

FIRST PRIZE

The Moon

A chipmunk scurried playfully over the soft forest floor, carpeted in velvet green grass and adorned in flowers and moss. He raced up a short tree and jumped, landing on a large, soft flower. He rolled off and lay for a few seconds, listening to birds chirp, and leaves blow. Lively, yet peaceful sounds surrounded him. He tumbled out of his reverie as a drop of water fell onto his head with a light, splashy sound. Sunlight filtered through the green leaves, dimming as the moon rose, casting its pearly glow over the forest when the terrifying blaze started.

There it was, glimmering in the moonlight: a lake of hope. A doe stepped forward out of the dense, dry, hot woodland where shrivelled plants roasted to their death and from which many animals had fled. Perfectly picking her way through parched grass and a soft flower to the water's edge, the doe stepped into the lake daintily. She then leapt forward, deeper into the water and swam to a tiny island, barely visible from the muddy banks. She looked back at a blazing inferno where once there had been a forest.

As she swam silently, many other animals were sheltering on the island. And for one moment in her life, all the creatures were united. The wolf would not touch the rabbit, nor the dog the deer. She stepped lightly onto the island and turned towards the fire, brightly illuminated without the help of the moon.

A lone rabbit had remained on the island well after he could have returned. He had been sleeping. He swam back to the mainland to find the remains of the fire alive with happy animals and covered with flowers and berries and other good things for rabbits to eat. The forest, once blazing, looked now like a heaven, with many places to run and hide or play. Squirrels scurried around below while birds tweeted to the blue, clear sky above. There was a light shaking as one of the squirrels ran over the rabbit's head on a berry-loaded branch. A small berry fell on the rabbit's head, knocking him into a flower he was sure had been there before the fire. It was soft and worn, yet it was the loveliest thing the rabbit had ever seen. It seemed brave, somehow, if that were possible for a flower.

The sun sank lower as the moon rose higher, brightly illuminating the forest, so beautiful, so brave, so persistent. The moon radiated like a beacon of hope. The wind whispered a melody that warmed hearts—a song of reassurance, for as long as the animals had one another, they were safe. The soft moon glow spread over the forest, strong as iron, sweet as rain.

by Leonora Shiell (Grade Six)
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FIRST PRIZE

Fratricide

As the limousine approached, Haydn materialized out of thin air. He opened the door, slid into the air-conditioned interior saying, “Step on it!”

The car accelerated away as a fireball erupted from the nondescript building. Neither the chauffeur nor the passenger looked shocked. Haydn typed, “Mission Complete,” on his bulletproof Blackberry.

Two hours later, Haydn walked into a familiar building. “You know the drill,” said the burly security guard.

After several security checks, a robotic voice announced, “Welcome, Agent 007, Haydn Wain-Lowe,” as he stepped into the headquarters of MI-9.

Immediately, his phone rang: “007. . . report to my office.”

Grabbing a coffee, Haydn entered the pristine office of John White, Head of MI-9. “007, there’s a plan to assassinate the queen. You are licensed to kill. 006 will accompany you. Here’s the mission document. You leave tonight. Clear?” finished Mr. White.

“Completely,” Haydn answered.

He took a sip of coffee as Mr. White added, “The leader of this plan is your brother, Kieran Wain-Lowe.”

Virtually choking on his coffee, Haydn stared in shock, but Mr. White did not look up. Silently, Haydn read the mission document. He and 006, Chris Smith, would parachute onto the roof of the targeted building, locate and kill Kieran and his team. Haydn sighed and glanced at his watch, *Time to find agent 006.*

Three hours later, the agents were airborne. Haydn checked his watch, gave a thumbs-up and turned invisible. Chris grinned, mouthed the words “show off” and jumped.

From the air, Haydn saw below the lights from two mercenaries’ cigarettes. Chris killed both smokers with shots to their heads. The agents landed but once inside were ambushed by three men. The mission seemed doomed, but Haydn exploited his invisibility and shot first. Two mercenaries were killed. Haydn, pointing his weapon at the third man, demanded, “Where is Kieran Wain-Lowe?”

“Down the hall . . . the door marked ‘President’,” he whimpered.

Now standing outside the door, Haydn tried to calm his breathing. The agents made eye contact. Then Chris kicked down the door as a round of bullets tore through his body armour. Coughing blood, Chris bravely reached for his pistol, but another burst of gunfire killed him. Silence seized the building.

Haydn, gripping his gun so tightly his knuckles were white, opened fire with deadly accuracy. Some mercenary bullets did slam into Haydn’s body armour, throwing him to the ground. Momentarily dazed, Haydn lay beside Chris, said a silent goodbye to his friend, then stood, ignoring the pain.

Cautiously, Haydn entered his brother’s office. Kieran was waiting and armed. Without hesitation, Haydn fired a single shot. The bullet tore through Kieran’s palm. Haydn sprinted forwards, but Kieran, pain and defiance in his eyes, muttered, “Goodbye, brother.” He then threw himself against the window, which shattered as he fell through to his death.

Kieran hit the ground with the sound of breaking popcorn. Haydn, looking down, typed, “Mission complete. The queen is safe,” as a single tear rolled down his cheek.

by Haydn Wain-Lowe (Grade Seven)
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FIRST PRIZE

The Box

I once had a large wooden box handcrafted by my esteemed grandfather, an artisan who plied his craft in isolation from the prying standards of the rest of the world. There was nothing extraordinary about the box. Indeed, it was a cliché, with wooden planks from the trees on our farm, a dark brown paint applied unevenly to the vulnerable exterior, and a blunted corner, where his hammer missed its nail. After he passed away, I would go down to the cellar every other day, where the box was, and lift its lid to relive the sweet fragrance of the wood. It would remind me of him, and keep the wooden pillar of his hallowed memory from petrifying into nothing but insignificant dust in a thousand worlds. It felt like he still lived with me.

Then the magical locust swarms arrived, bringing with them the scars of devastation from places I'd never heard of. This species could eat almost anything. After destroying all our crops—and because they arrived so speedily—they burst through an open window. Within seconds, the inside of our beautiful brick house was unrecognizable. They had a feast on our furniture, and furnishings, until there was almost nothing left but a few splinters of wood and the brick walls that relentlessly fenced us in.

Amidst the pandemonium, our cellar—and the box within—remained untouched, bunkered behind a sturdy metal door. A few days later, they spontaneously arrived again, audacity emblazoned by the rising sun behind them. After that event, which destroyed my efforts at repairing the damage, I never dared to open the door again. It was a last frontier of sorts, the lone fortress by the river Styx.

Next were the dust storms. The lack of any firm vegetation simply loosened the topsoil, which was completely picked up by the twisters the locusts' magical wings made. Our house was blown through many times, and spontaneously one day the storm arrived with extra vigour. While I hid in the oven, the metal cellar door finally cracked before giving in to the sudden blitzkrieg. Shiploads of sand poured in before the dust stopped. I shovelled at the sand in the cellar for a day, and only then could I inspect the damage to my beloved box, a treasure chest. From all appearances, it was completely undamaged.

After every drought comes the rain, which arrived as if an ocean were dumped into my world. Endless water—a Western monsoon—poured into my house, and down the cellar it went. When the torrent of water stopped, I rushed downstairs to find a completely dry cellar. My precious box, on the contrary, was in ruins. The last bastion of the wooden tower had cracked and split open, and the water it held within—my tears—started flowing freely again. My grandfather's spirit had tried to protect me, and now, spent of vigour, had left me to face future challenges by myself.

by Allen Wang (Grade Eight)
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SECOND PRIZE

The Brickten Spy

I awoke with a start. I felt as if every part of my body had been cleaned with a radioactive brush. A harsh fist gripped my shoulder. The fist pulled me out of the chair and I found myself staring face to face with my captor. He looked like a stereotypical policeman, but as my luck would have it, he was not.

“Well,” he said, “where is it?” I felt something in my pocket and I had a grave feeling I knew what it was. “If you don’t tell me where it is, I will kill you,” the man said in his deep gravelly voice. “You should be happy you’re alive.” He slapped me on the shoulder.

That slap shook me, and I realized, *These people are trying to capture me!* Then my body took over. All I remember is running faster than I had ever run before, some invisible force pushing me the whole way, past guards, through doors, and outside.

I took the thing out of my pocket: *Sunburst!* Sunburst is a rock that explorers found floating around the sun last year. The Brickten gang stole it from the army. It is the most powerful substance in existence. That is why both the army and the Brickten gang want it. This happened six days ago. But to understand what’s going on we need to go back six years.

I was crazy then because my uncle had been shot and I was trying to find who killed him. My journey led me to Brickten, where he had been seen last. One day I was hurrying down the street when a man in a black suit grabbed me and pulled me into an alley. The man yelled and three other men in black suits materialized out of nowhere. Just then, a cop appeared. He mistook me for one of them and dragged me to the police station. He pushed me into an office where another officer was sitting. The other officer spoke, “Mister, you were just found guilty of helping a gang.”

“I don’t belong to any gang. My name is Idiri Mackler,” I spoke timidly.

The officer frowned and said, “Are you related to Frank Mackler?”

“Yes, he is my uncle.” As soon as I said it I regretted it. The way the officer frowned at my last name, my uncle must have been a crook.

Suddenly, the officer’s face broke into a grin and he said, “Well, you don’t say.” He told me a long time ago my uncle was a spy.

When he finished talking I said timidly, “If the disappearance of my uncle lost you a spy, I’ll take his place.”

The policeman laughed a hearty laugh. I was scared he would taunt me, but he just said, “You will be perfect for the job.”

So since my uncle’s death I have been fighting for the lives of others. At twelve years old, I’m the youngest member of the Brickten Spy Agency.

by Benjamin Beiles (Grade Six)
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SECOND PRIZE

Salmon Struggle

The salmon was struggling, trying to fight the upstream current and clamber onto the rocks. This was how it was every fall over at the Corbett Dam in the Ganaraska River. The dam was too high for salmon to jump over so people built a long fish ladder beside the dam to help salmon pass.

Salmon are born in the river and they spend their life in the ocean. Finally, they will die in the river where they were born. Before that, they must finish this hard journey.

A small salmon family was born in the Ganaraska River. It consisted of Lenny, Susan, and Daniel. This fall Lenny was five so the family decided to start their journey back to the river. Daniel got lost on the way, so Lenny and Susan had to finish the journey and find Daniel.

On their way, they saw many dead salmon. Lenny looked scared. "Their spirit has left us and now we owe it to them to finish," Susan comforted Lenny.

They swam with all their might, passing thousands of dead salmon along the way. They had nearly reached the dam when a bloody fish with wounds and gashes passed by. "You mustn't continue. A big serpent. . .," he said in a raspy voice. Lenny and his mother didn't listen. They kept on going, desperate to finish their journey and find Daniel.

Finally, they reached the hardest barrier: Corbett Dam. They saw the giant serpent there! Susan knew she must pass the serpent to get up to the dam. Bravely, she swam towards the serpent. "Mom!" yelled Lenny. With one whack of the serpent's tail, Susan was swept onto the nearby rocks.

Lenny swam towards Susan, screaming, "Mom, are you okay?" Susan lay there, the life being drained out of her. "Mom! Don't go!" Lenny shouted.

"Honey, finish the journey. Find your dad. I love Daniel and y—," Susan stopped, unable to continue.

Lenny didn't want to leave his mother stranded here, but he knew he had no choice. While the serpent wasn't looking, he slipped away and climbed up the fish ladder. It was extremely difficult. Waves kept forcing him down. Blood was splattered all over the ladder. "I can do this," Lenny said.

Days and nights had passed. He struggled hard and finally reached the fishway. He was now searching for Daniel. There were only barren rocks and endless water. Suddenly, he saw a limp salmon; he had cuts all over and only one eye. Lenny swam over to him, yelling, "Dad! Is that you?"

"Yeah," Daniel said in a croaking voice. Daniel flipped onto his other side and looked at Lenny, then closed his eyes. He wasn't breathing and had stopped talking, however, he smiled.

Lenny understood what Daniel was trying to say. Lenny knew Daniel loved him. No matter where you are, love is too strong to be broken. Nobody, not even a giant serpent or dam, can come between it. Love will always be there.

by Julia Sun (Grade Seven)
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SECOND PRIZE

Under the Ice

The mountains of Alaska were exceptionally still, snow and ice muffling all sound and movement. Not even a whisper was to be heard. And then, with a crashing of snow banks and an echoing battle cry, Silver Armada sprinted into the silent clearing. Wooden bow and arrow raised, teeth bared, she lowered into a protective crouch. Her heavy breathing came in clouds of fog, and beads of sweat trickled down her neck. Her sharp eyes spotted the deer before it could run, and less than a second later her arrow was in its side. She slung the carcass over her shoulder and trudged through the forest, ignoring the way her white-blonde hair whipped into her face in the wind.

Night was approaching, and the sun was just disappearing behind the mountains Silver knew so well. She halted suddenly, drawing herself upright in one smooth movement, piercing icy-blue eyes gleaming in the semi-darkness. She had reached the river separating her shelter from the rest of the forest. It was the dead of winter and the river was frozen solid, seemingly safe for lithe bodies to walk across. Her instincts told her the ice was safe, and Silver Armada's instincts were always, always right. Slinging the carcass back over her shoulder, she took a confident step.

Crack!

Silver had a single moment to realize what had happened before she fell through the ice. She braced herself, preparing for the rush of freezing water to envelop her. With an almighty splash she hit the river, cutting through it like a knife.

Every pore in her body screamed in protest, the tips of her mitten-clad fingers were on fire for several long seconds before she lost feeling in them. Her supply of oxygen was running out fast, and little black dots were appearing in her vision. She kept her eyes fixed on the hole she had made when she had fallen and began to kick furiously, but her thick furs were weighing her down. Shaking off her heavy coat, she continued to struggle to the surface. She was dizzy from lack of oxygen now, and all she could do was tell herself to keep on going—she could not stop, she could not give up.

Finally, her head broke the surface and she took a great rattling breath, clearing her head instantly. Getting a firm grip on the edge of the hole, she hoisted herself out of the water and onto the ice.

Scrambling to her feet she wrung out her soaking wet hair and stripped off her wet clothes. She was colder than she'd ever been in her life and she knew she had to find shelter fast before she went into hypothermic shock. The wind whispered through the trees, almost as if they had been listening, waiting, but as always were exceptionally still.

by Sydney White (Grade Eight)
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THIRD PRIZE

The Forest of Oakbard

In the forest of Oakbard, if you listen ever so quietly, you might hear the flowers laughing their happy, squeaky little laughs. Now, you might be wondering why the flowers are laughing. It's because the fairies run their tickly little feet along their petals.

"Stop, it's uncomfortable," Daisy giggles.

The fairies enjoy tickling the flowers, but only in Summer; in Spring the flowers are much, much too small.

The wind starts to whistle through the oak trees as the autumn leaves begin to drift to the ground. The fairies and the flowers have always been allies in the forest and this year the fairies agreed to help the flowers fight Autumn. They would fight the cool, cool breezes of the wind, and the falling leaves that block out the flowers' faint sunlight so they can't grow at all.

"Are you ready?" the fairies question as they take out their magic sticks. At the flowers' nod they wave them in one, two, three circles and point them at the ring of flowers.

A great beam of light flies majestically from the magic sticks, and hits right at the flowers' roots. Daisy gets an itching sensation. Rosie squiggles, trying to rid the creeping feeling in her stem. It tingles and stings a little. The fairies watch while Bluebell and Daffodil wriggle too. Finally, the exasperating sensations stop. The flowers begin to grow, and grow, and grow, until they are taller than the trees. The fairy circle of flowers stands as a barricade, a huge wall of gigantic flowers, Daisy and Rosie, Daffodil and Bluebell. The light of the magic stick dies and the fairies put them back in their herb bags. Now they are ready to fight the wind and the leaves.

The fairies call up Spring's leaves to form a wall against Autumn's winds. They call back the birds and ask them to chirp like they do in Spring. It throws the leaves into confusion and the plan looks like it's working. But now the fairies' magic is used up. They fall to the ground, lifeless; they need to rest.

Autumn's leaves know Winter is a resting time, so . . . *whoosh!* The fairies are taken to their treetop houses and covered up. The ground fairies agree the snow makes a perfect blanket for them and the new little flowers that will grow next year. The fairies look forward to Spring and butterflies, as they sleep under their snow blanket.

If you should walk through the Forest of Oakbard when Winter's snow has melted, listen carefully, and you might just hear the quiet laughter of the flowers.

by Alexanna Little (Grade Six)
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THIRD PRIZE

Double Take

Suddenly, the mortician pulled the sheet back to reveal the man's face. He had olive-coloured skin, short, messy, jet-black hair, and a thin moustache.

"Yes, that's him. That's the man who killed my parents. I can't believe it's been ten years," said the twenty-three-year old Susanne O'Connell, a British accent edged into her voice. Tears streamed down her pale cheeks. She tried to hide it with her straight, elbow-length, auburn hair.

It had been about four years since she'd been in her birthplace: London, England. Living all the way in New York, it was just too difficult, too far. But when she got a shocking phone call, she had to take the chance.

"Is this Susanne O'Connell? This is Detective John McNeil calling from London, England. We believe we've found the man who murdered your parents. The problem is he died in a car crash," said a man with an accent much stronger than Susanne's. He explained that, being the only witness, she would have to see the man so they could confirm he was the killer.

Her bright blue eyes filled with tears—not just from sadness, but from relief. Almost every single night after her parents' death, Susanne had been having terrible nightmares. She knew her mother and father wouldn't rest in peace until their killer was dead as well. Now she could finally sleep at night without dreams filled with her parents' murder.

Susanne left the morgue and called for a taxi. The driver was short and stubby, with a shaggy black moustache covering his mouth. "Location?" he said in a deep, rumbling voice.

"The cemetery on Second Street," she said in barely a whisper.

The taxi accelerated down the busy street. They passed tall buildings and small food stands on the sidewalk. Soon they arrived at a cemetery filled with flowers and head stones. "This is it."

Susanne paid the driver and stepped out of the taxi, her black heeled sandals clicking against the pavement. It had been almost too long since she'd been here. She started looking for something familiar. Finally, she found it: a tall, dark-grey headstone stood in the middle of the cemetery. Two names were engraved on the stone: "Ethan O'Connell and Juliet Marcel O'Connell."

"Hello, Mum. Hello, Dad. It's been a while."

Suddenly, a deep, raspy voice spoke behind her: "Hello, Susanne. I knew I'd find you here."

She turned around and saw a horrible sight. Standing there was a tall man with olive-coloured skin, short, messy, jet-black hair, and a thin moustache. It was him! The man whose dead body she'd identified that morning!

"You? You're supposed to be dead!" She thought her nightmares had ceased, but they had only just begun. . . .

by Holland Taekema (Grade Seven)
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THIRD PRIZE

Worlds Changed

The yellow street lights were illuminating the sidewalks that were filled with people getting a glimpse of New York City at night. The cold wind brushed against my arm and I shivered and pulled my jacket close. Sirens were wailing, horns were honking, and cars were speeding by. The cold concrete wall was pressing against my back. I could not sleep, but I would have to get used to it.

He could be anywhere now, frantically searching for me. I could almost hear him calling my name, his breath reeking of alcohol. He had come home drunk many nights before. I was used to it.

“Gema, I’m scared,” a little whisper came out from under my swollen arm.

“Gabbie, it’s okay, we will be fine.”

A small tear slid itself down her tanned skin. I looked over at my sister, whose brown eyes looked so sorrowful, so sad.

Suddenly, footsteps pierced the darkness. The footsteps thudded against the pavement into the dark alleyway. My heart beat rapidly and I closed my eyes and slipped my hand into Gabbie’s. I winced, ready for a blow to the face, but none came. I cautiously opened my brown eyes and standing there was a police officer looking puzzled. He gazed down at us and started to mumble something, but then a gunshot pierced the thin air.

“Get away from my daughters!” a drunken voice shouted.

I touched my hand to my face and felt my cool and clammy skin. I sucked in a breath of air, but it would not go through to my lungs. “Breathe, Gema, breathe,” I told myself.

I lay there limp, images blurring my view. I vaguely sensed a crowd around me and I heard faint cries. I closed my eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

The cloth electrified cold into my body. My eyelashes fluttered open and I looked around. There was a smaller bed beside me and there was Gabbie watching *Dora* on the TV beside her bed. Giggles were erupting from her chubby face. I wiped my shaking hand across my clammy face and wiped off beads of sweat that had formed on my skin. A wooden sign on the pale pink walls above my throbbing head read: “Hope of Tomorrow Children’s Hospital and Orphanage.”

No, it can’t possibly be that we are orphans. Daddy must have been shot. I thought as the memories came flooding back. I could not help but let the wall of tears burst out. Gabbie and I . . . we would have no family, no place to call home.

I felt a wave of anger pass over me. “Why? Why?” I sobbed into the blankets spread over me.

This was the end. This was it. This sense of not belonging was all we would ever know.

by Laura Verbeek (Grade Eight)
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