

**From St Bede's Writers in Residence  
– a creative writing group**

**Collection 1:**

# **Autumn**



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## **A Scarecrow's Fear**

Isabella, Year 9

The worst part of it all are the pumpkins. Or at least, what they mean to me; all throughout the year, it is *my* responsibility to keep those troublesome, raucous birds away from the growing seeds sowed into the ground. *I* am the one supposed to be frightening, menacing to the point that no one would dare confront me. Yet once darkness falls, my brittle – almost non-existent – bones tremble at the mere thought of it. Now how is one supposed to be a warrior if one cannot even bear the burden of danger? Hence the reason why this particular season, where these darn, wrinkled squash become of great popularity, brings with it both terror and guilt.

The lazy, warm-coloured sun yawns as it slowly nestles amidst its rolling blankets on the horizon. If it weren't for the latecomers in their unusual apparel, picking the most appealing pumpkin out of the few remaining, the evening could easily be mistaken for yet another quiet end to the day. Although quiet is the last word I'd use to describe my nights. Even through the stillness of midnight, so many things can be heard out in the open of this field: the crunching of fragile, ageing leaves under the patter of creeping wildlife paws; and the wind, which brings with it stocks of snow-laden clouds for the coming season.

I hear the thudding of my own feeble heart, pounding in my chest the moment the sky is draped by the dark veil of widow Night's mourning dress. I often wonder if Autumn is a time of grief for her, when her heavy tears cascade for days on end upon the ground, just like they are right now.

The tall wheat grabs at my ankles, beckoning me towards the darkness of the ground below. If it weren't for those few lone stars and the occasional moonshine peeking from behind the hazy veil of clouds, it would be just as obscure up here. A gust of wind excites the surrounding vegetation, enticing a wave of whispers to ripple throughout the field. As it turns out, having your head stuffed with hay doesn't stop the voices inside. In fact, it only makes them louder, more threatening as they convince you into believing something dark is approaching... And of course, if there *were* anything out there, what better opportunity to reveal itself than this? All those children, dressing to impress it, or the sweets, laying a sweet scent for it to follow, almost as if inviting the darkness into their homes. Halloween is just a tempting challenge for fate.

Just breathe. I repeat this continuously to myself with my eyes barred shut, although this doesn't lead me to sleep. Even through the tight seals that are my eyelids, a gentle tear rolls down the curve of my stuffed cheek, racing its fellows to the tip of my chin. Although my thin, tattered waistcoat and shirt provide no shelter from the stinging bite of cold wind, I am grateful for the air which dries my face. What a failure, a disappointment, I am to my kind. Never in the history of my predecessors has there ever been any *Protector of the Crops* more cowardly than I. Alas, try as I might, my mind cannot resist the temptation of moulding shapes out of the darkness beyond, which make me quake in my welly boots. All I can do is hang

on (quite literally) until the long-lasting hours of twilight slip away into the early minutes of dawn.

A sudden shove from the wind jerks my arm sideways, although...it is too heavy, too *physical*, to be just a gust of wind? Do I dare to...? Too late, my neck is already twisting, slowly – ever so slowly – to look over my shoulder.

The darkness is dense, almost too much to see through – almost. Squinting, I can make out an elongated rounded outline of a creature perched on my arm. If I were graced with vocal cords, I'd undoubtedly use them to scream as the silhouette advances over the fabric of my torn shirt towards my face. Yet, as it nears my vision, I start to recognise a beak, legs, wings, beady eyes. Before I have the time to process the action, I feel the stroke of smooth, sleek feathers rest against my cheek. Instantaneously, the thudding in my chest slows, until it is merely a steady beat. As my lips stretch into a smile and the crow stretches its wings behind my neck in an embrace, I can feel it. The start of a new chapter, a...friendship. At last.

## **Autumn – a Transition**

Lisa, Year 8

Harsh, cold gusts shook my body as I pulled my heavy eyes open. My fur was awfully messy, with globules of a strange liquid clinging to it, causing it to spike up at awkward angles. My attempts to flatten my fur were futile; I needed help.

“Mother...?” my strangled yelp echoed in the musty den, ringing in my ears. No reply came. “Mother?” I called out again, struggling to remain calm. No reply came. My heartbeat quickened, thumping in my dry throat as another wail escaped through my thin lips. I cautiously padded along the musty floor of the burrow, taking care to be silent and leave no prints. In a world like this, there are never too many precautions. As I walked, dust spiralled down from the crumbling ceiling and pricked my ears. I flinched. Wiping my face, I hurried on towards the end of our cosy abode where the piercing gale still surged through the entrance. Bracing myself, I closed my eyes, stuck my face overground, pulled my eyes open once more... and screamed.

The familiar sights of the sun, and the pond, and the grass surrounding our burrow comforted me, but I was alarmed by the hideous, rust coloured leaves piling near the feeble frames of trees that stood almost bare against the grim clouds. I trod softly over to the tree in front of me. Its leaves looked tired and weary; I gently pawed them in sympathy, crying out when they helplessly flitted down from their branches. Where was I? Why was everything so sickly? What happened to all the life and joy that once was outside? As if in reply, a gust of frigid, bitter wind shot past me like an icy blade, knocking the air from my lungs. I stumbled backward, just as a current of perished leaves united with the cruel breeze. In an instant, I felt very small.

Stepping gingerly over the graves of straw-coloured plants and deceased foliage, I glanced agitatedly at the sky, dappled with tones of apricot and lemon. The bare branches of trees reached out, threatening to snatch me from all angles. Abruptly, the wooden limbs seized me. I thrashed in their unyielding grip, biting and kicking until I ached all over. After a minute, the pain from struggling overwhelmed me, forcing my frail body to fall limp in the arms of the trees. I started to think. Why was I accusing this thing, whatever it was, of turning the landscape painful and savage? As I stared wide-eyed at the surrounding scenery, the crude branches became tender and carried me gently down to the damp, warm soil where bushes offered me sweet, juicy berries at the ends of their arms. The breeze became calmer, offering a ride for the kaleidoscopic leaves that twirled and fluttered, dancing like flames. Blooms more beautiful than I could ever have imagined greeted my paws as I pursued the procession of autumnal surprises.

When something is familiar, you often want it to stay with you, identical to how it has previously been. However, the stage must be passed on to new things, often just as spectacular as what existed before. Every year, summer must take its bow, allowing us to open our eyes to Autumn, to watch it flourish and perform its mighty act.

## **The Runaway**

Ana, Year 9

*Run.*

Somewhere buried deep inside her was an instinct to survive. It pushed her scarred legs and worn arms and chaotic thoughts forward. One look behind and she was dead. One look to the past and memories would flood through her, creating a current so strong she'd get swept up and drown in her own secret nightmares.

Rotting leaves crunched underfoot, sending goosebumps rippling up her limbs. Things she'd done in the past... they weren't worth remembering. Fragments occasionally tugged at the corners of her mind. Hopeless faces. Shattered windows. Rattling cages. Lashing whips.

Focusing on her blurred feet, the fugitive girl ran. She ran even when gnarled branches scratched her viciously to hold her back, or tried to trip her up with thick, clumped roots. Moonlight glowed through gaps in the canopy of trees, shining a ghostly white beam of light.

Like a spotlight, it picked her out in the forest, illuminating sharply carved features – hollow cheekbones and auburn hair, green eyes, red lips. She resembled a marble statue painted with the crushed up autumn leaves that littered the floor.

As she swiftly raced past, squirrels rushed up trees, mice skittered to their holes and all the other creatures cowered, camouflaged.

In their den, some wolf cubs huddled together, shivering. Wisps of moonlight and icy air came in. Where was their mother, and the rest of the pack? It had been several hours since they last saw her, and hunger roared in their stomachs, eager for fresh meat. It was dark outside, pitch-black like coal. Whining, the cubs huddled closer together.

Meanwhile, outside the den, a pack of ravenous wolves roamed their territory. The wind had died down so the hunt was proving to be difficult – only scents of rotting greenery reached their noses. Suddenly, they spotted a pair of silky ears twitching. A rabbit.

Finally.

As one, the predators crept up silently on their victim, the ground below their padded paws barely rustling with the autumn leaves. It was a dangerous dance between prey and predator – one false move and the magic stillness in the woods would be ruined.

*Crack.* Ears pricked up straight away and legs tensed, the rabbit bolted at once, like a silver streak of lightning.

One wolf growled slightly, feeling her hope for a meal disappear along with the rabbit. That one creature would've been what would feed her cubs after so long without meat.

But... what was that? As the wind picked up again, a gradually growing scent reached her: salty, like tears; strong, like perfume; and unnatural.

Like humans.

Slowing down, the runaway leaned against the rough bark of an ancient tree, feeling how sturdy and solid it was. Her life was a storm at sea, with her stranded in the middle of the ocean, in the middle of nowhere, feeling alone. The tree gave her strength – like a floating log, it allowed her to keep hold of something secure in a moment of chaos.

A renewed breeze swept past, prodding her with glacial fingers as if to indicate for her to keep going. She did. The branches of the ancient tree lifted and rustled. Even though it was just the wind, it felt like a goodbye.

Only a few steps away, the girl froze with fear. She'd heard the howls of the wild and hungry: wolves.

Snarling in a crazed anger, the pack raced after her. Though she ran faster and faster, they had no trouble catching up with their victim. One, a muscular one, ran ahead of the others and snapped its teeth at her leg, closer and closer.

Red spurted and trickled down her calf, staining the wolf's maw as crimson as the dead leaves. Its fangs had sunk deep; her leg hung limp - a mess of fractured bone and broken muscles.

In a panicked hurry to escape, she yanked her limb out of the beast's grasp – though the pain was burning – and stumbled away, going as quick as her body would let her.

The enraged howling of animals she couldn't see blasted around her, but she didn't look behind. She didn't look down.

Down where, protruding from the ground, was a twisted root, bent in wrong angles. Her working leg got hooked under it, propelling her face-forward onto the mud and leaves.

The howls got louder. That could mean only one thing – they were coming.

She was going to die.

Trembling with horror, the fugitive whipped round to face the creatures. Strands of her hair stuck to her face with sweat, tears and blood.

A female wolf, a mother, crept up with a desperately hungry look in her inky eyes. Her lips were pulled back in a snarl, razor-sharp fangs showing.

Paralysed and powerless, the girl backed into jagged, crooked tree bark.

She could feel the ghosts of her past leering down at her, cackling and tormenting and taunting her. Chanting a word they always haunted her with, mocking how helpless she was, as vulnerable as they'd been, the day she had knocked on their doors how death was knocking on her door now.

*Run.*

But she couldn't.



## **Stuck**

James, Year 11

Autumn and with it rain. More rain. All it ever seems to do is rain. The water gradually beads on the window pane in front of my eyes. It's windy as well. Outside, a gale whistles through the streets whipping up leaves in its path of havoc like a vengeful spectre. The leaves are brown, mushy and everywhere. Thick and sludge-like, they coat the pavement in one great mass.

It is hard to remember a time when the leaves weren't brown. Then again, it is hard to remember a time when I wasn't staring out of this window. Time is like treacle, thick and viscous. For a fleeting moment, I can see the sun again. It is beaming down on my face and I can feel its warmth spreading through my body. Instantly, I snap back to reality. The sun never came out. It was just a trick of my imagination.

The grey clouds continue to hang ominously over the city, casting a blanket of melancholy across everything beneath it. An endless stream of drizzle appears to be never ending. For a fleeting moment, I remember a time when the rain was not continuous. The sun would break the clouds, but this seemed so absurd that the thought soon left my brain. An occasional car would drive by on the street below, splashing water onto the leaf-strewn pavement. The pavement is empty of people. I tried hard to remember a time when I had seen a fellow human being wander these streets, but like many things, I could not remember.

As I pondered this strange concept of other human being on the streets, I suddenly thought of something. Who am I? I realised I could not remember my name, my birthday, where I lived or what my job was. This seemed strange. I kept getting little fragments of a brighter world. A world with memory, warmth, purpose. I began to feel very trapped and very alone. I decided to go and lie down on my bed for a short while and soon drifted off to sleep.

I woke up with a start. My memory of everything had returned. I could remember my name, my birthday, my place of residence and my job. I was Lawrence Parker and I was an analyst living in London. I remembered the sun and the feeling of warmth, but most of all, I remembered it didn't always rain, the leaves weren't always brown, and it wasn't always Autumn.

## **Autumn from beginning to end**

Imogen, Year 8

Autumn begins with a soft crunch – a reminder of the bed of yellow, red and brown cloaking the ground – then a rustle in the bushes or the sound of a hare taking off and scattering leaves everywhere. The wind makes sure that it's never silent when it is either blowing a blanket of hair in your face or chasing leaves about the park.

However, it feels very quiet. Maybe because you're used to it or even your head is in another place. The past? The future? Not often right now, looking at the many little things going on. Just like how I nearly missed the next crunch. The hot and tired summer is retreating through the trees. It's still drowsy and relaxed, even when leaving. Not like autumn: an old watercolour painting in the attic. Its colours are blended until it's almost one red hue, because it may be the cold season but autumn is the season of warm colours.

Another crunch and summer is almost a pale ghost, watching its own funeral while unwrapping its green scarf from the trees and letting it drop. Summer scampers away like the hare.

The faint smell of smoke drifts through the air. So unlike the playful leaves that use the wind railway to hop about the park. They are frail and delicate, yet they run and jump with more spirit than any fresh spring flower. The smoke, however, drifts through the air sombrelly as if it is walking home from a funeral. This smoke is coming from fire. Innocent fire. Fire that has been forced into destruction.

Luckily, we have noticed the temperature rise; a frosty autumn morning is no longer a veil over the truth. The problem is that after you have looked out of your window to see ice covering the trees, you then look back down at your homework. This homework is due in a week and you will be in trouble if it's not handed in. Whereas, despite the feel of extra heat on our cheeks and its often appearance in the news, the flames that we cause doesn't seem to have a due date, so you set those worries aside.

Now winter is tripping through the trees with its red nose, shaking fingers and shivering body, folding Autumn's carefully-made patchwork coat, hiding it away, spreading a new white quilt over the earth and whispering goodbye to the leaves.

So you are left waiting, trapped, because you never feel like you have the time, watching autumn after autumn go by.

## **Autumn**

Bianca, Year 11

Nature is a battleground. The army of death is invading every fragment of vulnerability that is left out, vulnerable, in the open fields. Where life once thrived, death now lingers.

Each leaf is becoming a precious jewel in a crown of decaying debris. Each flower is now dead – a casualty of the omnipotent swarms of bitterness which dominate the temperate yet chilling air. Like diamonds, the leaves and fruits of trees have almost infinite worth. The last chance of hope. The last hope before death.

Nature is a battleground. The war between life and death mirrors the war of light and dark. The sky spews an eternal waterfall of navy leaving no escape for glimpses of light to be visible once again, like the summer which is now a distant memory.

The wind is screaming like shells flying over the fields of battles. It carries the harmonious melody of Death which infiltrates the blossoms. It infiltrates every petal. They are left clinging onto reluctant branches, like the soldiers cling to their lives. The blossoms have changed from their usual playful pink to a melancholic pale mauve.

The mist, which swirls gracefully at the base of the soldier-like trees, manipulates passers-by with its superficial delicacy and beauty. It is intricate like a painting, emanating fragility yet overwhelming strength.

Nature is a battleground, but death has won. The rare specks of vivacious green amongst the brown have now become none. The ground is so saturated with murky half-frozen water that, when a roaming animal steps on it, it cracks with an unbearable scream. Like the cracking of ribs. Autumn is killing the earth.

The scene is monochrome: a composition of, browns and depressing greys. It's colder and darker than ever before. Where clouds used to infect the sky, they have been swallowed by night.

## **The Colours of Autumn**

Katie, Year 8

Red, orange, yellow; there were a million different colours splattered carelessly across the twisting skeletons of trees in autumn. The sun was hovering over the horizon, painting the landscape in light for a few more moments, before it would complete its brush stroke and start again on the other side of the world.

Just across from the narrow winding path, barely visible behind a blackberry bush, was a doe. Its light tawny brown coat blended perfectly into the collision of colours that came with the harvesting season. The doe's stillness was purely animal, as if time had simply stopped to gaze at the work of art that was nature. But the birds had stopped as well. The squirrels had run up the trees, the rabbits had bolted to their burrows. The forest's number one tell tail signs of danger, silence.

The doe's ears twitched, its eyes missed the dots of silver behind a bush of red berries. It missed the glow of golden eyes in the gaps between the leaves. It missed the flash of deadly canines. The wolf's paws were silent on the forest floor, avoiding twigs that would snap beneath his massive weight. Head low, shoulders hunched, and ready to pounce the wolf stopped a few metres away from the doe. Waiting. Planning.

Eventually the forest cautiously resumed bits and pieces of its chorus for some of the creatures missed the cleverly hidden wolf. The doe relaxed a bit, still on guard and lowered its head to munch on some blackberries, unaware of death hovering nearby.

The wolf waited patiently until his meal was looking away and positioned himself in line with its neck. It pounced. The doe didn't have time to run or realise before long pointed fangs ripped through its coat and sank into its neck. Claws pinned the animal to the ground as it kicked its legs, disturbing the rotting branches and dead leaves. Tendons snapped and muscles ripped as the wolf's vicious claws and canines ripped the doe apart. The life leaked out of the creature just like the blood slipping out of it between white teeth. The crimson liquid stained the silver of the wolf's maw as it pulled back, its prey well and truly dead. Yet another colour to add to the palette of autumn.

## **Autumn**

Matilda, Year 9

A carpet of colours from red to green coated the forest floor. Bare trees protruded out the ground and reached their long branching fingers up to the sky as the taste of cold air clung to the back of my throat. The soft rustle of leaves between my feet filled the silence of dusk. I rubbed my numbing fingertips together in the crisp chill of early autumn. My warm breath echoed in the back of my ears as I breathed in the smell of fresh mud hiding under a blanket of leaves. I savored the sweet sound of nothingness as I gazed up at the sky. A sheet of a million colours lay across the vast landscape, filling this moment with peace and prosperity. For the first time in ages, everything felt right, like a book in its cover.

Small ferns covered the forest floor and tickled my legs as I brushed past them. I ran my fingers along the edge of a tree, feeling the bumps and joins in the bark and the mossy branches.

Above in the trees an owl called as he ruffled his soft feathers and gazed down contently, as if waiting for me. He opened his eyes wide, revealing all the colours of the seasons in the flood of hazel, red and green. I paused for a second and stared, mesmerized at this marvel of nature. He looked as if he had been shaped by God, every detail carefully placed: the small yellow beak placed precisely next to two eyes bigger than the palms of my hands. He softly shook his wings, waving at me and flourished his hazel brown feathers with silvery gold streaks running through his tail. The trees bowed down to this majestic creature as he stood tall among them. We looked at each other for a moment longer and he looked as though he was trying to tell me something. I pondered this for a moment longer before he broke our gaze, looked up at the sky and propelled himself out of sight above the treetops.

I sighed as I stared at his faint silhouette fade into the distance and smiled to myself. Autumn was beautiful. Leaves cascaded down around me, settling on the ground with a crunch. The ghost of the previous autumn drifted past me in a silent wave and I was suddenly overcome with a sense of relief. I looked back up at the branch the owl sat on hoping he might return. I guess good things never last.

## **Autumn Walk**

Emily, Year 8

Merry left her house, carefully making sure to lock the door behind her. It was dusk; the sun was only just visible between the orange-leaved trees in the distance.

She had decided to go for a walk; it had been a long time since she left the house. Two weeks spent indoors was probably not particularly good for you, she supposed. It had been a rough two weeks though. And it especially didn't help when her phone charger decided to break. Luckily, she had found a spare, but it was still very annoying.

Merry made her way down the pavement and turned a corner onto a road even longer than the one she lived on. Looking back, she really should have come on her bike, but then again, she wasn't the best at thinking ahead. Besides, walking was relaxing and gave her more time to think, and it beat sitting in her bedroom on her phone all day.

She passed by a particularly well-kept front garden – it even managed to keep the fallen leaves at bay – and she remembered the plants she had bought for hers. Great. Even more work that she had to do.

Merry sighed. It was hard living alone – you had to do everything yourself.

Crossing the street, she thought about how quiet the neighbourhood was nowadays. It was like no one lived there anymore. The family that had always been loud and annoyed everyone (in a good way, you couldn't really get mad at kids being kids) had recently moved away, something about an "amazing job opportunity" for one of the parents, or that's what Merry heard at least. After they had moved, things slowly began to get more and more dull, at least in the sound department. But Merry was fine with that, she didn't enjoy loud noises, especially ones made by children screaming on the pavement.

And then there was... Never mind. Merry shrugged the thought off.

Merry knew she should leave her house more often, but she didn't really like social interaction and all her friends lived very far away – it was way easier just to talk to them online. Besides, that way they could play video games while talking, which was always a good time. That was how she had spent her summer. Long nights with only a voice coming through her headphones for company. Merry couldn't count the number of times she had ruined her sleep schedule. Did she even have one at this point? Some nights she went to bed at 9 pm, and sometimes it was 4 am. Probably not very healthy, but who's judging?

She turned onto the last street before her destination. It was getting colder; autumn had always had a habit of sneaking up on her. And with autumn came memories.

If only she had a dog who could do this walk with her, or just some kind of pet to keep her company, but she could barely afford to live in her house, let alone adopt an animal. She had plans to though, once she was in a more stable position. She'd

always loved dogs, so she was probably going to try to get one of them in the future. A pet would also definitely help her with her mental health. She definitely needed that. At least she was out of the house at last. Who knew it was so easy to let your life fall apart?

And with that thought, Merry entered the graveyard.

## **The Hunter's Moon**

Isabel, Year 10

The Hunter's Moon came and went yearly, and every year on this changing date a repetition of events occurred. Autumn observed the girl who slipped out of her bed, her house, her garden, and into the woods over a well-worn stile. She travelled under the cover of the protecting trees laden with leaves turning reddish brown by the second, only carrying two blankets and a coat to cocoon her in from the ever-turning chilly air. Catching a rare glimpse of her manoeuvres, hidden by the tall, bowed trees, Autumn only ever managed to follow her by the slight crackle of the fallen leaves being crunched under her near silent footsteps. Once she emerged from the shadows of the trees and into a clearing, she set down her blanket and looked up to the sky. Then her movements were tracked by the light shining from the fullness of the moon, which bathed her in a soft autumnal glow.

It brought Autumn a sense of peace – when midnight ticked around on its watch – to look down on this girl settled on the hard ground with the sole purpose of moongazing. Ready for a quiet night of the moon illuminating the orangey brown hues of the leaves and watching them slowly spiral down to the already carpeted ground, Autumn relaxed.

However, this year felt different. Instead of the usual silence blanketing all areas the night could reach, and undisturbed moonlight shimmering against the slow ripple of water from a trickling stream, the areas around human civilizations were full of rowdy sound, penetrating through the yearly peace Autumn was so used to. Pumpkins were lit outside nearly every house, little parcels of candlelight drawing people in. Children ran through the streets shrieking, holding buckets and sporting costumes of ghosts, pirates, and skeletons. This behaviour led to the trees bordering the wood recoiling back slightly from the disruption and noise. The air appeared to thicken rather menacingly; the moon, usually so placid, now colouring slightly to match the steadily blooming colours of the wood.

It seemed almost like a warning.

Would this event happening dissuade the girl from braving the woods tonight? Autumn, the forever quiet presence, watched on questioningly.

But then a subtle movement caught her eye: the girl making her way out of her previously statue-like house. Today, the trees did not look so welcoming of her presence. Walking into the woods, they almost showed signs of drawing her in – Autumn couldn't tell if their motives were to protect... or trap.

Then Moonlight started to dim around her presence.

It was called the Hunter's Moon for a reason, and maybe it didn't react well to Halloween stealing its spotlight.



## **The Dryads in Time**

Matilda, Year 8

It was Autumn and the squirrels were getting ready for a cold harsh Winter. Autumn sighed, being a dryad in Autumn was hard, especially since there were hardly any Dryads at all in the old woods after the great war against the humans. The great war had ended in tragedy with half the forest being burnt down and the dryads dying with the soul of their tree.

Since then, the world and forest had changed. The Dryads and Naiads had learnt how to protect themselves and fight against the invading humans.

Autumn thought back to the stories she had been told about before the great war, when humans and all dryads and naiads were able to live together in harmony. But then the humans chopped down the King's tree. Nobody knows whether it was on purpose or by accident. But from that day on humans were never welcomed into the forest. Autumn wondered whether that peace could ever be restored. Every day now the humans were cutting down more trees and filling in more rivers, killing more animals and nymphs.

Again Autumn thought back to the stories about the peace before the war and the stories about the war. What had started it all and why had the humans cut down the King's tree? And if they hadn't cut it down, who had? There was only one way to find out.

Autumn started running as fast as she could towards a large clearing surrounded by stone arches. In the centre stood a beautiful-looking watch engraved with intricate gold lettering so small only the clearest of eyes could read. However, everybody knew what the words stated. They read, "Whoever dares wear me messes with time and time is not to be messed with. Therefore, do not dare wear me." Autumn whistled softly under her breath. Such meaningful words meant only one thing. The watch really was some sort of time changer. So, she, Autumn could travel back in time to the exact moment in which the King's tree was cut down. Millions of thoughts suddenly rushed about her head. She heard footsteps coming towards the clearing. She hastily grabbed the watch and spun the hands to a random place on the face. Autumn closed her eyes and felt herself being spun away by rushing winds. She could smell the salty sea and almost hear the crashing, foaming waves, as if she were travelling miles away from the forest and over the seas and oceans to other parts of the vast world.

She felt her feet hit hard ground. She slowly opened one eye and then the other. She took in a sharp breath. She was in the same clearing, yet it was so different. All around there were fights going on between humans and nymphs of all kinds and screams of agony, pain and frustration. Autumn stared down at the watch in her hand. It had reset to 8:30 so Autumn had no idea where she was. Though she did know what time it was at present. Much to her dismay, the watch of the present was still ticking meaning that time in the present world was still going so Autumn would

have to be fast. Autumn looked around again. Judging by the number of humans and nymphs still alive it must only be a few days into the great war.

Autumn hastily rewound the now illuminated pocket watch only a few times and was soon whisked away again. As she hit solid ground, she looked around herself. She gasped for not the first time that evening in the middle of the clearing stood a beautiful great oak. The King's tree!

She noticed a haggard woman coming towards the tree. Autumn realised almost immediately that it was not a human or nymph form. The murder of the king was not by humans or the nymphs. It was a witch!

As Autumn watched in spellbound horror, the thriving grand tree burst into flames before her eyes. Tears came to her eyes. Hundreds of thousands of old friends – humans and nymphs – had died because of an old witch full of spite and malice.

She did not care what happened now; Autumn was an orphan because of a witch. She lunged towards the witch with anger pounding inside her. All she could hear was the voice inside her telling her that it was this hideous creature's fault. She did not hear the sudden screams of upset and rage as the nymphs found their king dead.

And all of a sudden, Autumn was back in the present, curled up in a ball on the hard ground, no one needing to ask why an orphan from the war was crying.

## **The Yellow Traffic Light**

Elisabeth, Year 8

Autumn is like the yellow traffic light.

A leaf fell. Many more followed. Soon colour came cascading down from above, showering us with warm friendly welcome. Like a stain glass window, sun shone through long grass-filled glades dotted with mushrooms, and conkers tumbled from their trees. A fresh breath rushed playfully over skin, sweeping up colour, parading it with pride, for all to see.

And people did see. They saw the leaves, the colour, the glades, the conkers and the breath rushing over their skin, sweeping up the colour, parading it with pride. But they wouldn't see all. They blinded themselves from the warm friendly welcome, the freshness and the play, and they blinded themselves from the meaning of the breath's parade of pride. They needed to focus on other things, or at least so they thought.

Yet for all they claimed to be focusing on other things, they couldn't quite help but focus on the leaves. They blew them into piles with loud machines, leaving them in wrecking heaps, no one watching as the colour died. They couldn't quite help but focus on the long grass-filled glades either. They felt the need to cut the grass, pick the mushrooms, and surround it with tall looming structures, leaving the sun to creep its way in through the smallest cracks and crevices, like a criminal hiding from accusation. They also couldn't help but focus on the conkers; they couldn't quite help but to protect themselves from the breath's parade and they couldn't quite help but complain at the cold it creates. Never once did they look round to admire its pride.

They focused and they focused on a problem that never needed to be solved, a problem that never existed, except in their minds. They focused so much on blowing the leaves, cutting the grass, picking the mushrooms. They focused so much on building the structures, keeping the sunlight out, on the conkers and protecting themselves from breath's pride, that it was all forgotten. A never-declared war had begun and was won, for autumn was gone.

Left was the breath who paraded not. Pride had been abandoned since there was nothing to be proud of. Instead, autumn had become the yellow traffic light.

Autumn is like the yellow traffic light. Not quite green; and not quite red. We sit at the red traffic light waiting for that yellow one to appear, only so we can get ready to leap off into the distance when the green finally arrives. Autumn is that in-between time. The waiting. We neglect seeing the beauty in autumn and, in our eyes, it has become nothing but a time in which we sit around, waiting for it to be Christmas, or a time that we dread as summer comes to a close. But in reality, we do not see the beauty often because we have destroyed it. We spend so much time thinking about what is wrong with everything, we forget about what is right.