

The background of the top half of the page features several stylized dandelion seed heads in shades of blue. The seeds are represented by thin, radiating lines, creating a sense of movement and light. The seed heads are scattered across the top, with some larger and more prominent than others.

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# DANDELION

ENGLISH LITERARY SOCIETY, IIT KANPUR

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& PEOPLE**

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Presenting **Dandelion**- IITK's bi-monthly literary newsletter. Dandelion is an initiative by the ELS team to provide a publishing platform to budding writers of IITK, a creative delight for reading enthusiasts and brain-tickling word games for the puzzle fans. Hope you enjoy this edition and become not just active readers, but regular contributors to this space!

We are open to accepting entries in all formats (poems/stories/articles/reviews/anything else) by anyone (any year/branch, no need to be an ELS secretary either). If you wish to get published (anonymously or otherwise) in our next edition, drop us an email at [litsoc.iitk@gmail.com](mailto:litsoc.iitk@gmail.com)!

- by ELS team

# MAYBE TOMORROW

*Short Story by Aayush Kumar, Y20*

A bright and immediate flash of white.

'No, no, but seriously, would you rather find out you have a day or a year to live?' I'm washing my face. Wait, what? Where am I? I stop the rusty old faucet and stare at the grimy mirror above. Jesus Christ, what happened to me? There's vomit all over me - wait, wait, what is this place?

I look around at the pale, cracked walls, with random scribbles on them - call 9900780311 for fun, J&S forever, your usual run-of-the-mill bullshit. Ah - I'm in a public restroom.

The smell should've told me. And right as I realize that, the full extent of the smell hits me - shit, I need to get out of here (pun intended). The watchman sitting outside is saying something. It seems to be positive.

'Thank you, saab.'

I stumble a little as I try to focus on this guy's face.

'Sir? Are you okay?' He stands up, apparently to support me.

'Hey, hey, woah, I'm fine.'

I'm not though, at least that's what my feet are telling me. It takes all of my will which, to be honest, isn't saying much - to walk 5 steps without falling.

'Come on, obviously a year.'

'No, no, you haven't thought about this as I have though.'

Ok, this is me talking to Naveen, that sketchy guy from work. Yeah, this happened earlier in the evening.

'Why have you thought about this though?' Naveen slurs through his alcohol-stained breath, taking what must be at least his 523rd swig from what must be at least his 46th bottle. Even in the lounge, it's tough for me to make out his words through the loud foggy noise of the club.

'Yeah, I have cancer. Doctors give me a year to live.'

Naveen looks at me, very serious for all of one second. The gentleman that he is, starts laughing immediately after his one second of deliberation, in the process spitting on me pretty generously.

'Jesus, that's disgusting. Get a grip on yourself, man.'

'I just can't believe that you almost got me for a second there.'

'Yeah, fine, I don't have cancer or anything. But still, I kinda just wanna - I don't know, let go, I guess.'

'More than you have already? I've never seen you let yourself go this much granted, I don't really know you that well.'

Yeah, I guess I'd forgotten that I was on my second or third bottle too.

'Okay, I'm pretty uh, crapfaced, so-'

Naveen bursts into typically outrageous laughter.

'You have to know that that's not the word, right?'

'What?'

'Never mind, continue, good sir.'

His condescension bothered me, but I needed him. Wait, what, why did I need him?

'Point being, I feel like shit, so I need something that will, you know, pull me up again.'

'Well, what exactly are you looking for, ma-'

'Look, you've figured out by now I don't know too much about this stuff. So just give me anything that-'

Darkness. No wait, my eyes are closed. Something's shaking me. God, I hope it's not a rat.

'Sir? Sir? Are you okay?'

Nope, it's the guy from earlier. I somehow haul myself up and dust off - only to remember that I looked and smelled like I bathed in filth so there was no real point.

'Yeah, sorry, I'm fine.' I was trying to figure out why this guy hadn't just run off with my wallet when it hit me - I'd just given him 2000 rupees to use the public restroom. Ah.

I turned around to see smoke emerging from somewhere nearby. Oh no, no, no, no

I'm driving. Crying. Or laughing? Hard to say. Anyway, there's not too much traffic, it's too late at night. I get my phone out to call Kavya - oh god, what's Kavya gonna say when she sees me like this?

Oh, never mind. 'Veer? What the hell is going on? Why aren't you home yet?'

'Kavya, I was just, uh, this is insane timing.' I flip through the glove compartment and find that beautifully scary box - with her initials on them. I'd had it for a couple of weeks now but was still too chicken to ask. I hold it in my hand and just look - just look at it - wondering how something so small could be something so significant.

Upon hearing my crying (laughing?) voice, Kavya's angry tone immediately melts.

'Hey, V? Where are you, are you ok?'

'I - uh - you know, it's actually not a great time to answer that question.' I start laughing at my own sick joke as I slide the box into my pocket.

'I - I was just thinking, I want what's best, you know? Not the longest. Not the saddest. The best. You get that, right, Kavi?'

'Veer. Come home.'

'Bye, Kavi.' I cut the phone.

I reach into my pocket, and all I can come up with is a bunch of empty packets. Finally, I find one that isn't. I dump all of the white powder out on my hand. My face seems to be getting curiously close to it-

'Okay, now make sure not to take more than 2 of these things together. That'll screw up your heart or something, I don't know the exact details, but you get the poi-'

'Yeah thanks', I blurt out and quickly grab the handful of packets that Naveen was not so discreetly handing to me.

'And, it's uh, how much?', I ask nervously, shuffling through the newly withdrawn notes in my wallet.



Ok, uh, keep going. Yeah, that's enough.' He takes the cash from me, again being far more obvious than I had wanted. He seems pretty happy. It's very possible he just ripped me off. I'd have no way of knowing.

'I'll be honest, I didn't expect that I'd be getting a call from you today. Especially a call about something like this. I usually have a radar for these kinds of things, and you didn't strike me as someone who'd potentially be a customer.'

I just looked at him, buzzed enough not to know what my expression was. What reply could I give to something like that?

He didn't care enough to probe further. He started to get up.

'Well, anyway, pleasure doing business with you.'

Just as he started walking out, Naveen stopped for one final question.

'Hey, uh, what's your answer?'

'What?'

'Would you rather find out you have to live for a year or a day?'

I hesitated for a moment or two before responding.

'Let's say you have a year. You go home, tell your loved ones, eventually your coworkers, and at some point your illness or whatever becomes the news of the day for some people you met once at an office party. You get your affairs in order, make peace with everyone, maybe even eke out a happy moment or two cloaked by a shadow of sadness, and wait for the day to come when you eventually croak, in a hospital bed, your loved ones gathered round.'

Naveen looks at me, almost smirking as he asks me:

'And if you have a day?'

'You could decide to say a big old fuck you to everything and have one crazy night where you go out in a blaze of something. Probably not glory, but at least there's a blaze.'

And a blaze there is. The smoke isn't indicative of a fire, so I should be okay in that aspect. Luckily the car just hit a tree; an electrical pole or something could've really screwed things up. Jesus, what was I thinking? I could've easily killed someone. And I don't even have a driver to blame it on. Once again, I proceed to laugh at a joke I made. Didn't even say this one out loud. Kavya would've loved it though. She always loved my jokes. It dawns on me that I probably have cracked ribs. I can't feel too much pain, but I can see just the slightest tinge of red on my shirt. Airbags work, but they hurt like a bitch. The guy from the bathroom is still bugging me. Does he want more money?

'Sir? Should I call a cab home for you?'

'Hey, how many times do I have to tell you, I'm-'

The purest stream of vomit emerges from my mouth. The guy jumped out just in time so it wouldn't hit him. It looked pretty funny actually, I would've laughed if I wasn't gonna hit the footpath in a se-

The doctor walked in as I sat waiting in his office, feeling far more nervous now than I had been when I first came here yesterday.

He walked in with the air of a person who was here to deliver bad news. It seemed like he was doing it on purpose, to stop me from having any false hopes. He took out the scans and talked to me while pointing to some spots on them, explaining some things - I barely paid any attention. I don't even know if he said the c-word or not, though I'm pretty sure he did. I was thinking about what everyone's reaction would be - Mom and Dad, people at work, and Kavya - damn it, I'd have to tell Kavya too. I suddenly realised he'd stopped talking.

'So, uh, treatments?', in the situation I couldn't articulate myself much better than that.

'There are some experimental methods we can try out, but to be frank, their success rates aren't very promising.'

That I wasn't ready to hear. I felt this massive knot in my chest - which is an incredibly sick way, is funny, because the chest pains are why I'd come here in the first place.

'Oh, ok', I croaked out, after a solid 10 seconds of silence. I say croaked because I'm pretty sure that's how my voice sounded- you know, how you sound when you're trying not to cry?

'So, uh, how long is the usual- uh, expected-'

The doctor graciously interrupted me so I wouldn't have to finish my incredibly obvious and also incredibly awkward question.

'Well, if you come in regularly, take your medicine, make a few dietary and lifestyle changes, a year is definitely within reach.'

Oh, god. This is the kind of scenario people have nightmares about, isn't it? I begged myself to wake up, but all I felt was some moistness on my cheeks.

'Veer, take your time, this isn't news anyone should have to - just be back here tomorrow before noon, ok? We'll figure out how to proceed from there.'

I know that I walked out, went and sat in my car, honked at least a couple of times while still parked, and cried a whole bunch, but I really don't remember anything specific until the phone call.

My eyes are adjusting to the brightness above me - a couple of guys in white coats are pushing me on my surprisingly soft bed through a hallway with a ridiculous number of lights on the ceiling. The bathroom guy had the decency to get me to a hospital, huh? Shame I didn't get his name. Would've been nice to meet one last new person.

I stare at the phone as it waits for Kavya to pick up. I just have to talk to someone about this news; I can't keep crying in my car.

'Yeah Veer what happened?'

I sob noiselessly as I try to compose myself to any degree I can before I answer. I can't help but think how this conversation will go - an awkward phase where Kavya isn't sure if this is real or a lie, then eventually she starts crying, probably in a not very private place, then we head home and cry some more - I didn't want that.

I tried to think of something to say to her, but I came up blank. All I could do is stare at my glove compartment.

Now I seem to be in an operation room - clearly, this isn't going very well, they're all panicky and oh- I don't think they expected me to be awake for this, someone's putting a mask over my fa-

'Hello? Veer?'

Of course, I had to tell her that I was going to propose. No way I could hide that for more than a week, and then she'd probably say yes, and that we were going to fight through this, but for her it would probably just mean a year of sadness and concern, followed by a year of sadness and helplessness.

'Veer, you've got to stop butt-dialing me.' She cut the call.

I love how she chose to say that I'd been butt-dialing her. Clearly, she thought that I wasn't on the call, which means she only did it for herself. God, I'll miss her.

I make another phone call.

'Hey, Naveen?'

I'm back to the world of the conscious, and for some reason, I don't feel anything. No pain at all. I don't think that's a good sign. My right hand's connected to a myriad of wires, but I somehow manage to get it in my pants' front pocket. I feel around and - yep, it's still there. With my other hand, I tug at a nurse's lab coat. I'm fading now, I gotta do this fast. He turns and looks at me, confused, for a lot of reasons I'm guessing. I take out the box with the ring and I don't have the strength to give it to him but he notices it. I can barely hear myself though I think I can get the words out.

'Give to Kavya, and tell her - maybe next time.'

I let go.

A bright and immediate flash of white.



# TANIA-MUSIC ON RAILS

By Subhadeep Bakshi, Y20

I was skimming through the contact list of my dad's old, now unused phone. You would ask me why, but I have no answer to that because once in a while I do stuff which might not be a need but a fetish. It weirdly somehow makes life more than just a struggle for survival. As I scrolled past the 'S' names, a name caught my glance, rang a bell in my memory. It was such a wonderful coincidence that just before the phone was to be given away to our household help, that name crossed my path yet again. It read 'Tania'.

Tania did ring a bell in my mind because it's been nearly 10 years and I still vividly remember our first and only encounter. There are a few things I remember about people, like their eyes and, as you will see, first meetings. Having said that, Tania held an even more special place in my memory. I and my family were on the yearly vacation tour that I look forward to, even today. We were on a train to Chennai and the heat during that time of the year was killing me, all drenched in sweat and irritation. That is the first time I met Tania.

That is what I love about train journeys, you meet people whom you never planned to meet, no promises made, no strings attached. Everyone waiting eagerly for their destination, sharing stories and trivia with usually, no ulterior motives. Now, let me tell you beforehand, I am not a very great talker but a very attentive listener who will intervene you only with an occasional nod or an honest comment. Tania on the other hand turned out to be full of words and stories. She started with "Bhaiya, my name is Tania" and kept on rumbling for the rest of the journey. I had nothing better to do, so I paid attention to what she had to say.

She mostly spoke about music but with the kind of passion, I have hardly seen in anyone since then. I did pretend to understand her passion but felt guilty too. Guilty because at that time I was not a very avid listener of music although I did listen to it on and off. My dad had tried very hard to make me love music because he said "A person who does not love music is dead inside."(which I later realized was the derivation of a Shakespearean quote).

Meanwhile, when we were a few kilometers from Chennai, Tania finally tired with all the talking, dozed off. That is when her mother told us that they were traveling to Chennai for the treatment of Tania's leukemia.

She had a twin sister who was supposed to donate her bone marrow to Tania, although her chances of survival were thin. She was young in age but was much more aware of her situation than any other kid of her age would be. For a moment, my windpipe was caught in a knot. I couldn't imagine then, neither can I imagine now, how that joyous, little girl could double up in laughter at every little joke.

Before boarding off the train, she asked me "Bhaiya, who is your favourite singer?". I always believe in being honest in conversations but at that moment I was prepared to do anything to make her believe that I understood what inspiration she took from music. So, off the top of my head, I said "Alka Yagnik".

My taste in music has improved a lot since then but I am still not a fan of Alka Yagnik and neither do I share the same passion as she did/does. I don't know whether today Tania is alive or not because I never contacted her after that day but for me, she is still the same lively girl I had met on a train to Chennai. I do not remember her face but for me, she is still the joyous vibe of hope in the face of adversity, the infectious laughter in the eerie of silence.

I have changed many phones and many numbers but even today if you scroll through my contact list you will find a name there that says 'Tania'.

# FLEETING HEARTBEATS

*by Aditya Subramaniam, Y20*

She was right here in my arms, right here at the moment with me.

A complete standstill, a cinematic overcry.

Her beautiful eyes and her tender lips, smiling through undeniable strain.

The air heavy with forthcoming pain,

All we wanted was for the moment to stay a little longer.

Afraid to look into each other's eyes, the silence spoke more than us.

A gentle wind brushed her hair, the pacing clouds changing the weather.

The time had come, we had to let go.

It was never going to be easy, departing touching times.

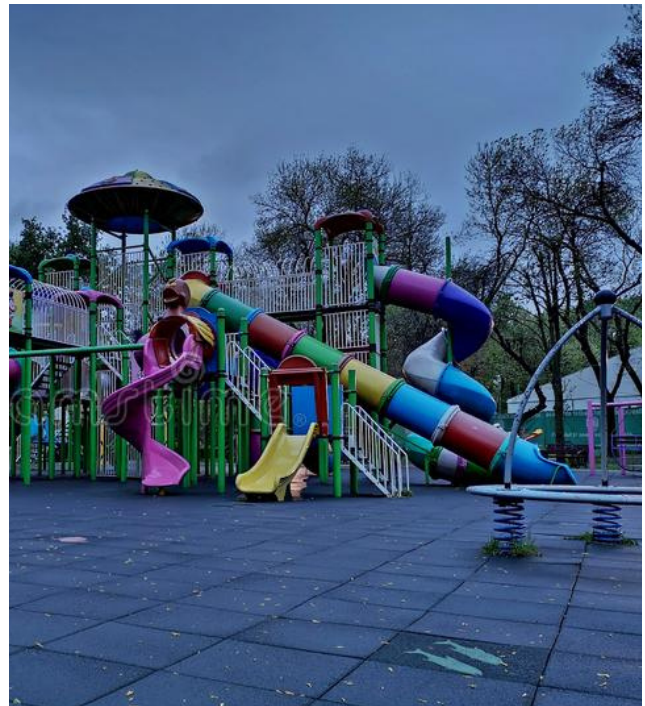
No longer in my hands, no longer in the moment,

To all the good times we had, to all the good times we had

# DREAM

*by Arka Roy, Y20*

Every dream not so sweet,  
 Not every memory is so vivid;  
 Not all avenues are my childhood Street,  
 Not everyone does so warmly greet.  
 I know I know all very far from truth,  
 Really it is ugly, nasty and so brute;  
 I know I know no it's shame to look at past,  
 We have to be cruel! and run very fast!  
 Still, I love my childhood Street,  
 Those simple minds and smiles so bright;  
 Let the god of sleep be so much pleased,  
 Bring me those memories every night.



# ALIENS

*by Rishi Agarwal, Y21*

"Normal, Unimportant just another kid,  
 Insignificant in the grand scheme of things  
 No say in matters, no bet.no bid;  
 Nil, nada, is what to the table he brings"

Shouts the world over and over in my ears  
 As I try to prove to them my worth  
 Been trying so long have to count in years  
 This could honestly be the theme of our  
 birth

But now I realise that we are above this  
 Won't need your approval sir, no, not today  
 There's still time, accept what the reality is  
 Whether you do or not change is mere  
 moments away

For and those like me, we are no regular  
 beings  
 Unfazed by your puppet show of a world  
 We soar the imagination realm with our  
 wings  
 Majestic like an angel, graceful like a bird

Away with your materialistic world peasant  
 Keep your judgemental thinking at bay.  
 For we dream even in the present  
 In another universal dimension, we stay.

We too relate to the world around us,  
 Eyes burning and heart flaming like the sun  
 Reach out and grab the stars one day we  
 want to  
 Want to be the epitome, the only one

We're impostors, misfits, even aliens you  
 could say  
 Striving for the world you fear ya know For  
 everything will be fine once we get our way  
 Nothing you could do to stop us, though

Tick tock my friends the clock is running  
 out  
 Our minds know this and our spirits pray  
 There's enough of us now, around and  
 about  
 And change is mere moments away

# GONE WITH THE WIND BY MARGARET MITCHELL

*A Review by Rose Agarwal, Y20*

A hideous blue spills from all corners of the summer sky and your clothes are soaked in it. You try hard not to think about how the fabric feels like tiny pins against your skin. Yesterday you told yourself that maybe you can live amid the absence of home-shaped gentleness, today you tell yourself that tenderness is just another old star you can get used to choking on. But have you ever been at your lowest, your whole sense of normal stripped apart and given a new name, and you are required not only to embrace it but also to strive through it and forget everything you based your life upon? What would you do when every shred of your belief is torn apart? When the one God you believed in never decides to show up? You just close your eyes and convince yourself that now he's in front of you. For me, if there exists hope, there exists God but when rising from the depths of death was never possible, hope and with that the God it attaches itself to remain doomed.

'Gone with the wind' is a vivid reflection of one of the similar glamorous summer skies, the same days filled with drenched bodies covered in pointy fabric of memories which struggles more and more through the past and gets created and destroyed mercilessly to find its feet in the present again, all jotted in ink (possibly red), parallel to the protagonist of the story passionately embodying this same world. Rising, breathing, and falling with it. The whole book is merely a point of view of 1850s girls before and after, from Barbie's World to Deathly Hallows.



War had never been the most gorgeous thing. It burns, not just people but relations, pens, papers too. Unlike the certain beauty of a rainbow, the pain it brings is unknown to us. The 1850s were no different. The winning flags were hoisting, the victory songs were being sung, even the opposing army was 22 miles behind, they were dancing away in their southern courtesies and telling their children stories of how the general was already hoisting their flag. This is what the Civil war was for the southern aristocrats who had mighty held themselves in such regards that on every signal of flight they dived deeper in for a fight. It was different for every southerner and they all embraced it in their own particular way. Forever in love with a memory, most of them became skeletons with hollow bones. With the gust of life snatched away, they were still people but what was left

inside was just fog. They became ghosts, standing there with nothing left to add. Ashley Wilkes, one of the main characters of the story is the personification of a past and people who refuse to move forward and surrender themselves to a fate of eternal want. And yet with each different route, all that stays common is hope and the instinct to survive. And so comes Darwin in play and the single point of beauty of the book. A lot of writers scatter their plot by describing the urgent scenes but that's not the case with this one. It shows everything from a single Scarlett point of view, omitting scenes which could've been given primary importance. Margaret shows the anxious waiting scene for those who went away and didn't even bother to describe the people in war. All she shows is a change in mindset of a single girl.



Scarlett O'hara, the headstrong protagonist around whom the book as well as the world revolves goes through a multitude of shades, but it all gets overshadowed by the constant obsession for a guy she couldn't have. And like the very purpose of obsession, it engulfs her enough to forget about her natural trait. An obsession that defied her very core of selfishness, and for this one fiery want, she is a character with a want to be selfless. The same obsession can be seen in her when it comes to Tara (her home), and with the thoughts that whisper the obsession into her mind that she needs to be like her mother. With every next decision made, the Irish blood of her father just flowed thicker.

The book has always received a lot of criticism alongside the fame due to its unusual take on sensitive topics which are usually not as distinctively available in mainstream literature. The whole plot seems absurd at points, as being almost raped and having the knowledge of the possibility of the death of her husband, Scarlett still only can think about her teenage crush, Ashley Wilkes. Every decision she takes is driven by her insanity for this one person. The first time Scarlett had to question her morals, she instantly remembered her mother and the fear of disappointment but later it came with ease. She is ready to toss away everything she gained just to monopolise him in her life. The decisions to make Scarlette a distinct character sometimes seem unnatural, and oftentimes forced. Another unusual style used is making the protagonist unlikeable and

yet admirable. Almost as if her hands were made for violence and never for holding. Repeatedly, Scarlett's decisions are compared and contrasted to southern virtues by a remembrance of her mother who taught her to grow up in a society that no longer existed. It all seems as if it fits just like a coincidence, but pure conscience is like virginity, you lose it once and then the guilt stops bothering you.

The whole book in a literary sense is written in a way of a classic but calling it one would be a shame. It is racist to the core and justifies racism and its acceptance with pride. It even shows the slaves taking pride in being directionless without a 'master'. When Big Sam meets Scarlett and asks her to let him go back to Tara, when everyone at Tara lost Gerald and a tide of relief came as Scarlett took charge because frankly, they were clueless what to do and how without being ordered about it. It almost seems as if the writer herself had a secret crush for racism. As if she sees the rot and chooses to stay, as if she stays and lets it be.

The intimacy of the main characters is a plethora of constant war. Fight and war is how Rhett and Scarlett begin and end, with a kiss that fills up with blood until there's no place left for tenderness or language. They carry it forever like a shame in their mouths until it's all they taste till they hurl broken glasses at each other.

### ***"Sir, you are no gentleman"***

That's Rhett, mystifying but also if put simply, a self centered man. Margaret tries to put in the Yankee viewpoint through this character and embodies it as a logical explanation of every hatred and crime. The whole book seemed to take up everything wrong that happened historically and bend it in a way so as to give it a glamorous defence. The Ku Klux Klan, a mob of people that developed during the civil war, carrying out murders against innocent people in the name of racial power was shown to be on the good side of ethics, the whole explanation being that they did what they did to save themselves and the women. I wouldn't go so far as to say that lies were fed, there are things you want to believe in but doubt is tangible and easier to trust so instead of lies we call it far stretched truth.



However, the whole book feels the same way as a half of a whole, as if something inexplicable should've been added. It did not make me feel full, nor was I rethinking my life, you don't hope for a better end and you certainly don't get a proper middle. You don't go to bed with your lungs aflame, gasping for belonging.

Through this whole thing, the end is rather satisfying even if abrupt.

*"Oh, I shall have to stay here for a while  
In glassy water, in a seaweed net,  
until this fact and I are reconciled:  
I wasn't loved, it's as simple as that."*

You don't read a whole long novel just to end it with 'well that's it.' It almost was like the writer was bored of her own story and decided to kill the plot and with it, all the characters too. The satisfying part of it was the defeat and the dialogues of the characters, they were strong, crusty and terrifying. Rhett's famous 'frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.' rings in your head and is one of the most famous dialogues to be used in early Hollywood cinema. He says it with an acceptance that makes both Scarlett and him losers in the game of love.



In conclusion, there's not much left to fall into or consumed by, the only thing left is a facade if you choose to ignore the deafening silence. It ends as if you are supposed to learn a lesson from it but there's none.

# SEX EDUCATION: SEASON 1

*Review by Ishita Vyavahare and Aayush Kumar, Y20*

A typical high school setting, everyone has had sex during the summer. Feels like Deja vu. Smells like teen spirit. I've seen this before: in movies like '10 Things I Hate About You', 'Clueless', 'Mean Girls', 'High School Musical', I've spent my less than mature days reading such fiction on Wattpad. I see familiar scenes in the first 20 minutes of the show: The gay, black best friend, the troupe of three that are equivalent to "the plastics" or the "untouchables", the dumb blonde, the emo chick, the hot jock, the bully and most importantly, the lanky/nerdy/uncool protagonist. Welcome to Sex Education, the show that is about sex, without it being about sex. The show revolves around Otis Milburn, otherwise awkward and nervous, whose precocious nature and uncanny ability to give out sex advice (even though he's never had it before) along with Maeve Wiley, the rebellious emo-girl-who-hates-everybody, taking care of logistics, running a sex clinic in Moordale High.



What sets Sex Education apart from these old school teen romcoms is simple: the time it gives itself to get involved in its own world. While 'Mean Girls' had to wrap the story up and tie a neat little bow on it within 90 minutes, the series format makes room for all of Sex Education's many characters to breathe. The one-dimensional villains of yesterday can now have actual real personalities, and secondary characters can have lives outside of their interactions with the protagonists. And the creators make sure to not squander this opportunity: effectively all of the characters on the show feel real, coming to life with their own distinct sets of flaws and redeeming qualities. An example of the way Sex Education uses the liberty of extra time reveals itself during the episode where Maeve gets an abortion. The anti-abortionists outside the clinic could so easily have just been that, flat one-dimensional sketches of people. But instead, the writers chose to color them in. The conversation Otis has with the woman outside the clinic in the grocery store adds so much to this character whose perspective we now actually get the time and space to consider rather than just discard it and her.

The importance of layered characterization in storytelling cannot be overstated. If you do not have relatable or redeemable characters, you can never really generate true emotion because then we, the audience, always know who's in the right and who's in the wrong. Sex Education however is quick to understand that an outright villain is not necessary for a conflict. Take Otis and Eric's fight in Season 1, when Otis left Eric on his birthday to help Maeve find the culprit who leaked Ruby's photos. Otis' fault? No, he was just trying to help someone who was going to be very publicly embarrassed the next day. Eric's fault? Of course not, he's justified in being angry when his best friend abandons him alone and outside on his birthday while he's dressed in full drag. By not handing us easy answers, Sex Education makes us feel the stress and frustration of the argument: we see and understand both perspectives, and that makes it all harder to get a simple moral solution that could resolve the issue. What most of us don't realise, however, is that this complexity is what actually makes characters compelling. Without any layers to unfold, we can't really accept anyone as a person, as everyone really has around a million contradictory thoughts that at any particular time are struggling to rear their head.

Something to notice about the setting of Sex Education is that this show is set in a hybrid universe: A very British speak and setting with all the elements of an American high school. The show takes the experiences of a teenager and divorces it from the American bog-downs. Nuances, like most people riding bikes and not cars; nuances, wearing less than perfect clothes - Otis wearing practically the same striped T-shirt every day, nuances, like forests and hills instead of suburbs and malls, a refreshing break from the usual.



Another element that sets Sex Education apart is in the use of, well, sex. In almost all other romantic or dramatic shows, sex is used as the climax (pun unintended) to a building tension: the guy finally getting the girl, the husband cheating on his wife, the protagonists finally admitting their feelings for each other. From the very first shot, Sex Education tells it's viewers that this is not the approach it's going to take. Sex is shown almost casually, just another part of life rather than something to be made a huge deal out of. And this subtlety turns out to be incredibly important: the normalization of sex is one of the principal messages that the show wants to get out there. Especially in a country like India, where sex is treated as either something wrong or something unholy, reducing it to just another thing people do really opens us up to a new perspective not many of us had seen before. It's also a bold statement by the showrunners: we're not going to depend on sex titillating our audience to engage them, but we'll sure as hell show a lot of it.

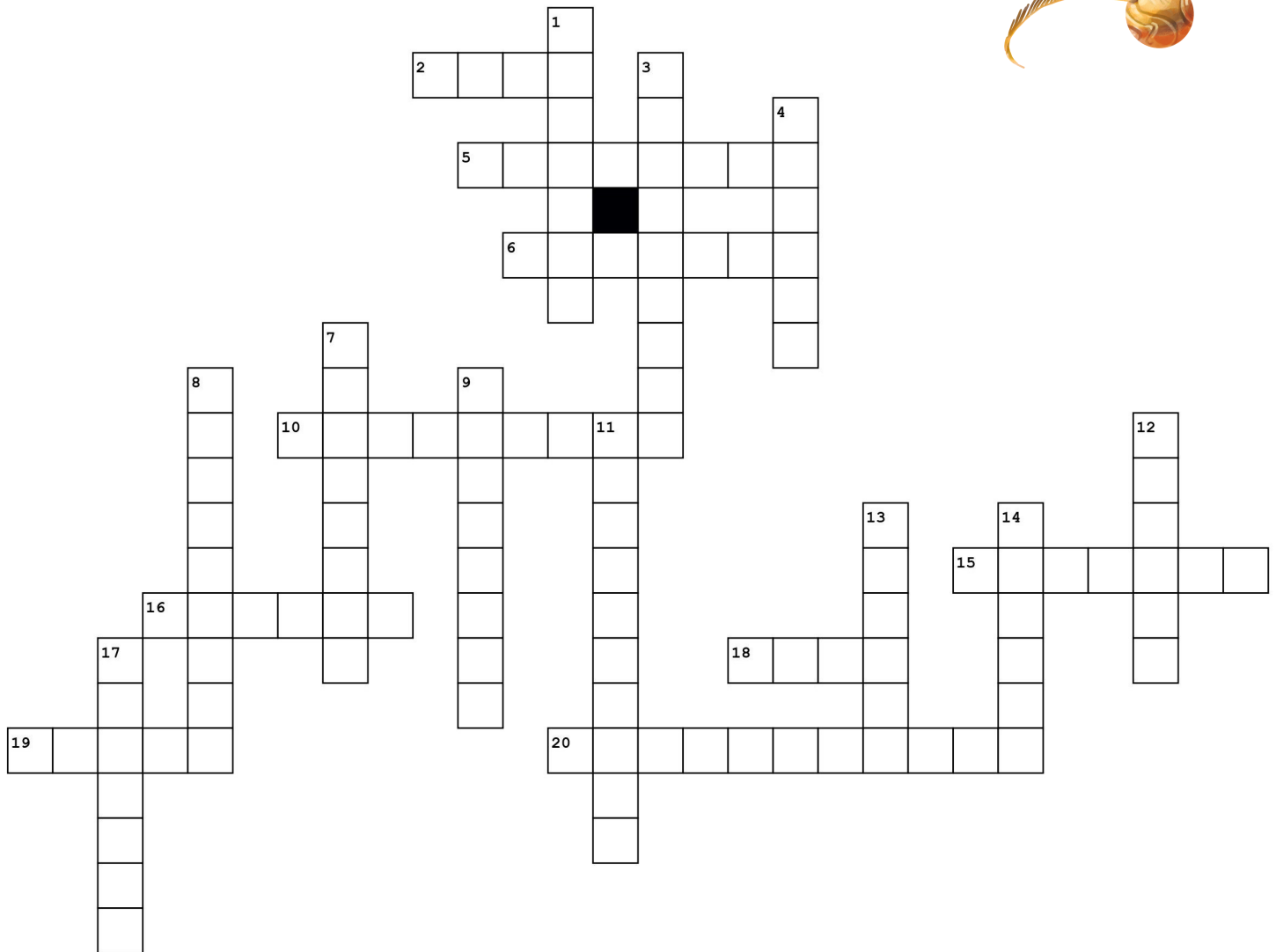
Similar subtleties can be noted in *Sex Education*'s messaging: always strong, but never heavy-handed. Eric, an openly gay teen, is assaulted on the street for cross-dressing. Now there are two ways to handle this as a plot point: first, make Eric someone who constantly talks about the struggle throughout and prove his point when this happens. This is the safe way. Second, let Eric go about his business and then hope that when this happens his characterisation and the moment is strong enough to deliver the message. This is the riskier route. Guess which way the creators went? I'll give you a clue: they had the stones to name their show *Sex Education*. Again, they expressed enough faith in their storytelling and character building to let the messages speak for themselves visually rather than shove them down people's throat. Well, at least for the most part.



At times, *Sex Education* doesn't fully flesh out its conflicts and resolutions, something which admittedly goes unnoticed among all of the parallel storylines. When Eric was assaulted for dressing in full drag, he wouldn't even hold his mother's hands while saying grace at the breakfast table, he didn't dress like himself and needless to say, he was angry and frustrated. But, in what felt like a weak resolution to his trauma, him seeing another black, cross dressed man in a car leads to him waking up feeling quite alright the next day, almost as if all his sadness was absolved just because he felt validated by seeing someone like him.

Nevertheless, the show is hilarious, endlessly and effortlessly hilarious, with situations that go to shit and the deadpan deliveries that make you bark with laughter, and yet at the same time it manages to be incredibly heartfelt and emotional when it wants to be. No one is always sad, and neither is anyone always happy. No one is perfect, and neither is anyone irredeemable. That's what being human is, and that defines the characters the show gives us. So just like we accept and cherish the people around us, we accept and cherish *Sex Education*, despite any and all of its flaws.

# Harry Potter Cryptic Crossword



## Across

2. Viral infection broadcast as powder (4)
5. Hogwarts ghost sabotaged fair raft (3,5)
6. A bright star who died very young (7)
10. Dreadful demon rests in prison (9)
15. Professor transfigured as a vermin (7)
16. Few ask about this magical bird (6)
18. repulsive, irritating, toxic animagus firstly (4)
19. Minister as sweet as sugar candy (5)
20. Diagon Alley shop devastated as ill vendor (11)

## Down

1. Harbour lock-opener used to teleport (7)
3. You don't need a map to locate these raiders (9)
4. Temptation reflected in mirror (6)
7. Sounds like a wicked creature (8)
8. Ancient wizarding family of terrible strangers (9)
9. A amusing transformation (8)
11. Spell-ed in an almost ridiculous way (10)
12. Death eater held by magic arrows (6)
13. Ginny's brother hates her bizarre pet (6)
14. American alt-rock band comprising magical creatures (6)
17. Exchange pat and food finally with a dog (7)

- All answers are some entities in the Harry Potter universe
- An introductory guide to cryptic crosswords, along with detailed solutions to this one, can be found [here](#)
- For an interactive version of this crossword, click [here](#)