

This is a powerful evocation of anxiety, how it can turn apparently small tasks and events into massive obstacles to be overcome, causing procrastination, which in turn causes further anxiety. The conversational register of the writing helps to put us into the mind of the protagonist and experience the extreme oddness of her existence – how, for example, the idea of going from dry to wet in the shower, is too “gross” to contemplate. There are some errors that could have been removed with careful proof-reading – some punctuation issues and the fact that Sarah’s friend’s name changes from Diana to Diane in the space of three words. Overall, though, we are left with a sense of the crippling futility of a life ruled by anxiety.

## NHS 1 – Newtown High School Group B

### His/her face was expressionless

Jane Doe

The hardest part of the day is always getting up. It wasn't that her bed was comfy per se- only that it felt safer than greeting the world. But, she has things to do, promises to keep. Otherwise she's alone. Utterly alone. The sun peeking through her curtain ,causing it to glow in alien hues, obviously agreed, the blinding light making her already awful headache much worse. After several more minutes of enduring this, she slides from her bed in favour of sitting on the ragged carpet beneath it. She has things to do after all. Important things. Which meant they are the only things she will do today. The carpet is nice, a bright shade of yellow with delicate mauve butterflies and ivy surrounding the border. Sarah had gotten it at a charity shop and insisted on her having it because in her words it would 'brighten up the place. This could be considered a fair argument considering most of her furniture was grey scale. Ah yes Sarah. She needed to pick up the CDs. Sarah's CDs from the music shop at 2:30pm. She flicked her eyes to look at the clock above her bed. 9:33am. That gives her 4 hours and 57 minutes to get ready, text Sarah and prepare herself to go outside. Well more like 4 and a half hours to ensure she doesn't arrive late. Speaking of which she needed to get going. Though reluctant to leave the floor its better to be prepared.

She went over to her wardrobe and quickly realised her sentiment before has been wrong, the hardest part of the day is choosing what to wear. What impression you want to make. She could wear her clothes from yesterday but she might look frumpy, however, it would save on the amount of laundry...no. None of her tops seemed to match any of her trousers and she could hardly wear a dress in this weather. She could wear a jumpsuit? A cardigan? She sat back on the carpet feeling defeated. Yellow and mauve. The butterflies looked for effortlessly elegant, their wings in perfect harmony with the winding ivy. If only she could do the same. She felt her wardrobe judging her from her sprawled position on the floor, her head turned and she spotted a fluffy knitted jumper hidden behind a blazer. She went over and picked it up then proceeded to put on a multitude of layers with the jumper and some jeans on top, though unconfident with the choices at least it was warm.10:06am. Once again she plopped down on the carpet, this time equipped with a pad and an orange highlighter in order to create a list.

-2:30 pick up CDs for Sarah

-Hunky dory, The wall and cosmos factory

-Come home

-Call Sarah to let her know you picked up CDs

That was it, her whole day planned out. 10:28am. 4 hours and 2 minutes. For the next 3 and a quarter hours she did next to nothing, sitting different ways on the floor, in her bed and on the armchair by her desk; scrolling and looking at random websites to learn more about the ancient roots of potatoes. 1:13pm. She went to the mirror to try and sort her hair which her pillow has decided was destined to be a pile of frizz, she attempted to fix it best she could before giving up. 1:48pm. She rushed around grabbing her phone, wallet, bag, tissue, extra socks (just in case) and hand sanitizer. Put on her shoes and coat then sat by the front door watching the clock and sifting through the bag to make sure she had everything. 2:00pm. She headed out the door locking it, walked several paces then went back to check. 2:05pm. She walked along the street suddenly extremely self conscious. There was dirt on the knee of the jeans, some of the yarn from the jumper had come undone and her coat had a hole in it. It felt as though every passer-by was criticising her, even the birds seemed to stare. 2:13pm. She finally reached the music shop. It was an old building with a big window in the front, above which was a faded sign that had once held the name of the shop. It wasn't packed so the owner looked at her as she came in, the idea of talking to him was mortifying so she chose instead to wander down one of the aisles. It was much like a book shop only instead of books it had CDs, DVDs and vinyl records in the displays. 2:23pm. The guy at the front desk was alone, all hope of it being Sarah's friend Diana had vanished. Diane was still scary but at least they had met before. She continued to pace the aisle. She'd spent a great deal of time avoiding the other two as if she was playing a game of PAC-man, and a third person entering the shop further complicated things. She pretended to look at the vinyl, skimming through the unfamiliar titles, just as she looked up to see if anyone was around she locked eyes with the clerk. She felt sick and shaky and it was all made worse when he opened his mouth. "Need any help miss?",

Her eyes darted around but he could be addressing nobody but her so was forced to reply,

"Um, my friend wanted me to pick up some CDs she ordered in"

her voice shook on CDs making her want to melt into the mismatched floor tiles. He looked at the computer for a moment then answered,

"Sarah Campbell?", she nodded, "I'll just be a moment"

He disappeared into the back leaving her to wait by the front desk getting stared at by the others in the shop along with those walking passed the window. Her heart was fluttering in her chest, it felt rather pathetic that she couldn't even pick up a CD without acting like she had drank 4 tubs of caffeine. 'Moment' had been a lie, it felt like an age before he returned holding the 3 CDs.

"There you go miss, have a good day"

He handed them to her and she bolted to the exit waving as she went to not

appear rude. The walk home was uneventful except for a pigeon she saw that she had dubbed 'Cheesecake'.

She reached her front door and slammed it behind her. Taking off her shoes then sitting in an armchair to call Sarah.

The phone rang for some time before she answered.

“Hello”

“Hi Sarah I have your CDs for you when you come back”

Sarah laughed sounding pleased, her voice light and carefree

“That's great, I'll come pick them up on the way home, maybe around 6?”

“Ok”

She felt awkward on the phone even with just Sarah. Her voice always sounded odd in recordings so she couldn't imagine it sounding very good from Sarah's end.

“Bye, I'll talk to you when I come pick them up”

Sarah hung up leaving her alone in her silent living room. The sun was violently attacking her so she went throughout her home closing all the curtains.

She felt slightly gross from going outside but the idea of going from dry to wet was too repulsive to take a shower. She opted instead to sit and stare out the window. Waiting. 2:55pm.

The silence was suffocating but her limbs felt too heavy to do anything about it. Her mind was rushing at a mile a minute, alone with her thoughts. Then she looked down. Her clean light jeans were what set her over the edge, they were no longer clean but had a trail of mud drops that went up to her knee. They must have been from when she cut through the park-*no wonder people were giving her odd looks. She couldn't breathe, the stress and humility whirled in her brain. She was drowning. The Victorians had named tuberculosis consumption but it felt a much more fitting name for anxiety, she was being consumed. Consumed by the interactions from today which replayed in her brain on loop, her stutter, the mud stains, stares, the people in the shop, being incapable of simple tasks, being alone, she was going to throw up, her heart rate, she couldn't breath-* she was pulled back to earth by a sharp knock on the door. She looked at her surroundings which were suddenly clearer, as she passed the mirror she noticed tears winding down her face. They were quickly wiped away. She often wondered if the settle from a spike of anxiety was similar to coming down from a high. She was numb, her face expressionless, it wasn't calm but as if some divine being had stolen her emotions leaving her an empty shell. It was disconcerting being so detached but as she reminded herself, she had things to do today. Important things.

So she opened the door.

