

**Huntsville Literary Association's
Fiftieth Annual
Young Writers Contest**

2018

Cataloguers for Literary Divisions 1-2

Alice Tanner

Marion Conover

YWC Judges for Literary Divisions 1-6

Annelle Craig

Leah Cusker

Millie Dempsey

Abby Dunham

Susan Hazen Guthrie

Tamera Hoskins

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Patricia Johns

Carey Link

Susan M. Luther

Joseph Mastromonico

Judi Moon

Harry Moore

Sally Naumann

Rose Norman

Annie Philips

Erin Reid

Liz Stagg

Beth Thames

Margaret J. Vann

Lynda Walker

Eloise Winkler

Missy Watkins Wood

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

Linda Fletcher

Judges for Art Contest

Debbie West, Chair

Joseph Mastromonico

Marena Owen

Monita Soni

Technical Support

Larry West

Booklet Compiler

Margaret J. Vann

Contest Committee

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

Bob Fletcher, Linda Fletcher, Liz Stagg, Margaret J. Vann

Awards Ceremony
May 6, 2018
Chan Auditorium, UAH Campus
2 p.m.

Introduction

Moderator, Beth Thames

Welcome

Carol Ashburn Roach, HLA Contest Chair

Program

Ann Marie Martin, Co-Chair

R.A. Nelson, Speaker

Presentation of Awards

Announcement of Elementary Poetry Winners by Peggy Brosious East

Announcement of Junior Poetry and Short Story Winners

by Abby Dunham

Announcement of Senior Poetry and Short Story Winners

by Rebecca Harbor Jones

Announcement of Art Winners by Debbie West

Readings by First Place Winners

Concluding Remarks

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

Special thanks to the Contest Committee and the HLA Board of Directors for providing refreshments and hosting the reception that follows immediately after the ceremony. Special thanks to Publix for its generous donation.

Dedication Page

The Huntsville Literary Association

dedicates

the 50th Young Writers Contest

to

the participating teachers

of Huntsville and Madison County

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Front Cover: <i>Kaleidoscopic</i> by Elisa Castañeda	
Upper Back Cover: <i>Me as Human</i> by Dalia Altubuh	
Lower Back Cover: <i>Ruminations</i> by Michaela Bolyard	

WINNERS

Lower Elementary Poetry Division

First Place

Elizabeth “Lizzie” Lee, First Grade
Mt. Carmel Elementary School
Teacher: Casey Sanders

Second Place

Amelia Langston, First Grade
Challenger Elementary School
Teacher: Jessica Depew



Upper Elementary Poetry Division

First Place	Joshua Macri, Fourth Grade Asbury School Teacher: Jennifer Macri
Second Place	Tristan Mann, Third Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Lisa Paulus
Third Place	Amelia Scales, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman
Honorable Mention	Abbie Morrow, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman
Honorable Mention	Sarah Wallace, Fifth Grade Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Karen Denman
Honorable Mention	Milo Littenberg, Third Grade Rainbow Elementary School Teacher: Kerri Scoggins

Junior Poetry Division

First Place
Rachel Stoner, Eighth Grade
St. John the Baptist Catholic School
Teacher: Kelly Backer

Second Place
Emma Teng, Eighth Grade
Discovery Middle School
Teacher: Jennifer Dahlke

Third Place
Margaret Jenkins, Eighth Grade
St. John the Baptist Catholic School
Teacher: Kelly Backer

Honorable Mention
Ella Stott, Seventh Grade
St. John the Baptist Catholic School
Teacher: Anna Glosemeyer

Honorable Mention
Erin Hataway, Eighth Grade
St. John the Baptist Catholic School
Teacher: Kelly Backer

Honorable Mention
Quinn Bigelow, Eighth Grade
Whitesburg P-8 School
Teacher: Sandra Collier

Junior Short Story Division

First Place	Collin Williams, Sixth Grade Home School Teacher: Amy Williams
Second Place	Regan Caple, Seventh Grade Challenger Middle School Teacher: Delicia Potter
Third Place	Davis Bigelow, Sixth Grade Contemporary Education Academy Teacher: Kim Bigelow
Honorable Mention	Andrea D'Amico, Eighth Grade Discovery Middle School Teacher: Elizabeth Brown
Honorable Mention	Nia Williams, Eighth Grade Huntsville Christian Academy Teacher: Mo Tcherneshoff
Honorable Mention	Makenzi Sedlacek, Eighth Grade Home School Teacher: Courtni Sedlacek

Senior Poetry Division

First Place	Cecelia Poehlman, Senior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Second Place	Carolyn Harper, Senior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Third Place	Natalie Roberts, Senior Lee High School Teacher: Michelle Sisson
Honorable Mention	Sarah Ibsen, Sophomore Sparkman High School Teacher: Paula Munts
Honorable Mention	Calvin Engstrom, Sophomore James Clemens High School Teacher: Candance Baum
Honorable Mention	Hannah Blankenship, Senior Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Carol Chandler

Senior Short Story Division

First Place	Calvin Engstrom, Sophomore James Clemens High School Teacher: Candance Baum
Second Place	Jenna Winkelmann, Senior V.I. Grissom High School Teacher: Mary Hudson
Third Place	Rebecca Cole, Sophomore Hazel Green High School Teacher: Freda Duggan
Honorable Mention	Hannah Blankenship, Senior Whitesburg Christian Academy Teacher: Carol Chandler
Honorable Mention	Madelyn Clark, Senior Providence Classical School Teacher: Jon Swanner
Honorable Mention	Alexis McFeely, Sophomore St. John Paul II Catholic High School Teacher: James Maguire

Artwork Category

First Place (Front cover)	Elisa Castañeda, Senior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Robin Lakso
Second Place (Upper back cover)	Dalia Altubuh, Junior Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos
Third Place (Lower Back cover)	Michaela Bolyard, Senior Westminster Christian Academy Teacher: Reneé Bumpas
Honorable Mention	Ashley Eng, Sophomore St. John the Baptist Catholic School Teacher: Payge Semmes
Honorable Mention	Lanie Hammond, Junior Westminster Christian Academy Teacher: Reneé Bumpas
Honorable Mention	Holly Bradshaw, Sophomore Bob Jones High School Teacher: Brandy Panagos

Lower Elementary Poetry

The Day of the Unicorn

Swish! Swish!

Unicorns, like songbirds, wake the sun to bring the new day.
Unicorns scatter magic on a glittery, wavy sunray.

Sparkle! Sparkle!

From a mysterious secret portal, Unicorns glide down rainbows
to spread color everywhere.
With just a wave of an enchanting wand, Unicorns care
with extraordinary flare.

Flash! Flash!

Thunder Unicorns, of the land, bolt like lighting to travel
with great speed.
Colorful, grazing grass of cotton candy provides tasty, delectable
treats for the *sweetivores* sugary need.

Splash! Slash!

Sea Ponies back legs transform into mermaid tails as they splash
across the seven seas.
These mythical animals spin, turn, and leap through the water
with great ease.

Zoom! Zoom!

Pegasi soar through the sky farther than any feathery friend.
The wind whispers welcome as wings kiss the clouds end.

Blink! Blink!

Pegasi use their glowing horns to light the celestial path
through the sky.
The stars and the moon wink at the unicorns
as the day bides goodbye.

*First Place
Lower Elementary Poetry
Elizabeth "Lizzie" Lee*

Aware

When the time ends

Something could be right

You might know what it will be like

To do

When it's time to be aware

Anyone you know to be

The one and only one to be

The one to be the best

And it's time for very endings

And then it's time that is true

You will be aware of you

*Second Place
Lower Elementary Poetry
Amelia Langston*

Upper Elementary Poetry

The End of the Line

You ask for my digits, but you never call.
I read your texts, they're not funny at all.
You have so many problems; they seem to multiply.
You throw me a curve, but I try and I try
to see your points, but I must draw the line.
Talking about your x all the time.
I try to be positive
but you're odd, even in your prime.
The frustration is a constant; you are wasting my time.
You push my limits too far.
You always have the right angle.
The factors and the unknowns twist into tangles.
Please be rational; don't be so mean.
It's a slippery slope and, from what I have seen,
I can sum it up neatly and break it to you,
Dear Math, it's over. I'm finished. We're through.

*First Place
Upper Elementary Poetry
Joshua Macri*

Within the Hills

Within the hills the Nature lies.
and the shining night is so powerful
the flowers blooming saying
the days of love are over
to sleep with all the dreams

*Second Place
Upper Elementary Poetry
Tristan Mann*

Touching the Wall

As I plunge myself into the water using all my might,
It seems that there is only one thing is my sight.

Splish, splash, splish,
Water laps my face as I take a deep breath.

Butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, free—
I'm gonna give them all of me.

200 meters, such a long haul
Only 100 more to go until I touch that wall.

My muscles screaming, starting to ache,
But I know in my head I'll soon get a break.

Splish, splash, splish
Almost there—25 meters to go.

My arms are feeling heavy like a rock,
I reach my arms forward looking at the clock.

I've beaten my time, and now I'm done.
The best part of all—I actually won!

Third Place
Upper Elementary Poetry
Amelia Scales

Junior Poetry

Bermuda

Day 1567.

As always, I press my hand against the giant glass dome.

The council takes pride in the “art” they create outside the city,
such as Amelia’s plane.

I remember the stories about her, but Amelia rusted and died along
with her Kinner Airster.

I look up at the surface hundreds of feet above.

The Sun distorts as little waves flow by.

I miss the Sun’s warmth.

Missions to the mainland are rare ever since the officials
discovered how to conceal our little airbubble. The last occurrence
was before I arrived here.

Reminded of it, I walk around the city edge, searching for the spot.

There it is, sitting outside the dome.

I press my hand on the cold glass, looking at my little ship.

Just another piece of “art.”

End of log

*First Place
Junior Poetry
Rachel Stoner*

Thoughts

Words of all colors
in a mist coalesce,
mix to form thoughts
fleeting, forgotten, and lost.
A pattern of ideas and hues
never repeating.
Dark purples push through
shadowy grays, and
flitting blues through golden rays.
Never ceasing movement
of clouds across canvas
Layers
upon
layers
covered and hidden,
forgotten yet repeating.
A pattern of difference:
knots, sounds, and colors
Words inside left unseen, unheard;
sensed, known, felt.
Clear and tangible,
but out of reach.
Parts of the soul,
meanings left unknown.

Opaque sensations
just within grasp.
Understanding brushes,
distance increases
Lingers
Covered by mist
of other words,
Forgotten
And remembered,
Lost and
Rediscovered
A pattern of
Light
And
Dark
Fleeting
Thoughts.

*Second Place
Junior Poetry
Emma Teng*

Hypernova

**Enormous star, Giant sun.
Falling, Falling, Falling.
The long summer is ending.
Smaller, Smaller, Smaller.
The Great Titan is shrinking, condensing,
Calling out for aid.
“Too Fast!” It screams,
And collapses in.
Now a black hole is made.
Fire, Heat, Light!
What an awesome sight!
Red Flash of Anger
Against the Dark Night.
Rainbow Tendrils fly.
They burn hot; blaze
A Gamma Ray Blast
Nothing gold can last
Even the stars will die.**

*Third Place
Junior Poetry
Margaret Jenkins*

Junior Short Story

Brave Betta

Where am I?

I am a Halfmoon Siamese Fighting Fish. I was swimming through my favorite tropical stream, and then a spongy thing wrapped around me! I was taken out of the water and placed in this trap thing.

As I calm down, I take a look at my surroundings. It is very dark. I am in some kind of invisible cylinder-shaped trap. A white object is clouding up the water.

“LET ME AT HIM!” another Halfmoon yells as he spots me. Thankfully, he is in his own trap.

Instinct tells me to spread out my fins and bang against the trap’s side brainlessly. So, I do it. You can’t fight instincts!

“FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!” a group of Crown Tail bettas chant.

Suddenly, they are all whisked away as a hideous creature lifts me into the air. I am set down at a place with other bettas. I have an amazing view! My spot overlooks tanks full of Fancy Goldfish, Neon Tetras, Glowlight Tetras, Ghost Shrimp...

Then another betta is put down in front of me. Goodbye, awesome view.

“FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!” the Crown Tails chant.

“Fight! Fight! Fight!” my mind tells me.

Three days later, I am still in this strange place. An old female Dragon Scale told me that this is a fish store, a place for fish to live before a creature sees them and takes them away. Creepy! So far, no creatures have taken anyone away. The only creature I have seen is the one that drops delicious bits of krill and shrimp into my “home.”

I will never get sick of this delicious food!

Wait. Is that a creature?

“Creature alert!” the old Dragon Scale warns.

The creature comes up to my “home” and puts a fin up to it. Curious, I swim up to it. The creature calls to its mother and looks at me. The creature picks me up, and everything goes dark. I sense movement. The movement stops, then resumes at a tremendous level. Awhile later, the movement stops. Before my water has a chance to stop sloshing around, I am brought somewhere. I can tell because the movement begins again. All of this movement is scary! I am set down somewhere, and the darkness-making thing is pulled away.

From my trap, I have a view of my amazing new home! Four plants are sticking out of the sand on the bottom of my new home. In the middle of my new home a giant wrecked ship lays on the ground. Bubbles are bubbling out of black holes in the sides of the ship.

Suddenly, I hear a very loud “pop,” and my trap starts tilting, and—Air! I...need...oxygen! I’m...in a...spongy thing. I...see my...new home...beneath me! I jump out of the spongy thing and land in my new home. It’s just as amazing as it looked from the outside!

“Get the fish, fellow parasites!” a voice calls out.

This means danger. Those must be Ich parasites! The parasites cling on to me. I attempt to rid my body of them by rubbing against the glass side of my tank. I succeed, but they just cling onto me again.

“Get off! Now!” I yell at them.

“Do you really think we’ll listen to you?” the parasite who seems to be in charge asks me.

“JUST GET OFF!”

“No!”

“GET OFF OF ME RIGHT NOW, YOU LAZY PARASITES!”

“No!”

The argument just keeps going on for hours. You’ll probably get bored, so I’ll just skip to the next part of my story.

My owner appears with a small version of my trap filled with dark blue liquid. The liquid is poured into my tank.

“OW! It burns!” the head parasite cries.

“Should we surrender, Sir P?” a parasite asks.

“I would like that!” I tell Sir P.

“We will not stop! We will kill this fish!” Sir P says loudly.

“You are going to kill a deadly Fighting Fish? I am not so sure about that.” I tell Sir P. I rub against my ship, dislodging Sir P.

“If you want to kill me, you will have to catch me first!” I shout.

Filled with rage, Sir P darts towards me. I swim inside of my ship

“You may have speed, but I have stealth!” Sir P shouts. Then he attaches himself to me. I have to put up with Sir P’s taunts for two days, but it is worth it. The parasites go to live in the water. The blue stuff is added again, and the parasites die.

I am happy in my new home! My owner feeds me delicious flakes twice a day. My roommate, Trail the snail, gets my leftovers.

To show my appreciation, I built a bubble nest for my owner. My owner seems to like it. You know, I think I’m going to expand my bubble nest now!

Well, that’s my story. I hope you liked it!

*First Place
Junior Short Story
Collin Williams*

Mink

A silent, sizable, sleek and skinny silhouette sat by an open window. Its triangular ears were folded down like wings against its head. Its nose did not glisten with the mucus it should have been producing and the chest barely moved, showing its slow and peaceful breathing. This Pharaoh hound had been through quite a lot. It was apparent by the expression it gave to the world as it looked at it from the concrete building. The steady beast had the corners of its mouth furled in a disheartening frown and its eyebrows scrunched from displeasure. Its eyes were devoid of any youth despite the dog being only three years of age. It emitted a lowly whimper, recalling the almost unbearable ordeal that it experienced earlier that day. It wants to forget, but it just cannot. The memory of the incident is locked into its brain. It deprived it of any thought other than the incident and darker matters. You could hear the dog starting to chuckle nervously as it thinks about how absurd the whole situation was. The window was only a few feet high. It was easy to run back to the place of nasty feelings and ideas but why would it? The internal monologue of the dog may explain.

The—the incident happened hours ago. Why am I still upset? Thank God, I managed to calm myself down physically for my family, however, they can still tell something is wrong. I may have stopped myself from shivering but my demeanor must express a terrible state for them to look at me that way, right? But, why would they care? They must have known this would happen.

No—No, they didn't. They believe or at least used to believe the theory of mink droppings. Ah yes, the smell of mink crap is so terrible that it could drive hounds to jump! It surprises me how smart these humans pretend to be when the answer has been right in front of their fleshy noses. The “smartest” even debunk the truth as if it were an ancient religion made billions of years prior (such as the Greek pantheon or the Celtic paganism). *My God!* I can't get the scene out of my head! Maybe if I thought of it formally it would then disappear from my head until I can at least better cope with it. Ugh, I hope I don't regret it—just the thought of the memory would drive me to do it.

The scene played in the dog's head. However, it wasn't narrated by it.

"Come on, JonBenet!" A stout, young man held onto a leash. The red, skinny rope was attached to a tannish brown Pharaoh hound. A worried and distressed expression was plastered onto the dog's face, who we can assume is named JonBenet. The dog's ears were pulled back and its tail in between its legs. It had a hard time fighting its owner. The man was standing not too far into a large, wide ashlar bridge that spanned over a rugged river. The air was chilly and a bit clammy, which was not unusual for the Scotland climate. This gave the bridge a tightening, too-high-up feel to it. The way everyone acted and the dreary day made the bridge look much gloomier than needed to be.

"You were jumping to get onto the bridge just yesterday," The man's shaky guffaw from the pun expressed his anxious emotion. His wife, who was standing just right next to him, gave him a hard look and a nudge.

"Don't joke about that," The woman scolded. She held a notepad in her left hand and a pen in her right. She picked up her arms and started writing. She muttered what she wrote down: "Dog won't go on bridge voluntarily."

JonBenet had a very good reason for not going on that was not apparent to any human. It could see just a little further down the bridge a carcass of a basset hound. It laid on the ground, motionless. It looked like it was there for many months. Its bloodshot eyes were rolled back into its head and its gaping maw was clustered with rotten, black teeth. Its fur colors were diluted and its tail seemed snapped. It looked like something that would appear in the older, gorier films that was made in the beginning of horror genre.

"Don't you see it, the dead dog?" JonBenet cried, but it was heard as just a whimper by its owners. The dog's head whipped to and fro, switching between the body and the man that held its leash.

"He can't hear you or me," A feminine voice growled. It seemed to come from under JonBenet's paws, but the only other object that could possibly speak was the basset hound, who is in a too terrible condition to speak properly.

“Don’t speak to me, you putrid pile of bones!” JonBenet whined madly. It was clear the dog was unhinged from all the commotion and that the fact it was forced onto the bridge. The dog acted as if the bridge burned its feet like hot coals.

“O.J.’s not the one speaking, you unworthy knot of flesh and fur!” The voice boomed once again, turning JonBenet’s insult around. The farther JonBenet was pulled into the bridge, the more *they* became visible. Dogs in such a condition similar to the basset hound lined the walls and parapets. They seemed lifeless and stagnant until JonBenet neared. They twitched with what seemed like unforgiving anger and made threatening gestures to the still-living dog as it was pulled by.

“You’re a coward, JonBenet,” The voice spoke again. However, this time, the body of which the voice belonged to could be found. It was a small beagle standing just a few feet away. It was against the wall to the right in the line with the other canine phantoms.

“You didn’t do *it*,” A smaller, childlike masculine voice piped up to just behind JonBenet’s left. It can be presumed to come from the smaller of the dogs in the hound group such as an otterhound.

“What do you mean by *it*?” JonBenet beseeched for the answer since it would do anything to calm the dogs that scowled and snarled at it. What has the Pharaoh hound done to deserve such a berating?

“You didn’t do what we have all done,” The beagle’s nicked tongue flopped as it spoke as if it were limp, “You *cheated us!*”

“What should I have done?” JonBenet screeched. The dog was now almost at the middle of the bridge, now pulling forward to get off the bridge as soon as possible. However, the owners kept the same pace as the woman scribbled words onto her notepad. Then, it dawned on JonBenet what the beagle hound had meant. “I was held back by my dad!” JonBenet screeched, “There was no way—I tried!”

“You were too weak,” A more aggressive voice growled, “Too scared to jump into another plane of existence. It was destiny that you were brought here and you didn’t fulfill it.”

“I tried! I tried! I was held back and taken away! My parents feared I would die!” JonBenet howled. Its throat was starting to get sore from shouting continually and loudly. The Pharaoh hound was now half-way pass midways of the bridge. It even started to tear up from closing its eyes so tightly.

“Why would they bring you here again if they were scared you were going to die?” The beagle spoke again, “They were trying to help you, but you were too weak from fear to do the deed.”

The voices were suffocating for JonBenet.

“Yeah, you’re just a fraud who could escape the inevitable momentarily,” The childish dog voiced once again, “You’ll have your moment for sure.”

Then, Silence. JonBenet was off the bridge. The voices, feelings and Hell Hounds were all gone. What was left was a sick, shivering dog whose vision went completely blank and mind paused.

The dog awoke in a makeshift bed near a window. The window was left open intentionally but it proved useful to JonBenet. The gorgeous setting sun was much more seeable and the twilight seemed to have calmed the dog down. However, the dog could not escape the previous event which clutched to the dog like dried tar.

Why did I think of it? Now, I am left more confused than ever before. Why were they so angry? I couldn’t get to the bridge the first time. My parents panicked when I struggled to get too close to the side of the bridge and was swept away into a car. Why are the dogs so cruel? No, no, no! I cheated them! That’s why they’re so angry! They didn’t have anyone to keep them from killing themselves. No one was there to hold them back while that nasty feeling overtook them and commanded them to jump off. I *cheated* them! I must set this right!

Gah! The mud’s very cold.

Article 39: Overtoun Bridge Terror

Dec 22, 2012

Article written by: C.C. Tinsley

The Overtoun Bridge in Dumbarton, Scotland, has taken another life. The bridge, that was previously built for easy access over a river to the nearby Overtoun Mansion, is infamous for being a supernatural hotspot. In 1994, a man had killed his child on the bridge, claiming the child was the antiChrist. After the action, the man tried to kill himself unsuccessfully. Superstitious people speculate that this event influenced the abnormal activity, encouraging dogs (specifically hounds) to commit suicide by jumping off the bridge in normally the same spot. At least one dog per year fall victim of the “negative energy” that surrounds the bridge. Up until now, the dogs must be on the bridge for the odd occurrence to happen. The event that occurred just yesterday, December 21, 2012, was truly devastating for the Jones family, who are known for their studies in the paranormal and supernatural.

The Jones family, consisting of Arthur Leigh Jones (husband), Isdal Jones (wife) and JonBenet (dog), worked together to research cases that have an odd twist to them. An example of this would be when the three visited the Eastern State Penitentiary to examine the claims of ghostly hauntings. The only thing that was reported was the dog feeling tugging sensations. The sensations were felt on the tongue and around the upper half of head. These sensations could be read by the owners through the dog’s specific motions and gestures. Sadly, the dog’s final act in the job was investigating the Overtoun Bridge.

The family decided to research the Overtoun Bridge as an easy report and break from heavy work. They figured the supposed hauntings would be easily disproven since they believe in the mink theory themselves and that their hound wasn’t interested in prey. However, now, they believe something much more happened. While staying in the nearby hotel, the dog leaped out of a bottom floor window and went to the bridge. The dog jumped and died. There were no known witnesses or body found although prints in the mud confirms this.

People are claiming that something out of the ordinary happened and it was not just mink scent like many people thought previously. “She did pull towards that one certain spot the first time. However, on the second, she kept whimpering and barking towards the sides of the bridge. She didn’t want to go onto the bridge at all and pulled towards the ends that were closest,” said Arthur Leigh Jones. This was added on by Isdal Jones: “I can’t believe she actually went back there just to jump in the middle of the night. This is highly unusual. Something convinced her to go, and I believe it has something to do with previous dog deaths.”

None say this is definite proof that supernatural beings or energy exist in our world.

*Second Place
Junior Short Story
Regan Caple*

The Tale of Luxemblot

He was a tall and gloomy knight. Phillip was walking through the woods talking to himself about his terrible fate. Just a few hours ago, he was a knight in the service of King Tarus of Luxemblot. As he was walking through the castle, an old man, who said he was a servant of the king, asked him to deliver cookies to the king. King Tarus was a very cowardly man and a bit on the pudgy side. It was said that he ruled his kingdom with a jello-like fist. Phillip, knowing that the king did enjoy sweets, was not surprised by the request or consider it strange that the king might have called for some cookies. Phillip was excited for the opportunity to do the king this favor because he wanted the king to notice him. He was hoping for a promotion and thought this was a good chance to please King Tarus. Alas, the knight did get noticed by the king but not in the way he had planned. As Phillip offered King Tarus the cookies, the king seemed surprised but greedily took one anyway. Very quickly, the king started to feel nauseous and sway back and forth. His face turned green. As he was choking, he desperately called for his guards and the castle doctor. The king's heavily armed bodyguards burst into the room along with the doctor and found the king clutching his stomach with one hand and the half-eaten cookie with the other. They all turned to look at Philip who was still holding the plate of cookies.

The castle food-taster sniffed the cookies and shouted, "The cookies are poisoned!" The guards grabbed Phillip and took him to the captain. Phillip tried to explain about the old man. The captain decided unless they could find the old man and prove the story, Phillip would be banished from the kingdom. Phillip was now wandering gloomily through the forest hoping the king didn't die because then his fate would be much worse. In his misery, he wasn't paying attention to where he was going, and, because he was so tall, he hit his head on a branch and stumbled down. As he was sitting on the ground rubbing his head, he looked up and was shocked to see four little gnomes staring at him.

One of gnomes, wearing a pointy red hat said: "Hey, Buddy, are you alright?"

The knight said, confusedly, "Are you real?"

“Yeah, we are real, and we are real angry, too,” replied the smallest gnome, who was smoking a pipe.

“Join the club,” said Phillip.

“Join the club? I’m the president!” said the pointy-hatted gnome.

“Oh, yeah?” Phillip challenged. “I bet you didn’t lose your job today!”

“As a matter of fact, we all quit our jobs today!” the gnomes shouted in unison. “What happened to you?” Phillip told them the story of what happened in the castle and why he was now wandering in the woods. The gnomes listened sympathetically, but when Phillip mentioned the cookie, all their pointy gnome ears pricked up.

When Phillip finished his story, the oldest looking gnome with the long gray bread asked, “By any chance, did that cookie have chocolate sprinkles on it?”

“Yes.... It did,” the knight answered suspiciously. “How did you know?”

“That sounds like the work of our old boss, the wizard Murdock. He was always concocting plans to take over the kingdom from that coward of a king who banished him when he got tired of all his lame and corny jokes and failed potions. A poison cookie was one of his schemes because he knew the king would never pass up a cookie.”

“Why did you quit working for him?” Phillip asked suspiciously.

“We just couldn’t take it anymore. His crazy plots always ended up with us doing something really dangerous, weird, or embarrassing that never worked anyway. On top of that, we got so tired of his stupid gnome jokes. As if he’s the first person to pronounce it ‘guh-nome.’ ‘Hey guh-nomes, these guh-nats are really bugging me. Hey, guh-nomes have you seen this picture of a guh-new? How about that guh-narled tree in the forest? When he couldn’t think of any new ones, it was ‘Hey, guh-nomes, do you know where my k-nife is? Or, when we told him the g was silent, Mr. Funny Wizard spent all day saying stuff like, ‘Hey, -uys, what’s -oing on?’ As if we hadn’t heard them all before. There’s no new gnome jokes under the sun. Eventually, we had enough.

Today was the day we decided to quit. But that cookie thing sure does sound like him.”

Phillips’ face lit up, and he jumped to his feet. “This is great! If I can find this wizard and bring him to the captain, I can clear my name, get my job back, and maybe even get a promotion! Can you take me to him?”

“First of all, he is a wizard. You can’t just waltz up to him and expect him to go peacefully back to the kingdom to be arrested for poisoning the king. Second, what’s in it for us if we help you?” asked the gnomes haughtily.

“What do you want? What does one give a gnome for a reward?” questioned Phillip.

“Well,” the old gnome said dreamily, “We’ve always had a wish to work as garden gnomes for the beautiful gardens of the castle.”

“If I can get my job back as a king’s knight, I can put in a good word for you.” Phillip replied hopefully.

“We love a good scheme, we’ve got plenty of time on our hands these days since we quit our jobs, and that guy really bugs us. We’re in!” the gnomes agreed.

“What should our plan be?” asked the knight nervously.

Then the quietest gnome got a twinkle in his eye, “I know what we can do! You can go to his house and tell him the king has died, and now is the time for a new king to take over. Convince him that you will serve as his knight when he becomes ‘king.’ Tell him you will do it in exchange for him making you Captain of the Guard of his kingdom so he has reason to believe that you want him to succeed. Tell him you have ‘friends’ on the inside who will let you into the castle and will also serve him as knights. Then you can lead him back to the castle where he will be arrested!”

Phillip excitedly said: “That might just actually work. Even if I get arrested for returning to the castle, once I’m there, I can explain everything to the captain. Then you four can take the guards to the wizard’s house to show them the evidence that proves the plot. We need to act fast, because the king might actually die.”

They headed off to the wizard’s house to put the plan into action. It worked flawlessly. The wizard was so sure of his poison potion, that he didn’t doubt that the king had actually died. He was

so eager to take control that he let Phillip convince him to head straight to the castle. When the guards saw Phillip coming, they rushed to arrest him because he had been banished and was forbidden to return to the kingdom until the Captain could find the culprit. When they threw Phillip in the dungeon, he told them everything and asked them to go with the gnomes to check the wizard's house. He waited nervously for their return. The wizard, meanwhile, in the cell beside him, was busy trying to cast spells to free himself or to turn Phillip into a guinea pig for tricking him. Fortunately, since he was never a very good wizard to begin with, he didn't have any luck.

When the guards came back, they told the captain all that they had seen at the wizard's house. Most importantly, they found a healing potion they hoped would cure the king. The castle doctor gave it to the king. Luckily, it was one of the few potions, the wizard got right.

The king's health returned, and he called for Phillip and the gnomes to come into the throne room. In gratitude, the king asked them what they would like to receive as payment for saving his life. Phillip, of course, asked to be returned to service as a knight and given a promotion to become Commander of the Knights of Luxemplot. The gnomes requested to be the royal garden gnomes and for the king to issue a decree that no more gnome jokes were allowed in the kingdom. King Tarus heartily agreed. Then he decreed that there should be a party throughout the entire Kingdom of Luxemplot for three days, but no cookies shall be served.

The wizard was thrown into jail, but since he had made the healing potion that saved the king, he was allowed to work in the kingdom's pharmaceutical research department, but only under very close supervision. All was peaceful in the land for many years to come.

*Third Place
Junior Short Story
Davis Bigelow*

Senior Poetry

tomato

It was May when the first
small, green orbs appeared,
swelling out of
withered brown flowers.

We licked our lips through
June, imagining that
sweet, red fruit prepared
in a million different ways,
savoring every last drop
of imagined juice
that we sucked from
our fingers in dreams.

When the temperature was a
hundred million degrees,
we sated ourselves
with watermelon, sweet
and cold, but not the same.
Ice clinked in glasses as
the hot breeze whispered

“soon, soon” and dried
the watermelon drips
on our palms.

July. We counted the days,
ready to scream.

We stared out of the window
at the raised beds,
where green

slowly

became

red and we ran outside
singing hymns of praise.
They were unbelievable,
two-handers,
a pound each of
succulent red flesh—
perfect raw
with a pinch of salt.

The juices were better than
any dream—they ran
off the cutting board
and down the edge
of the countertop,
dripping onto the floor—
we didn't care;
everything was
tomato, tomato, tomato.

*First Place
Senior Poetry
Cecilia Poehlman*

God Paint Me Rainbows

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come"

I have been sitting in the rain all too long
My clothes are soggy
They stick to my body like molasses
I walk with a drawl
My limbs are gooey with excitement and apprehension
Because I met a girl with auburn hair
And freckles on her nose.
My hands tremble as they reach for hers
I have braids in my hair
They usually fall out by the end of the day
Frizzled up in a brown mop.
I sit at my desk, knotting and unknotting my hair
Feeling my insides unravel and ravel again
with every swoop of her auburn hair in my direction
My teeth are wiggly,
My brain feels the same way:
Temporary, fragile
I talk with the kind of enthusiasm
That makes you think everything will be okay.

I have a smile on my face
Because life is good;
I can do all things *through Christ who strengthens me*

My Sunday school teacher taught us
Unconditional love
In the form of a rainbow
Because you see
God and I share a covenant
His love radiates through my body
And so does the girl with auburn hair

But I am drowning once again
My lungs are full of holy water
But my mouth is full of slurs
etched in my skin is

Faggot

Faggot

Faggot

Faggot

Until my skin is scratched raw
Red and itchy, my blood slow and sticky
Until it becomes melodic
And I can no longer hear my own voice
But I still sing it to myself
As my vision blurs
And wait for the rainbows to come.

*their **bloodguiltiness** is upon them*

*Second Place
Senior Poetry
Carolyn Harper*

Recovery

Swimming feels so much like drowning
that it terrifies me.

I find myself
Tugging frantically
On my life preserver,
Hands shaking,
Making sure my head is above water,
That I'm still breathing air,
And not ocean,
That my lungs are not heaving with the
Weight of the water—

Because sometimes,
The differences are too subtle
To tell.

Recovery is a fickle thing

You learn
To question yourself into relapse
And keep running in circles back to square one,
And you wonder why no one ever told you
That you can still feel the waves against your body
And a part of you will never know the difference.

No one ever told you
That you can still taste the salt
Of the sea that drowned you,

Or that the constant kicking of your legs,
The strain and stretch of your arms
Does make you strong,
But it also makes you tired.

No one ever told you that you can love yourself,
But you can never love yourself more than
The anxiety loves to take from you,
And it doesn't like to give back—

And that fighting
Feels too much like drowning,
And the differences aren't enough to make it matter anymore.

Why does it matter anymore?

Why does it matter when the ocean floor
Is so much quieter than the shore could ever be?

When recovery just takes too long—
Just takes too much out of you,

When your body craves rest more than it craves breath,

And you have oceans to go before you sleep.

And one day,
When you have finally crumbled away into nothing,
They will look at you,
They will say—
“I had no idea.”
They will say—
“But she was such a good swimmer.”
They will say—
“I thought that she loved the water.”

*Third Place
Senior Poetry
Natalie Roberts*

Senior Short Story

Diction

It was November, but the sunlight was still warm through the cold glass window behind him, and a soft heat pressed against his back. His sweatshirt was slung over his chair, and on his lap was an envelope.

The envelope was ripped open along the top, and its contents—a single piece of cardstock—were now clutched between his hands. To the average observer, the letter was nothing beyond ordinary. Scrawled in quick, semi-legible pen-strokes, it did not easily betray the care with which it had been written. At the top of the paper, it read, “Dear, Edwin.”

“Thank you, Ms. West,” Edwin said quietly.

He looked up from his letter, over a desk to the woman sitting opposite him. Her hair was thin, her face somewhat gaunt, but her eyes were sharp. They did not wander, nor did they grow unfocused. On her desk were piles of papers yet to be dealt with, although one lone sheet sat untouched in front of her.

She chuckled. “I think you’ve said thank you enough. Today I heard four more people talking about the letters you gave them, these thank-you letters. I thought you probably deserved one, too, because they...,” she paused, giving the proper words time to get in order. She knew how important words were to Edwin. “They needed those letters.”

Unlike his teacher, Edwin could not keep his eyes focused. They flickered from his feet to various points in Ms. Dalia West’s high school history classroom. The most fragile of smiles made its way onto his face as the moments slid by.

“You knew that. You always know what people need.” She said this not to tell him what he already knew (yet would never admit), but to articulate these things in her head. Ms. West continued: “That’s a gift, Edwin. Your grades aren’t the reason people know you. You know that, don’t you?”

Edwin was still, his face tight and his hands growing clammy as Ms. West opened a drawer in her desk and pulled out a letter of

her own. Beautiful cursive on the front seemed to speak the name “Dalia West” in a meek, pleasant voice. “This sort of stuff is why people in the hall know your name. It’s also why I called you in here about this college recommendation letter.” She gestured to the untouched form in the middle of her desk.

Edwin let out a breath and furrowed his brow, meeting Ms. West’s intense eyes for the first time since he’d entered her room at the end of the school day. “What do you mean? I’ve always given you my recommendation letters. Is something wrong?”

“No... and, well, sort of. But I’ll fill it out, don’t worry. It’s just...” For someone with such composure as hers, it seemed odd that the teacher would have difficulty navigating speech.

Edwin sat puzzled, watching, fascinated in a way. His skill with words was enviable. It came to him just like blooming comes to the rose—not always present, but beautiful when it manifests itself. His favorite teacher, however, did not share his talents, and in the years that Edwin had been her pupil, Ms. West had come to represent an odd conundrum to him. She was a profound and insightful woman when she could convey her thoughts. Her language was not limited by her intelligence, yet how people perceived her could be limited by her language. Edwin did not pity her, though. He simply wondered: why?

“I don’t want you to make a mistake. This letter’s for the Scientific Institute, right?”

Edwin nodded.

“Oh, Edwin. You’re good at math and science but...” She paused only briefly this time. “That’s not what really matters to you. These letters, writing, and helping people. That’s what you’re gonna remember when you’re my age. But calculus and chemistry, whatever it is you’d do over there, that’s...not what would make you happy.”

“Ms. West, studying at the Institute doesn’t mean I can’t help people. It doesn’t mean that I’ll just cut myself off from everyone. I won’t live in a lab.” Edwin laughed, but he wasn’t sure why.

“You’re right but imagine working in an office. At least I get to see kids, and I get to go outside plenty, get some sun.” She gestured to the scene beyond the windows of her classroom. Edwin turned his head slightly and saw that the sun was already nearing

the horizon. “And I get to help my students. I get to see them succeed. Don’t you want that?”

“Of course, that sounds nice,” he began impatiently. “But my life isn’t just going to be whatever I decide to study in college! I won’t just work in an office or a lab or whatever!”

Ms. West took the letter off her desk with a shaky hand. “But it’s not something you love. And...” She drew a breath and blinked back tears. “You won’t be happy. Of all people, you deserve to be happy.”

Edwin was stunned. He muttered, “Thank you... for believing that.” That delicate smile that earlier graced his lips now returned as a full-on grin. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. I think I have a plan, and I think you’ll like it.”

She wiped her eyes and looked up at him, slightly perplexed. She smiled weakly. “You’ll be alright. Whatever happens.”

Edwin grabbed his sweatshirt from the back of his chair and picked up his backpack. He looked around the classroom, scanning over all the familiar scenery—posters, whiteboards, desks. It held the same feeling that one’s childhood home might, a wonderful flavor of nostalgia. “Don’t worry,” he repeated. Years of ups and downs in this school flashed before his eyes. Conversations and triumphs and defeats and oh so much uncertainty banged around in his head like firecrackers, but only one thought stood out to him. “You’ll like it. I promise.”

“Determinism and Linguistics in Action” by Edwin C. Lund. Edwin examined the cover of his dissertation as he walked from his car towards the school entrance, shivering against the evening air. It was unextraordinary, nowhere near displaying the author’s attitudes towards its contents. Years of research, sleepless nights, countless studies—this cover showed none of that.

He reached the front of his old high school. The better part of a decade had passed since he’d last stepped through these doors. Weighed down by the experiences of those years, and by the two hundred fifty-four pages of work he carried, he entered the building. It was getting dark out, and no one sat in the front office. Edwin didn’t care; there was only one person he’d come to see.

He took the turns towards Ms. Dalia West’s room carefully, for he knew the weight of this moment. It seemed penultimate. His

dreams had been realized, and now those dreams were about to be shared with the world. His steps grew lighter, and he hugged the papers to his chest.

“Ms. West...?” he called softly, rapping his knuckles on the doorframe. He peered inside to find his teacher sitting at her desk, hunched intently over some papers. She jerked up at the sound of his voice and turned quickly to her former student. Her scrunched face eased into a look of amazement.

“Edwin Lund, I never imagined I’d be seeing you again!” As she stood, Edwin hurried over, set down his papers on her desk, and hugged his favorite teacher. She pulled back and motioned for him to sit across from her. He paused for a moment, remembering an afternoon he spent in that chair maybe seven or eight years ago. He eased himself into it, and he could almost feel the sun on his back once again. Looking around, it was evident that the classroom decor had changed, but his history teacher, with her wispy hair and ramrod straight posture, was the same woman he’d come to respect and admire. “What brings you all the way back here? Last I heard you were at graduate school in Massachusetts.”

Edwin pointed to the stack of papers he’d put on her desk, and she read aloud, “‘Determinism and Linguistics in Action.’ Is this what you’ve been working on?”

Edwin nodded. “My dissertation. But look,” he said, leaning to point at the title. “It spells ‘D.A.L.I.A.’”

Ms. West furrowed her brow and sat back slowly. Her eyes fell from her former student to her lap, and she finally asked, “Why, Edwin? I didn’t want you going to the Institute. I said you should help people.” She exhaled slowly and shook her head. “I regret that. I should’ve supported you.”

“No, you were right. And this,” he told her, gesturing to his work, “this will help people. This will change the way we treat others, the way we collaborate and work towards a common goal, *just* by changing the words we use.”

She raised an eyebrow skeptically.

“Determinism,” he said firmly, beginning what was clearly a well-rehearsed spiel, “has long been debated in the linguistic community. It’s the idea that language limits and shapes our thoughts. Orwell used it in *1984*, and psychologists and linguists

toyed with it for years. It was thought to be discredited, but my research shows otherwise. Your thoughts are shaped by the words you use to think them. You don't hear someone's emotions; you hear the words they use to express them, and then you look at those words to find meaning. By choosing our words carefully, we don't just speak more accurately, we can build an environment conducive to happiness and progress. Even just *hearing* words like happiness, people feel a small amount of joy. Using someone's name gives them a sense of pride in their individuality. And saying thank you..." Edwin's voice wavered, and he paused to collect himself. "Saying thank you is one of the most important things you can do. You taught me that."

Ms. West stared into the distance as a tear rolled down her cheek towards a smile that meant more than words could describe.

"So what brings me back here, Ms. West?" He took in the room around him, remembering all that he'd learned here. He recalled once more that fateful day when Ms. West reminded him of the impact of gratitude, and the importance of chasing what really matters to you. He looked at his teacher and saw pride in her eyes. He had made her proud, and that was all that mattered at the moment. "I needed to say thank you just one more time."

Ms. West laughed. "Thank *you*, Edwin."

The walls were covered floor to ceiling in words—words written in harsh, bold font. They were pasted over the windows so that instead of seeing the sunset outside, Edwin saw only "PRODUCTIVITY," "NEATNESS," "ORDER."

"Isn't it wonderful? And we just got a new word, too!" Ms. West said, waving an arm towards a massive new addition taped above her doorway. "'CONFORMITY' is one of the core values!"

Through gritted teeth, Edwin said curtly, "I know, Ms. West."

She gave him a perplexed smile. "Excuse me?" She pointed to her nametag. "You can call me Teacher!" Her voice was full of enthusiasm. She did very well to imitate the government-recommended tones that conveyed cheerfulness and cooperation—tones he had researched himself. However, her graying hair and tired eyes told Edwin that her tone was a well-rehearsed lie.

“Whatever,” Edwin said, and he knew that her sudden look of concern was the result of the ban on such nonchalant language. Another byproduct of his research.

“You’ve done so well. Your research is helping the country. We’ve never been so productive or orderly,” Ms. West exclaimed, but Edwin had read the same brochure that she had, and her compliments were nearly verbatim. Of course, that pamphlet hadn’t mentioned him by name. It deemed names too dangerous, too prone to prompting individualistic behavior. It complimented his work, not him.

Edwin didn’t mind that, though. He didn’t want to be associated with the new Government Language Programs, the twisted result of all he’d worked for.

“I shouldn’t have come back here. There’s nothing I can do.”

“Do?” Ms. West repeated incredulously. “What could you want to do? You’ve saved millions from lives—”

“—of confusion and fear.” Edwin concluded spitefully. “I’ve heard it all. It doesn’t change the fact that they’ve turned me and my research into a monster.”

Ms. West began a reply but her words seemed caught in her throat. Edwin saw what was happening. She knew what words to use, but they were no longer legal. The children she taught nowadays certainly weren’t learning them. This sort of spectacle, someone sitting around trying to find a way to express their deepest thoughts, was exactly what the Language Programs wanted. They made it impossible to express something too emotional, too... true.

“It’s just, that I wish I could say...” She trailed off, knowing that to continue would be a crime.

Edwin laughed bitterly. “Thank you? No, you don’t want to say thank you. You’re not grateful. You know this is all wrong.”

“No! I would never—”

“You know that it’s wrong not to be able to express gratitude, Ms. West. You know the value of ‘thank you.’ You know the value of ‘pride’ and ‘sorrow’ and ‘love’ and all those other words that they won’t let you put up on the wall next to ‘conformity’! You know the value of someone’s name, don’t you?”

“Stop, someone will hear you, Ed—” She caught herself, and her eyes went wide with fear.

“What’s my name, Ms. West? Tell me my name!” Edwin yelled, getting up from his chair and storming across the room to the whiteboard.

Ms. West said nothing. She sunk into her chair and took deep, heaving breaths, trying to calm herself down.

Edwin uncapped a marker. “Let me tell you!” He scrawled “Edwin Charles Lund” on the whiteboard and then turned to face his teacher. “Don’t you know what these words mean? They’re *me!* Edwin Charles Lund is *my* name, and they’ve taken that from me.”

“Keep your voice down, this is dangerous,” Ms. West pleaded, curling over as she started sobbing.

“Tell me your name!” Edwin shouted.

“Please, they’ll arrest you!”

“Why do I need my freedom when I don’t have my name?” he cried. “What’s the use of anything if you don’t have your name? What is your *name?* Who are you!”

In between ragged breaths, she replied, “I... don’t know.”

Edwin scoffed. “I don’t know who you are, either.” He turned to make his way out of the classroom and face whatever fate would come to him, but he paused for a moment when he heard something unintelligible behind him. “What?”

From her desk, as she cried into her palms, Ms. West said, “Thank you, Edwin.”

He stood for a moment longer in the doorway, for the first time at a loss for words. He opened his mouth to speak, then thought better of it.

Silent, he left.

*First Place
Senior Short Story
Calvin Engstrom*

The Experiment

Click, clack.

“Miss Jenkins?”

I hadn’t realized I had been shaking until now. My trembling fingers lowered the magazine that I was pretending to read, revealing a young woman in purple nursing scrubs in front of me.

“Are you Miss Jenkins?”

“Yes,” I responded warily.

The nurse’s voice was soft and soothing, like freshly whipped meringue. She had a sweet vibe to her, which calmed me and frightened me at the same time. She was smiling one of those overfriendly smiles that customer service workers usually have, or at least the good ones. Her brunette hair was pulled back into a bun, yet somehow it still radiated shine. Her skin glowed like those people you see in skincare commercials, and her eyes sparkled with cheer. She seemed perfect. Too perfect.

“The doctor will see you now. Follow me.”

She waited for me to gather my belongings before leading me through the door that she had entered from. Here, we entered a long, white-walled hallway filled with wooden doors, all shut.

Click, clack. Click, clack.

She led me to the end of the hallway, where there was a scale. She took my weight and measured my height like any other doctor’s office I had been to. Of course, I wasn’t here for just any ordinary check-up. I was here on a mission. I was here for a purpose.

After she took my measurements, we proceeded down another long hallway, identical to the one we had just come down. Only this time we went through a series of twists and turns, passing more and more shut doors, until finally landing at an elevator.

Click, clack. Click, clack.

I followed her into the elevator, and she pushed the button for the top floor. Floor 13. As we began moving, I finally realized what was making that clicking sound. It was her shoes. She was wearing black pumps.

“Nice shoes,” I started. “I don’t know many nurses that wear pumps to work.”

The nurse met my eye, and a smirk started to form over her face. Suddenly, her sweet demeanor was gone. All except for the sparkle in her eye.

“That’s because nurses don’t,” she said as she began stripping off her scrubs. Underneath she was wearing a short, black cocktail dress. She released her hair from the confinements of the bun and let it fall in loose waves around her shoulders.

“Wait, what—”

“The doctor will see you now.”

She winked, and the doors to the elevator slid open.

The room before us didn’t belong in a hospital, but in a Vegas casino. The room was huge, with red velvet flooring. The black ceiling was embedded with little lights, extending to the heavens and resembling a clear night sky. Two spiral staircases paralleled each other on each side of the room. The space was filled with freshly shaven men in fancy suits and women plastered with makeup and sporting sparkly dresses. A round bar was stationed in the middle of the vast space, and classy instrumental music faded into the extravagant background.

“Where am I?”

The fake nurse looked at me, puzzled.

“You signed up for the experiment, didn’t you?”

“Uh, yes, but I—”

“Well, this is the experiment. Follow me.”

I followed the woman into the room, looking around at the great scene in wonder. There was a buzz in the room, a sort of electricity that I had never felt before. The energy traveled throughout, jumping from person to person. After a few seconds, I realized that the energy wasn’t traveling, but was present in every individual. Each one of them was contributing to the charge that I felt. People were engaged in conversation and card games, and they all looked so...happy. Each person had the same sparkle in

their eye that the nurse had. I knew something was off, but in that moment the exhilarating sensation intrigued me. I had never felt this good in my life.

The lady led me to the round bar, where a greying man in his fifties sat. He was dressed in a black tux and shiny black shoes.

“Dr. Kipper, Miss Jenkins has arrived.”

“Splendid!” he shouted, turning on his stool to meet me.

“Hello, my dear! Pleasure to meet you!”

“Uh, hi. Um... I’m here for the... experiment.”

“Yes, of course! Everyone here is here for the experiment!”

“Oh,” I said, feeling like my awkward self again. “So...what exactly is this experiment?”

The fake nurse and the doctor shared a look.

“My dear, you don’t know about the experiment?”

I shook my head. “I heard about it from a friend, but she didn’t say much. Just that it paid well.”

The man chuckled. “That it does. Follow me and I’ll explain everything!”

The man jumped off his stool and jollily led me across the room to a door directly across from the elevator. It was plated in gold. The doctor reached around his neck and grasped a key that was hanging on a silver chain. He opened the door and revealed a grand office, with a dark wood desk, two plush chairs, and a flat screen tv.

“This is my office!” he exclaimed, gesturing for me to enter. “Please, take a seat.”

As I stepped into the room, the exhilarating feeling I had once felt vanished. I now returned to my state of discomfort and nerves. I had no idea who this man was, and I had no idea what I was exactly supposed to do for this “experiment.” I just knew it was my last resort.

After we were both settled, he began. “Well, as I’m sure you’re aware of, the world has experienced a growth in the usage of dangerous street drugs. People are dying every day from heroin, meth, cocaine, and a ton of others. And why do people take these drugs? There are many different reasons, but one of the main reasons is to escape the hardships of their lives. Same with alcohol. Many heavy drinkers indulge in their unhealthy habits because of

issues in their life. Well, what if there were a drug that allowed you to escape by creating an entirely new life for you? A drug that didn't harm you, but kept you healthy? Well, I have created this drug! I call it *Utopia*. It gives people a chance at a fresh start.”

“How does it work?” I asked, not sure if what I was hearing was true.

“Simple. Every 24 hours a recipient takes a dosage of *Utopia*. Then, the drug alters the brain's chemicals for the time being to make the recipient believe they have lived out an exciting and happy life, with no memory of the hardships that they have suffered.”

“And what happens if they stop taking it?”

“They just go back to their memories and real life. The brain goes back to the way it was before, and they are perfectly fine. Of course, I have never had a patient want to leave their fantasy world.”

I looked at him, trying to process everything that I had just heard. Was it true? Could a drug really create a hallucination that was safe? Was it science, or magic?

“How long does this experiment last?” I questioned.

“All of my patients have signed three-year contracts. Once a patient reaches their time limit, I pull them from their treatment and let them make the decision of whether they would like to continue the experiment or not.”

“Three years?!” I exclaimed. “How do these people have three years of their real lives to give up for some...some fantasy?” “You don't understand,” Kipper began. “Some of these people have been through great hardships. Traumatic experiences that you should hope never to happen to you in your lifetime. One woman watched as her father murdered her mother with a kitchen knife. One man was in the armed forces, and he had to stand next to his best friend in combat as a bullet went through his skull. There was nothing he could do but leave him. Some people just can't deal with these types of situations without proper help.”

“Proper help?” I fumed, beginning to feel the anger swell up in me. “Letting them forget their entire lives is proper help? Letting them forget the moments that made them who they are? There is therapy! There are other methods!”

I realized I had been gripping the sides of my seat with fierce claws. How could someone think that forgetting their problems was the same as solving them? How could they just give up their entire existence to take the easy way out?

The doctor chuckled, noticing my dug-in fingernails. “No need to get angry, now. You don’t have to participate if you don’t want to. This is completely voluntary. I’m sure there is someone else who would like your spot.”

“Yes, sir, I’m sure there is. Good day, Doctor.” I immediately stood and began storming towards the gold door.

“But remember Miss Jenkins, there was a reason you came here today. You need something, don’t you?”

I stopped.

He was right. I did need something.

All my anger began to dissolve, and I released it through a defeated sigh.

“My mother. She...she has cancer. And I... I can’t pay for her treatment.” My hands were shaking. “I can’t wait three years. She doesn’t have that much time.”

Dr. Kipper pondered this for a second, twirling around a gold pen that had been placed on a holder on his desk. “Well, if you decide to participate in the experiment, we can work something out. I can pay your mother’s bills. On top of the ten grand you would receive once you have completed the experiment, of course.”

I froze. “Are you serious?”

“I have lots and lots of money, Miss Jenkins.”

I considered this. I needed to save my mother, but three years was a long time to give up. And who would take care of my mother? I guess I could hire a nurse, but she would miss me. She would be miserable until it was over, and I wouldn’t even think once about her. I wouldn’t even know who she was.

But at least she would be alive.

“Of course, if you decline, and your mother does pass, maybe then you will empathize with those who see this program as their only option in continuing their lives.”

A pause.

“What will it be, Miss Jenkins?”

*Second Place
Senior Short Story
Jenna Winkelmann*

The Stargazer

The stars entranced her. One look and her gaze was trapped within the beauty of the contrast between the light that emanated from the distant orbs and the dark that encompassed the world. There was too much darkness in the world. Nevertheless, the night was Artemis's favorite and her brother always teased her for he was born to thrive in the sun. He called her "Dat," short for datura, the night blooming flower that is fatal if ingested. She never knew whether to take it as a compliment or an insult. He offered her both, but more often than not, it was the latter. Artemis loved him more than anything though. Apollo's burning heart was her other half, and she didn't know what would become of her without his stoic presence beside her. Artemis arranged her skirts around her ankles so that the flowing fabric shielded her feet from the night chill. Artemis absolutely despised dresses for their impracticality. She was supposed to meet Orion at the rise of the moon, but he was late. He was never late. Apollo didn't approve of their friendship and tried to keep them apart as much as he could, but once he went to sleep, what he didn't know wouldn't kill him. Artemis shifted her weight to her knees and was about to stagger to her feet when she saw the faint glow of a torch in the distance. Orion wasn't late; she was just lost in thought. Artemis scolded herself for not noticing him sooner. No one could sneak up on her, no one except for Orion. She ran down the hill, the light from the orange flames licking the wind beckoned her closer. Her long, dark waves bounced behind her as the wind caressed her cheeks.

Artemis was trying to slow down but her momentum was carrying her forward too quickly. Orion was standing by the pine tree waiting for her with that smile that lit up his hard features and reached out his arms as if to stop her before she plowed them both down. Even he wasn't strong enough to catch her, and Artemis yelped when she knocked them both to the ground. Laughing, he helped her off the mossy ground as she brushed off her skirts annoyed at all the grass prickling her skin through the thin silk. "What tonight Miss Artemis?" he asked her. Her lips parted in that mischievous grin he knew all too well and one word escaped her: "Run."

The two of them took off as fast as their legs would carry them. Jumping over branches and rocks and any obstacle in their way. The tall shrubs slapped Artemis's legs and scraped her ankles, but she didn't care. When her mother would read her stories of the battles of old, Artemis would always ask if it hurt when the soldiers were struck. She would soon learn when she grew older and began lessons, but her mother answered her: "Wounds of freedom always heal faster than those of suppression." This was her freedom. Nothing was holding Artemis back except the barrier of wind that smacked her face as she broke through. Orion was starting to slowly pull ahead of her, and Artemis pushed her legs to carry her even faster. It was a tie every single night, but she was going to win this time. They hit the sand of the coast and both stumbled into the water where the soft sand gave way underneath their feet. The salt water stung where she had sliced her shins, but she was oblivious. Artemis was distracted again by the light of the stars reflected on the waves like the ocean was one giant looking glass. Artemis was swaying with dizziness from staring into the ripples when Orion lightly pulled her away and broke her stare. Artemis picked up her knees and walked back up to the shallower shore where whitewater waves crashed around her. Orion was holding her elbow, steadying her. They both needed people to lean on. Sometimes she leaned on him, sometimes he leaned on her.

Today he was holding her up, and they collapsed together on the dry sand, Artemis still clinging on to his arm. “What happened today?” Orion asked her. He could sense she wanted to tell him something but was hesitating all night. Artemis’s lips pursed, and she sucked in a quick breath. “It’s Apollo, I love him so, but he is so vain and jealous of our friendship. He tells me that I can not love a mortal because we are much greater, but I don’t believe him. We are similar, you and I. Even if we are not made of the same blood, the stars brought us together for a reason.” Orion smiled and wrapped his arms around Artemis. “I will always be with you, even if I am not beside you. Remember that.” The two stood up and strode down the coast sharing stories and memories and everything they could only tell the other.

The next night, Artemis raced down the hill again to meet Orion. They were going to hunt. He was strong, and she was swift. Together they made the perfect team. Artemis and Orion crouched in the bushes side by side watching a stag prance through the tall grass. It had beautiful antlers that reached up toward the heavens and a coat that looked soft as silk. Orion pulled back his arrow and aimed at the stag. Artemis’s heart was pounding fast in her chest. The hunt always awakened all of her senses like nothing else could. She smelled the juniper nearby and was well aware of the caterpillar next to her bare foot, careful not to harm it. Orion let his arrow loose and it flew fast and straight, killing the stag. “Well done, but I could do better.” Artemis told him playfully. They constantly bickered about who was the better hunter and she always won. “I could kill any beast on this Earth,” Orion boasted.

“Careful, the gods do not like arrogant mortals” Artemis warned. Orion gave her a mockingly haughty glance and then bent down over the deer. Artemis heard a faint rustling in the shrubs and turned to see if there was something there. Then, a scorpion emerged from underneath the bush. It was red as an ember, and its sickeningly sharp tail curled over its wicked back. She had never seen one so large, almost the height of her knee. “Orion” she whispered, the sound barely escaping her lips. It was as if someone had clamped a hand over her throat and she could hardly swallow.

He turned and as soon as he saw the scorpion, he sprang into action. Orion drew his sword and immediately jumped in front of Artemis. The scorpion crawled closer, and the two took a tentative step back. "Stay behind me," Orion breathed to Artemis. He stepped closer to the scorpion and stabbed his sword. The scorpion managed to deflect the blow. His armor was strong, but so was Orion. He lunged again and again, but the sword bounced off the scorpion's back. Artemis wanted to look at Orion to seek comfort in his gaze, but she could not tear her eyes away from the creature. With an unholy hiss that even Hades himself would flee, the scorpion lashed out with its tail and struck Orion in the thigh. A choked scream escaped Artemis' mouth followed by a wail of grief like no other. Orion's legs crumpled beneath him as his body collapsed to the ground still. Artemis shook him and tried to revive him, but she could not. She looked around for the scorpion. It had killed her dearest friend, and she was going to seek vengeance. A life for a life. Artemis would not only kill the beast but would kill it slowly and painfully for all the pain it had caused her. But when she turned around, it was gone. "The gods," she gasped in a whisper to herself. They had heard his arrogance and decided to punish him for it. But why did they have to punish her, too? Orion meant the world to her, and now he was cold to the touch.

She was not going to let the gods play with her like a puppet on a string. Not like they treat the mortals. She was one of them. Artemis brought her chariot to Orion's lifeless form and tried to lay him as gently as she could in the seat. He was difficult to move because of his size, but she was not going to lose her friend. Once he was in the chariot, Artemis went to the sky and placed him where all could see. A memorial that would never fade. His body turned to stardust, from which all life originates, and his form took shape in the dark night sky. With tears streaming down her cheeks and a choked sob, she had made him into a beautiful constellation. The stars had always been her favorite. And now whenever she looked up into the heavens, she would remember her dear friend.

He would always be with her, even if he wasn't beside her. But that was not enough, every living thing on this earth needed to know why he was in the sky and not on the ground. Why the greatest hunter and most heroic mortal who ever lived was not protecting them but was protecting the heavens with his watchful gaze. Artemis rode her chariot in a pattern that she hated with the fire of a thousand suns and created another form. One that made her tears fall even faster and would hopefully make the gods weep with what they had done as well. A scorpion. Also made of stars. These two constellations would never be seen at the same time in the darkness, placed on opposite sides of the celestial sphere. Even far apart, Artemis did not like the risk of the two in the sky together and so created Sagittarius. The archer's arrow would always be aimed at the heart of the scorpion, ready to be released at one flick of Artemis's wrist. For no one could ever match the wrath of a heartbroken goddess or the power of a new female warrior.

*Third Place
Senior Short Story
Rebecca Cole*

