



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2017

Senior Winner: Annika Turon-Semmens, 16, Australia

Human Nature

It would appear that in a completely peaceful world, Willem Royle was anything but.

After a worldwide declaration of peace, Willem had been living his life like every other person. Clocks monotonously ticked away, cars flew by on the street and birds sang their songs in the sky, however Willem was a man with an inner turmoil unlike any other.

This turmoil however, was locked away, so deep inside this otherwise average man, that even he himself knew little of it. It only revealed itself to him on rare occasions, such as when the pickle jar proved a rather difficult foe, or when his keys, experts at hide and seek, decided to play.

It was moments like these Willem revealed little bits of himself by throwing the jar against the wall, the sounds of glass shattering as musical as the birds, or screaming at the ceiling, voice high and loud, hoping his keys would hear him.

Soon though, he would collect himself. He would gather his stray hairs, control his breathing, straighten his tie, and revert to his original state.

The clocks still ticked, the cars still flew, and the birds still sang their songs, oblivious to Willem Royle's troubles.

At present day, he was struggling with an old foe, the mayonnaise jar.

Unlike the pickle jar, which was stubborn, the mayonnaise jar was sly, with tricks up its sleeve, and the dried mayonnaise - a dark yellow crust around the edge of the jar - was proving his most difficult adversary yet.

He shouted, exasperated at himself and his weak arms,
"Why must you *behave* like this?"

The jar however, just stared blankly back at him. A challenge.

Arms straining and face as red as a berry, he struggled to open the jar. Just as he thought he had it - had accomplished a sweet victory - it slipped from his grasp and dropped to the floor, the glass raining upon Willem's feet.

Yellow mayonnaise trickled from the jar, swirling around the shards of glass like an ocean around rocks. The clock ticked.

He felt himself seethe, anger dripping off him like the mayonnaise dripped onto the floor.

Often, he found himself in a position such as this, on the edge of something he could not quite fathom, a precipice. And, as usual, he stepped away from the edge. The agitation settled beneath his skin, and like bugs, it crawled uncomfortably.

First along his hands, which had held the jar, then his arms and body, then legs and neck and head.

Spreading slowly.

Willem ignored it, and the clock ticked.

Opting for a drink to calm himself down, he stepped over the sticky mess, and made his way deeper into the old kitchen.

Turning the faucet, to his horror, instead of water, mayonnaise slowly oozed out of the tap and into his glass like a fat slug.

He stared at it a moment, before throwing it down with such a force that he surprised even himself. "Why," he thought, "if I possess a strength such as that, opening the jar should not have been such a problem after all,"

And soon, he started to laugh, because what had been mayonnaise was now water, spreading over the floor, a silent witness to Willem's moment of madness.

"I must be quite crazy," he exclaimed aloud.

The clock ticked.

And ticked.

And ticked.

He found himself picking it up and hurling it across the room. It made a majestic arc before finally landing upon the wall with a loud crash.

His breathing came out hard and heavy, filling the silence of the space.

The floor, now a graveyard of glass, judged him accusingly, and he felt something stir in his heart, something that wanted to break free.

The agitation under his skin crawled.

"I must be terribly exhausted, for me to be possessed by such actions," he wondered aloud, shocked at the scene that lay before him.

Glass shone like diamonds, catching the light, and glinting before him. The sun setting outside painted the room red, and amongst it all, Willem stood, the agitation still crawling beneath him.

"A stroll would be for the best," he decided aloud, realising that he needed to collect his thoughts.

Grabbing his coat and shoes - polished so well that he could catch his reflection - he walked away from the carnage of that afternoon.

The world was crimson, and so was Willem's mind.

Children ran by, off to their houses as the day ended, laughter following them like music. Women strolled in the park and men sat by the road gambling, hearty chuckles falling between them.

Everyone was happy and at peace, everyone who was not Willem.

"Don't you understand?" he shouted. One by one, the people on the street turned to look at him. Blank faces, staring.

He swallowed, his throat turned to sandpaper under the sudden attention.

"This isn't normal," he whispered to himself, and then to the others:

"This isn't normal," his voice high and loud, the same voice he used when searching for his keys.

The people occupying the street stared back at him, some afraid, some amused, most confused by what they thought a madman's display.

But Willem was not a madman.

"I'm not mad!" He screeched. He heard the police sirens, off in the distance.

He started to run, legs pumping. He didn't know where he was going, but the agitation under his skin crawled more than ever.

Flashing lights lit up the long, country road, and he stopped, right outside a petrol station.

It sat like an oasis, waiting for Willem.

Bells chimed as he walked through the door, and a piano warbled through speakers as shoppers went about late night tasks.

Willem's manic breathing started to slow as he formed an idea in his head.

"I'll show people what it used to be like, when life was exciting and unpredictable," the words echoed in his head, fueling his madness.

Anticipation and adrenaline flooded his veins as he bought a bottle of spirits, and although Willem was not an avid drinker, the occasional bottle of wine always lifted his mood, and so he thought:

"Why not buy something a little stronger on such an occasion?"

The door chimed again on his way out, purchase firm in hand as he walked to the curb. He inhaled the drink like air, and the world swayed enjoyably. It would have been simpler to pour the alcohol down the drain, but Willem was a firm believer in not wasting anything, and so he drank every single drop.

Stumbling on his feet, he reached the tank outside the shop. It took him several tries before he managed to take the nozzle out.

The night was silent but for the sound of Willem missing the bottle all together and pouring the petrol over his perfect shoes.

Cursing his inebriation, he tried again, and successfully filled the bottle.

The agitation itched under his skin like bugs.

He reached for his handkerchief, and thought ironically:

“I brought my favourite one,”

With a little sadness he dipped it in the bottle and set it ablaze. The fire licked the air and he felt anticipation rise from his stomach to chest.

“I will not be ruled by peace,” he shouted into the dark. Crickets, his only audience, chirped back.

Struggling on, his words slurred:

“In this dull prison of calm, I alone will be unique,” and he started to laugh, because he felt sorry for everyone who would never feel like he did, at that very moment, and he felt sorry for the world he would leave behind, this boring, new world where disagreement was a taboo, and the word conflict didn't exist.

The bottle flew in the air like the clock, turning ever so slowly against the backdrop of stars. As he walked into the flames, the bugs flew away and he finally felt free.