



**2009**

**Robert Fox Awards for  
Young Writers  
Award Winning Entries**

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<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>
--------------------------

**POETRY**

**First Place**

- We The People* – Stephanie Moore . . . . . 3**  
9<sup>th</sup> grade – School for the Creative and Performing Arts (Cincinnati)  
Teacher: Dr. Joy Fowler

**Second Place**

- Winter* – Patricia Stuart . . . . . 4**  
10<sup>th</sup> grade – Athens High School (Athens)  
Teacher: Ms. Anne Kemmerle

**Third Place**

- The Blacker the Berry* – Brianna Lundy . . . . . 5**  
11<sup>th</sup> grade – School for the Creative and Performing Arts (Cincinnati)  
Teacher: Dr. Joy Fowler

**PROSE**

**First Place**

- Moon Child* – Olivia Joy . . . . . 6**  
10<sup>th</sup> grade – Ohio DELA (Akron)  
Teacher: Mr. Nathan Stewart

**Second Place**

- To Save a Life* – Kristen Spicker . . . . . 15**  
12<sup>th</sup> grade – Mother of Mercy (Cincinnati)  
Teacher: Mr. Greg Bouman

**Third Place**

- Infinite Beauty* – Abby Napoli . . . . . 21**  
9<sup>th</sup> grade – Laurel School (Shaker Hts.)  
Teacher: Ms. Dory Gannes

## INTRODUCTION

The Robert Fox Awards for Young Writers was established by the Ohioana Library in 2006 in honor of Robert Fox (1943-2005). Robert Fox was a writer and poet who served as the Ohio Arts Council's first poet in the schools and then became literary coordinator for the Ohio Arts Council, a position he held for more than 20 years. During that time, he coordinated the OAC's Individual Artist Fellowship program, the Summer Writing Institute for Teachers, and the compilation of the OAC Writers Directory. He also worked closely with the Arts in Education residency program and served on the Ohioana Library Board of Trustees from 1985 – 1990. He authored several books, among them *Destiny News*, a collection of short stories; *Moving Out, Finding Home: Essays on Identity Place, Community, and Class*; and *Passing*, a collection of poems.

Ohioana's 2009 Robert Fox Awards were given on May 9, 2009 during the opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Ohioana Book Festival: Celebrating Ohio's Authors. The awards were presented to the students by Kate Templeton Fox and Ohio First Lady Frances Strickland.

The writing contest was open to Ohio students in grades 9 through 12. First, second, and third place awards are given in both prose and poetry. This booklet contains the 2009 winning student entries.

We thank the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, Barnes and Noble Booksellers, and the Ohio Department of Education for their support of the Robert Fox Awards for Young Writers, and the teachers and parents who have supported and encouraged students to participate in the program.

## **WE THE PEOPLE**

By Stephanie Gail Moore

2009 Ohioana Robert Fox Award Winner

Poetry - First Place

With justice  
and warm liberty  
swelling in their hearts,  
the three men sat, fingers  
scribbling across the rough, battered  
pages. Waxes dripping from dim, faded  
candles, ink splattered across their large  
achy hands, they clear their thick throats, and  
in swift, clear, print, they declare their independence,  
in words once whispered from dry tongues, and caroled in  
shadowed tunes to words now proclaimed through the simple dip of a pen,  
scrawling across the page declaring loud and clear,  
*We the People.*

## **WINTER**

By Patricia Stewart

2009 Ohioana Robert Fox Award Winner

Poetry - Second Place

Cold white flakes float gracefully to the ground  
Seems the leaves fell down just yesterday  
Many birds 'round here cannot be found  
Hibernation season on its way  
A white wonderland is all that I can see  
Snow rests on now bare branches of maple trees  
It begins to cover the ground around me  
Unheard the dying grass sends up its pleas  
Dense snow smoothly blankets countless rolling hill landscapes  
Sun beams reflect light sparkling beautiful rainbows  
A brand new bud through melting snow escapes  
No longer does the brutal snow oppose  
Animals begin to emerge from their warm winter hideouts  
And along cool winding broods new wild grass sprouts

## **THE BLACKER THE BERRY**

By Brianna Lundy

2009 Ohioana Robert Fox Award Winner

Poetry - Third Place

The blacker the berry the tougher the skin  
Little ghetto boys and girls sit on stoops witnessing things that should be unseen  
Mama tries to do right by her baby, but when morning comes she gotta go to work,  
When night comes she has to visit her good friend-  
Cold and smooth in her hand, the friend fades all of Mama's stress away when she pops  
the top  
Liquid poison trickling down her throat  
Mama's baby finding her in a pool of her own vomit  
Baby feeling bad, 'cause she was the one who brought the bottle from the tiny fridge at  
Mama's command

The blacker the berry, the harder the problems  
Mama's baby's stomach cries  
Mama ain't got the food to quiet it  
Reaching in the cookie jar looking for money she comes up empty handed  
She'd use that money on her friend

The blacker the berry the bigger the cycle  
Mama's baby, long legged and grown  
Adjusts her bust and waits for her next john  
Mama never really loved her,  
Not the way a good mama should, but these men might-  
Of course not all, but maybe, just maybe one would

The blacker the berry, the greater the hope  
Maybe she'd change-  
Maybe she'd have the will to be different than her Mama, who still wakes in those putrid  
puddles  
Maybe she'd be that sweet blackberry that sweetens the world

## **MOON CHILD**

By Olivia Joy

2009 Ohioana Robert Fox Award Winner

Prose - First Place

There once was a boy and a girl. That's how all stories begin; a boy and a girl, a princess and a knight, so on and so on. My story begins with a boy and a girl but one of them was extraordinary. The girl, my dearest friend, was a child of the moon. What does that mean? It will explain itself shortly.

When I was a young boy I liked to sneak out at night after curfew. Having a one-story home made it all the easier. I pushed the window open, crawled out, and went walking in the woods until I was dragging my feet to get home. Sometimes I fell asleep in a clearing for hours. Sometimes my parents caught me in the act of escaping. They always warned, "Son, you'll get eaten by a bear this late at night." Because we lived in a cabin far back in the forests of West Virginia; our only neighbors were wildlife. But I digress. In my old age I seem to have taken to rambling. I can't help myself when it comes to the moonchild. She's much too extravagant.

During my nightly explorations I found many things out in the trees. Hiding spots, animals, nests and dens. I made friends with field mice; I watched owls sweep from their perch, taking their breakfast to the treetops. I howled with coyotes in the dead of the night. Not once did I meet a bear, though. I always dreamed of wrestling a grizzly. A child's wish, but it was an entertaining fantasy.

I remember fondly the night of my twelfth birthday. It was October twenty-fifth, just past midnight, and I wore my thickest flannel pajamas with my heaviest coat and boots – it was very cold that night. I may have worn a hat, also; I believe it was snowing. I crawled out my window, took my usual path to a fallen tree I often visited to observe

the bugs inside. Always scurrying, finding, eating, until they flew off somewhere else. But this night was different. On my log was a sleeping, shining figure. Shining figures were impossible to my maturing brain but my childish side knew I was seeing a ghost. What else could it be?

When I got close she sat up, wide-eyed and innocent, and I could not stop staring. I'm sure if a bear were to jump out I wouldn't have noticed until I was mauled to death. No, maybe not even then. She was just too beautiful.

Everything about her was white. Her skin a shimmering milky white, hair the color of spider webs that was full and silky, like waves gently caressing her shoulders and hips, that moved softly in its own breeze. Even the small dress she wore was white and glowing, a gauzy material, covering her from shoulder to feet. And those eyes I'll never forget. Large pools of white with the slightest pale blue in her iris. They were framed by a thick lace of eyelashes. The only dark thing on her.

Oh my description does her young beauty no justice. I knew this was a bad idea, writing this memoir of my time with her, but I fear for my sanity as I grow older. I'm already beginning to forget where the dishes and silverware are in my house. I found crackers and socks in the refrigerator, not knowing how they got there. If I were to forget about my dearest moonchild I'd never forgive myself. She deserved to be preserved in history. When she...no, I'm getting ahead of myself.

So there she sat, that beautiful girl, staring at me with her impossibly large eyes. It didn't make her look awkward; she was angelic in all her shining glory. And her voice – ah, the shivers that raced down my spine, the electric zap that made the hair at the back of my neck and on my arms stand on their very end! A true siren's call!



“Greetings to you, strange boy,” she had said. I remember the smile on her face that seemed to make her glow more.

It was by far the best thing I ever saw in my young life. I believe I wanted to die at that moment, I was so happy; I knew nothing would ever make me feel so good. After her, everything else would be a disappointment.

And it most certainly was.

“H-hello.” I had to try at least six times to say that much and my voice still squeaked. Embarrassing for a brave boy like me.

“What are you doing in my forest?”

I wanted to laugh at her so much I had marks on my palms from my nails when I balled my hands into fists. It helped resist the urge. She thought it was her forest when I was the one born and raised in that area, where she just happened to show.

The next time I spoke it only took me two tries to spit out, “Where did you come from?”

And she pointed up. At the sky! If she told me she happened to appear there I would have believed her, but falling from the sky? Oh my little brain did soak it up, savored the information. I had so many theories in short seconds – my favorite being *So this is what a shining star looks like when it lands* – but she quickly dispelled my thoughts by explaining.

“I come from the moon.” A darling look of consideration crossed her face then. “Well, no, I suppose that’s not true. I guess I am the moon.”

“You came from the moon?” I gasped. An alien! I never thought they existed but I had proof. Or I thought I did.

She gave me that innocent smile. “Whichever way it works. I don’t think it’s been decided.”

“Why are you here?”

“Because it’s time to play, you strange, silly boy. For weeks I’ve grown brighter, ghosting through the treetops, and now I’m ready to stretch my legs again.”

“You appear constantly?” For I had never found a glowing girl in my forest before.

“Every month but I notice I fall to a different location every time.” Her frown morphed her face into something of sorrow; I wanted to cry from her expression alone. It was then, or maybe several times she grew sad afterwards, that I realized her eyes changed when she was upset. The blue disappeared, the white filling gray and black to create two gorgeous full moons.

I didn’t want her to be sad so I did what made people happy: I offered to be her friend. Who wouldn’t want to befriend the strange angel? She was so beautiful, so sweet.

We exchanged pleasantries, or would have had she known her name. Those eyes filled with moons again. I had to do something to take that sadness away so I dug deep into my thoughts and found some useful information. The name my mother used for the moon. She would often say when she tucked me in after our prayers, “Have sweet dreams, little one. Luna is smiling down at you.” My mother adored the moon with every fiber of her being.

And that was how I came to know Louna. A beautiful child of the moon, or the moon personified. But this wasn’t the end. You see, something happened to my precious Louna.

That first night we talked and played games (I always won at hide-and-seek and tag, being able to spot her easily) until the sun began to light the horizon. I stayed up much too far past my curfew I wanted to fall asleep there in the forest. With a sad smile I left her in that clearing. But imagine my surprise when I returned the next night only to find Louna waiting for me! I had spent night and day dreaming of her. Her eyes lit up when she saw me.

I realize now that before Louna I never really understood happiness. Yes, I was happy when my father gave me a BB gun for my birthday one year. Yes I was happy when my parents smiled at me and complimented me for a job well done, yet I never knew a true, content heart until Louna. There was something about her that made me feel like life couldn't be better. I wanted to drown in that feeling. I never wanted to wake up from this strange dream, at least that's what I told myself. It was all a dream. Now here I am, still living in that dream.

For many years Louna and I met. I waited the whole month just for the full moon to see my darling Louna. We spent the days up until the new moon – you see, every day the moon moved in its waning phase, she would become less visible until she was little more than the ghost I once believed she was – and then, we'd wait again.

Every year that passed I grew older. Louna never changed. She stayed that petite fourteen I always thought she was with long silky hair and white gown. Before long Louna had to knock at my window when I would go to bed early for work the next morning. I hated growing up. Louna begged to play; I had to sleep, no time to play any longer until my days off.

I knew I should have died much younger; denying Louna tore into my heart that knew so much joy and contentment as a teenager. But Louna, always the one to please, she would come into my room and sit at the edge of my bed using that siren voice to put me to sleep. Sometimes she sang, sometimes she told me stories of what she saw around the world.

Eight years passed from the time I became busy with my adult life. I was twenty-five then. Living my mature, adult life, surviving on my own in the city. I hate to admit it but I truly moved out of the forest because Louna kept finding me, asking to play. I feel that weight still heavy in my heart today.

No reason to fret, though. Louna found me in my apartment. The moonlight cascading through my window, there she stood. She traveled through the moon's rays since she obviously couldn't go through walls or open doors; even when she visited me in the cabin the moon was bright in my window, shining on my bed.

There she was in my apartment, glowing, young, beautiful as I remembered, frowning. Full moons in her eyes.

"What happened to my strange, silly boy?" she whispered. "He disappeared and was replaced with this...man."

"Louna I can't play anymore," I replied. "I'm...old. I have a job I need to keep up with. I can't be out all night."

"But you can! You always stayed with me despite your working thing. Do you know how long it took me to find you?"

Of course. I counted the days we were apart. It was little more than two years. Two years of boring life and pain.

“I can’t do it anymore, Louna,” I had whispered.

“Don’t say that,” she pleaded. “You’re different from the rest. You’re better. You’re my friend.”

I shook my head and willed her away. If she left, things would go back to normal. I wanted boring, depressing days, not beautiful, fun days. Well, nights, really.

“You can come with me,” she said quietly. “You can live with me in the sky! Please, I beg you! Please don’t leave me!”

She stumbled forward and I was surprised when she felt solid against me. Her little hands fisted in my shirt, large moons pleading with me. I can still see the devastation on her face. But I pried her hands off me, turned her away. I should have pushed her out the window yet I savored the feel of her shoulders under my fingers. Her dress so soft, skin so smooth. Warm.

“Don’t do this to me. We’re friends.”

“And we’ll always be friends but I have-”

“No!” She whipped around, eyes black as night in her newfound rage; like a starry night, they were. “If you don’t come with me in the morning we’ll never be friends! It’ll mean nothing-all the time we spent together.”

I sighed at her. I grew up in front of her eyes; she noticed I stopped playing even when I had the time, so she should have known that age-old child’s demand wouldn’t affect me.

The dark eyes disappeared when I wouldn’t answer. They became those moons again, begging me. “Come with me, then. When morning comes I’ll take you to the sky with me. We’ll live there forever and play more. No more work.”

I smiled gently at her pleading. So cute, so innocent, just like I remembered. “I’m sorry Louna, I really am. It sounds wonderful but I can’t give up my life to play forever. Besides, I’m old. I can’t do all the things I used to. Climbing trees is nearly impossible for me now.”

Her lower lip jutted out, forming a perfect pout. She let me go and moved backwards to my window, eyes focused on me. With the dim light I barely spotted it, yet I know there were tears building in her eyes. She turned her back just as one rolled down her cheek. I remember because I still see it in my mind’s eye before I fall asleep every night.

“If that’s how you want it,” she whispered. “My poor strange, silly boy. Out of all the humans I met you were always my most favorite. You befriended me, gave me a name. But you grew up, now you have no time for a child’s wish. I won’t bother you any longer.”

She faded before my eyes.

I rushed to the window just in time to see the moon vanish. As if fast-forwarding through time; half moon, crescent, nothing. Not even a shadow. Then there was all the media attention when the moon didn’t shine for days. But I knew exactly what happened. No one would believe me, though. How could anyone believe someone who says, “Oh, I just happened to emotionally hurt the moon, now she’s very upset?” No one.

I don’t believe it, myself. I didn’t hurt her. I killed her. She wanted a friend, I offered the friendship first even, and I went and took it back for selfish reasons. Because I wanted to sleep, because I wanted to keep my job, my life! At what cost? Everything! Every day after she left I was miserable. Driving home at night meant nothing when I

couldn't see that beautiful orb shining in the black, knowing she was still out there. It was just stars.

But I recall nearly thirty years later there was a sliver of white amongst the stars. She peeked out one night. I could feel her watching me with those wide eyes. Beckoning me.

It was fifteen years later she looked at the earth for another night. Scientists started calling it a phenomenon, predicting sightings like she were a comet only viewed every one hundred years. But again I felt those eyes at the back of my skull, the whisper of her voice.

Now I sit here at seventy-five, a truly old man like I used to tell Louna. Every time I remember those words I laugh; I never knew old until my bones turned brittle, I started losing my hair. Now I definitely couldn't chase her through trees or climb with her. Not that it mattered. Louna, my precious moonchild, the one person who made life worth it, was never coming back. She made that clear. I should have never told her no. I should have never told her good night that first night. She offered to take me to the stars; I should have gone.

I suppose I'm sounding like my grandfather. I never liked it when he went on about his "could've beens." I shouldn't force you to listen to mine, either. I only wished to tell you my grand tale of my dearest Louna. The child of the moon. The glory of the moon personified.

I'll close my book now, turn out my light, look out the window to see the moonless night, and go dream of Louna.

Wait! There's a miracle happening! I stand at my window this instant watching the moon fill before my very eyes, watching those night owl people in the street look to the sky in wonder. Is she coming back?

I write to you, yes, she's materializing before me now, lovely as ever. She's just as I recall. And she's smiling at me! My hands shake just like the first time, my eyes are welling like the last. Oh the beauty before me!

"My strange, silly boy," that siren voice calls to me, "will you forgive me?"

"Yes," I answer numbly. These feelings coursing through me are almost too much. My heart breaks five times faster.

"Will you finally come with me? Up to see the stars? We'll be friends forever and I promise you'll be able to run as you did those years ago. We'll run between the stars like the forest of old." She holds her hands out to me, waiting patiently.

She knows I won't deny her this time.

I watch my hands as they write these words, watching the wrinkles slowly fade from my skin, becoming strong and young. Everything about me becomes alive once more. So I shall put my book down, my tale finally complete with my own surprise ending, and sail through the stars with my darling Louna.



**TO SAVE A LIFE**  
By Kristen Spicker  
2009 Ohioana Robert Fox Award Winner  
Second Place – Prose

I wasn't supposed to be there to witness his death. It wasn't my duty. He was not my brother, my father, my son. We had severed ties completely, and yet I was the one he graced with hearing his death rattle. I didn't want to be there, hospitals weren't my thing. They reeked of the dying, especially on his floor. They said it was suicide, that he had intentionally OD-ed. I wish I could say that I knew. But the frail body I was looking down at wasn't recognizable to me. This wasn't the boy I had grown up with, my childhood best friend, the man I had loved. He was a foreigner to me, a monster, but as his lifeless body lay stiff on the sheets, I saw the child the monster had suppressed within itself.

It was me who found him, slumped in the corner of an empty bedroom at the party. He was unconscious with beads of sweat slowly slipping down his forehead. At first I had turned around, I wouldn't have come if I'd know that he'd been there. But there was something about his crumpled body that made me stay. I called his name softly, and repeated it when I didn't get an answer. I walked over to him, putting my hand on his shoulder. It felt oddly cold, and it was then that I noticed he was sweating. I knew immediately that it wasn't normal. I started to shake him, screaming his name out in panic. Later, when I asked the people at the party what he had took, no one answered me. He wasn't mine, but they offered him to me willingly, not caring as long as he wasn't their mess to clean up.

I cried on the ambulance ride over, that was the only time though. I think I had known then that things would be over soon, that he couldn't run from his consequences

anymore. They were selfish tears though. I was crying for myself, and I knew it. The doctors and nurses tried to console me, saying it wasn't my fault, and I nodded, knowing that I was the innocent bystander. They were the professionals who could fix everything. I was a teenager trying to make it through high school with my sanity. I didn't want nominations for sainthood, but opportunities had been shoved my way. I had wanted to live an average life, but I never received it.

The screech of the flat line brought information that I couldn't deny. The doctors didn't know how to save a life, and neither did I.

It was May, the last summer he was alive. I had practiced my speech so many times that it now sounded fake and foreign in my mouth. Everything in the house had been straightened up nice and neat. I kept trying to find more magazines to straighten, or slant at different angles to make it seem like I wasn't nervous about the upcoming conversation. It took all of my control to not run over and rip the door open off its hinges before he had even knocked. With a gentle rap at the door, I slowly stood up, slightly shaking, trying to swallow the knot in my throat.

He was smiling, oblivious to what I was going to tell him. I knew that in ten minutes there wouldn't be a smile on his lips, that he wouldn't even want to have anything to do with me. I took a deep breath, preparing a smile, but it failed. Instead my lips trembled pathetically, my eyes reddened, and I could feel their lids started to water over. The smile was off his face now; a look of worry took over his strong features. I stepped aside to let him in, and faced my greatest fear. I looked in my boyfriend's eyes, "Zack," I started, my voice shaking, "we need to talk."

It started off the way I had predicted. He sat down on the couch, giving me his slanted smile, a smile that normally could make me melt. However, when I looked at my Zack, it was as if he wasn't the same person who last Saturday, blacked out for half a minute from drinking and laughed about it. Like he wasn't the guy who took Xanax during lunch, or the kid who thought partying hard made him look older and more mature. The conversation didn't go well to say the least, the outcome had gone as figured, as though it was predetermined by tarot cards. I told him I was worried about him, he was partying too much, too hard, and wearing himself too thin. That I was afraid that soon there wouldn't be enough of him to exist. I had high hopes that he would at least consider my words, realized I was telling him this because I loved him, because I *love* him. Instead, he denied. "It isn't that bad," he falsely tried to reassure. "I won't be like this forever, I'm just *having fun*."

This wasn't my only attempt though. It was only the beginning of multiple tiresome conversations held at three in the morning that left me emotionally and physically drained the next day. I fought with him for weeks, hoping that my stubbornness would be the one to persevere, that there was the chance that he loved me enough to give up his Hollywood lifestyle, but in the end, it didn't matter. He was selfish, and he only loved himself. But that didn't stop him from hanging onto me. Every Sunday morning my cell phone would go off there'd be a tap on my window, or a letter and flowers on my nightstand, all saying the same thing; "I'm an idiot, I love you, I need you, forgive me?" And all meaning the same thing, that Zack was never going to change.

I tried to give up on him, sever all ties completely. He didn't care about me, if he did he would see that this was hurting me. That every one of his consequences were passed onto me. My first attempt to give up on him failed miserably. I caved three days later after passing him in a store. He came over to make small talk and after an hour-long conversation about nothing of importance, I voiced that I really should be getting home. There was a moment of awkwardness, neither of us knew exactly what to do. I finally broke the tension and leaned forward, hugging him. It was strictly platonic, but as I pulled away, he looked straight at me, and I melted.

"You aren't my mother, you're my girlfriend, stop nagging me!" Zack yelled during one particularly nasty fight.

"Listen to me, I'm trying to help you," my voice on the edge of hysteria.

"You're acting like you know everything! Like you seriously know what's best for me? Well, you don't. Don't expect me to change because you want me to. Weren't you the one that said you wouldn't change for me? Well I sure as hell won't change for you."

"Zackary, I only want you to slow down with partying, you don't have to change. I'm not doing this for me, like I'd seriously waste my time when I could find someone else. I'm doing this because you obviously don't know how to take care of your self, and I'm the only one who cares enough to try and keep you alive. And guess what, I **do** know best," I snapped, walking away from my boyfriend for the last time.

The funeral was the easy part. I didn't get angry when the priest talked about how he was such a blessing to everyone and never wanted to be a burden. The Zack that I knew had died long ago, this was just an imposter, giving everyone else the chance to say goodbye. This was just a formality. It wasn't until the first pile of dirt hit the coffin that I showed emotion. A solitary tear slipped down cheek, then another. Soon enough, I was in hysterics, my shoulders shaking and breaths coming out in uneven intervals. I felt someone grab my hand and squeeze it. I looked up to see Zack's mother smiling sadly.

"I think it's the worst when you watched them destroy themselves, and no matter how hard you tried, it didn't help," she said, looking at me knowingly.

I could only nod as my sobs increased, showing no signs of stopping. His mother pulled me to her, supporting me. It was as if every swallowed tear and emotion I had ever felt because of Zack had resurfaced. I was crying over the fights and the break ups, the sweet and romantic moments I couldn't get back, the feeling that no one was truly infinite or immortal, the loss of the first boy I had ever loved, and the disappointment that I couldn't be enough for him, that I couldn't save a life.

## **INFINITE BEAUTY**

By Abby Napoli

2009 Ohioana Robert Fox Award Winner

Third Place - Prose

*Beep-beep-beep-beep.* My hand reflexively flings itself onto the red snooze button and, in the same jolted motion falls limp on the end of my bed. As my groggy eyes begin to close once again, they catch a glimpse of the green numbers radiating from my clock. Why am I waking up two hours early? As stagnant as my brain usually is in the mornings, today my gears click to life when I remember the date. Shrieking under the covers, I throw them off and leap to the bathroom. The hot steam pouring from the head of the shower for once can't untie the tight knots in my muscles as I fiercely scrub my hair with strawberry-scented shampoo. I fumble with the cap of coconut scented body wash, pouring the cream into my hands. The smoothness from the wash feels anomalous against my skin, for this is not my typical bar of Dove soap. I don't allow myself the extra minute to give the water one last chance to loosen my rigid body, because I know the next part is going to be the most excruciating and treacherous part yet of this morning's regime. As I exit the shower, my eyes darting back to the clock, I unwillingly pick up the most terrifying utensil in my personal tool box: the hair brush. The brush battles its way through each tangle in my shoulder-length hair, reminding me with every jerk why I'm bothering in the first place. Grabbing a blow dryer, another trepidatious tool, I zoom around my head, refusing to let any wet piece of hair escape the dryer's wrath. Looking in the mirror to see my progress, I can't help but laugh at the frizz ball I've created. Now I blatantly see why my mother said I should have been born in the 70's; no hippy could compete with this hairdo.

I vigilantly open one of my college graduation presents, a hair straightener, and immediately put it to work. After what seems like an eternity, I finally get every hair on my head to remain straight, and briefly consider grabbing a camera to take a picture of this historical day for my hair. Glancing nervously at the clock, the green numbers seem to be growing more prodigious each time I look at them.

I rapidly throw on the outfit my fashion-forward sister chose for me a month prior, for she still knows that I even have trouble matching my socks. Still avoiding the ominous green glare of my clock, I look at myself in the mirror, feeling that I'm omitting something. "Makeup," I think to myself as I grab chapstick from my top drawer. But then I recognize yet another heretofore unused graduation present. The package contains eyeliner, eyeshadow, and mascara which launches me into a panic as I rattle my brain trying to remember when I last used this type of makeup for a play in high school.

The green numbers are so colossal now that I can't avoid them any longer. Walking as expeditiously as I can to my car, running in these heels is definitely not an option, the rumble of the engine shakes me more than usual as I put the keys in the ignition; my favorite U2 cd breaks through the stereo. But, instead of having my usual sing-along session with Bono, my mind flashes across the spectrum from writing in diaries as a kid to earning my masters degree in journalism to, hopefully, the beginning of my illustrious career, today. Cutting off the engine as I pull up in a parking spot, I attempt to smooth my hair, mainly out of habit. Feeling the odd sensation that it was already smooth, it gave me the extra confidence boost to get out of my car and push the open doors to my future.

“Hello, may I help you?” The lady at the front desk asks in a sugary-sweet voice. Definitely the kind of tone I would be happy to hear first thing every morning.

“Yes, hi. I’m here to see Mr. Walker for the job interview?” Chuckling for some reason, the woman leads me through cubicles of reporters and columnists who are effortlessly dancing their fingers across keyboards, with an occasional pause for a quick Starbuck’s moment. The tapping on the keyboards serves as the music to this finger dance, always adding a new beat each time a finger presses on a key. But as we round the last cubicle, the music is muted by the obnoxious heart beats pulsing through my ears. As my heart tries its best to maintain a steady rhythm, I firmly grasp the handle on the office’s door and step inside.

“Well, I appreciate you giving me a quite elaborate version of your resume. We like detail, here at *The New York Times*.” He felt the need to slide his newspaper’s name in as often as he could; reminding me, persistently, of how I’m just inches away from living every journalist’s dream. “You are far beyond your years as far as your writing is concerned, surpassing your colleagues by a wide mark. I will personally give you a call in the morning if you get the position.” I try to keep the expression on my face as smooth as my hair as I hear the words I never dreamed he would say to me. But I can feel my mask shatter from this exhilaration infiltrating my voice.

“I can’t tell you how thankful I am to have an opportunity like this so soon after receiving my degree, sir.”

“Yes, well, we are trying to bring some diversity to our staff.” He then quietly chuckled to himself, like I was missing some kind of inside joke. Thinking about what joke I’m missing, I thank him yet again and walk out the door. Staring down the lengthy



aisle trying to remember how to get back to the entrance, I suddenly am unable to move, gaping at the girl at the end of the hall.

Her long, tame brown curls cascade down her back like a chocolate waterfall, bouncing lightly as she majestically struts down the aisle, treating it like her own personal runway. Her ivory skin creates an aura of light around her slim stature, illuminating the dim-lit hallway. As I examine her impeccable features in awe, I notice she wears little make-up, just to show off her natural beauty. She doesn't seem to notice me as she opens the office's door and unveils a radiant, dazzling smile. Looking over my shoulder, I stare through the glass wall in horror as Mr. Walker shakes my competition's hand with unnecessary warmth. All I need is one look in his eyes to see the joke I'm missing. *We are trying to bring some diversity to our staff.* I freeze, unable to believe that that's what he truly means. Mr. Walker notices my stunned stare and, before he can give me a threatening glare back, I sprint headlong down the aisle, ignoring people's comical expressions as I stumble in my heels all the way back to my car.

Driving in the silence, the other girl's face disturbs my thoughts as I think back to his definition of "diversity." *His* view of diversity showcases someone whose picture next to their article is worth a thousand words alone. Feeling an irrepressible surge of tears forming behind my eyes, I step on the gas, praying to make it home before I can't fight them any longer. The moment I step inside the door, I throw myself on my bed, letting the tears flood down my face, distraught by the injustice.

It doesn't matter that he told me my writing "surpasses that of my colleagues by a wide mark." He's going to give my dream job to the other girl just because I'm not *pretty* enough, no matter how many times I fry my hair with a straightener or drown my skin in

coconut wash. After today, I can't avoid the truth that I live in a society where outer beauty upstages the inner.

But then I think about why I began writing in the first place. It brings out the inner beauty. A person with inner beauty takes each dull looking, solitary letter and weaves it into words and sentences that make it a beautiful masterpiece. Writing doesn't care what you look like; as long as you express yourself honestly, you will always end up with beauty.

The following morning, Mr. Walker doesn't call. I'm fully aware, at this point, that if the other girl didn't look like she stepped out of a Victoria's Secret ad, I would have gotten a call from him instead of my empathetic mother. Slightly unsmiling, I sit down at the computer to log onto Jobs.com, pull my unruly hair into a rubber band, and realize that I'm better off working somewhere with people who know the true meaning of beauty, because those people will be forever beautiful, just like me.

