



Wild

Northern Beaches Young Writers' Competition 2019

The Finalists



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The Finalists

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Introduction

The Northern Beaches Young Writers' Competition is open to students from Kindergarten to Year 12. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the competition. With over 400 wonderful stories submitted in 2019 it was a tremendous challenge for the shortlisting team and the judges to arrive at a list of finalists. 'Wild' is the fifth eBook of finalists' stories, with 'Upside Down', 'Treehouse', 'Doorway' and 'Tiny Door' published in 2015-2018.

The finalists' stories were entertaining and varied in the way they approached this years theme of 'Wild'.

Interpretations of the theme included Wild African adventures, the wild unpredictability of nature, wild animals, witches and wizards, wild love and emotions, and realms that are out of this world.

The strong themes of survival, grief, domestic violence, mental health, the protection of animals and our environment ran through, making for some very thought provoking reads.

Featuring characters such as The Kraken, Ned Kelly, Daemons, Olympian grandmothers, Serial Killers, Shape Shifters and Scrunchies, our young writers certainly let their imaginations run wild.

We would like to thank the following talented and generous professional writers who made the difficult decisions to select the award winners: Debra Tidball, Anna Fienberg, Oliver Phommavanh, Nathan Luff, Jaclyn Moriarty and Erin Gough.

Most of all, we would like to thank the young writers who entered the competition. We are also grateful to the teachers and librarians across the peninsula who encouraged and supported students to write their stories. We hope you enjoy these wonderful, award-winning stories.

About the Judges



Debra Tidball

Judging for the K-2 Category this year is Debra Tidball, author of the award-winning *The Scared Book* and *When I See Grandma*. In particular, she is known for her stunning picture books – which she believes are for everyone, regardless of age! Debra also has flash-fiction and short stories published in various anthologies, including *The School Magazine*. She reviews children's books on Sydney radio 103.2FM, and interviews authors on the *Just Write For Kids* blog. We are thrilled that Debra has taken the time out of her busy schedule to judge for us!



Anna Fienberg

This year we have Anna Fienberg judging for the years 3-4 Category. Anna is a local Northern Beaches author who enjoys reading, writing and a good cup of coffee. She has published numerous best-selling titles in both children's and YA fiction, and is notably the author of the *Tashi* series! Anna is also the former editor of *School Magazine*, and has won the Children's Book of the Year Award for both younger and older readers. We are incredibly excited to have her judging your entries!



Oliver Phommavanh

For the years 5-6 Categories, we have procured the wonderful Oliver Phommavanh, who likes nothing better than to make people laugh – be it through his job as a stand-up comedian, or through his numerous books! Oliver's stories are packed with non-stop laughter, but also have genuine heart and the authentic experience of living in a multicultural Australia. His most recent books include *Don't Follow Vee* and *Natural Born Loser*, and he is best known for *Thai-riffic!*, *Con-nerd* and *The Other Christy*. With Oliver here, we know that the judging experience will be a blast!



Nathan Luff

Judging our years 7-8 Categories is Nathan Luff, who moonlights as a scary clown and can't swim very well. (He also writes books). Nathan holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Theatre/Media), a Graduate Diploma in Screenwriting from the Australian Film, Television & Radio Schools (AFTRS) and also has a Master of Teaching from the University of New England. If that isn't enough, he's also published both books and plays, including *Chicken Stu*, *Bad Grammar* and *Thai-riffic!* (the play), which might seem just a little bit familiar as the original story was written by Oliver Phommavanh.

In any case, we are very lucky to have him as a judge!



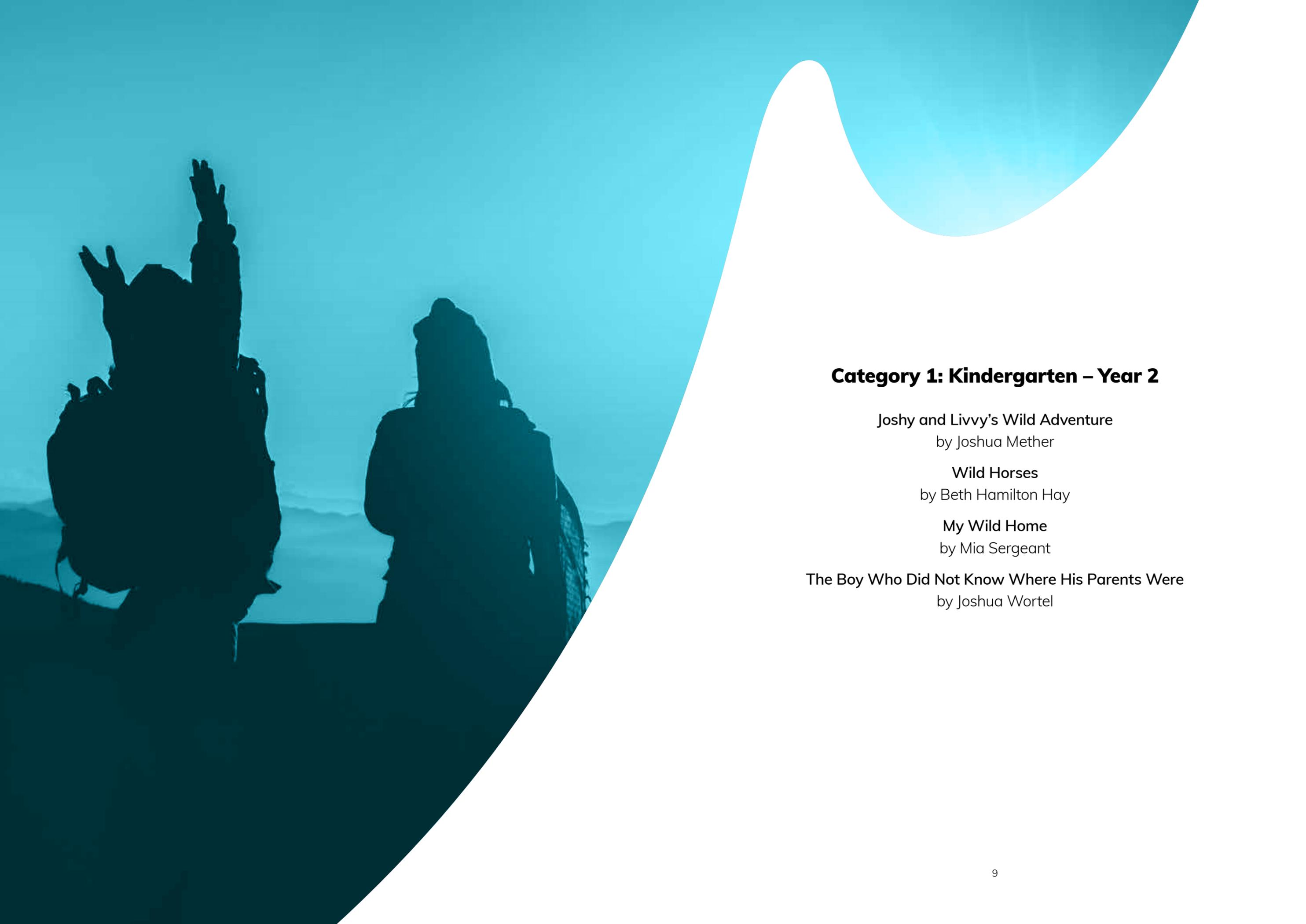
Jaclyn Moriarty

Judging for the Category of years 9-10 we have Jaclyn Moriarty, best-selling author for both YA and Adult fiction. You might recognise her from titles like *Feeling Sorry for Celia*, *The Year of Secret Assignments*, and *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlesone*. Jaclyn has been the recipient of the NSW Premier's Literary Award, the Queensland Literary Award, and the Aurealis Award for Fantasy. As well as that, her books have been named Boston Globe Honor Books, White Raven selections and Best Books for Young Adults by the American Library Association. We are so excited for her to read through your entries!



Erin Gough

The years 11-12 Category will be judged by the illustrious Erin Gough! Erin is the author of two award-winning YA novels, *The Flywheel* – winner of the Ampersand Prize – and *Amelia Westlake* – which won the Readings Young Adult Book Prize. Her short stories have appeared in a number of different journals and anthologies, including *Black Inc.*'s *Best Australian Stories*, *Griffith Review*, *Going Down Swinging* and *Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzUA Stories*. With Erin judging the entries, we know that your writing is in good hands!



Category 1: Kindergarten – Year 2

Joshy and Livvy’s Wild Adventure

by Joshua Mether

Wild Horses

by Beth Hamilton Hay

My Wild Home

by Mia Sergeant

The Boy Who Did Not Know Where His Parents Were

by Joshua Wortel

Joshy and Livvy's Wild Adventure

By Joshua Mether

Year 2

It was a dark and stormy night... well actually, it was a very sunny day. My little sister Livvy and I were in a scary fierce jungle in the wilds of Africa. We hid behind a spiky bush because a lion was approaching us. We were hungry, but he was hungrier! As scary as he could be, he opened his mouth and released a tremendous ROAR!!! We froze in fear.

We were so nervous. Would the king of the jungle discover us? We quietly stepped away, but accidentally stepped on a branch — crack! The lion turned and chased us. I yelled to Livvy "RRRRUUUUUNNNN!"

We tumbled but kept going. The lion was catching up to us, but luckily, there were giraffes nearby. "You speak Giraffe Livvy, say something!" Livvy yelled "Gwooollooyaaaa!" Instantly the giraffe ran to us. We swung on its tail, up its neck and climbed on. The giraffe raced like it was on fire. The lion was lost in the distance.

I asked Livvy "What did you say?" She replied, "I told her there was a bowl of ice-cream dead ahead." The giraffe halted and flung us off into a dark cave.

We dusted ourselves off and turned our torch on. Standing, actually, make that slithering, right in front of us, was the biggest snake ever. It wrapped itself around Livvy and started dancing with her. I thought this wouldn't be so bad. Unfortunately, I was wrong. It was a celebration dance before eating! He wrapped his tail around me, squashing Livvy and I together!

Just as he was going to eat us, Livvy passed me her favourite toy rabbit. She whispered "throw this on top of that log pile". I threw it and the logs tumbled onto the snake. We quickly parkoured over the logs and commando-rolled into a pile of leaves. That ninja warrior training was useful. I handed Livvy her rabbit and she smiled with glee! Suddenly her face dropped.

Standing in front of us was a big silverback gorilla. He reached down, lifting us up and bellowed "Grrrrr". Livvy asked me to translate because I spoke gorilla. He says "GO-TO-BED!"

Dad put us on the ground, "Go to bed kids, it's very late". We picked up our toy animals and went to bed. I asked dad if we could continue our wild adventure, he replied "Tomorrow".

Wild Horses

By Beth Hamilton Hay

Year 1

Hooves thundered like lightening across the damp, dark meadow. As some beautiful, white, wild horses galloped across the wavy grass their reflections silhouetted in the moonlight and their pearly, white bodies leaped, twirled and thundered.

Suddenly, a bang was heard in the distance. The horses reared. A hundred men were standing on a boulder, not too far away.

The horses ran for their lives. They galloped and stumbled across the grassy meadow until they came to a cliff they couldn't cross. How were they going to survive? One horse, the smallest one, spied a cave nearby. She banged her hoof loudly on the ground and led them quietly to it. They hoped that if they hid there, the men wouldn't find them. They crowded inside hopefully.

The men ran past and off the cliffs, falling into the valleys where the lions did their hunting. The horses knew, when the men were found, they would be skeletons.

They followed the path, back to their forest, where it was safe, feeling brave and proud. Now, every night as the moon goes down, they listen to the sounds of the wolves and lions hunting and feel grateful for their marvellous escape. For these horses were not meant to be trapped, these horses were meant to run wild.

My Wild Home

By Mia Sergeant

Year 2

Scratching at me with its claws, the crashing waves shake me to the core.

Lost at sea I feel alone an icy wind chills me to the bone.

I hold my breathe and close my eyes, I try to forget the dark, gloomy skies.

I gasp for air through the wild foam, and catch a wave to take me home.

Its powerful grip holds me tight, I kick and swim with all my might.

Now its time to be brave and fight this angry wild wave.

The wave roars at me like a dinosaur, as I courageously wrestle it to shore.

I reach out to dad to grab my hand and pull me to the safety of the sand.

My arms are weak, my body aches. I try to walk but my knees just shake.

I wrap myself in my soft towel, the wild wind continues to howl.

I look in to the distance faraway, dreaming of another day. Now it is time to say goodbye, to wild winds and gloomy sky.

Winter ends and summer starts, the sun comes down and warms our hearts.

Sometimes rough, raw and wild. Sometimes warm, calm and mild.

This is my home, this beautiful land. I love the sun but can't wait for winter again.

The Boy Who Did Not Know Where His Parents Were

By Joshua Wortel

Year 1

Chapter 1:

Once upon a time there was a young boy. He had no parents. He went to the zoo.

He first saw ants. The ants were very scared when he came in. He said "Hi" and the ants run away.

He did not know why.

Chapter 2:

Then the boy walked to the giraffes. When the giraffes saw the boy they were very scared when he came in. He

wanted to ask the giraffes if they saw his parents. But all the giraffes run away.

He did not know why.

Chapter 3:

Next stop, the zebras. When the zebras saw the boy, they were scared. He wanted to know if they knew where

his parents where. So he asked them, Did you see my parents? But the zebras run away and some tripped over.

Chapter 4:

Then he walked into the butterfly room. The butterfly's where tickling him and that felt very funny.

He knew that a butterfly was not his mom or dad. Maybe more luck by the lions.....

Chapter 5:

He walked into the lion cage. The lions where so surprised that a little boy walked into the cage.

The boy find out that the lions were not scared. The lions did not run away. The lions did not panic.

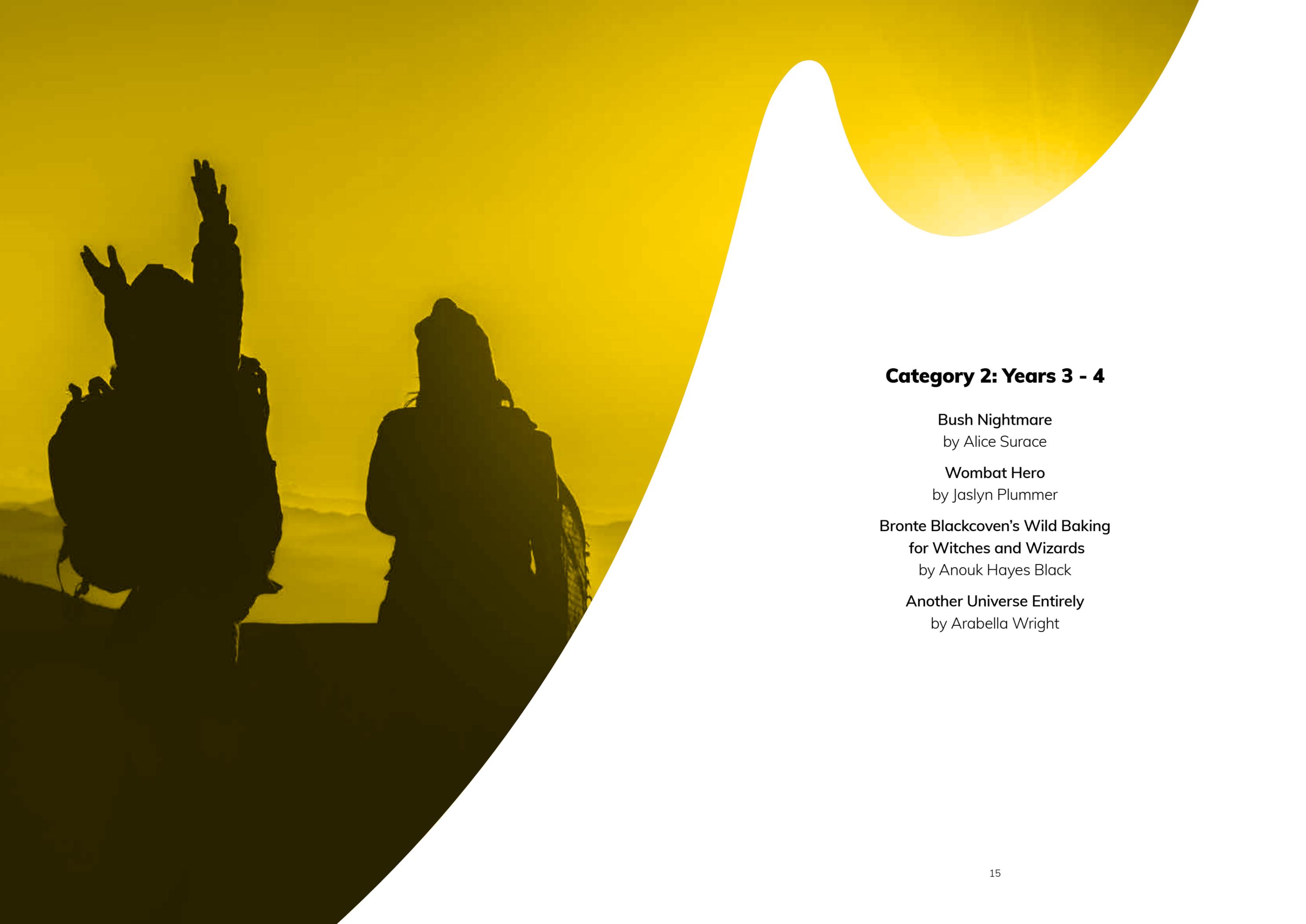
Then the king of the lions walked to the little boy. The little boy said, He, I know you. I remember you when I was

born in the wild, do you know my parents? The king said, yes boy, look at your hands. You're not a human kid,

you are a little lion. Let's celebrate and walk with me to your parents.

And that's how he find out that he was a lion. And happy to be back with his mummy and daddy.

The End.....



Category 2: Years 3 - 4

Bush Nightmare

by Alice Surace

Wombat Hero

by Jaslyn Plummer

**Bronte Blackcoven's Wild Baking
for Witches and Wizards**

by Anouk Hayes Black

Another Universe Entirely

by Arabella Wright

Bush Nightmare

By Alice Surace

Year 4

The air humidity was high and the sky was covered in a swirling warm grey blanket of clouds. I sensed the anticipation and terror preceding my arrival in the air. I could feel the large old gum tree on the hill vibrate in fear as the possums retreated back into their hollow cavities, which they considered home. A large “Bang” then echoed like a sonic boom, as the sound waves rippled and dispersed away from the crashing clouds that created the energy that expelled my life force. After my magnificent formation, I appear like a kaleidoscope of light streaking across the night sky before spearing downwards towards the dry undergrowth. I use the wind gusts to repeatedly broadcast my haunting tune. “Lightning strikes, leaves ignite and terror reigns”. The bushfire season is here again.

I eagerly ignite the undergrowth and the warm wind provides the energy to fan my desire to grow and be wild. I roar with delight as my flames accelerate down the hill enveloping and turning to ashes all in my path. I fear nothing and show no mercy in my need to create destruction. I care little for the essential purpose of my existence in the bush lifecycle as I create havoc. I dance happily across the treetop canopy fuelled by the eucalyptus oil that burns a shade of sapphire blue. With my size growing, I energetically jump suburban roads and greedily head towards the towns and settlements.

I delight in watching the kangaroos leap in fear as they exhaustingly try to maintain the speed to outrun my lashing flames. I show no mercy. Many birds retreat to the skies in panic, their worried cries providing warning to others. Some small marsupials manage to survive seeking refuge in tree hollows or creeks. Tree after tree is reduced to ashes and sometimes the loss of life is high. But my aim is not to destroy wildlife in isolation. I am also a life force in this ancient land. Many species of native flora rely on my existence for seed regeneration and land clearing.

I gather speed and hungrily head towards the settlement. Which house should I choose to consume? Some residents generously welcome my presence by leaving leaves in overflowing gutters just waiting like soft cushions to nurture my scarlet red embers as they fall from the sky. House after house I devour, taking delight in the cracking windows and breaking glass. My power grows with this sizeable abundance of fuel.

As I race around in my feeding frenzy, something in the distance catches my attention. There is a pulsating bright light on a large red vehicle that is shrieking an alerting sound. I gather speed and proceed closer in the hope of engulfing this irritating nuisance. My assault is relentless but this beast retaliates. I sense that I am now an unwelcome presence. My life force is feeling drained by its water cannon assault. I limp as I try to continue on my satisfying path of destruction but now I am also under attack from the sky. Plumes of water crash down upon me, suffocating my fire and draining my energy. I try to react with rage, hissing and spitting flames that unfortunately have now turned to steam jets. I am disappointed at my defeat for now. My energy gauge heads towards zero as my being retreats back to the nothingness from which it came. I return to the abyss to wait for my next opportunity for a glorious life spark and my chance to again reshape the landscape like an artist's canvas.

Wombat Hero

By Jaslyn Plummer

Year 4

He trembled. Wild winds swirled as branches from trees bent in the ferocious blustery weather. It strode shyly. A dishevelled wombat tired and weary battling the storm. It was just a tiny dot compared to its vast surroundings. Where is he heading? Who will help him?

“Daddy stop the car. Look over there. See the poor wombat? Please can we save it?” Oliver begged his Dad.

“We’re running late to get to Stanley’s Christening. If we stop, we’ll miss the ceremony. Besides what would we do with a soggy wombat? We’ve nowhere to take it and certainly no idea how to save it.”

Oliver pleaded, “Please Dad. He looks injured”, mustering his doughy brown eyes to look as innocent as possible.

Screeeech. The car stopped.

Squelch, squelch came the sound of dragging gumboots. The mud was thick, lurching and deep. The rain was so hard it stung. Before they knew it, Oliver and his dad were back in the car with the quivering wombat weeping on Oliver’s damp lap.

They arrived at the Christening just in time. The church was dry and warm. Oliver stroked the wombat’s coarse brown fur as it snuggled in his father’s old jumper on his lap. He thought of the stories he could tell... Oliver the animal hero would spread like wild fire!

Oliver refused to put him down so the wombat was the star of all the family photos. Everyone was flocking to have a pat but as soon as proceedings had finished Oliver’s Dad said, “We have to get him to a vet. He needs some proper care and checking over”.

At 7pm, most vets were closed so we drove for two hours to the nearest emergency clinic. As Dad took him off my lap to hurry inside I could see a look of panic on his face. “C’mon Son. Let’s hurry Buddy”.

“OK, Dad,” obeyed Oliver. “Walk gently though, he’s sleeping,”

But Oliver only needed one blank glance from his dad to realise the wombat wasn’t sleeping. The vet confirmed there was no heart beat. Oliver’s chest tensed, his cheeks fell hot and he forayed numerous tears he never knew.

“Oliver, come here,” the vet beckoned. “You couldn’t have saved the wombat. Its injuries were too severe but you have saved the baby. Look in her pouch”.

Oliver’s furrowed brow diminished. There was the tiniest creature Oliver had ever seen.

“Can we keep him?,” asked Oliver.

“I’m afraid not. This joey is still very under developed. I will care for him until he’s ready to be released. You have saved his life and in a few months he will be thriving. Then we will release him”, explained the vet. “How about we ask Dad if you can come with me and since you saved him you can release him back into the wild!”

Bronte Blackcoven's Wild Baking for Witches and Wizards

By Anouk Hayes Black

Year 3

Twelve-year-old Bronte Blackcoven whipped out her wand and muttered a spell. Instantly the batter in front of her was being stirred by an invisible mixer. Bronte was rushing because tomorrow was the annual Baking Festival for Witches and Wizards. She and her dragon-cross-monster friend Toffee had spent the day in the kitchen making broom cakes and cauldron cupcakes, but they couldn't seem to get the monster flipcakes and magical sparkle syrup right. Toffee looked as if he had been swimming in a swamp of egg and flour. Bronte looked worried. It was now close to midnight and she had the bitter realisation that they would not be able to finish baking in time.

Suddenly, she felt something warm and heavy in her pocket. She gingerly slipped her hand into her pocket and took out three perfectly round stones: the first was waratah red, the second deep ochre, and the third banksia yellow. Bronte placed the stones down on the table and a dozen monster flipcakes and jars of sparkle syrup appeared out of thin air. Meanwhile, a quill pen was writing a message on a scroll of parchment floating before Bronte's eyes, "The magic stones are listening" wrote the quill in dark blue ink. Almost immediately, Bronte found herself chanting a wish, "Oh great wise stones, do share with me your magic to wild success". At that moment, she felt an unknown sensation run through her veins, then everything went black and she passed out...

When Bronte came to, she felt strange, the world around her looked different, her legs were in a different place and she had four of them! She had transformed into a sleek white horse with a waratah red mane, deep ochre hooves and a banksia yellow tail. Bronte trotted around impatiently, regretting her wish. She tried talking to the stones again but could not utter a word. She was neighing instead. But Bronte was determined to participate in the Baking Festival. She was not going to be left out just because she had been turned into a horse. All she had to do was find Toffee and a comfortable place to spend the night. She paced up and down the kitchen until she heard a muffled grunt. She gently nuzzled the pantry door open and saw Toffee huddled in a corner. Together, they decided to spend the night in the kitchen, where the wild baking had taken place.

The next morning, Bronte & Toffee's stall proved the most popular at the festival. Their cakes, cupcakes, flipcakes and magical sparkle syrup were tastefully displayed, with the magic stones as a centrepiece. Later, as the sun was going down and the last cake was sold something unexpected happened: the magic stones disappeared and Bronte transformed back into herself. Bronte circled her arms around Toffee and squeezed him with happiness, "regular witches and monsters can have so much fun together," she thought. "Why was I wishing for wild success? I would rather have the ordinary success of friendship", she sighed in contentment.

Another Universe Entirely

By Arabella Wright

Year 4

"Crash, Bang!" The world stops. It goes forward and backwards, left and right, diagonal and every other which way possible. It stops just as abruptly as it started, as I fall into another universe entirely.

I get up and look around. My shoulder aches in agonising pain as I turn my body. Every part of me hurts just as much as it does to change their shape. As I am a shapeshifter I can change my body parts without changing my whole body. It hurts but the pain is what makes me who I am. I can change the way I look as soon as I think of it. I change my shape when I want to blend in or when I want to stand out.

I love travelling the universes but I don't like the rule the Universe Travelling Council makes that you have to stay there for 3 days. This universe looked a little strange. All around me are people who are glitching every second. I look closer and they don't look so human anymore. "Hello, my name is Hannah Shape. Do you know where I can find somewhere to shelter?", I asked. "Grrrr!", they replied. As they turn and creep around towards me I feel a shiver run up my spine and I suddenly feel like I'm standing in a freezer. They have cold grey eyes and shrivelled skin that is the colour of rusted metal. They have clawed fingernails and green moss under their toenails. I suddenly regret visiting this universe but there is no turning back. I was breaking a sweat and I felt like I was going to have a panic attack right there on the spot.

Over the next three days I stayed by a little lake I found when I went on a walk around the island. It was a little bit cold but I used the blanket from my daypack to keep me warm. I used some seaweed and leaves to make a little bed for myself. Every day I found myself food in the woods and went for some little walks. On the second last day I spotted a shooting star in the sky and suddenly I didn't want to leave. It was so peaceful here. The human-monsters left me alone for the whole trip. They might look scary but they are actually quite peaceful friendly creatures. "This might not be so bad." I thought to myself after a while.

Upon the day of my departure I packed up my stuff into my daypack and said goodbye to the human-monsters. I had enjoyed my stay more than I thought I would.

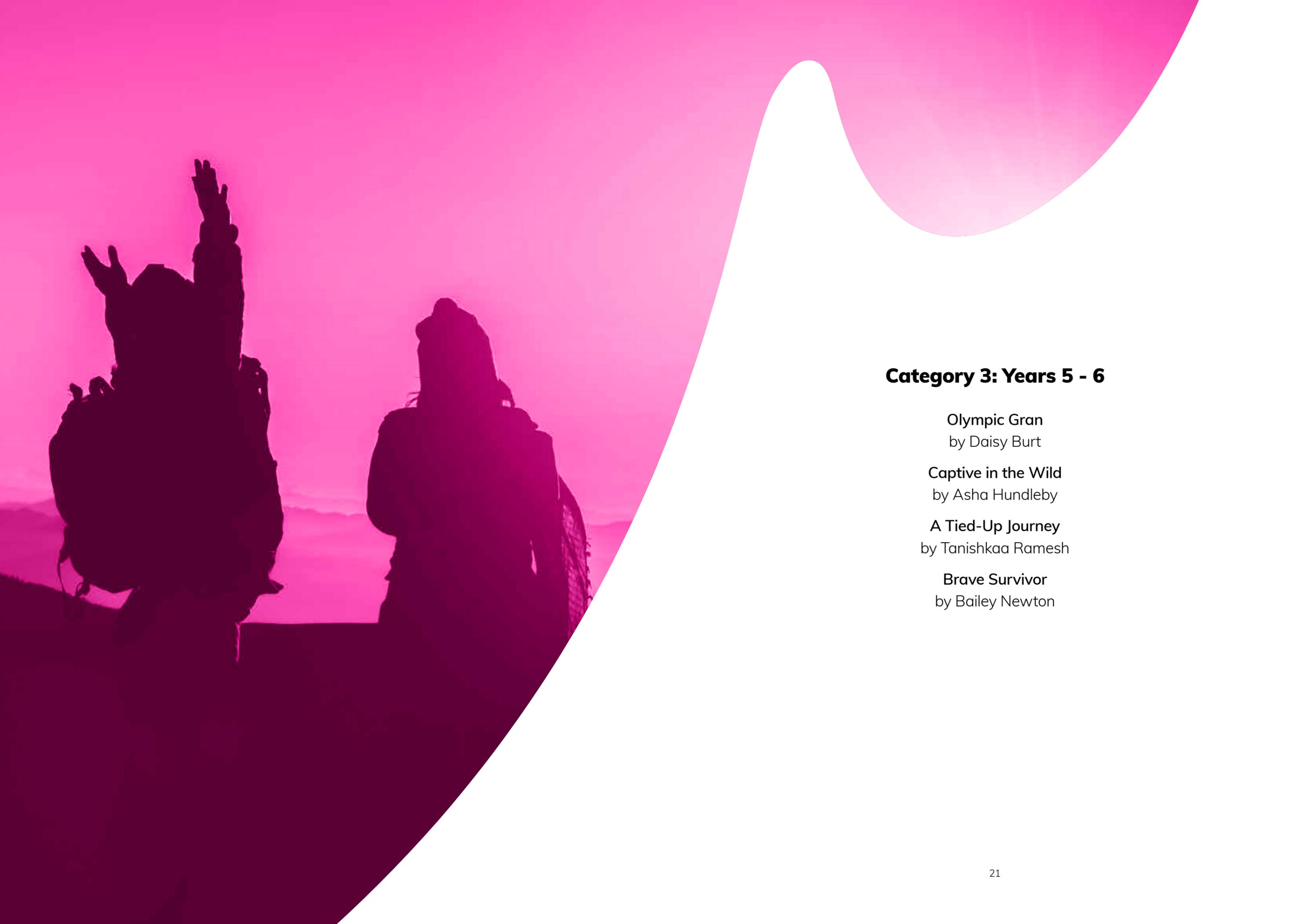
I start spinning on the spot and disappeared in a flash of light.

As I fall in a clump on my bed I feel as dizzy as a spinning top. It felt so good to be home. I hadn't had a proper sleep in three days. I find sleep quite easily and take a power nap.

I get woken up and blink around like a frightened rabbit. As my vision comes into focus, I see why I woke up. Standing at the edge of my bed is my sister Ada in her frilly pink pyjamas.

She slowly backs away as I sit up in my bed. Suddenly it all comes rushing back to me. The past few days come in a rush through my head.

As I lay back and think through what happened the past few days I finally realise that other universes can be totally wild.



Category 3: Years 5 - 6

Olympic Gran

by Daisy Burt

Captive in the Wild

by Asha Hundleby

A Tied-Up Journey

by Tanishkaa Ramesh

Brave Survivor

by Bailey Newton

Olympic Gran

By Daisy Burt

Year 5

“Not AGAIN! That’s the third time this month!” were the words that started this whole thing.

I woke with a start and checked my watch. Two forty-five in the morning. I looked out of the window to see my ninety year-old Grandma TRYING to do running warmups up the driveway, which wasn’t working, and I felt a bit guilty for just going back to sleep and letting my parents deal with her.

You see, my grandma used to be one of the greatest athletes of all time. But then she retired, and that was fine, because she KNEW she couldn’t do it anymore. But then she turned ninety and she got dementia, and that does something to a person. She thought she was twenty-seven, and could still compete, so she was doing her old routines, a few times a month. But when her legs gave in, and would start to bleed, she would let out all of these old-fashioned swear words that don’t mean anything now. “Blast! Damn these legs, they don’t work, I need new ones!”

So in summary, my grandma who was nearly ninety-one would be getting up at two-thirty in the morning to do running warmups a couple times a month.

Usually when talking about my gran, I would talk about her as kind and incredible, but now, she was well and truly, wild.

To fix her habits, we would send her to an old people’s care home (we call it the asylum) twice a week which would help... sort of...

Now, I love my Grandma and all, but sometimes she can be quite... well let’s just say she sometimes gets a BIT carried away. Like when I had my school athletics carnival, and I was running the eight-hundred metre race, and my parents were screaming, “GO CHARLIE GO!!!!” In the last two-hundred metres of the race (I might add I was winning) out of the corner of my eye, I spotted my Grandma about to do the pole vault. I changed direction, and sprinted across the javelin field, praying I wouldn’t get hit. I arrived just in time to stop my Grandma from probably breaking every bone in her entire body. I helped her back to the stands, and everyone burst out laughing, which was REALLY embarrassing. The crowd loved that I had quit the race. I really hate times like that.

Athletics is really the only thing Gran talks about. She also walks around the house with no pants on because apparently, it “helps your muscles move,” so I can’t really have any friends over...

I really hope she pushes past this, because it is doing SO many things to our daily schedule. I have been falling asleep and failing tests in class, caused by gran’s ‘training’. I’ve had to miss heaps of things due to taking gran home from the asylum and making sure she takes her pills.

I remember when Gran was like every other normal grandma, She would get me NORMAL presents at suitable times of the year. We would talk, and laugh, and do everything else kids usually do with their NORMAL grandparents. It was great back then, and I miss those times, because they meant a lot. But even though my Gran embarrasses me, and I am sleep deprived because of her, she’s still my Gran, and I still love her, even though she is... Wild.

Captive in the Wild

By Asha Hundleby

Year 5

Adrenaline fuelled the fear that engulfed me as I sprinted across the vast African savanna. Questions rushed through my mind but I pushed them aside, I could not afford any distractions. “They’ve already reached top speed,” boomed an imposing voice. “Keep tailing ‘em until they tire out but don’t lose ‘em”. His command pierced my ears, sharp as an ivory dagger, its ruthless tone disturbingly familiar. Wait, I knew that voice! It was the voice that was responsible for my chilling nightmares. It was the voice that brought back memories of the sickening, tormented cries. It was the voice of the man who took my brother.

My agile legs skidded as I halted myself for a second to confirm my suspicion. Frozen, I caught a glimpse of the poacher’s brooding stature and the menacing glint in his single eye. The other eye had been viciously scratched out by a fellow cheetah during the unsuccessful scrap to save my brother. As I tried to gather enough strength and momentum to restart my getaway, I realised I had made a colossal mistake. ‘Never stop running’, was the fundamental rule of survival that my ancestors taught our coalition to abide by. Desperate, I bared my fangs to intimidate the poachers, to which they casually snickered in reply.

Startled, I heard a distant yelp, almost drowned out by the obnoxious laughter of the poachers. “Zulu”, my hunting companion, Swazi howled, in a desperate bid to be heard. My ears pricked up upon hearing my name, however any hope of rescue evaporated as I witnessed Swazi being shot and dropping to the ground. The deafening bang reverberated in my eardrums like a recurring echo in a vast cave. Disorientated, I gazed up only to be met with the cruel face of a poacher. His wild expression was the last thing I recalled before being slugged by a second dart.

Hours later, Swazi’s cries roused me from my groggy state. After scanning my surroundings, I thought I saw a familiar pattern through the bars of my cage. Yet foolishly, I still clung to a glimmer of hope that one day my brother would return to our coalition with a heroic tale of escape. However, my hopes were shattered when I realised what was lying in front of me. It was my brother but not as I remembered him. His once glorious coat had been reduced to a rug spread cruelly on the floor. There was no mistaking the unique markings around his left eye. I slumped to the ground overcome with grief.

Just then, I heard footsteps coming towards me. I glanced up to see the kind face of a petite young woman who was clutching a crowbar almost as big as her. “SSSSHHH”, she whispered. “Don’t be afraid, I’ve come to set you free. You belong in the wild.” I looked beside me and saw Swazi had already been released. His relieved expression filled me with optimism. As I warily placed my paw onto the hard concrete floor of the poacher’s trophy room, the woman gently coaxed me out to freedom too. I knew I must return to my coalition to alert them that our wild habitat had now been infiltrated by callous poachers. The experience of seeing my brother in his lifeless state would forever haunt me. Although I was now safe, I kept thinking about who the next victim would be and I knew in my heart that my life would never be the same.

A Tied-Up Journey

By Tanishkaa Ramesh

Year 6

Once, I had no owner. I lived at the bottom of a glass box filled with creatures like me – hair bands and scrunchies. That was until, of course, the sales began.

Oh, the dreaded sales.

They ran for two weeks, and every day, at least ten more scrunchies were dragged away to their doom. In the previous years, I covered myself (and my very large fake diamond) with dirt, and sat in a corner. But this year, they changed the time of the sales, and I had no idea. I was shaken, polished and hastily stuffed into a paper bag.

I woke up to a banshee's scream. Clumsy fingers found me and I stared at a blonde hairball. At that moment, I became a mere servant to the monstrosity of Olga's hair- the wild, frizzy curls, which always seemed to be full of half-chewed vegetables. Unfortunately, her favourite hair band soon turned out to be me. I mean, I loved the attention, but why her? Why not the girl that Olga sat next to, with her luscious black curls and perfect plaits? Or someone, anyone, else?

But wait. You actually don't know how terrible this was, do you? Every day, Olga's mother scraped her hair into a ponytail, amidst a lot of screaming. Then, I was stretched, pulled and forced to tie everything together. Alone. After the very first week I began to lose my shape, and have recurrent headaches.

So I decided to run away. Problematically, I didn't have legs. Or hands. Or anything I could get away on. So I needed someone to steal me. And I thought I knew just how to do it.

On the day I came up with my plan, I put it into action. First, I washed myself, so I would look more attractive. Then, I made sure to loosen myself a bit more, so when Olga's mother did her hair, she would have to tie me extra tight. This would give Olga a headache, and from past experience, I knew this meant that she would remove me. Then, I preyed upon the absolute non-virtuousness of humans. As soon as I reached the surface of the table, I scooted across a little bit to get to the luscious-black-curl-and-neat-plait girl. She was exceptionally enamoured with me, and as soon as she could, she slipped me into her pocket.

I silently fist-pumped myself (in my mind, because I don't have fists). I had done it! I had left Olga! And now, I was destined to a life of fame and glory! All hail the amazing hair band of luscious-black-curls-and-neat-plait girl!

This elation only lasted until the next day.

I realised that I had made a mistake. This wasn't luscious-black-curl-and-neat-plait girl. It was the other girl Olga sat next to, with the huge dark frizz of hair.

Just like Olga, every day, for the first couple of hours in the morning, her hair would be tugged and pushed and pulled into a "better" shape. I began to regret leaving my original owner, but I knew it would be just as bad if I returned. At least here, my owner's hair wasn't full of half-chewed vegetables.

Anyhow, I reached that stage when I could endure the eternal snapping of sinews no more. When the girl took out her hair for the night, I scooted away, inch by inch, until I tumbled into the open cupboard. Over the course of ten hours, I made myself comfortable in my new home and cosily curled into obscurity.

Nowadays, I just dread moving to a new house.

Brave Survivor

By Bailey Newton

Year 5

He looked up, the trees were much taller than his 3 year-old body. He enjoyed the wild forest and often tried to climb the beautiful trees. Today he was with his dad, walking down to the waterfall. The boy peered over the mossy rock ledge to get a better view. He couldn't believe how far down the water fell before it landed! Surely it would hurt falling from such a height. Eddie ripped off his band-aid and threw it into the water hoping it would help. As he watched the colourful strip glide lower, his foot slipped on the moss and his plummet began.

He lost sight of his Dad. Some vines slowed his fall. He splashed into the clear, icy-cold water. "Eddie!" his dad screamed, the sound drowned out by the gushing water. As his teeth chattered, Eddie shouted 'Daddy! Daddy!' He was alone.

He drifted on his back downstream before he grabbed a stick to help heave himself up into a sitting position. He attempted to stand again using the stick but the fast running water pushed him down. Determined to get to dry land, he tried again. It took him several attempts before he was on his feet. Eddie stumbled out of the creek, his legs cut and bruised.

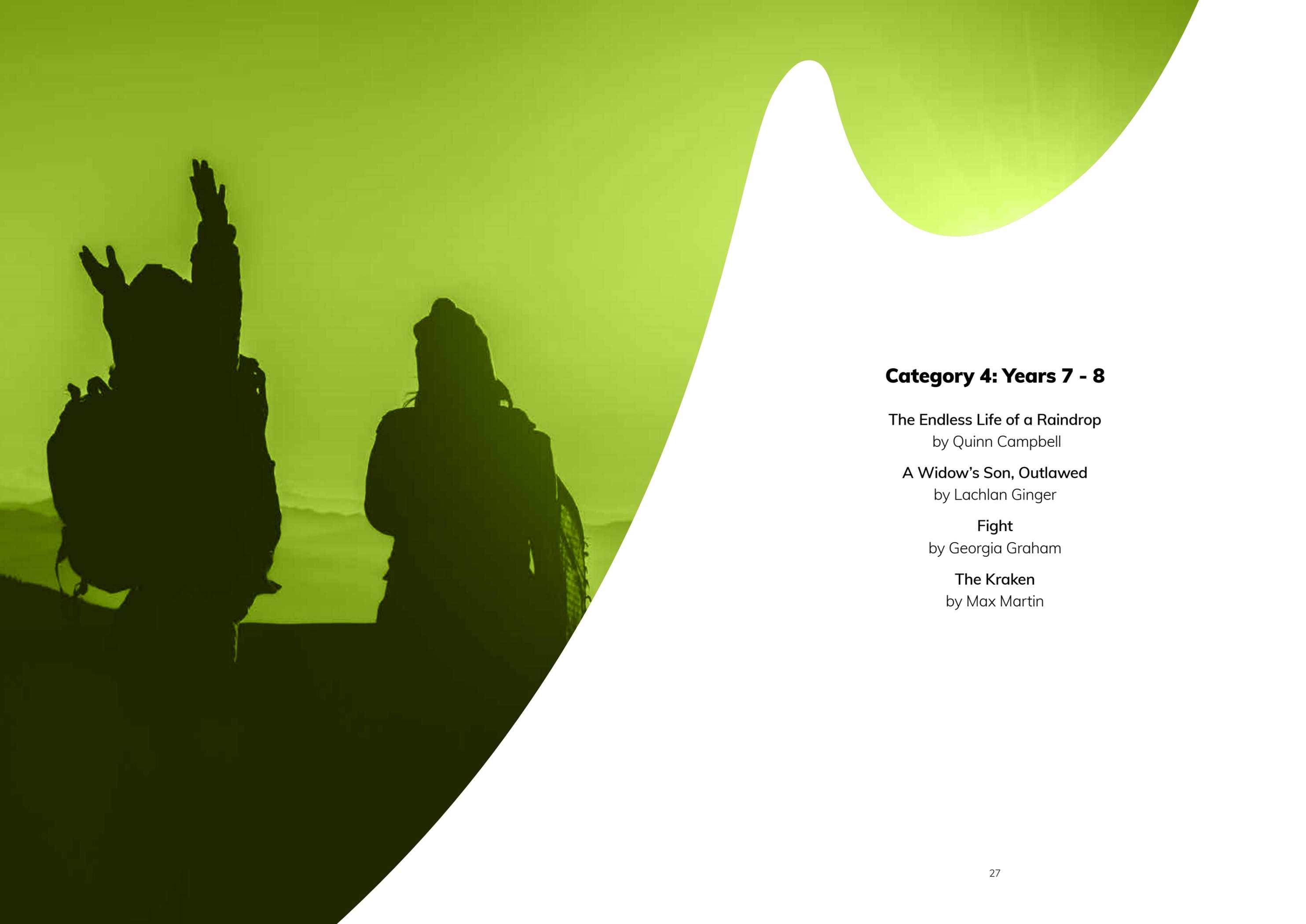
Eddie believed he knew the way home but every step hurt. He was very tired and extremely thirsty but still he pressed on.

Hours later in excruciating pain, he came across a dark cabin. Without a second thought, he ventured in. Inside he just managed to reach the light switch. It didn't work. Days passed as he huddled in the damp cabin, hoping to be saved. Lack of food and water made his mind hallucinate.

He threw his clothes off, and sprinted outside. The little boy jumped and rolled in the mud. Soon, he smelt meat. Eddie became a savage as he jumped onto all fours, bounding off to find the food. It was a deer. Enough to fill his stomach, for now. But this little boy had a lot to learn about surviving in the wild.

Three weeks later a distant whirr that he had been ignoring became surprisingly louder and louder and louder still. Then he spotted it. A helicopter. A rope net plummeted down from the helicopter and landed perfectly over the boy. As he was lifted into the helicopter he heard a familiar voice saying "My boy. My precious boy." Then a woman's voice, "Alfie dear, are you sure this is him?"

"Yes, this is him. I can't believe it, we've found our boy!" Eddie had survived his time in the wild. He is a happy, tame boy. For now.



Category 4: Years 7 - 8

The Endless Life of a Raindrop
by Quinn Campbell

A Widow's Son, Outlawed
by Lachlan Ginger

Fight
by Georgia Graham

The Kraken
by Max Martin

The Endless Life of a Raindrop

By Quinn Campbell

Year 8

My world is endless. Day after day, decade after decade, millennia after millennia, I carry out my duty. Relentless freezing and melting and falling. I have visited every nook of the globe, but I prefer solitary places like in an ice shelf in Antarctica or swimming in an azure blue fjord in Norway. They give me time to think. But I remain misunderstood and alone amongst trillions of others just like me. No one can understand the constant rollercoaster of my existence. The pain, the struggle. The torturous scream in my sub-conscious to reach the surface, to touch the ground, to melt away, to dissipate into nothing....

And yet I live on.

The life of a raindrop is wild, endless, and constant. Some years I am part of a vast ocean, jostling with other particles to get to the top of the void, to see the dazzling sun. The sun is a friend of mine you see. He helps me travel, to fulfil my endless struggle to be free, a constant companion in the endless gloom that is my life. When I finally reach the surface, I give myself up to the sultry heat and feel myself waft away. I feel the rush of the wind rustling past me, splitting my conscious into thousands of molecules until we reach the only place, I consider home: the clouds.

The clouds icy mist envelops me like a thick cloak, as my split body floats into the gorgeous heat of the supple, cotton candy clouds. Compared to the soul-splitting torture of the icy deep waters of the sea the warm layers of the clouds burn at my very existence, strengthening me like a blade in a forge. I move around my home collecting my molecules until I feel alive, filled with energy, ready to charge into a new existence. But I go too far. Perhaps I collected a molecule too many or was ignorant to my surroundings in my moment of bliss. I fear my burden has caught up to me. I begin to feel heavy, like lead, and slowly darken in colour. From my vibrant cobalt blue to a sombre murky grey as raindrops around me pummel to the ground.

I fight against my very being, trying to use the churning winds around me to push my way up to the top of my home, to grasp my radiant sun. I almost reach the top of the cloud, feel the heat of my friend encompassing me but it fades, hidden by the darkening clouds. I circle the cloud looking for signs of light, but, there is none. My once beautiful home, now a horrid depressing place. I feel myself boil with anguish, my body threatening to evaporate.

"No-no-no. Come back! Please! I need you! Don't leave me! Please, please!" I scream to my companion in desperation. I wither to an ashen black. The cloud around me is now a black hateful storm cloud, fuelled with raw energy. I scream, the sound fracturing my mind. My endless rage sends lightning hurling down to a nearby park, splintering a tree. I wail in agony, not sure if I am responsible as lightning hurtles down to strike the earth as though it were my own hands, punching the cosmos for burdening me with this cruel existence.

"I can't do this anymore" I howl. "I can't live on like this! I can't keep tasting freedom and getting it torn away from me! I can't, I won't, I-I..."

My screams collapse into sobs. I curl up, the weight of my feelings dragging me down to the bottom of the cloud and I give in to my fate. I fall away from the heavenly skies and rush towards the ground. I feel air rushing past my side and hear the piercing whistle of the wind screaming by me. I fall lower and lower and see snowy mountain tops and vast landscapes of green. I block off all my senses, not caring where I go next, for nothing can change my iron-clad fate. I slam into something soft and velvety with a thud.

I give a large sigh, half of it from the fatigue of my emotions and partly from the realisation that no matter what I think, no matter what I want, no matter how much I curse, scream, cry or sob, I have no control. I am just a single, simple raindrop amidst a quadrillion others. Together, and yet alone.

And so, I let myself go. I am nothing. I have heard a saying from humans that says, "We are just a small fish in a pond". I am literally a single drop in the earth. I will never make a difference worth living for. I will never get to relax or be free so long as I am stuck in this constant cycle of pain and suffering.

And it was at that moment that I had the idea that changed my existence forever. I allowed myself to grow cold, hardening into an icy shell of my existence. I gave myself up to nature, once my enemy and now my saviour. For as I solidified, I released all my anger, all my sadness, all my desperation and feelings until I was left with only memories of warmth, glee and love. Love to my beautiful home and my glorious sun. I roll around and eventually fall down a crack in the mountain range and tumble down into an ice shelf. I fall further and further down until I look up and gasp. I had fallen into a crystal-clear ice shelf. It was so pure and clear that sunlight streamed through the ice and enveloped me. I looked around to see an older drop, pear-like in shape with thick white residue below him. He gave me a warm, smile as if he knew how I was feeling. He opened his mouth and mouthed, 'Welcome Home'.

And so, I live on.

A Widow's Son, Outlawed

By Lachlan Ginger

Year 7

28th July 1880

We burst into the inn. I mustered my gruffest voice and shouted to the occupants of the bar.

"Alright, I don't want to hurt anyone but if you don't comply, I'll be forced to harm you!"

In the ensuing chaos I ran over the plan one last time in my head. Attract a police train to Glenrowan by murdering a police informant (Aaron Sherritt was the poor patsy here). Done. Next, the gang derails the train, coming from Benalla, sending it and its occupants into the gully next to the railway line. The train contains indigenous trackers that helped the police in their searches for escaped or wanted criminals. They had to go. Trackers are good, too good, making it tricky for us bushrangers to escape the crooked hand of the law. So, where was I? Yes, after derailing the train, we will head to Benalla and rob the bank before dynamiting the police station. Water tight.

I had calculated the times carefully. We would be holed up in the inn for the next twelve hours awaiting that damned train. Leading me back to our current situation — the lushy swells, scamps and coves who are to spend the night in here with us.

The night rolled on. We took it in turns to manage the sixty men, women and children detained at our pleasure. Steve, Joe and Dan partook from the stores of our salubrious accommodation which meant by morning they were sleep deprived and near floor'd. Not to mention impatient from waiting for the train. Me being the decision-maker and only sober one among the gang had to make a choice on hostage control. Let some go? Make them wait? Shut them up permanently? I released some poor cove whose wife was sick. A regrettable move. Speaking of the train, where was the damn thing? Seventeen hours late, according to my calculations which I checked multiple times. Was I wrong?

I am jolted out of my thoughts by shouts from outside the inn. "Oh no," I whispered, "The police."

Betrayal. The bolter we released no doubt went straight to the constabulary. Adrenaline shot through me like a shot of whiskey. Panicked eyes moved to my direction, the four of us donned our

armour and with cocked guns took defensive positions along the front of the inn. Shots rained own

on us from police and trackers hiding in the surrounding bush. I looked back at the hostages huddled in the corners, fearful that they might be hit by a stray bullet meant for one of us. I whipped my head back in time to see Joe hitting the floor, blood flowing like a river from a wound to the groin. There was nothing to be done, he was gone.

The firing had ceased. Dan's voice could be heard through the silence, negotiating the release of the poor sods in here with us. We were not a heartless crew; our beef was with authority, not these people who were really just like us. As they bolted for the cover of the surrounding scrub, I realised our mistake. Smoke. "FIRE!" Dan screamed. We were to be flushed out and taken down like sitting ducks.

Steve, Dan and I looked at each other for a moment that felt like an eternity. My carefully laid plans had gone up in flames like the inn around us and I knew this was the end. It takes a brave man to walk towards the barrel of a gun. Courage was something I had a-plenty. Bullets pinged off my metal suit as I charged through the front door. Dan and Steve did not follow but instead took a different path, retreating farther into the flaming building.

The first hit. My un-armoured leg. Under the weight of the suit my legs buckle. I struggle to a bullet — riddled tree stump near me, but not before my other leg is shot. I collapse to the ground. Although blood leaks from my wounds I will not surrender. I fire random shots from behind my tree as the police advance toward me. They move forward with caution, but I can hold my gun no more. With relish, they take my arms and drag my damaged body, bleeding past the inn that was now no more than embers.

So here I am, boned again. My wild ways curtailed for the final time. I am sure to be top'd. History will judge whether I be a murderous scamp or a defender of the bush'd, hard-working countrymen who are too beaten to stand against the mighty hand of the law. Those same law-makers who themselves steal, lie and cheat along with the worst of the scamps, sharps and sneaksmen. Or if not, that then neglect their duty when commissioned with reviewing charges against us. I guess there never was such a thing as justice in the English laws. But any amount of injustice to be had. All said I, Ned Kelly, am just like everyone, a victim of circumstances.

Fight

By Georgia Graham

Year 7

Steps pounded; heart raced. Luna ran through the shadowed park, scared to look behind her. She slowed, bracing herself for what she would have to face.

'What have I done?' she breathed. A soft but harsh laugh sounded behind her. Grimacing, Luna turned and faced the thing hunting her. The pain registered before the shock. Blood. The coppery tang filled the air and her mouth but her broken nose was the least of her worries. Before the daemon noticed, Luna flicked her wrist and a short, sharp knife was in her hand, glistening in the moonlight. Thank Suni, the God of Fight, for this suit.

'Ha!' the daemon snorted. 'Do you really think that a sliver of metal will protect you? Stupid female.'

Instantly, Luna was moving again. She couldn't bear to think about what would happen if she didn't end this daemons' life, considering what he had done to her brother. Her thoughts encased her mind and only once the familiar gurgling sound of the daemon choking on his blood echoed off the trees in the park, did Luna know she was safe.

'I need a place to stay!' Luna knew the twins, Jessie and Rosa, were contemplating Luna's ask in a secret language of theirs, that no one else could hear.

Jessie spoke first. 'Luna, we can't keep protecting you when you do something completely irresponsible!'

'You need to promise us that you won't go poking about the daemon part of town with Luca again' Rosa added.

Luna stared at the floor and quietly stated. 'They killed him. Luca left before me to scout the area and when he didn't return, I went to investigate. The daemon only chased me because he wanted to have some fun with a human, just like his brother.' That was the deal with daemons. They come in pairs, twins to be specific. Daemons had been terrorizing Croacigal for almost six years, but the daemons come from a different realm, a wild realm, one we can't pronounce in the common tongue.

A knock at the door vibrates through the room, pulling the girls from deep in their thoughts. Silently, moving as one, the twins take up defensive positions as Luna approaches the door.

'BOO!!' cries a familiar voice as the girls' attack. 'Woah! It's just me. Please take the dagger away from my throat!' the voice says. 'Luna, Jessie and Rosa but no Luca. Where's Luca?'

'Nick, you can't go sneaking around like that!' Jessie explains.

'To answer your question, Luna was just chased by a daemon and it's too late to save Luca, so we kind of freaked out.'

Nick can't believe what he's hearing. His best friend, a brother, is dead. Gone, never to rise again. Nick just silently turns and leaves, to do what, no one knows.

Luca. Dead. Gone. Nick doesn't even see the daemons that approached him before they were sprawled on the floor, limbs twitching. All he could think about was his best friends' death, at a daemon's hands, no less. Nick knew what harm the vile creatures could cause to the innocent people of Croacigal, what the daemons delighted in doing to innocent people. His mind drifted back to Luca's death and having to tell Hazel, Luca's wife, that he would never see her again, that Luca would never meet his unborn child.

Luna scanned the small room that the twins had lent her. The small iron cot would be enough. With Luca gone, nothing really mattered. Dinner had been silent, the twins muttering between them. Luna couldn't even remember what she had eaten, only that it had fulfilled the requests of her stomach. Luna longed for home, but she would never return. At least, not until the daemons had been defeated. Slowly, sleep claimed Luna and dreams closed in around her mind.

The warmth of sleep was comforting, though Luna knew she needed to awaken. Lazily, she turned over and a lick of warmth met her face. Luna casually flicked her eyes open and stared into a pit of black char, surrounded by flame. 'It's awake!' The bleak, raspy voice of a daemon filled her ears and Luna then knew what had happened.

A half-daemon half-human untied her from the spit and shoved Luna to her knees. Luna dug deep into the well of secrets people had confessed over the years and pieced together who stood before her.

'Hello, dear friend!' The voice of betrayal and torture, of dishonesty and lies. The voice so familiar to Luna, that she couldn't block the tear that descended down her cheek. Luna peered up at Rosa in disbelief. Pasting a smile on her lips and swagger in her eyes, Luna spoke.

'You probably shouldn't have shown me your hand so early in the game, Rosa. Unless it's a rookie mistake. I would expect that from someone so unexperienced.' Rosa glowered at Luna and motioned to one of her slaves.

'Turn around, Moonlight and have a look at what happens when you tell secrets you're not supposed to.' Rosa savagely shot at Luna. All Luna could comprehend was the use of his nickname for her. Moonlight. Moonlig-

'LUNA!' screeched Rosa. Reluctantly, Luna spun and faced something she thought she would never see.

Luca, stabbed on top of a sword, eyes carved out and guts lolling, blood staining his ripped clothes. The skin on his feet melted and his face of agony, frozen in time forever.

'You know, I had so much fun torturing him, but I had to leave because of you. I had to be back at the house. No one screamed like he did, except maybe Jessie' It was then that Luna knew she had to do something, anything.

Luna reached an invisible hand down into her secret well of power. Twisting, she drew the hand back up ready to fight for those she loved, to fight for those she would love. To fight for those who had died and to fight for those who had lived.

The Kraken

By Max Martin

Year 8

Water sprayed the wooden side of the 'Explorer'. The ship swayed side to side, like a feather in the breeze. Captain Salvator gripped the wet steering wheel and heaved it north. The crew grasped the rails, praying that the storm would disappear.

Grey clouds loomed over the mast, swirling in the forceful gale. Enormous waves crested over the hull, engulfing the 'Explorer' and all the crew. Screeching of faraway seagulls echoed through the darkness. Glimpses of blinding light seeped through the dense clouds, disorientating the crew.

"All hands-on deck!" shrieked Salvator in his deep and bold voice. "There is only one chance of us getting out of here alive. Make it count!" Instantaneously, the crew rushed to the mouldy deck and raised the sails. They glanced out at the dark horizon, hoping for a chance to escape from this storm.

The 'Explorer' continued to face the treacherous conditions. Turrets of blasting wind spurred towards the body of the ship, sending it into a frantic spin. Like a pebble, the boat skimmed across the vast sea. The coldness began to set in, freezing the already shaking crew. They entered the danger zone. The eye of storm.

The storms intent to kill the ship sent shivers down the crew's spine. The wind howled like a wolf on a full moon. The gigantic waves crashed into the ship, taking a piece of wood away one at a time. The dark cloud erupted with hard rain that made it almost impossible to see the horizon.

Emerging from Captains Room, an old man with rugged clothes and a wet map limped with his peg leg towards Salvator at the wheel.

"Should be past the storm. We'll be lucky to make it. I've spent my whole life, dedicated to find the mountains of treasure that the Devil's Cave holds. I'm not giving up now just for a petty storm." the old man exclaimed.

"Don't worry Calico. We'll make it through! I will do anything for that booty you speak of!" Salvator explained.

It was at that moment, Salvator saw his worst nightmare rise from the depths of the ocean. The eruption of water burst through the waves, the wild giant was ready to take its victims. Twenty ballistic, slimly tentacles broke the surface, slashing the wooden boat. The sail fell under gravities spell and tumbled towards the crew.

One by one, the crew were devoured by the beast. Rings of piercing dagger teeth surrounded its mouth as it demolished anything in its way. Captain Salvator had seen this very same thing before; his ship and crew being eaten by the dreaded monster. Him launching towards the gargantuan creature, putting all his might onto his shinning silver swords and stabbing the beast right through its eye.

That was the day he made enemies with the Kraken.

He knew it would return and take revenge, but he was always prepared.

"I've lost my whole life, studying this bloody island I will never find. If I'm gonna die, it's from that Kraken!" Calico shouted. He turned to the Kraken and screamed at it. The old man showed no fear, as he ran into the Kraken's mouth.

Salvator stared at the beast in disbelief, the man who he had travelled across the vast sea ran into the Kraken's mouth, dying. He realised that he was going to be next if he didn't act quickly. He launched his soaking hands into his gun holster and aimed the weapon right in the mouth of the beast. He pressed his finger down and the gun triggered. The bullet propelled through the heavy rain and sped towards the Kraken.

The monster dodged the bullet and glared at Salvator. Suddenly, a tentacle swung into Captain Salvator and squeezed him, making his face turn bright red. The beast was ready to devour the last of the crew, its mouth wide open and ready for the food.

"Not today son!" Salvator reached into his pocket and slit the Kraken tentacles in half with the same sword that took its eye. It squealed and dove back into the water.

"He'll be back." Salvator explained. He ran into the Captain's room and scooped all his treasure into his pockets. He reloaded his gun and waited for the next attack. The room started to fill with water. Salvator grasped a bottle of rum and walked onto the poop deck. The ocean slowly engulfed the ship as if it was a mouth. Salvator climbed up the ladder to the crow's nest.

"A captain goes down with his ship!" Salvator exclaimed and popped the cork of the rum bottle. He downed the drink and sung "Yoo Hoo Hoo, a pirate's life for me!" It was silent. The rained stopped but the clouds still towered over the sinking ship.

"Come and get me you coward!" screamed the drunk pirate. A black figure rose from the water and crashed into the ship, causing the crow's nest to plummet to the ground.

Captain Salvator glanced around, knowing this will be the last thing he sees. The mouth of the beats widened and launched at Salvator.

"Yoo Hoo Hoo. A pirate's life for m..."



Category 5: Years 9 - 10

The Librarian

by Selby Mumford

A Winter's Tale

by Annie Ming Kowalik

Mummy

by Elinor Williams

Lions

by Sophie Pycraft

The Librarian

By Selby Mumford

Year 9

Her name was Miss Novak and she was our school librarian.

Always dressed in black, ever ready to mourn the loss of manners or the decline in literary appreciation in contemporary society. She was a fully equipped librarian machine, complete with an on-demand steely glare of death (which had, on more than one occasion, brought a well-meaning yet hopelessly uninitiated casual teacher to tears.) Her long, silver hair was wrapped tightly in a well-behaved bun, as if it had never been afforded the freedom to dance upon her shoulders, even in her youth. Cocooned behind a pile of dusty old tomes, she rarely ventured far from her desk. She never smiled. She wore her gloominess like a comfortable old overcoat. And everyone was afraid of her.

While no one could actually recall a time when Miss Novak had raised her voice and most people were not brave enough to speak to her, there was an intrinsic understanding that this library was her dominion; frivolity, silliness or loud, exuberant behaviour would not be tolerated. The only sound was the oversized clock on the wall, which ticked away the seconds of our lives with complete indifference, or the whispers of quiet conversations held in hushed tones and with muted emotions. The heady smell of decomposing old books and the sense of lost opportunities permeated the soul.

Of course, there were rumours about Miss Novak and what had brought her to our humble library in this forgotten, sunburnt town on the edge of nowhere. A place eternally shackled to its colonial transgressions, where most, stoically acquiesced until a serendipitous escape. No one ever came here of their own volition; no one except Miss Novak. As a perpetual procrastinator and a dedicated daydreamer, I was more than happy to forsake my looming assignment deadlines and indulge in some of these half-finished, ill-conceived rumours or to seize the chance to fashion my own. Like a moth to a flame I could not resist our exotic enigma and my appreciative, unbridled imagination joyfully ran wild.

Whilst I unashamedly ignored that pesky science practical write-up, Miss Novak became a brilliant, unrecognised physicist; her mercurial yet unassailable genius the envy of all her male colleagues. After enduring years of credit for her work stolen by her painfully inferior supervisors, academic papers unfairly attributed and bitter professional rivalries, she abandoned the discipline she loved, vowing never to research again.

During my tacit protest against my art appreciation essay, Miss Novak became a gifted, yet tortured painter driven half mad in the pursuit of impossible perfection. Her life in a Parisian garret laid bare; a canvass torn, a smashed, lipstick-stained wine glass, the swirl of cigarette smoke, despair turning to ennui. Passion lost and potential forever unrealised.

Around the time my Renaissance history report languished patiently, she became a loyal and dedicated Russian agent, betrayed by her Cold War superiors in the spirit of Glasnost. Disillusioned by the ease with which her ideological foundation and justification for her actions had been abandoned, she retreated to the solace of the tame.

And, as I moved at the speed of a reluctant glacier on my discarded geography assignment, she was an intrepid explorer; spirited and free. Her adventures in a faraway land where the hot desert winds caressed the sunburnt skin and the sounds and smells of the spice souks surrounded the weary traveller, forever remembered. A chance encounter with a Bedouin man leading to a forbidden romance, the clash of cultures too much to overcome. The last fading glimpse of a forever-love lost in a bustling bazaar.

My commitment to reinventing Miss Novak's past would have continued had it not been for that day; a day that would remain forever etched in my memory. For on that cold, June morning, as the outback blooms heralded Winter's arrival, I would forsake my naive, juvenile imagination and, for the first time in my young life, see with absolute clarity.

It was my sixteenth birthday and my closest friend had given me a bunch of sunflowers.

The floral equivalent of pure, golden sunshine lay on the table in front of me, curiously juxtaposed against the backdrop of the cold, emotionless library. As I looked over to Miss Novak's desk a ray of sunshine from an open window broke through the gloom, illuminated the dancing dust specks and reflected off a heart-shaped pendant which hung optimistically around her neck. A feeling of great melancholy overwhelmed me and, without thinking, I picked up the flowers and walked slowly towards her. Everyone watched me, collectively holding their breath on my behalf, too stunned to speak.

As I approached, she looked up from her book, her pale blue eyes narrowed, viewing me with suspicion. I handed her the flowers and as she instinctively reached for them the raised sleeve of her dress exposed a tattoo on her wrist. Though it was smudged, faded and clearly very old it had a dark, ominous presence. It was a serial number, A62257. Her eyes met mine and in that single, epiphanous moment I could feel her loss, her sorrow, her grief, all that she had endured; all that she had tried to forget but would always remember. And my heart ached. She was none of the things I had imagined; she was so much more.

Her name was Miss Novak and she was our school librarian. But above all, she was a survivor.

A Winter's Tale

By Annie Ming Kowalik

Year 9

Frost.

Charcoal tipped noses on deer. Wind creaking between the spindly branches of cracked and splintered trees.

Ice rivulets streaming past frozen logs, slick with lichen, pale green and gleaming in the shards of sun, shattered like slivers of mirrors upon the roots of the old, empty oak.

Past those sodden tangles, up to the delicate snowy crystals that pile upon each other, reaching upwards in a search into oblivion lies crimson, fiery and steaming.

Splattered along the banks of the river.

Splayed across the boulders, red spiralling down the crevices and into the frozen earth.

And on top. Twitching, squirming, writhing in spasms of throes and anguish. Clenching muscles glistening like pink worms under translucent flesh.

Drumming of a laboured heart. One. Two. Boom, doom.

Thrice.

Silence.

Wind.

In the branches and the ice and the steps of fleeing deer.

Your mouth is filled with the musty taste of dirt, burnt wood. Your eyes flick across the river and into the twisting of the ice below. Underneath, you hear burrowing foxes, and the tinkle of branches as ravens scream their outrage to the sky.

The sun is a burning disk, and you are as quick and as free as the fish and the sea. Your limbs are strong and fast, and they carry you further and further aching with sweet relief as you fly across the undergrowth.

You are wild, free.

Your mind is clear, and your eyes stream in the cool breeze, chest heaving with life and with - you stumble and fall forward.

The ground opens and swallows you up, scrambling legs clawing at empty space, pitching you downwards into the dark.

Pain.

Pain in your head and pain in your eyes.

It hurts, you are cold and scared and you are a shaking leaf in an icy blizzard.

The midges march down into the bowl of dirt, scuttling over grubs as they burrow to safety from the air.

You stare at them, curled up in a foetal pose straining to catch some sun. If only you were that small, small enough to blend in with the ground, the bark, and light enough to scuttle around, unmarred by the ridges and high barriers of your enclosure.

You had strained to get up, to clamber over the dirt walls and to run away, yet nothing. You couldn't flee, you couldn't fly, and you couldn't see, feel or breathe.

And now, even the insects hurry over you as you lie in the muck.

Suddenly, as if the sun itself had been blotted out of the sky, a shadow tumbles over the ledge of your trap. Wrenching your neck and inflicting heavy blows that rain down upon your shoulders and stab like needles into your ribs.

Rough fingers drag you up and over and throw you into the numb pebbles that tremble at the weight.

Snatching at your limbs and pulling them tightly together, winding coarse fibres, chafing at your skin.

You are hoisted upwards, suddenly. The world spins as you swing wildly in the air. Your stomach clenches and blood pounds behind your eyes. It hurts, you are cold, and you are alone again, as alone as the weeds in the water, roughly spinning and swirling as they rush around you...

To think that you were once as free as the fish and the sea.

They drag it upwards slowly,

Yanking at hair, scraping shoulders against the hard rock.

Fragile head lolling.

They mutter and they growl. Cries like gravel in the riverbed, shouts like the roar of the falls, groans as dull as the crinkle of rotten logs as they split apart, pale white worms shying away, downward.

Those soft hooves scraping across every crack and every little bump in the pitted monolith of cold.

They twist, they wrench, they slither over the straining of a tortured soul.

You are strapped down, and hazily above, you glimpse eyes of cruel light. A dark, flat face wrinkled like the mottled bark upon a withered tree.

I am standing above it, sharpened blade pressing into the hills and valleys of my calloused palm.

I do not think. The thing beneath me is merely an organic construct to be bent to my purpose.

I am master of the forest, with my sharpened sticks, my raging fires, all is mine, and I may do however I wish.

My lips curl into a snarl, for, though I do not know it, I am scared. Scared of the beasts that roam between the low bushes, scared of the wind that whips in terrible symphony against my skin. Scared as they watch, as the ravens peer down from the sky and as the frozen rocks stare at my furrowed brow.

For, deep inside, I know that I am powerless against the true power of the wild.

But I ignore this, as to think about such things is to acknowledge what I am, and to me, what true horrors I contain must remain hidden from the conscious levels of my mind. Lest it destroys me.

I shake my head and tighten my grasp.

A hiss, steel on rock, and then pain deep in your belly.

You are twitching, squirming, writhing in spasms and throes and anguish.

You see the muscles glistening like pink worms under translucent flesh.

You struggle on, yet you are weak, and there is a light ahead of your eyes.

Your heart labours. Once. Twice. Thrice.

No more.

Finally, you slip softly into a world of blinding light.

The honeysuckle sways in the wind.

The branches of the beech tree lift into the sky and rustle their leaves.

You lurch forward, trembling on legs that strain beneath you.

Faster and faster you run, you can hear the water as it laps lightly on shore.

You rise upwards, your eyes streaming in the cool wind.

Now you are finally free, as the fish and the sea.

Unrestrained.

Wild.

Mummy

By Elinor Williams

Year 9

22nd of February 1963

Chatter, the smell of perfume and the latest girl group hit waft through the heavily conditioned air. On weekdays, the Grace Bros. Department Store is a haven for housewives, catching up over a session of retail therapy and an indulgent food hall meal, escaping the dull heat and droning of flies. Families burst out of chic pastel sedans to enter the throng inside the complex cube of departments, returning laden with various assortments of white knee-high boots, geometric dresses and the occasional pill box hat (for special occasions). Mothers pass through, leaning bassinets on their hips, or choosing to park their prams whilst sneakily perusing the racks of controversially short dresses. The store is a perfect scene of materialistic bliss; the ideal way for the respectably married woman to spend her day.

Unnoticed by anyone, she slips into the plaza.

Her thin body, ashy skin and plain dress fade her out of existence, like a ghoul you can only see out of the corner of your eye, her. Unlike her achromatic demeanour, her cracked lips provide the only colour, red-raw and blistered from constant biting. Her hair is stringy and patchy, with chunks nervously tugged out over time. But it is her eyes that truly scare, making Satan seem motherly. Ringed with storm clouds, they stare through the shops, latching on to every happy person, swallowing them whole in their murky depths. These are eyes of longing and pain, wild and inhuman, eyes that once you look at, you can never forget. What those eyes may have seen, one would not want to know.

Like a hunting dog searching for prey, she screens the shops, looking for the next family to fall her victim. Baby Charlie lays in a shiny Silver-Cross pram, innocent and finally asleep, unknowing of the crime he will be part of. His exhausted mother has taken her chance to try on a dress undisturbed. It takes only one offhand swoop for the ghoul to pick him up. So quickly, it is done. But the pain she has caused will last a lifetime. She hurries away, yet no-one notices. No-one cares. She seems like just another tired mother, rushing home to put dinner on the table.

Bouncing him in her arms, she whispers, with a new glint in her eyes, "Hello there James. I'm Kathy. It's nice to see you again. You can call me 'Mummy'"

Two days Later

Posters are taped up on lamp posts, depicting a rosy faced baby. "Have You Seen Charlie?" they ask.

Have you seen Charlie?

The North Shore Times is dropped on every resident's doorstep, the headline yelling its message. "Sydney Baby Snatcher Strikes again. Whose Child will be Preyed Upon Next" Charlie's father is quoted in the article; "We just want him home and safe. Whoever did this, you are sick. How can you be cruel enough to take a child away from their mother?"

6 Months Earlier

"No."

"Please hand the baby over, Miss Allen."

"No," She says numbly, her eyes fixed on James's rosy face (She had chosen the name after James Dean, her teenage idol).

"I ensure you he will be going to a loving home Miss."

"No"

The nurse sighs and rubs her eyes. "Look Miss. We've both had a long week. The Australian policy states that this baby is lawfully not your family." She leans forward, quickly excreting the dirty words from between her teeth, "This boy is not your son, and he never has or will be, because you are a dirty sl-" She stops herself in time, but Miss Allen winces. "Hand him to me, so I can bring him to his rightful family, who will give him a chance at a life that he won't mess up like you did!"

Miss Allen blocks the harsh words out, so she can't feel their sting, cradling James's head. She doesn't want him to hear, to know, to be tainted by the truth. He is now the only person who truly loves her. Not the baby's father, who turned away as soon as he heard she was pregnant. Not her parents, who couldn't wait to get their disgrace out of the house.

"Miss, let's just make this easy for both of us."

She doesn't even bother answering.

"I'm sorry Miss, but. .. I'm going to have to take him from you", the nurse says, putting back on her apologetic mask, leaning over to pick up James.

For a moment, Miss Allen seems not to realise what was happening, and her arms hung paralysed, still holding her son. The nurse hastily shuffles away, closing the door behind her. Almost inaudibly, she moans, "No."

"No. No. NO. NO. NO! NO! NOOOO!" Her voice rises to an unintelligible scream.

Tangled in sheets, she stumbles out of the iron bed, bare feet sliding across the cold vinyl floor, lurching towards the door.

"BRING HIM BACK! BRING HIM BACK! GIVE JAMES BACK TO ME!"

Her legs give in and she crawls for the door, beginning to scrape at it like a dog. She wrenches it open and staggers through the corridor, now surrounded by a cluster of nurses, tugging at her body, pulling at the sleeves of her flimsy institutional nightgown.

Ending at the doorstep, she stops, confronted by the bustling street of strangers. Her knees hit the ground. Passers by turn to stare at the spectacle, frowning at yet another moaning girl from the Mother and Baby Home. Parents with older children hurry them along, advising them never to disgrace themselves as this sinner has. Paying no attention, Kathleen Allen collapses, pulling her hair, sobbing into the pavement.

"My baby is gone."

"MY BABY IS GONE!"

Lions

By Sophie Pycraft

Year 9

It was deafeningly silent. Not in an eerie way. In a way that makes you think about banana milk and what you're going to have for dinner. Definitely not like the start of your Year Eight horror fiction assignment. More like awkward silence that makes you want to sink into the deep ocean trench of your couch and die.

"This is so stupid," Rise whined, rising slightly from her own deep ocean trench on the rug. "you thought sleeping lions was really going to be fun? We don't even have the people that encourage the lions to move. We are just lions in sleep paralysis."

I wanted to snap back at her, but the lion inside my voice box wouldn't speak up. So I had to use my regular puny human vocal chords. "There's seriously nothing to do. It's like two hundred degrees and if we go outside we'll be devoured by mosquitoes."

From the corner of my eye, I could see Rise's eyes sparkle slightly.

"No way. We're not going outside," I spat, trying to dim the adventurous spark in her eye.

"It could be fun," she replied. "You know, like a wild adventure. With lions. But lions that aren't paralysed."

The un-paralysed lion cub within her had taken over. She was well out of her deep ocean trench, so excited to get out of the deep dark cave that was my house and into the backyard, her jungle. I had to give in to her, or else she'd be whining the whole day, just like a younger sister. I just had to nudge the mosquito repellent her way.

"This is so much better than sleeping lions," Rise said, words muffled through the peanut butter sandwich that graced her mouth.

I had no energy left to defend my game of sleeping lions. The towering, dry eucalyptus that had a little Rise perched in it blocked the dazzling sunshine that grew hotter as summer proceeded. Summer never brought anything fun or memorable. Just several days with Rise that passed without recognition, like a train passing people at the station. Rise didn't seem to have the same longing for making special childhood memories, but perhaps underneath her chocolate milk loving, bubbly exterior, she did.

"Can I go up now?" I asked. There was only enough room for one twelve year old at the top of the tree.

"I'm not done," she said.

"So much for a wild adventure," I muttered under my breath. My lion seemed to wake up at that moment. "Look at all these mosquitoes. Getting malaria will be a great wild adventure!" it bellowed.

Rise's eyes sparked when I mention malaria. Not in the same way they did before - this time they sparked with a cold fire. "Malaria?"

And with that, like an EDM (Electronic Dance Music) chorus, she dropped out of the tree. Not spectacularly, not haphazardly. She just dropped. Plopped. Flopped. And sped back into our cold cave of boring days and sleepless nights. Now it was my turn to clamber to the top of the tree that let me sit closer to the big ball of fire named the Sun. The faded green leaves were scratchy, the bark dry and pale, ants and mosquitoes alike scurrying in every possible area. It wasn't all that striking.

But what was above it certainly was. Piercing blue heavens looking down on the few corrugated roofs that were spread across the grassy landscape, like cows that housed families of all different kinds. But something else was striking, not in the way that I'd hoped. A smell, a familiar one, but stronger than that of which my memories held. The smell that encases marshmallows as they toast. The smell that lets you know that your toast is a bit too hot.

The smell of a fire.

I'd only read countless stories about them. I'd seen smaller ones, but not of the size I could see now, at the peak of my small neighbourhood. With the smell came the smoke. It crept closer towards me, as though it was a lion stalking its prey. I wasn't the lion anymore. I could've been a sleeping lion if I hadn't left.

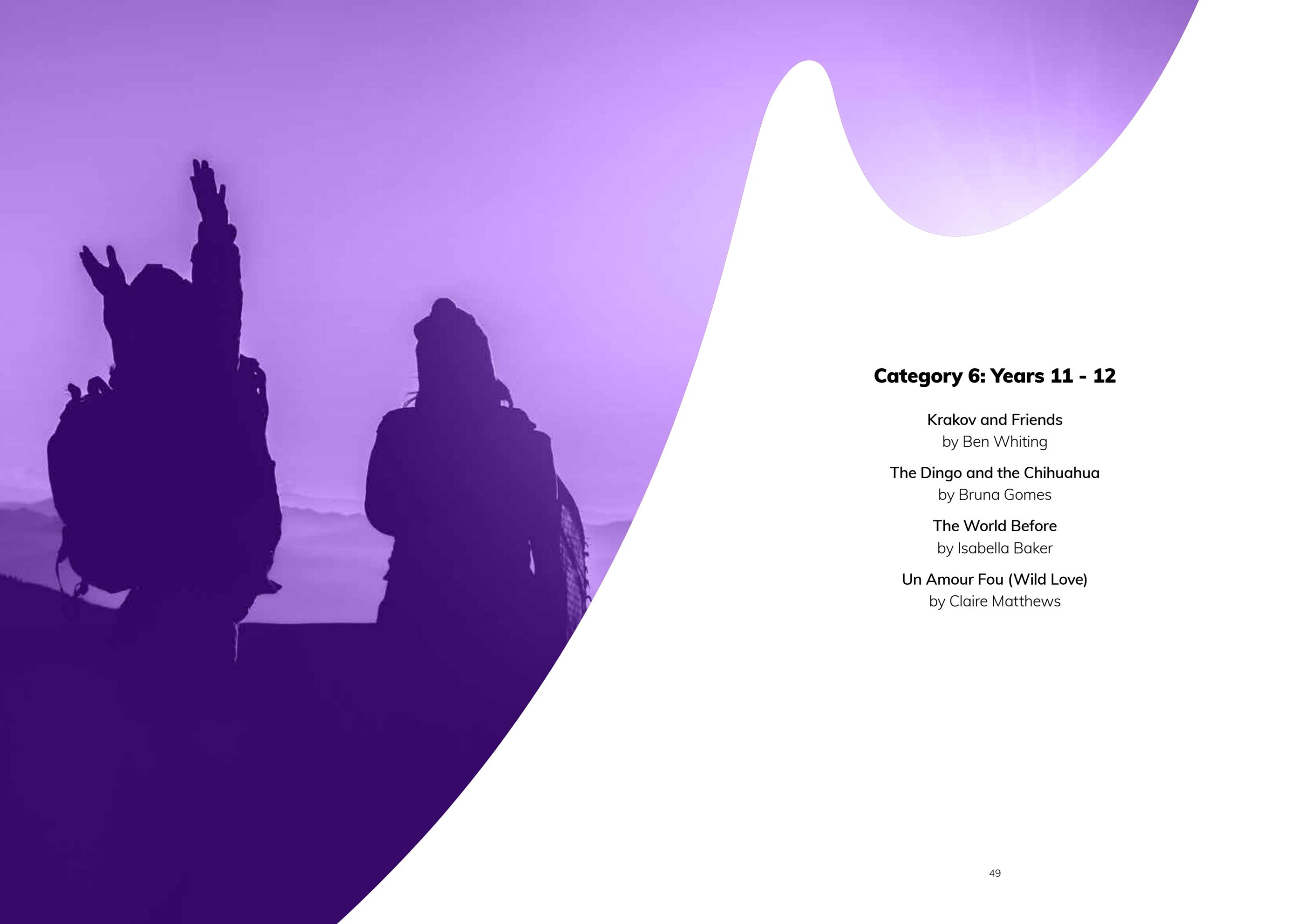
Rise was still in the dark cave. As soon as I mentioned fire, she flipped. My parents hadn't returned home, and all our belongings were still in our house. I didn't know what to take. I didn't know what was important. Ultimately, I didn't know what was happening.

So I just took Rise.

We joined my trusted neighbours.

We left the area.

If only the memories of the escape were more vivid. Without playing sleeping lions, we would be sleeping lions. Forever. Sleeping lions and climbing the skyscraper of a tree was all that stayed in my mind. As was scaring Rise with the concept of Malaria and sinking into the couch with excruciating boredom. I had been appointed a childhood memory, but not one like I asked for. Not a wild adventure. A wildfire.



Category 6: Years 11 - 12

Krakov and Friends

by Ben Whiting

The Dingo and the Chihuahua

by Bruna Gomes

The World Before

by Isabella Baker

Un Amour Fou (Wild Love)

by Claire Matthews

Krakov and Friends

By Ben Whiting

Year 11

Mrs Ross and Mr Ross had fallen asleep late after a late night and a couple of drinks, it sure had been wild. They woke up groggy but able to function relatively well. Mrs Ross walked past her red dress from the night before, now in a pile in the doorway of their bedroom. As Mr Ross walked into the dining room Mrs Ross had just put on pot of coffee.

“Would you like a coffee dear?”

“Oh yes, I assume our dear friend Krakov isn’t kicking any longer?”

“He must be dead by now”

Mrs Ross had just begun to pour two mugs of coffee as Mr Ross walked to the closet door. As he opened it George’s body slumped onto the floor - he must’ve died leaning against it.

“Where shall we dispose of our pal, here?” Mr Ross inquired, looking at Krakov with a fleeting glimpse of sadness in his eyes.

“Well the truck of course”

“Yes, well I was thinking maybe we should change our system, repetition is any murderer’s eventual downfall, is it not?”

Mrs Ross cast her husband a curious look, just for a second, “why the sudden change? It’s worked this long hasn’t it?”

“I just think we should be practical dear” Mr Ross suggested, taking a sip from his coffee,

“it’s better to be safe than sorry after all, maybe we could take him to the forest near

Pittsburgh? We could make a weekend of it”

“Yes, dear that sounds reasonable” his wife replied with a very slight sense of bewilderment in her voice.

After a second coffee to rid themselves of any lasting effects of last night’s escapades, the

Rosses got into their white truck with “Sunderland fire” printed in red across it; Mr Ross had been given the previously decommissioned truck before. As black tarmac crunched under the wheels of the truck, Mrs Ross could hear the taped-up body thump on the aluminium bottom of the truck as a wheel fell into and came out of a pothole. The green landscape passed in a blur, it flickered in and out of Mrs Ross’s vision as she dozed to sleep, dreaming of nothing.

She woke with a fright as Mr Ross braked with a sudden urgency. 5 hours of their 7-hour trip through the expanse of green fields lining the highway were over. As the truck came to a stop, Mrs Ross exclaimed violently “what is it!?”

“Sorry my dear,” Mr Ross said hastily, “there has been a blue ford following us for the best part of an hour, I hate to panic you, but I believe the gentlemen in the car may have been tipped off about our — dealings.”

“Well the answer is clear, killing him is the only option” Mrs Ross said with an underlying lustful tone in her voice.”

“NO — no, my dear, darling wife,” Mr Ross said calming his voice, “we must make an attempt to lose him before we do anything too serious.”

“But -

“No buts, dear”

Mr Ross’ voice was shaky, it was as though he was fearing the worst. It was as though he knew something she didn’t. A sudden, blatant U-turn throwing them both aside causing their seatbelts to lock up deployed to evade their suspected pursuer, was not followed by a U-turn by the blue ford. A collective gasp of relief encapsulated the cabin of the truck.

Adrenaline pumped through the veins of the couple as they picked up speed, now heading in the opposite direction of their forest destination. The body of Krakov was pressed up against the back of the truck, much like a person stuck to the back of their seat in a race-car.

After 5 minutes of racing down the freeway Mr Ross let out a sigh of relief and put the car into third gear and cruised at the same speed as all the other miscellaneous cars on the road. “lucky escape” Mrs Ross needlessly pointed out.

“I know,” replied her husband “we really need to get ol’ Krakov 6 feet under”

The husband and wife took a turn off 2 miles down the road with a sign reading

‘MOSHANNON STATE FOREST - 8 MILES’

As they drove, Ross could not shake the feeling deep in his stomach, the feeling of his intestines slowly tightening around themselves, like a slowly constricting pit of snakes. He knew something was wrong. He knew it was her.

8 miles later they pulled into a secluded parking lot with damp dirt roads surrounded by tall trees casting shadows that made the carpark look more ominous.

They stepped out of the truck and lifted the hatch at the back with a sharp metallic clang. Mrs and Mr Ross picked up a shovel each and then with Mr Krakov’s stiff body, they trudged through the undergrowth the occasional twig snapping underfoot breaking the piercing silence. The shovels hit the soft earth and they began to dig, not far away, a convoy of police cars rolled into the parking lot next to the fire truck.

As they dug Mr Ross could feel the snakes tightening.

The police surrounded them, with the stealth of a predatory animal. Mrs Ross leaned towards her husband and breathed in his smell for the final time, “it’s over my love” Mrs Ross whispered. With shocked acceptance, Mr Ross got on his knees and put his hands on his head, his stare boring into her skull as he stared into her eyes.

The Dingo and the Chihuahua

By Bruna Gomes

Year 11

They are sitting across from each other at the dinner table. She is admiring the new silverware she bought last Monday; he is opening another can of beer. As he fiddles with the stubborn tab, a golden crucifix swings from a chain around his neck, gently brushing through the hair on his chest that his singlet fails to cover. He wears the crucifix to remind himself that he is a child of God - sometimes it can be very hard to remember, even for him, especially for her. She takes a sip of wine, pats her lips with a folded napkin, careful not to rub off her lipstick. Finally, the tab pops off the can and beer trickles onto the tablecloth. He soaks it up with his napkin whilst she tries her hardest not to complain. That is the fourth time that has happened this week. It is only Tuesday. She has washed this very tablecloth four times in two days, and she will have to do it a fifth.

She has been married to him for five and a half years, though it feels like she's been waiting on him forever, ever since the day her mother taught her how to empty the dishwasher. They live in a large house in the middle of a neat residential suburb, with a backyard that they pay a mower-man to maintain once a week. She used to suggest every now and again that he mow the lawn, so they could save a bit more money. But he complained about his back and told her that if she wanted to save money so badly, she could do it herself. One time she said "fine, I will," and bought a mower and walked it up and down the lawn all on her own. As soon as he saw what she was doing, he screamed at her what a poor job she had done, and how the backyard looks ugly, like a grubby bit of ground that a dingo would crap on. The gold crucifix flapped against his chest, the chain threatening to snap. He screamed how the professional mower-man makes it look like a garden, screamed something about Chihuahuas loving gardens, screamed something about how he wants a Chihuahua, not a dingo. She understood then that she was born to be a domestic dog; the day her mother taught her how to empty the dishwasher was the day she was not allowed back into the wilderness.

He is asking her when dinner will be ready. She assures him that it'll be on the table in a few minutes. Another sip of wine. Another gulp of beer. He asks her why the forks look so fancy.

"Because they can," she tells him. "Because I like them like that, don't you?"

He replies by taking another gulp of beer.

She hears the timer go off in the kitchen, so she removes the napkin from her lap and walks over to the oven, putting on oven gloves and an apron like she was trained to do. The pot roast looks perfect. Smiling proudly, she carries it over to the dining table and positions it carefully in the middle, adjusting the baskets of bread so that there's enough room. Off with the gloves and the apron, back into her seat.

"Would you like another beer?"

"Yeah."

Up again, she retrieves a can from the fridge. She is a pet playing fetch. She pops it open swiftly and plants it in front of him.

"Good," he tells her.

Good.

They spoon morsels of tender meat and fragrant vegetables onto their plates, the house filling with the comfort of a home-cooked meal, though despite this, she wonders why she doesn't feel comfortable. They tuck their shiny silver into their meals and dine on her well-practiced cooking. She can hear his chewing and he can hear the conversation with a hot girl he had in a bar last night whilst she was at pilates. She coughs and then all they can hear is the tinkle of silver on china, like rain on an empty night.

"Do you like it?" she asks.

"It tastes different than normal," he says, "did you do something different?"

"I did, actually." She is surprised he paid enough attention. "I added a couple of new spices I found in the deli. The lady told me which ones go best with beef, like cumin. And pepper."

He puts his fork down.

"So you changed it?"

"Yeah, do you like it?"

"You changed it even though I specifically like the way you always make it?"

"Well, yes. I did. To try something different." She shrugs. "I think it's quite nice."

He stands up.

The back of his meaty calves sends his chair flying across the room.

He picks up his plate of food and spits in it.

He throws it across the table.

It lands in her lap.

He starts to bark.

"HOW DARE YOU CHANGE THE DINNER TO THE WAY YOU LIKE IT. I AM A HARDWORKING MAN WHO EARNS ENOUGH MONEY TO MAKE SURE THERE IS FOOD ON THE TABLE EVERY NIGHT. AND WHAT DO YOU DO IN RETURN? YOU DANCE OVER TO YOUR FANCY DELI AND BUY FANCY SPICES THAT YOU CAN EAT WITH YOUR FANCY FORKS. WHAT A GODDAMN JOKE."

She remains seated, watching him like he is a boring show on cable telly. She is all too accustomed to this part of the night; this is the part where the wild dog gets let into the house and the domestic dog has to remain obedient. This is the battle of the dingo and the chihuahua.

Most nights, the battle usually goes like this: for the dingo, being angry is justifiable and patriotic. He upturns furniture and smashes china in the name of deserved respect. The chihuahua is expected to whimper with her head bowed down. Both the dingo and the chihuahua are to remain sane, the former doing so by swearing profusely and the latter apologising profusely. The chihuahua has been told that anger is unfeminine, unattractive, and selfish. She was told to not acknowledge or manage her anger, but rather to fear, ignore, hide, and transform it, so that is what she does, just like the pomeranian in the house next door and the dachshund in the house after that. The chihuahua doesn't know how to stand up for herself without feeling angry or bitter, so she doesn't stand up for herself at all. If she were to get angry, she is scared she'd be ordered to go back to the kitchen to mull things over and cool off, to put a lid on her anger so it doesn't boil over and leave a bad taste in the mouth.

But tonight, the chihuahua has had enough.

The battle takes an unexpected twist.

The chihuahua throws plates and words across the dining room, shards of china hacking into the wallpaper and splinters of accusation tearing at his ego. She is mad, like a wildfire, spitting and screaming and crying, longing for the respect that she deserves, aching for the appreciation that she has never received. She yells, at the top of her lungs, yells about the burning desire within her to be a dingo. Yells about the mower she doesn't regret buying and the tablecloth she doesn't want to wash and the spices she loved eating. She yells about the vows she wished she had never promised.

The chihuahua barks so loud that the dingo whimpers into the corner of the room.

She lunges forward and rips the crucifix from his neck, proving her faith in his holiness to be as weak as the chain that held it.

She is a domestic dog gone rogue.

She loves it.

If being crazy and irrational is what it takes to express her natural, genuine emotions that she knows she is entitled to expressing, then so be it.

She wants to be a rogue dog.

Demonic, even.

She wants to be wild.

The World Before

By Isabella Baker

Year 11

Zhang woke at dawn. Outside, dust and smoke choked the air in a contorted convulsion of chemicals, slowly poisoning the city. Taxis and cars roamed the streets like phantoms, murmuring anxiously among themselves. Pages of the newspaper littered the streets as posters of the President hung in a foreboding silence. A cold sharp wind lingered above the city, hovering beneath door mats, before lashing forward, pelting through window panes and screaming beneath floorboards. Zhang climbed out of bed and made his way to the kitchen. It had been three years since he moved into this apartment and eighteen months since he started working at the machinery factory. As he looked out into the colourless world before him he yearned more than ever before to be free from this regime and to see his family again.

Zhang walked into the living room and took down the white sheet that covered the centre wall. For months now he had been illegally painting the wall with stories from the world before that his grandfather had told him who was now at a re-education camp. A montage of vivid colour and life coruscated across the wall as brilliant vermilion reds exploded in fireworks as verdant greens rolled in lush hills and meadows. Golden yellows and Byzantium purples painted kaleidoscopes of colour across the wall. Zhang let his eyes scan over the sunsets and the wild fields, the oceans and the waterfalls enveloped in ancient arms, the roaring thunderstorms and the luminous spheroids of stellar constellations. It was these images that brought him happiness and were in so stark contrast to the world around him. They were a reminder of everything he was and everything he ever will be. As his fingers traced the lines of paint sculpted by his paintbrush, memories of his family flooded his head. He painted to remember and he painted to forget. It was a salivation so dangerous and so daring yet without it, he was nothing. It was only a matter of time before the government would find out.

Zhang hung the white sheet back over the wall and made his way to work. People moved from street to street like monotonous mechanical puppets. Oil and sweat ran through their veins and the smell of smoke clung to their clothes. This life was all they knew. Zhang entered the machinery factory and sat down. He watched the five thousand other factory workers crouch over their work benches, nimble fingers sorting through packages, eyes downcast, cheeks hollow and warped with pain. It was hard to imagine the time before; the time his country was not like this. The time the sound of children's laughter rang through the street and music played in cadence with the trees. The time of freedom and liberty. He watched as his fingers checked package after package. He longed to paint, to merge colours and patterns, to form images of his own, to remember and to forget.

It was dusk when Zhang made his way home from the machinery factory. An inky blackness rinsed the city around him as the sun disappeared into the distance. Zhang looked up into the empty starless sky above him as government posters fluttered in the wind. Car engines droned and sighed. Traffic lights flickered on and off. Zhang climbed the stairs of his apartment and tore down the white sheet that covered the central living room wall. He sat cross legged before it and began to paint. As he stroked the wall with his grandfather's paintbrush he watched as he painted rivers of gold that snaked down mountains and rainforests that teemed with life. He painted mosques and synagogues bathed in hues of pink and orange. Yet as he stroked the wall with his grandfather's paintbrush an overwhelming sense of sadness washed over him. He put his paintbrush down and sat back. Slowly, his eyes closed and his body fell into a deep sleep. Zhang dreamt of grey and black that night. He longed to see his colours, but they were gone.

It was midnight when they came. They came with a fierce wind and shattered Zhang's world. The secret police were known to arrive when you least expected it. They told him he had partaken in illegal activities that undermined the security of the state. They told him he would be taken to a re-education camp where he would

learn to love his country. A second police officer gathered Zhang's personal possessions as he was forced into the police car. The grey and black colours of Zhang's dream did not leave him as the car drove away. Nor did the overwhelming sense of sadness that had overcome him earlier that night. All he could think about was the painting hidden beneath that white sheet.

The second police officer made his way around Zhang's apartment. An empty canvas bag slowly filled with Zhang's possessions as the apartment cleared for the next factory worker. As the police officer entered the living room he ripped down the white sheet that hung over the wall. His eyes scanned the wall before him in awe as a feeling of wonder grew within him. He lost himself in the beauty of the paint and he too remembered the world before. He remembered his wife and his children. He remembered the laughter and the happiness. He remembered the hope and liberty. He gathered the paint and paintbrush provided to cover up Zhang's wall and began to conceal the life and colour that had given him so much joy. With every stroke he covered he felt further and further away from the time he was happy, from the time of family and freedom. As he put down his paintbrush and stared at the now blank wall before him, he realised he had missed a spot next to the cabinet. The policeman reached into his bag and pulled out a poster of the president. He stroked the remanding spot of colour left on the wall before covering it with the poster of the president. Perhaps others too would admire the colour and life that Zhang so bravely created. Perhaps other too would remember the life before. Perhaps this small spot of colour would give them hope. Hope for change. As the policeman left Zhang's apartment he smiled for the first time in many years. He smiled for Zhang and he smiled for his country. For he knew things could change.

Un Amour Fou (Wild Love)

By Claire Matthews

Year 12

Frozen engines kicked into motion as the beast lunged forward, and steel muscles propelled us down the beaten track and into the abyss. Wafts of smoke and petrol mingled with the acrid stench of body odour. My mind was a jungle of thoughts. A fine layer of grime lined the vents above me, and to avoid closer inspection, my eyes wandered to the shadows that flickered across the dirt speckled windows. My reflection gazed back at me, ghostly and frail in the tunnel's gloom. The carriage was empty - not unusual for a Sunday morning.

Abruptly we escaped into the light and the engine growled away beneath me. A haze of golden hues ran past. Wheat shimmered under the afternoon sun. If I squinted, I could imagine the shadow of a child running through those fields, much like I had many years ago. Cherries had stained my teeth and pockets. Hair lifted by the wind. Daisy flowers held tightly in clammy hands. Parisian summers were soft, full of gentle warmth and sweet fruit.

Inside, the artificial chill of the air penetrated my lungs. I choked on memories of a distant childhood, as the train's broken movement did nothing to quell my rising nausea. What was I so afraid of?

That she wouldn't recognise me? That she wouldn't be the same? That she wouldn't care...

I flinched at the howl of the train's horn, and the sound shattered the chaos of my thoughts with piercing clarity.

6 years ago

Winter nights in Paris seemed to bring out the worst in the famed city of love, but tonight the grey apartment blocks we walked between looked particularly dull, everything around us trapped in a timeless state of degradation.

A whiff of cigarette smoke drifted towards us from where three men stood outside a dimly lit bar. My nose wrinkled as we passed a mound of garbage left to rot in the dark alleys. Here in the less privileged quarters of Saint-Ouen, everything seemed to smell like cat piss and disappointment. Not that Paris didn't always smell like urine.

The stars were suffocated by smoke from nearby factories, and thick clouds of smog spurted from the coal-stained towers and ate up our horizon. The outline of the slimming moon was barely visible, cloaked in darkness. My hands were tinged a red violet from the cold that had corroded my fingers. I pulled my beanie down further over my ears, and glanced at Lou, who grinned at me from under the warmth of her fur hood. Her cheeks were flushed from the fresh air, and she looked like an arctic explorer in all her layers as she enjoyed our midnight adventure. These streets were reminiscent of the times we had scouted the area like two lonely wolves, and climbed onto the roofs of buildings to steal a better view of the stars.

We would often attempt to outrun the rising sun, and giggled as we said our goodbyes only to see each other on the school bus and recount our night.

I didn't have the heart to tell her that this time; our trip might not have such a happy ending. We stopped to sit on a decrepit wooden bench under one of the Tilleul trees that lined the streets. In the yellow fog that crept around our bodies, Lou looked like a ghost, and her green eyes worriedly gazed at me. The wind pierced my skin like acid.

"Is something wrong?" she questioned hesitantly.

I sighed, and braced myself for the storm that had brooded ever since last Friday, when mum had tentatively announced over dinner that her contract had ended in France. Our seats to Australia were booked. The first week of the winter holidays. The first week, I had planned to spend with Lou. The first week of our new adventures.

"Don't argue, Charlotte. The tickets are not redeemable, and I'm sure you'll make new friends"

I don't think it ever struck mum that friends weren't what I was worried about. Saint-Ouen was an absolute slum, but it was still home, and my childhood. I had stargazed on top of the high school gymnasium, played soccer in muddy fields and skimmed rocks by the river. It was warm bread and bubblegum. Soft smiles and gasoline.

It was my first kiss, under the oak tree-

- it was Lou.

Her wild eyes and untamable hair.

I wished there was another way to tell her of my imminent departure. We sat on this morose bench in the middle of nowhere. I wanted to take her to a mountain and kiss her in the rain, like in the movies, the ones where they always end up together and live happily ever after.

Instead, we walked home in a strange silence.

My heart weighed heavy, like an anvil was pressed upon it.

The fields had merged into close knit villages that seemed to have been dropped in the middle of an ocean of rolling hills and grazing cattle. The train had groaned to a stop once, twice, three times. The next station was mine. I watched the coquelicot flowers wave in the breeze as I obsessively teased a loose thread on the hem of my shirt, and the string unravelled like the memories of my childhood.

I was afraid it would not be the same.

The train stopped slowly at its final destination and a sour sense of panic surged from my stomach. The wheels screeched to a halt.

I noticed the silhouette of a woman who stood, like a sentinel on the platform.

'Bienvenue à Saint-Ouen. Attention la marche en descendant du train'

Everything went oddly quiet, and there was a space of nothingness, like the moment between lightning and thunder.

And then I was in her arms, my suitcase on the ground.

I was home.

