

Competition entry 02

Stories

This town is full of stories. Like stars they shine even in darkness, most invisible. There are many you can see; they are everywhere. People. Lots of them. All different. All unique. And all with a story to tell. Some shout their stories for all the world to hear, others stay secret. Secret stories are always interesting. But the most interesting tales are the unseen ones. Hidden within the town itself.

For me, history is there to read in the red bricks and cobblestones Stamford is built from. It's not just bricks and mortar – the town is alive. It feels. It remembers. Not like we do, of course, which is why hardly anyone can see beyond their own lives in the here and now. They barely scratch the surface of Stamford. I can dig deeper, peel back the layers, relive times long gone.

It's not always a good thing.

The past is full of pain. And as a teenager, I have plenty of that myself.

Today, I'm late. Later than normal last-minute late. Taking a bus to school still feels like an alien concept to me. The bus is metal, unnatural. I can't sense it, can't connect. Besides, the power is linked to the town. At school, I cannot access it. I have to concentrate on my future. I don't want to grow up. Maybe that's why I forced myself to rush the walk into town. No singing today. Already, I'm late. I can't afford to miss this bus as well.

The pavement under my feet crackles with anxiety. My fingers brush the moss covered wall, electricity sparking through the bricks. The buildings I pass are holding their breath. Watching. Waiting. Apprehension sweeps along the cobblestones as I march along.

The town is unsettled. It makes me uneasy.

A car horn accuses me as I run across Little Casterton junction, distracted and still half asleep. My foot catches on a tree root, and I have to concentrate again on the time.

Time. There's never enough of it. I wish I could go and read on the meadows, watching the river flow past as languid and tranquil as my mind. But there is not enough time. The sun is warm above me, even as a February breeze makes me shiver. If I close my eyes, I can almost feel the grass beneath me, the aliveness of it filling me with life. However, my eyes stay open and fixed on the path ahead, unable to daydream when school is waiting for me. The colours of my fantasy fade into the mundane buildings – churches, houses, shops of every variety.

I leave the church spires behind as I near the Rec, shimmering with ghosts. I catch a whiff of long eaten burger, and snatches of carnival music. Then it's gone, and the bus stop is in sight. Still, I rush past people making their slow way into town. Stamford does that to you. Fills you with the slowness of a summer's day, peaceful and calm.

I can breathe out here.

I reach the bus stop with ten minutes to spare, dropping my bag with a sigh of relief. My eyes close, and I relax. I want to go deeper. My breathing evens out and I fall through time. It's nothing like sci-fi

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tells you. The Doctor Who colours and noises, the TARDIS – it's not real. This power is. The caterwauling of an air-raid siren; the rattle of horse-drawn carriages; the smell of horse manure; the town crier; a baker selling his wares; the taste of fresh bread; the stench of death as plague victims are tossed onto a cart. They all come crashing together in one great crescendo of history, right here on North Street. This town, its buildings, its history. But most of all, its people.

The baker's assistant turns and looks straight at me. He smirks and winks, and I blush. It's not often a boy looks at me like that, even if he is over a hundred years older than me. He shouldn't be able to see me, outside this apothecary. I'm not really there – I'm here, by the bus stop. Time is strange like that. The sounds of the past fade as I come back. The familiar streets, the smell of the Chinese down the road ground me in the here and now. The blue of Delaine comes into view. With the boy's face clear in my mind, I smile, get on the bus, and leave Stamford behind.

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