

Special Edition - Announcement of Short Story Competition Winners

Welcome to our special edition of the Youth newsletter. We are pleased to announce the three winners of our short story competition, which was judged by New Zealand author, David Hill. The three winning stories are included in this newsletter.

First Place \$1000

Elizabeth Youard (15)
Riccarton High School, Christchurch

Second Place \$500

Katarina Filipe (16)
Middleton Grange School, Christchurch

Third Place \$250

Emma MacDonald-Laurs (17), Palmerston North Girls
High School

Congratulations to our winners, and thank you to everyone who entered.

Our three winners will also receive the Young Person's Initiate Award.

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Lauren

First Place Winner: "Birthday Cards" by Elizabeth Youard

It started with the birthday cards from Grandma. My sister Hannah would rip open the envelope, pull out the card and open it facing the ground. Usually a ten dollar note would float down onto the carpet. Sometimes there would be a scratchie. Hannah squealed with excitement when she saw it, but her happiness would be over after a couple of scratches with a coin.

"A dud again," she moaned, "What a waste of money."

One year, on her sixteenth birthday, the scratchie was no dud.

"Oh my god!" whispered Hannah.

"What?" I asked, as she trembled from head to toe.

"Five hundred dollars is what!" she screamed excitedly.

I grabbed the ticket from her. Sure enough, there were three little suns, with \$500 printed underneath.

"I won, I won, I won," she yelled, running off to tell Mum.

Hannah used her money to buy the new cellphone she had wanted, but from then on she started buying herself the occasional scratchie or lotto ticket. I wasn't too worried about it, because what harm could a couple of scratchies do?

When Hannah turned 20, one of the first things she wanted to do was to go to the casino.

"I just want to exercise my rights," she said, choosing the dress she would wear to fit the casino's dress code.

Mum let her go as long as I accompanied her. Because it was Hannah's birthday, I had given her a couple hundred dollars as a present, intending her to use it towards



buying a car. Instead, she wanted to take it to the casino. "I don't think that's a good idea Hannah," I told her, as we drove there.

"Why? I did research and apparently you can triple what you take in those slot machines," she said.

"But you could lose it all!" I cried.

"No, I'm smart, I won't keep going if I lose, don't worry!"

We drove into the car park and went inside. Hannah's face lit up at the sight of the black jack tables and poker games but she went straight to the slot machines.

"Why do you want to use those?" I asked, "How about I teach you blackjack instead?"

"Oh, those games are too slow; I just want to win money."

I left her too it and went off, exploring the casino because I had never been there before either. When I returned to the slot machines an hour later, I found Hannah at the same machine, but she was no longer smiling. She jumped at the sight of me and her eyes had a strange glow to them.

"Oh hi, you gave me a fright. I'm just going to play one more game, then we'll go, okay?"

"How much money do you have now?" I asked.

She turned away from me, and then whispered, "Only ten dollars."

"WHAT!" I almost exploded.

"But just another game and I can win it all back and more!" she cried.

"Absolutely not! How could you spend it all? We're going now!" I dragged her towards the door, while she cried silently.

In the car, on the way home, she told me she had been winning at first but got overconfident.

"I just kept on losing! You won't tell Mum will you?"

I promised not to on the condition she never went to the casino again. She agreed.

Soon afterwards, Hannah got a job at the local hair salon. She moved out of home six months later. She enjoyed flattering and the freedom it gave her.

One evening, I rang her cellphone to organise what we should buy Mum for her birthday. She answered my call after about nine rings.

"Hey, you took a while to answer! Did you lose your phone again?" I joked.

"What, oh, no, well yes, I couldn't find it in my purse." She sounded a bit distracted.

"Anyway, I was thinking of getting Mum that new CD she wanted, and maybe a bottle of wine."

"Hannah didn't answer, but I could hear her breathing. Then I heard the sound of coins rattling.

"Hannah what are you doing?" I asked.

She laughed and then replied "Oh, just celebrating my flatmate's 21st at the casino."

"Are you on the slot machines?"

"Yes. Why? We're having a great time!"

I sighed. "How much money do you have left Hannah?"

"Heaps! I'm gonna be a winner tonight!"

"Hannah, can I speak to your flatmate for a second?"

"You can't - she's gone to the toilet," she said angrily.

"What about her other friends?"

Hannah paused for a second.

"Oh, they are all at the blackjack table, I don't want to bother them."

"You're there alone aren't you, Hannah," I said slowly.

"No! Stop worrying about me!" She cried. Then the line went dead.

The next day, I went to see her. She answered the door in pyjamas, with black circles under her eyes.

"You broke your promise, Hannah," I said. "Why?"

"You just worry too much," She took me into the lounge.

"I know you have been going to the casino every night, Hannah. I called your flatmate and she said you are never home in the evening."

"I work in the evenings now," Hannah tried to smile.

"She also said you are weeks overdue in your share of the rent. If you work overtime, you would pay the rent."

Hannah's smile faded and she stood up.

"Look, I need to go to the casino. It's harmless fun! I win money; what's wrong with that?"

I gestured outside, "You had to sell your car didn't you; to pay for the gambling?"

Hannah snapped. She stormed out of the room, yelling for me to leave.

I just sat there until she came back, crying.

"Help me," she said.

Second Place Winner: “Roll the Dice” by Katarina Filipe

Imagine this: You’re standing at the entrance of a huge amusement park. Through the front gates you catch a glimpse of an immense structure with the most complex architecture you have ever seen. With five sickening loop-de-loops, this has got to be the scariest ride in the world. The rusty entrance gates screech as they swing open and the crowd starts to move through. You find yourself drawn magnetically to the frightening roller coaster you saw before. Ten minutes later, you’re putting on your seat belt and clinging tightly to the safety bar. Forty-three seconds pass and then with a startling jolt, the ride begins. The first drop is petrifying, but as you whiz down with panicked screams of fellow joy-riders ringing in your ears, you know the ride has barely begun.

“Gambling is like riding a roller coaster. You’re not quite certain why you’re on the ride in the first place but the thrill of risking your life drums through your head, playing a hypnotizing song that sings louder than your conscience. You can close your eyes if you wish but it won’t stop the disturbing feeling of nausea taking over your body. Before the dice hits the table, you’re addicted.”

Sienna Copeland took a deep breath after she finished the first part of her speech. The youths she worked with were naïve teenagers who thought they could have a little bit of innocent fun, win a little bit of extra cash. Then several months down the line, they’ve clocked up a bigger debt than they can afford. Sienna’s speech gave them hope; hope they could overcome their addictions like she had.

At seventeen, Sienna started to feel like an outsider in her family. Her parents were both hard working and successful doctors and her older brother, Caleb, was set to follow in their footsteps. It was her loneliness that triggered her gambling addiction. At eighteen, Sienna found herself caught up in a serious tangle. A loss of \$5400 made Sienna spiral into depression. Her depression caused her cutting. It was the only way she could escape her stress. Two-inch cuts on her thigh relieved her misery yet Dave was always there to remind her how much she owed.

“I want my money by Tuesday,” he hissed.

“I need more time,” Sienna pleaded. “If you just give me more time, I can get the money. *Please.*”

He sensed the desperation in her voice but felt no compassion. “My business isn’t going to stop for *you*,” Dave snapped. “\$5400 by Friday or my men will pay you a visit.”

Click. The phone went dead.

Frustration and panic flooded Sienna’s thoughts. Without a job she had no means of getting that money.

Tuesday flew by in a blur and then Wednesday came with an agonizing pang of guilt. On Thursday she worked up the courage to confess to her parents. First they were speechless. “*How could their daughter be neck-deep in hot water? Sienna was only eighteen after all. Young people couldn’t become problem gamblers.*” After that came the threats. Next, the disappointment. And finally the solution. “*We have no choice but to pay Dave his \$5400.*” Her mother thought she needed counseling but Sienna promised it would never happen again. Although it was a lot of money, she later realized it was only the first drop on the roller coaster.

Two months later, Sienna took up gambling again. This time it started at a party on a Saturday night when a group of kids began to play Shot Roulette, a drinking game mixed with gambling. That night Sienna won \$14 and a hangover the morning after. The euphoria of winning clouded her judgment and within a matter of days she had returned to Dave’s business and was placing high bids again. She was so convinced she would get lucky this time. But her world screeched to a halt when she lost \$4300 and it caused the razor blades to find a familiar site on her skin to carve into yet again.

“I expect the cash to be in my pocket in three days,” Dave demanded.

“I can’t have the money by then!” Sienna was on the verge of crying.

“12 o’clock, Sienna. Be on time.”

“But-”

“Don’t play if you can’t pay.”

Click. Dave was gone.

With only thirteen hours until her deadline and not a cent in her wallet, Sienna came clean.

“I am glad you’ve decided to talk about your problem,

Sienna,” Dr Foster said with a friendly smile. “Not many young people are willing to acknowledge their mistakes. But I can assure you, from now on, things will improve.” “Gambling is not just a game,” Sienna explained at the conference. “It starts off as something you get ‘high’ from but it doesn’t take long before things turn ugly. I was only seventeen when I got involved with gambling and within a year I had already lost nearly \$1000. My parents forked out the money for me every time I lost a bet.” But she was quick to explain that the money wasn’t the only issue.

“For seven months I was depressed and cut myself. My school work was affected and my dream to become a

lawyer was put on hold for a while. My scars remind me of my stupidity and selfishness. Words can’t express how grateful I am to my family for supporting me when I needed help.

“You don’t realize you’re drowning until your head is underwater. You’ll find that you lose more often than you win, but what keeps you going is the illusion that when you do win, you’ll win big. Please don’t be fooled by this.” Sienna fumbled absent-mindedly with her jacket zipper, preparing herself for the end of her speech.

“There is no secret strategy for winning the jackpot. Gambling is based purely on luck. And you won’t always get lucky.”

Third Place Winner: “Visiting Las Vegas” by Emma MacDonald-Laurs

The first time Ginny Russell went to Las Vegas was on the 24th of June 2005.

“You look, um, good. Yeah really, um. Very good.”

Jake wondered how someone as intelligent as Ginny could go so, so wrong.

“Um you do know the theme is Las Vegas, eh,” he asked carefully, staring at the white train that waited dutifully in pile at least three metres from the bottom of what looked like a recycled version of his mother’s wedding dress.

“Of course,” Ginny replied. “Seriously, Jake. Did you really expect me to buy a new dress? You know I’m too busy with school stuff to get to Palmerston.”

“Of course,” Jake echoed sheepishly. “No really, you, you look great.”

“Welcome to Dannevegas Vegas ball. Can I see your tickets?”

“Um, here,” Jake thrust the two roulette shaped tickets towards the teacher before heading towards a deserted corner.

“Wait here Ginny. I, um, I have to go to the toilet,” he said hurriedly, moving towards his group of friends who sniggered on his arrival.

Ginny knew he would not be back. No one wanted to spend their seventh form ball with a girl who usually spent her Friday nights at home, in the company of two very old men – Newton and Einstein.

Ten past seven, the teachers had turned the disco ball on, and the music blared offensively as young couples filled the dance floor. Girls in above the knee minis and low cut tops wiggled in excitement, eyeing each other and laughing loudly. *How shameless*, Ginny thought. Bored, she decided to assign them historical nicknames, Poker Alice, Minnie the Gambler, Schemer Shelly.....

“Here you go Ginny,” said Mrw Werd, an English teacher, as she placed a small black disc into Ginny’s hand.

“Go and have some fun at the poker table, dear.”

“The ball committee hired out professional dealers and everything,” a girl in a chest hugging red dress enthused as each person around the table was dealt five cards.

“Ooh, yes I have great cards,” a tall, but spotty-faced boy boasted, placing down four chips.

“Bet mine are better,” his partner replied. Five chips.

“No mine will bet both of you.” Eight chips.

“Howdy partner! Have you seen mine?” Fifteen chips.

“Get over yourself, Johnno.”

Only Ginny Russell remained silent, placing down her only chip.

“Ha! See, I wasn’t bluffing,” Johnno said placing down his cards. “Four of a kind. Bet that, wise guy.”

“Oh shit. That’s another eight chips down the drain,” a blonde haired girl groaned, as she pushed her chips in Johnno’s direction.

“Wait. What about Ginny?” the spotty-faced boy turned in her direction.

Ginny looked at her hand, raising her eyebrow before placing it down.

“What? A royal flush!” Johnno shouted, banging his head against a nearby chair.

“Beginner’s luck,” the blonde girl smiled, shifting Ginny’s winnings across the table.

“You’re quite the lucker, little lady,” the dealer winked in Ginny’s direction half an hour later as twenty more chips were added to her vast pile.

“Imagine if it was real money,” the blonde girl gushed. “You’d be rolling in it!”

Ginny face flushed and her mouth was dry, despite just having her third glass of punch.

“Johnno! How’s it going with the winnings, bro?” a tall, dark haired boy wearing sunglasses and a pink and white bowler hat asked, slapping Johnno on the shoulder.

Ginny recognized him as one of Jake’s friends, A.J. Cummins.

“Sorry man. Ginny’s lucking us all out at the moment.”

A.J. glanced at Ginny, his eyebrows almost popped out of his head when he realized who she was. Geeky Ginny, the queen of poker.

“Hello A.J.,” Ginny said, smiling pleasantly. *How strange*, A.J. thought, wondering where to sit.

“Hey Gin, Gin. Whatsup girl?”

“Get me a drink A.J., and you can sit next to me for a couple of rounds,” she replied, before laying down her hand. Five of a kind. *Not bad, not bad at all*, she thought, as two more boys sat down beside her.

The second time Ginny Russell went to Las Vegas was on the 23rd of June 2005.

“Just going to the library mum,” Ginny yelled as she walked out of the house.

Earlier that morning Ginny had smashed the piggy bank that she had had since she was seven and stuffed almost five hundred dollars in silver coins into the pockets of her mother’s long black coat. As she walked up to the casino window, Ginny paused. It wasn’t that she thought they wouldn’t let her in because she knew they would – age restrictions meant nothing in such a small town, but it was something about the people inside, something wasn’t quite right. Ginny waited for a while watching a young woman pulling at a slot machine. At her feet a baby wrapped in a raggy blanket screamed loudly. Nearby, a man slammed his fists against the wall in frustration before removing his black gloves to reveal angry, callused hands. *Addicted*, Ginny thought. *How sad. How very, very sad.*

However, for Ginny, luck continued and at five p.m. on the 25th of June 2005, Ginny Russell had made a profit of just over two thousand dollars.

The last time Ginny Russell went to Las Vegas was at 8 am on Wednesday the 16th of November 2005. That day she stayed in Las Vegas for just over four hours, missing her Level Three Calculus exam and losing the five thousand dollar prize which was awarded to the high school dux. Half of the money she lost was used to buy new gaming machines for the casino. The rest was given to the high school social committee. They decided to spend it on next year’s ball.

For more information on these stories
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