

Hedera helix

2014
Vol. XII



Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta
The National English Honor Society for Two Year Colleges

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Editor: Jill Chadwick
Graphic Designer: Jody Ragsdale

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta
The National English Honor Society for Two Year Colleges

Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing. ΣΚΔ offers members opportunities for

- Scholarships
- Awards
- Leadership
- Competition
- Publication
- Travel
- National Conferences
- Networking

Visit www.english2.org for complete eligibility requirements.



Hedera helix—the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ, symbolizes resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

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Designed by Jody Ragsdale, Northeast Alabama Community College, Epsilon Alpha Chapter co-sponsor.

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L to R: Dr. John Pruitt, Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea, Dr. Sheila Byrd, Joan Reeves, and Ariana Bianchi

Editor's Note



What a pleasure to judge this year's entries! In every category, we enjoyed what our students submitted this year. Because we've had so many changes at Headquarters this year, the 2013-14 Hedera helix has been produced by a motley crew of SKD worker bees. No one hand can claim ownership. Many sponsors obviously encouraged members to submit their work — that's the first essential step. Then we secured judges from a wide variety of roles, including veteran faculty, dedicated adjuncts, professionals in their fields, and alumni students who are now thriving in

their own careers. Our SKD National office manager, Kat Padilla, who edited last year's journal, was instrumental in this year's final product as well. Without the expertise of long-time editor Jan Anderson and newly retired Graphic Designer Beth Butler, we had to re-think our creative process. Fortunately for all, Northeast Alabama Community College sponsor Jody Ragsdale agreed to step in as Graphic Designer and enabled us to finish this year's journal in a timely manner.

Thanks to all of you, we are proud to present this year's Hedera helix. Let's keep up the great work and submit even more talent by November 30, 2014, for our next year's journal.

Best Wishes,

Jill Chadwick, Editor of Publications

ΣΚΔ in Savannah, Georgia



Pictured above are just a few of the many talented Sigma Kappa Delta members who were recognized at the 2014 national convention.

2014 ΣΚΔ Scholarship/Award Winners

Scholarships

Dr. William Johnson Transfer Scholarship

Christy M. Shavers
Northeast Alabama Community College
Epsilon Alpha

Dr. Don Perkins Service Scholarship

Mykle Desir
Plaza College
Chi Delta

Dr. Susan LeJuene Service Scholarship

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Chi Delta

Dr. Sheila H. Byrd Service Scholarship

Robert McCarville
Pulaski Technical College
Epsilon Epsilon

Ms. Joan S. Reeves Service Scholarship

Scott Ivey
Northeast Alabama Community College
Epsilon Alpha

Chapter Awards

Literary Magazine/Journal

Aurora
Epsilon Alpha
Northeast Alabama Community College

Chapter Activity

Julius Caesar Theater Experience
Mu Alpha
Illinois Valley Community College

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Because I Drew Him from the Water

by Avery Quinn Wood

The boy stood on the truck facing the river, his eyes running, cheeks pocked with red. He sniffed and twisted the balled up cap in his hands. Off in the distance near the middle of the river there rose a railroad bridge with wooden supports crossed and constructed in sequence, climbing high into the clear midday air. As the boy stood, he watched the smokestack darken and near. A rhythm began in the distance, the sound of wheels and pistons willing train cars over the track, like a tribe of ancients clapping their bare hands upon drums fashioned from mammoth bones. The wail of steam sang as it passed overhead.

The front of the truck angled downward just into the bank, water rushing against the tires. Scars along the slope showed where the boy had rushed the truck down the hill, dodging trees, then crashed into the weeds. The boy's gaze fixed on the whitecapped rapids cutting like small green mountains atop the surface of the water. He leaned forward. Teardrops fell into the current. He inched one foot near the edge of the hood.

"Why are you crying?" a voice asked.

The boy startled and shifted back onto the hood and pulled his cap down on his head.

"I ain't." The boy turned and found the man studying him. A tall figure draped in a loose, black suit, a cigarette burning short between his fingers.

"What you lookin' at?" the boy demanded.

He was a pale man with a marble stare, yet he eyed the boy with warmth.

"I didn't mean to scare you," he said.

"I ain't scared."

The man nodded. "My mistake."

The boy clutched his shirt collar and wiped at his nose. The stranger came to

the edge of the bank and stood watching the torrents.

"Where'd you come from?" the boy asked.

"I came by way of the train."

"That one just come through now?"

"That's the one."

"Where'd you get that suit?" the boy asked.

"This suit?"

The boy looked back up the river. "I don't see no one else wearin' one."

The man stooped in the weeds and pulled at a long blade of grass. "No," he said. He rose and approached the bank, careful where he placed his feet, his eyes fixed on the water. For the first time the boy took note of the man's uncovered feet.

"Where are your shoes?" the boy asked.

The man faced the boy and looked down at his feet.

"You lose 'em in the mud?" the boy asked.

The man raised the cigarette to his lips. "I didn't lose them," he said. The embers flared on the end of the cigarette.

"You forget to put 'em on?"

"I didn't forget them."

"Then why you come out here with no shoes? Spend all your money on the suit and couldn't afford the shoes?"

"That's funny," the man said. "I'll tell you what. I'll tell you what happened to my shoes if you come down off that truck."

The boy squinted towards the bridge.

"What do you say?" the man said.

The boy rubbed at his nose and stepped backwards up the hood. The front axles groaned.

"Why are you up there anyhow?" the man asked.

"Why's it anybody's business what I do?"

"Why's it your business where my shoes are?" the man asked. "Or where I came from?"

"Cause you sneaked up on me. I don't like people sneaking up on me."

The man tossed the cigarette butt into the weeds and rose and dusted at his trouser legs. "Fair enough," he said. "Whose truck is that anyhow?"

The boy removed his hat. "My daddy's," he said.

"He teach you to drive?"

"Yeah."

"Where's your daddy now?"

The boy turned his face and muttered something.

The man turned his ear to the boy.

"How's that?"

"I said he's dead." He did not look at the man.

The man waited and watched the river, the waves like a fist opening and closing, pulling at the truck.

"How old are you?" he asked the boy.

The boy sniffed. "Eleven and a half."

The man dropped his head and inhaled a long time through his nose. "I hate this," he sighed. "I'm sorry."

The boy faced the man. "We raise cattle," he said. "One of the cows just got through givin' birth. This storm come through and my daddy got to fearin' for the new calf. He run out into the wind and I chased after him. I saw the twister and he told me to go back to the house but he didn't stop. He kept runnin'. Last I saw he made it inside the barn.

"I jumped in the old well. That's the only place I could think to hide. In the mornin' my momma brought a old rope and helped me out. She was cryin' the whole time, and I just thought it was 'cause she'd been worryin' about us. And I remember wonderin' why Daddy wasn't helpin' her with the rope. Then I saw the barn. We searched but couldn't

find the cattle. All we found was the horse. Just settin' there like he used to. Guess he'd calmed down. And now he run off when I tried to take him into town. I drove out here lookin' for him."

"Why were you taking him to town?" the man asked.

The boy turned away again and didn't speak for a long time. "To sell him," he said.

The man considered this and fished the pack of cigarettes and tinder from the inside of his jacket. He sheltered the match and lit the cigarette. Smoke danced and carried upwards, cupid locks of gray on the wind. He dropped the still burning match into the water. The boy's eyes followed it as it sank, hissing among the wet tangles of ill-complexioned weeds. The man drew deep on the cigarette, his lapels extending outward as his lungs expanded. The boy waited for the man to exhale. He watched a long time but the smoke did not come.

"Where you headed anyhow?" the boy asked.

"Funeral," said the man. "Actually wouldn't mind a ride, if you're still heading into town."

"Why didn't you take the train?"

"I felt like walking."

"Hurts your feet?"

"Something awful." The man dragged on the cigarette. "How do you aim to get the truck back uphill?" He pointed the cigarette at the slope behind the boy.

"I don't know. Maybe I'll leave it here. Maybe that'll be the end of it."

"Why don't you just come down now?"

For some time they remained silent, the man standing in the weeds and the boy on the truck. The boy turned and surveyed the hill. He looked back at the angry water. It seemed closer now. The fist had opened. He held his arms out to

his side for balance and peered over the edge. The man was watching him. He took a step toward the truck.

"Come on down. We'll walk you home."

"Ain't you gonna be late for that funeral?" the boy asked. He was looking in the river.

"They'll wait up," the man said.

The boy glanced back up the hill. "You go on ahead."

"You come down now. I'll bet that old horse is waiting for you back home."

"I can't go home," the boy said. "Not without my daddy's truck."

"Come on down and I'll tell you what happened to my shoes."

"It don't matter none."

The boy stepped off the hood. He sank to the open depths of the river. He tried to beat against the frigid water, swinging his limbs in their halted joints. The river cradled him down the watery pathway toward the bridge. He watched the underside of the surface above him course like ten thousand living mirrors. The bosom of heaven. Where the waters were divided. He shut his eyes.

His mother saying, "And God said: 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.'"

Her in the kitchen. His father outside. The horse in his stable. The truck around back. The storm still two counties off.

Him asking, "What's that?"

Her laying the Book open on its pages. "What's what?"

"The fir—the firm—"

Her reading, "The firmament. And God called the firmament heaven. And God saw that it was good." Her closing the Book. "Let's pray."

Holding hands, bowing heads. He shuts his eyes. She begins.

"Holy Father..."

Arms laced around his body and raised him from the fathoms. The boy

sputtered and kicked. The man pushed them up the bank on their backs.

"You're O.K.," he said.

"No," the boy said.

"You're O.K. now," the man said.

The boy said, "No. No."

They lay in the bank among the weeds and soil, like two bodies excavated from the earth and left to rest in their own backfill. The boy was crying. "I know," the man said.

"I'm glad he ain't here to see me now," the boy said.

"You don't mean that."

"Probably I do."

"I'm sorry," the man said. "I'm sorry as hell."

They watched the sunset paint the clouds above them with brushstrokes of unnamed colors.

"I don't see nothin' good," the boy said. He turned his head to see, but the truck was gone.

First Place Creative Non-Fiction

To the Cross at Trinity Mills

by Caitlynn Hughes

Did you know that they told us at work? Sunday morning, and you weren't there. Nick was worried, but he had to be at GM and so he told your mom to get ahold of you. Find out where you were, because it wasn't like you and he needed an expediter. I wonder if he knew then. I like to think he did, and he was just pretending to not be worried. How bad would he feel when he realized you had just been crushed in a car accident and he was worried about who was going to run the station?

Your mother never did get a hold of you, but the phone eventually rang. It wasn't you. She burst into tears, and I knew. I knew the second she left the building, taking your aunt with her. Even she didn't know yet, but I did. I felt it. And so we were all wondering and hoping. So much hope. And then we were watching the two state troopers pull into the parking lot, and your whole family was outside in that parking lot. Your mom and aunt, who were at work, where you should have been, when the call came. Your cousin and who knows who else, all outside. Who tells a woman that her son is dead outside of their place of employment? Who does that? But they did, and we watched and we saw her fall to her knees. (Oh God, her face.) Me and Maria, standing in there and watching. Maria turned to me and she said, "He's dead, isn't he?"

And what was I supposed to say? What did you want me to say to her? I told her I didn't know. I knew, because state troopers don't come to tell someone a family member's in the hospital. I took enough criminal justice classes to know that. The same classes that you made fun of me for. State troopers come to say, "We're sorry." They did the hat taking off bit and everything. It was like a movie, and you weren't there to laugh about how cliché

the whole thing was because you were in a body bag somewhere. Where were you while the whole world shattered for your mother? Were you on a hospital gurney, covered in a white sheet? Were you on your way to a morgue? How does that even work? God, I hope I never have to find that out.

Did you have a reaper? Was it someone you knew? I hope it was. I hope you got ushered to wherever by a familiar face. One that loved you. I don't think everyone gets that luxury when the time comes.

And so close to the end of the shift, Nick pulled us all aside, and I was dreading every word that came out of his mouth because it started with, "I don't know how to tell you guys this, so I'm just going to say it," and it ended with "I don't know much but if you need to talk, I'm here."

And half the people standing around us hadn't even worked there for more than a few weeks, and they didn't know you like we did. And it seems cruel of me to discredit their grief, but some part of me hated that they were upset. That Taylor cried, because what did she know? I just wanted to go home. And I eventually did go home, and I didn't even know what to tell my parents. I felt so alone that day because how do you just blurt that out? Because I didn't want to tell them, but people notice when you fall silent and can't seem to find a voice. When every avenue of conversation seemed so unfathomable and I'm so worried about your mom and my own grief that everything else seemed irrelevant and vapid and there was just nothing there. I told them in the car on the way to dinner because I'm a coward and they wouldn't see my face and I couldn't see theirs.

I still have a hard time wearing my hair in braids, because you called me

Wendy the one time I did. And at work, there are so many new people there that whenever something reminds me of you there, who do I tell? It has to be whispered, said gently and quietly because your mom is still there and she hurts enough without us drawing attention to your absence. She already sees. She occasionally says something about you, and she gets so misty eyed that I hurt for her. She was showing the new girl pictures of you today. Are they on her phone? Or, even worse, does she have hard copies in her purse, faded and creased and completely irreplaceable?

The funeral was hard. Nancy was there. I hadn't seen her since she left to finish nursing school and I haven't seen her since the funeral now. I didn't want to go, but I couldn't let Donna go alone. They made me work the morning of your funeral. I didn't even know Wednesday was your funeral because no one told me. I couldn't believe they hadn't called me or something. *Anything*. It was so weird, walking into work that day. They had people from other stores covering shifts so that everyone could be off to go. The whole place was so subdued. It was nearly silent. That new catering supervisor made some really stupid comment to me and I wanted to punch him. I'm sure you'll be unsurprised to hear that he's still a dick, so I guess not much changed.

David didn't get to go to the funeral. They couldn't find a shift supervisor to cover so Chris could go, and David stayed behind because he felt like Chris had more of a right to go than he did. He's a good guy. He left not long after. I miss him.

So I got off work, and I rushed home so I could change and make it to you in time. I forced my dad to go with me because there was no way I could make it there alone. Tristan was there. I haven't really seen him since either. There are a lot of people I haven't seen

since the funeral. I guess funerals do that. Pull people back into the past for a brief moment.

I sat over there with Donna who forced Vic to go with her, and I sat there with everyone from work. I felt we didn't even really belong there. The whole service was in Spanish and not a single one of us in that back row understood what was going on. What right did we have to sit in that room and mourn you when we couldn't even speak the same language? What right did we have to sit in that room and think "I miss you" and to tell people "he's in a better place"? Everyone there would have disagreed. There was no better place for you than with them. With us. I remember thinking about how you would have laughed at us for it. For not understanding. Then Donna leaned over and said that word for word in a whisper to me and we started crying and laughing because of what a ridiculous situation we'd found ourselves in. That wasn't supposed to happen. We shouldn't have had to be there. You should have showed up late for work that Sunday, a lot hung over but perfectly fine aside from a headache. That's how it always happened. You always showed up.

And your poor best friend, who walked in not even under his own power, propped up by his mom or a friend or a sister. And I remember looking at him and thinking about how it must suck. How survivor's guilt must eat you up from the inside, rot away the middle of you until you have no choice but to lean against someone else. And it was so obvious he'd been in that accident too. The open wound on his head, and the cast, and the back brace and the deadness of his eyes.

And at the end there, they called for everyone to line up and pass by the coffin for a last goodbye. And I didn't want to and Donna said she didn't think

she could, but your mom was up by the front and I had to see her, and so did Donna. Donna told me in the line while we waited that she showed up early, during the viewing, so she could talk to your mom. And your mom, sitting there in the front, stood up and turned her around and made her look into the coffin. Stood there with her and said, "My baby," and sobbed. I was never happier to have been delayed by work than in that moment. I don't think I could have stood that. I really don't.

And we got up there, and you didn't look like you. You didn't. You were all wrong. I hardly recognized you and in some brief moment of illogical hope I thought that maybe it wasn't you at all and everyone had been mistaken. It was some horrible misunderstanding. But it was you, because life isn't a movie and death is real. Whoever did your makeup isn't invited to my funeral to do mine, at any rate.

I remember at the end of that same month Donna got in an accident. We had snow. Texas, right? Anyway, we had snow right around Christmas and Donna hit some ice and popped her tire. I remember when I got to work that day, and Michael told me Donna had been in an accident. God, I practically panicked. I think Michael realized what he'd said and how it sounded after everything because he was very quick to say that she was all right. I texted her to make sure.

I keep thinking about that morning when I was a server instead of a cashier and you were expediter. And you turned and asked me for a piece of gum because you'd been drinking the night before and even I could smell it on you, but I didn't have any. Maria probably did, thinking back on it. I wonder if you ever asked her for any. If you did, I didn't hear it. But you turned around after I told you I didn't, and you whispered to yourself, "I hate myself like this."

At the time all I thought about was how beautiful that was. I fancy myself a writer, you see, and what a gorgeous line for a character to say. I have a soft spot for those self-loathing characters. But you weren't a character. You were a person. I don't think I'll ever forgive myself for briefly forgetting that. Because I've done it multiple times now, you know. Do I have license to use the memory of a real person as a character? Do I have that luxury? It seems wrong, but I fancy myself a writer, and what do I know more than my own memories and heartache? The ones with the most heartache, with the saddest ending, often times are the best stories. I think you hit too close to home for you to be a good story for me. For me, you're too real. You're not a character when I try to use you as one. You're a ghost. Ghosts don't make good characters because they stand over your shoulder while you do it. They whisper and they direct and they correct, and you realize you didn't know your ghost at all.

I didn't know you at all.

First Place Essay

My Story
by Kenecia Russell

I was a troubled child who, at the age of twelve, thought I knew more than the adults around me. I skipped school so much that I almost had to repeat the seventh grade, and I eventually dropped out for good in the tenth grade. From that point forward, I was never really able to get my life back on track. I did not realize at the time that quitting school would be one of my biggest regrets later on in life. I quit school because I was being defiant towards everyone around me, and not because I was stupid, or because I could not do the work. However, at the time I did not understand that the only person that I was hurting was me.

I was able to get some clean and decent office jobs that did not require much education, but I still felt empty on the inside because I had to tell lies to all of my employers, co-workers, family, and friends in order to get those jobs in the first place. Deep down, I knew I did not deserve any of the jobs because I had not earned them, or paid any dues, which only made me feel even guiltier. I found myself being even more ashamed about the fear that someone would eventually find out that I did not have a diploma, a certificate of completion, or a GED for that matter. Moreover, when I would hear the people around me talking about their levels of education, or the schools they had attended, I only felt worse and worse about my situation, and that is why I was so unhappy with myself that I took my frustrations out on all the people around me.

My first tragedy struck at the age of twenty-three when my mother passed away, joining my father who had passed two years before her. Naturally, being the big sister, all I had left was my little sister and my grandmother and even her health started going down very soon after my mom passed. That is when the

harsh realities of life began to set in. After my mom's funeral, for the next two years, I battled the worst case of depression anyone could go through, but I was too proud to get help, so I suffered through it alone and in silence.

It was also during this phase in my life that I had discovered some hard truths about myself, and those truths made me stand up and be the woman that I am today. For starters, nobody owes you anything in this world; no one cares whether you eat or not, have clothes, or shelter. How you get those things is entirely up to you, and if you cannot afford them that is your problem. I feel this is important because I was the one who took my mother for granted constantly. I wanted her out of my business, to stop telling me what to do, and to let me live my own life. I just did not know at the time how close I was to getting my wish, and as they say, "be careful what you wish for."

After my mom's death, I was completely on my own, and without any education. My grandmother was sick, so she could no longer be a caregiver because she needed one for herself. I did not have a job or money in the bank, my family was a mess, and no one was getting along. My grandmother lost her house in a fire and went to live with my aunt, and everything seemed to be getting worse and worse. My car got repossessed, I was homeless and living inside a hotel room with my fiancé who was fighting his own demons, and when I say all we had was each other ...all we had was each other.

I was able to get jobs through temp services, but even those ran out after a while. Finally, I left the hotel and moved into public housing because that was the best that I could do, and after a year of being in the projects, I felt like my life was going absolutely nowhere. I

also felt myself slipping back into that same lowly state of depression, but by that time my sister had given birth to my nephew which was the best thing that ever happened to me. He became the new love of my life, and the only thing keeping me together at that point along with my fiancé, but I was still on the edge because the lifestyle that I was living would eventually land me in jail. I was definitely a product of my environment, and someone who had gone from a lady to a deviant in the blink of an eye. I became a female gangster: I was involved with drugs, wrote bad checks, carried guns, blades, knives, and pretty much anything else that would inflict damage upon someone else.

However, I knew I could not keep on going at the same rate because this was not the type of person that I wanted to be, so I had a mental breakdown. I reverted back to the only way I knew how to solve things, and that is focusing on my religion. I broke down hysterically and prayed to GOD to please lift the weight of this world off my shoulders. I remember saying: "GOD, I don't want to be like this anymore! I don't want to live like this anymore! I am tired of struggling!" My answer from GOD came swiftly. GOD told me: "You already know the answer to that which you seek." The truth was that I held my fate within my own hands, and no matter how I had tried to fight it in the past, I already knew what I needed to do to improve my situation. I came to the realization that even though I did not have a dime to my name, what I did have no one could take away from me, and that was my brain. I am an intelligent woman; I just was not utilizing my intelligence, so I was just letting my gold mine go to waste. I began to get stronger and stronger with

each tear, and after I dried up all the tears completely, it suddenly became clear that I could pick myself up by my bootstraps because I was truly in charge of my own life, and I had the power to turn my situation around and still become successful. All I had to do was figure out how to channel my newfound anger, aggression, and determination towards something positive, and the world would be mine for the taking.

I signed up for the GED test, took the classes, and eventually took the test. The first stumbling block I encountered on my new quest was that I failed the math portion of the test by one question. I did not let that stop me because a new fire had been lit under me to succeed no matter the cost, so I got tutoring, checked out books from the library, and I studied so that when the next test came around I was going to get that last question, and I did. I got that question and picked up four more. I felt a huge sense of accomplishment after that, but I knew it was not enough to get me to the next stage of my goals, so I made the colossal mistake of attending Virginia College, and that is where I encountered my second stumbling block because they are not regionally accredited. I spent over a year at that school only to find out that I had to start over from the beginning. That was another hard pill to swallow after all that money and time had been spent; I had nothing to show for it. I felt like the last year of my life meant nothing because the credits were not transferrable to any other colleges, and I had accrued thousands of dollars worth of debt.

At that point, the only thing I could do was walk away from school and head back to work, or go back to square one and start all the way over again. It is often during your darkest hours that you

remind yourself how badly you want a better life, and it is also during this time that my sister had given birth to my niece which only added more fuel to my fire. Because out of all the deaths I witnessed, and all the funerals I attended, this new symbol of life breathed air into my world when I needed it the most, reminding me that I now had all the more reason not to give up, so instead of wallowing in defeat I let that guide my decision to start over here at Jefferson State. This decision posed another challenge because I did not have adequate transportation at the time which meant that the two buses I was originally taking back and forth to school every day had now become four (two buses each way). It had been three years since I last owned a vehicle, and to make matters worse, I had to catch all these buses during the summer months when it was a hundred degrees outside. I made it my mission every day to walk through my housing community with books and bags of supplies for school (including bottled iced water) strapped to my back, sweating something awful, and people would laugh at me, or make fun of me, but that was okay because I knew that everything I was doing had a purpose, and that my situation was just temporary. One thing life did teach me was how to have patience and how to see the bigger picture.

Fortunately, I made it to every single class by way of the Max transit system for the next five months, and by then I had saved up enough for a car. I went from walking to riding to school which only inspired me to achieve my next set of goals, and those goals were that I would be the best student in whatever program I chose. I decided that I was going to be the best at everything school-related, and I was going to become more than just the average college student in the process. I wanted to develop the types of relationships

that would set me apart from ordinary students. I wanted to make a real difference in the world and show everybody around me that I am indeed competition, a true force of nature, and this schoolwork ...I am going to smash it because I am strong enough to do what it takes in order to make my dream happen.

I know how to be the person that I want to be, and this is a person who helps improve the quality of life for others, so I am now in the Respiratory Therapy/Cardiopulmonary Science program here at Jefferson State, and the program also transfers to UAB, so I am university bound which is something I never could have imagined in my wildest dreams. I will transfer to UAB next year as a junior for my Baccalaureate degree. I have also joined Sigma Kappa Delta National English Honor Society and three of my inspirational writings have been published in the SKD Newsletter: "Metamorphosis," "Skin," and "Ugly." I have lots to say, so I am currently submitting other works to be published for *Wingspan*.

The rest of my story is still writing itself, but this project "hood girl" is now a winner, a writer, and a scholar, and to everyone who doubted my abilities, expected me to drop out, or thought that I could not do it to begin with ...I will see you in the nearest hospital emergency room!

Second Place Essay

Townley's Night Side

by Joshua Cook

Two years ago my family and I moved to Townley, Alabama. I remember sitting on the front porch, watching the sun cast shadows through tree leaves and feeling warm summer breezes blow by. The smell of barbecued steak and ribs hovered over the neighborhood as my neighbor's grandchildren rode their bikes up the street only to turn around at the stop sign and make their way back home to begin anew. The sound of big band music wove through the air while the elderly couple across the street sat outside watching their record player spin. That day will always be imprinted on my mind as one of the most peaceful that I have experienced. As I sat there, I asked myself how anything can beat this. It was not until that night that I saw Townley's true beauty. I was astounded by Townley's ghostly appearance, spooky sounds, and the scary atmosphere that covered the town.

When the sun had set, thick curtains of fog began crawling down the street, encompassing all of the local buildings until they became mere silhouettes. The shadow of the church steeple across the street carried through the fog, making the town look like a haunted cemetery. Thousands of fireflies began to glow, making a gloomy lightshow that glowed for miles through the fog. The nearby nineteenth century commissary loomed over the street, casting a shadow that covered the entire neighborhood. Streetlights looked like blurred candles through the fog, blinking and flickering as if they were about to snuff out. The colossal moon cast its beams against the fog, turning each drop of water into a mirror, brought visibility to a minimum. What light escaped the fog ricocheted against the eyes of toads, cats, and dogs making the night seem as if it were watching.

Beyond the fog and over the valley, hundreds of coyotes began to howl at the moon. After their howling, the crickets' chirping, and the frogs' croaking had bled together and become background noise, a bloodcurdling screech carried through the night. Moments later, a giant bat flapped its wings overhead. It swerved in and out of the fog for a few minutes, catching bugs along the way, and then vanished into the night. For a few moments, the night grew silent and the world seemed to be on the edge of a needle, waiting for the push that would delve it back into organized chaos. A few moments later, a train horn blasted over the hills, causing neighborhood dogs to howl in protest. The ground began to rumble and shake as an intense light beamed through the fog. The train began to slow down, its roaring engine reducing to a hum as it came to a halt on the tracks. The train sat rumbling for almost an hour, occasionally releasing steam and blowing its horn as engineers roamed about looking for mechanical errors. Once all the engineers had climbed back inside, the ground began to shake again as another train came closer. When the second train passed, the first was given clearance to continue down the track. As the train left, it blatantly announced its departure to the world waking all of Townley's residents. This cycle continued throughout the night until early in the morning.

The air was hot, humid, and groggy, making every movement exhausting and every breath come short. Every time the wind blew, it merely pushed the hot air around and did nothing to cool the night. Mosquitoes swarmed the air in droves, landing, and snacking on whatever they could find. When they couldn't find anything, they would buzz around the streetlights smacking into

them over and over. Everything was soaking wet; the dirt was turned into soggy mud, the grass was drenched and slick to walk on, and the tree leaves dripped water like a leaky faucet. There was a gut wrenching sense of apprehensiveness that revealed the town's dark side. It is no lie that Townley is a very eerie, hair-raising, and spooky swamp.

During the day, Townley is peaceful, serene, and tranquil, but it isn't until the sun goes down that Townley's true beauty comes out. The world seems to change. Everything that's reassuring during the day turns questionable at night when the so-called ghost-town becomes a literal ghost-town. It's easy for my imagination to run wild speculating strange shapes and noises, but strangely enough as I stand outside at night I can't help but feel a strange sense of peace. There is an enchanting darkness to Townley that has enthralled me ever since that night. My grandparents and great-grandparents lived in Townley, and now so do I. I am immensely proud to be the fifth generation of my family to live in the once boom town called Townley. Townley truly is the most beautiful place that I have ever lived.

Third Place Essay

Life

by Rebecca Jones

James Dean famously said, "Dream as if you'll live forever. Live as if you'll die tomorrow." I believe there is such an extreme difference in life and living. We often get so caught up in life that we forget to live. Far too often we think that we don't have time for what we want to do because we have to do what we have to do. I am certainly very guilty of that. Dreams are our way of seeing all the possibilities of life, realizing what really matters to us, and knowing what a limited time we have to do them in.

Dreams, aspirations, or whatever we decide to call them are wonderful things. They give us hope. They inspire and motivate us to do more and be more. They show us all the possibilities that living has to offer. They guide us to make conscious choices to get to a particular destination. They help us to never give up, no matter how hard life is. Personally, I dream of showing the world that there isn't anything we go through in life that can control us unless we allow it to. I refuse to just survive the hard things. I will thrive in spite of the hard things. After tragically losing my husband when I was only 31 and finding myself with three young sons to raise alone, I became even more determined to accomplish that dream. I know that it doesn't sound like a big dream to most people, but to me it is the biggest and most important dream I have. Accomplishing that, whether it is one little thing at a time or a freefall into something unexpected without a net, shows my children that there is never an acceptable reason to quit. I want them to learn that true strength, grace under pressure, and endurance are the qualities that will help us get where we want to go in life. I also want them to know that courage is not the absence of fear, but it is rather fear that has said a prayer and takes action anyway.

Dreams help us to determine which people and things should be important in life. Dreams help us prioritize and maximize all our opportunities, not just the easy ones. It has taken me a long time to learn that as life changes, we must also change with it, and that includes changing our priorities, attitudes, and outlooks. All of the things that were once the most important are not really all that important anymore. The cleanliness of my house is still important to me but not as important as making sure that my kids have made memories that they will never forget. I want them to know that, when all is said and done, life is what we make it. Dreams are the launching pad to make it all happen. I know that for me personally, if I don't consciously prioritize and focus where my energy is being spent, it is so easy to get distracted by the wrong things. Having dreams that I want to accomplish helps me to keep things in perspective.

Life will never truly be enjoyed if we have the wrong attitudes. We must realize that life is a limited time gift. It will not last forever, and there are not any second chances. We cannot be afraid to do the things we want. We also cannot only live in the moment with no thought for what may come next. We must find a happy medium, a task that I have great difficulty with at times. So often I get caught up in the excitement of something that I forget to take a breath and look at the big picture. However, I have gotten much better at that over the last few years. I suppose I am learning that particular lesson out of necessity. I have learned that I must love when I can, laugh where I am, and live each moment for all that it has to offer. My dreams are mine, and no one will be more disappointed than I if I don't do all I can to accomplish them.

Life is a moment-to-moment experience, each moment a stair-step to the next, and no precise moment will ever come again. Dreams are the way to truly enjoy each one. In my humble opinion, a life half lived really is no life at all. I have learned to live my life, not simply endure it. I am constantly adding things to my bucket list with the realization that while I may not accomplish them all, it will not be because I was afraid to try. My hope is that at the end of my life I will have led a life fully lived and will have taught my children to do the same.

First Place Literary Analysis

Burning Decay and Destruction Down

by James Pegler

“Late Poem to My Father” by Sharon Olds is a poem that deals with three generations of abuse in the speaker’s family and the effect that it has on each following generation. The narrative of the poem appears to be told by the author herself about her father. In the poem Olds is suddenly aware of the abuse that her father suffered at the hands of his father. She is also aware of how the damage from that abuse made him into the unfeeling father that she knew. The symbolic language used by Olds in “Late Poem to My Father” effectively illustrates the permanent internal disfiguring that child abuse causes.

Olds’ use of fire and heat in “Late Poem to my Father” represents the abuse that shapes who her father becomes. The symbol of fire has a central and reoccurring role in this poem. Olds first introduces the setting as “the unlit rooms/ and the hot fireplace with the man in front of it” (2-3). This image is of a dark room with a blazing fire in the hearth. The darkness signifies the unknown, and the placement of the grandfather as the only illuminated thing in the room shows that this man is the only visible example for the child to base his future self on. The intensity of the heat is shown when she refers to “the hot fireplace” and “the heavy air” (3-4). A very hot room has an oppressive heaviness to it, and Olds is using this heat and weight to add a sense of oppression and to build tension in the poem. Later she writes, “I remembered that/ child being formed in front of the fire” (20-21). This line in concert with the fire and heat call to mind the idea of a forge where metal is shaped, hammered, and hardened. The environment is like a forge that shaped and hardened her father through the

application of abuse. The author’s desire to give her “love/ directly to that boy in the fiery room,/ as if it could reach him in time” (27-29) shows her desire to give her father some alloy that would add softness to him before he is hardened forever.

In contrast to the heat and fire of the story are the cellar and the creek. Olds writes, “Down in the/ cellar, the barrels of sweet apples/... rotted and/ rotted” (8-11). The cellar is a cool underground place filled with sweetness where the child can get out of the heat and possibly hide. However, this cellar holds no more sweetness for the child because the apples are rotted. The cellar is no longer a place of refuge and sweetness for the boy. Olds also writes, “past the cellar door/ the creek ran and ran” (11-12). The use of the words “past” and “ran” gives the sense of the creek fleeing from him. The relief that the creek provides is fleeting. A blacksmith uses water to occasionally cool the hot metal before it is heated and pounded more. The water is the only momentary relief for the metal and the child. The use of heat and fire in “Late Poem to My Father” represents the intensity of the abusive pressures used to shape and harden the child into the emotionless addict that he is as an adult.

In the poem Olds also uses symbolism of decay to depict the deteriorating innocence and tenderheartedness of the youth as a result of abuse. The use of these symbols adds a dark and sinister feeling to the poem that allows the reader to tap into the feeling of the abusive environment. The most apparent use of decay is where Olds writes, “Down in the/ cellar, the barrels of sweet apples,/ picked at their peak from the tree, rotted and/ rotted” (8-11). The sweet apples picked at their peak represent the child’s innocence, youth,

and unspoiled ability to love. The apples are rotted just as the child's innocence is spoiled in the poem. It is possible that there is a double meaning when Olds writes, "there were things the man/ did near you, and he was your father,/ the mold by which you were made" (6-8). Aside from the more obvious meaning of this sentence, the use of the word "mold" to mean corruption or decay adds another dimension to the line. In this context the things done near the child by the grandfather are the contamination and corruption that shaped who he became as an adult. The contaminated innocence of this child is a result of abuse, and it has shaped him into a hollow and unfeeling adult.

Another form of symbolic language in "A Late Poem to My Father" is destructive or harmful language. The destructive language hints at the violence that is present in the environment. An example of this destructive symbolism in this poem is "the poison to help you drop down unconscious" (17-18). The poison is willingly taken by her father. This example refers to the father's addiction, but also, it represents the father's desire to kill his consciousness to avoid reliving the trauma of his youth. The poisoning of his subconscious in childhood by his father, tragically, leads to his use of poison to silence his subconscious as an adult. Olds uses another example of destructive language when she discusses how her father was formed: "the/ tiny bones inside his soul/ twisted in greenstick fractures, the small/ tendons that hold the heart in place/ snapped" (21-25). This section of the poem deals with the internal damage that is done to the child's heart and soul. This internal damage is the wound that afflicts him into adulthood. His soul is twisted by internal partial fractures. The imagery creates a picture of the soul as an internal child with

many broken bones that did not heal correctly causing him to be twisted. The father's soul is crippled and unable to function correctly. The snapping of the tendons that hold the heart alludes to the severing of the connection to love or emotion. His heart is free to roam within him, yet it is incapable of connecting with another. Olds uses this destruction to allude to the violence that fills this abusive environment. The ruinous symbolism illustrates the deeper damage that is done to victims of abuse. These internal mutilations lead to addiction and more abuse.

One word that provides an interesting insight into the symbolism of "Late Poem to My Father," and a deeper understanding of the father's condition, is the word "down." Though it is only used twice, this word adds a context to the images that Olds uses, and sheds light on the severity of the internal torment of the father. The word is first found when Olds writes, "Down in the/ cellar, the barrels of sweet apples,/ picked at their peak from the tree, rotted and/ rotted." The cellar is placed down as most cellars are, but the image of a cold underground room that is filled with decay also calls to mind a crypt or grave. Olds could have simply said, "in the cellar," but her use of the word "down" suggests that she desires the reader to consider the location of the cellar. The cellar is in the ground and filled with decay. She is using the cellar to represent death and the grave. The young sweet apples being stored in wooden vessels in this space are very much like coffins. The apples represent the purity of youth that is dead and decaying inside a coffin. Therefore, since the first use of the word "down" refers to this image of this cellar or crypt, the only other use of this word could be thought to add a correlation between the two uses. Olds writes of her father putting "the/ oily medicine to

your lips/ every night, the poison to help you/ drop down unconscious" (15-18).

The use of the word "down," as well as the use of poison, creates a connection to the other imagery about the crypt. This connection of dropping down into the grave from poison gives the impression that death will be the only true rest for the father. The grave is down, and down is the only source of relief from his torment. This level of trauma that requires poison or death to escape from illustrates the severe mental and emotional damage the father has sustained. This further illustrates the permanent disfiguring caused by child abuse.

"Late Poem to My Father" is a dark poem that deals with the realities of abuse. Olds' use of symbolic language creates a deeper feeling of the intensity of the setting, as well as a deeper understanding of the father's internal

scarring. He is an emotionless, hardened, and fractured soul with an inability to love. His childhood innocence has been molding in the grave since youth, and he longs to join his innocence in the grave to end his torment. Olds' use of symbolic language within the poem creates a better understanding of the long term damage that child abuse can cause. The redemption and resolution of this poem is the fact that Olds recognizes the torment of her father and responds with an empathetic love for the child that had to endure such abuse. Her wish to send her love back through time to reach him before it is too late creates the idea that the abused have a limit. There is a point where no love will reach them and they will harden. The poem sends the message that the abused need love before something inside dies and it is too late.

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Growing Pains

by Rachel Sweigard

During the years between adolescence and adulthood one is often expected to act like an adult, yet is still treated like a child. It is due to this cruel reality that the years between adolescence and adulthood are some of the roughest a person will experience. Young people often feel that they are being pulled in many different directions due not only to their expectations of themselves, but society's expectations as well. The short stories "A & P" and "Araby" tell the stories of two naïve young men and their quests to becoming their own people. Although the backgrounds of both "A & P" and "Araby" involve rites of passage into adulthood, the stories are quite different in the nature of the young men's pursuits and in the lessons that are learned in the end.

John Updike's "A & P" centers on a young man named Sammy who is working at a grocery store and is dangerously close to being assimilated into the corporate world despite his lack of interest in the field. Sammy's character represents a naïve young man on the pursuit of becoming his own person and fighting the conformity of life. He believes that he is nothing like Stokesie, whose only aspiration in life is to become manager of the A & P one day (371). When three wealthy young ladies stroll into the grocery store one hot summer day, Sammy views this as his escape from the corporate world that is his imminent destiny. The young ladies, clad in nothing more than bathing suits, represent the bright, glowing future Sammy sees for himself, one that does not involve succumbing to society's unspoken code of conduct. To Sammy, the girls are everything he wants for his life. They are violating every unspoken rule of the store, from their

lack of clothing to not obeying the flow of traffic down the aisles (371). When Sammy's manager reprimands the girls for their bare shoulders, Sammy sees his opportunity to rebel and quits his job on the spot. However, his actions are futile and when he walks out of the store his girls are nowhere in sight and he is without a job.

Virtually every young adult cannot wait to grow up and enter into adulthood. The same goes for the young man in James Joyce's "Araby." In this short story the nameless young man is on a mission to visit the Araby in order to purchase a gift for the girl he has his eye on, but the story carries a much deeper meaning. The Araby represents a rite of passage into adulthood that is just beyond reach for the young man. Throughout the story situations arise that could potentially derail his journey. In the beginning his uncle is hesitant to give him the money to purchase the gift and allow him to go since it is so late at night, but after some convincing by the boy's aunt, he is given the money and permitted to go (247). This situation represents the struggle that he and many young adults face as they are pulled in conflicting directions in the years between teen and adulthood. The gift that the young man is wanting to purchase is symbolic of adulthood itself. Throughout the days leading up to the visit to the Araby the boy is very nervous and excited (247) and it upsets him that he may not be able to go. Finally, he is able to go to the Araby but when he arrives it is late at night and with most of the vendors closed, he is forced to leave empty handed.

As people become older and more responsible, they may find that they do not have to follow the regulations placed upon them by society but are also held accountable for their actions.

In "A & P" Sammy learns this lesson the hard way. As a nineteen year old man, he feels crushed by the boredom that is his life and has high hopes that he will escape the life that others around him have accepted as their own. Sammy fears that he is stuck in the dead end job he is employed at and will likely end up as a middle class citizen just like his parents, to whom serving Schlitz in cartoon stenciled glasses is considered a racy affair (372). When the opportunity to escape the life he leads materializes in the manner of his boss scolding the girls for their immodest clothing, he identifies it and quits his job immediately in hopes that he will be able to pursue the life he craves. Sammy views leaving his job as an action that will impress the snooty girls that have come into the store, but it has a deeper meaning than just that. Sammy quitting his job signifies his rite of passage into adult life and that his actions have very real consequences. As he leaves the store after quitting, "I look around for my girls, but they're gone, of course... and my stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter" (374). For Sammy, this reality is both freeing and confining at once. For the first time in his life he is free of society's rules, but is confined by the consequences of his actions.

As young adults, many people possess a distorted view of reality and instead live in their own world where everything goes as planned with no bumps along the road. The young man in "Araby" views life in this manner as well. Throughout the story the young man is on a quest to impress the girl of his dreams and does not think that anything bad will come of it. In this story the girl he is pursuing is symbolic of where he wants to be in his adult life and from his point of view, it is just out

of his grasp. The end goal, to make his feelings known to the young lady in hopes that she will confess her love to him as well, is represented by the Araby. Once the naïve young man sets his mind to get the girl he sees nothing that could stand in his way. Upon arriving to the Araby he finds that it is very late at night and many of the vendors have closed with the exception of a distracted young lady. The young lady is milling around her stall at the Araby and upon noticing the boy asks in a discouraging tone if he wishes to buy anything (249). The lady working at the Araby represents the realization the young man comes to that life is not a walk in the park but is instead filled with unexpected disappointments. Soon, the lights in the Araby are turned off and the boy is forced to return home. While gazing into the darkness he sees himself as a creature driven and derided by vanity, and his eyes "burned with anguish and anger" (249). In the end, the young man learns not to view his life irrationally, but to be more realistic in his endeavors and expectations.

In conclusion, both Sammy in "A & P" and the young man in "Araby" are facing a mental tug of war between their daily lives and the lives they see for themselves in the future. Their situations are not unlike young adults of today's society. Most young adults feel pulled in different directions in that they cannot wait to grow up and become adults, but they do not know where to begin and are faced with challenges along the way. Although the backgrounds of both "A & P" and "Araby" involve rites of passage into adulthood, the stories are quite different in the nature of the young men's pursuits and in the lessons that are learned in the end.

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Third Place Literary Analysis

Martha Hale's Contribution

by Heather Williams

In Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers," Martha Hale is just an average woman who takes pride in her overlooked duties as a mother and a farmer's wife. As the story begins, Mrs. Hale is remembered as being Minnie Wright's, the central character's, old friend. They have lived as neighbors for more than twenty years. Mrs. Hale, however, did not visit Minnie in those years because "it had always been a lonesome-looking place" (184). Now, Mrs. Hale ventures over to her house, not to see Minnie, but to accompany the sheriff and his wife, the county attorney, and Mr. Hale in their search for justice. Mr. Wright is dead, and Minnie is in jail for his murder. Mrs. Hale's regret of not visiting Minnie creates an inner struggle throughout the story and forces her to accept the terms of their arrival: "I could have come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I've never liked this place....I don't know what it is, but it's a lonesome place, and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes" (192). While the men recreate the crime scene upstairs, the women take on the patronizing assignment of looking out for clues that they "might come upon," ensueing the underlying conflict of male versus female (188). This discreet gender battle has no significant meaning to the men. The women, however, use it in their favor. Unknown to the team of men, Martha Hale becomes a key defender in Mrs. Peters' battle of cognitive freedom. She encourages Mrs. Peters to think on her own terms instead of thinking only as a sheriff's wife. Mrs. Hale's former past with Minnie, knowledge about Mr. Wright's true personality, and ability to stand by Minnie's innocence—in spite

of the blatant clues—convince Mrs. Peters to look past the evidence and acquit Minnie with time served.

Having known Minnie for many years, Martha Hale immediately recognizes the degradation in her attitude and behavior. Seeing the rocking chair in Minnie's kitchen is the first indication to Mrs. Hale that things are not how they once were: "It came to Mrs. Hale's mind that that rocker didn't look in the least like Minnie Foster—the Minnie Foster of twenty years before" (185). This invaluable perception and understanding of the dramatic change Minnie has undergone plays a major role in persuading Mrs. Peters to feel empathetic toward Minnie. As Mrs. Peters gathers clothes to take to Minnie, she becomes keenly aware of the shabbiness of her wardrobe. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters examine a black skirt that has "the marks of much making over" (189). To Mrs. Peters it is just an old skirt. Mrs. Hale, however, is the one who observes the distinct change in Minnie. In retrospection, she says, "She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively—when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was twenty years ago" (189). The men, on the other hand, do not pick up on this change. They simply take the condition of the house at face value. The county attorney snoops around in the cupboard, hoping to find any piece of evidence that would convict Mrs. Wright of murder, but he only finds the broken jars of fruit. Resentfully he says, "Here's a nice mess" (187). He blindly assumes the broken jars are just a part of the messy kitchen. The county attorney's remarks further reveal the ignorance of the men concerning Minnie Wright. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters know that these things are not

simply “trifles” but breadcrumbs leading them to the ultimate truth of what really occurred the previous night in the Wright household.

Not only does Martha enlighten Mrs. Peters about years gone-by, but she also shares her knowledge of Mr. Wright’s unseen personality. Martha explains that Mr. Wright was a good man who did not drink, paid his debts, and kept his word, but he was “a hard man” (192). She tries in a roundabout way to insinuate to Mrs. Peters that Mr. Wright’s actions, and lack thereof, contributed greatly to Minnie’s mental and physical breakdown. Martha Hale further notes that even though Mr. Wright lived with Mrs. Wright, he provided no comfort or emotional support: “Wright out all day—and no company when he did come in” (192). Even Mr. Hale dares to express the notion of Mr. Wright’s complete dominance and superiority over Mrs. Wright: “...I didn’t know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John” (185). Finding the dead canary with its neck rung, though, is a vital turning point in the way Mrs. Peters perceives Mrs. Wright. Mrs. Peters reveals that she had once experienced a similar incident as a girl that pushed her to her breaking point: “When I was a girl, my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—before I could get there—if they hadn’t held me back I would have—hurt him” (194). The connection is made, and Mrs. Peters begins to sow a seed of compassion toward Minnie Wright.

Mrs. Hale’s ability to stand by Minnie Wright’s innocence throughout the story is the final blow to Mrs. Peters’ preconceived notions of Mrs. Wright. Though the evidence stacks abundantly against Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Hale always finds a way to justify Minnie’s actions. She defends Minnie when the county attorney rudely remarks about Minnie’s messy kitchen: “There’s a great deal of

work to be done on a farm” (187). He observes the rest of the kitchen and makes note of the towels half clean and half dirty. Then, defending Minnie again, Mrs. Hale shoots back, “Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men’s hands aren’t always as clean as they might be” (187). Later, as Mrs. Peters uncovers the half-finished quilt, she analyzes the reasoning behind the unusual sewing and beckons Mrs. Hale to examine it (191). The sheriff and his team walk in on the women while they are discussing the quilt. Throwing his hands up he says, “They wonder whether she was going to quilt it or just knot it!” (190). Martha calmly dismisses the sheriff’s poor attempt at humor and tells Mrs. Peters that she probably was not nervous about anything: “I sew awful queer sometimes when I’m just tired” (191). Although the men casually laugh about the quilt, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters acknowledge the true importance of it. Once the men leave, Mrs. Hale bluntly asks Mrs. Peters if she thinks Minnie “did it” (189). Mrs. Peters gives her answer, and then Mrs. Hale confidently gives her rebuttal: “Well, I don’t think she did” (189). Mrs. Hale’s unwavering dedication to the case of Minnie Wright evokes Mrs. Peters to rule her innocent.

The women of “A Jury of Her Peers” are the real detectives of the story. The men underestimate their abilities and leave the door open for the women to take matters into their own hands. Susan Glaspell’s struggle of law versus human bonding forces Mrs. Peters to make a very important choice. Does she reveal the dead canary as evidence to convict Mrs. Wright, or does she hide it pretending like nothing was there? In the end, Mrs. Peters chooses to justify Minnie’s actions and cover up the murder. Martha Hale’s insight about Minnie’s former lifestyle, knowledge of Mr. Wright’s façade, and persistence to

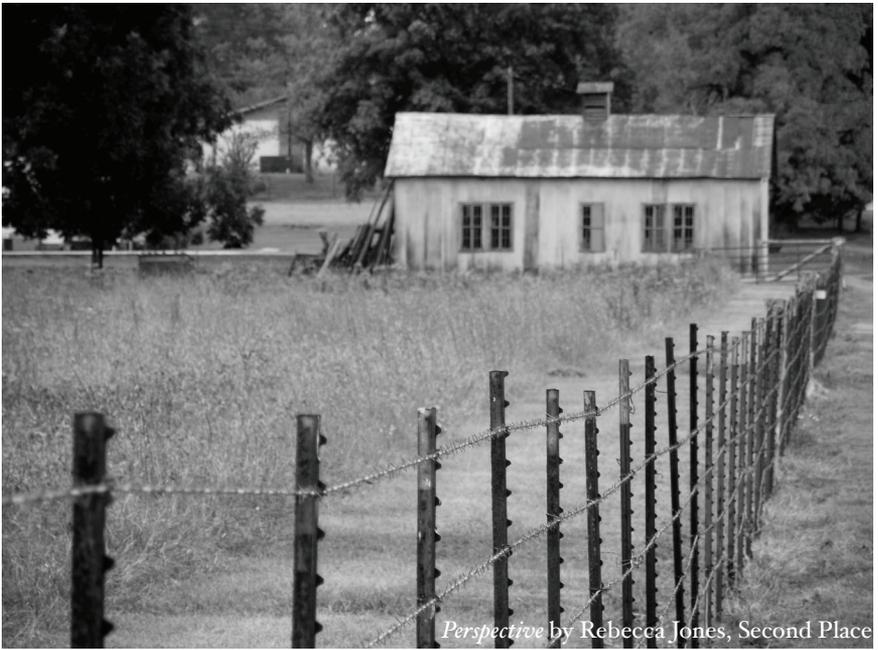
claim Minnie's innocence make a
winning case in her favor. The jury is in,
and they rule not guilty.

Work Cited

Glaspell, Susan. "A Jury of Her Peers." *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*. Ed. Edger V. Roberts and Robert Zweig. 10th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2012. 183-96. Print.

Jan I. Anderson Black and White *Photography Awards*

Towering Faith by Andrew Jordan, First Place



Perspective by Rebecca Jones, Second Place



Adventure Waiting by Andrew Jordan, Third Place

First Place Short Fiction

Fairy Clock

by Helen Companion

Aisle twelve is a wall of color. Stacked neatly on either side are boxes in bright shades, each with their own promises: all day dry, warming, cooling, intimacy. In the center of the aisle, sitting at eye level as if to stare at Jessi, are the pregnancy tests— blocks of blue and pink, each proclaiming to be more accurate than the last. She reaches out to grab the least expensive one, a single test with glaring plus and minus.

“Clean up in Aisle three,” blares over the intercom.

She turns the box over in her hand, once, twice. For a nearly empty box, it feels both heavier and flimsier than she expects. She puts it back, thinking that she needs to be sure; she should get two, and the price difference is only a matter of cents. Results should always be verified, after all.

“Assistance in aisle seven.”

“First Response,” she rolls the words over her tongue. That sounds good, knowing early. She chooses a box with a digital test and a gold ribbon plastered over the front, thinks to herself that it seems appropriate to consider *it* a gift; after all it was given to her by someone else. She wonders for a moment if she can return *it*.

The walk to the front seems like a long one and she hides the test in the crook of her arm without realizing. The wait at the register feels infinite; the line that looks the shortest is currently occupied by an elderly woman searching the depths of her purse for exact change. She places the test on the belt, then turns it over, hoping the other side will be less obvious. It isn't, of course. The cashier slides it across the scanner, as if skimming a cloud.

“What are you hoping for?” the cashier asks. She flips her blond hair over her shoulder.

“Not really sure.” Jessi pretends to focus on the pin pad. “I just need to know.”

The cashier hands her the bag and Jessi pulls the box out and slips it in her purse, crosses the aisle and enters the bathroom. Grey stalls are lined against the back wall with a solitary sink opposite the door. She opens the door to the handicapped stall and jumps back when it squeaks at her. She thinks it sounds like a mouse and remembers the lace of the mouse's tail as she dangled it over the cage of her pet Python, Marie, when she was nine. Only Marie's head was above the fake grass and it hung, levitating, waiting to strike. She waited too long to drop the mouse and the snake missed, curling around her hand, a black and yellow bracelet that she had to run under water to release.

The stall is comfortably barren; only a toilet, an oversized black toilet paper dispenser, and a tiny metal box on the wall are her company. She pulls down her jeans and panties in one motion, lets them fall in a heap on the floor and carefully opens the box: one flap, then the other, then pulls out the white, foil wrapped bar. She takes a deep breath and the urine falls like a waterfall over the test. “Yes,” it says. She shakes the test again, stares to be sure. “Yes.”

“I guess I shouldn't be surprised,” she says to herself and drops the test in the metal box, the paper crinkling in recognition. She pulls up her pants, places the other test in her purse and tosses the box on top of the test, the flaps exposed from where the metal lid doesn't close.

With the heater broken everything in the apartment is freezing. Jessi kicks her sandals off beside the door and makes her way to the bedroom. Matt is already asleep, curled up tightly in a white comforter they had bought when they

first rented the apartment. She slips her clothes off, letting them fall to the floor and places her purse on the dresser. Slowly, she crawls into bed, careful not to wake him.

"Missed you," Matt says, his words half language and half drool. Still asleep, he rolls close to her, draping his arm over her naked body. She kisses him on the forehead, says she loves him. Lying there, head pressed against his chest, hair creating a fuzzy pillow around her face, she thinks to herself that it'll be okay, we'll be okay. She brushes her hand against his thigh and he twitches. She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath and tries to sleep.

It was a cool spring day when they met and the unopened buds on the maple trees glittered in the sunlight, like snow. The park was busy, but Jessi found a corner near the basketball court and threw a green blanket down on the grass, under a red oak. The shade from its wide branches surrounded her like an embrace. She sat with her legs laid sideways and a little glimpse of her slender legs peeked from under her long black skirt. Her cardigan fluttered in the wind like wings and she admired the stitches on the hem, remembering each stitch as it fell off the needles. She pulled out her book, but just as she started to read, she heard the bounce of a ball against the rim and "Booyah!" echoed across the park. He was a tall guy, with brown hair that was matted with sweat over his brow and beads of sweat that glistened like dew. He high-fived one of the other guys there and Jessi shook her head, returning to her book.

Immersed in stamen and petals, she didn't notice he'd walked up to her.

"Here," he said "a pretty flower for the most beautiful woman in the park." The line was so corny that Jessi had to laugh.

Between his thumbs and forefinger he held a dandelion.

"A dandelion as a pick-up line? That's a first. They're just weeds." She pulled at the sleeve on her cardigan and remembered twisting the stitches to make the cables on the cuff. "We always called them 'fairy clocks.'" He leans down and picks up one that has already bloomed and is now covered in strands woven together like a soft sculpture. "After they've bloomed, you can make a wish on them. Watch." He brought the flower to his lips and gently blew, scattering the seeds. "Make a wish and every seed that falls will help it come true."

She was hooked. There were few who appreciated flowers the way she as an aspiring botanist did. They spent hours talking that afternoon about their lives, their families and dreams. And at the end of the day, she forgot her book.

One day, he told her he had a surprise for her. He blindfolded her, sat her gently in the passenger's seat, saying "Don't peek!" The silk of his tie against her eyes and the faint smell of his skin lulled her to sleep and when the car stopped, he got out, opened the door and took her hand, gently leading her. "Watch your step," he said as she stepped over a pile of rocks. It was fall and the crumbling leaves were melting into the soil, giving the whole place a musty smell. The air was still, as if even the wind was waiting for this moment. "Sit here," he said, and she sat on the blanket, eyes still obscured. When he pulled the tie off her eyes, she was surrounded by flowers. Four dozen black magic roses held the blanket down, one on each corner and concentric circles of vases of lilies and peonies surrounded her, with baby's breath and lilac buds scattered between. The air was sweet enough to take her breath away and

immediately in front of her was a rare ghost orchid, with him kneeling in front of her. In the center of the orchid, she saw a tiny fleck of gold and the light reflected off the diamond nestled in there.

“Will you marry me?”

She said yes and they ate a dinner of apples and brie while talking about plans for the future—the Ranch style house off Puget Sound they dreamed of and Matt wanted a Great Pyreneese named Bo. Jessi wasn't sure about pets. And they never talked about children.

His snores vibrate in her ear and his breath covers her face like a muggy afternoon. A glimpse of light from a streetlamp highlights a photo she took at the Moroccan Rose Festival a year prior. A red rose with pink veins is tightly closed, with just two petals emerging on either side. A baby would make traveling impossible; she'd be stuck with the local flora she'd been watching her whole life. She rolls over, first on her back, forcing his heavy arms off her and then on her other side, facing away from him. He reaches out towards her to pull her close.

“It's too hot,” Jessi says, and scoots to the edge of the bed, putting distance between them.

The morning sun slips through the blinds, casting cream colored stripes over the black marble bar. Matt flips to the comics and stops on an old strip of *Calvin and Hobbes*, reprinted for posterity. Every Sunday, his mom would walk to the gas station across the street from his home and bring back a paper. Together, they would read the strip over cereal, just like this morning. He's bought a comic every Sunday since his mom's death; it keeps her memory alive. He smiles as Calvin attempts to confront the monster under his bed, waking his father in the process.

The light gets brighter and too early. Outside, pine pollen coats everything in a haze of yellow. He reaches into Jessi's purse for some Tylenol, knowing a

headache is coming on and sees the pregnancy test lying casually on top of her wallet and picks it up.

“What are you doing?” He turns and sees Jessi, hair matted to the side of her face and still barely awake.

“Just needed some medicine,” he says and stuffs the test back in her purse. “I didn't know you were late?”

“It's probably nothing.” She turns her ring, so the diamond faces her palm. “Probably just the stress from that new hybrid we've been working on.” She isn't ready to tell him yet; still wants some time to process it herself. He folds the paper up, puts it on the table and walks over to give her a kiss.

“Let's take it together!” He reaches for her hand, trying to stay calm. “And either way, you know I'm here for you.”

“That's okay, I'll take it later.” Jessi says and grabs her purse with her free hand. “I need to go for a run anyway.” But when she looks at him, she sees the softness in his eyes and the comic on the table. He says it's okay, but drops her hand and she feels guilty. “Tell you what, we'll do it when I get back.” He hugs her and kisses her on the forehead, and she changes into a pair of sweats and leaves. Just before she gets back, she stops at the corner store to use the restroom, hoping that when she takes the test, there won't be enough for a result.

At home, the bathroom is lit up in corals and creams, soft colors that seem too much like a nursery. Outside the bathroom door, she can hear Matt pacing and she can't decide if he's nervous or excited. The blinking hourglass on the display seems infinite. “What's it say” he asks, his words bouncing sharply against the door. She hopes for a different result, hopes this time it will say negative, just to give her some time to think. “Yes,” the test says, but she waits a few moments more before opening the door. Matt appears to be bouncing and reminds her of a puppy or a kid on Christmas—no

control. Without a word, she hands him the test.

"I'm going to be a father!" He jumps up and down and gives her a big hug. "We're going to be parents!" He picks her up, spins her around and she feels like she's on a roller coaster that won't stop. "We should celebrate! I'm going to be a Daddy."

She smiles, says she needs a shower first and he agrees. The water is like rain and she wishes it would wash her away, to take root in some distant place. When she comes back out, he's in the spare bedroom, muttering about crib placement and colors.

Outside of the car, the world is a blur. Jessi watches as the clover and thistle in the median mixes like an impressionist painting. On the side of the road, she sees an abandoned Sportsman RV hitched to the back of a beige Chevy truck. She remembers her father packing his clothes neatly into boxes in the back of an RV just like it after the divorce, as the only commitment he ever made crumbled. "I'm just going for a drive," he said. "I'll be back before your birthday." He wasn't, of course. Two days after her twelfth birthday, Jessi had gotten the news from a teacher that his RV had been found in the river, her father still inside.

"We need to start talking about names," Matt says, the pitch of his voice growing with each word, "I like Irene for a girl—after my grandmother, how about you? But, whatever we choose, she'll carry it with her for the rest of her life."

The rest of her life, Jessi thinks. For the rest of my life, it'll tie me to Matt. For the rest of my life. Forever. "I can't believe you're so excited. You never mentioned wanting to be a father." Jessi tenses her body, as if bracing herself to strike. "Hell, we don't even know if it will survive. The chance it's not viable is still well over 20%." Already, she thought, it's taking over my life. Matt hated to travel; his mother had lived only a few miles down the road. He'd

never been anywhere interesting in his life.

He jumps back, startled. "What's wrong, Jessi. I thought you were excited?"

She tugs at her sleeve, the holes in the lace revealing the skin underneath. "That's you. I don't know what to feel."

"It's okay, whatever happens we'll do it together. I'll always be here for you, you know that." He turns away from the road for a moment. In the distance, a river peeks over the horizon.

Always. Forever. Those words again. Could she stay with him forever?

"I just don't know if I'm in love with you."

For a moment, the only sounds in the car are the wheels grinding against the pavement. Outside, the grass in the median is high and Jessi wishes she could curl up in the grass and disappear like a snake. Matt clenches his fist against the wheel and pulls off a nearby exit.

"Do you want to be?" Jessi looks at him. His eyes are intently focused on the road, as if avoiding her. The car comes to a stop.

She tugs at her sleeve again and then pulls her ring off her finger and puts it back. "I guess."

He takes a deep breath and reaches for her hand. "Then I'll just have to make you fall in love with me again."

"I don't know, Matt. I just don't think this is going to work." She pulls her hand away. His features crumble like a ruin falling to pieces as he chokes back tears. She reaches out for the handle on the door. "I'm sorry, babe. I think maybe I just need some time to think. I'm going for a walk." His hand brushes her side as she steps out.

The humidity is stifling and Jessi walks until she no longer knows where she is. She sits by the side of the road and notices a dandelion, fluffy and white. She grasps it between her fingers, takes a deep breath and blows the seeds, not really sure what to wish for.

The Land of Smoke Screens

by Stephanie Davis

She had dreamed again that night. She was dancing for the General in sequence with her classmates. Their hearts beat as one. Neon colored fabrics swirl and twist in a blur as she completes a long succession of fouette turns. In the last turn she finds herself alone in front of the General. She is so frightened that she can not move any part of her body, and her eyes become filled with tears. The General looks down upon her and smiles, his voice booming, "Don't cry, do your best." Her heart feels strong again, and she is once again dancing with her classmates. This same dream visits her almost every night lately.

In North Korea, every morning begins the same way, for both the destitute beggar to the wealthy politician. Loud speakers installed in every home, from every corner of the Pyongyang capital, blast the national anthem at 7 a.m. without fail. He-Jin Kang stares at the gray, peeling ceiling of the bedroom she shares with her grandmother nestled within her parents' three room apartment. Her Halmoni's bed already had the sheets neatly pulled up and tucked in, and she was nowhere in sight. She hears the faint clanking of dishes from the kitchen and knows her mother must be setting the table for breakfast. Her bed creaks and moans as she sits up, as if pleading for her to stay just a little while longer. She lets out a deep sigh. Her breath shoots out in billows like train smoke, an unwelcome reminder that it is freezing outside and not much warmer indoors. She races to put on her school uniform that consisted of a starched, white shirt with a large red necktie and a navy skirt. She heads down the hall to the kitchen, where the loudspeaker now echoes chants and songs filled with words of

adoration for the Great Leader. There is no guess as to what is for breakfast. It is rice. Always sticky, white rice.

The family's common room serves as half kitchen, half living area. From the center of the living room, gold framed photos of the nation's leader Kim Jong-il and its eternal president Kim Il-sung watch over the morning's festivities. He-Jin's father already sits at the table. The deep lines on his face make him appear stern while static, but in expression, a gentle light radiates from his eyes. He momentarily pauses the continuous shoveling of his rice filled chopsticks, to gaze fondly upon the small television set stationed below the photos of the Great Leaders. The television is a gift from the state, and a source of great pride for He-Jin's father. There is something special that exists in the Kang family – He-Jin, herself. At a very early age, He-Jin was chosen to participate in an elite gymnastics team that performed dance and acrobatics routines yearly at the Mass Games, a showcase of the nation's military might and cultural pride through the usage of choreographed dance and images. Thousands of families hoped that one of their own may participate in the Games.

At the age of 15, this would be the sixth Mass Games He-Jin has participated in. A week from today, qualifications will determine if she makes the final cut for this year. She has endured unrelenting practices all year for this moment of acceptance or dismissal, the later being a fate He-Jin could not fathom. In North Korea the reputation of your family means everything. He-Jin knows her father sees her participation in the games as her family's ticket to the Great Leader's good graces, bringing prosperity to her family name. Her father sits in quiet meditation, the reverse of her mother

and grandmother's outspoken enthusiasm. But she could feel the desperation burning through her from across the table. She did not want to disappoint him.

He-Jin always takes the walk to practice with her best friend and fellow team mate, Kyung Mi. A light drizzle falls as they chat choreography, weaving through a sea of primary colored umbrellas as they make their daily trek to the gymnasium. As a small child she did not understand why she must practice so hard and hurt so much. She would run away a lot to play and be alone, until her teachers found out and called her mother. Practicing in a gymnastics group, individualism disappears and your hearts beat in unison. He-Jin learned the beauty of this, and eventually began to long for the day she would please the General with their performance. He-Jin didn't mind practicing through the pain, because everyone did it together. You learn that it is never good to be alone.

The backdrop of He-Jin's and Kyung-Mi's walk changes gradually with each step, like traveling through a color wheel – the center consists of murky shades of swamp water that gives way to outer rings of Kimsilsungia flowers dipped in fluorescent pigments. The trip begins in the living quarters of Pyongyang where He-Jin's and Kyung-Mi's families reside. It consists of rust-colored tenement buildings with brown decaying courtyards. Once you move further out into the city, views begin to change. Rust-caked buildings are replaced with ones of fresh painted, vibrant flamingo hues. Sophisticated marble monuments flood the city, flanked by massive bronze statues of the leaders. Pyongyang is called the showcase capital because it is the first thing any foreigner will see, and

anything shown but polished excellence brings shame to the Great Leader. The pristine buildings of the central Pyongyang capital surround the decaying tenements in a protective embrace like a strong big brother, blocking out any outsider that would pick on its feeble sibling.

Another sight to note is the massive posters that litter the capital. They pass one depicting a drawing of a US soldier with a troll like appearance being crushed under his own fighter jet by the massive hands of the North Korean people. Her Halmoni often told in a very serious tone of the air raids during the war, and how "The American Empire was jealous of the resilience of our people and didn't want us to have a peaceful country, so they came with their air-crafts and dropped fire and toxin filled insects upon the helpless villagers, killing everyone in sight and poisoning those who remained. No human would commit such acts. These were monsters, He-Jin, you must remember this always."

They arrive at that day's practice only to be told that they would not be joining their classmates. Instead, they are informed by a man dressed in uniform that they have a duty and must follow him. He-Jin's heart skips a beat. All members of the working class are selected to carry out specific tasks to aide the government, once you are of proper age. Both He-Jin and Kyung-Mi have now reached that age, and were recently selected to be part of the government's foreign relations division, a cause of much concern among their parents. Any foreigner that enters the country is carefully guided through their stay, to ensure their comfort—but also to allow for careful watching. No foreigner should be trusted, as you can never be sure of their motivations. Members are

specially employed for various tasks, whether that means acting as a tour guide, or serving food. An average citizen is never allowed to interact with a foreigner. It has been ten months since Kyung-Mi and she have completed their training, without a foreigner in sight. For a while the whole concept of a foreigner seemed like a fable. "What do you think they will be like? Where do you think they will be from? It will be so hard to be nice if they are so ugly!" Kyung-Mi babbles as they walk behind the man in uniform. Her questions fall on deaf ears as He-Jin walks in silence. She pictures the green, troll-like creature from the posters in the city and a long shiver crawls up her spine.

They arrive at the large banquet hall of Pyongyang and the first task given is to change out of their school uniform into a traditional Korean Hanbok, dyed a soft green like the inside of a kiwi fruit. Other girls tapped for the same job were already getting dressed in the small room. As He-Jin was tightening the pink ribbon sash attached to her robe, a middle aged woman with the same kiwi green robe taps her shoulder and insists she follow her. She takes her to a station in front of the entrance to the banquet hall. She informs her that the guest is an American and that she should speak English. Her dark, rigid eyes glare at He-Jin. "You are to greet our guest and guide him to his table, where servers will take over for his meal. You are then to return to this post and remain til the end of the meal. Do you understand?" He-Jin nods vigorously as the woman turns to leave.

He-Jin's throat closes off and her body breaks into a cold sweat as she hears a crowd of voices moving towards her station at the banquet entrance. Her mind races viciously in disjointed thoughts as she tries helplessly to grasp what it was she had learned during training. She squeezes her eyes shut

momentarily when she senses movement directly behind her. Her eyes open to see a white man surrounded by officers pass in front of her. He has shoulder length wheat colored hair pushed behind his ears and is wearing a navy suit jacket with blue jeans. Is this the foreigner? Everyone turns to look at her, and the stranger's piercing blue eyes meet her gaze. Her mind turns into full panic mode, causing He-Jin to react in the only way she knows how— *to perform*. Her mouth stretches and curls into an animated smile and her voice cheers,

"Welcome sir, please this way!" She waves her arms in exaggerated motions towards the designated table as they walk. The banquet hall has room to seat a thousand to eat, but this foreigner is the only customer among a sea of lonely staged tables. Once they reach the table a bustle of activity ensues as other kiwi clad girls flood the table, including Kyung-Mi. They all break out in roar of insatiable giggles as the seated officers flirt with them. As He-Jin turns to return to her post, she takes one look back to meet Kyung-Mi's nervous eyes.

He-Jin had never seen so much food on display in her life. Tray after tray of food placed on ornate gold serving plates parade from the kitchen. She had a direct view of the foreigner as delicacy after delicacy is placed in front of him. His lips do not move much in conversation. He mostly stares and picks sparingly at his plate, chewing his bites slowly. He must have felt He-Jin's eyes watching, as he suddenly looks up from his plate in her direction. His mouth forms a smile and he squints his sapphire eyes into a glowing greeting. He-Jin's eyes quickly dart to the floor. The rest of the meal He-Jin watches the floor, wondering why the stranger is neither ugly nor green.

After the meal, He-Jin, Kyung-Mi, and a few other girls are asked to

accompany the officers and the foreigner to a karaoke bar. The bar they are taken to is a state sanctioned karaoke bar, reserved for foreigners and high ranking officials. A gaudy display of fake flowers and colored string lights cover the walls. A few couches surround a small television already set up to play, and further back in the room a mini arcade holds a pool and ping pong table. In the legion of kiwi robes vying for a seat, a mortified He-Jin is pushed beside the foreigner.

A spicy, aromatic scent blended with a whisper of alcohol permeates from the foreigner, a stark contrast to the putrid smell of sweat He-Jin recognizes from most men. Songs filled with adoration for the Great Leader echo off the walls as they each take their turns. The foreigner gets up and moves in front of the television. "Do you have any English songs to sing?" the foreigner asks after reviewing the large catalog of Korean and Chinese songs. He is handed a small laminated booklet, and he takes the next few seconds to flip carefully through. The foreigner suddenly breaks into a hearty laughter that causes the whole room to hold their breathe and one girl to jump in her seat. "Sex Pistols, eh? Unbelievable, I would have never..." The foreigner pauses to scratch his head, rustling his heap of wheat colored hair into disarray. "Great, I'll sing that then," he declares, handing the laminated booklet back to a girl. No one knew what he was talking about, but after a moment of digging one of the officers found the requested song on the machine.

A piercing rumble of static noise erupts from the speakers. It sounds like bombs dropping to He-Jin. The foreigner begins to nod his head violently back and forth in perfect sequence to the loud crashes coming from the speaker. When the first line of lyrics appear on the screen, the

foreigner begins to wail loudly, "I AM AN ANTI-CHRIST.....I AM AN ANARCHIST!" He-Jin does not know why he is shouting or thrashing about in such strange animalistic motions. She wishes to look away but the wobble of guitar waves ringing around her have her hypnotized. The foreigner spits into the mic in enraged riffs, and between screams he flashes a satisfied smile to the audience. Unsure of what to do, a few girls begin to giggle shyly and clap their hands in rhythm to the noise. The officers exchange anxious glances and a few trade soft whispers that He-Jin could not make out over the loud noise engulfing the room. Half-way through the song an officer begins to clap loudly and shout praises at the foreigner while another politely but firmly steals the mic from him. "You guys don't like punk rock?" The foreigner scoffs. Karaoke is over after that.

She is told Americans like pool, so she isn't surprised when the foreigner suggests a game. Pool carries on far more smoothly than karaoke, and everyone seems to be genuinely enjoying themselves, with even the officers loosening up a bit to crack a few laughs. On one of He-Jin's turns she continues to poke the stick into the velvet of the table rather than hitting the cue ball. "Let me show you," the American says while moving to stretch around her, his arms encapsulating her. He places He-Jin's arms in the proper stance and directs them in the correct motion of a shot. She feels the American's large hand circle on top of hers. He pushes a tiny something into her hand. "See, you'll be a pro in no time!" He releases his grip around her and returns to stand near the officers. She wants to cry in fear. But she remains calm and holds her hand towards her chest. Smiling coyly, she allows whatever it is to quietly slip inside the top portion of her Hanbok. Their visit comes to an end shortly

thereafter. The wheat haired, water-color eyed American bows graciously to the girls of the room before disappearing behind the officers through the glass door of the karaoke bar into the night. He-Jin watches him walk away, until even the wheat of his hair is swallowed into darkness.

On the walk home Kyung-Mi gushes over the foreigner. "How bizarre!" Kyung-Mi laughs tilting her head back. He-Jin sucks in deep breaths of the crisp night air. She doesn't say anything the whole walk; she is too occupied with her own thoughts to care what Kyung-Mi thinks. She wonders why the American was staying in Pyongyang, if he was perhaps like the many other foreigners who came to see the Mass Games. She thinks about the American's sapphire blue eyes, gazing at her from the stadium seats.

Back at home, He-Jin walks inside to questioning faces and sighs of relief. Her mother interrogates, "How was he? Was he rude?" He-Jin shrugs. "He was bizarre, of course." He-Jin asks to retire to bed early. Her family all offer their praise and approval, "Yes, the day must have been draining!" She slowly closes her bedroom door and rests her body against it, allowing the cold wood to relieve her sweaty back. She takes a deep sweeping breath and begins stripping off her Hanbok. She unties the front so fast and clumsily that the object within flings to the floor with a tiny dud. She lets out a small gasp as she watches the small foiled object tumble to the floor, catching the light in a soft shimmer as it spirals. She cautiously picks it up to discover it is a tiny piece of chocolate, wrapped in brightly shining foil the same color as the American's eyes, with a red flower printed on top. She unwraps the candy and slips the chocolate into her mouth. She plops to the ground and sits there, allowing the candy to melt slowly in her

mouth. She can't remember the last time she had chocolate.

That night she had a different dream. One with rhythmic pulses of punk rock, morphed with visions of Americans with wheat colored hair.

Third Place Short Fiction

The Reluctant Warrior

by Patrick Hughes

"What did I ever do to deserve this?"

I asked myself. Leaning against the curved aluminum side of a Quonset hut I took my helmet off and stared up at the stars in the clear California sky. The cool desert breeze blew gently against my face as if to provide me with some minor respite from my situation. Looking away from the stars as I pondered my question, my gaze fell to the ground at my feet.

The problem was that I knew exactly how I got here. In fact, so many of us got here the same way, we've made it into some kind of joke. 'How did we get here? It's all in our initials... USMC. They say it stands for 'U Signed the Motherfuckin' Contract.' And yeah, two years ago, in a youthful rush to please my parents, I did.

That was a different time. I'd just finished four years of high school in exactly the way my parents expected me to: near the top of my class. I wanted to take a break, but my father would hear none of it. He said that it was either college, trade school, or the military.

I didn't like any of those choices. I just wanted to relax for maybe a year, then find what I wanted to do with my life; but how do you tell that to a self made Vietnamese businessman who came to the United States with nothing? It's simple; you don't. And after far too little consideration, I told my father that I was going to join the army.

"Army? That for people who can't be Marines. You should be Marine," he said. I had my doubts, but my feelings didn't seem to matter much in this equation. I understand that he only wanted me to be the best at whatever I did, but at seventeen I just wanted to take some time off. Nevertheless, I went to the recruiter the next week and signed on as a motor transport specialist

- a fancy name for a mechanic.

It was a safe job, far from the front lines, with plenty of civilian applications once I got out. At least that's what I thought before the Iraq War. A year after the invasion the civilian transport contractors realized that war was dangerous and they wanted no part of it. That's when the call went out throughout the Corps for truck drivers. My unit, 5/14, with its large number of underutilized troops, was near the top of the list.

By May, 2004, we were given the Warning Order and sent to the desert for a quick week long truck driving class, after which we'd be sent to other units for deployment. We were separated into three platoons at the end of the first day. The first two were the combat platoons who were to deploy in three months. The third was a reserve for the injured, untrained, additional, and otherwise non-deployable Marines were sent. Third Platoon was currently my home. It was a place of terrible anxiety, as we each wondered if we were going to be chosen to fill out one of the other platoons or be allowed to return safely home. I was--

"Hey Chu?" a voice called out in the dark, shaking me out of my thoughts. "Is that you Chu?"

"Huh? Halt, who goes there?" I challenged the figure walking towards me in the darkness.

"It's just me, Espino." a familiar voice replied, "I'm here to relieve you. Head on back to the rack. You've still got three hours until reveille."

"Ok, see you in formation," I said to him, handing off my radio handset and reflector vest. My boots crunched on the mix of rock and sand as I walked back to the Quonset hut that had been my world for these past two weeks. Entering the windowless dark, I

counted the edges of the cots until I got to seven. My rack, the place I called home.

As I lay there, I envied Espino. He was going home. Four days earlier his seven ton truck was rear ended by another during driver's training. I saw the whole thing, being two trucks back from the accident in the convoy. Thankfully, no one appeared to be seriously hurt, but the Corpsmen said that there was a risk that Espino's spine had been injured and that for the next six weeks he was non-deployable.

There were other lucky ones like Espino and Lance Corporal Digert sleeping soundly in the rack to my left. Somehow, in its infinite wisdom, the Marine Corps forgot to assign him a specialty after boot camp, and until they did, he wasn't going anywhere. I wrapped myself in thoughts of envy and fear and somehow drifted off to sleep.

When the brilliant desert sun crept out to banish the night a few hours later, it found me standing unmoving alongside the other members of Third Platoon as we stood for morning formation. I wondered if we all dreaded this. Every day it was the same. The First Sergeant would come out with a new list of names to bolster the two combat platoons. Whenever they were short - and they always were - he would call out names from the Third platoon, my platoon, to make up the difference.

So there we stood in perfect formation awaiting his word on our fate. Some, like Digert and Espino, stood with a relaxed confidence that came from knowing they were non-deployable. Others, like me, stood trembling with the fear that our name would be called.

"Third Platoon, Report!" the First Sergeant barked.

"Third Platoon all present and accounted for sir!" the Corporal yelled back.

Then the anxiety would build as he shouted names like a roll call of the damned.

"Lee, Harper, Holt, Salinez report to first platoon following formation." the First Sergeant ordered, "Ableson, Baker, Bradford, Chu -"

I never heard anything after my name. A cold chill swept through my body as I tried to comprehend what had just happened. I don't know how long we stood there before Private First Class Baker brought me back to reality with a pat on the back, "I guess we're going out to the Sandbox together, huh?"

I nodded and said something warlike that I didn't really feel. My boots felt heavy as I walked into the Third Platoon hut for the last time. Anxiety rose within me as I packed my gear one piece at a time into my oversized green canvas sea bag.

I tried to keep up a brave front and act like a Marine was supposed to act, but it was no use; I had to talk to someone or I was going to lose it, but who? All my other friends had already been assigned to one or the other of the combat platoons. At a loss, I decided to talk to the Corporal. He was an unusual individual, about a decade older than he should have been for his rank. That wasn't his fault; he just found the Corps later in life than I did. He was into all kinds of military history and stuff. If some army used something somewhere, he knew about it. Now I had to see if he knew as much about people as he did about history. He seemed friendly enough, but now burdened with a command above his ability - the constant shuffling of personnel brought on by the deployment orders made him hold the billet of Platoon Sergeant - I wondered if he'd have time for me.

I checked to make sure the last of my gear was secured, and then walked down the sandy aisle separating the perfectly even rows of cots. Several of the others

whose names were chosen were also busy packing their gear, oblivious to everything else, lost in their own private thoughts. Others, lucky enough not to have been chosen by that terrible lottery, laughed and chatted amongst themselves. I approached the Corporal, who was chatting with Espino while pouring over a disorganized clipboard.

"Hey, uh, Corporal, can I talk with you for a minute?"

He looked up from the chaos in his hands.

"What is it, Chu?" he said quietly, knowing that my name had been called earlier.

"I'd need to talk with you for a moment, if you can." I glanced around at the several faces whose attention I had garnered, "In private, outside."

"Yeah, of course," he said handing off his clipboard.

I followed him into the barren world washed by the unrelenting desert sun. A pair of helicopters flew by on their way towards the distant mountains. The thumping of their heavy rotors matched that of my heart as we slowly walked through the dry sand.

"They're sending you to second platoon from what I heard, is that right?" he began.

"Yes, Corporal."

"From what I heard, they're supposed to be heading out to Al Qaim out on the border with Syria. There's not a lot of action out there."

"I didn't know that, Corporal."

He turned to me and stopped. I guess he could see the fear in my eyes. The Corporal pointed towards a pallet of crates behind one of the Quonset huts: "Have a seat, Chu. Talk to me."

I halfheartedly dusted off one of the crates before doing as he asked, my cover pulled low over my head as I faced the ground.

"I, I, I'm afraid, Corporal. I know I'm a Marine, and I'm proud to be one,

but I don't want to go war. I don't know if I'm ready."

He sat down beside me. "We're all afraid, Chu. Marine or not, we're all afraid. Anyone who says they aren't is lying out their ass, even Sergeant Morris. You know, all those Marine heroes – Chesty Puller, Dan Daley and the rest, well they were just as scared as you are now; they just overcame their fear when the time came. Fear is just part of being human. There's no shame in that."

"But, Corporal, I'm only nineteen. I haven't even had a girlfriend."

"You want to know something; I didn't either at your age. There will be plenty of time for that when you get back."

"If I get back."

"Well, I'm not going to lie to you. It's war and in war people die, but they also die here at home, in car accidents, robberies, fires. Life has no guarantees. You could get hit by a bus tomorrow even before you deploy. It's not when you die that matters, it's what you do with your life while you're here, and besides, it's not written anywhere that you're going to get killed just because you deploy."

"Can I speak freely, Corporal?" I asked.

"Sure, what's on your mind."

"That sounds all well and good from someone who's not going overseas."

He nodded, "I was wondering when you'd bring that up, but yeah, you're right. I can say whatever I want; for now, I'm not going. Tomorrow, next week, next month that can change. When they get to my name, I'll go. I'll leave my life behind for a time and go do what I signed up to do."

"And you'll probably be scared."

"Hell yeah I'll be scared. Who in their right mind wants to leave their family and go get shot at? I'll be scared now, I'll be scared when I get there, and I'll be

scared when the rounds start flying down range. I'll just put my faith in the fact that my fellow Marines will do their job and keep my ass alive, while I do the same for them. Remember, you're not alone, Chu. You're not alone out there."

I thought about what he said for a moment. He was right. No matter why I joined the Corps, I was one of them now. I wasn't going to war alone. I was going with a platoon of my friends, highly trained, well armed, dangerous friends who were counting on me to stand by their side as an equal when things went south.

"I think I understand, Corporal." I said, even though it would probably take much longer for me to truly grasp the significance of our conversation.

"We're all here for each other. That's who you fight for when the rounds start flying. Not mom, dad, apple pie, or even some shiny medal. You're fighting for the guy to your left and the guy to your right, and they're doing the same for you."

I felt a fierce pride welling up within me, a pride that helped ease, but not eliminate my fears. I hoped it would last. Jumping off the crate I looked over at the Corporal, "Thank you for your time, Corporal. You'll make a good platoon sergeant one day."

He shook his head and smiled, "One can hope."

"If you don't mind, I have to finish packing my gear and report to Second Platoon."

"I understand, just let me know where you end up so I can write, OK?"

I nodded and began the sandy trek to my gear. Walking past the other members of my former platoon, I took one long last look back across the racks at what used to be my home. With a full sea bag in one hand, I hefted my pack onto one shoulder and made my way to the second platoon barracks.

I paused at the threshold,

recounting the Corporal's words. He was right. This was my time to show what kind of person I really was, to show that I could be counted on when the chips were down. Stepping into the barracks I made my way through the crowd of busy Marines towards their leader.

"Lance Corporal Chu reporting, Staff Sergeant Radke," I said in a steady voice.

He reached out for my hand. Letting my sea bag fall to the ground I shook it. "Proud to be here, Staff Sergeant."

"Well, go find a rack, secure your gear, and get comfortable. It's going to get busy real quick like."

The next day was my last day at the 'stumps. That morning we were to board buses to integrate with our parent platoons. For me it was just a short drive across the base to meet the members of 1/7 'Suicide Charlie.' For the others it would be a trip to the airport, then either Camp Pendleton for members of First Platoon, or home for those lucky bastards in Third. As I boarded the bus, I looked out its dirty window at the members of Third Platoon. There was Espino, Digert, and of course, the Corporal barking out orders to all those who were lucky enough to miss this call. I no longer envied them; they had a different course to take and were a part of a different story. As for mine, I hoped it would have a happy ending.

First Place Poetry

Shower

by Helen Companion

Wait until it rains to wash your hair.
Before you hear the first drops,
lie on a couch in a white, silk nightgown
your back propped against its firm arm.
Flip the pages of an Economics textbook,
highlighting passages:
pareto efficiency in pink,
yield curve in yellow,
gini coefficient in green.
Spill the words off your tongue;
read over the sentences several times,
make sure they settle on the tip
of your tongue and roll back,
tumbling, clumsy like a two year old doing somersaults.
Soon, you will hear the rain slide onto the roof.
Slip off the couch;
saunter through the kitchen,
ease open the screen door.
Stand there and absorb the humidity for a moment,
but don't let yourself get wet yet.
Slide off your Birkenstocks,
jump off the porch; don't use the steps.
Let your feet soak into the soft clay.
Don't let the way the mud covers
your feet remind you of the dishes to be done inside.
Open your face to the sky.
You are wet.
Your nightgown sticks to your bare skin.
The dirt slides out of your hair.
Stand there for a moment.
Run your fingers through the tangles.
Don't worry about getting them out.
It will separate into bunches later,
and bunches are easier to work with.
Take your nightgown off.
Toss it in the mud; you won't need it
until it has dried and shriveled like a purple prune.
Press the water into your skin;
feel it soak into you.
Absorb it, absorb it,
like a bathing suit absorbs sand on the beach.
Don't think about anything else,

Don't think of dinner, or the bills in the mail.
Those things will come.
Just let the water run off of you.
Let it run off you, into the dirt,
let it run where it forms clumps at your feet
and when you go back inside,
don't wash those clumps off.

Second Place Poetry

On the Anniversary of My Father's Death

by Helen Companion

The red oak in my backyard is cracked
from lightning. Kudzu twists
between the split trunk, clinging
to charred edges. It's evening and the sun
casts fire over the lake. From my porch,
the leaves and purple flowers look like gauze
obscuring the view of the bloody water.

It's been a year now and I still hear your voice
in the pollen that forms a blanket over my car,
in the rain bouncing on the tin roof,
in the cracked walnuts on my driveway.

Grass and rocks are a rough carpet
as I walk to the lake, the cool
air wrapped around me like a sleeve.
I sit on our dock, my legs like two small trout
in the water. In the sand below, I see a fish
washed on shore and a water-lily, petals stretched
for something it can't reach.

Third Place Poetry

Rigid Ponytails, Sleek Tires

by Alejandra Munoz

She would gently hold your hair up,
wrap it around and around,
and tie it all
together.

Only for you
to reach your hands up
a mere seconds later
and tear it all down.

He would warn you
about the holes on the road,
how they would ruin
your truck's tires.

You purposefully ran
over the potholes,
to hear the clickety-clack
of treading on pavement.

She has since stopped
licking her fingers
to set your stray hairs
straight.

He has since stopped
warning you
against any crevice that appears
concave.

But you remember how
to create the perfect ponytail
and you remember where
the tires fall into the road.

No, the apple did not fall
far from the tree.