

“

Our lives were always full of action, we never slowed down,  
Until everything halted when Corona came to town ...

”

Wyndham City Libraries and Western Union Writers' *Imagination Creation* returns to showcase the young writing talent of Wyndham and wider regions over the past year.

This is a collection of the best entries in poetry and short fiction in three age categories from under 10 years up to 18 years.



imagination creation stories and poems 2021

imagination  
creation 

IMAGINATION CREATION WRITING COMPETITION  
POEMS & STORIES 2021

Wyndham City Libraries & Western Union Writers

wyndhamcity

imagination  
creation 

IMAGINATION CREATION WRITING COMPETITION

POEMS & STORIES  
—— 2021 ——

presented by:

Wyndham City Libraries

Western Union Writers

wyndhamcity

Imagination Creation, 2021  
Compiled by Angela Middleton  
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This anthology is a collection of the prize-winning  
submissions to the Wyndham City Libraries / Western Union  
Writers' Imagination Creation Writing Competition 2021.  
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## AWARDS

### Age 15-18 Poetry

First Prize: (Portrait)	Skye Carlisle
Second Prize: (If Only ...)	Ananya Nair
Highly Commended: (Everything Beyond Our Reach)	Rashini Weragalage
Highly Commended: (Success)	Damya Wijesekera

### Age 15-18 Story

First Prize: (Geode)	Shreya Tekumalla
Second Prize: (Careful What You Wish For)	Isabella Tozer
Highly Commended: (From Behind the Till)	Ruby Pensalfini-Brown
Highly Commended: (My Friend Youth)	Syazwana Saifudin

### Age 11-14 Poetry

First Prize: (Beauty)	Syazwani Saifudin
Second Prize: (Oh Dandelion)	Scarlett Chan
Highly Commended: (2019 in 2021)	Kareena Ghosh
Commended: (Betrayal)	Syazwani Saifudin

## AWARDS

### Age 11-14 Story

First Prize: (Circles)	Syazwani Saifudin
Second Prize: (Tsunami)	Avani Malali
Highly Commended: (The Tale of My Detention)	Muhammad Abdul Latif
Highly Commended: (Good as a White Man)	Juliette Agborchi
Highly Commended: (Green and Gold; Curry Leaf and Turmeric)	Sridivya Tekumalla

### Age 10 and Under Poetry

First Prize: (The Grace of Night)	Grace Guo
Second Prize: (I am a Girl from World War II)	Shraavani Ellinavaalu
Highly Commended: (Dumb Broccoli)	Dhavanesh Sriram Venkatesh
Highly Commended: (World War III)	Ryan Yang
Commended: (Two Knights who had a Fight)	Lucia Liao-Everett

### Age 10 and Under Story

First Prize: (Flight to Planet Zana)	Muhammad Rayan Sohail
Second Prize: (The Farm)	Aarna Choudary

Highly Commended: Krithik Eswar Prabu  
(The Elves)

Highly Commended: Catherine Yan  
(The Narrow Escape)

Margaret Campbell Award  
Grace Guo

Sherryl Clark Award  
Winner: Shreya Tekumalla  
Highly Commended: Krithik Eswar Prabu

Wyndham Local Award  
Shreya Tekumalla

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### Shortlisted Entries 2021

Age 15-18 Poetry  
Alexander Dalton (Life)  
Rachael Hamilton (The Urge to Spring Away)

Age 15-18 Story  
Shayna Fleiser (Sexism and the City)  
Syazwana Saifudin (You Were Everything I Ever Wanted)

Age 11-14 Poetry  
Syazwani Saifudin (Double Pandemic)  
Archana Karthik (The Piano and Me)

## AWARDS

### Shortlisted Entries 2021

#### Age 11-14 Story

Vishesh Manik (Space Hunters)  
Areeb Daiyan Rayann (Pure Luck)  
Tessa Manoj Jacob (The Secret of Baxtown)  
Syazwani Saifudin (This Planet)  
Charlie Pinard (An Allegory for Climate Change)

#### Age 10 and Under Poetry

Indu Tummalakunta (Monsters)  
Vinudi Bogahapitiya (Heroes)

#### Age 10 and Under Poetry

Aishwarya Yarravajhala (Seasons)  
Taksh Tamboli (Life in a Desert)

#### Age 10 and Under Story

Angad Parmar (In the Middle of the Night)  
Stella Eiszele (Grand Final Day)

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## PORTRAIT

## Skye Carlisle

He found happiness in the strokes of acrylic,  
The way the colours caught his eye,  
A piercing feeling of peace in the paint.

But that brush turned into a pencil, a pen,  
Then happiness now cost him time.  
He now stroked words rather than pictures,  
And documented things he didn't understand,  
Or things he just didn't want to know.

His canvases turned into paper; exams,  
The life containing paint tubes dried out,  
But that black and blue ink was never ending.  
Discouraged by his peers, his parents,  
That paint never paid.

So he stuck to those papers,  
He used only a pen,  
And since the time he had lost his brush,  
The only portraits he had painted,  
Were those on his resumes and reports,  
To paint a life in black and white print,  
A life that stole his colours.

His paints continued to dry in their case,  
The bristles of his joy had frayed apart.

Life was no longer his canvas,  
And meaningless books took up his nights,  
Only to suffer headaches in the day,  
Just to sit in an examination room,  
That gave him a number,  
To paint a dull, new portrait of himself.

## IF ONLY ...

Ananya Nair

(a poem about fitting in)

Life is a funny game, my mother told me  
 Play to your strengths, and be true to yourself,  
 she'd said.  
 Little did I know my naiveness,  
 Little did I know my obliviousness.  
 'Never forget who you are' – the all-time classic.  
 But do you not know dear mother?  
 How They ask me why I do not fly with the others,  
 why I do not soar,  
 I tell them I do not know what they're talking about,  
 If only such a lie was true,  
 If only it was as simple as an answer,  
 If only I was pale-skinned and blonde-haired,  
 If only I was enraptured in the presence of a boy,  
 If only I was pretty, thick lashes, doused with  
 drugstore mascara daily.  
 If only I was committed, eating only what's needed.  
 If only I understood, beauty is pain, beauty is  
 acceptance and acceptance is everything.  
 If only I knew, I can never change.  
 If only I knew, how to suppress my thoughts, how to  
 speak when spoken to.  
 If only society was so easy, so bearable, so  
 maternal in its creed.  
 If only my hair would sit straight, falling in a  
 monumental, goddess-like, supremely feminine way.

If only my lips would be ever glossed by the Revlon  
 gloss they all wear,  
 If only I could have changed sooner,  
 If only I could have understood,  
 If only I could have done something.  
 Dear mother, life is not funny, not for me.  
 Life is tedious, it is a book with empty pages,  
 It is a hair straightener worn out from the  
 intensity of its use.  
 It is a bottle of perfume, leaking slowly, bleeding  
 out that sweet, strong, ubiquitous fragrance I can't  
 seem to escape.  
 It is a seventh grade crush, someone who you swore  
 was your first love, but now, you don't really  
 remember their face.  
 It is a faltering bow, the same one you put in your  
 hair, because that's what everyone else does.  
 Oh dear mother how could you not have known?  
 How can I be myself?  
 How can I stay true to my tenet?  
 How dear mother, how?  
 Tell me, is it an exam, something I can study for?  
 Is it a dress, something I buy and slip on?  
 Is it a craving, where I restrict myself?  
 Tell me, oh tell me my dear mother how can I be  
 myself?  
 Because if you want to know the plain truth  
 I do not know who I am dear mother.  
 I can't see past the faltering bow, the ponytail,  
 the glossed lips and slightly touched mascara  
 dominant eyelashes.  
 I can't dig for the person I want to be.

Life is no game mother.  
 I have seen.  
 Life is a chase, dear mother.  
 You of all people know.  
 A mother's love is raw they say,  
 Then tell me why did you shield me?  
 Why did you pretend?  
 Why did you be someone you are not?  
 Why did you gloss your lips, straighten your hair,  
 and apply mascara?  
 Why did you dye your hair?  
 It's okay dear mother.  
 I suppose it simply runs in our family.  
 A tale of tragic loss, the loss of identity.  
 If only we had known.

## EVERYTHING BEYOND OUR REACH

Rashini Weragalage

We played hopscotch  
 and I fantasised about being a princess,  
 Building a diamond castle and riding Pegasus.  
 Dancing in the soft rain I dreamed of faraway lands  
 that I knew existed.

Skip five years with scraped knees, toothless grins  
 and participation awards, the magic and fun started  
 to disappear.  
 No potion existed for revelations and I now wanted  
 to be a teacher,  
 Probably one that shrank school buses  
 or maybe the ones that carried around wands,  
 Still in a land a little way away but I was sure  
 I'd reach one day.

Blossoming season called for a crowd dressed to the  
 nines,  
 All wicked behind masks,  
 Gossipers at best,  
 Fools that settled for mortality,  
 The one that called every eighty years or so.  
 Outrageously mundane I thought I'd be a doctor next,  
 Ever the sensible decision we cannot give Miss  
 Socialite a reason to think indifferently of me.  
 For the places I conjured in episodes of maladaptive  
 daydreams



would label me freak,  
a clown without a circus.

Then came the falling.  
A rebellion in every manner I waved their flag of  
disappointment,  
Bid good riddance to dreams and goals and ambitions,  
they were a weight I did not believe was mine.  
Happiness was the only desire now for I could not put  
into words I was barely holding on.  
A lifeline was needed,  
I was rewarded with darkness.  
Never forgiveness.

As he once said,  
"Nothing in this world weighs heavier than an empty  
heart."  
Flouting in the clouds I begged for that place to  
exist.

## SUCCESS

Damya Wijesekera

The journey to success is a self-perpetuating cycle,  
*(repeat, repeat, repeat)*  
Guided by dreams that don't belong to you  
And numbing the ones that do belong;  
Followed by a more colourful past,  
That fades fast in old photographs (and faster  
still in memory.)  
But why would you look back at who you once were,  
when the person you will become stands in front of  
you?  
*(close, but somehow unattainable, like a reflection  
in a mirror)*

The feeling that though you're awake, something in  
front of your eyes has closed:  
*(repeat, repeat, repent)*  
Drawn away from the beauty of the mundane:  
First thinking of yourself, but through the desires  
of others.  
Having to confine yourself to the present,  
Because the colours of the future are only brighter  
(and not softer, gentler)

Being doubtful of where the wish ends and the work  
begins,  
The vagueness of where you are going, or why,  
Mixed with the sureness that you must get there.

*(repeat, repent, repent)*

Uncertain if you carry the world or if the world  
carries you ...

Knowing one corner of your mind inside out;  
Like living on a single planet without seeing the  
entire galaxy.  
Climbing a mountainous spire of work,  
Only to impale yourself on its pinnacle:  
Every 'grand' peak is just another fluctuation in a  
greater scheme you might never see,  
So that you rise only to fall;

*(Trying to forget that the reality never matches the  
dream.)*

Success is a self-perpetuating cycle.  
*(repent ... repent ... repent ...)*

## GEODE

Shreya Tekumalla

I made my mother a promise that I would never kill  
myself and it's been easy enough to keep it. After  
all, it felt like I had already been dead for years.

The only thing that's missing is decay. Theoret-  
ically, after your consciousness joins oblivion, your  
body is allowed to decompose, dissolve in an explosion  
of atoms, return to the stars from which you were  
forged. Whenever I looked up at the night sky, I  
couldn't help but wonder what that would feel like.

Instead, my body had remained suspended within  
the resin of memory and hypothesis, cryogenically  
preserved by the hopes of those who love me. I had  
only ever existed in people's minds, including my own.

Lately, that's been changing. Quickly. And I've  
never been more afraid of anything in my life.

Just beneath the surface of my skin, he stirs  
impatiently. Tossing, turning, shifting. He used to  
be a quiet presence, lurking in the farthest recesses  
of my subconsciousness and only presenting himself  
through whispers or a ghost of a touch underneath my  
clothing. I used to only see him for fractions of  
a second, silhouetted against the curve of my body  
whenever I put on a dress. His appearances were so  
fleeting – so inconsequential – that I couldn't even  
recognise him. But now he won't rest anymore. He's

been writhing against the bedrock of my surface for so many years that the tectonic plates patterning my skin have ground themselves into dust. I am numb.

His incorporeal presence filters my reality – in other words: he’s inescapable. Everywhere. In the rearview mirror, in the sliding glass door, in the eyes of the people I pass by on the street. I can see him right now, in my reflection in the bathroom mirror, but he’s taunting me, hiding himself beneath swathes of soft skin and delicate features. I’ve been trying to coax him out for eighteen years, begging him to finally burst forth and let me decay, but it’s not often that he indulges me.

I lift my arm above my head and watch the domino effect ripple through my entire body – muscles fluttering and tensing all throughout my torso and neck. My arm naturally follows the through with the movement and I grab the collar of my shirt that rests between my shoulder-blades. With one firm tug, the fabric slides over my head.

Goosebumps patten the skin suddenly exposed to the cool air but they’ve settled by the time I’ve tossed my shirt in the hamper next to the sink. When I turn back around to face the mirror, my eyes involuntarily close for a brief moment but I force them open again and survey all the new skin that’s now exposed. I breathe in deeply and, on the exhale, I allow my shoulders to unfurl.

After all my mental efforts to banish him, and then all the time I’ve invested begging him to come forward,

I’ve finally taken the battle into the physical arena. I’ve spent a lot of tears, not only my own, trying to cultivate my surface to make it as hospitable for him as possible. My hair cropped close to my scalp, my carefully mussed eyebrows, fingernails trimmed as far as I can go. I’ve sculpted my form with a science that I can’t explain, pitifully clinging onto the hope that if I feel like him, maybe he’ll finally be convinced to stay.

A hum of satisfaction climbs its way into my throat as I inspect the other hard-earned fruits of my labour: the small amount of definition I’ve worked into my arms and the cords of my sinew that sit more pronounced in my neck. If I’m being entirely honest with myself, there’s probably no tangible difference. It could just be the light or wishful thinking on my part but, in this moment, I’m willing myself to swallow those doubts. For his sake, and equally mine, I need to celebrate every single victory I can manage.

I wait for a moment, but it becomes abundantly clear to me that he’s no longer impressed. I grimace when I notice the roundness of my face thrown into sharp relief by the harsh bathroom light. I can feel him withdraw into himself farther from the surface. Fine. Okay. Time to dance.

I crane my neck to the side and watch my reflection do the same. The plane of my face turns harder, more angular, and I feel something warm glow in my chest. A warm spot, a river of magma running down my sternum into the pit of my stomach.

I try knitting my eyebrows together. Raising one of them. Clenching my jaw. Nothing changes. My body lies dormant underneath the cool kiss of the bathroom sink against my fingertips.

Frowning, I gaze at the reflection with something close to revulsion. Or is it pity? Disappointment? I can barely tell the difference anymore.

As the expressions flicker through my eyes, the geography of my face twists, shatters and repairs itself again. Canyons and valleys appear, the soft land of my skin cracks and caves to make way for chasms. The flat, unmarred plains between my eyebrows give way to a hard line and suddenly, as if splintering out from within the crack, he bursts forth.

A shockwave starts at the epicentre of my heart and radiates outwards. Every square inch of my skin is awash with flames. The barren land roars, burns, incinerates. Slowly. Agonisingly. As the heat licks over my body, whatever's left behind smolders and collapses into ashes to give way to cool, soft earth.

I trail my hand up my own arm, running calloused fingertips over my skin with quiet reverence.

Nothing has changed, I've traded skin for skin. But every cell in my body sings. The contrast rings clear in the way my blood has crystallised in my veins, becoming beautiful. Full of wonder and vitality. He inhales deeply and my lungs respond to him with pleasure, like it was only created to provide him with the gift of oxygen.

Every resounding heartbeat is a celebration of being alive.

I look back in the mirror with amazement but within seconds, I see him retreat. Helplessly, I can only stare as he camouflages himself beneath round, rosy cheeks and delicate smile lines.

Immediately, shivers crawl up and down my spine before my skin contracts and stiffens painfully. I feel my own body begin to calcify again.

No.

I frown again. I desperately tug the corners of my mouth downwards. I furrow my eyebrows. The small kernel of logic remaining in my brain telegrams that I look ridiculous but I am long past the point of caring. I just need him back, please. Please.

Nothing.

My lungs spasm as I choke down a sob and I slap a hand against the bathroom mirror. A veil of water shrouds the slick surface of the mirror and, behind it, I see a reflection swimming in the glass. I don't know who it is this time.

I take a deep, shuddering breath and the oxygen pilfers its way through my system. It echoes around the empty crater of my chest and rebounds off the wall of my lungs, which are now frozen in place.

Close my eyes. Okay. Breathe in. Breathe out. In. Out. In. Out.

When I'm prepared to face my reflection again, the first thing I'm struck by is how vacant my gaze is. For a beat, I stare into my own eyes but, at every turn, I'm met with resistance. The deep well of shifting and glowing magma has solidified and returned to its slumber.

I tilt my head to the side and watch the muscles in my neck flex in response. My eye instinctively measures the distance between my head and my shoulder. The distance is too small. My torso is too short. My chest is too big. This land is dead. Infertile. Lifeless. Suffocating. The longer I look, the more it hurts, but I just can't tear my gaze away. He's not here anymore.

After another long second, I manage extricate myself from the mirror's grasp and turn around to finally get dressed for the day. I can only afford to give myself a few minutes to mourn because the world is going to keep on spinning. I'm going to continue on and spend the rest of my day stitching myself back together, piece by piece, after I was ripped to shreds in front of the mirror. I'm going to feel the ache in those seams whenever I see his shadow out of the corner in my eye, or every time my voice meets my own eardrums.

Slowly, I'm going to let gravity pull me back together and watch everything fall apart again the next time I can't resist trying to incite another seismic event. This dance of unison and enmity has become my new normal. I can't escape him and, I can't

get him to stay and, even worse, I can't decide which option is the most painful.

I can't even decide if it would have been easier for me if I had never woken up at all. I doubt I'm ever going to be able to answer that question. Existing in crystallised time, I've come to realise that both my past and my future stretch endlessly, far out of sight, weaving into each other so intricately that it's impossible to untangle them. It would be a futile exercise anyway and not for lack of trying. Instead, I've learnt that the only state of reality that can feasibly co-exist with my non-being is the present. So, I've established that as my territory and I reign over it.

I've built my kingdom on the foundation of my consciousness, the lucidity that takes the forms of fleeting moments. Gifts granted in splinters of realisation. Sparks stolen in low-light, in bathroom mirrors, in glances from strangers. Peeled from my skin. Foraged for from the depths of this body I call my home. I savour everything I feel in order to remind myself that I deserve to be alive.

## CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

Isabella Tozer

On a typical school morning in my younger years as a boy I was asked the common schoolyard question, "if you could have one wish what would it be?" Thinking I had found a loophole, I replied, "Infinite wishes." I remember the unsatisfied look of the girl who had asked, her insightful eyes looking me up and down, and if only I had responded differently my entire life may not have unfolded as it did.

It was a fortnight after I'd unwittingly answered the girl's question, that remarkable yet unexplainable things began happening. For instance my mum had taken my PlayStation away in an effort to bribe me into hanging the laundry, and as I reached my backyard with a tub full of soaked clothes, out of aggravation I said aloud, "I wish the laundry was hung, dried and folded by itself!" In the blink of an eye, the once soaking laundry was neatly stacked in the tub as dry as a desert plain. Wishes continued coming true for weeks, and I had come to the conclusion that my wishes would be infinite just like I had said to the girl.

From then on I decided I was going to get whatever I wanted in life, and that was exactly what happened. I got everything I ever desired with minimal effort, I aced every test without opening a textbook, I influenced people to like me whether or not I liked them myself, I always had the trendiest and most

high fashion clothes, I hadn't worked a day in my life but I had more money than I could ever spend. Travel eventually seemed dull as my wishes granted me access to be anywhere I wanted to go. I had done it all before I was thirty, just by starting a sentence with, '*I wish*'.

One promising year I decided I would attend a family gathering for the first time in a while. My parents and sisters were overjoyed to see me despite my long absence from their lives. All of a sudden, I felt loved again. While I'd wished this for myself from countless others, nothing compared to the sense of belonging I got from my family.

My youngest sister had three kids of her own now. Her eleven-year-old son reminded me a lot of myself at his age. It was when he approached me to ask, "Uncle, if you could have one wish what would it be?" that my eyes opened wider than I thought humanly possible. In that instance I realised I'd spent the first thirty years of my life running around like a spoiled kid, abusing my wishes instead of noticing the good they could have done from the moment I answered that girl's question so many years ago. My nephew helped me realise this.

In response to his question after taking a long sigh, I told him my final wish, I said, "If I could have just one wish, I wish my wishes were yours, and that you will do better with them than I did."

He looked at me startled, and slowly turned towards his mum and said, "I wish there was a cure for your cancer mum." My sister looked at her son and

wept. Our attention was then suddenly drawn to the TV. In breaking news, an oncologist was reporting the remarkable life-saving discovery of the cure for cancer, and I knew in that moment that I had done the single best thing I could have ever done with a wish.

## FROM BEHIND THE TILL

Ruby Pensalfini-Brown

Thirty-one years. Maybe thirty-two. That is how long I have spent here behind the till, scanning tinned cat food and serving mediocre potato cakes to school children. It wasn't exactly the life I had planned but owning this corner shop has shown me things that fixing potholes and disfigured street signs certainly wouldn't. My two older brothers followed in my father's footsteps and became tradesmen. I'm sure my father would've expected the same career choice from me, but I simply had no interest.

\*

It wasn't a particularly busy day for the shop. Sundays often aren't. The occasional mother would enter to purchase boxes of pasta, maybe some tinned goods, but I typically spent my Sundays perched on a stool in the stockroom, eyes fixated on the television.

Eight minutes before closing time, the store's bells melodically chimed, indicating a customer's entrance. A young girl of about ten-years-old shuffled directly toward the counter. The younger ones most often do this, for below where I stand holds the rack of sweet treats. Lollies, chocolates and small bags of crisps, more appealing than cleaning supplies and bags of rice, I am sure.

The girl held up one singular chocolate bar, examined it, and then placed it on the counter before me. She then made her way back in the direction of the store's

door, taking a right towards the large fridges, home to the chilled beverages. The young girl stood there, eyes darting back and forth, up and down, until she was satisfied with her selection. She opened the fridge delicately, took out a bottle of apple juice and placed that alongside the previously selected Mars Bar.

"Good choice," I said, as the young girl fumbled through her velvet coin purse.

"The Mars Bar?"

I chuckled.

"It's my favourite," the young girl shyly announced.

"Mine as well," I responded.

I scanned the items, she paid the required six dollars and twenty cents and then, she left.

\*

The following week, the same young girl entered the shop. This time, she presented me with the weekly Sunday paper. She had selected this issue from the racks that frame the shop's doors.

"Fan of the paper, are you?" I asked her, smiling down as she scanned the bolded headline.

"It's not for me," she responded. "My mother's brother is visiting home today. He enjoys cross-words. Sometimes the sudokus. My family often read the news online, so we never have spare newspapers lying around for him to use."

I nodded, indicating my understanding.

"You live nearby then?" I asked.

"Just around the corner. We only just moved to the area, actually."

"That explains why I didn't recognise your face when you first visited."

"I'm sure this won't be the last time you'll see me!" the young girl assured me.

And then she paid.

And then she left.

\*

One day, I noticed the same young girl entering the shop, although this time, she wasn't searching for a sweet treat to spend her week's pocket money on, nor was she presenting me with another newspaper to purchase for her visiting uncle. She was darting with direction towards the baking ingredients aisle, the aisle that is most often swarmed with old women and young parents, the night before their children's school bake sales.

"What are you after over there?" I called out from behind the till, hoping to help my friend out.

"Flour. And sugar. Mum is making brownies for us tonight."

Almost immediately after her response, the young girl located the items she was searching for, a look of satisfaction, almost excitement, on her face.

It was at this moment that another customer entered the store.

I usually enjoy greeting my customers with a "Welcome!" or an "Are you after anything in particular today?" But I knew that this man, dressed in a dark grey hood that concealed his face, hands sleeping deeply in his trouser pockets, was not expecting nor wanting a warm welcome.

His stealthy stride, the way he seemed to have planned each fragile step he took, lead him directly to the aisle that was home to the brownie ingredients. The same aisle as the young girl was



still wandering amongst.

I knew what was coming. And I could have stopped it, as well. Or at least done something to make what I was about to see less horrific than it most definitely was.

Within a few seconds, the mysterious man swiftly withdrew the knife he had been veiling deep down in his pockets, plunged it into the girls back with strong force and watched her cry in agony and collapse to the floor. It happened within a matter of seconds, but it also seemed as though the young girl's fall to the floor took an eternity, that this brutal bloodshed was a slow-motion rewind, the kind you see in action movies.

The man did not linger. He showed no remorse. He immediately fled the scene, meeting my eyes for one brief, chilling moment.

\*

I was paralysed. Unable to even slightly shift my weight from my scared stance that took place behind the till. The young girl was slumped over herself, her expressionless face pressed against the cold, hard flooring. I didn't want to believe it, but my friend had been killed.

\*

The shop was empty for weeks. No customers were showing. Pedestrians and passersby were ensuring that they crossed the street, so as to not walk past the location of the horrific homicide. My business was perishing.

\*

It happened as I was locking up the shop in preparation to return to my home. In the past, my most

anticipated hours were those spent serving customers. But succeeding the event that occurred in the aisle I had regularly ambled, I preferred the time spent inside my house.

As I was fumbling for my keys, desperate to farewell my shop after another unsuccessful day, an elderly woman hobbled seemingly toward myself and my now closed corner shop.

This woman didn't speak a word, let alone meet my eyes, as she was coming closer still in my direction.

Clutched caringly within her pale, frail hands was a bouquet of lilies. She held them out at arm's length. I leaned over to breathe in the fresh scent before she withdrew the white flowers from my reach and placed them gently on the ground, alongside the rack of newspapers the young girl had once skimmed through.

I smiled up at this old woman, giving her my thanks. She nodded, turned toward the direction from which she emerged, and hobbled away.

\*

Following the days of idleness that occurred in my shop, I began to notice that the bouquet of lilies was becoming accompanied by more arrangements of beautiful flowers. Roses, orchids and carnations, surrounding the store's entrance.

\*

It had been three weeks since my young friend's life was taken in my little, old corner shop. Three weeks of no business. Three weeks of pacing up and down the aisles, wandering aimlessly throughout the store, searching for a task to undertake, something to keep me occupied. I couldn't keep mopping the floors. They

were almost too clean. The stock that was arriving was becoming terribly excessive. I was losing hope.

\*

I was preparing to close early after yet another unsuccessful day when I heard the familiar chiming of the bells, alerting me of a customer's entrance. My first customers since the incident. It seemed to me as though they might have stumbled into the wrong shop, or perhaps had no awareness of the widespread news of what had happened in Tom's Corner Shop. Nonetheless, I saw a mother and son, cautiously entering the shop, the mother glancing around fearfully, clutching on ever so tightly to her son's hand.

The son pointed towards the front counter; this action followed by a reluctant nod from his mother. The son then traced his fingers along the shelves below the front counter. The shelves that hold the sweet treats and snacks. The same shelves my friend used to carefully examine.

"Just the Mars Bar, please," the son said, placing down the same chocolate bar my dear friend once had.

## MY FRIEND YOUTH

Syazwana Saifudin

I remember how naïve we were back then. In the dreamlike days of my childhood, I was completely and utterly infatuated with your presence. Even now, after twenty-nine long years of growing up, the mere thought of you still brings me back to the wistful days of summer break in the Japanese countryside. After all this time, I can still vividly recall the exhilarating feeling of running through the seemingly endless maze of sunflower fields, relishing the gentle breaths of wind that brushed past my eyes and ears.

When the afternoon sun began setting towards the horizon, the canvas of brilliant blue and white was painted over to reveal vibrant hues of pinks and purples that resembled those of an orchid. Worn out from the adventures of the day, we lay side by side on the veranda to listen to mother nature fall asleep. When the sun's light finally disappeared into the trees and white sparkling glitter appeared in the sky, it felt as though time had stopped and the world became silent. Only the ensemble of cicadas could be heard playing the background music of summer. The leaves of the giant camphor tree danced harmoniously in the evening wind and in that moment, we immersed ourselves in the beautiful tranquility of the earth. Eyes closed, uttering no words. Letting the songs of the cicadas speak for us.

On days when the repetitive cycle of work and home became too mundane to bear, I found myself

reminiscing back to a more pleasant time in life. It was a time where I lived with a strong optimism that tomorrow would always be just as good, or even better than yesterday. I looked forward to enjoying the beauty of life with you, wanting to make as many memories as possible, in the little time we had. I remember the long days and short nights of summer when it was only just the two of us. Spending hours immersed in our made-up world of endless sunshine and blue skies. Every day was a new journey that I would take on fearlessly with you by my side.

We would scavenge our way through overgrown knotweed bushes to reach the hidden pond near the old, abandoned temple. Squatting for what seemed like hours, we would squint our eyes to see into the murky water with hopes of spotting fish that glistened like jewels in the sun. "There!" I would scream in excitement, pointing my stubby fingers to the small koi fish wriggling fluidly amongst the algae. I would urgently tap your shoulder, wanting you to witness the bizarre sight. Unfortunately, by the time you turned your head, the fish had already swum away, and I was left arguing with you about the trivial matter of whether or not I had actually seen a fish.

When the sun had just woken up from its sleep below the horizon, and the crisp scent of morning dew still lingered in the air, we would walk through the vast extent of the broadleaf forest. In the thick canopy of foliage above, golden rays of sunlight peeked through, giving the area a strange, other-worldly glow. The melodic chirps of the woodpeckers and Lidth's jays serenaded us as we walked on the dirt path scattered with a plethora of sticks, stones,

and ferns. We trudged aimlessly through the infinite expanse of flora and fauna until our legs could not carry us any further. Not once did we get lost in the maze of the forest. You knew the paths amongst the trees, like the lines at the palms of your hands.

Under the burning gaze of the summer sun, we played together, climbing the tallest trees, and racing through the long and narrow patches of grass across the rice paddies. We ran as far as our feet could take us, battling against the strong resistance of the wind. It was a time when we were truly free from the restraints of reality, rejoicing barefoot through the fields of grass without a single care in the world. The sound of our laughs and screams of joy were carried by a gentle breeze through the countryside, echoing silently through the evergreen forest.

All of the dear memories I had of my adolescent years were spent with you. Such kids we were. Blinded from the worries and woes of the world with our silent giggles in makeshift pillow forts and hushed whispers in the night.

I remember how I had foolishly wished that life would always be that way. I never wanted to grow up because growing up meant losing you. You, who could see the vivid beauty of the world for what it was. Everything around me had seemed so blindingly bright and beautiful when you were around. We were always happy together and that was all that mattered. It had never occurred to me that the ugliness of the harsh reality had been concealed by our childlike innocence. Maybe I was too dependent on the hope you gave me. A hope that life on earth was not as bad

as everyone made it out to be. I desperately wanted to believe that there were beautiful things in this world. Without the familiar sight of your comforting smile and the infectious sound of your vibrant laugh, it became quite difficult. Just why did you leave me?

After your absence, time went by very quickly. At first, it was all too fast for me to handle. I was growing up and my milestone birthdays of sixteen, eighteen, twenty-one, and thirty passed by in the blink of an eye. Unlike the memories I had of my childhood, adulthood held no significant importance to me. My late teen years were spent in school and the haven of my room, worrying about grades, fulfilling expectations, money, university admissions, and future career paths.

My twenties were dull, uneventful, and unexciting. I made the mistake of choosing to study film for no specific reason and made no effort in making friends at university or work. I sat alone in my lectures, ate alone in the dining hall, and slept alone in my dorm room. Instead of studying, I spent the majority of my time working a part-time job at a small bookstore. I engrossed myself in the stories of meaningful classics including *Peter Pan*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Little Women*, in an attempt to distract myself from my own miserable reality. The flame that had once burned with a bright and burning passion had begun to dim, threatening to go out completely.

I went back and forth each day, merely existing with a steady momentum like the balls on a Newton's cradle. The cycle was endless; wake up, go to work,

go back home, sleep and repeat. At this point, I was desperate for something to happen. Anything that would give my very being some sort of importance or significant meaning.

Staring at the black computer screen in front of me, I shifted uncomfortably on the rigid mesh fabric chair. I began gnawing at the worn nail of my left thumb with great concentration in an attempt to distract myself from the claustrophobia settling in from the cramped office cubicle walls.

My degree in film was not much help when looking for a substantial and stable job that paid the bills. I had only chosen to take the degree because it was the only thing that seemed remotely appealing to my stupid eighteen-year-old self. I had no intention of becoming a filmmaker of any sort; all the lights, camera, and action stuff had confused me a great deal. My four years spent at university studying the art of moving cameras turned to have not much of use in the real world.

After months of applying for random positions that varied from cargo delivery assistant to cleaner at a strip-club, I finally managed to land a decent office job at a publishing company. The work was tolerable but draining and involved me sitting in front of a screen for eight hours a day, editing nonsensical articles and tabloid trash.

Thoughts of bills that had to be paid, an empty fridge, overdue rent, favors that had to be fulfilled, birthday gifts, and overdue apologies, circulated in my mind. I haphazardly reached out to down my

second cup of black coffee, in hopes to wipe my mind blank. Growing up, I had always hated the taste of black coffee, but now at the not-so-tender age of thirty-five, I had grown accustomed to the bitter things in life.

While overhearing the monotonous conversations and gossip around me about disliked employees including myself, the corrupt boss, unhappy marriages, unfaithful partners, deadlines, and news that I could not care less about, it led me to think about the conversations we used to have. We would argue passionately about magical forest entities, fairies, hidden treasures, and other make-believe nonsense.

The adult chit chat had now faded into the background and I had gotten absorbed into the unconventional conspiracies conjured up by my eight-year-old self. I started thinking about the existence of mythical creatures, supernatural beings, and Japanese spirits. It was then that I came across a revelation that never seemed to cross my mind before. I realized that you were not a specific time in my life. You were simply a state of mind.

That night I lay idly still in my bed, burying myself under the thin covers. The heavy silence of the apartment settled uneasily in the air, making me feel uncomfortably alone in my own thoughts. The silence wrapped its weight around my neck and my breathing stalled momentarily. A faint yellow light from the streetlamp outside shone through the linen blinds, piercing through the pitch black. I stared up at the popcorn ceiling, tracing the fuzzy silhouettes of the bumpy paint with my eyes. Thinking about

the past had become a bad habit of mine after I found that I could not sleep in the bleak darkness of this room. The vague revelation I had earlier made its way came back to me and complicated thoughts of you lingered in the hollow of my brain.

After thinking long and hard, I had finally managed to bring my thoughts to a solid conclusion. To see the beauty of the world through the lens of wonder, curiosity, and a yearning to experience, was a vision that anyone could possess. It did not matter if you were a child of five or an old man of seventy. Youth was not the rosy cheeks, pristine skin, and supple limbs that I had believed it to be. It was the willingness to explore, to learn, to live. The passion of laughter and the euphoria of pure emotion. That was the essence of life, and youth itself. Youth did not leave me. You were with me the entire time, hidden in the depths of the memories I held so close to my heart. Youth, my dearest friend of all who shone brightly in the stars alive and free.

## BEAUTY

Syazwani Saifudin

you are every painting on the ceilings of heaven  
every golden star in this universe and the next

you are a thousand sketches of ripe sunrises  
a thousand resplendent hues in an artist's paint  
palette

you are all of the ocean's glistening reflections of  
light  
all of the bittersweets reminisces of yesterday

you are the infinite mysteries and miracles hidden  
behind veils of cold rain  
the infinite wonder that turns leaves green with envy

you are each gentle melody in a flood of poignant  
symphonies  
each breath of wind and each stroke of the pencils  
that paint the clouds

you are of the same clay which forms the mountains  
who smile down at you  
of the same velvet that lines the gossamer-like  
dresses of blossoming flowers

you are beauty  
in all of its forms  
so never let anyone tell you  
what your beauty is  
for it is yours to define

## OH DANDELION

Scarlett Chan

Be careful dear dandelion,

The breeze will arrive carrying the wind on back,  
Every seed flees the scene,  
Vividly motionless, Yet flying up,  
Into lands beyond reach, Over oceans beyond search,  
And through paths beyond eyes can see,

Swiftly, Calmly,  
Landing in a thousand places at once, And with a  
thousand bodies,  
One mind comes to conclusion: Grow.

## 2019 IN 2021

Kareena Ghosh

Our lives were always full of action, we never  
slowed down,  
Until everything halted when Corona came to town,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

No children should lose their parent and every kid  
keep on smiling,  
We have had enough of dying and enough of crying,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I could hear the school bells again and even hang  
out at crowded places,  
No one wore masks and we could see everyone's angel  
faces,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I could shake my hands, kiss, and give bone  
crushing hugs again,

I could dance with my friends in the shower of rain,  
*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

My soul cries for a friendly chat and a warm  
embrace.  
I wish the world would be again a wonderful and  
happy place.

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

A walk in the park and Sunday roast at nan's,  
I had big dreams and I had big plans,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I hope our life had not become so meaningless,  
Confined to our houses, feeling nothing, caring less,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19  
I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I wish governments did not have to work so hard to  
contain this fatal disease,

Keep our distance, wash our hands and no blessings  
after we sneeze,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19*

*I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I am tired of social distancing meetings and social  
distancing talks,

I detest social distancing visits and social  
distancing walks,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19*

*I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I look forward to my Dreamworld rides,  
The beach, the hotel, and the water slides,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19*

*I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

I never give up hope and never give up dreams,  
The end is in sight, the vaccine is rolling out and  
so it seems,

*I dreamed of an Aussie dream, our country was  
liberated of Covid-19*

*I am hoping in 2021, Australia would be the same as  
it was in 2019.*

## BETRAYAL

Syazwani Saifudin

A snake with savage sapphire eyes,  
seaweed coloured scales,  
and a silken split tongue  
secretly snuck its way to my trust.

In my unsteady stupor,  
it suffocated and strangled me,  
while I was unsuspecting and sickly.

As my heart began to slow and stutter,  
the sly snake shed its skin,  
and I saw you.



## CIRCLES

Syazwani Saifudin

It's 12:45 am.

Empty containers and torn wrappers litter the tiled kitchen floor. Biscuit crumbs lay everywhere like forlorn wounded soldiers. A half-empty box of chocolate-covered doughnuts rests atop a puddle of neon green Mountain Dew. Blair Clarsson sits in the middle of this battlefield; her hands sticky from stuffing immense portions of candy into her chocolate smeared mouth. An empty tub perches on her lap. The only remnant left of the strawberry ice cream which was all devoured earlier.

Abruptly, Blair feels a surge of awareness wash upon her. It's almost as if she has snapped out of a hypnotic trance, or awakened from a deep sleep. Then again, that's how it always feels. Never in control. A rush of overwhelming guilt hits her next, as painful as slamming face-first into a brick wall. It isn't an unfamiliar feeling, yet it consumes her from the inside. Drowning. Suffocating. Blair catches sight of the remaining doughnuts in their box. "I've already messed up today. Might as well eat them now so that they're not a temptation tomorrow," she thinks.

After finishing the entire box of doughnuts and vomiting in the kitchen sink, she cleans up the mess she's made as quietly as possible. The entire time, silent tears streamline down her cheeks. She can't

risk her parents waking up and finding her like this. At 1:15 am, Blair goes to bed with a hurricane of thoughts wreaking havoc inside her head. They tell her, "You've done it again. What's wrong with you? You're a fifteen-year-old girl, not a cow. You've probably gained five kilograms. You don't deserve breakfast when you wake up." These thoughts ingurgitate the few remaining fragments of confidence she has left. They're persistently gyrating in her mind.

It's 7 am.

Blair lugs her ponderous body out of bed and directs herself straight towards the full-length mirror standing at one corner of the room. Immediately, she notices two new pimples. One is on her forehead and the other on her left cheek. They're red, nauseating and seem to make her already bumpy skin look even more like a pepperoni pizza. Repulsed by the sight of her blemished, swollen face, Blair heads to the bathroom. There, she stares at her humungous body for twenty minutes, scrutinising every single flab of fat. Did she gain some weight on her stomach? Of course, she must have after eating all that junk last night. She looked pregnant. Her arms definitely seem chubbier than usual too. She gets in the shower and scrubs her skin vigorously until it's red and sore. Almost as if she can just scrub away the layers of fat that make her feel like ripping her entire body apart. Afterwards, she spends half an hour covering her dark eye bags and straightening her crusty, untameable mop of dark hair. She goes to the mirror again. Even before Blair glimpses herself, she already knows that the girl she's about to see reflected before her will appear disgusting. The stretch marks on her thighs

are hideous. Her button-down school top is one hundred percent the opposite of flattering. Why does it accentuate her bulging stomach so much? Is she really going to go to school looking like that? What an eyesore.

Blair leaves her room with her school bag slung over one shoulder, desperately hoping that her parents have already left for work. She loves them but hates passing them on her way to the front door. She loves all that they've done for her, but hates when they ask why she's skipping breakfast. She loves the fact that they care enough to try, but hates the fact that they could never understand, despite their efforts. But most of all and more than anything, Blair hates herself. She hates what's wrong with her. She hates her illness. Yet, Blair can't do anything about it. She doesn't know what to do.

Regardless of her silent prayers, they're still in the kitchen making breakfast.

"Leaving already?" her dad queries. "Have some breakfast before you go."

"I'm not hungry and I'm going to be late," Blair responds dryly.

"Okay, have a great day sweetie," her mum says.

"We love you," both her parents say in unison.

"Okay bye," is her only response.

As she leaves the house, Blair gets a brief glance at what's playing on the TV. It's a protein shake ad. A gorgeous woman with a perfect hourglass figure promises, "instant slimness and efficient weight loss for a happier life."

It's 1:15 pm.

Lunchtime (a.k.a. hell) at Northern Shore High School. Blair sits with her two best friends: Valerie and Gemma. Blair resists the urge to choke as she gradually shoves down her school lunch of chocolate milk, mashed potatoes, some pathetic chicken pieces and a salad. She feels queasy; all too aware of the number of calories she's consuming. But she has to eat, right? Has to eat so her friends don't get suspicious, even if she vomits it all out later. The cacophony in the congested cafeteria only seems to exacerbate her dizziness as she half-listens to the shallow conversation between Gemma and Valerie. She only catches slivers of their discussion due to the fact that she's light-headed and they make absolutely no attempts to include her.

"OMG I saw your new Instagram post, ... you look so skinny in it!"

"... new diet recently ..."

"Did you hear about the new girl ..."

"... she's humongous ..."

"If she keeps eating at that rate, she'll burst out of her dress!"

"... ew I think she's looking at us ..."

"What a pig ..."

"OMG Val yesterday was so fun ..."

"... when should we hang out again?"

Wait, they hung out without her? Weren't they meant to be her best friends? "When did you guys hang out? Why didn't you invite me?"

Valerie and Gemma share a glance and make some

pitiful excuses flimsier than cardboard, but Blair barely hears them. The lights are too fulgent. The noise is too loud. She tells her friends it doesn't matter and gets up to head to the bathroom, using the excuse that she thinks it's her time of the month even though she hasn't gotten her period in seven months. There, she vomits as quietly as possible into the toilet bowl.

It's 11 pm.

Blair mixes apple cider vinegar into her water; several websites said it would help with fast weight loss. The acrid smell assaults her nose while she watches the orange-gold liquid pirouette in the water as she mixes it in. It tastes horrible, but Blair forces it all down and goes to sleep.

It's a week later.

Blair feels stuck. Her brain tells her she's worthless, ugly, a waste of space and so much worse. It's like a circle; she doesn't know when or where it started or where the finish is; if there even is a finish. Maybe it never ends. Maybe it's just one giant loophole that she's trapped in. It's a convolution. The fine line separating different moments becomes a blur. For Blair, each day is the same as the one that came before and the one coming tomorrow. Around and around. Again, and again. Inescapable. Always the same.

The tears, the weighing scale, the mirror, the calorie counting, the starving, the vomiting, the binging, the guilt, the darkness and then repeat. No beginning, no end, just infinity. Nothing ever

gets better. She analyses her appearance every day. Every day she never fails to find a flaw. The circle never ends.

It's another week later.

Blair conceals her internal war deep beneath forced smiles, fake laughs and lies. But it never fully goes away; it lingers in the darkest, deepest parts of her thoughts. The circle never ends.

It's yet another week later.

She's tired. Oh, so tired.

It's a month later.

The thing with circles is that they don't have to be infinite. Just like how you can't be certain where they start, you also can't be certain where they end. Any point on the circle can be the end. You don't have to be trapped in a cycle. You can get out of the circle. There may not seem like an end, but that's because there is no end unless you acknowledge that you have to make one for yourself. No one else can help you except yourself. You have to decide where that end is for yourself and slowly crawl towards it. And maybe she'll never get there but it gets better. That's what Blair realises sitting in her hospital bed as her parents cry by her bedside and she floats in and out of consciousness. The last thing she remembered before waking up in this sterile room was an unbearable urge to live just as she was on death's cliff.

## TSUNAMI

Avani Malali

A tiny child stood amidst a chaotic backdrop. Gallons of water surrounded her. Her ocean blue eyes were widened with fear as she searched for her parents. Her jet-black hair was drenched and her teeth were chattering. The ocean was in a mood. Its waters spilled onto land, flooding the narrow streets of Jakarta.

The child felt a gentle touch on her shoulder. She spun around and was greeted by a familiar face. Her dad picked her up and the girl buried her face in his shoulder, seeking comfort in his presence. When she looked up, her dad's face was heavy with sorrow.

"She's gone," he choked hoarsely.

Even though the child was only seven years old, she knew something terrible had happened. Cadence Pearl had lost her mother.

"Come on, Cadence!" Livia's shrill voice rang out over the phone. "It'll be fun!"

Cadence's first impulse was to flat out disagree. The ocean made her squirm. The sight of the churning waves, so paralyzingly close, was unnerving. Everyone who knew her expected her to love the sea, given the fact that her nickname was Ocean and her dad was a fisherman. But she didn't. Not anymore, anyway.

"See you there!" finished Livia.

Cadence put down the phone, a sense of dread blooming in her stomach. With a resigned sigh, she slipped on her shoes and headed to the beach.

As she walked, she tilted her head backwards. The sky was a grim shade of lead and dark storm clouds glared at her. A strong gale tugged at her long hair. Cadence felt that something was off; she couldn't quite put her finger on it. But before her thoughts could get very far, she spotted Livia. She pushed her worries to the back of her head, putting it down to her generally anxious thoughts about the sea.

Cadence watched as Livia and some of her other friends messed around in the water. She preferred to hang back and avoid the water. Her mind wandered to the first time she'd been to the coast after her mum died. She'd sobbed and wept and refused to let go of her father's hand. A horrified howl escaped her lips. A million raging thoughts swirled through her head like an uncontrollable tornado. The ocean had taken her mother away. It had reached into her heart and twisted it. It was an enormous thought for a little child, but Cadence wanted vengeance. She would make the ocean pay.

A crackle of thunder interrupted her train of thought. The waves pounded against the rocks relentlessly. Lightning flashed, painted the boulders white for a fraction of a second. A storm was brewing.

Livia and her friends packed up hastily. When she looked up, her face was taut with worry. Livia was courageous, and had a tendency to act without

thinking, but even she knew just how dangerous storms could be.

"We'd better go!" called Livia.

"I'm coming!" replied Cadence.

Suddenly, there was a huge rush of water. Cadence turned around to see a fifty foot wave in front of her. She stood rooted to the spot, frozen in fear. The wave crashed down, and its slimy hands tugged Cadence into the ocean.

When Cadence opened her eyes, the whole world was tinted blue. Air crawled out of her lungs, leaving her desperate for oxygen. Her arms flailed by her sides. She was in the heart of enemy territory. The deeper she sank, the more panicked she became. Petrified. Terrified.

As the air drained out of her sinking figure, so did the hope. Her eyes struggled to stay open. Was this the end?

A lock of black hair whipped past her. She felt a touch on her face, soft as a feather. Two dainty eyes blinked at her. They were a deep ocean blue. There was only one person Cadence knew except herself that had eyes like that.

Her mother.

The spirit of her mother smiled softly. As though it was a signal, dozens of other spirits appeared around her. Cadence recognised them – the victims of the floods. Their faces bore expressions of absolute peace.

"The ocean is not your enemy Cadence," she whispered gently.

She reached her arm out and pressed it to a place close to Cadence's heart. Air filled her lungs. Hope brightened her mind. And the strangest thing was, the ocean seemed to ... respond to her.

A rush of water scooped her up and thrust her up to the surface. She dragged in air with both her nose and mouth. She swung her hand in a wide arc, and a wave lifted her up. The wave carried her back to the shore and dropped her on the beach with a small thump. The wave hopped a little, as though it meant to wave at her, and then receded.

Now that the adrenaline had left her, she felt drained of all energy. Her knees buckled and she dropped. Blackness enveloped her.

Cadence's eyelids fluttered open. Light flooded her eyes. Her father's face peered at her worriedly.

"Cadence," he said, visibly relieved. "You're awake!"

He pulled her into her arms. A memory came back to her, from five years ago. A similar day.

"Livia called me," he informed her. "But I want to hear it from you. What happened?"

Cadence opened her mouth and words spilled out. "Bet you don't believe me," finished Cadence.

"Cadence," said her father gently. "I do believe you. I'm no stranger to unusual happenings."

Cadence stared at her father through dubious eyes. Then she broke the silence, "I'd better call Livia, she'll be wondering what happened."

Her father's gaze followed her as she left the room. "I suppose it was inevitable," he murmured to himself. "After all, my blood runs through her veins."

He raised his hand over a glass of water. Nothing happened for a moment. He was out of practice. A few seconds passed, and something absurd happened. The water rose up and hovered in mid-air.

The blobs of water levitated, held up by a strange, ethereal force.

## THE TALE OF MY DETENTION

Muhammad Abdul Latif

The pain.  
The burning, agonising pain.  
The undiluted, undefeated pain.

But there is nothing I can do about it.  
Because I am in detention.  
For the rest of the school year.

You might be wondering how I got into this less-than-comfortable situation.  
I got here by doing something I now regret.  
How could I have been so stupid?  
None of that matters now.  
But you probably want the full story.  
So here it is:

It was Thursday, and my class was just finishing up maths and getting ready for the end of school. I, like usual, finished my work in class, but a lot of other kids didn't. Probably because they were too busy playing video games on their laptops. I don't know much about what they were talking about, but I did hear them complaining about all the games being rubbish and the school blocking them all. Then I heard my friend Nate saying, "I'm sure I can manage something." And caught him eying me. A wave of nerves washed over me because I knew what he was thinking. And I didn't like it.

Sure enough, as we were walking home from school, He asked me for a favour. "Hey man, could you do a favour for a friend?"

I thought about it for a moment and then replied, "Depends, what are you thinking?"

"Well, as you know, I'm one of those people who likes playing video games and the only device that I can use is my school laptop, but all the good games are banned." I nod, I knew that already. "Well, I was wondering if you could get some games ... y'know, unbanned." I can't help but break out laughing. Even though this was exactly what I expected him to say, I didn't realise how ridiculous it sounded out loud.

"And how do you expect me to do that?" I asked. "What's your master plan?"

He just smiled. "I'm already working on one. It'll be ready by tomorrow at school."

And even though I was still chuckling at the idea, I felt a shiver go up my spine.

And not without reason.

I couldn't sleep at night no matter how hard I tried. I knew it was stupid to get fussed over something so small but I just couldn't. Every time I closed my eyes all I saw was Nate and his sinister smile. I decided to take my mind off it by playing some video games. And it worked. Two hours later I finally fell asleep.

I woke up in the morning having completely forgotten about the events of the night before. I brushed my

teeth. I made and ate my breakfast. Changed into my school uniform. Packed my school bag. But while I was doing all this, I had this strange feeling like I was forgetting something. As I got onto the school bus I convinced myself that it was nothing. But then it hit me. At the back of the bus, engrossed in conversation with his friends, sat Nate. I remembered everything. I quickly ducked into the seat next to me, glad that he hadn't seen me when I heard a voice I recognised all too well.

"Exshcuse me, but this shpot ish taken".

I sighed. It was Melvin 'lamo' Kerts. And I was stuck with him. For the entire bus ride. How embarrassing. I turned to him and said, "Melvin, there are two seats per row, remember?"

"Shorry," he replied, "I forgot".

I sigh again. What a start to my day.

At least now I know what the term 'a rude awakening' means. It can't be all bad, right?

Wrong.

I took the time I had on the bus to formulate a plan about how to avoid Nate for the entire day. It actually turned out pretty good.

In the morning, lock myself in my own locker until the bell rings and then sprint to class to get there just in time. Then, class will start and he won't be able to do anything to me. At first break, I'll stay in to ask our teacher a bunch of questions until Nate gets bored and leaves. Then I'll run somewhere.

When I'm coming back. I'll stay near the classroom but just out of sight and then when everyone goes in, I'll sneak in with them and start bombarding the teacher with questions again.

At second break, I'll repeat my plan for first break and at the end of the day, I'll skip the bus, and run home instead.

Genius, if I say so myself.

I'm so busy admiring my own handiwork, I don't notice that the bus has reached school until Melvin gets up and steps over me. Then I realise my plan doesn't include how to get out of the bus. Guess it's what I deserve for letting my ego bloat up. I look up and see Nate at the back of the line. Good thing he's still distracted. I push myself into the line, a crowded area where Nate can't see me. It works.

Notebook - Xavier Raspte

- First break      ✓
- Second break    ✓
- Hometime

As you can see from this extract from my notebook, 'Operation: First & second breaks' was successful. At this point, I was praying that I had similar success with 'Operation: hometime'.

And (spoiler alert) I didn't.

BRRRRIIIIINNNNGGGG!

That's the sound of the hometime bell. My anxiety levels were at an all-time high.

Particularly because Nate was trying his absolute hardest to try and maintain eye contact with me.

I didn't like it one bit.

"Class dismissed!" shouted our science teacher, Mr Sparks. I tried to make a run for it, but Mr Sparks stopped me. Nate casually stepped out the door and gave me that sinister smile while he did it.

By the time Mr Sparks let me go, it was too late. This time, there was no escape. As soon as I stepped through that door, it was game over. I gathered my thoughts, took a deep breath and exhaled. I opened the door and ...

"Hey, Xavier, my man, I got the plan ready!" He grabbed me with his burly arms and pinned me to the wall. I laughed nervously. "And you'll do it, right?" he said, raising his fist. I gulped. "Right?" he said again, this time in a more serious tone.

"Y-yes," I replied, stammering and with a squeaky voice.

He eased up his grip and smiled at me. "So, here's the plan ..."

"No way, I'm not doing this!" I shouted. I didn't care if he beat me to a pulp but there was no chance I was going to agree to this. Nate does the occasional dumb thing but I never expected he would go this extreme. Guess what his 'plan' was?

"Okay, so you're going to break into the school once everyone's gone and steal the principal's laptop to unban all the games!"

See what I mean? If someone agreed to that, they'd have the IQ of a brain-dead zombie.

But I guess Nate could see I was getting cold feet because then he started yelling, "Xavier's a



chicken! Xavier's a chicken!" I went red in the face. Everyone still there turned around and stared at me. Where's an invisibility cloak when you need one? Then he started making chicken noises and pretending his arms were wings. That was even worse. Why is he so good at exploiting me?

"FINE!" I yelled. "I'LL DO IT!" Nate stopped making chook noises and grinned at me.

It's 3 am. And I'm at school. I came prepared too; I had a backpack filled with supplies. I did some deep breathing to calm my nerves and then I climbed the fence. As soon as I reached the top I took out my slingshot and shot down all of the security cameras in the immediate vicinity. Then I climbed over. I sneaked my way to the administration building and took out a vial of 'organic orange juice glue' and started pumping it into the lock. It dries straight away. Wonderful stuff it is. I turned my makeshift key and entered the building itself. I made my way to the principal's office. Then I used a second vial of 'organic orange juice glue' to get in. I looked around. I never really noticed how creepy the principal's office is. I guess that's because I never really come here, and when I do, I scarcely look around. Then I started searching for the laptop. I searched and searched but to no avail. Then I realised that the principal probably takes his laptop home after school. "I should have known," I mumbled to myself. Just then someone turned around the corner and came into the room. I screamed. They screamed. And when I realised that it was the principal himself ... well, you can probably guess what happened.

So that's how I got into here. I was lucky I wasn't expelled. And if you'll excuse me, I have a detention to get to.

## GOOD AS A WHITE MAN

Juliette Agborchi

1915. Frying Pan Creek, NSW.

(Donald's Mother sits on a rocking chair on the veranda, deep in thought).

*He'll hate me for it, but one day he'll understand. One day he'll stand on the edge of the world and realise that people are just cruel. All you ever want is to shield your child from the world, and all they want to do is go out into it. An endless barrage of pain and cruelty that they seem enamoured with. Convincing themselves that everyone will be kind, help you up when you fall, have your back. Off he goes, bag slung around his shoulders, a uniform two sizes too big, yet another reminder of just how terrifyingly small he is, and how big the world is. How it will tear and bite and snatch and snarl and take everything that makes him as good as he is. Off he goes, to foreign lands, where he won't speak the language or know their customs. Who knows, maybe he'll come back, and he'll have forgotten our language and customs. Maybe this war will take away everything from him. I've seen people come back, eyes still seeing the horrors of the past, turning to the drink for comfort. The same men who left with a twinkle in their eyes and a surefire grin return with haunted eyes and gaunt faces. They go from someone's beloved son to a dero alcoholic. They'll tell him he's just as good as a white man, all to get a gun in his hands and a uniform on his back. They'll promise that*

*they'll keep shaking his hand and share a drink with him when they return. That he'll be their dearest little black mate. He'll come back, as alone as he left, with nothing to show for it but the ghosts of a past that will stay with him for a lifetime. He thinks I don't know about what it feels like to look in through to the world, but I know it all too well. I was the same age as him when it finally clicked; I wasn't a part of the world that I so longly observed from behind the wire. Walking down a street, the rules are simple: keep your head down and don't talk to none of the white folk. Make sure you don't get too close to them, they don't like that, not in the slightest. Maybe if you move quick enough you can avoid the yells of, "Bugger off, blackie!" I finally realised that no matter what I did, no matter how much I pretended to be a part of the world, I would only ever be looking in. Watching from behind the wire fence, watching all the bright lights and fancy sights like it was a circus. Wonder what would happen if I did write that letter. If he walked out that door with a white man's uniform on his back. Maybe someone decent would look out for him.*

*(She laughs, walking to the edge of the veranda, looking out on the sunset).*

*If I don't write it, he'll run away to God knows where. There are no other records that would say otherwise that he is or isn't eighteen, and he'd probably find a way to convince them he was of age. He's a boy, no letter will change that. He's barely seen the sunrise. He's fifteen, he shouldn't be out there. He shouldn't. God knows how old all those other boys are, they're probably all around the same age. Martha's boy from down the roads gone, and he's*

*barely a day over sixteen. They've practically sent a class of schoolboys off to defend this country from whatever horrors lie over the seas. Y'know what, I will write it. I'll write a letter that'll say he was born in eighteen ninety-eight out at Walters Run. Then maybe once he comes back and realises that all his white mates have disappeared like magpies in winter. There'll be no fancy land for him once he comes back. Doesn't matter how far out in the world he goes it'll stay the same. Us folk will still be watching in from behind the fence.*

*(She sighs, turning away from the sunset, walks towards the door).*

*Maybe he'll realise.*

*(Pauses).*

*Maybe.*

## GREEN AND GOLD; CURRY LEAF AND TURMERIC

Sridivya Tekumalla

*It's funny when you realise your existence is a shame.*

When I think of the first time I realised that people had a problem with me, I remember my mother's wide-open eyes. The realisation had not hit her yet, the shock had blocked her from the wave of disappointment just for now. It crashed against her, and the water leaked out of eyes. Her lips quivered as she struggled with her words. It felt like I was watching her die in front of me. I wanted to do something, I wanted to help, I wanted to take it back, but the damage was done.

Her first words to me: "Do not let anybody else know."

My turn to cry.

I didn't know what I was feeling in that moment. I was relieved, more than ever; this was more than what I expected her to do when I came out. I was planning this in my head for months, I had an entire speech ready to convince her not to shun me forever, and she was okay to coexist with me. That's more than I ever wanted. But, there was this nagging voice in the back of my head that was louder than ever. *I thought this was over.* I planned this to be the final act, I was ready to finally, finally, stop

pretending. I was so tired of hiding and lying and keeping secrets. And yet, I was to prepare for more like I was going into battle.

*It's even funnier how much you notice when you let people know you exist.*

My parent's side-eye now whenever anyone mentions the word 'gay'. There's a surprising amount of that in India, where we are for the holidays. I can feel them trying to convey to me to keep my mouth shut. It's not like I was gonna say anything anyway, most of the people here are homophobic. Whenever I'm alone in the baby pink concrete walls of my grandparents' room, when their eyes are finally taken off me, I laugh. I laugh at the humour of it all, at their irony, their hypocrisy. Do they know what land they're standing on when they spew that hot air out of their mouths? The same mouth they use to snicker at men wearing pink in the streets, they use to preach Hinduism. The most, and I say this with utmost certainty, queer religion ever. They use their hands to point and laugh at rainbow flags, to slap their queer children, to throw their entire lives to the streets, and they fold those same hands to pray to Lord Vishnu. Vishnu, who had a baby with Shiva, another man, to defeat a demon. Vishnu, who is known to have transformed into a woman multiple times. They read the *Mahabharata*, praising its themes of valor and righteousness, but conveniently forget Shikandini's transition into Shikhandi. I laugh and I laugh. I laugh to not cry.

*I find myself wondering why people like to have a problem with me.*

We fly back to Melbourne, and it's like I'm hit with a breath of fresh air. I'm finally home. I'm not allowed to be myself just yet, but here, it's easier to pretend.

The homophobia in Australia is different from India. Say what you want, at least in India, when they're being bigots, they're clear about it. You know exactly why they snicker and jest and make snide comments. Here, it's disguised as well intentioned, as help. It's the type to make you facepalm ten minutes after a conversation is finished. Although it's diplomatic, something about it feels worse.

I finally pin up my flag in my room. As soon as I see the rainbow on my wall, it's like a weight has finally been lifted off my shoulders. I can't describe it, but seeing something that's such a core part of me up there is euphoric. The next day, I walk into my room to find it gone. I confront my mum about it, and she sheepishly hands it back to me. "What if people see it?" she says.

We argue back and forth for hours on end. I tell her I'm sick and tired of hiding myself, I ask when I will finally be able to tell the truth to everyone? She says never.

It's funny when you think about it. India used to be so accepting of queer people. It was only during colonisation when the British introduced homophobia to the people that the country became so conservative. Australia is such an accepting country, but it was built by the same colonisers who ruined my

home. Now, as I lie in my room and cry and cry, wishing it was easier, the irony eats me up inside. I don't know who to blame.

Sometimes I think about the queer people in the city. Not too often, I am too afraid of hope. But during times when the dark seems too much like oblivion, when one moment seems to stretch out into forever, I let myself dream. I dream of rainbow walls and alliances and parades. I dream of walking hand in hand with my partner down the street, finally able to not be scared. I dream of saying the words, 'I'm queer', so casually that it sounds like I'm talking about the weather. The city is built by homophobes and oppression. The city was built by people who leached false ideas into the minds of the innocent, who created societies based around their awful ideals. It's horrible. But where else do I have to go? Here, in the now, the city is where I dream to be. I dream to stand on top of the past, on top of the years of discrimination, with the people who have fought their entire lives to get here. I dream to stand tall and be free.

## THE GRACE OF NIGHT

Grace Guo

Tonight the moon shines like a polished pearl,  
Elegant and shimmering.  
Tonight the stars twinkle like thousands of diamonds,  
Sparkling and stunning.  
Tonight the wind blows,  
As gentle as the clouds traveling in their way.  
Tonight houses on streets fall asleep peacefully,  
Welcoming tomorrow on its way.  
Tonight nature sings like a heavenly choir,  
Healing and relaxing.  
Tonight the Milky Way swirls magically as time  
passes by,  
Leaving me mysteries and inspiring my curiosity.

## I AM A GIRL FROM WORLD WAR II

Shraavani Ellinavaalu

I am a girl from 1939  
I was a little girl when my dad had to go fight for  
the country.  
It was hard to say goodbye since I had hardly spent  
any time with him.  
No one knows if everyone in the war will come home  
safely.  
I hope dad does.

I am a girl from 1939  
Mum always watched out the window to see if the  
mailman had drop of any letters or newspapers.  
The war was going fiercely there were a couple  
hundred people dying each and every day.  
I was praying to God that the couple hundred people  
didn't include dad.  
I thought that people where dying because of bombs  
or who know what else.

I am a girl from 1939  
My family and I hoped and prayed every day in our  
shared house that dad will come home safely and  
that the war will end soon.  
The people that we shared houses with got a letter  
saying their family member passed away.  
We were sad for them but happy for us because dad  
wasn't one of them.

I am a girl from 1939  
It was finally the day I had been waiting for, soon  
dad would arrive home.  
It took six years for the war to end.  
I was sad because seventy five million people had  
died in the war.  
I was sad because all my friends' dads and my dad's  
mates had died.  
I was the happiest kid that dad had arrived home.  
I am a girl from 1939

## DUMB BROCCOLI

Dhavanesh Sriram Venkatesh

Broccoli tastes like socks,  
broccoli is hard like rocks.  
Broccoli smells so yuck,  
even a buck won't like the muck.

Mum says broccoli is pure-ish,  
but I say broccoli is foolish.  
If broccoli is served to the queen,  
She would go grape green,  
She whacks the chef as hard as Shrek,  
And again would she never come near that wreck.

My dad's friend adores that piece of holy,  
Sometimes I wonder:  
Is he married to broccoli?

No matter what, broccoli is dumb,  
Thinking of it would make me go numb.

## WORLD WAR III

Ryan Yang

The seas got loaded, that is, worldwide,  
With battleships there and there filled with pride.  
They're ready to attack, if anything goes wrong,  
And if they don't meet, they'll be a thousand strong.  
They'll sail along the seas for days and days on end,  
With hustle and bustle on the ships that are owned  
or lent.  
The guns will be loaded with bullets nice and new,  
And soon the world will be in ashes, with lives very  
few.

Some take another approach: going on air.  
These won't collide, so the skin of them won't tear.  
They'll arrive quicker too, if the weather is very  
fair.  
But anything can happen, so they have to prepare.  
They'll fly along the atmosphere for days and days on  
end,  
With hustle and bustle on the planes, the ones that  
aren't unkempt.  
The guns will be loaded with bullets nice and new,  
And soon the world will be in ashes, with lives very  
few.

The altitude is filled with vehicles: the ships and  
the planes.  
They'll fly and sail without stopping; they won't be  
detained.

They'll arrive on islands and fight and fight and fight,  
 With, of course, most or all of their might.  
 They'll fight and fight until a winner is declared,  
 Then the territory will be changed, so people, be  
 prepared.

The guns will be loaded with bullets nice and new,  
 And soon the world will be in ashes, with lives  
 super few.

Two sides; two opinions; two arguments; two fights.  
 One composed of the physical, in which the world  
 will see no light.

Ashes. Blood. Defeat. Victory. Let all these things  
 be known.

Sacrifices. Cunning plans. Only one life to own.  
 The other fight is the internal one – retreat or  
 attack?

To cope with losses, to make decisions – march  
 forward, or go back?

May guns be loaded, for the whole world, with bullets  
 nice and new,  
 And soon the world will be in ashes, with lives  
 super few.

It is not only the brave armies that will lead the  
 fight.

Some are more vicious, like bombs floating up like  
 kites.

But then they will drop, massacring the city below,  
 And the nation will be in melancholy, if not mellow.  
 Soldiers will die by the thousands, and with them,  
 lots of hope.

And innocent people too, a loss made by timer and rope.

But again, guns will be loaded with bullets nice  
 and new,  
 And soon the world will be in ashes, with lives  
 extremely few.

But after a few years or so, the worst is seven years,  
 The Earth will recover after a decrease that  
 aroused fears,  
 And peace will always come again, just like the  
 usual.

And the planet will never again be dull.

Of course, this journey is a dangerous one,

But after it is fought, and a place is won,

Humankind will recover – like world wars one and two,  
 And after the world is in ashes, nature will thrive  
 again too.



## TWO KNIGHTS WHO HAD A FIGHT

Lucia Liao-Everett

There was a knight,  
who lived in the light,  
and he was bright.  
The bright knight saw the knight,  
who lived in the night,  
and they got into a fight.  
So, the bright knight won the fight.  
And so that was the end of the night knight.

## FLIGHT TO PLANET ZANA

Muhammad Rayan Sohail

Boom!! An asteroid had hit the other side of the Earth. Good thing that Lani, my brother, me, and my uncle, Dr. Dan, were prepared. Dr. Dan had created a bright blue spaceship to escape. He saw the asteroid on his lab radar. The clouds were filled with gases as red as blood. Lightning struck, and the power was out. I went to my room in the technical lab and got all the essentials, which were toothbrushes, clothes, toothpaste, a tub of water, fifty kilograms of chicken breasts, and ten apples.

We fueled our shiny spaceship with forty thousand litres of petrol so that it would not run out in space. After that, we all got in and the countdown began. "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one ... blast off!" exclaimed the woman's voice. Ghrrrr! We were off! I felt like I was upside down because I was so dizzy. Dr. Dan told Lani and I that we were going to planet Zana because the conditions there were like Earth's.

I felt like a dying animal. I had to drink some water. After drinking water, I played some table tennis with Lani. After playing table tennis, I read one of Lani's books he brought as his essentials. One of them was about a boy that was trying to find his parents. It was always as dark as a cave in space, so I checked the time on my wristwatch to know when to sleep.

One month later, we arrived at planet Zana. Other humans that had left earlier in their spaceships, had already built huts. When we got off our spaceship, we bought one hut for one hundred dollars. I got all my essentials and put all of them in the hut. A year later, we bought a modern house. There were also buildings in the city. All of us were happy, but still missed Earth.

A week later, grimy air came down from the sky and blew on my t-shirt. It was my parents. "Hello Zack!" called out my parents from their spaceship. "Hi mum and dad," I spoke. They came to the planet after me, Lani, and my uncle because they got lent a spaceship by other experts, not our uncle. This was because they dropped Lani and I at our uncle's place and they did not stay. When our parents got off the sleek spaceship, they looked as exhausted as people who had not slept for a year. I gave them water to drink and allowed them to sleep in our new house on the planet.

The next day, my whole family had a fever because we were not fully adjusted to the new type of weather in Zana. Other than that, the planet did have a lot of other fascinating facts. There were animals such as dorlies. Dorlies are a mixed version of tigers and lions. Another fact about the planet is that it has five continents. Doland, Foply, Daket, Gretifal and Crilica. My family and I lived in Crilica because it was the most civilised. Little did we know, something horrible was thought to happen to our continent. But luckily, it won't happen soon, so that's a thought for the future!

## THE FARM

Aarna Choudary

The only thing I want to do is go to the farm. Well, today is the day! We are going to a marvelous farm called, 'The Melbourne Farm'. When we arrived we got the tickets and then set off to see the animals. First, we were going to see the ducks. But then a rather unpleasant voice spoke.

"Mum!" said the lagging voice of my sister, "I want to see the piggies! Not the dumb duckies!"

"We'll see the ducks first then pigs," said Mum.

The ducks were magnificent. They had majestic white feathers with a hint of black. But my sister didn't seem interested. She was more keen on seeing the pigs.

"Now piggies!" said my sister.

The pigs were repulsive. They were fifty times worse than fertilizer. My sister was squealing in excitement. She joined the pigs and rolled in the mud.

"Ah!" shrieked mum. Luckily she brought spare clothes and there was a shower.

After the peculiar experience, we went to see the cows. While I was staring at a cow with black spots and a white body, a squeaky voice said, "Excuse me! Can I ask you a favour?" I jumped and looked around but there was no one in sight besides the cow I'm staring at and my family members. Then the voice spoke again, "I am speaking, the cow you are staring at!"

I was dumbfounded. How can a cow be speaking to me? Her mouth wasn't even moving when she spoke.

"Mum!" I called. "Can you hear this cow speaking?"

As soon as my mum, dad and sister heard this, they looked at me blankly. To break the awkward silence, my sister said once again, "Can we see the piggies? I like them."

My parents didn't let my sister see the pigs. They didn't want to let her after what happened. Besides that, I knew that my parents didn't hear the voice so I carried on with the conversation with the cow.

"What do you want me to do Mrs Cow?" I asked. I wonder what she wanted me to do for her. Maybe get some milk or rescue a baby cow? As I was thinking about this, I realized the cow was speaking to me again.

"For your information, my name is Moo, not Mrs Cow. Anyway, I want you to get some hay for me to eat. I'm really hungry. The farm people don't feed us often and I'm starving."

As I opened my mouth to speak, it was like as if Moo knew what I was going to ask and replied, "The hay is just next to that scarecrow over there. As the mean and other farm members are not there, you should be fine." I doubt that, I thought.

I crept over to the scarecrow. As I was ten years old, the scarecrow still looked very creepy to me. It had ripped bedsheet covers as clothes. It had dark red eyes and an evil smile on its pumpkin head. I gulped and quickly took a handful of hay and gave it to Moo.

"Mmmm!" she said. "This is delicious! Well, thanks. I hope you come back again soon."

As soon as she finished saying that, my mum called, "time to go home kids! We're going to have a scrumptious dinner."

"Bye!" I said to Moo. "I will visit you again one day!"

As I got into my car, I saw my sister wailing. "I WANT TO SEE PIGGIES!" she yelled. "IT'S NOT FAIR! PLEASE MOMMY?"

"We'll go home now ok?" said mum. I could see in her face that she was trying to control her anger.

It was a weird day. But I'm glad it's over now. After five minutes, I dozed off, having my sweet little dreams.

## THE ELVES

Krithik Eswar Prabu

Once upon a time ... but not very long ago deep in the forest there was a cottage. In the cottage there lived two elves their names were Betty and Jack. Every day their work is finding food and cutting trees. One day when they were working an evil elf captured Betty. Jack looked every single place. He looked in the cave, he looked in the trees but Jack couldn't find her anywhere and he looked in the city but she wasn't anywhere. Suddenly he fell in a hole. He slid down very fast and then he found a big castle. He sneaked in the castle and found a group of evil elves and then he found all the cages. He looked in every single cage at last he found Betty. He got the key and unlocked the cage and freed Betty.

## THE NARROW ESCAPE

Catherine Yan

I was soaring in the almost glacial water, it was sweeping my shell as I swam hastily to somewhere safe. My radiant colours of my shell glimmered in every direction, making it even easier to catch me. It was flickering so hard that anyone could have mistaken it as a reflection of the sun. The shark could've been right behind me, but I was too petrified to look back. The shark travelled in ghost-like silence, one of the worst things about it. Nevertheless, I dashed fiercely like a jet zooming past the sky, desperate to be out of the shark's sight.

Foolishly, I glanced behind my shoulder to see how close it was and my blood immediately froze into icicles. My heart almost stopped beating and a chill streaked past my back, fear prickling me like needles. A tremendous mouth (that could have swallowed twenty rabbits in one gulp) was targeted onto me, teeth like blades were placed neatly in the mouth and it soon turned into a nasty grin. Although the shark's eyes were narrowed, it seemed like the size of a basketball. Its head was towering on top of me and it glared unpleasantly, as I lingered there, terrified to the spot. Aghast, I realised that I couldn't move my body or my flippers! If only I could slide into my shell like normal turtles!

Luckily, just as the slobbery tongue was about to lick me, I came back to my senses and began to move.

My fear still remained but I was able to flee rapidly from the massive beast. My flippers were fluttering vigorously, almost like it was vibrating. I felt like I was gliding majestically in the air, only much faster. My flippers were starting to ache, but anything was better than being eaten. I wanted to stop and have a rest; my energy was already drained out of me, but the shark's only desire was to seize me so I had no other choice but to keep on swimming. Not daring to look back again, I kept on craving that this was a dream. The shark, however, was still targeting me with eternal silence.

Soon, I eyed a colossal rock, almost as big as the shark, and even better, luminous coral were circling it and it gleamed just like my shell. I launched myself behind the rock, and not a single person would tell the difference between my shell and the coral. I sighed of relief. But my tranquil thoughts were soon interrupted when I glimpsed an immense tail hovering and twitching in front of me. Again, I unwisely peeped out from the rock and the shark recognised my troubled face. I got an uneasy feeling in my stomach and my head began swirling again. Fortunately, the shark was much less intelligent than I thought and whizzed straight past me, water scraping my face from the pressure. After a few moments of eerie silence, I glimpsed from the rock again. I exhaled heavily. The shark was ... gone.

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Johanna Saunders  
Claire Moore  
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