

## Alanis Furtado (9E) – Junior Winner

### SOGGY OREOS

As the grimy glass doors squeaked open, Steven rushed inside out of the rain, with Dolores trying to catch up from a few paces behind. “Come on you slow-poke!” Steven taunted as Dolores finally made it to the service station doors, out of breath and drenched in rain. Steven immediately started to browse the aisles as Dolores was still pouring water out of her gumboots. Despite the storm raging outside, the service station shop looked the same as ever, empty, and cheap, but welcoming. Dolores stared out at the torrential rain in fear, but Steven and the bored checkout boy seem totally unfazed. Steven is eagerly weighing up which of the 12 flavours of Oreos he should buy, while the 19-year-old behind the counter looks dead behind the eyes. Dolores nervously inches toward Steven, saying “I think I should call my mom on the payphone”. Steven scoffs and continues looking at snacks, replying simply with “I don’t have any quarters. Now let me buy \$50 worth of Oreos.”

“Steve, please, no.” Dolores said half-heartedly, as she watched him pile Oreos onto the basket he had made with his soaking shirt. Steven shuffled towards the counter drowning in Oreos, he almost collapsed onto the counter, the biscuits spilling all over the scratched laminate desk. Steve gave the attendant a nod, squinting to read the grubby name tag with scratchy writing, calling out finally, “hey.....Seth!”. Ignoring Steve, he began scanning and entering 25 Oreo packets into the system. Steven dug around his pant pocket and found the creased \$50 bill. Seth, still refusing to make eye contact, passed him his change and a receipt. Steve, threw a quarter in Dolores’ direction and shoved the receipt into his pocket. He then slid the remainder of his change back to Seth, “eh, let me get a pack of bubblegum flavoured gum.”

Seth gave a slight eye roll and then picked up the bubblegum flavoured gum, scanned its barcode, took the change, put the change into the register and finally picked up the second receipt.

“Would you like a bag?” Seth asked sarcastically. “Nah, I’m good” Steven replied, while Seth slid the bubblegum gum towards him. “Cheers.” Steve said with a smile. He jammed the gum into his endless pocket and began reloading the Oreos into his shirt.

Dolores, meanwhile, was crawling on the damp, mud-stained floor of the service station, aimlessly searching for the quarter Steve had graciously gifted her with his superstar throw. She finally found it hiding underneath the car maintenance aisle. She slid her arm across the thick layer of dust and general grime and reached for the coin. Her attempt was unsuccessful. Steve walked to the corner of the store Dolores was in and poured his collection onto the floor, he sat down, surrounded by the Oreos with a look of pride on his face. He seemed more like a six-year-old than a sixteen-year-old. “How you going?” He asked nonchalantly. “I actually hate you so much.” She laughed as she tried whacking the quarter out with her bucket hat. Steve tried to whack it out before her with an Oreo packet to amuse himself. This went on for another minute until Dolores finally managed to free the coin. “Ha!” She shouted at Steven, making Seth look up from his Doctor Who fan fiction. “Sorry” she whisper-laughed at him. Steve slumped back down into his Oreo throne defeated. Dolores walked over to the sketchy pay phone and began to dial.

A short ‘beep’ noise played after each button was pressed, Dolores waited for an answer. “Hello, who is this?” The phone had a familiar and warm voice, with a soft Puerto Rican accent.

"Hi, Mamá? It's Dolores" she replied. "*Mija I was so worried, we didn't know where you were, the rain is so heavy...*" Dolores had to cut her off, "Mamá, I'm at the petrol station by those fields next to that house." "*Sí, sí, don't walk Mija, I will come get you, don't move the rain is too much*" she said hurriedly and then cut the call. Dolores walked back to their corner and slid down leaning against the wall with a sigh. "Did you tell her I said hi?" Steven asked smiling. "Yeah, sure" she said tiredly as Steven passed her a pack of peanut-butter Oreos, he had almost finished his pack of red velvets.

The thunder continued to roar. "Imagine if we were stuck here forever!" Steven said in a maniacal voice, breaking their period of quiet. "Don't even joke!" Dolores laughed, looking around the sad store.

"So what would you do?" She asked him after a while.

"What would I do?"

"What would you do if you were stuck here forever?"

"I'm set." he said, gesturing to his second packet of pumpkin spice Oreos.

Dolores sat against the window watching the rain, while Steve was engrossed in the 2000's music videos playing on a small television, mounted on the ceiling. The songs were too quiet to hear, but he was captivated by the bright costumes and blinding special effects, "scariest then the storm ay?" He said to Dolores pointing at the video, trying to cheer her up. She nodded in response.

"Are you all packed?" He asked her, his face changing from its usual wide grin. "Pretty much" she answered, staring at the floor.

"I'm going to miss you, ya know" Steven said to her, as if he was just, for the first time realising, that he would never see her again. "I know" she told him, swallowing her words. His speech was muffled, "You're actually the best, you know."

"Oh I know." She laughed.

"Well I just wanted to make sure you did, before you left."

"Thanks." Dolores said to him, her face beaming. Steven cleared his throat, "Looks like the rains easing up a bit."

"Yeah, looks like it."

They both gazed out the window in peaceful silence.

They had been waiting at the service station for just over an hour now, and couldn't even look at another Oreo. "We're closing." Seth said, in a monotone voice. Dolores sat up and hurriedly dusted off her bucket hat and Steven bundled up the remaining 21 packets of Oreos in his arms with care. Steve gave Seth a quick nod and they both stepped back into the rain. They stood quietly, for the next 13 minutes until they saw bright lights illuminating the road in front of them.

Dolores' Mum's Ford Escort pulled up in front of them and a window rolled down. "Hi Mamá" Dolores said in a relieved tone, and gave a small wave. Dolores opened the door and then turned to Steve, "Mija, you're letting the rain in!" Her mother called out of the drivers seat.

"Are you sure you don't want a ride home?" Dolores offered.

"Nah, you know, I think I'll walk." Steve grinned, dripping wet. Dolores tilted her head, her voice breaking slightly, "Bye Steve."

"Yeah, catch ya later."

He waved until they had turned the corner. He looked up and the rain had stopped. He aggressively wiped away a tear and continued walking.