

Candidate name: Candidate Alpha Candidate number: 0001

Centre number: 12345

SECTION A

FORM 1: POETRY

Kintsugi

Everything Okay?

Daisies

The mosaic of a man

FORM 2: PROSE NON-FICTION

Buzzfeed

FORM 3: PROSE FICTION

Garrett

COMMENTARY

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Kintsugi,

The Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold

mirror shards
erupt with fountains of glass
just to marr your fingerprint

reflection shattered
your face fractured
eye bigger than your lip

blood drips from your knuckles
seeps into the mirror's cracks
a red kintsugi repair

Commented [PF(1)]: An evocative image although perhaps lacking in subtlety.

Everything Okay?

~the words of suicidal tumblr

i'm not *good enough*.
because *every now and then*
it ~stings~

Commented [PF(2)]: An interesting concept for found poetry.

they say I should go to
~ my happy place <3 ~
so that's what I do
everything's there:
a surgical blade, painkillers and a tub of hot water

Commented [PF(3)]: Use of italics to differentiate between the tumblr comments and the poet's own words.

whoops
i'm sure this *means im loosing*
but *at least it makes me feel alive.*

doesn't mean *I hate the day after* any less
i'm just tired.
i am fucking tired
tired of living

but *isn't it tempting*
when *shit happens*
to have *authority over your pain.*
to give in to *the overwhelming urge*
again and again and again and again

.... *i'm sorry*
i just don't know how much longer I can hold on for

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Daisies

He loves me,
Well, that's what he told me,
Sat in the meadow,
Daisies, scattered through the grass.

He loves me not,
Well, that's what he screams,
Standing in the doorway,
Daisies wilting on the window-ledge.

He loves me,
Well, that's what his friend claimed,
"He just needs time that's all,"
He'll bring you **daisies** when he's done.

He loves me not,
I tell myself.
We're unfixable,
Well, **daisies** can't replace love.

Commented [PF(4)]: Perhaps not quite as effective as some of the other poems. A clear concept, but not entirely successful.

The mosaic of a man

I saw a book cover once.
It showed the mosaic of a man,
And I thought it was beautiful.

Black tile, spotted with an oil-spilled rainbow.
Off-white grout, occasionally singed.
Words wrapped around his head,
A halo of wisdom.
It was the mosaic of a man,
And I thought it was beautiful.

The book in itself was of poetry.
Yet the cover was worth more than the thousand words within.
It was the mosaic of a man,
And I thought it was beautiful

Commented [PF(5)]: An ekphrastic poem which does, quite literally, judge a book by its cover.

The songs in its heart,
Guarded by a shallow ear.
The words at its core,
Shielded by its absent eye.
It was the mosaic of a man,
And I thought it was beautiful.

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I saw a book cover once.
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Buzzfeed

Why I left BuzzFeed.

The videos continue to appear on YouTube feeds even today. Four years after [Ken Moffitt's original video](#) was posted (now boasting an astonishing 5.6 million views). Thousands more have been uploaded, all sporting the same title. You may wonder why every ex-employee feels the need to post this video. Do they all have different reasons for leaving? Do they want to say goodbye to their fans? Or is it that the same repetitive, attention-seeking title will draw people into their new channel? (Totally unbiased here, but I would go with the latter.)

[Safiya Nygaard's eight-minute-long video](#) (currently sporting fifteen million views) complains of the same things as every video like it. How entitled do you have to be to complain about *doing your job*? The job you were *hired* to do. Sure, you want to make decisions? You want to be in control? But that's not your job. You're there to churn out content. *You* are the social media equivalent of a burger flipper. But, still, people continue making videos to scathe BuzzFeed. (Though the disclaimers at the start say otherwise.) And yes, it's completely fine to be frustrated being in a minor position, to want to work your way up the ladder to a managerial role. But broadcasting it to millions of people all over the world? Is that really fair? To complain of the company laying off workers yet reducing their viewer count with every video under the four-word title.

Now, this might seem like I'm defending BuzzFeed, and I guess I am, in a way. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the way the company is run. The *problem* is their content. And where does that content come from? Their employees. The exact employees that have left BuzzFeed to make the same unimaginative, laughable and simply (To quote [Martina Obertova's Trustpilot review](#)) 'Trashy' content.

Now let me be clear. I hate BuzzFeed's content as much as the next person. Every '[It's Kinda Weird, But Your Sushi Preferences Will Determine What Your Zodiac Sign Should Really Be](#)' quiz causes my neurons to commit suicide. Every 'Adulthood', 'I'm not ashamed to be a Hufflepuff, and 'Save the middle part' article they post forces one real journalist to read the Daily Mail. And I'm almost certain the declining state of the economy has something to do with their war against man-spreading.

Buzzfeed is the millennial dystopia that haunts my nightmares. Their war on Gen Z is comparable to how the British press report on Megan Markle. Articles and quizzes about Astrology, Avocados and Adulthood make me wonder if they know the alphabet has letters past A. Clinging to words like doggo and bae. Trying to believe they're still young and not the embodiment of an Ugg wearing, wine drinking thirty-year-old called Becky. Who has an unhealthy pumpkin spiced latte addiction that drains her bank account every October because 'adulthood is hard.' (It's not hard enough to excuse your overspending habit on autumnal drinks, *Becky!*)

Diving back into the delves of [Buzzfeed.com](#), reading quizzes and watching videos of over-privileged millennials complaining of jobs that let them live in LA is something I never wish to do again. The Proxima-Nova font and side by side picture

Commented [PF(6)]: Effective use of form with hyperlinks.

Commented [PF(7)]: Effective tone.

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thumbnails now result in a trauma response. Now more than ever, I hope that BuzzFeed will be abandoned in the 2016 section of the Way-back machine. That millennials will no longer find cringe filled humour in it, and I'll get to read the video title.

Why BuzzFeed left.

Commented [PF(8): Not quite as effective as the prose fiction, piece.

Garrett

"Sean, you're a lucky man," the nurse said as she walked in. "That number of pills could have killed you..."

Commented [PF(9): Interesting opening.

He knew that - his search history would prove it. He had counted *four* times just to make sure it would work this time, but *no*, nothing could ever come easy to him.

"...you should be good to go once the Doctor can give you a discharge consult."

"Thank you, nurse." He paused to read her name tag. "Phillips."

She gave him a small smile before leaving the room.

"It was you wasn't it?" He looked over angrily to the chair in the corner of the room.

"What did you do, Garrett?"

'Nothing.'

"You always do something. I wanted it this time."

"You say that every time.'

"I mean it every time," He spat at Garrett as the Doctor walked in. She looked over to the corner in confusion but brushed it off and turned her attention to Sean.

Commented [PF(10): Capitalisation error

"Hi, I'm Doctor Morgan. I'm here to do your discharge consult."

★ ★ ★

"Are you on any medication?"

"No."

"Are you having any thoughts of suicide or harming yourself in any way?"

"No."

"Do you need transport arranged for you?"

"No."

"Have you got any more questions before I discharge you?"

"No."

"Okay." The Doctor handed over a red discharge form. "Give this to reception on your way out."

"Thank you."

Sean walked out of the room carrying the piece of paper tightly in his hand. He handed the form to the receptionist before heading out the front doors and into the large car park surrounding the hospital. Honestly, it should have been a concern that someone who tried to kill themselves less than twenty-four hours before was allowed to walk straight out of the hospital - but he supposed they were glad for the bed.

'You shouldn't have lied to the Doctor,' Garrett spoke from behind him.

Sean stopped and turned to answer. "About what?"

'All of it.'

"Shut up, Garrett. You're the only reason I even had to talk to her. Let me guess, you *called the ambulance!*" Sean threw his arms out dramatically. Behind Garrett, a woman stared at him like he was crazy.

"WHAT!" He yelled. The woman quickly averted her eyes, and she continued her walk inside.

'You're drawing attention to yourself.'

"Whatever." Sean began walking toward the road. "I fancy a pint. I'm going to the pub."

'The pub!' Garrett jogged to catch up. 'Sean, you just overdosed. You need to go home and rest, not go to the *pub!*'"

Sean stopped and turned around once again to reply. "You can't tell me what to do. *I have the day off work. I'm going to the pub.*"

'You only have the day off because you almost *died!*'

"Yeah, *almost*, but thanks to you, I didn't!" Sean turned his back on Garrett and continued walking. Garrett strolled behind him, humming the chorus of Highway to Hell, which Sean *knew* was stuck in his head earlier.

★ ★ ★

The pub was nearing empty as Sean walked in and over to the bar. Moments later, a fed-up looking bartender was standing in front of him.

"Pint of Stella, please. You want anything?" Sean looked behind him. Garrett shook his head. "That's it then, thanks."

"Three pounds sixty, please, mate," The barman said, taking the money and placing a pint on the bar. Sean took a large gulp before turning back to Garrett.

'You're gonna get liver failure.'

"Good," Sean said, and a couple of the people in the bar gave him a sideways glance. He ignored them and walked over to the corner where Garret was sitting.

The whispers of the few midday drinkers bounced off the low ceilings and sticky red patterned carpet. Sean could see the glances they were throwing his way.

"I'm not crazy," he mumbled, glaring at the next table. Their eyes quickly shifted back to their own drinks as he gulped down the last of his own. "Let's go."

★ ★ ★

'People are staring,' Garrett whispered in Sean's ear as he walked.

"I don't care."

'Sure.' Garrett rolled his eyes and began to murmur song lyrics. *I'm on the hiighway to hell - I'm on da hiighway to h-*"

"Shut up, Garrett."

'What?'

"I had that song stuck in my head four hours ago," Sean hissed. "Shut - up." Garrett stopped singing.

★ ★ ★

Commented [PF(11)]: Capitalisation error

Commented [PF(12)]: Capitalisation error

'Still,' Garrett mumbled as it started to get dark.

"What?"

'Still- you still have Highway to Hell stuck in your head.'

"You don't know everything that goes on inside my head."

'Don't I?'

"No!" Sean snapped his head to Garrett and then down to the pavement, mumbling to himself. *"No, you bloody don't."*

Garrett heard him.

★ ★ ★

Garrett was talking more and more as he neared home. People stared at him as he swore back through his teeth. Sean didn't care. He made his way up the stairs of his building and his elderly neighbour Mrs Jennings came out of her front door as he walked past her flat.

"Oh, Sean, darling, you're okay."

"I um- yeah, they said I was *lucky*." He gave Garrett a pointed look.

"I called the Ambulance last night when you didn't open your door, y 'know with happened last time and all, I was worried." She went inside for a second before returning with a tin. "I was wondering if you wanted some cookies." She held it out to him.

"Thanks." He took it with a polite smile.

"Well, I'm glad to see you're okay. Goodnight, Sean."

"Night, Mrs Jennings." Sean dug around his pockets for his keys and quickly opened his own door.

'I told you I didn't call the ambulance.'

"I know you didn't." He put the tin on the surface and made his way to his bedroom.

Garrett was already sitting on his bed.

'You always blame me.'

"It's easier." Sean was tired now. The anger he had for Garrett earlier dissipated as he came to his senses.

'You gonna take your meds?'

"I don't want to be alone." He climbed into bed next to where Garrett was sitting.

'It's not healthy, Sean.'

He sighed, reached over to his bedside table, and read the bottle before shaking two pills into his hand. He threw them into his mouth and swallowed them with a gulp of stale water before sleepily lying back down.

Clozapine.

*Take two 25mg pills once a day
for treatment of hallucinations
caused by acute Schizophrenia.*

"You know, you're my only real friend Garrett."

'I'm not real, Sean.'

"I know."

Commented [PF13]: Although the twist was telegraphed from the beginning, the ending showed a clear understanding of the short story form.

Commentary

For my first poem, *'Kintsugi'*, I was inspired by the traditional Japanese poem Haiku that creates a framed, focused image. I was influenced by *'The old pond'* by Matsuo Bashō. Matsuo creates the sound of the frog jumping into the pond using the onomatopoeic noun *'Splash!'*. I, therefore, used sound patterns in my stanzas to reflect the sound of the mirror smashing. In the first stanza, R sounds in *'mirror shards erupt'*, and in the second, the T sound in *'reflection shattered'* and *'fractured'*. I initially used a sequence of four three-line stanzas to mirror this whilst still creating a substantial piece. In the creative workshop, it was suggested that I should cut my third stanza between *'just to marr your fingerprint'* and *'blood drips from your knuckles'*. This made the repetition of three more prominent, having three three-line stanzas. It also made the piece clearer and improved the pentameter of the piece. I contrasted the destruction of the mirror with the idea of Kintsugi, a Japanese style of pottery that, along with Haiku, is a way to represent abstract concepts. Kintsugi is a way to show the beauty in imperfections, and Haiku are a way to look at the physical world and see something more profound. I wanted to show how people think that hurting themselves can fix them. Reflecting how the blood *'seeps into the mirror's cracks'* like gold in Kintsugi is used to 'fix' pottery when in reality, it makes it into a new piece entirely—showing that beauty is not found in perfection but rather in our view of ourselves. I showed this in the mirror, showing a distorted depiction of the character.

Similarly, in my second poem, *'Everything okay?'* I wanted to expand on this idea by showing how real-life people write and share self-reflections anonymously and, therefore, without judgement. I firstly took inspiration from the style of blackout poetry, especially the famous newspaper Blackout Poem created from the 1929 edition of *The New York Times* during the Great Depression, which references another poem by Emily Dickinson *'Because I could not stop for Death'*. I liked the idea of using someone else's words to create an entirely new piece which led me to find poetry. I decided to use Tumblr to find my quotes because Tumblr creates an echo chamber of people who feel the same, able to feel like their dangerous thoughts are normal. I wanted to use multiple quotes to show how many people have feelings of depression and suicide despite mental health being such a stigmatised topic and rarely talked about. Therefore, I changed my idea to use other people's words with mine added to make it into a cogent piece. To show the separation between my words and others, I put them in italics and bold. In the workshop, it was suggested that I take them out of bold, and I agreed. They also suggested that I make the punctuation constant throughout. However, I decided not to change it in favour of keeping the quotes verbatim to further accentuate the idea of these being real people.

My third poem, *'Daisies'*, was inspired by the game and associated phrase *'he loves me he loves me not'*. I used Daisies as a motif throughout the poem, one in each stanza to reflect on how the relationship was developing. To emphasise this, I put *'daisies'* in bold every time it was used. I alternated between *'He loves me'* and *'He loves me not'* on each stanza's opening line, reflecting on the game's alternate picking of the petals. To show this repetitive nature, I also used a similar structure throughout all the stanzas, starting with *'He loves me'* or *'He loves me not'*, then a line starting with *'Well'*, the description or content of the situation, and then a line containing the word *'daisies'*. This happens in all but the last stanza, where the reflection on the past relationship comes into the present.

My final poem, *'A mosaic of a man'*, was inspired by the cover of David Briggs' third book, *'Cracked skull cinema'*. After speaking to the Author about why he liked the cover, he said the image of the mosaic silhouette tautologically matched the style of the poems inside,

Commented [PF(14)]: Discussion of influences.

Commented [PF(15)]: It isn't pentameter

Commented [PF(16)]: Convincing consideration of the relationship between her ideas and her writing.

'showing a view of the world from someone whose heads cracked open from life.' Creating a 'distorted vision of life.' I wanted to describe the cover using poetry to similarly match how the cover looked to what it represented using the form that it represents. I was inspired by 'But you didn't' by Merrill Glass. Glass uses the same last line at the end of each Stanza to emphasise the main impact of the poem, which is to her lover not returning from war. I wanted to emphasise the impact of my poem which was about the picture on the front cover by using the line 'And I thought it was beautiful' at the end of each stanza.

Commented [PF(17): The style model isn't really used here; the book is, it seems, very much judged by its cover.

Commented [PF(18): Not fully developed.

My prose non-fiction piece, BuzzFeed, is an opinion piece on the 'news' website under the same name. The opening line is taken from the famous video titles on YouTube that have become synonymous with the website. Similarly, the last line is a play on the opening. I wanted the opening line to draw them into the article and both lines to stick in readers minds. And I used hyperlinks throughout the piece to comment on BuzzFeed's place as online journalists.

Commented [PF(19): Less effective discussion of the prose non-fiction piece.

My prose fiction piece, Garrett is a short self-contained story about a schizophrenic man called Sean with a hallucination called Garrett. Originally, I didn't use Sean's name in the piece as I wanted to reader to be in Sean's perspective, as they are the only one's other than Sean who know about Garrett. However, in the workshop, people said that they weren't sure who was speaking, Garrett or Sean, so I, therefore, added his name. I also wanted the reader to believe Garrett was a real person up until the end. I foreshadowed this using other people in the story to give Sean weird looks or look straight through Garrett 'Sean snapped, causing a couple of the people in the bar to give him a sideways glance'. I purposefully referred to Sean and Garrett using the singular pronoun 'he' rather than 'they' for example 'Garrett was talking more and more as he neared home' to indicate that there was only one person there. I also used apostrophes around Garrett's speech rather than speech marks because he doesn't actually speak, it is all in Sean's head.

Commented [PF(20): Effective discussion of editorial decision making.

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SECTION B

CHOSEN SPECIALISM: PROSE FICTION

Dictionary of death

Dictionary of death

"Do you have a visual yet?" Sylvie asked Luke down his earpiece.

Commented [PF(21): Engaging opening.

"No, not yet." Luke peered through the scope of his rifle, scanning the park below for their target.

"Sylv, you said she always walks this route home after she gets her prescription," Ben said, holding his phone over his earpiece.

"There's nothing wrong with my intel."

"Then where is—"

"I see her." Luke's gun followed the woman through the crowd: a contingency plan in case something went sideways.

"Okay." Sylvie tracked their movement in her mind. "Start walking."

"Five feet," Luke told her when Ben and the woman got close enough.

"Prepare for collision." She called the movement like she used to call her brother's shows. "And collision. Go."

A second later, Luke and Sylvie heard the sound of Ben's microphone hitting the woman's coat, a muffled apology, and finally, the sound of Ben walking away.

"Target out of view," Luke said, taking his eye away from the sight and lifting the sniper off the ledge.

"Ben, did you get it?" Sylvie asked.

"Yeah," he shook the small pot of pills. "One successful Chicago."

Chicago

Proper noun

/ʃiˈkɑːɡəʊ/

- The largest city in Illinois, a state in the central US.*
- The process of replacing medication with a poisoned alternative. Inspired by and named after the Chicago Tylenol murders.*

Commented [PF(22): An interesting device used throughout the piece. The definitions were highly effective.

Ben got home last. When he opened the door, Sylvie was studying a map on the kitchen table as Luke juggled some small throwing knives.

The apartment was clearly the kind of place that should have been renovated years ago into a modern industrial place with lots of exposed brick and copper. But the landlord lived in the building, and he was far too lazy to put any kind of effort in or ever check up on his tenants. So as long as they paid rent on time, he didn't care if they paid in cash or where the money came from. Which saved them the trouble of washing it.

"Hey."

Before Ben could step inside, Luke took the knife that had most recently landed in his hand and threw it at the door. Ben stepped out of the way just in time.

"Sorry," Luke said as Ben pulled the knife out of the wooden door frame and walked over, placing it down on Sylvie's map on his way to the kitchen behind them. He pulled a half-empty bread bag towards him, placing two slices on the surface.

Sylvie pushed the knife out of the way, scribbling something down on the area underneath. "What you doing, Sylvs?" Luke asked, flipping one of the two remaining knives in his hand as he walked over.

"Figuring out our next pay-cheque," she replied without looking up.

"Ah," Luke looked behind her at Ben and raised his eyebrows. In return, Ben nodded slightly, pulling his lips into a barely perceivable smile as he buttered his bread.

"Okay, stop that." Sylvie stood up straight, clicking her pen and looking between her brothers.

"Stop what?"

"Your stupid twin, telepathy thing. It's annoying."

"That was a circus trick, you know that."

"I'm not talking about the trick. I'm talking about that thing you do when you stand silently and somehow have a whole conversation with each other."

"We do not—"

"Ben," Luke gave him a skeptical look.

"We'll stop."

"Sure you will." Sylvie shook her head. "Just come here and take a look at this map." Luke walked around the table while Ben leaned over the counter slightly, continuing to make his sandwich. "I can't see any blind spots on his walk from home to work."

"So shooting him's out?" Luke asked.

"Yeah."

Commented [PF(23)]: Great use of dialogue.

“Then, why don’t we do a needle in a haystack?”

Needle in a haystack

Idiom

/ˈni:d(ə)l in eiˈheɪstæk/

1. *Something that is impossible or extremely difficult to find, especially because the area you have to search is too large*
2. *A specific form of stabbing with a long and needle-thin knife left in the victim and attached to a tightly woven item of their clothing. When the clothing is removed, the knife comes out with it, causing unnoticed internal bleeding and, soon after, death.*

“I thought about that, but there’s nothing for it to attach to.”

“Hey, where’s the lettuce?” Ben asked, rooting through the fridge.

“No, not lettuce,” Sylvie dismissed without taking her eyes off the map. “We’re in the city.”

Ben stuck his head around the fridge door and stared at his sister. “I was talking about the *actual* lettuce but whatever.” He walked back over to the table, abandoning the sandwich, and traced the highlighted route with his finger. “What about a Golden sun?”

Golden-sun

Noun

/ˈgəʊld(ə)n - sʌn/

1. *A warm golden color resembling that of the sun or sunlight.*
2. *Poisoned paper handed to a target. Named after the Golden paper scandal of 1838.*

“He’s an investment banker on wall street,” Sylvie shook her head. “He’s not gonna take any kind of paper we shove his way. And besides, there’s no blind spot. The paper will be traced back to us as soon as they do an autopsy.”

“Fine,” Ben rolled his eyes, going back into the kitchen and closing his sandwich, forgoing the lettuce. “What were *you* thinking then, Sylvie?”

“Slow acting poison, lift his wallet, put it on a card he uses often. Maybe a coffee shop he goes into on his way to work.”

Luke flipped the throwing knife twice in the air before catching it. “So you want to do a lookie-loo with a Golden-sun? You berate me for a needle in a haystack, but you want to do a lookie-loo *with* a Golden-sun!”

Commented [PF(24)]: Really effective world building.

Lookie-loo

Noun

/ˈluː-kē-ˈliː/

1. A person who looks at something for sale without intending to buy it.
2. Stealing something with the intention of returning it.

“That’s because, Luke.” Sylvie looked at him with a confident smile, “a lookie-loo with a Golden-sun will *actually* work.”

Ben laughed from behind them both. “God, do you remember when we were kids? I swear you did this for every city we went to. Planned out our whole act *and* your own.”

“Then we’d try to add in more or change them to tricks dad had taught us,” Luke smiled at the memory. “But *you* always said they were too dangerous.”

Sylvie looked back down at the table, pretending to read the map she had already memorized in an attempt to ignore her brothers. They were too young *then* to really understand what their life had been like. And too old *now* to remember much about the good bits, let alone the bad. “You were kids,” she muttered.

“So were you.”

★ ★ ★

The twins were eight when they started performing. Sylvie had started three years earlier when she was the same age. She tried to protect them -she really did- but she was only eleven, and every time she went to rehearse for her own act, their father taught the boys more

Commented [PF(25)]: A really effective transition to this moment of analepsis.

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and more dangerous tricks. Sylvie understood; nearly identical twins in a circus were a pot of gold at the end of a dying rainbow, but they were her brothers, and they were *eight*. They shouldn't be sword swallowing or jumping through hoops ten feet off the ground. They should be juggling, plate spinning, or doing a disappearing act. But the more their father taught, the more the boys wanted to impress him.

Commented [PF(26)]: Subtle exposition.

They were in the outskirts of Denver, Colorado, maybe a twenty-minute drive from the heart of the city. They'd spent nine hours the night before driving over from Salt Lake City. Sylvie, Ben, and Luke spent the journey, like most others, sleeping in their camper as their father drove. Once they'd arrived, the riggers, along with most of the strongmen and anyone else who wasn't too busy, put up the Big Top as everyone else started setting up camp behind. People made small bases with the rest of their discipline and then leveled and unpacked their camper. The show horses got put out to graze while people checked on their equipment, counting everything out and inspecting it for damage. Quickly, it became evening. The fencing around the backstage was being put up ready for their first show the following day, and a few people mulled around or chatted by the fires lit to keep the gnats away. Sylvie had just finished planning the twin's act for the two weeks they were there, and she gathered them on the double bed at the back of their camper to take them through it. The young boys bounced excitedly as they kneeled on the bed in front of her. Sylvie smiled from next to them, occasionally glancing across the small kitchen to the door in case their father came in.

"You're only on for twenty minutes," she explained. It was only their third or fourth week performing, and each new city made them bubble with excitement. "That means two small tricks and a big one." She looked down at the plan she'd scribbled onto the back of some old paperwork. "You're starting with juggling, then—"

She tried to continue, but Ben cut her off. "Can we do it with fire?" He asked excitedly.

"No—"

"Oh yeah!" Luke grinned, looking from Ben to Sylvie. "Dad's trying to teach—"

"No," she repeated herself firmly this time, causing both Ben and Luke's shoulders to sag. "No Aztec's, not until you're older. *Much* older."

Aztec

Proper noun

/ˈæztek/

1. *A member of a Nahuatl-speaking state in central Mexico that was conquered by Cortés in 1521.*
2. *Any trick involving fire. Named after the first peoples to use fire for entertainment.*

Commented [PF(27)]: A great way to link the world of the circus with their later role as assassins.

“Anyway,” Sylvie quickly moved on, sharply aware that their father could come back any minute. “Next, you’re unicycling. Just your regular routine.” She smiled. “You were great last week, audience loved it.” The boys grinned at the praise, and it broke her heart. All she wanted to do was hold them tightly and never let go, never let anything get to them. Not this life, not these people, *not* their father. “Then for your big trick.” Sylvie took a deep breath. She really hadn’t wanted to put this trick in, but they *needed* a showstopper. The boys had been practicing it for months, and ... *technically*, only the volunteer would get hurt if it went wrong. “A Robin Hood.”

Robin Hood

Proper noun

/ˈrɑːbən-, hʊd/

1. *A heroic outlaw especially: one that robs the rich and gives to the poor.*
2. *Shooting something in close proximity to a person. Often from the head with an arrow or a throwing knife.*

As soon as she said it, both boys leaped at her and made over-excited attempts at hugs.

“You’re really serious?” Ben asked; Sylvie nodded.

“Dibs on shooting,” Luke said, holding his hand up high.

Ben lightly pushed his shoulder. “Of course, you’re shooting. Last time I tried, I split the sandbag.”

The twins laughed, and Sylvie was glad when they started talking to each other about the upcoming shows. She looked back down at the slightly crumpled sheet of paper and to the plans for her own act. Aerial hoop. She loved it; she really did. It was like flying, spinning

through the air as quickly as she could, hanging upside down from just her ankles. The adrenaline rush that came with that kind of danger was addictive.

Eighteen years after the fact, she could still remember her first show, how high up she was, how the noise of the crowd became quieter as she and the hoop rose above them. How close she came to chickening out and how the nerves nearly made her fall. How happy she was after the show and how proud she made her father.

But she could also remember, a few weeks later, breaking her thumb falling from practice height. Her father shouting at her to get back up, forcing her to practice the trick until she couldn't fall. And, once she had, how he hadn't cared, he just moved her onto a more dangerous one.

Commented [PF(28): Nice juxtaposition between these two memories.

★ ★ ★

Sylvie cracked her thumb and stood up straight as she shook out her hand. "I was old *enough*," she said. "Anyway, why don't you two make yourselves useful and check the drop-sites for new jobs."

"Sure." Luke put the knives down on the table before heading to the door. "Come on, Ben!"

Ben scoffed, waving his hands in annoyance. "What about my sandwich?"

"It can wait."

"But—"

"If you don't hurry up, I'll steal your Metro card, and then you'll have to walk."

"Okay, I'm coming, I'm coming." Ben left his sandwich on the counter and joined Luke at the door. He grabbed his keys, wallet, and Metro card from the side table and followed his brother out of the apartment. They walked down the stairs and out onto the street. It was relatively quiet at three o'clock on a Thursday, with most people still being at work or school. But the unemployed and otherwise engaged filled the streets enough that the brothers didn't feel like they could be easily followed. They walked four blocks to the nearest Subway station, both swiping the flimsy paper cards through the barrier before walking to the platform.

"Remember when we first came to the city, and we couldn't afford the Subway?"

Luke said, looking at a woman struggling with the machine as she tried to top up her metro card.

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“Yeah,” Ben replied, eyes falling and quickly pulling away from the patrolling officers. “Remember the cop that chased you through the station when he saw you jump the barrier?”

In the distance, Luke could hear the train barrelling towards them. “Feels like a lifetime ago.”

The train pulled up, pushing a blast of hot air in their faces. The doors opened, and they waited for a couple of people to get off before they got on.

Ben added it up in his head. “It must have been eleven years now. Since we left the circus at least.”

★ ★ ★

When they first left, they’d had nothing. The only city they’d spent any time in was Vegas, and New York was *nothing* like that. They made money busking on street corners or subway stations, and it stayed like that for a few years. They made friends, found places to crash, and once they got into the swing of things, made enough money to eat real food and at least *pretend* they could pay people rent. They were doing alright, and they could probably do better. The only issue was they didn’t *technically* exist.

If she was to guess, Sylvie would say she had been born somewhere between New Orleans and Jacksonville. Luke and Ben, not far from Minneapolis, the same place, where, a few days later, their mother had been cremated. The camper she’d lived and died in, right along with her. Even though they weren’t Romani in their own right, it was one of the traveling traditions they’d always kept. Sylvie would have to say *guess* because there was no proof. No one had thought to tell the government. To get a birth or death certificate. The circus operated by their own rules, and no one was ever expected to leave.

One day their friend Sammy, who played guitar on the L train, asked why they didn’t start moving up in the world. Luke told him how they couldn’t, how they didn’t have the documents to prove they exist. Sammy said he had a friend that could ‘hook them up’. The dark web, he called it. Apparently, they had a load of stuff on there, including (according to Sammy) birth certificates, social security numbers, and anything else they might need. Sammy gave them the address, and the next week, after a bit of work in Central Park, they took a visit. It was shocking how easy it was to find - an internet cafe on Third Avenue, just around the corner from the NYPD’s nineteenth precinct. When the three of them walked in,

Commented [PF(29)]: Another effective structural shift.

they were immediately greeted by the man at the counter, who asked if they needed anything. Ben replied, saying their friend Sammy had sent them. The man nodded, walked out from around the counter, and led them to the back of the room. He logged them into the computer and pressed some buttons which pulled up lines of code. A few seconds later, the screen went black, then suddenly rebooted with a new website. The man guided them to the adverts before returning to the counter.

People were advertising all kinds of things on there: drugs, smuggling, weapons, cash. It didn't take long for them to find a counterfeiter who sold what they wanted, but there was an issue: everything was listed in *Bitcoin* - something they'd never heard of. So, Ben suggested they go back to the ads and look for somebody else. But again, everything listed was in Bitcoin. Sylvie continued to scroll through the pages, one by one, and suddenly, something caught her eye. It was a request rather than an offer. It paid in the strange currency and would more than cover the cost of the documents. She asked the boys what they thought, and they agreed it was worth a look, so she double-clicked on the link titled hitman.

★ ★ ★

The train slowed as it pulled into the next station, and Ben stood up, ready to get off. "I'll take the F to the Lower East side, and you take the A or C to Harlem. Then I'll meet you in Hell's Kitchen, and we can take the red line back."

"Sure," Luke replied as the train juddered to a halt. Ben got off, leaving Luke to change a couple of stops later.

At four-thirty, Luke and Ben met outside their final drop in Hell's Kitchen. It was by the taxi lot on West Fifty-First. A few years back, units in the empty office block next door were being sold cheap at auction. They bought one on the bottom floor for a few thousand dollars and set up a fake company called Tightrope Loans as a cover. It was still their slowest drop, but they'd gotten enough jobs from the other two to tide them over for the month.

"Anything?" Ben asked from outside the door as Luke looked through the letters.

"Nothing with cash." He roughly folded the envelopes and shoved them into his pocket. "Maybe a couple pro-bono."

"What did you get from Harlem?" Ben stepped back so his brother could close and lock the door.

Commented [PF(30)]: Well researched sense of place.

“Only one.” Luke pocketed the key. “Deposit on a Lolita.”

Lolita

Proper noun

/loo'li:tə/

1. A 1955 novel by Vladimir Nabokov.
2. Killing an ex-lover's new partner out of jealousy. Named after Humbert Humbert's shootout with Dr. Quilty over his devastation at having been robbed of Lolita.

“Anything downtown?” Luke asked as they began walking toward the station.

“A couple. Nothing interesting, although someone *is* spending a lot of money on a J.F.K.”

J.F.K

Initialism

/dʒeɪ ef 'keɪ/

1. Abbreviation for John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th president of the United States.
2. Murder for political or business gain.

As they walked down the street, Luke began ripping open the envelopes he had stuffed into his pocket. Most of them were just junk that he put into trash cans as they passed. But the last letter was handwritten, and he tore into it eagerly. Taking the printer paper out of the envelope, he stopped.

“What’s wrong?” Ben stopped a few paces ahead. Luke’s face was solemn, eyes darting across the paper. Ben walked back to him.

Suddenly, Luke shoved the letter into Ben’s chest. Ben took the, now slightly crumpled, paper and started reading whilst Luke pulled out his phone. Sylvie was second in his speed-dial, right between Ben and Old Italia Pizza, right down the street from them. It rang three times before she picked up.

Commented [PF31]: Building tension well.

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“Luke?”

“He’s back.”

“What? How do you know? Are you sure?”

“There... he left a letter in Hells. I don’t—”

“What does it say?”

Luke leaned over Ben’s shoulder to look at the letter. A fearful dread had settled in his stomach that he knew his siblings shared.

“He wants a job,” Luke replied.

Sylvie gritted her teeth. “I know he wants a job. What fucking job Luke?”

“Uh,” he quickly scanned the letter, picking out the details to name the job. “It’s a...”

“*Gypsy Rose*,” Ben whispered to his brother.

Luke quickly repeated. “A Gypsy Rose.”

“It’s mine.”

Gypsy Rose

Proper noun

/ˌdʒɪpsi rəʊz/

1. A perennial plant, *Knautia arvensis*, commonly known as field scabious.
2. Murder of an abuser either for the safety of the victim or for retribution. Named after *Gypsy Rose Blanchard’s murder of her mother Dee Dee after Gypsy discovered she was the victim of her mother’s Munchausen syndrome by proxy.*

Commented [PF(32): A subtle and intriguing ending, drawing together the threads of the past and present.

SECTION C

COMMENTARY

My original idea for Dictionary of Death came after watching the American TV series, Deception. The show ended on a cliff-hanger, without a second series leaving me unsatisfied, and I began thinking of writing something with a similar theme. The show's combination of identical twins and the world of stage magic immediately intrigued me because of the close-knit family that faced the world as one but also lied to protect each other.

The idea I wanted to expand on from this was a travelling performing art and how when something triggers a lifestyle change, this influences and helps them in their new life. My first idea was to stick with magic. However, having worked at the Circus Big Top at Glastonbury last festival. I thought that circus, although similar, allowed me to use my own experience as well as fully explore the idea of family and community; this is very important in the circus as skills are passed down from generation to generation. The idea to use twins was there from the start; however, I felt that as they would have very similar life experiences, there needed to be another character to bring in a new perspective and allow for more naivety from the twins, much like, in Deception, how Jonathan's experience in prison gives him a different world view to his brother who is optimistic in freeing him from prison. This is where the older sister Sylvie comes in. Much of the story is angled from her perspective, especially flashbacks as she was older and retained more memories from their time in the circus. The two flashbacks in my piece are heavily inspired by the moments of analepsis in Deception, showing Cameron and Jonathon's childhood and how it led them to what takes place in the show. I used the same concept, using flashbacks to show the sibling's past and how it led to the events that unfold in the present-day story.

An idea I wanted to explore as a subplot was the sibling's abusive father, who used his lack of care in the dangers of their performance training as a form of neglect. I again showed this through Sylvie's perspective in the flashbacks, first describing the dangerous acts they did 'sword swallowing or jumping through hoops ten feet off the ground' then later on in a memory, how she broke her thumb doing a trick and how her father 'hadn't cared, he just moved her onto a more dangerous one'. I wanted to show and not tell how Sylvie was afraid of her father through her body language, 'occasionally glancing across the small kitchen to the door in case their father came in' as, although subtle, makes the character seem more real. The final thing I did to show the difference between Sylvie and the twins, especially in their relationship with their father and the circus, was to have Sylvie exclusively refer to him as the more formal and detached 'Father' whereas Luke and Ben refer to him as the more informal 'Dad'. I did this to further show how Sylvie, as the older child, shielded her brothers from their father's neglect and retains more memories from their time in the circus; therefore, her view of their father is worse; whereas Luke and Ben remember their dad as someone who taught them cool tricks and let them perform rather than someone who put them in danger and Sylvie always had to protect them from.

The other main inspiration behind this piece comes from the names and descriptions of the circus tricks and types of hit in the form of dictionary definitions. The idea of the siblings having their own sociolect interested me as an A-level English Language student. I know that having an individual sociolect immediately creates the feeling of an established group. This is an idea that comes from *A Clockwork Orange*, as Alex uses Nadsat to narrate his life, initially excluding the reader as they learn the language. I used dictionary-style definitions and explained them to make the reader feel like an 'other' because they do not know what the words mean in context. However, as they read and more words are explained, the reader begins to feel like part of the group. In *A Clockwork Orange* Alex's language is

Commented [PF(33)]: Interesting comments on the creative process.

Commented [PF(34)]: AO4. Comments on the influence on the structure of the piece.

shaped by his experience as a teenager in a world of youth violence. I took this idea to show how the terms used by Luke, Ben, and Sylvie are shaped by their experience and that the idea initially developed from their time in the circus, 'Aztec' and 'Robin-hood', they then developed into names for kills, 'Chicago', 'Golden-sun', 'J.F.K'. These terms are not always correct. A 'Robin-hood' 'Shooting something in close proximity to a person. Often from the head with an arrow or a throwing knife' was actually the story of William Tell. However, is commonly associated with Robin Hood, and as these names would have been given informally based on the sibling's life experience, they would not always be completely accurate. The way I used the sociolect, as nouns, was inspired by *Oceans eleven* as Rusty describes each thing, they will have to do using a codename 'a Boesky, a Jim Brown, a Miss Daisy, two Jethros and a Leon Spinks' each of these had some relation to the action it describes. A Miss Daisy: references the SWAT truck used as their getaway car. *Driving Miss Daisy* is a movie about a woman who has a chauffeur drive her around under the pretence of a SWAT truck. I liked this idea because it made their life, either as hitmen or as circus performers, although unusual to readers, seem very casual to them. It also conveyed that they have been doing these things over a prolonged period as they had time to come up with these names and establish them outside of the written extract, therefore expanding their world and them as characters. The placement and timing of my definitions was essential as they broke from the narrative, but I did not want them to disrupt the flow and take the reader out of the moment. I also wanted to have the definition directly after where it is said in the text, so the reader did not have to stop reading to find the footnote or go to a glossary, and the definitions instead became part of the story. The exception to this is a 'Gypsy-Rose' because I wanted to end on the definition as it alludes to the idea that Sylvie and the twins were being abused by their father and that they have unresolved issues surrounding him.

Commented [PF35]: AO4. Accomplished use of a style model.

Although I always intended for this piece to be prose, it was suggested early in creative workshop that I turn my piece into script as much of my writing tended to be dialogue heavy. Although theatre and scripts has been a big part of my life, especially whilst writing, I knew I wanted the piece to be prose because the character's past and individual perspectives were significant to its context. I did not feel this could be as substantially portrayed using screenplay as I would have to switch between characters' perspectives or have things explicitly explained using speech which would not feel naturalistic. One of the biggest influences on the way Sylvie, Ben, and Luke interact with each other was a play I was studying, *Gaspig* by Ben Elton and his use of stichomythia. Near the end of the play, as it becomes apparent that a private air market is causing an oxygen shortage and soon, the end of humanity, Sandy and Kirsten, who have have the closest relationship of any characters, explain the declining state of the air market.

Commented [PF36]: Highly effective editorial decision making.

SANDY. Yes, it's serious, Chief, but with major plant closures --

KIRSTEN. Strategic lobbying, saturation mailshots --

this creates an intimate rapport between the characters as their speech easily flows. I wanted to replicate this idea "We do not-" "Ben." to show the close relationship between the siblings and how after many years together, their speech stays in rhythm with each other.

In creative workshop, the suggestion was given to include more description of the apartment the siblings live in and to give Ben an activity that can be described without using speech, such as making a sandwich. These are both things I implemented and made the opening feel less like a script. A piece of writing that inspired me to give my piece features of prose was Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, specifically in his use of speech heavy stories. Using multiple characters, all with similar speaking styles, the use of speech tags was important. However, I found that using 'said' repeatedly caused my writing to sound repetitive and offbeat. Hemingway often uses action in place of a speech tag to show who is talking. Such as, in *Cross country snow*, after Nick falls in a patch of soft snow and his friend

Commented [PF37]: Consideration of the creative process

George teases him for it, he sarcastically asks “‘What’s it like over the khud?” Nick kicked his skis around’, using an action tag, explained Nick’s tone using his body language. I replicated this to bring variety to my writing, “‘Sylvie gritted her teeth. “I know he wants a job’. However, there were moments where I wanted the person speaking to be ambiguous, “‘It’s mine.”” as it was essential to understand that all three characters have been affected by the abuse from their father, and it is both one and all of them that feel the responsibility to take this job. I consciously included more description and character perspective to differentiate from script ‘the unemployed and otherwise engaged filled the streets enough that the brothers didn’t feel like they could be easily followed’ This is most evident in my second flashback on how they became assassins, where I did not use any speech. This not only allows the reader to understand the motivations behind the characters but also becomes influenced by a biased point of view. For example, saying ‘they’d had nothing’ and then going on to explain, ‘they could probably do better. The only issue was they didn’t technically exist’ then showing that the only way they knew how to get documents was through ‘the dark web’, which, because their friend told them about, they did not see as wrong. I wanted to use this technique as I feel the character’s lifestyle, although unorthodox to many, is a reflection of their life experience and, to them, is not wrong as it was their only available option.

As I was writing, I found that there were many details I wanted to include, for example, someone blackmailing them or their history in the travelling circus. However, writing about these explicitly made my piece far too long and created a lot of exposition that insulted the audience’s intelligence and felt like a chore to read. In trying to solve this problem, I discovered Hemingway’s iceberg theory, from a critical essay by Matthew Duffus on the *Craft Literary* website, the idea that a writer should have 7/8 times the knowledge of their story to what they are actually writing because ‘if the writer is writing truly enough, (the reader) will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them’. The iceberg theory inspired me to change and purposefully omit parts of my writing and instead explain them through moments. For example, I never explicitly stated that the person who sent them the letter at the end of the piece was threatening them or that he had done it repeatedly, however by Luke saying “‘He’s back.”” and Sylvie immediately knowing whom her brother was talking about as well as saying “‘I know he wants a job.”” infers that this is something that had happened before. For the circus, however, I used a mixture of description during flashbacks, describing how they set up camp, ‘the riggers, along with most of the strongmen and anyone else who wasn’t too busy, put up the Big Top’ and showing habits/actions that come from their time performing, ‘Luke juggled some small throwing knives’. This weaved the circus aspect of their lives into the narrative without explicitly explaining how the circus worked, but providing enough information for a reader who has no experience with it to understand. In hindsight, there are still parts of my writing that I feel still contains too much exposition, such as, ‘But the more their father taught, the more the boys wanted to impress him.’ and “‘It must have been eleven years now. Since we left the circus at least.”” However, this is information that needed to be given to the reader, and after playing with the way it was delivered, I found this was the clearest and kept the best flow.

I presented this piece to a creative workshop in several increments whilst already having the finished piece. Having an audience read parts of a story and speculating about what would come next caused two significant changes in my piece. The first came from my second flashback. As I got feedback from the group on parts that they liked the most, I found that they seemed to enjoy the most were details about their lives as assassins. Originally the second flashback was about the night the siblings left the circus; however, I thought they might prefer to learn how they became assassins and therefore rewrote this flashback to be what it is now. I wanted to keep the last line “‘Since we left the circus at least.”” so I began

Commented [PF(38): Interesting to see the candidate using style models to explore specific stylistic problems they encountered in their writing.

Commented [PF(39): Perceptive comments on creative process.

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the flashback with reference to when they left and then described what their life was like after that but before they became assassins. I wrote this entirely using a third-person description. However, I used Sylvie as a narrative voice when explaining what happened to their mother. I used Sylvie to describe this, similarly to before, to show that as the older sibling, she retains most of the memories of their time in the circus. The second major change I made was the ending. I knew I wanted to end on a final definition as this is the defining feature of my piece, and I knew I wanted to use that definition to allude to the desire to get revenge on their father, but their inability to. My first ending focused on Sylvie's feelings and how she related to a possible client, a ten-year-old girl who wanted to escape her abusive parent. However, before I presented this, people discussed how my story might end, and there was an agreement that it would have to be something that changed the trajectory of the story. On reflection, I agreed with this and felt that my current ending was not substantial enough. I went back to my ending and rewrote it, keeping the final definition and what it alluded to whilst making a major change in the way the story was going by creating an issue for my characters to overcome.

On the surface, Dictionary of death is a story of three circus trained assassins. However, delve a little deeper, and you find that it is a story of exploited children trying to overcome deep-rooted trauma. A protective older sister, still planning everything down to the last detail to protect her brothers from harm. A family facing the world and the language they created whilst finding their place within it.

Commented [PF(40): Excellent conclusion