

Cusack Essay Junior Winner - Katie Wheeler

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

The call comes in the middle of the night. The shrill ringing like a brazen thief breaking the silence of slumber. Next come frantic calls to spread the news and sympathise with the family.

The cruel hand of Fate has teamed up with the Grim Reaper and snatched a loved one once more.

A journey comes next. Everything begins with a journey. The car ride to the hospital to be born and the celestial journey out of your body when your last breath has been and gone. The second you arrive, the uncertainty comes tumbling out. What should you say? What awaits us: you find yourself questioning.

Will you be sent down to the fiery depths of Hell, or heavenwards to the candyfloss storybook version of the pearly gates, serenading angels optional? How do you know?

A funeral is one of those things that brings thoughts about that hush hush event of dying tumbling in. Death seems almost embarrassing, like yet another awkward silence as you wait for someone to break the tension on a first date.

Death has really hit us when they bring out the bottomless mugs of strong tea and dried up ham sandwiches. This is the medicine of choice that is seen fit to ease the lumps in our throats, to quell the disbelieving shock, and fill the emptiness in our souls. You enter the funeral parlour: death has a smell. A sweet incense smell that pervades the room, nosying into every last corner and clinging to your clothes like a little child. This is your future.

Sobbing relatives surround the open coffin, they don't know where to look as they can't quite meet Death in the eye. It is the uncertainty you get as you look right and left before crossing the road. You see nothing coming, but you can never shake that unsettling feeling that hidden behind the bend is a crazy driver. This crazy driver who might escape the tiresome traffic, run a red light and end your life. All to get home by six o'clock to a nagging wife and a cold dinner. Death doesn't seem worth it.

As the funeral draws to a close and the relatives flood the pub to drown their sorrows, and to get the day's holiness out of their systems, you go home.

Walking up the stairs in the dark of the night, once again you get the unsettling feeling as you miss a step, there is that empty sensation when your foot falls through the darkness, throwing your body forward. This is Death. Death is taunting you like the school bully. Death has just tripped you up the steps while everyone laughs, and nobody helps you up.

You climb into the icy coldness of your bed, and shiver as though someone is walking on your grave.

As your eyelids grow heavy and your arms and legs grow tired, and you begin to feel as if you are drowning in treacle, you say a quick prayer. You pray that you evade the clutches of Death for at least a few more years.

As your eyes close and you fall into a deep sleep, Death carries the soul onwards and upwards to the undiscovered country. Where they are going, nobody knows. It is the great fear of Death: the journey into the unknown.