



Farmington Community Library

Teen Creative Writing Competition

2024



Friends



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Foreword

The Farmington Community Library created the Teen Creative Writing Competition in 1999 at the urging of Ray Okonski and our Young Adult Advisory Board. They felt that we needed to acknowledge the output of creative endeavors, as well as the reading, studying, and practice that the Library has traditionally encouraged. This year's competition has brought forth an incredible array of artistic talent from the young people in our community. With the help of our judges, we have chosen the best of the many wonderful submissions received. Because the nature of a competition involves a few winners from among many participants, we could not acknowledge all the beautiful writing that it was our pleasure to read. It is our hope that these people, and the people whose works you will soon read, will continue to brighten the world with their creative fire. It has been an honor to read every one.

Rebecca Brown, Teen Services Librarian

Farmington Community Library wishes to thank the following:

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Our deepest gratitude goes to Suzanne Sloat and Ray Okonski, who have sponsored and supported the Teen Creative Writing Competition since its beginning in 1999.

Criteria for Judging

Judges reviewed entries based on the following criteria:

- Originality
- Grammatical correctness and spelling
- Organization
- Word choice
- Imagery

Please Note

The creative writing in this brochure represents the views and opinions of the original authors and not of the Farmington Community Library.

Poetry

Ages 11-14

Poetry, 11-14 – First Place

O Lovers

by Jonathan Fang

They sing of lovers dolent, muses cry laments
Of flaming, gracious love, of cruel, unrighteous woe.
O Honest Muse above, unfold thy grand events!
Amongst the souls awaiting birth, a pair aglow:
By love, the souls are bound, a pact that they must heed.
Hope love shall not corrupt, for now to Earth they go.
Tonight, an infant born, without his mother's feed,
For she had long been plagued with blights that sprung from Hell.
His father gave his name, Eugene, thus sowed a seed
Of nights bereft of purpose, thirsts that never quell.
As since this dawn and years beyond, our sweet Eugene
May rise to heights supreme, yet Dole and Fates foretell:
O Sisters, fates divine, together we convene,
For I, Aurore, foresee O Lover's heart in thrall:
Dictated 'fore their births, he holds a soulbound queen.
The king, if gone astray from fated love, shall fall,
Though he shall higher rise without his promised queen;
Observe eternal dole, beyond one to forestall.
But hold their destined word, tonight is most serene;
The morrow waits with journeys, paths through hellish blaze.
Away from Fate for now, so let him rest unseen.
Yet calm shall meet its end; his father's sight decays.
The fading father cries: "Eugene, my son, come forth!
My eyes, they wish to see you 'fore their dying days.
My son, mature and proud; with honor, you're thenceforth
Thy house's master, let thy father take his rest!"
The father falls, morose and blind, as he gives forth
His final order: "Rise, Eugene, for you are bless'd
With sight beyond my own! You see, you rise, you fly!"
Eugene was but a boy, yet all his youth was wrest
By callous hands of Fate, a grasp which none defy.
So since this dawn and years beyond, Eugene forsakes
His youth; a man without his inner boy anigh.
In dead of night, in angst and gloom, Eugene awakes
Alone with only dolent thoughts and sleepless murk;
And oft as he travails in farm, in rests and breaks,
He sees the children playing, running 'round berserk.
Should he lament about the boy who grew too fast,
Or revel in the man who rose from dearth through work?
Eugene observes the waning sun and clouds amassed,
In hopes of seeking answers, truths for him to find;

And lo, a beam of sun escapes the clouds so vast,
And falls upon a maiden, gorgeous and refined.
He grasps his chance and meets her, they converse in joy;
And lo, the answers found: their hearts as one, aligned.
The maiden—named Christine—is lively, bold and coy.
A fire in her eyes, a youthful soul at heart,
She lives how she would feast; she feasts what she'd enjoy.
Though she appears naive, she's noticed from the start:
Eugene's aloof demeanor, feigning strength within.
Christine's compassion turns to love beyond her heart.
From here, their love shall grow, they love devoid of sin,
Yet Fate, in deepest dream, appears before Eugene;
She bears her destined word, so hear her dole begin:
"O Lover, Sir Eugene, together we convene,
For I, Aurore, shall speak of thy mistaken bride:
Dictated 'fore thy birth, thou hast a soulbound queen,
But this Christine is not the one, the fates decide.
So ask thy heart and find thy soul, a quest for love,
The truest love for thee; and cast that witch aside,
For she hath led thy love astray from Fate above.
So hark to my command, or lead a life of doom!"
Eugene replies: "Let Fate replace my human love?
'Tis humbly I decline; I wish my love to bloom."
Upon his statement, Fate declares: "To doubt my might,
To cede thy joy for strife; prepare thy father's tomb!"
Eugene awakes to dread, his father deathly white.
The father unto him: "In peace, my life shall wane.
For all these years of night, I now at last see light!"
As news were heard by others, many mourned in pain,
But kind Christine, who went to soothe Eugene, descries
Eugene engaged in work, travailing in the rain,
For he attempts to mend his ego's failing guise;
He says through tears unshed: "Christine, I'm strong, believe!
I'm not a child, not a knave who wails and cries."
"You're not a child, yes, but children know to grieve,"
Says she to him; "So why have strength when they have truth?
My dear Eugene, allow yourself to slow and breathe."
Eugene, in anguish, drops the hidden tears of youth.
In sorrow, languid sleep comes over in a swoon,
And in this sleep does Fate appear again with sooth:
"O Lover, Sir Eugene, thy love I shall impugn,
For I, Aurore, shall show to thee thy truest bride!"
A beauteous girl appears: 'tis Fate's predestined boon.
Eugene proclaims: "O Fate, you asked I search inside.
My soul is bound to dole; my faithful heart is not.
So I shall love Christine; 'tis in my heart she'll bide."

Then unto him says Fate: "I sense my work's for naught.
Eugene hath risen high; you see, you rise, you fly!
So thou shalt love Christine, or else thy love shall rot!"
The lovers wake to dawn, the sun below the sky.
From golden clouds to sleeping birds, the world is still;
Then all at once, the world awakens, truths anigh.
Eugene observes these truths, and what these truths fulfill.
Thus since this dawn and years beyond, Eugene shall stay
In love, with truths, at peace, as he proclaims he will:
"In time, the rising sun shall fall, our lives away,
But 'fore it does, let's sit, and see this happy day."

Poetry, 11-14 – Second Place

Progress

By Jenna Kihn

I live in a land called Progress
“The land of opportunity,” they call us
We like to play a game of make-believe;
Say things that we don’t perceive
That everyone is equal; treated the same
But it doesn’t seem so funny when we learn it’s not a game
“Maybe there’s no discrimination—it’s just what I believe”
No, that’s just what I tell myself, to grant myself reprieve
From all the harsh truths I cannot hear
And all the harsh truths I’ve come to fear

I don’t like knowing that any person can be corrupt,
But it’s true, and, in a shower down my face, my eyes erupt
When I think about it all, till I say, “That’s enough.”
Life can be harsh, so we must be tough

I live in a land called Progress—you could say it’s nice
Discrimination’s common; your apartment could have mice
School is kinda hard out here, temps are rising every year
Several creature species are starting to disappear

I don’t like going to school and hearing friends tease each other
For liking certain people, for being certain colors
And I know they say it light-hearted but some people do not
Knowing this hurts me and turns all my guts to rot

I live in a land called Progress, where they say everyone is free
But irony is plentiful in the land between these seas
I live in a land called Progress, dear
Equality isn’t too far from here
Maybe I will go there someday
If you see me there, say “hey!”

And it’s funny to think that we’ve come such a long way
From how we treated each other, way back in the day
A lot of progress has been made
So that we can point to a stranger and say
“This person is human, just like me;
This person is human, can’t you see?”
But notice I said can, not that we do
That I didn’t say equality, even though progress is very true

I live in a land called Progress
I'm telling you, don't try to wrong us
We're working very hard, you see
Trying to make a better place to be
For each other and ourselves;
From starfish to gazelles
From LGBT and beyond
To Q and I and A; everyone belongs
Yet saving the world is often postponed
To a day after tomorrow

I wonder when "home" will become a word everyone can use
I wonder if all pain will stop—and all kinds of abuse
I like to try to calm my mind when it's time to go to bed
But sometimes I just lay awake, and dream up these lines instead

Because that's the thing about Progress
There's so many things here that surround us
Not all of them are good, of course
But things here could be so much worse
And the nice thing is that, with every new "today"
We can make things better—we don't have to shy away

Poetry, 11-14 – Third Place

The Sky and the Sea

By Alveera Poptani

The sky...
Blanketing the world
In endless colors and swirls
Exhibiting peace in every shift

The sea...
Wild and Untamed
Its hunger like a beast unchained
The world cowers in fear,
The waves crashing in a thunderous cheer

Under the sun's gaze
They're split by miles and miles

Under the sun's blazing gaze,
Miles apart in endless ways,

But as dusk descends,
The moon ascends,

The two intertwine
A dance of colors, wild and free
And Twilight whispers its arrival
As azure waves embrace the shore,
And Twilight whispers evermore

Above, the vast expanse beckons the sea
Clouds glide through like soft whispers and pleas
The moon, a calling light in the sky,
The waves pull towards it's gentle cry
Yearning to embrace it with relentless love and life

From dusk to dawn, a timeless dance
Each wave a sigh, Each breeze a chance,
The symphony of sky and sea
Bound in love eternally,

Yet when dawn breaks,
they're torn apart,

The sky weeps, longing in its heart,
Glimpsing their beloved, they remain bound,
Unable to embrace, though their love is profound.

But through it all, their bond holds fast
An eternal dance that's meant to last
So gaze upon this wondrous sight,
Where sky and sea unite in light,
In every wave and cloud above,
There lies a tale of endless love

Poetry, 11-14 – Honorable Mention

Why do you hate us

by Maya Coronado

The politicians in their perfect white offices
With their devout black lies
Our 46 male presidents
Boasting a diversity rate of 2.174%
The 5 men in the Supreme Court
4 Catholic, 1 Protestant
Any man in power
What do they know about us?
What do they know about women?
Have they been through the struggles that we have?
They've heard about it, watched it on TV
But never seen it with their heart
Only with their clouded vision
For 49 years we had this right
The right to choose what happened to our bodies
This country was in no way perfect
But we had the peace of mind that we could safely and legally get an abortion
How could they strip us of our liberty?
They take and take from us
To them we are the Earth
Can't they see that everything comes from us?
But they're the oil rigs
They're the factories pumping out tonnes of carbon
They're the pipelines running through our lakes and rivers
They have a religious obligation to rob us of everything we hold important
How can they destroy the givers of life?
With a woman's existence being insignificant compared to the cells forming inside of her
The cells that her body created
And I have to look the United States in the eyes and see his hate glare back at me
Simply because I have this organ that dictates everything in my life
And Brett Kavanaugh and Donald Trump sit in their high chairs, surveying the land
But I'm too small for their sight
Is half a nation invisible to them?
We don't choose to be born like this
Little girls, teenagers and adults don't choose to experience the violence of rape
And nobody should have to choose between giving a child a life of financial insecurity
Or of being tossed throughout the foster system for 18 years
So I forever wonder
Why do you hate us?

Fiction

Ages 11-14

Fiction, 11-14 – First Place

Mermaid's Grace

by SaanviSri Karnakanti

Once upon a time in a small coastal town, there lived a young fisherman named Kellan. Kellan was known for his extraordinary skills in catching the biggest and most elusive fish in the sea. His passion for the ocean and its mysteries was unmatched, and he spent every day out on his boat, the "Mermaid's Grace," searching for the next big catch.

One foggy morning, as Kellan set out to sea, he noticed something shimmering in the distance. As he approached, he realized it was a beautiful mermaid tangled in a fishing net, struggling to break free. Without a second thought, Kellan dove into the water and freed the mermaid from the net.

Grateful for his help, the mermaid, named Liriel, offered Kellan a magical pearl as a token of her appreciation. She explained that the pearl held the power to grant one wish. Overwhelmed by her generosity, Kellan accepted the pearl and returned to shore, still in disbelief at what had transpired.

That night, Kellan sat by the shore, gazing at the pearl in his hand. He thought long and hard about what he truly desired. Despite the allure of riches and fame, Kellan knew exactly what he wanted. With a determined heart, he made his wish: for the ocean to be free of pollution and for its creatures to thrive once more.

The next morning, Kellan woke up to a sight beyond his wildest dreams. The sea was clearer than ever, teeming with life and vibrant colors. The news of this miraculous transformation spread far and wide, and soon, people from all over came to witness the wondrous change.

Kellan's selfless wish had touched the hearts of many, inspiring them to take better care of the ocean. His act of kindness had sparked a movement, and the once polluted shores were now clean and filled with life.

As for Liriel, she watched over Kellan from the depths of the sea, grateful for his pure heart and the positive change he had brought about. From that day on, the townspeople spoke of Kellan and the mermaid who had granted him a wish, reminding each other of the power of compassion and the magic that lies within the depths of the ocean.

And so, the legend of Kellan and the mermaid's pearl lived on, a testament to the extraordinary power of a single wish and the boundless potential for kindness to change the world.

Fiction, 11-14 – Second Place

I...Am...Empty

by James Potter

October 5th, 1973. A cool breeze stirs my hair. Leaves crunch under my feet. The cold of fall sets into my skin. I walk a familiar path, though I have never traveled it on this date before. My first journey was on October 6th of last year.

Normally, this path would be green and lush, with squishy mud and mossy green branches. Normally, sunshine would filter through the trees to create a dappled, glowing path. After nearly a year of journeying, the path is well trodden. But now, dead leaves cover my path. Sparsely covered trees crowd close. Their bare wood is both ominous and beautiful at the same time. Grass is seldom, and my footsteps create all the sounds here.

It is truly a bleak morning.

Regardless, the pen and notebook tucked in the crook of my arm give me some comfort. They are my world. Sometimes, I just want to scream everything out. But my vocal chords just don't work that way. I would sound like a squirrel. A really squeaky squirrel. A really squeaky squirrel who really, really needed an inhaler.

But, alas, writing is all I have. I must make this journey to the tree every day, sit, and press my pen into the paper. And it is nice. I walk alone. But, I'm never truly alone. They are always with me. I glance around, but none are in sight. They will be there eventually, I can feel it.

I gaze up at the sky while walking. I suppose I shouldn't, but I do. It is plain, gray and cloudless. I focus my full attention on that color. I let it soak into me like a page in my notebook soaking in freshly scrawled ink from my frantically scratching pen.

And then there is no ground beneath my boots, only water. I sink, twisting, turning, gurgling. Cold bites my skin. Icy blue, misty water chokes me. Dust flies as my body hits the ground, rocks poking into my back. Flailing does nothing. My lungs burn and burn as time slows. The light fades.

*

October 5th, 1973. I stare up at the sky. I know I shouldn't but I do. I let out a deep sigh. This is the life.

A vision crashes into my head. Me, falling into the stream; me, sinking; me, drowning. I stop in my tracks and glance down. Sure enough, the deep-running river opens up before me. A narrow path of stepping stones bridges the gap. I stand, shocked, for just a second. Of course! It hits me. This is just what they would do!

I glance behind me, looking for one of them, the source of the vision. A shadowy figure flickers at the edge of my vision, just... dark and empty. It is familiar, but it is unlike any of them that

I had ever summoned into the material world. This one looks like me.

I shudder, and jump over the jagged rocks. How could one of them appear if they weren't summoned by me? Making the final few leaps, I reach the far bank of the river, rocks rolling underneath me.

My eyes dart around, focused on the trees around me. I need to make sure that I could spot this stranger appearing before it gets to me. My biggest threat now is the mysterious figure. Not anything else, not even-

My feet teeter over the edge of a long cliff, a gorge with a fifty foot drop. I am suddenly falling through the air. It rushes into my face, a note to my impending doom. The rocks below me come closer and closer. No vision to save me now.

The landing seems anything but soft, everything is blurry, red and gray streaks. And now only red, red, I am falling apart, nothing left, nothing.

My scream sounds like a really squeaky squirrel who really, really needs an inhaler.

*

October 5th, 1973. My nerves tingle. What was that entity? How did it appear? My gaze flits around, examining everything - except the ground below my feet. The trees are crisp and empty. Everything's empty. I'm alone. But I'm not. And usually, that was comforting, but now...

My breathing escalates as a breeze much too cold hits my skin. I turn. Empty. Nothing there, nothing anywhere. Empty, empty, empty.

Must keep walking.

Empty, empty, empty.

Almost there!

EMPTY!

PLEASE!

"EMPTY!"

But this time it is spoken and in front of me.. It is a figure. Me, but...

Empty.

My primal reaction flares and my fist flies out. It connects with chill air, but sloshy and wet. I gag, and retrieve my fist. The figure stands in front of a narrow gorge. I act within milliseconds. Quick! My brain screams. I dart to the side and leap over the gorge, stumbling up a long hill. Dead, yellowing grass is in front of me. It crunches under me. The trees are thinning. I can see the treetops, empty and brown. There are footsteps behind me, sounding like water in a pail.

I begin seeing things, things that would normally be left as just misconceptions, or the shreds of a used eraser - things that aren't, shouldn't be real. But they are very real. They are at the edge of my vision... and they are chasing me. But I can't think of anything like that.

My breath comes in shorter and shorter, less and less. Everything burns. I can't go much

longer... Are the footsteps getting closer?

Can't... Stop...

I reach the top of the hill, and collapse, gasping for air. My world slows, then begins to fill with them. The figures. Some like me, some not. I feel pain on the back of my head, and curse myself for creating all these things. Everything becomes dim. And then the sloshy, wet air cuts off my breathing, fills me. And I am gone.

*

October 6th, 1972. I sit beneath the tree that I just found, writing in a journal that I just bought. After the accident yesterday, my vocal chords were damaged beyond repair. But I can't think of that, I remind myself. Now, I have to find a way to talk other than true speech. A way to express myself.

Writing.

I smile, putting my pen to the paper. But, words are already written there. "They will become twisted." I have no idea who they are, or how that is in my new journal. But I shrug, and fish an eraser out of my pocket and rub it against the strange letters. I begin to imagine a world of magic and wizards...where even fate and time can be changed.

After a few pages of a written paradise, I begin to think to myself, this isn't half bad!

Leaves fall from the tree above me, pink and magical. The twisting bark makes me think of an unreal place, far far away. But it is in the heart of these woods. Green and pink mix together to create a pure tapestry. I think I'm coming here again.

*

October 6th, 1973. I am in a void of darkness. Somewhere and nowhere at the same time. My heart sinks. Memories begin to fly into my head, ones of sadness, depression, and death. I begin to remember. But in these memories I don't remember. I am clueless, just walking down the same path over and over again.

I should have heeded the warning the journal gave me that first day, and the many after. Words? What words? I must warn her... I scream into the void, hoping that somehow, in this mess of ink, pages, and time that it can reach me.

I fall.

*

October 5th, 1972. I am in a notebook shop. A familiar one. The scent of worn pages and leather reach my nostrils. One storekeeper sits in the very back. Crowded aisles with stacks of notebooks in each one fill the small space.

And I know, I remember now. No longer am I bound by the spell of forgetfulness, of death. I reach for a notebook, one I recognize among many strangers, I search the vicinity for a pencil,

my eyes land on one shaped like an old barren tree...fitting. I start to write. But what to write? I feel... fragmented. Gone. I must... must warn... they will not go...write... they will become... twisted. I choke, it burns. I must go back. I just manage to scrawl my warning before I lean forward

The pain...

I fall into the blank pages before me, like a ripped page reuniting with its book.

*

October ?th, ?????. I lie in a dark void, trying to forget and remember at the same time, I was a person... but now. I can't even see myself. I am now trapped in my own dream turned nightmare.

I should have known what would happen to writers who let their stories become more than words on a page, made them real. At first, it was great. But then, it became...

Empty, empty, empty.

They become...

Empty, empty, empty.

And now...

Empty, empty, empty.

Empty, empty, empty.

Nothing, alone, gone, scared.

Time? Time is empty.

How long? Time is empty.

Empty, empty, empty.

I am...Empty.

I am...

...

Fiction, 11-14 – Third Place

Welcome to EXCITEMENT LAND

by Kailyn Mansker

I walked through the airport, marveling at all the stores and planes. My parents, my little brother, Arnold, and I had just landed in Oklahoma City. We were there to see Leasie and Jeffrey, our cousins, whom we hadn't seen in years. We were going to go to EXCITEMENT LAND, an amusement park. I had never been to an amusement park before. I hoped that there weren't any big, scary rides.

After we picked up our bags, I was approached and embraced by a girl I could barely recognize. I pushed my nervous thoughts out of my mind. I would worry about them later.

"Leasie! I missed you so much!" I said happily.

I embraced my Aunt Isela and my Uncle Jonah next. Then we drove to their house.

The next days were a blast! We slept in, had pancakes for breakfast every morning, and played. A lot. But the best part of all was when our parents announced we would be going to EXCITEMENT LAND tomorrow. I couldn't sleep that night. I was eager to see what EXCITEMENT LAND was like, but I worried about tomorrow and what it might bring.

The next day we all piled into Uncle Jonah's van and drove the long way to EXCITEMENT LAND. We had a lot of fun singing our favorite songs and playing the alphabet game. Finally, Leasie exclaimed, "Look! There it is!"

I looked and gasped. It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen! There were so many colorful roller coasters and rides! I could not believe my eyes. It was an absolute kaleidoscope of colors and lights. There were two tall drop towers and a big Ferris wheel. There were so many rides! It looked like a tangle of colorful snakes all looped together. There were loopy roller coasters and hilly roller coasters. There were twisty roller coasters and bumpy roller coasters.

One towered above the rest.

"That's the Great White Shark roller coaster. All the rides are named after sea creatures," said Leasie. I looked up at the huge ride she had just identified as the Great White Shark. It had the biggest hill you ever saw. I saw a roller coaster car zoom up the hill. Everyone on it screamed when they went down. I hoped I didn't have to go on that today.

Soon we were parking. I jumped out of the van. I was excited and nervous at the same time. Leasie noticed I was nervous and said, "Remember Clyn, the worst that can happen is you hate it."

I knew what my cousin said was true, but I still shivered when I looked at the Great White Shark.

Suddenly I noticed the smell. The wafting aroma of cotton candy, peanuts, and hot dogs

floated up from the park. I was giddy with excitement.

First, we lined up in a long line to get into the park. After we got in, we decided the first ride we would do was Colorful Corals, the Ferris wheel. It began going up, and I could see the whole park. I took a deep breath and breathed in the fresh air. As we looked at the park, I had the hunch this would be a wonderful (and terrifying) day.

We decided we would go to the Butterflyfish Ballet next. When I saw it, I noticed it was a very tall roller coaster that had a lot of corkscrew spins and turns. We had to walk up a whole bunch of steps to get to the top. When the car came, I saw it was painted blue and yellow. I got on.

"This is the first time I have ever been on a roller coaster," I confided in Aunt Isela. And it won't be my last if I go on the Great White Shark, I thought. After a whole bunch of twists and turns and spins and spirals, I got off feeling a bit sick.

"Let's do a not-spinny ride next," said Dad, looking a bit green.

Next, I mustered enough courage to go on the smaller drop tower. It was called Dolphin Dive. The taller one was called Ornerly Orca. Leasie went on Dolphin Dive with me. Arnold was too scared to go. Mom said that she would stay with Arnold and watch while Aunt Isela would go on Dolphin Dive with us.

My heart was beating so fast I thought it would jump right out of my chest. A sort of harness lowered and snapped to the seat, right between my legs. It reminded me of the car seats Arnold and I used to use when we were little. Suddenly, we began to lift off the ground! We rose higher and higher till we could see the whole park. It would have been rather beautiful, if we weren't suspended a thousand feet in the air.

"We're halfway up," said Leasie.

"Halfway!!!" I yelled, my voice trembling.

"Any second we're going to go down." Leasie said calmly. Suddenly, we plummeted towards the ground at (in my opinion) record-breaking speed.

"HELP!!!! I'M GONNA DIE!!!" I screamed at the top of my voice. I wondered if the Great White Shark's hill was this steep. If I was brave enough to do this, I could do the Great White Shark, right? Right before we hit the ground and were smashed to pieces, we stopped abruptly and began to rise again.

"Not again!" I yelled.

"This time we are going to the top," said Leasie, her voice rather shaky.

I cannot describe the utter panic, fear, and thrill the drop from the top gave me. It was like I had left my stomach at the top. When we finally got off, I fell to the ground, my legs refusing to support me.

"How about lunch?" my mom asked.

After a delicious lunch of hot dogs, hamburgers, corn dogs, and fries, Leasie suggested the next ride. "Let's go on the swings!" she said.

"Swings?" I asked. "We have those at our school playground."

"I bet you don't have those swings at your school playground!" She pointed to a whole bunch of swings attached to a big pole.

"Wow!" I spoke. They looked fun. The park wasn't just big, scary rides, I thought.

We got on. The swings began to spin and lift off the ground. They were fun.

"Wee!" called Arnold next to me.

After the swings Dad said "Jeffrey, Jonah, and I are going to go to Swirling Salmon. Do you want to come?"

"What's Swirling Salmon?" I asked.

"It's a loopy roller coaster," said Leasie.

"I'll try it," I said reluctantly. Swirling Salmon was painted pink and silver. I saw it was full of loop-de-loops. We soon got into the car.

When we began to move, I realized... we would go upside-down.

"Leasie, how will we stay in the car?" I asked in alarm.

"It'll be going so fast, the pressure will keep us in the car," said Leasie.

That did not comfort me. In fact, it made me more alarmed than before. I was reminded of the Great White Shark. It had many loops de loops. We zoomed down a hill toward the first loop. I was scared out of my mind. I hung onto the bar across my lap, hoping it and the speed would keep me on. I felt us swinging up, up, upside down! I felt the blood rushing to my head. It was a new sensation for me. But soon we were swinging down again. We zoomed toward the next loop. After five more loops, we zoomed down a hill and pulled into the station. Huh, that was fun. I want to do that again sometime, I thought. But soon I had other things to worry about.

"We'd better be heading home soon now," commented my dad.

"But Uncle Goerge, Clyn better go on the Great White Shark first," said Jeffrey. "No trip to EXCITEMENT LAND is complete without it!"

I froze, hoping, hoping that my father would not heed Jeffrey. No luck.

"That's a good idea. What do you think, Clyn?"

"Help!" I blurted. "Will no one think sense? That thing is overly dangerous! We could die!"

"No one's going to die, Clyn. It's tested," said Lesie.

I shivered, thinking about the horribly high hill, the loops, the spins, and twists and turns. The Great White Shark was the perfect imitation of a nightmare. At least, for me. The rest of the park was fun. This was dangerous.

"I'll walk with you." I decided. But go, never. At least that's what I told myself, although the truth was a little bit different. And I knew it. Fully aware that my biggest nightmare stood in front of me, I kept my eyes on the ground.

"The Great White Shark will be closing in one hour. I repeat, The Great White Shark will be closing in one hour," an announcer said over the loudspeaker.

"Let's hurry up and get in line," said Jeffrey nervously. "We don't want it to close before Clyn has taken a spin."

"No, never, ever, ever, ever will I sit in that unsafe thing," I pointed to the roller coaster car. "Does it even have a seat belt?"

"It has five, Clyn! You don't think that the authorities would allow someone to do it without a seat belt, do you?"

"Yes, in fact I do, seeing they allow there to be a roller coaster like that at all!"

I don't quite know how it happened, but five minutes later I was standing in line for the GREAT WHITE SHARK! I must have had a temporary lapse in judgment. By the time I realized my deadly mistake it was too late to go back down.

In fact, it was too late to plan my last will and testament. But I began shouting down to my mom as much as I thought I could get out before I died. "Give Arnold my X-box and give Marge my sewing machine. Lesie can have my books, all of them!" Marge was my best friend, and she always wanted a sewing machine. "You can donate my clothes to Goodwill. My stuffed animals can go to Patricia and Patrick." They were my two-year-old twin cousins.

"Clyn, what in the world are you doing?" Lesie asked, puzzled.

I ignored her and continued, "Mom, keep Mrs. Kitty though. If you ever recover my body, bury her with me. Please, if you do, put all my necklaces and bracelets on me for my burial. Put my favorite earrings in though." By the time I had finished the sentence we were ready to get into the car. I yelled super-fast, a jumble of words,

"If you dont find my body, look. I love you-HELP!"

The next five minutes were a blur. I kept screaming out whatever I could of my last will and testament through the “HELP!”s and screams.

Suddenly, we stopped, almost. I opened my eyes. We were at the top of a big hill. “Wow!” I said, momentarily forgetting what came next. I looked down at the track. It looked like it had stopped. “What?” I spoke, baffled. Then, I remembered what came next. The hill. Help! We dipped down for the last plunge. I felt like I was dead. But I opened my eyes again and realized it was over. It was kind of fun. As a pondered the unexpected development, we climbed up yet another hill. This time, I had fun when I went down the hill. It was still scary, but sometimes, scary is fun.

Poetry

Ages 15-19

Poetry, 15–19 – First Place

The Perfect Girl

by Elena Recinto

When my face becomes my worth,
you will sell my insecurities,
and rearrange my exterior, mold me
into an object you can crave.

Preach of perfect bodies,
so I will run marathons and leave
the table unsatisfied, yet you remain
insatiable.

When I replace dolls for contour,
you will show me how to slim
my ethnic nose and teach me to hate
what's in the mirror.

Shame me for aging,
you will look past my shoulder
at beautiful 20-somethings and loathe my
wrinkles that convey years of love and laughter.

Unmoved by my cries,
you will create mountains
I can never climb
to become the perfect girl,
yet nothing will appease
the man.

Poetry, 15–19 – Second Place

Faces of a Mother

by Olivia Davis

Gazing up into the lonely stars,
Wondering where you are
Thoughts of you plague my mind
They tell me I'll find you again
"In time."

A face that closely resembles mine:
Green eyes,
With specks of a sunflower sky
A memory of a woman cradling me—
Lost to the curse of time

Lying awake in the night
Wondering if you think of me
As each birthday passes me by
I wonder if you can even see
The distance I've come and the places I've been
And all the memories in between

I think of all the memories that we never made
As a tear slowly falls down my face
I tell myself not to be afraid
Because being adopted is not a disgrace

I spend all day
Mourning a woman I've never met,
But still happy with the one I got
A mother who gives me memories I've always kept
A mother who loves me quite a lot

So in this night, I'll sing this song to my mother
Not to the one whose face I closely resemble,
But the one who brings my whole family together
The one who makes my heart cease to tremble

My heart will always burn with your absence
But I'll sing, and I'll dance
Because I was found by a family who loves me just as I am
16 years without a face that closely resembles mine—
Instead cherished memories I'll hold until the end of time.

Poetry, 15-19 – Third Place

Hallucination

by Yewon Kim

hated autobiographies with shameful history,
stories untold containing pent mysteries,
never ending abstractions continues through the dawn.

dawn, the time of surprise,
when inadvertently seen a sky that's blindly beautiful,
scattered hues of dreams are collected.

A man laughs by finding a wavering shadow.
A man cries by finding falling tree leaves.
eye-opening under accustomed ceiling,
eye-opening on the road with single flower,
eye-opening in the dream faraway,
we are confined in the mirror.
when we look in the mirror,
There is a cat looking straight at itself.

Fiction

Ages 15-19

Fiction, Ages 15–19 – First Place

A Legacy of Life

by Zak Burns

In the unfortunate event of my imminent demise, I hereby request that my surviving relations contact any soul residing at 4311 Asphodel Avenue. You'll find your answers there, I promise. The last word was nearly blotted out by the dark brown splotch of dried blood that covered the bottom half of the page – a page, which, by hap and unfortunate circumstance, was attached to my uncle's chest by a dagger, the handle carved into an ornate raven's head design, and the blade sunk up to the hilt into his heart.

"Again, Uncle?" I muttered to myself as detectives and uniformed officers streamed around me, marking off the body and going through the rest of the house. My uncle had been found in his three-story townhouse on East Street by the maid, who had alerted the authorities – and myself, his only living relative – immediately. It was a Monday, and from what anyone could tell (and based on the stench and age of the blood) it had been nearly three days since his murder. It wasn't every day that your uncle died. For me, though, it was about twice a year.

My uncle had told me once that death was a scam that was made up by funeral homes to sell more coffins. I don't exactly know what he meant by that, but what I do know is this – my uncle is a man who had cheated death time and time again, and today was no different.

Except for that note. He had never left any sort of note or signal before. He always simply died, and then popped back up to life during the service, scaring some poor priest halfway to hell before getting up, changing his clothes, name, and address, and getting back on with his life before dying again.

My uncle was never one to put down roots, which was why I had been pleasantly surprised to learn that he had opened his own business after his most recent death: Professional Extramortal Contact, the sign outside of his office read, and below that, in smaller script: Seances, Possessions, and Other Medium Services.

"I'm close enough to the dead as it is," he had told me over the phone after signing the lease contract. "They've let me get a glimpse of their world, so why shouldn't I give them another look at ours?"

I had been skeptical at first, but his business had attracted a steady stream of clientele – grieving mothers wishing to speak to their children again, elderly folk who wanted to make sure that their loved ones were waiting for them – and my uncle maintained a steady living off of it. The address of his office was, of course, 4311 Asphodel Avenue. I looked down at the note again, trying my best not to look at my uncle's face. No matter how many times I'd seen him deceased, it didn't make it any easier.

The note gruesomely attached to my uncle clearly wanted me to check out his office, but to contact someone living there? His office was in an almost-abandoned building, and his rent was the

only thing keeping the landlord from tearing it down. But, a clue was a clue. And this was the first time he had ever left a trail to follow in the wake of his demise.

I left the house to the swarm of blue uniforms and headed toward his office. A raven sat on the wrought-iron gate that led from his house to the street. Head cocked to one side, its bright green eyes pierced my own briefly before flying away in a rush.

Walking down East Street, the sky as dark and angry as a mother's frown, I mulled over the details of my uncle's death. Truth be told, what struck me the most was how...unsurprising the entire event was. The day was nothing special (unlike his death in '96, when he had died in the middle of Christmas dinner), as far as I had known he hadn't been planning anything (because as it turns out, death is great way to escape debt collectors and suspicious investigators), and even the cause of death was nothing of alarm. When you know that death is of no consequence, you tend to live life quite a bit closer to the edge, and as such my uncle had been involved in far too many illicit schemes to keep track of - schemes which, when they caught up to him, often ended in bloodshed (see above: debt collectors). The dagger was one of the least gruesome ways I'd seen him get murdered.

What my uncle could want post-mortem was quite beyond me, but the address was a start - and with a start I realized I'd arrived at my destination.

My uncle's practice was located in a gargantuan of ancient gray brick, the roof slumped from too much exposure to the winds of time. The entire thing was like despair in office form - as I approached, the sky seemed like concrete, and the concrete sidewalks were washed out in that dreary way you see in old photographs. Even the door proved a struggle, the wood having expanded so much that it was nearly jammed shut, as if the building itself didn't want me coming in.

You'd better not be leading me astray, Uncle, I thought to myself as I finally got into the building. His office was on the first floor, so I didn't have to brave the unwelcoming, shadow-filled hallways for long.

The door to his office was made of a dark cherry, with an embossed bronze plaque in the center of the door, which read: "Henry D. Leicester, Extramortal Specialist." This one was thankfully easier to open than the first one, sliding open with a soft woosh.

The moment I stepped into his office, a shrill voice called out from seemingly every part of the room. "By the gods, you're finally here. Took you right long enough."

A woman appeared directly in front of me, startling me. I fell back against the door, slamming it shut behind me.

The woman couldn't have been more than five feet tall, her black, floating hair streaked with silver. Her grayed face was twisted into a snarl, her dead black eyes piercing my own, living, green ones. Short as she was, she was floating a few inches above the ground so that her face was level with mine. She smelled of shadows and gravedust.

"Long enough indeed," she said, her face mere inches from mine. I'm sure that if her body was still

capable of producing fluids, my own face would have been flecked with her spittle. "Henry said you'd be here, and I quote, 'post haste.' Does three days later seem 'post haste' to you?" The last sentence came out as a shriek.

I tried to stammer out a response, but she held up one slightly-translucent finger, cutting me off. "We've spent far too long chit-chatting. He's waiting for you." The finger moved from in front of my face to point at a door on the other side of the office.

I had only been to my uncle's office one other time: during the grand opening. It looked much the same as it had then - every available surface covered with trinkets and knick knacks. The worn coffee table in the center of the room held a small bonsai tree surrounded by candles of various colors and lengths. The many mismatched armchairs all had equally-mismatched pillows and blankets adorning them. A shelf against one wall was devoted completely to crystals of every size imaginable - including a human skull (that I sincerely hoped was not real) embedded with amethyst.

I couldn't say I remembered that door from my first visit, but it had been a blur of tarot readings and champagne, so there was a lot I didn't remember. The door was outlined by a very faint glow - one I wouldn't have noticed had the crystals not picked up and reflected the light. The door had a travel poster hanging slightly off-center - one of some foreign beachfront destination, its letters in a script I didn't recognize. Greek, perhaps?

"Wait!" The ghost screeched from behind me as I gripped the door handle. I turned slightly, seeing her hair like tentacles in the dim light of the office. "When you see him, ask him to release poor old Agata from this mortal coil. This office is much too boring of a haunt."

I sighed, shaking my head, and headed through the door.

A rough concrete staircase started immediately after the doorway, descending as far as I could see, lit by the harsh industrial glow of overhead lights.

I started walking down. What else could I do?

Time didn't seem quite right in that staircase. After what I thought was only a few minutes of walking, I looked back to see the door that I had left from. All I could see were those same stairs stretching up as far as I could see.

Minutes? Hours? Days? Who's to say how long I walked. At some point, the walls went from the dull, chipped white paint that had been in the office, to old red brick, the original mortar chipping in places. Gas lamps soon replaced the LEDs, the light turning much softer but the shadows growing much longer.

Who am I? Where am I? Why am I here? Who's to say how much of the mind is lost due to introspection. When all you have is your thoughts for comfort and company, there is little to do but spiral - much as this staircase kept going down, down, down, my sense of being went down, down, down with it.

Brick was replaced by soot-stained wood, lamps were replaced by torches, and still I kept

walking. My legs never grew tired – instead, the longer I walked down, the lighter my steps felt. As the wood switched suddenly to the cold stone of a cave, as the steps turned into great slabs of roughly-hewn stone, I could have sworn I was floating down the staircase. I felt as though I could keep walking forever – for what else was there to life outside of this staircase? What was the point of a destination when the journey had left me with no need of one? Each step a millennia and each breath an aeon, and at last the staircase ended, as abruptly as an old man's last breath. An archway of stone as black as night led out into a vast gray plain, a rolling fog covering the ground in an inscrutable mist. The dreadful monotony of the field was interspersed by colossal skeletal trees, their leafless branches creating a canopy below the starless oblivion above me.

Shades spotted the misted distance, nothing but shadows of outlines of people. But one figure was close enough to see – and close enough to recognize. My uncle stood near the entrance to the staircase, eyes unfocused, skin ashy and transparent.

He looked much the same as he had on the floor of his house – short gray hair perpetually tousled, green tweed jacket over a rumpled white shirt (sans the bloody knife), tie never quite straight.

His dulled eyes lit up when he saw me. He pulled me in tight, though I couldn't feel any warmth from his embrace. In fact, I couldn't feel much of anything.

He held me at arms length, looking me over once.

"I don't have much time," he said, taking something from around his neck. "You'll need this. Carry on the family legacy." I could hear the flapping of wings in the darkness. Someone was walking our way.

"What would that legacy be?"

He pressed a small object into my hand, a circular disk connected to a chain. As soon as I felt it touch my skin, the world fell a bit sharper into focus. My uncle seemed blurrier, more unfocused than he had just a moment ago, though the shades in the distance became solid outlines of people.

He grinned. "The legacy of life."

Clearer of all was the man that now stood at my uncle's shoulder. Tall and gaunt, his cheekbones were as piercing as his eyes of jade. A cloak of black feathers hung over his shoulders, and a knife was slung into his belt, the handle carved into the image of a raven's head.

"Is it time now, old friend?" My uncle murmured, his eyes closed. "I think I'm ready this time."

The man took his shoulder, leading him into the mists that stretched out ad nauseam in front of me.

I looked down at the object in my hand. A bronze pocket watch on a gold chain, the case engraved with a script I couldn't recognize. Greek, perhaps? On the back, in English, read the

words: 'Death Shall Ne'er Do Us Part.'

I opened up the watch, and finding it almost four hours ahead, wound it back to the correct time. The mists had wound their tendrils around me, blocking off my view of the stairs, but they melted away into nothingness as I walked through them. Soon enough I was able to find the way I came.

I looked back one last time, trying to see my uncle through the fog, but whatever distinguished my uncle in life was lost in death amongst the legions of shades that crowded the grim field. Up and up I went, the stairs leading me back towards light and life. Towards another chance. Towards a legacy of life.

Fiction, 15-19 – Second Place

Letter To

by Yewon Kim

The day I met you, I was standing on the extreme cold winter ocean, holding my both hands together and blowing white breath. you were in the middle of season, middle of shimmering sunbeams and middle of colliding waves that's creating a foam on the shore. For sure it was the first-eye meeting moment, but I had certainty that I had to save you. Special warning crossed my mind. In a sudden, without sensing a sharp cold winter wind, without remembering that it was winter, I ran to you. You stood so far, where in a point I had to swim without fear.

But..isn't it impressive?

I couldn't even float or swim, but the only reason, keeping you alive, made me swim fearlessly. The moment you were swallowed by the swell, I held your hand with all my strength to reel you up. However, in the moment, when stiff ocean waves pull you down and when I tried to pull you up with all my might, I lost consciousness.

Can't imagine how long I was asleep, I woke up with soft waves touching my face.

Actually, or maybe awkwardly, we were laying down on a puddle in a field full of summer aura, holding our hands tightly. um, maybe it wasn't the field that was abnormal. maybe it was us, us who were laughing out loud after all the disaster.

On the day, you hand light smile on your face and asked,

"Do you..regret saving me?"

And when I tried to answer, you pushed me into the puddle. It was too late. It was too late to notice that it was all a dream. On my face after waking up, I had traces of tears even I didn't know, and all over my body, I had deep sweats. I now knew that it was all a dream, but moments you swept through ached so much, ached so much that I couldn't properly live. After repeated seasons passed several times, on the day when winter had returned for the fourth time, as if I had taken an oath, I ran to the closest ocean with a camera. When I arrived at the winter ocean, without catching my breath, I pressed the shutter again and again. Few takes after, I opened my album. it was symmetric to the ocean view I met you in the dream.

And my brain blinked with innovation. I have figured out the reason why that day, the day with unforgettable moments that I had tried to erase, you pushed me back to reality.

Was it because you wanted me to forever remember you? ain't I right?

If then, the reason you were familiar, even though I thought it was first, was because I was the one who forgot you. Now is the time to tell you the right answer.

no, no I don't regret saving you.

I would like to ask for forgiveness instead. I would like to apologize that I forgot you and smiled daily. Now, when I miss you, I will take some pictures and remind myself of the memories with you. Just like that, one by one, I will apologize for the unstoppable clock. so, although I will never again be able to meet you again, I will remember you. the memory of abnormal, awkward but beautiful you.

Sending gratitude to. childhood full of brilliant hopes.

Fiction, 15–19 – Third Place

The Light Post on 5th Street

by Anthony P. J. Carzon

Radio Host: We welcome you to the APJ Network for this week's thrilling radio program Haunting. Tonight's episode is adapted after a short story written by the talented author Jack Chromer which is filled with suspense and excitement that will make you hold on to your chairs. This is Haunting and we present to you "The Light Post on 5th Street."

Narrator: It was a cold autumn Tuesday evening. Captain Henry O'Brian had gone to Barnaby Jones's residence, a murder witness and a potential suspect, to discuss details of the prior night's murder report.

Barnaby Jones: (Knock. Knock. Knock.) W-Why, hello Captain. Won't you come in?

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Well, I'd like to ask you a few questions out here if that'd be alright with you?

Barnaby Jones: S-Sure. What's it that you would like to ask?

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: You had reported a murder last night, and you are a witness to the events. Am I correct?

Barnaby Jones: Yes, that would be correct.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Right, right. And where did you see all of this happen?

Barnaby Jones: Why, it was from up there. The dormer window there.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: I see. What time was it? When it all happened?

Barnaby Jones: Oh, I'd say around 3:30 in the morning?

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: That's awfully specific, isn't it?

Barnaby Jones: Well, I wanted to make sure I had good, hard information for the authorities.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: That's fair enough. Could you tell me exactly what happened last night, Mr. Jones?

Barnaby Jones: Yes, of course Captain. It was late, quite late. I woke up due to a loud sound. It was like some sort of a cry for help, but the words couldn't come out. Like they were being strangled death. Terrible sound it was. Scared me half to death already! But that's precisely when I saw it... a dead body, a lifeless corpse on the road. It shone clearly. It was in the light of the light post right over there on 5th street.

Barnaby Jones: I'm awfully sorry, Captain. It isn't much to go by, but I hope it helps out in some capacity.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Not at all! Not at all! Any bit of evidence helps out. I better head back to the office. Thank you for your time and let me know if you get any more information.

Barnaby Jones: Absolutely Captain.

Narrator: Later that night, Barnaby found himself very restless while in bed. All of a sudden, shortly after midnight, there was a scream, a scream of great horror. He quickly looked outside at the light post, only to see a puddle of burgundy blood slowly dripping off of the street curb, met by a clearly dead body with just a hand in the lamp light. Jones felt tired and sick. He didn't realize the gravity of the situation. He was blinded by the horror. He sluggishly went over to the telephone.

Barnaby Jones: Hello...? Hello? Operator? Could you get me the police department? It's no emergency. Wait. No! No! No! It is!

Telephone Operator: One moment, sir.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Captain O'Brian speaking. Who might this be?

Barnaby Jones: This is Barnaby Jones from today! Earlier today remember? Captain, I'm afraid I have just witnessed another murder this night!

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Good Heavens! I'll be down there at once!

Narrator: And so he was. Captain Henry O'Brian arrived promptly just outside Jonse's residence on 5th street with two other officers and had begun searching the area at once. Barnaby was already outside just a couple of feet away from the poor, dead man. He was holding his face in fear and surprise.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: I'm very sorry you had to see this kind of thing happen again, Jones. Could you tell me what happened tonight? If it's not too much for you?

Barnaby Jones: I-It woke me up in the middle of the night. The screaming, the horror. All I saw was the blood and his hand... It was bruised, his hand. I was in so much shock that I could barely recognize whether it was really happening or not. I could barely see through my eyes! I was clouded...

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: I understand. If there's anything the police department or I can do, let us know. Thank you for your time again. That'll be all.

Narrator: Jones was losing his mind; he had trouble conveying his experience to the Captain.

Narrator: The next day followed almost normal for Jones other than the occasional glimpses of trauma. That night, however, did not share the same sentiment. Jones was awoken again by a struggling plea. This time he could smell the blood and the fright in the air.

Officer: (Knock. Knock. Knock.) Captain Henry O'Brian would like to see you, sir.

Barnaby Jones: I-I'll be out. Just one moment...

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Jones, one of your neighbors reported the body. Frankly, I was expecting you to, but that might've been a good thing. Did you see anything tonight?

Barnaby Jones: Captain...

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: Yes?

Barnaby Jones: I... remember...

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: What do you mean, 'you remember'?

Barnaby Jones: Captain... I-I'm afraid I killed the men... I remember it. I remember the feeling of it. The strength of my hands! The hatred I had! The power!... The fear in their eyes...

Narrator: Jones began to weep uncontrollably. Captain O'Brian caught sight of the victim's body from the other side of the road, this time more brutal and mangled.

Cpt. Henry O'Brian: You mean... You killed the three men?!

Narrator: Barnaby Jones was convicted of three acts of second-degree murder and was institutionalized for diagnosed insanity and derangement.

Radio Host: The hour is 8 o'clock. We will see you next week for a thrilling new episode of Haunting! Brought to you by the APJ Network.



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