

1st Place

“When I Say I Wrote the Birds”

Hannah Wehrung
Yulee, Florida

When I Say I Wrote the Birds,

Know that I am lying
someplace, in a grassy spot
and that I am looking up at those birds
when I write it. That it's warmer, here,
than where the birds take notice, and
frizzed stiff or slaving,
like any dog leashed by summer is:
Lead-tongued. Quiet. All-knowing, know-nothing,

know that the birds are circling, that they are
not wolfish like this, or know the birds are hunters.
Know the birds are crows, that they look like bones,
that like me, they are circling something
in heavy ink, stalking until I am
surrounding, surrounded or

swooning blood-drum
at the neck. Body tipping
backward, sinking, running
at all the vital arteries, vitalities, looking
down at her. She is so small, up there.

Our feathers— we rustle, we slice,
we break glass. We don't glide
like a knife, but fall through, too thin
for holding me. But I am caught
by the air ourself. Believe me.

See us sunlit, see us blessed,
see us mirrors and seer teeth,
see us antique smell, see us mana-crust.
Nothing good comes before the dusting,

the casting off.
Blood-stung knees scratch
grass that's dry and
shriveled away from breath:
a spine dug in dirt
looking up. And she looks like bones.
And she's circling something
in heavy ink.

Says she writes the birds,
and writes the sight of them.

2nd Place

“Hunter S. Thompson for Sheriff”

Lane Devers
Interlochen, Michigan

Hunter S. Thompson for Sheriff

1. Chad Abraham,
(Contributing Editor for the Aspen Times
and co writer of the article “Thompson Found Dead”)

What you have to understand is that Aspen then,
wasn't the town you're picturing right now.
Nobody was rich, everybody just wanted
some heifers for spring and Nixon out of office.
Even California was crops. From an airplane,
Vegas looked like one of those
Barbie play houses,
something so small you could stick it
in your breast pocket for later
or lose it in the wash. But of course,
it wasn't. It was enormous and looming,
not a single one of us had to read
the book to understand that. Still,
I read it anyway at seventeen years old,
kept it wedged between my bed frame and the wall,
my mother practically begging me
to turn out the lights and rest.
So when they asked me to help break the news,
even the part about his boy finding him at the kitchen table,
his remaining body already the color of pearls,
I thought *well everyone is going to lose their head now.*

2. Matthew Anderson,
(Former follower of Hunter S. Thompson)

Of course we believed in him.
Everything else
was violence. The cops

hurt us everyday. A baton stick can't
listen. Can't ask you how
your daughters are or tell you

or tell you all, that the shit
everyone's been sentenced to death
over should be legal. In the bars

all across town we would hang
the election posters. The ones with
the big fist at the top, like we were ready

for whatever might be next. One night
someone suggested we all get tattoos. Then
a ranch hand I think, said

we should brand ourselves instead.
Something simple, his initials *HST*.
Which would have been fine,

but then it was decided
the letters would be engraved
on the handle of his own

pistol. We were so stupid. All of us.
And now I've got a murder weapon
running down my right thigh to prove it.

3. Sandra Conklin,
(Ex-wife of Thompson)

On our first date he asked me, he said
you like fireworks don't you? And I nodded
because, well, who doesn't? Yes that was before
all of it, when he was just a man. No army
at all, just a tall skinny guy in a pair of jeans
it looked like my mother might own. Yes,

he was always trying on different costumes,
even in our own living room:

Sheriff when he had lost. *Dr.*
when he wasn't one. *Jesus* worst of all.
I learned to live in a kind of unending

silence. Each night I would unzip
my nightgown as quietly as I could manage,
inching my way down the line. I was always closest to him
then. Afterwards.

4. Deputy Fredrick Yates,
(Aspen Sheriff's department)

I swear to you he wasn't like the other hippies,
wasn't all grateful dead and smoke.
Hunter adored firearms, kept a serious pistol

on hand even when he'd bring the little ones
to the tavern. I promise you when
Bundy jumped out

that courthouse window
he was all over it.
Anything that made the officers look

like idiots, was a gift.
I imagine all those days
while everyone was out looking for Bundy

and for the girl plucked from
her hotel room,
he was home by the window,

drunkenly watching
the helicopters spin
in hopeless figure eights.

5. Jaun Thompson,
(Son of Hunter S. Thompson)

It was early in the morning,
around my twelfth birthday,

he wanted to play dress up. Yes,
but calling the police would have

felt like a kind of betrayal.

He was washing the pile of dishes left
from breakfast when he decided to take on

the role of my mother, laying a rag across
his bald head in imitation of her knotted

curls. Yes, I waited. Yes, but he said,
Clean your damn room! Laughing,

his body shook so hard
he had to steady himself

with that same countertop.

It was later that same night,
I had the dream—

him and his horse in the thick of a blizzard,
my mother finally shouting back

I don't sound like that.

3rd Place (tie)

“Sick”

Lucy Cai
Lexington, Massachusetts

Sick

In Oregon—a man slaughtering his son's favorite pig. The wife chops up the legs and slaps them on a grill, slathered with homemade barbecue sauce. The son takes a nibble and pretends to feel sick.

He stretches himself out over a bottomless well, his fingers grasping at one edge, toes barely grazing the other. He shouts but never hears the echo. A girl, faceless, swings under the Sycamore.

The parents are fast asleep in the barn. He presses a cold ear to the wood and listens for the sound of his father, grinding and gnashing his teeth. The tractor pushes him to Idaho and makes him carsick.

At his first country concert, he meets a girl. Faceless, of course. A bruise curls around her elbow, and he lines up his grasping fingers and squeezes. It is hard to tell if she is burning or lovesick.

A hole in the kitchen floor births termites. A daughter, covered in welts, is rushed to the clinic, then turned away. The father buys lotion on the third floor and shuffles his feet to the elevator music.

3rd Place (tie)

“Hunting”

Tyler Kellogg
Greenville, South Carolina

Hunting

today i

park near an old catfish pond follow the smell of familiar

bell peppers to a Thai place where ivory serpents

slither between stenciled lily pad

& green pavilion to my bone ash bowl

& where my mother's ghost takes her lunch break

slides into the booth across from me where we share

silence & a panang seance

where she sets cast iron pots between us

mushes oolong leaves into a map of leviathans

that keep us apart