

Here, Telluride Magazine presents the fiction and poetry winners of the 2000 Mark Fischer literary contest, which is held each year and is open to everyone. Read on to learn about the special relationship between two brothers, and spark your thoughts with poems full of imagery and meaning. If you'd like to enter this year's contest, call Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer at (970) 728-0399.

The two brothers walked down into the river bed with tin pans in hand. They'd been at it for days, churning through river sand and pebblestone as if they planned to expose the very heart of the earth itself. They hadn't found a single fleck of gold in all that time, although the younger brother had tucked a few pretty rocks into the pockets of his overalls.

The brothers were bent on making their fortune in gold. The elder had read all he could about the craft. He knew just how to swirl the water and tilt the pan. He recognized the sort of eddies that held potential. The oldest brother could tell the difference between the element and the counterfeit. You couldn't fool the elder. He tried to teach the younger brother all that he knew, but the younger brother had a mind of his own.

"My way's just fine," the younger brother said, and he pushed away his elder's hands. "Let go of my pan."

"You're doing it all wrong," the elder counseled, but the younger had his own thoughts about right and wrong.

The brothers had built a lean-to on the banks,

## Two Brothers

by Allison Johnson

where they stored a blanket, a thermos and some crackers. When the sun got too hot around noon, they laid up inside, talking about what they'd do with their gold when they found it. The elder wanted to fix the leaky roof over

their house. The younger spoke of warm, southern beaches.

The lean-to was constructed with scrap wood and nails so crooked that not a perpendicular angle blessed the structure. Every time the wind blew, the side panels shivered and threatened to collapse, but they hadn't yet. Yet was good enough for the brothers.

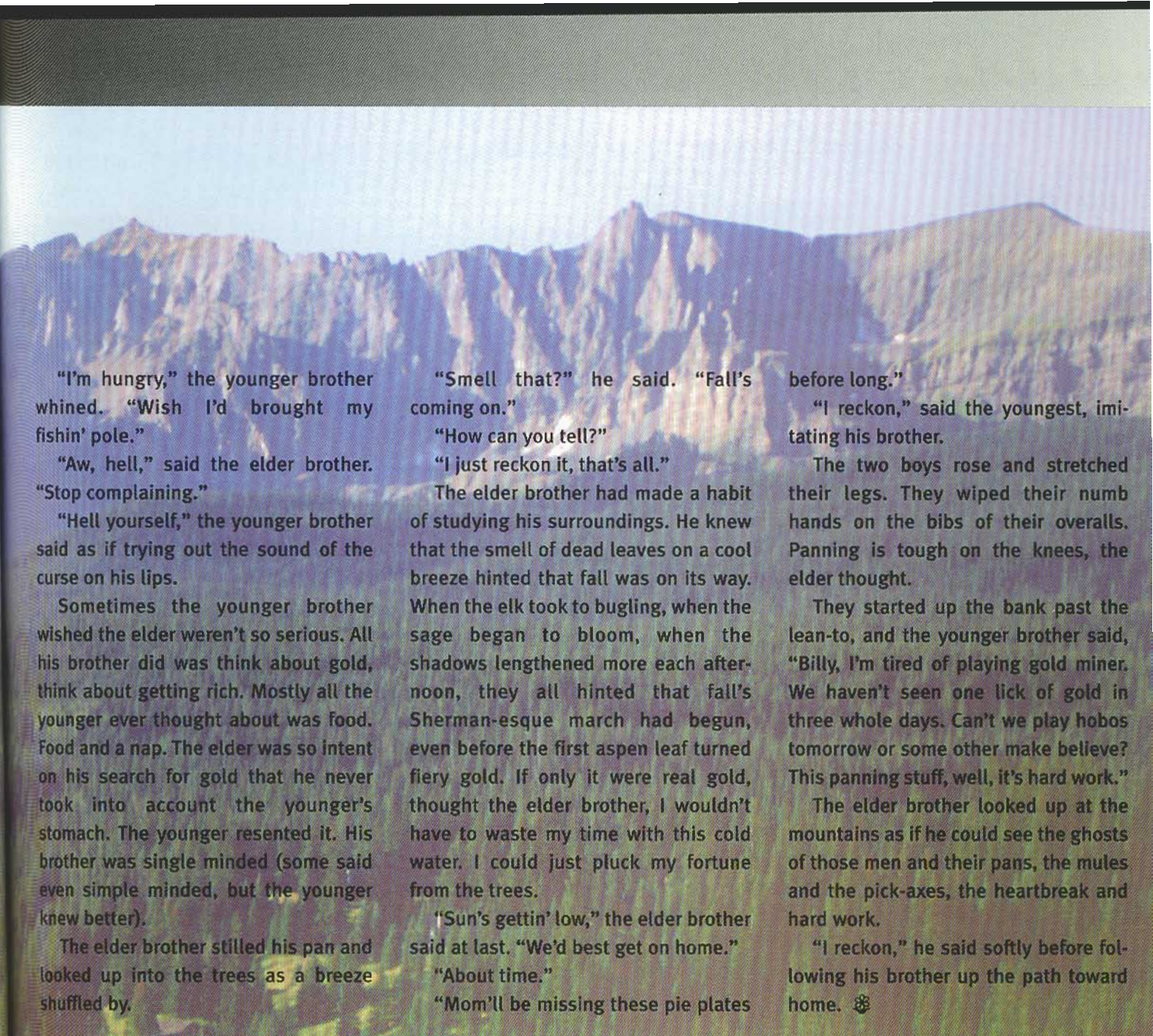
When the midday heat blew off the river, they each chose an eddy and got back to work. The elder brother stared at his pan until his eyes hurt, probing the grit with his fingers for that one brilliant flash of legendary gold. Plenty was still hidden in those rocks, he'd heard, and the elder aimed to get his share. The younger brother's efforts were more easily diverted. Water sloshed over the lip of his pan as his eyes wandered to the banks, the trees, the water tumbling down over speckled rock.

"Look, Billy! There's a fish," he'd say on occasion. Whenever he spied a little brook trout in that water, the younger brother dropped his pan and had to start all over again.

### Chief Sequoia: The Lame One

BY BILL KIMMEL

He counted, and counted again  
The talking leaves, the 26 signs  
And felt within the pure pleasure of Truth painted on  
The pain of watching the principal people scatter  
And drift like leaves and die  
Charcoal on sycamore  
Truth on pain  
Then the lame one led his people  
From darkness to light  
What did the wonderful talking leaves say?  
What was the spark?  
Of course the task was impossible  
Any linguist could have told him  
Fifteen tenses and no prepositions  
Repeated nouns repeated  
No man in the history of the world before or after  
Would invent a syllabry  
The redwoods, the sequoias, bare his name  
The most immortal  
The closest to heaven of all living things



"I'm hungry," the younger brother whined. "Wish I'd brought my fishin' pole."

"Aw, hell," said the elder brother. "Stop complaining."

"Hell yourself," the younger brother said as if trying out the sound of the curse on his lips.

Sometimes the younger brother wished the elder weren't so serious. All his brother did was think about gold, think about getting rich. Mostly all the younger ever thought about was food. Food and a nap. The elder was so intent on his search for gold that he never took into account the younger's stomach. The younger resented it. His brother was single minded (some said even simple minded, but the younger knew better).

The elder brother stilled his pan and looked up into the trees as a breeze shuffled by.

"Smell that?" he said. "Fall's coming on."

"How can you tell?"

"I just reckon it, that's all."

The elder brother had made a habit of studying his surroundings. He knew that the smell of dead leaves on a cool breeze hinted that fall was on its way. When the elk took to bugling, when the sage began to bloom, when the shadows lengthened more each afternoon, they all hinted that fall's Sherman-esque march had begun, even before the first aspen leaf turned fiery gold. If only it were real gold, thought the elder brother, I wouldn't have to waste my time with this cold water. I could just pluck my fortune from the trees.

"Sun's gettin' low," the elder brother said at last. "We'd best get on home."

"About time."

"Mom'll be missing these pie plates

before long."

"I reckon," said the youngest, imitating his brother.

The two boys rose and stretched their legs. They wiped their numb hands on the bibs of their overalls. Panning is tough on the knees, the elder thought.

They started up the bank past the lean-to, and the younger brother said, "Billy, I'm tired of playing gold miner. We haven't seen one lick of gold in three whole days. Can't we play hobos tomorrow or some other make believe? This panning stuff, well, it's hard work."

The elder brother looked up at the mountains as if he could see the ghosts of those men and their pans, the mules and the pick-axes, the heartbreak and hard work.

"I reckon," he said softly before following his brother up the path toward home. ☼

## *I'll Be Waiting*

BY SUZANNE CHEAVENS

You tipped your hat with a soft, hot  
Spring

Nature's rochambeau

sun beats snow every time.

Impossibly green the color of May,  
bluegrass as pure and high as a  
plucked mandolin.

June, you are a sundress, you are  
brown skin

you are love.

Withering grasses beg for August rain  
And at last, you deluge soft streams  
on thirsty tongues, eager lips.

Peach juice giggled down my chin like  
old men on a park bench  
beating the pants off each other in  
checkers;

you were there to lick it up.

Walking with my love into the  
westerling sun,

who said Summer is so short here;  
but that moment was all shorts,  
sandals, sparks and eternity.

While I slept, you left me a note

that said 'soon';

I know, I know.

Then, your white sister stepped on  
autumn's toes,  
and killed the flowers and the lettuce  
we grew together.

So, that's how it must be.

Never goodbye. Your feral heat beats  
my heart while I mark time  
til Solstice, when at last days  
command nights.

And then I'll have you in my sights.

Oh yes my soulmate, my desire.

I'll be waiting.