

Adjudicator's Comments. This story is very well written. There is a clever use of imagery, playing with the interchange of light and darkness, evoking the deranged world of solitary confinement. The intrusive voice, the one who claims to know the restless protagonist, is aptly disturbing with its accusations and accompanying smell of fire. Often, “and then he woke up” endings can be a let-down, a cheap, convenient exit from the plot. In this case, however, we are left wondering whether this is just some random nightmare or whether it is born of Robert’s guilt for some past misdeed.

PEN NAME: HONEYSUCKLE

SECTION: A

TITLE: THE DISTANT LIGHT...

Light is something that comes and goes, often at somebody’s will. A simple switch can send miles of darkness in a second. Send the light tumbling into some place of unknown.

If there is light, there is also dark. This is something that is always true. And if there is dark – light is not hidden or in fact covered, it is stolen. Taken to nowhere. It is kindled and then it is killed. Snapped. Just like that.

He was looking out, through the bars, at the sunlight. It was unbearably bright yet still welcome. He cherished those few minutes every day – they were never late – when nothing was concealed by shadows. It was the only time that mattered. It was the only time worth looking forward to, no birthdays, no more Christmases, only the light. Those minutes were the only times he could touch the light. He could always see the light, far away... it was so distant yet so close.

He watched it. The light. Playing upon his fingertips, the strings of radiance robbing the echoes of darkness and then it is gone. Snapped. Just like that. Banished to the other side. It was the only time, despite his locked-up-ness, that he could truly feel free, wildly free.

The night hummed. Its leathery blackness enveloped him like the wing of a stark crow.

Beckoning.

There was nobody else with him in the day. But in the night he could have sworn there were eyes watching him.

He searched each corner. Nothing. Emptiness. He had never known anything else besides being alone... but the night always had visitors.

The eyes burned into his soul, threatening his already shaking form.

He couldn’t sleep.

“What do you want?” He called.

I know you.

“No - no you don’t.” He was restless, pacing, there was nobody there. But this figure...

I know you... It whispered. You liked it, didn’t you? It smelled of fire. Watching them scream.

The sun came up.

Robert woke up.

“?” His wife lay next to him, her eyes searching his.

“Just a nightmare.”

Robert got up and opened the curtains and the light came.