

Writing competition

Step into a symphony of stories!

Imagine a world where books burst open and amazing characters

from every kind of story leap out!

Write a short story about a wonderful world filled with colourful characters. (Limit of 3 pages per entry.)

From My Window

My name is Alia. Last spring I tried standing at the window on my own, gripping the sill till my knuckles went white and my legs just folded, like two wet noodles, before I'd even got halfway up. Mum heard the thud and came running. She didn't scold me or anything, just dragged the chair over to the window and said something about the light being better there for reading. That's not really why the chair's there. We both know it. But from that chair I can see the whole of Marigold Lane, and honestly, some mornings that's enough to make the folding-noodle feeling go away for a bit.

Mr. Okafor comes out at seven sharp in his painter's overalls. He wears a different colour every day like he's got a hundred flags in his closet and can't remember which country he's repping. Today it was this green that actually hurt to look at, like he'd lost a fight with a parrot. He slings his ladder over one shoulder like it's nothing, whistling some tune I can never quite catch through the glass. I've tried humming along. Always wrong. The first time he caught me watching, he just marched right up, stuck his face against the pane and crossed his eyes at me like a total lunatic. I was about to fall off the chair. Now most mornings, he finds some excuse to walk past slow, and every time he acts shocked, I'm laughing, like it wasn't the whole point of him being there.

There's a woman who sells flowers off a cart with one wheel that squeaks every third turn, kind of like a heartbeat that hiccups. Different scarf every day - purple Mondays, yellow Thursdays. She leans over her roses the way you'd lean over a crying toddler, telling them to behave. I call her Mrs. Petal. I never got her actual name and at this point I don't really want it. Some mornings she wheels the cart right under my window, holds a flower up so the sun comes through it and tells its whole life story loud enough for me to hear through the glass. Last Tuesday's rose ran off to join a travelling circus, apparently. I don't know if she makes these up on the spot or has a whole filing cabinet of them at home.

Rina and her twin race bikes down the lane most afternoons, wheels rattling like loose teeth, nearly clipping the post-box every single time without fail. Rina's the one with the crooked front tooth. She skids up to our gate and just yells the day's news through cupped hands, whether I asked or not. Her brother once held up a dead beetle by one leg, dead serious, and announced it died of exhaustion from being too handsome. I don't even know where he comes up with this stuff.

Mum came pelting in when she heard me laughing that hard. She thought I was choking or something. She took one look and just stood there grinning in the doorway.

Then there's Mr. Finch, two doors down. He waters his tomatoes in a ratty bathrobe, slippers going slap slap slap on the pavement, telling the plants off if they grow too fast like a tomato's ever shown off in its life. He caught me watching once and did this ridiculous bow, arm swept out and everything, like I was some princess he'd come to inspect instead of just a kid stuck behind glass.

The old man with the three-legged dog is my favourite though. Same time every evening, that dog goes hop-hop-hopping down the lane, and somehow it still beats every four-legged dog on the street to the corner. It stops at each gatepost like it's checking for mail. The old man never once yanks the lead to hurry him along. He just stands there, hands stuffed in his coat pockets, waiting him out.

For years I'd press my hand flat against the cold glass and pretend. Pretend I could feel the wind pulling at Mrs. Petal's scarf. Pretend the road under Rina's tyres was warm under my palm instead of just glass - cold, flat, going nowhere. Then last week the dog stopped right under my window and looked straight up. The old man followed its eyes, tipped his hat, mouthed '*good evening*' slow enough I could read it off his lips. He had no clue I couldn't say anything back. He didn't stop him waiting for my nod anyway.

I sat there a long while after they'd gone, just watching my own breath fog up little clouds on the glass. I'm not just a girl watching a wonderful world through glass. I'm part of what makes it wonderful. Somewhere below, Mr. Okafor's ladder scraped against a wall, and Mrs. Petal's cart gave its usual squeak, and I got it. Nobody had to spell it out for me. The street had been talking to me this whole time. My legs might never carry me down Marigold Lane, but it doesn't matter.

I'm already living on it, one window at a time.