

Anaia loves to read, and hasn't met a genre she disapproves of, though as the piece below will attest, she has a marked love for gore. She also enjoys playing tennis, hanging out with her friends, and trying to drink way more bubble tea than is good for her! She attends City of London School for Girls in London, England, and will be joining Year 8 in September.

The Girl Wakes

by Anaia Swarup

An arrow, trailing smoke behind it, plunges into the heart of the city one night. No one notices it. Not until it's too late – they're all safely tucked up in bed.

A dishevelled stray dog, around twelve years of age, with large, sad eyes and a staggering gait, trips over the arrow, straggly locks of fur immediately turning to ash at the contact. Watery grey eyes shut tightly, head arches back, and a pitiful howl is uttered, a discordant sort of sound, rousing the city out of its twilight stupor.

People fumble for their torches; clumsiness increased hundredfold by the torrentious fear paralysing each and every citizen save for one. A little girl with a sleek black bob. She rushes out barefoot, paying no heed to the clamour of the citizens behind her. No one notices her go. No one notices the little girl slip through the gate and dash off into the streets. They're too busy noticing their own fear.

However, in her haste, she forgets one thing: her glasses. Without those dense ebony frames to squint through, the world is a blur. She can see no further than one yard, and even that is a struggle. Momentarily paralysed with terror, she pauses, locked in an unwilling stasis, hoping someone will notice her absence and send out a search party to look for her.

The girl waits, and as she waits, she wonders why no one has come for her yet. Why no one has stopped her from slipping through the gates. Then she remembers. Her parents were attending a seminar in a nearby village and would only be back at the break of dawn the next day. But there is still no other option for her, too lost to move, so she waits. Perhaps, she thinks, a family friend might check in on her, or everyone would be counted at the city hall. Maybe someone saw her as she slipped away, and even now is raising the alarm. Perhaps the seminar finished early, and her parents are on their way back.

And then she hears it. The slight crackling of a flame to her left.

Blindly, the girl twists around, arms jerkily suspended in the air in a futile attempt to sense the heat. From a distance, it looks almost as if a voodoo doll is controlling her. The whispering sound draws nearer, a slight gust of wind propelling fatal amounts of smoke to the girl's back

Still locked in place, rendered helpless by the fear creeping over the barriers of her mind, polluting her thoughts with hysteria, the girl takes one last breath before everything overwhelms

her. The horror blares in her mind like a fire alarm, even as her lungs fill with smoke and her hair slowly catches fire. The flames crawl across her body, sparks embedding themselves into her skin like miniature rubies. For a split second, the girl's scream is distinguishable, before it's swallowed by the smoke, and all that is left of her is a pile of ashes.