

Honorable Mention, Prose
Grades 10-12

“The Pub,” Caroline Epstein

A single pub stood in the monotonous line of buildings, bright lights illuminating the seemingly deserted town of Brighton. Not a single car drove past, creating an eternal sense of abandonment. The only sign of life being the loud noises from the inside of the pub and the intoxicating smell of alcohol which acknowledged the certainty of ephemerality. The once-tuned harmony of the town was now ransacked and destroyed, leaving an out-of-tune melody that sounded like broken guitar strings--a failed attempt at playing the broken instrument.

The pub, made of deep red brick that eroded after standing for years, was the only building with its blinding lights illuminated. The street was dark, except for the dimly lit steel street lights which flickered on and off with age. The building, built in 1924, barely stood, simply a skeleton of the framework it once was, ready to disintegrate and turn to dust. The windows were barricaded with stapled-on plywood, hiding the vulnerable windows and covered in meaningless graffiti.

The strike of midnight shook the pub, silencing the groggy and drunk men temporarily. The smell of alcohol and sweat reeked the place, as the men listened to the old grandfather clock, tucked away in the corner. The clock was regal, its deep walnut wood making a gorgeous piece of art, with shining gold accents throughout the piece. It was a lost treasure, once beautiful but now covered in dust, unused and with a massive blistering crack straight down the middle. The clock's glass was scratched and dull, no longer clear. As the chimes diminished, the drunk men returned to their illicit conversations, unaware of the presence. The forbidden conversations struck up between the men, talking about whatever was going on in their drunk minds.

Optimism, a word to describe the men drinking away their problems in the pub. A raging war lay just beyond the rundown door in the front, a dingy sign hung in the middle with the words “We’re open” strewn across. The door itself was uninteresting and dull, but it marked the line between war and freedom. Inside the pub, the war was forgotten; the tragedies, death, destruction, and terror were all neglected. The alcohol wiped away the fear and the memories, only leaving

optimism. Had the men been in their right state of mind, they would've remembered their brothers who perished, their children who've gone missing, and their mourning friends and family. But as the men drank and talked, all of that didn't exist. In fact, nothing existed but living in the moment. They would wake up and suddenly all of the emotions and terrors would crash upon them, but not yet. Now they would drink their alcohol, take a shot of tequila, and wisp away their troubles. The war their country was losing was not on their guilt-ridden minds.

But the world was not ready to allow them to forget. They weren't allowed to forget the perils their country was facing, no, they had to remember. The temporary liberation was just that, temporary, but the world decided to end it. After that stroke of midnight, terror was going to overcome that pub, the men just didn't know it yet. Their innocent conversations and drinking continued, avoiding the subject of war and families, which were torn apart and lost. A familiar feeling graced the pub, one that was lost when the war started. They yearned for a normal life, their pre-war life that was laced with content and freedom. But that would never happen, and the world would make sure of it.

A sudden and distant *BOOM* shook the pub, cutting across the noise like ice, where everyone immediately fell silent. The loud crack of a glass smashing to the floor broke the silence, spilling the alcohol everywhere. Everyone stared, as a closer *BOOM* shook the floor. They were getting closer. The realization hit everyone like a bus, they were getting bombed. A frenzy started, people screaming and ducking to take cover, but it was too late.

Suddenly the roof exploded and glass flew everywhere. Temporary tranquility settled over the pub as if the world was in slow motion. The glass, crystal shards flying like daggers, aiming for no target in particular. The tables, glasses, and chairs were blown and flew around the room. Then the tranquility ended when the building collapsed, the bones collapsing and encasing the men in the pub. No one was allowed the luxury of forgetting, and as the planes swept on, dropping bombs elsewhere, the names of the men who were killed were simply added to the ever-growing list of casualties.

Caroline Epstein is in 10th grade at The Blake School. She enjoys reading, rowing, and doing various forms of art. Her most prominent hobby is making art for her Etsy shop.

