Victorian Manor

—Dan Metzger
First Prize

Deja Vu
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Grandma

—Randy McCallum
Second Prize
Midnight Oiled

With my philosophy paper finally finished, 
And with my mind trampled under 
A confused stampede of footnotes, 
I slammed the last book shut 
And was just going to turn out the light 
When an old Bic Banana, who had been 
To the Fountain of Pen, came gliding down 
The snow-white paper 
And offered me this bit of wisdom:

"There are three kinds of pens in this world. 
Some, in their attempt to leave their mark, 
Let out too much ink in a series of 
Boring blue blobs. They cling 
To the paper, making it soggy, 
And never do make an impression. 
They are quickly discarded and replaced."

"There are the hardheads who let 
Out very little ink. Although they may 
Have their fine points, they only scratch 
Across the paper in cutting, sharp strokes."

"Those that let out just enough ink will automatically 
Make the correct impression. While they may 
Seep through the paper at times, and refuse 
To write at all at others, they still stay 
Within the average flow for their type of points. 
They have a flair for living," he wrote as he skipped away.

I shut the light and vowed 
To write in pencil from now on.

—Pat Mandia
First Prize
the revered fore
just went bang and
people are scraping
the sweet from the sour
mr twiggs steps
from the higher square and
lies asleep at the feet
jesus christ
speaks soothing sundries
to the trusting
but what of the agnostic
who papers circles
with dotted plans
come tuesday strips
of deleted content
sing of sorrow
the poor man says
what the hell and
sticks his hands
deeper and
sidewalk cracks
still break mothers backs

—Carlos C. Beam
Second Prize
Her name was "Grandmother," but in the beginning, perhaps because it had been easier to pronounce, we had called her "Gramma." Several years later, the pages of a nearly forgotten comic book suggested a name more appropriate. Then in the quiet of her garden or under the bedcovers, we whispered, speculated and giggled about "Gamma Rays."

On no particular afternoon, I sat on her side porch, too lazy to move and much too hot to be comfortable. It had been an intense summer. It had been a year that had seen young buds telescoping beyond the tree limbs at a time when a usual red knottiness would have been only a promise. And this heat never relented, but stayed throughout, remaining even during this time when orange berries fell from the Ash trees. It stayed, and we would squash the berries under our feet, feeling the pop as the juices ran out onto the pavement.

It was this heat that brought a languor, keeping me on her porch when I should have moved to the shade. One could hardly call it a porch. No gathering of folding chairs could occupy its space on a warm evening—its size excluded that possibility. Instead, it was a stepping place, a small top of a short climb, a spot to wait while ringing the bell. I admired its compactness, for it neatly held me in. To my left and back, a short iron rail contained me. On my right side, a screen door that never slammed, but slowly whoosed shut separated me from inside. Winter knew no screen. Instead, a solid oak door begged one to enter hurriedly, then quickly sealed shut with a bang. Only a screen separated me now.

The stone steps were cool beneath me and cooler still where my legs angled down. I could only guess at the source of this coolness, but concluded it must be one that ran contrary to a seasonal heat that touched all else.

I rose to find a shaded place when the flicking began inside. Thoughts of my brothers and sisters tugging early tomatoes from the vines, piercing those tough skins with new teeth, the juice running down their chins, nearly moved me. But the flicking had begun and I stayed. I would remain until the stone lost its appealing coolness.

Flick-flick. I could hear the wax-coated cards click as each one was set down and knew she was laying a spread. The cloth had come off the table; that meant lunch dishes had been put away, shades had been drawn to permit a bearable temperature, and now it was time for Gramma's strange game.

It was a frenzied game the way she played it. Each ragged card, whether club, spade, heart or diamond, King or Queen, had peculiar markings on its top. They were placed in particular rows, about six or eight of them. Once all the cards were down, she would look them over, sometimes making a tsk-tsk, tongue on teeth sound. Then up the cards came, as rapidly as they had gone down. It was an unusual form of solitaire, but all the same, a usual late afternoon occurrence.

The flick-tap had ceased. I waited for a signal. Then I heard a sweep of work-smoothed fingers across the surface and knew the cards were once again in her hands.

I focused and steadied on a row of bushy leaves that ran from one end of the drive to the other, finishing just where my feet met a stone walk. From these bushes hung globe-like flowers, which accounted for our naming them "snowball" bushes. Today they were especially fragrant, vying for prominence with the keen aroma of manure and humus at their feet. We called them snowball bushes for no one could recall a proper name. I felt uneasy, not knowing, and resolved to find out what they were called. I wanted to line my drive with them one day, too. Not knowing frightened me. I had to know.

I blinked and their petals haloed. I looked beyond the yard, letting my eyes rest on another cause of concern. It was the fence across the street, the one that had always bordered acres of a vineyard; it had come down. There had been no warning. I awoke one morning and it was gone, hundreds and hundreds of feet of the grey split rail, dismantled and gone. There would be no more twilight raids; no more tripping through the grasses, stained pockets bulging with stolen fruit. Raids were no longer the same and I felt uneasy because the boundary had been dismantled.
Flick-tap, flick-tap, —like the alarm clock beside her bed. The cards were new; never had they made such pronunciation. All were down: silence. Now a whisk between her fingers. A shuffle, loud, like a riffle echo. Again the flicking began.

A breeze must have come, for the flowers bouyed for an instant, then resumed their sag. Grandfather would have pruned them this spring, had the leaves not burst from their shells so soon. The garden had wanted tilling and sowing, rose bushes required spraying, and, everywhere, the lawn grew too high, too soon. My Grandfather had attempted to attend to all at once, lost his patience to the flourish, and died in late May.

A tune floated from the house and through the screen. Airborne, it came, la-te-da's drifting, mixing with summer sounds across the yard and beyond, to the borderless vineyard. The melodies ran with no tune, but came, mellow at first, then graduating an octave above her natural talents. Here, as always, they split and ended, unfinished.

Now, the notes joined an image moving behind my eyes. It was a picture of lilies and drawn drapes, of consolation, coffee and sandwiches. Within the center, Gramma sat, rocking in a rockerless chair, la-te-da's moving void of course, unmendable.

Her songs had run a course among us: first being a source of merriment and joking, then a matter of speculation and concern, and finally, a respected secret we shared with no one.

The tune broke. She was shuffling again. The hollow raffe noise. The quick-patterned flick-flick. I leaned to one side, shifted, then scratched raw where the stone had left me wet. A lightness tugged at the back of my neck and moved up and around my temples. I knew I should move out of the sun. I should find my brothers and sisters. But this I could not do. More about her game—I wanted to know all I could.

My world was buzzing, mixing with planes and insects in a faraway drone. The cards were clicking inside where all was muted and cool.

I wanted to enter, but the game would end if I did. It always had.

The flicking went on furiously. I heard a click of her tongue and knew she was shaking her head in disfavor. Mixing with this, the sounds of my sisters' laughs boiled up and I knew their games were over. I squinted through the white light, seeking comfort in their familiar forms, but found, beneath my cupped hands, the vineyard revealed. Borderless, it continued on, a ruffle of green, for perhaps a mile, each row paler than the one before; the last, surely lost to the limits of my own vision.

Flick-flick: off the surface, then silence. Perhaps she was moving toward the bristly rose chair by the window. She would begin her novenas.

A dragonfly came up from the manure and lighted on my knee. It was like a slender stalk of rainbow there. She would be on that chair in moment. The soft clink of rosary beads would be heard. Her melodies would begin.

"Now," I said aloud. "Now!" No sound was heard except for the sliver of life on my knee. It would sting me. Then a thud from inside. It was a muffled fall, yet an explosion.

—Chris Kreiser

Third Prize
LAMIA

Fire is ice and ice is fire,
Let the freezing flames grow higher,
Into pits of peaks retire,
Until mutes become a choir.
Right is wrong and wrong is right,
Breathing sunlight into night,
Until pacifists must fight.
And those with vision lose their sight.
Rings are square and rhombus round,
Find what's lost and lose what's found,
'Till what quivers becomes sound.
And dead men walk upon the ground.
Ice is fire and fire is ice,
Living dead must be killed twice,
Pay your soul to kill the vice,
Of memory at any price.

Honorable Mention
—Jeffry C. Shafer

Twilight Sight

Quickly purple swiftness
hears the gun
and glides on by
while gently the horizon's
amber softness
fills the sky.
Lower in the distance
are black timbers
blending fine
beside children shaking water
from the branches of a pine.
Slowly it gets darker
so they wander
in the door
just to gaze through
shiny windows
and watch velvet
start to pour.

Honorable Mention
—Chris Adamczyk
Three Owls

—Vicki Flickinger
Goddess of Lightning

Bursts of turbulent, whipping wind.
Gleaming neon lightning,
Dramatics on a darkened screen,
Reflecting energy of a restless people,
Goddess of Lightning,
Prima Donna of a dangerous game,
Stakes of human lives and property.
Petty in the thrill of its excitement.
She throws her silvery tantrum with her precious, precise spears.
Her effervescence illuminating the globe and terrifying children.
The insightful realize her magnificent beauty.
The ignorant curse her evil.
Frenzy overcomes a dreary world.
Crackling energy of her agile limbs,
Striking things dead and quickly exiting into the sky.
Long raven hair,
White satin sheath drapes a supple body,
Wild, wide green eyes,
behind lush, thick lashes,
describe her immense, striking presence.
She raises her long fingers and
thrusts a bolt to a pin point on earth,
Tosses her head back,
and laughs at scurrying people out of the burning building.
She smirks at the idiotic ant-people,
Powerless against her.

—Kelly Lynne McDougal

Blue sky smoke,
  atmospheric phantasy,
heaven’s vapor,
  earth’s breath.
  celestial elegance;
raindrop castles:
  Clouds.

—Laura Carroll
Bridge

—Bonnie Lazear
Fugitive

Her hobbling step came to a stop before
The abandoned house. The west wind rustled across
The once well-kept lawn where now nothing but clinging clumps of weeds—unmoved—remained.

The claw-like hand perched on her cane—lassoed
Around a limb of the gnarled leafless willow a
Frayed rope and rotten black rubber inner tube—dangling—
Two faded pink and grey curled signs nailed into the
Tree—Warning—would-be visitors against Tres-
Passing crumbled pile of mortar steps to the
Caved-in rubble of the front porch where her
Family and neighbors had visited on cricket-quiet
Creaky old swing summer nights—Dusk—buried
In the paint chips and dust from the decayed house
A tiny dull diamond set in a tarnished chipped
Ring—shattered picture window blankets the
Swing with jagged shards of rain-spotted glass
Grey sparse wisps of hair—cloth—tattered once-
White lace curtains draped in sweeping spiderwebs—
Caught up by—Time and harsh weather-warped roof
A few tenacious shingles stuck still

Two attendants found her hunched outside
Of the stark hollow shell and carried her
Gently to the car. One shook his head and snorted,
"Senile!" They drove her—silent, stiff
Osyrus statue—back to the Happy Hills
Home for the Aged where she would soon die again.

—Pat Mandia
Transformational Rule

What I say.
What I said.
You heard me.
But what foul thing
pollutes the air . . .
that a winged-bodied word,
horned,
is delivered?
The transformation was not mine.
It was not yours.
It was in the air.
In that veil
shrouding and shifting
between us;
robbing intent,
slanting meaning—
hell bent:
  Down.
  Abyss coded.
  Cailed.
  Distorted.
Whose lungs you leave?
Isolation heaves,
the third person scream.
I heard it, but it was not mine.
We are lost.
We are alone.

—Chris Kreiser
Vulture of the New World I

—Andrea Gallatin
A Lifeline

Even though the doctor
snatched me from your womb
and thrust me into
a cold and harsh existence
and proceeded to snap the umbilical cord
which bound us so perfectly,
you will always be,
... A Lifeline.
A barrier
from pain and sorrow,
and a connection
with love and happiness,
A Lifeline.
A buoy,
which is tossed to me,
while drowning in depression,
and often draws me closer,
when I need security,
A Lifeline.
Nourishment to my soul.
Comfort to my heart.
Meeting my needs and desires,
as only you can and will.
A precious Lifeline.
A bond to view reality with,
but only the beauty
never the ugliness of it.
The cord seems to hold a powerful grip
on me,
and leads me on a straight and safe path.
I feel it tugging now.
Pulling me towards home.
Pulling me to a warm, sleepy lair.
The womb once more.
One last comfortable time.
I struggle,
but it tugs all the more.
I continue to fight
its mighty force,
for someday my Lifeline
will wither and die,
and I don't desire to share its same slow, painful death.
Yanking me into its anonymous grave.
Breaking all the barriers,
which have sheltered me from ugliness,
all these years.
It would be too much for my naive world,
and would leave me shallow and despondent.
So I have to make measures now,
to break its bonds,
before it breaks me.
I have to cut it before it's too late,
before I become too dependent.
So I, too, may become a mother.
So I, too, may become ... A Lifeline.
Don't ya know it's junk mail waiting at the top of the stairs... and you just throw it away. Even if ya know in your mind that someone does love you, if you can't love yourself today how can ya be happy, just in the dealings with the junk mail at the top of the stairs.

—Joanne Grim

REMNANTS

Left are the remnants which once were the future dreams for spirits of the past known as pioneers.

—Elizabeth Zimbello
White Heron

Randy McCallum
Tiger Love

—Bonnie Lazear
The Trail Where They Cried

The moons and the indifferent suns
glanced obliquely, not noting
terrors in the small ones' eyes,
nor trials on the aging shoulders.-

And the march of the Five Nations
moved to the curse of the Long Knives
past the bosom of the soft hills
and far to the blanching plain.-

The gods of the placid Seminole,
and the Creek and the Chocktaw Sign;
the Chickasaws' strange Medicine
did not speak, nor plague nor sing.-

The young grew old, and the aged
died in the yoke of the strange path,
as dews of the night-kiss misted
in the stare of the walking suns.-

The smokes of the Cherokees' tipis
shall haunt the land of the Evening,
and the spirits of the Trail Of Tears
shall weep and sing in the shadows.-

The braves shall hunt in the wilderness,
and strange beasts fall to the bow;
while the squas sing to the doe-eyed young
of The Trail Where They Cried.-

—Carlos C. Beam

HAIKU

Pictures on the wall
fall to feel the floor or more
shattering colors.

—Laura Carroll
Thought

—Rochelle Edwards
Skyscraper

Have you found
what it brings
besides heartship
and pain
below rivers that flow
and the mountainous plain
of a mind deep
in sorrow
for yesterday's guilt
and the trauma is knowing
tomorrow's not built,
but today's hanging
in there
with hardly a hope—
don't fly angel
I can't seem to cope
with madness of running
and following dreams
that are in the foundation
of my mortal schemes
My hope is salvation
beyond the new star
Will we see tomorrow
to see who we are

—Chris Adamczyk

Socials

People of collective nature
gather, on days of mist,
to know each other's goings,
or simply reminisce.
People of solemn demeanor
hide in their darkened room,
and write their last bequeathings,
and hear the thunders boom!

—Carlos C. Beam
DARKNESS NEVER STOPS

The sun tells me I must
write a poem for tomorrow,
a long, sad poem that
says goodbye for a
long, sad time.
The sun burns through my eyes
to reach the memories
deep within,
But I keep them closed.
I keep memories hidden
in dark corners and
old attic boxes.
It's no use bringing
them out again,
for they are antiqued in their
unlit graves of time.
The sun tells me to make
words beautifully soft,
But I feel today not like a poet
I feel today like finding
myself the darkest, coldest
corner of the world where
memories will be nothing
but darkness and cold.
I feel today like finding
a place where
darkness
never
stops . . .

Scales

I awoke to the caustic bell,
and walked to the marketplace
of insensibility.
Upon the Mark I found Opulence,
and in the mill, Despair.
At the end of the vague rainbow
lay John D.'s thirty pieces,
and Hoover's Prosperity.
Away went the sun's high zenith,
up reared the front-door's Wolf;
what-in-the-name-of-George-Meany
must a poor man do?

—Connie Garaux

—Carlos C. Beam
—Lil Sereychas
untitled photo montage

—Dave Dysle
REM

when death
comes on me in the dark
internal regions
i falter and
reflect on absurdities
nothing named
transgresses
these soft paths
hues and forms
do not touch
nor brilliance
finds no
waiting bust
my many loves
find there no
measure
i rise
transcending
and forget
i dreamed

—Carlos C. Beam

Gazing

An icicle hangs
just outside my window
ricoeheting sunlight within
its diminishing self.
The yellow ball sets and
illuminates heavy cream
smoothed over a field
garnished with animal tracks.
And the bare trees stand
at attention surrounding
a towering pipe that coughs
black smoke above a pink haze.
Slowly, a silver line
is traced high onto the horizon
by an invisible
pen.

—Chris Adamczyk
Flowers

—B. Denise Rhea
Train

—Ralph G. Schlitz
MY KIDS

Jesus said to
become like you,
Curious
child,
asking so many
questions,
silent
dreaming,
turn over
little one . . .
Play hard
my sweetheart,
cook me
some
soup,
sure
I'll
have
some
candy.
Yes,
it's
snow outside
no
sunshine.
Sunshine
smile
at
me
with your laughing
blue eyes,
Sad girl,
cry a tear
for me too,
Silly silly
silly
one,
laugh
laugh.
Oh so
poor
child, you don't
have to do
that,
I love you
anyway . . .

—Joanne Grim
Daisey

—Tina Ruble