

FIRST PRIZE

The Elevator

THE MAN WAS SHOVED as he attempted to make his way onto the elevator that was already holding a hazardous number of people. The elevator itself was truly a sight to behold. With its glass exterior, it boasted its existence to onlookers. It travelled to the top floor of the Realm Building, a building so influential that its history was mentioned at every opportunity by the oldest citizens of the city. When one looked out the window, the skyscraper was always there, providing a sense of security that nothing else was able to give.

It was common knowledge that taking the stairs was much faster than going on the elevator, but the man hadn't seemed to figure that out. He had a hope in the lift, the same hope that had prompted him to move to the city from the countryside. That day, however, was the day that he finally decided to stop. He didn't want to trek the stairs, and he didn't want to wait for the elevator anymore. Before he moved, his life was predictable. It wasn't like that anymore. He had officially given up trying to make his way in a city that didn't want to try with him.

Instead, the man hurried outside, the colourful city lights providing an appropriate backdrop for his drab clothes. He was drawn to the worn-down diner across the street that had nearly no one inside. There was a red neon sign half hanging from the front door, but other than that, the pale moonlight that reflected off its windows was the only decoration.

The man dropped himself into one of the booths and closed his eyes, allowing himself to get engulfed by the silence that coated the air.

"What would you like today?" the server asked.

"A coffee," the man stated.

The coffee didn't take too long to arrive, unlike the elevator that the man had been faced with just moments before. As the man took a sip of the drink, warmth filled his body; he stared out the large window where crowds of people with individual lives were getting lost in the darkness, never to be seen again. It was then that the man realized what the truth was. The city was as alive as ever, not stopping for anything or anyone. It didn't mold itself to the liking of the man, instead molding the life of the man himself. The man stood up and placed his coffee cup back down on his plate, causing a clattering sound to echo through the walls.

"Thank you," the man whispered into the air, before rushing out of the establishment to go back to the elevator, ready to try once again.

by Kate Shahidi (Grade 9)
Richmond Hill High School
Richmond Hill, Ontario

FIRST PRIZE

Jojo

ROSES ARE DIM IN THE FALL. They shrivel up under cloudy skies. Jojo knows this to be a turning point in the year. He collects a pile of petals and crushes them with his mortar and pestle. Then he scatters the dust onto the field. When his mother asks why, he claims in a very serious manner that he must free the grass from the weeds before winter. Otherwise, they'd settle as if they were home. The snow would cover them, freeze them in place, soak them, bless them with the cool air and frost. Jojo was adamant they ought to shrivel with the roses, to die with the tulips and geraniums out front. So, he would take the rose dust and sprinkle it all over, and every year, the weeds died off before winter.

Jojo's mother is a loving woman. She caresses Jojo's back before sleep; she wraps her love like a blanket around him before school. She is the kind of woman to mindlessly leave coins in donation jars or stay up until midnight with Jojo and his pile of sick, snotty rags. Her front tooth was chipped, her hair was like straw if she didn't wash it for a day, and she smelled subtly of firewood and sterile saline. She took her love with her when she'd leave for hours each day while Jojo stayed with his grandparents down the street.

By midsummer, the weeds grew back. They sprawled in ugly white puffs and cumbersome tubes of green. Like the poison in Jojo's mother, they asserted a gloom over the grass, a taint to the petals, and when fall came again, the roses became a bundle of corroded pink.

Jojo was staying nights at his grandparents now. Most of his clothes had been moved. On the rare occasion his mother came back, she was subdued, muted in her vibrance, paled in her beauty. Still, there was a familiarity in her chipped tooth and her hair that hadn't been washed properly in months.

An announcement was posted on the neighbourhood bulletin last week, the week after they buried her in the snow. Come spring, a new basketball court would be installed. It'd be larger than the one in the neighbourhood over, and it would have four square painted in thick, yellow lines. Pavement would be poured onto the field.

That summer, the weeds didn't come back and neither did the roses. Yellow lacked the familiarity of pink. Jojo mourned for a good while, petals falling off the last of his roses. Finally, he dispelled his dying stems and painted the court himself: a bright pink that'd never go dim. *Not quite her shade, but it is her colour.*

by Olivia Voulgaris (Grade 10)

Unionville High School

Markham, Ontario

FIRST PRIZE

The Last Hope

THE SKY DARKENED, and the clouds began sobbing. The town was as quiet as a graveyard waiting for the rooster to announce a new day. Under the tree sat a boy, shivering in the cold and listening to the raindrops strumming their beats. He was wearing a thin black jacket with bite-like holes, a pair of shorts with stripes, and a pair of boots that seemed to have been through a long journey. In his hands was a metal cup, with a few small pieces of round metal that could not stop making *ding-dong* sounds.

He sat under the tree patiently, watching the leaves and raindrop fall when suddenly, a familiar figure appeared in front of him. He looked closer. It was a lady wearing a red dress and a black hat. He looked even closer when her face was within his view. The boy's eyes opened wide in shock. A face he had not seen in five years was standing right in front of him under the rain in a ghost-like town.

"Mother?" he muttered those long-forgotten words.

The lady smiled broadly, her eyes like dishes of the full moon. She knelt down, took off her gloves, and stroked the boy's face. "Ian, my son."

A soft wind swirled as the clouds stopped crying, as if they were also celebrating the union of this long-lost family.

"Where have you been, Mother?"

"Oh, my son, I was brought to the factory and was given a job sewing clothes."

"Isn't that what you are great at, Mother?"

The lady smiled again, but this time, there was sadness in her eyes. "Of course I was good at it! I was the best out of all the aunts there, so I got paid the most."

"How much?" asked Ian curiously.

"Just enough for you to buy your favourite ice cream," she smiled, but her voice fell into an awkward silence. The lady looked down to the layers of calluses on her hand.

"But why didn't you come back?" Ian looked up at her to see tears streaming down her face.

"I tried, my dear, desperately, but I . . .," her voice trailed off as she sighed and wrung her wrinkly calloused hands nervously.

"Mother, does that mean you can stay with me now?" asked Ian, with his shiny eyes open as if his mother was the hope he hadn't seen in so long.

The lady nodded, patting Ian with her hand. Soon, Ian closed his eyes, leaning his head on his mother's shoulders as the morning sun rose again, but when morning finally came, people in the town saw a boy hugging a tree branch, leaning on the old tree with his brightest smile.

by Lily Chen (Grade 11)
Magee Secondary School
Vancouver, British Columbia

FIRST PRIZE

The Rose Bush

“HONEY, DON’T TOUCH THE ROSES.” I jump, snatching my hand back from the thorny bush as if I’ve been burned. The ruby thicket bites back, leaving a trail of stinging, crimson slivers on my dark-brown skin. Wincing in pain, my eyes dart in the direction of the voice.

“Sorry, dearie, I didn’t mean to scare you.” A frail, old lady stoops out of the small, snow-white house at the end of the driveway I’m on. The midday sun’s golden rays catch in her short, silver locks as she hobbles towards me. Grey, crinkled eyes sparkling, she flashes a smile that could melt ice.

“No, I’m sorry,” I call out. “I live over there—” I beckon to the sky-blue house opposite hers, “—and my little brother accidentally kicked a ball under your rose bush. I was just trying to get it back.”

Suddenly, the old woman frowns. “You’re bleeding.”

“Oh, um, yeah.” I glance down at my hand, watching small ruby beads squeeze out of the razor-thin cuts. “Don’t worry about it—I’ll treat it when I get home.”

“Tsk, tsk.” She clicks her tongue, draping her arm behind me. A dainty aroma of vanilla and peppermint wafts off her thin, cream cardigan. “Nonsense. If you get hurt on my rosebush, your injuries are my responsibility.”

I laugh. “That’s not neces—”

But she’s already led me to her mahogany door, nudging it open. “My name is Beatrice Goldsen—or Mrs. Goldsen to you, I suppose. And yours?”

“Amara,” I reply, stepping into a little, dusty-rose-coloured foyer.

“What a lovely name,” Mrs. Goldsen coos, ushering me into a stuffy, wooden kitchen. Every nook is crammed with luscious plants. They’re sidled beside one another on the dusty windowsill, hang from the ceiling light, and spill over the plaid-set dining table. Their heavenly, crisp scents flood my nostrils.

Rummaging through an oaken cupboard, Mrs. Goldsen produces an earthen crock. From it, she smears a foul-smelling, jade paste on my bruised arm. “There. Should be all better.”

“Thanks!”

“You’re welcome,” she smiles. “My husband, Edwin—rest his soul, never appreciated my poultices.”

As I leave Mrs. Goldsen’s house, I suddenly realize: *I forgot my ball!* Crouching by the garnet rosebush, I manoeuvre through its spiky maze and grab the ball. A beige paper flutters out behind it. Curious, I uncrumple the little note. My blood chills.

“If something happens to me, it’s her. The thorns are spiked.—Edwin”

“Honey.”

A dark silhouette engulfs me. Heart pounding like a drum, I turn. Mrs. Goldsen’s lips stretch into a scowl, stone-grey eyes hard as flint.

“Don’t touch the roses,” she mutters. Poison laces her every word.

by Janelle Ackom (Grade 12)

University Hill Secondary School

Vancouver, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Millie's Walk

MILLIE HAD MISSED THE BUS. She recognized the bus number as it went by. Number 57. It was her bus. Millie remembered what her mom had said earlier that morning: “*If you miss the shuttle, you’re walking to school.*” Oh, the irony. There was only herself to blame. She should’ve gotten up when her mother told her to. She probably shouldn’t have lain in bed and stared at her bookshelf while she gathered motivation to get up.

But she did all of that, and left at seven fifty instead of seven forty-five.

Millie wouldn’t even have to take the bus if her school weren’t being renovated. Her grade was kicked out to an elementary school very far away from where Millie lived. It was a nightmare getting to school. So, Millie walked past the high school she was technically a student at, turned left, and kept going. In the cold. The song “Beneath the Brine” began to play in her earbuds. A dramatic song for a dramatic walk.

Winnipeg Novembers are cold. It didn’t help it was snowing. But Millie kept walking. She scolded herself and teared up a couple of times. She hardly paid any attention to the music that was playing in her ears.

Eventually, she reached the busy intersection and spotted kids her age ahead cross the street. That meant she wasn’t extremely late. Maybe she’d be on time!

Millie kept walking. She walked with some little kids from the school. Finally, she made it. The last song from the school musical she was in, *The Addams’s Family*, had started playing in her earphones. “Move Towards the Darkness.” How ironic.

She went inside the school. There was no one in the hallway. Everyone was in class. Millie felt as if she were in shock; she thought she’d never get to school! She opened her locker and put her coat inside, along with her hat and mittens. Millie pulled her tablet that was playing music out of her bag and turned it off just after Gomez Addams asked Morticia whether she was unhappy. That’s how Millie felt. Unhappy.

She grabbed her binder and went to class. No one acknowledged her. To them, she was just late for some unknown reason. They didn’t know she went on a trek. They didn’t care that she’d missed the bus.

She checked the time: eight forty-one. Millie’s walk took fifty minutes. She was sweaty and would remain sweaty for the rest of the day (*yuck!*).

Millie wasn’t going to let that happen again. Tomorrow, she’d get up and not waste her time staring at nothing. Tomorrow, she’d leave when she was supposed to and get on the bus.

And she did.

by Meredith Jennings (Grade 9)

Collège Jeanne-Sauvé

Winnipeg, Manitoba

SECOND PRIZE

The Stream of Secrets

IT WAS IN THE LITTLE STREAM, behind the village, past the field, through the trees, and by the rows of daffodils where his secrets lay. It gurgled silently, whispering but never heard. So each day, he went and fed it with all of his feelings, all of his thoughts, all of his life. And each day, the stream waited eagerly.

The boy was tall, clever, and sad. His hair was rumpled, but even more so were his clothes: the same collared shirt and baggy jeans he wore each day. The village children whispered and pointed in their frilly dresses and sleek button-up shirts, but the stream smiled and awaited his voice.

When the village ran out of water one day, he knew what was to come.

Before the rooster could crow, he was out the door. The boy ran through the empty village streets as the sun began to rise, casting an ethereal red glow over everything. The field was a sea of warmth as he stumbled through it. In the distance, the trees towered taller and mightier than ever, but their shadows didn't intimidate the boy. He weaved through their stumps and their branches and their leaves, never pausing once on this familiar trail. At last, the little clearing appeared. The daffodils twirled in a golden dance, parting like curtains to reveal the stream, bubbling quietly.

The boy padded over and took a seat, pulling his knees into his chest. The stream splashed contentedly, to which he gave a bittersweet smile. His eyes gently fluttered shut. Inhale. Exhale. The key unlocked, and his lips parted as the words began to tumble out, one by one.

He spoke of truth, despair, and fear. He spoke of anger, hurt, and resentment. He spoke of dreams, light, and tranquillity. He spoke and he spoke in a soft, melodious voice that lulled the forest to sleep. He spoke of a slow beginning, a sombre in-between, a light at the end of the tunnel, and a beautiful, unexpected ending.

The stream shivered from all that it was being fed, and it knew then what was to come.

Slowly, the village began to wake up. They stretched and dressed, before they began their search for water as the skies turned blue overhead. Behind the village, past the field, through the trees, and by the daffodils, they looked. They looked but found neither a stream nor a boy.

In their place, two flourishing daffodils grew. They swayed in the breeze, one murmuring its secrets as the other listened.

by Sierra He (Grade 10)
John McCrae Secondary School
Nepean, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

Dulcet Cacophony

AS NIGHT FELL, the hazy glow of one hundred lamps dotted my sky like stars. The soldiers' paddles drew lazy strokes through the surface of the water above as they neared their destination. Tirelessly, they strained against the swells, but no wind would fill their sails tonight. The god of air did not smile upon those who plundered and pillaged, but he did have a fondness for the daughters of the sea.

Foolishly, these soldiers had entered our waters with no wards, no protection against us. An unwise general or enemy spy must have described our feeding grounds as a shortcut. Or maybe this was the sea's gift for my sacrifice: vengeance wrapped up in a wood and canvas bow.

My starving sisters darted erratically around me, their scales glistening in the diluted moonlight. Their jarring movements created harsh currents fed by the fevered hysteria of impending satiation. Subtly, we corralled our prey like cattle—they would sail no further tonight. Their arrogance and impatience had condemned them. Soon, we would feast to a dulcet cacophony of screams.

Few among the many men noticed us in the refracted shadows of the waves. Their eyes widened in horror as they fought through the myriad of emotions that accompanied an unknown foe. But I was not unknown to them. And they had not yet seen my face.

Such palpable terror reminded me of a time long past—an endless nightmare of pain and suffering, an eternity of torture for body and soul. I was naught but a chattel to them, my flesh painted in streaks of red, my shackles wearing skin to bone. I thought only death could release me until I heard the whisper of the sea. I threw myself on her mercy, and she promised me revenge.

There would be no such mercy for my tormentors tonight. The sea had fulfilled her promise. In the water where I'd found my freedom, they would find only the bitter brine of doom.

Young faces weathered and scarred. Old bodies mangled and bent. Once innocent boys twisted by greed and gold. Once pure hearts poisoned by power and the promises of a corrupt and ruthless king.

Once predators—now prey.

Breaching the surface by the jagged rocks, I drew in a breath. The frigid air permeated my lungs as naturally as the sweet salt water now flooded my gills.

Tenderly, I sang the first note in the symphony of the night.

by Sapphira Skuter (Grade 11)
Mount Douglas Secondary School
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SECOND PRIZE

A Mind Repurposed

COMING TO A STOP, Ryan looked back the way he'd come, taking in the view. A mountain range sprawled out to his left, and before him was a valley. The sun dipped over the edges of the horizon, catching the valley in the day's last light. As the shadows lengthened, he was forced to head off the trail and make camp.

As the flames from his newly made fire crackled, he leaned back and stretched out his legs, wincing at how sore they were from the day's walk. Not for the first time, he wondered if going on a weeklong trek had been the best idea.

No sooner had the thought entered his mind he heard his dad's words as clear as day, "*You need to do something tough for once. Without that, you'll never know what you can handle.*"

Hours later, he kicked dirt over the fire and was going to enter his tent when he heard footsteps. People had gone missing on this trail, so he didn't think anyone would be hiking this late in the night.

The footsteps grew louder as the person approached and then stopped at the part of the trail directly in front of him. There was a pause before they continued, this time heading right for him.

Terrified, he rifled through his pack and pulled out the gun his dad had loaned him. Swinging around, he aimed at . . . nothing. He couldn't see anything, yet the footsteps continued.

Then, it appeared. Even with the dim illumination, he could still see the monster with four arms in front of him. It loomed high above him. Its body was lean, with veins visible along its forearms, legs, and neck. It had no mouth, and as he stared, shell-shocked, he heard a voice ring in his head, *Put the weapon away, boy.*

Arm shaking, his finger grazed the trigger as the monster lunged forward and knocked him to the ground, driving the air out of his lungs. Gasping, he tried to sit up, only to have what looked like a syringe stabbed into his shoulder. Lethargy hit him then, and the trees spun as he went limp.

AT LEAST THIS ONE tried to put up a fight, Glyric thought, looking down at the human. *Little good it did him.* Hauling the boy over his shoulder, he made his way to his craft. They were needing more and more humans now; otherwise, his species would die out.

Unable to reproduce, they'd taken up copying human brainwaves into AI. The process took years and left the humans withered and dead. Under the threat of war, they were losing bodies faster than they could replace them.

by Jamie Kievit (Grade 12)
Rick Hansen Secondary School
Abbotsford, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

The Miser and Her Abettors

THE CLOUDS HAVE HUNG A VEIL over the moon's grace, painting the sky a sinister black. The only sound in the lull is the clamour jerking in my head. All noise ceases when the restaurant towers over me, and I look through the window to see a family laughing. My heel chains to the concrete, and I ache to loot the happiness on their faces. A tear brushes my cheek, and I pull my gaze away. My parents walk past me and enter.

Once we are seated, Mom sternly glances in my direction. I swallow and place the colouring sheets and coloured pencils behind the jumble of condiments. *Childhood has never been mine anyway*, I console myself. Same as the last few times, we order a large pepperoni pizza, garlic bread, and Parmesan chicken; too much for our appetites. My father's misty grey eyes meet mine, and he looks away, ashamed. My mother is a miser, and my father is a chicken. Neither has ethics or morals, simply greed.

The waitress crams the large plates onto the table, and we hastily stuff the food in our mouths. The neighbouring table eyes us, and we slow down, trying to avoid suspicion.

"How was your day, honey?" my mom asks. I'm sure it's just part of the deception.

"Good," I reply flatly.

The bill arrives, and the performance begins.

"One hundred and twenty dollars!" my mother exclaims. "Mark, we really can't afford this. It's all the waitress's fault. She never told us the price. What will we do?"

My father clasps my mother's palms, exaggerated care gleaming in his eyes. "It's alright. We'll figure it out," he replies softly.

She then goes on to exclaim that it's my birthday. Pity fills the faces of those around us, and short whispers are shared. I feel a twinge of guilt as I enjoy the attention. It is the sympathy I am due for having to live with foul mortals.

My mother's words lead to a commotion in the building, and the waitress summons the manager. After a cacophony of cries and shouts bounces through the walls, it is decided. We will pay nothing. My mother's face is overtaken with a malicious smile, which consumes the few beautiful features remaining on her face. She takes great pride in maintaining a streak of successful conning for the past ten years.

As we leave, the receptionist winks at me. I think nothing of it until I see her in an officer's uniform standing outside our door the next morning.

by Jasjeet Bacheer (Grade 9)

Elsie MacGill Public School

Milton, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Colour

AS I LIE IN MY BED watching my digital clock strike six, I groan as it starts to go off.

“Anak! Come downstairs!” I hear my mom yell.

I hate that name. *Anak*. Tagalog for “my child.” If I had my way, I’d be called by my actual name.

“I’m coming down!” I yell back, rolling my eyes.

I take a quick look at myself in the mirror. My black hair and tan skin look uglier than they did yesterday. All of the kids at school have fair skin and thin noses. I am the only one who stands out. I put a toque on. I don’t want to stand out more than I already do. I go down the stairs, and my mom greets me with the biggest smile on her face.

“I made your favourite! Chicken Adobo rice! It’s your lunch for today!”

She shows me the container of soy-sauce-covered chicken on top of a bed of rice. I feel bad.

This is going to waste. Her efforts will go to waste.

“Sorry, Mom, I already have my money for lunch today. Just bring it for yourself.”

“Ailene! I worked so hard on this for you! You have to take it to school today!”

She demands too much of me.

“I’m not taking that to school!” I yell, grabbing my backpack heading for the door.

“Ailene! Your mother made that for you. You *will* take it to school!” my dad scolds.

I turn to look at him. I’ve always been envious of his blond hair and blue eyes. I slam the door, running out.

I walk down the snow-covered sidewalk, regretting my words. I sit down on the cold bench, pondering to myself. As I do, an old man with tan skin sits down next to me.

“Lovely morning, isn’t it, Michelle? Could you come home please? Mom and I are worried about you.” He turns to me and smiles.

“You know, I know how hard it is. Being the only Filipino in school. It’s hard. But you have to be proud of yourself. Your heritage.”

I look at him confused. “I’m sorry, I think you have me confused for someone else. . . .”

In the distance, I hear a middle-aged woman calling out the name, “Tay! Tatay!”

From my own broken Tagalog, I could tell that it means “*father*.”

“Tatay! There you are! I’ve been looking for you. Come now! We were all worried.”

As she leads him away, I take his words into consideration. I’ve always hated the colour of my skin, but maybe just maybe, it’s okay to stand out.

by Nicole A. Q. Labad (Grade 10)

Valleyview Secondary School

Kamloops, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

Cotard's Syndrome

THE YOUNG BOY lay on his bed, dressed in all black. He smiled and looked over at his best friend. "Hey! Why do you look so sad?" The boy smiled at the other on the ground. "Come on. Do you know what happened? You're just in denial. . . . Or what's that word. . . ?"

The girl held her head and winced in pain. "Everything's so blurry. . . . I don't know why. . . ." she sighed, looking up at the boy on the bed.

"Well?" The boy looked down at her.

"Well, what? You finally going to tell me why we are dressed in all black?" He smiled and sat up, crossing his legs.

The girl sighed and held her head. "Aspen. . . ." She wiped her teary eyes, and black eyeshadow ran down her face as if blood were coming from her eyes.

Aspen tilted his head like a dog hearing a high-pitched noise. The girl looked up at him, "Aspen. . . . Come on, it's almost time," she sighed, standing up and walking to her mirror.

"Time! Time for what? A party? Oooh, can I come!" He smiled and walked behind her, hugging her tightly for the last time.

The girl gently placed her fingers on his arms and smiled. "Your hugs always make me feel better. . . ." She smiled through her tears and gently wiped off her makeup with the sleeve of her dress.

Aspen gasped in terror and quickly took her arm. "No, don't use your sleeve, silly!" He smiled and grabbed a cloth and wiped her eyes and sleeve.

"Aspen, how can you be so happy. . . ?" The girl had now turned around, staring up into his big, blue, puppy-dog eyes.

"Well, no one died! How can you not be happy?" He giggled, looking down at her. Aspen's shadow towered over her like a tree, while the girl looked into his sky-blue eyes. They both let the silence be their peace.

Soon, the silence was broken by a soft kiss. But the girl was gone. Aspen looked around in a panic. "Vi! Violet?" His once happy face fell into a frown, and tears ran down his face. He looked around in a panic. Where had she gone? She was just there. He panicked, looking around and calling her name, but there came no response. He fell to the ground, sobbing.

Soon, his bedroom door swung open. He looked up at his mother, who had sympathy in her eyes. "Honey. It's time to go." Aspen's mother gently picked him up, walking out of the room with him. "It's time for Violet's funeral."

by Lilly Whitford (Grade 11)

Cold Lake High School

Cold Lake, Alberta

THIRD PRIZE

Train of Thought

FUNERALS ARE STRANGE.

When you're alive, you hear from your family maybe a few times a year. Probably only see them at weddings and, ironically, funerals. When was the last time you hung out with your cousin just because? Or the last time you told your aunt that you love her? It's probably been years since you gave your grandma a hug, though she only lives a few blocks away. The point is nobody cares about the living.

None of you deserve to be here, let alone crying here, as if his death even affects you.

Nobody here ever realized that he was alone for years. Yes, my father was a harsh man at times, but his own brothers and sister could have called occasionally. Five or ten minutes here and there. It's the bare minimum, really, but he didn't even get that out of you people. I'm willing to bet that not a single person here could tell me what his phone number is—or rather, was.

I can't believe that some of you people took time off work for this. A few of you even travelled here using paid time off. My father is dead, but for you, this is just an excuse for a short vacation. I don't recognize half of the people here. Most of you are probably cousins and distant relatives, I suppose. It doesn't matter how close you are, though. Nobody here deserves to mourn if you haven't as much as spoken to the man in the past year.

You may as well just leave. If you actually knew anything about him at all, you would know that he wouldn't have wanted you here anyway. He would have loved a visit when he was alive, but there's no point in coming to see him now that he'll never know. You're just here for yourselves. "Closure" or whatever. You don't deserve closure. You keep saying, "He lived a good life," and, "He's in a better place," but you don't know anything. He was miserable, and heaven could very well be a fairy tale.

I hate you all. Each and every one of you is a horrible person. You should've told him that you loved him when he was in the hospital for the past six months. Nobody came to visit him, even though all of you knew, and now you're here, acting as if the whole thing came as a shock.

My hands are shaking with rage, and I take a deep breath to calm myself down as I step in front of the crowd of mourners.

"Thank you all for coming here today. I know that my father would have appreciated it."

by James Bourgeois-Thiessen (Grade 12)

Lake City Secondary School

Williams Lake, British Columbia