



w 49

presents

Ethan Reyes

Mia Knezevic

Joshua Kier

Hana Osman

Denielle Hill

Tracy Lissner

Candice Yee

Anita Shen

Laura Birthwhistle

Joshua Kuepfer

Julia Perroni

Stephanie Lines

Karoline Pasciano

W49 Editorial

After a brief hiatus, we are pleased to announce the 2015 edition of W49, a publication dedicated to showcasing the best writings of the students of Langara College. Having had the privilege of teaching Creative Writing at Langara College over the past decade, I've encountered first-hand the literary talent that passes through these hallways. The goal at W49 is to introduce these writers to a wider audience.

Thanks first and foremost to all writers who submitted their work to the W49 Writing Contest; unfortunately not all could be placed, and some difficult decisions were made. Particular congratulations to the authors of the winning entries and featured selections, those afforded, as Edmund Wilson put it, "the dignity of seeing your name in print." We are grateful for your collaborative efforts and your patience.

I would like to thank Peter Babiak for his assistance and advice. Thanks also to all members of the Langara English department who volunteered their time and literary perspicacity as adjudicators for the W49 Writing Contest; these include Deborah Blacklock, Karen Budra, Kina Cavicchioli, Caroline Harvey, Trevor Newland, Kathleen Oliver, Roger Semmens, and Jacquie Weal.

Finally, much gratitude to W49's graphic design team, Graham McFie and Vianney Cabrera, who displayed dedication and diligence through every step of the process.

Guy Wilkinson

w 49
← a magazine of award-winning
poetry and prose

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It All Comes Out in the Wash

Runner up Poetry
Karoline **Pasciano**

Every Sunday my mother would bake a pound cake
To be served with sweet tea to the women from our street
Who would come and sit around a table to share tales
And secret recipes on how to remove tomato sauce stains and
Mud smears and lipstick marks from white shirts

Bleaching isn't enough they would say
You've got to soak it and leave it and come back to it sometimes
You have to work on it with care and patience
Rasp it against the sink a thousand times and scrub

The thoughts of how it used to be and how it can still be
Can you still remember how fair it was?
Are you able to reach for those pale memories?
Maybe it's time to let go and find a new fabric to focus on
Like the stool-smudged diapers or the greased dish cloths
These can be easily washed along with the other delicates

You may go back and look at the tarnished textile again
And think that the blot has gotten so small it's almost invisible
You convince yourself it can only be seen against the light or
By those who look for it or know it is there

Even it knows it is there for it looks back at you
A single eye gazing with lying lids
Which batter lustfully in the darkness of your bedroom
Whispering love sonnets and erotic fantasies unfulfilled
Its words revolving in your head in a permanent-press cycle

Can you forget its presence?

Pasciano

Can you still wear it like before?

Those were questions I couldn't yet understand whenever I spotted
The group of women who would laugh at each other's remarks
And rub each other's backs in soothing circles between sips
While trying to erase each other's blemishes
And murmuring reassuringly that eventually
It all comes out in the wash

Turtle Road

Runner up Fiction
Karoline **Pasciano**

The first light of dawn traced faint, multi-coloured lines over the cracks of the dusty window on that historic summer morning. On the counter, the radio played a soft tune, its static buzz mixing with the crackling pops from the ground liver in the frying pan. While Mrs. Cook prepared her famous liver pie for lunch, Frances ironed her dress with an almost religious care, making sure not to miss any wrinkles. As she admired the perfection of her work, Frances' hands smoothed over the creases of the white cotton, her small fingers delineating the shapes of doves and olive branches embroidered on the fabric. This was her best dress; she had gotten it as a present for her 11th birthday last year and hadn't had a special occasion to wear it until today. From where she stood, Frances could faintly hear the muffled voices on the radio. The announcers were giving the details of today's event, but their words were lost under the sound of Mr. Cook's thumping steps towards the kitchen.

"Frances, are you almost ready? We don't want to be late. Today, we will witness history happen in Harmony. Isn't that exciting?" Mr. Cook winked at the young girl, giving her a pat on the head.

"Yes, Daddy!" replied Frances, flashing a gap-toothed smile.

Upon finishing their preparations, the Cooks departed on the five-mile walk to Harmony, merging at Turtle Road, the connecting roadway to the town. The curious road got its name for the hundreds of painted turtles that stroll across it in the summer to reach the cooling pools of water—an oasis from the parching climate—at the border of the Skitseten reserve. In the bright sunlight, the red dirt road appeared to shimmer with the heat, and the turtles' shiny

carapaces glimmered as they paced. Frances loved the turtles. She loved flipping them on their backs and admiring the vivid colours on their bellies.

As the family paused for a few moments to refresh themselves with chilled pieces of tangerine, Frances decided to choose a specimen to study as she zigzagged between the army of reptiles. After selecting a promising option, Frances carefully flipped the animal onto its back. Upon being picked up, the creature quickly withdrew its limbs and head into the safety of its shell. Seeing the rich colours tattooed on the turtle's body, Frances reveled at the sight of Nature's masterpiece. This one was particularly impressive; the outer rim of its shell was painted a deep red shade which bordered wavy, symmetrical, emerald contours. These contours, in turn, encircled the shell's coral-tone core, forming a complex map-like design. With the tip of her fingers, Frances traced the outlines of the shell junctions, imagining clues to secret treasures hidden on the atlas in front of her and fantasizing about fairy-tale lands where people would have picnics, wear beautiful dresses and celebrate historic events every day. As she pondered on the details of her imaginary world, Frances' daydreams were soon interrupted by a gentle voice.

"Come on, kiddo. We better get going, or else we'll miss it," Mr. Cook said, while chewing on a piece of tangerine.

Frances stared at the living map in front of her. Whenever she played with the turtles, she always made sure to flip them back on their feet, for she knew that the creatures were unable to do that by themselves. As she did that, Frances often felt a bubble of pride swelling inside of her, like a gas balloon. She would often think about stories of Saint Francis, the patron saint of all animals, and would profess that she too was an angel rescuing helpless beings.

Frances continued to admire the beautiful shapes in front of her. She had never seen a shell with such an intense pattern before. She considered that, once she flipped this turtle back, she would probably never be able to find it again; it would be lost forever.

Maybe... if I just leave it right here on its back, then maybe it will still be here when we come back in the afternoon, Frances contemplated, biting her lip.

When she realized that her parents started walking again, Frances came to a decision. She slowly stood up, watching the animal, which was now moving its limbs like a row-boat on land.

"Don't worry, okay? I'll be back soon. Everything will be alright," she whispered to the restless creature, running her finger across its

shell in a caress. Your angel is coming back soon, Frances thought with a grin.

The rest of the walk didn't take much longer, and they were soon met with the town's familiar Main Street. This was, in fact, Harmony's only street; it served as an artery connecting the town's welcoming arch to the heart of its public square. Multicolored warehouses lined up the principal lane, saluting the parade of passersby. As the Cooks marched on, they could recognize at the very end of the square the façade of Harmony's Public Hall. With its white walls reflecting the brightness of the sun, the building seemed to irradiate an almost blinding glow.

The public square was already packed with residents, as well as with visitors from nearby villages, who encircled the corners of the large stage. While Mr. Cook searched for a good spot, Frances stood observing the different people who had come to see the event. Many sat on blankets, serving home-cooked dishes from picnic baskets. Others enjoyed the lively tunes played by a band. But Frances also noticed with curiosity a small group of people standing by the shades of an oak at the far corner of the square. They wore black clothes and grave expressions. Frances wondered why they weren't joining the others. Her musings were suddenly interrupted by Mr. Cook's voice.

"Look, it's starting!" he exclaimed, pointing at the stage.

It was only then that Frances noted the several objects on stage. At the very middle of it, she could distinguish the shape of a tall, wooden arch. A short lever and a small corner table with what seemed like several pieces of rope could be seen by its side. Frances considered that perhaps there would be a magic show in the event, and tricks would be performed with the rope and the arch. Although she had never been to a magic show before, she had seen pictures of the great Houdini in magazines and had wondered ever since how a man could disappear in front of everyone.

Suddenly, two men wearing dark, hooded robes entered the stage and moved towards the corner table. With precise movements, they wrapped the end of one of the ropes around the centre of the arch, tying the other end in a lasso. Frances squinted her eyes at the contraption, wondering what it was for. Perhaps they would bring animals in and needed to tie them up? But even so, the rope was set up way too high to be used for that. While she questioned the purpose of the device, the hooded figures went backstage. They shortly reappeared, leading a third man who had been blindfolded. Frances pondered if the third man was the magician. He didn't seem that majestic to her.

He wasn't wearing a flashy tuxedo and didn't seem to have a top hat full of rabbits; instead, he was dressed in dark grey garments, and his front was covered in red dirt.

The blindfolded man was then led by the other two to the centre of the stage, directly under the arch, and his hands and feet were tied with the remaining pieces of rope. While one of the hooded men performed the task of binding him, the other moved the lasso over his head.

Oh, I see! thought Frances with a flash of recognition, *He is going to untie himself using magic, like the great Houdini!*

On the stage, one of the men started talking with grand gestures to the audience. Frances, however, could barely hear his words through the cacophony of voices in the crowd. All she could do was watch the man's movements. He had now turned to the magician and seemed to be asking him something. Though Frances could see the bound man's parched lips moving, his voice was completely drowned by the cries of the audience. It was then that Frances felt a queasy feeling of discomfort in the pit of her stomach; she didn't know why, but something was just not right. It was like the feeling she had when she changed stations on the radio, when two different songs mixed with the raspy sounds of static—there was no harmony.

The hooded man then strode towards the lever, pushing it with a quick snap. Suddenly, the floor under the magician's feet disappeared, and Frances stared in awe at his contorting body. The rest of the crowd also seemed hypnotized by the figure's pendulum movements. Nobody was talking now; the only thing breaking the silence was the rasping sound of rope on wood.

After some time, the magician ceased moving completely. Frances blinked in confusion. Where was the trick? Where was the magic? As she turned to question her mother about it, Frances noted with surprise that she was keeping her eyes tightly shut. Behind her, Mr. Cook seemed to have his gaze fixed on a distinct point on the ground. While Frances examined the faces in the audience, she thought that their expressions reminded her of a child being caught by their mother after doing something wrong. Upon turning towards the shade under the oak, she saw that it was now empty.

Mr. Cook's grip on her arm put her observations to a stop. He was pulling her and Mrs. Cook away from the crowd.

"Daddy? Where are we going?" asked Frances, twisting her arm while trying to free herself from his tight grip.

“Home—That’s enough—I thought this would be—I thought...” Mr. Cook muttered.

As Mr. Cook stomped through Main Street, Frances struggled to keep up, her short legs taking two steps for each stride of her father’s. After a few minutes, they were facing Turtle Road once again. Under the harsh afternoon sun, the red of the road’s dirt seemed even more intense, as if the ground was bleeding with the torridity of the day.

They walked in silence for the first hour. Frances wanted to ask why nobody was talking or why the magician didn’t use his magic to escape, but her parents’ stern faces warned her otherwise. As she looked around, Frances recognized that they were reaching the spot where she had left her precious turtle. She felt a bubble of excitement rising in her chest at the thought of seeing the beautiful colours on the shell again. Upon distinguishing the creature’s form, she skittered towards it, smiling. However, as she approached it, Frances’ steps faltered as she took in the sight in front of her. Several fragments of the painted shell lay on the floor, like an unfinished puzzle. At the centre of the road, the turtle laid immobile with its core exposed and its carapace bent at an awkward angle. Frances could feel her lower lip tremble as she approached the motionless animal. She then knelt to the ground and carefully gathered the crimson fragments against her body, dying the front of her white dress with red dirt. She held the pieces tightly against her chest and raised her head, staring at the sun. The aggressive rays hurt her eyes, squeezing minute tears. She could feel the beams going through her flesh and reaching her very heart; they burned her entrails with guilt.

It was then that Frances understood: There were neither saints, nor angels in this world; there were only trickless magicians and men in dark robes. Her father was right when he said that this would be a historic day. After all, this was the day when magic disappeared from the world.

“To My Father”

Runner up Poetry
Ethan **Reyes**

Who always outpaced me
In airports and in supermarkets
Even though my knee was bad
Until only my cell phone stood between
A life of chewing gum
And the lint in my hoodie’s pouch.

To my father
Who I forgave
And forgave
Because he was not so much as other fathers
But who was stayed by my forgiveness
And whose faults I played accomplice to

To my father
Who was perhaps not the man he hoped to be
By now, as I am much the same
In mirrors and around my mouth
Embittered by my family name

When the time comes
I will leave you behind
But keep this as no victory
Each father played the son’s part once
Perhaps you foresaw that day
The reason why you are this way

To my child
Cradled by the sun's first light
As you read this letter,
Yellowed by age and the brine of years
Think of me better than you do
And do me the kindness to remember
That this weathered hypocrite
Forgot how his own father stood
Tall and proud as a statue in a square
Be patient with me child
Even marble sees some wear

Descent

Runner Up Fiction
Denielle Hill

From the great heaven she set her mind on the great below. From the great heaven Inanna set her mind on the great below. My mistress abandoned heaven, abandoned earth, and descended to the underworld.

All Saturday I sat in the kitchen from early in the morning to late into the night. I couldn't think of sleep. By the time today had come, I decided it was time to pay a visit. Mom was still in bed but probably awake. I wait by her door for a moment. It seems like I should say something. I can hear her cries on the other side.

"Danika?" she says. I say nothing. "Are you going to the hospital today?"

"Yes," I tell her through the crack of the door.

"Could you?" Her voice is so hoarse. "Would you say hello for me?"

"Of course I will."

I leave a note on the table, it says I will be back before dinner but I don't know if that's true. I haven't seen Melanie in over a week. I didn't realize how long it has been since she was transferred. I don't know where my head was. Before I leave I stop to apply mascara in the hallway mirror. I've always had nice eyes. I hang small beads from my neck, grab an umbrella and a purse to match my shoes.

She placed twin egg-shaped beads on her breast. She covered her body with a pala dress, the garment of ladyship. She placed mascara which is called "Let a man come, let him come" on her eyes.

The hospice is small and tucked away behind the hospital. The outside is just as unremarkable as the inside. There are two sets of doors to keep out the cool air. I leave my umbrella in a stand in the space between them. The lobby area is dim and empty. I hate the idea

of coming alone. There is a front desk but when I call out but no one answers. I lean over the counter top and there are two vacant chairs. Behind me is a series of waiting chairs, couches, coffee tables which are all empty.

When Inanna arrived at the palace, she pushed aggressively on the door of the underworld. She shouted aggressively at the gate of the underworld: "Open up, doorman, open up. Open up, Neti, open up. I am all alone and I want to come in."

There is a metal gate. The bars are curved, decorated with flowers and black. There is a list of floors and their facilities. I type in the numbers carefully into the number pad. With a clicking sound, the gate slides open. To the left is an elevator whose doors open swiftly. I pump the hand sanitizer station and rub my hands together. The walls of the elevator are mirrors and imagining myself a stranger, I stare at the girl watching me and she smiles. A soft bump and the elevator doors open again. There is a nurse fiddling with some equipment. I feel her pretend not to be watching me, but when I turn to the left she lifts her head. The door this time is wire and glass. I reach up to the keypad but the nurse looks from me to the hand sanitizer station. I wet my hands again. This door pops open and I slip inside; the nurse follows and closes it behind me.

"Visiting someone?" she asks. I look into her face which is round and kind. The hall has a series of identical doors with little number plates above them. I hold the number up on my piece of paper. She squints as she reads it. "Melanie?" she says and I nod. Her eyes search my face. "Sorry I have to ask. Are you family?"

"Sister."

"I should have known. I was surprised when no one came by last week." I follow the squeak of her shoes down the hall.

"Last week was busy," I lie.

She flicks a glance over her shoulder. "Right." She stops and points to a closed door. "Well, there you are. Don't be afraid to ask if you need anything." She smiles then leaves.

I wish the door was open even a little but it isn't. I look behind me at the nurses in the station who don't seem busy, but they aren't watching me either. What must be the living area is vacant and the kitchen supplies are dusty. It's very still. She could be asleep. Maybe I should come back in a few days. Another nurse walks by when I feel her eyes on me I feel pressed to knock.

"Yeah?" It's Melanie.

I wet my lips and crush my package against my chest

“It’s me.”

There’s quiet. I press my ear to the door and hear the hum of a TV. I press my ear to the door and cannot hear her voice. My ear is pressed to the door and I hear my own breathing. I wait but the door doesn’t open, so I knock again louder this time.

“It doesn’t lock.”

She’s right and the last door swings open. The air is warm; it smells sweet and sick. The lights are off but I can see that the bed is empty and the sheets neat. She is there in the corner, sitting in a straight back chair and I can’t see her face.

Come in, my lady. Thus are the rules of the lady of the netherworld.

As soon as Inanna had gone down into the netherworld,

Ereškigal saw her and trembled in fury at her.

Inanna, without thinking, sat above her.

“Do you want me to open the window?” I ask.

“No.” A small TV screen flickers as the channels change.

“Can I turn on a light?”

“No.”

My hand finds the switch behind the door and I flick it. She says nothing but scowls at the TV. There are tubes running from a machine behind the bed into her arms and into her nose. I can’t help but think of a bunch of holes. Her eyes have sunken in. “There’s nothing on. It’s all crap.” She points to the bed and I sit. She hardly moves but it is easy to see her breasts are sagging with her skin. I feel the need to touch my own chest.

“At least it’s got a better picture than the last one.”

She finally looks at me. “Pretty shitty way to get a better TV.” I can’t say anything to that. She gives me a once over from the braids in my hair to the package in my lap.

I hand it to her, “I baked you a loaf.” She doesn’t look at it but puts it on the bedside table.

“Nice dress,” she says. Was this hers? I can’t remember. “I wouldn’t fit something like that anymore.” She looks away.

“You’re thinner.” She has the arms of a child. It’s disgusting. “Have you eaten?”

“No.” Beside her on the nightstand, the food tray is bare. She places the remote down on top of it. “Have you seen the people here?”

“The nurses?”

She shakes her head. “The patients.”

I remember the rows of open doors. “No.”

“I’m the youngest here. I can’t talk to them.”

“Oh.” I don’t want to hear it. The silver tray looks almost white under the lamp light. “You want me to get you something to drink?”

She shakes her head. “Old people, everywhere. They die all the time.”

The nurse comes in with something in hand. There is some fiddling with the tubes. There is some rustling and I’m still afraid to look. I think I could see a needle.

“You need to grow up,” Melanie says and I know the face she is making.

“I know,” I say and my foot begins to tap.

“There’s a lot worse.”

“I know.”

She signs and whispers to the nurse before she leaves. Melanie’s fingers begin to tap. “So, how’s school going?”

My chest twinges. I think I am getting a headache. “Why did you want to see me?” I ask her.

Her throat moves like a snake as she swallows. “You called me. You came to see me.”

“You really want me here? Because I can go.” I reach to grab my coat and realize I’m still wearing it.

“If anyone else came I don’t think I’d let them in.” Her hand reaches across the bed and finds mine. I squeeze it back. I remember this hand even though it has changed.

“Even mom?” It’s difficult to picture mom here with me.

“She’s never come by, not even once. I haven’t seen her in months.”

“But if she did, would you want to see her?”

“No. I hate how she cries.”

“I hate it too.” For a moment I think she imagines how I see mom locking herself away with her face buried in her hands. There is a soft moaning sound. “Is that you?”

Her hand is clutched at her chest. “The pain killers should’ve kicked in already.”

“Do you want me to get someone?”

“No. It’ll pass.” Folding in on herself, all I can see is her back which heaves. Her back is no longer round but has creases that show through her gown. It is not the same back I remember. It is as if her bones will pop into the open air when she bends over. I wish a nurse would come by.

“I think I should go,” I say with my head low.

She looks up and her face is a hollow black mouth and ratty hair. “Stay.” She gasps and starts to rise. “Please, stay.”

My palms sweat and I curl my fingers in. “I can’t.”

“Why? Please, stay.”

“I can’t, you know I can’t.” I inch back in my seat. She is standing now. Her breathing is hard but even.

“Please,” she says as her words turn to moans. I have never seen her cry and I am terrified. I stand up. Her eyes flash to the door. “Just once.”

“No. I’m leaving.” I turn off the lights again. Before I close the door, I stop for a moment. I can hear her breathing and I say, “I think I might be able to come by next week.”

A nurse watched me leave and went to attend Melanie. I can hear her angry cries down the hall. She’s swearing my name through her teeth.

Why did she set her heart on me? Why would her mood lighten mine?

Shall I eat a loaf of clay for bread, shall I drink dirty water for beer?

Shall I weep for the young men who have left helpmeets?

Shall I weep for the young women who are wrenched from their lovers’ loins?

Shall I weep for the helpless infant who was taken before his time?

My fingers feel numb and I rub them together on the way down the elevator. The mirrors are there again and maybe the lighting is different but there are definite bags beneath my eyes. I don’t want to look. I don’t want another reminder of how tired I am. My hands are trembling as I clutch at my chest.

Who has ever ascended from the underworld, has ascended unscathed from the underworld?

At the black gate I have to enter the passcode again and I get it on the second try. I need to sleep. I retrieve my umbrella from the stand then just as I turn to leave, I see a nurse waving me down.

“Danika, right?” the nurse asks. I nod.

“Your sister told me to bring this to you, is it yours?” She is holding my purse. How could I forget that?

“Yes, thank you.”

She holds the door open for me. “You’re leaving so soon?” She seems concerned but I look away.

“Yes, she’s all yours now,” I say and let the door close behind me.

Please Define

First Place Non-fiction

Mia **Knezevic**

Here's what I enjoyed about high school:

1. Sewing class
2. Creative writing club
3. The eighth grade
4. The math teacher's jokes

Here's what I didn't enjoy about high school:

1. Everything else.

Two years after graduation I stand in front of the sewing room of my high school. The teacher must still leave right at the bell because she isn't in. I peer in at the dark, empty classroom and can't help but smile. One time, when I was having a hard time trying to sew a pair of pants out of jersey, the teacher told me, "you are the manipulator of the fabric. Don't let it manipulate you."

"But that's easier said than done, the fabric's stubborn," I replied.

She picked up the pant leg and pulled on the fabric with an expert grip. "It may be hard, but it's not impossible," she said, rearranging the pins. "There, go try again."

So I did, though I sewed it wrong several times and then had to rip the stitches out and try again. Inevitably, I pricked my fingers with the pins as I tried to stretch the fabric to the shape I wanted. A few times I messed up because I pressed the foot pedal too hard and the needle went into overdrive, resulting in a jagged line. But eventually, I learned the direction I had to pull it to make it stay, and I learned to press the pedal gently. Eventually, it became muscle memory.

Staring into the classroom makes me long to be in that class again. I guess this is what people feel when they say they're nostal-

gic. Nostalgia is defined as the pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again. I've always thought that definitions, while they do help us communicate, can't always convey exactly what we're feeling. Feelings are subjective because everyone experiences them differently; they are beyond a simple definition.

I continue walking. The hallway still smells like dust and vanilla body spray. They've repainted all the classroom doors red instead of the 80s green they used to be, and many of the teacher's names above the classrooms are now ones I can't recognize. As if connected by an invisible marionette string, I find myself in the empty gym, where I spent my last afternoon of high school covering the windows of the gym's fitness room with pieces of fabric.

"Could you hold that piece, Rachael? No, not that one."

"This one?"

"Yeah, just hold it still so I can attach it."

"That looks better," said Ms. Stone, our Creative Writing Club mentor. "That should be good enough for the surprise dance."

"I think they'll be pleasantly surprised," I said. Emphasis on "they." Of course the teachers decided to make school fun the year we left.

"I hope more students join the club next year, considering most of the members are graduating" I said to Ms. Stone while attempting to hold the stubborn fabric. I had to wrestle with it to stop it from flapping wildly like a crow when somebody trespasses on its territory. My patience back then was non-existent.

"I wasn't half as dedicated as you guys when I was a teenager," Ms. Stone said. "I loved writing just like you did, but I didn't have the discipline to make the commitment to attend a club regularly."

It never crossed my mind then, but I wonder how different teachers are now than when they were teenagers, or even young adults? How much of themselves do they retain, and how much has been moulded by life? Do they see a part of themselves in their students? I wonder if, by teaching, they are ever reminded of what they were like as teenagers. Perhaps the teacher that is the strictest about attendance is the same person who always skipped classes in high school. Perhaps the Home Ec. teachers chose to teach because they regretted not knowing how to cook as teenagers. Or, perhaps the English teachers who never cared about grammar in their youth realized the importance of being able to express themselves properly as adults.

"Alright guys, that looks great," Ms. Stone said. "I'm sure you're all eager to get out of here, so thanks again for helping. Best of luck

in the future!” She left and the other students trickled out one by one.

I stood alone in the dark gym, inhaling body odour, sweat and sports equipment. It felt like finality. Something I couldn't wait to get out of, but was now, suddenly, at its end. I had never hung out in the gym much, but I remembered my first PE class, how I was scared shitless of the teachers and spent half the time peeking through the other side of the wall at the boys with the rest of my class. One time, the student council held a Halloween movie night in the gym by projecting a movie onto the wall. I carried a foldable lawn chair all the way to school for the occasion. In the same gym, I played the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz* in the eighth grade, when I had to exit through a gap in the audience as Ms. Gulch and the hem of my skirt got stuck in the pedals of my bike, causing a near crash with an elderly man and his grandson. Luckily I saved myself with “oh, to be young again!” and everyone laughed. I'm still young, but there is a disconnect between the young of then and the young of now. The young of high school is innocent and naïve, when all that exists in your world is school and your friends. It's small, finite, easily contained. When you leave, you realize how expansive the world really is, and that really, you're just an ant on an infinite sidewalk. This sidewalk is littered with many new obstacles and responsibilities, but if you look closely enough, there are infinite possibilities as well. It just takes some time to see it.

I leave the gym and look for my old locker. I locate it easily, and wonder if the person using it covered the insides with fuzzy carpet. I hope so. I pick up the lock and pretend I'm opening it, and it reminds me of the last time I cleaned out my locker. It was right after I helped out in the gym, and I was full of expectation.

Expectation is defined as a belief that something will happen or is likely to happen. Most people say that the high school years are the best of your life. So naturally, I came into the eighth grade with that expectation. I was ready to find out what I was truly passionate about in the company of many good friends and fun classes. After all, this was just a continuation of elementary school, right?

I dialled my locker combo and began to empty out my locker. In earlier years, I had decorated my locker elaborately; wallpaper to cover the peeling grey paint, little baskets with magnets to hold pens and various things, a mirror, and the blue fuzzy carpet I had bought at Dressew to put on the bottom of each shelf. This year, though, I didn't bother. Perhaps I got tired of the whole thing. It was get in, get out.

“Wow, I didn't realize I'd hoarded so many sketchbooks over the

years. Look at them all!” Rachael said, indeed holding an armful of sketchbooks.

“That’s going to be really good for your portfolio,” I said.

“Yeah, I can’t wait. I’ve been dreaming about it, and now they’ve accepted me.”

“I knew you would get in. You’re destined to become an artist,” I told her, closing my locker for the last time. “I expected no less.”

But how many of us would end up where we expected? Expectation, this feeling of entitlement for something you know you deserve, can be your downfall if it doesn’t happen. We’ve all learned by now that in real life, you can’t always get everything you expect. It may be best just to let things be. Ride the wave and see what happens. We may not always end up where we expected, but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes, life will take you on exciting new paths, if you let it.

I leave my old locker and head upstairs to the math classroom to see if the teacher is there. I’ve only showed up once since graduation. Granted, I was frantically trying to adjust to post-secondary life, but part of it was because I didn’t want to revisit my memories of the school. Merriam-Webster defines memory as the power or process of remembering what has been learned. Well, I learned many things in high school. Like how you won’t fit in if you prefer reading a book to going to a party. Or, how if you end up on the Honour Roll, you will be forever branded as “one of the smart kids” and nothing more. But I also learned the value of hard work, and through math, that with enough effort, I can succeed at anything. Perhaps the whole experience wasn’t all bad.

The teacher is in there, bent over a textbook with a few students. I locate my old desk in the back, where I spent countless afternoons with my pre-calculus textbook. The teacher gets up and notices me, breaking out into a wide smile.

“Mia, you haven’t been here for a while! We were wondering what happened to you,” the math teacher says.

“Uh, I’ve been really busy with school,” I say.

“Everything going well? Grades are good?”

“Yes, it took some time to get used to it, but I’ve adjusted.”

“I’m glad. I mention how hard you worked in class and your success to the students that complain about being bad at math.”

“Ah, that’s nice. All they need to do is work hard and practice.”

“Exactly, and many of the students do. Well, there’s a line forming in front of my desk so I have to go help now, but I hope you come back soon.”

“Yes, of course.”

I pass the sewing room once again on my way out. I'll have to visit another time so I can show the teacher the jersey dress I made. Muscle memory is never lost, and even though you don't know you can control the fabric, when you figure out how, you'd be amazed at what you can do. I walk down the stairs, and find that the pounding heartbeat and anxiousness I had when I walked in is gone. It took some time, but I know now that I could have manipulated my attitude from the very beginning. There is no need to be afraid of my memories. As I realize this, the dam that had blocked my emotions gives way, and I feel them all in one steadfast current: the good, the bad and the in-between.

I feel them all, but even though they are all different emotions, not one of them can simply be defined. Just because the definition of a word is official in the dictionary, my experience of the word is different from someone else's. But if we didn't have definitions, we wouldn't be able to get what we're feeling across to each other in writing. There has to be some kind of starting point.

I always think that if I were a famous poet, I could use definitions and their connotations to affect people's emotions. Poets don't use sterile definitions to get their point across. They use the universal connotations behind words that people know and feel. People are affected by poetry because there's something in those words—something they can't name— that resonates with them. Robert Browning, in his poem "Confessions," wrote, "How sad and bad and mad it was—but then, how it was sweet."

That defines it perfectly.

After-Prom

1st Place Poetry

Candice **Yee**

BCBG

Dragging, tiled floor muckity-mucked cigarette butts and sludge,
French fries

Suave sir, suspenders, bow tie, handkerchief peering from a pocket
Clickity-clack stiletto and oxfords

What would you like sir

One Big Mac

One Filet-o-Fish for this fine fox

(Fine fellow nods at me)

Iced Tea and Coke

Two large fries

Two Mcflurries, Smarties and Oreo swimming in hot fudge

Our three-course meal

Shyly under the golden arches

Salty fingers tangled

Two paper bags

Soaked

Welcome To Your Soma®

1st Place Fiction

Anita **Shen**

1. Welcome To Your Soma

Congratulations on your new purchase! This model is variant Homo sapiens (femina). Your new product (hereafter referred to as ‘your soma’) contains the following parts:

- **Head.** Composed of five orifices, two neural hemispheres, a corpus callosum, cerebellum, hippocampus, thalamus, medulla, etc. and functioning auditory, visual, olfactory and gustatory apparatuses. Your soma should come with a safety covering of hair for protection of the orifices and of the brain (contained within skull).
- **Arms.** This model has two arms terminating in five fingers each.
- **Legs.** This model has two legs terminating in five toes each. It will balance on these appendages, your soma’s locomotion being derived from the lever-like interaction of these toes, a pivoting heel, and Newton’s Third Law.
- **Respiratory and cardiovascular systems.** The main components of these are located in the ventral cavity. It is recommended that you do not feed your soma excessive trans fats or sodium, or teach it to smoke, as these will directly compromise its respiration and blood circulation.
- **Heart.** This part is replaceable, and it is recommended that you do so every seventy years, at risk of voiding your warrantee.
- **Doubts.** This model comes installed with an extensive variety.*
- **Digestive system.** Your soma should come with a standard preference for sodium chloride, carbohydrates and animal lipids (“fats”), in addition to irrational cravings for attractive foodstuffs that are

Shen

devoid of nutrition, such as sugar-free candy, esters (“cinnamon,” “vanilla,” “mint,” and other flavors), vinegar, and cellulose fibre. Many additional manuals are available for purchase containing further information on the nutritional requirements of your soma. See page 112 for a general guideline on digestive health.

- Reproductive system. This component unfortunately could not be tested in our laboratory for quality assurance. We guarantee a 95.3% success rate, should you wish to replicate your soma.
- Sexual organs. These are extremely sensitive to neural stimuli, and changes in heat, moisture, radiation, pressure, and pH. This model has a vagina capable of hosting foreign anatomical and non-anatomical objects, and a uterus capable of hosting new life.**
- Lymphatic and endocrinal systems. These may “act up” during spring allergy season, or during puberty. This is perfectly normal, and no cause for panic, although you may want to get your soma serviced if the issue persists. For further information, call our toll-free hotline or register your soma for a family doctor.
- Epithelial tissue. Each soma has a skin tone range* for the large flat organ that covers its surface. The colour range of your model may result in negative social experiences in some regions. See page 209 for details.

Please check to ensure that your soma has arrived intact and without cuts, bruises, or other visible defects, and contains all parts listed. If any part is damaged or missing, please contact your point of purchase for assistance.

Have fun living in your new body!

YOUR MODEL 1993-XX0114

SN:e736Ro441052g0

**Doubts that life has a purpose, doubts that she will ever have a foie gras double down as good as that one time in Montreal, doubts that flip-flops qualify as footwear, doubts that her tax returns will ever come back with good news, doubts that her ex-boyfriend wasn't picking his nose in bed that one time (She's right; he was.) and doubts that her cat is using jedi mind tricks on her (She's wrong; it is.)*

**Comes in the skin tone range of medium beige #F5F5DC to caramel tan #C3503. Has eyes in the colour brown, and hair in the colour brown. Full height of soma is 169 cm. This model is medium-hairy and medium smelly.*

®SOMA is a registered trademark of *Hey! You're Alive, Inc.* under the Trade-marks Act of Canada and the Lanham Act.

**Any experimentation with your soma's sexual capabilities is at, you, the owner's sole discretion. We are not liable for any unexpected injuries, pregnancies, tangled feelings, or relationships that may be the result of such activities. See page 237 for a discussion on human instinct, social dynamics, sexually transmitted infections, birth control, sexual orientation and gender, and for resources for further reading.

2. Essentials

Having a soma is a wonderful thing, and set up has never been so quick and easy as with our latest model, 1993-XX0114. When you turn your soma on for the first time, a Welcome screen will appear. Here, you can choose your soma's mood for the day, her feelings for her friends and family, and her procrastination levels. If at any point you are unhappy with the settings you have chosen, click into the Home screen and shake your soma until a prompt appears with the following options: mope, enter Autopilot mode, call a friend, self-medicate, or reset your soma's settings.

A. Charging

Every biological machine needs fuel to keep it running. Your soma is no different. As long as your soma is healthy and active, it should get by on food, water, sleep and a little bit of human touch, natural scenery, visual art, literature, pleasant smells, or good music. Additional fuels may include coffee, adrenaline, methamphetamines, and many others. Don't leave your soma's needs unattended for long periods of time, or it may get grumpy!

B. Cleaning

Your soma may sometimes be messy! It is important to keep up a standard of hygiene for your soma, as it affects your soma's mood, health, and the first impression it will make. Wash surface with warm water 30-40°C with a mild soap. Keep away from excessive heat, or your soma may sweat or burn.

C. Sound, display & notifications

Not all somas are equally perceptive. Some will come nearsighted, tone-deaf or a bit slow at catching social cues. Although it is easy to put on blinders (Settings > Senses > Display > Zoom in) or tune out (Settings > Senses > Sound > Selective hearing mode), noticing things

Shen

takes time and effort, and manually prioritizing the complex input from your senses can be done from Settings > Senses > Notifications.

Try it out now! Maybe soon you will unlock our “Focus,” “Bliss,” and “Mindfulness” modes!

D. Updates

Here at Hey! You’re Alive, Inc., we strive to improve our products with every generation. We release regular updates and you can opt-in for organ transplants, epigenetic screening, or any of our thousands of bioresearch projects in 196 countries. If you choose to opt-out, we will prioritize your soul for rehousing in a new soma once your current one becomes nonviable.

E. Help & support

For nearly all questions and concerns, you can call our hotline at 000-000-0000.

This book introduces just a few key features of the Soma 1993-XX0114. For more details about our warranty, or for biotech support, please visit:

support.soma.com/1993-XX0114

We also welcome feedback from you about your experiences having a corporeal form. Being human is different for everyone, and we couldn’t make it happen without you! It’s easy to send your feedback. Just go to Settings > About soma > Send feedback and think about being alive.

Our representatives will get in touch.

Ampelmännchen

First Place Postcard Story

Joshua **Kier**

There is a sign in an unknown, dilapidated East Berlin suburb that reads: *All National Socialists must hang!*

It's a miserable sight; made all the worse by the corrugated tapestry of the sign itself.

Picture: vermilion ink dancing upon a landscape of orange and oxidized metal; toxic watercolours and Cold-War hieroglyphs. I, during moments of poisonous nostalgia for Communist-era artifacts, have made pilgrimage to this soiled banner to collect my thoughts and purge my boredom. Moreover, I travel to this spot to bear witness to the ghost of the Wehrmacht soldier.

Beneath the sign, swaddled in clothes blighted by the decades and the trappings of violent decay, the lonely apparition looms—its appearance that of a youthful leper conscripted into a children's crusade. Its abdomen is saturated with wounds and violent abrasions; blossoms of jaundiced viscera leap and crawl from beneath fabric stained with Fascist slogans and Iron Crosses. The spirit's mouth is a yawning patchwork of teeth and bruised tissue—locked in a permanent scream of fear and shell-shocked horror.

Something is different this time. The ghost—typically static—now points towards something fluttering within the window pane of a nearby apartment flat. A red flag. Hateful, it descends from the building like blood from a wasp's sting and I am reminded of the truth. I stand upon a necropolis populated by the butchered and anchored: those that observed, without breath, the birth-mewls of a modern city emerging from the vice of primordial conflict; marked by a solitary, lacerated tombstone.

Overcoming Breast Cancer

Second Place Non-Fiction

Laura **Birthwhistle**

I had a friend who died of breast cancer. In 1991, while I was working in Japan, she wrote to me that the doctors had given her two years to live. At the birth of her first and only child, the doctor diagnosed breast cancer. She immediately went in for surgery to remove one of her breasts.

I find it difficult to write about the breast cancer diagnosis I had. This took place in September 2009. I carry on with my life, trying not to think about it too much, but knowing that I have got through it.

I had a mammogram that summer, and received a letter saying they wanted me to come in for another screening. I didn't know what it was all about. At the next appointment they used the ultrasound, and had to do a biopsy. During this procedure, they removed a piece of tissue with a needle for further examination.

Following this I was sent off to my family doctor for a consultation. The doctor I went to at the time worked at a walk-in clinic on Denman Street, near the beach at English Bay. Mother and I took a trip downtown on the bus, a rare occasion. One of the well-known radiologists at the diagnostic imaging clinic, in the Fairmont Building on Broadway, phoned the doctor to tell him of the urgency of the matter.

Mother and I waited, and were soon ushered into the doctor's examination room.

He said, "I have difficult news to tell you. I've received a call from the radiologist, and you have been diagnosed with breast cancer. This is a life threatening illness," he said firmly. Mother and I sat in his office on the edge of our seats.

"You will need to locate a surgeon," he continued. "I can recommend

one at the Seymour Medical Clinic. She has a good reputation. I would send my wife there,” he said.

Mother and I took a long walk along the sea wall afterwards. “I never thought this would happen to me,” I said, looking out at the grey ocean with the ships in the distance. We were sitting on a bench. I didn’t know what kind of future I could expect, but there was still hope.

I went to my father’s care home. He was just waking up from a sleep as I walked in and began to arrange the things on the bookcase as I always did. Eventually, I summoned up the courage to share the news. “I went to the doctor today,” I said. “He told me I have breast cancer.”

Dad sat up, with a look of concern on his face. He steadied himself on the edge of the bed, and reached for his walker. Together, we walked along the hallway. We went down the elevator to the first floor, where we continued to walk, down one hall of rooms for residents, and back along another. “I wouldn’t like to have my breast cut off,” I said.

We sat down at the end of the south hallway in a small lounge with comfortable chairs. “My auntie May died of breast cancer,” Dad said.

I finally had my appointment with the surgeon, an experienced woman with an expertise in cancer surgery. She gave me an outline of what to expect, and set the date for my surgery. I was told that the lump they found in my right breast was tiny, less than a centimeter in size. There would be the removal of one or two lymph nodes to examine whether the cancer had spread into the nodes. She sent me home with a book to read, from the BC Cancer Agency.

By the time the surgery drew near, November 6, 2009, my father had been hospitalized at the Vancouver Hospital. Mother and I took a taxi that morning to St. Paul’s Hospital, where they would inject a dye into the breast. We returned via taxi, after that procedure, to Mt. St. Joseph’s Hospital. When we arrived at the admission desk it was pouring rain outside.

In a curtained cubicle with a high bed, I changed into a nightgown while my mother stayed with me. The orderly arrived, sat me in a metal chair with wheels, and pushed me down the hospital corridors. They transferred me to a gurney, and I lay in the hall for a while, waiting. Eventually, I got wheeled into a darkened room with a padded table, for a procedure to insert a thread that would guide the surgeon to the lump that had to be removed. After this, a mammogram was taken in another room.

I was placed in a waiting area on another gurney, when the surgeon came to talk to me. Soon I was being wheeled into the operating room. I noticed the transparency set up on an easel, meant to help the doctor

Birthwhistle

find the way into the offending piece of tissue. The room started to spin around. I went into a sleep, and the surgery progressed.

I woke up in the recovery room, and then they wheeled me into my room on the ward. My mother was there in the room. I spent the afternoon sleeping, and my mother slept in a chair the whole time.

When I returned to my father's bedside, a day or so later, I tried to show him where the stitches were, like Band-Aids with wings. When I returned to see the doctor for follow-up, she said the surgery had been successful; but the unfortunate thing was that some cancer cells had been detected in the lymph nodes removed for examination. Another surgery would have to take place, an axillary dissection.

My father died on Tuesday, December 22, 2009. My surgery was to take place on January 13, so there would be as little delay as possible. In the meantime, I sent out Christmas cards to all my relatives and friends, in which I expressed sadness over the loss of my father, and wrote about my breast cancer struggle. It was a spot of light to feel connected to the people I had known in a lifelong way.

When the time came, mother and I walked down to the hospital in the darkness of early morning. We went through the same procedure of being admitted, and waiting in a small room with a bed, where I changed into a hospital gown, until I was wheeled away. My mother walked with me, but they wouldn't let her come any further than the two double doors I was about to be taken through. She gave me a kiss, and said she'd be waiting for me when I came out.

I woke up in the recovery room with an oxygen mask being held over my face. I gasped for air; but eventually my breathing stabilized, and I removed the mask, only to put it back on if I needed to.

That day, ten lymph nodes were removed. I lay in bed with the intravenous stuck in my arm. My mother and my sister sat with me that evening, by my bedside, while I ate my supper, and drank cup after cup of tea that mother brought to me. I had a tube that would drain the lymph fluid from my armpit; it would stay in place a number of days, and I had to keep a chart of the amount of fluid that was being drained off.

In the recovery period at home, a nurse came in regularly to check my drain. Later, they would come to remove it. After that, they visited me periodically.

I had an appointment to see the surgeon who would tell me the results of the surgery. I sat in her office, waiting expectantly for her to come in.

She entered and sat down at her desk. She swiveled in her chair to

talk to me. Smiling, she said, “I have good news. No cancer cells were detected in the lymph nodes after the dissection. Now that means,” she continued, “you will only have to have radiation.”

I had an appointment with the radiologist, and he gave me a breast exam while I lay on the examination table. He phoned, a few days after this and advised radiation to my underarm as well as my breast. He said I had a better chance of it not recurring if I had the whole treatment. I didn’t have any choice but to accept.

I went for an appointment to have a dot put on my chest between my breasts. It would be permanent. I was placed on a slab in front of a large machine with a round hole in it, and it drew me in; it scanned my torso, and I came out of it again.

I went down to the radiology unit, and had a schedule made up for my treatments, daily for approximately five weeks, twenty-four treatments. I started them while the 2010 Olympics took place in February. I would take off my blouse and bra, and put on a gown that was kept in a bag with my number on it, then I would sit in the waiting lounge until it was my turn to be called.

I entered the semi-darkened room with a big machine that I would lie down on. I took the clip out of my hair, and left it on the countertop. I felt self-conscious about exposing my breasts to the two male technicians; they would give me a pillowcase to cover the open gown. I got up on the machine, and lay down under the mechanism, which had something like cameras on it. They adjusted my torso on the table: left arm raised with hand placed behind the head, and right arm stretched above my head, while positioning the breast. They turned off the light, and I heard the temporary buzz of the radiation.

The painless procedure didn’t take long. I got up off the table, and scooted over to reach my blouse as quickly as possible. The lady at the desk marked the day and time of treatment on my pink card. When it was done, I returned to the changing room to get dressed. I put the gown back into the bag, and hung it up for next time.

Once the radiation treatments were complete, I saw the radiologist, Dr. Peter Lim; he asked to look at my breasts, and carefully examined the results. Like having sunburn, my breast was all red from the radiation, but this went away in time. After the radiation, my right breast would always be rubbery, and somewhat painful to the touch.

I was sent back to the BC Cancer Agency for follow-up at regular intervals. I had started out with Dr. Gelmon, but finished my visits with Dr. Howdle. In April 2010, I was put on letrozole, a drug

Birthwhistle

to suppress the hormone estrogen, to prevent the growth of cancer cells. I am expected to be on this drug for five years. Letrozole helps to prevent the recurrence of breast cancer. December 2010, I had my final visit with Dr. Howdle, after which I would be released to my family doctor.

A year after Mary Jane had her first mastectomy, the second breast also had to be removed. After this she went into a recovery period, and we began to revitalize our friendship through visits, telephone calls, and an exchange of letters. We gave each other strength and resiliency. She always said, "I don't want you to get breast cancer."

My friend died just one week after her daughter's sixth birthday, and a year after the loss of her mother. I do breast self-examination every month, and I have a check-up breast exam with a doctor every six months. I also get a mammogram once a year. Through the determination I have to take positive, productive steps in my life, one must keep a perspective, and live each day with gratitude.

M(a)tricity

Second Place Poem

Karol **Pasciano**

You gaze at my form scrutinizing
My long lines and curves like a poet
Examining stanzas on rough drafts
While looking for the perfect rhyme
To fit your exact meter and cadence
And trap me in your sonnet or ode
I enjoy your lyricism for a while
I let you shape my themes and tropes

Until you get tired of symbolism
And start bending and breaking my
Beats with enjambments and needless
Allegory and alliteration
Which make my head blast in millions
Of hysterical syllables
Craving and crying with open mouths
Oh Oh Oh Oh Please make it stop
Haven't you had enough of handling me?

Fighting and struggling for release
From your pen which shuts me in closed
Enclosures possessive and vile
I utter a screech like an amber owl
Until my skin changes and transforms
And I become the sublime Muse
I watch you stare with glowing eyes
While I ascend into the darkness
Spreading my dusty wings to finally
Write my free verses

My Observations from this Week on Thomas Street

Second Place Fiction

Joshua **Kuepfer**

Monday

Barry South lives on Thomas Street, in the town's second-largest house. He wears a dark greatcoat, but struggles to fill it as he ages. The municipal rail system is a family heirloom run by those he rarely sees, but he does savour casting a shadow there. On those occasions that Barry ventures into his offices, it is only to cast about spittle and advice in response to disappointing dividends—those that have slipped below acceptable consistency. He was there briefly this morning, but the chief occupation of his day was the purchase of a hat from a gilded shop, an arrangement he has been contemplating for a week. Not, you understand, due to cost, but due to its expected effect on his stature. A South is hard to please, and the shop owner's pride glinted through his composure as he flushed a half-dressed customer into the street.

Tuesday

Sal tends to Barry's house and grounds, and lives in private quarters on his estate. She is missing her right ear, but cannot remember losing it. Sal maintains her job, despite her defect, only because of how much she enjoys managing household affairs. Perhaps once a week she allows herself the luxury of submerging her head in the house's main tank. She finds the murmurs of the fish soothing, though they look down on her in their own way. They are greater than she can ever be, and rarely fail to remind her of this with gently condescending caresses upon her rough cheek or stump ear.

Wednesday

Barry spent the day at Waterfall Wall, networking with other absentee owners. Along with a new drink order, he shared a marvelous piece of wisdom with his personal intern—that “relationships are all that matter in life”—and the intern twitched and turned pink and upturned a drink and was cuffed up the head for it. Barry has every intention of doing right by this young man, but even the nuances of tough love elude him. Any real man has a myriad of reasons to practice triage in such a town, and Barry knows the annoyance of emotional posturing for the sake of traditional morals. Some institutions are simply not worth the time.

Thursday

Sal spent the day directing yard work. She is now too old to do more than occasional weeding and potting, and instead collects crews of corner unfortunates that, if sober enough to hold a rake, are paid as much as Barry will allow. He recently made it known that the time for her charity was near an end. After all, this is a town for professionals, with space only for achievers. She was tempted to smoke the afternoon away, but instead finished quickly and went to visit her son. He was in bed with a throbbing headache, but her soup helped nearly as much as her heated tongue.

Friday

Barry was kind today, slowed and softened by the distractions of his previous evening. He met someone on Thursday night; she drank coffee, he had a nutty tea. They talked of things learned in business, but soon drifted to younger topics of travel and college boxing and music. When they moved from the table to chairs by the fire, the shop emptied but never closed. This morning he rose early and left silently. Drifting into the office, he spent so long staring at a drafting table that an engineer left in tears.

Saturday

Sal spent her afternoon in the flowerbeds, cutting dead stalks the workmen had missed. It began to rain this afternoon, soaking her and the chaff, and when she collected it all the bundle was too heavy to lift. She revisited the tank, days earlier than usual. Staying well back this time, she tossed in a shimmer of gold and made a wish. After twenty-one years, that’s all the token was good for.

Kuepfer

Sunday

Barry South died today on his way out of the house. When the town noticed, it knew, yet nobody moved. His attorney does have a letter, but it was written with the careless confidence of time for further revision. Barry was clear enough in his desire that he be buried in his fish tank, and Mother suggested we place a sprig of holly in his breast pocket. Looking back, I wouldn't say it's enough. In any case, it appears I'll be stepping up once my head clears.

A Tragic Scholar's Lament For Turkey

Second Place Postcard Story
Hana **Osman**

At the height of my youth and educational pursuits, I embarked on a historical exploration of early Ottoman architecture in Turkey and subsequently murdered an Iranian monk. Having retired from weekly trekking in Uludağ, I sought refuge from the stormy weather of Bursa, which seemed to submerge the world in a torrential wretchedness. It was in a café, eagerly documenting my fruitful account of the various fauna I had observed on the mountain, that I came across the reserved gentleman.

Hidden in a corner by an aging bookshelf, he perused a study of hermitages and monasteries, the line of his jaw as if robes trailing beneath him, and the gleam of his eyes reflecting an army of astounding scope and breadth. The elegance of his simple and humble nature seized me with a severe infatuation and harrowing self-realization. Only he and I remained in the café's dwindling hours.

In the morning, the monk would reside in the muddy riverbanks of Nilüfer.

How pitiful I was! A robust and crude gentleman of twenty and, yet, I grieved for my youth! For thirty years, in a foreign prison surrounded by ancient brick, I yearned for Oxford and the familiar comfort of British libraries. My bland future walks on the fickle leverage of law, and I am sorely aware of all that hinders me from the marvels of a cultivated scholar!

Drenched in an unbecoming shame, I glance at ripened olives on a web of wrinkles through a shard of glass...

HIROSHIMA POEM

Runner Up Poetry
Laura A. Birthwhistle

This is the place
this island
this explosion in the night/day sky
black cloud and terror
of all terrors
grandmother walks to the door
and looks out
something strange
an illusion
she reaches for her newborn
grandchild
who toddles lightly into the room
that splinters
skyward
that evaporates in a cold white light
reaching
falling
debris scattering
across the stagnant hot
airless
ground
I hear a cry of the child
in the dust
the old woman collapses
the land glows
with blinding light

parched, lifeless

hard to believe
the return
the renewal
the crowds of people
who pack the subway
the pregnant mothers
pushing their carriages
along the roadway
past the Pachinko parlours
noisy rattling
of tiny balls

tick tick tick
here stands
the monument
high upon a knoll
a reminder

Family Dinner At a Funeral

Third Place Non-Fiction

Stephanie **Lines**

Three years ago at Merritt Pine Ridge Cemetery on a windy day in June. Everyone was given wilting flowers to lay on his freshly buried plot. To say goodbye to him. One by one, pale lengths of carnations, daisies and mums were set -generic, long-stemmed sympathy blooms foraged from the memorial. People slowly laboured to the soft earth where his body was hidden to dispose their funerary offerings before withdrawing back into the gathered ring. The three of us stood in a close twist of the circle on the grassland hill, crossing our blossomed arms and shifting on our feet uncomfortably. We were the final ones to lay our flowers. It was a silent joke to us; waiting until the last moment possible to fulfill the obligation of formal familial duties. It was a joke we had shared all our lives, as natural to us as breathing. There were no words for it - we knew it inherently, without giving any, in the same way that we knew and shared the invisible shudder wrenching us those weeks. Still, the grave flowers were not the weight of our reality. The breath and summer that filled our bodies was—the sun glancing off our sunglasses and the lazy heat of our youth.

Hands emptied, sunglasses, black and suits slowly broke away in crowded vehicles to do whatever we were meant to do next. By the time we pulled into our aunt's dust bowl driveway, the fire pit was burning and extended family accepted our arrival as cue to pull out the food. We had been slow in delivering the remaining perennials to grandma's place, where emotional friction had burst into fiery words, increasing the delay and stoking our pain. My father was the first one out of the truck and the first one to reach the flames. He was confronting his changing life headlong, definitively speaking the passing of

his own father in eulogy that morning; the man that had given him life, had set and followed his existence in most complex bearing. He moved towards what we were all struggling to understand. The largeness of forever lost. The becoming orphaned.

By the flame pit I sat next to Grandma, stealing comfort in her silence. The fire was spread out and broken down into embers, and the day finally began to burn down. Everyone sagged into lawn chairs and familiar ribbing trails. Time ran slow in the tapered roasting of meat and listless consumption of potato chips. Noticing my sedentary lapse, my brother asked if he could roast me a hotdog. I didn't care to talk to anyone, but I saw in his reaching that he cared. It was new to us still, this taking care of each other in our adult life. It was a connection we had never had the proximity for., not until a month earlier, when I had flown to Calgary with the rest to sit by his side and cry and wait. To watch dumb movies and pick up sandwiches. To argue for his dignity with cold doctors as they lectured him from weak hospital bed for drug reliance. They didn't care about how tired he was and how hard he had been working all his life. They just wanted to make sure they didn't prescribe him any narcotics and shamed him for the ones he had procured. I still felt sick to my stomach from it.

But we didn't talk about what happened last month. As the afternoon stretched muggy over us, we hovered next to the fire, dancing around smoke on rough hewn wood. Was I playing any shows in the city soon? He wanted to bring his friends. I never gave an answer because the chance for cracks about his rowdy mates was immediately seized by those that knew them. I regretted the loss of the conversation thread connecting us in that moment, but everything kept moving, languid, through the eddies of our tired afternoon. Food continued to roast and smoke to drift. As life would go, we would never get the chance to meet in the city that summer anyways.

It wasn't until we finished eating that the lightening began. I didn't see it coming. The wind had pulled at cloud and sun streams all afternoon. But the thunderheads rolled up suddenly, like a shadow rising in stretch from sleep. Aunts fluttered with tablecloths in the wind, pressing plates and trays of food to their chests as they streamed towards the house. Chairs were abandoned and people collected under awnings and porch. My brother lingered outside on the rainy deck where Jen snapped photo after photo of him in front of shocks of lightening. Everyone threaded inside and filled the muted spaces of linoleum and carpet. More talking. More ribbing. The intermittent piercing of children's cries. Evening drew close and my brother circled

Lines

around the flat to wish all our extended relatives well before leaving with Michael. He was out the door before he noticed, and came back, laughing, because he had forgotten to say goodbye to us. I would be back to the city the next day and wouldn't see him before I left. So he hugged us. And then was gone.

It was the last time I saw my brother. Less than two months later, at another family dinner, I would be running to Michael's car, clutching his head as he climbed out of the vehicle weeping, the shudder we had been carrying running visibly through us both. It would be the final severance of something that was slowly being taken away from us, cut off in an instant and gone, with our brother's breath. It would be the wind knocked out of us that we would never get back.

But we could still breath that day, those long, sore hours in Merritt. They were gentle in the warmth of their draft and rain hammer above our heads. They were still making some sort of sense. There was a discordant contentedness in each other's presence. In spite of tired mourning, things felt safe. It was my family's first time together since my brother's accident, when the news of his coma had spread through us like cold metal, hardening in our lungs and stealing our breath. But breath had returned to us like exhalation finally being released. We could laugh again. For all its pain, the death of the elderly is natural, and we accepted it as the cost of a long, rich life. The fear over my brother's narrow escape from death had melted into relief, and relief was fading into a peacefully false sense of security. We accepted our familial brushings, our differences and strain, as the gift of our fully gathered presence.

The Endurance

Third Place Poetry
Stephanie **Lines**

the space
between
what i wanted us to be and
what we are
is a continent of ice.

our stillness
is the clench of polar crevice
for irreversible depth
thrust into
floe
where fine crystal roughly folds
exposed faces
in gentle
impenetrable
compress.

this snowscape
i thought would crack
crumble
before cold determination
and hull.

but ice doesn't break
crackle
like thin sheets beneath my feet

Lines

on a city sidewalk
in winter.

this is antarctica.
—there is no end to snow.

i thought if we came here
together
we would feel
less alone.

Fair

Third Place Fiction

Julia **Perroni**

I remember the going, but I don't remember me too well. The world was too large for me to have been anything but small; it must have been years ago. Here's what I do know: we went to the fair. Definitely myself and the littles (said, You're gonna be a big sister! and didn't expect it twice over all at once). Must've been Mum, too, and Dad. Maybe not Dad? There were at least five, though, so it must have been someone. Anyway, I thought of him as the big, because he was. I never thought of him as Dad, or whoever he was. Also the littles are important.

See, they were big enough for walking and for talking some, babbling and nonsense the way babies do but a little more like kids than babies. I wasn't a baby, that's for sure. They were the littles to me from the moment they were born. So we were at the fair, and Mum, must've been Mum, she said, Let's get some food, hmm? That last bit, the hmm? She did that a lot. She liked to hum. Her voice was beautiful. I remember the sound of it over the music from the carousel.

We got food, I think. When Mum said things like that, most of us listened. I was eating. Mum said, I'll be right back. She got up, left me and the littles with whoever was there. The big watched us. Not so good at watching. One of the littles got up from the table, and while the big was looking at a newspaper, she wandered away. The other little followed. One, two, and off they went. I said, Hey!

Shut up, said the big. Whatever you want, your mum'll be back in a minute.

I said, No, the littles are gone.

The big was not listening, or didn't know how to listen to me too

well, because he just said, That's nice. The big didn't know that by the littles I meant her and him, just babies, really. I watched them go. I twisted my fingers together in my lap. I remember looking down at the white skin of my knuckles, I was holding so hard. Soon, Mum came back. She said, Where are the twins? She sounded curious.

The big looked up. Shit, the big said. Fucking hell, Andy, why didn't you say they wandered off?

I did, I said, in a tiny voice. The tiniest, smallest, littlest voice that ever passed my lips, because the big's eyes were like fire and I was afraid.

Mum was angry. She grabbed my shoulder. Did you tell the big that they'd gone?

Yes, I said, a little bigger in my voice, but I was small then, I was all curled up. I said, "The littles are gone."

Damn it, big! Mum said. Don't you know that when she says that she means the twins?

No! the big said. A big fight. I could see Mum's hands curl. Her knuckles were white like mine. I thought it was just some more of her usual bullshit!

Mum put her face in her hands for a second, then she turned to me. She had the look on her face, like: I'm not mad at you, but I am mad. I'm so mad. I was afraid. Mum said, Where did they go, sweetie?

That way, I said, and pointed. She went and he followed her.

Good girl, Mum murmured, and she ran in the direction I pointed, shouting, Has anyone seen two toddlers?

I watched her go. I watched. The big put his hand on my shoulder and he shook me, and his face was less like Mum's, more like: I'm angry, and it's because of you. Be scared, little. Get scared. I listened.

You fucking retard, he said. Speak like a normal god damned human and maybe I wouldn't be in so much shit all the time. Cassie's gonna fucking kill me and it's all your fault.

Then he hit me. Maybe? It might have been that he gripped my shoulder hard and shoved me, but either way, I fell off the bench to the ground, and I smacked my head. It didn't hurt. Then everything was white with pain, and I cried. I was loud. The big said, Shut up. Then he followed Mum. People were looking at me. I curled up. I cried. I cried.

Mum came back. She saw me, she said, What happened?

Mum and the big were already fighting. I knew he'd only be more mad if I said that he hurt me, so I said, I fell. Sorry. That was pretty normal for me. If you asked Mum then, she'd say I fell a lot.

Oh sweetie, don't apologize, she said. If he'd been paying more attention... She shook her head. Where's he gone?

I shrugged. That was my favourite thing to do, and still is. Not yes, not no: no pressure. Shrug. Shrug. Shrug.

She said, Damn it. I closed my eyes. She picked me up and set me back on the bench and felt my head. You'll have a lovely goose egg, my dear, but you'll be fine.

I sniffled. Where's the littles?

I found a help desk person. They're looking. I'll go look more in a minute. He's out there looking for them too, right?

I thought, oh no. I said, He'll hurt them. It was very quiet.

Mum said, in a voice that was like a knife, What?

He's mad, I mumbled. He might hurt them.

Did he hurt you?

Shrug.

Honey.

Shrug.

Tell me the truth, Andy.

Shrug.

You wanna know why I remember this? Because when the big came back, he was dragging him and her by their wrists, and they were crying. Mum jumped up. Shouted, How dare you lay a hand on my child, you bastard! She took the littles from him, said, You can go straight to hell. You're definitely not riding back to the house with us. It was the first time I'd heard Mum talk so loud to the big, though he liked to talk loud to her.

I didn't know much then, about what any of it meant or why or what was happening. I don't know much now. No one knows much. I know that after that the big wasn't around any more. It was good. He used to hit me, see? Anyway, that's why the fair is my favourite place.

Postage Due

Third Place Postcard Story

Tracy **Lissner**

I find the world here oppressive and strange and I am burdened in it. Little could have prepared me for the “adventurous” travesty that we’ve gotten myself into.

If only for an ounce of foresight and insight into my character, from either of us, this may have been prevented, and I’d be comfortable at home in my warm flannel pajamas, with my cat purring next to me for company, waiting for the 7-o’clock evening special movie of the week to come on. Oh bliss.

I’m growing tragically weary as each hour passes. It’s not pretty. I blame you. “You’ll have a great time,” you said. Remember.

I’ve tried to survive in this environment, this place of crude basic instincts, with only the most basic of amenities of the modern world, and now it’s trying me. I can’t help it, I’m a city girl.

As a woman in the 21st century it’s insulting to my human intellect at the thought of succumbing to such primitive and barbaric impulses and conditions.

FYI my basic instincts have failed.

I crave the noise of a crowded bar. I miss my morning double mocha- low fat-no foam latte served by Alexander behind the counter.

How did I ever let you talk me into this?

Who ever invented singles retreats should be shot.

Much Love, Anne.

PS. They don’t have a post office out here, so postage is due.

A Beating Prayer for Canada

Runner Up Poetry
Karol **Pasciano**

O Ginsberg

Your howling keeps me up all night

Thundering through my hazy windows

With holy hymns from the Golden Gates

Navigating the Pacific waves with whales and torpedoes

Up the west coast to find the holocaust of the East Side

Where the best minds of my generation lie on the icy asphalt

Sobbing and sighing with pain and pleasure as the rusty needle enters

And blasts an endless rabbit hole under their bodies

Which invites some to wonderland while chopping others' heads off

Where children nurse each other through starvation in graveyards and parks

Offering a tit or a neck in rotting mangers on oil sands

Screaming Bethlehem! Bethlehem! Where did my star go, Gabriel?

Where maple leaves become a red sea and the Euphrates flows in Canada

Opening up a path to the land of Cain or Canaan

Where music plays all night in arrhythmic beats under the nauseating neon lights

Without any joy or jazz to preach redemption

Just the heavy metal whipping the napes of the hysterical youth

Who dance over pools of sweat and saliva and tears for April

Where grown men and women leave their homes to become enthralled
By the chanting chains of goblin cries:

“Come buy! Come buy! Come buy!”

Where families thaw dinners in front of TVs with fixed eyes on liquid crystal

Watching local news and commercials and bombings in Israel

Where red necks and black necks and white necks and yellow necks bite the bullet every day

Breaking jaws and noses and skulls to expose and serve their brains on a silver tray

Without ever breaking down or breaking bad

Where young girls swing with broken backs bent over fallen pillars of parliament

Wanting to feel the chilled feathers of golden loonies on their skin

While trying to avoid the nickel

Where the young mind never dies but walks among Lions along emerald bridges

Blinded by fog and puffs of joint smoke clouding the midday sun

As they wait with fallen heads for the deliverance

Of acid rain which melts away the grease on their palms

Where voices of wingless angels in the underground join me across a glowing railway

Which brands the leathered skin and makes us wail a single prayer:

Holy! Holy! Holy Ginsberg! Holy! Holy Kerouac! Holy Cassady!
Holy!

Shine the beatific light upon the Canadian Dream and guide us out of Rockland!

Thanks for reading

Have a good day

