

SHORT STORIES *∞* POETRY *∞* VISUAL ART *∞* PHOTOGRAPHY

FOR STUDENTS GRADES 7 - 12



RICHMOND HILL PUBLIC LIBRARY

2015

*Arts*

CONTEST



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# Greetings

## Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Richmond Hill Public Library's Arts Contest continues to showcase the wonderful talent of the youth of Richmond Hill. Your stories, poems, visual art and photography are engaging. Congratulations to all of you! Thank you to our judges who give their personal time and whose expertise and dedication to the Contest make it very special. I would also like to thank the Library staff whose work behind the scenes makes this possible.

**Louise Procter Maio**



## Message from the Judges



### **Jamak Hadiyan - Visual Art**

Jamak Hadiyan is a graphic artist with more than 10 years of professional experience in the field. She also holds a master's degree in graphic design. She is working as an Art Director at Webharmony which is based in Toronto. Jamak embarked in the Fine Arts twenty years ago, and was fortunate to have had a myriad of different artists to work with. Creativity has been an integral part of her life for as long as she can remember, even as a child. Jamak has always loved color, in whatever medium she has chosen to work in, as an artist and a designer.



### **Emily Pohl-Weary - Poetry**

Toronto author Emily Pohl-Weary's most recent novel is *Not Your Ordinary Wolf Girl*. She's written five other books, including the biography of her gender-bending, Sci-Fi writing grandmother, *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merril*, which won a Hugo Award and was a finalist for the Toronto Book Award. She also founded the Parkdale Street Writers, a writing group for youth in the neighborhood where she grew up, and co-founded the Academy of the Impossible, an open-source mobile learning center.

## Message from the Judges cont'd



### Ken Sparling - Short Stories

I once saw a woman whose hair was a poem. It was red and unruly and it seemed to me utterly indifferent. There was a moment, just before I tried to write about that woman's hair, when I felt something I'd never felt before, something I've never been able to adequately capture in words. Ever since then, I've hungered to write down what I felt in that moment. That's why I write, I write to experience again that moment, just before I set pen to paper, when the world seems as hauntingly indifferent to me as that woman's hair seemed so many years ago. I write to experience that swooning, exhilarating, almost sickening moment that always immediately precedes the realization that I am about to indulge again the overwhelming and impossible desire to carve the indifference of the world onto paper using words.

Ken Sparling is the author of six novels, has been nominated for a couple awards, and is the creator and curator of The Serial Library.



### David West - Photography

David has been an avid photographer since the age of seven. David, his wife Michelle, and sister-in-law Danica, operate West Photo in Richmond Hill. He has won numerous national and international awards for his work.

David is an active participant in his community. West Photo donates time and product to various charitable causes. David is currently the Ward 4 Councillor for the Town of Richmond Hill.

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# Photography

## Grades 7, 8, 9

### 1st Prize

Ali Raeisdanaei

#### *Power of One*

We live in societies that discriminate against others, we set them aside and isolate them. They are pawns in our own little game, instead we should live by them, with them, and unite with them. The title was the Power of One; one pawn could be the next future of that chess society, and win. We are all chosen and made to do something amazing with our lives and to help others do amazing things with theirs, but this picture was a cliff hanger. It left the viewer to think if they would change the way society unjustly looks at them or not, will they do the right thing at the expense of their lives?



### 2nd Prize

Nazanin Soghrati

#### *Beauty of Nature*

This picture was taken after a long - but worthy - drive, from the Port Moody Lake located in Vancouver. My goal was to capture not only the mist and the lush trees with their reflection in the water, but also the certain beauty that nature always holds. Many people try to search the whole world in hopes of finding true happiness and beauty in their lives, while they are unaware that the key to their problem is often found in the littlest qualities of life, such as nature. The sky, the trees, and the things taken for granted the most in our lives often turn out to be the most valuable.

# Photography



## 3rd Prize

Megan Chee-A-Tow

### *By the Dutch Canals*

This photo reflects two modes of transportation traditional to Amsterdam. Cycling is the city's primary method of getting around. The second is in a gondola, via the canals. While not as common as cycling, it remains authentic to Amsterdam.

## Grades 10, 11, 12

### 1st Prize

Nabil Fancy

### *The Serene Skies*

I took this photo on my flight back from Cuba with my family. Even though my vacation was very relaxing and enjoyable, I must admit that I missed my home.

Toronto may not be the prettiest place on this planet, but the sentimental value that my home holds for me is irreplaceable. There is absolutely no place in the world like this city. When I mention "city," Richmond Hill goes hand in hand with Toronto in this description. After all, I have lived here for almost 14 years now.

The rays of the sun penetrating through the sky gave me a warm feeling, the kind you get when you come home at the end of a busy day and nestle down in front of the fire place taking in the delicious aroma coming from the kitchen.

The sun rays hitting the grey landscape were such a stark contrast that I realized that only here can you have such a visual contradiction. And I was okay with that. In fact, as we were landing, I was even okay with the wintery weather we were going to face. When winter rolls around at the end of this year, we will again have the itch for a warm retreat.



# Photography



## **2nd Prize** **Auston Chhor**

### *Free*

This is my best friend Brittany. She uses dance as a medium to express herself, I use photography. There are really no words to describe what this picture means because frankly, everyone takes it differently, as it should be. This is truly, up to your own interpretation.

## **3rd Prize** **Zoe Papakonstantino**

### *Into the Open*

This photo was inspired by the beauty I found in my neighbourhood. It was taken during a walk I took through the trails near my house. I came out into a clearing at one point, and was stunned by the way the light shone into the small pathway that I took this photo from. I loved how the sky was this vibrant, yet washed out shade of blue, and how the snow reflected this colour, and gave the whole scene this soft blue tinge. I also love how the sun leaves a yellow smear of color towards the background of the sky. In my opinion, it completed the photo.



## Grades 7, 8, 9



**1st Prize**  
**Christina Mangos**

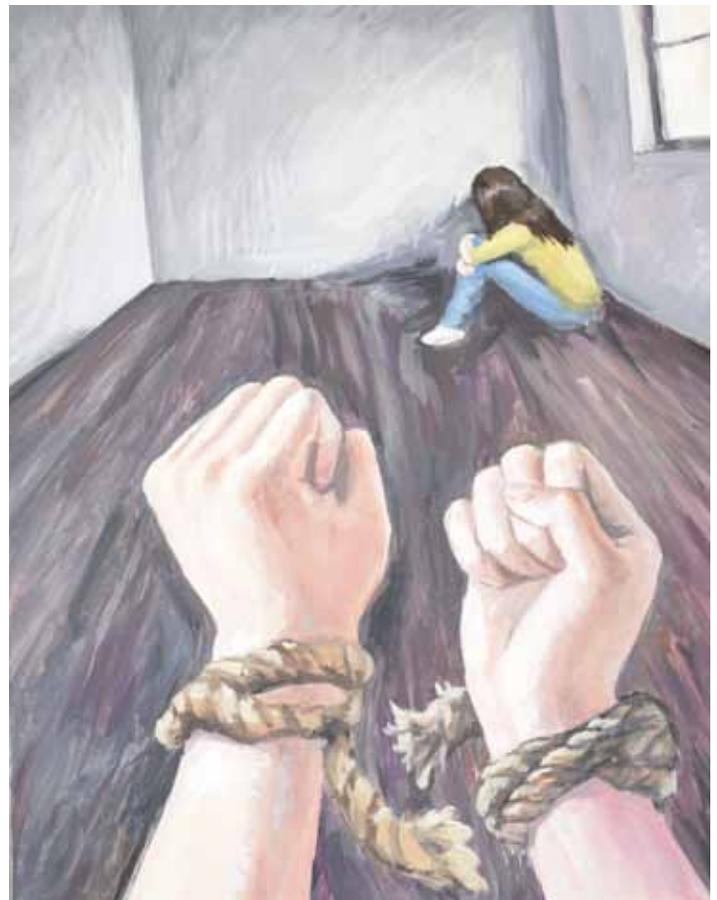
### *Town of Desolation*

The landscape of a town using mostly a blue palette.

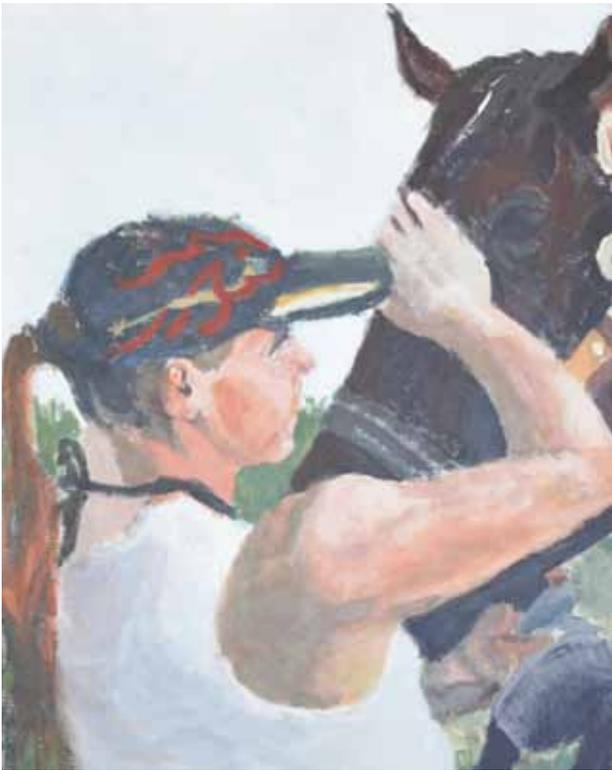
**2nd Prize**  
**Brianna Fan**

### *Light in the Dark*

My piece is called *Light in the Dark* because it symbolizes hope in the darkest of times, and that you can always overcome your darkest times. I used acrylics on canvas and used darker colours in the background to better portray the depression and darkness. The light hands in the foreground symbolizes finally breaking free from the darkness and coming into the light. Even though the background is dark, there is a window with light streaming in to show that there is still hope.



# Visual Art



## **3rd Prize**

**Kathleen Ka Min Tsang**

### *Importance*

Why do people care about animals? What's in it for them to have this connection? There are many reasons; they might lack company, or maybe their lifestyle is a little too stale. Regardless, the trust that forms between human and animal, whether it is an owner and their pet or a horse and it's rider, is usually very strong as they are all impacted often in a positive way. Some people could enjoy having a companion all the time, or they could start to have a purpose in daily life, as they have something to care about.

Without animals, life would be empty.

## **Grades 10, 11, 12**

**1st Prize**  
**Bonnie Wu**

### *Thrive*

Flowers are nature's masterpiece. They bring colour to our lives and poets constantly sing their beauty. They will always be a part of our lives, whether to show our love, to pay our respects, or even to simply say hello. I wanted to capture their delicate beauty in this acrylic painting with careful use of light and lively colours.



# Visual Art



**2nd Prize**

**Jennifer Fayth Korman**

***Day of the Dead Sugar Skull  
Fluttering Hearts***

Learning about different cultures throughout the world, I came across Mexico and their tradition which celebrates family. Day of the Dead is ancient holiday which honours a family's deceased loved ones; believing that happy spirits will provide good luck and wisdom to their families. This inspired me to replicate the essence of happiness and love that everyone can share.

**3rd Prize**  
**Tanya Estrin**

***Braveheart***

This piece is a symbol of bravery. Most people just see the outside - the lion - who is simply courageous; however, those who are truly brave are always plagued by worries and doubts, which are represented by the snakes.



# Poetry

## Grades 7, 8, 9

1st Prize - Matthew A. Olivan

### *Imagination*

Imagination is a thing of the past.  
It's ridiculous to believe that  
All our hopes and dreams can come true. And  
It's obvious that  
Daydreamers are a burden upon society.  
It's a lie to say that  
being free and independent is the way to live.  
It's clearly evident that  
None of us can make a difference. And  
Only the clueless would believe that  
Innovation can change the future for the better. Besides,  
All the experts say that  
Having a perfect world is impossible. And  
It's crazy to think that  
Following your passion leads to success.  
Everyone knows that  
"Conformity beats uniqueness."  
Only the feeble-minded follow the phrase:  
"Everything you can imagine is real."  
It's only logical to say that  
Some things just can't be avoided.  
It's absurd to believe that with creativity,  
One day violence and crime will come to an end.  
If the world trusts in hope and dreams,  
Humanity will fall into ruin. But  
If we all go with the flow,  
We will have a chance at peace.  
With imagination and creativity,  
We will all suffer. However,  
With predictability and conformity,  
We will all lead stable, ordinary lives.  
Unless this is all reversed  
(Now read this from bottom-to-top)

# Poetry

## 2nd Prize - Trinity Guppy

### *Hand in Hand*

Flowers are simplistic in their beauty and grace  
Every petal is unique and shaped differently, all various sizes  
They flourish more and more every day  
Their petals are like arms and the petals sticktogether  
Because arms are made for holding  
And the warmth of closeness is made for knowing  
Flowers are fragile  
Tear one arm, the other one falls  
Doesn't take long to break apart  
But you must grow again  
Flowers need to be watered in order to survive  
Water to them is like love and friendship which they need to thrive  
Knowing that you are valued gives you motivation to try  
Flowers are like people  
People change and grow and create new identities  
They need to be loved, the alternative is to be lonely  
People can shatter like glass, faster than they can mend  
They get through life beside a friend  
I guess that's why flowers grow so close together  
Because everything's better when you're hand in hand  
Flowers are like people

# Poetry

## 3rd Prize - Adi Fishkin

### *Writer's Block*

Writer's block  
Fitting words for  
A useless circumstance  
Known all too well.

Almost like someone  
Decided to close  
Your gates of thought  
And threw away the key

Nothing you try  
Seems to get through  
As if your mind  
Is drowned in wool

Or a dreary mist  
Protecting thoughts  
Showing foggy forms  
Not worth a dime

There is no simply spell  
A wives tale, or foolish knavery  
That would end  
This hideous affair.

Just the passage of time  
As the hours tick by  
And you start to worry  
Whether it'll ever be done.

**1st Prize - Tanya Estrin**

*First Model*

When I was first released, I didn't know who I was supposed to be.  
I strolled through life with a smirk, shouldering enough confidence to feed a city.  
My wardrobe was full of energy and excitement.  
We were introduced.  
You were constructed from same material as everyone else,  
Interested in the same topics,  
Yet still the last puzzle piece of my picture of friendship.  
But my voice was excluded from your songs, my thoughts never crossing your mind.  
I was made from something else, something twisted and terrifying.  
I wanted to be like you, interested in the things that interested you,  
I wanted to sit next to you and hold your hand in mine.  
I took myself back to the drawing board, examined my every nook and cranny,  
Made sure I left no rough edges overlooked.  
Modeled myself to fit in,  
Dressed myself in clothing I did not recognize.  
When I looked out the window, people shook their heads in disappointment,  
Vexing me with their strange looks.  
You'd changed, worn a different skin,  
Your eyes were glazed over,  
Voice like nails on chalkboard.  
You were now out of date, our friendship rotting along with your faith.  
One glance was all it took.  
For me to realize that the first edition of me,  
Was much better.

# Poetry

## 2nd Prize - Bonnie Wu

### *Young Explorer of the Universe*

Remember that one cold evening,  
when those stars had lost their light?  
You grabbed your favourite sweater  
and padded out into the night.  
You were young and scared of nothing  
enchanted by the moon  
and the field of glowing stars that danced  
on the ceiling of your room.  
Young Explorer of the Universe,  
you made constellations of your own.  
Closed your eyes and turned off the world,  
from your warm bed as a throne.  
The moon blushed and glowed a welcome,  
the sky painted an inky blue,  
until the buildings threw you into darkness  
as the wall just grew and grew.  
You were blind and scared of the nothing-ness,  
for the first time in forever.  
The night seems like a stranger,  
no longer powerful and clever.  
You heard the full moon giggle  
as you sent a plea out into the night,  
until you saw a familiar sheath of stars,  
as you were cloaked into its light.  
Young Explorer of the Universe,  
pack your lantern and your tent,  
your ambition is a curse, you know,  
as countless, dreaming nights have been spent.  
But never will you surrender,  
off to the find the life you lost,  
searching for your own bright light,  
as autumn grows into a frost.  
I hope that when the night has fallen,  
and your fire's just a spark,  
you still roam with your heart still strong  
and rediscover beauty in the dark.

# Poetry

## 3rd Prize - Ariella Golden

### *Just There*

Have you heard of Gus?

Probably not.

He's a street cleaner, you see.

On the other side of town, where no one actually lives

Except crumbling houses and rusted mailboxes

And ghosts, if you believe in that kind of thing.

They must've stopped paying him years ago

When his job was no longer needed

'Cause people were moving away from those parts

To the city, where creativity is a corpse under pavement.

So Gus works alone on the streets,

Sometimes I see him if I pass through the park.

Just cleaning away without a care in the world,

His companions a broom, clippers, a bucket, a sponge,

Whistling old folk songs to himself

As he sweeps up the sidewalks and pulls all the weeds,

Tames the wild lawns that nobody owns,

And cleans the windows with every ounce of his being,

Looking in, and never looking out.

And sometimes he just stands there, staring

At his reflection in the sparkling glass

Just adjusts his rugged uniform, 20 years out of date, sometimes picks at his teeth

Or something.

Sometimes I wonder why he does what he does,

It makes me angry to see him waste away his days

It's like a symphony played to deaf ears

Or a sonnet written to the blind

It's like rain on a parking lot,

It's not helping anything to grow.

It's just there, just there, nothing more.

I want to yell to him, to tell him to get a real job

To just trash that uniform, the supplies, just move on.

But still he remains, his whistling breaking

The silence of a street left to rot.

**1st Prize - Richard He**

### *The Man in the Mirror*

There is a mirror, hanging above the doorway of our kitchen.

It's a small mirror, the kind you'd use on your desk if you didn't want to look at yourself. We hadn't any use for it before we hung it up — in fact, I don't even remember if it was on sale or not. , it sat just behind the cabinets, facing the sliding door, balancing precariously on the slab of wood some idiot put in to mess with tall people.

The day my mother put it up, my father was out in the woods while my younger self held on to the kitchen chair that my mother stood on. She explained to me, after I had asked incredulously about such an odd place for a mirror that it was to prevent thieves from sneaking in through our backdoor. She told me, with a glint in her eye, that they would look in, see the man in the mirror, and run away in a fit of fear. I didn't like this idea (I was scared of the mirrors) so I had told her it would never work, and that it was a stupid idea, and that I was going to do my homework and no mom I don't need help.

Three years ago, my mother lost her memory. I hadn't spoken to her in years (always "busy"), and yet she greeted me with open arms. Her smile was so sweet and loving it felt like a slap to the face. I couldn't believe, that in my fantastical dreams of earning enough (never enough) money, I had become negligent of my own mother.

I had become negligent of myself. Of my true personality, of my true life. I had wrapped myself in a cocoon of lies, dreaming of the day I'd finally fly — a day that'll never come.

Three years ago, the man in the mirror stopped talking to me.

Do you think it was something I said?

# Short Stories

**2nd Prize - Jessica Lu**

## *The Lucidity of Dreams*

In all actuality, it is thanks to the muted glow of the streetlamps that she is able to see them at all. There is a window of two to three seconds before the denial - the fog - takes hold in which she is able to comprehend exactly what she is seeing.

He, her love, her ex, is pressing feather light touches to another girl's side as they stand a hair's breadth away from each other, breaths fanning across high cheekbones. With gentle hands, he cups the girl's cheeks, runs a calloused thumb over four freckles, and smiles that tiny endearing beam. Her eyes are downcast, and the treacherous little imposter must be trailing the path of buttons that move down the collar of his shirt because she herself had been in her shoes five weeks, thirty nine hours, and an unbroken heart ago.

She crawls into bed that night and waits for the tears to come. A sense of betrayal nags, because he should still be pining over her. He cannot be over her. Eventually, there is only an ugly whimper and upon patting her cheeks, something cold, dry, and brittle. She lets the void claim her.

When she blinks, the nothingness unravels unhurriedly, leaving behind languid streaks of fading coals. She stands in a field of ink and words forever unsaid, caged, straining against incarceration. The black from the sky bleeds – rivulets creeping through the desolate earth and fingers dipping into the underworld that is her mind.

The thumb unfurls. Twisting and twitching, it trembles before some of the black drips down, pools at the base, and then she can see his body. His legs. His face and his smile. He's finally smiling at her, and not that girl.

"Why are you ignoring me now?" she demands when she finds her voice.

He tilts his head, eyes narrowing in his endearing way, in which his right eye is a bit more open than the left. "I'm not. I still love you best."

She huffs, pouts. "You don't love me as much as you love her."

He grins at her, all curves and no edges. He is silent for a long second. "We'll fly someday," he says instead, eyes staring fondly up at the dark. "But not today." She watches the wings on his back shuffle, but it does not spread. The feathers are beautiful. He is perfection, in more ways than he used to be in real life.

She bolts upright in her bed and snatches the cellphone from her nightstand. After robotically punching in a series of numbers, the line connects with an irate, "Why are you calling me at this hour, woman?"

# Short Stories

## *The Lucidity of Dreams* - cont'd

"It's six, you idiot." She rolls her eyes. Not that Anna would see anyway.

There is a soft sigh on the other end. "So, what brings you to call at six in the morning then? What can be so incredibly life-altering that you feel the need to share at this ungodly hour?"

She hesitates. "I had a dream about him again. For like what, the fifth time this week?" A peal of laughter falls. "He's always so cryptic. Said something about us flying, Anna. He's not nearly as condescending as he used to be." Only static answers. "Anna? Anna, listen to me, it's important."

Anna is silent for a long pause. "Look – I hate to break it to you, but he is not coming back; he moved a few days ago and I know this is so hard for you, but still. You have to know. Come to your senses, it's not real it's—"

"I get it. Not real, got it."

"Good. Now, let me go, girl, unless you want me to give Ilse the tickets for the concert next Wednesday. Good night. Or day. Whatever."

The call disconnects with a click, and she ends up staring at the sickly white wall blankly. Eventually, she skips school for the first time since sixth grade.

He is the first to greet her when she arrives today, hand raised in a two finger salute. He's grinning, as usual, although there's a new layer to it today. She gives it no further thought. "Hey, you're back."

"Why wouldn't I be?" she fires back in response.

"They usually don't come again. You're different, you know?"

She gives a tentative smile of her own. There is liquid fire, however mild it may be, settling in her guts, and upon taking a step forward, rushing down her leg to burn away her ankle. An astonished and loud cry later, he is by her side.

"Whoa, you alright? There, there. Breathe, that's right. Breathe. You'll be fine." He slips an arm around her, and she is surprised at how much she has missed the act he used to bequeath upon her almost daily. She's sobbing into his side now. "A deep breath in and another out. I'm here, I won't leave, won't leave you for her. Shhh."

Later, she is tucked in his arms as she thanks him for his presence. The pain is no longer currents of knives and shrapnel grating against her nerves, and merely small stones banging against her bones in two four time.

# Short Stories

## *The Lucidity of Dreams* - cont'd

Next Wednesday, Anna is all shades of irked when she arrives thirty minutes later than the time they have agreed upon.

“I slept in, sorry. I’ve been a bit tired for the past few weeks, but it’s okay now,” she explains, sheepish.

Anna pauses. “Really? You’ve been looking exhausted for the longest time now. I’m been worried. Everyone’s worried about you. It’s not... him is it?”

She bites back a laugh. “It’s better now.” She is almost guilty about the sheer amount of relief etched in very fabric of her friend’s face.

As it turns out, the concert is cancelled, so her friend’s fears do not matter. That night, she is mildly shocked to realize (but not really) that she’s looking forward to drifting off. She wants to chat with him about the concert. Falling into the darkness is hardly difficult anymore, and it’s more like flying than anything because it is the freest she has felt in millennia.

She wakes up in a cold sweat the next day. There is something so horribly wrong, and the panic is so overwhelming she can barely breathe; she can barely remember how to breathe. Shallow puffs of air hit her blanket, rapid and skin deep. The space beside her, behind her, is so empty.

She can’t meet him. Why is he refusing to see her again? Is it her who can’t get through to him?

Forcing herself to sink back down into the mattress, she tries to sleep again. The dark claims her once again, but still, she cannot get through. His words come back to haunt her: “They usually don’t come again. You’re different, you know?” Ice forms in the depths of her core. She is just like the others now, is she not? She’s abandoned him. She’s worthless, useless, and—

It is her phone. She picks up with an angry curse, desperately hoping it is him, but not really. She has a headache. “Leave me alone! Can’t you see someone’s trying to fucking sleep?” she snarls into the receiver.

“It’s one in the afternoon! How are you still asleep?”

“I want to.” She holds her thumb above the red ‘cancel’ button.

“Don’t you dare hang up on me! Dammit, I’ll call him, he needs to come back—” She cuts the conversation off without a second thought, and ignores the consequent rings that follow as she buries herself back into her blankets.

# Short Stories

## *The Lucidity of Dreams* - cont'd

In the end, she finds him on the third sleep after her initial distress. He looks the same as ever: messy hair, restless hands, except he stands with his back to her this time. His wings are spread, heavy sable sails tapered to narrow ends. Is he... leaving her?

“What took you so long?” he murmurs, still facing away. She bites her lips, refusing to break down in front of him. “I waited. You wouldn’t come.”

Her heart feels like it is going to shatter in two. “I tried, I really did. I couldn’t find you – I thought you didn’t want me anymore, please, don’t not want me because I really want you.” She is a babbling mess by then. “I love you. Don’t leave,” she gasps as he finally reaches out for her.

“Don’t. Don’t worry,” he assures her softly. Something warm touches her forehead. “I love you too. I won’t leave you.”

When he leaves, he brings her with him.

It takes nine hours for the police to find the body.

By her bedside, there are two voice messages on her phone left unanswered: Okay, he’s coming back; said he’d call you, don’t leave, and Hi, it’s me. Are you free tomorrow? I know this may be sudden, but I’ve realized it was my mistake to leave you. I’m willing to try again.

# Short Stories

## 3rd Prize - Enshia Ivy Li

### *Mirage*

It was a quiet night, a passive night. They were talking, her friends. They were talking and laughing all around her, and she trailed behind. She didn't mind, for the summer breeze was tickling her fingertips and tugging at the ruffles of her dress, and she was grateful for the joy alit in the air, like thousands of fireflies. The sky was a mystical color. A dark, dark blue it was, almost black, almost entirely devoid of light, tinged with purple, slightly rusty—yes, that was the best way to describe it. The streetlamps glowed a nervously dim orange, flickering, wavering slightly, scared to shine brighter for fear of disrupting the peace.

And it was in that moment — in that passive tranquility she heard those startling words.

Mary turned to her; there was fading laughter at her lips, remnants of a joke just borne, now vanished into the evening sky. “Lucia,” she said. “Edmond wanted to see you. Tomorrow, at the harbor, before he leaves for the holidays.”

Lucia stopped, stared. A tremor overtook her hands; they shook slightly. She watched Mary assimilate back into the crowd, her hair fanning out behind her as she ran.

“Mary—”

She started, but she cut herself off. Mary had already gone.

It felt like she had been waiting her entire life to hear those words. Her face broke into a smile, and wave after wave of emotion washed over her; she grew erratic, and all at once through the stillness she felt electricity surge. She turned on her heels and ran.

“Where are you going?”

She didn't know either, didn't care.

“I have to take care of something!”

She passed by Edmond's home on the way back to her own. Turn left at the crossing, it's the third one down. It was all too familiar, this house, with its garden full of tulips and the ivy scaling up the walls. Her own home was not far, and in a few moments she would be there, but right then she stayed, lingered.

# Short Stories

## *Mirage* - cont'd

Seven years ago the Pontmercys had moved in. They had a son her age, but Lucia had never paid him much mind. For the majority of her life she had grown normally, undisturbed, not having known even his name.

She had bashed herself for being so boring, so cliché. Other girls fell in love — she scoffed at the term — and fawned but she — she herself was different. She was indifferent, special, transcendental, independent, immortal, and she would never fall prey to such mundane and trivial affairs, into feelings that twisted your thoughts and contorted your soul under the name of romantic affection. Why would she let another person hold so much influence over her?

But there was a catch, and the catch was happiness, and desire, and the addiction of infatuation, and a place to belong, someone to belong to. It reeled you in, slowly, slowly, until it had swallowed you whole, and the most frightening, most surprising thing was that she didn't mind, because when it was her it was different, different from what she had concluded, what she had decided romance was. Her rationality told her it was uninteresting, that this was all too common, but one glance from him made her feel as if they were the only two people in the world that mattered. Her heart raced. Her soul trembled. She looked away.

It was last summer when the quiet Pontmercy boy began to draw her attention. Sometimes he was withdrawn, icy, reclusive, but his humour was attractively quaint; his voice was smooth, and with his streams and rivers of words it rose and fell, coolly, refreshingly laminar, never turbulent; and his eyes were observant, captivating. He was French, knew how to speak the language she so often butchered, the tongue she couldn't wrap her own around. She inquired after his name, learned it to be Edmond, and engraved it on the walls of her mind.

How strange her life was before! How was it possible, she thought, that she had passed days, months, years without a single thought spent on him!

By the evening winds and her own impassioned state, her hair had become undone. It fell at her shoulders in clusters, in grapevine tangles. Drops of sweat glistened, sparkled on her forehead. She arrived at her front doors and flung them open. Eagerly, she set down her hat and doublestepped up the stairs.

The more she lulled this over in her mind the more fervent she became. Had Mary had any idea of the weight her words carried? — and when she heard those words! So it is possible, so tears of joy do exist — so one can experience such happiness, so vehement and uncontainable, spilling over the corners of the eye! Again and again she repeated those blessed words to herself: Edmond wanted to see you. Edmond wanted to see you.

# Short Stories

## *Mirage* - cont'd

She told herself that she would be contented had he given her nothing, done nothing but bestow upon her the mere allowance of being in his presence, but the longer she entertained these ideas the more her thoughts began to stray. Nay, she thought, he must have prepared a note, at the very least. That would be a fitting enough reason to request a meeting, would it not?

She left him many notes, signed and unsigned, some long, some short, some lighthearted, some ardent; all of them she hoped would have made his day brighter, his self, happier.

What was he planning? She giggled, allowed herself the indulgence of fantasy, to be carried away by her wants, her desires. Would it be only a note? A letter, perhaps? Or maybe a gemstone, maybe a pearl, a small token of sorts—but—but—if anyone learned the depth of her affections, her devotion, the cascades, the waterfalls of consciousness about him she had poured forth, would they not say to him, That girl, Lucia, she is worth strings and mountains of pearls. If any gift was to be given, she would receive it gracefully, elegantly, and already she could envision herself at the harbor: The day would be warm and cloudless, and the breeze would come with subtlety. In the background there would be lively chatter, and he would bestow the thing he had prepared—looking slightly abashed, turning the slightest shade of red — to her. She would let on a smile, faint, pleased, surprised; she would stifle back tears of gratitude.

And what else — what else? Would the parting gift be accompanied by an embrace —!

She washed up, looked herself in the mirror, for once thought herself quite pleasing, undressed, fell back into her blankets. For a long time she could not sleep.

The next morning she felt a strange sort of different. The clear sunlight of day seemed to have washed away the whim and passion of night. Something was amiss, something she could not pinpoint — but no matter. She smiled, remembering the previous night's occurrences.

Lucia washed, dressed, ate. She went through the motions of her daily routine. Just before noon she changed into her nice dress, the finely embroidered one with the floral design.

She walked down to the harbor, summer heat on her skin, summer wind through her hair. Among the claustrophobic, bustling crowds she made out his familiar form. She called, he waved. She smiled, she ran. In his hands he carried a rather large box, and as he started speaking her heart rate soared.

“Thank you, Lucia, for coming down —” He smiling, faintly, looking wonderfully abashed. His cheeks were flushed, perhaps by the heat, perhaps by — “Would you take this tea set back to your mother?” His hat cast shadows over his eyes. She tried to make out their shapes — “My ship is about to leave — tell her thanks for us.”

# Short Stories

## *Mirage* - cont'd

The silence at the end of his phrase lingered, a bit longer than normal. She willed it to linger, something like demand, like expectation rising in her chest, daring to ask, to demand, to implore, well is that all? The silence ended, quietly, quickly wilting away.

“Oh,” she said, her spirits plummeting. There was the horrible, sinking feeling of disappointment, disappointment she refused to admit she was feeling, in the pit of her stomach. “Oh, all right.” Where was it? Oh, where was everything?

“Thank you. I really appreciate it.”

These words, spoken in the normalcy of conversation, were harsh, cold, blunt, direct, cruel — so candid, so black-and-white they were! They were the bombs befalling her paradise (homes blew up in ruins; the villagers screamed), they were the ink stains smearing the meticulous brushstrokes of her masterpiece, her flawless creation (the pained artist flew into a rage; buckets of paint thrown across the room). Her perfect mirage in the distance was dissolving, fading.

He waved, she nodded. He turned; she walked away, the tea set heavy in her arms. She thought of saying something to him, but when she turned around he was already gone.

### 1st Prize - Armand Acri

#### *Silence*

It was terribly cold. The wind felt like blades cutting against his skin. The snow was almost as high as his waist.

But Liam thrived in the cold. It was in the deepest part of winter that he felt most at home, where he belonged. Here, he felt untouchable, like nothing could stop him.

He was waiting for someone. He stood alone, watching the snow fall. He checked his watch. Three minutes. He thought about everything this moment had lead up to...

The kitchen. Liam sat at the table. His mother set the plate on the table in front of him. Looking at the food, he cocked his head slightly, considering. He decided he wasn't hungry. He stood up, and walked away. His mother was calling after him, saying something, but he couldn't hear what it was. Halfway up the stairs, he stopped, and turned to look at her. He could see, despite her face being twisted in anger, that her eyes radiated a sadness he couldn't quite describe. A stab of guilt flowed through him, and he couldn't stand it anymore. He turned back and kept walking.

The cafeteria. Liam sat in the same place he always did, because it made him feel like it was his own. Everything else had been taken from him. One of the mean ones approached him. Liam understood the need for a daily ritual, but that didn't make him feel any better. The boy's mouth moved, and the other ones broke into laughter. Something warm rolled down Liam's cheek. Liam couldn't remember why, it had been a long time...

The office. His mother was talking to a man he didn't know. She was pointing at Liam, trying to make the man understand. The man looked at her with disbelief. There was condescension in the way he gestured. He was anxious, he didn't enjoy wasting his time with his mother. He turned to leave. His mother fell to her knees, and pleaded with him. The man, for the first time, looked at Liam. There was fear in his eyes. It made Liam afraid.

Liam blinked. The iciness of his surroundings snapped him out of his reverie. He had almost found himself lost again. He checked his watch. One minute. He was glad it wasn't too late. Liam, despite his best efforts, was worried. What if he was waiting forever? What if it was all for nothing? Liam closed his eyes. He breathed in, and inhaled the freezing cold air. It was all nothing - none of it mattered. Liam focused on the road ahead of him.

After what felt like all the time in the world had passed, a bright red car drove through the snow, and stopped in front of the snow bank that Liam was standing on. The door opened, and a girl stepped out. She seemed to stand out against the otherwise dull background, like a shining star in a dark night sky.

She looked at him, and he saw her face for the first time. She smiled; it was the best moment of Liam's life.

# Short Stories

## *Silence* - cont'd

All the other smiles had something else within them: deception, depression, violence, cruelty, hatred... But not her smile. It was pure, genuine, something Liam could not remember seeing before. Maybe Liam was wrong. Maybe the others were the normal ones. Maybe she was the one with all the secrets.

But Liam didn't think so. There was something that told him he was right about her smile, that it was the right one all along.

Maybe this was what Liam was waiting for his whole life. He wasn't too sure himself, but he was happy to let it be the case.

Maybe this is what he had needed the whole time. Maybe, if he had seen it earlier, things would have been different. Maybe, just maybe, it wasn't too late.

Liam was deep in thought, considering, and he didn't notice the girl was walking towards him. By the time he realized what was happening, she was already right there, beside him. She was so close to him, he could feel the heat of her body.

Normally, he vehemently disliked heat. But now, Liam actually enjoyed the warmth he felt. Her eyes were a deep brown that told Liam everything about her. It was then, looking into her eyes, he knew her smile, and the reason she was standing in front of him, and everything about her, it truly was all real.

She spoke.

"Hello, Liam," she whispered. "You can call me Maya."

"Come, we're going to your new home."

Together, they walked back to the car. For the final time, images flashed through Liam's mind.

The police line.

The funeral.

The tombstone that bore his mother's name.

The knife.

The trial.

Words echoed in his head. Words he didn't understand. Words he wished hope against hope that he could forget.

"Not criminally responsible."

And then he looked at the girl again, and something amazing happened.

Liam did forget.

# Short Stories

2nd Prize - Mina Vukovic

## *The Secret World of Mystery and Wonder*

You'd miss it unless you knew it was there. Even I had overlooked it, and I've lived two blocks away my entire life. To be fair though, it's not like it attracted much attention. There was a canopy of leaves covering the entrance; the branches stretched all the way down to the ground, leaving a small hole through which only a small child could crawl. But even if a brave, young soul dared to venture through, they would have to pass the green monster. An obtrusive green generator stood right in front of the hole and made low rumbling noises if you stood too close. A monster. It was like it was warning people to not even dare think about going through that little opening. Below, the grass surrounding it had long ago wilted and was littered with old chips bags and pop cans. Once I found a twenty dollar bill, but that was the only thing worth noticing. Everything else was unimpressive, ugly and boring.

On my first day of grade five in my new school, I was excited because I would finally get to ride the school bus like all of the other big kids. My mother joined me on the five minute walk. I was bursting with excitement, jumping up and down. I hadn't paid attention to where it was exactly that we were walking because that wasn't important. Only when my mother stopped and told me that this was my bus stop did I fully become aware of where I was. I rotated 90 degrees and came face to face with the grumbling generator. If green, metal boxes had eyes, I was certain that this one would be giving me the death stare. I gulped and squeezed my mother's hand, when I suddenly noticed a small bouncing mop of blonde hair walking towards me.

She was confident and buoyant. Those were my first thoughts. She was also walking alone and suddenly I felt self conscious that I was holding my mother's hand. Her combination of a yellow shirt and pink shorts topped with a striped headband normally shouldn't have looked good but somehow she pulled it off. I knew right away that I wanted to be her friend. When she finally approached me, she wasted no time in introducing herself.

"Hi! I'm Naomi and I'm in sixth grade today," she chirped, holding out her hand for me to shake.

We started up a conversation right away and before I realised it, we were on the school bus, then class started, and then school was done. It all passed by so quickly. At exactly 3:15, Naomi and I were sitting next to each other on the bus ride home. When we reached our stop, Naomi spoke up.

"What do you think is down there?" she asked me, pointing to that little hole where the tree branches didn't quite touch the ground.

# Short Stories

## *The Secret World of Mystery and Wonder* - cont'd

I paused. The generator rumbled. “I don’t know...”

“Wanna go down there and find out?”

I looked into her eyes and I couldn’t see a single hint of fear.

“Um... Wouldn’t we get in trouble?” I flustered.

“From who?” She called. She was already making her way toward the entrance. “Come on! Let’s find out.”

I laughed out loud in disbelief but sure enough, I followed her down. The generator didn’t seem that scary anymore.

I crawled under the branches and stopped. This little opening led to an entire different world. It was so natural and green and beautiful... It was also clearly a ditch. But that didn’t matter. It was like we had just discovered a little corner of the world that had forever been overlooked. And it was ours. We made our way down the short but rather steep slope to the bottom while taking in everything we saw. There was a small stream cutting through the entire ditch, rippling through the small stones scattered in the water. It all led into a sewage pipe but it didn’t give off an unpleasant stench. As if meant to be a makeshift bridge, there was an old bus stop sign crossing the stream. It was clearly old since there was rust, but the actual sign itself hadn’t faded. The white letters against the blue background were as clear as they would have been originally. To this day, I still do not know how it came to be placed there. Everything was peaceful and beautiful and isolated. It’s like the monster generator wanted to protect this beautiful, secluded mystery from the rest of the world. It was for our eyes only.

Naomi and I spend every day there. The minute we got off the school bus at 3:45 pm, we would run into our new little world. Our parents never suspected a thing. Nobody knew of it except for us. And each day the world revealed a new secret.

A few weeks later, I was poking around in the grass near the stream when I found a fist-sized, dark rock, covered in small holes. The words “meteor rock” popped in my head. I was beyond excited; I called out Naomi’s name and showed her the rock. She fumbled around with it and soon came to the conclusion that I was right, that it was obviously a meteor rock. We looked at each other, mouths agape. We had made a scientific discovery! We quickly ran home, eager to go to school the next day and show all of our friends. When we arrived at school, we rushed straight to the science teacher to show her our meteor rock. She explained to us gently that we had found an incredible and extraordinary piece of common charcoal. It didn’t matter though. In our world, it was a meteor rock. Our world was on our side and therefore we were scientists. Then two days later we became archaeologists. Because that was when we found the skull.

# Short Stories

## *The Secret World of Mystery and Wonder* - cont'd

There was this one tree that had branches that jutted out about a metre and a half from the bottom, creating a perfect 'shelter' — at least, that was what it was to us. I was sitting there, legs sprawled out in front of me and my hands supporting my weight behind me when suddenly I shifted my hand onto something smooth, small and round. I immediately turned around and to my horror, saw an old rat skull. At least I thought it was a rat skull. We hadn't officially been archaeologists for very long. But it was definitely an old skull. When I showed it to Naomi, she was as repulsed as I was and we made the decision to throw it into the haunting abyss that was the big sewage pipe. And then we spent the next few weeks searching for skulls, lost in our world... but lost together.

I'd like to say that to this day, Naomi and I are still friends. Two years after first meeting her, I changed schools and that was the last time I ever saw her, even though we lived a total of five blocks away from each other. I don't know why. Maybe we outgrew the friendship. Maybe the ditch was the only reason that we had spent half an hour a day together. But we never saw each other again.

A few weeks ago, (six years later) I found myself walking past my old bus stop. Feeling nostalgic, I stopped and remembered all of my memories there. The big generator didn't seem so threatening anymore. In fact, it was probably reaching old age, as what were once bold growls were now painful wheezes. I looked over to the entrance of the ditch. The small entrance was no longer there. In the past few years, the overhanging tree that had partially hidden the entrance had grown and it was now impossible to enter the ditch. Just as Naomi and I had changed, the ditch that had once opened its arms to us after its discovery had outgrown us. We had moved on with our lives, and our secret world was no longer a part of it. Perhaps if Naomi and I had stayed friends we could have ensured that the world would stay open. Alas, I not only lost a friend, but I lost the one thing that made me feel completely at peace.

Yet, somehow, I know that Naomi must still remember me as I do her, and that the secret world will always remember us. Even though we all grew older, our lives had become intertwined. And the big, mean, green old generator, once my enemy, was now my friend. I knew I could trust it to protect our Secret World of Mystery and Wonder for Naomi and me. For I know that you can never truly forget something that special. You may miss it unless you knew it was there, but once found, you can never overlook it again.

# Short Stories

## 3rd Prize - Aileen Liang

### *Centuries*

Charlie stared at her. Her feline eyes narrowed ever so slightly, beckoning him to come closer. A snarl, soft but dangerous, escaped from her throat, and Charlie felt his heartbeat quicken. He relished the gentle silence that enveloped them and wished he could freeze this moment in time.

All of a sudden, a vehement gasp of “Charlie!” from the shuttle bus pierced the silence and effectively ruined the moment.

Charlie looked around, slightly alarmed by the zookeepers rushing towards him from all directions.

“Well, this is embarrassing,” He muttered to himself as the bulky men in ridiculous caps dragged him back onto the shuttle bus as if he was an old mop.

“I cannot believe what I just witnessed,” The zoo attendant’s voice dripped venom, “I thought a grown man like you would know that, in a cage-free zoo, animals can only roam free if humans stay on the bus.”

Charlie shot her a smile that he hoped seemed apologetic and breathed a sigh of relief when the attendant huffed and turned away. Cautiously, he glanced back. The tiger remained where she was, swishing her tails carelessly, as if amused at the pandemonium.

Charlie pressed his face up against the shuttle bus window, ignoring the zoo attendant’s shrill cries of I’m watching you, mister!

“You’re unbelievable,” he murmured, observing the tiger as she scratched her ear easily with her retractile claw, keeping her eyes on Charlie.

Unbelievably beautiful.

Charlie always remembered.

Sometimes the memories were fuzzy and ambivalent. When she reached out to touch him, he would feel a jolt go straight through his core as images of the past flooded into his head. Other times, his recollection of everything in the past was as clear as those of a twenty-year-old recalling his childhood.

The start of their forever was in 1910, when Charlie, with a nervous grin on his face, slid the thin gold-plated ring onto Bianca’s trembling finger.

The beginning of the end was that fateful September afternoon — a painful memory Charlie would rather not recall.

He had enlisted. He was going overseas. He had dropped the bomb on Bianca with no warnings. For the longest time, they were stuck in an impasse. But time waited for no one and fate was inevitable. Bianca eventually accepted reality because she could not afford to waste what little time she had left with Charlie.

One morning, Charlie breathlessly rushed into the room while Bianca was setting the table.

“Look what I have,” he waved a crumpled piece of paper in front of Bianca’s face, “Just look.”

# Short Stories

## *Centuries* - cont'd

At first glance, Bianca got nothing. It was a slightly yellowed piece of paper, filled with Charlie's miniscule writing. Words and numbers.

"In the letters, we're not supposed to say where we're located," Charlie explained, "So I came up with this."

It was an intricate system. Each adjective corresponded to a latitude line, and each noun to a longitude. They were all variations of letter openings.

"Let's practice. If I were to write "Dearest buttercup", that would mean I'm where?"

Bianca found the two words on Charlie's code sheet, "That's around fifty-three, three. So... Liverpool, England?"

"Exactly."

The wide grin on Charlie's face was contagious and Bianca, finding the whole thing brilliant, laughed and flung her arms around Charlie's neck.

"Keep the sheet and map safe, okay?"

Bianca nodded eagerly into Charlie's neck, until a new worry crossed her mind.

"How will you know? You can't bring a copy of the codes!"

He winked at her and tapped the side of his head playfully, "I've got it all in here."

Less than a month before Charlie's departure, Bianca's nightmares became more frequent. More often than not, they were simply flashes of images, rarely sequential or logical.

Battlefield. Charlie. Blood. Charlie. Death.

When she woke up, sweating and panting, the terror only ever lasted mere seconds, and then Charlie would be up, wrapping his arms around her and tucking her head under his chin.

One night when the nightmare was particularly bad, it took Bianca a few moments to regain her breath and stop shaking.

"What am I going to do," She whimpered into Charlie's chest, "When I'm all alone?"

"I'll come back as soon as I can." Charlie muttered.

"What if you don't —"

"I will," he promised, out of reflex.

"You might not!" Bianca snapped, pushing herself off him, "You might not be back." She trailed off, too scared to meet his eyes.

"I will," Charlie whispered seriously, cupping Bianca's chin with his palms and tilting her head up to meet his eyes, "Maybe not this life, but I will."

# Short Stories

## *Centuries* - cont'd

“Do you really believe in that?”

“I believe that you can't get rid of me this easily,” He grinned mischievously.

Departure day. Both wore bright smiles.

“I'll write to you,” Charlie vowed as he held Bianca against him, “Every single day.”

Bianca laughed, “You better.”

When the train departed, Bianca collapsed on the platform, clutching her heart and sobbing into her hand. Charlie made a beeline to the washroom, where he stayed for most of the ride, silently drowning in his sorrow.

That April, Ypres happened. In forty-eight hours, six thousand were wounded.

“This is so brutal. Simply inhumane!”

“Where are our boys? They're not there, are they? Someone tell me our boys aren't there!”

“No one knows! You only find out when you get that damned telegram!”

Bianca knew. Bianca rushed home and retrieved Charlie's latest letter. It had arrived this morning. Due to all the commotion, she did not have a chance to read it yet.

“Sweetest honey”

52.5, 3.

Ypres, Belgium.

That damned telegram came two days later. Bianca died inside.

The next time they met, Charlie did not recognize Bianca until much later. Charlie really was not all that bright that life. Bianca, two grades ahead of him, was his math tutor.

“I apologize in advance,” Charlie announced as he walked into the room, flinging his snapback off, “I don't get algebra at all.”

Bianca looked up; a reassuring smile was just starting to form on her lips when, suddenly, the colour drained from her face. All that escaped from her throat was a strangled gurgling sound.

There in front of her — in a pair of washed-out jeans and a dreadful plaid shirt — was someone she recognized from another lifetime.

Charlie did not know why during their second tutoring session Bianca asked him out. Bianca was beautiful, smart, and a senior, for god's sake. Yet, somehow, they stumbled their way through the rest of high school and university, never leaving each other's side.

It was after Charlie put the ring on Bianca's finger that he remembered, stumbling backwards with a gasp.

# Short Stories

## *Centuries* - cont'd

Bianca doubled over in laughter, but when she looked back up, her eyes were brimming with tears.

“Took you long enough, idiot.”

Their lives were not linear. Sometimes they jumped to the future, and other times back in time.

In the Elizabethan Era, Charlie was a blacksmith. Bianca — who was then a boy named Benicio — was the chancellor’s son. In the late 1900’s, Bianca was just celebrating her sixtieth year as an elementary school principal when six-year-old Charlie marched into the school, cookie crumbs and snot stains all over his face.

Not all lifetimes had a ground-shaking love story. Not all lifetimes were filled with passion and desire. Yet there was always a bond. A bond — whether romantic or platonic — built on centuries and centuries of never-changing love.

Charlie’s ringtone snapped him out of his trance. Sighing, he picked up his phone lazily.

“Hey, Sean? Yeah. I’m still on the shuttle bus. Uh, I don’t know. Give me...twenty more minutes? I need to buy an annual pass for the zoo. And a bus pass. I’ll be coming here quite often, it seems like.”

Once more, Charlie pressed his face up against the window to face Bianca. The tiger snarled playfully, her whiskers trembling.

She knows, Charlie noted with glee. As much as humanly possible, Charlie scrunched up his face and growled teasingly at her.

“Twenty-first century and still no equality,” Charlie laughed, tearing his eyes away from the tiger, “Now I have to pay just to see her.”



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