



Second Prize Winner 2022, Category 8-13 years: Cecily Fox

Pin a death upon a wall

The door is unlocked. I suppose it's always unlocked. Carefully, I step over the threshold, glancing around warily. The dim light casts long shadows across the room, falling onto my bare legs as I start towards the far wall. The floorboards creak after each step, a loud reminder of my solitude. I slide my hand into the pocket of my coat, feeling around for a slip of paper. I draw it out, and hold it against my palm with my ring and little finger. Against the wall before me is a similar looking piece of paper, held in place by a single pin, I pull it out, replacing the sheet with the one in my hand. I open the new sheet of paper. The handwriting is a scrawl, anyone else may have mistaken the freshly drying red ink to be just that; ink. I know better.

Emily White : 12th September 2019, 23:02

My heart skips a beat, but reluctantly I pull a notebook from the inside pocket of my coat, scribbling down the date and time along with the name. I turn away from the note and cross the room, slipping through the door and silently pulling it shut behind me. I pull my phone from my pocket, checking the time. 19:59. Just below, the date is the 12th September. A message appears with a soft buzz. I unlock my phone to read it.

Emily W: Hey Adam! I know you've been busy lately but perhaps we could get a coffee tomorrow? Usual place + time?

I pause. I've told people that they need to... prepare, in the past. But with Emily it feels different, perhaps it's because I've known her since I was young. Perhaps I don't want to tell her that she has 3 hours and 3 minutes left to live.

Reluctantly, I start to type a message back to her.

Me: Hi Em, again I'm sorry that I've been so caught up with... work. I'm super busy tomorrow, so I can't make it for coffee. I'm about 10 minutes away from your place, I can pop round if you want?

I hesitantly press send, and start to my car, a little way from me. Only once I've settled into my seat and turned the key does my phone buzz again.

Emily W: Sure, I'd love to chat!

I don't bother responding, I switch off my phone and drive away from the house quickly. It turns out that I'm closer to Emily's place than I first thought, it takes about five minutes to drive through the empty streets. The night is silent, save for the hum of the engine, which falls silent as I pull into the driveway. The door falling shut behind me is unnaturally loud in the darkness, sending a shiver down my spine. I briskly make my way to the door, knocking with a closed fist. A moment passes. I lift my hand to knock again when the door swings open, the warm light spilling into the night.

“Adam! Do come inside!” Emily exclaims, opening her arms wide. I smile, stepping into the warmth. She offers to take my coat but I turn down her offer, I would rather not risk her seeing her date, no, *time* of death.

“Tea? It’s a bit late for coffee, although I have decaf if you want some.” She leads me to her kitchen, where I take a seat at the counter. She opens a cupboard and takes out a packet of tea bags, unopened. I feel a lump in my throat when I realise that she’ll never have a use for more than two of them.

“No sugar,” I say, resting my head in my hands. She nods, flicking the kettle on.

I check my phone. 20:11

“So, you got any weekend plans?” Emily asks, leaning on the counter opposite me.

I swallow, hard. “Nothing much, I suppose. How are things going with Richard?”

“Wonderfully! He’s staying with family at the moment, but things have been better than ever!” She sounds so excited, I feel my heart shatter inside me.

The next hours pass as a blur, we catch up, chat about our childhoods, talk about our favourite films, songs, books...

The minutes tick by like a leak, slowly spilling faster and faster. Soon it’s flooding past, the seconds won’t stop, marching on persistently. The clock on the wall ticks in time with the beating of my heart, except the speed increases with each tick.

Finally, at 10:45, I can’t take it anymore. I get to my feet with a sigh.

“Look at the time! I best be off. Lovely to catch up with you, Em.”

She glances at her watch, then meets my gaze again with a surprised smile. “I wouldn’t have kept you if I had realised the time! Well, hopefully we’ll see each other soon.”

Inwardly, I tell her that it's unlikely we'll be meeting again soon. On the outside, I just grin and hug her tightly. Just before leaving, I tell her to phone Richard and tell him she loves him. She tilts her head and laughs, before playfully shooing me out the house and towards my car. I wave before she closes the door and disappears inside.

For a moment, I just stand in the dark, listening to my rasping breath. After a long moment, I get back into my car, and start to drive. Really, I should go home, but I want to see if there's a new name and time.

I pull up to the house and quickly walk to the door, where an automatic light turns on, catching me by surprise. I slip inside, flicking the lightswitch and illuminating the room, pulling the piece of paper from the pin. I hear a church bell begin its 11 chimes, as I open the paper.

Adam Sullivan : 12th September 2019, 23:03

I pull my phone from my pocket. 23:03, already.

I have no time.

None.