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"Our Stories" non-fiction	<h3><u>Writers' Contest!</u></h3> <p>We are excited to announce the results of the Writer's Contest held in the summer issue. The 1st place winner is William Hughes with his piece, "Malcom and Chelsea". The 2nd place winner is Cheryl Sommese with her piece, "Winter's Mask". The 3rd place winner is Susan Rocco-McKeel with her piece, "The Liar in His Mind". We were thrilled with what contestants did with this challenge and would like to take this time to thank each and every individual who participated. It was a difficult contest to judge but our winners particularly took the concept and ran with it. Congratulations! Read their entries below.</p> <p>The object of the contest was to take this first sentence and write a short short of 500 words that included the following words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -barren -hope -timid -wasteful -joy <p>First sentence: <i>"There was nothing fundamental about the loss he perceived in his life; it hadn't fostered growth but rather a standstill in what seemed to be an inescapable winter of the soul."</i></p> <p>*For additional inspiration through it's emotive melody, participants could click below to listen to the song, "Winter Sun" by Dishwalla from the 2005 album, <i>Orphanage</i>, via YouTube.</p> <p>The first place winner shall receive a \$15 gift certificate to Barnes & Noble bookstore. The second place winner will get to design the next edition of <i>Writers' Contest</i>. The third place winner has their piece published below. Great job William, Cheryl and Susan!</p>
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Malcom and Chelsea

By William Hughes

There was nothing fundamental about the loss he perceived in his life; it hadn't fostered growth but rather a standstill in what seemed to be an inescapable winter of the soul.

How else do you explain Chelsea Sinclair? Her eyes were like fresh almonds, her hair black like a raven's feather and curled like a spring. I remember most summers I would look out my window and admire her from afar. She would see me sometimes and wave back with a smile.

I see her on that night wearing her dress, driving us around, looking up at the stars. Her timid smile telling me all I need to know.

"Isn't the night sky beautiful?" she said. I followed her gaze.

"Yes it is. It's like having a million spotlights shining down on you at once." She seemed to agree. Chelsea leaned in and gave me a kiss similar to if not better than the one we had shared at the dance.

She would always look stunning with her lips rose red, her skin a hazelnut complexion. I had to ask her to the Senior Prom.

What happened that night? I just remember dancing. Chelsea was pretty in blue, glitter shimmering off her skin. She leaned in close to whisper something into my ear and I intently listened.

"Why have you never kissed me, Malcolm? I don't bite or anything."

As I looked deeply into her almond eyes I could feel my face contort to a quizzical state. I didn't know. I leaned in close and could feel the room evaporate around us. That night was magical.

"Malcolm, are you okay?" Chelsea's confusion seemed turned to transfixed joy. I had to shake out of the memory of the hour before. "Sorry I was just thinking of how wonderful it was sharing our first kiss." She chuckled.

I would freeze that memory to help me through the coming tide of despair when I felt I couldn't go on. Her laugh against the usual Martin Stone, preacher and social activist, his first book would always be the Holy Bible. And he was my father. His own father's fiery sermons always preached how a wasteful existence would lead to damnation in the hereafter.

I couldn't see but could hear everything that was going on. I heard Psalms tearfully recited by a voice like my father's. Crying seemed to echo.

It seemed as if hope had dissipated. I forcefully opened my eyes. All at once the noises made since I was in the hospital and the reality of it caused tears to now flow from my eyes.

"Where is she?! Tell me is she okay?" I was almost hysterical. To his credit, Martin, my father, shed a tear and continued to read from the Psalms. What could have happened? On that night we were looking at the stars.

The mistake was freezing that smile. Those few seconds and a deer changed our lives. When I saw the doe's eyes I saw a plentiful future become a barren landscape.

Winter's Mask

By Cheryl Sommese

There was nothing fundamental about the loss he perceived in his life; it hadn't fostered growth but rather a standstill in what seemed to be an inescapable winter of the soul. The wasteful consumption of the land only heightened his melancholy of untimely goodbyes, so he rested his brow against the barren bush praying for answers. "Where is she now?" he uttered as his body collapsed onto the lawn.

Jenna regularly broke the rules of love like an unrepentant bandit reveling in a brazen spending-spree; and her spontaneous departure from Joe continued the pattern. Her plump lips sipped the freshly-brewed liquid, fashioning her face with joy, as her milky fingers flipped through the chic magazine pages. "I want my hair to look just like that," she thought while primping for the salon appointment.

Joe rose from the ground like an elderly man with creaky hips; frosty grass stained his newly-purchased jeans. "Great, now I have to change," he thought as he entered the minimally-furnished flat. He threw on different pants and crept out by way of the slider. Burning leaves scented the air about him.

The man drove aimlessly until his truck halted in front of Jenna's home. He sprinted to the doorway and rang the decorative bell, but no one came. "I guess she's out," he thought, but then the woman's car came careening around the bend. An inexplicable awkwardness violated his innards.

Jenna departed the snazzy vehicle in confusion. She stared blankly as she blurted, "I thought we said everything we needed to last night." Joe anxiously gnawed at his lower lip while answering, "No, I don't think we did." "Then come in," the delicate voice rejoined with a measure of compassion.

Joe and Jenna entered the tasteful home. "I made coffee earlier, would you like some?" the woman nonchalantly inquired. "Thank you, no, but I have a few things to get off my chest," Joe exclaimed with conviction. "Then do it," Jenna evenly replied.

The couple sat at the large, marble table. Joe looked timid as his lids fell in angst, but confidence soon overcame his face. He tenderly peered into Jenna's chocolate eyes as his mind processed the words he would say. Fortunately, the syllables came to flow with ease.

"You have the capacity to love but you stop yourself," he began. "You act like you're incredibly selfish, but I think it's all a front. You're afraid of love, Jenna, and I believe it's because you don't feel worthy. Well, I'm here to tell

you you're wrong. Whether you find it with me or someone else, you are worthy of love."

Jenna stared on in amazement. She lurched forward to grasp Joe's imposing hand. Hope filled the air as they gazed at one another with fondness. "Are you busy on Saturday?" she asked with trepidation. "Yeah, I think I'm free," he professed with a smile.

The Liar in his Mind

By Susan Rocco-McKeel

There was nothing fundamental about the loss he perceived in his life; it hadn't fostered growth but rather a standstill in what seemed to be an inescapable winter of the soul.

The man went through the motions of necessity, shuffling to the bathroom and drinking. He avoided the vacant-eyed stranger in his mirror while rinsing the bitterness he tried to spit.

Then crawling back on the bed, staring impassively, he was swallowed by the emptiness. He lost time, the alarm removed of its battery to rid the man of the ticking that contradicted his heartbeat. His proud will that once propelled him had retreated to the shadows.

The man's days, once vermilion and plum had grayed. He preferred the fading, fearing that color would refocus his eyes on former expectations. Hope, obscured by repetitious binges of self-pity was a neglected bargain, requiring the effort of notice. The gray days stretched incessantly until night when they dwindled into the wasteful sleep of nothing and nobody. His barren passivity became his continuance until pressed once more to collect another box of documents marked "For Review" to add to the dusty pile in his foyer.

The boy, with his shaggy black hair and undersized shirt, contrasted oddly with the plush carpeting and hand-painted murals of the hallway as he waited for his mother to clean the mess of others'.

The man had kept the boy to a fuzzy periphery, Tuesday's hallway décor; but today the man had to see the boy to avoid tripping over him. The simple joy of play shining in the boy's obsidian eyes as he pushed a scuffed truck along the wall irritated the man like gravel ground into the raw spot of his soul.

"Hey, Mister," the boy greeted. He received the usual silence.

"Hey, Mister, you sick?"

"Scram, Kid." Encouraged by an answer, the boy got to his feet.

"I got nowhere to go 'til she's done." The boy pointed his head across the hall. "Hey, Mister, you got job for me? I'm strong, fast."

"You want money."

"That's what job is, Baboso," the boy muttered, lowering his voice on the last word and twitching his nose at the man's unwashed smell.

Turning away, the man trudged sloppily, in bare feet, to the lobby to collect another box. Bending to lift it, he gasped and stopped, rubbing his left oblique muscle.

"I carry it, Mister." The boy pulled the box nimbly into his scrawny arms, waddling with the weight. He scabbled through the man's door, depositing the box carefully on the other boxes.

The boy squared his shoulders, locked onto the man's eyes and held out a dusky palm.

A timid smile reluctantly dared to tickle the man's lips.

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