



**The winning entry for the inaugural  
Student New Angle Prize (SNAP)**

**'Across the Water'**

**by James Cullen**

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His son found the marquee first, waiting for them across the River Stour. It had been raining, but now the meadows were bathed in sunlight, reflected in a myriad of crystal droplets that shivered gently in the wind.

He loved this place. It reminded him of home.

'Are you sure it's alright for you to be here?' said the son as they walked.

'I'm sure your mum won't mind.'

'That's not what I mean, dad.'

'I know.'

The solemnly-dressed crowd gathered outside the marquee fell silent as they approached. A stern, slender woman emerged, looking just like her mother had. His son ran to her; half-siblings. They greeted each other warmly.

He looked away. His gaze fell upon the nearby drinks table, his throat became dry and constricted. Nowhere was safe to look.

'Why are you here now?' the woman's accusing voice cut into him. His son had gone inside.

'He wanted me to come.'

'Still hiding behind your son. And what about all those times you let him down?'

His voice failed. The woman who was not his daughter continued. 'You can't make things right now.'

'I know I can't... but—'

'Everything was fine before you showed up. Mum was happy before you.' Her voice trembled slightly. The crowd gathered nearer, her friends and family, her community, joined against him.

'She's gone,' the woman continued. 'You should leave Sudbury too. There's nothing for you here anymore.'

'What about my son?'

'You'll do the right thing for once. Leave him here, with his family. You have nothing to offer him but disappointment.'

And she was gone. And the crowd's accusing eyes followed him all the way across the river.

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He watched from the opposite bank as they began scattering the ashes. He saw his son approach the river, tightly gripping the last remnant of his mother. The silence was broken by his small cry, borne with the ashes by the wind, and the father could watch no longer.

After what might have been minutes or years, he looked up to see his son running towards him, hand still clasped. When he saw what he was holding he almost broke down again.

'Mum would have liked you to say goodbye,' he said quietly, tipping the last little ashen grains into his father's gnarled palm.

'You shouldn't have done this.'

'Nobody knows.'

He looked down at his hand, lost in memories. Everything she once was - the woman who had charmed him away from Donegal - distilled into fine ash, weighing so little and so much.

'You're not going away, are you?'

The question startled him, and a careless gust of wind snatched her from his hand. She was gone as quickly as she had arrived, returned to the land that raised her.

'They were saying bad things about you,' said the son through sobs, 'but they're not true, are they? I don't want to lose you too.'

The father could think of nothing to say, but just held his son.



**gotelee**  
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