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illumination

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Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Students

2013 - 2014

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All entries were blind judged with one judge assigned to each category. Each judge selected their top choices in the order of rank for the winners. Artwork was provided by Marc Poole, who selected pieces from students in art classes on the Jackson County Campus.

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“Shells” Jamie Nash

Building up “The Highwayman”

By Sarah Rhea

1st Place Winner: Critical Essay

The poem “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes is a narrative poem that describes a tale of a lone highwayman and his love for Bess, the landlord’s daughter, and their utter destruction. “The Highwayman” was first published “between 1903 and 1908 and first appeared serially in *Blackwood’s Magazine*” (“Alfred Noyes”). Noyes unwinds this tale in a cadence sort of fashion, using this rhythm to create suspense towards the end of the poem. When describing “The Highwayman,” Marantz, Art Education Department of Ohio State University, says:

Noyes’ masterful manipulation of such figures of speech has made this poem unforgettable. The ingredients of melodrama are all here: the lovers promising to meet again ‘before morning’s light’; the pitiful unloved informer and a midnight’s setting. We feel the passion, sense of suspense of waiting for the ending we hope against hope won’t happen. (Marantz and Gerhardt)

To better understand how this poem is a narrative poem, one must analyze further how the key elements of setting, foreshadowing and symbolism contribute to this poem.

The setting in this poem is the basic building block of the entire development of the poem itself. The first stanza is written entirely for the purpose of elaborating on the description of the setting to set the mood. “The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees/The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas” (Noyes 1 - 2). Noyes here, using the wind, is showing the fierce force of nature by emphasizing the immense power of the wind. With the comparison of the moon and clouds, along with the wind, Noyes has created the perfect stormy night for a robber (the Highwayman) to appear. The location of this poem begins on a highway that is “a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor” (Noyes 3). The highway has two main points as to why it is mentioned. It is the beginning of the tale, but it is also where the Highwayman is shot down and killed tragically after a failed attempt to save the one he loves. As the story transcends, we transfer to an old inn, where Bess the landlord’s daughter lives. Other than the highway, the inn is the

most important setting because it is the meeting place for Bess and the Highwayman, as well as the location of the arrival of King George's men, the "red-coat troop," and the death of Bess (Noyes 40).

The foreshadowing of "The Highwayman" has several clues to show us prematurely the conclusion. One example is Highwayman's parting words with Bess before he takes off for his last robbery.

Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me
through the day
Then look for me by the moonlight,
Watch for me by the moonlight,
I'll come to thee by the moonlight, though Hell
should bar the way. (Noyes 32-35)

The Highwayman says, "Though Hell should bar the way," signifying that no obstacle can stop him from returning, not even "Hell" can block his way (Noyes 35). This indicates that he may or may not be aware that foretold dangers await him on his return to Bess (which in this case would be the red coats). But before the final good-bye between Bess and the Highwayman,

the reader is told in the fourth stanza of Tim the Osler, a stable boy who is madly in love with Bess. In verses seventeen through twenty it is told that "Tim loves the landlord's daughter." Tim's eyes are "hollows of madness" as he listens to Bess and the Highwayman's conversation. From this one can infer that it was Tim who alerted King George's men of the location of the highwayman. For a deeper understanding of Tim's "hollows of madness," it describes Tim as not only physically enraged at the couple, but internally, to the very essences of his soul. Tim is blackened with hatred and to the deepest pits of agony, thus resulting in his eyes becoming "hollows of madness," which leads to the future betrayal from him. Another example of foreshadowing is line thirty-seven, "He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon." Here one can see that something is holding the Highwayman back from returning to retrieve Bess. In line forty the "red-coat troop" is marching down the highway, so one can see that the Highwayman isn't just an ordinary robber, but a high priority if all of King George's men had come just to pursue a lone highwaymen. With this one can conclude two possible outcomes at this point of the poem: either

the highwayman valiantly fights his way through the troops and heroically saves Bess and runs, or this is the upbringing of his death.

For “The Highwayman,” all throughout the poem, there is a strong use of poetic symbolism. The color red is a major symbol within the whole poem. The first time the color red is mentioned is line eight in the description of his clothes: “A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.” Claret in this case is a colorful description of his coat. Claret is an expensive red wine made in Bordeaux, France, so to be used in the description of his clothes, it symbolizes the expense of the cloth, as well as indicating the type of looting he achieves if even his clothes are beyond riches. Red is also mentioned in stanza three, line eighteen, “Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.” The ribbon itself, when it is folded and tied, can represent a never-ending tie, or even a complication in itself. But since it is a “dark red love-knot,” it shows Bess’ never ending love for the highwayman. She is tied, intertwined, and sealed with her love for him, making her as inseparable as her hair to the ribbon. Line twenty-three describes red as in “The landlord’s

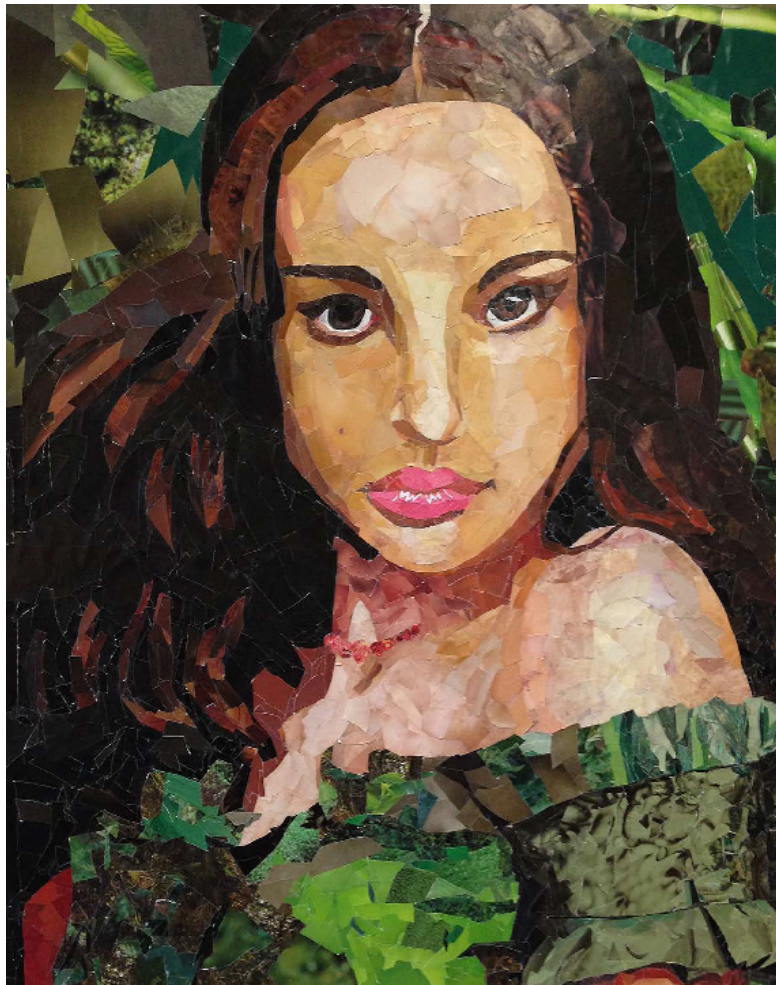
red-lipped daughter.” “Red-lipped” can either be interpreted as immeasurable beauty, seductiveness, attractive or even scandalous. But from the knowledge of Bess’ committed love for the Highwayman, one can see that it is a fitting description and testament to her natural beauty. In lines seventy-eight and eighty-one, red is paired with the word blood, “Bowed, with her head o’er the musket, drenched with her own red blood!” and “Blood red were his spurs I’ the golden noon wine-red was his velvet coat.” Red goes from the description of fine clothing, to never-ending love, to the final resulting death of both protagonists. Both Bess and the Highwayman are shot and left to lie in their own pool of “red blood.” With the wording of “wine-red was his velvet coat,” already his coat is described as “claret velvet,” but now Noyes adds more emphasis to the redness of his coat by wording it to “wine-red” to give a clearer focus of the change in the red (Noyes 78, 81).

After analyzing Noyes’ “The Highwayman,” one can now understand how this poem and its key elements contribute to create the foundation of the poem. Noyes creates the setting on a dark stormy night adding to the poem’s ghost-like tale with

its heavy description of detailed imagery. Foreshadowing and symbolism, heavily emphasized, aid as the building blocks of this narrative poem.

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“Girl”

Camryn Bosarge

No Scar, No Skin, No Flesh

By Danielle Hunt

2nd Place: Critical Essay

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan focuses on the generational contrast in the lives of four Chinese mothers in pre-1949 China and the lives of their American-born daughters. The setting of the story is San Francisco, California. Each of the mothers emigrates from China to America to escape war and poverty and to have a better life. The novel is divided into four sections, each section having four stories with three of the mother figures telling two stories and the four daughters telling two stories with the exception of Jing-mei Woo. Jing-mei Woo, also known as June, takes the place of her dead mother, Suyuan Woo, who was the founder of the Joy Luck Club during the Sino-Japanese war, in the first and last sections of the novel. The purpose of the Joy Luck Club was to help the women cope with the war; they would meet weekly to play mahjong and share their hopes for the future. June also narrates a story in each of the four sections. The first and the last sections tell the mothers' stories of their harsh family experiences in pre-1949 China and

their current relationship to their American daughters. The second and third sections are the four daughters' stories of growing up and their current family situation. Understanding Chinese culture is a big part of understanding the traditional Chinese mother. The daughters are not willing to understand their mothers' cultures and are ashamed of their mothers; they see their mothers' ways as eccentric and odd. While the mothers' stories show their feelings of pain and loss toward their daughters for their unwillingness to combine American and Chinese heritage, the daughters' stories seem to amalgamate, showing the lack of understanding of their Chinese mothers.

Suyuan Woo creates another Joy Luck Club in San Francisco as a revival to the one she started in China. Succeeding her mother's death, June Woo is asked to take her mother's place in the Joy Luck Club, which consists of her mother's best friend's auntie Lindo, An-mei, and Ying-Ying. June is apprehensive about taking her mother's place at the mahjong table. At the first meeting, her mother's best friends tell her that her mother's long-lost daughters have been found in China and that she needs to go there to tell them about their

mother's death. June is nervous at the thought of telling those poor daughters back in China of their mother's death. "My mother and I had never really understood one another. We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more" (Tan 37). While in China, June embarks on a journey to tell her twin half-sisters their mother is dead and the being of her immigrant mother. June's mother had to abandon her babies on the side of the road in Kweilin during the Sino-Japanese war, as she was suffering from dysentery. Suyuan moves to America as she believes one can be anything one wants to be in America (Tan 141). Suyuan dies never knowing whether those babies are alive or dead. For June, her mother told her when she was nine she could be a prodigy just like Waverly, Auntie Lindo's daughter, after seeing her success as a chess player. June's mother chooses for her to be a pianist, and June is not good and does not become a child prodigy like Waverly. June perceives her mother as hyper-critical and believes the mother expects too much out of her. June feels as if she is constantly disappointing her mother by not meeting her mother's expectations. June has a flashback to last

year's Chinese New Year's Eve party when Waverly outdoes her again; Suyuan tells June she has "best quality" and that can't be learned. June realizes her mother does accept and love her for who she is and that she never had expectations for her, only hopes.

Lindo Jong is Suyuan Woo's best friend. When Lindo is two or three years old, she is purchased by a matchmaker in China to marry Huang Tai Tai. At twelve years old, she moves into the home with the Tai Tai's, and around thirteen or fourteen she marries Huang Tai Tai. Realizing Huang Tai Tai is in love with a servant girl and has impregnated her, Lindo devises a plan to use old Chinese superstitions to get out of the arranged marriage to Huang Tai Tai. Lindo goes to America where she marries her second husband, Tin Jong, and they have three children. Lindo's daughter is Waverly Jong, and as a child Waverly is a chess champion who makes the cover of *Life* magazine. "Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess" (*The Joy Luck Club*). Waverly tells this to her mother as her mother is walking along the street bragging and taking credit for her

daughter's successes. Waverly is ashamed of her mother, for her mother does not even know how to play chess. As an adult, Waverly is afraid of her mother's disapproval of her new fiancé, Rich Shields. Waverly takes her mother to her apartment that she shares with Rich in hopes of gaining her mother's approval for the marriage. Waverly shows her mother the new fur coat Rich got for her, hoping this will prove to her mother how much Rich loves her. Lindo can only point out the coat's flaws, and this upsets Waverly. Later, Waverly takes her mother to the beauty parlor to get her hair cut for the wedding, and the hair stylist, Mr. Rory, points out that Waverly and her mother look similar. At this moment, Waverly tells her mother she does not know the power over her, and that she is a little child all over again. Lindo is happy to know that Waverly is not ashamed of her and just wants her acceptance.

An-mei, above the other mothers, believes that your mother is "in your bones." An-mei's mother is widowed at a young age and left to care for An-mei on her own. An-mei's mother is raped by Wu-Tsing and becomes pregnant with a son. An-mei's parents do not believe her when she tells them she was

raped, and they kick her out of the house. An-mei is left to be raised by her grandmother. An-mei's mother is forced to move in with the man who raped her and becomes nothing more than one of his concubines, and she has to give up her son to the second wife. An-mei's grandmother becomes very ill, and her mother comes home to visit her and feed her soup blood in hopes of healing her. An-mei's mother dies, and An-mei moves into Wu-Tsing's house with her mother. For An-mei and her brother to gain their rightful position in the Tsing household, her mother decides to kill herself with opium.

A girl is like a young tree; you must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. You will fall to the ground with the first strong wind. And then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, running along the ground until someone pulls you out and throws you away. (Tan 213)

An-mei tells this to her daughter, Rose, as she is going through a divorce with her husband Ted Jordan. During the marriage of

Rose and Ted, Rose loses sight of who she is and shifts from her American ways to Chinese ways. Rose becomes a servant to her husband, and he does not want her to do this; he wants his wife to have a voice. An-mei also wants her daughter to have a voice, to speak up for herself, and to know her worth, as her own mother did not know her own self-worth.

All of the mother-daughter relationships struggle with cultural and generational differences. Each of the mothers comes from China where women are the property of men and do not have their own identity. The daughters do not understand the hardships their mothers endured to get to America to live the "American dream," as they were born American. Each of the daughters struggles to comprehend their Chinese heritage. Their mothers bring them to America for a better life. Why should they understand their Chinese heritage if the American way is better? The mothers want their daughters to be able to understand them to pass on their spirit after they are gone, and they want their daughters to understand what they went through for their girls to live an independent life. By the end of June's journey to China, she undergoes dynamic characterization when she understands

what her mother means to her and the terrible loss her mother suffered from having to leave those babies on the side of the road in Kweilin. Waverly finally gets the approval of her mother for her marriage to Rich, and An-mei shows her daughter, Rose, how to speak up for herself. As the girls grow older, they realize the importance of combining their American ways with the Chinese ways and what it means to understanding themselves.

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“Skull and Shell” Mikayla Rogers

The Dangerous Life of a Squirrel in Autumn

By Jennifer King

1st Place Winner: Personal Essay

The sky is the color of cold stones as I cautiously make my way down the trunk of dying oak. The few remaining leaves of the tree rustle as a light autumn morning breeze passes through them. One of them is blown free, making a soft snapping sound as it breaks away from its anchored brothers and begins to fall to the ground below. It twists and turns as it goes, and I watch it in momentary curiosity. I have seen this often before. It is still mostly green, only slightly browning at the edges. It makes a show of falling, as though it knows it has an audience. It spins and dances, carried across an unseen stage by the breeze. The breeze fades and dies, and the leaf follows shooting down quickly towards the earth like a predatory bird diving down to its prey. It makes no sound as it lands and lies atop its brethren who had performed the dance before it. Its faded green shows brightly against the decaying browns and violets. I twitch my nose as my

interest passes then continue my sprint down the trunk of the tree. The life of a squirrel in autumn is precious and dangerous.

I am a North American tree squirrel. I am fairly young, only a little over a year old. Considering where I live, this is a great accomplishment. I have watched many cousins murdered by screeching hunting birds, bored, pampered house cats, humans with guns who are dressed like trees, and most often the shiny metal boxes that speed by on the stone path. Usually my kind are very good about avoiding the streets. We keep to the tops of trees and light posts and hurry across their branches. However, there are times when we have to use the ground, and it is there that we find danger. I am very good at avoiding danger. I am small and usually quite lithe with thick bark-gray fur that allows me to blend into the trunks of trees. With my excellent senses of sight, hearing, and smell, I can detect the dangers that may surround me. However, as winter quickly approaches, I am no longer the thin and too quick young squirrel I had been in the summer days. I have grown fat and slow in preparation for the long sleep.

I race across the ground below, my small paws kicking up noise and dying leaves as I pick up speed. I pause briefly between sprints to listen for sounds of predators, or simply to hear what the birds are singing about today. I twitch my nose and catch the scent of pecans, acorns, and other forms of nuts within the area. They are my usual food source and are very scarce now that it is so close to winter. I must act quickly, or some rival animal will snatch them away. I take off as fast as light in the direction of a particularly strong scent. My heart pounds in my chest so fast that it's almost not beating at all. I can smell and hear my rivals as they race towards the scent as well. I am quite certain there will be a fight on arrival. I prepare myself to win this race and the fight that may follow. Yet, when I cross the span of the front yard of an old abandoned house, I am attacked. I cry out in fear and try to break free as sharp fangs sink into the delicate flesh of my bushy tail. I scratch my paws over the ground, ripping out small bits of dying grass and pebbles. I hear a guttural rumbling and glance back in horror as my eyes meet those of my captor.

My captor is a pampered gray house cat with the blue of the summer sky and the mischief of a devil in its piercing gaze. It is well groomed with long fur and a purple band around its neck with a little bell on it. I am paralyzed by the cat's gaze, unable to do anything more than stare back at it as my heart beats overtime. The cat slowly stands and begins to drag me across the yard, the bell tinkling as it moves. My head bumps over sticks and twigs in the grass. Occasionally, the cat kicks my head or steps on my body. We travel on foot for a small passing of time; then suddenly we are soaring through the air.

A world of colors flashes by me, blending like a melting rainbow of decay. There is the sound of creaking metal as the cat lands atop a rusted chain link fence. It pauses there for a moment surveying the area, then jumps down to the brown grass below. I feel blinding red pain as my neck catches against the barbs of the fence. It cuts through my gray fur, and I can taste blood, warm and metallic on my tongue.

Apathetic to my pain, the cat begins to run. It moves with the power and pride of a predator. My capture is a conquest. It carries me up to a house and prances up a short flight of stairs.

The cat drops me on the top step before the door and crushes its paw into my neck, placing pressure on my injury and increasing my pain. The cat begins to call out to its human, howling loudly to announce its victory. The door opens, but I cannot see by whom. There is a gasp and the wails and growls of a human, "Let it go! Let it go!" The cat lifts its paw from my wound. I hear the human growl again. The cat yowls and dashes in through the open door. The human groans in disgust, and then the door closes with a tight click.

Fighting my growing pain and fearing a second capture, I quickly get up and flee home to the safety of my dying oak. I curl up in the shadows of the tree and am able to see the bright gray afternoon light from outside. The scent of my blood is strong as it dries, killing any hunger that may have grown.

My eyelids feel heavy, and my body grows cold in spite of my fur. I burrow beneath old dry leaves and pine needles for the extra warmth and close my eyes. Tomorrow will be a hard day, and I need the rest.



“Purple Heart” Christian Wise

Devastated Christmas

By Jillian Gray-Clark

2nd Place: Personal Essay

One afternoon, my mother picked me up in front of my old elementary school, The Little Red School House on Dauphin Island, to go Christmas shopping with her friend. Her friend handed me an early Christmas present, which happened to be a three foot long stuffed horse I named Lisa. I usually sat behind the passenger seat, but I decided to sit behind my mother so that I could see my mother’s friend. I placed the horse on the seat, and then sat on top of him, as if I were riding an actual horse. I had a bit of an imagination when I was younger. My mother decided to take the interstate to go to the mall that day. Around any holiday, traffic is always horrible on I-10 in Mobile, Alabama.

We had the music turned up and were singing Christmas songs. My mother loves Christmas music. She is so excited when Thanksgiving Day is over because then she can start playing Christmas songs. We were in the middle of singing “Deck the

Halls” when I heard my mother’s friend, Lynda, as she turned over her shoulder and said, “I really hope that car doesn’t hit us.” All I heard was the screeching of tires, and then everything went white.

I finally woke up and looked up into a fireman’s face as he told me everything was going to be all right. I took a very detailed look at what had just taken place. Fragments of the windshield, or what used to be a windshield, were now strewn throughout the vehicle and looked like a beautiful arrangement of diamonds. The back windshield fell on top of my head and shards of the broken glass cut just about every visible part of my upper body. The smell of gasoline lingered in the air as I noticed a beeping sound in the background of the roar of panicked pedestrians, and to this day, I still do not know what the source of the beeping sound was. The driver’s seat collapsed on my body and would not budge. I had a metallic taste in my mouth, which I soon figured out was blood. I realized I was stuck and could not escape. I also noticed my mother and her friend were not in the vehicle. At this point, I was petrified. All I wanted was my mother.

The fireman walked away, and I overheard his conversation informing someone I was trapped under the driver’s seat and they could not get me out. After this, I heard my mother’s scream of panic. About 30 minutes later, they finally cut me out of the vehicle. I was thrilled to be out of the vehicle, but I could not move. I felt as if I were still held captive in the vehicle. This sensation made me nervous and timid. Paramedics lay me on a stretcher and wrapped a cervical neck collar around my neck. They began to ask me a series of questions beginning with how I felt then fading into questions about myself, including my name and age. All of a sudden, I was able to move. I jolted up and screamed for my horse, Lisa. The paramedics forced me to lie back down, but eventually a fireman handed my horse to me.

When they loaded me into the ambulance, I could hear my mother talking to me from the cab of the ambulance; only I was too scared to reply back to her. They finally closed the doors, and then we rushed off. The siren was extraordinarily loud, and it startled me. To arrive at the hospital did not take long. They unloaded me from the ambulance, and we rushed

through the double doors into the emergency room. The emergency room was overcrowded. I am assuming because of the Christmas holidays. I turned my head just in time to see they were guiding my mother into a room as they continued to push me through the hallway. They put me in a room, and a doctor rushed in to examine me. The doctor informed me the cuts from the glass would be healed within time, but I had a bad back and neck injury; nothing too serious but I was going to have a lot of pain. To this day, I still have back and neck pains. My mother finally came in to see me, and she wrapped me in her arms.

My mother was perfectly fine, but her friend, on the other hand, had a broken arm and a few other minor injuries. My mother told me my stuffed horse actually saved my life. She talked to the fireman, and he told her the horse propped me up a good foot in the air. If I had not been sitting on the horse, the seat would have collapsed on me and fallen down on top of my head, causing serious brain injury or death.

When Christmas finally came around, the man who crashed into us sent me a CD player for Christmas. When he wrecked into us, he was going eighty miles per hour. The impact

from his vehicle forced us to collide into two other vehicles in front of us. To this day, my mother never leaves the house. When she does leave the house, she goes to the grocery store or places not far away. I believe she was traumatized by the wreckage, but she will not admit to her fears. I learned a life lesson from my experience: never drive during the holidays.



“Three Crosses” Holly Beckham

Putting Fear into the Bold

By Tyffani N. Bush

3rd Place: Personal Essay

Horses are beautiful and majestic creatures, so beautiful we almost forget how deadly they can become. I had forgotten how strong they are; the realization of that fact was soon knocked into me. Bright and sunny was how the day started. A cloud was not in sight, yet the air had the humidity of a rain forest. My long blonde hair was a mess. I was in the second semester of my eighth grade year and had promising potential. On the third Saturday in September, I had woken up early in the morning to talk to my mother about the horse we were going to ride that day. He was a beautiful horse, shimmering, slick buckskin color majestically faded down to his black hocks. His mane and tail were blacker than a raven’s feathers. He was 16.5 hands, which is pretty tall for horses. I was only 4’11”, and I just barely hit the top of his shoulder. He was every bit of a “haus,” which is what we call these built horses “tanks.” The definition of his muscles reminded me of Dwayne Johnson and how massive and distinctive his muscles are. My mother had seen

him on *Craigslist* and went and tried him out a little under two months ago.

I did not fear horses, not even a sliver of doubt coursed through my veins. I was strong-willed and stubborn. Of course, why would I be? I had never been bucked off; I was the “man” I thought they should fear. The lady was located above Noxapater, Mississippi, and the drive up there took over four hours. We had to take several stops for bathroom breaks, lunch breaks, and fill ups. We finally arrived a little after one. The lady came out and introduced herself and her daughter. We stood shin deep in muck, which smelled of dead animals and rotten food, as she rambled aimlessly about how she found him and how her daughter loved him so much. I grabbed the tack and started to tack the beast up. He stood calmly with great disposition. His head was lowered, and his ears were in listening position, which is a great sign in a horse. I opened the make shift gate and walked him into the pig sty they called his “field.” The “rule of thumb” is every horse needs an acre of land to graze on. Poor Rebel only had a third of an acre. Almost every square inch was

covered in mud, pine trees, and weeds. I do not remember ever seeing a blade of grass anywhere near or in the field.

When trying out a new horse, I always walk it around and talk to it. I tell the horse how much I love to ride, and how I would never hurt it. I check its sensitivity. I do this by touching under the belly, rubbing around the genital area, and checking teeth and ears. Doing so helps me see how spooky the horse is and how I should ride it. Rebel was a bright, tentative horse. He was nowhere near stupid and knew exactly what he wanted to do. He acted calm as I tightened up the cinch strap and began to mount him. I walked him about 12 feet before I gave him subtle heel cues. As soon as my heel touched his lower abdomen, he went into a full buck. I had never experienced anything like that before and did not know what to do. I instinctively grabbed the nearest tree branch and clung to the branch in confusion. No one told me he had bucked. I thought he just had a fire to him. I wanted him, badly. I told my mother I wanted him and would not part with him. We loaded him up into our 16 foot bright, baby blue trailer. I was anxious the whole way home.

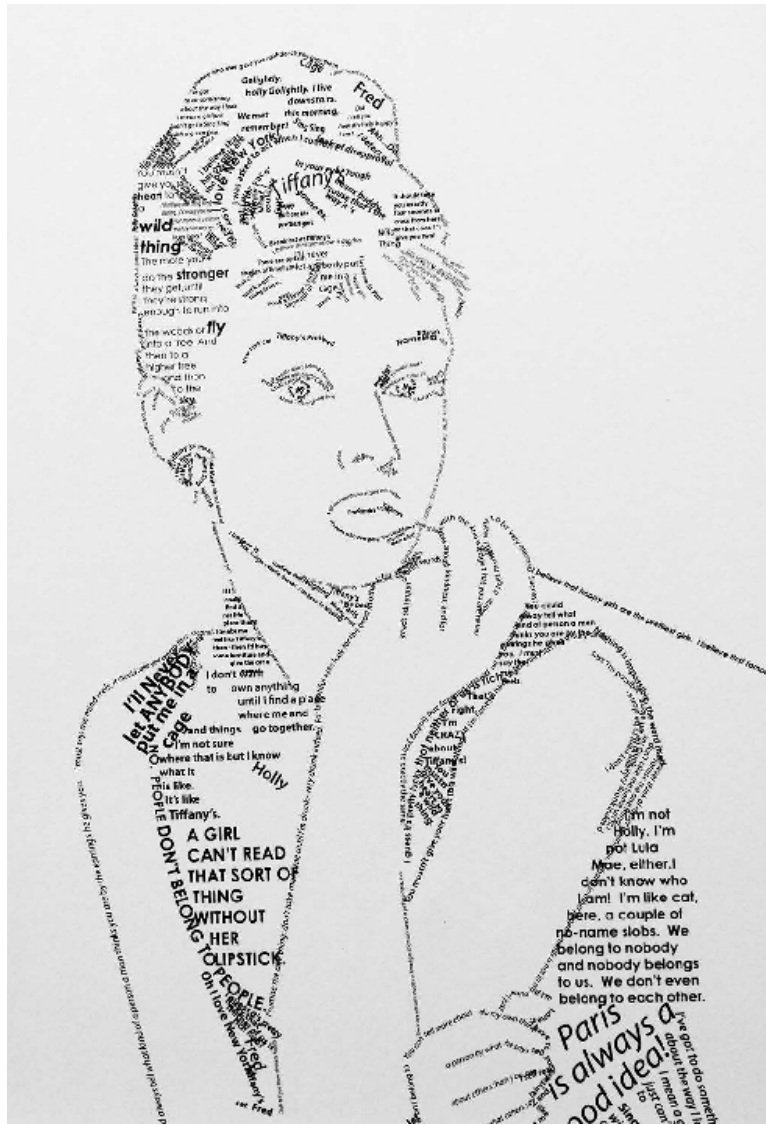
We arrived home around six thirty. I unloaded him and walked him to one of our three thriving pastures. I walked him along the fence line to show him where his “boundaries” were and where his new home was. After walking him around and watching Rebel meet the new horses, I went inside the house. I woke up early the next morning to feed up. About an hour after feeding up, I caught Rebel and brought him to the barn to tack him out. I had invited the neighborhood to come and witness my magnificent horse. I tacked him up and shamefully put on a helmet. My mother had me wear a helmet just in case something would happen to scare the horse. We walked over to the arena where my family and our neighbors sat waiting and watching. I walked him around the arena to show him his boundaries for the area. Once finished, my mother hooked a lead rope to his halter as I proceeded to mount him. She led me around as I sat upon my “tank.” She walked two whole laps and unhooked the lead rope and signaled me to continue without her. At that moment, time seemed to stand still. I had appraising looks from everyone as they stared in awe of my ride. Then it happened.

He started to buck as never before with the mindset of killing or maiming. He reminded me of the bucking broncos at the rodeo, as all four feet were off the ground. I don’t remember ever screaming. All I can remember is grabbing the horn and just staring at it. I imagine having the expression of a deer in headlights. I held on until he reared up and knocked me in the face with the horn of the saddle. I can’t remember how I fell, but I remember the awkward position I fell on the ground. I fell shoulder first into the rough, packed dirt. My head and back end followed. I hit my head and the middle of my tailbone on protruding roots. I could not breathe, nor could I move. All I could do was lie motionless, helpless. I could hear, and I tried to scream for someone, anyone, but I could not force a scream out. I heard screaming, distantly; I guess it had come from my mother. To this day I do not know whom the scream came from. Rebel trampled me three more times before I felt the tight grasp of a hand on my arm. I could feel myself being dragged. I heard yelling and cursing, then a deafening shot rang out. I felt like my ear drums shattered. After that, all went black.

I woke up surrounded by friends and family. I looked around and saw I was in a hospital. My body ached, and even turning my head brought me to tears. I had a neck brace, a shoulder sling, and a support frame for my back. The doctor rushed about half the people out of the room and asked everyone else to stand by the door and be quiet. He introduced himself and explained to me what had happened. When Rebel smacked me with the horn, he had given me whiplash, and the impact of the ground had given me a mild concussion and fractured my tailbone. I bruised my ribs and my right shoulder. I was released later that week, having promised to be on bed rest.

I could not bring myself to look in the mirror for two weeks. I finally broke down and looked at myself. I had so many bruises. As I turned around and took my brace and sling off, I burst into tears. I looked like I had lost in a fight against a bear. I never thought a horse, so gentle and loving around humans, could do so much harm. I was so damaged and defeated. It took a month for me to touch a horse, and another two months to think about riding. I had therapy for a while, but I quit going. I felt like no one understood what I had gone through. The few

friends I had never asked me about it. I never wore my hair up because of the nasty bruises on my neck. To this day, I still hate my neck to be exposed. A year later, I was back to being my old self, with horses at least. I decided any horse I ride should never treat a rider like Rebel had treated me. Right then and there, I decided to devote my time to desensitizing horses to become the gentle giants we tell children they are. I still have the fear that one day I am going to find another horse just like Rebel, except this time I will be injured worse or even killed. The day he did so crosses my mind every time I ride a new horse. I have learned a lot since then, and in my experience I have learned the showing signs of a “white-eyed crazy.” To be fearful is one issue; to have fearful respect is another. Rebel changed my life forever, but I decided to jump in the saddle and not let fear of the game keep me from striking out.



“Audrey”

Chelsea Merrill

Am I the Milkman’s Kid?

By Heidi Adams

3rd Place: Personal Essay

Growing up with my brother was always an adventure.

Luke was a small-framed guy, with wheat colored hair down to his shoulders. His personality was anti-social, with a temper of the Incredible Hulk. One would think he stood six feet tall with the way he walked the neighborhood, but in truth he was all of five feet. He had crazy skills with drawing and an imagination that would impress Stephen King himself.

Then there was little ole me. A member of the lollipop gang, I stood all of three feet tall until 6th grade. My hair was blonde, but very short, thanks to my brother’s barber skills. My personality was more outgoing than Luke’s, but only because one of us had to talk. I guess that was a good thing because now my job requires me to be talkative. When it came to talent, I was the milkman’s kid. Both my mother and brother absorbed it all and left me depleted. My imagination was something out of a Cracker Jack box, nothing to be impressed about.

Even though we had many differences, my brother and I found common ground. He was not only my brother, but for a major part of my life, he was my father too. Raised by a single parent, we relied on each other. Luke would pick me up every day from school and help me with my homework. Then we would work together to get our chores done, so we could go play He-Man in the woods. With Luke's imagination, we would build forts for the He-Man characters and play for hours together. During those moments we felt like nothing could touch us. It was us against the cold dark world in which we lived.

As we got older we started to drift apart. Luke began his rebellious ways due to my mother's marriage. We hardly talked unless it was about school or chores. He spent most of his time in his room or away from home. On the other hand, I was always hanging out with our new stepsiblings and enjoying the fact that we were a functional family. Then Luke left for college, and we developed a relationship through letters. The distance brought us back together because we had time to mature and miss each other.

When I found out I was pregnant at 17 years old, Luke supported me through the whole thing. I decided to get married before I graduated and asked Luke to walk me down the aisle. It was a blessing to have my brother, the man I always looked up to, beside me on my wedding day. Even though we had our differences through the years, he was always my rock and strength.



“Self-Portrait”

Joshua Edgar

When Life Is Gray

By Bobur Alimov

Winner: Short Story

A man in his mid-40s was looking at the lighter that he had just taken out of his pocket. It was a gift from his boss, but he didn't even remember for what occasion because it didn't bear any significance to him. The man looked around him. People were shivering, which indicated that the weather was unusual for that time of the year.

“Brrhh, Gray. It is sad to look at you. It must be freezing to stand here in one jacket. Here, it will warm you up.” One of Gray's companion's held out a metal bottle offering him a drink.

Gray grinned back, “Cheers mate, but I don't need to be warmed up. I'm not cold.” For people like him, for whom winter throughout the year was a regular deal, it wasn't cold. He looked at the lighter and breathed out. Gray could still feel the taste of alcohol on his breath. He didn't drink liquor because it was cold; a man drinks it every day if he wants to get distant from his problems. For this guy it was a remedy to stop the flow of his thoughts, forget what happened, and, at last, to help him fall

asleep. "Better than the crap they sell in the drug store," Gray thought to himself.

"Oy, bring those fellas here!" Gray heard one of his companions, but he was too absorbed in his thoughts, so he didn't notice who it was. He looked back and saw a man with an AK-47 hanging on his shoulder. Gray didn't like to carry around heavy guns. A pistol was enough for him, though the famous Kalashnikov gun saved his life and more than once; that's why he respected that gun. A group of people followed after the man with the gun. Their hands were tied. The faces and bodies of each of them were covered with bruises and dried blood. "It is one beautiful piece of armory you have, mate." Gray looked at the man with the gun and pointed at the AK-47.

"Cheers brother, that is the classic," the man with a gun replied with smile on his face.

"Isn't it heavy?"

"Maybe, but I'm used to it. Army. And it makes me feel safer."

"Yes, it does." Gray knew that in the Army an AK-47 was the best you can have. Like an old body, it was stable and

reliable. "Well, I think, like women, guns are a matter of preference."

They both laughed.

Then Gray looked at the faces of the poor fellas. It looked like the conversation of him and his companion about guns made their faces more horrified. He looked at the eyes of each of them. Almost in all of them he could see the horror and acceptance of their future destiny. In almost all of them, except for the youngest one, he saw the hope in his eyes that there would be mercy upon him. Gray approached him.

"A beautiful day, isn't it?" Gray popped the shoulder of the young man. In response he heard the young man sobbing. "Cheer up, fella, it is all to be about over! Cheer up!" but no one responded. He looked at the youngster's eyes; there still was a light of hope.

As they proceeded to the destination, Gray looked around as he tried to enjoy the view of that place or as it was new to him. But neither of that was true. He knew that area like he grew up here. It was just a regular construction site in London's countryside that was abandoned years ago. There was

nothing special about that place to enjoy. It was gray and boring, deprived of any joy and beauty. They started getting closer to a truck container. As the young man saw it, his face turned into a grimace of horror. He turned to Gray and screamed, “Where are you taking us?”

Gray giggled. “See that container, fella? It is your new home.”

“But, but...we will...die there. Suffocate...horrible death,” the young man started stuttering.

“Relax, fella, breathe. Don’t scream. It won’t help you. No one will hear you. This place is deaf,” Gray smiled.

The young man breathed in as much air as he could. “But it is worse than a dog’s death!”

He tried to say it as calmly as he could, but it didn’t work out well. “I didn’t know that they were going to kill him, please...”

“It doesn’t matter now. And I have news for you mate, there is nothing noble about us. People like me and you don’t deserve to live. I just got luckier today.” Gray looked at the poor fella’s face; it was pale like he was already dead. Then he

concentrated on the young man’s face and eyes. Gray could literally observe how his words drained the life away from those eyes. The light of hope in them started flickering out, leaving emptiness behind itself.

Gray felt that it was easier for a man to die without having any hope, so he tried to make it easier for the young man. He popped his shoulder, then Gray and his companion grabbed the youngster and threw him inside the truck container. It was dark out there.

“Why don’t you finish them right here?” asked the man with a gun hanging from his shoulder. “You don’t want nightmares to follow you after.” They both laughed. After all that they had seen in life, nightmares should have been afraid of them.

“You don’t want your hand to get dirty. And I don’t want to hear them screaming, it annoys me. Let’s just wait until tomorrow, they won’t last for long without enough air. And tomorrow we will just burn the container. So, lock it up!”

Gray started digging in the right pocket of his jacket.

As Gray was watching his companion hanging the lock on the container, he took his lighter out and a cigarette. "At last!" he thought to himself. All that had happened made him think about his life and the life of that young boy. He lit the cigarette and breathed tobacco smoke into his lungs. He felt it fill his lungs, which made him feel free and warmed him more. He breathed the smoke out, and it got easier. Disturbing thoughts left his conscience.

Gray started walking towards his car. He didn't enjoy this morning. He didn't remember when anything brought him joy in his life, and it looked like that following day wasn't going to bring it either. It wasn't because of the business he had just done. His boss told him to do that and he did it, just another job. He didn't care for people. If he had to face those people, it meant they deserved punishment. There were no honorable people in that sphere of activity. Gray realized that one day the same may happen to him. But he didn't care about that either.

As Gray was proceeding to the car, thinking how he would spend the rest of the day drinking to get some sleep, he felt he stepped into something. "Damn," Gray looked at his shoe

covered with dog crap. He reached his car, opened the door and grabbed a napkin. Done cleaning his shoe, Gray took a ham sandwich from his car. As soon as he was ready to take the first bite, he felt something looking at him. It was a dog, probably abandoned. The dog's eyes were begging for some food. Gray saw a lot of begging looks. They were all the same, but it was different with the dog. There was some purity in its eyes. Gray put the sandwich on the ground.

The dog got it and ran away.

Gray felt warmth, but not body warmth. In his soul he felt it. At last, something brought him joy. He felt happy and exhausted at the same time. He sat in his car, then drove away.



“Blue Dog, Red Shoe”

Chelsea Merrill

The Orphan

By Therron Ducharme

2nd Place: Short Story

As Matt and I made our way down the old logging road, the dehydrated remains of once vibrant foliage made a crunching sound underneath the soles of our moving boots. It was a chilly Saturday morning in December. The week had been riddled with meticulous tasks regarding our clients’ final quarter tax preparations. This quiet and peaceful outing was a needed change. I was cautiously hopeful and excited about our father/son hunt.

We hadn’t spoken a word since entering the woods. As we were quietly approaching the stands, Matt startled me when he asked, “Dad, I’m taking the deer stand on the loblolly and you’re taking the one on the white oak, right?”

“Yes.” I whispered, directly. I had built the stand on the white oak tree higher, to avoid an unsafe line of fire.

We approached the loblolly stand first. The rope was dangling beside the wooden ladder. As I watched Matt tie off his

rifle, I leaned down and whispered, “Now remember, if you see one, make sure you have a clean shot. If you shoot one, stay put.”

His brown eyes made contact with mine, as he replied, “Okay. Love you, Dad.”

Michelle and I had adopted Matt when he was four. He was one of us, now—a Thompson. He was twelve and on the verge of becoming a “Thompson man.” Next year, he would be hunting on a stand by himself. This hunt was another opportunity to prepare him. This week of doe season broadened his opportunity, even more.

“Love you, too, Son.” I said.

After watching Matt hoist up his rifle, load it, and settle, I made my way to the other stand. It was located about seventy yards to the left of his. Upon reaching the top of the stand, I carefully pulled up my rifle and loaded it. I scanned the woods for movement. With a deep breath, I began to absorb the essence of this monumental experience. The sun was still low on the horizon. Shadows were slowly shifting through the tree line, adding to the camouflage of the brush. The silence was enabling

me to calibrate my hearing to the sounds of the on-goings of the natural surroundings.

About an hour and fifteen minutes later, the silence fell to a loud death. The report of Matt’s rifle rang my ears, and I was suddenly seized by excitement. About ten seconds had passed before Matt called out.

“I got ‘em!” Matt yelled in an elated tone.

“Stay put! Be quiet!” I sternly commanded. If the deer was only injured, I didn’t want it to run. Instantly, I started assessing what had just happened. Questions rapidly formed and raced in my mind. Did he say *I got him*? Is it a spike or a big buck? Is it a trophy buck? I was stricken with pride! He did it! I started imagining the rest of the day—the celebration, the father/son ritual of cleaning the first deer together, and the smearing of the blood on his cheeks to glorify his successful arrival through a rite of passage.

Anxiously, I looked down at my watch. Five minutes had finally clicked off. I made my way down the stand’s ladder and headed toward Matt.

I called out, “Is the deer still there?”

“Yes!” Matt yelled back. I sped up my pace. I could hardly wait to see for myself.

While trying to control my erupting nerves, I yelled, “Go ahead, and lower your rifle! Make sure it’s unloaded and tied off! I’m heading your way!”

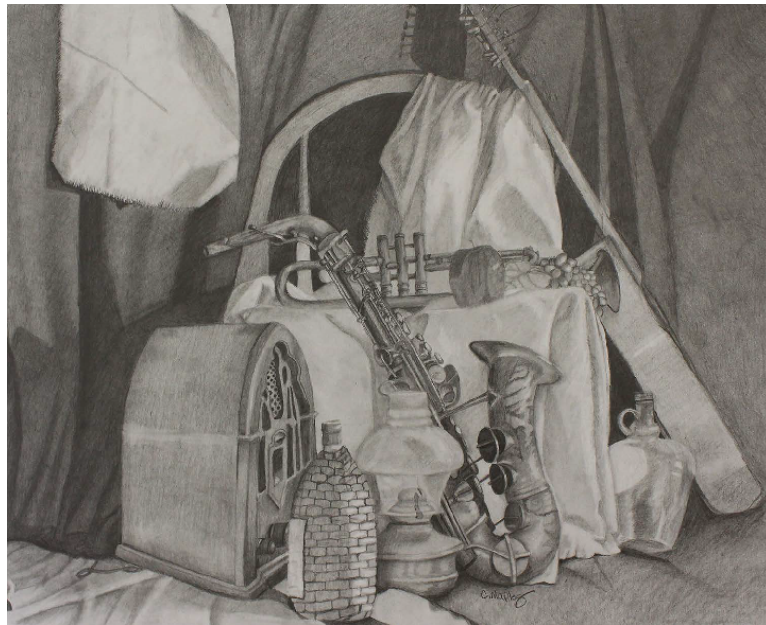
We met at the base of his stand. Immediately, we started cutting a direct path toward the fallen deer. When we arrived, I saw it was a doe. Matt had shot her in the head. The bullet’s explosive impact had removed most of the left side of her head. Oozing brain matter, her shattered skull lay on a pillow of bloody leaves and sticks. Her lifeless brown eye gazed upwards.

Before either one of us could say a word, I heard a sound that hit me with the same ferocity as Matt’s rifle report earlier. It was a high-pitched cry coming from a briar thicket about fifteen yards away. Both of us spotted it at the same time. Trembling and pacing, it accusingly stared at both of us as it cried out. It was challenging its fear of us while disregarding its inborn instinct to run away. Repeatedly, it came toward us yet kept its distance, stomping the ground with its tiny front hooves. Then, it

would back off, crying the whole time. It wanted its mother. It wanted us to *run away*.

Matt’s brown eyes met with mine. The turn of events had arrived as fast and violent as the bullet. Matt’s pleas were revealed through his demeanor and tone. He wiped his eyes as he asked, “What are we going to do, Dad?”

The fawn’s ardent cries grew louder. *Everything was loud—the stares, the cries, the questions*. Spontaneously, in one fluid move, I shouldered my rifle and sighted the fawn’s head. The sound of judgment was rendered from the barrel. Dead silence—*needed silence* was delivered with the thunder. Its blood spilled. The question was answered. I killed the orphan. As I turned, I saw that Matthew’s countenance had fallen like the dead mother and her fawn.



“Still Life” Crystal Maples

Outwitting the *Gendarme*

By Vel Merrithey

3rd Place: Short Story

Everyone knew about the little grocery store that stood next to Bayou Lamareaux. It was a shallow creek only deep enough to float a pirogue filled with jugs of liquor and the deliveryman. People came from miles around by wagon, foot and pirogue to get the “best stuff” around. Prohibition was enacted in the winter of 1919 and in a little neighborhood tucked away on the back side of New Orleans they laughed at the whole idea and the enforcers. Those who imbibed and the purveyors had a good time outwitting the *gendarme*.

Sarge sat at his oversized brown wooden desk piled with yellowing papers and dusty books. Dust mites danced in the muggy air stirred by a rusted wall fan whose paddles barely moved. His sweat-stained shirt was plastered to his body and hound dog jowls were splotted red from the oppressive heat. *Lawdy will dis heat eva let up. Kno ah put dem papas sum wah. Dat sumbitch askin fa a report on an ol lady dats only runnin booze. Sumbody betta git on dis soon. It's too damn hot tagit ya*

drawrs twisted ova sum jugs a likka. Dem feds mus be breedin down da Capin's neck. Cappet Baggs wanna sho us Southen Boys how ta do it. Ha! Jeesus but it's hot. Statin ta smell lik onea dem ol goats Paw-Paw keep in his back yad.

“Hey Louie, come in hea an see if ya can fin dat warrant.”

Don kno why I ask him, he don know what a warrant look lik. Only seen one a cupla times mahself. Neva serv one. Where can dat damn ting be? One a dese days gonna gita big bag an trow all dis shit away.

Louie, one of the three men who made up the Seventh Ward squad in charge of policing the area, ambled in. “What’s up, Sarge?”

“What’s up? What’s up? The Captin is on my ass about da booze runnin’ from Miz Sudie’s grocery store. He yak on an on ‘bout the same ting. ‘*Why can’t y’all get in dar an fin da crap?*’ Get damn sick an tired of him jumpin’ on me ‘bout da same ting.”

“I know Serge but every time we go out dar an search we don’t find nuttin. It’s only the ol’ lady an dem two boys, one

sit in da stoe on dat apple crate, an da utta one sit on da steps by da gallery jus lazin’ away in da sun.”

“Don’t wanna hear at crap. You know it’s dar. I know it’s dar. An da Cap damn sho kno it’s dar. So why can’t you find it?”

“Like ah tell . Sarge. We go out dar an neva fin a ting.”

Connected to the grocery was a house where Ms. Sudie’s sister and her family lived. The backyards were separated by a twelve foot feather-board fence. At first glance, all of the boards were nailed to an eight-by-eight-inch post. To those who knew, the second and third boards from the bottom could easily be removed when the *gendarme* was in the area. Lucian, who sat on the step, would whistle three short and one long; and Jake, who sat on the apple crate in the grocery, would run through the living quarters of the grocery to the backyard. There he would remove the fence boards, put all of the jugs in the next yard and run back to his place on the apple crate. Once more they would have deluded the law.

Lucian was tall for his age. The legs of his bib-coveralls never reached the top of his cracked, worn-down clod hopper

boots. Gangly arms hung from the sleeves of his shirt that resembled a patchwork quilt. He had an infectious smile and could whistle loud enough to be heard blocks away.

Jessie started sitting on his apple crate perch before his feet could reach the concrete floor. A scrawny little fellow who could only yell, "Oh, Miz Sudie. Dey be comin'," when he would hear Lucian whistle. He wore his older brother's hand-me-downs and always a baseball cap. As he grew, he was taught how to move the boards on the fence and put the jugs of White Lightning in the yard next door.

That August was hotter than most could remember. Humidity hung on everyone like a wet rag. Lucian sat in the unbearable heat watching the heat devils dance on the banquette. They had hypnotized him and he was soon sound asleep. Earl Lee and his squad drove down the dusty rutted street in their Black Mariah determined this time to find the jugs of hooch they had searched for and arrest the seller. Little did they know the boy who lazed away would be their biggest helper. Lucian failed to give the signal. They walked to the grocery, searched the house and backyard, and there they were – the jugs they had

been looking for. Lucian's eyes were as big as dinner plates. His mouth hung open, and he was shaking as though he was naked in an ice storm. He had crawled to a shady spot on the gallery in his sleep and was oblivious to all that had happened.

"Okay, Miz Sudie. Dis is it. We have ya na," Harvey, one of the officers, said. "We're gonna take ya ta Broad Street."

"Don be so crazy, Harvey," Earl Lee said. "We can't tak a lady ova da. Look, Miz Sudie. Call ya brudda ta come home so he can go in ya place. Ya know us havta take sumbody. If ah take ya, ma mama's gonna kill me. She lik ha lil nip she get from ya at night an she say ya always give hu a lil lagniappe to go wit hu beans an rice. Lawd knows ah don't even wan hu ta know I was hea."

Ms. Sudie gave everyone, including Lucian and Jessie, Mammy cookies and a Big Shot Root Beer to cool off while waiting for her brother Henri. He was taken down to the station but was released by the time they arrived. Ms. Sudie had made a phone call to *someone*.

The next day it was business as usual.



“Robert Frost”

Sarah Rhea

For Emily Dickinson
 By Richard Hightower
 1st Place Winner: Fixed Verse Poetry

I heard a fly die when I buzzed;
 I heard the sizzling pang.
 The fly was in the circuit caught
 When I the doorbell rang.

Electric current did so pierce
 Its brief and shining soul.
 I heard it scream out just before
 Its thorax turned to coal.

Into the fixture it had crawled
 As bugs are wont to do,
 But then as I did come to call,
 It bade its life adieu.

It left no keepsakes for its kin,
For it was but a fly.
There were no friends to mark its death;
No eyes to wring them dry.
In need of words, I think of Donne,
The better to console.
My fly met a poetic end:
For it the bell did toll.



“Still Life”

Lauren Watkins

After Renoir's Painting, *La Promenade*

By Haley Skiados

2nd Place: Fixed Verse Poetry

Curiosity remains evident
as bashfulness glows on my rosy cheeks,
matching the flowers atop my bonnet.
The dangers of desire my heart seeks.
We are both still dressed in our Sunday best
as he leads me through the bushes and ferns,
dirtying the ridges of my white dress.
We skipped the Sunday Mass with no concerns.
Oh, Dear God forgive our nonappearance:
his hand within mine got the best of me.
Mother will shame my lack of common sense.
Where he was taking me, I had to see.
A guilty feeling tells me to turn back
but it's the thrill that keeps me on the track.



“Ray-Ban Still-Life”

Alexandra Corradini

Cinquain for *Clown Car*

By Vel Merrithey

3rd Place: Fixed Verse Poetry

wobbly

kicky wind up

cone top transportation

color fast patchwork jalopy

folly



“Texture”

Jennifer Mayer

The Performance

By Richard Hightower

1st Place Winner: Free Verse Poetry

I never know, gazing on the secretive water,
Where a mullet will jump out,
Making his cameo in this other world,
Rising through the trap door of his shimmering stage,
Cavorting briefly above that which sustains his life,
Treading the liquid boards,
Having his moment.
What I do know is he never appears directly in my line of vision.
Always everywhere but where I'm looking.
Stage left;
Stage right.
This madman doth play his part.



“Tree Frog”

Cindy Rancier

Semi-Salty World

By Vel Merrithey

2nd Place: Free Verse Poetry

Silken webs glitter in the sun
Stretch between water oaks
Stand in puddles left by yesterday's rain
Fallen logs loblolly and slash pines in distant piney woods lay
Star-shaped leaves of sweet gum
Tall thorny stalks of devil's walking stick
Showy goldenrod waves in a cool breeze
Across the murky bayou birds call in the distance
Squirrels chatter on a hunt for fallen nuts
Away from its protected habitat a Blue Heron glides in
Step by slow step searching for hidden critters
Dark green water ripples
Mullets jump
Soft waves roll into inlets where grass turns brown
Touch of fall in the air

Salt marsh and cord grass

Gator makes a wallow to hide

Flattened grass is his favorite sunny spot

Undisputed master of the bayou waiting to dine

Like a gourmet on frogs, fish and birds

Natural world bayou full of sights and sounds

Wind through trees buzzing

Insects and birds twitter

Marsh animals busy

Searching for food and places to hide from each other

Beautiful this natural semi-salty world



“Mandible” Cindy Nguyen

Dementia

By Rachel Ann Purser

3rd Place: Free Verse Poetry

There is a place that can only be reached

Sifting through dust and cobwebs

A hidey hole of mystery

This world severed from consciousness

Vivid memories fill a secret void

Mind fading corroding with time

Resting her frail head, tired eyelids falling

She stumbles her way through dust and cobwebs

Becoming whole again



“F100”

Holly Beckham

Pump Number Six

By Graham Perry

1st Place Winner: Prose Poem

The molting process began as the detergent like foam eroded the landscape of dry sweat and asbestos fibers. The water I had pumped from my earlier shift was now the natural force escorting the toxic lather to the grimy conduit at the bottom of the tub. The final stages of my transformation were upon me, as I tuned the shower knob for the last bit of the warmth infused liquid. Each adjustment drew me closer to cleanliness, until the dreaded stain of the pumping station’s brew plagued the vascular system of the city’s utilities. I rushed to the stockpile of mason jars in my garage. I lined the tub with the glass containers as I collected the red tea-like liquid of one of my decrepit shift successors. After several days of removing Stickney Steve’s biological matter from the public utilities and collecting it in an assortment of containers, the community gathered at the cemetery. Jars, Bottles, and other pieces of glassware shared

numerous hues of red, as the flickering candlelight projected lively images of a diluted Stickney Steve. The procession grew larger as more pieces of glassware completed the macabre collage of an obsidian ritual. The tail of procession was visible as the priest collected the remaining line of glass bearing mourners and entered, carrying the Holy Water from the church in a clear religious crucible. Finally, the ceremony officially started as the choir sang hymns while the glassware jingled with lively fellowship. Once the hymn ended, the priest asked for the Holy Water and a small altar boy retrieved the crystal crucible that contained Steve’s rich red liquid. The priest grasped the crystal glass piece with firm divinity as he poured the contents into an empty Windex bottle. The mourners silenced as the air filled with an eerie aroma. Refracted candlelight projections united with the shadows of the setting sun. The obelisk at the center of the cemetery caught the images of Stickney Steve’s final mechanized intercourse with the ghost of pump number six.



“Marilyn”

Chelsea Merrill

His Real Name is Franklin, But He'd Never Tell You That

By Haley Skiados

2nd Place: Prose Poem

Wind came past me on the back of that motorcycle, swirling inside my caged head from the open visor of my helmet. Beside me, Lake Champlain calmly sat holding chilled water and bobbing sailboats. My hands sat awkwardly on his broad shoulders, too timid to wrap a safe grip around his torso.

We weren't going fast, so I wasn't concerned until he turned away from the lake down a narrow back road and I could hear the engine running high. He grabbed my attention from the side mirrors and pointed to the speedometer, which was slowly accelerating, and watched as it reached over sixty and by each passing marker, my grip grew tighter.

He reached a hand up to mine and placed it around his torso where I held both hands there, still quite awkwardly. Just before he hit eighty, my grip around him was tighter, and then I felt his dog tags underneath his shirt. Outlining them with the tip

of my index finger, a comfort came over me. It's been so long since we've last seen each other, that I haven't really noticed how much the Army has changed him. He's thicker, muscular, a more prominent jaw line, with a crew top shaved head. He lost those high school baby cheeks covered in acne and his curly ringlets of brown hair, the only things I really remembered of him.

I could see the pride reflect from his eyes and even though we had only just begun to know each other again, a rush of trust and security came over me and I started to break my grip from around him and let the wind take my arms back perpendicular to the road. I heard his chuckle over the rumble of the engine and he began to move his arms back, too. Quickly, I retreated to my safe grip around his waist and smacked him on the stomach. I was getting braver, but not that brave. He laughed again, and I felt it through the palm of my hand on his chest.



“Trumpet Vanitas” Sarah Rhea

Gray December

By Alireza Yazdanshenas

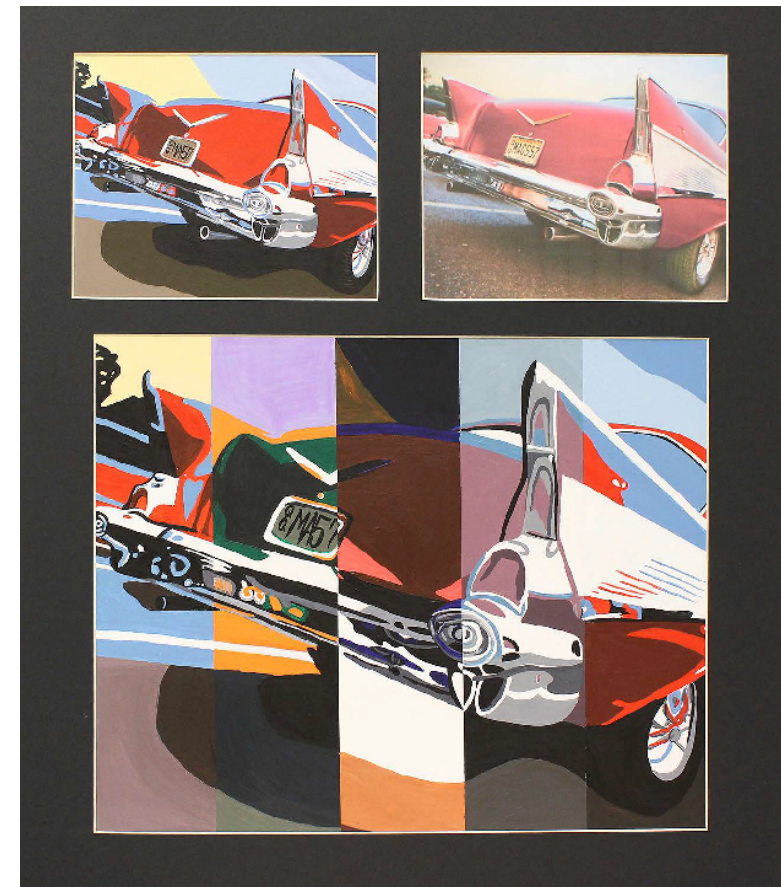
3rd Place: Prose Poem

It's cold and humid. The layers of clothes can't stop the cold from crawling to the skin like a venomous snake. Hunter and I stand on the porch, dry from the Mississippi December drizzle. Gray clouds fly silently above our heads, low and swift, pulling my mind into a trance. I'm numb from the humid cold surrounding Hunter and me. A wind brushes my hair to the side, and a cold, wet kiss from the red lips of a petite vampire lady hits my numb cheek. Seductively, the wind plays with her long red hair as well, and she digs her cold red nails into my skin. The cold sensation vanishes, only to be replaced by the long sharp hissing of the trees in the wind, hissing from snakes of the cold, seeking to crawl beneath any layer of warm clothing.

A dry and sharp cigarette smoke scratches me out of my twilight. The same smoke built *between* Shannon and me, forcing me to

leave her. The same smoke Shannon needed more than she needed me. The same smoke stained all her other qualities with a black soot. The smoke I hate but can't move on from. The same smoke that fogged up our relationship to a dark gray. I turn my head to my left, hoping to catch a lively glimpse of Shannon playing with her luscious red hair, holding a cigarette with her red nails, and wanting to kiss me with her provocative red lips. There is no such luck, just fantasy. I left her last December, a year ago, to get away from the gray smoke.

My empty eyes zoom in on Hunter's cigarette tip instead, as it slowly turns into smoke to join the gray clouds all around us. Hunter's arm, without a word, reaches in my direction to offer a smoke. I hesitate at first, but I accept a cigarette, hoping to forget about my red love for Shannon. The smoky gray clouds continue to cover the sky; the cold is numbing my skin, and the cigarette smoke numbs the inside. I'm cutting myself with the same knife that cut Shannon apart from me.



“57 Chevy”

Chelsea Merrill

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