

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

An Octavia Wells Mishap

A little old woman, about seventy-five years or so, stepped clumsily into the dining room of the Rimrock Hotel. The tables were neatly set with crisp tablecloths. Waiters circled the large room, carrying silver trays with sparkling glasses. The curtains were open to reveal a beautiful view of the snow-capped mountains. The woman blinked and wiped her nose with the palm of her hand.

“Miss Octavia Wells?” a waiter startled her.

She glared at him. “Yes,” she said loudly.

“Let me show you to your table.”

The waiter turned, leading towards an empty seat. Miss Octavia Wells followed him, clutching her purse, and staring at the other customers and their food. The waiter motioned to the chair, and getting no reaction from Miss Wells, coughed and motioned again.

Miss Wells sat down abruptly. A loud ripping sound followed. Surprised, she looked down to see her black dress caught on the edge of the table, a two-foot rip down the frock. The whole dining room stared. She pushed her tiny glasses up on her nose and began twiddling her thumbs as if nothing had happened.

Minutes later, Miss Wells headed over to the buffet. After successfully lifting the heavy lid of the chafing dish, she decided to taste the food with the tongs provided. She shoved a piece of carrot into her mouth, and, loving the sauce, licked the tongs clean. After stirring the platter of food with the tongs, she slopped some onto her plate. She grabbed the silver handle of the dish and pulled. It was stuck. She pulled and pulled some more. The lid then suddenly whammed shut, sending Octavia Wells flying backwards, limbs flailing. Performing a back somersault on the floor, her ripped dress flipped up, letting the whole world see her frilly blue bloomers. She then, *very* clumsily, stood and proceeded to pick her food up off the floor, throwing it back onto her plate. The other customers looked at one another, not knowing what to think.

Meanwhile, Miss Wells had carried on to the next dish. Seeing no tongs available, the old woman grabbed a piece of meat with her bare hand. She then scratched her head. A long, grey hair came out of her bun. Octavia Wells looked around. There was nowhere to put it! She quickly placed her hair in amongst the pieces of meat and closed the lid.

Miss Wells returned to her seat. Holding her steak knife in her fist, she began stabbing the meat. A small chunk of food flicked up into the chandelier over the table. She stared up at the light. *Hhmmmmph*, she thought. Rising, she climbed up on her chair, then the table. She stepped on her wineglass, smashing it to bits with her ugly, black, orthopedic shoes. Miss Wells suddenly began to flap her arms like they were two windmills and swayed precariously backwards. In a matter of seconds, the table tipped backwards, and she crashed into the neighbouring table. The collision sent a pile of food, broken plates, cutlery, and people flying everywhere.

The old woman rolled off the broken table and searched blindly for her glasses. Finding them, she rose to her feet. On the bottom of the overturned table there sat an ancient, brown lump of gum. Miss Wells deftly picked it off, and stuck it into her mouth. She grabbed her purse and headed for the door, blowing dirty beige bubbles.

Once she had left, everyone, including the victims of her fall, burst out laughing.

Jocelyn Mah

Branton Junior High School (Grade Seven)
Calgary, Alberta

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Hope on the Horizon

Life with a sibling is never easy; especially when they get all the attention because they have a disease or a sickness. Well, that's my life. It's not annoying, however, and my twin brother, Matthew, and I are very close! We share secrets and even seem to read each other's minds.

My name is Melody Wells and I am a thirteen-year-old girl struggling through life. I worry if my brother will be okay. We've gone through operations together; I have been his donor. I am now stuck in a boarding school so my parents can concentrate on helping Matthew get better. All I think about is Matt. I haven't even told my best friends about my twin. I don't want to be treated differently, and it always happens. I just want to be normal.

I e-mail and write to Matt all the time. I feel so badly. I try to be strong, but I know he's always the strongest one. He acts like everything is fine. I wish I could trade places with him. I wish I could take his pain. How can I be a good twin if I'm not always there for him, with him? I can't help but think about how frightened he must feel, and how lonely he must be without me.

I always want to ask him questions about how he's feeling or if he's scared, but instead I try to be cheerful. People say twins are supposed to feel each other's pain, but I have no idea how much pain Matt is going through. I am sitting here right now having fun with my friends, forgetting about Matt and his problems, while he is going through another round of chemotherapy!

I slowly come out of a daze when my friend, Beth, asks me, "Melody, are you okay? You seem lost."

"I'm fine," I reply, hiding my pain, fears, and worries once again from my friends. *At least I'll get to visit Matt soon*, I think to myself.

As I finish writing an e-mail to Matt, I think about how I wish he would be serious with me: tell me how scared he is, how he feels, how lonely he is, why it has to be him. Instead, he replies that everything is fine and that he's great, once again covering up his feelings with lies. So much has changed since he got sick. We used to tell each other absolutely everything!

When I finally have a chance to visit him, standing beside his hospital bed, I begin to cry; trying to be strong fails and I let it out.

Matt takes my hand. "I'm going to be okay, you know," he says confidently.

I smile through my tears. "I know. I know," I reply.

Just at that moment, Matt's doctor comes in holding papers. "I have the latest test results," the doctor informs us. I tense up, preparing myself for the worst. "Matthew's condition has improved; he's going to be fine!"

I breathe out. I smile and Matt says, "I told you so!"

Ashley Spicer

Berwick and District School (Grade Eight)

Berwick, Nova Scotia



FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Marching Band

The river flowed with an intimidating swiftness. The waves were topped in splashes of white but, through them, I could see the rocks. The big, round boulders were hiding too closely to the chaotic surface.

“What are you waiting for?”

I glanced down at the shore, where the group was waiting expectantly. I could feel the four sets of eyes on me, burning holes through my skin.

“To be one of us, you need to jump.”

As if to defy them, I clutched the pillar behind me even more tightly. My knuckles turned white.

Breathing deeply, I leaned forward until my entire torso was out over the edge. I surveyed my potential landing pad with uncertainty. A huge wave crashed against the column of the railway bridge with a thunderous roar. I snatched my body backwards.

Laughter rippled up from the shore. I could feel a hot blush rushing to my cheeks.

“Are you scared?”

Poor imitations of chicken squawks replaced the laughter.

I ground my teeth together and again leaned over the edge. My head began to spin. I could hear a faint ringing in my ears. I fixed my eyes on the waves. The ringing grew louder. It came in pulses—long, drawn out pulses. Then I could hear the beating of my own heart. It was like a drum; one of those giant bass drums worn vertically along the stomach in marching bands. I could feel the batons being slammed into my chest. The power of each beat swayed me inches in each direction.

The ringing grew louder still. My heartbeat quickened. I was faintly aware of noise escalating on the river bank. They weren’t laughing anymore; they were chatting nervously. I strained to hear. . . .

But it was too loud. The ringing grew to a mighty crescendo. I waited for it to peak. It never did. It only grew louder, drowning out the chatter.

Louder. Louder.

I caught movement in my peripheral vision. My head instinctively snapped to the side so my eyes could focus properly.

It was a cloud. The wind carried it swiftly like a child blowing bubbles. It billowed out like a magnificent cape—never bursting, never slowing. Since when did clouds move in such a manner? Since when did clouds come from a train?

The long metal snake was charging at me with a speed more frightening than that of the river. Its horn rang through the air, pulsing rhythmically. The wheels chugged like a heartbeat, a giant bass drum.

The bridge shivered violently under my feet. It threatened my hold on the pillar.

I don’t remember the impact when I fell flat on the water. I don’t remember my ribs shattering when I crashed into the river’s rocky bottom. I don’t remember the water fighting its way down my throat like boiling blood. I don’t remember the moment I realized I was going to die. But I remember the moment I did.

Deanna Fox

Foundations for the Future Charter Academy (Grade Nine)
Calgary, Alberta

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Unloved: Memoirs of a Dead Girl

It happened in a flash.

Too quick for my brain to process it. Bright lights. Blindingly bright. Boisterous noise; the shrieking of grinding metal, screeching tires, breathless screaming coated in a thick layer of terror—mine? Excruciating, searing pain. Tentacles of it twisting and writhing throughout my body like the tentacles of a sadistic octopus. Overwhelming, all-consuming pain, ripping through every nerve, every vein, every fibre of my being—ripping me to shreds, leaving just a hollow carcass in my midst.

So many things swirling, bewilderingly, in a tornado of insanity behind a thick fog of confusion and uncertainty.

Pain. Noise. Lights. Voices. Senses on fire, searing fiery flames tickling my senses. Most of all, pain.

Then . . . nothing.

You never held me, Mother dearest, never cradled me as a baby, gently in your arms. No soft harmonic voice to sing me lullabies, in the security of your embrace. Too focused on your flailing youth and beauty to spare a penny for my thoughts; only yours ever mattered. Only you ever mattered, in those eyes of yours, constantly blindfolded to reality.

And you, dear Father, Papa . . . Too busy, slaving away. Long hours spent in the office, wrapped up in work, slipping away, slowly, evermore.

No time for me.

No time for your son, Simon.

Or family dinners, excursions, or any of the like.

Rushing off first thing come dawn—some nights not returning at all—thoughtlessly not even bothering to call.

Promises and excuses, so flimsy and fragile, possessed the powerful claws to shred up the fabric of our loosely woven family. Couldn't you have just kept your mouth shut, stayed quiet, spared us the lines?

You lost sight of what was important; I don't know if you ever even knew. Perhaps, you just had a different view than I did. I'm not really sure, but family seemed like something that should possess some significance.

Never did I call either of you Dad or Mom—never did you deserve it—you truly weren't. Flimsy, fraying, biological ties were all that linked us together.

Not trust or love, belief or faith—those were the things of fairy tales.

Did you ever acknowledge my achievements, how I strived for perfection? If I'd attained it, would you've noticed me, then? Or would I be just another certificate, another award, to brag about, but not give a second thought to?

Some parents spent time with their children. I would've been placated if you'd just taken the time to look at me, to see the fear in my eyes—fear I'd never know my mom or daddy, fear they'd never know me.

Did you even notice when I took the car and didn't come home last night?

Did you even take the day off when you heard your darling baby daughter died?

Secretly, afterwards, I felt a strange sense relief. If I'd told you, would you have understood why? Would you have even cared? Did you care?

You never showed it.

You never held me.

Did you ever love me?

Morgan Carleton

Fort Richmond Collegiate (Grade Ten)

Winnipeg, Manitoba

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

The Mark

I still remember her face, her long blonde hair that shone brightly in the sun, her blue eyes that were as dark as the ocean, and her smile . . . God, her smile, the smile that could attract any man she wanted, the smile that would brighten even the worst day. And her children—two young girls—one six, the other ten. The youngest had short red hair, the oldest had long dark hair. They both had their mother’s face, her eyes, her smile.

It was a beautiful day when I completed my contract. I sat up in the clock tower that stood over the city, granting me the view of a magnificent place. The sun shone brightly and the sky was like a resemblance of the ocean, dark blue and cloudless.

I was perched on the edge of the stone wall, like a raven resting in his nest, looking over the city with my binoculars. After a while, I spotted her. The sun reflected off her hair, making it hard to directly stare. She was so beautiful I couldn’t believe she was real. How did God create something so pure, so lovely? She was truly a goddess. She was walking down the street, both children holding her hand, one on each side. They were smiling and laughing. I wish I knew what they were laughing about, or where they were going.

Her husband was a wealthy man, but apparently he had been cheating on her with several other women. The scum; he should have realized how lucky he was to be with that woman. It’s not every day a person wakes up next to a goddess. After she caught him in the act, she divorced him, took half his wealth, and gained custody of the kids. Good choice on the court’s part, I think. Several weeks later, her husband came to me. He had connections with bad people—people that were killers, people that ruined the lives of others, people like me. It didn’t last long. He offered \$500,000 and I accepted. He then told me the time and place and I prepared for the day. Little did I know it would be the day I killed a goddess.

It was time. I lowered my binoculars and picked up my rifle. I got myself comfortable, adjusted my position, and aimed. I took my time, aiming at her head. I wanted to make it quick, but it killed me to think that she wouldn’t be able to have an open casket. Her face wasn’t going to be so pretty after this.

A gentle wind began to blow; it relaxed me with its cool breeze. I continued to watch her, I couldn’t look away. I almost forgot that I was looking through a sniper scope. She walked with her children to the end of a street. Then they stopped, waiting for it to be safe to cross. I took a deep breath and focused on her. Time seemed to stand still; she almost froze in my vision. My finger slowly began to squeeze the trigger. Sweat trickled down my face. I finally let out my last breath, and then pulled.

It was all the same after that: screaming, hiding, crying, and all the chaos that followed a shot. Her blood was everywhere, even on her two girls who were crying and confused as to what had happened. I gathered my supplies and left, slowly walking down what seemed to be an endless array of stone stairs. I could hear the sirens for a distance.

The husband regained all his lost wealth, including custody of the kids. He eventually moved to an island off the coast of Mexico. The cops never figured out who killed her, or who hired me. It were as if a random bullet just happened to strike down a goddess.

I can’t stop thinking about her. It’s punishment. Her way and God’s way of making me understand the pain that I have caused, the evil I’ve done . . . by killing a goddess.

Garret Kelford

Grand Forks Secondary School (Grade Eleven)
Grand Forks, British Columbia

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

The Worth of Love

Vigorously he swept, as if wanting to scrape the tiles off the floor. He did not falter in completing his duty for he knew that in a little while he would be enjoying the comforts of home. Closing the store at night was never a task he took pleasure in doing. Then again, working at the store in general dampened his ambitions altogether. Whether it was the solemnness of the empty store or the monotonous ticking of the clock's hands, he always dreaded the store at night, for it further exemplified his insignificant life. He struggled to even live a life of mere simplicity, for the pay he received at the end of the week seemed to mock him more than please him. *Tick tock, tick tock*, went the clock on the wall. Today it was more friend than foe because it thoughtfully reminded him there was only fifteen minutes left to go. Fifteen minutes filled with fear for what lay outside in the urban chaos he called freedom.

During times like these, he thought of what pleased him most in life: his daughter. No pleasure in life could ever surpass the amount of pride he felt when thinking of her. He believed she was everything a daughter should be: responsible, hardworking, intelligent, humble, and, most of all, trustworthy. Although poverty always lingered by his side, he continued to provide her with more than just a father's love. Recently, he had bought her a crystal bracelet as a gift for having been accepted into university with a scholarship. He remembered the look on her face when getting the gift and then realized that only one measly minute had passed since he last checked the clock. In his eyes, his daughter was as close to perfection as anything could be. There was only one small incident in her past that had once made him want to disown her altogether. What had been an act of hopeless and juvenile behaviour, however, was now a fragment that had been, for the most part, forgotten. She had realized her foolishness and, subsequently, matured into a fine lady since the event. He hoped and dreamed that she would accomplish great things in life, and it was for this reason that he sacrificed all he possibly could for her.

Having noticed that five minutes had passed by gave him a small, but gratifying, excitement. He realized how pitiful his antics were, but he was by himself and did not appear to care. It seemed as though there was not a person in sight, and it was for this reason that he decided to close the store early. Just as he was about to put some boxes away in the back of the store, he heard the doorbell, which to him almost sounded foreign because the store had not seen customers in so long. His heart dropped into his stomach as he faced someone who seemed to want more than milk and cigarettes. Their face was covered with the most ridiculously eerie mask, and they were dressed entirely in black. A sudden rage ran through the masked menace, who clearly was in no mood to leave empty-handed. The working man would not take it. He would not let this coward take away his integrity along with the cash in the register. So, he courageously grabbed the gun that lay in the villain's pocket, and instigated a scuffle. The masked robber was smaller than he realized. The seemingly juvenile thief obviously never wanted to shoot since they could have pulled the trigger so much sooner. What a coward to even have a gun, and what a shame that the man who worked his life away had now accidentally been shot. He lay on the floor, which was no longer clean, but instead stained with his own blood. As the thief ran to their freedom, the worker slowly died, looking with wonder and astonishment at the crystal bracelet that had fallen in front of his face. Shattering every loving memory he ever contained, it glistened until the moment he closed his eyes.

How could she?

Giovanni Ferrara

Neil McNeil Catholic Secondary School (Grade Twelve)
Toronto, Ontario

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

The Puppeteer

Diarmad Blackman kept his rather idiosyncratic collection inside a large black-painted wooden cabinet. He never took any individual part of the collection out, just added and added to the shelves.

The puppets were all in a uniform position, sitting with their legs bent at the knee at the edge of the shelves. They were designed in a consistent fashion, their expressions blank but with an eerie air of terror in their unblinking eyes.

Diarmad had just finished crafting the newest puppet a few minutes before, and placed it on the next available space on the shelf. He handled it quite carelessly, but did not show any aggression towards it either. He gazed at it for a few moments, locking his deep brown eyes with the puppet's black ones. Then he let his hand enclose the glass knob on the cabinet door and shut it tight before stepping back to admire his life-sized assembly.

Satisfied, Diarmad exited the small storage room he kept the cabinet in and took the key out of his pocket. The coldness of the metal sent a chill up his hand as he twisted it sharply in the keyhole, tugged it out and put it back inside his pocket. Diarmad never forgot to lock a door and locked up every door in his apartment that he could. He was always looking behind him, always worried, which is why the abrupt reverberation of the doorbell made him jump.

He marched to the door and opened it a crack. There, he found a small, gaunt man with ivory-framed glasses. He recognized the man as Flynn Callaghan from down the hall.

"Callaghan . . .," Diarmad said under his breath. "What do you want?"

"Just thought I'd drop by," Flynn said with a naive, carefree cheeriness.

"Did you, now? I'm a very busy man," Diarmad said. "And I've not forgotten how much you still owe me, Callaghan."

Flynn's smirk disappeared and his lips tightened, stretching straight across his face as if cutting it in half. He disregarded Diarmad's implied demand. He felt uneasy, however, at his penetrating gaze and looked away awkwardly as he remembered his unpaid debt.

"I guess I should be on my way then."

"No, wait, come in," Diarmad said, pulling Flynn inside.

"But I . . .," Flynn began, noticing the terrifying hunger in Diarmad's eyes. His wide-eyed gaze was averted upon seeing a flash of silver in Diarmad's burly hand, and he blacked out in a rush of adrenaline.

It was nighttime. Diarmad had just finished crafting his newest puppet. He silently placed it on the next shelf of the black-painted cabinet. He shut the cabinet door and left the room, turning off the light and locking the door on the way out.

Pitch blackness filled the room. The newest puppet was in just the right place to catch a sliver of moonlight from the small crack in the ceiling. If you were to look closely enough, you'd see its frightened little eyes glint behind its ivory-framed glasses.

Rachel Crawley

Cosburn Middle School (Grade Seven)
Toronto, Ontario

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Jeremy's Soup

It was a rainy Wednesday. The maple trees that surrounded the premises were a bright and passionate red. It was a cold, wet, fall day. Jeremy, a precocious six-year-old boy, was riding the bus home from school to enjoy a delicious homemade lunch. When the bus stopped, Mrs. Jones, Jeremy's mother, was waiting under her umbrella to greet him. "Hi, Jeremy! How was school today?"

Jeremy looked up at his mom. "Fine. What's for lunch? I'm famished!"

Mrs. Jones quickly replied that she had made his favourite: vegetable alphabet soup. Jeremy was thrilled with the great news and waddled into the house.

As Jeremy entered the kitchen, he saw his favourite bowl filled with hot soup. His mouth began to water as he took in the aroma of the meal. Then he stared at the place mat where his soup sat, and sighed. A few minutes passed and Jeremy wasn't eating yet. Mrs. Jones asked, "Is your soup too hot?"

"No," replied Jeremy.

"Why aren't you eating your soup?" she pressed.

"I can't!" he insisted.

"Jeremy, please eat your soup," Mrs. Jones snapped.

"I can't," he repeated. "I just can't!"

A little worried, Mrs. Jones felt her son's forehead, thinking he might be feverish, but he was cool as a cucumber. Once again, she asked Jeremy to eat his lunch, and he again replied, "I can't, Mom. I just can't!"

Mrs. Jones decided to call her husband for help. Mr. Jones agreed to come home before his afternoon meeting.

"What's wrong, Jeremy?" Dad asked.

"Nothing, Dad," he replied.

"Why won't you eat Mom's soup?"

Jeremy signed and said, "I can't, Dad."

Mr. Jones looked at his son sternly and told him that he would be punished if he didn't eat his soup promptly, but Jeremy just looked at his dad sadly, and said, "I can't eat my soup, Dad."

Perhaps the doctor should see Jeremy, thought Mrs. Jones, so she called his office. Dr. Erb arrived ten minutes later with his trusty medical bag. He sat down at the table next to Jeremy.

"How are you feeling?" he asked. "Does your tummy hurt?"

Jeremy replied, "No. I feel fine."

Then the doctor checked his eyes, ears, and throat. "You're fit as a fiddle, young man, so why won't you eat soup?"

Jeremy politely answered, "I can't, Dr. Erb."

Just then, Jeremy's grandmother walked into the kitchen. She saw Jeremy, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and Dr. Erb gathered around the table. "What's going on here?" the old woman questioned.

Mrs. Jones responded, "Jeremy won't eat his soup."

That seemed odd to Grandma, so she, too, asked, "Why won't you eat your soup, Jeremy?"

In a frustrated tone, he said again, "I can't, Grandma. I just can't!"

"Don't be silly," she said. "You can tell Grandma why you won't eat. Whisper it into my ear." She leaned towards Jeremy, listened attentively, and cried out, "Jeremy *can't* eat his soup. He doesn't have a spoon!"

Jocelyn Cameron

Laurelwood Public School (Grade Eight)
Waterloo, Ontario

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

How Could She Sink So Low?

Kella was scared. The cold metal burned into her hand. She was in disbelief of what she had just done, but the sound of the crack rang through her mind, an instant replay.

Little wet drips coated the floor. Her hand was soaked. The black of her shirt was just a little bit darker.

The damage was irreversible. *Is there no way to bring him back? Oh, Lord, how will I ever explain this?* she thought desperately. A strange calm enveloped her as she realized the truth, but her smooth skin began to sweat. The hand that held the evidence quivered uncontrollably.

She knew she had to clean it up, had to hide it all. At least, then, she would have a chance to come up with a plan.

Sure, she had been angry. Kella had never liked her mother's boyfriend, but she hadn't known she would lose her self control. "Concentrate, Kel," she murmured. "You can do this."

Slowly, she pulled open the cabinet, extracted some towels and threw them on the mess. They were red.

Kella stashed the evidence in the cabinet, underneath some other towels. Their warmth was an odd contrast to the smooth cold of the metal.

Usually, she would have been more careful. But she had been angry, and her temper was infamous.

"It's not as if I ever liked him."

Shifting the sodden towels to cover the warm spout of liquid, she tried to stop the flow.

Her hatred for Steve had overwhelmed her common sense. She knew now that he hadn't been completely useless. Guilt joined the tears that clouded her vision.

Kella found herself wishing he were still around. Flushed, she looked at the cabinet.

Her hand still shook.

She had yelled and screamed. He had tried to calm her down, but that only made her angrier. Kella was good at winning fights. What teenager isn't?

The sound of her mother's steps reached Kella, *She must have heard!*

Kella heard the footsteps reach the stairs. She braced herself, wondering what her mother would say. The fight had been juvenile, almost completely pointless. Kella just didn't like listening to her mother's boyfriend. He was not her father. He had never been her father. Now, he would never be. She wasn't quite sure now whether that was good or bad.

The footsteps came closer as Kella raced to hide the soaking bulk. It was saturated, heavy, and musty smelling. Her muscles burned with the effort of hiding everything as fast as possible.

"Kella?"

She held her breath, heaving the load into the bathtub. Wiping her hands on the corner of a towel, she took a moment to calm her racing heart. "Yeah?"

Kella's mother pushed open the bathroom door. "What happened in here?" she gasped.

Gesturing to the spurting sink, which now lacked a handle, Kella answered, "I'm sorry for yelling at Steve, Mom. But I'm even sorrier he's not here to fix the sink!"

Emily Krahn

Ardrossan Junior Senior High School (Grade Nine)
Ardrossan, Alberta

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Back Home

“Hello? I’m he . . . *oomph!* Get off, you ugly little buggers! Hey, stop! Ow, ow. *Ow!* I haven’t even made it into the back yard yet!”

Tom’s complaints were soon drowned out as other cousins joined in the welcoming ritual, otherwise known as jumping on Tom. After a minute of yelling, laughing, and tussling, Tom managed to free himself from the pile, and quickly dashed away.

An epic chase then ensued, with Tom laughing and goading them on. He ran around the rest of the back yard and then on to the front of the house. Tom earned himself a couple of seconds to catch his breath, while the cousins split up and tried to coordinate their pincer movement.

Two waves of waist-high warriors rushed around the corners of the house. Tom cried out in mock horror while the cousins issued their high-pitched war cries. He made a point of looking around for a nonexistent escape route to spur them on. Then, turning left to face one group of cousins, he roared and lumbered towards them, slowly picking up speed. Confronted with The Troll, Tom’s roughhousing persona, the group squealed with a mixture of delight and terror, broke ranks, and fled. Tom’s unguarded back only spurred on the group from the right, however, and they jumped straight onto it to his surprise. The Troll turned around to face the more imminent threat, and was beset as the routing cousins rallied and returned to attack his legs. He let out a cry of despair and crumbled to his knees, then fell flat on his stomach. Recognizing the play-dead-then-roar-even-louder-than-before tactic, some of the veterans started to back away. When The Troll still hadn’t moved though, a couple of the braver cousins walked tentatively towards the body. Just as they were leaning over it, Tom flipped onto his back and, sure enough, roared once again. This alone was enough to send half of the cousins fleeing to the back yard. The remainder soon followed after The Troll stood up and tucked a cousin under each arm.

Tom made his way to the part of the back yard where all the adults were hanging around to catch up with family he hadn’t seen in more than a year. Once he reached his destination, he released his squirming captives, who promptly scampered off through the collection of tables and chairs.

As he walked about, he kept wondering what happened to the giants of his own childhood . . . and when did they become so short? When one of his uncles offered him a beer, he had to hold back his surprise. It wasn’t so much the offer that surprised him (he had been offered beer before in Germany) but that—especially after having just played with the cousins—he was now perceived as “grown-up.” Inevitably, his exchange in Germany was the topic of most of the conversations he participated in—what he had learned, how well he spoke German, what kind of people he met, etc. The one message Tom received from every relative, whether it was explicit or implied, was that it was great to have him back.

David Caughey

Bell High School (Grade Ten)
Nepean, Ontario

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

The Final Heat

Finally, the event of the evening had arrived: the third and final heat of the annual fall fair's smash-up derby. A new and barely known classmate, Jon, was in this race, yet, this night of crazed and tumultuous action, sights, and sounds caused us to inexplicably bond with him.

When the announcer called his name, we rose up, shouting so loudly that my ears ceased to accept the sound, and something near silence deafened me. My voice, which at first had flown out piercingly, began to scratch and catch along my throat, but I didn't care. Tonight was the one night I could scream my loudest with no reprimand, and that is no small thing.

After all the cars had entered the arena, my friends and I joined the crowd in bellowing "Three, two, *one!*" A horn blared and the cars began crashing and bashing, sending up sparks and plumes of smoke. Toxic fumes caught in my throat, causing me to hack and hold my breath. I wondered if carcinogens filled the air, but the thought was fleeting. How could one think dark thoughts on a night so full of life? The indulgent sugary and greasy food, the carnies' cries, the overstimulation from flashing lights, the monstrous winning pumpkin, the roar of engines, the swarms of people . . . all were at once novel and nostalgic.

While the vehicles battled, the blaring music was turned back on. Caught up by the rising crescendo of vibrating energy radiating from the spectacle below and the crowds around, we danced and shouted in our cramped positions, shouting nonsensical statements and laughing nonstop. Even the spectators, stepping none-too-carefully over our heads as we sat on the stairs, could not interrupt this breaker of emotion.

Then only two cars were left: Jon's and our common enemy's. Strained excitement crept over my babbling group. Jon's car stalled, and we held our collective breath, whimpered, shouted, sent up prayers; every fibre of our beings stretched towards the failing vehicle, straining to move it with our sheer willpower. The count-out began. The flag man waved his signal once, twice, three times, four times. . . . I, with many others, leaned forward, hands clenched, concentrating to the point of pain, and I willed Jon to revive the struggling machine on which our hopes rested. The flag man waved his ominous black banner a fifth time and, with a collective sigh, we all leaned back, our tensed muscles falling slack, and mumbled, "At least he got second."

Following this first defeat was a second; time had conquered us, and we had to go home. The derby was done, parents and homework were awaiting us; however, this new stimulus of separation, sad as it was, reinvigorated us. Hugs and lustily shouted goodbyes were given to people hardly known before. My memory is often stony, impressed with but a chip from the chisel of events, but I swore to carve that night into my mind. I know time rolls on, eroding the rock of memory, but at that moment I knew I must remember that derby, that night. . . . Oh! And what a night it was!

Eliane Drijber

Cayuga Secondary School (Grade Eleven)
Cayuga, Ontario

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Unknown

He walks along. Pushing through crowds, he sees no one. He hears nothing, although the noise is deafening. He's nobody. Nobody cares where he works, if he works. He might or might not have a family. Maybe he was visiting his sick mother. Maybe he's rushing home to his kids, or maybe he's taking someone out. It doesn't matter. He sees nobody, nobody sees him.

She struts the hall of the five-star hotel. They cannot help seeing her. She's wearing designer clothes that should be on a runway. She's beautiful, but it's well disguised by the layers of makeup she wears. Her heels make her almost six feet. She's above everyone else. She knows it. They know it. The elevator waits exclusively for her. Why should she wait for anything?

He pays a token, walks down the platform, and waits. He checks his watch. Is he late, or is it just an action that goes with waiting? The subway pulls in. The doors chime once and open. A brief battle ensues as passengers fight to escape while others push in. He almost finds a seat but someone slides in before him. He stands between two people, but doesn't know what either of them looks like. He stares at an ad but doesn't see it. Everyone else is as invisible as he.

She gets into her new car. She's going somewhere expensive and exclusive. She has money. Her best friend is her private jet. She's insanely happy. What person has more than she? She needs people to notice her as she zooms past. She is at the top of the scale. She craves the feeling of being more. She *is* more. And they are less.

He wades to the door. He's carried out in the host of commuters. He climbs the stairs. Why not the escalator? Perhaps he's always been scared of escalators. Perhaps walking is the only exercise he gets. Perhaps he wants to lose weight before his wedding. Does it matter? He leaves the station. There are less people now. He reaches a red light and stops.

She speeds. She has the money to pay for a ticket. Her attorney calls her. Of course she won't agree to a compromise; she signed the prenuptial. She hangs up. She gets out her \$5000 lipstick and smears it onto her already blood-coloured lips. She stuffs it back into her crocodile purse. She looks up just in time to see the red light and the car turning in front of her. She swerves to the right.

The wreck makes the morning news. Some billionaire crashes her car, killing herself and a man waiting for the light. The car is an Aston Martin, and the damage to it is, surprisingly, not extremely serious. Some experts have been called in and they say there is a good chance they will be able to restore it to look almost brand new. It is an expensive car, and beautiful.

Annemarie Sherlock

Bishop Allen Academy (Grade Twelve)
Toronto, Ontario



THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

The Start of a Frightening End

Footsteps were heard. Hard, cold breathing was one of the sounds. Walking, walking faster—the slyest movement—striding, both arms to the side of the slender body. Or so it seemed. The hard breathing continued as well as the striding. At the furthest end of the narrow passage, was a little glow of light, flickering through the plain night. The passage was bordered by prickly bushes, giving off a fresh scent. Up through the dark empty night was the moon, but nothing else seemed interested in shining alongside it. A rather circular shape, lightly rounded with bumps on it. There were no stars to fill in the depression of the darkened sky. Instead, there were colossal, heavy, sad clouds ready to empty their sorrow and grief upon the body in the bushed passage.

The slender body moved gradually forward, to the little twinkling. Its eyes narrowed to view the glowing light. Footsteps were once again heard.

“For he who shall have seen the flickering light may be drawn to it once and for all!” There had been a very ominous voice. It thundered through the glimpses of electric lightning.

The body advanced nearer to the centre of the bushed maze. Its shadow lingered a couple of inches from itself. The thunder rumbled through the penetrating night and the body’s heart thumped more and more. The light splattered once again, exiting the body’s eyes to gaze into the illumination.

Something was wrong there! The light . . . it kind of twirled. It was a candle, but not on a stick. It was in the rounded, carved-in shape of a basin, engraved into a rock. On the rock were marvellous carvings of some sort of eerie spirits or ghosts. The body felt shivers climb up its spine, one step at a time, and then goose bumps followed along. Suddenly, the candle went crazy—flaming red in all directions! Then the body’s eyes noticed something strange.

The carvings on the rock basin became alive! They came out of the rock. They peeled themselves out of the basin, and then . . . the candle’s light went out! The low, ugly, unbearable voice came back, louder this time, saying, “They have returned!”

“*Aaagggghh!*” Sophie yelled, waking up from her nightmare. On her beautiful large mirror in her dark room, she saw traces of blood. Mysteriously puzzled, Sophie wondered exactly what her nightmare had revealed, or if it had truly even been a nightmare?

Jayanna Pleau

Québec High School (Grade Seven)

Québec City, Québec



THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Living in Fantasy

The rain pours down on my head, my clothes so wet I'm soaked through to my bones. It doesn't matter. A large, pearly raindrop lands on my awaiting tongue. I breathlessly take a gulp of pure, sweet air and listen to the beats all around me. I sway to the music, watching Emily do the same. We take off running down the street.

Flying through the wet trees, we dance, daring anyone to take away this freedom. We twirl, laugh, and sing into the park, watching the water drip down onto everything.

I climb aboard the swing, and pump my legs before jumping and landing into a huge crisp puddle of water. It sprays everything, everywhere. Emily screams and takes cover in a purple slide. She uses the next puddle to do the same to me.

The rain keeps pounding down on us, not willing to give up. My dress whips in different directions and the flowers all around me turn vivid colours of scarlet, tangerine, lime, lemon, mocha, turquoise, and white all swirled into one.

I find myself lost in a fantasy world, changing everything around me. A princess climbs the nearest tree and waits for her long-lost prince to rescue her until she is found and taken back to be locked up in the castle again, only to marry the horrible Prince George. Two orphans swing from branch to branch, feeling the joy of not having to go back to the house where the beatings happened; they run away from the world and into a place where they can be free.

But, as the rain stops, I forget what I'm doing and realize how cold I am. I'm shivering. Emily and I both look up at the sky, wishing for more. We walk slowly, smelling the fresh pure air, and tasting the sweet smell of something new.

Lindsay Straiton

Westmount Junior High School (Grade Eight)
Edmonton, Alberta



THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Alien

The sound of my alarm clock pierces the silence of early morning at precisely 6 a.m. every day. I slip out of bed, dress quickly, and tiptoe downstairs. My school bag waits for me at the door, like an old, faithful friend. Picking it up, I stop by the mirror and spend the next five minutes scrutinizing my reflection: my curly black hair that has a mind of its own; the sprinkle of freckles across the bridge of my nose; my fair skin and almond-shaped eyes. Everything seems to give away my identity, my past. Looking too Asian, yet somehow, not Asian enough. I sigh, and part with the comfort and safety of home for another day. Then I lock the door behind me.

I haven't truly enjoyed school since my only friend moved away. Now, I walk down the frosty hallways alone, then sit in a desk at the front of the classroom . . . alone. I can feel the judging stares of my classmates boring holes in my back. Today is particularly miserable.

Usually, my teacher and I have a kind of unspoken agreement. She leaves me alone, doesn't call on me for answers. She understands what it's like, being disliked because of your past. Today is different. A substitute, an elderly woman, stands at the front of the room, peering down at each one of us from behind her glasses with their scratched frames. During attendance, she reads out my full name: Elizabeth Johnson. She pauses, confused, then goes on.

What am I supposed to tell her? How do I explain to her that when Mother married, she took her husband's name? That marrying a Canadian, and having a child, was the only way she could avoid deportation back to a country where she was not welcome. One more person knowing wouldn't make a difference. The whole class already knows. It slipped out one day, then spread through the school. "Did you hear, Lizzie is an alien? She's not supposed to be living here."

I sigh, slumping down in my seat, trying to become as inconspicuous as possible. I shiver, for no other reason than I can feel the coldness of the people around me.

I didn't think my mother's actions would influence what my classmates thought of me. I was proved wrong again later when I forgot my money at home. I hesitantly approached one of the girls. "May I please borrow a dollar for bus fare?" I asked.

All I got in return was a disdainful stare. "Why should I waste money on an alien? You can't live off of us hardworking Canadians all the time." She got up to join her friends.

I stood in the biting cold, feeling very unwelcome. I drew in a deep breath, the air feeling strange and foreign to my lungs. This would not be the last time I suffered because of my mother's decisions. I braced myself against the wind, and started making my way back to the safety and comfort of home.

Marina Smirnova

Byrne Creek Secondary School (Grade Nine)
Burnaby, British Columbia



THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

The Day I Made up My Mind

We are standing there, halfway up the road. On the bottom, the water's edge looks like I can reach out and touch it and, on the top, there seems to be a man with a broken-down car. The road is on an angle, but we happen to have found a flat part. On one side is a giant rock wall and, on the other, a single, old-style, wooden home with a battered picket fence. The sky is grey. . . . A storm is brewing.

I am standing there thinking about how it's too hard for me to make up my mind. I'm doing so, while trying to avoid the stare of her beautiful, moonlit eyes. She puts a single finger over my lips. I stop. She says, "*Shhh*, just listen for a moment." We pause for a second. She starts again, "This is wrong. This is not how it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be easy." She pauses to catch her breath. The expression on her face changes. "I can't lose you." She corrects herself as a single tear drops down her cheek and freezes near her dimple. "I won't!" she yells. Then her eyes wander to the ground.

I put my hands on her face and lift her head up. We are looking each other right in the eyes now. I no longer feel the need to avoid her stare. My words find a way out. "Don't worry," I say as I wipe her single tear with the thumb on my left hand. "I'm not going anywhere," I plead.

A smile has found its way to her face. At that very moment, we share our first kiss . . . her hands hanging from my elbows, mine still on her face.

We release each other from our embrace, and her smile is all I can see. My face blushes, her smile gets wider, and we move in for another kiss, when . . . *boom!* Thunder roars through the sky. We look up simultaneously as the first drops of the storm reach us. She shrugs her shoulders, and lets out a little grin. I'm not worrying about the storm at all, still dazed by her beauty.

Her arms are on my shoulders, mine are resting on her waist. We kiss again, while the rain falls, cooling us down in this moment of intense heat; it's almost as if it's turning to steam.

It's over, my mind is now made up. . . . I'm staying. I think to myself, *The rain is getting too harsh*. I unlock myself from her lips, take her hand, and begin to pull her to the only shelter in sight. We stand there, under the roof, gazing out at the showers as the water pounds the ground with tremendous force. I turn to her and utter the words, "I love you."

She turns to me . . .

Tyler Hillier

Sir Wilfrid Laurier Collegiate Institute (Grade Ten)
Toronto, Ontario



THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Searching for Forever

She hobbled down the busy street, her cane silently hitting the pavement with each ungainly step. She was a shell of her former self—her eyes opaque, her skin translucent, and her once rosy cheeks devoid of colour. People swarmed around her, brushing past her, ignorant of the lonely woman. She didn't notice them either, her eyes passing over everyone to look for the man she truly loved.

She had lost her husband today and, without him, she was lost. The simple fact overwhelmed her; she knew she was not complete without him, and she would not rest until she was with him once again.

He had promised to be with her forever, and now she was alone. *Alone*. The word haunted her, invading her soul, and leaving her to drown in a whirlpool of emotions. Fear. Pain. Loss. Grief. They were all there, each one meshing into the other until they became one throbbing ache, coursing through her body.

Her thoughts crowded around her, overpowering her, slowly eating her sanity away. She crumpled in agony, her knees hitting the pavement and her hands covering her face. She was fraying at the edge, and nothing she could do would stop it. Her mouth contorted in misery, no sound passing through her withered lips. Her whole body shook with her grief. But still, no sound was made; no tear breached her eyes.

That was when she saw him.

The sun trickled down around him, surrounding him with an almost ethereal glow. His head was hung low, pain putting a heavy weight on his shoulders as he shuffled down the sidewalk. Even from the distance, she could see his fingers idly thumbing his wedding band, the enormity of the simple action treasured by her.

Tremulously, she lurched back to her feet, her cane forgotten. She couldn't blink, for fear he would disappear. She took a cautious step forward, willing him to look up, to see her. *Now*, she thought. *Now we can go home*. She took another step towards him, limping severely, praying he wouldn't disappear. She hobbled forward, faster and faster, her mouth still moving to his name.

He didn't look up.

She ached to hold him, her arms reaching out in front of her, her steps gaining speed. She was almost there.

She stopped in front of him, unable to make a sound.

Finally, he looked up.

Her mouth gaped in wordless horror at his appearance, her eyes taking in every detail. His eyes were lifeless, rimmed with red behind his thick glasses. His face was hollowed, worn and etched with grief. His usually immaculate clothes were rumpled, and his hair tousled. He was in shambles.

He didn't see her. Instead, his eyes passed through her, swiftly returning to the sidewalk once again. He walked right through her, alone in his torment.

His wife had died today and, without her, he was lost.

Arianna Siebert-Timmer

Calgary Christian School (Grade Eleven)
Calgary, Alberta

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

The Day It Rained

"I've never seen it rain like this. Fifteen years I've lived here and never . . . nothing like this."

No response. The silence bothered me more than anything but it's what I expected. One more try.

"Taking you to the station first, but we'll get you home soon, okay?"

Nothing. . . . Not even a flinch. Something bothered me about him, but I didn't know what. Something I wasn't doing right, something that was just too far to grasp. He'd been through a lot, but I'd have to get him to start talking soon.

"God damn rain. . . ."

A smile, and I couldn't help but smile back.

"You're finally smiling, huh?"

"Yeah."

Quiet, but it was a start. It started to get hot in the car so I rolled down the window. I had to turn off the sirens. Now, all that separated me from the kid was the sound of rain racing by.

"What's your name, son?"

"My friends call me Louis."

"Tell me a little bit about yourself, Louis; it's quite a ways to the station." All he did was smile, but something about it kept bothering me.

"My father is a Christian."

"Oh yeah, what's his name?" Silence. "It's just that it's a small town and I might know him."

He started to fiddle with his hands as he looked out into the sky, just adoring the downpour.

"People call him a lot of names."

"Well, what do you call him?"

"I call him Dad."

A stupid question with an obvious answer and all I got for it was more silence. The station was up ahead, but all I could think about Julie at home and that warm cinnamon smell of hers when I took that first step through the door. I sighed.

"God damn it," I muttered, and all I saw in the rear view mirror was another smile from the kid.

I had to get straight to the point.

"Did you see the man who killed those two people, Louis?"

"Yes."

It would be a short night, no doubt about it. Keep it up, Pete, and you just might make it back in time for coffee. Here goes. "Okay, did you see . . .?"

He cut me off and asked, "Are you a Christian, Peter?"

Did I tell him my first name?

Silence.

"No, actually. My wife is though; goes to church every Sunday."

Another smile.

"Well . . ." This time it was the radio that cut me off.

"Yeah, Jennings, we got a problem down here."

“What is it?”

“This guy is really freaking out. I’ve never seen anything like this before.”
Just like the rain. All I could do was look at the kid now.

“What’s he doing?”

A smile now, like he was enjoying it.

“He’s . . . Jesus! I think he’s ripping out his eyes.”

I dropped the radio. Louis now had a wide grin. “Did you see him, Louis?”

“Yes.”

“What did he look like?” I could feel the sweat, it was hot again.

“Don’t you know, Peter? You’re looking right at him.”

Instantly, I dropped to the floor for the radio. I got up, and just like that, he was gone. I could smell something very distinct in the air. It was cinnamon.

When Peter got home, he sat down at the table alone and sipped slowly at his cold coffee. On the following Sunday, he went to church.

Brenden Chidlow

Samuel Robertson Technical Secondary School (Grade Twelve)

Maple Ridge, British Columbia

