

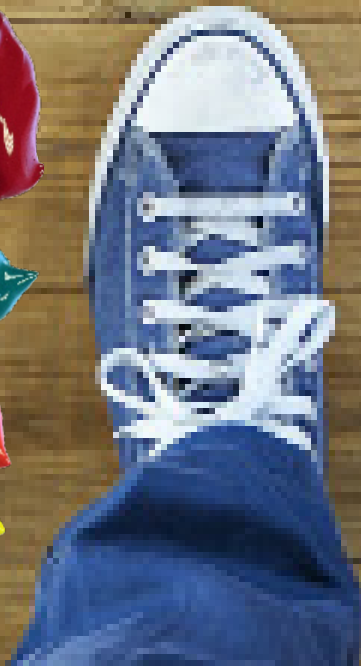
Richmond Hill Public Library's

2018

# ARTS CONTEST

FOR STUDENTS GRADES 9-12

POETRY | VISUAL ARTS | PHOTOGRAPHY | SHORT STORIES



# Greetings

## Message from the Chief Executive Officer

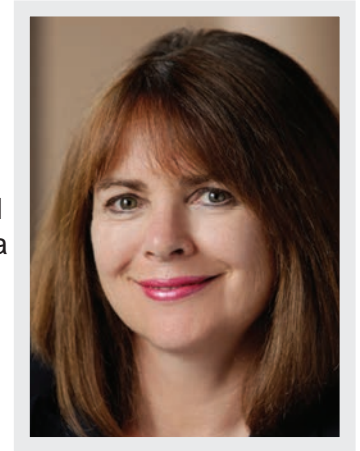
*“If I were called upon to define briefly the word ‘Art,’ I should call it the reproduction of what the senses perceive in nature, seen through the veil of the soul.” – Paul Cézanne*

Art is a powerful tool with which to engage communities. It’s a means to public dialogue, contributing to the development of a community’s creative learning and helping to build community capacity and leadership. Art can empower, and give a voice to the voiceless.

One of the annual highlights on the Library’s calendar of events is our High School Arts Contest, when we welcome the young artists of Richmond Hill inside our doors to celebrate their outstanding work. Each year, it’s an honour to showcase so many fantastic displays of skill, craft, and technique, and this year is no exception. Congratulations to all the young photographers, poets, visual artists, and writers for their creativity and vision.

I’d like to thank our judges for offering up their time and expertise. With so many strong submissions, choosing the contest’s winners is no easy task, but their careful consideration and dedication to their craft is helping to set a wonderful example for our community’s next generation of artists.

I would also like thank the Library staff who have organized the High School Arts Contest, and have made the evening of celebration such a welcomed and anticipated annual community event.



- Louise Procter Maio

## Message from the Judges



### **Andrea End - Visual Art**

Andrea End’s inspiration is the sunlight -- the colours and shapes that are created in the forests and on the lakes of the Canadian scenery.

Her offering is a window with a view that inspires to pause, disconnect and be present.

Andrea is a professional visual artist, painting landscapes in gouache, an opaque watercolour. Gouache is an uncommon fine art medium and gives her paintings a unique look.

Andrea is on the Board/Executive Council of the Richmond Hill Group of Artists. She has served two terms on the Cultural Leadership Council, an advisory committee for Richmond Hill’s Cultural Plan.



## Trevor Cole - Short Stories and Poetry

**Trevor Cole** has won international acclaim for his fiction and journalism. His first two novels — *Norman Bray in the Performance of His Life* (2004), and *The Fearsome Particles* (2006) — were both short-listed for the Governor-General's Award and long-listed for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. His third novel, *Practical Jean*, published in Canada, the US, Germany and France, won the 2011 Leacock Medal for Humour and was short-listed for the Writer's Trust Fiction Prize. In 2013, Cole won the Canada Council's Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award for outstanding artistic achievement as a writer in mid-career. His fourth novel, *Hope Makes Love*, has been called "rewarding," "riveting," "powerful" and "brilliant." In 2015, he adapted his first novel for the stage, and in 2017, HarperCollins published his fifth book, *The Whisky King*, which *The Globe and Mail* called "a superb work of historical non-fiction." It is shortlisted for the 2017 Speaker's Book Award.



## Ken Sparling - Short Stories and Poetry

Ken Sparling's seventh novel, *This Poem is a House*, was published in the spring of 2016 by Coach House Books. He is the creator and curator of The Serial Library ([theseriallibrary.com](http://theseriallibrary.com)). Ken has lived in Richmond Hill for more than 40 years and is the communications officer responsible for teen programs at Toronto Public 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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**1st Place - Michelle Lin**

## **In the Eye of the Beholder**



The popular saying, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” adopts a very literal and ironic meaning in this photo. Taken outside of a cosmetics store in Spain, the glass display window had been cracked and damaged in the “perfect place.” I was able to angle the area of damage directly on to the eye of the model in the advertisement. The warm hues of reds and oranges, starkly contrast the sinister symbolism of the cracked glass. Inspired by the promotional posters of the film, *The Black Swan*, the cracked glass illustrates a metaphorical façade of perfection beginning to crack. Perfection and beauty are subjective yet highly desired traits. With constantly changing definitions, the pursuit of these two traits are futile and may lead to dark paths.

**2nd Place - Jeffrey Wong**

## **Sandy Shores**

This photo was taken by the Scarborough Bluffs in late April.

It displays a beautiful juxtaposition of the sunny shoreline on the left and a raging storm brewing over the lake. A high shutter speed was employed to increase the definity of the layers in the clouds.

The photo represents the change in our lives. Nothing is constant. The sunny shores will soon flood with rainwater, and the storm will precipitate away.



**3rd Place - Sasha Latchaev**

## **The Spirit of the Arctic**



Last summer I participated in the Students on Ice Arctic 2017 expedition. This picture of the incredible mass of icebergs in the ocean was taken in Evighedsfiord, Greenland. I could hear the sound of the ice melting and summer ice crackle of icebergs that have its own unique shape and its own shining colourful white – bright blue – blue – purple – pink colouring of the ice. The landscape was filled with surprising beauty that we lose in our daily lives. Unfortunately, it is impossible to capture the amazing atmosphere and energy of that place and immerse in the feel, sounds and smells of the Arctic in a photograph. However, I hope you are feeling the breath of nature looking at this picture. We have to save this wonderful place for future generations.

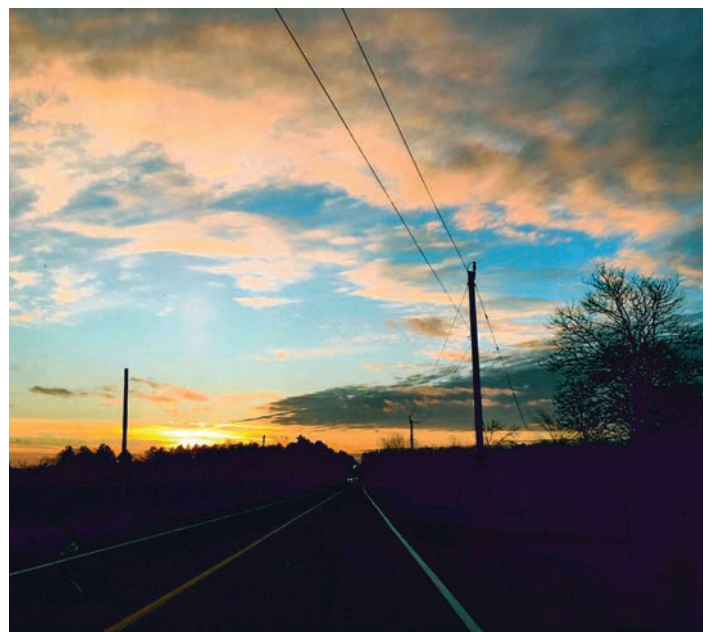
**Honourable Mention - Alya Fancy**

## **Elders**

I took this picture on my way home recently in Richmond Hill on 19th Avenue. I saw the beauty in the sky on the simple path that we were driving on. It really showed me that life doesn't have to be complicated for things to be beautiful, it can happen even when things are simple.

When you just look at the simple plain road, it seems like there is nothing to look forward too, but this photo shows that with perseverance, you can see something bright and hopeful. It is important for people to believe that there is a bright future ahead even when they are having a hard time in their lives.

With so much difficulty facing our world today, people need to stay positive and need to know that if they persevere, there is brightness ahead at the end of their path. We must believe that tomorrow will be brighter than today.



**1st Place - Reena Wu**

## **Nightlight**



Nightlight was created by reversing the concept of a flashlight to make a machine that could project the night sky. This painting was made as a lighthearted piece about using your imagination and finding joy and wonder in the most mundane, everyday things to make them infinitely more interesting.

**2nd Place - Howyn Tang**

## **Beyond the Boundary**

This piece is called “Beyond the Boundary.” It was drawn using pencil crayon and watercolour. It’s based on the idea of the struggle to overcome life’s obstacles in order to find ourselves, and reach our dreams. The glass wall that is broken by the hands represents the boundaries, the obstacles in life we all must overcome in order to realize who and what we are. The colours of the wall are paler in contrast to the colours where the glass is broken, representing the hidden potential in ourselves that can only be revealed when we overcome our weaknesses. The glass wall is many colours rather than one to give off a more mystical feeling, representing that we don’t actually know what is behind it, we’ll only know once we break this barrier and it is uncovered.



## 3rd Place - Sasha Latchaev

### Leshik



Beautiful Canadian forests hide incredible things and surprise us when we are willing to look into it. Winds whisper stories to those who are willing to hear them and twisting rivers show the flow of life. Strong trees creak their own fairy tales and their colourful leaves from lime-green to the rich colours of autumn, demonstrate the all beauty and greatness of nature. As a child, I always looked at the amazing nature and listened to its wonderful sounds, imagining it was talking to me.

On a cold winter day, I remembered that bright feeling of wonder and decided to express my childhood love for forests by creating my friend Leshik. I re-experienced nostalgia for my childhood. Through my visual representation and using digital art, as well as many hours spent on this art work, I was able to return at that wonderful time.

## Honourable Mention - Jessica Lu

### Rose

This painting was what was inspired after reading *The Imitation of the Rose* by Clarice Linspector, which is about a woman who is recovering from a mental illness and has an obsession with perfection. Through *Rose*, I tried to give a visual representation of what this preoccupation with perfection could feel like.

The roses seen trapping the woman in the painting represent the faces of the illness and perfection. Trapping the woman from in front and behind, the thorns that are present with the roses signify the nature of perfection discussed – while perfection itself is beautiful as are the roses, reality imposes other issues such as the trapping nature of its poses, where the thorns can hurt the pursuer and others in the form of isolation. The woman is also depicted with fingers gauging the skin on her face open, but all the lies underneath is red. The perfect smoothness of the colour shows again the perfection she is aiming for, as an imitation of the red roses, but in actuality hurts, just as when injured, people bleed red.





## 1st Place - Enshia Li

### Beethoven

Muzzled fate knocks thrice  
at the door, the dark  
part of the ear, cavern  
damp with yearning.

O horsehair arm, tongue  
of horn, horn of brass—  
Of what make is the master  
who stitched you together

like a wound, the blood  
sticky still, pulpit wet  
with sweat. O Frankenstein,  
Doktor,

Doktor. Have our flowers  
And these organs too.  
And all our ears for you,  
our ears with their sinew.

Wrap them in cotton, unstick  
them by the skin. The wind snakes  
through their canal. Can you hear.  
Are they weightless in your hands,  
  
can you see all that they feel.

## 2nd Place - Jane Wen

### Midday Washed in Homeland Sun

Late summer noon leaks gold through the thin curtains,  
Burning behind my eyelids only half-shut in artificial sleep.  
I lie on a cool bamboo mat, watching in hazy silence and cicada song;  
Grandmother sits at the wooden nightstand in her pajamas  
And the old sewing machine thrums under her wrinkled fingers.  
Jade wounds around her heavily veined wrists, veins that run  
Through her Canton blood and Canton bones like the Yangtze,  
Through our breathing city of flashing lights and tree-lined streets and  
Corner stores smelling of the curry fish balls that were my favourite.  
This home is incense curled in smoke of childhood – but the sultry air sighs, reminding me  
Here is a city I can merely glimpse every other airplane trip,  
When snowstorms morph into grandmother's cooked jasmine rice on china plate.  
I am watching from the outside, behind a sheet of frosted syrup, with the touch of  
Slippery tones and recollections once firm in my grasp and now not enough.  
My supposed native tongue, foreign upon traitorous lips that manage  
Sticky smiles and aching monotonous responses;  
Foggy traditions and family bruised with years and kilometers, shattering  
Into a million numb fractals stolen from newly suburban-washed Canadian soul.  
I see my grandparents through awkwardly angled webcam screens,  
And my city through honeyed photos search engines feed me  
That simply cannot contain the resonance I try endlessly to piece back together.  
Suddenly, the sewing machine's hum tangles with a voice deep as valley mist:  
Grandmother murmuring an old melody that although I don't quite remember or understand,  
Stirs something that awakens deep within the roots of my shivering mind.  
Mid-autumn moon outshone by a sea of festival lanterns like glowing lotus seed paste,  
Tippy-toes in stubborn effort to scoop up baby tadpoles from leaf-strewn fountain,  
Clumsy roller skates struggling to catch up to my cousin's laughter,  
On sunny trails freckled with spots of foliage shade trembling in warm zephyr –  
All at once, I stop looking.  
I feel this city, in every breath I take, alive with the itch beneath my jittering skin,

cont'd

# Poetry

Bound by an inseverable thread knotted around heartstrings and gathering dust, perhaps;  
But one that will never fray, holding together the essence of a home I have loved so well.  
Still – there are two, one string woven with China’s summer thunderstorms  
And another with the biting Northern wind  
Both existing oceans apart, yet both intertwined into my very being.  
Grandmother turns slightly to me, finished with her creation, and  
For a second, I see her smile: dark crinkled eyes that dance  
With light and life like our neon skyscrapers cocooned in night horizon.  
Then she gets up to leave, shutting the door quietly behind her  
And leaving me to drift off into  
Balmy, contented doze.

## 3rd Place - Jessica Lu

### a kill order

the kill order come,  
from her majesty reclining with established poise,  
to her guards who eagerly run with pup gaits,  
down to the knights who protest:  
“a troublesome notion!”  
who hold loyalty fast and close to their hearts  
but clutch their duties faster.

so the order sl i  
ps down to the dungeons  
the executioner turns, on edge but—  
it's not his job to question, he executes.  
he brings the descent of heads.

the stairs,  
ascends  
he

blade cradled close.  
ascends the levels  
ascends

until he is across the floor and looking  
down at her majesty  
“the kill order?” he asks, confirmation needed.  
thumbs down. confirmation given.  
he raises the blade and dragged down the stairs  
by some inescapable downwards force,

goes  
her majesty's  
head.

## Honourable Mention - Mariane Olivan

### The Rules of Society

Ladies and gentlemen, we have something to say.

There's an amazing place; just come with us!

You'll join us either way.

We welcome you to society!

We're pleased that now you're here

And once you finally settle in,

Our rules will be quite clear.

Just make sure you're conformed

To our perfect standard of normal.

We want everyone to fit in nicely

So make sure you're not abnormal.

We'll tell you that your looks don't matter

Through red-stained made-up lips.

What we really mean is look perfect

Right up to your fingertips

We'll cast a mask of lies for you

So that you'll be prized

Don't blame us if it comes crashing down,

You were weak and so was your disguise

We'll shun you for your body type

Then ask you why you starve

We'll pretend to care, for a little while

And then we'll start to carve

Your heart and shape it to our every whim.

Delve further into our perfect society

Be the puppet on our strings, and by the end,

you'll be the perfect image of propriety

We'll let you live a life of freedom

As long as it's by our rules.

This is for your own good,

cont'd

# Poetry

We swear that you're not tools.  
We hope you have a nice stay here  
It's too late now; you can't retreat  
You'll find happiness here eventually,  
After forever on repeat.

# Short Stories

1st Place - Richard He

## Conversation

“Wonderful day, isn’t it?”

“Wonderful day, hmm.”

A young man stands at the bus stop, but he is restless, pacing back and forth in the small shelter. He stares down the road with an anticipation that seems almost like anger from afar—but barely noticeable. The older man sits behind him, peering through a pair of dusty glasses with a mixture of amusement and pity.

But the young man doesn’t mind him. His diligent watch will not be interrupted.

“God, it should be here by now...”

Almost suddenly, the silence of the space makes itself known. The young man turns, almost repentant—has he broken a rule?

“Sorry, you were saying?”

“Oh, nothing of importance, I don’t think.”

A pause.

“If it’ll make you calm down, I have the schedule; would you like for me to check?”

“Yes please, that’d be wonderful.”

The old man reaches for his bag, and the world is silent save for the howls of the wind. The young man shivers.

“Say, aren’t you worried at all? There’s a chance we’ve missed it...”

He trails off, and the old man pauses for a beat, thinking. His breath creates ripples through the cold air.

“Well, I figure we’re already here, aren’t I? We can’t possibly miss it, so...ah, here it is.”

The map is worn and leathery, but the schedule is clear nonetheless. The old man points.

“5 minutes? Really?”

The old man is perhaps a little offended—but takes no heed.

“Well, that’s what the schedule says.”

“Hmm.”

The two stand, side by side, two tall shadows waiting in the cold. But the older man is tired, and retires to a seat with a sigh.

cont’d

# Short Stories

“Well, it’s not here, is it? Stop pacing and join me, will you?”

They are apart for a moment. But suddenly, the young man turns—an idea.

“I think we should go home.”

“...What?”

The older man scoffs.

“Relax, the schedule says—“

“Well, perhaps we already missed it. Or maybe the schedules are wrong.”

The old man laughs and shakes his head.

“Do you not want it to come?”

The young man feels that he should be a little offended but isn’t. He looks at his feet.

“I don’t, not really. I just want to consider all the possibilities.”

They are both silent, and the air settles.

“Son, it never fails to arrive, if you’re here. Just wait, won’t you?”

“But what if—?”

He shakes his head, and stands, stretching.

“You’re overthinking everything—”

He pauses—interrupted by the rumble of a truck, in the distance.

“Well, I’m heading home. Call your mother when you get on the bus.”

Without a second glance, the old man walks away, ignoring the calls of the younger.

“Hey—aren’t you going to keep waiting with me? Where are you going?”

The young man shivers, resigned to waiting just a bit longer, but doesn’t mind all that much. After all, it’s a wonderful day.



# Short Stories

2nd Place - Angela Zhang

## The First Encounter

### Part 1

T

it's raining. the drops hit the young boy's brown hair as he runs home from the bus station. his footsteps echo along the empty road as he approaches an old white house. panting, he searches through his pockets hoping to feel the welcoming touch of the rusty house key. he feels nothing.

hmm.

he remembers grabbing it off the kitchen counter before he left for school. he doesn't remember stuffing it in his right pocket like he usually does. a sudden realization dawns upon him as he frantically unstraps his already soaked backpack and searches the front pocket. his fingers swiftly stroke a cold hard surface. he grasps the small object and quickly attempts to insert it into the keyhole. it doesn't go in. so he tries again. it still doesn't go in. at this point, the boy is drenched, as if he just stepped out of a pool after accidentally falling into it.

he ruffles his dark hair in frustration. he's beyond confused. why isn't the key going in? he puts his backpack down and tries again.

it. still. doesn't. work.

he groans and forcefully throws the key down. he slumps against the door. he gazes at the grey sky as raindrops splatter across the granite driveway. the trees of spring were dancing wildly in the wind. he drifts his gaze down to where his key landed, beside his backpack.

suddenly, he jolts forward and grabs a tag that was dangling from the zipper. he doesn't remember having a tag on his bag. he reads it.

name: vee jones  
Phone #: 647 128 0421

cont'd

# Short Stories

he stares at the tag in shock. this isn't his backpack. he grabs his phone from his jacket pocket. he presses the home button. 3:03 pm. his workaholic mother wouldn't be back until after he falls asleep and she almost never speaks to him. if one were to meet the two, it would be difficult to tell that they were mother and son. sometimes, he couldn't help but feel alone. in a rush, he types in the phone number and it begins dialing.

## Part 2

V

the moment her father opens the door, she's met by the sour stench of alcohol. he's drinking again. she quietly stuffs her jacket into the closet and makes her way into the kitchen to get a snack before heading to her room to do some homework. the smell only gets worse in the kitchen. bottles litter the counter. she could hear her father doing a mix of laughing and hiccuping in the room next to the kitchen, probably watching some 80s comedy show. she grabs some yoghurt and carries her bag upstairs into her room.

she looks around with a sigh. it's too small for her liking. like a prison cell. pushed into a corner is a stack of books for school. her father threw away her other books because of the lack of space. her bed sits under a dusty window, too small for her to roll around in. on the opposite wall, she had hung up r family photos in a cluster. they remind her of when she was truly happy. when she actually hung out with friends. when she would laugh to almost everything.

when her mother was still alive.

she sniffs, trying to hold back her tears as she strips her eyes off the hanging frames. she shuffles slowly to her bed and plops down. it's been eight months since her mother passed away. her father was never the same kind man he was before. she was never the same. all she wants was for her mother to magically appear in front of her and hug her like they used to every night before she slept.

unfortunately, miracles like that don't happen.

she zips open her backpack and pours its contents onto the soft padding of her bed. an assortment of pens fall out, along with a digital wristwatch, and some scrunched up pieces of homework. she looks at the unknown objects in shock. she reaches into the backpack and takes out a thick binder. She proceeds to open the binder and a few stickers catch her eye. they were pop-up stickers, the ones she likes to use because they were fun to poke. three letters

cont'd

# Short Stories

stuck to the front page of the binder.

T. E. E.

tee? she questions as she tries poking the stickers. to her dismay, she doesn't feel the same satisfaction that she usually does.

she wonders what may be lying in the rest of the binder. just as she's about to find out, she hears her dad's half-drunken voice vibrate through the house.

"vee! t-there's an unknown number calling your phone! p-pick it up before i shut it up m-myself!" she hears his heavy footsteps return to the television afterwards.

she sighs once more and trudges out of her room and down the stairs to find her phone. the kitchen still smells like alcohol. she wonders when it ever smelled like anything else. she glances down at her lit up screen. an unknown number indeed. since she has nothing better to do, she presses the accept button.

"hello?"

## Part 3

V

" *hi there. are you perhaps vee?* " her eyes widen, wondering how a stranger would know her name.

"yes, and who are you?"

there was a pause.

" *fine. it's tee. weird name, right?.* " she gasps softly and runs up the stairs to her room.

"tee? as in t-e-e?" she quietly murmurs to herself as she opens the binder again.

" *yeah. what else would it be?* "

cont'd

# Short Stories

“never mind. why did you call me?”

*“ being the smartass i am, i’m guessing that you have my bag, correct? ”* he sounds quite exasperated, as if he wants the phone call to end as soon as possible.

“yes that’s true.”

*“ well, guess what, yippee, i have your bag. it looks exactly like mine. ”*

“makes sense. your bag looks like mine too except that it doesn’t have a name tag and it’s much messier.”

*“ hey! i’m not that messy. ”* he exclaims, trying to sound hurt, but she could hear his chuckles through the phone.

“sure. anyway, i’m pretty sure we go to the same school then, because how else would we have swapped bags?”

*“ probably. hey, can we meet up? ”*

“it’s raining.”

*“ i ’m aware. but i’d rather get my bag back than wait at my door drenched. my keys are in there. ”*

“you’re outside?!” she exclaims.

*“ yes and i can’t get into the house. so do you live close to school? ”*

“i do.”

*“ there’s a park next to it. let’s meet and exchange bags. ”*

“fine, but only because i pity you and your sorry self. meet me there in fifteen minutes.” she hangs up and stares outside at the rain.

she cleans up the mess back into the boy’s bag, puts her jacket on, and slips out the front door, leaving her father behind to watch comedy shows.

halfway to the park, she realizes.

cont’d

# Short Stories

she forgot her umbrella.

## Part 4

T+V

he's running. within fifteen minutes, he arrives at the park. frantically, he looks around, still grasping onto a strap of the girl's bag.

the park is vacant. the leaves shake violently on the tip of the branches, as if they were holding on tightly. the wind howls fiercely, as if possessed by werewolves. the clouds crowd the dull sky, showing the moon that is slowly poking out of its edges. benches situated along the pathway have water droplets pouring off of them, like a miniature waterfall.

he hears footsteps approaching.

he hears the soft panting of a girl.

he hears vee.

*she forgot an umbrella he thinks as he notices that she, too, is completely drenched.*

without thinking, he engulfs her in a tight embrace. even in the cold of the spring rain, he feels warm against the shivering body of the young girl.

he lets go.

she hands him his backpack and grabs her own. then, she turns and begins walking away.

"wait!" he calls out.

she turns and looks at him.

"thanks for returning my bag, even though it's raining. i really appreciate it, vee. i hope we can talk more and become friends." he says with a warm smile.

vee doesn't understand. maybe it's the smile that reaches his dark brown eyes. maybe it's the way his face turns slightly pink from the weather. maybe it's the way he says those words like he genuinely means them. she doesn't know the reason, but for the first time in eight months,

cont'd

# Short Stories

she feels happy.

she smiles slightly. "yeah, let's talk more, tee."

with that, both of them turn and walk in opposite directions.

returning home smiling.

drenched in rain because of the other.

thinking about their first encounter.

# Short Stories

## 3rd Place - Cynthia Ding Summer Escapades

**7:08 PM**

Buzz. I look down at my phone. It's a text from Josh. Sometimes I wonder why we're friends, he's a jerk and I hate him (most of the time). He's always telling me that picking on each other is what friends do, but I don't like it. It makes me feel worthless, like I'm not good enough to be his friend – or anyone's friend for that matter. I shake that thought out of my head. He has his sweet moments. I yearn for those. I unlock my phone.

J: I don't know if I can make it tonight.

My heart drops a little. It feels like an eon has passed since the last time we saw each other. His uncle got him an internship in Washington... and it's lasted the entirety of the past month. I mean it's not like we haven't talked at all. We've been skyping almost everyday, but it's just not the same. I'm going through withdrawals. Is it even possible to go through human withdrawals? I don't know. There's a lot I don't know. But that's just part of my inadequacies.

ME: You might not come?

I glance at the time, it's 7:08... I just spent four hours getting ready. Who spends four hours getting ready? We might not even hang out anymore. So it was an utter waste of time. Time is something I'm always wasting. I need to get it together. Ouch, I burn myself on my curling iron. Buzz.

J: Border is packed, won't get home til 9. So prob not.

If I don't see him tonight, I'd have to wait another week. And right now, that feels like forever.

ME: Oh come onnnnn.

J: ?

E: Come hang out with us. At least make an appearance.

J: By the time I get there it'll be like 11.

ME: I mean I'm still down to hang out. But not if you're gonna be tired as hell.

Normally, I'd never pass up an opportunity to get more sleep, but right now I want to see him more. I don't know why. Buzz.

J: Ya, I don't know, it's also late and I don't wanna bother Kate's parents.

ME: My parents are outta town, and I promise I can be a good host.

We've been talking about meeting up for weeks. He can't back out now. I shoot a text to Kate saying we might meet up at my place. She doesn't want to leave her house. I don't blame her, it's massive.

ME: Oops, scratch that. Kate wants to meet up at her place.

# Short Stories

She said her parents are fine with us staying as late as we want though.

I wait anxiously. I hope I've convinced him. Buzz.

J: Alright. I'll pick you up around 11.

I let out a breath I didn't even realize I was holding.

ME: See you soon.

## 11:11 PM

I'm in his car, we're jamming out to songs on the radio, even though neither of us can sing. We're awful and it's hilarious, I can't stop smiling. I throw a side glance at him, he's smiling too. The windows are down and the warm summer air is caressing my hair. We are definitely speeding, and it's dark. This should feel dangerous, but instead I'm... content. I haven't felt so free in a while. I look at the clock, 11:11. I wish this feeling could last forever.

## 12:46 PM

I'm staring at him. Again. But not just staring, checking him out. Again. This is the twenty-third time tonight. I kept count. I can't help myself. He looks good, really good. Washington has treated him well. I scrunch my eyes shut and take a deep breath. I know I don't like him like that, I'm just appreciating him physically. When I open my eyes, he's looking at me. We make eye contact. He smirks. He noticed me staring. I groan inwardly, I do not need to be feeding his ego. Washington may have treated him well, but he also became a whole lot more arrogant. I don't know if I like it or not.

## 1:21 AM

"So uhhhhh, you guys can keep hanging out here but can I go to sleep?" Kate is evidently tired. I feel bad for making her hang out with us. I can't believe I dragged her into this mess of a friendship, but Josh and I really needed the buffer tonight. I admit it, I'm generally a flirt. I'm not really sure why, I think it makes me feel a little better about myself. I flirt with everyone, even girls. But lately, he's been flirting back. Add that to my inability to stop checking him out (thirty-one times and counting), and I don't know what we would have done if we were alone.

"Your parents are out of town right? Let's head back to your place to hang out for a while." Josh is looking right at me. He's so tall that I have to tilt my head up to look at him. His eyes are intense. I taste blood. I'm chewing on my lip, and I didn't even realize it. I force myself to stop.

"Sure, but doesn't your mom want you home by two?"

"Yeah, but it doesn't matter, we'll just hang out for a bit more"

I guess it's settled then. We head back to my place.



# Short Stories

**1:37 AM**

We're waiting for the elevator. I don't know what to say so I stick my tongue out at him. I act cute, because that's the persona I created for myself. Cute. It's a persona I can hide behind. It makes me slightly more comfortable. He flashes me a smile but shakes his head. I let out a breath.

**1:44 AM**

We're laying on my bed side by side, not really interacting. But the silence is comfortable. I'm on my phone playing a game. Josh glances over at me.

"Oh come on, you're not playing that stupid game again, are you?"

"Hey, don't be mean! I need to take care of my dragons."

"Not in my presence you won't"

Before I realized what happened, he has my phone in his hands. I'm aggravated, we both know I won't be able to get it back. I'm useless when it comes to physical strength. Another one of my inadequacies.

"Give it back!!"

"Not unless you promise to stop playing that stupid game."

"Never."

We wrestle for my phone, and I get it back. But we both know he let me have it.

**2:08 AM**

"Why are rulers only six inches long? That's a bit short if you ask me." I wonder out loud.

"You bet it is" He chuckles.

Confused, I look at him. He gives me a lascivious wink. I grow flush, realizing the innuendo I made. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

"Oh god, you're gross" I make to give him a shove, but before I can he grabs my arm. Annoyed and defeated, I tug on my arm expecting him to let it go. Instead, he moves on top of me. I gasp. He kisses me.

Surprised, I push him away. Extending my arms between us. Why would he do that? I'm not worth it. But isn't this what I want? I mean I'm sixteen – no wait seventeen. I just turned seventeen, and I still haven't been kissed yet. Oh gods, it's so late that I can't even remember how old I am. I can't think straight. Stupid brain. I don't know if I want this. I think I do.

"Don't you need to be home by two?" I can't look at him, because I know that if I do I would cave in and let him kiss me.

"I'm not leaving now." His voice is so intense. My arms cripple. His lips come crashing

# Short Stories

back into me and we're kissing again. My hands move to his hair, it's so silky, and my hands get lost in the feeling. I'm tangling it, and I don't care. He smells so sweet, sweet like honey. It's intoxicating. His body pressing against me is my entire world right now, the rest of the world can wait. I don't know how much time passes. It feels like both forever and an instant.

His phone starts ringing. It's his mom. He carefully disengages from me and picks up his phone. His back is to me. I don't know what he's thinking. I don't even know what I'm thinking.

"Yeah mom, I'm leaving now." He walks out the door without so much as glancing at me.

The world comes crashing back. I'm dizzy. What just happened? All of my emotions are buzzing and clashing. I'm left feeling numb. Why didn't he look at me? Did I do something wrong? Of course I did. My brain is aching from all my thoughts. I choose one and cling to it. It was purely physical, it meant nothing. I'm exhausted. I try shutting everything else out. But one question remains. *Do I regret it?*

# Short Stories

## Honourable Mention - Kashfia Mahmood

### Venomous

Across the table, a pair of unblinking elliptical eyes peered down at her.

She was neither old nor young, unsightly nor striking, timid nor bold; the woman was simply herself, and that was what she had come to offer. The man's scaly, dirt-encrusted hands reached for hers, the texture unsettlingly rough against her prudently moisturized skin. Displeasure crossed her face momentarily before shedding into a forced smile. She had always hated it when her frozen hands made contact with anyone. Through the windows entered the arctic August air, rattling empty chairs with sudden force. She shivered.

There was a rush of movement, friends saying farewell, families heading home, couples sharing the first kiss of many to come. The smell—oh, the smell!—of apple pie and black coffee permeated the infinitely intimate coffee shop. This was the scent of satisfaction, she thought to herself. An unexpected emotion arose in her, a fear enveloping her chest as if she were a rodent caught in the fangs of a cobra. For fear of looking childish in the company of her date, the feeling was not mentioned and soon forgotten. She excused herself to the restroom.

Alone, she thought of the events that had to transpire to get her to this point. She met a man, he professed his love, and now here they were. A year had passed since they had started dating. Was this love? She couldn't tell. A toxin had slithered its way into her heart; she was taken with the concept.

Reflected in the mirror above the sink was a woman, neither slender nor obese, tall nor short, happy nor sad. In fact, she noted to herself, she was rather average today, just as she was any other day. Turning the knob on the old faucet allowed for a gush of scalding hot water to burst forth, briefly warming her frigid hands. For a moment she relished in the glow which spread through her entire body. Soon enough, however, the temperature's effect dulled as her skin adjusted to its newfound environment. The soothing sound of water was replaced with the opening and shutting of the door as another person walked in. The effect of the venom had hastened.

Nothing had changed. Unable to make a sound, she returned to the table with weakness burdening her steps. She had been poisoned, and he could be the antidote.

His knee made contact with the ground and he asked for her eternal love. People pointed fingers in awe, gawking at the sight. A few even whistled.

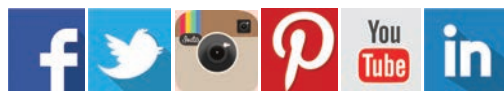
Her heart remained stagnant as she said yes.



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