



KS4 Shortlist

Please find attached all 10 of the shortlisted year 9, 10 and 11 entries for the 2020 Young Writers' Competition.

Key Stage 4 Entries- Candidates 11-20

Candidate 11

Getting to Work

“Oh, hot mother of terminals!” I yell as the train lurches to the side, chucking steaming coffee down me for the second time today.

The old woman on the seat next to me looks up quizzically from her newspaper, “Are you alright, love?” I shake my head, “I’ll live.”

The woman nods at me, “It could be worse.”

She looks down at her newspaper and begins to hum as the train rattles into familiar ground. The city begins to grow as the train rumbles closer, closer. Silver and steel skyscrapers dominate the skies; cars move like beetles, scurrying along the roads that twist and turn in every direction. The day is still young; the rising sun giving a golden glow to everything below it. I press my hand against the window, it is cold to touch; the heat from my hands forming hand-shaped prints on them.

"We are now approaching the city station. Anyone getting off at this stop, please prepare for departure." the speakers squeal, cutting through my daydream.

The train stops and I move away from the window, grabbing my coffee and bag; following the stream of people headed for the exit. I turn to say goodbye to the old woman, but I've been swallowed up by the crowd. They jostle and push out of the train, onto the platform. Then, all at once, they disperse, going their own separate ways. The station clock splutters into life, spewing out five warbling notes that merge together into a cacophony of echoes.

Even though it's so early, the station is still rammed. The trains are the only way in and out of the city, and people like to come early as train rides to other cities can take hours.

Slowly, I pick my way between the crowd, spitting out apologies and threats to the people I bump into. Finally, I reach streets. I hug my jacket tighter as I walk along, careful not to step into any of the potholes that litter the pavement. The pavement is the same ashen grey as the buildings on either side. The wind tugs at my hair; it goes flying across my face, cutting my vision into ribbons. Silently I consider cutting the wind into ribbons, but I resist the urge.

A sudden gust bursts from between the buildings across the road. It hits my body, sending me tumbling sideways into an alley. As I battle frantically against gravity, my foot hits a pot of some kind, and I stumble forward in the dark, smacking my face against a wall. My coffee goes flying and I swear, “Oh, fight me, you ceramic son-of-a-lawn mower!”

As soon as I regain my balance, I square up to the broken shards of plant pot and kick the largest one. The satisfaction that courses through me soon crushes when I reach up to touch my nose. My fingers come away red.

With a theatrical flourish, I rest my hand on my forehead and sigh, “I fought a plant-pot, my nose is bleeding and the only thing that will keep me sane has just dribbled down the drain. How can I possibly keep any shreds of my reputation intact if I walk into work like this?”

Laughing, I pick up my bag and walk out of the alley, if only any shreds of my reputation *were* still intact. Then the sun would rise in the West. And Earth would be round.

I saunter onto the street, wiping the remaining blood off my face and onto my sleeve. I need to cross the road. Standing at the crossing, I find myself standing next to a tall man on his phone, holding a lead. The dog attached to the lead sniffs a near-by lamp post and, as if sensing me, looks up immediately and trots over. It looks up at me. I look down at it. It cocks its leg.

I lock eyes with him. Looking away from a dog is a sign of submission, and I am not in the mood for backing down to a mongrel the size of a football who probably doesn't even have balls.

I grind my teeth, "If you pee on my shoes, little canine, I'll skin you alive and use your fur to make new shoes. Then I'll sell them to your owner." A lone droplet of blood hits the pavement, scarlet against the dull, grey concrete.

The dog's eyes widen. Slowly, it lowers its leg. I grind my teeth again, "So if you don't get the heckity-heck out of here..."

With a yelp, the dog scurries back to its owner, who is still oblivious to the world.

I grin. Me: one, Stupid Dog: nil.

The cars stop and we walk across the road. I wave at the dog, still grinning, and it tugs the man to the left, as I move to the right.

I slow to round a corner and wipe my face again. I cross another road and walk over to a tall, glass and steel building. I push open the double doors, warmth flooding my body as I step inside. The Tower is already busy, despite the time of day. People bustle around, carrying stacks of paper, briefcases, laptops and steaming drinks. Though I can't see the source of the drinks, I know who can tell me.

"Clara!" I yell.

A small woman in a yellow pinstriped suit stops in her tracks, turning slowly. I bound up to her. She looks at me and frowns, "Been in the wars Liz?"

"Yeah. I'll tell you about it later. Look," I say, "I lost my coffee to a plant pot and I need your help."

"You want coffee?"

I nod.

"Sure," Clara says, turning away from me, "But clean yourself up first. And tell me what happened."

Ten minutes later I'm sitting in an office with coffee in my hands, and Clara looks at me, "It could have been worse."

I laugh, "I'm the living embodiment of 'It could be worse.'"

Candidate 12

The Watcher

Rain, rain everywhere, it flowed down the high roof tops above me. Bouncing off of the lonely pavement, running and gathering to form enormous puddles. Battering cars, splattering down gutters and ricocheting off of my heavy shoulders as I run down a labyrinth of weaving streets. Goose bumps invaded my body as the once distance murmurs morphed and contorted into ear splitting shrieks. As I sprinted into the shadows of the street in front of me, I spied that my once hopeful exit was blocked.

The brigaded exit enclosed me within an abyss of uncertainty.

Bleep! Bleep! My alarm shouted aggressively before letting out a stomach-churning scream, which woke me abruptly from my slumber. I jaulted forward, while stretching out my arm to stop the violent alarm which stood lonesome on a small bedside table. I rested my head back for a moment before a second

merciless bleep was let out. I seized an old grey jumper, which lay over a chair and pulled it onto my cold body.

Shuffling forward, my media screen let out a sharp piercing noise. It was time for the morning exercises. As the screen lit up, I swung my arms mechanically to follow those of the emotionless figure. For a moment my eyes started to drift towards the small window beside me, from the window I had a clear view of the city. Multiple of the same greystone, high rise apartment buildings towered up towards the bleak sky. Further in the distance I could see a glimmer of the control centre. This was where the watcher resided.

Suddenly the media screen beeped and flashed a series of numbers 57233. This was me. I shuddered and plunged back into the exercises, that I loathed, with more enthusiasm than ever. As the exercises came to an end, I stumbled towards the corner of my apartment, next to a tall bookshelf. This was the only place I was safe from the watcher, as the media screen was unable to see around the sharp corner. Yet, this was the only safety I was provided as every other corner and crevice was in clear view. With the watcher around you were never truly alone; any movement you made or word you said was monitored.

This was how the watcher maintained his power.

Any time anyone said anything against the watchers ruling the watch dogs were deployed to hunt them down. It was the watch dogs job to eradicate anyone who did not comply to the ruling, with a click of the watcher fingers the watch dogs could extinguish the flame of many unsuspecting victims.

An echoing bell rung throughout the building – it was time for work. I retrieved a pair of well-worn overalls and a pair of dark work boots and pulled them onto my frail body.

Simultaneously my neighbor and I opened our doors and stepped out into the empty hallway. As I walked towards the exit at the end of the prolonged hall, I spied that door 57230 was left ajar, I quickly stepped in. The media screen was busing erratically, in a pattern I had never before seen, and the curtains were drawn to a close. I called out to the homeowner but there was no response. Hastily I fumbled towards the bedroom, as I pushed the door open, I was engulfed by a sea of cryptic paper. In the middle of the pool of letters and newspaper articles lay a manuscript, and on the front, it read:

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE WATCHER

Without a thought I snatched the manuscript and concealed it in my loose blue overalls. My blood ran cold as I sprinted up to my apartment, when I reached my door, I secured it safely behind me. I flung the manuscript open and read tentatively as the truth behind the world I once thought I knew filled my head. My eyes widened and my voice raised as I called out the real history of the watcher. My ghastly media screen let out a low-pitched scream and flashed a series of unknown symbols repeatedly.

They were coming

My trembling hands fumbled as I tried to pry the door open, this was my only hope. I slumped around a corner as the footsteps grew closer, my heart burned, and my head ached but all of a sudden wave of energy seized my body. I darted around the empty looping street; my only chance of survival was to

outrun them. The pounding footsteps seemed to dissipate into the distance, I flung myself against a cold wall while my body shook aggressively. As I attempted to regain my breath, I felt a sharp blow to the left side of my head, my body collapsed down to the wet floor as my eyes slowly plunged into the unknown.

Candidate 13

The Mountain Dream

My eyelids felt heavy. Slowly, my dreary eyes began to open. Taking me a few minutes, I became fully aware of my surroundings, as I glanced around. The corridor was stuffy, and the air had an undertone of bleach. The walls were magnolia, as I realized I was entrenched in a hospital bed. With trepidation, the last thing I remembered was collapsing at school. Shivering, I could almost again feel the cold floor that my face hit as I fell. Panicked, I glared around the hospital, as I tasted the bitter aroma of cleaning products. Ambulances outside bleated loudly, the sound was deafening. A shiver ran up my spine, as sweat dripped down my face. Why did I collapse? Nervously, I stared out the window, as the dull lightless sun shrouded the dying sun, and the rain were knives stabbing the window. Disappearing, the sun hid behind a grey, colorless cloud, its radiant colors slowly transforming into distant shadows. Gradually, a tall man walked towards me, his glasses framed his reluctant eyes and his dark hair sunk slowly with every step. His eyes mirrored mine and hesitantly, I stuttered 'W- What's wrong with me?' 'I'm sorry,' he replied. 'You have incurable cancer.'

Tears streamed down my face, drowning me. Hyperventilating, pain filled my body. I wasn't ready to die. Suddenly, as I looked up, I saw a boy with light brown hair and blue beaming eyes rush towards me. It was Oscar, my best friend. My heart lightened, and my eyes creased as I felt Oscar's presence fill me with happiness. Grasping on to me, he looked at me with sympathy. 'I know what happened,' he said softly, knowing I couldn't say the words myself. 'I guess I will never get to go to my dream destination, the Himalayas', I mourned. Since I was a child I had always wished to go there. Oscar looked up at me almost as if he could feel the same pain I felt. At that moment, his eyes widened as big as a hungry predator. 'What' I questioned. 'We can go!' he suddenly exclaimed; his face lit up like a bulb. 'What do you mean? I have to stay here.' 'Well...you can break out then,' he exclaimed. 'At midnight, I'll meet you outside' he insisted. Thinking, I thought what I had to lose, and my heart beat with hope. 'Ok, we'll do it' I agreed. Leaping up, he smiled back at me and left. My lips curved, as I examined the clock.

The clock struck twelve. Silently, I lifted up the covers and quickly slipped on my cold shoes. Breathing hard, I sang on my black coat and tiptoed to the door. Shaking, I nervously reached out my hand towards the door handle. I pushed it down. It was locked. Suddenly I felt hopelessness flush over me, as I helplessly glanced around. Then I turned towards a window. Carefully, I pushed it open feeling the sky's gentle wind blanket me. Adrenaline rushed through me, as I swung myself through the window, grasping onto a pipe. The luminous stars scattered the sky, as I anxiously began to lower myself down. Finally, I could see the ground, as I panted with relief and happiness gaping at the window which I was on. Turning around, I saw Oscar run

towards me and say 'Quick, let's go to the train station.' We dashed down the road, as I tasted the damp air and the moon illuminated a pathway to the station. Hesitantly, I asked 'Do we even have tickets?' 'Nope, we're going to break onto the back of that train which is leaving right now!' he replied, enjoying my reaction. We hurried on towards a red, loud train that had begun to move. The hard, cobbled floor of the station sat cold and rough, as the frozen engine kicked into motion. Oscar leapt onto the back of an empty carriage, stretching out his arm towards me. 'Jump!' he yelled. Like a frog I leapt forwards as Oscar pulled me into the carriage sighing with relief. Pushing the carriage door, we lay onto the floor astonished. Most swirled gently across the empty track, covering it in a wispy blanket, as I became hidden in a mysterious layer. As midnight comes trailing by every day, everything is forgotten only the long trance ahead filled with dreams and nightmares. Which shall it be today?...

'We're here,' a voice softly whispered in my ear, as Oscar gently shook me awake. Oscar led the way, jumping out the back of the train as I followed. And then we froze. Towering in front of us, the Himalayan mountain rose into the sky, its craggy, grey face steeper than ever. Its white top was coated in snow, as a chair lift ran down the side. Fog crawled down the side, as each mountain top shone like a jewel. 'Come on!' I excitedly said to Oscar. 'Let's go up the chair lift!' Like little children we pranced towards the lift, my soul felt as light as a feather. Walking closer, we lifted ourselves onto the chairs, as Oscar helped me up. Looking above the fresh snow, it began to move, as we excitedly sat suspended off the ground. The icy air filled my lungs, as the mountains towered high into the misty clouds. I turned to Oscar. 'Thank you.' I said. He turned to me, his lips stretched and he beamed, delighted. Rising higher in the air, we began to reach the peak, as we got off and stood in the crunching snow. The beauty and the thinness of the air overtook my senses. The world seemed more real. Behind me mountains overlapped as Oscar beckoned me to an empty spot, where we sat down. We gazed at the magnificent views.

The pain in my body that once burned like fire had faded away into an icy numbness. I gazed around one last time. I could see everything. Slowly, blackness filled the edges of my vision and the only thing I could hear was my own heartbeat. My chest slightly tightened like a knot for a second. My fragile, human heart beat one last time.

Candidate 14

Darkness

Light illuminated the pitch-black corridors which continued timelessly into the spacious void which sat in front of it. The rotting smell of something unpleasant wavered throughout the interlocking tunnels and faint echoes boomed faintly across the hollow decaying walls. Bloodlust vaguely lingered around the iron bars of the windows and faint glimpses of moonlight illuminated tiny spots of the floor which exposed the peeling bits of wood with spots of fungi that sprouted up from it. The place was left in ruins and a sense of nostalgia roamed the empty rooms. A faint

silhouette stumbled as he regained his consciousness after a fairly long nap, his shadow was deformed and demented and his teeth were shaped like daggers , after long repetitions of muttering he finally rose up after many attempts while getting up, his eyes flickered vividly like a drunk having a hangover from drinking too much at a party, the brown corroded chains which held him in place shattered as he moved each wrist side to side and swayed as if he was in a trance which would never end ; a complacent smile firmly spread across his squalid face. His muscular physique contrasted with his bony features on his face and the pale complexion of his skin reflected the shimmering iron bars of his cell.

The weary man hovered in the cell for a bit, suddenly he bent the iron bars with ease and escaped the luminous and gloomy confinement which held him in place, consecutive steps followed as the man pounded on the webbed cobblestones as he heaved and whined heavily as the shackles were tight around his trachea, he took a turn and edged himself forward to what he remembered to be the exit. Bewilderment filled his face as he found himself face to face with his cell, he also found out another thing- he doesn't have a good sense of direction. He ambled around a bit and fell onto the floor and waited for something to happen, boredom filled his face and the depression dampened his mood, countless attempts to free himself from this place hunted his mind and restlessness overcame him whenever he tried to sleep so he rested his head on one of the chilly tiles which were spread across the floor.

The minutes became hours and the hours became days, the man reclined in wait for a long while and then fell asleep as his eyelids became heavy , a faint rumbling occurred and a piecing bright light shone through the pitch-black abyss and then a loud pitter pattering of footsteps rung around the translucent walls, a infant popped his head around the corner, the child's name was Ebert ,the cold atmosphere sent chills traveling up his spine and each step he took made death more inevitable he travelled further while beads of sweat dripped down his face and his heart beat so fast that his face turned bright red , he could only breathe slightly and each time he tried to get closer it felt like another weight was being dropped on him and that gravity was going against him, he could see the dark aura floating around the old man and was incredible how intense the air felt each time he glanced at the person, the startled boy began asking himself how he ended up here and remorse danced across Ebert's heart strings, his legs was nearly giving into the heavy force but relentlessly exerted more of his strength until he collapsed onto the floor with a heavy sweat only to discover

himself face to face with the deadened old man. The black swollen eyebags marked the man's face and he could barely open his eyes, fleas roamed in his hair and a toxic stench reeked from his armpits, yellow saliva slowly dripped from his crooked mouth and he slowly focused his distended eyes on the little boy who was standing in front of him. The man then ascended up again and started questioning Ebert who was frozen in fear, his brittle knees rattled together and tears formed in his eyes it was clear to the man the boy was threatened by his existence, He distanced himself from Ebert and asked him why he was there, Ebert regained control of himself and told the man that he was exploring the dungeon and conveniently found the man in the process, a sudden proposal sparked up into the man's mind and excitedly jumped up and down at the idea, while that was happening the boy stared in bewilderment and questioned why of all places was he here, the man suddenly grabbed Ebert at the edge of his shirt and dragged him with him as he wandered off, the man was thinking the boy could lead him to where he needs to go and smiled in delight and skipped off like a girl going to the shopping mall, the man had hands of iron and Ebert couldn't move and whether the man asked Ebert pointed him in the right direction as he hung aimlessly in the air as he was pulled further to the exit.

The exit was right in front of them and the man chucked the child away and dashed for the exit to the dungeon. A faint tinkle sounded and the man ducked just in time, the metal blade crashed against the wall and the wall crumbled away leaving only a crater in the middle of it, lying on the floor the man jumped and backed away. Feet slowly started to be revealed out of the darkness as the dark humanoid figure walked out leaving a trail of darkness behind each of its steps, コココ コココココ (menacing), it raised its scythe and pointed at the man, its long skeletal finger was aimed directly at the man then it lowered his arms and aimed his scythe in the right position bracing itself to land the next attack, the man figured that this could have been the gate keeper of the dungeon but something irritated him faintly, some fact that he could have missed out, the creature charged in for another attack, the man jumped to the side, the scythe barely digging into his arm leaving a small gash, he attempted another dodge but the scythe hooked itself into his arm and caused his blood to spout out, he could die from major blood loss so he had to finish this quickly, they were fighting in a cramped place and the scythe is a huge weapon, the creature dashed in for another attack the man backed further away and squatted, he thought of all the possibilities the creature could attack, he closed his eyes. It was a forward thrust! The man quickly clasped his

hands together and stopped the blade and froze it in position, a little crack travelled down the blade and snapped in half, the creature disappeared away, the man stood still in thought and released a sigh of relief and focused his mind towards stepping outside of the exit. He took a few steps but stopped instantly in his path. His heart skipped a beat. A Dark spacious void sat in front of the entrance, and Darkness enveloped everything, Darkness crawled in. Darkness took control. Darkness dominated. The man let out a blood curdling cry as he held his head in agony at the sight, which was in front of him, Ebert was there as well, the man pathetically crawled towards the boy and a sense of relief came over him but he wasn't the same. Ebert turned around with a long scythe in hand and a blood thirsty smile spread across his face, all the colour drained out of the man's face and the demonic choir of laughter started to ring out around the empty void. The man woke up startled as he breathed heavily while beads of sweat ran down his face and stared empty at the cold stone walls. It became clear that resistance was futile and that he only knew one thing in his sorrowful life...DARKNESS.

Candidate 15

Their Last Chapter

It is not always that a person knows when their last chapter is being written, and sometimes, they are not aware until the final page.

William Turner and Daniel Walker spent their childhoods dreaming of a monster -- something even scarier than the Japs whom their fathers had fought -- and how they would defeat it. But as the two boys grew up and apart, their childhood fantasies became mere memories, and distant ones at that.

It was the summer of 1964, and they were determined -- as childish as it seemed to an outsider -- to find something. Perhaps not the monster which had been the most interesting thing about their childhoods, but *something*. They had been born in the midst of the world's greatest conflict, but it was over by the time they could walk. They often craved for *something* to happen -- and were, in truth, somewhat excited by the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. That was until they realised that it might mean the end of the world, not just another six year war.

The two men, who were still just little boys internally, made their way down to an isolated forest. They would find a bear, perhaps. Or *anything* that would give them the thrill which most people felt when they were only little. A child may only need to see a picture of a bear inside a book, but a man needs to see the real thing, up close.

'Are you scared?' asked William Turner. He asked this question because he now was: the reality that what they were doing was insane had hit him like a ton of bricks. That, of course, was assuming that they did what they said they would; infuriate bears for example. 'Not in the slightest.' returned

Daniel, boldly. William tried to read whether he was lying, but couldn't tell. He had never been good at reading people -- he had judged that his father was okay on the day he had shot himself. *Poor guy went crazy after the war*, the detective had explained to William's mother, *those Japs did some crazy things -- enough to send a man crazy. That's why we had to drop them two big bombs, you see? But I guess the bombs ain't going to help a guy who got sent crazy.* William vividly remembered wanting to tell the detective to shut the hell up -- his mother had been hysterical, and now this guy was calling her late husband a lunatic.

'Oh my! I don't believe that!' Daniel exclaimed, for there was a bear some forty feet from where they stood. He picked up a stick, heavy enough to hurt a human, maybe, but it wouldn't do much more than enrage a great big bear. William gripped his arm. 'What the hell do you think you're doing?' he was taken aback by his friend's stupidity.

'We didn't come all this way for nothing -- we came for an adventure!' yelled Daniel like a spoiled child. With seemingly abnormal strength, he tugged away from William and hurled the stick through the air. The bear snapped out of its trance and immediately saw the two men. With a beastly snarl, it started towards them. William wanted to curse Daniel, but found that he was unable to move his mouth. The bear raised its paws, and picked up pace. Then: bang! bang! bang! The bear staggered forward, then backwards, and then fell onto the forest floor. In its eyes was a look of sorrow and pain, but they would soon close ... forever. Where had the gunshots come from? Who had saved them? A haggard, old woman, perhaps sixty years old, emerged from behind the trees, clutching a rifle. 'You boys are lucky I didn't miss! I might have blown your brains out, or that damned bear might have ripped you up!' she grinned.

'Jesus Christ, Mrs! You came out of nowhere!' William said, maybe a little scared of the woman who had come at *just* the right time, but, in his relief, he scarcely cared. Her grin widened, but she did not answer. The three of them looked at the bear, William and Daniel still in awe of what had just happened. The lady had fired three shots, William was quite sure of that, and they had all struck the bear!

'Now come back to my place, boys, I'll make you some coffee.'

'We'd love to, really,' said William, 'But I'm afraid we're on a bit of an adventure.'

'Boys,' she said in a stern, almost maternal, way. 'I saved you from that damned bear, it's the least you can do for me. It gets awful lonely in these parts, you know? And you owe me your lives ... both of you. Don't go forgetting that.' she was deadly serious.

Her words echoed around William's mind, *you owe me your lives*, it didn't sound right, not in the way she had said it, anyway -- it was like she wasn't joking. How had she even known about the bear? The boys never screamed out. William supposed that she could have just been walking around in the area at the time. Could was the key word there -- he wasn't convinced. She insisted, becoming almost aggressive, that they go back to her place.

You owe me your lives. You owe me your lives. You owe me your lives.

And so, the last page was written, and it was only then that William Turner and Daniel Walker realised what was happening.

Discovery

Was this it? My heart skipped a beat. My breath quickened. My brow swam in sweat. I have found it; I waited for so long and now finally I was awarded with what I wanted: The gem. The luscious green gem. The luscious green gem which my mother gave to me before she left me. The gem I thought I lost forever. I collapsed to the ground, allowing the mud to devour me. My hands trembled as they reached out to clasp the elegant gem. As soon as my fingertips touched the coldness, a wave of beautiful memories hit me. It was like my mother was right next to me: sitting with her arm around me and her beautiful smile keeping me warm.

Finally, I've found it.

* * * *

I poured into my car and drove home quickly. I need to find it. I must find it. I threw on a pair of scruffy clothes and let the CD player sing. I scurried outside and watched the leaves twirl in the wind; the cans dance along the side of the road and watched the sky devour the sun.

Glowing- the Maldives beaches were glowing. The giant trees swayed calmly in the cool breeze; the small boats rested calmly at the shoreline. A pulse of powerful energy went through my body. I was close.

The golden sand swallowed my feet and the moonlight danced along the ocean. Will I find it today? Will I be lucky enough? Questions flew around my brain, making me regret ever coming.

Then a wave of determination hit me.

I took the closest boat and rowed to the small island which was outlined by the moon. As the ocean gently splashed against the boat, a distant howling could be heard; it echoed a sense of loss in my heart.

Before tears could form in my eyes, the boat collided with the island. I sprawled out and ran towards the centre. I dug my hands deep into the sand and kept digging.

* * * *

When I got home, I sunk into the sofa and admired the gem. It was as if all my loneliness was taken away and my mother had come back. That's all I ever wanted, and today that's what I got. A gentle smile crawled along my face and my eyes watered. Gentle drops of

rain showered on the window. A calm breeze swayed the trees. I found it. I'm no longer alone.

As my eyes started to wander, an aggressive and loud banging startled me awake. Cautiously, I tiptoed towards the door, hiding the gem in the shoe rack. I waited a few moments, hoping the person had gone.

After a few minutes of silence, I turned to retrieve the gem, but the aggressive and loud banging started again. I peered through the eye piece to see a short yet old man. Golden chains were weighing him down. His bald head reflected the dim corridor lights.

I didn't know who he was, yet his face seemed familiar. As I placed my hand on the doorknob, the sound of a click could be heard. A cold, icy click. A click which can only be made by a gun.

I froze. I couldn't move. Did he have the right address? What have I done? Could it be because of the gem?

Was there any way out?

Candidate 17

Forbidden Code

Story preview: you and your soulmate are the last two people on earth, neither of you know where the other person is. You have 25 days to find each other and figure out the forbidden code before earth is reset and another pair are sent down to complete the task. But if you can find your soulmate and solve the code, life will be set back to reality. If the code is not put on by 12pm on the 25th day, then its game over.

Its day 1. I don't know where I am, I pretty sure I'm In LA but for crying out loud it all looks the same. All the cities are deserted, I have no idea how far I'm yet to travel to find my soul mate but I pray we could be the ones who solve the code together and put an end to this. It's only been 12 hours and I can already feel the fear coming over me.

Night is approaching, the sun is slowly setting in the western suburbs and you can see the stars slowly starting to appear as the night draws in. It's getting colder as time goes by, I know full well I need to seek shelter, yet I do the complete opposite. I carry on walking down the empty roads with no destination in mind, I just continue my journey. My throat becomes extremely dry, thank god I see a small gas station up ahead.

As I push through the door, a little bell ring. It scares me a little considering it's the only noise I've heard all night apart from the sound of me feet scrapping across the roads. There is barley any food left on the shelves, but I was able to find a bottle of water and some crisps to snack

on. I grab some “essentials” to help me get through the next few days without in some way killing myself. I walk out the store and the sun is slowly rising in the east. I've been walking for 24 hours now, and yet still no sign on my stupid soulmate. It's been a day and I already feel like giving up. What if he is like a total jerk who's selfish and doesn't care about anyone but himself? I will end up punching him in his face.

I've been walking for a few hours and I've found a lake. It's beautiful. The sun is glistening down on the water, I watch as the leaves fall into the lake creating small ripples through out the water. Its moments like this when you just want time to stop so you can savor every given moment. It wasn't long until I fell asleep on the rock I was sat on.

It's been 10 days since I arrived here. Still no hope of finding him, I wonder where he is, it's annoying to think about considering he could be ten minutes up the road or 3000 miles away. I am slowly giving up on myself, but part of me tells me I must keep going. I can hear the waves crashing in the distance on some rocks. So, I know there is probably no hope for me if I keep walking in this direction. I'm running low on my supplies; I need to find another store but all I can see is land with no building in sight. I keep walking until I come to a forest, I had no over choice but to walk through it. It got darker and darker as the trees started to lean over me, trapping me, yet I still had no choice but to keep going.

The sound of the twigs snapping as I walk over them was the only thing keeping me sane. Nature relaxed me; it gave me weird feelings inside that calmed my nerves. I looked up and all you could see was trees, the sun was trying to break through, but it didn't stand a chance. Part of the forest would be full of beautiful flowers but that only occurred within the parts where the sun managed to break through. The rest was just basically dead. I heard a few leaves snap behind me, but I thought nothing of it.

The next thing I knew I was being chased by a 4ft bear. I ran. I had nothing on me to distract it, so I did all I could do, run and yell for help praying that in some way he could hear me. I didn't know where this trail would lead me, but I didn't care at that given point. I knew bears could climb trees so that wasn't really an option and that given point, then suddenly...

Bang.

I turned around and found the bear lying on the floor motionless. I sigh with relief knowing this nightmare is slowly coming to an end.

“Hey, I'm Jason”.

To be honest I didn't know how to react, I just turned around and gave him a tight hug, I mean not only did he just save myself from a bear. But he's also my soulmate.

“I'm Elania”.

He gave me a heartwarming smile and carried on walking, I followed behind him just a few paces between us both. I'm glad I finally found him, but that was just the easy part, we must

now complete our task of breaking the formidable code. The night started to draw in and we sought shelter in an abandoned hotel.

We are on day twenty-five, the last day. We shortly discovered a few days ago we are in the Philippines and not America, but everything looks the same when its deserted. There was a volcano on the island, and we could tell by the smoke it was due to erupt any time soon. This only put more pressure on us both, we had no clue where the forbidden code was, but we had to keep looking. We had been living off little food and drink and this was starting to take effects on us both. He became very snappy and mardy. But I'm guessing that's a guy thing.

The smoke from the volcano is getting worse and we have four hours left. I'm scared as to what's going to happened and I know Jason is too but he's just afraid to admit it. We have found the first two digits of the code we have two more to go.

It's an early start for us. The sun is only just starting to rise, but we had to find the last two numbers even if it meant losing an arm, we had to make it out of here alive.

I drag along my little feet trying to keep up with his pace,

“For crying out loud Jason slow down a bit, will you?”

I keep having to run to keep up with him and it gets annoying.

“Shut up E, at your pace we won't make it out here alive” He snaps back.

I kept quite from then on, this time he had a point. We cross a bridge and walk through a cave. I kept close to Jason as I hated being in such small spaces.

“E THIS IS IT! THIS IS THE LAST NUMBER!”

His sudden yell startled me a bit, but I had never felt better. We had done it, we just had to go to the mountain and complete the code. Just as things were going well the ground began to shake, fear filled me. I looked and Jason and he gave me same look back.

“The volcano!” We both said in unison.

He grabbed my hand and we ran out of the cave. Dodging the rocks that were being thrown out the Volcano. It was a living nightmare. We had to reach the mountain before it was too late, we had 55 minutes before it was over.

“WE HAVE TO KEEP RUNNING E OKAY? WE HAVE TO CRACK THE CODE THEN THIS WILL BE OVER!”

Despite him yelling I could barely make out was he was saying, it was too loud to hear him. The rocks crashing on the land either side of us, made it harder to breath. I couldn't catch my breath, but I had to keep going. If I stopped now, I would die, I had to keep going.

We reached the bridge to cross the lake, the mountain on the other side. It wasn't safe for us to cross together,

“E, you have to cross.”

I stared blankly at him. Did he just say that? If we had any chance of ending this, it was him that would need to crack the code.

“Jason if we have any chance in surviving this, it's on you. Only you will be able to save us I ca-”

He didn't even let me finish before he pushed me on the bridge. The only thing keeping me from falling to my death was the bit of threadbare rope and broken planks of wood. I couldn't look down, I took a deep breath and kept moving at a slow steady pace. Dodging the rocks flying at me. Before I knew it, I was on the over side. Jason was making his way across. He was so close but not close enough. A rock hit the bridge and it started to fall. He jumped and I managed to grab him by the hand, my grip wasn't strong enough.

“E let me go. Save everyone else. Not me.”

Before I could say anything, he let go. His eyes filled with fear. He screamed as he fell to his death.

“NOOOOOO!” I screamed as the tears filled my eyes. It hit me, I just watched my soul mate die and there was nothing I could do. Despite the fact I had to keep going, I didn't want to move, I wanted to curl up in a ball and cry, but he wouldn't have wanted that. I got back up on my feet and carried on.

The mountain was pretty much impossible to climb. I had fell and cut myself too many times. But it didn't stop me, the ash in my lungs made it harder, but I made it to the top. Then it hit me. I MADE IT TO THE TOP. I ran over to the code and entered it. I've never been happier. It took me a few tries as my hands trembled and it kept saying error. The final seconds ticked away.

It was too late. We didn't make it in time.

Game over.

Candidate 18

Escape room

The sun slowly closed in, rain began to patter against the pavement, night slowly drew in and the clouds faded into the moonlight. The silhouette of a young girl stood completely still in dimly lit street, like she was waiting for something to happen. Mia looked into the distance spotting the tall figure, telling the rest of her friends. The group of teenagers sat on the park, intimidated by this figure of darkness. The trees danced with the wind as the group stood up one by one, puzzled at what they seen, seconds later the dark figure was gone, they started their journey

home questioning it. There was an eerie silence throughout the neighbourhood. Moments later, a siren like scream echoed throughout the trees, Kayla, the responsible teen of the group walked towards the scream, they walked towards a field of just grass, and a misty like fog, the group found themselves pacing further and further into the distance. Within a split second, another scream echoed from afar, Kayla was gone. The group ran to find her, "wait!" Shouted Tom, the group stopped, confused at what he had seen, "there's a hole where the gate is" he says timidly, knowing they have to find Kayla they step inside, one by one. They started to venture beneath the ground throughout the deep, dark, mysterious tunnel.

Fatigued, the group had been striding their way onwards for 2 hours, seeing no sign of Kayla, and still were walking through the everlasting tunnel. They carried on, one pace after another determined to find Kayla. Charlie, the oldest of the group looked further into the tenebrosity of the tunnel, "I see light!" He shouted through a rage of excitement. The luminescence came from the end of the tunnel, the group began running towards it, it was too bright, they could only feel each other's presence, and the sound of their voices. The light gradually became dimmer and dimmer, there was only daylight. The group found themselves standing in the middle of what seemed to be an escape room, decorated with the same wooden floor, and old vintage wallpaper.

Nebulous, Mia spotted a note written in black marker pen in regards to why they was in an escape room, she started to read aloud; "I know you must have many questions regarding your whereabouts, or what you are doing here, I have been here in preparation of the escape room, in order to rescue your friend Kayla, you must follow the escape room rules, in order to leave you must do everything as you are said to do". The group all stood timidly bunched together in the box room, without any knowledge of what was going to happen to them next. They made their way towards a large door and began to read a message printed on an old vintage poster "here is your first task, escape the box room, in order to leave you must find the key that matches the keyhole, behind you is a box filled with different keys, you must find the correct one in order to leave remember it may be higher than lower, good luck". Eager to leave they rummage through the box looking for the correct key, trying each and every one, after 10 minuets still no key matched the keyhole. Mia began to think about what the note had said and read it back to herself "higher than lower" she began to feel around the door frame, "I found it!" She screeched in accomplishment. They each walked through the door onto their next task.

Eager to leave, they paced through the door ready for the next task, they found the room was much bigger than the last, the door began closing behind them, there was no way of leaving, realising they have to do what the game says. Tom spotted another note, he began to read to the rest of the group "well done, you have completed the first task, however this one will certainly not be as easy. You have to make your own way out, use only the resources you have and each other to guide yourselves throughout this task" the group all stood puzzled in the middle of the room filled with old antiques, TVs and newspapers. Charlie began looking around

the room for something they could use, there was no door to be seen anywhere in the room. He began to move all of the objects around in the room looking for something to guide them through the task, he started shuffling all of the old TVs and antiques, and suddenly spots a vent. "Over here" Charlie shouted, the group stumbled towards where Charlie shouted, they began helping him move the rest of the objects, one by one they climbed inside of the vent and crawled their way through the never ending vent. After crawling through the tightly fitted space they reached another room, however this one was filled with complete darkness, Mia crawled her way back through the vent but closed before she reached the end, she screamed "HELP!" the rest of the group ran over to the vent where Mia was stuck, "you still there?" Questioned Charlie, there was no reply, nothing but silence.

Several moments later they got the vent open, however Mia was already gone. Charlie began to think about where she could be, but nothing added up, the group carried on making their way through the darkness of the room. Suddenly, there was a sound of a broken radio, the group were closely packed together as someone began to speak "hello, you have made it to your third and final task, this requires teamwork and the ability of the hearing to guide each other through the task, then you may see Kayla and Mia again, good luck" the group began looking around the room for anything they can find to venture their way out of the escape room, after 20 minutes of searching, nothing was found, "Over here" shouted Tom eager to leave, "Here.. There's a door," Tom began leaning paces further forward.

"WAIT, underneath you!" shouted Charlie, puzzled Tom stands still and looks over a trapdoor, the old radio sound began again.

"This task is a riddle answer the riddle correct you may go through, however answer incorrectly you lose a member of your team, here is your riddle What belongs to you, but other people use it more than you?" They all stand bunched up baffled by the riddle.

Tom shouted "food!" in a split second the trap door re-opens, a loud scream echoes through the walls of the room.

"Tom!" Shouted "Charlie", realising he has to finish the task Charlie moves forward onto the platform and reads to himself "What belongs to you but other people use it more than you?". "Your name!" Shouted Charlie, the old, rusty steel door slowly creaks open, Kayla and Tom both standing in a small space bunched up.

"Thank goodness you're here Charlie!" Kayla said.

Standing still for moments and moments, Tom whispers, "where's Mia?" Lights begin to slowly become brighter and brighter, the group find themselves standing in the room of Kayla's house, they are all puzzled by what has happened, and that there was still no sign of Mia. Weeks passed, Mia was only known as missing, nowhere to be seen since the night of the escape room, was she apart of a plan? Did she leave town? Where is she? No one knew.

Candidate 19

The Future Nightmare!

Through the dim glow of the tranquil evening, I glimpsed through a tall magnificent casement. I awaited for her arrival. Eventually she had arrived with her tall, light hearted father who was the owner of the property and she was the only daughter in the family. When I was alone, she always brightened my soul, I bonded with her and trusted my life upon her. Although she was from the upper class, she still had feelings for me and felt sympathy for me. Her lips always curved and her eyes always creased, making my lips spread from one eye to the other as usual. She brought in breathtaking books to read to everyone, however today was astonishing, unexpectedly she brought a book that was peculiar and abnormal with the cover of a devil, I thought she wanted to spook us out. This all happened when the glorious full moon arrived. On the next day, she had arrived but without her father. She had made an excuse to go to the toilet, I started approaching her and then she dropped a crumpled up note. When she came out she ignored me and went away with no explanation. It thought I had been jilted but when I had read the note it said "If you still love me come and search for me in the nearest urban area." So I took the risk!

My mind was relentless, I had no idea about what I was going into and I had no idea where the city was. The pale security guards chased me with their sunken eyes because I was too young to leave the orphanage. I thought her compliment was a trap and that my lover desires me to suffer behind the dirty cages of cells. This had led me to a vile nightmare.

Terror gripped me as I noticed the security guards were no longer chasing me but the heavily armed demonic police were now on my chase but then it became way more dreadful as they were in armoured cars. Beyond the cracked tarmac road, I spotted a little, worthless bike which was an advantage for me to recover as I was too exhausted to run anymore. I was panicking as the police threatened to use their electric taser on me. Out of nowhere, a giant sign came up telling me that I was close to the nearest urban area. So then I gave it all my energy into the little, squeaky bike in order to outlive the horror!

Successfully I had escaped and made my way into the crowded, luxurious city. Suddenly every object was disappearing until nothing left but just an ordinary book ahead of me, there was not a single soul out there but the moon watching me in the darkness. I approached the book carefully and read the single page it had. Out of nowhere my heart started to beat faster than ever, chills crept down my spine as I sensed something major was going to occur. A cold wind rushed passed me giving me shivers as I thought I had seen my lover approaching through the luminous fog. I was delighted to see her again but unfortunately as she came closer, I had realized something had changed. Her innocent eyes were filled with dark blood and her golden blond hair started to levitate as if it was alive and her lips were now straight and her eyes no longer creased, it was seen as supernatural. I remembered the book I found and it said that I had to destroy it as my lover was abnormal and she was seeking for the book so no one would know how to break the witchcraft. I desperately tried to get hold of the book but it had made her more furious. I knew she was about to terminate me and yet, knowing this would be my end, I leaned over and gently kissed her on the rotten red lips. A moment later, hesitantly my love came closer to me and whispered passionately in my ear those three powerful words of love!

The Red Queen

The gates were locked shut behind me and the guards were no longer dressed as the three of hearts or the five of spades. The roses were no longer painted red and the white was peeping through. Where was the queen of hearts and her bossy orders? The king's window was boarded shut and I'm guessing if an inch of light had peeped in, we would no longer see the abnormally short king that ruled by the queen's side, but we would see an average sized man who was unfit to rule alone. The castles croquet court was damaged, and the hedgehog balls had been replaced with dull wooden ones, I guess the queen finally learnt how to play without cheating. The snowy colored rabbit was draped across a muddy bench with his brittle, bronze and broken pocket watch dangling by his side, scraping along the floor with each small swing. He looked peaceful. That has when I noticed he wasn't singing about being late however he sung the words "I'm early".

* * *

I seemed to remember floating down the little black hole last time I visited, it turned my ankle length, baby blue skirt into the appearance of a large umbrella. This time however I plummeted to the ground and landed within the beautiful flower garden. I expected to be greeted with awful comments and pokes to the ankles except I did not. The Roses, Tulips and Daisies had been ripped out of the earth and thrown across the floor. They were no longer judging me; they were complimenting my flowing golden locks and my black and white apron. My breath was caught in my throat and I could not stand to see the sight any longer. I hurried away from the garden and towards to the home of the trusted hatter and his mouse, who always seemed to be as high as a kite. Hopefully, he could explain why the flowers were dying and why everywhere seemed unusually quiet. I followed the uneven path and the old, curvy, sapless trees to the house of the hatter.

The path was longer than I remembered however I reached the hat shaped house within a matter of minutes. When I approached it I thought it was abandoned,

which seemed normal enough for the hatter as he was always round the hares for tea every time it was his un-birthday, except there was smoke tumbling from the tip of the hat. I followed the steppingstones up to the door and pushed myself through. Gathered around an extremely uneven table was six lifeless figures, all as dull as the one next to them. None of them raised their glares to me, instead they stayed in their statue-like form. The hatter was no longer dancing around the hallways like a raving lunatic and I feared it would mean that I would never discover why he said a raven was like a writing desk. The mouse was no longer higher than a kite, but he was more aware of his surroundings. The smoke falling out of the Hatter's home was not that of the blue caterpillars because he was no longer smoking O's from his long pipe. The twins were huddled together over in the corner of the table, they looked like they were in the harsh winters breeze and this was their only source of warmth. And finally, floating in midair there was the Cheshire cat, however he could no longer be described as Cheshire due to the loss of his supposedly incurable smile. These were not the people I remember from my many visits and I did not want to see them this way. I fled from the scene and did not look back.

I remember a forest when I was on my first expedition in Wonderland. The old sign had long been taken down because the drummer frogs and the mirror birds kept peeling the paint of it, however Tulgey Woods would always lead me to the Red Queen's castle. When I first took my steps into the enchanted orchard, I expected flocks of mirror birds to come and hover around my face and remind me that one day I might not be able to imagine six impossible things before breakfast. Instead I was pushed along the once beautifully even pathway by thousands of shiny birds that showed a blurred reflection and frogs scrambled at my feet and croaked out music from a bass drum. I longed to see the creatures I once hated however I needed to get to the queen. I raced away from the creatures and down the path. I tripped and tumbled the whole way and I wondered if I was too late. The fate of the silhouettes was left in my hands once again. I could say queen was not entirely smart, even though her head looked big enough, as she never changed the direction of the maze. Two lefts and a right to get to the gates and even then, the hatter managed to get lost.

* * *

I raced over to the rabbit in the blue tux and checked his invite, which had been stored in his back pocket. 12:00. The time was 11:30. He was indeed early. I grazed my hand over the white fur and wondered about what happened. How long had they been left like this? I lifted myself from the ground and entered the large, heart-shaped palace. I expected abnormal people and different playing cards for guards, however I received a glass coffin, enclosing the body of a young girl. She looked more peaceful in death than she ever did in life. All the stress and the impossible thoughts that she never tried to make possible had not taken effect on her beautiful image. Her crown appeared more scarlet than it had ever before and a white rose was placed in her hands beneath the coffin, for the white queen and taken the life of her remaining family.