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Writers' Challenge!

The second place winner of the winter edition Writers' Challenge, Thomas Lucas, designed two stimulating prompts based on the theme of our Four Year Anniversary Summer Issue. Two writers have tied for first place as each took the prompts in their own direction yet left lasting impressions. Stephen Carey and Amy Sprague will both get to design prompts for the next issue due out in January. Read their winning entries below!

Prompts:

1) *An anniversary can be a time of celebration, or a time of solemn reflection. Write a story in no more than 500 words that describes your protagonist's feelings about the event being remembered and how it affected their life. Use the words "flashback", "anniversary", "recognition", and "future".*

2) *Summer is always a special time, and is often characterized as a period of transition in a young person's life. Imagine a powerful coming-of-age experience for your protagonist, and in 500 words or less, describe how this particular summer changed their life forever – for better or for worse.*

A Problem With October

by Stephen Carey

“I’m going to tell Mom.”

“Chicken,” said the older brother as he began to pour soda into the small hole in the ground. “It’s an experiment.” The first yellow jacket landed on his forehead. With panicked speed he smashed the bee with the soda can opening a gash just above his right eye.

“Run, stupid, they’re all coming out!” said the younger brother. A bee cloud formed to attack their enemy.

The problem with October is its depth, or maybe its shallowness. It settles as a mist of past, present and future. It is simplicity, irrevocable, without mercy.

“I’m not sure what to do; they will kick my ass if I don’t have cigarettes for them tomorrow after school.”

“Who?” asked the younger brother.

“These guys on my way home.”

“I’ll meet with them and give them some of mine,” said the younger brother, “...you concentrate on chess club.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.”

It makes perfect sense and no sense. A long term solution, a short term problem. Stopping his pain now is to begin mine forever. It is the anniversary of agony, a festival of regret.

“I don’t understand,” said the older brother, “they just

walked right up to me and gave me ten dollars, just like that.”

“You know, bro, understanding is highly overrated,” said the younger brother. “Everytime they see you, they give you ten bucks, that’s the deal we worked out with them, so I think they will be avoiding you.”

I want the past. What was is better than what is. But there is no hope there only stagnant longing. Only forward remains and with it the brokenness dictating who I become. A new me, a broken me, a me the old me would judge harshly. I think sometimes I miss me more than him.

“I need another beer... God, this bar sucks.”

“Yea,” said the older brother. “I want to ask you something, will you be my best man?”

The younger brother was silent. “Well sure, if that’s what you want; are you sure that’s what you want? Your first real girl friend, what a looker, sure, and that body... but is she right for you? She’s, well, bossy and”--

The older brother’s anger grew. “I can’t believe you. Someone looks my way and you get jealous? Thanks a lot. She said you would say that. I’ll find someone else. Dad will do it for me”.

Yet for all the mental gymnastics, simply put, it is what he wanted. His final “screw you” to a failed marriage and a divorce judge who refused to see things his way. Home from the court house, humiliated again, how easy to close the garage door and not turn off the car on that October day. How easy to turn off life. For all of my weapons, exercising it, dealing with it, one thing is clear, I miss who I was, who we were. One might say I have ‘a problem with October’.

The Swimlot

by Amy Sprague

They're almost there, pedaling as fast as they can into an unknown idea. July is ending and the small town buzzes with campers, RVs, coolers, boats. The highway is the shortest way, they cut across in a flash of chrome and into the woods behind Frankie's Pizza.

"I know its down here, Amos, I know it's here somewhere," Mike shouts back. They're eleven without permission. This is about to be the peak of their childhood, knowing too well that it was time to grow up. But there was something special between these two—the love of adventure. They'd spent the summer climbing the city's crumbling ore dock, fishing, biking to the lake to jump into the waves during storms, exploring ravines in the rain, and at night they'd draw and dream and watch *The Goonies*, thinking about how they could chase tornadoes together.

Up ahead they see the trees thin and then suddenly it's just water. The field immediately stops, held back by a four foot high cement wall that runs the expanse of the woods. At the bottom of the wall there is a thin, wooden ledge to stand on, the water lapping it in the silence.

They don't have to say anything. They're sure they discovered this. This was it. This is what they'd been searching for—a wild place to call their own. They look at each other, reflecting back the same glint in their eyes, the explosive joy heaving their chests. They say nothing, but give a knowing nod to each other.

"Let's hold hands, on the count of three!" Mike says. They don't bother taking off their chucks or clothes, there's no time. It must happen now.

The water is a cold aqua, with sun beams striking through into the deep.

She holds her best friend's hand.

He counts "one....two....THREE!"

That second, that split second in mid-air, before their futures were riddled with scars both inside and out, they are free. Untouchable. Beautiful.

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