

# FIRST PRIZE

## Manicures

“This colour’s gorgeous!” Rosie exclaims.

Ashley smiles. “I thought you’d like that one.”

We’re at Ashley’s house, and like always, we’re doing our nails. Ashley’s got more makeup than anyone else I know. She’s got a huge closet and bathroom, and between the two lies her makeup room. The thin shelves lining the small passageway are stocked with treasures: mascara, blush, lip gloss . . . and nail polish, every shade imaginable. She’s got at least three hundred. Ashley never wears the same colour twice. Her nails never go unpainted.

Since Ashley’s skin doesn’t go with every colour—though it does go with most—she lets us use some, mainly the stuff she can’t use. We’ve each got colours that look best on us. Me, I just use whatever Ashley hands me. Ashley and I have a really similar skin tone, and if it looks good on her, Ashley tells me I have to use it, too, to make us look like twins. Though I wonder, *Is it just so I look like I’m copying her, idolizing her?*

Ashley plucks a sunset orange from the shelf. “Cass, this one’s for you. I bought it yesterday, tried it on one nail. Loved it.”

“Sure.” I take the bottle, and once everyone else has picked their colours—Ashley: Winter Blizzard, Rosie: Rainforest Mist, Bridget: Hot Magenta, Julie: Darkness of the Night—we all settle in our spots and begin the process.

“Remember,” Ashley orders, “the secret to perfect nails is a few thin coats. And then the top finish.” We all nod in agreement. “So, what’s with that new boy, huh?” Ashley laughs. “Is he gay or what?” I shift uncomfortably, but the others just laugh. “Cass, what’s the matter? That tile floor hurting your back?” Ashley eyes me.

It’s much more than the simple question it seems. “No, I’m fine.” I force myself to smile.

“Good.” Ashley stares at me for another moment before continuing. “And what about Kayli? Can you believe she said hello to him?”

“It was just a hello,” I cut in, and everyone immediately looks up and stares. Except for Ashley. She takes her sweet time looking up before glaring at me.

And in that moment, I realize, *What am I doing here?* I’ve got nothing against nail polish—well, my mom does say it should be illegal to put chemicals on yourself . . . but all of this? Making fun of other people, hurting others to stay at the top? It’s not fun, it never was. And I’m tired of following in Ashley’s shadow. It’s a very dark place. Trust me, I should know, I’ve been in it for months.

“You know what?” I stand, screwing the cap back on the bottle, nails only half done. “I think I’m done here. Sorry. Bye.” I stand up and leave, never looking back, and not regretting it.

Manicures. They sound fun, but let me tell you—they can be pure hell.

*by Caelan Beard* (Grade Nine)  
The Woodlands School  
Mississauga, Ontario



# FIRST PRIZE

## Building

“Pointless.” This is what I text Tess who’s somewhere in India building a school while I’m stuck in this apartment picking up the blocks Davey has been throwing.

“The kids here love me!” Tess texts.

“Davey just aimed a block at me,” I text back as I bend down to pick up another stray block.

“Fun,” Tess texts. “It’s amazing out here. You should see what we’re doing. I’ll send you pics.”

I start to text something back, but “You should see the loose change I gave a homeless guy” doesn’t remotely compare to giving kids a future.

“Bad,” Davey says. He stands up and gives a kick to what’s left of the multicoloured plastic house we’ve just spent the last hour building.

*Great, I think, Tess is out there building hope and I’m stuck with an eight-year-old who doesn’t even know my name.*

“Bad blocks,” Davey says.

Disjointed words—this is how Davey talks. My volunteer description is to play blocks with him for three hours every Saturday afternoon. Usually his mother sits in the kitchen staring at the wall while I do this, but today she went out. “Just for a little while,” she said when I came in, “and just across the street to the park so if . . . if you have trouble or anything, go to the window and signal or something.”

When she said signal, I imagined myself building a fire and signalling SOS.

“Do you want to build another house?” I ask Davey as I resume picking up the blocks. Davey doesn’t answer. He just stares at me. I wonder if this is what Mom meant when she said no to India because, if making the world a better place is what interested me then why not begin by volunteering locally, preferably somewhere I could get to with bus fare. “Do you want to help pick up the blocks?” I look over at Davey.

“No,” he says.

I drop the blocks I’ve picked up and walk over to the window. It overlooks the park. I can see Davey’s mother sitting on one of the park benches. To my surprise, she doesn’t look like the sad, older woman who’s been greeting me at the door for the last five weeks. She’s with a girlfriend and she is laughing. She looks almost young and almost pretty.

“Good,” Davey says. I almost jump because I didn’t realize he was standing beside me. He gives me a smile and points to his mother. “She good,” he says.

“She’s very nice,” I say to him.

He shakes his head from side to side and points outside. “Mommy good be . . . because you.”

“Me what?”

“You here,” he says. It takes me a minute to understand what he is saying. I watch as he bends down, picks up a block and hands it to me. “You Davey’s friend,” he says. “You help Davey build.”

“Yes,” I say.

Davey smiles. “Thank you,” he says.

*by Marina Mavridis* (Grade Ten)

The Study School  
Westmount, Québec



# FIRST PRIZE

## It's Really Quiet in Here When the Radio's Not On

The door slammed once again as her son left the house, but this time Elizabeth Matthews knew she would never see him again. She heard the roar of the engine and then the fading sound of tires moving against the pavement. The house immediately grew quiet and all you could hear was the radio broadcaster's voice announcing the day's casualties.

Elizabeth sat down at the kitchen table and thought about her life and all the questions she still had. She had raised her son to the best of her abilities, but some days she did wonder if she had instilled the proper values in his life. There had always been a close tie between the two of them, which is what made this separation so hard.

She glanced at the table before her and it was like she had gone back in time. Elizabeth was making dinner when her son's laughter suddenly drifted into the room. She went over to the table and saw he was playing with a little figurine, a toy soldier. She approached her son and despite his protests took the toy away. Elizabeth then enveloped her son in a warm embrace. She had promised herself a long time ago she would try her best to never let anything harm him. She now realized she had failed.

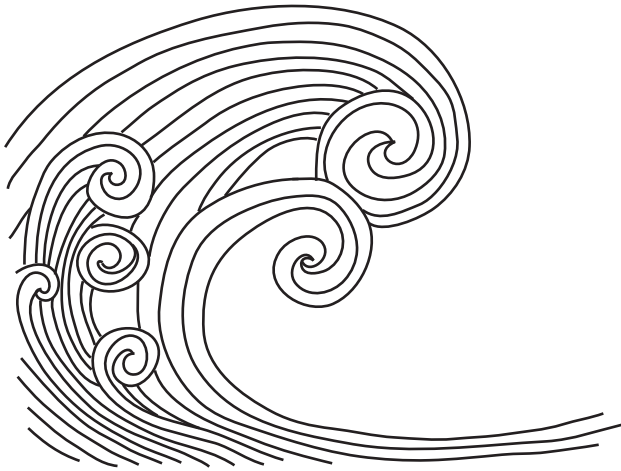
Eighteen years ago two other people had sat at this table with her. Five years ago there had just been her and her son, but she now sat there all alone. Uncle Sam had ruined her life and left her with nothing.

The days carried on and summer soon turned into fall; like a zombie, Elizabeth barely noticed. She lived her life like nothing had changed. Each night she set the table for two, yet ate her meal in solitude. The voice from the radio continued to echo throughout the house, acting as her only companion.

It was during one of these typical evening meals she finally heard what she had been silently dreading: "Private John Matthews died in a roadside bombing. . . ." For an instant Elizabeth was overcome with grief. She quickly composed herself, something she was now accustomed to doing. She then shut off the radio and removed the extra place setting.

*by Leigh-Anne Bertrand* (Grade Eleven)  
D'Arcy McGee High School  
Gatineau, Québec





# FIRST PRIZE

## The Ocean Never Fails

I pass the giggling middle-school kids frying eggs on the sizzling sidewalk. Instinctively, my bare feet seek refuge in the cool, damp grass. Their laughter fades as I continue on my way to the beach. The air is thick with salt water, so I know I am close.

As the breeze picks up, I let my hair down. I'm feeling a little conceited because I'm happy the powerful sun is turning my already blonde hair even lighter. A smile spreads across my sunburnt face as the beach comes into view. This may be a typical Saturday, but the ocean never fails to impress.

As always, the second my toes hit the sand, I deliberately collapse. It's funny how millions of tiny rock particles can be so soothing. I cover myself with small handfuls of the clean white sand, and dig my feet in deeper. I try to persuade myself to get up and swim in the ocean, but I decide to relax; I have all the time in the world. I rest my head in the sand and close my eyes.

After intentionally losing track of time, I look up at the sky. The sun doesn't seem as potent anymore, and the sky is darker; however, people still crowd the beach, tourists and locals alike, so I know it can't be late. I dust myself off and head for the water. The waves are angry, but I don't mind. Adorned with white caps, they bombard me from all directions. Smiling, I let them engulf me, and imagine I am a dolphin as I glide effortlessly through the water. As I catch a breath of air, I inadvertently get salt water, too, but I love the taste.

Once my hands and feet are far past wrinkly, I decide it's time to get out. I stand up in the knee-deep water. I feel it frothing around my calves. As I look around, I see the entire shoreline is bubbling. It reminds me of the milky foam in a latte. In a matter of seconds, the water retreats and leaves me standing in the sand. Something's wrong.

Accompanied by a deep rumbling sound, the tide continues receding. It's unlike anything I have ever experienced. I just stand there in suspense, watching as the monstrous waves move further and further towards the horizon. Parts of the ocean floor are revealed, and the water abandons colourful fish, leaving them to struggle in the sand. The wind is cold and furious, but adrenaline is pumping through my veins so rapidly I'm sweating. People around me are screaming frantically. I can't hear them, my world is silent now, but I can sense their fear. I know what's coming, but I still can't move.

I knew the ocean would never fail to impress. In the distance, I see it growing larger. The blue wall of water surges forward. With my heart in my throat, I turn. And run.

*by Lysle Hood* (Grade Twelve)  
Iona Catholic Secondary School  
Mississauga, Ontario



# SECOND PRIZE

## Happy Days

The sun glistens on a perfectly shingled home, just in the countryside. Out in the back yard, the luscious green leaves of trees sway in the summer breeze. A little blonde girl sits in her kiddie pool splashing without a care in the world. Inside, Loman sits at the kitchen table as Dorothy sets down a steaming bowl of mashed potatoes.

“Annabelle, come inside! Lunch is ready!” Dorothy calls out.

Loman isn’t bothered by minor distractions while he flips through his newspaper, squinting at the tiny lettering. The screen door opens, and in pops his bundle of joy. “Hey, princess!” As he continues to flip through the newspaper, he begins, “How wa—?” Loman glances up and his eyes grow large with horror. There, within the door frame, a monster of chaos looms.

Reptilian scales ooze with blood underneath. Its eyes are black as coal, and seem as though no light ever seeps through. Loman pauses in disbelief, not knowing what to do. He blinks, and there before him, his little princess smiles. He shakes his head, and gives a reassuring smile. Annabelle joins them at the kitchen table and they dig into the meal set before them.

That night, while Dorothy is in the bathroom brushing her teeth, Loman sits on the edge of the bed. A quiet moment passes before Loman hears Dorothy’s footsteps coming towards the bed. He smiles, awaiting his wife’s face, but what appears is the most horrid of images. A red-faced demon stands before him, with horns of great height. He lets out a yell that would awaken any man from their deepest slumber. He stumbles, covering his face with his sweaty palms.

“Honey! What are you doing?” Dorothy’s fearful voice cries out.

He peeks between his fingers only to see his wife’s face looking back. “I . . . uh, I need to get some fresh air.” Loman stumbles out the door before Dorothy can mutter another word.

In silence, he walks the empty streets, the images of terror infecting his mind. Without knowing, he treads into town absentminded, while cars pass him by. When he finally forces his eyes up, his sight veers towards the cars. His eyes meet the drivers’ own. The empty abyss of their eyes hold no emotion, yet much perplexity. He runs head-long down the sidewalk, refusing to let his eyes wander further.

His head to the ground, oblivious to those around him, he runs right into one of *them*. His eyes dart around, demon upon demon; there is no escape. He bolts into an alleyway, unaware of his surroundings, when a black cat crosses in front of him.

Loman yields to the tiny feline. Startled by the sudden movement, turning to Loman with its obstructed demonic face, it lets out a shrill cry. Loman stumbles to the ground, falling face-down onto the cold concrete. The stone walls slowly dissolve into white motionless barriers. Loman lies on the ground, face to the floor, in his suffocating straight jacket.

by *Natasha Eden* (Grade Nine)  
St. Gabriel the Archangel School  
Chestermere, Alberta



# SECOND PRIZE

## The Only Sound for Miles

His footsteps echoed on the stone; the only sound for miles. The tower loomed before him. He swallowed his fear and opened the door. The tower itself could not hurt him; what lay within was what he had to fear.

The halls were dark and empty. He moved forward cautiously, feeling rather than hearing the door close behind him. There was no turning back now. There was nothing to turn back to.

He walked onward, keeping a nervous eye on the floor. He knew from bitter experience it was trapped. He hoped he remembered the signs it was about to give way.

The first creature found him shortly after. It was a pitiful thing, wailing its misery as it dragged its legless body along the floor. The enormous claws it used to move were anything but pitiful. He pinned himself to the wall and waited until it had passed before moving again.

The staircase led down. It always did, even if it took him to the highest level of the tower. He'd given up wondering why. His questions had no answers and he had no voice to ask them. The sound of something rolling down the hall broke his train of thought. He turned and ran. His breath came in short, hard gasps; his ruined throat protested. The sound grew louder and louder. He sobbed with relief as he reached the next flight of stairs.

The first thing he noticed about the new level was the window. Red light came in, illuminating the passage. He paused, staring down at the city. There was no movement below. He turned away and started walking. The tower could not go on forever. Sooner or later, it would end and he could finally rest. The twisted creatures would not be able to touch him. The repetitions would end at last.

An anguished cry resounded throughout the hall. He barely had time to bring the sword between himself and the beast before it was on him, hard beak scrabbling for purchase. Another swing and it fell, a heap of bloodied feathers and a single reptilian eye glazing over. He looked down at it, wishing it hadn't attacked. Killing never got any easier. He swallowed hard and moved on.

The next level was underground. Water rippled beneath the rotting platform. The constant sound of dripping drowned out the growl behind him. Something threw him into the air. He caught a glimpse of orange eyes and leathery skin before he hit the wall. The force of his fall rocked the platform. The floorboards cracked, sending the monster screaming into the depths. He watched it fall, tired eyes tracing its path. Another life on his conscience. The boards creaked again and gave out. He didn't even try to scream. The freezing water dragged him down into the darkness.

He opened his eyes to find an empty city. A choked sob escaped his throat. He wasn't finished yet. His footsteps echoed on the stone—the only sound for miles.

*by Nicola Kapron* (Grade Ten)  
Gloucester High School  
Ottawa, Ontario



# SECOND PRIZE

## The New World

I pulled my OxiBreather over my face before the black smog could find its way into my lungs. Gripping my sister's hand more tightly, we shuffled our way through the line. The air around us was thick with the smell of thousands of bodies crammed together like sardines and the factory smoke spewing from the towers nearby.

"We're almost there, Dessi," I said. She nodded her head, her eyes vacant and distant.

The year was 2026. Our world was in the midst of a war that was leaving it polluted and plagued with disease. America had found a cure for cancer, but now the cancer had warped and become more deadly. As other countries had stolen the killer cure; the disease had spread like wildfire. It infected the brain first, making one lose their mind and go insane. People started turning on America and the war started. The National Disease Guardians was set up to give people food and shelter and keep out the diseased.

Two years later it seemed there would never be an end. Millions had been wiped out, including my family—except for my sister and I. There was little I could do to comfort Dessi about our losses, since I didn't know how to comfort myself. Instead, I kept my mouth shut and tried to peek over the tops of heads towards the massive machine in the middle of the room. It would transport us to the new world—years back, before the war started. We were to start a new life. Only a select few would be transported.

As Dessi and I neared the front, screams and shouts could be heard from behind the thick steel doors.

"What was that?" Dessi squeaked with panic in her voice. I shook my head. I had no idea.

I was pushed from behind and realized we were standing before the aircraft. A soldier in a dark green uniform and OxiBreather reached down to help Dessi mount the stairs and check her ticket. As I was about to get in myself, the steel doors burst open. Gunshots and screams rang out through the dome as people rushed through the doors and towards the aircraft like cannibals to try and save themselves.

I was pushed aside and trampled underfoot.

"Jake!" Dessi screamed, reaching her hand towards me. But it was no use. The machine hovered ten feet above my head waiting for the dome to open so they could take off to the new world.

People reached hungrily upwards, but the soldiers pointed their guns menacingly at them. As tears streamed down Dessi's face, the machine took off with a loud *zooooom* and disappeared with a pop of bright light, taking my hopes and dreams for a new future with it.

Dessi stared at the lush forests and sparkling waters that lay before her. It was nothing she had ever seen before, and she could tell this was where her new life would begin.

*by Megan Prive* (Grade Eleven)  
Bethlehem Catholic High School  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan





# SECOND PRIZE

## Catch

Their laughter echoed throughout the park. It was a magical sort of laughter; the kind that was contagious.

In appearance, the young pair did not look like they'd ever fit together. She was short with fiery red hair and eyes like melted chocolate. She was clumsy, made evident as she tripped over her feet. She would've fallen multiple times if not for the boy who seemed always to catch her. He moved like a dancer; controlling his long limbs with an athlete's training. His hair was dark brown and tightly curled and his eyes couldn't decide if they were blue or grey. Lucy and Colton had been best friends since they were babies and now, as they danced around the park, they were celebrating their high school graduation.

"Twelve years and we're finally out of school," Lucy sighed and fell back into the grass. Standing over her, Colton gave Lucy a look. She laughed and reconsidered her words. "Well, finally out of mandatory school. You're choosing to go back to university," she said.

"When your record deal falls through, don't come crawling to me," Colton replied smartly.

"When I'm rich and famous, don't expect me to remember the little people," Lucy sniffed, striking a pose.

Colton raised his eyebrow, an obvious dig at Lucy's lack of height. Her reply was an eye roll as she attempted to get up. In the process, Lucy tripped on herself. Like usual, Colton caught her before she hit the ground. Both chuckling at an inside joke, they continued their game of tag.

Not quite three years later, Lucy and Colton found themselves back at the park. The scene, however, couldn't be more different from the last time they were there. There was snow on the ground and temperatures were cold enough to freeze toes through layers of socks and winter boots. There was no laughter in the air now; both Colton and Lucy wore serious expressions. They sat side by side on a cold metal bench.

"There's nothing—," Lucy's voice broke. She took a deep breath and started over again. "Is there anything they can do?"

Colton shook his head, which felt oddly light now that all his hair was gone. He was thankful for the hat that covered his bare scalp. "Nothing," he said sadly.

Lucy squeezed her eyes shut. "How long have you known?"

Colton's breath hitched.

"How long Colton?" Lucy's voice was sharper now.

"Nine months."

Lucy looked up and glared at Colton, but before she could spit out the angry words, Colton stopped her.

"Look," he said, "I don't want to spend the time I have left fighting with you."

Lucy's composure crumpled with that proclamation and she began crying. Colton's tears soon joined hers, the salty liquid freezing on their faces. And as selfish as it was, Lucy couldn't help but cry over the fact that nobody would be there to catch her the next time she fell.

*by Jayme Fouillard* (Grade Twelve)

Bishop Carroll High School

Calgary, Alberta



# THIRD PRIZE

## Dark, Cold Day

It is a dark cold day, yet we are still on the water. Waves crash against the side of the boat and the wind has become a threat instead of an advantage. We can think of nothing else to do but try and get to land, no matter if that be a deserted island or the port we shoved off of. We see a patch of land in the distance, and luckily for us the wind is blowing us in that direction.

“That a way!” one of our sailing mates calls out, and points to an unknown area of land we’ve never encountered before.

“Watch out!” another man screams, and we turn just in time to see a huge menacing wave about to crash on top of us. Our mouths are open, mid-holler, and dirty, fish-filled water invades our bodies, causing us all to sputter and gasp for air. As if we weren’t soaked enough from the sea spray, we are completely drenched now and our boat is overflowing with murky water.

“We can’t give up now!” a man gurgles and we scurry about the boat, trying to stay afloat and make it to land—we just need to make it that far.

“Here comes another!” Shouts of panic fill our ears, followed by yet another huge wave. We gasp for air, still trying to make it safely to shore.

“Look out for that rock over there!” A woman points to a large mass of rocks that taunt us, making our safe arrival a lot harder to come by.

“Which one?” somebody shouts back grumpily, as they try to bail water out of our sinking boat. The waves lap over the edge of the boat, making us recoil in fear. *What if we die at sea?* is the only thought in our minds as we bail out water and fight to keep the boat under control in the roaring wind.

We’ve already recognized we are in the midst of a horrible storm, but the flashes of lightning in the sky tell us there is more where that came from. A raging storm is brewing, our adventure has only begun.

More waves engulf us in our little boat full of six people. We are all scattered about, each completing our own task. But someone is not doing a good-enough job. That becomes clear to us as the boat lurches and we feel a massive thud. We chance a peek over the side of the boat and see that, in the side, there is undeniably a colossal hole glaring at us.

The boat falls onto the shore. Our boat is destroyed, much to the chagrin of our crew. We are shipwrecked. Shipwrecked on a dark, cold day.

*by Tia Christoffersen* (Grade Nine)

St. Martin de Porres High School

Airdrie, Alberta



# THIRD PRIZE

## No Going Back

The night of the show is cool; the moonlight glowing in corners the streetlights couldn't, illuminating the other girls as they walk ahead.

"Erin, wait up," Amy calls from behind, still in the van.

I stop, fold my arms against the chill. I hear the honking of people trying to park, closing my eyes against the headlights of passing cars. Across the street, a man sits on the steps of an old building, dressed in little more than rags.

"Okay, I'm ready!" Amy says brightly.

We should've been smarter than to cut through the side lane. I shouldn't have let myself get so far ahead of Amy. But we weren't smarter. And I did.

When I hear the terrified squeak, I whirl clumsily. Amy's eyes are wide, her knuckles white, her neck in the crook of his elbow. Before, he'd seemed so forlorn; pitiable. Now, my chest constricts and my heart stops. We stare. Both he and Amy look at me; him waiting for my reaction, Amy for her rescue.

"Stop it! Stop it!" he yells suddenly, pushing the gun against her skull, though nobody had moved.

I force my tongue to move. "Put the gun down. If you wa. . . ."

"Stop!" he yells, eyes vacant and insane, and I realize he's talking to himself. I walk forward.

"Don't!" he shouts, clear and angry, gun suddenly pointing at me.

Amy realizes the gun is no longer at her head and spins, ferociously kicking him. He fires the gun blindly, and I feel the bullet tear into my arm. Screaming, I cover the bullet hole, dark blood streaming between my fingers. Looking horrified, Amy tackles the man, taking him to the ground while the gun falls away harmlessly. He punches her, and when she rolls away kicks her ribs hard enough I hear the crack. I drop to my knees, nails scraping the pavement as I scramble for the gun.

I whip it up, aiming with shaking arms at the demented man. "Don't move!"

I don't know if he deliberately disobeys or if he doesn't understand. He attacks Amy again, kicking and punching, shouting words that make no sense.

I can shoot him, or I can run for help that'll come too late.

I pull the trigger, and watch in horror as red blooms on his back. He falls to the side, eyes rolling wildly. Amy crawls towards me, gasping and clutching her abused ribs. Freezing my heart, he gets back up. Stands, and walks. I fire the weapon again. I hear his cry, again. I watch the blood gush, again.

This time, he stays down. He doesn't move.

Months later, I'd hear words meant to reassure me, reminding me it was self-defense. Every time, I'd remember the smell of the gun, the feel of the cool metal, the sight of his body, his blood staining the pavement, and the instant I knew I'd killed him.

There was no going back, the moment I held the gun.

*by Shannon Gibson* (Grade Ten)  
Pinawa Secondary School  
Pinawa, Manitoba



# THIRD PRIZE

## Euthanasia

A sleek black vehicle was waiting for them. Seating her in the back like a dangerous criminal, the officer pulled into the heavy traffic. Judging by the car's interior, it must have been expensive, but honestly, what did the government own that wasn't?

In the quiet, her panicked mind raced. Memories flashed through her consciousness, moments irrelevant to the occasion: movie night in the tiny living room, tedious hours in a stuffed classroom, her brother's third birthday. . . . She thought of her home, the building held over a thousand residents. She remembered the news reports; first the passing of the law to reduce the dramatic overpopulation, the beginning of the euthanasia, the update the law had extended to all people without the money to cure themselves. All the criminals, all the terminally ill, all the elderly: killed. She knew her diabetes and insufficient wealth would bring her to this day, she just never thought it would come so soon. She thought she would have time to reach adulthood, to start a family, to live a full life. People like her, genetically imperfect, had to be stopped before they produced more unhealthy citizens.

The vehicle came to a stop. The officer came to the teen's side and tugged her from the immobile police car. The cool parkade was dim and grey. Lines of vehicles identical to the one she had rode in filled the stoney area, but not a soul was in sight. The muscular man silently led her to a nearby door. The elevator transported them to a hospital-like waiting room. It reminded the teen of that day, listening to a nurse discuss her condition with her father, her mother rubbing her back while cradling her baby brother. They walked through the harsh white lights, down hallways, past closed doors. The only sound was their footfalls, his boots clomping and her sneakers squeaking.

A white-clad nurse stood motionless next to an open operating room. "Welcome," she flashed an inauthentic smile. "This won't take long."

The room was steely and sterile. Medical utensils and bizarre apparatuses lay out along a polished counter. The operating table was brightly lit in the dark room. The nurse gestured for her to get onto it. She did so, flinching at its icy touch. The medical professional busied herself at her station. The teen stared at her back, wondering in a disconnected way how the injection would feel.

"It's nice when you guys don't make a fuss." The nurse turned, wielding a sizable needle. "It makes it so much easier for us both." The woman leaned over her with a friendly grin. It happened so quickly. The needle slid easily into the diabetic's arm. Her vision grew fuzzy, but she watched the nurse walk towards a page button on the wall. The last thing she was aware of was the nurse's voice: "Next, please."

*by Corinne Gusnoski* (Grade Eleven)  
Gillam School  
Gillam, Manitoba



# THIRD PRIZE

## A Bedtime Story

Mama says Daddy's going away. She says it's going to be a lot of sleeps, too many to count on my fingers.

I don't want him to leave. I tell her ten sleeps is too long!

Her eyes go all wet and her face goes splotchy like a tomato. It's going to be more than that she says. She sounds like she is a croaky old frog. I think of telling her that but she looks sad and maybe it would make her more sad. So I hug her with a big strong hug and run upstairs to see Daddy.

He sits on the bed holding a sock. He looks sad even though it's a yellow sock. I grab the sock and tell him yellow is a happy colour. He laughs but it sounds bad. I ask him where he's going.

He grabs the sock real tight and gets off the bed. He kneels down until his face is really close. His breath smells good, like minty toothpaste. "I'm going to a place where I'm needed," he says, then says a really big name. "Do you understand we live in a very nice, fair place, son?"

I nod. Mama and Daddy tell me every day because they say it's really important. Sometimes they give me candy, which makes me think it's true even more. I tell him that and he laughs a tiny bit, which makes me feel better.

"The place where I'm going, kids don't ever get candy," he says. "Sometimes they don't get food, either. Sometimes they don't have a cozy car bed to sleep in."

"They could have mine," I say.

He messes up my hair with his hand. He does that when I say smart things. "I know you would," he says. "But what would you sleep in?"

"I don't know," I say.

"We live in a place where everyone gets fair treatment," he says. I listen because this sounds like a serious time. "Over there, not everyone does. People get hurt. Moms have to wear big black cloths over their faces. Your mom wouldn't know how to read."

This scares me. "How would they get bedtime stories?" I ask.

He smiles but it's not happy. "They don't."

This is what makes me think it's okay for Daddy to go. I tell him, "If there aren't mummies to read bedtime stories, I guess it's okay." He hugs me with a big strong hug. "Let those kids know they can come over anytime and sleep in my bed," I say.

"I will," he says by my ear and squeezes me tighter.

I wiggle myself out and kiss his cheek with a big smack. I tell him, "Good night."

"I love you," he says.

I tell him, "I love you, too. Come home fast." Then I go to bed where Mama reads me my favourite bedtime story.

*by Sarah Mitchell* (Grade Twelve)  
Elphinstone Secondary School  
Gibsons, British Columbia

