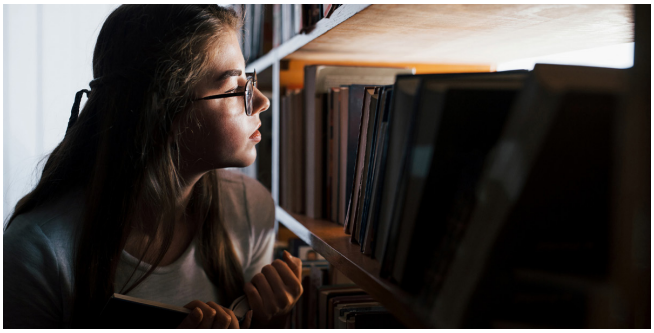
Excellent Decision-Making

by Jigisha Jhamb, Telopea Park School



The hairs on my neck stood up. I had the strange feeling that I was being watched. Probably just nerves for the test tomorrow, I told myself, but I began to feel the unease settle over me. I dimmed the brightness of my computer screen, even though the sun had only just set. Headache again. I could feel my head pounding alongside my heart. I scanned the vast library. Just in case. Just in case, I told myself. The library shelves loomed over me, towering with books. The posters of famous characters monitored my every move. The flags from different countries hung wearily from the high ceiling. I shrank back into my tiny corner of the library, flung out my legs, and accidentally kicked my pencil case into a bookshelf.

Oops…

Pick it up later.

Test tomorrow.

The letters and formulas blurred together, and I was left staring at the page. Why of all the places I could have chosen to study was the library first on the list? Especially the library after dark. If the librarian found out, I would be toast tomorrow. Excellent decision-making, Aanaya.

Did the lights just flicker?

I fidgeted with my pen and looked around the room again. The room was as empty as a stage after the audience had gone. I looked back at the endless formulas and equations of science. Totally useless. When will I ever use this in real life?

Focus.

Test tomorrow.

I rubbed my drooping eyelids and took a sip of water. Finally, I accepted defeat against sleep. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

Just for a bit. I will close my eyes for… just… five minutes… My thoughts drifted off into dreams of haunted houses and librarians chasing me through the aisles.

Creakkkkk…

I abruptly jolted awake from my nightmare, nearly leaping out of my tiny corner in fright. Everything suddenly came rushing back in. The test was tomorrow, and I hadn't even studied half the topics. There were still five more pages I needed to revise. But this wasn't even third on my worry list right now. I stared at where the sound came from. That floorboard was as annoying as a mosquito buzzing in your ear. My back pricked. I felt wide awake now. I was sure I was being watched.

I glanced around the towering library shelves. No one. I turned back to my computer, as my fingers tightened around its keyboard, accidentally typing 'zzzzzzzzz'. With a yawn, I deleted all of the zeds with a satisfied smile.

Focus.

This time I felt as though I had really studied. I happily looked at the time, but only ten minutes had passed. Ugh. Worst mood killer.

Suddenly, the lights flickered.

Creakkkkk… screeched the creaky floorboard.

That's it. I cannot take this anymore. I made a run for it. I will get my stuff back tomorrow morning. And find a way to explain this to the librarian tomorrow. Forget the test.

I dashed. I dodged. I ran around the circular tables. If only I had this much energy in PE. Then I would probably make it into the World Cup. My footsteps echoed painfully loud around the deserted room. Each step felt like I was announcing that I was here. I finally made it to the door. A sigh of relief left my mouth. My hand reached shakily towards the door handle. I could see the dimly lit hallway extending out in front of me. Freedom. I pushed down on the handle and pulled the door, expecting to fall into the arms of safety, but my head just banged painfully against the cold glass door. Owww… My headache pounded in my ears. My heart apparently decided to run a marathon without informing the rest of me.

I stared at the silver handle. This can't be happening. It just looked back at me placidly with a smug expression. What am I going to do? Yeah, what are you going to do? The door handle nearly agreed. I stood there frozen. My survival instinct kicked in and I reached for the handle again, my hands sticky with sweat, and pushed. But it was still locked like a vault. I could practically hear Saanvi saying, THAT was your epic survival instinct? I missed my friend so much that I nearly laughed, even when she sounded like this. But this wasn't funny.

I pressed my face against the cold glass and gazed longingly at the hallway. Face it.

It was locked.

I was locked.

Now what was I supposed to do? I was trapped in the library with my worst enemy: my own stupid decision-making. Why hadn't I just gone home to study? Well, sure, it was noisy at home with all of my siblings, but this, this was way worse. I felt a huge wave of regret wash over me, stronger than a tsunami. Now I was stuck in a possibly haunted library at night with barely any revision done. Suddenly, the sound of someone flicking through books started.

The lights flickered again.

I quickly slipped behind the nearest possible hiding spot: the reception desk on the right, where students went to borrow books. The smell of old papers wafted up to my nose and I just managed not to sneeze. I remembered earlier today when I was returning a science textbook in this very spot, trying to convince my friends the library was not haunted. I remembered laughing at them for being so scared over nothing. It didn't feel so hilarious now. Beads of sweat began forming on my forehead. The only problem with this spot was the book chute, where students slide their returned books. This chute screamed YES, HERE SHE IS! LOOK AT HER WHITE SHIRT! AREN'T I SO HELPFUL? My white T-shirt stuck out like a neon sign against the wooden reception.

The flicking stopped. Silence. My heart was pounding so loud I was certain whoever was there could hear it. The silence somehow felt worse.

More silence.

The lights abruptly shut off. The shadows of the shelves loomed, but there was an even bigger shadow stretching across the floor. And it was coming closer. I heard the thud-thud of footsteps. It felt as though my heart was trying to escape out of my chest. My breath caught in my throat. Were those footsteps coming closer?

Thud.

Thud.

Closer.

They went past the creaky floorboard in the library. Again, my excellent survival instincts kicked in and, startled, I jumped.

And came face to face with the school librarian.

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding and stood there, my mouth hanging open. The librarian jumped back with alarm. She looked as relieved as I was. The library was not haunted. This whole time I was hiding from the librarian, who was also here for some reason.

But now I had to explain what I was doing in the library at 8:47 p.m. On the record, I would rather explain that I was studying to the librarian than to, say, a monster.

"What are you doing here?" the librarian asked. Her voice was not angry, and her eyes looked genuinely curious.

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

"Studying," I managed through my dry throat. It sounded like a lie, even to my own ears.

She glanced overhead at the clock on the wall.

Then at the reception desk.

Then back at me.

"At… 8:47 p.m.?" she asked sceptically, raising an eyebrow.

"Um. Y-yes, Miss. I have a test tomorrow," I said, trying desperately to not yawn in front of the librarian.

"Then… why were you behind the reception desk?" She scrunched up her face until I finally realised that she was trying not to laugh.

How was I supposed to explain that I had spent the last half hour hiding from a floorboard?
"Alright, alright. You kind of… scared me. I didn't know you would be in here," I finally admitted, deciding that the truth was the best option here.

"That's okay, kid. Now go home and get some sleep," she said, waving to me, "and good luck for your test tomorrow."

"Thank you, Miss. I stuffed all my things untidily into my bag as the librarian unlocked the door of the library. I was ready to get out of here.

I had survived the haunted library.

I had survived the terrifying footsteps.

I had survived the librarian.

I had survived my own imagination.

Tomorrow, however, I still had a science test.

Excellent decision-making, Aanaya.