

Young Minds Short Story Competition 2022

Category: Year 7-9 – WINNER

Karthiga Vijayakumares

Untethered

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.

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.

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