

FIRST PRIZE

Wonder

I sit in the subway train, mindlessly reading the colourful ads plastered along the walls. Nothing piques my interest. Nothing's changed since yesterday.

I'm usually pretty mellow during my commute; there's nothing like breathing the stale underground air after a day of gluing my eyes to a computer screen. But really? What are the chances of catching the same train as yesterday, the one with the dead animal smell? It's pretty hard to distract my mind from the burning stench in my nose without headphones or any reading material. Well, at least it's suitable; a miserable end to a miserable day.

I scoot further towards the wall, shrinking the virtually nonexistent space between it and my body, as an elderly woman drops into the seat next to me, wearing a thick, incredibly space-consuming, fur coat that ought to make her pass out from heat stroke.

I cringe as several schoolgirls stampede into the already crowded train, giggling and speaking in phony tones. I almost wince from second-hand embarrassment—do they even hear themselves? I roll my eyes at the tall brunette's riveting tales of Becky's sweaty romantic escapades.

An involuntary sigh of relief escapes me as the train slows to a stop at the next station and the pretentious horde hurtles out. The space suddenly a hundred decibels quieter, I go back to ignoring my surroundings and dreading the next day's workload.

A small, high-pitched voice snaps me out of my reverie. "Let's sit by the window! I wanna look through the window!" A petite creature speeds like a bullet into the train.

"Masha! Stop running! *Pomedlenneye!*" A winded blonde woman pushes through the closing doors, grabbing her daughter by the arm. Her Russian accent is thick as she scolds the girl in a low tone. Shameless, the little girl mischievously smiles at the others in the seats, completely disregarding her mother. "Masha! You listen to me!" her mother exclaims, exasperated with the child.

"Can we sit by the window?" she repeats, her face turned innocent for her doting mother.

"There are no seats left. There's nothing to see anyway."

Smiling, I stand up and say, "Would you like to sit down? I'm getting off soon."

The girl grins widely, but says nothing and crawls onto the seat, kneeling to get a better view. "Sorry," says her mother apologetically, "I just can't teach the girl any manners."

"Don't worry about it," I chuckle. And I don't mind. I really don't. There's just something about the look of joy on her face, illuminated by flashing tunnel lights, that melts my heart. That childlike wonder makes everything an adventure. It paints everything in excitement and magic. I wonder when I lost it.

by Irina Petrovic (Grade Nine)
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FIRST PRIZE

A Basketful of Magnolias

I shouldn't take it. I can't help it; it's about fifty bucks for goodness sake. When a man hands you over a package for fifty dollars, would you keep it for him or refuse it?

"Excuse me, miss?" I look up to a rather tall figure with a lean body arching down towards me with wavy brown hair lightly gelled all the way to the back of his head. His cologne scent is very strong. Not Giorgio Armani, but the cheap kind you buy at Walmart—the cheap kind that smells of sweat and sweet Febreze.

"Yes?" I reply to his approach, looking up from my phone, which I had my eyes fixated on for ten minutes.

"Hi, I was just wondering if you would be a darling and do me a favour. I have this package that was supposed to be for my friend, Akeem, . . . you see, I couldn't help but notice you are also going to Nepal. Akeem forgot this in the car and . . . I've been trying to call him for twenty minutes, but his phone seems to be turned off." He shows me the call history on his iPhone as he scrolls down the limitless number of calls he's made.

"It just has some documents he needed for his conference there. Oh! Here—" He regains his tall posture as he feels through his pockets and places one fifty dollar bill in my hand. "I know it's not much, but it would really save my friend's neck if you'd do this. He's a bit short and has stubbles for hair. Oh, and his name is Akeem."

What am I to do? This man I have only known for five minutes wants me not only to give this package to his friend, but to pass it through international security check under my own name. What if he has placed a bomb in there, and it gets detected? My neck would be on the line. Breaking news: "Terrorism within Canadian Borders. Iranian woman arrested in YVR for alleged bomb attack through international security." It's the way the whole world works—or doesn't.

When I was in third grade, our class went to botanical gardens for a class field trip. I still remember it well. Annie Jacks had handed me a basketful of beautiful, golden magnolias. When our teacher found out about the magnolias, she came over and slapped me across the face as hard as she could. We weren't allowed to touch the flowers. Annie went on the scavenger hunt while I sat in the crafts room with my chair facing the window, watching the children down below.

I suppose I never truly learned my lesson.

by Ghazal Jafari (Grade Ten)
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FIRST PRIZE

Under the Apple Tree

It was a pleasant summer day. The buttery sunshine kissed my skin the day I saw him sitting under the apple tree. A boy with caramel locks brushed over his brow hummed the melody of a bird, an open book sitting in his lap, a pencil tucked behind his ear. His lips were pursed tight in a fine little line. I stared at him a moment before calling, “What are you doing?”

The perplexed expression on his face melted away, and I was met with a sight I had never seen before. I was a girl with mousy brown hair meeting a boy with a smile that could show you the whole world. It wasn’t until the leaves were turning orange when he kissed me under the apple tree. It was artless and blind, his teeth clunking against mine. But his lips were tender, tasting of pumpkin pie and apple cider. His face was sincere as he leaned in for another, and right before his lips met mine, he whispered, “I love you.”

My stomach felt full of dancing butterflies. “I love you too.”

Then, things started to change. Snow crunched under my shoes when he stopped under the apple tree. His face was grim, staring gravely at the barren branches through to the icy blue sky. His lips were chapped and pale from cold. A hesitation a heartbeat long before merciless words left his mouth: “It’s over. I can’t do this anymore.”

The wind howled through the silence, carrying his words away over the dead air. I fumbled for something to say, but I couldn’t see a thing through the blurry mosaic colours in my tears. I ran away without saying a single thing, but he didn’t come after me, his solemn silhouette still under the apple tree.

Tiny little leaves were budding on the twisty branches of the apple tree when I came back there for the first time since that awful day. It was hard to forget the memories formed there . . . sharing sneaky little kisses, stargazing at dawn, watching the sunrise with my head on his arm.

But those times were over and it was time to move on.

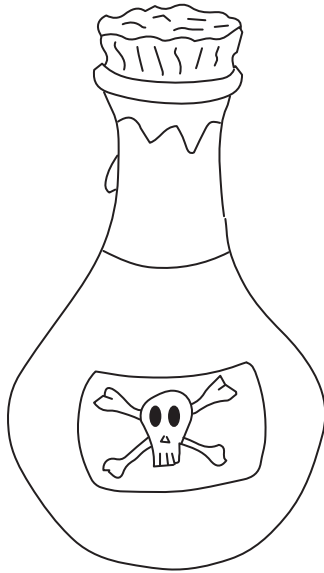
I dug a hole next to the apple tree, planting a brand-new seed, a brand-new memory. I thanked him for our time together and wished him goodbye.

“What are you doing?” When I turned, someone new was standing there, with freckles across the bridge of his nose, flushed cheeks, and a shy little grin.

I gave him a smile, one that stole my heart one summer day, and I hoped he could see the whole universe, the same sight I had seen.

by Carole Palattao (Grade Eleven)
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FIRST PRIZE

The Disposal

She smiled as she set the plate down in front of Brian. *Brian? Brendan?* It didn't matter. She served a plate for herself and sat opposite him.

She watched carefully as he took his first bite. He seemed different than the men she was usually sent. His shave was cleaner and his clothes had that expensive look to them. She noticed a fascinating precision about his movements. *It is a shame, she thought, that in a few minutes he'll be dead.*

After a lifetime of bad luck and bad decisions, the woman found herself under the employment of a Mr. Lawsen, head of the very secretive Estron Organization. She didn't even really know what they did. She had accidentally walked into one of the labs in the building one day only to be promptly pushed back out. All she had seen were test tubes and Petri dishes. She didn't know what any of it was, she just knew she got paid good money to do her job: to bring the men on Lawsen's list to her apartment for dinner and poison them. Estron would direct her to them and she had the charisma to lure them over within a week or two. This one sitting in front of her now had only taken three days.

Friendly conversation flowed and she glanced at the clock on the wall. Six minutes since initial consumption. The effects would kick in soon.

One minute later, he was still well. She was impressed.

Four minutes later, she was nervous.

Questions raced through her head. *Why isn't it working? Can poison expire? Did I even remember to put it in? Of course I did. . . .*

His plate was nearly empty. *Normally, the mark would be dead by now. They'd be past the sweating, the gagging, the falling—*

He took his last bite.

She sat, still and staring.

"That was delicious. I'm afraid I have to get going though."

This is impossible, she thought. Maybe he'll collapse when he stands up. . . .

He didn't.

She wiped the sweat off her brow and led him to the door. She didn't have a backup plan. *What kind of idiot doesn't have a backup plan?* Her hands fumbled through the closet and found his coat. As she handed it to him she saw, in small grey letters, "Property of Estron" printed inside its collar. And suddenly it all made sense.

She took a quick step back. Their eyes met: hers frightened, his inhuman. She watched its hand reach for the inside pocket.

"I've had a lovely evening," it said slowly.

Her throat was slit before she even saw the blade.

It closed the door behind it on the way out.

by *Emily Helmer* (Grade Twelve)

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SECOND PRIZE

I Saved Fiction

Tomorrow was Oparo Day, and billionaire John Jarram was preparing excitedly. Finally, he would see the Oparoes! A week ago, a strange chap from the Oparo Preservation Society (OPS), S. Winey, had come to him and done a wonderful presentation on Oparoes: a magnificent but shy type of bird with orange plumage, a piano-shaped crest, two pairs of wings, and a high-pitched warbling call. Impressed by these birds, Jarram immediately signed on as a donor.

On Oparo Day, Jarram drove to the location of the Oparo Protection Reserve, a forest with a shoddily hand-painted sign reading, “Oparo Reserve.” It looked suspicious, but Jarram snuffed out any doubts. He loved the thought of such wondrous birds existing, and he loved the thought he was going to help save them. Ever since his childhood, he had read about quests and heroes. Now, he had before him a heroic quest to save something pure, innocent, and fantastical. It was so wonderful, something too good to be true!

At the observation tent, Winey gave him an Oparo telescope with warped lenses. Jarram could not see anything when peering through it. Obviously, he was going blind; what else could be the cause? Not the telescope, of course.

Jarram’s inability to see the Oparoes stemmed from another reason: the “Oparo Blight,” a condition, according to Winey, due to chemical pollution. This caused the Oparoes to develop bark and leaves on their skin, camouflaging them, and causing them to die. Obviously, a new massive donation was required, and Jarram enthusiastically obliged, flooding Winey with cheques. Anything, anything was worth saving the Oparoes, and making them visible.

Even though he could not see them, could not find any mention of them outside OPS pamphlets, sheer faith and hope kept Jarram bankrupting himself to save Oparoes. He was almost penniless now.

After a few months, for some odd reason, Winey abruptly stopped visiting him. His mail from the OPS also stopped. What happened? Intrigued, Jarram drove up to the reserve again. Maybe the Oparoes were flourishing now—there was no need for further donations!

The forest was empty. But the Oparoes had to be there! So he scurried around looking for them, getting himself hopelessly lost. He camped out in the wilderness, praying hard for an Oparo to appear.

Finally, two weeks later, when he was famished, cold, and suffering from dehydration, one finally came—an Oparo, in all of its glory—and approached him. Jarram gaped in awe, and was even more awed when it actually spoke and thanked him for saving its species. Enraptured, Jarram laughed in joy. The next thing he knew, he woke up in a hospital bed.

by Bruce He (Grade Nine)
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SECOND PRIZE

Eclipse of the Future

It was a bright Sunday morning when The SUN went out.

Citizens rushed into their homes as temperatures fell below zero in an instant, and the Electrical Light Source Department struggled to maintain general heating. Scientists were called to headquarters, and emergency plans were drafted in case The SUN's emergency batteries failed to activate.

Suddenly, a bright light flashed in the sky. A few flares followed; then The SUN rebooted and flickered back to life, filling The City with its comfortable, normal background noise: the droning hums of The SUN's countless engines.

The intercom crackled. "The SUN has risen! I repeat, The SUN has risen!"

Life resumed. Corporations, workers, and students were called back to their usual routines. School children could be heard complaining quietly, "Why couldn't the eclipse have lasted a bit longer? I didn't study for my test today. . . ."

Industrial ladders were brought to the edge of the city's limits and set up. Numerous engineers and scientists, all dressed in protective orange suits and all sporting identical pairs of SUN-glasses, clambered up the ladders. The shell on one of The SUN's malfunctioning rays was promptly removed, and the complex wiring of the super light bulb was revealed to the world.

"It's been three years since we last did maintenance," the lead scientist, Pedro, remarked, squinting up at the interior of The SUN with a critical eye. "The fuses are all burnt out; no wonder it went out today."

"The materials are supposed to resist short circuits," the head engineer retorted snappily. "It was obviously a miscalculation on your part—didn't I send a report in about how we specifically should not increase the brilliance of The SUN during harvest time? The circuits are simply not meant to accommodate these fluctuating charges. We should just leave The SUN alone, I tell you. . . ."

"If only it were a star," a young intern observed, "then we wouldn't have so much trouble."

Pedro blinked, completely speechless.

The head engineer slapped his forehead in exasperation. "Do you want to get fired? Then stop blabbering and get to work."

The intern rolled his eyes and pattered off, grumbling quietly under his breath.

"It's all because of that ignorant 'retrograde movement' happening in universities recently," Pedro shook his head in sorrow. "From what I've heard, the graduates nowadays are even talking about separation from machines! Alas, how society has fallen."

At the same time, the engineer clicked his tongue reproachfully. "He's been reading too many history books, that one. 'A star,' he says! What pure drivel; what pure wishful thinking. Disgusting."

They paused, exchanged sympathetic glances, and then patted each other on the back.

"On another note," the scientist said curiously, "what's a *star*, anyway?"

by *Grace Hu* (Grade Ten)
Colonel By Secondary School
Gloucester, Ontario



SECOND PRIZE

My Time

What a wonderful lunch. I can't remember the last time I was out on a date. Especially not with a handsome gentleman, like the one in front of me now.

"This has been lovely," David mumbles from behind a napkin.

David and I have been working together for a few brief, splendid months. His old assistant just suddenly disappeared—so weird and slightly sad. But that is what got me here.

"Yes it has. Thank you for the fourth-month lunch," I reply, picking up my wine glass to toast, while brushing legs with him under the table.

An appreciative smile brightens his already shimmering blue eyes as he responds, "My pleasure."

"Dessert to share?"

"But Ms. Jackson, that isn't very professional," he tells me, playfully scolding.

Secrets are hard for me to keep, especially when they make me so happy. But David insisted our relationship needs to be one. I'm not sure why. There's nothing about me to be embarrassed about, but I don't want to push. "You are absolutely right, Dav—I mean, Mr. Langford. Where are my manners?" I take another sip of my wine. "So is there anything new on your agenda for this evening?" Our alone time lately has been fleeting and insufficient.

I need more.

Slightly choking on his wine, David answers, "Actually yes, good thing you asked. Jenny has a softball game tonight I'm going to watch. Can you fill that in?"

"Of course, Mr. Langford," I reply politely, crushing the wine glass in my fist.

Jenny. Always Jenny. Jenny can ask anything of David and he'll do it at the drop of a hat. The only person in this whole world who has his love and attention all the time is that rotten little brat. She takes up my time with David—my precious time. If she were no longer around. . . .

Problems always have solutions.

David's personal phone starts to ring and he is going to ignore it.

"You might want to get that. I believe it is your sister," I mention casually, while closely examining the dessert menu.

From under my eyelashes, I watch David's shock as he pulls out his phone and sees I am right. He answers it with a lovely, "Hello, Sis," but instantly stops. His face falls. Shock and horror invade his blue eyes as he stares into my own.

In the next moment, David is running away from the table, probably racing to the police station morgue. Happiness envelops my insides as I finish off the wine and think about all the free time David will now have to spend with me.

by Katelyn White (Grade Eleven)
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SECOND PRIZE

Her Purple Raincoat

Caroline fastened the buttons on her daughter's purple raincoat. She realized they had become more difficult to close; her baby girl was growing up. Soon their favourite coat would be too small, but Caroline did not have the heart to buy a new one.

Ellie pushed her mother's hands away and turned towards the street. "I see the bus, Mom. I'm fine."

Caroline hurried after her five-year-old, pulling the hood of the child's raincoat over her curly mane. "It's going to rain, Ellie. Promise me when you're outside you'll put on the coat?"

"But, Mom, I really don't want to."

"Eliana, I don't want you to get sick."

"Fine, okay, I will."

The bus approached the curb and the little girl carefully stepped on. The steps had already been soaked from the wet rain boots of the other rambunctious five-year-olds on board. Caroline looked with sad eyes at her daughter. She could see the little girl remove her raincoat as she took a seat next to a girl her mother recognized as Christine, one of Ellie's best friends. Disappointed and upset, she looked through the window at her, first trying to get her attention with stern looks, then giving up and waving goodbye—the child noticed that.

She'd fixed Ellie's hair, buttoned her raincoat, and pulled up her hood. Caroline has analyzed these actions a hundred times, reciting the moment when she waved goodbye and watched her daughter walk away from her. Everything was as she'd always done.

But this time, Ellie was gone.

The police report said someone was waiting for the children when they got off the bus. "We found her jacket at the entrance to the school. A purple raincoat, correct?"

"Yes," Caroline said, lips trembling, words still struggling to escape her mouth.

"Some teachers said they saw a man lingering around the school. We believe he tried to lure her in with the raincoat. We suspect your daughter had dropped the coat and he took that opportunity to get her attention. That's most likely when he took her."

He. She despised how the officers neglected to mention the man by name. Robert Jackson, the man who stole her daughter. She feared if they stopped mentioning his name, they would stop talking about Ellie too. Silently, she started crying. She brought the coat to her face and breathed in her daughter's lingering scent.

Caroline never found her daughter, but forever keeps the purple raincoat Ellie just didn't want to wear that day.

by Taylor Cenac (Grade Twelve)
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Toronto, Ontario



THIRD PRIZE

Windows to the Soul

The door of the Imperial library slammed shut.

“Hey, Ivan. You need something?” I asked, slightly disinterested, a bit disoriented. I didn’t even look up. I continued reading, word for word, sentence for sentence. Royal or not, coming in five minutes before closing held a rudeness of itself. In all brutal honesty, this book on the counter was more alluring than any prince who’d ever stepped foot in this establishment. Flipping a page, I yawned, awaiting a response. “I’ll ask again. What. Do. You. Need? I’m about to close up.”

An undisturbed, peaceful silence filled the atmosphere. Adjusting my spectacles, I peered up to address him, “Your Majesty, get a book or get out—”

I shut up, mostly due to the ebony pistol at my neck.

That’s when I understood this wasn’t one of Prince Ivan’s late-night reading visits.

The cold machinery pushed softly on my skin, and I felt it shift, drift, before tensing, becoming rigid. He kneaded gloved fingers within my blouse’s fabric, pulling me in, intimidating me. The man spoke calmly, “Listen, lady, this poor pitiful commoner needs something.” His eyes were the only visible aspect of him. They were reserved, aloof, yet recognizable, familiar—quite familiar. All of him was concealed mysteriously by a black hooded trench coat. An embodiment of nightfall, his eyes were luminescent, contrasting against his crepuscular clothing. Even the room’s dimness turned pitch black next to his irises. “Tell me about *The Book of Generations*.”

I watched him, watching me. And I knew. Knew just who this cryptic maniac was. “King Wilfred’s family tree? You said it yourself, commoner, you aren’t exactly—”

“Prey patronizing predators seems stupid, am I right?” he retorted, interrupting me. His boot slapped the floor noisily as he jerked me forward by the blouse. “Imagine a worm crawling from a bird. Doesn’t seem too wise, does it? Please try to be wise.”

Again, the death toy nudged my neck, and I tried desperately not to laugh at his ridiculously horrible prank. I have to admit, his acting had me convinced for a while there, but no one fools a librarian. Lifting a hand I ripped off his hood, catching the young noble delinquent red-handed. He grimaced, face painted in bitterness. “Ivan. You know how much I hate pranks.” I exhaled deeply, examining him. Eyes still soulless with vacancy. Eyes unknown.

The enigmatic man moved the weapon to my forehead, thrusting me backwards. “Prince Ivan, huh? Tell me about him too. Tell me all about my family.” Twisting the pistol on my skin, he glared. “Hurry up. After three seconds the bullet arrives.”

Flicking off the safety, he anticipated an answer.

And a good one at that.

by *Janisa Nedd* (Grade Nine)
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THIRD PRIZE

The Girl Who Stood

The girl was there. He could see her. Only she didn't run as the pillars plummeted from the sky, falling straight towards them—towards her.

How fast they fell. They dropped like arrows, completely straight. Not even the hot desert wind could shake them from their course as they pierced the air with the quietest of shrills.

The others screamed, ran for cover. Families searched for each other, mothers picked up children. No one came for the girl. She was standing alone, one hand raised to her forehead, blocking out the sun, the other by her side, clenched in a fist.

As the first pillar struck and fractured into pieces, the ground shook, the air boomed. He was thrown from his feet, hot sand stinging his face as he landed. There was no explosion. The mere force of it was enough to send everyone flying. Then came the second, and he felt like he was tearing in two. He had barely enough energy to rise up to his hands and knees before the third one sent the world spinning.

When he looked back, the pillars were there instead. They rose straight up from the sand, their absurd and horrible darkness splitting the once lovely sky. And they didn't stop coming. There were dozens of black lines falling to the earth, rapidly approaching. The other people were sprawled, like he was, and several didn't move to get back up.

They should've been expecting it. All across the world, events like these had been happening, and now it was happening here, before his very eyes. And the horrible thing was nobody understood why. They fell at any time, any place, taking the lives of thousands. They never came with any warnings, none at all.

Miraculously, he spotted the girl, on her hands and knees. She was looking up, right at the black pillar streaking down to exactly where she was.

He screamed for her to run. He didn't know her name, but he recognized her as she turned to look at him. Blood ran down her face, and her eyes were frozen large. He knew there wouldn't be enough time for her to escape, and she must have realized too, because instead, she shakily stumbled to her feet. He could only watch as the girl raised her arms, fingers spread wide, as if she could catch the whole sky. In slow motion, he watched as the pillar descended upon her. If she expected to stop it, he didn't know. The last thing he saw was her, legs together, back arching, face turned into her shoulder, her hands stretched out and unable to withstand the horrible force that was the end.

by Madeline Sceviour (Grade Ten)
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THIRD PRIZE

Farewell

She looked upon her dead mother's face, lying in a black cherry wood casket. Her mother was dressed in an ivory white-lace gown and her face an ice-cold sheet. People came to greet her with their condolences, apologizing for her loss, but she didn't respond to them. She just kept staring at her mother's closed, dead eyes.

Her mind flashed back to her past. Nights when she came home to her mother screaming at her to lose weight because she was supposedly too fat, locking her up in her room to starve. She pounded on the door and begged for dinner. Her mother tricked her into thinking she bought her a new car for her eighteenth birthday. She gave her the car keys, told her to go outside and check it out herself, but when she ran outside, she found nothing but a vacant lot.

Suddenly, she felt a tap on her shoulder, snapping her back to reality. It was Lola, her cousin. "Jean, it's time for the eulogy," Lola whispered. Jean nodded and took a seat at the front pew.

When preparing for her mother's funeral, she refused to do a eulogy. Instead, the younger family members prepared one. As Celina, her other cousin, went up the podium, Jean noticed her face expressed such gloom, a blanket of sorrow draped upon her.

It took her a few seconds to begin her eulogy. Jean could tell she was trying to keep herself together, but eventually Celina took an intake of breath and opened her mouth to speak: "We gather here today to honour a loving and caring woman. . . ." Jean listened to the thoughtful and meaningful speeches said by her family. All of them said they would miss her; however, they knew she was in a better place now, a happier place because she was finally in paradise with God.

After the eulogy, Jean was overcome with confusion. It didn't make sense to her. *How could they miss her, if they didn't even know her?*

Everyone was then ushered outside. It was time for the burial. The priest did the final prayer. The casket was slowly lowered into the pit, while white roses were being thrown into the grave. At the exact moment the casket hit the soil, the kin wailed in unison. It seized all who wept in mourning to speak. Everyone's faces were streaked with tears, trying to gasp for air. They hugged one another for support, as if the loss of Jean's mother would not allow them to live on because of the unbearable pain. While all had streaking faces, Jean just stared below at her mother's grave, her face as dry as the Atacama Desert.

by Audrey Garcia (Grade Eleven)
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THIRD PRIZE

The Blind Arctic Boy

Bone craved to see the Northern Lights.

His father had seen them, once upon a winter's night, and he told what he could to little Bone as his hunting boots thawed on the candle rack. The end of Father's tales had not sated him.

When he recounted his wish to the other boys, they laughed at him: "Blind Bone, how will you see the Lights?" The boys had beaten him regularly. After they'd left, Bone would get up and weep, but he never held grudges. All he prayed for night after night was a glimpse of the Lights, but even this could not be granted.

One night, while he was sleeping, a strange creature bugged into his tent. It sniffed him, and chewed at his box. Bone gave his food to the creature. It ate liberally, and rested in his bed afterwards. Near daybreak it left, giving Bone a kiss on his eyes. The next night it came again, as if it were a friend, leaving with a kiss. Others warned him, "You sleep with a monster." However the next night came, and Bone kept it still.

The others refused to accept him after he spent nights with a hag. It was harder to live. Yet with each kiss at dawn, he felt more alive and his passion trembled more violently within. His spine ached for wings. He loved the creature despite everything.

Finally, one good night, the creature whispered, "Come with me!" Bone immediately got up and went. His bare feet were stabbed with frost by each step. Soon he left humanity behind him. The turquoise sky was tinted with bright stars. He felt the cold, but he could not see the stars—at first.

Slowly, miraculously, his vision began to brighten. His eyes opened to things previously shaped only as myths in his mind. He saw a mysterious faint glow in the sky, before the creature ahead paused. Slowly, it turned, and drew back its cloths.

The glow in the sky burst open, in gallops of red and spirals of blue, flowing and tumultuous in waves. Children danced on the inconstant platform as they would on Earth. He crouched as he beheld the creature. That hideous cloak had flown away like a crow, and the revealed face was what he had waited for in his darkest hours.

It extended an ethereal hand: "Come with me!"

Those children descended. They were not like the tribesmen; they knew love and did not hurt him. Bone took the creature's hand and they walked up. The air paradise had brightened every strand of his hair, overwhelming him. "Who are you?" he whispered.

"I—," replied the creature, "I am the Northern Lights."

by Ashley Zhao (Grade Twelve)
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