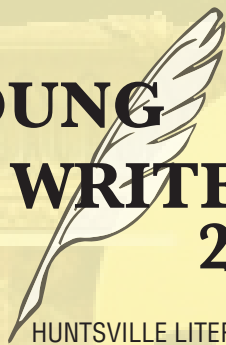


# YOUNG WRITERS 2020



HUNTSVILLE LITERARY ASSOCIATION



## Acknowledgements

The 2020 Huntsville Literary Association  
Young Writers Contest has been made  
possible through funding from the  
Arts Huntsville, Arts and Cultural Grant  
Program funded by the city of Huntsville.



**Huntsville Literary Association's  
Fifty-second Annual  
Young Writers Contest**

**2020**

**Cataloguers for Literary Divisions 1-2**

Jessica Temple

Marion Conover

**YWC Judges for Literary Divisions 1-6**

Annelle Craig

Leah Cusker

Millie Dempsey

Abby Dunham

Susan Hazen Guthrie

Tamera Hoskins

Abbiegail Hugine

Carey Link

Susan M. Luther

Marjorie Masterson

Judi Moon

Rose Norman

Annie Philips

Erin Reid

Liz Stagg

Beth Thames

Margaret J. Vann

Lynda Walker

Eloise Winkler

Missy Watkins Wood

**Cataloguer for Divisions 3, 4, 5, 6, and Art**

Linda Fletcher

**Judges for Art Contest**

Debbie West, Chair

Mary McGaha

Marena Owen

Monita Soni

**Technical Support**

Bob Fletcher

**Booklet Editor/Compiler**

Margaret J. Vann

**Contest Committee**

Ann Marie Martin, **chair**; Carol Ashburn Roach, **co-chair**

Bob Fletcher, Linda Fletcher, Liz Stagg, Jessica Temple,

Margaret J. Vann

**Huntsville Literary Association's**  
**Fifty-second Annual**  
**Young Writers Contest**  
**2020**

The purpose of the Young Writers Contest is to encourage, stimulate, promote, and reward outstanding creative writings by students in grades one through twelve in public, private, and home schools in Madison County. We wish to thank the teachers and school administrators for their support and assistance. Thank you, WLRH Public Radio for your continued support of this contest.

The Awards Ceremony had to be cancelled because of the special times we are in with physical distancing caused by COVID-19.

**Dedication Page**

**The Huntsville Literary  
Association  
dedicates**

**The 52nd Young Writers Contest  
in honor of  
Linda Fletcher  
HLA Cataloguer  
and**

**in memory of  
Joseph Mastromonico  
HLA Judge**

# Table of Contents

<b>List of Winners</b> .....	1
------------------------------	---

## **Lower Elementary Poetry**

<i>Friday Night</i> by Jon Thomas Macri.....	8
<i>Insects</i> by Kayla McNabb.....	9
<i>The Story of the Girl and the Panda</i> by Jewel Ramsey .....	9

## **Upper Elementary Poetry**

<i>A Cycling Dream</i> by Vedanth Gopinathan .....	10
<i>My Aunt Leaving</i> by Crimson Meeks .....	11
<i>Racoons</i> by Latham Wells .....	11

## **Junior Poetry**

<i>Middle School Blues</i> by Joshua Macri .....	12
<i>Painting in My Mind</i> by Anisha Katoch .....	14
<i>Cinquains of Seasons</i> by Oliver Merchant.....	15

## **Junior Short Story**

<i>The History of the Future</i> by Collin Williams .....	16
<i>Mirror Mirror</i> by Zoe Widman.....	19
<i>The Kettle, the Cub and the Coin</i> by William Perkins .....	22

## **Senior Poetry**

<i>the tenth pew</i> by Colby Meeks.....	27
<i>Affectations of a Black Boy</i> by Bryan McNeal.....	29
<i>the chronicles of learning to burn</i> by Jillian Naylor .....	31

## **Senior Short Story**

<i>Black Earth</i> by Calvin Engstrom.....	33
<i>Fisherman</i> by Elisabeth Mayfield .....	40
<i>Midnight Voyage</i> by Chole Todd .....	45

## **Artwork**

Front Cover: <i>Retro Happiness</i> by Emma Hardy	
Upper Back Cover: <i>Trumpet Man</i> by Anaya Chambers	
Lower Back Cover: <i>Kaleidoscope</i> by Georgia White	

## WINNERS

## Lower Elementary Poetry Division

First Place Jon Thomas Macri, Second Grade  
Asbury School  
Teacher: Jennifer Macri

Second Place Kayla McNabb, Second Grade  
Home School  
Teacher: Angel McNabb

Third Place                      Jewel Ramsey, Second Grade  
Life Christian Academy  
Teacher: Holly Ramey



## **Upper Elementary Poetry Division**

First Place	Vedanth Gopinathan, Fifth Grade West Madison Elementary School Teacher: Annie Glass
Second Place	Crimson Meeks, Fifth Grade McDonnell Elementary School Teacher: Karen Colvin
Third Place	Latham Wells, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman
Honorable Mention	Annelyse Burkhart, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman
Honorable Mention	Lauren Woodfin, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman
Honorable Mention	Aurora Deshazer, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman



## **Junior Poetry Division**

First Place	Joshua Macri, Sixth Grade Discovery Middle School Teacher: Emily Smith
Second Place	Anisha Katoch, Eighth Grade Discovery Middle School Teacher: Sherika Lampley-Gray
Third Place	Oliver Merchant, Seventh Grade Home School Teacher: Corrie Merchant
Honorable Mention	Laurel Howard, Sixth Grade Mountain Gap P-8 School Teacher: Brittney Kent
Honorable Mention	Abigail Wilson, Eighth Grade Mountain Gap P-8 School Teacher: Leslie Graham

## Junior Short Story Division

First Place Collin Williams, Eighth Grade  
Home School  
Teacher: Amy Williams

Second Place      Zoe Widman, Eighth Grade  
Discovery Middle School  
Teacher: Christi Moore

Third Place William Perkins, Eighth Grade  
Monrovia Middle School  
Teacher: Janet Hightower

Honorable Mention	Ben Lambertson, Eighth Grade Discovery Middle School Teacher: Sherika Lampley-Gray
-------------------	--

Honorable Mention                  Ava Howse, Eighth Grade  
Randolph School  
Teacher: Nichole Liese

Honorable Mention	Abigail Hornbrook, Eighth Grade Whitesburg P-8 School Teacher: Emily Stone
-------------------	--

## **Senior Poetry Division**

First Place	Colby Meeks, Junior Lee High School Teacher: Michelle Sisson
Second Place	Bryan McNeal, Junior Huntsville High School Teacher: Amy Bishop
Third Place	Jillian Naylor, Freshman Lee High School Teacher: Donna Geise
Honorable Mention	Ariahna Battle, Junior Lee High School Teacher: Michelle Sisson
Honorable Mention	Skye Anderson, Freshman Lee High School Teacher: Michelle Sisson

## **Senior Short Story Division**

First Place	Calvin Engstrom, Senior James Clemens High School Teacher: Donna Geise
Second Place	Elisabeth Mayfield, Senior Providence Classical School Teacher: Jon Swanner
Third Place	Chloe Todd, Senior Providence Classical School Teacher: Jon Swanner
Honorable Mention	Toni Glover, Senior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Honorable Mention	Sam Clark, Junior Providence Classical School Jon Swanner
Honorable Mention	Montgomery Lin, Junior James Clemens High School Teacher: Donna Geise

## **Artwork Category**

First Place (Front cover)	Emma Hardy, Junior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Second Place (Upper back cover)	Anaya Chambers, Senior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Third Place (Lower Back cover)	Georgia White, Junior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Honorable Mention	Yunona Shkolnikov, Senior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Honorable Mention	Maggie Brown, Junior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Honorable Mention	Abby Warren, Junior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos

## Lower Elementary Poetry

### Friday Night

Temperature rising,  
My heart skips a beat.  
Tempting scent fills the air.  
Almost swept off my feet.

The time is here.  
I'm amazed by the sight.  
Spent all week waiting  
Just for tonight.

PIZZA! I cry,  
Red sauce covered in cheese.  
PIZZA! I shout,  
Mushrooms? NO!  
Sausage? PLEASE?

Chewy, golden crust,  
Goey mozzarella, my favorite part...  
Pizza, pizza,  
You fill my tummy and my heart.

*First Place*  
*Lower Elementary Poetry*  
*Jon Thomas Macri*

## **Insects**

Bugs are crawly  
Some are quite small-y.  
Others are grubby  
Like the baby grub.  
Some are jiggly and wiggly  
Like the slinky caterpillar-y.  
Some are pretty cool to see  
With your naked eye,  
Like the beautiful monarch butterfly.  
And the pretty, majestic and amazing ladybug?  
You may ask and shrug?  
What's so great about this dull beetle bug?  
The ladybug lugs itself up a leaf  
To gobble up all the aphids  
To which it's their belief  
Have hid with all their might!

*Second Place*  
*Lower Elementary Poetry*  
*Kayla McNabb*

## **The Story of the Girl and the Panda**

There was a girl  
and a panda  
walking in the forest and  
they bumped into  
each other and became  
friends.

*Third Place*  
*Lower Elementary Poetry*  
*Jewel Ramey*

# Upper Elementary Poetry

## A Cycling Dream:

The black ink dripped from my quill,  
My eyes soaring through the stars.  
I hear a nightingale sing a lulling melody,  
And I am swung into dreams  
I witness the bloom of chirps in the showers  
I observe cats sneak through the trees.  
I feel a rustle in the leaves,  
And I plunged into a new dream.  
I go into a warp in time,  
And find myself falling through the sky.  
I see and hear a mammoth's tromp  
Through the morning snow.  
Suddenly, I steady myself in a hard shell.  
I'm a snail! I'm a snail! I sing as I slide.  
I pass wonders, flowers as high as towers,  
Grass big enough for playground slides.  
And suddenly, oh suddenly, I am back,  
Witnessing a constellation,  
Shaped as a snail, a mammoth, a chirping bird,  
And I have discovered the treasure trove of Dreams.

*First Place*  
*Upper Elementary Poetry*  
*Vedanth Gopinathan*



## **My Aunt Leaving**

My aunt leaving  
Leaving for awhile  
Big boxes packed tight  
An engine loudly roaring  
Waiting to leave  
Dark blue lettering  
On the truck  
Big brown boxes  
She walked out  
With many boxes  
Slowly placing them  
In the car  
Waving goodbye  
The truck grew strong metal legs  
And ran away with all of her belongings

*Second Place  
Upper Elementary Poetry  
Crimson Meeks*

## **Raccoons**

Awake at night, asleep all day.  
this critter has some out to play.  
Greedy eyes covered by a mask,  
this little thief has come to rob your trash.  
Ran away without a trace,  
except for the pile of garbage in its place.

*Third Place  
Upper Elementary Poetry  
Latham Wells*

# Junior Poetry

## Middle School Blues

Not sure what it's all about.  
In the cafeteria, kids scream and shout.  
First bell rings, we file out.  
Get ready for the Middle School Blues.

Makin' my way through hot, crowded halls,  
Getting pushed into the walls,  
Never thought I'd feel so small.  
Curse those Middle School Blues!

8am, indoor soccer.  
Bell rings, class change...  
Hit my head on a locker.  
Make a mad dash to class,  
As the eighth graders laugh,  
I'm humming the Middle School Blues.

Class to class,  
Teachers fill my head.  
I wish that I was still in bed.  
Upcoming tests! I'm filled with dread!  
Singing these Middle School Blues.

Boys play games on their devices.  
Girls compare their wardrobes' prices.  
Pop quiz!  
Is there such thing as an 1/8<sup>th</sup> life crisis?  
I'm feeling the Middle School Blues.

Boys I played with all summer long  
Putting me down, what did I do wrong?  
Not smart enough? Cool enough?  
Guess I know my song...  
I'm living the Middle School Blues.

Last block of the day,  
I hear Teacher say,  
Great job, you got an A.  
I put on a grin,  
Wonder where I fit in,  
Know tomorrow I'll do it again,  
It's all part of the Middle School Blues.

*First Place  
Junior Poetry  
Joshua Macri*

## Painting in My Mind

I sat at my desk,  
pondering and wondering.  
Why is this canvas taunting me?  
What does it want from me?  
I look at the clock, the night sky,  
and then to my canvas.

My brush is dipped in a soft yellow,  
and it glides across the canvas.  
Suddenly a beautiful image appears in my mind.  
The colors blended together,  
forming the most delicate picture.

As the details calmly flow through my head,  
my brush starts painting them.  
Incorporating each and every star.  
I keep adding details, each one completing the picture.

The painting was perfect,  
and the image was finished when my mind was blank.  
I returned to the way I started,  
staring out the window,  
but this time my canvas was full of life  
and my brush was resting in the water.

*Second Place  
Junior Poetry  
Anisha Katoch*

## CINQUAINS OF SEASONS

### SPRING TIME

The life season,  
Wakes up the sleeping world  
At last, the warmth has come again  
Seed time.

### SUMMER

Time of heat  
Its radiance can scorch  
But we are granted peaceful shade  
Fire.

### AUTUMN

Chilly season  
When earth decides it's time ...  
... Time to turn the temperature down,  
Harvest.

### WINTER

When snow falls down  
And everything is asleep  
Cold heaves down like a heavy weight  
Icy.

*Third Place  
Junior Poetry  
Oliver Merchant*

## **Junior Short Story**

### **The History of the Future**

The year, nobody knows. Out here on Earth 2, we cannot match our days with Earth 1's days, so nobody tries.

An unknown amount of time ago, but probably several hundred Earth 1 years or so, global warming started being too much for all life on Earth 1. Humans and animals would suddenly drop dead because of the extremely frequent heat waves. Ocean evaporation was measured in feet. During the days of "Environmental Earth", global warming was just a pain, but when it became a murderer, it was time to take action.

By gathering supplies from Earth 1 and outer space, humans created a new habitable planet, Earth 2. The few million humans who had not yet died gathered into massive civilian transport spaceships and left Earth 1.

Now Earth 1 is a desert planet. The few humans who foolishly stayed have adapted to the multi-hundred-degree temperatures. Instead of being warm-blooded, Earth 1 humans are now ice-blooded, relying on constant boiling temperatures to keep their blood thawed. No longer do whales roam the oceans, instead fossils roam empty basins. Lizards live where seals and polar bears once lived. Earth 1 will never have another ice age.

Obviously Earth 2 is a lot colder than Earth 1. The temperature is equivalent to pre-global warming Earth 1. Since changes in the weather only occur if they are necessary, the weather during the seasons is very predictable.

Just like how the weather only changes if necessary, we Earth 2 humans only take what we need. We only occupy a small part of Earth 2's land area, Pangaea 2. Most of Pangaea 2 is for the animals who were brought to Earth 2 to avoid extinction. Creatures such as fish and chickens are still killed to fill our stomachs, but at a reasonable rate to preserve them

and us. Animal hunting is only allowed when a species goes out of control and disrupts the environment.

The “only take what we need” rule also applies to our daily lives. Houses are not bigger than needed, and sometimes multiple families will share a house. Trash cans are a thing of the past, instead waste is recycled or composted.

To prevent global warming from occurring on Earth 2, most technology from Earth 1 is unused to prevent the need for unnaturally created electricity. There are no cars, only car-shaped pedal-powered replicas of automobiles. Cookfires are used instead of electric ovens and stoves, and the fire’s smoke powers machines that, in turn, power electric lights.

It may seem like we have become our primitive ancestor’s replicas, but us Earth 2 humans are inspired by nature instead of pixels. Typical jobs are now wildlife protectors instead of computer defenders. Some electronic devices are still powered up, due to excess energy that needs to be used, but most Earth 2 humans don’t know what a computer, video game, or phone is.

Humanity has also outgrown currency. Instead of trading worthless pieces of paper and useless hunks of metal, money has been replaced by the fair trading of useful objects. This way we actually have the value we say we have.

In schools, people learn about flora and fauna instead of the ancient stone fortresses and metal men of Earth 1. Wars and plagues have never set foot on Earth 2.

Without fear of premature death, we are free to use our talents and shoot for the stars. (Literally, since Earth 2 is in space as far as Earth 1’s inhabitants are concerned.) Many talented performers and scientists have become legendary across Earth 2. As long as we all learn from what happened to Earth 1, humanity and Earth 2 will continue to live on.

Some people worry about the possibility of humans overrunning all of Earth 2. Just like Earth 1,

the animals will have to move for the sake of new neighborhoods and stores. Where will the animals go if humanity once again takes over? There are two likely scenarios.

One possibility is creating Earth 3, an animal-only planet.

There the animals could thrive and run the planet their way, without the human interference that occurred on Earth 1 and Earth 2. Of course, humanity's greed would probably result in the domination of Earth 2 and Earth 3.

The second possibility is researching a way to recreate

Earth 1's atmosphere and reduce the overall temperature. If it were possible, it could result in a home for the animals and a way to recreate what humanity lost when global warming drove us away. A section of Earth 1 would have to still be desert for the current inhabitants of Earth 1, but restored Earth 1 could result in a home for the animals on Earth 2. Rebuilding Earth 1 would keep humanity busy for many Earth 1 years, reducing the possibility of animals quickly losing their new home.

Hopefully the invasion of humans in the animal's territory will never happen. If we are content with the fraction of Earth 2 we have, humanity can endure for thousands of Earth 1 years, just like we already have.

Humanity has evolved and endured for countless eons. We created countless new things, only to lose them to our creation, global warming. We have killed a planet and made a new one. We have rebuilt humanity from the ashes of a dying planet and the birth of the new one. We might be able to survive on a planet that was not naturally created, or we might create another home world. We might never kill another planet, or we might kill a whole galaxy's worth of planets. One thing is certain, though. We will try our best.

*First Place  
Junior Short Story  
Collin Williams*



## Mirror Mirror

It was a chilly winter day, the air frigid and still as I plodded to the antique shop belonging to my Great Uncle Ben. He had always been a bit odd, always collecting and hoarding ancient objects that should have been thrown out long ago, but I guess there were some pros to his condition considering that he now owned the most renowned antique shop in the county. That doesn't really say much, though, considering that his shop might possibly be the only of its kind in the county.

I had always adored hanging out at the quaint and dusty little shop, despite my great uncle's oddities. I mean, the place was like a peculiar yet fascinating museum of all things ancient and broken! The shop had everything from books to porcelain eatery to furniture items.

Reaching the shop, I flung the door open and skipped inside, smiling when I heard the small, rusty bell ring as I opened the door. To my relief, my great uncle didn't appear to be at the front of the store and was instead in the back half where he lived, meaning that I got to avoid another awkward conversation in which he talked aimlessly about his delusions of ghosts and ghouls. Sometimes I seriously worry for him. I mean, who in their right mind would believe in a mirror that created malicious doppelgangers that were made purely up of the darkest and most evil desires of humankind?

Skirting a rack of old clothing that even my great grandmother wouldn't be caught dead in, I noticed something odd. There was a tattered maroon curtain hanging against one of the wooden walls of the building. Curious as to why it was there when there wasn't a window behind it, I slowly slid it to the side. Behind the curtain stood a petite wooden door that one would have to climb on all fours to get through. How have I never noticed this before?

Cautiously, I glimpsed around the store, making sure that there wasn't a soul who would notice what I was about to do. After I decided that there was nobody else in the shop, I dropped to the ground and began to climb through the tiny door. Upon reaching the other side, I noticed how dim and dusty the room was. The

only light in the room came from a candle-fueled lantern that sat on a small wooden stool. Next to the stool stood a tall object covered by what appeared to be a curtain or blanket.

How unusual this was. I examined the rest of the room thoroughly, which is when I made a peculiar discovery. The dust upon the wooden floorboards had small footprints in it from when I stepped into the room, but there were none leading to the lit candle. The entire path to the lantern was completely undisturbed. If nobody had come into this room in what must have been years for the layer of dust upon the floor to be so thick, how was the candle still glowing bright.

The strangeness of the situation was off putting, but before I left, there was one question I had to answer in order to satisfy my curiosity. What was hidden underneath the curtain?

Taking cautious steps, I softly tiptoed towards the mystery object until I stood directly before it. It was there that I stood, still as a statue. It took me many moments of calming breaths until I gathered the courage to uncover the mystery object. Before I could change my mind, I roughly grabbed the curtain and flung it to the side where it hit the wall and slid to the floor with a slight flutter-like sound.

I stood there, almost spellbound, as I stared at it. Why would a mirror as nice as this be hidden away in this dirty room? It was then that all of my great uncle's stories of the evil mirror came flooding back to me. But those were just childish stories made up by a delusional man, right?

Having only found a normal, boring mirror hidden beneath the curtain, I decided that I might as well leave before I got caught. With care, I tread lightly over to the curtain and picked it up. Preparing to place it back on the mirror to hide the evidence of my intrusion, I turned back towards the mirror. This is when I noticed something horrifying. Something terribly, frighteningly horrifying.

Why was it smiling at me?

My reflection was smiling at me in a way that was so unnatural, so grotesquely horrifying that I dropped the curtain upon the floor in shock. It appeared that its terrible smile reached all the way to its eyes, giving it an almost Cheshire-cat like appearance.

As I stood there, completely stunned, I watched in horror as that thing on the other side of the mirror raised its fists into the air and began attempting to crash through the mirror from the other side. As shards of glass flew down to the floor, I finally broke from my trance.

Screaming like an asylum escapee, I dashed towards the door, leaving the curtain forgotten on the floor. I dove to the ground and slid out through the tiny door as fast as possible. It wasn't until I had closed the little door and covered it with a large, heavy box that I let myself relax.

I slid down against the wall and let out a sigh of relief. A steady banging against the wall, however, made me jump up in fright.

That thing is still in there. What if it gets out? What will it do if it does?

Deciding that I had had enough frights for today, I raced out the door, not even stopping to say my farewells to my great uncle as he yelled after me from the cashier's desk. I didn't stop running until I was back at home.

I let something out that day...something that was pure evil. And I know that when that thing gets out, it will stop at nothing to find the one who let it escape.

*Second Place  
Junior Short Story  
Zoe Widman*

## **The Kettle, the Cub and the Coin**

I poured water in the kettle, preparing tea for when Oscar made his return. The earthy taste of tea brought me back to the moments I was most fond of in my childhood, relieving any tension. Better yet, the soothing fragrance overpowered the stench of tobacco, even if it was just temporary.

In the other room was the sound of the door swinging open and slamming shut.

“Oscar?” I yelled out. There was no reply, only the sound of Rooks groaning over each other.

“Oscar!” I raised my voice. “Answer me now, or I will get the crowbar, and I’m not afraid to use it if you’ve turned!”

Oscar walked in with a solemn expression, blood dripping down his arm. On his shoulder was a small, yet deep cut.

“Got a coin lying ‘round here?” He sat down and pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket.

“Probably so.” I raised an eyebrow, his unorthodox entrance puzzling me. “Why?”

“Just find it.” Oscar released a heavy sigh before slouching in his chair. He grabbed a cigarette out of the pack and seated it comfortably between his chapped lips. “The size doesn’t matter.”

I began to rummage through the bags and purses scattered throughout the house. “What’s with that cut?” I questioned. “Did a Rook get ya’?”

“Yeah. You never truly realize just how scary they are until you take a real good look at their six-inch claws. Even worse is the smell of rotten blood on their coarse, brownish skin. Disgusting.” Oscar let a puff of smoke flow through the air. “Hard to believe that those things used to be human.”

“Yeah.” I mumbled. “You got that right.” Beneath a teddy bear was a dime. “I know I’ve already asked, but what do you need this for anyway?”

“One of us needs to die.”

I paused in my tracks on account of the bizarre statement.  
“Could you repeat that?”

“If you haven’t noticed, take a look outside.”

I did as he commanded and peeked out of the window. Outside were countless Rooks moving around in a herd. One of them looked at me then let out a groan.

Even just one Rook could kill us if we let our guard down. I couldn’t imagine what an entire herd would do. “How do you figure we even get out of this?”

“You’re saying it like both of us can make it out alive.” Oscar wiped the sweat off his forehead with his sleeves. “I told you before, one of us needs to die.”

“Well can’t we just wait it out?” I suggested.

“We ran out of rations yesterday.” Oscar refuted. I didn’t bother saying a word. Outside was a Rook banging against the door, demanding entry into our abode. “Soon enough the night will fall upon us and it will be too late.”

The room fell silent, the only thing audible being the Rooks groaning and bumping around against the RV.

“I’m not sacrificing my life for *you*.” The kettle began to whistle. I tossed the coin in Oscar’s direction before preparing to turn off the stove. Oscar caught the coin and walked in front of me to stop me in my tracks.

“Not so fast, Dante, what’s that supposed to mean?”

“Why would I sacrifice my life for someone who kills people?” I attempted to walk past Oscar, but he blocked the way with his arm. A portion of the blood dripping down his arm transferred to my shirt.

“Like you’re any better? You’re one of the greediest thieves I know. You could never keep your hands out of the cookie jar. Jewelry, food, water, kids’ toys, you’ll take anything you can get your hands on.”

“I had my limits! I never killed anyone, not even ones who deserved it! I would never murder someone in cold blood or because I had some anger issues to work out with myself!”

“You’ve stolen from an entire family at once, leaving not even a scrap of food for them! Chances are they starved to death or were killed by Rooks! Do you understand how horrible that is? I bet you feel no remorse, do you?” Oscar pointed his finger at me.

“Neither do you! You killed a child!” For a second I thought it was guilt that came over Oscar as he stared at the ground. “You had no second thoughts about it! It’s like you think there aren’t any repercussions to your actions and apparently there aren’t because you still continue!”

Neither of us said a word. I didn’t care about the kettle, nor the Rooks. Before lighting another cigarette, Oscar crushed the one he had been smoking before in the ashtray.

“I’ll admit it. I’m not a good person. Neither are you. There’s no right here, there’s not a greater good. There is no way for us to correctly determine the outcome of this situation, that’s why we need the coin to do it for us.”

“If you still think I’m sacrificing myself, you are completely mistaken.”

“Dante.” Oscar sighed and rubbed his forehead. “Do you know what Lions do when they are starving? They eat their young. It may seem messed up, but if the Lion starves, then the cub will die anyway. Two living beings die when one could have survived. One of us has to be the cub if one of us lives. Otherwise, both of us die.”

I fiddled with the coin as I listened to Oscar’s explanation. “Well considering the facts, what if that’s for the better?”

“You don’t care about what’s better. It’s the hard truth and you can deny it all you want, but you just want to live, I do as well.” For the first time since he entered the room, he looked directly at me, eye to eye. “Even if you live with guilt, you still want to live just a little longer because you’re scared of what’s waiting for you. You know that somewhere down in hell, the demons are waiting, and they’re waiting for me too.” Oscar sifted his fingers through his short buzz cut before returning the coin to me. “There’s no other option.”

I sighed and stared at the coin longingly, considering my options and weighing the ramifications of those options.

A Rook began to shake the RV, attempting to find a way inside.

“There’s no more time to think, Dante. You know what you have to do.”

My clothes began to tighten as the room heated up like the sun’s blaze. Without any say or control, the only thing I could do is risk it all on the flip of a coin.

I gripped it tightly before throwing it in the air. The room felt like it was spinning, yet it was just an illusion. My arms, legs, and hands began to tremble. The sound of the Rooks outside sounded as if they were right next to me. Piercing my skull was the sound of the kettle that whistled relentlessly. Oscar let off a puff of smoke that invaded my nostrils and lungs. I could merely inhale a measly amount of breath. Time moved so slowly, yet before I even knew it, the coin fell into my hand.

“Heads or tails?”

\* \* \*

I walked the trail, miles and miles away from the RV and the Rooks that attacked it. The smell of nature and the shine of the sun was all around me, so infectious. The air that day wasn’t too humid, nor too dry. Not too hot, nor too cold. There was a faint smell of Chrysanthemums, a flower that had been my favorite since a young lad.

A couple walked by, both with large hiking backpacks. I approached them, giving them a warm, welcoming smile.

“Why hello there, isn’t it a lovely day?”

“Sure?” The woman looked at the man and then at the bloodstain on my shirt as if I were some sort of freak.

“I hate to beat around the bush, so I’ll just ask directly. Do you happen to have anything to spare? I just got attacked by a bunch of Rooks and had to leave behind almost everything except for the clothes on my back and a switchblade. I would be grateful for anything you are willing to leave behind.”

The man shrugged. "Sorry man, I don't think we have anything we can spare."

"That's alright." I gave off a lighthearted chuckle and patted him on the shoulder. In my pocket, I reached for the switchblade and pointed it directly at the man. "I'm sure you don't."

The man's face drained with color. He froze for a moment before throwing his pack in defeat and running away. The woman gawked at him before throwing her pack as well and running after him.

Despite being miles and miles away from the home I called the RV, I could still hear the kettle whistling its tune.

*Third Place  
Junior Short Story  
William Perkins*



## Senior Poetry

### the tenth pew

it was autumn  
and the air still carried that  
alabama summer in it  
how it seemed to burrow in the dry, burnt dirt,  
grab us by the throat,  
and smother out that ember-glow smolder  
until all that was left was the raw pulp  
of a well-worn despair that laid deep in  
    the pits of our tonsils,  
    the long-stemmed bronchi of our lungs sticky with  
humidity,  
    the forest of our strung-out and unwound vocal cords.  
those were the days of seafoam lockers and  
that stench of dust and sweat; when  
we bled white before we bled red  
those shallow-shaken lines where  
our flesh was pulled apart and  
we prayed for it to put back together  
    sitting by the half-dead honeysuckle bush  
    that bush where we kissed but never told  
    where sneaked past the fence to the  
    ditch where the rain water puddled like baptistry  
    that shallow, cool water where we washed out our own sins  
it was in that heavy air when  
sorrow was woven in between the  
sugars and the phosphates of our dna,  
desperation dripping from our desert-dry, sour-cracked lips,  
and deep cut and raw-worn skin around our  
crescent-less nails that dug deep in the near-mold of soft-skin  
oranges,

at the lunch table where neither of us ever said  
*i love you*,  
where we learned starvation,  
where we drowned in everything we never spoke,  
where we half-locked hands as if somehow  
that would heal us, that would *save us*  
from coughing up memories that neither of us wanted to  
remember:  
everyone who sunk their teeth into us like low-hanging  
fruit  
growing heavy on the wiry branches of the tree on the edge  
of eden.  
but we were not saviors,  
and honeysuckle was not communion,  
and even white blood stains.

*First Place  
Senior Poetry  
Colby Meeks*

## **Affectations of a Black Boy**

Eyes closed,

The World watches me.

I paint myself in

Colors,

Melting my skin of its

Color.

I am ashamed.

Donning the garbs of

Society,

I am finally seen.

I belong now,

Here in this space.

My smile is their own.

My hair is theirs.

My skin is still brown.

I am ashamed.

The box that belongs to me

Is a coffin.

The bed that belongs to me

Is the concrete.

The drink that belongs to me

Is my blood.

I am not ivory, though I long

To be.

I am ashamed.

I paint myself in

Colors,

Melting my skin of its

Color.

I am ashamed.

*Second Place  
Senior Poetry  
Bryan McNeal*

## the chronicles of learning to burn

i.

She dipped a finger  
into the scalding, white wax-  
a persistent scent of gardenia  
filling the stale air.  
she had never liked candles.

ii.

the same candles were used  
over the summer before junior year:  
cheap, a lingering taste of sweet flowers,  
the summer camp where crosses lined  
the walls,  
the shelves,  
and wherever else they could fit.  
incense filled the air  
leaving smoke to fog the rooms,  
turning days to weeks,  
creating a small taste of purgatory.

she wondered if this was how it felt  
to burn.

iii.

She was pushed to her knees and told to pray,  
to repent for an abundance of sins  
she was sure she'd never catch up to.  
instead, she reached out to the candle  
and tried to hold the flame,  
tried to become the wick  
and burn.

She was banned from candles for the next three weeks.

iv.

they told her to search  
for something that made her sacred,  
so she found it in the lips of her bunkmate  
and she burned.

v.

she soon came to realize  
that gardenias are the scent  
of damnation,  
and if it makes you feel sacred,  
perhaps it's not holy.

She, like the bush,  
burned.  
still She, like the bush,  
never turned to ash.

vi.

when She returned home in august  
her parents smiled, expectantly.  
she smiled back  
in a spiteful sense of blasphemy  
with a display of false faith,  
any lies for saving face,  
and a cheap, white, gardenia-scented  
candle  
that only ever taught her  
to burn.

*Third Place  
Senior Poetry  
Jillian Naylor*

## Senior Short Story

### Black Earth

In the plains of southern Minnesota, in the grip of a winter night, the wind crept along the ground toward a thicket. Though the sky was clear and no snow fell, the gusts carried with them pulsing tendrils of fine frost, held barely aloft, that gave body to the wind. Between bent and stunted trees, it slithered until parting around the little red cottage in the thicket. The wind whistled and hissed in the eaves, and a sign hanging above the door was thrown about by the gales.

*The Land is Kind*, read the sign. It knocked softly and steadily on the doorframe.

Kajsa struck a match and carefully lit a single candle, and the budding flame danced in the draft that ran through the room.

“Has it always been like this in the winter?” she asked.

Grandmother smiled and poured herself more tea with a shaking hand. They sat at the dining table, watching the snow soar over the ground outside. Beyond the barn and a couple lonesome birches, the fields stretched toward darkness. *Thump, thump* came the knock of the sign outside, and the picture frames on the shelves rattled each time the gusts crescendoed.

“Like what, dear?”

Kajsa shivered and breathed into her palms. “Restless. It always seemed so peaceful when I was little. Now all I can think about is the cold, and that wind.” She paused, listening to its sibilant howl. “Doesn’t it seem like it’s whispering something?”

The old woman set down her tea. “You’re definitely not the first person to hear voices in this wind, Kajsa,” she said quietly, barely audible over the din. “But it’s been a long time since they’ve actually said anything.”

“Said anything?” Kajsa repeated, yet Grandmother seemed not to hear her. She had turned her attention to a picture on the high shelf. In the frame stood Ebba, Kajsa’s mother and Grandmother’s only child. She leaned against a tractor and smiled

despite the muck on her overalls and the sweat on her brow. She was laughing at something behind the camera.

“Your mother was about as old as you are now when she came back to help with the farm,” the old woman began. “She returned from college and brought your father, Karl, and you were born not long after that. And now you’re coming back to take over. The wheel just keeps turning, I suppose.”

The wind faltered briefly, and the sign outside stopped its clamor. A relative silence fell uncomfortably over the cottage. No rattling picture frames or windowpanes, no hushed voices on the night air. The wind laid the snow down to rest on the fields, and Kajsa mulled over the thought of living her days out on the prairie, just as her mother had chosen to.

“How did Mom die?”

Grandmother started, having nearly drifted off to sleep. “What did you say?”

Kajsa met the woman’s gaze and asked again, “How did Mom die? You said you would tell me when I was older.”

A moment of frigid silence passed. Grandmother glanced at the picture, then out toward the dark horizon beyond the barn. She saw something that Kajsa could not.

“It started when the wind picked up again.”

Your mother had been back for a year. You were just born, and winter was coming fast. Karl, well, he’d never seen a winter in the countryside. A city boy he was, raised in Minneapolis where he and Ebba went to college. After graduation, they got hitched and moved to the farm.

But Ebba had to pester and prod for months until that man of hers finally agreed to come, stubborn as a mule he was. He probably knew what was good for him, though. Soon after he got here, I could tell that he wasn’t made for this life. His thumb was as black as coal, and every plant he tended to rotted before we could save it. Even the lilacs, the morning glories, the honeysuckle—your mother’s precious flowers—none of them made it through Ebba and Karl’s first spring on the farm.

That spring was also quiet. Fewer birds in the mornings, fewer bees in the afternoons. The loons never sang on the pond. Other animals grew nervous, too. The cat hissed at him, and



Nannie, the only dairy cow, once kicked him hard when he walked behind her. Broke his leg, she did, and we drove him to the hospital in Mankato. Ebba sobbed and sobbed, blubbering that it was her fault that they'd come to the farm. And that no-good man of hers? What did he do, after murdering the lilac bushes his wife picked from when she was no taller than my hip? After taking the morning glories from her mornings?

He agreed with her, told her that this land was no place for a man to live.

He was poison, Kajsa. He was arsenic in the water, seeping into the soil and killing off the summer.

Harvest time brought a poor crop, and the days grew ever shorter. Karl's leg was almost healthy again, but he moaned and complained and thwacked the dogs good with his crutches if they got in his way. Ebba seemed not to mind him, though. She'd just met you, her beautiful little Kajsa—not that you got near as much attention from your father, that great loaf of a hypochondriac.

Yet to Ebba, you were sweeter than all the flowers in Eden. She imagined you in a couple years' time, swimming in the pond and stargazing with her at night. You were her angel, and you shined so brightly that she seemed to forgive the world its every vice. Not even Karl bothered her anymore. I smiled every time I saw you both together—the scene always reminded me of Ebba when she was a girl, walking with me through the corn fields in the morning and doing cartwheels in the mud.

You kept her warm as winter came, but your father had nothing to thaw his soul. He grew restless as the sunset arrived earlier and earlier every evening. He felt trapped in this house, so far from the city and the people and the noise. I thought it was funny when you mentioned how loud the wind is, because Karl thought it was painfully quiet. He didn't know how we could bear the weight of such silence.

Once, after Ebba put you to sleep and went to bed herself, Karl and I sat up late on a night not unlike this one. We were in the living room while the wind shook the windowpanes and screamed about the eaves. Karl was becoming an insomniac, and he jumped in his chair every time the gales picked up or the cabinets rattled.

The gales kept blowing and blowing, but I've learned not to heed them. They're no threat—I know the land here won't hurt me.

Then he leapt up and cried, "What was that?"

"What was—" I began.

"Shh, be quiet." He stalked toward the window and peered out. "Listen!"

I only heard the wind, the same wind that filled every winter night. I stared at him, and I remember his hands, curled into fists, and the shaky breaths he took. He wouldn't rip his eyes from something in the distance.

"There!" he whispered. "Did you hear it? Someone's in the fields."

I carefully approached him. "I don't hear anything, Karl. It's just the wind."

"Shut up! I heard it, clear as day." His lip trembled, and he pressed a hand against the cold glass of the window. He stood there, still and cold as the frozen earth. The cottage was seldom so frigid. "They're calling for help... oh God, they're out there!"

"No one is out there, Karl."

But it was too late. He ran. He went to the back door, and the wind hurled it open as soon as he turned the handle. Then he was out the door, off into the fields. I heard him, his voice carried back faintly on the night air, "I'm coming! Stay there, I'm coming!" He ran and ran and ran, the billowing streams of snow curling up around him, ensnaring him, until the night took him. I didn't hear his voice ever again—only the hiss of the wind. His coat and scarf were still hanging on the rack beside the door.

The next morning, we set out in the pickup to look for him. We took you with us, bundled up tight in blanket after blanket, so we could keep an eye on you, and Ebba held you close while I drove. She wouldn't look away from you, not wanting to think of anything else, I reckon. She was afraid to.

Miles away from the farm, we found him. I called the police, and when they came, I told them as much as I knew. Ebba refused to speak with them, though. She took you in her arms and walked away from the whole scene. That morning was just as cold as the night had been, but she wore far too little—not that she seemed not to notice. Nor did she notice when her hat fell off, or

that you soon started crying. No, she simply stood at the edge of the road and looked out across the frozen fields, clutching you tight while you bawled and bawled. As I led her back to the car, her face seemed carved in marble—white, hard, and cold.

Grandmother paused. “Kajsa, dear, are you sure you want me to go on? It’s such a dreadful story.”

“No, please,” she replied softly. Kajsa felt somewhat like marble herself, numb and still, unsure of whether or not to trust her own ears. So many questions flooded her head, and she felt that she should be angry or upset or *something*. But she felt nothing except confusion. The wind had picked up and began again to build, competing for her attention. Her head seemed empty, and every little noise, every flicker of the candle, every word from Grandmother fought to fill it.

“I still want to know.”

The old woman sighed. “I figured.”

Well, your mother didn’t speak to me the rest of that day, and she never went to sleep during the night. She sat by your cradle upstairs and moved only to feed or change you. I came in every now and then to check on you both, to ask if there was anything I could do. But she simply sat there and stared at the wall—almost through it, through it and over the snowdrifts and all the way to that ditch where he had collapsed in the night and fought the cold until he could fight no more. Until that cold heart of his finally froze solid.

I don’t think I saw my daughter that night. She sat in the cottage, but her mind was elsewhere. I once took her hand during that day, and it was cool to the touch. I feared that you could no longer fight off the winter chill for her, and with Karl gone, well... I didn’t know what else could.

She loved that man, no matter how wretched he was. Ebba saw something in him that I never could, but it seeped into her just like his poison had taken hold of the land. It snuck inside her brain, inside her heart, and when he died so suddenly, the pieces of her that were now his died too. Hence the hollow look, and the hands and face like stone.

The next day, she hardly moved and hardly ate. As the second night after Karl’s death began to fall, I sat at this very table

with my knitting. Then I heard Ebba's footsteps banging down the stairs, a jarring break from the day's silence. She ran through the room, toward the window where the wind softly spoke.

"Ebba," I said quietly.

She smiled, a bittersweet grimace aimed at the swirling darkness and slithering gusts of snow above the ground. "You hear it, don't you?"

"It's just the wind."

"It's speaking. It's him, Mom. He just needs me to come help him, and then we'll be back together again—all three of us."

I stood carefully and approached her. "You've heard this land for years," I told her. "It's only ever been kind to you."

"It's not been kind to Karl!" Ebba snapped. "It hasn't been kind to him since he got here! So I'll find him and take Kajsa and we'll leave the farm. We'll go back to the cities. Karl said it himself—no one should live in this place."

I knew then that I was right. She was no longer my daughter, picking flowers and watching the stars, and the land knew it too.

I shook my head. "The land is kind to those who are kind to it first, and Karl was a monster."

And then she was gone. Ebba flew out the door and into the field, barefoot and calling out to the wind, which coiled around her like serpents and carried her over the ground. The frozen earth cut her feet as she ran, and the wind bit at her skin and hissed in her ears. She was gone, but Ebba herself had already left us earlier when she stood on the side of that road and clutched you to her chest. The land took what it thought rightfully belonged to the land.

Her body was never found.

Kajsa stood and grabbed her coat. The gusts outside swelled and the draft worsened. The candle flickered, danced, and faded suddenly into a wisp of smoke. "I have to go."

The frail woman pulled herself out of her chair. "Kajsa, dear?"

"I can't take the farm. I can't stay here. I have to go."

"But dear—"

“I’m leaving!” she yelled. “I can’t stand the cold or the isolation or the *wind* anymore, especially not after what this place has done.” She threw open the door and took a step outside.

The wind howled and squirmed, it slinked and slithered and coiled around her. It pierced her skin with ice and ripped the breath from her lungs as suddenly she felt a hand, just as cold, grip her wrist. Gasping, she whirled and saw Grandmother behind her, eyes wide in fear.

The wind cried out in a distant, echoing voice, “Help me, Kajsa!”

“Mom!”

“I’m here, all you have to do is help me! Please!”

The darkness closed in on the little red cottage in the thicket, and the warmth left its hearth. The sign clattered above the door, swinging and clamoring about the spot where it hung. The wind circled the farm and, like the snake, squeezed tight, drowning out the drum of life that beat within Eve’s chest.

*The Land Is Kind*, read the sign. *The Land Is Kind*.

*First Place*  
*Senior Short Story*  
*Calvin Engstrom*

## Fisherman

The air smelled musty. This was going to be a rough night. Lee sat on the deck watching the fog slowly roll in, enveloping the horizon until there was nothing but grey. The salt air was so heavy that he could barely breathe. Lee stroked his chin, the feel of his beard still unfamiliar. He tried in vain to wipe the sleep from his eyes. Lee's boots squeaked as he made his way across the deck. The polished wood was getting more slippery with every passing day.

He went about his tasks with the same, comfortable monotony. Some birds in the sky drew his attention. Lee looked up, always fascinated by the gulls. The grey birds blended in with the fog, their large numbers obscured by the darkness. Two birds at the back of the pack caught his eye. They were not light and joyful like the others.

The two crows descended toward the boat like graceful angels of darkness. As they landed on the railing, Lee could see their dark coats shining in the dim light. When the gulls finally passed away and all was quiet, several crows emerged from the darkness of the water to sit with their brothers.

Lee counted nine in total. He stood on the deck looking at the birds for quite a while. They drew a stark contrast against the calm, grey sea. He had to untie the rope upon which they sat, but he didn't want his new companions to go away. Finally, the crows left the perch of their own accord and Lee went back to his routine.

The crows did not leave entirely. Instead, they flew in circles around Lee's boat. Some flew faster than others, some flew lower than the others, but each bird kept a constant, steady pace and even route.

Their cawing and squawking annoyed Lee at first, but like all noises of the ocean, he grew used to it after a few minutes. Their sharp voices joined the orchestra of the sea that constantly provided Lee with cacophonous music. Lee went on in this manner for some time, doing his work and occasionally looking up at the birds.

It was about midnight when the crows left. The world was almost black, and the fog had settled in, thicker than ever. The ocean was still as glass and there was no other sound but Lee's breath.

A squeak sounded from the other side of the deck. The hair on the back of Lee's neck stood up. There was a pounding in his chest. The constant pit in Lee's stomach grew. He had heard sailors tell stories of ghosts and apparitions. They spun tales of strange visitors appearing in the middle of the ocean. Lee had never listened to those men, dismissing them as lunatics afraid of the sea. Now he wished he'd listened. He longed to know how to face whatever was waiting for him when he spun around.

There was nothing. Lee sighed in relief. It must've been a mouse, though he doubted that any still lived on his ship. Lee smiled and looked out at the icy sea.

A pale face started at him from out of the waters. Her white veil floated around her, gentle as seafoam. She would have been beautiful, if it weren't for the murderous look in her eyes.

Lee screamed and fell back onto the deck. As his cry reverberated into the silence, his breath became steadier. The reality of his own voice chased the delusion out of his mind. He had been out here too long; he was starting to imagine things.

Lee slowly got back up, the face was nowhere to be seen. He started at his knot again, his motions were careful and exaggerated. When Lee had finished his knot, he threw his net into the sea. Satisfied with his work, Lee watched his net drift down into the unknown.

Only, his net didn't sink. It seemed to be caught on something. Something big. *Great*, thought Lee, *That's just what I need. A shark ruining my last net.*

Lee watched helplessly as the creature wriggled about in the net, its white body thrashing this way and that. There was something about the creature, the way it moved with such grace, that intrigued Lee. Its body flowed about in the water like the tentacles of a jellyfish.

Lee leaned in closer, dying to get a closer look. That was when he saw that this creature of yore was, in fact, no creature at all.

The woman's face appeared at last, obscured by the many folds of her gown. She had finally made her way out of the net and began to use it as a ladder, climbing up the side of the ship.

Lee scampered away, hoping she would disappear like before. His entire body trembled. It seemed as if the cold had seeped into his bones.

Lee closed his eyes and took a deep breath. *Dear Lord, he prayed, Give me sanity! I care not when or how I die, but please, keep my mind in one piece as I still walk the earth!*

Prying open his eyes as slowly as possible, Lee looked around the ship. His prayers had been answered. The strange apparition had gone.

Water dripped onto Lee's face. The last thing he needed was rain. He looked up to see a soaked rope dangling above his head. The other end of the rope hung around the bruised neck of a woman. She smiled down at him lovingly. He was tempted to trust her.

Lee was frozen in place. All he could do was watch as the apparition leaned closer to him. Her pale lips, once ruby red, brushed his forehead. As she did, Lee closed his eyes. His mind was suddenly filled with visions of another life. There was a beautiful house, it was enveloped in flame. A handsome man lay dead in a coffin. Lee saw a quaint room and felt a shiver run down his spine. He didn't know what it was, but there was something about this place, something terrible had happened there.

Lee wrenched open his eyes. He didn't want to know another thing about this strange woman. She was a monster. She was the reason that sailors feared the sea, the reason men cried out from their nightmares, the reason that everyone had told him not to embark on this journey.

They said that many fearless men had sailed out into this sea. All had the courage of lions, and yet, when faced with the terrors of the sea, they cowered and died as fools. Lee now saw how silly he was. If these brave men perished here, how could he, a man of many fears, possibly survive?



No. He would not die a coward. He would not succumb to the fears that threatened to drown him. He would not let his boat be taken without a fight. Lee reached up and grabbed the rope that hung from the apparition's neck. As hard as he could, he pulled down, slamming her delicate face into the deck. He scampered to his feet before she could, ready for whatever she might throw at him.

In a motion too swift for the human eye to detect, the apparition was up. Her beautiful face was smeared with a red and purple bruise. Despite her injury, the apparition still smiled her cruel and beautiful smile. She walked toward Lee with the grace of a lion. Before he could stop her, the apparition had her hands on Lee's throat.

This is not what he thought being strangled would feel like. His mouth burned and nausea crept into his stomach. His knees wobbled and his head pounded. His whole body ached and shook as his heart beat faster, but Lee's breath continued to flow. Even as her slender fingers closed around his throat, air still filled his lungs.

Lee's eyes moved rapidly over the woman, searching for some weakness. He found nothing. Finally, Lee had to resort to his last method of defense and began to thrash wildly, kicking at her shins in the process. He could only hope she was wearing heels.

The apparition shook a bit, but her grip held firm. She had to take a few steps back to avoid losing her hold on Lee's neck. Lee watched her steps carefully. He looked at the posts on the railing and began to count in his mind, *One. Two. Three. Four. Five.*

Once the apparition was lined up with the fifth post, Lee kicked his feet back and swung hard, landing one final blow. His calculations had been correct. The apparition's heel-clad feet slipped on the deck. The fish oil that Lee had spilled there a few days earlier sealed her fate.

The woman hit the deck hard. A loud clap rang out in the silence as her small body hit the stiff wood. Her body went limp and, as she slid off of the deck, Lee thought of how similar she looked to a dead eel.

Lee watched giddily as her body slid down into the ocean without a splash. Her white dress took on a blue tint as she was enveloped by the water. Lee's heart swelled with satisfaction. Now that her hands were no longer on his neck, his strength was returning, but so was the woman.

Her pale face rose out of the depths, stronger than ever. Her smile seemed more vengeful this time. This woman was a plague on the sea. She had to be destroyed. Lee watched her for a moment, waiting for her to come onto the deck, but it was his turn now. Adrenaline coursed through his veins.

His boots pounded on the deck. He wasn't concerned with the slickness now. He climbed the rails with ease and catapulted off. Lee's hands led him as he dove downward. They caught her neck as he plunged into the sea. The water was colder than he would've thought.

Lee pried his eyes open. His face felt wet, though he didn't know if it was sweat or water. He assumed it must've been sweat, for his heart was still racing. Lee looked around and found that he was lying face down on the deck of his ship. The fog hanging out at sea mimicked the one in his head. As Lee rose, he found that his joints were stiff and muscles sore. As he looked over the railing, he found his boat was tied up in the harbor. There was not a single soul on the docks around him. Only two black crows staring down at him from the mast.

*Second Place  
Senior Short Story  
Elisabeth Mayfield*

## Midnight Voyage

Entering the room, I was in a daze. A slow breeze blew hair in my eyes. Looking up, I saw the sea. Its beauty mesmerized and drew me in like a fish trapped in a net. Nothing could keep me from moving towards her. With every step I took, the marble floor beneath me became more like sand, and the room around me darkened. My feet faltered a bit with the change of ground, but I continued moving forward at a steady pace. At the edge of the water, I stopped and stood in awe at the masterpiece before me.

Glancing around, there were no birds above or creatures below. I was alone but did not feel alone. The sea was my friend, and the waves were her children. With open arms, the black waves beckoned me into a world that was not my own. Its blue caps and foam glinted in the moonlight as they raced towards me. They danced and tumbled in beautiful harmony creating a symphony like no other. I longed to join them in their joyous midnight dance and to revel in their music. I wanted to immerse myself in the sea's watery embrace.

I stepped forward to meet her. Her watery fingers reached out to touch my feet but quickly retracted. Not knowing why she did so, I began to wonder what I had done wrong. On the blue horizon, I saw a shadowy figure appear. Inch by inch, the sea started to bring it across herself to me. As it moved near, the figure took the shape of a boat. At that moment, I realized why she had retracted earlier. The sea knew that as a mortal, I would die in her arms, so she found a vessel capable of assisting us in our dilemma. Studying the boat's structure, I saw that its deck was long and broad, and the billowing sails draped low. The boat waded up to the shore and invited me to come aboard.

Once I was on board, the sea pushed it off. The breeze began to blow as the boat gained speed. The waves raced along and playfully hit the boat's sides creating a mist. Lifting my head, the sea's salty spray kissed my face. I laughed and began to dance with the sea from the deck. The creaking of the boards under my feet added to the ocean's midnight symphony.

When the music came to a close, the moon peered out from behind his cloud. I smiled and invited him to join our fun. Being a dear friend of the sea, he could not resist. He smiled back and began to run between the stars. The waves jumped for joy at the sight. The sea gathered them around the boat and put their energy to use. Soon, the boat was pursuing the old moon at a remarkable speed, which man alone could not achieve. Peering over the side of the boat, it seemed as though it was flying. Closing my eyes, I threw my arms open and for a few seconds felt as though I was the one running between the stars.

Abruptly, the boat stopped, and I tumbled forward into the mast. Rubbing my sore head, I sat up and saw the moon above. We had finally caught up to him. Letting out a big yawn, he wished us well and returned to his cloud. Getting up, I paced the deck once more.

As I drew in a deep breath, I gave one long look around me. I wanted to stay here forever. I loved this place and the companionship that I had found. Knowing that I had to return home, I searched the boat to see if I could take something with me to remember my time here, but there was nothing on board. A big wave splashed over the deck and left a small shell behind. Picking up the shell, I put it to my ear and heard the sea's symphony. I rolled it around in my hands and marveled at how the shell's design resembled the waves. The quiet beauty that surrounded the boat was forever stored inside this shell.

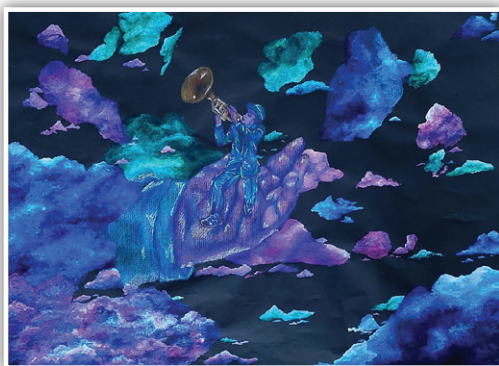
Dawn approached and stole room from the moon in the sky. Putting the shell in my pocket, I leaned over the side of the boat and asked the sea to take me back to the shore. After I was off the boat, the sea took it back to the horizon. I shed a tear and opened my eyes. It all laid lifeless before me. My friend was not real. I stepped back and looked around at the bright creme walls. The buzz of people filled my ears. I was surrounded but so alone. As I walked away, I looked back and waved goodbye to my friend, the ocean trapped in the painting on that gallery wall.

*Third Place  
Senior Short Story  
Chole Todd*

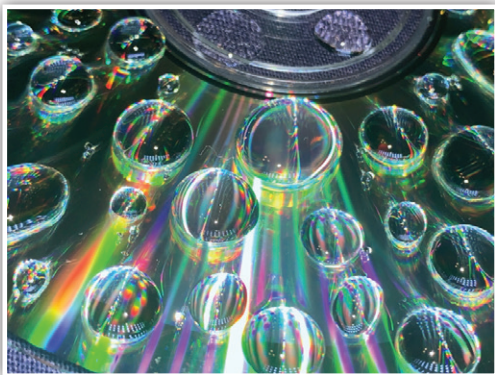




Front Cover:  
First Place  
*Retro Happiness*  
by Emma Hardy



Upper Back Cover:  
2nd Place  
*Trumpet Man*  
by Anaya Chambers



Lower Back Cover:  
3rd Place  
*Kaleidoscope*  
by Georgia White



