

Young Shetland Writer 2008**Winner - Age 14-17 Years
Lucy Grundon*****Oblivion*
2050 - A Shetland Odyssey
Shetland in the Future**

She sat, slumped on the bathroom floor, dressed in a colourless hospital robe.

She disliked the hospital. Its expansive white rooms and polished floors seemed to stretch on for eternity. In a country that adhered to boundaries, the vastness terrified her. The air conditioning hummed from the walls too smoothly, and the doors slid open so efficiently she was immediately filled with distrust, yet another new emotion.

The plastic blade dug into her forearm. It was nothing more than a flimsy plastic knife, given with her insipid hospital lunch. Yet her determination compensated for the knife's weakness and its serrated edge finally pierced her skin. Scarlet trickled down her arm and splashed in blotches on the floor, which looked alarmingly vivid in the pallid room, but it barely registered. Her heart raced in anticipation, and the robe felt clammy against her skin as the enormity of what she was doing consumed her.

Of course, the feelings were still numbed. But not for much longer. Everything was within her grasp now.

She continued to dig resolutely with the knife, ignoring the electric pain streaking up her arm. Closing her eyes, she pushed, and a fresh gush of blood streamed down and pooled in the her hand, which she tightened into a fist as the plastic met something hard.

Attempting not to retch, she separated the skin surrounding the knife and peered into the wound to see a small metal disc, deeply embedded in the flesh. She carefully teased it out, trying desperately not to quiver with the exhilarating cocktail of adrenaline and acute pain.

She leant against the cool metal door, whimpering inadvertently, and examined the chip in her hand. Again she marvelled at something so tiny being able to have such a huge impact on the lives of millions. The idea had first been suggested in 2015, when Britain's crime reached such record highs that drastic action was proposed. After a lengthy struggle in the House of Commons, it was decided upon that the NHS install advanced technology microchips into every British citizen to reduce crime. It had worked. Britain was now, in 2050, a virtually felony-free country.

They anaesthetized the emotions and adrenaline lust, which meant crime reached stupendously low statistics, and recreational drugs were merely legend. Misconduct barely merited conversation these days. The cost of the installation of all of the microchips had been a strain, but as crime and hospitalisation were down, councils and the NHS needed much less money.

Suddenly the room shifted a little, and the light's hum seemed deafening. For a second her concentration focused solely on the sound, and a mist descended upon her vision, clouding the room behind a greyish film. Suddenly, as rapidly as she had been thrown into the trance, she was jolted back to reality, *real* reality, and the rawness of the of emotion she could feel overwhelmed her.

The artificial breeze felt cool against her cheek, and the glare of the light which bathed the room stunned her. The mirror shone immaculately, and the minimalist metal adorning the room positively glittered. Her blood spilling across white tiles contrasted viciously.

She'd had no idea blood was so red.

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She cleaned meticulously, and covered the wound with a small square of thick bandage she had filched from the blank-eyed nurse's trolley. Any injury was treated with severity. Forms had to be completed for so much as a grazed knee in case any damage was caused to the chip. The faceless powers were determined that its citizens would not be personified.

She was astounded by the energy she could see here, in the impersonal bathroom of the soulless hospital, and yearned to shout at other patients, encouraging everyone to remove their chips and join her in the ecstasy she felt. Yet this was ridiculous. The chips froze freewill, and the stares from the other patients would be impassive. Besides, the soul-crushing metal crumbs were *law*. She was a rare criminal, and she almost laughed at the thought, but stopped herself, fearing her audibleness.

She splashed water on her face, which was blotchy with tears and the scarred with mascara remnants. Her lips twitched back into their standard line, her eyes undertook their vacancy. She smoothed her robe, rechecked it for telltale blood and left. She walked with great concentration on not trembling. She avoided the empty stares following her, their eyes nothing more than cavities in their faces. For a moment, their state of oblivion seemed Utopian as concentrated feelings of dread and helplessness combined into a coarse concoction and lodged in her throat like vomit. She banished the thought, swallowed the metallic taste and clambered into her bed, tugging the curtain around her bed with as much mechanism as she could manage with her shaking hands.

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It was night time on the ward in Gilbert Bain Hospital.

She cradled her swollen stomach beneath the duvet. She felt the reassuring tapping of the baby's movement.

The lights were off, but a dirty orange glow filtered through her curtain from the streetlamps outside and shadowed the bed. The emergency button hovered temptingly. It would be so easy to relent and have a nurse attend immediately. A replacement microchip would be administered within minutes. She could return to the blissful state of void. She would not have to fight back tears when she held her baby. She would not have to pretend not to be the only one in the country with a soul over a chip, excluding the Government, but that had always been debatable.

She ground her teeth in frustration at her own fickleness. She had been incredibly lucky to have the chance of a malfunction, yet she was *willing* to return to a life where individuality was an impossibility. She embraced her stomach tighter. If not for herself, she had to give her baby the chance of freedom. The days of rights were over, but she had the opportunity to provide her child with a choice.

She lay in the eerie glow of the ward, which smelt strongly of bleach and latex as she whispered to her unborn, muttering mantras until the words became jumbled with sleepiness.

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She awoke before dawn, brimming with sensation.

She had *dreamt*. She had been chased through nightmares, which left her gown satisfyingly moist with sweat. She had ventured through unfamiliar places and met others. Though only wild fragments of her imagination, her solitude had evaporated. The sound of rain punctured her thoughts.

Rigid pain perforated her joints as she clambered maladroitly from the bed, reminding her yet again of her responsibility. The dreams had chosen for her. She refused to surrender her baby, which she suddenly felt unbridled maternal love for.

She glanced down the empty ward, and walked briskly past the other bodies who seemed to barely breathe in their identical poses, and caught the elevator to the ground floor. Inevitably, several nurses were meandering aimlessly. Two security guards stood stiffly by the doors, their faces set in usual vacuity. Logic seemed to have abandoned her for a frenzied moment, and she stood before the consequence.

Accusation filled the eyes of the nurses as they caught sight of her and began to drift towards her, their footsteps hastening as she frantically wiped the sweat from her sticky fringe and tried to compose her expression.

Questions attacked her as she milled around her, scrupulously eyeing her to try and determine whether they were truly witnessing a malfunction. She had never before realised how programmed their voices sounded. She felt like a bin liner being shredded by gulls.

That's when he appeared. His hooded eyes glinted malevolently as he flashed a sardonic smile of fractured teeth. He wore a crisp overcoat and tapped his nails patiently on the trolley as it wheeled towards her. A robotic nurse accompanied him, glaring condemningly.

He did not have a chip. He was a Government doctor, a mandatory part of a hospital in case of chance emergencies. On the trolley lay a dish with gleaming medical instruments and a metal speck which glittered in the fluorescent lighting. She struggled frantically and found herself shouting as she was pinned by scrabbling nurses.

Empowered by resolve, she wriggled free and sprinted for the doors. The zombie throng halted to watch the ballooned woman crash through the doors, which shattered into thousands of diamond shards.

She felt the wind rush against her skin, and could feel the glass piercing her flesh. Blood gushed down her face and hands and she balled her fists, feeling the splinters dig in. The pain felt good, it felt *real*. It served as a reminder of her newfound power.

Laughing through tears and the icy rain that drenched her, she continued to run as her heart thundered and the baby kicked persistently. The vanished, leaving behind her only the splinters of something that should have been broken long before and her resounding laughter.