



Through our eyes



BY TEAM DUCKFISH

# Copyright:

Published by Duckfish, Box Hill High School, 1180 Whitehorse Road Box Hill VIC 3128, Alex Robb, An Sam, Anesha Narwal, Christine Quahe, Nancy Ye, Rishitha Raju, Talon Lee.  
Copyright © 2023, Duckfish. All rights reserved. This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.  
Enquires should be made to the publisher.

## Team Details

STATE: VIC  
DIVISION: Middle School  
SCHOOL/GROUP: Box Hill High School (BOX HILL)  
TEAM NAME: DUCKFISH  
TEAM ID: 893

## Parameters and random words

### Parameters

Primary character 1 Teacher  
Primary character 2 Plumber  
Non-human character Glasses (spectacles)  
Setting Disco  
Issue A gift of kindness

### Random words

ruby  
melts  
shiver  
tasty  
sponge

## Contents:

1. Through the looking glass	1
2. Revolt	3
3. Memory lane	5
4. Perspectives	6
5. Gift	7
6. The dance	9
7. Epilogue	10

# CHAPTER ONE:

## Fiona

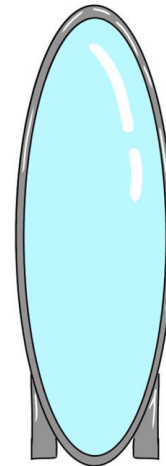
I sat, frozen, staring at myself through the mirror. I knew all the kids would be getting ready right now. I could almost hear them squealing in joy, carpooling to the disco. But I just couldn't get myself to do anything. The longer I stared into the mirror, the longer I went back in time.



Seeing myself three years ago brought a **shiver** down my spine. My short hair, greasy and untamed, and the bags under my eyes made me look like I hadn't slept in weeks. Which was true, I hadn't. My sluggish appearance disgusted me, as I smacked the mirror, trying to get rid of the stranger staring intently at me. I couldn't recognize myself.

As a familiar face returned to the mirror, I sighed in relief. But something about my reflection was unsettling. I was worn out and had been for several years. I didn't know why, but something in me gave up years ago. I thought becoming a teacher would bring a sense of purpose into my sullen life, but all it did was show me what I missed out on, and it seemed to make the world around me monochromatic. And I couldn't be bothered to do anything about it. But I had to. For the kids. I didn't want to ruin their lives like I ruined mine.

So, with all the energy and motivation I had left after a long day of work, I got up and wiped the tears off. I tried to cover up the bags under my eyes with an abundant amount of concealer and attempted to hide my sadness with a smile. I put on my mother's brooch, the only thing that gave me good memories from my past. A delicate butterfly, looking like it would flutter away. I threw on a random purple turtleneck found on the ground and carefully clipped on the brooch.



"Fiona Reinhart, you can and *will* conduct yourself well tonight." I voiced, attempting to encourage the dull expression in the mirror.

My shoes felt unnatural on the soles on my feet, but I paid it no attention. As I walked out the door, I felt an uneasy sense of optimism in the air.

"I guess there's something waiting for me at the disco."

## CHAPTER TWO:

### Fiona

Treading up the gravelled path to the Maranoa State High School, I heaved open the door into the gymnasium, enjoying the calm before the storm. Exhausted, I collapsed onto a plastic chair in the pitch-black corner. Almost immediately, the knocking began.

“BANG BANG BANG!” I heard from the door, the unsettling noise interrupting my rest. I pulled myself up and stumbled down the hallway, past the classrooms. A hundred children stared me down and bashed the fragile glass door. I reluctantly yielded but quickly regretted letting the crowd of high schoolers storm the school. Screaming, they crashed through the door and filled the hall.



“Slow down! This is not a zoo!” Mrs Smith shouted from outside, drowning in the noise, fruitlessly attempting to bring the stampede under control. The teacher was an aged woman with gradually greying hair. Having served in the Royal Air Force, she was very stern regarding obedience. When the last of the students had cleared, sanctioning entrance into the hall, she ran in and took up the microphone.

“Students! How very rude and disrespectful to barge in! The disco does not start for another half hour! Go back outside and line up properly, and then I’ll think about letting you in!” Mrs Smith announced.

As the shyer kids began to flow outside, I watched from the hall as Jeremy, a light-hearted brawny yet unruly teen, led his friends another way. They tiptoed down to the bathroom, wary of the possibility of prowling teachers. “Revolt! Revolt!” Jeremy’s iconic amusing voice echoed off the tiles into the hall.

Meanwhile, Mrs Smith allowed the line in slowly. “Good kids, I’ll let you in early to the disco. You see, when I was in the military, this was how we did it.” She pivoted around, hearing a noise from the bathroom, only to see the wild, troublesome child himself emerge:

“JEREMY!” Mrs Smith shrieked. “What did you do this time?”

Jeremy’s sheepish grin told her everything she needed to know. “Why, just going to the bathroom, of course!”



Mrs Smith looked at him with narrowed eyes. “That doesn’t seem like something you would do. I don’t recall you leaving the hall!”

After Mrs Smith carefully treaded into the bathroom, I could hear her scream “All right, that’s it! You boys, stop throwing those paper towels around and clogging the toilets!”

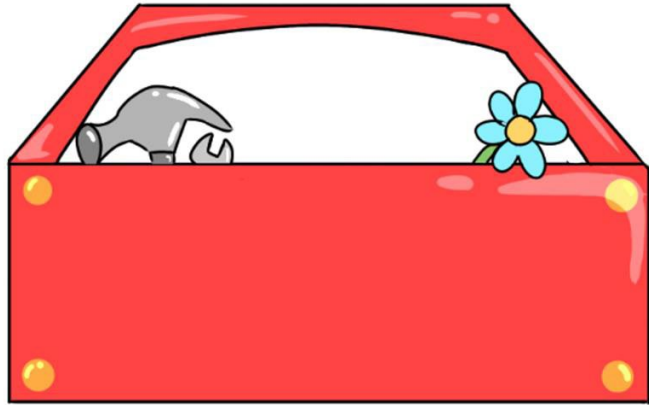
“Wait, we can explain!” Jeremy tried to redeem himself.

“You can explain to the principal! Come on boys.” Mrs Smith replied, herding them to the office. “Fiona! Call the plumber! Jeremy and his crew have... done something!” she shouted.

I watched the children dance through the halls. It wasn't even supposed to have started! I produced my cell phone, calling the only plumber in the phonebook of our rural town. The list of troubles began.

"I can't hear you, but can you come to Maranoa State High School as soon as possible?!" I shouted into the phone, not able to hear a response. The loud music thrummed through the halls after the students reached the stage.

I headed to the doorsteps outside of the school. Only a few minutes on that warm, summer evening had passed before an old, sinewy man in overalls with a toolbox turned up at the glass entrance to the school.



## CHAPTER THREE:

### George

When I got the call, I was full of expectation. I hadn't gone back in a long time, and I couldn't wait to see what has changed. After driving there, I got out of my Ute and walked into the school, marvelling at the changes that had occurred since I was last here, as a young schoolboy. I chuckled as I looked at the trees and benches that I had longed for during my glory days, as I head for the teacher on the steps who stuck out like a sore thumb against the dull brick of the school buildings. My legs ached with pain, and my back cried out in relief when I leaned against the wall. Although unseen, possums screeched in the branches above me.



I rummaged through my toolbox, before opening the compartment filled with all my treasures and trinkets. A rainbow lorikeet's feather. A sand dollar from a holiday. A sprig of gumnuts from the eucalyptus tree outside. After a bit of searching, I finally found them, and took them out of the drawer. The pièce de résistance. A strangely adorned pair of spectacles. I chucked them onto the crook of my nose and laid back. The glasses were adorned with bits and bobs, it was cracked and old, but it accumulated recollections over many years and companions. It had the power to move people's hearts. To show what they couldn't see. To change people for the better.

I looked at the black brick wall of the main building, and suddenly, I saw a glimpse of myself. Smiling. Laughing. With my large friends and scrawny buddies whose names have been lost to time. The rest of the scenes, with help from the glasses, popped in from the murky unknown that was my long, long memory.



I was plunged into a world in the past. I knew that then. The sky looked like it came straight out of a VHS tape. Not so real, but not exactly completely fake either. I watched as our past selves doubled over with laughter and delight as an extremely disgruntled-looking teacher chased a chuckling kid with a spray can down the stairs. The air vibrated with the hearty howling only rowdy Maranoa State High School ninth graders could have made, and as we dropped to the ground in laughter, the scene shifted. Now I was in the old gymnasium. We played roller-skate hockey and laughed as we fell over.

Suddenly, I jerked my head into a different direction; the memories were too painful to relive.

I buried the memory under grief. I buried it under the sadness. I buried it under happiness. I thought nothing could pull it out. But I was wrong. Nothing could stop the glasses from dragging it back out of the pit I had so thoroughly dug.

We were playing basketball with a mauled ball of rubber stood in the middle of two crates mounted on poles. The middle of the day during summer was a very, very bad time for playing sports. The asphalt emanated waves of heat as sweat poured down everybody's faces and neck. The heat seemed to get to them, as we stopped to argue about the foul. The

small argument quickly escalated into a yelling match, and then to the brink of a fistfight. I watched as my past-self conceded and looked coldly at the person I thought was my friend and our relationship.

In hindsight, the signs were obvious. He grew apart from me. And I should have noticed.

Something shook George out of his stupor. A kindly woman was looking down at him. I stashed the glasses into pocket and stood up.



## CHAPTER FOUR:

### George

“Hello. I’m Fiona, and you must be the plumber? George?” said Fiona, looking weary and tired.

“Yep! That’s me! So, what’s bugging you?” I replied casually.

“Oh, the toilet seems to be blocked. There’s been a little incident in the bathroom. Here, I’ll show you the way. Follow me.”

Fiona and I walk in awkward silence. Finally, I turn and starts talking to her.

“I used to go to this school. Decades ago when I still had somewhat good looks.” I chuckled.

Fiona looked up at me. “Has it changed much?”

“Oh yes. I advocated for the planting of trees, and more benches. I guess I was successful since the school grounds now seem to be healthy and hearty!”

I laughed soulfully, and Fiona smiled weakly with me. We reached the toilet, and I cordoned off the area and put a slip sign on the floor. George quickly inspected the cubicles and the pipes. “Simple blockage. I’ll be back later with more specialised instruments to fix it,” I tell her. I studied Fiona, before heading back towards the door. She had bags under her eyes, and she didn’t seem very sure of herself as she walked. I turned towards the dancing children and watched them for a while, before looking at Fiona again. “What do you think of them? What do you think when you see them?”

“Me...?” Fiona murmured. She looks up. “I see nothing much. Just children, dancing. They aren’t even that good at it, honestly.”

I chuckled. “That part doesn’t matter. All that matters is they’re having fun, with their friends, and they’re pouring their heart and soul into that memory that will stay with them.

When they think back to this moment, what matters is not their dancing, but that they spent this lasting moment with their friends. I remember all the times I danced with my friends, and I’m sure that we weren’t that good.”



Fiona heard this and appeared to think deeply. However, she didn’t seem to understand what I really said. I think it’s finally time for me to hand down *the glasses*. Pulling them out, the memories resurfaced, and I once again recalled fond memories from my childhood, dusty and forgotten. I gave them one last good look and turned to Fiona.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### Fiona

“Here, these are for you,” George said, forcing a pair of peculiarly decorated glasses into my hands. “Treat them carefully, they contain more than that imaginable.”

“Huh?” was all I could utter.

Confusion swept over me, as I gripped onto the table, to stop myself from falling like the embarrassing heap I am. There was no possible way someone was gifting something to me, especially someone whom I had just met. With eyes the size of dinner plates, I looked at George, who was grinning back with kindness, in contrast to the disbelief and insecurity plastered on my face.

“I- I- I have to go, sor... sorry,” I replied hesitantly, gripping the glasses fiercely.

*Why did he give me this, I think to myself. What crazy person would do that?*

“Ok, then. I’ll be back to fix it later,” he said, as I ran into the dancing crowd of the gymnasium.

I sprinted through the crowd past grooving, joyful dancers, wishing I could be as optimistic as them. Suddenly, I ran into Stuart, my brightest student.

“What’s that, Ms. Reinhart?” He asked curiously.



I was too shocked to reply, so I softly muttered “glasses,” and held them out for him to see.

“You should wear them!” he beamed, looking back at me with shining eyes.

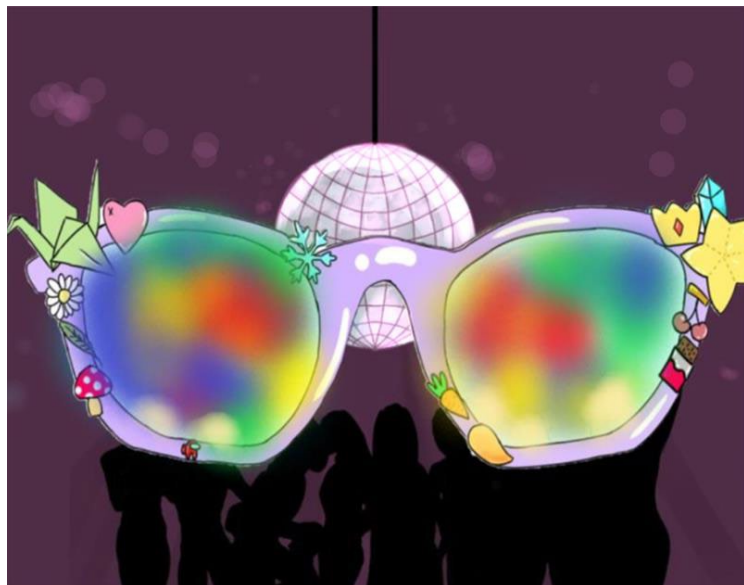
“Y-you think? Really?” I asked, wondering. If Stuart thought so, then maybe they didn’t look *that* bad.

I turned around, wanting a break from the peculiar glasses, and bumped into Lisa, another one of my students, who was grabbing platefuls of fairy bread. She dropped a few sprinkles, looked at the glasses and then at me.

“Ms. Reinhart, did someone give you those glasses?”

I nodded dismally.

“Don’t be shy, Miss, you should try them on, they look interesting!”



Hesitantly, I examined the glasses for the first time, staring at the mismatched charms adorning the rim of the glasses. A tiny, **tasty**-looking chocolate bar. A small **ruby** sequin in the middle of a crown. The glasses were unapologetically cracked, giving it a strange charm.

A sudden, unnamed feeling washed over me, and suddenly, I looked at Lisa and Stuart with wide eyes, and placed them on my face.

A friend's laughter. A joyful event. A bright, sun filled day, in the present moment, in the past, in the future. A little glimpse of lives not belonging to me. I took the glasses off again and looked at them in a new light. I then put them back on my face. A sudden influx of people and places rushed into my mind. Paris. Sydney. London. A nice tall man laughing with his child, a woman laughing with another woman, an old man smiling at his great-granddaughter.

A final hug from a mother before they were separated. A son who never appeared again. And although they were gone, the memories shone brightly, announcing their presence to the world, through the glasses they were somehow housed in. I stood there, shocked, stunned, flabbergasted, at the countless pearls of memories flooding into my mind.

## CHAPTER SIX:

“Wha- wh- what?” My mind was blank, searching for reason and logic among all the chaos of the glasses’ influence. But when I looked at the world around me again, I saw things in a new light. The happiness of students and teachers alike around me seem more permanent, more necessary. The joy in the world was almost tangible, and I felt like a **sponge**, soaking it all in while standing in the middle of the stage, silhouettes dancing around me, laughing and singing. The lights flashed brightly, casting multicoloured hues on the floor and people spinning, twirling, running, standing, and enjoying the dance, the moment, the love and life filling their eyes and the air around them. I took the glasses off again, to check that they weren’t broken, but I still saw everything in a different perspective. A... lighter perspective. I shoved the glasses back on, before going to find George again. “Wow, Ms Reinhart, you look amazing!” I heard Stuart say.



“Ms Reinhart, your glasses are so cool!” Another student yelled from across the stage. I gave them barely more than a nod before continuing to run towards the toilets. I saw George near the taps, packing up his belongings, picking up a stray nail from the floor. “GEORGE!” I called. He turned towards the sound of my voice, his snow-white hair shining in the light.

Removing the glasses, Fiona stared into the lenses in wonder. “What... are these?” His face broke into another grin, one full of memories, and I could see an entire lifetime in his expression. “Why, lass, it’s something I found when I was at school. And now, you need it more than me. Think of your mind like an ice cream cone. Over time, it **melts**, and your memories disappear with it. But these glasses are like a freezer. And with it, you can piece your heart back together. Enjoy your life. Have a fun time.” He looked at me, and in his eyes, I saw a young lad on a sweltering summer’s day, laughing and grinning with his friends, slapping flies and eating Tim Tams with fingers covered with sticky, molten chocolate. These glasses really were something. And as I watched all these beautiful recollections, I realised that what really matters is not in the past or the future, but the present, right now, the golden moments where memories are made, memories that will last a lifetime. He tossed the last of his equipment onto his toolbox and started pushing it toward the door, stoop-backed and hunch-shouldered. Suddenly, whether by the spectacles’ will or my own volition, I felt an urge to give him back a little piece of the joy, a small thing compared to all that he had allowed me to see.



“Would you like to dance with us?” I asked, tilting my head. He turned back and smiled, and for a moment I saw a schoolboy, eyes sparkling with mischief, straight-backed and shoulders wide.

“I would be delighted to,” he replied.

We walked to the stage, and started to dance with the music, surrounded by whirling silhouettes of people that gradually became clearer and clearer. A flame-red haired girl who winked at us as she passed. A dark-haired boy wearing glasses who would not stop laughing.

Red, orange, yellow, green, swirling and swirling in a tornado, picking up people and depositing them in the eye of the storm where they could dance their hearts out and make memories can outlast a lifetime, laughing all the way.

“Can I join you two?”



It was a year seven who spoke. I briefly recalled seeing them standing in a corner, too shy to start dancing with the rest of the happy swarm.

“Of course!” I smiled and held my hand out to them. They took my hand, and we started twirling around, laughing, and smiling the entire time. Before I knew it, our group of three had become a group of ten, then one of twenty, then one of fifty, and then of hundreds. Friends and strangers. Students and teachers. Hands clasped together with unknown people that we’ve only known for a moment but feel like have been with forever. Each and every one laughing, smiling, and fully present, treasuring their time together, remembering this moment to keep them company forevermore.

## EPILOGUE:

“Jeremy Wang,” Mrs Smith called out, shaking her head. The troublemaker bounded up the stairs, grinning wildly as Mrs Smith handed him his diploma. Fiona hugged him, beaming.

“Never would have thought my wildest student would graduate with honours,” Fiona whispered, pride emanating from her.

“All thanks to you, Miss. Thanks – for everything,” he whispered back.

As Fiona let go, Jeremy turned back and winked, sparking a *tsk* from Fiona. Cheers sung from the crowd signalled the end of the graduation ceremony, and Fiona slowly walked down the steps, smiling nostalgically. Strolling into the yard, she looked around her through new lenses. The children’s laughter was lighter, the clouds were fluffier, the sky was bluer – everything was just *more*. Hopping into her car, she drove the roads that were engraved into her mind after eight years of teaching. Finally, she pulled up to her house. Walking to her bedroom, she stared into the mirror, and I knew she saw a different person than that girl, five long years ago. Taking a deep breath, she slowly pulled out her phone and dialled a very familiar number.



“Hello, this is George the plumber speaking. How may I help you?” an old friend asked.

“George? It’s me-” Fiona began awkwardly, but she didn’t even need to finish the sentence.

“Fiona! Wow, it’s been a while, hasn’t it?” George chuckled, and you could hear his smile.

“It really has,” Fiona sighed. “I’m sorry I haven’t called in a while, but I’ve been kind of preoccupied with teaching (Jeremy has been a bunch) and graduation.”

“Graduation! Look at you, your little babies all grown up!” George laughed. “Congrats!”

“Thanks - but that’s not what I wanted to talk to you about.” Fiona hesitated, her heart rate speeding up. *It’s okay*, I told her reassuringly. *Go for it. Do you really need me anymore?*

“I - I think it’s time I - I let go of the glasses. I - I want to help someone else.” Fiona inhaled sharply, expecting the worst.

George exhaled heavily. “You might not know this, but I was once like you. Misguided, sad, not knowing what to do in life. But then I met an incredibly nice man named Hamish. He gave me those glasses. He helped me out of one of the most difficult parts of my life.”

Fiona started, shocked. “Y-you were like me?”

“I was. Then he helped me. Now, I have helped you.”

“S-so I should help someone else?” Fiona asked.



“You should do what your heart tells you.” George responded instantly. “But if you do choose to, there’s a tradition you should respect. See all the little things plastered on the glasses? Each one of them is something a previous wearer added. Everyone has their own trinket – see if you can spot mine.”

Fiona’s eyes traced the glasses, searching.

“Is yours the sprig of gumnuts?” Fiona softly asked.

The silence that followed affirmed it was a painful memory.

“I’ll think about it.” Fiona concluded. “Thanks for all of it. Everything.”

“No need to thank me,” his voice responded. “I’m simply passing on what has been given to me.”



The sparkles gleamed off my new rhinestone brooch as Fiona slowly walked away.

*Thanks*, she mouthed. I blinked back. *You’re welcome*.

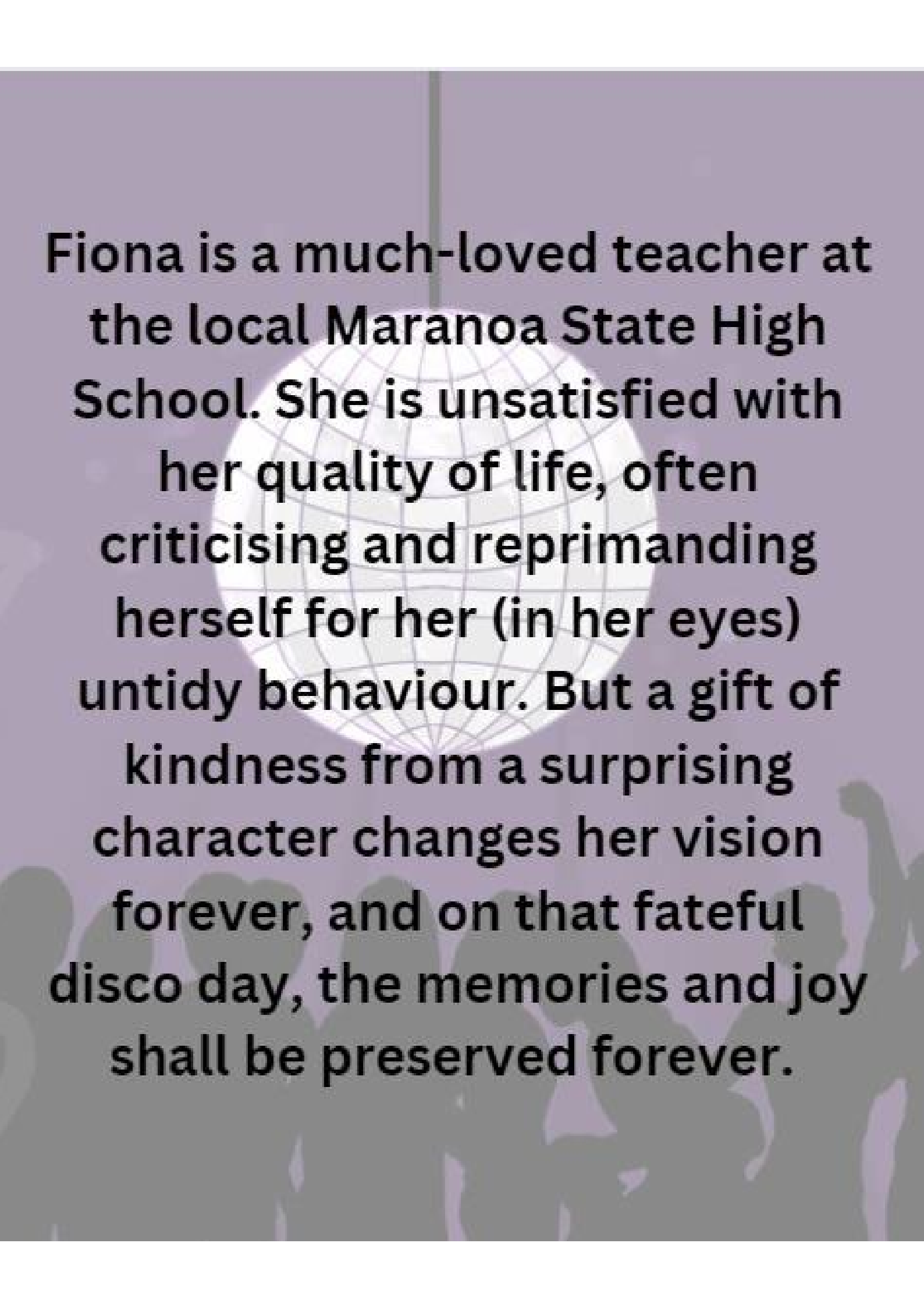
Eventually, my most recent friend had disappeared over the horizon, jubilantly walking away. Yeah, she was happy.

I turned my gaze to the people wandering around the park. Soon, a girl in a grey jumper slowly came over the horizon. From afar, nothing seemed wrong with her. But her personality was revealed when she got close. Bags under her eyes, clouded pupils, chapped lips. She was in need. I angled myself to shine the sun into her eyes.

Blinking, she turned around and spotted me. *That’s it*, I coaxed. *Come closer...* She strolled over, picked me up, and put me on.



And her vision changed forever.



Fiona is a much-loved teacher at the local Maranoa State High School. She is unsatisfied with her quality of life, often criticising and reprimanding herself for her (in her eyes) untidy behaviour. But a gift of kindness from a surprising character changes her vision forever, and on that fateful disco day, the memories and joy shall be preserved forever.