

The Phoenix

Spring 2020



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The Phoenix

Spring 2020

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Introduction

Every year, the editors of *The Phoenix* invite a distinguished individual to write an introduction to be included at the start of the publication. This introduction serves a reminder to all readers that the contents of *The Phoenix* are unique, creative, and worthy of admiration and respect. It explains in greater depth the reason why *The Phoenix* is created and treasured by so many Thiel students and staff annually.

For the 2020 edition of this publication, Samuel Faber, a member of the Class of 2020 at Thiel College and a highly successful individual both in and out of the classroom—who also serves as a co-editor of this issue—has been elected to write that introduction. His writing, featured below, is not only an excellent tribute to the work and creativity put forth by himself and by his peers to allow this year’s issue of *The Phoenix* to come to fruition, but it also serves as an editor’s note by which he, as an admired member of Thiel College’s current senior class, will be forever honored and remembered.

Good literature invites us to weigh and consider the significance of certain images, symbols, and texts. For example, birds are associated with many aspects of our life. Their calls are often the first sound we hear when we step outside on a warm summer morning. We see them fly above our heads and sit at the nearest branch or telephone pole while they watch our interactions with the world. In scriptures, the Holy Spirit takes on the form of a dove to represent peace and tranquility. The dove is used as a messenger of God for Noah during the flood of the earth. When the dove returned to Noah with an olive leaf, he knew the flood had ceased. When Noah sent out the dove for a third time, the bird did not return: the dove had started a new life, just as Noah did.

There are many other representations of birds in literature and they seem to signify a higher figure that we want to emulate, especially when they are given a second chance. The story of the phoenix is not a complicated one. When the phoenix dies, it is burned into ash and from those ashes it begins a new life. It is given another chance to accomplish things it did not accomplish in its previous life, that is, if it takes advantage of the opportunity. Perhaps it wanted to spend more time trying to catch that one big worm for dinner instead of settling for a much smaller worm. It could possibly want to build a better nest after the last one blew off the branch due to the tree’s poor architecture. Or, the new-born phoenix wants to find a better mate instead of going back to its previous life.

Human beings are always finding ways to seek second chances in life. We are so prone to making mistakes that can either significantly or microscopically alter our careers, passions, and relationships. We tend to reflect on our previous actions and ask ourselves what we did wrong so that we may prevent ourselves from making the same mistakes. This is the sole purpose of this literary journal. We are given the opportunity to make some sort of amends of our past. If you’re a college student reading this, you’ve probably heard someone who’s ten plus years older than you say that you’re young and you haven’t yet experienced the “real” world. While this is true, we have already experienced small portions of some very serious aspects of life.

Most likely, we have experienced the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a romance that has either successfully blossomed into a wonderful alliance of trust and love or that has broken our heart and left us feel utterly lonely and confused about ourselves and our future relationships. We have experienced successes and failures in academics, sport competitions, and any other interests in which we plan to succeed. We have undergone the consequences of divorce, loss of friendships, and abandonment from role models which cause us to spiral into a battle within our consciousness that can lead to the deterioration of our positive outlook on life. These are very real experiences of the very “real” world.

This creative journal allows us to tell these stories so that readers may learn about the people of this campus and what motivates us to become aware of ourselves and those around us. We are born again from the ashes of our past and we start a new life of imagination, creativity, and motivation to take advantage of our new opportunity to experience life. This journal is not *The Phoenix*. The people who pour their emotions onto a canvas or a computer screen are *The Phoenix*.

One of the pieces submitted for consideration as a cover is titled “Rising with the Scroll of Knowledge.” Walter Holtgreffe, a co-creator and the submitter of this art piece, provided a detailed description of what this cover depicts:

In stark contrast to previous years’ art covers, this year’s depiction of the bird holding the scroll and flying toward the light is concrete rather than abstract; the work is intended to parallel the journey of Thiel students, taking the knowledge learned at the College into their own futures. The “scroll of knowledge,” however, is explicitly not a college degree. What is learned at Thiel is not constricted to a diploma, and specifying what the scroll contains, rather than represents, disregards individual interpretation and experiences. The eye of the bird is facing the readers, as if to confront and inspire them to rise and fly. Apparent at first glance is the wing’s transparency, revealing to the reader that college—or any amount of education—is a part of, but not the sole part, of completing a person or fulfilling a student’s full potential.

Samuel Faber, Class of 2020

English/Secondary Education

“The artistic depiction of the bird came from a poster made at summer camp: the team I led was named the Golden Eagles. My partner, Katie Benson, and I drew it on a bright yellow tri-fold poster nearly three feet tall and four feet wide. The drawing was digitized, edited, and prepared for submission, using the free program GIMP. I do have Ms. Benson’s permission to reproduce and submit our joint design.”

Walter Holtgreffe, Class of 2023

Biology and Health Systems

Cycle of the Fire Bird

By Sean Oros

“Upsurge”

Out of darkness springs a light
As the fire bird begins its flight
From tangled brambles burning through
To soar upon the winds above
And breathe the air that rushing by
Fills both wings and lungs to rise
Above travails that would entrap
And clip the wings that now propel
The fire bird to lands unknown,
To find a destiny, fate all its own.
Adventure beckons on the wind,
As youthful hopes rise high again.

“Descent”

The flight is long and burning bright,
The fire bird expends its light;
For as it soars, all seek its glow
To ease their pains and slack their woes;
As moths are drawn to fire’s warmth,
So hurting souls are drawn to heal.
Plumes of flames are fast dispersed,
But faster than they can regrow.
The phoenix has a healing myth,
But healing others costs oneself;
If a warming flame only ever gives
Then nothing’s left to ensure it lives.

“Demise”

The blazing embers start to die
But the fire bird yet gives no cry.
The clouds now thicken and turn to grey,
But the restless bird flies on despite.
And as it flies, the winds grow strong
As through a growing storm it fights
And rain against its wings then raged,
Alone amidst the clouds ablaze,
With lightning of the surging storm
That drives the fires from its wings
And casts the bird to rocks below;
The fire bird once soared the sky,
But on cold ground it prepares to die,
No one to heal or mourn its end,
No one its tattered wings to mend.

“Ashes”

The storm is passed, but gone the bird
That once with dazzling fires bright was gird.
The skies are grey with passing clouds
As wind amidst the trees now moans;
This orchestra befits the passing
Of a bright flame that outstripped
Its own endurance of the storm.
Alone it flew and gave of itself;
Alone it crashed when lightning struck.
Born in brambles it escaped,
The storm ensnared it all the same.
Now the wind its ashes stirs,
Burnt to naught and gone from life.
But gentle winds can stir a flame
And in the ashes embers hide.
Then from the ash—there springs new flames
As one last spark its life reclaims.

“Resurgence”

Out of darkness springs a light
As the fire bird begins its flight
Rising from the ash, undimmed,
It spreads its wings and feels the wind;
Not quite spent, not quite new,
But strong enough to flight renew.
Into the air it leaps to rise
As to the sun it casts its eyes
And sets its course to journey's end,
To heal the hurt and hearts to mend.
Adventure beckons one time more
As weathered soul finds strength to soar.



Photo by Yuanyuan Qu

In My Thirteen Years of Life

By Molly Shepler

I'm happy just to be near you,
Your presence is what brings me to life!
How lonely home is when you leave,
The rooms quiet—I wait for your return.

For years and years I've lived in this house
And protected you from the dangers
Which wander outside.
Each door closing, each knock or noise to which
My ear is untrained puts me on high alert.

To see your smile is my favorite thing, though
I've felt your tears on my back before.
Going for walks is fun, but time keeps moving on...
I can't quite hear what you say as easily
But my ears always perk up when you speak!
I'll follow you wherever you'd like to go,
I'm your travel companion for life!

Where have you been all this time?
No matter—I'm glad you're home!
I haven't been this happy since yesterday.
I'm so glad that I'll run in circles,
Sniff your toes and wag my tail,
Then I'll get in my seventh nap of the day
At your feet
On this comfy carpet floor of a bed.

I may not have many years to offer,
But this I can tell you for sure:
As grateful for you as I am
Each day that goes by,
I love you ever so much more.



“Teddy” by Molly Shepler

Learning to Say Goodbye

By Jon Burkley

Eventually, everyone must say goodbye,
But we all have memories that can't be taken.
Sometimes we're all just left with questions,
Left with a feeling of being forsaken.
How could they go, why did they leave?
What more could we be left here to grieve?
How can our world ever get brighter,
When all our heartstrings only get tighter?
A hundred poems I must've written,
Yet now my mind, like Pandora's box
Clamps shut to hide the words I need,
Almost as if each a curse it blocks.
But now is when I can't be reckless.
My hand grasps my Eagle necklace,
A symbol that my papa gave to me
Reminding me hard work and dedication are key.
He's a man who earned his place in heaven
And there he's all-in every hand,
Watching over each of his family,
Every deal going just as he planned.
Now we all gather to partake in
A recollection of memories that can't be taken.
Each of us in dresses and suit and tie,
Eventually we all learn to say goodbye.



“Papa Charlie”

Courtesy of Jon Burkley

An Elegy of April the Fourth

By Hans G. Myers

Why did you give up in your fight 'gainst death?
Was it to assuage the pain you felt
With each slow, rough, and labored painful breath?
Perhaps it was grimness towards the hand dealt

In life's capricious game of chance with fate.
You hid from us the fact you had stopped it:
Chemotherapy and all treatments late
Even before Christmas had yet us hit.

Were we not enough to console you then?
As hair thinned and greyed on your proud, stern head.
Or was it misheard surgeon that helped when
To Death's cold door you decided to tread?

The phrase "Last Christmas" stuck tight in your mind
Despite it being only mondegreen.
Remembering the meeting, you will find
He spoke if no action were made to wean

The body of its illness and its doom,
Of what happened without the surgery.
But you misheard, and allowed yourself gloom,
Leaving you in a sort of perjury.

How long you had fought and how much you won
Were meaningless when you stopped treatment then.
Did you think then of me, your only son,
Who would grapple for life with this choice when

His father dies just two short weeks before
The dawning of his thirteenth year on Earth?
As like a skiff adrift from the far shore,
Your loss my mind reshaped in heavy dearth.

Seared in his mind the visions of your form
Consumed by illness and wasting away -
Supplanting happy memories like storm
Clouds supplant the brilliant sun's bright ray.

How much did you think in those last few months
Of Wife and Son lost in grief and despair?
How much did you think in those last few months
Of Mother and Father's sad, mourning prayer?

You chose to stop fighting, does that mean that
You chose to die? To leave us all behind?
To stay wreathed in darkness, by coffin sat
Our eyes filled with tears so often made blind?

It was your choice to make, a hard one though.
Do I resent your choice? Not really, no.
Your loss to me was akin to a blow
Delivered straight unto my soul, now low.

But who is to blame for your sad loss then?
God? Medicine? Surgery? Not them, so
Who can bear this blame solely among men?
Perhaps the doctor who mistook it, though,

For a simple, plain course of kidney stones;
Or perhaps the surgeon for his phrasing;
The very ache that so long filled your bones;
Or the disease that snuffed your fire blazing.

I blame a president long ago who
Authorized the rainbow off to the war.
The clouds of death falling, by wind now blew
Over not only you, but millions more.

Ode to Flowers

By Britney Georgia

*Death and immortality of people.
May Rome never fall nor society
Slip to chaos with a lion's roaring
To become no more than ruins entombed.
Colors abright and birds in flight- still gloom
Dust will gather and time will pass all up,
But who was put in the glass with worn paint?
At the edge of life but never drawn breath.
Not to be forgotten alone in time.
Marked flowers of wood, glass, or plastic.
Let us be told by the blooms if they rest
Did they cross the River Styx to forget?
Finally given the flowers in urn
Which follow a burning on an altar.
Ashes and ashes or soil that lacks
Unneeding nutrients for flowers cold.
Flowers that do not seem to mind the snow
Forever in bloom, far longer than life.
Gods blessed them never to fade in color
Nor lose a petal to a season's touch.*

*Stunted is the growth, still fragile in heart
In likeness to more delicate flowers
Rearranged and refumed, the bold beauty
Has lost its virtue, but remains in bloom
Used and looked at year after year; wishing
that more company would visit each day.
Forevermore is the heart's gift present.
Be it the body you guard has a mind
Who stays with Socrates and great thinkers
Or is waiting to live again by the Nile;
Within the old pyramid-tomb of stone.
Guided in the dark by the hard petals,
But they do not fall to leave trails to keep,
So new paths continue after time has passed.*

The Palace

By Ian Miller

A once pristine palace between two hills.
It once shone like the sun and was loved by all.
People came from far and wide to visit.
But everything that rises must fall.
The doors that once stayed open stayed shut.
A blackness surrounded the once light place.
The walls weeped in remembrance of the past.
They missed the light and the joy of the people.
After many years there was no more hope.
People knew the doors would never open.
Yet one day light shone once again on the doors.
Joy and laughter filled the palace once more.
No longer does the darkness control it.
Will the cycle continue or the light prevail?



Photo by Molly Shepler

Midnight

Anonymous

He's in my veins again,
Creeping toward my heart,
Sitting on my lungs.
He's perched just so;
I cannot breathe.
He is smoke in my throat,
Blocking my nose and
Closing my mouth
So I may not cry out.

Could He be drained from me,
A desperate Nosferatu willing to oblige.
There will be no Bela Lugosi
To my rescue tonight;
I rather fear I am the subject of Wells:
A Griffin hidden in plain sight.

Could the moon be to blame?
No, she is faultless,
Where He is an illness, my leprosy.
Nor did He come from the lagoon,
Its murky depths not parent to His treachery.

He is still a beast come to claim me.
My soul will be drained,
Drop
by
crimson
drop
Until I am nothing more
Than His latest damsel, never rescued.

No sooner am I down that He is gone again,
More hidden than even myself.
He will be back, in time;
Of this, I know too well.
He is a parasite,
My only companion.



Photo by Morgan Wood



Photo by Morgan Wood

Battle with Insomnia

by Sophia Kostoff

I know it's late, but I just can't seem to close my eyes.
I have too many thoughts going through my mind all at once.
I have exams tomorrow.
I have to recite a speech in a few days.
My embarrassing fall to the floor over a boy will still be on everyone's mind tomorrow.
I fear tomorrow.
Maybe if I just don't sleep, tomorrow will never come.
I know that sounds like nonsense and make-believe, but I really wish I could keep tomorrow from coming.
Fear, stress, and anxiety rush over me like waves crashing on the shore of the beach.
Most people say that sleep is the cure for all of this, but to me, sleep is the thing that will take me to these things.

Contemplation of all of my stressors make the process even harder to go through.
I seriously don't want to face what tomorrow has in store for me.
I will fail all of my exams.
I will mess up my speech to the point of no return.
People will laugh at me because of one moment.
That moment will never be forgotten about.
Why does life have to be so complicated?
Why does it have to be so full of unlucky cards?
Why can I not once draw a king instead of the two from the deck of cards life hands me?
I wish I knew.

My body and soul want me to sleep away all of my worries and woes,
But my mind, more powerful than all of that combined,
Says no to sleep and yes to all night contemplations.
I feel as if I'm carrying a backpack full of bricks on my back.
So many bricks full of pain and woe.
They won't fall out when I try to shake them out.
They just sit there, reminding me that I still have to face all of the misery that holds me down.

Sleep is the last thing on my mind.
I desperately want to clear my head of all of this negativity.
My mind feels like Satan, tempting me by convincing me
That I will never get through it all.
Satan is winning over Grace in my mind right now.
I feel my body aching and getting tired.
I feel my bones start to relax as the sense of being tired rushes to my body, missing my mind.
Stay awake, it says.
It will never end, it says.
Give up now, it says.
I feel it, giving up on my dream taking over me
Like the blood flowing through my veins.

I feel as if I will never again close my eyes and sleep.
Sleep is no longer function in the despair that is my mind.
Now all that is in my mind is fear, sadness, anger, and worry.
Will this ever end?
Never, my mind says.
Will I ever see the light of day?
Not ever, my mind says.

I hit the pillows, I cry to tire myself,
But nothing suppresses this agony that I think about.
Only tomorrow not coming would end all of this.
What is happening to me?
Let me sleep!
I want out of all of this pain and fear!
That's life, my mind says.
You can't escape it, my mind says.
Deal with it, my mind says.
And then it happened.

Finally, my mind seems to be calming down.
Finally, the pain and the woe fly up into the sky.
Finally, I'm not worried anymore.
Finally, my eyes close and I fall into a deep sleep,
Sleep to erase all of the pain from the previous day,
Sleep to be ready for the one I'm about to look straight in the face.

Books

Anonymous

Books were her escape. When she was alone, with nobody to turn to, she picked up a book. They were the friends she never had growing up. Her pain and sorrows were lost in them, and they listened to everything she said. They were the best listeners and let her slip away from any problem. Within them, there was always a way out. When reading, she could pretend that she was the character, going on a magic quest, or a lonely child finding a place in life. Books were the greatest escape for her. Late into the night, she would stay up with them, reading until she could no longer hold her eyes open, for she never wanted the adventure to end. During school she would carry them with her, to get away from the stress and chaos throughout the day. Rarely was she seen without one; at lunch, recess, or any break during class, her nose would be buried in a book. A few times a week, she would be on a new one. As she grew older, she did not need them as much. She would still open one when she was bored, but she was finally finding her place and no longer needed an escape. Eventually, she left them behind. She moved on to bigger things and did not have time to read. The adventures still lived within her, though. The characters she dreamt of being while growing up became part of her, and the quotes she read over and over again became her vocabulary. She no longer escaped into the magic of books. Instead, she became the magic of them.



Photos by Katie Miller

Where Are We Today?

By Katie Miller

Remembering the 2019 Greece trip

You'll become close with someone
When you spend nine hours together on a plane -
You'll become closer on the eleven-hour trip home.

We had the time of our lives
Trying to avoid looking like tourists
When all many of us wanted to do was gawk at temples.

Those were the days
When we burned more than just the euros in our pockets,
And we saw parts of each other we never want to see again.

We learned the similarities
Between the ever-important Paul Revere and Alexander the Great
(They both had a horse, you know).

That was the place
Where friends were made in the most unlikely circumstances
And former strangers became siblings, of sorts.

We tried foods we may never taste again,
Saw sights that stole the breath from our lungs,
And laughed over jokes we still bring up months later.

From questionable Gucci belts
To nicknames never to be repeated in the company of children,
We'll never know how crazy the locals truly thought we were in the end.

Those days may be over,
But that doesn't have to stop any of us from asking one more time:
"Where are we today?"



"A Titan's View"

An Ode to My Bed

By Jenyfer Pegg

The airport walls harbor a chill
That I know you could rid my life of

The airport walls reek of anxiety
That I know your comfort could ease

These airport walls are filled with the daunting eyes of TSA
That I know does not exist in your world

The airport walls, although I'm through security, dip me in the burning sensation of feeling unsafe
And you are where I feel most secure

Suitcases rolling,
Children laughing,
Parental exhaustion, and
Homebodies longing
For the same thing I am.
Bed. Blankets. Pillows. Comfort. And Warmth.

These airport walls make me feel tired,
When all I want to be is asleep in your keep.

12 more hours
And I'll be home to you again,
All my love,
A woman, who misses her comforter

The Smell

By Ian Miller and Julia Langietti

I went for a walk
It smelled like dead animals
The smell was the mulch

It smells like death
Why did they put more mulch here
I want to transfer

It is not yet spring
But yet I still live in fear
For the mulch will come

Let There Be Light

By Ian Miller

We lived in a world with no light.
Stumbling around blind,
We knew not our plight.
Then one man was very kind.

For he made a marvelous find.
"Open your eyes," he said.
"No longer are you in a bind."
"You don't need to be filled with dread"

"Now go in my stead."
"Tell the people they can see,"
"And make sure the word is spread."
"For blind they no longer have to be."

"The people will realize"
"They are not blind when they open their eyes."

The One I Could Not Save

By Sean Oros

There was a boy I could not save.
He had more heart than was good for him,
His ideals both a banner and a blindfold.
He was both fierce and cautious,
Both guarded and freely giving,
A contradiction wrapped inside an enigma;
He was a wounded and yet hopeful soul
That I tried to save.

He burst forth from the briar bush,
Snapping the snares that held him fast,
Setting out with steps strong and sure,
Following the winding wind wherever
Just for the thrill of adventure.
And yet, I could not save him.

Seemingly blind to pain,
He set a stride, strong and sure.
For long, he strode undaunted.
But as the miles gathered,
The steps doubted, stalled,
As distant journeys took their tolls,
But his resilient heart yet rallied
And cast off warnings to slow his pace.
And still, I could not save him.

He marched and marched to the beyond
Until there was no sign left of him.
Perhaps he died upon his road,
Or perhaps he at last abandoned it.
Whether he froze in the alpine mountain pass
Or the Slough of Despond at last ensnared him,
His swift steps ceased.
And I could not save him.

For, despite all the people I've tried to help,
I could not save myself.

Throughout the Ages:

A Response to W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts"

by Molly Shepler

Mastery of principles, commanding the elements to life
In a new way.

Somehow seeing the world and showing it

From a fresh, oil perspective.

Depth and shadow, color and tint.

Where did the brush touch the page?

History in the making

With frescoed ceiling and mural magic.

...

Flecks of brightness conquer the eye,

Begging for attention and consideration.

So much more now than simple scenes,

More real in the sense of feeling, emotion.

Impressions of the Sunrise,

Cubing all perspectives.

Turns out that pretty landscapes

Of lakes and trees are far more

Imaginary—

More imaginative than one

Might have thought them to be.

The abstract captures a true sense of

What it *means* to be a tree.

Stand on your canvas.

Toss the material, the color each way

Whichever way it wants to go.

All you must do is listen and

Obey.

...

Part of a bigger picture now

Aware that for the first time,

The horizon may be empty.

Try to make your mark,

Paint a picture,

But don't expect a place in

Art History.

Montezuma

By Dylan Santore

VI

I wish you the best in death, opposed life,
You carried with you the voice of your world entire,
You entertained, perplexed, condemned, commanded,
I hope the guardians of the lake
Hold you in their arms once again

II

You were their perfect gift, weren't you?
You were their divine conception
You were there to give him comfort
You were his ultimate achievement
Weren't you?

But what did you do for them?
What did they see that I couldn't?
What did they see that he ignored?
What did you become,
And how did it please them?

You learned to walk, clumsy cliché
You learned to talk, flawed enthusiasm
You learned to talk to them, your flock
You learned to exist above your equals
Rightful heir?

III

But that's over now, over and gone
We didn't meet when he arrived
We didn't meet when you gave him gifts
We met when he saw you for what you are

They rised from the ocean, god
They cluttered your roads, all
They were made of silver, power
They spoke no human tongue
What have you received so kindly?

He stood before you, an alien,
He commanded them, idle foes,
He eyed you, overestimated,
He took chances, took lives,
Why did you let him?

IV

You were strong, as told,
You were courteous, as teacher,
You were pious, as taught,
You were weak, as fact
Who wrote after?

But you tried, right?
But you talked, right?
But you fought, right?
But you lost, right?
Who won?

You were a man, not a king
You were a visitor, not a host
You were a soldier, not a general,
You were the dead, not a mourner
What were you?

V

As you lay dying, what did you think?
As you lay dying, were you scared?
As you lay dying, were you pleased?
As you lay dying, what was it all for?
Were you me?

As they built over you, did you cry?
As they erased you, who remembered?
As skyscrapers fell, what was built?
As a metropolis is reborn, are you there?
Can I still see you?

As I read this history, can I hear you?
As I scroll through drawings, can I see you?
As I close the text, are you gone forever?
As I lay dying, will you die with me?
Will we meet there?

I

You were a smudge on a great history
I see nothing but error in your name
I sense nothing but pity in your voice
You were a wasted name
Wasted upon a great story

Notre-Dame de Paris (Lignes sur le feu du 15 avril 2019)

by Hans G. Myers

What have you endured through the long, great years
Of wars and horrors that challenge your name?
Your great visage now hidden by ash smears.
The streets of Paris and of the world hears
Of your steeple caught and ruined by flame.
What have you endured through the long, great years?
O'er Hindenburg's bombs, your bells did sing clear.
And midst Revolution's gore, the same.
Your great visage now hidden by ash smears.
Here Hugo found muse, his art linked with yours.
Here Bonaparte did the long bloodlust tame.
What have you endured through the long, great years?
Wreathed in smoke, roses wilt like royal *fleurs*.
Spires crash as flames lap and lick and now claim.
Your great visage now hidden by ash smears.
Our Lady of Paris, your loss heart sears;
Not just in France your majesty seas tame.
What have you endured through the long, great years?
Your great visage now hidden by ash smears.

ROSE GARDEN

By Anna Gordon

THE ROSES ARE IN THE GARDEN,
THE GARDEN IS ALL DEAD,
AND VISIONS OF WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN
DANCE ABOUT MY HEAD.

THE VOICES,
THEY WHISPER
WORDS UPON MY EAR
AND I BEGIN TO THINK,
WHAT IF YOU WERE HERE?
WHAT WOULD BE DIFFERENT?
WOULD I BE ALRIGHT?
OR WOULD I SIMPLY LIE IN BED AND CRY AWAY THE NIGHT
THESE DEMONS,
THEY HAUNT ME,
YEAR AFTER YEAR.
WHY WOULD THAT CHANGE IF ONLY YOU WERE HERE?

THE ROSES ARE IN THE GARDEN,
THE GARDEN IS ALL DEAD
AND SO ARE MY VISIONS
AND ALL THE THOUGHTS INSIDE MY HEAD.

Defeat

By Sean Oros

Darkness swirling rampant
In my wounded soul,
Attacks from all directions
Blind my eyes in pain.

I gasp as if to breath,
But nothing fills my lungs,
And without the breath of air,
Even surging fires Die.

Fires once burned so brightly
In my resilient heart,
But now those fire flicker,
And ashes choke my lungs.

I fought to free myself
From many ensnaring roots,
Only to be choked to death
In nets my own design.

Now I sit impotent,
Staring at what could have been,
My heart an empty tomb
Full of molding dust and bones.

No air now stirs my sails,
No fires fuel my drive,
Waters stale and stagnate,
And my foundation turns to dust.

My will, once unbroken,
Is now a rusted shell.
My fires, once a phoenix,
Now smolder into void.

Shivers and Serotonin

By Jenyfer Pegg

Shivers down my spine,
Serotonin floods my brain
You. The object of my affection,
The flutter in my heart,
Are a breath of fresh air.

I've been suffocating all this time, but
Your voice opens my lungs and fills them
With long awaited air,
I continue to live.

A weekend is all I ever have,
But it will never be enough.
I will never get enough of You,
Your voice,
Or the oxygen you grant my lungs

You are the breath of fresh air I will always come back for
At 5am when we're just going to sleep
And all I'm thinking about is whether You're thinking of me
too.

I spell Your name in my mind to pass the time
One syllable
Three letters
Your name is
Peace and Comfort

And your name will sit in my heart
On my brain
With Shivers and Serotonin

Patience

By Anonymous

Two years between
My Husband and me,
Four years, from:
Me to you.
Never more loved,
But more to give,
More to gain, to
Hold, and to have.

Circling my finger and
Heart, so long;
Dreams of home, and
Days in.
Something yet for
Us to work and win.

Only two years more
Between me and him,
For us, from now
To Forever, then.



Submitted by Yuanyuan Qu

In the Lake Michigan Moonlight

By Jenyfer Pegg

We flourished,
But only in the moonlight.
We would never venture into daylight.
It was too dangerous.

We hid in the sand of
The Lake Michigan shore,
Sinking into it and ourselves
We were satisfied.

But if life has taught me one thing.
It's that everything good must come to an end.
It is a cruel trick of fate,
For you were there, and then we weren't

August hurt.
September hurt more.
October was filled with anger,
But I was free by November

Waking up stopped being teary eyed
And started being numb.
Waking up stopped being numb,
And I just existed again



Submitted by Molly Shepler

Tale of the Brown Knight

By Sean Oros

Once a white knight atop a stalwart steed,
He rode boldly and followed duty's lead,

His high-born banner once a so proud a white,
He looked with eyes confidently bright,

Unblemished and aloof from peasant dirt,
He rode his high-horse with manners curt.

He rode so tall and proudly through the lands—
But much has changed amidst time's shifting sands.

Now a brown knight, he roams across the land
An old and dented sword in weary hand,

His armor rusted, stained with his dried blood,
Now but a hedge knight on a road of mud.

His lonely nights are dark and full of fear,
His aging soul's remorse all he can hear.

His quest unfinished and his banner stained,
Long lost the confidence that once he feigned.

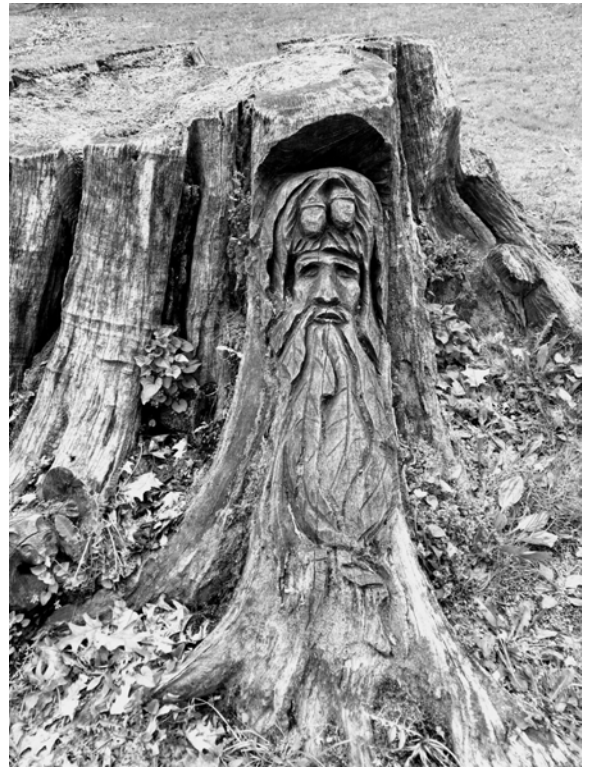
His only refuge commoners once scorned,
His former haughty pride now fully mourned.

But now his pace he quickens
As his growing conflict thickens;

Wounded, battered, fading fast,
Losing fights he can't outlast.

But still he stands despite the pain
And holds his head amidst the rain

Battered, but unbroken,
Wounded, but not killed,
He rides to fate yet unfulfilled.



By Yuanyuan Qu

by Morgan Wood



Summer Symphony

By Katie Miller

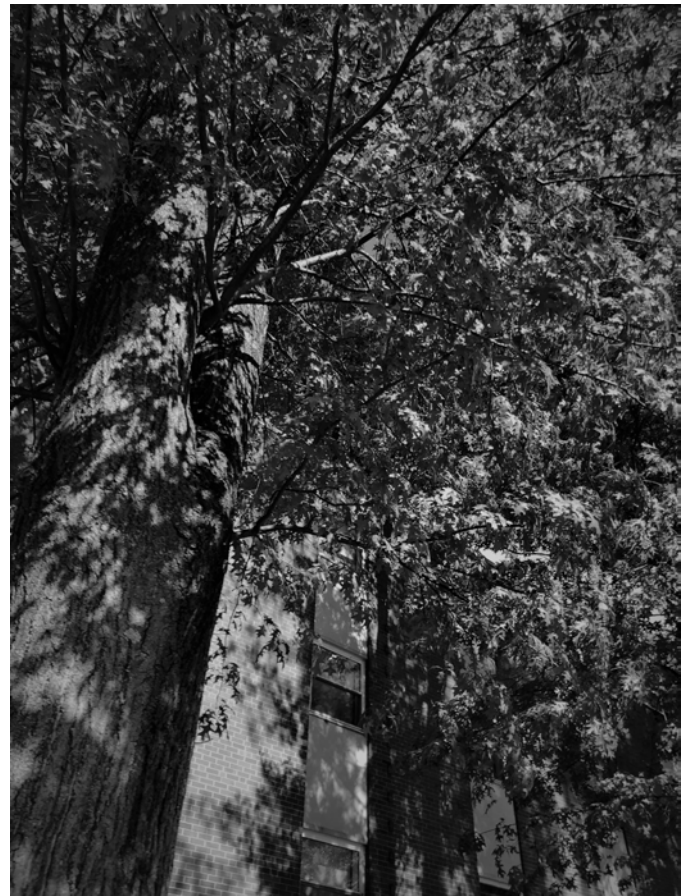
I never was fond of the forest,
With its floor covered in poisoned plants
And trees looming large as my ego.

The concrete jungle was my home,
Its cacophonous symphony of car horns
My childhood lullaby.

But there you came out of the brush,
Like some sort of modern Tarzan,
Ready to show me the tops of those towering trees.

Suddenly, the world was green with life
Rather than the sickly shade of envy
For all the creatures running free in the brush.

Now, I long for our home in the canopy
When I find myself trapped on skyscraper balconies
And the symphony itself is rivaled by birdsong.



by Morgan Wood

I like to imagine the birds are singing for us;
Their sounds are sweeter than church bells, for certain.

By Ashley Limestoll



Blue Eyes

By Sophia Kostoff

Oh, why can I not turn my gaze from her?
That smile, that face, those eyes,
Those innocent blue eyes, so pure,
Dance like the morning rain.

Oh, why can I not flout the sweetness of her tone?
The sound is like a nightingale, so fair,
So soft, so sweet, above the sun it shown,
And soothed the worry in mine heart.

Oh, why can I not cease to think of her?
Images of her reside in my own mind,
Day in, day out, I think of her,
And wish she could belong to me.

Oh, I know why I can not turn my gaze from her,
Her grace, her voice, her innocent blue eyes,
That draw me in, that make me sure,
That she will never be in bed beside me.



Submitted by Taylor Clayborn

Beautiful Imperfection

By Sean Oros

We live in a world of dark and cold,
Where nature kills and death abounds;
We tell stories of immortality,
But a single plague could end our whole kind.

We speak of nature as something pure
In place of our industrial smog,
But a wild creature would end our life
Purely on nature's instinctual whim.

We speak of "inhumanity,"
And yet that is often the most human,
As acts for cruelty's sake alone
Are purely our invention.

And yet—in this imperfect world,
We find the perfect moments.
Amidst all the ugliness of life
We somehow beauty find.

For what is beauty, but a word
We ourselves devised?
We devised a vision of something more
Out of the void of thought.

For what is life, so fragile,
That it defies such boggling odds?
What is the mind, so conscious,
Amidst the cold, dark void?

A word with arbitrary meaning
Can stir our hearts aflame;
And yet we *made* that meaning
Out of our transcendent minds.

With symbols and our words,
We weave together themes
Into a tapestry with meaning
Far greater than its parts.

We think of our world as a failed good,
And yet, we've risen above every odd;
We've seen the depths of cruel humanity,
And yet we know there still exists "good."

For we should all be but animals,
Thoughtless and unconcerned—
But we are filled with breath divine
To spark our fate-defying minds.

For what does it mean to be human?
When we exist in spite of every odd?
It's easy to see how wrong we are,
But we shouldn't be at all.

We exist not because of fate,
But in its spite of its violence,
And the fact we rise above the wrath
Is life's true miracle.

And if we are but accident?
If we have no greater purpose?
Then we are life's true mystery
Like divine sparks in a void.

We are crass and rough and bold,
But gentle, kind, and introspect;
And that we even forged what those mean
Is a marvel all itself.

This beautiful imperfection,
This ugly world so perfect,
We transcend our instinctual shackles
And cry our barbaric yawp to the stars.

An Arrogant Arachnid

By Katie Miller

An Ekphrastic Response to "A Noiseless Patient Spider" by Walt Whitman

Perfection is my muse,
And hunger my favorite motivator.
Mates are useless when they fail to bring food,
And children simply more to feed.
So I spin my home, my trap, my workplace,
Again and again while the hairless one watches ever on.
My silk weaves a future, a meal, a bed,
While all the hairless one can do is gape.



Picnic Season

By Katie Miller and Molly Shepler

In the sun, I fly free.
The air is fresh and warm,
Though the hunger in my gut be impossible to ignore.
There down below I see,
As though in a dream,
A table filled with A, O, and B.
Just a matter now of choosing my favorite flavor
Or perhaps I shall play roulette instead.
My choice is made and I'm ready to feed.
Next the bloody delicacy,
And -

By Yuanyuan Qu

Mad, Mad World

by Natalija Kutlesa

No one would believe the craziness I go through.
Who would think I would run away?
They chase me to high heaven,
I just want to get away!

One tells me how she strives and thrives in her new fabulous life.

The other lies,
so no ruffled feathers fly.

One even goes so far as to chase me down,
To regain her crown.

My world will never be peaceful.

My world will never be calm.
It's a mad, mad world from these Haulms!

Tonight, Tonight

by Natalija Kutlesa

Tonight, tonight,
the stars won't shine so bright.

Tonight, tonight,
my heart won't beat right.

Tonight, tonight,
My life won't ever be the same.

Tonight, tonight,
I'll never forget the memories you gave.



Submitted by Zach Lyons



Submitted by Ashley Limestoll



Submitted by Ashley Limestoll



Submitted by Ashley Limestoll

Finals Week

By Dylan Santore

I course no math, but I can speak only in numbers
12 days out, 1/2 page today
6 days out, 1 page today
Tomorrow, tonight
Tonight

I course no math, but I can speak only in numbers

6:00 P.M., showered and ready
9:00 P.M., another episode
12:00 A.M., halfway there
2:00 A.M., most sleep yet

I course no math, but I can speak only in numbers

I average 90, before 95
I need 85, just 85,
This is only a 60
Barely a 60

I course no math, but I can speak only in numbers

20 days free, making the most
15 days free, taking my time
5 days free, no time left
0 days free, 1 week out

I course no math, but I can speak only in numbers

The People

By Ian Miller

Join me please, my brothers.
Can't you see we're oppressed?
Every day we're working stressed,
All for the benefit of others.
How long do we need to be actors,
Pretending that we're not depressed?
Working, working with no rest.
Everything for our superiors.

Why are we complacent?
We struggle underneath the man.
They will begin to see our dissent,
When more people join the plan.
We will fight the one percent.
Rights for the working man!

Depressive State of Mind

By Taylor Clayborn

In the day I'm weak but can withstand you
Slowly yet gradually getting through
I start to pace
My body begins a race
Can my heart pull me under
Or will my mind do it first...
I feel cursed
With this unsettling feeling to curl up in a ball
I suddenly feel so small

Then night rolls around
Words can't be found
I lie in bed and pray
For it all to go away
Now all I hear is thunder
Still no one sees...
What it's doing to me
This depression is stronger than she looks
Yet everyone overlooks

I need help

Jenka's Lament

By Katie Miller

Dragon Boy, my Dragon Boy,
Why must you leave my side?
The willows are weeping as you depart,
And the clouds drop tears at the sight.

*Druid Love, dear Druid Love,
I must now run and hide;
The hunters are still after my heart
And I lack the strength to fight.*

Dragon Boy, my Dragon Boy,
The time I wish thee could bide.
Just leave me a kiss, one last work of art
Before you must reach the sky's height.

*Druid Love, dear Druid Love,
They will reach me with the rising tide;
The journey I must soon start
If I wish to escape their grasp so tight.*

Dragon Boy, my Dragon Boy,
The path out of the forest is wide.
I will come and protect thy soul's every part,
And you should not protest, though thy might.

*Druid Love, dear Druid Love,
Now into the blue we may ride.
Never again shall we be apart,
And the coming days, I promise, will be bright.*

Intro. to Literature

By: Dr. Johnson's Fall 2019 Intro to Lit Class

People like grapes
It's the best fruit
The cold juice what tickles the nape

Everyone must eat them for god's sake
But why not oranges? They're cute
People like grapes

Why not eat some crêpes
Any argument against is moot
The cold juice what tickles the nape

Can we end this for clarity's sake?
Give me the loot
People like grapes

But of grapes, what we hath forsake
They taste delicious, not of a boot
The juice what tickles the nape

Of the vineyards of which they make
Even Jesus would not dispute
People like grapes
The cold juice what tickles the napes

Lines on the Assassination of Yelena Grigorieva

by Hans G. Myers, '19

The Neva flows through a Czar's great city.
Petersburg – jewel of the Romanov crown!
Now your streets are running with blood gritty.
Your protections for us? A jesting clown.
Wild and large spans Russia's great bear 'cross land:
Yet her people live in fear of themselves.
Repression rife, foul hatred's flames are fanned,
Vulnerable people fend for ourselves.
Does Putin's reign falter for her murder?
Does Czar Vladimir she is now dead?
He still cuts society's strong girder:
Democracy, decency will he shred!
Yelena, thou art dead, but thy soul still
Shall Putin's autocratic heart chill.



Submitted by Cassie Gray



Submitted by Cassie Gray



Submitted by Cassie Gray



Submitted by Katie Miller





“Naxos”

by Katie Miller

Another Poem About You

Jenyfer Pegg

My phone is still filled with traces of you
But I can't bring myself to delete them

Those traces bring back memories,
Memories bring back feelings,
And feelings bring me back to your Facebook

"I'll only look for a moment"
Is the most common phrase I use when I think about you
And I spend the next 20 minutes dedicating my heart to loving you again

You said you wanted to see me forever
And you had wondered what we could have accomplished
If only our lives had lined up
That wonder still sits so heavy on my heart

My brain is still filled with traces of you
And all I want to do is to delete them

Unruly Angel

By Taylor Clayborn

You may not be able to see her
But I promise she's there;
It's getting hard to bear
I swear

Even my own mother can't see;
What this is really doing to me
It's like I'm an apple getting plucked off a tree

I'm being taken away
Without a say
Please save me

The rabbit hole

By Taylor Clayborn

I hate that I'm scared.
The distraught little girl inside is starting to show.
The need to question everything you say
pulls me in every direction.

You're like a ginormous wave crashing down on me.
Jumbling up my head,
Saying something one second
Then the next you change.
I need consistency.

Not someone who can just leave and get on with life.
I can turn everything off like a switch;
either wake up with the morning or
go to sleep with the night never to be seen again.

I want to push past this crazy horror story...
yet for some reason I can't.
My eyes have become blurry to all you can do.
What if my emotional state isn't good enough for you?

I promise I break easily.
Please don't pull too hard
I will fall apart.

Star's Last Dawn

By Sean Oros

The star rose bright in the morning sky
As a young soul strode forth, fate to defy.
But life is cold and winds are strong,
Wearing down even stones over centuries long.
Clouds will hide the shining stars
And duties confine like prison bars.

Now doubts settle as momentum fades,
A hero's journey stopped by Hades' shades,
The rising star now droops to set—
But not yet.

Sometimes a phoenix burns to ash,
But life was never built to last.
In face of Death, we march in spite,
Stepping towards a fading light.
The Dark may come, but we are here
And in the mists we persevere.

I can't say that we can win,
I can't say if we'll rise again,
But phoenix flames now fuel my heart
And I consent to play my part.

One last time we rise to stride,
Our burdens shouldered and confined.
Our ages show, but life remains
Within the coursing of our veins.
Is this the end, then let it be:
Let's make a show worth all to see.

The world may fade, but we endured
Against all odds that we had heard.
One last hurrah, one last show—
That we lived we'll always know.

The sun breaks through the morning grey

By Sean Oros

The sun breaks through the morning grey
And lights the leaves in shades ablaze
Of Autumnal heraldry displayed in leaves
Like vibrant tapestries of the trees.
The clouds disperse and let the sun
Display its warmth as on it runs
To shining sunset of brightest tones
As creatures their evening hymns intone
And all the world seems then at peace
As weary laborers their tasks then cease.
An autumn evening bathed in colors bright
Is beyond compare a vibrant sight.

Alone in the Dark

by Sean Oros

Alone in the dark I wend my way
Over stony fields where wild weeds sway,
A lonely pilgrim soul who's just begun
The lonesome journey long with no return.
It's said the road goes ever on and on,
But I can't say I know the way to turn.

This traveler endures the hectic rate,
But yearns for forgone days of peace and rest.
A steady pace and grizzled gait
So long only can endure the test,
This weary strider of the trails of fate
Has found the journey's promise but cruel jest.

I've left behind all hearth and bond
That could my transient life enfold,
Thus turning steps towards the beyond,
Embracing dark, down paths of canyons cold,
To march the lonely trails of the abyss
Until someday my last steps miss.

Power of Perspective

By Sean Oros

We use words
As a way to divide.
This is “good,” that is “bad;”
Something is “high,” something is “low.”

What was meant to describe and celebrate
Now separates.
What was meant to highlight individualities
So often condenses and excludes.

Words only speak in relativity
To the Truth with which they swirl;
Words only capture a glimpse
Of a totality that is a soul.

Even the inanimate
Has a beauty, a presence;
In a world obsessed with industry
The quiet art of ‘being’ is forgotten.

Light and dark swirl in unison
Neither existing without the other;
But we take the power of words
And use it to build up prisons.

Words have a power
That we too often abuse,
Using our powers of symbolism
To create walls and cages.

The power of perspective
Is not letting words control us;
It’s remembering that words
Are designed to express, not rule.

Words can give or take,
With powers hard to describe,
For words are the very fabric
Of human life and being.

In the hands of some true masters,
Words can stir and sway;
But powers can be often used
For either good or ill.

A master of language’s power
Has great obligation:
For a warden of truly wondrous words
Holds the keys to all humanity.



“Mountain” by Molly Shepler

Submitted by Yuanyuan Qu



Submitted by Molly Shepler



Submitted by Morgan Wood

Submitted by Ashley Limestoll



Submitted by Morgan Wood





Submitted by Yuanyuan Qu



Why am I not deserving of happiness?

I thought I was doing everything right.

High School is the best four years of your life...

College is where you'll find what makes you complete...

maybe

just

maybe,

Happiness doesn't exist for me in this life.

Instead,

I am the future model of what life looks like through emptiness.

~~(at least i have a purpose?)~~

“How do you handle being universally hated by every living human?”

I used to let it get to me

Like **really** get to me

(I still do)

But,

After years and years of doing everything possible to change myself
to fit their idea of me
(losing completely my individuality)

I slowly lost everything that made Bailey Shepard

Bailey Shepard.

I hate myself for what I have become,
I'm sorry for what i've become.

“How do handle being universally hated by every living human?”

By reminding them that no one hates Bailey Shepard

like Bailey Shepard does.

Submitted by Yuanyuan Qu



Submitted by Taylor Clayborn

Submitted by Morgan Wood



Submitted by Morgan Wood

Submitted by Morgan Wood

“Mykonos” by Katie Miller



“Through the Roof”
by Katie Miller





“Demigod”
by Katie Miller

A Man of a Thousand Faces

A Man of a Thousand Faces,
One whose home is many places.
He owns nothing and is no one,
A ghost walking the waking world.

Beloved, but yet still unknown,
Infamous in a subtle way,
Beheld by corners of your eyes,
A memory nudging gently.

Tracing lines in the sands of time
Along the stream of consciousness.
A myth to be made manifest,
Waiting for his shining moment

To stand where no else can,
To fight the battle that cannot be won,
Embracing Lady Death's final kiss,
And shaking the halls of the Earth.

When it ends, no one will mourn,
No elegies for the Fallen,
Only the hint of a smile
And a true fondness for Legend.

Carpe Diem

My gaze wandered across pale horizon,
Seeking a sign of better things to come.
Long did I look in the deepest places,
Treasures I found, but none of them my own.

Many paths I crossed in this solemn quest,
Counsel I gave, and well was it heeded.
Yet not for naught have I wandered alone,
Boon companions I have earned by my deeds.

Emotion weighs heavily on a mind
That honors duty and cries in despair,
Wearing an indifferent mask to all,
Lost in a sea of platonic friendship.

For what is warmth without the fire?
Divinity without a spark,
Existence without a purpose,
Life rings hollow in a static world.

So I took a risk, leapt without looking.
Turned my back on reason and prudence,
Reached my hand out to Lady Destiny,
It was the best decision I ever made.

Show me a man not foolish when in love
And I will call him the worst of his kind.

Fatherhood

Joy and sorrow, fear and excitement,
Such are the feelings of fatherhood.

Joy at knowing that life will continue,
That the future will be preserved a while,
To see a part of yourself, your essence,
Move forward, growing, learning, immortal.

Sorrow in that someday you will expire,
Leaving your child without your presence,
To face the world without your advice.
You will miss the days when they were small.

Fear comes like a whirlwind incarnate.
Is your child safe? Does the heart beat strongly?
Have you done enough to raise them right?
Will you have to suffer outliving them?

Excitement, when you receive the news.
The first time you see the heart beating.
The day your child arrives in the world,
Knowing your life will never be the same.

Father is the greatest title I hold,
A privilege I will treasure always.



Photo by Morgan Wood



Submitted by Victoria Young



“Hinkles” by Allen Morril

Of Poetics, Dialogue, and Philosophy

By: Britney Georgia

“So, you mean to say that selfishness is innate in humans?” I ask my friend, Wisp.

“Yes,” replies Wisp. “Indirectly, that has become my conclusion after all my years of watching people every day. You must understand this; no one is exempt of it.”

“I realize that humans are selfish, but surely there are those less selfish than others?”

“No.”

“You must be joking!... But I know you are too old and wise for jests. Please, my friend, tell me how it is that all humans are equal in selfishness. I am always interested in your conclusions.”

My friend hovered for a moment, clearly trying to decide the best way to explain the theory that was at hand. The silence did not feel awkward, it was normal for us. Often taking on a sense of meditation and it is calm for a time. Finally, Wisp began to explain, reverting to a favorite method of poetry reciting.

Selfish is the man who hunts for food each day

Selfish is the maiden who gathers the eggs

Selfish is the child who shares a toy

Misguided in motive and hidden the truth

Wondering through the hearts of man, does the reality never settle

Another pause came after Wisp finished. I thought for a moment then asked my friend, “Why even when a child shares a toy? That seems selfless to me. The opposite of selfish is thinking of others and sharing... Unless you are referring to time and how people cannot be selfless all the time.”

“My young friend, while you make an important point about time, that was not what I meant. The act of sharing is selfish as well as seemingly selfless... Humans think too much, but I only have time to think these days.”

“What do you mean but that?... Perhaps an example would be far more useful.”

“Think of something simple, like cake.”

“What does cake have to do with this idea that you present my friend, though I would enjoy a piece right now. Hahaha.”

“That is just the thing. We shall use cake as our example. It is simple and sweet, but the latter part is not important here... Think of this in a scenario. There is cake with slices taken out and the rest is offered to no one. You are welcome to take a slice, but you know that there may be someone else who also wants a piece... Now if you are selfish, then you happily take a slice of cake without a second thought. If you do think, then debate for a time and reason that there are other possible slices to pick from, you are still in the end selfish... Let us say you do not eat the cake in order to maintain a diet or your figure, that is selfish because you want a better body... By not taking a piece, to allow yourself the clear conscious to let someone else enjoy the food, there is also selfishness to want to be guilt free. You remove the chance for you to feel guilt since another person is not disappointed...”

“Then what if you actually cannot eat the cake, such as for medical reasons?” I ask, beginning to see the point.

“Then that is selfish too. By needing to maintain health and choosing to do so, it is equal to keeping a

diet.”

“I suppose I see what you mean. There seem to be degrees, but all are selfish.”

“Truthfully, breathing is selfish... Air is necessary to live. So, by willing yourself to breathe, there is selfishness. Living and maintaining life has need and thus, selfishness. To be born is to have a selfish intention and again there is my point that humans are born with selfishness. As you said, it is innate,” Wisp states and begins another small piece of poetry.

Keep the sense of time returned

Laughter is an idea for good

Keep the peace and the home

Gather the worthy, old and young.

Teach them ways that can be undone

Born into the world with love and greed

What greater good or evil can be present?

This selfishness creates the world we see.

“My friend, you have indeed had a long time to think this through.”

“The reality is that humans have had a long time to think about this, I only brought it t your awareness... But do not worry, being selfish is now no longer a mental obstacle for you. It is unavoidable. There is no point in struggling against your nature.”

“It is still better to be less greedy, if possible.”

“This is true, but I see no point in doing so. Being selfless or selfish, it is all the same.”

“The point is that it is better to share the cake than to take all the remaining pieces for yourself.”

“Perhaps you are right... If you would excuse me, I should think more on the matter tomorrow,” Wisp turns and leaves, disappearing into the night.



Photo by Morgan Wood

Say Love with Orchids

by Sophia Kostoff

It was late that night as he walked me home. It was a night that changed my life forever. He held my hand without an intention of ever letting go. He held me close and kissed my cheek with his soft and delicate lips. Oh, I loved him. I knew for certain that he felt the same. As we walked up my driveway, I knew that he wouldn't be leaving that night. I loved those nights that he stayed. He always kept me so safe and warm when he held me close. As we lay together, my head on his chest and his arm around my bare back, he whispered "I love you no matter how many times they say we shouldn't be together. You are mine and I am yours to love forever". He always told me that. I looked into his eyes and he looked into mine. We both leaned in, our lips locking under the light of the moon. I felt safe. I felt loved.

It felt good being with him like this. I was surprised that he wanted to be with someone who couldn't have children. Who was battling cancer. But he enjoyed the thrill of passion just the same. That was true love. He didn't love a normal girl. He loved me. A girl about twenty-four, bald, skinny and barren. He thought that I was beautiful the way I was. He loved me as much as he did the day we met years ago. Me, cancer free, long dark brown hair, and happy, covered in pink orchid tattoos looking for a forever partner. Father of my children. I always dreamed of having children. But when I met him, everything changed before my eyes.

I started acting like the opposite of myself. I felt sick all the time. He became worried and took me to the hospital after finding me collapsed on the floor in agonizing pain. We learned the ugly truth. I had cancer. The doctor told he and I that it was incurable, and that having children wasn't an option. He recommended that I have a hysterectomy. I had never cried so much in my life. Everything that I dreamed about was now crashing down. I thought for sure that he didn't want to be with me after being told all of that. I thought that he wanted a woman who could give him children. I told him to go if he wanted to and find someone worth his time. He didn't go. He stayed. He found pleasure in our relationship, much to my surprise. He loved passionate nights as much as someone who could be a father. That's what I loved about him. I shaved my head to make my treatment process easier to go through. He didn't mind it. Beautiful I was in his eyes, but in my own, I felt like the ugly duckling. Unloved and laughed at. But it didn't matter as long as he was with me. I refused to get the hysterectomy done. I guess that I still felt that there was a small sliver of hope. That my dreams could still come true. He understood. He loved me whether he would be a father or not. The fact that he still wanted to make love even though nothing would happen made me feel normal. Like I wasn't sick. Like it should be. And that's how it was.

That night that we lay beside each other, loving, was a special one. It was the five-year anniversary of the day we met years ago. Atop my dresser sat a beautiful orchid that was pink in color. He knew how much I loved orchids. Going out on a date, a special occasion or whenever I'm just down right upset about everything, he buys me an orchid. We had each other's names tattooed onto our bodies that night. My name, Orchid, tattooed on his chest and his name on mine. I gazed upon it as I laid my head on his chest that night. I knew we'd be together forever. As did he. He made that night the most special of all our anniversaries.

Earlier that night, we had gone to the local park for the same festival of Memorial Day, as we had every year since the day we met at the festival years ago. We sat upon a soft blanket on the cool ground, me with my head on his shoulder and him with his arms around my body, kissing and smiling as we watched the fireworks. I noticed people pointing at us as they walked by. Talking about how such a good-looking man was kissing a bald, skinny, cancer stricken woman. He ignored them and continued to love me as he had been. This occurred every year at the festival. People would walk by and see complete opposites attracting. We didn't care. We were blinded by our love for each other. That's how it was that night. He didn't see the sickly bald girl that everyone else saw. He saw a princess. In him, I saw a Prince Charming. Something that only existed in fairy tales. As he walked me home that night, we stopped to sit on a bench and look at the moon. He looked at me and opened a little black box. In it was a sparkling diamond ring. "Will my sweet Orchid be my flower forever?" He asked. "Yes." I whispered into his ear and kissed him. He then pulled a beautiful pink orchid out of the bag he carried and handed it to me. It was so beautiful; the best-looking orchid I had ever seen. He really knew how to say I love you.

He looked into my eyes and could tell instantly what I wanted. I knew he wanted it too. He again wrapped his arms around my body and kissed my cheek as a sign that he could no longer wait. Lucky for him, I was good at picking up hints. We walked home, his arm around my shoulders and me nuzzling myself into his body out of love. People pointed at me and him. They looked puzzled to see us. "He can do better than her", I heard a group say as they walked past. It was true. He could do better than me. I couldn't give him

children. I could die young from the cancer. I wasn't the most attractive woman who ever lived. He deserved better. But he chose to stay when I told him that he could leave while he still could. Before everything he loved went away. "Nothing went away", he told me, "I don't see anything less than beautiful". He pulled me into him closer and kissed me again as if he was saying "Don't listen to them. Where were we?" I smiled. He smiled back. I longed for nights of passion almost as much as he did. I felt safe feeling his body next to mine. It felt good to be with a normal man in a normal relationship. Any other person wouldn't bother being intimate if they couldn't have children. They would treat me like the sick woman I was. Either keep their distance or just walk away. No one else would ever do what he does to me. I liked that about him. He loved me as I was. If he didn't, he wouldn't have asked for my hand in marriage. My ring glistened in the light of the moon as he held me close. I lay with my head on his chest, dreaming of our ceremony of being together forever. I knew people would question our being together, and maybe even be against us being together. After all, that was the way it had been since I had been diagnosed with cancer. The people of our small town referred to him and me as the "two-wrongs-make-a-right" couple. We were opposites, but we just worked. I couldn't imagine living life without him. And neither could he.

Have you ever heard that saying "The Power of Love"? In the months leading up to the wedding, things happened that surprised everyone. Including us. It started with this. The news that changed my life. About six months before the wedding, I made the decision to have my ovaries removed. It was the only way that I could possibly rid my body of this incurable cancer. It also meant that any hope of having children was gone. Being cured meant more to me. The love of my life meant more to me. On the day of the procedure, the oncologist made a shocking discovery. When he scanned my abdomen, to look at the cancer..... it was nowhere to be found! Everyone was absolutely stunned. Especially him and me. "I thought it was incurable", he said. They thought so too. "Then where is it?", he said. They didn't know. They didn't have an answer. I feel as if it was his love and passion that cured me. His kisses, love making, passion and touching saved me. Every time we made love, I felt a bit better. I felt more hope in the life I lived. I felt as if I would get through this pain and suffering I dealt with. That we dealt with. And we had. This is how he felt too. I overcame everything with the love of my life.

Everything that I was told would never happen. I don't think that I ever cried so much as I did upon learning of this. These were tears of joy. He wrapped his arms around me and kissed my cheek. He looked into my tear-filled eyes and smiled. "We did it," he said. I pressed my face into his chest, and he put his arms around my back. It truly was the power of love. I knew it. We knew it. I couldn't believe it. I was free at last from the cancer that could have claimed my life. And my dreams. But it didn't. We didn't let it.

Photo by Taylor Clayborn



Bronze Heart

By Katie Miller

It was strange, coming down from the mountain where she'd spent her summer. The convent had a perpetual chill in its atmosphere, the plain building hidden from view by the peaks which surrounded it. The modest abode had been constantly filled with the sounds of the stream that ran nearby, fueled by the snow melt from the previous winter. The sun was almost uncomfortably warm on her face now, her head hardly protected by her closely shorn brunette hair. Conforming to the roles of the historians and scientists with whom she so desperately needed to learn from had been simple, and she quickly realized returning to her old ways even after mere months away from home was going to prove to be interesting. The cotton of her Ozzy Osborne tee almost felt too soft against her skin, her ripped jeans too clingy to her legs. Maybe she'd become accustomed to the roughly woven robes they were all required to wear, though her arms still itched as though the heavy wool remained upon her.

The path down was clear if one knew where to look, and Amala had spent years trying to decipher how to climb up. Her hiking boots were heavy on feet now used to being bare, but she was thankful for the protection now. Each step was careful, but not cautious, backed with the knowledge that if anything went wrong, one of them would bring her back to the convent. The path was always watched, simply so those who didn't deserve their secrets wouldn't find them. She was much better off now than when she'd gone up there, finally armed with more knowledge and strengths than she ever would have gained at the stuffy boarding school her parents tried to coerce her into attending.

She thought about them now and the fight they'd had before, the one that caused her to slip out of their mid-city apartment in search of what she truly desired while they slept soundly. Amala flinched at the thought, unsure of whether her father alone would be furious or relieved when she appeared on their doorstep, now covered in piercings and tattoos he never would have approved of. There was symbolism to each modification, she reminded herself as she tried not to worry at the silver stud through her lip; after all, she was a historian now, tasked with carrying the knowledge of magics long forgotten to even the most niche fantasy books. One day, she'd get to pass on every ounce of her knowledge to someone else, and the cycle would continue. Sure, she had to be particularly careful now that nothing happened to her, but despite her anarchist appearance, Amala had been a cautious person growing up.

Stepping over a particularly delicate-looking wildflower stretching toward the morning sun, her mind moved on to her best friend, the boy she'd lost years ago. He wouldn't know her now if she went to visit, but then again, she was sure being confined to a mental hospital had probably changed the reckless kid he'd once been. Maybe Saint had never been the best of influences, but he knew how to have a good time, and even better, how to find information. Saint had told her of the convent, after all, of the supposed cult obsessed with remembering. It was getting more difficult to remember him lately, from the harsh sound of his laughter to the way his constantly tangled hair curled over his eyes when he refused to cut it for months on end. That was an easy fix now, she'd found; all Amala had to do was pull out the charm tucked under her shirt and focus.

The anatomically correct heart fashioned of bronze fit neatly in her palm and held a weight comfortable against her chest. It seemed to pulse with its own life, like the knowledge of Saint she'd imbued it with was enough to cause its delighted thrum. She closed her eyes, and suddenly his toothy grin was at the forefront of her mind, accompanied with the classic "C'mon, Mallie," he'd always throw her way when she was being stubborn. In spite of herself, she never could help but smile and roll her eyes in turn before letting him drag her into whatever hare-brained scheme he'd cooked up this time. Most people in their school couldn't decide if they were long-lost siblings or dating, but Amala's removing door of girlfriends should have answered half of that.

The trek down the mountain was almost complete now, and her heart almost ached at the knowledge that she'd have to let the friends and colleagues she'd made go for now. There was no so-called normal way to communicate with the modern world in that convent, only a special charm they'd given her in case of an emergency. Hopefully, she'd never need it. It was no matter, though; soon, she'd be home with her parents and little sister. She could imagine Effy jumping into her arms now, her little six-year-old pigtails nearly hitting Amala in the face in her excitement. The thought of home felt almost as foreign as the clothing she wore now, something that worried her a just a smidgen.

The bronze heart gave a firm pulse in her hand; honestly, she had forgotten it was still clutched in her palm. Saint flashed through her mind again, and Amala made a decision she didn't even realize had been an

option. The heart seemed to guide her once her feet left the mountain, soon plunged into a forest that seemed to come straight from a Tolkien novel. This was the way she'd come in the first place, sure, but her footsteps were different this time, a new destination in mind. Thankfully, she'd come prepared for the walk this time, mostly because her new friends insisted on taking impossible inventions that made the journey so much simpler.

The walk that had been miserable the first time around was simple now, barely more than a day's time that had initially taken three. The mental hospital was thankfully in a much different part of town than her apartment, so running into any of her family members on the way was hardly a worry. It was suspiciously easy to convince the woman at the welcome desk to let her see him, and soon enough, she was led to a small room filled with nothing but two chairs, a table, and silence to wait while a nurse brought him in.

Amala didn't realize that sitting and twiddling her thumbs was a real thing, but it seemed like that was all she could do. She'd left her phone sitting on her nightstand when she left home at the beginning of the summer, and flipping through the memories stored in the heart didn't seem like the best way to spend her time. It had been three years since she'd seen him, after all; thinking of what they used to be would be a waste now. Would he recognize her? Hell, would he remember her?

Her feet tapped out the same rhythm on the cold tile three times before Saint was ushered in, prisoned in the stained pajama-like pants and hospital gown shirt of a patient grown unfortunately complacent. His hair was longer than ever, and shadows hung under eyes she was so used to seeing filled with mischief. He smiled once the nurse left, the action almost appearing to be painful. "Whatcha doin' here, Mallie? Thought ya'd never come around."

Her shoulders relaxed, released of tension she'd grown tired of holding. Well, at least one of her worries had been resolved. "Hey, I couldn't come without *some* sort of good news," she said with a smirk, pulling the bronze heart out from under her shirt. "You were right. The story was true and you're not crazy." Amala lifted the heavy chain over her head and passed it over, Saint all too happy to take it off her hands for the moment.

He turned the heart over in his hands, a grin slowly building on his lips. A spark appeared in his eyes, and he began to look like her best friend again. "You're too smart not to know what this means, Mallie, I know you. There's a plan in that pretty li'l brain of yours, and you've been building it since before you walked in here." Leaning over to prop his chin in his hands, Saint batted his eyes at her in a way that normally would have been comical. "Spill."

All she could do was laugh as she snatched back the heart, placing it around her neck once more before leaning back in her chair and kicking her feet onto the small table between them. The room was cramped enough that she could lean right against the wall without worry of falling over. Her arms crossed behind her head, and suddenly Amala realized what villains in her favorite B-rate sci-fi movies must have felt like. They weren't the bad guys, not really; though she supposed every villain thought they were the hero at some point down the line.

"Am I really that predictable? Ah well," she mused, unable to wipe the smile off her face while she shrugged. "Magic's gonna make a return, and I know just the two people either confident or stupid enough to be the catalysts."

The bronze heart pulsed beside her real one, the secrets of magic trapped within it. Well, she did have to pass on her knowledge one day; no one said when that day had to be. Her new friends would want them dead for sure because of this, but what was life without a little excitement? The sparkle in Saint's eyes told her she'd done the right thing. Family could wait when she had magic to save.

Reconnaissance

By Mary Jones

Error: System Malfunction. Running diagnostics sweep...

Initiating recovery protocol.

...

SABER [Stalker Class -- Shadow Model] exo-suit integrity: operation at 39% efficiency.

After-burners [Malfunction] : operation at 31% efficiency.

WARNING: Thruster pack: [Inoperable] Right booster compromised.

I can't feel my legs.

Exosuit digitigrade leg operation: [Inoperable] Components required are missing.

Fuel reserves at [0] percent. Computing estimated damages... ERROR.

Why did this happen?

Occupant vital signs: Detected [Weak] Requires attention.

How did the rebel insurgents even spot me?

System administering immediate cauterization: Location(s) Left Patella, Right Patella.

I failed.

Sending out a distress call...

I made a mistake. I stayed for too long.

Emergency flare status: Deployed.

It's hard to stay awake.

Distress call transmitted.

...

Estimated time of arrival of [REDACTED]: 18 minutes.

~

Three hours before the crash.

"Attention Loading Bay ECHO-473: Departure will occur in [12] minutes. Please have all of your registered Sabers inspected and fueled before the mission's arrival. The Red Authority wishes you a safe journey to be met with success."

An automated voice rang out overhead, the sound crackling to life over the loudspeakers scattered throughout the loading bay. *Because failure is unacceptable.*

The prerecorded message of a cheerful woman's voice was duly regarded by a female sitting by a sleek looking large suit of armor. Her sharp, calculating cerulean gaze placed behind a pair of vision correcting visors was focused on a small digital pad in her hands, seemingly running over last-minute system checks. It wasn't required, seeing how she had everything prepared for this mission hours ago, but it was something to keep her distracted mind busy and her anxiety from spiraling out of control. Her small lips were tightly pursed in a kempt frown, a disdainful expression creasing her face. She had slicked back strawberry blonde hair, kept generally neat by all of the hair gel she applied to comply with the general soldier's code. That's right, she was a soldier now. She had to say goodbye to being a warlock months ago since she proved to be more useful with boots on the ground than cooped up safely in an Authority substation. She did not prefer this life, as it yielded too many hazards for her to count on four hands, but it was demanded of her by the powers above. A labored, nervous breath escaped the blonde as she smoothed a hand over the skin-tight red and black carbon suit she wore, which boasted a set of large, red concentric circles on the chest, the back, and on both knees. This would make the sixty-sixth mission that she would be deployed on, and would indubitably be marked as the sixty-sixth success. The datapad clattered against the marble table as the woman moved to her feet at an instant, standing at a full height of an underwhelming five feet flat. Her face was set to a determined, yet unreadable, expression as the appearance of a new woman made herself known, approaching the soldier with a clack of high heels and a scowl.

"Rias C-313. I hope that your suit is fueled, double checked, triple checked, and ready for deployment," came a sharp, biting tone. It was produced by a tall woman with broad shoulders who held a very authoritative air. She seemed to sneer at all times as if that were her default expression. She had both arms tucked dutifully behind her back as she glared down at the soldier, Rias, who stood stiffly at attention with a salute.

"Of course, Commander Iris. All of my Saber's systems are green across the board, and it is prepared for deployment." Rias's stiff response was received by the disinterested and scornful higher-ranked soldier before her.

"Good. Then suit up immediately and meet Djinn A-012 in the launch bay. It's rude to keep the commander waiting on you, C-313." The lower-ranked soldier did not even have time to respond before the echoing clacks of high heels resumed, the officer already swiftly moving away. Rias did not question this as she turned swiftly to her Saber. Muscle memory took over as the warlock-turned-soldier moved to the rear of the inactive Saber positioned before her and clambered into the tight quarters. It was like a glove, but for the full body of the wearer. The padding was cool to the touch and fit her perfectly, adjusting after a moment to tighten appropriately. Her visor automatically connected to the system of her Saber and the system diagnostics popped up all across her vision, alerting her of the system boot. The suit straightened up and Rias felt positioned in her exo-suit, able to register where her feet and arms are placed, which translated through the suit. The digitigrade-modeled legs stepped forward with her center of gravity, and she now stood nearly seven feet tall in her armored suit. She began to walk towards the area of the designated Launch Bay, an irritated look threatening to touch her face as she passed by other soldiers who stared at her. She knew that she was regarded as a very efficient and successful soldier, but this did not keep the others from talking about her. *Whispering.* They knew that she had been a warlock, and although she hadn't wanted to be a soldier, she was one now, whether she liked it or not. She worked her way through the ranks very quickly due to her ability to pilot a Saber and was the first rune-reader to receive a custom suit after serving for such a short time. They all begin with the Ranger variant, but she proved to be a formidable pilot and translator and was worthy of choosing her own suit. She chose the Stalker variant and wore it well, like a second skin. It had come naturally to her.

Once she was standing in front of the reflective metal doors of the Launch Bay, she paused for just a brief moment as she drank in the sight of her reflection. Standing before, she was a soldier, wearing an ornate, sleek exo-suit of durable armor. The chest was black and ridged, each ridge was lined with brass, all leading into the red concentric circles that were boasted against the center of her chest. The sharp shoulders were set back in a confident stance and led into armored imperial red forearms, round and ending in a pair of dexterous hands. Armor plating was present against the leather gloves, flexible in nature with a reflective surface against each

individual piece. Down her lower torso and her thighs, the armor plating was replaced with fine leather, allowing for superior flexibility and excellent maneuverability on the battlefield. The leather-bound thighs tapered into digitigrade styled legs that ended with sharp feet, lacquered black at the tips that were faded with wear. Against her back, forearms, and legs were afterburners and thrusters placed strategically in a sloped manner, which were used to increase her speed and ability to dodge on the field. The lightweight build-- compared to the other three models of Sabers-- also slowed the overheating while in flight, giving her the upper hand when it came to agility. She stared at herself in the sharp blue eyes of her reflection before her slender fingers rose to engage the facemask of her Saber. The dust cover slid down to shield her face, locking in place and causing the dark eyes to burst to light. They possessed an intimidating red glow and she tucked her lip, albeit unable to see it, waving a hand against the panel next to the doors. They slid open to reveal the launch bay, where an immortal giant stood. Rias steeled herself, before stepping inside, listening to the massive doors hiss shut behind her.

"About time, runt." Came a gruff, taunting voice. A Warforge -- both the suit build and the woman who donned it -- stood before her in an intimidating fashion. Her faceplate was currently retracted, allowing her dark-toned, heavily scarred face to be revealed. She possessed striking yellow eyes, a pair that would never back down from a challenge and dared to trump all. She was a hulk of a woman, who already stood at 6'5" without the suit. With the suit on and with it being the largest model, the general easily cleared 12 feet. She wore a cocky smirk, one that told anyone who encountered her that they may not leave alive. She had a dangerous glint in her eye, one that could easily scare off even another Warforge. Rias approached her and she straightened her back, feeling the watchful gaze of the commander land against her. This was none other than the infamous General of the Alpha Centurion army. She was a weathered veteran, and her ego only seemed to swell more and more with each victory she tore out of her enemies' hands. She was a true force of destruction, one not to be taken lightly, and rumors that she was a god among women spread like wildfire. This incorrigible woman was also a lapdog for the Red Authority. *Down, Djinn.*

"Of course, Commander." *It's C-313. Not 'runt'.* Although that was how Rias wanted to respond, she decided against it, with her better judgment in mind. "I apologize that my timing was not more punctual than being 6 minutes early. I was running through last-minute diagnostics. I have taken all appropriate steps to assure that this collection mission will run exactly as planned." Rias informed the high ranking officer simply, militaristic and calculating in her tone.

"Whatever, runt. I don't need a review of the mission, I just need to make sure my suit is running the way I want it to, and I don't worry about the mission failing. I know it won't fail because *I* don't fail." Djinn said in a dark tone, the heavy stomp of her full steel feet booming against the concrete floor as she took a step forward to back her words with confidence. Djinn could become violent at the flip of a dime, so her action was irrefutably threatening. Rias stepped back as her first response, fear striking up her spine which caused her to cower, if even for just a moment. The installation of fear that Djinn held, not only over Rias but over everyone underneath her, caused a vicious grin to touch her lips. "Don't be so scared. You cannot back down from anything on the battlefield, not even me. I don't care if you rarely engage in combat; you need to be prepared for anything. I don't know how many times I have to tell you this before you get it." She sneered at the shorter armored woman before taking a step back and turning around to look at the hangar doors. Rias tucked her lip back in a snarl beneath her helmet and glowered as she looked at Djinn. The commander was a real thorn in her side, and her cockiness was ill-received by Rias. It was, however, praised by the powers above for some terrible reason that the translator's logic inclined mind was unable to properly grasp. This minor annoyance was soon forgotten, however, as the Launch Bay steel blast doors opened before them, the hangar doors peeling apart to reveal the outside world to them.

Long, cascading waterfalls that roared down into distant canyons were accompanied by the ambiance of distant animals and apex predators alike. The sky was a beautiful shade of orange, with deep shades of blue and purple bleeding in from the East to signify that night was approaching. Streaks of yellow were painted across the sky, clear as the water that ran through the canyons in the surrounding area from the height that they were elevated at. The entire Red Authority-sanctioned outpost was elevated above most other terrains in order to reinforce the fact that the Red Authority stood above all. It was placed into a sheer cliff face and was only accessible by ship or Saber. And even then, access was heavily restricted and only allowed soldiers with mis-

sions in nearby areas to dock here. Rias sucked in a breath at the view before them, forgetting all about her previous grudge against Djinn for now. Now was the time for her favorite part of the mission.

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Rias and Djinn had been flying for hours now, and the sky had long since been enveloped in utter darkness. Only one moon shone onto the landscape below, bathing everything the rays could touch in the pale moonlight. Shadows were cast against the ground from the many cliff sides and trees that dotted the land, giving the duo the cover of night that they needed in order to complete their objective. A reconnaissance mission for the first part, and information extraction for the second. There were usually two moons that hung in the sky above, but it appeared that the first moon was new, and the second had only a mere sliver of it available to cast light in the night sky. Having as little light as possible made spying out a rebel base even easier than anticipated, but this kind of careful work required stealth and covering a lot of ground on foot. That part came next. The ever graceful Stalker Saber seemed to move like the wind whipping around it in the sky. The way that she could turn and dodge in the sky resembled a dance, graceful in the eloquent maneuvers it took to remain unseen, unheard. Her bulky companion did not possess the same finesse.

After flying to just under two miles from their destination, Rias and Djinn made their descent into one of the ravines below and crashed directly into a deep body of water, in an attempt to cool off their Sabers without landing against the ground and making more noise. Rias went spiraling gracefully into the deep blue below, and the warnings popping up on her visor were immediately dismissed. Her afterburners were no longer overheating and automatically made the switch to their aquatic movement propeller system. While she had landed gracefully, the behemoth of a woman that flew several paces back had plummeted into the water, probably as loud as humanly possible, and would have created quite the scene had they landed any closer. The lower-ranked soldier engaged the underwater propulsion capabilities on the Saber and emerged from the water quietly, pulling herself onto the land with her hands once she disabled the afterburners. She did so in a quick and quiet manner, as is the MO of her model, but Djinn didn't see the need to follow suit. She was plenty loud and slow about it, which was to be expected from her Warforge counterpart. Rias simply sighed to herself and checked her nav-map, taking note of their location and turning in the appropriate direction. She initiated their long trek there, unaware of but hopeful that it would be rather uneventful. The duo moved in silence, aside from the hiss of hydraulics and the crunch of dirt beneath huge mechanical boots, much to Rias's relief. Even then, the noises their Sabers made were well disguised by the ambient noise of animals and nature at all ends. It allowed for the walk to be generally peaceful and to be made at a quick rate, and the silence couldn't be missed more by the time they arrived at their destination.

"Log 2072. We're here." Came the blonde's whispered voice. "It has been two hours, forty-nine minutes and thirteen seconds since our departure from Red Authority outpost Echo-473. We have reached the reported rebel base in Sector 83-dash-2S4. The insurgents from this view appear to have standard Sabers that appear to be very worn, but my closer inspection scouting report will surely divulge more information. My escort, General Djinn A-012 in her Warforge Siegebearer Model will remain behind on overwatch until I return from my scouting objective." Rias took logs of her objectives and her observations, as well as documented recordings and photographs when it came to her missions. The blonde had also found comfort in these recordings, as the documentation set her mind at ease and allowed her to express her thoughts and emotions to herself. She looked back to the Saber in question, and Djinn gave an exasperated nod to her recording.

"Yeah, yeah, I know the drill, runt. Let's just get this over with." She replied in a gruff, annoyed tone, the metallic cling and system static accompanying her voice with the solid steel face cover engaged. The Warforge took a few steps back and checked through her ammo reserves idly as Rias began to make her way down. Her dexterous Stalker allowed for the easiest movement down the cliffside, and she was able to avoid causing any mudslides or falling of rocks by the way that she scaled down carefully. She had excellent control over her Saber and was obviously an extremely skilled pilot. This was a surprising development to behold due to her general unfamiliarity with being a combatant. Her stealth was unrivaled when it came to her job, and she always accomplished it extraordinarily well. This would explain her ability to climb through the ranks so quickly, that even Djinn was impressed with her uncanny ability. Not that the brute would ever admit it.

The black lacquered feet of the Stalker touched down onto a jutting rock in the cliff face, not even 400 feet away from the base located beneath a sheer overhang. From this vantage point, Rias could see a considerable number of Sentinel Sabers, way more than she had been initially expecting. It made her heart drop in her chest, and she clenched her teeth in irritation. She had to remain silent, in and out, like a shadow. The technician recorded the view, marking at least 40 insurgents wandering about, some in Sabers, others not. Their Launch Bay was wide open, and on a platform near the far left, there was a Warforge Saber that caused her heart to stop. Rias launched her hand up and increased the magnification of her helmet, trying to get a clearer view of the suit of armor that she saw. "*Oh, no.*" She gasped out, hand trembling nervously. There stood a massive suit of Legion Warforge armor, plated in faded gold and white. That had to be the rebellion leader herself. It absolutely had to be. But how were they so close? *I have already overstayed my welcome. I need to leave before I am detected.* "That is the armor of the infamous rebellion leader, Sevra Tarn. I can't believe it. There are an estimated 40 rebels here at this launch bay alone, this must be a headquarters. I need to fall back. If only I could collect a little more data..." She anxiously breathed out, sucking in a breath as she deactivated the magnification on her HUD. Her steel feet froze as she surveyed the hangar bay for just a moment longer, careful eyes scanning over the well-hidden base. A small glint in the upper left corner of her vision seemed to catch her eye, and she faltered when a shot rang out. The superheated metal shot directly through her armor, piercing the protective plates of her bracers like water through paper.

The Red Authority Stalker bit back a scream of agony, blended into fear, as the bullet hit true, tearing through layers of padding and leather, and, unfortunately, through malleable flesh. Her left arm was suddenly rendered frozen, and she seized up as fear clutched her heart with cold claws. She spared a glance to her left and spotted another Stalker Saber laying behind some crates, a heavy-duty sniper rifle in hand, donning pearlescent white armor with brass highlights that seemed to catch the rays of the moonlight above. Fear induced a heavy wave of nausea and Rias no longer saw fit to stay quiet. The afterburners and thrusters all over her Saber roared to life as they all engaged at once, at full speed, and Rias executed a triple jump perfectly. She avoided two more sniper rounds and she screeched into the comms. "Djinn! This is a headquarters, we need to fall back now!" Her panicked tone left no room for argument. She heard Djinn growl into the comms before a chaingun was suddenly ignited from above, a hailstorm of bullets volleying the top of the cliff that Djinn could see. Rias narrowly evaded another sniper shot by dodging to the side and swooping up the cliff to her left. Her suit suddenly warned that she was about to overheat from the sudden ignition earlier, but she was so close, just a little bit higher-- then disaster struck. Well, lightning would be more accurate. Her entire suit overheated and Rias was so close to grabbing the cliff, but her hand missed its mark. Her vision was assaulted with several messages and warnings popping up, and she began to plummet down into the valley very far below. She began to freefall and she turned around so that she was in a nosedive downwards, in an attempt to cool down her Saber and wait for it to begin to respond again. *Where had that lightning come from in the first place? The sky was clear, and-- no.* She desperately looked up and spotted her assailant. Floating outside of the Launch Bay, out of view from Djinn from the covering cliff above, was a floating Saber, electricity dancing and spiking up their right arm. It was a Striker-- an Elemental. *An extremely rare, powerful Saber, how did the rebels manage to get their hands on one!? Unless-*

"Djinn! My suit is down! You need to get out of here, I forwarded my logs to you, you need to get those back to the Red Authority! Go! I'll keep their--" Static suddenly roared in Rias's ears and she flinched, a bullet passing through the side of her helmet at such an angle that it hit her jump pack as well. Her suit responded to this and her warning screens flared to life, and the Stalker jammed her hand directly into the cliff-face to slow her fall. Doing this only managed to throw her off balance and she smacked a branch on her fast descent, and could not anticipate the next sniper round, which got her directly in the leg. It went straight through her kneecap, causing a loud scream of pain to escape the disabled Saber that continued to plummet down. Everything had happened so fast. Angry red screens flashed in her face, warning beeps filled her ears that had continued to ring, everything was going downhill. A small icon located on her overcrowded HUD informed her that her thrusters were back online, but required maintenance. She ignored the warning and instantly made her move to engage the damaged jump pack.

Her leg boosters roared to life once again, jerking her injured leg forward which caused pain to shoot through her thigh, her torso, up to her mouth and she felt the bile rise in her throat. The pain was sickening, her mind was racing, she wasn't flying upwards anymore, and- Her jump pack malfunctioned from the previously

set bullet. It made a high-pitched squeal as she tried to engage it, Rias struggled to throw it off of her back, but she was too slow.

Rias was suddenly enveloped in an explosion as her after-burner thrusters had taken a direct blow from the sniper shot. The explosion was centered directly on her back, and Rias watched helplessly as everything flashed around her with a bright light. The only sounds she could hear consisted of muffled shouting, a volley of bullets missing their mark from above, and an insistent, everpresent ringing that would drown out the offending voices.

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The lithe Saber pilot wasn't sure how long she was out for, but she awoke to the vague sound of running water. Her visor was cracked, her face was singed, her helmet ran frantic diagnostics that showed she was in no position to move, and looking up at the sky revealed that she had no idea where she was. Granted, the sky was difficult to see around her crowded Heads-Up Display that flashed an angry red in various locations, a distorted beeping originating from the system around her. She washed up somewhere, probably far away from the mission objective, probably far away from her course. *Failure*. She felt sick to her stomach at her injuries, yes, but even more so at the impending failure of her mission. She was unable to move, and her suit dispatched res-



Photo by Ashley Limestoll

Allen Castle Haunting

by Natalija Kutlesa

Prologue

Over a hundred years ago, on March 21, 1802, a vicious murder occurred. One afternoon, Eleanor Allen, a young wealthy socialite, was sitting in her drawing room. Her servants had the day off, though not to her knowledge, and her family had just left for town. Eleanor was quietly sitting, reading a book, when Charles Edwards, the prominent Duke of Cheshire County, entered the room.

"How did you enter?" Eleanor hastily arose.

Charles did not answer. Instead, he began to argue with Eleanor.

"I know you saw! I saw you lurking around trying to find something!"

"I do not know what you speak of." Eleanor replied, trying to escape the mad man. Charles, not knowing what to do, grabbed the closest thing to him and struck Eleanor dead. Realizing that no one was in the house, he was not concerned with leaving and, instead, admired how he had killed Eleanor Allen. As Charles gently put back the fireplace poker, he heard rustling at the door. Not knowing what to do, he wiped the blood off the poker, grabbed his pocket knife with shimmering blood on it, and left the scene. Ever since that fateful day, Eleanor's death was known as a suicide.

Since the tragedy, Eleanor's ghost has been haunting the castle. Every day at 1:30 p.m., the time of the murder, strange occurrences happen. First, the front door swings open. Then, a loud voice echoes through the halls. After 1:40 p.m., a scream happens, followed by blood on the carpet, spelling out "justice." After 1:45 p.m., the phenomenon would stop and the blood disappear. If anyone did mention Eleanor and suicide, the person would feel suffocation, then a sharp pain across the neck. The occurrences worsened ten years after the murder when Charles died at the age of twenty-nine, of a cause known only by the family.

Since Charles' death, heavy boots roam the hallways, day and night. Shadows lurk throughout the rooms Charles entered that fateful day. Clocks have been known to turn back to 1:30 p.m. when Charles enters a room then reverts back as soon as he leaves. As for Eleanor, nothing changes until justice is served.

Mini Chapter 1

1902 Allen Castle Cheshire County, England.

"Miss Bennett, you do not understand," Mrs. Bates, a neighbor, and a fellow socialite said.

"Mrs. Bates, I do not believe in silly..." Louisa Bennett interrupted

"They are not silly!"

"In a silly local legend. I have rightfully been named mistress of this castle by my father, and I will see that my duty is fulfilled." Louisa briskly walked away, leaving Mrs. Bates concerned in a standstill. Louisa entered the house and closed the door, leaving Mrs. Bates still in shock on the porch.

"Haunted," Louisa snickered to herself, "A woman married and distinguished to believe in such a silly notion! Though I am only twenty-one, even I know not to believe in such myths." Louisa walked further down the entrance to meet Margaret, a maid known to the Bennett for ages. Louisa began to give instructions to Margaret when the clock struck 1:30 p.m. The front door swung open behind them. Margaret rushed to shut the door. Then echoes of an argument began towards the drawing-room.

"How did you enter?"

"I know you saw it!"

"Saw what?"

"Don't lie to me!"

"Charles, I have no idea what you are talking about."

"Oh, no?! Let me remind you. You left the dance to lurk around, trying to find something new for your gossip circles when you heard me and the King's niece, Julia, arguing about our relationship. You heard it all: how she is with child, her uncle finding out we had a secret relationship. I will not have my name ruined because you can't keep your mouth shut!"

"For the last time, I do not know what you are talking about. Charles, neither you nor your life interest me. I do not spread scandal nor create it. I ask you now to please leave."

Just then, a scream blared through the hallways. Louisa and Margaret quickly run for the drawing room. On the carpet in blood was written, "Justice." Then the clock in the drawing-room struck 1:45 p.m., leaving a clean carpet. Louisa and Margaret look at each other in confusion.

"It must be the neighborhood children playing a trick on me or Mrs. Bates for not believing her. Come now, we have lots to do." Louisa said.

Margaret quickly followed.

For the following week, more strange occurrences would happen, such as boots walking the rooms and hallways. Clocks would change, following the strange noise. Even weirder, the clocks only changed to 1:30 p.m. At first, it did cause Louisa to be curious, however, after the fifth time, she was not amused. She brushed it off as a prank, the house settling, or broken clocks.

Mini Chapter 2

Louisa held a dinner party for all of the prominent families in Cheshire County. While enjoying dinner, the guests engaged in conversation.

"Has the castle been frightening to live in?" Mrs. Bates asked.

Louisa chuckled at the silly woman, "No, in fact, it has been quite comfortable."

The guest laughed in amusement of Louisa's answer. Mrs. Bates went back to her meal, looking around nervously in fear.

"Have you heard of the story?" The young Duke, David Edwards, asked from the end of the table.

"Yes, I have. A young woman committed suicide." Louisa stopped breathing. It felt as if she was suffocating, then a sharp pain went across her neck. Not wanting to bring attention to herself, she quickly moved the topic of conversation.

When the guests had left, not knowing of strange phenomena, Louisa thought about the strange occurrences and concluded that there was not a logical reason why she had felt that way.

The next morning at breakfast, Louisa could not stop thinking about last night.

"Margaret..."

"Yes, Mam," Margaret said as she laid down the hot plates of food.

"Eleanor Allen, did she commit suicide?"

Again, Louisa felt suffocated and a sharp pain across her neck.

"There it is again!" Louisa exclaimed, also panicking.

"What Mam?"

"That awful feeling. A painful feeling."

"Are you alright, Mam?"

"I think so. Only I cannot help but think Eleanor Allen's death was not a suicide. Margaret, do you know if the castle came with anything from the Allen family?"

"If I recall correctly, Mam, in the attic, there are boxes that belonged to the Allen's. Why, Mam?"

"I have a feeling there might be some answers as to what is going on." Louisa rose out of her seat, gently placing the napkin near her plate.

"Would you like some help, Mam?"

"No, thank you, Margaret. I think I will be fine."

Louisa had gone upstairs to the attic, which had not been touched since the Allen's had lived there. Dust and cobweb-covered boxes sealed away their secrets. A small box across the dark, musty room caught Louisa's eye. *Hmm, what is this?* Louisa thought. Louisa opened the box to find letters and old newspaper clippings. The first letter read:

March 22, 1802

Dearest Francesca,

I regret to inform you that your beloved sister has passed. The papers and local gossip say it was by suicide, yet I do not believe it. Eleanor was not the type to instill harm, let alone to herself. The reports say a knife had cut across her neck. I am sorry, my dear. I did want to spare you the details; however, everyone is talking about this. It is hard to escape it. Though the reports are gruesome, they do not seem accurate. Firstly, the knife they found was a pocket knife of a unique collection with gold embroidery, one of which we do not own. Secondly, the knife was found in the right hand. Our dear Eleanor was left-handed. The final piece of information that I must warn you is about the servants. I feel I can no longer trust them. That fateful day, March 21, 1802, the servants were supposed to be working. Instead, they were not here. As of now, they refuse to speak. I am distraught. All I remember is Eleanor saying she saw and heard something. She wanted to tell us later.

She seemed concerned and did not want anyone to know. The house is not the same without her. I am sorry this letter contains such sorrow. I will see you soon for the burial.

*With Love,
Father*

"This letter..." Louisa stood in confusion. "This letter proves Eleanor did not commit suicide, but who killed her?"

Louisa kept digging through the box when she found a newspaper clipping from 1812 that said:

"Duke Charles Edwards Dies by Thief stabbing with Duke's knife."

The article mentioned that Duke Edwards had a vast pocket knife collection. Each knife varied in size and shape, but each had gold embroidery.

"Similar to the one they found next to Eleanor's body." Louisa started to connect the puzzle. Louisa ran downstairs to inform Margret.

"Margret! Margret! Look what I have found!"

Margret rushed over to Louisa, who was quickly walking down the stairs.

"What is it?" Margret asked.

"Look!" Louisa pointed at the letter and article.

"Oh, my word! This means..."

"Yes." Louisa nodded.

Soon justice was to be served.

Mini Chapter 3

Louisa ran to Mrs. Bates' home.

"Mrs. Bates! Mrs. Bates!"

Mrs. Bates was drinking tea in the drawing room.

"What is it, dear child?" Mrs. Bates said with concern, making room for Louisa to sit.

"Look what I found!"

Mrs. Bates began to read the letter and article, her eyes expanding.

"But then this means..."

"Eleanor did not commit suicide."

"But everyone knows..."

"What they have been told. Look at this article."

"I am confused."

"All the knives match because they are a part of a set."

"That means..."

"Yes. Charles Edwards murdered Eleanor."

Mrs. Bates was in complete shock; she arose and called for a cab.

Before the end of the week, everyone, thanks to Mrs. Bates, was informed of Louisa's discoveries.

Louisa peacefully sat in her drawing room, reading a book that was left in the attic, when the front door swung open. Soon heavy boots marched to the drawing-room.

"Oh, hello, Duke Edwards," Louisa said, returning to her book.

"How could you, ignorant girl." David stormed through the doorway.

"How could I what?" Louisa set the book down.

"For one hundred years, my family kept Eleanor's death a secret, and my great-great-great-great uncle's death a secret. But you—a wealthy, selfish girl who thinks she can move to a new town and ruin what a family has worked hard to save—you honestly think you will get away with this?"

David grabbed the poker and slit Louisa's throat.

"Now who will cry justice for you? Silly girl, now everyone will think your death was a suicide and think you were overtaken with the guilt of lying."

As David dropped the poker he turned around and saw Mrs. Bates.

The Squirrel Story

By Sam Faber

Mike Williams licked the line of melted ice cream that ran down the knuckle right above his pinky. Sometimes he didn't understand the concept of eating an ice cream cone on an October afternoon. Even though the temperature was beginning to drop more than average, he didn't understand that soft-serve ice cream from a college cafeteria tends to melt fast. Amber was too occupied from scrolling on her phone to notice her boyfriend desperately attempting to clean himself like an animal. That was, until she bumped into his rear-end as he was bent over.

"Woah. What are you doing? Did you drop something?" Amber said.

"My ice cream fell off my cone," he replied.

"Well, what are you going to do with it?"

He let out a disappointed sigh. "I don't know yet."

"If you put that back on your cone, I'm not talking to you for the rest of the day."

"Fine. I won't. Let me throw it away at least."

Mike slid the ice cream back on the cone with his hand and threw it all away in the nearest trashcan. He wiped the melted ice cream that was on his hand on the grass since he did not have a napkin with him. He was a slob. Amber could've said so much more than she did, but she chose to consume the remainder of her almonds. She was an All-American pitcher for her school's softball team, so she had to be aware of what type of meals she ate. She, unfortunately, couldn't serve as an example as to how to properly eat an ice cream cone.

"Can you at least give me a couple of your nuts?" Mike asked.

"I guess. You're not going to drop any?"

"No. They'll be in my palm this time. More secure."

She poured the almonds onto his palm. There were at least four that he let fall to the ground.

The hungry couple proceeded to walk through the sunny campus. The shades from the leaves danced on the freshly mowed grass. The fallen leaves covered most of the sidewalks which had pictures of ribbons that were drawn with pink chalk to raise awareness for Breast Cancer. Homecoming signs were posted around the campus light posts and entryways. Squirrels were seen hopping in the grass areas looking for fallen acorns or twigs. Birds placed themselves on leafless branches that grazed some of the windows on the buildings. Students could be seen walking and scrolling through their phones trying to find music to play through their air pods that distracting them from the scenery. It was a typical college campus.

Mike barely looked up from his hand. No matter how much he ate in the cafeteria, he still needed something to chew on. As he was placing an almond between his teeth, he noticed a squirrel walking closer towards his direction.

"Look at this squirrel," he said to no one in particular.

"Yeah, they're everywhere," his loving girlfriend said.

"Yeah but look how close. They usually never get this close to anyone."

He suddenly became at peace with his surroundings. He seemed to be very focused and cherished the naturalistic elements that were around him.

"Remember when we took that trip with your parents to New York City and we fed that squirrel? I'm going to do it," Mike said.

"No way. Everyone tries, but they never get to. They always run away."

"Not this time. This one likes me. I think we have a bond."

"Yeah, you both like nuts."

Mike grabbed another handful of nuts from Amber's bag since he ate all the ones he took earlier.

"Hey! C'mon," said Amber.

"Just wait. It's going to happen this time," Mike eagerly replied.

Mike pinched the best looking almond he could find from the bunch and held it out far in front of him. He slowly began to walk towards the little mammal and started to crouch. He stuck his free hand out as if he was trying to show that he meant no harm.

"C'mon, buddy. I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to give you this tasty almond," he calmly said.

The squirrel just observed his actions and continued to crawl around the vicinity. Mike was persistent. He continued to creep up to the squirrel, but once he got to a certain distance, the squirrel looked at him and slowly backed up. That squirrel knew he was there but chose not to run. Mike took this opportunity to continue to walk, but the more he did, the more the squirrel walked backwards. Not running, though. Amber, the most supportive girlfriend, began losing her patience.

"Can we please go? I have class in a couple hours, and I want to nap."

"No. he's almost got it," he said, even though they lost distance between each other.

Amber had enough of his ridiculousness and took another direction to her apartment. Mike, feeling sorry to kill his girlfriend's patience, finally gave up.

"All right. I'm coming."

He scoffed and threw the nut at the squirrel. This startled the squirrel, but he did not run away. Once Mike pulled his jeans back up around his waistline and ran to his girlfriend, the squirrel finally approached the nut. He sniffed it a couple times until he picked it up and stuffed half of it in his mouth to secure it as he ran away. He hopped and bounced through the campus grass while dogging some of the feces from other campus critters. Once he saw the maple tree that overlooked the office of admissions, he started to scale the trunk of the tree until he reached a certain branch. He almost began to have his lunch until he saw another squirrel watching him from some higher branches. He decided to store the almond back in his mouth and climb up to the other squirrel's branch. Once he got there, he sat next to the other squirrel and removed the nut from his mouth.

"College kids are animals," the hungry squirrel said to his neighbor.

"What did they do this time, Carl?" The other squirrel said.

"Don't you find it funny that they always try to feed us? They do it all the time. I get that they miss their pets from back home, but still. We're wild animals. We could have rabies and if we take the food from their hands, we could very well give them rabies. They should know better. Like, are these kids cavemen or are they just dumb?"

"Wait, that's not the almond you got from that fat kid, is it?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. It is."

"Ew! Why would you take that? You just got done saying how stupid they are."

"Stu, I said they were dumb, not dirty."

"Carl, how long have you been on this campus? Dumb means dirty. I've heard horror stories of how some fraternities put laxatives in their pledges beer without them knowing. And those are potential brothers. We're just squirrels, man! Imagine what they could do to us. This could be coated in rat poison for all I know. You've seen what they did to Louie."

"That was the maintenance crew and this campus had a serious rat problem. Besides, I'm starving, and he seemed kind of nice about it."

"No. That's rancid. Just have an acorn. They're very high in potassium. Please, just do not eat that."

"I'm tired of acorns. That's all I've been eating for the past two months. I need some variety. All I meant was that he should know better to not try and feed a wild animal with his bare hands. If I wasn't such a nice squirrel, I could've easily bitten the tip of his finger. If people watch me take it from him, they'll all try to

feed me, which will just get annoying. But, hey, if he's going to leave food on the sidewalk, I'm certainly not going to let it go to waste. These are the good kind, too. They're sea salt."

Carl, the squirrel, finally began to eat his salty treat.

"I am severely disappointed in you," Stu said. "You're no better than a Central Park squirrel."

"Oh.... That's what he said," Carl responded, "He said that if he can feed a Central Park squirrel then he could feed me. Doesn't he know that those squirrels will go up to anyone holding a nut out in front of them?"

"I'm worried that you're becoming just like them, Carl. You'll take just about any nut from any student."

"You worry too much, Stu. I've eaten worse things on this campus and felt fine. Remember when those kids threw cupcakes at the window of that one kid's dorm room and they got all stuck on there? And after a couple of days when they fell off, I took the icing and I"

"Carl, please," Stu interrupted. "You're going to make me vomit."

Carl just laughed and continued to eat his almond while enjoying the scenic college campus. From their angle, they can clearly see all the eager visitors and potential recruiters.

"Hey. Look at that family out there," said Stu.

"What about them?" Carl asked.

"The mother looks familiar. I feel like I've seen her before."

"You probably have. I've seen the same family get tours in the same month. I don't know what they missed the first two visits, but I guess people do that."

"No. I remember those people, too. But this family is different."

The little squirrel rested his chin between his thumb and index finger.

"I think I recognize her from T.V. actually..."

"When do you watch T.V.?" Asked Carl.

"When I'm in my nest."

"You made a nest? Like a bird's nest?"

"Well, it was a bird's nest. Howard's family, but once their kids moved out, they decided to leave too. Anyway, they sold it to me for a reasonable price, so I decided to take it. I needed something different. But it's perfect because it sits right in front of some undergrad's window so I can see their T.V. perfectly."

"How come you never invite anyone over?"

"I like my space. Plus, your friends are dirty. They always forget their acorn shells and drag around those disgusting brown cases with that smelly black stuff that college kids put in their mouths. I don't want that stuff in my nest."

"You're such a neat freak."

Squirrels are very peculiar about their nests, especially Stu.

"I think she was on that one show from the nineties. I guess people watch it for nostalgia? I think they did a remake of it because every time I watch it, she looks different. And sometimes she's not even on the show," said Stu.

"I'm sorry, but I have no help regarding that. Let me look at her."

Carl goes on his tiptoes to look at the mysterious woman. He then says,

"Wait. I think I saw her on the news one time. I saw it on one kid's phone when I was up on the branch. I couldn't read the headlines, but I recognize the face. I think that's her."

"Yeah. I saw something like that too. Or I overheard someone talking about it."

“I did see her name, though. I think it was... Lori something?”

“Lori Laughlin?!”

“Could be.”

“That’s her! She’s on that show that the kids watch. I heard about her. She got in trouble with some college in Carolina. I think she bribed them into letting their daughter go to that school.”

“Celebrities. They think they can get away with anything. I’ll bet you any nuts too that her daughter is already viral on Instagram, twitter, or even TikTok.”

“Without a doubt.”

“I guess she didn’t go, or she dropped out?”

“Maybe. I didn’t follow the news that far along.”

Those two squirrels continued to mumble and groan and shake their heads. The Laughlin family was taking in the scenery of the college while the squirrels watched from above. The student tour guide pointed out significant areas of the college and gave every fun fact and detail which he was taught to give. This was, after all, Lori Laughlin. You wouldn’t dare give a weak performance for this television star.

“This really doesn’t sit well with me,” Said Carl.

“I told you not to eat that almond,” Stu replied. “That kid looked like he had some problems.”

“No. I’m talking about her being here. It’s not right.”

“Yeah, but remember, It’s just a visit. It’s not like they’re going to come to this tiny liberal arts school. And, if she does go here, it could raise publicity for the school.”

“Yeah, the bad kind. Like I said, if she’s famous on social media, you know she’ll be posting about every little thing that she does on this campus. Once the media finds out that she’s here, we’ll be the laughingstock of all the Division III liberal arts schools in the country. And just look at her. She’s being totally disrespectful on her tour.”

Laughlin’s daughter dressed as if she was ready for a night that consisted purely of underaged drinking. As the prepared tour guide talked, she would carelessly scroll through her phone and fiddle with her hair during the entire presentation. She knew what she wanted to do in college, and it didn’t occur on the weekdays.

“It’s not right,” Carl continued to say. “They would completely give this school a bad name. It’s like saying ‘after the scandal, the Laughlin daughter is now accepted at this private liberal arts college who will apparently take just about anyone.’ Trust me, this school’s reputation will be destroyed. And you should care, too. It’s been good to us.”

“Carl. We don’t even pay to go here.”

“True. But, it’s still our home.”

Stu contemplated what was to happen next.

“Well, do you really think they would accept her?” Stu asked.

“I don’t know. I highly doubt it, but we have to make sure that she doesn’t even want to come here.”

“How’s that going to happen?”

Carl looked below and considered how he could ruin their visit. The group walked directly under the branch and stopped right where the squirrels were residing.

“I have an idea...” Said Carl.

The tour guide was extremely nervous. This was his first tour and he watched *Full House* on a regular basis with his girlfriend. So, he knew exactly who this woman was, and he was told by his boss to not discuss her time on *Full House*. He, however, was a huge fan and wanted to give his best performance for her.

“And, this building, to... to the left, is, uh, actually our first oldest building on campus, uh, Weimer’s hall. And most of the, uh, class held here are our humanities, so like, English, uh, history, religion, and um, philosophy, that one.”

The daughter just rolled her eyes. She thought she was watching the welder kid at high school give a doctoral thesis. The mom gave him an interested and engaging smile, but when he looked away, she rolled her eyes, too. Like mother, like daughter.

The guide took his time to properly explain every detail and he made sure not to leave anything out. During his explanation, there were some students walking past them to go to their class. Something the daughter would never do. Among the students was Mike Williams. This time, he was by himself with his own bag of almonds. It was as if his waistline expanded since the last time he was on this part of campus. He watched a fair amount of T.V. and probably would've recognized the mother if he took his eyes off his food for just one millisecond. When he was close enough to the tour group, he heard a faint screeching noise. He stopped and looked up to see where it was coming from. When he did this, he saw Carl with his arms outstretched like a skydiver and made a loud screeching noise as he was coming down. All poor Mike Williams could see was a brown furry body and its four giant rectangular teeth. Carl landed right on top of Mike's head and began screeching and crawling all over him. In a frenzied panic, Mike clutched his almonds and tried to hit the squirrel while yelling,

"Oh, my God. Get him off me! What is happening? Help!"

The tour guide's jaw dropped so far that his chin was touching his Adam's apple. Then he heard another screeching noise. He looked up and saw Stu coming to Carl's rescue. He landed right next to Mike's feet and he bit his ankle. While hopping on one foot and trying to knock Carl off him, Stu ran over and bit his other ankle, causing the behemoth to fall to the ground. Now, the two squirrels were running all over Mike Williams and biting him every so often. Lori stood in disbelief while clutching her heart and yelling,

"Oh, God!"

The daughter started recording the incident on her phone. She seemed happier rather than concerned. The tour guide called his boss and said,

"Beth, I need help. I'm giving a tour and these squirrels just start attacking this kid! No, not the recruits. Yeah, they're fine but, what do I do? Do I keep going? Should I help? Do I call public safety?"

Stu finds the hand that was clutching the bag of almonds. When he finds it, he bites every finger until Mike finally let go. Carl took the opportunity to grab the tiny bag and carry it with him back up the tree while Stu followed.

Mike Williams got back on his feet, pulled his pants up and yelled,

"They just took my nuts. Those squirrels took my nuts."

As he ran away, crying, the tour guide tried to resolve this issue.

"Uh. That doesn't usually happen," he said.

Lori looked at him in horror and disbelief. She decided that this was not the type of campus for her daughter. She wanted a respectable place where squirrels get along with their campus community, not attack students and steal their nuts. Horrified, Lori guides her daughter back to the office of admissions to tell them that they are no longer interested in pursuing this college. The tour guide followed them back.

"I'm definitely getting fired," he muttered under his breath.

Carl and Stu are sitting back at their branch while Carl takes an almond from the bag.

"I cannot believe you made me bite his fingers. I'm going to have to gargle with saltwater for a week. Carl let's never do that again," Stu said. "I feel disgusting. That was the worst thing I have ever done. He tasted so sour. And, he definitely ate a grilled cheese sandwich right before, too."

"How do you know?"

"I could taste it on his fingers."

Stu dry heaved.

"Seriously, how could you be eating his almonds right now?"

Carl just laughs at him.

“Look on the bright side, though,” Carl said. “They’re walking away. I bet you we scared them so bad that they aren’t going to come here at all. We should do this every time we see a sketchy visitor on campus. It was fun.

“Absolutely not. I told you humans are filthy. You can if you want but count me out. I only did it because it was them.”

“Well, I’m glad you helped. Thank you. Trust me, we just saved this school's dignity.”

Carl peacefully ate his almonds while Stu sat and watched the college kids continue to live their day. Although they could see the college kids on their phone, they, unfortunately, were too high on the tree to see the content on their phones, which was a video on Instagram of Carl and Stu’s attack on Mike Williams. Although the squirrels did not know why the students were laughing, they were glad to see such happy students enjoying the best four (sometimes six) years of their lives.



“Squirrel Statue in Chicago” by Victoria Young

15 Miles to Somewhere.

By: Julius M.

Can't come out from the cold. The words of *Philby* rang in Erik's mind as he continued on down the street, attempting to find a place to stay warm. It had been snowing continuously for the past several hours, and he was not "unprepared." He had on a parka denim jacket he got discounted from Levi's and appropriate waterproof boots, he simply wasn't expecting there to be *true* snow. Snow that falls in cotton-like fragility from a grey sky, the sun or moon only breaking out from behind the weak points in the ethereal sheet. Those moonbeams- for it was somewhere around nine o'clock at night- casting a backlight of beauty and indifference on not only what it has created, but also the world below. The beauty of the snowflakes is the situation they bring; the silent winter nights and the heatless landscape covered in pristine white. Erik was surely not prepared for this true winter's snow that has absorbed him. He cannot appreciate it in a Levi parka jacket.

The sidewalk continued on and on next to surprisingly silent streets. Only faintly in the distance could Erik hear the sound of a car or semi-truck pushing through the night. The occasional streetlamp would light his way, for the waxing crescent moon peaking through the clouds was already low in the sky. Erik hadn't really been keeping track of time. He had continued to hum along to Rory Gallagher, in perhaps some attempt to direct attention away from the piling inches and inches of soft snow, or as a driving force to keep himself out of nature. But Erik had no real purpose or anywhere to go. It was a conundrum, of sorts.

He had wandered into town on a cold December night with almost no particular purpose. There was a Greyhound station some thirty to forty miles that-a-way towards Denver from whatever town he had wandered into. Erik wasn't focused on the small details; details like names of places, appropriate clothing and supplies, and of course self-preservation. Erik was looking for something that he didn't know about. Something that he couldn't have found in his small college town, or going to some big state university, or even just working a steady blue-collar job. Erik was restless and aimless and simply bought a ticket going somewhere and decided to get off anywhere.

This was anywhere. Anywhere was where he wasn't from. Where he wasn't known. Where there were no restraints on his freedom to be Erik. Where he could learn who Erik was, and was not. Who Erik could be, and who he might be. These all seem like existential questions that ran through his semi-delinquent mind, but like the underlying springs of any spontaneous action they are best left ignored in the moment. All Erik currently had on his mind was the snow and himself. How hungry he was, how cold he was becoming, and how he wanted at least one of those two things to change.

Gas station hot-dogs are not what anyone would normally call... fine cuisine. Not many people would even call regular hot-dogs fine cuisine, unless of course they are a middle-aged father wearing a cookout apron with the elegant words written on "Kiss the Cook." In such a case they are excused, but Erik is certainly not a middle-aged father at a cookout. He's barely a man, but definitely a boy. The Greyhound trip has caused stubble to grow on his growingly unwashed face, and his hair is kept medium length just above his ears. It's a shade of brown that makes one think of oak trees, old guitars, and October festivals with leaves falling into a nipping a wind that carries them out of memory. His eyes are those of a cloudy day dreamer, with the faintest hint of emerald. Currently they are in search of a respite, but of the cold or the hunger it is hard to say, and certainly harder to imagine which he will find first.

The snow at night is a privilege to behold. True snow in the true dead of night. Not snow at five past nine, or light flakes at midnight. True snow- as Erik believes somewhere in his heart- is soft yet crystalline,

falling and hovering all in the same moment by moment existence it lives as a snowflake, all before becoming part of the greater snow. The snow that can cover the world in a pure white blanket for miles and miles on end. The snow that is made up of millions- billions of snowflakes that lived as snowflakes now only in memory, and even their life as snow will end as remembered winter. But what makes true snow in the dead of night is not just that, it is softness that the world gains. It is the silence of a sheet covering the earth and all its inhabitants, and the warmth that brings. True snow is oddly warm. It is not the same warm as spring or summer or a car heater or even what a blanket can bring. But a blanket of snow is different; it brings a warmth like that of a mother holding her child, and a soft smile being brought involuntarily to her face. It is the inner warmth of a hug that a close friend brings unexpectedly, but right when it is needed. It is the warmth of a crackling birch fire, but only after a long day where the weariness of the world can be shed by the licking of the flames. It is the warmth of a loving gaze across a crowded room, and everything is moving yet still, and one can only think that this is correct; that this is good and pure and truly right. Erik is privileged with that feeling of warmth as the world around him is seemingly timeless and endless. A moment that could last a lifetime.

In that moment Erik had no desire for gas station hot-dogs, or any search of conventional cover. Erik saw the snow fall. Each flake drift pass his eyelashes and sometimes onto his jacket, other times onto his boots, most of the time onto the other snowflakes becoming snow. As the time passed, and the waxing crescent moon now long gone under the obscured horizon, he simply watched as the snow fell and enjoyed it. Erik had no concerns of if he was in the middle of nowhere, or if he was making any choice correctly. Tomorrow was something that would come tomorrow, for now he simply wanted to be. Erik wanted to be snow. In the moment, anything is possible.

The Racket of War: Dying for Lies

By Sanford Kelson

My name is Sanford Kelson. I was born in 1944 and graduated high school in 1962. I have been a lawyer and a teacher in a special program for gifted and talented public school students.

When I was growing up, my education caused me to believe certain things. Education is not just what you learn in school. It's what you learn at home, from TV, newspapers, the movies, from music, art, etc. I got a consistent message from all these sources. I learned that we Americans were special. We were better than others. Our form of government was the best; our economic system was the best; our leaders were more intelligent and just; we were more honest, smarter, more trustworthy and brave. God was on our side. And I learned that there were bad people in the world. Communists were bad back then. We wore the white hats and people in bad countries wore black hats. And there were weak countries that, like us, wanted peace and freedom. We had to protect them from the bad guys. A nice and simple picture to understand the world was painted for us. Good versus evil.

So, in 1963, young and patriotic, I enlisted in the US Army for a three-year tour of duty – a chance to kill commies for God and country. I took certain written tests and I was told I had very high scores. I was told that I could pick my own MOS, military occupational specialty, i.e., job.

Nevertheless, I volunteered for the infantry, to be a grunt. Visions of being John Wayne, a hero, danced in my mind. Heroes always got the fast cars and pretty girls. I was proud of my high test scores. I thought I was smart. With hindsight, I came to realize that the tests did not measure intelligence. The test results proved I had been successfully socialized and propagandized. My high scores told them that I'd do whatever they wanted. I'd be a good robot.

Two and 1/2 yrs after joining, in December 1965, I was 21 years old and stationed in Alaska. I was a sergeant in charge of a 10-man machine gun squad. The squad had two M-60 machine guns: awesome and deadly weapons.

It is important to remember that members of a military unit become very close, good buddies. Troops, 40 in total, slept together in a large bay; 10, a squad, in one row; 4 rows per bay; 4 bays per company. We woke up together. We did physical exercise together, ate meals together, trained and worked together, showered together, spent our off duty time together, usually drinking beer. We did everything together every day. We bonded. We became really close buddies. I now know this was no accident. You see, we had all only been in the army for months or, at most, for a few years while our government had a two hundred year plus tradition of militarism. Our leaders knew that when we were thrown into combat that all of our heroic visions would disappear, that our wanting to fight for freedom, democracy or God would quickly vanish. We'd be fighting to stay alive and for one another.

A necessary corollary to this bonding is the military's dehumanizing the people we were to fight. During the time of my service, the Vietnamese were dehumanized. Our leaders referred to them as gooks and slant eyes. Today, the enemy is referred to as rag heads and sand niggers. It's hard to kill human beings, so they must be made less than human.

In December 1965, my outfit received orders to ship out to Vietnam. We were one bunch of frightened young boys. The immediacy of being in the heat of deadly battle started to work against my desire to be a hero. We started getting ready to ship out. We sharpened our bayonets and the edges of our folding shovels. The shovels were designed to dig foxholes, but somebody figured that in close combat they'd be good to swing at the enemy and maybe cut off his head.

We were told the purpose of our mission. There were two countries: North VN and South VN. The North was evil and was trying to forcibly impose communism on SVN. SVN was one of those weaker countries that, like us, wanted peace and democracy so we had to protect it from the bad guys. We had been getting the same message on TV, in newspapers, magazines, on the radio, everywhere.

Just before my outfit was due to be shipped out, my commanding officer, a captain, summoned me to his office. He explained that, since I had less than 90 days remaining in my three-year tour of duty, I would not be going to VN. My orders were changed from going to VN to being discharged from the army and being shipped back home to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to safety, to the bosom of my family, while my outfit, my buddies, would be going to VN, into harm's way. I was so naive and stupid that I had no idea what this would mean to me later on.

After I got home, I started getting letters from my friends who were in VN. The letters told of horror after horror. One buddy, Jimmy, 18 or 19 years old, was somebody who would make us all laugh, but he'd remain stone faced, not even smiling at us who were engaged in uncontrollable laughter. We'd look at him, see that he was not even smiling and we'd all stop laughing momentarily to ponder how he could keep such a serious demeanor. Then we'd all break out laughing all over again because it was just so funny that he could get us to such uncontrollable laughter but he wouldn't even crack a smile. Well, Jimmy was standing among a group of his buddies when a hand grenade was thrown at them. Jimmy instinctively jumped on the grenade and clutched it to his stomach. None of his buddies were hurt but he had been blown in half. I called his parents. Their grief was mine. We cried.

I got a letter about a buddy from Missouri. He was a six-foot tall African-American who was quiet, honest, polite and respectful. He was a joy to be with. It was obvious he had been raised with loving care. He was riding with his squad in a helicopter. A .50 caliber bullet fired from the ground went through the belly of the copter, through the canvas seat he was sitting on and into his buttocks and then spine. He became a quadriplegic. He would lie on his back forever, never to have a job, a wife, children.

I then got a letter about John. John and I were close. He was from New England. He was fit, lean and strong. He was a reliable and serious young man. He was the lead man in a jungle patrol when the Viet Cong sprung an ambush. It was sprung early and only John was in the ambush zone. The VC caught John alive. The VC wanted to entice the rest of the American patrol members into the ambush area. It was all set with booby traps and explosives. To do this, they began to torture John. They started by stabbing him in his arms and legs with his bayonet, they cut off his ears and tongue and his penis, which they stuck in his mouth. John, while he could, screamed uncontrollably in fear and pain, begging for help, but his buddies knew it would be instant death to try to save him. When John's body was retrieved nobody could recognize him because he had been so badly mutilated. Naturally I was sickened. I felt like I had abandoned my friends by getting out of the army and coming home. I felt as though I had let them down. Maybe I did.

Then I got the most important letter I had ever received. A buddy wrote and said, Sandy, everybody here hates us. I wondered, how could any of them hate us? My friends were dying to protect them from communism, from the North. We were spending billions of dollars in VN. How could they hate us? We were the good guys, we wore the white hats. I was confused. Things didn't add up. I began to critically think – possibly, for the first time in my life. Up until then, I had believed what I had been told by my government on faith. Faith is the belief in something without proof. I started going to the library and I read everything I could on VN.

Prior to WWII, VN was a French colony. When WWII started, most of the French occupying force in VN went back to Europe to fight the Germans. After the end of WWII, France wanted VN back as a colony. The US supported the French. The US transported French troops to VN to fight Ho Chi Minh, a nationalist who wanted freedom for VN. The problem for the US government was that he was infected with a deadly virus: he was a communist. Nevertheless, the American enlisted men on the transport ships protested in a letter to then-President of the US, Harry Truman. They wrote that it was against US principles to help subvert freedom of a people and to help those who would oppress them. Truman ignored the enlisted men. The US financed the French in a bloody war but, nevertheless, the Vietnamese beat the French in a big battle at Dien Bien Phu and the war was over.

The warring parties signed a peace treaty, the Geneva Accords. The accords called for a temporary division of VN, north and south, to take account mostly of the then relative strengths of the respective opposing forces and provided for free and fair elections to be monitored by the international community. The Vietnamese were to finally determine their own fate. There never were two separate Vietnam nations. The CIA told the then-US president, Eisenhower, that if the elections were to occur, Ho Chi Minh would win with over 80% of the vote, even in the southern portion of VN. Eisenhower sabotaged the elections and US troops began replacing the vanquished French. So much for democracy. With this history, it all came together for me. I was no longer confused. The US was not fighting in VN to prevent the forced imposition of a form of government that the Vietnamese did not want, but to impose one on them that they did not want. The US was the oppressor. That's why my friends were hated. My own elected leaders, whom I had revered, had lied to my friends and me and had duped us. I felt violated. Raped. My friends were dying for lies told to them by their own elected leaders. I was angry and hurt. I continued to read.

My grandfather served in WWI. The American people, before the US entered the war, were overwhelmingly anti-war. The US government formed a propaganda organization, the Creel Commission. The commission was so successful that within six months most Americans were pro-war. President Woodrow Wilson told Americans that the purpose of the war was to end all wars. That it was a war to make the world safe for democracy. However, after WWI, in a speech in Ohio, President Wilson said: "Is there any man here, any woman, nay any child who does not know that WWI was a war caused by commercial and industrial rivalry." After 10 million dead, after no immediate need for more warriors, the truth was told.

I studied about Smedley D. Butler, a Major General in the US Marines, who was awarded two Congressional Medals of Honor, the highest medal given by the US government for bravery in combat. In 1938, in bitter reflection on his military career, he said:

I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for American fruit companies in 1903. In China, in 1927, I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in 3 city districts. We Marines operated on 3 continents.

My parents and uncles served in WWII. In high school, we were told that on December 7, 1941 Japan engaged in a surprise attack against Hawaii (a US colony at the time), a day that would live in infamy. We were taught that the attack was particularly dastardly because the Japanese had delegates in Washington, D.C., to talk peace. The peace talks were top secret back then. I started to read about the peace talks, which had been declassified. I learned that the Japanese had invaded Nanking, a province of China. The Japanese were very harsh occupiers. They tied human beings to telephone poles to be used for bayonet practice. They raped young children, middle-aged women and the elderly. They used live Chinese for germ, arctic and chemical warfare experiments.

In the peace talks, the US never objected to what the Japanese were doing to the citizens of Nanking. What the US wanted from the Japanese was access to the Nanking markets on the same terms as the Japanese enjoyed. Japan refused. The Japanese explained that the US had the Monroe Doctrine that provided for the US to dominate Latin America and to protect its markets in the same way the Japanese were doing in Nanking. The Japanese promised to honor the Monroe Doctrine and wanted the US to recognize that Japan had the same right in Nanking. The US refused and placed an embargo against the Japanese islands that effectively denied Japan of needed oil, steel and other resources. Only after the embargo, which strangled Japanese industry did the Japanese attack. Sixty million people died in WWII, another war due to commercial and industrial rivalry.

George Kennan was a high-ranking US State Department official. After WW II, in 1948, he drafted and the US government adopted Policy Planning Study 23 which provided:

We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships, which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. To do so we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and daydreaming and our attention will have to be concentrated on our immediate national objectives. We should cease to talk about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democracy. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

PPS 23, in 1948, was top secret. In PPS 2,3 the planners were talking to one another. To pacify the public about wars, the planners still found it necessary, even to this day, like about Iraq, to trumpet idealistic slogans.

Shortly after WWII, while the earth was still wet with the blood of 60 million dead, American business interests were gleefully counting their war profits. WWII years were the best years ever. US businesses wanted a permanent war footing for the country because it was good for business. A US business magazine lamented that Stalin might accept Truman's peace overtures and disrupt the profits associated with militarism. Communism was the perfect threat to excuse away Mr. Kennan's straight power concepts and to keep the profits rolling in. Just like today, terrorism is the perfect threat to justify the use of "straight power concepts" to retain the US wealth disparity. And the lies continue from our leaders as a raging river causing so much destruction to the people and property in its path.

Thomas Jefferson, the third US president said: Never was so much false arithmetic employed on any subject as that which has been employed to persuade nations that it is their interest to go to war.

My buddies died believing they were fighting for a better world, that they were a force for good, just like many US soldiers now serving in Iraq believe and just like many soldiers who served their respective countries throughout the years believed. It is a good sign that leaders must lie to their citizens to get them to fight. This proves that if the people knew the truth, they would not fight. One of the most critical lies in every war is that others, the so-called enemies, are less than human.

If we the living don't work non-violently to bring that better world about, my buddies and millions of other veterans from all over the world, who likewise thought they were fighting for the good and the right, will have died in vain. We must realize that people are complicated and nobody wears all white or all black hats: the hats are gray. Nobody is all good or all evil; nobody is better than anybody else merely by reason of what country he or she is born in. To engage in the effort to bring about that better world so my buddies will not have died in vain, what we call: Abolish War – The Last Campaign, I joined Veterans for Peace. I will not abandon my buddies again.

I have been speaking to students to tell them my story. I ask that students not take what I say as truth. If students do, then, in a way, I will have done to them what others did to me as a young person. I will have caused them to believe something by blind acceptance, on faith. What I told you is *my* truth. I ask that you not accept what anybody tells you as truth. Not your parents, not your teachers, not your religious leaders. You must explore, by reading, discussing and critically thinking, and find your own truth and then act on it for the benefit of all the peoples of the world: our brothers and sisters.

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—The Editors