THE CITY OF SUBIACO PRESENTS THE 2018 TIM WINTON AWARD FOR YOUNG WRITERS

LET YOUR IMAGINATION TAKE YOU SOMEWHERE UNEXPECTED
CONTENTS

Lower Primary
- The Fate of CX 211 .......................................................... 4
- Crack! ........................................................................... 8
- Calm and Strong .......................................................... 12

Middle Primary
- Life is life ..................................................................... 16
- African Cooking Disasters ........................................... 21
- The Adventures Of Jeffery-Bob ..................................... 24

Upper Primary
- Despair .......................................................................... 29
- The Lost Word ............................................................. 35
- Shine Bright Etoile ....................................................... 41
- The Keeper of Seasons ................................................ 47

Lower Secondary
- A Pot Full Of Promises .................................................. 51
- The Last Man ................................................................ 56
- Anyone’s Stories ......................................................... 60

Upper Secondary
- The Colour Red ............................................................ 65
- The Old Lie .................................................................. 70
- Jubilee Bay ................................................................... 75
LOWER PRIMARY
THE FATE OF

CX 211

SHAUN TOOR
I am an indispensable part of your daily life. Your children adore me as I keep them entertained and educated in this technological era. Can you guess who I am?

“Look at these beautiful babies!” proclaimed the production line manager as he smiled in admiration. I was designed and conceived in one of the most elite manufacturing hubs.

I belong to the second generation prestigious CX family – the best android tablets in the world. I am ‘CX 211’ Batch number 007. My numerous incredible features include a 9.7 inch Super Amoled touch screen display with a four gigabyte memory. This is coupled with a long lasting battery life which allows me to give you an electrifying performance.

My looks are astonishing! With a sleek ebony black backing and silver trimming, I was immaculately designed to perfection.

After spending a few days in the manufacturing hub, the friendly staff took very good care of me and packed me into a cosy box. Then, I was transported to a different part of the world.

In a few weeks, I finally arrived at my destination. I was still packed and kept in a storeroom. I really hated the small dark room which I shared with the other competitive brands of tablets. The other brands envied me as I was the best and the most popular. “I will get out of this small dinghy room” as I whispered to myself.

Suddenly, a loud broadcast startled me. “John, can you please bring out the latest CX model!” The next moment, I heard the sound of footsteps approaching the storeroom. My prayers have been answered.

Soon after, I was in the hands of John; who seem to be an expert salesman. He started convincing an elderly lady in her mid-seventies about me. “This is the best android tablet.” “That’s definitely me!” as I gleamed with pride.

“Great, I’ll take it. Can you wrap it up please?” the lady requested. I was wondering how my new owner would be like? She seems to be a pleasant person. I can’t wait to serve her.

The lady drove me in her luxurious red car to a nearby wealthy neighbourhood. The car stopped and she carried me gently towards a magnificent house. I could hear the sound of loud music and chattering voices of a crowd. It seems to me a party was going on.
I was presented to her grandson, Jake. It was his fifteenth birthday. In excitement, he ripped off the gift wrap. “Awesome! It’s a CX 211!” shouting eagerly. “Thanks grandma.” Jake showed me off to all his friends. He seemed happy with me. Who wouldn’t be? I am the best tablet after all.

The following day, Jake took me out of my cosy box. He started me for the very first time. He explored all my features and uploaded the latest programmes. I felt very fortunate to have a good owner.

After seven months, my happiness was short-lived. “Ouch! Ouch!” I screamed in agony as Jake was very rough while playing computer games. He pressed hard on my sensitive touch screen. Jake became addicted to useless computer games. He would spend sleepless nights to play these games. This started to take a toil on him. He became restless and quick-tempered. Day by day, his tapping got worst on my screen. I felt exhausted as I was not given a moment to rest.

One night, Jake was up late as usual playing these games. While playing the game, he lost and became very upset. In anger, he threw me hard against the wall and I fractured my screen. Luckily, all my internal parts were not damaged. Instead of saving me, he flung me in his disorganised cupboard. “I’m going to get mum to buy me a better model than this stupid old tablet!” shouting to himself. I was heartbroken as I took refuge in his dark cupboard.

After a few weeks in the lonely cupboard, Jake left me on the street verge. I was thrown beside an old stained mattress. “What are we doing here?” I questioned the old mattress. “This is an annual verge collection. The owner doesn’t need us any more. So, they threw us here.” replied the old mattress in a distress voice. There I was with a stained old mattress, a rusty old bicycle and an old washing machine. We were all sharing our sad stories together. Is this the end of my legacy? CX 211, the most prestigious tablet in a dumpster?

Just when I thought my whole world was going to crumble, I was lucky to be picked up by a teenage boy who was walking home from school. “CX 211! That’s a cool tablet!” as he carefully placed me in his schoolbag. I was saved from the street verge. Who is this boy? I really hope he’s not like Jake.

The boy placed me on his study desk in his bedroom. I scanned my new owner’s room and found out more about him. His name was Robin. He was in year eight and he loved computers. This was obvious as his room was filled with computer gadgets and old computer spare parts.
Robin examined me cautiously. He dismantled me and did a thorough check. After his evaluation, he realised that all I needed was a new touch screen. Immediately, Robin called up my birthplace – the manufacturing hub and ordered a brand new touch screen.

In a few days, the touch screen arrived. Like a true surgeon, he operated on me. He replaced the cracked screen with a new one. He then went on to remove all the virus infected games which Jake had installed earlier. At the same time, he updated my operating system and installed a new anti-virus programme. I felt I was reborn. Robin brought me back to life!

For the last two years, my life had improved with Robin. We worked together perfectly. I have helped him in his school work and he uploaded educational games that served him better. Unlike Jake, Robin has shown great respect and value for me.

Like any other mortals, my battery life will come to an end one day. As long as my operating system runs smoothly and I stay virus free, I will continue to serve Robin till eternity.

This is my story…. I am and will always be CX 211, Batch Number 007.

– THE END –
Crack! There was a noise under Matilda’s bed. Matilda’s heart was pounding. Her knees were shivering and trembling. Sweat dripped down from her face. Her teeth chattered. She gripped her warm and cosy blanket. Crack! Matilda was terrified.

Matilda slowly slipped down her bed clutching her favourite toy, Tina the teddy bear. She crept into her big brother’s room. Matilda nudged her brother and John woke up in a startle. She quietly explained why she woke up.

John and Matilda ran back to Matilda’s room. Crack! Matilda and John jumped! “See, did you hear that?” Matilda whispered to John. “Sure did!” replied John. They slowly lifted up Matilda’s bed and they saw something green with lumps on it. Matilda’s heart jumped. Slowly appeared a huge ugly green monster! John and Matilda SCREAMED but luckily they did not wake up their parents.

The monster had horns with razor sharp claws. The monster had disgusting warts at the tip of his nose and he was humungous. His hands were lumpy and had long yellow nails. Matilda was so shocked her blonde hair stood up straight on top of her head!

The huge ugly monster smiled at them. The ugly monster said, “I am Ugyabick but you can call me Ug for short.” “Do you want to be my friend?” asked Ug. Shocked, Matilda and John moved backwards and shouted out, “NO!”

“Don’t judge anyone by their appearance,” said Ug kindly as he looked straight into their eyes. John and Matilda thought about it for a little while and they agreed to be his friend.

The ugly monster asked John and Matilda if they wanted to have fun. Matilda and John started to jump up and down excitedly. The monster found two sticks in the room and started rubbing them together. “Are you trying to make a fire?” asked John as his eyes widened. “Yes, just do everything I tell you to,” replied the monster. The ugly monster made the fire and told them to jump through the fire. The children closed their eyes and jumped through the fire. When they opened their eyes, they found themselves in a ferris wheel! They also rode in a carousel and a merry go round. Later, they went rock climbing and watched funny movies.

“Where is this place?” Matilda asked. “This is the Land of Games,” answered the ugly monster, “it is where I used to live.”

“Why did you leave such a fun place?” asked John.
“My brothers told me to leave and I am scared to go home,” replied the monster with a tear running down his cheek.

“You have to be brave and fear nobody,” said Matilda. “But how did you get under my bed?” asked Matilda.

“When my brothers told me to leave I made a wish at the wishing well to leave the Land of Games,” Ug replied.

They played at the Land of Games for hours and John decided that it was time to go home. Matilda and John did not know how to go home! They thought for a little and John suggested that they could go back to the wishing well to try. When they arrived at the wishing well, Ug said to John and Matilda, “I am afraid it is being renovated.”

“We could go through a magic portal!” said Matilda. “I have been reading about magic portals in books”. The ugly monster did not know what magic portals were.

“Why don’t we jump through a fire again?” questioned Matilda. “We could try!” exclaimed Ug. Ug found two sticks and rubbed them together. Ug managed to make a fire again. Matilda and John closed their eyes and leapt through the fire. When they opened their eyes they were still in the Land of Games. Matilda sighed heavily. Her heart felt like it was about to sink. Big tears slid down her freckled face. She was really disappointed.

Finally Ug said tearfully, “The only way for you both to go home is to get some advice from my brothers.” Ug trembled as he told them why his brothers were mean to him. He told them that when he was little he was stuck on a steep hill. His parents went to rescue him but rolled down the hill and died. Luckily he survived but his brothers blamed him for killing his parents. Matilda and John calmed him down. “Be brave and fear nobody,” Matilda reminded him.

They set off and arrived at Ug’s brothers’ home. It was made out of a really huge tree trunk with weeping willow leaves on the top. Ug took a deep breath and bravely knocked on the door. There appeared eight monsters that looked like Ug. The brothers gasped when they saw Ug. They were so happy to see Ug and were not mean to Ug. They told Ug they were sorry for being mean and they understood now it was not Ug’s fault their parents died.

The monsters introduced themselves as Ya, Bick, Limon, Not Be, Gooey, Yuck, Sidon and Do. The eight brothers then asked Matilda and John what they were
doing in the Land of Games. Matilda and John explained that they needed to go home but the wishing well Ug used was now being renovated and nothing else worked.

The oldest, wisest and the cleverest of all the brothers told John and Matilda that he read a book once that said there was one other way which was to build a fire, add willow tree leaves, sap from willow trees and monster hair. The monsters built a fire outside their willow tree house and added the willow leaves and sap. Finally, the monsters plucked a piece of hair from their bodies and threw it into the fire. A bright fire spiral formed. Matilda and John waved goodbye, closed their eyes and jumped through the fire spiral.

When they opened their eyes, they were back in Matilda’s bedroom and fell fast asleep. John and Matilda always remembered not to judge anyone by their appearance. Meanwhile, Ug was living happily with his brothers and never forgot his friends John and Matilda who taught him to be brave and have no fear.

A few nights later, Matilda woke up suddenly. She heard a noise under her bed. Crack!

– THE END –
“The waves were chasing each other backwards and forwards on the peach coloured sand.”

CALM AND STRONG
by Olivia Bell
A small boy sat fishing with the crunchy sand between his small bare toes. Every day at the beach he watched the sailors, fighting and crashing against the waves in their boats. He thought the waves were giant, but the sailors did not stop to worry. He liked to watch the smooth aqua marine ripples against the peach coloured sand. He also liked the pelicans diving down to get some fish, but he also did not like them when they were too close to him when he was fishing because they took away all his fish. They caught all of the fish in one part of the ocean, so he had to move to a different spot each time. Not that he did not like pelicans, but they were just pesky.

The sun sparkling on the ocean surface looked like steps to God. The waves were chasing each other backwards and forwards on the peach coloured sand. One day the boy wanted to sail on the smooth waves in a wooden boat of his own. Then he could fight through the waves and be like a real sailor.

One morning, he saw a small boat nearly drifting off to the salty ocean. But before it could, he tried to save it, but he fell into it! He felt so brave, and thought he was a real sailor. So he started to run the sail and pull up the rough and plaited ropes. He saw scaly blue fish, more than he had seen in the aqua shallows. There were really thick fish on one side, and small fish on the other side, shimmering with speed. He paddled even further. The boy felt a sway every now and again from the ripples.

The clouds started to spit a bit and it felt like gentle fingers tickling his head. It made a funny sound on the wooden boat. Pitter patter, pitter patter. But the boy was not scared because he knew it was just a bit of rain, and sailors did not worry so he did not worry either. Soon, the clouds turned into dark blankets in the sky.

Suddenly the waves turned dark black. The waves were overlapping each other and he could barely see the light blue sky any more. The boat rocked faster and all of the fish hid. The rain pelted onto his head and into his boat. It felt like hard rocks falling or seagulls pecking at his head. The wind howled and pushed more rain into his boat. He was really scared now, trembling with fear and fright. He stood up and blocked the rain on one side using his spare paddle. His eyes were wide with panic because the water got through his paddle. The thunder boomed and the lightening crashed. His teeth were chattering. He did not know what to do. He could not see the shore and not even one sailor. Now his teeth were chattering like mad. He thought to himself, “Good sailors would not come out now, but good sailors would be brave if they were here!”.
So the boy kept going. He picked up both paddles and got the sail running again. After a few minutes his arms were aching and his tummy was rumbling but he kept going. He pulled hard on the oars and his teeth were not chattering anymore. They were grinding with force and determination to get to the shore. He had to focus. He did not know where he was going because of the big waves crashing around him.

As he arrived to the shore, lots of people saw him wet and astonished. They crowded around him and started him and started to interview him. He felt relieved that he was back on land. Now he would not go in the boats, only if he was invited.

A small boy sat fishing with the crunchy sand between his small bare toes. Every day at the beach he watched the sailors, fighting and crashing against the waves in their boats.

– THE END –
MIDDLE PRIMARY
Life

is Life

WRITTEN BY

Samara Bailye
What shall I do now?’ Jack Goldgrubber wondered aloud. He had been going around for almost three months now with no way to get food, water or shelter so he had had to beg for money to live! (Which is a thing you only do if you are desperate) The reason he had to do this is because he lost his last job (which was a piano soloist for concerts) he had lost it because he had had an extremely bad car accident and had lost his hand this had been replaced with a hook which, although it was extremely attractive, still had its disadvantages. (E.g. not being able to play the piano.) By now Jack was so desperate to get a job that he went to the job Centrelink and asked the lady at the counter if she had a suitable job for him. She had a list of jobs in her drawer and she pulled this out.

The first job on her list was ‘vet.’ Jack seemed excited about this idea so she had no reason to read on. “You will receive a job offer in the next five days. You will have a week to answer after you receive it. If you don’t answer then we will give the job to someone else.’ She told him severely

Three days later, Jack received a letter, thinking that it must finally, be his job application he excitedly tore it open preparing himself for a lovely surprise. Well, he got his surprise just not quite what he was expecting it was just a bill the commonwealth bank. Jack was so annoyed about this that he marched down the road to the post office and yelled at them. He was in this type of mood partly because he worried that Centrelink had forgotten about him and partly because he was annoyed that the post office was so slow at delivering people’s letters. This drama, however was quickly cleared up because a missing letter was found left in the bottom of the postie’s bag’s folds and sure enough it was addressed to ‘Mr Jack Goldgrubber’

After Jack had finally retrieved, his beloved letter he opened it, then, he jumped with joy as if he was a seven year old and went racing everywhere hugging his letter close. After this things went considerably better for Jack. The next day he sent in his acceptance form and hey presto he had a job.

Two days later, Jack Goldgrubber dressed in his smart new vet’s uniform, drove to Wembley Veterinary Animal Hospital and prepared his office for the day…

That night he came home tired and discouraged, in his mind this morning he had pictured the perfect day but as he bitterly thought afterwards ‘I believe everyone did that just to annoy me on my first day’. He even muttered to himself as he went up to bed that night ‘life is life, why, the only thing that liked me today were the parrots. The patients certainly didn’t and every time I came even close to a dog it growled a fierce growl and bared its teeth ferociously.’
The next day he went to the job Centrelink again and went through the whole process again. He actually went and did this seven more times because he kept hating the job that was given to him!

After the vet episode Jack Goldgrubber went to work as a waiter on a cruise. He loved the sailing bit but, he couldn’t hold onto the plates! (I believe he managed to break about seventy if my memory serves me correctly) Next he worked as a shopkeeper, he absolutely loved the amount of money he was getting but the rest of it was too hard work for someone his age (which was um let think about that-probably twenty five. Then he tried to work as a taxi driver, he loved the driving and the steering bit but he kept getting his hook stuck in the wheel so that job was no good either. After that he went to study to be a scientist (a botanist to be precise) he loved to follow maps to retrieve his samples but the plants themselves he is allergic to- they give him a rash. (Just like a scientist.) After that he tried to work as a swimming instructor, he loved the water and the bossing everyone around bits but all the little tiny tots were scared of him. The final time he went to get a job he was out of just about out of hope. I will never get the right job he thought to himself sadly (but he will oh yes he will.)

Today Miss Sarah (who is the lady at the counter) met Jack. She looked extremely excited and he felt tremendously happy for her because she had probably received some delightful news from home (Miss Sarah had told me that her family was very poor) so I tremendously surprised when she rushed to me and cried ‘young man I have got the perfect job for you’ Jack was so stunned out of his senses so for a moment he did not answer. ‘Well, didn’t you hear me’ she said, slightly, annoyed ‘I said I’ve found the perfect job for you. You, are supposed to excited and happy aren’t you?’ By this time Jack had caught on and was begging her to tell him what it was. ‘Why a pirate’ he eventually managed to make her say (he still doesn’t know why she spoke in that voice because it made poor Jack think that she though that he already ought to know about it. ‘It has got everything you like if you are a captain you get to have a parrot’ (vet) ‘you love getting money’ (shopkeeper) ‘you love following maps’ (botanist) ‘it’s perfect, and best of all there will be no children on that ship.’(Swimming instructor) ‘And you love sailing and steering ships’ (waiter) it’s perfect. Absolutely perfect

After that Jack Goldgrubber had the best life, life can give to anyone. He sailed away with his pirate crew and they made Jack their captain so Jack changed his name from the normal name that anyone could have to a very important name that anyone who was a pirate at sea in the days of this name will remember until their dying day…..Cap’n Robert Slashface (because it sounded more
piratey than his last name) he even made up a song that his men sang to warn him that there was an enemy approaching and many years later they also sang it at his funeral it went like this.

Here they come
Here they come
Across the raging sea
Lift the muzzles, men
Aim those guns
Steady now
Aim
FIRE
Shoot ’em down
Swing across the ropes
All ’em still surviving
Throw ’em in the sea
With ’em hungry creatures
that they now call crocodiles
They won’t last an hour
You go steal the gold
Then we depart
And leave ’em all to drown
Leave their side
Join ours
Or die

In this crew kidnapping was a very big thing, they even used to go back to their old home towns where they grew up and kidnap some young people who wished to sail the seven seas. The young ones thought that it was great fun and a big favour that you couldn’t miss. One day while they were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean Robert called out to his men ‘Now bound for England’ when they reached port Robert saw his own wanted posted (the reason underneath was ‘for being a pirate captain’) How unfair thought poor Robert.

Then he whispered ‘right here’s the plan pals, we creep into the Centrelink pretending to come to look for jobs as a group and whilst you are all arguing I will slip around behind Sarah with the cover of the bench that goes all around it and get her. Simple.’ ‘Right does everyone now know what they’re doing?’ he asked raising his voice a little so that the men could hear him over the noise of the people in the park behind them. ‘Yes’ they all chorused they thought it a bit odd that the captain should kidnap a lady but the captain’s wishes were their
commands and if they didn’t obey then they would be thrown to the sharks which was the worst death possible. Well the plan went to scale if you have a tremendously strange idea of something going right.

The plan went right until the part of going into the building Centrelink because going in and out of each door was a policeman on patrol right ‘what we need to do is to beat them up until they’re unconscious then sneak in.’ said Robert. They managed to do this bit as well but they had completely forgotten to check under the bushes and there were some hidden under there only a few but a few with walkie talkies meant a few with trouble.

The next silly thing captain Robert and his gang did was try to kidnap Miss Sarah. She had heard the commotion outside and had been preparing herself for a man that she used to call Jack Goldgrubber to come racing in and she thought it was her responsibility to help him to safety. But she did not only see Robert walk in but a great gang that swarmed about him and looked like p... pirates w...with swords! She couldn’t disguise her shock completely but she quickly recovered and told herself sternly that ‘the more there are the more there are to be saved.’ Not waiting for hellos she pulled them all under her desk (it was a big desk.)

Milliseconds later the door burst open and ten police officers marched in. ‘hand him over miss, and whilst you’re at it would you kindly hand over the rest of his gang. They’re a sneaky lot and you don’t want to get mixed up with ‘em. But we’re sneakier because we had some of our men in the bushes in front of this building that if you were wondering is how we knew’ But Sarah would not hand them over ‘They went out there’ she said shakily pointing to the back door which, for some reason was propped open. ‘Right men call the others and we’ll go track ‘em.’ The rest of the police force now joined them (half were still half unconscious) and went in hot pursuit of......nothing.

After they had all gone out the door Robert and his men crawled out from under her desk. Robert was so grateful to her for saving his life that he asked her to marry him. She did, so Robert said to his men ‘sorry people I’m not going to sail the seven seas any more so you can go and either find another captain for you or you can be a fisherman. Surprisingly, every single one of those men went for fishermen and to this day Robert does not know why. But he did tell Sarah that he thought she was an astounding actor.

– THE END –
African Cooking

DISASTER

WRITTEN BY ELLEN WAHL
was sitting on a huge and dirty elephant going straight forward in the dry African Savanna. The sky was gloomy and big. My name is Harry, I have brown eyes like most of us here in Africa. I love to run, and my favourite food is chicken and bread.

When the sun started going down, it formed a beautiful sunset. I decided to jump down from the elephant when I saw it was way too far down to the ground. It felt like I was an astronaut on the moon looking down. I didn’t know what to do, I was stuck! I saw a big giraffe go towards my way. I started screaming, “Help! Help!” I know no one was going to hear me. I took a big breath when I saw the giraffe coming closer. Eventually I got an idea, I slid down the big elephant’s tail. When I was on the dry land again I was running as fast as I could. I started coming closer to my village. I slowed down and took all the sweat from my face. I pretended nothing had happened. When I came closer to my mom she was standing in the open kitchen and cooking dinner. Her long hair was up in a bun and her brown eyes shined in the sun shine. I was about to ask her what we were eating when she asked what type of bread I wanted with the chicken. I had two choices, fluffy bread, or small thin bread, I wanted to have the thin one.

The next morning, I went to school and I saw my friends. We started talking about what we were going to do today and what type of food we were having for lunch. We decided that we were going to guess what type of food we were having for lunch. I guessed that we were having rice and some chicken. My friend Kaela who has short hair and a small thin braid over her hair, brownish black eyes, a small nose and she loves warthogs. She thought it was going to be porridge and my other friend Kasengele, he has no hair and a headdress which is called Gele in Africa. He has brown eyes like Kaela and a big smile all the time. He guessed it was going to be bread and vegetables soup.

During lunch time we walked in the open corridor to the room where you get your lunch. It started smelling very weird. A smell that we had never smelled before, by then all of us were sure no one would have guessed right! When we came in we saw a big black bucket with green porridge that looked like monsters made it while they were picking their nose. We went out of the room you get your food in and went outside and sat down on a bench. We looked at the food we just got, and we tried it! It tasted exactly like it looked. We saw a dog and it looked hungry, so we put all the food on the ground. The dog came closer and started eating. When we saw it eat we all walked away.
The next few weeks it was even more and more weird food at school. The second week probably no one was eating the food and the dogs at school were surely happier and happier every day because of all the food they got. It started to get a bit mysterious at school and now the teachers didn’t even eat the food! You never even saw the chef that cooked the food for the school any more. Normally the chef at school is so nice and always wants to talk with the students, but now we never see him.

One month later everything had changed. Me, Kaela and Kasengele had figured out that we have a new chef at school and she could cook! One morning we saw someone that we hadn’t seen before, so we followed her and saw that she was the new chef at school. We saw her cooking and she cooked so weirdly as if it was a zebra standing in the kitchen and cooking. She just chucked things that she found and put it in a big bowl. We talked with her and told her that she had to tell the principal and start to go in a cooking school. She went to a cooking school so now while she is away we have another chef at school called Jasmine. But we hope that the other chef comes back soon because she was so nice, and her name was Sara, she came from Denmark, had long brown hair and we loved her and her food.

– THE END –
THE ADVENTURES OF JEFFERY BOB

BY JESSE ROSE JACOB
i hope you’re ready for this extraordinary tale. it’s a little bit odd i tell you. but every word is absolutely true. this tale starts in a cereal box, carefully placed in a large dustbin in a dusty, busy and noisy city. it’s the story of a …

**LADY-BUG**

This lady-bug’s name was Jeffery-Bob, and she was a girl! Her parents loved to spend all night partying. This was before they had Jeffery-Bob of course. Jeffery-Bob’s parents were Millionaires and that’s why they didn’t have to go to work.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is the night of the accidents! And I mean two accidents!

1. The night they had Jeffery-Bob (to them it was an accident)
2. The night they drank green goo from the caterpillar (which ladies and gentlemen made them diabolically bonkers).

These incidences were both on the same night. When they had Jeffery-Bob, they had come home completely bonkers (having just drunk some caterpillar goo)! They were so bonkers that they named their baby girl JEFFERY-BOB.

They lived in the fanciest and biggest cereal box that had more than 100 rooms! They had lots of servants and that’s who took care of Jeffery-Bob. Jeffery-Bob wasn’t taught to ask politely so she asked each command in a very mean voice. When she was actually five years old (but thought she was 101), she walked over to a servant named Marther and said, “I want to know how to read” in a very mean voice. The servant was shocked. Not only at the thought of a child (who had been raised by mad hatter parents) wanting to know how to read, but also at the thought of how hard it would be to try and teach Jeffery-Bob how to read.

Marther had to say yes because Jeffery-bob had anger issues and would cry until the end of time if Marther denied her. So Marther took out an ABC book that had three letter words in it. She started to teach her some words but noticed that that Jeffery-Bob was yelling out the words already! Marther stopped and looked at Jeffery-Bob shocked and confused. “You know how to read already”, said Marther. “No I don’t, I asked you how to read not write”. Jeffery-Bob was getting confused between READING AND WRITING! Ha, ha, ha! Laughed Marther.”No.” “Your getting confused between READING and WRITING !”
Marther started to explain the differences between READING and WRITING but noticed that Jeffery-Bob was walking up stairs to her bed room and stopped in the middle of the stair case and said, “I’M TIRED AND GOING TO BED!” in another rude way of her own. Marther said “Ok.” I’m glad that’s over, thought Marther. After an hour, Marther went to check on Jeffery-Bob, she realised that Jeffery-Bob was reading a novel and that perhaps Jeffery-Bob was a whole lot cleverer than Marther had initially thought.

That night, Marther saw a piece of paper sticking out the dustbin (upon which the cereal box was placed). The paper read…”Entrance exam for the LadyBug University (LBU)“. This gave Marther an idea…she showed it Jeffery-Bob and said that she would teach her how to write and help her with the exam. Marther expected Jeffery-Bob to be her usual rude self back, but instead she was very surprised when Jeffery-Bob blushed and thanked Marther for caring for her. Maybe all Jeffery-Bob needed was someone to give her a chance.

Marther and Jeffery-Bob set about the preparations. Jeffery-Bob had to write a fantastic story in order to be given a place at the fancy LB University! Each night Marther helped her scribble her ideas on the walls of the cereal box and slowly the story started to take shape! The day of the exam came at last and off Jeffery-Bob went. She gave it her best shot and wrote a fanstasically wonderful story and Marther couldn’t have been prouder. Now they had to wait for two weeks before the results were announced. During that time, Jeffery-Bob’s crazy parents started to wonder what Jeffery-Bob would do with her life. It had been some time since they had drunk the caterpillar goo and some sense was starting to return to them!

Finally the day arrived and the letter from L-B-U was delivered. Jeffery-Bob was so nervous so she asked Marther to read the note to her. Marther cleared her throat, and announced that Jeffery-Bob was accepted and would be going to L-B-U the next term! Jeffery-Bob could not believe her luck.

The next day, Jeffery-Bob flew to L-B-U and started studying. She spent four years in that university and every holiday she would visit her parents. Each time Jeffery-Bob came home, her parents got grumpier and grumpier with her. Perhaps they were jealous of being able to go to L-B-U and learning all these new things. The last holiday before Jeffery-Bob graduated was the worst holiday ever because on that exact holiday, Jeffery-Bob was grounded by her parents for one month! Her parents were completely bonkers (as I have already told you). What type of parents wouldn’t be proud of their little girl achieving
such great things? Jeffery-Bob had to escape! But how? That night, Jeffery-Bob stole a toothpick from behind her parent’s backs. She cut a hole in her cereal house and flew out. She flew all the way to her best friend Emma’s house and stayed there until L-B-U was open again.

Finally the year past and Jeffery-Bob graduated and got a very good job. That job was a medical engineer to insects! After three years of hard work, Jeffery-Bob had one year’s leave. She decided to visit her mom and dad. They are obviously still bonkers because they didn’t remember Jeffery-Bob being grounded. For her 13th birthday, her mom and dad bought her an “AROUND THE WORLD TICKET” (which was kind of funny, since Jeffery-Bob could already fly)! Jeffery-Bob gave the ticket to her lovely servant Marther (who was actually an ant and couldn’t fly) and Marther was delighted. Jeffery-Bob learnt so many wonderful things because of Marther and when she went back to work, she taught everything she knew to all other insects big and small! Jeffery-Bob became world famous!!!

And that ladies and gentlemen, is the story of JEFFERY-BOB THE LADY-BUG, the result of two accidents on an otherwise very ordinary night!

– THE END –
The bus stood where it always did, shining, new and lustrous, waiting for its last passengers. I inhabited it, flitting in and out of people’s minds, planting my seeds of hopelessness and observing them grow. I buzzed around like an annoying fly, never quite staying in one spot but always lingering nearby, just out of sight. As I did my duty, I absorbed people’s life stories. I spied an accountant with two kids and a pilot for a husband; I decided she would fall ill. Then I happened upon two teen-aged girls, chattering and laughing on their way to swimming; one of them would fall and break an arm.

I never went further than inflicting an injury. We were to do our maudlin job, but never to cause catastrophic interference with a person’s life. It sounds crude and cruel to a kind heart, but every person must experience all human emotions in order to live an authentic life. At least that is what we had been ordered to believe. I always felt wicked casting my shadow of forlornness over the bright souls alighting my bus, but I was afraid of the trouble that would be caused if I didn’t.

Sitting at the back of the bus, head in his hands, was an old man. As I entered his brain, I flicked through the events in his life, like a person might flick through a photograph album or a folder. Few of the man’s memories were good. As a boy he had been bullied, then as a young man, he had been a soldier. He had watched his friends die in the Vietnam War. The war had not been exciting or glorious. It had made him feel terrified and ashamed. He had lost an ear in the balmy jungle; it was a permanent reminder of his pain. The old man had married though – he had met a girl who was a nurse and they had one child together. The old man had lost his home in a fire, and then lost his wife who had passed away two years ago. Now, the elderly gentleman lived in a small house, where his daughter and granddaughter visited him every weekend. Those visits were the highlight of his sad and lonely life. I could see that this man had already suffered so much searing sorrow. I could inflict more pain on his scarred and troubled soul by spoiling those much-anticipated weekend visits, but for once, I decided, I would not and could not, do my terrible duty.

I flew out of the bus, where I was quickly captured by Anger and Fury as Arrogance descended upon me. Arrogance ruled all feelings. She was both the head of the Council of Feelings and the Rule Enforcer. She glared at me with condescension in her eyes and squeaked venomously,

“You have not done your designated duty and have caused unrest in our world. You have interfered with the natural order of human experience. I am forced
to accompany you to a trial, where the Council of Feelings will question your competence to be entrusted as one of the more important emotions. If the Council finds you to be incompetent, you will be stripped of your title and demoted to less significant role as a lesser emotion.”

I caught a draught and flew away as fast as I could. The angered emotions swiftly pursued me, but seeking refuge in someone’s head, I managed to escape and avoid detection. I heard the voices of Anger and Fury whine, “Hey, where’d he go?”

“I don’t know, you numbskull. I was on his trail until you blocked me,” was the growled response.

Anger and Fury continued to bicker like malevolent henchmen, until I heard one of them say,

“Hey, what if he is hiding in someone’s head?”

“Well, you know we can’t risk it. No one has ever tried having two emotions in one head before. Who knows what could happen? For all we know, the person’s brain could overload and explode!”

“Cool.”

“No – not cool at all.”

The bickering voices of Anger and Fury gradually became softer until I couldn’t hear them at all any more. I was sure they had gone away, so I tentatively exited through an ear. Thank goodness I was invisible, as I must have looked a sight.

**Happiness Shines a Light**

Wallowing in self-pity, I continued down an abandoned road lined with towering poplar trees, but no houses. Suddenly, a bright light came into view and I felt overwhelmingly frightened. When I realised with relief that the bright light was Happiness, I trudged on.

Happiness followed me, and with great concern in her eyes, implored, “Oh Despair, are you upset? I’m so sorry for asking so bluntly, but it is rather hard to tell when you are downcast for you are always supposed to look sad and sorrowful.” I nodded.

“Don’t be disheartened,” soothed Happiness as Guilt flew in. “What you did was, well, honourable. I know you didn’t do your job, but you really helped that old man.”
“I just feel so guilty,” I replied softly. “I deliberately failed in my duties, so that makes feel ashamed. More than that though, I feel guilty for all the pain I’ve inflicted on people over the years. I wish I could be more like you. I wish I brightened people’s lives, instead of making them darker.”

Happiness stepped aside to reveal the presence of Understanding, sitting quietly under a tree. They both smiled empathetically, as Happiness counseled, “Look Despair, I am not saying that it is a great feeling to bring misery and hopelessness to people’s lives, but without you, there could be no appreciation of me, Happiness, or Joy or Peace, or any of the other positive emotions, for that matter. Despair, you and I, we go hand and hand. Out of Despair comes Happiness for most. Every cloud had a silver lining and it takes a rain shower to produce a rainbow, and all that jazz, you know?”

Understanding nodded vigorously in agreement.

“I guess I’ve never thought about it that way before, Happiness. Thank you for comforting me. You have really helped.”

“No problem,” replied Happiness. “Now, what are we going to do about this? You obviously can’t remain as Despair, and even if you wanted to, if you return to the Council of Feelings, your employment will be immediately terminated.”

“Hmmm, you’re right, Happiness. You know, it grates me that the oldest emotions are in charge of the Council of Feelings. The newer emotions are definitely more positive and open to new ideas,” I mused forlornly.

“Despair, you’re a genius!” exclaimed Understanding. “We need a new emotion that is stronger than those that have gone before. We need an emotion that is new and fresh.”

“That sounds great,” I answered falteringly, “but how do we create that?”

“Well, emotions are born when humans experience something new,” prattled Happiness excitedly. “Maybe if we searched in a human mind, we might find something that could help us create a new feeling that is better than any that anyone has ever experienced.”

With that, Happiness and I bid goodbye to Understanding, and flew side by side, unseen, through a crowd of people. We then dove in and out of minds, in search of “that special something”. We toiled for hours, shuffling through thoughts, learning life stories and listening to the whirrings of people’s minds.
Eventually, we gave up. Sadness washed over us and Happiness sighed, “I don’t understand. Why didn’t that work?”

Suddenly, Understanding appeared by our sides, and with a wise and knowing look in her eyes, she whispered, “New emotions are born of new experiences. What you did just now, did not create anything new. You searched for the stories of where people have been, but not for the story of what lies ahead for them. Emotions have always looked through thoughts one at a time, in a single file motion, but have never combined to create a new emotion all together.”

“That’s right!” squealed Happiness. “You are so right, Understanding. There is something I just thought of that hasn’t been tried before. So far, the Council of Feelings has only ever allowed one emotion to enter a person’s mind at any one time. What would happen if two emotions entered a person’s mind at the same time and co-existed there? Could that create a new experience that gives rise to a new emotion?”

“Oh no, no, no,” I moaned gloomily. “We are not doing that, Happiness. The risk is far too great and besides, the Council of Feelings will be furious when they find out what we have done. They will punish us severely, and that’s presuming we even survive the experience!”

Happiness and Understanding remonstrated with me and eventually wore me down. What did I have to lose anyway, they wanted know – I was already in serious trouble with the Council of Feelings and likely to be banished. I would never be an active emotion again, let alone an important one. So hesitantly, I agreed to give the radical idea proposed by Happiness and Understand a very reluctant go.

A Revelation

The old man sat at the back of the bus. I instantly recognised the man that my heart had ached for.

“Why him?” I asked Happiness.

“His daughter and grand-daughter have moved away. He thinks he has nothing left to live for. If our experiment succeeds, he might have one last chance to find me, Happiness.”

“And if he doesn’t?” I cried nervously.

“I don’t know,” admitted Happiness, “but there’s no time to think about that now. On the count of three – one, two three!”
We quickly entered the elderly man’s brain and radiated our specific emotion at the same time expecting fireworks but…precisely nothing happened. “Well, that was disappointing,” sighed Happiness.

“Perhaps we have to dig first,” I wondered and Happiness agreed.

As we began to work side by side radiating our particular emotion and rifling through a lifetime of thoughts, something incredible happened. We touched.

Our plan had been to find a new experience to generate a new emotion, but instead, Happiness and I merged as we radiated our own emotion, and we became something new entirely. We now moved as one, we spoke as one, we thought as one and we felt as one. What had happened, we wondered? And then in the dim recesses of our elderly gentleman’s mind, we heard the whispered realisation of Understanding.

“When you, two opposite emotions, touched each other whilst working towards a common goal, that was a new experience for all of the emotions existing in the Realm of Human Experience. No emotions had ever touched with purpose before. They had always been too filled with pride and self-importance to risk losing their own individual significance. Even though you are opposites, you have always complimented each other. When combined, you are even more powerful. You have created a new feeling, a new emotion, that is better than any emotion that has gone before it. Now you must give it a name.”

Happiness and I nodded as one and we wondered together what we would name our new emotion. As we pondered this question, we heard the old man speak. He had uttered one single, solitary word, and that word was “Hope”.

Then, for the first time in a long time, the old man smiled a wobbly smile, and his eyes gleamed with the promise of what can be born from the sweet, sorrow-filled pairing of Despair embraced by Happiness. For the first time in his life, the old man’s eye gleamed with Hope, his face beamed and we all shone with a light so bright that it was dazzling.

– THE END –
Now if you’re looking for just another fairy tale, I’m sorry (so not sorry) to say, you are on the wrong page. If you’re weary of carbon copy anecdotes then this might be your cup of tea. I suggest you get comfortable, because someone should be. I’m huddled over a lap top crafting these words, not once upon a time but rather, in your time, right now. There will be no magic beans or fairy godmothers on my watch. This story is about a girl who is neither helpless nor hopeless. She is formidable, well she becomes formidable. When we first meet her, she is floundering a bit. Nonetheless, she doesn’t wait for anyone to save her.

Diana was a keeper. Since the beginning of language, since the very first word, there were keepers. Keepers are the guardians of words. They have a sacred duty to protect a word and by doing so, preserve the world it belongs to. Without keepers, we are without words. That would really put me out of business. You might recall forgotten words, erased from common speech. Well that’s down to sloppy keepers misplacing them. A word will cease to be by a keeper’s abandonment. So, you can see being a keeper is not for those donning glass slippers.

There was no creepy witch, enchanted lamp or spelled rose. At the age of 3, Diana simply woke up one morning to find a word tucked under her pillow. She knew absolutely that she must protect that word. Even at that young age, Diana knew the word was hers, and in some ways, the word was her first friend. She cared for her word fiercely. With little control or privacy, she was ardent in her determination. You know when a toddler is chucking a tantrum over a beloved bunny or blanket, as if it is a matter of life and death. Well that’s a sure sign of a keeper. Diana’s early years were dotted with such tantrums.

Diana had been a keeper for almost 10 years, although she had no plans to celebrate the milestone and no one to celebrate with. It was a solitary duty. Diana attended a small country high school in the Hills, on the out skirts of the world’s remotest capital city. A perfectly ordinary cover for the keeper of one of the most extraordinary words.

I’m going to give you a closer look at an unusual day for Diana. We find Diana in her bedroom after school. She flung her heavy bag onto her bed and like every other day she checked the secret compartment in her desk. Diana had become a little relaxed about her keeper duties. It’s not uncommon during puberty. Parents grant their children more privacy and in turn these teenage keepers leave their word somewhere they think is safe, and Diana thought this was the case.
Take a front row seat as the action unfolds. Diana held her breath. She looked into the hidden draw and blinked hard. A gaping, dark hole opened in her heart and before she opened her eyes, Diana knew the word was lost. Disappointment and shame washed over her. What was she without the word? What would become of the world? Seeking relief from the building agony, Diana began to rock herself. It was gentle to start. Each knock was a relief until she pushed a little harder, ramming into the wall. Diana felt she deserved the dull pain. Panic had filled the word’s void. Even in the midst of this catastrophe, real life beckoned. Diana was supposed to be doing homework.

Suddenly, Diana saw a flash of gold. She searched her desk and glimpsed a shadow of the word before it faded. Diana clutched the piece of paper. It was just plain now, nothing special. The blank page spoke to her. Well not literally, no talking paper in this story. Diana understood a life without that word would be a blank page, an endless abyss of despair. With certainty, Diana knew she would rather die trying to recover the word, than live without it.

Before dinner, the dishwasher required unstacking. You never see that in a fairy tale. She didn’t sigh, it’s not like that, she just got it done. Her mother was on the phone, pleading for customer service. Diana noticed the television over the heads of her bickering siblings. Images of refugees in off-shore detention flickered on the screen. It hurt Diana’s eyes to see how her country treated those entitled to protection. They should be shown … and her mind reached for her word but it was lost. In a world without her word, innocent people suffered, brothers and sisters fought and when help was needed, you pressed #. Diana zeroed in on the news reporter. Had she just said the word? It snapped away like elastic, popping out of reach. It hadn’t been a mistake. Her word was in her room before, and it was spoken fleetingly on the news just then. Diana resolved not to let the word slip beyond her reach.

After a restless night spent searching for the word in her dreams, Diana went to school on auto pilot. She moved through her lessons and made notes but felt withdrawn. She was on high alert for the word, but low alert for her teenage life and didn’t register that the Library was covered in graffiti. The colours and angry slogans blurred as she walked past. Later, in class, Diana took any desk, oblivious to the anxious girl nearby. Feigning interest, Diana scanned her memories for the word. By the end of another ignored class, our keeper was convinced the word was scrawled amongst the graffiti.
As the bell rang, hope coursed through Diana. She ploughed through crowded groups of students, charging like a warrior towards the library. There was no handsome prince on a steed to rescue this situation. In fact, there were students fighting, and she passed someone being pushed around. Diana didn’t have time for that, she thought only of her word. Her heart was beating so loudly she didn’t hear her battle cry to the maintenance woman armed with a roller. Diana saw the underside of her word briefly before it was rolled over and exiled. She slumped and discouragement drenched her heart.

The ghost of the word haunted Diana that week. Each morning she would double, triple check her secret place. The word’s absence could be felt at school, in her street, in the news, and in the lives around her. The hostility and darkness left in its path strengthened each day, and there was no incantation uttered or curse to be lifted. Without the word, life was hard, and softness was obliterated. Sensing her despair, Diana’s mother had insisted on a tried and true teenage cure: shopping. I know, ridiculous right? but I warned you this is no fairy tale. If Diana is going to find the word and save the world she won’t be singing in the morning while blue wrens dress her, she will dress herself.

“People have forgotten common …. decency” her mother muttered after being squeezed out of yet another car park. Diana noted how quickly other words clamoured to replace her missing one. She could see road rage overflowing as people failed to help the elderly, berated their children and abandoned their trolleys. Later, we find Diana wrestling on another dress her mother had chosen. The relentless pop back beat which was meant to induce shopping euphoria assaulted our keeper.

Over the mindless din, Diana heard familiar voices enter the next change room. They were her friends, who were step sisters. Oh, settle down, not those step sisters! Anyway, she was about to call out when she heard them nastily eviscerate a girl from school. By the time they had finished with the girls looks, her walk, things she said, where she lived and what she did, Diana’s voice had vanished. The music transitioned into mumbled rap, and her word briefly blurred into urban rhythms. Even when she took respite from her quest, well not a quest, from her responsibility, it found her. Diana zipped up the last dress she was prepared to try on and looked into her reflection. Her eyes dared her to restore the word to her friends and that poor girl. If only they could hear themselves, she pondered but I won’t write magic into this mirror. “Is there anything you like Diana?” her mum called. Diana stormed out of the change room. “There
is nothing I want from here.” She surveyed her friends, and the blush of their embarrassment clashed with their outfit. The word may be missing, but she would not let anyone forget it’s meaning. And I assure you that Diana’s mother didn’t let her forget her tone either.

Shortly after Diana was delivered to her Taekwondo class with a crisp reminder that her mother was not her personal shopper or driver. She regretted her behaviour and burst into the dojo seeking the freedom of a hard training session. The open nature of the class, the obligation on senior students to coach the little dragons and the discipline, normally soothed Diana. She looked up to her coach who was compassionate but firm and expected commitment from her. It really was a veritable hero training ground, if I can ask you to look past the fact that these otherwise gentle kids were mastering a hook to the jaw. No princesses allowed.

Today’s class was fractured. Younger students unleashed on each other without discipline. Older students were disrespectful and the coach was short tempered and had forgotten his trademark patience. While sparring, she was distracted by another murmur of the word. It had been spoken between students. Quietly it slipped out, and swiftly, it slipped away. With her head turned and her guard down, Diana took a kick to the head and her back slammed to the ground. Winded, gasping for air and hazy from blinding ceiling lights, she summoned her will. For the first time, she wished for the word, for herself. I won’t give her a falling star, or a magic wand. I will leave her there. Diana had to earn and learn her word. So, she lay motionless surrounded by riot, and darkness enveloped her.

Despite the concussion, Diana convinced her mother she could go to school the next day. She felt like an empty glass, translucent and fragile, a broken warrior. Classes came and went. Remembering her duty, she retraced her steps. Diana understood the word would not simply arrive at her desk, couldn’t be hunted at the library, imposed on her friends or even wished for. Turmoil continued to flourish in the school halls and without a treasure map to guide her, Diana sought respite in the toilet block.

There was a girl sitting in the corner of the bathroom sobbing. Her legs were tucked tightly and she rocked gently. Diana recognised that rocking and couldn’t pretend otherwise. She knew this girl from class and recalled over hearing her friend’s mean portrait. “Are you ok?” she whispered. Her words floated towards the girl and the power of her inquiry halted the tense movement. Diana
threw out a soft warm smile. “I’m just so alone” the girl whimpered and broke as the words escaped her.

“Not anymore” Diana replied in a gentle dead pan voice. There was silence until a soft giggle escaped the girl’s lips. Minutes passed awkwardly before the girl said “You are the first person to be KIND to me”. Instantly, as it was used, the word was returned to Diana. She knew unequivocally that her actions had restored the word. Diana had to lose the word in order to realise she must embody it, to truly protect it. Now it was up to the rest of the world to do the same. Are you up to the task?

– THE END –
Around the corner from the newsagent stand, on the street behind the major tourist café, Pierre’s Patisserie, lies a small, secluded laneway. This street is bereft of the big crowds, loud noises and the hustle and bustle of trucks and cars that the other streets of Paris gladly endure. It lies silently, useless and unloved. Of course, on all the official maps, the street is always marked, but most people ignore it as it is so tiny. There are few who acknowledge its existence, who walk its cobblestone paths.

But something remains on the sparsely used street. A rack of five hire bicycles; the legacy of an earlier attempt to invigorate the little lane. On the bike in the very centre is a large basket with a bright, memorable, golden star. In brave font across the side, the word ‘Étoile’ is stencilled.

As usual, Étoile awoke around fifteen minutes before dawn. From his tiny compartment on the bicycle rack, he could see a slither of the Paris sky. While he waited and thought about his daily routine, he noticed the darkness beginning to gain faint and delicate colours. The enormous black, starry curtain was slowly pulled away, revealing a mixture of red, orange, purple and pink. They swirled over the sky like watercolours on a dynamic canvas. Slowly, that layer was also pulled away, like a game of pass-the-parcel. It dissolved into a gentle blue, the same as the nearby rushing Rivière Seine. Étoile knows that it is not long after this stage that Annelise arrives.

Annelise’s customers prefer their fresh baguettes and croissants early, ready for breakfast. Annelise is fifteen and earns quite a few Euros selling bread and local newspapers using Étoile. She used to have her own bike, but it didn’t have a basket. As the demand for her services grew, she could no longer carry her supplies in her bag. Annelise uses Étoile while she saves up for her own bicycle. Hiring Étoile costs only 5 centime.

Étoile spotted Annelise turning the corner to the small street. He could see that there were small bags under her eyes, but it was impossible to miss their excited, cheeky spark.

“Bonjour Étoile. Comment ça va? Are you full of enthusiasm again today?” Annelise dropped her centimes into the slot. Instantly, Étoile was released from the machine, and he jumped out energetically. Fortunately for Étoile, Annelise had a steadying hand on him.

“Let’s go. Vite, vite.” Annelise pushed off, out of the small street and into the busying roads of Paris.
By now it was about six-fifteen. Pigeons had flown from treetops to the ground, scavenging for crumbs outside La Boulangerie. The last cats from the night’s hunting could be seen slinking away. Étoile and Annelise each took a deep breath. Dew had settled across the city in the crisp, early morning air, and the light from the last of the city’s street lights sparkled. As they rode past the café, the smells of coffee brewing and sweet hot cocoa boiling were overpowering. It sent their mouths watering frantically. A lone tour bus carried only the earliest-rising tourists on the top deck.

Soon enough, Annelise was knocking on the door to her first customer, Odette Dupont. With two young children and a husband, Odette always orders three baguettes, two croissants and the morning’s newspaper. Étoile waited a few metres away, dutifully leaning on the side fence. “Bonjour, Madame Odette. Sera-t-il l’ordre habituel ce matin?”

“Oui Mademoiselle Annelise. Merci beaucoup,” she declared with a smile upon her face.

“Oui, oui, venir tout de suite.” Annelise reached into Étoile’s basket and handed her the still-warm, crunchy bread, wrapped in recycled paper. She grabbed the newspaper from her backpack and handed them all to Odette.

“Voilà ! Ça c’est 5 Euro. Merci, au revoir.” Their morning carried on like this. They would cycle a little, then stop at a house or apartment, although strangely, today seemed more enjoyable than usual.

After the tenth house, Étoile and Annelise began the ride home. Over the time the pair had been travelling, the number of people had tripled. Despite the fact that it slowed them noticeably, it gave Étoile the irreplaceable delight of ringing his bell. It tingled like a wind chime in a gentle breeze. Soon enough, Étoile’s slick, black tyres were once again rolling over familiar cobblestone footpaths.

“See you on Monday. Thanks again!” Étoile was pushed gently into the machine. It grabbed him and held him captive. He reluctantly watched Annelise stride back into the outside world of Paris. Étoile was exhausted from the long cycle. His eyes were heavy and he could feel them drooping. He surrendered to the lull of sleep.

The sun burnt brightly overhead, stealing Étoile from his slumber. Amongst the many strong French accents, he heard a strange, distinctive group of voices nearing his street. The bell on his handlebars rattled with growing anticipation. Finally, Étoile identified the source of the voices. An excited family of three had
wandered onto his street. He eagerly tried to make himself visible.

“Look, mum and dad! Over there, by that old bench. It’s some bicycles. Can we please use them?” Étoile was intrigued by the small girl’s strange way of speaking. Her vowels were long and harsh. He immediately straightened himself, trying to look as worthy as possible.

“That’s an amazing idea! We can ride alongside the river and up past the Eiffel Tower!”

Étoile grinned widely, matching the beam on the child’s face. The father slipped in a few centimes, first to the left of Étoile, then to the right.

“I want the one with the star! What does the writing down the side mean?”

“Google translate says ‘Étoile’ means ‘star’,,” answered the father, glancing at his phone. “Awesome!” The girl grabbed the money and Étoile was liberated once again.

Multitudes were swarming like bees. It was much worse than it had been earlier. A motorbike rushed past, sending clouds of dust all over them. There were so many people, Étoile couldn’t get moving or he would run into someone, so he was being walked. All the crowds made him feel very uncomfortable and he wasn’t sure if he should go left, right, forwards or backwards. He thought he would let the girl do the directing. Finally, they found a bicycle path, and Étoile got that feeling. The priceless feeling of gliding over the world like a shooting star.

The Seine River was wide and strong. Étoile started to calm down and immensely enjoy his afternoon.

“Whoo-oo-oo!” Without any warning whatsoever, a large boat sounded its horn. Étoile jolted upwards, his heart beating fast. His front wheel swerved all over the path. His head was spinning, until he finally regained control. His stomach was full of butterflies, knowing he was terrifyingly close to falling. Although the girl had a steady hold on his handles, his front wheel was still shaking. With a few deep breaths, he was back to effortlessly sailing along the path, although inside he was still jittery.

The sun glared down on Paris violently. Étoile was exhausted. His pedals creaked with every circle, the rhythm becoming slower and slower. The weight of the young girl seemed heavier than anyone he had carried. To move forward, he had to push physically and mentally, though the pain was excruciating.
The scenery around Étoile slowly morphed into the familiar. The buildings became shorter and whiter, and the streets narrower. After what seemed like hours and hours, Étoile could see his street coming closer and closer to his creaking body. When his front wheel finally rolled into the machine, he mustered up the little remainder of strength lying deep inside him. Then, Étoile grinned triumphantly. Once again, he had successfully returned his customers safely. He listened to the family's voices slowly soften.

“That was just spectacular. Best. Holiday. Ever.” He fell asleep with a tired smile on his face.

It was already dark when he awoke. Blue and red lights filled the sky. They weren’t pretty like fireworks. They were cruel and harsh, splitting the sky forcefully. Sirens screeched intensely, accompanying the lights. Étoile wished he could escape from the machine holding him hostage, out into the open. He wanted to cower behind the brick wall. He had an eerie feeling someone was watching him, staring him down. He could almost feel his seat rattling anxiously.

Suddenly, Étoile could sense movement. His suspicion was confirmed. Stealthily emerging from the darkness was a tall, muscly man. All his clothing was black. Blacker than the depths of the ocean, and only his piercing blue eyes could be seen. They shone like torch beams in a cave.

Étoile wished that he could be covered by blackness, not showered by the light of a lamppost, like a spotlight on a stage.

Étoile watched every tiny dart the icy blue eyes made. Adrenaline was pumping through Étoile, like the feeling of getting fresh air in his tyres. He wanted to go on a chase! But another part of Étoile was holding him back. It was like when his front wheel was turning perfectly but his back wheel wasn’t oiled, so he was stuck. But in the end the strange man saved him from a difficult decision. The machine clicked as it let him go, for better or worse. The robber dumped a heavy sack into Étoile's front basket.

Wind rushed onto Étoile's face, making his eyes water. He never thought it was possible to go this fast. He swung crazily past the flashing lights and cars in the middle of the road.

“Stop! You’re under arrest.” Étoile tried to skid to a halt, but momentum and power forced him to unwillingly continue. His stomach dropped like he was descending an enormous hill. He had just ridden straight past a policeman. He
was a criminal. The word was strong and bold in his head. Criminal. In that second, everything made sense. He knew what he should do.

Étoile could feel the headlights burning on his back wheel. His wheels spun around and around faster than could be counted. He knew he’d have to gather as much speed as possible to throw the robber off. After a hundred metres, the end of the road disappeared into shadow. Étoile’s bell rattled a little in anticipation. It was the sharp turn he’d been waiting for. It was all or nothing. Now or never.

One second, full of activity. Screeching tyres. Wind rushing from one side. His left pedal millimetres away from scraping the ground. The robber’s and Étoile’s weight perfectly balanced. The man almost parallel to the road. A dangerous moment frozen in time. One second to decide everything. Étoile knew he had to do it. No hesitation. No regrets. Now!

Étoile’s body smashed against the road, his perfect blue and gold paint scratched to an ugly grey. The robber sprawled onto the bitumen. Étoile instantly couldn’t breathe. He tried to pull air in to his limp body. Through the corner of his eye he could see the robber trying to rise. But the police had a steady grip on him. He cursed at Étoile and the policemen ferociously. Despite the pain, Étoile allowed himself a small smile. Everything went black.

The aroma of tea wafted gently around Étoile. His eyes flickered open to a warm, cosy room. A large picture of the French countryside filled a wall to his left. Étoile realised he was leaning on a red plush couch. It felt like silky fairy floss against his frame. He became aware of a slight tingling feeling on his side. He glanced towards it and noticed blue paint where the scratching had been. A kind, cheerful face peered in from the corridor. Étoile immediately recognised his favourite person. Annelise made a cup of tea and sat down on the couch, and almost imperceptibly, Étoile leaned in toward her.

– THE END –
The keeper of seasons

BY JHANI MARGIO
Back in the time when the earth was new, before day and night were born, before the seasons were created, there was a being. His name was Petrich, he wore a robe woven from the fibres of the Tree of Life itself and possessed the Book of Seasons and the crystal ball of winter.

Petrich lived in the base of an ancient bunyan tree, at the top of a rushing waterfall - it’s branches drooping over the rapids. One evening while he was out collecting field mushrooms for his dinner he felt an icy chill spread down his spine. The mushrooms slipped from his hands and he dashed home. The sight that met him was heartbreaking. His tree was crushed to the ground, it’s leaves stripped from its branches and at his feet was the crystal ball - smashed and empty. Winter had escaped!

Its bitter icy tentacles were spreading across the land and he had to stop it. He felt weak and powerless although deep inside there was a spark of hope. He packed his remaining belongings and the Book of Seasons and set off to stop winter.

He travelled many miles across rough frozen terrain, following winter’s icy trail. He crossed countless mountains covered in snow and ravines filled with frost. Finally Petrich reached winter’s heart - trapped in the northern pole.

He lifted the key from the chain around his neck and unlocked the decrepit Book of Seasons. He thumbed through it and a wave of warm air burst from the pages, sweeping over his face. A visual cacophony of colour exploded from the book. Red, pink, green and yellow - spiralling in every direction, swirling and twisting through the frosty air. New saplings eagerly pushed through the melting snow seeking the source of warmth.

Petrich could feel the temperature rapidly rising as the new seasons tore through the bitter air.

Winter shrunk its icy tentacles back upon itself, compacting and building up as if overwhelmed by the swirling colours. There was a tremendous cracking as glassy avalanches plummeted to the ground sending frozen debris in every direction.

Suddenly he heard nothing. A silence as deep as the sea - swept over the world. Then a songbird sweetly called over head signalling the beginning of spring. Relieved Petrich picked up the Book and headed home carrying only it and a single seed from his beloved bunyan tree for the beginning of a new life.
But once every 12 months winter creeps back out again and is always driven back by the warmth of spring.

*Petrich* - *from the word Petrichor* - *meaning the pleasant smell that often accompanies the first rain after dry warm weather.*

– THE END –
LOWER SECONDARY
A Pot full of Promises

'This will absolutely change your life'

EVA MUSTAPIC
“This will absolutely change your life,” I promised.

“I don’t really need it. I don’t get out much, but thanks,” the woman smiled, shifting her grip on her handbag as she pushed her pram past me and my display. I was situated in the centre of a bustling shopping mall, by a chair, mirror, and shelves stocking the same products advertised on a banner over my head.

“Let me give you a demonstration. Come on! It’ll make you feel fantastic!” I smiled, holding out the pot of cream. She hesitated, dithering for a moment. “When was the last time you did something for yourself? You deserve it.”

“Fine,” she sighed, looping her handbag over her pram and tucking her baby’s blanket in.

“She’s beautiful,” I complimented, looking down at her softly sleeping daughter, her dark eyelashes fanning over her cheeks, and her cupid’s bow dark and pronounced.

“I know.” The woman smiled softly.

I watched her. Her clothes were tasteful, but not expensive. Her dress had a small stain on the hem, and the soles of her sneakers were beginning to wear thin. Her thick brown hair was in a simple and practical ponytail, and nothing about her had any embellishment. Her appearance was plain and mundane. She was beginning to hit middle age, with her smooth skin starting to loosen slightly, and the dark circles under her eyes doing nothing to further her. Even so, she still retained an air of easy, natural beauty.

*She didn’t need this product.*

“What’s your name?”

“Lillian.”

“Lovely. Lillian, sit down here,” I smiled, patting the bar chair set up in front of a mirror. Lillian gingerly perched herself there, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear as she glanced from the mirror to me.

“This is cutting-edge anti-aging cream. It can make you look decades younger, and it’s so easy to use,” I began, taking some onto my finger and smoothing it onto her cheeks. “You can pat that in.”

“Just like this?” she asked hesitantly, unsure.
“Perfect.” I watched her rub it in with the tips of her fingers. She was obviously not used to using skin care. She clearly had no idea what she was doing.

“Does it feel nice?”

“Yeah.”

“Fantastic. Make sure you smooth it in under your eyes really well.”

“Okay.”

“This cream makes you more youthful and gives you a healthy glow, and our research shows it makes women more attractive to men. Do you have someone to impress?”

She paused, a small, sad grimace on her lips. “No. Her father…” she looked at her daughter, “he’s out of the picture now.”

“I’m sorry.” I paused, thinking my words through. “Are you still thinking about dating?”

“I wouldn’t know how to date anymore. Where do you even meet people?”

“Well, where did you meet him?”

“In a bar, but I’m never doing that again.”

“Well, what about through work?”

Lillian laughed. “I just work down at the supermarket stocking shelves.”

My heart sank further. There was no way the cream was going to help her. Sure, it would make her look better, but it wouldn’t turn her life around.

“This could turn your life around.”

“Yeah?” She sounded doubtful.

No, it won’t. Go spend your money on things you need.

“Everyone goes supermarket shopping,” I started, smoothing cream onto her forehead to hide her worry lines. “The rich, the handsome: they all eat. If you look cute, you might catch their eye.”

Fat chance.

“I guess.” She was listening to me. My heart lurched, but I kept talking. I had to make money too.
“You might find love, and be able to start a proper, stable family. You won’t have to work everyday to feed yourself and your baby. I’m not saying this cream will magically make everything perfect, but it’s the first major step in the right direction.”

“Yeah.” This time, she was agreeing with me.

“What about your house? Do you have space to get yourself ready?”

“I have a flat. It’s not very big, but I can manage to pay the rent each week.”

Go pay the rent then and live your life. Don’t buy this.

“If you take five minutes each morning to put this cream on, even if you don’t wear any other make-up, you’ll look and feel so much more confident and comfortable in your own skin. Because you’re an amazing person, you know? So, you should look amazing too. People will be able to see that in you.”

“Yeah,” she said again.

“And you have such pretty eyes! They’re a gorgeous blue,” I sighed. It was true. She had bright, duck egg blue eyes. “The cream reduces the redness and puffiness around your eyes and brings them forward more.”

“I do kinda like my eyes,” she admitted quietly, peering at herself in the mirror.

“You should. They’re your best asset, and that’s what people will remember about you. The cream gives you a perfect canvas to display them, and stops the redness dulling them.”

“How much is it?” she asked after a short hesitation.

Don’t do it.

“The smaller pot is $40, and the larger is $70, which is better value. If you’re going to wear it daily, the larger pot will last you longer, and it’s more cost effective.”

She seemed to wither at the price, and so did I.

“I use it every day, and I’ve come to think of it as an investment more than a product,” I added hastily, hating myself for it.

She looked up at my face.

“You do have nice skin.”

That’s why they had hired me.
“Thank you.”
She looked back to the pot in my hand.

Don’t buy it. Walk away. Just walk away.

“I’ll get the large,” she decided finally. I forced a smile onto my face.

“Fantastic! Card or cash?”

“Cash,” she mumbled as she got out her purse. I could tell by the way it was buried in her bag that she held onto it with tight strings. She counted out the notes, handing them over. I keyed her purchase into the till behind me, printing her receipt and folding it, putting it in the bag with her cream.

“We have a 30-day return policy if you’re not happy with your product,” I told her as I presented it, holding it by the top corners as I passed it over.

Return it now.

“Thank you,” she smiled at me, a real smile. I felt sick to my stomach.

“No problem! Have a nice day!”

“You too!” she waved, putting her bag on her pram and began to push it away. I sat down, staring at the money in my hand as I slowly put it into the till.

What have I done?

– THE END –
The Last Man

Benjamin Ramsay
The last man in the world sat down in a creaky, old, plastic chair, watching the Sun set across a desolate Earth. He thought about how the years had gone by, and how the grey streaks in his hair were becoming ever-more consistent. His life had been one desperate attempt at life after death after another, and he had finally achieved the ultimate goal of immortality, but only to discover that the rest of the world had been sacrificed in order for him to realise his greed. He looked up at the clear blue sky, free of pollution and emissions from bustling machines. After 3000 years, he was still as amazed as he had been on the first day of the silence that had now befallen the Earth. People had warned him that having an unlimited life span wasn’t like it sounded, that not being able to die upset the balance of life. He hadn’t listened. He was now paying the price.

Everyone he had ever known, loved, met, seen or even heard of, along with the planets other 78 billion inhabitants, had been swept away from him in an instant. House were empty, cars were invisible and families were suddenly non-existent. No matter how hard he tried, nothing could rid his memory of the terror that he, and he alone had experienced that fateful day. His only condolence was that, if quantum physics even applied anymore, no-one had felt a thing. They had just disappeared, as if they had never even existed. No pain, no suffering, no knowledge of their impending doom. Nothing, however, helped the fact that it was he who had brought that fate upon everybody, except himself. Nothing helped the fact that he was the murderer of an entire animal kingdom, with trillions and trillions of inhabitants. Nothing helped the fact that he had caused a quite literal Doomsday, Armageddon, or End of the World. Something he still didn’t understand was why the plants remained untouched, but there was no such thing as animals any more.

Every time he endeavoured to finding out the reasons for this, he ended up further away from the answer than from when he had started, so he had, after 2500 years of extensive - yet fruitless - research, he had given up. Something told him that if the answer was to reveal itself, it would do it when and only when it was ready. He had then stopped looking for ways to undo his selfishness, and decided to go into exile. He found a house in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of a country that had been forgotten by every animal or person but one. He had been forced to stay alive, regardless of the things thought to be essential for life. The Earth, however, had fared much better than its inhabitants. Without mankind being there to poison it, the world had been unveiled in all its glory and beauty. Forests and fields of grain where everywhere, and all seemed to be neatly organise, but uncontrolled at the same time.
He thought about the beauty of nature, and that maybe not having humans here to pollute it was a good thing. The he thought of the mass genocide he had committed, and realised that nothing could justify his selfishness. He may regret his actions, but selfishness was selfishness, whether intended or not. He thought back to when he was in grade 1, almost 3000 years ago now. He had been caught stealing from his teacher's draw. It was a simple matter to bypass the voice recognition by using his spy pen he had requested for his 6th birthday, and getting her fingerprint off the whiteboard was even simpler. He smirked at remembering her expression; her diamond engagement ring had been kept in there, and being a teacher at the richest school in Canada, she could afford to get the most high-tech safe possible. Puh-lease. He thought. *If a 6-year-old can break into a safe with nothing but a spy pen and a piece of sticky tape, then it can’t be that ‘high tech’.* But the thing that had made him remember that particular memory at that particular moment was the consequences of his actions. He had got a thorough talking-to from his parents that night, and one thing that his father had said, one thing that really resonated with him, was that “…the world doesn’t revolve around you, Cameron. You may be smart, but the world is a big place. There will always be someone out there that will trump you in some aspect of your life.” Cameron shuddered, thinking how his father’s prediction had been proven wrong.

There was no one to trump him anymore, nor was there anyone to be trumped. Truth be told, he missed the simplicity of his old life, his life before alchemy had arisen as the new answer to every question. Science had been replaced by the new magic, and everyone became a practitioner of it. All your dreams could come true with art of creating materials from nothing… or so it seemed.

Cameron, being the inventor, knew more about the science of alchemy than any other person alive, and he knew that when something was created, it wasn’t just summoned from thin air. Alchemy worked on the basis of equal swaps, an eye for an eye. If you summon as plate of bread that would cost $10, then something worth $10 is taken off you. So, to prove it, since no one would listen, Cameron had decided to attempt the ultimate feat: either gaining immortality, or losing his life.

The test had started out smoothly; he mixed the potion and cast the spell, muttering several infinitely complex incantations under his breath. Then, he felt his whole body heat up suddenly, and, thinking the worst, he resigned himself to his fate. But as quickly as the warm feeling had started, it vanished, and
Cameron felt more powerful than he had ever felt before. Only then did he
notice that the insane applause and cheering behind him had died down. He
turned around and saw something that made him want to throw up. Nothing.

He had continued around the world, still finding no signs of animal or human
life, only plants. He had returned to his apartments in the suburbs 100s of years
later, and still found nothing. Pulling out his Alchemy: Everything You Will Ever
Need to Know book, which had been published (and heavily modified after
publishing) by himself, and flicked to the page that held his calculations for the
immortality experiment. Immediately, he spotted an error. He had assumed that
if the alchemy would strip him of something it would’ve be his own life, but the
immortality would stop that.

He hadn’t thought that the magic was as smart as he was, and it quickly
resorted to destroying something it considered as valuable as immortality: the
life of every other being in the animal kingdom. Shocked back to the present
as his memory met its end, Cameron decided that reflecting on the past was
just too depressing. He decided not to make the same mistake twice, just like
he had decided not to use alchemy ever again, even top attempt the revival of
the human race.

After looking out all of the windows, to make sure that there were no signs
of movement, he sighed, getting up from his creaky, old, plastic seat. He then
heard a knock at the door.

– THE END –
ANYONE’S STORY
Lauren Pudney

"The library was a place of learning, and he as a child had done exceedingly little of that."
The mother:

There was a man in the library, sitting on the purple high-backed chair amidst the bright colours and flocks of children. He was in his early forties, with a touch of grey showing in his brown hair and small reading glasses perched on his nose. He was deep in concentration, as was evident by the furrowed lines of his forehead and the restless tapping of his foot on the orange and green carpet. But then the mother realised what the man was reading. It was a picture book. Millions of words came rushing to the mother's head. A picture book, at that age? He must be pretty stupid, she thought, an idiot. Why was he like this? Did he have any dignity? Overcome by a flush of guilt at the judgemental thoughts that had entered her mind, the mother pushed them away. This was a modern time, and she could not allow herself to think like that. It was simply unacceptable.

Nevertheless, as the day drew on, the mother felt her mind return to the man and she watched him. He had sat in the chair for an hour at least, his lips forming what she had deduced to be the syllables of the words he read. He moved through the text like a small child, tripping and stumbling over the sentences, occasionally using his finger to trace the words he read. His progress was tantalizingly slow, yet at the same time the mother was strangely intrigued by his exploits, and before she knew it, the afternoon was gone.

The man:

He had known it would be bad, but he didn’t think it would be this bad. The library was a place of learning, and he as a child had done exceedingly little of that. He chose his perch wisely, a purple, high backed chair amongst the intoxicatingly bright backdrop of the children’s library and set to work. He picked a book and opened it. The words immediately swam on the page, nonsensical symbols bearing no correspondence to the lazy English he spoke so competently, but he soldiered on. The man soldiered on through the arrival of the mothers’ group and their pitying, condescending gazes. He continued through the harsh glare of the old librarian and through the judgemental, sidelong glances of mothers. The man hated being an object of their pity, he hated how they looked down on him. But most of all, he hated their judgements. All through the day he had heard their criticisms and, although imagined, they were no less real to him than the picture book in front of him. Stupid, brain-dead, dim witted! He was an idiot, he told himself, and that was what they all thought of him.
Through the afternoon, the man learnt. He learnt that a finger placed on the current word helped to keep his place. He learnt that a highly held book blocked the incoming stares, he learnt to recognise simple words like “the” and “a” and he learnt, at least partially, to turn off the insults in his head.

He hated it, but he knew he had to come back.

*The mother:*

The man came the next week, the next week and the next. He never missed a week. The mother continued to watch him, out of the corner of her eye, over the top of a book, whenever she had a chance. But her stare, unlike many others, became curious not judgemental. Every week she watched him sit in the big purple chair and slowly decipher the words and phrases of whatever picture book he chose to read. He was getting faster, she knew it, and he knew it. Now, a small smile would play at the end of his tight lips and a lively glint would form in his eye as he discovered the childish exploits of whatever character the day would bring. His nervous foot tapping ceased and the furrows in his forehead relaxed slightly. Selfishly, the mother wanted him to stay. She wanted him to continue his journey, and for her to be a part of it. She no longer wanted to know why he was like he was but who he really was, as a person. The mother, a quiet observer, was no longer content with her silence. Next week, she told herself, I will talk to him.

*The man:*

He was getting better, and he knew it. Week after week, story after story, word after word he was improving. The words seemed to flow, and he felt himself become lost in the books’ fairy-tale lands. In spite of himself, he began to enjoy it, but knew he no longer needed the library.

*The mother:*

The mother never saw the man again. The next week, the high backed purple chair remained woefully empty, the small dip where the man had once sat remained a painful reminder of the times that had now passed. The mother felt a sour stab of disappointment. He was gone. It felt wrong that a strange man she had never really known had left such a dent in her heart. Week after week when she took her children to the library she cradled the small beacon of hope that he may be there, sitting in the purple chair, reading a picture book. Week after week she was disappointed. His face faded from her memory and she felt
distraught that she could no longer recall it. Traces of the man faded from all around her and she knew she would never be a part of his journey.

Years passed…

The mother walked into the children’s library. Her gaze immediately flickered to the purple chair. It had remained a constant in the ever changing universe of bright colours. The mother, disappointed, looked down, and then she looked up again. There was someone in the chair! It was a man, and it was THE man! The woman flushed with excitement and walked forward, before stopping abruptly. There were two young children perched on the arms of the chair and their resemblance to their father was uncanny. They were drinking in the man’s every word as he read to them. Sensing a disturbance the man turned to the woman, but she was already gone. This was where their journeys would part.

– THE END –
UPPER SECONDARY
"She dreamt about running through the streets, the sky stretched infinitely ahead of her."

KATE GRAHAM
She crouched in a dark alleyway, hidden in the shadows. Many passers-by thought she was simply another orphaned urchin, and so they continued walking without another glance. They were very wrong. This was the freest Elisa had felt in a long time. She sat, smiling to herself and furiously devoured her stolen goods. The gaunt baker, already dangerously close to losing his business with the strict rationing of food stamps, had been furious when he had seen the thin, dirty arm reaching towards his bread rolls. He had screamed, purple-faced, and chased her down the street. Elisa had evaded him, ducking down low and losing herself in the crowds of people. She giggled to herself as she thought about it, sitting in the dank, dingy alleyway with a full stomach. To her, this was the greatest adventure. She didn’t dream about being an explorer sailing to foreign lands, or a princess living in majestic castles. She dreamt about running through the streets, the sky stretched infinitely ahead of her.

She stood up, venturing out of the alleyway. People ignored her, looking firmly above her head, their eyes skirting around her. They didn’t know who she was, just that she was dirty and unimportant. Elisa didn’t understand why. She thought that they looked almost as hungry and sad as she usually was. Perhaps they were too busy to pay attention to her and had places to be. Maybe they just didn’t care. She shrugged to herself. It didn’t matter. She wasn’t here to see people.

Elisa looked up. A small smile tugged slowly at her lips before it won over, displaying crooked teeth that were too big for her child’s face. The miserable sky was almost entirely grey, blanketed in clouds and smoke from horizon to horizon. But to Elisa, it was the most beautiful thing in the world.

From every building, every person, every street, Elisa could see flags of red. She hated the hideous emblem of stark and rigid lines branded on them but red was such a bright, pretty colour. Elisa could have stood there for hours, drinking it in. She felt spoiled. She could barely remember the last time she had seen this much colour. Glorious, splendid colour. It gave life and passion to the dark and dull street. The ugly shop windows and lamp posts breathed and danced before her eyes. The city was alive. Elisa laughed, and she could feel the wind laugh with her. She heard the laughter drift down the street, fading merrily.

She stumbled over her clumsy, naked feet, trying to chase it. The further Elisa ran, the faster the laughter ran away from her. It beckoned her, asking her to follow. Elisa quickened her pace, not wanting to be left behind. It was the colours themselves that were calling to her. Red was the loudest of them all.
Elisa had decided that it was her favourite. Singing flitted and floated between the red flags that lined the street, making them fly out in the wind and reach out towards her.

They started to twist and turn, rippling like an ocean of rose petals above her head. Elisa craned her neck up to look at them. They surrounded her, rising and falling to an unseen song, pulsing to the beat of an invisible heart. The red danced. Elisa danced too as she followed it, trying to join in.

Elisa skipped and danced with the red for what felt like hours. She almost lost herself through the long streets that twisted behind her like beautiful, colourful ribbons. She didn’t care. She didn’t want to find her way back. Elisa never wanted to spend another miserable day of her life trapped in the dark. The streets had emptied, and the first streaks of orange started to paint themselves across the glowing horizon. Elisa wished she could see the sun setting every day. It was even more beautiful than she had remembered.

The red moved more urgently, and Elisa turned onto a new street, admiring it. A sudden shock of stillness and silence echoed around Elisa. The dancing was extinguished like a hundred candles being snuffed out at once. Where the waves of roses had swirled above her, now flags hung limply, as if they were holding their breath. They were waiting for something. Elisa felt the hairs rise on the back of her neck. A few seconds passed. She couldn’t move. Something was very wrong. Why had the flags brought her here?

A strange sound echoed up ahead. It was the sound of boots. Two pairs of them. Heavy, black, striding with purpose. Elisa started quaking even before they had walked into view. She didn’t know the two men. She had never met them. But she had met others like them. She knew who they were. She knew what they did.

The tallest one of the pair stopped when he saw Elisa standing in the middle of the street, tears rolling down her face. She stared up at him. He frowned.

“Are you okay, child?”

Elisa said nothing.

“What are you doing out so late?”

She said nothing.

“Are you lost?”
Nothing.

He looked at the shorter man and shrugged. “What do we do with her?”

“Let’s just take her in.”

Elisa felt the cold and painful embrace of stone on her back as she scrambled to get away from them. Angry words spilled out of her like hot tears before she could stop them. “NO! Get away. You can’t take me again! Not like the others.”

Elisa choked on her sobs when she realised what she had just said. She should have stayed silent. The men exchanged a knowing glance. They didn’t know who she was, but they knew enough. When they looked back at her, they both had a strange look in their eyes and Elisa didn’t like it. She could feel them staring at the bones that jutted from her skin at awkward angles, and the deep brown eyes that revealed too much.

“The … others?” The first man asked cautiously, already knowing the truth. Elisa could barely hear him.

An angry, high-pitched wailing pierced the air. It wasn’t coming from Elisa, or the men. It was coming from the armbands the men wore on their ugly, over-starched military uniforms. The armbands were red. Elisa felt betrayed. She should have noticed. She should have known. Red was the symbol of the soldiers. It had been a trap.

The screaming suddenly multiplied tenfold, coming from every direction. The flags hanging from above joined in. Elisa covered her aching ears. They howled and screeched, thirsting for Elisa’s blood, yearning for it to spill out onto the street. They wanted to create more red. The angry red flags became columns of flame twisting viciously into the sky, polluting it with ash. She should never have trusted them.

The men walked closer towards her and the flags jeered louder. Elisa quickly scrambled back up to her feet and sprinted back the way she had come. She couldn’t think properly and could barely remember which of the almost identical streets she had previously travelled down, but somehow her legs remembered. The men gave up chasing her, but the flags kept up, always just above her head.

At first, her feet had been numb, but now they stung viciously with each slap against the ground. The rough cobblestones had ripped them apart. A trickling flow of blood began to trail after her. It was a fresher, brighter shade of red
than the flags, which howled in delight. The blood howled back. It snapped and grabbed at Elisa’s wounded feet.

Elisa was almost home. The sun had fallen beyond the horizon, sending a comforting darkness to surround her. It smothered the flags like a thick fog so that she could no longer see them, and they could no longer see her. Their deafening noise quietened to a dull roar of white noise, and by the time she turned onto her street and slipped between two buildings, she couldn’t hear them at all.

Elisa ducked down behind a carefully constructed pile of household junk like any other and quietly unlocked the trapdoor hidden behind it. She dropped down into the pitch-black basement room and three pairs of arms instantly surrounded her. They squeezed so tightly that she felt like she couldn’t breathe, but it was a good feeling. Her mama. Her little cousin. The old man who refused to tell her his name but whispered stories to her in the dead of night when she was too scared to sleep. They were her home.

“Where were you?” Her mama sobbed softly into Elisa’s hair. “We thought …”

She hadn’t escaped like she had planned, but Elisa felt safer and happier in that dark, colourless room than ever before.

– THE END –
The Old Lie

The words are on the tip of his tongue when the explosion hits

BY EMMA HORAK
n the end, it is neither the fanfare of patriotic crickets, nor the horses standing to attention in the paddock that wake the man. Through the wind’s murmured anthem head remains buried in pillow, and even his daughter’s annual march through each corner of the house falls on deaf ears. In the end, it is the faintest tickle of golden sun briefly caressing a stiff thigh that has his eyes swelled to the breaking of a new day. A glance to his right reveals the usual: A rumpled king-sized bed, littered with dolls strewn haphazardly across the floor, a hallway that when followed leads to a kitchen and a lounge and his family. There is still a hum of warmth among the sheets; His wife can’t have been up for long.

His naked body is a bullet whizzing from its chamber, stiff and quivering, to the cupboard, hands lurching back the drawers to show three shirts he has worn since university, and three pairs of pants bought from the time he married her. Dressing and cinching his favourite belt, he trudges towards the kitchen, rubbing the canyons beneath his eyes, footsteps loud and irregular. The world is silent, no hoof beats, no whistling of wind through a hole in the bathroom window in need of fixing. White noise fills its place.

Down the dimly lit hall, and nestled in the corner that joins to the kitchen and living area is the ‘family stand’ as labeled by his wife. Among medals and portraits and a few of his letters from when things were awry, the centerpiece is a frame of his daughter’s feet, taken at birth. His fingers find themselves moving of their own accord, tracing the curves of her heels, caressing her stubbed toes, lingering on the cut from big toe to arch. His mother had remarked to him about how huge she was, and the photos, tattooed upon mind, confirm it: His wife, recovering after battle, clutching the white bundle to her breast, slick dark fuzz in one palm, a ghostly smile on her face. The man feels a familiar ray of heat within his solar plexus. He feels it for every day he makes them laugh, for the days he lies on his back and sends his daughter into the sky on his upturned feet.

There is a sudden creak of wood, and the man whirls away from the stand, eyes darting about like a fly caught in a jar. Only darkness greets him. Perhaps it was only the resettling of the house, and yet his heart is a battering ram against his ribs. The silence, a white noise in the ears, offers no comfort, and he pads silently around the corner towards the lounge and kitchen. Head tilted out of the wall, he drinks in the picture that meets him, bathed in sunlight: His wife pausing to take a cereal box from the cupboard, his daughter sat upon the floor with a soccer ball in her hands, staring intently at the ridges and grooves. His heart slows. Perhaps it was just the house.
Making his way into the kitchen, he ducks to kiss his daughter’s forehead before swooping his wife into an embrace. She smiles in greeting, and he plants his lips on her cool forehead. She reminds him that there isn’t much milk left in the fridge. He agrees to get it on his way into town.

A bowl from the cupboard, two eggs from the pantry… the man is gentle in tapping the eggshells to the bowl, spilling gold from its fragile interior. Then, into the microwave. His fingers linger on the buttons. To think that all that is needed in the world is the pressure of a finger on a button or trigger; One to heat, another to end. He selects one minute and the machine immediately falls into a monotone buzz, occupied by its own task. His eyes, drawn to the methodic twirl of the bowl, see the egg bubble at the sides, the timer flashing cautiously…

A flicker in the corner of his vision, followed by a whisper like a rustle of coarse breath and his gaze is lurched to the window. The egg is forgotten, left to its own devices as he paces on his toes out of the kitchen. His daughter ceases her ball bouncing. Another step towards the main door, then another, a dance to meet the intruder upon their doorstep.

A year ago some passing city kids had harassed his wife, and six months earlier they had woken to the sound of a car on their property backfiring like a rifle in a cave.

Reaching the wooden door, he twists the knob, slowly, the brush of the frame against the wall a chorus of screams, and that damned white noise. The door is flung open and his body pounces from its position inside.

No attacker greets him. Somewhere far away the horses stamp their feet, and the wind murmurs through the sashaying trees.

His wife is at his elbow, her gaze pointed in his direction, and her eyes are narrowed as she searches, too. Finally, her hand closes on his and she mouths to him what on earth the matter is?

He knows the sliver of the dark body he saw in those shadows, the flicker in the corner of his gaze. And yet he finds himself thinking to a time when he’d lose an article of clothing or a toy, and his mother would smile down on him and tell him that it was alright, that all it takes is a mother’s look.

He glances again to his wife’s steeled expression, full lips pursed into a thin line, eyes blank and without meaning. He walks back into the house without another word.
His little girl regards him with silent awe as though he is a stranger entering. The bowl is out of the microwave already, cooling on the bench. She remarks that she took it out before it dinged, like he always does. She still has the soccer ball in her hands, but abandons it briefly to clutch his leg and gaze up at him with familiar wide eyes. Taking the bowl, he kisses his daughter's cheek, feeling a small ray of heat bloom in his chest.

And then he sits down to his breakfast.

At one point his wife sits adjacent to him and begins to fold laundry, steeled gaze still on the top of his head. His own eyes remain lowered, deliberate.

When the ball nearly knocks over a chair, his wife yells at their girl to go outside. She flees in a flurry of dark hair, opens the door quickly and forgets to shut it. Wind shrills between the gap.

His wife’s gaze returns to him, and her steeled expression softens. She’s asking questions, honey drenched in her tone, and the man cranes to listen and yet his mind is wandering to the shadows and his daughter outside. He makes meek responses. Feeds himself until he can feel his stomach balloon with content. And when she stands up to lay a gentle hand on his shoulder, there’s the usual seize in his arm, quickly replaced by relaxation. She continues to croon sympathies, but they are recycled phrases. In the end, he pulls her to him and kisses her, itching to feel like that familiar desire from her own body, the way she used to grip the back of his neck. Instead the small lick of inferno condensates when he sees no easy smile on her lips but glazed eyes. He squeezes her thin arm once before picking up his bowl and moving it to the sink, body trembling.

There, hands work as methodically as a nurses’ to add scalding water with bubbles, fingers dancing alongside sponge, then a rinse under the tap again and to the side for drying.

He watches his daughter outside of the window as he works.

Her long hair twirls in the breeze as her thin legs connect with the ball, kicking, kicking, around the tree and between two cans, pumping her fists in the air like the star of the pitch. She’d done the same thing at her first game according to the coach, and his wife frequently remarked that during breaks between games various parents would ask whom she belonged to.

The man finally tears his gaze from the window. Surely the dog, which frequently lazes beneath the house, will alert them if there is something.
She is still folding laundry when he re-enters, her thin frame hunched over a shirt, collar tucked beneath chin. He itches to bring comfort, a familiar warmth, and yet his arms and hands do not seem to hold the strength they once did, his body as foreign as a child’s. His hands instead find themselves smoothing over her hair, as mind runs rampant for something to say, a joke to coax a smile onto her, to wrinkle the corners of her eyes.

The words are on the tip of his tongue when the explosion hits.

The sound is once but deafening, and the man drops to the floor, bringing his wife with him, the laundry basket toppling over. His body, alien to him, registers the vibrations of his wife’s screams, the barking of the dog outside. He holds her to him, spreading his shell over her body, and all the while the ghastly thought: *where is my girl, where is my little girl…*

His wife, battling him, thin wrists wrestling a vice grip, lips beside a deafened ear.

He sees shadows with ghastly voices, so human yet so mechanical, and their breath is metallic and hot. Knives clutch his sides, and the adrenaline calls him to action, yet he is frozen, shrunken under the shadows. Their eyes, wide and human, cry insanity and maliciousness and desperation… Sorrow.

Finally, the echoes whir to vibrations. White noise fills the silence.

His daughter, beside him, tears on her face but seemingly unharmed, crying *I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry…*

His wife, shaking him. Maybe yelling. But the battering ram is back in its home, the colours of the room spin, and that white noise, a constant reminder…

The two words slide greasily up his throat, before being vomited before his family: “I’m fine”.

And then the lone casualty is up, past the probing hands and strained words of wife and child, past the upturned basket of laundry, past the guilty soccer ball, around the corner and down the hallway to the bedroom. His fingers shake at the buttons of his shirt, the zipper of his pants, and then he is naked, crawling between the unmade covers of his bed, pulling the doona overhead, muffling the white noise once more. And as the light shines through the windows of a new day, a man is seeking the safety and warmth of his mother’s womb.

– THE END –
JUBILEE BAY
OLIVIA TAN
It’s 7:30am. I know this because I am awake. Just as I know it is 9pm when I fall asleep. Not once do I wake up before or after exactly half seven. I have not seen the sun any lower than it is at this moment, nor have I seen the moon any higher than when my eyes seem to close against all will. Somewhere inside, I know that the moon continues to arc like the sun over the sky, until there is darkness and then light again, when the sun peaks over the mountains in orange ribbons of flame that seem to be extended from the sun itself.

I couldn’t begin to try to explain how I know this. Perhaps it is all imagination, as my neighbour Bill would suggest over the fence that divides our gardens. But something in my stomach tells me that it is something I have always known - just like one knows what is up and what is down, because nobody falls upwards.

It is 7:30am. It couldn’t be any other time, and so I set about making my bed. I opened the curtains, just as Judy, the neighbour across the street, opened hers. We both opened our windows, and the fresh morning air floods against my cheeks as I smiled and waved.

“Beautiful morning, Robbie,” remarked Judy.

“It certainly is, Judy,” I replied.

With a jubilant smile, I stepped back from the window and rub my face. My smile seems to have stretched my face far too much after its stillness in sleep. I made a face as if I was yawning, rolling my jaw back and forth.

I went downstairs and poured myself a mug of coffee and opened the sliding doors onto my front lawn and stepped out onto the grass. It was velvet smooth under my feet, and I picked up the hose to water my roses. Bill was also watering his roses. I looked down the street and noticed, to my amusement, that the rest of the street was also watering their rose bushes.

“Beautiful morning, isn’t it, Robbie?” said Bill. I told him, “yes it is”. Bill’s hair is combed over to one side, a parting running along the corner of the left side and topside of his head. I have noticed that the rest of the men in this town, including myself, have styled their hair this way. The women all share curled ponytails as well, teased fringes bouncing just above their eyes.

“Will you walk with me and Judy this morning?” Bill asked.

“Yes,” I smiled brightly, “I think I will. It’s a wonderful day for it.”
Bill smiled as though it was pleasant to hear, “Wonderful!”

We are all so very close with one another in this town. So synchronised in our own lives that we even dress the same. We all keep bushes of roses outside our terraced houses, bordered by a white picket fence.

I strolled out onto the street where Judy and Bill waited for me. As we walked along the waterfront, I slowed my steps and look at the water. The waves crashed on the sand seamlessly, not spraying up the beach. The sand remained dry and white, and the water turquoise and mostly still. Something about the way the waves crashed made my head spin. Not wanting to induce a headache, I sped my steps to catch up with Judy and Bill, who hadn’t slowed nor noticed that I had done so.

“Shall we pass by the sign?” Asked Judy, and Bill nodded enthusiastically. We were coming up on a fork in the path, where one direction would circle back into town, and the other would take a wider loop around the sign that signalled to tourists that they were entering Jubilee Bay.

How long had I been in this town?

I tried to think back to when I’d moved here, for somewhere in the back of my mind, somewhere I couldn’t detect, I knew that I had come from another place. I didn’t know that place’s name, nor what it looked like, but I knew I had not spent all of my entirety in Jubilee Bay.

“Robbie, are you coming?” Bill says. His voice caught me off guard. Something about his tone sounded, for a moment there, as though it had been spoken through a fan. He and Judy had walked back towards the town. They both watched me with their usual smiles. I felt suddenly unsettled, but shook it off as I hurried to join them.

“Judy?” I said as the town began to come back into view.

“Yes, Robbie?”

“When did you move here?”

“I’ve always lived here,” she replied sweetly, “since I was a girl.”

“But there are no children here,” I said, only just realising it as it came out of my mouth, “Why are there no children?”
Judy and Bill seemed to freeze. I stopped and turned to them both. They stared at me with sparkling irises as their grins seemed to stretch to their ears. For a moment, I thought they were in pain, and then they both continued to walk, as though nothing had happened.

I felt the unsettling feeling stir my stomach, and I forced myself to move so I could catch up. I watched Bill and Judy’s legs as I caught up. They were in time with one another, each foot hitting the ground with a never-ending rhythm - step step step step step step step.

“Are you two alright?” I asked. Bill laughed sharply.

“Of course, Robbie! We feel jubilant!”

Judy agreed fiercely, “Yes we do! Are you sure you’re feeling alright, Robbie?”

I smiled, straining my face even as my palms turned clammy.

Tomorrow was a new day. I opened the doors that opened from my bedroom onto the balcony. Nobody else was outside, instead the top-right window of each house on every street contained a silhouette brushing their hair, teeth, washing their face.

I watched on with some strange sense of detachedness. I gazed over the number of streets with a voyeuristic sensation, as though I were some omniscient entity.

The waves crashed on the shore, suddenly the clearest sound. Where were the insects? Or the sea breeze? The waves crashed one after another, over, and over, and over, and over ver v e r ve r v e r.

A wave of impulse made me sit up, I began to count under my breath. A wave crashed in its usual rumble and fizz. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven… Another wave crashed. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven… Another wave … And another.

The waves. They were timed, replaying on a loop. Every seven seconds, one would crash. What could that mean? I counted again. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven… I looked up at the sky, and watched the clouds. They weren’t moving. If there was wind for waves, there was wind for clouds.

Where was I? I felt my chest tighten as my breathing shortened. I tried to remember when I had moved here. I tried to remember yesterday, but all my subconscious would tell me was that I did the same thing as today, as I had done the day before that, and the day before that, and th
I knew a time before this. What couldn’t I remember?

What is this place?

Something poked in the back of my brain. It told me I did remember. My eyes began to grow heavy. Tiredness overcame my body, making me limp in the sunbed, but my mind protested, willing for me to sit up, to keep myself awake. I had to figure this out. What if I forgot tomorrow? What if I was somehow, reset?

Just as I slipped into sleep, I knew that I was being controlled.

——

I wake up, it is seven-thirty. I push back the covers of my bed, and then start. I’m in my bed. That is not possible.

I get up and rush to the window, flinging it open. Judy is there, as always, and shines an automatic smile. I stare at her, not smiling back, noticing the way her teeth shine whiter than teeth should, and the way that her hair is smooth and stray-free.

“Beautiful morning, Robbie,” she says, and it’s as though it’s a voice recording, a broken record stuck on a point.

“Ah, morning,” I say.

“Beautiful morning, isn’t it Robbie?” he says. I simply stare at him.

“Have you noticed anything about this place?” I ask, my voice low and subtle. Bill continues to smile at me, eyes unflinching. I look closely at his eyes. His irises are glittering - unnaturally so. No, not glittering - flickering.

“Will you join me and Judy for a walk this morning?” Bill asks.
“Will you join me and Judy for a walk this morning?” Bill asked again. As though he were speaking through a fan.

“I have to get out of this place,” I say, backing away. I look at Bill, who continued to smile at the point where I had been standing, and then to Judy, who was talking to her neighbour.

And then the strangest thing happened. Judy simply disappeared. And then she returned, but I could see through her - I could see her front steps through her stomach. She flickered in and out of view.

I took another step, and everyone stopped flickering. The smiles disappeared, deleted from their faces, as everyone on my street turned to face me. Their steel eyes watched me. Pastel men and women stepped out of their white picket fences and began to follow me. Where could I go? Could I leave town? I didn’t have a car.

I began to run. I looked over my shoulder to find the street merging into a hoard, following me at a terrifyingly calm pace.

I ran towards the beach. I had never seen anyone swim in the water, and I liked the chances of swimming away. I crashed through the vegetation, not caring for the marked path, onto the white sand. I looked over my shoulder to find the hoard of people in their perfect, crisp ironed clothes trudge through the vegetation, their hard gazes set on me.

I gave a yelp, and ran for the water. I was expecting the splash of water to fly up, spraying me with salt. Instead, I felt nothing. My legs were dry, and all I felt was a cold surface beneath my feet, as though I was walking on metal. I stopped knee-deep and looked down. The turquoise water around my feet surged with glitches of black and electric-blue.

I kicked around, and the water around me continued to glitch. I took another step, and glitches webbed out from around me like ice cracking underfoot. I looked back again, and the hoard was packed up against the water’s edge. They didn’t come any further.

Slowly, the smiles began to return, and they all spoke in a perfect, chorale-like unison.

“Thank you for visiting Jubilee Bay!”
I took another step through the water, and the glitches took over. Black and blue squares spread out through the water and onto the sand. The people disappeared as the glitches continued to swarm up towards the bay. I watched in awe as the town began to be consumed by the flickering darkness.

I remember now. I know what my life was before. I remember now. I remember now. I remember now. I remember now. I remember now.

– THE END –
LET YOUR IMAGINATION TAKE YOU SOMEWHERE UNEXPECTED