

# Madras College

Nicky Johnston  
Entries  
2011



Winner: Zoe Davies

## The Exam

by Zoe Davies

Jolted out of my trouble-free dreams by a shrill ringing, I stumbled out of my cosy duvet-nest and fumbled for the switch on the side of the hellish contraption. I stood on the spot for a minute, slowly blinking and fighting the urge to crawl back into the warmth of my bed and drift off far away from anything associated with cold, tiredness and school. Ugh, school that week meant exams, which intensified the urge to sleep, to forget. I glanced at the scribbly mess of paper and pen that was pinned to my wall. Maths. Well, there went my enthusiasm. Nevertheless, I began my preparation for school and had my breakfast which was practically shoved down my gullet by my "loving" parents. Nothing like nausea first thing in the morning.

I could feel the seconds tick by as the merciless chasm of Credit Maths -Paper 2, drew ever closer. A bell similar to that which had awoken me that morning rang suddenly, causing me to start. Helped along by a sudden wave of people, I made my way to the mass gathering outside the hall. A friend frantically chatted - to me or herself, I haven't a clue - about pacing yourself and being calm, all the while amassing five pencils, a ruler, a protractor, rubber, sharpener, calculator, highlighters and compass into her seemingly bottomless pencil case. I inwardly raised my eyebrows and allowed myself a small smirk as I double-checked that my pen and calculator were still in my back pocket. Looking around at all the chatting, panicky-but-(mostly)-trying-not-to-show-it faces that surrounded me, which no doubt matched my own, I noticed a group of people all with revision books out, frantically flicking through them. I was pleased with the amount of revision I had done, although I silently prayed that there would be nothing about box plots, whatever they were... .Doors opened, the atmosphere drained to leave only tension as thick as treacle, and the flutter of a million butterflies as they somehow materialised into peoples stomachs. A buzz of low murmuring caused the air to tickle my ears as we poured into the hall and fought for tables close to friends, or at least, someone we knew.

As I tried to make myself comfortable in the rickety, old, wooden chair behind the desk I'd chosen, I was struck by how, interestingly, the acoustics of the room were so that the teachers footsteps echoed menacingly and the faintest whisper could be heard from across the room. Just an amazing coincidence, I guess. As a teacher droned on in a monotone about something or other, I can't really remember (It mustn't have been important) I yawned and got a mouthful of the perfume that the girl in front of me had just sprayed, missing herself completely. My eyes watered and felt increasingly nauseous as I tried, and failed, to get the skunk-worthy taste out of my mouth by drinking almost all of the water I had. Great, now I was

either going to die of thirst or need the bathroom halfway through the exam. Knowing my luck, it would be the latter. The teacher finished speaking and there was a wave of noise as everyone simultaneously turned their pages.

Ten minutes into the paper, I was bombarded by a succession of questions causing me to curse my teacher (well, how else was it alien to me?) and my 'brains' memory capacity. Deciding to return to them later, I tried another, only this time my calculator wouldn't work. Frustrated, as I knew how to do it, I sat and tried every combination under the sun to try and bypass the accursed syntax error, without success. Exhaling, I looked up and almost fell out of my uncomfortable chair. I had less than half an hour to finish the entire paper. Not caring about the quality of my handwriting, I rushed through the paper, checking the clock every spare second and growing anxious at the growing number of people seemingly finished. On the last question a teacher selected me as their next victim to unsettle. I immediately stopped writing and waited for them to move on, only they didn't. Without lifting my head, I glanced at the clock. Five minutes. I counted the seconds as they stood there, waiting for God knows what, and wondered how accidental it would seem if I were to shift my chair slightly and possibly crush a toe or three. After they finally prised their clumpy feet from the floor behind me and moved away from me, I hurriedly finished the paper and pushed it away from me as if it were dangerous to my health, which it probably was.

Leaving the hall, I felt my eyes begin to sting. Cursing under my breath, I quickly removed the evidence that I had been felled by some black ink and a few sheets of paper, and glanced around me hoping that no-one had witnessed it. I knew my stressed-out, over-active brain was making mountains out of molehills, but I couldn't help but feel slightly (ok, hugely) worried at the thought of my expectant parents finding out the marks I got. which would no doubt be horrific. Feeling deflated, I recovered my bag from the reducing pile and made my way to my next class, squirreling the troublesome thought into the furthestmost reached of my subconscious to be dealt with afterwards, maybe never.

# Madras College 2013

by Alex Fyfe

Monday 10th June 2013

Mr Darge told us to keep a diary over the next few days to give a real picture on what the new school building is really like. I don't think many people will bother in my class but I will write a diary because if it is good maybe Mr McKay will put it in the Madras diary section in the paper. My teachers think I am not very clever but I think genius comes like puberty, one day it will just arrive. I hope the day comes very soon so I can prove everyone who calls me lino Lyle" wrong. They call me lino Lyle because my dad is a lino salesman and fitter. I am very proud to be his son because the school has asked him to put down the lino in the new school. I will be able to tell everyone "that's my dad's lin you're setting fire to" or "that's my dad's lino you just spat your gum on" next week

Tuesday 11th June

The rector announced at assembly today that a mystery celebrity is going to open the new school! Rumours are flying round that it is going to be Sienna Miller! Personally I hope it is Evelyn Glennie, my favourite percussion player. I play the triangle and maracas in the school concert band. Eventually I hope to progress to the glockenspiel but Mr Bell said that I would have to be very lucky.

Mrs Craib told everyone that there would be new instruments for everyone at the new school at band practice tonight. I can't wait as my current triangle is very rusty and the ribbon round it is so dirty I have to use my hand sanitiser gel after touching it. Also, only one of the maracas works as the other one was smashed over Douglas Ramsey's head. He isn't very popular. I keep telling Miss Burns this but she said because I stand right at the back it wouldn't matter as nobody could see me anyway. There is not much I can do about it. If Evelyn Glennie does come I will ask her how she managed to get to be at the front of the stage.

Wednesday 12th June

With a week to go we all received our new timetables and just my luck I've got swimming on the first day! I hate PE. I don't want to go around smelling of chlorine the first day so I will need to find a way out of it. Rumours of the new food hall are rife around the school. Apparently shops will set up in little stalls and we can all get our lunch wherever takes our fancy. Someone told me that there is going to be a Subway, Pizza Express takeaway, Starbucks and a Janettas ice cream bar. To think I have been suffering on nutrigain bars and semi skimmed milk for the past three years at the scaf!

As we only have one week left people are leaving mementos of themselves all over the desks and chairs. I sit down in maths and all I can see is "DAZ 2K13" and "emileeee woz ere 2013 "and "If you read this you are gay LOL" Thank god we will have new desks next week

My first day swimming dilemma is solved! My best friend Douglas Ramsey has a verruca and he is willing to sell me it for a pound! I will do anything to get out of swimming so I gave him my pound and met him in the toilets at lunch. He took of his sock and I took off mine and he rubbed his big toe all over my foot! I surely must have a verruca by now! Then the janitor walked in. Mrs Seeley told us to keep our feet to ourselves and that she would phone my parents if we were caught again I didn't care, now I won't have to do swimming or smell of chlorine for the whole day.

Thursday 13th June

We had double home ec with Mrs Nisbet today. This is my favourite subject and I want to become a cook when I am older, like Jamie Oliver. Since he only passed two exams and still managed to become a chef I think I must have a pretty good chance because I managed to pass my food hygiene unit with a 4 minus. This is pretty good considering that several drops of hand sanitizer went in my tuna and sweetcorn bake while the teacher wasn't looking. My favourite subjects are:

Home economics, Hospitality, technical cooking (Elmwood college course) and music. However my standard grade in music isn't looking too good as the SQA have just said that the triangle is not a recognised instrument for the exam. On the plus side I might get to do glockenspiel instead. The latest gossip in the corridors is that the new toilets will have those dead fancy Dyson airblade hand driers and automatic foaming soap! I think I will visit the toilets in the new building to sample these luxuries! I have never been to the school toilet before, I have always opted to hold on and go the Morrison's toilet. If the stories that come from our toilets are true I would not be able to hold my breath long enough to go for a pee and wash my hands.

Friday 14th June

The graffiti levels are at an all time high! Every desk chair and wall is now adorned with names, dates and swear words. Thank the lord that there will be new stuff at the new school next week. The place is starting to look even more like a Romanian orphanage! I bet you that Mr Jones cannot wait for the move! Hospitality today, I made a fantastic sunshine sandwich with bacon, a pineapple ring and a glace cherry but somebody stole my cherry off the top! I asked Mrs Nisbet for another one but she shrugged and said" I have dealt with enough of your requests this week Lyle, next time take better care of your ingredients." I will try and find a cherry at home before I give it to my dad but if not I think a sultana will have the overall same effect. Anyway if you don't experiment with food you will never be like Jamie

Oliver. Shame I am not allowed to experiment at school, you have to follow your recipe card to the letter.

I decided to raise my thoughts with the management today and told Mr Millar that if the new school had boy and girl stairs then I would make a complaint because it was sexist and that I had the right to mingle with my female colleagues on the stairs. He told me that "there will be no mingling on the stairs and would any girls want to mingle with you?" I didn't quite get his meaning but I suspect he thinks that a girl would not like to mingle with me! I can assure you that I speak to girls very regularly. I spoke to a dinner lady at lunch just yesterday.

Monday 17th June

With only two days left at the old building spirits are running high, not with nostalgia but with excitement. The new home ec rooms will have nice new gas cookers and new equipment, the food hall sounds brilliant and now it seems that the royal couple are tipped to open the new school! I have told the library that in the new school I wish to see my new favourite book "The Naked Chef by Jamie Oliver. I expected it to be a little more interesting considering the title. Still, is very good but if I had wrote it I would have put in a few more lead characters and some more plot. Douglas told me that there might be an airfix model aeroplane club starting at the new school, I told him to get a life' When I got home I finally got passed the level ten recipes on Cooking Mama! I am dead pleased, I can't wait to tell everyone at school. Maybe if I don't become a chef I will be a professional Nintendo gamer.

Tuesday 18th June

Had my last practice session with my old, rusty, bent triangle. No tears were shed and I will not miss it! I prayed last night that the new triangle will be a Meinl 6" chrome plated steel one, I doubt it will be but you can live in hope! Evelyn Glennie's triangle was on ebay. I told Mrs Nisbet but she said the school couldn't afford it now they had spent all their money on the new building. Shame, I could have said that the most famous Scottish percussionist had sweated on the very triangle I was playing. Some good news is that my verruca has manifested nicely and I am guaranteed not to have to go swimming! It certainly was a bargain at a pound, think how long it will last me, six months at a push!

Wednesday 19th June

The last day of the old school buildings, I am not very sad but there was a rather nostalgic feel to the air until I filled the home ec room with smoke! For some reason I don't think the department will be wholly supportive of my dreams to be a cook and I will have to buy a new tie! While cooking my chicken stir fry my tie got caught on top of the work top and without realising it I put my wok down on top of it! After stirring my chow mein I

picked the wok up and my tie was melted to the bottom of it with a nasty acrid smoke coming from it! In the end Mrs Nisbet had to cut me free and she said that "I had made a right mess of a brand new wok" when I said we were about to get brand new ones anyway she sent me out. Anyway I bet you Ken Horn's got his tie stuck to a wok before and he is still famous. Don't think I will sleep a wink tonight as I cannot wait until tomorrow morning!

Thursday 20th June

Finally the new school! Though to be honest the day started disappointingly when the mystery celebrity turned out to be Alex Salmond! Most of the pupils didn't know who he was and he waffled on for an hour talking about "the quality of the Scottish education system" before unveiling the plaque. Surely they could have got someone more interesting. I mean he isn't really a celebrity he just managed to get his face on the TV. The new lino looks very good, it looks very similar to the old stuff but I'm sure it is of the highest quality. However it appears to me that the council ran out of money and started selling off sponsorship deals for the new departments. At almost every corridor there is a little plaque saying "welcome to the English department, proudly sponsored by Chambers dictionaries" and "Welcome to the Modern Studies corridor, built on funds raised by Gordon Brown" and "This food hall was built through funds donated by McDonalds" and "Welcome to the Madras College driving range paid for by Donald Trump" I think it makes the place look cheap but maybe they were going for that look.

PE was a disaster! When I got down to the pool and presented Mr Tarvet with my foot he just smiled and said get changed! So by the time I had pulled on my speedos (noticing to my horror that everyone else had shorts — even Douglas) Mr Tarvet came through with a verruca sock! He said to me "now were in the new building I thought it would be nice to buy a new swimming sock! You can give it its maiden voyage!" When we got to the poolside I noticed they had shiny new plastic hand rails, so at least I didnt get electrocuted. Swimming went downhill from then on. Everyone laughed at my speedos and the verruca sock and that my goggles were pushed so hard onto my face Mr Tarvet had to prise them off at the end of the lesson. I want my pound back now!

Another surprise today was a new tannoy system! Mr Jones records his commands and they are played out continually through speakers in the corridor. It is a nice idea but the novelty has worn off already. We surely do not need to be reminded continually "Ties at throat" and "Keep to the right at all times" and "Move quickly to your next class". It also seems that he has recorded some ridiculous waffle e.g. "Our race for excellence has no finish line" and "look before you leap" and "would the janitor please make his way to the Steven Hawking science suite"

But by far the biggest shock was the horrible fact that the school had not bought new chairs or desks and we were still stuck with the old ones. The old desks that everyone had just covered in graffiti because they were

going out had turned up in every classroom. Once again will I have to relive the nightmare of reading "if you read this you are gay LOL" and everyone noticing and calling me a homosexual. All in all the first day has not been great but hopefully things will get better, anyway I have sworn to try the toilets tomorrow.

Friday 21st June

The toilets did not turn into the gleaming, polished, Armitage Shanks dream I once had. They in fact turned into the public toilet from hell. The loo seats were the ones that don't even go all the way round the edge! I bet you the teachers have fully circular 100 seat while we have to make do with a cut price one. The hand driers were in fact cheapo plastic ones which didn't even heat the air! In the end I had to apply hand sanitizer even after washing my hands because already the taps were looking grimy. I had music for the first time today. I had been looking forward to brand new keyboards but obviously the recession was still biting so we still have the manky, dirty ones which are covered in chewing gum, marker pen and glue. Most of them have keys missing anyway. Although there was one brand new keyboard. It had been donated by KT Tunstall which was pretty nice of her. Still I didn't get a go on it so I just hit a tambourine all period and pretended to work.

Another disappointment came at lunchtime, the food hall did not have any of the rumoured shops. Instead they were all healthy food stores, not a Greggs in sight Things like "Holland and Barrett" and "Spud U Like" which nobody likes. Most people just starved but I phoned my dad who passed me a chip buttie through the gates. Sadly Mr Munn caught me and confiscated it. Between you and me I think he ate it himself! I don't blame him now everyone is forced to eat pulses, nuts and granola bars!

Monday 24th June

Today has to be one of the worst days of my life. The home ec department must truly hate me now. It all started in Hospitality when I was cooking my potato and sweetcorn chowder I left the gas ring on and closed the glass lid over the rings without realising that the ring is still on! Five minutes later when we were all sitting down listening to Mrs Grieve there was a loud smashing noise from my cooker! The glass top had exploded everywhere! Mrs Grieve was so angry with me she said "That was a brand new cooker! Never been used before and now it is wrecked! I must have said a million times turn the gas off but no, you leave it on! You will pay for the new one Lyle, get out of my class!" My dad is going to go berserk when he gets the bill. Being a professional gamer is now much more likely! The day was already going badly and then I discovered that the library had not purchased the book I requested! When I asked the librarian she said that they were only going to buy books that appealed to everyone. I had to settle for "the Simpson's comic book collection" instead. It must have a

universal appeal considering the library has purchased all twenty books in the series.

Tuesday 25th June

Another major disappointment today. The school have not bought me a new triangle or maracas. It is still the same old smelly one with the dirty ribbon. I can't believe it, everyone else has got new instruments so why haven't I? I asked Miss Burns she said "the triangle isn't a major part in an orchestra so we didn't think it was necessary to buy a new one' I feel dead miffed! Not a major part of the orchestra! I understand that the audience can't hear it in the concerts but the school hasn't given me an amplifier so it's not my problem. I forgot my hand sanitizer today so I couldn't even clean the germs from my hands. I think I will sue the school for neglecting my hygiene.

I think the whole tannoy thing has gone to Mr Jones' head if I'm honest! The constant announcements affirming his authority are becoming very annoying! All we hear is "only drinking water is permitted" and "violence is not the answer, go to your happy place instead!" and "If anyone finds Mr Darge's memory stick please hand it into pupil services as he has lost it again". Thank god I only have three more years of this! I feel very sorry for the first years.

Wednesday 26th June 2013

I have decided finish my diary of the new school now, I think I have touched on every area of our new marginally improved lives. My dream of becoming a chef is in jeopardy after I blamed defective equipment in relation to the safety glass on top of the cookers. Mrs Grieve didn't agree with this view as "The cooker was brand NEW!" The lunch situation is as dire as ever but there is talk of a tesco metro, somehow I doubt it. Swimming will be over in a few weeks which is good but now I have to get rid of a monster verruca! I have tried every over the counter product without success, I only succeeded in making the condition worse by squirting liquid nitrogen on my big toe by accident. I will never trust a can of cold liquid again. The new school nurse just looked at my toe and fainted so I will visit the chiropodist next week. I might threaten to leave the concert band if they don't improve my instrument but for some reason I don't think they would really care. But by far the worst thing about the new building is having to look at Alex Salmond's face on that plaque every morning.

Alex Fyfe, with apologies to Adrian Mole

P.S. Please Mr Jones never buy a tannoy system, ever.

# Home

by Michael Martin

I could end it. I could end it all. I just had to jump.

I could see the headlines the next day: "Kid jumps off school", "youngster bullied to death." It would only take a second, only one split second to stop all the miserable years still to come. It would all be over. I would be free. No more name calling, no more beatings, no more life.

A sick feeling overwhelmed me as I peered over the edge. I wanted to jump, I wanted to more than anything in the world, but I couldn't. I was pathetic! A coward! I stared up to the dark sky and asked it: "why can't I do this?" It didn't reply. Tears streamed down my pale cheeks. Why? Why couldn't I just end it? Why was I putting myself through all this pain! Now came an all too familiar walk, the walk of shame. The walk back down from the roof, I had failed. Again.

There must be a kid like me in every school. I'm the loner, the goth, the emo, whatever you want to call me. Most kids just call me "Freak." I guess that's what I am. A freak. Cuts run up and down my scrawny pale arms, my ghost-white face is hidden under my greasy, black hair. I'm that kid that sits in the corner, the one who doesn't talk, the one people throw things at, ye, I'm that one. Or at least I used to be.

I vividly remember that day, the day that transformed my life. It started off like any other. "BRRRING! BRRRING! BRRRING!" that was the sound I hated more than any other sound in the world, the sound of my alarm clock. It signified the start of a school day, the start of ridiculing, the start of name calling, the start of pain. That is what my life consisted of. When hearing that sound, I would awake from my nightmares, and into a new one, one that I could have ended.

I trudged through the rain to school with my head hung low, as always. It was a grey, miserable day. While kicking a can alongside the road, a school bus raced past me. It splashed a puddle of dirty water over me, then some kid opened the window and shouted: "Emo prick!" I ignored him, I was used to it. I just kept my eyes on my wet feet and kept going. Then, as I turned the corner I saw the place of my nightmares, the hell house. Madras college. Madras was like any other school, we all had a social class we belonged to. There were the neds, the athletes, the geeks, the musicians, the popular kids. Everyone had a home, everyone, except me. I was the lone goth, the ugly duckling. Well that's what I was, until that day. That day when my whole life changed.

It was in the quad that it all started. I sat on a bench, just thinking about life, when a group of neds turned the corner. You could here these guys from a mile away, swearing at people, shouting about how they got pissed on

Friday night. There was an unspoken rule among us other kids. Never look a ned in the eye. They were vicious, heartless animals. For some reason I couldn't help myself, when they were mere feet from me I lifted my head, and stared a ned named Matt straight in the eye. Matt was the "top dog", the guy who thought he was above everyone else. The ned who got the first tattoo, the ned who'd banged the most girls, the ned that could drink the most. You know the kind of guy I mean. He thought he was untouchable. He wasn't the big, strong ned, he was the skinny "football hooligan" The one that wore the McKenzie jacket and had zigzag shavings in his hair. Alone he posed a threat to no one, but that's why they travel in packs. I remember his words: "What the fuck ya lookin at ya wee freak!" my legs trembled, my mouth went dry, I felt I was going to be sick. His piercing eyes looked me up and down, sizing me up. I was going to get battered, I knew it. In a few seconds some kid would shout "FIGHT!" The whole school would come running, just to see me get the shit kicked out of me. That's not what happened though, not this time. As the stench of alcohol and tobacco drew near, I closed my eyes, wishing it would all go away. Wishing I was in a happy place. Wishing I was home. That's when it happened. That's when my life changed. My wish came true. A warm hand grasped my shoulder. That hand pulled me back and put three guys in my place. Was I dreaming? Was this real? The neds stopped, and took a step back. The same thing must have been going through their minds: "what's happening?" No one ever stood up to them, especially not for a freak. These guys showed no intimidation, they stood their ground. I saw something in Matt's eyes. Was it fear? It was. Matt, the hardest guy in school, the hardest guy alive, was scared. His eyes darted from side to side, unsure of his next move. He took a step back, and another, he was walking away. I couldn't believe it, The neds had been defeated, "try that again and I'll kick the shit into ya three." Mart said to the three guys. I knew he wasn't going to do anything, and so did they. He just needed everyone to think he would, to think he was still the hardest guy on earth. A ned couldn't admit defeat, they always needed to feel as though they were in control.

I couldn't understand it. Why did these three guys stop the neds from battering me? Did they want something from me? Money? Because I didn't have any of that. Or maybe they wanted to show the neds who the real "top dogs" were. I just didn't know.

They approached me later on, the three guys who had saved me.

"You alright mate?" one asked.

"Ye, fine, thanks." I didn't know what else to say, people don't tend to talk to me. I mean who would want to talk to Freak? Then they said something which left me speechless:

"You wanna come to lunch with us?"

Was this a joke? A dare? Maybe a bet, see how long you can hang around with Freak.

"I . . . I . ." I couldn't talk.

"Common mate just come."

I didn't know what to do, so I just played along.

I soon found out it wasn't just these three guys I was going with, it was also four girls. I was bad enough talking to guys, but girls. I don't think I had ever talked to a girl in my life. These weren't just any girls, they were beautiful, talented girls. I kept touching my face, scratching my head, I felt so awkward, so uncomfortable. I was about to scurry away, hoping no one would notice, but suddenly "hey there" one of the girls said.

"Em. . .hi" I trembled. She smiled at me. My entire face went crimson, fortunately my hair hid it.

I lingered at the back of the group as they walked through the streets. I didn't tend to go into town at lunch time. I would buy my lunch before school, when there was less people in the shops. This way I avoided being around school kids, which meant I avoided being shouted at, bullied, even if it was just for a little while. Suddenly I was brought into conversation. One of the guys asked me: "so where you from? You know, where's your home?"

Home. I thought about that word. A home is a place you are happy, a home is a place you feel safe, a home is a place you belong. The truth was, I didn't have a home. I had a house, but no home.

The next morning felt different. I didn't drag myself out of bed, it was sunny and I wasn't miserable. It was odd. I actually held my head up on the way to school. The sun smiled at me, I smiled back. The school bus past me, not a word came from it, no one shouting "Freak", no one throwing anything out the window. The neds swaggered towards me, I braced myself for a punch to the gut. Nothing. They didn't even look at me. I stumbled down a busy corridor, I didn't get tripped, called "freak" I didn't even get a paper aeroplane thrown at me. I felt a feeling inside, one I hadn't felt in a long time. I felt happy.

I went to lunch with the same group of friends that day, and the next day, and the next. I even started talking to them, saying "Hi" to the girls in the corridors, giving the guys high fives. They would give me a friendly punch in the arm. I actually looked forward to going to school, the "BRRRING!" sound of my alarm clock now brought a smile to my face. The slits on my wrists were fading, I even cut my hair. I was a whole new person.

I really got to know these seven kids. They were all so different, all from different groups, yet so close. There was Karl, an expert craftsmen, who could make anything from wood. Lew, a future rugby player for Scotland. Mike, who was the next Leonardo da vinci. Sarah, a promising actress, Amy a master chef, Nicole, a genius, and Grette, who I could see performing Swan Lake in the near future. They were all so talented, but what was my talent? What was I good at? Well I will tell you. I am a musician.

That's what I did at my house, while my parents shouted at each other, arguing, swearing. I sat alone in my room, playing guitar, it's the only thing that kept me sane. It took me away, out of my life, into a beautiful place. You probably think I'm into Slipknot, and all that heavy metal, well you're wrong. I like real music, beautiful music. My personal favourite song: "Somewhere over the rainbow."

Amy often had the group over at her home for a movie night. This time she asked me to come along. While sitting at Amy's, in the dark, watching movies, I looked at the others. Seven faces, all happy. They had taken me in like an abandoned puppy. They didn't care how I looked, how I smelled, they didn't call me Freak. I felt something, a warm, comforting feeling inside. That's when I realised.

I have friends.

So here I am, a year later. Standing on the roof of the school, looking over the edge. Except from this time I'm not contemplating suicide. I come up here to think. To think about my old life, to think about my new. To think about what a great decision I made a year ago, and to think about how I feel. I feel happy, I feel safe, I feel I belong. I've found a home. That home is Madras.

# Waiting

By Gemma Malek

We just lay there and stared up above at the ceiling. We waited for the right moment to tell each other how we really felt. I waited for him to tell me that I meant more to him than he'd ever let on. I waited for him to laugh and tease me for falling for another one of his jokes. I waited for the courage to bubble up inside me and I waited for myself to blurt out that I was sorry and that I loved him. I waited to confess this but although my lips trembled with fear, I couldn't make them form any shapes or words. I waited a long time to discover who I really was, but even now as I recount this story to you, I am still figuring it out. I don't owe you an explanation, I don't owe you anything. But now that one of the most important people in my life is gone, there's really no one else to tell and I know you won't believe me, I know you will think that I'm fucking physco but it happened, it really happened. Let me take you back to the worst day of my life.

17th of January, 2011. It was a bitter, bitter day, not unlike this one. The cold wind was biting at my face as I waited in the Quad for Dan. My teeth were chattering together and as I wiped my nose on my glove I saw him strolling across the Quad towards me, as if it was a bright Summer's day. The cold never bothered him, that was one of his best attributes, he was warm on the outside, just like his heart on the inside. He smiled at me and I was forced to laugh, despite my hardest efforts. That's all you could do with Dan, laugh at how abnormal he was, laugh at how he seemed impossible, like nothing else on Earth. Just laugh.

We just stood there for a moment or two and he looked deep into my eyes, as if he could see into my soul. I could never hold his stare and I was first to speak, cutting into the silence.

Whenever we did that, have a conversation I mean, people always stared. They were clearly jealous of our friendship. Dan never had any other friends, I was all he needed. They just didn't understand.

I laughed at Dan as he screwed up his face at me, in an attempt to cheer me up. We both stood there, cackling at one another, as if there was no one else in the world. But then everything changed. The perfect setting dissolved around me as a girl came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder. I swung around to see who it was. A girl. Just a girl, like any other, she was tall with long, blond hair, I remember that. She stood there and asked me who I was talking to. What a stupid question. It must've been the pillar, it must have been blocking her eyesight because she couldn't see Dan or the funny faces he had been making at me. And she couldn't see him then as he stood behind her and mimicked her face. I was roaring with laughter, I couldn't help it, its like I said, he made me laugh. She was

livid. She pushed me and pulled my hair, saying that I shouldn't have been laughing at her and when I explained it was Dan she only tugged it harder. But that wasn't the worst of it. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her hand creep slowly into her jacket pocket and pull out a blade, like a silver python, emerging from its home. She rammed it into my back and dropped me. I fell onto the flagstones with a thud and Dan immediately came running.

He must've called an ambulance because the next thing I remember is us in hospital, lying side by side, staring at the ceiling in my hospital room, with wires and drips in me. He told me he was going away and that he might not be back for a while but that I would be fine on my own. I tried to speak but there was nothing to say. We just lay there and stared up above at the ceiling. We waited for the right moment to tell each other how we really felt. I waited for him to tell me that I meant more to him than he'd ever let on. I waited for him to laugh and tease me for falling for another one of his jokes. I waited for the courage to bubble up inside me and I waited for myself to blurt out that I was sorry and that I loved him. I waited to confess this but although my lips trembled with fear, I couldn't make them form any shapes or words no matter how much I wished for that.

And now I am stuck. I am trapped in this room with padded walls and a bolted door because everyone says I'm crazy. Everyone says I have a vivid imagination and that I'm lucky to be alive. But what do they know? Everyone thinks that I'm a liar. I needed you to at least know the truth and not some twisted, sick story from the men in the white coats.

I was healthy enough to be released from hospital four days ago. They said I should be waiting 3 years for a kidney donor.

But I'm just waiting for Dan to come back.

# **Murder At Madras**

**by Catherine Vallis**

He panicked. The blood was on his hands. What could he do? He ran.

A few minutes later the first period bell rang. A mob of students poured out of classes and noise broke the quiet. The ordered chaos moved around the room of the crime as if subconsciously repulsed by the horror of it. The body was eventually found by a pupil, who had gone to the library to 'study' instead of going to P.E, in the crime section. The cry of murder filled the sellotaped marked corridors and crumbling classrooms, soon followed by silent shock and even quicker by not so silent rumour. Speculators went into overdrive. Who was the victim? Not one of the teachers or pupils. A tourist maybe, mesmerised by a feature of the architecture then caught unawares as part of the architecture fell away and crushed them? A student from the university looking for his political science class but instead finding death? A disgruntled citizen of St Andrews, armed with a letter of complaint about an unruly pupil, who had an accident with a letter opener? And why were they in the library? Who was the murderer? Why would someone do something like this? Would there be a chance to skive off classes?

Jack's hands burned as the rest of himself shivered. He could understand now why they called it murder in cold blood. He could feel his blood and it was as if it was freezing in his veins. He couldn't see his blood on his hands anymore but like Lady Macbeth he could still feel it there. Jack was paranoid. Was there blood on his shirt? Did he seem nervous? When would they catch him?

The police had arrived in a matter of seconds. Some people said that they had a permanent car around the corner, just in case. They seemed confused as if it was an elaborate practical joke. The two policemen's uniform stood out from the grass and their presence was comically ominous. They looked awkward as they took the long walk up the path to the quad as they were aware of the many nosy eyes of St Andrews' residents boring into the back of their heads. It was very disappointing, though to the spectators as the young policemen looked more scared and inexperienced than anyone else.

The police. Of course there was going to be police. He had known that there would be but he had hoped that there wouldn't be. As if the whole incident would blow over and people would name it 'murdergate' or 'librarygate' and then move on. Maybe he should confess or give a false witness statement or start a rumour against someone else. No he couldn't do that. But he had no other options. His head felt it was going to explode. There was a few hours until school was over then he could flee home and clear his head.

Everyone was confounded. There weren't any fingerprints or bloodstained carpets or anything remotely like evidence except from the body at the side of the room. The police were sure it must have been done by a criminal mastermind. There were no witnesses, suspects (apart from all pupils and teachers) and even the victim was unknown. There was a queue of eager students willing to 'help' but no statements of real worth. Only conspiracy and 2012-doomsday theories and occasionally a budding Sherlock Holmes complete with deer-stalker hat. The police were despairing.

They suspected him. He knew it because two of the teachers had looked at him, after being updated by the police, with evil eyes. Jack was beginning to think he wouldn't have to decide whether to turn himself in or not as he would have a heart-attack first.

The vultures were circling. The cliché was being passed around as a universal code for 'the journalists are here'. The different news channels had gathered on the front grass. The reporters were standing with sombre faces indicating to the building behind them and telling the camera that it was indeed the school. The cameramen were doing well to keep filming as a large crowd of hecklers had formed behind them to complain about their vans creating traffic. There looked like there might be another fatality as a conker nearly collided with the BBC presenter's head so they retired inside to try and snatch a couple of interviews with monosyllabic pupils.

He decided to plead guilty. A journalist had ambushed him on his way out to lunch. He hadn't said anything but he knew they knew. It would be in the papers He would be demonized. He would confess His problem now was how. He had no motive that he could think of. It was a split second action that was more of an accident than a malicious slaughter. So how to make it sound convincing. Everyone was owning up. How could he make his confession stand out from everyone else's? If he said that he particularly hated the man then they'd ask him who the victim was and he didn't have an answer for that.

Everyone knew how he had been killed so to describe that wouldn't be original. Why, what, where, when and how had been used already. Jack concluded that there was nothing he could do therefore left it to the police to work out and hoped they'd find him soon.

## The Second Door

By Andrei Ruskuc

A hushed silence emanated from the centre of the room as the spotlights switched on. Pillars of light illuminated the obscure facade tearing the darkness away and revealing row on row of highly polished glass panels sculpted into the shape of a rippling wave. A melodic tone permeated the thick night air followed by a soft, soothing voice: "On behalf of the Aflux organization I am pleased to announce that 2098 is the start of a new era. An era of joint partnership between ourselves, a leading technological development firm and the education division of the Fife Council. It is with pleasure that I announce the brand new Madras college multi-purpose school officially open". The crowd erupted in spontaneous applause as a pair of iron bolted doors at the base of the artificial cliff slowly opened - a gaping mouth of darkness leading to another world. As the praise subsided the crowd filed through the portal in strict order. Their faces grinning like small children at Christmas but with eyes blank and emotionless as empty holes.

I walked down the corridor trying not to think about the people whose presence I was in, or what they might think of me. But as the procession proceeded I felt more and more out of place. Furtive glances were being cast in my direction every time I looked up to admire the multi-faceted ceiling and I felt a sure certainty that the two people behind me were staring at the back of my neck. Their cold breaths were sending shivers up my spine. Was it possible that they could tell that I was intruding from another place and time? Surely I wasn't that conspicuous. Dwelling on it no further I bent down to tie my shoelace, a bead of salty fear appeared on my forehead as half the crowd looked down at me condescendingly, judging me with those blank eyes. They smirked in unison and walked off. Both angry and relieved I got up and tried to open the door immediately on the left.

The door gave way under the lightest touch and I stood inside the classroom. My eyes widened and pulse raced at what I saw. The room was divided into cubicle - spaces one for each pupil. Within the small rooms the walls, floor and ceiling were covered by a massive LED touch sensitive display. Tentatively I touched one of the walls which immediately turned a pleasant blue colour. A low pitched whirring sounded from the front of the classroom. It became louder and louder, I glanced out of the cubicle and standing right in front of me was a small one metre high robot. Seeing me it issued the statement "Remain within your cubicle until the end of the school day". As it entered, the same soft, soothing tone emanated from the speakers "Welcome to your new classroom, you have been assigned cubicle number 101. The cubicle will guide you through different subjects for the entire day. Lunch will be provided by me at twelve o'clock...". Rather disinterested by this monologue I gave the cubicle a proper inspection.

There was nothing to be seen other than the blue screen, which was rather disappointing so I walked out to the front of the classroom. This seemed to distress the small robot significantly as it stood in the same place clicking, whirring and at random intervals stating the single word "twelveH. Looking around I tried to find an off switch to put it out of its misery. Hidden behind a small flap on the wall I found an invitingly yellow button which I proceeded to press.

The moment I touched it the room crumpled into complete oblivion. Reality decided to take a holiday and I was left in complete darkness unable to see, hear or feel anything at all. A bright red beam of light appeared -engulfing me and giving my skin an unnatural sheen. I gazed up at the unbearably bright source and the beam intensified. I felt something in the pit of my stomach lurch as my whole body seemed to be transfixed by the light - moving up as if it were escaping through my pupils. Feeling faint I closed my eyes and succumbed to darkness.

The lone figure stood for some time with closed eyes in a world of darkness, overwhelmed by the red beam of light. As the red slowly faded and was replaced by a pleasant shade of blue the eyes flickered open revealing blank, empty emotionless pits. A faint smirk passed over the face as the figure walked off into darkness.

I opened my eyes and took off the pair of glasses I had been wearing. Wiping a greasy smear from the front of the lenses I listened to the Fife Council representative: "I hope you have enjoyed the short glimpse into the future provided by our new 3D visualization system and that we have your new school finished and ready to use within the next ten years". Walking into the quad I embraced the fresh spring air, happy to be back at the old Madras College and trying to remember what had exactly happened over the past fifty minutes.

## A Few Minutes of Madras College

*by Jonas Neukirch*

Margaret Cruikshank was a lady in her seventies. She was very small and fragile, had many wrinkles, the deep voice of a heavy smoker and a head of small, grey curls. She hated the modern youth and thus only went shopping in town when the horrible teenagers from the discipline-lacking school were not about. It was just past eleven, when she passed under the West Port, the arch indicating the entrance to the town centre. She scuttled along the pavement, slightly bent over, gripping her handbag very tightly — the bones of her hand glowing white under her skin.

It was a very bright spring day, and the temperature was close to the twenty degrees mark. The strong sunshine reflecting off the car windows hurt her eyes, even though her eyesight was slowly fading away. She closed her eyes slightly and turned left, off the pavement and into the organic food shop that she visited every time she came to town. She was met by a young sales assistant with long, dark hair and deep blue eyes. "Good morning, Mrs Cruikshank!" the young woman said enthusiastically. "How can I help you today?" Her mouth stretched to give a friendly smile. "Good morning, Annie," Mrs Cruikshank said in her sandpaper-like voice. She made her order of tomatoes, spinach and strawberries and paid far more than she would have when she was Annie's age. She stepped back out into the sun, her claw-like fingers returning her small purse into her bag. She continued up the street, when suddenly she stopped in her tracks. Had someone called her name?

"Margaret!" It was a rushed, squeaky call, but a voice she recognised. She turned around, slowly, and saw a ball of fat waddling towards her, waving frantically.

Of course it wasn't a ball of fat, but a good but drastically overweight friend of Margaret.

"Doreen!" Margaret exclaimed excitedly, "How are you, my dear? I haven't seen you in ages!"

"I'm great sweetie," Doreen panted, her chin wobbling with every word. "It must have been three weeks at least!"

Margaret had already opened her mouth to reply when suddenly she closed it in shock. Doreen had turned around as well. Margaret did not need to look around to know that others had stopped to look in the same direction. A sea of teenagers had erupted from the old school building like lava from a volcano. They made an earsplitting noise, the amount of voices making it impossible to make out any particular conversation. They spread out on the lawn in front of the school like water displacing air, and travelled towards town like a tidal wave. She critically eyed the slack uniform of the children. Many of the ties she saw were messily tied, and there were

several without any hint of one. The tourists who were seen earlier taking photographs of the school and Blackfriars Chapel were not able to be made out anymore.

It took the two elderly ladies a little while to realise that within the sea of teenagers there were also grown men and women, happily walking along and contributing to the sound. One of those adults stood out to Margaret. He had long, brown, wavy hair and stylish glasses. This was Oscar Barge, the principle teacher of the English department. As he crossed the road, Mr Barge spotted two elderly ladies, one bony and the other overweight, stare at him. Then the bony one turned around and started to walk away. Mr Barge was a very popular teacher among pupils and staff, partly because of his outgoing, friendly personality and because of his unconventional teaching methods. For many people, Mr Barge was a legend of Madras College, and he had once shocked everyone by removing part of his iconic mane. He had given up on controlling his class of 5th Years, and had compromised himself to lead a conversation with one of his fellow teachers, Emily Wayne.

"This might be the one time I'm happy to go to this assembly," Mr Barge said grudgingly.

"Really?" Mrs Wayne asked, surprised. "I thought that was the class you told us about the other night."

"What did I tell you?" Mr Barge asked. He obviously couldn't remember. "I thought it was the class with all those 'clever people'." Mr Barge laughed.

"Even 'clever people' can be irritating, Emily. You of all people should know that," Mr Barge said, ignoring the stern look from his colleague, and turned around to address his class: "Right folks! Behave when you're in there!" His hand went back to his hair as he passed the pipe band playing Scotland the Brave, and he entered the church followed by his colleague.

On their way in they passed William Baker, a maths teacher who was part of the Great Assembly for the first time after starting to work at Madras. He was a teacher who was popular overall, with a friendly smile, kind personality and fun teaching methods. He had been transferred here after he had moved away from Glasgow, where his ex-wife still lived. He had only known Madras College from several sports matches that his old school had lost. It was his first year and he was still overwhelmed by all the different traditions. He had never been in this church before, but he was still surprised by its large capacity. There were still pupils and teachers pouring into the holy building, and it didn't really seem to fill. Maybe, he thought, it was the high ceiling. The stone building and the coloured glass was very impressive, and he had to, once again, admire the architects that had lived in this magnificent town many hundred years ago. He snapped out of his daydream when someone pushed him accidentally, and he shuffled towards the benches to find a seat, gazing at the beautifully sculptured baptismal font and the altar.

The pipe band had attracted a lot of attention from the public. Doreen was there admiring the sound. She had been left by Margaret, who had complained about the youth and the loudness of the pipes and the lack of discipline. Margaret was a grumpy old lady. Doreen got bored quickly though, as her mind was on her ever-increasing hunger. As she waddled off to Market Street to acquire some food, her place in the crowd was taken by a young man. He had short, pitch black hair and short stubble on his chin. He was in his late twenties and had followed the procession from the school to the church with large interest. He was only in town to accompany his girlfriend, Annie, when she had her lunch break.

His name was Mark Jamieson, a former pupil of Madras College. He watched the hundreds of teenagers pour into the church through the big, arched doors, and saw the reverend speak the rector. He had never met the rector before, but many newspaper photographs had helped him remember the face. When Mark had heard the bagpipes, and seen the masses of pupils wash into the church, his nostalgic side had been awakened. He did not know why, but his interest faded and he left the church. He headed back the way, crossing South Street and passing some of the last pupils — the wave was now no more than a trickle.

One of these pupils was Andy McIntosh, a short, fair haired 4th year who had had the longest way of all, coming all the way from the chemistry department at the top of the Celtic Block. Andy and his companion, Callum, were both in a rush, and therefore did not notice the man who passed him by, walking towards the school with a glazy look in his eyes. "I wonder," Andy said, "what his speech will be about today". "Why's that?" Callum asked.

"Because he used that for all that fundraising stuff last week," Andy explained. For the past few years, the Rector's Easter speech had been about giving and what giving means in society. Andy was happy to hear that the bagpipes were still playing. He was amused by these events. For weeks now, just like every year, the school had explained that despite being held in a church, the Great Assembly was nothing to do with religion. Yet the first words always had something to do with God, Jesus or Christianity as a whole. They walked into the church and found a seat at the back, near Mr Barge, who was in conversation with Mrs Wayne.

Mark heard the bagpipes stop playing and knew that the assembly had now begun. He cautiously walked past the chapel, past the big yellow sign telling everyone that only staff was allowed to park there, and through the archway into the quad. The place had hardly changed. He knew that he couldn't walk about the place, but he felt memories coming back to him, and he sat down on a bench in the shade. Mark closed his eyes — and remembered.

Two hours later, Mark was eating with Annie, Margaret Cruikshank was sitting at home watching a cooking programme on TV, Mr Barge was enjoying a lunch at the Kilrymont canteen, Mr Baker was sitting in the staff room, fascinated by the Madras College traditions, Andy was listening to Callum complain about the fact that the musical interludes of the assemblies were the same as in the spring concert and Mark was eating lunch with Annie.

"What's up with you?" Annie asked him.

"Nothing," Mark replied. "It's just that every time I visit the school I miss it more than before."

"What's so special about it?" Annie asked him sceptically. Mark laughed.

"I'll need thousands of your lunch breaks to tell you everything that's special about Madras College." Mark then closed his eyes, and let nostalgia take over.

# The Hive

*by Owain Simpson*

In the dusty dry bowl of Africa, standing out taller than all the others, towered a colossal red, earthy, Termite mound. In the native tongue of the land this mound was known as Skool. Many paths lead out from the mound, traversing out across the landscape: some lead to the water holes, others to the old and twisted Acacia trees, one to the ancient battle grounds and another to the high rocky outcrop, many miles across the Savannah. The plains were a dangerous place for young Termites: there were many predators and other dangers, but none could get inside nature's architecture, it was thick, hard-as-rock.

The mound was predominantly a nursery and produced many successful Queens and fighters who gained great fame among the creatures of the Savannah. The first two years of a termites life are spent as a Pupa before they take on the shape of what they are to become. During this time they are unsure of what role they wish to play in the mound's running and often experiment. However, by the time they reach their third year they are usually fairly certain of their place.

Some young mites were strong and bigger than the rest. These grew into soldiers and ventured out of the colony to fight other mounds for land, water, food and pride. Skool's fighters were among the best on the plain and were renowned for their prowess. Other youths weren't strong but some had intelligence; they could think logically and remember things that the ordinary mites forgot. Intelligent mites were often successful and far surpassed the strong athletic ants in the hierarchy of the Savannah. Many of the mites from Skool became Queens and most that survived the bountiful dangers that the world awaited them with gained powerful positions in other mounds.

Not all termites had the defining features of a leader, a Queen or a fighter; but that didn't mean the colony forsook them. In fact these mites in their maternal position gave more care to those who needed it. This was why the average worker from Skool was so revered and thought of so highly among the creatures of the Savannah.

On occasion a rogue mite was born. These beasts wreaked havoc among the other young mites and there was little any of the more senior termites could do. Occasionally they would try their very best to save these mites from themselves. This sometimes worked but more often than not the creature would end up out on its own roaming the savannah with nothing to protect it. When this happened a mite's chances were slim. In charge of the hive was the queen and under her there were six fearsome flying mites. Their charge was to keep the colony in order, keep the mites in

line and support the wise older mites who were trying to pass on knowledge to the younger generations. These senior Termites had huge elongated fangs with razor-sharp edges and a bite with a sting. A couple were very wise and the others were very direct and efficient in their approach. Despite the demanding nature of their job they were effective and commanded respect from all they met. The queens bite was the most deadly and by far the most feared.

Throughout the warren-like six foot skyscraper were tunnels. They were earthy and damp with a homely atmosphere, if a bit worn-down. Inside each tunnel groups of young termites would gather and listen intently to all that their especially learned elders told them. They were taught many impressive things such as: the dangers of the Savannah, how and where to find food, how to tell when it was going to rain and countless other wisdoms which the young termites took to their hearts and learned. Many of these wise old mites were full of wisdom and some were friendly. Some were strong and others logically proficient. These differences aside they were all there to kindle and feed the curiosity of the young termites minds; many took this duty upon themselves with enthusiasm and zeal. The Hive is still standing, it towers above the plains churning out bright and intelligent mites to go out onto the savannah and earn great respect. They have started work on a new hive now, this one a seven footer. Skool exemplifies the essence of cultivating the future of its civilisation and, as it has in the past, will continue to do so for a long time to come.

## The Defector

by Johnny Watson

Tim Linman was edgy, even the most unobservant member of his chemistry class noticed this, though they didn't know why. This was the worst he'd been since the start of the week. Some said he was having an affair with someone's wife and that he had come close to being discovered early in the week and was now trying to break it off, other more fanciful pupils said he was a Soviet spy and that slowly his network was being shut down. The latter however was not too far from the truth; he used to be an active member of the British service, until he became redundant departmentally, he returned to his roots and turned to teaching. He was also scheduled to meet an East German by the name of Fritz Lehman that night, something that gave him the jitters. Of course he knew little about the meeting only that he was going to be paid vast sums of money to relay an account of the structure of the service, in which he had served for a ten year period in the fifties. He knew that the man was not using his real name from experience, when you went abroad you always were given a pseudonym. The children of course knew none of this, seeing only the turmoil on the surface, and such were taking advantage of his shaky manner and lax discipline being rowdy and burning paper on the Bunsens, something that normally would have been stamped out with gusto. News of his temporarily enhanced suggestible nature had spread like a flash flood consuming all other gossip in its path, even teachers were taking advantage of his down period, Mrs. Astworth had given him a larger share of the departmental filing. Several had asked favours that would normally have just been rude, asking him to make them coffee when he had just entered the staffroom. He was happy to comply though as he needed something to keep his mind from drifting.

The bell had rung at precisely the same time every day for the last ten years of his teaching career, but Mr Linman thought it late today, usually saddened by the end of the day, today he was relieved, he glanced at his watch counting down the hours. He was a very proud man but to he was selling himself and his colleagues out to an undesirable, as the intelligence service described them. See it was Mr Linman's opinion that communism wasn't wrong, it was just impractical to implement on a large scale, of course this eventually led to his removal from active intelligence being thought of as a sympathiser and a liability to the department. As he turned on to North Street, so his thoughts turned once more to the details of his defection and a niggling feeling that it would not happen that night as had been planned. He walked into a cafe, and for a second struggled to maintain an even pace, and failed to remain unnoticed as he entered, trying to remain as discreet as possible he chose a table near the back. He subtly drew the attention of the waiter — and observing the occupants of the cafe — he ordered a black coffee and asked if he could use the telephone,

adding that he would pay the charge. He pulled the receiver close to him and dialled the number printed on the tiny business card he had been given.

Hans Wehrbeck saw the phone ringing before he heard it and snatched it up during the first ring; he had waited in the flat all day slowly tensing up until he could hardly move without twitching. He muttered a string of numbers into the microphone and received the preset string back, he felt safe, although he didn't know the line was secure and tried to hurry things up. Mr Linman was down the other end expressing a deep concern about the operation and how it was going to pan out. Hans assured him that there was no intention of letting him down, the money was already in the account and he would acquire the details that night. The phone was audibly shaking on both sides, and the pair hung up involuntarily at the same time unable to cope with the sound of the other. Hans leaned back in his chair and reached for a bottle of scotch, something communist Germany was not privy to.

He didn't like this, the whole thing stank, and if he failed or ran he would be killed, so no encouragement from that quarter and he didn't have any reassurance at all that he would be missed because his family were gone and he was discouraged from starting a new one. He twiddled his thumbs in dark anticipation of the horrors to come; he never knew that the business was so hard.

At 8:00pm he left the flat and headed down to a dry cleaner on South Street where he had deposited a suit earlier that day. He took out last week's paper, detailing his comrades breaking of the mach 2 barrier for commercial flight. The manager hadn't been happy about coming back and reopening at night but a few ten pound notes had silenced his qualms. Fritz sat in the waiting area observing the school, which was shrouded in darkness. He contemplated Britain's move towards a decimal system and decided it was probably for the better, as their current system took a 3-day course to learn in Germany whereas the new system was logical. His head snapped up as he saw a figure etch its way through the night, a wayward shadow wandering away from him into the impenetrable black. Thanking the manager he set out in pursuit.

Tim heard him before he saw him, the dark footsteps echoing above the sharp click of the lock. He eased the door open and emerged in the quad, swiftly followed by Fritz who slid it shut. A sharp silence prevailed when neither man elected to take control of proceedings both being unsettled by each others presence. Tim eventually ceded control to the man he knew as Fritz who wandered aimlessly searching for a suitable classroom, apparently declining the obvious and accepting the cramped classroom that has never been aired. Tim felt peculiar in the school without any pupils it felt somehow wrong, as if it was the pupils who made the school, rather than the slightly dated building. They sat on opposite sides of a school desk

and smoothly began the process of confirming each other's validity and discussing the basic preliminaries.

Formalities gone they began the interrogation proper, beginning with Mr Linman's biography, who he was his brother his sisters, his childhood in St Andrews — not particularly interesting to an intelligence officer, however Hans took note of everything having been trained to pick on insignificant details. They began to move the interrogation towards Mr Linman's time in the service and it was at this time Hans leaned forward and temporarily stopped taking notes. At the time Mr Linman failed to comprehend this action being in full flow at the time, it was only a discovery the next day which drew its true significance to light. Mr Linman continued, "at that time everything went through systems... special travel handled the passports... well I never noticed it...certainly there are flaws but overall the system works..."

Tim had talked for over two hours and had relinquished all knowledge he was conscious of knowing. Fritz hadn't interrupted him once and had never stopped taking notes which appeared to have played havoc with his wrist, sending it into minute spasms that signalled the pain below the surface of the East German's iron skin. Tim now directed operations in regard to the Swiss bank account containing the £30,000 he was to be paid for his expose of the service. Fritz handed over the slip containing all the details casually and without any feeling of the vast sum of money that had just changed hands. Fritz began explaining the terms for his further questioning on aspects of his report which would come sporadically throughout the year through calls from payphones which would result in further meetings elsewhere. Before Fritz had finished speaking a pair of almost inaudible clicks could be heard emanating from under the desk. Tim voiced his suspicion to Fritz only to be told, "It is only my watch, sometimes she clicks 12 minutes past the hour." Again he had been almost imperceptibly deceived, coming from a lack of practice, as Fritz's wrist had been on the desk all the time.

Work done Hans packed almost all his equipment into his pockets and strolled calmly from the room leaving Tim sitting alone. He emerged from the front entrance at just past 10:15pm and headed across the car park. He froze as a white searchlight locked on to his startled figure. Voices could be heard along with running footsteps though he could not see them through the white smog. He was wrestled to the ground and he felt the cold cutting of steel around his wrists. A bag was thrust over his thrashing head; he kicked out wildly connecting with one of his assailants who gave a muffled cry. He felt the sharp stab of a needle and he ceased struggling, his muscles turned to lead as his willpower evaded him and took a tumble. Defeat burned his mouth.

Tim watched this little scene below him and watched as a wry smile pulled its way across his face as the German's slumped body was placed in a black car and driven away. The rest of the team pulled away and followed, he didn't know where they were going only that he had done his job and he could keep the money he had been given. The truth was he had been sent as a sleeper agent, his work hadn't been required anymore by the service, but he couldn't officially leave, so they had inserted him in a teaching job and set this little trap for a foreign agent snooping for information. He had been able to give a truthful account as the note pad would be burned and Fritz would never leave the country.

Not everything had been accounted for though; Hans had recorded their meeting on a miniature tape recorder. Amid a morass of chewing gum under a school desk the entire account was being transmitted to a Russian satellite which was decoding the encrypted files before being sent across the iron curtain into Russia. The man in the Russian office smiled, a rare pleasure that he would permit for this momentous occasion, a detailed account of structure and protocol that would influence soviet intelligence decisions for years had been recorded and received. The man they had sent, he knew was either dead or captured, didn't matter because he knew nothing of importance. He was merely a pawn on an unwitting suicide mission for the greater good, one man had died to make life better for many of his fellow citizens.

## Hero of the playground

*by Geir Darge*

He closed his eyes and remembered the heat of the sun baking his back as he subconsciously listened to the idle chatter of the excitable pupils enjoying June's midday sun. He remembered the refreshingly cool, rough feel of the pillar against his cheek while he puzzled over his friends words; "Think of the glory old chap! Think of... The honour."

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As his eyes flickered open once more and was greeted by a cacophony of sound that engulfed this tranquil memory and replaced it with fear, confusion and above all excruciating pain. He glanced down at his uniform and saw thick, congealing blood bubble out of his abdomen and ooze out into the muddy mire of No-Man's Land. There was nothing glorious, nothing honourable about this, no mans suffering should be applauded or wished, to die in a pitiful foxhole does not make you a better person. He pushed up with all the strength left in him up onto his knees and fumbled on the sodden ground for his rifle. His filthy, callused hands eventually grasped the cold metal steel of his weapon just as heard a tremendous crack and felt a terrible burning in his chest. As he fell to the ground, he felt the burning spread through out his body like wild fire and so he sank back into his muddy grave.

A sudden chatter of merciless gunfire filled the air with screams of agony and sent him drifting back to that baking sun, that idle chatter, cloistered by the grand pillars that protected the quadrangle. Once more he was the carefree, light-hearted student; "hero of the playground" resounded through his mind, ricocheting round the quad's walls.

Strolling through the flagstoned courtyard; washed out memories flitted in an out of sight; the rector, Mr McKenzie, proudly marching the corridors with his long black robe billowing behind him; the rugby team swaggering out into the quad bursting with exuberance; the rich, enticing smell from Mrs Louden's cookery class constantly gnawing at the boy's hunger, enticing you down into the kitchens. The old, limping janitor that would never leave a window pane dusty or a skuttle empty. He remembered sitting in the rector's office, waiting for his first trophy and inspecting the portrait of Andrew Bell, who looked down at him with stern, expectant eyes.

Most vivid was the spectacular recruiting rallies by the army; banners flying, pristine uniforms, boots that shone as bright as the faces of the onlooking pupils. Then the gruff recruiting sergeant bearing down on him like some hungry wolf, eager for young meat and his friends, all too willing to be

snatched away He saw the younger pupils staring in awe as the older chaps signed their lives away That was the day he left Madras, the day life became a constant struggle against the unrelenting current that swept him all the way to the water-logged fields of Belgium.

A warm hand clutched his shoulder and sent him firing back into a world of suffering His eyes, gritty and bloodshot, scrutinized the surroundings only to find layers of corpses fogged by acrid smoke and a lonely white rag wearily waving at the opposite side of field. A shot of anger pulsed through his veins; countless lives lost, unbearable suffering for a glorified bog and a white rag.

Then imperceptibly the anger was replaced by a cold chill that seeped through him very slowly, leaving him with a single solitary thought, the great chestnut tree that he had once loved to gaze at; standing like a king; towering above its subjects, bowing to no one. No howling wind, no biting cold could diminish its power. It would forever stand tall and proud for generations.

And as the last wisps of life left him he smiled and once more pondered on that beautiful midday sun.

*In memory of Logan Studley, a Madras pupil who died in Belgium*

