

Asia (Year 11, James Allen's Girls' School)
DLF 2017 Winter Short Story Competition entry

Fall The Snow, The Prostitute Said

Cage cringed as he swatted his coat and kicked at the batwing door. Gustard was tending the bar, metal arm twitching as he poured the new prostitute a drink. Although the bartender's arm whined with every movement, it wasn't something you noticed straight away since his entire body always seemed to creak, even his skin, cracked and pale. Probably because he'd never felt the sun's warmth. Few in WinterTown had.

Gustard smiled at him as Cage found a stool next to the girl. "The Snow's intense today," the bartender said, shoving a beer across the bar with his good hand. Cage caught it and the prostitute giggled, nudging him. He glanced at her- she was obviously just finishing up work on her first night, lipstick smudged on her small mouth and snow-filled hair in disarray. Gustard's smile widened and he grunted, the sound synonymous with laughter for him.

"What's your name, Hun?" he asked.

"Nova."

"Well, Nova, my mate Cage here is quite an upper-classman, he is. Government league. Much more important than you or me. You know what he does?" He leaned over the filthy bar with fake seriousness. "Cage makes The Snow."

Nova turned to Cage, not with a drunken expression of awe like he'd anticipated, but with suspicion, pouting a little. "That right, love?" she asked.

Cage shrugged, swallowing some bile.

"I don't wanna know nothing about it," she stated. "No one knows where The Snow comes from. That's what makes it beautiful." She glanced out the window, mesmerised, as if to confirm her statement.

The Snow was famous, and millions of conspiracy theories surrounded it. It gave the city its name, WinterTown- the only place in the world where the sun hadn't shone in a hundred years. Always snowing, always steel-grey, as if a dark secret was lingering in the air. Which it was.

And yet, the people didn't seem to mind. It was the opposite- most who came to visit WinterTown never left. Overpopulation was a problem worldwide, but here it reached a whole new level of extreme. Flats were crammed together and clubs perennially full, neon night-lights on every street overcompensating for the city's natural gloom. The Snow was a magnet making WinterTown a unique and trendy place to live. It disgusted Cage.

Cage sighed and stared at Gustard hard. The bartender leaned back, prosthetic arm jerking with the sudden movement. "Alright, no need to get so uppity about it. Just messin' with ya."

Nova might not believe him, but Gustard was right; Cage overlooked the SnowProject. It had taken him years to climb his way to the top of the Government ladder, and now he knew some of the conspiracy theories were true. The Snow was more beautiful when you didn't understand it. Because it wasn't really snow at all, but well-disguised ash.

Human ash, to be precise. Of the terminally ill, the unemployed, and the unclaimed children. How else did people think the Government dealt with overpopulation?