

2nd Place (High School, 2022): Olivia Cook, Huanui College, *Calm before the Storm*

The sun rose, spreading a pink glow over Haragamaobama Beach, as the returning night fishermen were making their weary way home along the quayside. Gentle waves crept across the sand's warming surface, whilst seabirds squabbled over the discarded fish bones and crabs scuttled to their daily hideaways. The aroma of salt drifted into the air, mixing with the smell of ginger and herbs from the beach cafes. The repetitive tone of a car starting signalled that the local residents were heading to work.

Flipping the handwritten sign on the door to show that he was open for business, Chan Jing began his daily routine, getting ready for the seven o'clock rush. It had been five years since he had purchased the store from his uncle; back then it had been a dusty old noodle bar with rusty tables infested with spiderwebs. Now, as he looked proudly around at his refurbishments - polished tables, fluorescent lights and cherry blossom paintings - he felt a sense of achievement. Excited for his uncle's arrival, later that day, he wanted everything to be perfect. Rolling up his sleeves, he headed to the kitchen to prepare the first batch of steam buns.

Four doors down, an elderly lady, wearing a frayed apron over her plaid dress, struggled to open the laundromat door. Entering, she pulled her heavy shopping trolley behind her. The smell of washing powder and damp clothes was familiar and somehow comforting. Feeling her Nokia phone vibrating in her pocket, she took it out and was not surprised to see her daughter's number. Mae Lin pestered her every day about retiring and moving to Osaka with her, to help with the grandchildren. She wasn't even tempted, as she valued her independence and these peaceful early mornings. Flicking the switch of her kettle, she slumped onto her favourite chair for a quick nap before the first customers arrived.

When the water in the bay started to recede at a dramatically high rate, nobody really knew what it meant. The early-rising tourists with their sun shades and folding chairs, who were the first to see the giant wall of water, couldn't have imagined the devastation it would cause.

Three hours later, a group of volunteers were sorting through the wreckage of drifting wood. Earlier they had successfully rescued an elderly lady who had managed to make her way to the roof of her building. Disorientated, she was repeating a phone number that was obviously of great importance to her.

Searching the waterways for any signs of life, a young volunteer noticed a handwritten 'closed' sign drifting along what had been the main street.