

FIRST PRIZE

Warthogs

IT ALL HAPPENED IN A FLASH. Running. Squealing. Then it stopped. But the internal pain did not, and a trail of tragically deep sadness was left.

The pale morning sun shone on the warthog pair. The baby was galloping in the tall, golden grasses. The mother was cleaning her hooves and watching her beautiful baby frolic around. But then she saw a flash of spots. Another. There were hyenas—five of them. The mother cried out to her baby and hid him in the grass.

The hyenas advanced, looking for the baby, and the mother charged, trying to keep them away from the hiding spot. Again and again. Her breathing quickened after every charge. She couldn't do it much longer; she was getting worn out.

Meanwhile, the baby was hiding in the grass, watching his courageous mother fight for both of their lives. Then he gasped. His mother was surrounded. He feared for his mother, but he knew that he couldn't interfere.

Suddenly, one of the wretched creatures lurched towards the baby. He was picked up, and he squealed. A bite. An excruciating bite. He yelled and gasped for air. He weakly cried out for help, but thirty seconds later, he took his last breath.

The mother heard her baby squeal, and she bolted. Inside her head, she thought, *Noooo! My baby didn't have a fair chance to live. To see the world, to enjoy the amazing things in life!* And the devastation was like water, and she was a sponge, soaking it all up. It was a tragedy. Her baby was gone. She had failed as a parent. For a long time, she would have to wait to be ready to be a mother again. And yet, she knew in the back of her mind that she couldn't dwell on it forever. Some day, she would have to move on.

TWO YEARS LATER

The mother's tail bounced, skimming the tops of the tall, golden grasses. A one-year-old warthog and one-week-old baby trailed behind her. The babies trotted to catch up to their protective mother, who warned them to stay close. She beamed at them, her tusks shining in the sunrise. She still had an ache in her heart from that dreadful day and couldn't ever forget it, but she'd moved on as much as she could. Now, she had new babies and was always on the lookout for predators. She was happy, and she'd learned not to think too much about the past but to focus on the future.

She nuzzled her babies, let out a contented sigh, and prepared for a new day alongside her two little beauties.

by Shirah Margolis (Grade 5)

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FIRST PRIZE

The Last Day of June

THE SUN BEAT DOWN on my face as I jogged up to the lake house. It felt good to clear my mind after a long school year. I was excited to spend my days with my family and my calico cat, Luna.

I sprang into the kitchen to grab an iced tea and plopped myself down on the couch. I heard the sounds of news reporters reporting on recent news. I thought about tomorrow, Canada Day. Fireworks with Grandma June were always a celebration.

Out of nowhere, Luna began meowing like crazy as if she were desperate to get my attention. She jumped up at me, and her meowing continued. I was confused as she meowed loudly, running towards the hallway. I decided to get up and follow her to the bedroom.

Suddenly, my heart dropped to my feet. I yelled, "Grandma? Are you okay?"

There was only silence and the pounding of my heart. The panic rushed through my body like Niagara Falls. I quickly called for help.

AT THE HOSPITAL, we learned that Grandma had a stroke. She was paralyzed and could no longer talk. Mom wrapped her arms around me, and I felt her tears wet my shoulder. The news felt as if I had been hit by a train. "It's going to be okay, Harper," said Mom. Through my sobs, I told Mom about Luna trying to save Grandma.

BACK AT THE CABIN, I couldn't stop thinking about my conversation with Grandma June that morning. I was telling her about my friends at school and how they were getting into trouble all the time. Grandma told me that when she was a young girl, she had to stop hanging around with some troubled kids. It cost her some friendships, but she would never regret her decision. "*Not all people you meet are good friends.*"

AFTER A COUPLE OF WEEKS, Grandma arrived home. She was given a computer to communicate by typing with her good hand. Grandma was frustrated and sad and did not have interest in her computer. It seemed as if life had been sucked out of her. I just wanted my grandma back. I leaned on Luna for comfort.

MONTHS LATER, Grandma wheeled up to my mom and me. Finally, I saw her move her working hand over to the keyboard. She slowly typed out some words. After some time, she finished typing and clicked the ENTER button.

I read, "Hi, Harper. Your best friend saved my life. I am very grateful. Make sure to give Luna extra treats. Grandma loves you."

I hugged Grandma tightly and wished for the return of June.

by Everlee Huculak (Grade 6)
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SECOND PRIZE

The Plan

CLEO GROANED and, slumping, slapped her weak morning hands on the ringing alarm clock. Normally, at this hour, other middle-school students would be calling their friends, asking them what to wear or what excuse they should come up with for missing homework. Not her. She wore a once-white but now off-white t-shirt and ripped jeans that she hadn't ripped herself. Her excuses were always "I forgot" or "It was my goldfish's birthday," even though she didn't own a pet of any sort. And for the friend part, she had no friends. Not even one. Not even a half friend. Not that everybody hated her; she was just a nobody, and she had adapted to that.

Of course, this had to pose some problems. Such as in class, when the teacher told you to pick a partner. And at lunch. And when you forgot to do your homework. But guess what? Without any friends, the teacher had to pick Popsicle sticks to decide your partner, there was nobody to swap Lunchables with at lunch, and there was no one to copy homework from. Cleo knew this, and she had solutions: Eat lunch in the bathroom stalls, deliberately go with the weird kid in science class, and copy homework off the internet, but she did plan on making friends eventually.

On September 14, 2022, the new kid arrived, and obviously, there was a lot of gossip about stuff like that. Having read a fair number of books, Cleo knew that new kids usually had a hard time making friends. To her, this was a whole new opportunity.

When he sat down alone at lunch, she heavily debated sitting next to him. In the end, she decided not to. She didn't even know the name of this guy! And thus, another lunch period was spent in the bathroom stall.

Then, she decided to sit with him at lunch the next day. "Hi," he greeted in a dull and quiet tone.

"What's your name?" Cleo asked, still refusing to make eye contact.

"Devon," he replied, looking anywhere but at her. And that was the conversation. No more words were exchanged—no eye contact, no friend. They both just sat in awkward silence, eating their lunches. For all she knew, he could've had rainbow eyes, and she wouldn't ever have known it.

When she got home, the second thing she did was take a sheet of paper and write down some words. "Plan: Sit with Devon at lunch and become friends. Tell him about stuff and actually make eye contact for once."

The next day at lunch period, when she walked into the cafeteria, she knew what to do for once. And she did it.

by Sophia Wang (Grade 5)

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SECOND PRIZE

The Knight's Daughter

A LONG TIME AGO, a knight's daughter was running for her life through the grand forest at the edge of Ivason, her town, the castle guard on her tail. Her mind raced to find her courage . . . and a spell. She disappeared into a shadow, leaving the guards in awe and terror.

Though it may seem incredible, teleportation always ends in extreme nausea. Her dad was not home yet, so she ran into his room and placed thirty-four gold coins where he put his pay. That was when the idea came. Her dad was on duty when she was selling magic orbs that glowed when you were sick. He was one of the guards chasing her. *If he saw my face*—no, she wouldn't let herself dwell on that. Nearly choking on tears, she sat down on her bed, her back to the door.

She jumped at the sound of her name. "Beatrice Maddock!" her dad roared. Beatrice's throat dried. "You forgot to bring the pig to market!"

A kind of relief settled over her. "I'll do it now," she said.

She exited and went to the pen, where a pale and fat hog snorted. Beatrice sighed and magically harnessed him in rope. The walk to the market was rough, and the cold wind made it no better. She was walking up the rocky road when a castle guard ran in front of her.

"Halt! You match the description of a witch we saw in the woods." With no more explanation, he dragged her and the hog off. Only one spell could save her, but she would be poor again. She'd have to not use magic unless there was a danger. Her feet barely touched the ground on the walk to the prison, because the guard was basically carrying her.

They were at the prison door. The prison was a rock building with no roof or windows; it was maybe twenty-five-feet tall. The guard threw her in. It was no different on the inside. She muttered under her breath, "Fine!"

Bitterly, she started to glow. She appeared in the shadows at the market, drained. She knelt next to her hog and wept. She brought home one silver coin. One coin. And it set them back a hog. All the money she had made for her dad over the years was gone. And it showed. Barely anything was in the house, and there was barely food.

The spell worked; no one remembered she was magical, but all evidence of her magic was gone too. All the money and her secret orbs. If someone saw her use magic again, the spell would shatter. She couldn't risk that. So, she stayed magicless.

by Grace Johnson (Grade 6)
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THIRD PRIZE

Salish

AS EMILY AND I SWAM towards the rocky island, I could feel the cold water rushing down the back of my neck. The grizzly bear that had been chasing us paced the shoreline in the distance.

When we finally reached the tiny island, we lay there breathing heavily. The beach was not much of a beach, all sharp rocks and barnacles. We heard rustling in the bushes when a wolf pup jumped out at us. It didn't attack us. Instead, it started walking towards us. It looked injured.

"Oh no!" I said. The wolf needed help.

"Do you think she's been separated from her pack?" Emily asked.

"We can't just leave her here," I said.

"We can't go back; the grizzly is still over there."

The wolf pup was licking her paw. "Let me have a look at that," I said to the wolf. There was a large cut on her paw. She backed away from me cautiously. "It's okay, you can trust me," I said. The wolf began walking towards me. She carefully gave me her hurt paw to examine. "Ouch. That looks painful." I had some band-aids in my backpack. I put a band-aid on the wolf's wound. "There you go," I said.

"Wow, that was amazing!" said Emily.

"We'd better find some shelter," I said. "It's starting to rain."

We found shelter under a big cedar tree. "I'm starving," said Emily.

"Me too," I said. "Wait, where's the wolf pup?"

"Oh no!" said Emily.

"Oh, phew. I see her over there," I said.

It came to us with a huge salmon in its mouth and dropped it at our feet. "How are we going to eat this?" laughed Emily.

"We'll cook it on a fire," I said. "My dad taught me how to light a fire in the woods."

Emily and I gathered some old man's beard and a couple of sticks. "This will do," I said. We rubbed two sticks together. A fire slowly started. We placed the salmon on the fire.

After we'd eaten, with the wolf at our side, we slowly drifted off to sleep listening to the crackles of the fire.

In the morning, as I woke, I saw the sun rise over the trees. As the light hit the ground, I noticed wolf prints in the mud. I woke Emily up and pointed at the wolf prints, and we followed them. The wolf pup excitedly moved beside us.

When she saw her pack, she ran to the wolves with her tail wagging. I knew it was best for her to go home. "Salish! That's what I'll call you."

by Coco Collins (Grade 5)

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THIRD PRIZE

Hiding Clones

HAVING A CLONE is not easy work.

“Caspian, I would like you to do your piano practice after dinner!” happily says my mom.

I try my best to look depressed. “Alright, Mom, I’m just going upstairs to change into my pyjamas!” I moan.

As soon as I am upstairs, I whisper, “You there?”

“Yeah?” and my clone emerges from my bedroom in my pyjamas. I say, “You have gotta play the piano for me!”

“Okay, okay,” my clone remarks, clearly annoyed. My clone marches downstairs.

As soon as my clone starts playing, I notice something is wrong. My clone is messing up the music!

“Caspian, your playing sounds, umm, rustier than usual,” remarks my mom.

“Sorry, Mom. I’m just tired, that’s all,” quickly adds my clone. I let out a huge sigh of relief as my mom believes the lie.

As my clone finishes up, he says, “Mom, Dad, I think I’ll just have an early night.”

“An early night? That’s not normal!” declares my dad.

“I had cross-country at school today,” my clone affirms.

As my clone slips upstairs, I say, “Next time, I will do piano. Alright? Mom and Dad are already catching onto us!” I add.

“You’re the boss,” he says.

At night, my clone sleeps on the top bunk of my bed. I hear footsteps in the other room, and I think, *Oh no! Dad is coming in to check in on me! I’m busted for sure!* As my dad walks in, I quickly say, “Dad, could you get me some water from downstairs?”

“Of course, Caspian,” he says.

While my dad goes downstairs, I whisper quietly to my clone, “You gotta make sure to hide when Mom or Dad comes in the room!”

“Yes, yes, I know,” says my clone sluggishly.

The next morning, I quickly rush downstairs to make myself a delectable PB&J. As my clone walks downstairs, my dad is already down there.

“Hey, Caspian!” he states. I dodge out of sight and swiftly rush upstairs to make sure I don’t get caught.

“Morning, Dad!” says my clone.

“Time to eat breakfast,” declares my dad. Things are going well. “In thirty minutes, you have to go to school!” my dad stresses.

I have, of course, already eaten up my PB&J and got myself dressed for the day. My nervous clone bounds up the stairs. I say, “I’ve got it covered,” and I salute to my clone. Then, I say with a smile, “See you on the other side.” I run down the stairs and say, “Let’s go to school!” to my dad.

Hiding your clone from your family is hard work. I should’ve come clean at the start!

by Maximilian Bina (Grade 6)

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