

Neil Gunn Writing Competition 2016/17: Secondary school section

Commended: Abbie Lamond, Millburn Academy

State of Mind

"Hey wanna play?" a small child asked Jeffery. "Ah, no kid. I'm too old for this stuff." As soon as the words left his mouth the kid looked up at him with a puppy dog face. "Fine, got nothing better to do." He walked over to the other kids and started to playfully chase them. To begin with it seems ridiculous, but he began to enjoy himself, it wasn't the coolest thing in the world but it helped calm him. After playing for a while he walks over to the shed. That's when he heard skateboards from over the fence. Randy, Troy and Keith all hopped over the fence, they were the ones that sent his brother to juvie. Randy stared at Jeffrey with a burning hatred.

"Hello, Jeff is it?" He looks back at his two friends. "We have some unfinished business". Jeffrey looks at his bruised nose and slowly starts "Randy look we're even. I beat you up, and you got my brother sent to JDC." Randy chuckled slowly. "I don't go for even, I go for winning". As he said that he ran at Jeffrey. Both falling to the ground, Randy raised his fist and punched Jeff across the face. Jeff quickly pushed Randy off him and scrambled onto his feet. The kids that had been playing were now screaming and their parents running out the house with shocked expressions on their faces. Troy and Keith now getting involved pulled knives out and shouted "No one interferes or guts will fly."

Running to the back door knocking it open, Jeff tries to get away, but falls instead. "Come on Jeff, who aren't you fighting back?" Randy taunting Jeff laughs "I was the one that got your brother sent to jail! And now you're just going to take it". Spotting the vodka on the counter beside him Randy grabs it and smashes it over Jeff's head, "You should be ashamed." As the vodka soaks into Jeff's white hoodie, he leans down and grabs a piece of glass and stabs it into Randy's throat. Smiling as he watched the helpless kid fall to the ground. Limping through the door to the side, only for the other two to walk through. Jeff hiding behind the car picks up a wrench on the floor and runs at Troy smacking him across the head, an open wound forming as he fell to the ground.

Keith angrier than before pushes Jeff into the wall knocking down the shelves, causing a half empty bottle of gasoline to fall. Keith noticing what he has done walked over to where Jeff lay and started to laugh. "What's so funny" asked Jeff propping himself against the container. Keith slowly going into his jacket pocket pulled out a lighter. "What's funny, you ask?" Flicking the top open "is what you're covered in". With that Jeff's eyes widened as a lighter hit against his clothing then dropped to the floor igniting everything. Feeling the burning sensation against his skin, he let out a horrifying screech.

Four months later

Jeff lay in a small bed in a grey room, bandages covering most of his body. Jeff could feel stitches throughout his body. Reaching up he felt rough material on his face. His eyes covered by darkness he smiles, he reached his hand across his bed until he felt a small red button and pushed it. A dulled out noise came from overhead and a nurse came rushing in. After her asking him questions he was unable to answer, the nurse let him take off the material covering his face. "Now Jeffrey, this might be a shock but the wounds will heal". The bright light above nearly blinded him when he looked up his eyes out of focus, the nurse handed him a small hand mirror.

He slowly lifted the mirror up. And that's when it started to consume him. His face wasn't the same. His lips had been burnt to a crimson red, his face was pure white and his hair had been singed from a light brown to a charcoal black. Slowly running his fingertips across his face he noticed it had

a slight leathery feel to it. He looked up at his family and then back down to the mirror smiling. "It's perfect." Jeff laughed almost sounding a little crazy. "A face to match the way I feel". He stroked his face; he couldn't stop glancing down towards the mirror. The nurse brought him lunch but he didn't eat anything, his hunger seemed to have vanished. Soon after he was taken home and went straight to his room not wanting to talk to his parents or brother.

Later that night his mother woke up after hearing crying coming from the bathroom. Slowly opening the door she took in the horrific sight. Jeff had cut a jagged smile into his face going from one cheekbone to the other. "Jeffrey? What are you doing?" enquired his mother. Jeff looked over at his mother. "I couldn't keep smiling mummy. Now I can smile forever." She noticed his eyes were ringed in black. Seeing his mother's shaken expression Jeff spoke up. "I didn't like not being able to see my face". With that his mother ran back, waking her husband. "Honey where's the phone w-" she paused noticing Jeff standing by the door with a bloodied knife. "What's wrong, I thought you loved me?" was the last thing they both heard before Jeff ran at them with the knife in hand his grin getting bloodier by the moment.

His brother Liu just shutting his eyes, and on the border of going into a deep sleep, got the strangest feeling that someone was watching him. He opened his eyes and looked around the barely visible room. That's when his brother's hand covered his mouth. Jeff laughing slightly raised the knife above his head before plunging it into his brother's torso. Liu cried in pain before beginning to thrash, hearing a single sentence before he drifted into eternal slumber. "Shhhh. Just go to Sleep."