

### Third Place Prose – High School

#### **“Cherry Tree”**

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There was a world that illuminated your imagination. Hills covered with a multitude of flowers and lush forests. People were consistently happy, and could be whomever they wanted. You could go on so many grand adventures if you lived there. Learn to fly, brew potions, or even own a pet dragon. There was a calmness and no one would think anything bad could ever happen in that world. There once was a world. Was.

A queen and king ruled over this world, with their daughter, Evelyn. In the village nearest Evelyn’s castle, there was a cherry tree. This tree was so old that no one could recall when it appeared. The ancient and regal tree held the crest of the kingdom. There had been many myths and lore over the decades about the tree having magical properties. One of the greatest lores told is that an heir of the kingdom shall vanquish away the evil. Evil didn’t seem to exist there so over the years, those stories grew old and forgotten. Evelyn fancies legends. She believes.

“Come on your highness, we shall not keep your parents waiting.” A female knight spoke to a fair maiden who was sitting underneath the cherry tree.

“Oh, Natalie. I wish I could stay by this tree forever. I dream of all the fabulous stories it could share.” Evelyn gently outlined the tree bark with her delicate fingers, admiring the tree with complete awe.

“Yes, I know, Evelyn. But we must go.” Evelyn nodded her head and proceeded to get up. She slowly followed Natalie. Only slowing even more a couple of times to wave to some passing villagers.

Everyone loved Evelyn, and she loved them. At only 16 years old she was always trying to take care of all things. She never felt she was more important, or deserved more than any other person in her world.

When Evelyn and Natalie arrived back at the castle, they were informed to go straight to the throne room. When they entered the room, the aura was strange. Something was very wrong.

“Father, what is wrong?” His gaze was gloomier than she had ever seen. He quickly motioned to the others in the room to leave. Allowing only Natalie to stay off to the side.

“Evelyn...” Her mother spoke. “The trees in the neighboring villages forest are in trouble. They are rotting, the trees are dying.”

Now, that may not seem strange, trees die. But in this world, this kind of thing was rare. Plants here were always lush and vibrant with life.

“The rotting is spreading. From tree to tree, and village to village. All trees.” Evelyn’s father stated. Evelyn listened intently, and then he added quietly, “If it gets to the cherry tree, then that will be our end.”

“What are we going to do? We have to protect the tree.” Evelyn said anxiously. Evelyn’s parents knew she would do whatever she could to protect them, others, and the cherry tree.

Evelyn left the throne room, with Natalie close behind her, and headed up the twisting stairs of the northern tower to her room. Natalie stood outside the bedroom door while the princess paced. She just had to think of a way to help.

Evelyn exclaimed out loud, "There must be an answer. Somewhere. Somehow." She continued to pace and found herself in front of her overloaded bookcases. She ran her hand along the spines of all that wonder and knowledge. She sighed in disappointment at her bookshelf. The notebook. She remembered a notebook, it belonged to one of her ancestors who studied the tree and the neighboring forests. Suddenly Evelyn ran out of her room, leaving behind Natalie. "Where are you going, Evelyn?" Natalie called while following her down the winding stairs and into the old study room. Only the princess and her knight have access to this room. Evelyn had gotten permission when she was a young girl, and her love of studies showed.

"There is a notebook here from a previous prince. He studied the cherry tree all of his life. He traveled from place to place to learn all he could about it." She frantically looked through the many piles of old textbooks, journals, and notebooks which covered the desk tops. "Here! It's here." Evelyn flipped through the notebook pages, her eyes holding a desire to find the answer. "If thou shall rot within thy nearby forests, then thou shall grow. Once rot happens, there henceforth is no solution. Start anew."

"That's all. No solution. Start anew? How? There had to be another way." Evelyn proclaimed. She threw the notebook towards Natalie in frustration.

Natalie gently reached out to Evelyn, "Princess-" She just batted her away. Tears held onto the edges of the princesses eyes, her cheeks flaring red.

"Where is the answer?!" Evelyn cried out. She turned to Natalie, tears dripping down her face. "Where? Where is it, Natalie?" Natalie took Evelyn's hands in hers and spoke softly.

"The answer is in you, princess. For you must start anew... A new era for the people to grow even more in." Evelyn was the solution.

"I will replant the cherry tree. We must start again. We must learn to grow without rot destroying us from within."

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"Claira! Time for dinner." A jarring and loud, present voice called out into a backyard. Beneath a large cherry tree, sat a child drawing in a notebook. Lost in a world all her own.

"Claira!" The sound of her name brought her out of her daydream.

"Oh mom, I'm telling my friend a story." The mom stepped out into the backyard and walked up to the cherry tree.

"Oh? The story of the cherry tree?"

Claira nodded her head with excitement, "Mhm!"

"Dinner now, you can continue the story later." Claira reluctantly agreed and came inside. After Claira walked inside, the mom slowly turned and while looking back at the tree, she whispered.

"Thank you, Evelyn."