

# The Lost Winter



Elizabeth Ryan

# The Lost Winter

Writing on the Wall  
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**WOW**  
WRITING ON THE WALL

## Introduction

Write What's Next provided mentoring and creative writing masterclasses with high profile writers for young Liverpool creatives. Our emerging writers worked in small groups for 16 weeks to develop their writing skills; gain practical experience and create brand new work.

The following story has been developed on Write What's Next with course mentor Yvonne Battle-Felton, author of *Remembered* and partnered with Sheffield Hallam University graphic design students to create bespoke illustrations.

Working together, this writer and artist have created a story that shows the importance of storytelling, creativity and imagination.

*The Lost Winter* by Elizabeth Ryan is set a century from now, in a world where the worst has happened. After decades of deforestation, wildfires are out of control and death is a part of everyday life. Sixteen year old Finn has been forced to grow up quickly after being left to care for his elderly grandfather. His parents are away, working with a team of government scientists, trying to salvage what is left of the planet. *The Lost Winter* is a tale of a world ravaged by the inaction of a previous generation.

Elizabeth Ryan partnered with graphic designer Rachel May to create the e-book you are about to read.

Thank you to our fund managers at WEA who made the Write What's Next project a possibility. Thank you to our funders The European Social Fund and the Liverpool Combined Authority.

Thank you to the Writing on the Wall staff that have worked tirelessly to deliver Write What's Next, especially our Senior

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Project Manager Amy Carrington and Project Worker Lauren Buxton without whom this project would not have been possible.

Thank you to Yvonne Battle-Felton. Yvonne mentored three emerging Liverpool writers for Write What's Next, provided weekly masterclasses to aid them in learning their craft and edited *The Lost Winter*.

Most importantly, thank you to our Write What's Next writers: Elizabeth Ryan, Ana Caroline Colombo and Jennifer Khalil for sharing your stories and talent with us.

**Jenny Dalton**

*Project Worker - Books and Publishing*

# The Lost Winter

A Short Story

Elizabeth Ryan

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I find my grandfather sitting at the kitchen table, staring down wistfully at one of his well-worn photograph albums. The album is open on a page with a photo of himself as a young boy, playing in the snow, making a pile of snowballs and laughing. It's one of my favourite photos. It was taken in the back garden of this house, over eighty years ago.

'We had no idea this would be some of the last snow we'd see in these parts,' he murmurs to himself.

'I know, Pops.' I gently squeeze his shoulder. 'I'm just going out for our rations now. I'll get our nutrition pills and some of the O2D's too. I think you need a higher dose. You seemed a little breathless this week.'

'You make sure you stay in the shade while you're out there, boy. It's a hot one today.'

I glance up at the dusty window, frowning. Even if walking in the shade would make any difference, he must know I would be hard pressed to find any. It's nearly mid-morning, and like always, it's dark outside, the amber glow of the winter sun is almost completely drowned out by the soot that fills the sky. Grandfather's cognition must be worse than I thought. Hopefully the higher dose of his medication will help.

I put on my respirator and step out of our porch into the oppressive heat outside. I pull the door behind me



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quickly, trying to limit the contaminated air seeping in and maintain the cooling effects of the air conditioning.

Almost immediately, a layer of sweat starts to form on my brow. Pops might be confused about the shade but damn, he wasn't wrong about the temperature today.

I start out towards the old Picton Library building. The ground feels gluey underfoot, the soles of my boots biting into the softening tarmac. The scent of burning rubber fills the air and even with my respirator on, the acrid smoke clogs up my lungs, making me feel like I'm suffocating.

It isn't far to the collection point but by the time I get there I'm soaked through with sweat and coughing so much it's making me feel lightheaded. I push open the heavy doors to the building and walk into the small foyer. It looks as though a pile of rubbish has been dumped in the corner but as I approach it, I realise it's a body slumped over. I lean over it to see if it's anyone I recognise but the old woman is unfamiliar. Stepping over her, I walk further into the building. As a child I had loved coming here. I'd spent many a weekend lost in the towering stacks of books, immersing myself in tales of a world that no longer exists. Flicking through encyclopedias filled with vivid photographs of jungles and oceans, colourful plants and all of those different species of animals; devouring history books, that described a way of life that had been taken for granted and the poetry and novels that were inspired by beauty and opportunity. The contents of the library have long been eviscerated. Most of the public buildings are now being used for rationing and more recently, as morgues for the unclaimed.



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I remove my mask to make the most of the cleaner air in here. Feeling a little better now, I go to the nearest collection desk and stand in front of the retinal scanner. It quickly brings up my details on the screen and I place my order. Whilst I'm waiting for our rations to be delivered down the conveyer, I turn to the supervisor who looks like he's nodding off in the corner of the room.

'Have you reported the body?' I ask, gesturing towards the entrance. He barely looks up.

'Yeah. It's been there since yesterday. They're taking longer to clean them up now.'

There's a beep from beside me, signifying my supplies are ready so I pack them into my rucksack and head home.



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Later that evening, I'm clearing the table after dinner whilst Pops dozes in his armchair, when a shrill alarm interrupts the silence. The noise startles me and I take a few seconds to realise it's the external messaging system signalling an incoming call. I barely have time to wonder who it could be when my father's booming voice fills the room.



'Finn? It's time, son. You need to pack up. You can only bring one small bag, so make sure you just pack necessities.' He pauses briefly, 'Finn, are you there?'

'I'm here, Dad. It's good to hear you. Is Mum with you?'

'I'm sending a car for you. 0600 tomorrow. Be ready. Remember this is classified information.' There's a click as the call ends.

I stare at the speaker. We've been waiting over two years for that call, and I wonder if I've imagined it. Behind me I hear my grandfather clearing his throat and as I turn to see him standing in the kitchen doorway, any doubt I had about whether the call was real is quickly quashed when I see the expression on his face.

'Sounds like we better go and get packed up then,' he announces, his face lit up with joy.

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Climbing down the loft ladder, I close the creaky hatch behind me. Dusting off the two small cases I've dug out, it occurs to me that my father didn't answer my question about Mum. A sense of unease starts to gnaw at me. If something had happened then surely he'd have let me know? We'd been told from the beginning that contact with them would be very limited whilst they were working on the project. What if they wouldn't let him get in touch with me? What if something is seriously wrong with her? I try and push the thought from my mind. The team they are working with includes some of the world's best scientists. They would be well looked after so I need to stop worrying about it until I know what's happening. This time tomorrow we'll be at the government's Phoenix complex, and I can see them both. The team must have made good progress with the project if they're sending for family now and that has to be a good thing.

Fastening up my case, I walk across the landing and knock softly on Pop's bedroom door. He opens the door and I swear he looks twenty years younger than he did this morning. It's as if a weight has been lifted, knowing we are finally going to a better place. I'm just as relieved. The last few months he's become more reliant on me and I'd been worrying about whether I could look after him properly for much longer.

After tossing and turning all night, the glowing blue digits on my alarm clock finally show it's time to get up so I drag my tired body from my bed and go downstairs to make a cup of coffee.

While I wait for the kettle to boil, I look around the kitchen. I know if all goes to plan this will probably be the last time we're

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here and even though the last couple of years have been hard, I'm going to miss this house.

I run my hand over the old oak table, thinking back fondly to the meals Pop's and I have shared across from each other and all the rounds of blackjack we've played to pass the time. I nudge a cracked floor tile with my foot. I'd dropped a pan full of water and potatoes when Pops was first teaching me to cook and he had just shrugged and said, 'at least it was before they were cooked.' I smile to myself. He always finds the positive in every situation. I know this place is full of even more memories for him than it is for me and I really hope the move won't be too much for him to cope with. The loud click of the kettle boiling interrupts my trail of thought and I finish making my coffee.



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At exactly 6am I hear the roar of an engine and as I look out of the living room window, I see a large, green military jeep pull up in front of the house. I help Pops fix on his respirator before fitting my own and then reach down to pick up our bags. By the time we get outside there's a soldier standing next to the vehicle. He looks up.

'Finn Michaelson?' he asks loudly, his voice echoing through the full-face mask he's wearing.

'That's me,' I shout back and I gesture towards Pops, 'and my grandfather, Joseph Michaelson.'

The soldier looks down at his clipboard. Scanning down the page he flips the paper over and then flips it back.

'It's just you on the list,' he pauses and looks away, 'I'm sorry. You need to say your goodbyes. We need to get going.'

'There must be some mistake, can you look again?' I ask. The soldier picks up my bag, throwing it into the boot of the jeep as I follow behind him, 'please, have another look!' I feel a tight grip on my wrist as my grandfather pulls me back. I shrug out of his hold. I just need the soldier to have another look. He must have missed his name. But I already know there is no mix up. They have only sent for me. I feel sick, a heavy weight settling in my stomach. Pops pulls me towards him, enveloping me in his embrace.

'It's okay, Finn. I'm okay. You need to do as the soldier says and go. They will send for me later.'

Fighting back tears, I look up at Pops. I can see in his eyes that he doesn't believe that anymore than I do. 'I'm not going without you,' I say, hugging him tighter. He won't manage without me. He needs me. Hell, I need him just as much. He pulls away from

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me slowly and holds my upper arms firmly, forcing me to meet his gaze.

'Listen to me. We always knew there would be limited resources. They need to be used in the most effective way. So this is the way it has to be. You are going to turn around and get in that car and you're not going to look back. I've had more than eighty years to enjoy this planet and now you're going to be an important part of fixing the mess that the rest of us made.' He lets me go and steps back.

I swallow back the lump that's formed in my throat and take a deep breath. I know what I have to do.



# The Lost Winter

To be continued...

## About the Author and Illustrator

Elizabeth Ryan is a new writer of YA fiction and contemporary romance. She also enjoys writing poetry. Elizabeth is from the Wirral, has a background in biomedical sciences and volunteers for a local charity. When she is not looking after her three children, she can be found reading, listening to nineties music and dog walking with friends.

To keep up to date with Elizabeth's work, follow her on twitter @lizryan99

Sheffield born and bred, Rachel May is a twenty-three-year-old Graphic Designer, Illustrator and recent graduate from Sheffield Hallam University. Rachel enjoys many aspects of design, but is especially passionate about publication design, illustration and print. She is also an avid reader, animal lover and horror film watcher.

To keep up to date with Rachel's work, follow her on Instagram @rachel\_may\_design and check out her website <https://rachelmaydesign.cargo.site>

**To contact Elizabeth or Rachel for upcoming  
projects, please email Jenny Dalton at  
[jenny@writingonthewall.org.uk](mailto:jenny@writingonthewall.org.uk)**



## Afterword

Congratulations to all those who participated in Write What's Next for creating such moving and inspiring writing, and for sharing their stories with us throughout the project.

Writing on the Wall celebrates writing in all its forms through our annual festivals and year-round projects, working with a broad and inclusive definition of writing embracing literature, creative writing, journalism, nonfiction, poetry, song-writing and storytelling.

We work with diverse communities across the Liverpool City Region to promote and celebrate individual and collective creativity, publishing high-quality work and supporting health, wellbeing and personal development.

If you have a story to tell, or would like to take part in, or work with WoW to develop a writing project, please get in touch – we'd love to hear from you.

**Madeline Heneghan and Mike Morris**

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