

Toppers - 3
2nd Place

Grace and the Race

8-year old Grace positioned herself in a deep runner's lunge behind the starting line. Her dark wavy hair was tied back in a ponytail and she wore a short sleeved navy blue shirt. She had hazel eyes and long eyelashes. Grace was beautiful and was often told she looked like Natalie Portman. "On your marks, get set, go!" She and her classmates ran as fast as they could around her school's track. Parents there for the school's annual Olympics Day event cheered on their kids while they sprinted for 10 minutes, keeping track of the number of laps they ran. During her second lap, Grace slowed down to a jog and then to a walk as she clutched her stomach. She was short of breath and had an awful cramp. As all of her classmates passed her, tears welled in her eyes. Her PE coach, Coach Joey, yelled at her to keep running. She was embarrassed and disappointed and wished she could disappear. After the race the kids compared the number of laps they ran. Grace had run the least number. That evening at dinner Grace told her parents that next year she would be the fastest girl in her class on Olympics Day. "Grace, you're good at many things, but running isn't one of them" her mother said. Her mother smiled, not wanting to hurt her feelings. "I'm not very fast either." "You're a great student, artist and dancer" her father added. "Can we go to the school track so I can practice?" Grace asked. Reluctantly, her mother agreed. Three times a week, Grace practiced running and kept improving her time. At PE, while all the other girls walked and chatted during their laps, Grace would push herself and run her absolute fastest. Coach Joey told her he was proud of her. The next year, Grace was in third grade at Hedgerow Charter School and couldn't wait for Olympics Day. The day of the race, she wore her lucky gold locket and placed a magenta jasper stone in her shorts pocket. She

had heard the stone brings good luck. At breakfast, over pancakes and eggs, she again declared that she would be the fastest girl in her class. Her mother said, "You're probably not going to be the fastest. Don't push yourself and try to have fun."

"Of course I'll push myself" Grace thought. "This is the RACE!" Her 4-year old brother said "Try not to cry this year" and made a funny face at her. As her class lined up at the starting line, her two best friends, both named Chloe, asked her to run with them. She knew running with friends would slow her down so she declined. "I can do this" she said to herself. Grace took off like a shot. Soon however, her legs started getting tired and her throat became dry. She touched her locket with a black and white picture of her grandparents inside. She remembered what her grandmother had said when she gave it to her. "You are strong and capable. Reach for the stars. With hard work and determination, you can accomplish almost anything." She also remembered hearing that when her grandparents, Dora and Leo, came to America by ship, they couldn't speak English and had no money, but worked seven days a week and started a successful business selling clothes in New York City. Grace found the strength to keep going her fastest. After the race, she saw that she had run more laps than any other girl in her class. All her friends congratulated her while they enjoyed their cherry ice pops. "You really surprised me," her mother said after the race. "I can't believe you were the fastest girl. I never thought you stood a chance and was so worried you'd be disappointed. We're so proud of you." Grace beamed. "I'm still faster" her brother said, not happy with all the attention she was getting. At her school's awards ceremony the following day, her name wasn't called because although she was the fastest girl in her class, she wasn't the fastest girl in her entire grade. There were two other third grade

classes. She told her parents that next year, she would be the fastest girl in 4th grade.
This time, they didn't doubt her.