

FIRST PRIZE

I'm Coming Home

HE'D LOST TRACK OF TIME a long while ago. Maybe a whole day had passed. He wouldn't know. The wood planks all looked identical. What he did know was that he had escaped those cruel ladies, he had abandoned his friends, and he was alone.

He needed to go home. Back to the ones who gave him warmth and fed him plentifully. Where were they? How much longer would he have to walk? Did the women with their harshly pale skin and long black gowns know he was gone? Were they looking for him?

His stomach let out a weak moan. When was the last time his belly was truly satisfied? In the school, he did not hunt what they put in his bowl. Not that it mattered anymore. Soon, he'd eat surrounded by light and laughter.

As he drowned himself in hopeful daydreams, the burning cold that seeped through the thin cloth covering his body was momentarily forgotten. Lost in a different world, his feet dragged on.

His mouth filled with the taste of fresh earth, cleansed from the melting snow. The cool metal nails of the railway against his cheek slowly drew him back from the warmth of his imagination. He had fallen. Suddenly remembering what he'd gladly ignored, he closed his eyes, not daring to open them. And to the searchers who found him not too long after, he never did.

IT WAS DARK. Dark, cold, and scary. Tucking his knees tight against his chest, he wished to see Mother again, to run with Father again. It was getting colder and darker, hope dripping away drop by drop until he wished no longer.

Then, there was warmth. An unbearable heat as he watched two arms cover his fragile, shivering waist. A chin rested upon his head, and he leaned into the feeling he missed so much. He couldn't see a face, but no child can forget the love of a mother. A second light appeared, and he looked up to stare into the strong, steady eyes of his father. His vision blurred, and he closed his eyes, letting tears flow.

WHEN HE OPENED HIS EYES AGAIN, he was seated beside a fire. Singing voices surrounded him, speaking his forbidden language. Looking around, there were so many people with the same bronze skin and crafted furs like him. He even noticed some who were in the same school as him, who had been pronounced dead, laughing together.

That night, the young boy feasted until his belly would burst, laughed and sang till his voice was a rasping whisper, and danced until his legs gave out, and forever more, he'd dance to the light of the shining stars.

by *Serena Cooper* (Grade Nine)

Louis Riel School

Calgary, Alberta

FIRST PRIZE

Karma

SMASH! The window shattered into hundreds of shards, sparkling like the stars above. I hesitated as my masked “colleagues” crawled their way into the gloomy house.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING? Go!” exclaimed the getaway driver as he pushed me in.

The glass crunched under my beaten-up sneakers as I looked around for anything valuable. The place was barren, decorated with some biblical paintings and torn brown furniture. I crept my way up the creaky staircase and spotted a dusty wooden dresser. I opened the top drawer and felt as if I had just struck gold, because I did precisely that. I hastily unzipped my backpack and shovelled heaps of jewellery in until I heard stampeding footsteps and yelling from downstairs.

“SOMEONE’S DOWN HERE! GET IN THE CAR!” shouted a distressed voice.

Before I left to regroup, I noticed a golden ring that shined brighter than the rest shoved in the back of the drawer. I grabbed it, but before I could drop it into my backpack, I heard the revving of the car. I shoved it on my finger and bolted down the stairs. I heard the thuds of loot falling from my unzipped backpack with each stride. I hurdled over the cracked window, but to my misfortune, all I could see were the bright-red taillights of the getaway car.

I had no time to dwell. An enraged bald man trailed behind me. He wielded a corded phone pressed against his ear, presumably dialling 9-1-1. As I turned the corner, he grabbed my backpack, but I swiftly escaped the shoulder straps and accelerated forward. I briefly glanced behind me. He knelt and searched the bag aggressively, then fumed as he realized it wasn’t there. He looked up and stared into my eyes furiously. I took off.

I entered my apartment and instantly felt relieved. I lay on my half-deflated air mattress with my eyes wide open, as the guilt of what I had just done crept up on me.

The next morning, I entered the local bodega for breakfast. As I approached the register, I was greeted by a familiar face. The flickering lights above reflected off his head as he rang me up. Thankfully, he didn’t recognize me. That is until I reached for my change. His eyes glossed over the golden ring and immediately widened. Before he spoke, I fled.

My immense guilt led me back to his house, where I graciously placed the ring back on the dresser. I got back to my apartment feeling reborn. But when I opened the door, my apartment had been emptied. The window beside the fire escape was smashed in. Next to it was a bright-yellow sticky note that read, “Karma.”

by Kabir Hundal (Grade Ten)
University Hill Secondary School
Vancouver, British Columbia

FIRST PRIZE

The Variety Shows of My Childhood

MY EARLY CHILDHOOD was serenaded by the songs of pirated Vietnamese variety shows. Real DVDs were too luxurious to buy on a single mother's meagre salary made running a convenience store. Still, we led a life rich in bright memories of vibrant reds and golds and aromatic lemongrass and incense against a backdrop of lilting melodies and stories from the shows. We would pop in a DVD when we were sad, celebratory, homesick . . . every situation could be made better with a song and a few laughs.

But time marched on steadily, bringing new trials.

“. . . Ty Dung? Is Ty Dung here?"

Second grade: kids shed their sheen of innocence, revealing juvenile malice.

"Present. And it's *Thùy Dung*," I said, proudly pronouncing my name.

"Her name is Dung!" The class burst into an instantaneous, horrifying chorus of laughter. Mortified, I shrank into myself.

Lunches: another kind of misery. Kids around me plugged their noses, scrunched their faces at my *buôn nước mắm* (noodles and fish sauce). I hastily screwed the lid back on my Thermos, but the damage was done. To my classmates, I was nothing more than a girl named Dung who reeked of fish.

Time kept marching still. *Thùy Dung* turned into Katie, and *buôn nước mắm* turned into sandwiches that I would handle reverently, as though each one were a piece of ID proving to my classmates that I was just like them.

High school: I suddenly found out that my black hair and downturned eyes were undesirable. Makeup and blonde hair dye became my first best friends. I felt reborn—my golden halo of hair and three-millimetre strokes of eyeliner were putting three miles of distance between me and my unwelcome Vietnamese features. I was set free. Beautiful. Wanted.

Yet one night, a sound came from our living room—one that I hadn't heard in years.

Sinking onto the couch next to my mom, I soaked in the nostalgia, the soulful highs and lows of the exquisitely garbed singer in the variety show as though hearing it for the first time. It brought me back to the days of a shining, fierce love for golden lemongrass and red, glowing incense.

I forgot how beautiful being Vietnamese is.

I looked over at my mom. Dry, cracked hands from working hard to support us in a new country. A lined face from worrying about her lost, hate-filled daughter.

I wished I could grab the remote, rewind the last decade of my life. Stand up to classroom bullies, bring home-cooked lunches, proudly show off my downturned eyes and black hair.

But the damage was done.

We sat in the dark, listening to the aching sound of a culture long lost.

by Joanne Lang (Grade Eleven)
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Richmond Hill, Ontario

FIRST PRIZE

Prisoner CAN-F-47

I HOPE THEY DON'T LOOK up at me. But when they do—for this is inevitable—they'll give me a verbal warning through my comm first. After a few paces, a buzz will notify HQ. I might cover a few more metres before they cut my oxygen reserve, rendering me unconscious.

"PRISONER CAN-F-47, REDIRECT TO YOUR DESIGNATED JOB SITE."

I scale the rounded lip of a crater. I'm awkward in my bulky suit, half buoyant. I'm a marshmallow in a river of molasses. I'm an astronaut on the moon. I'm a prisoner violating protocol. What was it you once called me? Headstrong? That had been a fonder descriptor of yours—when you'd still fancied me a woman you could love.

Because I know they're listening over the comm, I say aloud, "I have a son."

No reply.

"He has these eyes, cornflower blue, I think. And when I used to hold him as a baby, I'd count all the little jade flecks in them."

I don't tell them I've forgotten what blue looks like—green too. They won't ask.

"See, when you're offered a shorter sentence, you take it. You strap yourself into that rocket, you pick up that shovel and put on that helmet. You do it because the court promises you'll watch your son graduate if you do."

I've never strayed this far from Base before.

"But what you don't anticipate—" I pause then continue, searching for a foothold, "—is the forgetting. Colours, the taste of a buttered bun, the call of a lark, the way the sun stains an evening sky. The features of your own child's face."

On the moon, there are only blacks and whites and shadowy beiges. Only red still sometimes flashes behind my eyelids. Blood—yours—crusted under my fingernails and dripping onto the tiles. *Tap. Tap.*

"OXYGEN SUPPLY DIMINISHED BY 50%."

I'm crawling upwards, and the mute observer is you now. I think of your cruel mouth: to kiss, to slap. And I think the lack of oxygen has made my head float up, up. Like the bubbles you taught our child to blow from a wand. You, claimed by the soil, and me, imprisoned in the sky.

"We've failed him, Husband."

So close, nearly there, but not enough. Then I see it. And I know all at once by that sunset that buns and birds and little boys with blue-green eyes still exist. I didn't dream them up. Because in the Earth, hovering just over the arcing expanse of the moon, I see my son's eyes. Deep-blue eyes. With the little green flecks in them. And I hope he's looking up at the moon right now—

Up at me.

by Samantha Batte (Grade Twelve)
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SECOND PRIZE

A Child's Chuckle

THERE, THE GIRL SAT, legs dangling from her perch, swinging ever so slightly as she sang a trembling tune. Her hands sped through the crumbling wooden blocks Papa had carved for her so many years ago. Childish giggles drifted from the house and coloured the air with bright, joyous hues.

And there, Papa stood, his gaze pinned to the girl with soft joy. She was his everything, his inspiration, his reason for happiness. As she continued fiddling with her blocks, he trod lightly towards her, whispered a quiet farewell, and headed off to work. Before he could leave, a small face hoisted itself up beside his ear and mumbled a wavering goodbye back to him. His thin colourless lips rose to a smile, then he trudged towards the sunrise once more.

Papa's work was gruelling and gruesome. Animal after animal fell beneath his blade, while the stench of blood filled his nostrils with their infectious taste. He remembered how he'd once used these skills before. To exact some injustice his mind could not recall. But that was neither here nor there.

He longed to hold his little girl in his arms again. With each chop, he thought of her embrace, the delicate sound of her laughter, and the feathering touch of her hand. Papa impatiently checked the darkening sky again, biding his time until work was finished and he could make his way to the market.

"Getting something for your girl again?" The old tradesman gave a sad smile.

Papa dipped his head in greeting, eyes scouring through the cart to search for the one that would curl his little girl's lips up in a joyful beam. He gave a small nod at a stained linen doll, pointed at it, and fluently flipped out the collection of coins he'd been steadily saving up. The old man shook his head sympathetically and tossed the doll to him.

"This one's on me, alright?"

Papa smiled faintly in appreciation, clasped the doll gently, and began heading homeward to his darling girl, his pride and joy.

Behind him, the hoarse voices of two men drifted down the cobblestone path. "Still can't let go, can he?"

"Poor guy. I reckon living in that hovel is doin' no good for his mind either."

Papa paid no heed to their vagaries and instead hurried home.

When he reached the cozy cottage at last, a charming laugh tinkled from inside, "*Papa, you're back!*"

Papa ran forward and hugged his little girl. "I got you a gift," he whispered excitedly and dropped the doll into her outstretched hands.

It hit the floor with a muffled *thump*, carefully consigned to the heap of gifts that his daughter would never hold.

by Sophia Xu (Grade Nine)
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Oakville, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

Starfire

SHE TIPPED THE BOTTLE upside down, watching black smoke pour from its container. Her face betrayed no emotion, but her eyes were fixed on the creature before her. Though it was almost lifeless—indefinite and wispy, with colours crackling like lightning at its core—Aisha knew it to be alive.

It turned to face her, a ball of violet light for an eye.

Endless . . ., it whispered. *Your fear . . . endless. . .* Its voice was the sound of falling leaves and whispered secrets. *I change you?*

“Not me. Someone else.” For the first time, a flicker of fear crossed her face.

Who?

“A man. Tynan.”

You fear him. . . .

“I want you to change him.”

To a lamb?

Her lips quirked up, her eyes sharp. “To a demon. One his family can’t ignore.”

And your payment?

“The light you take from him is yours. Your sparks will burn brighter then.”

He will burn. . . . The *sigmara* turned away from her and slipped out the window. Her eyes followed it until she forced herself to look away.

“He’ll burn,” she whispered to herself. “Even if his wife can ignore that he’s a demon, his son won’t be able to. And he will burn his father in starfire, and I’ll be free of him forever. No more hiding. No more fear. He will burn.”

JUST HOURS LATER, the *sigmara* returned. It was larger than before, the size of a large dog or a wolf. More colours crackled across its surface than before, vibrant with fresh light, full of fresh life. It turned to face her, a smile of parted smoke stretching across its front.

It is done. . . .

“He’s a demon?”

Yes.

“Good.” She walked past it and looked out the window, watching for the tell-tale burst of silver-white flame. “It’s only a matter of time then.”

He is coming. . . . It followed her, its nearness bringing the bite of frost to her skin. *Aisha. . . . He is coming for you. . . .*

She froze in place before turning to the *sigmara*. “What did you say?” she said, each word carefully enunciated.

He is coming. . . .

Never taking her eyes off it, she grabbed the vial it had been trapped in, forced it into the bottle, and stoppered it with a plug made of birch wood. For a moment, it tried to push past the wood but, upon contact, parts of the creature fizzled away. She set it down on the table with a slight smile and strode back to the window.

“All the better, then. For the light you took from him is all I need to send him up in flames.” She looked out at the sky, waiting for her demon to arrive. “Let him come. He will burn.”

by Kira Hawthorne (Grade Ten)
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SECOND PRIZE

The Cost of Exploration

DANIEL HAD PREPARED fourteen months for this trip. He would pilot his one-person craft, the Inevitable, out of the atmosphere and head towards the edges of the solar system. The space-eating engines that allowed this flight folded space in two, a process that Daniel pretended to understand during briefings but never fully grasped. He was just the pilot, and he knew the risks. One day in space was seven years on Earth, and the Inevitable was going to be travelling for ten. Any family he'd had would be dust when he returned, the time he would have had left with them traded for rock samples and scientific data. All this for the sake of exploration.

Daniel's wife was waiting on the launchpad with stormy eyes the colour of a windswept ocean. She held in her arms the baby that Daniel barely knew—and never would. Daniel didn't cry, but he felt his heart crack when he turned his back.

Liftoff.

For twenty-four hours (now interstellar time), Daniel watched his blue marble planet shrink from view. When they cleared the atmosphere and the moon's orbit, the space-eater engine revved into gear. Silence, then an invisible explosion bloomed and pushed the present day from the lonely pilot's sight.

Space was far vaster than Daniel could have imagined, so vast that the Inevitable felt like a tiny minnow floating in its endless blackness. *Perhaps*, the lonely pilot thought, *space is really the belly of a massive whale, spotted by tiny barnacles that twinkle away in the deep.*

On the sixth day, the ship sailed—or rather was propelled—past a nebula so dense no light penetrated its iron pyrite core. It looked as if a thousand golden bracelets had been melted down and set adrift in a pot of oil, or tar, or an inky-black pupil that never blinked. Daniel feared the time away from home was getting to him.

The days passed with the slow rhythm of red faces on digital clocks. *My baby is graduating now*, Daniel thought. . . . *Now she is getting married.*

Jupiter loomed outside the viewscreen and bathed the Inevitable in darkness as it shuddered along its course. Daniel counted stars, comets, and the centimetres that his tomato plant grew in zero gravity. Globes of rock spun lazily outside, surrounded by rings of ice like frozen wedding bands.

I am the first, the lonely pilot thought, *to see these vistas. I am the first to watch and learn from their solitary journeys. And I am alone.*

SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY MILLION KILOMETRES AWAY, a brand-new interstellar ship clears the atmosphere of a small blue planet. The captain of the Possible has her mother's eyes.

by Kyra Brown (Grade Eleven)

École secondaire Mark R. Isfeld Secondary School

Courtenay, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

A Wish for Warmth

AROUND HIM, THERE WAS a tenebrous night of dismal streets—unfamiliar, winding alleys that were cold of both emotions from their denizens and the lack of light from anywhere but the sky full of stars far above. He ran with heavy breaths and an open mouth, shrugging off the cold that bit at his bare soles. An apathetic soul, he had found something to chase at long last. Though aching legs made it feel as if ages had passed since he had last been in motion, the beautiful light that led him forward was now too close to let go.

Faces passed by in his pursuit, some of them still familiar but many long forgotten. Sometimes, the boy thought to stop for a moment and sit down with some of his acquaintances of the winding city to remember living a slow life, but ever since he had begun running, his beacon moved too quickly to give him the opportunity. On one hand, nothing was binding him to push on ahead, but on the other, he had no desire to stop for a slow life again.

Whenever he rarely caught his own reflection in a puddle or off the window of an empty building, he would see a ghost and trip over the past. There were worries below the surface that the chase hid, and tripping meant glancing at their hypnotic allure. So long as he saw that warm and welcoming light up ahead—the brightest star of all—he could never fall. On a scale with his dreams, worries had no weight.

When the light turned a corner, it cast massive shadows in its wake so that its follower would not get lost, and when the boy came to that corner, he turned as well. How many turns had he taken? How long could he still run? Like any person, he could not do so forever. At times, they grew closer together, and other times they would drift, but never did either one abandon the other.

Now, he was nearer and warmer than ever before. His heart raced from more than pure exertion in anticipation for what might happen if he were to grasp the light, though he had never dared try before. It was too much of a risk to lose his guide.

The space between them continued to close, yet he expected them to repel as they always did. His eyes were blinded, and at that moment, he knew that the choice was to risk it all or keep chasing forever. The threads of fate emerged, and the morning shone brightly. With a full heart, he wished upon the star and reached out a hand.

by Emanuel Puscoi (Grade Twelve)

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Calgary, Alberta

THIRD PRIZE

The Hunter's Last Catch

ALBERT SAT IN THE BUSHES, waiting—waiting for the faeries to fly by, into the net he had hung up between the two trees close to him. He had been tracking this particular group for months, and he was tired. Chances were, with his age, this would be his last faerie hunt. He knew his days were numbered, but that did not make him feel sad, or bitter, or angry. He had been doing this since he was a child, and he was going to make it a hunt to remember!

Suddenly, he heard them. Thousands of them, flying towards what they thought was an empty clearing. Judging by the sound, they were still quite far from where he was. He quickly ducked out from his hiding place and checked the net. He felt the weights. Still strong. The weights were heavier than usual; he had needed stronger ones due to the size of the group of faeries. He ran his gnarled fingers along the length of the rope. The trick with faeries was to catch them by surprise. If the rope had too much slack, it didn't close fast enough, but when it was taut, it was like a rat trap.

He chuckled; the faeries were going to get a surprise. They did every time, but he never got bored. Each time was like the first time, with all of their little arms and legs kicking, their little mouths screaming obscenities at him. He laughed every time. He listened again. Closer now, almost to the clearing. Almost to the trap.

Snap! The net caught them. It was almost the same. He saw them kicking arms and legs and heard them screaming, but something was different. He also heard them crying. He saw their injuries. He saw faeries smaller than the other faeries. *The children*, he thought. He saw children screaming for their mothers, and their mothers returning the screams. For the first time, he truly saw what he was doing. It wasn't right or needed. It was genocide. Pure and simple.

He stood there for a while, standing, thinking. This was all he had ever known; this was what his father had done, and his grandfather, and grandfather's grandfather. All entire generations had ever known. This was what he had made his living on his entire life. Then he sat down and cried.

For hours, he cried. Then, wiping his face, he stood and opened the net, freeing the faeries. It made him happy, seeing the children hug their parents. It made him happy. He stood there, happy.

Later, he felt his heart stop. He fell to the ground, dead, with a smile on his face.

by Owen Podetz (Grade Nine)
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THIRD PRIZE

Your Love

THE AIR IS COLD, and my fingers are blue. In a world where all victory ends in misery, how do we escape this fate? How do we win unscathed? It is no longer surviving; it is living—living with or without you. And in that cruel, wide world, I am faced with the truth you have given me. Your sweet, endless lies keep me sane.

This world continues on: adults walking together, snowflakes falling, children laughing. When I look at them, I see a reflection of what could have been. I think of how you dare to leave me. I think of how you dare to promise me infinite nothings that will not matter when it ends.

Your love covered me like a blanket. It was my warmth; it was part of me. Your hands held my cheeks in the cold, your nose against mine. Your laugh as innocent and pure as the first spring rain, your smile as mischievous and new like summer winds.

Your love was cruel lies in the middle of autumn. Falling leaves, falling castles, falling hope. You failed to be there when my birthday passed, and I spent all evening sitting on the porch, waiting for you to show up in the cool night.

Your love made me wishful. I was down-to-earth, an academic, a lover of all things logical. You swung me into a forest of enchanted beings, enchanting me from head to toe to fall for you. You held my hand when we flew on high-spirited winds above all of the witches on the lands below us. You smiled. You cried. You laughed with me.

Perhaps it is true that too much wishing is not a good thing. Too much believing, too much hoping. This faith wavers—wavers unlike you in your pain. This faith that you do deserve it all makes me question my love. This faith—this ugly, horrible faith hurts to bear and hurts to feel.

These repercussions of your love are the scathing, unforgiving snowstorms of winter. I am burdened by hail and clumps of snow, forced to shovel my porch full of snow, forced to sit alone when I drink my tea—*your* tea! Just as you liked it.

This is no victory. This is misery. I have lost you.
I have lost.

The air makes me feel nostalgic. The relentless winters of our love, the endless summers of it. How you held my hand and lived with me through it all. You bound me to you. In the glow of the dark, of the nothing you have given me, my fingers are blue.

by Meixuan Fan (Grade Ten)

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Richmond Hill, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Old Music

THE OLD WOMAN SAT in the middle of the field, her chair resting on a cracked stone platform. The ground surrounding her was spongy and deceitful, the tangled plants concealing shards of stone and ancient pieces of masonry. In front of her perched an odd kind of machine, a sort of cross between instrument and loom, the pale wood it was made of weathered but still strong and well polished.

The crone started turning a wheel set into the side of it, and a high, thin note rang out over the fields. She adjusted a knob, and a lower one emerged from the belly of the thing. Then she set her hands over the imaginary fibres and started weaving.

A song began to emerge, a silvery and strangely bittersweet melody that danced through the grass and skipped over the stream. She tried to follow the labyrinth of notes that she called forth, but it circled her and rose into the sky, forming into a wall composed of beautiful noise.

Then it started to take shape. The old crone's hands moved faster and faster, and the notes fell over themselves before sliding into place. The bricks of the wall met at the top in a glittering glass dome, encasing her in a building that wasn't really there. She could still see the rest of the fields through the imagined walls, and the music spiralled out onto the meadow in a silver spill of sound. Non-existent roads sketched themselves over the rippling grass, laying the foundations for neighbourhoods to rise out of the ether. The clear notes skated through the air, drawing history behind them. Arched doorways, marble pillars, sunbathed pavilions, peaked roofs—they all glimmered into existence, shining like a heat haze, only to disappear if she looked at them directly. A world made solid by music and memory.

The more she studied the city, the more she noticed the ruins it was built out of. Boulders dressed in moss revealed themselves to be carefully laid blocks of stone, hidden corners rising out of the mire were the foundations of long-gone houses, fragments of oddly shaped rock were scattered pieces of once impressive statues.

The music crescendoed in an overwhelming cascade of sound, and the old woman saw the echoes of people, phantoms, ghost lights, walking, talking, laughing. A well-loved dog ran past her. A child cried out. A musician tuned their instrument. A young couple huddled under an overhang.

Then the music fizzled out. It was not a rising, climatic end, but a brief, discordant decline followed by silence. And the old woman was alone once again, except for the crumbling ghosts whose songs still echoed in her ears.

by Sam Lazure (Grade Eleven)
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Sudbury, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Nostalgia

ALEX GRABS A JUICE BOX from the table and plops down on the steps of the back porch, out of the sun, watching his little cousin run around with all of his friends. The birthday cake having made them all hyper, they race around wildly, shrieking and laughing. Alex shoves the straw into the box, his eyes following them around the yard.

He isn't expecting the flood of memories that comes along with his first sip of juice. It brings him back to summers spent at his grandmother's house many years ago, he and his sister, Layla, spending their precious days of freedom running around in the sun. They were pirates and dragons and sorcerers, adventuring all across the backyard every day and taking breaks in the shade with Gran, drinking apple juice.

Once, they'd been knights with cardboard swords and shields, riding borrowed brooms for horses while they battled back and forth across the garden. Gran had watched, cheering for them both and calling them in for lunch with the claim that even knights needed to eat.

Another day they were merpeople, and the backyard was their ocean. They fought off sharks from the sunken shipwreck of the swing set and collected rocks from the garden, telling Gran that they were pearls.

The three of them used to play hide-and-seek together, sitting on the back porch so Gran wouldn't have to run around and hide. They'd all pretend they could be as small as they liked and pick a place to hide, taking turns guessing where the others would be.

Sometimes Gran would let them dress up in her clothes, and they'd parade down the stairs in hats and dresses, trying not to trip over the hems. Layla would wear a new piece of Gran's jewellery every day, and Gran would just laugh and adjust a necklace around her neck or fix the comb in her hair.

Gran has been gone for years now, and the house was sold even before then. It probably looks nothing like it used to now. What Alex wouldn't give for just one more day there, drinking apple juice in the shade with Gran and Layla. It's an odd feeling, knowing that nothing will ever be quite the same again.

He supposes time has a habit of continuing whether people want it to or not. The Earth keeps spinning, and he keeps growing, and every day that passes takes him further away from those summers. He hasn't even thought about them for who knows how long. Still, it's nice to remember.

He takes another sip.

by Serena Davis (Grade Twelve)
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