



OUR OWN EXPRESSIONS

Celebrating 25 Years

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



TEEN

Writing & Art Contest

2021 Winners

2021 Winners

Congratulations to the more than 700 talented students who participated in the 25th annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff, reviewed all entries. Writers Michael Magee and Brandi Douglas selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style and general presentation. Photographer Lisa Roden and artist Abrian Curington selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity and effective use of media.

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

The Pierce County Library System gratefully acknowledges the contributions from the Pierce County Library Foundation to help fund and support the contest.

Join us in recognizing and celebrating 25 years of creative teen talent, voice and vision!

POETRY
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**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**
Celebrating 25 Years

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Opinions

Kaylina Warren

Sumner Middle School

2nd Walk in Front of Me

Alexa Kotansky

Kopachuck Middle School

3rd Winter Nights

Natalie Bates

Aylen Junior High School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Atlas

Clarisse Fowlkes

Bellarmine Preparatory

2nd Unsaid and Forgotten

Audrianna Rouse

Emerald Ridge High School

3rd If The Music Dims

Olivia Lathrom

Bethel High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st Ode to the Girl I Abandoned

Benita Kitembo

Curtis Senior High School

2nd The Silent Sound of Falling Snow

Lily Tamminga

Covenant High School

3rd Rosemary and Rain

Honor Tamminga

Covenant High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st artwork2021

Tia Norman

Giaudrone Middle School

2nd Einsteinian

Chelsea Bass

Key Peninsula Middle School

3rd Trendy dog

Erika Rusak

Sumner Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Baby Leo

Iris Rogel

Bonney Lake High School

2nd Harley 2000 softail

Julia Clarke

Gig Harbor High School

3rd Focused on a Deadline

Charlotte Southworth

Stadium High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st The soul through beautiful eyes

Sam Johnson

Bethel High School

2nd The blind garden

Chloe Brown

Home School

3rd With Liberty and Justice For All

Taylor Swensen

Bonney Lake High School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st The Great Outdoors

Michael Fulkerson

Other

2nd Trapped in a Bubble

Morgan Ackerland

Home School

3rd Rainy Night With Saw

Natalynn Kirkendoll-Graham

Key Peninsula Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Petaled Bath

Sofia Anderson

Steilacoom High School

2nd The Crown Plaza

Alana Rojas

Steilacoom High School

3rd Wet Plate Photography - Chemical Star Wars

Anna Salmon

Steilacoom High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st The Voyage

Jehlil Ruffner

Steilacoom High School

2nd Confined

Jade Edwards

Steilacoom High School

3rd Innocence

Elliot Carlsson

Steilacoom High School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Flint and Fire

Audrey Douglass

Other

2nd Maggy the Ornament

Gabriella Vonada

Home School

3rd The Birth of the Philippines

Lia Hartley

Ferrucci Junior High School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Clockwork

Rylie Wood

Covenant High School

2nd The Sleepless City

Jacob Lawty

Covenant High School

3rd 911: What Is My Emergency?

Nathan Schmidt

Covenant High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st An Amethyst Remembrance

Mary Funches

Covenant High School

2nd The Lighthouse

Honor Tamminga

Covenant High School

3rd The Binky

Aubren Reis

Covenant High School

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

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**OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS**

Celebrating 25 Years

Opinions

by Kaylina Warren

First Place

When we run we run
Are legs get moving and the earth shatters beneath our feet
Little worms and insects are trampled and stomped into the mud
And our hair flows like water
Our breath bubbles up and pops at the surface of air
Sounds travel away from our ears; and so we run
Our sails are so thick no air travels through it
No air travels around it
Instead, our sails hold that air in a little cup
And when it bounces out
It screams, it's a curse
So we run, and we run
And we never stop running still we hit the border,
it scares me
I don't want to run, I don't want my sails to kill me
I don't want to hide my face in the darkness
I want to breathe
Without having the air wipped out of me first
Will I ever breathe one day?
Or will I just continue to stand on that curse I hate so much?

Walk in Front of Me

by Alexa Kotansky

Second Place

“Walk in front of me,”
She does not ask why.
“Walk on this side of me.”

No explanation does she need,
Nor would she accept the superficial consolation of a lie.
He implores: “Walk in front of me.”

Not near the road; away from the street,
She is sheltered on the inside.
He points, “Walk on this side of me.”

It angers her, not his protective words, but their necessity.
Yet to his request she still complies.
“Walk in front of me.”

In front for him to see, beside for him to keep
Her away from kidnapping, assaulting, molesting crimes.
“Walk on this side of me.”

While his words’ intent is pure and precautionary,
She feels they mock her defenselessness; she tries not to cry.
“Walk in front of me,” says he.
“Walk on this side of me.”

Winter Nights

by Natalie Bates

Third Place

Have you ever wondered what the snowflakes do, at night, when you're not awake? They dance across the forests and over the snowy scape.

Or what about the trees, standing tall and still? They host the little creatures and protect them from the chill.

Even when the wolves howl a chorus to the sky, the world rests and the snow does its best, to hush their eerie cry.

The lakes reflect the Earth's respect, as the tulips lay down for spring, and soothe the moon as he worries what the next night will bring.

Soon the sun will rise, and daytime will be here, but night will come again, so calm and cool and clear.

With that in mind, I bid thee farewell, but the tale is now yours to tell, of what the world does when you're not awake.

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
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**OUR OWN
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Celebrating 25 Years

Atlas

by Clarisse Fowlkes

First Place

I'll put my hands in the pocket of my hoodie
Because there's nothing more I want to hold than my own self
The drawstrings are already choking me
If I am too much to hold
What parts of me do I drop
What must I let go of to finally breathe
And how, if I so please, am I able to tear off the parts connected
to me
I was welded to the armor
I am Atlas and I am the heavens
Let me rest
Let me drop the heavens onto the humans below
Let me be greedy like King Midas
I shall take my gold and leave the scraps to the peasants
But knowing that it will only bring pain,
I must never drop the heavens
I must keep myself, for if I drop the heavens, there will be
no one left
Perhaps I think too much of myself
Maybe I am less than I think I am
The drawstrings tighten either way

Unsaid and Forgotten

by Audrianna Rouse

Second Place

Where do you put the words that wouldn't come out?
I can't just leave them in my head.
Up there they'd be tossed around,
over and over again until I hit the ground,
crying.
Where do I put the unsaid words?
They carry meaning that goes unheard.
I cannot just let them consume me,
again.
So where do I place the forgotten conversations?
The ones that keep me up at night.
Where can I put the lost sentence?
The ones that never felt quite right.
And where can I put the poetry,
That never made it past the page?
Will time take these words away?

If The Music Dims

by Olivia Lathrom

Third Place

I winced at the reverberated bass,
shielded myself from her everlasting personality
that brought nothing but loud lyrics
and sad melodies.

She played every individual,
played them as singles,
played them as songs.

She never once played me,
and for that I was grateful.
I don't think I am anymore.

Her silence was astounding when she left,
pleading nothing but empty air
and an echo of beauty,
notes spilling even after long abandonment.

She left me to a stale hum
of nothing but memories.
I only wish to hear her voice once more.

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12

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Ode to the Girl I Abandoned

by Benita Kisembo

First Place

She is the sun-soaked Sahara mid-afternoon.

She is the whispers of my mother tongue now foreign to my ears.

She is the warm embraces of the family, now as alien as strangers.

She is the whirring of the airplanes as the Atlantic morphed into the Pacific.

She is the Bantu knots and goddess braids in a sea of straight blonde hair.

She is the cutting curiosity and wounding wonder that still haunts my nightmares.

She is the biting laughter that spreads like wildfire every time her accent slashes through the air.

She is the all-consuming longing for desert sands and warm embraces.

Ode to the Girl Abandoned.

Who buckled under the weight of agonizing loneliness.

Who yearned endlessly for a taste of home, for a glimpse of respite.

Ode to the Girl I Abandoned.

The girl I buried in the very depths of my soul.

Who starved for her culture, as the conformer silenced the fighter.

Ode to the girl I abandoned.

The girl who never really left.

The girl who lives in every rebuke that shoots of my tongue, in every piece of revolution in my DNA.

Ode to the girl who survived.

The Silent Sound of Falling Snow

by Lily Tamminga

Second Place

When in the evening the busy street,
Covered in a white blanket of peace,
Falls silent of cars rolling on.
And wond'ring out to the yellow line,
I stand in the cold and look both ways.

The silent sound of falling snow.
The muffled sound of movement ceased.

My ears stretch to hear life's.
And I smile when there is none to be heard.
Other senses take the front:
My skin, freckled with delicate ice.
My nose, frozen, pink to the tip.
My eyes, observing a world softened.

Snow cannot melt with the heat of anger,
It covers all scars and mutes all edges.

Snow falls through the light of a lamp,
I watch each flake land and settle,
Like a life on earth, intent to stay.
But someday, the sun will show its face,
And each icy-star will dim and fade.

Rosemary and Rain

by Honor Tamminga

Third Place

Rosemary danced with Rain one dreary afternoon,
While the Clouds, in pearly splendor, hung about the room.
And Lord and Lady Lavender tried to catch Sir Wind,
But he was busy gallivanting and could not be pinned.

Rosemary took Rain's hand and said "How do you do?"
And he, in turn, asked after her, as the sound of music grew.
Then in strode Master Sun, who shooed away the Clouds,
And they took Rain, their servant boy, far, far from the crowds.

Rosemary and Rain couldn't even say goodbye.
Sun took her hand in his, and Rain began to cry.
"Come quickly, silly boy," the Clouds said with to-do,
"We've no use for selfish Sun, but we've still got use for you."

But Rosemary and Rain, though far from one another,
Thought not of Clouds, nor Sun, but only of each other.
So in the dark, cold night, long since the ball was over,
Rain came to Rosemary, and asked her for forever.

Rosemary ran away with Rain, that dark and damp midnight.
The Stars twinkled with glee, as they dressed her all in white.
And Father Moon looked kindly as they softly spoke their vows,
And as Rain took his bride, he said, "Forever starts right now."

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

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Celebrating 25 Years

artwork2021

by Tia Norman

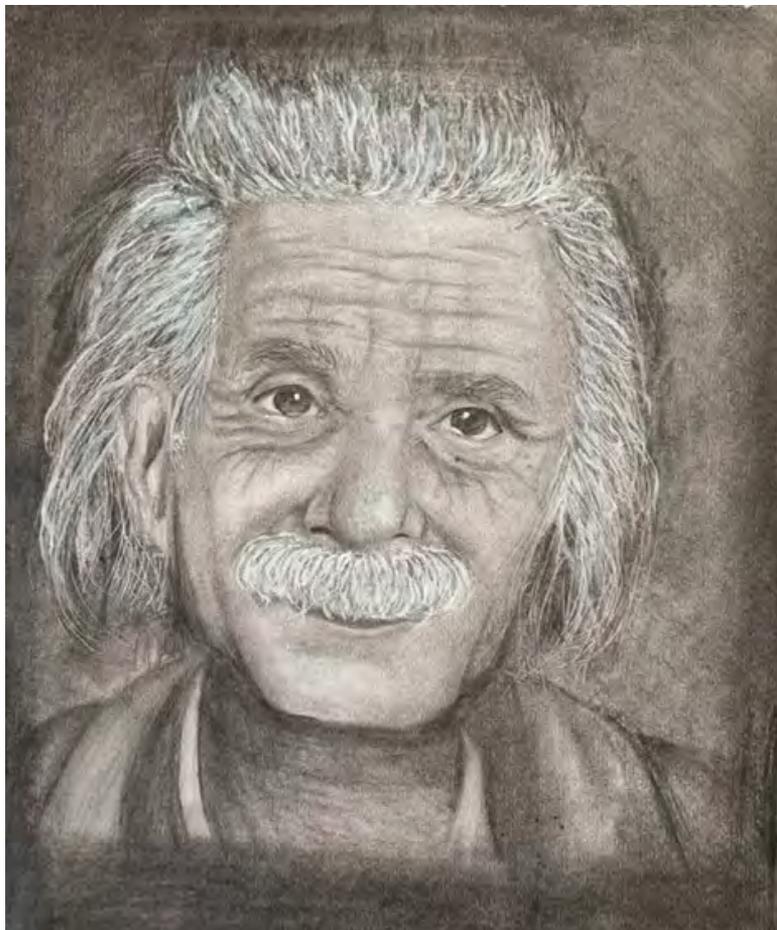
First Place



Einsteinian

by Chelsea Bass

Second Place



Trendy dog

by Erika Rusak

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
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**OUR OWN
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Baby Leo

by Iris Rogel

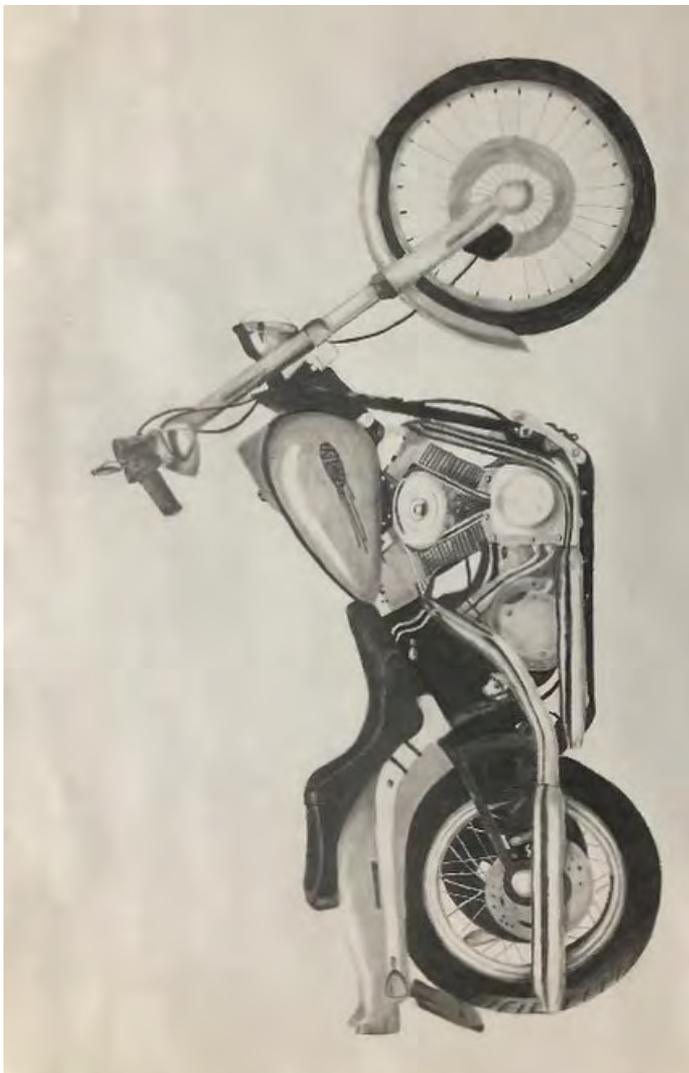
First Place



Harley 2000 softail

by Julia Clarke

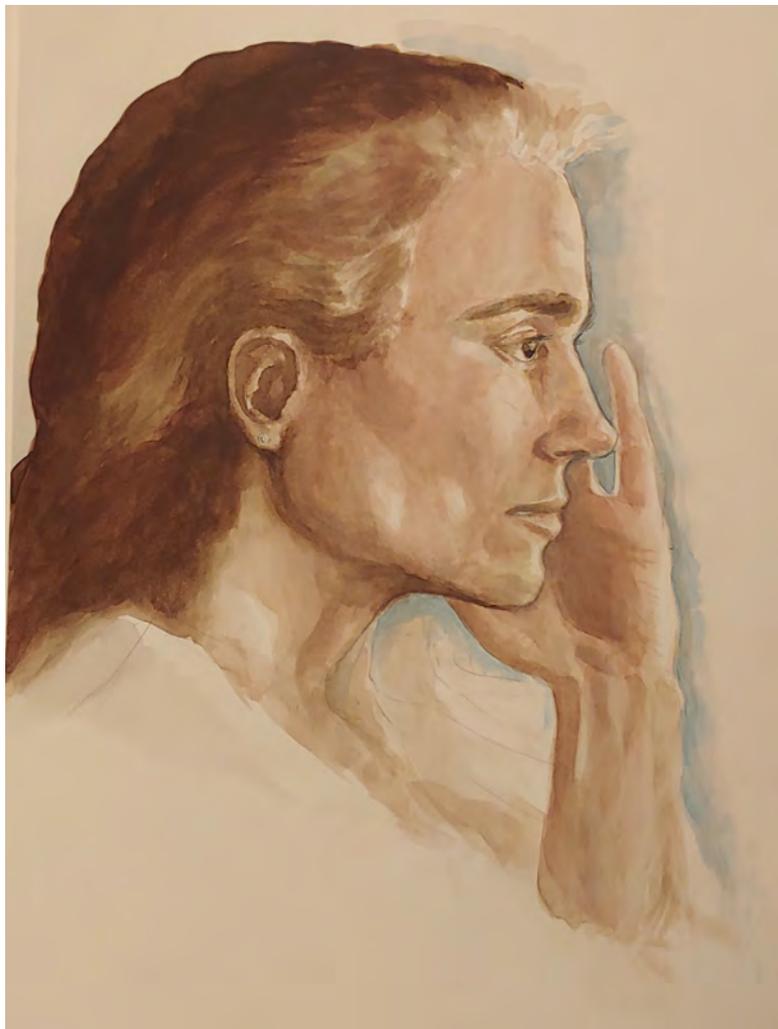
Second Place



Focused on a Deadline

by Charlotte Southworth

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 11 & 12

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The soul through beautiful eyes

by Sam Johnson

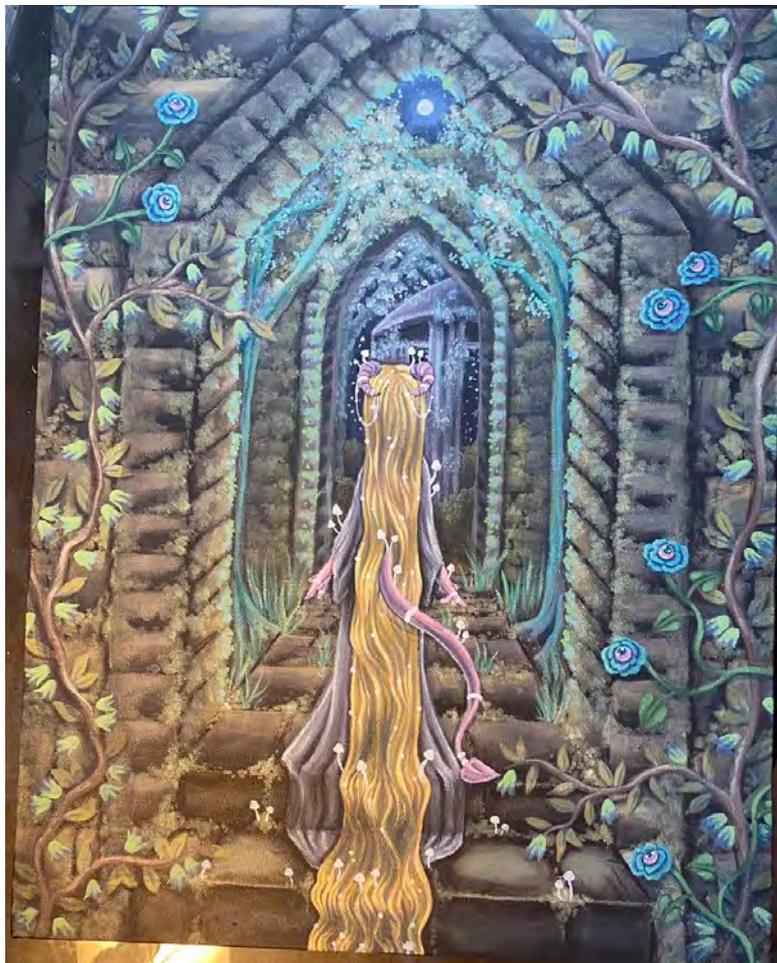
First Place



The blind garden

by Chloe Brown

Second Place



With Liberty and Justice For All

by Taylor Swensen

Third Place



Photography

Grades 7 & 8

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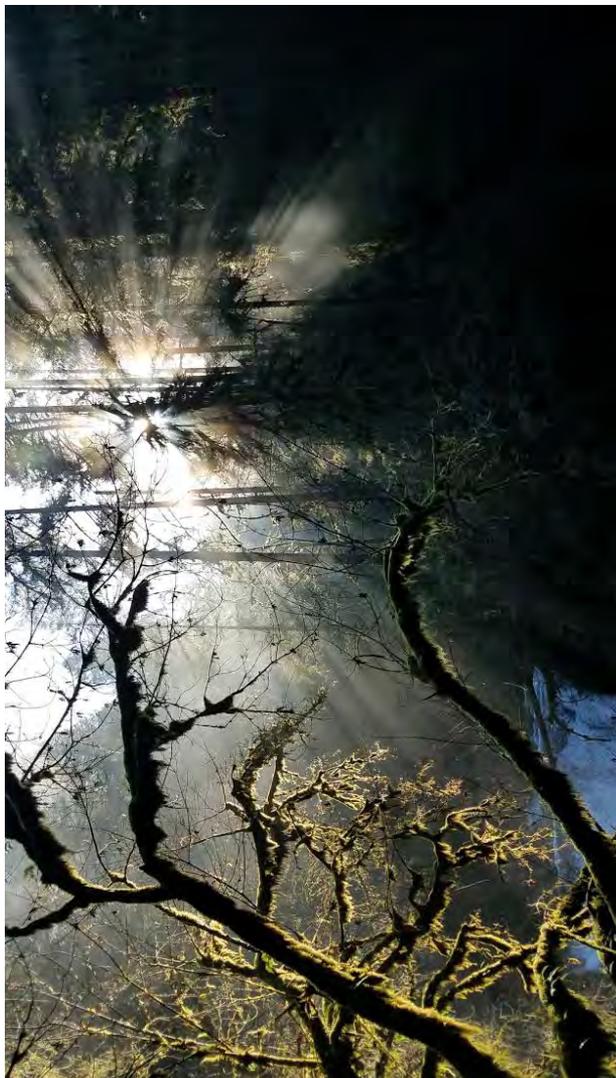
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The Great Outdoors

by Michael Fulkerson

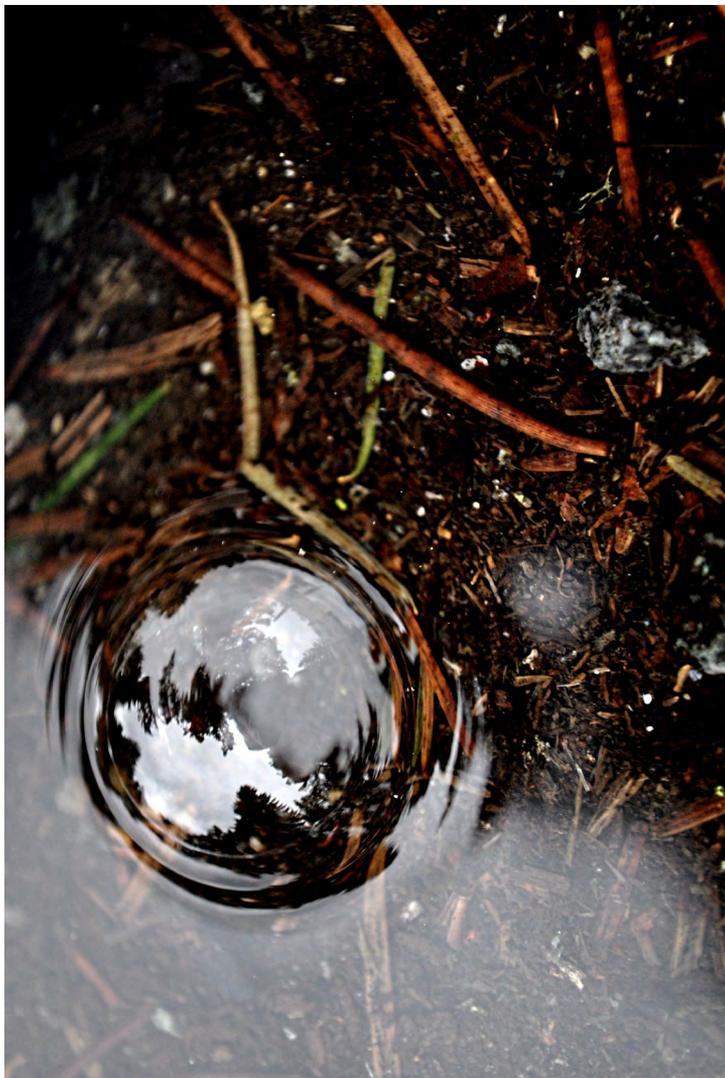
First Place



Trapped in a Bubble

by Morgan Ackerland

Second Place



Rainy Night With Saw

by Natalynn Kirkendoll-Graham

Third Place



Photography

Grades 9 & 10

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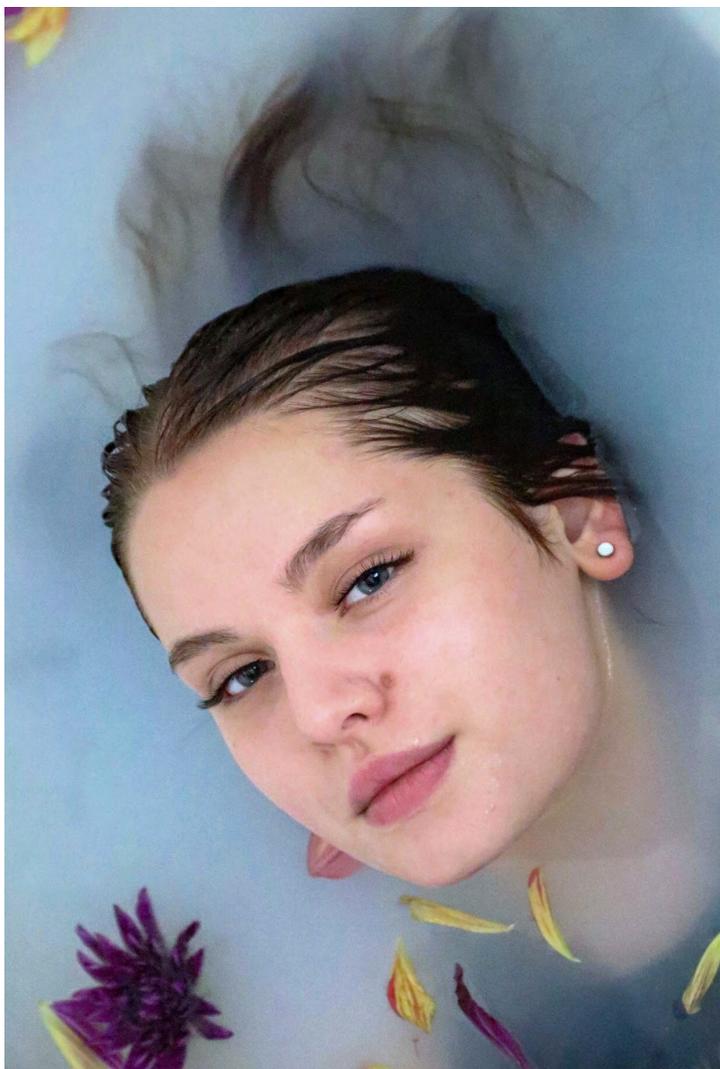
**OUR OWN
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Celebrating 25 Years

Petaled Bath

by Sofia Anderson

First Place



The Crown Plaza

by Alana Rojas

Second Place



Wet Plate Photography - Chemical Star Wars

by Anna Salmon

Third Place



Photography

Grades 11 & 12

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**OUR OWN
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The Voyage

by Jehlil Ruffner

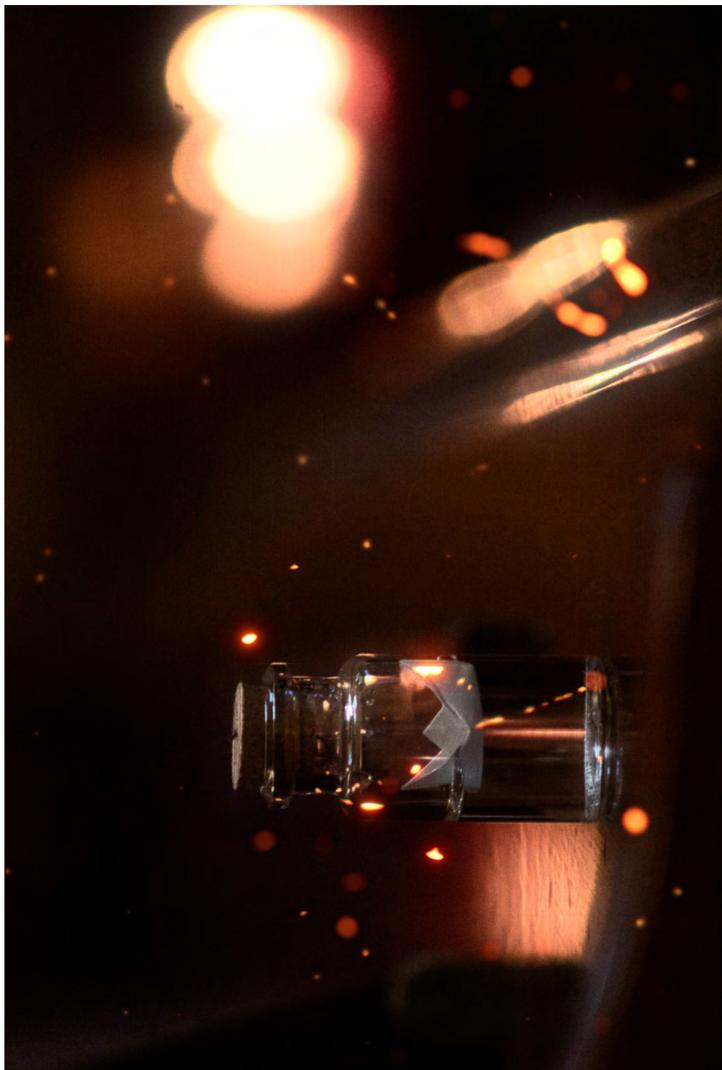
First Place



Confined

by Jade Edwards

Second Place



Innocence

by Elliot Carlsson

Third Place



Short Story

Grades 7 & 8

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**OUR OWN
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Flint and Fire

by Audrey Douglass

First Place

He looked up at his mother's sparkling blue eyes. She is very pretty, he thought, feeling a surge of pride at the fact that he was her son. Although Matthias was only seven, he could already tell that he wouldn't turn out as fun, awesome, or handsome as his parents, even though they repeatedly told him that he was their "beautiful boy."

Matthias's family lived isolated from the rest of the kingdom, but it was never boring on the farm. Papa had made many wooden toys for his son to play with, including a small wooden sword and some blocks to build mini structures with. Sometimes Matthias would help Mama cook by handing her ingredients or adding them to the mixture. He was even old enough that he could assist his parents with feeding some of the animals almost every day. But he hadn't been able to get close to the horses yet because, especially when he was really young, Mama worried that he would get trampled, and so the pasture was off-limits for him.

"You see those horses over there?" she asked her little son one day, pointing out the window to the pasture. "Those all belong to our family. Every single one. One day you'll be able to ride one of them."

"Will Papa teach me?" Matthias's gaze fell on one of the horses in the field: a black-and-white beast with a neat, short mane and a straight tail.

"When you are older, yes," Mama explained. She smiled at Matthias's wondering face as he stared at the horse outside. "Have you found one you want to ride?"

"That one." He pointed. "The black and white one. It's pretty."

Mama nodded. "He's a nice one, indeed. His name is Flint."

"Flint," he repeated. "Can I meet him, Mama? Please?"

“I don’t see why not,” she consented after a moment’s thought, and she took his hand and led him outside. Matthias shied away from the other horses when they tried to nuzzle him, and he leaned into his mother’s skirt. She laughed “They can’t hurt you as long as you’re with me,” she murmured. “They probably wouldn’t hurt you anyway. All they want is to say hello.”

Timidly, Matthias extended his hand as a black-and-brown horse reached out with its nose. The wet tongue licked his hand as though searching for a treat, and he giggled, bringing back his hand. The horse’s eyes were reproachful and seemed to say, “You tricked me. I want a treat.”

“Sorry, Ebony,” Mama told the horse, scratching behind Ebony’s ears. “No apples today.” Ebony snorted and trotted away, head high and aloof. Mama laughed again.

Brown eyes were looking deep into Matthias’s own; Flint was only a meter away now. Matthias let go of Mama’s hand and cautiously stepped toward the beautiful beast. Flint whinnied, and Matthias took it as a greeting. He made an imitation of the noise — it sounded more like an odd squeak, but it was close enough — and the black-and-white mane shook with delight. The speckled muzzle bumped him gently in the chest, and the ever-searching lips caressed his hand. A burst of laughter escaped him, and he threw his arms around Flint’s neck, pressing his cheek against the soft fur. Flint snorted in a friendly way.

“I think he likes you, Matthias,” said Mama with a smile.

“And I like him,” answered Matthias, pulling back, patting the horse’s neck. “He’s the one that I want to ride on when Papa teaches me.”

“We’ll see.”

“Ami! Matthias!”

Matthias looked around quickly and saw Papa running toward them, his dark beard and hair ruffled and his face sweaty. Mama dashed to meet him, her son on her heels, and Papa grabbed her shoulders. His eyes were intense and fearful.

“What’s wrong, Lucas?” Mama demanded, obviously struggling to keep her voice steady.

“Bandits,” gasped Papa. “Outlaws. Men in black, They’re burning the crops!”

Matthias became aware of the strong smell of smoke coming from the direction of the fields on the opposite side of the house. Two or three of the horses - including Flint - had started pawing at the ground and whinnying, their eyes growing wide. He tried to calm Flint down but instead almost got knocked to the ground by a flailing hoof.

“I’ll try to put out the fire,” Papa said, dancing from one foot to the other. “Ami, you and Matthias get whatever you can from the house. I’ll keep the bandits away.”

“But, Lucas, what’ll we do if you-” Mama began, but Papa cut her off.

“It doesn’t matter what will happen to me. Just get what you need and get out. Understood?”

Mama nodded and watched as Papa dashed off to fight the fire. She shook herself and grabbed Matthias’s arm, pulling him along with her as they made for the house. He ran alongside her and followed her through the door.

“Get all the food you can carry from the pantry,” she ordered. Matthias obeyed and pulled open the cabinet as Mama emptied the drawers of clothes and a few cooking utensils.

He had just picked up the last small bag of potatoes when the smell of smoke grew stronger. He was struck with horror as he realized that the flickering flames had reached the roof. “Mama! The roof!” he cried, desperately collecting up as much food as he could pile in his arms as he stood. His mother had a bundle of clothes which was wrapped tightly around some pots and pans.

“Get to the door!” she shouted over the roar of the ever-spreading fire.

Trying not to drop any of his precious items, he scurried to the way to the outside. For some reason, he didn’t look back. He didn’t

want to see his house turning to ashes. And he knew his mother was right behind him. Once he made it halfway across the horse pasture, he risked a glance at the cottage. The thatch roof was nearly gone, and he couldn't see anything through the windows except flame.

He couldn't see Mama either.

"Mama? Mama!" he screamed, dropping his load, and sprinting back to the burning house.

Mustering all his strength, he shoved a slab of wood blocking the doorway. The smoke hindered his vision, and he soon gave up looking through the haze and began crying out for his mother at the top of his lungs. Why had she not followed him? What had kept her behind? Why was she not answering his call?

Suddenly something grabbed him from behind and pulled him back outside the building. Matthias began to struggle until he realized that what was dragging him was Flint. The tall stallion had bitten the back of the collar of Matthias' s tunic and was pulling him away from the tongues of fire. Matthias shook out of the horse's grasp and turned to him. "I can't leave Mama," he told Flint sternly "No, Flint," he shouted, pulling the corner of his tunic out of Flint's mouth again. But before he had the chance to run, Flint picked him up completely and galloped away from the fire, despite his complaints, and wouldn't let him turn back.

Flint had saved his life.

Maggy the Ornament

by Gabriella Vonada

Second Place

Trina pushed open the rotting, gray door, which revealed the same miserable place she'd called home for a month. She was glad this shack was temporary. It was colorless and little more than decomposing wood. "Sara, we found a tree!" she called, cocking her head, there was the unmistakable THUMP THUMP THUMP of her little sister pounding down the stairs. "MAMA! TRINA!" called the little blond half running half falling towards them. Sara was seven years old and full of energy. She ran her tiny fingers over the fake bark in curiosity. "You ready to put it up honey?" Their mother asked. Sara looked up and nodded vigorously. So together they hauled the fake tree into the living room, which consisted of a faded, threadbare couch and matching carpet. They put up the tree and started decorating. When they finished their mom made them a hasty dinner, but as they sat down to oranges and nuggets there was a jingling in the living room.

Sara turned and shouted at something behind Trina, "Diego no! Don't attack the ornaments!" Diego was an adorable white kitten, and was always getting into mischief. When Trina turned she saw that he had jumped into the tree and was gnawing on a fluffy-looking bird. He looked up at them and seemed to mew, "Uh, Oh"



It was past midnight when Trina woke. At first she couldn't place what disturbed her, but she heard it soon enough.

Another jingling from downstairs, She groaned, couldn't that little cat just go to sleep? Still she pulled herself from her bed and tromped down the dark staircase. As she came down the last few creaky steps she heard voices mixed in with the startled mewling.

She froze, then a sharp hiss followed by a ripping told her Diego was

having a real fit this time. She took a deep breath and put on her best commanding voice. But when she stepped inside, it was a disaster. The already pitiful couch was filled with deep gashes, and as a ball of white fur crashed into the base of the tree it shuddered, then tumbled to the floor, spilling ornaments everywhere.

Trina watched in horror as the crystal dove that had been handed down for generations nearly shatter on the hard wood floor. "Diego STOP!" she shouted. But the fur-ball refused to cease chasing the scattering ornaments. Then she realized, the ornaments were running from Diego.



Trina stared in shock as little voices came into focus. "Help!" "Mama!" "Don't just stand there do something!" She shook herself, "DIEGO, BED!"

The kitten skidded to a stop and hissed his complaint. Trina repeated the command and the puffball grudgingly stalked up the stairs. A glittery peacock ornament strutted confidently up to Trina and asked "Your one of those Treehangers aren't you? Can you tell me why you got a Histung?!"

On top of finding out that her family's ornaments were alive, Trina now had to deal with the fact that one was yelling at her. "I...I-" she stuttered. Then shook herself again, these were the same decorations she put up earlier, surely she could manage them now.

"Let me help you get back on the tree." She said. The peacock recoiled but didn't argue, so one by one Trina lifted the ornaments back into the branches. As she turned toward the stairs to. she wasn't sure what, a tingling filled her from head to toe. She felt like she was being compressed, the ground was suddenly far beneath her. Faded colors rushed up to meet her.

But before she made impact something soft and strong reached out of the branches and broke her fall. She wasn't dead! "Are you all right?" asked a sympathetic female voice. Trina turned and found herself looking into two, rich blue eyes as deep as the sea, belonging to a turquoise bird of astonishing beauty. "Wow." she breathed, the bird cocked her head and repeated the question. "Oh, yes. Thank you.

What happened?" Trina asked, embarrassed, stepping off the long tail feathers onto a needle-covered branch. "You shrank." The bird replied flatly.

"But before you start freaking out, get on my back. It's just past Moonpeak and we need to get you back to size before the Histung comes back." Trina obediently hopped onto her back, gripping a clump of feathers. SHE'D SHRUNK! But, HOW? "I'm Maggy by the way, what's your name?" Asked the bird, slicing through Trina's thoughts.

"T-Trina, um, Maggy, where are we going?" Maggy turned her head to look over her shoulder at Trina, "We're going to the Queens in the upper branches, over the years Victoria, our peacock, has gotten grumpy with lots of Treehangers. But don't worry Trina, the Queens should have you back to size well before morning. This happens more often than you'd think." Well, that was good news at least. A few hours later Maggy stopped, "You'll need to get off for this part." She said, jerking her head toward a stretch of branches that glittered with icicles. Trina slid off her back and gripped another limb for balance. "Don't touch any of the icicles though, they may look pretty, but at Moonshine their cursed." Maggy warned.

Trina stared at the thick icicle forest in dismay, it would take hours to get through. And indeed the first light of dawn had just appeared in the living room window when she and Maggy cleared the last icicle. "Maggy, why can't we just fly up to the Queens? I mean, you are a bird." Trina asked. Maggy smiled, "We may be decorations but we take good care of our Queens, besides I am way too heavy to fly. This next level should be it though."

With that thought in mind Trina grabbed at the branches with new energy, they were so close, and it was almost morning. Then she heard it, the sound she'd been dreading. A hiss, the tree trembled and Trina turned to find herself looking into two, giant eyes. Diego was back.



The branches gave way under Trina and furious hisses filled the air as the tree tumbled to the floor. "MAGGY!"

She shrieked as the ground grew nearer. At the last moment turquoise feathers came between her and the floor. But as Trina looked up a huge paw came crashing towards them, "DIEGO NO!" she shouted, the huge feline recoiled, hissing.

"Maggy!" She gasped, turning to the beautiful bird. Maggy stirred, she would be okay. "Help." came a whisper, Trina jumped. A beautiful woman lay with one leg trapped under a branch. "Please." Trina rushed to her side and pushed with everything she had left, but to no avail. The woman gasped, "Where is your binder?" Trina shook her head, "I'm not an ornament." She said flatly.

The woman paused, then, smiled? Pulled a wand from her sleeve and said, "If I restore your size...Treehanger, will you restore the tree?" Trina nodded, it couldn't be, a Queen?

The woman waved her sparkling wand and Trina started tingling from head to toe. And before she knew it, she was big again. Trina was home in time for Christmas.

The Birth of the Philippines

by Lia Hartley

Third Place

It was a bright and sunny afternoon. High up in the trees, a family of birds were perched on a branch. The birds were surveying the lush and beautiful forest. The father bird, Luzon, was admiring the tall, proud, emerald green pine trees that seemed to reach the heavens. The mother bird, Mindanao, was looking up at the crystal blue sky that was filled with white, puffy clouds. The baby bird, Manila, had closed his eyes, and was drinking in the smell of fresh sap and pine needles, while listening to the soft rushing sound of a waterfall off in the distance.

Despite how peaceful their surroundings were, the birds were anxious. For off in the distance, a terrible and violent war had erupted. Every day, the birds heard gun shots, and cannons being fired. They heard yelling, and the ear-splitting screams of terrified people. Every time a gun was shot, or a cannon fired, the ground shook, causing animals to panic, and flee the forest left and right. The war had been going on for about a month now. When it first started, the bird family decided to stay in the forest until the war was over, thinking that it would be over soon. But they quickly realized that wasn't the case, and that the war could possibly last for years. That morning, Luzon and Mindanao had decided that it was time to leave the forest. They would take refuge somewhere safe, somewhere they weren't woken up every morning by the sounds of gun shots and people screaming.

With a heavy heart, the birds took one last look at their beloved forest and took off. They extended their wings, and soared through the air, looking desperately for a safe new home. Six days later, the birds were still flying, and still searching for a home. Luzon, Mindanao, and Manila were beginning to lose hope. After all, six days was a long time to be travelling, especially for three little birds. The first four days they had been flying over land and could take short

breaks to rest, but now they were flying over the ocean and there was nowhere for them to stop. Turquoise blue water stretched as far as the eye could see. The sky was filled with gray storm clouds. Thunder rumbled in the distance. Manila even thought he saw lightning flash. Plip! Plop! Plip! Rain started to fall. The wind was starting to pick up. The birds were exhausted, and a storm was not helping at all.

They desperately needed to find shelter and quickly. They could be struck by lightning at any time! The birds were starting to panic, fearing that they might not make it out of the storm alive. But then, they saw it. A small little island off in the distance. It wasn't much, but it could serve as a decent shelter, at least for the night. The bird family swooped down and landed on the swaying branch of a scrawny palm tree. They huddled under the palm leaves, trying not to get wet from the rain. But they weren't concerned about that for long because soon they were fast asleep.

The next morning, Luzon, Mindanao, and Manila explored the island thoroughly, and it was beautiful. The sand was white as sugar, and the water was the stunning color of turquoise. Palms trees swayed in the gentle wind, and the island was full of lush vegetation. The air was filled with the aroma of fresh flowers. The calm waves lapped at the shore, slowly peeling away at the sand. But the best part of all was that there wasn't a single gunshot or the explosion of cannon fire to be heard. The birds were immediately overcome by a sense of peace and tranquility.

However, despite their new home in this nearly perfect paradise, they felt homesick. They missed the pine trees, they missed listening to the elk bugle, and they missed watching the squirrels race up and down the tree trunks. They knew they could never live there again, it was far too dangerous, but they just couldn't keep themselves away. So, the birds came up with a plan. Every two weeks, either Luzon or Mindanao would secretly fly back to their old home while the other stayed behind to care for Manila. The parent that flew to their former home would gather soil, seeds, plants, and fruits. They carried mangos and banana leaves, vegetables like Sayote and Calamansi, and retraced their flight over the ocean to drop them into the waters

around their new island home. Then, they would trade places with the parent who was watching over Manila and repeat the journey until their new home was vibrant with the sights, smells, and sounds of the home they loved so dearly before the war.

Luzon and Mindanao were diligent in their efforts for years, and over time the soils, seeds, plants, fruits, and vegetables grew into many rich and colorful islands dotting this little portion of the Pacific. The archipelago grew and grew and grew. The bird family named the biggest island Luzon after the father bird. They named the second largest island Mindanao after the mother bird. And they named the capital island Manila after their beloved baby bird. It was in this manner that one island that the bird family found refuge on evolved into the present chain of nearly 8,000 islands that today we call the Philippines.

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

**OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS**
Celebrating 25 Years

Clockwork

by Rylie Wood

First Place

Eleven fifty-nine, our world, was dying. Moment by moment, our fate drew closer. The Great prophets had told us this time would come. If only we had listened. Living in the Inbetween had been a glorious life, with an egregious ultimatum. We had built a society, a nation, a home, but now that was all coming to an end. I wondered if those who come after us will even know our names, or care that we are gone. I wouldn't blame them if they didn't. After all, we did the same thing to those before us. I did the same thing. I chose to live in the present, not even giving a passing glance to the past societies wiped out by the merciless rotation of the Great Hand.

As I prepared for my fate, I remember what Grandfather had said all those years ago. It was my first memory.

"Never forget," he said. "Never forget the Great Passing. It is what connects you, child, to all of the ones who have lived and died in the history of the Inbetween. Someday you will take part in a Passing of your own, and take your place in the halls of your ancestors."

"Grandfather, I don't want to go to the halls. I want to stay here, in the Inbetween, with you." I recalled with a smile the childish distress on my face. As if I had a choice. As if I could stop the Hand.

"The Great Passing is not a calamity, Tempus. It's a gift. Just as the return of the tide washes away the flotsam on the shore, the Passing cleanses our world. It restores balance to a society rife with chaos. You may not live to see a society reborn, but I have. Many times. It may not seem so, but with the death of your world, a better one is made."

It's true, what he said, that the Great Hand is a tool that brings balance to the Inbetween. I just wish I could be alive to see it. Nobody has ever survived the Great Hand, except for Grandfather.

It's whispered that Grandfather has been alive since the beginning, before the first Passing. But Grandfather would never confirm such a thing. At least, not until recently, when Grandfather had suddenly appeared before me. I had been in my home, and all of the sudden I had blinked and he was there.

"Tempus!" He declared with authority befitting his age. "Your end is near."

"I know. The prophets have been standing in the streets, mourning the Hand's coming. We all know." Grandfather grabbed my shoulders, hard.

"Tempus, child, I've lived in the Inbetween since the beginning. I've seen too many deaths to count. But, Tempus, I don't want you to be one of them. Your end is near, but only if you resign yourself to your fate. Do not go gently into that good night, child. Go to the new lands, and you might miss the Great Passing. You might see the birth of a new society."

"What new lands? What are you talking about? Grandfather, you told me that nobody could survive the Passing."

"Listen to what I'm telling you now. Go to the east, and you may yet live as I have. I have a plan, child. Go!"

He let go of me with a shove and left as soon as he had arrived.

That had been three days ago. I had done as he said, and travelled east. Through my city to the edge of society, and then through the wilderness, all the way to the uncharted parts of the Inbetween, holding onto foolish hope that what Grandfather had said was true. But it had been a long trek. The beige sands blew beneath my feet in the wasteland on the borders of the Inbetween as I stumbled forward, tired and thirsty. There was no way that I could actually survive this. The Passing was soon. The Hand would come for me. At least Grandfather would know I tried.

I was about to give up and collapse, awaiting my death, when I saw it. A glowing golden line running across the sand. Across the line was green, life, and hope. It was shimmering, a glorious mirage welcoming me. But this was no mirage. This was real. I ran to the new

land, trembling with joy, and slammed against something blocking my way. But, there was nothing there. I tried to step over the line, and something again blocked my foot. I reached but again something stopped my hand. It was as if an invisible barrier was blocking my entrance to the new lands. I yelled in frustration and anguish and hit the barrier with my fist.

Just at that moment, twelve chimes rang out. My end had come.

Everything went dark as the Great Hand rushed to greet me.

I awoke in a small, wood-paneled room with someone standing next to me. Was this death? I was standing as well, and it was as if I had simply opened my eyes to a different space. I turned to see who my companion was.

“Welcome to the new creation.” She said in a soft, sad tone.

“Wh- Where am I?” I asked, confused.

“We are in the viewing room. My name is Krona. I am from the land of *Eleven fifty-eight*. Or, I was, before my Passing. You were chosen, just as I was, to witness the birth of your successor, after your Great Passing.” Her voice was weary, as if she had been waiting a long time for me.

“Who chose us? Was it Grandfather?” She turned away, ignoring my question.

“Hark, the time has come.” She said, gesturing to the wall. As she waved her hand, the wooden panels on the wall melted away as if they were grains of sand, to be replaced by a window with a golden rim. Through the window, I could see the green land beyond the golden line that I had tried to reach.

Through the glass, I saw a field, where tiny glowing particles were scattered. As Krona and I watched, the particles slowly came together, forming the shape of a body. They stood unsteadily, unsure of themselves and their surroundings. Suddenly, Grandfather strode towards them. I tried to rush forward, to break the glass, to tell Grandfather that I hadn't survived like he had wanted. Krona gripped my arm gently, holding me back.

“Watch.” She whispered. Grandfather took the new creature’s hand, looking into its eyes, and spoke.

“Hello my child. Today you are born. You are Hora, and this is your land, *Twelve*.”

Hora looked down at her hands, and back up at Grandfather, with a single question in her eyes.

The Sleepless City

by Jacob Lawty

Second Place

It's been three weeks since the Sickness came. My mind is still haunted by the sight of my crew lying, coughing, their skin turning white as they slip into death. I am almost glad to be away from it all, having expelled their limp bodies from the vessel soon after their demise. I wish I could expel these memories in the same fashion. The bottom of the ocean is quiet and dark. I have lost all contact with mission control. My rations are running low. I am prepared to die. What does it say that a man of my caliber must die so appalling a death? The universe is cruel.

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Three days ago, in the darkness of the ocean, appeared a light. I have not identified the cause yet, but it seems to grow brighter and bigger each day. I have spent hours since it appeared overwhelmed by its blue glow. As wary as I am of emotion, this light has roused something in me. Perhaps an undiscovered phenomenon or creature has shown its face. Or perhaps this is a hallucination of a man drifting closer to insanity. Only time will tell.

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The universe has seen fit to rescue me from my fate. Today, a shiny figure appeared in the light and took my hand. It led me out of my ship and on to the sandy ocean floor. Closing my eyes out of sheer awe, I felt its presence carry me for miles. When my eyes were opened the figure was gone and laid out before me was a city. Illuminated by the same blue glow that had so captivated me earlier, the city featured only humble buildings, resembling grass huts, stretching as far as I could see. It was something I could not have imagined experiencing outside of a history book, and a far cry from the towering structures I was used to. Descending the dune to the city, I faced my new fate.

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The inhabitants of this city fascinate me. They do not understand my words nor I theirs, but they seem to have accepted me. They have not protested when I have explored their streets or investigated their houses. Just hours ago, for the first time, I pondered how I was able to breathe and walk, being completely submerged in water. It seems there is an energy that radiates from this city and its people that has powers I cannot begin to understand. I am hungry to find the source of this energy.

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My attention has been placed fully on further study of the inhabitants of the city. They are a primitive people, not advanced in any technology that I have seen or studied. They are a gathering society, taking a journey out of the city each day to gather sea grass and whatever else they can find to sustain themselves. The most curious thing I have noticed is that they do not require sleep as us humans do. Perhaps the constant level of light provided by the persistent blue aura does not render in them any sense of day and night, and so they have not developed the need to sleep. For this reason, I have named them the Sleepless.

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I marvel at my fortune. Centuries from now, people will look back at my achievements as revolutionary. To be one of the few people who have discovered a new race and a new world is alone a grand honor, but I have discovered the civilization of the greatest magnitude. My journal, these very words, will become the most valuable of historical artifacts. I will go down in history as a pioneer and a discoverer. Nothing will take away my glory.

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I have searched the city for the source of the energy that protects this town. I have found nothing. It is a peculiar trouble. I cannot begin to imagine why this object, this thing escapes me. I will search further in the city. The only way to find this energy, which I believe with my whole heart to be here, is to continue my search. When I have found it, all the glory in the world will be mine, and mine alone.

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I saw something today in the city which shook me to my core. Continuing in the search for the energy, I stumbled into a house near the outskirts of town. I will never forget what I saw. Huddled in the corner was an entire family of the Sleepless, coughing, lying, with patches of white appearing all over their bodies. Suddenly I was stricken with an undeniable sense of intruding, and I left immediately.

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The Sickness has come here. It is spreading. Already bodies line the streets. I fear that it will continue spreading until it strips away my glory and my life, as well as the entire civilization I have discovered. The healthy ones are rushing from house to house, but the attempt is futile. They do not know how to stop the Sickness. I do not know how to stop the Sickness. It will not be stopped until it lays this city to ruin.

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I rage against the universe. How is it fair? How is it right that my glory should be taken away from me as soon as it has blossomed? The universe is a cruel force with no answers.

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Perhaps the city itself has betrayed me. The energy that allowed this civilization to be formed has become corrupted, and is committing a brutal act of suicide. But one thing lies unexplained. Was it the proximity to the city that took away the life of my crew? Is this energy so powerful, so overwhelming in its nature that it could affect a tiny vessel miles away? No. I fear there is only one solution, and I was too blind to see it before:

I am the Sickness.

It was my pride that kept me from realizing it, but now I see that it is the only way.

My fleeting glory was laid to ruin, just as I am now, by my own doing, in my own mind.

911: What Is My Emergency?

by Nathan Schmidt

Third Place

“Please, sit down wherever you’d like.”

“Thanks, Dr. Juarez.”

“Of course. We want you to be as comfortable as possible.”

I plopped down on his black pleather couch like a deflated balloon. Never did I think I would be there, but I recently came to realize that I needed to deal with my issues, instead of my usual technique of ignoring them and distracting myself with ice cream and naps.

I’ve been blessed and cursed with expressive eyes, and I’m incapable of hiding my emotions. My nerves were through the roof and I must have looked like a cat on hot bricks because Dr. Juarez said, “You know, Maria, there is nothing to be worried about, but I understand that this may be difficult for you at first.”

“Right.”

“Well, okay. We can just dive right in. How was your life growing up?”

His big, brown, puppy dog eyes made me feel safe and made it easy to open up. To my surprise he didn’t have notes to record what I was saying, but instead sat and listened to me. I went into detail about my parents’ delusional aspirations of becoming successful actors on the big-screen, and being packed in a house with six older brothers, and my troubles to keep up in school.

I continued on to say, “My problem is, I’m thirty-two years old and I’ve been dealing with this for a while. I can socialize and hold conversations in person, but as soon as I get on the phone, I’m a mess. And it’s gotten a lot worse in the last year since I started my job. Some may call it social-anxiety, I call it a pain in the neck.”

“What line of work are you in?”

Understanding the absurdity of the statement I was about to say, I hesitated but said, “I’m a 911 dispatcher.”

Dr. Juarez pondered that for a moment and stared out the window above the sofa I laid on. The sun was setting outside and the sky was painted in the warmest of colors, most apparent due to L.A. pollution. Taking a deep breath, he asked me, “Why work a job where you need to talk on the phone all day?”

“Good pay, good benefits. And I can’t afford to quit right now because my rent is so high.”

“I can see that this is something that really affects your day to day. But this is not an unusual problem. Can you give me any examples of specific situations that heighten this stress?”

My entire work day is filled with phone calls from frantic people who are having heart attacks, or being robbed, or have their cat stuck in a tree – which happens more than you’d think. But these situations hardly faze me. Rather, my most difficult and stress-inducing customers are those with little to no emergency.

In my first week on the job, I received two calls that would provoke my anxieties. I had just come back from lunch and answered the phone, holding my breath for the other voice to peep.

“911 what’s your emergency?”

That voice did peep, loudly, like a blaring horn. In a thick Boston accent it exclaimed, “James Michael Ferreira, you gonna keep ignoring your mama’s calls? You’re coming straight home from school today, are we clear? No sports. No tryna hide at Conor’s house. And when your father gets home and hears about the stunt you pulled, you’re gonna get a—”

I tried to interrupt but she kept on like a bulldozer, “Ma’am... Hi ma’am this is not James. You’ve called-”

“Oh, so now he’s hanging out with girls? Listen I don’t know who you are, but my son is not having a girlfriend in the sixth grade.”

“No, I’m afraid you have accidentally called emergency services, ma’am.”

“I do not like the way that you spoke to me. I will be leaving a poor Yelp review.”

She hung up with passion. Getting yelled at on the phone for good customer service was disheartening, and I felt sick for the rest of the day. It felt like talking to my own mother, and that was a scary thought. Just when I started to forget this, two days later I received another call that sealed the deal.

“911 what’s your emergency?”

Silence.

“911 what’s your emergency?”

I could hear a static-like noise in my ear piece. I would’ve hung up, but my desk mate advised that I stay on just in case. Seventeen minutes later, the static was interrupted by some shuffling.

Then to my surprise a man’s voice picked up. It sounded like sandpaper, but I heard him mumble the words, “Darn, I’m out of Cheetos.”

He proceeded to pour a bowl of assumably not Cheetos, and I had to make myself known, “911 what’s your emergency?”

“Huh?... aha! I knew that the FBI was spying on us, but I couldn’t figure out how. They’re working with our local police stations! Wait, they know I’m on to them. I have to fill my bathtub with water. They’re gonna turn off the power and —”

He continued his rampage and I was not about to sit on this call any longer. It completely drained my energy and strength. He wasn’t even rude. I just couldn’t handle the pressure of a phone call.

And yet, phone calls are the entire point of my profession. After explaining this to Dr. Juarez, he informed me that our session was complete.

He told me frankly, “Of course everything we talk about in here is confidential, but should you ever like any assistance in finding another job, I’d be glad to help you look.”

I appreciated the gesture and I said that I would consider a different job if it had the same salary and benefits as my current job – and of course didn’t require much talking on the phone.

It was nearly dusk when I exited his clinic. The sky was now fading into night. Spotting my Ford Focus with its signature dent in the bumper, I walked over to it. Behind me came a petite woman carrying a box of exercise bands. She tried to unlock her car with a couple spare fingers but dropped her box on the pavement sending its contents flying. I walked over to the mess and assisted.

“Thanks for the extra hands,” she said, “Normally I’d have someone to help me with this but my assistant quit on me.”

I laughed, “No problem! Why do you need so many by the way?”

“I work in the physical therapy office next to Dr. Juarez’s. I’m Dr. West by the way.”

We parted ways and the following week sped by before my next appointment. Dr. Juarez greeted me with a smile and provided a remedy – a job offer from Dr. West to be her new assistant.

Hearing this news, I thought for a moment, and concluded that, of course, I would apply for the job. Now, I don’t work at a call center in North Hollywood. I work at a physical therapy clinic in Glendale! And best of all, I am lucky enough to not have to take any more phone calls.

Short Story

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

**OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS**

Celebrating 25 Years

An Amethyst Remembrance

by Mary Funches

First Place

“Look out, Grammie B!”

Beryl jumped as the frisbee flew by an inch from her ear.

“A family trip to the beach,” she concluded, “Is not for the fainthearted.” Settling her glasses on her nose, she resumed her *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, but not before she shot a severe look at her eldest daughter, Melody, who had caught her mother’s half-muttered remark.

“Come on kids!” Melody called. “Let’s explore Agate Beach and let Grammie B enjoy her book quietly for a bit.” It took a while to get all eleven of Beryl’s grandchildren on the move, but eventually the hubbub was reduced to the rush of the waves and the sigh of the wind.

Beryl put her book down and sighed too; it had been a long day. Why she had allowed herself to be talked into this madcap scheme was beyond her. But her three children had begged, pleaded, and promised, and she, in a moment of weakness, had consented to stay in a very small beach house with her three children, their three spouses, and eleven young grandchildren. Beryl loved her family, but a week-long beach trip was not her idea of a vacation.

Determined to enjoy this rare moment of solitude, Beryl continued reading poetry. However, the air was warm, and the ocean was whispering secrets to itself. The book slid out of her hand as her eyelids drooped, and her thoughts drifted out with the tide.

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Keeeeaaaaw! Beryl jerked awake as a seagull squawked right behind her. The sun was now glaring from its zenith, her left foot had fallen asleep, and her glasses now hung by the purple beaded chain around her neck. As she fumbled with her glasses, she noticed

that her book had slipped off her lap into the sand. Grumbling about seagulls, beaches, and family vacations in general, she reached for her book, but it was slightly out of reach.

“Can I help you?” A small, tanned hand picked up the book of poetry and shook the sand out of it. Beryl looked up into the freckled face of a girl, perhaps ten or eleven years old. The girl grinned and handed the book to Beryl.

“Thank you,” Beryl muttered and found her place in the book, expecting the strange girl to run off and play in the surf or search for shells. But the girl just stood there, twisting the coral swim skirt she wore. Finally, Beryl lost patience and set her book down. Frowning over her glasses, she said in her most schoolteacher-ish voice,

“Don’t you have somewhere else to go?”

“Not really.”

“Oh. Well, run along.” Believing she had settled the matter, Beryl attempted to resume her much interrupted contemplation of “The Lost Jewel,” one of her favorite Dickinson poems. The boisterous sun had other plans, however, and its bright glare on the white page dazzled her eyes.

“What are you reading?” The girl was still standing next to Beryl’s beach chair. Beryl gave up.

“*The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*,” she replied grudgingly.

“Poetry? I love poetry, but I haven’t read very much. What poem are you reading now?”

“I have been trying to read ‘The Lost Jewel’ but the sun and a certain persistent child have been preventing me.” Beryl answered with a little more irritation than she felt.

“I could read it to you. I have nothing else to do and I am good at reading.”

“Oh, go ahead, if you insist.” Beryl settled back as the girl took the book and sat down on the sand. In a soft yet distinct voice, she began to read the first stanza.

*"I held a jewel in my fingers
And went to sleep.
The day was warm, and the winds were prosy;
I said: "T will keep."*

*"I woke and chid my honest fingers, -
The gem was gone;
And now an am..."*

"Why did you stop?"

"I can't pronounce those words."

"Amethyst remembrance?"

"Yup, that's it.

*And now an amethyst remembrance
Is all I own."*

The girl finished the last two lines with a triumphant ring in her voice, proud of pronouncing the difficult words correctly. Then she tugged at one of her tight brown curls.

"That was pretty, but what does it mean?"

"It's about losing something and then only having the memory of it left," Beryl explained patiently. She was beginning to like this stubborn, friendly, poetry-loving kid. Something about her thoughtful tenacity reminded Beryl a little of herself, many years ago.

"Hmmm, I guess that makes sense. Is an ame-whatsit a gem?"

"Yes. An amethyst is a pretty purple gem."

"Oh! I found a purple rock on the beach. It's pretty, but I think it's just an agate." The girl opened a little bag and pulled out a rock the size of a marble, with chunks of rough purple agate sticking out of it.

"What a pretty agate!" Beryl smiled and took it in her hand, "If you put it through a rock tumbler at home, it will be quite impressive." She handed it back to the girl.

“Would you like me to keep reading?” The girl grinned and Beryl smiled back,

“If you want to, I would love it.”

“Numen Lumen...” The girl began, and Beryl leaned back and closed her eyes, listening to the youthful voice reading the timeless words as the breeze fanned her face.

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“Have a nice nap, Grammie B?” One of Beryl’s granddaughters bounded up exuberantly, and she was once more yanked back to the summer sun and the salt smell. Her grandchildren were milling around her, talking all at once. Beryl was relieved when Melody announced lunch, and the children stampeded in the direction of the rental cottage. She looked around and noticed that the girl was gone. Was all that a dream? A pity she had not asked the girl’s name... Glancing down at her lap, she saw *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, and on top of that, a rough chunk of purple agate, about the size of a marble.

“An amethyst remembrance...” Beryl smiled and looked thoughtfully out to sea.

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# The Lighthouse

by Honor Tamminga

## Second Place

Ms. Mary Lenning stood in the center of the room. Empty bookshelves spiraled up to the top of the lighthouse. The staircase that had once taken up most of the space within had been replaced by two ladders that rolled around the room on tracks. One of the ladders stretched a little taller than the other, so that it could reach the upper room, which still housed the old light. The light had not seen sailors safe to shore for many years, and yet it was Ms. Lenning's darling wish that it should stay.

There was a stomping outside the door, and without so much as knocking, a tall, thin man stepped in with snow still falling off his boots.

"Really, Currer, you'd think a great mind like yours could get the snow off his boots before he got inside. This flooring was just redone!"

"Apologies m'dear. The place is looking wonderful." Currer Henderson was an old fashioned sort of a man. He plucked a snow-dusted hat off his head and leaned in to give Ms. Lenning's a kiss on the cheek in greeting. She accepted it stiffly.

"Please don't call me dear," she said uncomfortably, "You never did before and it's awfully strange to start now."

"Well," he responded, "if that's what you want, of course. Not that it matters much. I don't suspect we'll be seeing each other once the lighthouse is finished."

"No, I suppose you're right. It's going to be so strange. You know I won't miss you, but all the same, it will be odd." There was a long silence as Ms. Lenning and Currer both stood looking about at the bookshelves without books and the ceiling that was a floor.

"Shall we go up?" Currer motioned to the ladder.

"Oh, yes, let's do that. There's not much more to see down here."

“Ladies first.” Curren took Ms. Lenning’s hand, leading her to the ladder and helping her up the first step. The upper room was small, and rather than walls, it was lined with thin windows that did not keep out the cold. The world outside was white with snow and the sky was full of flurries dancing to the ground.

The old, broken light stood in between Mary and Curren. Curren did not try to move closer to the lady across from him. He did enjoy making her a bit uncomfortable at times, but up here, he could not laugh off the past. Nor would she shrug off his foolery as annoyance. Rather, it would cause her pain, and he feared it would cause him great embarrassment. So rather than commenting on the close quarters or slipping his coat over her narrow shoulders, Curren looked out at the water, humming softly.

“You know,” Mary said quietly, “I wish you all the best. Harvard is lucky to have you. You’ll be teaching some of the brightest literary minds, I know, but none of them will be as bright as yours.” Ms. Lenning was staring at her shoeless feet, and Curren had not moved from his spot, nor had he averted his gaze from the horizon. Finally, adjusting his glasses, Curren looked at the woman who had very recently been his wife.

“‘Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs.’ Charlotte Bronte, you know.” Curren cleared his throat.

“Yes, exactly. Yes, that’s it precisely. We needn’t part on bad terms.”

“Divorce is a bad term. That can’t be helped. But let’s just try to make it as good as it can be. We can do that, can’t we, Mary?” Mary smoothed out her skirt and breathed in deeply.

“Naturally...Now about the light, Earl said he could work on it this Saturday. After that, it’s just furnishings and then we’ll be ready to sell. City Council said they’ll open it for the public this summer.”

“This summer,” Curren repeated quietly. He had just noticed a crinkle under Mary’s eye that hadn’t been there before. She still looked quite young. But it was ten years ago in this very room, Curren had knelt before Mary and asked her for forever. Forever is never as long as you think it will be.

“Don’t you want to keep it, Mary? It was always the plan-”

“Plans change. I’m not likely to fill those shelves with books and even if I sold it to you, you certainly wouldn’t maintain the place. No, I think we’d best leave it to the city to deal with.”

“It would have been wonderful. Really wonderful. The library of my dreams,” Currer sighed.

“And the home of mine,” Mary added quietly, but not so quietly that Currer did not hear. She stepped towards him, reaching for his hand as she stepped onto the ladder.

When Currer stepped down the last rungs, Mary was wrapping a scarf about her neck. Currer helped her into her coat, and the two walked through the snow to the cottage at the base of the lighthouse.

“Home, sweet home,” Currer sat down at the little table as Mary put the kettle on.

“Oh, don’t say that,” Ms. Lenning said, “You’re so flippant sometimes.”

“I only meant that it feels a bit like old times. You and me, admiring our lighthouse, cozying down to a nice cup of coffee at the end of the day. Don’t you miss it?” Currer spoke with jest in his voice, and sadness in his eye.

“This is why we didn’t work out, dear. You just don’t know when to stop. I wish you’d grow up and move on. We both made this decision and I think it’s for the best. I’m sorry, of course, but there’s nothing to be done now.” Coffee sloshed onto the table as Mary thumped the mugs down. She sighed heavily and grabbed a towel. “Look what you made me do. Make sure it doesn’t get on the floor.” Currer leaned down to observe the floor, clean of spilled coffee.

“You and your floors. I think this one’ll make it.”

Mary rinsed out the dirty towel and left it in the sink. “Enjoy your coffee.”

“I fully intend to do so. I think I miss the coffee most. I just can’t make it like you do,” Currer raised the mug to his lips.

“Well, I’m glad I can offer just one last mug. ‘Life is too short’, and all that.”

“Quite.” The two sat quietly drinking their coffee for several moments. Finally, Currer pulled off his glasses and spoke, “Mary, I am sorry. About the lighthouse I mean. I know the divorce ruined everything. I wish we could have worked something out. If I’m being honest, I really don’t want to let it go. The lighthouse, that is.” Mary looked up.

Outside the window, the lighthouse stood tall. It, like their marriage, had always lacked something. The broken light, the empty shelves. But soon, books would fill it, and soon that light would shine once more. Soon it would be complete.

“Me neither, Currer. I don’t want to let it go either.” Currer set down his mug and took Mary’s hands in his own.

“Maybe we won’t have to.”

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# The Binky

by Aubren Reis

## Third Place

Rain pattered on the roof. As it ran down the window, it made long, deliberate trails. Dmitri's eyes creeped open, blindly reaching for his tattered, cream sweater. It was cold today. The TV in the laundromat had mentioned something about a Snowmageddon heading down from the northern hemisphere. *The phrases they make up today*, he thought as he rolled off his bed and planted his feet on the wooden floor of his bedroom. Slowly, he went into his bathroom, brushing what was left of his thick, gray hair with a comb. He pulled his brown trousers on and headed across to the bedroom door.

The shuffle of his feet had become loud in his ears. Ever since his wife had died, the house had become sullen and quiet. He slowly walked towards his dirty, scratched coffee table where he ate his cornflakes. He rinsed his bowl with a minimal amount of water and set it aside for dinner. Passing the mirror on the other side of the kitchen, he came to a stop, whispering "Take heart, Dima", and went towards the door. Dmitri had fallen into the habit of calling himself Dima. It was sort of a lasting memory of his wife's fond nickname for him. Ever since she had passed, he had done and said less, though he had never forgotten her.

He reached for his grabber and turned the rusty knob of his front door. Remembering he needed to stop at Goodwill for some new loafers, he placed some change into his hand.

He opened the door and felt a full gust of wind hit his face. A new day was supposed to hold new opportunities but those moments never seemed to appear for Dmitri anymore. As he walked down the cement steps from his apartment, Dmitri smelled the wind as it blew across his face. It was blowing south for sure, but Dmitri didn't believe that an enormous snow storm would come from the northern hemisphere and blow right to his front door.

He started to grab garbage. Dmitri had finally decided that he enjoyed his job, even though it was tiresome at times. He felt that each piece of garbage had a story. Dmitri picked up a Snickers candy wrapper and placed it into his white, garbage sack. It probably came from the three teenagers that walked by his apartment every day from school. Maybe they had bought it at the 7- Eleven up the street or won it for getting an A on a paper, though the sweatshirts and white basketball shoes didn't favor that option. He picked up a McDonald's napkin and his mouth watered. He remembered the summer day when he had taken some of his savings and bought a Quarter Pounder with cheese and extra bacon along with some hot fries. He had sat on the street curb looking at people as if he were a king. He remembered that day so well.

He pulled a chocolate Clif bar from his pocket and munched on it as he grabbed a dismal looking shoe on the side of the road. It isn't much better than my old things, he thought as he glanced at his own. As he went to straighten himself up, something came gliding towards him and he backed away, falling. He looked over his shoulder and saw a blur of white tennis shoes and a bike turn down the next street.

"Nu ty voobshche!" he yelled after the bike.

"Are you alright?" said a voice behind him.

Pivoting on his hand, he glanced up to see a brown-haired woman walking quickly towards him with a stroller.

"Ah...yes," he said. "Thank you", as she helped him up from the ground.

"Teenagers never seem to look where they're going," she said. "They just run around on their new bikes, not even thinking of others. Not even looking where... I'm sorry." She stopped abruptly and extended her hand. "Liberty Piper and this is Emma. Say 'hi', Emma." She lifted up the top of the stroller to reveal two, blue eyes and a chubby, smiling face.

"Well, anyway," Dmitri said, trying to not smile at the bright blue eyes that were glued on him, "Thank you for helping me."

"Not a problem," Liberty said. "We live just a block up the road. Do you live nearby?"

“I live around the corner there. The light blue apartment with the chipped siding,” Dmitri said, shyly pointing to his house up the hill.

“Oh, I see. Well, if you need anything just know that we’re a block away, Mr...”

“Mr. Ivanov, Dmitri Ivanov.”

“Nice to meet you!” Liberty said, as she and Emma walked on.

“Bye-bye...,” said Dmitri, waving. He caught himself smiling and quickly looked away. He saw a bright pink binky on the ground. Picking up the small binky, he looked at the teeth marks and the small heart at the end of it. He stared after the pair as they turned the corner. He slipped the binky into his pocket and continued to put an empty chip bag into his sack.

That night he ate his microwavable mac-and-cheese meal and stared at the binky on the table. He rinsed the bowl and put on his sweater and new loafers.

He walked up to the bright light at the end of the street. There were happy squeals of laughter and Dmitri could feel love pouring out of the house. He placed his hand on the doorbell and hesitated. Dmitri realized that maybe Liberty wouldn’t recognize him. Was 6:00 a good time? Should he come back later? He whispered, “Take heart Dima,” and pressed the button.

The squealing stopped and Dmitri heard a few heavy steps up to the door. The deadbolt turned and Dmitri looked up into two large blue eyes of a tall, brown-haired man.

“Hello,” the man said. “Is there something I can do for you?”

“Mr. Ivanov!” said Liberty from behind the man’s shoulder. “It’s so good to see you! Sweetie, this is the kind man who I met this afternoon with Emma.”

“Mr. Ivanov! It’s so good to see you. Liem Piper,” said the tall man, extending his hand. “Please come in, we were just finishing dinner. Would you like some meatloaf? We have plenty extra,” Mr. Piper explained, putting his gentle hand on Dmitri’s shoulder.

“Well...,” Dmitri hesitated. “I guess it wouldn’t do any harm.”

He smiled and stepped over the threshold of his new home.

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