

Years 9 & 10

3rd Place: Ethna Josephine Jimmy

Year 10, Willetton Senior High School

### A Writer's Loss

Streams of light materialized atop endless rolling hills as if liquid gold itself had ebbed down from the heavens above. Chamomiles and cornflowers appeared in the midsummer's zephyr, emerging amongst the green canvas of the earth like bejeweled freckles. Yet not even the brightest diadem, in all its glory, could have captivated Joseph more than the sunlit currents of Anne's eyes.

"Why do you look so lost?" she asked.

Her gentle voice seared through his mind. Flustered, he snapped out of his daze as a giggle surfaced from her shimmering fuchsia lips. Fighting down a blush, Joseph instead singled his gaze on the little daisy that he rolled between his fingers. He would've seemed like a fool had he told her that he was as enamored with her eyes as a kid in front of a toy store.

"Do you remember when we first met?"

The spontaneous question toppled out of his mouth before he could stop himself. Anne took a silent step towards him, her lips forming a tender smile.

"Of course I do. It was at that coffee shop, wasn't it?" she laughed. "You dropped your stupid cappuccino all over my lap."

Joseph shook his head.

"What do you mean? I clearly remember it –" she started. "– unless . . . unless it was the library in Albany."

He closed his eyes, trying to remember. He knew it wasn't there either but if not Albany or the coffee shop, where had he met Anne? The answer seemed to be on the tip of his tongue, just out of reach. Frustration bubbled in his throat at the inability to capture the precious moment.

"Oh!" Her face lit up. "It was at the –" She froze.

Anne's still face met Joseph's eyes. Not a breath escaped her lips. The ends of her dress rigid against the gale, transfixed in time. For a second, he could've sworn that her whole body scintillated as if woven from threads of gossamer light.

Joseph paused. His heart skipped a beat. "Anne?"

"Yes, Joseph?" she said.

The dress now fluttered again in the breeze, mocking Joseph with every flap of its fabric. Anne's wide eyes, which had been as still as death, searched his face in confusion.

"But you were just –" he raised an accusatory finger. "I swear for a second you just –"

"Just what, Joseph?" she questioned lightly.

"Never mind," he exhaled, shaking his head. That cup of coffee before bed last night had been a mistake.

She frowned. "If you say so . . ."

He felt stupid. Red crept up his neck as embarrassment flared in the pit of his stomach. Unable to face her any longer, he turned to the scenery before them. It had all seemed so vibrant, so vivid . . . so fake. Joseph blinked thrice and with each blink of his eyes, the world seemed to warp and twist, fade and dull out. Since when had the chamomiles and cornflowers hung over with the despondence of a man condemned to death. He could've sworn that he had been holding a daisy but now his hands laid barren.

And he didn't want to admit, but whenever his gaze wasn't focused on Anne, her figure seemed to almost disappear . . . like a ghost or a character when you stopped reading a book.

"Joseph?"

He jolted at the sound of her voice. "Yes?"

"Are you okay?"

"I don't know." He briefly glanced to the side to see that the view had been restored to its original splendor. *What on earth was happening?*

"You look a little pale –" she reached up to feel his forehead.

He waited for the coolness of her hand, that cool brush of her manicured nails, the faint waft of her peony-scented hand cream.

It never came.

"Anne?"

"Yes."

"Weren't you going to check my temperature?"

"I already did."

The confusion that leaked from her voice stabbed daggers of dread in his mind.

An awkward silence stretched between them. He wearily watched as she fidgeted with a sheer white ribbon that had fallen loose from her hair. Thankful for the distraction, Joseph reached out for it, hoping the romantic gesture of tying her hair up would ease the sudden distance that he had stupidly created.

His hands though, fell through hers.

Ice cascaded through Joseph's veins as he desperately fought a rising panic. His head pounded with the force of a thousand hammers on anvils and fear clawed up his throat, threatening to rip him apart. "Anne?"

She didn't respond. In his mind's eye, Joseph tried to cultivate the quirk of her lips and the deep delight in the dents of her dimples. He tried to paint her radiant aura and reignite the warmth that spread through his heart whenever he locked eyes with her. But he was incapable of capturing her essence, her love, her heart.

"Anne?" he asked at last.

"Yes Joseph."

"You're not real –" his voice broke off, "– are you?"

"No, Joseph," she said, looking calmly up into his hollow eyes fogged with grief.

"I hate you," he scowled at her fading figure.

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"I love you . . ."

The ashen night seeped through the open window, enveloping the little apartment as Joseph typed out the final words on his laptop.

He sat still at his desk. The unnatural fluorescence of the screen illuminating the tear streaks that ran down his face. Slowly he scrolled up the pages and pages of writing. He had typed until his fingers were numb and his body was stiff. Day after day, night after night. Yet no matter how brilliantly he crafted his words together, no matter how vivid he painted the imagery or how real he made the dialogue, there were no words. Not a single word that could describe Anne.

Tired, he laid his head beside the framed photo of them together, before she passed. Writers could bring stories to life.

So why couldn't Joseph do the same with Anne . . .