

1st Place, Poetry

Optical Illusions

by Mel Finefrock

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I walk on an endless plane where ground and sky are one.
People are characterized by articles of clothing:
Floating T-shirts and pairs of shorts
Contrasting against a non-descript, grayscale world.
Color does come to me sometimes like smatterings of paint—
A blue sky here, a golden sun there, a green cloud of foliage—
Especially red, like the girl in the red sweatshirt from *Schindler's List*.
The eye doctor waves hello, but I see her white sleeve, not her tawny hand.
I've been known to think a small tree was a person.
I've flinched at unknown shadows, even my own.
I turn like a sunflower toward any emission of light.
I have personal firework shows in my head every night
That find their way even into my dreams.
Cones and rods fall away, and I see ghostly yellow and purple ripples.
Blood vessels burst, and my world bleeds red.
If I stare at something long enough, I can make it disappear.
Sometimes, I can find it in me to laugh at these optical illusions...

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Being able to write not only enables me to get things off my chest, but should others read my work, they may also gain understanding of what it's like to have a disability or, if they have a disability, be able to identify with me and not feel so alone. I will also make a disclaimer that though this poem is on the sad side and losing my vision can be difficult at times, it certainly does not reflect my overall attitude about living life with a disability. In fact, the idea came about during a major vision loss spurt last spring, when I was describing the way I saw things to my boyfriend, and he told me to write them down so I'd feel better, adding that he thought they'd make for a neat poem. I accepted the challenge, also with the intention of touching upon the constant question that is asked of me: "So, you're not totally blind? What can you see, then?"