

2014

Winners

Congratulations to the nearly 1,000 talented students who participated in the 18th annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff and Pierce County Library Foundation Board members, reviewed the entries. Author Randall Platt and poet Patrick Flores-Scott selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style, general presentation, grammar, and spelling. Photographer Dane Meyer and artist Mary E. Smith selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity, and effective use of media.

Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes and the winning entries are published in this book.

Pierce County Library gratefully acknowledges the support of Pierce County Library Foundation, The News Tribune, Pacific Lutheran University and Print NW to help fund the contest.



Our Own Expressions

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st Cry Me An Ocean

Emily Saletan

Charles Wright Academy

2nd Winter

Taija Perrycook

Home School

3rd Grandfather's Institution

Michelle Smith

St. Charles Borromeo

Grades 9 and 10

1st Bliss

Fiona Macdonald

Gig Harbor High School

2nd Discrepancy

Myles Moulton

Bellarmino Preparatory

3rd Unbroken

Claudia Speakes

Kallas Junior High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st I am the Song

Claire Summa

Gig Harbor High School

2nd Eulogy for a Starship

Matthew Pfefferle

Covenant High School

3rd Mumbling Mouse

Christina Lyro

Covenant High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st Legolas Greenleaf

Rosalie Roscoe

Home School

2nd Together from the Start

Celine Conkle

Sumner Middle School

3rd Baby Bobcat

Trevor Kvinsland

Kopachuck Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st Hmong Girl, Sapa, Vietnam

Bao Nguyen

Convenant High School

2nd Pug

Abbie Welch

Convenant High School

3rd Reflection

Nani Woodard

Convenant High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st Fles

Chelsie Conroy

Bonney Lake High School

2nd Noah's Art

Hanbi Hyon

Lakes High School

3rd The Mockingjay

Cole Maurmann

Home School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st **City Lights**

Maddie Anderson

Harbor Ridge Middle School

2nd **Pure Prayer**

Taija Perrycook

Home School

3rd **100 Cobblestone Way**

Caileigh Gainey

Key Peninsula Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st **Struck**

Meg Low

Washington Virtual Academy

2nd **A Baker's Inspiration**

Collin Walker

Rogers High School

3rd **Abandon**

Savannah Bohl

Peninsula High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st **Stuck Inside**

Kirsten Kennedy

Bonney Lake High School

2nd **From the Darkness**

Tiana Neuerburg

Rogers High School

3rd **Leading Leaves**

Lara Riekana

Home School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st The Wings

Emma Beha

Keithley Middle School

2nd The Mentor

Keir Adamson

Kopachuck Middle School

3rd Any Given Monday

Gabby Trevino

Hudtloff Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st Hearing the Silent

Abbie Welch

Convenant High School

2nd Leaving the Clouds Behind

Noah Peever

Home School

3rd A Mother's Love

Karli Stevenson

Convenant High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st My Usual Life

Hana Jang

Convenant High School

2nd The Red String of Fate

Jessi Pitts

Emerald Ridge High School

3rd Bound for Love

Casey Morrison

Convenant High School

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Cry Me An Ocean

By Emily Saletan

First Place

Cry me an ocean.
Build me a ship,
With a dry inside and a flag raised high.
Sail me away.

Cry me a river.
Build me a bridge,
With towers tall and a deck that's strong.
Walk me away.

Cry me a rainfall.
Build me a house.
Give it rock hard walls and no roof at all.
Wash me away.

Winter

by Taija Perrycook

Second Place

When the world is sleeping,
When the frost is creeping,
 And the day is short,
 And the horses snort,
 When the light is dim,
 And the cold prowls in,
And the warmth takes leave upon a whim
 When the stars are bright,
 And the geese take flight,
 When the snowflakes fall,
And the silver ice begins to crawl,
 Winter is walking up the path,
 He's knocking at our door.

Grandfather's Institution

by Michelle Smith

Third Place

Shriveled, hunched, shaking residents, with cirrus hair; wispy and white

Confused and clouded eyes wet with tears

Memories lost and blank

Small wet drops tumble down fragile faces in frustration

Tears run from dwindling guardian's lifeless eyes

Relatives' hearts sink like capsized ships

Patients pruned and immobile reach with boney hands in comfort

Doomed inmates howl in desperation

Shrieks of discomfort in the dreary setting

Kith and kin drown in the sea of sorrow

Bitter cleansers eradicate illnesses

Scent of urine lingers throughout

The stench of institutional slop swirls the hall

Salty drops fall into sobbing traps



Bliss

By Fiona Macdonald

First Place

The eternal radiance of clouds

In an infinite

cerulean sky of hope

Join with the serene waters.

As the soothing sound of

sails unite with the breeze,

like two intertwining hands.

Innocent of the boundless doubts that

drift along

with life.

Discrepancy

By Myles Moulton

Second Place

Death

Radiant, Ambient

Embrace, Enclose, Insinuate

Reverie, Entwinement, Struggle, Schism

Beguile, Allure, Sunder

Turbulent, Chaotic

Life

Unbroken

By Claudia Speakes

Third Place

Can these barbed wires hold me?
Not forever – I will be free.
These shackles will not bind me.
Not forever – I will be free.
This tyranny will not suppress me.
Not forever – I will be free.
This nightmare will not frighten me.
Not forever – I will be free.
Their corruption will not deceive me.
Not forever – I will be free.
The torture and pain will not affect me.
Not forever – I will be free.
These barbed wires will not hold me.
One day,
I will be free.

By rescue, or –
the kind hand of death.
I will be free.

Auschwitz 1942

I am the Song

By Claire Summa

First Place

I am the leaves that carry the breeze
I am the shore that crashes upon waves
I am the landscape that blankets the snow
I am the fruit that bears the tree

I am the story that creates the writer
I am the symphony that composes the musician
I am the crowd that inspires the leader
I am the wisdom that speaks the master

I am the truth that speaks the man
I am the beauty that captures the words
I am the freedom that craves the cornered
I am the love that spreads the people

I am the song that chants the world

Eulogy for a Starship

By Matthew Pfefferle

Second Place

The cold expanse of space before,
Our blighted Earth behind,
The Ark flew on, and bore within
The last of all mankind.

Her battered body bleeding air
From battle scars she bore,
The Ark limped on, towards brighter stars
And safer, kinder shores.

Far from the red and dying light
Of Earth's still-sputtering Sun
The Ark's own crippled core gave up,
Her beating heart undone.

Above the skies of our new home,
Her lifeboats launched and gone,
The Ark's old engines slept at last,
Still pointed towards the dawn.

Mumbling Mouse

By Christina Lyro

Third Place

Here I am waiting for the thundering to end
Of knife like heels and waffle soled men.
To steal around the corner and burrow in deep
But if not, and I'm caught, oh how they'll all weep.

I'll make it I'm sure. My kind always do.
Except for Aunt Frieda and an unfortunate few.
I want to get out from this humdrum house.
I mean, this really is no place for a well-meaning mouse.

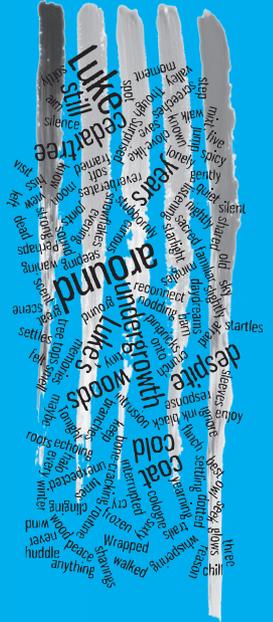
To simply soar free like the big birds that I've seen
And feel wind move my whiskers like bulrushes in spring.
I've learned too many tidbits from the novels I nibble
And now I want to wander where walruses wibble

Or slither with snakes in the scorching savannah
Or even make memories marauding in Montana.
I hate to complain; I mean I really feel awful,
But I'm sick of my company. They're really a paw full.

Sheet rock walls smother me like late Aunt Frieda's kisses,
Good-bye to my family and the best of wishes!
I'm leaving for critter country, adventure and fun.
Maybe you'll hear me squeak "Freedom!" at the top of my lungs.

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

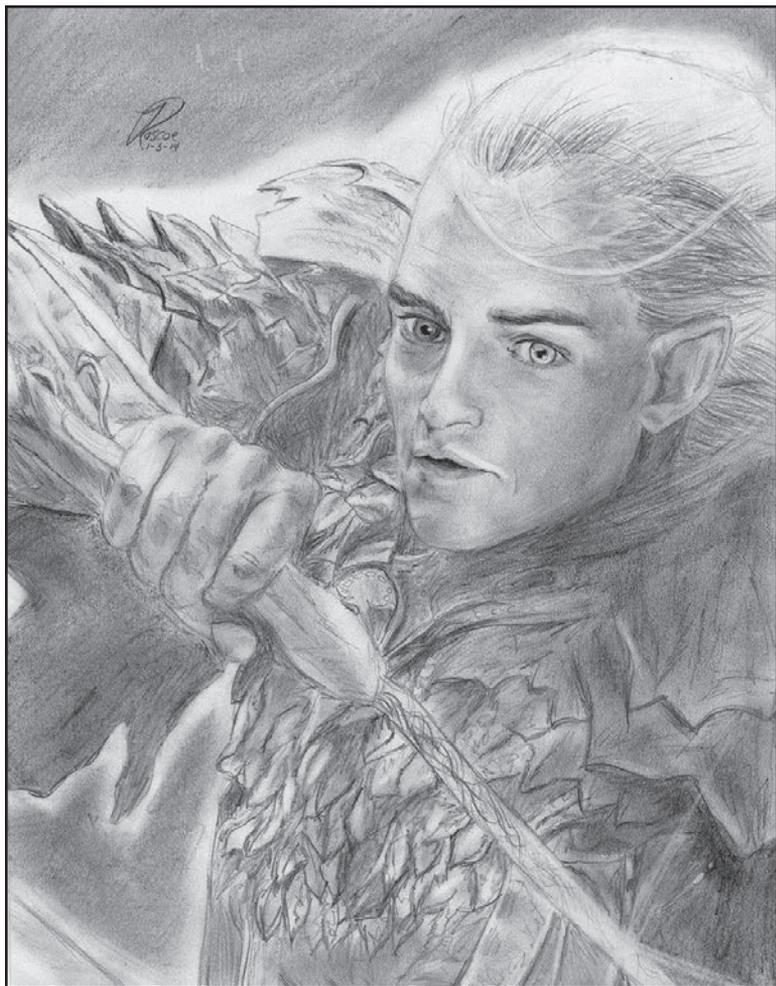


*Our Own
Expressions*

Legolas Greenleaf

by Rosalie Roscoe

First Place



Together from the Start

by Celine Conkle

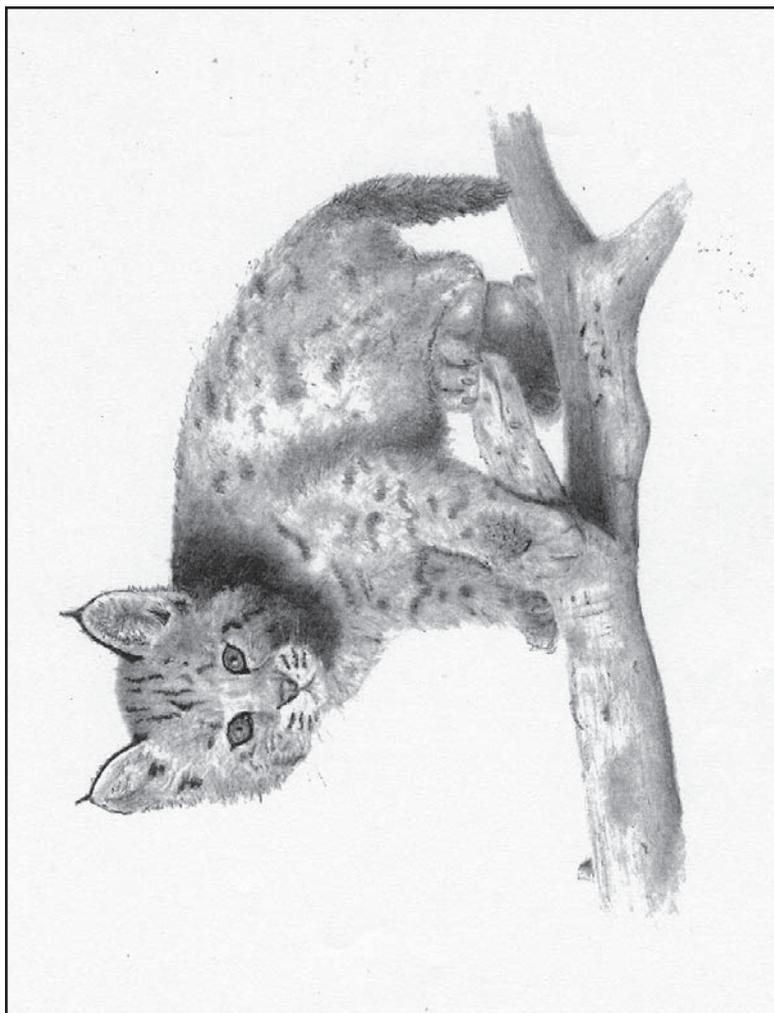
Second Place



Baby Bobcat

by Trevor Kvinsland

Third Place



Hmong Girl, Sapa, Vietnam

by Bao Nguyen

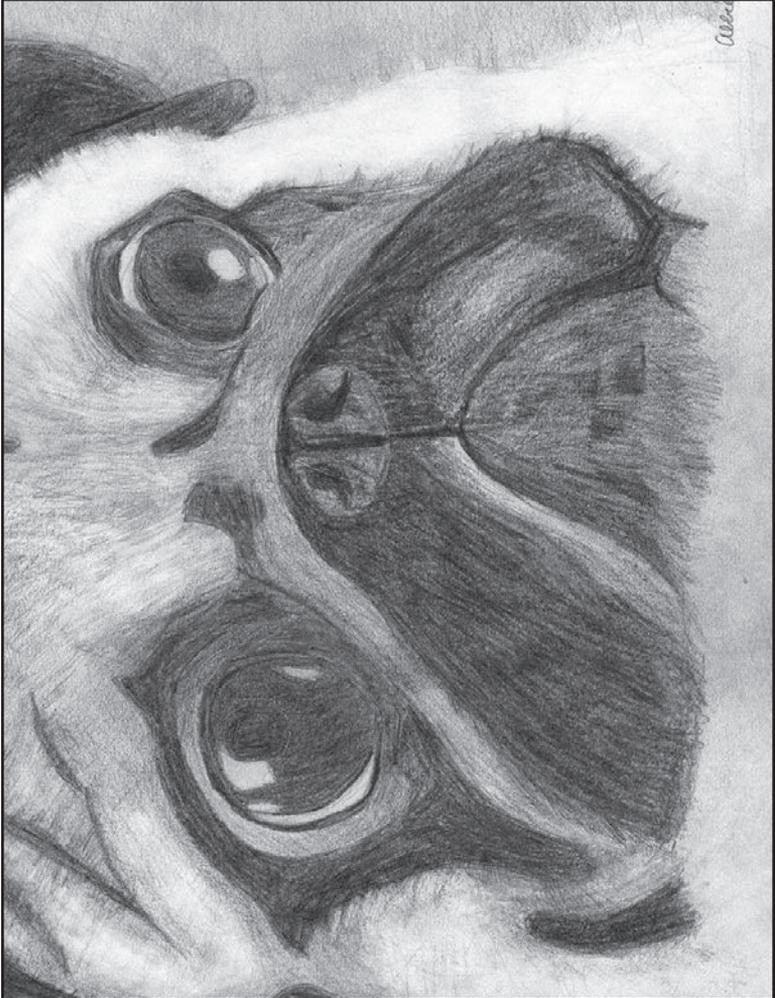
First Place



Pug

by Abbie Welch

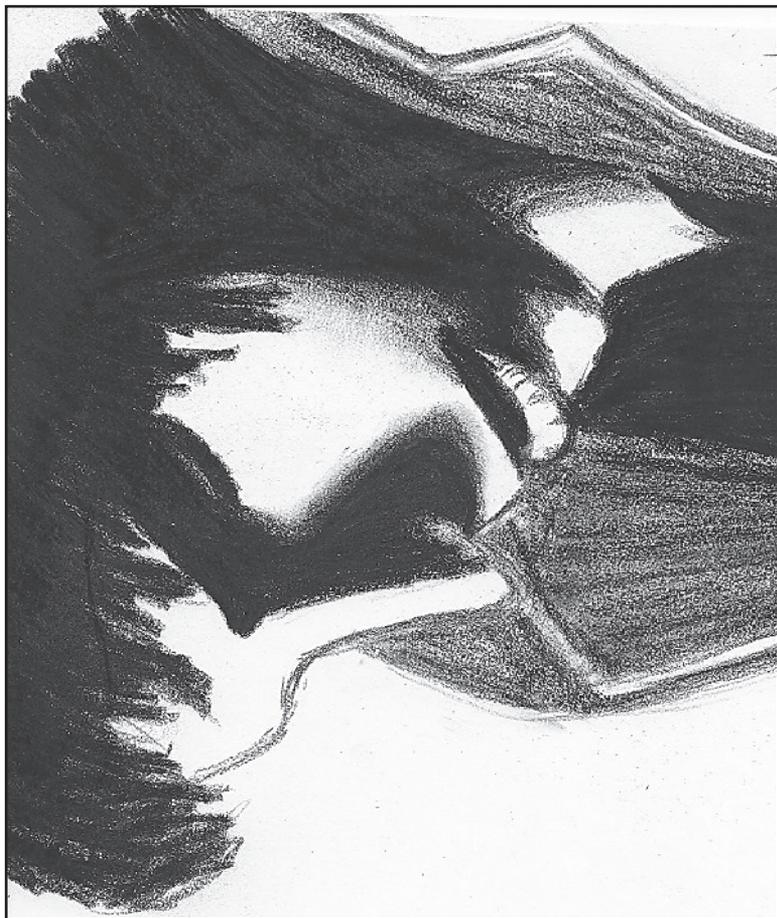
Second Place



Reflection

by Nani Woodard

Third Place



Fles

by Chelsie Conroy

First Place



Noah's Art

by Hanbi Hyon

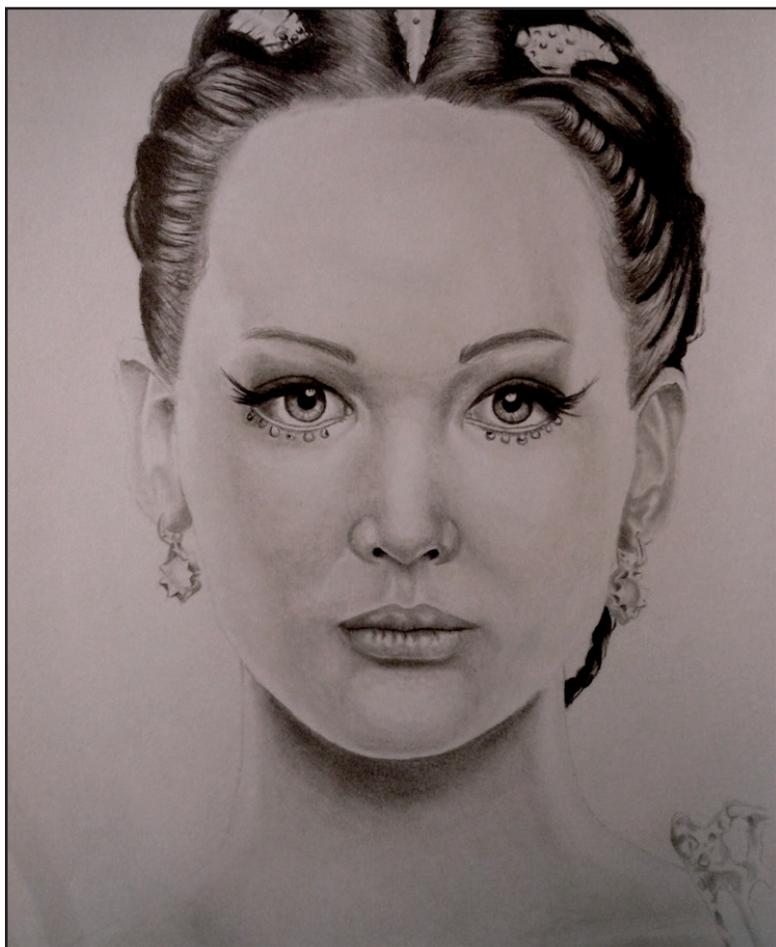
Second Place



The Mockingjay

by Cole Maurmann

Third Place



City Lights

by Maddie Anderson

First Place



Pure Prayer

by Taija Perrycook

Second Place



100 Cobblestone Way

by Caileigh Gainey

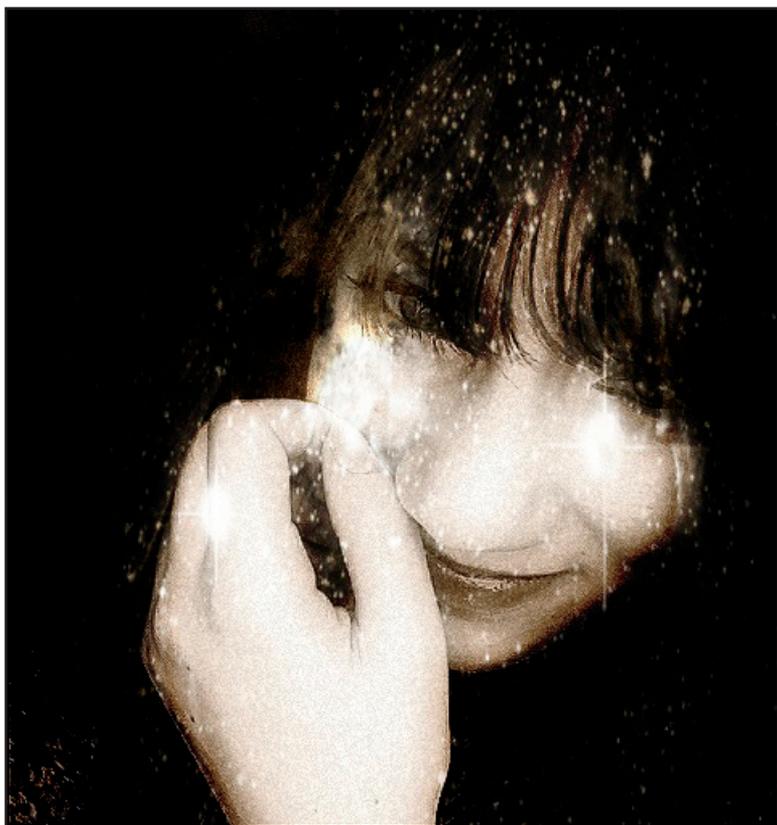
Third Place



Struck

by Meg Low

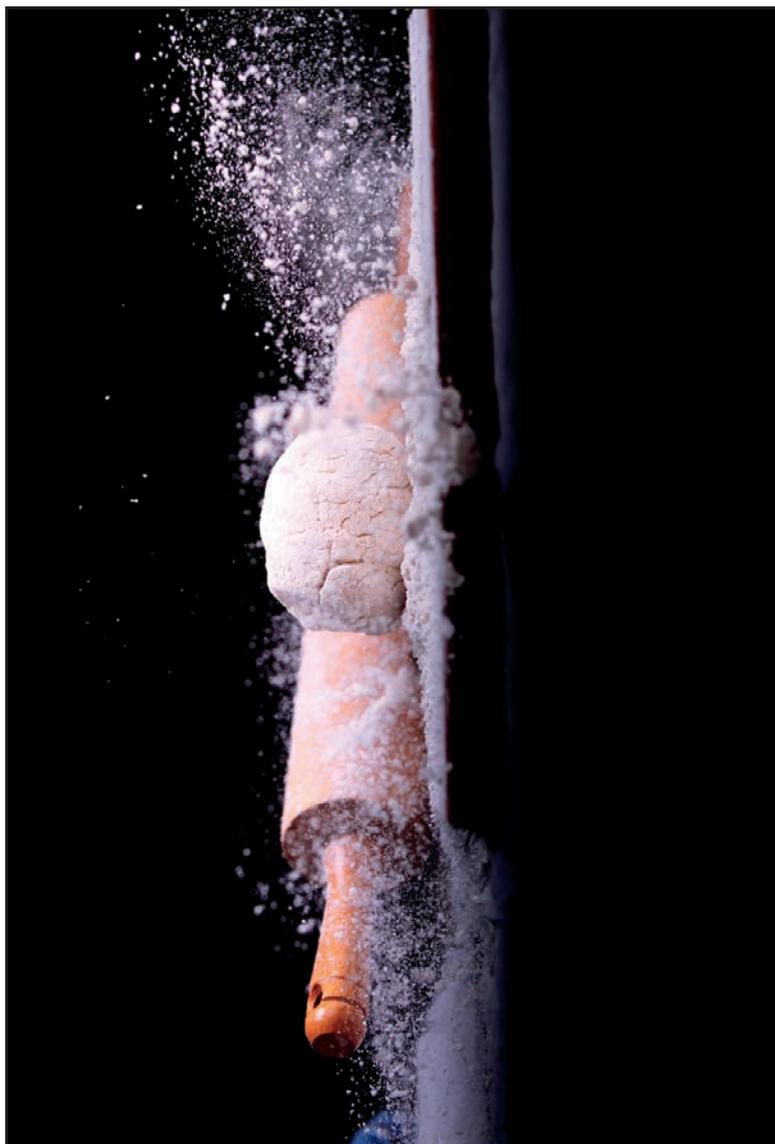
First Place



A Baker's Inspiration

by Collin Walker

Second Place



Abandon

by Savannah Bohl

Third Place



Stuck Inside

by Kirsten Kennedy

First Place



From the Darkness

by Tiana Neuerburg

Second Place



Leading Leaves

by Lara Riekema

Third Place



The Wings

By Emma Beha

First Place

As I stand in the wings I hear the applause that was earned by the girl.

She subjected herself to the vulnerable situation that I am about to force my mind, body, and soul into.

My subconscious mind knows that if I subject myself to this situation the material and emotional benefits will be endless.

My body however feels tired. It aches for the comfort of my bed.

My feet are impatiently waiting to get out of the corset like pointe shoes that they have been shoved in for eight long hours.

My palms are red and dripping with a cold odorless sweat, as is my face full of caked on makeup.

My scalp itches because of the half can of extra strength hairspray.

It glues my thick brown hair to my skull. I swear my heartbeat was audible to the stagehand next to me.

My name is introduced to the silent audience ready to stare me down and critique every part of me.

I press my feet into the rosin box to the left of me for what feels like the tenth and what will be the final time.

My feet become one with the floor and the butterflies in my chest fly into the girl in line behind me.

As my body floats onto the stage the feeling of anxiety exits my body.

The anxiety flies into the chest of the little girl who just wished me luck.

I know she will be embarking on the same one hundred and forty second journey that I just begun.

The Mentor

By Keir Adamson

Second Place

Ian was not supposed to die this quickly.

This morbid mantra echoed in the head of Andrew Yeager as he briskly marched out of school that April afternoon. The fifteen year-old boy made the familiar turns of his twisting street, as he quickly became lost in his head.

He's not going to be better today, Andrew mused. He's only going to be a little more confused.

Ian had been in Andrew's life for four years, but to the teenager, it had felt like decades. Andrew had been lonesome before meeting the septuagenarian, on account of having no friends, no father, and a mother that worked all day. Nevertheless, the strong bond that held them together for years was about to be shattered by the elderly man's Alzheimers disease.

In Andrew's eyes nothing could have ever been as horrible as watching Ian grow increasingly more disorientated over the course of the past month. The day that Andrew had first noticed that something was amiss stood out in his mind like the crescent moon over a charcoal black sky.

He had been strolling away from school once again, gazing up at the clear Idaho sky. Once he was only one block away from Ian's house he had broken out into a run. Andrew had opened up the forever unlocked door, wiped his feet on the welcome mat, and found Ian in the family room. The old man had been holding a photo album, staring at the pictures with an intensity that Andrew found unnerving. Andrew had hung back, awkwardly attempting to capture Ian's attention.

“Ian, I’m here,” he had exclaimed, nervously cracking his knuckles. “Ian!”

“Oh... of course,” Ian had muttered gruffly, shutting the album as he stood up. “Sorry about that, I was just trying to...” The elderly man had then trailed off, and immediately started towards the kitchen.

To Andrew, it didn’t matter that Ian would never be himself again; he would help him to the end.

Andrew now found himself at the same door, pushing his negative thoughts away, and pulling on the copper door knob. Ian was sitting on the sofa of the family room once again, completely exhausted. Yet as soon as he saw the boy, he sat up instantly.

“Andrew!” he called out, his eyes wide with optimism. “Come and sit down!”

“OK,” the teenager murmured, overjoyed to see that Ian was alright. Ian’s caretaker always left at one in the afternoon, so until Andrew’s high school ended for the day, Ian was completely alone. Andrew slung his backpack across the back of a chair, and sat down.

“How are you, Ian?” Andrew asked carefully, knowing that Ian wouldn’t be able to answer the way he normally could.

“Very good,” Ian replied, still smiling. “How are—”

In violent, jerky motions, Ian thrust his hands to his head and began shaking.

“Ian!” Andrew blared, standing up. “What is it? What’s happening?”

“Headache...” Ian moaned painfully, collapsing. “Just a headache...”

Andrew immediately reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. Dialing 911, he kept a careful watch on Ian. Once he had completed the panicked call, he sat back down next to the man and attempted to comfort him.

=====

It had been several years since the day that Andrew had first met Ian. He was only twelve years old at the time, and suffered from loneliness, low self-esteem, and self-consciousness. On the same day he had met Ian, Andrew was being pursued from school by several tormentors. They had focused their anger on the slight, shy boy for no apparent reason other than that there was no one to defend him. The gang of boys had surrounded Andrew, and he prepared himself for what would come next. Yet as soon as the first punch came-

“Move! Get away now, ‘fore I call the cops!” Andrew’s tormentors swung around but no one could be seen.

“Who are you” One of the boys, the clear leader, barked. When no answer was supplied, he began to flee. The rest scrambled after, leaving Andrew lying on the ground. Standing up frantically, Andrew began to sprint away from the voice as well.

“No, not you boy! Why would you run away? Come inside and let me talk!” This time, Andrew realized the voice was coming from a sizable building, with fresh azure paint and a magnificent mahogany door. With considerable foreboding, the child trudged toward it, regretting every step. As soon as he was on the front porch, the door was whipped open, and a towering elderly man was behind it.

“You alright?”

“Yeah.” Andrew mumbled, his eyes downcast. As the old man made way for Andrew to come inside, he studied the boy, as if deciding what the issue was.

“I’m Ian.” The old man declared simply.

That afternoon, Ian had given Andrew advice on how to get rid of the band of boys that bullied him. On the next day, as Andrew ambled past his house, the elderly man had asked him how the suggestions had worked, and Andrew felt compelled to come in. Of course the advice had worked, but that wasn’t the big victory in Andrew’s mind.

The teenager had finally found someone he could talk to. Over the next months, he had learnt about Ian: a seventy three year-old man whose wife had died, who had no children, and who had lived in the same small town for his whole life.

=====

“We received a call from this address about an elderly man having stroke like symptoms in this house,” a commanding female voice inquired, as a team of medics came pouring into the modest family room. “Is this correct?”

“Yes, he’s right here.” Andrew sat up abruptly, struggling to contain tears.

Andrew could barely focus as the physician asked him question after question about Ian: how old he was, his medical history, his family history. All he was interested in was Ian, as the medics attempted to save his life. Ian was finally brought upon the stretcher and into the ambulance.

“On April 14th, at 3:04 PM, Ian Palmer died of an apparent stroke, thought to be related to his worsening dementia,” the female medic declared somberly to a detective, and immediately, Andrew’s world collapsed.

=====

Andrew was sitting alone in his house, once again, several weeks after Ian’s death. Nothing had improved. Everyone he had talked to always told him that things would get better, but it hadn’t, and Andrew was starting to doubt if they ever would.

Interrupted from his thoughts by the doorbell, Andrew rose up from his chair and answered. The medic from Ian’s house was on the other side.

“Hello Andrew. Are you doing any better?”

“Yes.” There was absolutely no chance of him telling the truth to a relative stranger.

“That’s good. Now, the medical examiner discovered something in Ian’s coat, and it was addressed to you,” As she was speaking, she pulled out a cream colored envelope with Andrew’s name on the front. “If you’d like, you can read it.”

“Thanks,” he muttered, taking the envelope from her. Opening the seal, he found a simple letter inside:

Thank you, Andrew, for everything.

Any Given Monday

By Gabby Trevino

Third Place

Ruby really hates being sick. She hates the particular tickle at the back of her nose, just waiting to ignite some tremendous sneeze; she hates the constant scratch at her throat; and she especially hates the pounding headaches that accompany every snot filled day.

The day happens to be Monday, a day about which most people living have a negative opinion. Maybe that's because it is supposedly the start of the week, a horrible wake-up call after the laziness of the weekend. Whatever the reason, Ruby knows she's not particularly fond of setting an alarm for six a.m. the next day on a Sunday evening.

But as already mentioned before, Ruby happens to be sick, and just a bit of excessive coughing has convinced her parents to head to their cramped cubicles and endless typing, while Ruby sits at home consuming as much junk food as humanly possible. The coughing worked and now Ruby is doing just as she planned, wrapped in a cocoon of fluffy blankets accompanied by a carton of orange sherbet ice cream. Though after maybe half an hour of this, she's craving the cool morning air and fresh smells of pine.

Ruby leaves behind her house with only a ten-dollar bill hurriedly stuffed into her pocket, and the hopes of finding some local hole in the wall. After about three minutes of walking along a wooden boardwalk Ruby comes across just the kind of place she's looking for.

She pushes open a glass door, the silver bell above it ringing, and slowly walks into the softly lit room. Ruby glances around, her eyes sweeping across the highly stacked books and empty wooden chairs, finally coming to rest on a counter in the back of the room. A tall figure stands behind the flat-topped fixture, hands working with something behind the cash register.

Ruby suppresses a cough. With her throat aching she walks to the counter, trying not to sneeze on the only other person present. The figure is indeed a boy, probably sixteen or so, with glossy black-framed glasses perched on his nose. He's hunched over, giving off the impression that he's working intently on whatever is behind the shiny metal box.

"Uh hey," Ruby finally manages to say, and she almost slaps herself in the face for sounding so dull.

The boy only a couple meters away from her looks up from his hands, smirking a little when he notices her attire; a stained cloudy grey sweatshirt and some faded jeans. "Hello?"

It sounds more like a question, and Ruby blushes under his gaze. His curly brown hair hangs over his forehead and ears in a sort of endearing way. "You sell coffee right?" She stands on her toes, looking over his head at the neatly arranged cups and containers full of coffee beans. Above the cardboard cups is a glass case with a large silver padlock strapped over two handles.

"Of course. Is that all you need?" He sounds as if he knows she's itching to ask another question, anything to keep a conversation going.

She pretends to think for a moment. "Uh, would you consider yourself an idea person?" And at the moment she doesn't even remember if she likes coffee or not. His eyes are just really, really blue, like the sparkling water of the Caribbean. Ruby almost wants to let him know how nice his skin looks under the pale yellow light.

"Possibly," the boy replies, leaning forward and placing his elbows on the counter.

"So let me set the scene," Ruby starts. Yeah she didn't even want any coffee to be going with. "A girl wants to enter a short story contest, and the deadline is in three days. She's spent the past week searching for inspiration, but her mind is appearing as only a blank sheet of paper."

He glances over at the far left wall quickly, and for a moment Ruby doesn't even know if he looked away from her or not. "Okay how about this; a teenage girl plays the protagonist, and a teenage boy portrays the antagonist. Are you following so far?"

Ruby nods slowly.

"The girl is sick, and escapes from her small home as soon as her parents leave for work. She finds refuge at a local bookstore that also happens to sell refreshments. Her conscious is muddled by the sight of a handsome boy and the already pending doom of the common cold. She is no longer keenly aware of what is going on and the intelligent antagonist actually becomes the winner."

Ruby doesn't know why the boy standing in front of her is smirking the way he is but she does know that his breath smells very minty. "The antagonist wins?" she repeats. "When does that ever happen?"

He grabs something from behind the cash register and turns around. In a matter of seconds he is on the other side of the counter, one hand holding probably the largest wad of cash Ruby has ever seen. He waves it in front of his face dramatically for a few seconds.

"I win," he says.

Ruby is still rooted to the floor.

"In the case of this certain plot line, the bad guy gets away," he says.

Ruby doesn't know what to say. She suddenly realizes the metal sign out front doesn't read 'open'.

He backs up a bit, one hand on the transparent glass door. "You might want to get out of here."

She finally finds her voice "Why?" It's a stupid question, but at the moment her vocabulary seems to have shrunken to nothing more than that.

“The police will be here in, uh” he glances at a bare wrist, “sixty seconds or so.” With that last statement he turns around, pushing the door open and walking briskly away.

It takes Ruby almost the full minute to finally evacuate the crime scene.

Hearing the Silent

By Abbie Welch

First Place

Why can't I be like everyone else, Aimee thought as she watched groups of friends walk by her on their way to class. No one stopped to even look her way. Trailing into the classroom behind the others, Charles, one of her classmates, bumped into her causing Aimee to drop her books.

"I'm so sorry, just ask me if you want any help picking those up," Charles said as he walked away laughing. Sighing, Aimee bent to pick up her books. If only she could tell Charles how she felt right now, maybe he would stop picking on her.

After gathering her books Aimee found her usual seat in the back row. From there she looked at groups huddled around desks while the participants laughed at inside jokes. Overhearing Charles laugh, Aimee blushed, certain that he was joking about how she had just dropped her books. Trying not to look in Charles' direction, Aimee stared out the door just as a boy entered the room.

Charles also looked at the new boy and said just loud enough for all to hear, "Who's that new guy and what's wrong with his clothing? I mean, really, who wears that style of glasses anymore, and I wouldn't even dream of going out in public with my shirt collar sticking straight up."

Aimee watched, eyes wide as the new student walked right towards Charles' group.

Why would he do that after hearing their mean comments, Aimee thought. As the new boy approached Charles, Aimee watched Charles roll his eyes and sneer.

From her back row seat, Aimee barely heard Charles say to the boy who had just entered the room, “Where did you come from, Nerd City?” Cringing as Charles’ friends joined in laughing at the joke, Aimee wished that she could intervene for the new boy, but how could she? No one ever listened to her.

Before the joking could go any further, however, the teacher walked in and said, “Before we get started I’d like you guys to meet Justin. He’s a new student. I trust you’ll show him around. Let’s open our books now, to page seventy-two and continue reading where we left off.”

Aimee leaned over her book, but she could not help thinking about Justin. Since he looked different, Aimee thought, *Will Charles ever stop teasing him?*

The lunch bell rang, and as Aimee headed to the cafeteria, she noticed Justin walking toward the gym with his lunch bag in hand. Aimee then continued in the opposite direction to the lunch room, where she found an empty table to eat her lunch. Rushing through her meal, she was just about ready to pack up and go to the school’s library, when Justin, walked into the cafeteria.

His face lit up in a smile and he waved when he spotted Charles’ group saying, “Hey! There you are. You guys left me in the hall and this is a big building. It’s easy to get lost in.”

Aimee cringed and felt sick to her stomach; Justin had not learned his lesson. She hurried, got up to leave, and practically ran to the library. She could not stand to see Justin get bullied again, and so she ran to her only friends, the books. They talked to her when no one else would and, if she went to them maybe she would forget about Charles’ antics.

Every time she walked into the library, Aimee felt as if she had entered another world. The towering shelves full of books offered a maze to wander through. She stared at the spines of the books on a

shelf marked fantasy, and after a few moments, chose a book. Taking it in her hands, she started in the direction of her favorite table. It was always during this time of day that the window above her table would have the sun streaming through it, and the specks of dust would give their performance as they floated through the sunlit air. In the quiet, Aimee planned to read her book. As she got closer to the table, however, her keen ears picked up an unusual sound, a sound she had never heard in the library before.

Following the noise, she rounded the corner of a bookshelf and thought, *Is someone crying?* Hastening forward, she quickly turned down another aisle made of bookshelves, and turned to the right when she nearly tripped over a huddled mess at the base of the shelves. With eyes that were red with crying, the bundle looked up with a gasp of shock. Aimee lurched backwards, mortified that she had nearly tripped over a boy.

Although he probably would not understand her, Aimee felt as if she should apologize, and signed a hasty, "I'm sorry, didn't see you there," when the boy broke her off.

Now it was Aimee's turn to be surprised as the boy, Justin, signed, "Oh, its fine. Probably shouldn't have been sitting here."

A silence, where neither one said anything ensued; but as Aimee turned to leave, Justin finally continued, "Would you please stay? I mean, if you want to talk to me that is. I don't think anyone else wants to," and for the first time that day, Aimee smiled. She had found someone to talk with; someone who would listen to her. She had finally found a friend.

Signing back and forth, the rest of the lunch period flew by, and soon the friends had to go to their separate classes. To Aimee, the hours dragged by. She was too excited to take notes or listen to lectures, she just wanted to talk with Justin. When the final bell of the day rang, she leaped out of her seat and ran to find her friend.

Rounding the corner where his locker was located, she surged forward, smiling and waving. Justin, who had heard her coming, looked up, smiled, and waved back. Then the two of them sat down at the base of his locker and continued talking to each other.

They had not talked long when Aimee asked, “How come you know sign language? I mean, I know because I can’t speak, but obviously you can talk.”

Justin replied, “My little sister signs. I learned because of her. You know, she’d love to meet you. You could come to my house for dinner sometime.”

“Really? Do you really mean it,” Aimee asked holding her breath.

“Of course I do,” Justin was saying when Charles and some of his friends walked by. The characteristic sneer on Charles’ face warned Aimee and Justin that a mean comment was coming, but ignoring Charles, the two kept on talking.

“You know, it looks really lame to sit there and only pretend to be talking. You guys are both so weird, no wonder you’re friends,” Charles said.

Aimee narrowed her eyes, stared at Charles, stood up, and signed to him.

“What? What’s that supposed to mean,” Charles asked while taking a step backwards, the sneer disappearing from his face.

Then Justin stood up and said to Charles, “She said, ‘What kind of people judge books by their covers?’”

Leaving the Clouds Behind

By Noah Peever

Second Place

The day was foggy. The town was plunged in grayness. Wisps of mist scudded in the faint breeze that refused to blow the fog away. Dewdrops trembled on leaves and spider webs, hesitant to fall to the damp ground below. The cottage was silent, shutters pulled tight over shadowy windows—all but one. A girl sat next to the sill, wrapped in a large sweater against the chill, hesitant to shut the window in spite of the weather. She held a book loosely in her hand, her expression dreamy as she gazed at the clouds above. She turned as a whisper of a sound came from the room behind her. The carpet rose from the floor, hovering; it rippled as if beckoning to her. Smiling, she climbed on. The window seemed to open wider as she flew through it to the sky above. A flock of geese neared the girl and carpet, silver-grey feathers glinting in the sun as they rose, leaving the clouds behind.

The fog below her slowly vanished as they soared over the sea. Looking ahead, she could see a dark strip of land coming closer as the carpet flew on. Beneath them mountains came into view, white tipped peaks seeming to reach up for her; their jagged tips becoming smaller as the carpet rose to avoid them. There were more clouds here, they quickly vanished as she entered the hot blue sky over a desert. The carpet began to descend as a city made of white stone came into view. The noise and bustle of the outer streets disappeared as they landed in an open courtyard; the carpet floating gently to the ground with one last ripple of its patterned weave. A stone statue of a dragon rose from the paving stones underfoot, its granite body perfect down to every diamond shaped scale. The girl walked toward it. She grinned.

Her eyes twinkled as she patted it on its cold stone muzzle. Color raced outward from her hand; the black-streaked scales turning crimson and gold. The dark eyes burned as it unfolded its wings with a snap that echoed through the heat-scorched stones of the courtyard. It crouched for the girl to get on. She swung aboard and held tightly, giving the carpet a nod over her shoulder. The wind whipped her hair as the dragon launched into the sky. Over the desert they flew, until desert gave way to forest, and forest gave way to sea. They flew over ships, their cannons blowing smoke and metal, their sails stretched tight with the wind, but even the fastest of them seeming hardly to move as the dragon sped over them.

Over a towering city, hundreds of people packing its streets. Faint strains of music, laughter, and shouts rose into the hazy sky. The Dragon clipped a steeple with one wing. Its bells, chiming and clanging, sent pigeons flurrying in a cloud of iridescent feathers around them. They flew on.

Haze became mist, mist became fog, fog became clouds as they came to her village. She climbed into her window as the dragon hovered outside the cottage, giving it a last pat on the muzzle before it flew away. The sun burst through the clouds, pouring golden light on the village. The girl left her place at the window, crossing the bare boards of her floor, leaving her book on the window seat for another grey day.

The boy hitched a basket higher on his hip, brushing his black hair back from his sweaty face. He shoved the courtyard door open with his free hand, pausing to stare at the statue. It looked different somehow. He shrugged and walked around it towards the storage barrels on the far wall. His sandaled foot caught on something soft, and he tripped, sending the contents of his basket flying. He pulled himself up and stared at the brilliantly patterned carpet that rested on the dusty stone.

“Where did you come from?”

It rippled.

A Mother's Love

By Karli Stevenson

Third Place

“If you can’t seem to support me in what I want to do with my life, then there is no reason for me to stay, now is there?” Trevor Carter, sick of fighting, uttered these words calmly, as if trying to explain something to a small child. Trevor then turned his back to the woman who loved him more than anything in the world, his own mother. He hastened to the back door and slammed it behind him, not even hesitating to look back.

As he was walking down his driveway, his boots tramped through the mucky mud toward his old red Ford, engine already running. Without a second thought, he jumped up into the cab of his truck, his bags packed up beside him, and backed out of the driveway, getting one last look at the place that he had always called home.

Almost as soon as he got down the end of his street, his cellphone vibrated loudly right next to him. It was Red Taylor, the lead singer of his band, ‘Ready Men’.

“Hey Red”, Trevor said instantly.

“Trev, have you left yet?”

“I just pulled out of the driveway. It feels so great to be out of there, man.”

“It only gets better from here, my friend. We’ll be livin’ the dream in a matter of days. I was just calling to make sure that you didn’t have any doubts.”

“Not one.” Trevor wasn’t lying when he said this. He felt as if every moment of his life had built up to this and he was finally free.

“Perfect. Just meet us all here in L.A. tomorrow at the hotel and we’ll work things out from there.”

He hung up the phone, quickly. The rain was pouring down from the sky, splattering on the windshield of his car, as if they were small bugs. Trevor was very concentrated on the road, hands shaking. He hadn’t had his license for long, between his recent DUIs and getting his license a year late. This weather wasn’t usually something that he would choose to go out in, but he had to.

As he began to exit the town, he passed the little old grocery store, and with it, handfuls of memories. Memories of younger years with his elementary school friends and memories from mere weeks ago with Red and the band. The more recent memories brought in a flood of discomfort just thinking about all of the drugs and trouble that came with it. Every bad situation Trevor had gotten into these past few years, Red was there, using encouragement to dig him deeper into it.

The further he drove, the more the guilt weighed on him, as if it was chasing and rapidly catching up to him. He knew how much his mother loved and cared for him, yet he still broke her heart.

“She didn’t respect me though. She weighed down my true potential and this is the only way that I can become somebody.” Trevor tried to convince himself. He attempted to scrub the feelings he felt for his mother away with his thoughts and words but it was becoming more difficult than he had intended.

He couldn’t have arrived at the airport soon enough. His mind and thoughts were eating away at him, as a termite does rotting wood. He felt sick to his stomach and did not want to stay in his old rusty truck a moment longer. The airport was jam packed and the rain was soon followed by wind which was later followed by thunder and lightning. Trevor was concerned that the flight to L.A. might have been delayed but he held onto his hope. After finding a parking spot, he quickly hopped out of the cab of his truck, took his bags, and ran into the concourse of the airport, trying desperately to stay dry.

When he entered the airport, he went through the regular airport procedures, checking in his bags and going through security. Relieved that all was going well, he got to the gate where his plane was departing from. A few moments later, however a raspy voice came in over the speakers and announced, "We are sorry to inform you that Flight 815 to Los Angeles, California will be delayed due to weather conditions. Further information will be announced shortly."

Trevor's heart sank into his stomach. He was already having his doubts and the last thing he needed was more time on his hands to think. Hands shaking, Trevor reached for his headphones to block out the thoughts. Music was what spoke to him. It touched his soul like nothing else could. As he was beginning to put the large, black headphones over his ears to drift into another world, he noticed an old frail woman approaching him.

"Is this seat taken?" she quietly said to him, ushering to the empty seat beside him.

"It's all yours," Trevor said back to her sharply. He wanted to be left alone and let his music work its magic, drowning out all the feelings and complications in his life. As she began to sit down, he moved his guitar further under his chair with his foot just assure its safety, not wanting to take any chances.

Just as he was beginning to close his eyes and drift back into his own private world, the old woman, tapped on his shoulder to get his attention. He ripped the headphones off of his head once again and glared at her.

"Does that guitar belong to you?" she uttered to him. Her voice was quiet, yet kind, like the soft chirping of a bird.

Trevor half rolled his eyes. The answer to him seemed quite obvious. Not caring enough about the conversation to make direct eye contact, he responded, "It is."

The old woman, expecting an answer like this one, nodded her head. "You remind me of my own son," she said back to him.

Trevor tried, once again to escape back to his music, but she pressed forward.

“He had always loved music, just like you appear to. He was quite tall and oh, so very handsome,” she said with a little smile on her face, but Trevor noticed that this seemed to be very painful for her to talk about. She paused for what seemed like forever, and then turned her head to Trevor once again and said, nearly whispering, “Haven’t talked to my boy in almost 12 years now.” This woman paused again, with tears in her eyes, “He may not know it, but I love him just as much as I did the day he was born. All his life I’ve just been trying to do what’s best for him.”

Every word that she spoke was like a punch to his gut. He related everything she said to his relationship with his own mother. He could hardly bare it. He finally mustered up to say, “I’m sure he feels the same way.” Almost as soon as these words passed his lips, his hands reached into his pocket, searching for his cell phone, with only one person in mind.

My Usual Life

By Hana Jang

First Place

"Have you done your homework?"

"Oh mom!"

"Quit playing with the dog and get in that bedroom and do your homework!"

Jason reluctantly released the sock that he had been pulling from Cocoa's mouth and the dog stood there in silence, waiting for her master to return to playing their game of tug-of-war.

"Can't a kid have some fun?"

"You've had enough fun today. Right now, it's time for your homework."

"Listen to your mother," the father insisted. "I told you how important your homework is."

"Oh yeah, like my whole life's gonna end if I don't do my stupid homework."

"Hey, young man, you watch your mouth!" The father had been reading the evening paper from the family room couch but now he directed his full attention to his sarcastic son. Jason remained on the floor near Cocoa, fully expecting a tongue-lashing by his father. He was determined to remain defiant, but his father's large imposing stature and the swiftness with which he was capable of pulling out his belt, quickly diminished his boldness. "We've been too lenient on you this year and your grades are down. But that's gonna change. From now on I want you to automatically do that homework of yours after dinner. And I don't want to have to tell you about it, again."

Jason slammed his fist into the soft, carpeted floor before rising. He was aware of his disobedience, yet he wished to make a stand. "I don't know what the big deal is," he sharply replied.

"The big deal is: we want you to have a future."

"I don't understand what's wrong with you kids today," the mother chided him. "They can't make it any easier for you."

"Oh right, like it was so much harder when YOU were kids." Jason's insolent response surprised even him.

"You're damn right it was," the father argued. He hopped off the couch and approached his defiant son. "We didn't have all the luxuries like you kids have today. And we didn't talk back to our parents the way you kids do."

"It's tougher being a kid today," Jason declared, slowly backing away from his father. "You didn't have all the problems we have. We have a lot more pressure today."

"All right, just for that, you're grounded! Now get in that room of yours and do your homework! And stay there for the rest of the night."

"What did I do?" Jason cried out in surprise.

"You know very well what you did! You better start watching that mouth of yours, boy, 'cause I've about had it with your sarcastic remarks!"

Jason stormed out of the family room and headed down the hallway to his bedroom. Cocoa loyally followed him, wagging her tail.

The mother and father gazed at each other in silence for several lingering moments. Their son's laziness was becoming a growing problem and they were uncertain how to handle it. His behavior baffled them because they had always stressed the importance of work to their son. Where had he developed such apathy? They shook their heads in dismay before resuming their prior activities.

The father returned his attention to the evening paper which was displayed on the family room ceiling-viewer. He floated comfortably two feet above the flat, bed-shaped, anti-gravity couch, with his arms folded casually behind his head. "Turn to Sports," he commanded. Page one of the Sports' section instantly appeared on the ceiling-viewer.

The mother reclined on the shape-shifting rocking chair, which naturally altered its shape to provide the maximum comfort to its host. She reached over to the house's computer control panel, pressed a red button and ordered, "Othello, please." Colorful, life-like, computer generated, hologram actors suddenly appeared in their family room and began to act out Shakespeare's classical play. Her left hand tightly gripped her Tension-Ball, which absorbed all the stress and anxiety from her mind and body.

"I hope we aren't pushing him too much," the mother noted worriedly. "You know, it's not good to push a child too much, either."

"The boy's got to learn that life's not easy," the father firmly replied. "No one's gonna hand you anything today. You have to work for it." He reached out and grabbed a snack made, and served to him on a tray, by their government-issued robot.

"Rays, please," he commanded, as he munched on his delectable after-dinner snack. An invisible beam was instantly emitted from the anti-gravity couch and was directed at its occupant. Gentle bursts of stress-relieving heat and comforting waves of inaudible sound, vibrated and massaged his aching back and his stiff neck. "These four-hour work days are killing me," he mumbled to himself.

"I hope we're doing the right thing."

"That boy's taking everything for granted," the father abruptly added in anger. "And we've got to put a stop to it right now."

"I guess so," the mother softly replied. Her eyes were already closed - her mind and body drained of all the anxiety that was the

result of the previous argument. She was beginning to drift into a deep, relaxing sleep.

####

Jason was fuming in his bedroom. He hurled his pillow against the wall in indignation before brusquely grabbing his homework assignment for the night.

"They don't understand," he bitterly complained, directing his comments to Cocoa. "Things are tougher today. They don't have any idea what it's like being a kid."

But since no reasonable alternative to his problem existed, he reluctantly placed aside his resentment and began to work. He inserted the homework disk into his player, grabbed the long connecting cord, and inserted its metal end into the socket in the back of his head. Like everyone else, his cerebral socket had been implanted at birth.

Jason always hated downloading his homework into his brain. He swore it was the longest two minutes of the day.

The Red String of Fate

By Jessi Pitts

Second Place

They say the red string of fate binds two soulmates to each other. It connects by the ankles, and though the string may bend and twist, it will never break. I've always been fairly good at giving advice when it comes to the string, but the tense air between my eleven year old sister and I across the table says otherwise.

Even the glistening cobweb-like threads that bind the very fabric of the world seems tense. How someone so young can influence the mood of the room that powerfully intrigues me. But right now, I feel so much like a child being scolded that I can't dandle on those threads for long. Ning has only one particular thread on her mind.

"How do you know it's still there?" she demanded.

I stared into my cup of lukewarm green tea.

"I return home from university for the holidays and this is the welcome I receive?" I said, trying to make the mood lighter. She isn't having any of it.

"You told me this summer that my string was loose, Yin. You said my soulmate was close. You *lied*."

Ning and I have a peculiar relationship. At almost ten years older than her, I'm caught between roles of sister and aunt. It was easier when I still lived here in this old home, but now that I'm off earning my East-Asian studies degree, Ning's been something like an only child. I can tell she hasn't talked about her problem with the string to anyone else.

"I'm only human," I said, muttering into my tea.

Ning's face was burning. "Why did you lie to me?"

"I wasn't lying—" I tried interjecting, finally looking up at her, but she began to rant.

"Every boy I've met since you left hasn't even come *close* to being something like a soulmate. I'm almost certain this red string doesn't even exist."

It took all my being to not laugh, and even so a small smile escaped. She took deep offense at this. "It's not funny!"

I searched her almond eyes and found nothing but disappointment and hurt shrouded by anger. She truly doubted the string.

"I can see your thread," I reminded her. "It's not cut, if that's what you're worried about."

"I'm not a baby anymore, Yin," she puffed, looking an awful lot like one. "I don't believe in your stories anymore. Even if the string was real, no one can see it."

I raised an eyebrow. "Oh? And how do you know the string is red if no one's seen it?"

She opened her mouth, but then closed it as my words began to sink in.

I really could see the red string. It wasn't a story I'd conjured up to let Ning's imagination run wild. As I watched her blink in the lazy afternoon sunlight, flakes of dust danced around a red string leading from under the table straight through the back wall. It was so tightly stretched that it looked almost air thin. I knew she must feel that thinness and interpret it as dread.

She wasn't sure what to believe. Ning had once had complete faith in me, but at age eleven was beginning to doubt everything. Good. Better to be a skeptic than to follow blindly.

"An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstances!" I recited. "The thread may stretch or tangle but it will never break."

It's... it's really still there?" Ning said so quietly it might've been lost to me.

I nodded. "It's taut, but the knot holds firm."

"How can you see it?" she asked, wonder filling her face. Any trace of the moody, doubtful girl was gone. In her place was the curious sister I knew well. "Everyone says they're invisible!"

"To most, yes. But I like to think I'm special," I said, swinging my leg out from under the table and into the open.

Ning glanced at it, then raised an eyebrow condescendingly. "Yin, I can't see the string."

"You and me both, for once."

Her grip on her own cup of tea grew tight. "You can't see your own string?"

I shook my head, calmly sipping tea. "No, if there was one, I'd be able to see it. There's nothing there but skin."

Ning wrinkled her forehead. "Nothing? But... I thought everyone had one."

"The red string of fate binds two lovers to each other," I said. "It just happens that I have no one."

"But that's so sad!" Ning said, now full of compassion. Her own troubles seemed hardly relevant now that my truth was laid out.

"Oh, but I'm fine with it," I was quick to say. "Some of us are born with fates that are different from others. Your fate is still awaiting you," I explained, pointing at her string, even though she couldn't see it. "Mine is to help you find the end of that thread."

She seemed to understand, looking down at her ankle with a new sort of reverence. Even if she couldn't see the string like I could, I knew she could feel its presence.

"Thanks, Yin," she said, a lopsided smile glancing her lips. "I'm

glad you don't mind your fate.”

“Being with my family and friends are all the love I need,” I said, holding out my arms for her to run into. She failed to hesitate.

Wrapped in my arms, she asked softly, “Do you think I'll find the end soon?”

I laughed. “You're still very young, Ning. It may take years, but you will find it. You must only let the string lead you where you need to go.”

Yes, the red string of fate does connect two soulmates. But some people are created without the extra appendage, and I like to think they're getting along just fine.

Bound for Love

By Casey Morrison

Third Place

The first time I laid my eyes upon you, I knew you were perfect.

I was a simple Cupid, yet I was deigned worthy enough to write your love story, and the very idea was a preposterous one! A perfect being such as yourself was not something I felt worthy to follow—and yet I did.

The arrows clung in my quiver on my back, between the small alabaster wings that provided me with movement; to follow you, to watch over you. The bow in my right hand was my constant companion; it was the quill I would use to write your love story, and the arrows were my ink.

I watched you as you grew, you from a small potato-like thing that still shone with grace and beauty, to a young human that began to glow like the sun. The finite knowledge of your playground days divulged me with much entertainment, as you played with the other children.

“A bug, gross!” You would exclaim.

“I wanna swing!” You would cheer.

“Mommy!” You would sob, as you fall to your knees and scrape one.

I remember each time, each remark, and every action you brought forth with a verbal elaboration with the help of the English language. You probably remember very little from your time as a young sprout, but its okay; a memory is fond and cherished to any who remember it.

You probably also don't remember your first crush, but I do quite spectacularly. As first steps are important to a mother, a first crush is important to me; especially yours, you graceful and perfect being.

I remember the anticipation, as my bow began to burn hot in my hand. Anxiety picked up in my chest as I watched you play in the sandbox, still a small little thing you were; the other approached you, and my heart leapt with both joy and worry. I refused to look at the quiver as I drew the arrow with skill from its home; I had not known what this one would be to you at the time, but the small weight of the arrow assured me that this was not to be your special someone. The anxiety I felt disappeared at the light weight of the arrow, as I brought it up and knocked it against the bow, resting it gently as I pulled back, back, and back, until I was fully drawn.

I released the tense string of my bow, and watched as the arrow went flying and met its destined target, and she experienced you bully her for the next four months, in the way children do when they are in like.

And this pattern continued on; each time my bow would burn, I would refuse to look at my quiver; yet I knew with each arrow I knocked that I was far from completing your love story. With each arrow, my quiver never became lighter.

While I was elated, you were becoming saddened. You watched as your friends entered in to long term relationships, and you cursed your own fate for not having that luxury. I wanted with all my being to tell you that their relationships were not permanent, yet no matter how loud I was, you would never hear me. I watched as you continued to spiral down.

Oh, you wonderful being, no matter how far you fell, you were still radiant. I watched as you even got with people that I released no arrows from, and each word you said to them, each "I love you" was wrongly placed, and hurt my heart and my ears, and I wish in all my

being for that special arrow to come forth, and yet it didn't. And you, you began to hate yourself with each person you were with, and you believed yourself to be of no worth.

Yet, you continued to age, and soon I watched as you graduated from high school, and then college—a bout of four years where my arrows were never loosened from my bow, and I simply enjoyed my time watching your beautiful soul mend itself, as you acclimated to a more stable life. I watched as you made friends and enemies alike; I watched as you had matured, that while you watched your friends go off with their loves, some of them their life partners, that you had no qualms about your life choices.

I watched as you talked with the barista at the coffee shop. I remembered how happy they made you, yet my hand did not burn, so I didn't view this as your love. I viewed this as your friendship. A beautiful friendship that made you grow; you would have once been after the skirt of every girl in your sight, but this one, you treasured as a member of your own family.

But, ignorance on my part proved for me to not be ready. The last year of your college year, you were ecstatic; leaving college meant another fresh start. Your apartment was roomy, and you kept it clean, and you enjoyed a few more flings, and I felt my quiver lose almost all of its weight; it contained just one more arrow, the heaviest of all of my other ones.

And then the time finally came. We were once again in the coffee shop with the barista, and you reached for your coffee, and your hands touched, and mine began to burn with the heat of love. I grabbed for the last arrow in my quiver, and knocked it.

But, my hands became clammy.

My breath sped up.

I couldn't do it.

This arrow was special. It was the arrow of true love, of eternal

love; in it, I could see your whole life flash before my eyes. I saw the pain you would go through with the person you were to be with, oh my precious charge. I saw the torment, the mental and physical pain, the way your heart would twist and hurt.

I clamored and the arrow dropped to the ground, and I went to retrieve it; I had stuttered long enough, I had. . .

I had missed this moment, as I grabbed for empty air where the arrow once was.

I watched as this moment which was supposed to be the best in your life, passed by without a bang; no parades, no fireworks, just another normal exchange.

I felt the emptiness of my quiver, and, alas, the emptiness of your heart.

I'm sorry, you precious and lonely creature; this is my fault.

I'm so, so sorry.

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