

2014 SLWP Writes!

Poetry

"Glass" by Bella Biondini
"A Dream" by Katie Weber
"The Pain of Reality" by Youngone Kim
"Weather" by Lindsey Potter
"A Good Way To Be" by Tristan Barco
"The Follower" by Jessica Gabriel

Fiction

"Present Tense" by Maggie McMichael
"The Finding" by Ryan Ard
"The Hunter" by Tyler S. Manning
"The Stalker" by Sara DeRouen
"Losing Interest Is Ok" by Anna Grace Koepp
"Hysteria" by Kathrine Costanza

Non-Fiction

"Four Letters of Complex Mental Circuitry"
by Heather Lobb
"On the Meaning of Sorry" by Katie Monette
" 'A Life Worth Ending': A Response " by
Courtney Smith



SLWP Writes!

2014

Writing Contest Sponsored by
Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project

Dr. Richard Louth, Director
Michelle Russo, Co-Director
Jessica Kastner, Editor
Mik Kastner, Cover Artist

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SLWP Writes! Contest

Overview

The purpose of this contest was to promote and recognize young authors (grades 6-12) who demonstrated creative ingenuity through fiction, nonfiction, and poetry in the Southeast Louisiana region. In the spring of 2014, the SLWP received an overwhelming number of submissions to our Fifth Annual *SLWP Writes! Contest*. Writing Project teachers and writers read meticulously through submissions and selected 15 winners and 10 honorable mentions based on originality, clarity, language, style, and detail. Please note that SLWP Writes! does not revise the winning entries in order to keep the integrity of the works.

SLWP would like to give a special thanks to all the students who poured their hearts into their words, to the teachers who encouraged their students to submit to this contest, to the judges who spent many long hours reading, deliberating, and determining the winning submissions, and to Dr. Richard Louth for organizing and supporting this project.

For more information about Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project writing contests or summer workshops for teachers, please visit our website:

http://www.selu.edu/acad_research/programs/slwp/

SLWP Writes! 2014 Winners

Division I Poetry (Grades 6-9)

Winners:

1st Place:

"Glass" by Bella Biondini
Covington High School, Grade 9
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

2nd Place:

"A Dream" by Katie Weber
Fontainebleau Jr. High School, Grade 7
Teacher: Janice Krantz

3rd Place:

"Death" by Youngone Kim
Fontainebleau High School, Grade 9
Teacher: Colleen Hildebrand

Honorable Mention:

"Not of the Mouth" by Matthew Delcambre
Fontainebleau High School, Grade 9
Teacher: Colleen Hildebrand

Division II Poetry (Grades 10-12)

Winners:

1st Place:

"Weather" by Lindsey Potter
Covington High School, Grade 12
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

2nd Place:

"A Good Way to Be" by Tristan Barco
Covington High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

3rd Place:

"The Follower" by Jessica Gabriel
Ponchatoula High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Gretchen Hintz

Honorable Mentions:

"The Voice" by Kathrine Costanza
St. Amant High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Andrea Broussard

"Self-Actualization" by Gabrielle Randazzo
Fontainebleau High School, Grade 11
Teacher: Colleen Hildebrand

"A Short Tribute" by Meg Denny
Fontainebleau High School, Grade 12
Teacher: Shelly Easterling

Division I Fiction (Grades 6-9)

Winners:

- 1st Place:** "Present Tense" by Maggie McMichael
Covington High School, Grade 9
Teacher: Eugenie Martin
- 2nd Place:** "The Finding" by Ryan Ard
Fontainebleau Jr. High School, Grade 7
Teacher: Janice Krantz
- 3rd Place:** *The Hunter* (novel excerpt) by Tyler S. Manning
Martha Vineyard Elementary School, Grade 6
Teacher: Wendy Burns
- Honorable
Mention:** "The Wondrous Path" by Katelyn Williams
Franklinton Jr. High School, Grade 8
Teacher: Chanda Thomassen

Division II Fiction (Grades 10-12)

Winners:

- 1st Place:** "The Stalker" by Sara DeRouen
Slidell High School, Grade 11
Teacher: Kristen Henderson
- 2nd Place:** "Losing Interest is Ok" by Anna Grace Koepf
Covington High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin
- 3rd Place:** "Hysteria" by Kathrine Costanza
St. Amant High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Andrea Broussard
- Honorable
Mention:** "The Walls Never Crumble" by Quinton P.
Williams
St. Amant High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Andrea Broussard

Division I Non-Fiction (Grades 6-9)

Winners:

**Honorable
Mentions:**

"Love and Purity" by Sammy Burke
Covington High School, Grade 9
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

"Accidents" by Harris Baumann
Covington High School, Grade 9
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

Division II Non-Fiction (Grades 10-12)

Winners:

1st Place:

"Four Letters of Complex Mental Circuitry"
by Heather Lobb
Ponchatoula High School, Grade 12
Teacher: Gretchen Hintz

2nd Place:

"On the Meaning of Sorry" by Katie Monette
Covington High School, Grade 10
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

3rd Place:

"'A Life Worth Ending': A Response"
by Courtney Smith
Fontainebleau High School, Grade 12
Teacher: Colleen Hildebrand

**Honorable
Mentions:**

"The Art of 'Art'" by Richard Barnes
Covington High School, Grade 12
Teacher: Eugenie Martin

"Containment" by Lauren Heffker
Fontainebleau High School, Grade 11
Teacher: Patricia Vicknair

"In Loving Memory of Keith Bernard Landry"
by Jessica Ragas
Fontainebeleau High School, Grade12
Teacher: Colleen Hildebrand

Division I: Poetry—First Place Winner
Bella Biondini

Glass

It's all in my head
a monster that eats at the inside
nothing's wrong
you tell me nothing's wrong
but you wouldn't understand
sanity
you gave it to me
and when you left
it raged inside my mind
tearing away
empty thoughts
filled with you
filled with who you were
who I thought we were going to become
we fit together like broken glass
a cut that needed to heal
it hurt
but it was okay
I was the glass
I told you everything
clear
you saw my rough edges
my imperfections
you start to put the pieces
back together
one by one
happiness
was moments away

but

you

left.

Division I: Poetry—Second Place Winner
Katie Weber

A Dream

I sit quietly, wild look in my eye.
Through the jet black sky, no moon will arise.
I look below as I hear the wolf's cry.
Stars seem to mock me, twinkling in the skies.

I jump and cower at ev'ry rustle.
I'm silently still, controlled by the fright.
The darkness has no hustle or bustle.
My wings expand as I soar into the night.

"Do not be afraid, you sweet little dove.
"I know not the origin of this voice.
It seems as if it's coming from above.
"You control fear; it is fully your choice.

"My eyes flutter open, sitting in bed.
I banish the horrid fear from my head.

Division I: Poetry—Third Place Winner
Youngone Kim

Death

(Shakespearian Sonnet)

An amazing fascination so strange
Wonderful and wanted. . .or a bad curse
A big fat book being ripped, page by page
Your life disappearing, your life now worse
To never revive and see day again
Never to tell your loved ones your good-byes
Regretting everything you did back then
Wanting to take back all your hurtful lies
Necessary to put our guilt to rest
Before permanently going to sleep
Will you ignore your pride and pass this test
Or miss this last chance and not make a peep
Are you afraid of death or how you'll die?
At least ease your heart and repent past lies

Division II: Poetry—First Place Winner
Lindsey Potter

weather

I didn't see it coming; the effect he had on me,

on my heart, my mind, my soul.

He was the natural force

That picked me up,

threw me around,

and ripped me

to shreds.

torn.

thin.

dead.

Division II: Poetry—Second Place Winner
Tristan Barco

A Good Way To Be

And they asked with vigor
But I would not relent
It was to their displeasure
That I would not repent
I could not be tamed
Not in mind or in bone
I'd rather be tied at the stone
Than be forced to conform
To an idle old storm
To a group of nimwitted
Unchangeably ill fitted
Members of a group so rigid
Yet quite so frigid
In mind and in spirit
I just could not bear it
So I formed my own group
Very far from their loop
And we were happy and free
And that is a good way to be

Division II: Poetry—Third Place Winner
Jessica Gabriel

The Follower

I'm screaming but silent
Surrounded but alone
I'm passive yet violent
Notorious yet unknown.
Obvious and invisible
Impotent but deadly
So you think you know me?
You haven't even met me.
The darkest bloody crimson
And purest virgin white
Condemned by redemption
Hidden by the light.
Pride is hard to swallow
And love is hard to find
But I wasn't born to follow
And sometimes you lead from behind.

Division I: Fiction—First Place Winner

Maggie McMichael

Present Tense

She was the kind of girl you could find locked in her bedroom, her back pressed to pillows and tissues strewn around her tanned legs. Tears would stream down her rosy cheeks as she cried over the book that sat upon her lap, its spine facing the ceiling and its cathartic words pressed to her skin. She didn't like to let people see her cry, but with me, it seemed different. The quilts and sheets caressed me as I held her, listening as she explained the book through sniffles, a tiny smile of embarrassment on her face as she gestured and spoke so enthusiastically about a world that wasn't real.

She was the kind of girl who cried over the characters who didn't exist, the words that created them, and the beautiful mind that allowed them to grow. It had amazed me from the start. Always, there had been a self-effacing way to how she carried herself; as if she didn't understand any better than the rest of us what made her so special. But it was what she didn't see, what nobody saw, that drew me to her like a moth to flame. Her eyes seemed to penetrate anything she looked at: big, doe-like, brown and luminescent as they flitted across the room, always observant. Her smile tightened knots in my chest, her unkempt hair fell perfectly imperfect; her fingers always cool on my hot skin. She was like a burning house, and when I was beside her I realized I wanted so desperately to light myself on fire.

She was a million different colors; her favorite books and that same song she always hummed when she washed her hair. She was the thoughts and wonderments that left her lips every day; each of them restarting my brain, changing my mind, making me question everything I had once been so sure of. For this girl, she was not, never, what anyone perceived her to be.

She told me she preferred sunflowers to roses, and that her favorite sound was the way I breathed when I was sleeping. I felt her hands in my hair, her legs crisscrossed in my pajama pants, while she sang quietly as the 5 o'clock sun broke over the trees and danced through the blinds. I felt her cold toes against my bare calves, sharing the same blanket, while both of us pretended the power was out and we had an excuse to talk instead of watch TV. I felt her heartbeat in the valley between her fingers when we held hands, and the soft drum a soothing metronome that fixed the timing of my brain.

All the time, I asked her what she liked to read, but she would never answer. Instead, I would find myself on the couch until the stars were out and the rest of the world was asleep, enticed with the world she loved more than her reality. The next day, 'What did you think? Did you like it?' was always my good morning. She would pour me coffee and lean against the counter, grinning like a child as I tried to gather my thoughts, a sleepless night of words and pages hanging over me like a heavy blanket.

She explained later that she also loved poetry, because it didn't have to mean anything. It was all about pretty words and one's interpretation of them, and she told me it was mindless, really, but that she loved it all the same. I replied that she made me want to write a novel, and between the two of us, it was easy to see that we said the words and spoke the language like we had created it. I wanted to kiss her, to taste her lips and the words that lay unspoken upon them.

And together we would count the headlights on the highway, perched on the skywalk overhead, our eyes heavy and our words real. Everyone else seemed irrelevant when I was with her; everything seemed to pour out of my ears like water: the worries, the work, and the obligations. We created our own world, and while reality called our names, the place we created held us solid. With her, I learned there was no way out, nor did I have any desire to go.

She was the person that liked to hold my hand more than she liked to kiss me; who watched rain drops on the window and questioned whether or not it was tedious, to be a part of the water cycle. She was funny in the way that made you laugh until your stomach hurt, her smile giving off enough affection to light up a room instantaneously. She was the girl that didn't really mind if she fit in, that kept to herself and watched more than she did take part in the action. She was a writer, able to say even the ugliest of words in the most beautiful and heart melting way.

Once she said that she determined who she loved by whom she automatically searched for in a crowded room and later, she told me I was that person. And, oh, I enjoyed being in love with her. I enjoyed the feeling of her breath on my neck, and the feeling of her soft stomach under my fingers. Her laugh still resonated in my ears, the memory recalling her in my brain like she had never left my side.

And while everyone chose to see the things she was not, I found myself simply noticing the millions of things that she

was, instead. She was her bedhead ponytail on a Sunday morning, her sleepy smile and the soft kiss she would give me that announced it was time to get up. She was her magical laugh and her slender fingers; her round saucer eyes that led you straight to her thoughts and the songs she sang in the shower. She was that infinite abundance of beauty, one I admit I could barely contain.

The stone she was buried beneath sat before me, my old bones creaking as I made my move to touch it, sunflowers in my wrinkled hand.

No, no, there were infinite things she was not: a million errors, a thousand tears, a dozen arguments, and a handful of flaws. But yes, yes, there were also infinite amounts of things that she was.

She was the books that made her cry, and the movies that made her laugh. She was her chronic worrying and her warm cheek on my shoulder. She was her smile and that one ring she always wore on her finger; her habit of stealing the covers, and her whispering voice when we sat out in the dark.

She was eighty-three years of my life.

And I still love her, present tense.

Division I: Fiction—Second Place Winner

Ryan Ard

The Finding

Long ago there lived a fisherman by the name of John Augustine. He was a well-known and respected man. Poor Augustine dealt with a few seasons of harsh and unusual weather. This situation brought him severe financial troubles as the very nature of his business was dependent on a calm predictable climate. His wife passed away giving birth to their son. John needed to find employment or he would lose the small parcel of land his family had because of back taxes owed on the property. This would leave his elderly mother and blind sister homeless. By-and-by John secured a spot on board the Finding, a trading vessel bound for a series of islands that were famous for unusual goods for trade. He had spent his life on fishing boats and he was desperate for money, so this path seemed to be a logical course of action.

Captain Claymore Richards was in charge of the Finding. Obsessed with anything nautical, his maritime capabilities were noteworthy. He welcomed John with kindness, as he was himself the son of a fisherman. John would work as a deck hand. John quickly found out life at sea was arduous work with no creature comforts. There was too little food and too many rats. He would do what he had to do. He just wondered why life was so hard and wished it didn't have to be that way.

The work on the ship was grueling for John. His schedule was sun up until sun down day after day. He longed for the days when he was the master of his time. He felt like he was being punished. Everything he loved in life was gone to him. He fell asleep at night listening to the sailors' talk of wild escapades and superstitious beliefs. One night, John heard them whispering about "the Glow". He tried to get details about this eerie phenomenon, but none of the sailors wanted to be caught talking about it out loud. Finally, an old salty sailor said he would tell him about it because he no longer feared death.

John listened silently as the old sailor told him about the mysterious disappearance of sailors from the ship over the years. It came any time, day or night, and afflicted young and old, optimist and pessimist. Everyone was at risk. It couldn't be prevented or stopped once it made its selection. He told John that it would be at a normal time, on an average day, during an average journey. You would look up and see a fellow sailor that seemed to have been touched by the sun from within. Before you

could move to help or issue a warning, "the Glow" would consume the man. A few times, men had turned up years later. They couldn't remember anything that happened to them but they had aged considerably. They spent their lives working hard and never complaining. Not once.

John was not a superstitious man, but he wasn't sure what to make of this story that grown men didn't want to talk about. Honestly, he was too exhausted to care. He closed his eyes and began to say his prayers and stopped. What did he have to be thankful for? Everything in life he loved was gone. He went to sleep.

John woke early and began swabbing the deck with his bloody blistered hands. Hours into the afternoon, his back was killing him and his food ration didn't begin to fill the constant hunger in his belly. Just then, another sailor passed and told John he was taking over for him because the Captain needed help in his cabin moving something. The sailor told John he was lucky to be getting out of the scorching noon day sun. John snorted and said he never had a lucky day in his life.

As John walked below deck he noticed that it was brighter than it had been above deck. He looked up and saw sailors scurrying to get away from him. He could see their mouths screaming, but he could hear nothing. He looked at his arms and they were shining so brightly he had to close his eyes. This must be "the Glow" he had been warned about. John felt himself passing out.

When John finally opened his eyes, his breath caught in his throat when he realized he was not alone. There, sitting before him, was a handsome, finely dressed man in a captain's uniform. His hair was silver and lay back with the most extreme care, and his aristocratic features were offset by the finery of his uniform. He introduced himself to John as Captain Isaac Seymore. John openly wondered about his present predicament, at which Seymore simply shrugged and said luck could get a man anywhere, but it was thoughts and deeds that held you back or moved you forward.

"Where am I?" John asked. "Am I dead?"

The Captain chuckled ominously.

"No, if you were dead, you would know peace. Does this feel like a peaceful place to you?" At this answer, the Captain smiled a startlingly white grin.

"I will offer you what I have offered the others before you. Serve me and your life will be easy and pain-free. You will never know hunger, hard work, disappointment, or loss," said the Captain, and he waited for John's answer.

However, John was confused. He didn't understand what this elegant gentleman was offering. "What would I have to give to experience this life?"

Several seconds passed as the Captain seemed to penetrate John's inner self. "Something that you haven't been using or caring for in a long time...your soul."

It took a couple of minutes for this to sink in. John was confused about many things in his life. It was true that he felt life had dealt a bad hand. It was tempting to think about a life such as the one the captain dangled before him. But the cost was too great. At this moment, John realized he still had hope that situations can change for the better. He would not give up. He refused to surrender anything, much less his soul.

"I repeat, this is an offer that you should not refuse," said the Captain. "I have seen your suffering. I have watched you turn on everyone, including your Creator. You have been abandoned. I am here to tell you that you are not alone. There are many others that are just like you who have chosen to serve me. I have cared for them well."

"Captain, I thank you for welcoming me into this splendid ship of opportunity. However, I don't believe that I could part with anything as important as my soul. It is true, I have known hardship. Not a day goes by when I have not felt pain for those I have loved and lost. Still, I believe in a brighter future for me. If that means that I am to work hard to realize the fruits of my labor, then so be it."

The Captain seemed taken aback, as if the words uttered by John stung like acid on his skin. Then, he slowly regained his composure. "Well, that is your choice? You choose suffering over sovereignty? Fool!" The Captain's visage began to transform rapidly. His once-handsome features were now replaced with horrendous facial features. Beautiful tan skin was replaced with mottled, pock-marked flesh. His dark eyes were replaced with the eyes of a goat. Looking deep within the pupils, John saw shocking scenes of battlefield carnage and human anguish. His nose was now a mutilated lump of fleshy pulp. His mouth opened wide to reveal sets of various shaped teeth that fenced a forked tongue, like a serpent. As he stood in his raggedy uniform, the smell of decaying flesh filled the room. "Now, foolish son of

Adam, your choice has been made. Don`t think that I ever will give up or that I will be too far removed from you!"

John quickly moved toward the door as the Captain reached for him with clawed hands. As soon as John escaped the room, he saw nothing. Total darkness surrounded him. Just then, he heard the voice of the old salty sailor. He opened his eyes to see the crew of the Finding standing over him. Captain Claymore Richards slapped him on the shoulder.

"Welcome back, boy! We thought we lost you when you took that fall down the steps and hit your head. You better take it easy tonight and rest your head. Tomorrow is a busy day and we have a hard journey before us."

John smiled and thought how grateful he was to have another chance to work another hard day in an uncertain life. He knew he made the right choice even if it wasn't the easiest.

Division I: Fiction—Third Place Winner

Tyler S. Manning

The Hunter

CHAPTER ONE

A brown boot slopped through the mud. Sticky mud flung onto the man's camouflage pants. He stopped and crouched to his knees. His black gloves stopped at the knuckles. Using his fingertips, he brushed the mud and revealed a softball-sized footprint. He moved closer to examine the print. It had small scaly impressions like the print of a large lizard. The man's long black hair tickled against his white tank top as grasped his AK47 rifle.

The man slowly walked the trail littered with fallen trees and giant lizard prints. He paused and looked through the rifle scope as his mouth formed a grin. He shouldered the AK and silently drew his revolver. He moved so fast he appeared almost alien. He aimed his gun at something moving in the distance. Silently and quickly he continued to move closer. The man thumbed back the hammer, aimed, and... POW!

A shot thundered through the air. The target dropped to the ground with a thud as the man re-holstered his revolver and sighed with relief. His heart pounded with excitement as he stepped out of the brush and moved in to examine his kill. "A Velociraptor," he said to no one, "and just the right size." The man was impressed with himself, but not for long.

While still gazing over his trophy, the man heard a deep, rumbling growl in the distance. He immediately wondered how far the sound of his revolver had traveled. Had the gunfire attracted the monster capable of such a roar? Would the creature run away, or would it come to investigate? Thinking of all the possible ways the situation could go wrong; the man grabbed his khaki supply bag and quickly retreated.

As the sky turned pink, the man disappeared over the horizon. His silhouette revealed that he was carrying his trophy, the small Velociraptor, slung over his shoulder. Just as the man vanished into the distance, a new figure appeared. This figure was twice the size of the man, and was no doubt the source of the awful noise heard in the distance. The hunter had now become the hunted.

CHAPTER TWO

The noise of his backpack being unzipped was the most noise the man made all night. He pulled out his camouflage jacket and put it on. A patch on the front of the jacket revealed the man's identity, "Gary Mayberry."

Gary slept very little that night. When he awoke, the sun was so bright he had to squint just to sit up. Sweat ran down his forehead and dripped off his nose as he did push-ups. Gary had broad shoulders and big muscles. He worked hard to stay in shape, and he would soon need all of his strength and training just to stay alive.

Gary unsheathed his knife. The serrated blade was so intense it made his enemies quiver in fear. Using the knife, Gary cut open the Velociraptor and took what he needed. One thing he took was a large tooth that could be used both as a weapon and to sharpen his knife.

Gary hit the trail once he had taken what he needed from the kill. Despite his aching feet and back, he continued on with a purpose. Just as Gary disappeared over the horizon, the monster reappeared. Watching... Studying... Tracking...

CHAPTER THREE

As Gary walked away, he had a strange sensation that he was being watched. The hair stood up on his neck. He stopped for a moment and surveyed the area. That's when he caught his first glimpse of the monster. "A full grown Velociraptor," Gary whispered in disbelief. He had never seen one so big. Gary suddenly knew he was no longer at the top of the food chain. He had become the prey.

As the giant raptor caught up with Gary, it screamed its war cry and let out a foul huff of breath. Its yellow eyes stared directly into Gary's soul. The monster curled its lips and revealed its razor-sharp teeth. Wrinkles drooped from both eyes and its nostrils flared wildly. Gary stared into the face of death.

The creature lunged forward but Gary moved out of the way just in time to avoid a death strike. Gary ran as fast as he could but his speed was no match for the raptor. The monster quickly closed the gap between. As Gary braced for imminent attack, the Earth suddenly opened up and he dropped out of sight.

In the frantic heat of the moment, Gary had not noticed the pit covered with a brown tarp and disguised with leaves. He was now a prisoner in a poacher's trap. This fate was potentially far worse than the death match so desperately sought by the monster lurking above.

As Gary collapsed into the pit, he hit his head with such impact he immediately drifted towards unconsciousness. In the last few blurred seconds, Gary saw several dark figures looking down at him and yelling. As his body was being lifted out of the pit, everything went black.

CHAPTER FOUR

When Gary came to, he found himself tied up in the bed of a rusty pickup truck. Two men sat around a nearby campfire, the only bit of light in the night sky. Gary decided to remain still and listen. He didn't want the men to know he had regained consciousness.

"Well, what do we do now?" the tall, scrawny man asked.

"We can't let him go. He'll turn us in to the authorities and ruin our business," replied the other man who was preferably fat. "But we can't kill him either."

"We may have no choice," barked the skinny man.

Despite their debate over his future, something told Gary it was the poachers who would not see the next sunrise. Was it the argument building between the two men? Would they eventually turn on each other? Was it just a hunch? No... it was the menacing, yellow eyes of the Velociraptor who stared at the men from just outside the glow of their campfire. Yeah... that was it.

In the blink of an eye, the raptor lunged out of the eternal darkness and sunk its teeth into the the skinny man's neck. The bigger man tried to pull his gun, but it was too late for him too. His head was suddenly between the creatures massive jaws.

As the monster finished his job, Gary crawled through the broken rear window of the truck and fell into the torn, unforgiving seats. He used a shard of glass to cut the ropes from his hands and feet before turning the key. The old motor coughed, sputtered, and then roared to life. With a stomp on the accelerator, Gary sped down the dirt road filling the air with a smothering dust cloud.

CHAPTER FIVE

The red arrow on the gas meter pointed to "E". A short time later, the truck bucked and complained before coming to a stop. Gary knew deep down the monster was coming for him. He refused to run anymore. He couldn't run anymore. So, he re-loaded his guns and sharpened his knife. He sat on the tailgate of the truck and simply waited.

As predicted, the raptor found him. They stared into each other's eyes. Gary and the monster were forever linked. Each had developed some sick admiration for the other. The stare-down lasted only a minute, but it seemed like a lifetime as they both accepted the full truth of their fate. Then it happened.

The bullets of Gary's AK47 did nothing to slow the leathery-skinned beast as it lunged forward. The raptor knocked Gary to the ground and pinned him to the unforgiving, sun-baked road. It reared its head back ready to tear Gary to shreds.

In one final act of desperate hope, Gary grasped the sharp tooth harvested from the smaller Velociraptor just a few days earlier. He drove the tooth into the monster's chest and it howled in pain as it fell back.

Gary tried to get to his feet but he wasn't fast enough. The massive creature had already regained its strength and was back on the attack. The raptor slammed Gary down. The force jarred Gary's knife from his hand and knocked the loaded revolver from its holster. Gary reached for the gun. There was only time for one more shot. Whether Gary lived or died would depend on one bullet finding the perfect target. He knew a shot through the monster's heart was his only chance. Things started moving in slow motion as Gary grabbed the gun.

POW! And just that quick, it was over. The monster lay motionless on the ground. Gary had escaped doom once again.

But... What about the sound of his revolver? How far had the noise traveled? Had another monster, or maybe poachers, heard the noise? At that thought, Gary grabbed his supply pack and disappeared over the horizon.

Division II: Fiction—First Place Winner

Sara DeRouen

The Stalker

I go to your school, but you never hear my name called during roll call. I'm that Facebook friend you can't find in your friend list; the one Twitter follower that doesn't have a link. My name is unknown. My appearance changes every year. Is it wrong to love someone so much you hurt them? How can I express my feelings if they always fear me? Anne was her name, Anne Green. She was beautiful. What I loved most was her freckled, high cheek bones, like mushroom umbrellas when she smiled. Anne had light blue eyes, kind of like ice. She had braces too on her pearly whites, but they were removed on April, eighteenth at exactly three twenty-four in the afternoon. She had been checked out of her high school, missing her quiz on the stock market in civics.

Anne begged desperately for her parents to get her Justin Bieber concert tickets for her sixteenth birthday, yet they told her no. I saw her rant on her Facebook wall, so I bought her two tickets, one for her and her best friend, and sent it. The birthday present arrived in time and I assumed her parents were confused, lying that they actually bought them for her when they knew better. Her post that day made me smile so wide I think my face would have cracked. Did I mention I had a camera in her room? I only turned it on at night so I could watch her dream and smile in her sleep. I liked it when she was happy.

Her later tweets and posts all were about waiting for the concert, how the concert was, and how she loved her parents so much for getting them for her. That hurt me deeply. Why couldn't she see that it was her secret admirer? I had sent her white roses, her favorite flower, with the tickets. I was tired of waiting after that post. Tired of being ignored. Tired of being invisible to her heart. So I sent her a text telling her that I was her secret admirer and I wanted to meet her after school sometime. She told me to meet her at the abandoned park behind the school that her and her friends hung out sometimes. I had expected no response actually; surprising the girl I loved was stupid. When I revealed myself to her, no name, she became frightened of me. My beloved Anne called me horrible names! How could she do that to me? I gave her nothing but love and she denied me like a poisonous snake lying in the grass! I had tried reasoning with her, telling her I loved her and I meant no harm as I touched her arm intimately, but she screamed. I didn't want to hurt her. I didn't want to watch her funeral from afar either. I only wanted her to love me.

Division II: Fiction—Second Place Winner

Anna Grace Koepp

Losing Interest Is Ok

Once they get you, they got you. Then, *it* begins. The beginning is nice. You become enveloped in this alternate world where everything is wonderful. Every. Single. Thing. about them is perfect.

The way she holds your hand, late night phone calls where you don't want to be the first to hang up, even the way she cocks her head to the side when she backs out of the driveway is breathtaking. All you see is good, because good seems to be the only thing present. Even the bad things seem good, like how she loves Chinese buffets even though you hate them because once when you were a kid you got food poisoning and vowed to never eat Chinese again. How she has to have the radio volume on an odd number, even though you hate odd numbers. She just feels right.

You don't mean to lose yourself into a new life, but when you try to think back about what you used to do, or how you used to be you're at a loss. What did you do in the mornings before now, when the first thing you do is text her so she starts her day off well. Did you leave it on the dock beside your bed, or was it on the floor because you really didn't have any use for it that early?

What happens when your entire existence is based on making someone else happy, not by force, but by will? Do you lose yourself in the process? A part of one's identity is stolen when they are serious about another person. You don't go out on the weekends with your friends anymore, and you might stay up a little later than you would like just to please them. Regardless of the fact that you have a long day ahead of you tomorrow, but it doesn't matter. Right?

Time starts to pass by and you might not notice the subtle changes that are occurring day by day. These changes don't come all at once, and they usually aren't that noticeable. Maybe you fall asleep instead of calling to talk about each other's day, or you go out that weekend with your buds instead. It's "no big deal. Don't worry about it." She tells you in reassurance.

You still feel good about everything; you just wanted some time to yourself. After a while you need more time for yourself. When you see her you aren't as excited. In the car you don't put

the volume on an odd number, and when she does it irritates you.

When she suggests going get Chinese you instantly tell her no, and never give it any thought. Things aren't the same anymore. Everything that was once so phenomenal about her just seems to irritate you now. What is it? She's still beautiful, and she's just as caring as she was from the start.

It's fading and you can't stop it, and that's ok. Life is about learning from experiences and being ok with yourself before you become seriously involved with someone else. Take things slowly before you become too invested in something you can't get out of. It's okay to end things.

Division II: Fiction—Third Place Winner

Kathrine Costanza

Hysteria

When you sleep, you tend to forget your surroundings. When you wake in a strange white room, empty save for a hospital bed and your own confused self, it's natural to panic. But I am lulled, observing a foreign reality with the eyes of a prisoner. I wake in this merciless, finite space for an immeasurable quantity of times over the course of an eternity. I forget that I am existing, breathing, moving. My mind is numb as I welcome a familiar, involuntary urge to resume my slumber.

On one occasion, my mind was awakened with my body. I was no longer observing; I was living. I sat upright and saw that the white wall across from my bed was now a glass barrier; behind it lay a familiar hospital bed holding man about a decade my senior. As he sat up and met my gaze, I saw that we shared dark hair and matching eyes. Only, trying to remember my own age and face was like wiping rain from my eyes in the middle of a thunderstorm.

He walked to the glass wall and touched it, staring at me expectantly. I shakily got to my feet, feeling the cool white tiles beneath my bare toes, and met him at the wall, watching this stranger cautiously. When the barrier restricted us from hearing each other's questioning words, he began to pound the glass with his fists and roar inaudibly. I backed away, eventually stopped by the back wall, and slid down to the floor. I held my head, feeling sluggish, fighting a familiar groggy feeling. When I looked up with an unsteady gaze, the man was stumbling backwards, looking just as sleepy. I let unconsciousness overtake my busy mind.

When I began to wake once again, I wasn't lying safely in my hospital bed, adorned by a papery gown, suspended in time. Instead, I was in fairly normal clothes, my face pressed against maroon carpet. I sat up and leaned against the tan sofa, my head heavy. I noticed that man lying next to the door, and he soon stirred awake. My presence didn't startle him. He asked for my name. My voice came out hoarse and unused as I claimed that I didn't know. He said he'd call me Tate—he'd always wanted a son named Tate. He said he was Hayden, and not to ask him questions, he's just as confused.

Then the muffled crying started. When I shot Hayden a puzzled look, he turned and opened the door. I followed him

through the dark hallway and into an open room. A soft blue light washed over us, and the cry was at its peak. There was a tiny baby in a crib, throwing a fit. Hayden and I stood over him, trying to hush his cries.

A toy car came to life; it zoomed around the room and made beeping noises. Hayden pinched the bridge of his nose, complaining about how "it wouldn't shut up." I thought he was talking about the baby, but, luckily, it was the little toy car that he stomped. It wasn't the first time Hayden had made me a little frightened of him. I hoped that, in my far-away life, I wasn't like him.

Once it was quiet, the child relaxed. Then, the blue nightlight in the corner of the room flickered and dimmed. The darkness wasn't frightening, it was the the distant creak . . . I watched Hayden, my heart speeding. He met my gaze, but his eyelids fluttered and he cursed softly; I soon understood. My head suddenly felt heavy. I tried to speak, but my mouth was numb. I heard a footstep in the doorway; my mind was reeling with panic, but I didn't react. I slipped into darkness.

This time, when I woke up, I was sitting in the passenger seat of a car; I opened my eyes and saw the road flying past us. I turned to Hayden as he drove with one hand. He noticed me and smiled, a strange look for his worn face. He said I'd slept longer than he had—don't worry about how he got a car, just look at the view. Our lives in our hands, he said. He smiled again. I muttered about his sanity, but I was relieved, in a way. This was far out of the ordinary, yet comfortingly normal. I folded my arms and closed my eyes, letting myself relax.

When I opened my eyes, we were turning a sharp curve and too far in the left lane. A little silver car was approaching; I didn't even have time to scream or tell Hayden he was speeding. Everything became a blur of spinning images and loud crashing noises, skidding, and screeching. When our vehicle shook and stood still, I turned to Hayden as he recovered from the airbag's punch. He met my eyes briefly before getting out; I followed him. We stood by our car, watching as a teenage boy got out of the passenger seat of the silver car. His face was scrunched up and flushed.

It was hard to understand his throaty wailing, but the words came to me in pieces: "You killed her!" He fell to his knees, pulling at his hair. "She's dead!" He screamed, giving me chills. I turned to Hayden as he stared at the woman in the driver's seat, her head slumped over as blood trickled from her scalp. We were paralyzed. I wanted to help the boy and yell at Hayden for not doing so, but my tongue was heavy in my mouth and

I was swaying. I told myself not to give in, but I was soon on the asphalt, staring with half-lidded eyes at the boy as he rocked back and forth, sobbing.

When I woke up, Hayden was already awake and sitting in the square, white room. I rubbed my eyes, leaned against a white wall, and watched Hayden fiddle with a small bottle. Without meeting my eyes, he said, "Funny how life gives us exactly what we need, when we need it." I watched him, feeling angry and strangely sober. Once again, I hoped that, in the magical land of my past, I was never like him.

He had a strange expression. I thought his eyes were wet, but I wasn't sure. He put the short, orange bottle to his lips and downed the contents: maybe fifty little white tablets. I knew what he was doing. I reached for him, realizing my arms weren't moving. My eyes were wide yet fluttering. I couldn't help myself as I quickly resumed sleeping, screaming inwardly at my helplessness.

And, I finally woke up. Life was set in motion. My past was my present and I was alive. I opened my eyes to see a nurse, her eyes lighting up as I awakened. I was sore everywhere, as if I'd never moved a muscle before. When I did move, I was tugging at tubes and wires sticking out of my vital points. The nurse helped me sit up; when she walked away, I noticed an elderly man approaching my hospital bed, his smile relieved and genuine. I gave him a questioning look, feeling like I knew him.

"Do you know what happened?" he asked in a gruff, aged voice lined with kindness.

I shook my head, wondering about Hayden.

He nodded. "Do you know . . . who you are?"

I shook my head.

He somberly handed me a scrapbook; he was expecting this reaction. After a few pages, I saw a familiar room with a baby inside a crib. My eyebrows furrowed. A few pages later, there he was . . . that teenage boy . . . that woman . . . that dead woman . . .

"She's dead," I whispered, like a child reciting facts.

"That's right. You remember. Your mother died about twenty years ago, in the accident."

I stared at him gravely. I shook my head, words eluding my lips. Not my mother . . . she was that boy's. Wasn't she? I flipped through the scrapbook quietly; there I was at the end. I recognized my own face, young with dark hair and matching eyes. I shut the book and handed it back to the man.

"What happened?" I whispered, eyes downcast.

"You overdosed several weeks ago. Your wife, Rosalyn, had died the night before. Your son was stillborn . . . I'm sorry to make you relive these things, son. You couldn't take it . . ."

That name meant something to me, but I wasn't sad. I couldn't remember a wife or a son; I was confused.

"I need to go to the bathroom."

With some assistance, I stood up and staggered to the bathroom. I looked into the mirror. What I saw was not myself. It was the face of Hayden. I stared into those weary eyes, trying to comprehend. I looked down at the sink to find an orange bottle of white tablets.

Funny how life gives us exactly what we need, when we need it.

Division II: Non-Fiction—First Place Winner

Heather Lobb

Four Letters of Complex Mental Circuitry

So many of the afflicted say they knew they had been infected from the first moment. How could they know when the actual explanations are inordinately complex? So much time and thought are given to the pursuit, attainment, and containment of this obsessive dopamine igniting drug. The music industry alone is saturated with accounts describing a portion of this socially acceptable madness. Even the most stoic of individuals can be enveloped despite their claims of immunity. In truth none are immune to this infectious virus.

Passion, companionship, emptiness, this altered state drags the impaired brain through a tunnel of emotions that sporadically expands and shrinks. By way of stimulating the mind's pleasure pathways, the madness makes a person oblivious to the convulsing tunnel walls and focus only on the object at the end. This is the dopamine rising while the serotonin drops. Over time, continued exposure allows the neurotransmitters to adapt and eventually fall back to their normal levels. The blinders are removed so to speak and replaced by a new neurotransmitter, Oxytocin. This is the little darling that makes a human more inclined to lie for those who hold their trust. Depending on the amount of Oxytocin, the now battered person, after being dragged for so long, can either sever the force that pulls them and end the obsession or continue aware of the surroundings but committed to reach the circular wall of light. Hoping beyond hope the venture will end consummately, the beleaguered brain plows on taking the body and heart as vassals or serfs for the ride.

What is this manipulative drug that is deemed worthy of sacrifice? What obsessive disorder leads to an institution without being committed to a hospital? What is this madness? The term humanity has coined is love.

Although love is constantly said to be true from the first moment, the oft maligned word applies to more than common lust and attraction. Love has become a catch all word, but is based in the idea of caring for someone else so greatly he or she becomes more precious than the afflicted's own comfort. Why does this matter? Is this a conscious change or an unconscious impulse caused by the need to produce offspring? Or perhaps, like everything in this world, the answer is a complex mix of

both options.

While love at first sight is a romantic fallacy, a potential partner can begin the process with a display of attractive qualities. Consciously, the person being viewed is perhaps dubbed cute, but unconsciously the person is being measured against standards required for reproduction. Given time and exposure, the two individuals can gather information required to begin the first stage of infatuation. Surface traits are interpreted by the conscious mind and the reptilian part of the brain alike. If judged both physically satisfactory and mentally sound the collective brain begins to spurt out an excess of Dopamine. The obsessive state allows faults to be learned and overlooked. The Dopamine promotes this effect in order to keep the couple together. If faults were learned after the body stops the specific neurotransmitter flow the individual is less likely to gloss over the shortcoming. The next stage of loving companionship is aided by Oxytocin. Oxytocin is both a neurotransmitter and a hormone thus allowing the effects to linger in the body. Oxytocin stimulates bonding and greater trust in the couple and is actually the same substance released when a mother bonds with her child. This is generally where the idea from which true love stems. This bonding is especially important in regards to emotional fulfillment of both partners. At the end, there is consummate love, a mixture of romance, companionship, and practicality. This is when the hormones have done their job and the couple is close enough to breed and effectively raise their offspring. Love is not the food of poets alone, but also the product of intricate chemical messages with the goal of prolonging the species.

Obviously, love weighs on the mind. The sheer volume of romantic comedies is a testament of that. So the question remains. Is everything the work of species prolongation? If this were the case, the only standards would be physical fitness and the ability to provide for one another. The conscious mind has some say in the bestowal of affection. Certain traits are chosen based on preference. Intelligence is a characteristic some seek after while physical bulk is another. The characteristics fall in with the above standards but they are different choices that are made by conscious preference.

In brief, love is given such disservice by society today. The term is used to describe the feelings felt for grilled cheese or to describe empty lust. Love is so gloriously complex the idea that at first sight the neurotransmitters and hormones needed to really be in love would overwhelm the brain and end the chances of a relationship poorly. The affection humans come to know and associate with love is only a part of the process.

The rest occurs in the reptilian parts of the brain that attempt to spread their genes. Some romantic types may find this troubling but really this adds to the story of affection. The whole cognitive operation gives much more depth because it is the deepest parts of the brain working together with the cerebrum. A person's cocktail of neurotransmitters, hormones, and desired characteristics surging through a dark tunnel to reach the person they love? That sounds like an exquisite tale.

Division II: Non-Fiction—Second Place Winner

Katie Monette

On the Meaning of Sorry

"Don't you say it. Sorry doesn't mean anything!"

"Stop apologizing."

"You have no reason to be sorry."

I almost hate to admit it, but these are phrases that I am all too familiar with. As a chronic apologizer, it seems like I have subconsciously decided that it is my duty in life to apologize not only for my own existence, but for that of nearly every other person on this Earth, because everyone has to be sorry for something, right? Therefore, it's my job to make sure those sorries are said. If someone were to hit me with their car as I was crossing the street, I would use my dying breath to say "Sorry for denting your car." What has made this tired, two syllable word seemingly the most-used in my vocabulary? I *know* that I really have nothing to be sorry for, I *know* it wasn't a big deal and trust me, I *know* that the word is meaningless. Not meaningless, automatic. It's a reflex, and I say it before I think about what I'm really sorry for. It's like I have to make sure every mistake is accounted for, from "I'm sorry for eating the last bagel" to "I'm sorry for knocking your geriatric grandmother down the stairs." Most of the sorries are essentially pointless and were they even necessary in the first place? Probably not, but who cares; they were said and that is comforting.

Maybe it's the need to be approved of. If I mess up, if I hurt someone, they won't want me anymore. This is a feeling that I've applied to both people and things. I used to (okay, I still do) feel bad about throwing anything away. To this day I regret giving away the tons of stuffed animals I used to love so much. I mean, how would I like to be stuffed in a garbage bag and sent off to the local Goodwill? The Toy Story movies didn't make feel better about this, by the way. I can't bear the thought of hurting anyone or anything, even though inflicting pain of some sort is an inevitable part of being human.

There's something to be understood about people: they're like restaurant crayons- they smell funny and break easily. Wounds are attempted to be healed with apologies. Are they as assuring to the person on the receiving end? Apologies are about repentance, and what's the point when you know that you're

saying it because it's what you're supposed to say? Am I really regretful or am I trying to ward off the emotions of the person I'm apologizing to? Probably the latter, because no one wants someone harboring bad feelings against them. At a certain point, I don't think it's even about apology anymore. It's more about the fact that I want to convince the other person that I'll change, that I'll do better and I really won't ever hurt them again like I did. Apologies are a form of deception- they'll get you by until the next screw up.

And on the receiving end: it hurts. I'll admit it. It hurts as much to hear the word as to say it. Because it's not always alright, no matter what comes out of your mouth. After you play videogames with your favorite controller for too long, the X's and Y's on the buttons rub off. It would be nice to rub words out of your vocabulary, but just the ones that are hard to spell and the ones that hurt people, like February and sorry.

You know what? I'm actually really sorry I wrote this. There are a million other things I could have chosen to write about, and what do I pick? To write about perhaps the most annoying trait of mine. Figures. I'm sorry that I wasted so many words on something no one really wants to hear about.

Division II: Non-Fiction—Third Place Winner
Courtney Smith

"A Life Worth Ending": A Response

Death may approach swiftly, or it may creep upon us slowly. This ambiguity, compounded with a fear of suffering in our last days, months, or years, tempts us to exercise control over this cloudy and frightening end we are all destined to face. Through tremendous medical advances, doctors can prolong the lives of their patients for decades longer than they once could, but this trend often leads to extending the dying process, rather than improving the quality of life for its patients. The pro-euthanasia movement seeks to end this type of agonizing, medically-prolonged death by actively choosing when the end of a person's life will come. Michael Wolff, in his article "A Life Worth Ending," seeks to defend this position through the example of his slowly deteriorating mother. Although Wolff makes many legitimate points in his article, his argument holds errors in failing to recognize the value of vulnerability and the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary treatments.

Throughout his article, Wolff makes many valid observations and legitimate complaints about the modern healthcare system. He laments that our technologically inhibiting death does not add to the patients' quality of life, but only prolongs their unnecessary suffering. He observes the case of his own mother, who cannot address even her minimal needs and is showing progressive signs of dementia. He refers to cases like his mother, individuals who do not technically have a terminal illness but are far from healthy, as those in an "advanced stage of terminal breakdown." This population, he explains, suffers from a low quality of life and drains medical resources and funds. These legitimate issues, the avoidance of death and prolongation of suffering, progressively shape a society that insists on control over all areas of our lives, including death itself.

In a culture that values the powerful and strong so highly, the ideas of death and vulnerability can appear as things that need to be harnessed and controlled. Wolff too makes this mistake in his argument, pointing to his mother's anger at her condition as justification for euthanasia to end the crisis of degrading old age. He writes, "When my mother's diaper is changed she makes noises of harrowing despair—for a time, before she lost all language, you could if you concentrated make out what she was saying, repeated over and over and over again: 'It's a violation. It's a violation. It's a violation.'" Yet

death, he proposes, is the most humane way to alleviate the degradation of returning to a diaper in old age? This argument, although well-intended, misplaces the mercy that ought to be shown to the sick and needy, for it is precisely the sick and needy to deserve our care and compassion even more than the healthy and strong. The deteriorating elderly, being vulnerable as they are, deserve our efforts and resources to make them feel as loved and as comfortable as possible, so that death may never be sought as an answer to avoid being a burden.

Perhaps most importantly, however, Wolff makes a serious mistake in his conclusion by failing to distinguish between ordinary and extraordinary healthcare measures. His conclusion that we need active euthanasia to end this technological inhibiting of death is invalid. All throughout his article, what he appears to really desire for his mother is the refusal of excessive or disproportionate treatments, a decision far different morally than active euthanasia. He does not appear to desire to kill his mother; he only wishes that her death be accepted as inevitable. After the surgeon suggests heart surgery to correct a narrowing aortic valve, Wolff wonders why he never asks, "You want to do major heart surgery on an 84-year-old woman showing progressive signs of dementia?" He notices that this treatment, medical treatment that ought to improve someone's life physically or emotionally, did keep her physically alive but harmed her tremendously overall. When she later has to go on anti-psychotic drugs and anti-seizure drugs, he laments that they only were "frying her brain even more." These treatments, unknown to him, could have easily constituted as extraordinary means. They were excessively burdensome and did not offer enough benefits to be worth the burdens proposed by the treatment. The treatments were disproportionate to the expected outcome; doing heart surgery on an elderly woman with dementia and administering drugs that offered her no hope for a better future only prolonged her death and could have been denied. Active euthanasia, often nothing more than a reaction to excessive, death-prolonging technologies, loses much of its appeal when the option to deny extraordinary measures becomes recognized.

Wolff is right in one respect: the greatest good should not merely be preserving the body while disregarding the overall well-being of the patient. This medical trend seeks to exercise excessive control over death, but Wolff merely reacts by encouraging that we exercise control in a different sense through active euthanasia. He fails to recognize the value of vulnerability and does not recognize that it would be morally acceptable to accept death as inevitable. In a society that values autonomy so highly, this concept of powerlessness over

our own dying may seem frightening, but the true way to die with dignity is not to go towards it kicking and screaming, but to accept it bravely whenever it comes.

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