

Third Annual  
Pierce County

TEEN

Poetry & Fiction  
Writing Contest

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1.9.9.9

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# **1.9.9.9**

## **Pierce County Teen Poetry & Fiction Writing Contest Winners**

### **Poetry (Age 12-14)**

First Place	Dawn Leavitt, 13 Home School, Puyallup
Second Place	Amanda McLean, 14 Charles Wright Academy, Lakewood
Third Place	Eric Cheney, 14 Woodbrook Middle School, Ft. Lewis
Fourth Place	Janae Perkins, 13 White River Middle School, Buckley

### **Poetry (Age 15-18)**

First Place	Courtney Caughran, 18 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Second Place	Jonas Lerman, 17 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Third Place	Jennifer Antos, 18 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Fourth Place	Kevin Thomas, 17 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor

## **Short Stories (Age 12-14)**

First Place	Adrienne Johnson, 13 St. Patrick's, Tacoma
Second Place	Christina Haass, 13 Lighthouse Christian, Gig Harbor
Third Place	Ian Beck, 14 Sumner Junior High, Sumner
Fourth Place	Byron Leavitt, 14 Home School, Puyallup

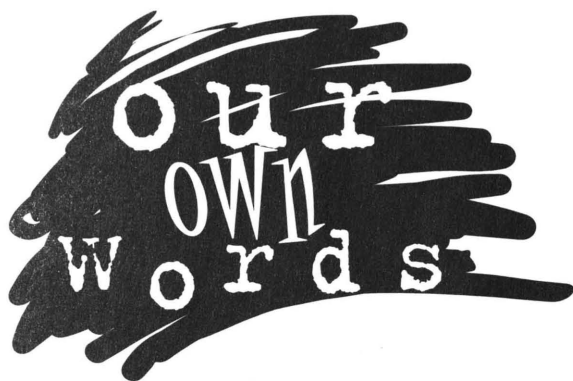
## **Short Stories (Age 15-18)**

First Place	Melissa Nichols, 18 Stadium High School, Tacoma
Second Place	Jonas Lerman, 17 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Third Place	Sage Wohns, 16 Charles Wright Academy, Lakewood
Fourth Place	Nikki Dounok, 15 Steilacoom High School, Steilacoom



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**Poetry**  
**Age 12-14**

## BUTTERFLY GARDEN

The shadows clear and the sun peaks through themisty gray sky,  
The wind that once stormed through my hair now lies still,  
A small light rests between the trees ahead,  
And as I approach it I hear the sound of wings,  
Like a small bird's wings fluttering in the wind.  
I get closer and see that it is not bird's wings, but butterflies,  
Floating through the air like rose petals drifting in the breeze,  
Dancing 'round as if playing a game.  
I lie down on the grass and watch them fly higher and higher,  
Their majestic colors splash together as they dance in the distance.  
Then softly they fade away,  
As I dream in the butterfly garden.

*Dawn Leavitt, 13, First Place*

## THE AUTUMN MAPLE

The leaves complain  
As they shrivel and die  
Their emerald radiance  
Becomes bruised  
In red and gold.  
Their once defined  
Cut-paper edges  
Curl and crack.  
Reluctantly  
They twirl, turn  
And dance wildly  
To the forest floor.

*Amanda McLean, 14, Second Place*

## THE MAN AND HIS HORSE

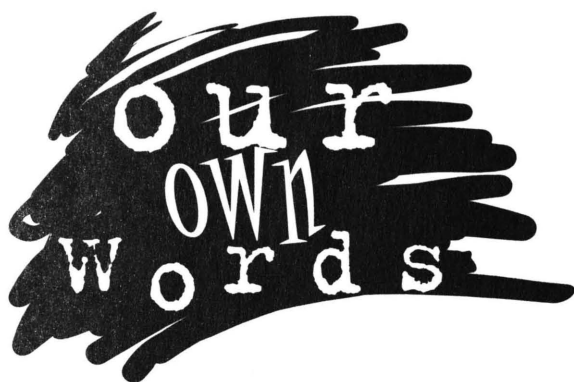
That man is the shadow.  
His name is the sparrow.  
He was a rider, a horse breeder.  
He is alone, because he was thrown.  
He goes to the auction, looking for a horse in his old section.  
He looks for a horse in particular,  
A horse of stubbornness,  
A horse that is stricter for a man who is serious.

*Eric Cheney, 14, Third Place*

## DAISIES

Where the dusty lane  
Wound dull and plain  
Among blind weeds,  
Today daisies  
Have opened a petal-  
Decorated way  
For us to walk;  
The two fluttering, white-  
Fingered, golden-eyed banks  
Seem wide celebrations-  
As if earth were glad  
To see us passing here.

*Janae Perkins, 13, Fourth Place*



**Poetry**  
**Age 15-18**





## SALTWATER OARS

Look, the blackberries have stained your hands.  
Your fingerprints line my oars  
along the top, and down the side.

Your marks still welcome me each morning  
as I fit my fingers over them. I keep my hands  
in your stains while I pull the oar through the water.

*Did I forget to tell you I'm okay?*

The thickets no longer swell. Our berries drop before turning red.  
I drive over them in the gravel and leave lines up the pavement.

This morning, I found my rowboat making its own way  
across the water. I let the splintered oars  
slide from my fingers to wash beneath the salt.

*Courtney Caughran, 18, First Place*

## RIPARIAN SPRING

She knows the names of birds. In a field of stone and trees,  
she watches the sky, calls out the old, names the new:  
*Corvus, Barranquilla, Isallobar*. She leans against a cold trunk,  
feels its rough bark, follows line and wale and scar and tidemark  
up until she can reach no higher. This tree fills the space  
between stones. A bird lands on a middle branch.  
She calls out: *Rook, Shearwater, Grebe*.

There is question in her inflection; this bird is new.  
Before she can be named, she climbs above the leaves  
for the eleven-day flight to where North is an idea,  
June is a place, and cypress line the Magdalena,  
rooted deep as our names.

*Jonas Lerman, 17, Second Place*

## Woman at 6823

Lines in the woman's face   fade away   the end  
of a beaten road   the last string of light before sleep  
The streets from her house are traveled lightly  
    by her eyes   always surprised at the oak  
among pine   fir   occasional alder  
She sits in a chair   aligning sill and sky   humming  
hymns   counting vice   waiting for his car to pull home  
Arms of a fan rustle her into the kitchen   ready to scrape  
rust and rot from the night   ready to pass time  
before sleep   Elsewhere   a leaky roof is not channeled  
    egg on a pan not soaked   blinking clocks not tuned  
    papers fly unsorted   She is long past the five oak

*Jennifer Antos, 18, Third Place*

## March News

*For H.D., a Downed Fighter*

The Orioles beat Cuba today,  
black birds with bellies of flame  
dropped bombs into the outfield  
of Russia's ally.

•

We moved to Phase Two  
of the action in Kosovo.  
Guided by Mars, inspired by Phobos,  
we march.

*Envoi: Aviano Air Base, Italy*

From his hospital bed, the pilot  
watches F-117s take off  
every fifteen seconds.

*Kevin Thomas, 17, Fourth Place*



**Short Stories**

**Age 12-14**



## Untitled

Henry was a normal kid in most aspects. He lived in a nice house, had good parents, nice friends, went to school, and had homework. And, like a normal kid, he didn't care for the last two at all. Yes, Henry was your average, run-of-the-mill kid. Except for the fact that he was a penguin.

Not that anyone cared that he was a penguin. After all, what can one expect from living next to a nuclear power plant? Henry and his friends loved nothing better than to come home from school to Henry's house and go up to his room. There they would do their homework, listen to music, and watch Henry's fish tank (the fish had long since disappeared, suspected to be the victims of an after school snack). Every day, they would stay until Henry's dinnertime, at which time Henry's dad would yell at them to "get out or give up their souls," just like any normal household. But this was all to change.

Henry waddled into the kitchen one day after school, without his friends. There his mom greeted him.

"Hi Sweetie," she said. "How was school?"

As we all know, penguins can't talk. So Henry just stared at her for awhile, then waddled over to the fridge. He began pecking at the door.

"Oh, do you want me to get you some fish?" his mom asked.

Henry just stared at her.

"Okay," she said, and opened the fridge. But before she could take out the halibut from the previous night, Henry began pecking at some turkey.

"Oh!" his mom said in surprise. "You want turkey?"

Henry stared at her.

“Well, okay,” she said, and put the turkey on the floor. Henry gobbled it up greedily. Then, he waddled up to his room, feet slapping quietly on the linoleum.

The next morning, his mom was busy chopping vegetables. Henry waddled silently into the kitchen.

“Henry, hurry up or you’ll be late,” his mom called. “Oh,” she said, spotting him out of the corner of her eye. “You’re already up.” She turned towards him, brushing her hands on her apron. “Well, hurry up or you’ll miss the bus...” She stopped, looked him over, and screamed.

When Henry’s father came home, he noticed the house was unusually quiet.

“Honey, I’m home,” he called. “Where are you?”

He walked into the kitchen. There was his wife, crouching in the corner, white as a ghost.

“What’s the matter with you?” he asked, and reached for a beer.

“H-h-h-h-enry... h-h-e’s grown,” she burst into shudders.

“Grown what?” he asked.

“ARMS!” his wife screamed.

“Arms? Doesn’t he already have arms? Or would you call them flippers?” he pondered.

“HUMAN ARMS!!!!” she screamed.

“Human arms? What is that supposed to- OH MY GAWD!” he yelled as he turned and saw Henry, happy as could be, patting his head. “What the heck are those supposed to be?!”

“See? I told you!” Henry’s mom said. “Arms. Plain as can be.”

The next morning, Henry came down, ready for school as usual. Except he was wearing jeans.



“Oh, no you don’t!” his mom said, as she pulled him back inside as he was walking out the door. “You’re not going out there, and make everybody stare. Are you so selfish, you didn’t even think what my bridge club would think? No, you’re staying inside until you get rid of those arms. Now, go to your room.”

Henry obediently waddled back up to his room, where he fell asleep feeding his fish that no longer were there.

The next morning, Henry woke up.

“Wow,” he thought. “What a weird dream. Wait a minute... since when did I start thinking?”

Henry looked down and screamed. He flew downstairs to the living room where his parents sat.

“Mum! Dad! Look at me!” he screamed. “I’M HUMAN!”

His parents jumped up.

“WHAT THE HEY!” his dad yelled (only he said a naughtier word I’m not allowed to use). “What is THAT?”

“It’s me! Henry!” he said. “I’m human!”

His mom fainted. His dad sat down with his head in his hands.

“I knew this would happen one day,” his dad said, “Sit down, son.”

Henry sat down.

“Now, son, when you were born, the doctor said you weren’t normal.”

“Could that be because I was a penguin?” Henry asked.

“Shad up,” said his dad. “Anyway, the doctor said, you were born a penguin, and would one day turn human. We didn’t believe him at first, but here we are. He said it was a side effect of the nuclear power, but it lowers our heating bill \$.10, so we either had to move and have a normal child, or

pay a cheaper gas bill. Naturally, we picked the cheaper solution.”

“Naturally,” said Henry.

“But, now I’m afraid that you have to leave. Forever. Humans just can’t live a normal life among pigs,” his dad said.

“I understand,” said Henry, and stood up to leave.

“Wait,” his dad said. “Here’s five bucks.”

“Thanks,” said Henry, and stepping over the still unconscious body of his mother, left.

So Henry left his happy home among the pigs, and headed for the real world. He ended up in Aberdeen, and became an accountant. He met a nice cat, and married her. He lives there to this day, with his wife and four very furry children.

*Adrienne Johnson, 13, First Place*

## No Match for Fate

Nervously wringing her clammy hands, Sarah clenched her fists, refusing to succumb to the fear. She held her long skirts tightly against her body in a futile effort to keep them clean. Somehow trying to separate herself from the fetid atmosphere, she marched down the sordid hallway with an air of false confidence. The nurse said that it was the third door on the left. Passing the first door was bearable, passing the second door was unnerving; but as Sarah approached the third door, her stomach lurched within her, sending a wave of nausea over her body.

When Sarah finally entered the room, she encountered a sight beyond all belief. Every single cot was filled with ill or injured men in silent agony. The floor was littered with corpses, and a putrid scent hung in the air. Rats scampered all over the room, not afraid to nibble at the injured men's wounds. The young woman stifled a scream as a rat started crawling up the hem of her skirt. She swallowed her apprehension, squinched her eyes shut, and timidly shook the rodent off her skirt. Sarah pusillanimously walked between the cots, praying with all her being that one of the bodies on the floor was not his. "Jamie! Jamie!" Sarah cried, half-afraid to call out for fear that silence would answer. A loud groan in a nearby cot stirred a little spark of hope in her heart.

Rushing toward the cot, the young woman blocked out the dead bodies that were in her way. Sarah knelt beside the flea-infested cot and stared in horror at the man whom she recognized as her brother. For a moment she rested in grim quietude, remembering the robust boy that he used to be. Now, his face was disfigured with numerous lesions, and the two gunshot wounds on his thigh were festering. Sarah gripped Jamie's hand tightly, as though trying to take his pain away.

“Sarah... we won. We... won at... Gettysburg,” Jamie croaked, each word leaving him out of breath and exhausted.

“I know you won, she whispered, blinded by a fountain of unshed tears. Overcome by a mountain of emotions, Sarah gripped Jamie’s hand, closed her eyes, and refused to let the circumstance daunt her. How could her father allow Jamie, barely seventeen years old, to march off and ruin his life? The war had transformed him from a fun-loving young man into a nearly dead being.

“Sarah, I’m leaving,” the soldier managed to mumble in a labored voice.

“Yes, I’m getting you out of here. Once we’re home, you’ll get better, and things will be just like they were before the war,” Sarah responded quickly, denying reality and trying to quell her own fears as well as Jamie’s. She did not succeed in convincing herself that Jamie was going to get better. Fear pressed down on Sarah’s chest, affirming her worst nightmares. A look of frustration passed through Jamie’s eyes as Sarah gazed upon him, but it disappeared as quickly as it came. “I am going to talk to the nurse. Don’t tire yourself. It is a long trip home,” she cautioned out of love, while composing herself and clearing her tear-streaked face. Yes, it is a long trip home...to heaven. Jamie rested in the numbness of absolute pain.

As Sarah carefully picked her path to the door, she tried to process all the thoughts, sights and smells of this horrible place in a coherent way. Reaching her destination, Sarah continued down the filthy hallway, desperately searching for the nurse in each room that she passed. She found the nurse in the obviously unsanitary scullery, midst the rats, cooking some indescribable, rancid-smelling concoction.

“Excuse me ma’am,” Sarah interrupted as politely as she could.

“Whad’ya want?” the agitated nurse called over her shoulder.

“Well, I was wondering if you could possibly call a man to assist me in taking my brother out to the carriage.”

“You can’t take any man outta here without me sayin’ so. And I say you can’t. He’s not well.”

“How can any man recover while living in these circumstances? You don’t even change the bandages on the men’s wounds! I do not care what you say! I will take my brother away from here!” Sarah determinedly exclaimed while fury-filled blood rushed through her veins.

“Fine, but no one is going to help you in any way,” the nurse sourly sputtered. Sarah turned sharply on her heel and returned to the room where Jamie lay.

“Jamie, this is going to be very hard. You have to be strong. I’m going to carry you to the carriage.” Jamie gave a weak smile and consented.

Sarah took a blood-stained sheet from an empty cot and spread it out on the floor. She wrapped Jamie’s arm around her shoulder and managed to half-drag, half-carry him to the bed sheet. Once he was on the sheet, Sarah grasped two of the corners of the sheet, tied them around her waist, and pulled Jamie out the door and down the hall like an oxen pulls a plow.

Once she reached the entrance to the hospital, Sarah picked up her six-foot, two-inch brother in her arms like a baby and carried him to the carriage. Sarah carefully placed Jamie in the back of the carriage with a blanket wrapped around him.

“Sarah, do you remember when I said I was leaving? You didn’t understand me. I am leaving.” Jamie stated timidly with a faint smile on his lips. She gently kissed his forehead and put her hand in his. Sarah looked up at the sky as it

clouded over. Tiny raindrops fell from above, mixing with the tears in her own eyes.

“I love you, Jamie,” Sarah whimpered. The air was still except for the soft pitter-patter of the rain hitting the ground. The light shower soon evolved into a torrential downpour; it seemed that all of heaven was weeping with her. Sarah tenderly slipped her hand away from his and was stole away from the carriage. She carelessly sat down on the muddy ground in a state of complete incoherence. Sarah did everything in her power to save Jamie, but she was no match for fate.

*Christina Haass, 13, Second Place*

## **The Brothers Three: A Fairy Story**

Once upon a time there were three brothers. Now these three brothers were born into a family that had been farming the same plot of land for longer than legends could tell, but they found the work of their forefather's forefather's forefathers a bit tedious, so they decided to go and seek their fortunes. But before they could make good their escape, their parents enrolled them in the best hero's college in the general area and somehow got farming scholarships for all three.

Their plan having been foiled, the brothers decided to live with the college life and apply themselves to their school-work. After all, they weren't on the farm and that was certainly a plus.

The first to graduate from the prestigious place was the eldest brother, named Edgar. As soon as he got his diploma, Edgar took off to seek his fortune, taking only one loaf of bread and a change of underwear, for he wasn't one for worldly goods.

After traveling for a while he came upon a little grove of trees where he saw three old women, all of whom were trying to undertake difficult tasks. One was heaving a huge load of wood along on her back, another was attempting to draw a large bucket of water up from a well, and the third was looking for a needle in a haystack.

Edgar observed them, all the while trying to remember his Basic Training in Spotting Benevolent Fairies, Et Cetera, until he thought he recognized the one hefting the wood to be a good fairy in disguise.

Now as everyone knows, when a young man helps a good fairy in disguise with some strenuous labor, he is always rewarded. Edgar knew this, of course, because of his good

college education, so he deemed it wise to assist the old hag in carrying her wood.

The fairy was indeed glad of the help, for the wood had been monstrously heavy, and she thanked Edgar very kindly for his services.

“It was nothing,” he replied to her heartfelt gratitude. “Now give me my reward so I can go. I’m a very busy man, you know.”

The fairy was miffed at this, so she turned him into a tadpole and threw him into a nearby pond.

Edgar was slightly put off by this recent development in the plot, but he knew that his middle brother would eventually come and save him, because that is what middle brothers always do in fairy stories.

The middle brother, whose name was Wolfgang, graduated soon after Edgar did, and, like his brother before him, immediately set out to seek his fortune. He took one loaf of bread, a change of underwear, and a change of socks with him, for he was a bit more practical.

So along down the road strode Wolfgang, whistling happily, for his youngest brother had developed quite an attitude problem over the last year or so and he was glad to escape.

Pretty soon he came upon the same grove of trees that his older brother had encountered before him and he found the old woman attempting to haul water from the well and the other who was searching for a needle in a haystack. Deciding that he had better study the situation carefully before making any decisions on what to do, Wolfgang sat down and examined the old crones while munching on his bread.

Presently however, Wolfgang got thirsty. Deciding that he may as well help the old maid in pulling up her water in the hoped that she’d give him a drink afterwards, he walked over, tapped her on the shoulder, and, heaving and tugging, pulled



the bucket from the well. The woman snatched it from him, then cast a contemplative eye over him, trying to decide a fitting reward to give him, for she was a fairy in disguise too.

After about thirty minutes of being contemplated, Wolfgang got a little impatient and said, ever so politely, "Look are you going to give me any water or not? I'm getting kind of tired of being contemplated you know."

The fairy, who had been on the verge of thinking of a really fitting reward, lost her train of thought completely, and in a fit of rage turned Wolfgang into a polliwog, thereafter throwing him into the pond nearby. There he was reunited with Edgar, who had grown into a polliwog as well, and they reminisced about the old days and waited for their youngest brother to come and rescue them, because that is what youngest brothers always do in fairy stories.

The third brother, who was christened Salisbury Frederick Nicholaiovitch Methuselah George the Third, graduated with flying colors. His grades were set in the Book of School Records and the local newspaper remarked on his many talents. The unfortunate truth, though, was that he had cheated on everything and was in fact dumb as a peanut.

Well, to get on with the story, Salisbury went off to seek his fortune with a large picnic basket chock full of goodies, a bulging wardrobe full of clothes, and 15 servants to carry all his wealth. His school gave him a parade out of town, and many teachers were seen to be sobbing into dripping handkerchiefs, although whether it was from grief at Salisbury's parting or from happiness no one could say, for as was mentioned before, Salisbury had a fairly bad attitude problem and loved to cause dissent in the classroom.

Salisbury tripped down the road in all his finery, and by and by reached the grove of trees and noticed the old woman searching for a needle in a haystack. Pulling out a lawn chair

he plopped himself down in order to watch, while all of his servants took the opportunity to slip away into the underbrush.

After a few hours Salisbury became aware that all of his servants had disappeared into thin air. Because he had nothing better to do, he got down on his hands and knees and started helping the old woman look for the needle in the haystack.

Meanwhile, Wolfgang and Edgar grew into frogs. Edgar was eventually kissed by a girl from a nearby farm and turned human again, whereupon he married her and helped her with her farm. He rejoiced that his family had finally moved to a new plot of land and he lived happily until the end of his days.

Soon after Edgar's transformation, Wolfgang migrated away from the pond and got a job as the only talking frog on a local radio station. He lived to be famous and very rich, in the end retiring and starting the first vacation retreat for frogs.

As for Salisbury Frederick Nicholaiovitch Methuselah George the Third, he never did find the needle in the haystack, and as far as I know he is still searching.

*Ian Beck, 14, Third Place*

## Grandpa's Coming for Dinner

Grandpa Charles bounced his granddaughter, Tina, on his leg. Tina giggled happily and clapped her hands.

"Okay, Tina. Grandpa needs to take a break," he told her.

"Why, Grandpa?" Tina asked.

"Well, when you get older, honey, your body doesn't work as well as it used to," he answered.

"Oh," she replied.

"Hey, do you want to know something, Tina?" Charles asked.

"Sure."

"I'm ninety-six years old. Isn't that old?"

"Yes," Tina agreed, enchanted by her grandfather.

"You know why I got this old?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, when I was your age, my grandpa went away, and because he went away, I lived to be as old as I am."

Tina looked at Charles in alarm. "You're not leaving me, are you, Grandpa?!"

Charles looked at his beloved granddaughter sadly. "Well, I'm afraid so, honey. But because I'm going away, you'll get to live just as long as I have. Maybe even longer."

Roger, Tina's dad and Charles' son, set the axe on end and slowly sharpened it by running a steel rod over the clean edge. Back and forth, back and forth went the rod, with each pass making the axe a bit sharper. Roger was softly humming "Old Dan Tucker" while he sharpened the axe, licking his lips every once in a while. It had been too long. He could practically taste today's rewards in his mouth.

Monica, Roger's wife and Charles' daughter-in-law, hummed the same song as she cleaned out a large cooker.

"Do you have the butcher knives?" she asked.

"They're in the top drawer." Roger told her.

"And the butcher paper?"

"That's in the paper bag on the counter," Roger replied.

Monica reached in, got the butcher paper, and spread a large amount of it over the dining-room table. She sighed happily. "Perfect."

"But, Grandpa, I don't want you to go!" Tina sobbed.

"I'm sorry, honey. It has to be this way." Charles told her. A tear ran down his cheek.

Suddenly, Monica poked her head in the room.

"Dad," Monica said, "It's time." Charles nodded and stood. He turned to Tina and smiled bravely. "Goodbye, Tina."

Tina hugged Charles. "You'll come and visit me, won't you, Grandpa?"

"We'll see," he replied. And with this he left the room.

Charles sat down in a chair in the kitchen, and Monica closed all of the kitchen doors. Roger, not watching the other two work, turned, and picked up the axe which he had set in a corner of the kitchen.

"Maybe we shouldn't do this," Charles said. "The girl seemed awfully heart-broken."

"Oh, don't worry, Dad. She'll get over it," Monica replied.

"You're doing the right thing, Dad," Roger said, raising the axe above his head and then striking down with a horrible chop.

That night, Tina and her parents ate voraciously. Monica had baked sweet potatoes, dressing, a green bean casserole, and a succulent roast.

“Boy, Mom!” Tina remarked. “This stuff’s great! What is it?”

Monica and Roger looked at each other knowingly. They smiled. “My secret, honey.” Monica told Tina. Maybe some day they’d tell her. Maybe.

*Byron Leavitt, 14, Fourth Place*





## **Short Stories**

**Age 15-18**





## Moon of Awakening

Every story has a beginning. Sometimes an event in the middle of the tale is mistaken for the true beginning, but the story really began long before.

Long ago, in a land lost in time, the Panthress, assassin and mercenary, was both feared and loved: feared by her enemies, loved by her friends. Yet even her story has a beginning, a dawning long before the world knew of her, and this is that dawning . . . .

\* \* \*

The moon rose, large and stately, through the clear night sky, spreading her silver light across the valley, washing it of color. Goldwater watched the moon through the window of the small, dark hut, striving desperately to slow her ragged breathing and calm her frantic heart.

This was the night! The first full moon after her thirteenth nameday, This night was to be her Awakening!

Every member of the Clans had a Night of Awakening. It was on this night that the Moon Goddess granted Her gift to Her children. The Night of Awakening marked a turning point, a coming of age for each Clan member, and Goldwater's time had come.

Goldwater waited. A breeze blew slightly chill through the open window, piercing her thin linen shift and raising gooseflesh on her bare arms. Goldwater shivered, in fear or anticipation she did not know. Finally she heard the soft tread of someone approaching the hut. The latch was lifted and the door creaked open. Turning toward the sound, Goldwater made out the form of her older sister, Civet, in the pale moonlight pouring through the window.

Civet was a small, slightly built girl only two years older than Goldwater. Two years ago, almost to the day, had been

Civet's Night of Awakening. Before then, she had been known as Rainsong, with eyes as grey as a storm cloud. Now, Civet's eyes were a greenish-yellow, the same color as the eyes of her namesake.

"It is time," Civet said quietly. "Come."

Goldwater stood up quickly and instantly regretted it. She had fasted all day, and the sudden movement sent waves of dizziness through her. When the nausea subsided, Goldwater followed her sister outside and down the winding trail, treacherous in the dark despite the bright moonlight, that led to the Grove.

The Grove was a perfectly circular stand of ancient oaks and sacred to the Moon Goddess. The trees ringed a glade in which stood the altar to Mother Moon, now bedecked with early spring flowers. It was here that Goldwater's Awakening would take place.

The Priestess of the Moon Goddess and all of Goldwater's Clan's Elders awaited them when the two sisters arrived. The Elders, men and women both, stood around the glade's perimeter just beneath the trees. Each wore a loose white robe that stirred in the light breeze that whispered through the branches above them.

The Priestess directed Goldwater to kneel before the white stone altar that glowed at the touch of the moon's rays, while Civet took her own place beneath the trees with the Clan Elders. As the moon began to rise over the treetops and her light to shine into the glade, the Priestess and the Elders began to chant:

"Li-hia Kala lia-ko k'sheara

Keh hi Neta Meshala . . ."

Mother Moon, we bring

Before You Your Daughter . . .

Goldwater closed her ice-blue eyes and lifted her face

toward the moon, allowing her midnight-black hair to fall down her back like a cloak. She let the chanting fill her, soothe her. Slowly, Goldwater felt the Moon Goddess's power pour into her. And then the visions came.

The first was familiar: a dark shape with golden eyes padding softly through her dreams, the same shadow that had haunted Goldwater for months.

The vision changed, becoming a bloody battlefield filled with the dead and dying, shifting to a dark alley and the glint of a dagger. They changed again and again, each showing a different scene. The visions came faster, too fast for Goldwater's mind to register them. And through them all padded the dark shadow of her dreams.

The visions stopped suddenly and without warning. Goldwater felt dizzy again, her head spinning from the onrush of the many visions and their abrupt halt. Dimly, a small part of her mind, amazingly still clear after the frenzied pace of the visions, realized that what she had seen were glimpses into her future.

A Voice came to her then, beautiful and haunting, and somehow, some sense told Goldwater that it was the Moon Mother Herself who spoke. "You possess the heart of a Panthress, My Daughter, and so a Panthress you shall be."

Pain! A burning fire running along her nerves, her bones shifting and changing, her muscles screaming in agony as her whole body transformed. Never had Goldwater imagined this, Never had she guessed that the Awakening would hurt so much!

Finally, the pain ended and Goldwater sagged in relief. Slowly she became aware of her surroundings. She could smell the others in the Grove near her: lion, tiger, leopard, civet . . .

The Priestess's voice, soft and low, roused her. "Arise, Panthress, and be greeted by your Brother and Sisters."

The one once called Goldwater stretched luxuriantly. She marveled at the feel of her body in the wake of the Awakening, reveled in all the sounds and smells she had never before noticed. She didn't need to look to see the silken black fur that now clothed her body, to see that neither she nor any of the others in the Grove wore their human forms.

With a soft sigh, the Panthress opened golden eyes to see a world made new beneath her Moon of Awakening.

*Melissa Nichols, 18, First Place*

## The Fabulist

His real name was Philip Kristof – everybody knew it – but he insisted on being called Senor Gambit. He wore a fedora and sampled produce with a Bowie knife. He insisted on his groceries being bagged “faster than a shortfin mako,” and always had a comment about the periodicals next to the express line (“Elvis Seen in Child’s Pudding? Why, the King and I hunted rhinos just four weeks ago!”) But today, Senor was worse than usual.

He had picked on Peter for two years, since the boy started at Kroger’s. He made fun of Peter’s apron, told him he should be lifting weights, and asked him weekly, “How goes it with the ladies, my boy?” Peter decided to grin and bear it. Today, Senor walked up to the register with two baskets of canned food. (He didn’t like to push a cart – “Makes me look like a pregnant woman,” he said.) He put the baskets on the circular conveyor and removed a snakeskin money clip from his khaki vest.

“So, Pete, how goes it with the ladies?”

“Fine, Mr. Krist . . . Senor. Going fine.”

“Fantastic. Why, when I was your age – ”

“Paper or plastic today, Senor?”

“Neither, my boy. Today, I’ll be carrying my bounty in this rucksack I purchased from an Australian peddler.”

“Okay.”

“A vile race, the Australians. No wonder: descended from convicts, you see.”

“Mm-hm.”

Wanda added the total on the register one can at a time. Peter noticed they were all the same: Campbell’s Chunky Chicken. Senor Gambit turned to Wanda.

“Miss, the soups are identical. There are thirty of them, one for every night of my journey to the Dark Continent. Now, type in the price of one can, and multiply by thirty. It’s simple. Really woman, you oughtn’t breed.”

Wanda was speechless.

He went on: “Sometimes I think the people of Guam were onto something – exiling women after they’d given birth. If only they didn’t eat their young. Truly a savage people.”

Peter couldn’t take it any more. “Hey, Phil, shut up.”

The old man dropped his money clip. “Pardon?”

“You come in here once a week, you buy weird food, you make up stories about places you’ve never been and people you’ve never met. You usually just make fun of me, and that’s fine. I can take it. I pretend you’re a TV actor or a mental patient or...an actor on TV playing a mental patient. But this is too much. I know I’m young, I know you don’t respect guys who wear aprons, I know I’ll never be a real man until I kill an alligator with my bare hands. I also know you’re a lonely, mean old bastard who should do the world a service and die.”

The store froze. Peter didn’t realize the volume his voice had reached. He was yelling, and everyone heard him. Wanda’s eyes were wide and unblinking. The people in line stood mouths ajar. The store manager held open the lid of a bulk container, letting granola spill onto the floor. Senor Gambit threw back his head and started to laugh.

“Bravo, Peter! Ole! A perfectly smashing outburst! I haven’t seen such verbal ebullition since my Moscow days. Kudos, my boy!”

Peter looked at Wanda. He looked at his tattered Reeboks. He looked at the old man in front of him.

“Paper or plastic?”

*Jonas Lerman, 17, Second Place*

## **“Zero Fighter’s Friend”**

I am early, T-minus 30 minutes, but I have come to see the action. A small man is hunched over a device that few understand. I am one of the few cursed to know its power. All the little man knows is that he has to push a button. He sweats as he presses the red button. Red for blood, blood on his hands. The countdown begins. He wipes his brow with a trembling hand and then he removes a picture from his wallet. It is old and stained with blood and dirt. He kisses it, then walks to a window over-looking the square. He spreads his arms and flies.

I follow him.

He waves his arms and his tears freeze in the air as time slows. I grasp his hand and pull it out of his body. He slowly leaves his now useless flesh behind. He stares at me, still crying.

Crash!

He glances down to see himself smashing into the cement, parting a crowd that had gathered there for hours. Like water, they close in on the spot of impact. He asks me a question. My answer is yes.

I leave him. T minus 28 minutes and 32 seconds.

I visit a woman alone in a corner of a bar. She is drinking. The bar is dirty and she is left in a corner as the others gather around the TV. I watch her and wait. She sees me, she sees the eyes; tunnels without a light. She gives a silent scream before she collapses. Her head bounces against the counter. The others do not even notice her between their bursts of ecstasy.

T-minus 23 minutes and 7 seconds.

There is a man in a dirty hotel room. He has his family in front of him. He holds a shiny toy in his hand and the other is

in an angry fist. While the mother and child see my face in this toy, the father does not know where I am. I am everywhere. He nervously glances around the room, yelling, waving his toy.

This is a new toy; it has a gleam to it. The child wants it. She reaches her hand out for it, she wails. The man swings the toy in her direction, but the mother restrains her. They are all crying. Nobody in sight to help. Then an angel appears; outside the window it drops. One of my more experienced messengers. He too carries a toy, his is used, old, broken in. The father turns around but I am too fast, he is mine.

T-minus 18 minutes and 42 seconds.

I visit a temple. This one I see knows me, and he smiles, before plunging the knife aimed at his bowels, preparing for the “millennial doom.” His mouth is open, and the man behind him finished his agony with a swift move. His life spills forth, but I embrace him. I move on.

T-minus 2 minutes and 6 seconds.

I visit a place of the sick. Doctors rush up and down the hallways. Many wail in agony, some with self-inflicted wounds. These very halls are continuously filled with my presence. I meet a man, surrounded by nurses and family. There is much commotion in the small room. He is being pumped full of different medicines and his shell is being shocked by electricity. Then he eyes roll into the back of his head and he sees me, but he also sees a light, His eyes roll back and he coughs and the family rushes toward him. He embraces life once more but he only delayed the inevitable.

T-minus 30 seconds.

The crowd moves in a singular motion. Time slows as the apple moves down. Smiles are upon billions. This planet will be changed in a fraction of a second. They smile, counting.

T-minus 10 seconds.



They count, crowding in, their hands move as one. I reach out to the crowds. Their end is near. First a blinding flash and I engulf them, 3,648,327 of them. The rest will be claimed later. Their smiles will not cheer another being. My task is done before the dust settles.

After my task, I travel to a far away place on this planet to visit a friend of mine. I watch him as he sips a cup of tea from an old cup, chipped and cracked. He sits in his chair, and around him he has many televisions set up. Outside his comfortable rooms, he can hear guns firing and he takes another sip of his tea. He suddenly hears a great banging noise outside his door. He looks up at one of his televisions and sees that it has changed from a picture, to static. He smiles and takes another sip. He hears another noise outside his door. He turns and looks over his shoulder. He puts his teacup down in its saucer on the floor and takes a deep sigh. He stands up and takes a look back at the static filled monitor. He then removes a small silver gun from under his chair's cushion. He looks at the monitor and fires.

This is my time, the second that the bullet enters his skull and tears through his brain. I walk over and touch his hand, he looks up, and he sees me, he sees his only friend now, the only winner of this game. For I am your destiny and your fate, for I am the Zero Fighter's Friend and you are mine.

*Sage Wohns, 16, Third Place*

## River of Love

I sat there by the river humming a sad tune. From time to time my eyes would drift out across the water. The river was as still as glass. A slight breeze blew through the trees, and rustled my long red hair. The moon shone bright and full in the night sky. Everything was peaceful.

Suddenly the river started to move. I looked at the ripples on the water and then around. On the opposite bank stood a young man. Young as humans reckon age, he had lustrous brown hair that fell around his shoulders. He smiled at me, and I smiled back despite the fact that he had disturbed my river.

“And how are you this fine evening elfish girl?” he asked. So he had noticed my pointed ears.

“Quite fine young sir, and you?”

“My night was going quite poorly, until I saw you.” My heart leapt into my throat. I swallowed and stood, brushing off my long, white dress.

“Careful what you say,” I told him. He stared at me, and started to swim across the river. The second he touched the water I knew him. Every thought and emotion that had ever passed through his head. He climbed out of the river and stood before me. His eyes were as green as the trees and his skin was a healthy tan. He looked at me and smiled, eyes fill with love and joy. Those emotions transferred to his voice.

“Many nights I have seen you sitting here. Many nights I have seen you in my dreams. You, who have bewitched me with your flame red hair, your blood red lips, your moon pale skin, and your eyes. It was those river blue eyes that called to me.” He placed a hand on my hip and the other on my face.

“How can you love me when you don’t know me?” I asked softly.

“Ah, but I do know you. In my dreams you would talk to me.” The love and affection that was so open on his face was surprising. What surprised me more was that I felt the same way. I placed a hand on either side of his face and looked into his eyes.

“You must know what you are dealing with first.” I guided him to the river’s edge, and there we sat. “Look into the water.” He obeyed and suddenly the surface lit up.

He saw me when I had been young and foolish. I rejected the love of my town’s chief. Not only was he our leader, but a powerful sorcerer. I had been adopted into that elfish town and was to be grateful for everything I had been given. Then the leader tried to force his love on me, and I ran. I ran away from the town, as far as I could. Eventually he caught up with me on the bank of the river. He said that for scorning his love and affection, I would remain tied to the river, become one with it. He told me that a river can’t be loved or needed, and I would remain alone forever, and that my affection would only bring death. Kissing me was like being trapped under water until your lungs burst. You can’t kiss a river.

The young man turned to me.

“Do you still love me? After seeing that?” He didn’t answer, he just gathered me in his arms and kissed me. When we parted, his eyes were wide. His lips formed the words I love you, and then the life left his body. Very gently, I laid him in the river and watched as the water swallowed him up. Then I sat down on the bank and cried. I cried because he was dead, because my nature had killed him, and because for one moment in 1,000 years, I had known happiness.

*Nikki Dounok, 15, Fourth Place*

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