

Second Place Prose – High School

“The Scarlet Field”

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Grade: 10

School: Alanson Public Schools

Thomas dragged his feet through the moist grass trying desperately to stay awake and keep pace with Jace so they could make it to the gathering on time.

“Hey! Wake up. You should know this by now but you need to be getting more sleep. I’m younger than you and I know better.” Jace gave his best attempt at a stern look but it only made him look like a mad puppy.

Thomas laughed and looked ahead. “Mom is rubbing off on you.”

Jace rolled his eyes and punched Thomas’s shoulder softly. “Whatever dude, just stay awake. I’m not kidding,” Jace remarked.

Thomas waved him off, reaching for the energy drink in his backpack pocket. Jace sighed and gave Thomas a disappointed look. Thomas only flashed Jace a sly smile and sipped his drink.

“Cheers.” Jace laughed at his brother’s stupidity and Thomas looked ahead to see how close they were to the field.

As a silence settled between them, Jace glanced over at Thomas and tried to read his face before breaking the silence, “So what were you and mom talking about last night?”

Thomas pondered Jace’s question and gave him an unrecognizable face, kicking a small rock into the ditch along the road. “Alaina.”

Jace stopped dead in his tracks and his face morphed into a combination of sadness and misery before finally muttering, “Any news?”

Thomas shook his head. “We won’t give up though, we can’t. Mom said she has a cop friend in the next town over who is willing to help us out.” Jace gulped down what looked to be a dry spit and tried to shake off the emotions his face was portraying.

“You know full well none of these cops will help us. Whether mom is their friend or not. We can’t trust them.” Jace declared fiercely and crossed his arms.

“I know bub, we can talk to mom about it later.” Jace nodded and Thomas pulled him into a bone-crushing hug, patting his back as they pulled away.

“But for now, we need to get a move on. I know how punctual you are.”

As the two boys got closer to their destination, the smell of gasoline and blood hung in the air. This threw Thomas off but he quickly regained himself remembering that just meant they were almost to the field and that it wasn’t very unusual for it to have an off-putting smell. Once, when their mom was younger she told them it smelled like mold and decay. It had filled the town and every crevice you could imagine with its horrendous smell. Everyone was used to it at that point, the smell wasn’t even the worse part.

The town didn’t have a choice in whether they could do something about the field or not. They had already tried everything in their power and after destroying the field itself, something cemented deep inside it awoke. A series of disappearances and massacres rained down on the town of Eastmore and left many of the families despondent. Thomas and Jace’s family was among the many that had undergone a loss.

The town was left in a state of despair and disarray. They all were all in a dark place when she came to them. How could they say no. If they could take back the deal they would but it was far too late. The town has been relying on Scarlet for decades now.

Thomas was confused and by the looks of it - so was Jace. They both gave each other a bewildered look and both tried to hide the fear building up inside them. The field was never this color, in all the time it's been around (long before even both Jace and Thomas's great-grandparents were kids), it was never known to be this color.

The beautiful and mystifying field was a dark scarlet all the way from the treetops down to the soil itself. A color that Thomas didn't even know could be so hypnotizing, until today.

Jace reached a trembling hand in Thomas's direction and squeaked, "Tommy, is it supposed to be that color?"

Jace hadn't called him that since all 3 siblings were together, learning just how cruel the world was outside of their little bubble, when Alaina was still with them. Barely able to hold herself up without the help of her older brothers.

After getting brought back to the real world due to Jace's urgent tugging of his shirt he responded, "I don't know bub, don't touch it though."

"But-"

"No! You will listen to me, just this once. I can't lose you too." As soon as the words left his mouth, Thomas held in a breath and looked over at Jace. Hurt was written on Jace's face and Thomas instantly pulled him into a hug, hoping it meant more than an actual apology.

"That was out of line, Tommy."

"I know and I'm sorry," Thomas said while letting go of Jace. "Now grab your hood, we can't be more late than we already are. You know how upset Scarlet would be."

Jace wiped away a tear threatening to slip out of his eye and nodded, retrieving his and Thomas's hoods from his backpack. They knew they probably should've left with their mom, it was dangerous to be going into the field when it was this color. It was like walking straight into an open bear trap and acting surprised when it snapped. They didn't have a choice though, one of the many things the town agreed to was going to every gathering Scarlet hosted. Everyone was required to go and if you didn't, well no one could really help you after that. The two boys embraced one last time and cautiously stepped into the foreboding field, awaiting their consequences.

A cricket chirped in the distance, a bird in a nearby tree fed her hungry babies a worm, and the scarlet field sat still - not a person in sight. Not even Thomas and Jace.