

3rd Prize – Librarian’s Choice Award

At the canteen

The crowd grows at the aroma of the steamed delectable. Lines grew in size, blurring together as students pushed to the front. The warm, orange light illuminates the hot food, like prizes in a carnival. I couldn’t believe I was doing this.

An oversized, sweaty body pressed against my side and I shuddered at the contact. I scowled up at the boy picking at a stain on his shirt, his brown hair sticking to his flushed cheeks. I was in the middle of the canteen line, pulling my phone out as I tried to forget the plump boy beside me. A pretty impossible task when his stench was distracting enough.

I moved up at last. My legs had started to ache and I couldn’t hear my own thoughts. Something touched my wrist. Looking down I squashed the urge to scream. A swab of saturated, sticky, spit ran down my ulna. I watched as it dripped, mind seemingly rebooting. I bit my tongue. *Don’t make a scene.*

Feigning calmness, I look back up, a smile stitched onto my face as I internally screamed bloody murder. I swear I was going to crush whoever had the pure disrespect-

‘Miss? Can I have your order?’

Shoot.

I focused on the lady in front of me. Blonde hair pinned back underneath a blue net. She stared at me, waiting. I swallowed.

‘Oh, yeah. C-can I have a muffin?’ The need to unbutton my collar had me reaching for my neck, giggling nervously, fingers pulling away at the blue fabric. The reflection of orange light coloured her pale skin.

‘4 dollars’ she mused.

I quickly handed her the cash, snatching my treat and hastily scampered out of the cluster of students. Cheeks flushed with embarrassment. I tucked my phone away and scuttled back to my friends. *I’m never doing that again.*

By Nicola Footit