

Fiction Contest

Thank you to all who entered our Creative Minds Fiction Contest. We received many excellent submissions and congratulate our contest winners! We'd like to thank CTY fiction writer Ben Reynolds for helping us choose the winners.

Our Creative Minds Poetry Contest will open in June. For details, go to www.cty.jhu.edu/imagine.

First Place

Forgiving

by Kelsey Josund, 15, WA

"Hey," I said quietly, stepping through the door. The sun slanted through the open curtains, casting her face in shadow. My mother didn't look up from her writing.

Her graceful dress seemed outdated to my forward-thinking eyes, though it was the height of fashion, and her carefully arranged hair seemed a mockery of the real world. I had a hatred in me boiling against this old world, where the nobility had hundreds of underfed, oppressed minds at work to make their every moment flawless. Resentment flooded forward; I'd trained myself for so long to reject what I'd been raised to covet.

But this was my mother. Two years away weren't enough to fully sever the bonds there.

Steeling myself, I took one step toward her. Another. I intended to walk up behind her and assert myself, but I wasn't strong enough and I kept on going, stopping when I reached the window. My knuckles whitened as I gripped the sill, gazing out at the garden without seeing it. Through all that I'd seen, all that I'd done, I had never been as afraid as I was now, trying to talk to my mother who was a stranger to me.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. I was apologizing for everything in those two words: the way I'd acted as a child, humiliating her. My childish rebellion had been utterly unnecessary. The disappointment I must have been to her. Running away from school. She had never been affectionate to me, but I knew somewhere under the stolid façade was a parent who really cared about her children. I don't think I was just wishing for that.

Her hand on my shoulder made me jump; I hadn't heard her get up. "No," she said, her voice quiet in my ear. "I'm sorry."

Startled, I turned to look at her, angling my chin upwards. Last time I'd been this close to her, she'd been a head taller than me. Now, we were the same

height, and I was a little taller if anything. But standing there beside her, I felt like a little child who had to look up.

"I'm glad you met my father," she said slowly, not looking at me. I wasn't sure if she was talking for my benefit, or for her own. I remembered the way Grandfather had comforted me in the rare moments I'd wished for my childhood home, the one I'd run away from. I had always seen the two of us as the black sheep: he the one who'd grown old before giving up on trying to conform, and me the one who had never given it my full effort. "He is a good man. You should have known him when you were younger."

I didn't know what to say. Nothing seemed right. I said nothing.

"When I was young, he tried to be a good parent." She sounded nostalgic in a melancholy way. "I never knew my mother, and he had no idea how to raise a girl. No father can be a mother."

I nodded. I didn't feel like I'd known my mother, either.

"He had a school for local boys, did you know that?" she said, laughing a little to herself. "Taught them everything, how to be an officer and how to fight. They were peasants' boys, though; they never needed that. He insisted I come along to classes."

That surprised me. My regal mother, in a class like Grandfather still held in the village in the mountains?

She turned to look at me, moved her hand to my cheek. "I know what it's like to not want what your parents hope for you. It was never the right fit for me, that life he tried to give me."

I saw tears in her eyes, but she seemed happy. To my surprise, I felt tears in my own eyes, too.

"This was never the right fit for you." Her voice was soothing, and she smiled. "Find where you fit."

My gaze shifted to her face, then away. I surveyed the room, the spotless pine floor up to the bookcases that lined the walls. All of it, from the claw feet of the antique desk to the ornate carving along the tops of the bookshelves, was too lavish. Uncomfortably nice. Even the dust motes floating

listlessly in the sunbeam seemed richer than the ones found anywhere else. The monogrammed paper in its neat stack was imperious and the tomes on the shelf were as certain of their superiority as the gold-leaf tea set on the desk.

She was right. This was never my place.

But as my mind wandered back to my grandfather's little cabin in a village not big enough to warrant a note on any but the most detailed maps, I realized I didn't belong there, either. I had been ashamed until then that I had so easily adjusted to warm bath water and five pillows on my bed. But I didn't need to bathe in a stream and sleep with my clothes balled up in a pillowcase to be myself. I was somewhere in between.

My mother continued to smile at me, her perfect white teeth and her wide green eyes congruent with the neatness and wealth of this room. She could not have been more different than the homely women

of the village, with their scraggle-toothed smiles and ash-dusted hair, and yet something in her face reminded me of their kindness. In that moment, I would have almost said my rule-bound mother was offering me the chance to break the rules.

Find where you fit. Her words echoed in my ears. I nodded, knowing she would understand. I didn't know where I fit, not yet. But I would find out.



Kelsey Josund is a freshman at Shorecrest High School in Shoreline, WA. She enjoys figure skating and snowboarding, hanging out with friends, raising money for good causes, and of course writing. Kelsey is working on two full-length books, as well as many poems and essays. In 2006, she co-founded the Pink Polka Dots, a fundraising guild for brain cancer research that has since raised more than \$100,000.

Second Place

Touching the Sky

by Megan Hatch, 16, MA

I made a path toward my friend's house with a loaf of pumpkin bread in my hands. It was her birthday today, and I had promised to make her my mother's famous pumpkin bread.

Three houses away from my friend's house, I sighed. I had just passed a pothole in the pavement and annoyed myself; upon seeing it, I had immediately thought of someone speeding over it, losing control of the car, and crashing into another car. Nothing like that had ever happened, of course, but that was one thing about me: I worried.

A lot.

Honestly, sometimes I thought I was afraid of *life*. Don't get me wrong: I didn't live in a bubble or anything. I loved to play sports, act, and be with my friends and family. But with everything I did, a voice in my head always said, "the stage lights could fall and kill you," or, "you could tear your ACL when playing soccer," and, my personal favorite, "if you don't triple check the lock on the door, then a murderer will come in and kill you all."

"Yes, thank you," I always thought to the voice. "Thanks for being so weird. Now shut up."

Third Place

une tranche de vie

by Elizabeth Koh, 15, CA

It's biting clear, twenty-seven degree weather, and light streams through the window, leaves little puddles of white on the floor. She throws open the window and sticks her head out, looking down at the street. Ten stories up, it is an overturned anthill of bug-like cars, scuttling over the concrete below. The taxicabs race among the automobiles like dots of sunshine among smog-stained clouds of rain. Framing the congested traffic, warmly clad people wrap their coats closer and hurry on, oblivious to the world around them.

The window clatters shut, doors open and close in rapid succession. Soon she too steps out of her apartment and joins the crowd, feet clicking against the pavement. Above her, the sky stretches out over the city, an endless plain of blue.

Honorable Mention

Dragon Nonsense

by Maya Aronoff, 10, MI

Read these stories in their entirety and more about the authors at www.cty.jhu.edu/imagine/creativemindscontest/contestresults.html.