

# FIRST PRIZE

## Rebellion

I was about a week shy of eleven, or maybe I had turned eleven just a week before, when they aired the execution of six rebels on the television.

"Juliette," my father called, "come, watch."

I walked in and sat next to my father on the sofa. On the telly was a grainy image of six women standing before the nooses that would hang them. Unlike all of the other women and girls in the country who wore skirts, these women had defied the law even for their final moments and worn pants.

An announcer with a gravelly voice read the charges in a monotone: "Collusion, treason, wilful disobedience of the law, and attempted assassination of the Supreme Minister. And now, the country will allow these dissidents one final statement before they are hung for their crimes." He sounded as if he couldn't care less.

As one, the women on the screen roared at the gathered, jeering crowd: "Freedom!"

The executioners fit the nooses around the women's necks, and my father switched off the telly with a "tsk." He turned to me. "Now you understand, Daughter, what happens to women who don't marry. They get distracted and angry and then disgrace their femininity with debacles like this."

"Yes, Father," I murmured in reply. Secretly, I was curious, though I dared not voice it. *What drove those women to break the law so drastically, to the point of trying to kill the Supreme Minister?* I had never seen an execution, and the looks on the women's faces intrigued me, staying with me long into the night.

Late, so late I was just on the verge of sleep, my mother crept into my room. "Jules," she whispered, shaking my shoulder gently, "wake up."

"Mama," I whispered. "What is it?"

She didn't answer, just pulled me out of bed and down into the cellar. I sleepily wondered if we were baking some sort of pudding. But there were no holidays coming up.

My mother led me into the back room, the sewing room with her machine and thread and cloth; pins and needles were scattered. She knelt on the floor, pulled away a heavy carpet, and pulled up three loose floorboards. It was full to the brim with books. My mother looked up, a steely gleam in her eye that I had never seen before. "Tonight, Daughter, you learn the true history of the government and why those women were hanged. As is the tradition, tonight at midnight is when you join our rebellion."

"What rebellion?" I asked, wide awake.

My mother just smiled and pulled one of the books out.

**by L.A. Smith** (Grade Nine)  
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# FIRST PRIZE

## Maybe I Belong amid the Stars

She's lying in the grass looking up—no, out, she's looking out—at the sky. It's dark in a way that's not, the world cast in the flat white light of the moon. But she isn't looking at the world. Tonight, it's not down here that matters; it's out there.

The stars are only *up* because of Earth's gravity—without it, they are out. She won't be held down by such things as gravity, even that of her home planet. This is her home, she decides; going out there cannot change that fact.

Everyone feels cooped up at home sometimes.

She closes her eyes for a moment and *breathes*. Feels the grass beneath her, the solid ground. Smiles at the nothing (it's not nothing, is it? It's just something else) beyond the sky. She knows her destination: a place that makes the largest stars look like ants beside mountains.

Her eyes don't open. If there were anyone around to see, they might think her asleep—or dead. She is neither. But she is no longer here. Her body is, yes, breathing slow and shallow, eyes shut, hands at its sides, expression of peace on its face. It will wait for her return.

For *she is no longer here*. She is out there, just as she planned, travelling light years with every blink—or what passes for a blink, what she feels is a blink, though she is naught but spirit; she's left her physical form behind. The rest of her remembers what it's like to have a body, to take shape. She knows what it is to move.

And move she does, to the far side of the solar system, the galaxy, the *universe*. Past stars, planets, moons, comets, asteroids, black holes, quasars, and other, stranger things. The heat doesn't burn her, and the cold doesn't freeze her; she is incorporeal, a spirit in the great expanse.

She loses all concept of time. Alone in the darkness, surrounded by things she can barely comprehend, there is no way of knowing up from down, left from right, seconds from days. Then, it hits her: the enormity of it all, the beauty . . . the loneliness. The universe is gorgeous—frightfully so. There's only one thing left she wants.

She blinks her spirit eyes, and there it is: a little blue and green planet, accented with white wisps of cloud. Her place there is still shrouded in darkness, though only just.

The sky is lighter when she opens her body's eyes, safely tucked away in the mortal flesh, feeling better than she ever has. She will do this again, she is sure—maybe next week, but maybe tomorrow.

The stars will still be there.

**by Arika Block** (Grade Ten)

Cabri School

Cabri, Saskatchewan

# FIRST PRIZE

## Plans

The ringing bell brought with it a much needed lunch break. I paid for my meal before the students crowded in, escaping the chaos that inevitably ensued.

As my eyes scanned the area for a vacant seat, I chanced upon a boy whose name lingered in the recesses of my mind. Presently, I called out to him: “Hey, Matt. Haven’t seen you around lately. How’s it been?” He sat alone, and it was a mere whim that prompted me to sit across from him.

“Oh, hey. Yeah, it’s been some time,” his reply mirrored his desolate expression.

We had previously shared some classes but have since drifted apart. And in that time, I hadn’t realized how quiet, almost weary he had become.

“So, how do you find the semester so far?” I queried when silence overcame us.

“Uh, it’s fine. And you?” He smiled, picking at his food.

“Don’t even get me started. I already had two tests to study for this week, and the universe decides to grace me with another one.” The reminder rekindled a fathomless despondency. “Just thinking about it makes me want to die,” I joked.

He responded with a tired laugh. “That’s terrible. Sounds like a lot of work.” Strange, how dismal his eyes were. His voice was barely above a whisper.

“You okay, man?” I chuckled. “You look depressed—like, dead. Rough day, I’m guessing?”

That same strained laughter. “Yeah, I guess I am busy. But after today, I won’t be.”

“Well, that’s good. I won’t be free until this weekend.” Something about Matt’s pallid complexion evoked further curiosity. “Are you even sleeping? Just looking at you feels like sleep doesn’t fit your schedule,” I teased.

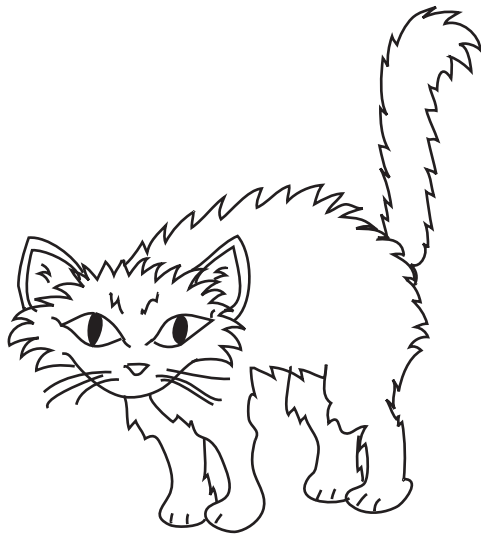
“I don’t know . . .” he trailed off, looking drained from the conversation. It was then that I realized he hadn’t looked up—not once—since our encounter. “It’s okay; I won’t be here tomorrow. I’ll catch up on my sleep.”

The abrupt ringing of the bell pierced our ears, signalling the end of our short-lived break. I watched Matt as he collected his belongings. As he walked away, I absentmindedly called him once more. I cannot name the notion that compelled me to delay him—perhaps the curious supposition that maybe Matt was less than sober. Perhaps I was irrationally apprehensive.

“Hey, Matt!” He turned. “You, uh, want to hang out? After school, I mean.” His surprise was evident as he hesitated. “You don’t have other plans, do you?”

He contemplated his answer, perplexed at the simple question. “No.” The light was flickering back into his dreary eyes. “I don’t. Let’s hang out.”

*by Leeneh Mohammed* (Grade Eleven)  
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# FIRST PRIZE

## A Cat's Tale

With his hands blistered from picking at his guitar, and an open guitar case at his feet, Henry had made a total of three dollars. He plucked at the strings and strummed from time to time, but he couldn't bring himself to tap his foot.

He would offer his song to passersby, but they would shake their heads as if he were trying to sell them something. His song became less of an offer and more a plea that begged anyone to listen.

A street cat happened across the corner where Henry was playing and ambled over, swaying to his guitar. Its fur was matted and dirty.

Henry stopped his playing. "Shoo!"

But the cat sat itself down and waited.

Henry looked at the three dollars he had made and then at his audience and huffed. The cat cocked its head.

Henry, shaking his head, tightened his guitar and then he started to play as if he were whispering. Not soon after, the tender sound became tougher, grittier. His foot was a drum. He closed his eyes and poured himself into the song, and when he finished, he looked down at his unpolished wedding ring and then at the cat, who walked off.

The cat came back the next day and again on the third day just as black clouds settled in the sky. The rain started to sprinkle on the pavement and make stars, constellations. Henry flipped his hood, closed his guitar in its case, and started to walk away. The cat was left staring after Henry, shivering.

Henry turned around. He didn't like imagining the fleas the cat might have. But how could he leave her, helpless?

He carried the cat to his apartment and straight to the tub. He started the razor and shaved her back, stomach, and mane, and when he was done, Henry ran a bath. He scrubbed the cat's scalp with soap, dried her with a paper towel, and fed her leftovers.

There was no bed frame for the mattress. Henry lay down; he set his wedding ring on the floor and stared at it before the cat brushed past his leg and found a place at the end of his bed. He turned over and fell asleep.

The cat wasn't there in the morning.

Henry slung his guitar over his neck, sprinted to the corner of his street and played. He was sure of his fingerings and consistent with his notes.

He waited until the street lamp started to flicker, and by then, his fingers were raw.

Henry went out early the next morning. His melody wandered, lost.

He stopped after the third day. His guitar had failed him again.

*by Bryn Miller* (Grade Twelve)  
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Lloydminster, Alberta

# SECOND PRIZE

It

*Thud . . . thud . . . thud.* Each step I took echoed in the dimly lit room, but none of my colleagues paid any notice to my arrival. A group of males loomed over a round table in the corner, speaking in hushed voices. They occasionally swivelled their necks, fixing contemptuous glares to the thing behind the glass screen. I walked towards the table, and attempted to join, but I only caught glimpses of the conversation.

“What are we going to do with it?” one scientist whispered. “Would it be beneficial to experiment on it?”

I soon let all of their voices become drowned out and muffled, their concerns the same ones expressed a week ago, when the radar had gone haywire in headquarters. The radar had detected activity of life in M7V coastal area, address 148, so my crew was assigned to investigate.

When we arrived, we were greeted with a murky sky. Disregarded plants throttled the sides of dilapidated bungalows. Everyone was equipped with stifling hazmat suits, meant to shelter us from possible pestilent diseases lurking in this neglected neighbourhood, but despite this reassurance, I couldn’t steady my erratic breaths and had to focus to keep my knees from buckling.

With a vigilant eye, we scoped the area for address 148. My crew darted past address 144 . . . , 146 . . . until we spotted our target and barged in. That’s where we found the creature, huddled up on the grimy ground, knees clamped tightly to its chest. It was sheathed in thick layers of fur, and its leathery, peach encasement was obscured in soot.

The team hauled the creature to the interrogation room—a desolate area where a single flickering light shone on a remote metal chair we motioned for the creature to sit on. With tears pouring from emerald-green eyes, streaming its filthy cheeks, the creature submissively sat down, and indestructible cuffs strapped its limbs to the seat.

We extracted some information about this creature’s kind. *They conduct futile rituals to mate and cleanse, and they rely wholeheartedly on archaic systems. They are a fault in evolution. How could we ever ameliorate their primitive brains to benefit our society—?*

I was jarred out of my thoughts by a booming, sinister voice: “I have made my decision.” I was back in the room, now silenced in the wake of the commander speaking. “Dispose of it.”

As two men in hazmat suits began seizing its arms, the thing’s face contorted in anguish. Wailing bounced off the bare walls, but the creature was quickly subdued. The commander averted his gaze from the tantrum, sighing a breath of relief. “I’m glad we have finally er-eradicated this s-species,” he stammered, his face twisting in repulse, “the . . . the humans.”

**by Samantha Melo-Centanni** (Grade Nine)  
Marshall McLuhan Catholic Secondary School  
Toronto, Ontario

# SECOND PRIZE

## Snow

The rattle of my room wakes me in an instant. Debris rains from the concrete ceiling and lands on the ground with a rumble. Today is the day for the town census—a nice way for the government to count the people in our town and eventually forget about us.

I spend no time getting ready to leave. I rush to my makeshift wardrobe and grab my finest dress and a simple burgundy hijab. The dress slides easily over my head and shoulders like silk, reminding me of the day I got it. One of the new peacekeeping soldiers had brought it from a place called Canada. “Canada,” I repeat aloud. The word seems unnatural in my mouth. The soldiers say that it is a peaceful and beautiful place filled with tall mountains that stretch high into the sky, their tips kissed with fluffy white snow, the land surrounded by deep seas hugging its coasts, their waves crashing against the rocks in a fluent, steady rhythm. I would only dream of travelling from coast to coast soaking in the sunlight in the summer or bundling up in excessive layers of luxurious blankets while sipping a cup of steaming hot chocolate and watching the snowflakes float gracefully down towards the ground. Instead, I am surrounded by sand, poverty, and the unrelenting, harsh sun.

Before leaving, I sit, perched on my wooden chair, which creaks in protest. I sit tall in front of my mirror and stare at the reflection before me. My eyes dance along the hem of my dress, taking time to fixate on the simple pink daisies sprinkled on the fabric until my eyes eventually meet my reflection’s. I smile, taking time to look at my dimples, which hide among my freckles scattered carelessly across my cheeks. My gaze returns to my grey eyes—cold, stone, sad, innocent, hollow. Although the rest of me is smiling, my eyes do not tell the lie that my smile does.

I swiftly pin my hijab on and scurry out the door, sliding on my plain sandals as I go. I arrive to the centre of town as my name is called, “Maya Amari.” The soldier beckons, the name echoes in the silence. I open my mouth to reply, but the sound of a roaring fleet of jets silences me. I watch them disappear over the horizon until suddenly, the intensifying sound of a bomb dropping from the sky makes me freeze and gaze up. My throat goes dry like sandpaper, my eyes widen in shock. I am frozen. A single tear drops effortlessly from my eye.

*It’s not a bomb, I reassure myself. It’s snow.*

**by Kathryn Walker** (Grade Ten)  
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London, Ontario

# SECOND PRIZE

## Herold Was No Hero

Herold was no hero. He never meant to be. He did things like usual, always. And that was that.

He stepped into the bright sunshine that lit up Elmwood Avenue, snapped his suspenders against his scrawny chest, and took a deep breath of the fresh, spring air. It was a fateful morning, just not for him.

He started down the crowded street, his old red lunch box in one hand, and a jacket he never wore in the other. He waved at acquaintances and smiled at strangers (though there weren't many of those), as he meandered to the bus stop.

Herold whistled as he walked. He tipped his hat to birds nestled on buildings and twitched his moustache at the chattering squirrels.

The sun shone on the little brick houses and shops that lined the streets, and the hustle and bustle of the late morning was rather cheerful.

He passed the bakery, where the air smelled of baking bread. The baker was busily preparing for the day inside.

Upon arriving at the bus station, Herold sat down on one of the wooden benches. He watched as all different kinds of people passed: mothers and fathers walking their children to school, old couples strolling arm in arm, and the occasional business man or woman trotting along with a coffee in hand and a cellphone to his or her ear.

It wasn't until the old woman was in the middle of the street that he noticed her. He looked down the road and saw that there weren't any cars coming or going. He looked at the woman with her halo of frizzy white hair and cataract-ridden eyes. She was shuffling across the street with the nearest crosswalk fifty feet off.

Herold scratched his moustache. This was a rather strange sight, and he wasn't sure he liked it.

Then, in his left ear, Herold began to hear the low humming of a truck engine approaching. He glanced at the people around him, who were also waiting for the bus. There was a teenager with her earbuds blasting in her ears, an old man with his nose buried in last week's newspaper, and a flustered-looking father trying to braid his young daughter's hair. Herold was the only one paying any attention at all.

The old woman was still in the street, her old legs failing her miserably. Herold watched as she struggled. The roaring of the truck grew louder. No one looked up, moved, did anything. They were all too busy to notice. A big red truck came barreling down the road, the driver unaware of the old woman.

And he watched. After all, Herold was no hero, and he never meant to be.

*by Karly Larson* (Grade Eleven)  
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# SECOND PRIZE

## Just Say It

“I have to go.”

“Why must you leave? Please stay.”

He took her hand in his. “I love you.”

“I love you,” she returned. “Please don’t go.”

“I have to, my love; I’ll come back, I promise.”

“They always say they’ll be back. It’s a bloodbath over there.” She shook her head, a single tear trickling down her soft cheek.

He wiped it away. “I have to go, my love.” He stood and pulled her up gently. He pressed his lips into hers and held her close. Perhaps a tear fell down his cheek as well. “This isn’t goodbye.”

“You say that, but I know it is.”

“This isn’t goodbye.”

“Please just say goodbye; no one ever says goodbye.” More tears fell now.

“I won’t say it.”

“Please just say it.”

“It’s not true,” he claimed.

“Just say it.”

“I don’t want to say it. I can’t.”

“Please, I need you to say it. You need to say it, for me, for yourself.”

“I can’t.”

“Please, don’t go without saying goodbye.”

“I’m coming back.”

“What if you don’t? What if you don’t come back?” she stammered.

He wrapped his arms around her. “Don’t think like that,” he whispered. “Shh . . .,” he said as she cried into his shoulder. “There is no one like you. You are the only thing that matters, which is why I can never say goodbye.”

“But if you leave,” she sniffed, “and I never see you again—” She couldn’t finish.

“I know,” he said in his soft, quiet voice. “I know.”

“I can’t live without you.”

“You won’t have to, I promise.”

“Don’t make a promise you can’t keep. You don’t know what will happen.”

“I don’t know what will happen, you’re right, but if I spend all of my time thinking I’ll never see you again. . . .” He sighed. “I just have to keep hoping I will. That’s what will keep me going, that’s how I’ll survive. . . . You.”

“They don’t care if you’re in love. They’ll shoot any man, any woman, any child.”

“But it’s because I’m in love that I know God would not deny me my soulmate. I know I will find my way back to you.” He declared, “I know it.”

“I feel as if you’re already gone.”

“I’m right here, and I always will be.”

He kissed her slowly again, and she knew it would be the last time. As his hand fell from hers and his feet moved to the door, she knew this was their last touch. As he left her there, his bag in hand and hat on snug, she knew it would be the last time she ever saw him.

He was gone, but he never said goodbye.

*by Abbey Lenardon* (Grade Twelve)  
Craig Kielburger Secondary School  
Milton, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## Welcome Back

A paroxysm of rain poured harshly as I trudged through the endless field of tall grass behind the bustling hospital. Although I should have been worried about Papa and Mama labouring in the hospital, I'd become lifeless and dull the past weeks after your demise. *If I wandered to the end of this vast field, would I see you again?* I shivered beneath my thin t-shirt and tightly hugged myself. *Why couldn't the truck have struck the worthless mutt instead?*

I halted my journey and steadily stared up. Shutting my eyes, I focused on individual droplets caressing my face. I could recall that moment as clear as day.

*You and I were walking home after school as the crimson sun gently rested on the horizon. We were discussing reincarnation when you spotted the stray dog on the muddy street. I blinked, and you suddenly disappeared from my side. I witnessed your heroic leap, the terrified puppy, and the hurtling truck. When the tired driver noticed your jump, it was too late. The wheels squealed as he slammed on the brakes, but the truck skidded into you just as you threw the hound to safety.*

*"Tobio!" Swivelling, you gave me a final look of farewell. You didn't cry nor make a sound. The image of your short black hair framing your placid face, ocean-blue eyes, and apologetic smile embedded into my soul, saying, I'm sorry, Mavis. Shortly after the accident, the ambulance and both of our parents arrived. My parents consoled me but couldn't help me overcome my sorrow.*

My teardrops joined the downpour. I aggressively brushed them away and dropped to my knees. *You were my best friend. Why did you leave me?* My vision blurred. Attempting to retain my sorrow, I blinked vigorously, but the pain wouldn't recede. I screamed into the weeping sky with deep, vigorous, suffering emotions. Maybe my call would reach the heavens.

"Mavis!" Papa hollered. I slowly turned to him, exhausted. Papa bolted towards me and embraced me tightly. "I'm sorry, Mavis, about Tobio . . .," he began. I nestled my tear-stained face into Papa's warm shoulder for a while. "Ready to meet your baby brother?" Papa sheepishly asked. I smiled, and we went to Mama's hospital room.

Mama looked cheerful, despite the sweat pooling down her cherry face. She cradled a little bundle of blankets with a cute, tiny face peeping from the top. "Here, hold him," Mama commanded wearily. Reluctantly, I took the delicate bundle she handed to me.

The moment my arms circled him, his ocean-blue eyes popped open. With his black mop and wild grin, I knew my call had been answered. Kissing him, I gently whispered into his ear, "Welcome back."

*by Allison Tran* (Grade Nine)  
Ottewell Junior High School  
Edmonton, Alberta

# THIRD PRIZE

## Guilty and Waiting

“This is your fault,” I whispered to myself as I rocked back and forth in my seat. That hospital smell gave me a headache. The walls were painted a worn-out white colour with nothing but a single clock hanging. It seemed as if it were mocking me with the fact that it was two o’clock in the morning. Across from me was a tired mother, with her baby bundled in a grey blanket resting upon her chest. She gave me a rude stare, which made me wonder if she knew what I had done.

I glanced around to distract myself from the uncomfortable situation. A distinct sound of sirens caught my attention. My head snapped at the sight of someone being rushed through the lobby. I closed my eyes to avoid the memory, but it was no use. My eyes became glued shut, and all I could see was me getting into the car with her and her asking me if I were sober enough to drive. I lied and said yes. Everything seemed fine until I drove past a red light and a truck slammed into us, hitting her side first. A tear gently rolled down my cheek as a flush of guilt filled my body as I remembered her slamming her head into the windshield. “This is my fault.”

Just as I opened my eyes, two police officers came around the corner. “Miss Emily Davis? May we ask you some questions?” they said. I stood up shaking. *They are going to arrest me. I’m a murderer!* “Start with after you left the party,” one demanded.

“We got in the car around one, and the crash—” I paused. It hurt to even say the word crash out loud. “The event happened at around one thirty,” I said softly.

Then, he asked me the question I didn’t want to hear: “Were you intoxicated?” I stayed quiet. I knew that he knew. “All right then,” he said strongly and walked away, writing down notes.

“*Emily is a killer*” is what I imagined to be written all over the paper. Walking back, I thought, *My news, will it be good or bad? And even if she is okay, she will have that memory all of her life because of me.* I became dizzy, so I started to walk to the bathroom just as both the officer and doctor called my name: “Miss Davis!”

My hearing became muffled, and my head pounded with every step they took. My heart became still, and I fell to my knees. “I did it. I crashed the car. I killed her!” I screamed as I held my hands out in front of me.

**by Brook-Lyn Peixoto** (Grade Ten)

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Toronto, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## Fall of the Crimson Lily

The setting sun cast a scarlet glow upon Lilith's black and white paws as she lumbered around her enclosure with impatience in her dark eyes. Zookeepers flitted around, tending to animals.

Chasing them as they passed, Lilith peered at the humans with a searching gaze. Most ignored her, rushing away with buckets of food. Some paused to smile at her, muttering an apology as they left. Lilith sighed in disappointment every time, realizing they weren't the girl she was looking for.

*Where is Mallory?* Lilith grunted in frustration, flopping to the ground with a hopeless expression. The panda whimpered, longing for the girl's melodic voice. She felt her eyes drooping, and she forced them open, stifling a yawn. She refused to sleep until Mallory came, seeking the soothing song of the girl's lullaby.

In spite of her will, Lilith found herself drifting into fitful dreams. Darkness enveloped her like iron bars of a cage, lurching within strange, metal birds that humans built. She remembered blaring sirens and flashing lights as her cage was dragged through an endless path of hollering animals that grasped at her with claws. There had been no solace from their incessant jeering, except for the comforting tinkle of Mallory's song. Lilith's breaths rose and fell with the lulling rhythm of the melody as she drifted to the sweet land of dreams in the girl's lap. Mallory had beamed, stroking the panda's fur until morning.

As dawn light filtered through clouds, clangs of metal keys jangled, opening gates to let in zookeepers. Lilith watched with eager eyes, spotting Mallory skipping in, humming a merry tune. Lilith cried with joy, stumbling over to greet her.

"Sorry, Lily," Mallory murmured, unlocking the door.

As soon she opened it, Lilith pounced on her to embrace her with a yelp of happiness, knocking the human onto the ground. There was a dull thud as Mallory's head hit the floor. The girl let out a weak croak, her face turning as white as a ghost.

Lilith gasped as Mallory's eyes glazed over. *What have I done?*

Wondering the same thing, nearby zookeepers rushed to the girl's side. Seeing Lilith, one shook his hands, shooing her back.

The panda blinked in confusion, leaning down to lick Mallory's face.

The zoo visitors screamed, staring at her as if she were a monster.

"Go away!" another zookeeper growled, backing away with the girl in her arms.

Lilith shook her head in disbelief, staggering to follow. The panda whined, yelping when the zookeepers closed the gate in her face with a jarring clang. Refusing to move until Mallory returned, Lilith stared out the cage as the rising sun painted a crimson sheen on her paws.

**by Mingmei Dang** (Grade Eleven)  
Olympiads School  
Toronto, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## The Serpent

The sound of soaring waves drowned out everything on the beach. Tesni sat at the edge of the tide, her hair draped over her face like sheets of seaweed. Her body shuddered as waves washed over, chilling her white skin.

“Don’t you want to swim?” Tesni looked back at Fiore, who was staring at the red buoy.

“We have to kill the serpent first,” Fiore said.

She stood up and faced Fiore, blocking his view.

“Tesni, move!”

“Come here and make me.”

“I swear to God, Tesni. Every time we have a job, you always make a big fuss about nothing.” Fiore walked towards her, his white hair suddenly visible.

“Come on, it has been a while since we have gone to the beach.” She grabbed his hand and dragged him further from the shore. “There’s nothing to worry about.”

“Not until we get rid of it for the locals.”

The buoy was partially seen over her shoulders. “You never want to take a break, do you? If it shows up, I will protect you.”

“I am not a child, Tesni. I am as old as you.”

“You are still a child to me. A talented witch such as I can protect us—”

The buoy was gone. Before she could finish her sentence, Fiore yanked her body away from the water. The serpent burst from the deep, towering and glistening in silver scales. The serpent swept its tail across the beach. A cloud of sand covered the couple as they hid from it. “We could have waited for it to arrive,” Fiore complained as he picked up his hammer. “But you want everything to be hard.”

“Well, I just wanted my husband to love me,” Tesni shouted at Fiore as she fired a ray of lightning that pierced the serpent’s body. “But the only thing you love is your job.”

Fiore leapt and swung his hammer at the serpent, breaking its skull in an instant. It collapsed on the ground, its blood staining the white beach. Tesni assisted Fiore as he landed on the red sand.

“Great, now our vacation is ruined,” Tesni complained.

“We can go on another one,” Fiore said as he removed a piece of silver scale from the serpent. “The payment and the scales should be enough for a month of vacation.”

Tesni jumped on Fiore’s body, hugging and kissing him. “I am so sorry, Fiore. I was a brat for doing things like this on our job.”

“It’s fine.” He embraced and kissed her on the forehead. “I am sorry that I wasn’t considerate towards your feelings.”

The couple stood up, and they spent the remainder of the day cleaning up the beach.

*by Thang Tran* (Grade Twelve)  
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