

My Utopia

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My Utopia:

A Collection of Creative Writing

Edited by

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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1317-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1317-4

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PREFACE

Marge Piercy notes that “we can only know what we can truly imagine. Finally what we see comes from ourselves.” Today, the odour of utopia pervades the heart of art, literature, film, architecture and fashion. In contrast to the view of utopian thinking as dangerous and totalitarian, a utopian fashion can help us think about issues such as overpopulation, war, terrorism, new and sometimes unbelievably dangerous technologies, cybernetic crimes, religious extremism, and climate change in the Anthropocene in which humans and societies have become a global geophysical force. Such thinking can also boost our imagination with new perspectives for the future. Thus, a way out is obviously required and utopian thoughts can display the way. However, it seems that writers have not been serious in illustrating such issues in the 21st century, as Amitav Ghosh in particular about climate change argues “literature has approached climate change with silence.” Thus, it seems necessary to stimulate people to think more and more about such current trends, and in this relation, creative writing can be a way out to achieve this goal. The quest for utopia and the urge to explore new horizons led to unbelievable faces of creativity. Samples of this creativity were displayed in the ‘In Search of Utopia’ exhibition at the Museum in the city of Leuven, where Thomas More’s *Utopia* was first published. The Museum was enough for the emergence of new thoughts, arts, and waves of creative works. I visited the Museum with a group of colleagues from Université Catholique de Louvain in late December 2016. The Museum inspired me to think of a creative writing project on the theme of utopia. ‘My Utopia’ was a creative writing call first announced at the 18th International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society – Europe, *Solidarity and Utopia*, Gdansk, Poland, July 5-8th, 2017.

This project aims to demonstrate that utopian thinking is beyond any gender, race, age, color, nationality, and border limitations, and everybody can think of his/her utopian world regardless of place and time restrictions. Utopia as an organized concept encourages everybody to investigate the norms of organization and to discover ideal systems by which human lives could be made better. It is not easy, as Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent claim in *The Utopia Reader*, to consider all of the utopian works and thinking informing the genre today, but utopia began with the myth of

Eden. The first utopian thought refers back to Plato whose *Republic* is one of the pioneering utopian works. Plato, in *Republic*, describes a model for an ideal world; however, it was not until the 1500s, when the term utopia was coined by Sir Thomas More in his work of the same name that illustrates a fictional society on a remote island in 1516. More sets his utopian world on an isolated island, but makes it contemporary with his own time. He depicts a society in which individual possession is revoked, education is for all, men and women are considered equally, and there are no limitations on religious practice. To think through utopian lens is a key political approach including a refusal to be confined by our current obsession with time and place in order to think of a world that maximises human flourishing.

The present volume offers a diagnosis of the present and future through the lens of utopia and by depicting the concept through the pen of writers from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Iran, Italy, Romania, Turkey, UK, and USA. This call was seeking short fiction (science fiction, fantasy, horror, and graphic fiction), poetry, short essays and works residing across/between utopia. Creative writing projects like 'My Utopia' can give us the chance to think and to write not only about the aforementioned issues, but also about a better future.

Ruzbeh Babaei, PhD.
University of Porto

SHORT FICTION

EXCERPT FROM MURMUR ISLAND

CHRISTOPHER C. YORKE

After we had ascertained that we were not being overheard by anyone, Perkins continued:

“Our ancestors hail from Rum Island, in the Inner Hebrides. In 1826 they were expelled from the island to make room for sheep to graze. The irony would not have been lost on your Thomas More, for as you may recall it was he who referred to sheep as ‘great devourers and so wild, that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves.’

As it happened, there were three boats chartered to move the population to Nova Scotia for resettlement. The last of these, the *Drysdale*, was taken off course by a fierce ocean storm just after clearing the Sea of the Hebrides. The main mast broke in the tempest, and crashed through the deck, rendering the vessel unseaworthy. On the morning of the fourth day of drifting aimlessly, the passengers bailing water ceaselessly as they went, they spotted land off in the distance to the west. Luckily, and here you may be tempted to intuit the intervention of the hand of Providence—but I beg of you to resist this urge—the broken hulk of their ship ran aground on the stony beach of this small wooded island.

At first, life on the island was difficult. The survivors made do on the remainder of supplies from their ship until they could organize themselves in such a manner as to become self-sustaining. Given the small number of them, only three hundred and fifty-nine Scots in all, specialized knowledge was highly valued. Indeed, not only strictly practical wisdom, but also general knowledge and personal talents were treasured, for the purposes of entertainment and the overall planning of the rapidly developing community.

You might think that a people so isolated would soon turn to all manner of savagery: incest, murder, cannibalism, and so forth. Yet these people had had previous experiences with each other—they were former neighbors and friends, and so had a history of cooperating. Also, they were all planning to settle together in Nova Scotia—New Scotland—and so were

already somewhat prepared for a communal change in lifestyle. In other words, both their previous state of familiarity with and their current state of preparedness for calamity served them well, and made possible a future state of shared prosperity.

Luckily, shellfish were quite abundant on the island, as well as wild berries and tubers; and tools which were salvaged from the ship were sufficient to fell some of the island's trees and produce a clearing for the initial settlement. Once the basic necessities of everyday life were provided for—food and shelter—the people began to think about how best to govern themselves. Such matters came under consideration because rescue seemed less and less likely as time went on, and also less and less necessary. After all, these people were prepared to be settlers in a new land, and they were well on their way to satisfying that function already.

When the question was put to the assembly of survivors as to what form the government of the island should assume, it was unanimously agreed that at minimum it should be different from where they had come from: for example, no person would be moved against their will from any plot of land they had settled on, tended to, and developed through their own sweat and toil. It bears reminding here that your Saint Thomas saw no problem with moving his Utopians around like pieces on a chessboard, to other towns in Utopia and even to foreign lands. Our settlers, given their recent history, would never allow such a fate to befall them a second time.

Thus the first point of agreement among the survivors took the form of a complaint against the authorities of their homeland. They decided that they would be fiercely independent of the British Government, and to steadfastly refuse to be treated as pawns by any king or emperor, indigenous or alien. Never again would they be sent to colonize distant lands at the whim of some equally distant ruler.

Also despised was the overvaluing of wealth and the debasement of ingenuity in their former country, with the former often causing the latter. Since ingenuity was what would ultimately sustain the settlers, it was decided that it would be ingenuity that they would treasure most, wealth in the traditional sense being meaningless; as international trade was nonexistent and all natural resources were held in common trust. While each would work in their own capacity to maintain the community, those whose innovations, inventions, inspirations, and ideas made labor lighter for others—whether through the crafting of useful material devices or literary panacea—would be kept comfortably, and largely exempted from

manual chores. This was a substantial reward, as the labor could be quite onerous in those early days. Thus the impetus for creativity was both firm and constant on the island from the beginning.

Finally, remembering the debilitating influence of religion—the strife, for example, they had heard of and seen firsthand between sects of Christianity as similar as Protestantism and Catholicism—it was concluded that to avoid unnecessary disputes between themselves they would forswear conventional religion in favor of an ethos of cooperation. They would recognize divinity only in each other's persons: inasmuch as the base fact of human life itself is miraculous and strange, and *their* lives being doubly so, in that they somehow managed to survive their aborted voyage overseas. But attributing such phenomena to a God, they reasoned, was like putting a middleman in between a buyer and a seller. There is humanity, and there is the world; and nothing should intervene in this basic relationship. Cooperation, it was thus decided, would be the sole and highest legitimate expression of worship. Of course, it did not go unnoticed by the settlers that cooperative activity had the additional benefits of maintaining social cohesion, while it regenerated the material foundation which vouchsafed their community's survival.

After these basic tenets had been settled on, it was jokingly suggested by one member of the assembly that their grand designs would never be understood by their countrymen back in their native Scotland—that they would only be perceived as a low, indistinct sound in their ears, given how far they had traveled, both geographically and ideologically. Indeed, so this fellow had said, their assembly would only register as a murmur to a listener on the West coast of Britain, an indecipherable hum of voices. This allegory for their splendid isolation stuck, and a motion was passed at a later assembly that their new home should be officially known as 'Murmur Island'. It appealed to the early settlers' sense of humor for several other reasons, of course; as they would not only conduct themselves *inversely* to the manner in which they had in their former home of Rum Island, but they would also conduct all of their endeavors with *double* their previous efforts. I need to seek out refreshment for you now, so I will leave you for a moment to ponder the logic behind these semantics."

With a furtive glance over his shoulder, Perkins departed our encampment, leaving us with much to quietly discuss among ourselves...

About the author:

Christopher C. Yorke is a freelance writer in the UK.

THE TERROR LETTERS

ROBERT WALLACE

There are millions of ordinary people lying awake at night suffering from a staggering tragedy. A story takes place with these persons, a story only they can tell but often they're stymied by their anguish. I give them permission to tell, as if I were outside their door, listening through the keyhole.

They send me letters, old-fashioned letters, mostly pen or pencil on paper, as if they were trying to connect in some elemental way with the person they have lost. Occasionally I will receive a type-written letter composed on a manual or electric typewriter, some with letters partially formed because the ribbon is worn or the person has failed to press the key sufficiently.

Before I start in how it happened, I should say that I find the letter to be the most extraordinary means of communication ever invented. Nothing in our technological age compares to the old-fashioned letter because it is solemnly personal. But of course there are few letters being written anymore.

I came upon the "job" of the world's receiver of letters from victims of terror by accident. How is of little consequence. I put the first letter in the back seat, on the passenger side. For some reason I didn't feel like looking at it as I drove home. I know that doesn't make sense, but I felt the presence of the letter, or maybe it was the letter-writer, I don't know, and I thought if I left it on the passenger seat, next to me, it would distract me in some way, perhaps keep my eyes off the road. I drove carefully, as if I was carrying something precious. I was purposely careful to stop at yellow lights. I must say I am in general a cautious driver so this extra carefulness wasn't anything truly out of the ordinary. I lived, then, close to where I worked. I recall that first letter was damp and there was what appeared to be a tire mark on the bottom right hand corner. This was in 2017, so many years ago now.

I lived, then, in a cul-de-sac, renting an apartment in a downtrodden building, on the east side of town. The name of the town doesn't matter. I don't live there now and haven't for some time. I have since learned that the building is no longer there, destroyed in the usual way. My apartment was small, although the one I live in now isn't much larger, but it had this tiny vestibule, and it was in this vestibule that I opened the letter. I had a small lamp on a small table, and I believe I turned on the light, or maybe it was already on, I'm not sure. Some details I have conveniently forgotten.

The sharp edge of the ebony wood sliced open the seal of the letter with precision, with one swoop if I recall. It popped open without a rip, and I removed the letter, which was ordinary unlined paper, but made of heavy stock. The letter was not long, a simple paragraph. I have memorized it and, to this day, it remains my favorite of all the letters.

Dearest Sam,

I finally have the will to write, though perhaps not the temperament. My pain remains undiminished, and I expect it to never go away, though my hope is that in due time it will subside some. I still think of you every moment of every day. This especially happens when I'm doing

the dishes, while my hands are in the sudsy, warm water, and I'm looking out the small window above the sink. There are blue birds nesting in the birdhouse you put up last fall. It is a miracle, these birds. I love to watch them bringing bits of straw and dead grass, watch their heads peeking out of the hole. I often dream about what it would be like to be in the birdhouse, lying quietly in the nest, asleep, absorbing Eden.

They took you away from me. How can I ever forgive them for that?

Love Forever,

Mary

In that town—and it was a town—I lived in at the time, there was a park, a small park, with a few children's swings, and a sandbox or two, some trails that seemed to go nowhere, a slide that curved at the end, as if some teenagers had bashed it one night with a sledge hammer. I went to the park right after reading the letter. I stuffed it in my back pocket and walked there from my apartment. At the park I read the letter over and over, until it felt as though the letter-writer was before me reading it out loud.

I now live in a city far from where this all started. It doesn't matter where. It's just another city. I've been in many, probably many more to come. This city is near the water. Each day I take time to watch the boats come and go. Seagulls fly above the polluted harbor, hopelessly waiting for some fish to be tossed overboard, something they can grab quickly, fly off with in a hurry. I can't see how I can continue much longer. I can't deny the letters weigh on me. Even as I move from place to place, the letters keep coming. They come from everywhere: Colorado, Oregon, Paris, London, Afghanistan, and Iraq. North Carolina. Even Canada. Yes, if it happens in Canada, it can happen anywhere. Terror knows no boundaries. It is spreading; soon it will occur in Scandinavian countries, or islands that have few inhabitants. The terrorists will try to outdo each other, or copy what has worked spectacularly before. I thought it would all fade away, both the impossible that human beings do to one another, and the letters. But I see that neither will stop. There are no safe-havens. There are no utopias.

The afternoons slowly drift before me like an unfinished apology.

I could move again and not have my mail forwarded, but who would receive the mail of the weeping world? Someone has to receive the cries. I am that listener. I am the listener for those that can't talk, but who cry out in written words.

Recently I received a letter from a child. He speaks for you. He speaks for me. He speaks for all of us. I open this letter now and read it aloud.

I'm a boy: fourteen years old. What do I know about handling grief? I don't know anything. I don't know how to talk about it. Do I walk it off? Do I put it in the closet, behind the clothes that I never wear, in a shoe box with his cigarette lighter and a small conch shell that he bought for me on one of our beach trips? Perhaps I put my grief in the shell, and when I want to listen to it, to him, I can lift the shell out of the box and put it to my ear. I can hear the sounds of surf, the splash of salty water, and I can conjure the image of him near me. But the truth is why would I want to do that? What I want is him. Nothing less. I don't want the memory of him. I don't want a photo image. I don't want a story about him by a distant cousin who I don't know at all, and don't care to know. I don't want someone to tell me what he was like as a boy, how I look like him, how I remind them of him when he was my age. What does any of that mean to me? The truth is some days I wish I never knew my father. That he never existed.

Some days I wish I never existed.

About the author:

Robert Wallace has published fiction in a number of literary journals, including the NC Literary Review, the Bryant Literary Review, and the Raleigh News & Observer, among others. He is the author of the novel “A Hold on Time.”

WITH THEM

JASON A. BARTLES

We were to grow old together. His hands lingered on the lock wheel. It resisted his grasp, but the hatch door opened. Deep gray spires rose in the distance against a pink and purple sky. He alone emerged from their bunker. As he looked down into it for the last time, his breath fogged the thick glasses he wore under the mask, smudging all detail into a dim, greenish glow.

The paths through the surrounding tobacco fields remained free of debris. The wide leaves brushed his bare hand, their filaments stinging as they sucked the blood and sweat from his skin. *I can't.* In the dry heat, no hummingbird or mosquito flew, no turtle, lizard, or frog took a breath. He pulled his arms tight to his sides as he walked and turned his eyes down, refusing to look at the anemic bodies suspended above. He stumbled frequently on the too-smooth ground beneath his feet and suffered burns wherever his exposed torso touched the invaluable plants.

Between breaths, silhouettes of masked bodies appeared before him as they walked on this and other paths. At the end of the fields a desolate, littered space opened before him, and other solitary figures were headed in the same direction. *Go.* He hurried toward one of them and attempted to shout. The mask dampened his voice. The other person turned toward the last rays of the evening sun and waved him forward. So he walked on.

When he arrived at the entrance to the ruined train station, lights flashed across his body, and he could hear the echo of voices rising as if from a well. Beside the stairwell leading down to the old platforms, an empty pedestal stood with its inscription. The word “after” had been scratched out and replaced in crude letters with “before.” It now read: “We are useful even before our deaths.” Casey had often repeated that phrase to him as they planned for today. He descended further, guided by the thumping bass. The smoky air was illuminated by strobe lights and lasers. A tireless DJ stood behind a table of rotting wooden pallets. The tracks blended into one another without interruption and to their rhythm, more or

less, swayed and bounced the individuals, couples, and small groups of the growing crowd. They caressed one another's faces and masks, their arms and hips and lower backs. In the heat, sweat ran down their bloodied and dirty bodies. Lights crossed patches of skin exposed through the rips in their clothing, now glowing in neon yellow, blue, and purple. As his goggles fogged and cleared, the crowd in front of him pulsed in waves up and down the platforms.

Worker opened the hatch door and descended the ladder, locking them all inside. Feeding season for the tobacco plants had begun. Today Worker would harvest Casey and tomorrow, him. He could not allow it. None of them would allow it any longer. Quicker than either expected, Worker slashed Casey's leg with a machete. Casey screamed and slumped to the rusted floor of the bunker. As Worker leaned down to place a mask on Casey, he stepped out from behind the empty bookshelf where he had been hiding. Resisting shock, he severed the wires protruding from Worker's lower back. Worker froze in place, sparks spurting from every metallic joint. He pushed Worker to the ground and dropped to Casey's side.

He took the final step onto the platform. Someone pointed him to the tubs of glowing paint. He reached into the sticky liquid that briefly soothed his plant burns, and he created streaks of yellow across his bare chest. That crowd of unidentifiable, glowing, and impure bodies, speaking little behind their fogging masks, opened to him as it gave itself over to the furious beat of the music. He felt legs wrapping around his own, other backs and lubricated chests sliding against his as he embraced the tangle of grimy flesh, cloth, saliva, plastic, memories, screams, hair, rubber, dreams, lost opportunities, blues, yellows, purples, impossible plans, dirt, burns, blood, failures, tears, joy, shadows, vibrations, jeers, forgotten names, leather, shouts of pain, despair, hatred, and hope.

He took off his shirt and ripped a strip of cloth from it, tying it just above the gaping wound in Casey's leg. "We were to grow old together," he said with blame and regret as he shoved the rest of the shirt into brown and red flesh, trying to slow the blood that poured onto his hands and the floor. Casey saw the fear in his eyes, the dread of being alone, abandoned by the impossible promise of a future neither could have known. "Go," Casey said to him, pushing the mask toward his chest. "Not now. I can't. Not without you." He tried to return the mask, but Casey called him forward and put the mask on his face, tightening the straps near his ears. "Go. Allow me to watch you leave. Be embraced by the uncounted, sway and sing in the disharmony of the crowd, mumble, whisper and shout more

than you can understand, comfort at random, perhaps the most horrid or the most humble, perhaps the ones who will never know me or the ones who will not notice you. Be useful before your death. Be swallowed in them all, without me, now, tonight, because I cannot reach tomorrow, because you still can with them.” Casey kissed him and struggled to watch until his ankles disappeared up the ladder toward the hatch door.

As the music slowed and the crowd thinned, he followed them toward the surface. Sunlight beyond the horizon threatened to expose their reinvigorated bodies. A stranger next to him was fumbling to tighten the mask. He reached over to adjust the straps, trying to discern a face, but his glasses fogged over before he could catch even a glimpse. This person cupped his stinging hand, squeezing gently, and released it. With the crowd they both turned away from the distant spires and fields and rushed toward the burning dawn.

About the author:

Jason A. Bartles is an assistant professor of Spanish at West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

FLOATING HOSPITAL B-44

TOMASO VIMERCATI

Miro crossed the dorm, stepping over the blood stains absorbed by the laminate floor. Nobody could tell why he persisted walking barefoot in that filth.

He passed the cots of Avdo, by now reduced to a vegetable, and Lara, who on the other hand still smiled, although her body was a field of red spots and her convulsions were becoming much more frequent.

Miro wasn't even paying attention to these monstrosities anymore. Those who were well, like the man in the bed next to his own, wore weird vegetal masks which someone claimed had health benefits and prevented infection. The limit between science and superstition is thinner than one could expect.

With that thing on, Sami looked like a tribal warlock crossbred with a cartoon character Miro remembered from his childhood; a man with a turtle shell on his back.

He perceived Miro's gaze, turned towards him and lifted his mask just enough to unveil his eyes, then he smiled. Miro smiled back with no enthusiasm and sat on his cot, turning his back on him:

"I'm tired."

"Of what?"

"If they want healthy semen, they must pay for it from now on."

"They won't let you do it. You know that."

"But I can't keep this up."

"So what do you intend to do?"

"I'll go to New Tyre, docking ships. A new patented system. And, if I fail, then I will either come up with something or leave the planet."

“Where would you go?”

“I don’t know.”

“What about Martha?”

“Martha doesn’t know what she’s saying. She’s dying.”

“Sarah? Tisha? They are well, right? Don’t you love them anymore?”

“Martha says, 'Please stop talking nonsense. Find yourself another girl. Do it for me and for the others.' Then she gets sad. I ask her why and she goes, 'What a pity, I’d like to meet another metamour.'”

“And George? How’s he doing?”

“Healthy as a fish. Most probably immune. He doesn’t seem to be worried, even if Martha and Atli are both dying.”

“Is he sure?”

“I’d say yes. Blob is oozing from his two-inch-wide wounds. He says it looks like apricot jam. But does anyone remember what it looked like?”

“I heard it has the same flavor as well.”

“There must have been someone close by to hear it said first, because I bet the guy who tasted it died after a few minutes.”

They kept silence for a while, trying to spit those disgusting thoughts out of their heads.

“You remember the beginning? Monogamous people accused everybody else of causing the pestilence. They wouldn’t explicitly say that, of course, but that’s what they meant. They still have Bibles in their drawers after all.”

“Don’t say ‘monogamous people’ come on. It was just a little group of fanatics.”

“Yeah, I know: Hernesto is mono and it’s a choice, but you know what I mean.”

“Of course. I just don’t want you to get used to that kind of talk, that’s all. And let them say what they want. Ever since day three, we’ve known sex

isn't the key to all of this, even if intimacy with multiple people doesn't really help either."

"So what? Should we stay isolated? Each one of us in our own flying urn, like serial killers?"

"I know. And I'm not defending them, so Calm down."

"In the Middle Ages, they died of epidemics too, but they weren't poly!"

"Even later than that, but they used to live in communities and hadn't even invented the term *hygiene*."

"Well, only the word remains to us now. Those who can afford it live in an aseptic world where it hurts to breath, and look at us..."

"Some are even worse off."

"Yeah, don't let me think about it."

"Let's sleep now: the sun is low."

"Thanks, Sami. You're a good neighbor and a good friend."

"Sleep well, Miro."

"You, too. I hope you sleep as if it were night. As if we were in Italy."

"See? You have that memory at least. I have never been there."

"It was even better than you can imagine."

"Goodnight, then."

Sami pulled his mask back over his face and relaxed his muscles, letting his head sink deep into the pillow. Miro laid down too, put his hands behind his head and stared at the ship's ceiling, like every other night.

About the author:

Tomaso Vimercati was born in Cantù, Italy, in 1983, and started writing short novels at an early age; then also poems, songs, screenplays. In the last few years he is particularly interested in ethical non-monogamies. He actually lives in Como and works as a freelance film-maker and writer.

AN EXTREMELY SHORT TALE OF JAM TOMORROW

ALEX MARSHALL

Fifteen minutes.

Why am I being put through this? Why are they subjecting me to this?
Why torture me?

Fifteen.

What's the point of this game?

Fourteen-and-three-quarters.

The seconds tick away slowly. I remember Dad saying that time feels faster as you get older, which frightened me, but now I wish I was a hundred years older so it wasn't so slow. Fourteen-and-a-half. It sits there. A pink one. I'm not actually hungry, I need to remember that. But I only need to be patient for fourteen-and-a-quarter more minutes. It's a pink one. I like the white ones a lot more but I still like pink ones a lot too. If I take it, I'll still have it, but I'll have it *now*. I start calculating in my head. I think how much I want an extra one. But the more I want an extra one, the more I want the first, which is just sitting right there, but also the more I would enjoy the first, the more I could have – double in fact – if I wait and get the second. I can't win. I can't think this one out. In fact, if I think about it I want to take it more. I want to be rational but there's no rational answer. Even trying to be rational makes being rational harder. And there are fourteen minutes and eleven seconds left to wait.

Why make me do this?

I wish it was a white one. I like the white ones more. But if it was a white one, this would be even harder so I'm glad it's a pink one. Fourteen minutes.

Wait. When I get the second one, will it be a pink one or a white one? The worst is that there's a white one, and I don't eat it, and as a reward I only get a pink one. But that can't happen. Yuck that would be horrid. But it can't happen. Either I wait to eat a pink one then get another pink one, or I wait to eat a pink one, and I have a pink one and a white one. So I'd be swapping a pink one for a white one. I would do that, definitely.

Thirteen minutes and three seconds.

Maybe I could just take it and say I didn't? There's nobody else in the little room, just me, the chair, the table and the big mirror and the clock on the wall. So there's no way they can see me. I could just take it. I'd have to lie but I could.

No, that's stupid. I pull my hand back. I'm being stupid. Even if they can't see me they'll know I've eaten it when they come in and it's not there. They must know I'd think of that, even if they're not watching. I look over at myself, and the plate on the little table, in the mirror.

Twelve fifty-six.

Ok so I'll try maths. So if I like the pink ones one number, say 2000, and I like the white ones another number, say, 5000. 2000 times 15 minutes is

um

2000 times 15 minutes

it's

30000 minutes.

And 5000 times 15 minutes is

is 50000 minutes.

No that's times ten, so it must be 55000 minutes.

250 minutes.

It's a lot more minutes.

Eleven-and-a-half left.

Maybe I should times by eleven-and-a-half. But that's even harder. And it's not 30000 minutes. And I don't like white ones 50000 more than pink ones. Oh this is really hard. I don't like this.

Why are they doing it though? It's not a fun game. It's not a good test. I'm just a kid.

I could ask if it's a white one or a pink one.

But ask who though? There's nobody here so they can't see me. And they probably wouldn't tell me. Or they might tell me I can choose one and then I would choose a white one. But they also might not. Or they might tell me I can choose one but there are only pink ones.

Maybe there isn't one at all.

Maybe it's like when Mum said we were going to the playground but she suddenly went to work instead. Or the times when she promised me a birthday present but said she didn't have enough money and got me the wrong one that wasn't as good. When she promised I could go to the seaside with Dad but then said he hadn't come to pick me up.

Ten minutes twenty-two seconds.

This is important. I was really looking forward to the seaside and Mum can't drive that far without getting ill and I like Dad and I really wanted to see him and I didn't get to and I never get to.

Eight minutes.

That time went really quickly. Fifteen divided by two is, is, is, um, seven-and-a-half.

I'm not even halfway.

Ok now it's halfway.

Halfway.

It took so long.

But I did it and that means I can do it again.

I did it and I can do it again. That sounds good. I should think that.

And some of the time went really quickly. It was quicker when I was doing maths or thinking about when Dad didn't take me to the seaside. Like when I grazed my knee and Mum said to think about something else. So maybe if I think about something else, maybe something good, like the time Jake let me play with his kite and I made it fly and he couldn't.

Looking at the table is tempting so I turn away and look at the mirror.

Ok, so: Remember, I went to Jake's house and then his mum took us up the hill in the car and he played with his kite and he couldn't make it fly and then his mum said to let me try and I made it fly and he pretended not to be upset.

Seven minutes fifteen seconds. This isn't working.

It's really hard to just make yourself think about something. Maybe I'll think about the car. It smelled different to Mum's car and it was newer and Jake said it was nicer. It looks really nice even for a pink one. I make myself turn back to the mirror. Actually sometimes I like the pink ones more than the white ones. Maybe this is a really nice pink one. Ok, *concentrate*. The car smelled different and the kite was red and it looked like a bird.

Six fifty-five. It looks really nice.

It didn't really work. But then it didn't work when I grazed my knee. I thought about something else for a minute but my knee still hurt. She didn't take me to the playground and the legos she got me for my birthday weren't real legos and Dad didn't take me to the seaside and thinking about something else didn't work and it's really upsetting and why doesn't she let me have as many sweets as Jake is allowed and why am I only allowed them at the weekend even with my own pocket money and why does she tell me I'm not allowed to eat the whole packet and I have to save some? It's really upsetting and she doesn't want me to have sweets and when she says I can have things sometimes she changes her mind later so I can't even have them.

What if after fifteen minutes they just take both away and I don't get any at all?

What if they want to give me a second one but Mum won't let them and so I only get the pink one and what if she doesn't let me have it because it's only Wednesday?