eyes and effortless flare,
That made me forget about my cares,
That was the life I had with Fame,
And his intriguing immersive games,
That I continued to crave,
and crave and crave...

Within a week Fame had coerced me into showbiz. I remember how I had listened naively when he said "it'll be fun." and "you'll be great." I'd sing and dance for hours, as the fans worshipped me, but despite this I didn't feel like a *God*. I wasn't superior

to others. People shouldn't kiss the ground I walk on, when just as hard-working and talented - yet unrecognized- people tread on it too.

I didn't feel special at all until Fame would tell me how well I'd done, sweeping me up in his arms. *Then* I'd feel special.

Our love for each other hot and intense,
The way I was always left in suspense,
Game shows, Meet and Greets, interviews,
Were soon the only things that I knew,
That was the life I had with Fame,
And his relentless remarkable games,
That I played all day all day,
All day...

It's like I'd been inserted into the perfect life Fame had coded. My every move felt analysed, my every need taken care of. And maybe I should've been annoyed, or at least bothered by this, by the overwhelming weight pressing down on me every day. But Fame would lift it up, carry it over his head for me, running into my room in the middle of practices, just to remind me he was still there for me. That he'd always be there for me.

Always and forever.

First, I admired Fame; his charismatic energy, his charm, and his elusive nature. Then my love for him grew into a fascination, amazed at how he could manipulate my emotions with a slight glance in my direction. I couldn't help but relish the life he'd given me. But next? It was an obsession.

But soon my "chosen" lifestyle started taking its toll,
My happiness was at an all new low,
My personality and my beauty, for others to decide,
Unforgiving fans were not very kind,
That was the life I had with Fame,
And his tiring tedious games,

That left me dep-

I wince in pain cocking my head in discomfort and opening my eyes. The tireless rehearsing and deprivation of privacy hadn't been the worst thing that'd happened to me... My world spins as a flashback unfurls.

That warm summer night, the last time in weeks I'd been alone, felt like a miracle from heaven, until I was unfortunately interrupted, witnessing something that's...

scarred me for life.

My heartbeat races as I remember that dreaded night.

Red and blue lights; the arrival of the police. A wet knife. A warm pool of blood. **A dead cold body.**

I'd been informed much later that he was my "Number 1 fan", the same fan who had been stalking me for months, out of infatuation. The one that had now killed himself as I didn't reciprocate feelings for him.

The amount of hate I got online,
Didn't seem to decline,
Soon I had to apologise,
When I was the one who was traumatised
That was the life I had with Fame,
And his toxic twisted games
That made me his slave,
His slave, his slave...

I quit soon after, escaping the choker hold of being a celebrity. I felt like I was a caged animal, who'd just figured out there was a whole jungle out there. So, I decided to explore the jungle, get therapy, try and move on with life *with* the one thing (I at least thought) I still had: Fame.

However he'd left... just as quickly as he came. I'd been forsaken by him and everyone else. My fantasies of spending the rest of my life with him, and eternity were thrown away, now respected even less than the dream I had when I was six: to live in a real gingerbread house. Yet I can't seem to stop closing my eyes and reminiscing on the bittersweet memories.

Silhouettes of people I used to know cascade into my mind's eye. Moments roll back like old movie tapes. The big ones treasured by everyone. The smaller ones coveted by me. The quiet ones too infrequent, and the scary ones too frequent.

I pity anyone who plays with
Fame, Every single one of his
silly games,
Who will walk on every single step I trod,
But maybe they won't fall, and they'll rise further instead.

Commended: Pride and Doubt

Yuna Kim

She stood in the final formation of the choreography onstage, sweat glistening on her neck. Panting into her microphone, her arms aching. In the symphony of roaring applause and the crackling energy of jubilant cheers, Lily's heart soared, her cheeks ablaze with the glow of Pride as she stood. On her beloved stage, her dreams unfurled like petals in full bloom.

Over and over, over and over again, she trained and performed tirelessly. She watched her numbers slowly grow—ticket sales, subscribers, comments. She had Pride in her talent and Fame would follow. However, one day, while scrolling through comments again, she noticed a string of vile ones poking their way through the usual ones praising her.

Best singer ever!!!

What's with those monkey ears?

OMG she totally killed that note!

Where are her eyes?

Can't see them, lol

The vicious comments haunted her for months. Pernicious vines of Doubt coiled around her, slowly suffocating her. Determined to break free, she decided to cut the problems— with plastic surgery.

On the day of the surgery, she gulped nervous breaths as she twiddled her thumbs. Pride whispered in the back of her head, *But your talent is enough*. Doubt shook its head. *No, it's not*.

A few weeks later, she performed again. This time, the audience was louder and rowdier.

Her numbers swelled into the thousands. She checked the comments again.

She looks different...

Wow, I never noticed how pretty she was

Doubt sneered. *See, I told you*. Pride glowered back.

Emboldened, she began to undergo more and more surgeries; an insidious craving for attention dominated her thoughts. Her fame skyrocketed, and her numbers reached millions. Calls from magazines and brands began flooding in like a voracious swarm of eager suitors, each vying for her attention with tempting propositions and offers. Training and practice soon became second priority, taking up less and less of Lily's time. She was busy. After all, it takes time to be so gorgeous.

Ur so beautiful, Unnie!!!!

Your beauty is unreal <33333333

God spent extra time with you

However, there were also disappointed fans.

Your talent used to outshine everyone else's...

She's so pretty!

Anyone else think she sounds kinda flat??

What's with that high note...

It was a typical Tuesday when her mother stormed into Lily's opulent penthouse (she had moved last month), banging the door open with a loud *thud*. "Sua Lee!" her mother yelled, using her legal name. "Why haven't you been answering my calls? I know you're always training but—" She paused and frowned quizzically. "Why are you still on the couch? I thought you were out busy practicing."

Lily rolled her eyes, "Practice? Why? I don't need that. I'm beautiful and beloved." Doubt preened.

Her mother's face contorted to a violent, scarlet hue, as her hands curled into fists and she yelled, "You can really live with that? Where is your Pride? Aren't you embarrassed?!"

"Pride? What pride?"

Her mother quieted, staring at her as if seeing her for the first time. She whispered, "What happened to singing? That was your pride."

Lily's eyes hardened into daggers, seething. "Get out. I don't need your criticism."

As her mother slowly walked away, Pride followed. And with a slam of the door, they were gone.

Lily scoffed, continuing to scroll through the mass of adoring comments.

She had millions. Millions of fans. Millions of followers. Millions of sales. Millions of dollars. But all it took was one rumor for all of it to slip through her fingers and smash into a million pieces. It was just a normal Monday when it all came crashing down. Lily was scrolling through comments again, drinking up word after word of worship and adoration. But she froze when a particular thread of comments caught her eye.

OMG, is that Sua?? No way, she used to bully me in high school You liar, she would never.

Hmm... you sure tho?

Shut up, you're just trying to get attention.

She watched in alarm as the fabricated lie exploded through the Internet, spreading faster than wildfire. She threw her phone across the room, as if to shatter the comments like the screen. Her body shook violently, her breaths shallow and spiked. *It'll blow over soon. It'll be fine..fine..* Lily thought, cradling herself, willing her breath to slow down. She collapsed onto her bed, cocooning herself in the warmth of the thick, fluffy blanket. *It'll be fine tomorrow. You'll see...* she thought to herself as she drifted to sleep.

At her concert a few weeks later, Lily noticed that the stadium wasn't nearly as packed as it usually was. The small crowd was also eerily silent. The light sticks in their hands usually omitted a bright, neon light, a luminescent wave of support. Today, however, they were nothing but an ocean of black. Her heart deflated, feeling increasingly uneasy with every note she sang. When the song ended, the normal cheers turned into jeers. An empty plastic bottle flew out of the air, hitting her squarely in the head. Suddenly, the warm light of the spotlight felt hot under the harsh glare of scrutiny. She fled off the stage, tears threatening to burst, as the crowd cheered triumphantly. The comments she read later were filled with poison and stung like thorns.

*She just has a pretty face, that's it
Talentless....*

How dare she call herself a singer. Where's her pride?

Lily stood, alone, in the middle of a gloomy, unlit room. Tears streamed down her face like a torrent. The bleak sunrise shone through the cracked shutters, but everything remained an endless black void. Bereft of family and shunned by society, her once glowing reputation as an idol lay in ruins. Silence enveloped her, more deafening than any thundering applause.

Doubt, once a constant whisper that lurked in the shadows of her fame, stood silent. Pride, her steadfast companion under the spotlight, had been abandoned. And Fame now lay shattered at her feet, nothing but dry, crumbling petals.

Category: Poems

1st Place: I Am Red, White and Blue

Elaina Wang

inspired by Chaemin Kim at Longfellow Middle School

I am red, white, and bruised blue from the beating of batons
against Black bodies. I am starred with bullet holes, spangled
with broken tears and laughing gas, rotten milk and forgotten tears
forming streams, rivers, flowing from city streets into sewers. Betsy Ross
embroidered me with the fear that you call freedom, my stripes
like fields of farmland, Emmett who Tilled that soil with his own blood,
red pin-pricked on cotton that is picked, plucked, then woven
into cloth that forms me, flimsy unless puppeteered by politicians,
flow in a sky shrouded in smoke. My white lines like the rope wrapped
around wrists and wringed around necks. I bear witness
to that lynching, that school shooting, that border crossing turned burial—
but I bear no responsibility. My wave welcomes to tourists
and wave away weary travelers just as easily, and although I have no voice,
many speak for me, through me, use me to put more profit in their pockets.
Fight over me, fight wars for me, kneel protests
on sore knees, forge crowns of grabbed glory. I am just
another form of currency. They praise me, promising false
liberty, so much for the land of the free, oh say, can't you see me?
There is no end to what can be colonized, even on the pock
marked moon I fly. I am the armour wrapped
around soldiers shoulders, I am the sign that sparks surrender.
Because America, you hold me
like a lover, yet wield me like a weapon.
I am the anthem, the sound of shots fired,
the ghosts of the Bison stampede, manifest destiny wrought in iron,
and here I emerge, above rockets
and ruckus and riots, the gleaming whiteness of me
that becomes my innocence

2nd Place: Fame Is Not A Game

Harry Farrow

This is the tale of Harry, a boy just 13 years old,
He claimed his life was dull and boring, nothing to behold.
He lived with mum and dad, his brother and his dog,
School, homework, sleep and chores, his life was one big slog.
Harry craved fame and stardom, subscribers, likes and views,
YouTube, TikTok or Twitch, which platform would he choose?
“Are you absolutely sure?” said mum “I can’t emphasise enough,
Be careful what you post online, or your life could be quite tough.
If people don’t like what you say, they’ll criticise and mock,
It could turn nasty quickly, and crush you like a rock.”
But he ignored his mum’s advice, persisting with his dream,
Watching his beloved on-screen stars and learning how to stream.
Late one evening, he set to work, he had a plan in mind,
Prime was the latest fad online and bottles were hard to find.
He sourced the newest flavours in his local corner store,
Completing the full collection (until of course they brought out more).
He reviewed the Prime on YouTube shorts, some flavours were divine,
And when he woke next morning, of course went straight online.
An overnight sensation, half a million new subscribers,
Thumbs up, smileys, follows, “you’re so clever”, happy vibes.
Boosted by this new-found thrill, Harry was elated,
He stayed up later every night, those million views awaited.
Videos of his dog doing tricks, they were really trending,
The number of subscribers did not stop ascending.
A TikTok dance soon followed, inspired by Baby Shark,
Harry’s fanbase doubled, he’d smashed it out the park.
This new-found fame made Harry feel initially so proud,

Walking with a swagger, chest puffed out, tall and loud.
Kids pointed to him in the street, whispering to each other,
“Did you see his latest vid? When will he make another?”
He reached celebrity status in his local secondary school,
Students in every year group acknowledged he was cool.
Back home his mum was worried, she feared he’d soon get bored,
Of the constant praise and admiration and being so adored.
And sure enough, it wasn’t long before clouds began to gather,
Thinking of more new content got him worked into a lather.
But it wasn’t just the concepts that were difficult to ponder,
Harry had quickly found that fame wasn’t that big a wonder.

Hurtful comments, online trolls, jealous friends and foe,
This is not much fun he thought, feeling full of woe.
Instead of feeling happy, the attention drove him mad,
Being online every night just left him feeling sad.
The online world isn’t a friendly place he had now discovered,
Just the same as IRL, he had enemies uncovered.
“There are always those who can’t be nice,” his brother said to him,
“In fact, in some ways I would say the Internet is more grim.
But don’t worry, the world’s a fickle place and people soon get jaded,
They’ll find a new target soon enough, once your fame has faded.”
So Harry posted less and less, his screens no more appealing,
He decided that he’d had enough and just what he was feeling.
Fame isn’t all he thought it’d be, it wasn’t that alluring,
A fanbase is unfaithful, celebrity is not enduring.
Thinking if he had a Tardis, Harry would go back in time,
To the evening long before he wasted £30 on Prime.

3rd Place =: Reflections of Reality
Jet Pariera-Jenks

The flash of stars blinds my blinkered vision,
as my crystal heels tread the red carpet of dreams,
though my features are coached to be photogenic:
there is more in my eyes than the camera sees.

Their shine reflects smiles and the pens of reporters,
making my life a soap opera, to be discussed and disgraced,
poised to record every slip of my mask
until I am no more than a photoshopped face.

Do the photographers notice how my breath cinches tightly?
How my steps are cramped by these fairytale shoes?
Or am I to them just a museum exhibit?
Do those rose tinted lenses distort their view?

Instead of that red carpet before me:
these sore feet tread a treacherous path,
would I ever have smiled for the cameras,
if I had foreseen this, the aftermath?

My dainty steps falter and stumble,
the poisoned apple has begun to rot;
and I'm running past the hushed whispers
after a life I pushed away and forgot.

But my too-long dress and pain-blurred vision
knows it's not to be;
I'm a bird who's just noticed the bars of my cage
and is captured on the wrong side of free.

Then this twisted vision of perfection
takes me down with a laugh:

and I am nothing but a news headline;
a pile of broken dreams and glass.

And as the tears drip from my lashes:
I can still see the camera flashes.

3rd Place =: The Blood Red Carpet
Thanh Theerapasiri

Each thread woven from a drop of blood
Crunching under her shiny scarlet stilettos
Her necklace sculpted from tears of gold
Cold against her pale skin

Each gust of wind whispering
Cigarette scented secrets
That weave through her bleach blonde hair
And past the smile plastered onto her crimson lips

Through the sea of people, I approach her
in my tattered grey boots
When I ask why she'd left the coffee I made
On our kitchen counter to grow cold
The light of a dozen cameras disappear
In the void of her eyes
As she asks me, "**Who are you?**"

Commended: Leaves/Fame
Mary Lane

fame is like the
autumn leaves
bright, showy
scarlet
yellow
orange
in November
they turn brown
and fall
the tree is stripped
shoes and animals
trample on the
once beautiful leaves
fame
like autumn leaves
only lasts so long

Commended: Am I Ready For This Day

Ahi Lloyd

As the sun rises my eyes start to open,

The birds begin happily chirping,

And finally, I'm awoken,

My mind is whirling,

Am I ready for this day?

I have dreamt of this since I was a boy,

This is my only chance,

I'm overwhelmed with joy,

And ready to advance,

Am I ready for this day?

Soon enough, I slide my shirt over my head,

Bending over to lace up my boots,

Remembering what my coach said,

I can hear the crowd hoots,

Am I ready for this day?

Running out through the tunnel I go,

I feel the stadium atmosphere come alive,

As the whistle starts to blow,

The game is now live,

I KNOW I am ready for this day!

Commended: A Name Dripped In Fame

Libby Harrison

Bright lights flash.
The cameras click,
A river of red runs rich and thick.
Smiles dazzle,
Diamonds gleam,
Outfits argue over who fits the theme.
Limos arrive,
Helicopters whirr,
Hundreds of faces melt and blur.
But every event, of everyone you meet,
There's never a friend to save you a seat.
There's so many greetings,
But conversations are fleeting.
So many faces,
And glamorous places.
There's hundreds of people,
But no one to keep all
My secrets or hold me when I cry.
There's no one I would trust to dry my teary eyes.
Alone each night as the day comes to an end,
For a name dripped in fame, is one without friends.

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.

