

Years 7 & 8

2nd Place: Sophia Huizinga

Year 8, John Calvin Christian College

Life on Edge

“Keep fighting honey.”

The words reverberated like the drum of a marching band through the interwoven maze of Kate’s brain. Sliding like jelly back and forth, back and forth, back and forth . . . slowly fading until just a faint heartbeat was left.

Ringings filled her ears, her senses making her more confused, rather than helping to identify what was going on. All was dark and the moment Kate tentatively tried to lift her head the darkness held a tinge of red.

Kate slumped back down and opened her eyes.

When everything swam into focus, she was able to see clear, blue skies dotted with puffs of white clouds. She breathed in the scent of honeysuckle and a butterfly fluttered onto her nose, its golden wings shining as bright as the sun.

She wriggled about her nose, giggled and tried once more to get up, this time achieving the goal easily. The butterfly wobbled about in the sky like a foal and Kate reached out her hand, gaping as the sun’s rays of light seemed to go straight through her.

She looked about to see stunning scenery that most definitely wasn’t her chipped, pink painted walls that had made up her bedroom since the age of 4. Instead, lush blankets of grass lay out in front of her with thick trees rooted proudly in the ground, encircling what looked to be a glistening, blue river.

“Where am I?” Kate called out, gasping in surprise as her voice came out as a chord. Three voices in perfect harmony.

She looked about for the owners of the other two voices but as far as she could see, it was only her in this beautiful new world that belonged in a fairy-tale.

Kate pushed herself up and curiously had a look around, admiring the beautiful birds that flitted past and the fluffy little bunnies that crouched beneath the brush.

Kate skipped along a winding path until she made her way to the big, blue lake. She crouched in front of it and admired her reflection. Her black hair shimmered, and her pyjamas had been replaced with a sparkly gown that spread about her when she sat down.

Kate sighed contentedly. “I don’t want to ever leave this place,” she giggled, her laughter echoed throughout the fantasy world she sat in and dipped both palms in the crystal-clear water, bringing it up towards her face. Kate glanced a reflection in the water and gasped, closing her eyes to get the corpse out of her mind. Somehow, she knew that it was her.

Her hair was greasy and stuck out in several places, in the gorgeous ball gown’s place were ripped rags. No, no this couldn’t be, it was just a dream . . . just a dream, but then why was the water suddenly becoming heavy? It was like she was holding a tonne of bricks instead, the water was pulling her down into the lake. Kate shrieked and spread her fingers to let the water fall through, but it stuck to her like a barnacle to a boat. Kate’s face plunged into the water, and she was sucked up into a whirlpool spinning downwards, lower, lower still.

The beautiful blue lake turned muddy, and the soothing water suddenly squeezed her, ringing her out like a sponge and her breath left her. Kate sucked in a desperate lungful of mud water and heard the faint humming sound:

Beep, beep, beeeeeeeep.

“Just breathe sweetheart.”

Came the same soothing voice and Kate moved towards it, struggling against the increasingly strong tide. It was no use, the current pulled her back, spun her around until she didn't know which way was up, down, left or right. Kate felt a tugging sensation and let it pull her around like a rag doll. There was no point.

“No Kate, not that way, come back towards me”

A mysterious warmth pulsed from somewhere amidst the cold gloom of muck and Kate sluggishly turned towards it. Anything had to be better than whatever was pulling her.

Kate flailed about in the water, making seemingly no progress. Her energy was running out, and fast. She took one last stroke through the water and latched onto something, pulling with what little strength she had left until her head suddenly met air. She gulped it down, relishing the bite of the ice-cold oxygen.

Without opening her eyes she pulled herself onto land. When her head finally stopped spinning, she reluctantly opened one eye, then the other. This was definitely not the same place she had been in before, gone were all the pretty bees and butterflies, in fact there was nothing at all. Nothing except dirt, blood and . . . people? Kate swayed as she stood and took one hesitant step towards the people. They all lay motionless on the ground, except for one. Its body kept twitching. It was a boy of about 17 or so. His whole body spasmed violently, and his arms and legs bent at funny angles. Kate dropped next to him.

“Are you alright?” she asked, noticing in horror her voice came out as a rasp.

The boy's body twitched again before he took a ragged breath and whispered, “There's no escape.”

“What do you mean? What happened to all these people?” but the boy's eyes glazed over and after three whole minutes he didn't take another breath. Kate covered her hands over her mouth and gasped, tears filling her eyes. What was this place?

She looked at the bodies surrounding her. These people, they'd given up. The world swam out of focus and Kate touched her head, her hand coming back sticky and red with blood. What was happening? What was going on? Kate sat down on the ground and small pinpricks stabbed her flesh. But she was numb.

The boy had been right; there was no escape. No hope. She might as well just lie down and give in . . .

“Kate! Kate honey, come on, I know you can fight through this.”

That voice was starting to become annoying.

“Just let me sleep –” her voice started to become a soft whisper as her eyelids drooped.

“Sleep is good. Talk to me when I wake up again . . .” She heard one final

“Kate!”

Before her eyelids were too heavy to be kept open.

Beep, Beeeep, Beep, Beeeep.

“She’s not going to make it,” a calm but regretful voice and someone else started sobbing, huge, guttural cries.

“Kate,” they whimpered.

But no guilt was felt as Kate let the darkness take her, it was so, so much easier than fighting.

She felt herself falling deeper and deeper into a never-ending black hole. Her body started to fade. First her feet, then her legs, the merciless darkness creeping all the way up to her armpits before a golden rope appeared in front of her.

A ringing entered her ears, the noise stopping her from becoming unconscious, something kept zapping her awake. Kate knew she was getting one final chance.

She took a moment to think through her foggy mind.

What do I have to lose? she asked herself and a soft whisper rang through the darkness.

“Everything.”

With one final act of determination, she took the rope, using her still-in-tact arms to maintain a firm grip on it. Her arms seemed to work of their own accord and started hauling Kate up. Sweat poured off her like an avalanche. She felt tears streaming down her face and each time she pulled herself up the strain almost pulled her back into the black hole. Almost. She wasn’t done just yet. As she got closer and closer to the end of the gold rope her body began to reappear, and along with it came the extra weight. Kate’s grunting and groaning intensified as she reached the end of the gold rope and a bright light burned down on her, searing her eyebrows. The light was like a magnetic force, pulling her closer and closer, the heat baking her skin, blisters forming by the second until she physically couldn’t stand the heat any longer and the light mercifully disappeared.

Suddenly, in the small, white room of Ward 4, another pair of blue-grey eyes burst open. Kate was suddenly aware of her surroundings, of everything. The first thing she noticed was the explosion of pain in her head. It was rather hard to ignore after all.

Beeeeeeep . . . beep, beep, beep

Kate looked to her left and saw the heart monitor start showing her now steadily beating heart. Doctors in white coats and surgical masks rushed up to her, fiddling with the cables clamped onto her fingers and the endotracheal tube that was in her mouth. It was like she was an outlet, and the tubes were the cables, only the cables were the ones pumping the energy back into her.

After a series of needles and bandage changing the doctors cleared. She noticed a man and woman with salt and pepper hair sitting in hospital chairs across the room, a trail of tears still running down their faces, staring at her as if she was a ghost brought back from the dead. They shook themselves out of their trance and scuttled across the floor, hugging her painfully tight.

“We thought we’d lost you,” came her mother’s cracking voice and Kate managed to smile.

“So did I.”

Their arms tightened their hold around her.

“But some annoying voice kept telling me to keep going,” continued Kate and her parent’s eyes filled with tears.

That’s how they sat for a long time, arms wrapped around each other while they whispered happy memories and laughed quietly, shedding joyful tears through it all. The sunset bled into darkness, the lights grew dim, and everything was silent. The night was dead, but Kate had never felt so alive. Once you’ve brushed with death, then you can’t help it when you are so grateful for every mere breath you take, for every memory you make, for every smile you bring to someone else’s lips. Some things were simply worth fighting for.