

Young Minds Short Story Competition

2022

Category: Year 7-9 – SHORTLIST

Qistina Eryna Almursyid

Night Light. Her bare skin was pressed against the cold metal of the railing of the balcony. She didn't flinch; her mind was too busy elsewhere. She gazed down at the world below. Cars sped past, yet not a soul seemed to notice the crack in the sky. Avery Ashwinger breathed in the cold city air to try to soothe the dread threatening to burst out her throat as a frustrated scream. She started to question herself. Was the large crack in the sky her imagination? It couldn't be - the crack was right there, a white shot in the sky like lighting on a stormy day. It was bright and daring, and its mere existence seemed to be challenging Avery's sanity right then and there, in her expensive little apartment in the heart of the city. The clock ticked closer and closer to 2am. How long had it been since she woke up and looked at the sky? It had been her imagination, right? Avery was a tired woman leaning on her balcony, staring at the sky in the middle of the night. Maybe what she saw as the crack was just the blur of the stars sealed together as one entity. Her eyesight had never been great. Avery sighed and closed her eyes, turning on the spot to go back to bed. She told herself that when she woke up, the crack would be gone. She wrote a mental note to remind herself to think into investing into a pair of glasses. She stepped through the balcony door and bumped into something large... and furry. Her breath hitched in her throat and her stomach did a backflip. She was staring at a beast, about the size of a large horse, covered head to toe in bright pink fur. Its golden-brown eyes shone through the dimness, and its yellowing teeth peaked in its mouth. The eye contact was instant. Avery did the typical thing people did when they found a large bright pink monster in their home, scream. The monster leapt away from her. Avery smacked into the door of the balcony; her arms were raised, ready to fight. Meanwhile, the monster smacked into the kitchen island, knocking a jug of water onto the ground, its contents slowly spreading on the carpet. For a while, neither moved. At this point, Avery was unsure of her consciousness. First the crack, and now this? She pinched herself to make sure her was awake. She was. She took a deep breath and pulled herself together. There was a crack in the wall, she was up at 2 in the morning, and there also happened to be a beast in her apartment. She did the immature thing and walked up to it, her knees trembling. She intended on trying to touch the beast, and if she happened to lose a finger, at least she knew that the beast was real. On second thought, she'd rather not lose a finger, but it was too late. Her palm reached the forehead of the trembling animal. It seemed as she was touching any other pet. She

gently pressed her palm into the soft pink furs of the animal, and it crooned under her touch. Her heart fluttered and the beast tilted its head back, allowing Avery to touch its soft neck. Suddenly, Avery wished that this wasn't a dream, and that she really was touching a giant pink beast. The beast opened its eyes once more and then Avery spotted the crack again. It shone in the beast's eyes like the flash one sees before thunder cracks the earth. Avery jumped back, and the beast let out a mighty roar. She heard thunder and when her head hit the ground, she was conscious for long enough to see the door flying open and the beast jumping off into the night. The morning light woke her up just after dawn. Her head pounded, and her grip on the pink fur loosened. The crack in the sky was barely there, but it loomed over her. It hadn't been a dream, and Avery wasn't sure she was very happy about that.

Brooke Benton

Frost is the fire in the gale. A burning cold. Blackening. Chilling. Two sides of opposite coins, different in every form, yet somehow bound together. In a similar way, nothing must always be bound to something. As something must one day become nothing. My legs lay in the sea, my crystalline eyes reflecting the storm clouds overhead. Raindrops splash over the churning ocean, sea foam spluttering with each dawning wave. The chilling air pelts my side, yet I feel not a hint of its frostbite. The sodden rainfall drowns the sands, as I lay waterlogged on its surface. The wind whips leaves and sand clumps through the air, as I stay untouched by the chaos. The squawk of a seagull, the sound of the water enveloping me in its waves, the whistling wind shooting over the stormy beach, and the crack of thunder as it breaks over the horizon. Off to the east, boats are moored by the harbour, rocking wildly over untamed seas, off to the west, nothing but the empty coast, sharks swirling around the sharp rocks that jut out of the ocean floor. And then there is I, in the state of in-between, in the state of being middle. I, the pale moonlight that settles over rising storms, I the silver sails that dock into places unknown. I, untimely death, I once timely tragedy. I exist, yet I am exist less. Frostbite is my tongue; frostbite is my touch. My fingers, blacked as the death I have risen from, my demeanour, cold as the freeze that claimed me to its depths. From death, I retreated. To life, I was not welcome. The west, the barren seas, the east the plight of living. I am, as in-between. I am moonlight, I am ever being, I am, as nothing is. My eyes lay wide and unseeing, forever trapped, in an everlasting dream. I am born of something but have come to be nothing. Now, a whisper, a breath. Then, a memory distant, and finally, the forgotten dream of a lost soul, washed on shore.

Sarah Rehman

King Stefan gripped the side of his throne on a cold, bleary winter's morning. He had just had breakfast and was waiting in the throne room because of an official appointment with his Royal Adviser. He glanced out the jewel encrusted window and onto the market right below the palace. There were people weaving in and out of the crowd, haggling for fruits and other items. It looked so peaceful, but King Stefan knew it was anything but. Just last month a mysterious woman had arrived at the palace doorstep, claiming to live in one of the lesser towns. Her belly was inflated. However, she was angry and demanded to meet with the King. The King, not being able to deny her of this due to her state, agreed. "Sire!" she bowed low regardless of her condition. "I have come from a town a little away from here. We are in need! Crops are dying, plants wilting! Nothing will grow there! We are at the brink of starvation and poverty! Every day the people curse the guards that pass through and laugh at our ordeals! They are sure the King is ignorant of us. But I wasn't! You must help me sire! Help us!" She put a hand to her belly. The King was visibly stunned. Poverty? Starvation? In his country? "I demand to see this. Take me to your town!" he had ordered. The events that followed were too heartbreaking to recount. King Stefan rubbed his eyes. The country was calling out to him. He... He must help. Two weeks after that meeting, he had sent him men with food and provisions. But more towns kept popping up, demanding help. King Stefan had no idea such acts were occurring under his nose! Present-day-Stefan rubbed his eyes. "Bring me Alaric!" he ordered to the closest guards. They exchanged looks. "Again, Your Highness? It's the fourth time this week! Whatever he's showing you... be careful" the guard hurried often, scared he had overstepped. Alaric was the Royal... wizard? Warlock? Bah who cares? thought the King, as long as he can prove useful. Alaric was a thin man with a patch of hair on the back of his head, hair that also occupied his face in a long, narrow beard that reached his stomach. He had heavy eyebrows, also greying. He always wore a long trailing black cloak. Aside from his eyes, which were a light teal, there was no color in the man at all. "You called, Your Highness?" he hissed as he shuffled to kneel before the King. No doubt he already knew what the King called him for. No doubt. "Show me the vision," the King said. Alaric brought out a silver globe, almost as if he was waiting for the order, which he was. "Of course, Your Highness" Alaric bent over the globe, muttering strange words in otherworldly languages. Suddenly a great fog overtook the globe, it swirled like a mini hurricane and whooshed out of the globe and onto the air before the King. It settled and formed a vision. A vision that had been haunting the King for the past month. Poverty. Starvation. Several towns being swallowed up under the great wing of darkness that overtook them in the form of pain and trauma. "Yes, yes. Show the next vision!" barked the King. Alaric bowed and flicked a lazy hand across the air. The vision rippled, as if sensing his order, and changed. The towns were the same, except... they weren't. There were colorful markets, laughing children, talking men and gossiping women. All happily living in his kingdom, away from the stench of their own swollen bellies, away from the odor of dead relatives. The King gazed into this vision with a longing. He wished for this. He wished for an entire kingdom happy with his rule, content and safe. He leaned back. He WOULD make this come true. But... of course it would need work. The King leaned forward again, staring as multiple towns became happy... and so he sat there. For quite a while, staring, dreaming with his eyes open... for a future he was determined to make reality.

Joanne Jia Ern Chong

A Love Story? By Joanne Jia Ern Chong Romance. A question and fairy-tale at the same time. Love? A story? A love story? A beautiful tale of lovers with sweet, flowy words, right? A place of utopia with the one you love, and it truly felt like I was in a fairy tale. The best chapters are always the ones with you, and I am lucky enough for them to be continuing to be written in my life. Every moment I spend with you makes the fairy-tale seem to have no end, the words and drawings continue to limitlessly outflow with every new chapter. The sunset cast a glowing halo around you and the word paradise had never found itself in such a perfect description. The faraway gaze that you stared at the hilltop scenery with, I wish I could capture it and keep it forever. Your brown eyes softened with an infinite amount of emotions that could not be described in word and your perfect complexion was illustrated with intricate sketches of fine detail. The orange sky and slowly fading day spread a calming atmosphere across the tall grass that danced with the wind to bend over to touch the picnic mat with the top of its heads. Yellow and white flowers dotted the field as they poked their head up like children trying to peek over a shop's counter. The scene was almost a dream, perfectly fit for a watercolour artwork and the writing across a pastel sky was petite and cosy. You turned to me, sighing deeply, the warmth of your glistening eyes had disappeared and were replaced with a tense undecidedness that were like sharp rocks of ice, cold and unwelcoming. I had never seen this look before; it was something new, a bad type of new, an uncomfortable foreign look that made me unsettled. My heart's thrilling beats had slowed to subdued drags as I felt a look of fear, or maybe confusion cross my face. The sun was slouching on the horizon, refusing to continue to spread its fine light through the sky and stabbing the sky with red streaks of resentment and defiance. My throat went coarse, and I felt a dizzying feeling trickle from my head down my spine then seizes my heart like piercing thorns. Then, it was truly empty, a feeling that hollowed without mercy, and crept up on me before I could notice it was even there. A dreaded feeling that's absence I had taken for granted. A feeling that had imposed itself on me just then, as you walked away saying "I'm sorry, I love someone else". The sun, along with its last ray of light had hidden its face from the ugly scene that had just unfolded amongst this field of weeds and the moon was probably too scared to reveal itself too. In a moment darkness had grabbed this opportunity, engulfing, and folding in and out of itself in a distorted havoc all around me. "I have my answer now, the ending to the fairy-tale; You weren't the person I thought you were to be. This whole time I was blindly following the false dreams that made up the fake relationship between us, skimming through the pages and reading every second word. These chapters were dragging on for you, the words and drawings were forced and so was your love. But now, I realise that my dreams of us were just nightmares in disguise, a book with a fake cover and one I had read in a cloudy daze. Whoever made the phrase 'falling in love' was right, because they must've felt the pain of dreaming with their eyes closed. It was a fairy-tale, it's fake, a lie, I only looked at the strokes of this painting, but never the hidden meaning slashed between the paint and the canvas. So, from now on, I'm going to start dreaming with my eyes open, and maybe, just maybe, one day, I might wake up and close the book."

Jeremy Barrow

Creepy Things in The Dark Night I often dread sleep because my dreams seem so surreal, sometimes I dream about how I feel. Mostly I'm scared at night and I battle with myself not to sleep, instead I stay awake in fright. Sadly, I see things, scary things when I'm awake at night. I see things lurking behind my door and shadows crawling on the floor. I try to ignore what I see, it's worse than listening to Grandma snore. I can hear the creek of the door. I wonder what those shadow puppets are, what is their purpose - is it to place a curse? Is it to torment me or worse make me want to constantly 'P'? Goodness me, I now see some peeking through my window and even crawl from under my pillow. For heaven's sake, I yell out loud 'Go away, I don't want this crowd you're not allowed'. The crowd of shadows are glaring at me and come closer as if they are pairing together, then they float above me light as a feather. They shout back 'Take us on if you dare or are you not daring?' I reply 'No way! You don't exist, you're not really there.' I pretend that I'm in no mood for caring. They scoff and blow out a pungent smell that smelt like hell, it made my lungs fill until I let out a cough, irritating like a tickle from a moth. In my throat there was a lingering tickle. Suddenly, I farted and a really smelly one come out and it made them fly down and out they run. I thought to myself now that part was fun. It wasn't over though as the blackness was still lurking, oh no, my stomach's churning. Now from all this learning, I know what they were searching. It was my night light as it was too bright. I turned it off and with one final pop let another one rip. Then I saw a ghost trip and it looked like he landed on his hip. My fart must have smelled really off because with a fast flip, he flew off. It's not over though, as now I see something create a black haze, it waves all about in a craze. It's mesmerising and scary too, but now I really need the loo. I hop out of bed with heavy dread, the hallway to the toilet looks like a maze. I should be more grown-up these days. I'm always in a apprehensive phase, lack of sleep and weird dreams and silly things that still faze me. Anyway, I make it to the loo and out of the blue, I hear Mum say 'Wake up you. You've been dreaming with your eyes wide open. Plus, strange words were definitely spoken.' By the way did you 'pass wind?' Your room smells like a rubbish bin. I'm so glad it was just a dream, I thought to myself. Oh no, what's that in my wardrobe! I think it's just broken my shelf!

Hitesh Balaji

Reveal the truth Hitesh Balaji “Did you know I survived the sink?” One of the most memorable stories of all human history. A story that has never told and will never be revealed. Kensuke and Kazue glanced at me before turning back. Once it has been told it will be the only story anyone would listen to and pass on the truth. Just like my story. Kazue sprang onto the bed and Kensuke crowded in closer. I only had a few moments left, and this would be the time to end my story. As a Grandfather I squeezed my grandsons’ hands so tight, it felt like they were in the ship with me, but inside my heart. “RMS Titanic set sail April 10th, 1912. We were enjoying the view and once we boarded, we took off. England is where we started and a journey to New York was where we would set foot on. “What do you mean ‘we’ grandpa,” Kensuke silently whispered. “Your grandma,” I replied, slowly drips of tear ran down my eyes. Kazue held my hand tightly. “After a few hours I started to feel seasick and I was old,” Kensuke gave a little chuckle. “There were crew members helping me, I could see that time and it was hilarious how they were scared, because it was their first board. Their eyes told what was happening in their minds. The breezy wind howled and when the waves rose like an alarm clock I was up. “I didn’t know what was happening, no one moved or spoke. But the only movement was the movement of the ship slowly rotating. I looked at the crew, the captain and everyone on board, the ship was going to crash into something. “Why was no one doing anything?” Kensuke asked. I smiled at him affectionately; he was so young, so curious. “I pushed past everyone and the captain. Slowly lurking the starboard to the left. The wheel was plunged into the floor, and soon enough the rock damaged half the boat and the wooden board snapped.” “Soon after I was unconscious and laying in a small bunker, I couldn’t understand the situation. We weren’t at war, were we?” “After getting out of the bunker I could understand the situation. The food supplies were lost, and most beds were destroyed. There was someone talking through the radio. “Dear passengers, I am sorry for this unconvincing. The crash took without us knowing.” “I lay there on the bunker and thinking why did the Titanic crash? It was different, many boats normally don’t push into something, maybe it was a sabotage?” “After the crash we called in for back-up, but they didn’t answer. Something was going to happen; it was very bad.” The nurse came in and told the boys they had to go home. But they urged her for tonight, to stay with me. “So, you two are interested in what happens next?” Yes, indeed grandpa, Kensuke called, this is respect, isn’t it?” The words of the boys broke my heart, this was the true meaning of love. The next few hours Kensuke and Kazue stayed up, without a twitch. The boys sat up with warm blankets, coated like hot chocolate and they listened. “Right, as you must have heard the Titanic was not very stable, so electricity wasn’t working. Some people were severely hurt, and the crew was trying their hardest to help.” “Grandpa what were the people doing?” Kazue asked. “It was hard, no one knew what was happening, but out of nowhere, the captain was replaced.” “I asked him, what was happening and when he told me, I knew something was different.” As everyone went to sleep, we were interrupted again. “A sudden “BANG” shook the ship, and we were on our backs. The captain rode off in a safety boat, which had all the crews. One elder paused to get on but was hurt.” I couldn’t possibly fear the soul out of those boys. Kensuke slowly yawned. I saw the cardiac monitor and it looked low. If I couldn’t finish the story, then my grandsons will. They slept deeply, while I quickly wrote a message, it said: Reveal the truth.

Hazel Shute

The girl gets dressed. Her outfit consists of loose, black tracksuit pants and a band T-shirt that is purposefully too big. With a wave of her hand, it becomes a perfectly sized school uniform dress and dark leggings. Or, at least, that's what everyone else will think. At lunch, she can't help but overhear a group nearby: '...she looks lonely? She's a freak. She chooses to sit alone. Leave her by herself. You'll just annoy her, and you know what happens if she gets annoyed. She'll turn big and green and...' The group laughs. The girl stands. Her hands curl into fists at her sides. She storms up to the group. The offending speaker also stands, ready to face off. 'What do you want, freak?' She sneers. In her fury, the girl hadn't come up with a plan. But now, the cogs in her brain work at the speed of lightning. She takes a few deep breaths, gathering her rage and fears and conflict and demons - all the things that had made her their home. The things she'd put up with for so long. She becomes hot with power, electricity crackling through her veins. Her eyes flicker, sparks dancing across the surface. And she sets her plan in action. She gasps, all colour draining from her face. She stares at something behind the group of girls. Her eyes widen to impossible size. Fooled, the other girl turns. And sees her concoction. A massive, fire-breathing beast the size of a ten-storey building. Grey, leathery wings branch off its spiny back. Its snakelike tail swishes around. It brings itself up to its full height and roars, the sound reverberating through the verandas. Absolutely terrified, the other girl gives a high-pitched scream, and turns and runs in the other direction. The girl's mouth twitched. She knew the other girl hadn't seen Harry Potter. She didn't know what true, classic entertainment was. After all, she would recognise the dragon if she had. She sits down. Everyone roars with laughter in the other girl's wake. All they'd seen was the mean girl making fun of the wrong person, and then fleeing in terror. For no apparent reason. The dragon evaporates. 'Dawn, please come to the principal's office.' The girl grabs her shoulder bag - which everybody sees as the school bag - and trudges out of the classroom. She stops outside the principal's office, listening to the voices inside: '...was really weird. Like I was dreaming. And nobody else could see it!' Before the principal gets suspicious, the girl knocks on the door. She gets let in. 'You see, Heather said you had something to do with the... er, incident... yesterday.' The principal says carefully. Heather glares at her from the corner of the room. The girl takes a deep, shaky breath, as if recovering from a traumatic experience, 'That's funny, because all I remember was having a talk with Heather, and then...' she pauses, as if collecting herself, 'and then she turned around, saw something behind her, and then she just screamed and ran.' The girl finishes her performance by putting on a look of intense anxiety for her 'friend'. The principal puts her hand on the girl's arm. 'Thank you, Dawn. We all know what you're going through.' She turns to Heather. 'See? We're all worried about you. Have you considered seeing someone, or-' 'No!' Heather yells. She stands up so quickly her chair falls back behind her. 'It's not me! It's her. She's a freak! She made me see things!' With that, Heather surges forwards and grabs the girl by her collar. 'This isn't the uniform dress...' She pauses, feeling the fabric of the girl's T-shirt. The illusion flickers and dies, exposing the girl's casual clothing. Her face pales, but this isn't part of her plan. She formulates a new illusion, another her, sitting in her chair, overlapping her. The real her gets up and runs. Nobody knows what happened to her. Some say she lived out her days on the streets, homeless. Some say she joined a group of others just like her. Others say the government shot her and had it hushed-up. The truth? Nobody really knows for sure.

Karthiga Vijayakumares

He lives in a world between the dreaming and reality. It is a world where life seems so real, and yet so clearly a fantasy. He would be standing in front of an audience, packed in the largest arena in the world. As he stood there, his guitar in his hand, he would sing at the top of his lungs, relishing the feeling as thousands of people would scream along to the lyrics he sang. But he knew this was a fantasy, for if it were true, he'd really be sitting on his bed finishing assignments due in a few hours. He hated reality. It was always so much harder to achieve one's goals; constantly being set back by obstacles that have been so conveniently placed to ruin it all. And so, he would transport himself to this world he'd call, "dreaming with eyes open", or dweo. It was his way of escaping it all – the obstacles – and feeling the satisfaction of succeeding in his endeavours at just the click of his fingers. It was magical. But reality is a cruel thing, constantly finding ways to rid people of their happiness. Hence, he couldn't stay in dweo for long before he would be pulled back into reality so that it can purge him of his joy once again. "Oi!" his teacher shouted, smacking the whiteboard eraser vigorously on the table. The only way one could describe that woman is this: the avatar of hell. "First you zone out in my class, now you ignore me? Stand up!" He stood up, sighing in annoyance. The woman waddled towards him, her mask so orange and shaped in a way that it made her look like a duck. "Cyprus, I don't know what to do with you. You don't concentrate, you aren't respectful—" "I get good grades, isn't that all you teachers want around here? Why should how I get those grades matter to you?" Cyprus chided. Oops, looks like his temper got the best of him once again, how unfortunate. The teacher goggled at Cyprus. "I have tried to make you a better and good-standing citizen. But it seems to me that you are hopeless! Do you have any motivation in life, Cyprus? A drive to live? Because you could have gleaming report cards but that doesn't mean that you will succeed in life!" God forbid, he did not want to hear this lecture again. Cyprus picked up his bag and walked straight through the door, despite the hollers and shouts he could hear behind him. Even though he was wagging school so blatantly, he walked through the school gates, striding down the sidewalk towards the end of the street. He turned the doorknob, walked through the door, and stormed towards his room. He slammed his bedroom door closed, sinking to the floor. He wanted to go back to dweo; back to that world where his problems were non-existent; back to where everything was okay. And so, he grabbed his guitar, placed it on his lap, and let the chords flow. As he played them, his fingers transitioning smoothly from fret to fret, a melody began to form on his lips, at first in soft hums, then in smooth, silky vocals that soothed the raging soul within him. This was what he loved most, this escape from reality, the ability to spill all his emotions in a form that was so soothing to the ears. He let the melody flow, letting it take control of every fibre of his being. For the longest time, he had dreamed of becoming a singer. That was his drive, his will to live. But the more and more he posted on YouTube, the more impossible his dreams seemed. The little views he got, the hate comments. But, as he strummed the final chords, he heard a soft ding from his pocket. By instinct, Cyprus took out his phone, unlocking it to read the notification. As he stared, his eyes widened. He didn't know what else to do but scream at the top of his lungs in utter joy. It seems dreams can become reality if you believe in them enough.

Viishnuvarman Vijayakumares

The Stage The audience was silenced. The lights went out. The curtains unveiled the stage, the only light being the spotlight beaming down on the set. Daniel watched sternly. The pondering thought of failure wouldn't snap. Abruptly, amid his anticipation, every moment of every session cruised through his head like a movie roll. He clenched his fist; the burden of training not-so-talented street lot into class theatrical performers for 12 whole months wasn't going to doubt him any longer. They had worked hard for this. *** 12 Months Ago... "We're ready for auditions sir!" "Bring them in!" Daniel responded with radiating enthusiasm. Fifty people lined up in the ticket entry, waiting to show-off their unrecognised talents. The first person entered the stage. The theatre's ambiance was the swirling of rainbow hues, but at times, it would take in more serious times, times that couldn't get more serious than this one. From the rising sun to the rising moon, Daniel listened and observed the singing and dancing from those who performed. He didn't manage to find someone who fully satisfied him. In the serenade of the black, velvet sky, the final few performers remained in their seat, ready for their audition. Peculiarly, six of the last ten, were very much on their way to the floorboards of the Broadway stage! Stunned by the formidable future stars, Daniel was convinced he had to sign them up. "We're featuring some hit classic and contemporary songs; I hope you guys are ready. The directors are requesting a vibrant feel and a slight amusement throughout the musical." Daniel orated. To his surprise, they were stupefied. Each person was rooted to their place, slack-jawed, you could sense their heart skip a beat. "Sir, we aren't classic, you're aware of that, am I right?" Daniel processed the words slowly, his eyes open but the thought circling round his head. "Right, but this is requested from our board of directors." Folding his arms, Daniel gestured group back to their rooms. Their lack of experience in the genre scared Daniel, it was a tingling sensation from head-to-toe. Session by session, on multiple occasions, a pirouette would go wrong, a piano chord would be dissonant, or a pitch would break up in a raspy tune. It was a recipe for a disaster! His confidence in their 'formidable' talents dropped gradually every day as they couldn't cope with the conditions and high requirements needed from them. Frustration had led to lingering practice and improvement was subtle. "People, twelve days to the big night, expectations are high, all I can say is... do well." *** Now... The spotlight gleamed upon the performers, Daniel breathed with uneasiness, his heart in his mouth as he sank into the chair drowned in sweat. Knowing his crew were not ready, his career was on the line. Ominous thoughts squirmed at the back of his mind. 'Was I going to watch failure? What would the audience think? Was I going to get kicked out?' They had begun. The pirouette was seconds away, Daniel bit his nail anxiously waiting for the outcome... whoosh! A sublime twirl in the air executed with confidence! The backdrop changed with the mood; the piano struck sorrowful chords with fluidity. Daniel couldn't hold in his smile. The performance was somewhat a dream. He couldn't believe it, moving his hand around, he took seconds to process he was still in the right dimension. Then, the lead singer sung melodically transitioning flawlessly between the gloomy spirit of the piece to the chorus. The guitars and drums stayed in sync and managed to keep its' twangy style. Daniel closed his eyes and opened them again; he was dreaming with his eyes open! He was certain they were failing rehearsals as soon as three hours ago, it was live miracle! As the last chord was played, the first applause came soon after and the whistles of praise echoed through Daniel's mind. Who knew that dreaming with your eyes open didn't always have to be a daydream...?

Priyanka Manikandan

After Six Years The walls were whispering, they were talking to me. Every day and night, they reminded me of the murderer who took my freedom away. I heard heavy footsteps approaching my cell, echoing off every dead wall. “Get up,” whispered a hoarse voice. I slightly lifted my head off the distant, cold floor and took in a broad, tall man. He couldn’t have been much older than me, maybe by two years. His almond, brown eyes were illuminated with eagerness, or was it fear? I couldn’t really lay my finger on it. “Get up,” he repeated, emphasising each word. I steadily pulled myself up as my shackles fought against my thin legs. He cautiously unlocked my cell and strode towards me, taking my arm. His grasp was tight, a bit too tight. He must have been a guard, at least, he wore the uniform. “What’s happening?” I asked, trying to keep my face as casual as I could. “Where are you taking me?” He didn’t reply, but instead, I read the uneasiness that danced gracefully on his face. I lightly smirked to myself – who wouldn’t be scared holding the world’s greatest assassin by the arm? We took many sharp turns and finally, entered a small room. “Sit,” he demanded as he pointed at the small stool. He hastily shut the door and locked it. “Would you mind explaining?” I asked with a hint of annoyance in my voice, as I calmly took my seat. He kept a respectable distance from me, but the way his eyes were fixed on me made the hair on my neck stand up. “Six years ago,” he finally released with a slow breath. A sharp pang echoed through my heart as my thin hands started quivering. Six years ago, was when I stopped believing in God. * * * The moonlight shone brightly amongst the dark cobblestone, and it was my only source of light. My hood laid loosely over my head as I nimbly jumped from one roof to another. I had my eyes fixed on the target, on Sahree Athred, the most feared man in this city, Cethrin. My face enraged with anger, as my eyes started tearing up - I would slay this man in the worst way possible, then man who remorselessly murdered my parents right in front of my eyes. Rumors spread that he would skin his opponents alive, that he would take pleasure in slicing each finger off slowly, that mercy was never a part of him. He walked into a luxurious looking mansion, and I swiftly landed on the hard ground, pressing my ear against the thin wall. “Hand over the documents.” I heard some ruffling through papers. “Where is my money?” My body shook at the sound of his voice. The memory played clear as glass in my mind. It was four years ago, when I was twelve. My hands were tied back as tears flooded down my burning cheeks, “Stop!” I screamed, “Stop!”. I didn’t know he was Sahree Athred back then, and I didn’t care. All I cared about was that he was slowly slicing my parents’ neck, and his face showed such joy, such happiness. I cracked back into the present, as a droplet rolled down my pale cheeks. I watched closely as he exited the mansion, but then, that’s when God prevented me from killing Sahree Athred. I felt something on my neck, like a small ant bite. Suddenly, the whole world started spinning as I dropped to the ground. It was a trap. I found myself waking up to Sahree Athred’s face – his wicked smile plastered across his scarred face. My arms ached from being held up by the heavy chains and I could tell my face was bruised from the hard blows to my head. “The world’s best assassin,” he chuckled. * * * I stared right into the guard’s eyes. “You’re getting your freedom back.” My heart was thumping so loud, I was afraid he might have heard it. He secretly helped me escape the prison. I held my breath as my eyes laid open the open horizon. “I feel like I’m dreaming with my eyes open, after six, long years.”

Marty Cocking

He should have known; the signs were all there. The ocean wasn't the same as it usually was, it was no longer the pristine blue framed by the golden horizon of first light, but a monochromatic grey on grey blending the ocean around him to the sky above. The rain poured, as heavy as stones being dropped onto his skin; all sound being drowned out by the white noise of the rain hitting water, save for the guttural roar of waves crashing in on themselves. A knife sharp wind blew from a rocky shelf several hundred metres away which stretched to the furthest reach of his vision. The only land in sight and yet no sign of any life, let alone that of a human. Isolated and alone the man carried on waiting. The man, anxious and shivering, sat exposed to nature's harsh elements in the anticipation of a wave. Most waves coming through that morning were heavy, carrying a lip several metres thick and sucking so much water off the reef that it became just as exposed to the elements as he was. Despite this pattern of monstrous waves, he stayed determined. Waiting, hoping that a surfable wave would come... Finally, he saw what he was after, turned his board and began to paddle. The repetitive action getting faster in an attempt to match the speed of the wave slowly creeping up behind him. The wave reached the man and swelled beneath him. The wave morphed from a mound of water to a mountain when hitting the reef bottom below. The man felt the wave pick him up, and he jumped to his feet. Immediately he knew something was wrong and before he could correct himself, the nose of his board poked beneath the surface of the wave and he was thrown off. His board, the only factor he could control in the discomposed ocean, gone; swallowed by the unknown darkness below with him to soon follow. Underwater his attempts to control his body was futile. His body being gyrated in every direction by invisible force the water placed him under. Limbs being pulled to a point of such exertion where to which he thought they would simply tear off. The time spent in this state of turbulence felt longer, much longer, than the few punishing moments he was held at mercy to the water. And then, nothing. No more was his body being lynched by the water around him. Opening his eyes to feel the sting of the salt water was the most he could do after his body went through such exertion, all muscles limp. Doing so, he was looking up toward the surface of the water. There where water met sky, waves collapsed in on themselves and rain broke through the surface he saw beauty. The sky was no longer grey as it was before, but now a shimmering white as the light refracted off the surface of the ocean. This light pulsed in and out with the crashing of the waves. When waves broke and white water filled the surface covering all below in darkness only letting the thinnest slits of light through just as sheet lightning illuminated the night sky during a storm. Despite the turmoil of his surroundings, here he was at peace, as if it were a dream he did not want to wake from. The chiaroscuro of the water above blending into the lapse of consciousness brought about by his lack of oxygen. His body still too exhausted to do anything but stare, he accepted what was going to happen, glad it was somewhere so beautiful. His thoughts cycled through his family, his accomplishments, his unachieved dreams, all he could have done and all he is missing out on by submitting to the mercy of the water, but his thoughts always returning to the dreamscape above him. The surface slowly getting further away from his vision. The grip of the cold was soon around him as he descended into the water's depths.

Each blackout getting longer until he no was no longer fading back into reality, the last image on his mind was that of the water above.

Charlotte Munro

Dreaming with eyes open I was lying flat, down on my bed as I felt the sudden urge to wake up. My body felt heavy, and I had chills running through my body from head to toe. My eyes beamed wide open, but all I could see was the darkness of the world. I felt as if my body was being controlled from the inside. With no hesitation, my body shot up, I was now sitting up right with my legs straight out. I was stiff. I could see light. I didn't know what was happening to me, I think it's a dream. A dream with my eyes open. I tried waking up, but my body wouldn't budge. I'm sitting there and I finally see something. I see my mum standing there in a red floral dress in a cafe, I see my dad in a truck driving up the hills, I see my brother on the footy field playing professional football for the team he's always wanted to play for one day. I can't see me though. I'm trying but I can't see me with my family. I was confused as to why I was seeing these things. My mum doesn't work in a cafe, my dad's not a truck driver and my brother is way too young to be playing professional football right now. What is going on? I feel as if I'm in a simulation. I've been transported to another world and now I'm stuck here forever. I'm still trying to wake up, this isn't like any other dream I've had before. My body aches I'm still sitting upright in my bed. I try looking deeper into this explicit scenery to try and find a reason to this. As I'm searching, I see the Earth, our planet, all on its own. It's just floating in mid-air above the water. I'm as confused as a goat, put into a pen with a bunch of chickens. I dig deeper and I see our earth trying to somewhat recover from something. A bushfire maybe. Then I remember, we did have a bushfire here not too long ago. I'm starting to understand and put all the pieces together at once. I'm dreaming of the future with my eyes open. The future, oh no, do I really want to be dreaming about the future right now. I look behind to see if there is a way back into reality but all I can see is a white wall with no way home. Why me? Why was I the chosen one to out see the future. Is this a warning? I haven't discovered anything terrible or horrific yet so what is the reason to all of this. I accept that I'm stuck in this 'future life' for a while now and decide to search a few things. I go to the cafe I saw my mum working in. Turns out she runs her own business. She's always wanted to run her own business one day. I somewhat feel relieved that she'll be able to experience her dreams soon. I go to the truck I saw my dad in, and he looks unhappy to be there. I can't point out why, but my gut dropped to the floor in fear. I walk to the footy field to see my brother and he is playing for the Tigers. It looks they just finished the game and have won the grand finale. I so want to spoil this to my brother, but I'll let him figure it out on his own. I finally turn my body to see the earth. It looks tired and hopeless. I really hope we can figure something out before it gets too harsh. I get a sudden shock in my body. I drop on my back, onto my bed and close my eyes. I am no longer stiff; I'm relaxed but a little too relaxed. My body feels like jelly almost. I see my future. It doesn't look like all the other ones I just witnessed. Now I know why I've been invited to see the happy side of things because mine is about to get a whole lot worse.

Mel Jovanovic

A Moment or Two “Run!” called Tula, horror grasping her voice. We sprinted up the stream of the glistening waterfall, the trees gleaned down above us. The sun would soon set, which left me wondering if it would once again rise for Tula and me. We were halfway to the end of the stream, both of us gasping for air. I hunched over and put my hands on my knees. My consciousness washed over me, and a fireball of fear struck my heart. An image of the strange creature clouded my vision. A human, but then a monster, the transition was extraordinary. The human had honey brown hair which matched his eyes. Quickly and drastically, hair had sprouted from the tip of his head to the bottom of his feet. Bones in his skin cracked and formed in new inhumane positions, and lastly, his eyes. His eyes had morphed from a hazelnut brown pigmentation into a crimson red. His eyes told a story, and I recognized the intensity from somewhere. Fear had consumed the eyes; he was scared. Maybe of himself. I awoke. The sound of peculiar birds chirped above me and I realised I was lying down on the cold, damp, bug infested ground. I instantly stood up and scanned my eyes around. “TULA!” I screamed, only a few minutes had passed, and she was nowhere to be seen. I glanced at my watch just to be sure of the seconds that had ticked by. To my surprise it had been hours, I assumed I had fallen asleep. My mind catapulted to sudden conclusions of where she could be, but the massive tracks that were imprinted near me gave me an obvious idea as to what happened. I needed to get to higher ground, and fast. The moon was approaching, and every second caused worry and fear to spread inside me like wildfire. I needed a miracle, but time was ticking, and moments were passing by. It took all my strength to run up that steep, rugged terrain, while pushing aside the reaching thoughts of my aching muscles. I made it to the top of the waterfall quicker than I anticipated but still, not enough time to catch a breath, not enough time to admire the stunning view with stars just starting to emerge from behind the clouds. I looked around and saw how massive the scope was of where she could be and my head said, “Give it up.” But even over all my huffing and puffing I still heard my heart, followed by a familiar voice, “You have to try!” That voice was my mother, I knew it was. I didn’t remember her being that loud and clear, but, how could I? She could only whisper when she had gotten... sick. I couldn’t do anything but hug her helplessly in my arms, while clinging to hope. My eyes filled with water and I whipped them clear. I avoided any emotion, because I knew it would pull me down, and then there would be no chance of saving Tula, or me. Denial, anger and sadness was the invisible stage I was at, when all I wanted was peace. I clutched my necklace tightly, as I closed my eyes. Breathing in and out, steadying my breathing for a moment or two. My eyes slammed open! Sharp claws dug into my back and something pushed me off the edge of the cliff, but it wasn’t just something, I knew there was someone hidden inside of the creature, trapped in a body that wasn’t theirs. I didn’t know if this would be the last time, I would open my eyes, but I hoped Tula was ok and that she was safe. But deep down I hoped I would get to see my Mother, I missed her, and she knew it too. I really tried convincing myself I was dreaming, only thing is, my eyes were wide open. But I flew, just for a moment or two. Seeing my Mother and Tula on the other side of the bright light, I was happy I flew.

Esther Santoso

Star I proved everyone wrong. A four foot eleven Asian with no sporting genes can swim. And swim well. For years, I spent hours pushing myself through the saline sea, over and over until my body became subject to gravity, unable to move. Sounds a bit exaggerated, but it's only the truth. My coach always told me I would never make it further than districts, because I was short. I would peak, reach great speeds, but there will be a six-foot giant still developing technique already reaching my personal best. To a degree, he was right. I felt breathless every lesson, but I never improved a lot. It was millisecond by millisecond improvements every week. So, I should just give up, my friends would say. What is the point? My family would ask. But this was something I have been dreaming of for half my life. Literally. Ever since I was in Year 4, I dreamed of reaching the stars as I swam in the baby pool. I saw Kate and Bronte Campbell fly across the pool through a screen, and I knew if I worked hard, I would be able to at least touch the star. Because the stars always screamed, "If you work hard enough, you can be here too." When I received the offer, it was a dream come true. I could feel the rough card against my hand, the red rubber stamp. And it was not my friend's. It had my name on it. It was only an invitation to the state monthly meet, but it meant that I could move to the state team soon. It means that I was in line, at the ticket counter, just waiting for a ticket to the stars. And today I was at the front of the line. I look left, I look right. I did not know anyone I was racing; I don't even think I have seen them before. But they seemed to know each other. Like they're regular visitors to the stars. They seemed so relaxed, like as if there are not hundreds of people watching them swim. I focus on the water below me, with my reflection staring back at me. It was only going one lap, "Take your marks- BUZZ." There is no time to think. I dive. All energy off my legs. Straight arms pushed forward. Straight torso. Push legs up. I crash into the water, and adrenaline takes over. The rhythm takes over my body as if I was a robot, programmed to move when triggered. I feel water leaking into my goggles. The sting of chlorine hits my eyes, and suddenly autopilot was turned off. I could feel the pain travel through me- moving like a tsunami from my legs up to my shoulders. I keep pushing- fifteen metres- ten metres- five metres- one metre. I slam into the wall, and after wiping my face, I look up at the time board. It was my personal best, yet I was last. Those around me seems like they just came out of a shower; rejuvenated, while I float lifelessly. And I realise, chasing this "dream", is like chasing the wind. Because the funny thing about dreams is that we only remember a few. We spend hours each night encapsulated by this dreamworld that we create in our minds, yet when we return to the real world, we only remember a few. And usually, the few remember are outrageously crazy. But unless you truly open your eyes, you cannot see how that train rushes to star that did not shine as bright to you. There are millions of stars around us. Each with their own unique features that make them beguilingly bright. Some of them may stand out to us, but when you visit them, you start to realise that it is not your star. Staying on that star will never make it better, it will not make it more attractive to you. So, dream with your eyes open, I tell myself. There's a fearfully and wonderfully made star out there somewhere, just for me.