**‘Hurt’ by Teya Beggan**

Year 11, St Gregory’s School

**Judging panel comments:**

*The panel thought this short story demonstrated a powerful imagination on the part of the writer, and the way that racism can divide friends and communities. Panel members loved the descriptive style of the writing, comparing it to that of Toni Morrison and Margaret Atwood. One panel member commented on the structure of the writing, which he described as ‘fantastic’ (particularly the syntax and how the writer used shorter sentences amongst longer sentences for impact).*

**Hurt**

Silently, she walked down the street. Alone. The pace of her feet crunching the dead leaves under her, matched her elevated heartbeat. She felt the eyes that followed her like tiny knives in the back of her head and the dull roar that occurred, prickling her ears, as people whispered nothings, filled with ignorance and blind hatred.

Words clawed desperately in her mind, trying to escape, but they never did. The whispers that fluttered through the air, she always told herself, were better than the slurs laced in bigotry, that were often thrown carelessly at her. Better than the abuse hurled at her from her classmates almost every day in her own living hell. They were even better than the dead silence, which held nothing but empty stares, and silent judgement.

Exhausted. The fatigue of maintaining the false façade of her being fine, wore her down like the sea crushing small rocks on the beach. She cried a lot. Never in front of them. She wouldn’t give them that power over her, but every night, her mind replayed the poisonous words, like a record stuck on a never-ending repeat. When she would wake up, she placed the mask back on, revealing nothing of the constant pain that scarred her.

Loud mocks and shouts rang in her ears as she quickened her pace. Multiple presences appeared beside her as she continued to ignore their remarks. How she “probably looks so sexy under it” and their laughs and smirks as they continuously told her to “take it off”, chanting it. Her head tilted upwards, her silent act of defiance.

She kept going forward, ignoring them; she refused to back down. A boy, had a face twisted in fury as he reached out. She felt a strong tug at the back of her head. Her hijab has been ripped off. Thrown into the dirt, and she belatedly followed.

A stab of pain shot through her, and then nothing. The dead stares morphed into surprise which was plastered on their faces, as they watched a fifteen year-old girl hurled to the ground, mocked, and they did nothing. Eruptions of hoots and laughter exploded from the boys. Fists clenched, she rose to her feet. Just like that, laughter halted, smirks dissipated, and the boy who did it, looked at her.

She searched his eyes only to find the fire of anger burning in them, much like the anger coursing through her, except his had grown, had manifested into something that could only destroy. And then she was crying, for him, for now she saw a fifteen year-old boy so engulfed in hatred and anger, he was blinded. Ten years ago that boy helped her when she fell over, and finger painted with her, before they could comprehend the divide that didn’t need to separate them, but did. She longed for the boy she once knew, before hatred and anger turned him into someone unrecognisable.

Teya Beggan- Year 11