

FIRST PRIZE

The Maiden

1426

“Come on, Joan, we’ll be late for dinner!” exclaimed Frederick, her brother. Joan picked up the stack of dry sticks and heaved them onto her back. Sighing, she ran towards her cabin, gently opening the door for fear of getting yelled at for the several times she accidentally knocked the door down.

“There you are, Joan. Hurry up!” exclaimed her father in a rough voice. They all sat down and ate silently.

Joan’s father cleaned up, opened the door, and was gone. Joan busied herself with knitting but kept wondering where her father went. He was never out for more than an hour. Finally, curiosity got the best of her. She packed a slice of bread and took off.

“We barely have food for ourselves!” her father said to the village leader.

“But, sir, the British have lit our entire village on fire. We’re just asking for a little food and shelter. We have small children who are starving!”

Joan crept behind her father and sat down. She noticed some young children lying down, their stomachs growling. Joan eyed them with compassion as she took the piece of bread from her pouch. She reached out her hand. The children’s eyes widened at the sight of food. They crawled excitedly towards her.

Suddenly, a hand reached out and tore the chunk of bread from Joan’s hand. It was her father. He put it into his pocket and glared angrily at Joan. “Go!” he said.

“But . . . ,” Joan sputtered.

“Go!” her father shouted.

Joan ran as fast as she could. She ran higher than the hill, farther than the valley, her red cape flying in the air. Tears were falling down her face.

Out of the corner of her eye, she glimpsed a trail of torches moving in a line, leaving houses in flames and people screaming.

“Mama, Papa!” Joan took off running towards her village screaming. “The British are close, they have torches!”

Everyone came out of their shacks, confused, looking at Joan, who flailed her hands in the air as if she were mad.

Joan ran to her cabin. She told her family what she had seen. Everyone outside understood and started screaming. Children were crying, mothers were packing. Horses were saddled and wagons were hooked up. It was a nightmare.

Everyone managed to climb the hill ahead of the British. The whole village burst into flames behind them. Some people started whimpering and crying.

The British invaded France that week, trying to destroy its spirit.

“We can’t lose hope,” Joan said over the campfire.

“We’ve lost everything,” her mother answered.

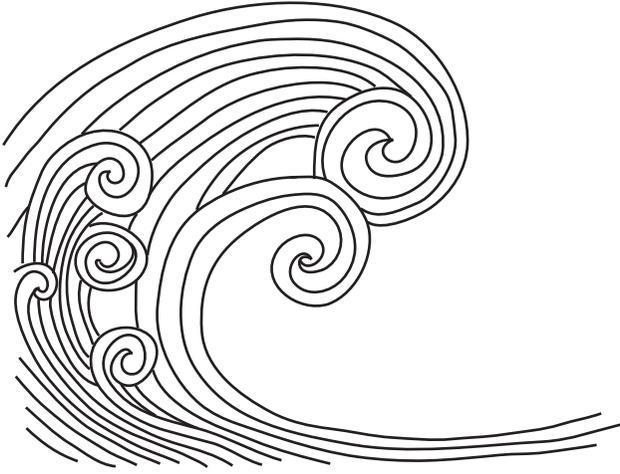
“Including hope,” Joan’s dad said, putting the sleeping bag over his head and turning around.

“Never hope,” whispered Joan.

by Julia Fielden (Grade Seven)

Lycee Louis Pasteur

Calgary, Alberta



FIRST PRIZE

The End

A warm breeze caresses her perfect skin as she strolls down the empty road. Her excitement grows with every step. As she turns a corner, she starts to speed up. She's almost there; she can already picture his reaction when he sees her. "He'll be thrilled," she tells herself as she tries—but fails terribly—to hide her smile. The girl picks up her pace once more. She scurries around the last corner and sees him standing outside the school, waiting.

When the boy sees her, his smile reaches his enormous brown eyes, which widen with joy. They meet with a passionate hug. The girl is taller than the boy, but they share the same physical traits. The siblings pull apart and slowly walk to their favourite ice-cream store, while the boy talks about his day at school.

They eventually find a bench to watch the stunning vast Pacific Ocean and eat. The boy talks, and the girl actively listens, smiling at her brother's mispronunciations. She laughs at him when he exaggerates. He is so innocent and young, with a strange imagination, so when the boy declares to the girl that the ocean is mad, she doesn't think much of it. Nevertheless, deep down the girl is confused; he seems so genuine, and as if there is no doubt is his mind that he might be mistaken.

The girl dares to follow the boy's gaze. At first, she sees nothing other than the blue waves. Then suddenly, she understands: *They aren't waves, they're ripples—hundreds of ripples—coming from beneath the water.* The girl tenses up.

"Are you okay—"

The boy is interrupted by the noise coming from the street behind them. The girl spins her head around to see the buildings and cars shaking.

Earthquake, the girl thinks to herself. She grabs her brother and sprints to a nearby building, but is stopped in mid-stride by movement under her feet. She falls backwards, pulling her brother with her. Where her feet had been seconds ago, there is now a massive crack in the earth that spreads down the road, separating them from the buildings. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees a man falling through the crack, desperately trying to find a grip. It's total chaos. The girl perceives that she should not stay here, but somehow, she feels that it won't make a difference. This is no earthquake. She hugs her brother hard.

"What's going on, Talia?"

The girl smiles at him, as tears wet her cheeks. "It's going to be okay, Ben."

With the world falling apart around them, they hug, bracing themselves for the end.

by Isabelle Chafe (Grade Eight)
Whistler Secondary School
Whistler, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Bear

It was 5:00 a.m. The malevolent winds ripped at every square millimetre of my crumbling body. The harsh cold tore through my skin, turning me into a living pile of frost and fur. But even though Mother Nature was trying quite hard to murder me, I refused to stop. Even though all the snow in my eyes turned me half blind, I still plodded on, each step a little piece of hell. Even though my paws ached so much I thought I was going to pass out, I still lumbered onwards, through the storm. I wanted to stop. I wanted to find out if this whole thing was a game and I could just stroll away, never to take a second glance at this wasteland. But I couldn't. The hunters were after me. If I were to go home, they would slaughter everybody I know. So, here I was this moment, alone and suffering—trying in vain to shake off the hunters.

Suddenly, a distant yell filled the air. Then, I heard somebody cry, "There's the white bear!" I made an astonished yelp and somehow, despite my grogginess, I bolted as fast as my almost dead legs could take me, praying the bloodthirsty hunters would lose me in the chaotic storm.

Finally, after three whole hours of nonstop running, I saw a glint. Fatigued beyond belief, I dragged myself towards the origin of the flash. I begged that it was a den or a cave I could hide in until the hunters passed, not knowing the white bear they sought was right under their noses. But alas, I knew I couldn't be *that* lucky. Instead of a comfy cave or another polar bear, I stumbled across a hunters' den that was occupied by some very angry-looking inhabitants. Before I could even think of sneaking away, I was surrounded with spears and vengeful faces. Not knowing what else to do, I bared my razor-sharp teeth and growled menacingly, hoping in vain to scare them off.

Suddenly, a sharp pain erupted from my back, and I looked behind to see a huge, irregular stick protruding from my shoulder. My soon-to-be assassin, one of the hunters who had chased me earlier, was parading around and roaring, showing off to his friends his soon-to-be kill. I, on the other hand, stared at him coldly in the eye with my last thought swearing my revenge one of these days.

Then, everything went black.

by Da-Yong Chan (Grade Seven)
Diamond Elementary School
Surrey, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Two Truths and a Lie

True or false: Your heart belonged to the nation.

Since the day I met you, you dreamed of being a part of the army. I would always find you hidden away in the wheat field beside the neighbourhood park. And while all the other children slid down the slides and hung off the monkey bars, you were lost in your own fantasy world of plastic soldiers and tanks. I remember how you would always mimic a soldier in battle; crawling on the muddy ground and bravely forcing your way through the golden wheat stalks, taking down any enemy soldiers who dared to show their faces. Your mother was always so disappointed once you returned home as your clothes were constantly caked in mud and adorned with wild grasses.

I remember I was running after a butterfly, a beautiful monarch, when I met you for the first time. I had tripped over you as you were lying on your stomach, pretending to be a war hero. I suggested that you join the Air Force when you grew up, so that you could fly. I never understood why you wanted to fight on the ground.

We were so young then, and yet, even at that age, I knew that you were a fighter.

True or false: You lied to join the military.

You couldn't wait to turn eighteen to join the army. You even had a calendar, tracking how many days were left until you could leave: 732, 731, 730. With 730 days left, on your sixteenth birthday, you faked your identity to become a soldier. They were in desperate need of troops then, so they accepted you without hesitation, much to your delight. With a big smile on your face, you told me it was the best present you could have received. I just nodded and smiled back.

I remember I whispered, "Are you not afraid you won't return?"

Reading my mind, you answered, "Don't be worried, Vanessa, I promise I'll come back."

I just nodded again and forced out a bigger smile. What else could I have done? I was torn inside, I didn't want you to leave me. And I didn't understand how you could leave me, just like that. Did I mean nothing at all to you? You meant everything to me.

But no matter how much I prayed, cried, hoped.

I stood, frozen in place, as you kissed my forehead goodbye.

True or false: You'll come back.

by Jessica Diao (Grade Eight)
Centennial Public School
Waterloo, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

The Girl in the Mirror

The weather outside was dismal. No, that wasn't the word for it. The weather outside was terrifying. Lightning lit up the sky, and then crashed down to the earth, and trees started to burst into flames, before the torrential rain put the fires out. Far off in the distance, I could see a sort of lightning wall. The lightning was defying all laws of science as it hit the same place over and over again.

But no, that was impossible. I shook my head and turned away from the window. I was at school, and I had my Halloween costume in my bag. As we weren't doing anything important at the moment, I decided to go change.

When I got to the bathroom, I took a glance at myself in the mirror. As I turned away from the mirror to the stalls, something stopped me. Something was off about my reflection. I drew closer to the mirror as I tried to figure out what it was. My hair was the same: waist length and blonde. My mouth was the same: blossom shaped with soft edges. My eyes were . . . that was it. My eyes were red—pure blood red.

As I watched in silent horror, the rest of my body began to change too. My hair shortened and quickly turned white. My mouth went hard around the edges. My face mangled itself. My reflection was quickly turning into an only slightly humanoid monster. Suddenly, the very mirror in which this ghastly apparition had been revealed exploded outward with a noise like cannon fire, revealing the fiendish creature behind it. As the mirror exploded, the thing inside simply flew forwards and literally entered my body. With all these sounds ringing in my ears, everything went black.

My eyes snapped open as light filled the small room. I was lying on the bathroom floor. I still remembered the horror of what had happened, but something seemed to have taken control of the emotional part of my brain—and the physical part, for that matter. I felt myself getting to my feet and saw the bathroom going past me, yet I couldn't stop my feet from moving as I walked towards my classroom. Someone else was in control now.

As I entered my classroom, my teacher looked up from behind his desk. "Good gracious, Casy, what took you so long?"

"I was *changing*," I heard myself say.

"Well, that certainly is a nice costume. Wherever did you get it?"

The low laugh that escaped my lips was not my own.

by Devin Rose Frost (Grade Seven)

Five Bridges Junior High School

Hublely, Nova Scotia

THIRD PRIZE

Bandages

The girl sat on the icy, wet ground, her body shivering from the stinging cold. She had fallen, scraping her knees badly on the rough pavement. Raindrops dripped onto her face and were joined in by her salty tears; together, they splattered onto the ground. Then, she heard footsteps and saw a figure hurrying towards her. It was her mom; she had an umbrella in one hand, while the other hand pulled the girl into a tight hug.

“Oh, my baby, that cut must have hurt a lot,” her mom said, looking concerned. The girl just felt really worn out, so she leaned into her mom, feeling the warmth of her grip. The girl’s mom carried her like a little kitten as she started to walk towards their house.

As soon as they stepped inside the door, the girl was greeted by a pleasant wave of warm air and the aroma of cinnamon and apples. Her mother laid her down gently on the couch and crouched down to the girl’s level. “Sweetie, be more careful next time, okay?” her mom said with a stern tone as she began to unwrap a bandage for the girl’s knee. The girl felt warm and cozy on the inside as she lightly nodded.

Suddenly, the girl felt a sharp strike of pain. When she had regained her consciousness, she was sitting on the ground again. The girl looked down to see where the pain was coming from and saw that the bare flesh of her knees was touching the dirty, contaminated ground. She winced, quickly extracted her knees from the ground, and started to search for her mom. She saw no one, nothing, except the rain and dark clouds looming above, engulfing her tiny figure in a boundless shadow.

The girl was too caught up in the moment that she only now realized there was something in her hand. She opened up her palm, revealing a half-opened bandage. Memories came flooding back to the girl, her past, the horrendous car accident that took away the person she cherished the most in this world. She felt her chest tighten as the weight of the memories pressed her deeper into the ground. The girl wanted to cry her heart out, but all the tears had already been used up, leaving her eyes arid and swollen. Instead, the girl started to laugh—it was a long and bone-chilling laugh that would make anyone who heard it shudder. But there was no one to listen to the poor little girl. She was alone, the bitterly cold rain drenching her in a coat of sorrow and darkness.

by Amanda Wu (Grade Eight)
Lord Byng Secondary School
Vancouver, British Columbia