Oakwood
2004
Prose
Wasted Generation
   Nancy Kneip
Like the Moon
   Heidi Mayer
The Hunted
   Katie Pavel
You Lose Some
   Bethany Schlaikjer
Portrait of Helen in Red
   Berit Soli-Holt
Sabbath Day: A Memoir of Suicidal Depression
   Colleen N. Stein

Poetry
Old Woman
   Heidi Jo Mayer
Geisha Girl
   Heidi Jo Mayer
Colors of Life
   Nancy Kneip
I’m Sorry
   Kristin Marthaler
You Think Too Much of Me
   Josh Moore
Good Friends
   Katie Pavel
Bookmark
   Joseph L. Pikul Jr.
Apostle
   Thomas Martin
Dog Eyes
   Joseph L. Pikul Jr.
Haiku
   Chad Robinson
Sax: Living Blues
   Joseph L. Pikul Jr.
Under Alfalfa Hay
   Joseph L. Pikul Jr.
I Live at the End of a Sentence
   Berit J. Soli-Holt
Haiku
   Chad Robinson
Upon Seeing a Ghost in Scobey Hall
   Jennifer Reisch
Haiku
   Chad Robinson
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cover Girl</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiku</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiku</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind Faith</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is Watching</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiku</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Broadcast</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’ Be Joyful</td>
<td>67-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stray Cat</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beggar’s Lament</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Man in My Dreams</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmented</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Messiah is Finally Here: a Rant</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witherington</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessings</td>
<td>78-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vulture</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Wind And Fire</td>
<td>81-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Rose</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train-Striped Overalls</td>
<td>91-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someday</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd Shaped Box</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fallen</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Winter Fun**
- Melissa Ross

**Unwanted Child**
- Alana Black Bird
- Amanda Kern

**Life in it’s Entirety**
- Emily Brake

**Art**
- Light on the Water
  - Rebecca Hopp
- Three
  - Rebecca Hopp
- Untitled
  - Ryan Nelson
- Fear Stalks the Land
  - Ryan Nelson
- A New Choice
  - Rebecca Hopp
- Away
  - Rebecca Hopp
- Bee
  - Garrett Rahm
- Ill-usion
  - Rebecca Hopp
- Cupid and Psyche
  - Klaiire Lockhart-Beilke
- Birds
  - Garrett Rahm
- Athena
  - Klaiire Lockhart-Beilke
- July 20 Storm
  - Garrett Rahm
- An Opening
  - Rebecca Hopp
- New Years
  - Garrett Rahm
- Pheasant
  - Garrett Rahm
- The Face
  - Klaiire Lockhart-Beilke
- Fallen
  - Rebecca Hopp
Wasted Generation
Nancy Kneip

My professor is saying something about how words have power, but I can’t seem to be able to concentrate today. My mind wanders at the slightest provocation. As I glance toward the window, I am confronted with the plainness of winter. The way the whole world seems to blend into one big, grayish-brown blob. Last night it all seemed so pretty. The white snow reflecting the lights of the city as we drove around in my beater of a truck trying to find a place to party. My phone rang, and after a quick discussion we were headed across town to one of the local trailer courts. “There’s a kegger,” Josh explained. We didn’t need to hear anything else before we had made up our minds.

I suppose that the doorman could have been a clue. Well into his forties, the man’s eyes had lingered on my chest before taking my five dollars. I already felt like I had to take a shower, and I hadn’t even entered the party. But, as I walked in, all I could see ahead of me was a hazy line of college kids standing around looking either for a place to sit or for the alcohol. I suppose that it seemed normal enough.

As I glanced around, my eyes strayed into the living room of the spacious double wide trailer. Immediately, I couldn’t help but notice two little children trying to sleep through the chaos. I stood there for a minute, looking at the little children, wondering why they were there. In an instant, the whole party took on a different tone, and I couldn’t help but gape.

One of the girls looked to be about seven years old. Her greasy, dirty blonde hair was spread on a pillow that she was using to try to cover her ears while the t-shirt she wore was not quite big enough to cover her faded pink underwear. She had her knees tucked up underneath her and each of her socks, one white and one gray, had holes in them. Every now and then, I could hear her sigh over the din of the party.

The other girl was younger, maybe four or five. She lay next to her sister on the grimy floor of this one-room “home.” She had the same stringy blonde hair as her sister but it was her eyes that struck me. In place of the innocent blue eyes I expected, I found hazel. I was immediately reminded of myself as a child. For a moment, we exchanged our thoughts and in a glance I could see what she was thinking just as clearly as she could read my reflections. There was a girl, as dirty as the floor on which she laid, yet her eyes shone fiercely. Like the last embers of a fire, she refused to be snuffed out by her surroundings. Filled with shame at being at the party and the hideousness of the situation, I looked away.
My attention snaps back to the classroom as my teacher asks me if I have any favorite words. “Ummm…” I say, searching for an answer. Kyle, one of the boys known for being rowdy, decides to pipe up, “I have a favorite word. It’s breasts.” We all roll our eyes and wonder when he is going to realize that he’s in college. Yet, we all laugh at his joke.

Over everyone else’s laugh I hear one girl’s. It is high pitched, and seems to echo that which I had heard last night as I turned to leave the party. My reflections about the children had been broken by the shrill cackling of the woman I presume was their mother. She looked to be about forty years old, but it was hard for me to tell because of the prematurely wrinkled skin and crooked yellowed teeth. In between her tightly pressed garishly red lips, there was a cigarette. It was dangling there precariously, and I still cannot picture the woman without it. The ashes fell silently to the floor, but the woman seemed not to notice. She was merely adding to the layer of filth on which the two children laid. Her hair, a faded and dyed red, was piled on the top of her head like a crown. Her robe fell over everyone else, but it was hard for me to tell because of the prematurely wrinkled skin and crooked yellowed teeth. In between her tightly pressed garishly red lips, there was a cigarette. It was dangling there precariously, and I still cannot picture the woman without it. The ashes fell silently to the floor, but the woman seemed not to notice. She was merely adding to the layer of filth on which the two children laid. Her hair, a faded and dyed red, was piled on the top of her head like a crown. Her robe was a tattered Harley Davidson shirt that revealed the rolls of her bulging stomach. In her hand, she held her scepter, a beer bong, as she slurred, “Who’s next? Step right up!” She looked at me, her hazel eyes trying hard to focus through their alcohol induced stupor, “How about you girl? You look like you’re ready.”

“No thanks,” I responded curtly, as I found myself unwillingly glance toward the young girl. She had hid her head in the pillow.

Somehow, the rest of the people seemed not to notice these anomalies. They walked around them like they would a piece of furniture and continued on with their games. They had paid their five dollars and were ready to get their money’s worth. I looked ahead of me to see yet another person bonging beer while they were playing a game at the table. A group of people had gathered in a circle around the old, splintered thing, and they were taking turns tracing their fingers along the cheekbone of the person next to them. One young man had his eyes closed. Incredibly wasted, he had ash on his face from the woman whose thumb traced his cheek. Everyone around him snickered nefariously as they wondered how long it would take him to notice that they were playing a trick on him. At a normal party, I too would have probably found the situation humorous. There, it only seemed to add to the grimy atmosphere.

“Some words,” the teacher is saying “can mean different things in different situations. I know you’re all mature, except maybe Kyle, so I’ll give you a mature word. Take the word bitch. When used to describe a female dog, it has no negative connotation. But, if the word is used to describe a woman…”

I watched helplessly as one drunk boy stumbles over the girls. The mother yelled across the room as she pulled herself out of her chair. “Goddamnit girls! I thought I told you to stay out of the way!” She managed to stagger over to them. Gripping the younger girl by her arm, she threw her across the room. I heard her whimper as she fell to the floor. Just as she was about to pick up the second child, I opened my mouth to yell in protest. But before I could say a thing the doorman had come in and decided to take matters into his own hands. “Trudy, what the hell are you doin? You want to get us in trouble?” he asked—not yelling, but speaking with an authority no one else was able to command. So, instead of tossing the other girl, the woman simply glared at her and moved back toward her game.

Finally, unable to stomach any more of the party, I went to look for my friends and leave. Yet, as I headed out the door, I couldn’t help but glance back toward the younger girl. She looked at me as if pleading. It’s as though she knew that I found the situation as offensive as she. I stood there, and could almost see her entire future spread out before her. At once, I saw her soar above her current situation. Incredibly wasted, she had paid their five dollars and were ready to get their money’s worth. I looked ahead of me to see yet another person bonging beer while they were playing a game at the table. A group of people had gathered in a circle around the old, splintered thing, and they were taking turns tracing their fingers along the cheekbone of the person next to them. One young man had his eyes closed. Incredibly wasted, he had ash on his face from the woman whose thumb traced his cheek. Everyone around him snickered nefariously as they wondered how long it would take him to notice that they were playing a trick on him. At a normal party, I too would have probably found the situation humorous. There, it only seemed to add to the grimy atmosphere.

“They’re just kids,” the teacher is saying “can mean different things in different situations. I know you’re all mature, except maybe Kyle, so I’ll give you a mature word. Take the word bitch. When used to describe a female dog, it has no negative connotation. But, if the word is used to describe a woman…”

I watched helplessly as one drunk boy stumbles over the girls. The mother yelled across the room as she pulled herself out of her chair. “Goddamnit girls! I thought I told you to stay out of the way!” She managed to stagger over to them. Gripping the younger girl by her arm, she threw her across the room. I heard her whimper as she fell to the floor. Just as she was about to pick up the second child, I opened my mouth to yell in protest. But before I could say a thing the doorman had come in and decided to take matters into his own hands. “Trudy, what the hell are you doin? You want to get us in trouble?” he asked—not yelling, but speaking with an authority no one else was able to command. So, instead of tossing the other girl, the woman simply glared at her and moved back toward her game.

Finally, unable to stomach any more of the party, I went to look for my friends and leave. Yet, as I headed out the door, I couldn’t help but glance back toward the younger girl. She looked at me as if pleading. It’s as though she knew that I found the situation as offensive as she. I stood there, and could almost see her entire future spread out before her. At once, I saw her soar above her current situation. Incredibly wasted, she had paid their five dollars and were ready to get their money’s worth. I looked ahead of me to see yet another person bonging beer while they were playing a game at the table. A group of people had gathered in a circle around the old, splintered thing, and they were taking turns tracing their fingers along the cheekbone of the person next to them. One young man had his eyes closed. Incredibly wasted, he had ash on his face from the woman whose thumb traced his cheek. Everyone around him snickered nefariously as they wondered how long it would take him to notice that they were playing a trick on him. At a normal party, I too would have probably found the situation humorous. There, it only seemed to add to the grimy atmosphere.

“Some words,” the teacher is saying “can mean different things in different situations. I know you’re all mature, except maybe Kyle, so I’ll give you a mature word. Take the word bitch. When used to describe a female dog, it has no negative connotation. But, if the word is used to describe a woman…”
Like the Moon
Heidi Mayer

I'd like to say that the chances of two little girls coming across such ugliness were small. I'd be lying. Truth is that in those days we lived in the ugliness. We watched it day after day. We watched it on the playground and the streets. We heard it discussed in the evening through the steam rising out of coffee cups and in the back corners of bars after a few empty glasses lined the table. It had been going on for generations, and I guess it still goes on. This is just a sliver of what it was, but at least we did out bit to fight it.

Her mother died giving birth to the twin boys who would have been her only siblings. The three were buried together on a rainy day when Kamaria was four. The Negro child held her father's hand to watch the rainwater pull through the walls of the grave, staining the yellow pine box red.

This would not be her only sorrow.

I was six and my sister, Lydia, was nine when my mother hired Kamaria to help with the laundry and cooking. She was fifteen at the time, but her tiny dark figure looked no more than twelve. She could go hours without speaking and yet her face was alive with thought. There was no idleness there, but a presence in her silence. Sometimes she would bring my mother the few eggs she could spare off her chickens to sell. She would carry them in her apron pockets, and I was always amazed at how large they looked against her waist.

One hot summer night, Lydia dared me out into the darkness of our yard. There was nothing to fear except the darkness. Our house sat contently in the center of town, large and white surrounded by a sprawling and manicured lawn. The town it sat within was small and my father its only physician and my mother intricately involved with its society events. However safe, a child's mind creates many monsters where none exist. It was these monsters that sent me scampering back towards the light of the house. Frightened, I fell.

Kamaria was in the kitchen cleaning up the supper dishes. I cried as red beads of blood swelled on my palms. She drew me next to her to wipe them clean. I had never known such gentleness. There was a connection with us after that—a thread that would bind us. She became my confidant and friend.

The town, the state, the region was hot with segregation and anger over the loss of the war. Kamaria became my lens through which to see what I would not have otherwise understood. Through her, my child eyes would see her people as people—while the rest of the South saw...
slaves. She became my guide into the injustice of the time. She told me once, early in the summer, that her name meant “like the moon.” She was. Never was there such a glow in such darkness.

Kamaria began working for us on a morning in June. It was a morning in September when it happened. We found her behind the house. Mother pushed us inside, but not before I could see the finger marks that wound around her wrists and the blood seeping through the front of her skirts. She looked very small.

It did not take long for her stomach to swell with child.

A few months later, her father stopped to tell my mother Kamaria was ill and would not be to work. That evening Mother gave Lydia and I a loaf of bread and a few pieces of meat to take to her. The tiny house she shared with her father was nestled just beyond the edge of town in a grove of willows. We cut across the backyards of our neighbors, making the distance no more than a few blocks.

The early evening air was still and the voices from her yard moved out into the twilight without resistance. From the road, we could see two figures in the yard. The dark curved figure of Kamaria and another, masculine and blond. The son of the butcher.

We were nearly to her gate, hiding ourselves in the lengthening shadows. The chickens by her squawked, pulling themselves into staccatoed flight. She had been gathering eggs. Her palm still curved around one, smooth and brown between her fingers.

He slapped her, “Whore.”

She cried, pulling her arms across her stomach.

“You wanted it then. You made me. Just wanted a little white in ya. I’ll kill you first.”

He pushed her. Hard. She fell on her side and pulled her knees up to her. He kicked her over and over.

Lydia turned and staggered back towards town. Later, she’d come back with our father and Kamaria’s.

I wouldn’t leave. I swore it. I struggled forward, my body rigid with fear and anger. I clenched my hands and pounded on his back, screaming to leave her alone. Her turned long enough to slap me. The force of it laid me next to her.

I saw him spit on her twice before he left.

Kamaria’s body convulsed over and over. Pushing out the bloody mass which would have been her child. I held her hand, and smoothed her hair, but I don’t think she was there.
Having lived on the East Coast for the past five years, she hadn't realized how much she had missed the towering monoliths of the Rockies, giants compared to the rolling green mounds of the Appalachians. Not that she didn't like Washington, D.C.. Her job as photographer for the National Geographic Society had given her the chance to travel the far reaches of the world—the African Sahara, Russia tundra, and Argentine plains, for instance—and this was something she knew she could not have passed up. Yet even so, whenever Kim found herself driving along the lonesome highways of Wyoming, she felt the most at home. There just was no place to compare to the endless expanse of rugged prairie and the jagged, granite peaks of the Tetons. Therefore, when the assignment of photographing a pack of newly introduced wolves in Yellowstone had come up, Kim had immediately jumped at the opportunity.

The ranger station was hidden deeply within the mountains of the park, and it had taken Kim several hours to drive from Jackson to the post. She was stiff from sitting for too long and slowly climbed out of her silver Ranger. The scent of pine and wood smoke floated about her in the autumn wind, and she instantly felt revived. Distant memories filled her head with images of camping within those very woods and hiking the endless miles of trail. The cool air bit through her light flannel shirt, and she pulled on a thick sweater and then her lined, navy jacket. She then grabbed her backpack and camera bag form the pickup and entered the station.

“Good morning,” she said to a heavyset man, who was dressed in the usual forest ranger attire. “I'm Kim Clarkson from...”

“National Geographic,” the man finished. He stood and sauntered over towards the counter, asking her if she wanted coffee. She politely declined. He poured a cup for himself and settle back down on his swivel chair. “You’re causing quite a stir here, you know that?“ he droned. “Normally, we get magazine people who want a short story about the release, maybe a photo or two of the wolves we've got in captivity. But to go out and spend a couple of days in the wild? Now, that's going to be interesting.”

Kim smiled tentatively and shifted her backpack. “Why is that?”

“Oh, you know, it's just that these wolves won't be easy to find. Sure, we've got tracking devices on them, but even then they are known to hide from the surveyors on occasion. You might see them, but then you might not.”
“Well, we’re going to try,” a deep voice responded from behind her.

Kim turned to find a tall, rough-looking man smiling wryly and looking down at her through striking brown eyes. Instead of the ranger uniform, he was dressed in faded blue jeans, a hooded sweatshirt, and a deep gray Columbia jacket. His unruly hair was hidden mostly beneath a baseball cap, except for a few dark strands that curled slightly at his ears and the base of his neck. He had a two-day growth of stubble and a slightly crooked nose, perhaps from one too many fights as a kid. Before he even introduced himself, Kim had already guessed that this was Ty Daniels, her guide for the next couple of days.

The two discussed the events for their journey and then headed for a ranger truck. Ty took Kim’s pack and placed it in the bed, alongside his own. They then climbed in the truck and headed down a gravel road that led into the depths of the forest. Before long, the road had diminished to two ruts, not even that in places, as they bumped over rocks and skirted cliffs. They drove for about an hour, mostly in quiet contemplation, for Kim was deep in thought about what the ranger back at the station had told her. She had been so excited about this assignment. What if it didn’t work out?

“Don’t be worried about what Harry said,” Ty said, finally breaking the silence.

Kim almost jumped, finally driven from her reverie. “I’m sorry,” she apologized, realizing how impolite she was being by not carrying conversation. Ty simply grinned. “If there’s one thing I’m good at, it’s tracking. We’ll hunt down a pack or two. Don’t worry. You’ll get plenty of shots.”

“How close will we be able to get?”

“Depends. Probably fairly close, within a hundred yards or so for sure. The wolves are wild, but they got some exposure to humans during captivity and they really have no reason to be seriously afraid of us.”

“Isn’t that bad?”

“You mean for us? No. They’re still wary. They won’t try to come up to us or attack us or anything. Even so, I’ll bring my bow along, just in case.”

“You don’t hunt with a gun?” Kim asked curiously. She had noticed when she climbed into the truck that only a long bow hung from the rack behind their heads.

Ty shrugged. “I do both. I’ve just gotten to like bow hunting more. It’s quieter, but just as effective, and it takes more skill. Anyone can shoot a gun at something and hit it, but it takes practice to kill cleanly with an arrow.” He reached under the seat and pulled out a bag of arrows, bound together with twine. Handing them to Kim, he allowed her to pull one out and study it. The edges of the arrow gleamed in the hazy sunlight. It was sharp beyond reasoning.

“Speaking of protection, do you have anything along with you?” Ty asked.

Kim shook her head.

Reaching down, he pulled at a belt that was bound about his left calf. He handed her a long hunting knife encased in a black sheath. It was six inches long and was nearly as sharp as the arrow that she had just looked at. She stared at it, almost afraid to touch such a deadly weapon. “Are you sure I’ll really need this?” she asked, hesitantly strapping it to her own leg.

Ty shrugged. “Probably not. But better to be safe than sorry.”

They came to the end of the road, which by now was only a continuous opening through the trees. Ty stopped the truck and turned the key. “We’ll have to hike the rest of the way. We should reach the wolves’ main territory by nightfall.”

They climbed out and gathered their packs and other gear. Then they headed off through the woods, climbing up and down one rugged hill to the next. They hiked through much of the day, pausing only for lunch and a quick break. By late afternoon, the sun was beginning to dip behind the tall hill before them and Kim was tired and sore beyond anything she had ever felt before. Even so, she remained undaunted. Ty had seen wolf tracks along the bottom of the last ravine they had crossed. About six or seven wolves he had estimated, a healthy pack. As darkness fell amongst the trees, they made camp and settled in for the night. The last thing Kim remembered as she drifted off to sleep was the howling of wolves from a distant Northern hill.

Before the sun had risen far into the sky, they were already up and heading north along a steep crest overlooking a wide meadow. A den was located along the farthest edge of the meadow to their left. They passed swiftly through the trees, hanging along the edges of the shadows and gazing out into the ever-brightening sunlight. Suddenly, Ty halted and sank against a tree. He turned to Kim, A huge grin on his face, and pointed. Kim followed. Before the sun had risen far into the sky, they were already up and heading north along a steep crest overlooking a wide meadow. A den was located along the farthest edge of the meadow to their left. They passed swiftly through the trees, hanging along the edges of the shadows and gazing out into the ever-brightening sunlight. Suddenly, Ty halted and sank against a tree. He turned to Kim, A huge grin on his face, and pointed. Kim followed his gesture and smiled excitedly. About a hundred yards away, a pack of...
four adults and three juveniles were lazing about and playing around a hollow mound of rock and earth. They seemed oblivious to their observers. Kim quickly removed her camera from its case and started shooting away. She changed lenses several times, getting close ups, group shots, and even scenic with the surrounding trees and mountains in the background. Before she knew it, she had completely used up an entire roll of film, and she quickly bent over her camera, changing from one roll to the next.

As she was doing so, one of the wolves, a huge male, rose and trotted off into the trees behind the den. He paused momentarily at the top of the hill and looked down at the meadow. Kim glanced up at the beautiful animal, and she got an eerie sense that the wolf had spotted them and was watching them closely. But then it turned and, trotting quickly, disappeared over the ridge.

Ty suggested that they follow the wolf, and they quickly skirted the meadow and started climbing the hill towards where it had disappeared. It was more rugged here and steeper and it was half an hour before they had reached the top of the hill. Quite winded from their hasty excursion, they paused for a moment and then slowly eased down the other side of the ridge towards a small stream that ran swiftly through the valley below them. There was no sign of the wolf anywhere.

Ty stopped and scanned the area around them. "You might as well wait here," he said, "I'll search down by that stream. If he crossed it, I'll be able to pick up his track."

Kim nodded and dumped her pack onto the ground. She sat down on the hillside and relaxed for a moment, taking in the smells of pine, dirt, and rock. Ty was nearly to the bottom of the hill and was already surveying the area, looking for paw prints in the muddy banks of the stream. Fading sunlight floated down through the branches and bounced in patches off his cap and shoulders before he disappeared amongst the thick brush and trees lining the water.

Kim was changing lenses on her camera when she realized that she was being watched. She looked to her left and right, but there was nothing but forest and fading sunlight. Then she glanced up the hill behind her and froze. The wolf stood at the crest of the hill about twenty yards above her. Its cold, yellow eyes gazed at her with an intensity she had never seen. Her eyes shot down the hill, searching for Ty, But he was nowhere in sight. Now what? All she had was the hunting knife. She gripped her camera, wondering for an instant if throwing it at the animal would frighten it away. She almost laughed out loud.

Neither of them moved. Kim's heart drummed within her chest, the
beats rising up into her throat, the rhythm echoing in her ears. She began to wonder what the wolf was thinking. It continued to stare at her and its ears moved slightly, listening to her every breath, yet it showed no signs of hostility. It seemed to simply be regarding her as any other normal object of its world, but whether friend of food, Kim could not decide. She slowly shifted her feet beneath her until she was facing the wolf in a crouching position, but even then the animal did nothing.

After several minutes, she realized that she was still holding her camera. She glanced down at it and then back at the wolf. Silently, she raised the camera to her eyes and trained the telephoto lens on the animal. Its features became strikingly clear and she saw the wolf as if it was only a couple of feet from her. Its eyes stared straight down the lens at her, and she gasped at their powerful coldness. She quickly lowered her camera, half expecting the wolf to be right before her. Then taking a deep breath, she again raised the camera and focused on the animal's head. She paused for a moment and then...click.

The wolf's eyes flashed at the strange sound; its hair bristled momentarily and its lips curled back, revealing sharp, yellow teeth. But it did nothing more, and Kim continued to cautiously snap pictures of the beautifully dangerous animal. At the click of the sixth photo, the wolf seemed to have become tired of their stand off. It turned and slowly sauntered across the ridge and then down the hill on her right, disappearing behind some brush.

Only then did Kim realize that she had been holding her breath, and she released the captured air and gulped in more. Moments later, Ty appeared from her left, walking almost casually towards her.

"Where have you been?" she gasped, clambering to her feet as he approached and dumped his pack on the ground.

"I was circling back," he answered nonchalantly, rummaging for a water bottle.

"Did you see the wolf:"

"Yes. I was about fifty yards away." He took a sip of the cool water. A smile crossed his face as he realized that Kim was staring at him with an expression of fierce surprise. "You were fine. I had my bow trained on him the entire time until he left, but you really had nothing to worry about."

"Well, I would have liked to have known that you were there!" Kim almost screamed.

Ty grinned wryly. "If you had known I was there, they would have too. And then you wouldn't have gotten those shots."
The tires of a beaten '77 Chevy skidded to a halt in front of the Prairie View Motel, sending a rolling cloud of dust into the evening air. The truck used to be fire engine red, loud and proud, just like its owner. Not anymore though. Both sun and use had battered the paint into a chewed bubble gum pink, spattered with dirt and rust. The guys down at the station called it Bazooka.

For a moment after he turned off the engine, Paul sat motionless behind the wheel, staring blankly at the motel office door. A sign swayed in front of the building, whining softly as a humid Kansas breeze drifted over it. A toddler screamed. Paul lurched forward and whipped his head to the right, his eyes scanning the dirt parking lot, settling quickly on the source of the God-awful noise, a kid sitting in the back of a blue Volvo at the other end of the motel, wailing as his mother strapped him into a car seat. He twisted and squirmed, waving pudgy little arms defiantly in the air. Tears ran down his Kool-Aid stained face as he fought the losing battle.

Paul watched as the mother secured the seat belt and patted the boy’s blond head before she shut the door. Jesus, she can’t be a day over seventeen, he thought. The girl slipped into the driver’s seat, checking the status of her reflection in the rear view mirror before backing out of the lot. Paul’s gaze drifted back to Kool-Aid boy, who was staring right at him now. No crying, no screaming, no funny face, just looking at him, as if the kid had never seen another human being before. As if, he saw something reflected in Paul’s green eyes that transfixed him. Their stares remained locked as the car passed Paul slowly, the driver now putting on lipstick with one hand and holding a cigarette with the other. Just before they turned out of the lot, the boy raised his hand and waved. Paul blinked, and they were gone.

Tears burned in the corners of his eyes, and he squeezed them shut against the pain. He shuddered and opened Bazooka’s door, which responded with a loud screech of protest. Should have got some WD-40 for this damn thing, he thought. Not that it mattered too much now though. Paul stepped out, slamming the door behind him. He turned and reached into the bed of the truck, his Stetson sliding up on his forehead as he searched for his bag. His hand closed around a canvas strap, and he dragged it up and over his shoulder as he turned towards the door of the motel office.

A bell tinked against the screen door, announcing his presence. The grungy old man behind the counter didn’t even look up from the
newspaper he was reading. The air in the tiny room was thick and stale, almost suffocating.

Paul coughed politely. "What kin I do ya for?" the man said absently, still staring at the paper. He reached up and scratched his balding head, revealing dark yellow sweat stains under the arms of a shirt that had been worn enough to make it sheer. "I need a room for the night," Paul replied, "Anything you have, nothing special."

"Just you, or do you have a missus?" he said, finally glancing up at Paul, who stood near the doorway still, shifting his weight awkwardly from foot to foot. Paul blinks back the faint memory of a slender arm draped across him as he slept and the sound of coffee in the morning, humming a gritty harmony to his wife's rendition of I Will Always Love You. The woman was no Whitney Houston, but he loved the sound of her voice anyway. "Nop, just me," he said, walking up to the counter. Delilah had left him three weeks ago. Paul could still see her face in his head every time he closed his eyes. "I can't watch you destroy yourself like this, Paul. It wasn't your fault," she had whispered. And then she was gone.

Paul's large frame seemed to fill the tiny office. He was nearly 6'5", and the tip of his cowboy hat brushed the low ceiling fan as he moved toward the counter. "Holy shit, boy!" the man said, "You a big one, ain't ya? I bet them ladies really take a likin' to you." He threw back his head and cackled the kind of laugh reserved exclusively for dirty jokes.

Paul sighed. "Yeah, I guess I am." The man noticed his bag. "Oh, yer a fireman, huh?" he asked, raising one white eyebrow. "Hell, I'll be that really gets 'em goin'!" Another laugh. "That thang sez you from Kansas City, cowboy. What you doin' so far from home?" Paul stared evenly at the man. "Look, all I need is a goddamned room," he said quietly, and pulled out his wallet. "Geez, no need to get all bothered, son," the man replied, "Just makin' friendly wit ya." He rummaged through a drawer in the counter and tossed Paul a key.

* * * * *

For as long as he could remember, all Paul had ever wanted to be was a fireman. He loved it. When that whistle blew, he was ready for anything. It was his whole life. When he was six years old, he lit a match and set his own tree house on fire, just so he could put the damn thing out with the garden hose. HeSing his eyebrows clean off, lost an entire box of baseball cards, and made his mother faint, but it had been worth it.

He joined the Kansas City Fire Department on his eighteenth birthday, and had walked on air ever since. Countless fires later, Paul had reached the status of lieutenant in the department, and it was only a matter of time before he became captain. As he washed Engine 3 that Friday morning, he listened to the weekend shift walk into the station. "Yo, Paulie," yelled the latest probationary fireman to join the station this year, "What's up man? Ready for the new blood to take over?" Paul gave him the finger and kept scrubbing.

"Shut up and go fix breakfast, Juan," said Harry, slapping the back of the kid's head as he passed him. "Move it, proby!" Harry was the current captain on Engine 3, and Paul's best friend. He was shorter, fatter, and slower than Paul, but what he lacked in mobility he certainly made up for with intelligence. Nobody knew more about fire than Harry Mickelson. "How about a cup of coffee, Fire Breath?" he asked, leaning against the newly waxed truck. "Man, I made that jalapeño chili eight years ago. When the hell are you going to let it go?" said Paul, rolling his eyes. "When you learn the value of a Tic Tac," he replied, laughing.

Paul got up and took a mock swing at his captain. Harry dodged it, slapped him on his back, and walked into the mess hall to check the status of Juan's culinary efforts. Paul could have gone home. His shift was over, and he was finished with the truck. But he didn't. He had followed Harry for that cup of coffee.

* * * * *

Paul jiggled the key in the lock that belonged to Room 108. The door creaked as he entered, and thick, musty air wafted out of the motel room, like a tomb that hadn't been opened in centuries. The door swung shut loudly behind him, and he turned to survey the room. The place was a hippy's wet dream, with puck green shag carpeting and psychedelic drapes. Sunlight dripped through ragged holes in the curtains, pooling yellow onto the floor. Paul dropped his bag on the bed and went into the bathroom. It smelled like mold and diapers, the kind of stench that could only be created with the dedicated help of white trash tenants and shifty housekeeping staffs.

Paul put his hands on either side of the sink, and stared into the dingy mirror. Christ, what the hell happened to me, he thought. He hadn't shaved in more than two weeks. He facial hair was too short to be called a beard, and too long to be called stubble. The damn thing made him look homeless. Tired blue eyes gazed back, rimmed with depression and defeat. Guilt was eating him alive, and all he could do now was let it.

He sat down on the toilet and for what seemed like the hundredth time, he cried. He wept for what he was, and what he had become.

* * * * *

"Juan, I don't see any eggs!" yelled Harry, banging his plate on the table. "Get your proby ass out there with breakfast!" The rest of the
station guys laughed as the "new blood" stumbled out of the kitchen wearing a pink frilly apron reserved for the newest probationary firemen on Engine 3. Paul grinned, sipping his coffee while Harry continued his trade.

Suddenly, the whistle screamed. In an instant, the whole table was vacated, leaving Juan's eggs steaming in the serving bowl. The men grabbed their gear and leapt onto the truck, already pulling away from the station. Paul jumped on at the last minute, having elected to gulp down his coffee first. He wasn't actually on duty now, but what real fireman could resist a call?

Harry, yelling into the radio occasionally, shouted orders to the men in the back of the truck as it roared down 22nd Street, sirens wailing. "It's a structure fire on West 5th," he said, "I need three men on the line as soon as we get there." His shouts were mixed with the sound of the fire truck's piercing screech, forming an undeniable harmony. Paul could see black smoke coloring the morning sky almost six blocks away.

When they pulled up to the apartment building, the entire second floor was engulfed in flames. The fire curled behind the windows, which wheezed against the heat and shattered, sprinkling glass onto the crowd that had gathered to watch the blaze. Paul jumped from the truck before it rolled to a stop, and made his way through the mob of people to the building.

Paul's eyes scanned the windows on each floor as the landlord told Harry there wasn't anybody in the building. "We're in the process of tearing it down anyway," he yelled over the noise, "The place has been vacant for weeks." Before the last words in his sentence left his mouth, Paul knew the landlord was wrong.

"¡Señor, senor, por favor, salve mi hijo!" a woman screamed from a corner window on the fourth floor. "Get the ladder up there now!" shouted Harry, running towards the truck. There was no way anyone could get to her, the fire had claimed the stairwell, and was winding its way up through the walls. Paul cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, "Stay calm, ma'am, we're coming for you!"

She spilled out a river of terror-filled Spanish. Oh shit, she doesn't understand, he thought. He yelled the same message again, waving his hands in the air. Abruptly, she turned and went back into the apartment. "Lady! Lady, stay by the window!" he shouted as loudly as he could. "¡Ayúdeme, salve mi bebé! ¡Dios mio!"

Jesus Christ, Paul thought as she returned to the window, this time holding a small bundle wrapped in a blanket. "¡Salve mi bebé!" she screamed, and outstretched her arms, holding the infant precariously four stories above both Paul and the pavement. He could deal with fire, with smoke that blinds and chokes you while the flames cook you from the outside in, but what the hell was he supposed to do now? He shook his head furiously, motioning for her to pull the baby back inside. "¡Por favor, ayudeme!" she cried, and as she stared down into Paul's face, she let go.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, he thought, and stretched out his arms to catch the child. The blanket fluttered off the infant's body as he fell, his tiny legs kicking the air, finding nothing. Paul reached up to grab the bundle out of the sky, but it was too soon. The child slid through the clumsy bulk of his gloves, and smashed into the cement under his feet.

Just then, a gas oven on the third floor exploded, ripping apart the front of the building and sending a curtain of debris onto the crowd. The force of the explosion knocked Paul onto his back, and his head slammed against the pavement. Seconds later, he sat up dizzyly, blood weeping from a gash above his right eye.

"This did not just happen, this did not just happen," he said to himself, combing through the rubble on his hand and knees. He lifted up part of someone's living room wall, and what he saw burned into his eyes for the rest of his life. A tiny hand stuck out from beneath a pile of wood and drywall, still clenched in a fist from the force of the impact.

The sun was setting now, casting a soft golden glow over the Prairie View Motel parking lot. Paul gazed out the window into the evening, leaning his forehead against the cool glass. Bazooka gleamed in the dusk, a shadow of what used to be. He turned away and closed the disco curtains, shutting out both the light and the world.

I'll never forget the sound, he thought, I heard him hit the pavement. Sitting down on the sagging bed, he reached blindly to his left for the pistol. Oh, God, this isn't happening to me. Harry tried to console him after the accident, but Paul was beyond any help. "You win some, you lose some, Paul," he had said, "But you can't beat yourself up about it." The cold metal of the gun tasted coppery, like he was sucking on a penny. As he closed his eyes, Paul saw the same image that had haunted every waking moment of his life for the last two months. That tiny hand. Yeah, I lost this one, Harry, he thought. I lost me, too.

* * * * *
"What now?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," I replied looking down at the motionless body resting its nose ever so gently in the crease of its elbow.

I inhaled and holding my breath I heard the cars hiss by. With eyes closed on the scene before me, I imagined the rain hitting the pavement outside, glossing over the dusty, cracked concrete becoming a glistening obsidian.

If I had left work as usual, smelling of hamburgers and stale coffee, I would have been tramping through muddy puddles with shadows of pink snakes cast from the "CLOSED" sign swimming in them. My footsteps and the pouring rain would make the neon serpents dance and would perhaps make me smile as I made my way through Chinatown to the dirty box of an apartment I called home.

But instead, I was inside the diner and instead of getting off work, work had to be done. Instead of experiencing the wriggling pink snakes, I was inside and the morbidly blue neon electrified my white smock a chilling periwinkle. Huge Jackson Pollock-like splatters punctuated the apron with a violet-purple intensity.

I exhaled in a quick huff, pulling on my hair-net and agonizing over the loss of another clean uniform.

"We're in this together, right?" he asked me cautiously. God knows why. It was me that wanted Saul dead. But together we were, standing there. I merely nodded still fussing with my hair-net, although thinking about it, only I had held the gun, only I had handed Saul his one-way ticket. The diner was silent save the hum of the refrigerator units. My shoes click-clacked as I took a place at the counter and untangled the black net from my dirty curls.

Stuffing, grey and greasy, was oozing from the gash in the vinyl of the end stool. My fingers drifted aimlessly towards the escaped cotton blend, searching for an answer to a question I hadn't thought of yet. Instead, I found lost food drippings staining the guts of the sparkly red seat as they fought their way out of their silver bandage.

"I tried to fix these last week," I muttered, "perhaps I should try stitching instead of duct tape..."

"Or perhaps you can put a bullet through its head," his voice cracked at 'head' and I hated him for his weakness. "You seem to be pretty good at fixing things with that solution."
"Oh, for fuck's sake, stop acting like a pigeon that ran into a plate glass window and pull yourself together. I never thought..." but at that moment I couldn't remember what I'd never thought.

In fact, my mind was void of thought. All that occupied my ringling skull was the sound of the pause before I pulled the trigger. My stratagem following the execution was meticulously planned out, but now it was a mere echo in halls of my brain.

What they never tell you in that the aural experience of shooting a bullet into a human head will hinder rational thought. And although I was the most rational person in the North end, even I needed time to collect the shattered pieces of the reality I knew before I killed my boss. Before I killed Saul, "why' didn't matter anymore. What mattered was if I could maintain myself, my consistency of character.

"What now?" he repeated studying the scene then his feet.

I still didn't know but I wasn't one to repeat myself. I was clear in my intentions, and that wonderful virtue, consistency, haunted me. I looked over at Harvey who was staring down a smattering of crimson on his wing-tipped shoes. I wasn't sure which one of them was going to win, fry cook or blood spot.

"I'm scared," he whimpered. Apparently the blood won. He shifted his weight and thrust his hands into the pockets of his double-breasted coat, faded, falling apart, and sporting a murderous red hue from the glare of the stop light on the counter.

"Of course you're scared," I answered, swiveling on my stool to face him. As always, Harvey could find a way to irritate me in any situation.

"You're an idiot."

"What should I do?"

"What should you do? What do you mean, what should you do? I'm the one who shot the bastard."

"Yes, that was quite obvious when you splattered his brains all over creation," Harvey stuttered. His brows were wrestling each other for the space above the bridge of his nose.

"Listen, I didn't know his head would... explode like..."

"Well, it did, now didn't it? How am I supposed to regain any kind of composure after that?" Harvey's eyebrows were really duking it out, but somehow he managed to carry on a train of thought with all the wrestling across his forehead. "What are we going to do with the corpse?" he gulped, then whispered, "God rest his soul," as he crossed himself.

I rolled my eyes and swiveled back to the counter letting my face fall into my hands. My palms stuck to my cheeks and I pulled them away to reveal red reminders.

"Tell me what to do, Helen, I'll do anything you tell me to do. Let's just do something." I cringed at his sniveling and wondered at how much blood covered my face. I could tell some of it trickled down my neck and I felt a not unpleasant shiver.

But then I remembered Harvey, and I soured. I hated having power, a superior control over such men as Harvey. Saul too, but he was on the floor in a deep sleep, waking at this very moment in heaven, if he was lucky—the bastard.

Perhaps this control was why I began watering, because the lonely old folks that came in to the South Street Diner to get their miserable coffee from my sweet hand were too enamored with me to leave me any less than two dollars for their five-dollar meal. After three years of this undying adoration, I was disgusted. Sure I made good money, but the surplus money sat untouched in the shoe-box under my bed. I could only bring myself to spend the fifteen percent I deserved, the rest of it was filthy. I never ever counted it, just shoved the leathery bills out of my sight. I didn't want any kind of power, and now that Saul's head was blown apart at the fourth booth from the door, I still had control.

"Tell me, Helen, tell me! I'll do anything, I just want it to be over!"

Harvey's eyes pleaded with me like a puppy's when it has been denied a bone. He was begging to be ordered around by me and that was not the anything I wanted him to be doing. I just wanted to wander through my thoughts. I had never killed a man before and I kind of wanted to savor the victory. Harvey, with his humanity, was making this very difficult to do. And this was pissing me off.

"Leave," I said quietly, hoping that would be the end of it and it could be at peace.

"What?" Okay, so Harvey's irritating nature was as consistent as my determination.

"Leave, get your bratty ass out of here so I can think."

"Don't you think we should be thinking together?" Not watching his face, I knew his traumatic eyebrow war waged on as the traffic light glared a sickly green over the hands, I still searched for answers.

"There is no we, dumb-fuck." I implanted my palms into the counter top leaving matching scarlet prints. I was the one covered with Saul's Blood and bits of brain, not Harvey. I was the one who was the murderer, I wanted to kill Saul, I did. I did and Harvey couldn't take that away from me.
"You aren't even supposed to be a part of this," I continued ranting. I could feel my shoulders raising above my ears in anger. "I just needed you here so you could witness this, then you wouldn't have to be all suspicious when Saul never came back to work and now you can't do a damn thing but work his shifts too, you stupid fry cook bastard, because you are now my accomplice and I am the new boss!"

I panted with rage and spun back around to rip the cigarette pack I hid under the ledge of the counter from its secret spot. I lit a smoke, dramatically flourishing the match and tossing it into Saul's black blood.

"Is this true?" The tremor that had prevailed over Harvey’s vocal cords had vanished. In my surprise, I tuned around to investigate. His hands were now at his sides, fists clenched furiously although I couldn’t quite see if he held anything. For a second, I thought he had somehow grabbed my revolver. But there it was, on the floor by Saul’s worthless feet, a testament to my atrocity. My atrocity. I didn’t care if Harvey was upset. It was about time someone alive knew how I truly felt.

"Why would I lie?" I had released my shoulder upon my one-eighty maneuver and I balanced an elbow on the edge of the counter. I dispelled a plume of smoke over the body and it drifted slovenly towards Harvey. "There’s not a damn thing you can do about it, you know. If you go squealing like the filthy pig you are to the cops, I’m sure I can work it in my favor. It’ll be no trouble to lead them to believe I’m under your spell and I’m just as much of a victim of yours as that dumb fuck on the floor. It won’t matter that I killed him... sweet little me? Half the precinct would give their right arm to have me as their waitress on any given day. No one will believe I killed Saul."

Wait. No one would believe me. But it was me. I paused to stare down at the rivulets of blood that spidered through the grid between the tiles on the floor. I did that. Me. I looked up at Harvey, but couldn’t make out a singular emotion on his face and his eyebrows had retreated from battle. He was placid, stone. I searched him for any clues to his inner dialogue and come up empty handed. I wasn’t sure if I was okay with this. The diner went from green to yellow to red. Too much red. Then flashing red

And I heard it.

Ding.

It was the little bell above the chrome framed glass door.

I stared blankly at Harvey, but he shifted his glance to where the footsteps stopped behind me. He gave me a nod. I took a long, drawn-out drag of my cigarette, but still didn’t bother turning around. Harvey, emotionless stepped gingerly over Saul’s corpse. As he passed me, I glanced down at his greasy fry cook hand. A cell phone protruded from his jacket sleeve, and “call ended” flashed on the lime green screen. The door dinged as he left and I felt more cold than the dead cat near the trash can I had practiced on earlier.

"Oh, Harvey, humanity is full of surprises, isn’t it, you bastard."

"Ma’am..."

"It’s Helen," I said still facing the back of the diner. I really wanted to play a song on the jukebox. I could see it now that Harvey was gone. I would have given anything to hear a song instead of the gathering of footsteps outside the door of the South Street Diner, all waiting for me. This moment was all for me, just like all other moments. I was still the main character. The cigarette dangled from my blood-sticky face.

"Put your hands on your head and stand up slowly."

I waited a moment and the officer repeated his scripted words. I inhaled more black death from my cigarette. Perhaps I finally had gotten what I wanted. I only wish I could remember what is was.
While my mom clears away the breakfast dishes—the skillet soaks in the soapy water and the syrup spatters have been wiped clean from the kitchen table. I sit back in my chair and drink in the familiar scene. Another boring-ass Sunday. Full of pancakes, I feel fat and tired. None of my friends ever call me on Sunday. Sleeping is the only way to escape the dreadfully sunny afternoon.

My mom has her back to me. She is intensely scouring a plate free of runny egg yolk that has melted and dried on like yellow candle wax. My dad sits across the table, barricaded behind Saturday’s newspaper. The news has become so important to him these past few years. Apparently it isn’t enough that C-span is on in the living room and the radio above the coffeepot crackles and blares the local announcements. The computer is even booted up and connected to the Internet, displaying twenty-some emails which I am certain he will spend the rest of the day replying back to.

No one asks me what I learn in school anymore. Hell, I’m also am almost an adult and I’ll be leaving in a few years. For good. To college, then I’ll more than likely get married and move to another state. What then? I’ll no longer recognize these cupboards and this yellowed wallpaper. Not that it matters. I think my parents anticipate the time that I strike out on my own. They’ll probably even buy a new doublewide after I leave. Assholes. I felt like a baby bird that hasn’t grown all of its plumage yet, but already its parents are pushing it over the edge of the nest. I’m falling off the branch and there is a hard sidewalk beneath me.

On Sunday I want to die the most. I ask my mom what there is to look forward to just to stay motivated. I look for anything: a cousin coming to visit, a neighborhood get-together, anything. I get so entirely consumed with the hopelessness that I can’t go on. I sit paralyzed until some flicker of cheap plastic joy lights my dim mind. Only then, can I move again. I can carry on with the same monotonous bullshit for a while longer. My one hope is to catch a grain of sugar on my tongue from that giant invisible cube that makes the rest of the world smile.

I sigh a long, draining sigh and rise from my chair unnoticed.

“I’m gonna take a nap,” I mutter, looking at my mom for some faint sign of approval.

She turns around and wipes her suddy hands across the ass of her maroon stretch pants.

“When do you want me to wake you up?” she asks.
I can read in her eyes that she is slightly dismayed that I am not fueled by the same fervor to do housework as she is.

“Never,” I say in the same monotone voice as before.

I’d been fighting the Sunday system for two years now. I am so wrapped up in my midmorning napping routine that I have long since pinned a heavy blanket over the drapes of my bedroom window. The darker, the better. Am I the only person in the world who hibernates?

In two hours, I am stirred from my deadening slumber by the roar of my mother’s cursed vacuum. The woman does not understand the concept of the Sabbath—the day of rest.

I learned of this unique idea in the sixth grade when we read the book, Johnny Tremain. The overly enthusing silversmith’s apprentice wanted to get some sort of sugar bowl done ahead of schedule, so in secret he goes into his master’s shop and sets to work. Little did he know that the master’s son, some pudgy kid named Dove, rigged the mold so he would mess up the job. Johnny screws up the project, and in the process, burns himself so horribly by the hot liquid silver that he spends the remainder of the novel with his fingers on one hand oddly melted together.

After my nap, I spend the rest of the day trying to find something to busy myself. Screw homework—it’s Sabbath day. I putter around my room and then go down the hallway into the kitchen to check on everyone.

My dad is still glued to the computer, pecking at the keyboard. His head twitches and I know he is in the zone where he cannot be reached. Anything I say, he will not hear. Always a multi-tasker, he holds a half-burned Camel cigarette in his right hand and types with the middle finger of his left.

I return to my room and dig out my library book, The Bell Jar, by Sylvia Plath. I connected with this girl. She couldn’t taste the sugar of life either. I figured I’d attempt to finish it off tonight, and if not, the calmness of reading would send me back to sleep.

It is around eleven o’clock when I finish the book. It is powerful, it is me. I sit and stare at the cover. Change my name and my address, and tweak the time zone, and this is my story. I hear the door open and know it was my dad returning from some township meeting.

I hope he won’t notice my bedroom light on and come down the hall and peek in, asking me what I am doing. I’d have to explain to him what I am reading some depressing shit and as soon as I tell him, he’ll forget anyway.

He is no longer my father. Between his meetings, emails, phone calls, and radio shows, he is just some media junkie who lives in the same house that I did. He doesn’t really care what goes on in my life. Hell, he doesn’t care about anyone anymore. I’m surprised that my mom puts up with his shit. Our lives can’t go on like this. Something has to give.

I pause and look up towards my doorway. Footsteps sound across the kitchen and his bedroom door shuts at the other end of the trailer house. I’m glad he didn’t come talk to me. I throw my book on the floor beside my bed and reach up and turn my light off. I lie alone in the dark. Tears begin to roll down my checks and drip into my ears.

My life is so empty. So tragic. Nothing good ever happens. I am in a bell jar like Sylvia. I want this to end. I want to die.

Three hours later, I wake to the sound of my mother’s voice. She is talking in a normal tone but there is an oddness within the house that wrenches me from sleep.

“Joe?” She is asking. “Joe, wake up.”

I throw off my blankets and pad down the hall, through the kitchen and living room and into my parent’s bedroom. My mom is sitting beside my father who is lying facing the ceiling in his yellow shorts. She is on the phone and he is sleeping.

“I don’t know,” she says into the phone. “He’s not...breathing.”

I stand there. This is a dream. A horrible dream. If not, a joke then. My body is numb, I feel nothing.

“Take the phone.” My mom tells me when she sees I am standing in the doorway. “I have to give him mouth-to-mouth.”

I talk into the phone. A numb narrator, relaying the information to the professional secretary on the other end of the line. All I know is a whirl of confusion. This is a cruel joke, this nightmare. Why are they tricking me? Why are my parents playing such a cruel joke on me?

Soon, the men in white come in. They jam a plastic tube down my dad’s throat and unravel cords to equipment. I stand still. I am alone. I stare at my father’s arms, bronze and muscular, curved like a varnished archer’s bows. They lightly bounce every time paddles hit his white chest. There are technical words exchanged and the cords are raveled up again.

Something gave. Silently in the night, I lost him. My father. I wanted change. I wanted death. But not his. This was not what I wanted. Now that I was in the very room with Death, I no longer wanted his company. I want my father back.
A New Choice
Rebecca Hopp
Old Woman
Heidi Jo Mayer

Sitting,
Her nightgown is sprinkled
With yellow daisies.
I can see it
Through the gaping front of her untied robe.
The belt that would have fastened it is pulled too far one way
So that one end
Lies coiled
On the floor next to her chair.
Her flesh has sunken
In around her skeleton
Filling in all the empty spaces.
With the corner of her slipper,
She traces the edges
Of a single too sterile
Aqua-blue tile
Among many aqua-blue tiles.
Her hands move as if she is washing them.
Sliding fingers over palm,
Knotted knuckles
Scraping on knotted knuckles.
I wonder which sadness within her eyes
She is trying to wipe clean.
Geisha Girl
Heidi Jo Mayer

She floats.
Her steps are tiny
Flowing into one another
Carrying her like a bobbing flame.
Her body is rigid and slim
In her cocoon of cherry blossom silk,
Hands fluttering to the black knot
Of her hair,
She glides on.

Colors of Life
Nancy Kneip

He died in Spring,
as if to mock Mother Nature.
All of us who knew him well laughed at his timing.
We sat around the fire, nostalgic, mourning,
while Miss Nature arrayed herself in her finest shawl:
a rainbow of colors sprinkled across the horizon.
Dressed in black, we attended his last rites
Touching his cold, cold,
Cold hands,
as if we could return their warmth through ours.
I'm Sorry
Kristin Marthaler

My little daughter
So young so fragile
So meek so mild
So little so precious
My little daughter
Lying there sleeping
Arms across your chest
As it rises and falls
My little daughter
So innocent and calm
Unknowing to the outside
So tiny in the world
My little daughter
I never meant for it to be like this
I never meant for you to be so small
My little daughter
I love you I really do
I never meant to screw you up
I never meant to cause harm
My little daughter
It hurts to see you lie there
Little fingers and little toes
Not knowing where you are
My little daughter
Strapped to a machine
I wish I could touch you
I wish I could hold you in my arms
My little daughter
I try to hold you but I can't
They won't let me see you
I love you with all my heart
My little daughter
Please listen to me
I only meant for
The best to come out of this
I only meant for you to live

Away
Rebecca Hopp
My little daughter
Hear me out, I never meant
For you to hurt this way
To be in all this pain, to suffer so much
My little daughter
I don't hear you cry
The tubes are making that impossible
It kills me to see you
My little daughter
How I ache to see you lying there
How it pains me to watch you die
There is nothing I can do,
But there is so much that I did
My little daughter
I tried my best, I tried to save you
I REALLY DID
But there's nothing I can do, nothing
My little daughter
They told me that I have to say goodbye
Because you are leaving too
My little daughter
I will see you one day
I will be with you when my life's over
I'll see you again
My little daughter
I'm sorry I really am
Now it's time for goodbye
I love you and I'm sorry
My little daughter
So young so fragile so meek so mild
So little so precious, my little daughter
Is gone

You Think Too Much of Me
Josh Moore

You being tall slender pretty and 18
Think too much of me
As I preach the dialectic of Bakunin and communist anarchy Dionysus and Apollo's forces and their impact on poetry;
Or how the only Christian died on the cross and I doubt his divinity yet not being anymore than superficially knowledgeable about Nietzsche;
Or when I expound on JK and Turtle Island and the dead in Iraq, the books I've read, the movies I've seen all the places and things I be that make it grand to be me.

Of course you being tall and pretty and 18 sitting across from me making eye contact only when you're supposed to be looking at the speaker—but always gazping at me—I don't mind it much—but like Hefling says prolonged eye contact isn't really my lunch.

You being nearly tall as me is very much a turn on.
But still I get this feeling you think too much of me—
like an Emerson quote sent to me about those who have style are often lacking any sort of personal identity and I wrote a strange story back on a napkin like science fiction;
like reading the report the psychiatrist wrote about being pleasant looking and apparently above average intelligence;
like looking back at my pictures of girlfriends from high school one being a short difficult attractive redhead another (blonde) reading Rushdie.

You being tall and pretty and 18 don't remind of those things—
Good Friends
Katie Pavel

She lies patiently on the tiled floor,
A look of displeased consternation
Spread across her face. She wonders
Why she must accept such manners of abuse.
Her muzzle wrinkles in slight disgust, but
She bares no teeth, too reserved for such
Extreme measures; she sets her ears back and
Sighs, waiting for the moment to pass.

He stands on her foreleg and rubs her
Bearded chest, his motor running a rampage within.
His sister bemusedly bats a tangle of string nearby,
Her bottlebrushed tail whipping to and fro. They do not
Know that there exists a rule that marks cats against dogs,
That they are breaking the very logic of their species.
They know only of four paws and soft fur and
A wet nose, quite unlike their own.
Bookmark
Joseph L. Pikul Jr.

Never do I want to be left unfinished
Slipped back onto misty stacks
of your mind.
Marked with a yellowed
dog-eared, bookmark.
Put down when lights dimmed
and tears blurred your eyes.
The guy from yesterday.

Ill-usion
Rebecca Hopp
Apostle
Thomas Martin

—I heard a voice say wake up—

I was asleep listening to my rap music
When, I was awakened by the tongues of twelve nations
They were all around my bed
Different faces
Different complexions
Lacked affection
Yet one displayed expression
As I rose to the exit
He grabbed me and uttered some words
I quickly drew back, afraid
Entering the living room
Spirits were hovering the room
I woke up and left three days later

Dog Eyes
Joseph L. Pikul Jr.

Eyes on my soul.
What clues have I given you,
enthusiastic guardian with wagging tail?
Front seat, right, nose on the world.

Secrets revealed
through a twitching black nose,
recording, decoding, history of all that
passed this way, this day, and before.

Brown eyes
deep liquid pools, reflecting wisdom,
dancing for this moment
in the sun. Smiling.

Surveying territory
with stately air. Squirrel!
Pleading eyes glance my way. Stop!
I do not. Dejected dog ball curled in place.

Dog navigation
tracking time, speed, and distance.
On subtle cue the ball unwinds, rises,
forges past injustice and all my sins.
Let's play.
Haiku
Chad Robinson

November first
the night nurse's bookmark
one chapter in

Sax: Living Blues
Joseph L. Pikul Jr.

16th Street
Mister, got some spare change?
Amid panhandlers and street toughs
the music of your soul
snakes down the canyons
mixing with the wind and freezing rain.
In darkness you play
next to Starbucks
where poetic hustlers
look out on your world
work on words and double cappuccinos.
Pathetic bastard do they think?
Instrument case at you feet
catching green and some loose change
from those who care.
Ya got a good sound.
Thanks man, I play, never know if anyone listens.
I listen.
Meeting on a gravel road
stretched taut over the Dakota plains.
GMC with cows in tow
Ford with twisted gate
cattle dogs pace their toolbox perch.
Old boys hunched over the box of the beat up Ford
thoughtfully searching for answers down in there
with the “handyman” jack and busted bale of alfalfa hay.
I pass, they look, adjust their caps
ain’t from around here
return to search alfalfa hay.
I Live at the End of a Sentence
Berit J Soli-Holt

I live at the end of a sentence.
For now I'm waiting—
someone will get to me
    eventually
but I wait—
perhaps the writer is fond of run-ons,
it may be ages before I'm discovered
but I will be—
    you'll see
after a clause and a pause
someone might find their end,
find me, finally—
    maybe soon
but I wait—possibly there's an editing error
(I panic)
or perhaps the writer is avant-garde
and has no use for
    ends of sentences
like me—

Haiku
Chad Robinson

after sixty years
grandpa's pocket watch still set
on Berlin time
Upon Seeing a Ghost in Scobey Hall

Jennifer Reisch

You told me I looked pale
Now I know the reason why
I just saw a ghost
As I was walking by

A classroom towards your office.
Standing there, he looked too real to me.
Chatting with a teacher.
Then he looked up, but didn't see

Me standing, staring, scared.
Then I must be the one
Unreal, made of invisible air.

Birds
Garrett Rahm
Haiku
Chad Robinson

beside the rose
on my brother's coffin
my fingerprint

Athena
Klaire Lockhart-Beilke
Cover Girl
Jennifer Reisch

Every day I applied the mask of makeup
that covers my imperfections.
Not even I noticed the difference.

It's funny how, wearing it so long,
I believed that I had become the mask.
Not even I noticed the difference.

Lately my mask has been peeling slowly away,
so I can see underneath.
Not even I notice the difference?

Haiku
Chad Robinson

old ferris wheel
unable to hold its paint
July 20 Storm
Garrett Rahm

Haiku
Chad Robinson

the mechanic's tree
fixed
with hood ornaments
Blind Faith
Lindsey Walder

A story through time
Worshipped blindly.
Faith.
Will ascend me
After life?
Today's significance
Lost.
Unneeded, foolish
Sacrifices
Steal time, moments,
Thoughts, loves.
Closed minds
Claim a value for each life,
Yet condemn the
Unbelievers.
Prejudices make self holier.
Beautiful gift of life

In the present?
No.
Living is sin.
Heaven awaits only those who
Pray.
The rest of life,
To Hell.
Missionaries will save-
And convert, kill, burn.
A self never disclosed.
Hidden in fear of
Disobedience.
Life
Never lived.

God is Watching
Bethany Schlaikjer

I can see them
Fear sits deep in my stomach
Knotting and twisting me
I watch, frozen in time
She cries-tears soak her sleeve
Here's a quarter
Call someone who cares
He says, tossing the coin
At her face
He sneers and drinks
His glass of milk
Listen to me
She mumbles, we need
To buy groceries
She looks down at her sweater
Soaked with milk now.
Don't.
He does
She reels into the couch
I gasp
Don't
He rants about responsibilities
She sobs
Sucking her bloodied lip
Her jaw is bruised again
He always hit on the left
I sit there
Dumbfounded innocence
Mom says
God is always watching
I wonder
Does He see this?
Cows
Berit J. Soli-Holt

Bovine beasts betrothed to their packaged fate of a styrofoam bed, with a transparent spread, apparently approved by the USDA.

An Opening
Rebecca Hopp
Rose
Colleen N. Stein

"They don't like to let go of each other,"
The Florist said, shaking the rose free.
Their stems and thorns tangled together
Smiling, she handed it to me.

The flower I bought for my father's stone.
Honoring his 45 years spent.
Plus the year I've spent alone
I knew the words the Florist meant.

This Last Broadcast
Matt Stassel

This last broadcast may contain
Some graphic language.
the men and women who fight
Fight as follows and are Recorded.
The journalist breaks into description
Of Life in the scythe-fields of men.

"We are here in the sands and storms of Iraq
Marching on to Baghdad..."
When...

An RPG
Rampaging
Primal
Gorilla fist
With gas propelled teeth and talons
held out in a scream and a whistle;
Ripping open the guts of the audio play
And spilling static innards
Into the cracks and folds of my brain
Like black ants racing in mud spangled snow.
My ears are a T.V. screen.

Back in action a solider yells
"Where the hell are my guys!"
Another solider coughs and leans
To the journalist who can only mutter
And spit and describe black smoke
And says, "You alright?"
His voice like a mother, touching foreheads
Peering into the soul through crooked eyes.
O' Be Joyful
Matt Stassel

Sixteen it seems was too young
To be a drunk blowing hollow goat horns
On the streets for attention
And having no idea why
I needed to scream,
Smash TV's through windows
Into the open air, sleeping streets
Of middle middle-American Dreams.
I awoke in the Dreaming state
Of tethered children in shopping malls
Safely engaged in a radial world of nothing
But gimme fingers flittering fruitlessly at the edge,
Where one touch of forbidden merchandise
Was cause for immediate retraction of the blue leash
And the helmeted kid dangling sideways at the end.

I was a menace, don't get me wrong,
And there is a place next to where
The Disabled American Veterans play bingo
And anonymous alcoholicics meet weekly
To smoke like productive factories in shame;
Where women in mini-vans drop
Their little ballerinas off on thin ice
To learn what cost grace and beauty
Can take on one's knees.
This is the place of forgotten lore
Where I went when I got nabbed;
Juvenile Dynamo Correction, J.D.C
Or Juvy Hall as was the preferred moniker.

Inside the toilets were made of ice, the beds and sheets
Reeked of institution and sterile dreams;
Dreams like turpentine quick to flame
And quenched as neatly without memory of danger,
That only the smell on the floor could rekindle.
I was barely alive on the pasty, gray bottom
Floor of my cell, and the echo of children
Cracking jokes in the halls bled
Like crash cymbals through steel doors
While I lay writhing green,
No more than a worm beneath the grass,
In my jump suit and my plastic safety shoes
Made of milk jugs, and teaching toys
Where the cow says “moo!”

What is more, there was no love,
Only forgetfulness and fear of sympathetic magic
As if the rapid weathering of my youthful exuberance
Would reveal an aging man; an image
In the wind blown dust and booze baked cremains
From the cracked penoplain of my soul
My image in his image.
A father the same as the other
And his son cut down beside him
Caught in the act of denudation.
Here I had found oblivion in Delirium Tremens.
They kept shaking off memories,
like one would bees
Swarming and stinging.

There in the bright orange buzz of the skies of
The ceiling that never set was the sun
That shone on the river of Oblivion.
It was the smoking last-light
In the night of an atom bomb;
The exponential division of myself;
The artificial nourishment of remembering
What I had done;
The blinding dark after
The light-bulb flash and the photograph
Of the filthy tableaus of perfection I was not!
Damn these eyes and Damn the Son!
I thought in beep-sobbing, tacit whispers,
As a silently sung moral chorus
Resounded off the walls, telling me to sleep,
As I drifted of to the syncope thrum of the ancient lyre.

I dreamt of glory and of form,
Of a lone Sunflower following the Sun,
and of its Roots entangled
In the smoky banks of he Lethe.

Stray Cat
Colleen N. Stein

A grey, stray cat
came to our house
one winter
We laughed as he ate
ice-fishing minnows
out of the Styrofoam bucket.

One melting afternoon
he ventured near our dog
who ravaged him and
broke his body.

Wringing her hands,
my mother sent me out alone
to attend the damaged creature.

Our golden retriever sat guilty
wagging his tail,
waiting to pay penance.

I kicked him in the chest
and screamed.

I found the cat
muddied and dragging
himself across the grass.
His limp hind legs
trailing behind him.

I scooped up his broken body.
Numb with a snapped spine,
He purred in my arms.
Beggar's Lament
Austin Tucker

The sidewalks' cold grimace mocked my every step
Twisting my ankles, stubbing my toes
Its laughter composed harsh misery in an antiseptic tone...
I wanted no part of that cruel game of strip-poker
Though dignity is all I bare
That was enough—
Feeling naked, fully clothed
Footsteps! Footsteps!
They walk on my bed, stand in my toilet
Keeping time like a metronome
Counting down days in minutes
Withering away in green blankets
The Man in My Dreams
Katie Pavel

A man walks passed my bed every night. He stands in the doorway, tall and silent, his eyes reaching through the sliver-blinded moonlight to touch me. Then he drifts beside my bed and pauses, leaning over my pillowed head, his brown hair falling from behind his ears. He wears a leather belt about his waist, and a long dark cloak, draped across his broad shoulders, flows to the floor, curving around his boots. His face is calm, his eyes gentle. A small smile always plays across his lips. Who he is, I do not know. A guardian of the night, perhaps, checking to see that I am safe, That I am breathing. Or maybe he longs to bend down and give his sleeping beauty a kiss. I will never know, for I always wake before then, and he vanishes, straightening and fading into the shadows. I used to be afraid of him, starting upright in my bed, shielding my face with my arms But I no longer am. No, instead, I have come to expect him.

Fragmented
Louis G. Whitehead

The darkness of the new moon
That dwells in a starless summer sky
Blankets the earth that lies sleeping below it
It creeps into a man who stands fragmented and alone
In the midst of his brothers and sisters who surround him and stare
And yet pay him no mind
They don’t see the tears that he hides from them and from himself
The tears that long to slide down his cheeks and fall to Earth
Tears that he fights to release and hold back at the same time
Day after day, year after year,
he has divided, subdivided, and subdivided himself yet again
Like so many quarter notes, broken down into eighth and sixteenth notes
And spread himself so thin
Like a pat of butter that struggles to service so many slices of dark toast
So that pieces of himself have scattered to the Four Winds
With a handful of Top curled in his fingers
He raises a trembling fist and voice to the western sky and calls
"Come back!"
To the northern sky
"Come back!"
To the eastern sky
"Come back!"
To the southern sky
"Come back!"
Making a complete circle, he turns again to face the west
And casts his offering of tobacco into the gathering breeze

https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/oakwood/vol2/iss13/1
The Messiah is Finally Here: a Rant
Berit J. Soli-Holt

I smell fake cheese and orange soda—
the complete absence of anything warm and inviting
like original thoughts
and opinions
and dreams
and real fear
and real happiness
that actual people feel—
there is none in those faces
dripping with the glue
that imprisons them in a glowing world of plasticity
filled with the things they should be doing
if they weren't so obsessed
with living vicariously through a virtual universe
created to demean and refuse
the fact that the human race is one small step
above the rest above the planet
because of the way that hunk of gray matter in our skulls functions—
it's all in the glue of infomercials
and talk show hosts that cry—
fly chairs and animated bombs—
it's all in the special sale price
that was placed on that glue
so people bought it
because it came with a free piece of shit—
and they can put it where they kept their soul
because now their soul comes from that radiating slab of machinery
and all they can do is wish
that they could fly like that man on television

The Face
Klaire Lockhart-Beilke
Fallen
Rebecca Hopp

Witherington
Blessings
Kelly Deutsch
First Place Poetry

Let's call it white caramel cappuccino
[the fluffy frothy foam floating on top]
a school-green folder in my locker
[constantly corroding into a beautiful fray]
a piece of a tree, once fallen
[hardly hacked but eventually strewn]
my mother's intrusive, pungent laugh
[betraying the withering wall of the bedroom]
a chill within my soul, withal
[grateful for the grace to feel]

nay, I shall only comment
[despite the obsequious objections]
the blessings of the world are—
“Omigod! You are driving me up the wall!”

“Omigod! You are driving me up the wall!”

“Stop it!”

“Stop it!”

“Quit saying every single word I say. You’re soooo annoying!” I shriek at Jae, who is the president of my fan club and who also happens to be my little sister.

“Quit saying every single word I say. You’re soooo annoying!” shrieks my echo.

This game was much cooler when I was six. When did the copy-cat idea become so unbearably irritating?!? And since when have little sisters been so incredibly obstinate?

The time has come to face the truth: I, Quinn Kelsey, am doomed to live with a tape recorder rewinding and replaying my every word. As I discouragingly plop onto my bed and bury my head into the pillows, Jae waits, anticipating my next sentence so she can chew it up and spit it back out in a much higher six-year-old voice. My blood boils and head pounds at the mere thought. I need help. No, not just help, a miracle.

“Please, God, make her stop!”

Suddenly, maybe the idea came from God or maybe from the “How to beat any kindergartner at their own pathetic game” file lodged far back in the dusty shelves of my brain, I conjure a solution— the answer to my prayers.

“Jae is stupid. Jae is stupid. Jae is stupid,” I yell instantaneously. I shoot the words like a round of bullets from a machine gun, barely firing the first sentence before I load up and fire again.

Silence. Pure stillness. When a six-year-old is in the room, silence is a rarity. No, not a rarity, a miracle.

After the smoke clears, I see Jae, a defeated soldier, a once self-assured kindergartner realizing she has lost the battle.

“Hah! How ya’ going to beat that one, Ms. Copycat, Ms. Quinn-wanna-be!” I think triumphantly to myself.

Jae’s eyes start to squint, becoming more diminutive than they already are and her face turns a deep red, showing through her dark skin.
The Vulture
Quinn Kelsey
Second Place Poetry

A nippy autumn evening
The air is crisp and crackling
The leaves are confetti of pumpkins, sunshine and chocolate scattered on the ground as if someone forgot to pick them up

Mom's bustling in the kitchen, mad because dad is late
In the alley, behind the house, a pair of headlights flood the dullness
A rusty, ancient pickup rumbles into the garage
Spitting gravel and shooting sand behind the tires

Dad shuffles out in his patched, plaid crimson flannel
Triumphantly carrying three trophies—
Their scrawny necks are the same crimson shade as dad's flannel
Mom stays in the kitchen because she's still mad he never called

For half an hour he guts and cleans them, I try not to watch but I can't resist
He salvages only the parts he finds useful
The color inside the birds is the same crimson their necks used to be
And the same crimson my dad's flannel still is, except now covered with feathers

Finally, he's done
After the putrid smell of death, dogs and dirt floats out of the garage
The time has come for the vulture to swoop in and claim what's hers

Mom doesn't notice because she's cooking, she's not mad anymore

I'm much too occupied for supper tonight—
Mom made fresh pheasant
But I now have two feather pens, a claw necklace and a pointy beak
Perfect for scaring the neighbor girl

Of Wind And Fire
Sinduja Sathiyaseelan
Second Place Prose

Meh’ru sat under the shelter of the massive birch tree, her head buried in her arms. Faint thunder crackled overhead; sparks of lightning cast the ominous clouds into sharp relief. Rain poured in sheets, unmercifully soaking all. Meh’ru’s hands trembled, but from cold or fear, she didn’t know. The puddle of soiled water collecting beside her mirrored a pale and ashen girl of twelve. When she caught sight of her reflection, she gasped. Her cheeks were stained with tears and her eyes harbored ghostly vacancy that made her cringe with fright. She was cold, wet, and tired, but she neither knew nor cared. The only thing that mattered now was that they were all gone. Everyone. Everything.

I should be gone too, she thought bitterly as her tears joined the rain. She pushed her drenched and matted red hair out of her eyes and sobbed into her hand. Questions hung over her head like the blade of a guillotine. Who had done this? And more importantly, why? The villagers of Ser’ph had no enemies. Hardly anyone even knew the Border Lands were populated, much less cared. There were rival villages, and a border invasion was far from feasible.

It must have been the Spirits. It had to be. Her grandmother had always told her of the Spirits that haunted these woods. Meh’ru hadn’t believed her then, but she did now.

The Forest of Tears, they called this place. And for a good reason, too. This was the site of the first and only massacre in Ser’ph’s history, where the villagers had cornered and slaughtered the Mages. That had taken place over two hundred years ago, at the height of the Witch Hunts. But it was said that the souls of those who died still wander. No one apart from the militia and the woodcutter ever dared go into these woods.

No one, except Meh’ru. She came in here often, never into the wild interior, but far enough for the bullies following her to give up.

That was why she had been in the forest when... when it had happened. Raode and his cronies had been chasing her, and she had run into the sanctuary of the forest at the edge of the village. The bullies stopped, afraid to pursue any further. They may be rebellious with their parents, but this was one piece of advice they followed to the syllable.

So Meh’ru took refuge in the woods for the remainder of the afternoon, passing her time by watching the creatures of the forest go about their
How long have I been here? she wondered. A day. Or more. She tried to
surprise to find a pile of windfall fruit beside her. She picked up a pear
Then, just as abruptly as it had begun, the wind ceased to blow, leaving a
The trees swayed dangerously, all the while regarding her with mute
indifference, but the breeze whispered softly in her ears. Comforting voices
that delivered her peace; murmurs that sounded almost... human. She
ringing silence behind. And when she looked at the dirt floor, she was
was unthinkable, but she could follow one of the other trails and still
determine what was there. She turned, planning to do just that, but froze when she saw—it—on her
intended route of travel. The Spirit stood in plain view, piercing her with its
wrathful eyes, burning crimson with insane fury.
Meh'ru gasped for breath; her lungs seemed to have closed up. Her chest
heaved and cold sweat trickled down her forehead as she squinted into
the darkness, trying desperately to see what she did not want to see. But
it—whatever it was—was gone. What was that? But no sooner had she
asked herself the question that she realized the answer. A Spirit.
That was it. She made up her mind. She couldn't possibly stay in this
forest, not after what she had just witnessed. Going back to the village
was unthinkable, but she could follow one of the other trails and still
emerge in the pasturelands, safe.
She turned, planning to do just that, but froze when she saw—it—on her
intended route of travel. The Spirit stood in plain view, piercing her with its
dagger-like stare. She stood as if spellbound, thought failing her as an
irrepressible fear swelled to fill her heart. And by the time she was able to
permit it. Meh'ru's legs had turned to lead and she stayed rooted to
the spot.
Meh'ru watched, transfixed by the horror before her, unable to budge
in the wake of the firestorm.
I should have done something. But what could she have done? Anything.
At least I should have been there with them.
Wallowing in her own guilt, Meh'ru finally cried herself to sleep, the dull
thudding lullaby of the rain carrying her off into unsettling dreams.
By the time Meh'ru roused, night had fallen. Everything around her was
carpeted in a blanket of silence that was broken only by the chirping
crickets singing their sonnets to the sky. She pushed herself up into a
sitting position and looked around. Her vision was poor due to the waning
crescent of a moon, but from what she could see, there was no sign of
anyone except for the most miniscule of creatures.
She wanted to cry, to indulge in her misery once again, but tears failed her
call. She slumped back onto the cool earth, too worn to move. Hunger
gnawed at her stomach, but she had neither the energy nor the will to
find food to satisfy it.
"How long have I been here?" she wondered. A day. Or more. She tried
to concentrate, but it was hard to ignore the lump that rose in her
throat every time she thought of the village. The memories kept
returning, echoing louder with vengeance each time.
Meh'ru suddenly shivered as the wind traced an icy finger along her spine.
The trees swayed dangerously, all the while regarding her with mute
indifference, but the breeze whispered softly in her ears. Comforting voices
that delivered her peace; murmurs that sounded almost...human. She
calmed; her breathing deepened and her grief eased.
Then, just as abruptly as it had begun, the wind ceased to blow, leaving a
ringing silence behind. And when she looked at the dirt floor, she was
surprised to find a pile of windfall fruit beside her. She picked up a pear
from the lot and studied it before deciding it safe and stuffing half of it
into her mouth. The juices eased her hunger as well as her thirst, and
Meh'ru finished the last of them before curling up beside the birch tree to
sleep. But this time, her slumber was serene, and if she had dreams, they
were peaceful.
Meh'ru woke to the sounds of movement in the trees. Leaves rustled and
twigs cracked, as if someone—or something—was moving about in the
forest, just beyond her range of vision. Soft, cackling laughter echoed
through the gaps in the undergrowth. Again she heard whispers; however,
this time they were not consoling, but rather caustic and malicious. There
was no hint of a breeze, only shadows that darted about.
She sat upright and scanned her environment for any real sign of trouble,
but saw nothing. Maybe I'm just imagining it. Lying back down, she tried
to sleep again, but slumber had successfully deserted her.
That was when she saw it. A tall and white figure was moving about in the
trees. In the split-second glimpse of it, she could tell that whatever it
was, it was not even remotely human, although it had the general shape
of one. Slightly translucent, it seemed to be made of hair-thin strands of
silk that shone in the little light that penetrated the thick foliage. Its face,
or where its face should have been, was devoid of any features except two
wrathful eyes, burning crimson with insane fury.
Meh'ru had watched, transfixed by the horror before her, unable to budge
in the wake of the firestorm.
I should have done something. But what could she have done? Anything.
At least I should have been there with them.
Wallowing in her own guilt, Meh'ru finally cried herself to sleep, the dull
thudding lullaby of the rain carrying her off into unsettling dreams.
By the time Meh'ru roused, night had fallen. Everything around her was
carpeted in a blanket of silence that was broken only by the chirping
crickets singing their sonnets to the sky. She pushed herself up into a
sitting position and looked around. Her vision was poor due to the waning
crescent of a moon, but from what she could see, there was no sign of
anyone except for the most miniscule of creatures.
She wanted to cry, to indulge in her misery once again, but tears failed her
call. She slumped back onto the cool earth, too worn to move. Hunger
gnawed at her stomach, but she had neither the energy nor the will to
find food to satisfy it.
"How long have I been here?" she wondered. A day. Or more. She tried
to concentrate, but it was hard to ignore the lump that rose in her
throat every time she thought of the village. The memories kept
returning, echoing louder with vengeance each time.
Meh'ru suddenly shivered as the wind traced an icy finger along her spine.
The trees swayed dangerously, all the while regarding her with mute
indifference, but the breeze whispered softly in her ears. Comforting voices
that delivered her peace; murmurs that sounded almost...human. She
calmed; her breathing deepened and her grief eased.
Then, just as abruptly as it had begun, the wind ceased to blow, leaving a
ringing silence behind. And when she looked at the dirt floor, she was
surprised to find a pile of windfall fruit beside her. She picked up a pear
from the lot and studied it before deciding it safe and stuffing half of it
into her mouth. The juices eased her hunger as well as her thirst, and
Meh'ru finished the last of them before curling up beside the birch tree to
sleep. But this time, her slumber was serene, and if she had dreams, they
were peaceful.
Meh'ru woke to the sounds of movement in the trees. Leaves rustled and
twigs cracked, as if someone—or something—was moving about in the
forest, just beyond her range of vision. Soft, cackling laughter echoed
through the gaps in the undergrowth. Again she heard whispers; however,
this time they were not consoling, but rather caustic and malicious. There
was no hint of a breeze, only shadows that darted about.
She sat upright and scanned her environment for any real sign of trouble,
but saw nothing. Maybe I'm just imagining it. Lying back down, she tried
to sleep again, but slumber had successfully deserted her.
That was when she saw it. A tall and white figure was moving about in the
trees. In the split-second glimpse of it, she could tell that whatever it
was, it was not even remotely human, although it had the general shape
of one. Slightly translucent, it seemed to be made of hair-thin strands of
silk that shone in the little light that penetrated the thick foliage. Its face,
or where its face should have been, was devoid of any features except two
wrathful eyes, burning crimson with insane fury.
Meh'ru gasped for breath; her lungs seemed to have closed up. Her chest
heaved and cold sweat trickled down her forehead as she squinted into
the darkness, trying desperately to see what she did not want to see. But
it—whatever it was—was gone. What was that? But no sooner had she
asked herself the question that she realized the answer. A Spirit.
That was it. She made up her mind. She couldn't possibly stay in this
forest, not after what she had just witnessed. Going back to the village
was unthinkable, but she could follow one of the other trails and still
emerge in the pasturelands, safe.
She turned, planning to do just that, but froze when she saw—it—on her
intended route of travel. The Spirit stood in plain view, piercing her with its
dagger-like stare. She stood as if spellbound, thought failing her as an
irrepressible fear swelled to fill her heart. And by the time she was able to
shake it off, it was much too late. More of them materialized around her,
surrounding her so that she could not flee. Not that her body would
permit it. Meh'ru's legs had turned to lead and she stayed rooted to
the spot.
The Spirits all stared at her with the same psychotic rage, a look that
promised no good. One of them stepped closer; she recoiled to the
ground. It reached out with what must have been a hand, the fire in its
eyes blazing higher with every passing second.

"You," it breathed, a rasping sound much akin to a growl. "You... must... die!"

And that was all she heard before the darkness of an abyss overwhelmed her and she collapsed to the earth.

"Meh’ru?" a soft voice called her name from above. It was a voice that sounded quite familiar, though she could not remember why. "Meh’ru?" it called again.

With a certain amount of effort, Meh’ru opened her eyes to the source of the sound. A dark-skinned blur swam near her beneath the azure morning sky, before her eyes snapped into clarity. When they did, she saw an amber-toned boy peering at her, his strange orange eyes contorted with worry. His hair was curiously white on a such a young face, which itself attested to no more than twelve or thirteen years.

"Are you awake?" he asked.

Meh’ru sat up, confused. What happened to the Spirits? Had it all been a dream? Who was this boy? And how—how had he known her name?

"I’m Telwyn," he said, answering the unasked question. His voice was surprisingly deep and she noticed an accent in it, one that she was not familiar with.

"Oh. My name is—"

"Meh’ru. I know."

"But how do you know?" she blurted before she could stop herself. Immediately she was ashamed of her outburst. But still... she couldn’t ignore the curiosity gnawing at her.

Telwyn looked a little taken aback, but quickly hit it with a smile. "The Wind Spirit told me."

The effect of his words was instantaneous. Before she realized it, Meh’ru was soon on her feet, ready to run at any sign of trouble. The Wind Spirit? The Wind Spirit?

The boy had stood up as well, but his face showed confusion and shock. "What? What’s wrong?"

"You’re one of them, aren’t you?" She pointed an accusing finger at him.

"Them. The Spirits."

There was a spark of understanding in his eyes and he smiled warmly. "No. Of course not."

Meh’ru wasn’t ready to believe him just yet. He sat down on the very little grass there was and beckoned her to join him. But she stayed firmly where she was.

"What about the Wind Spirit?" she asked.

"He isn’t one of them, either," Telwyn replied looking straight into her eyes. She unfinchingly met his gaze and he continued. "The Wind Dragon, as he’s more often called, is the guardian of the forest. He makes sure that the other Spirits are kept in check. But recently, they’ve been getting out of control again. Their thirst for vengeance has grown beyond their control. They revel in destruction and death."

He paused, seemingly unsure about whether to say more.

"And?" she prompted. "I already know that the Spirits murder anyone who comes into the woods. Everyone does."

He sighed. "But there’s something else, too. The spirits... they burned down the local village of Ser’ph. They demolished your home... and killed your family."

The words echoed horribly in the silence that followed. Meh’ru’s knees gave way, and she fell to the floor. Tears welled up in her eyes. The fire... the screams... the terrible stench of burning flesh. It all came back to her, as strong as ever. Grandma... A strangled sob was all that escaped from her lips before she collapsed onto the ground.

Suddenly she felt arms around her, warm and affectionate. Just like before, a breeze grazed her skin and whispered placating murmurs into her ears. Let the grief out, it said. Let it all go. All will be right again, you’ll see. Little by little, she calmed, heeding the voice, trusting it. Vaguely she wondered if this was the Wind Dragon Telwyn had talked about. If so, she could not see anyway that it could be anything less than good.

Finally, she composed herself and opened her eyes. The breeze had stopped, but to her surprise, the comforting arms around her were as solid as ever. For a while she closed her eyes and leaned back into the embrace, still breathing heavily, but relaxing more with every mouthful of air.

The arms loosened and released her. Meh’ru turned to find Telwyn grinning sheepishly, a smile which she gladly returned, albeit weakly.
“It is time to move on,” he said, quickly sobering. “Come.” He held out his hand for her. “I will take you somewhere safe.”

“Somewhere... safe?”

Telwyn nodded. “There is a Temple not far from here. It is isolated, but it is safe. The Spirits don’t dare go there.”

“A Temple?” She didn’t know of any temple near here. But then again, the villagers of Ser’ph might not have known about it either. They tended to not care much about anything out of the border of their lives. She immediately swallowed the lump in her throat. Telwyn was right. It’s time to move on.

“Okay.” She placed her hand in his. The Wind Dragon trusted him. And she trusted the Wind Dragon. “Let’s go.”

They had trekked through the wilderness of the forest for three days, and Meh’ru was tired. She just hoped they would come to the Temple soon. Her legs had started protesting the first night after she met Telwyn, and had kept right on complaining the two days that followed. Now, all she wanted was sleep.

She blew on the small fire to kindle it. They had stopped to make camp for the night, although it was a crude one. But the small tent did keep any rain or moisture out, and they hadn’t seen any Spirits so far. Once she had started to unwind, Meh’ru had found the peace of the forest quite beautiful, much to her surprise.

Another thing that had come as a shock was Telwyn. He had proved to know more about the woods than she had ever thought there was to know. He might be disinclined to talk during those long hikes, but he was good company. What was more, he had become something of a friend, the first one she had had in a long time. And although she still did not know why he was in the forest, she was just glad he was.

“Here,” Telwyn said, coming to sit beside her on the soft grass. “Dinner.” He handed her two small fish, ones that he had caught in the brook nearby and had gutted and cleaned.

“Good,” she answered. “I picked some berries. We should have enough for dinner and breakfast tomorrow. And maybe even enough for lunch.”

Soon, she finished cooking the fish; at the same time, Telwyn managed to get the tent up. As they sat down to eat, a heavy silence fell between them. Telwyn preferred to let her do the talking, but Meh’ru was lost in her own thoughts. She looked at the silver-haired boy lounging next to her, and questions flooded her. Who, exactly, was he? How had he gotten here? And why was he helping her?

But she knew better than to question him. Her curiosity would not be sated if she did. Once she had confronted him about his past, and Telwyn had reverted to talking in riddles. Everything he said could have had multiple meanings. No. Asking him would just lead to more questions, and there was always the chance that his was a sensitive past. Bordering upon it could anger him, even enough to drive him away. And she couldn’t even think of what that would mean. The loss of a friend... and a future. She swept those questions to the back of her mind. It was time to focus on the here and now.

Abruptly, Telwyn put down his dinner and stood up. She started to ask him why, but he cut her off by raising his hand.

“There’s something near,” he whispered. “Spirits.”

Meh’ru suppressed a gasp and joined him in scrutinizing the shadows in the trees. The hair on the back of her neck tingled and she knew Telwyn was right. There were Spirits around... somewhere.

Then, with no warning, they attacked. Quicker than lighting, Spirits soared toward them from all directions, too many to count.

Telwyn pulled her down onto the ground; the Spirits were forced to scatter.

Before thoughts could grace her mind, Telwyn had pulled her up again and they were running—no—they were gliding across the grass. The wind itself seemed to be pushing them along.

But the Spirits weren’t going to give up easily. They followed, and gained speed by the second.

“Telwyn! They’re coming!”

“Hold on.”

Telwyn came to a sudden halt, spinning so Meh’ru was safely behind him. Muttering something barley audible, he pointed his palm at the Spirits.

The Spirits’ eyes widened in shock. But it was much too late. The spell was cast.

The wind tore savagely at them. Ripping, slicing, killing. Invisible knives plunged into them.

Horrible screeching filled the air. Voices from Hell.
Luminous bodies spurt blood as black as Death.

All this, Meh’ru barely glimpsed, for Telwyn didn’t stay long. Pulling her along, he ran again through the thick undergrowth. Branches and bushes twisted out of their way. The foliage urged them forward.

Then she saw it. A spirit. Bigger, brighter, and stronger than any other.

"Telwyn!"

"Right."

Again Telwyn spun his spell. But he wasn’t fast enough.

Spirit charged.

Not at Meh’ru but at Telwyn.

A sickening sound of ripping flesh. The spirit thrust its claws into Telwyn’s side.

He crumpled.

But not before the wind had had its say. It slashed at the Spirit. Icy daggers that sought to destroy.

The wind spiraled around it. Trapped. Spinning ever closer to the Spirit, the explosion of wind plunged itself into the ethereal body. A moan of pain was cut off suddenly as the Spirit vanished.

Silence.

Meh’ru dropped to her knees, shaking with every fiber of her body.

Telwyn shuddered. She stared at him, trying to discern how much he had been hurt. But he was lying face-down, and it was difficult to tell.

"Telwyn?” she called anxiously, “Telwyn?”

He grunted and tried to raise himself up. Failing, he flopped back onto the ground. Finally, with effort and Meh’ru’s help, he flipped onto his back, facing her.

Now she saw the damage. A vast gash across his shirt revealed a fresh wound, raw and tender. She couldn’t really tell how deep it was, but it wasn’t gushing blood like she had expected.

Telwyn moved his hand up to cover it when he realized where she was looking. “Don’t worry,” he said in a hoarse whisper tainted with agony. He tried to smile, but only succeeded in producing a grimace of pain. “I’m fine.”

“Don’t worry? Don’t worry?” Meh’ru’s voice rose with hysteria.

“You’re hurt!”

“No. I’m fine. Listen. There’s something important.” He spoke between sharp intakes of breath, as if each word was costing him the highest price he was willing to pay.

She nodded, not daring to take her eyes off his face.

“The Temple. We’re close. Just a half-mile. Follow that trail.” He pointed to the depths of the woods, where sure enough, a trail meandered through the trees. In the urgency of the battle with the Spirit, she hadn’t seen it before.

Telwyn continued. “And…there’s something I didn’t tell you. You’re not the only one who survived the fire.”

“What?” she croaked, completely taken by surprise.

“Another lives, as well. He approaches. Don’t worry. He will not hurt you. You are all he has now. And he is all you have. Take care of each other. Don’t stop. Don’t look back. Keep going and don’t return. Heed my words, Meh’ru.”

She shook her head desperately, tears forming in her eyes. “No! Don’t say that.”

“You must go. I will be fine.”

“NO!”

“Meh’ru.” He smiled. “Trust me.”

Tears fell freely, but she didn’t care. Telwyn reached out and touched her cheek.

“Look,” he said, turning her head toward the path he had pointed to earlier. A dark figure was approaching, bearing the shape of a tall and lanky boy. As he neared, she could make out his flaming red hair.

Telwyn’s hand slipped and fell. Meh’ru spun quickly and was shocked to find…nothing. Where Telwyn had been, he was no more, as if he had somehow melted into the wind without so much as a whisper. She started at the spot where he had lain, trying to grasp the fact that he was gone, not even noticing the boy, who had gotten close and stood, completely taken aback by her presence.

“Meh’ru?” said a very familiar voice. Her head snapped up toward the boy, now close enough so that she could clearly distinguish his distressed face, one that she knew very well.
Yellow Rose
Emma Schutz
Third Place Poetry

With leaves in a glass soda bottle
Expands each day; unfurls soft yellow sections.
Each petal movement an addition
To various diameters.
A crisscross of Pis and Rs
Increasing the circumference of a scent
And the area of a glow.

A friendship.
Time will brown it.
Around the edges of each layered petal
Age will form.
Take that brown and turn it upside down.
Hang your yellow friendship from your ceiling.
Let it dry and darken
Crispen to the touch.
Browned beauty forever.

Train-Striped Overalls
Quinn Kelsey
Third Place Prose

Hello, I'm Galen Kelsey. This here's my wife Marlys. She'd be standing here next to me, but she got herself some knee problems. I suppose kickin' the lawnmower wasn't too good for it. (Her knee, not the lawnmower) Well, everything is goin' fine at the farm. Crops are comin' in, animals stayin' helathy, my granddaughter is looking at colleges and well, I suppose she won't be coming back to South Dakota anytime soon. We've had a few medical problems over the past year- but I won't ramble on about those. I already feel like I'm at a cattle rancher's convention with everyone talking about their operations.

Welcome to the Kelsey-Gidley family reunion. And meet Grandpa Galen- he's practically deaf, totally bald, extremely embarrassing, and yes, he is wearing train-striped overalls. For the past ten years of my life, my grandpa's train-striped overalls have served as a painful (and humiliating) reminder that I grew up in a state which trademarked the two-fingered wave, a state which many assume got running water yesterday and uses buffalo for transportation, a state whose only attraction is a few faces carved into a rock.

However, over the past year, I realized I've been deceived- not by a person, but by a pair of overalls. Looking back on my childhood in South Dakota, reflecting on the friendships, the experiences, and the lessons, I've discovered that old Grandpa Galen's train-striped overalls aren't something to be ashamed of- but proud of. After all, within those train-striped overalls lie my foundations, my beginnings, my history.

Ever since I've know Grandpa Galen (which has been 17 years), and I'd assume before I even entered the picture, my grandpa has sported the same aged, train-striped overalls. If he owns only a single pair and Grandma Marlys washes them while he's sleeping (I'd assume he does not wear them to bed, though I wouldn't be surprised) or if he owns numerous pairs and wears them on a daily cycle, it is still a matter of conjecture. Not that it matters. After all, train-striped overalls are train-striped overalls.

To me, the overalls are more than a dynamic fashion statement and a mighty handy article of clothing; the overalls are a symbol of everything I love about South Dakota. The material represents the people: strong and stitched together firmly, tightly, and carefully. Whether grandpa was laboring in the corn fields on a the family farm (as he did in his younger days) or caning chairs in the basement of his little, white house (as he did in his older years), the material endured dirt and sawdust, tractors
and varnish—never once did I see a tear in the material. However, I’m sure if there was, grandma would have patched them up “good as new” and those overalls—would set out for another day’s work. The simple, striped design reminds me of the South Dakota landscape—not flashy, not busy, but natural, peaceful, and astoundingly beautiful. So many clothes today are bright, complicated and demanding attention—the train striped overalls don’t demand attention, they deserve it.

Last year, my mom and I drove to Minneapolis for a not-so little (we told Dad otherwise) back-to-school shopping spree. There is NOTHING like setting two women loose in a massive building packed wall to wall with the bare necessities—shoes, clothes, makeup, and handbags. As I was blindly stumbling through the choppy sea of people, doing my best not to drown amongst thousands of other mother-daughter teams out for their back-to-school shopping sprees, I floated past a store—the kind of store that sells the trendiest clothing, uses the cheapest materials, and charges the highest prices—and despite the wave of women going against me, I stopped dead in my tracks. There, next to a waif-like mannequin in a mini skirt stood a lifeless mannequin with a Mohawk hair-do. But the Mohawk isn’t the point. The point is, the Mohawk mannequin was wearing a pair of train-striped overalls.

I wanted to march right into that store and buy every pair of overalls in stock. Train-striped overalls aren’t a fad, they aren’t a trend; train striped overalls are classic and timeless! The little teeny-bopper girls who buy those overalls as displays of fashion don’t deserve them, the punk manikin doesn’t even deserve them—Heck! It’s not even alive and most of those girls aren’t even South Dakotans. My grandpa, he deserved them, he earned them.

As a 17 year-old high school senior with high aspirations and bright hopes for my future, I can hardly sit still in my school desk when I think of the adventurous world outside the brick walls and how it’s just calling my name to jump and explore it. (The world, not the walls.) However, one thought always keeps me grounded: although my future may lie outside South Dakota and although my career is likely not in farming, those faded, train-striped overalls will always be my history, and my foundation in South Dakota. I’m no longer embarrassed of those overalls—I am beaming with pride.

The other day, my dad trampled in from a long day’s work of carpentry—he was wearing train-striped overalls I couldn’t help but break a smile and say, “Hey grandpa.” When I have kids, I hope they love their grandpa’s train-striped overalls.
Odd Shaped Box
Myles Estes
Honorable Mention Prose

Gibberish. That’s all it’s ever been. The butterflies no longer flutter. Maybe the radiation finally kicked in. No, I don’t have a gun. Never mind. Mind never straight. An odd-shaped box with ears, listening to everything. Boxed up hate. Boxed up pages. Boxed up impatience. Hastened slaughter at a young age ages the effects of trauma. Dad hit mom and mom didn’t get up. Bloodshot gaze or a ‘I regretted you ever since you were born’ look, I couldn’t tell or care after the first swing. Why is Christ sideways? Lying down on the job? I got up.

“Thanks for nothing.”

They sunless day peered through the crooked shades. The beer cans on the TV set were hardly visible from the drone of the race that was on. The dried and stained area around my left eye looked eerie on the hall mirror. I’m still home. The screen door about fell off its rusty hinges. There were no stars. His truck was still in the driveway. I quickly turned to run inside but fell finding out my leg wasn’t asleep but broken. My bare palms stung against the bottle sharded porch step. I grabbed the handgun from his night-stand. Steps echoed through the kitchen hallway passed the laundry room and from the basement. As I forced the two beads on the pistol to line up, his face appeared behind them. Drool covered, the man of 8 years in absence to me, was finally surprised to see me.

“Why?” I calmly forced myself to ask.

“What the fuck you talkin’ bout, boy?”

“Wrong answer.”

I went deaf and blind when I pulled the trigger. It was light behind my finger as if it were meant to be pulled now. I heard a thud. The Tungsten angels shown light upon the un-masked monster. I fell back into one of the dining room chairs. My mother lay motionless, still breathing. A vision of me at the age seven flashed into my eyes. I shook my head seeing my younger self waving at him with his moving van. 2 years back into my life and I know why he never waved. The cuts and slashed scars no longer felt like sob stories.

The black lustered cyclops of my inevitable demise at 17, peered into my thoughts and sang me to sleep. Never to wake up. Count the clouds for me. Even if you yourself never see day, count away. Count like it matters.

The Fallen
Sinduja Sathiyaseelan
Honorable Mention Poetry

Ignored by man,
Scorned by God.

Walking a desolate path,
Toward a desolate future.

Never to know a mother’s smile,
Never to feel a lover’s kiss.

With wings of ebony
Clipped and cut,
Robes of crimson,
Sin and lust.

Past forgotten,
Fate unknown,
Sin remembered,
Of sin born.

Sky’s laughter,
And Earth’s pain,
All to know
And none to gain.

Never to know a brother’s bond,
Never to hear a friend’s song.

A desolate form for all to see,
A desolate mind in agony.

Scorned by God,
Ignored by man.

They are the Fallen.
Winter Fun
Melissa Ross
Honorable Mention Prose

One Saturday morning, I opened my eyes to an amazing sight. I looked out my window to see the bright, white snow piled high all around and still falling. I don’t usually like snow because it makes the roads so icy when you have to travel, and the blizzards can be pretty scary. Today, for some unusual reason, was different, so I got up, made myself some scrambled eggs with toast and devoured it so I could get outside sooner. I didn’t wait long after I ate because I was so excited; there was so much I wanted to do.

I began to bundle up to stay warm after I got outside. First, I put on some dark gray leggings, and my post prom t-shirt from last year. Then I put on a sweater and a pair of jeans. After that layer, I put on my Longhorns playoff hooded sweatshirt. I also put on a pair of wind pants so I could easily brush off any snow and keep myself from getting wet. I went to the closet and got my old winter coat to wear as my top and final layer of clothes. Just as I was getting finished up, my mom came into my room.

“Just where do you think you are going?”

“Outside!” I exclaimed, “There’s a lot of fresh powder out there, I would hate to let go to waste.”

“Okay, but make sure you have plenty of clothes on because it is kind of cold out there.”

“Yeah, Mom, I know. I have enough clothes on, don’t worry.”

All I had left to do was to put on my snow boots and then my gloves. My boots were out in the garage, so I sat on the top step outside our door and put them on as fast as I could. I just got my last glove on as my dad came through the garage door wearing his coveralls, a jacket, and gloves.

“Hey, chores all done?” I greeted.

“Not quite, I have a couple things left to do. I still have to take the tractor and get a bale of hay put in the corral for the cows. Then I am going to get a straw bale to bed the shed, but right now I am going to let the tractor warm up a bit and myself as well. How come you’re up so early?”

“I just thought I would go out and enjoy the snow. Do you want some help putting the straw down in the barn?”

“Yes, but first I am going to go in the house and warm up a little, and then I’ll be back out.”

“My dad nodded his head as he went inside the house, and I headed out the door of the garage. I went into our yard and fell backwards into the snow and started to make a snow angel. That didn’t go over well because our dog ran up to me and started to lick my face.

“Taz!” I shouted.

I had to push him away, and I got up only to see a very strange outline in the snow: needless to say, not a very good snow angel. I told the dog to stay, and he did, while I made another snow angel. I wanted to make a snowman, but the snow was too fresh to stick together. After awhile of trudging through the snow down on our creek, I came back to the house and saw my dad just go through the gate into the barn with a straw bale.

I headed for the barn to help him. First, he set the bale down on the ground and drove the tractor forward to get the bale to slide off the fork in the back. He drove the tractor out of the barn and parked it in the corral. He came into the barn and grabbed a pitchfork. He started by tearing the top several layers off the bale and throwing the hay back behind him.

“Is there another pitchfork around her somewhere?” I asked.

“There might be one in the tack room,” my dad answered, not taking his eyes off his work.

“Okay, I’ll check.”

I went to open the door of the tack room, and a small brown mouse ran out the door and right across my foot!

“Ah, gross!” I yelled.

“What’s the matter?” asked my dad.

“A mouse just ran across my foot,” I complained.

I could hear my dad chuckle as he went back to work. I am really glad that mouse didn’t decide to run up my leg. I opened the door wider and spotted a pitchfork. I went in, grabbed it, and shut the door quickly before I had any other little surprises. I went back to the bale and started to help tear it apart. Pretty soon, the bale had gotten to be about half the size it was when we first started. By that time, it was small enough to roll, and it neatly unraveled just like wrapping paper on a cardboard roll. The bale soon diminished as it was unrolled. Then my dad and I walked around the barn kicking the straw as we went, in order to spread it around. It didn’t take us long to get that done. My dad handed me the pitchforks and then crawled back into the tractor to put it away, I put both of the pitchforks back in the tack room and went to the garage.
I took off my gloves, then my snow boots, and went into the house. I removed most of my layers of clothing and put them away. I helped my mom make dinner and then clean the house. Later that day, the snow had quit falling and the sun had been shining for several hours. This made the snow somewhat wet and sticky, so I figured it was the perfect opportunity to go make a snowman. This time I only put on my heavy coat before I went outside. I took an old scarf and baseball cap out of the cupboard and grabbed a carrot from the refrigerator before I went out to the garage to put on my snow boots. I put a carrot into my pocket, pulled on my gloves and headed outside. I got into the yard and started with a medium sized snowball and put it on the ground and rolled it. It wasn’t long before I had the bottom portion of my snowman formed. I started the middle the same way, only I stopped when this ball got to a size a little smaller than the bottom. I picked it up and stacked it onto the first ball that I made. So far, I had a two-layer snowman. This next one was the important layer: the head. I rolled it just the way I had done with the other two and picked it up and stacked it on the very top. I pulled the carrot out of my pocket and put it on the snowman’s face for a nose. I set the baseball cap on my snowman’s head, along with the scarf that I wrapped around its neck. I dug out several rocks from underneath the snow and formed a pair of eyes and a mouth. I went behind the garage, just beyond the fence to the creek, and picked up two gray tree branches. I walked back up to my snowman with the branches and gave it arms. I was happy that I ended up getting to make a snowman, and a darn good one. What a way to end a day!

Unwanted Child
Alana Black Bird
Honorable Mention Poetry

Waking to the cry of an unwanted child
What a nightmare you must face
I won’t pity you, for you already feel pity
I won’t shed any tears for you
You’ve shed enough for a lifetime
I’ve cried until no more tears will come
You may not be prepared for this
But if I could do it, you can, too
You will come to love this child
As I’ve come to love you
Books
Amanda Kern
Honorable Mention Poetry

Books are our way out:
Out of fear, out of sickness out of reality.  
They open doors for us. 
They allow us to believe in the unbelievable. 
They don’t judge us for anything. 
You can read them alone or to another. 
You can read fact or fiction; 
Good or bad; past, present, or future. 
It doesn’t matter. 
You can go anywhere, 
Do anything, 
Be anyone, 
Or just be nothing, no one, or no where. 
It doesn’t matter. 
Books are our way out, 
But we can always get back in.

Life in it’s Entirety
Emily Brake
Honorable Mention Poetry

Get grimy
grungy
with the opportunities
of being
genuine
guiltless
Liberation
for the real dirt
of the world
Oh how I long to follow
my own advice