



**'Nursing Homes'**

**By Amaal Fawzi, Senior Runner-up aged 17 from UK**

No one thinks about the souls  
Wandering around the halls  
Of nursing homes.

Two hands, shrivelled with age:  
One clasping my alien-blue scrubs,  
The other pressed against the poisoned glass  
Of a bedroom window,  
Tainted with mist from breath whispering,  
'This is a safe space between us -'  
A smile, crumbling to dust,  
When every ten seconds I must ask  
Somebody's grandma  
To say 'I love you' through a face mask -  
My pupils, those tiny swirly spirals  
On a loading computer screen  
As a I stare and stare  
Through a little black fan  
Of lines  
Stamped on blank little irises,  
Waving hello and goodbye to pixels  
Calling themselves people.

No one hears about the souls  
Stumbling through the halls  
Of nursing homes.

I get home and peel off layers of plastic  
That feel more solid than skin.  
I wake up, go to work, do it all again.  
My friends say I'm brave.  
*"So brave for going in there every day  
And living by yourself.  
Never seeing anyone,  
Always there to help."*  
I'm not brave.  
I'm just a person trying to keep other people sane.

One old man asks me my name  
As I come in with his usual breakfast on a sanitised disposable tray.  
I've known him for a year  
But I tell him anyway.  
He smiles at me. Says he wishes he could see my face.  
I steel myself till I'm safe within my one-bedroom-fully-furnished cage.  
Till it's too late at night to keep it all at bay.

No one cares about the souls  
Floating around the halls  
Of nursing homes.

Some of them don't even have a contact to dial into the phone.  
They sit on their favourite armchair or bench  
In a silence that makes me hesitate before I break it  
With a suggestion of playing cards or tea.

My limbs have become polished, whitewashed cave walls.  
You could drop a stone down my throat  
And feel the echo reverberate in my bones.

But I'm still here.

With the wilted hands and the constant fear.

*No one knows about the souls*

*Drowning in the halls*

*Of nursing homes.*