

The Wake Review

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“The Unbinding” by Molly Elizabeth Ashline

1st Place Fiction

Marjorie McKinnis was a fidgety woman of the matronly age of sixty-two. She lived in a hovel in the backwoods near the outskirts of a well-to-do town that relied primarily on the business of logging to keep the economy trudging onward (in that town, they referred to Marjorie as The Mad Mountain Wench and she was given mystical, malicious traits which did not actually pertain to her nature at all). Marjorie lived alone, with the exception of her three rotund and complacent cats. They had a mutualistic relationship, for without the cats, Marjorie would have lost the last strands of sanity she was clinging so nervously to; without Marjorie, the cats would not get all the heaping helpings of food to which they had come to feel accustomed and entitled to. These felines would lounge around regally atop the refrigerator or the sofa, or the small circular table that crowded the diminutive kitchen, and they could only be bothered to move from their chosen posts when Marjorie moved toward the cupboard which contained their food. They would then lazily drop down and saunter to their respective dishes. Marjorie would delightedly welcome them over as she poured out oversized portions of food. She would smile dotingly, merrily squeaking out phrases such as, “*Eat up, my darlings*” or “*There you go, Mittens*” to the long-limbed black and white, “*There you go, Samson*” to the drowsy-eyed tabby and “*There you go, Penelope*” to the lofty calico.

It made large twisting valleys across her face on such numerous repetitions, daily—she had unoccupied, unrestrained joy; her countenance became knottier to denote her calcifying age and she gained an aura of whimsicalness. The only other moment a mode of easiness wafted in place of her otherwise shaky, mouse-like behavior was when she weeded her garden as the sun became a deepening chrysanthemum bouquet diluted throughout the Above. She preferred to do it then because the loggers, with their beastly sounds trucks and saws that jarred Marjorie’s tense tendencies from predawn to late afternoon, had gone down the rugged highway leading out of the dense (less dense than it was before they got there) boreal cluster that Marjorie occupied. Even as the actual area where sweaty, virile bodies were hacking down lines of trees all day—

supplanting them from their soil homes— was miles away, Marjorie still felt as if they would cut an unconcerned path through her land, toppling over her house with her cats and herself helplessly within, unaware that they were decimating her home as the grinding machinery twisted past. She would retreat under the table— where Penelope lay unperturbed— like she was preparing for an air raid, ducking under it and squeezing herself into a vibrating ball. Marjorie had always had a proclivity for recalling children’s songs, especially lullabies.

“Hmm-hmm-do-daa-da-hm-dadada...sheep’s in the meadow, cows in the corn,” she trilled, clutching the thin, oily strands of hair that hung limply around her head and looking above the fridge to Samson’s drooping eyes.

When she thought Samson looked hungry enough, she would crawl across the kitchen floor, looking frantically from side to side until she reached the cupboard. She would pull out the food and presently stand up in a complete reversal; she would be happy for the few minutes that the cats ate.

“Eat up, my darlings,” she’d chime.

As the three cats began to lick their chomps in conclusion of the meal, Marjorie’s face would darken and turn, fretting, to the floor beneath the table. Sometimes, she could manage to restrain herself and instead sit in a chair or make a small meal.

When the night had drawn the covers of complete darkness overhead, Marjorie would crawl, still fully clothed, into her sunken bed. In the morning, it would begin again.

By happenstance, by Marjorie’s cruel destiny, by overfeeding her cats in moments of intense stress, Marjorie McKinnis discovered that she was out of cat chow.

After running through the scenario with every possible detrimental outcome, after having a panic attack that sucked away her breath in gasps only to be returned in scarce amounts, and after giving all the cats an emphatic lecture as to what they should do if for some reason her return never came (“I left the door unlocked, so you can go outside to get food

and then come back in,” she said, then adding expressively while looking into the slatted, bored eyes, “I love you, Mittens; I love you, Samson; I love you, Penelope. You three are the only truth I have in this cluttered world”), Marjorie hobbled to her old jalopy and began her perilous odyssey to the grocery store.

There were three stoplights on the way. At the particular times that Marjorie came to all of them, they had reached red in the timed progression that stoplights had. Marjorie clung to the steering wheel anxiously, hovering over it, stretching her neck forward as if that action would cause a speedier change of the color guard that governed the intersections. Marjorie chanced a couple glances to her peripheral surroundings, placating her paranoia; if a car pulled up beside her, she would immediately shift back to a narrow, straight-facing gaze to avoid acknowledging any judgment that could be passed toward her by the penetrating road-goers. Marjorie sincerely held the opinion that if she held a stare with any one person (or cat) for more than a few moments, that cat (or person) would gain the ability for understanding her every dazed doozies of thought. Marjorie could not remember or articulate whether this was the cause or the result of her reclusion; she was now inextricably subject to this stream of thought, paralyzed by it. The light would take on Miss Envy’s hue, enabling Marjorie to continue courageously along the left.

The town was vibrant and buzzing, much to Marjorie’s dread. Along the main road (duly called Main Street), the only parking spaces available required the Parallel Maneuver. Marjorie was terrible at parking, and more to the point, was highly aware of this. All she could chant to come to fruition was that she get in the parking space without scraping or banging another vehicle, without completely collapsing into her own fear through mode of complete catatonia, and without her weak bladder giving out because of stress and bodily strain. She checked her mirrors (rearview and side- five times) and cut her wheel while simultaneously wriggling her face in and out of a wrinkled state.

“Here I go,” Marjorie gasped at last.

It should be noted that during this period of time an individual became the spectator of Marjorie's parking *kampf*. The man in his late twenties was ordinary with his youthful, somewhat lanky build and his neat hair and clothing; meticulously neat, his profession being of logging. He was extraordinary (though not in the connotatively positive sense of the word) in his proclivity for fixing his eyes unflittingly and smiling at the misfortunes for creatures big and small (preferably small) and near and far (preferably near). The smile could be cognitively transferred to one good-natured and innocent, but this was an intended lie; the smile was more akin to a wolf baring its incisors preceding an attack. His name was Arnold Garrett, and he was the man surveying Marjorie McKinnis as she took on the Herculean Feat of parallel parking.

His smile and stare were unalterably there as he calculated her smallness—she was a mouse—and as he considered how near she could be, he imagined himself to be encapsulating her.

Marjorie was in the space (mostly, the front end obtruded from the uniform line expanding up the lane) within the (approximate) span of ten minutes. Her eyes were a sea of restrained tears. Her throat was a seizure of movement. She sat in recovery from the honking horns of impatience and the shouted, caustic phrases from the Beast of indifferent anger and her own neuroses and painted failures.

"Mittens, Samson, Penelope," she gutturally moaned in an attempt of reprieve.

The blackness of immovability broke like a battled fever. Marjorie was able to escape the vehicle that was a cell. She worked her way around the jalopy to the sidewalk by clinging to the metallic, rusting, flaking, baking body that had served as her protective and injurious vessel.

At the moment The Mad Mountain Wench, Matron McKinnis, stumbled onto the concrete causeway, Arnold Garrett crossed the street to intercept her. He easily placed himself in front of her, due to his corporeally virility and her fawnlike trips in step.

"Well if it isn't the Town Crazy, the old wench on top of the Mountain, out in public." Garrett projected like an accomplished stage actor, though

he now stood only the intimate measure of a foot from Marjorie, having obstructed her path stubbornly.

Marjorie spoke to her cats all day. She was not prepared to confront this overwhelming Figure of a man.

“An errand,” Marjorie mumbled succinctly. Her only method to overcome interactions was to ignore them, and if ignoring them proved impossible, to end them.

“But what kind of errand could someone as loony as you have? Did you need to find out what year it was?”

Garrett’s passion was to harangue, to harass, and to accost when he found an object that was susceptible and willing enough to undergo it without protest.

“Cat food.”

Marjorie contemplated this torment in terms of divine retribution for some unknown sin: she felt undeserving yet self-flagellating.

“Is that what you eat nowadays? I guess that explains the smell.”

During all of this, Arnold Garrett continued his smiling and his fixated look, which were really just nods to the Feral Ghost raging inside the catacombs of his consciousness.

“It’s for my cats. They ran out.”

“Did they tell you that?”

Garrett laughed with his head propped up to the sky and his mouth opened to the edges of allowance, willing to accept a gourd of any menacing material.

Marjorie shuddered.

As violently as he began laughing, he just as abruptly ceased and brought his face to level, inches from Mountain McKinnis.

“Who do you think will go first? You or your precious kitties?”

Garrett began his maniacal guffawing again and slithered around Marjorie to go westward.

There, Marjorie shuddered.

It took Marjorie thirty-eight minutes to conclude her purposes at the store. The whole incident included a trip to the bathroom to relieve her protesting, distracting bladder, choosing the cat food and lugging the oversized bags (two, there had to be enough to ensure Mittens, Samson, and Penelope would be fed for a significant, preferably month-long or longer period without taking more of these arduous voyages) through the store and to the checkout that was queued at a crushing length of the six people that preceded her. All the people stared and the cashier was deliberately slow as she gawked and puzzled over the assumed absurdities of the legend of The Mad Mountain Wench.

It took six minutes for Marjorie to return to her sitting jalopy. She was sweating and wheezing with the physical fatigue invoked by the great masses of mixed paper and plastic lining that contained the bits for cats to nibble. She stuffed them into the passenger seat to make a copilot, personified.

It took her a total of twenty-seven minutes to drive back to her retreat. She passed only one car once she got to the Mountain Road.

From the time that he left Mad Marjorie shaking in the street, Arnold Garrett had an hour and twelve minutes available.

Marjorie could hear the caterwauling, rising up from the confines of the hovel while she was still in her jalopy.

“No!” she cried without having a factual basis, and with a knowing in the most exact degree that comes from the unification of beings that are symbiotically dependent.

The door stood open. Marjorie’s brain worked back in time to find the place from where an immediate guilt had sprung. She entered the house, a house shrouded in shadows and agonizing, woeful moans.

“Mittens! Samson! Penelope!” she beckoned.

The poignant, striking moans did not cease.

She entered the kitchen where Penelope and Samson were wailing on top of the table. They scratched at the tabletop and pawed (pointed) in

the direction of their distress. Marjorie was confused temporarily in the sum of the scenario she had just become an undoable part of, but she could not alight on what was missing.

Her mouth hung open like a repugnant abyss, surrounded by the crevices of her skin and the craters of her eyes. In a panoramic shift, Marjorie twisted her neck to witness what Samson and Penelope could not look away from; Marjorie — to wrench the pain from her soul— in unintelligible shrieks, exhorted aloud, that the world would know this travesty.

The door was unlocked. Arnold Garrett saw this as a reaffirming gift, though if it had been locked, he would not have been deterred.

Mittens was a mutilated mural created in the style of ancient, sacrificial carnage. His four lank limbs were stretched out across the freezer, held up by thick strips of duct tape. Upon closer examination, which is really only possible after the hysteria has been dismissed, on each silver line a voluptuous heart had been drawn with a black permanent marker. From his neck to his belly (white on his belly, black on his back) was a deep incision bordered by gluey mats of brownish red fur. His small skull slumped, in that false sleep of Oblivion, against his left arm.

A cacophony of unadulterated misery exploded from that house into the wilderness surrounding it, to create an eerie disturbance in the green corridor. It lasted until the dusk sent a purifying hush through the forest.

Marjorie gave out in a crackling breath the last of her protestations of the burden of reality. With all the motherly care that she could muster, with all the love and pity that resided in the blustering realm of her polydimensional heart, with all the respect that this rare companion of hers was deserving of, Marjorie un-taped the untimely Departed Mittens, and she gathered him up in her arms (he was warm still), supporting his head and his back. She placed him on a clean towel, laying him on his side. It was his wake, a vigil in his honor.

All three of the remaining clan, with Marjorie in the center and Samson and Penelope at her sides, imparted their final epitaphs and gathered their last memories, profound impressions, and solitary moments of camaraderie (those exceptional experiences of being alone while with

another) of the late cat Mittens. In conclusion to this impromptu ceremony, Samson and Penelope licked clean the gaping gash; Marjorie kissed the tip of his nose, and for once, she stopped her constant shaking.

All was over but the comeuppance.

He needed it to sink in; the dread and hopelessness needed to be fully realized. Arnold Garrett needed Marjorie McKinnis to suffer and to shrink; to be smaller, and then he would create his glorious ending.

Marjorie did not have rolls of duct tape, but she did have lengths of strong nylon rope that were kept absent-mindedly in a shed to the rear of the house. Containers of used oil were in rows on the cobwebby shelves and a rusted shovel leaned like an idle tramp in the back corner. Most importantly, there was a wooden mallet in that shed that had been fashioned from a hardwood tree that had been struck down close to Marjorie's cabin; its head was a massive block that could knock an ass away from his trough.

Marjorie collected these pragmatically selected items from the dusty shed and brought them inside.

"You two need to go in my room and stay there," she told Samson and Penelope as they caught her reentering the house, the pile of tools clumsily compiled in her stringy arms. Her stringy hair hung bedraggled across her face; it distorted her features and equated her countenance to a frenzied sorceress. She was The Mad Mountain Wench, at last come to occupy the body of Marjorie McKinnis.

Her steps were deliberate, and she was steady in her work. Unbroken incantations emitted lowly through her cracked, reddening lips; these made her ever the more deliberate, ever the more steady.

"Mittens was a good cat. A good cat. Never did a thing wrong. Always ate all his food. Purred like an angel. Mittens was a good cat. A good good...he's a bad man. A bad man. With his taunts. With his hurt. With his smile. A bad, bad...Mittens was good..."

So went the narration of the Mountain Wench's plot.

Full night had fallen, enriching her surety, for in the night, size has no influence. What cannot be seen cannot be held to the same measurements

as in the light. In the dark, there is mutability, there is possibility; there is open madness. In the world of night, the Maddest triumphs.

The Mad Mountain Wench, formerly the timid and aging woman known as Marjorie, awaited the coming beast with a warrior's scintillating anticipation, marked by her eyes, glowing cat-like in the dark.

He had left his car halfway down the mountain and hiked up the rest of the way. He wanted to approach quietly, so there was no warning. He wanted the reissue of fear to strike her at exactly the moment when she could no longer run away or hide. Garrett wanted to build her a prison before he expunged her from the veil of existence.

No light streamed out of the house as he walked up: Garrett smiled his canine smile and licked his swollen lips gluttonously.

The door was still unlocked, which surprised Garrett slightly, for he thought she would have barred up the dilapidated shack, but he was also half-expecting her to be rocking the cat on the floor with all its blood and entrails spilling onto her; he relished this possibility most of all out of the numerous ones he imagined.

He pushed the door open and took one step inside. Two steps. Three...but his feet went out from under him in a second like a car's tires hydroplaning the metal carriage into a ditch.

The oil that coated the floor around the entrances of the house was nearly imperceptible in the complete dark. Arnold Garrett did not notice it until he had been undone by it. Dizzied and astonished, he lay prostrate for a few seconds. His temporary handicap gave The Mountain Wench time to come out from behind the front door where she had been standing statuesquely for almost two hours, clutching the mallet in her hands, which she presently brought down on Garrett's smile.

"Mittens was a good cat," was the last thing he heard before being knocked out with a wooden mallet by a sixty-two-year old madwoman.

"Ugh-agh," Garret gargled out.

At the moment of returning to consciousness, he acknowledged three definite facts. One was that he was now outside: he could feel the weeds and the cold soil against his bare temple. The second was that he was tied up: he could not move his arms (they were tied both above the elbows and at the wrists) nor his legs, which were tied at his ankles. The last realization was that something was tied to him: it was small, slightly warm, and it ominously smelled like death.

“Mittens was a good cat. He never did a thing wrong, and you’re a bad, bad man.”

Marjorie was standing a couple feet away from Garrett, resting her hands on the handle of the shovel.

“Agh, what? What are you doing, you crazy devil-bitch? Let me go.”

Garrett was seething, and he was too dense to realize that he no longer held the paradigm of power in this duo. He was now small.

“No. Mittens was a good cat. He was a million times better than you, and you took him away from me. You took him away from everything. You’re a bad, bad man, and your deed will haunt you until your death and still be with you after death.”

Marjorie spoke with prophesizing ambiguity.

“Let me go, dammit! I will rip the flesh from your body and devour it, you unseemly lunatic! Let me go!”

Garrett—like all people who find they have power over people from an early age and develop a zealous affinity for manipulating that power—was awash with his own pride, unable to give it up even when it was past the point of serving him, when he instead became a servant to it.

“That is why I could never let you go. I can’t risk you hurting Samson, or Penelope, or anyone else again. You’re a bad, bad man. You created this fate against yourself.”

Then Marjorie pushed him, attached to Mittens’ corpse, into the hole.

It wasn’t until she flung the first shovelfuls of moist dirt onto him that Garrett changed his tune in the name of simple survival.

“Wait! Stop! I’m sorry. I’ll never hurt anything again. I promise! I’m sorry! Stop!”

There were no more words from The Mountain Wench.

Garrett slunk back into his natural state of abusive egotism.

“Ahh! You’re crazy! You crazy demon! They’ll know it’s you. They’ll come for you and you’ll never see those your precious kitties again. You be alone until you die, miserable and starving and disgusting. You’ll rot in...”

Marjorie had covered his face with dirt.

This was Marjorie’s tutelage in liberation. She placed camouflaging dead leaves and sticks across the dual grave, which was a trap of retribution, paid at the fee owed; one tormented soul left to suffocate in despair with the catalyst of his demise. They rotted together, and the next year Marjorie placed a gnome in the shape of a house cat on top of the burial site.

No one ever came after her as Garrett’s last words had promised they would. The local explanation, when they found Arnold Garrett’s abandoned car along the Mountain Road, was that Garrett had broken down and gotten lost on his way to find help. The townspeople imagined that he had either fallen off some precipice in the dark or was eaten by a large mammal. Nobody looked too closely; his stare and his smile must have been insidious enough to enough people to prevent any organized effort to retrieve the man.

Marjorie lived in the hovel on top of the mountain and overfed Samson and Penelope and nourished her garden. Her life progressed in the routines that she had always had without much change as the years of her inevitable senility approached, but she could no longer be bothered to cringe at the sound of the logging trucks, and she slept with the absolute ease of the innocent.

“I Found Her Naked” by Threa Almontaser

1st Place Poetry

I found her naked on the floor again at 3am
Staring out the window in fearful fascination
Sullied in a shroud of smoke
It glided like cursive through tasteless lips
Obscuring questions to a sky that never answered

Drip...drip... drip...

The sink jabbed into my torso
While my eyes squinted into remnants of a light that used to infuse her
A despondent sigh when I realized

No

It was just the reflective glow of her wedding ring
Too small now for the elegance of her fingers
Where plucked flower petal nails clutched at a drifting meal

My somnolent state was captivated
By an insignificant detail in the only thing she wore:
A rip in her black stockings right at the knee
Just the size of a nickel
Like a pink cloud drifting in outer space

Simply exhaling made her collarbones jut out like twin swords
Displaying the passage of her spine
Where the words *pretty* and *famished* had a romantic promenade down
knobby steps
She swallowed the whole room with every harsh inhale
Because the place where her heart used to be was vacant
It shriveled up like a grape in the sun and fell so deep into the prominent
cage of her ribs that
I couldn't even smell it rotting

I gasped when Denial seized me by the hair and turned my gaze away
Yet Hope continued to smirk, whispering about the single thread
From the strings of yarn she had for bones
That possibly, maybe, miraculously
Got caught in her heart like in the Greek Minotaur legend

At church later that evening
After the eggs and toast had grown stale and soggy in the sink
She moved her head left and up
Gulping down the setting sun and tasting its colors
Savoring the raw purples and oranges that poured onto the asphalt's
puddles
Melting deliciously into the town

A bit of leftover sun spilled onto her head, placing stars in her hair
As if in silent agreement that looks were everything

**“Let Them that are Without Sparkly Vampires Cast the First Big Mac”
by Meghan Austin**

1st Place Non-Fiction

If asked to describe McDonald's and what one associates with it, answers would vary depending on age and date of last visit. Most people readily recall the golden arches, fun, bright colors, and Play Places. A recent customer might describe a newly renovated facility, designed with modern decor that more closely resembles a coffee shop rather than the quintessential “fast food joint” of yore. Baby Boomers, Gen X-ers, and even Millennials might reminisce back to their childhoods, remembering the clown mascot Ronald McDonald and his friends from McDonaldland. Some people nostalgically recollect Happy Meals and Happy Meal Toys, while others rattle off Dollar Menus, Big Macs, Chicken McNuggets, and “McDonald's Fries, mmm.” Rarely will someone associate McDonald's with *The Twilight Saga*: the young adult book series that became a blockbuster movie franchise with sparkly vampires and shirtless werewolves. The same franchise that forced Americans, nay, “Worldicans” to look deep into their souls, and answer one of the most important, most profound existential questions of the noughties (2000s): Team Edward or Team Jacob? Aside from both McDonald's and *Twilight* being cultural staples and world-wide phenomena, most people think that commonalities between the two American behemoths end there. It may behoove one to consider that although *Twilight* is generally thought of as being very different from McDonalds, they are actually quite similar when examining the categories of quality, popularity, and comfort.

Consumers do not patronize McDonald's because they believe that they are making a conscientious health choice, nor do fans of *Twilight* believe that they are embarking upon an intellectual pursuit; most people are well aware that they are engaging in low culture activities. The food, literature, and film are all relatively bland and mediocre to the palate, yet inexplicably addictive. Articles have been written and documentaries have been made about McDonald's, “exposing” the inordinate amounts of calories, fat, sugar, fillers, and preservatives. McDonald's ingredients do not hail from the finest sources in the land, nor

does *Twilight's* prose: with utmost subtlety, characters explicitly announce their desires, feelings, and intentions. The dominant rhetorical device utilized is cliché. *Twilight's* protagonist Bella Swan is plain in appearance and has a nondescript personality, yet she is popular and obsessively loved. Throughout most of the series she is an average, clumsy, flawed "Everyman" who in the final installment emerges from her vampiric "cocoon" transformed into a beautiful, perfect, apt "Mary Sue." Traits such as courage, bravery, and selflessness are perceived as pathetic, melodramatic, and ostentatious. She is constantly offering herself up as the sacrificial lamb, a martyrdom that in print and on film insists upon receiving attention *ad nauseam*. Bella is a habitual "hamburger in distress" in constant need of rescuing from some Hamburgler, by either Ronald McDonald (her love interest) or Captain Big Mac (her unrequited admirer). The plot of the second installation in the series, *New Moon*, borrows so heavily from Shakespeare that inclusion of the characters' study of Romeo and Juliet in school barely transforms plagiarism into homage. Burgers, fries, chicken nuggets, shakes, vampires, gorgeous leading men, and the insipid women who love them: none of these are imaginative or innovative concepts, just food-porn and eye candy that were repackaged with better lighting and more scintillating imagery. McDonald's food is chock-full of calories and preservatives while clichés, stock characters, and "McPlots" are the very substance of *Twilight*. These aspects do not diminish, but instead strengthen the resilience of these two American institutions.

Twilight and McDonald's both enjoy abundant popularity that sometimes borders on mania. *Twilight* has set numerous records in books and film: both mediums being produced in multiple languages around the world. McDonald's serves "Billions and Billions" in over a hundred different countries. Both induce extreme reactions from the public: they inspire loyal, ardent fans, and arouse vehement, vociferous critics. Pop culture references of both abound in movies, songs, and sitcoms. Despite low quality and bad reviews, the two franchises are incredibly popular because of the comfort they provide.

Twilight and McDonald's are comfort foods for the mind and body: salves to soothe psychological stress, balms to mitigate negative emotions. Regular daily life provides many stresses: "Will I still have this job in 6 months?" "Will my car start tomorrow?" "Will they still love me in 10 years?"

“What if they don’t like me?” Unpredictability and instability breed anxiety, which people combat with *Twilight* and McDonald’s. One may not know where their next paycheck is coming from, but they do know that at any of McDonald’s many locations they will be able to order a Quarter Pounder that will consistently taste the same every time. One may not be able to rely on their transportation, but they are able to rely on McDonald’s opening its’ doors punctually and operating its’ store functionally. One may not be sure of whether their romantic relationship will endure, but they are sure that Edward will always love Bella. One may fear exclusion or rejection in social situations, but they fear not acceptance or inclusion as soon as they see the golden arches, or turn the first pages. Like Jesus, *Twilight* and McDonald’s always “hang out” with those who seek them: keeping the company of those who may look funny, talk with an accent, walk with a limp, or act a little weird. One is always welcome and extended an open invitation. Whether in the form of food or entertainment, *Twilight* and McDonald’s provide consistent, reliable, everlasting acceptance.

It is worthwhile to consider similarities between seemingly disparate activities so as to recognize parallels in human nature, thus reducing condescension and increasing compassion and understanding. While it may be difficult to relate to a particular activity: “Eating McDonald’s?! GROSS!”—it is easier to understand the motives and desires that underpin it: “I just needed some comfort.” Everyone has a *Twilight* or a McDonald’s: maybe instead of sparkly vampires or shirtless werewolves, one prefers tabloid magazines or reality television; maybe instead of Quarter Pounders or McShakes, one prefers “fresh” submarine sandwiches or smoothies. One should remove the *Twilight* from one’s own eye, before attempting to remove the McDonald’s from another’s eye.

“Jerewater,” a song by Brandon Josiah Harris

1st Place Audio/Visual

Youtube link: <https://youtu.be/WaGw9ZpsKFM>

Lyrics:

See how this has thrashed me so?

I'm cracked, you laugh,

And slacken your rope.

I crave the lofty luster

The pearl and the prize,

Not these vulgar frames.

But my brittle will breaks, veering,

Drift, slip, like a landslide,

And I'm soiled again.

Yellow-bellied and quivering.

Because this is not your war

My plights, my fights

Are they but jerewater?

What of my cock-eyed leaning?

These fickle fears and scarlet years

Don't they pass, unbent and unwound?

Does your cannon
Curb my taint?
I'm sick of your errant shots,
Your redwood pride
And cacophony.

You know nothing
By callow, or elect.
Where am I to go?
Once this was my home.

Brother, what about the concord,
What about the concord?

“Spritely Dance” by Marjorie Walsh

2nd Place Poetry

Cold dawn breaks free from snow-pale moon
Spirits tumble in unruly dance
Only once she lilts the tune
We evermore through fables prance

Spirits tumble in unruly dance
Drifting free across the sky
We evermore through fables prance
Never asking where or why

Drifting free across the sky
Fair folk light on snow-bare branches
Never asking where or why
Finding the way through simple chances

Fair folk light on snow-bare branches
Cold light shines out of the past
Finding the way through simple chances
We come for the fate for which we are cast

Cold light shines out of the past
Cold dawn breaks free from snow-pale moon
We come for the fate for which we are cast
Only once she lilts the tune

“Boylan Lows” by Brandon Jacob Edwards

2nd Place Audio/Visual and Cover Image



“Sarah” by Dallas Brown

3rd Place Poetry

I remember back in the day when we'd run around your back yard with stuffed animals and sticks,
And we were all convinced that we were knights or Jedi or Power Rangers or something.

I remember the smell of sweat

And grassy, earthen paste rubbed up just below the knee-caps with that Wisconsin summer

All twisted together in our respective nose-holes,

Framing that Kodak moment I keep on my desk in the charred maple frame.

Stowed somewhere too, in the back of my brain.

I get a sort of peace

When I drift off to the pulled weeds and lawn clippings,

The picket fences, and the four-square (though I'd always lose),

The swimming, etc.

Eventually, we'd go inside and play some archaic version of Madden on your brother's N64;

That or old-school Super Smash Bros.

Which was somehow cool at the time;

You were always better than I.

I look back and those were surely the glory days,

When we didn't care,

And we had that cute innocence and imagination and that now-elusive sense of satisfaction

To justify whatever fantasy we had contrived for those sacred hours of shelter

While my mom hustled her two-buck job bussing tables

And dad—who knows?
Sister,

I'll remember you that way-

With your purple jeans and your cartwheels and the hours and hours of
Pokémon,

And your bright, sharp smile—like the sheen off the handlebars of your
dad's Harley.

But I see you now and I see those convoluted eyes

And it makes me feel frightened

Because that blissful adolescence really didn't mean much in the end and
God knows

(Or whatever cosmic powers be at play)

Where we're headed,

Where we'll stumble,

And where we're hurtling,

Hapless, helpless, and headlong, into that world-swallowing cavern,

That incontestable pillar of human deficiency,

L'âge adulte. Like the French say.

“Portrait” by Ashley Cook

3rd Place Audio/Visual



“Untitled” by Juan Pablo Esandi

Honorable Mention



“Blackberry Winter” by Cherokee Ottesen

Honorable Mention

In Dyer County, folks don't miss Wednesday night sermons

Women gather 'round to shell black eyed peas

Chat about how some of the congregation had

Turned away from the Lord, not livin' right.

On chilly mornings, roosters crowed as my Pappaw

Walked in with fresh collected speckled eggs.

His swollen, cracked hands were aged with their

Own history. He and my nanny would fry up

Their indigenous breakfast of chocolate gravy,

Bacon-greased eggs, home-canned preserves of

Blackberries, strawberries, or peaches.

“Them there peach preserves are goooooood,”

My uncle proclaimed daily. “When did ‘ju pick those?”

My papaw called them “blackberry winters”

Early May, when the pickin' was right.

He then thanked the Lord for our food

That gives nourishment to our bodies. Amen.

The Wake Review

literary magazine and club

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