

*May 2, 2019*



## HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY AWARDS

*2019 Winners*

**Poetry First Prize**

*Overcoming Gravity*

**Alissa Frame**

Pittsford Sutherland High School

Grade 12

**Prose First Prize**

*Electric Fingertips*

**Tali Beckwith-Cohen**

School of the Arts

Grade 10

**Performance Prize**

*Rainbow*

**Rebekah Marcus**

Rush-Henrietta Senior High School

Grade 11

**Poetry Second Prize**

*Button Ups*

**Fallon Rendon**

Greece Odyssey Academy

Grade 12

**Prose Second Prize**

*The Worry Tree*

**Meena Potter**

Pittsford Sutherland High School

Grade 12

**Poetry Third Prize**

*Amen*

**Emani Diaz**

School of the Arts

Grade 12

**Prose Third Prize**

*Something Found*

**Caroline Palermo**

Penfield High School

Grade 11





# SOKOL HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY AWARDS

## PRESENTATION AND RECEPTION

*May 2, 2019*

*Since 1958, the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library has sponsored a creative writing contest for high school students in grades nine through twelve. In 1985, Mr. and Mrs. Eli & Mildred Sokol established an endowment, through the Community Foundation, that makes it possible for us to award monetary prizes to the winners and honoraria to the judges.*

*We are pleased to offer a special performance prize in addition to the traditional prose and poetry prizes. Through the Sokols' foresight and generosity, the Friends & Foundation of RPL will be able to encourage young writers for generations to come.*

**Thanks to the committee members who selected the finalists for this year's awards:**  
Andy Iserson, chair; Lyla Grills, Mary Heveron-Smith, David Hou, Jim Memmott, Patrice Mitchell, Kate Parsons, and Patricia Uttaro (Monroe County Library System and Rochester Public Library Director).

**The Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library thanks the three judges of the 2019 Sokol High School Literary Awards competition:**

### **For the poetry awards**

The elegies in **Charlie Cote's** forthcoming book, *I Play His Red Guitar* (Tiger Bark Press, due out May 2019), lament and celebrate the loss of a beloved son, taking the reader through seasons of grief, recovery and transformation. Cote is a clinical social worker in private practice in Rochester, NY and the author of *Flying for the Window* (Finishing Line Press, 2008). His work has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Big City Lit*, *Segue*, *Salamander*, *The Cortland Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Upstreet*, *Connotation Press*, *Ducts*, *Terminus*, and *Quiddity*. He teaches poetry at Writers & Books and serves on the board of 13thirty Cancer Connect and BOA Editions, Ltd.

### **For the prose awards**

**Leslie C. Youngblood** received an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a Bachelor's from Georgia State University. A former assistant professor of creative writing at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, she has also served as a columnist and assistant editor for *Atlanta Tribune: The Magazine*. Youngblood's writing honors include a 2014 Yaddo's Elizabeth Ames Residency, the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Prize, a Hurston Wright Fellowship, and the Room of Her Own Foundation's 2009 Orlando Short Story Prize. In 2010 she won the Go On Girl! Book Club Aspiring Writer Award. In 2016 she landed a two-book publishing deal with Disney-Hyperion for her middle-grade novel, *Love Like Sky*, which was published in 2018. She's currently at work on her second novel that will be published in 2020.

**For the performance prize**

**Joshua Pettinger** is the Owner & Operator of Wicked Squid Recording Studio. Josh has had a deep passion for the art of audio production since 2005. He holds an A.S. and B.A. in Audio Technology and has run Wicked Squid since 2011. His skill sets range from remote audio recording and mixing to artist development and management. Josh has worked with a variety of organizations including Gathering of the Vibes, *Upstate Live Magazine*, Allston Pudding Music Blog, the Rochester Public Library, and the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library (FFRPL).



Friends & Foundation *of the*  
Rochester Public Library

FFRPL raises funds, presents programs, supports special projects, creates specialized spaces and purchases supplemental materials and equipment for the Rochester Public Library. [ffrpl.org](http://ffrpl.org)

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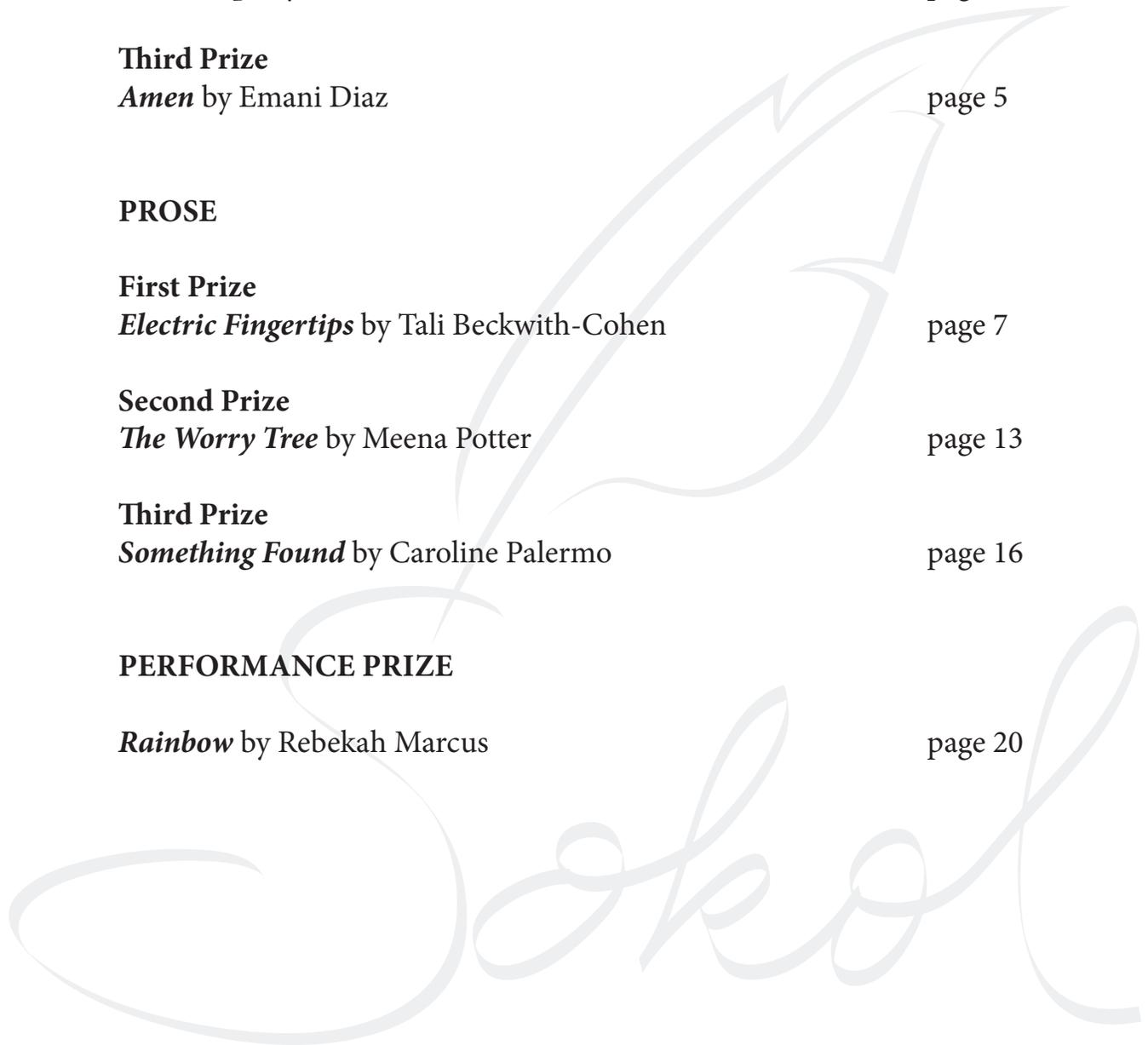
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# Overcoming Gravity

The white fluorescent lights shine like an artificial sun.  
But they still rise and set each morning and night.  
The squeaking of wheelchairs fills the stale air.  
My nose tickles with the overwhelming aroma of Purell.  
I touch her frail hand and feel the years of sun,  
the delicate smoothness amid wrinkles.  
The room is warm with stillness, empty stares that I see.  
Tiger runs in and covers her with kisses,  
right there at the Highlands.  
Well, dogs aren't really allowed in the center.  
No matter, we'll bring Bodhi next.  
Because there's something about them,  
they make those fluorescent lights a little more like the sun.  
Silence and one-way conversations filled in by a dull drawl coming from the tube.  
"They've discovered Jesus' bones after years of search..."  
and with a flip of a channel,  
"Now, patter the eggplant coins in the breadcrumb mixture..."  
We sit in the rehab center and have cherry cough drop breath.  
She says we can shoot the breeze,  
but the breeze only blows in one direction here.  
The rainbow-colored pills of fear and confusion and skeptical relief  
shake around in plastic cups.  
Everyone is as active as turtles.  
We float through the air and abandon all constraints,  
eating cherry pops the size of balloons.  
Li twirls through the air, taking her by the hand.  
I tell her we'll be in the garden tomorrow,  
popping juicy tomatoes in our mouths.  
Pretend footsteps embedded in the grass.  
I'll backtrack through them towards the future,  
and you can come with me.

*Nous marcherons à la lune, vivant au milieu de la gravité.*

Teeth will talk and lips will yell up to us.  
As we sit with our legs hanging over the moon,  
Lights rising and setting above us.

**Alissa Frame**  
Pittsford Sutherland High School, Grade 12

# Button Ups

My brother was born in 2015.  
He was five feet, four inches  
and one hundred twelve pounds.  
He sent me a letter,  
a formal introduction  
in the form of chopped hair  
And button ups,  
that were found in the  
Boys section  
of our favorite store.

I would go with him,  
to select some shirts.  
And he'd reject every one  
I'd present to him.  
With a sincere smile saying,  
*"Pink isn't really my color,"*  
And he tells me  
He notices  
when a stranger sees  
That he's carrying the weight of the world  
pushed down and flattened out  
right underneath his button up.

Suddenly there has become  
a war on button ups,  
Bloodied button ups,  
Don't come home button ups,  
Never got the chance button ups.  
But in the battle of button ups,  
All of the soldiers are banned.

And then there are times  
When he says,  
*“Why must I prove that I am a button up?”*  
Is it that easy to confuse him  
for a short skirt?  
When there is a tag  
that sticks out the back of  
my brother’s button up shirt -  
A brand they’ve given him  
as they call him brave,  
But there is only one word  
He wants to bind himself with,  
*“Boy.”*

**Fallon Rendon**  
Greece Odyssey Academy, Grade 12

# Amen

Hanging down, a low starry sky,  
moon dripping in silver sways.

A gentle shadow that speaks back to me,  
connecting without words but through silence,  
a feeling of comfort that speaks volumes—

Volumes not measured by a disconnect between,  
but a connection all around.

Maybe I belong.  
Maybe I don't.

My faith in you descends  
just as quickly as the moon leaves me.  
Is it faith, that stole my peace of mind?  
“God will guide you” they tell me  
but is it wrong to feel mistreated, misguided?

We used to talk for hours,  
a familiar fluorescent light would greet my face,  
talking to the moon where I sit  
searching for answers.

Pushed down to my knees surrendering,  
I remember who tugs on the strings of life  
In the far distance rings a too familiar chorus  
“How precious did that grace appear”

Shyly I hum along,  
foolish girl.  
I will not again be bitten.  
I no longer look to the dismal sky,  
its silence covers my eyes.

If I were to scream Amen,  
would I then be a better woman?

**Emani Diaz**  
School of the Arts, Grade 12

# Electric Fingertips

My hands are cold when I wake up. The windows are frosted with residue from last night's storm, the crystals of snow, visible and well defined. Each one is different. I take a deep breath and summon all the warmth left in my lungs, expelling it onto the freezing glass. I watch as the snowflakes are devoured by my breath and turn into tiny little tears. I wonder if these small pearls of liquid can retain the patterns of the crystals they once were, or if each unique pattern becomes lost as it melts into a uniformed river flowing down my window pane.

On my walk to work, I keep my hands pocketed, trying to defrost them. A nurse needs warm hands. I have learned that the warmth of a gentle touch can heal someone better than pills and drugs. I wiggle my fingers and try to send electric sparks through their tips. For a moment, I feel the familiar sting of my nerves going haywire, but it dies, smothered by this impenetrable cold.

The hospital's beds sit in long rows, just how I left them last night, and just how I will find them tomorrow. Nothing ever changes here except for the patients, and even they begin to look similar after a while. Sickness gives the same makeover to anyone who is housing it. My fellow nurses say health is the only remedy to restore their previous expression, but I think that is wrong. I think that once sickness has permanently moved in, once it has carved out a space for itself in the chambers of your heart where you can feel it, pulsing and aching, you can find a way to look like your truest self again. Sickness can liberate you. I have seen it happen.

Marty Hudson is a man who has been with us for months. His sleeping figure, shrouded in blankets, has become a familiar decoration. He smiles at me as I peel back his curtain. He looks forward to any company, especially mine. His teeth are revolting, yellowed and rotting, but I force myself to look him in the face and greet him.

"How are we today?" I ask.

"Just fine, just fine," he answers, but I can tell he is lying by the way he winces as he lifts his neck to speak. It is funny how some patients try so hard to mask their pain. They don't want to draw attention to their weakness, especially in front of the people they like. I am one of those people. The doctors think it is because I work hard. The nurses think it is because I am young and remind old men of their daughters. They do not know about the sparks in my fingers.

I look at the pillbox in my hand and smile up at him. "Ready for your painkiller?"

He tries to casually nod, but I can see the desperation in his eyes. I hand him the capsule and a plastic cup of orange juice. His hand shakes as he raises it to his lips. Little drops of juice slip down his chin and onto his pillow. As I watch him, I rub my hands together, gathering their moisture and igniting the nerves in my fingertips. I step closer to him as I take back the cup, and place my hand on his arm with careful precision. I feel his muscle stiffen, then relax. I close my eyes and feel myself sink below external contact, imagining my nerves attached to his, like a bridge between us. I can feel his pain, feel his aching joints and how he longs for the past. Through my palm, resting on his cracked skin, I feel how lonely he is, day after day in the same bed. It almost overwhelmed me, but I accept his sorrow like a gift, and in return I send him my warmth. I push it through the pores of his skin, sending all my youth and electricity into his bloodstream. I hold his arm until I see his eyes soften, then, I let go. As quickly as it had come, I feel his pain dissipate inside me, and I watch as the temporary strength I have given him leaves his expression.

Mr. Hudson smiles up at me again, but this time he is sincere. “Thank you,” he says. He does not know what he is thanking me for. They never do, but it is enough. I am not smart or pretty, bold or brave, but I have my fingers, and the look on Mr. Hudson’s face after I have touched him fills me with pride.

People are afraid of sickness, afraid to get too close to it. I am not, and that is why my touch is electric.

I leave Mr. Hudson and move on to other patients. By lunch, I have felt the anger of a woman who will never walk again, the frustration of a young man dependent on tubes in his stomach, and the fear of a child, whose mother may never wake back up. Although these feelings leave me as soon as I relinquish my grip on those who truly possess them, they haunt me throughout the day, reminding me just how much pain there is in the world. When I am assigned a new patient, I am praying that they will have some minor affliction, some small laughable accident that will not require the healing powers in my fingers. I fear I do not have enough strength left to send. I am distressed to learn she is treated for cystic fibrosis.

As I peel back the curtain to her bed, I see that she is sleeping, breathing peacefully. The sight is almost funny. A woman with wires hooking her up to a machine, at peace in her dreams. There is no one there with her, no one kneeling over her bed, praying she will recover. She is all alone.

I am careful as I take her heart beat. She stays asleep. I stop to look at her, to take her in. Her face is rounded, her features soft like a child's. I guess she is about 30, just a few years older than me, but she looks youthful. Her eyelids flutter with each inhale of breath she takes.

Her hair is short, falling just above her shoulders in frizzy curls.

Curiosity makes my fingers start to tingle. I want to know who this woman is and how she came to be in this bed. I want to brush my fingers against her skin, but I restrain myself. I will wait until she is awake, otherwise it feels like I am invading her. I don't want to invade, I want to heal.

She stirs. I continue to measure her blood pressure. She stirs again, and I take her temperature. Her eyes crack open at the beeping sound of the thermometer. I smile at her as she tries to get a hold of her surroundings. It takes her a few short moments of panic to remember what happens, then she sinks back into her mattress. Her eyes are foggy, drugged out. Her mouth opens, trying to form words, but she finds her voice is cracked and dry. The woman looks away and by instinct I reach for her hand. Her skin is soft.

I feel the familiar sensation of sinking as my nerves latch on to hers. I send sparks down, through my arm and try to find her, to let her in. Slowly, like molasses, fear and despair slip up my arm. I brace myself, make myself remember that these feelings are not mine, that they belong to the woman I am touching. Sometimes I have to remind myself. I summon all my strength and try to let it melt down my veins and into hers. I see her eyes relax, and know my electric fingers are working, but then, all the sudden, her eyes harden again. She yanks her arm away from me and the world takes shape again. She frowns and rolls over, eyeing me resentfully. I stare down at my finger and wonder if they are failing me. I walk out of her room confused. This has never happened. No one has ever rejected my healing fingers.

That night when I lie in bed I think about the woman. It doesn't make sense. Why would she pull away? Why would anyone reject the relief I can give them? Especially a patient with cystic fibrosis. I have seen cases like hers. They hardly lived past thirty and when they do their lives are full of suffering. Why would she not accept my fingers like the gift they are? As I drift into a fitful sleep, my resentment turns into hurt. I am hurt that she didn't want the only thing I have to offer. That night I dream that when I touch the girl, my hands are hot coals and she cries out in pain. "Don't touch me!"

I wake up with my hands clenched and a whole nights worth of resentment tugging my lips into a scowl. I catch my reflection in the mirror and silently vow to help as many people as I can today. I will prove to myself that my fingers can work miracles. I feel the sparks already flying through my fingertips as I dress and tug on my worn out tennis shoes. My walk to work today takes half the time it normally does because my steps are quickened by determination.

By the time I enter my first patient's room my hands are itching with excess energy.

I memorize the expression on each sick person's face as I flood their nerves with relief and hope. I commit to heart how the tense muscles around their mouths relax, almost into a smile. Each small expression of gratitude I receive wells up inside me, warm and comforting. It slowly begins to push out the confusion over the girl who pushed me away. I am starting to think of her as a mere hiccup, a medical mystery, when I pass by her room and am reminded of my humiliation. Every inch of me wants to stop and look in on her, to prove to her that my fingers work. I want to make her need their electricity and watch her eyes fill with gratitude. I want to make her accept my gift, because it is all I have to offer, and she was rude to refuse it.

I slowly enter her room for the second time. She is still alone, no trace of a grieving family. Today she is reading a magazine. She puts it down as I enter, glaring at me. "Good morning," I say. She doesn't respond, and I pretend to be reading her monitor. She picks up the magazine again. In a split second decision I reach for a thermometer. "Can I see your forehead for a moment?"

She scowls and lifts her frizzy curls up for me to place my instrument. As I lower the thermometer, I carefully make sure my fingers make contact with her skin. It is warm to my touch. I start to send her my sparks, carrying with them all the healing thoughts that I possess. I frantically push them down my arm, knowing I have mere seconds to convince her to let me heal her before she pulls away. She is quicker to catch me this time.

"Stop doing that," she says. Her voice is not loud. She does not yell like she did in my dream, and yet her voice is commanding. I remove my fingers from her skin. "Stop doing that, stop making me feel strong," she says again. This time her voice is less sharp. This time it is broken. I bury my hands in my pockets, ashamed. In the moment, I thought I was helping her, but her discouraged face makes me feel like the bad guy. I have never forcefully used my electricity before and it felt wrong. My fingers buzz with anger, anger at myself for not fighting the urge I had. I should have just let her be.

The girl's hateful eyes push me out the door, but I stop with my hand on the door knob. I turn around quickly and say the word that has been bouncing on the tip of my tongue since the first time she pushed me away.

"Why?"

The girl doesn't respond.

"Why don't you want it?"

The girl smirks. "Because I am going to die anyway, no matter how strong a freak like you can make me feel."

"But don't you want to feel strong again?"

“No, I don’t want to feel strong. I want to be strong.” Her voice is cold, but it is no longer venomous. The words she is saying are what scare me. They threaten everything I thought I knew. They threaten the electric sparks in my fingertips.

“You don’t want hope?” I accuse, one more time, desperately clinging.

“Not if it is false.”

I leave her room and make my way to a supply closet. I shut the door and stare at my fingers in the darkness, my one gift. False Hope. The words seem to echo through the empty closet. I can’t escape them. I think of Mr. Hudson, who has been barely alive for months, who knows each breath could be his last. I think of all the times I have given him strength. Was I lying to him through my fingers? Was I giving him a lick of something he would never be able to taste for more than the few seconds I made contact with his skin? He was going to die soon. Perhaps my fingers were just prolonging his suffering by giving him something false to live for.

The line between healing and hurting had always been so clear to me. My fingers and I had always effortlessly fit on one side, but this girl was blurring it, and for the first time ever, I wasn’t sure where I belonged. I was lost.

A loud beeping sound coming from down the hallway interrupts my thoughts. Any hospital employee can recognize that sound. It is the sound of coding. I gather myself and rush out of the room, following the sound until it reaches the same girl’s room, the room I just left. Her body is convulsing as she reaches for breaths she cannot find. Two doctors are already trying to ventilate her, and it is my job to hold her down. As I quickly approach her, I see the panic on her face. The cool, hard features are gone, replaced by fear. The moment she has been prepared for all her life has finally come, and she is terrified. She looks like a completely new person.

Although she is barely conscious, I know she recognizes the hands on her shoulder. Her frantic eyes dart towards me. They are pleading for something, but I am not sure what. Subconsciously, my nerves begin to reach for hers. I try to stop them, but I can’t. I feel her terror wash up my arm, and I know I need to give her something back, but strength and hope are all I know how to give, and she has made me question them.

Her monitor is going haywire now. The doctors begin to slow down. Trying to save her life is only protocol now. It is only so that we can tell her family we did all we could. I need to give her something. I can’t let her die with that fear in her eyes, I don’t realize what I am doing until I feel something new slipping through my nerves and into hers. Courage. I reach down inside myself and summon up courage. I imagine tiny soldiers marching down my arm and

standing beside the girl as her death approaches. They do not fight, they just salute her and hold her hand as she takes the last few steps of her life. The girl's body relaxes as I continue to force bravery into her arm, and then her eyes soften. She lies perfectly still as the monitor continues to speed up. I watch as her hands unclench and her mouth becomes fierce. For a second I can see the girl she could be. For a second I can see who she was underneath the sickness. My fingers become so warm I think they will burn. Then the monitor stops beeping and all emotions wash out of my arm, all except acceptance, which I realize is mine. I release my grip on her shoulder and watch the girl. She looks like she could be sleeping, resting, dreaming. I imagine her eyes opening and the true girl inside her waking up, the girl without fear and full of hope. The girl who faced death with courage, and let the feeling free her.

**Tali Beckwith-Cohen**  
School of the Arts, Grade 10

# The Worry Tree

"I want you to think of a field. Waves of nameless grass, weeds, tiny flowers glimmering with morning dew. It's an atmosphere of vague familiarity that wraps around you as your world manifests according to your design. There is a forest somewhere, a mile behind you, and the moon is gazing fondly down upon you, nestled in her bed of clouds. Simple, peaceful, quiet."

"Now imagine a tree".

"Any type of tree you want. It could tower above you, stretching across the sky, dappled with mixed starlight and moonlight. It could be the size of your hand, the long rippling grass making it nearly impossible to see. A weeping willow, a giant oak, peeling bark, blue leaves, pink fruit. Imagine you look closely at the fruit. Imagine those fruits are shaped like stars."

"Now I want you to imagine something that's hurting you—a cruel comment, a stressful situation, an overwhelming thought—and give that something to a fruit. Watch as it lights up, holding your burden for you. Take as much time and as many star shaped-fruit as you need. Don't worry, they'll be there when you return."

I always worry that I'm going to fall asleep when I visit Dr. Janette. Her voice feels like a heavy layer of snow on a house, and I sometimes get muffled by it. It doesn't help that my chair shoves the smell of pine needles and cinnamon up my nose, that pungent smell of old furniture in unfamiliar offices. Nevertheless, I obligingly close my eyes, trying to remember the tree I've made up in the past.

It's white, the fluorescent teal sap pulsing just behind translucent bark. The pale green leaves are wisps of clouds, or maybe cotton candy. Specks of golden fruit pepper the branches, emitting a brilliant glow as they bob in the breeze of the evening wind.

I don't like to count how much fruit I light up.

I don't think my great-grandmother did either.

...

Nobody says why my great-grandmother left.

My mom was the first one to actually talk about it. She said that Nana had packed her bags, leaving her room empty, and took a little vacation, but she never said where that vacation was. Whenever I ask her about it, Mom bursts into tears and demands why I don't have faith in Nana. Sometimes she'll cry without me even saying anything, and when I ask her why, she shakes her head and says she's fine. It's not nice to keep secrets from people.

I don't think Mom's fruits are lit up. I think she believes she doesn't have them.

My older brother says we shouldn't cry about Nana. He says it's her fault for abandoning us. He tells me that I shouldn't look at pictures of her or wish for her back because she doesn't deserve that. He says she betrayed us. When we first learned that she had left, he punched a hole into the kitchen wall. I know he was angry, but now the wall is broken and that's never a good thing. We're very fond of walls, my family.

I'm pretty sure my brother's tree doesn't even have any fruit. Maybe the only things there are the splattered remains of glowing star-shaped fruit that were hurtled to the barren field ground.

My younger sister has a rock that she keeps under her pillow. Sometimes I'll come into her room and I'll catch her whispering to it. She says it's a wish stone, and if she wishes on it 1,000 times, Nana will come back. I tried telling her that's not how it works, but she never listens to me. No 2nd grader listens to what people say anyways.

I think my sister's tree is shriveled and dried up because she doesn't water it. I think she just hopes for rain.

My grandfather doesn't talk much. Nana was his mom, and as soon as he heard the news, he locked himself in his room and doesn't come out save eating and going to the bathroom. I don't think we've had a proper conversation in months. If you approach his door, you can hear the TV playing the same cartoon, over and over. Grandpa must have it memorized by now. I wonder why he doesn't watch anything else.

Grandpa's tree will get no water, not because he's not watering it, but because he's moved his to an icy tundra. The water will just freeze if it gets close.

"How about your dad?" Dr. Janette asks. I wonder what her tree looks like. Maybe it's a pine tree, and a layer of snow frosting the leaves that do nothing to shield you from the glow of her fruit. I'll bet her branches are strong and broad to counter the weight. She's got a lot of people giving her worries enough for twenty trees.

"My dad?" I ask, pulled out of my thoughts.

"A couple weeks ago during our last session, you said he really liked the idea of the Worry Trees and wanted to try it. What do you think his tree looks like?"

My dad's tree glows, I'll bet. When you stand by it, you can see one large branch with pictures of Nana nestled among the leaves so he doesn't forget what she looks like. If you climb up to the branch, you can hear the whispers of stories about Nana when she was young, stories she's told Dad countless times. There's a tape recorder tucked gently away in a hole in the branch playing a song she wrote. At the base of the tree trunk, there's a notepad with

drawings of trees and fruit and little notes in his scattered handwriting, reminding himself how to make the tree. That's how he knows what to say when I start crying and can't seem to stop, when my world spins and calming down is something that's as elusive as an unlit fruit on his tree. That's why when he wipes my tears away, he tells me to take a deep breath.

And then he tells me to imagine a field.

I love my family with all my heart, and that includes Nana. And I know everyone misses her just as much as I do. I know I may not have as much fruit as my dad, and that he may not have as much fruit as Nana, but I know that we all have some, and I know that it can hurt. I know that we all treat our trees differently.

Sometimes I cry about Nana too. Sometimes I feel like my tree has too much fruit, that the branches will break with a sickening crack from the trunk and topple down upon me. When that happens and Dr. Janette isn't there, my dad asks me what I think Nana's tree looks like.

Her field is full of fairies, of hidden creeks, of floating water lilies. Her tree is laden with fruit to the point where the branches dip and billow, bending close to the ground.

But the branches don't break.

A lot of people that are Nana's age have trees full of fruit, but they don't like to admit it. I think that's a very human thing to do. I think it's very human to dislike the fact that you need to have a tree every now and then. Nana really liked her tree, though. I think that's human too.

Sometimes people don't care for their trees. Sometimes people forget how to.

I think it's important to remember.

I think that's what Nana did.

**Meena Potter**

Pittsford Sutherland High School, Grade 12

# Something Found

“Only half a mile left!” she called out. The problem was we were only half a mile in and I was struggling to keep up. I am not a runner, in fact until my best friend Emily and I began rooming together this year, the last time I voluntarily exercised was back in high school. Now, I was doing it to keep up my end of the deal with Emily. When the first two weeks of living together didn’t work out due to Emily’s ability to leave the dorm a mess and my inability to leave the dorm at all, we decided to draw a compromise. If she would pick up more, then I would go out with her more and try to be social. For some reason, this included these despised runs every other day.

“I don’t see how this will make me the social butterfly that you are,” I heaved as I placed my hands on my knees to catch my breath.

“Do not stop running,” Emily retorted as she spun around, still jogging in place, “I’ve explained this to you before, running releases stress, which reduces insecurities. It’s very simple, Abby. You’re lucky I haven’t created an entire marathon training program because your self-confidence seriously needs it.”

I winced in reply. I’m used to these types of comments from her from time to time, but they still sting. Plus, I can’t help that I’m not the confident, happy, beautiful person that she is. Looking at her, then at myself, I can understand why she gets all the attention. She is tall, thin and dressed confidently. While she is wearing bright pink running shorts and a tank top, I am dressed in my favorite Boston University sweatshirt and sweatpants which she says make me look like her mom. I was a sweaty mess running through Boston Manor Park during the hottest week of September to date. But why couldn’t I just take the sweatshirt off? Good question; to be short, I am just sick of it – all of it. The stares, the laughs, the finger pointing, and especially the way mothers tilted their bodies to block me from their children which were attempts at being discreet, but I noticed all of it. When I was younger, it didn’t bother me. For the first year, I was just happy to be alive. This was until middle school when I became aware of my looks and suffered from the awful tormenting that followed after going to a birthday party during the summer before seventh grade. The birthday girl, Carly, had a pool and told everyone to bring a swimsuit so I wore my favorite purple bikini. As soon as I took off my cover-up, I felt the burning of their eyes on me. I was called a freak, a monster, and one boy in particular was so upset that he pushed me down. And because of what? People hated me because of the scar that stretched across my shoulders down to my ribs, mutating my stomach

and chest. The bubblegum pink scar tissue twisted in every direction like a spider's web. There was no way to hide it without clothes, the skin bulged at the seams of the scar. I knew I looked different from the others, but that day I realized that maybe different wasn't so good after all. When I got home from the party, I went through my clothes and threw out those that gave others even a glimpse of my scar. I then convinced my mother to buy me all new clothes before school, so my closet pretty much consisted of sweatshirts, sweaters, turtlenecks, and pants. I was 12 years old.

Emily is the only one here in college that knows about my ugly secret. She has never made me feel bad about the scar, but it has become an invisible wall between the two of us since I never want to explain the crash to her. She feels left out, but I do not think there is any way she could understand. There is also the factor of embarrassment. That's why I keep my sweatshirt on, shower in the dorms at the crack of dawn when no one is up, and have confidence the size of a dust mite.

"Dad save me!" I scream as I see the red orange flames climbing up from my hip to my neck, "I'm going to die!" That's when I sit up in bed, awake immediately in a cold sweat; the nightmares have returned. They are so vivid that the scent of singed hair still fills my nostrils as I wake up. I know it was 10 years ago, but I remember every detail as clear as if it were just yesterday. The flashbacks scare me so much that for the first 5 years following the accident, I saw a psychologist to manage my PTSD. The scar is more than physical, the story behind it has left a mark on every aspect of my life.

I roll over and see that the clock reads 2:47. Since I'm already up, I decide to run into the shower before the rest of the floor begins to stir. I grab my towel, toiletries, and throw on a sweatshirt on top because you can never be too sure that everyone is asleep at this hour. Once, I made the mistake of wearing just a tank top and a girl gawked at me until I retreated into the stall.

I turn on the faucet to a lukewarm temperature because hot showers have only reminded me of the flames. Tears soon join the water and together they are channeled by the scars. The only person in the world who would understand my situation is Dad, and he is long gone. See, while many pity me for coming out of the crash mangled, I pity my dad for never coming out.

First class is theology. It is my favorite class because I use it as a time to reflect on the actions of God. Why did He let that man get so drunk? Why couldn't we have left home an hour earlier like we were supposed to? Why did the man have to be driving a semi-truck? Why did He save me and not Dad? As for the rest of my classes, I am so submerged in

learning that the rest of the day flies by. They give me something different to think about instead of what my mind usually wanders to. In the world of stoichiometry, Shakespeare, and supply and demand, my personal problems can't reach me.

Later that night, as I'm studying for a test, I log into my laptop and look at the tab I left open. It reads "Authorities Identify Victims in Semi-Truck Accident. Father Killed, Daughter in Critical Condition. Drunk Driving Suspected as Cause." I close out of it, frustrated with myself. Whenever I am bored, I always seem to find my way to that article. It's the most self-harming thing I do. I couldn't tell you why, but for some reason I read it so much that I could probably recite it. What upsets me the most is the way it talks about my father like he was just a statistic. Not a person with a real soul and a heart of gold. Not the type of person who could make you belly laugh even when you're mad at him. Not the type of person who lit up every room he walked in. Not the type of person like my father. From a bystander's perspective, however, the article is accurate, thorough, and well written. It even goes back to earlier that evening and how the two of us lost track of time playing cards and left an hour late to get to Mom's work dinner party. This background is used just to amp up feelings of pity and sadness and it works. By showing that we were at the wrong place at the wrong time, the reporter raises awareness for drunk driving which brings some peace to me. Still, I close my computer with tears rolling down my face.

The next day is Saturday and Emily has the genius idea of bringing me to the school's activities fair. Reluctantly, I agree because she has been doing a great job of picking up (and washing!) her dirty clothes and taking out the trash.

"Oh! What about Alpha Phi! We could be sorority sisters!" squealed Emily.

"Absolutely not," I replied.

She then tries with Habitat for Humanity, Educational Theatre Association, and Model United Nations. None of them sound right. Suddenly, I see her body tense up. As I follow her eyes, I see why. There is a booth with a boy in a wheelchair and two other kids. The sign reads "Mothers Against Drunk Driving Support Group."

"Bingo," Emily says in a near whisper.

She pulls me right up to the table, signs my name on the list, gets the information packets, and introduces me to everyone. It happens so fast that I don't even have the time to resist. The first meeting is on Monday.

It seems weird, but I am oddly excited for the meeting and not just because it will get Emily off my back about socializing. Emily's really helped by telling me that if it is awful, I never have to go again and that she is free all evening, so she can even come with me if I want.

I decide that it's best to go alone, however.

When I walk in the door, I see the three people from the booth and another boy I recognize from my Economics class, Michael. I'm immediately greeted by the boy in the wheelchair, who seems to be the one in charge, and told to take a seat. I plop down next to a girl who looks about my age. She has long brown hair that covers most of her face and long, thick eyelashes that accentuate the piercing green of her eyes. I remember her name is Ava. We go around the circle saying our names and stories. Ava starts. She tells the story of how her cousin was killed in a drunk driving accident. Then Lenny, the boy in the wheelchair, explains how his decision to get in the car of his friend after a party was the worst decision of his life. His friend had a BAC of 0.3 and veered off of the road into a tree. Lenny lost his legs and his friend lost his life. Next is Amy, a quiet girl who lost both of her parents at the age of 6 due to a drunk driver. Then it's Michael's turn. I look at him patiently and see the hurt in his eyes. I recognize that look, because it is what I have every time I think of the accident. He opens his mouth, ready to start, and then closes it. Finally, he shuts his eyes and a tear trickles down his cheek.

"It's ok Mike, we understand," Lenny says. Then he turns to me and says "Why don't you go next?"

"Ok, I will try," I stammered, "My name is Abby, I'm 20 years old, and the past ten years of my life have been a nightmare." I tell them everything; including things I've never told my mom. I tell them how time slowed down as I saw the truck swerve. I tell them how I felt as the heat crawled up my neck. I tell them how the sight of my father is something that will always haunt me. Every little detail, I tell them. By the time I'm done, I am crying really hard, like snot-nosed crying. Ava comforts me by giving me a hug and the others begin to clap. They are proud of me because I've gone through so much and still fight on. As I look around the room of people who were strangers an hour ago, I finally feel at home. And there is something else, something that I have not felt in the longest time and that I lost when the truck hit us. It is hope.

**Caroline Palermo**

Penfield High School, Grade 11

# Rainbow

I have a whole rainbow of friends.  
They're the people I often unknowingly spend  
The most time with.

Red. My red friend loves to play pretend,  
Keeping her heart locked up, suspended,  
Like the red house across my street,  
Alone, small, shrinking and shrinking as its red paint peels and its red window shutters blend  
into a warped mess of wood.

But she's all cherries and strawberries,  
A sweet but bitter ordinary  
girl with no  
intentions of living past graduation,  
her red blood dripping and dripping in her solitary sanctuary where she lies, wary, and let me  
tell you it's really scary.

Orange and yellow. My orange and yellow friend is the color of the sun, of sunsets, quiet,  
but I bet  
Somewhere underneath her fiery exterior  
There's someone struggling,  
a little bit blearier,  
but she's always cheerier  
than the rest of us.

And I'll never know when she'll wink out of the sky,  
Closing her eyes with the smallest of sighs,  
Her light, the one that could light a whole room,  
Gone with a blink and a click of her tomb.

Green and blue. My green and blue friend stretches as far as the eye can see,  
Reaching for her dreams, I guarantee,  
By the time we graduate she'll forget about me.

Her eyes soft hazel and her confidence unnerving,  
Her emotions as wild as the angry sea, alerting me to her,  
Deeper than I could ever be.  
Who knows what lies behind the surface,  
Behind a lush forest of trees that are worthless when they have nothing but water.

Purple. My purple friend and I have a lot in common, her  
Shade hard to determine when  
She fades in and out of being human,  
Her purple as dark as the night sky,  
Trying to satisfy  
Her whole world while staying silent,  
But sometimes,

Sometimes her purple lightens into a beautiful lavender, her color far  
Brighter than anyone I've ever seen and  
Sometimes,  
Sometimes,  
She reminds me of the little purple flowers  
That come by in the spring  
A reminder that not everything  
Is ending,  
A reminder that she never has.

And then there's me. I'm white. Nothing special, except for the moonlight  
In my eyes. Too much white can blind, so I tone it down and  
My friends accept me hanging around.

I have a whole rainbow of friends and, again,  
My rainbow of friends all happily send

Their regards.

They remember you, you see. I remember you, you and me.

I met you when you were the whole rainbow,  
The happiest person I'll ever live to know and  
When I said yes (which seems so long ago)  
I didn't expect you to melt like snow.

Your rainbow collided, your color became black,  
Your face finally cracked  
Under the pressure of being someone you weren't.  
And you reached out and touched me, you touched me with no intent of turning back.

That was when the black ransacked me,  
You abandoned me,  
Leaving me to slowly turn to grey.

No one likes grey, not quite.  
No one likes grey, not better than white.

I have a whole rainbow of friends and, because of you,  
because of you.  
I am not one of them.

**Rebekah Marcus**  
Rush-Henrietta Senior High School, Grade 11