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Best Midwestern High School Writing: A
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Prose

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Stand Strong

Akanksha Panda

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Okemos High School

East Lansing, Michigan

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Honorable mention

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Akanksha Panda

Stand Strong

“Nistha!” Annika exclaimed, “What is taking so long? Come on! There is going to be a huge snowstorm soon and we want to get to the hotel before it hits us on the highway! Hurry!”

“Okay okay, calm down, I’m coming,” I said. After making sure that everything was there, I zipped up my suitcase and headed down the stairs.

“Are you ready to win?” Annika asked.

“Most definitely,” I said confidently..

A few honks from the car told me that her dad was waiting. I put on my coat and dragged my suitcase into the car. Once inside, I put on my seatbelt and waved goodbye to my mother standing at the door. *Chicago, here we come*, I thought.

Once we were on the highway, I pulled out my iPod Touch and headphones and listened to the song “Dhoom Machale” the song we choreographed for this year’s ICS Dance Competition. Putting the song on loop, I closed my eyes and pictured the broad open stage, Annika and I standing in the middle, the strobe lights flickering, and then starting our dance as the crowd cheers us on. I pictured that gold medal that I had been dreaming about for the past five years. *After all these years, what would it feel like when we finally win?* I thought.

After an hour, we entered the highway.

“No problem! Love ya girl! Ramesh Uncle how much longer?” I say.

“Two and a half more hours,” sighs Ramesh Uncle.

I lean my chair back and stare out the window. The sunlight in the sky had dimmed as black clouds started to cover up the sky. Snowflakes started to fall down heavily, and the wind started to pick up.

“Uncle, will we be okay? There is a huge blizzard coming in...” I asked.

“Yes, we will be fine; I have gone through more hazardous weather than this,” Uncle said confidently.

“Annika, I have a question,” I asked.

“Yes?”

“What if we don’t win this year...do you think we should just give up?”

“No! Never! Not at all! If we don’t win, then we will do it again next year, the the following year and keep going till they kick us out! Never give up! Stand strong! Are you crazy?”

“Okay, okay chill jaar! I was just asking,” I laughed.

“Oh well, now you know your answer, TYFL,” concluded Annika.

“Yes, my TYFL”

TYFL stands for TwinYs For Life. We invented it when we were younger, however we never understood why we added the Y in the abbreviation. We each had little bead necklaces with our names and the abbreviation TYFL as well.

After a while, Annika started to feel sleepy. She leaned her head against the window and slept.

Another car was driving down the highway at 90 mph. It couldn’t hit the breaks in time and started to spin. It just touched another car, which hit our car on the side that Annika’s head was on. Our car flew into the grass.

Police officers came within 15 minutes. Surprisingly, the only injury I had was a couple glass pieces in my arm. I walked out of the car and looked at it. The bumper had fallen off the front. A huge crater was on the side of the car, as if a bowling ball hit it. Windows were shattered and bits of glass surrounded the entire car

“Nistha!”

I turned around and saw Uncle. He was limping and appeared to have injured his wrists. I ran up and hugged him. Looking around, I realized that Annika wasn’t even in sight.

“Uncle, where is Annika?”

He doesn't respond. For a man that never cries, his eyes started to water. He turned and walked towards the officers.

I looked through the broken car window. Found her.

“Phew Annika, your dad scared me! He was in tears and everything!...Annika?”

No response. I figured that she must be asleep. I step inside the car a sit next to her.

“Annika, time to wake up now...” I said as I started to shake her to wake her up.

No response. I push her shoulder down so that her body is facing me.

“...Annika...”

Blood dripped out of her eyes and nose, her head was cracked open, and there were scratches on her face from the glass pieces. I held her body wedding style, and it was floppy. I put my ear against her heart. No pulse. I put her down, kissed her forehead, and rushed out of the car with tears in my eyes.

After three hours, my mother came and picked up Uncle and I. We went straight back to Lansing.

A year went by and the competition was today. I had no intentions on participating until a few hours before the competition when Uncle came by. I had not seen Uncle since the accident.

“What? Uncle! No I don't want to participate! I want to do it with Annika! Not alone or with anybody else!” I yelled.

“Nistha, Annika's dream was to have that golden medal. Don't you think you can win it for her? Make her dreams come true. Don't let her down. Don't give up, never give up,” Uncle proclaimed.

Never give up! I remembered those words well.

“Okay, I will do it for Annika.”

I hurry up and choreograph “Dhoom Machale” for just one person. Once choreographed, Uncle drove me straight to the competition.

Four and a half hours later, we were backstage. When the anchor started to talk about Annika’s death, I started to tear up. I held my necklace. *For you TYFL, just for you.* I got on stage and performed the best performance I could ever do. The crowd exclaimed when I started to break dance. I never knew I had it in me.

After everyone performed, the judges went on stage and announced the winners.

“3rd place goes to Elena Mathrika!”

The crowd cheered.

“2nd place goes to Karena Mukherjee!”

The crowd cheered.

“And the 1st place winner is...”

My hands and armpits start sweating. My eyes are focused on that one envelope as the judge opens and reads the name.

“Nistha Panda and Annika Mishra!”

I got on stage and accepted the awards for both me and Annika. I got on stage and took the mic.

“Hello everyone. I would first like to thank my parents and Annika’s parents for this award. I would like to thank the policeman for driving me here. I would like to thank Annika. She couldn’t be here today due to the negligence of another driver. She was a great friend; my best friend actually. We have been going to this competition every single year since we were 6 years old, in hopes of winning. Every year, I come out as a loser, but she came as a winner. How you might ask? I would lose hope, but she would keep telling me, ‘We will win next year, most definitely, Never give up!’ Well Annika, we won. If only you could see it. I won this for you. I will lay your medal by your grave. Without you Annika, I wouldn’t have gotten this far. Without you, I wouldn’t have participated in this

competition. Without you, I wouldn't have danced. Without you, I don't know how I would've been without you. I don't know what comes next, but whatever it is... whatever it...it..."

I start to tear up. Wiping them away, I stay strong. "I love you Annika. I love you so much. I will be thinking of you through everything I do. I will stand strong, just like how you have always told me to. Stand strong, just for you."

I will stand strong, just for you TYFL, just for you.