

FIRST PRIZE

A Ray of Hope

Lina sat in despair, staring out from her plane seat. Within an hour her wonderful life had changed entirely. Lina had known her foster family was struggling with money; however, when they told her this morning she would no longer be living with them due to financial reasons, she had been surprised. Her friends, her house, and the wonderful feeling of family were slipping away from her. Overcome by sadness she turned her head from the window. Then the plane took off and she stared forward, willing herself to not look back.

She didn't know where she was going, nor did she care. This was a different sadness she had never experienced before. *Sadness*, she thought as she closed her eyes.

In her sleep she dreamt of her first memory of sadness. *Dark clouds filled the sky as the sound of thunder echoed through the streets. A flicker of lightning was spotted. Hundreds of lightning bolts met her eyes as a single bolt reflected in all the windows. For a split second the air was illuminated with a large flash, and then the darkness returned. She heard the sound of thunder again, repeating over and over right before the familiar flash of lightning. She saw people stare out of their windows; faces full of shock. She could hear the sounds of dogs barking. The streets were barren as everyone hid from the quick heavy rain—everyone except for her. She felt alone and unprotected. Suddenly, she started to see light, not quite surrounding her yet, but off in the distance. As the sun began to seep through the dark clouds a feeling of hope began to build up inside her. Finally, surrounded by sunlight she had walked away knowing everything was going to be all right.*

As simple as it may seem she had never forgotten that moment—that moment when she had felt as if anything could happen. As she awoke that same feeling of hope began to build up inside her and she knew everything was going to be fine. *Now is the storm and tomorrow is the sunshine*, she told herself. She did not know what lay ahead, but she knew the storm couldn't last forever.

Suddenly the plane landed. *Sunshine*, she told herself, *it's time for the sunshine*. Then she closed her eyes and stepped out of the plane.

by Hannah Vanderzwet (Grade Six)
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FIRST PRIZE

My Brother

Salty tears rolled down my cheeks as my hair was blown across my face. The frigid wind numbed my hands, but I no longer cared. I stared down at the wreckage of what was once my home. Wood and metal lay scattered all over the ground at my feet while my eyes searched for my brother. But all I could see were people screaming, people shouting, people crying. I ran, pushing and shoving, as desperation clawed at my throat. I shouted his name, “Dan! Dan!” over and over again, but my voice was lost in the sounds of sirens and shrieking.

Many figures lay on the ground, eyes closed. I pushed the thought of a little boy, dead, out of my mind. Of course, that wouldn’t happen. I would find him. I wouldn’t give up. I searched for hours and hours. Finally, the firefighters and police cars arrived, helicopters hovering, sirens blaring. I ran over to the nearest cop car and shouted, “Where is my brother? Where is Dan?” But nobody heard me. Everyone else was screaming, too, hoping to find a lost relative or friend.

I turned and ran again, my heart pounding in tune with my footsteps. Every time I saw a young boy, I’d run up to him, only to be disappointed once again. My eyes stung with tears, and all I saw was a blur of colours. Rescuers and survivors alike ran amok, but nothing seemed to register in my brain, except that I had to find him. I was all he had, nobody else would take care of him, nobody else loved him.

The roaring wind blew debris around in the air as the evening sky darkened. The firefighters had built a few large shelters, where many people were taking refuge. I frantically searched the faces in the crowd of people, looking for a very familiar one. I kept telling myself I was going to find him, alive and well, but I didn’t really believe it. I had run around and around in circles, my breath coming out in white puffs. My lungs were burning, and my legs were shaky. I’d begun to cry hysterically.

Finally, I stumbled into a shelter and sank to the floor, trembling. I had lost the only family I had. I failed to protect him, though I swore I would when our parents passed away. I was a failure.

That’s when I saw him. The boy looked just like my brother, wandering around the edges of the canopy shelter. I didn’t even realize I’d stood up, until I was standing right in front of him. I swept him into a hug, weeping. “Dan!”

by Sophia Liu (Grade Seven)
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FIRST PRIZE

A River of Life

“How much longer until we are allowed onto the battlefield?” My quadrant still had not participated in any of the action since this war began, and we were all anxious to paint our swords red.

“We shouldn’t have to wait for too long now,” my commander grumbled as a messenger from the king cantered over, very nearly trampling several soldiers with his horse in his urgency. I was jostled back into my position, which we had been holding for two hours on standby. We began to march, nervously shifting our swords and shields.

After much groaning and stomping, we reached our hidden position on the enemy’s right flank. If all went well, those attacking from the left flank would drive the enemy right into our ambush. I was near the front of our miniature army and my commander was becoming agitated. Reverberating screams from across the enemy army provided no comfort to our cramped infantry.

An enemy spy slithered through the snow-dusted brush until I stepped out of line and cut him down. But his agonized scream revealed our position to the world. My commander stepped forward and onto the field, calling us from our relative safety and onto the saturated red and slushy field almost immediately.

We ran out just in time to watch him fall, his blood running in rivulets from a gash in his side. In the ensuing confusion, nobody in our quadrant was capable of giving orders. So I hollered, “Retreat” as loudly as I could into the chaos. Most of the group ran, though the stragglers were hacked down and the brave, yet foolish, remained behind, myself included.

Sweat and melted snow ran down my body. My foes surged towards me and I hacked apart ten, twenty, maybe fifty men, before I fell among them. And as my battle rage faded, I realized I was dying.

I was dying.

Bright red ripples washed across my sight and I became conscious of a fleeing river of blood. As I felt my life flow across the red and white snow away from my desecrated shell of a body, I willed my blood, my last hold to this world, to flow with the blood of the other fallen—becoming a raging torrent to drag our enemy into a deep mahogany sea.

by Emma-Sera Upsdell-Reddekopp (Grade Eight)

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SECOND PRIZE

The Start

Samantha Green is a real jerk. She teases me *all* day at school, and then goes home to a perfect life, with a perfect house, complete with her perfect wardrobe. My point is, Sam has it great, and I don't. My father is off fighting overseas while Sam's father is probably on a business trip to New York.

I sigh as I start walking to school. Our car broke down and we don't have the money to replace it or buy a bike, so I have to walk a mile to get to school.

When I arrive I see Samantha stepping out of her sleek, black SUV, all ready to gloat. I walk past Samantha until I feel something around my ankle and I see the ground getting closer and closer until I smash, face-first into the asphalt pavement. I blink back tears, not wanting to give her the satisfaction. "Oops! It was an accident!" she shrieks, but I can hear the venom behind it. Then she struts away, cackling like a witch. I blush, and then hurry off to class.

After math, I walk down to the cafeteria and sit alone, like always. Samantha gets taken out to lunch by her mother. Gym class is as boring as ever. I really hate stretching. Then we have our assembly; we have one at the end of every day since the war started. It's routine for me. I bow my head as our principal gives the usual speech. Today, however, he adds something different. I perk up. "We are incredibly sorry to hear about the loss of the father of a thirteen-year-old girl in Mrs. Gage's class."

My heart stops. *I am in Mrs. Gage's class. I am thirteen. He couldn't mean . . . my father?*

"This man served our country bravely, and will always be remembered. This man's name was. . . ."

Tears well up in my eyes. "It can't be my father. It can't be my father," I whisper under my breath.

Our principal says the man's name. And it's not my father. It's Samantha's. My heart stops again, just for a second.

Samantha always waits on this certain bench before school ends. I slip out of the gym. I see Sam, her eyes red and puffy, sitting on the bench. All the things Sam has ever called me, all the times she tripped me, teased me . . . meant nothing now. In God's eyes, everyone should be forgiven, even Sam—especially Sam, who has just been hurt quite badly. I walk over to her, sit beside her, and put my arm around her. It isn't much, but it is a start.

by Ceily McInnis (Grade Six)

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SECOND PRIZE

Soul

It's dark. The air smells of musk and desperation. We are travelling in an old camouflage Jeep, bouncing along a dirt road. Suddenly, our captor says he is very hungry and we can help him.

Then my sister leans over and whispers so softly I can barely hear her, "Is he going to eat us?"

I tell her, "All is well; he probably just needs us to cook for him."

My sister and I are both frightened. The man isn't very tall, but looks gnarled and tattooed, like he used to be a biker. We make a plan: as soon as we see a thick bush we will jump.

She tugs my arm and we jump out her side. I cover our mouths trying not to alert the man.

Landing, I can't see anything; the Jeep created a huge skyscraper of dust. Once the dust clears the man is nowhere to be seen. We agree to follow the dirt road back. We decide it is best to stay to the side of the road because if the man comes back we can jump into the bushes and he won't be able to see us easily.

After what seems like days we arrive to the outskirts of town where a big sign states, "Welcome." We walk into town and find the food bank. We notice through the window the lone man at the counter is my teacher. He has an abundance of chocolate, marshmallows, loaves of bread, and jars of jam and peanut butter. I walk inside and with a dry raspy voice ask him if I may have the rest of the food. He shakes his head, but I push it all in my backpack anyway. I run outside, grab my sister, and my teacher screams, "Wait, you are in danger!"

I already know that, so I just keep running with my sister. We dig a hole in the ground near a tree and decide to stay there for the night.

When I wake I decide I am already a thief and likely going to jail, so I might as well get some more supplies. I sneak back into the food bank. On the counter I find a cup of milk with a note from my teacher. I find a pot and a pan on the counter, along with a raw slab of meat in the fridge, and some matches in a drawer. Once I am set, I walk out and grab the milk.

I return to find my sister awake and alone. She thought I had been stolen again. We split the milk and look through the supplies. Then we start down the long dirt road out of here. . . .

by Eve Hegedus (Grade Seven)

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SECOND PRIZE

Frozen in Time

You crouch in the underbrush, tense, not daring to move a single cramped muscle. In fact, you realize with a pang in your lungs, you haven't risked breathing much either. You gaze in triumphant anticipation at the sight before you: a magnificent buck grazing just closely enough to take a clear shot at.

You have been tromping through these endless woods for the past few days, tracking the elusive beast. As a result of this trek, you've had the opportunity to shoot a variety of other animals including squirrels, birds, foxes, and even a scrawny coyote; however, none of this matters now. Your sharp intuition and hunter's instincts have led you to this exact moment. Right here. Right now. You will not let your prized shot escape this time.

Determination firmly takes its hold, gripping your whole being. Every sense in your body is now focused on the one thing that currently matters: this shot. Steadily taking aim, you suppress the ache in your lungs. If you do not achieve a straight, direct shot right now, this grand opportunity is sure to slip away. Your eyes blaze with adrenaline as you imagine this majestic animal hanging on your wall back home. There is no retreat. Checking your aim one final time, you take a deep, silent breath, and with a subtle click, shoot.

Immediately, the buck's head whips around. Suddenly, a pair of bottomless black eyes reaches yours. Those eyes. . . . Reflected in them is a flurry of emotions no human will ever be able to grasp. Underneath the apparent wariness and fear is an air of calm, conflicted with an array of indescribable emotions that seem to both contradict and complement each other at the same time. Startled, you just have time to shoot once more before your prize buck vanishes instantly into the forest beyond.

A sudden onset of sheer joy and exhilaration brings a smile to your face so large, it's almost comical. You cannot press the "playback" button on your camera fast enough. Hands shaking, you stare at your first picture, an unobscured, crystal-clear image. A soft sunlit glow of fuzz lights the buck's crown of antlers. Looking down, its long brown lashes caress its cheeks as it grazes on dainty white flowers. More stunning is the next photo. You are abruptly once again gazing at the wild beauty of those foreign, endless eyes, frozen in time. The buck's long, powerful legs are poised to bolt swiftly away at an instant's notice. Every detail is highlighted on its golden sunbathed coat.

Sighing, you methodically put your camera away and begin to trudge home. Yes, this has been a very successful hunting trip.

by Kira Innes (Grade Eight)
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THIRD PRIZE

A Night to Remember

In the dark, dank forest, Jake was looking for some wood to use for his campfire. He jumped when he heard the dry branches crack. There was only the tiniest bit of light filtering through the top limbs. Suddenly, Jake was blinded by a radiant light. Jake covered his face, because his eyes were burning from the luminous light. As Jake approached it, he cut his finger on a branch. Blood began trickling down, but Jake didn't care, because he finally made out what the scintillating object was. It was a hovering, rotating, squealing UFO!

As the light dimmed, Jake was in awe of what he was seeing. He hid behind a tree, so he could peek out and see what would occur next. Suddenly, a little creature stepped out of the landed UFO. The creature looked around cautiously, picked up a leaf, and smelled it. Jake was shocked. He wondered what this odd little creature was. Jake's curiosity made him reveal himself from behind the tree. The creature started to make a terrifying screeching sound. Jake fell to the ground, covering his ears. The horrific noise finally stopped. As quickly as the creature had appeared, it disappeared back into the ship. Jake suddenly was levitated and swept into the UFO.

Jake looked around and noticed three of the creatures, which he realized were aliens! Jake saw many different buttons, and a big screen. Suddenly, the alien pulled a lever, and a big metal box fell on Jake's head. He fell to the ground, and became unconscious. The aliens levitated him onto a white table with padding on the surface. One of the aliens opened a cabinet and took out a glass bottle with blue liquid inside. The alien opened Jake's mouth and poured the liquid inside; the liquid was to make Jake unconscious a while longer. The aliens took off his shoes and socks, and started to examine him. They took a sample of his toenail, hair, clothing, and saliva. The aliens put all the samples in a metal tin, put his shoes and socks back on, and put the tin aside. The aliens seemed to be fascinated with Jake! Finally, the aliens gave Jake the power of high intelligence, since they thought this was necessary for all humans.

Jake awoke on the damp ground, feeling strange. He began looking for the UFO, wondering where it was. After looking around, Jake realized the UFO was gone. Jake felt extremely intelligent, and wondered why. As Jake walked back to his campsite with numerous unanswered questions, he wondered what other hidden wonders he would come across!

by Clover Halperin (Grade Six)
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THIRD PRIZE

One Small Moment

I live in the country of Tanda. My world has been corrupted with war, killing, and violence. My sleep is plagued with nightmares that the army will come and kill me if they find out who my father is.

One day the army came to my house and abducted my parents. My father is, or—I cringed at the thought—*was* the mayor of our town, Quen. I still remember the last thing he said to me before he was taken: “*Vladimir, whatever they do to you on the outside, don’t let it change you on the inside.*”

Suddenly I heard someone yell, “He’s coming! Everyone, run! He’s coming, everyone!”

I heard a bang and his voice cut off instantly. I looked out the window to see a woman lying over him, sobbing. I saw the army marching down the street, coming straight at the woman.

“Run!” I yelled.

The only response was a fleet of bullets ricocheting off my window.

I sighed. Emperor Venius, my father’s only enemy, had descended on Quen. This was his revenge, to destroy everything my father lived for. Things were going to get dirty.

In the town people were shouting, bullets filled the air. Troops were storming the city. Suddenly on the roof of the mayor’s house, a boy shouted, “Stop!”

All eyes turned to him. All guns turned on him.

“Wait!” The boy raised his hands. “Before you shoot, think about what you’re actually doing. Killing a kid? Why? You are not accomplishing anything. I hope someday there’ll be peace in Quen and some of you will realize how you’re hurting our nation.” The boy looked at the wreckage and sighed.

Shooting once again rang out in the village, but now the army lay divided. A new revolution had begun.

The next hour of my life was mayhem. I went back into the house. I hid under the bed. Suddenly a soldier burst into the room and began shooting wildly. His first shot got me in the hand and I gasped. I darted from under the bed and collapsed on the floor panting.

Suddenly he cried out, “It’s him! The boy from the rooftop! What have I done? I’ve killed our saviour!”

Saviour? Is he talking about me? I was going to tell him I wasn’t dead, but I didn’t have the energy to speak. The soldier ran frantically out of the room.

That hour of my life might have been mayhem, but it led to a new history. I was no saviour, but that one small moment might have just saved our planet.

by Sébastien LeFort (Grade Seven)

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THIRD PRIZE

Slightly Different

I lug my heavy backpack while trudging up the steps to school, cursing darkly under my breath at its weight. Somehow, I also have a raging headache; it must be due to the rain. “Dang it,” I mutter as I trudge up the remaining steps into the school. *Why is life always an endless grind of monotony and inconveniences?* I don’t know when my mood swings started. I just know one day I woke up and found life flat, stale, and unpredictable. That feeling hasn’t stopped since.

I slam my locker shut and immediately jump right out of my skin as my friends Fabi and Jean leap in front of me, giving me the shock of my lifetime. I respond the only way I know how: through anger.

“Gosh! Must you do that?” The words escape my lips before I can bite them back. I can tell my friends are taken aback, and I can sense the subtle, almost imperceptible what’s-up-with-her? look that passes between them.

Jean clears her throat hesitantly and steps forward uncertainly. “Uh—we just wanted to surprise you. I guess it didn’t turn out well. . . .” Her voice trails off.

I get the familiar, searing guilty feeling of being a jerk in the pit of my stomach and I leave. I can picture their bewildered faces in my head and I lower my eyes, concentrating on moving my shuffling feet into the classroom the quickest way possible.

Six hours later, I enter the house and wearily throw my socks on the ground before I hear my mother’s voice, sharp and nagging with a hint of exasperation: “How many times do I have to tell you not to leave dirty socks on the carpet?”

I give a long, exaggerated sigh, which I purposely drag out to show my frustration. I turn around, stomping upstairs as I fling my socks down the staircase, even though I know it will just add fuel to the fire. I flop onto my bed, ignoring the tears welling in my eyes although they are already cutting a salt-laced path down the side of my face.

Suddenly, I am aware of a nagging thought at the back of my mind. I ignore it, but it’s slowly bulldozing its way into my consciousness. *How am I supposed to enjoy life if I’m constantly moody and temperamental?* I can’t fully take pleasure in everything life encompasses if that’s the case. I start to pace up and down the room. Maybe my back is still hunched, and maybe I still look downwards when I walk, but maybe, just maybe, there’s a slight spring in my step this time.

by Cherie Tay (Grade Eight)
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