

FICTION, 3rd Place: Cesar Canizales

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The Sisyphus Conundrum

From the moment you take your first breath, your walk begins. Dew-covered grass sits softly underneath your feet and rolling hills stretch out for miles in front of you. People walk past you at different speeds. Some run, some frolic, some stroll and stop to smell the flowers. Not wanting to fall behind, you begin to walk with them. As you begin to walk, you learn more about the world around you and the others walking beside you. You make friends, you talk, you share stories and pick flowers. You watch the sun rise and set over and over again, yet never really notice the moon until it's gone. While you were busy daydreaming, however, the crowd began to move faster, and you began to fall behind. You push yourself to move faster out of fear of being left behind. Your frolic and stroll becomes a calculated speedwalk as the ground beneath your feet becomes earthy and uneven. You still enjoy the clouds in the sky and the smell of the breeze, but you have too much to worry about to truly enjoy it for long. Even still, despite your efforts, people you walked beside for so long traveled farther and farther away. You begin to run as fast as you can, but you can't seem to catch up. Eventually, your body grows tired, and you fall even further behind while resting. You stress, but you've learned your lesson. You continue your journey at your brisk pace, but even since you exhausted yourself, you haven't been able to move the same as before. There's no time to worry about that, however. You finally reached the mountain, ahead of most others you started with. Just within eye-line after years, you see your old friends. Your body is fatigued and yearns for a break, but you puff out your chest and begin

to climb. You grab the stone ledge and hoist yourself up, only to sink back down to the ground. Curiously, you try again, only to be met with the same fate. Now you're frustrated. You came all this way, and now you can't get past the first step? You gather all the strength in your body and pull with all your might. You begin your climb. Every flex of your muscle is agony, and every movement threatens to send you to the bottom, and as you step onto an unsecured stone, you slip back to the bottom, defeated. Still, you do not give up. Quitting is for cowards. You are not a child anymore. You realize you're still falling behind, people you've always led are now miles ahead of you. You continue your climb with a furious exhaustion when something catches your eye. People are staring at you. They're judging you. You climb and you climb but always end up back where you began. You begin to cry and sob but never quit climbing. Every muscle in your body aches and your mind is searing hot, but you never stop climbing and you never make it up the mountain. After years, you begin your next ascent when someone stops you. "Are you ok?" they said, concerned, motioning behind you. For the first time since you began climbing, you stop and slowly turn around. Attached to your ankle is a heavy iron shackle, and dragging behind you on an iron chain is a massive boulder. "When did that get there?" you ask yourself. No wonder you couldn't make it up the mountain. You've spent so many years wasting time trying to climb the mountain that you couldn't possibly make it up now. Your body aches, and you're so, so tired. Before you begin to give up, that person lays a hand on your shoulder and sits down next to you. You spend the rest of your days at the base of that mountain, talking and sharing and enjoying the beauty of everything that came before, the grassy plains in the distance. The boulder never goes away, but with time and rest, it becomes smaller and smaller, until it's the size of a pebble. You pick it up, holding it in the palm of your hand. You toss it up and down

a few times and smile, before you close your eyes and rest.