

FIRST PRIZE

The Two Keepers of the Necklace

It is July, but it has been snowing for a month! Standing at the top of a snowy hill, I look at the doom below me. Each breath of cold, crisp air fills my lungs and comes out as small clouds. Next to me, Mia clutches her hands nervously. I fidget with the necklace my grandmother gave me. She had explained, “Veronica, only you, the tenth generation, can unlock this magic heirloom to transport into the world of the necklace and control the weather.”

Three days later . . . Grandma is missing. She has left a note saying, “Roll in the snow.” So this is it! Mia and I take a deep breath and roll down the hill.

I feel the sparks of coldness, then the sensation of being lifted, before finding myself lying on a luscious bed of grass. Nearby, I see a forest, and a castle on a mountaintop. Mia is gone. “I know where she took her,” says a girl with green eyes and golden hair glistening in the sun. “I’m Sunny, Keeper of Sunshine, one of the two Keepers who live in your necklace. The Witch has taken Keeper of Snow’s power too. Go to the castle. Mia is there.”

I walk through the forest alone. I cross a bridge, then climb to the castle. Inside, a woman sits on a throne. Mia is next to her, but she runs over and gives me a hug. “She will let us go if you give her the necklace.”

I turn to the woman and ask, “What do you want with all that power?”

“To rule the world,” she replies. “But first I need Sunny.”

“Not this time!” says a voice. A girl with blue eyes and white hair appears. “I am Crystal,” she says. “The Witch tried to take away my power to control the snow, but I regenerated in the necklace. Now I have my powers back, summer is restored.”

The Witch looks horrified. I am horrified to realize it is my grandmother. “I’m sorry, Veronica. I’ll release both Keepers and bury the necklace. Just ask the necklace to send us home.”

Instantly, we are in Grandma’s house. She pulls the necklace off me and laughs. “Aha! I just needed you to activate it. Now all I need is—”

I grab the necklace and hurl it. *Crash!* Both Keepers emerge. “Thank you for freeing us,” Sunny and Crystal say. Then they float upward into the sky.

The precious necklace is smashed, but I think maybe I have just freed my grandmother, too, from an evil inheritance that had trapped her.

by Skye Reid-Calder (Grade Six)
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FIRST PRIZE

The Climax

Michel was going to kill the mountain. The decision was sudden, barely an hour after the bodies of Michel's wife and son had been returned lifeless from the mountain. Michel ignored his brother's warnings. "You can't kill a mountain," Emrick had said. Michel didn't care.

"I want revenge," Michel told himself. He was as immovable as the mountain he was preparing to kill. Taking with him a pitchfork and a straw hat secured to his head by a string, Michel left his family behind. The mountain had killed his family, so he was going to kill the mountain.

Michel couldn't see the top of the mountain from where he stood at the base. The mountain loomed over the man's head, not threatened by his tiny presence. Michel didn't care if the mountain didn't care. It would be destroyed soon enough, anyway. His mind was a narrow corridor. There was only one option from here. "I want revenge," Michel whispered to himself again.

Michel began to climb. He barely noticed how the climb made him short of breath. He didn't care. There were flaws in everything, Michel knew. Most of all, there were flaws in natural things. Natural things like mountains. Michel knew at the top of the mountain there would be a weak point, and he could make the mountain crumble.

Halfway up the mountain, dark was falling, and Michel came across the village. "I'm going to kill the mountain," Michel had told the villagers.

"You can't kill a mountain," the villagers replied.

"I don't care," Michel would reply. "I want revenge."

He left the village and continued climbing the mountain. The mountain was not worried about his presence. Michel didn't care about that, either. The mountain got steeper and Michel was finally forced to care about his safety, but he could see the top of the mountain. He was close. The mountain was going to die.

The flaw was obvious. He stood over it with his pitchfork. "I want revenge." He struck the flaw. Stones flew. He struck again. "The mountain killed my family," he choked. He hadn't noticed the wind had blown off his straw hat. "So I'm going to kill the mountain!" The mountain cracked. It still did not worry about Michel's presence, even as its peak split open. Michel was staring into the chasm he had ripped open in the mountain below his own feet.

The villager knocked on the door and Emrick answered it. The villager said nothing and held out Michel's straw hat. The silence was heavier than the mountain.

Michel had tried to kill the mountain, so the mountain had killed him.

by Zoe Lebel-Pantazopoulos (Grade Seven)
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FIRST PRIZE

Veronica and the Windwalker

Veronica was brave. There was almost nothing her freckled face couldn't laugh off—almost nothing.

Every night before she slept, Veronica lay trembling. It was the wind that got her, the wind that made frightful noises. It was always the wind, and whatever lurked within. That night the wind blew, the house shook. Then nothing, only silence, and Veronica was happy. Then she heard it: *Knock. Knock. Knock.* From her window.

Veronica tiptoed to it and opened it up, peeking through to see only the black of night. She was about to turn back, but something small hit her. A draft entered her room as the thing pried itself off and stood on the windowsill. This wasn't anything Veronica had seen before. It had a bulging head, eyes the size of ping-pong balls, and skin, thick and patterned with spirals. Its hair flowed with stars. It had no feet, yet stood. Veronica's mouth dropped, she was filled with wonder and uncertainty.

"I'm a Windwalker. My people and I travel on wind. Our wind was stolen, tumbled into a storm. We need it back or we will die, could you help?"

Veronica shook her head. *Impossible!* "I fear the wind. Why help it?" she replied, scoffing. The creature sighed and flew away.

The next night the wind still blew, the house shook. Then nothing, only silence, and Veronica was happy. Then she heard it: *Knock. Knock. Knock.* Veronica moved to the window, opened it, and there appeared the creature.

"Do you want to help me now?" it spoke.

Veronica remembered last night, *Why didn't I help it?* "I'll help you, I guess."

"If you take my hand, we'll go to the Windwalker who started the storm. This Windwalker is powerful, but not very clever." She hesitated, but grabbed its hand, and felt herself shrink, smaller and smaller. Then, Veronica and the Windwalker leapt through the window, headed to angry, grey clouds.

Rain pattered, strong winds swirled, and everything around Veronica diminished into overhanging fog. In the middle of it all, another Windwalker floated . . . the one in charge! It was different, much bigger. Veronica spoke, "I'm here to get the wind back."

"You mustn't speak human, I am much greater than you. I have the wind!"

"You do? Why don't you show me?"

"Of course!" it boomed, raising its hands. The Windwalker laughed, but the winds became stronger, and it spun, thrashing, trying to keep its ground, until it fell, defeated. It was much too big to float with those winds.

Soon, Veronica lay in her bed, but she couldn't hear wind. She feared it was gone, forever. Then, it started. The house howled, the walls whispered, and Veronica was happy.

by **Julia Berardini** (Grade Eight)
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SECOND PRIZE

A Friend in Need

I was cozy on the couch, watching my mother's painting come to life. Her hand moved swiftly on the canvas. She was painting our shed in the starry night. It was beautiful outside. I couldn't stop looking. At 10:27 P.M. I was dreading going to bed. Finally, kissing my mother good night, I went upstairs. Maybe if I had waited a second more this harrowing accident wouldn't have happened.

I got up to the sound of my mother banging on the door. "Wake up, wake up, wake up!"

I didn't want to wake up. I felt as if something were amiss. I opened my eyes. I felt the ground under my feet, but couldn't see it. I couldn't see anything. I shuddered frantically. "Help!" I called out. "I can't see!"

Mother came rushing in. She tugged my eyes open wider. It was no use; everything was dark and devastating as coal. I was so befuddled by what was going on. Yet, I had one distant idea, but I refused to acknowledge it. "We have to get you to a hospital. Now!" She tried to act calm, but was failing miserably.

We arrived at the hospital and the doctor said I was blind, and now unable to do anything I loved: read, paint, or know the exact colour of the sky. Nothing. I tuned out after about an hour of talking. My life was ruined. I couldn't grasp what to do now. I was useless.

I lived the next month in oblivion, fear, and blankness. My mother brought my meals. People visited me, while I ignored the world. On rare occasions I went for a walk, still remaining utterly silent. Day and night I'd stay in my bed listening to my parents' mumble. I had a walking stick at my disposal, but stayed in my bed memorizing my mattress.

One day I heard my mother gallop up the stairs and pound on my door. "We have a surprise for you!" she announced.

I hastily bounced off the bed, like a monkey who just spotted a mountain of bananas. Questioning, *What could surprise a blind girl?* Nothing came to mind, except, of course, the gift of my glorious, fantastic sight back. I rushed down the stairs for my gift.

My parents asked me to sit, and I happily did. I felt a husky breath on my cheek. I tardily turned my head, reached out my hand, and touched a soaked nose. A thunderous yet soothing bark hit the air. My own MIRA guide dog! Fireworks of hope danced in the familiar blackness. That's when I knew . . . I'd never be alone again.

by Serena Masciotra (Grade Six)
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SECOND PRIZE

Life

Her dark cape flapped in the wind as she flew from roof to roof. Dark eyes glinted from underneath the hood, filled with determination and happiness. Her pursuers chased after her, to no avail. Their calls for her to stop breezed past as she pounded on the tiled roof.

Then the ground unexpectedly rumbled and slowly shook into rhythm with the growing thunder. Her pursuers sprawled onto the roofs, and watched in amazement as the girl, not stumbling once, rappelled down a nearby pipe. She faded into the darkness as the thunder and lightning followed her away. The girl smiled wryly as she imagined the looks on her pursuers' faces.

Pulling out a loaf of stolen bread, she continued walking. Slowly, her smile slipped away as she continued down a narrow road. The wind was whispering, to anyone who would listen, about a creature in the town. Something was wrong.

She could feel the air tightening as she ran towards the town square. Then, as she rounded a corner, the wind suddenly grew agitated. Their whispers became frantic and she felt the stones beneath her feet slipping backwards, away from the direction she was going.

Then she saw it. Towering thirty-eight feet, white pupil-less eyes shining like beacons, and worst of all, a bloody mess of skinned animals for its torso and legs. The overwhelming stench of blood fell off of it in waves as it cornered a young cowering boy.

"Stop!" she screamed, the words flying out of her mouth.

The creature simply turned its head around and stared at her. *Well, well . . . what do we have here?* She heard a chilling voice in her head. She froze. The wind ran away and even the fog cleared out. Then, she spotted something. She watched in fascination as the boy, sensing his chance, retracted a sharp clear knife from his pocket.

There were captured air spirits inside the knife, for it was the only way to kill the creature. Then, the boy suddenly jabbed the knife into the creature's body. Its eyes filled with blood and it howled like a banshee as it crumpled to the ground; however, it was still alive.

The boy mercilessly brought the knife back up again. The creature struggled against the spirits and the girl saw not the creature, but her dying father. As she remembered her father fighting for life, his words echoed through her: "*Life is life, no matter human or monster. Respect it.*"

She grabbed the knife and did not let go. Police sirens already rang throughout town. The boy looked into her eyes and understood. Taking his hand, they slipped into the shadows, the wind and fog trailing after them.

by Denise Zhu (Grade Seven)
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SECOND PRIZE

Toy Soldiers

The roaring of the plane surrounded me, a constant reminder of where we were going. Usually people were excited when they travelled to France. I anxiously shifted on the floor, looking around at the other soldiers. Suddenly, a seemingly sleeping officer said, “You should try and get some rest, Private. We have a long day ahead of us.”

“How can anyone sleep at a time like this, Sir?” Trembling, I felt a cold sweat pop up all over my body.

“Not all of them sleep. Some pray, some sit there terrified, like you, and some wish they had deserted. Yet here they are.” The officer grimaced. “Not all of them will make it through this.” Turning away, he went back to sleep. I glanced at him, wondering. We might all be dead soon. While this attack was supposed to start a decisive push by the Allied forces, the survival rates were low—very low.

I was startled by a voice talking on a loudspeaker, breaking the continuous hum of the engines: “Prepare to jump. I repeat, prepare to jump.”

Getting into ranks, we prepped our parachutes as an officer began to speak, reciting a biblical verse, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”” The book of Isaiah, chapter six. It’ll be dangerous out there. Not all of you will make it back home.” The officer surveyed us. “Good luck.” Then he turned and jumped out the door. We followed.

Falling through the air at incredible speeds was not fun. My stomach rose into my throat, and when I finally pulled the cord on my parachute, I felt like I was hit by a truck. Thankfully, we were not spotted right away, but I was also surprised not a single person had noticed the thousands of troops who had just dropped from the aircraft.

Then I heard them. Looking up, I saw countless fighter planes flying towards us, all of them with Swastikas painted on their bodies. I watched as they weaved through us, their guns spitting bullets. I heard the screams of agony, and out of my peripheral vision, saw a plane head straight towards me. So this was it . . . this was the end.

I felt bullets rip through my parachute, felt one graze my leg, and—

“Sweetie, it’s lunchtime.”

“But, *Mommm*, Private Xavier was about to—”

“It’ll have to wait. Now put down your toy soldiers, and come eat.”

As he left the room, the boy looked back and smiled at his toys. Private Xavier would be back.

by Nathan Goliath (Grade Eight)
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THIRD PRIZE

The Parisian Peril

“It’ll be fine,” said my mom, grabbing my hand as we descended into the catacombs.

The whole day my family and I had been trekking around Paris to see the sights: the marvellous architecture of the Eiffel Tower, the magnificent spires of the Notre-Dame cathedral, the domes of Sacré-Coeur, not to mention the network of underground tunnels that make up the metro. Finally, we had arrived at the catacombs.

A wave of nausea washed over me as I entered the first room. Skulls and various bones lined the walls. There was a musty, damp odour. I took a deep breath to calm myself.

“The map says we have to turn left,” my dad said, his nose buried in a brochure. “Is this the right orientation?”

We walked down several corridors. First left, then right, then left again. I wished we had taken the guided tour. At least we would have had the comfort of being in a large group. I started to feel dizzy. “Can we take a break?” I asked.

“Sure, just lean up against the wall,” Mom pointed to a grinning skull whose empty eye sockets seemed to follow me around. I found another spot.

Suddenly, the wall gave way. I had fallen into another room. “We should explore,” said Dad.

We went in, made a few wrong turns, and ended up hopelessly lost. We sat down, figuring out what to do. I was on the verge of having a nervous breakdown. “Maybe we should yell,” suggested Dad.

“No,” I started, “it’ll—”

“Help!” the sound reverberated around the room, not going anywhere.

“Cause an avalanche,” I finished. A skull hit the ground with a sickening thud. I screamed.

Suddenly, the whole wall seemed to fall inward. We started to run. Our only hope was to somehow find our way back to the main path. We sprinted away from the wall of falling bones and made our way down the path. The bones chased us, falling from the walls and ceiling left and right. Skulls showed their decayed teeth, as if they were happy to get revenge.

Finally, we reached a wider section of the path. I fell to the ground, panting. As I looked back into the corridor we had come out of, the bones stopped falling as abruptly as they had started. The passage behind us was blocked off for good. We followed a faint glimmer of light. As I ran towards it, I was suddenly blinded by the intensity of the glare.

I woke up to bright sunshine flooding my room and the sound of my dad’s voice: “Wake up. Today we visit the catacombs!”

“Oh, no,” I moaned.

by Rohan Shetty (Grade Six)
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THIRD PRIZE

Beneath the World

A small cup of instant noodles. Two slices of pizza. Three pieces of Kentucky Fried Chicken. This is what I eat for every breakfast, lunch, and dinner. No brand-name clothes, no fancy watches, no Aldos. I'm living by myself in the basement of a newly built high-rise.

Well, the truth is, I like living alone. I like going to the train station from time to time, when I need to “borrow” some food. And I am certainly fine about my crazy stuck-up hair.

It may not really get to you why I live here, why I ended up here.

Where is here? Underground.

Seven years is the time I've spent in the basement. Always hidden, not needing the presence of *time*. Seven years before is what I don't remember—only that my parents left us, my sister and me. When my parents vanished I was still five. I still know how to smile, thanks to my sister who called me names.

My sister, Audrey, had just turned thirteen, and she could make better sense of what was happening than I could. When she called Grandmother, I could hear her crying over the phone. That was the moment I learned my parents had abandoned me.

Audrey and I spent two months with Grandmother after the incident. Two precious months where we felt relieved, even happy. Two months when we fulfilled our pursuit of being loved and could love. Audrey hadn't expected Grandmother's death so soon, and obviously, as a young child, neither did I.

Today is exactly the 1925th day since Audrey left. Of course, she wanted us to live. But it is hard for me to forgive Audrey for what she did. She packed up and went to the city to find a job. I have never heard from her since. On that day Audrey had told me without warning: “Austin, please listen to me. I have to go to the city to earn some money for us to live. When I come back, I'll buy you chocolate and new clothes and racing cars, okay? But while I'm away, you can use this money to eat.” She had stuffed thirty twenty-dollar bills in my palms.

I had looked up at her, confused. “When are you coming back?”

“Soon. It'll only be a few weeks.” Audrey had smiled, but when she turned away I had seen her hiding tears. I pounded on the window to wave to her.

Sometimes I imagine her coming home on train 49, the train that took her to the city. But I know it's only my vivid imagination. Because there's no home left for us.

by Judy Rhee (Grade Seven)
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THIRD PRIZE

Patchy

I stumbled out of the tiny grey box and doubled over in pain. Light grey smoke billowed out of the machine, sharply stinging my lungs. After five minutes of coughing, my lungs cleared and I was able to stand again. I stared grimly at the machine. Humanity's first time machine had succeeded in time travel, but had failed miserably surviving the ride. I knew it would fail somehow. Things like this never work on the first try. I was supposed to only go back a year, so if something did go wrong it wouldn't be that bad. Looking at my surroundings, it was obvious I hadn't landed a year ago.

I had landed in a dense forest. The time machine had created a small circle of burnt dirt and plants around it. Huge trees and large ferns were growing almost everywhere. There was no point in hanging around the machine, so I started my descent into the thick foliage.

I had taken only fifteen steps when a menacing screech broke through the air. I looked up and saw three unnaturally large, strangely shaped birds flying through the air. It took me a moment to realize they weren't birds. I let out a squeal of delight. They were pterosaurs, Quetzalcoatlus to be specific! With a wingspan of fifty feet, they were the largest flying reptiles that ever lived. I loved dinosaurs and prehistoric beasts when I was a child. Seeing the majestic creatures flying overhead awakened a beautiful sense of nostalgia in my heart. The Quetzalcoatlus flew out of my view and I continued my journey into the forest. I now knew I was in the late Cretaceous period, about sixty-six million years before I was born.

A small roar broke my thoughts. It was coming from behind a fern. I pushed the green leaves aside and gasped. It was a baby Pachycephalosaur, about up to my knee in height, lying on its right side and struggling to get up. Its left leg was bleeding, and a pool of crimson had formed below it. I knelt down beside it and started comforting and petting it. Pachycephalosaur was my favourite dinosaur when I was a child. It snorted as I pet its smooth scales. I stopped petting the Pachycephalosaur and lifted it into my arms. I wasn't about to let the first dinosaur I had met suffer and die.

I found a small cave near where I had found the Pachycephalosaur. It was sufficient shelter for now. I leaned against the cold, stone wall. The Pachycephalosaur, whom I had named Patchy, slept in my lap. If I were going to be stuck here, at least I had a companion.

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