

# 2014 MCC Creative Writing Contest

## Fiction Category

**First Place:** “*Peace of Me,*” by Rachel Gilbert

“Dumb bitch, I said no ketchup.” His shouts echo in the hollows of my mind as I numbly reach for his dinner plate. He slaps my hand away. “Leave it!”

“Sorry,” I say, my voice a whisper.

“Sorry?” He turns in his chair. A scowl draws his eyebrows into a deep “V”. “I work my ass off, you feed me this—shit, and all you can say is sorry!”

In one quick move, he snatches his dinner plate from the table then sends it sailing across the room.

Shatter.

My body jerks. Ketchup and mustard confetti the wall to my immediate right, red and yellow smear together to make vibrant orange...a lovely sunrise, I close my eyes.

The sun warms my skin. Salt-soaked air kisses my lips. My lashes flutter open. I stare over the expanse of the crystal clear gulf. Smooth like glass. In one short step, water tickles the tips of my toes daring me to come in. I smile, a real smile and proceed. Waist deep in lukewarm water, I drop to my knees then lean back surrendering to the water’s embrace. I tip my head back relishing the endless blue sky blanketing me. I float, content, and spread my arms, offering my body to the...frigid liquid covers my face.

I gasp from the bite of the icy assault. Balling my shirt sleeve in my fist, I frantically wipe at the liquid. Fizz penetrates my eyelids. Each frothy pop feels like acid corroding the cornea. I blink away tears and take a startled breath. The sweet scent of cola deadens as the carbonated drink burns my nostrils.

“Are you deaf? Clean up this mess.” He slams his empty glass on the table. Fury ignites in his gaze, while I divert mine.

I try to urge myself forward, but I’m frozen in place.

“Don’t just stand there like a—”

Statue, I finish his thought...a lovely marble statue. Powerful, unmovable, I am. Patrons come to a halt before me. Mouths gape in awe as they circle. In a hushed tone one says to

another, “Notice the perfection of the etching, the symmetry of each line, beautifully crafted despite the small fractures.”

“I agree,” the other responds, his outstretched hand covers mine. “Not living, yet, so full of spirit.”

Yes, I think. My spirit livens at the gentle touch. His fingers move to stroke my arm, I marvel in him—his caress...my body slams against the wall, head bounces off the paneling. With shaky fingers I reach to touch the point of impact to find my hair matted in ketchup and mustard.

“Do I have to do every damn thing myself?” He hovers in front of me, arm cocked.

I collapse to floor. Shattered glass grates my knees. My hands scoured by the shards I recoil, pressing them to my chest.

“Please.” I cry.

Crunch. Glass grinds into the floorboards under his weight. He bends down, gathers the hair at the nape of my neck then jerks back.

I yelp.

“Stop your fucking crying.” He uses my hair as a leash and yanks me from the ground then drags me to the kitchen sink.

Portions of hair tug free of my scalp, hundreds at a time ripped from their follicles, strands of blond-brown hair fall like dead leaves around me. My cries intensify. I arch back to release the tension of his hold. But he slams me forward. My fingers fold over the edge of the stainless steel sink. I cling to the counter for support as his grip loosens from my mane. My chin drops to my chest.

Tufts of condiment soaked hair lay scattered in the sink. Pieces of me. Torn.

“I’m going to get a real dinner,” he says already on the other side of the room. “You better have this mess cleaned up by the time I get back.”

The door bangs shut. I watch as he slides behind the wheel of his pickup then backs down the driveway and out of sight.

Hand trembling I plug the sink and turn on the faucet. Water rushes from the tap to fill the basin. Crystal clear...smooth like glass. In one short step, water tickles the tips of my toes daring me to come in. I smile, a real smile and proceed...out the door, down the street, around the block. From one town to the next and the next, until I reach a place where he can never hurt me again. A place where the sun warms my skin, where salt-soaked air kisses my lips and I surrender to a life of peace.

## JUDGE'S COMMENTS

The movement into fugue states as a coping mechanism is described brilliantly by just stating it, never explaining. I would suggest cutting the next to the last line ("From one town to . . . where he can never find me again.") We already know what the narrator is enduring and what she hopes for. In any case, the realism of the descriptions and the flat statements of events make this an excellent work.

*Jim Fatka served as judge for the 2014 contest. Mr. Fatka is a recently retired MCC English instructor who taught numerous writing and literature courses, including creative writing.*