

# All for a Drink

Matthew Chan, Year 10

"Muuuuuum! I'm really thirsty. I mean it!" I cry.

"That's enough! I don't want to hear another sound from you," chides Mother, while trying to talk to the salesperson at the same time. I look around me. The intricate figures carved on the bedposts stare at me with an evil glint in their eyes. *Hold on*, I think, *I'm just imagining it all*. But what if it is real? What if they were alive, watching, waiting for a chance to strike ... no. It can't be true. It's just not possible.

I sit down on a bed, any bed, the closest bed. I can hear Mother's voice in the distance, but I shut it out. I shut everything out. I curl into a ball, and I scream, and I rock back and forth, and I scream some more. Within a split-second, Mother is onto me and she pulls me up by the ear.

"You didn't take your medicine today, did you?" She stares into my eyes as she says this. She knows when I lie.

"I did! I did! I did! I mean it!" I shout, closing my eyes tightly, pounding my small fists against the bed. Mother tells me that I have some medical condition, *whatsi-tosis*, and that it makes me see things differently to others. I don't believe her. I think it's some conspiracy to make me take my medicine every day, and nothing more. Truth is, I slipped it to Rocky, our dog, this morning during breakfast, but I don't think I did much harm to the dog. In fact, it had started bounding around the house; eyes wide open; tongue hanging out; legs and tail jerking around, like my best friend at school, when he has an epileptic spasm attack. I just know that Rocky must have liked it!

"It's OK, son," says the salesman, "There's a water fountain upstairs in the office. Feel free to go up and get a drink." I express my gratitude silently and, as I walk away, I poke my tongue out at Mother; I'll get a scolding once I get home, but it's worth it. I quickly run towards the stairs on the far side of the warehouse. Then, all of a sudden, I notice a very, very minor detail that makes a very, very big difference.

The steps of the stairs are unattached.

Stairs like this really freak me out; I know each step is attached to the rail, but there is a huge gap between them. I turn towards Mother's direction, but there is no-one there. *They've gone outside*, I think. So I'm all alone in the warehouse, except for the stairs, the beds and the carved figures. Which are staring at me. Or not. Or maybe they are. I don't know now.

So, my task is to climb up these stairs without falling through the gaps. Not too difficult. Yet when I reach my trembling foot out to reach the first stair, the warehouse seems to tremble, like a skyscraper swaying in the wind. Promptly, I retreat into the kind embrace of my knees and arms. Fear begins to overcome me. Perhaps there is something that the warehouse is hiding upstairs and it doesn't want me to see. A few minutes later, I peek out at the stairs. It's still the same as before. I gingerly begin to climb the stairs, one at a time. I just can't help but think: what if I fall? What if I slip

and plunge through the gaping space between the steps? What hideous creatures lay hidden underneath the stairs?

In the end, I find myself standing on the fourth step with a long way still to go. I have decided that I must stand on the edge of each step, just to be sure that I don't fall forwards but only backwards if I am unlucky. The next step. Then the next. My foot wobbles as it reaches the stair in front. The air of concentration that originally surrounded me vanishes and my mind wanders. I start to imagine what things live under the stairs. Wild beasts with ten arms and eight legs, armed with claws and poison glands and, and ... I feel faint. Stars start whizzing around my head. No. I mustn't fall. I mustn't.

I continue tentatively but my focus has gone. Snakes. Vultures. What is down there? I can imagine their beady eyes staring at me. They follow my every move. I look over to the other side of the warehouse. Mother is still not back yet. I'm about two-thirds of the way now. I know I have to push on because my thirst is eating me from the inside. The rest of the stairs seem steeper than originally, but I'm sure that's just a psychological thing. I think. Shadows appear in the office window. A fiend holding a club! I lose my balance. My arms start to swing windmill-style to regain my footing, but it's too hard to save myself now. Bit by bit, and then faster, my body weight heads forward, towards the gap. But then I reach an arm out and grab the railing and pull myself back up. My heart is pounding so loud that surely it is echoing off the corrugated iron walls. I'm breathing heavily and I feel tired.

It must have been minutes before I woke up to my surroundings again and still Mother had not yet returned. I focussed my mind to the task ahead and decided the run up. Legs pumping, I dashed up the home straight. My eyes widened; I realised that I would make it!

"Boo!" a man's head appeared in the doorway, with a wicked smile on his face. My legs immediately buckled and my joints froze. Stability was quickly lost and I found my face centimetres from the stair in front. The last step. At this moment, I realised that I would not make it to the top. I fell through the gap between the stairs with a loud scream of sheer terror. The last thing I saw was the sea of beady eyes which waited for me below before the cold embrace of black unconsciousness swallowed me up.

The sound of whimpering and the occasional shout could be heard around the warehouse, until all fell silent.