In the Gymnasium

The mats, two twenty foot stretches of hand woven camel hair and synthesised rubber, are brought by two running boys, immaculately dressed in white shorts. They roll the white carpet out for the master as they would a red carpet for a king. Then all the boys form a large circle round one of the long mats, at the other end of which stands the master, on his toes, ready to strike. He is dressed in a black track suit. He is just about to begin when he hears a whispering from the perimeter of the circle.

He bursts out : 'Shut up.'

All is hushed, every boy silently praying that he will trip up or fall down. Then his plimsolls squeak on the polished gymnasium floor and he hovers in the air. There is a quick flick, a ball of black in mid air and then he has done a complete somersault.

Next, two boys bring forth the vaulting horse. It has given up jumping years ago and is now jumped over itself, handing on its knowledge. The horse stands there, a vacant look on its face. A spring board is brought into the arena and put near the horse. On the other side of the horse is put a mat made of straw.

The master walks up to the horse, like a race horse being shown the first fence of the Grand National. He does not exactly sniff it, but as he tests the two pommels, he gives a disapproving snort through his nose and tells the two boys (or are they stable lads ?) who got the horse out, that it is not stable.

He lines up the springboard himself and the boys form an awe-inspired semi-circle around the mat. He walks back to the start, looking down at the wooden floor, thinking what a fool he would look if he fell, and telling himself he's never fallen yet. He can't fall because as a race-horse loses its life when it breaks its leg, so he would lose his job.

He turns at the start and a little voice inside says : 'Go', and the next minute he is over and he realises he is a better jumper than Arkle.

R. Sindall, 4B 1965-6.

The Chemistry Lab.

This is the one room in the school where a pupil cannot be bored. On the benches are rows of bottles, some with POISON written in bright red, some with name only half on, some with glass stoppers and some with plastic ones. All of them contain what looks, to the inexperienced, like a liquid called H_2O. Only the chemistry master knows that each liquid is different.

Oh, how one's fingers itch to mix this with that to see what colour suddenly appears ! Oh, how you long to get that bottle of ammonia under the nose of an unsuspecting friend, or to take away a handful of blue copper sulphate crystals as a souvenir, to show them to an inexperienced classmate and to say 'I made these.' They'd believe you !

On the sides of the laboratory are rows of filter funnels, tripod stands, beakers and pipettes. But what I find the most interesting objects in the room are enclosed in a museum in the corner. Only privileged Sixth Form students are allowed in this honoured room. The rest of the school have to lower themselves to the old brown inaccurate balances in the junior laboratory.

In and out of this room pass many people, and each has his, or her, opinion of it. Some think it is like a cemetery with its rows of labelled instruments. Others think it is paradise, and float in and out in a dream, hoping that they one day will be able to work in a laboratory all day, every day.

Personally I have no particular feeling towards it. To me, this room is just another in a whole lot of rooms in the school, with no particular speciality, where I must go and learn about things and where I can daydream another lesson away.

Janet King. Form 4B, 1965-6.

An Ode to the Medical Room

The Medical Room is cold and bare
With very little light or air.
Three tables, a basin, a very hard bed,
Are combined with a draught and a pillow of lead,
To give you the sense of approaching doom.
What a horrible place is the Medical Room !

The walls are some sort of bilious green,
The worst shade of colour that's ever been seen !
Three thick grey blankets are tickly and rough :
One day spent on them and you've had quite enough.
As delirium rises so strange creatures loom
All around in that ominous Medical Room !

If you're ever headmaster of this Grammar School,
For the poor pupils' sake, don't make it a rule
To ensnare the sick in a horrible tomb,
That unfriendly place of a Medical Room.

Claire Johnson, Form 2C, 1966.

The Truth

From unreality, oh set us free,
Oh open our eyes to let us see
The Bird of Peace, as she wings away:
She hovers, longing for place of rest
For one peaceful heart to lay her throbbing breast;
But finding none, is doomed to homelessness.
Men grasp frantically at her, with power-dirtied hands
For peace means prosperity in every land.
But she is too wise
And onward, searching, flies.

The Dove weeps with grief at human insanity --
The mushroom clouds on the horizon appear
Bringing not rain but hellish pain and fear.

'Hiroshima ?' says the Statesman,
Out of touch with human suffering
Above that of his own indigestion,
-- 'a very bad slip,
Spoilt our good relationship.
Still, these things will happen.

To show our good will we'll hold a meeting
Of all the nations.
Plenty of publicity --
Hands across the sea (and all that)
We'll sit socially together, black, yellow and white
All inwardly knowing we hate each other's sight.

The people consider themselves in peace-time.
But what is peace ?
What of the man who sits in your place
On the 8.15 ?
With a smug selfish face ?
And what of the dustman who makes such a din
And then deliberately dents your new bin
(Because you dared not to give him
A tip at Christmas for emptying your bin --
And strewing the paper all up the road !)

We read of World Peace Conferences,
But what do they mean to us
In our gossiping over the garden fences
About the black people up the road --
'There ought to be a law !'

For centuries men have striven for peace.
They've invented the bomb and strengthened the police.
Peace ?
The truth is that which people scorn --
Peace is not a thing inborn.
It cannot be arrived at
By treaty or law :
Human nature's the source of war.

Hazel Nicholls, Upper 6, 1965-6.

Child Versus Reality

A child prays and knows that God is love,
He needs no outside stimulus to make him believe,
God is for him and jungle natives and his mother.

A child dreams and to him life is a castle,
In which armoured, gallant knights live.
And Indians are driven from the range.

A child sleeps, in utter faith that when morning comes,
Everything he knows will be there,
Everything he loves will love him more.

A child plays, in make believe world, often comical,
As he talks to himself in his game,
Often not as make believe as Reality.

A child is hurt and runs to his mother,
Only she can make whole again.
Unless she turns away to her harsh Reality.

A child is clean, to him dirt can be rubbed off,
But in a back alley a tormented woman knows
Dirt cannot be erased with man-made soap.

A child is a child, until that loathsome moment,
When he is first disillusioned and sees life.
And, from that time he is burdened with the responsibility of men,

Which is Reality. Or is it ?

Judith Emmerson, U6.

Return from Battle

I fell asleep to the sound of eager, marching feet, thundering past like the dull pounding of horses' hooves on the parched earth. When I slept, it was to vivid dreams of the glory and colour of the battle field, of a fast, furious battle and of a heroic, triumphant return. I awoke to the sound of marching feet, and ran out into the night to cheer our men on. I was astounded.

What I saw was a ragged rank of men, and the night was full of the sound of their exhausted, automatic steps as they trudged past, staring into nothingness. Their faces were completely expressionless, like those of sleepwalkers, their eyes blank, lips set.

Suddenly the front man stumbled, and sank exhausted to the ground. This was like a signal to them to release, as one man, their pent-up feelings of bitterness and sorrow. The masks melted into ashen faces of flesh and blood, every line of their bodies reflecting the abject misery of beaten men.

Behind them came what was left of the cavalry. Horse and man merged into one, exhausted body. The once-glorious, gold-braided uniforms, now plastered with filth and slime, hung in shreds, gaping away from red weals, kisses from hungry swords, and mangled wounds.

The dead and dying were dragged past on litters by choking, stumbling horses, or were strapped over the saddles, ungainly and insecure as sacks of potatoes.

Lastly came the wounded, helping each other over the beaten ground, already bloody from those who had gone before : the superior young officers, the rogues and the idlers together, stripped of their rank.

Then they were gone, the dragging sound of their feet lost in the night air. There was the empty atmosphere of the anti-climax, the only sign of their passing, a broken leather bridle ground into the dust.

Cheryl Nathan, Lower 6.

Paper Boys

If you mention paper-boys to most people, they think of a small boy trudging along the streets with snow falling around hime like a blizzard. And then, the mothers especially, will say that boys should not be allowed to go out so early in the morning and in such terrible weather. They forget the summer. This is totally wrong. To be a paper-boy is the most wonderful experience any boy can undergo. Wonderful in every meaning of the word.

At half past six in the morning, there is no other human being on the streets except you. Everything is quiet and still, quiet to the point of being able to hear the dew drop off the trees. You walk along in your own quiet Utopia, free of the noise and rush of modern life, free to think or dream without someone telling you to'look lively.'

The job also allows you to become much more widely read as far as world news is concerned. This is possible as an average round has every main newspaper printed on it. This allows you to read the best and the worst accounts of the same event. You can also distinguish between papers which concentrate on news, such as The Times, and papers which like to stir up trouble. This may seem a pointless asset but you can often tell if a person is honest or a trouble-maker by the words he uses, which usually bear a resemblance to one group of papers or the other. This is, of course, only a general guide but it never seems to fail me.

The final recommendation for the job is the money and the independence from one's parents. The money allows you to do what you like without having to ask your parents for money, which is, after all, asking permission to do something or other, with the possibility that your parents might say No.

Now comes the rough. It is hard work. The paper bag on a Sunday weighs a good fifty pounds which, if you have to walk round like most of the boys in my shop, begins to hurt the neck after the first half mile. In the winter the cold stiffens the fingers to such an extent that you sometimes make a noise as you put the paper in the door. The result of this, if you have a bad-tempered customer in the house, is that you get told that you are the biggest fool under the sun. Also you don't get any Christmas box from that house for the year.

Christmas boxes, by the way, usually add another £10 to the pocket every year, as long as you build up a reputation as a reliable paper-boy.

However, the job has its laughs, especially when the manager oversleeps and a group of boys tries to wake him up by throwing stones at his window. The method succeeded as one stone penetrated the glass and set the alarm off.

G. Marshall, Form 5B.

Bad News in the Family

'How much longer, Comrade. We have been waiting over an hour.'

'Patience, my dear chap. You can't hurry nature, you know. What!'

And the two men continued pacing the room. They were waiting for the arrival of twins into the world. -- The joining of two great nations. Well, one great nation and Britain, the joining of communism and democracy. The eagerly awaited children were the combined efforts of An-An and Chi-Chi, the Russian and British giant pandas. Twins were essential, one for each nation. They were to be the first giant pandas born in captivity and, as each nation had supplied a parent, each must receive a child.

'Why don't you sit down, old chap ? You'll only wear your boots out.'

'These boots are state boots: they will never wear out. But I think I will sit down. If they are of both sexes, which will you want ? We are having the male one.'

'Oh, we will be pleased to have a female one.'

'Why ?' demanded the Russian, suspiciously. 'Are the males weaker ? Why should you prefer to have a female ?'

'No reason. No reason at all, old fellow. It doesn't matter which really, but let's cross our bridges when we come to them, what.'

'Cross our bridges ? I believe in no god.'

'Top marks to you, Ha, ha ! Marks, you see. Marx. A play on words.'

'I do not understand your capitalist joke, but here comes the Doctor. Comrade, what sexes are they ?'

'They aren't they : they are she.'

'What, another capitalist joke. But we have no time for frivolities. Answer my question.'

'I would never indulge in frivolities, comrade. There is only one child, one baby panda.'

'No, that can't be right, old chap. We were sure. Couldn't there be a delay ?'

'There is never any delay in our state hospitals.'

'But this is disastrous. Which of us shall have the little bbb-baby ?'

'The father should have the child,' cried the Russian.

'The mother is closer,' countered the Briton.

'It was born on our soil!'

'Then it should live on ours.'

'If we don't have it, we will spread communism to the Isle of Wight and then in Britain,' threatened the Russian.

'It's ours. We'll tell America.'

'We can use the bomb.'

'We've got anti-radiation shelters.'

And so they followed the judgment of the Bible and cut the panda in two and they're still arguing over who should have the top half and who the bottom.

Jennifer Goodier, Form 5A.

Premature Visit

I woke with a bump when I landed. Where I landed or what I was in, I did not know, but it was very narrow and the roof was only about half an inch from my face. Funny shape too. Then I heard voices, a kind of chant. Suddenly rain began to patter on to the top of my roof. Well, it sounded like rain at first, only it was too regular. It had a definite rhythm: it was in time with the chant.

It sounded familiar. Where had I heard it before ?

That's it. Aunt Maggie's funeral, when they chuck the earth on top of the coff... in.

Ye gods ! I thought. I've just been buried.

Buried ! What for ? What's happened ? 'Help ! ' I shouted. 'Get me the hell outa here.'

There was no answer. Well, I couldn't really expect one, could I ? I mean, eight feet of earth between us. Flipping uncomfortable though, like living in a biro-tube. That's me, a human refill -- for what, I wonder.

Well, what do I do then, I thought. Whistle ? No room to pucker my lips - not a square inch. What is this coffin -- made to measure ? I can imagine it -- a coffin boutique in Carnaby Street. Up to the minute designs. 'Oh yes, sir, the single-handed version is coming in this Spring. I'm showing my latest Courege coffin at the mortuary next week.'

Never mind. Nothing much I can do about it. Just have to lie here until some kind body-snatcher comes along.

Knock, knock.

Hallo. What was that ?

Knock, knock.

There it is again. There's someone at the front lid.

Hang on. I'm coming. Wonder who it is. Maybe it's my neighbours come over to welcome m

Gor ! This lid's stiff. I heaved it open and standing there were two angels, complete with choir-boy outfits and wings.

What's all this ? I asked.

Come on now, one said. We haven't got all day, you know. This is Cherubim and I'm Seraphim.

Don't tell me, I replied. You're two out of work Soho hairdressers.

No we're not, said the big one. We're messengers of the Almighty.

We hope to, replied he. We're taking you to heaven. Your cloud's all ready and waiting.

You what ? I said. You've got a nerve. First of all I find myself dumped in a grave all boxed and sealed. Now you want to cart me through the Pearly Gates. There must be some mistake: I'm not even dead.

Hm. You do look a bit fresh, I'll admit, said Seraphim. Tell you what. When we get there I'll get Peter to check up in his log book.

But right now, said Cherubim, we must be off: the engine's still running.

We dashed out to a brand new Triumph Herald. I jumped in the front with Seraphim; Cherubim climbed in the back and we were off. Boy, what a ride. On the way we passed many tourist angels, picnicking on lay-by clouds.

It took us only twenty minutes to get to the Pearly Gates. I couldn't wait to be set free. After all, it's unnatural to be dead.

When Cherubim and Seraphim had managed to knock Peter up, he had a look in his book. Let me see now, he said. Month of February, second week. Here we are. What's your name ?

William Fry, I said.

Hang on a minute. No. No William Fry down. I'm afraid you've got the wrong man, men.

I was overjoyed. I could go home. But how ?

Here, I said, How do I get home ?

Just take the second cloud on the left and it's a straight road right to your church.

I never ran so fast in all my life, or death.

R. Harris, 4C, 1965-6.

A Changed Person

They were so nice when they were here. She was the nicest. We did everything together, then her dad won the pools. That was it. They bought a huge house near the sea and moved away. She came back a lot to see us, but each time we noticed something different about her, --- the way she dressed, the presents she bought, her manner of speech. She used to be so thoughtful, so full of laughter, so kind and friendly.

When she comes now, she speaks so coldly, sits so stiffly. We're the ones who have to make conversation. She used to be bubbling over with things to say -- everything that had happened to her lately, the latest news -- now look at her. Not at home at all. It's horrible to see such a change in her: in fact it's annoying. Sometimes I feel like saying: 'Don't sit there like Lady Muck. If you can't feel at home, go back to your old house and your old money. I don't know what's come over you. '

To be honest, I don't think she's completely happy. I'm sure she'd rather be in their old house across the road, and not very well off. It must be horrible to be so well off, to be able to go out and buy a Jag whenever you feel like it. I know she doesn't enjoy it and I know I wouldn't.

The number of her visits gets fewer and fewer. She'd rather have the 'rich people' as friends.

They'd never owned a car when they lived here. The first time they came back, they came in an Austin. The next time they came in a Cortina. Then a Corsair. Then a Jag. The next time they still had a Jag, but they also had a chauffeur.

It seems a shame, because she was such a nice person.

If my dad wins the pools, I shall just leave home.

Christine Hull, Form 4A.

Hotted turns to Hotter

It's a beautiful morning,
Just a few white clouds in a
sunny blue sky.
The air is crisp ;
And everyone is happy.
It's like a cornflake ad.
Then my brother and the other
guy arrive on the scene.
Coca-cola bottles are placed on
the floor and everybody clamours
round their driver.
Both guys are pretty confident
But I know my brother will win.
I spent six months tuning that
engine and there isn't a rod in
the state that can get the drop
on it, except maybe Micky
Lovejoy's.
But he's a professional.
The grid is cleared
And we can make out the
figure of the time-keeper at
the end of the air-base runway.
Keys turn and a purr turns to
a roar.
The flag goes down.
Frank's car's clutch jumps.
The other guy's clutch jumps.
Both cars' front wheels come
down at the same time.
It's gonna be close.
The drone gets louder, louder,
louder.
Smoke fills the air.
FRANK'S OVERTAKEN HIM !
HE'S KEEPING THERE !
HE'S WON !
His parachute's taking its
time opening.
It's taking ---
NO !
OH NO !
NO !
UH ---
The blue sky is misted in my
eyes.
My whole body goes weak.
I sag to my knees.
Janey has collapsed.
All my buddies are running
to the blaze.
What am I going to tell
Ma ?
Jim looks away as I just
cry and cry.
My white overalls are
Covered with cinders as I
crumple on the floor.
I am hysterical.
The distant whine of the
sirens
Become reality.
The ambulance stops
by me.

N. Mcmanus, Form 4D, 1965-6.