

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S Creative Writing Contest

FOR AGES 10-18

“Once Upon a Red Moon” by Emily King
1st Place, Short Story 16-18

Poems ● Essays ● Comix
Short Plays ● Short Stories

CASH PRIZES!

Entries Accepted Feb. 1-March 3

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#1
A+++
Very well written +
creative w/ a
great twist

Once Upon a Red Moon

My milky-white riding cloak ripples behind me as I zoom through the forest, my steed knocking down twigs and shrubbery in its path. Bird cries send adrenaline through my blood as they frantically fly away.

“C’mon, c’mon,” I whisper to myself. I’ve got to get out of here. The sun set five minutes ago and I don’t want to stay in these eerie woods any longer than I have to. I just hope whatever lurks in the shadows doesn’t have a craving for human flesh. Or that it can’t catch me.

Suddenly, the horse stops, flinging me off to the side. I fall to the ground with a thud, puncturing my shoulder on a rock in the process.

“What the hell?” I slowly look up and take a moment to let my vision settle. Then my heart stops. In front of my horse stands an amber-eyed wolf. It turns to me, growling. My final prayers are interrupted when my horse quickly darts away, the beast turning to follow it.

And then I black out.

When I wake up, there’s a pair of gold-flecked eyes watching over me. “Ahhh!” I scurry back in fright. In the dim, early morning light, I see that the

eyes belong to a young man, a boy really, well-built, but with a sort of lanky gait.

“Sorry!” The boy backs up with his hands out in caution. “I didn’t mean to scare you..”

I scoff, “I’m fine.” As I try to stand up though, I feel an agonizing throb in my left shoulder. “Gaaah!” I yelp.

The stranger rushes to my side and eases me down. He smells like fire smoke and cedar. “Careful” he says.

“I’ll be okay” I retort. I attempt to stand up again, to no avail.

The boy smirks. “Here,” he pulls out my cloak from underneath me and ties it around my bleeding wound. This time, I only respond with silence.

When he’s done, I give him a simple thanks and wait for him to speak. “What were you doing out here?” he finally asks curiously.

“It’s none of your business what I’m doing out here.”

The young man registers my wary tone, “Not one for small talk?” I nod, “Very well. Let’s start with some simple introductions. My name’s Lucien. I’m from Hoxgrove. The last time I checked I was 17, but that was a few winters ago. And if you want to keep that wound from getting infected, I suggest you tell me how you got it so I can help you.”

“My horse got spooked and threw me off.”

“Traveling?”

I nod again, "From Beechmire." I stop and think about what he told me, "You're from Hoxgrove?"

"Well I was...Now I live in a cabin a little ways back."

"Oh" I pause, "Do you know Florence Cradowin?"

"Yeah, I remember her. She always liked to bake sweets for the village children." Lucien smiles at this.

He's right. And maybe if he knows her... "She's my grandmother....I was actually heading to see her...She's sick."

"Oh," Lucien's taken aback, "I'm sorry." We sit in silence for a while before he asks, "Can you get up? My house isn't that far from here. You could use some rest and I have some healing salve you can use."

Blushing, I let him help me to my feet and lean against him as a crutch. We walk a little farther before I finally say, "My name's Beatrix, by the way".

The two of us arrive at a small wooden cottage and Lucien helps me inside before easing me down onto a small bed in the corner. He gives me a blanket then walks over to the fireplace and sets a fire. The blaze makes the house comfortingly warm compared to the chilly air outside.

As I glance around, I notice how simple the cabin is. There isn't much besides the bed I'm lying on, the fireplace, and a wardrobe in the corner. It certainly can't be enough for more than one person.

“You live alone?” I ask as Lucien moves to pick up a small bottle from a nearby shelf.

“Yeah, my parents died when I was younger,” he pours the contents of the bottle on a rag, removes my cloak, and starts to clean the wound.

I wince, but let him continue, “What about you, Beatrix?” he asks.

“Oh, it’s just me and my dad.” He finishes cleaning the cut and starts bandaging it.

“Why aren’t you with him? Where is he?”

I groan, “Probably passed out in a tavern somewhere or drooling over the lap of a prostitute.”

Lucien ties up the bandage and sits down in a chair by the fireplace, “Oh, I’m sorry.” He picks up a hunting knife and starts sharpening it. The firelight gives him a sort of ethereal glow.

“So no husband then?” he asks. “I’m surprised. Most girls your age are settled with a family by now.”

I grin, “Well most girls don’t ride alone through the woods at night, either.” I glance out the window and see that the morning sun is out, “I need to get going.” I swing my legs over the side of the bed and stand up. Lucien’s knife glints as he joins me.

He grabs my cloak off the floor and hands it to me, “Here, you might want to wash it.” It’s now so covered with my blood that it’s a pure crimson red.

“That’s ok,” I grin, “Red’s always been a better color on me.” I wrap the cloak around my shoulders before turning to Lucien, “Thanks. For everything”.

“Of course,” he replies. I notice how his smile brings little wrinkles to his eyes. And there’s a little scar on the side of his cheek. It’s rather handsome. Lucien sees me staring and leans closer. I don’t back away. He’s close enough that if I turned my head up, I could kiss him. I *want* to kiss him. With a strong arm he pulls me against his chest. Using his other hand, he tucks a strand of dark-brown hair behind my ear, “Beatrix,” he whispers.

I pray that he can’t hear my heart pounding against my chest, “Yes?”

“I’m sorry,” I feel the sting of the knife against my throat before everything goes dark.

†††

The girl’s dead body is cradled in my arms as I step into the clearing. At this time of night, there are no villagers around to notice. I glance down to see her empty, brown eyes staring widely at the sky. From across the field, I can see Flora Cradowin’s cottage sitting at the edge of the town.

I carry the girl to the front porch of the house and gently set her down. Then I turn and run back to the woods before anyone can see me. From this distance, it would look as if the girl is sleeping, well, if it weren’t for the crimson smile staining her neck.

I sigh. *She was a good one.* Through the trees I look up to see the silver moon casting a bright glow. I let my senses take over. My body shrinks down and two legs are replaced by four. My face morphs into a snout and grey fur sprouts over my body. Once I'm back to my true form, I let out a long howl before running off into the night.

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S Creative Writing Contest

FOR AGES 10-18

“The Little Ocean” by Charlotte Suttee
2nd Place, Short Story 16-18

Poems ● Essays ● Comix
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A++ So very good! Left w/ chill. All the great elements of a short story!

The river is two feet at its deepest, brown and sluggish. It's as if God wrung his dirtied mop, and here are the sinful rivulets. It crawls over a bed of mud and, nearer to the shore, a substance in between sand and gravel. It crunches like muddled styrofoam.

"I want to take my shoes off and feel the sand," Jazzy says to me with an excited grin.

"Don't do that. You'll cut yourself," I say.

"What kinds of fish do you think are in there, Sissy?"

"The water's too toxic for fish."

Her smile falls a little, and she busies herself with collecting little black shells, greatly outnumbered by beer bottle shards.

The wind bounces off the water in a cold, sickly air and I shove my hands deeper into my pockets. I dig toe and heel into the damp ground in search of something other than broken glass and leech-like shells because I have nothing better to do. We search like this for a while under the weight of a soggy, stratus-woven sky.

I turn to face the aching breeze over the river. I hope my sister gets to see the ocean someday. I wish this was the ocean.

So I close my eyes and listen closely the sloshing water-- ocean water? The dumpster seagull's call suddenly belongs to the sea. The stench boils down to salty wind that's pushed with the strength of a thousand sea waves. I feel the edges of my lips tugging upwards, and some old familiar thing inside me begs: *keep going, go deeper, find it*. Jazzy possesses a strength that propels her seaside, across hundreds of miles in less than a blink. I think I can, too.

I open my eyes. This is the ocean, but it threatens to leave as my sister frowns at her gross collection. Her fantasy hangs on like single-knotted shoelaces, and reality has a hold of one under his boot.

“Do you hear that?”

The batting of heavy sails.

“What?”

“Pirates!” I exclaim.

“Pirates!” she repeats.

We fly inland to the nearest and thickest palm tree and snuggle closely behind it just as the enormous ship leans into the cove. The rusty anchor shoots down to halt the wooden beast, and the scurvy men row to the bank.

The pirates stretch out their sea legs once they reach the shore and we watch one particular pirate, nose pointed high, wrapped in a soiled, velvet coat, and a Spanish cutlass wagging behind him, look over the crew in disgust as he steps off the boat.

“Stop waddling like babies and search! Sundown is almost upon us! Fools!” The captain squawks. The last boat pulls in, cradling a large treasure chest. The rowers drop it into an explosion of sand and my sister gasps as the captain reveals a swollen pool of shimmering treasures from around the world.

His crew begins to pour hat-fulls of black shells onto the pile, and the gold is dirtied by a thick layer of charcoal-colored sea trash.

“Cap, pardon me, sir, who do you s’pose is going to buy these lots of rocks?”

The captain waves a man over with a fishing net and commands him to cast it out ten feet into the water. "Fritter, wade in the water there, just before the net, and don't let go of this." He shoves a shell into the hand of the doubtful pirate and knocks him into the water. Fritter stumbles to a watery seat and stares into his hands like a fascinated toddler.

"Look Cap! It's an emerald!"

The shell glows!

We watch a long, green sea creature weaving towards oblivious Fritter. It makes the bend around the net. Avast!-- The mossy monster strikes the poor pirate, sucking him down into the splashing water!

"Reel her in!" caws the captain. The crew yanks on all ends of the ropes and drags the jumble of flustered fish and mutilated pirate onto the harsh sand. But it's not a fish!-- a galaxy-green mermaid in a storm of long black hair wriggles free and glides back into the deep sea before the pirates can even think of grabbing a hold onto her slippery figure.

"She's so beautiful!" my sister sighs aloud. "We can't let them fish the mermaids, Sissy!"

"Sorry cap," the dumb pirate pants as he peels away from the snare. "I couldn't hold onto it."

"Fritter, you useless fool, I knew you wouldn't. At least she'll be back again for these," the captain grins as he picks up a newly shed *mermaid scale* that blackens in the air as an invisible flame would crawl up a leaf. He buttons it up securely in his chest pocket.

My sister looks to me expectantly as my shifting feet meet a coconut. She wants to hear a plan to save the mermaids.

Night comes quickly, along with deafening crickets behind us and equally boisterous snores ahead of us. We finish snacking on our shredded coconut and check how seamlessly the shell halves close together.

Sandy tiptoes. Midnight waves. Cackling fire. Wooden creak. Soft sounds into the coconut shell. Dungbie!-- A few slivers of gold rattle out of the chest. I twist the top half of the coconut over the heavy half tightly, just as the friendly pirate, Fritter, perks up, dirty bandages over his injuries.

“Hey, what you’ve got there young lads?” Fritter whispers over the fire.

“Only a coconut!” I whisper back as my timorous eyes bounce from one slumbering pirate to the next. I hold the coconut overhead for him to see, cursing myself for the obvious rattle.

“I don’t think Cap would appreciate you being near our chest there.”

“Of course. Just leaving,” I reply.

“Goodnight to you!” he says to us.

Jazzy sends a friendly wave to Fritter as he leans back into sleep.

We shuffle off to a row boat with our scales and swords, and Jazzy takes a heroic stance at the hull as I pull the paddles through the dark water. She slices the stars with a stolen cutlass, and shimmering flakes flutter down over us from the sky.

Back on the beach, slow Fritter rises once again, but now as he registers his grave mistake. He shakes the captain awake.

Drunken figures rush to the boats, hooting and hollering, and their strong arms allow them to close the distance on us quickly. I make out the first fearsome face when he is only feet away. Jazzy jabs a silver point into his porpoise flesh and he howls as the next boat overtakes his. She nearly strikes the next pirate down, but the back of our boat meets the starboard of the ship and she somersaults into the enemy's hold.

"Sissy!" she cries as the brutish captain raises his dagger.

I swing an oar to his head with the might of a thousand mermaids and draw my sister back into our boat. Cutlassless and down to a single oar, we simultaneously turn to climb the barnacles speckled across the ship's wooden side, but a heavy footstep on the boat sends our backs onto a splintery floor.

The stars outline a looming silhouette of the iniquitous captain, and a glimmer reveals his raised steely weapon-- my oar intercepts his strike towards my sister, and I propel to my feet clumsily. As Jazzy begins the climb, I soon realize that slicing through the air with a heavy oar will not carry us for much longer. *Thunk, scrape, thud*: sword meets wood. Alas!-- The rocking rowboat forces the captain and I overboard. Through stinging eyes, I make out a rope ladder batting against the starboard, but something hard clamps onto my shoulder and pushes my head under. Already long out of breath, I pray up to the surface as the water breaches my lips, but my eyes focus on the captain's glowing pocket instead. It grows brighter every second, like the life of a jungle, until it's so bright that it pulls the captain aback. I rise to the surface in a splashing-coughing fit as a smaller set of hands reels me to the row boat.

My flustered gaze remains on this fearful scene to the end: The emerald queen rises from the dark sea, seizes the captain's pocket over his heart, and her starry eyes meet mine just before she

disappears with the whining captain under the water. My sister and I've won the ship, we know as we watch the captain's light fade into oblivion.

"Sissy," she peers up at me, "we should give these back to the mermaids now."

I nod, and we start skipping one shell to the water at a time. I sense the magic is gone when she lets all the pieces roll off her fingers all at once.

But it isn't really gone.

I smile at the two stars gleaming through dark, ocean-swept hair, belonging to the girl who would fearlessly climb atop our ship's mermaid prow and dice the wind and sky with her sword.

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S
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FOR AGES 10-18

“Miss Clara Adams’ Emeralds”
by Emily Tucker
3rd Place, Short Story 16-18

Poems © Essays © Comix
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#A + #3
 Very good
 Lots of detail & intrigue
 Well written & presented

Miss Clara Adams hadn't left her quarters in weeks.

Aaron, her husband- casually speaking, of course, no one wanted too much of a relationship in these times, and she didn't care for him enough to accept the title of 'Mrs'- had tried the door until his hands bled, but she had locked the door fast. Her servants- she was a woman of noble birth, and by the Queen, her status relied on them- plead, cajoled, used every form of persuasion they could think of, but she remained silent. Even when her mother, Amelia, had stopped in for a visit, Miss Clara Adams said not a word.

They brought in a doctor, a priest, a policeman. None of them could convince her to exit the grave that had become her bedroom.

Clara Adams lived in an estate bequeathed to her in the will of her great-grandmother on the event of her passing. The mansion had a long, winding dirt path that led up to the stable, where one could rest one's horse with hay and water provided by the servants before one could walk up to the front doors, which were fashioned from the finest glass imported from France. The interior of the house was pristine, a great chandelier gently swaying above, clinging to the ceiling and shadowing anyone who walked in. Above the chandelier lay the second floor, and the west facing bedroom on the second floor was Miss Adams' bedroom.

The estate sat south of London in the countryside, and, for all intents and purposes, was rather small in comparison to all the other ladies whose husbands were able to provide for them. Aaron Adams made a decent wage as a lawyer, but Clara yearned for the day he took public office. All those ladies with husbands as politicians always had the best houses, the most servants, and they were so rich that they used the latest fashions as dish towels for their servants. Then, she determined, then would be the day she would finally be happy.

In the days before Clara Adams had shut herself away, she had attended a gala in London, a gala which she had only managed to snag an invite for through her husband's friend who knew a man who knew the Prime Minister. Clara knew she was expected to wear nothing less than the finest threads, and she took great pains to ensure that this would be the case. She had borrowed her husband's paycheck on a set of deep green emeralds centered by a red ruby that snaked around her neck, glittering like poison ivy on her pale marble chest. She had found the advertisement in the post, the words on the page glaring out at her like the stars.

"You have to have it! We know You know You best, so look Your best! For a limited time only."

Clara knew then that she had to have it. She had to have it. She knew herself best.

So, she filed the mail order, and it came in that very evening. She hid the necklace in a place she knew her husband would never look: the kitchen. The little black box sat in the pantry, casting a shadow atop the bucket that held the grain and looking over the sealed bucket of fresh green apples plucked by the servants from their apple trees in the center of the garden.

On the night of the gala, Clara Adams hurried back into the kitchen, frantically throwing back the doors of the pantry, searching for that little black box that would determine so much of her fate in status.

It had fallen into the apples, the dark, glittering emeralds contrasting sharply against the green tint of the fruit. Clara panicked for a moment, her vision flashing red as she vowed to punish whatever careless servant had knocked it over, they would pay, she had to have it, and *they would pay-*

The moment of heat passed as she examined the jewels, all of which were undamaged. Not even a scratch, nor a speck of dust or grain lay upon the gems. Clara Adams let out a slow, thin sigh of relief. It was safe. *She* was safe.

At the gala, Clara Adams was incurably aware that she- no one else- possessed the finest gems in the entire Empire. The necklace shined on her chest, reflecting blinding light into the eyes of everyone who looked into their green depths. Clara always reckoned that her own eyes were a dull, mousy brown, her hair the same, but with this beautiful green and red that wrapped around her neck like a snake, it was made up for.

As the gala went on, the new woman smirked as all the men who had never given her a second glance raked their eyes over her form, and all the women who had never thought twice about speaking to her flocked in hoards. Everyone was talking either to or about her, and the adoration made her head spin with joy.

She adjusted the necklace slightly higher up on her neck to ease the discomfort of its tightness as she spoke to several women of nobility. The Duchess of Cambridge, the wife of the Prime Minister. Everyone wanted to talk to Miss Clara Adams, wife of Aaron Adams, the lawyer. No one quite knew why, but they were drawn to her. For the first time in her life, Clara Adams was enchanting. And she adored every second of it.

"Oh, my dear lady, *where* did you receive that *beautiful* necklace? It's *positively stunning*."

Clara's lips curved upwards, her head tilted in the direction of the woman to whom she was speaking.

"I just had to have it," she responded, her voice strained slightly from the weight of the necklace. "I knew I had to look My best, I had to have it." The woman seemed satisfied with that answer.

And Miss Clara Adams went home, and she went into her sleeping quarters, that was the last anyone ever heard of her.

"My dear," Aaron Adams' words sounded stilted, even all these weeks later, as he made one last attempt to draw her out of her chamber. "I know... I know you took my paycheck. I'm not upset about it, I promise, just please come out!"

But she wouldn't. Not for that, not for her servants, or the doctor, or the priest, or policeman...

"My dear, people are beginning to... think," Aaron tried, his voice trembling slightly. "My firm is talking. About you, and about your... absence, from society. They're saying you ran off with another man, that you've the plague, that..."

The door swung open. A creak reverberated through the room. Aaron Adams' stomach dropped.

"I had to have it. For a limited... time only."

The voice was hissing, like the tongue of a serpent, and it was emptier than the pristine black box he had found lying open on the ground in the parlour whose price tag was marked 'humanity.' The husband stepped into that long-closed room, and his heart turned to stone while his feet felt like he had tripped into a bowl of ice. He gazed upon his wife with despair.

Her face was a pale cloud, her lips tinted blue, the only thing tainting her blemishless face two dark red lines of precious life force slipping down her face in even trails as her eyes

flashed green. Upon closer inspection, it could be seen that her eyes were not eyes at all, but two hard, cold emeralds.

Missing from their sockets on the chain that bound Miss Clara Adams' esophagus shut were gems. Cold metal, tarnishing her chest with rust.