



2nd prize
14-16 years age group

Name: Jessica C

Age: 15

Bio of author: N/A

Title: Locked-In

Judge's notes:

"Powerful and very well written, good pace."

"A very powerful story"

"Enjoyed reading this interesting take on being locked in. Real sense of drama captured in few words. Story is well paced with a real sense of positivity at the end."

Locked-In

Our belting voices intertwine with the music that blares through the car. We revel in the warm sunlight streaming through the windows. As the song fades, we break into laughter at our mismatched voices. Storm clouds smother the sun, descending us into shadows, but even that can't dampen our mood.

"Almost there!" Mum triumphantly cries. Cheering in unison, we begin one final song. Suddenly, the glare of headlights emerge from the darkness. The screech of tyres pierce my ears. A flurry of discordant shouts erupt before I am enveloped in blackness.

Faint jumbles of sound fade in and out, like the tide of the ocean. I can't see. I can't move. Am I dreaming?

Beep. Beep. Beep. The sound echoes through my head. I can hear Mum's panicked talking somewhere distant. I probably just missed my alarm clock again. I try to pry my eyes open, but they are so heavy... I just want to sleep...

I'm awake, but this feels like a nightmare. My muscles are rigid, rippling with pain. I groan, but nothing escapes my lips. My heart skips a beat. I try to take a deep, calming breath, but I can't do that either. My clenched limbs refuse to move, and my eyes are glued shut.

My head spins as if I'm tumbling in choppy waters, my body's crushed as if under the weight of the ocean. I feel like I am drowning, suffocating in my own body. I force my eyes to crack open. A labyrinth of tubes are connected to me. A heart-dropping realisation hits me. These breathe for me, feed me... I have no control anymore. I squeeze my eyes shut, but not before a single tear leaks out.

People visit every-day. They look at me, eyes glistening with pity and grief. But they don't see me. They only see the shell of the person that I'm locked inside. It's frustrating, scary, upsetting. Being here, but being unheard, being unseen... Being alone.

I abruptly wake to another day when voices cut through the droning beeps.

"Doctor. how is she?"

"Still unresponsive." The voice drops to a hoarse whisper. *Nadia, it's been over a year. Do you want to turn off life-support?"

My stomach drops. A tsunami of dread threatens to overtake me as I wait in tension. I want to yell that I am still here... But all I can do is hope.

Withheld sobs makes her voice quiver. "I will never give up". She gently perches next to me, tightly gripping my hand. Adrenaline courses through me. With all my willpower I flutter my eyelids open. Mum gives a jubilant cry, while the doctor gapes in shock.

"In all my years, I never thought I'd see a case of locked-in syndrome!"

It's true. I'm locked-in, I'm trapped... But I'm not alone anymore. My opened eyes create windows to my soul. I'm finally understood, finally seen. My eyes swell with tears, and for the first time in a year, they are ones of happiness.