

THE POEMS



FIRST PRIZE

Alien

Inspired by American immigrant detention camps.

I saw an alien today.
It wasn't quite what I expected.
It wasn't your stereotypical alien,
With a bright-green complexion,
Black eyes,
And three reptilian fingers.
No,
What I saw
Was the skeleton of an alien,
A dangerously thin creature
With a bloated beige stomach
And hollow cheeks.
Its sunken eyes were scared;
They darted around
Watching me,
Fearful of me.
It reeked of urine and sweat.
Its vehicle wasn't what I imagined;
The trademark saucer wasn't anywhere to be found.
Its only vehicle was a confining, barred cube,
No more than a metre by a metre.
Its spindly fingers gripped the bars.
The alien looked at me
With wet eyes
And called out for me to help.
I did not answer
Because I did not speak its language.
Socorro!
It cried,
A tongue so foreign yet so familiar.
Socorro!
I turned away from the alien,
And it turned away from me,
But when I tossed an idle glance back at it,
I found that it had only shifted.
The alien had deep gashes
Snaking across its emaciated body,
And you
Would not believe it,
But
It bled,
Just like you and me.
And then, I realized
I was not staring at an alien
But at a human being—
No,
A human child.

by Trinity Svoljsak (15 years)
Grimsby, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

Six Years Later

The first time I set foot on thick white snow,
I was unable to unscramble the unfamiliar letters
On signs that marked the road to my new home,
Where it was a thousand times colder than Shenzhen.
When I went outside for recess at my new school,
I clung onto the only two kids I could speak to,
The only two kids who looked like me.

Six years later,
Downtown, where the snow melts quickly,
I walk down the road to my new school,
Where I read John Green in first-period English.
I go to the art room at recess with my best friend,
Laughing as I draw her with her golden hair,
Scrambling back up the stairs as the recess bell rings,
Passing the Mandarin classroom to go to drama class.

Six years later,
As I speak to my mom about my day,
I catch her frown as I stumble over a word.
When I text my friends after dinner,
They complain, in English, about Chinese school.
While I write in my diary, I almost start doodling in the margins
The few Mandarin words that I still know how to write.

Six years later,
English classics occupy the space on my bookshelf,
Where *Shui Hu Zhuan* and *Hong Lou Meng* used to be.
Every day, I seem to forget a word of the language
That my old self had desperately wanted to keep.
I wonder if I have lost most of my language
Along with the stories—our stories—it celebrated.

Six years later,
A part of me wishes I had continued Chinese school,
Knowing it was impossible because we now live farther south.
While my mother reads Chinese poems to my little sister,
I listen in and try to remember a few verses.
Occasionally I pick up *San Guo Yan Yi* and begin reading,
Using a Chinese dictionary for every other word.
When I visit my relatives in China for summer vacation,
I spend as much time with them as I can,
Savouring the moments where we connect.

Six years later,
Even though I have lost most of my Mandarin,
I am relearning it step by step, little by little,
So that the day it returns to take root in my mind,
The tales,
The memories,
The warmth of a mother tongue
Will return to me as well.

by Grace Liang (13 years)
Toronto, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

children in cardboard

grey puffs in the air,
dust makes pills across pallid cardboard,
things retrieved from hidden spaces;
their only purpose
the physical prompt of memory.
a contrivance of childhood,
it lurks here—
this cardboard box,
first-grade diorama,
with its plasticine mime
of five-year-old wonder,
still holds
my miniature fingerprints,
small hands that worked
with embryonic dexterity,
pinched and pulled life
into that one-colour clay
to give form
the brilliant scape of my imagination.
i withdraw these things
from creaking cupboards,
pull motes of years past
deep into my lungs,
sneeze as my careful, sure fingers
make tracks across my younger mind
and send flecks of light into the air.
seminal hints of who i am
wait in those smiling figures;
to gaze upon them is to step back
into the years that separate me
and that short girl
wild with excited potential
testing the different paths of life
to see which one to take.
after hesitation,
my prosaic phone
creates duplicates
of these cardboard reminders
that mark how i've changed.
i slip the boxes from my room
to join the others in the lane
in a subtle misunderstanding
of what it means to grow up.

by Emily Grabovac (15 years)
Vancouver, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

You Are the Seasons; I Am Changeless

Darling, you remind me of a summer day.
Your light shines everywhere you go.
My skin burns when I get too close.
You smile, I am remorseless.

Darling, you remind me of an autumn day.
Your golden hair bounces when you walk.
My fingers itch to reach out to you.
You laugh, I am helpless.

Darling, you remind me of a winter day.
Your eyes rain tears while you say you're fine.
My heart aches when you admit you're not.
You cry, I am cheerless.

Darling, you remind me of a spring day.
Your downfalls beget your flowering beauty.
My mind is at peace when you are happy again.
You rise, I am breathless.

by Chloe Bailer (15 years)
Courtenay, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Waltzing on the Wind

Our silken locks snagged on the heavy breeze
as we raced the other down those cobbled lanes, swimming in cherry-satin petals
playfully tossed from the bows of blooming spring trees.

Stretching hands hunting the snaking strings of those speckled balloons
that loved to taunt our yearning hearts by
frolicking just out of the reach of our seeking fingertips.

The wind assaulted our faces as if nature itself were urging us to turn back,
but those speckled balloons we could not bear to lose;
too many memories they cherished within their painted plastic shells,
an abundance of untarnished, oblivious joy they dutifully preserved.

They had in mind no method to the madness in which they flew,
no planned destination in which to depart, choosing simply to accompany
whichever gust seemed thrilling enough to carry them.

Mother told us that we had grown too old for such youthful follies,
but those speckled balloons wandered so carefreely through the heavens—
their ignorance to strife a blessing, making their every movement buoyant,
a kind of carefree that in that moment was the only thing we aspired to be.

Which was why we did it
one last time.

A single great soaring leap and the strings were clutched within our fists, and yet
our toes never seemed to find their way back to the cobbles.

Never before had we believed it possible to feel so light, suspended in slow motion
amid the elegant blizzard of fuchsia petals swirling 'round our giggling faces.

So, our speckled companions floated us higher still, until our boulevard was but a pinprick
within the daunting entirety of the world encasing it.

And we imagined the pinprick people gazing up at us in astonishment,
for our speckled balloons were the radiant constellations of daylight—
an assortment of rainbow sweets scattered across the universe for its inhabitants to behold,
alluring enough to pluck out of the sky itself and unwrap to discover the joys hidden within.

We somersaulted with sparrows and lounged across beds of cloud.
We spiralled and pranced through the air with the grace of a pair of drunken ballerinas,
but our atrocious arabesques were of no consequence,
for they were born of pure, flamboyant thrills of elation.

And skyward was the only direction in which we could fly: each puff of air a violin trill
transforming impossibility into reality before our widening eyes.

But, inevitably, our fingers slipped on the thin speckled strings, and the time had come
for us to begin our heavy, heartbreaking descent earthbound.

Sombrely, we sailed to the cobbles, toes alighting upon solid ground
as we released the strings of those speckled balloons
and watched them depart our small boulevard town as if they had never visited at all.

Gravity sucked our feet firmly back to the ground,
and with it, the weight of reality settled upon our once buoyant shoulders.

Staring blankly at each other, for the first time we questioned the tightrope walk
between reality and the impossibly constructed worlds of our own imaginations.

We turned and heavily walked home to Mother
as all those speckled balloons sailed weightlessly in the opposite direction:
reduced to a receding memory,
the strings of which we could never reach for again.

by Shamma Taank (15 years)
Surrey, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Reform

Blank slates
Scratched wood
Walls tell tales of phantom images
Data memorized, stored, edited, deleted
Messy scrawl fills lines of pages

Mouths ready to shoot at dead ends
Air fills with subsiding laughter
Like heavy gates, eyes are held open
Ideas fall to the floor, along with precariously placed pencils
Wasted

Small voices whisper, grow
In alleyways, classrooms, homes
Small slips of stationary are sent
Revolution, change
Action fills the desired blueprint
Words once whispered are called
Messages spread like electricity
Current carefully conducted

Dry air
Bare branches
In its colourful leaves, September carries hope
Separation of dreams and dust
The door finally closes
A tombstone marked
And an era buried

by Achyutha Surukanti (14 years)
Edmonton, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Violin

I can't help but hear
the sound of your violin.
You went to it
after I left.
I can still hear it.
I can only imagine
that playing is stressful,
having everyone constantly
critique your work,
even though you have just begun.
What are you so afraid of?
Perhaps losing us each to our own
strange, distant worlds
in which you do not exist.
You shouldn't fear.
We all return,
and you escape to your own world,
the violin.

by Hannah Brockington (13 years)
Ottawa, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Mountain

Whenever I climbed a mountain,
You were there.
You were my guide, map, and compass,
Guiding me up the slopes.

But this mountain is bigger,
And you're not there.
Without my guide, map, and compass,
I must scale it.

The path is rough and harsh.
I stumble with every step
As the wind lashes at me.

Finally, I have scaled it,
But I have learned
When you scale a mountain,
Even if it seems you're alone,
You never are.

by Bethany Shevalier (13 years)
Montmartre, Saskatchewan

HONOURABLE MENTION

Not in Vain

Though dusk won't settle through night and day,
Onward they fought to seek their prey.
With some lives did they pay,
To fight for our freedom,
The ground on which we stand,
As some with their miseries ended in this very sand.
They fought through fear and pain,
Through sunshine and rain,
But it was not done in vain!
Medals of Honour were received
But could not compare to the loss they grieved.
Though much respect was due,
Left to receive it were few.
We raise this flag of which we are proud,
Declaring our freedom, independence loud
In honour of those who were slain.
It was not done in vain!

by Kyra Mills (12 years)
Aylsham, Saskatchewan

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Fermi Paradox

The night sky tonight was shearly tremendous;
I was able to observe a sea of stars, bright and endless.
One question that tantalized me was “Is there other life out there?”
Then, I started to wonder a bit more, so follow me, if you dare!

Considering that for every grain of sand on Earth, there are 10,000 stars—how staggering!
And out of these stars, there are 500 quintillion stars similar to our sun—how flattering!
And with so many sun-like stars, there must be rocky Earth-like planets and potential for life,
“Where is everybody?” is the question that caused physicist Enrico Fermi and me some strife.

We’ve seen and heard nothing from the abyss of space;
Maybe our technology is unadvanced to pick up any trace.
And with so much potential for life in our universe, the paradox presses on;
It makes me think that we’re so extremely rare and life’s a precious phenomenon.

by Gregory Perri (10 years)
Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Bunny Rabbit

Round tail and twitching nose,
Soft fur down to the toes.
Eyes dart here and there,
Easily can get a scare.

Floppy ears that look so cute,
So quiet it seems on a mute.
Bunnies scampering through the grass,
I love to see them swiftly pass.

I wish I could pet a bunny rabbit,
But it has a cautious habit.
Don't hurt bunnies, let them be,
Because wild rabbits are nice to see.

by Serene Sani Nijanand (9 years)
Oakville, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Antlers

I have big antlers nice and strong.
Love my antlers, they are long.
You may think I'm a moose,
But now a lamb is on the loose.
I better go catch it,
So the farmer doesn't have a fit.
Now you wonder what I am.
My name is Sam,
The caribou that I am.

by Bjorn Bulten (8 years)
Oyama, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Living in the Country

I like to live in the country because it is so quiet.

I like to live in the country because I can wake up to the birds singing and the woodpeckers banging on the trees.

I like to live in the country because I can see bears right outside my window.

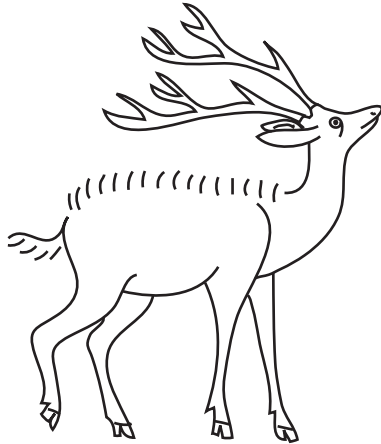
I like to live in the country because you can ride your bike and swim in the lake.

I would not like to live in the city because it is really, really loud and there is more traffic.

I love living in the country!

by Lily Dean (6 years)
Prince George, British Columbia

THE SHORT STORIES



FIRST PRIZE

Celestial Winter

I don't know how long ago it started. It's getting harder to remember the sun, the stars, or the moon. Very few of us survived the initial disaster, and even those who did were permanently scarred. We hardly had enough time to get to somewhere safe. The only safe place . . . underground.

There was a worldwide warning; sirens wailed as they frantically tried to evacuate cities, though nobody knew where they were going. There were a lot of people who initially didn't believe the reports. But by the time they saw they were wrong, it was too late. It was the biggest asteroid ever recorded on a collision course, and it would create an extinction-level event that made the dinosaurs' seem like a firework next to a bomb.

The first thing I remember were the screams. Some ran around frantically; others more like deer in the headlights, staring awestruck at the sky. I followed the gaze of those who were frozen in place, and then I was too, hypnotized by the sight of it. It was only a speck on the horizon but burning brighter than any star at night. I felt a tug on the back of my shirt and managed to tear my eyes away from the flaming ball of death steadily hurtling nearer.

"Come on, Allison! We have to go! Now!" It was my brother, Aiden, panting as he seemed to have run from somewhere.

Our parents weren't far behind him, moving as fast as they could through the frightened, frantic masses. "Grab whatever supplies you can find along the way!" my father said loudly so we could hear him over the noise of the scrambling people.

Before I knew it, we were running at top speed, through alleys and abandoned yards, going whichever way had the least people. Once my brain caught up to my flashing feet, I mustered up enough breath to ask, "Where [pant, pant] are we going?"

My mom responded, panting as well, "To a well-protected underground cave system that we've turned into a survival bunker."

They refused to tell me anything more until we got there. We stopped to take supplies from a small store we found along the way. While our parents went through the place, taking anything that could be useful, Aiden and I sat at the back, catching our breath, with me still trying to wrap my head around what was going on.

"Are you okay?" he asked, snapping me out of my thoughts.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. I-I think so. Do you have any idea where we're going?" I replied.

"I don't know much about our situation other than the fact that there's a giant hunk of space rock heading for us. But I think you might know that already."

"I'm not sure this is the right time for sarcasm," I replied, somewhat comforted by the fact my brother was still able to make light of a bad situation.

Before he could reply, we were whisked out and continued on our way to the bunker. We stopped once more but for barely enough time to catch our breath. By the time we slowed down, the meteor was a huge looming threat, burning brightly enough to hurt the way the sun did if you looked at it for little more than a second.

There were a couple of people outside, and they ushered us in quickly once they saw us. There was enough light spilling into the cave to see by, but it was still very dark, especially compared to the ever-blinding skies outside. A couple of others trickled in before they sealed the entrance.

Although we are among those who were smart enough to seal themselves underground, it doesn't mean it's safe here either. When it struck, the whole world shook, and it led to a new menagerie of disasters. The impact sent enough of the land up into the air to cover the whole planet in dust, ash, and debris as well as cause a chain reaction of earthquakes, eruptions, and tsunamis. All of them worked together to wipe clean the slate that was the world above.

The cloak, as some call it, blocked out the sun, which made the temperature drop tremendously, even underground, causing what we call Celestial Winter. Everything is documented in the little library we have. I don't know how long we'll last down here, but I do hope something gets to see the light again. One day.

—*Saved on my iPad, January 20, 2035*

by Petra Simpson (14 years)
Lee Creek, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Torn

Black clouds started to engulf the sky, creating the illusion of it being night. In the distance there was the low rumble of thunder that was paired with lightning that looked like veins going through the sky. A storm was quickly approaching.

Serena's hair was long and was made up of different variations of orange that closely resembled a tranquil autumn evening's sky. Her hair danced in the increasing winds alongside the wavy, lush mane and tail of her horse. Serena rested atop a magnificent black stallion whose stance showed domination and whose dark eyes gleamed like black opals.

To many, especially Serena's mom, dad, and her few friends, her horse, Inspector, was a savage creature that didn't have the capacity to love, but they didn't understand him the way she did. Their powerful connection, evident after just their first interaction, was still unwavering. Serena gave her entire heart to Inspector.

The two stood in silence on the top of a hill that overlooked green fields and dense forests. The hill was blanketed with delicate fuchsia, lilac, and scarlet flowers. There was a single flower that stood by itself and was as dark as an Alaskan winter. She was drawn to it for the same reason that she was drawn to Inspector; he was quirky and stood proudly despite his obvious differences from the group—just like Serena herself.

Serena had watched the local wild horse herd with her father ever since she could walk; it was a regular activity for the two. She was captivated by the pure power and wildness of the herd. Three years ago, Serena's life had taken a positive turn once she saw that the herd had a new member, a stunning colt. He had a lustrous, solid-black coat and was highly spirited. Serena would sit in pure awe and amusement as she watched him buck around in the fields or lie down and peacefully sleep. She couldn't help it; she instantly fell in love with him. Serena became determined to tame the wild beast by which she was helplessly entranced. Here she was now, her deepest desire a reality, yet something didn't feel right about her triumph.

"Okay, Inspector." Serena found it incredibly hard to grasp what she was about to say. "Are you excited to return to your true home?"

As if responding to Serena's question, Inspector started to become antsy and pawed the ground as he looked out into the distance and watched his family herd. She dismounted Inspector's saddleless back and slowly moved in front of him, her fear seeming to weigh down each step. Serena placed a gentle kiss on his muzzle, and the two connected foreheads. Hot tears rushed down her cheeks, tears that were triggered by the heartbreak and fear that consumed every cell of her now quivering body. Inspector moved his head to rest on Serena's shoulder, and her sobs were muffled by his neck.

All of the moments that the two had shared together rushed back to her mind. Serena would sneak out of her family home at night and sit in the privacy of Inspector's stall and confide in him and receive no judgement. His silent intensity conveyed his deep understanding.

Inspector was once a free-roaming wild colt, and in his heart, he always would be—nothing could extinguish the flame of wildness that was burning within him. A horse as spectacular as him wasn't meant to be locked away in a dusty old barn. He was meant to be running through endless fields of green. He was meant to be *free*.

Serena held onto Inspector and savoured her final moments with him. She knew that he couldn't wait to return to his wild place. With a sudden surge of strength and readiness, Serena let go of him, at least physically.

"I will always love you, Inspector," whispered Serena through heavy tears. "You will always be running through the vastness of my heart."

Inspector took a couple of strides forward and looked back at Serena with eyes that were full of excitement and hesitation. He longed to return to his wild pastures yet didn't want to abandon Serena. She gave him a subtle nod, and he pranced down the hill and occasionally bucked or whinnied. *This is the true Inspector. He is wild and free*, thought Serena to herself. Despite her pain, she knew that she had made the right decision.

by Mya Baxter (15 years)
Hagersville, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

A Forlorn Faery Tale

“Tell me a story, Mama,” the little girl said, her bright gold eyes shining.

Her mother sighed, stroking the girl’s red locks. “It’s getting late, Lorelai.” The woman gave her daughter a reproachful look.

The little girl pouted, her eyes pleading. “*Pleeease*,” she beseeched, dragging the word out. The two stared at each other, but Lorelai remained unwavering.

Pursing her lips, her mother gave in: “Once upon a time, in a kingdom that existed long ago, lived a princess with a thirst for the forbidden. As a child, she was known for wandering into places not meant for a child until her parents finally had enough. They made her and her friends promise not to go anywhere off-limits again. None of them broke that promise for another five years, until the princess’s sixteenth birthday. The girl managed to rope her friends into one final adventure—before the princess had to leave for her betrothed’s kingdom.”

“Betrothed?” Lorelai wrinkled her nose. “*Ew*.”

Her mother laughed gently, before continuing the story: “She had decided she wanted to visit Faerie, the land of Fae and all the other mystical creatures she had heard tales of as a child. They decided to spend a night in Faerie. The small group found their way to the two tall hazel trees marking the entrance to Faerie. But before any of them entered, the princess made each of her friends promise not to eat or drink anything the faeries offered, for mortals who devoured faery food would not be satisfied by anything else ever again. Together, the five friends walked through the shimmering air between the two hazel trees, on one final exploit.”

The woman paused for a moment, a faraway look in her eyes, before speaking again: “They were greeted with a sight too beautiful for words—a faerie gathering. Enthralled by the beauty and allure of the faeries, they approached the gathering of bewitching beings and were instantly welcomed into the wild celebration. She soon lost track of her friends, who were all frolicking beside the lake much farther from where she stood. She contemplated joining them. The urge to dance among the ethereal beings was strong, but if there was one thing she had learned from all those tales, it was that faeries are dangerous. Knowing that, the princess asked the faery swaying beside her to promise that she only had to stay for a day. The faery seemed reluctant but promised the girl that she would only stay for one day in Faerie. Relieved, she allowed herself to join her friends. The princess spent the entire night mingling and dancing with dozens of different faeries. She danced with all sorts of faeries—each more beautiful than the last.”

The girl looked up in wonderment. “That must’ve been wonderful.”

Her mother smiled, continuing the story: “After what seemed like an eternity of dancing, the princess stumbled on top of a hill away from the dancing, the euphoria finally wearing off. She sat there for a while, before she was suddenly pulled to her feet by a golden-eyed faery. He pressed a silver locket into her hand and told her go back to her world, for the faeries were not what they seemed. She inquired about her friends but was met with an ominous answer. They were lost. Horrified, she bolted for the two hazel trees in the distance, fear fuelling her. Along the way, some faery would try to pull her in a dance, before pulling away once they caught sight of the locket in her hand. Leaping between the two trees, she landed in the forest that they had entered Faerie through—except there were now strange people wandering around. Terrified, she frantically asked a passerby about the royal family who lived here. The princess was told that the last monarchy here had ended a century ago. Sinking to the ground, she realized what had happened. The faery had not lied. After all, one night in Faerie could’ve been a century in the mortal realm.”

“That’s it? What about the happily ever after?” Lorelai cried, dismayed.

Her mother smiled sadly. “Not all stories end well, child. Now, go to sleep,” she urged. Turning off the lights, the woman silently exited the house, where she stood under the moon. A lone tear escaped her eyes as she fingered the silver locket around her neck and wondered if, somewhere out there, the friends she had left behind were staring at the same moon in Faerie.

by Cora Shao (11 years)
Vancouver, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Nell, Strangely

One day, exhausted from a long geometry lesson, I accosted my nurse, Emily, and declared I was bored.

“Go visit your cousins.”

“I don’t have any,” I replied.

She slapped a hand over her mouth, as if she’d accidentally cursed. “Never mind,” she muttered, scurrying off.

Intrigued, I decided to question Mother. She was scribbling notes in her study. “Mother,” I asked, “do I have cousins?”

She laid down her pen, shuffled some papers around, picked at a bit of dust on her sleeve. Then, “You do. Who told you—Emily?”

“Yes.”

She sighed. “She needs to learn to keep her mouth shut. Anyway, I never told you because they’re a bad influence.”

“What did they do?”

“Nothing illegal, but—” She paused, seeming unsure what to say. She opted not to finish the sentence and continued, “They’re Aunt Beatrice’s family—the Strangelys. You know . . . in the old black house on Thistleton Street.”

“She has children?” My voice rose in indignation.

“Yes. A boy and girl, I believe.”

That was all I needed. I was out the door before Mother could stop me.

The house was straight from a mystery novel: a great black structure with a spindly turret, rickety-looking patio, and more intricate scrollwork than was strictly necessary. The door bore a note:

*“Solicitors, Realtors, and Charity Workers:
Whatever it is, we’re not interested.”*

I knocked anyway.

There were some reluctant footsteps, then the door was opened by a girl with a sour expression. “We’re not—” she began.

“I’m not a solicitor,” I insisted. “I come from the brown house on Parley Avenue. I’m Nell.”

“Never heard of you.”

“That’s because you shut yourself away and don’t socialize. It might’ve been nice if I’d known I had cousins.”

“I don’t need any cousins. The house is full enough.”

“Bridgit?” A woman appeared behind her. She had familiar blue eyes—Mother’s eyes. This was Aunt Beatrice, mentioned only in passing and excluded from our list of Christmas dinner invitees. “Who’s this?” She turned to me.

“Hello, Aunt Beatrice,” I said. “I’m Nell Hastings.”

Her eyes widened. “Elizabeth’s girl? This is a surprise. I see she’s finally warmed up to us.”

“I don’t think *she* has,” I admitted. “But *I* wanted to meet you.”

She paused, considering. “You can join us for tea, if you’d like.”

I followed her down a carpeted hallway, Bridgit trailing behind.

“It’s lovely to meet you,” said Beatrice. “I wish we could have more visitors, but—”

This was the second unfinished sentence of the day, and I was too curious to ignore it. “But . . . ?”

“I suppose you could call us . . . *eccentric*. That note on the door . . . Bridgit wrote it. More passive-aggressive than I’d wanted, but it’s out of necessity. You’ll see in a moment.”

We emerged into a parlour, where an array of mismatched armchairs crowded about a low mahogany table. More interesting were the people seated there: a little boy with startling green eyes; a man in a scarlet waistcoat, complete with a gold watch chain; and—I blinked, trying to understand it—a girl made of paper, brush-bristle hair tied back with twine, mouth a blot of red wax.

Beatrice noticed my expression and smiled. She addressed the parlour. “Everyone, this is my niece, Nell. Nell, this is—”

“Let me do introductions, Mother. You’ll leave things out. We should get it all over with, so there are no surprises.” Before Beatrice could object, Bridgit began pointing out the room’s occupants. “The boy is my brother, Apollo. He reads the stars, but he’s not very good yet. The man is Julian. He came to our door one day asking what year it was. He claims he’s a time traveller who accidentally got stuck here, but we think he probably hit his head and got confused. He’s staying here until he gets sorted out.”

“I *am* a time traveller!” insisted Julian.

Bridgit ignored him. “And that—” she gestured to the paper girl, voice tinged with pride, “is Sheaf. I made her from my old art supplies and a chemistry textbook.”

I saw now that Sheaf’s dress was covered with headings like *The Atom* and *Static Electricity* and diagrams of beakers and subatomic particles.

The girl gave an inky smile. “It’s true. And I like being a girl far more than being a book.”

I turned to Bridgit. “You . . . made a girl? Just like that?”

“That’s what I said. It takes a lot of practice, but I’ll show you, if you want.”

by Paige Henry (15 years)
Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Flee

Tap. Tap. Tap. The young alien queen sped through the marbled halls of the palace. Her violet hair had almost a crimson tinge to it when the evenly spaced lights on the walls bounced off it. Her yellow-green amphibian-like skin contrasted with her form-fitting blue dress with designs of gold. Her crown was also made of gold and embedded in it were many expensive stones such as rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and some so rare they were nameless. All these riches highly contrasted with the small ragged bundle in her delicate arms. This bundle was so caked with dirt and other substances it was impossible to know what its original colour was.

She rounded the corridor and was about to slip behind a hidden passage concealed by a delicate and shimmering tapestry made of an alien silk. She knew a servant would be waiting just inside and would take the bundle as far away as possible. A sudden, commanding voice made her stop. She quickly moved the cloth behind her back and turned to face the owner of the voice.

“My queen, there you are. I was looking all over for you.”

The woman forced a smile as she looked at the green face of her husband, King Rachan. He was garbed with even more gold and riches than she. His sky-blue hair was filled with many beads, trophies of his many slaughters. His royal purple cape swirled all around him and his navy-blue suit. The amount of gold, silver, and other precious metals and stones decorating his clothes could almost blind anyone who stared at him too long. And around him stood two of his deadliest guards. He stepped forward, his sickly smile showing his sharp teeth.

“My dearest Navta, what do you have there?” He took another step, his guards also following, “Why are you hiding it? It wouldn’t be a present, would it?”

Navta looked at him straight in his four eyes. “Why, however, did you guess? I was just going to give it to my servant to hide till your birthday,” she lied. Her smile didn’t waver as she tried to keep down the bile rising from her stomach.

Rachan suddenly let out a harsh laugh that made her shiver. He took another step, and the guards raised their deadly poison-tipped spears. “My dear, beautiful wife. How lovely! But I get this feeling you aren’t telling me the truth. You wouldn’t be lying, would you?” His voice still held a tone of slight amusement, but he almost spat out the word “lying.”

Navta shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

“Then show it to me,” Rachan commanded, all pretence of niceties gone.

The queen shook her head once more. “You-you would spoil the surprise!” she stammered, taking another step back, almost touching the wall now.

Rachan growled, and Navta gulped.

In an instant, she twirled around, sweeping the tapestry of herself aside, and handed the rags to the waiting aqua-skinned boy. “Run,” she whispered, and her indigo eyes widened as the spear thrown by a guard pierced her torso, orange blood splattering the dyed cloth of her dress and portrait. The boy took a millisecond to nod then turned and ran as fast as his young legs could carry him.

King Rachan groaned as he heard the pattering of footsteps running away from the corpse of his bride. He took the last remaining steps to the dead Navta and pushed her body aside. “Go after them!” he commanded, pointing down the passage. “I want that human baby dead!”

The male and female rushed by him, the female already grabbing another spear from her back. Rachan shook his head, muttering the word, “Useless,” under his breath. He had almost exterminated the pathetic human race—all that was left was that revolting child his own queen had risked her life to save. He almost felt sorry for killing her. She was his favourite wife he’d had in at least a century.

He walked off towards his throne room to await the confirmation of the baby’s death. Nothing could stop him from conquering the galaxy, especially not a defenceless infant. Nothing could stop his purge of that filth. Ever since his first family had been murdered in a peace treaty negotiation by human terrorists, he swore he would destroy them all. Every. Last. One. And he would continue to kill and remarry till he filled that void in his chest.

by Sierra White (15 years)
Rich Valley, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Good Side

Standing on the balcony, I witness a sea of civilians congregating below me. It's awfully humid outside today, along with the peculiar distant scent of blood. Everything seems so surreal, almost as if it all happened overnight. Technically, it did for some of us, but now we're aware of the countless lives dedicated to the revolution over the past few decades. They claim to be a "new and free Kavlikiva" and state they'll "free us from the tyrannical dictatorship by instilling peace and stability through democracy," but I don't believe a word of it.

I set my mind back to my original intention, which is to find my little brother, whom I had sent to the market to collect our weekly allotment of meat. The moment he left the door, I immediately started worrying and regretting my hastily thought out decision. The potential repercussions begin to dawn on me: *My parents are going to kill me! What if he never makes it out? What if—?* I stop myself from continuing the thought and remind myself that if I can find him, nothing will happen, and no one will ever know about it. I sigh and head downstairs. *There's no way I'm ever going to be able to spot him in the crowds of seemingly millions, but what if. . . I can conquer the masses and go out to look for him on my own?* I'll probably get trampled like a gazelle in a herd of buffalo, but it is the only idea I have, and I need to get to him quickly, before anything happens.

I grasp my hand around the brass handle and mentally brace myself. *It's now or never*, I think to myself as I take a deep breath and push the door open.

Immediately, I am hit with a wave of uncertainty. It seems to be a thousand degrees yet on the verge of raining, and the whole scene is utter chaos. Nearly everyone is screaming or yelling a barely audible chant as they slowly move towards the downtown core. Others exit their buildings to see what is happening or to join the masses themselves. I feel as if I've been engulfed in complete anarchy and begin to lose my sense of direction.

"Jacob!" I call out. "Jacob! Jacob, please! It's Katarina!" I scream at the top of my lungs, again to no response. It's no use; my cries are drowned by the noise of the crowd. I can barely hear my own thoughts. I spot a little blonde head bobbing in the crowd in my peripheral, and my heart skips a beat. *Could it be. . . ?*

A tall, thin man with slick black hair crashes into me, resulting in me nearly falling over. "Watch where you're going, little girl!" he shouts over his shoulder as he is swept away in the mob. Knowing the directions to the market by heart, I—slowly but surely—begin to make my way through the crowded streets.

I arrive at the market, panting, with my hands on my knees. At least the market is in the opposite direction of the bustling city, further out towards the rural farms. After searching the market, yelling, "Come on, Jacob! Where are you? Come here!" In my head, I come to the conclusion, *Jacob is gone*, and it hits me like a wall. I collapse on the stone-cold ground from both exhaustion and disappointment with myself and begin to bawl my eyes out.

"K-Katarina?" I hear a boy's dreary voice, startling me. I jump to my feet and—recognizing my younger brother—embrace him. "There's not much time, Katarina. Mommy and Daddy must be with the rest of them," he murmurs out before I can muster the courage to explain myself.

"I promise I will never leave you again, Jacob. You hear me? We'll find Mom and Dad, and everything will be all right." I give him a weary smile.

Finding the crowd is as hard as finding a tsunami that just hit your city. My ears begin to ring again as we start to approach the revolutionaries, who have now filed into the city square with a makeshift stage at the centre. Seemingly important people (possibly pioneers of the revolution) step up to the podium, while the ensuing chaos calms. As I listen to the speeches and the chants, I am slowly convinced. *We will find my parents eventually, but for now, we are the revolution. We are the good side.*

by Kaedan Yu (13 years)
Brampton, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Invasion

A week has passed since the meteor struck in Washington, DC. A giant crater is all that's left of it. It happened so suddenly, no one really knew what to do. Washington, along with a few neighbouring cities, has now been deemed uninhabitable due to excessive radioactive material. Hundreds of thousands of people have died.

Lex read the news with utter disbelief. Lex thought about the incident and was pretty sure that meteorites weren't radioactive. He thought it was pretty weird and couldn't seem to get his mind off it.

For the next few days, he tried to forget about it, but he became curious and started to do some research. He found some theories stating that Washington had been nuked and multiple others claiming that aliens had invaded Earth, both of which he highly doubted, as America was basically a global superpower that every other country was afraid of and no sign of extraterrestrial life was found within or near the crater.

Yeah, it may be the year 2088, but no aliens have been discovered yet other than the ones supposedly moved to Area 52 after Area 51 had been raided. So, what was it that made the meteor radioactive? He found out soon after.

A week had passed, and the American government was already in new hands. Aliens had indeed invaded Earth, and the radioactive material was in fact alien dust from which they formed, which basically made them invincible, since if you killed them, they would just reform. The only way to kill them was with powerful lasers beams, something that humans still didn't have yet.

Lex and his family had quite enough of them after they stormed into their home and took most of their valuables. They and a few close friends decided that they were going to strike back, but how? His mother suggested that they steal some laser blasters from the aliens and replicate them. Then, they would form an army and use the blasters to destroy the aliens. But first, where could they get the blasters? And how?

For the next few days, the group split up and scouted New York City and found half a dozen storage houses that contained blasters. One by one, they raided them and got their hands on about forty blasters in total. Next, a secret weapons group run by the republic replicated them. Finally, they spread the word that they were armed and ready to battle, and that's what brought them here.

The army was ready and was preparing to attack the aliens' headquarters. Everything was going as planned until . . . *boom!* An explosion rocked the ground, followed by two more. Everyone scrambled to get their weapons ready, but before they could, aliens rushed out and assaulted them.

Many people were dying, but Lex knew that they still outnumbered the aliens, so he grabbed his weapon and started blasting away at the aliens. Then, once he saw a clear path into the base, he and a couple of handfuls of people rushed inside. There, they were greeted by more aliens rushing outside, whom they blasted away.

But the wave of aliens didn't seem to have an end. It seemed as if for every alien killed, there was one to replace it. Sticking together, the group decided to go deeper into the facility, shooting at aliens around every corner. Eventually, they found they were spawning from a portal, which they took down by throwing a grenade into it.

Lex thought they had finally put an end to that, but the next thing he knew, two more portals appeared. As even more aliens flooded the room, the group had no choice but to retreat. As they were leaving, Lex decided to create a diversion. He led the aliens down a flight of stairs and into the basement, which contained the energy core for the base.

As Lex tried to go from the other exit, more aliens came in and surrounded him. Since he couldn't escape, he decided to risk his life for all the others and shot the energy core, which exploded into a giant ball of fire and consumed the entire base. The portals were instantly destroyed, and the remaining aliens were burned to crisps. The remaining people cheered, and that was the last of the aliens.

The following day was Lex's funeral, which was attended by his family and the remaining army. All recognized him as the true hero.

by Kevin Yang (13 years)
North York, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

A World of Dreams

I woke up to the usual constant roar of car engines outside my bedroom window. It overlooked the city—an everlasting expanse of ugly grey skyscrapers, fluorescent signs, and humans living in a place so congested that it clogged up nature’s beauty.

“*Urrgh*,” I groaned and rolled out of bed for another day of endless, unstimulating office work.

I fetched the newspaper on the doorstep and took a deep breath. The air reeked of car exhaust and fast food. It made my stomach churn. Back in the kitchen, I slapped the newspaper onto the table and began brewing some coffee. Its scent was dull from sitting in a package too long. I tried to imagine it as freshly ground coffee, but it was too far off for me to even pretend that liquid was fresh.

For breakfast, I pulled a plain doughnut out of the fridge and fried it until both sides sizzled. It looked all right on the pan, but I knew it had been sitting on the shelf in the gas station for a long time. It was better fried but not like freshly deep-fried. Those would be delectable, only I can’t afford them.

Yup. So, here I am, jammed in the heart of a city, drinking instant coffee and having stale doughnuts for breakfast. Fantastic.

I unrolled the newspaper, took a bite of my coffee-dunked doughnut, and began flipping through the pages. A certain advertisement caught my eye. It read: “Bored with your life? Ready for a change? Escape to a place personally customized for you! Just drive fifteen minutes in any direction while thinking of where you want to go. Don’t believe it? Give it a try!”

This might mean I’m gullible, but I couldn’t resist. I called my work office, claiming I was ill, then hopped into my car and drove randomly around the city for fifteen minutes. I wondered how I’d never accidentally gone to my “personally customized place” before, but with sudden realization, I noticed that every time I get in the car, I have a destination. Every single time. That’s why I found driving around randomly like this to be so difficult.

With two minutes of driving left, the city around me lifted like supernatural fog, and then the most breathtaking transformation occurred right before my eyes. The apartment buildings were replaced by tall pine trees and the buildings and warehouses became thick underbrush. Soon, all the people walking briskly down the sidewalk morphed into wild animals, and the smoothly paved road I drove down turned into a rough dirt path winding through northern forests.

I watched elk stroll proudly through the trees while the red squirrels chattered from above. I caught sight of a bear lumbering away from me once, too. I was so appalled and so pleased that I never wanted this moment to end.

Then, it got better. At exactly fifteen minutes from when I left, I came to a glossy wooden sign that read, “Cozy Cub’s Cabins by Sprucewater Lake.” I pulled into a small parking lot and stepped out of the car. A glorious sun rose in the brilliant blue sky, shining down on a glassy lake. I gulped in the fresh, brisk air that made the stinky city air seem deathly toxic.

I saw a cute waterfront café and couldn’t resist entering. The sign above the cedar door read, “Cozy Cub’s Café” and had a detailed carving of a grizzly bear cub next to the welcome mat. Inside, the café smelled of warm maple syrup and freshly cut cedar logs. I took a seat next to the window overlooking the lake, daydreaming of how nice it would be if that were the view from my bedroom window.

A friendly, dimpled woman brought me a mug of rich, dark, and deeply flavourful coffee along with a plate of plain doughnuts with soft insides and crispy outsides. It was all affordable here, even the cabins, so I booked one for a month.

This place, from the way their food tasted to the way the loons called in the early morning, really was my dream home.

Suddenly, the roar of the cars’ engines stirred in my mind, and my vision began to change. The forest, lake, and café faded away to darkness, and I opened my eyes.

There I was in my normal home in the city, rolling out of bed for another day of endless, unstimulating office work. But now, I was inspired.

by Megan Kilby (12 years)
Godfrey, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Curse of the Diamond

Inspired by the mythology surrounding the Hope Diamond.

The curse had begun with being given the day off.

I had rushed into the laboratory, heading to my office when my boss intercepted me and told me to go home, assuring me that I would be covered. He ushered me out the door and told me to take a day to relax before my business trip to China. I left quickly, my brisk pace taking me to my car in a matter of seconds.

Finally, I arrived at my apartment. Fumbling with my keys, I proceeded to unlock my mailbox, as I did every day before heading inside. Peering inside, I pulled out a lumpy package. It was addressed to Gillian Rafen in beautiful cursive. Entering the apartment, I opened the package, unveiling another, albeit smaller, package.

My heart pounded against my chest. I hadn't ordered anything online recently, had I? Unwrapping the package, I gasped. Inside lay the largest diamond I had ever seen. It must've easily been worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Despite the warm air, I shivered.

I couldn't shake the feeling that the diamond was not just a harmless gift; after all, who had that kind of money?

The day of my flight came and went. I rushed around the apartment, gathering last-minute items that I might need during my trip. I grabbed a handful of items off the mantel in my efforts to get my phone and stuffed them all in my purse. As I rushed down the stairs, I grinned; I was ready for my journey.

Six hours into the flight to China, the plane dropped. My stomach plummeted, and my neck thrashed backwards. Pain erupted in my neck, and I clenched my teeth to hold in a scream. I must've hurt it badly. Every shift we felt during the turbulence was agonizing. Pain coursed through me and white dots danced across my vision. It lasted twenty-five minutes—too long to be natural. Finally, we arrived at the Chinese airport. Shaken passengers from the flights were rushing around everywhere, which made it difficult to spot my guide; however, I managed to navigate through the mess and find him. My top priority was to seek medical attention, so we went to the nearest hospital to see what was wrong.

Two hours later, I left just as sore but with a diagnosis: a pulled neck muscle. The doctor told me that any more tension on it would've torn the muscle, which could have ended extremely badly. Despite how much pain I was in, I was forced to head off to the meeting immediately.

Inconveniently, this conference centre was across the tip of the Gobi Desert. They used the desert to enhance ancient discoveries, but the heat was sweltering. Soon, I was sweating buckets.

We were in the car for hours, driving through the sandy terrain. I wiped my brow. We still were only halfway, and suddenly, the car groaned and lurched forward. The hood poured smoke, and we stopped dead. The car seemed to have broken down. My heart leapt to my throat. We had no supplies.

My phone battery was almost dead. I needed to call emergency services, but I didn't know what the number is in China, and I couldn't speak Chinese. In one last attempt for help, I called my boss. He was well connected everywhere, so he may have someone in China who could come to help us. I told him this and asked him desperately if he could help. Before he could answer, or I could even tell him our location, his voice cut out abruptly. I frowned and looked at the screen. My hopes plunged into despair. The phone was dead. My guide was no help whatsoever; his phone had no battery either.

Desperately, I rummaged through my purse in case I had anything of use to us. Suddenly, my hand closed around something hard and cold. I froze. Slowly, I lifted my hand and opened my fist, revealing the diamond that I had received. Had I grabbed it accidentally in my rush to make my flight?

Suddenly, my geoscientific instincts kicked in. *An extremely large, deep-blue diamond . . . which carries a deadly curse.* Slowly, I turned the diamond in my hands. Confirming my worst fears, engraved elegantly on the silver plating on the back in an ancient Indian dialect, the French language, and English, read:

“The Hope Diamond, from the collection of Lord Francis Hope.”

by Kaitlyn Stevens (12 years)
Mono, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Bull Runs of Down Under

You know that it is going to be a terrible day when you wake up on a Saturday morning to find an envelope that most likely contains your heavily descriptive report card stating your failures in school, no glass of water beside your bed (which probably means that your parents went out), nineteen messages from your friend, and your dog slobbering saliva all over your face.

I pushed my dog off my face, which is really difficult considering the fact that my dog is an overstuffed husky with no athleticism in him whatsoever.

I follow a daily routine, though sometimes, when my parents are out, I add a slight change to it. Sometimes it includes eating leftovers from yesterday's dinner for breakfast, instead of my normal toast garnished with three pounds worth of fruit. Occasionally, I go out on my scrap of metal, also known as my ancient bike, which for some odd reason is considered a family heirloom, to my little shack located in the forest about four kilometres from my house. I don't do much in this shack: sometimes read a few comics, play games on my phone, sleep, eat junk food from my stash under my daybed, and play with my pet kiwi bird, Kauri, and my dog, Kawaii.

I was in my shack, just relaxing, when I heard this weird honk, followed by a squeak, and then a chorus of elongated bellows. I got off my daybed and was going to go outside to see where all the racket was coming from, but unfortunately for me, the back of my shack was trampled by three bulls that started chasing me. My adrenaline went up, and I quickly picked up Kauri, slapped Kawaii to wake him up, and dashed out the door as fast as I could, my feet crunching on the fallen leaves.

You might have heard of bull runs in Pomplana, Spain. Well, this was like in Pomplana, but this time, the runner—*me*—had to avoid roots, branches, tree trunks, and the occasional hiker staring at me wondering whether I was mentally stable.

I broke out of the forest screaming like a chimpanzee, hoping someone would help me. My screaming seemed to have startled a baby, because the baby started crying a lot. The baby then woke up a dog, which started howling, which made other dogs howl, and then—well, you get the point. I knew right away that these people couldn't help me because they started hollering at me for disturbing them. So, I decided that I was the only one who could get me to safety.

I remembered a video I watched about bullfighting where a person uses a red cape, and the bull goes after it. There were no capes nearby, so I improvised. Instead of a cape, I pulled off a red shirt from a clothesline and chucked it behind me. That was when I learned the internet had failed me. Instead of going after the shirt, the bulls got even wilder and chased after me with short and repetitive grunts.

I was starting to get panicky from all this grunting. So, I decided I should threaten them. I was running through a small alley when I saw, just fifty metres ahead of me, a barbecue. I ran as fast as I could, picked up the closest piece of meat I could find, and revealed it to the bulls. Even though I was pretty sure it was chicken, I pointed at the grass grazers and then pointed at the meat. The bulls must have realized that I was threatening them, but in the wrong way. They probably thought that I was showing them the meat of one of their friends, so they charged at me. I just managed to dodge those horns, but then I tripped and fell into a pool. The bulls decided that going into the water wasn't a good idea, so they trotted away and started eating grass.

A while later, a person came running up to me and said, in an apologetic way, "Sorry about that! My company was transporting animals for the upcoming autumn fair, but then a cage toppled, releasing the bulls into the forest. Here is a little toy, which makes random animal sounds, for compensation."

He passed me a tiny tablet-like object with a button, and when I pressed it, there came a recognizable mooing sound. So, I screamed and chucked it as far as I could into the pool.

by Aayush Chakraborty (12 years)
Surrey, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Darkest Night

It was the day the moon fell from the sky.

I lay on my bed, awake from my brother's shouting in his room next door. Apparently, he was playing a video game. I finally decided, *I can't sleep anymore*. I swung my legs off the bed and stood up. My alarm clock said it was 1:37 a.m. I shuffled to my brother's room to tell him to cool it with the shouting and the volume. Then, there was a huge noise outside our window. My eardrums felt as if they were dead. Another moment later, a huge vibration. The windows broke, and the walls and the ceiling started cracking. I ran inside the doorway of my brother's room. I stood under the door frame: Earthquake 101.

After what seemed like a millennium, the vibration stopped. My brother was looking outside the window. His mouth was open in an O. His face looked stunned. I followed his gaze outside the window. I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. Outside was the most horrible thing I ever saw in my life.

It was the moon. I could tell it was the moon because I got all As in my space unit in school. The moon had giant holes and dips. I ran outside into the cool night air.

When I ran outside, it was pitch black. There was no light. It was probably the darkest night any human being has seen. Under the dim glow of uncrushed houses and street lamps, I saw the moon had moved a millimetre of a millimetre. Then, it rolled . . . down the hill . . . right on top of the electricity tower.

Everyone held their breath. The way that the moon rolled crushed the entire city. The people who were out of reach of the moon were very lucky. The tower made a loud cackling noise and spurts of oil came from beneath the moon. I could barely see in the darkness, but I could see the way the tower shut down slowly. Then, there was a small flame, licking the cool surface of the moon. We all stared. The flames grew bigger and bigger until the moon was engulfed in the flames. It was a conflagration.

The people started screaming and running away from the huge ball of flames. They ran into their vehicles and drove as far away from the burning moon as they could.

I ran back inside our house and found my parents and my brother. We took as much stuff as we could. I could hear the chaos outside. People were screaming and shouting. Something that was almost hilarious was that the firefighters were trying to put out the ball of fire.

I went to the front door and opened it. A wave of heat blew inside our house, and our furniture started catching on fire. I felt as if I had been stuck in a working oven. I ran outside and ran away from our house. I kept running until I felt cool night air again.

I stopped to catch my breath. I turned around. No one was behind me. *Where is my family? Did I run too far?* I walked back a few steps. I could only see flames rising into the night sky. It was as if the sky were on fire. I stared, mesmerized. I walked back a few more steps. I kept walking until I could feel heat burn my skin again, but that was the worst decision of my life.

The flames exploded, and I felt myself flying through the air.

I saw darkness.

When I opened my eyes again, I saw a blue sky. I blinked. *Am I dreaming?* I held my hand in front of my face. Then, I pinched myself. *Okay, I am not dreaming*. I put my hand back on the ground. *No, wait. The ground isn't soft, but whatever I am lying in is soft*. I looked sideways. I was lying on grass! I sat up and looked around.

"About time you were awake." A man suddenly appeared behind me. *Where had he come from?* It was grass as far as I could see in every direction.

"Who are you?" I asked him.

"Well, it doesn't matter. Do you know where you are?" he asked.

I shook my head no. Shaking my head was the second-worst decision I had ever made.

Whatever he said next made me freeze and scream. He said, "You are in heaven."

by Annora Wu (12 years)
Maple Ridge, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Is the Monster Real?

There are legends about the terrifying monsters that sleep above your bed, waiting to pounce on you—the indescribable horrors that will stop at nothing to devour you, if by chance they find you. As I lie under the bed, thinking about this, I feel the shiver passing from the end of my tail, up my spine, and through my spikes to my head. I tremble, my teeth clattering, as I hear the unmistakable soft footsteps of the monster climbing up the stairs and crawling up on the bed.

The bigger one reads a story about three pigs and a wolf to the little one. The wolf tries to eat the pigs the way the monsters want to eat me; I have to be careful not to make noise. I can make out the conversation between the small monster and what seems to be his mother. The little one asks the bigger one to check for monsters under his bed. As soon as I hear that, I dive into my hiding space.

In my rush to get there, my sharp teeth graze my forked tongue, so I let out a small growl. I can feel the little one diving under the covers when he hears that, so the bigger one turns on a flashlight and shines it under the bed. The blinding light is overwhelming, so I lift my paws to cover my eyes. I can't think of what they will do to me if I am caught. So, I hold my breath, staying as silent as possible.

Finally, after what seems like an eternity, the flashlight turns off. The bigger one says to the little one, "You see, there are no such things as monsters."

But then, who—no, what are the things sleeping above me?

I try to fall asleep, but I can't. So, I just close my eyes. I twist and turn, flailing, trying desperately to go to sleep. I lash my tail around, shaking my head and growling. Finally, I decide to open my eyes as I obviously can't sleep. Bad choice.

I find myself staring into a pair of huge, brown eyes. He was checking under his bed for me, probably since I had made a lot of noise. I scream as the monster lets out a high-pitched roar. The monster tumbles onto the floor as I try to get away quickly. This is my nightmare. I've been trying not to let them find me. But now they have, so the only option left is to run.

My claws dig into the floorboard as I run out, not looking at where I am running. I bump into the monster. We scream simultaneously, "Please don't eat me!"

I'm confused. *We don't eat the monsters; they eat us.* So, I reply before I can stop myself: "We don't eat you. You eat us." *Great, now it's probably going to eat me.* We scream again.

The monster says, in his high-pitched voice, "But you do eat us, you're a monster. And we don't eat you either."

Frankly, I am quite relieved at the fact that he is not going to eat me. But I am still confused and scared at the same time. We both don't know what to say, so we don't speak.

The awkward silence between us gives me time to analyze the monster. He has a patch of yellow fur on the top of his head. His eyes are larger than normal—and he has two instead of one. His legs are long, his arms are long . . . he looks different but not too scary. Actually, I don't think we are really that scared of each other anymore.

We hear footsteps approaching, probably the bigger one. He dives into his bed as I crawl into my hiding space.

The bigger one opens the door and comes in, walks over to the bed and asks, "What was all that screaming about?"

Uh-oh, they're going to find out. Luckily, I still have my escape plan; it's good that they're not really that scary. And also that they won't eat me—I hope.

"It was a monste—" he paused. I listen, surprised. "Uh, actually, it was nothing, I just had a nightmare." And I felt, even for a tiny moment, a friendship.

Well, I guess monsters aren't real, so . . . what about the other monster? That evil stuffed bundle of horror called Stuffed Animal? Is it real? Well, what I don't know about can hurt me!

by Grace Zhu (11 years)
Markham, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Super Guinea Pigs

Once upon a time, there were three guinea pigs that loved to play in the fields. The first guinea pig had a brown, cone-shaped face and a bright-peach body with dark-brown spots. His name was Jeff. The second guinea pig was black, light brown, and white. He had a circular face, and his name was Billy. The third guinea pig had a similar body to Jeff and had white and mocha all over him. His name was Snoopy.

The three of them were playing in the fields, running around squealing with joy.

“Tagged you!” Billy said.

“Did not!” Snoopy replied.

“Calm down, guys. It’s time for dinner,” Jeff squeaked.

“Yum!” Snoopy squealed in excitement.

As the three of them scurried to their little rocky home, Billy asked, “What’s for dinner?”

“Lettuce and carrot stew,” Jeff said.

“Oh,” Snoopy said.

When they started drinking their stew, they all said, “Too hot!” They all decided to leave their stew on the side of the rock to cool down. While they waited, Jeff started paying taxes, and Billy and Snoopy started playing Connect Squeak. Doing all these activities made them forget all about their stew.

Suddenly, a lightning bolt and rain came out of nowhere. Snoopy let out a big *squeak!* and jumped onto Billy. This reminded them of their stew. They all rushed outside!

When they started drinking their stew, they said, “*Ahhh*, just right.”

But what they didn’t know was that the stew had been electrocuted. Even Snoopy said, “The stew tastes funny.”

Jeff said, “You must have eaten something else before because I don’t taste anything!”

After dinner, they went to bed and fell fast asleep, each one snoring louder than the other.

When Jeff woke up, he tripped on a table and . . . he started levitating! He thought he was dreaming, so he pinched himself, but nothing happened; he was playing with his powers for ten minutes until he heard a loud *squeak!*

Jeff flew straight to Billy’s room and saw how there was a hole in the ground! “What—!” Jeff squeaked.

“I don’t know what happened either!” Billy replied.

“Wait, if I can fly, Billy can make holes, then . . . Snoopy?”

They both dashed to Snoopy’s room, but Snoopy was still sleeping. “*Hhhaaahhh*,” Jeff said in relief.

“You said you could fly?” Billy asked Jeff.

“I’ll tell you later,” Jeff said.

That’s when Snoopy woke up. “Why are you guys in my room?” Snoopy asked.

“Just come over here!” Jeff said.

“Okay,” Snoopy said.

“Hey, Snoopy, can you give me that marker?” Billy asked.

“Sure.” Snoopy threw the marker at the wall, making a giant dent and almost hitting Billy.

“Why would you do that?” Billy screamed.

“I didn’t mean to!” Snoopy cried.

“It must be superpowers!” Jeff squeaked.

“Super wha—?” Billy said.

“Come meet me at the table in the dining room.”

They talked for ten minutes because Snoopy didn’t know what was going on. “For the last time, I have flying powers, Billy can melt holes in the ground, and you have strong muscles,” Jeff said.

Billy was bored, so he plopped down on the couch and started watching TV. The news reporter, Gary Guinea Pig, said there was a robbery at the bank on Guinea Street. Jeff jumped up with a crazy idea. “What if we stop the bank robber with our new powers?” Jeff exclaimed.

“Are you insane?” Billy replied. “We have superpowers, but we are not immortal!”

“You’re right . . .,” Jeff said sadly.

“All police guinea pigs have been injured trying to take him down,” Gary Guinea Pig explained.

“Well, we have to go now!” Snoopy said.

“Yeah, let’s go!” Jeff said, running very quickly.

“Fine,” said Billy nervously. They discussed their plan on the way to the bank.

Jeff was outside waiting, Snoopy was on the second floor, and Billy was on the first floor. The robber finally came onto the first floor, and Billy, acting fast, burned a hole to make the robber fall down to the second floor, where Snoopy was. When Snoopy saw the robber, he grabbed pipes from under a sink and tied them around the robber. He was struggling to get out, but he couldn’t. Snoopy gave the robber to Jeff, and he flew the robber to the nearest prison. He would be kept there for a long time. This was only the beginning of an adventure with Jeff, Billy, and Snoopy—the Super Guinea Pigs!

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