

FIRST PRIZE

Alone

The boat was shaking violently, threatening to throw its load of people into the raging sea. Hugo held on tightly, closing his eyes. His mind wandered off. He recalled one time when he was playing in the park with his friends, fantasizing to be pirates stranded on a boat. They rowed until they couldn't row anymore. They were saved by Hugo's mom calling them inside for dinner.

Another huge wave struck the boat. Hugo opened his eyes. It was numbingly cold. He wrapped his blanket tightly around his body. He glanced at the faces around him, hundreds of them. The woman to his right sat silently, holding her baby in her arms, as if shielding him from the horror of the miserable night. Her pretty face and sparkling, blue eyes reminded him of his own mom. Tears ran down his cheeks. He closed his eyes again.

The last time Hugo had seen his mom was a week ago. It was right before his ship departed. She kissed him lightly on the head and mumbled a few words Hugo couldn't hear. He could see the tears in her eyes as she walked away.

Hugo did not want to leave, but his parents were adamant. The country was a war zone. A few weeks ago, his neighbourhood was hit by a stray bomb dropped from an aircraft. Hugo's family survived, but most on his street were slaughtered. It was a horrendous scene of blood, flesh, and destruction. People were desperate to leave.

The only way out of the country was to board a smugglers' ship, an expensive and perilous journey. Hugo's parents poured all of their savings to buy him space on a ship to go and stay with his uncle in Canada. They hoped to reunite with him, one day.

Another huge wave struck the ship. Hugo opened his eyes. He felt hungry. He drew a piece of stale bread out of his half-ripped pocket and chewed it slowly, enjoying every bit of it. Cold and drained, he pulled his blanket up to his chin, lying down on the floor. He put his bag under his head and tried to get some sleep, but thoughts and memories kept popping into his head. He wondered how his life would be in Canada. Would he fit in with the kids at school, or would he be considered an outcast? Eventually, exhaustion overwhelmed him and he fell into a troubled sleep.

The next morning, Hugo was awoken by the sounds of anxious chatter. Everyone was staring at a small island in the distance. *It must be Greece*, thought Hugo, his first stop on his long journey to Canada.

by Rami Golea (Grade Six)
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FIRST PRIZE

Slow Dancing

No, this isn't awkward at all. I'm simply standing and humiliating myself in the middle of the gym, the whole school population staring at me. God, if you're there, then do you mind doing me a huge favour and saving me?

The sarcastic thoughts of Camilla didn't do her any good. She tried to suppress an exasperated groan from slipping out from under her defence, which, by any means, wasn't much of a good defence at all; anyone who would've seen her at the moment would clearly see her flushed cheeks and frowning lips.

Her dark-blond curls were starting to lose their bounce slightly from the heat of the room. Her pink, sparkly dress swayed and brushed gently against the edge of her knees, and the thin straps dug into her shoulders. Slightly tight bubblegum flats adorned her feet and the small magenta flower pin in her hair did nothing to decrease the itching she was starting to feel at the crown of her head, obviously being unaccustomed to braids and such.

She wouldn't have been here if not for her teenage-like mother and fangirl of a sister forcing her to go, alongside her devious best friend who just loved seeing Camilla flustered and uncomfortable.

Speak of the devil and he shall appear.

Well, in this case, it was a she. Dakota, Camilla's best friend, sent an amused look her way. She smirked and pursed her lips in such a manner as to stop her flow of laughter from escaping.

Camilla scrunched her eyebrows and rolled her eyes at the scheming brunette on the other side of the room. She did look away and back towards the boy in front of her when she accidentally stepped on his foot. Blushing and lowering her head in an embarrassed manner, she started muttering quiet whispers of apologies.

She was expecting laughter or some sort of reprimand from the boy, but she only received silence. So she looked up, curious, only to see gentle hazel eyes staring back at her. Short mahogany streaks of hair were falling messily into his eyes. She gulped, before speaking up with more confidence. "Sorry," she said. "Don't worry about it," he responded, tightening his arms slightly around her waist.

And when he sent her a timid smile, one that sparkled in her eyes and looked as if he were sharing a secret with her, and only her, one thought crossed her mind: *Maybe slow dancing isn't that bad after all.*

by SooGyung Bak (Grade Seven)
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FIRST PRIZE

Farewell, Jonah

“Jonah! Hurry up!” I yell up the stairs to my five-year-old brother.

“Wait for me!” he hollers back. He lumbers down the stairs carrying an enormous backpack full of who knows what.

“Why do you need all of that?” I question. “We’re just going to the park.”

“I have to be ready!” he insists.

I roll my eyes and chuckle at him.

He crams his feet into his beaten-up sneakers, grins, and stumbles out the door. He wobbles down our driveway, the bulky backpack twice his size bobbing up and down with every step.

I step outside, lock the front door, and turn to catch up with Jonah. He’s made it out of my sight, despite the added weight. I jog down our street giggling. “Jonah!” I call teasingly between laughs. “Where are *youuu*?”

Slowing to a walk, I round a corner of my street, trying to see around the large evergreen blocking the other side from view. “I know you’re there!” I hear a rustling coming from inside the tree. *I’ve got him!* I inch closer and separate some branches to peer inside. I hear a snap and something rains down on my head. *A pine cone!* A fat squirrel leaps down from a branch. *Just when I thought I caught him!*

I hear the roar of an engine starting up. I peek my head out and see our mailman’s truck drive by. I dismiss it and turn back towards the tree. Then I hear a thumping and a muffled whimper. I whip my head around, confused.

I’m almost positive I catch a glimpse of a face in the back of the mail truck, which is now speeding away. *Jonah!* I careen down the street after the mail truck, but I know it’s no use. I run towards the doorstep of the closest house I can see. I halt abruptly at the doorstep and pound and scream frantically at the door. “Call 9-1-1!” No response.

I sprint to the next house. “Help! Somebody! Anybody?” But not a single person answers my desperate calls.

My pace slows and exhaustion weighs on my shoulders. I go to our friendly elderly neighbour’s house, collapsing against Mrs. White’s front door. Only then do I surrender to the wave of sobs I’ve been holding in. The suffocating guilt weighs on every inch of my body.

And that’s when the door opens. Out walks Jonah, Mrs. White in tow. “Wanna treat?” Jonah innocently asks, prodding me with a cookie tray.

“Where were you?” I demand as I embrace him fiercely.

“I was *jusht getti . . . n a cookie*,” he mumbles between bites.

I vow to never let Jonah—lovable, adorable Jonah—out of my sight again.

by Jocelyne Murphy (Grade Eight)
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SECOND PRIZE

Spider

I was in my room when my mom came in and told me to clean up. I started to clean when I saw a spider. I screamed loudly! I absolutely hate spiders! I squished it and continued cleaning. Suddenly, it got very windy! At first, I thought, *Hmm . . . maybe a storm's coming*, but then I came to my senses and realized that I was inside, so it shouldn't be windy. The wind was blowing my stuff all around. *Cleaning my room is going to take longer now!* I thought.

Thankfully, the wind stopped. I was cleaning up the mess the wind had made when I heard someone writing on what sounded like a clipboard. I turned around to say, "Go away," when I saw something I couldn't believe! It wasn't a human in my room; it was a fairy in a lilac-purple dress with a hot-pink, sequined cape. I was right, she was writing on a clipboard! She looked up and gave me a dirty look. I was shocked because I thought fairies were supposed to be nice! She looked back at her clipboard.

Finally, I got the courage to say something: "Why are you here?"

She gave me that dirty look again and huffed. "Obviously," she explained, "I'm here because you squished that spider!"

I was shocked; that was between me and the squashed spider. "And why do you care?" I asked her. The wind blew again and I was swept up along with the fairy! I screamed, but no sound came out.

Finally, the wind stopped, but I wasn't in my room anymore! I was in a courtroom. There was a judge and benches filled with other fairies and spiders. The judge, also a fairy, pointed to where I was supposed to sit. I sat down and the judge hit her desk with her gavel. "Do you admit to squishing a spider at 12:36 this afternoon?" the judge asked me.

"Yes," I replied.

"Do you know who that spider was?" the judge asked.

"Um . . . a regular spider?" I guessed. I was pretty sure I was right though.

"No," the judge said. I could tell she was mad at me for not knowing who the spider was. "No, the spider was not just an ordinary spider. He was a scout and had been watching you since Thursday. We needed a new princess and were thinking about you . . . until you squished that spider." The wind came again, but I was used to it now.

I landed back on my bed. *So because of my hatred of spiders, I would forever miss out on becoming a princess? Come on! Now, I really hate spiders.*

by Brigitte Poissant (Grade Six)
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SECOND PRIZE

Shattered Lights

Trying to reach the glass lights on the top shelf of the shed probably wasn't the best idea; especially if it's filled to the brim with every decorative light you own. Tony Kenway didn't realize that until all the lights came crashing down, and they landed with a sickening crunch onto the pavement.

Red and green glass littered the ground, only fragments of their former selves. Lawn flamingoes and garden lights wouldn't be enough to make the spectacular light show that Tony and his father made every year.

Now that his father had accepted the new job as a stockbroker, he was constantly on the phone. This year was going to be different. Tony was planning to make the grandest display of lights, which had to catch his father's attention; however, his dreams came crashing down before he even got started.

"Looks like setting up the lights this year was a smashing success."

Tony looked up just in time to see his neighbour Amy Weaver pop her head over the fence. Amy was in her second year of college, majoring in art and drama.

"Well, there's always next year," Tony sighed.

After a few seconds, she came back holding a purple strand of lights left over from Halloween. She started to string the lights across the lilac bush. When she plugged them in, they shone fluorescent purple.

Tony replied, "I don't think purple is very Christmasy."

"Who said they had to be northern Christmas style?"

Amy started to rummage around the shed for the pink lawn flamingoes. She pulled them out and searched for crazy glue. The fractured lights were still littering the floor, and she started to glue them on the flamingoes. When they were done, it looked like a disco ball met a flamingo.

"Now, when we place these in front of the garden lights, they'll sparkle just like the flowers and birds in a tropical rainforest," Amy said.

Tony got the hint and looked inside the shed for the inflatable palm tree from summer. He also remembered the stuffed green bird that he had in his room.

When they collected everything, they had an assortment of coloured lights, disco flamingoes, and stuffed birds. The yard looked like a tropical explosion, but it was just the unique thing that Tony was looking for.

A black BMW pulled into the driveway. Tony's father stepped out, talking on the phone rapidly. When he looked up at the yard, he dropped his phone in surprise, and it shattered on the ground.

"Wow!" he gasped. Looking back at his phone, he declared, "You could never have gotten this done with me; I would have broken all the lights!"

Tony just smiled nervously.

by Kaylie Borntraeger (Grade Seven)

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SECOND PRIZE

Sir R.O.O.S.T.E.R.

(Reginald Oswald Orin Samuel Terrence Emile Raleigh)

“The battle is won!” cried the royal knight, his tail feathers flying in every direction as he leapt from the hay bale he had just fought. “The cursed enemy is vanquished!”

Aunt Sarah rolled her eyes and clucked haughtily, “Oh really.” She then returned to her business of checking the barn floor for seeds. Her two chicks looked inquisitively at their cousin, but did not dare go near him. The knight—his needle-sword flashing through the air, his feed-bag cape flapping behind him, his tin shield firmly grasped in his wing, and his chipped teacup helmet perched precariously upon his head—was not done.

“Now, to my loyal steed!” he cried, careening towards a fat chipmunk that had been eating someone’s old shoelace in the corner of the barn.

The chipmunk, seeing the flapping, floundering rider bounding towards him, nimbly scurried sideways. Sir Reginald, unbalanced by his sword and helmet, flew past his intended target and smashed into the wall. The chipmunk chittered.

“How ridiculo-o-u-u-s!” cried the knight’s aunt, as she stared at the figure writhing in the dust. “Will he never learn?”

Sir Reginald did look truly ridiculous with his lopsided helmet, twisted cape, and shield pulled over his face. His sword was nowhere to be seen.

The strange figure managed to poke his head up through the volumes of his cape. “I, Sir Reginald Oswald Orin Samuel Terrence Emile Raleigh, have been struck most grievously by a terrible enemy. But do not fear,” he added, looking at the chicks between his aunt’s feet, “for I have not been overwhelmed! Aye, for I shall stand and face my most treacherous foe!”

Unfortunately, as he attempted to stand, the rooster caught his foot on the cape that was twined around him, causing him to fall down again. “Oh, loyal steed!” cried the knight desperately, as the cape began to choke him. “Help your noble lord!” The chipmunk found this hilarious and held his sides with mirth.

“Oh my!” cried his aunt, and she waddled over to her nephew. Quickly, she pulled the grasping cloth off the rooster with her beak. “Now stop playing your foolish knight game!” she stormed at him.

“What game?” cried Sir Reginald indignantly. “This is no game! Locked in most deadly battle was I!” He then strutted off to his steed. Once again, the chipmunk attempted to leap out of the rooster’s path, but this time the knight was quicker, landing on the chipmunk’s back. The chipmunk promptly collapsed under the weight of the nearly fully grown chicken. “Onwards, onwards!” cried Sir Reginald, but the chipmunk was stuck. The noble steed sighed. This was happening all too often. . . .

by Lukas Rohner-Tensee (Grade Eight)

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THIRD PRIZE

Only Tomatoes

One day, a girl named Tomato went to the store. She was buying her seventeenth box of tomatoes in three days. This was because she loved tomatoes so much. She would eat tomatoes for breakfast, lunch, supper, and everything in-between. She would drink tomato juice, eat tomatoes, and put a tomato on top of everything she ate!

“Hello,” said the lady at the register. “I haven’t seen you in two days! Have you given up your craving for tomatoes?”

“Nope,” said Tomato. “Guess what I’m buying? More tomatoes!”

“I think I’m going to be sick!” said the lady.

The next afternoon, when Tomato’s mother, Mrs. Veg, was making supper, she thought, *It’s such a shame that Tomato doesn’t eat more food. There are so many more delicious foods in the world other than tomatoes, but what can I do? All she will eat is tomatoes!* Suddenly, Mrs. Veg had an idea! *I know what to do! I’ll put real water in her glass of juice, and I’ll put in red food colouring to make it look like tomato juice!*

Later, when Tomato came home from school, she said, “Strange, I don’t smell any tomatoes cooking. Whatever, maybe I’ll smell them soon.” She went to do her homework.

That night, when it was time for supper, Tomato came downstairs, and she was shocked! There were no tomatoes on her plate! When she asked her mother what had happened to the tomatoes, her mother said that there would be no tomatoes for supper and that she must eat some delicious chicken that her mother had made. Tomato sat down, picked up a piece of chicken on her fork, and took a bite. After she finished chewing, she said, “You know what I think? I think that this stuff tastes very good, but it needs some tomato flakes.” (Tomato flakes are made out of fried tomatoes and then they are ground up into flakes. They are similar to black pepper.)

When Tomato opened up the spice drawer, she was shocked! There were no tomato flakes! “Mommy,” she asked, “where is the jar of tomato flakes?”

“They are all dumped into the garbage can.”

“What?” said Tomato. “I need to put some on my chicken!”

“Well, that is just too bad. Please try the chicken again.”

“Okay.”

When Tomato tried the chicken again, she found that it actually tasted good! It was then that she decided that there were delicious foods other than tomatoes. Now, that didn’t mean that she would never eat tomatoes again; she would still eat them, but they wouldn’t be the only food she liked. This made Tomato, her parents, and the lady at the store very happy.

by Zahava Friedman (Grade Six)
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THIRD PRIZE

To Neptune

Willy clutched his writing set as he sped in the direction of home on this freezing night. Large raindrops were blown onto his face, slicing his skin like tiny knives that never left a wound. He finally saw the gates to his house.

Warm air surrounded him immediately, as he opened the door and sat down to have dinner.

Willy woke the next morning, as bright sun rays pierced into his room. He could hear Mom making breakfast in the kitchen and Dad watching the morning news. The nine-year-old stared out the windows. Outside, tranquillity filled the neighbourhood.

Suddenly, he saw a group of ten or so people dressed in black with hoods that covered their faces, all carrying guns! Willy watched in horror as they tried to smash the windows and break in! Dad flung open Willy's bedroom door, grabbed his shoulder, and pulled him into a tiny tunnel hidden in a closet. Willy grabbed his writing set just in time.

"Who are they?"

"Terrorists, I knew they'd come!" Dad replied as Mom locked the tunnel door.

The sound of furniture being knocked over forced its way into Willy's ears. He swallowed hard; tears ran down his cheeks like two flowing rivers, as he crawled after his parents. Mom tried to push back her tears. Dad had sweat on his forehead, trying to find the right way. Everyone was too shocked to say anything. *Oh, what will happen to my rock collection? And my iPad and pet hamster and. . . .* Pictures of his favourite things flashed through his mind. Willy craved to go back, but he never said a word; he kept on going.

The family came to a wooden door labelled "Rocket" and pushed it open. Fresh air embraced them instantly as the sky-blue room appeared.

Before them stood a lofty rocket, its newly painted surface glinting serenely. Without any hesitation, Mr. Sharpe pushed his son and wife into the passenger cabin, and seated himself at the control centre.

Willy was so fascinated by all the high-tech features that he didn't even notice the rocket rising into the air. It wasn't until his ears began to hurt that he realized he was in space!

Mrs. Sharpe suddenly started floating in mid-air, turning cartwheels and handstands and all those crazy things as she tried to hold on to something. Willy watched his mother and laughed and laughed, and soon he started to float too!

Mr. Sharpe decided to land on Planet Neptune, where signs of life were seen. With a thunder, the rocket touched the surface of Neptune. Willy ran out joyously, but he heard his parents crying again. This time, however, they were tears of joy.

by Cindy Zhang (Grade Seven)
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THIRD PRIZE

Stars Fall

Jasmine was a curious girl just like Pandora. Her bedroom held many items of knowledge: books, a telescope, encyclopedias, and many more artifacts. Every night, she would ponder the unknown under the unbreakable stare of the moon.

One night, the thoughts occupied her mind, leaving her with a restless sleep. Her room felt stuffy while she was moving, and she yearned for a gasp of fresh air. She brought her feet down onto the uncertainty of the cold wooden floor. Jasmine extended, reaching for the latch on the window. In the midst of her attempt, something from the corner of her eye captured her straying attention. A shine in the land a storey below her window. Creaking down the stairs, she left to investigate.

She slowly opened the lock on the front door, not expecting what was to come. She twisted the frosty doorknob clockwise. Something illuminated her eyes; beauty covered her lawn that had once just been a layer of snow. *Was it true? Had the stars fallen on her lawn?* Bright rays of beaming light shone at her. Strains resonated, lighting up the ground. She gaped at the excellence of what she was seeing. Awe filled her heart, causing her jaw to drop.

It defied all logic. She quickly shuffled inside and embraced her telescope. Scaling the sky, she observed no stars in a patch of the sky. A million questions bombarded her mind, because in her vicinity, the stars seeped and diffused into her room. Her eyes twinkled, as if the stars resided in them. She desperately wanted to show the beauty to her parents, but when she came upon their open door, no one was asleep in the empty bed. The white, cloud-like comforter was not harnessing anyone. No parents were swaying in the sweet breeze of dreams.

Jasmine abruptly gasped and sat up, her eyes shifted from sheltered to aware. *Was it all a vivid dream?* she thought. She reflected more, until she surrendered to her wonder. She braced herself for the disappointment of just snow on her lawn.

Once again, she crept down the stairs, twisted the frosty doorknob, and slowly opened the door. She looked up and saw stars, looked to her sides and saw stars; she looked down and saw planet Earth below her. One word galloped around her mind, riding her emotions—a word none of her non-fiction books included, a word only in tales: *Abduction!* At least Pandora still had hope.

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