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# INKLING

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First Place Prose Winner

Wistful Thinking
Kate Milosevich

The foam fizzed and fell over his hand when he popped the tab; he let it drip down through the cracks in the porch then took a sip. He'd just bought a case off of the display in the store, so the beer was warm and disgusting, but he drank it anyway. He wiped his hand on his shirt and leaned forward, elbows on his knees, staring out at the early day.

Dark clouds were rolling in, with sunlight still shining through them, giving everything an eerie brightness. It made the colors of the wildflowers more vivid, almost neon against the green grass and dark dirt. The expansive view from Bill's front porch spread across a large open field, ending with his neighbor's barbed wire fence, only a small line in the distance.

So far, Bill had predicted this morning perfectly, and in the face of that unwavering reality, a warm beer at 11 a.m. didn't seem like such a bad idea. In fact, it seemed like a sanity insurance policy. He could hear Denise's incoherent yelling coming through the screen door and open windows—or, maybe she was perfectly coherent, and he just wasn't trying to follow. Bill wanted to get out of there as fast as he could, but he had to take a break for a few minutes; he had been packing and hauling boxes all morning. Besides, he'd gotten fairly good at blocking his wife out of his head when need be.

He didn't really blame Denise for starting arguments out of nothing (and they really were about nothing; he didn't even have to speak) because now that it was officially over, she could, without any real consequence, say all the things she had been wanting to say. She could let out all the years of frustration, years of keeping quiet and trying to work it out. He didn't care. He thought the least he could do was let her have that release.

Bill could hear the liquid sloshing around in his stomach each time he pushed back on the rocking chair; he was making himself sort of sick, but it felt strangely good, too. Denise had momentarily calmed down a bit, so Bill's dog slowly crawled out from under the porch and sat next to him, nuzzling his hand, then tried to lick up the spilled beer although most of it had already absorbed into the creaky, weather-stained wood. "You too, huh?" said Bill as he emptied the rest of the beer on the ground for the dog and opened a new one for himself. "I'm sorry you had to stay here, Bud, but Robbie's wife doesn't want dog shit in her yard." Then he thought for a second and chuckled to himself, "And now she doesn't want my shit in her house."
While he and his wife were going through the final steps of the divorce, Bill stayed with his younger brother, Rob, and his wife, Shelly. Shelly didn't try to hide her contempt for Bill and, after only three days, started hinting that he find another place to sleep. Her attitude towards him was probably due to the fact that Shelly and Denise were very close friends, and they talked about everything. That's the word Denise used awhile back anyway, with great emphasis: *everything*. It was far-reaching and uncomfortably vague; it made Bill's nose itch when she said it.

God only knows what they had been saying about him during their recent late-night phone conversations; Bill would be lying in bed, slowly drifting into sleep, when the phone would ring. Mostly it would be very quiet, but then, every so often, angry, muffled tones would come up through the floor, just frequently enough to keep him awake. Occasionally, Shelly's voice would rise, and he could make out a "He did what?" but, otherwise, their talk remained a mystery to him.

Denise opened the door and stepped outside, holding a cigarette and fanning herself with the *Ladies' Home Journal*. She looked at him, almost sympathetically, and sighed, staring into his eyes for a long time. She looked tired. It seemed as though she was about to say something, but when she noticed the dog lazily lapping up the beer and Bill's glazed expression, her eyes hardened, and she turned quickly, walking back into the house and letting the screen door slam loudly behind her. Lately, she had been punctuating a lot of her thoughts with the slamming of a door.

Bill had a small flatbed trailer hooked to the back of his truck in the driveway; he was glad that he was never able to sell the trailer since now it was coming in very handy. Several boxes sat beside his truck, and there were random objects scattered everywhere: a couple of folding chairs, high school track trophies, a coat rack, the lawnmower, a photo album. His clothes were packed hastily in garbage bags, their hangers poking through the plastic.

The trailer wouldn't hold all of Bill's stuff since the side rails weren't very high, but he figured he could rig something up so he wouldn't have to come back again for anything. After staring at that large pile of his life for a few minutes, he remembered something and walked around the side of the house to the garage. He peeked his head into the dark and could just barely make out what he was looking for. Leaning against the wall in the back were some thin sheets of plywood just where he remembered them. They had never used the garage for anything but a storage house, and it was hard to navigate a path through all the junk that had collected there over the years. Bill grabbed the flashlight they kept by the door and started in. He stepped over a box marked "kitchen" containing the cheap silverware from their apartment in
college; he slipped past a broken dishwasher with a rusty toolbox on top, and jars full of old nails and brackets from things he would never put back together. Newspapers, which they had been meaning to recycle for years, were stacked in corners with various headlines about the invasion of Kuwait, Clinton's inaugural speech, and the fall of the Soviet Union.

Trying to avoid a scurrying roach, he almost tripped over a small sealed box. Bill shined the flashlight on it and could just make out the word "jazz" through the thin blanket of dust. He squatted down, brushed the dust away, and started to open the box. The tape came right off, and Bill unfolded the top, revealing about fifteen or twenty of their old records. He thumbed through them with a smile: Bud Powell, Keith Jarrett, Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday. He and Denise used to lie in bed listening to these records, before they were married, talking about what life would be like for them in the future. They thought so many great things were going to happen, that life would only get better. They would get big breaks, small favors—the same thing every kid thinks when they're twenty. But everything slowly settled, and eventually their marriage became the same day, over and over again.

She told him he was the only man she had ever slept with while they were listening to "Embraceable You." That was true then, and in the first years of their marriage, but Bill knew that wasn't the case now. They hadn't had sex in over six months and hadn't had good sex in a few years. When they were having problems, but before they decided to get the divorce, it was like they were taking pity on each other when they made love. Either that, or they wanted to pretend that they both weren't sleeping with someone on the side. Maybe it was just to feel normal again, for a little while. To feel married.

The musty smell inside was thick and oppressive. Although the garage was small, while he was standing in the middle of this heap of strange, disjointed memories, the door to fresh air seemed very far away. Bill wished he could stop breathing until he was outside again. Instead, he hoisted himself up, pulled his shirt collar over his nose, and made the last steps to the back wall.

A few spiders scattered in panic when he lifted the boards from where they'd sat, untouched, for probably six or seven years. They were covered in cobwebs and were rotting a little on the bottom from water damage, but they were good enough to do the job.

Once out in the open, Bill drilled holes in each sheet of plywood and used twine to attach them to the sides of his trailer, making higher walls that would hold a lot more of his stuff. Now he could just pile it all in, no problem.

When everything was loaded up, Bill walked back to the garage, and came out with the record box and a can of red spray paint. He was going to spray "wide load" on
the plywood in the back of the trailer, but after looking at the haphazard stacking job, and the whole bizarre contraption itself, he decided on something different.

Bill didn't know what saying goodbye to Denise would feel like, and he decided not to find out. He didn't want to feel any of it, and he thought it would be better for both of them if he disappeared quietly. He left the box of records on the front porch, with a note reading, "Wistful thinking. Love, Bill." Then, he pulled out the spray paint and, in the largest letters that would fit, wrote "JUST DIVORCED" across the back of his trailer, bright red and ridiculous.

He climbed into his ancient truck and started the engine, just as a fat drop of rain hit the windshield. He would have to leave now if he wanted to stay ahead of the weather. Bill didn't take one last look at the house but pulled out of his driveway quickly, his dog panting out of the open window, the wheels turning up a small cloud of dust behind.
The Movies
Michael Muniz

When I remember the movies—
their images flickering on
our faces like dwindling candlelight—
I remember seeing your face
glowing like a moon jewel in
the opaque gallows, bearing either
a childlike smile that will flutter my
heart until its swan song beat
or a rumbling tear descending down
the mountain crescent of your pallid cheek.

Then your round eyes would cast their
glare toward my own, suspended
in the darkness, and we would melt
into the volcanic submission of
a long, wet kiss.

Our two devices bled into one
microcosmic entity enclosed
in the dim chamber, an empty
arena for love to perform its
sacred embodiment ritual.

My heart’s connection was the
white light radiating from its projector,
embedded with the particles of my
soul, floating like dust specks.
Only when immersed into your screen
did the images configure, taking form
and shape—then the sounds drowned
the auditorium like a pierced ship and
we were lulled into places as unseen
and unknown as the deep chasms of
our blooming hearts.
Maternity Ward Matinee
Leslie Krafka

"Call me Axel, Axel Foley," said the voice from the TV. Sam had seen the movie a hundred times, but he still had to watch. Eddie Murphy was his favorite. He’d been watching TV from the moment they arrived. After channel surfing for a while, this was the best he could come up with. Sam was a little peeved. It was going to cost two grand for a two-night stay; couldn’t Mercy General at least offer movie channels in their hospital rooms? He adjusted himself in the chair. His jeans rubbed against the Naugahyde and made an unsavory sound.

"Hey, no farting in here, or they’ll kick you out," Betty said with a smile. "I’m at seven centimeters, and I’m going to need you, real soon."

Sam wasn’t all that anxious to see his wife give birth. He started to rub his butt across the chair, creating a symphony of fart noises. "Ya promise they’ll kick me out?"

"Sam, stop jokin’. You know I need you to be serious right now."

Sam turned to his wife and, in an overtly sentimental tone, said, "Sorry, honey... you know I’m here for you. You are numero uno." He took his wife’s hand and squeezed.

A moment later the nurse came in with a plastic bowl, a razor, and some shaving cream. "Okay, looks like it’s time to prep you." The nurse pulled up the blanket and exposed Betty.

"What’s that for?" Sam asked the nurse.

"We have to shave your wife." Sam gave her a blank stare. "It’s for sanitation purposes," she said with disdain in her voice. He stood up to watch the nurse work.

"I think I had a fantasy about this once, but, honey, I don’t remember you having the big stomach," he blurted out.

The nurse looked at him, horrified.

"Don’t mind him, ma’am. He’s a comedian. He can’t help himself." Betty gave her husband the stare. He knew the stare too. It was the one that said, "Sit your ass down and shut-up." The nurse was done in no time and then checked Betty’s progress. "You’re approaching full dilation," she said, patting Betty’s knee. "I’ll let the
doctor know. We'll be moving you to the delivery room in just a few minutes.” She paused at the door. “And I suppose he’s going to be in the delivery room with you?” She didn’t try to hide her displeasure. Sam thought her face looked like someone was holding an invisible pile of dog poop under her nose.

“Yes, my husband will be with me in the delivery room.”

The nurse continued to show her displeasure. “This is why they should still have waiting rooms for fathers,” she said as she left the room.

“I thought nurse Ratchett would never leave. Did you see the look she gave me? Geez, you’d of thought I’d asked her to have a three-way with us.” He hesitated then added, “I don’t suppose there’s any chance of that happening...is there, honey?”

“Oh, Sam, would you please be serious...ohhhh, I feel another big contraction coming...ohhhhhhh.”

“Are you supposed to be holding your breath and turning red like that? I don’t remember that from the Lamaze class. Honey...I think you’re doing something wrong.”

Betty waited for the contraction to pass. When she had regained her composure, she said, “You know, Sam, there have been countless times in our marriage when I have thought how great it is to be with someone who’s always joking...but, this isn’t one of them!”

Just then Dr. Jackson walked in the room. He looked so distinguished with his white hair and matching white coat. “Oh dear, lovey,” he said with his proper British accent, “your face is all red. You must be doing something wrong.”

“Why does everybody keep saying that? I’m not doing anything...I’m just waiting to give birth. Ohhhhhh...another...contraction.” This time she tried to remember how to breathe, so the doctor wouldn’t think she was stupid.

“Oh, that was a big one, lovey. I think you’re ready to go to the delivery room now,” he said, giving Betty a fatherly pat on the head.

The nurse and an orderly came in the room to take Betty to the delivery room. When Betty wasn’t looking, Sam reached into his backpack and pulled out a video camera.

Outside the delivery room, the orderly handed Sam a paper gown and paper booties.
“Here, dude, you have to put this on so’s you don’t contaminate the room with your germs.”

“Why, young man,” Sam said with his best indignant Groucho Marx voice, “I’ll have you know my germs are welcome in hospitals and delivery rooms across the globe. And do you know why?” The orderly shrugged. “Because they’re fun-guys. Now give me those paper clothes.”

Sam entered the delivery room holding the video camera to his eye. “Ah, yes, here we are in Dr. Frankenstein’s laboratory.” He moved the camera to the bed. “Ah, this must be his most recent experiment…gruesome, isn’t it?”

Betty had just finished pushing through her first contraction. She caught her breath, “Damn you, Sam. I thought I told you NO video camera. I don’t want this on tape.”

Sam kept the view finder to his eye. “Come on, honey, it’ll be great. Just think, when our kid is 15 or 16…if they’re not screwed up enough, we’ll just show ‘em this tape. That’ll do it for sure.”

Dr. Jackson was watching the monitor. “Here comes another contraction…now push, lovey…that’s a girl…keep pushing.”

Sam kept the viewfinder to his eye. He moved the camera and focused in on the birth. “Is that…what I think it is?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, Sam, that’s the baby’s head. Now, Betty, another contraction is coming. I want you to give me one more big push, lovey. Okay, and the baby will come….”

That was it for Sam. He hit the floor so hard the doctor and nurses could feel it shake.

“Oh, dear, lovey, looks like your husband just passed out. But, look here, lovey, see your baby girl. Isn’t she beautiful?”

The doctor placed the crying baby on Betty’s chest. She had never felt anything so wonderful in her whole life.

“I guess we should wake up Sam, hey, lovey?”

“Ah, just leave him.” Betty’s eyes were fixed on the baby. “He’s fine. He’s just doing his Ricky Ricardo imitation anyway.”
First Place Poetry Winner

Remnants
Patricia Clay

Those muddy shoes sit by the front door
Where you left them after that November rain.
Your coat, haphazardly thrown on the chair
Rests where the cat lies dreaming of mouse chasing.
Your hat, well-worn and bent in all the right
Places, making it snug on your head,
Messing your hair slightly around the edges,
Giving you cause to complain that a hat aged
Such as this enhances a man's image.

These possessions of yours, they sit,
Waiting patiently, like ghosts calling
For you to come home to their caress.
They call your name, pleading that you should
Hear their cries for affection. They carry the scent
Of you in fall and winter. Foolishly they
Occupy their spaces, never daring to move
For fear that you will walk in the door and miss
Them. Desire them. Want to place them against your
Skin as once you did out of passion and love.

Winter is disappearing. Soon the cold fingers
Which strangle the tree sap and suppress the
Tinder shoots of grass and flower will loosen
Their grasp. The sun will command release of
Those taken prisoner by the cold gray northern
Winds of ice and snow and give way to spring.
But our winter will not relinquish to demands
Of the sun, warm breezes and azure skies,
Not this spring or this summer or this fall.

Changing seasons will have no cause
To gently coax you, plead with you to
To bud, to bloom, or breathe deep
Breaths of flower-scented essences.
Winter will not release the heavy ground
That selfishly cradles you, but holds you tightly.
While we, the left-behind remnants of your once
Life, continue in this coldest of winters
Knowing that our sun waits in darkened silence.
Contemplation

Kelsey Berkenbosch
Rhythm
Sheroca Richard

Bodies writhe,
moving in slow sensual figure eights
to mellow bass-heavy beats of Reggae...
hands in the air,
waving to and fro while hips
circle and roll with
the rhythm.

Sweat.
Heat.
Mercury rises in their blood
as they move, cautious at first
then wild and free as they drift
above their own
bodies...

Nothing matters except the beat
echoing in heads and ears...
and for a few minutes,
electricity courses through veins,
seeking to escape...
exploding from fingertips, toes, spine.
Orgasmic.

The beat stops.
Hands creep down to sides.
Hips slow to stop;
the comedown starts to sober
just as another song starts
and bodies float and glide across the floor,
drifting with
the rhythm.
Third Place Poetry Winner (Tie)

Frumious
Anastasia Voight

Where have you gone, beamish boy,
Bright once with optimisms,
Mercurial,
Intemperate?
Were you staked and stolen by quicksilver talons,
Sharpened,
Shiny,
Slimed with subtle poisons?
What volatile vapors, what vorpal blades clouded or cut mind folds,
Blindfolds?
Did you not 'ware the Jabberwock,
Not shun the frump,
The bandersnatch,
Mendacious, meretricious, without mercy
In her wanting?
Were you lured with false silvers, shimmers, shoal waters beneath,
Covering her hazes,
Her hazards,
Her hatreds many?
Or did you drink some absinthe wine, green
Of wormwood that did
Wind and tug
Mind shapes to devious forms and doubts?
Hatchling,
Did you unearth this mind offal, these trimmings, byproducts, remnants, wastes,
Rubbishes, debris?
And then retrieved, recycled and renewed, to be
Born again
In measured meanness,
Stingy, selfish, scathing,
Small?
Behind your Paxils and pawned honors is there still a son that
Semaphore a plea for freedom
Then subsides?
Where have you gone?
Cancer, Is It Really a Burden?
Janet Hudson

Recently, my family and I discovered the definition of the word *burden*. If asked at the beginning of our journey through cancer the meaning of the word, we would have answered with a dictionary description, something like a burden is something that is emotionally difficult to bear; it is a source of great worry or stress. However, today after experiencing “burdens” in every aspect of its meaning, we would answer the question with a much different perspective.

Cancer is a burden not because of the surgery that maims you, the anesthesia you must undergo, the tubes put in places you would rather not discuss, or the indignity of undressing in front of people you don’t know. Cancer is not a burden because of the complications of surgery, causing your husband to stay in the hospital for 16 days during the Christmas holidays, or the week you spend in the hospital because of a punctured lung you receive during a common procedure to get a port for the chemotherapy drugs. It is not a burden to stand before doctors and nurses while they calmly discuss your myriad choices for reconstructive surgery on the breast they are going to remove while your husband at your side is horrified at the thought. Cancer is not a burden because of the financial difficulties you experience because of the work missed when you are self-employed, or the deductibles and co-insurance that must be met, or the fact that you have to pay the maximum for three years in a row. It is not a burden when you are diagnosed with breast cancer a year after your husband was diagnosed with colon cancer or when you must wade through the mountains of insurance, bills, and paperwork because everyone wants his or her money now. Cancer is not a burden because of the sickness experienced or the indignity of losing your hair while on chemotherapy. It is not a burden to buy and take zillions of pills just to make it to work while suffering the side effects of the drugs that pour into your veins every three weeks. It is not the memory loss called chemo brain or the hearing loss due to the drugs it is not the shingles, or
the nausea, or the diarrhea that makes cancer a burden. On the contrary, once I would have classified each one of these difficulties a burden, but not anymore. After going through cancer, we realize that God was in control of each trial and tribulation that we experienced.

Cancer is not a burden because God sends an answer to each difficulty that arises. He sent family and friends to support us when we were in the hospital. He gave me employers who never questioned where I should be when my husband was in the hospital those sixteen days. God gave us a daughter, who came home from college to help take care of her brother, and he gave us a sister and parents, who cleaned our house, mowed our lawn, fed our animals, and brought us meals. He gave us people who cared enough to provide taxi service for our son, and a brother who sent a maid to clean our house every week while I was on chemotherapy. He sent more meals and He gave us visitors and flowers and people who spent the night at the hospital. Cancer was not a burden because of precious family and friends who spent hours in prayer on our behalf while we went through these trials. God gave us doctors and nurses who cared, and He gave us wisdom through each decision made. Each and every person who God sent made cancer a bearable burden. Finally, we learned that trusting God is the only thing you can do.

When you are young, you think that nothing bad will ever happen to you, that burdens are something other people experience. We learned that difficulties will come, that it is just a matter of time, and that if you look around, you will find that there is much to be thankful for. Consequently, today we would say that cancer is a burden only because it might come back.
Devotion
Holly Wilcox

Walking through the rain together
We were in no hurry.
You would tell me you missed me
When you returned from no further than the kitchen.
We watched our favorite movie every night
Falling asleep in the same scene without exception.
You could see how I felt with my eyes closed
Hearing only music when you spoke.

Then, you wanted to watch the sunrise
And I, the sunset.
Your watch was a day ahead of mine
Mine clicking backwards.
Your face faded in my photo album
Leaving me blank picture frames and empty drawers.
You dodged the light that shot from my eye
And made shadows behind my back.

We shared picnics on cloudy days
And drove the long way when we were late.
You'd turn down the heat
And cuddle under swarms of blankets.
I could feel your breath on my neck
When we talked on the phone.
You caught my dreams
And read them back to me.
Grandmother’s house is located on a street lined with hundred-year-old maples, the largest of which stands majestically in her front yard. Grandmother was always so proud of those trees, hanging birdhouses and wind chimes on the lowest branches so she could awaken to the sounds of music every morning.

Pulling into the driveway, I see my mother sitting solemnly on the porch swing, pushing to and fro. Lost in thought, she doesn’t notice my arrival.

"Hi, mom," I say from my open car window, shaking her from her reverie. “Have you been waiting long?”

“Not too long. I was just listening to the birds,” she responds, with sadness in her voice that betrays her grief. I open the trunk of my car and retrieve a cardboard box.

“What do you think we should do with all the birdhouses and wind chimes?” she asks. I step onto the porch, habitually side stepping the loose board to avoid the inevitable creak.

“I don’t think we need to be thinking about that just yet, mom. Did you get the key?” I ask, bending down to the large, brown clay frog that conceals a spare key to the front door.

“No, I was waiting for you, dear. I didn’t want to go in alone,” she says, slowly pulling herself up from the porch swing as if laden with an unseen burden. I turn the frog over, retrieve the key, and unlock the door.

As I turn the doorknob, my mother takes my hand, and opening the door, we walk in together. The house that was always filled with laughter is silent. My grandmother’s unopened mail lies on the entry table next to her house keys and purse. Next to her favorite brown leather chair lies a half-finished scarf on top of her knitting bag with the needles poking through a skein of orange and yellow yarn. I pick it up and finger the perfectly spaced knit. “She was making that scarf for you,” my mother says, “for your ski trip.” Words fail me.

Walking up the creaky, wooden stairs worn smooth by decades of use, I turn the glass doorknob, and we quietly enter the time capsule that’s my grandmother’s attic. I am struck by the beauty of the dust that dances in the beam of sunlight falling through the dormer window. There is a sacred silence here that even the sound of our footsteps cannot disturb.

I walk to the bare light bulb that hangs in the center of the room and pull the cord. The light illuminates stacks of boxes and trunks of every size containing a lifetime of memories. I
am saddened that the woman who so carefully accumulated and stored all of this nostalgia during her lifetime will be buried tomorrow.

Exhaling loudly, my mother says, "Where to begin," and walks over to a pair of ice skates hanging from the handlebars of a red tricycle. "I wondered where these were. I haven’t seen them in years," she says while running a finger along the blade. A soft smile plays at the corners of her mouth, and I imagine her remembering the last time she ice-skated. Then a cloud moves over her eyes and a frown creases her forehead.

"What are you thinking about, mom?" I ask, trying to keep my voice light and even.

"Nothing, dear," she says with a deep sigh. "Let’s just get this over with, okay?"

Grandmother’s death has been hard on everyone, but I don’t ever remember seeing my mother, usually a woman of strength and self-assurance, now so frail and uncertain. Even after my grandfather passed away, she was the strong one that helped my grandmother through it and kept everything, and everyone, together.

I open the closest trunk and lift out a beautiful white knitted shawl and also something unexpected: the scent of roses. I suppress a laugh and smile, remembering. I press the shawl to my face and inhale deeply the smell of my grandmother’s perfume. I am immediately transported to the rocking chair where, bundled up in this white shawl, I first learned of Peter Rabbit and Winnie the Pooh. She read to me with a voice so warm and soothing surrounded by the warm scent of roses.

"I never thought mom would put her violin in the attic," my mother says. The violin. My grandmother had been first chair of the symphony orchestra for thirty years until she retired at the age of sixty, when grandpa died. She could make the most beautiful music, and people traveled from far and wide to hear her play. For as long as I can remember, whenever I heard violin music, I’d look to see if it were my grandmother playing.

“She asked me to bring it up here about two years ago,” I said, deciding not to tell the whole truth. Grandmother was sad that she couldn’t play it anymore because her arthritis had gotten so bad. She didn’t like to be reminded that she was not a young woman anymore because her mind told a different story.

“What do you think we should do with it?” my mother said, her voice cracking with emotion. I hear her strum the strings and turn to see her slump down onto a wooden trunk, holding the violin in her arms as if it were a newborn baby.

Swollen, heavy tears fall from her eyes and make a hollow thump, thump as they strike the wood of the violin. I come over to her and hug her head and neck, rocking her back and forth.
“Oh, mom, it’s okay. Everything’s going to be okay,” I say. “We’ll get through this, I promise.”

“I just don’t think I can do this right now,” she says between sobs.

“It’s okay, we’re done. I’ve found enough photos of grandmother for the memorial service,” I reassure her, stroking her hair. “We don’t have to go through everything today. We have plenty of time for that.” Still clutching the violin, my mother follows me down the attic stairs, through the stillness of my grandmother’s house and to the front door.

As we walk out the door and stand on the porch, we are greeted by a magnificent jubilation of sound and movement. Flitting and fluttering about in the sun-dappled branches and leaves of my grandmother’s majestic maples are birds of every size and color, blending together in an orchestration of music and melody. Sparrows trill in response to the starling’s serenade. Wrens warble a melody in perfect tune with the vocal stylings of the finch. The thrush’s staccato keeps exact time to the timpani of the white winged doves and chickadees.

I turn to look at my mother, and she looks at me. In that moment, her violet eyes, the eyes of my grandmother, express acceptance and love. She finds her strength. We put our arms around each other and stand a moment just listening. Accompanied by the sweet avian song and the light peal of wind chimes, lilting on the afternoon breeze, a violin plays.
Coffee Cups

Candy King
Glasses of the Mayans  
Diana Skyles

They are the forgotten, the left-behind, the ones the soldiers missed, ghosts of an unjust war that, though officially ended, still goes on, now being fought by the foot soldiers Discrimination and Indifference. They live in small villages sprinkled over the mountains of Chicabracan in almost the same fashion their ancestors did before the Spanish conquerors arrived; only now it is just them, the laborers, the ones who grow the corn. They have no leaders like the ancient rulers of Tikal to guide them, but they live in community cooperating and sharing with each other.

We have the nerve to call ourselves “missionaries” because we carve a week out of our lives to care for these people. We have the best intentions, but we fall so short. Here in Guatemala I learned the true meaning of the phrase “it is in giving that we receive” because these people give us so much more than we could possibly give them. The true missionaries are the couple who started and direct our organization. They truly dedicate their lives to the Mayans of Chicabracan: planning; plotting; coordinating; obtaining donations of money, time, medical and school supplies; and training the people that will go on each trip. I could not begin to know everything they do behind the scenes.

Here we are, at an altitude of 6000 feet, away from the noise and haste of Houston and the pollution of air and souls reigning in Guatemala City. The picture-perfect countryside speaks of the calm, contentedness and resignation of these people, but you won’t find a drop of indolence here. The corn grows on the hills in parcels without fences; only the direction of the rows distinguishes one from the other. Beans and squash grow on the same rows as the corn in an effort to maximize the terrain, but they know not to reach as tall as the Lord Corn, just as venerated today as it was centuries ago, during the Mayan splendor.

This time we have come to conduct only a vision clinic. There are eight of us: an engineer and his wife, who is a nurse, the leaders; a retiree from an oil company and his wife, also a nurse; a medical doctor and his wife; and my roommate and I. Four of us are fluent in Spanish, but everyone speaks it to some degree. The leaders of the community have come to translate from Spanish to Quiché and vice versa, as the oldest and the youngest who have not been to school yet usually do not know Spanish.

We set up camp at the little church and the small building next to it. We can prescribe glasses without having an optometrist on the team thanks to the focometer, an instrument created by a doctor at the University of Houston to be used by non-doctors who have been trained.
on its use. The "tumbling E" chart is also a great tool. It cleverly substitutes for the traditional eye chart. Instead of different letters and numbers for the patient to read, the chart is composed of rows of many "E's" facing up, down, left or right. The patient is given a letter "E" and must move it to match the positions he sees on the chart. This eliminates the need for the patient to know the name of the letters and for the health worker to know them in Spanish or Quiché.

We are very well-organized. We have the reception-triage area, the station to check for general eye health, then the "tumbling E" to determine if they need correction for distance. If so, they go to the focometer to determine the prescription, then to the station where the glasses are assembled and fitted and one more time to the "tumbling E" to insure they indeed have been fitted properly. As far as the near vision goes, we let them try on different strengths of reading glasses to find the best match.

The doctor and nurses find a lot of sturgium (caused by the constant exposure to the sun, dust and wind) and cataracts. These patients are referred to the eye surgeon who goes once a month to Santa Cruz del Quiché. The remainder we help. The retiree, whose hands are used to assembling minute pieces (his hobby is buying and repairing old clocks) is the perfect person to assemble the glasses and fit them to their faces. He works constantly and patiently, and every night his fingers hurt, but the next day he is ready to go again. In a lot of cases the frames we use for adults are children's frames because they are such small people.

I cannot describe the feeling we get from witnessing so much happiness as they can see once again. In some cases it has been years since they were able to see well. An old man missing several teeth is so grateful for his reading glasses that he makes the rounds to each station hugging and kissing and blessing each of us. He says, "Now I will read the Bible to my grandchildren." Many women need reading glasses even though they may not be able to read because the glasses help them with their braiding. They buy palm leaves from the coast, and they split them and braid them in rows that they sell to people in other towns who manufacture hats and beach bags. It is a treat to watch their fingers moving with such dexterity. They teach us how, but our fingers are slow and clumsy, and our rows turn out uneven. Whenever the women are not making tortillas, or taking a cow or goat to a good grazing spot, they are sitting on the ground braiding. The image that for me captures the essence of Guatemala is a woman carrying her youngest child (even two or three years old) on her back, held by a colorful blanket that she ties on the front, like a kangaroo with a reversed pouch. On her head is another blanket, folded into a square to help balance the basket with the corn as she goes to the mill to have it ground for tortillas.
On the last day of the clinic there is again a long line of patients when we get to the church. I notice a woman in her thirties on crutches. I bring her to the front of the line. After lunch I notice she is still outside, sitting on the ground with other women, and I wonder why she is not going home. Around three o'clock a man comes to ask if we will give her a ride when we go home. She lives in a village we are not familiar with. Our leader reluctantly agrees. Once in the minivan we chat. She tells us how she lost her leg because of an infection on her foot that went untreated for too long. The people in her village held a collection to pay the doctor, but by this time all the doctor could do was cut her leg. Just for something to say, I ask her who had brought her to the clinic. She casually tells us that the day before she had walked to the village where we were holding the clinic and had spent the night at a friend's house. She matter-of-factly adds she is very grateful for the ride because her armpits are still bleeding and hurting from the previous walk. She is not feeling sorry for herself; she is happy she can see. I am not a good judge of distances. I do not know if we have driven her five, six, seven or eight miles, but I know it has to be at least five. She walked them on crutches, on uneven dirt roads because she was so desperate to see. We all feel so ashamed we had to consider whether to disrupt our schedule to give her a ride or not.

While we are talking to this woman, I realize we give these people glasses so they can see from a distance or read, and that is a great thing, but they give us so much more! They give us glasses so we can look into our souls and look at the world with renewed eyes. Despite the absolute poverty there is no sense of neediness. They are totally dependent on the corn for their existence and totally dependent on God's rain to grow the corn. This reliance on God makes them humble; they are aware each of them is only a small dot in the infinite vastness of the universe. What a contrast with we Americans, always thinking our way is the best, believing ourselves to be indispensable, competing instead of cooperating.

Our organization tries its best to help them without making them like us, without causing them to want things. The directors instruct us to bring pictures of our families where you see only the people, not our houses. We women are supposed to wear long skirts and tennis shoes (some of us even buy the same fabric they weave for our skirts). We are not allowed to bring presents because they would feel poor if not able to reciprocate. Little do they know to what extent they do reciprocate! We want them to go to school and progress without losing their identity as a people. We want them to abandon superstitions and learn hygiene while hanging on to their culture.
After each trip I feel this urgency to tell every one about it, but there are no words to describe the beauty of the experience or the way I feel for a while afterwards, how it doesn't matter if the kitchen needs remodeling, and how my life in Houston seems so superficial.

I wish I could build a wall around Chicabracan to protect them from outside influences, but I know it is not possible. Recently their villages acquired electricity. During the home visits every now and then we find a pervasive intruder. In these little one or two room homes, built with hand-made mud bricks, with little or no windows and dirt floors there may or may not be a bed, there may or may not be a couple of chairs, there are never a kitchen table or closets, but we can always count on finding a rustic wood table and hanging above it a crucifix or a picture of Jesus. On the table are some candles and a Bible. This is their home altar, and whichever one is able reads the Bible to the other members of the family. Now in a few of the homes we find another small wood table with a television set on it, and a couple of times we have been surprised by the ringing of a cell phone. Technology is extending its relentless claw towards Chicabracan, and I, selfishly, wonder how much longer these Mayans will be able to keep giving us the true glasses of life.
"Man, that shit is gonna make you retarded," Jeff complained while fanning smoke from around his face.

"Yeah, it worked wonders for you." Jake locked the door behind him as they left. Even though it wasn't quite seven yet, and the fair and girls weren't more than a thirty-minute drive, Jeff knew they'd be late. The sun held in the sky long enough, though, that none of them thought anything of it being almost 8:30 as they walked on to the fair grounds. The rich scent of animal dung suspended lowly in the atmosphere among the haze of sizzling high-pressure sodium lights and gaudily lit rides. College kids and local folk mixed with the help of overpriced beer—it was a fair, and everybody just wanted to enjoy life and see the sights.

"All right, here's your drinks. You better enjoy them for what they cost," Jeff informed Tina and Mary.

"Oh, you bet we will," Tina said. Mary took hold of Jake's arm and bit from the funnel cake he was slowly working on.

"Thanks, baby," she said, wiping sugar from her lips.

"Hey, let me help you with that," Jake said, turning to face her.

"Let's split up for awhile and meet back here later," Jeff said. Between the two of them, Jake and Mary murmured their agreement. Jeff put his hand over Tina's, and together they walked along a beaten path with rides on the one side and brownish tents on the other. The trick to not bumping into people in a crowd, Jeff observed, is to imagine you're floating in a sea with all the other people. Adopting a crowd mind, they easily maneuvered about and around.

Jeff felt a small wave come from the right somewhere.

A voice spoke out above the din, "Good people, welcome one and all to the carnival. Leave your wearied lives behind to explore the world of the senses!" The sound felt like milk and cookies. Tina's hand tightened around Jeff's. Looking to the right, a dark-suited man had taken the raised podium beside a dust-colored tent. "Come, and witness a spectacle the likes of which you've never seen!" The lanky man swept both gloved hands out from himself in a grand gesture. Above him, red flaming letters spelled the phrase, "Temptations of the Flesh."

A small crowd gathered around the fellow, pushing Tina and Jeff up almost in front of him. "What have we here? Young sir and madame, would you care to experience the wonders of the world? Would you care to revel in the glories of nature? Of course you would, but life also brings with her pain to check our wonder. To live is to suffer, and to live well is to suffer well!" Jeff could taste the honey in his voice.

The entertainer made a flourish with his right hand indicating the entrance. "Just step inside and we shall show you everything you've never seen before!"

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The throng pushed at Jeff's back and sides. Tina looked at him. Their clasped hands stretched as far apart as possible. Shrugging his shoulders, Jeff said, "Why not? It'll be fun." The crowd surged as the man drew back the curtain of the entrance. Bodies pushed in, forcing Tina's hand from his. Swept in by the human current, Jeff stood within the darkened antechamber of the tent.

"Dispel your fears, you will not be harmed in the least—alas I cannot say the same for the poor folk you shall witness. When we pull forth the curtain, you shall all see something quite marvelous. Something you would never imagine possible!" The crier yelled from the entrance behind the crowd, "Now hold yourselves still and behold as flames rise from the Earth and engulf every last one of you, but fear not the pain!"

Jeff's jaw clenched as a gust of stale-smelling air filled the room. The tang of spoiled eggs and burning weed made his eyes begin to water. Something brushed against his pant leg. Gradually he felt the play of wispy fingers up from his feet to his thighs. A flickering candlelight began to fill the darkness of the tent, emanating from no apparent source. The light grew stronger and radiated warmth as the caresses grew bolder. Audience members began to breathe noises of pleasure and discomfort.

Jeff looked to where Tina had been and was shocked to see flames loping across her legs and up past her midsection. They licked over her skirt and slipped beneath its folds. She let out a moan of ineffable passion, then covered her mouth as she spied him, his jaw agape at her burning form. Her shaking arm pointed down to his lower half. Glancing to where she looked in awful terror, Jeff viewed flames teasing over his jeans. He sensed the increasing dread of all involved. One voice rang out over all: "Now see the greatest wonder of all! We shall pull back the curtain and witness the transformation your performance induces in those on the other side!"

Not a will could force its head to look away as the curtain rose with theatrical grace. The outright groping of the flame which did not burn contorted Jeff's face into a writhing expression of uncounted emotions. He wondered if Tina was all right beside him, but could not force himself to spare a look away.

As the curtain rose, so did the lights in the opposing room. Jeff looked upon Jacob's face in the crowd not fifteen feet away, standing beside Mary. Jake gasped and pointed, shock and panic dumbing his responses. The entire crowd facing Jeff radiated disbelief and alarm. Their eyes held wide in surprise while their mouths gaped in amazement. A few cried out to help. "Worry not, gentle folk, for not a one of those misguided souls cries out or is pained by the inferno!" Their fear simmered to puzzlement and then to rapt intent.
Jeff felt the movement of bodies without control all about him, pushing each other. The voices he heard now held eerily quiet. Jeff's awareness past the communal ecstasy roiling amidst the flames started to dissolve. His sense of self slowly consumed by the burning pleasure.

Rolling his neck, moving with the rest of the mass beyond all personal control, his view cast upon a familiar form. Jacob's eyes held wide, superhumanly aghast, intent, focusing upon the spectacle. His pupils were enormous black holes, absorbing every photon, drawing in the scene before him. The body surrounding that scene seemed errant, unnecessary. As the eyes widened, Jacob's body dispersed, becoming ethereal, allowing his eyes to swell, growing—glutting themselves upon sights never seen before or since.

An old, familiar voice cried out, gathering that last spark of awareness left burning in Jeff to listen to its silky pronouncement: "And lo, the perfect spectacle draws to a close, consuming performer and audience, exposing them for their parts, roles drawn out for each one by each other. All phenomenon is but a dance of self and other."
The Paraffin Pineapple
Mary Mancl

The January sun, glaring off virgin snow,
intrudes through the window, choosing
the paraffin pineapple
long forgotten on the recess of my desk,
its intricate shawl of spider web reflecting
the fuzzy jumble of unfinished thoughts
clogging this ill-equipped mind.

"Look in the mirror, child," I hear Sigmund plead.
Each crumb, each morsel, fortifies, exemplifies
each fragment, each fraction, connected, conjoined.
Look deep as the snarl reveals its congruency,
briding the span from then until now,
birthing coherence
and a net
for the marvel of you.

I shall never dust
the paraffin pineapple.
The Memory of Leaves
Lynda Long

He said he could hear
The quaking of the leaves on the Aspen,
So I hopped a plane to Denver,
But the Aspen were bare,
Bored with winter
Yet not quite energetic enough for spring.
Like the Aspen I am bored
With the harshness of my past,
Yet lack the energy to imagine
The coming of the spring.
Perhaps it is my age,
The rings I have accumulated,
The seasons recorded beneath my skin.
I can't quite make myself burst into enthusiasm,
Knowing winter is just a few short months away.
Why bother branching out at all
If my achievements are to be stripped from me
With the lengthening of the night.
Only this I know with any certainty:
That the memory of leaves
Brightens the cold and bitter darkness
That is inevitably to come.
And so, like the Aspen, I quake
Anticipating change.
Loads of Love
Tina Howard

"Mom, I'm home!" My daughter, Mandy, would come home on weekends from college with a song in her heart and laundry in her basket, looking forward to a home-cooked meal. Her visits were sporadic, generally waiting until she was down to her last clean everything. Somehow, she would always manage to make it through the door right before the dinner hour when I would be setting the table and putting ice in the glasses.

On one particular weekend, my husband and I were getting ready to go out for dinner when Mandy showed up, unannounced, as usual. I heard the key in the lock and turned to see her fall through the front door with a mountain of laundry, a backpack, keys in her mouth and purse around her neck. If I had not been so focused on the laundry basket, I might have found it all comical. "Hey, what's for dinner?" she panted.

"We were about to go out. You're welcome to come along if you like," I said.

"Are you kidding? You're not cooking?"

I looked at my "grown" daughter and the disappointment on her face. It was a look that made me decide I could peel a couple of potatoes for the poor, starving child that lives on a dorm meal plan during the week. So, I acquiesced to her wishes and whipped up a meal Emeril would have been jealous of: fillet of sole stuffed with crabmeat, twice-baked potatoes, steamed asparagus (which I knew she wouldn't eat, but I love, so I made it anyway), and a "clean out the refrigerator" salad. A little rocky road ice cream for dessert and we were all set.

Mandy came into the kitchen as I was dishing up my in-a-flash gourmet meal and said, "You crack me up."
"Why?"

"I know no one who just happens to have this kind of stuff in their kitchen."

"Hey, you never know when you have to come up with a good meal on a moment’s notice."

After an hour of good food and great conversation, Mandy sat back in her chair and sighed while she rubbed her contented belly.

"Thanks, Mama. Then she hopped up, kissed me on the cheek and said, “See ya later. I’m going to visit some friends.”

"What about your laundry?” I asked.

"Can you get it started for me? I’ll be back later. Love ya, mean it, bye!” And out the door she went.

For some reason, I found myself being a little irritated with her for expecting to come home and have me be her “beck-and-call” mom. I did a lot of mumbling when I was washing the dishes, scrubbing extra hard on Mandy’s plate. When I finished, I made my way to the front door and dragged the entire Foley’s sportswear department to the laundry room. I separated, I cursed; I pre-spotted, I cursed. My husband thought I had gone off the deep-end.

"Why do you do this?” he asked. “It’s her responsibility.”

"Don’t start with me. You couldn’t possibly understand,” I said. The look on my face told him that now would be a good time to retreat to his office.

Load one had dried, and I bent over to grab a pair of blue jeans out of the dryer and found a dollar. “Yeah, that’s probably what my time is worth,” I thought.
I took such care to crease her pants and do the department store fold on her tee shirts. I wondered if she ever noticed. I had this little rhyme going in my head:

What did I do to deserve all this?
Is it really worth a hug and a kiss?
Is this truly my lot in life?
Couldn’t I have just been a wife?
“Maid/Mom; same thing.”

Her teasing words inside my ears would ring.

The rest of the weekend went by in a blur. All of the bending, and folding, and starching was finished by Mandy’s departure on Sunday. I had earned a whole $17.42; helping the child could be lucrative at times. I watched from the front window while she loaded up my weekend’s work. As she picked up the last basket to put it in the backseat, I saw her stick her face in the clothes and take a big whiff. When she lifted her head, her eyes were closed, and she had a huge grin on her face. I reached up to wipe the tear from my cheek and headed out to the car with her $17.42.
The Ones We Adore
Lisa Krafka

The world where the dead live
is like a dry heart,
And the dead like to linger
outside after dark.

They gather together
in the chicest of places
To see, and be seen
by all the right faces.

A Jimmy Choo shoe, a new Prada dress—
Mother’s diamond necklace across the chest.

A vodka martini, a lit cigarette—
A chance to be seen with the latest brunette.

The world where the dead live
is so full of glam—
From the meaningless banter
to the sex in the can.

You can’t tell from looking,
they’re so tan and tone,
The world the dead live in
is dry as a bone.
Past or Present?
Kristina Cammilleri

“PUSH!” the nurse barks while holding my right leg. “I’M PUSHING!” I scream back at her, and I grit my teeth and struggle towards my knees all the while praying to God that I don’t poop accidentally on the doctor down below. “Okay, that’s it—contraction’s over—let’s rest,” the nurse says while fussily arranging some pan and scissors of some sort. I’m scared to ask what the pan is for, thinking that surely it’s not for my baby to fall into just in case the doctor misses his catch.

I look over at my husband, who has been holding my left leg, and wonder how in the world I got here? I thought I was fully prepared for this. I mean, I went to childbirth classes, I read every book written about pregnancy, and I practiced my breathing just as my ob-gyn said I should....I should be breezing through this. But, instead, I’m scared, I feel like my body is ripping in half, and breathing? Forgot about that when the first “real” contraction tore through my body like a flesh-eating shark having me for lunch. “It’s okay, honey, you’re doing great,” my husband, Rogan, softly whispers in my ear while smoothing my hair. As I fix my most deadly glare on him— the one responsible for this—I chillingly tell him to get his paws off of me; he’s done enough as it is.

“Okay—showtime, another contraction coming,” the nurse chimes while intently surveying the monitor beside her. The doctor, who is doing nothing but sitting there waiting to “play catch,” predicts that this time is it. Rogan and Nurse Venus grab my legs again, and I feel the shark start circling around for leftovers. “OH, Jesus,” I cry as the pain becomes totally unbearable. “HEAD’S THROUGH,” the doctor shouts while
the black dots behind my eyes start to fade, and I am able to focus again. "Now, one
more push, little momma," the doctor cheerfully chirps, and I put my last ounce of effort
into a pitiful attempt to push. But that is all that is needed. A cry, softly muted at first
but then gaining momentum into a full-out wail, fills the room.

"Congratulations, you have a boy," Nurse Venus smilingly says as she places
the tiniest human being I've ever seen in my arms. I kiss the top of his head, which is
wrinkled and wet, and look over to see my husband openly crying. All too soon, Nurse
Venus takes my son away to clean him up and record his birth weight and length, take
footprints, etc. I grasp Rogan's hand, and weeping now, I thank him for giving me the
best gift I've ever received.

"Let's try breastfeeding," Nurse Venus says as she places my son in my waiting
and eager arms. She basically takes charge, and any modesty I might have still intact
is stripped away. After about five minutes, enough to tire the little guy out, he falls
asleep. He is wheeled away to the nursery for observation while I am being readied for
transportation to my private room. Rogan and I chat about names as they wheel me
down the hall.

Deciding to get some sleep while I can, I send my husband home to relay the
good news to family and friends. As I slip blissfully into a relaxed state of mind with a
smile on my face, my last thought is how blessed I am to have delivered such a beauti-
ful, healthy baby boy.

"Ma'am—wake up," someone says as he is gently shaking me. I open my eyes
to see an orderly wearing green scrubs with giant glasses shoved up onto his head.
"What's wrong?" I ask.
"Is anyone here with you right now?" he says.

"No—not right now, my husband went home for a bit—why?" I can see a hint of reluctance in this man's face that starts to alarm me. He looks around as if gathering unseen forces by his side. "Well, we'll talk to you just as soon as your husband arrives—you might want to give him a call and ask him to hurry on over."

"What is it—why does he need to come—is something wrong with my baby?" I start to throw back the covers and get out of bed.

"Ma'am, please stay there—your epidural hasn't worn off yet, and you could fall! Please listen to me!"

"Well, tell me what is going on!!!!"

Upon hearing raised voices, a nurse comes into the room with a needle in one hand and a clipboard in the other. "Are you ready?" she asks.

"Ready for what," I nearly shout, and I'm growing more scared by the second. I am ready to start tearing down the halls to get to the nursery at this point.

"Ma'am, you need to stay calm—Nurse, I haven't told her anything yet—Ma'am, it seems that we cannot locate your son right now."

I jerk awake and am unaware of my surroundings—"Where am I?" I wonder as I look around. The room is sparsely furnished—only the bed that I'm lying in, a writing desk with a chair, and a small window about five feet off the ground. There are no amenities of any sort—no pictures, no curtains on the window, no wallpaper, nothing. As panic starts to set in, a nurse comes into the room and cheerfully hands me a paper cup with some pills in it.

"Where is my baby?" I grab her arm and look pleadingly into her eyes.
“Oh, Amy—not that dream again,” she says and gives me some water to take with these pills. “Take them—they will help you rest better.”

“Please—tell me where I am and where my baby is—I need to go and get him!”

“Honey—this is 'The Havens' facility, and your husband brought you here six years ago. Now take these pills and get some rest.”

I look at her in total shock. “Six years?”

Forcing me to take the pills, she smilingly gives my shoulder a pat and eases out of the room. I gather enough wits about me to follow her to get some answers and find that the door is locked. I can’t get out. Fear swells in the pit of my stomach and grows until my air passage is blocked. Black dots start to gather behind my eyes as I grow tired, oh so tired now. I need to just lie down for a minute....
Second Place Poetry Winner

Outcomes
Anna Borrego

Sometimes in my haste I shake
the ketchup bottle too vigorously
and end up with fry soup.
I put off exercise
and one shocking day it's like
an elephant
trying to wear a giraffe's jeans.

I am like my cat
when he quenches the flame
of a candle with his paw
and later has to furiously
gnaw at his wax-covered
digits.
I live with consequences.

Words grow wings, fly out my mouth
and crash into another person's
heart
leaving faint but permanent
imprints.

I'm wondering if I will
ever learn the lesson of
the action and the
result.
The Wizard

Aislinn Strang
Oklahoma Mountain
Marcie Gatlin

We head up the mountain just like we had done as kids. My brother and I make our way up, attempting to beat the setting sun. We are here in Oklahoma spending the Thanksgiving holiday with our family. I drove up from Texas, he flew in from Kentucky, but I think we all came in for a break. Oklahoma has always been our home away from home, and for my brother, his birthplace. Marcus pulls his black leather jacket tighter around him. I can make out his dark features from under his ball cap. We all have a little Indian blood in us. You wouldn't know it to look at my brother Matt or me, but in Marcus I see it show through, not just in his dark hair or skin, but in the fire behind his eyes.

The air has become much cooler with the evening, and the shadows are beginning to play tricks with my mind. The wind whistles by, kissing my ears. I pull the hood of my sweater over my dark brown hair and half cover my icy eyes. We are leaving tomorrow, and we both know that we cannot go without a trip up the mountain. After all, it's what we came here for.

As we start up, I admire the massive piece of land in front of me. It has stood here for millions of years unchanged. I wonder the things that it has seen and the wisdom it could pass on if I only asked. We have always called it a mountain, but I think that anyone not from Texas would refer to it as a hill on the back of my grandparents’ land. The horses are quietly eating grass and do not seem to notice us as we pass. We don't take a straight shot up the middle but move from side to side, in and out of bushes, avoiding all the bad spots. You never forget them there like the creak in your stairs that you step over without hesitation. The sky begins to turn a dark bluish purple with slices of pink coming through the seams. This is my favorite time of night. I like to watch the sky change colors as the stars slowly appear. It's the final act just before the curtain closes. I look up and wish I could see this scene from my home in Houston. I say a quiet prayer and thank God for such a beautiful sight. We don't say a word. We both just keep our eyes and our thoughts straight ahead.

The top of the mountain is always the hardest part. I lean in to keep from losing my grip and falling back. As my eyes come up over the top and I pull myself onto solid ground, I can feel an explosion as my heart leaps from my chest. I devour the air around me. Close my eyes,
reopen them, and close them again. I look around at the dancing sky, the endless land, and the possibility of anything. I start to relax for the first time in a year. A complete peace slides over me. All the troubles that brought me all these miles seem to head back down the mountain. I am totally aware of my surroundings and how truly blessed I am. I have taken a lot for granted lately. I think sometimes I need the mountain to remind me of that. I turn to look at my brother. Marcus turns, smiles, and lets out a funny little laugh with a nod. I know he is thinking the same; no words are needed, for us we just understand.

Marcus joined the army when he was 17 and had nowhere else to go. Now here he is 19, and he has just returned from fighting in Afghanistan. I swallow a lump forming in my throat. I know the reality is that we are at war and it will not be long before he will leave once again, this time for Iraq. I want to reach out and stop the world from spinning, stop the things that I know are to come. I guess sometimes life just happens, and there is nothing we can do to stop it.

He plops down on the ground. Pulls a cigarette from his jacket pocket and tries to fight the howling wind as he lights it. I lean in and cup my hands around the lighter to help in his effort. As I sit down beside him, I begin to play with the dirt underneath. Deep red Oklahoma dirt. The kind you only appreciate if you truly love the land. Marcus takes a long drag and finally breaks the fogged silence.

"Grandma says the dirt is red from the blood of the Indians. What do you think?" he says.

"I believe everything Grandma says. Listen to the wind. You can hear them whispering secrets." As I let it fall between my fingers, I can feel their lost souls swimming around me. I look up and see Marcus playing with the dirt as well. He still looks like a child to me.

"You know when you were about three or four, you told Mom that you wanted your own garden. When mom came in the room later, you had the window open, and you were shoveling dirt into the room with a plastic shovel. It took mom forever to get it all clean," I tell him. I stop playing with the sand, look at him and grin. "You've always been such a pain in the ass."

"Me? What about you and Matt?"

"Me, I'm perfect, and Matt wasn't a pain. You just liked to pick on him," I say.
"He'll probably have to have therapy for all the times we locked him in something. Like when we locked him in that little cabinet and sat in front of it. Mom kept asking where he was, and you told her you didn't know and then blamed me when we got in trouble."

"Yeah, that was pretty funny," Marcus says. "What about when we watched Candy Man and when he went to the bathroom, we flicked off the lights, shut the door, and started yelling 'Candy Man, Candy Man, Candy Man.' He wouldn't go to the bathroom with the door closed for a week." Marcus laughs so hard I thought he would roll off the mountain.

"Yeah, good times, good times," I say as I start to laugh with him. We continue telling stories starting with "Remember the time . . . ." Somehow we manage to avoid talking about the war, my postponed wedding, or any of the other things resting deep in our thoughts.

"What are you going to do when you get out of the army?" I ask. "Are you going to move back home or stay in Kentucky? What kind of job are you going to get?"

Marcus stands up and walks to the edge of the mountain and looks down. "I don't know. I haven't made any plans," he pauses. "In war there are no predictions."

"Hey, when you go to Iraq, try and stay out of trouble, okay. I don't wanna have to come over there and get you out of some mess," I say. Marcus knows I am sidestepping what I really mean, and I can tell by the look in his eyes.

Marcus gives me that mischievous grin that he used to give as a child, the one that says, "I didn't do anything" with an underling smirk. "Don't worry, Sis. God doesn't have the balls to kill me."

I laugh and try to un-jinx him under my breath. I know he's just saying that to make me feel better, and it almost helps. This has always been our way of handling things; we laugh and make our lives into a joke. Or is it already one?

He gets serious for a moment and sits back down beside me. "I want you to do me a favor," he says "If something does happen to me, I want you to bring my ashes up here and scatter them for me. I don't want to be put in a coffin. I've seen entirely too many scary movies, and I don't want to take the chance of being buried in a box alive."

"I thought you said nothing was going to happen to you. You practically promised."
"I know. Nothing is going to happen, but just in case. Come up here and scatter my ashes and pray to the Indian gods for me," he says.

"I don't think I know any." I try to get up and walk away. He grabs my hand and pulls me back down.

"Please," he says.

That is all I need. He's right: one day I will release his soul here, but I pray that it will be years from now, when we are both old. Marcus starts rubbing the whiskers on his face.

"You're starting to get a little scruffy there, little brother. You planning on growing a beard, now that you're all grown up?"

"No, I'm not too fond of beards. Remember on Halloween that year when Dad made me a pirate and he tried to put my beard on with that glue?"

"Yeah, it was like super glue or something. He kept pulling and pulling trying to get it to come off, and you just kept crying. Man, that was so funny. I still don't know how he got that thing off."

Marcus rubs his face again and shudders. "I do," is all he says.

I look over at Marcus. I see that his face has hardened over the past few years. He has gone from the chubby little boy whose belly poked out and spoke with a lisp, to the man sitting in front of me who has seen things I cannot imagine. I want so much to tell him how I have missed him. How much things have changed since the last time we were on the mountain. I have so much to say but don't know where to begin. I want to wipe away his scars. Take back all the horrible things I've said. I want to erase all the pain he's been through. I don't realize I am crying until I feel a sting from the wind blowing across my tears. I try to wipe them away before he sees.

He gets up and walks away, deep in his own thoughts and problems. A world and a lifetime away with screams that only he can hear. I think of when we were younger. He used to always beat up on me and call me fat whenever I looked in a mirror. He pulled my hair, spit in my food, and pushed Matt down to make him cry. He stole my car and trashed my house. And when no one was looking, he helped Matt learn to walk and kissed him when he slept. When I worked late, he would bring me food and stand up for me when no one else would. Instead of
going to parties, he would hang out with me and make me laugh in hard times. In return, I held my report cards so he would not get in trouble for his. I gave him money, let him steal my car, and when he really needed me, I gave him a place to live.

The sun begins to sink deep into the distant land. The stars start to pop through the thick black blanket above us. I make a wish and turn to look at my little brother. I wonder if it is not the mountain and its sprits that are so magical to us but the people we come up here with.

“You know we still have our bags to pack and our goodbyes to say,” I say. He turns to me, swallows hard, and nods. I know one day when we are older and we both have kids, we will bring them here. They will pull each other’s hair, call each other names, and, when no one is looking, help the other when life makes it too hard to stand. We begin to walk slowly, not wanting to leave behind the mountain, the peacefulness, or each other. We continue talking as we walk back down, avoiding all the bad spots like we have forgotten to do in life.
The Daughter Dance  
Linda Leschak

She rages at me; I rage back.  
    She smolders, I smolder too. 
We take our stance, hands on hips, not to be outdone.  
Neither of us will back down, nor will we have won. 

She screams out her frustration,  
    I counter with my own. 
Our hands tight knotted balls, arms across our chest.  
Don't give in, don't back down, dare not fail this test. 

She turns her back,  
    I walk away 
Seething in silence, not a sound  
Hard inside, we regroup to go another round. 

She glares at me with those eyes,  
    I glare back with my own. 
We've both forgotten how this battle ever came to play,  
How'd we come to this, we never used to be this way. 

I soften a bit.  
    She seems to calm 
A change of tact to make our points more clear.  
We posture and we pose, but don't touch, don't go near. 

She cries finally, I follow at last,  
    She hugs and I hug back. 
We talk now in normal voice, but tentative, reserved.  
Aware our shaky bond, not so quite preserved. 

She's stubborn, so am I  
    Just like the others before; 
I danced myself a similar tune long, long ago  
It seems that nothing's changed all that much you know. 

I'm older now; she's grown and gone, and I miss her every day.  
I often wonder, if given the chance, would we dance in that same way?
Face

Kelsey Berkenbosch
Third Place Prose Winner (Tie)

Adam’s Sin
Allen R. Sutton, Jr.

Adam came home from school early with a black eye and a swollen lip. He didn’t say a thing to his mom as he walked through the house. Instead, he walked straight back to his room and shut the door. He threw his backpack down on the bed and stood in front of the mirror for a second or two. His face was swollen on the left side, and blood had dried along his lower left lip where the fist ruptured his lip. His left eye was swollen half shut, too. He touched it, dark purple and sore, as if to verify its reality.

"I'm always the one that gets blamed," he thought to himself, thinking back a few hours earlier to his meeting with the principal.

Cory Donovan and his group of thuggish friends had beaten him up yet again. It was the fourth time this year. They were a full year older than Adam, and much stronger. They hated him for many reasons. They said he was ugly for one, threw things at him in class, and poked him with the lead-end of their pencils. Cory was especially happy to trip Adam while he was leaving the lunch line to sit down and eat or simply steal his lunch money. He was hated because he was smart, always passed tests, handed in homework on time, or tried time and again just to fit in with their crowd. But, above all else, they hated him because he was girly. He never played a sport, twisted his rear end as he walked, and spoke with a mild lisp.

They called him Amanda most of the time and looked for excuses to pick fights. Anything was a good reason when it came to Adam. Fights always ended the same way: with Adam in the principal’s office listening to how he was the instigator and that he needed to be taught a lesson.

The principal suspended Adam the first week of school. Cory had caught him in the changing room just before gym class and taken his clothes. Adam had pleaded with Cory to give them back, but he ran into the gym with them and threw them behind the bleachers. Adam ran out to get them just in time for Cory and his group to trip him and finish stripping him down, and then proceeded to kick him and spit on him. The coach ran out, but instead of pulling them off, he jerked Adam up by the ear and stood him in the center of the gym, saying, “You want to parade around naked? Here’s your chance.”

The teachers knew all too well what was happening; they heard the class whisper their
insults. “Amanda, want to come sit on my lap?” Or “Watch out, there goes Adam the fag. He’ll turn you into a faggot if he touches you.” But they pretended to be deaf when it came to Adam. All the school staff turned their faces when Cory jabbed his pencil or when Shelly would spit on him. None cared, but why should they? He was, after all, just a queer.

Today he decided he knew just what had to be done. He’d been planning it out for some time, waiting for just the right moment. His mother always said, “it will pass,” “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” or simply “we will pray, and the Lord will take care of things.” But the Lord wouldn’t help him; the Lord knew what he was just like everybody at school.

Adam had been forming this plan for some time. A few days ago he had written a letter, telling his mother everything. How he just couldn’t handle it anymore and that no matter what he loved her. A day later he swapped the blade out of a razor and, when his mom wasn’t looking, carried it back to his room and sealed it away in a baggie, along with the note. The day that he would need to use them came fast; he fished the zip-lock out from under his socks and closed the dresser drawer slowly, then placed the bag gingerly in his pocket for his final walk and made his way to the bathroom.

He closed the door behind him and threw the baggie on the sink. Then he took off all his clothes and folded them neatly, setting them on the closed toilet. Standing back in front of the mirror, he reached for the baggie, opened it, and lay the contents out on the brilliant white sink. He thought about it one last time and decided he was right; this was the way it had to be.

He carefully picked up the shiny blade in his right hand, held it up, and adjusted it so that he faced the sharp end outward. It reflected the light from the single hundred-watt bulb that was screwed into the lonely light socket above the mirror. “Look at Adam the faggot,” he heard in his mind.

“Shut up,” he thought, lowering the blade to his left wrist.

“Shut up,” he said out loud, the tip sinking into his skin. A pool of red formed around the blade. He pushed down hard; a thick stream of red life shot out from the puncture wound and scattered across the mirror, streaming down across his reflection. There was no pain at first, but as he pushed farther down his wrist, he began to groan lightly as the pain caught up to match the wound. Before long his whole wrist was burning.

His eyes started tearing up, blood ran freely down his arm, squirting out and spraying the pure white of the sink. His legs were red with blood running down to meet the tiled floor. There they formed pools and smeared as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He watched with fascination for a few seconds. He thought it was amazing how much blood he had in there.
He then took the blade in his left hand, which was now turning stark white and growing numb. In his head there was more laughing and taunting; he could feel them pointing and cracking their jokes. He saw the teachers turn their faces, saw his mom close her eyes and pray, and saw the principal teaching his lessons, but the taunting continued.

"SHUT UP!" he yelled now. "LEAVE ME ALONE!"

Dizzy and enraged, he thrust the blade into his other wrist. It was more of an effort to get it in as deep, but he pushed as hard as he could. Down the hall, he heard footsteps beginning to get closer. His mother’s voice seemed to be coming from a hundred miles away.

"Adam? Who are you talking to in there?"

She knocked at the bathroom door, before turning the knob slowly. She eased it open a little bit, just to peek in and make sure everything was all right. The reality of what she was seeing knocked the wind out her. She stood for a second in complete disbelief. Drops of red glimmered on the white tiles. A pool of dark crimson engulfed the floor, and in the center was her baby. His eyes were nearly shut, and his body swayed from side to side. A soft whisper escaped his lips, but from where she stood, she couldn’t quite make it out.

She ran across the tile floor to her son, sobbing and praying that this was all a dream. Her arms flew around him and pulled him close to her. Adam’s arms flopped clumsily as she rocked him back and forth. Blood was drenching her lacy white blouse, but she needed to protect him, make it all right again. How could this be happening? She stroked his hair with her hand and kissed him on the cheek. His eyes wandered around the room, not aware of anything anymore; she screamed out to call 9-1-1. Over and over she screamed, but there was no one to answer her plea. She pulled him along with her to the phone, blood staining the carpet in a trail down the hall and into the living room. She held him tight as she dialed the number.

"9-1-1, please state the nature of your emergency."

"My baby! Oh God please, MY BABY!"

And he knew no more.
Red
Mary Lavender

The two girls roared into the bank parking lot on gleaming Harleys. The smaller of the two shut off her bike, removed her helmet, and ran a hand through her fiery tresses.

"Red," the taller girl warned, "I think you are about to be busted. Isn't that your grandmother's 'vedy, vedy' British butler Giles coming out of the bank?"

"Crap, Shelly," Red muttered, "it's Wolfe, Nigel James Wolfe to be exact, and there's no way he's not going to tell my granny that her one and only granddaughter is riding a disgraceful hog. I will never ever hear the end of it. Daddy was smart to buy it for my twenty-first birthday and then take an extended business trip."

"You might as well smile girl 'cause he's just spotted you."

"Miss Hood." The elderly butler managed to convey disbelief, horror, and distaste in two words.

"Morning, Wolfe," Red smiled disarmingly. The frost remained in the butler's face and the girl shrugged. "Tell granny that I'll be by to see her one day soon."

Wolfe inclined his gray head regally. "I'll convey your message Miss Hood, but might I suggest that you phone Mrs. Abercrombie prior to your visit." The lift of his eyebrow announced that civility required it.

Red smiled noncommitally and waved as he got into the black limo.

"Miss Hood," Shelly intoned and gave a small bow. Both girls broke into giggles. "What does your granny call you?"

"Maagarret," Red drew the syllables out majestically. "Margaret,' she always says, 'remember that you are a lady.' Decorum is one of the first words I remember her teaching me."

Shelly grinned as she took in Red's tight black leather ensemble. "I hope she never sees you in that rig, the poor soul will have a stroke."

"She'd have a stroke if she heard me called Red."

"Red makes sense for you with all those flames on your noggin. Now, your granny's butler is sure misnamed. I never saw any one look less like a wolf—an ancient hound dog maybe, with those big ole ears, mournful eyes and awful British teeth."

"And long flapping tongue," Red sighed. "Wolfe is a terrible gossip—information gatherer I believe my granny calls him. She doesn't get around as much as she used to, and Wolfe is her way of keeping up on things."
"I do love the old girl so guess I’d better make fast tracks over to her place and stroke her ruffled feathers."

"After you change, I hope."

"Heavens, yes. Somewhere in the back of my closet I’m bound to have something Gran deems a ‘suitable’ young lady dress, and in answer to your next question, no, I’m not going over on my bike, darn it."

Red arrived at her grandmother’s palatial estate a scant two hours later in a demure floral dress, carrying a lavish basket over her arm.

"Hi, Woody," she called to her grandmother’s burly gardener.

He grinned and opened the gate, saluting her with his pruning shears. "Aren’t you the brave one, missy? Where’d you stash your hog?"

Red rolled her eyes. "She’s furious, isn’t she?"

Woody’s grin broadened. "My guess is she’s going to eat you alive."

"Whew! I guess I’ll just sneak in with my key and take her by surprise. She’ll be so shocked to see me in a dress that I’ll have at least a five-second advantage. Then," Red lifted her basket, "I bribe her with goodies from Le Bon bakery. Gran has an unbelievable sweet tooth, and I bought one of everything. Think it will work?"

Woody laughed. "When pigs fly maybe. The windows are all open today, so sing out if you need rescuing."

"Drum roll, please, here I go." Red let herself into the house quietly and glanced upstairs. Her grandmother’s bedroom door was closed, a sure sign that she was within. Red straightened her slim shoulders and hurried up the stairs.

"Gran," she called and tapped once and opened the door. Her grandmother stood with her back to her, as always dressed impeccably, every silver hair in place.

"Come on, Gran," she coaxed, "at least look at me. I’m sorry if I worried you, honest."

Something about the rigid set of her grandmother’s shoulders distressed her deeply. Sitting the basket on a table, Red sped across the room to fling her arms around the disgruntled old lady. She let out a loud yelp of pure astonishment.

"Wolfe!" she gasped softly, "what the heck are you doing wearing my granny’s clothes?"

Facing her with a look of anguish, the butler gripped Red’s arms so tightly that she shrieked. He immediately loosened his grip.

"I apologize, Miss Hood," he said faintly. "I do wish I could offer a suitable explanation, but I fear it will be inadequate."
Red stared at the butler incredulously, taking in the bouffant silver wig, the ivory silk blouse and skirt, and the string of pearls. Red felt for a chair and collapsed in it. The man’s spindly legs were encased in silk hose, and he’d even managed to get his feet in her granny’s pumps. The rouge on his sagging cheeks had been subtly applied, but Red had obviously interrupted him. Only his upper lip sported the deep plum lipstick her grandmother favored.

Before Red could speak, there was loud knocking at the door. "Mrs. Abercrombie, Miss Hood," Woody shouted, "Are you alright?"

The butler looked a frenzied plea at Red, and she swallowed a giggle. The hound dog eyes had never looked so mournful. She almost expected him to put back his head and bay.

"Wolfe," she whispered, "is my granny all right? I mean you haven’t drugged her or anything, have you?"

He looked at her with offended dignity. "I would never harm Madame. Never."

Red nodded. "We’re fine Woody," she said calmly. "I just turned over a vase."

She waited until the footsteps died away and looked at the butler. "Okay, talk to me Wolfe. How long has this been going on, and does my granny know about your um... little habit?"

He shook his wigged head wearily. "Madame has no idea that I have, shall we say, borrowed her apparel these thirty years."

"So how do you know when it’s safe?"

He looked at her reproachfully. "I did suggest, Miss Hood, that you call before you came, didn’t I? As to your grandmother, she occasionally enjoys a little apricot brandy in the library. It seems to have a salubrious effect for two or three hours." He shrugged his rounded shoulders. "There never seemed to be any harm in it." He looked at Red anxiously. "Will you tell Madame?"

Red snorted, "Why? You two are happy like you are. There is one thing, though. “

Wolfe swallowed and waited.

"Yea, the thing is Wolfe, I don’t think that lipstick does a thing for you."

"You don’t?" he faltered incredulously.

"Nah. I’ve got a tube in my purse that will look a lot better with your coloring. Here we go." She proffered the gold tube, and the two leaned toward the mirror to examine the rosy results.
The Sending

Casey Young
Writer's Block
Tina Richardson

Oh, how repressed this vicious, white,
lined flatness made of trees and pulp.

Words caught amid the left and right
and right and wrong,

fall out onto this white expanse and make
no sense or form.

Where is my muse to ease this task
of making words to make them feel

amazing in my mind the imagery of sounds
and tastes, of texture and of memory,

left dead and hollow in my hand and on this page.
The “M”
Anna Borrego

“I can’t believe I let you guys talk me into this,” I said as we parked at the bottom of Mt. Jumbo. “Three switchbacks and I’m toast.” I got out of the car and stood looking at the mountain that was the central focus of all the valley.

“Oh, you’ll be fine,” my youngest sister Eileen tried consoling me. Easy for her to say. She had been running up the mountain the last three months for training. I had been living in sea-level elevation the last two years. I could barely walk from the car without breathing hard. Somehow Eileen and her friend Lindsay had convinced me to go for a hike with them. I was only in town for a week, so I gave in to spending time with them. We had hardly made it down the concrete path to the steps leading up to the first part of the trail when I began to worry. I didn’t know how I was going to do this.

“Okay, we’re here,” Lindsay said as we climbed up the large wooden steps and planted our Nikes and New Balances on the dry dirt trail. “Let’s go!” she said, stepping forward, causing a small cloud of dust to erupt from the ground. We started our hike, water bottles in hand.

The ultimate goal of hiking Mt. Jumbo was to reach the massive white concrete “M” that was located on the center of the mountain. It was the backdrop of the University of Montana and could be seen all throughout the city. It was a brown, grassy mountainside that had no trees except way at top where the mountain became forest. A series of about fifteen switchbacks made up a trail that allowed people to “hike the M.”

The first part of the trail was wide enough for people to get on and off the hike at the same time. It was a very gentle incline, and I could almost convince myself that I was going to be able to do this. People of all ages and health hiked this all the time. I took a few deep breaths and fell into a comfortable pace behind Eileen and Lindsay. They were nice enough to go slow for the sake of my lungs.

“Hey, Ana, watch out for the big rock coming up,” Eileen hollered over her shoulder.

“Thanks,” I said in time to step over a large purple rock that was embedded, but not buried, in the middle of the trail. It stuck out high enough to trip the unsuspecting hiker.

We had just reached the end of the first switchback and turned about 60 degrees to our left when we had to stop and let a man and woman pass us as they jogged down the mountain.
“Thanks,” the man barely spit out as if each of his breaths were precious at that point. We continued on, the path narrowing.

My breathing had become only slightly labored as I was relaxing more at each corner. To breathe in the clean summer air was almost liberating to me. Living in congestion and dirty air had literally taken something from me. Here on Mt. Jumbo I was reconnecting with the purity and simplicity of this place I grew up in.

“Passing on your left,” a voice called, and we all moved to the side, our legs brushing up against the dirt bank. “Nice evening, huh?” a white-haired man with really long legs said, looking down on the three of us short girls as he passed.

“You bet,” I said to the back of his head, then glancing down I noticed my calf had been scratched by some protruding grasses and sticks. “Hey, you guys, I need to stop for a second. I drew blood.”

“There’s a bench coming up at this corner; we can stop there,” Eileen said, pointing to a bench made of two large rocks and a piece of slate rock on top. I sat down and squirted water onto my injury. Fortunately, the scratch was thin and didn’t require any more attention. We all used it as an excuse to stop and take a breather, though.

“We’re halfway there,” Lindsay said.

“Only halfway? I guess you’re right,” I said between drinks of water. The higher up the mountain, the shorter and steeper the switchbacks became. I looked over and saw that we were eye level to Aber Hall, the dorm on campus. “We’re pretty high up, huh? I don’t think I’ve been this high since I was on the plane.”

“Let’s get going so we can reach the top before it gets too late,” Eileen said as she jumped up and started moving. I took one more look around at the grasses and knapweed, filled my lungs again with the air, and followed the girls. As I started up the trail, my legs quickly reminded me that they were very sore, my muscles tightening and burning. I had somehow been able to ignore them until now. I slowed down right away, falling behind Eileen and Lindsay, who were turning the corner.

“Hey, Ana! Are you okay?” I looked up to see them peering down at me from the switchback above.
“I’m okay. My legs are a little tired,” I said.

“Hang in there. There are only three more, and we’re there,” Eileen said encouragingly. “You didn’t come home for nothing.”

“Okay, I’m coming.” The next three switchbacks hurt with every step. People passed me going up and going down. Some people I saw twice as they headed down. I was so involved in my temporary suffering I failed to consciously recognize that I had reached the M.

“All right! You made it,” Eileen said as she ran up to me. I stood with my hands on my knees, breathing hard and not wanting to move my legs. I felt like my lungs were rejecting each breath. “Sit down and look,” she said, motioning me to a corner of the white cement. I sat and looked up. The entire Missoula valley was in sight. The sun was just beginning its slow, summertime descent and cast yellows and oranges across the city.

I had not looked upon my hometown like this for years. I saw the university campus and the three rivers that weaved through the city. Familiar locations like my high school and the mall revealed themselves all over. I sat peacefully, watching my home open up to me as I sat high above it in observation. I hadn’t been home for so long. A combination of deep longing and reconciliation filled my spirit. The three of us sat for a long time, watching the city. The sun had disappeared over the mountain and left its rays in the sky. Finally, it was time to go.

“Ready?” Eileen asked.

“Only if you carry me,” I said as I stood and took in the scene one last time.
Blue
Heather Lee Hallowell

Blue's singin'—
Beltin' out lyrics
Like they're the only thing keepin'
Her heart beatin'.

Notes blowin' o'er me
Like a dust storm o'er cattle,
Seekin' me out
In my chair in the corner
Like a hunter stalkin' prey.

She's singin' 'bout love
Of course,
As painful as a root canal
And as sweet as cake.
About a man
Who gone done and tore at
Her heartstrings
With pride
As sharp as new scissors.

Such an angry song,
With her ravin' at the mic—
All the hurtin' of the song
Reflectin' like a mirror
In her perdy face.
Third Place Poetry Winner (Tie)

When the Fields Belonged to Us
Lynda Long

When the fields belonged to us,
we danced
because joy rose up singing inside of us
at the feel of moist fertile soil beneath our feet
and fragrant wind upon our faces.
we danced at each new sunrise
celebrating the roundness of the days,
the circle of the seasons,
praising the fruit swollen with the seeds of tomorrow,
rejoicing in the roundness of our bodies
fertile and teeming with new life.
artists fashioned statuettes of Circe
the round enchantress,
revering that point where the two ends of the circle meet.
we danced at each full moon
offering our thanks to the Great Goddess
who gave birth to both Order and Chaos
and first set the wheel of life and death in motion.
we danced,
our bodies rejoicing in the wonderment
of joining, of birth,
for when the fields belonged to us
the sun and the moon were content,
the fruit was bountiful,
and men spoke in the round syllables
they learned at their mother's breast.
somehow their language changed;
we no longer understand their meanings;
their syllables have edges
like plows, like swords.
they began to sing songs of war,
to speak no more of fields,
but of kingdoms, of countries.
they placed death upon a pedestal;
artists erected vast statues of soldiers
while the blood of armies poisoned the fields
and the fruit rotted on the limb;
the statuettes of Circe were shattered
and we were told to cover our nakedness.
then we danced
not in joy, but in shame,
for the coin of the realm.
they said there was no place for Chaos, only Order,
who reinvented time to flow consecutively,
but fields know nothing of linear time
and so man declared war
on the fields, on us,
because we could not hide our roundness.
when the fields belonged to men
they became dry and barren,
the children starved,
and we became too weak to protest
as the Great Goddess lay wounded.
but, somehow, when we were alone
locked in our houses,
we closed our eyes and saw the fields
as they were in days of old,
moist and fertile,
and we danced
while the Goddess whispered in our dreams
welcoming us back into the circle.
someday we will once again sing
in round syllables
to the sons suckling at our breasts.
we will open their eyes once more
to the beauty of Circe, of ripened fruit,
and we will teach them
to dance with us, barefoot in the hard dry fields,
not in joy—but in hope—
that the sun and the moon
will one day rise again round and content
upon moist fertile fields
of fruit swollen with the promise of endless tomorrows.
Joe THE Lawnmower
Brian Killpack

Joe had a beautiful leaf-green lawn of Kentucky bluegrass. It was feather soft, and Joe and his friends often slept on it at night, with nothing between themselves and the grass carpet but their pajamas. There was never a worry about getting itchy bug bites from lying on Joe’s lawn. Even the notorious Komodo dragon fire ants seemed to sense this lawn was not to be trifled with.

Joe served as an apprentice lawnmower under his father. At the age of 17, the dawn of manhood, Joe was a master of his craft. He had 70% of Delta’s lawn business. But Joe thought more of his girlfriend Angie than of his skill with the mower. Angie was seven feet tall, had bewitching green eyes, and had hair the color and smell of hot cocoa. She was as beautiful and fickle as any Greek goddess—but not nearly as intelligent.

That summer Delta hosted the prestigious Grass Roots lawn-mowing competition. Joe’s business, You Grow It, I Mow It, did not leave him much free time, but his friends and clients pestered him to enter, and Joe liked the idea of winning. He asked Angie what she thought.

“Joooee! You know we always visit my parents on Saturdays, and that’s the day of your little contest.” Angie was posing in front of a wall-sized mirror as she did her Jazzersize workout to the NeverEnding Story movie theme.

Joe involuntarily flinched at the mention of her parents.

He thought of Angie’s dad, a former college basketball player, who would pinch Joe’s butt every time he posted for a hook shot.

He thought about Angie’s mom, a palm reader, who told Joe he was marked for abso-lute—And that was when Joe yanked his hand away.

What ever it was, he didn’t want to know. Joe got the conversation back on topic.

“I’m going to enter that competition, Angie,” he said evenly as he jabbed her reflection’s nose and smudged the mirror. “Will you at least come watch? This is important to me!”

Their conversation seemed to be a verbal karate sparring match.
Angie delivered a deft counter-strike with a change of subject that knocked the wind from Joe’s argument.

“I think dinner at Chaddwick’s tonight would be wonderful,” said Angie wistfully. Chaddwick’s was the most expensive restaurant in town. It had a dumb name, too.

Frustrated, Joe left Angie to admire herself. He wanted her support, but he decided he would compete without it.

Joe arrived early to the fair grounds the morning of the contest. He quietly checked the oil and gas in his scratched and dented eleven-year-old Snapper mower. He didn’t expect to see Angie.

The competition blossomed into action with the bark of the official’s pistol. The fans quickly left the other mowers and surrounded Joe’s yard to cheer him on. Joe mowed with manliness and won. His corner turns and maneuvering around the trees were unmatched.

Joe examined his plastic trophy of a still lawnmower in action coated in gold paint. It’s head fell off. He looked up and saw Angie. She was winking, but not at him.

Joe strode to the judges table to find Clive, one of the judges, whispering in her ear and running his fingers through her hair. Angie was grinning and laughing playfully.

Before Joe could speak, Angie issued her ultimatum.

“Joe, I’ve decided to marry the man who wins the Lawnmower Olympics.”

Joe was thrown. “Never heard off it.”

“Not surprising, coming from an amateur,” said Clive smugly as he continued to whisper into Angie’s ear.

Angie was enjoying herself.

“Well?” Joe demanded.

“We said it’s true,” Clive growled. “Beat it, kid!”

“Shut your mouth, slappy,” said Joe peaceably enough. “I’m talking to the lady.”

Clive sprang to his feet with fists clinched.

By this time the other judges arrived and hauled Joe off the fair grounds, his own turf, to the taunts of Clive.
Joe called Clive every bad word he could think of as he sulked home. Then he called his old boss, Scott, whom he used to mow construction lots for. Scott agreed to train Joe. Scott kicked Joe out of bed every morning at 4:30 to run twelve miles. Breakfast was a cold, saucy mug of "stick drink."

"It tastes like a stick," said Scott as Joe puked, "but it's pure adrenaline energy, and it increases the natural SPF of your skin."

From 11 am to 5 pm, when the very air boils, Joe mowed lots strewn with bricks and hidden potholes. He mowed through hailstorms and freezing rain. He mowed as tornados tangoed about him.

Joe wondered if Angie was worth it. She was cute—no, beautiful! "Keep going," he thundered to himself.

Joe sat on fire ant piles—Angie is beautiful! Angie is wonderful!—without moving, until every ant in the colony had bitten him, as he learned to focus his mind—Angie is . . . beautiful, Angie is . . . ?—above the pain.

The sun faded Joe’s picture of Angie beyond recognition, but he continued to chant, "Angie is—, Angie is—," with waning enthusiasm.

Lunch was two quarts of rust-colored water and whatever beetles and slugs he could scavenge from the earth. Joe spat. He had had it. Joe decided to compete for himself.

Joe meditated every Sunday, twelve hours at a time, without a word as he practiced molding his face into the perfect scathing stare that could wither a cactus with a blink.

Dinner was a cup of mush and a banana, followed by a draining three-mile charge up Chimney Ridge, pushing Scott and his Cadillac all the way to the top.

Joe slept every night on the hard, itchy lots he mowed. Sleep was a six-hour nightmare of his previous day's training.
Finally, after three months, Scott decided Joe was ready. Privately, both men were sick of each other. Scott handed Joe a sealed envelope when he left for the Olympics. It was a glowing letter of recommendation in case Joe lost, and his lawn-mowing reputation was destroyed in the process.

Joe returned to the fairground, which was also the arena for the Lawnmower Olympics. He inhaled the air, patted the grass and soil, and acquainted himself with every patch of lawn. He was ready.

* * *

The next day people from seven states poured into tiny Delta to see Clive duel Joe in a contest of skill and endurance. Joe and Clive toed the line.

"You know the rules," said the official. "The winner will be world champ."

Clive looked at Joe like he was an old burning log belching fat, white tree grubs, and Joe looked at Clive like he was an old piece of cheese on a mouse trap.

The starter's gun cracked like a soldier's salute, and a few minutes into his lawn Clive had already broken the region's thirty-two year mowing record. And Joe . . shattered the world record.

With grass clinging to his body like a fur coat, Joe accepted his solid-gold medal.

"Oh, Joe!" said Angie in a very (much emphasis) stupid voice. "Marry me!"

"Judge, I believe I'm entitled to a wish as the winner," said Joe as he shrugged Angie off.

"So you are," said the wise judge.

"I wish Clive and Angie to be banished to another planet," said Joe with a huge grin.

"Let it be done," said the judge with a grin of his own.

And Joe went home a happy man.
Daddy's Girl
Jacqueline Adalis

A guilty pleasure
Your hand engulfs mine,
An overwhelming warmth,
And I stare at you.
The back of my head touches my spine.
We walk together,
Speechless,
Though my smile says enough.
You say that was why you brought me a Blow Pop after work everyday,
Just for the silent conversation my smile brings.

Separation
Next to each other we sit,
My shoulder brushes your elbow,
No words spoken.
You grab my hand,
Intertwine your fingers with mine,
The tips of your nails lie above my wrist.
You bless me as I get on the plane,
Tears flood my eyes.
My sight desperately searching to see you again,
as your image slowly fades away.

A special bond
You drive me to school,
Tejano music blaring,
As we lean our chairs back.
Our lips move in sync,
Acting as if we know the words.
We laugh,
A different laugh,
More real than your adult life understands.
You reach for my hand,
Kiss my knuckles,
And you stare at all the gaudy rings that clasp each of my fingers.
A stressful blink,
Long closed eyes,
As you try to absorb my youthful ways.
Kids swarm the outside of my school,
A quick kiss on the cheek.
Widen eyes
My hair, 
Formally done, 
And a Schlotzsky's sandwich shared between us. 
Later, 
A silver-blue dress hugs my body, 
A smile I've never seen before appears on your face. 
The arrival of my date, 
The disappearance of your smile. 
Your hand grips mine, 
A forever grip, 
Down the walkway, 
In the street, 
To this other man's car door, 
An approval worked hard on, 
And your grip loosens against my fingers.

Parting
Piled boxes stack in my new apartment. 
You insist I get the small stuff, 
Leaving all else for you, 
There is no small stuff. 
The moving van, 
Empty. 
Drenched in sweat, 
You leave for our old home. 
We hug. 
My arms wrap around your waist, 
My head lies on your shoulder. 
A remembered moment. 
Holding hands, we walk toward the front door.

Realization of Growth
Separate roofs cover our heads, 
My head only slightly tilting to lock eyes with you, 
Our shoulders touch when we sit. 
My hand, 
Much larger now, 
Aged with your guidance, 
Still daintily lies within yours, 
Yet always desperate for your continuing encouragement, 
Direction, 
Comfort.
The Lost Soul
Aislinn Strang

My legs shiver and shake through fishnet hose,
I touch up the makeup on my eyes and nose,
I gaze up and down the cold, empty street,
Hoping, searching for my paycheck to greet,
Headlights appear at the end of the block,
I smooth down my skirt and on his door I knock,
"Would you like some company for the night,
I'll keep you warm and hold you tight,"
I'm welcomed in—it's a real nice car,
Hopefully he won't take me far.

The motel is nicer than most I've seen,
The bed is made and the carpet is clean,
I lock the door and close the blinds,
"Don't be loud. I've been caught for these crimes,"
As our clothes fall to the ground,
I feel like my wrists and legs are bound,
My soul is churning to get out,
And this man on top gives no damn about
The feelings I've had and the person I've been,
If only he knew what makes me sin...

The scary nights and the dreaded belt,
The fury of my father and the fright I felt,
His footsteps thundering down the hall,
The lock on my door not holding at all,
His breath rank and skin smelling like sweat,
On top, like this young man I just met,
A broken beer bottle and the scent of weed,
My cry in the night, a scream as I plead...
“I’m done now, here’s your money, go.”
The stack of cash is yet another blow,
I leave the motel with no more but far less,
He was a pig but is respected, blessed,
But who cares about a hooker, right?
A stereotype to add to my blight,
It doesn’t matter what happens to me,
No one knows every night I pray on my knee,
“God change me, I can’t, it’s too hard to bear,”
No one sees me or hears me or cares to care,
All they see is small skirts and fishnet hose,
Makeup on my eyes and nose,
The men that pay me every night,
The wall round my heart that I constantly fight,
But, God, they’re missing so much more,
My hopes and dreams that forever soar,
The ones I’ve had since I was young,
The ones Dad said that “Satan brung.”

Every night I wait and wait,
But finally I sigh and create,
A different image than my true self,
And hide my dreams on a dusty shelf,
I dress in my leather and silver rings,
An angel with horns, praying for wings.
An Inside Joke
Christopher Ryan Craig

Nobody hears the quiet dignity of the
two a.m. city-street lit by a motley of lights
like kindly hands holding gently back the dark.
You'd step outside and swear you felt a whisper,
a chuckle of absent communion
passing before your profane presence.
To walk carefully with lips sealed
in serene silence fascinates me;
It's as far from the clumsy quiet of bad dates as
my late-day rush hour is from its reverence.
Sometimes I can't help but tell Emily I love her
with partial words what we already know completely.
I'm not sure that even now I understand
the untold truths of good fortune,
but don't wait in once-vacant streets
to hear them from me;
I'll keep the beauty private and perfect
as a secret,
As an inside joke of reticent teachers.
Third Place Prose Winner (Tie)

Imagine That
Patricia Clay

The one thing that Zeke liked least about everything that happened in the past year was that Peggy got a job. “It’s just that simple,” she told him. “The plant shut down. You can’t find a job, but I did.” Then three months later, she refused to quit when he started working as a day manager at the new Sonic over on Pine across from the high school. Every afternoon when he came home exhausted from dealing with the irresponsible kids who worked there and the ones who didn’t, Peggy was out the door leaving him to care for their four-year-old daughter, Allie. After helping catch up on the household chores and taking care of Allie every night, by the time Peggy got home at midnight, he was so tired that their love life had gone out the window. Hell, he didn’t think that they even qualified as two ships passing in the night anymore.

On this particular night, while transferring clothes from the washer to the dryer, Zeke heard a squeal and a ker-thump from Allie’s bedroom. He ran upstairs, tripping over a train in the hallway and landing belly down on the carpet facing a headless, naked Barbie doll.

“Allie, what happened to this doll?” he asked as he rolled over on his back and looked up at her. “What did you do with her head?”

“I don’ know.” Allie shrugged her shoulders and went into her bedroom.

Zeke pulled himself up and followed her. “Allie, sweetie, tell Daddy what you did with Barbie’s head so I can fix her.”

“’S gone.” Allie leaned against the wall standing on her left foot and then shifting to her right. “All gone,” she said as her thumb went into her mouth.

“Allie, big girls don’t suck their thumbs, remember.” Zeke gently took her hand and wiped it dry with the tail of his tee shirt. He knelt on the floor beside her bed and looked under it. He found an empty toilet paper roll, a sock, a book, and a half-eaten cookie. He sat on the floor and sat Allie next to him. “Where did you hide Barbie’s head? Mommy doesn’t like it when you decapitate your dolls.”
“I know,” Allie sighed. She got up, opened the closet door, looked inside and shut it. As if forgetting what she was looking for, she sat down, started playing with the ribbon on her pajama top and then looked up at her daddy.

“Tiger took it. He won’t give it back.” Zeke frowned and just looked at her. This had been an exceptionally long day for him. Even his own daughter was not going to give him a break. “For real, Daddy, he did.”

“For the fourteenth time this week, Allie, there are no tigers in our house. He didn’t take your blanket or your teddy bear. He didn’t take your blocks or your red ball and he definitely didn’t take your Barbie’s head. Why are you trying to drive Daddy insane?”

Allie leaned over and picked up the book Zeke pulled from under her bed. She opened it and carefully turned the pages, looking at each one before flipping it over. She stopped, handed the book to Zeke, and pointed to a picture on page twelve. There was a tiger curled up on a rug in the middle of a big room. A blanket exactly like the one Allie’s grandmother made for her was lying by the tiger’s right paw. A red ball, four wooden blocks, and a brown teddy bear were scattered on the rug in front of him. The head of a Barbie doll was lying by the sleeping tiger’s shiny black nose. Zeke slammed the book shut.

Allie climbed up on his lap, put her arms around his neck, and whispered, “For real, Daddy, tiger took it.”
No Pole

Jamie Salvaggio
Lexicon
Anastasia Voight

In the beginning was the word or many.
Any place, anywhere, any
When must begin
With language thin.
For life's discourse with chaos
Needed substance, energy, and information.
Mix well for half eternity and time and tine
Fork signs and symbols,
Associations, conversations, communications,
Between cells and souls
And distinctions
On state of matter, mind, and ment.
Then relate, equate, debate,
The last the hairless monkeys do with hate,
Seeing, hearing, speaking evil
But also singing beauty to move
The waters, signing angel,
And "Come with me... new pleasures prove..."
These elements, these bits, iota,
These meaning quanta, verbal quota
So change and rearrange
To suit each being's repertoire.
Such symbols, signs, soliloquies are ours,
Life's to name, describe, delimit life
Itself and more.
Grackles
Mary Lavender

The grackle mafia muscles its way into my backyard wildlife sanctuary, wearing cheap, shiny black suits and sporting baseball-bat-and-brass-knuckle attitude. Their harsh grating announces their presence several dozen strong. A long-tailed, smaller version of the sinister raven, the villains have made trips to my backyard over the years but never in such clacking force. They commandeer all three pine trees and the rows of bird feeders. Like a horde of locusts, they devour the seeds I’ve put out for my menagerie and intimidate the other birds. The sparrows are first to take nervous flight. The scrappy blue jays peck for a few minutes and streak away when grackle bullyboys push in. The discriminating cardinals never show up. Only the small finches seem to be safe. After briefly examining the thistle seed in the feeder close to my bedroom window, a grackle curses and flaps away.

I watch in dismay as more and more grackles descend and stride about, bowlegged and brashly cocky. Except for the chicken walk of the doves, all my other backyard birds hop. I never realized how adorable hopping is until the striding thugs blanketed my yard. A few normally combative white wing doves peck nervously around the perimeter and then scatter in squeaky winged protest.

The sunny October morning seems diminished as harsh grackle voices split the air. I have trouble concentrating as their grating continues without pause.

An unflappable gray squirrel turns his back on the riff-raff and munches concentratedly. A grackle strides over five feet to peck the squirrel on his bushy behind. Refusing to respond with more than a small jump, the squirrel bravely eats on until the enemy surrounds him. The grackles jeer and sneer as he scampers up a tall pine tree.

I’m reminded of the goblins in Tolkien’s Fellowship of the Ring as the grackles are seemingly as interested in mayhem and murder as they are in devouring. Every spring I risk heat stroke chasing them, sweating and shouting as they raid blue jay nests and abscond with crying babies. They foul the two birdbaths, and I’m forced to replace the water several times a day as they slop about in their bathing ritual.

I’m glad no one is around to witness my ludicrous and futile efforts to scare the villains away. Every fifteen minutes or so I slide the back door open and march into the yard snapping towels and yelling. From there, I turn the garden hose on full blast and direct the spray as high as I can into the tall pine trees. The grackles simply fly out of water range and taunt me with foul-mouthed derision. As soon as I close the door, they resume dominance.
About nine in the morning I notice Snub, the stubby tailed squirrel, futilely searching for seed. I open the sliding back door and call, “mere Snub, come baby.” The mafia lazily retreat to the trees and snicker among themselves. Usually Snub bounds to the door for the peanuts I offer, but today, as the grackles menace from the trees, he hesitates. “Come on baby,” I urge, “Mama won’t let those nasty creeps bother you.” As I continue to coax, he cautiously approaches and accepts the peanut. I know he’s hungry but, he’s wary. Eying the trees, Snub quickly buries his treasure and comes back to the door. He stashes his nut deep in the ground and heads back to me with more of his normal exuberance. As I talk reassuringly, he eats a peanut under my watchful eye. All the while grackles curse and threaten from the trees. Snub stays near me and dispatches a peanut, facing his tormentors with an “in your face” satisfaction. After burying a third nut, he saunters away, pleased with himself.

As soon as I close the door, the “back plague” descends. When the scenario repeats itself a second day, I am frantic. According to my bird book, they migrate in late autumn. Since some years Houston doesn’t have what could be called autumn, will the pests ever leave?

Last year they did eventually take off but not before they had eaten a number of delicate pink lizards and chased away my twenty-six vibrantly beautiful goldfinches.

The goldfinches never returned. I am still resentful.

I decide to resist bird tyranny even if it means losing my bird population and reluctantly remove all nine of my feeders. After three days of stubborn non-compliance, the vermin lifts off, cursing and muttering dark threats.

I wish for a heady cleansing wind and rain to remove all traces of their putrid presence, but none comes.

I wait another day before putting out seed again. Only days later do a few birds nervously return. They take skittish flight frequently, and I think unkind thoughts about the undearly departed.

One day a single grackle joins the doves and sparrows under the trees. Without cohorts, it ignores the other birds and grazes on the seed as placidly as a cow, proving at least to me that humans are not the only creatures to act the bully in a mob.
INKLING CONTRIBUTORS

Prose and Poetry

Jacqueline Adalis is majoring in English and is interested in the medical field of neonatology, dance, and classical literature, and she hopes to one day publish a book of short stories and poems.

Anna Borrego is a sophomore who is interested in creative writing.

Kristina Cammilleri is majoring in general business. She enjoys reading books and spending time with her two children. Because her passion is scrapbooking, she says, "I love knowing that when I'm gone, my scrapbooks will tell my story for me."

Trisha Clay is a sophomore and a regional manager for IKON. She enjoys writing, traveling, music, art, and watching her children grow.

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Tina Howard enjoys reading, writing, photography, scrapbooking, and quilting. She is a sophomore who is majoring in English.

Janet Hudson is an office manager, a cancer survivor, and a creative writer.

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Dr. Greg Oaks, Christy Addison, Lee Barnes, Tina Richardson, Lalae Azodi, Kat Edie, Tina Howard, Dr. Rebecca Tate, Jeff Miller
CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST INFORMATION

All *Inkling* submissions are considered as entries in the Tomball College Creative Writing Contest. Each anonymous work is then submitted to a panel of judges: Doug Boyd, Professor of English; Dr. Allen Gee, Associate Professor of English; Dr. Greg Oaks, Associate Professor of English; Catherine Olson, Professor of English; Dr. Van Piercy, Associate Professor of English; Katherine Reynolds, Professor of English; John B. Rollins, Associate Professor of English; Melissa Studdard, Associate Professor of English; and Dr. Rebecca L. Tate, Professor of English. Each judge picks his or her top five in both poetry and prose. Next, each work is assigned a point value ranging from five to twenty-five. The total for each work is added, and the top three highest numbers become the first through third place winners.

HOW SUBMISSIONS ARE SELECTED

Works for publication, including artwork, are submitted to Dr. Greg Oaks or Dr. Rebecca Tate, *Inkling* faculty advisors. They substitute, in place of the author’s name, a number; thus, only they know the identity of the individual contributors. Each staff member is then given a duplicated copy of each submission to be considered for the current issue. After final selections are made, the staff members’ copies are returned to the faculty advisors and destroyed, thereby prohibiting the circulation of unauthorized copies of anyone’s work. The final step in the selection of materials is a staff selection meeting when the *Inkling* editors, staff, and advisors meet to discuss and vote upon the final selection for publication. Only after final selections have been made do the advisors reveal the identity of those individuals whose works have been chosen.

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