

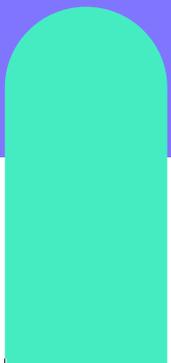
GIVE VOICE TO
our values

WINNING
entries



1st
place

The KitKat Man
by Teresa Kirby



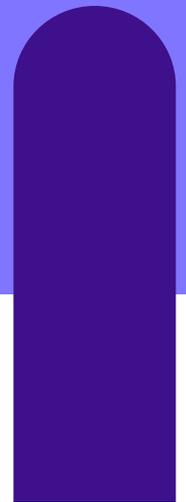
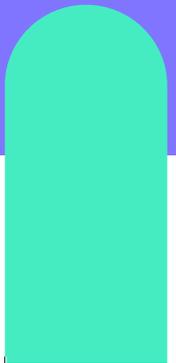
"He used to write to me on KitKat wrappers. He didn't have writing paper - there wasn't enough to go around. Anyway, eating chocolate and oranges was the only way to avoid dysentery. And his letters were always scented with chocolate orange. So, when he joined the Army and left for North Africa in 1940, Alfred wrote his love letters to me on those little red and white wrappers. They were more like poems really - you can't write much on a two-bar KitKat wrapper. We'd only been together for three months before he left. But I came to know him, and love him, more through his writings than his spoken word. Although I still remember him laughing as he recounted his best football moments with the Civil Service Sports Club in Chiswick. His letters kept him close, even though I knew he was so far away. And I would re-read each one nightly, until the next arrived. I was working in a munition's factory in London, and all the girls would laugh when my monthly chocolate wrapper arrived. I pored over, and savoured every word, before sharing the highlights with my friends. It was May 1941 when Alfred visited the Cape of Good Hope. I thought that it sounded a funny name - was there such a thing as bad hope? Surely all hope is good? I hoped that Alfred would come back to me - that he would still want to marry me. Alfred wrote that 'whenever I felt down, I should imagine him draping a cape of good hope around my shoulders' and 'that cape would be him'. The only problem is, imaginary capes can't keep you warm, and my grey winter coat was wearing thin by 1942. They say that love can keep you warm, but it can't. I'd hoped that Alfred would return for Christmas 1942, after the 8th Army's victory at El Alamein on 11th November. But I started to worry when that month's wrapper did not arrive. I read all the newspapers, but never found out what happened to him - only wives received telegrams. I never threw away his letters, instead, filing them carefully in a book of memories for myself and little Eileen. It's funny really - remembering someone through chocolate. Still, as I discovered, chocolate is an aphrodisiac. But my chocolate was imaginary. Only the words and Eileen are real - I wished that Alfred had known about his daughter. Even now, years later, whenever I eat a KitKat, I think of Alfred, aged 25, with his blue eyes and black wavy hair, before he went to War and never came home again."

1st
place

The KitKat Man
by Teresa Kirby



Legacy
by Sue Crawford



He wears his old man face again. A miasma of grimy onion, stale tobacco and fusty sex enfolds him like a security blanket. You wonder who he paid. He looks up from his laden plate smiling through missing teeth. Halitosis gusts across the table agitating your stomach like a plunger. Fingers stained the colour of old bruises tremble, rattling cutlery against plate. Meat juices congeal as you push at your food with a fork. If it were a wand, you could make this mess disappear. 'It's been a long time, Kat,' he says. Long enough for a kind, intelligent man to become a sleazy, squalid tramp. Not long enough for a murderer. 'Why have you come back?' you say, but you know. 'We need to talk.' 'After what you did?' 'Not fair, Kat. She wanted me to sign the Do Not Resuscitate form.' 'I'm her sister. You should have asked me. You should have bloody asked me. I want you to leave.' 'It's Rosa's house.' He still has that quiet confidence. Appalled by your involuntary physiological response, your skin crawls in shame. You feel queasy, in need of a shower. Mr. Kyle Sissons. Forty-two years old. Looks ninety. About to make you homeless. Validated Rosa loved butterflies. When the cancer drugs made her hallucinate, she'd laugh at the garden display no one else could see, exclaiming over fritillaries, hairstreaks, and admirals. Once the effects wore off, she'd become tearful, clinging. 'I'm not ready to leave,' she'd say. Then she'd beg. 'Don't let them bring me back. It's no life.' We talked about Kat. 'It's your home,' Rosa said. 'Evict her. It's time she made a life for herself.' Afterwards, unwilling to enter the home I'd shared with her, I sofa-surfed my way through an army of friends, until their goodwill ran out. 'I wish I'd died with her,' I said to my therapist. 'Grief takes time,' she replied, handing me a card for AA. Instead, I slept with one woman after another, failing to anaesthetise the pain that grew larger than Rosa's tumour each passing day. Kat turned her back. Always overshadowed by her big sister, the kid I'd once teased out of shyness wouldn't tolerate me within ten feet of her. Sustained 'Why have you come back?' Kat is as warm as a cryogenic chamber, her chin as narrow as an ayeaye's, and she points a long bony finger as if cursing me. But I'm already a blighted man, and I care nothing for her threats. 'It's Rosa's house,' I say, watching her shake. 'And Rosa left everything to me in her will.' Kat's never done anything to support herself, always relied on others. Her snaking fear is tangible, drawing her into its shadows. It thickens her breath and coarsens her features, slowing down time. She looks at me like I'm the devil. An image of a cross appears on the wall, cast by the clock. Tick tock, she's in shock. Tears sheen her cheek like polished glass. The Ice Queen is melting. We both need a fresh start, a way back to living. 'She wanted you to keep it,' I say. 'I'll instruct a solicitor to transfer the deeds.' Her gratitude is an ugly thing. I cannot bear to be near her. It's no compensation, but maybe she'll flourish if she owns her own home. Maybe she'll find herself. I've betrayed my promise to Rosa, but Kat and I have been given another chance. One of us might take it."

Runner
up

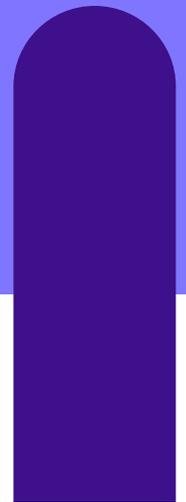
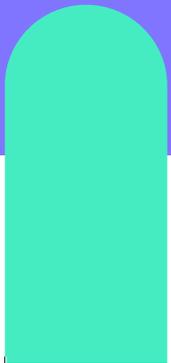
Legacy
by Sue Crawford



Commended

One Ice Cream

by Fiona Bray



"One ice cream. We had both been promised one ice cream at the beach. I'd been looking forward to it for months, finally getting to make sandcastles, splash in the sea, and devour an ice cream. We lived hours from the beach and without a car it took us even longer by train. Most people would have made a weekend of it but that meant hotels and meals. The train tickets alone needed saving for and Mum said we weren't a hotel kind of family anyway. I'd realised we weren't a lot-of-things kind of family actually, because things cost money. But Mum had promised us if we were good at Nan's over the summer that she'd take us to the beach. And today was the day. Jaxon instantly started begging for an ice cream but I knew better. Mum would make us wait a bit longer. But after we had made sandcastles, screamed in shock at freezing waters, buried each other in sand, and eaten our sandwiches, Jaxon asked again. This time there was hope in the air. Mum emptied a brown envelope into her palm. Out fell our return train tickets and two pound coins. Jaxon and I ran to the ice cream van which we'd clocked hours before and joined the queue. We both knew what we'd ask for, "a single scoop of vanilla ice cream in a cone with a flake please". Scanning the pictures of ice creams on the van I began to frown. Suddenly it was our turn to order and I pushed Jaxon in front of me. Jaxon ordered his ice cream and when it was handed to him the man asked for £1.90. Jaxon pulled back his hand clasping the pound coin which he had begun to offer. He turned to me and looked at his coin. I immediately grabbed it and handed both coins to the man. I couldn't look Jaxon in the eye but I knew he was staring at me as tears pricked my eyes. I told Jaxon I'd changed my mind and didn't want one anyway, and he better eat that before it started to drip. I felt jealous of Jaxon; too young to realise how much better life could be. I felt angry at my mum; why couldn't she be like the other mums who laughed and said yes more. And I felt stupid; stupid for caring so much about an ice cream and for wanting to cry so much in that moment. "Excuse me", came the shaky voice of an old man. He must have been boiling in his thick wool suit on a day like this. In each hand was an ice cream - a single scoop of vanilla ice cream in a cone with a flake. "There have been times in my life where I changed my mind about having an ice cream and bitterly regretted it. I couldn't help but overhear you boys in front of me in the queue, and thought perhaps you'd reconsidered your decision?", at this he held out an ice cream towards me. I didn't know what to say, but I had the good sense to accept the gift. "I saw you boys playing earlier", the gentleman said, "why not get your mother an ice cream too?". He handed over £5, and went on his way, smiling. "Thank you!" I called out to him and ate my ice cream. I felt happy, this kindness given so freely and unexpectedly. You should have seen mums face when we handed her an ice cream. We talked about that day for years."

Commended

One Ice Cream

by Fiona Bray