

Creative Writing

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6663

LIFE.

## Half-A-Dozen

*Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November 1940 - Surrey, England*

*07:46*

There wasn't one piece of road that didn't have soldiers on patrol as Rachel tip-toed her way to the shops. "Go early," her mum said—"you'll miss out on the bread.'

She knew how much her brothers loved the toast that Nanna C cooked on a Monday morning – the rest of the time it was bread and dripping for the three children. Rachel was the middle child: she didn't like the bread and dripping at all; she didn't really like the toast either, but it was the only thing the Smiths could afford to buy that wasn't going to leave them hungry again five minutes later.

Rachel, still tip-toeing down the dusty track in her home made floral dress, that had previously been Mrs Smith's tablecloth, clutched on to the tokens that would get her family enough food for the week ahead – more importantly, the bread for her elder brother.

Tom was three years older than his little sister—he was just like his father, Gerry. He loved to eat: if he could scoff pie and chips all day, he would. He would eat anything given the chance—that was just the way it was. Before the summer he had been a ten year old boy in a men's medium pullover, but that soon changed. It changed for everybody. His eyes weren't like a child's, but were drowned by the black that surrounded them. He looked rather slim now and weighed around five stone – he looked like a stick in fact – the sort that had been battered and bent by every child in the neighbourhood.

Rachel had narrow features just like her Nanna and broad cheekbones, the spitting image of her fathers', although her skin was like the ghosts that were lurking around the world that was falling apart. She never really went out much, not anymore. She had become more of a 'mummy's girl' since Gerry went away to France in May; before that, she never left his side. She would follow him everywhere – she was like his shrunken shadow.

Mrs Smith barely mentioned her husband anymore – it was as if he only existed when she knew he was coming home; the rest of the time, she cut off her feelings. Cut off from her husband, cut off from her children, cut off from her lost and lonely self, as though she was stuck in her very own miniature world war. She was always in a constant battle with herself – she couldn't cope with everything on her own. She was tearing herself apart whilst her husband was away getting torn apart; she was confused, angry in fact. It was in her eyes – but so was the sadness that swallowed her up each and every day, the sadness of the reality that was swallowing each nation bit by bit.

Her daughter knew she wasn't well – that was partly why she did everything, including the shopping for five people on her own every week. The boys never offered to help. Tom was always in his room, and Charlie soon learned to copy him. After all, they didn't have a father around to teach them the rituals of how to be a man.

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*Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November 1940 – France*

*08:53*

Gerry hadn't slept for days now. His feet were dragging on the floor whilst his eyes were barely staying open – he was drifting off mid walk. It was like his body had programmed itself to sleep-walk. Gerry still acted like a dad, even though his children weren't with him – he was the oldest between him and Gunther. He was about 19 – he was still a kid really. Gerry was only just under double his age – he was 36, yet his boredom breaker and best friend was just a boy who was young enough to be his son.

The streets were dark and dismal all through the village – most of the houses and shops had cardboard up at the windows to stop anyone from seeing in, and stopping the light from leaking out into the lonely village roads in the middle of nowhere.

The frost had set all over the bungalows and shops – it was slippery and the blisters on Gerry's feet were shredding against the inside of his boots each time he tried to stop himself falling head over heels. The two men only had their uniforms for warmth, and both of those were torn and shredded from the barbed wire they climbed through earlier that week. It was beyond freezing outside, and from the thermometer on the window of an isolated corner shop, Gunther could just about work out that it was minus eight degrees outside, once he had strained his eyes past the condensation.

The only people who were visible to the soldiers were each other. Their footprints lay in the frosted mud along the side of the road next to the overgrown branches. Neither of them could really see where they were going, and there was no sound around either; only their feet that squeaked from beneath the ice.

Out of nowhere, there was a dim glow from what appeared to be a shop of some sort – at first it flickered rapidly, but once it had held, it gave Gerry and Gunther a sense of direction again after being away from other humans for so long.

Gerry went first – he was the more confident one of the two, but then again he was the elder. He tapped on the glass panels of the door. As soon as they stepped through it uninvited, the smell of fresh bread shot through their nostrils like a gun. Gunther's eyes lit up but he didn't do much talking - he was too scared to ask for food, and he left that to Gerry too. The pair of them hadn't eaten for over a week now. The last thing they had was a measly bit of cheese that they had shared.

Luckily, the baker spoke pretty good English. It wasn't fluent, but it was at least better than Gerry and Gunther's attempt to speak French. They didn't really even have to ask for any food – the baker, Louis offered “croissant for man and boy with jam, home-made.” Nothing excited them more than the thought of food after so long – the aroma alone had taken over their bodies and the warmth from the ovens had wrapped itself around them like a blanket shielding them from the bitter ice the other side of the glass.

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*Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November 1940 - Surrey, England*  
*08:01*

Rachel queued up at the dingy corrugated iron cabin, still clutching onto the ration tokens. Being so small, she could easily squeeze her way through the swarm of people fighting and waving their arms around trying to get the food before it was too late. She pushed through the door, scraping her neck on a brown tinged screw that was poking out of the frame. She was covered in cuts and bruises – she would always manage to get hurt, except she didn't get hurt – or at least she never let it be noticed anyway. She was possibly the strongest out of all three of the children, both emotionally and physically. Over time, she learned that she had no choice but to do all the things her mother once did before she got ill.

Most of the mothers at the shop were chattering away, with others scrapping over who was in the queue first, but Rachel sprinted her way to the bread counter. She didn't have any shoes on – she didn't have any shoes at all, her nylons had holes in them and her hair was a matted mess. The parts of her tiny feet that were exposed by her shredded stockings that were no longer white slapped on to the floor with every step she made. The cold floor had just been washed and the yellow 'caution' signs were put up throughout the aisles in every direction. Rachel left a smeary, black trail of footprints wherever she went. She was now jumping up and down to make sure she didn't get ignored. She would do it every week and Baker Dave would always keep a cheese twist to the side for her, so that she could eat it on the way home from shopping. That cheese twist was like her life – a twisted mess, but she wouldn't have it any other way: she loved it just as it was.

On the way back home Rachel balanced the two overflowing paper bags on each shoulder, and in her hands was a bottle of milk and the fluffy cheese twist that she longed for each week. It was the only thing that she had to be excited for. To her left was the village hall that had once lit up the children's faces – but as she walked past, she stared into the lifeless windows that had frosted over-night. Rachel remembered that her dad used to take her down an alleyway that led her straight to the back garden of her house, but there were so many alleys around her that she didn't know which was which.

As she forced her way past the overgrown holly that had climbed up the metal bar fence and taken over the alley, the dainty snowflakes started to land on her mahogany coloured hair. Before she had realised that the snow was going to destroy the sandy paper bags that held her shopping, she looked up and, for a moment, her face was shining with excitement and her deep brown dismal eyes were growing bigger and bigger at the thought of playing in the snow again – just like she did when her daddy was home.

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*Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1940 – France*

*09:04*

The blizzard outside of the baker's was no longer visible – the snow came down so fast that it looked like a white sheet placed in front of the three men's eyes. Gerry took his bulky boots off, and then peeled the soaking wet socks off his feet to place on the radiator. Gunther did the same – he copied most of the things that Gerry did.

The two men sat at the wooden table, full of deep indented scratches, that looked as if it were fifty years old, at least. Louis brought them two portions: each of them had a warm croissant on that was hanging over each side of the chipped plate, and to the side was a pile of jam on torn grease-proof paper. Before Louis had a chance to say any more, both of them had begun to tear away at the first piece of food they had seen in over a week. Their mud stained fingers were shredding the crumbly croissant and dipping it into the home-made strawberry jam that was smudging all over the plate.

Gerry and Gunther ate so quickly that they never got the chance to taste the food – they were so hungry, they didn't even care what they were eating – they just ate. Gerry used his middle finger to wipe the plate clean, licking the leftover crumbs and specks of jam off with every wipe, whereas Gunther picked up the plate and licked every last piece of food there was to get.

Gerry remembered that jam was his daughter's favourite – she would try to steal it at home, dipping her miniature fingers that used to wrap around his thumb into the sticky remains around the top of the jar – that was when he stopped. He hadn't heard from his family in months – he didn't even know if they were still alive.

He went into a day-dream – his eyes stared at the crack in the window that crept right the way up from the bottom corner to the white metal frame in the centre, just below the shop sign. Before he had the chance to think anymore, there was a deep rumble that made the whole village tremble with fear.

*"Go to back room - down the hatch, under the mat. It's safe in there!"*

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## **THE WORLD THROUGH MY EYES**

### *Sketch.*

A child doesn't know the colour of the  
skin it's born to be in.  
Racism breeds racism.  
And if you are taught to discriminate,  
the colour of their skin will depend on whom you  
hate.  
Looking through the history books,  
the facts are in  
black and white:  
slavery, discrimination, hatred, segregation.

Is it too hard to see that  
we are all the same?

Vendredi treize Novembre, 2015.

Paris, Francais – 21 h 20

Where is the peace that our world  
once held?

Our love has turned to hatred,  
our peace has turned to war.

The silence is no longer peace;  
the silence is now the deceased.

It is not fair that people do not care,  
for the world is no longer under control –  
it's all going to despair.

*It's you, not me.*

I see you over there.  
Yes – you! Right *there*.  
I see your sorry eyes cry inside, but  
they're too cold to shed a tear  
as you sit waiting, wondering, dreaming  
that somebody cares -  
that somebody acknowledges your existence.

You huddle in that doorway each day,  
no matter what the weather,  
with your dog who loves you dearly,  
but cannot keep you from falling apart.  
I can tell as,  
I see you over there.  
Yes – you! Right there.

I pass you on a daily basis.  
You may not know my name, but  
Well, that's not important.  
I hear you sob, y'know,  
All of the time-in fact, as  
I see you over there.  
Yes – you! Right there.

I wonder if you have noticed me  
just like I do with you.  
Then I think, Why should you?  
What have I done  
for you? Just remember-  
I see you over there  
Yes – you! Right there.

I sit in my warm bed at night.  
I'm lucky – yes I know.  
I'm just wondering if you're warm at all,  
If you need to...  
Forget it, but don't forget that  
I see you over there.  
Yes – you! Right there.

I mean,  
Have you eaten?  
Are you warm?  
Do you need help  
Going through that storm?  
Do I talk or  
do I leave? Oh, if only you could  
see.

Until we meet again.

I said goodbye soon after hello,  
Not long after you came from another grass;  
Your loss soon made me bellow.

Your temperament so calm and mellow,  
How I wish that time wasn't our last,  
I said goodbye soon after hello.

Now you've gone off with a halo so yellow,  
It pains me in my heart to see you pass;  
Your loss soon made me bellow.

I wish I could have seen you grow,  
Even if it is through a pane of glass.  
I said goodbye soon after hello.

If only I could take you to one more show;  
Surely you'd be the best in class.  
Your loss soon made me bellow.

After all you've gone further than my arm can throw,  
The dreams of the future are in the past.  
I said goodbye soon after hello,  
Your loss soon made me bellow.

It is I.

It was in May you passed me by  
It was in May you caught my eye  
Soon we were meeting in the dark and light  
My nights suddenly became so bright  
It happened so quick, a short 'trick' I thought  
But it was only your heart I seemed to have caught

Yes, it is I who kept you from walking away  
Yes, it is I who has no regrets of that very day

Those silly walks through the park still fill my mind  
Those silly words you always seemed to find  
Only you could get away with such things  
With the happiness and joy you would always bring  
That summer went by just like a dream  
We always made the perfect team

Yes, it is I who kept you from walking away  
Yes, it is I who has no regrets of that very day

Who would have known that you'd close that door  
Who would have thought you would look for more  
When you searched elsewhere you left a hole to fill  
As the time flies by I miss you still  
Although you have hurt me deep inside, I still feel you near  
Sending me your best and filling me with cheer

Yes, it is I who kept you from walking away  
Yes, it is I who has no regrets of that very day

Cut.

I can't escape it  
I've tried all that I can do  
It's all down to you  
My love for you was no strain  
It ran deep within my veins

Get away.

The wind kept knocking –  
Bashing, screeching on the tree trunk.  
It wouldn't go; it wouldn't stop.  
It sunk its claws into my head,  
And never stopped what it said.

The months go by;  
I still look at the sky;  
And the claws are now withdrawn.  
They're gone from my head.  
But the scars lie in their bed.

It's been years since you left-  
I'm no longer obsessed.  
And the scars are now covered  
With make-up instead,  
Because... I need you gone from my head.

Go back to your bed.

What comes next?

Continue growing for one year ahead.  
Pull over in the lay-by – celebrate.  
Crawl over the bridge and then keep climbing the hill.

Stop! Take a right onto School Road.  
Read, watch, absorb all that you are told.  
Walk along the corridor and then keep climbing the hill.

Take the last exit at the round-a-bout .  
Revise! Focus! Pass! Continue on the path of success.  
Collect your results from the memory test and then keep climbing the hill.

Take a left onto exit A – level up the ladder.  
Follow examination lane – stay inside.  
Revise – continue around the round-a-bout and then keep climbing the hill.

U-turn at the last exit – find your friends.  
Turn right- your destination must be here.  
Move on from them, destroy distractions and then keep climbing the hill.

## Reflective Commentary

For my first form, I wrote fiction; I split up 'Half-A-Dozen' into four sections alternating between England and France during World War Two. I aimed to create two perspectives, allowing the reader to get an insight into Rachel and Gerry's world at the same time, from different locations - this is why I timed and dated each of the sections.

The initial idea was for create a fictional piece which primarily focused on the impact that war had upon a child's life. Inspiration from this came from the stories that my grandmother, who witnessed the Second World War as a child, told me and this is the perspective I wanted to convey to the reader. I aimed to explore the emotion she may have felt at this time, and the only way I could do so, was by putting myself and my life into her childhood on a piece of paper. I wanted to make Rachel very much like myself; I gave her a family unit that I could completely relate to, being the middle child in between two brothers.

The idea of a second perspective from a soldier's point of view came from a war documentary on television as I was mind-mapping ideas for my first draft. This is when I began to think of ways I could portray each of their lives and create a link between them, so I came up with the idea of a father-daughter relationship written in a similar style to Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, when there are swift changes in narrative. I realised that the narrative change was difficult to carry out and didn't work well with my style; however, I still switched between locations and scenarios as McEwan effectively does.

I aimed to focus on the lack of food worldwide and the importance of ration books, creating a food motif throughout my extract; I tried to embed this in my first paragraph - "Go early" her mum said - "you'll miss out on the bread." Furthermore, I also wanted to create emphasis on the opening sentence using rhymes, 'said' and 'bread', portraying how the soldiers are keeping order within a world of disorder. I wanted to contrast the ideas that Choman Hardi portrays in *Invasion* with 'their death bringing uniforms'. I attempted to make the soldier a comfort figure where the people of the towns are not afraid of them because they're used to having them around.

With the French setting I wanted to oppose this idea, and make it more like the idea of being 'confronted by young men', as Hardi states. At first I wanted to make Gerry, have a confident, mature soldier alongside him, but I realised that I could explore how war affected young soldiers if I used a vulnerable character like Gunther, who is 19 years old. I wanted to dig deeper into the reality of young boys being sent to war, risking their lives when they are so young that their adult life has only just begun.

In parts three and four of the extract, I wanted the reader to realise that Rachel is typical child who is 'covered in cuts and bruises'. I made her physical appearance resemble her mental state - she is injured but still keeps going. I also wanted to create a sense of perseverance in part two with the 'dim glow' from the shop, representing the little hope that the soldiers have, yet they continue to carry on, as Robbie does in *Atonement* with his thrive to get back to Cecelia.

In parts two and three, I also wanted to reinforce the father-daughter bond I had initially set out to create. I used 'her dad used to take her' and 'jam was his daughters favourite food' to show how they are thinking about each other at the same time, yet they are completely unaware of it. To achieve the effect of embedded memories within each character's mind, I used a range of compound and complex sentences. The length of these sentences portray how neither of them will forget these memories and that they'll always be there; it also shows how far away they are from each other, creating an impression of someone being far, yet so close to the heart.

One of the things I wanted to focus on was the weather conditions, like Wilfred Owen's use of 'merciless iced east wind' in *Exposure*. I set the novel in late November to show the bitter conditions that soldiers face at this time of the year, when usually people are beginning to prepare for Christmas in the month ahead – a time that is usually filled with happiness and joy, but instead it's filled with misery and dread. I used a cliché to show how the snow 'looked like a white sheet' and to clarify the intensity of the speed that it is coming down.

I personified the crack in the window that 'crept', allowing me to create emphasis on the way that the soldiers' lives, along with the majority of the world's lives are broken and incomplete. I looked into the harsh conditions that the whole globe faced in this time of sheer desperation and focused directly on one family, and how each member is affected by the intensity of war.

My second mode is a collection of poetry which I did not initially set out to write; however, it allowed me to express feelings and experiences that are personal to me, which I have not been able to openly do before, and this is what I wanted to convey to the reader – 'The world through my eyes'.

The first poem, *Sketch* – was written after I experienced a racist encounter on the bus with my mixed-race cousin. It is, to an extent, an angry rant about the judgement made by the women about an innocent two year old child. The first draft of 'sketch' did not have the rhetorical question at the end; I added this after I had stumbled across *Half-caste* by John Agard. I realised that I wanted to challenge the woman and the reader, as Agard does throughout *Half-caste*.

The next poem was originally called 'peace'; however, it was too simple compared to the situation it was written about, so I decided the situation itself would be the title 'Vendredi treize Novembre, 2015. Paris, Francais – 21 h 20'. The poem was written in memory of those who died from the Paris attacks – I wanted to express my lack of understanding for the drive to kill innocent civilians.

'It's you, not me' is about homelessness and how people do nothing to help. I always have an image of a blind man who huddles in a city centre doorway with his pet dog. I pass him every time I go to the city centre and this is why I directly address the reader with the epistrophe 'I see you over there' at the end of each stanza. It became apparent to me as I was writing that I do nothing to help him, yet he is so worthy of the help. The final stanza is a list of questions that I want to find the answers for, but I have never had the confidence to do so, despite knowing that I should.

'Until we meet again' is a poem that I experimented with to try new styles and techniques, which is why it is written as a Villanelle – they were originally Italian harvesting songs about gathering memories. For me, the memories were of the time before the loss of my pony that now has a 'halo so yellow'.

Both 'It is I' (lyric) and 'cut' (renga) focus on relationships – I wrote them at a time when I was comforting my friend with a 'break-up' which appear to be so silly to people from the outside, yet impacted her greatly. The isocolon at the beginning of the lyric poem was used to fix the moments they once had whereas the lack of punctuation in Cut create's a sense of a never-ending love. I wrote each of them as experiments; however, they resembled the situation well. A slow toned, lyric poem shows her upset, whereas the renga shows her temporary upset.

'What comes next?' Is a poem I wrote like a sat-nav was speaking and directing me through life. 'Keep climbing the hill' is a phrase that I associate with my life because there is always an obstacle in the way that needs to be tackled, like the hill in the poem. The epistrophe at the end of each stanza was used to create a sense of determination and to emphasise the fact that you work your way up the ladder of success.

Feedback from the workshops allowed me to cut out any irrelevant wording, helping me to focus on the main concept of the writing, particularly in my poetry where I saw significant improvements to the rhythm. Although there are a variety of subjects that underlie my writing, the main theme is life experiences showing strength and perseverance.

Creative Pieces Word Count –2960

Commentary Word Count – 1500

Total – 4460

## **Bibliography**

BBC Two, Britains Great War, The War Machine 2/4

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Exposure – Wilfred Owen

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Half-Caste – John Agard

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