

STUDENTS FOR THE EARTH

# *In sp ire.*



A SHORT  
STORY  
COMPILATION

SFE. INTERNATIONAL SHORT STORY WRITING COMPETITION 2017



## Inspire

“Small Acts, Big Impacts”

: A Compilation of Short Stories From The Sfe. International Short Story Competition:

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The ebook has been prepared after discussion with the participants.

*Dedicated to all students and youth with a dream of making positive changes in their community and to the environment, and to their parents and teachers...*

*The motto of Students For The Earth is*

*“Small Acts, Big Impact”*

*and we asked the participants to weave a story from our motto. Read and enjoy their creations!*

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# From the Founder's Desk

Dear Readers,

“You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.”

This is one of the quotes that still inspire me everyday making me remember not to doubt your abilities and go for the dream you aspire for. This was the same thought when I founded Students For The Earth on March 19th 2013, which started off as a simple Facebook page for Environmental awareness to one of the leading youth organizations internationally.

In view of our 5th year celebrations in 2018, we planned to kick start it off with an International Short Story Competition which we launched in July 2017. We would like to thank Youth Opportunities for their support in promoting the event. We received nearly 300 entries around the globe by the last date of 21st September 2017 (International Peace Day).

We had two teams of segregators who assigned roll numbers to each entry for complete anonymity and fair judging and then a team of judges who checked through the entries and marked them on a scale of 40 with criteria including Originality, Language, Use of Theme, How Inspiring the Story is and Creativity.

After compiling the marks, the top 5 in each category, School/Under 18 and College/Above 18, were selected as winners of the Judged Category and also the top 20 in each category were selected to be eligible for the Popular Category decided by Votes on Facebook.

We would like to thank all the people who have involved in the judging process and those who supported us throughout. We would also like to thank all the participants, their parents, teachers and well wishers for their support throughout.

We look forward to organizing the Sfe. International Short Story Competition again in 2018.

Till then, do visit, [www.mysfe.jimdo.com](http://www.mysfe.jimdo.com) and [www.facebook.com/studentsfortheearth](https://www.facebook.com/studentsfortheearth) for latest events.

All The Best!

Regards,

**George Zacharia**

***Founder, Students For The Earth***



*Sfe. International Short Story  
Writing Competition 2017*

# Results

## SCHOOL CATEGORY

### JUDGED CATEGORY

1st Prize: Shaarika Gopakumar, 14, The Millennium School Dubai, UAE

2nd Prize: Hanna Pishchik, 17, MSLU, Belarus

3rd Prize: Niranjana Jayanath, 14, The Millennium School Dubai, UAE

4th Prize: Iman Altaf, 14, The City School, Darakhshan Campus, Pakistan

5th Prize: Sahil Saleem, 11, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE

### SPECIAL PRIZE WINNERS

Aryan Raj, Gems Our Own, UAE  
Kashinadh Pranesh, Gems Millennium  
Sharjah, UAE

### POPULAR CATEGORY

Muneeba Shakeel  
Samrin Saleem  
Sahil Saleem  
Aulia Rachman  
Iman Altaf

## COLLEGE CATEGORY

### JUDGED CATEGORY

1st Prize: Isha Altaf

2nd Prize: Bhanubhakta Adhikari, 22,  
Institute of Agriculture And Animal  
Science, Nepal

3rd Prize: Hanna Kusumawaty, 22,  
Sriwijaya University, Indonesia

4th Prize: Rizky Amalia, 21, Abant Izzet  
Baysal University, Turkey

5th Prize: Teguh Nurrohman, 22,  
Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

### POPULAR CATEGORY

Warisha Rais  
Sukanya Basu Mallik  
Sinem  
ELEKWA UCHECHI RHONDALYN  
BHANUBHAKTA ADHIKARI

*Congratulations to all the winners,  
finalists, and participants!*

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[www.mysfe.weebly.com](http://www.mysfe.weebly.com)



School Category, 1st Prize Winner (Judged)

# ‘How it all started with a thrown lunch’

*By, Shaarika Gopakumar, 14, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE*

“My word, Allen. Did I not ask you to toss that paper bag into the yard

yesterday?” His mother called out, her soft palm pressed against her

forehead in disappointment. “Boys these days, I tell you.” She muttered to

herself, pushing the bag through the creaking window.

What wasn’t noticed by her motherly instincts was that the poor, young boy

across the street watched the bag fall. Picking up his speed before anyone

else did bother, he scurried across the busy road to the bag, hoping for a

free meal.

“Ah, today isn’t my day.” He cursed, staring at the apple core at the bottom of the bag. He threw the paper bag aside, watching the yellow core stumble out, the little brown seed still intact.

“What if,” he whispered to himself, his eyes swirling with crazy ideas. He grabbed the apple core and dashed into the streets of England with the purest of minds in the whole crowd.

His legs carried him to the closest patch of land that he recognized as nobody’s. Kneeling onto the soil, he dug the deepest of holes his nine-year-



old self could. His nails lowered the smallest of shiny seeds into the moist earth.

“I shall name you Jefferson.” He whispered, his palms gathering soil to cover up the apple seed. “And henceforth, you shall be mine.” He smiled at the soil, once he finished pressing down on the wet soil once more. He wiped his muddy hands on his even dirtier shirt, admiring his work in pride. “I won’t let you down, Jefferson. Not like my parents did.” He promised his little seed, his hand placed on his chest with pride.

“Even when you’re the crankiest, I shall feed you water to your heart’s content.” He offered his toothless smile before he heard his father’s echoing call for him.

---

A decade into the tale...

---

“Jefferson, I must say you’ve grown quite taller than when I last met you,” he said, shaking his best friend’s leaf. “Would you look at that?” He exclaimed at the pearly white flowers drooping from one of the strong branches. “An apple will sprout soon, I have belief in you.” He offered the tree the smallest of hugs, before he sat at the foot of the tree, narrating away today’s factory gossip.

“Would you believe your roots if I told you I lost my job at the factory, merely because my boss thought I’d sell their ideas? I’m going through hell, that’s it.” He sighed, searching comfort from his tree.

“You’d think a boy of nineteen knows how to earn his boss’s trust by now,” he shrugged his thoughts away. “But I won’t stop trying. You see, Jeff, the first night you hung over me when my dad had kicked me out of my own home, I swore I would grow you into a beautiful tree where you can protect others as well. I sure won’t forget the second night it rained and your leaves stopped the drops from giving me a cold. I’ll get you something in return, it’s my word.” He patted the tree trunk, standing straight.

-- -

As the sun drowned into the surroundings one fine day, the light fading away to leave darkness, he made his way back home to Jeff.

“Is that-?” He felt a shiver travel up his spine, “An apple?” He shouted. He ran up to his only friend, offering him a cuddle.

“Oh, you’ve done too much for me, Jefferson. How will I ever pay you back in this life?” He sighed, realizing the flowers were sprouting all around the tree. “This is marvelous. Imagine if this could get me some coins in the

market. Oh, how many fertilizers I’d get you!” He squealed, plucking the apple and placing it in his pocket.

Racing across the busy roads of England, a sense of déjà vu rushing through him, he muttered a million excuse me’s.

“Oh, good sir, would you be ever so kind to tell me how much this apple would get me at the market?” He asked the local fruit seller.

“My, my, that’s a fresh and healthy-looking apple you’ve got there. I hope it isn’t stolen?” The seller raised an eyebrow at him. “Good heavens, no.” He shook his head, “It’s fresh and riper than ever!” He added, hoping the fruit seller would buy it himself.

“Alright then, how much would you like for it?” The fruit seller asked, a smile spread across his face looking at the hopeful boy.

“Oh, I feel like we should be dancing, Jeff.” He sighed, “Two pence. That’s what I got for your apple!” He held the silver coin to his heart, a sense of pride washing over him.

“A manure, that’s on me.”

---

“Would you believe five years ago, I stood on this farm, holding two pence with pride?” He snickered, gazing at his apple farm. “Try this, will you?” He handed her a green apple.

“Two pence? That’s ridiculous.” His wife laughed, rolling the apple out of his hand onto hers, before she studied his steady face. “Oh my, I have to look up to you for that.” She smiles, before she bites into an apple.

“I just hope I won’t die eating apples for the rest of my life.” She laughs before walks inside.

After an eye roll, he calls back at her, “Save that seed, will you?”

“You’ve done enough seed saving for a lifetime, do come in for tea, please.” She smiles through the window.

“You hear that, Jeff?” He giggles to himself, before taking long strides away from his dead best friend.



Robin Roy,  
OOEHS, SHJ (Boys')



School Category, 2nd Prize Winner (Judged)

# The Forgotten Bouquet Of Flowers

*By, Hanna Pishchyk, 17 years, MSLU Belarus*

It was April. April, as it usually does: it had not forgotten about the winter coolness yet, but it was already open for the spring warmth. Spring is the time of the year, which gives us the most hope...There was another morning of a big city. A young gardener Francis, as usual, hurried to work. But this time work was in a foreign city. There was another owner of the villa waiting for him with a request to tend his garden. Francis sat in his car, waiting for the progress in the traffic jam and singing to the rhythm of a melody on the radio. «Why are people so inattentive and sometimes cruel to flowers? It is ridiculous, but



if it is not their selfishness, maybe I could not find a job». He was lost in these thought, so he did not notice how a black cloud hung over the area. The signals of cars made him wake from his thoughts and steer the car forward. He did not have time to leave for the intersection, as there was a deafening thunder with a lightning, from which the car shuddered. In a flash, all the

sounds mixed up: a thunderstorm, a roar of machine alarms and screams of running people. The young man abruptly turned the car toward the curb, almost crushed by falling tree. He jumped out of the car and ran indiscriminately, searching for shelter. It was raining really hard, and a new flash of thunder and lightning made him run even faster. Fortunately, a few meters away, he saw the outlines of the door. In the hope that someone would open the door, he rushed to it and began to knock. He knocked for a long time, but no one opened it. Francis almost gave up hope, but suddenly the door opened.

There was a woman stood on the threshold, completely gray-haired head pointed to her advanced age. Without words, she let the young man into the house and quickly slammed the door in front of a storm. The woman pointed to the small dashboard, saying that there the young man can freshen up, and if he need it to take a hot shower. Afterwards, she said, there is hot tea waiting for him in the living room. Francis squeezed into the small bathroom, in the truest sense of the word, and turned on the light by barely finding a switch. After taking a shower, Francis entered a large room with a small light burning there.

In the room five children sat at a table, staring at the young man with frightened eyes. Francis sat down at the table and tried to speak with children. However, they are only more scared.

— Sorry, I did not ask your name,— the old woman said.

— Francis Goossens, ma'am. Thank you for hospitality.

— Very nice. I am miss Lutrin. Francis, would you mind helping me in the kitchen?

— With pleasure, ma'am.

In the kitchen Francis found out the cause of children fright and one more thing... Miss Lutrin told the young man that these are disabled kids,

abandoned by their parents. They suffer from various psychophysical diseases that prevent them from leading a normal life. And she is the only support in their lives, because no one wants to develop these little ones. And they are frightened, because nobody visits them. There were five of them, three girls and two boys: Haley, Athena, Kitana, Gregor and Aaron. She said she keeps the house alone, so it does not have good conditions for the children. During the conversation, Francis paid attention to the courtyard of the house, which was extremely untouched. Catching the look of the young man, the old lady said she simply could not keep order there. Then Francis made a promise to himself, that he would make there a garden for these kids. So during the next month in each of his day off Francis came to this house and landscaped the garden. Throughout this timeframe, he became attached to the kids, and learned to communicate with them in a simple language—the language of love. After work, he played, drew, watched movies with them and of course talked about flowers. Francis learned to understand them without words and saw how sparks of life and the energy of children free from physical disturbance appear in them with his every visit. But a month passed. The garden was built, in which Francis put all his soul and love. And he had to go home. It was hard for him to say goodbye to these kids, but the young man knew he would definitely see them again.

It was the ninth year since Francis met the amazing residents of this house, when the young man got in trouble. It was July and the midst of work. And one day the heavily exhausted guy fell asleep, driving the car. He ran into the iron fence at a full speed. Everything happened so quickly that Francis only had time to feel how a stream of hot blood running down his face and as something hard pierced his right shoulder. For more than two weeks, the young man did not regain consciousness. He could hear doctors' speeches in fragments and feel how his limbs try to make the slightest movements. However, he quickly fell into an unconscious state. And all this time he only



distinctly distinguished the smell. The smell of flowers, his flowers, which he planted in the only garden.

When he awoke on the third week, Francis did not immediately recognize the silhouettes. But when the young man used to daylight, he saw that in the ward, carefully looking at him, the children were sitting. It was them, all five guys. There was a huge bouquet of flowers on the bedside table, beautifully decorating it. Francis tried to say something, but he managed only to make indistinct sounds. Then he tried to rise, but the body was as if it not his. All that he managed to do was to raise his left hand. He was full of fear. He looked at the guys. Once such shy and unsure of themselves, they smiled widely, seeing that he came to himself. And the soul of Francis immediately became joyful and warm despite a strong concern about his physical state. At this time, Aaron, exchanging glances with the other guys, took an envelope out of his pocket, unfolded it and put it in the Francis's arm, which he could move. The young man started to read it:

«Dear Francis,

If you read this letter, then I am no longer live. But I am happy, that my children kept their promise to give this letter to you personally. My dear friend, I want to thank you. On that day, by accidentally breaking into our house, you changed it forever. The Lord did not save my children from a physical disability. But you have saved their souls from a disability. I see a lot of emotions in them when they look at your garden. It's incredible. Do you remember what the guys were like when you met them? They are still physically weak. But look! They love, believe and not afraid to be a part of this life. Look into their eyes. You will see there a light. The light of their burning hearts, which you lit, just knocked at our door. In our house you have brought the truth, which many people must understand and accept:

*Children with disabilities are first and foremost CHILDREN. And every child is a flower that needs care, attention and an opportunity to live life full*

*of love and hope. And perhaps disabled children need just more hope. We do not have the right to deprive them of opportunities for a happy life full of bright colors, just because they are DIFFERENT. As well as we do not have the right to deprive ourselves of the opportunity to live in a flowering garden.*

May the light of your kind heart never goes out, Francis.

With love and gratitude miss Lutrin»



Shwetha Suresh Iyer  
Grade 9 B  
The Indian High School  
Dubai

College Category, 2nd Prize Winner (Judged)

# The Full-Moon of a New Moon Day

By, *Bhanubhakta Adhikari, 22 years, Institute of Agriculture And Animal Science ; Tribhuvan University, Nepal*

I am a retired police officer. Twenty nine years ago; I was on my way to home. It was raining heavily and there was no umbrella with me. I was running as fast as I could. At the very time, I heard the sound of a baby coming out of the bushes. I supposed myself to neglect the cry of baby. As I was moving forward, I heard the cry of baby as it was earlier. I had been about ten meters ahead but I decided to step few steps backward. Just near the bushes of *Lantena camera*, I saw a baby boy.

The boy was sucking his clothes. He seemed to be very much tried and he was not in the condition to utter any words. I looked around carefully and could not notice anyone around there. I awaited

there for around twenty minutes if anybody could be there searching the baby. To my misfortune (for that time), there were no one around the periphery. I felt myself uncomfortable and humanity didn't let me keeping the baby alone in such huge rainfall. I hold him around my arms and looked at his face. The crying and shouting face turned to be calm face. I felt too much pity upon him. I couldn't wait myself bringing him to my home.

My wife was so much happy seeing the baby at our home. She fed the baby with milk and some flour made things called "lito" It had already stopped raining as soon as I was there at my home. I was getting ready to visit the nearby Police-Station; but my wife was forcing me not to return back the baby. We were not



blessed with a child for all these years. I convinced her that he was a baby of someone else parents and they might be crying and shouting for their baby. Finally, she got convinced and I went to the nearby Police-Station.

I reported a case as a baby was found and it was broadcasted through local FM and radios. The police tried their best to search the parent of the baby. I waited at the Police Station for around three and half hours but no one was there to claim the baby. It was nearly seven O' clock at the wall clock. The police officer suggested me to take care for the baby until his parents claimed the baby. I stepped forward with the baby toward the home.

She was very happy seeing the baby at the home back; but I was not sure how long the happiness would last for.

We were married too much early of our age. Child marriage was a prevailing system and I could not escape from the society and the existing systems too. I was sixteen and she was nine at the age of marriage. We did not even speak with each other upto our third anniversary properly. We rarely used to speak with each other regarding small things for the house management. After three and half years, I was admitted to Indian army. I still remember her eyes full of tears at the time of departure.

Time passed away. We rarely used to talk through the land line phone which was the only phone of the village. But the communication between us once a fortnight/month would give us huge satisfaction. After one and half year; I heard a news that my father is no more in this world. I immediately returned back to birth place by managing the holidays. The funeral ceremony was performed.

I lost all my hopes. I had already lost my mother during her pregnancy. When I was crying for the life in this earth; she had her way out to heaven. I was an orphan; but was never orphan as my father provided me with the love, care and affection which was to be provided by mother; and never gave a chance of missing mother. After father's death; I thought that all has ruined; but rather convinced myself.

The days were going well.

Then after, my elder brother put disputes regarding the parental property. We all know that wealth or money is the biggest enemy. The person with whom my all childhood memories were attached with; didn't speak with me now due to wealth. I was not supposing that one day we could get detached with each other and be enemy of each other.

I left the village and moved to town with my beloved wife. I had nothing left with myself. The person who used to love more than himself was not there with me. I again joined the military force and my wife took care after the house. We wished to have a child. but each and every birth was dead. The Rh-factor was same and we couldn't have our own child. I earned some money, but wealth without child doesn't seem to be meaningful.

Is there anyone in this world who doesn't wish to have their own child to continue their generation ?

So am I. Everytime we wished to have a child; we failed. Every birth was dead. We tried our best with miracles of science and technology and medical treatment too but we they turned to be ineffective.

There were so many people who suggested me to have another marriage; even my wife; but I was fully confined within myself that the one who was there with me in every ups and downs should not be betrayed.

The happiness, joy, sorrows, hills, plains that I spent with her were the hinderance for me to have second marriage.

Years passed away. And I got retired from my job. I had money, a well-established house, a well reputed status in the society and everything for a happy life but not a child.

The next day, I went to the police-station but there was no any possibility for the parents to be addressed on. My wife used to take care of the child to her best. There was a only one time schedule for me to visit the police station with the hope to find the parents.

Days passed away; weeks ended up and new moon has turned to another new moon; but the recognition of parents didn't get success.

Yes, we know that the new moon has turned to the next new moon; but it has been a full moon in our life. We were praying the almighty for not providing him with the parents. We were ourselves clamming him as our own child. He belonged to us; only us.

In each and every moments we were connected with him. We used to wake up with him, go to bed with him, eat with him, play "Rail-Gadhi"(a train game of children) with him and many more...

We ourself started to celebrate the birthday on the same new moon day; in which I happened to met him.

The happiness, sorrows, jow were not limited within us; but were attached with him too. He was smile of our happiness, tear of sorrows and solutions to our problems.

He was admitted to one of the best school of the city. He used to secure first position in the schools. The feelings of kindness grew in his soul that we couldn't even imagine. He used to help the friends with stationary materials at the time of necessity. When we used to visit the school; each and every teachers would appreciate him, his creativity, passionate, helpfulness and kindness. We were very much happy to have a son like him even though he was not our blood.

The happiness didn't last for long time. Just after the seven days of sixth birthday celebration, she had a serious heart attack. She was admitted to hospital but she left me. I again became orphan for the third time. I never knew my mother, my father; who always devoted himself to grows me was no more with me and she was also leaving me alone. Those caring hands for all these years were not with me. The spring and winter were same for me. I would miss her at every moment. While she was with her last seconds left, she was thinking of our son. She compelled me to promise her that I would always be with our son and I should always show him right path.

The only person who could care about me was my son who was just eight(around) years old and studies at grade four. I used to make tiffins, get up with his school dresses and help him do with his homeworks and subjects notes.

"Do you see that young man in between those old people?"

I turned towards the nearby building.

"He is my son."

The same person with whom I spent my twenty-nine winters and springs together. The same person who used to catch these hands and make attempts to walk on himself during his childhood . The same boy with whom I used to talk upto midnight telling the fairy- stories.

He is a medical doctor and stay together with me and other thirty aged-people like me. There are also fifteen children who are orphans and homeless in the same building. The aged people take care of these childs and every economic activities are looked by my son.

My investment throughout my life, is my son. I had spent all my property, house and every penny that I had; for his study of medical science. Now the return of the investment is shown by him.

I often used to doubt upon myself that would my investment for the study of medical science have a positive change. I was in doubt that spending all the wealth and being on road would be the wise decision.

I was absolutely wrong that I doubt upon my son; No "our son". When I was supposed to be there at street; my son was dreaming of more than thirty aged people and more than fifteen orphan and helpless children to have a home to live in; to have quality education for the children; to have hygienic food for all these old peoples(including me).

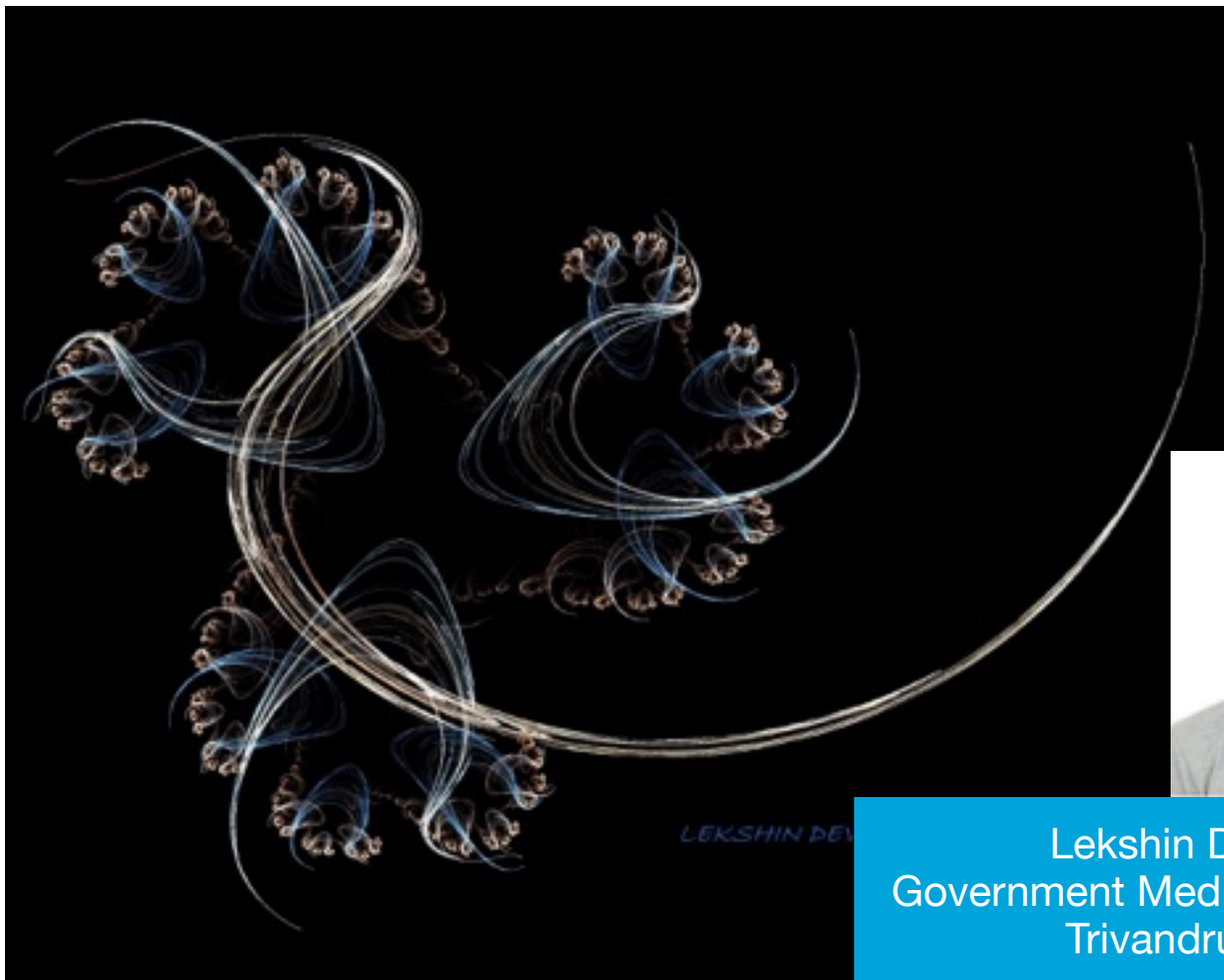
Now he is not only my son; instead is a son of every father and father of every helpless children.

"I still remember that new moon day; which has its own star missing at sky and glowing in the earth."

The old man wiped out his tears and told,"These tears are of happiness. I am very happy seeing my son."

"Her dream came to success and the promise was accomplished ." he whispered.

My eyes were full of tears and some drops were rolling down through the face. I cannot stop my tears.



Lekshin Dev,  
Government Medical College,  
Trivandrum

School Category, 3rd Prize Winner (Judged)

# Change Of Fate

By, Niranjan Jayanath, 14 years, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE

## 1

I crept in through the window. No one could see me. I couldn't afford anyone to. What happened last time couldn't happen again.

I looked around the house, thinking of how beautiful it must have been when it was built. I had researched the place. Now it was just a burden. A relic. A waste of time waiting to be sold. Where would someone hide valuables in a place like this?

I walked into a lamp, watching as it fell with a crash.

“ Damn it! ”

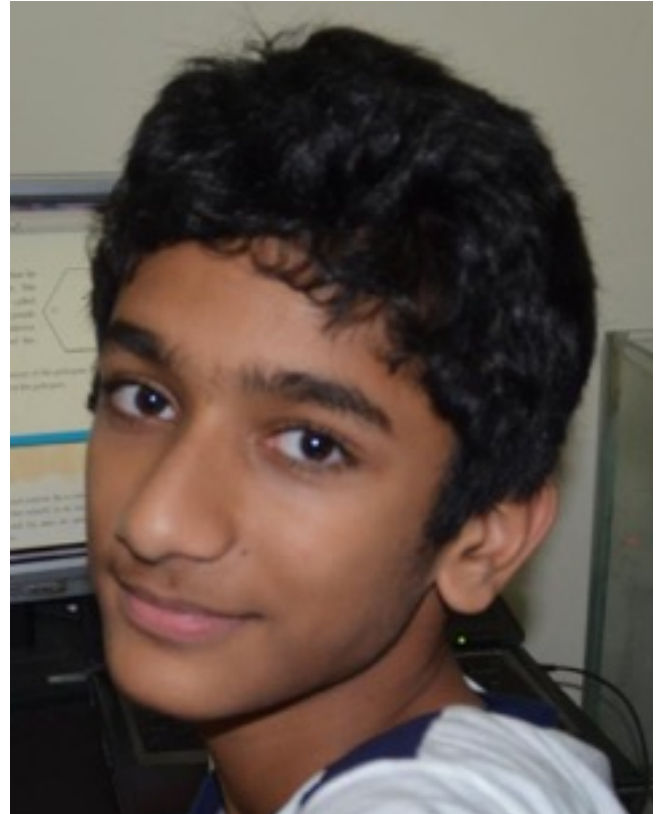
I waited to see if someone had heard me. I couldn't hear anything. I moved on. I had to be more careful after what had happened the last time.

It had been a rainy night, and I was just been leaving trails of water around the owner's house. I don't know how he noticed. It had been pitch black that night, just like tonight. I had just noticed that I could hear footsteps behind me. The next thing I knew, there were sirens outside. I had been lucky to escape that night.

I had run towards my building, about a block away, without looking back. Julie had opened the door. That blonde, little she-devil stared at me with that accusing glare of hers.

“ What was it this time? ”, she asked.

“ Umm.. I was.. jogging. With that new neighbor guy , uh... Rajesh Varden..”, I was smart at making excuses that way .





She kept pestering me. But she couldn't find out that I robbed for a living. She shouldn't found out that I had no other skill other than picking locks and being able to live on 3 to 4 hours a day. But I wasn't in a good mood that day. I couldn't stop it from happening.

" You're going to have to tell me one day you know, what you do late night most of the time."

" It's nothing. Stop poking your nose in everything."

" You should talk about it. My teacher told me today that most problems are caused because it wasn't prevented by a simple, articulate conversation."

I exploded.

" You just don't get it, do you? I didn't want you to know but here it is. I rob houses. Happy now? You just can't stay out of things, can you? I should have given you to your mom when I had the chance. But noo..., I loved you too much. Now she's gone, leaving me with you. But let me tell you one thing. The world isn't what you think it is. Every problem cannot be solved with a silly little chat or a snap of your fingers. You're not that big, as compared to the world's problems. You're just a small, silly little girl with silly dreams, aren't you? "

That had been the last thing I had told her. I was lucky to have got that weekend with her. But she had to go back to her boarding school the next morning. Now that I think of that day, it seems like a long time ago, even though it was last week. Man, she must have felt bad. But it was just a silly argument. She'll probably get over it by next week.

A subtle ' MREEOWW' brought me back to reality.

Of course they had a cat. The black cat stared at me from across the attic, probably guessing my next move. I must seem to him to be in his territory, someone here to conquer. He wasn't done making noise.

He let out a loud cry, alerting someone down below.

" What's wrong with that stupid cat now? ", came a voice from below.

The attic door was opened, letting in beam of light in the other side of the room. A tall man emerged, holding a flashlight and a packet of, was that CAT FOOD? I stayed still hoping that he wouldn't notice me. That's when I saw the face in the wall.

" What the..."

" What? Who's there? ", tall guy said as he turned and saw me, " Oh, you THIEF! THIEF!"

He yelled as he charged at me, while I was distracted by the woman's face in the wall, grinning at me. A good bang on my leg from that flashlight brought me back to my senses. I ran the way I came, as I heard him trip behind me, " OH THIS STUPID LAMP!" while I jumped through the window. Only a second later did I realise how dumb that was.

Have you ever fallen from a three storey villa? Imagine going down the fastest elevator in the world, then remove the elevator. The last thing I saw before crashing was that woman's face again, and then it was all black.

## 2

I woke up to complete white. There was nothing except for that woman, who seemed to be wearing clothes that were a trend in.. I don't know when. She wore a long, white cloak with a hood, lined in gold. She looked at me kindly, though the menacing looking scythe in her hand seemed to say otherwise.

" Am I in Heaven? "

" You think you'd reach Heaven after all you did?", she asked, with a voice smooth and accusing, while still maintaining that smile of hers.

" Then who are you? Where am I? "

" I'm your reaper, and welcome to the future. "

She waved her hand around her as I saw reality itself bend around me, taking me to a building terrace of some unknown place.

" This is the Crimson Wildlife Reserve, one built 11 years from you falling down that villa and we are about to witness history. Or the future. Depends on how you mean to see it " , she said.

"Wait, you're like THE grim reaper? I always thought it would be wearing a black cloak with a skeletal body, and no offence, but I thought it would be male."

" That's sexist, and you humans don't understand us reapers. We simply create a structure for you creatures to perceive us while we reap your souls. We have no

gender or permanent body. We are what we think we are, and we exist whenever we need to. "

" Thanks, that really clears things up. So am I like dead? "

" Your body lies where it fell, slowly losing its will to survive. I have taken you now to show you what you have done. Now we witness the survival of a species, one believed to be extinct during your time. The Tasmanian tiger. "

I scanned my surroundings. I seemed to be standing on the terrace of the main hall of a fairly sized reserve. There was only one difference. There wasn't anyone or any animal. Just a crowd waiting outside the main gates, led by some woman holding two leashes connected to.. " Oh my, are those actually.."

" Yes, the last two Tasmanian tigers, a male and a pregnant female, discovered on 2032. Guess who's leading that crowd? "

I took a close at the woman and was shocked.

" Julie, she.. She's all grown up. Saving a species? Wow... I ... I.. She's beautiful. "

Everything was white again. The reaper looked at me with a smug look on her face.

I was angry , " Why did you change it? Take me back."

" We're not done yet, Charles. Next ."

This time it was some sort of conference. We stood in the middle of an amphitheatre, as people walked through us . Not a pleasant experience, I can tell you that.

I looked on stage to see what the big crowd was waiting for and yes, it was my daughter again. She stood on stage and by the looks of it, she was finishing her speech.

" ... and that's my life story. And it's all thanks to my father, who helped me at every step, making sure that I took the right path. So let me tell you this. There's nothing hope can't solve. From saving a species to preventing a world war, all that stops you, is you " , she finished her speech, as she received a standing ovation. Tears welled up in my eyes. I knew I hadn't done anything much for her. And yet...

Everything was white again.

“ Will you stop that? I want to see her ”, I said, “ Take me back. ”

“ It’s not that simple. And you will, soon enough ”, the reaper replied as she held her white staffed scythe.

“ What do you mean? What happened? ”

“ You just don’t get it do you? None of that will ever happen. You changed her fate the day you shouted at her, when you blew away all her hope and ambition for the world away. You changed her. And now, you’re dying. There’s nothing you can do to change what you did. ”

“ WHAT! Then take me back. She deserves more. Please..”

“ You still haven’t figured it out have you? You thought you could just go unpunished after all you did down there? For the indirect extinction of a species, and for the indirect prevention of a prevention of the next world war, I hereby condemn you to eternal punishment. And do you know what you did to your daughter? You sucked all the light out of her. You moulded her to be a suitable candidate as a..” , she couldn’t complete her sentence.

Before my every eyes, a rip in the air appeared behind the white reaper, as a blur of green and gold attacked her from behind. I noticed that the blur was another reaper, just like the first one, but green.

“ What the... ”, I too couldn’t finish my sentence before both of the struggling ninja reapers dashed into me, pushing me into another reality. But this one felt more realistic.

I was lying on a stretcher, pushed along by a couple of attendants and... was that JULIE?

She must have been called from school, what with her father dying and all. Her hair was in a frenzy, with dark circles under her eyes. She was obviously crying. I couldn’t bring myself to say anything to her.

I then noticed that there was someone else running behind Julie, someone wearing a green cloak. It was the other reaper! I slowly looked at her face and realized... It was JULIE! The old one!

“ I turned you into a reaper?!”

“ Who are you talking to dad?”, young Julie asked.

“ Don’t worry about it dad, they can’t see me. I came here to tell you that you still have a chance to change my fate. The other reaper will be back soon.”

My stretcher was pushed away as I saw the white reaper, jump out of thin air onto reaper Julie, pushing her and disappearing together.

I was pushed into a room where they lay me, saying that I would be taken into the operation theatre in about 5 minutes. Apparently I had some junk stuck inside my legs. That was a surprise to me, as I couldn’t feel either of my legs. They left me alone with Julie, with her head in her arms, tired.

“ Julie” , I said “ I’m sorry.”

She lifted her head and looked at me, with absolute grief on her face. She ran towards me and hugged me.

“ Don’t leave me daddy. Please don’t go.”

“ There’s no need to cry. I just wanted to tell you this. Don’t ever give up, okay? I want you to keep on going. No matter how much people put you down, I want you to always have hope, all right? Because that’s all that really matters.”

I saw a shimmer in the back of the room as reaper Julie jumped in. She too, ran to my side and held my hand, as I wondered how young Julie couldn’t notice my hand rising randomly.

“ I love you, dad”, both Julies said together. Behind them, a white scythe appeared. The white reaper appeared, her face filled with disgust.

“I love you too Julie. I always had.”

The white reaper got closer, raising her scythe on me.

“ Live your dreams Julie. All that can stop you, is you.”, I said, as I kissed young Julie on the cheek.

I watched as the white reaper disappeared. Reaper Julie smiled at me as her existence was slowly erased.

“ Thank you”, she said as she disappeared.

The attendants came back. They held Julie back as she tried to stay with me, while I was pushed into the operation theater. I smiled as I coughed a little blood. I had changed her fate. I had saved her. That’s all that I really need to do, I thought. I closed my eyes as I was pulled back into eternal darkness.

### 3

It has been eight months since I became a reaper. Eight months since I died. Eight months training to finally work out here in the field. I know the rules. We reapers are not allowed to communicate with or show any signs of existence to the living. Which meant that I couldn't tell Julie about all of this.

But I wasn't one to follow rules anyways.

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Sanjana Kukreja

College Category, 3rd Prize Winner (Judged)

# Joseph's Morning Tale

By, *Hanna Kusumawaty, 22 years, Sriwijaya University, Indonesia*

Joseph is ready to go to school this week, it is his first week of junior high school and he is all prepared to go to. While prepare himself to go, his Mom decides to check on him in the living room before they go to school.

"Notebooks?"

"Checked"

"Pencils?"

"Checked"

"Lunchbox"

"Ah mom!"

"Your water bottle?"

"Mom no. I am going to have my food on the canteen and buy the mineral water. I am an adult now I don't need baby lunchboxes!" Answer Joseph curtly.

Joseph's mom laughs, she shakes her head and continue to ask more for Joseph's school utensils.

"Handkerchief? Or small towel?"

"MOM NOOOOOOOO!" yelled Joseph

His mom laughs even harder this time, because she thinks how ridiculous is his son now for not bringing this important stuffs to school.

"What is wrong honey? It is okay to bring all those lunchbox thing and handkerchief to school. Beside, you can save your money from it right?"

Joseph frowns. He knows that he will be yelled by his friends at school if he does not go to canteen together just because he is not going to buy any food but instead, bring his own lunch. He does not want to be called as a mama's boy, he is thirteen now, a teenager.

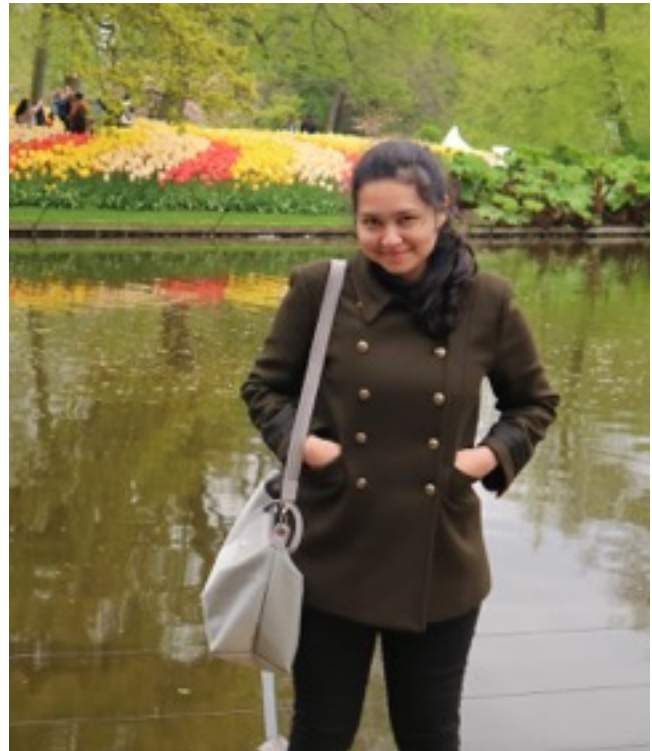
"Mom, I don't want my friend to make fun of me just because I bring lunchboxes, mineral water bottle, even handkerchief!"

His mom does not listen to what Joseph said, she packs all Josephs belongings, put them in a box, and carrying Joseph to the car.

"Come on, hop in to the car Baby Jo"

"I am not a ba--"

"Do not answer, Joseph. Just listen."



His mom put him on a seatbelt , tucks his bag on his lap, and put the lunchbox behind his seat. Today is a special day for Joseph, so instead of taking the bus, his Mom brings him with the car.

“so Joseph, while I am driving and you are sitting next to Mama, I want you to listen my story, this is a long story that your grandmother used to tell me when I was a kid, just your age.”

“What is it, Mama? Is this something serious like.. Dating? Yucks!” Joseph shows his digusted face as he mentioned the word dating. His mom laughs, she can’t believe that Joseph will mention dating.

“Of course not! So.. you still want to listen?”

“Well.. Okay mama, if you insists.” Answer Joseph with displeasing tone.

His Mama then starts the engine, drive the car on a slow speed, while driving her son to his school, she startes her fable that her Mother used to tell her about.

*Once upon a time on a cloudy day, all the nature feature gathered to complain their misery to the Sun. The Sun, as the leader of all, listened to their stories.*

*“My dear mountains, what happened to you until you are no longer that green?” Asked the Sun to the Mountain.*

*“Your Highness, humans are not being grateful with my beauty that you have given. They climb on me to see you rise, but they also litter on me after they see your magnificence. My lord, I can not bear this anymore, I am getting sick by the amount of litter they put on me.” Answered mountain with soft voice.*

*The mountain slowly cried and all the other nature feature gathered to comfort him. The Sun was furious to Mountain’s situation, He asked the other nature to speak up.*

*“My Lord Sun, I am the water that live on the lake, river, sea, and oceans. Humans live with me. They could not do many things if there is none any of my presence. Humans take everything from me, they take my water creatures, fishes, seaweed, shells, corals, and more. They mostly enjoy my existence by doing sports or just sit down on the seashore, they drink me also! But my lord...” The water hesitated to speak up more*

*“What is wrong, my water?” Asked the Sun with angry and curious expression*

*“Humans love me, but they take me for granted. They litter on me everytime. They throw plastic bag to the sea. They throw every water bottles around and it damages my creature. Just today, a tortoise died before he can pull himself under my waves. He suffocated of the plastic bag on his mouth.”*

Joseph takes a closer attention to his Mother’s story. He starts to imagine a tortoise suffocates inside a plastic potato chips bag. Joseph reminds his last summer break when he went to the beach and just throw away everything on the seashore. From bottle water to plastic bags, and then he realizes that maybe that day a tortoise also died by his action.

“Mom, I remembered our last holiday at the beach and---“

“I am not yet finish, Joseph. Shall I continue?”

“Sure Mom.”



Then Joseph's mother continue the story line.

*The Sun was so furious, he started to flame, but he tried to stay under control, because he still had not heard any stories from wind, and forest. He was hoping that the upcoming stories would be something good about the human behaviour toward the nature feature.*

*"So my dear Wind, you are the only free willy on this earth. No one can touch you, they only feel you, nobody can keep you. So, is there any human behaviour that hurts you?"*

*The wind was doubtful to tell, but the sun knew what was going on. Wind was not the same from when it was first created, wind was cold and clean, fresh and soothing, but as the sun examined the wind, it was cloudy with smoke and dirt.*

*"Uhm.. my Lord, I don't think I should tell you, you can see it clearly how I am now." Answered Wind upset.*

*"Yes my wind, you doesn't look nice anymore. What has bothering you after all?"*

*"Humans pollute me, Sun. They use cars and buses when they can bike or simply walk, they give me pollution. I am not that fresh anymore. Sometime human wish me to go away, cause I only bring smokes and pollutions to them."*

*The Sun is angrier this time, He can not believe that the free wind can also be ruined by humans. So then he asked Forest, and he expected to hear a few good stories about human being.*

*"I am afraid I can not satisfy your expectations, my Sun. People are cutting my trees down, they take me for their own use, like plastic bags, papers, tissues, I cause all this chaos, but it is because humans are greedy."*

Joseph tries to contemplate what this story is all about, nature elements that come alive and talk about their situations. Joseph then looks around him while his car moves toward the traffic lights. On his left is a huge park made by the local government, there are trees, a little pond geese, bushes, and he sees people are jogging on the park, doing yoga, even just to have some rest.

"Joseph? Are you still on me?" His mom asked since he is looking away to the window

"Yes Mama, you shall continue, I wonder what comes next. Will the Sun get angry? Will the Sun gets furious over humans?"

His mother does not answer but continues the story.

*The Sun was not only sad and angry, he is furious! He could not believe what Humans were doing to the natural creature that lived on earth. So then the Sun decided to punish all human being to made them regret their actions.*

*"My dear mountains, water, wind and forests, I would not give up on us. I will give the human being some lessons so then they will learn."*

*The Sun decided to hush all the clouds away and he started to fire his flame over the earth, so all the humans were feeling hot and dry.*

*While on earth, there was Eco, a boy who lived in the city and never did anything pleasing to the mother nature. He littered, wasting water, overused the electricity, using too*

*many plastic bags, and worse was, he never cared to any existing things except himself. He stepped on flowers, he didn't care to his pet, and he never recycled. His life was about wasting and throwing.*

*As the Sun was angry and flamed the earth. And the earth temperature was rising above its usual degree. Eco, who was walking down the street from the mart decided to keep himself under the tree protecting himself under the shed.*

*"My my, what a hot day!" He mumbled to himself*

*But as the sun streak so hard, the heat was unbearable and the leaves started to fall, and one by one, the leaves are falling and there was no longer shed to hide away from the sun. Eco moved onto another tree and he caught by the leaves that started to fall. Then he tried to runaway to hide himself from the sun. He felt so tired and overheated.*

*"What is going on these days? Jeez, it has been almost a week and there is no a chance of rain at all." He mumbled as he walked to his house. He then remembered that there was a lake not far from the road he was walking then, and he rushed toward the Lake so probably he could jumped himself in an feel refresh.*

*When he could almost see the lake, he was startled that there was no water at all. It was all evaporated to the sun. The lake was deep and dry, no single drop of water at all. Disappointed, Eco lost all his mood and decided just to go home, and while on his way back home, he took the bottle water from his plastic bag, gulped it and throw it on the street.*

*"Where should I go now? I'd better just go home I guess. This world is frustrating me!"*

Joseph still listens carefully, but he starts to show his uninterest to Eco. *Why in the world someone would act so recklessly and selfish?* he thinks to himself. While Joseph and his mom still on the way to school, on the street they see a man who sweeps the pavement, and he gathered mostly plastics instead of the falling leaves. Joseph suddenly reminded maybe those are Eco's plastics.

*Eco finally arrived home, and he started to turn on every electricity on his house. The air conditioner, TV, lamps, everything. He lay himself on the couch and took a bottle of soda from the fridge, gulped it in an instance and tossed it away through his own window next to him. He thought what he did was something ordinary just because all people were doing it.*

*The Sun realized that one of the human being was being so ignorant, he decided to do something else to taught the human being.*

*"I should just vanish. Then I will gather all my clouds to pour the rain every single day, non-stop!"*

*The Sun started to move further from the earth, he commanded all the clouds to pour all the rain for as long as they can.*

*Eco was struck by the changing weather, it was sunny but then the light changed only on a single blink. Everybody outside was going back to their houses, he looked to his neighbors from his window, they all gathered they belongings from the outside and shut their window closed. And like what people were expecting, thunder stroke followed by loud sounds from the thunder. The wind blew really hard that all the trees and benches were almost collapsed.*

*The rain started to pour really hard, for almost five minutes it already made a huge flood in Eco's neighborhood. Eco was quiet panicked and he saw the the water flooding around*

*their neighborhood because the soda can he tossed clogged the drainage and it caused the flood of getting worse.*

*While on their way to school, the dark turns dark and the drizzle start to pour.*

*“Mom, will we get flood also?”*

*“If we are doing good to our environment, of course the drainage will work well and no flood will damage that hard.”*

*“Hey Eco! Look at your house drainage’s it ruins the whole water sirculation you see?”  
Shouted someone accross from Eco’s house.*

*Eco could not clearly listen to what he said but he was pretty sure that the man was talking about the soda can. He clearly looked to the drainage and wanting to go out but the rain was really hard, it was not safe for people to get out from his house.*

*But as the flood was getting worse, Eco decided to just get out and took the soda can from the drainage pipes. And then, he saw all his litter that blocked the sirculations, mostly plastics and bottle water. He then realized, he litter the most from every people around the neighborhood. He complained everyday about the weather and earth but he had done nothing good to the earth.*

*He took all his litter, while the rain kept pouring hard and he was all wet, he then took a stick to remove each litter one by one, collected them all and slowly the drainage ran better than how it used to.*

*The Sun then saw Eco’s action, he startled that there was a human wanting to go out on a hard rainy day only to unblock the drainage from litters.*

*Eco was still doing his attempt to cleanse the drainage from litters, he vowed to himself that this had to be the first and the last time he cleaned the drainage because he did not want to litter anymore. The rain didn’t only flood the neighborhood but the entire city, and one main cause was because the drainage was blocked, on Eco’s house.*

*“I shall forgive this humans by giving them rainbow.. Eco is truly the hero. He took care of us all, even what he did was only cleaning his regrets, taking away his litters, but he is a step further than how he used to be”*

*Then the rain slowly started to stop, the Sun rised, and the rainbow appeared as a gift from the Sun to the world, especially to Eco.*

*Eco would not stop until he finished cleaning his drainage system, he didn’t want to litter anymore, and realized that, littering, wasting plastic, gave no good not only to the mother earth, but to the human being as well. He then called as the new hero of environment. He stopped using any plastic bottles, he recycle, he took good care of the garbage, he was the brand new environment hero!*

*Joseph and his mother has arrived on his school and they finally comes up to a conclusion in the story.*

*“So my dear Joseph, what can you take from the story I just told you?”*

*“Well, bringing lunchbox, reducing plastic bottles usage, recycling, don’t make me any baby or kid, it makes me all grown up, and I can be the next environment hero!”*

*“So, would you mind bringing all the luncboxes now honey?”*

Joseph immediately took all the lunchbox and handkerchief so he could save the environment and also his monthly pocket money. He then opens the door and walks out of the car, waves his mom goodbye from the front of the school drop-off.

“Take care my future Eco!”

“Bye Mom! See you later after school! And I am hoping for another story this evening!”

As he walks closer to the school door, his Mom’s shouts.

“So Joseph, mind to talk about dating now?”

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Rijisha

TV,  
Viswajyothi College of

School Category, 4th Prize Winner (Judged)

# A Little Can Mean A Lot

By, Iman Altaf, 14 years, The City School, Darakhshan Campus, Pakistan

Emma's eyes stung with fresh tears as she ran her shaky fingers over the mahogany of her brother's casket. She let out a choked sob as her fingers skimmed over the imperfection she left in her flesh, the memory splitting agonizingly through her brain.

*She sat slouched against the door, her head hanging between her bent knees and her hair framing her tear stained face. She inhaled a shaky breath and stood up. First she turned on the faucet in the bathtub to fill it. Then, with one look in the mirrored door of the medicine cabinet, she slid the panel open. She picked a razor from the shelf and flipped it between her fingers.*

*"It's now or never," she whispered to herself; and to the pale walls of the bathroom.*

*She ran her index finger over the top of the blade. It slid into her flesh; she did not flinch. Why would she? This pain felt like nothing compared to the endless torment that consumed her life.*

*She settled herself into the half full bathtub, the blade positioned carefully in her hand and her wet sleeves pulled up to her elbows. With one last breath, or so she hoped, she clenched her left hand closed and slid the piece of steel vertically down her left arm. Bright crimson spilled out onto her lap and into the water, fragments of her life spilling out with it.*

*She pressed the fatal instrument into her right wrist next, her skin cracking under it. Just then the door flew open and the blood stained razor sunk to the bottom of the tub.*

*"Emmy, mom wants- what are you doing?" Emma's brother stepped into the bathroom. She wanted to say something, to tell him to leave, but she could not find the strength in herself.*

*He stepped in further, and then he saw it. He all but hurled himself towards his sister, pulling her quickly weakening body out of the tub and into his strong arms. The older boy pressed his sister to his chest, hoping to keep her from slipping away. Emma remembered her brother's hand closing tightly around her wrist, their bodies shaking with his sobs, and then all went black.*

*"You are not going to die."*

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This is the story of someone just like me, the story of someone whose life I am glad to have impacted. This is Madison's story:



As I walked between the numerous easels set up around the room, I made sure to glimpse at each and every painting my students were creating. I smiled as a freckly boy artfully stained his canvas with oil paints, his passion and creativity blooming with every stroke.

Just as I reached the corner of the room, next to the window, I noticed how different one painting was from all the rest. Drawn gorgeously across a plain canvas was a pair of eyes, a pair of sad, pained eyes. Two orbs lay nestled in spirals of grey like literal eyes of hurricanes. I looked up at the student; she tightened. I walked away and left her to herself for I have learnt from experience that when one is creating they should not be interrupted.

"Kids," they all looked up, "Let's wind up for today, you have lunch soon. If you are not done, then please feel free to complete your paintings tomorrow. You may leave now."

Gathering their belongings and tucking their stools behind their easels, all but one student left. The girl with the pained eyes sat slouched on her stool, her face close to the canvas.

"Madison?" Her head shot up towards me.

"Miss Evers, is it okay if I stay here for lunch?" I nodded and she gave me a hint of a smile.

"Would you like to get something from the vending machine?" She shook her head and turned back to her work.

"Madison," she looked up at me, "This is absolutely gorgeous, you're very talented."

"Thank you," she said softly with a smile.

"Have you thought of expanding beyond painting in school?"

"Miss Evers, that's not an option for me." With a sad smile she turned away from me and I took that as my cue to leave her alone.

And that is how the next few days went by. This incredible prodigy of a student spent heaps of her free time in my classroom, portraying parts of herself on her canvas, and I let her without asking too many questions. She would occasionally ask a question or two about her medium of art or some new technique she wanted to experiment with, and that was it. That was until one day she did not show up to art class.

Almost a week later, Madison walked into my classroom again. She did not look any different but something about the way she held herself felt off. She looked tense and uneasy, like she had seen a ghost... over and over again... for the first time. I had taken that week to go through her portfolio. The change in her work, from the beginning of the semester up till now, did not go unnoticed: from happy and full of life to unhappy and melancholic.

I watched her that day. I watched her shoulders hunch and her pale hands tremble and her brushes smear imperfectly across her canvas. She was as far from herself as seemingly possible and I was worried.

"Miss Evers?" A shaky voice caught my attention. A hand was up at the back of the room, it was Madison's.

"How can I help?" I said from the front of the room.

"Can I be excused?" She asked softly. "Restroom."

As soon as I signaled 'yes' she speed walked out of the room, her jaw set and her eyes wet. Something was wrong. Nonetheless, I waited. In the meantime I took a quick look at what she was drawing and I could not possibly have been more surprised when I saw the vast emptiness on her sheet, her disinterest and distraction very obvious.

She walked back into the room ten minutes later with her head low. She had been crying. What was worse was that I could not approach her in front of twenty other people, so I had to wait until the end of class.

Eventually, the bell rang. Students stopped by to inquire about their end of semester projects and I impatiently answered their repetitive questions with the hopes that I would not miss Madison leaving the room. I did not miss her; rather she dodged my eye and snuck out from in between her classmates.

When the last of my students left, I scribbled a quick note onto a piece of paper and tucked it into my jeans pocket. Then I set off on my quest. After taking many turns and crossing several hallways I reached the front office. The office secretary, Mrs. Gibbs, waved at me through the glass door.

"Miss Evers, how can I help you?" She asked with a smile as soon as I walked in.

"I was wondering if you could tell me one student's locker number." I rested my elbows on the counter in anticipation.

"Which student?"

"Madison Greene." I tucked my hands in my pocket, my finger skimming the top of the paper.

"Oh! That lovely young lady," she paused to type something into her computer, "It's 1517."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gibbs."

With one last smile I exited the office and headed down to the west wing of the large high school to find Madison's locker. I slipped the folded paper through the slots of her locker and hurried towards the teachers' lounge before anyone saw what I was doing.

The day after next, Madison walked in along with a group of other kids and took her usual seat. But the difference today was that she finally met my eye. She looked sad, almost fragile, but she finally met my eye. My attempt had been fruitful for I noticed rushed footsteps pacing outside my door during lunch period.

"Madison," I said when I opened the door. She did not say anything; instead she dropped her bag to the floor and engulfed me in an embrace.

I pulled her into the room and held her; I just held her and let her tears soak through my shirt. "Thank you," she almost incoherently murmured into my shoulder. I smiled and pulled her away from me, holding her at arm's length.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I asked quietly, cutting almost instantly to the chase. She shook her head. I did not press.

"Madison, just know this: you are never alone." She pressed her lips together and wiped her fingers under her eyes, nodding with the smallest smile on her face.

From then on, she started spending more time in art, her paintings now slightly less gloomy than before. Sometimes she would even bring a sandwich with her which was an upgrade from nothing at all.

"Miss Evers?" Madison tapped on the edge of my desk one day, her fingernails dirty with the oil paints she was ever so fond of.

"Ready?" I tucked away the book I was reading.

She nodded and sat down on the chair across from me. She opened her mouth to say something but closed it as if she could not find the words.

"Take your time, it's okay," I reassured her.

"But it isn't." Now we are really getting started.

"Why not?"

"Because nothing feels right." She twiddled her thumbs together.

"Why?" I leaned forward in my chair.

"I don't even know where to start, Miss E," she all but cried out.

"At the beginning, that's where you start." She inhaled a shallow breath and was starting to well up.

"Breathe." She inhaled. "Breathe." She exhaled.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"You have nothing to be sorry for." She nodded. "Do you want to start over?"

"My father is an alcoholic, my mother is dead, my brother hates me and I feel like I don't have any control over my life." Her hands sat clasped tightly on my desk.

"Go on," I encouraged. She needed to get this out.

"I don't understand why my brother hates me as much as he does, and when my father is sober Tom's all he sees. It's like I am invisible to him!" She was finally getting all her pent up anger out.

"How did your mother die?"

"Soon after I was born, she passed away. But that's not so important."

"Okay, what is important then?" My eyebrows knitted together.

"I am ashamed," she quietly mumbles.

"Of what?" She pulled up her sleeve to reveal an array of raw red marks running horizontally down the length of her forearm.

With my jaw set, I unbuckled my watch and showed her my own mark. Her eyes widened not only in shock but in familiarity.

"Why are you ashamed?" I asked, not because I did not know but because I wanted her to say it out loud.

"Don't you see? I hate being this weak!"



“Madison, you are not weak. You shouldn’t have had to deal with so much starting at such a young age.” She turned away from me, her thumb and index finger pressing underneath her eyes.

“Madison, look at me,” I tried to coax. She did not look at me. I got up off my chair and crouched down in front of her.

“You are not weak,” I said slowly, forcing her to look at me with her teary gaze. She gave me a terse nod and I knew she did not believe me. Still, for the umpteenth time I did not press. She would not say another word if I did.

“Miss Evers, you asked me the other day if I’d expanded my art beyond school.” I nodded. “Neither my brother nor my father let me.”

I pulled up a stool and perched on the edge of it. “Maddy, your life is yours. You’re smart, talented and strong; please don’t let anyone take that away from you.”

She nodded, and this time I knew things were going to change. With each passing day Madison became more like herself. Slowly but gradually, life trickled back into her, the light returned to her eyes. Eventually, the semester came to a close, bringing my students’ painted stories to their ends.

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I stood towards the back of the football field with all the other teachers as the graduating class settled into their seats, restlessly waiting for their diplomas. The principal gave his speech and called the valedictorian on to give their speech.

The one person I honestly did not expect appeared on stage: Madison. She stood behind the podium and smiled, her eyes meeting mine.

“Good morning, class of 2017!” Cheers erupted and echoed in the open field.

“High school: the journey of a lifetime, a truly unforgettable experience. This is true for all of us regardless of how the years go by. Some of us have it easy and some of us don’t. I didn’t.

“This last year wasn’t easy, it wasn’t a breeze and I’m not going to lie and say that it was. But, one person helped me through it. She showed me that even in the darkest of times there is hope. I found more solace in her classroom, these past few months, than I did in my own home.

“She saw me when I felt invisible. She listened when she didn’t have to. She paid attention. She gave me time and she was patient; she didn’t pressure me or force me into anything. She made me feel like I had some control over my life when in reality everyone but me did. She taught me to stand up for myself and never let anything come in between me and what I’m passionate about.

“She saved me from myself and I could not be more grateful. And she didn’t do this through some huge, gargantuan effort, it was the little things.

“I will end by saying this: make sure you surround yourself with people like her, people who uplift you and make the world seem like a better place even when things are at their worst, because a little can amount to a lot. So, thank you Miss Emma Evers, thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you.”

In that moment, when the entire graduating class and faculty turned around to look at me, with smiles on their faces, their applause almost deafening, I knew I had done something right.



Rijisha TV,  
Viswajyothi College of  
Engineering and Technology

College Category, 4th Prize Winner (Judged)

# The Twilight Troops

By, Nava Amalee (pen name), 21 years, Abant Izzet Baysal University, Turkey

It was a Friday morning of a fine summer when I checked my phone after I woke up, gazed at her contact name, wishing her will write something for me soon.

*“Bulan<sup>1</sup>, I’m really serious to join. Please don’t abandon me”*

I read again the last message I wrote, it still remained undelivered.

As I walked down the stairs, I saw mom and dad were sitting, waiting for me to join the company.

“Get yourself ready after breakfast. You’ll come with me to meet our new investor”

I left my glass of milk on the table, gazed his eyes while he’s looking at me not the way a dad sees his son, but more like a patron to his slave.

“What’s my business with your investor anyway, dad?” I asked. My fingers began to shake when his face clearly showed that he didn’t like my words.

“Watch your attitude, Bintang<sup>2</sup>. You’re the son of the owner of the biggest mining company in this country. Besides, He’s the foreign investor and the meeting will be kind of chill anyway. You need to get used to this kind of companion”

I decided not to say any word against him anymore, for



1 A girl name which means “The moon”

2 A boy name which means “The star”

it's always been useless. I checked my phone again, only to realize once more that she hasn't read the message yet. I checked the story when I found her photograph was posted by one of her friends. I smiled directly, for she looked so stunning with her dimple while she's smiling.

*"Rest in Peace, Bulan"*

I read the caption once again, and the words remained the way I read it the first time. I barely breathed and my body was paralyzed.

"No, that's impossible" I whispered. And the sound of my breath together with the fear appearing from my face had taken my parent's attention.

"You okay, sweetheart?" asked mom. I didn't say any word, I couldn't. It was like something, not me, was controlling my body. I went to my room, grab the car key and rushed into the road. Dad was calling my name, screaming. But I didn't care anymore.

I arrived when her body was being thrown the soils little by little. I couldn't see her face anymore, but I could understand how much she lost weight by seeing her skinny dead body started fading away under the soil. People raised their hands, sent her away with the words of praying, demanded God to erase her every sin and grant her a new beautiful home above.

"Didn't you know, Bintang?" asked a friend of her, as we were walking by after the funeral. I shook my head.

"At all" I answered. She took a deep breath, as she was trying to be ready to say something.

"She has been dealing with black lung disease for seven years"

"Black lung disease? For seven years?" I repeated in disbelief, she nodded.

"But she looked okay in most of the time, and... she's a doctor as well"

“You know, she spent her childhood in the coal mining area, which is the reason why she got that disease. She was trying to look okay most of the time. And the only reason why she wants to be a doctor and build the community is that she doesn’t want any other children, especially those who live in mining areas, to feel the pain of those kinds of diseases”

By the time she finished her words, some part of me felt apart, broken into pieces. I came to a condition where my power wasn’t left even to say goodbye when she walked away as she said the community will hold a meeting at the university auditorium today.

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My story of knowing her began in September a year ago. It was the third day of Orientation Day at the campus, where I just got out from my car and found most of the freshmen looked so dumb with their kind of excitement finding the most suitable community to join in. Like... If I were they, I would have sat in the cafeteria drinking my cup of coffee. But the crowd that day had pissed me off till I decided to have a small tour to the school communities who built their stands in the yard.

“Hi. You must be a freshman” said a girl, standing with a bunch of brochure in her hand.

“No, I’m a junior”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’ve never seen you before. Would you like to have one?” She gave me the brochure, and I can’t help mocking at its ridiculousness.

“Low budget community?” I asked. She fell silent for a moment. I used that time to look at the brochure once again.

“*The Green Troops*... Even the name sounds so absurd”

“Well, this community focuses on the environmental subject, especially the problems created by mining activities. We volunteer on helping people who live near the mining

areas to have a better life. You know, they have problems with their water, air, even health”

I looked at her eyes, only to find out how awkward her smile was.

“Well, would you like to be one of the volunteers?” she asked.

“Do I look like I’m interested?” I asked. “See, please yourself with this stuff. Their lives aren’t my circus, not my monkeys anyway” I walked away and I thought it was the first and the last time I saw her.

As I entered my junior year, my other adventure began. It has been an obligation of the university that every 5th-semester student will be formed into groups and will be sent to certain under-developed regions and villages around with a mission to create a project related to the progress of populations living quality. I was sent to a village 300km away from the city center, which place has pissed me off since the very first step I entered. It was disgusting everywhere. People lived so close side by side that I can guarantee you can hear your neighbors chitchat only by sticking your ears to the wall. There was no bed, of course. And the toilet, yeah... they used the common toilet 50m away from the house I stayed. The situation had been enough to persuade me to call my dad so that he can use his power to pull me away from here. But, besides there was no signal and my phone didn’t work properly here, there was another thing that suddenly, made me want to stay.

Monday morning, when I just woke up from my sleep, I got out from home to see my group partners started doing their first project: making a new proper toilet in one of the former coal mining areas. The soil left after those mining activities were awful, like there won’t literally be no plant could live there anymore. In another area, about 300m from the place I stood, I saw a single home standing still at the edge of a landslide.

“It wasn’t a landslide you know...” somebody came near me, I didn’t recognize him.

But I knew he was a part of The Green Troops.

“It was a normal area, about 2000 families lived there till... it was taken by a mining company, and they left a dead land after the activities. The soil was completely damaged and erosion happened right after. Hundreds of families died. And if you look at that home closer, the half of it isn't there, erosion took it away. Now, no one lives there anymore”

I smiled. I told him I need to take a bath so I need to leave him.

“You can't” He said. “You need to wait till people from the city bring the clean water. Maybe 1 hour more”

I was diving in silent. A group of children playing in the yard took my attention. They all wore mask to protect their nose from breathing the low quality of air since it has been polluted by mining activities around. A girl who was acting as a ghost trying to run after the other children stopped her step suddenly. She opened her mask, trying to find oxygen. But she failed, and she fainted. Everyone was in a rush to help her, and that's the time when I saw her, a girl with her ridiculous brochure trying to help the girl to breathe again. But no matter how she tried with her medical devices, the girl couldn't survive.

The fine morning turned bleak. As people took her body away to be buried, she walked away from the crowd. I saw her sitting at the edge of a big hole of former mining area and choked up. At first, I couldn't understand why she turned to be that miserable from the loss of someone she doesn't know. But when I looked at her eyes, deeper, I found something else, something beyond love and softness of an innocent heart within the shape of a brave, rebellious girl.

“I want to join your community”

My word shocked her a bit. She looked at me, with a glance as cold as ice.

“Don't bother yourself. Their lives aren't your circus, not your monkeys anyway”

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Since then, I didn't know that both the softness of her heart and the coldness of her behavior towards me had made me fall into her until this time that her loss didn't only made me cry, but choke up. That it didn't only made me sad, but broken into pieces. My decision had been made by the time I drove right to the university to join the community's meeting even though I wasn't invited.

The door was left open. And as I knocked it, I could read the amazement from every single gaze. The guy permitted me to come in and began the meeting right after.

"Okay everyone. I know we're all still down but... we need to move on. There are many things we need to do. Bulan may be gone, but her spirit and dream will always burn. Thus, we need to work more to make it come true"

He stopped for a while.

"As you can see here" he opened the slide, I can see a map from the projector showing the data of broken land due to former coal mining activities.

"More than 500 areas were left broken. Thousands of people can't access the fresh air and clean water. This place, for example" he pointed the nearest area to the city center

"Last year, 20 children were dead due to the lung diseases. Five of them were the new born babies. Things get worse day by day, and we need to act more, as soon as possible"

"As far as I know, the mining companies have responsibility to do restoration after they finish exploring" I said some words, He nodded.

"Yes but most of the activities were done by small mining companies and they have no financial capability to do restoration"



“Well it means they break the agreement right? So we can push government to do something”

“If government had done something already, we wouldn’t have been here trying to find solution”

“Well... If we can do small acts, like... to persuade societies there to begin to plant trees and to work with them to clean the polluted water”

“That’s exactly what we want to do, Bintang. But we have no money. In another word, we need sponsor”

I fell in silent for a moment. “I know where to go”

I knew that dad will have a meeting in his office right after he met the investor. So I took them rush to the office, and without any fear and hesitation, I bumped into the meeting room, stood in front of them with my shaky knees, didn’t care at all if I looked like an idiot.

“Dad, I’m sorry but I beg you to listen to me this time, please”

I took the slide from the guy, displayed to everyone in the room. I showed them the pictures of the former mining areas; the holes and the landslides, the polluted water, children playing with their mask. Then I displayed the statistics showing the increasing number of death due to the lung diseases and ended up crying telling them that the girl I fell in love with, was one of the victim.

“I don’t expect you to be the kind of idiot who cries over a dead girl, Bintang” my dad yelled.

“Yes dad. Only if you lose me someday because I have a lung cancer due to the polluted air, you’ll definitely be one of those idiots too”

“We won’t bother your business. We promise. But please, help us. Open your heart, dad. Open your heart so that... so that no people won’t choke up over the loss of their beloved ones, so that no innocent child will die in a very young age, so that everyone has equality to breathe the fresh air that God has equally given to us. I beg you, dad”

For my 21 years of life, it was the first time I forgot my ego and put my knees on the floor right in front of him. I've hated him, but that time, I was looking at her eyes and let him see the very broken pieces of me. But something that I didn't expect at all, that he would put his hands to erase my tears.

Soon after it, the real project began. Every weekend the troops worked together with societies to plant the trees and retreat the dead soils. The areas were cleaned, the process of river sterilization and water refreshment system were done little by little. Students were encouraged more to volunteer. Students from Medical School -most of them were friend of Bulan's- devoted themselves in socializing the healthy lifestyle to the societies and gave free treatment and check up every weekend. From Bulan, I learned that we don't need to wait till we lose the things to realize their values. And that we don't need to wait to be superior to influence people to act. For it's not the power, but the sincerity that make people open their eyes. We then, decided to change the name of the community into "*The Twilight Troops*" because, it's in twilight that the moon appears as the compass for everything, even the stars, to find their way.

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Aman Jain,  
The Indian High School, Dubai

School Category, 5th Prize Winner (Judged)

# John and His Parrot

*By, Sahil Saleem, 12 years, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE*

“Wake up, John! It’s 6 o’clock! Time to go to school!” John’s mother, Mary yelled from the kitchen. John was in the middle of a beautiful dream. He was flying through the sky with Tweety, his parrot.

John wanted to complete the dream, but his mother insisted that he wake up. John woke up and ran to Tweety.

John was a 12-year old student. But, unlike other children of his age, he was smart, kind, loving and above all, far more intelligent than his peers.

“Good Morning John,” Tweety wished him, just like John had taught her. John greeted her back just like a morning routine. They had their usual chat for a while.

“Mom, did you feed Tweety?” John asked at his mother. “No John, you know that she will be happier if you feed her.” John was happy to hear that. He knew that only he will feed Tweety in the morning. John went to get food for Tweety.

After feeding Tweety, John rushed to the restroom, got ready to go to school. He again went to Tweety, had a quick chat. Mary was happily looking at their conversations. Tweety kissed on John’s cheek with her beak and said bye.

Sam and Greg, John’s friends, were waiting for John in front of his house. John joined them and they started walking towards the school bus.

On their way they met the cleaner, Paul, an old man, who was picking up garbage from the ground. John wondered why there is so much of garbage on the ground when there is designated bins for it.

He wished Paul a very good morning. While sitting in the school bus, he was wondering about the amount garbage on the ground and the plight of an old man cleaning those garbage!

“Jo, what are you planning to do on the weekend?” Sam’s question made John to put all thoughts about garbage to the back of his mind. They both started discussing their weekend plans.



Throughout his classes, John was thinking about his early morning dream of flying like a bird! He always wanted to fly with his Tweety. "How awesome would that have been!" he exclaimed!

He couldn't mingle much with his friends that day as his mind was full of flying with Tweety and sometimes the morning garbage thought was disturbing him.

Tweety was waiting John on the fence near the gate. She was so happy to see John when he jumped out of his school bus. Tweety came to him and chirped, "Hello John! How was your day?"

John rushed inside, freshened up and ran out again to take Tweety for a fly. They went outside and started playing together. Tweety flew around John's head in circles to make John laugh. While they were playing, Sam and Greg came around.

"Jo! Come on! All the boys are going to play football. Won't you join us?" Sam asked.

"No Sam, you guys go play. I want to spend time with my darling Tweety."

John and Tweety walked through the neighborhood. On their way home a couple of hours later, John saw the old man Paul again. He was still collecting garbage. This time, John was really curious.

"Uncle, you were collecting garbage in the morning. Are you still not done?" he asked Paul.

"My dear son, this is a gated community of about 40 houses and I am the only one collecting all their garbage. What more, people don't use dustbins anymore and never stop littering," Paul replied.

John thought about this all the way home. When he reached home, he put Tweety in her cage and went to the kitchen. As soon as he entered, he saw his mother about to throw some garbage outside.

"Mom no! Why are you throwing it outside when there are proper bins designated for it? Can't you see that poor Uncle Paul has to pick up everyone's garbage every day? Our teacher has also taught us that littering is harmful for the environment," John stated.

"Just because one family stops throwing the garbage, the world will not become a less polluted place. Besides, Uncle Paul is only doing his duty. He is being paid to pick up the garbage."

John was very confused now. That night, before he fell asleep, he voiced his thoughts to Tweety. "Tweety, my teacher told me that it is wrong to litter as it will harm the Earth. But my mother is saying that it doesn't make a big difference. Everyone in the community is also throwing all their garbage here and there. I'm really very confused, Tweety."

The next few weeks were uneventful. On one Tuesday, John let Tweety out to play, but she didn't return that day, like she usually did. John became very worried and searched for her everywhere. John along with his parents and friends searched Tweety all over, but in vain.

John was so upset, he did not eat anything that day nor could he get any sleep. The next day, John and his parents were sitting inside the house, feeling dejected, when Sam came running. "John! John! I've found Tweety!" he yelled.

John rushed outside and followed Sam to his backyard. John looked everywhere in the sky, and, on failing to find Tweety turn to ask Sam where she was. That was when John noticed that Sam was not looking at the sky, but rather at the ground. What John saw made him collapse. His darling Tweety, lying on the ground, unconscious. He took Tweety in his arms and rushed to Uncle Samuel, who was a veterinary doctor and his neighbour. After Uncle Samuel examined him, he had very grim news. He was unsure how to break it to John so he told John's parents that Tweety died by choking on a plastic wrapper.

John couldn't handle the grief. His pet, companion and great friend was no more. He lost interest in all his daily activities and withdrew into himself. He rarely talked or ate. A few days later, he started going to school, albeit with little enthusiasm. But, contrary to what everyone around him believed, it wasn't Tweety's death that caused this change of behaviour in John. Rather, it was the reason for her death and how it could have been prevented, had his neighbours been a little more concerned about the environment.

Over the course of the next few days, John started googling facts and figures of the animals who had died by choking on plastic, like Tweety. He was shocked to find that many animals and birds, especially marine animals had suffered a similar fate.

That night, John thought about a way to bring about a change. He wanted people to stop littering. Finally, he came up with a brilliant idea!

The next morning, he asked his mother for a pair of gloves. He didn't tell his mother what they were for, even after she insisted several times. John took the gloves and went away.

A few hours later, his mother called him for lunch. But he was nowhere to be found. Mary panicked and searched for him around the house. When she couldn't find him, she gathered a few neighbors and went to search for John.

They looked all over and finally found him picking garbage on the streets. His mother scolded him immediately saying, "John! What is this nonsense? Don't you know there are people to do this job? Why are you doing this then?"

"Tweety died because of our carelessness. If we hadn't littered the place so much, she wouldn't have choked to death. Many animals and birds are dying in the same way. I googled it and the numbers are huge! Not just animals or birds, humans are

also getting impacted by polluting air, water and soil. If I start cleaning up, I can inspire others to do so too. Slowly, many people will become aware of this problem and start doing something to solve it. Mom, you said that if one family litters, it won't make a big difference. But, if everyone thinks the same, won't there be a lot of litter everywhere? Won't it make a big difference? And can't the same thing be said for the opposite? If one family stops littering and others begin to do so too, won't the Earth be a lot cleaner? This is why I'm doing this," John explained.

All of the adults were shocked. They realized that they had been blind this whole time. They were mindlessly littering their surroundings and not caring about the consequences, while a small boy was more concerned than they ever were. They vowed never to litter again. Together, they cleaned up their community and kept it clean thereafter.

John and his friends went to the neighboring communities and the schools to spread this message. They made them aware of the consequences of pollution and importance of preserving earth.

These small acts of the communities' people made a big impact on the Earth's cleanliness!

John was happy that he could make some change in the communities and dreamed of having a pollution free nature in the future.

After few days John's father presented him a new parrot and John named it Tweety!

-----The End-----



Aaditya Gandhi,  
The Winchester School, Dubai



JERIN SAM JOJY,  
GRADE IX,  
SHARJAH INDIAN SCHOOL



Aditi Gandhi ,  
Grade 5,  
The Winchester School, Dubai



College Category, 5th Prize Winner (Judged)

# The Pond

By, Teguh Nurrohman, 22 years, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

School had a lot to offer, unfortunately not for him — not yet. The hour hand unhurriedly shifted towards one, and the bell rang frantically once it got there. He packed up his stationery and notes like no other students, who were typically overly excited hearing the teacher's *let's call it a day*. He sat still, watching others make noises as they rushed out of the classroom and mumbling about weekend — he wasn't interested. Yet there he was, ambling through the corridor and nibbling on one end of his pencil. The lobby was amusing as usual — AC, sofas, wall magazine, and TV. One thing seemed to be his drawback with the room, the crowd. He effortlessly decided to leave, denying the comfort of AC and sofas, forgetting the artsy posts pinned on the wall magazine and ignoring the news anchor reading the news of President Bush being re-elected.



For most of kids on his age, the world was simple: either at home or at school, there's no other or in between those two. In this matter things were pretty much different with him, he's got his own third world he loved but hated to admit — the pond about half a mile from the school. Now that he thought of it, his parents being bankers was the thing that brought him to the pond. Banks closed at three, the bankers then needed to make report and do stuffs up to five, six was the earliest they could pick him up from school. Waiting was never been simple, and he'd stopped making friends since he knew how much it hurts seeing them being picked up by their parents pretty quick — leaving him there. In spit of the size, the pond was perfect; it got water and soil he could play farmer with, fish to share his snacks, shady big trees exhaling fresh air,



but ultimately, it kept him company. He learned to appreciate it more as he could tell how its air differed from the other places, the ways the water sparkled and stirred calmly as the fish swim. He had the fish poorly sketched on his notebook, they're four: Ella, Ali, Ron, and Diaz. If it wasn't for the pond, he would've gone hating his parents or being the nightmare of students that was widely known as bully.

Ten minutes had passed since he left the lobby, and he's halfway to the pond now. He got extra snacks and empty tumbler to water the watermelon seeds he planted three days ago. The fish grew bigger and needed to eat more, the seeds had just begun to sprout some tiny leaves — he wondered how the pond would look like about a year from now. All this exciting thoughts got him fastening his pace towards the pond, almost hopping like a bunny from the morning cartoon he casually watch with his brother. The sun shone quite hotter than usual, but that didn't bother him at the very least for what was heat compared to five solid hours of loneliness? He hadn't arrived there yet but he couldn't hold it any longer, he started to mumbling, "This is great, I got cheese puff for myself, and all the others for you guys!" The picture of himself spending time at the pond didn't fade even slightly. Few seconds later, he's there all halted at once as his eyes spotted on a figure of a man in grey sweater sitting near the pond, it was like the man casted a magic that bent the tree branches and roots to entangle him. There was never been anyone else here.

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"Alright," he said, while picking up some packs he had dropped on the spot. Eyes still pinned down to the man in grey, he walked slowly, approaching the pond. The man had neither said anything nor glanced at him when he looked around cautiously and then decided to sit across the pond. He faced the man, with ridiculously high sense of awkwardness, separated by approximately three meters long body of water. Even though he realized he had entered 'yellow state' since he noticed the man in grey, he did not mind him sitting there since it was a public space after all, it was just . . . he couldn't seem to be loosely relax as he usually was. But then again, he thought, *it's alright*.

Some bloop and splashes broke the ice, he finally stopped assuming things about the man in grey and enthusiastically ducked closer to the water. "Now, who's hungry?" he said. Pebbles were put above the opened snacks so that it won't be blown away by the wind, it happened

quite a few times in the past until he thought it was kinda stupid to chase after some plastic wrapper and if someone really cared to not litter, he or she would have used pebbles this way. At least he knew one thing of why the pebbles were there at the first place. His heart was always content whenever he was sure the pond was free of trash. Now that he had done feeding the fish, he went on to see the ground where he planted his watermelon seeds, what he saw crushed every single thing of his. The small sign board made out of plywood with 'Hello, I need water!' written in it had been pulled off of the ground and landed about a meter away, made it look like it was harshly kicked. Practically it was not a big deal since he only needed to put the sign back and that's it, yet the picture of the sprouts being flattened by an energy drink bottle and stained by cigarette stubs successfully, mentally dragged him down. All kinds of follow-up questions, the ones started with 'what' up to 'how', lingered in his mind. Things felt even worse as he couldn't fathom any reason to justify such irresponsible acts. He knelt down holding a tumbler full of water, yet he preferred to water the sprouts with his teardrops while cleaning up the mess.

The man in grey finally showed a sign of life by diving his right hand into his waist bag, and reaching out a shabby pack of cigarette, lighter, and half-emptied energy drink. Wrinkles, patchy beard, no rings worn. With those darkened lips, the man in grey held his cigarette and lighted it up. His head bowed down, eyes were locked to the waving grass in the tip of his shoes.

As soon as he noticed the smoke floated and danced up in the air, he deliberately jumped into 'red state', stood up straight and tall facing the man in grey, declaring his acute anger, to be precise. "It— it was you," he said, ignoring his doubt on whether he's allowed to confront an adult that way. "you definitely did that, didn't you?" pointing at his now-screwed-up plants.

The man in grey blew smoke up in the air, readjusted his sitting position. "Nice to see you too, name's Andrew, what's yours?" he zipped up his waist bag.

He wasn't sure if he needed to tell him his name, what he knew was that he needed to gather all of his courage just to throw such accusation. "Bruno. Now answer my question." He said.

"Yeah kid, I did."

"Why do you think you can do— just why?"

“Oh hell yeah I can, why can’t I?” Andrew challenged him back.

“Sir, without doubt, you are the worst adult I have ever known.” he said.

Hearing it, Andrew burst laughing out loud for a moment. “It’s kinda weird that I agree with you, but—“

“I come here five days a week, I take care of everything here because I love it being here, and I’m not afraid of you, everything here is my friend. I’m gonna ask you one more question and if you refuse to answer that by any means, I’m gonna ask you to leave at once as you don’t have the rights to be here,” he said, despite of his fluency and his stance, he was actually trembling, he was fooling nobody. “why are you here?”

Andrew didn’t give any response, he didn’t have any. He stood up and left.

He’s gone. Just like that.

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“Man, it’s been two days and I still feel bad,” he said to one of the fish, Ella. “I’m sure I was mean, what if he was just having a bad day, just like my days before I found this pond.” The fish swam in a circular motion as if it actually listened to him, it just wanted the snacks, really.

Beside that, he felt even worse knowing that his plants were still alive. It convinced him that he was too dramatic. He ran out of snacks, and it was the last drop of water poured down on the plants as well. Scarlett sky, and mild, cool breeze. It was time to get back to school and wait for his parents to come pick him up. He packed his things up, straightened the sign board, and kissed a goodbye to the fish, a trace of worries reflected in his face as this was Friday, he could come again three days later on Monday. “Alright, will be back on Monday, it’s just three days, you guys will be fine.”

“I wanted to come earlier at one or two,” a heavy, deep voice comes from his back, it was Andrew. “But yeah, you know, I needed to get these stuffs first.”

“Sir, I’ve been meaning to—“

“Naaah, this is still my turn,” Andrew interrupted him. “I apologize I lied, I can’t do that to your plants, or any other things around this pond, and you did a good job taking care of it. It feels

nice.” He said, putting off stuffs he brought— jasmine and sunflower seeds, manures, and some fish, alive.

“I lied as well, my name is Bernard, Bruno’s my older brother,” he said. “and I was wrong to say you have no right to be here, you have, and I’m sorry”

Things were settled down pretty quick, and Bernard got going few minutes afterward as he worried his parents were already at the school looking out for him. He took home the seeds, leaving Andrew with the fish and the manure. Apart from the fact that Andrew bought stuffs for Bernard and provided some changes in the pond, bigger changes had happened to he himself. He would have fallen even deeper if Bernard did not speak up and made some sense out of his damn mind. As an mature adult, being saved by a fifth grader was the last thing he expected to happened.

—The End—



Ishitha Manoj,  
The Indian High School,  
Dubai, UAE



School Category, Special Prize Winner (Based on Age)

# A Small Act Of Kindness

By, Aryan Raj, 8 years, GEMS Our Own English High School, UAE

## Short Story Small Acts, Big Impacts

One day Sam was returning home after playing in the park. On the way, he found a Dh.5/- note in the road, he looked around but did not find anyone so he thought to take it. He thought to buy his favourite chips, juice and chocolates from the supermarket. He went home and showed it to his mother and told her how he found the money. She told him to do anything as he wish.

As the supermarket was near his house he thought to go and buy the things. On the way to the superket, he saw a sweeper sweeping the road, suddenly he forgot about chips, juice and chocolates, his mind and heart told him to give the money to that man.

When Sam went to give the money, the man kept his broom down and took the money with his two hands and gave Sam great honour and respect. Sam felt very happy and relieved.

Sam went home and told his parents what he did with the money. His parents felt proud of him and appreciated him for his

kind act and adviced him to do more charitable works.

A small act of Sam had a big impact on the sweeper, giving to those who are in need will give us immense satisfaction.

Aryan Raj



School Category, Special Prize Winner (Based on Age)

# Kindness Repay

By, KASHINADH PRANESH, 8 years, GEMS Millennium School, Sharjah, UAE

Once upon a time there lived a little boy named Rohan with his family in a village. He was 6 years old. He had a little sister named Rita. Rohan was too naughty. Though Rohan was naughty he is a brilliant boy. Everyone liked Rohan especially his teachers. Rohan liked animals. He always asked his parents to have a pet animal. But they won't allow. Rohan felt sad.

One day while Rohan return back from school with his friends on the way he saw a cute white puppy. Rohan liked the puppy and he gave some biscuits to the puppy. Puppy ate the biscuit and swings its tail with happy. He went home and started studying. But he was not interested in his studies. He was thinking about the puppy. He asked his parents shall he take puppy to home. But his parents won't allow him to do so.

Next day also Rohan gave biscuits to the puppy. As the days go by one by one puppy and Rohan become very close.

On a rainy day Rohan felt very sad. His parents ask him the reason behind his sadness. Rohan cried and said the little puppy don't have a home to stay in the raining season. The puppy gets wet. Rohan's parents felt sad about the puppy and proud about their kid's kind heart. They allowed Rohan to take puppy to home. They make a beautiful kennel and put puppy their. Rohan named the puppy Buster.

He taught puppy lots of tricks. Rohan, Rita play ball, hide and seek with Buster. Now buster also a new member in their family. They had so much fun day by day.

Days gone. Rohan grown up and buster too.

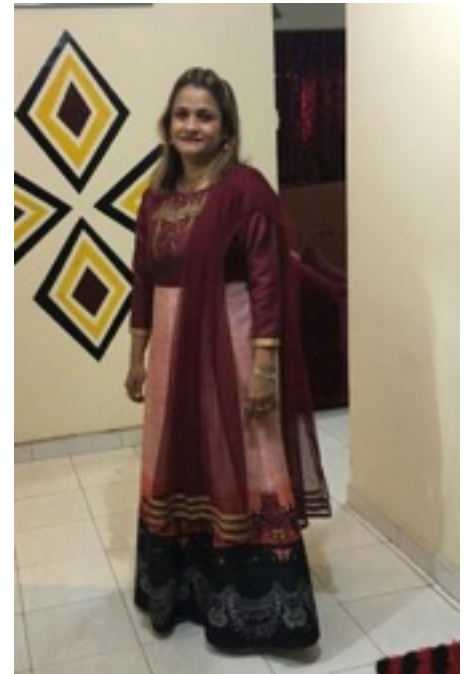
One day Rohan and his family went for a trip to Agra. While they are going they told Buster to take care of the house. Busters swing his tail as he agrees. Some



thieves nearby saw Rohan's family going for the trip. They were very happy and planned to steal things from the house that night. At night thieves went to Rohan's house and Buster chases the thieves. Hearing the noise neighbor's also wake up and follow Buster. The thieves were forfeited to the police..

After a week Rohan's family return back from the trip. Hearing the story about Buster they were very happy.

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Rashida Adil,  
Teacher,  
Sharjah Indian School







# *the team behind it*

GEORGE ZACHARIA  
PRESIDENT, COMMITTEE

ABDUL BASITH  
COORDINATOR, COMMITTEE

ANJALI MOHAN P  
MEMBER, SEGREGATION TEAM

SHANIDA ABDUL RASHID  
MEMBER, SEGREGATION TEAM

GAUTHAM MADHU KUMAR  
MEMBER, JUDGING PANEL

SALWA NASRIN KP,  
MEMBER, JUDGING PANEL

School Category, Finalist

# I knew You'd Come

*By, Aman Jain, Indian High School, Dubai, UAE*

"Munnu" a feeble, old voice echoed in the small house of a village in Alwar, Rajasthan. This was a household of a family like no other, despaired by fortune and strengthened by desire however this setting was not unusual for a state where soldiers were born everyday. It was a home to a grandmother and her grandchildren, Manan and Jagat –whose parents were no more, for whom she was still alive, fighting and battling against life.

Manan was a young man in his mid 20's ready to serve and die for his nation for he knew a soldier is a citizen of death's land, drawing no dividend from tomorrow's time. While the younger was just a boy of 13, at a age where normally equations of life are easy and the solutions easier, this boy was no different from his elder brother wanting to do something for his country.

"Son tomorrow you leave for war, be brave and protect the country and don't worry of me or Jagat. We would be just fine.", said the old grandmother coughing all the way as she said it to Manan, who had now completed his army training and was posted at a zone near the Himalayas as a result of the war declared by China.

To this he replied with a polite delight, "I would be back soon grandma" following which after taking a pause he continued with a gentle smile, "and even if I don't, don't you stop waiting for me."

"Ok! Ok! Good night soldier, for you have a big day tomorrow", said the old lady trying to control her tears to flow over her wrinkled, pale face.

"Good night grandma", said Manan.

The night grew dark and darker. In no time this darkness surrendered to the sunrise. Manan's parents had died fighting for the freedom of the nation when he was just a teen, and now Manan was ready to die protecting it. He was set to go, luggage packed, some photos to accompany him during desolated times. Grandma and Jagat accompanied Manan to the district railway station to bid him perhaps a 'final adieu'. On reaching the station they weren't a bit surprised to see the station full of men in army suit. A board just ahead them read in bold and bright words, "TRAIN TO HIMALAYA POSTING/BASE 231 LEAVES IN 2 MINUTES."

Manan hugged Jagat and told him, "Take care of yourself and grandma. Study properly."

He then took blessings of his grandmother and hugged her. He then said to her, "Over the years you have made me strong and valiant. Would you miss me when I'd be gone?"

"Sure son. When you are there serving the nation, always remember that there is an old lady in a village, not very far away praying and waiting for your return."

Just as she said this the train sounded its horn. Manan got on the train as it began to move gradually pacing its speed. He leant over the gate waving his arm to his family as far as his teary eyes could capture them in his heart. During the journey he took no notice of his fellow soldiers. Sitting by the window, he watched how the world beyond that window- the rivers, trees, acres of plantation and the village were being left behind. Seeing this he closed his eyes and recalled how once his grandmother carried him to the village doctor at 1 in the morning when he was severely sick by fever. He remembered how she gathered money from ounce to ounce so that he could complete his formal training by working day and night stitching clothes. He also reminisces of his grandma who never let him starve even if that meant compromising on her own hunger.

Cherishing these moments he eventually fell asleep. As he woke up he looked out and saw a platform white as snow. He had reached his destination. Getting off the train he and others were escorted to their posting by the Colonel. The place was freezing cold and even the air that blew over the face felt no less than daggers. The place had no medium for communication with the rest of the world and food was brought in canned tins. The in-charge took the role call of all men one by one in loud audible voice, "Manan Singh, Rajasthan regiment."

"Yes sir", replied back a firm strong voice.

All soldiers were provided with ammunition, were taught of enemy tactics, showed them their tent-house and were addressed by the Colonel,

"Soldiers, the people of our country safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us. The people beyond the border are enemies. We must vanquish them or die fighting. Tomorrow we launch attack."

The air next day was filled by firings being burst from both sides each of them taking shelter behind ice caps as they fired, shelling of bases. This was no less than an open massacre.

Manan fought bravely, fired bullets, hurled grenades at the opponents and stopped every foot that tried to approach his motherland. At the end of the day, there were casualties on both sides. Many young warriors had fallen while the others were severely injured. Back at the camp after a disastrous war, some soldier had taken a bullet in the limb or the other had lost an arm but every face had pride. While Manan had slightly injured his arm when a bullet had whizzed past his right shoulder. Everyone was assisted and provided medical care.

Later that night as everyone was asleep, Manan stepped out of his tent house and sat on a snow covered rock, took his left arm and reached into the pocket of his uniform slowly and made no sudden movement as to avoid any jerk on his injured arm. He took out a photograph of him and his family- his complete family. He realized how his grandmother never made him feel of the absence of his parents.

Just then a man from behind approached to him with silent footsteps and sat beside him.

"We are your soldiers friend, other things may change us, but we start and end with the family. I am Vikrant Bhushan, Rajput regiment. I greatly admire the way you fought today." Pointing at the photograph Vikrant asked, "Is that your family?"

"Yes sire", replied back Manan.

"These are my parents", he said pointing at them as he said it, "this beautiful woman in yellow is my grandmother and this jovial boy is my younger brother."

" We are both sons of the same motherland protecting it, so you and I are brothers.", replied Vikrant with nostalgia.

Both of them talked for a while and later retired to sleep. The next was just like the one before. There were more casualties and more martyrs.

After the disastrous war, at the camp Manan said to Vikrant," Thank you for saving my life today when I ran out of ammunition and had no choice but to surrender. At the right time you provided me cover and safety. I owe my life to you."

"Your life is precious soldier. I don't need your life, but only your friendship."

" You forgot the terms soldier. We are not friends, we are brothers", replied Manan.

Both of them became best of friends. They fought together, ate together, and talked about their home, childhood, education everything.

By then war had become the permanent constant. Every other day there were more victims, some of the war while some of the weather. This was the routine for about the next 27 or 28 months.

It was night time when Manan, Vikrant and some other cadets were making strategies for safety for the next day. Just then all of a sudden there was a loud roaring sound outside their base. China had employed a secret attack on the post. There was a wild chaos and mayhem among the Indian soldiers as they weren't ready for an attack. They grabbed whatever weapon came into their hand.

Vikrant took his gun and went a little further the tent to defend the base while Manan followed him about 100 meters behind. In the hurry Vikrant forgot his bullet proof vest at the camp and was grounded from all sides. Watching from behind, Manan saw the soldiers piercing Vikrant's chest with bullets .Three bullets, Manan counted one by one as they struck his body.

Horror gripped the heart of the Indo soldier as he saw his friend, his brother fall in battle. Caught in a trench with continuous gunfire whizzing over his head, the soldier asked his Colonel if he might go out into the "no man's land" between the trenches to bring his fallen comrade back.

"You can go," said the Colonel, "but I don't think it will be worth it. Your friend is probably dead and you may throw your life away." The Colonel's advice didn't matter, and the soldier went anyway. Miraculously he managed to reach his friend, hoist him onto his shoulder and bring him back to their trench. As the two of them tumbled in together to the bottom of the land, the officer checked the wounded soldier, and then looked kindly at his friend.

"I told you it wouldn't be worth it," he said. "Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded."

"It was worth it though, sir," said the soldier.

“What do you mean; worth it?” responded the Colonel. “Your friend is dead.”

“Yes, Sir” the private answered. “But it was worth it because when I got to him, he was still alive and I had the satisfaction of hearing him saying, “Manan..., I knew you’d come.”

While other soldiers and the Colonel had managed to force the foes to retreat.

For the next few days, Manan was mostly quite and unchaperoned, remembered his friend all time. Within a week he got over his grief. His friendship itself with Vikrant provided and instilled in him courage to overcome the loss.

Two months later it was the October of year 1962, and both nations had finally agreed upon peace. It was finally time for the war hero to return home. The soldier had seen, witnessed and conquered but it was now time to come back.

He sat on the train, just similar to the one he had about three years earlier. Unfortunately couldn’t get a window seat this time! All the way he questioned himself in his mind,” Would grandma be at store when he would reach the village? Would have Jagat grown a moustache by now?” and lots other things. His joy knew no bounds.

On reaching the village, Manan could feel gentle breeze, smell of wet soil and hear the rustling of leaves. He reached his small hut that had grown dusty. He knocked the door, but no one came. He went to the uncle that lived next to his house for years and asked,” Chaacha, do you know where Jagat and grandma are?”

“Oh Manan! You have returned. I am very happy to see you. Jagat now studies in a hostel in a town nearby.”

“Wow that’s great. And where is grandma? Is she at the temple?”, he began to trot as he questioned. He turned and hardly had he run a few steps when the middle aged man shouted, ”Manan”. He stopped to hear what the uncle had to say.

“Your grandmother waited for you long, but you took a little longer”, taking a deep pause he continued ,”she is no more.”

Manan was devastated. He couldn’t feel the ground beneath his feet or the sky above his head as if everything had come to a standstill; he couldn’t feel his heartbeat nor feel blood run through his veins. He couldn’t even be with her as she breathed her last breath. He couldn’t perform her rites. She was gone with the wind, just felt. He blamed himself for her demise.

That month the weak soldier cried, consoled himself and cried over again. For the next couple of months, he secluded himself from society. Isolated, desolated it took him time to recover from the diminution. The soldier grew, settled in the small city at the outskirts of the state, got married, and had a son.

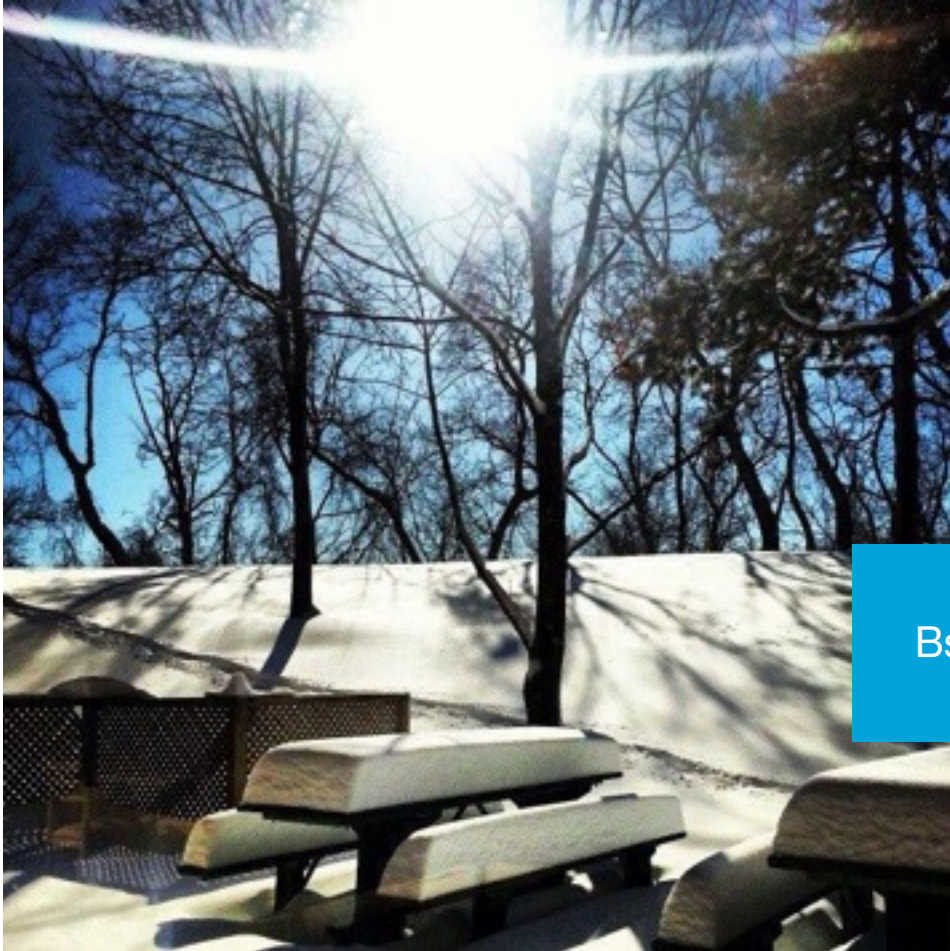
“And this was the story of my life”, said a father to his son.

“Dadda, how did fight these tough battles?”, said a amiable small boy.

“Son, God doesn’t give hardest battles to his toughest soldiers, he creates the toughest soldiers through life’s hardest battles”,the father replied.

“ Now you must sleep. Tommorrow you have to get up early and visit Jagat uncle’s place for Independence day celebration. Good night Vikrant.”

“Good night dadda.”



Jawad Ahmed  
Bs (chemical technology)  
5th semester



School Category, Finalist

# The Crow

*By, Srishti Iyer, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE*

When I was younger, I'd always wondered, looking up at the starry night about what kind of person I would become. I had decided there were only two kinds of people in this world; people who were good but did bad things and bad people who did good things. Much of my free time was spent deciding which of the two I belonged to. The older I got the more I realised I would fall into the second category. I wasn't a good person. I just did good things, now one may wonder how exactly I found it possible to do so but I did and because I did that, I eventually began to realise I no longer hated what I once loathed.

There was a story every boy and girl was told at the age of five. The story of a crow that held our blessings. Every person has one crow that they could never see until they hurt another's. When you take away someone's blessings, their blessings follow you home. They curse you till another person carries the curse from you. Of course, it was just a story. It was told throughout the years to scores of people and eventually, the details start to wither and you're left with an old fairytale. In the 80s, who would believe in blessings and crows? I definitely wouldn't but my piano teacher would. She would repeat every class "save a crow, save a soul".

On my way home from piano lessons, I was walking down an unfamiliar alley when I passed a shop I hadn't noticed before, it was a dark and cluttered shop with boxes piling each end of it. The door was wide open and I couldn't make out what was written on the sign. I looked from side to side to see if anyone was nearby. I heard a caw and ducked my head, just missing a crow that had flown over my head and rested on the worn out, rusted sign of the shop. It let out a loud caw and began to clean itself. I heard some shuffling coming from inside the shop and my heart rate quickened.

I saw a lanky figure waddling towards the door carrying a walking stick. "Argh, that bootless, flap-mouthed clotpole. I could'a sworn it'd be gone chasing it's daylight b' now. An ugly black thing that messes me shop around". An old man, scrawny and long-limbed was holding a stick and aiming it at the crow. The man seemingly took no notice of me and focused solely on the crow, he picked up a

stone and threw it at the crow, missing it by a few centimetres but it was enough for it to shudder and take off in flight. "I swear- one day I'll catch the darn thin' and lock i' in a cage and watch it starve", the man grumbled, my presence seemingly unnoticed.

He trudged back into his store and I couldn't see him once he passed through the maze of boxes covering the walls. I shuddered, feeling a sense of dread creep over my shoulder though I couldn't pin it to a particular event. I rambled through the street looking into the eccentric stores; golden cauldrons, books, quills but none were dusted or maintained. I tightened the ribbon around my hair and made my way out of the quaint little alley. I couldn't believe I had never noticed it before. I saw the sun was beginning to set and hurried along my usual path making it home just before dinner. "Where have you been Victoire? I expected you an hour ago!" My mother pronounced, as she was setting the table.

"I'm sorry Mumsie, I got a bit distracted on my way home and I lost track of time". My mum gave me a reprimanding look but dropped the topic. Dinner passed by quietly. Little conversation passed between my mother and I but most of it was in silence. I helped her clear up the table and went to bed. I woke up the next morning and trudged to my piano lessons. I saw the crow come back to clean its feathers and the man shouts, hurls a stone and waddles back into the shop. This went on for a few days, like clockwork, the same passage of time down the little alley remained the same whereas the outside world continued on differently.

I wracked my head trying to think of an explanation but no matter what I came up with it didn't explain how both the crow and the man acted simultaneously. One day, I was feeling particularly more defiant to our old-fashioned laws and so I walked through the same dull grey alley again, I stood beside the shop and waited for the crow to come soaring. This time it came but it didn't clean its feathers. It sat on that worn sign and stared straight at me as if it was testing me; a challenge. I felt a chill crawl up my spine but I didn't waver from my plan. I bent downwards not breaking my gaze with its pitch black eyes. I picked up a smooth grey stone and within a second I hurled it at the bird. My aim was true and the bird fell to the ground and after a series of spasms went limp.

I turned my head to face the shop window and saw the old man gazing at me through the glass. I felt a strong sense of guilt and admonition as I looked down and hurried out of the lane and back home. The next day, I couldn't bear the thought of having to walk through the alley. I tried and tried to think of another



way home but I couldn't. It was as if the universe wanted me to walk through that alley again, which I eventually did have to do. I reached the small turning where I would see the damp and dreary brick walls but instead I was greeted by golden walls, people walking through the shops chattering excitedly. I couldn't believe this was the small, dreadful looking alley.

I smiled widely seeing the once abandoned shop now filled with customers. I passed by the old man's shop and smiled seeing him help some little children who wanted sweets from the top shelf. He looked out the window but his smile faded when he saw me. What replaced it was a sad smile, a pitied look. I was confused, what was wrong? The shop was no longer boxes upon boxes of dust and books but lively and full. I shrugged thinking perhaps the crow was his friend but I couldn't help but feel that me killing the crow was the reason the alley was alive again. I thought what I had done was perfect. I eliminated the main source of dirt for that lane.

I made my way out and back towards my home but the closer I got the more I realised, it wasn't my home anymore. The road was dull, the trees were wilted and dying; no longer green and full of life as they once were. I trudged through seeing the houses with broken glass for windows and faded paint on the walls. Looking through the windows one could see torn furniture that resembled abandoned houses before they were to be torn down. I walked cautiously towards the road and reached my house at the end of the lane. The gate came off from its hinges after a push and I gasped at the clanging sound it made but no one seemed to be around to notice.

"Mum..?" I asked nervously pushing the front door open with one hand. No one was home. I kept my bag down on the dusty floor and made my way around the house, all that remained were m picture albums and not an item more. I trodded back to the street in hopes of maybe finding my neighbour or the grocery man but no one was in this lane. It appeared to be abandoned and invisible. I looked around, searching for any sign of a living creature. I was going to head further down the street and maybe towards the main road I heard a caw from behind me. I turned around silently hoping it wasn't true. It wasn't possible... I watched it die. I turned back towards the direction from which the sound resonated from and came face to face a black crow, ruffling its feathers.

College Category, Finalist

# An Autobiography of Garbage

By, Shreya Soman, 20 years, K.S. Hedge Medical Academy, India

If you ask Wikipedia what I am, it will tell you that I am “Unwanted and undesirable material discarded by residents.”

Ouch. Harsh words. But, that is what I am – Garbage. No, not figuratively, I mean, literally.

You might recognize me from the corner of your streets or better yet, you may have seen me strewn all across the roads. Parts of me are piled up in residential areas, which by the way is not very eco-friendly.

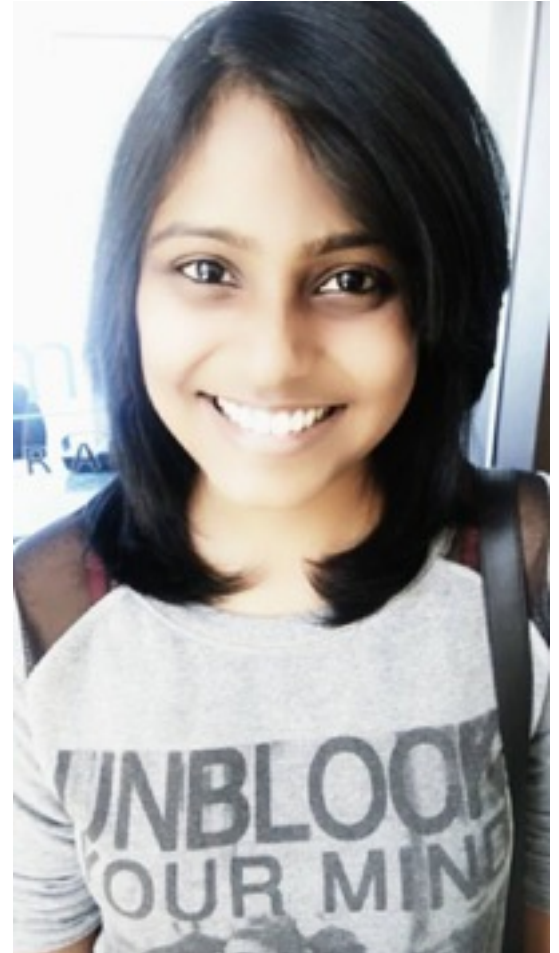
Anyway, a part of me was piled up near a Dhobi's (Washer man's) shop in Bangalore, a city in India.

Apparently, I was driving his customers away. Go figure, right?

He needed to get rid of me for obvious reasons. One day, he came to me in the early hours of the morning and hung a portrait of Devi's (Indian Goddess) right above me.

I was baffled, but since I'm supposed to be non-living, I could not question his actions. A few hours later, one of the residents came with his pile of trash and upon seeing the Devi's portrait stopped dead in his tracks. It was at that moment, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the brilliance of the Dhobi's act hit me. No religious Indian, in their right mind would disrespect God this way. The fear of God in these residents drove them to clear me off from the area and dispose me in an appropriate manner.

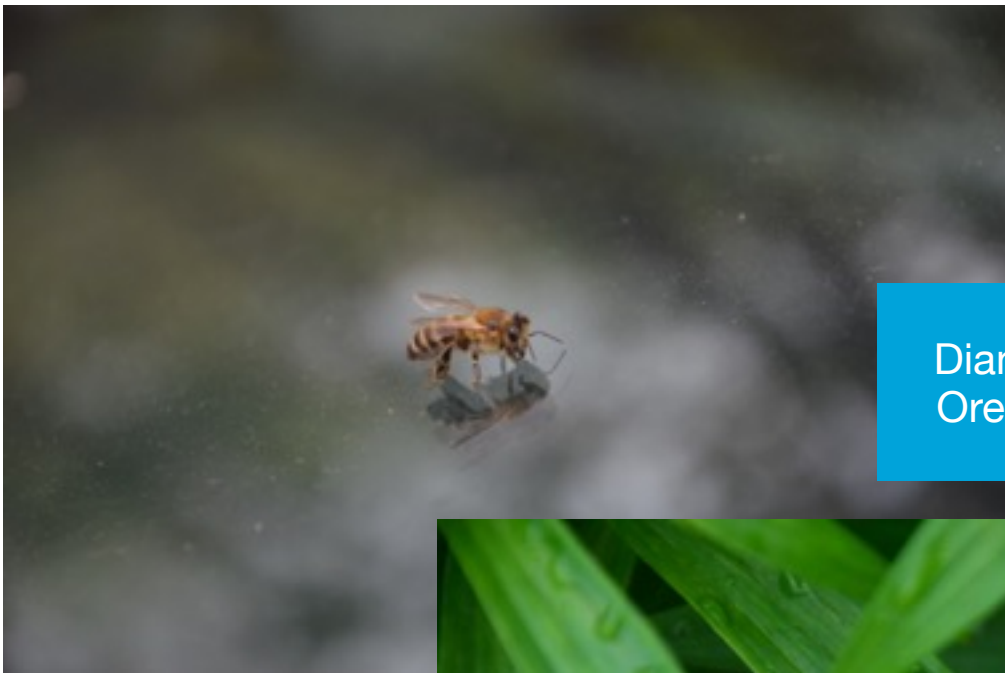
This act on the Dhobi's part had a ripple effect. Many shopkeepers and residents followed suit and started hanging portraits of various religious figures. Others went one step ahead and started potting plants in the potential dumping sites. Before I knew it, I was getting disposed the right way. The residents even started segregating me into wet and dry waste. Got to say, that's pretty smart. It felt really good to be treated with a little bit of care. Soon enough, the trend caught



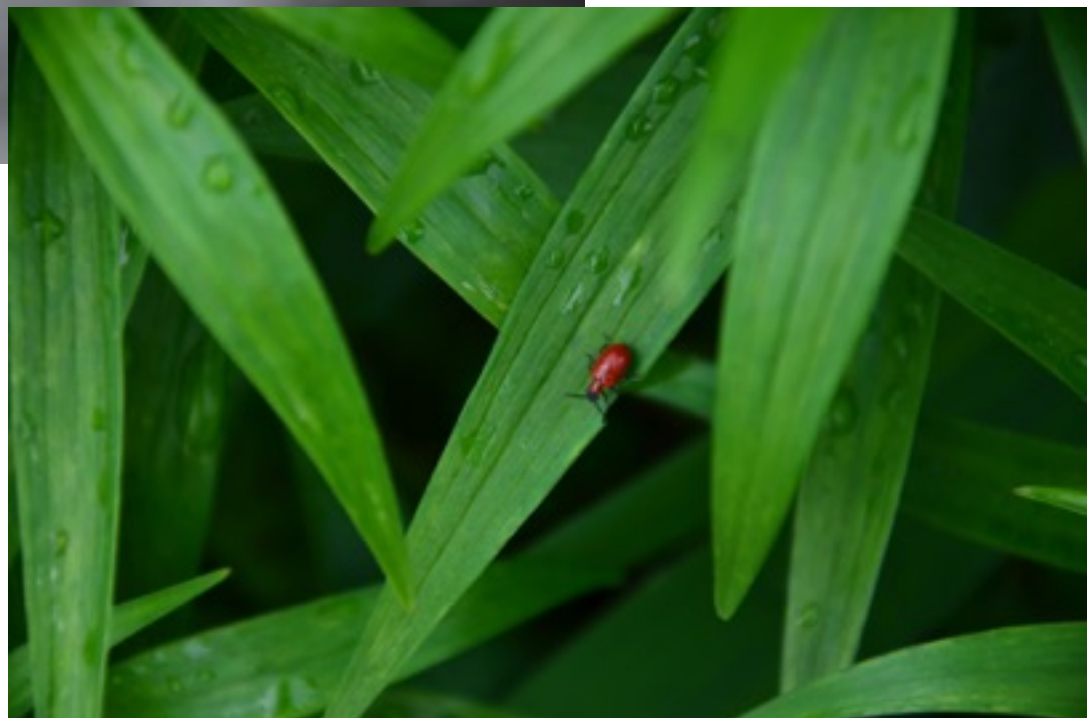
up with the rest of the city and the citizens started actively participating to get me off the roads and take me to dumping sites away from the residential areas.

To this day, it fascinates me how one small change brought about by a Dhobi had such a big impact. I believe it was Gandhi who once said something about tiny drops of water making the ocean or something like that? I don't really remember how it goes, but you get the point, right? To end up with something big, you usually have to start small. It does not matter how small your contribution is, because in the long run, it will be significant. Small acts eventually have big impacts. Trust me, I was witness to this.

I am now placed at my final destination where I am hoping I'll have a dignified death. It's quiet here, which is why I like it. I never really fancied the hustle and bustle of the city life. Here, I have the peace and quiet to collect my thoughts. It will take a few more "Dhobis" to make the world realise that my proper disposal and treatment is imperative. Until then, I will find solace in the fact that at least the awareness has manifested itself.



Diana Mukhamedzhanova  
Orenburg state University



College Category, Finalist

# Little Wish

*By, Chelsy Veronika Rema, 21 years, Daffodil International University, Bangladesh*

Mr. Dominic Francis is the Principal of a Missionary school. He always gives a round to the school during the Tiffin period. It was a part of his job.

One day he noticed a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade school student named Angela was picking wastes that other children threw recklessly and taking that wastes in to the dustbin. Mr. Dominic smiled looking at that. He had a good thought but forgot very soon. Next day he again noticed Angela was doing the same thing without any complain and innocently. Day by day, he was continuously noticing that girl Angela and was very curious.

One day Mr. Dominic went to that girl and asked "Little Angela, why are you always picking up thrown wastes? You're too small for this kind of work. And we've our staffs to do this. Please go and play like other kids do."

Angela replied, "No sir. I really want to do this."

Mr. Dominic Asked again, "But why?"

Angela said "Because, I want my elder brother to recover soon."

Mr. Dominic got surprised, "What happened to your brother, Little Angela?"

"My brother got hurt because of me sir." She said with teary eyes. "Some days before while we were playing I threw a banana peel on the field. My brother was running towards me without noticing that banana peel and unknowingly he step on that and he fell on the ground and his head was on a big stone. Blood was all over the stone."

Mr. Dominic was speechless and looking to Angela with sympathy in his eyes.

Angela turned her head down and said with a teary voice, "Mother says, brother is in coma. He is sleeping a long sleep. Mother says he may not get up for a while or never." Stopped for a moment and again she said "My parents are always crying. I know I have done a big mistake but they've not scolded me for once."

Mr. Dominic sat on his both knees and hugged Angela. Then he softly said, "Yes Little Angela. You've done a big mistake. The garbage should've thrown to the dustbin but it wasn't entirely your fault my dear.

"I want to play with my brother sir. I want him to wake up soon." She cried. That day Mr. Dominic was upset and thinking about Angela's word all day long.






On the very next day at the time of assembly Mr. Dominic came to the stage and began to talk with a bright smile in front of students....

"Good morning beloved students. As you all have classes, so I won't take a long time. I want to

share something with you all. Tomorrow I learned something big from a little angel. Let me tell you a short touching story.

My little angel is very small. She had a happy family with her parents and elder brother. One day without having any kind of thoughts she threw a banana peel on the ground but a little time later her brother who was running around the field, unknowingly step on that banana peel and fell on the ground. He got an injury very badly because there was a big stone and his head was banged on that stone.

I heard, that little angel's brother is in coma now and little angel is very guilty." He stopped for a moment and began to talk "don't you think it could happen to you or your family too. Dear students, what can we do for her? Can anyone suggest? She doesn't need financial support but a mentally support. Can we all everyday make a pray for her brother? If you all pray to the God, he may listen to you very quickly. And that little angel may be happy once again. When you start something good, everyone gets inspiration from that. So also let's make a small promise that we will always throw wastes in the dustbin and will always keep clean our ways. Because when you start, someone will follow and that someone could be everyone. " Mr. Dominic Smiled brightly. And there was also another smile in the assembly line. The smile was little Angela's.



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School Category, Finalist

# Greenish

By, *Aulia Rachman A, 16 years, SMAN 1 Kec. Suliki, Indonesia*

“Good morning, Ihsan. You should wake up. It’s already 5.30 am.” Say Ihsan’s virtual assistant.

Then Ihsan get up from his bed. It’s early in the morning but all of his body is wet because of his sweat.

“The sun isn’t show yet but why it is so hot?” Complaint Ihsan.

“Ugh. It looks like I should take a bath.” He continue.

He go to the bathroom and start to take a bath. The water is so cold but who cares? It’s so hot!

After take a bath, he starts to move. As usual, he goes to school every Monday until Saturday. Today is Tuesday, so he should move.

“Mom, Dad! I’ll go to school.” He says.

“Be careful, sweetheart!” His mother says.

Then he goes to school by bicycle.

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“Let’s go to the canteen!” Ihsan says to his bestfriend, Rahman.

“What about going to the library? Library is not hot like at the canteen. Then, I’m not hungry.” Rahman suggests.

“Hmm. Okay. Let’s go!”

At the library Rahman searches a novel because of its beauty. According to him, every novel have a beauty. It’s like an inner beauty. Meanwhile, Ihsan tries to search something else and much different from his best friend.



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Today is Rahman's favorite day at school because his subject today is chemistry so he's so excited. The topic today is about hydrocarbon and oil such as gasoline and kerosene. He also learns about the impact of using gasoline and the greenhouse effect.

This topic is very interesting for him because he always feels uncomfortable now because of Global Warming effect.

His chemistry teacher, Ms. Emma explains how the greenhouse effect occur, why do the earth getting hotter nowadays and also how to handle it. Instead she explains about oil, Ms. Emma explains more about the Global Warming. Rahman's eyes never see anything else except the whiteboard in front of his classroom.

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The bell is ringing. It means the student may take a rest. Rahman directly go to Ihsan's class to meet him. He walk fast with no doubt.

"San! Ihsan! Hey! I'm sure all of us already know about the Global Warming. This is the biggest problem ever for our lovely earth. Hmm, do you have any plan?" Rahman says confidently.

"Plan.. for what?" Ihsan ask confusedly. He can't understand what Rahman said because Rahman spoke too fast.

"Argghh. Okay, so it's about the Global Warming. You know, it is hotter. Also our earth from day to day is getting worse. Do you have any plan about it?" Rahman asks Ihsan.

"Hmm. Could we please talk about it later? I am so hungry now." Ihsan replies.

"Argh. Why don't you tell me first?"

"You asked me first."

Then they go to the canteen and have some meals.

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Their talking about ideas to solve Global Warming yesterday is going to be continued. They have some plans. First, they will tell the headmaster about it. Second, they will tell the chairperson of Students Association in their school. Third, they will make something like a campaign, a little campaign, but the big effect.

Today, they will talk about their plans to the headmaster, Mr. Reno. The last bell is ringing which means the student may go home. The last bell rings at 2.45 PM so they rush to the headmaster's office. Fortunately, Mr. Reno is still in his office this afternoon. Mr. Reno is the busiest human in that school that ever exist. Talking to him sometimes is like standing in line for a long time. But lucky for them, they don't have to wait.

Rahman asks "Sir, may we talk to you for a second, please?"

"Sure." Mr. Reno replies.

"Are we disturbing you, Mr. Reno? 'Cause you are very busy." Ihsan asks.

"Of course not. I have no appointment today. So let's talk in my office." Mr. Reno says.

After take a seat Mr. Reno asks to them "So, what is this about?"

They tell Mr. Reno about the problem and their plans. Mr. Reno looks very interested. After a long chit chat, the clock shows that now is 3.35 PM. It's almost a hour but the talk is not over yet. They also talk about the flood that happened 2 months ago in their area.

Ihsan asks Mr. Reno "So, can we make something else like do a campaign, Sir? Just a little. We will do like socialization or counseling to every class."

"Hmm. You can do that too. I will support you, guys. For sure. No doubt. But you have to work just by two of you because you know I am kind of busy so it will be hard for me to help you. But is it okay?" Mr. Reno asks.

"No, no. It's okay, Sir. We will try to be independent." Ihsan says.

"Ok, maybe that's all for now, Sir. We also have to go to the printing office to print some flyers and banners. Wish us luck, Sir." Rahman says.

They shake hands each other. Then, Rahman and Ihsan go to the printing office to start their campaign. Rahman and Ihsan feel so excited.

"I hope it will be not hot and also flood anymore in our area." Says Ihsan to Rahman.

"Yeah. Aamiin." Rahman replies.

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After one day, finally the banner and flyers is ready to be spread. After school, they start to spread the flyer. They do it on foot. Actually, they have spread it before at their class and also their school. The flyers contain some useful information like:

“Why our earth become worse?”

“Whose responsibilities to take care of earth” and many more.

There are many people that interested in it. Some people are screaming like “Hey! Let’s do some useful activity like this! These two kids need more attention from us!”. Ihsan and Rahman just smile to react to that kind of man.

But there are also some people who doesn’t agree with this. When the flyer arrives at his hand, he directly tear it up and throw it to the trash can. Ihsan and Rahman only can shook their head.

“Don’t him realise about it?” Asks Ihsan to Rahman.

After spread it to all over their area, the flyers are still exist like a hundred more. But they are so tired. They are so exhausted. They also need to rest. So they take a rest on their home.

Actually, Ihsan’s home and Rahman’s home are near so they make their own home in the middle of their home. In their home, there are many materials about “the broken earth”. While they are taking a rest, suddenly Ihsan says

“Rahman, I think we should grow some tress around here. My father have some seeds in my warehouse.”

“Hmm. That’s cool! I also have some fertilizer at my home. It will be a good idea! Let’s grab it! We plant it today!” Rahman replies.

They go to their home to grab some tools that will be helpful.

“Hey! Are you planting or not? It looks like you just dig the soil.” Ihsan says.

“Have you ever seen a flying sandal? Not a flying sneaker but sandal. Do you wanna see that?” Rahman says.

“Sorry, dude. Slow down. That was only a joke. Don’t take it too serious.” Ihsan says. He laughs out loud.

First, they plant a seed. And then two, three, four, and goes on. Finally now they already plant 20 seeds. They are now so excited because there will be more trees around them. And there will be no hot anymore.

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Time goes on. Time moves on. Now Rahman and Ihsan can see a glimmer of their hope. The Chairperson of Students Association also agree with them and ready to make an “army” that be called “Rubbish Army” or “Cleaning Army”. In accordance with the name, this “army” will take a roll as a rubbish police so that they will control the rubbish in their school, process the rubbish, and give a fine to every student who throw rubbish at random and then punish them.

Rahman and Ihsan also make an article to a local newspaper and magazine about what they have done. They scream to everyone about this campaign via media.

Surprisingly, their campaign is accepted by most society in their area. More than 98% society in their area accept their campaign. But of course there are also some people who doesn't care about this bad change.

Despite there are more than 98% people accept their campaign but they don't stop yet because they know there will be more problems for this earth.

\*\*\*

18 months have passed. There is no word ‘flood’ anymore in Rahman and Ihsan's dictionary. In their area now, word ‘flood’ just like something impossible, the myth. Now everyone put the rubbish into a trashcan. Their school is getting better. Their school is the number 1 for Healthy School competition. What a big achievement!

“My beloved student, it is because our work. Just because we put rubbish into a trashcan our school become a number 1! You can see that it is just a small act, but the impact? It is even bigger than what we imagined before!” Mr. Reno said enthusiastically. Every student dances like no one is watching them.

Now, Ihsan never get up from his bed sweating. Even now, he uses a blanket to sleep! Likewise, Rahman is never say “Canteen is hot” anymore. It happens because everyone care about their environment around them.

Actually, when Rahman and Ihsan went to the library, Ihsan read a book about “How to persuade people easily”. So that's why most people accept it easily. It's important anyways.

“I think we should paint our own home.” Ihsan says.

“Ok, let's paint it green!” Rahman suggests.

“That will be cool!”

After 3 hours painting, finally now their own home has become like a green house which is surrounded by 20 trees that they have planted before. They are so exited now.

Every single person who pass the road near their green house can not see clearly what is actually the color of their painting because their home is covered by the shadows of their 20 trees. And also actually Rahman and Ihsan only use a small paint cans so the color green is not clear enough to see. So, people just call this place "Greenish" because they see the paint looks like green from far.

"Look what we have done, Rahman" Ihsan says.

"Yeah, just because of this small act we can make this." Rahman says.

"The effect. The impact. Fortunately, we started it first. If we didn't start it, who would start? What would it be?" Ihsan replies.

-THE END-

School Category, Finalist

# In the beginning there was nothing, Then there was everything

*By, Vibha Ramachandran A, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE*

---XXX---

The planetarium was packed today. Usually, children would be running around and following their parents or students coming for a field trip with their teachers. The main attraction was the galaxy dome that showed us our universe in accurate details. Once you enter you would feel like as if you were in space looking at the millions of stars big and small, all the planets in our solar system. Everything beautiful or ugly to us on Earth would fade away once you see the stunning cosmos. I'm proud to say that our dome is one of the biggest tourist landmarks and I created it. But today it was packed for a different reason the famous scientist Stephen Hawking was visiting.

"Are you nervous?" asked Ben, my friend.

"No I'm just walking up and down for no reason" I replied with sarcasm.

"Don't be nervous Luna just think it's just another person" said Ben.

"But it's not just any other person it's Stephen Hawking for Pete's sake!" I exasperated.

After 10 minutes of calming down with the help of Ben the sounds of clicking started getting louder that only meant one thing. Professor Hawking was on his way. His appearance in reality was completely different from the pictures you see online. His smile that lightened up the entire place, his curiosity of the technology used and his enthusiasm for learning more made me feel like he was a close friend.

"Did you get the idea to create this dome?" Professor Hawking asked.

"Yes I did." I replied bashfully.

"What inspired you to create it?" he asked.

“Well... it started when I was a young kid. I was always enthusiastic about space and dreamed of going to space but I was going through some hard times back then” I said.

---XXX---

(Flashback)

“You are so worthless. Can’t you do anything right? No wonder your parents abandoned you and left you in that shabby place you call ‘home’” they said. They kept hitting and punching even though I tried to defend myself I failed.

“Hey what are you kids doing there!” a teacher screamed.

They ran away leaving me in such a pathetic condition. Tears streamed down my face and hiccupping I looked up to see my favorite teacher Ms. Daisy looking down at me. She immediately took me to the clinic. She didn’t say anything to me on the way to the clinic. I knew that she was upset, the silence killing me slowly. Even after the nurse treated my wounds she kept quiet and started leading me somewhere.

“Ms. Daisy where are you taking me?” I asked.

“Don’t talk and follow me.” She replied.

She took me to an empty classroom and sat across me.

“Sit down.”, she said and I did not want to make the situation worse.

“Tell me what’s going on”

“Nothing Ms. Daisy”

“Then explain why those students were beating you up”

I remained silent.

“Is it because of your parents?” she sighed. “I told you Luna to ignore those people, they don’t know what you’re going through.”

I remained silent.

"You aren't going to listen to me are you?" She sighed again. "Luna, what you're going through now is just a phase trust me it will all heal with time you just need to beat it. Okay let me tell you a story about the universe to encourage you."

This piqued my interest.

"The universe wasn't like how it is now. It's like what Carl Sagan said "if you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the universe". According to the big bang theory there was nothing, no milky way no galaxy nothing. The universe came into being in just one single moment- a cosmic explosion that gave birth to numerous black holes, dark matter, dark energy and other things that we haven't discovered. It gave birth to galaxies, stars, moon, sun, planets, oceans and solar systems. Remember Luna time is always constant, there was a time before you and there will be time after you it will never cease to exist. Time created something beautiful as the universe and it also created you. You are part of our beautiful universe Luna so be proud and create a big impact on our world."

---XXX--- (Flashback over)

" I never forgot what my teacher told me that day. She had such a huge impact in my life. It was because of her I wanted to pursue Astronomy" I said.

Professor Hawking just smiled and said "Well you have changed the world of Astronomy and given an insight for the future generations to know the unknown."

The smallest act of kindness that my teacher showed me that day changed my entire life and made me who I am today.

College Category, Finalist

## When dream breaks....

*By, Jawad Ahmed Randhawa A, 22 years, University of Gujrat hafiz hayat campus, Pakistan*

Najma was on her way to college, with great dreams in her eyes. On her way back to college she was thinking about his poor father who works from dawn to dusk to pay for her fee. She was the only child of his poor father and she has the aim to work as a son. She was standing on the bus stop; suddenly a boy came and offered her a ride. She ignored that rich guy but the boy keeps on following her on daily basis.

She was so innocent to respond to that guy. But he was following her like a shadow. She was not sharing it with his dad and mom, because she had a fear that they might ask her to stop going to college.

Days keep on passing, one day Najma stopped and ask the guy what does he wants from her. The boy claimed that he has fallen in love for her from the day he saw her and he wants to marry her. This confession developed soft corner in Najma's heart for that guy.

After going home that day, she kept on thinking that what's wrong to marry a guy with long car and high status. She lived her life in poor circumstances and she thought that by keeping relationship with rich guy she will be able to live life of her dreams.

Next day, on the bus stop guy stopped his car and asked for her reply and she hesitantly said yes to him. From that day Najma's life was changed,



she started to date him. She went to the restaurants, she never imagined. Instead of going to college she used to go to hotels to spend time with Saim. She was all caught up in newfound feelings of love. She stopped chasing her dream of study but following only her heart. She thought she is just living a fairy tale.

Although she did not like the thought of having a secret relationship but she knew if she would share it with her parents, they might kill her for breaking their blind trust on her. In her mind, there was anxiety of getting caught by her parents but she selfishly kept this relationship packed up in her heart.

One day, she asked that guy to send marriage proposal for her, because she wanted to make things official. Saim started to laugh and said I was just passing time with you; I was never in love with you. You sold yourself to me just for the sake of enjoyment.

After listening to all this, she was all busted into tears. She went home and cried bitterly into her pillow. It took her days to get back to normal life. Now she knew the fact that only she can make her dreams come true, no prince charming is coming to change her life. She decided to never see the face of Saim again.

But

She was wrong, after few days Saim started to blackmail her. He demanded to spend time with him and his friends. She was ignoring him totally but he blackmailed her to put his private pictures on internet and social media. He tried to torture her mentally in every possible way. She was a joke in front of his friends.

She couldn't bear the thought of losing her family and their respect. She knew that if her poor father get to know about all this, he would never be able to



face the people of society; her mother will die of shame. She knew that his uncle might kill her on name of honor killing. She has no way out.

She pleaded a lot to Saim and his friends to show some mercy. But no one listened to her. No one tried to understand her pain. Instead, her phone calls and requests were reason of Saim and his friends laughters.

So a girl with big aims, decided to quit her life and then a Najma died with her dreams buried inside her heart. Not just Najma died, only “SON” of his father also died, dreams of her old mother also died.

A small entertainment for Saim destroyed not only an ambitious girl and its dreams but also the trust of a farther to send her girl to college.

If the play guys like Saim will keep on playing with girls, then no father will have the courage to send her girl to college or job. No father will think of her girl as his “SON”. A small act, created a big impact.

College Category, Finalist

# When dream breaks....

*By, Dr Anum Rahman, Pakistan*

As he concluded his presentation with a broad smile and a wink at his partner, the phone rang. He looked at the screen and put it on silent mode before talking the leave of their hosts and rushing towards their parked vehicle at the reception bay.

They hurled their bags on the back seat and jumped into the front seats to hurry towards the next destination. He switched the ignition on, pulled the seat belt, put his phone on the wind screen cradle and started to get back to the recent missed call. His partner gave him a look of surprise. He looked at him and smiled, meanwhile the call tone transferred on to the stereo of the car. Suddenly someone answered and said ‘Asalamoalaikom Sir! ‘

He replied, Walaikomasalam Siddiqui sahib, I am sorry I missed your call earlier as I was busy in a meeting. Tell me, I am all yours now.

The person on the other side of the phone replied, ‘No problem sir, I understand. Sir! I hope you have read my message about the tuition fee of that orphan girl which is supported by our charity organization. Tomorrow is the last date of fee submission else she will miss her term. Though I have

asked couple of other donors as well but as the deadline is approaching fast, I have to bother you for

this. ‘

He replied, It’s ok, I can understand and I am glad you have called me else my hectic lifestyle always

make me late to get back to people. How much is required?

Siddiqui replied: ‘130,000 Sir.’

He Said, OK, I am going to transfer it now through wire. Are your details still the same?

Siddiqui: ‘Yes Sir.’

‘Stay on the line while I log in to my banking and transfer.’ He pulled the tabs on the phone, popped

out the banking app, scrolled the existing details of Siddiqui, pinched in the numbers and made the

online transfer in a flash. Done Janab. Please remember me in your kind prayers. Allah Hafiz.

Siddiqui: 'JazakAllah khyr Asghar sahib. Wasalam'

He Smiled, said Wasalam and cut the line.

When he looked on to his left, Samad was ogling him with his hand under his chin. Samad asks: 'What was this? Do you think of yourself some Edhi?' He smiled, drove off and replied, well, certainly not.

Samad: Than what? Why do you waste your money this way all the time?' he smiled again and replied, I don't waste any money. I just invest them. Samad: What investment? What does it give you to splash your cash like this on unknown people?' He replied, Well, I may not know the people and they may not know me but I know the satisfaction and pleasure of God through these acts. Beside all this, this is our moral and national duty as well to lend helping hands in order for our communities and country to prosper with cooperation and little acts of kindness.

Samad: You live in the world of fairy tales and books, your contributions can not change the society

and country. Our Government is corrupt, our institutions are crippled. It's their job to do it as they have resources. Individuals like you can't change this scenario and lift up the society. We are just minions. Unless the Governments want to change and fix issues, we cannot do anything.'

He looked at him and smiled. You know Samad! You are partially right that Government should do their job but partially wrong that we should do our job and put our share in the betterment of our society and communities. We all are part of this society and we all have the moral obligation to play

our roles in whatever and whichever capacities Allah has blessed us with.

Samad, You need to think with open mind with an ounce of compassion.

He kept talking: We are living in a "me first" type of society. This notion of selfishness is what has caused damage to our society and country in the 1st place. For many of us, we are taught from the cradle to "look out for number one!" and many of us do just that whether we need it or not but our

goal is that we have to acquire the riches. We are self-focused and self-possessed. An unfortunately majority of country population finds it very difficult to see beyond themselves to look at those around them.

Our problem is, we lack empathy because we have maddened by numbers and material. How often do we act without considering the effect of our actions on those around us? We as part of the

community must act collectively as every action has a ripple effect. Be it positive or negative. It's like

throwing a pebble in the lake. Pebble is very small but has the capacity of making big ripples. Same goes for investing into our communities. You sow flowers, you will reap flowers. What will you make of the community in which you live? Will you be a kind contributor or a self-centered instigator? And what does kindness mean, anyway? And remember, its swing and roundabout in this

world. Every action has a reaction and is bound to affect you directly or indirectly. Help a child to get

education or skill and become useful to the society or disown him to become a criminal to haunt your society. So the choice is yours.

Samad: 'Yar you are just too philosophical, it doesn't work that way. Now if I tell you that this Siddiqui and tuition fees is all a fraud?'

He smiled and said, well you have a point but I have made sure that Siddiqui is a man of integrity so

he would use the funds honestly and appropriately and even if he doesn't, Allah looks at my intentions and HE will sort it out.

Samad: let's see how it dishes out but I will find out what he did to it.

Asghar smiled and said, Ok, let's see.

A year had passed. One day Samad was passing by and saw a sign board of Mr. Siddiqui's organization. The memory flashed back and he was intrigued to find out what had happened to Asghar's donation and weigh its impact.

He sent his visiting card to Mr Siddiqui who came out of the office to receive him and shook his hand

warmly and took him in. Offered him seat and asked for tea.

Samad initiated the conversation by saying that Asghar talk very high of you Mr Siddiqui.

Mr Siddiqui: Well, he himself is a very good man and a regular contributor to our noble causes without ever inquiring and I am glad he has sent you to do the audit.

Samad: Siddiqui Sahib, Last year Asghar made a transaction of 130,000 to you in my presence. Can I

ask you what happened to it?

Siddiqui: (with an obligatory smile replied) Sir, let me get Asghar sahib's file.

After a while Siddiqui came back with a file flipping the pages. He then stopped at one page and said.

Samad sahib! Here is the breakdown of that amount.

Samad took it and started to read while Siddiqui kept talking. Sir! This was a wondrous instance. I clearly remember it. Actually it took a while for the transaction to appear in our account due to technical issues and I was almost hopeless and the child too was upset and praying to Allah. Then at

the dying hours of the day, another donor brought us cash and we managed to submit the fees.

The transaction as you can see on the statement slip was cleared in next week.

I called the student and said to her that amount is cleared and if she wants we can put it in her wallet for next year fees. But the student refused saying that Allah arranged for me this year and HE

will surely arrange for me for next year. You should spend it on other deserving people.

That time I had two young boys in need of jobs at my organization and had no idea what to do to help them get on the ladder of life. Suddenly an idea flashed my mind and I took them both and the

amount and went to a supplier of goods. Bought them some stuff and taught them how to sell it forward to houses and other people. Now those two boys have quadrupled their business and formed a strategic partnership with a national supplier of different domestic goods. This has enabled

them to employ 5 other young people to work and earn their living with dignity. Sir, you know, 5 people's job mean, providence and life of dignity for 5 families. It's amazing how one lending hand can lift many families, directly or indirectly.

Samad was reading the report of the said project and was inspired and without realizing, mumbling

the words of Asghar.

" We all are part of this society and we all have the moral obligation to play our roles in whatever and whichever capacities Allah has blessed us with. We as part of the community must act collectively as every action has a ripple effect. Be it positive or negative. It's like throwing a pebble in

the lake. Pebble is very small but has the capacity of making big ripples. Same goes for investing into

our communities. You sow flowers, you will reap flowers. What will you make of the community in which you live? Will you be a kind contributor or a self-centred instigator? And what does kindness mean, anyway? And remember, It's swing and roundabout. Every action has a reaction and is bound to affect you directly or indirectly. Help a child to get education or skill to make him useful to the society or disown him to become a criminal to haunt your society. So the choice is yours. Samad certainly had made his choice and was asking Mr Siddiqui to take him on board because he has now understood that small acts have bigger impacts.

School Category, Finalist

# Result of Good Deeds

*By, Sandip Kumar Paul, 15 years, Rajshahi Education Board Govt. Model School And College*

The day was Wednesday. Maruf was going to his university as usual. Everyday he gets into the bus from the place named 'Gaochia'. Generally the bus of the university comes there at 8am. And his class starts from 9am. On that day, he had a class presentation in his class which was very necessary for passing in the exam. So, he reached Gaochia at 7.45am and started waiting at there for the bus. It was almost 8am. He saw the bus coming. But suddenly it started raining. He didn't have an umbrella. So, he got drenched.

In that morning, many persons were also going to their offices and other working places. So, not to get drenched they started looking for a dry place. Like that an old person was also looking for a dry place. The old man tried to go to the opposite side of the road but he didn't noticed that a car was coming at a fast speed from his left side. For both of their(Driver and old man) carelessness, the old man confronted a crash. The spot remained silent for some moment. Only the sound of rain had heard. The old man was seen to lay down on the road in a very bad situation. The car driver had run away with his car. Everybody kept looking at the old man but nobody took a step. Maruf alone went near the old man for help. He figured out that the old man was senseless and blood was bleeding from his head badly. The person needed to admit in the hospital as soon as possible. But on the other side, his university bus was about to go away. He was in great trouble. He couldn't figure out what to do. But at last he decided to take the old man to the hospital though he knew very well that without attending the presentation he would fail in the examination for sure.

He managed to admit the old man in the hospital. The doctor told him that much blood had bled from the body of the old man. So, he needed blood. The doctor also told him that the blood group needed to be B+. Luckily Maruf had the same group of blood. So, he donated the blood. After some hours when the patient got his sense back, the doctor ensured that he was out of danger. The patient thanked Maruf for his help without which he could have died. The old man also gave Maruf the phone number of his son. Maruf called the son of the old man and told him everything.

When everything was al-right, Maruf went to the university to meet his teacher. When he went in front of the room of the teacher, he found that he was working on some official documents. Maruf took his permission and went in. The teacher looked at him with an angry look. Maruf knew that the teacher noticed that he hadn't attended the examination. He hesitated to say anything. But at the moment he tried, the teacher ordered him to stop. The teacher said," You don't need to explain anything. Actually at today morning I was in the bus too. So, I have seen everything. I have also wanted to help you but if I did that then most of the students would struggle because they had their presentation. So, don't worry. You are passed in the presentation test." By hearing this Maruf's mind filled with joy. He thanked the teacher in all ways he could.



It was almost evening. Maruf was returning home. He was relaxed because he knew that everything is al-right now. Though it was a very tough day for him. The sun was ready to set. The environment was overwhelmed with greenery. Maruf understood that spring had come. The nature was colorful because there was green almost everywhere. The color of nature also colored his mind.

How have you BEEen?

# BUZZING BY TO SAY HELLO!

Do Check Out Our New Website,  
[www.mysfe.weebly.com](http://www.mysfe.weebly.com) and learn  
about Sfe. Chapters and start  
making a difference in your  
community.





College Category, Finalist

# Janakpur to Kathmandu

By, *Promisha Mishra, 26 years, Ramsarup Ramsagar Multiple Campus , Nepal*

*Regular phone calls were not sufficient for us then, I just wanted to meet him. Because this time if I missed to meet him then I won't get a chance even to see him at least for 2 years because my best friend, Nripesh was going Canada for his further studies. Travelling to Kathmandu was full of risks but for everything you have to pay something. So this time I prepared my bag full of risks. In order to reach Kathmandu I have to be at Bardibas first, which seemed nearly impossible due to Madhesh Band for some kind of protest. Somehow, one of my friend agreed to drop me. We were supposed to leave Janakpur at 4:30 AM, so that we can travel safely. I did the same and finally after a ride of 1 hour I was at Bardibas, where I felt that now I can sure be at Kathmandu after some hours. My friend returned. We waved goodbye to each other and I did not forget to thank him.*

*I have been working at Mahottari since a year, so the bus owner recognized me and gave me the ticket for the front seat on A side easily. I asked him about who is sharing the seat with me. He gave a look at ticket book and answered with smile, "Madam, it's a girl, nearly 20 years old, she had written her name as Swapna." I entered the bus, there she was. She was at window seat, I took the next one beside her.*

*I was excited. I called Nripesh. He picked. Before he even speaks a single word, I told him "Hey! I am at Bardibas now and I took the bus, so now it's sure that we are going to meet before you leave Nepal." He was too happy after hearing that and wished me to have a safe journey. It was one of the happiest moment of my life so I decided to celebrate it with some Cadbury. I picked it up from my purse, and after unwrapping it I asked to have some to Swapna. After all she was the partner of my journey. She had it with a smile and thanked me. Suddenly she asked me "Are you headed to Kathmandu?"*

*I answered, "May be not today. Actually I have to meet my sis Pragati at Narayanghat, so after meeting her I will go there tomorrow." At the instant her face became dark. I couldn't get it.*

*I asked her, "Are you okay?"*

*Politely she answered, "Yeah! I am. "*

*But her face had a very different expression and I had no idea how to handle the situation. I again gave her a smile but there seemed no change at her facial expression. She asked me for my name. I answered, "Promisha."*



*After a while she told, "Actually I am afraid of men. So I asked you that whether you are travelling with me to Kathmandu or not. I will feel safe if you can travel to Kathmandu."*

*I knew that most of the girls feel unsafe when the beside seat is taken by unknown men. But she really seemed frightened. It was not a casual expression for any girl. My curiosity did not let me to be silent. I asked her, "Why are you so much afraid with that simple issue? Later we have to work with men at office. Everywhere in the world we need to face men. You are afraid for just a single journey of some hours. A girl should not be afraid ever at least of men."*

*She answered, "Yeah! I know all these. But I am afraid of men always, either at my home or other places."*

*I was shocked. Her part of the sentence "at my home" stroke my mind. I asked her, "Why should you be afraid at your home. I am not getting your point dear. Men are not always bad. I am headed to Kathmandu to meet my friend and he is a boy. So don't be afraid ever."*

*She answered, "I heard you talking on phone. That sounds good when a girl is not afraid of men and trust them equally. But everyone is not lucky as much as you. Sometimes they have very bitter experience only because they are girl and I am one of them. So I trust an animal too if it is only female."*

*My curiosity aroused with her answer. I asked again, "Hey sis, Can I have a chance to know why you are afraid of males? Your reason cannot be a simple a reason. So, if you allow I want you to share with me your reason. May be I can help you and I can introduce you to some males who really respect female more than them and they don't just show it. They really mean it from their heart."*

*She nodded. After a minute, she told me that she will share everything if and only if I will travel to Kathmandu with her. Without a delay of second, I told her, "Ok, sure. I will meet my sister while returning."*

She started.

My love story started when I was 13 and a student of class 7. He was my crush when I had entered Samprada English Boarding School. You know, the best part of adolescent age is your crush proposing you. Before I could think something I accepted his proposal. Later I realized that I was in love. We started to enjoy our relationship as others do. We used to bring chocolates for each other and shared it while talking. He was a complete science lover and I had never interest in any topic of science. But we enjoyed our company. The best days continued for a year.

I never told my mom about my relationship. One of our neighboring aunty complained my mom that she found me at Children Park with a boy. My mom inquired me about that either I have been to Children park. I answered her that I have been there with my friend and he was a boy. My mom advised me not to be anywhere with any boy because the society had problem with it and later it will be problem for my family when they would search a life partner for me. I did not care her words because if the society has problem they should search for their solution and I have found my life partner who loved me. So I neither stopped to love him nor having fun with him.

Later my mom had to face a lot of questions from the neighbors. One day my mom asked me, "Is there a guy in your life?" I was confused if I tell them the truth I will be punished and if I cheat them I won't be able to face myself. So I did the worst decision of my life instantly. I told her the truth. She slapped me. I had no idea how to handle the situation. She asked me about the boy. I told her everything. Mom seemed angrier when I told her about him. With a very loud voice she scolded me, "I can't believe this my daughter loves a non-Brahmin boy. You know better that you are born in a Brahmin family and they have to follow the rules of their ancestors. And the strictest rule is that they are neither allowed to love non-Brahmins nor to marry them and the daughters

who don't obey it the family calls them whore. Either you stop it instantly or I will punish you badly if it is continued."

I was never interested in cast system. Neither had I had much idea about it. I just knew that I belonged from a Brahmin family and I was the daughter of a widow of a Brahmin family. My mother herself couldn't wear any colorful sari or use any cosmetic just because her husband was not alive. I felt tortured with this Brahmanism where woman had no life without their men. After a while I realized that my love is non-Brahmin. I was happy.

I stopped meeting him. But I was in contact through phone calls. One day our maternal grandfather came to visit us and he found me chatting with him. He complained my mom and strictly ordered her to take me out of the city so that I won't be able contact him. Mom told her that my studies will be disturbed but he advised her that your daughter had committed a crime and that was loving a guy. She couldn't afford me study at other cities so they decided to take me at either at maternal or paternal house at village. Before I could defend they took me to maternal place. Later I realized it was a village where no phone contacts or any kind of contacts with him. I cried a lot but none of them was ready to hear that. My life was bound within the walls of that house.

Mom dropped me there and returned back to her place. My tears did not count anything to her. So, I concluded "She is a Brahmin woman bound with oaths and bondages who delivered me." Motherhood was just a single word there. I could see love for me in my mother's eyes but her ears had not been able to hear my voice. I wanted to make her understand, "Mom, this is Brahmanism." I knew she loved me more than herself but she had no choice as me.

It was quite difficult for me to adjust with that family but I had no choice. I just cried for him and my mom. The persons who loved me were no more in my life. They were away from me. I kept crying but no solution. After a week, my maternal uncle arrived there during holiday from his job. He used to visit me in my room when I acted like sleeping. One morning he asked me, "Do you like him so much?" and suddenly he touched my hands. I felt uncomfortable. I tried to pull my hands but couldn't success. I asked him to leave my room but his hands were approaching my cheeks. I was not feeling good. I told him, "Uncle! Please leave me." He replied, "I will love you more than him and buy you more gifts." I had no idea what was going. He touched to private parts of my body. I was feeling some kind of pain but I couldn't do anything. I kept silent.

Later It was regular with me. He used to visit almost all night my room and put his hands inside my t-shirt and played with my breasts and I felt pain then and even now. He tried to kiss me so many times but somehow I have always been able to not let him kiss me. I was abused each night but my mom had misconception that I was in a safe place. Almost all the time I prayed, "Please! Not today, not again with me." I tried to share it with my aunt but could not. I never had words to share it. I did not know how to share it and what could be the best words to say it properly. I tried so many times to share it with the family but I never been successful. There were so many members in my family who were literally dedicated to care me but each night I was sexually abused.

Once having some courage I told part of these things to my grandmother. But the reactions were opposite. She scolded me as much as she can. I still remember her words they were, "I can't believe you are my daughter's daughter. Look at her she did not talk with men even she is working in office. You are a whore. You loved a guy who was not Brahmin and we gave you place to live and you have started to ruin my family." She even threatened me that if I tried to share it with someone then I will be punished badly. I was punished each night so I did not have courage for more punishment. I kept silent. My silence and my tears were my best friends those days.

Almost after a month mom came to meet me. She brought some gifts for me. I did not accept a single gift. Because gifts had the different meaning in my life those days. Gifts meant to me first

pain then gift. My uncle too used to bring chocolates for me each night and left it there after his entertainment. Mom was transferred to her central office at Kathmandu for 5 years so she had come to take me there.

Just a month of my life made me understand the relation between men and pain for girls. So, when I see any men near me I just associate it with pain. I tried so many times to say it to my mom but never been able there too. I always thank god that my father died during an accident when I was developing inside my mother's uterus and my had no child other than me. Especially she does not have any son. I feel good that there are no men at my home. And I feel better that I am a student of Padma Kanya Campus.

*Almost both of us were in tears when she ended her story. I kissed her forehead and travelled to Kathmandu.*



IT'S TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE

# LET'S BE AWARE

**KNOW THE SYMPTOMS AND  
GET CHECKED UP TODAY!  
DO A SELF EXAM.**



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College Category, Finalist

# Your word is your world

By, M. Arief Billah, 20 years, Sampoerna University- Jakarta, Indonesia

I live in the small village inside a country which surrounded with the beauty of lies. Stayed

with parent that still have a strong believe with traditional norm, which could not nicely accept the

use of technology. When I see most of people around me have communicate through their

smartphone, but my family is preferred to speak through a really old handphone with only has

function to call and to send a message. That is not because my parent cannot buy that technology,

but because they believed that, cell phone is much more enough to communicate. It is something

weird to see when there are a lot of people which compete each other to have a high-tech of gadget,

especially smartphone with all variant of applications, and the only may parent that use the old

one. The only family member who use smartphone is me, because I am the only child of my parent.

“Honey, put your phone away while you are eating!” My mother asked.

“Wait a minute Mom, my friend is chatting me now.” I answered

“is it really important? Now you have a dinner with your parent, that is the most important!”

My father said.

“Okay Dad, I’m so sorry. It was chatting about homework for tomorrow, so I need that information.” I answered.

That was one of my uncounted lies that I have given to my parents. That was a chat from my



new girlfriend, and it was about our date next week. These two weeks are my academic holiday

since tomorrow is Christmas and New year. I was lucky to have girlfriend during my senior high

school, even I am an introvert person. It is really hard for introvert person to have direct communicate with the others, except from chat which is more comfortable for me. By using

chatting application freely and easily to use, I can talk to my friend without any weird feeling as

an introvert person, except for my girlfriend. She just wants to chat me if our holiday has come,

because we cannot meet each other. Direct communication is really necessary for her because she

can see my face expression while we are together.

This story was happily happened after my nightmare during my first year in senior high school as introvert. I was accepted in one of famous senior high school in my city, and it was a

boarding school. One of regulation from that school is no phone and other gadgets during the first

year. For me as introvert who really addicted to my smartphone since my junior high school, it felt

like I lost one of my hands.

“During this first year, we will shape you to be an active and creative student who have good social impact to the others, especially among your friends and your seniors.”

Dormitory Coordinator said.

“Sir, can you give some reason why we need to have this regulation? How if our parent need to communicate us here?” One of new student asked.

“Your parent is allowed to visit you once a month, so it will be fine.” Dormitory Coordinator answered.

Again, this is my true nightmare has come up. The first school day, I just introduced my name

and sit silently on the corner of the class. Three full days I only keep silent during the class, and

act like an actor who are really busy with reading some random books, although I did not even

know what I had read. The next day, there was a discussion to choose a class leader through the

voting. That day was the beginning of my reason to hate democracy, because it is the first day of

my job as class leader. Live as an introvert is really hurt, where extrovert person just took an

advantage from my weakness. On the same day, I have promised to myself, that I would try to be

extrovert person, even I know it would not be easy. I just need to change my habits.

“Hi Bro, why are you looking to yourself in front of that mirror?” My roommate asked.

“Nope, I just try a new hair style.” I answered.

That was included in the list of my uncounted lies, because actually I just prepared to lead the

class discussion tomorrow about sport competition for this weekend. Speaking in front a public

for an introvert, it seemed like you jumped to the river even without knowing how to swim. Small

note book had become my little friend, where I could write every single thing that I needed to talk.

It was also very useful to decrease my nervous while I was speaking.

“Okay guys, today we need to discuss about which sport competition that we will choose for next week. There will be basketball, volley, and futsal.” I said while reading my small notebook.

“How about basketball? Most of our classmates have a taller body rather than other class.

It will give much advantage for us.” My classmate said.

“That is a nice idea, but even we have that advantage, we still need to practice because skill also important. If there is no other opinion, we will choose basketball and tomorrow the practice will be started.

Now let’s comeback to my real timeline. This has been my second year, where I still need to stay in the same class with the same job as a class leader until my last year. My little friend had come back to me since the regulation had over. However, I just realize that my love for my smartphone had decrease significantly. It was more comfortable to bring small note book rather than to hold my smartphone, especially when you are together with your friend. As people know that, smartphone without internet is just like a scientific calculator. Small notebook is better rather than smart phone for introvert especially for me, because I can read what inside my mind directly.

The most common problem for introvert person to talk, is they do not know what they want to say.

“Guys, have you feel any difference from your first day come to this school? Do you realize that you have lost willingness to play your gadget? Which one is better, playing gadget or speaking to your friend?” My teacher asked during flag ceremony.

“Speaking to our Friends!” all students said loudly.

If we realize that now days, gadget has taken people’s world. Start from wakeup in morning, the first thing that they took was their gadget. Gadget has become human’s new friend, until they forget that the true meaning of “friendship” has disappeared. Gadget has betrayed the social contract, where people cannot live without other people. People has chosen to type on their gadget rather than to speak. Can you imagine that if you put your smartphone in your pocket, and start to speak with people beside you? Maybe on that day, you will find the person who are the best listener for every story in your live, like what I have got from my girlfriend.



College Category, Finalist

# From Nirvana to Inferno

*By, Martin Iryayo, 28 years, Yogyakarta State University (UNY), Indonesia*

In the forest so called “**The Big First**”, all families lived in a good climatic condition, the weather was fair, and best attractive landscape was glistening in the forest. The latter was very green with long trees, all kinds of animals were there and there could not be a complete shortage of food because the forest was rich on various grazable plants that could help in case of temporary famine. The animals like buffalo, elephant, and other herbivores were very cheerful of the lifestyle in the forest. Furthermore, when the sunny period came, all animals were free from high temperature as the sun’s strong rays could not penetrate intensely. However, small animals’ families were always victims because whenever big animals felt hungry they took them as their preys. As the time rushed up, some endangered families started selling their homes and flee to other places. Mrs. Deer and her family moved to Savana district, Mr. Impala joined her daughter’s family living in Asia, and Madam Partridge and her husband went to the bush close to human monde. Unfortunately, the majority of endangered families remained in the same place due to the lack of any other alternative.



Mr. Hare, the one who never thought of fleeing, always complained to the king of the forest about the mistreatment and persecution by big animals to small ones, “they do not give value to us; they consider us served food by God but they have to keep in mind that without small animals the life in the Big First cannot continue” He claimed. The main cause of complaints was that, one day, Madam Hare gave birth to five offspring, that day Mr. was not at home because he had an urgent assignment in the tobacco plantation of Ir. Hyena. Meanwhile, the son and the daughter of Mr. Leopard came and eat Madam Hare and all five newborns. Since then, Mr. Hare got angry but he had nothing to do about the incident as long as he had not directed mechanism to revenge.

Next to the house of Mr. Hare, there was wild chicken coops, they laid eggs inside there every day. One night, the anaconda, the chief of reptiles came and swelled up all the eggs including those that were about to be hatched. Before the chief Anaconda got close to the coop, the wild chicken tried to resist but all in vain, they also tried to close the doors and windows of the coops but fail because the Chief Anaconda came with a big hummer to destroy the whole village. Some of wild chicken fled to the trees others got injured during the incident. From that day, all wild chicken mourned for three days with deepest anger and sorrow but they could not do the same destructing act in return.

After three decades of persecution, it came to pass that Madam Rat got pregnant. Six months later, she felt somehow sick with the symptoms of feeling dizzy and then vomiting; it was clear that something wrong was in her womb. She waited for some minutes to see whether there would be some positive improvement but the situation got worse as the day was running out. Finally, she made decision to go to healthcare center for medical assistance. That morning, she went alone because her husband had been in the workshop, with other small animals about the “**Small Animal Rights**”, and that was her first pregnancy since married with Mr. Rat. There was no other person except her cousin staying home to look after and find grasses for the family cattle. On her way to the healthcare center, she passed by Ir. Hyena’s tobacco plantation and lay down, under the big and large leaf of tobacco, and sleep because she was very tired.

On the same day, Mr. Elephant whose house was next to Ir. Hyena’s den held a party because his son got the first trophy after participating in the competition of eating; he ate ten kilograms of grasses mixed up with small plants, bushes, fruit twigs, and tree bark and roots. Around 9 AM, Madam Elephant went to pick the invitees from the bus station because most of them did not know the new location since Mr. Elephant’s family moved to a new house. Arriving near to Ir. Hyena’s tobacco plantation, Madam elephant saw Madam Rat sleeping under tobacco leaf with excessive thirst. When she heard the footsteps of Madam Elephant, she started asking for help with some water, unfortunately Madam Elephant did not give a damn; she treaded on Madam Rat and squash her instead. The only reason that made Madam Elephant crushed Mr. Rat’s wife was that the latter was sleeping in her way to the bus station.

On his way back home, Mr. Rat came to get information about her wife death, when taking some beer in the bar of Mrs. Porcupine. He rushed home and ask Mr. Hare because he knew that Mr. Hare worked in the tobacco plantation. After meeting Mr. Hare, Mr. Rat got full information

about what had happened to her wife and the reason behind. All the rats gathered, accompanied by Mr. Hare, to plan vengeance; Madam Elephant did not even remember that what she had done to Mr. Rat's family would have negative impact. During the discussion, Mr. Hare suggested eating all the roots of every tree where they expected any elephant's and leopard's families. Tonight, all the rats invited each other and eat any tree roots; all grasses were eaten. After accomplishing their target, Mr. Rat's, Mr. Hare's families and their friends directly left **The Big First** forest. As consequence, all trees in the forest started drying.

One week later, Ir. Hyena, the very famous farmer of the whole population, came back from the seminar called **Animal Go to Farm**. The next day after his arrival, he wanted to visit his tobacco plantation, he expected much money from it as usual, unfortunately all tobacco trees were already dry due to the lack of rain. From that morning to the evening, Ir. Hyena was unstoppably crying because he thought there would no other way to survive and pay school fees for his children who were studying at **Amazon University**. Visiting another plantation, the situation was very worse because all leaves were dry. Ir. Hyena seemed losing his mind; he took more than five tobacco leaves for smoking purpose as a way to escape from unbearable problems. Agricultural problems created by the lack of rain as consequence of the destruction of the forest, which had been contributing much to the prosperity of the **Big First**, was not only for big farmers but also small ones.

After ninety-six hours, Ir. Hyena never slept at all due to the sorrowful life condition of his business. Each day, he smoked five tobacco leaves to control his anger. At the fifth evening, Ir. Hyena made a fire to smoke; he made that fire outside his den. Prior to finishing all the leaves, he started feeling sleepy and directly fell down. After a couple of minutes, the fire became very big with long fire flames. At the same time, the wind was strongly blowing which caused some fire blazes to be scattered all around in the dry grasses. The more the wind was blowing, the more the scattered fire blazes grew to make enormous fire. Shortly, the forest started burning and ruin all the residences were destroyed, and all animals that were in **the Big First** died except those that hid underground.

The consequences of the forest burning were expanding day in day out. People living near to the forest started suffering because their crops productivity rate was hugely becoming low. Besides that, the human being monde became unstable because many of them had been getting vegetable and some honey from the forest before its destruction. Little children, the sick, and old

people were losing a lot because they could not find some traditional medicine from the forest any more. People started suffering the malnutrition because any crop they tried to grow could not germinate. The price for farming products tripled, the export rate dipped, and most of the farming based industries started closing their doors which caused starvation and wildlife complete instability. If Madam Elephant did not underestimate Madam Rat, all these problems could not be happening.

College Category, Finalist

# BLACK BUCK AND IT'S UNEXPECTED ADVENTURE

*By, V.M. EBIN NAVIS, Loyola College, India*

In a part of Asia, a dry forest with lot of animals and birds having a hard life without a good environment. Life becomes uneasy without good food, water, air. there was a New born Black Buck travelling along with his family for a long journey, (The blackbuck is known as the Indian antelope, a kind of a deer found in India) along with the black buck there were lot of animals and birds were travelling, all together there were a group of thousand along with his family, the New born Black Buck was looking light yellow in colour and looking cute and feeling hard to walk and trying to jump as well. Since it was summer season and the sun shine made the Black Buck to feel thirsty since the whole Black Buck group was moving towards a particular direction the young Black Buck cannot find water anywhere in their way so out of curiosity and thirst the young Black Buck went out of the group in search of water, after an hour somehow the young Black Buck finds few fresh water near a small natural water tank and tasted it, after drinking enough water the young Black Buck started look around for its group but there were no sign of Black Buck group in that place and none of the animals were there. it got scared because this is the first time for the Black Buck to travel alone, since the Black Buck was young its was feeling somewhat cool because Buck has not faced any alarming experience in the forest and not yet trained to face some situations like this, so no other go the Black Buck went in search of its own group by jumping and running...

On its way the Black Buck saw a forest and started to run towards the forest thinking that his family would have entered into the forest. After reaching the

forest the Black Buck was quite surprised by seeing the some group of animals standing in its own group and something was going on there, when Buck started to hear what's going on, it's all about survival of life but the young Black Buck cannot able to catch things because it was too young to know the world and the Buck was still new born and expecting young group of friends to join with him but Buck can only see big animals were all round and birds were planning to move out of the forest in search of something so the Black Buck decided to move with the new group, instead of staying alone, so it started to join the new group which was an normally unusual to join a group full of strange animals and birds, anyway it started to move with them and reached out of the forest, now the young Black Buck got a new group and thought on the way it can able to find its own group if possible.

And a Ploughshare Tortoise was also moving with the group so here comes the first friend of the young Black Buck, Ploughshare tortoise was looking at Black Buck and thinking, there were no Black Buck in our forest then how come he joined our group and he is looking too young and after all thinking the tortoise directly asked the Black Buck that I have never seen you in our group so you are from? Black Buck replied that I am coming from

nearby forest and I have lost my family and my group, I was very thirsty so in search of water I have lost my group and I don't know how to search them again and explained all the thing happened on the way. The Ploughshare Tortoise told the Black Buck that My friend, don't worry we all are here, Ploughshare Tortoise made an announcement that we have a new young member to our Forest Family from our nearby forest, and tortoise officially welcomed the Young Black Buck into the group and the Black Buck asked how old are you, Ploughshare Tortoise

told I am very young, I am 32 years old and Ploughshare

Tortoise asked how old are you Black Buck? Buck told I am 8 months old, and they started to have a good swing in their conversation. The Buck felt being a part of a group, and Buck started to impress many by By telling how he got lost and the adventure of finding fresh water and also

how he found this forest.

Meanwhile all the young animals and the birds were attracted by listing the adventurous stories of the buck and now buck became almost a young icon.

Now all the young born animals and birds were very tired of travelling and started to ask their parents why are we travelling? Where? We are tired! All kind of simple question what a child would ask. So all the grown animals and birds felt that we should make them to understand what is happening all around and they also felt that this is the right time to tell them all about the world, they planned to explain them in the next morning so they will also get rest as well as they will be in a good and fresh mood to listen.

Early morning, Sun Shine with pleasant climate, all the animals and birds were getting ready for a public announcement promised by all the parents, so with some expectation Black Buck also standing with the group and getting ready to listed, it also it felt that this is something

Very important for its life.

There comes an African Grey Parrot flying from the branch and landed in the middle of the group. Ploughshare tortoise told the young Black Buck that the African Grey Parrot is the one of the smartest bird in the bird's kingdom, so the African Grey Parrot greeted all the animals and birds and told that we all are here for a purpose, a purpose to survive and to live. It is easy to survive when we are together as a group, at the same time it's a very hard for our life to live in this

particular situation, and it's very hard to getting food and water. Nobody knows what the creator's has planned for us, and with great voice, African Grey Parrot concluded "we all move together, stay together, live together, Unity gives life in all ways".

Suddenly a small voice from the crowd that "what is the reason for all this problems?" asked by the young Black Buck from the crowd, Ploughshare Tortoise

got surprised seeing the young Black Buck has dare to raise questions with others and happy to have such a smart friend.

One of the oldest living Chimpanzees form from the group came forward and appreciated the young Black Buck for the question and it said that.." Mother earth has an environmental system like we all have in our animal and birds body system, like circulatory system, digestive system, skeleton system, ETC, Mother earth has lot of system to make life exist in its surface and also other process like photosynthesis for example. So if one of our part get damages all of our other part will get damage. If one of the process of the natural environmental system get affected then all the system will get affected or may stop. It's all a chain reaction in our body as well as in our Mother Earth. Our Mother Earth has enough natural resources for every living things but due to some living species greediness we all other species suffer a lot"

Pigeons and rats who is travelling along with the group informed the young black buck that, You know about 32 million acres of forest have been cleared annually which is our sweet home and destroying our homes leads to Global warming.

Again the young Black Buck questioned that, which living species is the reason for everything?

Pygmy Three-Toed Sloth and Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat one of the group



members asked the young Black Buck that have you ever heard or encountered a living Human Beings, Buck replied No, and asked why?

Wise Chimpanzees said human beings are the only reason that all the living specious in the earth are suffering now. If god suddenly comes to a human being and ask what wish do you want, they will say something for their personal growth which will satisfy their personal life need, at the same time, If god comes to Animals and Birds, ask what wish do you want now I am sure that all the living specious in the Mother Earth will say we don't want Humans to have Mother Earth only in their hands by controlling all the living specious, Natural resources, all means of and make some calamity in it, and we all will request god to make sure that let humans understand that this Mother Earth also belong to us, not only to them, because they are the only reason that all the animals and birds are suffering a lot and many specious got disappeared and many are in endangers stage now . In the name of saving birds and animals they just jail them in a zoo and ask all the humans to come near to the iron bars and smile and they will get entertained by seeing us jailed and take photographs which was completely meaningless in the name of saving endanger specious and it also querulous, And In the name of development they just washout the natural resource without preserving it for their next generation which was again meaningless because they are extremely selfish, they don't make way for their own next generation to use the natural resources again.

African Grey Parrot said the funniest part is human's, they just use all the natural resources blindly for themselves, they don't even think of their own next generation.

So the announcements and sharing's were over and all have started to move

towards their plans, and the Black Buck also started to move along with their plan, and after few days of their long journey of walking they saw a beautiful place, it's a estuaries. None of the animals and birds have seen such a beautiful where a river and sea joins, so they looked that place like a heaven and there ever full of green trees and plants all around, a big water falls connected with great mountain ranges, those mountain ranges were filled with green agricultural crops so, looking at that every birds and animals were feeling good, all felt that they have come to a place that there can spend their rest of their life with peacefully.

BUT,

All the animals don't know what to do next, there were a big wired wall with electric current passing by and a big board noticing them that "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED".

And then Chimpanzees, African Grey Parrot, Ploughshare Tortoise, Pygmy Three-Toed Sloth and Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat were in a shock with upset mood and told the young Black Buck that "you have not seen Human Begins yet but remember this is the really Face of Human being, you don't need to see them in your life so let's move towards the other direction for our survival, so the Back Buck started to walk presumptuously with thousands various specious of Animals and birds.

College Category, Finalist

# Change your words

By, Devi Anggriyani, 25 years, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia

One day, just like my usual habit, I sit in the same place and still need someone else to help me walk and sit. At the sidewalk of the department store I sat down on my floor mat 1-meter x 1-meter as my cushion. Yes, this is my same life every day. I do not live with the same way like those who are lucky to have a harmonious families, can eat well, shop and play as much as needed. Besides, I am not a person who can get education like other people. Far from that, it was not easy for me to see them enjoying their life, even to focus on my daily way I cannot afford too. Yes, this is the limitation that God entrusted to me. My inability to see makes me realize that being given the ability to see perfectly is one of the ultimate blessings. Being grateful for whatever we possess right now is the best thing to do.



Since the death of my parents, I started my lonely life. As a consequences of a motorcycle accident three years ago, I lost my sight and both of my parents. There is no maternal and paternal affection anymore. All the members of my father's family left me alone; there is no other family to run to because my mother was born unique, no brothers and sisters. Now, at the age of ten, I have completely been left alone. Being raised in an orphanage near to the hospital where I had been treated, made me a brave little girl. I am confused what I should do to be autonomous and not to bother others. Finally, I decided trying to feel the street with my hearing and instinct. Two months later, I tried to walk in the streets by myself with a stick. Every day I practice on the streets and always meet new people who want to help me with directions on the road, their voices sound pity to me. Sometimes, someone of them takes me straightly to the orphanage. Even though I do not want to go home, they immediately escort me to the police station and finally taken home. I face the same thing every day.

Today, I am sitting right next to the stairs of the shops. I put on my black glasses and place the empty dish, with a white napkin within, in front of me for begging purpose, hoping someone would feel for me and give me some coin. Yes, this is the life I am living now, a begging girl. Even from morning till afternoon, I sit with my hand up without dropping my hand a second, but the coin I get from begging is just enough for my daily diet. The adoptive mother, at the orphanage, never asked me to make money. However, from a conversation I had overheard about the cost of living at the time, I know that the

adoptive mother is very distressed to support us as adopted children. Finally, I decided to beg on the streets. In order to make money and help my adoptive mother with buying some food.

I just sit and wait for people passing by to throw coins to me. Sometimes, I hear kids running around laughing with friends, talking about school and other childhood activities. I want to be like them and really want to feel how fun school is. Occasionally, I also hear the sound of coins thrown into the dish in front of me. Maybe a coin is thrown away but I do not know where the coin falls. However, I keep trying to feel around, maybe the coins fall around me, maybe the coins are taken by others who are just begging like me. This is very sad, but this is a life I must be grateful for now because God still gives me a chance to live. Although the chance of life, this time, should be full of struggle without parents again.

Shortly after, an old woman comes up to me while stroking my hair saying "How pity you are oh little girl! How can your parents abandon you like this?" she said with a little sob. "I am blind and both of my parents died, Madam. Now, I am completely alone" I replied. She immediately hugs me and take the money out of her pocket and then put the money in my hand. She also said "keep this money to use it in case you do not have any coins to buy some food". Then she wrote something on a piece of paper. She writes "I'm Blind, Please Help Me". "Hopefully, any passer-by will give you a lot of coins after reading" she said and then go away. I cannot thank her because she is very fast.

Three hours passed, but the coins I still have a little money, I am not able to buy even rice this afternoon. Suddenly, I hear the footsteps of someone approaching toward where I am sitting. It seems he is standing right in front of me doing something. I begin feeling the standing feet. I think he is a man with nice shoes, his shoes are very slippery and stiff. But I do not know what he is doing actually. What is he doing in front of me? But it seems like he is writing something just like the madam has previously done. I ask "Who are you? Do you know me?" But the man do not answer me. He just stroke my hair and then I hear his footsteps go away and disappear.

However, what happened? A few minutes after he leaves, I hear the sound of coins thrown onto the disk in front of me, so much money. What is happening? Why many passers-by give me money? The more passers-by, the more coins are placed on the disk. When I feel the coins, it is very much. I start putting a little coin into my pocket. God! This is so much! It is more than enough! What has the man written until these coins continue to grow? What makes everybody who passes throw coins into my plate? I am very confused but I am very happy to be able to get coins abundantly. It is enough to eat for a week. "If every day like today, I can save the money to register for school", I think to myself.

During the fall of the afternoon, I feel it because the air gets colder. Finally, I decide going home because the money I have gotten today is enough. Suddenly, someone comes to

me and I finger his shoes. Undoubtedly, this is the person who has approached me before the coins have been given to me abundantly. After that, I ask him, "I'm sorry sir, what are you doing here this afternoon so that many people give me coins?" The man replies "it is okay, I have just written a beautiful word on your paper". I become more confused but the man goes straight away and disappear as before.

Shortly after, I prepare myself to go home. A woman who seems to be as old as I am, tries to help me stand up straight and fold my mat. She says, "It truly makes me touched". I am confused. "Which word, Miss?" I asked. "The word you write on this paper", she answers. I am getting more and more curious about what the man has actually written. Then I reply, "Someone has helped me write it down, but I do not know what he has written for me". Then the woman replies "It is a beautiful day, and I cannot see it".

Truly speaking, this is the exact way of expression with wording. The word use in our communication can mean a lot to the interlocutors. It is better to be attentive of any word that is used because once it is wrongly applied, the views of whom we are communicating with can change; positive or negative interpretation.

College Category, Finalist

## **Small Acts, Big Impact**

*By, Simon Petrus Ama Sina, Catholic Widya Mandira University, Indonesia*

Once upon a time, in a small village lived a small family. That family has two children. Nadus was the second child. He, his sister, and his parents lived in very simple life. They were very poor family. Both of his parents worked as a farmer. He and his father used to planted peanut in their garden so that they could get the harvest and sold it for cost their living. Because lack of money, in a very young age his sister had dropped out from school and could not get an education as well.

He felt distressed about what had happened to his one and only sister. He should accept the bitter of life that bear down upon his family. In addition, he could not criticize for hoped that he would never experience poverty, but they were. That it was not an enabling experience. Poverty entitled fear, stress and sometimes depression happened to him. It meant thousand petty humiliations and hardship.

What made him more feared for himself was not poverty, but failure. He just ended up his study in senior high school and was not able to continue his study in University at that time. Afterwards, His father forced him worked their garden with the result that he could save money for college. He energetically helped his father for their garden because he believed he can earn money then. In the middle of the garden, besides helping his father, He took little time to studied Physics. He loved studied physics anytime he ever could, and the good news that he never gave up with his education even if he had just little chance on his daily

basis to grow up his knowledge because he did not enter to college yet, where he could study well and listen to a true lesson from the professor.

He climbed out of poverty by his own efforts that were indeed something on which to pride his self. He worked very hard at being the best in everything he did. Day by day, he passed to help his father in the garden as well as studied physics. One day, he woke up on his dream; believe that he could do something to change his life and the rest of his small family. Finally, He went to the big city which named Lamalaka. In that city, he looked for a job but he never found a good job as he ever imagined before.

With enough money to live in that city for couple months, he tried to fend for his self while he was so far away from his parents. He tried hard on and on to find a good job but it never happened to him. Sometimes he wanted to give up but if he failed, he never achieved something that he ever wanted. Suddenly, some words came upon his mind, said that “if I didn’t seriously, I maybe never brave to walk lonely in this city so far”.

He became a volunteer at school as physics’ teacher. He used to be there for four months and hoped that he has got a lot of experiences how to be a real teacher in class. It was simple to create his dream but it never enough because he never experienced to learn something new which was about physics. During lived in that city, he tried to search something else that would bring him to be on top of success.

As a Catholic member of the church, he began to rely on his life in God, he went to the church for worship and asked petition. He did it well day by day but life was just going to difficult itself. Unhappily, he had been no more money to pay for living. There was not enough food. He became anxiety about the future. Thought him, “How could I survive for another day if could not eat anything?”.

In one morning, he went for a walk and hoped that somebody wanted to help him. He went taken around the city but no one understood him. In the corner

of that city, stood an old man, think perhaps could help him. He tried to approach that man and asked for a job. He was lucky because that man offered him a good report, and said the man to him, “our office is looking for an employee that occupied to be a physics’ private teacher for teaching children those are homeless. If you interested with this chance you can join us as soon as possible. Don’t worry about the cost for we want to pay you expensive.” He was very exciting for that good opportunity. Without more hesitant, he accepted an offered from that kind man.

At the first day he entered to class, all students made greetings to him and acted like he was truly a true teacher in class. He taught them about physics and what was phenomenally happened to their daily life. The bell rang, the class stopped and all students went out to buy some snack at a canteen. All Students were very happy grabbed the snack from the grocer. He spent a while time to approached all students at canteen those was busy in consuming while accompanied by some cup of coffee when he was in a canteen. Suddenly, a

student was crying and came to him such need a hand for help. He said to the student, what is happening to you? and that student said, i am starving sir, but I don’t have money to buy a snack. Immediately, how kind of him to give some money to that student even though it was very small value. He hurried to give the money to his student then that student went to buy a snack.

He has been spent his quality time with students at the school for a year to taught them about physics and at least he earned lots enough money in order to paid for his living as well as saved for the college. But it was never enough that life just went hard and hard, he tried to do another sideline job while he was teaching students at the school.

He went for a walk again in the early morning when people were not crowded to run their activities yet. He arrived at the old buildings that had full of



rubbish spread around, he took it all into a sack then he went back home because the day was growing dark. He sat in silence and thought very hard, if people do it as perpetually, we can see our environment will catch pollution and world being unsafe in the years ahead. I should do something to change it be a good benefit for our society. Just counted in a week, he conjured all that trashes became well bags that could be worn again.

With the very cheaper price, he used to sell it at the Oeba market which was near to his living place, not too much but it would be valuable to buy some groceries and paid the cost of the living at that moment. He sold some of it. The

rest of it he used to give to an orphanage, people who were taking care by an institute when their parents could not.

He was very happy because he could help other with small things though he never experienced a very good life also. He was living in poverty and help others was being his obligation. e was made kind by being kind. It had been too long he never saw his parents, he sometimes sent an email, just made them sure that everything was going alright. His parents could not reply his email because there was in their village, yet no electricity as well as a cell phone that used to contact each other. There was no sophisticated technology in their village and people still used a candle to built up a light whenever it was going dark. Through that condition, in fact, it was very motivating his self to study hard all the time. He wanted to change his life, family and all of his people in the village.

One day on Friday morning, he was invited by his friend to attend a seminar that held by a top university in that city. He was lucky, at that seminar, he got a good topic about how to create a good technology without harm our environment in our daily life according to physics' laws, at least it gained his knowledge about physics nevertheless he didn't enter to college yet.

To him, learned from experiences was very necessary. Now he thought, "I

should bring this knowledge that I learned to be my reality, I wanted to make an idea that how to make my folks live in prosperous". After attended the seminar, he went to the bookstore to bought some physics books and he studied it as

perseverance at the whole day when he settled down at the bottom of Banyan tree in the yard that next to his boarding house.

He loved what he was doing. In that city, as a member of the church, he also actively joined the choir at the church. He met a girl who inspired him about an education. That girl called by Elia. They were very friendly to talk each other, shared together about education. One day, they made a promise to meet at a canteen, at the university which was Elia immersed herself to study English course there. As an English university student, Elia was pretty good in learned English than him. Elia was very kind, humble and had full of strong desire to helped him in studying English.

He finally fell in love with Elia because she was very smart and take heart.

At the moment, that she told him faced her past, how painful she was, he felt that girl might need a huge spiritual power to brought herself of being closer to God again. He taught her about spiritual as from the bible said. As time went by, they spent it together just to learned.

He very motivated by her when he knew Elia got a scholarship to study abroad, that motivation as something as haunted him every time when he felt in sleep. Furthermore, she always told him that "education is a key to open any door, with it anything is possible, that is why she came to this city and immersed herself to study so hard". Even though he had lack of money but he never gave up in his study. He did not learn from university, he made it himself. Besides that, he did anything else as long as he still had a chance to do it. He joined a social club that

gathered nice people to serve others. They collected second-hand books and every

week they gave it to an orphanage. As a member of that club, he had a good chance as a volunteer in taught an orphan without any payment. He was very grateful that could help those were homeless and no parents. Again, he taught them about physics and inspired them about an education.

He took lots of experiences since he had been there. At an orphanage, he could experience how was difficult the life especially for all orphans there. There were not many clothes and sometimes they used to wear just a blouse for a week. It took his heart deeply, he made up a thought on his mind that wanted to do something to help themselves through that storm of life. With a hand for Elia, they went to her campus and posted a poster that announced to all students who were kind to help others; they could gather the used clothes and donated it to the orphanage. It succeed, not too much but they got around twenty-five pieces of clothes. Initially just little members but sooner, it would grow up around hundreds of people joined in the group to serve others who lived in poverty. While joined that group he also used time wisely to study Physics. Every night was full of prayer, he lifted up to God through in petition.

One night before he went to sleep, In his prayed, he said, God please make my dream comes true, you have known that I wholly to help others, but it is never enough if I just end up with only this condition, I need a good education to bring me being testimony to others who live in poverty, there will a lot of people need my hand, I want to change their beliefs that life is good and if I can't help them I just wasting my time". Ended with those words he fell in his sleep and until

brought that good prayer into his dream. In his dream he heard a man whispered to him, "my son, your time is coming, go and bear lots of fruits". He shocked and just woke up from his sleep. He hurried to call Elia and told her about that dream. Elia said to him, "you know God is good all the time, get ready for that". In the early morning, the cell phone was ringing he came to the phone and wrote a

message. The good news that he would be invited to interview him in order to get a scholarship. It was very hard, yet he passed it and finally, he had got a scholarship to continue his studied in University.

He had chosen to study Physics engineering in University, and he graduated after took three and half years on behalf of immersed himself to studied there. After graduated, he worked in a foreigner's firm for two years. He broke for worked afterward. With enough money, he decided to come back to his village and served for his people there.

One thing he did it was he installed an electricity in the village, he opened a school for the children of those who lived in poverty with free tuition fee.

Besides that, he also opened jobs for his people. He trained them with good skills. He had too many employees worked in manufacture that headed by him. In the village that once lived their lives is very difficult but he changed it became a very prosperous village. Everyone got a job because of him.

That village became a well-known village had full of modern technology.

People knew how to use electronic devices such as used cell phone in order to communicate their family when they lived separated away even some investor that came from overseas offered him to collaborate with his concern. From his sacrifice, people there studied to help each other, loved each other in faith, and most of all they brought their world in a better day. "It is easy to end up this poverty if we all have a hand that minor in importance in order to help others", thought him. He was finally successful. He settled down his partner who was named Elia in a home and they lived in happiness with all his family for the rest of his life.

College Category, Finalist

# Small Acts, Big Impact

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## PRELUDE:

Jason's small act which gives him a big impact in both good and bad deeds is described here. Jason, 19 year old boy, from a poor family whose dad is a driver in a private agency and mom , an homemaker is an intelligent and obedient boy. His whole family wanted him to become a great doctor.

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"Get up!", shouted mom to Jason. "Mom....!!!!5 more minutes", said

Jason. But it was already 8 in the morning. Another voice came from the hall,

"Wake up my boy , today your results will be out " from dad. Hearing this

Jason's sleep flew away. "What the hell!! !My results....."said Jason. He ran to the restroom to attend to nature's call . He came out with his legs trembling

and got ready to go to school to check his results.

"Maamm....!!! My results and my grade for Medical studies !!!",asked

Jason to his teacher . "Congrats my boy , you have got 97.25% and your

Medical percentage is 94%" replied the teacher . Jason was happy about his overall score but sad about his medical score which was not enough for availing a medical seat. He returned home with mixed feelings of happiness and disappointment.

On seeing Jason' s face, his parents felt depressed. They asked him in

a pitiable manner about his results. He told them that he got a good overall percentage but not enough to get a medical seat. His parents were disappointed but his mom consoled him. His dad went to his room with his eyes filled with tears. Witnessing this scene , Jason sunk in sorrow and started

crying aloud . His dad came and sat beside him and consoled him saying he would get a medical seat by paying money . But Jason thought that availing a paid medical seat would be a burden to his parents which will be a huge amount for them . His relatives enquired about his progress regarding the medical seat regularly which gave him more pain .

The days after Jason's result were full of sorrow as he felt a lot of pressure because he was the only one who was expected to be a doctor from

his family . After some days ,the selected candidates list was published and Jason's name was put in the waiting list. He had little faith that he would get

a seat . As counseling was going on , he used to wait everyday in front of the medical administration office for his medical call letter . The last day of the process was conducted and he was eagerly waiting for his call letter. It was a long wait for him . It became 6 pm but there was no response.

Finally the admission was closed and he was highly disappointed. He returned home . His parents consoled him again. That night Jason was having dinner along with his parents. His eyes were filled with tears . Seeing this, his parents tried to make him feel better. He said," Mom and Dad, I am so sorry. During my exam preparation I actually left a small topic which

seemed unimportant to me though stressed by my teacher and that particular

topic was asked and ruined my happiness". His father went speechless .

After that Jason always felt that his act of neglecting a small topic made him lose his medical designation.

Days passed, "Dad, let me go to an engineering college as I will be freely admitted in the top most college owing to my marks. No worries Dad",

said Jason . When dad heard this he was bit upset but keeping the financial problems in mind, he allowed Jason to do so.

Thus Jason was admitted in an engineering college on a scholarship.

But everyday Jason weeps his way to college because he has to go past his favorite medical college to reach his college.

It was his first day at college and he was a little tensed, suddenly "hello.....dude....." came a voice from behind .To his surprise it was his school friend. A familiar face made him feel better. One day both of them decided to go out. So after college both of them were waiting at a bus stand for the bus.

"aaaaaaannnn aaaaaannnn", the horn given off by the bus excited them. Both of them got into the bus. Jason sat beside a weak 50 year old man named Ben. "2 tickets to the beach "said Jason to the bus conductor which cost him 9 dollars and he had a remainder of 1 dollar which he saved to buy cotton candy which was his favorite. "1 ticket to BRITS HOSPITAL",

said the 50 year old man to the conductor. "5 dollars ..." replied the conductor. The man took his purse from his bag, but to his surprise he found his purse torn which had only 4 dollars . Ben gave what he had but the conductor was adamant that Ben should give the total fare or get off the bus.

But Ben was in a hurry to go to the hospital. No one came forward to help Ben. His eyes were filled with tears as it was the last bus to the hospital where his son would die shortly. Seeing this , "Here take my 1 dollar and give him a ticket" said Jason. Ben thanked Jason for this gesture.

While travelling in the bus Jason saw his favorite medical college which made him cry again .Ben asked Jason why he was crying which made Jason narrate his story regarding the medical admission. In return Jason asked Ben why he was heading to the hospital. Ben was unable to hold back his tears and said, "I am going to see my only son die of blood cancer. He was going to

join a medical college , you know..." This made Jason cry. Both of them reached their destinations.

After 10 days, Jason along with his dad planned to visit an exhibition at a nearby college. While Jason stepped out of his house, he saw a luxurious car standing in front of his house. A man came out of the car with a high class suit on."Is it you Mr. Ben ?" exclaimed Jason."Yes it's me, Jason", replied Ben. Jason was surprised to see Ben . Ben said, "On that day my car faced an accident which forced me to take the bus. My boy, I have a great



news for you. You are going to become a doctor". This came as a shock to Jason. "How Mr. Ben?", exclaimed Jason in a confused manner. Ben replied that his son's medical seat has been allotted for Jason and also that he would take care of all his educational expenses. Jason couldn't understand what was happening. After some deep thinking and considering his family's wish, he accepted Ben's offer and studied in one of the best medical institutions. Jason became the most successful oncologist in the world .

Jason helped Ben by giving him a single dollar which made Ben see his son during his last moments which was just a small act but later Ben paid back with a great reward which had a great impact on Jason's life .

**BOTTOMLINE:"Jason's 1st small act of negligence gave him sorrow but his 2nd small act of sympathy and empathy gave him happiness"**

**MORAL:"PLANT SEEDS OF GOOD DEEDS AND GET TREES OF SUMPTUOUS GOODNESS".....**

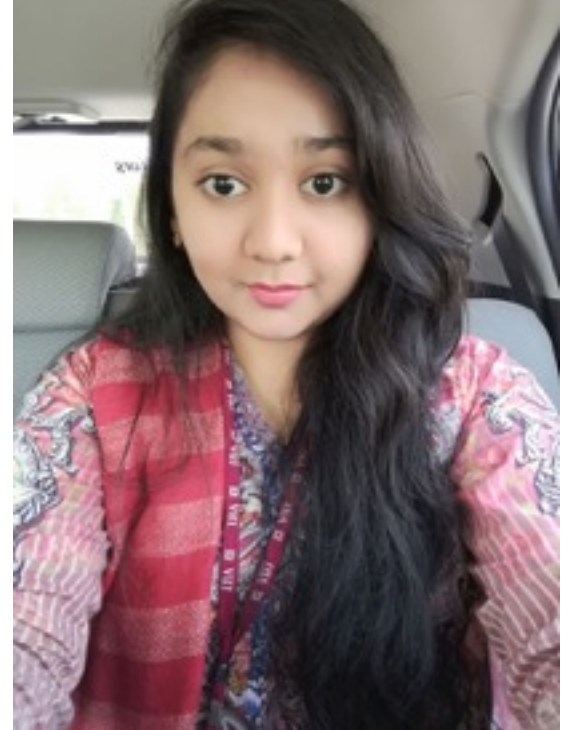
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College Category, Finalist

# Soft Boomerang

*By, Warisha Rais , Institute of Business Administration, Karachi*

With slow measured steps, she walked towards the sliding glass doors to leave the building. She supposed this was what a cat would feel like when you dangle a mouse in front of it and snatch it before the cat can grab it, simply because the mouse looked too small to feed it properly. This was cruel. She had the right qualifications and experience for the job and yet she couldn't get it, again. This was the fifth time in a month. She was running out of time. The payment for her aunt's surgery was due next month. She just had to get robbed a few blocks away from the bank, on the way to make an advance payment to the hospital, and lose most of her back up savings. The company she worked at before had already hired someone in place for the temporary leave she took to take care of her aunt. She was so stupid. She should have worked overtime, that way she could've been able to pay for a hired a nurse to take care of her aunt. Now, she had no back up. She shouldn't have been so weak. Her aunt was the last reminder of her mother she had; she couldn't bear to see her suffer and so she was there for her like her mother would've been. Still she should have kept her emotions in check for her sake. Sentimentality never did turn out good for her.



She took deep breaths to calm herself. There was still a week left. The world could change in seconds, she had a whole week. She had almost reached her car in the open parking lot, when she finally took notice of the shadow trailing her. She bristled. If this was another robber, she would rip their throat out. She had always worked so hard and even in desperation would never take away something that rightfully belonged to someone else. Would never presume someone as better off because everybody suffered and as a human she did not have excess to the that kind of personal information because she was just that, a mere human being, who couldn't comprehend or judge anyone or everyone's pain. But this made her furious. She hated people who took away the rewards of somebody else's arduous work. She was in this situation due to someone who thought her money could be put to more desperate use than whatever she planned to do with it. That someone had assumed that she was so much better off that one robbery wouldn't hurt. But it did hurt and now her aunt's life was on the line.

She turned around to confront the figure she saw from her peripheral vision and punched it hard. As it dropped to the ground, she woke up from her rage induced haze and realized what she had done. She was frozen and trying to grasp what had happened as the figure started moving. It was a man. If this robber had a gun then she might have as well signed her name on a death note. The figure stood to its full height, rubbing his jaw and mumbled, "After all these years and you're still just as scary."

He was a young handsome man. Probably in his mid-twenties from what she could tell of his appearance. His appearance, which consisted of a navy-blue business suit with a very nice tie. She tried to understand why she had pegged him as a robber but she was too tired and gave up,

bracing herself for the yelling that would soon accompany this incident, asking her reasons for being so violent. He did have a rather bad bruise developing. At least she didn't break his jaw.

She was taken aback when he smiled at her and not the creepy stranger smile which could bring cold chills promising revenge, but a sincere smile. The smile one would give to an old friend; there was affection and respect in his gaze.

"Good afternoon Ms. Aliza. I see you're as spirited as ever," he said and extended his hand towards her.

She stared at his face and then his hand. "If you don't tell me how you know me or what you want within the next minute, I'll beat you up with my bag this time," she warned. She was too tired, she just wanted to go home and try not to do anything disappointing for a while.

Hearing footsteps, she moved a little to glance behind him and saw a woman approaching. She looked younger but resembled the man. The woman gave Aliza the same sincere smile but there was a hint of admiration in her gaze. Instead of stopping to stand beside the man, she moved towards Aliza and hugged her.

"You'll be proud of who I have become Madam Aleez," the woman whispered in a soft tone.

There was only one little girl who called her that. She withdrew from the hug and held the girl by her shoulders to properly look at her.

"Hareem," she said then looked at the boy standing behind her, "Dayan." She was tearing up, her happiness at meeting them, overwhelming her.

The girl hugged her again and the boy put his hand on her shoulder.

"She gets a hug and I get sucker punched. I thought I was your favorite student," Dayan grumbled.

"You both... I-I can't believe this," Aliza said breathlessly. This day was catching up to her. She needed to sit down.

Hareem being the more perceptive of the two, took the car keys, opened the door, and guided her to the seat. She took out a water bottle from her bag and after rubbing her back to calm her, had her take small sips.

"I thought you were a robber," Aliza spoke in a tired voice.

"You would've punched a robber? Madam Aleez you are supposed to be the grown up here."

Aliza smiled sadly, "I wish somebody else could be a grown up for once."

Dayan got on his knees and moved closer to her. "Did someone say anything to you?" he asked.

Aliza was reminded of the little boy whom she had taught more than a decade ago. The ten-year-old orphan boy with curly brown hair, who lived with his seven-year-old grey eyed sister in the dorms of the non-profit community school set up by her college friends. The boy who wanted to become a writer and the girl who made wonderful things by playing with paint. She had volunteered to teach there while studying as an undergraduate at a nearby university. Having lost her parents and siblings in a terrorist bombing, she needed to be around people. The house was too silent and suffocating, it was no longer home. The way he was looking up at her reminded her of the times the children would seek her outside of class hours and ask her to play with them. The times they talked about the world and family in a manner that made her realize that they had matured earlier than the rest. She could understand their pain a little and was glad that they had each other.

She reached out and ruffled his hair. "Like I would let something that insignificant affect me," she responded.

"This is about the job, isn't it?" Hareem inquired. When Aliza just stared at her taken aback, Hareem smiled and continued enthusiastically, "You do realize how overqualified you were, hmm? Oh yeah, this is Dayan's company. I mean he started it with the other academy kids. Their efforts and clever but sincere CSR got them some major investors and you know after five something years, things started to get better. Happy ending. And we have so much to tell you but you look so tired, so come up in our office and let us chat over tea. What do you say?"

When Aliza remained quiet, Dayan chuckled and took her hand from his head and guided her back to the building. Hareem locked the car and followed. When they entered the lift, Aliza pulled them both towards her and hugged them tightly. Dayan patted her head lightly and realized how much shorter she seemed now.

"People don't get smaller, you've finally grown taller," Aliza mumbled as she withdrew.

"Still reading minds. Will you show us the eyes at the back of your head now?" he joked.

"Nope. Teacher's code," she sighed and went on, "Can't reveal secrets or the international super-secret agency of grumpy teachers would hunt me down and make me write a sorry essay."

They all laughed and got out of the elevator as it stopped on the fifth floor. Dayan, still holding her hand, steered her towards the office while Hareem asked the assistant at the desk to order for tea and snacks.

When Aliza was seated between them on the couch in the office, she took both of their hands and kissed them. "You grew up so well. I'm proud."

Hareem moved closer and enveloped her in her arms. She put her head on Aliza's shoulder and said, "I've wanted to hear that from you for so long."

Dayan took her hand and put it on his forehead. She could feel his tears on her fingertips.

"Hey, I'm here now. I won't leave again," she tried to assure them.

"We never blamed you for leaving. We knew why you left. Just like we know why you're so exhausted right now. You didn't have to be alone then and you don't have to be alone now. And this time we won't let you be the only one with weight on your shoulders. Let us take care of you. Please. Please Ammi," Dayan said in a small voice that reminded her of his childhood, again.

Aliza felt her chest contract. She had taught them for three years and she knew they were attached then. She was attached. They had never called her 'mother' before, but always felt it and let her feel it too. She was what they searched for when distraught. She was their haven. But she also knew that she could never replace what was lost. She wasn't enough. She couldn't even stop herself from disappointing her aunt, couldn't take care of one person; these children deserved so much more, a person who could take care of them. She had too much emotional baggage to be a comfort for anyone.

"The payment to the hospital has been made. You don't need to stress yourself," Hareem said.

"NO! Stop it you two! How can you-"

"You think we don't know who sponsored our education even after you left? You think we don't know how we magically ended up with those college scholarships? You think we don't know who sold her entire legacy to fund the graduation of the entire batch of our year? You didn't have to go so far for us. You didn't have to do anything. You didn't have to make it so personal. You could've

stopped at the academy but you didn't. This isn't a repayment of any sort. I would've done the same for any person associated with that school," Dayan interrupted her in a controlled manner. He let go of her hand and clenched his fist by his side. He went on in a wavering voice, "but you're not just any teacher. All that money that you inherited felt like a burden and so you thought nothing of donating it. It wasn't just the money. It was your time. It was you as a person, being there for us. Giving us your time and considering us as deserving humans and just-just having fun with us."

He smiled and looked at her, "And it hurts me to see you so worn out. Don't deny me this. I beg you. Don't deny me. *Ammi.*"

"Ammi," Hareem repeated and freed Aliza from her embrace.

They were waiting to be accepted or rejected, Aliza realized.

"I'm not your mother and I don't know how to be," she said tearfully, "but I couldn't deny you then and I can't deny you now."

"That's enough for us." Both children clung to her.

They knew this wasn't perfect and it would take so much longer for things to work out between them but for now, they had each other and that was more than enough for them. Aliza decided not to ponder too much and let it be. She was reminded of her family and she held on to whatever nostalgia that was hitting her now.

After a few minutes, Hareem laughed nervously, "Also, don't punch me like you did with Dayan but I sort of, kind of, called a few of our friends from the academy and they're all waiting for you outside."

When Aliza just sighed, she added, "They have cake."

College Category, Finalist

# Baby Blue

By, Sinem , 19 years, Istanbul University

A long, long time ago there was a bird with charming blue wings and a small golden beak. She loved flying above all the beautiful lands and oceans. Every bird up in the sky admired her. It felt like there was a magical wind coming behind her back that makes every bird want to come after her. But nobody could. Because she was the fastest of all times. She was flawless, and one of a kind. They called her “Baby Blue”.

She had a dream about a thing that any other bird can't even imagine. She always wanted to become a human. At the beginning it was just a dream. As years passed by, this dream turned into a goal. She wanted to walk like a human, to run like them, to talk like them, and even fall in love with some other human. There was just a one way to make this dream come true. Every bird knew that way, but no one ever wanted to give it a try. Because hundreds of years ago, an old bird tried that way, but couldn't achieved it. So he couldn't turn into a human, but also had gone blind with both eyes. For years, they thought the reason why he lost his eyes was because he lost his courage. They thought that he got doomed because of his fears. Any hesitation could cause that kind of a failure by this purpose. After these rumors, no one ever thought about becoming a human. But they never knew if it's the truth, because this trial had been done many years ago and no one ever had the chance to ask him why he had gone blind with his eyes.

But somehow, Baby Blue was determined to turn this wish into reality. She didn't care about that mysterious legend. One day, she decided to tell that goal to her family and friends. When they heard it, they tried to make her give up, but no one could succeed. The next day, she said “Goodbye” to everyone and left with wishing don't ever come back to skies and clouds. But there was a long road waiting for her.

If a bird wants to turn into a human, the only way to make that possible is, to leave seven feathers from his/her right wing to an extinct volcano, and



spend one night there. Then take one of the feather back and drop it into a human's balcony. If the owner of the balcony touch that feather, then the bird would become a human.

She thought that it would be more easy to find her way if she leaves the district with the birds who are going to be off to migrate the same day. So she left with these birds. Migratory birds were not very kind, but also not that rude. They thought wanting to become a human was the craziest idea that could ever been. They told her that if she ever changes her mind, that was the wright time for it. They told her to go back, and forget about that crazy dream and go on with her life. But when they noticed that she was certain about that decision, they stopped giving advices to her. Some of them admired her. They thought she owned a warrior heart, and the bravest soul that any bird could own.

They were flying a little bit slow, but Baby Blue wanted to get faster. She got the fastest and strongest wings than any other bird had, so it was dull for her to fly this slow. She left these birds that she began to fly with. She got faster and faster that other birds couldn't even see her. Then she changed her road, and tried to look for an extinct volcano. But the wind was blowing very hard that she got tired and wanted to take a rest. She spent the night on a tree until the sun rose. When the morning has broken, she got all the courage all together that she had, and began the new day with loads of faith in her heart.

She danced and floated in the deep skies with grace for a while. The weather was wonderful that day. The sun was so warm that she could feel the heat in every feather on her wings. The sight was very clear that she could see every little detail on the ground. She was far, far away from home. Just for a second, she couldn't believe that she made it to the spot she got. Suddenly she heard noises coming from somewhere. She got slower to see where all the noise was coming from. She turned around and drew a circle while she was looking to the ground. Then she noticed that these noises were coming from some birds that she couldn't see. After a while, she finally saw the birds. There was a huge lake. When she got down, she saw hundreds of birds flying close to the ground and drawing circles in the sky. She got closer to the land, and lent on the lakeshore. The scenery was awful. There were loads of birds lying on the ground. These birds were the same birds that she left the day before! If she wouldn't have left them, she would've died in the same way just like they did. Some of them were in unbearable pain, some of them had died already. Other birds were screaming and crying and they were trying to make their voices got heard. After a while, they saw some other birds were coming. These birds had heard all the screams and came for help. None of them could understand why these birds got hurt that much. They took a look around but

there were no human-being or any other animal. They decided to disappear and stalk for a while to figure out what's going on. So they left that area immediately and found somewhere to hide.

Baby Blue was so terrified because of all the things that she saw. She had heard these kind of mysterious deaths before, but never witnessed them. And the worst part was the dead birds were her friends! She had to do something. They all had to do something.

They hid and looked for something to happen for a long time, but nothing happened. After a while, they saw a bird coming along the lake. He told them that there was a huge factory on the other side of the lake and there were many human working in that factory. They separated into two small groups. One of these groups stayed in the area, the other one went to have a look at the factory. They followed the lake for a while. When they got there, they saw a huge factory as he said. It was built very close to the lake and hidden in the middle of a little forest. When they got closer, they noticed a horrible smell coming from the lake. The surface of the water was not clear, and it wasn't a natural kind of dirt. They thought that dirt was chemical dirt and it was coming from the factory. They were wright. Humans were causing death by poisoning these animals with the water that they're drinking. They were cruel, because they were doing this consciously. They were killers, and they needed to be stopped.

That group turned back to the area. They needed a plan to stop these humans before any other animal got killed again. The plan was simple; every single day a small group of bird –four or five birds in each group- would go to the factory area, draw circles in the air and then, when they got noticed, would show the death birds' area, then go back to the main spot. No matter how much time does that plan need, they were all sure that they were going to be noticed anyway. It was simple, but they needed to be patient. That was the only way to stop these ugly creatures called “human” and prevent more deaths.

That day they spent the night in that spot. In the morning first group went to the factory area and tried to be noticed. They tried it for hours but no one ever cared about them. The screamed for minutes until they lost their voices, but they couldn't get any attention. They gave up and got back to the spot. A few hours later the second group got off for the same mission. When they were working on the plan, the other groups were trying to prevent other animals come and drink the toxic water. They did the same things with the first group. They waited for a human to get out of the building, then started to draw circles in the air with the loudest screams they had. They got noticed by



him, he watched them for a few minutes. The group was so excited for getting noticed finally. They tried to show the area by drawing a line through the direction of the area. But he just got back into the building. He did nothing! He just stared at them and did nothing, that was disappointing. They got back to the spot, and had some rest for a while.

They had to stuck with the plan, but they had to leave as well. Because weather was changing and they had to migrate as soon as possible. But there was no other creature who is going to take that responsibility to save lives. So they thought pushing their limits was the greatest and only way to stop that savageness.

After hundreds of tries every single day, with loads of small groups; they finally made it! They got noticed by a few human-being, and they succeeded to show the death birds' area. They were a small group of humans, who were there by chance. The birds never knew why these humans were in that territory, but actually they didn't care about the reason. The only thing that they cared about was their achievement. Humans understood the reason why these birds had died in that area. They immediately called some other humans, and told them about what they saw. They talked about some solutions and talked about getting people out there. A few days later, they put that area in quarantine.

The migratory birds and Baby Blue left the territory that day with joy of victory. Yes, they've lost their friends, but they've saved loads of lives at too. They've made a difference with their limited possibilities.

They flied all together for a while, but it was time to leave for Baby Blue. She had to go and live her dream. What she saw for past few weeks didn't change her mind, they made her wanting more to become a human. She had to become more powerful to make the world a better place to live. She had to have strong legs, strong arms and a strong mind. Becoming into a human was not just a dream anymore, it was a mission that given by the nature to her.

After a few days, she found an extinct volcano, and lent there. She could hear her heartbeat through her skin. She picked up seven feathers from her right wing, and dropped it into the ground. She spent the night there, but couldn't sleep all night. It was impossible to sleep without thinking the fact that she's going to become a human soon. That idea was enough to drive her crazy. She just waited for the sun to rise sitting on a rock.

With the morning lights, she got up and picked a feather back up that she dropped last night. She changed her route to a city town. It felt like it took forever to fly to the closest city town. When she got there, she saw so many

buildings with different colors. They all had one or two balconies and even terraces. People were staring at her. They were looking at the beautiful wings that she had and the blue feather hanging from her golden beak. Her beauty got them shocked.

She chose a balcony with laundries hanging. There was an old colorful sofa and beautiful flowers around. There were bees flying on them. She waited for a human to come out to the balcony. There were two kids playing inside. She got closer to the window to get noticed by them. One of them saw her, and showed her to his little sister. They ran to the window to take a little closer look at her. The little girl called her mother to take a look at the beautiful bird in the balcony. The mother came to the window, then she opened the door. She got closer to Baby Blue. She couldn't take her eyes off her. The mother thought that Baby Blue would be afraid and fly away, but she didn't. She just waited for her to come closer. Then, the mother got closer to her, finally she was there. She dropped the feather to her hand and flew far away from the balcony...

A few hours later, she became into a human. The blue color that she used to have in her wings turned into gorgeous blue eyes. The golden beak turned into a golden heart full of love and kindness. She still had the same spirit full of courage and the same loving soul. She was truly happy for the first time in her whole life. She knew that she would miss dancing up high in the deep blue sky. But she was okay with that. Everybody thought that she gave up on her freedom over becoming into a human. But they were wrong. Freedom was not being able to go anywhere you want. It was being whatever you want to be. It was being yourself.

That was not just a story that you read. It was a warning to stop us for all the mean things that we've done and keep on doing to the Earth for many years. It was a reminder of a fact that animals do not have to correct our mistakes. It was a call from mother nature. A cry for help. And also a call from your heart too. Don't be afraid to listen those two. You won't regret it.

School Category, Finalist

# Making a difference

By, Ruchitha Rakesh , 10 years, The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE

“Lena, over here!” Called Taylor. She was standing in the middle of the cafeteria waiting for her friend. Lena slowly walked towards her. She had a worried expression on her face. “What happened? You don’t look so good!” Taylor said looking at her miserable looking friend. “It’s nothing, I’m fine!” Lena replied. She quietly walked to the food stand and took a juice bottle. “That’s it? You’re just having juice?” Taylor asked shocked. “Um, I’m not really hungry!” Lena said under her breath. “This isn’t normal! She’s usually so cheerful and active! What happened to her?” Taylor wondered. The closed-up, quiet Lena just stared at her tray, deep in thought. “Lena! What’s wrong? I know something’s bothering you! Just tell me!” Taylor said. “I told you! I’m FINE!!” Lena yelled. She tossed her tray in the trash and rushed out the cafeteria slamming the door behind her. There was silence in the cafeteria as everyone was gawking at the scene. Taylor awkwardly sat back down and continued to eat her food. Once she was done, she tossed her tray and walked down the noisy corridor looking for Lena. “I- I’m sorry! I won’t r-repeat it!” Said a soft voice across the hall. “How DARE you just walk past me and ignore me like that?” Screamed a loud voice. Taylor rushed through the maze of lockers to the other end of the hall to see what was going on. She saw a girl being cornered by Trixie and Jo, the school bullies. Once they were gone, she got a closer look of the girl being cornered. It was... Lena!? “Lena! What did they do to you?” Taylor said as she rushed over to Lena who was now on the verge of tears. Lena quickly dried her eyes with her sweater. “Y-You saw all that?” She asked. Taylor nodded her head. Lena burst into tears. “Taylor, y-you have to help me! Th-they keep talking behind my back, posting mean stuff about me and embarrassing me! I just can’t take it anymore! Look what they posted online yesterday!” She said whipping out her phone.



Lena Shyer is officially the biggest dork EVER! She wears huge braces, thick and nerdy glasses, and her nose is ALWAYS buried in a book! She is a total NERD! Wait, if I call her that, it would be an INSULT to nerds! Sorry nerds!

- Trixie Blake

Definition of Lena Shyer:

Lena Shyer: the most PERFECT example of a person who lives under a rock! Clearly she is still stuck in the 1880's because who spends their entire life in the LIBRARY? Answer: NERDS!

She is SO lame, even a donkey would never show its face again if I compared her with it!

- Jo Woods

**“Why don’t you tell anyone about this? Why do you just hide it? This needs to be told!” Taylor said. “Because if I do, Trixie and Jo will just get EVEN angrier and it’ll get even worse! This is something I need to solve myself!” Lena replied. “NO! This is not something that you have to go through alone! I have a plan! Next time they bully you, just send me a quick text, I’ll take care of the rest!” Taylor said reassuringly. “Thanks a lot, Taylor! But that plan of yours better be ready because I don’t think it’ll be too long till I send you that text!” Lena said. And trust me, it wasn’t even a few minutes after the fifth period until Jo and Trixie walked by and couldn’t resist making fun of Lena. “Well, look who we have here! It’s little L-Lena S-S-Shyer!” Trixie teased. “Ugh! That disgusting puke- coloured sweater is so gross! Wait, Lena, have you been stealing from the charity box because you are so desperate to wear something that doesn’t have the words “The library is my happy place!” or the words “I Love BOOKS!” on it for ONCE?” Jo snickered. Lena brought out her phone and sent a quick text:**

Help! Bullies in the hallway outside the cafe! Time for your plan!!!

- Lena Shyer

Taylor instantly got the text and rushed to the hallway. She saw everyone laughing at the miserable Lena. "Hey! You!" Taylor shouted grabbing everyone's attention. "You have no rights to bully my friend like that! So yes, maybe she spends a lot of time in the library, but because of that, she knows heaps more than you do!" She yelled to Jo. "And you!" Taylor said pointing her finger threateningly at Trixie. "Yes, she may be a nerd, but what's wrong with that? Nerds are the ones who are going to be successful in life and the ones who make fun of them are the ones who'll be living on the streets! Both of you tease others so that you feel better about yourselves. Everyone is different and special in their own ways, but you aren't some perfect people to make fun of that! People who make others feel miserable, are miserable themselves! So quit making fun of my friend!" She yelled. Trixie and Jo flushed red. They were embarrassed to be yelled at by a sixth-grader. It was true! They had problems of their own and bullied kids so that they would feel higher. The truth is, they were no different from the others. "Why are you just standing there? Apologize to Lena!" Taylor said. "W- We're really sorry, L-Lena!" They stammered and walked away. Lena smiled for the first time that day. No one ever bullied nor was anyone bullying in that school and the school was a happy place again and it still is till date.

School Category, Finalist

# Making a difference

*By, Mohammed Rafaz Mustafa , The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE*

**Walking down the narrow, dark street lit by dim lamps, I started thinking about what had happened during that session, what was the takeaway? What was the lesson to be learned? As I continue walking down the pavement of red bricks I see a child sitting under a lamp on the green grass. I wonder what could someone be doing up so late in the night? What could someone be doing in a place where there is barely any light? What could someone be doing where one barely had any sight? I decided to take a closer look intrigued by what the young man was doing late in the night. Taking few steps at a time I observe closely and what do I see? A child with his books on his lap and writing distinct numbers and letters and only then did I finally see how hard people work and endeavour to reach higher goals and cross the vast sea of life.**

**That night all that came to my head was that one child, why did he end up so differently? What is the purpose of life? So many questions drifting across my head, and answers which seem to be lost in time. The next morning, I wake up and get ready for school. I walk to the bus stop and the pleasant smell of jasmine flowers greet me, as I breathe the fresh air around me, I hear the sound of my school bus and it screeches as it comes to a halt. I hop on and so many smiles greet me, all**

of them who seem very happy by who they are, what they have done and where they have reached.

As the starting bell rings, Ms. Kailine walks in and places her books on the table smoothly. The class and the teacher exchange greeting. Ms. Kailine has been my English teacher since fourth grade and she knows me more than I know myself. “Today, we shall be having a discussion on how one can contribute towards society? What is one’s responsibility as a part of a community and how one can become a global citizen?”, says Ms. Kailine. “Why don’t we start with you, timothy?” and I stand up. “You know, I was taking down a walk down the street the other night and what do I see? A child studying under a street lamp because he has no roof under which he can study, a child who was working so hard in order to pursue his goals and for people like us life was made simple, we have a roof over our heads, we have food to fill our belly and we have a bed to sleep. Now, we mustn’t go through life wondering when we will get that new phone we want or the new tablet we want, we must be making sure we do right by others too. I believe each and every one of us has the potential to do something more and be so much more. We owe and a responsibility to the world we live in, change isn’t something that takes place by itself, it is something that starts with me, it is something that starts with you, it is something that starts with all of us. Now I believe there is a hero in all of us, that gives us strength, keeps us honest, makes

us noble and helps achieve our dreams. Now we can just sit back and do nothing about happenings in our society or we can be the hero and do something about, help children like the one I saw yesterday, thank you”.

For a moment, there was silence. I was wondering what happened , why did everyone remain so calm and quiet? And there was a huge applause and everyone saying that he is right. I was happy I could deliver my message to my fellow classmates. The next day, I could see students putting up posters, handing out leaflets and organising many activities to create awareness among others. Every night when I take a walk down the street I could see the child, he was elder to me. One night, I went up close to him and offered him to take him to my house so, he could study better. He was shy at first then he come along with me to my home. “What is your name?” I asked him and he replied, ”Santhosh”. When I asked him about why he was studying under the lamp, he said that his father worked at a workshop and could not afford to have electricity in his house. When we reached our destination we sat outside in the veranda and I brought him a couple of biscuits and he left later that night and I dozed off on my bed.

For the next few days I started seeing Santhosh quite often, we would often ask each other about how everything was going for each of us. I would ask him about his studies and how well he is performing in his school. As I was lying on my bed, I started thinking about what all had



happened since the first day I saw Santhosh. I felt like I was doing more good and I realised he was the turning point of my life. From the first day I met him, I constantly felt like I was being more selfless, encouraging and motivating others to achieve more. I also came to learn about the golden rule : treat others as you would like to be treated. Every day was new journey to learning something new. Everything went as usual as per schedule, continuing my daily routines and going around and seeing what is happening around in the neighbourhood. I felt good, awesome and amazing, never had I felt more alive.

Life went on like a book, before I even knew it I joined college. Time flew fast, and my own very life flashed before my eyes. Next thing I know I completed my course in college and started looking for a job. The job market was indeed competitive and I kept looking for a job. Finally, after an extensive search, I had finally found my dream job. Years felt like days, days felt like hours, hours went like minutes and minutes went like seconds, tomorrow's going to be a big day for me, it's the day I am going to get married to a person I knew from my childhood. The journey of life as I know it, had just begun for me.

“Darlin’, take care of the kids, I’ll be back in the evening” I said to my wife Martha. I slowly shut the door behind me and started walking down the busy street, cars were honking and buzzing around. The city life was indeed a busy life. I push the doors of think.com as I enter.

**“How ya doin’, timothy?”, says Jack as I walk in. This right here is life, what more could one ask for? I had a roof under which I could live, I had the perfect job, I had two amazing and lovely children and I had a caring family. Nothing could even more better, I felt like I was settled for life. That’s when a life changing event happened.**

**I had gone home after work, and while checking my mail, I came across a mail talking about a prize day ceremony tomorrow for my daughter and I was invited. I decided to attend the event for it was going to be a proud moment for me and everything was going amazing, the mail also stated about a special person who was going to attend the event but no further details was revealed. The next morning everyone in the house wakes up and gets ready to attend the ceremony. As we approached the gate of the school, there were vehicles parked everywhere, my guess was about 3000 to 5000 people were attending the event. The auditorium was indeed crowded and packed with people. We went through a lot of trouble to find seats; my guess was that all these were here to see - the special person. As we all settled down, the announcer gave the signal to start and prize giveaway occurred swiftly and everything went so fast. As we approached the final event of the ceremony, an announcement is heard through the speakers, “Finally the moment everyone has been waiting for, he is an inspiring figure, he is someone who has achieved great heights and success and knows no limits. He is the CEO and founder of**

**solutions.org. Everyone put your hands together as we welcome the one and only, DR. SANTHOSH SHARMA!!!!!!” .**

**For a moment I thought I heard the name wrong but I knew I wasn't dreaming. Could it really be him after all this time? Will he even recognise his old childhood friend after all this success? As I was trying to take a look, the crowd was jerking left and right cheering and welcoming him. I finally saw the person and when I had thought I'd never see him again here he was. With all this astounding success and fame, who am I to him? Will he remember me?. “We shall now call upon Mr. Sharma to address the gathering”, says the announcer.**

**“A very good morning to everyone present here and congratulations to all the prize winners, you know I never thought I'd be visiting a school on my business trip here. I never thought I'd get to see these beautiful and wonderful children, but here I am standing seeing all these pupils who have made their parents very proud. I want to say to the children sitting in front of me that all of you are living in one of the beautiful times. You know seeing all of you here today reminds me of my childhood. Today all of you have polished shoes to wear, you have brown paper to cover your books, all of you are living an advanced and luxurious life. Can any of you imagine a Dr.Santhosh who wasn't blessed with all these gifts? Those days, I was just Santhosh, the son of a Seeran Sharma, a welder. Life was hard and it just got harder every day. But in every person's**

life there is that one person who always encourages you, that one person that helps you with your life's journey ahead. A friend in need is a friend indeed, I too had a friend. A friend who helped a child who had nothing and helped him become something. My dear friend timothy. My friend who provided me a place to study at, my friend who helped me become the man I am today, my friend who cared more about me than him and without worrying about his own future he worried about mine. He was the first one to see that I had the potential to be someone, through him did I see the world, he was the one who thought me how to dream. Every crowd I see, I hope somewhere along he is there. His friend Santhosh is living a great life because of him. He told me this whenever I felt demotivated, 'Do you know why we fall, my friend? So, we may learn to

pick ourselves up. Now, life may knock us down, brother, but we have choice to rise up or stay down.' These words still play in my head. Timothy is a brother to me, he is family and if he is seeing this from anywhere, I just want him to know that there is nothing I wouldn't do for family".

With that he ended his speech, everyone around me started applauding, I just sat there tears of joy sliding down my cheeks. After reaching great heights, he didn't forget even a single detail, I was proud to be called his brother. As my wife and my children were about to exit the school, we were called to the principal's office and I couldn't believe my eyes but standing right in front of

me was none other than my friend Santhosh. I greeted him with a huge hug, I really was happy to see him. I congratulated him on his achievements and he replied back with a smile saying none of this would have been possible without my help. He offered me a placing in his very own company and I accepted it as it would be an honour to work side by side with the great Dr.Santhosh.

From that day, onwards, I changed my complete outlook on life. Maybe our future can be influenced by the choices we make today. What we want to be, who we want to be, can be decided by us. We should all strive for the best. Every day is a new journey, every day is a new beginning, every day is a day to explore something new, every day is a day to discover something new, every day is a day to be the best of ourselves, every day is a time for a new start.

College Category, Finalist

# I just wanted to help them

By, *Peter Junior Njovu* , 23 years, *BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION, Zimbabwe*

The words ‘witches’ and ‘wizards’ could always come up when we passed by the house of Mr and Mrs Munyoro with my friends. The Munyoro’s house was one where I rarely saw lights at night. It was as if they loved living in darkness. In the afternoon you could notice that their yard was much disorganised, with a lot of papers and rubbish all lying around. Often we could see both Mr and Mrs Munyoro sitting as usual in their couches outside by their veranda basking in the midday sunlight. Their old dark faces were like dark masks hiding the pain of something I know not. What was odd about them was that they had no children and yet they were already old enough to be placed at some old people’s home or retirement home.

At times I could just wonder what they had really done to be so hated and despised by the whole community. They had been rumours circulating that the two old partners were witches who hovered about at night bewitching people. To be honest, I never really believed these stories. Other rumours had it that the two had murdered all their children for rituals to become rich.

I never believed these stories. All I could see when I saw Mr and Mrs Munyoro were two old people who needed the community’s support. I wanted to talk to them. But usually my friends could just discourage me to do so.

One evening, while at home, a feeling of urgency came over me. I felt so moved to tell my mother and father how I so desired to help Mr and Mrs Munyoro in their distress. At first I couldn’t. I knew already they were going to judge me, especially my Mom. She was usually the most vocal when it came to pointing fingers at calling the Munyoro’s witches.

But I didn’t want to listen to what they said. I wanted to listen to my own voice of reason. I just gathered what felt like silly courage. I decided deep in my mind I was going to present my idea to them. I looked at my mother. Her face was so strict. I stared at my father there was something about his face that told me he wasn’t in the mood for such an issue as I was about to present it to him. He wasn’t going to entertain anything of what I wanted to say.



I looked at my parents once more. In my heart I just said ‘I’m ready for anything. Whatever they say it’s not going to stop my effort’

‘Mama, I want to do something to help Mr and Mrs Munyoro. At school they said we should be helping those who are suffering and living in poverty with whatever we can help them with’ the words just slipped out of my mouth.

They both gazed at me with deep, hot fiery eyes. It was crystal clear. They didn’t want to listen to me saying what I was saying. My mother was silent with her mouth wide open.

‘What do you mean you want to help those old, old hags?’ She eventually erupted. I realised I was deep verbal trouble.

‘I won’t allow you to do that!’ Papa yelled ‘Never! Not in a million years’ He continued reading his newspaper as if he had told me something final. I nodded. ‘I don’t even want to hear you talk about those old witches. Understood!’ Mama yelled.

‘Now go read your books! Fast!’ Papa yelled.

I just stood up. I went straight to my room. I tucked myself in the blankets. But the thought and idea of going to the Munyoro’s home was still lingering in my mind. I really wanted to find out why they were so despised by almost everyone, if not everyone in the society.

The following day, I woke up as usual and prepared for school. But I was still thinking about Mr and Mrs Munyoro. One of my teachers, my Religious studies teacher, Mr Dube had taught us some principles about helping others in one of his lessons. He had talked about how it is more blessing to give others than to always be on the receiving end. This message had touched me so much I really felt like doing something for Mr and Mrs Munyoro.

I prepared my school lunch. Then I quickly realised something. I had a couple of dollars in my money keeping can. I immediately took the can and counted the coins and \$1 notes that were in there. I knew already what I wanted to use them for. I was going to buy toiletries for Mr and Mrs Munyoro. I grabbed the money and stuffed it in one of the pockets in my backpack. The usual hurry-up-we-are-late car hoot banged from outside. I peeped through the window. Father was already in the car waiting for me. I could see his face frustrated with my delaying. For all I knew father was one of the most strict people when it came to keeping time and punctuality.

I checked my watch. It was already 7:15 am. The car hoot rang again. I knew I was going to get into deep, deep trouble if I didn’t get out of the house just then. I quickly rushed out straight into the passenger seat.

‘What took you so long? Don’t you know we might get late?’ Father said with his deep guttural voice.

I didn’t answer. I knew if I did answer the issue wouldn’t end so easily. It would take ages to end. Father had the propensity to keep on rambling about an issue if you led him on. So just keeping quiet would be enough when talking to him. It would tone him down a bit.

He dropped me off at school and went his way to work. In the first two lessons I didn't really pay much attention to what the teachers were saying. All I thought about was going to the Munyoro's household to help them as my religious studies teacher had taught us to.

'Are we together, Ronnie?' Mr Choga, the maths teacher, asked me at one point. At first I didn't hear him well. He repeated with more energy in his voice. I turned over to him immediately.

'Ronnie, are you still with us or you want to excuse us?' Mr Choga said yet again. The whole class had their eyes directed at me. They seemed like vultures all ready to pounce at me.

'Sorry, Mr Choga' I said.

'Don't daydream in my class ever again' He said.

The whole class burst into a frenzy of laughter. I looked to the girls, they were all wild into laughter. Even Sarah, the one I admired was high up in laughing mode. It didn't matter, anyway. All my thoughts were on helping the Munyoro's.

At exactly 12 pm, the bell to go home rang. Seth and Thomas suggested that we run some errands in town for some money before we go home. But I had different thoughts altogether. I wanted to pass by the mall and buy the toiletries for Mr and Mrs Munyoro.

'Why don't you want to go with us today?' Seth quizzed me.

'I need to pass by Dad's workplace' I lied. Of course I lied. I can't justify it.

'OK then. See you tomorrow' Thomas said.

I went over straight to the shopping mall. I bought a lot of good stuff; towels, tooth brushes, bathing soaps, washing powder, and many other toiletries. The sole intention was to help Mr and Mrs Munyoro in their distress. After the shopping mall I went straight to the Munyoro's home. I had my gifts all stuffed in a plastic bag. I was greeted by the Munyoro's old rusty gate. There was something about their yard that spoke old school. There was an old bicycle by the small garden. It seemed like those 90s perry bicycles that my father used to talk about. There were old cooking oil gallons scattered about the yard.

The Munyoro were not on their usual outside couches. So I definitely knew already that they were inside their home. I entered the gate and walked to their front door. I knocked with no hesitation at all.

'Come in!' Mr Munyoro's voice said loudly.

I opened the door, slowly. There they were. The two old partners were sitting in their two sofas side by side watching a reality program on their small black and white television set. Mrs Munyoro stood up and said 'Take a sit' she pointed to a sofa by the corner. She had one of the sweetest voices. I felt at home.

'How are you, Sir. How are you, Ma'am' I greeted them.

'We are fine, Son' they both replied with smiles all stamped on their faces.

'I'm here to give you this gift I made for you' I couldn't resist divulging what I had come to do. I handed Mrs Munyoro the package. As soon as she opened the plastic bag she began crying.



‘Son, you’ve done something great for us. Our children have long since passed on. But you only you remember us in such a time’ She cried.

‘Don’t cry, Mama’ I handed her a small tissue to wipe her tears.

That day I spoke a lot with them. They told me how Mr Munyoro had left his job soon after being diagnosed with a rare type of cancer. They told me the saddest story of how their five children had perished in an accident. I was really touched.

College Category, Finalist

# In drops

*By, Elekwa Uchechi Rhondalyn , 18 years, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria*

“STOP DUMPING THINGS IN THE RIVER! STOP!!! WE ARE ONLY KILLING OURSELVES!!!” I exclaimed with all the air in my lungs. “Hikari is at it again” that was the first comment of the day. “Here we go again”, some of those who were on their way to the river. The others just plainly ignored me. The signpost I put up in front of the river read “Pollution is bad!! Please if you could just listen for once, it’s bad enough that we are suffering from uranium poisoning and we still have the guts to empty waste into the river”. I was regarded as nothing, those who came to fetch water passed by me like I was

invisible. Before I knew it, I was thrown like a sac of potatoes on someone’s shoulder and carried away. “Put me down you oaf, stop it please. I am just trying to help, it is getting worse”. I thrashed madly but the grip of this bodyguard was too tight unlike the others who have tried this before. I was taken to the village square and locked up in a cage, “My Cage”. “Orphan Hikari at it again” said Queen Meerka as her maids fanned her, “She never ceases to amaze me”, “Such a Bribri (means black) and a waste of the breath of life”, Chorused Queens Cabrin and Tigri. “Same old complaints, nothing new” today, they sighed.

My name is Hikari; it means light from what my parents told me. My Mother came from the land of the rising sun, hence the name. I am fourteen years old; I know you will be surprised given the level of my disturbance. Well, I don’t have a surname I do it’s just that Orphan displaced it. Floating village (it’s actually mabish village I like to call it though) is a small village surrounded by water, so the only means of moving out is by sea transport or air (no airport though I saw it in a book once).



Make-shift carts are also available for moving about the village. The village was quite remote from the rest of the world; in fact the mabishians thought they were the only ones until navigators came this was roughly about twenty years ago before I was born. My Mom came with them and fell in love with my father, so she stayed. The second navigators came when I was Six years old. That's a story for another day. So when the navigators initially came, they came with clothes made from wax, cotton, wine, they came with books for sharing knowledge (My Mom had a lot of them so that's how I learnt how to read), as well as with mining equipment. My Father was an artist, so I was privileged to see a painting of the navigators and their sheep. The leader of the navigators was called Oak, he came prepared. They spent Eight months; their sole aim for navigation was to discover mineral deposits like gold, platinum, diamond as well as radioactive substance. With the stars on his side, he found a large amount of gold and uranium deposits of which the mabishians were unaware of. Convincing king Foma wasn't that difficult, he was sixteen and naive. King Foma willingly gave the lands that were still far to settle and the lands bordering the path to the river on both sides (for the second time they came) for mining and when the navigators had gone no sign of life. I heard they built something that looked like an incinerator which got damaged and released poisonous oak. As a result, that part is called Ojo area meaning evil. Out of his benevolence, Oak gave us artificial light, which never lasted for long. King Foma even sent slaves and defaulters for the mining, that's where my parents come in. Because my Father was intelligent and was never in support of the mining, he was sent there as the miners developed one disease or the other. My Mother was the first to speak up, but they refused and sent her to mine too. I am able to read and speak because of them.

"Better get going and don't cause trouble", I was released for the day. I am an Environmentalist and I knew dumping things in the river was bad. It's bad enough that we are being threatened by Uranium poisoning and we still dispose things there. Before their deaths, my parents built incinerators and now it's been abandoned. "Good afternoon Miss sapphire", I greeted. Miss Sapphire is my inspiration, I met her after my parents died, I would only greet her out of fear, but then I eventually got to know her as she was lonely like me. "Afternoon dear" she said, still washing the fruits I brought her the previous day. "It's getting worse right?" "Yes". Sapphire had explained how the poisoning would occur as she had devoted more than twenty years of her life to do so. "How do you know?" "My side of the village is gradually getting affected, we need to leave". "We can't leave the villagers", I argued. "Don't worry, we will find a cure" she assured me. I never drank

the village water because my parents had built underground water in our backyard, because my mother had witnessed such in her village.

Three months later, people started dying more and the rate of sickness got worse. It was getting out of hand, so out of fear I ran to sapphire's house I wasn't affected, Sapphire and I built a Boat and I mainly fetched water from her side which was lush and quite like a jungle. Despite its remoteness, everything was natural and lush. Through Sapphire, I knew I wanted to be a scientist and an environmentalist. We used a map she had stolen from one of the navigators and we embarked on three-month journey to get the land of the high winds, where we were accepted. We told them all that happened and there offered their expertise by the time we got back to my village was wiped out and we had no other choice but to go back to the land of the high winds where we were accepted.

It's been three years since the event; I left Sapphire to travel around the world. Unlike the navigators, I went around helping villages and enlightening them online how to protect their environment. This is the only thing that makes me feel better.

"My story ends here, so little ones tell me what you learnt", said Mama Hope. "Pollution is bad" Mabina replied, "when someone is becoming a nuisance listen", said Jules. "When you engage in something little by little, the end is always like a bomb", said Charmine. "Yes", agreed Mama Hope. "In other words, small acts big impact, for both good and bad and it is necessary we protect our environment, now run along little ones". "Goodnight ma", they chorused", she smiled "Good night my dears". "Teaching them one of life's lessons I presume?" asked Papa Hope, "Yes dear and stop teasing me" Mama Hope replied. "Hmm small acts indeed", "You are one to talk, after all your small acts of love shot through me like a cupid". They both laughed. "Come let's go to bed", he said. With that they went to sleep.

School Category, Finalist

# The Girl Of The Woods

*By, Arpita Sibi , The Millennium School, Dubai, UAE*

Why is our environment the only home we don't care? Why do we need it, yet don't look back towards it? It's only because of the ego we seem to think we have everything. There is nothing in life which can be earned by just money and wealth.

Instead you need to give your time, care and love. In spite of being nurtured by the environment, it's hard to believe, because we are always behind prosperities of life.

We need to believe that the Earth is our real HOME....

You all must have heard of Mowgli the Jungle boy. Similar to that, today I have a story to tell about 'The Girl Of The Woods.'

Ava Lightwood was a girl who gave her smallest contributions to worship her mother Earth as that is all she could afford. She was left in the woods by her mother at the time of her birth. Not knowing where to go or what to do, she could just wail for help. She prayed to Mother earth for somebody to take her away.

Earth was her only hope, the only person or thing she could whole-heartedly trust.

Unlike the others, she spent her childhood quite different. She played with the animals, witnessed real beauties of life, and was a committed personality to her environment.

At last one fine day, she had some visitors. A couple who set out on an adventure found her and took her to their home. She wasn't quite happy leaving her first ever home, even though she got what she wished for. She was introduced to a whole new world, the world outside the nature made by us humans for our convenience. She was named "Ava" by her new parents. She found them really loving and caring. They provided her with all essentials she needed at that moment.

Time passed, Ava was 7 years now. She started going to school, and she got used to the routine. But she still didn't feel right as she didn't feel home. She missed her

environment, who had provided her the nourishment for life. But she did not like the kind of atmosphere that was in her school. She was made fun of the way she was showing care for her environment. Whenever she used to get hurt, she used to run towards the lake to heal her wound. Her only company was her mom, who adopted her. Her mom understood her more than anyone else and she loved her mom a lot.

But one day, her mom got seriously ill and unfortunately passed away. She felt very guilty about the fact that she couldn't do anything to save her mom. But no matter what, she still believed in Mother Earth, as her mom once told her, 'When anything happens to me, you shouldn't worry, because I will join the heart of the environment, only to protect you.'

Days, months, years passed, she was 15 now. She still didn't stop worshipping Mother earth, even though all the children at her school felt she was crazy. One day during the school assembly, she got selected to deliver a speech on what she believes in. Most of them were telling on love, friendship, miracles etc....but she said she believed in her Mother Earth. Everyone started laughing. But she still took courage and completed her speech. Before she ended her speech, she asked a question to everyone, "If the natural resources are so pure, to heal anything, then why do we believe in these harmful chemicals, in the form of medicines, to heal our pain?" Everyone was speechless. They didn't have an answer to that question. She challenged them to bring the most useful natural resource from the nature and use it in clinics or for emergencies during school hours for any injuries. Everyday children started bringing some resources, which they purified using some chemicals. Ava said the same thing to everyone "It's not pure!"

One day, the school's biggest marathon was taking place. It was one of the greatest programs organized by the school in a year. There were 5 runners from

the girl's section for this race. They were all set to go. The gun was shot in the air as a signal and they started the run for the 800m race. But, after the race started there was a loud moan. When they looked up, a bird fell down because of the bullet shot which went into its body. Nobody tried to save it. Ava ran down from the spectator stand to save this creature as she couldn't bear to see it in pain. She ran towards grass area and dug the earth. She found some soil and applied it on the wounded part of the bird. The bird stayed still for a while and started to fly again. Everybody was awestruck at what she did. A girl stepped forward and asked her the reason for this action and she replied briskly telling, "When I told you all to bring something that is pure from nature and could heal our pain, all of you just took the pure matters mixed it with unsafe chemicals and brought it to school thinking it could heal us. But did you know, the very pure soil of our Mother Earth possesses the most healing power. Our mother earth is our real home, but why do we need to believe in things that consume the resources and energy of earth just for financial status and benefits? It's easy, you just need to pray to universe to be with you for all the things you do because it gave you birth and it will also provide you nourishment for life!"

That night she saw her mom in the sky, smiling as one of the stars. She realized that she found her real HOME. She was proud that because of her 'Small Act, she could make a Great Impact!' She was proud and happy that she could bring a small change in at least in one corner of this big world.

School Category, Finalist

# The Promise

*By, Md. Imroz Shahriar Shaik , 14 years, Pabna Cadet College, Bangladesh*

It was a story of a happy family.

The father, the mother and the only son lived in the lap of a pictorial valley. The

parents loved the baby most. The father wanted to bring up the child as he wished.

Things were going on according to his will.

The days were passing by nicely until that day. After the lunch the baby was

asleep. The parents were gossiping among themselves in the drawing room.

The baby woke up with the sound of gunfire and the painful screams of his parents.

He was frightened. He was too little to understand what was happening. After sometimes he got up from the bed and went to the drawing room in search of his parents.

He found his parents' body imbrued with blood. They were lying on the floor and the floor was awashed with their blood. The boy started crying. His father was not still dead. He called his beloved son beside him in faint voice. The child rushed there.

The father said to his son, "Son, you must make promise to me before my death."

The son replied, "Yes, father. I will."

"Promise me, if you find these culprits in some times, you will not take revenge.

You will finish what I couldn't do. You will always care for humanity. You will help my people until death. Promise me..."

"Promise, father."

The poor soul of the father departed the body. The son cried and cried. But the father didn't respond. He never could.





25 years passed by....

It was 2017. The son had grown up by the flow of time. He hadn't forgotten the promise made to his father. Rather he had prepared himself according to his father's will. He had finished all of his studies on Law. Because he thought that it could help him in the in the near future. He was earning his bread and butter well. And he remembered the promise made to his father.

One day, he was surfing the websites on internet. Suddenly, he noticed a news about the torture on Rohingyas by the Army of Myanmar. This phenomenon made him curious. He started observing the facts about Rohingyas. He found that the Rohingyas were living in the states of Arakan of the Myanmar for more than 1000 years. But suddenly the Government of Myanmar declined their citizenship in 1982 by "The Burmese Citizenship act-1982".

Since then they were being suppressed everywhere in the country. According to the UN they were one of the most suffered tribes of the world. They didn't have the right of education, property, marriage, birth certification and even travelling. Even they were deprived of their fundamental rights.

Since August-September of 2017, mass killing of Rohingyas had been started in Arakan of Myanmar. Their houses were being burnt and they were pushed to enter neighboring country Bangladesh. By that time the "Rohingya Issue" had come to the limelight. He remembered the promise made to his father. He thought that it would be a great chance for him to serve the humanity.

So, at first, he went to Bangladesh to observe the actual condition of the Rohingyas. He was dishearted to see the nature of torture inflicted on them by the army of Myanmar. He felt the situation of Rohingyas. He observed the unbearable, heart-bleeding sufferings of the Rohingyas. He saw them being miserable. So, he decided to stand beside the Rohingyas.

He joined in the volunteer program of UNHCR and started serving the Rohingyas

officially. He sold all his excess properties and contributed the refugee fund. The amount was not so less as a personal contribution.

Day by day, the condition of Rohingyas got worse. Every day the number of Rohingya on the refugee camp was increasing. He started exchanging his views and sympathy with them. Rohingyas started finding confidence in him. They kept trust on him. And they started expressing the stories of their pain and grief to him. He was able to realize the mental condition of Rohingyas. At last he took his ultimate decision – “To return Rohingyas their own land Arakan.” He will liberate the Arakan as well as the Rohingyas. And he remembered the promise made to his father.

He communicated with the then Rohingya leaders. At first, the Rohingya leaders were amazed to listen his plan. But soon they understood the contained truth and importance of the plan. They all agreed to him.

The Rohingya leaders started to reunite the broken community. They were able to make their people understand how the independence, the sovereignty of Arakan as well as the Rohingyas would come. The whole Rohingya community got united. They started a revolutionary movement being united.

The time seemed proper to him to make an application to the International Court of Justice on Rohingya issue. So he made the application. The movement of Rohingyas for liberation were getting stronger day by day. As he was a lawyer and as he worked with the Rohingyas, he was able to make understand the people of the world about the crisis of them. He highlighted the problems of the Rohingyas. He also highlighted the torture inflicted on them and put an emphasis on their liberation. The International Court of Justice gave the order to make a referendum on liberation of the Rohingyas in the UN General Assembly.

More complicated his tasks became. But he was happy that there was a huge chance of him becoming successful. He deeply understood that he was in need of

international support to liberate the Rohingyas. He urged upon all the people of the world to make a movement for the liberation of the Rohingyas.

He started travelling countries to countries with the Rohingya leaders to make the Head of the Government of that countries understand to give their votes in favour of liberation of the Rohingyas. As the people of different countries started movement in favour of the Rohingyas, his tasks became easier.

As he was one of those who were helping the Rohingyas most, there was an attack upon him. But he knew that such day would come. So he was already prepared.

However, when he found that he was on the verge of being attacked, he leaded the attacking team to previously prepared trap. The team got caught red-handed. After primary interrogation he came to know that they were from the same person who killed his parents. But because of the promise he made to his father, he did not take any action on that culprit.

At last the day designated for the referendum came. He was very much tensed. Because if he failed, he would fail his father too. All his life's work would go in vain.

But the luck kissed him. Most of the countries of the world voted in favour of the liberation of Rohingyas as well as Arakan. The proposal was passed exclusively.

“The People's Republic of Arakan” started its journey. The long cherished dream of thousands of Rohingyas came to light. He became a hero to the Rohingyas.

World famous magazine “The Times” termed him as the “Brother of Rohingyas”.

But a question arose in the mind of most of the Rohingyas. The question was –

“Why would a person help a suppressed tribe so much taking risk of his life whereas he has no connection with them?” Most of the people thought that it was out of humanity.

Of course, out of humanity it was. But only a few of them knew the right as well as the secret answer. The answer was that he was also a Rohingya.

How?

His father was a Rohingya and his mother was a British citizen. He looked alike a British not alike a Rohingya. So everybody thought him as a British. He was British by birth but a Rohingya in mind. He made the promise to fulfill his father's dream to his father. He was successful.

The world recognized him by awarding him with the renowned "Nobel Peace Prize". A small promise gave birth to a very big impact. The small promise gave birth to a liberated nation, a sovereign country.

He was truly a hero.

2 months later...

When all these circumstances settled down, he just simply disappeared. He was found nowhere.

After 4 years...

A couple was sitting on the sea-shore on a solitary island, gossiping among themselves and watching their little girl playing with the ocean. The girl suddenly found a very beautiful sea-shell. Being so much happy, she ran to his father, "Daddy, Daddy, I will keep it in the showcase." The father smilingly answered, "Okay, my little princess." Getting up the couple grappled the hands of the little girl. They started moving towards their house inside the island....

And it was the starting of another story of a happy family...

College Category, Finalist

# In The Dark

*By, Steven Andrew Seepersaud , 25 years, Greenheart Medical University, Guyana*

Arya fell to her knees, anguishing in pain, as he repeatedly slapped her across the face

while shouting like an army drill sergeant. She would often compare the way he spoke to her

with the bark of a hungry Doberman, relentless and foaming at the mouth. Oddly enough, that

same night, he came home drunk and hungry after he spent hours drinking with his friends after

work. He didn't like the food Arya prepared and left for him, so he shook her out of her sleep and

immediately started arguing. She was in an obvious state of daze after just being abruptly woken

up and tried to go back to bed, but he wouldn't let her. He tightly held on to her wrists and

dragged her into the kitchen where he made a mess of the plate of food and everything around it.

He beat her mercilessly with his bare hands like he was training for a twelve round boxing

match. Even though her face and body was being hit, it was her psyche that took the most



bashing. The ordeal lasted for about twenty minutes until he got tired and passed out, but to her, it felt like it had been hours. A battered and bleeding Arya screamed her voice hoarse, but those pitiful cries went on deaf ears, or so she had thought. The dramatic noises of an intense exchange echoed into the adjacent apartment where it resonated with a quirkily naive young man.

Zayn lived by himself in a low income apartment complex that was decent enough, if no attention was paid to the poor plumbing and its dilapidated exterior. Nevertheless, he couldn't complain because he was a struggling journalist that worked odd jobs at different newspapers just to make ends meet. He had just finished a degree in creative writing but making a living from that wasn't the easiest thing to do. However, that never seemed to down his spirits, it rather gave him more motivation to strive for greater things. He lived alone because he was socially awkward and somewhat of an introvert. Nonetheless, he had a cat that kept his company on most days and when it felt like. He never spoke to the people next door, a recently married couple with no kids, who had moved into the building a few months back. He would seldom wave to Arya, and she would just smile softly at him without saying a word. The apartments were so close

together that Zayn could hear when they were arguing and fighting to even when they got

intimate, which up to that point, only affected him slightly. However, on a night that began like

all others, things took a sudden turn. He is usually a night owl that sleeps late and as he was

getting ready to go into bed, the frightful screams of a woman startled him. After he gathered

himself, he realized that the screams came from Arya since he had grown accustomed to hearing

her through the apartment walls. It scared him so much that he couldn't blank it out and go to

sleep, even after the screaming had ceased. It kept replaying in his mind like a scratched

recording from a horror movie. In contrast to earlier, his apartment became quiet and he could've

heard every heartbeat palpitating and every anxious breath he took. He laid as still as a mountain

with his brown eyes wide open and glued to the off-white ceiling that looked like it hadn't been

cleaned in years. However, the silence didn't last too long as he noted a loud banging at his door

which added to his feeling of panic. He thought if he had just ignored it then it would go away,

but that wasn't the case as the banging continued. He reluctantly opened the door and to no real

surprise, it was a wounded Arya, clutching to a dirty handkerchief filled with blood. Zayn, who

was clearly confused, took her inside and cleaned her up because he didn't know what else to do.

He grew up in an orphanage, so he wasn't exposed to any situation remotely similar to what he

had just encountered. This would probably explain his apprehension towards the incident and by

extension, Arya. Once again, the silence returned as they found themselves sitting on the living

room couch staring into space, until she finally broke the ice. She was telling him about her

marriage, then stuttered and paused at mid-sentence, before eventually breaking down into tears.

He became the literal shoulder that she cried on, albeit quite awkwardly. After that night,

something clicked like the illumination of a light bulb above Zayn's head and he began

educating himself about domestic violence.

Every day was like waking up to a living nightmare for Arya, as the physical and mental

abuse carried on. She had marks all about her body from a black eye to a bloody lip to

strangulation scar to even broken ribs. According to her husband, he only does it because he

loves her and he remained consistent with the logic, touting that the more he beats her is the

more he loves her. Moreover, he was a master of manipulation who made her feel as though she

was the one responsible for all the problems. She would constantly make up self-damaging

excuses in her head to justify the abuse and in so doing, indirectly prolonging her ill-treatment.



Zayn empathized with her which was a new feeling for him, and he expressed it by spending a lot of time talking with her, trying to understand what she was going through. Sometimes the talks were deep, reflecting personal sentiments, while other times they were superficial with simple everyday conversations. Little by little and without either of them knowing it, Arya's confidence and self-worth was rebuilding itself. He was the support that she didn't think she needed or even would get but it helped her tremendously. It started to clear up her mind up like a beam of sunlight radiating through a rainstorm. At the same time, it helped him with his social awkwardness when talking to people. After a while of trials and tribulations, Arya decided that it was time to leave and in that particular moment, time froze for Zayn, as he felt a tingling sensation in his gut similar to that of butterflies. He concluded that all of his gestures, if nothing else, did some good for her and he wanted to push it further by aiding in a plan for her to get out. It took a lot time, effort and patience but they were able to come up with a reasonable plot in order for her to leave. Arya didn't sleep a wink the night before she was supposed to leave because of the high levels of anxiety that promptly kicked in. The next morning her husband went about his normal routine and headed off to work, oblivious to the fact that she wouldn't be

there when he got back home. At the exact instant when he closed the door to leave, adrenaline flowed through her bloodstream like a kink being removed from a hose. Zayn had managed to set up her transportation to a women's shelter where she would presumably be safe. However, it was rather painstaking for him to find a shelter with space available but alas, he did manage to find one. Leaving no chance of looking back, she said goodbye to Zayn and headed straight to the shelter with a single black suitcase stuffed to the brim all her belongings. It was a bittersweet moment for him, but he felt a great sense of humanity and above all, he sighed a huge breath of relief. The whole experience, over several months, ignited a flame of belief under him, a belief that he could make a difference in people's lives.

After a while of job hunting in the city, Zayn finally got a permanent one as a writer for a print media advertising agency. It wasn't as glamorous as he anticipated but he had to make do with the circumstances being as it was. During his spare time, he joined many local groups that advocated against social problems including something that grew close to his heart, domestic abuse. He was rapidly becoming one of the most recognized exponents against domestic violence because of his uncharacteristic approaches. He wanted the management strategies towards it to

become less about publicity and more about being proactive, which would in turn breed better

action. He had many ideas on how to reduce the incidence of abuse but the problem was actually

getting the people with the power to listen. The addition of new, and the improvement of existing

prevention programs, along with serious and consistent penalties, were the fundamentals of his

vision. He believed that the best way to curb the ongoing cycle of abuse was to stop people from

becoming abusers in the first place. However, he had no choice but to store those thoughts at the

back of his mind as distant dreams. It was frustrating for him because he didn't understand why more people from the public didn't support him and the local groups. Yet, another dream of his

was to open a women's shelter where he would be able to at least effect some of the change that

he spoke so passionately about. He even found an ideal location, an abandoned building that was

a stone's throw away from a police station. He sought out many private organizations for funding

of the project but to no avail. Every single organization turned him down on the spot because

they simply thought it was way out of his league. Not willing to give up, he sent in a letter of

request to the government for them be a part of the project but again, nothing came from it. In his

quiet moments, Zayn wanted to pack it up but he remembered Arya, who he hadn't heard from

since, and thought of the great number of women in the same situation who needed help. He ultimately decided that he would send a letter to the government every week until they responded. With the use of his proficient writing skills, he stayed true to his word and neatly prepared the letters and mailed them every week. After over a year, dozens of letters, hundreds of stamps and countless paper-cuts, he finally received the response he wanted. The government agreed to renovate the old building in his name and he couldn't be any happier. Tears trickled down from his face as he couldn't believe that his persistence paid off and now it was all coming together. It took about three months for the project to be completed and within that time, he had a fairly good blueprint on how it was going to be operated. The women's shelter had its grand opening a week after its completion and it was an occasion not to be forgotten. The place was filled with important people, ministers within the government, media personnel, local celebrities, and other advocates against abuse. As was his entire week, it was a very busy day for Zayn, his head was spinning with the amount of speeches and interviews he had to give. However, in the middle of one particular interview, a journalist asked him about a murder-suicide of a young

couple that happened the night before. Zayn had no knowledge of it and probed the reporter to reveal more information about the tragedy, but what he found out was quite shocking. The

reporter had shown him pictures of the gruesome scene with blood splattered everywhere like a

sick and twisted painting. After his initial uneasiness and upon proper inspection, he could have

been identified the victims. The pictures slid out of his hand as a stone-faced Zayn he fell to his

knees in gut wrenching agony.

- THE END -

College Category, Finalist

# Father's Promise

By, *Sukanya Basu Mallik*, Techno, India

It was a calm and fresh July morning when I was looking through the gaps of the bel leaves to capture the most perfect image in my D.S.L.R. camera.

Goodness Gracious! ” I exclaimed out of fright; on seeing 'Burobaba' motionless in his only asset; his 'riksho-gari' .I rushed in to call my mother. She said 'His pulses are falling I'll call up the ambulance.'

The ambulance arrived within fifteen minutes. The ward boy connected the pipes to the renal region of 'Buro-Baba's left hand. The fluids kept dripping into his vessels as the vehicle negotiated through the jam-packed road.

“Don't worry, he'll be okay', consoled my mother. even though the same anxiety filled up her mind. 'Baba' is of Bengal origin. He crossed the borders and stepped in our country in search of his lost son. Five years have passed since then. He and his 'riksho-gari ' found eternal peace under the shade our Bel tree.

The ambulance stopped in front of the huge sky building with a placard that 'Hooghly hospital!

Baba was made to lay on a wheeled patient bed and was immediately taken to the 'Intensive Care Unit ' where the doctors gushed in hurriedly while my



mother completed the necessary formalities. Meanwhile, I got a call from my father.

‘Bapi, Buro-Baba, that old man about whom I’ve been talking to you since the past few months is in a really serious condition. He is in the ICU. Please be at the Hooghly hospital as soon as possible.’ I said.

'Buro-Baba' was not just any rickshaw puller. He bought me my asthma medicines when no one was around. He helped 'Ma' with grocery shopping and stayed in front of our house all day. Throughout the past five years when Dad wasn't there after his transfer: ‘I am landing at 3:00 pm, will be right there. don't worry! said Dad.

Ma came and sat beside me after the formalities were over. Somebody patted me from the back. I turned to find my father smiling at me. Ma went out to get some snacks for us. Bapi sat beside me and enquired, “Now tell me. who is the man. and what is the matter?”

I started narrating Buro-Baba's biography. I told Bapi that he was a Bangladeshi man who had come here in search of his son. He said he had promised to stay with his 'khokon' till the last breath when he sent his only ward to India for security reasons. But he only had a silver chain as the sign of his son.

"You tell me Bapi, how is it possible to identify his son by means of a simple silver chain? Like for instance even you are wearing one. "

The doctor came out with a pale face,” Sorry, he is no more. "I started weeping against Bapis's chest and heard him whisper softly,

"Baba kept his promise. ..."

College Category, Finalist

# The Blessing from a Homeless Man

*By, Muntazir Ali Sayed , 24 years, Rajarshee Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Government Medical College, Kohlapur, India*

Small acts of kindness, humbleness, help, encouragement, inspiration, motivation and even discouragement can have great consequences in the life of a person. Do you believe in that?

Rani was a young woman in her early thirties. A victim of domestic abuse and a single mother at present of two young kids. Well, life was not kind to her. Yet these incidents did not deter her from being kind and humble and forgiving. In spite of being so good, I have always suffered. Did I do something wrong? She would always ask herself.

It was love which had changed her life. Going against her family to marry the love of her life and then realizing that the man is abusive and a chronic alcoholic was a life changing challenge for her. But she was pregnant soon enough.

With just graduation in hand and the sympathy of her friend Rani had secured the job of an accountant in an esteemed institution. The company immediately requires an accountant and hence chosen you to replace the current one, her friend informed her. Rani was ecstatic that day. She served the company for six long months, toiling hard day and night learning new things and contributing herself immensely for the good and betterment of the company. These endeavors did impress her boss earning her a good spot in the company.

She wanted to get away from marriage soon enough Simran was born but lost the courage on learning she was pregnant again. However, no longer to bear the constant abuse from an alcoholic husband and the neglect from her family for giving birth to a girl, she fled. Rani was adamant Juhi will help her and she did. Aditya was then born soon enough.

Ms. Rani Patel is now an assistant manager in the same institution. My life has become so monotonous! Yet I am contented. She would rethink again and again and constantly expressed her gratitude to the Almighty for giving her the two beautiful kids.

However, Rani did not know she yet had to learn a new lesson. Every evening while returning from her office, Rani would encounter a homeless man at the exit of the freeway. He was a stranger to her. He looked to be in his late 40's but was probably a lot younger. He had shoulder length straight





black hair a short beard, and he was of average stature. But he was paralyzed! The old rusty wheelchair would always make Rani felt the tinge of sadness the man must muster but he looked contented. Were they similar?

His eyes were what struck her the most about him, they were brown and they had a sparkle. There was an inside light that was beaming out of his eyes. His eyes, she thought, represented the man in general. People say they can tell a lot from a person's eyes. It was certainly true in his case. He always waved at every car, he was always happy and smiling.

He was just a stranger. There are invisible barriers between "strangers", made up of distrust and fear, which make people think they are alone and no one cares, Rani thought to herself. Every day after work she would remember to gather any spare change, and put it aside to give to him if she saw him. A feeling of joy would come over her every time she saw him, as she came off the ramp. He had that effect!

She'd quickly roll down her window and give him the coins. Occasionally the red light would be on for a minute and they would ask each other about our day. People flock to their groups -- family, friends, national, religious and ideological groups -- and often exclude everyone else from their meaningful interactions. This can make a person feel like they have to be young, beautiful, religious/atheist, liberal/conservative, white/black, successful/not-too-successful, in order to be worth anything to other people. It is soul-crushing, Rani would teach these values to Simran and Aditya each night after talking to the homeless man. His answer would always be the same, I'm blessed!

Rani knew what his answer was going to be every time, yet she would still ask. It amazed her that even in his situation of being homeless he was so positive, and his answer would remind her of how blessed she was. A single mother of two amazing kids, with a place to call home and with a job to provide for my kids- Yes! She had it all!

It was that fateful day when Rani was all dressed up for the annual gathering meeting of her company. Juhi gifted Rani a beautiful blue saree and everyone knew it was her favorite color. On her way to the office, destiny unfolded and Rani suffered from a tragic road accident. She was bathing in blood and remembered people approaching her the time she shut her eyes! Oh! Not now my dear God! Not now! I have Simran and Aditya to take care of, her thoughts echoed. Funny as to how powerful love is. It was love which changed her life in the initial days of her marriage from an abusive husband and it was love right now which was not letting her go!

Rani regained consciousness after a tiring week. Simran and Aditya were besides her and Juhi was screaming in happiness- hot tears running from all of their cheeks. Happy and sad and sad and happy! The room was filled with mixed emotions. Were they turning hysterical?

And then her eyes turned to the door. There was a man sitting on a rusty wheelchair smiling at her. She strained her eyes to get a clear picture and it was her friend she met each day. What is he doing here? Rani asked her friend.

The man pushed his wheelchair towards her. There was more than spark in his eyes this time. He felt more than contented as if he had achieved the most that day. He smiled and said, "You have always been kind to me by giving me something to purchase food. I cannot work with this

paralysis and it s you who provided me with help each time. So when it was my time to help you; do you think I could have backed out?" He smiled again and bid a farewell for the day. "Take care and I will visit tomorrow memsaab."

Rani, you were lying in a pool of blood. It was Raju who gathered people to rush you to hospital. You immediately required O negative blood the rarest of its kind and we were lucky that Raju could donate, explained Juhi.

"Who's Raju?", inquired Rani.

Raju is the paralyzed man you just met my dear. He obviously got weak and lethargic after the blood donation but would be fine soon as assured by the doctors. Rani was speechless and beyond words. The thoughts came in. She just helped the man in meager ways and she couldn't expect this result of it. You see my kids, small acts does have big impacts! Rani taught her children a new lesson. Little did they know that she learnt it herself that day!

That day he gave her more than his blood, he taught her a valuable lesson. No matter what material things are taken from you, no one can take away your choice to be joyful. After discharge, her ride home was smooth sailing, she knew she was blessed!

She would always remember the lesson to teach her kids and inculcate in them values she felt in the homeless man:

'Acts of kindness towards people you don't know accomplish more than it may seem on the surface. First, a little effort on the part of the helper can solve a big problem to the person being helped. Doing one little thing you don't have to can potentially save a person a lot of time and money. This is usually related to being in a position where you have the resources and power to do that. But that's not the most important thing. The good will that bridges the gap between two strangers is the most important thing. It will reach through all their defenses and the entire mental story most people have in their heads to justify all the bad that happens because "that's just how the world works". It will go straight to their heart, that warm and neglected part of them. This will put a dent in their stories and open their hearts to fellow men and women. It's an entirely different way of being. A person with an open heart is more trustful and helpful to fellow human beings. So it is likely they will do a good deed for some other person out there and the love will spread. Every time you help a stranger you nurture their trust in other strangers. They start seeing people aren't so bad and as a consequence they behave less badly to them. Another person somewhere is helped by a person you helped, and somewhere in that chain there is a person who will help you. Small acts do have big impacts.'

Rani wrote this in her book. A lesson learnt forever!

Love can't disappear. Rani now believes it is never lost, but keeps circling around. It's the law of conservation of energy! Find it, give it, and spread it around.

**Every time we're faced with challenges, we should think of the homeless man's valuable lesson and remember that we are blessed.**

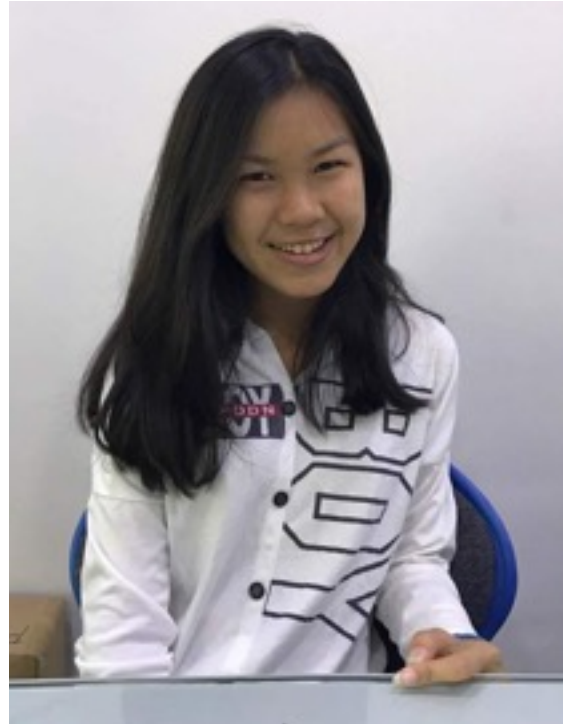
School Category, Finalist

# It starts from you

By, *Sokuntevy Chhy* , 17 years, *Preah Sisowath High School* , Cambodia

As a citizen, what do you usually do in your free time to help your country? Do you think that you have to have a lot of money to help children and poor people? Do you think you are still too young to help your community? Do you think it is not the time to think of this big goal yet? This is a short story of a group of people that have made a very big change to young children and their country.

Bopha is a young girl who lives happily with her family in Phnom Penh.. She is the only child. Her parents bring her to a very famous school in the country and get her everything that she wishes to have. Bopha is 16 years old now and she is in grade 11. As a high school student, Bopha only goes to school, play games and hang out with her friends. Bopha usually goes to movie theatre with her friends in the weekend. She thinks everyone is happy and has everything they need just like her. She really enjoys what she has in her life.



On Sunday, Bopha is going out to watch movie with Lida and Kunthea who are her classmates. After having lunch and watching movie Lida suddenly asks Bopha and Kunthea “Hey! Are you guys interested in an event in our school next week?” Bopha replies “NO! I think I want to watch the new movie that will release on Friday”. Lida says “Oh come on Bopha, we can watch it later”. Kunthea agrees and says “Well, I think so, we have never been to our school event before we only come here. I want to know what it is like in the event”. Lida explains “As I hear from our teacher it is a charity event and is called Doante & Fun”. Bopha hesitates and tells them that “I don’t know what that is but if you guys want to join, I’ll join, too. I don’t want to watch the movie alone.”

\*At the school event

Bopha, Lida and Kunthea meet Dara who is an outstanding student in class. Dara is wearing a t-shirt with the logo ‘Donate & Fun’ on it. Bopha immediately asks “Where did you get this t-shirt from?”. Dara smiles and replies “because I’m a volunteer in this event”. Bopha continues to ask “Why do you volunteer? It wastes your time”. Dara denies “No of course

not, this actually helps me, children and our society a lot” Bopha wanted to ask why but before she could Dara suddenly tells her that “I will talk to you next time I have to go now, bye”.

\*2 days later in the school

The school principle announces for students who want to volunteers to teach children in the countryside on every Sunday. However, no one is interested in that. The school principle continues that there will be a trip for all 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in this weekend to countryside. Every student screams “Whoa a trip”. Everyone is very excited about this news. Nobody notices that the school principle shakes his head with a hopeless face he made except Bopha.

\*In the countryside

Bopha walks around with Kunthea and Lida while a kid runs to them and says “Do you want to buy my flowers?”. Kunthea replies “Yes, cutie I will buy them”. Bopha notices the kid’s cloth and then asks “Why are you selling this?”. The kid answers “Because this is my job I have nothing to do instead of this”. Lida adds “Don’t you go to school?”. The kid replies “No, in fact there is a school, but unfortunately there is no teacher. Last 3 months there are 2 teachers that came to teach us every Sunday but after that they told us that they have to continue their study abroad. They did promise that they will find good teachers for us. But it’s been 3 months now, we go to school on every Sunday but there isn’t any teacher there” Bopha stuns and then she looks at Kunthea and Lida then says ‘We must do somethings about this’. Kunthea closes her eyes and says “Right, let’s talk to our school principle about this”.

\*On the way back to the school

Bopha keeps silent and then she decides to ask the school principle about volunteering. “Mr Principle I saw a kid who doesn’t go to school” she adds “He said there isn’t any teacher to teach them” The school principle takes a deep breath and replies "Yes, Bopha. I already tried my best to help them but unfortunately I can’t find any teacher for them, what I can do is trying to find donation to buy school supplies for them”. Bopha tears start to drop “This is heart breaking”. “Mr principle I want to be teach them I will try to manage my time to come and teach them every Sunday”. A smile appears on the school principal’s face “That’s great Bopha, thank you so much”. Bopha tells Kunthea and Lida about this. They are really surprised and they ask why. Bopha explains “I was confused, I thought every kid is happy and has a wonderful school life just like us but in fact I was wrong. We have to help them. I think this is the only thing we can do.” Lida and Kunthea understand and say “We will do it, too”. Fortunately, Dara comes “Great you guys. I’m really happy to hear this” Kunthea doubts and asks “Why don’t you be a teacher too” Dara smiles a bit and says “I wanted to but I have to organize many charity events to find funds for every poor people. Every sunday me, the school principle and our team go to the poor villagers to give them useful

stuffs that will able help them in living. This is why we can't teach those children." "We understand" Bopha, Kunthea and lida say. They continue "From now on, we will be their teachers and Dara if you need help from us to be a part of the charity event, please tell us." They all smile.

\*many years later

Bopha, Kunthea, Lida and Dara graduated and have a good job but they still don't stop teaching and helping their students every Sunday. Years and years pass by. Bopha is sitting watching her student leaving after graduating. Her students come and hug her so tight. They are all cry and then say to Bopha "Thank you very much, teacher, we will never forget you. Thank you for spending your time for 12 years with this". Bopha says to her student "I never thought I will have today, too. I hope we all will become good people and help weak and poor people especially young children who need to study. Please help them" All of the students say "Thank you teacher, we will remember this".

\*10 years after that

Her students come back to the school and call her out load "Teacher Bopha" with a huge smile on their faces. They ask if Bopha is doing okay. Bopha smile and hug all of them tight and ask "Why do you come here for?" One of the student replies "We are here to be a teacher just like you, we have collected donation to buy study supplies for the children here. Bopha cries "I'm so proud of you guys. You guys are superheroes. The student replies "We wouldn't have a good job and become a teacher today without you" "We are lucky enough to have a good teacher just like you. You are our role model, we follow your rules, we are trying to help and support young children to be able to go to school. We have organized many events to find donation for homeless people. We are hoping that the young children that we help will become superheroes that help everyone that is in needed." they continue "Teacher you are our superhero."

Bopha, Kunthea, Lida , Dara, their teams help hundreds of children and homeless people every years. Children now has the same chance to study and find a good work, homeless people are now can finally have a home and have a job at Dara's organization. With just a small actions they did, it finally can make this change happens. They inspire and motivate young generation to go good and help other people. This change has started from a small group of people but the impact to society has grown bigger and bigger from day to day.

Remember, small acts can always make big impact. So start your action now to make a big change in the future. A future change for our country, community, society and next generation, IT ALL START FROM YOU. DON'T WAIT YOU CAN ALWAYS TAKE ACTION RIGHT NOW.

School Category, Finalist

# The Story of How Three Teenagers saved the World

By, *Samrin Saleem* , 15 years, *The Millennium School, Dubai*

Margaret Maple, and her mother, Barbara Maple, were witnessing yet another funeral. Another one of their extended family members had died. This happened every day. Every day, Margaret and her mom saw not one, but lots of funerals. All of those who died were murdered by her families' worst enemies – humans.

You see, Margaret was a maple tree, like her parents. One day when she was just four years old, a large, burly man came into her neighbourhood leading four other men, all carrying big axes in their hands. The five cruel men cut many trees across their trunks, killing them. One of those trees was Oswald Maple, her father. After the death of her father, her mother had to take care of her and Grandpa Maple all alone.

It has been ten years since, and Margaret still remembers it like it was yesterday. Every funeral she attends reminds her of her father. But more than that, it reminds her that it didn't have to be this way. 'Oh! If only those humans weren't quite as cruel,' she often thinks.

There was a time in history when her ancestors were worshipped by the humans for they were extremely useful to them. Gradually, that all changed. Instead of man abiding by nature's rule, he started to bend nature according to his will. He didn't go to the rivers to get water anymore. No, he made the rivers come to him and deliver their water. Gradually, man grew arrogant and started to take nature's gifts for granted.

Margaret wishes, with all her heart, that man would realize his mistakes. At least then the killings would end.



Not very far off, another 14-year old was talking to her friend.

Eleanor Davies was tired of it. She was tired of people taking Mother Nature for granted and thinking that she would provide them with her bounties forever. “We’ve got to stop this! We’ve got to DO something!” she exclaimed to her friend Lisa White.

Eleanor cared a lot about the environment. One of the things that bothered her greatly was the hypocrisy of her school. They preached about saving the environment and doing our best, but, in reality, they wasted paper and ink to print out and distribute learning objectives, mind maps and cross curricular link lists for every student, every lesson, and every year. It annoyed her a lot and she could see no point in it.

Eleanor was subject to long periods of speaking out aloud about these issues. Lisa, being her best friend, was usually the one at the receiving end of these speeches. She too, wanted to bring about a change, but was not as passionate about it as Eleanor was.

“What can we do, Eleanor? How far will our efforts go? After all, we are just two 14-year olds. Who would listen to us?” Lisa asked her friend now.

“So what? Once we start doing something, I’m sure many people will follow,” she reasoned, trying to convince her friend.

“But, what do we do? How do we make an impact, Eleanor?” Lisa asked.

Eleanor thought for a while. “Why don’t we go to the little forest? You know, the one where we go to after school sometimes for some peace and calm? Maybe we’ll get some ideas,” she told Lisa.

And so, the two friends set off to their all-time favourite spot, with some snacks, music and of course, something to put all the litter in.

Back in the forest, Margaret was in deep thought. She was thinking of a way to stop humans from exploiting her kin. She racked her brains hard, tried shaking her branches, shedding some leaves (to take some weight off) and even used extra energy. But she could come up with little ideas.

That was when she saw two girls approaching. It was them, the two girls who came here every day in the evening, talking, playing, laughing, eating and having lots and lots of fun. Margaret liked them. They were nice and kind, they never littered and never harmed the trees, bushes, plants, animals, or even the insects. From eavesdropping on their conversations, (she really

couldn't help it – they always sat in her shade!) she learned that the two girls cared a lot about the environment, especially the tall, brown haired one.

She loved them due to a lot of reasons, but most importantly, because they weren't like the rest of their kind. Maybe, she could do something to stop the humans, after all...

Eleanor and Lisa were approaching their favourite tree now. It looked so pretty, and it was always nice to sit under its shade. They went there and sat down on a nearby tree-stump (it used to be Oswald, but of course, they didn't know that). "Now, let's think of a way to stop people from harming nature!" Eleanor announced at once.

"Oh! That is just what I have been thinking all day!" Margaret exclaimed. As if on cue, Eleanor and Lisa jumped in surprise.

"Where in the world did that noise come from?" Lisa cried.

"Oh please don't be alarmed, it's only me, the tree you sit under every day. I didn't mean to scare you. I just wanted to talk," Margaret stated.

"You... You can talk?" Eleanor managed to sputter out.

"Well of course I can. My name is Margaret Maple. I am a maple tree, which you obviously knew. That is my mother and grandfather," she explained, pointing to them.

"Don't you have a father?" Lisa inquired.

"That used to be him," Eleanor reminisced, pointing at the tree stump. "He was cut down by some big mean men when I was four."

"Oh dear! That really is too sad. I feel so bad for you, Margaret. I apologise on behalf of my kind. I am terribly sorry," Eleanor promised.

"It isn't your fault. You girls are nice. It's the others I'm angry with. The ones responsible for all of this. They have been causing a lot of deaths in my forest lately. Why, there was one just yesterday. It was that one over there, with a few red leaves around it. It isn't flowering season, so we had to improvise for the funeral. His name was Spencer Knight... used to be a good friend of mine... he died so young," Margaret sniffed.

"This isn't right! We must stop this!" Lisa exclaimed.

"Exactly. We've been thinking of ways to make a positive impact on the environment and I really do believe this is our chance. But I have one



question, Margaret. If you and the other trees can talk, why don't humans know about it?" Eleanor wanted to know.

"Well, there was a time when humans did know about our ability to talk. They used to consider us their friends and worship us. They used to take our advice on different matters related to nature and farming. Man used to revere us. But now that humans have stopped caring about us, we too didn't think about giving them a second glance. Over the years, we stopped talking to humans and the stories and legends that had talking trees came to be considered myths. These days, our ability to talk is just a secret. The Council of Elders have decided to keep it that way," Margaret stated.

At that time, the Council of Elders were having a discussion about the recent rise in killings, and Margaret was glad. If they ever found out that she revealed herself to humans, they wouldn't spare her.

"Well tell us about the extent and nature of the killing that have been taking part here," Lisa implored.

And so Margaret did. She told them about the woodcutters with their axes, industrialists and contractors with their big machines to clear the area, replacing the forest with a concrete one.

"A forest?" Lisa wondered out loud. "But there are hardly a handful of trees around here."

"You wouldn't believe it! There used to be lots of trees around here. And a whole variety of animals, birds and other organisms too," Margaret replied.

So she told them about life before the killings started – days in the rain, playing laughing and having fun with all the different creatures. She told them how the animals and birds fled for their lives when the number of trees started dwindling. She told them about the increasing number of funerals she had to attend each day and about the one that remained with her every day – that of her Father's.

"There is one more thing. All this pollution has damaged my grandfather's vascular system and he has a disease which is the plant equivalent of asthma. His health condition worsens every day. We never know when he will die," Margaret worried.

"This is just horrible!" Eleanor yelled. "It is outrageous. Something must be done to stop this. Do you know much paper is wasted? All of it made from the

pulp of innocent trees like you! People aren't in the least bothered about it because paper is a biodegradable waste. They never stop to think about all the trees we cut down to make the paper! We have to act!"

The three of them thought hard for a while, before Margaret began shaking her leaves to show excitement.

"I think I have an idea!" Margaret began, "Why don't you two spread awareness about the dangers of deforestation?"

"We could organise talks in schools and elsewhere and use social media as a platform. Hey Eleanor, maybe we can do something about all the paper-wastage the school is doing," Lisa suggested.

"Yes. We could appeal to those with a logical mind by providing scientific reasons not to cut down trees. At the same time, we could use the fact that plants too have lives and that they too are living organisms like us to convince those who are more emotive. We could even drop hints about the fact that trees have emotions and that they can think like us!"

And so they did. They spread awareness about Mother Earth. In Eleanor's exact words, "She is falling ill and we, as her children are duty-bound to take care of her." Time to time, Margaret helped them too. She convinced the Council of Elders they needn't silently suffer anymore. With an oath in the name of the martyrs, they began to fight back in whatever little way they could, be it not providing shade, preventing people from taking all their fruits, or even a timely branch sent to someone's head.

They say that small acts make a big impact, just like little drops make up an entire ocean. And it did. These three teenagers, taking over the world, changing mind-sets, making the world a better place to live in, one talk at a time.

College Category, Finalist

# Small Acts, Big Impacts

*By, Muhamad Najmi bin Zol , 21 years, Konkuk University, Seoul, South Korea*

The room was too dark. It was 10 in the morning, with the sun shining bright, releasing its solar radiation to the Earth. But the room was still dark. The old, faded white curtain of the room reflected all the possible light it could, just to keep the room as opaque as its owner what the room to be.

The bed, which is just next to the window, was in a total mess. One figure was there, lying still with not a slight movement, giving a sign that it still did not ready to come out from its hiding. It then curled itself under the blanket, trying its best to be as small as it can, hoping to be diminished and forgotten by the world.

Knock, knock.

The figure still didn't move.

Knock, knock, knock. The knocking kept on coming and this time, they were louder than before.

Still, neither reaction nor movement from the person residing in the room.

"I know you are in there."

Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock.

It seemed like there could be a hole on the door, with all the energy and effort put on each of the knocks. Dust from the door and the walls fell down, in a strangely slow motion and unexpectedly beautiful. Right after all the annoying knocks, a voice bombarded the small room from outside, breaking the non-ending silence of the room.

"You have until next week to settle the rent." An old woman's grasp voice with an urgency. Everyone on that floor could hear the heavy breathing of her.

"Or else, pack your stuff and get the \*\*\*\* out from here." She stopped for a while.

"Do you hear me?" A question came out from her mouth before the sound of her steps could be heard clearly, indicating that she has gone for good.

At last, the figure finally moved as the blanket which was covering its body slides down, fell straight onto the floor.

A woman in her late 20s, still in her pajamas, moved from the bed towards a corner of the dark

room.

A dim light from the fridge occupied a small part of the dark room. The milk on the shelf was lifted up, she stared at it for quite a moment before walking straight to the bathroom.

She poured the milk into the sink, knowing that something is waiting for the expired milk. If she could not save herself from this challenging world, at least she could help other creatures to continue their lives.

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They were patiently waiting for it. Waiting and waiting without losing their hopes as they quite sure it will be here anytime soon. They knew that around this time, something would come down to their place and that 'something' is the thing that they will feed on in order to continue their lives in the sewer.

That something can be anything. You name it. Sometimes it was just orange juice and coke and if they get lucky, a hamburger and fries would be the thing that they will feed on. There was one time where they hit jackpot – slices of pizza came down to their place. That day was a festival for them. Until now, it was their luckiest day from what they can remember.

Back in their old days, they need to work to stay alive, fighting through the floods of human, searching for foods. Their days were full of running away from the humans as they wandered through the dark, dirty alleys, putting a great deal of effort to collect food wastes from the New Yorkers. Now, all those running, hiding and wandering things were in the past. Thanks to humans' habit, this time they just need to wait for the wastes to come down to them. This is their time.

They were still waiting, hoping for some wastes from the humans. On the other hand, they tried not to put high hopes on it since for the last few days, they only managed to get expired milk which running down the drains. Last three days, they also feed on expired milk and as a result, they need to work on that day, searching for other sources of food. They spent almost 5 years down in this sewer, from only a few members in the beginning until thousands in these days. They came a long way to reach this level.

Splash!!!! The sound of something running down from the drains to their places.

This is the time they have been waiting for, they assumed. Pizzas, pies, hamburgers and fries were in their mind. To their surprise, the drain water started to change its color from light gray to faded white. One of them had the courage to dip its tongue into the faded white liquid – expired milk once

again. That was the moment it knew that they would have another work day before they can fill their stomach.

Their minds have now been full with many thoughts. Is she has any problem these days? Is she really didn't have anything else rather than expired milk for the past few days? Usually, she is a bright girl who will eat anything she wants without thinking about her weight. And the members are quite diligent in exploiting her weakness to get some foods from her small room. She really scared of themselves – sewer rats.

There was a time where a number of rats did sneak up into her room, just to find cookies and donuts on the table, and brought those foods back into the sewer. On the other day, one of them took it too far when it swam up a passage full of water and ended up in her toilet bowl which resulted in the woman's screaming on that day.

With only expired milk that day, they will have to make their way up to New York City and try to find anything they could from disposed waste and garbage just to survive for another one day. Crawling up the drains, the sun was shining brightly on them as soon as they reach the gray pavement of New York City. Humans, as usual minding their own businesses, while those sewer rats already noticed the wastes and garbage in one of the alleys in that busy, growing city.

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From afar, one pair of eyes kept following those small things. They looked like small dots, wandering through the walking people. It was waiting for the right time, the right moment before launching its attack towards those small creatures. Timing is the most important thing, as it should be perfect enough to ensure its attack didn't turn into a useless one.

Standing on top of the building, it continued to look around, but its focus still directed to those small dots yet again. It is not a rare thing to see sewer rats wandering on the pavement of the city searching for foods. Unfortunately, luck was not on its side for most of the time. Sewer rats are clever, cunning and fast animals. You take your eyes off them for a moment and they will be disappeared forever. They quite experts in sneaking between humans, walking and running around without fear – something that red-tailed hawk cannot do.

Those sewer rats now were busy tearing those garbage bags apart in an alley. They tried to find anything they can, just to bring the wastes back into the sewer. They didn't realize that danger was just right above them, waiting to ambush them anytime soon.

With a good, extremely keen vision, the hawk now could clearly see 4 bodies of sewer rats. The hawk started to flap its wing rapidly, before gliding smoothly in the air. It flew in a circle, soaring high above the ground, constructing the plan for its attack on those sewer rats.

Nope. Not now. Let's wait some more.

It waited up above the sky while considering all the factors from its speed while attacking until its passage down to that dark alley for hunting. Those sewer rats seemed like already got all the things they needed for the day as they started moving in the direction, heading to their home.

3,2,1..... Now!!!

The red-tailed hawk, using all the momentum and the light weight of its body, started storming down, slicing the air, with all the focus on one of the sewer rats. Its eyes were so big, focusing on every small movement of the rats. It was going down with incredibly high speed, through the passages of flight that it imagined a while ago. Those small creatures, realizing the danger which was approaching them, started to run nervously. They left all the wastes they carried just now, with only one motive – to go back into the sewer safely.

The hawk changed its path to gain more speed before making a projection with its sharp claws ready to grab at least one of the sewer rats. The distance between the rats and the flying hawk decreased sharply.

15 metres,7 metres,2 metres..... and snap.

The last one was now in the hands of the hawk. The red-tailed hawk grabbed the rats tight using its claws, not letting the sewer rat slide down. Another successful hunt for the day as it started to correct its path – going up into the sky again – flying towards its nest.

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The vibration of the phone disturbed his conversation with his daughter. He tried to ignore it, but couldn't resist it.

“Daddy, daddy,” his daughter called him with a soft, cute voice.

“Your phone is ringing.”

The man stopped his walk and took his phone out of his right pocket. All his focus was on the screen.

His face expression changed within a second.

“ I'm really sorry, darling. I need to take this call,” he released the grip of his 6-years-old daughter and started to answer the call.

“ Hello, Mr. Anderson. I am on my way to the park right now,” he said with a shaky voice. He glanced towards his daughter, who was kicking small pebbles that she found on the street.

“ You do remember what we discuss about the project, right?”

“ Absolutely. I will take a look at the site and we’ll continue about it later at the end of the day.” The call was ended after that as the man jogged slowly towards his daughter and grabbed the small hand back.

He looked at his daughter and said, “ Let’s go to the park now.”

His cute little daughter, with a smile on her face, held his father’s hand tightly as they walked their way to the park. The man continued to listen about her daughter’s first day in kindergarten and it was the best moment of his life to see his little girl growing up. The smile was always there on his face ,but deep down, his mind was busy thinking about the project of the park they are heading right now.

The park is a beautiful one. Located at the center of the city, it has been a popular spot for people to hang out and families to have picnics together on the weekend. It is a shame to see this park going down just for shops to be built on the site. In fact, the park is his and his daughter’s favourite spot to have some quality time together. But, a little change from a park to shops can mean a lot to many people – including himself. It is a billion dollar project and as the head architect of his company, he could make a great profit from it.

“ We arrived, honey,” the man said to the little girl. The girl was really excited as it has been quite a time since the last time she went there with his father.

The man took a moment to look around, observing every part of the park and released a long sigh. It didn't change a bit and that is a good thing, he assumed. On the other hand, he began calculating all the possibilities, all the things he could do to make use of the area fully. That ponds need to be covered while all the trees need to be cut down to make way for construction of the concrete buildings.

“Daddy, come here,” she dragged her father heading to the pond. And then there was a woman, still in her pajamas, sitting on the bench, looking at the street blankly. They walked passed the young woman who seemed like lost her hope in the life.

Yeah, it is kind of hard in this time – he talked to himself. The competition is really tough out there and guess what, only those who strong enough will continue to survive. Wake up and pull yourself back – his inner voice tried to give some motivations although she couldn't hear it.

With shops replacing this park, there might be more work opportunities for young people like her. The fact that the employment opportunities being outpaced by labor forces are disturbing. For a moment, he thought that the project should go on for the sake of the unemployed young people in the city.

The girl struggled to catch her breath after dragging her father to the pond. She then pointed towards something in that pond.

“Dad, there are tadpoles in the pond,” said the bright little girl to the man.

He lowered his body to get a better sight of the thing pointed by his daughter. Yes, she was right – there were a lot of them in the pond, waiting for their time in their life cycle. The little girl then switched her position, facing his father right now.

“Can we come here again when they grow big and become frogs?” a question came out from the little girl.

The man stoned for a moment – with the billion project in his mind – with no answer to give to his daughter. His reply was delayed by a hawk, with a sewer rat in its claws gliding just above the pond gracefully. Then, the hawk flew its way up to a big, tall tree towards its nets.

“Woahhh!!!! That is a big bird,” said the little girl. “Can we come again, daddy?” she asked him the question again.

“Yes, girl,” with hesitation in his voice.

“This park is so beautiful.”

“Yes, it is.

“Daddy, when I have children, I want to come here again.”

“Oh really?” he got struck by his daughter for a moment.

“I want to show them this park, just like you showed it to me.”

Once again, he was left without words with his little girl. At that moment, he made his mind on something. He took out his phone from his right pocket and switched it off for the rest of the day.



College Category, Finalist

# Small Acts, Big Impacts

*By, Syed M. Salman Haider , Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan*

As Sara walked down the corrugated road putting all her effort so her feet could move towards her afflicted destination, she cradled little Maria onto her bosom. She noticed a group of men following the duo. Sara and her five year old daughter were being catcalled by these filthy men. She lowered her gaze and hurriedly walked towards the Rural Health Center, holding on to Maria tightly so that she could burglarize a little bit of comfort that little Maria had within her little torso. She entered the hospital and looked around for her tyrant of a husband Jamal and his relatives; when she found the coast clear, she tip-toed to the counter to collect the ultrasound reports that she had been regretting from the past three months. She covered her and Maria's face with her dupatta so that no one would spot their existence. God forbid if anyone from her community was to catch a glimpse of them, she would be dead meat. Flashbacks of the previous beatings played before her eyes. If her husband can break her nose for not bringing 'enough' dowry, he can do anything. She did not want to make her life anymore miserable, her husband more violent and her mother in law more hostile. The uninterested receptionist arrived back at the counter with the reports while Sara was murmuring these words like her life depended on it, "I hope it's not a girl this time, else Jamal is going to kill me". The receptionist interrupted her thoughts and gave her the news that she did not want to hear: It was a girl. Bile started to rise in her throat making it very difficult for Sara to breathe. Her knees felt



weak and she slowly put Maria on to the floor. It felt like if someone had pulled the ground under her feet. Tears welled up inside Sara's eyes; she left the hospital and started to walk towards her house with Maria.

They kept walking at a low pace and as soon as they covered a little distance, Sara saw her neighbor Aliya sitting in the fields staring off into space. The pale moonlight danced along Aliya's bruised skin as Maria noticed in her eyes a reflection of her own fears, anxieties and sorrows. Sara suspected that her father must have beaten her up; she decided to walk up to her but as soon as her feet brushed against the crops, the gang of uncivilized men appeared out of nowhere and tried to create small talk with Sara. Fear rose in Sara's body and unholy thoughts started to build up into her mind just like a tornado in a stormy night. Sara lowered her gaze and briskly dragged her daughter out of the field and bolted towards her house leaving Aliya at the hands of those barbarous animals. Aliya threatened to call the police on these men but they threw acid on her face and raped her one by one. Aliya's muffled screams echoed in the fields until she was brought to the hospital the following day. When she opened her dull, penitent eyes, she just found Maria by her side; her eyes were searching for her mother and father. She wanted to bawl her eyes out in her mother's lap and she wanted to hear her father admonish her for leaving the house without him. However, she came to know that her family had disowned her because she had brought 'disgrace' to the well-respected family. Her parents had two other daughters to betroth and carrying excessive baggage was not in the picture; especially baggage that could postpone the marriages and call off engagements for the remaining siblings of Aliya. She hadn't even heard from Qasim and when she could finally stand on her flimsy legs, she phoned him and got to know that he had called off the engagement because she wasn't pretty or as good as new anymore. He told her that she was impure and he didn't want anything to do with a filthy girl who would destroy his reputation. Aliya's grief was spreading like cancer; she was drowning deeper and deeper in the ocean of despondency and Sara in the ocean of self accusation. Her guilt was eating her up just like an ant on dead meat. She believed that if she stayed back and called the police, this wouldn't have happened. The entire incident played before her eyes and it was like a lump in her throat which constantly reminded her of her selfishness and she finally decided not to care of her own

situation and circumstances and help Aliya. She can keep the ultrasound reports a secret for another week but she cannot abandon Aliya, not this time. Just like she needed a shoulder in such times, she assumed that Aliya needed way more support than her. Aliya had lost her hope of living; all she saw was darkness and nothing at the end of the tunnel. No one was there to pick her up and put all her pieces, everyone had abandoned her because of something she didn't ask for. Slowly but surely Aliya was finding the much-needed bed of roses in depression. She had stopped being alive; she was like an alive corpse. Sara couldn't bear to see a fellow woman in such agony and for something that stayed with her like a black cloud on stormy nights. Sara believed that this burden might lift off her chest if she helped Aliya; she believed that her bravery might prevent such barbaric incidents from happening in future. The next day, she mustered up courage and walked to the local Police along with Aliya to file for an FIR. She hoped that getting justice would soothe the never-ending wound. Sara was so optimistic that maybe someone, who was a total stranger, would take pity over Aliya and be the light at the end of the immensely darkened tunnel. Sara held Aliya's hand and rubbed it between her palms; she was desperately trying to encourage her to voice out her emotions to the police man. There was a strange silence in the room until the Officer interrupted the telepathic conversation that was going between the two women and asked them to spill the beans before he kicks them out, since he was getting late for his lunch break. Aliya broke down in to hysterics and Sara started narrating the story to the policeman in a summarized way. As soon as the uninterested policeman found out it's a rape case, Aliya noticed in his eyes a strange yet familiar excitement. The policeman immediately said, "Are you sure it was rape and you did not know those men?" Aliya shattered into pieces and tears streamed down her cheeks. She murmured, "Yes. I tried to escape but they besieged me and I was forlorn. I lamented for help and no one came to my aid." The policeman smirked and replied, "Who wouldn't rape young and beautiful lass, with a perfectly built figure, sitting in the fields alone at night? And considering the way you've dressed up, I suspect it wasn't the men's fault". Sara yelled at the officer, "What is wrong with her dress? She has fully covered herself. We have come to you for help!"

The Officer remained calm and simply asked Aliya to show 'where' she was hurt. Sara motioned towards Aliya's arm and back but the officer insisted on showing him the 'bruises'. He got up from his chair and started to touch Aliya's contused carcass – as soon as his palm cumbered against her upper legs, slowly parting them, Aliya recognized the ferment building in his eyes; it was similar to the boys who had raped her. She budged him away and sprinted out of the room, sobbing loudly. She begged her Creator to end her misery quickly before she took a sinful step.

Yes, my friends, this is Gender Based Violence. Welcome to Pakistan!

School Category, Finalist

# Small Acts can make a Big Impact In Life

*By, Nichole Ann Philip , 12 years, Gems Our Own Indian School, Al Quoz, Dubai, UAE*

I was exhausted after a whole day's work. On the way back home, more often there would be a poor, homeless man standing at the sidewalk of the street. His eyes were the thing that struck me the most. A bright light was beaming out of his eyes. I believe that a person's eye represents him or her in general. People say that you can tell a lot from a person's eye. It was true in his case. He always waved at every car, he was always happy and sometimes, almost dancing!



Every day after work, I would make sure that I would gather some spare change, and put it aside to give him. A feeling of joy and happiness overwhelmed my heart, every time I saw him.

When I reach that street, I'd roll my window quick and give him the coins. Occasionally, the red light would be there for a minute and we would ask each other about our day. His answer was always the same, "I'm Blessed!"

I knew that his answer would be the same every time, yet I would still ask. It amazed me that even in his situation of being homeless, he was so cheerful, and his answer would remind me of how blessed I was!

One day, I was called into my manager's office. I was scared. He told, "I'm sorry, Ms. Ann. Due to the financial crisis in our company, you will

have to resign from your job. I'm terribly sorry Ms. Ann, but I have to.", said Mr. John.

I had no other option other than to leave my job. I was very upset on my way back home. I didn't remember to gather the spare change and keep it ready, like I usually did. I didn't feel that joy as I turned from the exit the penurious man would be. Yet, there he was as always, as I turned from the exit. He set his eyes on me, while still smiling and waving at others.

I hoped to catch the green light, but I missed it. While I was waiting for the red light to turn, he strolled over to my car. He had a big smile he looked me straight in the eyes and joyfully said

"Today I will give you a dollar!". He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill. I was blown away. I burst into tears. I wanted to jump out of my car and hug him!

That day he gave me more than a dollar bill. He thought me a valuable lesson in life. No matter what things are taken from you, no one can take away your choice to be joyful. My ride home was smooth, I had lost my job, had no savings, but I knew I was blessed!

That small act, did make a big impact in my life!

School Category, Finalist

# Memorable Tears

By, *Izleen Farhanah Binti Husain*, *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Ibrahim Fikri, Malaysia*

“Wow! What a spectacular view”. Whispering Nik to himself while inhaling the fresh air of misty morning. He loves to go outside his house everytime it rains at night.

He sits on the bench staring at the magnificent nature, smelling the nice water drops at the bamboo tree where he sit under it makes him think about something. At the same time, there are cats just playing around. Nik smiles, and his memories about 20 years ago appears in his head.



“Ha ha ha, you should chase after her not me”. says Johan, Nik’s older brother

“Lisa, catch up”, his younger sister yelled.



The field was full with kids laughter. That is how Nik’s life was going. Love is everywhere. They were on cloud nine. As usual, the noise that siblings make, their parents feel the same.

It was a dark night, only moonlight been seen. Nik was hiding behind the curtains to make surprise to his mother. Before he did, his father came. “you look unhappy, did you had a problem?” ask Jamil his father to Maria his mother. “No, I just imaging how house without the kids” says Maria. She feel her world going to pieces. Then Jamil spoke “we must be lonely if they were not around”. Nik saw his parents face were little bit sad.

Day pass day, month pass month. The kids became adults. All his siblings were settled down. There just Nik and his parents who live at the blissful house. Soon, Nik will register for his new job at town.

He remembered when his older siblings left the house for work. He saw tears streaming down his mom’s face. It looked like it was so hard for her to let go her child.



“I love you, please remember us”, says Maria to her child. For Nik that was the first time he saw his mother cry.

It has been two years and the house does

not have any colours. His parents don't even talk to much.

"Mom,dad, I have to go now".Nik started the conversation. With a fake smile,his parents say, "yes, you might be late for your first day at work".  
The parents let him go with a heavy feeling.

Three months passed. The kids had  
Returned to their hometown for holiday but their parents still looked sad and the house was still silent. The kids were busy with their work, so the parents still unhappy as usual.

Nik was worried about his parents. So he decided to make something to give happiness to his parents although the siblings were not around. "How much for the couple of these chickens?" asked Nik.  
"Its only RM15", says the seller.

"I hope mom and dad will love it", thought  
Nik to himself.

"Mom dad are you at home?"  
"Yes, we are at the back".

Nik showed them what he bought. His parents were so excited.

The parents started smiling. They took care  
of the chicken very well. Jamil and Maria did not feel bored anymore. Seeing his parents smile again, Nik wanted to make their happiness bigger. He also gave them a cat. Maria really loves cats. The cat also can be therapy for his parent's sadness.

"With these pets, I hope you guys won't be sad again",says Nik.

" We will not". Thank you my son for giving us noise back.

" The sound of these chickens and the cat is the cure for missing our children's laugh", his father says.

"I love you mom, dad". They were crying while they hugged each other.



Nothing is more valuable than to see our parents smile because of their children.



College Category, Finalist

# The Day That Mocked Death

*By, Abhishek M Nair , TKM College Of Engineering, India*

Sitting on his bed, all alone with sweat running down his face and fear running down his throat. Nobody knew that he had run away from the hospital the previous night. He was still in his hospital clothing and had not slept the previous night as to not miss out the few remaining hours of his life.

John had been an employ of Core InfoTech for the last three years. A well educated and a well respected man with his parents being really proud to have him. Being a sanctum scorer of every examination, finding a job had never been difficult for him. If looked at, John's life was surely giped with every success

that anyone would desire for. But all of this was none of those things he expected out of his life. John had been a fan of cricket throughout his life and always loved playing it.

He had been a part of the school cricket team throughout his secondary and higher secondary classes. His desire to pursue cricket as a career was reprimanded at once by his parents and he finally ended up in an engineering college which later gave him a white collar job. Life then went on to give him all possible luxuries and nullified all of them by injecting tuberculosis into his body-all by a surprise.

One day lying on the hospital bed with all his family and employees with him, John somehow overheard that he would probably not last for more than a few hours. Hearing this he was as cold as anyone would

be. He had everything in his life but had nothing for him to remember. His dream of playing cricket for his country still haunted him after all this time. Nothing else but this mattered to him very much. The thought of lying stagnant on the hospital bed and dying at last with all the grief just made him more

depressed. His mind flooded with such thoughts made him jump the hospital wall and go home.

Sitting on his bed all alone with the same thoughts haunting him, he got up and went up to the mirror.

He took a deep breath and smiled at himself very widely. This was the least thing he could do now. But it gave him a very big relief and energized him to a great extent. All in an impulse, he took his car keys and drove out of the city. Without knowing where to go he kept driving until he found a group of small children playing cricket in a ground. He immediately stopped his car and ran to the ground. He went to the kid who was on strike and was busy enjoying the game.

“Can I have the bat for a moment?” He asked.

The boy gave the bat to John. “30 runs to win from 6 balls”. He said John was all agape. This was really a massive score to make the win. He took the strike and indicated the bowler to ball. The first ball came straight to the bat. John managed to hit it to a fair distance and started running to take a run. At the very moment he started running he felt a severe pain in his chest.

He quickly came back to his crease. He was coughing badly and felt like vomiting. Sadly realizing that he was now incapable of running because of his cancer he sat down and took a few deep breaths. He then stood up, holding the bat very firmly. He now had to make 30 runs from 5 balls, meaning 5 sixes in 5 balls.

“This is surely a record to make” He said to himself. He had never hit even 2 consecutive sixes during the time he had played the game well. So now if he manages to make 30 runs he would surely have something to remember for himself. He took his position and indicated the bowler to ball.

The ball came at a very fast pace. Keeping his eyes fixed on the ball John raised his bat and BANG! The

ball had managed to cross the boundary line giving him 6 runs. This brought a wider smile on John's face. As a result the remaining four balls ended up in bigger BANGS that made a total of 30 runs at the end.

John now felt very much energetic and was really very excited. He dropped the bat and started walking towards his car with his heart beating very loud out of excitement. He straightaway went to his home to have a peaceful sleep in spite of knowing that he may not wake up later. He was now fearless of death.

All he needed was a bit of relaxation and a strong smile to get away with his fear. His inning at the ground was surely a record for him. He had achieved a bit of cricket once again after a long time and that was all he had wanted from his busy life. Now even death was not a botheration for him and all this was a result of his willingness to smile even in such a situation between life and death.

College Category, Finalist

# Bele Bale

*By, Sirhajwan Idek , UITM, Malaysia*

On the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia, a peaceful village located in a region of what is now known as

Sabah, was famous for its lush rice paddies. Rice was the staple food of the locals and their lives

revolved around the paddy that not only served as their main source of income, but was closely tied to

the beliefs of the indigenous group of Sabah, the Bajau.

Not far from the village, lived a unique being in the mountainous areas of Kiulu Valley surrounding the

majestic Mount Kinabalu. He wore shabby clothes and a tattered hat and his body was entirely made of

straw. He never knew what his name was, where he came from or who had created him but he surely

looked like no other in the world. Legend says he was created by Huminodun, the goddess of harvest

that was highly revered by the indigenous people. A harvest festival known as Kaamatan is celebrated

annually as a tribute to her sacrifice for the locals. Despite his origin, he was treated differently as his

appearance was considered bizarre, ugly and scary which people refused to tolerate.

He was kind-hearted and hardworking but his rather strange look kept people and animals from him. He

wanted to befriend with everybody in his village but they were too scared of him that they did not even

want to be anywhere near him. He usually crawled out of his cave during the day but avoided humans

who generally ran away the moment they saw him. His intention was merely to do good deeds even

though humans never appreciated what he was doing for them. He regularly gathered logs for humans

to collect and use, cleared the bush for humans to be able to walk through, prepared the soil for humans

to plant crops and vegetables. He spent every single day of his life trying to help humans in every way

that was possible as it made his life meaningful. Deep inside, he always wanted to be accepted by the

humans as one of them.

One day, when he walked to the forest with an axe in his hand, he saw an old man wearily carrying a pile

of firewood. He wanted to offer the man his help.

“Let me help you carry the firewood for I have no burden on me”, said the person whose body was

entirely straws. The old man was surprised when he saw him.

“Keep your distance away from me, you ugly freak, I know you try to trick me so you can take the

firewood!” cried the frightened man.

“No, I definitely have no intention to do so. In fact, I am about to cut some woods for myself,” he

replied.

“I could cut more for you and help you to carry it home”, he added pleasantly. The man warned him not

to come near.

“I do not trust you for you are a deceitful and foul being”, yelled the man in fear. He dropped his firewood and ran as fast as he could to his home.

He felt upset because the old man did not trust him and accused him of a sinister being. He sincerely

wished he could help the old man carry the firewood for he looked really tired. In fact, he felt guilty that

because of him, the old man had left his firewood after all the efforts of cutting and gathering them. He

decided to return the firewood to the man the next day. As he walked to the man’s village, he noticed

the villagers were having a large feast that locals referred as “Mesduo” to express their gratitude to the

blessings in their life. He spotted that the old man, whom he met the day before, was among the crowd.

He quickly went to the crowd until he heard a woman’s voice yelled,

“Look!! It’s the horribly-looking creature! He is coming here to steal our foods”. The villagers

immediately noticed his presence and started to pick up some stones from the ground and threw them

on him.

“I do not mean to harm any of you or steal any of your property, I just want to return the firewood”, he

cried. He begged the crowd to stop but they continued to throw stones on him. He was in a great pain.

Therefore, he dropped the firewood and ran as fast as he could, he ran past his home and went to the

deep woods. He felt so sad because the villagers were mean to him even when he tried to be nice to

them. He wished that there would be people who could accept the way he looked. He continued to walk

aimlessly in the woods until he reached a beautiful village with a wide range of paddy fields and ranches.

He decided to stop for a while before he started on another arduous journey.

He visited the farms and noticed that the crops were being ruined by the crows. The crows were eating

the seeds of the paddy. The farmers were futilely trying to shoo the crows away but the crows kept

coming back and continued to feed on the crops. He remembered that animals always ran from him for

they were scared of his bizarre look, therefore, he decided to go to the farms and hoped he could scare

the crows away from the crops. As he expected, the crows immediately flew away when they saw him.

He then left the farm and the crows at once came back to the crops and started feeding on them again.

The farmers saw this and requested him to stay with them.

“We have tried many methods to shoo those crows away but none of them had ever worked as well as

what you have just done”, the oldest man among the farmers said.

“We hope you could help us with the crows, we will let you stay here with us and give you whatever

you needs”, another man added.

“But I am afraid that I might scare you all away as well”, he said to the farmers.

“How can you scare us away when you have just become the hero in our village”, a woman replied. She

further added,

“It has been a while since we have not had our feast, our crops never grew and we have no harvest to reap”.

“We were scarce of food for quite some time and if it wasn’t because of you, we would have been

starving to death”, said a young man.

He felt pitiful towards the villagers and finally decided to stay with them. All day long, he would be in

the farms and crops were nowhere to be seen around the crops. The crops started to grow and the

farmers eventually managed to reap their harvests. As a way of expressing their thanks for the harvest,

the villagers decided to do a large Mesduo and invited everyone in the village including him. The

villagers thanked him for his help and expressed their gratitude to him. In fact, they requested him to

stay with them permanently. He was so happy that the villagers accepted him for who he was and he, in

return, accepted their offer to stay with them. They decided to give him a name and the villagers agreed

to call him Bele’ Bele’.

“You have now become our denakan (family)”, uttered one of the elderly ladies during the Mesduo.

Bele’ means “hawk” in the Bajau language and Hawk is a predator that birds are scared of and it is



deemed as one of the most powerful animals among the locals. The villagers believed that he had the

gift of a hawk since he was not only able to scare off the birds but also guarded the paddy like a hero.

The name was repeated twice “Bele Bele” as the signature manner of how the Bajau people highlighted

the significance of something and his name became one of the most essential words in the local

community up to the present time.

“I finally found the reason why I am who I am”, whispered Bele’ Bele’ as he watched the farmers

separating rice from straws while some ploughed the muddy paddy field with buffaloes. They built him a

bamboo house in the centre of the paddy field so he could easily guard the crops. He never thought his

little deed of scaring the crows away would have made such a huge impact on the village.

The story of “Bele Bele” was how the Scarecrow came to the existence in the northeast of Borneo and

that is the name that people use to refer to scarecrows in the state.

School Category, Finalist

# Muneeba Shakeel

*By, Muneeba Shakeel , 17 years, Beacon house School System Defence Campus Karachi, Pakistan*

It was 5:15 p.m. and Sarah was still waiting for her mother to come home from work. The

two of them had reserved dinner seats at 6 p.m. at the new high-end restaurant in town to

celebrate Sarah's graduation from middle school and her mother, Mahnoor's promotion as the head architect.

Sarah looked down from the moist window of her apartment building, hoping to see her

mom walk by when she realized that the odds of Mahnoor coming home just in time for

dinner were very little. It was raining cats and dogs. There was no chance her mother could

beat the traffic, come home, get ready and then reach the restaurant in time. The street in

front of Sarah was flooded with cars and motorcycles, each blasting the horns of their

vehicles at the other one. The pavements had taken a dark grey color indicating just how

wet and slippery they were. However, the pedestrians were struggling the most. Almost



each and every one of them were drenched in rainwater attempting to protect their

belongings and bags while also trying to find asylum from the heavy rain.

This just simply showed how extremely unprepared Karachi and its residents were for rain.

Eventually, Sarah's train of thought drifted from the dinner and her mom towards the

people in the chaotic scene below her. Each of them had different concern at the moment

and all of their personal frustration and displeasure was coming out on the rain. Each of

them were so engrossed in their own problems that they seemed to be unaware of their

surroundings and thus being unable to make sensible decisions. Whenever a vehicle

untangled, the other quickly moved forward thus blocking the road all over again. "If only

they'd be patient." Sarah quietly mumbled to herself.

Fifteen minutes later and the traffic jam was still not moving. At this point the teen's eyes

drifted towards the pavements. It was still the same, people with wet clothes running and

rushing with their hands over their heads, trying to find shelter; almost no one carrying an

umbrella. Sarah now noticed a yellow object camouflaging in the faded yellow paint of the

concrete floor. Anyone could have easily missed it and walked right over it. On a closer

examination Sarah realized that it was in fact a banana peel. She had always heard about

people slipping on banana skins in comical stories but had never thought it was a possibility

in real life. However now looking at the combination of the slippery floor and the fruit

peeling, Sarah's humor shifted into concern.

Right in that moment, a little girl in a pink floral dress almost slipped on the banana peel but

luckily, had a strong hold on her father's arm, and thus was unharmed. The little family,

however, did not pick up the piece of litter, and quickly resided in a small café, next to the

footpath. Sarah now knew she had to do something about this ridiculous yet serious

situation. She quickly got into her shoes, grabbed her keys and an old umbrella, which was a

little weary and had specks of dust on it and rushed out of her building.

On her way out she saw her neighbor's five-year-old son looking out of the lobby window,

probably waiting for his parents to return home. She felt sympathetic, after all she was

waiting on her mother too, and she knew it was going to be a long time before any of them

showed up. She immediately brushed off the feeling and finally opened the rusty green

umbrella which she now noticed had animated picture patterns of bananas. "Oh the irony!"

she said. Sarah hurriedly started walking towards the footpath where she saw the fruit skin;

her spectacles had now gotten foggy because of the sudden change in temperature and her

hands were shaking because of the cool breeze and yet she was determined to fix the

situation. Finding the banana skin was a hard task since that soggy piece of fruit was

masking itself with the yellow paint on the footpath, but, once she got hold of the now wet

and nauseating banana peel, she wasted no time in disposing it off in a dust bin nearby.

Sarah then looked around the street and realized that the traffic had no signs of

improvement and had actually gotten worst. She looked up at the sky and saw the fury grey

clouds and bolts of lighting and concluded that the chances of this raging storm ending any

time soon were impossible. The little five-year-old boy was still looking out the window, but

this time at Sarah. "He probably thinks I'm a weird person!" she thought as she let out a

sigh. The fifteen-year-old then started sluggishly walking towards her apartment building

with an obvious damper on her mood when she decided to leave behind her umbrella on

the street for someone else to use, someone who was desperate in the rain.

A couple of hours passed by and Sarah had now fallen asleep on the couch next to the

window. On the street below her, Mahnoor finally got out of the taxi and started swiftly

walking on the concrete floor of the footpath that led to her apartment building. Mahnoor

felt extremely guilty for not being able to reach home in time. The young lady walked over

the yellow painted floor, exactly on the spot where the banana peel once rested. Sarah had

just saved her mother from a horrible accident.

Fast forward, a couple of weeks after the storm, the five-year-old boy who was Sarah and

Mahnoor's neighbor decided to pick up litter in his local park because he had seen Sarah do

so. The park sweeper was able to go home early that evening and spend some quality time

with his family and friends. He died unexpectedly later that month because his cancer made

a sudden relapse. His children still cherish that one evening they got to spend with him.

A young couple had taken Sarah's umbrella from the street below her house and had

happily used it to shield themselves from the rain. They donated the umbrella and a few

months later the animated banana patterned umbrella reached a charity organization

where an old homeless woman was gifted this. The umbrella was her most prized

possession as it had become a sturdy walking cane for her and it facilitated her mobility.

The conclusion of this story is simple, any good that you do will always pass forward.

Although you may never see it, your little acts of kindness, or bravery or hard work will

always pay off. Sarah will never know how just by picking up a banana peel and letting go of

an old umbrella she filled other people's life with joy and happiness and one day the circle

will complete it's self, returning the favor back to her. This is the rule of life. Small acts work

in mysterious ways to make big impacts.

*The END*

The background is a dark blue night sky. It features several stylized, light blue and grey clouds scattered across the top and sides. Numerous small, four-pointed stars in shades of yellow and light blue are scattered throughout the sky. At the bottom, there are three stylized mountain peaks. The peaks are white with grey shading on their sides, and they sit on a base of teal and light blue geometric shapes.

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