

WRITE FOR 2025

An Anthology of Stories and Poems Written by Teens for the 2025
Write @ Your Library Creative Writing Contest



THE OWEN SOUND & NORTH GREY UNION PUBLIC LIBRARY
2025

WRITE FOR 2025

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"Hand to Hand" Copyright © 2025 Maeryn Herrick
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"When I was younger, I was richer, but why has it become so tough"
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The Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library
824 First Avenue West
Owen Sound, ON N4K 4K4
www.library.osngupl.ca

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1 – The House

Catherine smiled at the agent. "I'll take it. It's perfect."

Mr. Morrison looked pleased. "I'll tell the sellers, Miss Hanna. Then I'll get you the paperwork right away."

Catherine smiled up at the cute, old house that was soon to be hers. Built in the 1850s, it was more of a charming cottage, but in good shape. It was in a quaint little town called Esther Hills, and she was certain she'd make lots of new friends here. Coming from a big city, Catherine already felt at home.

"Who would ever want to sell such a perfect little house?" she mused, turning to Mr. Morrison.

"Not me. But they seemed quite eager to sell it."

"Well, I'm sure they had their reasons. I'm just right glad they did. The price is a steal, don't you think?"

"Yes, very unusual. Most comparable houses are going for considerably more."

"Then I'm just glad I got here first. I really can't afford much else."

He laughed. "Young lady like you, I'm surprised you are even buying a house at your age."

"It's an investment," she admitted. "I just finished university, and my grandmother gave me some money. Not quite enough for a city house, but I don't mind. I think I prefer it here anyway, nice and quiet. I'm working on a story, you see, and it's rather hard for me to concentrate in the city, with all the noise."

"Ah, well, best of luck, Miss Hanna. I'm sure it will be a lovely story. Oh yes! I do believe the typewriter we saw in the upstairs bedroom is coming with the house. Perfect for a writer like you."

"That ancient thing!" she said with a laugh. "Well, I'll make sure to try it once I can actually see the keys through all that dust."

They exchanged goodbyes and Catherine climbed into her car, very excited for when it would actually be hers.

A few weeks later, she watched as the moving truck pulled out of her family's driveway, en route to her new house. She

hummed and whistled with joy as she navigated the twisting highways that led to Esther Hills. After a few hours, she switched to a narrow side road that took her through the little town. Her home was at the far end, so she admired all the cute houses along the way. There was a lake too, with cottages perched on its shores.

Soon she was pulling into the driveway directly behind the truck. She oversaw all the boxes and crates, directing the movers as to where to put them. When they finally left, she skipped merrily around the small home, running through all the rooms.

When she came to the bedroom, she saw that Mr. Morrison had been right. The typewriter was perched on a small desk with an oak chair. It was just as dusty as she remembered, but she figured with a good scrub it would be entirely usable.

She set to work unpacking and cleaning. She made the bed and stocked the pantry. She was pleased to see that they had left all the furniture, and even a large area rug in the sitting room. She washed her hands and made a quick dinner. Exhausted, she clambered into the large cherry oak bed and stared at the typewriter across from it. She vowed that tomorrow she would clean it and start writing.

As tired as Catherine was, she had a restless sleep, tossing and turning. Eventually, at dawn, she gave up trying with only a couple hours sleep. However, she was motivated to get up and continue her cleaning. Catherine ate breakfast and then watched the sunrise on the wooden wrap-around porch. *I'm so glad I moved here*, she mused to herself. *It's so beautiful.*

She took a soapy bucket upstairs and began to scrub at the typewriter. It eventually came clean, so she inserted a paper and tested it out. It worked beautifully, despite not having been used in a while. Unable to quench her motivation to write, she began to work on her story.

By the time she looked up from her work, it was nearly noon. She told herself she must get settled in, so she hurried downstairs, promising that when she was done, she could write again.

After a few hours, it was mostly done, so she hurried up to the typewriter. She reached down for her paper, eager to read it over—but stopped short in confusion.

She hadn't written this:

Ring around the Rosie,
Pockets full of Posie,
Ashes, ashes,
We all fall down!

She gasped and threw the paper away as if it were poisonous. She glanced quickly from side to side, but no one was there.

2 – The Mystery

"Mom, I didn't write it!" Catherine panicked into the phone.

"Someone was in my house!"

"Calm down, Catherine. You're panicking. Trust your gut then and call the police. I can't come over right now because I have a night shift at the hospital. Come here if you're really worried about it, okay?"

She took a deep breath. Here she was, acting like a child over some punk kid, probably trying to freak her out. Well, it did work. She vowed they would not get the satisfaction of scaring her further.

"It's fine. The door was open when I came downstairs, so they're probably gone. I'm an adult, I can handle this, thanks Mom."

"Are you sure, Catherine?" Her mother's voice sounded worried.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Someone just wanted to spook me, I guess."

"But I'm coming tomorrow, alright? Unless I call Mrs. Riley about skipping my shift..."

"Mom! It's okay. You know you can't drive in the dark, and I have a lot of cleaning to do here."

She sighed. "As long as you're sure. Just do me a favour and make sure the door is locked. And maybe call the police, just to check things out."

"Okay, I will," said Catherine.

"I love you kitty cat."

"Love you too Mom." She hung up the phone and dialed the police.

"Esther Hills Police Department, what can we do for you?"

"I think someone was in my house," Catherine explained.

"Okay, have you seen them? Are you in a safe place?"

"Yeah, I'm outside. I haven't seen them..."

"Okay, so what makes you think someone was in your house?" questioned the police officer.

"My typewriter. I was typing, and I went downstairs, and when I came up, someone had typed something that I didn't."

"And what was that?"

"The nursery rhyme, the one that goes like this: *Ring around the Rosie, pockets full of Posie, ashes, ashes, we all fall down!*"

"Alright, and you're sure you didn't write it?" asked the dispatcher in confusion.

She started to panic again. "No! I mean, yes, I'm sure it wasn't me."

"What's your name, ma'am?"

"Catherine. Catherine Hanna."

"Alright, Catherine, I'm going to send a patrol over to your house. Don't go inside, wait for the officers to arrive."

"Okay, I won't," she assured them.

Catherine paced nervously around the small yard. The police car showed up and asked her to show them around. She led them up the stairs and into the bedroom.

She pointed to the bottom of the page. "There."

But she gasped.

"What's the matter?" the officer asked instantly. "What is it?"

"It's gone!"

'But, alas, my lady! Surely you know by now that I'd never forsake you, nor our love.'

It was gone. The creepy nursery rhyme had disappeared, and now it was just her work.

The cops looked at each other, confused.

"I swear, it was there! It was right there!"

"We'll give the house a complete search, ma'am, for your peace of mind. But I'm afraid there's nothing further we can do."

She sighed. "Okay."

They searched the house, and it came out clean. No footprints, people, or any evidence at all of an intruder.

The police officers left, urging her to call them if she had any further concerns. She saw them out, then collapsed against the door, looking around nervously.

As she prepared dinner, she thought she could hear the *clickity-clack* of the typewriter, but put it away to paranoia—otherwise, she'd go crazy with fear. She told herself to stick it out until tomorrow, when her mother would come. Then it dawned on her, no wonder the previous owners sold so quickly and cheaply. If the strangeness didn't stop, she told herself, she would sell it as well. Or burn it.

Catherine lay in bed. Again, she couldn't sleep. She tried to distract herself from the thoughts of her creepy house, but to no avail. And that's when the typing started—and this time it wasn't paranoia.

She started to hyperventilate and quickly flicked the light on. There was nothing there. Terrified and sticky with sweat, she gingerly tiptoed across the room. She looked down at the typewriter.

Hickory dickory dock!
The mouse ran up the clock!
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down,
Hickory dickory dock!

She glanced at the clock. 12:59.

Junior Short Story – Second Place

MIRROR, MIRROR

By: Elle Williams

“What did I do to deserve this?” I mutter under my breath, sitting in the silent car with my mother. I had just lost my third beauty pageant in a row – which is normal for most girls in these contests, but quite odd for me.

I was entered in my first beauty pageant at the young age of three years old by my mother. I came in second place. My mom and I both knew I was better than that and deserved first, so I did more pageants. Over the years, I’ve come first place more times than I haven’t, and why wouldn’t I? I’m perfect. I have these natural golden blonde curls, perfectly straight teeth, dimples on both sides of my cheeks, and bright green doe eyes. Not to mention I have a lovely personality – at least in front of the judges I do.

Recently, I’ve been losing pageants more often. My mom says I’m getting uglier with puberty, and she’s not wrong. Two weeks ago, right before a pageant, I had a noticeable breakout on my forehead. We saw a doctor, and they said it’s just hormones messing around and it should go away on its own. My mother covered it up with a lot of makeup, more so than I would normally use, and she was treating me as if it was my fault.

I love the pageant life, I really do, but ever since I was young, I’ve been pressured to look perfect all the time, and sometimes I am sick of that lifestyle.

“I’m hungry,” I say quietly to my mom.

She ignores me at first and continues to stare at the road ahead. The sun is bright; you can see mirages on the highway that slowly disappear as we approach them. Most of the trees around us are filled with orange and red leaves; it’s mid-October.

My mom slowly takes a deep breath. “You should’ve thought about being hungry before you lost.” She pauses before continuing. “Only winners deserve to eat, and you aren’t a winner, Kyleigh.”

I turn to my window before swallowing the lump in my throat. I roll my window down halfway. The air is crisp and cool; the autumn colours outside are a reminder Halloween is close by.

We finally arrive home – the pageant was almost four hours away. It's around 8:00pm, I'm exhausted and starving, but I avoid eating and run directly to my room.

I shut my door, the only thought in my head is that my mom is right, I'm not enough, I'm not perfect and I never will be. I sit in front of my mirror. My room is cold and dark; I'm in a small pair of shorts and an old oversized band tee I wear as a sleep shirt. I look at my face closely, pointing out every flaw. My eyebrows are uneven, my skin is bumpy, my undereye bags are dull and noticeable. And all I can think at this moment is I wish I was perfect – no, I wish my mom could accept that I'm not perfect. I light a candle and stare into the mirror with a tear rolling down my cheek.

"I wish, to get out of this life."

"I wish, to get out of this stress."

"I wish, to get away from my mom."

I whisper.

Nothing happens at first, as expected, but I feel weird. I look around my room and catch my reflection in the mirror. The eerie thing is, it's not my reflection. For almost a second, I catch a glimpse of a girl with long black hair. She's beautiful. She has fair skin, full eyebrows, and shimmering eyes. The next moment this figure turns into something that looks almost cursed. I really can't describe what it looked like, but it scared the crap out of me. I almost got lost in the mysterious reflection's eyes, but this startled me out of it.

I quickly blow out the candle and race to bed. I'm filled with fear but also confusion. What had just happened to me was a strange thing, but I assumed I must simply have been going a little crazy as I got more tired and hungry. I quickly fall asleep on an empty stomach.

'3:03am' The beaming red light from my alarm clock reads as I slowly wake up sweaty and cold. My head's pounding as I sit up tall and look around my room. Something is wrong. Normally, I would just go back to sleep, but there is an uncontrollable urge inside my body almost pulling me towards my mirror. Something tells me that if I follow this feeling, I can have my wish to get out.

I have to use every muscle in my body to pull myself out of bed. I stand in front of my mirror, dazed and tired. I'm startled by the image I see in the mirror. Actually, it's not the image I see, it's the image I don't see. I'm not me anymore. For a split second, I'm the girl

in the mirror I saw hours before. Suddenly, my reflection is cursed. The cursed image I couldn't explain yet couldn't get out of my mind. It's cursed, then it isn't, then it is, then it isn't once again.

My thoughts are racing with confusion. Am I sleeping? Is this a dream? I slowly put my fingertips towards the mirror, my hand shaking. I lightly touch the mirror. For a moment, the mirror is warm, and a sense of comfort is brought over me, but that quickly fades. All of a sudden, my fingers feel as if they are going through the mirror, and suddenly I'm not half asleep anymore. I realize this is all really happening. In this moment I feel almost not a part of this world – I feel it for real. I can feel what's on the other side of the mirror and I'm slowly becoming a part of it.

As I am chaotically being dragged inside this mirror, I feel I'm not perfect, I know I'm not perfect. I feel the ugliest I've ever been, almost as if something is slowly taking away my beauty, almost as if I'm not *me* at all anymore.

For a moment everything goes black and silent. I try to look around but I'm still frozen in shock as to what just happened. Suddenly the light in my room turns on. It's my mom. The noise and chaos must've woken her up to come check on me.

She walks in my room and asks me if I'm okay, but something's wrong. She's not asking me. She's asking someone, no, *something* that's posing as me. I try to do something about it, but I just can't. It's as if I'm watching this whole moment in 3rd person. The realization suddenly hits me. I can't do anything about it because I'm trapped. Trapped on the other side of the glass where no one can hear, see, or even sense me. That's when I knew my wish had come true. My wish to get out, I just never thought it would be like this, truly, the only thought in my mind was:

"What did I do to deserve this?"

Junior Short Story – Third Place

HAND TO HAND

By: Maeryn Herrick

Short, short, short, pause, long, long, long, pause, short, short, short.

Why have I heard this before? Where have I seen this before?

"Riva... Riva!" My head jolted up from the hard library table.

"Girl Scout Camp!" I shouted in realization. I saw an annoyed glance from the kids behind us. Avoiding eye contact, I turned back to my friend Josilynn.

"No, Riva," she said. "Girl Scout Camp is not the powerhouse of the cell, Ri. Even I remember this from sixth grade science, two years ago!"

I sighed.

"I know that's the mitochondria. I wasn't answering your question."

"Oh, that makes more sense," Josilynn interrupted, while brushing a strand of curly, red hair behind her ear.

"I think..." I paused. *I hope she won't think I'm crazy for saying this*, I thought. "I think my hand is calling for help." Josilynn gave me a blank stare before commenting on my unsettling remark.

"You mean your left hand? The one with facial dementia or whatever?" she asked.

"It's focal dystonia. Or at least that's what the doctors say. I only got the diagnosis two years ago, but you remember how I couldn't even control it before that. My hand moves on its own. I don't think it's just muscle spasms."

Josilynn looked at me with the same blank stare. She's a great friend, but not the sharpest tool in the shed. I decided to move on, despite her confusion.

"Do you remember when our mums signed us up for Girl Scout Camp?" I asked.

"Ya," she replied. "Every day we'd try and find ways to get out of going."

"Remember the survival course? We learned about the S.O.S signal."

"The Morse code stuff," Josilynn replied. I could tell she was catching on.

"I think my hand's been squeezing the code for S.O.S for two years and I haven't even noticed till now!" I huffed, my face six inches from hers.

"Calm down," she said, pushing me to sit down again. "First of all, that is really weird, and creepy. Second of all, are you sure it's saying S.O.S? Couldn't it just be some random pattern?"

"You're right," I said, pausing to realize the absurdity of my prior statement. "Do you think this library has books on Morse code?" I asked. I saw her think before she went to look for the librarian.

What if someone is calling for my help? Or maybe - something?

A few minutes later, Josilynn returned with a book in her hand. The title was *Morse Code, History and Chart*. She sat down, dropping the book on the table. She flipped to the page with the code chart. We both sat, staring at it.

"Should we test it?" I said, breaking the silence. Josilynn nodded.

We started an experiment. I took off my watch so we could count the seconds. Josilynn got some paper and set up the book so we could compare my hand squeezes to the code. I was in charge of counting the squeezes and the seconds in between them. Josilynn would write a checkmark every time I said "Squeeze" and an X when I said "Pause". We were ready. All we had to do was wait. And we waited. My hand sat motionless for five minutes until it started moving.

"Squeeze, pause, squeeze, pause, squeeze, pause, pause, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, pause, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, pause, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, pause, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, pause, pause, pause, squeeze, pause, squeeze, pause, squeeze, pause." I could hear Josilynn scribbling down checks and Xs. I was anxious to hear the results. She was looking back and forth from the paper to the book, putting the pieces together. "So?" I said, leaning over her. Josilynn was focused on her work.

"According to this book," she said, "three checks together are dashes in morse code, and the stand-alone checkmarks are dots."

Quickly, she wrote out the dots and dashes that corresponded with her notes. We both read it. Dot dot dot pause, dash dash dash pause, dot dot dot. It was the exact code that represented the letters, S.O.S.

#

We sat there while people started to leave. My hand was frozen on the table. *What do we do now?* I thought. *Am I... am I calling myself for help?*

Suddenly, my hand started squeezing again. I shook Josilynn, getting her attention. She jumped back in, scribbling down everything my hand was saying. This time, she went right to the code. I'd never seen her work that hard in her life! I could tell this was different. It wasn't the same S.O.S it had been signaling for years. This was long. After reading it, we were shocked.

"You're trapped in the basement here?" I asked aloud. At that moment, my left hand made a perfect thumbs up. Josilynn concluded that they could also read my mind.

"They can probably hear us through the vents. This is the first floor." I informed her. Again, my hand gave a thumbs up.

"Yup, definitely mind reading," she resolved.

"Ok, let's look for this basement," I said, getting up. As we started from the table, we heard two bells chime over the P.A system. *Twenty minutes till closing*, I thought. *We better find this door soon.*

We eventually found a pair of doors leading to the basement behind the adult books section. We saw the concrete steps through the glass. Josilynn pushed the door forward.

"It's locked," she said to the door. I reached out, pulling the handle of the door towards me. It opened with ease. "Oh, it's one of those pull doors!" She said, realizing her mistake. I smiled. *One day she'll get there*, I thought.

I started down the stairway, before hearing a voice behind me.

"Um, Riva?" It was Josilynn. Remembering her fear of the dark, I let her stand guard at the top. Trusting my hand along the railing, I blindly continued down. Reaching the bottom, I continued right. My hand searched the wall, hoping to find a light switch. I felt something brush across my head. It was a pull chain for a lightbulb. I pulled it down. The entire hallway was dimly revealed by the light. Then, I heard a voice.

"Riva, are you there?"

It sounded like a boy, but not extremely young.

"Where are you?" I asked hesitantly. I was unsure if I could trust this person.

"I'm stuck in the room with the green door," he said. His accent was strange. I paused before trying the door.

"It's locked," I stated. It was a lie, yes, but I needed more information on this person before meeting them face to face. "I'll pick the lock with my hairpin. It will take a minute though," I told the person behind the door. "Who are you? What is your name?"

"I'm Lincoln. I was trapped here when me and my brothers were playing hide-and-coop." *Hide and coop?* I thought. "They always find me last because I'm the youngest. I knew I could ask you for help because my mom always said we are connected to some people more than others. That's what your name means, right? To join? To tie?" I heard the ten-minute closing chime from above.

I never really knew what my name meant.

"So you knew we were connected?" I asked, while pretending to pick the lock.

"I didn't know who you were until I heard you upstairs," he said.

"Ok, well that's-" I stopped. My hand pretending to work on the doorknob had opened the door.

"Thanks Riva, I really appreciate-" he turned around. He looked me in the eyes. He seemed about fourteen, and was finely dressed. His clothes looked as if he'd walked out of the 1850's. His hair was neatly combed and his eyes... they looked as if the ocean breeze was bottled up with storm clouds. He smiled and held out his left hand, making mine form the same position. We chuckled. I raised my left arm and bent my elbow so that I could receive his handshake. The moment our hands touched a chill went up my spine. The lights flickered, and darkness overtook the hallway. We let go. I backed up but tripped on the uneven floor. The five-minute chime rang. I fell on my back. I saw Josilynn coming down the stairs with her phone flashlight on.

"Guess what? There's a morse code translator app! It's free too. We could've saved so much time..."

She found me on the floor. After helping me up, she stared at me in shock. I realized that I had given her my left hand to pull myself from the floor. *I can move my own hand now. Does this mean I'm normal?* I turned around to see that Lincoln was gone. All that was left was a grey mist.

"Were you talking to..." her voice trailed off. I finished her sentence.

"A ghost."

Junior Poetry – First Place

FIVE GREAT EGGS (AN ABECEDARIAN ACROSTIC POEM)

By: Esaiiah Mueller

A

Bug, specifically a dung beetle,
Carried
Dung Beetle
Eggs.

Five

Great eggs-
How great they were!
'I have to take these to our
Just
King and Queen'- thought the beetle.

Loud of rain and

Mourning was that

Night-

Opened was one of the

Powerful King and

Queen's eggs, opened not by birth but by

Reptiles, who wanted a

Snack.

The

Untouched baby beetles- four-

Vamoosed from their eggs

With

X-itement

Yoyo, Clef, Jack and

Zozo were their names.

The shepherd fell,
Blood flowing like worthless, priceless lentil soup to the fields
below.
The hunter watched,
The first time a life would end, with him the culprit.
The parents sat,
Unknowing that they lost two children with one stone.
The Maker Saw,
His favoured one coming to Him as He came down.
The earth soaked,
Innocent blood and guilty tears mixed,
The Everlover marked,
Sending away His favoured one's favoured one.
The keepers remained,
Their tree pruned too young.
The wanderer left,
Vengeance his only relief from his everlasting guilt.
The farmer rose,
Favoured as always.
But then, he didn't know.
How could he know?
That with one stone he could end his and his kin's life?
That there would be no comfort for either?
That his descendants would no longer be the favoured ones?
That he singlehandedly changed history, or rather the future,
for eternities?
That his moment of rage would cause lifetimes of grief?
He didn't know.
How could he know.

Junior Poetry – Third Place

WEARY AND WEAK

By: Alegra Tudor

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

The prophet Isaiah must've been weary, just like me.

Tired from the weight of the world's problems, weighing down on us
like bags of sand, heavier and heavier with each grain.

Well, I'm pretty weak.

Those bags of sand weighing down on me, so then when I get thrown in
deep waters, I drown under the dark waves.

By the time I get pulled out, I'm too weary to walk home.

There I sit, alone, on the beach, the storm coming in closer, the
thunder growing louder, the clouds getting darker, along with the wind
of the world beating down on me.

You can do better.

You won't get there.

Why don't you do it right?

You're ugly.

You're not good enough.

You FAILED.

Then out of the darkness, a light.

The light, piercing the darkness, forcing it to flee.

The sea turned calm, the wind changed.

You're loved.

I'll make you new.

I'll help you.

You're forgiven.

Don't worry.

You're beautiful.

Out of the chaos, quiet.

Peace that transcends all understanding.

Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him.

Before, where there were demons of darkness, a hand, the light of the world.

It reaches towards me.

Draws me in.

I feel His arms wrap around me, comforting me.

Before, I was crying tears of pain and sorrow, but now, tears of love and joy spill from my eyes, like a waterfall after the snow melts.

Rushing, crashing onto the cliffs below.

All of a sudden, I feel lighter, like a feather.

I stand up, feeling renewed and restored.

I take my next steps, draw a new breath.

Relax.

Until the wind blows.

Isaiah 40:29.

Junior Poetry – Honourable Mention
A SHORT POEM REGARDING PIE
By: Jacob Douglas Craddock

Pie is fine,
Should you touch pie that is mine,
I will firmly tell you to stop.
Pie is totally gas.
If you offer me pie, I will never say pass.
If you have pie, you should consider yourself blessed,
I wish that every summer there was an annual pie fest.
Pie is super good.
But if you eat pie for every meal I will tell you
You shouldn't,
unless these pies are of the shepherd's type.
Pie is totally worth the hype.

THE SIGHT OF MY JO

By: Esha Gill

The chill of late fall had only just started to settle in as Jo finally pulled into the driveway. I had been waiting over an hour for her to arrive. The engine of her beat-up grey Honda Civic purred as she messily packed up her purse resting on the passenger seat. She was frustrated – she always moved in a rush when something was on her mind – what was it this time? She closed her eyes and heaved one last sigh of stress before cutting out the hum of the sedan, leaving my nighttime ambience to the whistle of the wind.

She walked up the porch steps and made her way to the front door as I relocated from the corner of the living room to the hallway. I resumed my position behind the wooden doors of the coat closet before Jo could fumble her key into the lock and slip behind the entrance.

She threw her coat on the ground next to the front door as usual and stowed her shoes away in a similar manner. She never used this closet unless she wanted to impress guests by storing their coats in a civilized manner – leaving it instead to be a frequent and excellent waiting room for me.

“Yeah, no, I just got back,” she explained to someone on the phone.

Who was it?

She made her way into the kitchen, dropping her purse on the counter and continuing: “Of course not, you’re always the first person I call if something happens. I just thought that maybe for the situation, and since I was so close by, he was—” Her speech was cut off by her fuming correspondent. She looked so distressed.

Who would do this to her?

Who in their right mind would want to make her feel this way?

“We didn’t *do* anything, Rick. Nothing. Is that so hard for you to believe? Do you really think I would be that shallow?”

Rick. Of course it was Rick. The man who thought he had a relationship with *my* Jo – mine!

People like Rick don't deserve people like my Jo – not when she is everything sweet and innocent in the world, and he is all that is selfish, jealous, and obsessive. He feels the need to always keep tabs on her as if she belongs to him – which couldn't be further from the truth.

If anything, Jo belonged to me, and me alone. I was the only one who truly looked out for her – always. I *always* had an eye out for my Jo, and made sure she was never too far from me, in case she ever needed me, you understand?

“Fine! Be that way! If you really don't believe me, come over and see it for yourself. I'm at home, why don't you come to take a look? Then you can me tell whether your expertise or his would have been better!” Rick gave a short reply and hung up the phone, leaving my Jo to stare at the screen in anger and frustration.

I registered the gravity of the phone call.

He was coming.

Here.

But I was here? How am I supposed to enjoy the sight of my Jo for the night when she will be occupied by that heartless, crazed man? I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. I needed a new waiting room. I looked again through the helpfully wide crack of the closets' bifold doors and saw Jo stalk away to her room down the main hallway and slam its door behind her.

I took the opportunity to slip out from the closet and make my way silently out of the front door, careful not to step on her strewn coat. The night air was crisp, and the garden shed invited me to wait in its shelter until he arrived, where I made myself at home among the tools and supplies.

When the crunch of rotating wheels upon gravel sounded at the edge of the driveway, I moved closer to the shed window and watched as Rick stepped out of his vehicle and stormed towards the entrance of our home.

Jo stopped him on the porch, and the arguing continued.

“So you think I’m going to just stand here and wait for you patiently while you’re off doing God knows what with any person you feel, huh Josephine?”

I scoffed at her full name – if he truly loved her as I did, he would know she hated being called Josephine.

“You’re not listening to me! Who else am I supposed to go to if my car gets hit? He’s a mechanic for God’s sake!”

“I don’t want to hear it! I have kept every promise I have ever made to you, Jo. Every one of them! But I can’t do this anymore. Not when you play by a different rule book. You can go figure out what you want to do with the rest of your life, and who you’re going to spend it with – and I thank God for knowing that isn’t going to be me. I’m done.”

Jo refuted and Rick said something in response, but I couldn’t exactly pay attention to all they were saying. How could anyone worry about fighting when there was *her* to look at? The way she talked: accentuating her words with her hands and displaying every emotion behind every word on her face. The way she folded her arms so gracefully after every statement. The way her nose turned slightly pink and her hair shifted with the night’s cold wind. She was living, breathing art, and I couldn’t get enough.

My Jo went inside with tears streaming down her face after saying her final words to Rick, who sat at the end of the porch steps, processing all he had done in that short-tempered argument.

No one could hurt my Jo in such a way and not expect repercussions. Something had to be done. But God usually takes his time with karma – this needed immediate action.

The garden shed just so happened to be God’s way to affirm my motivation. The metal shovel was only an arm’s reach away, and Rick, perhaps 20 meters. The shovel felt cold and heavy, but firm in my hand. This would only take a moment. Jo wouldn’t even notice. As I crept out of the shed and made my way to the base of the porch, I could hear Rick softly weeping while I calculated the best angle to connect the unforgiving metal to his skull.

After the shovel had been returned to its original location, I made my way to the side of the house where a window would be

my vantage point to look within the living room. I could see my scared Jo preparing to sleep on the sofa after being shaken by the words of our late Rick. Her hands trembled as she prepared her record player, placing an old vinyl on the platter and lowering the tonearm. As the record spun, The Flamingo's *I Only Have Eyes for You* serenaded her in the large room, and I was given the perfect muffled ambience from my position outside the window.

My love must be a kind of blind love,

I can't see anyone, but you...

As she fumbled with her thin blanket in an attempt to get comfortable on the sofa, her eyes darted back and forth from the front door to the coat's closet to either side of her makeshift bed.

Are the stars out tonight?

I don't know if it's cloudy or bright...

I only have eyes for you, dear

Stalker. What a rude term.

The moon may be high

It was a title Rick had bestowed upon me that never quite sounded right.

But I can't see a thing in the sky

Jo ultimately fell asleep from exhaustion, with the slim satisfaction that her "stalker" was gone.

If only she had the sense to look out the window.

I only have eyes for you...

Senior Short Story – Second Place

EN PASSANT

By: Graeme Manwell

You laid the wooden playing board between us. It clunked as it settled on the table. The morning light draped across its intricate carvings. Lines and points organized in a perfect geometric system. Like crisscrossing roads and tiny cities all on a wooden board that could fit between your hands.

You had set each piece in its place. Four rows of dancers, two black, two white, poised and ready to begin. Holding my gaze, you explained the rules of the game. I listened as best as I could. Once you were satisfied with your instruction, we played.

You beat me. Quickly. I stared at how the pieces now arranged themselves, confounded. A short time ago, they seemed so different, so symmetrical. Now they were splayed out all over. Mine were clumsily jumbled about as frantic, futile shelter. Yours maintained a strict attack formation, positioned against my favour. I looked up at you, my pleading eyes demanding clarification.

“You were playing too defensively,” you advised. “In this game, you must not be afraid to make sacrifices.”

I furrowed my brow at the game board. I studied the curves and lines of the pieces, but I still couldn’t make any sense of it.

“Want to play another round?” you offered.

I nodded, determined. You reset the board. We started.

Within a few short exchanges of pieces, I was staring, yet again, at the board with confusion.

“You were too aggressive that time,” you noted. “This is a game of balance.”

I pouted.

“It’s okay, Bee,” you assured me, “you’re just starting to learn.”

I raised my head and glared, my face hot and tight with resolve.

“Let’s go again,” I challenged.

We played. Again, and again, and again. The pieces performed dozens of complex waltzes, each composed of a hundred whirling moves. Their shadows shrank and grew as the sun crossed the sky.

Each game, no matter how unique, always ended in the same outcome. I stuck out my lip and squinted at the wooden battlefield. How had you beaten me this way, that way? Where had I gone wrong?

Eventually, we broke for dinner. While I dumbly worked bits of grilled cheese from my plate to my mouth, my mind traced the next moves my pieces would make, the next strategies I would employ.

We returned to the board and carried on. I was playing better now, I knew it. The games lasted longer. My approaches got more detailed. Less and less you finished each game with a lesson to give, with mistakes to point out. I was learning.

It was dark by the time I had finally won. You had lit a candle. The game pieces' shadows wavered like wary soldiers across the board. I narrowed my eyes and played my first move. The battle began.

I evaded the traps you set and made some of my own. Our pieces crossed, twisted, and spun. After a maddening series of final jabs and blows, the chief of your pieces toppled, while mine remained intact.

I sat, my eyes wide and still. Was this possible?

Beyond the board, you offered your hand.

"Good game," you declared with a simple nod.

My eyes were still wide. Then they softened. I smiled. A bright and youthful thing. Briefly, it felt unfamiliar on my face, having been set so stern during my conquest. The feeling quickly subsided. Warmth and pride took its place.

I reached out and accepted your hand. Your old and weathered fingers enveloped mine. I shook.

"Good game."

Senior Short Story – Third Place

DORA MAAR

By: Nevaeh Suresh

I wake up fast, heart pounding. I blink a few times because the light hurts my eyes. The noise from the Paris streets is loud—cars honking, people shouting, footsteps everywhere. The sun hits my laptop screen and blinds me for a second. I push myself up, dizzy. My room looks like a storm hit it. Notes and sketches all over the floor and sofa. My head is killing me.

I look around for my phone but can't find it. Everything feels blurry. "Coffee," I mumble, then shake my head. "No, not now."

On the carmine Lawson sofa, all my plans are scattered—maps, papers, things written at 3 a.m. that might not make sense now. I haven't really slept for two days. There isn't time anyway.

"Keys!" I shout to no one. "Where are the keys?"

A loud car horn from outside makes me jump. I run to the window, lean over, and see a red Mercedes SL 300 Gullwing parked below. It shines so bright it almost hurts my eyes. They're here.

From the hallway, voices start up.

"Peachy, don't be like that," one says, kind of whining.

"Shush it, Ambrose!" another snaps.

I groan and open the door. There they are—Rowan Ambrose and Calliope Peach, still fighting. Rowan is tall, about six-foot-two, with messy chestnut hair and eyes that look grayish green. He's wearing a brown bomber jacket, black pants, and a blue-gray shirt. Calliope is slightly smaller, around 5-foot-7, wearing her pink bow in her honey-blond hair, a flower skirt, and her big iconic Doc Martens.

"He ate my last chocolate éclair," she says, pointing at him. Rowan looks embarrassed.

"It was an accident. I didn't know it was yours."

"Yes, you did!" she shouts.

I sigh loudly. "Enough. Please. We don't have time for this."

Calliope crosses her arms. "He's buying me a new one."

Rowan puts his hands up. "Fine. I'll buy you ten éclairs. A hundred. Whatever."

She pauses, then smirks. "Good answer."

I rub my face. "Now can we go?"

Calliope glances at the plans on the sofa. "So, it's today?"

"Yes," I say, grabbing my bag. "It's today."

The Musée Picasso looks huge when we get there, bright and rustic with shiny steps leading up. Inside, people whisper while the air smells like money and perfume.

I look around, and then I see it. *Dora Maar Au Chat*.

The painting is strange. The woman looks sharp, like her face is made of glass and color. A small cat sits atop the shoulder. The colors are wild—green, red, yellow—like everything is alive and dangerous.

"Wow," Calliope says softly. "It's kind of creepy."

Rowan is already scanning the room. "We're not alone." He's right. Across the room is a woman dressed all in black. Her hair is dark, pinned up neatly. She looks calm but also like she knows something no one else does. "That's her," Rowan says.

I nod. Camille Cartier. I've heard her name before. I walk up to her slowly.

"Bonsoir, Mademoiselle Cartier."

She smiles. "Bonsoir. You've come for the painting, haven't you?"

"Yes," I say. "It's more than just art, isn't it?"

Her eyes narrow. "You understand, then." She moves closer to the painting, pointing lightly toward it. "He painted Dora in pieces. Not because he wanted to—but because he couldn't see her whole anymore. There's something hidden here. A message." I lean closer. The brushstrokes almost move in the light. And there—tiny scratches.

"1-9-41," I whisper.

Camille nods. "That's what they all missed." Before I can ask what it means, Rowan's voice crackles in my earpiece.

"Security incoming. Two guards."

Camille frowns. "You didn't come alone?"

“I—” I start, but alarms suddenly blare, red lights flashing everywhere.

“Go!” she yells, handing me a folded paper. “Midnight. East wing. Come alone!”

And then she’s gone.

At midnight, the museum is silent except for the echo of my footsteps. I go to the east wing. Camille stands by the window, half in shadow. “You came,” she says.

“You told me to.”

She nods. “Picasso hid something in his work. But Dora hid something, too. The date—1-9-41—it’s not random. It’s when everything began.”

“What does it mean?” I ask. She steps closer.

“She left her own ending. In Vallauris. Go there.”

Before I can say anything, she disappears down the corridor.

Two days later, we find ourselves in Vallauris, at a small chapel that’s falling apart. Dust everywhere, the smell of old paint. Rowan pries open a wooden panel near the back. Behind it—another painting. Calliope gasps.

“Oh my god.” It’s Dora again. But she’s turned away this time. No cat. No sharp angles. Just calm colors and soft lines. “She painted this,” Calliope says quietly. Rowan squints.

“How do you know?”

She points at the bottom corner. D.M.

“Dora Maar,” I whisper. For a long moment, none of us speak. The painting feels... peaceful. Like she finally escaped something. Rowan wraps it up carefully.

“So, what do we do with it?”

“Show the world,” I say. “Let her story breathe again.” We step outside. The sun is rising, turning the clouds pink.

As we load the painting into the car, I look at it one more time. The morning light hits the canvas, and for just a second, it looks like Dora turns her head, whispering something I can’t quite hear.

Finally, I am seen.

“I can’t believe we’re actually doing this!” squeals Katie as she walks behind me.

The harsh, cool blow of the wind bites into our bones as we walk along an empty street, lit by a few dull streetlights. We’ve been best friends forever and thought it was time to make that official — with tattoos!

“I know, I feel like such a rebel!” I reply.

As we walk through the door of the tattoo parlor, we are greeted by the smell of smoke, ink, and alcohol. The inside is covered in posters and ads that look straight from the 90s. Chairs, paper, and candles are scattered around, and a desk littered with coffee cups and clipboards stands right in front of us. I feel Katie lightly clutch my arm as we walk up to the lady behind it.

Gathering all the confidence I have, I say:

“Hi, I’m Liah and this is Katie and we’d like to get some tattoos.”

The woman looks at us before pointing to a chair on her left. “Go over there, Alex will be out in a minute.”

We sit down on the black leather chair until a guy, I assume Alex, walks up and sits on the stool in front of us.

“Are you girls ready?” He asks in a gentle voice.

“Yep!” We speak at the same time. A smile touches my lips as I look at Katie and turn back to Alex.

“We’d like to have 11:11 written right here,” I say as I point to the skin just below my left wrist. A spot we chose to metaphorically connect our pulses together.

“Alright girls, who’s first?”

I feel the nerves coming off Katie as she volunteers. She’s always been someone who’d take a bullet for me, just so I could live for five more minutes. She shuffles around on the seat to better face Alex, and looks back at me.

“Best friends forever, right?”

“Best friends forever,” I answer.

2 years later

As much as I hate to admit it, there is life after your best friend up and moves away without saying goodbye. The first few months were awful. Going from seeing her every day to not seeing her at all was brutal. It felt like a piece of me was ripped out and dragged away with her. Apparently, life doesn't stop because your entire world falls apart. I don't want to admit how many hours I spent scrolling through our old texts and her Instagram to see how she's doing or how I avoided the places that meant something to us: that coffee shop on main street we went to every morning, the tree we always went to when we skipped school, the graveyard we called our little secret because it was our hideaway from the world. I tried to text her every day, drafting messages I never sent because I was too scared of not getting a reply.

Eventually, I was able to think about Katie without feeling like my heart was breaking all over again. The hurt became memory, not ache. I told myself she was gone — but not forever. If she ever texts me, I'll be there, without a second thought. Until then, I tried to move on and be grateful for all the memories we already had.

On October 11, I see a text from Katie. It reads: *Hey, I'm back in town! Let's meet up at the cemetery, Friday 5 pm. Just like old times!*

Nerves, joy, excitement, and surprise all flood through me as I stare at the message. She's back!

As I drive to the cemetery, I think about all the ways this little reunion could go. It could be exactly how it was before, but somehow it feels like everything will be different after today. The sky is dark and my windshield is covered in scattered raindrops as I turn the corner and see the cemetery. It looks empty, except for graves, grass, and the occasional bouquet. Colourless and cold, this doesn't feel right.

Katie's always been the brightest person I know, and as odd and out of character as it seems, meeting in a cemetery was our way of always being there for each other. The first time we came here, we were too scared to go in alone. So we went in

together, realizing it wasn't as scary as it seemed. It was one of those weird, best friend bonding moments, and then this place became our secret spot.

I check my watch; 4:57 pm. She'll be here any minute now. I walk along the path in the middle of the graveyard as I wait for Katie to arrive, trying to shake off the unusual feeling of nerves sinking into my bones.

I look at all the headstones, the graves never ending, the bodies buried and laid to rest. Some have flowers, others are growing moss and have lost their shine. An old iron fence surrounds me, protecting the dead like its children. This place has a quiet aspect that I've always found comforting. The stillness that came from dead bodies and lost souls felt like peace in a world that never stopped.

I check my watch again, 5:47 pm. I drag my phone out of my pocket and press on Katie's contact. It's not like Katie to be this late. It rings 5 times before going to voicemail.

Hi, it's Katie! I'm not here right now, catch you later! I hang up and call again.

Hi, it's Katie! I'm not here right now — I call again, no answer. Becoming nervous and hysterical, I keep calling as I continue to walk along the path. My fingers, frozen from the cold chill in the air, find her contact again and again — I call five, ten, twenty times — still no answer. This is so unlike Katie, and an awful feeling begins to form in my stomach.

Hi, it's Katie! I'm not here right now.

Hi, It's Katie! I'm not here.

Not in service. I pause and dial again. It beeps twice.

I'm sorry, the number you have dialed is not in service.

Panic and dread fill me as I look up from my phone and see what's in front of me. About two feet tall, speckled in gray, black, and white, is a headstone with the words:

*In Loving Memory of
Katie Maire Anderson
November 17, 2006 - April 10, 2025
Until We Meet Again*

Silence hangs in the air as my mind struggles to understand what I'm seeing. Shocked, my phone drops from my hands to the ground. Horrified, I follow, as I feel my knees collide with the soft, damp earth I was standing on a minute ago. This can't be true. I must've got something wrong. I clutch my head as tears flood out of my eyes and run down my cheeks.

"She's not dead, she can't be." I mumble to the cold air.

An empty sob finally escapes my mouth, sounding defeated as I put all the pieces together: I never let myself think about her, never sent the texts, avoided our places, and I'm standing on her grave.

I think about the text I saw asking to meet up, and quickly retrieve my phone, clinging on to the last bit of hope that what the universe is obviously trying to tell me is wrong. I find her contact and see the text:

*Hey, I'm back in town! Let's meet up at the cemetery,
Friday 5 pm. Just like old times!*

Relief floods through me — it's there. I didn't imagine it. The spark of hope grows bigger... until I look at the date. My breath catches in my throat.

Sent March 18, 2025.

March.

My stomach twists.

It's been months.

My heart stops as I remember — when she got back after March Break; She came home, and we met back up.

At the cemetery.

That Friday.

At 5 pm.

I shake my head, trying to forget, but fail. She's gone. This is real. Katie is dead, and I can't get her back. The memories we made together replay in my mind, like a montage of our best moments: the early morning coffees. The late nights on the phone. The time we crashed the car. Our first heartbreak. Our first dance. The million times we shared a laugh. And now, when we say our final goodbyes.

My hand drifts to the inside of my left wrist, where half of the matching 11:11 tattoo we got sits permanently on my skin.

My best friend.

I can't stop the tears as they arise or pretend my world didn't just end, but I sit with Katie until it hurts too much to stay.

Hours later, I drag myself out of the cemetery, back down the path I know too well. Before closing the gate, I turn back to see the place where she lays and hear myself say, "Someday, we'll meet back here. It'll be just like old times."

Senior Short Story – Honourable Mention

BLIND TO YOU

By: Taya Brindley

I always saw the world differently than others. In fact, I could never see it at all.

I was blind since birth, but it never extinguished who I was, the dreams I had, nor the way I learned and thought. I knew being blind would have its consequences; my parents did too; but it never had mattered.

I lived in a loving household; they taught me everything they could with the disability I had.

School was the first challenge. It was the largest, being surrounded by people who could see and constantly torment me for things I could never control. But I kept my head high for a long time. The first struggle was daycare; that was the first time I heard being blind was a disability, not just something I could never fix. Maybe that was when the insecurities started to arise, when it was obvious I could never be like anyone else. I could never hold and text someone over a cellphone like they could, I could never pick flowers that were specific colors, and most of all, I could never see who I was talking too. It was hard to know who actually cared.

After Kindergarten is when the bullying began. I would be pushed around and could never explain who it was because I never saw them. I wished to be like everyone else; maybe then I would not feel so isolated. So different. So useless.

The bullying got to a point where me and my family were forced to move away and start fresh: high school in a new place would not be an exception, I guarantee, but here we are. My first day at Mayfield Highschool. Nervous could never describe how I felt.

I walk into the unfamiliar grounds with my white cane, each step making an obvious noise for people to view me as an anomaly. People snickered, stood there and watched. Just because I can not see, does not mean I do not know what is going on around me.

Bumping into people happened often, but this one was different. I felt someone - tall, skinny, short hair - and heard him hit the floor.

"I'm so sorry!" I cried out, reaching around where I believed he fell to try and help him up. He took my hand slowly, trying to process what I was, who I was. I stood there, silent, as if ready for him to leave me standing there with my books and paper on the ground.

He didn't.

"I am deaf," he said, slow and inarticulate. I pause for a moment, before smiling.

"I am blind," I mouth, slowly. "Sorry for dropping your things, and mine."

He took my hand and pat it, acknowledging my apology since I could not see his smile. I smiled wider.

"I am Elora Bruce, I'm new here." I spoke slow and clear for him to read my lips.

"I see. I am Leo Baker." He said slowly. He took my school paper from me, examining it for a moment before wrapping his arm in mine.

"I will lead you to school," he stammered. It was close, but I would like to help him speak. If he would let me. I took his arm back, walking me to my class and helping me down into an open seat, then sitting down beside me.

Class carried on, and he took notes for me without me even knowing. He handed them to me, explaining that he would describe them during lunch.

I had someone to sit with, someone who understood a disability, who understood what it felt like to have so many loving people, but them never truly understanding you.

Months went on, and it was almost Christmas break; we planned to hang out as much as possible. Leo even had been teaching me sign language, as I had been teaching him pronunciation. It all just worked.

Leo and I grew a closeness no one could completely understand without actually being us, and that was okay. Classmates would laugh at us, throw things; but we would

get up and keep pulling each other through all the struggles because what else could we do? He made everything better.

My Mum said I had a spark in my eyes since I met him, and she loved him like a son.

“You saved our daughter,” she would explain, holding his hands in hers. “I can never repay you for that.”

Maybe he did save me.

“Are you excited for Christmas?” I signed. He smiled, proud of my progress.

“Yes, I am. Are you, Elle?” he asked, and I was proud of his progress too.

“Yes,” I signed.

“I got us something,” he said, pulling out a metal phone. I ran my hands along it before hugging him. He got a physical braille keyboard so he could text me.

“You’re the best!” I mouthed, kissing his cheek. “Now we can talk all day.”

“I am glad you are happy with my purchase. I will text you every day!”

And he did.

We went out a lot, especially during Christmas break, like promised. The snowflakes stuck to my eyelashes and clothes, sending shivers down my spine. Leo would wipe them off for me when I got cold. He would take my hands and teach me how to skate, without feeling ashamed of being in people’s way. I would teach him to pronounce his orders in our favourite shop, where we would sit, study, and drink lattes. Leo was my other half, and when summer came it was even more beautiful.

“I wish I could see the beach,” I signed. He would nod, and look out to the sea, describing it for me in the best detail he could.

“The ocean, it is very blue like your eyes; its beautiful. Now when I see water, I see you. The sand is a pale yellow, shiny with minerals and stones, shiny like your hair!” He would gleam. “I can see you everywhere. It’s my favourite thing.”

I would lean against his shoulder. “What about the sky?”

“The sky? Today at sunset, near the sun it is bright deep pink, and filled with bold yellow and orange. The clouds are pink too!”

“I think pink would be my favourite, if I could see it.”

He frowned slightly, his eyebrows burrowing as he stared at my tan, freckled face. “One day, Elora. I will do something to make you see,” he answered, holding my hand to let me know he meant it.

“Promise?” I signed.

“I promise.”

It was not until college when we began to date, and all of it made me confident with who I was. Even on the days I felt animalized. We would hold each other wherever we went so he could guide me, and now people did not just see two people with incurable disabilities - they saw lovers who shared something many others did not.

I never needed to see to know he was the most beautiful being, and he never needed to hear me to know all I had in my voice was love and admiration for him. One day we would get married, have kids and grow old together. But until then, I will let him describe every bit of life to me, just to hear more of what I remind him of, because he is my eyes, and I am his voice, and together it all made sense.

Florence Murphy Dabbs Memorial Award

Senior Poetry – First Place

RED

By: Nevaeh Suresh

Red.
I see red.
Coming from within.
From the child I had been, to the stress I am in.
Red.
I see red.
Red when I wake, red when I rest.
Red like the fire that burns in my chest.
Red.
I see red.
Red in the ink, red in my blink.
Red every time I think.
Red.
I see red.
Red in my art, red like my heart.
Red is my colour, red is my friend.
Red is what's in my head.
Red.
I see red.
But maybe—
Red means I survived.
Even fire leaves ash behind.
Red.
I see red.
Yet I'm still here.
Red is the flood, created by blood.
Red is what fed my livelihood,

Red is what ruined my childhood.
Anger.
Rage.
Frustration.
Pain.
But still—
I see red.
And I remain.

Senior Poetry – Second Place

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I WAS RICHER, BUT WHY HAS IT
BECOME SO TOUGH

By: Ayla Green

When I was younger, I was richer
I never got it easy, but greatness grew in flower fields
I allowed my ideas to fill the gaps in my smiles
I healed my scrapes with my mother's soft kiss
But why has it *become* so tough?

When I was younger, I was richer
I felt no need for a mirror
I dreamed of adulthood as of it was a treasure
Like I'm working now to achieve
I did what my heart called to me
I ran through the flowers that grew naturally
Although my thoughts were littered at a young age
I just had to be for the flowers to join me
But why has it *become* so tough?

When I was younger, I was richer
My heart loved by a simple hug
My soul forgave and reclaimed trust with a simple sorry
My mind was a battlefield
But the flowers came so naturally
But why has it *become* so tough?

When I was younger, I was richer
My hands were softer
My nails longer
My hair thicker
My eyes deeper
Filled by a pool of flowers
Yet now I'm full of everything I'm desiring
But I'm starving
I am full, yet I am starved

Life is overcomplicated by every influence
Every relationship
Every creative fiber and inspiration inside
Every piece of me believes life is deeper than it is
But why has it become so *tough*?

When I was younger, I was richer
The smell of this field gave me wonder and hope
I lived for the future
For right now
I have the life I want
But why have the flowers backed off?
Why am I left to work to see the greatness?
Why do the aches keep me from running through the field?
Why has my smile become strained?
My wonder has bled through to understand things no one knows
What if the field leaves me for good?
What am I to do?
Why has it become so tough?

Senior Poetry – Third Place

THE REACH

By: Haidyn Ruthven

Equality

This hypothetical thing

That's been promised to people like me

That's so close to see

But always seems to be just an inch out of reach

The 21st century came along

And brought along this notion

That this nation would be a better place

A safer place

Where these kinds of things would never have a place

To stay, in our world

But instead, you've just isolated the people from the problem

For so long— and now they think that the problem is gone

But it's not.

No matter the skill, no matter the mind

Society decides that cis-men deserve the upper hand

Yet they have the audacity to tell me that we have reached
equality.

And sure, we are all insured under the same law

But sir, tell me how it can be true

That I will always make 20% less than you?

I look into the TV and all I can see

Are these empty beings that are supposedly me

But if that is true, all I'm intended to do is be a pretty object

And obey as their eyes dissect and objectify my outside

In this life we are told to stand and take it with grace
Be so polite that we sacrifice our own inner light
Until we've tried every diet
To try and hide our depression that spreads like a cancer in the heart

Instead of turning towards one another, we turn on each other
Until we are a divided minority— no longer a community
And it's not our own doing— it's the intricate work of society
In a desperate attempt to break apart our solidarity

How is it fair that at the youngest of ages,
we must prepare for the everyday worst cases
That no person should have to be aware of

Yet there is no place for a woman to be or feel safe
Not outside, not at work, and not even in her own home

So, to society, open your eyes
'Cause not everybody can be a statistical anomaly
So we must reach equality

Senior Poetry – Honourable Mention

THE MOON BOOK (A POEM WITHOUT A'S OR S'S)

By: Selah Mueller

I went through the city in the nighttime
I noticed one book on the bench
I picked up the book to look through it
The book told of the moon, but not only of it-
it told of the city, four of them
In one city, ice covered everything,
being very cold with the wind blowing
In one other city, they wrote everything:
from the movie,
to the comic,
to the novel,
to the poem-
multiple of them
You could tell the city roomed the bookworm-
multiple of them.
In the third city lived one mother with her boy
In the middle of the city, on top of the hill,
they lived wonderfully together
The book concluded with the fourth city,
where everyone lived in their own rocket home
When I completed it I left it on the bench
I continued to go through the city,
In the nighttime.