

FIRST PRIZE

Goodnight, Kiddo

JULY 18, 2016. Pa sat at the table with his son. “Hey, kiddo, how was school?”

Oliver glanced up. “Sensational,” he smiled, his eyes filled with a sudden giddiness. “I think Chelsea Hepler likes me.”

His father looked up from his plate. “Really?” He flipped through the pages of *The New York Chronicle*. “You like her too?”

Oliver shrugged. “She’s pretty—funny, too—but I’m only seven.” He took a bite and swallowed, before taking a swig of milk.

Stew, not a normal Henderson family meal. It was supposed to be Mama’s day to cook when she’d make her delicious beef stew.

July 18, 2014, changed everything. Pa remembered the fire blazing furiously from the car windows, an old man dragging him from the car as he screamed in agony. And after her death, the taste’s never been the same. The love and care she put into it was replaced with empty bitterness. He stirred at his food, pushing potatoes and carrots aside from each other and forced a feeble smile. “Well, kiddo, I had my first girlfriend in preschool. Kissed her right on the cheek!”

Oliver looked up. “But you’ve got confidence, and ti—”

The hourly chirping of their cuckoo clock rang out until the wooden bird retreated into its clock doors. “You were saying?”

“What I mean is, I wish I had the time to be like you.”

Pa pushed his plate aside. “Wish you had time? You’ve got a whole life ahead of you, Son.”

Oliver stared at him, his eyes glazed over and his expression stony. Oliver got up; the stairs buckled under his weight. Pa rose and scraped the leftovers into the waste bin. His footsteps followed Oliver’s.

Oliver lay in bed, waiting to be tucked in. Pa sat on the edge of his bed.

“Can you tell me a story, Pa?”

He kissed Oliver’s forehead. “It’s late, kiddo, maybe tomorrow.”

Oliver clenched onto Pa’s hand and squeezed it tightly, causing his knuckles to whiten. “But what if I’ve got no time?”

Pa turned his head. “Oh, kiddo, what’s that doin’ crossing your mind? You’ve got time, Ollie.”

Oliver lay there, his body motionless, only his lips moving. “But I don’t, Pa; I never did. I’ve been gone for two years today. But you do, and you’re wasting it on me.”

Pa held on to Oliver’s teddy bear and caressed its stitching. “Oh, kiddo, whatever do you mean?”

Oliver looked up and smiled sadly. “You’ve gotta let me go rest with Mama in heaven.” And with that, Oliver’s hand grew colder until Pa could feel nothing at all.

With a tear rolling down his cheek, Pa rose and turned off the lights. “Goodnight, kiddo.”

by Maeve Sipes (Grade 7)

William G. Davis Public School

Cambridge, Ontario

FIRST PRIZE

Brace for It

CHESSIE LIVED IN THE APOCALYPSE, and she despised braces.

Her burning hatred for her braces far outstripped that of simple annoyance. Those strung-up silver scumbags were completely determined to mock her at every turn. From gathering tiny particles of unidentifiable mush to stabbing her in the gums like barbed wire when she least expected it, her braces made everyday life insufferable. If not for the fact that they were irreversibly cemented to her teeth, Chessie would have torn them out long ago.

The apocalypse was bearable. The zombies were really stupid. She enjoyed being alone, and she avoided disease like the plague. She gathered food, water, and first aid. She raided houses and scavenged for abandoned weapons. She even managed to get over her parents enlisting into the scattered military and leaving her to fend for herself. Chessie was a model survivor in every way.

Except for the braces.

CHESSIE'S EYES DRIFTED OPEN. She was still where she was when she had fallen asleep. Nothing had taken a bite out of her while she slept. There was a distinct lack of stench, groans, or shuffling footsteps. All good.

She still had braces. Not good.

Chessie rose stiffly from the ground, kicking up a swirl of dust that danced in the warm, sunlit air of the warehouse building. She didn't want to brush her teeth that morning, which was just as well, because she'd left the nearest water source days ago. She snatched up her backpack, hefted her baseball bat, and slipped open the door. Frankly, she enjoyed living free in the blasted ruins of civilization. There was nobody to please, nothing to stress about—

Except *that*.

Gazing out at the street, now overly conscious of the barbed-wire braces cutting into her sanity, Chessie continued her trek with no destination and no goal in mind. Suddenly, she was stopped short.

"SANDY J. SMILES DENTISTRY NOW OPEN!" proclaimed a bold billboard in purple text. "NEED A NEW DENTAL PLAN? BRACES NEED ADJUSTING OR REMOVING? SANDY HAS YOU COVERED! NEW LOCATION AT 960 ALPENROSE AVE!"

Chessie was sure the billboard hadn't been there last night. It still retained its original gaudy brightness as if ripped straight from the pre-apocalyptic past. She knew it was too good to be true, but who cared?

At that moment, on June sixth, at 6:51 a.m., Chessie decided where she would steer her fate. She would find Sandy Smiles and rid herself of these ever-present braces. And if not, if Sandy Smiles had been eaten up long ago, she would find a way herself. That would be the easiest thing in the world, for her heart was at last buoyed with hope.

by Luke Zhang (Grade 8)
Southwood Public School
Windsor, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

Locked up Long Enough

*“TYGER TYGER, BURNING BRIGHT.”*¹ An old tiger was lying in his cage at the zoo. He had heard that sentence many times before. Where did it come from? He repeated it multiple times in his head. The tiger knew it meant something. As if he were meant for more than this small cage in a zoo. He was thankful that the hairless humans had cared for him when he was a young, injured, and reckless tiger, but that wasn't him anymore.

A kid slammed against the glass of the viewing area, startling the old tiger. But he was used to that, used to the cries, roars, and screams, used to the horrible noises. He wished they would go away, but they didn't. They would if he left, and he wished he could leave.

The old tiger, who had gotten lost in his thoughts, turned his attention back to the viewing area. A young hairless child was taunting him. He'd had enough. The old tiger slammed his body against the glass and roared. The people in the viewing area screamed. The old tiger did not stop until all of the people left.

Next, he needed to find an escape route, and fast. The viewing area was slightly farther out than the rest of the cage. The tiger struggled to jump up onto the roof, while causing plenty of the “wooden” plates to fall to the ground. He hauled himself up and looked at the ground outside the cage. It was a far leap for an old tiger. He jumped carefully to the ground and landed on his feet. The old tiger looked around. He was out of his cage! He knew he couldn't savour the moment, since the evil people would try to take him back. So, the tiger started running.

He could see the fields beyond the zoo. He could hear the people gasping and screaming as he ran past. *“Tyger Tyger, burning bright,”* he thought again. This now meant something more to him. He knew what it was trying to tell him.

The old tiger ran into the field beyond the zoo. He stopped running, turned around, and stared at the people inside the confines of the zoo. The bright sun shone against his back, making him look as if he were shining, or even burning. The people leaned against the fences of the zoo, mesmerized, and then he turned to a forest that lay far beyond the dry field. The old tiger knew the people would search for him and take him, but he was finally free.

“Tyger Tyger, burning bright.”

¹ Verse from William Blake's “The Tyger.”

by **Natalie Jones** (Grade 7)

Georges P. Vanier School
Calgary, Alberta

SECOND PRIZE

The Day of the Sun

FOR SIXTY YEARS, day and night, the Sun, not once, peeked out from the cloud.

For sixty years, day and night, the cloud, not once, stopped the storm.

Every sixty years, here, on Neptune, the cloud, for just two hours, vanishes. One may never live to see the Sun. One may live to see the Sun twice. But for as long as Neptune has existed, the storm always comes back.

APRIL 2, 4702

No one could focus. Not today. The teacher, Mr. Dawson, wasn't even here yet. The class was buzzing until an obnoxious voice cut off any conversation happening.

"Who knows what the Sun looks like?" It was Dylan, with his best friend, Nigel. Ella groaned, but he continued. "I heard that you can't even look at it! Seriously, we've been waiting for thirteen years, and all we get is this?" he complained.

Ella thought about what her grandfather had told her. "I heard it's like a bright, golden orb of light. Like a coin," she said out loud. Everyone nodded in agreement.

"You fools are going to believe her?" Dylan screamed, "You're such a liar, Ella!" Dylan stood there enraged, catching his breath.

When no one said a word, Nigel pulled Dylan down from the chair, and the giddy chatters and laughter resumed with full force.

Suddenly, a hand clamped over her mouth. She thrashed and struggled. More hands grabbed her wrists and dragged her to the supply closet. She kicked her legs, but they threw her in. The door slammed in her face. Ella clawed at the door, but someone responded, "That's what happens when you lie." No one noticed she was gone.

"Look! It's the Sun!" A stampede of footsteps stomped in the direction of the window. Ella began to scream again. Her voice was hoarse, but she couldn't give up. Not yet. The footsteps hurried towards the door, and all she could hear was silence.

Meanwhile, the whole planet was celebrating. Soaking up the warmth and running around the field. But as they say, "time flies when you're having fun," so before they knew it, a big fat raindrop tumbled from the sky and splattered on the tarmac. The teachers rushed the kids inside as more started to pummel.

Mr. Dawson did a quick head count, only to realize that one of his students was missing. When he asked, "Where's Ella?" he noticed that Dylan's and Nigel's faces went white. The two boys slowly opened the closet door, and Ella weakly stood up. She stumbled to the window, pressing her hands against the glass as the rain started to pour, and the last wisps of sunlight disappeared behind the cloud.

by Angie Sun (Grade 8)

Waterloo Area Enrichment Program

Waterloo, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Be Yourself

ADDISON STAYED IN THE BACK of the class as it seemed the safest spot in the crowded room. While she ate her cream cheese and cucumber sandwich, she looked around. She heard shouting. She saw a group of boys playing Monkey in the Middle with someone's hat. She saw a group of girls sitting and gossiping. She saw a group of people playing Dungeons & Dragons. Addison had never quite fit in anywhere. Maybe it was because of her bright-pink hair. Maybe it was because of her artsy outfits. She didn't know. From her first day of kindergarten, she knew she was different. She had gone through a few friendships, but she never found someone right. Then, when she walked into middle school, Addison got the feeling that this year would be different. How? She didn't know yet. She just had to keep hoping that someday, maybe, she would find her people.

"That's really good," said Addison's art teacher, Ms. Anderson.

"Thanks," Addison responded.

"Have you considered joining Art Club? I think you'd really like it."

Addison shuffled her feet. "Um, . . . I'll think about it."

The bell rang for Addison's next class. As she went to her locker, she thought about Ms. Anderson's proposal. *Honestly, I'm not sure what I want*, she thought. When they had announced that there was an art club, she hadn't really considered it. But now, after their conversation, she was starting to reconsider her decision. When they had looked at the school's club list, Addison remembered her mom saying, "*Addison, this club would be a great way to meet some new friends with the same interests as you.*" Hm . . . maybe her mom was right.

Ring! The late bell! She slammed her locker shut and ran.

It was lunch break, and the flyer for Art Club said it was today. Her palms started sweating. *Well, I should probably stop stalling*, she thought.

As she stepped into the room, all eyes turned towards her. She was starting to regret her decision. She sat down and took out her sketchbook.

That day, she was working on a drawing of aliens invading a shopping mall for her little sister who loved outer space.

"Is this spot taken?"

Addison looked up to see a girl with long blue dreadlocks, wearing an oversized yellow sweater and ripped jeans. "No."

"Great!" The girl sat down and took out her own sketchbook. "My name's Julia, by the way."

"Mine's Addison."

Awkward silence.

"I like your outfit," said Julia.

"Thanks! I like yours." And at that moment, Addison knew that they would be friends forever. *I guess that everyone is slowly starting to find where they belong*, she thought as they exchanged numbers.

by Hazel Essery (Grade 7)

École Glenbrook Middle School

New Westminster, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

The Bridge

DAISY SAT ON THE EDGE of the river, deciding whether or not to jump in. If she did, she would disappear under the bridge, just like her sister. If she didn't, she would never know what was on the other side. Her older sister had disappeared two years ago when she was eight years old. Ever since, her family hadn't been the same. They were already poor, but after she vanished, they had lost another big source of income, which meant they had to move to the poor part of town where the only houses were small shacks on the side of the road.

Her legs dangling right above the water. *What would happen?* she wondered. The bridge had been there for years before Daisy was born, and everyone talked about how there was something horrible on the other side because nobody ever came back. *But they've never seen it*, she thought. There was only one real way to find out, but she wasn't ready. Daisy stood up and took one last glance at the bridge before walking home.

At home, she made dinner with her grandmother, the way she did every day. She never went to school; they couldn't afford it, and it wasn't mandatory, so why spend the money? Everyone in the house had a job to be able to afford basic necessities, so nobody ever really saw each other apart from Daisy and her grandmother, who made the meals together. In the silence of making dinner, Daisy asked her grandmother, "Grandma, what do you think is beyond the bridge?"

Her grandmother looked shocked. Nobody ever talked about the bridge; it was an unspoken rule everybody followed. Eventually, the old woman said, "Well, there are many different stories about what's beyond the bridge: monsters, plagues, war, and the list goes on and on—" She paused for a moment. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no reason, just wondering," she said. Daisy knew her grandmother wouldn't approve of even thinking about going under the bridge.

That night, Daisy was in bed but not asleep. She was thinking about the bridge. *But what if it's nice beyond there?* she thought. *Maybe that's why no one comes back.*

The next day, she went back to the river. She knew she shouldn't jump in, but her mind was racing with thoughts about what could be under the bridge. Then, without thinking, she looked back at her house and waved before jumping into the water.

As she drifted down the river, she was slowly swept under the bridge. All she saw on the other side was a blinding light. Then a voice called out to her, "Daisy, you did it. You found me!"

by Isabelle Lacey (Grade 8)

Lester B. Pearson Elementary and Middle School
Toronto, Ontario