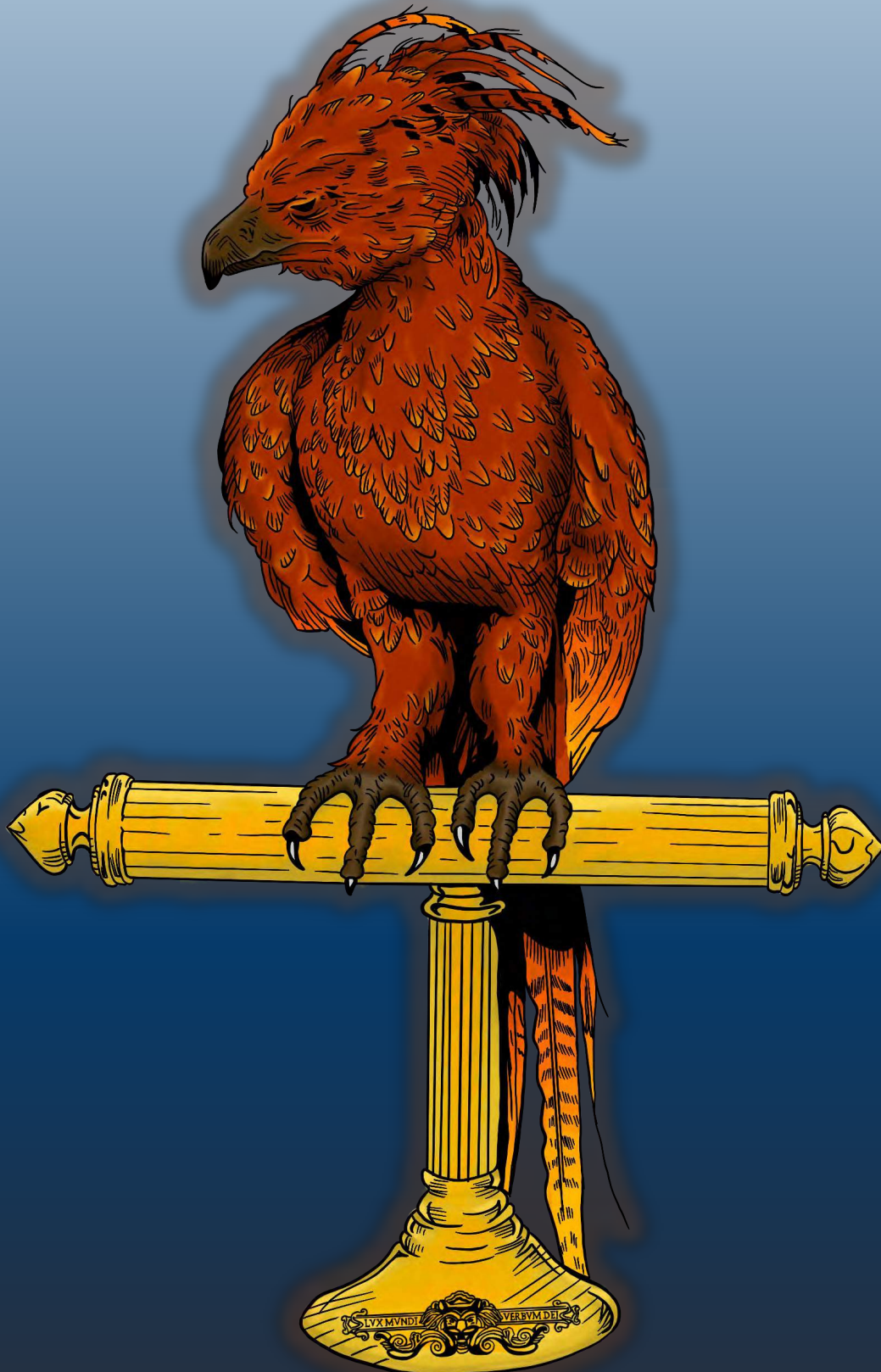


The Phoenix

Journal of Art and Literature



LVX MVNDI VERVM DEI

The Phoenix

Spring 2021



The Phoenix

Spring 2021

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Photographs

*throughout the publication

Introduction & Dedication

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 2021 edition of this publication, Dr. Sheila Farr, a member of the Class of 2010 and current Assistant Professor of English at Thiel College, has been selected to write that introduction. Her writing, featured below, is not only a tribute to the work and creativity put forth by the contributing students and staff who allowed this year's issue of *The Phoenix* to come to fruition, but also a tribute to Dr. James Koshan to whom this edition is dedicated.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing." Writing is at once creative and historical. With the publishing of the 2021 edition of *The Phoenix*, the writers and artists whose creative pieces appear in Thiel's literary magazine are now memorialized. *The Phoenix* is an important part of Thiel's institutional history as it embodies the college's mission of "empowering individuals to reach their full potential by creating a diverse and inclusive environment that ensures educational excellence, stimulates global awareness, and promotes ethical leadership." These creative pieces are worth reading.

The Phoenix empowers students, alumni, and members of the Thiel community by providing an inclusive space for their works to reach an audience and receive recognition. For some, getting their works published in *The Phoenix* could be the platform to build their confidence and creative portfolio needed to submit pieces to national journals and publishing houses. This is a publication that allows early writers to begin building their authorial identity. The creative pieces within *The Phoenix* composed by various members of the Thiel community represent the diversity of human experience and emotion for which the mediums of creative writing and art inherently provide. There is something for everyone to enjoy in the pages of *The Phoenix*, from short stories and poems to photographs and illustrations. These creative pieces are worth reading.

While we often memorialize writers and artists, we must also memorialize the work of *The Phoenix* editorial board. As a former editor-in-chief of this literary magazine, I know the amount of work that goes into publishing an edition of *The Phoenix*. The editorial board personifies the definition of ethical leadership that Thiel College emphasizes in its mission. Editorial board members are chosen due to their educational excellence and their commitment to the survival and flourishing of this distinctive literary magazine. Through the ethical practices of blind judging, everyone's creative submission receives a fair evaluation, ensuring that *The Phoenix* remains an inclusive publication. I believe I can speak for the editorial board when I say that these creative pieces are worth reading.

Just as we memorialize the creative works in this literary magazine, we also memorialize one of our most distinguished faculty members in the 2021 edition of *The Phoenix*: Dr. James Koshan, Professor of History and Department Chair. Since Dr. Koshan began teaching at Thiel over 25 years ago, he has impacted so many students and contributed to their success, and I include myself in that group. When I was a first-semester freshman here at Thiel College, I had trouble finding my footing, as Dr. Koshan always likes to remind me.

His first impression of me was sitting cross-armed and scowling in his Western Humanities course, and he quickly showed me that Thiel College was where I was meant to be, which is characteristic of Dr. Koshan's devotion to students. No matter your major, when you have a class with Dr. Koshan, you find yourself suddenly declaring a history minor, or, in my case, a major doubled with English. While it sounds cliché to say, I would not be where I am today—a professor at Thiel College—without his instruction, mentorship, and friendship. I am honored to be considered Dr. Koshan's colleague and grateful for his continued devotion to my success.

With Dr. Koshan's retirement on the horizon, his legacy will be felt at Thiel for many years. His office is bursting with awards from various student organizations declaring that he is their favorite professor, and, most recently, he received the Professor of the Year Award, the most prestigious award a faculty member can receive, at Thiel's Founders' Day in February 2021. Dr. Koshan, we dedicate this year's *The Phoenix* to you, as you have always empowered students to reach their full potential through the educational excellence you provide them in your classes, and as you have always encouraged your students to become leaders with a global awareness that comes with the territory of studying history.

We dedicate *The Phoenix* to you, Dr. Koshan, because you are worth writing about.

Sheila M. Farr, Class of 2010
Assistant Professor of English
Thiel College



The Artist's Curse

By Janelle Mudry

O buff Apollo with your golden lyre,
call on your muses¹ to spin me a tale,
like lovers' ashes mixed from off the pyre²,
or Thor and Hymir's³ cauldron filled with ale.

But chaotic Eris⁴ had her own plans.
Though lacking golden fruit⁵ to incite war,
she thought to stop the writing from my hands
by making my mind race more than before.

And maybe those nine muses are a lie.
But I still struggle to pen a refrain;
the wells of inspiration will run dry.
Yet still I seek and seek and seek in vain.

Perhaps my art is not completely dead,
and I just can't remove it from my head.

¹In Greek mythology, the nine muses serve under the god Apollo as sources of inspiration in the arts and sciences.

²An allusion to Achilles and Patroclus.

³Allusion to a Norse myth in which Thor is charged with obtaining the giant Hymir's mile-deep cauldron in order to hold the amount of ale needed for the gods' feast.

⁴The Greek goddess of Discord. Roman: Discordia.

⁵Another allusion to the *Iliad*—Eris is the one who presents the golden apple to the goddesses as a prize to be won.

Rising Phoenix

By Sean Oros

Like a phoenix
From the ashes,
Flaring boldly
After gloom
Rising newborn
From the darkness
Freshly plumaged
With new flames
Thrown to dirt
But unbroken
Resilient hearted
And unbowed
Rising higher
From the birthplace
Soaring high
Into blue skies
New storms threaten
But renewed
The flaming phoenix
Can prevail
Relentless passion
Fuels the fire
Burnt to ashes
But resurgent
Now high-reaching
This fire bird
Perseverant



By Tyler Zere

My Whole Mind

Anonymous

I'm threatened by words they never speak,
Insulted by their minds which have never thought of
me.
Is it worse to never cross his thoughts than
To make her roll her eyes?
Or to laugh in disgust while I worry about my thighs?
The flies that buzz must know
How dead I try not to be.
I'm alive, a funny way to remind me
That life is more than paper thoughts
Cut from dying trees.

Maple and oak are shades of lipsticks,
Hues of dresses and the softness of her smile...
I've tried not to fall in love, but I still have this
Desire
To wear my hair in braids with vines that flow
Down my temples, from my eyes.

The jewels on my finger should tell me to
Look at who I have behind me,
But my glowing hand says
To brush on more face, to "glow like honey."
A house of cards, a glass of poison,
Where I live, what my tongue touches
When my bottle empties.
And these thoughts are mine, but I hate them still

A Beautiful Woman

By Madi Yurich

A beautiful woman
Whose pale body was tinted
Whose long hair was trimmed
Whose ordinary nails were painted
Whose little fat was thinned
Whose blemishes were covered
Whose flaws were disguised
Whose originality was smothered
And all for a man whose eyes were dissatisfied

Red for the anger in my will
To wake up tomorrow, and
What if I don't feel like it?

When will I be enough for my own self?
When will my lost talents reemerge?
And my words, my art, my voice
Will be among the things out to be heard...
When will that little girl come to see me,
The one whose heart was big, hands were full,
Eyes were wide and words were more kind
in her own mind than in my own.?
Is she alone?
Is she gone?
Did she grow up?
She may be me, but I don't think she'd know me
If she saw me, even if she asked my name.
She does not deserve me to hate her like I hate me.
Ironic how the same mind that hates me
Is the mind to be hated
How my own being is teamed up against me

Fatherhood

By Jason C. Merriam

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.

The Pain of Time

By Molly Shepler

1/18/2021

Time is what took you away from me
Because Time is what made you grow old.

My memories of you are many,
They dance in my head and
Bring a slick warmth to my face.
Over and over again I see you,
I remember how you smiled at me
Or how you saw me grow up.

In photos you are preserved,
In my mind your presence is clear.
I fear the day that clarity escapes your memory,
The inevitable time when other thoughts
will be stacked before memories of you.

You're napping in a pit we dug in the yard.
You're there because you're tired, I know.
Because your bones ached and your
breathing was labored,
Your heart struggled to beat against the pain of Age,
The Pain of Time.

Time is what took you away from me
Because time is what made you grow old.

My sweet, I will never stop loving you.
You made my sad days glad, my long days short,
My good times better.
Friends like you are hard to find,
But *you* are one of a kind.

Time is what took you away from me
Because Time is what made you grow old.

The giggle in a smile,
The strength in a song,
The warmth in a kiss,
The pain of a death.

A true blessing it is to have known you,
To have held you and felt your last breath.

Time is what took you away from me
Because Time is what made you grow old.

(But what a gift He gave me to have put your life in
Cross with mine, for a time.)



"Teddy" by Molly Shepler

ephemeral

By tiffany amber davison

my being

made of the stars; I give

myself entirely

to the silent skies above;

my spirit

shall remain

flowing

forgotten waters of the sodden earth,

water the flowers

above my body allow them to

grow

within the hearts of others;

my hope

shall drift through the

air

seed of a forgotten wish;

my love

shall guide you through

tribulations

footsteps on a forsaken path;

my soul

enchants

the serene skies

with your avid gaze upon the patient night sky,

discover me in this astral divinity.

Ode For an Aging Rock Band

By Katie Miller

New music is a blessing,
I think as I open the video,
Taking in unfamiliar sounds
Behind familiar vocals and new words
With an act I will always adore

The comments are not as happy as I,
Filled with raised fists and angered fans
“This isn’t the band I grew up with!” they exclaim,
“How dare these musicians change their sound!”

Perhaps it is because I am younger,
Unborn back in the so-called glory days
And happy to receive whatever content I can find,
But I roll my eyes and hit “like,”
Since despite all the negativity
There are still some of us who enjoy

“People change,” I wish to yell back,
“So why shouldn’t their music change with them?”
After all,
Why should a forty-something-year-old
Want to scream of the misfortunes of their teenage years
When those times are half a life in the past?

I sigh at the building commentary
And turn away from the frustrating scene
It is as easy as that, truly, I swear
If you do not like the music,
Just turn off the radio

Some Lines on a Mask

By Dylan Santore

Blue, bright, unused
Tossed is the gifted face wear
Into a gray can

My Black Hole

By Sydney Varga

I don’t think
It was a coincidence
Seeing the sky
When I closed my eyes
And thought of you
You were
Majestic
Infinite
But most of all
Unobtainable

No Thoughts, Head Empty

By Janelle Mudry

My mind runs away, and it can’t be caught,
And my emotions I only can fight;
I can’t bear to be alone with my thoughts.

So much noise, things are easily forgot,
But I still try to find the words in spite.
My mind runs away, and it can’t be caught.

In my stomach, a near-permanent knot,
And my heart is in constant fight-or-flight.
I can’t bear to be alone with my thoughts.

But when I do think, it cannot be fought;
Panic sets in and I can’t sleep at night;
My mind runs away, and it can’t be caught.
I can’t bear to be alone with my thoughts.

Untitled (Lines Composed Near Midnight on New Year's Eve 2020/2021)

By Hans Myers '19

What can be said of our dear New Year's Eve
in a year plagued by dread, death, horror, grief?
How can we find cheer and glee while we grieve?
While millions mourn, how can we turn a leaf?
While the world seems gripped by rude disbelief,
While the world cowers and hides from Death's
scythe,
While our rulers fear to grant us our tithe,
At our suffering, they seem rudely blithe.

'Twas not war which created all the death
In this wretched, vile year; nor all its pain.
Innocence strangled, denied of its breath;
and Justice struck down as if by dread Cain.
How often will our society feign
compassion for the sick, hungry, poor, those
whom Christ in a loving embrace enclose?

In the bleak midwinter, it is not love
which animates our dear hearts this year, no!
Nor do angels sing Hosanas above.
In our hearts, Christ's birth we truly do know;
But the joy and peace are lost in wild snow.
Rejoice! I say: Emmanuel is come!
Yet we dwell still in this wretched dark slum.

What will the New Year bring? Its bells peal now.
As Longfellow once heard on Christmas Day,
God is not dead, nor does he sleep! Lord, thou
hast carried us through a nightmare, and yea
the dawn does not yet in heaven's dome play!
How shall we survive the coming sorrow?
How shall we survive to a good morrow?

"Love one another," thus sayeth the Lord:
"Welcome the stranger, care for the needy.
Thy plowshare must be beaten from thy sword.
And thou shalt not be jealous or greedy.

For my son gave you my love so freely,
The darkness is deepest before the dawn:
And soon this pestilence and plague be gone."

"But Lord," I cry in anguish and dread fear:
"It is not the virus alone which so
threatens that we hold most loved and so dear.
What of Breonna Taylor? George Floyd? Tho'
man's inhumanity to man is no
new sin, it seems much worse these dreadful days.
It is hard to find in shadow sun's rays."

"They rest with me," proclaims the great Father.
"As do all who die in their innocence.
It is for you to remake mankind, alter
their basest impulses, plant innocence
in the chasms of their bleak spitefulness.
'Tis not hard," said the Lord, "to be a saint,
All one must do is easy and quite quaint:

"Love thy fellow man and help ease his woes.
Help where help is needed – without boasting.
Show kindness to all, be they friend or foe.
Thou dost not win salvation by toasting
Avarice and wealth whilst the poor, coasting
From check to check worry about their food,
their shelter, their heat; whilst you do collude

"With those who make their suffering much worse
by punishing them for their lack of wealth.
Else when thy time comes, thou lay in a hearse
And find that your forsaking commonwealth
Thou hast resulted in thy hand being dealt
As barren of joy and forgiveness. So thou
shalt let kindness and peace be thy holy vow."

Two-Thousand and Twenty at last hath died.
To Two-Thousand and Twenty-One, let us cheer.
"Peace on Earth! Goodwill to Men!" I have cried.
Yet the darkness lingers still o'er hearts dear.
And the shadows only deepen and drear.
May we soon return to normal, but yet:
Let kindness and joy us all ever abet.

Sestina for Sickness

By Dylan Santore

Spring is sprung, but most would say it has not
My heart should be filled, but instead, it is ill
Over flowers, anxiety and misery fill the air
I peer outside, all joys and laughs have gone
I sit here, wishing for two weeks before,
When all was good, and all was true,

Then for me, the rumours were untrue,
I calmly thought all of the fear was for naught,
As I had seen all this fear twice before,
When the first person one day 'came ill,
I wished the sick would come, and be gone
I chose to ignore it, all of the signs in the air

While I was out running, feeling the air,
I heard of closing the school, must be untrue,
By Thursday all my hope had left, was gone
"School would stay open"; I knew it could not,
I was glad, at least, that I was not ill,
Longing, for the time two weeks before,

People, panicked and afraid, deciding before,
To wear masks to not succumb to death from the air,
They would rather hoard than choose to be ill,
"Food would run out," they thought that true,
Home Depot for toilet paper, of course not,
Everywhere they looked, it was all gone,

Dorms, parks, bars, places of joy have gone,
If only we could return to two weeks before,
Any source of catharsis has given us not,
Not even enjoyed, the sweet smell of the air,
We hoped the estimates would not be true,
I cannot seek my friends, for one may be ill,

But what is not sick is my spirit, refraining from ill,
My sense of motivation has yet to be gone,
I seek to express my mind, to speak what is true,
I no longer mourn for the two weeks before,
I seek only to fill my lungs with fresh, spring air,
The world is in pestilence, but my mind is not.



By Jakob Shingler



By Jakob Shingler

2020

By Sean Oros

1-29-2021

Through silence and pain
Dulled screams mourning the slain
Madness has descended here.
We've seen ugly truths
And flooded hospital booths
In this, the most noisome of years.
For plague had its way
As leaders fumbled the play
In spite of our rivers of tears.
Alone and afraid
At home we all stayed
As screens gave life to our fears.
Madness then ruled
Blind justice was fooled
As shots in the dark burst and seared.
Protests were put down
At behest of a clown
To pose after tear gas cleared.
But in silent strength
Change broke forth at length
As we thought of lost loved ones dear.
Voices joined in vote
In unison they smote
The lies that so long did leer.
Though troubles remain
Through silence and pain
We still fight for skies that are clear.

Gehenna

Anonymous

You were in my dreams again

It was that same old nightmare
The one where I try to say goodbye
But the demon gets in the way

You know the one:
Tall, sharp, stunning
The one I could never hold a candle to
Lest my flame be diminished once again

I try to fight it
And you try to wait
And wait
And wait
But it's no use
You have to go, and my arms are empty still

I know dreams coming true
Are meant to be good omens
So why does this prophecy fulfilled
Make my stomach churn
And my eyes bleed tears in the night?

Solar Eclipse

By Sydney Varga

I was the sun
But you were the moon
There was no place
For us in the sky
Together

But every eclipse
We met up
And made the world dark
So we could have the most beautiful light show
To ourselves

Mistakes

By Taylor Clayborn

I have made mistakes and I do realize that.
They do not define me
Or my future.

I wish everyone could move forward
I am doing a lot better.
That same person does not exist.

The growth is real and true.

We talked about your feelings the other night
I feel like you are the only one who sees the real me
Me without all the shimmering glass
All the sparkles disappear, and you understand
You understand how raw and real I can be
You moved forward from mistakes

Now I just need everyone to do the same.

“Love” Story

by Madi Yurich

Kids.

Love.

Too young to say the word

Too blind to know the word

Past.

Forgotten.

Remembered.

A love that expired before it could bloom

One girl.

One boy.

She loved him every minute of the day

Her heart poured out, she was always in pain

He took over her thoughts, made them burn

Because for him love was just a word

Time.

Now.

She was more than what he deserved

Her eye for men has taken a turn

For she has grown and has observed

Why boys like him will never learn



By Jacob Traupman

Perception

By Isaiah Burgos

You will learn Compassion
Right from wrong; endless paranoia
You will learn the means for success.
Forced to waltz, never to glance at another's misfortunes.
You will know what it means to not be me.

Father, I learned fear.
Anxiety, the only fuel that keeps my heart pumping.
I learned to fear others, tears being an adequate currency
Non-refundable, a defect that will not soon fade.
I owe you thanks, but would that really be Compassion?

Surface Level

By Sydney Varga

Your eyes
Strike me
Like the depths of the ocean
From the surface
It looks so shallow
And blank
But beneath the surface
There is life
Beyond our dreams

Reincarnation

By Sydney Varga

I **love** you
You do not know it yet
But I have for centuries
In the next life
I will have to tell you sooner

You and I

By Taylor Clayborn

The birds will fly above
Whispering while the rain clouds form
This isn't just a coincidence, this is true love

Our hands fit together like a glove
We collide as if we are a magnetic storm
The birds will fly above

Love isn't something you can just fall out of
In the end we will transform
This isn't just a coincidence, this is true love

When push comes to shove
We will always keep each other warm
The birds will fly above

This can't just be young love
Even in the darkest of times we always reform
This isn't just a coincidence, this is true love

Being with you is something I'm proud of
We aren't like everyone else, we don't conform
The birds will fly above
This isn't just a coincidence, this is true love

Some Poets

By Zachary Hunchuk

Some poets are cool
Some poets are wack
Some poets know all
While others know jack
Some poet's brains are like a mashed tater
To these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets are pissed
Some poets make me pissed
Some marks are hit
While others are missed
To some poets I say see you later alligator
To others I say, no maybe later

Some poets let it flow
Some poets let it sink
Some poets really shine
While others really stink
To some audiences they may cater
But to these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets are intriguing
Some poets are confusing
Some poets are thinking
While others are snoozing
I don't want to be a hater
But to them I say, no maybe later

Some poets are goofing
Some poets are huffing
Some poets are serious
While others are bluffing
Some poets are not the most talented creator
And to these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets imagine
Some poets live
Some poets persist
While others have nothing left to give
Some poets by day are a hard-working waiter
And to some poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets are you
Some poets are me
Some poets are them
And what poets they be
Some poets weave words like a master hair braider
And to others I say, no maybe later

Some poets are talented
Some poets have luck
Some poets can really write
While others really suck
Some poets belong in a deep, dark crater
And to these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets have rhythm
Some poets are choppy
Some poets can rhyme
While some simply can't
Some poets turn red like a great big tomatomato
And to these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets move forward
Some poets move in reverse
Some poets leave in a limo
While others leave in a hearse
Some poets stress out like the worst procrastinator
To these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets hit like daggers
Some poets pierce like a bayonet
Some poets chop like a knife
While others serve mush in a hairnet
Some poets really are just the greatest irritator
And to these poets I say, no maybe later

Some poets know how to please
Some poets know how to cause a clamor
Some poets are swinging for the stars
While others are stuck swinging a hammer
Some poets mess everything up like the worst exacerbator
And to these poets, I of course say, no maybe later

A Crown for 2020

By Sean Oros

2020 in Verse:

A year like none, but warning for our age,
As whispered, hateful harsh lies fanned the flames
Until our minds were overrun with rage
At surging seas of segregating claims.
The blues and reds and party in-betweens
Were all held deceit's captives, strangling health,
As mists of lies obscured the broken scenes
Of right and wrong held captive to deep wealth.
Our values bought and sold to bitter death
As corporations boomed and small folk fell,
Our people shot at home, bereft of breath,
And troubles so much more it's hard to tell.
This year saw lies and grand deceit run rife,
Remembered by its harsh refrain of strife.

A Year of Strife:

Remembered by its harsh refrain of strife,
A stain of ruptured kin and broken towns,
As pride is ranked above all human life,
This year of arguments and bitter frowns.
We saw a plague left rampant like a crime;
Saw victims disregarded for their skin;
As stuck at home we languished with more time
To see the sorrows we've ignored slip in.
The Internet, once meant for public good,
Now tainted foul with havens for all lies,
Saw forums fashion lies as fast they could
Embraced by "leaders" pandering to sties.
What darksome melancholy can appear
When leaders vacate duty to sow fear.

Abandonment of Leadership:

When leaders vacate duty to sow fear,
Forsaking truth to dredge for votes and cash,
No longer serving, blind to prices drear
They dodge to let the poor folk feel the crash.
Enslaved to greed, but virtues they proclaim,
To act a role they fail to live or prove,
As shouting, raging, fault to others blame
And only act when patrons to behoove.
Both bought and buyer, spewing hate so vain
To stir and sway with rhetoric of fright
In derelict of truth and common gain—
But hope endures even in endless night.
Despite the raging shouts of stifling strife,
Our trampled souls refused to give up life.

Battle of Realities:

Our trampled souls refused to give up life.
In protests bold the people rose to hold
A banner bright to halt the bitter strife
And revealed themselves to be not as lies told.
Denial mounted tall against all facts
And madness was rewarded with a crown;
Cacophonies of frenzied mindless acts
Were spurred by fools who watched the world burn
down.
And still the plague did life disable
As people clasped so blindly to deny
The mounting tolls of death avoidable
And raised the death-charts higher to the sky.
We barely could survive even or even cope;
This plague was swift to close our homes and hopes

New Plague Rising:

This plague was swift to close our homes and hopes
As darkly swift it swept, ignored or not,
As down our world slid down dark Despair's slopes:
In price of ignorance we all were caught.
The poor were first to feel the bitter blast
As judged "essential," still to work they went,
And yet they received aid only dead last
As towards the richer ends the scales were bent.
Small shops went under but large chains were bailed
As those who signed those bills were patron coaxed,
Debating pennies while their people failed
And raving that the plague was just a hoax
This plague did indiscriminately kill
As, trapped alone, the nation rested ill;

The Quandary of Quarantine:

As, trapped alone, the nation rested ill,
Its people looked for guides but found no rock.
Ensnared by fear, they turned to idle thrill;
With Netflix binge they passed the clock, Tik Tok.
At first we thought it all would quickly pass,
But soon we were ensnared by unknown threat
As quarantine would hardly leave so fast,
And panic passed as folks at home did fret.
Then doubt arose as fools their theories spun,
As faith in experts were quick spurned with claims
And efforts to forestall the plague undone,
With lives ranked under economic gains.
In year almost as mad as story tropes,
Our leaders twisted Truth with Falsehood's ropes,

Suspension of Fact-Belief:

Our leaders twisted truth with Falsehood's ropes,
Immune from harm thanks to cunning device;
But when leaders behave with whines and mopes,
The poor are they who feel the steepest price.
Our lives endangered by the rule of lies
As facts forgotten lay off to the side,
With forums ruling through their outraged cries
And experts driven from their jobs to hide.
Assured it all was passing and was fine,
The fools for unjust vengeance loudly cried.
But still Bravado claimed all was in line
And that he turned more gold than Midas spied.
Our captain bragged despite a mounting bill,
Then patience failed as COVID spread on still.

The Long Lockdown:

Then patience failed as COVID spread on still,
As rich waxed richer, sucked from human lives,
And all politicized to rage and thrill
Instead of answers given to survive.
With grief-torn families in mourning throes,
And losses rising quick to drown our pleas,
The lies turned sour when thick mixed with woes
And we then turned from fear to look for truth.
With masks and space the virus we delayed,
With social distance armed and to remain;
Too few of us health mandates did obey,
But still we strived to counter the insane.
We thought we'd only wrestle with this blight—
Then blasting shots rang out amidst the night

The Myth of Inalienable Rights:

Then blasting shots rang out amidst the night
As cries of woe arose in neighborhood;
The bursting guns not in response to fight,
But wanton violence just because they could.
Racism baldly reared its grizzly head,
Though some denied it, ignorantly brave—
But how to hide the mounting toll of dead?
Their voices cried for justice from the grave.
Though some might bicker if racism's real,
From comfort judging wholesale based on skin,
The truth is plain to those its bite do feel,
So deep a plague its own, where to begin?
To fight it would be struggle, nail and tooth,
So protests rose to show the grim, dark truth.

The March of Demonstration:

So protests rose to show the grim, dark truth
As day dawned on Breonna's life laid bare,
As sorrow welled to peak and burst
As whole race then begged like Floyd for air.
Debates were held in comfort how best to aid,
But Brazen called militias white his friends;
Both failed at end to help those deep afraid
With death at door to families grimly rend.
So people took to streets as common souls
And called for help through masks till they were
parched,
With just awareness, justice as their goals;
Disparaged just as riots, still they marched.
With voices raised to bring their plight to light,
Their pleas were met with gas to blur their sight,

Free Speech and Tear Gas:

Their pleas were met with gas to blur their sight.
Agents were loosed to kidnap Portland boots.
Grim lines were drawn as if a war to fight.
Violence was caused for Bible photoshoots.
So madness came full chaos, free speech condemned,
As calls for cease of deaths were "riots" deemed,
Though men could storm statehouses, no problem;
Division sown now poisoned all, it seemed.
Our leader condemned protests, not proud boys,
As grieving souls were screamed down by harsh
crowds,
Little more than kids with AR15 toys,
As rich, like callous gods, watched from safe clouds.
So venom spewed from Brash behind guard booth,
With Justice still enslaved to the uncouth.

Continued Fight for Justice:

With Justice still enslaved to the uncouth,
We learned to lift up fellow down-trod souls
And fight for rights so long denied, ill truth,
But when the system fights it takes grim tolls.
We chose to value lives over king coin,
We chose to fight for people over pride;
But still the corporations wealth purloin,
And still our social justice ill earns pride.
Still much to do, we cannot rest quite yet,
As plague still roves and yet so much to mend;
To start uncovers pains our minds to fret,
But better starting now than to pretend.
Despite the fear, we did not fall to rage;
Despite the pain, we learned to break our cage,

Looking Ahead:

Despite the pain, we learned to break our cage,
With voices raised to vote and campaigns toured,
And though the Bombast long did rave and rage,
Election fair was held and faith restored.
So much remains the same, but still rage fights:
The Bully thrown from white house, but still rales,
Our people still must strive for simple rights,
And quick we will forget these bitter tales.
We heard the warnings, saw the beacons lit
But even now we see returns to norms.
Do not forget these people hardest hit,
And lift the trampled as power conforms.
We look ahead with both new hope and fear
As we now come to end of noisome year.

Does 2020 End?:

As we now come to end of noisome year—
But does it truly seem to ever end,
As rebel insurrections new now rear
And “election fraud” false claims still rend?
New lies still rise about people and plagues,
We are divided just to watch more deaths,
Still taking burdens far too great for legs,
Like puppets made to fight, till out of breaths.
False flags still fly despite a victory,
As people groomed for rage still bitter shout;
Can we win back our own from thoughts awry?
Can we still save the downcast we block out?
We stand still gripped with too much to fear—
But still, we come to end of noisome year.

Master Sonnet:

As we now come to end of noisome year,
Remembered by its harsh refrain of strife
When leaders vacate duty to sow fear,
Our trampled souls refused to give up life.
This plague was swift to close our homes and hopes
As trapped alone, the nation rested ill;
Our leaders twisted truth with Falsehood’s ropes,
Then patience failed as COVID spread on still.
Then blasting shots rang out amidst the night,
So protests rose to show the grim, dark truth.
Their pleas were met with gas to blur their sight,
With Justice still enslaved to the uncouth.
Despite the pain, we learned to break our cage,
A year like none, but warning for our age.

THE TIME CAME ...

By Woody Powell

.. and no one thought it would,
until too late.

It crept up, crisis upon crisis,
until ordinary days became nightmares.

Remember when ...

... we felt sorry for refugees
until they overwhelmed us?

... welcomed spring rains
until they drowned our towns?

And then

... summer suns that ripened grains
cremated them in their infancy.

... we lounged upon our beach-fronts
until the beaches disappeared.

... we thought hurricanes and tornadoes
tragic, but exciting,
until devastation became routine.

... we thought cruelty the sole province of despots,
until our bullying politicians bared their stripes,
and comforted only the rich.

We know now who to blame
for ceding sovereignty to fools
for seeking comfort over survival,
... we know, yes, we know.

When the time came
our hearts, once buoyed by false narratives,
sank.



By Katherine Aaron



By Katherine Aaron

You Know

By Molly Shepler

2/17/2021

A husband and boys,
Five in all,
With enough scraped shins and
Broken arms to go around.
A family built on solid ground
In half of a stone-chimney house
With homemade birthdays
And potato digging at Mr. Roe's.

Travel to the West where
Large hands pat small heads
And little fingers run against the bark
Of the mightiest trees...
A month-long adventure,
You learn best by seeing.
Missing Kansas (close enough), Mount Rushmore,
And toes in the cold Pacific,
The cold of the snow in drifts against
The tent outside the van.
Camping out under a sky of stars,

And then...

Four daughters-in-law,
One by one.
Wedding after wedding
And gown after gown,
Giving away each of her best gifts,
The most treasured, handsome gifts,
One by one.

Worth it, though, before a girl is born
And then a boy, two more, and
Around they go
Twelve in all, by the end,
A happy house and a heart just as full.
Three ponds out back and a candy drawer.

An old workshop where
The grandsons play
And a room of trains that run
Around the clock each day.
Fish in tanks and in the ponds,
But the favorite around here is frogs.

Planting bright orange lilies,
Pointing out calling birds of
Blue and red and gray.
Ice-blue eyes peering at the sky,
Filling with water, as they may.

Paintings of flowers and ducks
Or apples in baskets,
Trees overhanging the streams that
Are good for fishing, so they do.
Oil and water mix for a painting,
For you.

Emails and ceramic kittens,
Teddy bears of lamb-fur
And red flannel with
Bows and monogrammed letters.
Homemade quilts and sweaters,
Playing cards and long pearl necklaces,
Piano notes and singing hymns,
Loving Jesus and Christmas and
Every bit of falling snow.
A scribbled-in Bible's worn and red pages.
"Let it snow!"

Grasping hands and giving kisses
Loving bunches, making wishes
Wishing to never leave
Wishing for another cup of coffee
Wishing for her memory
Telling another old story

Dementia

By Dylan Santore

Stage 1

We took a drive, long and windy, in my car
We can see the length, the blonde of her hair
We both smiled so pure, so sweet, so nice,
We harmonized with the radio,
We went on and on that phantom road
We never ever wanted to return home

Stage 2

She told me something about going home,
She drove a very large car,
She left, can't think what road,
She was wearing something in her hair,
She liked a short song, on the radio
She was the finest, she was nice,

Stage 3

At one point, the weather was nice,
At one point, I made it home,
In the living room, quiet radio,
In my sleep, I heard a car,
I can't know the length of my hair,
I can't know the length of the road

Sanctuary

By Isaiah Burgos

I strive to End.
To cease this mundane cycle
Of monotonous repetition.
Beauty may not exist without a counterpart,
Let me leave this momentless shell
And obtain true beauty.
A place constructed, separate from reality
Designed to create my reality
A cool touch, the trigger within my grasp.
The subject is clear, Five pounds of pressure
The magic number.
Click. Surprising self-confetti
Beckoning my blissful end.

Stage 4

To get to somewhere I take a road,
To get somewhere that wasn't nice,
The mean people hurt my hair,
The mean people took my home,
I can't find my only car,
I can't find my radio,

Stage 5

Off, off, off, turn off the radio!
No, no, no, don't drive on that road!
Please, please, please, not in the car!
Water, water, water, it's so nice!
Home, home, home, take me home!
Cut, cut, again cutting my hair...

Stage 6

Repeat after me sir: hair; "hair,"
Good, good! Now: radio; "radiooo,"
Alright, next is: home; "hoooooome,"
Please focus on me sir: road; "roe..."
Sir, please try harder: nice; "stay,"
That's not right, one more: car; "..."

Intruding Time Traveler

By Sydney Varga

When my head fills
With thoughts of you
You are a part of me
I feel as though
I am an outsider, looking in
An intruder in my own head
Watching you dance
Through the cracks in the universe
Only to fall
Into my arms again

The Frog

11/8/2020

By Sean Oros

Hoppity hoppity hop,
The thudding tread behind me bopped;
I ducked and weaved through towering weeds
And stumbled over a flaxen seed.
Hoppity hoppity hop,
The beast followed at unsteady clop,
The pursuing bounds echoed in my ears
As my throat was gripped with gasping fears.
Hoppity hoppity hop,
The earth then shook with might flop
As down the frog leapt in my path
A hungry beast consumed with wrath.
Hoppity hoppity hop,
It turned to lunge but I leapt atop
And gripped the slimy skin for life
As we were locked in bitter strife.
Hoppity hoppity hop,
We wrestled amidst the muddy slop
Until I grabbed a jagged reed
And stood my ground prepared to bleed.
Hoppity. Hoppity. Hop.
The wary frog began to—POP!
My reed struck true and felled my foe,
As I faced the biggest frog I know.



By Katie Miller

REVERENCE FOR LIFE (or the Albert Schweitzer cure)

By Woody Powell

We are looking up
from laden tables
looking up
from hand held screens
looking up
from fairy-tale stories;

To see a world turned alien;
no longer a place of assured survival.
but a bloody arena for deadly struggle.

Does the age of technology
guarantee our future,
or simply render us vulnerable
to cosmic storms?

Do we really think ourselves immortal,
exempt from entropy and death?

We, who have destroyed
a thousand small worlds,
and even more species
can also feel the pressure
of displacement,
perhaps replacement.

After all,
we are just one more specie
with far less claim to longevity
than the lowly cockroach.

Take heart, though,
it's not over yet,
there is reprieve,
if we finally decide
to embrace old Albert's "reverence for life".

Pink

By Taylor Clayborn

Do we see the same?
Do I see the pink that you see?
Does it look beautiful to you as it looks to
me
I wish I could know.

This is just the beauty of it all.
All the complexities of life.
Life is so complicated.
Yet can be as simple

As the color pink.



By Sydnee Pilarski

My Favorite Novel

By Sydney Varga

You take time to unravel. A novel that is 1,000 pages but I'm absorbed in every word. Your touch the rising action, your lips the cusp of climax. Others are merely novellas. Short stories. Some even haikus. You are an encyclopedia, a wealth of knowledge. So many words. Such meticulousness. A beauty, really. That so much information can be summed up so easily. You have a beautiful book jacket. What's inside compares to more than 300 times what's on the outside. You're like my favorite story. I could read it all over again a million times and never be bored.

Love

By Isaiah Burgos

Pain deep within fills a voided stone.
A stone eroded through warmth and compassion.
Guarded, born with twelve walls destine to protect.
Only one may create a diamond
But, neither wall nor stone can glance through time.
A Judas will try, invading the role destine for one,
Only to break the nearly unbreakable.
Slowly driving through chisel in one darkness in the other.
Making way as a stake fills the void.
Walls standing strong, the stone lays shattered.
Roots binding a parting stone as time fulfills its duty.
Eventually one, gracious and sweet
Meets a cold shallow shell, healed through time yet broken
Ferociously guarded by twenty-four walls.
Warmth in one, compassion in another.
Will they truly be the one.



By Natalija Kutlesa

“Evening Sunlight” by Katie Miller

The Box

By Madi Yurich

She is tough
for she does it all
But it's become too much
she's starting to fall
back into the box that she just escaped
the box of pain, the box of ache
The longer she's down the shorter it takes
for her lungs to give up
for her to suffocate
Once the lid closes she will be out of luck
for it is in that box she will always be stuck
In that invisible box whose key is lost
she will learn why she gave up
and at what fatal cost
She will die in that box
and everyone will see
how she looked on the outside
was her just trying to get free



Jazz

By Dylan Santore

She wiped the sweat off her forehead from the mean heat of jazz,
Her brow furrowed in disgust from the streams of distaste,
If the day was up to her, she would have ended the night fast

His eyes were of sparkles, composed of rose-coloured glass,
He looked at her in wonder, wanted to lessen the space,
The boy raced for that table when he saw the soft sight of jazz,

Her hands were scared and alone, fearing the rough feel of jazz,
They would approach him in caution, they possessed every grace,
She eventually offered her grip, as if the evening would last,

He sensed her affection in the air, he feared the moment to pass,
His nose tracked quickly the source, like flowers in a vase,
The boy was soon to realize he had followed the sweet smell of jazz

She finished off her cheap drink, drowning the bitter taste of jazz,
The brass was still on her tongue, leaving without haste,
Her stomach was empty, ill, like a fast

He was entranced by the band, playing that fast,
Both her voice and the notes had him tied to the mast,
Competing for his attention like a jealous rat race,
But in the end, the boy chose the soothing sound of jazz.



By Morgan Wood



By Morgan Wood

Store-Bought Love Is Hard to Find

By Sophia Kostoff

For days, she had been making them,
Hammering letters, tiny diamonds and love
Into the silver surface of the pendants, and as
She adorned them with red, green, blue, and pink, they
shone bright in the light of her room. Oh,
Her friends would surely love them.

The season of giving was upon them,
And people could be seen chattering about as
They browsed department stores and they
Searched for the gifts they would give with love.
The girl watched this charade in the shops, thinking oh,
Why does Christmas need to come from them?

Parents of children these days wake them
With presents of electronics and store-bought love
On Christmas morning. When the girl was a child, oh
She would receive more homemade gifts. Now, as
She hammered away at gifts for her friends, she hoped they
Would appreciate the love and hard work she would give them.

Finally, the day arrived when they
Would receive the gifts she made for them.
That day was Christmas Day, a day of joy, faith, love,
And of course, gift bags with presents inside them.
Her friends chattered away about their holiday haul as
She approached, their shiny new phones in hand. Oh,

Hopefully they'll like my efforts, she thought as
She handed a brightly wrapped box to each one of them.
The wrapping now removed, they
Peered into the boxes at their friend's gift...oh,
They said. And no more. They closed the boxes, and her love,
Like the gifts she gave, was closed back up with them.

They once more picked up their new phones as
The girl slowly hung her head, fighting back tears as they
Filled her brown eyes. The chatter resumed as she left them,
Almost as if they hadn't noticed. Oh
Why, she cried, does money weigh more than love?
Did her friendship mean anything to them?

Or did their phones mean more to them? It was as
If there was no weight or reciprocity for them to return to the store. Oh,
The girl mumbled, "they can't buy friendship...or love."

Eyes

By Taylor Clayborn

I met you when times were brutal
COVID was showing it has no refusal
Soccer was a no show
Motivation was at an all-time low

Now that I am with you
You may not even have a clue
I now know to cherish all things
Even if all the pain stings

Many situations seemed like there was no purpose
Now because of you I understand everything matters
Every aspect to our lives leads up to a moment
A small piece can create a mosaic to the changing master piece of life

You make me feel sane
Making me look at every little grain.

Page 17

By Sydney Varga

You read me like a book
Every breath
The turn of a page
Your fingers
Cascading down the crevices of my skin
Like a satin bookmark
Over the fold of a page

Childhood memories

By Sydney Varga

You have taken the place of my happiest
memory
The blue sky
The sun
It is now
Your eyes
Your skin
You are what makes me feel at home

Sunlight Through the Blinds

By Sydney Varga

You are the sunshine that streams
through
The cracks in the blinds on windows
Peeking through to cover me
Reminding me to see the light
When I lift the blinds
Your love
Cascades over me
Until I am bathed in brightness

Concussion

By Sydney Varga

I fell for you
I thought
You would catch me
But you let me fall
When I hit the concrete
All the love I had for you
Seeped out
From the cracks in my skull

Empty

By Madi Yurich

A hollow tree
Sturdy and strong
Continues to grow
But not for long
For inside there is nothing
No mind or soul
The tree is standing
But it is not whole

Silence and darkness
Coexisting martyrs
Married to each other
Inseparable partners
They fill the trunk
From the roots to the leaves
Their presence is innocent
But unintentionally feeds
The inability to feel
The inability to need

Its bark takes a beating
But the tree keeps on breathing
The tree does not feel it
So in time will come healing

Though a gentle knock
Reveals through the bark
The quietest of echoes
Of the slightest of sorrows

The tree feels nothing
For it is numb
It looks normal on the outside
But internally
There is uncertainty and chaos
That is seen by none

The tree lives on
Through its normal life
Never knowing how to feel
What its armor has disguised

Some envy the tree
But more often than not
They remember the tin man
And the difference between
Not having a heart
And being completely empty

Drained

By Sydney Varga

You said my aura was beautiful
Beautiful enough to make you stay
But
When you touched me
You drained me
And now I am colorless

The Empty Spot in My Bed

By Sydney Varga

I let my tears fall
Where you once lied
So they may take the shape of
you
And hold me
Like you once did

Bulletproof Glass

By Sydney Varga

It feels like
The thinnest piece of glass in the world
between us
I can see you
We are almost touching
But I cannot really have you

Inspiration

By Zachary Hunchuk

A pile of inspiration as big as a hay bale
But I will keep this poem short for it might grow
stale.

Inspiration as great as a whale
Could all be stopped with a whack of her tail.

Inspiration found in a massive yard sale
Could be junk or the almighty holy grail.

Inspiration as old as a fairy tale
Could lead you down a long winding trail.

Inspiration found in a garbage pail
Could lead you down the path of betrayal.

Inspiration hiding within a bowl of kale
Or blown across the sky on a mighty gale.

Inspiration crawling as slow as a snail
Will not hesitate to flail.

Inspiration from beneath the earth's shale
Might be struck down like a nail.

Inspiration falling as hard as hail
Rest assured, you will not fail.

Terminator

By Isaiah Burgos

Moonlight appears delicate; passionate slumber.
Tranquility shifts to uncertain discomfort
As the Huntress claims all with her chilling glow.
Blazing frost blanketing all, the nights Archon reigns.
Seemingly endless, a majestic glow penetrates all
The shivering ground settles as the hunt nears its end.
Carried away shrouded in icy winds, her true fear has yet to come
As the Great King illuminates the darkness.
The Huntress retreat, now to burden our brothers and sisters in distant lands.
Calming the icy blaze, an elegant song coats all.
The Great King's reigns demands the celebration of living.
All is well for another day. Yet to fear,
A great fear lies dormant, for the Huntresses reign is due near.

Italy

By Hannah Keeling

A

Beautiful place where I could be

Carefree and

Drenched in sunlight along the Mediterranean Sea,

Eating a different

Flavor of

Gelato every day and

Having deeper cultural experiences than ever before.

I smiled with

Joy when I sang in the convent of Spoleto and met the

Kings of Italian hospitality so full of

Life and love in the hills of

Mestre (not to mention their

Never-ending feast). I

Opened the

Pages of history, walking through the

Quiet

Ruins of Rome and the majestic space of

Saint Peter's Cathedral

Towering over the Vatican city. I walked

Under Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel and wandered through

Venice where the streets are made of

Water. This

eXperience would only be richer if

You had been along instead of at home, which seemed like

Zillions of miles away.



By Morgan Wood



By Morgan Wood

Girl, Interrupted

By Janelle Mudry

With each and ev'ry year that passes by
When longing for what's lost comes creeping in
And patience with complacence wearing thin,
I do find myself needing to know why
That when girl likes something, she must lie?
Why anything feminine seems a sin?
Long, the concept has been beyond my ken,
But as of late an answer came to mind:

Since the dawn of time and that fateful fall,
There's one thing that keeps womankind in pain:
Male's companion has always been his gall.
The rules that they create drive me insane.
For when their audacity comes to call:
Listening is something I've learned to feign.



By Morgan Wood

By Morgan Wood



A World Small and Large

By Katie Miller

By all means,
We should have never met

Two creatures half a world away
Seven hours of difference
And a computer screen between us

Perhaps creating fiction
Is not a conventional method of meeting
But it brought me to you
And for that, I will keep writing

I know your name from our speaking
And your face from photographs long deleted
And your voice from a four second clip
You do not know I have saved

My language is not your first
And maybe not even your second
Or perhaps not even your third
But still, I call you friend
And you call me the same

Perhaps one day, this will all change
And our conversations find their end
But for now, I cherish your company
Though physically you are not here

There is half a world between us
Of this, I know too well
But in these times where our neighbors
Seem just as far away,
That does not seem to matter as much
As how long we will talk today

The Misinterpretation

By Taylor Clayborn

The Teddy Bear is his friend.
The Teddy Bear keeps him company.

He doesn't appreciate Teddy.
He doesn't care about Teddy.

Teddy tries so hard to be supportive.
Teddy always falls short.

Teddy gets Damaged.

Scales

By Kayle Martin

I'm stuck in the ocean,
The water in commotion.
Stuck in the core,
Swimming to the shore.
While all around,
There is no ground.
No end in sight,
I have no more fight.
I am slipping under the surface,
Into no other place.
Where I am not afraid,
I am being decayed.
From a world of terror,
To somewhere I can bear.
For now I am a mermaid,
And will not be a grenade.
Not a danger to those around me,
Because now I can swim free.
Away from a terrible place,
In an ocean pure of grace.

I Remember

By Sydnee Pilarski

I remember sunsets that set the hills ablaze.
Tall, weeping willows whose long branches swayed.
Meadows filled with flowers and teeming with creatures.
All with their own definite, defining features.

I remember the songs that hung in the air.
That filled every corner, every place, everywhere.
Music that enchanted every young couple who walked by.
Making them sing and dance as if they would fly.

I remember the smell of the cool spring rain,
Filling the world with new life once again.
The smells that hung so vivid in your nose
While smiling at the yellow umbrella you chose.

I remember the way that life used to be.
Before the end began and we could not be free.
While I sit here with hopes that this world will return,
Who knows if it will, but for it my heart will continue to yearn.

A Tree and Its Leaves

By Sydnee Pilarski

A tree in a meadow,
Standing true. Standing tall.
In the heat of the summer,
Knowing no leaves will fall.

But the day the wind shifted,
And the clouds fell gray,
The sturdy tree knew,
It could not stay this way.

And so it began.
The dearly departed,
They drifted away,
Before the snow started.

And barren it stood,
So sturdy and strong,
Knowing its cold, saddened heart,
Would not last too long.



The Light

By Sydnee Pilarski

It's the light.
Through the blinds, through the cracks, through the holes in the sky,
It reminds us of how we'll get through it, and why.
It's the light that fades into old memory,
Or the perfect cup of coffee that was a morning remedy.
It's the glow of a child who has just won a race,
And the smile that remains on our lost loved one's face.
It breaks through the dark and cascades over the earth.
Reminding some people to know all that they're worth.
It's the light.

All Good Things

By Sydnee Pilarski

Blue jeans, pictures, memories, too.
They all fade with time,
As all good things do.
Coffee stains, laughter, a warm summer day,
We put them in the place
Where all the good memories stay.
But even our best will grow old and disappear,
Because all the good things
Must eventually end up here.

By Morgan Wood

Questions

By Sydnee Pilarski

What is the point?
Why are we here?
What is the point of living in fear?

What if there's nothing?
No point at all.
What if we were waiting.
Only to miss the last call.

Who knows why we're here or what lies ahead,
But for now we must decide:
Which path do we tread?

Turtle World

By Sydnee Pilarski

Imagine a turtle,
With a world on its back.
Teeming with life
On a shell that wouldn't crack.

The ecosystem balanced,
Each group had its niche.
However, that crumbled,
When someone dug the first ditch.

And with the hole,
Dug deep in the ground,
The race to industrialism
Had finally come around.

The things that they built,
From whatever they could find,
Created a whole new world,
To which the turtle was blind.

They used and they used,
Without thought or attention.
Now resources were limited,
Causing harsh tension.

The race to be the best
Was not slowing down,
So they dug deeper, and farther
Into the ground.

Remember that shell,
The one that couldn't crack?
Well, that was a lie.
And they found the turtle's back.

Their world was alive,
Thriving off a living thing.
On the shell of a turtle,
Their whole world was just sitting.

This caused a pause,
Among all of the creatures,
To consider their actions,
And the last of the world's features.

So, they stopped, and they thought,
How can we make this right?
What could we do?
Could this world still be alright?

They could see their world dying.
Right in front of their eyes.
They knew they had to do something,
To comfort the turtle's cries.

Their pause in thought
Was enough to spark change.
In a world of consumption,
This new notion was strange.

Take care of this place,
Do not let this world crack.
For we may be riding
On the shell of a turtle's back.



By Molly Shepler

The Unknown Companion

By Isaiah Burgos & Natalija Kutlesa

I come in like a thief in the night.
Stealing your daydreams,
Crumbling all your hope inside.
The light is dim, yet I stay.
Withering within with echoing whispers.
You don't let go so easily.

Every move buries as your shoulders ache.
No color nor shade
To uncoil your heart of disarray.
Seek warning, heed caution.
Your fate is a balance
Of misery and hate.

You weep your thoughts
And pray one day you'll forget me.
But what am I to you?
Do I anger you?
Is acceptance possible?
Is it time to move on?

But what do I know,
I am just Grief

School

By Payton Brooks, Taylor Clayborn, Kyler Moore,
Janelle Mudry

Rolling out of bed lasts a lifetime
And the motivation to learn is absent
Five more minutes
Academia *should* be a noble pursuit
But my time and pride fall through
Four more classes
I find my gaze drifting to the window
Inexplicable images in the clouds distract me
Three more years

Counterpart

By Isaiah Burgos

A common goal prompts ambition.
The desire for another's touch
That can nourish a darkened soul.
Acts unknown become repetitive,
As love's shackles cage your morals.
Binding individuality through your noose,
A comforting mind strengthens the knot.
As laughter voids doubt, yet sorrow remains.
Unfit to change, these chains become me.
Now a slave to my cause,
Oh, sweet love, Guide me.

Nov. 4th

By Natalija Kutlesa

When the flowers no longer bloom
I think of you.
When Autumn leaves fall guiding my path
I think of you.
When the sun shines mocking my sadness
I think of you.
When Sunday's summer Hymn sings
I think of You.
Every November 4th—

I think of you.

The Sky

By Sylvia Patterson, Natalia Kutlesa, Olivia Burd,
Mackinzie Kirk

For my head is angled a particular way
And my eyes can swivel in the breadth that I lay
Cotton candy skies and temporary sun
That wane as time passes, and when that is done
The sun's half-brother, darker, one soft beam
Cuts through a sea of inky sky and paints a dream
Of spatterings of stars that I will never see
You're no longer happy when you cry to me



By Molly Shepler

My Spring

By Britney Georgia

Every poet should write a Spring poem.
Louise Glück

A new day has long begun
But only now I see my Sun.
Joy it brings upon my face
'Til again I rest in place.



By Molly Shepler

Happy Birthday, B-young

By Kyler Moore

Every time life knocked me down
Brother, you were always around.
With every conquest failing in the end
You encouraged me to try, try again.
We both have our fair share of struggle
Together; However, we create our own bubble
To keep ourselves outta Trouble.

I know life can get the better of us
Yet the one thing I'll always ask for is trust
That we will see better days
And I'll take it to the grave
That we'll find the joy we seek
If we lean on each other when we weak

My friend, my lifeline, my blood brother
Till the day we both lay
I wish you a happy birthday

A Riddle

By Jason C. Merriam

Nothing more precious in all creation,
Yet freely given to those found worthy.
A few would curse its spontaneity,
Others would insist it needs time to grow.

It can elude your search for a lifetime.
While some who receive it, throw it away.
Most will sacrifice all to preserve it,
The key to human possibility.

Dreamed, hoped for, lamented, exulted in.
Simple and mysterious at the same time.
Perhaps the only thing that matters.
Opinions disseminated daily.

Described in every facet imaginable.
The quintessential reason for existence.

Lazy Dog

By Dylan Santore, Britney Georgia, Joshua Christner

Get up, get up rise your head
You eat and breathe, you're not dead
You heard the clucks of the cocks

To get up is key that remains a lock,
Youth and love await outside
There's a tail or a coon to chase
But stay down, it's not worth the race

Run fast, run hard, run free
Exhausted, rest your head on the porch.

Death Can Wait and So Can I

By Natalija Kutlesa

I phone Death to speak to me
But he lets his cell phone ring
I daydream of a peaceful slumber
Leaving those who look and wonder
I long to meet those who went before
To be able to sing and dance forevermore
But alas God has something waiting for me
Keeping Death from visiting

Although I must wait and Suffer bear
It will bring me closer to up there
So I must wait for my day to come and patiently
Bear their sharp tongues

For God sees me and loves me so
He will use my pain for those to know
Death can wait and so can I
My Cross will help me reach High

Nobility

By Britney Georgia

I washed the old wet walked floors.
I tend the fire's timbers and twigs.
I clean the clattered and cracked dishes.
I straighten the silver-skirted pictures.

You step on my sore, scabbed back.
You pull my thin strings with pure pride.
You bent and broke my bones in sly sport.
You silence each owned set of worn shackles.

I grit my teeth, giving groans.
I conform to the corpse you crave.
I pass perilous days patiently.
I will myself to remain where you wish.

You lie to make me like a lamb.
You quickly quell my thirst for quills.
You stop my drive on my distant home.
You claim to be my constant commandant.

I dare to feel for free will.
I shake the scarring chains strongly.
I take steps towards a tomorrow.
I finally fulfilled your filthy toil.

Now, if you are so high class,
Why am I more noble than you?

My Rough Edges

By Taylor Clayborn

I try to forgive, but I cannot let myself move on
forgiveness is hard, and this is not being
acknowledged
if I close my eyes and let myself think,
I truly wonder if I deserved to be exploited.

Poetry You Are Not My Dearest Friend

By Natalija Kutlesa

Poetry, you are not my dearest friend.
You come uninvited
And stay past your welcome
Poetry, you are not my dearest friend.

Everyone seems to love you
Celebrate you
So easily write you
But you, Poetry, you give me a headache
You are not my dearest friend
Iambic, sonnets, haikus, trochaic—
You hinder me with your specifics.

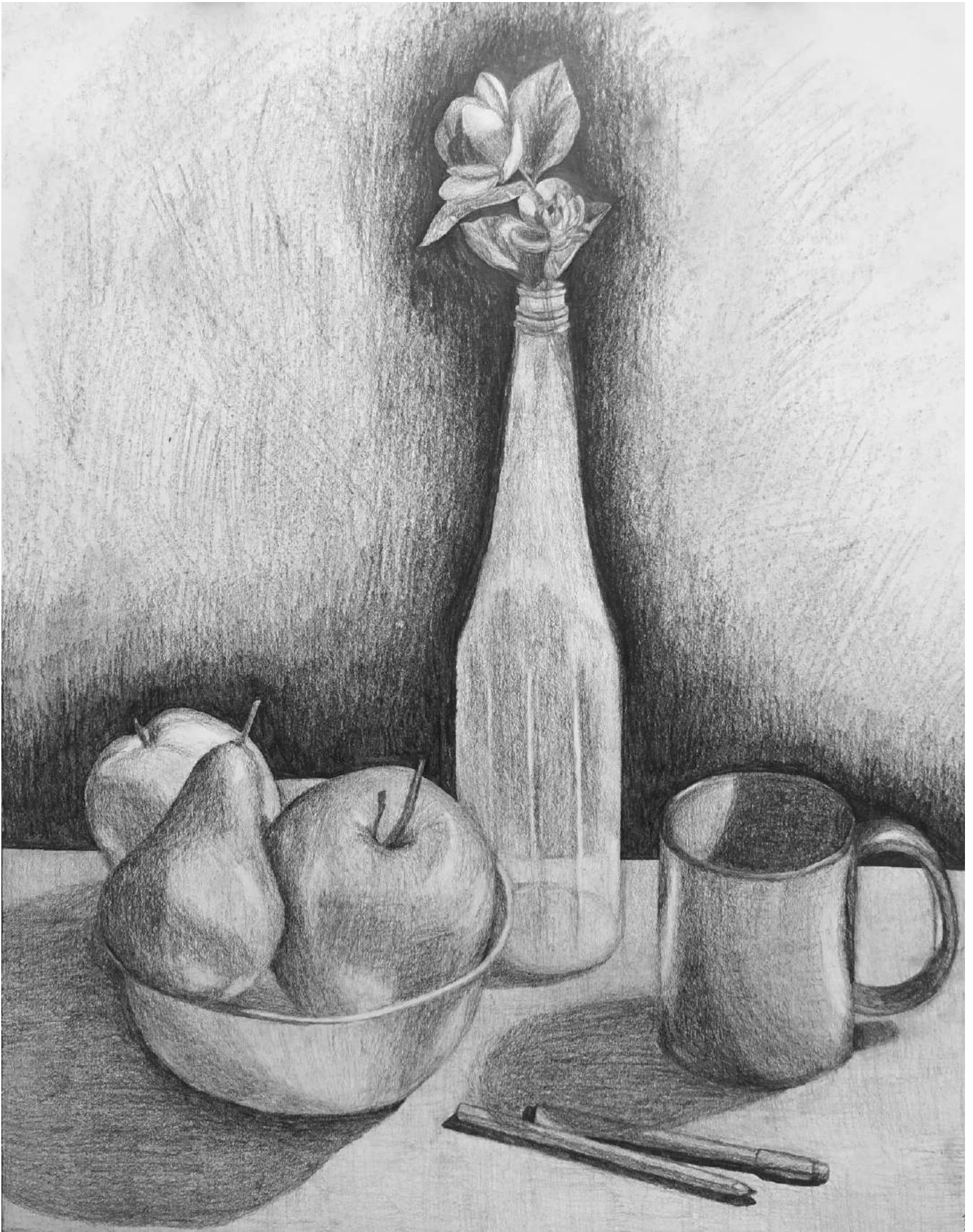
Shakespeare, Keats, Whitman, Poe—
You do not really know my dearest Foe.
He intrigues you
Mesmerizes you
Transports you
Then leaves you in wonder...How would they write you (Poetry)?

Now you know why Poetry is not my dearest friend.

To the Archer

By Payton Brooks

Our youth was a burning game
Ten years later and back-to-back we are the exact
same
A decade later and weak men inflict bone-crushing
pain
I'm in love with this woman.
I'm spending all my days writing folklore with this
woman
Golden, bright flame
She is every brand-new, gleaming secret I cannot
name
She is every feral, pretty creature I cannot tame
I'm in love with this woman.
Our life is a frozen fame.



“Kitchen Table Still Life” by Molly Shepler



“Winter Shoes” by Molly Shepler

College

By Leah Endres

Year one the doors were open wide,
they just had to take it all in stride.
routines were set in place
With new challenges to face.

Year two things are invigorating,
more difficult they're persevering.
Joining clubs and settling in,
students' lives are about to begin.

Year three things are getting scary,
Students, parents and advisors are growing wary.
Are credits lining up?
Let's hope! Let's not disrupt.

Year four and graduation is near,
I hope students aren't filled with fear!
Futures coming fast and hard,
They are all leaving as shooting stars.

My Fall

By Taylor Clayborn

the cliff will be my horrendous fall
this will not stop the drop to my knees
the drop is the hardest moment
this, I ask for forgiveness.

my world seems to fall apart
He listens to my mistakes and urges me to move on
my life becomes hectic, and I feel broken
He puts me back together.

I realize my worth
His love helps me through the anxiety ridden moments.
I open up and allow vulnerability
His reassurance keeps me moving forward.

I drop to my knees. He listens.

Start Again

By Sylvia Patterson

I poured revenge into a cup
and sent it down the hatch
I felt it weighty in my throat
And on my curling thatch
I felt the skin you touched with yours
And peeled it off like film
I sent the body that you held
Into a funeral kiln.

Push Pin

By Leah Endres

It all started with a small friendship.
One that was for the books,
a friendship, with laughter and secrets.
Only her friendship was going to be ruined by
hooks.

It started as little squabbles
that made her head go 'round.
Soon, she would find, their fellowship
was about to face something profound.

One morning she woke up
the room an empty mess.
Her friend was gone, to not be found.
Now let's induce the stress.

The following week was going to be dread.
In passing there were no words shared.
She was filled with disconcert.
Once with awful fear from a malice filled glare.

The end has come to meet these girls,
all she needed was a push pin.
From tearing all the pictures down
she wondered what could have been.

Gaining Lost Control

By Olivia Burd

It started to go, and I lost control,
as it weakened, I no longer felt whole.
Denial can't fix the issue, the frustration just continued.

I gave up and didn't seek help,
I thought with time it would just go away,
Those hopeful thoughts just weren't enough.
Opening up became a struggle.

So, I kept it closed.
It's been closed for years,
But my heart is opening up,
accepting the facts,
and slowly adjusting.

I tried to hide it but that only lasted so long,
I just wanted to live normally and stay strong.
It trembles and shakes, but the strength is coming back.
I feel stronger now, but confidence lacks.
But it started to improve, and I gained control.



By Sydnee Pilarski

Stuck Again

By Kyler Moore

Stuck again, Stuck again, Stuck again
I reach this state every now and then.

Stuck again, Stuck again, Stuck again
Cut off from thought, I need my friends.

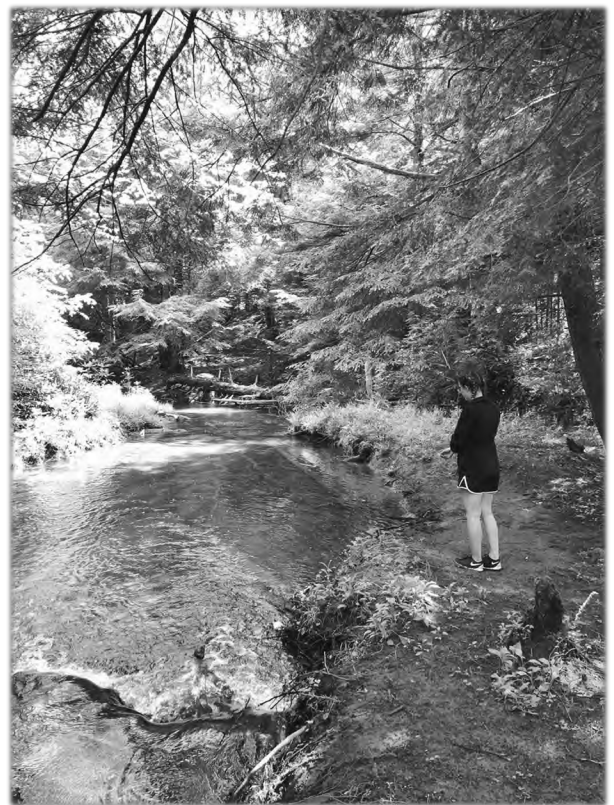
Stuck again, Stuck again, Stuck again
No matter what path I take, I reach the same end.

And in my mind? The emptiness is refined
Every endeavor's fate is signed.

I don't know what to do, what help to seek
I can't understand why the future seems so bleak.

Falsity breeds doubt, doubt adds to the void
I pray my resolve is not destroyed.

My only wish to regain the feeling that's been lost
My only wish to be human, no matter the cost.



By Molly Shepler

little piece of something

By Sylvia Patterson

I.

We left from the throat of a little white house
Into a hollowed mouth paneled with chip chop wood
Past a fat tongue with wheels hidden low beneath it
Out of the warm belly of a split beast
And onto the winding twisting blacktop path
Curling like a cat's tail
through a forest of little white houses with hollowed
mouths
That all had warm bellies of their own but
Not quite as warm
As the one we left from.

II.

At the tip of the cat's tail a wide berth spread and
there
A little piece of something intangible laid inset in the
ground-
A swing that swung so high
My feet would comb through the clouds
And split them into twos and fours and fives
and sevens
And a little pond that seemed so big
And made me feel so small
And ducks
Some days,
But only the best ones-
And you, too.

III.

You had long long legs
And ankles that poked from the ends of your jeans
And my legs were short and scraped up
And yours were scraped up too
But not really the same way as mine-
Spiderweb veins
Delicate, spiraling, springing, searching,
Clinging to sinews and corners and curves
On your legs,
and on mine, baby fat and brushburns
But we both had little bruises
Like clusters of stars.

IV.

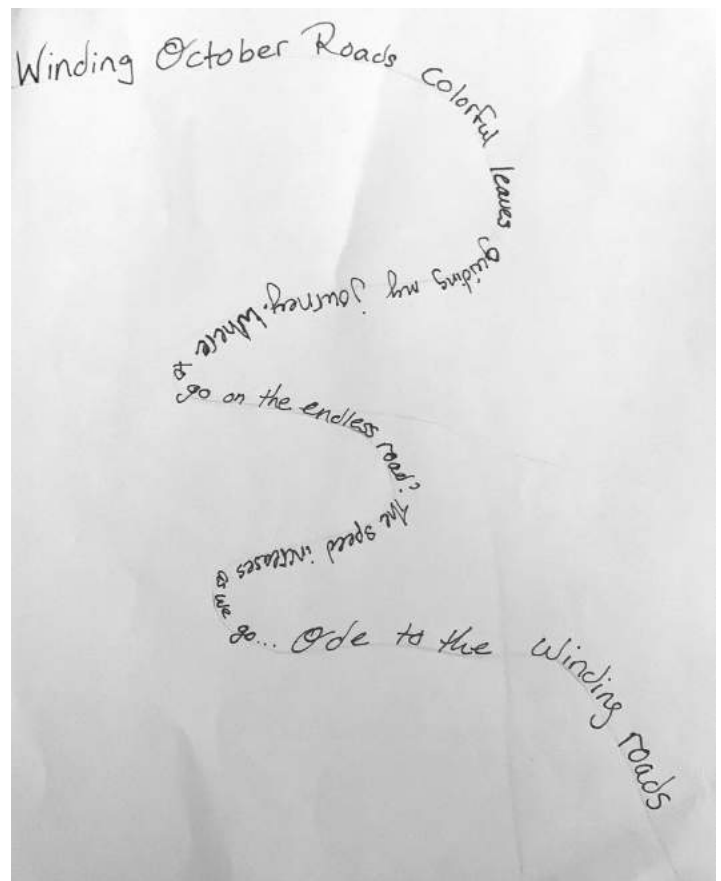
Knowing the pond is not quite so big
Is supposed to make me feel grown up
But it only makes me feel empty-
It's been a while since we've seen it
It's been a while since I've seen you-

V.

The pond is grown over with weeds and cattails
And the swing is broken,
Rusted over in disrepair,
And you can hear the low belting of frogs and cricket
chirps
But no ducks
And no you, either-
And that little piece of something has picked up from
where it once was
And gone away

Ode to Winding Roads

By Natalija Kutlesa



A Glimpse of Olivia

By Jason C. Merriam

I saw her passing through my café,
Auburn tresses flecked copper in the sun,
Shoulder length, framing the face, sways slightly,
Reflecting her figure, reed in the wind.
She approaches, features revealed in detail.
Her porcelain skin kissed by Apollo.
Fine brows hooding her bird of prey gaze.

My betters would scoff who am I to judge,
An aging wordsmith of little renown
Banding phrases of scant consequence.
Who am I? I have not da Vinci's brush,
Nor the deft hands of Michelangelo.
One need not be a master to praise beauty
As a young talent taught me long ago.

Enough nonsense. Her eyes focus on my own.
Twin gray orbs, each a sea of mystery.
A fleeting moment of brief exchange.
My eyes lower in respect from her riposte.
She seats herself diagonally from my place.
The hostess arrives with a query.
She replies in melodious French.

I can't quite make out the conversation.
A bundle of nervous energy
Born of excitement rather than tension.
I notice her apparel, boat shoes,
Bare skin to mid-calf, her khaki capris
Rising to a cameo top. Sweater,
Light violet, it was a chill morning.

Perhaps she came from the quay directly,
It lies downhill via the main avenue.
Where is her crew? It must be small indeed,
Her craft, to navigate the coast alone.
She would though, a woman of action.
I sip my chocolate, jot my notes.
Head bowed in study; ears opened wide.

Curiosity has been my sole vice.
How and why, the mistresses of passion.
To know, understand, feeling connections,
That is the reason for being, of life.
This time, I hear her very clearly.
She waits, for someone who has been away
For a long time. Family? Friend? Lover?
It does not matter. She has lit my way.



By Natalija Kutlesa



By Molly Shepler

The Cost of Freedom

By Jason C. Merriam

The musket shook slightly in my hands.
My land was not far from the first shot.
The shot that would be heard around the world,
My friends and neighbors against an Empire.

My grip firmed up as I raised to sight.
A handful of farmers, poorly trained.
A column of British regulars
Sent to raid and seize armaments.

I never drew bead on a man before.
They stood on the green to defend
Hearth and home against a greater foe,
Holding steadfast for the first volley.

This would be my first kill, I would not miss.
Someone fired, both sides blame the other.
Men fell and died, my friends broke and ran.
The British reached their objectives.

My shot rang out, he fell, I felt pride.
The call went out, over fen and field.
Men armed with wrath, filled with fury.
Men who knew how to fight on home ground.

I reload. They cannot find me. My pulse
Groups of three or four, ten or fifteen
Gather along the Boston road
Behind tree and fence, wall and stone.

Pounding. I take aim again. I shoot.
It starts at the Corners, They are surprised.
They send skirmishers out to little avail.
They can hardly believe how well we shoot.

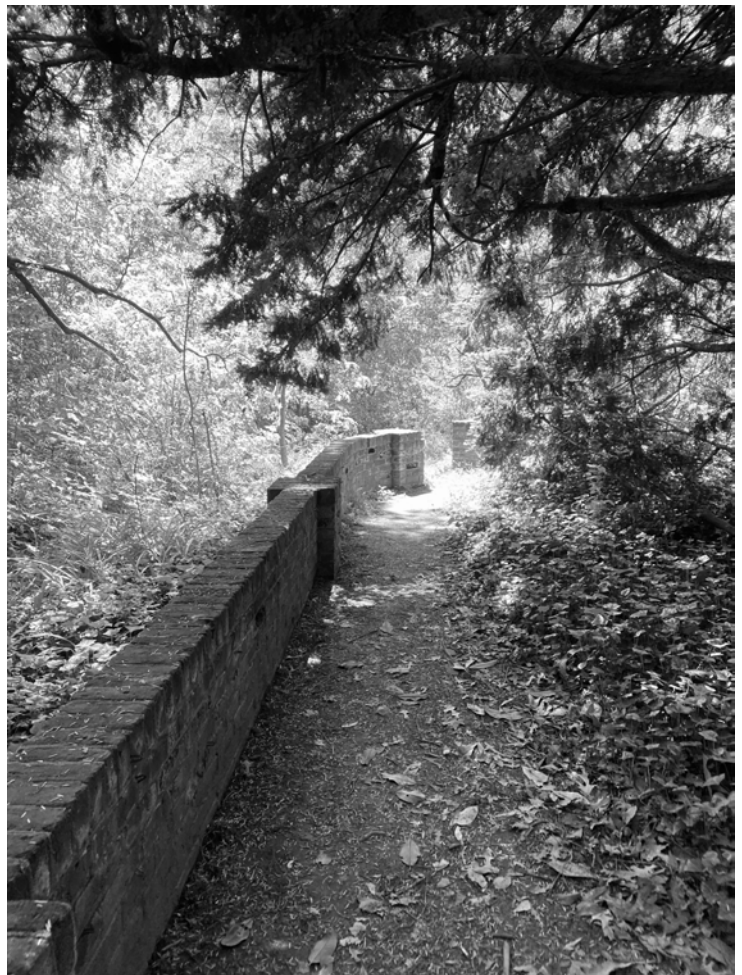
Another Redcoat falls. More shots. More fall.
We hunt to supplement our diet.
Small game, squirrels, birds, and deer.
From long distance, and quiet as death.

They are firing in every direction now.
Nothing anywhere near me. I hear
More of us coming. I reload and fire.
An officer with a flashing sword falls.

They begin to march. More muskets blaze.
Even their vaunted discipline fails.
They leave their dead along the roadside.
The chase begins. Sixteen miles to Boston.

That night I came home, blood on my hands.
The pride I felt then, faded away.
This fight I fear was too easy this time.
The war to come will cost us dearly.

Yet on that spring day, free men stood,
Took the worst an Empire could give,
Found the courage and will to fight,
And a Revolution was born.



By Morgan Wood

Collodi Complex

By Isaiah Burgos & Janelle Mudry

Searching, for what makes me you
Deciding my fate, from ventriloquistic view.
I am but a man in a man-less shell,
Manipulated by compassion. Blinded by twisted
bonds.
Bonds that turn your fate towards immortality.
Scars rattle the bone
A permanent imprint by your design
Though that is your care.

Porcelain:

Flawless, painted,
Cracked and tainted.
Wonder
-fully
Misbegotten;
Long forgotten
Lost lithe doll.

Lost, a path guided by doubt.
Little lithe doll, cracked and tainted
The aftermath to your cause.

Control your tide, let the light shine.
For that is the curse of misbegotten.
Unknow to me, my path is clouded.
Chords of life weight heavy,
Fate, my conceivable path.

Without fail,
The ageless hands
Of Time will take
Strings—reins
And cut
Or pull tighter.
No choices now,
Dummy, doll.

Hands of time pull
In abrasive rhythm.
No time. No fate.
No shift in action,
Commanded through your vessel.
Atonement shall be my only leisure.
Now, in wait as I dangle over reality,
Conceal my fate, I submit.



By Morgan Wood



By Molly Shepler

T. W.

By Payton Brooks

Have you ever seen an angel?
He is my favorite daydream,
A sky full of fluffy, pink clouds before a setting sun,
And drifting to sleep.

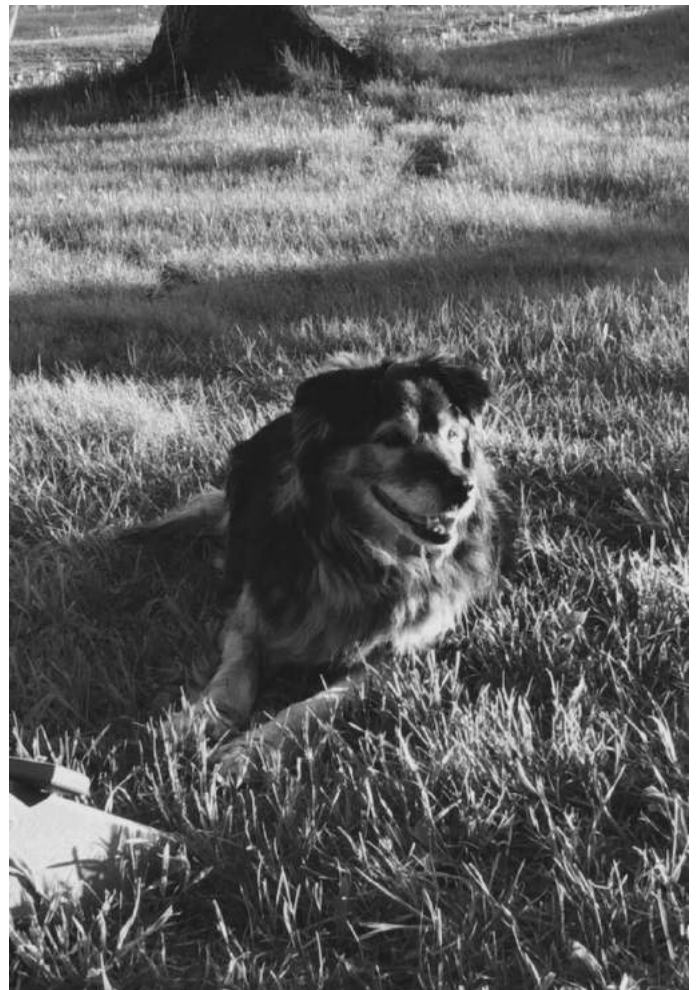
Have you ever felt this blessed?
I am entirely innocent,
A pair of drowsy otters holding hands down the river,
And kisses on cheeks.

Have you ever wondered aloud?
We are connected in the purest way,
A romantic poem recited under the cherry blossom,
And giggles like gold.

spring.

By Janelle Mudry

the low hum
of bumblebees
ushers in Spring's
warm flush.
and soon
cicadas will
mourn the Summer's
dying breath.



By Molly Shepler

My Angel

In loving memory of Agnes Joann Martin

By Kayle Martin

Her hair is so white,
Her smile shines so bright.
With her whiter than snow,
Her smile starting to fade, I know.

I can see it in her eyes,
Every time we part with goodbyes.
She is my star,
The bravest by far.

She's the strongest woman I know,
This I can tell you is so.
She's been there for me,
I love her so dearly.

She doesn't know how much I love her,
For maybe even that to her is a blur.
For she cannot remember,
Though she is a beautiful ember.

I know soon she will fly,
For her I'll try not to cry.
She will be an angel,
With her wings spread out full.

I know she will always be there,
Even though it is not fair.
She will at last be free,
And I know she will protect me.

She is no longer in pain,
I feel her when I am in the rain.
She is always near me,
Only now... flying free.

The invisibility of Mental Health

By Kayle Martin

They walk to class, tears in their eyes with no light,
Empty on the inside but smile shining bright.
They want it to go away,
But the mental problems always stay.
Teachers and peers never notice,
The bathrooms their best friend.
It's always hard to focus,
Will it be like this till the end?
They offer us aid,
But the price says otherwise.
Then positive feelings fade,
When the help seems to be a disguise.
If you ask for help then you're weak,
With a mask that is needed daily.
But sad words slip through your beak,
So sing with the sounds of a ukulele.
Although treatment is expensive,
Mental health is not a game.
Harsh words can be and are very offensive,
And all people should be treated the same.

Words

By Isaiah Melvin

Words are said - Words are read
Brilliant Words leave in the wind once their father is dead
Too often Words from the wise are forgotten
The world continues a cycle so rotten
Words not just our mother but the mother of all
Without her every king and nation should fall
So take heed to wise Words and listen well
For Words can save you from a living hell

A House Lost in Time

By Natalija Kutlesa

Nature was tired of waiting. The vines slithered around the house like a looming snake waiting to capture the house's final breath. The Garrett House in West Middlesex, Pennsylvania, has so much history. It was the first house, the first family in West Middlesex. The house that once fostered a lively family now lies in dust that travels through the perils of time. The old horse step stands in front of the house, hoping to be use one last time. Old, yellowed lace drapes that were once white lay over the windows keeping the secrets of the house inside. The large "G" formed with bricks on the side of the house reminds the town who was here, who mattered. A small American flag crooked in the window awaits to be fixed upright. It waits for the one who caused the house to be left asleep in the vivid memory of those who knew it.

The house was not always empty. Some say that before the Vietnam War it was vibrant; even the bricks had a glow to them until one fateful day. A Garrett sister's son went to fight in the war. His youth and resilience followed him up the bridge away from the town. The war was winding down. The letters stopped. The clouds grew grey. The young man was pronounced MIA. The townspeople's gossip echoed through the town like the night wind.

"He is dead," one echoed.

"He is alive," another one whispered.

Nevertheless, the sisters kept hope in their hearts. The house was shut. No more liveliness. No more involvement in the town. West Middlesex stood as a town moving forward while the Garrett House became its own place standing in the grips of the past.

Time moved forward. Decades went by, and still no answer from her son. They kept the house the same in hopes if he ever visited, although many things changed, he would always know his home.

The sisters are no longer in the house waiting, but the flag waits in hope. Every night, the house stands guard, observing every passerby, hoping it is him, while nature can no longer wait.



"Garrett House" by Natalija Kutlesa

By Natalie Zgurich

She is tall, obtains the most perfect figure, beautiful, but boy is she stubborn. Stubborn is a great way to describe her, but particular is just as fitting. Her laundry must be placed in the same direction organized by color in her drawers, and all her socks must have a pair. Her clothes are ironed to perfection as she never needs a drycleaner. She must wake up before 5:30, but she has no problem doing that. She climbs out of bed so elegantly like a queen off her throne. You may think she has a big appointment, but she only goes to her entry level service job. She makes it to work by 6:00 only after a shower and a cup of coffee. She does not need makeup to feel beautiful as she feels a natural woman is the most beautiful kind. She tells her daughter and granddaughters that makeup is the reason for pimples in attempt to shy them away from it. She has only ever worn it a few times for very special occasions. Oh, but she swears by her Chapstick as she always has some handy and ready to put on after each meal. Her hair had to be done a certain way, nothing special, but she needed to look presentable everywhere she went. She only went to one beautician, MaryAnn. Her work clothes almost looked like rags, but after working in a bakery for fifteen years, that was expected. She did not have the money nor did she care to go buy work clothes. Her weekend clothes and church clothes were always picked out with precision and matched so simply. Her personality is like the Pittsburgh weather. It can change quickly. One day she may be sunny but the next she is like a horrible thunderstorm wiping out power lines. She is not in a mood for the whole day as she is very easy to cheer up. Little things make her tick, causing a bad temper toward bad drivers, slow walkers, and people do not listen to her. Most the time, she works hard and makes people look. She has a soft spot for her kids, and she will tell you that. They are the reason she works so hard, and, ultimately, what she lives for. Her granddaughters encompass her whole heart, too.

This is my grandma. She is strong, fierce, and loving. I am so thankful to have such a wonderful influence to show me how successful I can be with hard work. When I visit, I listen to her advice because her drive is so evident. She always says she sees herself when she talks to me which makes me consciously work harder. Throughout COVID, it has been difficult to see her which makes us sad, but we both hope this subsides soon. This way, we can go back to chatting and eating our Wendy's for lunch.



By Kevin Farr

Blessings Made with Iron

By Katie Miller

Hunger gnawed at Sindri's stomach, but she knew eating would be pointless. All of the food here tasted of ashes and dead soil, and the metallic wrappers it came in burned her fingers. It wasn't always like this, she knew, but it turned out that Pop Tarts and canned ravioli were a hell of a lot less tasty than the garden-fresh beets and carrots her wife had gardened so readily before.

That had been seventy years ago though, and neither of them had aged a day while the world continued to revolve around them. That was the rub of being immortal in a land of the dying, she supposed; then again, the dizzyingly tall iron structures and steel cages on wheels the humans called cars were killing her just the same.

Perhaps that time span would have been a life to the people she'd watched in her time here, witnessing birth after birth and death after death. Things they described as miracles were hardly a bat of an eye to her, but no one cared enough to ask. All Sindri had become to them was strange, beautiful but strange, and normally, that's how she would have it. But then the oddities became the norm, and suddenly her bubblegum hair was no less strange than her pointed ears, or her wife's ruby red eyes. It didn't sit quite right with her to fit in with people who had once tried to hunt hers for sport; then again, these were the distant descendants of those bounty hunters.

Humming softly, she yearned for a piece of sweet fruit as she tied up her mass of pink curls, knowing they'd only get in the way otherwise. She didn't deal with a mirror, knowing it wouldn't help her blinded eyes one bit. Instead, she sat on the edge of their bed, surrounded by a floor that seemed to have been hit by a tornado. Clothes were strewn in essentially every nook and cranny of the space, aside from the matched overnight suitcases behind her. She could hear the door open and shut softly, the familiar cadence of her wife's footsteps approaching. Two cool arms wrapped around her, but a round mass stood in the way of a proper embrace.

"Ready for today?" Kelly cooed before pressing a quick kiss to Sindri's cheek.

"I'm ready to meet our daughters," Sindri responded carefully, her inability to tell untruths bringing up an issue. Yes, she wanted to meet their kids, to be able to hold and play with them. Even so, she'd enjoyed their hectic life together, and bringing a set of twins into the world was only going to make things more complicated.

Kelly let out a soft noise. The scent of blood was in the air around her; she'd fed recently, Sindri noted with a bit of relief. It wasn't exactly every day a vampire gave birth, after all. She knew right about then, Kelly's eyes would flicker to the relatively empty suitcases, and the stress of still needing to pack when the twins were due that day was settling in. "I'm ready to stop being a host to these two. I'm supposed to be the one feeding off of people, this is weird." When her joke fell flat, she sighed and sat down beside Sindri. "You're not getting jealous over our babies, are you?" The silence that followed answered her question. "Oh. You are."

Sindri huffed softly and leaned back. "It's been us since the '40s. It's gonna be weird with two other girls around vying for your attention."

Kelly only laughed before she leaned in to kiss her wife. "Just think of it as another adventure, love."

The reek of sterility burned the inside of Sindri's nose, causing her to crinkle her face in near disgust. One baby's cries filled the stifling air of the room, though the doctors seemed more concerned over fussing over her than handing her to her pink-haired mother.

It wasn't much longer before another soft cry entered the air, along with the announcement that "It's a boy!" Both Sindri and Kelly seemed to startle at this, having been told they'd be having girls for months. Despite not being able to see her, Sindri knew she and her wife likely had the same look of bewilderment on their faces; they didn't have a name picked for a boy, much less the items at home for one.

“Sin, love, hand me my phone please?” Kelly asked, having handed off the device to Sindri when they’d entered the hospital. Humming softly once it was in her hand, the vampire woman began tapping quickly on the screen.

“What are you...”

“We both like music, I figured it won’t hurt to name our kid after a song. Do you have any better ideas?”

Sindri stayed silent for a moment; she didn’t have anything better than that.

Kelly just laughed softly as she tapped a few more times. “Alright, there’s every song with a boy’s name in it I know, plus some I don’t. First one that comes on is the winner.” With that, she hit the shuffle button, and a familiar guitar sound entered the space.

“Blink-182. *Adam’s Song*, right?” Sindri checked, reassured by Kelly’s soft laughter that she was. “Adam. That’s a nice name,” she said softly.

At long last, each woman was handed a baby, Kelly getting their daughter, Gabby, and Sindri being handed Adam. She couldn’t see him, but she could hear the soft sounds he made once she held him close, his crying coming to an end. His tiny chest rose and fell so delicately, skin soft as rose petals to the touch. Leaning in to press a small kiss to his temple, he didn’t reek of metal yet, just of life and cleanness and warmth. It was a pleasant scent, she felt. Her fingertips brushed his tiny cheek, and Adam began to cry again. It wasn’t like before though, or one of hunger; this cry felt strange.

Kelly seemed to realize what had happened before even her ancient faerie wife. Sighing as she cuddled Gabby close, she sounded disappointed. “Did you just bless our son? We’ve been over this, Sindri. Fey blessings don’t work the same here as they do in your homeland.”

Sindri frowned as she held their son to her chest. “Why shouldn’t he be blessed? He’s half faerie, it shouldn’t do him any harm.” *I hope.*

There was another sigh. “...Just don’t go blessing any more babies, love. You know not every blessing works out the same way.”

“Don’t worry. There’s enough iron here that my magic shouldn’t hold.” The faerie woman reassured, eyes unblinking. “He’ll be fine. You know blessings can’t be made with iron around.”

As She Goes

By Elijah Williams

Fifty-five years I've lived. Thousands of things I have seen, three kids I have had. Ten grandchildren call me grandpa. I never had a break in life; I was born in a harsh world. An alcoholic dad, and a strung-out mom. They bred one hell of a kid though. Not me, my brother, he was a soldier. He got the Purple Heart and reached the heights of a three-star general. He was a looker; I was the exact opposite. I had a nose the size of an apricot, and I was born with no teeth. I worked many odd jobs, everything from a janitor to a carnie. I met my lovely wife in the circus. She's so damn beautiful, I've never understood what she sees in me. But I ain't complaining. Anyway, I've always fell in my brother's shadow. No matter what I did; when I farted, it was "Your brother's farts sound more sophisticated." I never cared, but it just gets annoying. I can't stand when people repeat themselves. It is the worst thing in the world, next to mushrooms of course. I never really cared about my parents or brother, I never really cared about my crappy life in general. Until the day Liv was born, my little Olivianna.

I have two other little whipper snappers, even though they're not so little anymore. But I never felt for them the way I did Liv. Don't get me wrong, I love em to pieces, but we never bonded like Liv and I. The day she came into this world I cried, for the first time I cried. No no no I bawled, I absolutely bawled. She was and is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. The first five years were some of the best of my life. The first time she talked, she said dad. Dad was her first word, that's the day I knew she loved me the same. The countless trips to the park. And the double chocolate brownie bite deluxe we got after every trip. Then her teenage years. My other two got real distant and were always out. Not Liv. She was open, free, and spirited. She was never distant and loved everyone. And everyone loved her, not a soul disliked her. She didn't latch onto a boy during those years, like every other teenage girl. She spent most of her time learning. Learning who she was, what the world meant to her. She never had astounding grades. But Liv was so wise for her age. My other daughters decided to go to your typical state school. Liv went to this real small art school out on the coast of Rhode Island. RHODE ISLAND, this is what made my daughter so unique. But then there was Marc, oh how I hated that kid.

He was twenty-three when Liv started dating him, but I always thought of him as a kid. He was the valedictorian of his class, played lacrosse, and was studying marine biology at the school down the road from Liv's. Still in my mind he was a kid. Everyone absolutely adored Marc, but I knew, I fucking knew something wasn't right. My wife always said it was cause I feared my little girl leaving me. But no that wasn't it, I knew the bond my daughter and I had would never be broken. I also knew that Marc wasn't who he said he was. When I got the call on April 1st at 5:45 in the morning, I thought it was a prank. The kids in the neighborhood treated April Fools like it was Christmas. I mean they worshipped the damn holiday. So when I got that early morning call on April Fool's, I hung up and went back to bed. I only believed it to be true when the knocking began. We never had a doorbell, I'm too cheap and not handy enough to get one installed. I could tell it was important, the way they knocked. It fell in rhythm with my heartbeat. It was loud but gentle at the same time. It was the knock of an authority figure. So I turned off the stove, not worrying about the omelet I was in the middle of cooking. I opened the door and when I did, I heard "Mr. Davis?" I responded like I always did but more nervous than ever, and I could see the badge protruding from under their coats.

"Mr. Davis, I'm sorry to inform you, but your daughter, Olivia Davis, has been found dead, and we need you to come down to the station and identify the body." I had nothing to say, I just shook my head and threw my coat on and left in the pajamas I was wearing. The whole way there, I said nothing. I felt nothing. I went, I identified the body, and I left. I went straight to the house my daughter used to call home. As I parked, I grabbed the revolver I kept in the glove box. I went up to the door and didn't even bother knocking. I busted in and Marc was standing right there in the doorway putting on boots, a packed bag beside the table in the hall. I knew he killed my Liv and I was there to return the favor. I aimed and pulled the trigger, not even hearing the ringing of the gun shot or feeling the kickback from the recoil. The .38 bullet landed right between his eyes, but that wasn't enough. I emptied the last five shots in the chamber until his face became red, pink, and white.

Putting one bullet into the chamber, I then turned the revolver to myself tilted my head back put the barrel under my chin and pulled the trigger. I saw something on the internet saying if you were to shoot yourself, this was the way to do it. Well, they were wrong, I'm still alive, and without my one true love. Marc did kill my daughter; they found the murder weapon on him. I was tried nevertheless and it was found to be a psychotic break. So, I sit in the finest loony bin the state has to offer. I wish I were in prison, at least I'd have the chance to be done with this world and see my little Liv again.

Childhood Living

By Dylan Evans

A person never truly realizes what they may have taken for granted until it is no longer present in their life. A simple enough concept, and one that many think about. Though this concept is familiar, and not hard to conceive, simple human nature causes people to forget the simplest joys and aspects of happiness, and when such things fly free, they only then wish to catch it with their hands and hold on to it for as long as possible.

A young man sits on the curb of a sidewalk on a warm summer's day, the breeze flowing through his hair and the jacket he has following the fluid motion of the air. His blue eyes are relaxed; dancing around all the views of the world around him. He stares into the sky, at the clouds painted on the bright blue. He hears and admires the songs of lovebirds who chase one another, gliding and looping as freely as the wind guides them. He then glances to his left and sees a pair of long legs in stockings approaching him. He lifts his eyes to see that the legs belong to a confident and brisk stride of a young lady. She has bronze skin, dark and flowing hair that seems to be singing the songs of the wind, and a light, fashionable jacket on. A true statuette of a person, and with each step she displayed a different pose of eloquence and power that could be modeled on a display for any product in a superstore, and the stock would be emptied in moments through wishes of resembling the beauty who displays it so easily.

The young man lifts his head and straightens his back in seconds as the lady walks closer. Her dark, auburn eyes do not make gesture towards him, though he continues to look and admire her as he was admiring the scenery around him.

'She could walk in front of me all day. I got nothing better to do, and I'm loving the view,' he thought slyly to himself. 'Not today though, old sport.' He smirks as she walks past and keep his eyes on her as she floats down the road, walking by the boy as if he were a rock in the stream she was rowing through. Just as he was about to look away and return to his admiring of the birds and fauna around him, a light, though stunning slap comes across the back of his head.

"Aye!" he yells out of reaction. He steps to his feet quickly and turns to whoever assaulted him, his chest puffed, and shoulders raised.

"You're such a pervert, you know that?" a young, stern voice scolds at him. "But I must admit, you're hilarious when you're mad! Your face is so red!" The boy lowers his shoulders and laughs.

"Damn, Elana. I thought I was gonna have to kick someone's ass! You scared the hell outta me, you know that?" The boy relaxes and playfully shoves the girl back an inch, though not taking much effort to push her away.

"Every time I see you, you're staring at some girl or woman. Don't you have manners, Dean? Not only that, they're always women who aren't even interested in you! That lady wouldn't have turned her head if a car crashed next to her. She's the kind of person who would want the EMTs to treat her ego because it was more crucial than the dying victim." Elana glares at the figure, much further down the road now, with her emerald eyes and lip pursed in frustration.

"Hey now, come on! I was just admiring her style." He slides his hands into his pockets of his leather jacket. "I'm a big clothing buff, don't ya know?" Dean smirks and shows his teeth, resembling all the honesty of a cat begging for a fish.

Elana lightly punches his arm. "Of course, how could I forget the street rat friend of mine whose goal in life is to become a clothing designer." She rolls her eyes and then grabs the belt hanging off the jacket, pulling Dean to wherever she wishes. Elana has blonde, almost white, hair and pale skin. If she were any paler, one would think she was a corpse amongst the living. She wore blue jeans and a blank shirt, with no make up on her face, though no need for it either.

“Where are you taking me anyways, man? I was fine at my little perch over there...” Dean spoke relaxed and lethargically.

“Man!” Elana sneered mockingly, “Do I look like a man to you?” she glared at Dean from his sarcastic responses. “And anyways, I told you days ago that I needed help at the school! Don’t you ever listen to anything you’re told? I know you’re more intelligent than what you show in school and around people!” Dean let out an unnoticeable sigh and straightened his back.

“I’m sorry Elana... I must have forgot.” Seeing as this was the first sincere sentence she had heard out of Dean in probably weeks, Elana loosened her grip on his jacket, ceasing to use it as a leash as she had been for several minutes.

“It’s okay...” she resorted back to her quiet and reserved way of speaking, “I just wish you’d take me seriously...” Dean was offput by her honesty and bluntness, as she usually was a gentle and nonchalant speaker.

“I take you seriously Elana. I’m real sorry I didn’t mean to upset ya. I’ll help you with your uh... wait what are we doing?”

“Ugh! The painting!” she scoffed and rolled her eyes, though she was trying to hide her smile and keep her angry expression so Dean would focus. He noticed the curves of her mouth rising, even through her resistance. He jokingly wrapped his arms around her waist and threw her over his broad shoulder with ease. “DEAN! LET ME DOWN!” she squeaked through laughter.

“Why? So, you can lecture me about responsibility and whatever some more?” The two laughed through struggle and rough play, and Elana wriggled enough that Dean lost his balance and began to fall from their path on the road. “Aye! Woah!”

Dean felt his feet slip and slid Elana into his arms, as they both fell to the grass next to the road. Dean landed with a thud on his back, Elana on his chest so she would not get hurt from his incompetent way of jest and careless romping.

“Oh Dean! Are you okay? I’m so sorry I didn’t mean to make you—” Elana’s words buzzed right through Dean’s head as they laid on the ground. He had hit his head, though he merely smiled and opened his eyes to look up at Elana.

‘She always had a habit of rambling when she was worried...’ he thought while he smirked at her. Her soft, angel blonde hair shined in the light from the sun, perfectly positioned behind her head where they laid. Dean lost his smirk and felt a jump in his heart, astounded by the image before him. He could see Elana’s lips moving, but he was too focused on the snow-white skin and emerald eyes before him to mind what she was saying. Elana stopped talking and looked at him with concern.

“Are you... why are you looking at me like that?”

“Huh? Oh uh... sorry I uh...” Dean’s cheeks flushed, and he looked away. “I guess I hit my head worse than I thought... heh...” He gently touched the crown of his head to make sure there was no blood from the blow. Meanwhile, Elana stared at him, relaxing a bit from her worried state.

She tenderly touched his arm and through stifled words asked, “Are you alright?”

Dean looked at her and smirked, returned to his typical demeanor. “I’m always alright. There isn’t a hit to the head that could knock me out!” he said in hopes of making Elana laugh. Instead, they both kept staring at one another.

“Let’s get to the school!” Elana said excitedly. She propped Dean on his feet and began dragging him again.

“Alright alright! You’re always in such a hurry man.”

“STOP calling me a man!”

Another ten minutes of walking go by and the pair finally arrived at the school. The doors remained unlocked for a few hours for extra curricular activities and students who neglected to grab their books from their lockers. Elana led Dean into the school, where he begrudgingly entered.

“Ain’t it bad enough they got me here seven hours a day? And now you’re making me do overtime,” he grunted.

“Hush. I want to give something to you.” Elana led Dean down several halls to the art room where she kept her supplies.

“I don’t think I’ve ever actually walked in there.” Dean said with a raised eyebrow. “I was never too good at art. Which is why I’m awfully confused on why you want me to help you with a painting.” He said with his head tilted.

“Well... I wanted to tell you something and it has something to do with the painting, and you could help me too in the process.”

Elana gingerly looked out the window of the dark room, the counters covered with supplies and half-finished drawings and sculptures. The sunlight entered the windows softly, keeping the room warm, and giving just enough light to see, but not overwhelm the senses. Elana tucked her hands together and kept them close to her chest, breathing noticeably heavier than before. She turned to Dean and sighed.

“I’m going to move away soon. This is our senior year of high school. I can’t stand this town and most of the people here. It’s compact and boring. I need excitement, Dean.” Her expression was sorrowful, even though her words sounded certain and confident. “Next week is our last week here ever, and I’m moving about three hours away to live with my aunt. I’m already accepted to the college there, and I hope to find a job too, so I can start... living life.”

During this, Dean looked with a blank expression. He raised his eyebrows and lowered them. His breathing shifted from heavy to almost nothing with each word.

“But... I... how... how are we supposed to see each other? You’ve been my best and only friend for years now Elana. You’re right, the people here suck, they’re cardboard cut outs... especially compared to you...” He cut himself off and shook his head. “And I...” he stammered off, unable to say what he wanted to.

“I know Dean...” she walked to him. “That’s why I made this... for you!” Elana proceeded to lead Dean to the storage area of the art room, where a hand sized painting sat in a single ray of the sun. Elana gently put it in Dean’s hand. Her hand revealed a portrait of a horse, standing peacefully in an open field. The detail was limited because of the size, but the eye could tell that much care and love was put into the picture. He looked at it and smiled at Elana.

“It’s beautiful. Probably the second most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen...” he looked at her with calm eyes. The two stared gently at one another. Dean spoke quietly to interrupt the silence. “When are you leaving?” he said with a deep, low voice.

“Two days.”

Dean reacted like a heavy weight champ punched him in the gut. “Damn...”

Elana gently touched his hand and looked at him.

“Elana... Have you felt like...?” She quickly put a finger to his lips and smiled.

“I’ll be back. Before you know it. I know you’re going to college at Kell since it’s only a few minutes from here. This is how you can help me. Please, Dean... please apply yourself and start learning more. I know you have interests, and I know how intelligent you really are. You didn’t study for the entry exam and still got into the college, but your grades don’t reflect that. Help yourself Dean and learn how to appreciate everything for what it’s worth.” She gingerly touched his cheek. Dean nodded slowly and smiled with a different look in his eye than before.

Those two days went by quickly, much faster than Dean ever wanted them to. Soon enough, Elana left to her aunt's house to walk down a path that she had been carving for a long time. Dean sat on the curb, in front of the field where he usually did. The long legged, model-like woman walked down the street once again. Dean stared at the picture of the horse in his hand, as the sun shone on him. The woman took a quick glance at Dean, though he did not notice; though even if he did, he would not have taken much mind to it. He stood up, looked at the field behind him and smiled gently, and then slipped the painting in his wallet.

“Not today though, old sport, not today.”



By Morgan Wood



“Field of Roses” by Natalija Kutlesa



“Daisy” by Natalija Kutlesa



By Katie Miller

A Crack in the Mirror

By Emily Irons

It was a cold and snowy night. The college campus was still and silent. She had just finished her busy day – a day full of putting on a smile when all she really wanted to do was sleep. She was never given the chance to be free or let alone breathe. She was here. She was there. She was everywhere. She spent most of her nights studying at the library and worrying about her academics.

The library – a stone’s throw away from her room; however, the late night walk from the library back to her room was long and made her think: “Was she doing the right thing? Was she at the right school? Was she *really* okay, *really* happy?” Questions after questions. Answers after answers. Although the late nights, questions, and answers seemed all the same, this night was not – this night was different.

A February night. Another late night of studying. She made a list: “math homework, study for history quiz, write paper...” the list went on and on just like her night. She was in an endless cycle: start assignment, finish assignment, turn in assignment, repeat. She asked herself, “Will I ever get to stand at the top of the Eiffel Tower and look across the Paris skyline?” A random thought, but a thought of relaxation, a thought of hope – back to studying.

A couple hours passed, and she was tired. She needed a break. She did not want a break, though, she wanted to keep pushing through the pile of books that sat beside her and mocked her, but she knew she mentally needed a break. Going to the bathroom – a taboo subject, yet a human necessity. She got up and went to the bathroom, leaving behind her studies and academic presence.

She walked to the bathroom and lingered around the hallways of the library. Her fingers ran along the spines of the books on the wooden shelves. Big books, small books, thick books, thin books. Each book having its own purpose and reason for being on a shelf in the library where she was.

The library bathroom was... unpleasant to say the least. Dark green walls with orange hued lighting that sounded like a beaten-up engine. Old. Dingy. She went to the bathroom in the first out of two stalls. She wondered, “Am I only able to take a break to carry out a basic human function? Will I ever have at least one night off?” She got out of the stall and washed her hands. As she was about to leave the bathroom something caught her eye. A single crack in the dirty mirror in the stingy bathroom. She stared for a while. She looked at the crack in the mirror. She also looked at every crack and crevasse on her face. This is what she looked like. This was the face she was given when her mother birthed her. As she was about to leave a second time, something happened. Her reflection stared back at her. Not in a way that signified the mirror was doing its job, but in a dark and diabolical manner. Her heart stopped. She ran out of the bathroom in fear and confusion. “Who was the figure staring back at me?” she asked herself. “I’m just tired and stressed. My eyes were probably just foggy.” She told herself these statements to calm herself down. These statements were lies; she lied to herself.

She got back to the place where she was studying. Her chair was slightly moved. Enough that it was important, but not enough for her to notice. Back to the pile of books that mocked her. Frightened and confused she rushed through the rest of her assignments. “What was that?” She asked herself. “Am I going crazy?” Constantly peering over her shoulder, she was worried someone (or something) was going to attack her from the back. Shivers down her spine and fear in her eyes, she finally finished the never-ending cycle of homework – for now. She packed up her things and left the library. As she headed to her dorm room, everything felt different. The campus. The walk. Her life. She closed her door behind her and sighed in relief. Another day was complete, another study session was complete, and another step towards the endless cycle was taken. Although she slept soundly that night, the wind swept through the campus, the full moon lit up the night sky, and the crack in the mirror shined as if it had just been freshly polished.

She woke up. Not to the sound of her alarm, but to her brain telling her to get up. She looked at the clock – 9:22 am. She missed her first class. Even though she was certain she set her alarm, she rushed out of bed and hurried to get ready for the day. An impending thought... “Today is going to be a terrible day.”

She made it to her second class on time. The professor called role and she said she was here. Lecture and note taking and more homework assignments – the cycle was starting all over again. Just when the day seemed as if it were going to turn out normal, it did not. She left the classroom and started to walk towards her next class. Suddenly, she remembered she was going to ask her professor about extra credit opportunities. She turned around and headed toward the class she was previously in. As she entered the class preparing to talk to her professor, she saw herself. No, there was not a mirror she was looking into. She saw a physical copy of herself standing in the same room as her real self. She was stunned.

“Need something?” her professor asked.

“Uhhhh no, sir.” She spit out as she ran out of the classroom.

“What the hell was that? Am I seeing things again?” she pondered. “I must’ve just slept in too late.” There is no way I saw myself standing in the same room as myself she thought. This statement was a lie. She lied to herself again.

As the unusual day went on, more and more strange things kept happening. She got to the cafeteria later than when she normally ate lunch. (Normal. What a pitiful thing to have a normal day.) When she went to swipe her student ID to get into the cafeteria, her ID did not work.

“Sorry, you already ate lunch today.” said a cafeteria worker.

“Huh? No I didn’t.” she replied, baffled.

“Hun, it says here you ate lunch about a half an hour ago.” the worker responded.

“Yeah. That’s when I normally eat, but I am just now getting here.” she said back, still in a state of confusion.

“I’m sorry. I can’t let you in since you already used your swipe for lunch today.” replied the cafeteria worker in a meaningful yet concerned way.

She walked away, bewildered, but not surprised because of how her day has been.

As she was on her way back to her dorm, she stumbled into one of her friends she typically eats lunch with.

“Hey, was I at lunch today?” she nervously asked. She felt crazy for asking this question, but she figured the answer would be no which would make her feel less crazy.

“Yeah, why?” her friend answered in a questionable manner.

She was absolutely shocked. Appalled even. How was she at lunch today when she was not even really at lunch? Her friends’ answer did not make sense. Today did not make sense. Nothing seemed to make sense anymore. She just walked away. No response in the world could make her feel any better or any sense.

When she arrived at her dorm room she just sat on her bed. She reflected on the entire day she just experienced. She woke up late even though her alarms were set. She saw herself, not through a mirror, but a physical, cloned copy of herself standing in one of her classrooms. The lunch lady said that she already ate lunch when she certainly did not. Her friend said that she was at lunch when she was sure she was not present at that time. She was disoriented. What was the meaning of all of this? Is there a meaning to all of this? Was she dreaming? The more questions she asked the more puzzled she felt. Searching for an answer to these seemingly unanswerable questions made her sleepy. She fell asleep.

She was sound asleep on her bed, dreaming even. She dreamt of a bright and sunny day. A single white violet swayed in a field of sweet nothingness. A small breeze filled the warm, mellow air. Calm. Serene. Safe — suddenly, a storm. A great, big, huge storm that crashed through the field. The clouds pushed away the sun. The rain washed away the warm air. A single flash of lightening slowly, but surely, struck the white violet. The storm passed. The only thing left was the stricken white violet crushed in the field that was once its place of serenity but is now its gravesite.

She woke up. She did not fully remember the dream, but she soon would.

It was around 8 o’clock. Another cold, February night full of studying. She walked to the library hoping that she would get her homework done and assignments turned in. She had forgotten about the weirdness of her day; however, it would soon come back to her.

She sat at her regular table in her regular section of the library. Like most nights, she was the only student, only blood-flowing body, in that library. The stack of books that piled up beside her mocked her once again. She made a new list: “write paper, history homework, study for math midterm...” the list went on and on just like her night. Assignment after assignment, she was working through her list. Finally, she thought, a little bit of routine and normalcy. How did her long night of dreaded assignments bring her relaxation? She was not sure. All she knew was that the day was almost over which meant a new day was about to begin – or so she thought.

A couple hours had passed – oh, how the days seem shorter, but the nights get longer. She was almost done with her homework list – almost but not completely. There was that feeling again – the bathroom feeling. Although she never felt like she had to go before, this time, as mentioned before, was different. This time, instead of going to the bathroom as a study break, she went to the bathroom because she felt called to go to the bathroom. Not in a way that “nature calls,” but in a way that she was drawn and almost hypnotized to go to the stinging, library bathroom.

The walk to the bathroom was still the same. Her fingers slyly lingered along the spines of the books. Books that had a purpose who were written by authors who also had a purpose. “What was my purpose?” she thought.

As she entered the bathroom, it felt darker than ever – almost as if a storm cloud was terrorizing over the library bathroom. She headed towards the first out of two bathroom stalls as she normally does; however, someone was in the first stall and, as previously mentioned, this was no normal night. “Huh” she said to herself, “I thought I was the only one in here tonight.” She got out of the stall and washed her hands. As she was about to leave the bathroom something caught her eye. A single crack in the dirty mirror in the stingy bathroom. It was the same crack from the night before, only this time the crack seemed shinier. Once again, she looked in the mirror and glanced over her features. Her fair skin. Her rounded cheeks. Her unkept eyebrows. Her deep brown eyes that looked like pools of chocolate. All these features were hers. As she was about to leave a second time, something happened. Her reflection stared back at her just like the night before. The only difference this time, though, was that this was not a reflection. The figure staring back at her was the copy version of herself standing behind her real self. “How could it be,” she asked, “that I am staring at myself, but not into myself?” She turned around to see if what she was seeing in the mirror was really there standing behind her – it was.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“I am you.” her copy self simply replied.

She glanced over her copy self just like she did in the mirror at her real self. The same fair skin. The same rounded cheeks. The same unkept eyebrows. The same deep brown eyes that looked like pools of chocolate. She was staring at herself but not through a mirror.

“What are you doing here?” she questioned the other version of herself.

“I am here to save you.” her copy self responded.

“How did you get here? Were you made in a lab? Are you a clone? How did you become a clone of me? Did someone steal my DNA? Were you the person I saw today...” she spiraled into questions like she always does.

As she turned around to look at the mirror, because, at that time, the mirror seemed like the only place she could find her answers, she noticed the crack in the mirror was gone. There was no longer a crack in the mirror; however, there was a shard of glass missing from the mirror. As she turned back around to ask more questions about the crack in the mirror and now, the shard of glass missing from the mirror, she felt a sharp pain. The kind of pain that hurts below surface. The kind of pain that comes from more than a punch. The kind of pain that one feels after being stabbed with a piece of glass.

As she falls to the ground of the library bathroom floor, she bleeds. She lays there in a pool of her own blood as her copy self stands over her with the shard of glass in hand. The shard of glass that killed her real self. The shard of glass that was once a crack in the mirror. She bleeds out even more. She is now a lifeless body. Just as her copy self is about to leave, she bends down to her real self. Her copy self glances over the same features that her real self noticed about her copy self. The same fair skin. The same rounded cheeks. The same unkept eyebrows. The same deep brown eyes that looked like pools of chocolate. And now, the pool of blood that surrounded her real self’s dead body. Before her copy self gets up to leave, she caresses her real face and kisses her real body on the cheek. She whispers in her ear, “I saved you.” Her copy self gets up and walks out. Not through the bathroom door like a normal person, but through the mirror where she came from. Simultaneously as her copy self enters the mirror, the shard of glass missing from the mirror, that was once a crack in the mirror, disappears. The mirror is now an ordinary mirror.

As her lifeless body lies in the pool of blood on the bathroom floor, she has a single thought left: the books. She thinks back to the books and remembers how each book has its own purpose and how each author who wrote each book has their own purpose, too. She now knows her purpose.

She now spent most of her night lying dead on the bathroom floor of the library. Her blood was everywhere. Her blood was there. Her blood was here. She was now given the chance to be free and even breathe. She had just finished her busy day and busy life – she no longer needed to put a smile on her face, and now she is finally able to sleep. The college campus was still and silent. It was a cold and snowy night.

Festival of the Crying Beast

By Shayna Lantz

Prince Alec let the guards push the dining room doors open for him as he strolled in, fixing his hair, and brushing off his tunic, to meet his parents for dinner. He took a seat along the side of the table greeting them with a nod. His mother gave a warm smile and inquired “How was training? I heard Sir Gareth gave your behind a kicking during the swords match.”

“I was just distracted from the settling of a heavy lunch,” Alec defended himself, not liking to be brought to face with his losses. From the head of the table his father heaved a grunt. “A prince doesn’t need distractions holding himself back. We’ll notify the cook to prepare you a lighter lunch from now on,” his father stated, sounding displeased to hear of such a bad report on his son.

“Well, I guess I better fill up tonight then,” Alec said, glaring at his mother for prompting a discussion about his flaws.

The smell of beef stew filled the room and Alec perked up in his seat, straightening his posture. Food didn’t entice him tonight though; his interest was in the server. Beverly, his parent’s servant, pushed a wooden food cart through the doors. Her dark red hair was up in a bun with two strands left out to frame her oval face. She made her way around the table placing steaming bowls in front of everyone’s faces. Alec smiled up at her tall stance with an amorous glint in his eyes; in return, Beverly gave a tight smile, squinting her almond-shaped eyes. The king’s eyebrows furrowed at the interaction and Alec could feel his scrutiny. Tonight was the night he planned to ask for Beverly’s hand in marriage, and he knew it would not meet the approval of his father; but that was an issue he did not yet have to face.

After dinner, Alec went to his room and asked his servant to fetch him some strawberry tarts. In the meantime, he sat in front of the mirror running his fingers through his dark hair, letting the grease it acquired since the last time he bathed mold it to his liking. He flashed a smile at himself, checking for food in his teeth, and gave them a quick rub with his knuckles. He started to pace his room when finally, his servant returned with the requested dessert. Wrapping the tarts in cloth, he placed them in his tunic and was on his way out of his chambers.

He waited patiently with his horse so he could give Beverly a ride home. When the castle doors opened, he took a stride up the steps to meet her, taking her hand and leading her down the castle stairs. “I thought I could give you an easy journey home tonight. My attention has been brought to notice the hard work you have been doing around here lately and I thought you could use the break,” he insisted.

“That is very kind of you, Sire,” she said, hoisting herself onto the horse before he had the chance to assist.

When they made it to her home, Alec rushed off the horse first so that he could help her down. He kept his hand on hers and lead her to the door as if inviting her to his own home. He reached in his tunic and pulled out the tarts. “I brought you desert,” he said, placing the cloth-covered tarts in her hands. “Like I mentioned, you have shown your work very well this week around the castle, and it is the least I could do.” He held his hand up as if not to accept any words of gratitude, but his lips inclined at the corners when she said, “Thank you, Sire, for everything you have done for me tonight. I promise it will not go without appreciation.” With this response, he saw his opportunity and pushed his way to the main point he set out for tonight. “You know, m’lady, there is one thing, if I may ask, of you in return?” He raised his eyebrows as if asking to go on with his request.

“Of course, my lord, ask anything and I will be happy to assist in any way that I can.” She responded with obedience.

“You’re a beautiful lady, Beverly. I would like to ask for your hand in marriage.” He straightened his back to stand as tall as he could and reached for her hand that was placed on top of her pastries that sat on her

other palm. A moment went by before his brows bent inward in wonder of why she did not take his hand or given a response. Beverly stood with mouth slightly agape almost as if to find the right words. Then the realization hit him. "I know it will take some convincing to get my father's approval, but you can leave that to me." He extended his hand once again for her to grasp and searched for a smile to appear on her face, although he still did not feel her hand. Her words gashed into him, weakening his authority and masculinity:

"I am so sorry Sire, but I have already promised my hand to another man." Her eyes showed sorrow, but he stared right through her with ill temper. A moment went by; Alec did not know how to respond to rejection from someone of a lower standing. Then, he snatched the pastries back out of her hands. He shoved the now crumbled dessert into his tunic and straddled his horse. "Do not expect your place in the castle to remain," he warned as he rode off. Beverly's words of rejection clouded his head and he knew that terminating her from the castle would not be enough. Suddenly an evil thought broke through his mind, and he steered his horse down a path that no one with a sane mind would dare to enter.

As he rode, the night seemed to darken faster than usual and the woods—although looking rotted—almost felt alive. He had never felt these senses before, but knew what it was without a second thought.

Magic.

He pulled the reins of his horse, bringing it to an abrupt stop, as he saw an opening to a cave that illuminated a greenish-blue glow at the entrance. He tied his horse to a tree and walked up to the cave with slowing steps the closer he got. Before he could call out at the entrance, a croaky voice echoed to him: "What have you, bothering me at such an hour?" He squinted his eyes to find the source when a tall shadow appeared on the side of the cave, making him step back. "I was just looking for your service. I can offer a good price," he responded, trying to keep his voice stable.

"Look at me while speaking, young man. What kind of service do you seek?" The voice sounded annoyed, but also compliant. Alec squinted his eyes, searching for the source of the shadow, when they landed on a short, wrinkled lady with a scrunched nose, looking up at him. He was less scared now, but still cautious, knowing of the power witches hold.

"I would like you to put a curse on a foe of mine," he stated with a demanding tone as he held out a bag of gold. The witch snatched the bag from his hands before he could tighten his grip.

"Ahh, what a price you do have to offer me," she said as she opened the bag and poured some coins into her hands, examining them.

"What kind of curse are we looking to bestow upon such an unlucky foe?" prompted the witch, finally pulling her eyes from the gold to meet Alec's. Looking at such a worn-out face made him wince.

"What kind can you offer?" he asked her, not really understanding all that magic has to offer.

"Well, do you want to affect the person directly or indirectly, perhaps through a family curse?" She offered. "I find those can hurt worse than direct curses. No one wishes to see those they love suffer."

"That will do just fine," Alec agreed.

"Just give me the name and I will place a curse on their eldest child. For on the night marking the last day of the week they will turn to a beast and thirst for those that they love," she explained.

Alec gave her Beverly's full name and rode off, not feeling the need to stick around for the show, and wanting to get to sleep.

He awoke the next morning and went to his father's chambers, thinking of how to tell him to expel Beverly from coming to the castle ever again.

"Father, I have some concerns with Beverly being in my proximity," Alec began as he walked over to his dad. "I feel she is becoming a distraction to me and don't know if keeping her as a servant will be good for my training," he went on, really selling his pitch.

"Yes," His father replied, "I have begun to notice you taking interest in the girl and would be keen on replacing her if it will be a service to the future of the kingdom." Alec gave a nod to this reply, satisfied with how easily he was getting his way once again.

Twenty years later:

It was a dim Monday morning. The shade of the trees still held the chill of the night in the forest as the knights walked their patrol. Sir Mericus stopped and held his hand to his ear, signaling the knights behind him to come to a halt and listen. A small distance ahead they heard a whimper. Mericus signaled to Sir Rowley to investigate while the others stood back. Crawling quietly off his horse, Rowley crept closer to the soft cry until he spotted a girl who was bare except for a large circle of cloth that sagged around her lap. She sat with her legs bent, cradling a limp body in her arms. She appeared to have splatters of mud covering her arms and hands, but as the sun peaked through the trees, Rowley saw a red tint smeared on her skin. The sight of what he now realized was blood made him take a step back, and as he did, a stick snapped under his foot. The girl's head shot up and her eyes met his through a curtain of short red hair. "Please. Help him." Her lips quivered as she spoke. Sitting up straighter, she tried to show what damage a young man had taken. Rowley walked over to examine the body and found a gash at the neck, leaving the head with no support and scratch marks running along his legs and arms. "Is there any way to save him?" The girl urged. As Rowley lifted his head to look at her, he saw blood dripping from her mouth and stumbled back. "Seize her!" he shouted, and the other knights ran over to tie the girl's hands behind her back as they draped a blanket over her naked body.

"Wait, no! Try to help him. I can't lose my brother!" She pleaded, reaching her arm out towards the body they left on the ground as they rode off on the horses with her laying face-down behind Mericus's saddle.

Rowley was in the lead as they entered the kingdom, bringing their prisoner to the king so he could decide her fate. They took the girl into the great hall where the king sat at a long table sided by his daughter, who wore an annoyed expression. "Sire, we do not mean to interrupt, but this girl was found covered in blood with the body of a dead boy in her arms," Sir Rowley explained to the stern look on the king's face.

"I swear I didn't kill the boy!" the girl hissed now, anger outgrowing the sadness she felt in the woods. "That boy was my brother and he was attacked last night by a wild animal." She tried to explain further.

"Then why do you have his blood dripping from your mouth, wench?" Rowley shot back at her.

"Silence!" The king cut in. Everyone went quiet to look over at him. "Could you at least allow me to excuse my daughter before we assess the situation at hand?"

"I can excuse myself," said Princess Elizabeth as she walked past the knights that were crowding the door. As she passed them, she stole a curious glance at the girl.

"Alright then, explain your case." The king demanded of the knights. Sir Rowley went on to explain what happened in the forest and the state they found the girl in, but as the king sized up the girl he did not look to be buying the idea that she could have killed the boy.

"What evidence do you have that she could have committed the crime and not a wild animal as she claims?" The king challenged.

Sir Mericus tilted the girl's head up by her chin, showing the blood around her mouth, but that wasn't what sold the king on the accusation. When the king looked into the girl's almond shaped eyes, he saw the same shade of green of the girl that he once loved and realized who was in his castle. "I see," the king finally said after a moment of pondering what to do with the girl. "Take her to the dungeons. She will be prosecuted on Sunday morning for her crimes."

The daylight was dimming and the king was standing in front of the mirror in his chambers, running his fingers through his beard, when his daughter's reflection appeared behind him. "Please tell me the word isn't true," she said with her eyes locked on his in the mirror.

"That depends, my dear. What is the word?" He responded.

"Why did you lock her up?" Elizabeth demanded.

"Ah, is that what is troubling you?"

“I don’t think she did it”

“You didn’t see the evidence. There was blood on her mouth and it was dripping off her hands. Not an innocent look if you ask me.”

“Did you even let her speak? Or did she not get that privilege because she is a woman?”

“I didn’t see the need to hear an explanation from her. The girl is a savage,” the king defended himself, angry that his own daughter was now challenging his decision.

“Oh, well pardon me,” the princess returned sneeringly. “I forgot no one shall ever have a voice in this kingdom, but you.” The king stood with anger in his eyes, but before he could get another word out, Elizabeth stormed out of his chambers.

Later that night when the sun had fully set and the castle was settling down, Elizabeth decided to give their new prisoner a visit. She made a stop at the kitchen to pick up some bread and cheese, knowing only left-over dinner scraps were sent to the dungeons. She was not able to get a good look at the girl earlier that day, but as she walked along the cells, she caught a glimpse of fiery red hair that she could not forget. The girl sat with her knees to her chest and her toned arms wrapped around them. As she walked up to the cell, the girl’s head popped up with glaring eyes. “I assumed you might be hungry,” Elizabeth offered as she held out a piece of cloth that held the bread and cheese. The girl hesitated as first, then reached for the food. “I’m sorry about my father.” Elizabeth tried for an apology, but the girl turned away. Deciding she can always come back tomorrow to try for a conversation again, Elizabeth turned to go back to her chamber. She couldn’t blame the girl for her silence. “Thank you... for the food,” the girl finally said before Elizabeth started to walk away. Turning her head back to the cell, Elizabeth gave a warm smile. “It is the least I could do. I’ll be back with more tomorrow.” She promised.

The next day after lunch Elizabeth went to the kitchen to make doughnuts for the girl in the dungeons. She found the old recipe she would make with her old maid that her father fired after she was caught stealing food from the kitchen. She set the cooked doughnuts on a cooling rack and decided to come back after dinner to glaze them and whip up some additional sandwiches to go along with the dessert. Once she saw her father had went into his chambers for the night she snuck back down to the dungeon. When she reached the girl’s cell, she saw her laying on her back, hands placed on her stomach, with her eyes moving along the stone ceiling. Elizabeth followed her gaze finding a lighting bug floating above.

“you must be hungry; sorry I can only come at such an inconvenient hour.” Elizabeth handed the girl a sandwich and two donuts through the bars of the cell. “Could I possibly have the pleasure of knowing your name?” the Princess asked trying to start a conversation.

“Thea.” The girl said through a mouth full of food. “you’re king Alec’s daughter?” Thea asked with a slight disfavor to her tone.

“Ah, yes. That would be me, Elizabeth.” Elizabeth grappled for something to say to change the conversation from her father, who she knew Thea was not a fan of.

“I never would have imagined that man could create someone so pleasing to look at.” Thea said, her lip tilted up to the right. Elizabeth pushed her hair out from behind her ears to cover her now red face.

“just to make things clear, I don’t approve of my father’s decision to keep you down here.” Elizabeth stated “And I’m not a big fan of the man myself. I would much rather live with my uncle Ulric, but he lives in the village of Amba and I am not allowed to venture in the woods. To be honest the woods have always scared me...” This got a snicker out of Thea. “What? My father said goblins and fairies creep through the woods.” Thea’s hand was covering her mouth and her cheeks turned up.

“You’re afraid of fairies?”

“Don’t they bite?” Elizabeth tried to rationalize the fear, but now Thea was rolled on her back and wiping a tear from her eye.

“Yeah, those little things are vicious.” Thea mocked. Elizabeth crossed her arms.

“Like I said, I’m not allowed in the woods. I am just going off the word of my father.”

“Well your father must be a real wimp if he is afraid of humans the size of my pinky.” Thea held out her pinky palm up wiggling it as if beckoning Elizabeth to her. In an unconscious response Elizabeth leaned in with a smile on her face, happy that the mocking was directed at her father now. “Do you wonder about the woods much?” Elizabeth asked.

“I’ve been adventuring through the woods ever since I was a young child. I don’t think I could say I’ve ever been bitten by a fairy though.”

“How are your navigation skills?” Elizabeth quizzed, now plotting an idea.

“I could probably navigate better than your trusty Knights.”

Elizabeth’s lips tilted up and Thea tilted her head wondering what she was so giddy about.

“I’ll be back tomorrow evening.” Elizabeth turned away as Thea’s hand reached out unintentionally, but Elizabeth was already on her way down the hall.

The next evening Thea paced her cell waiting on Elizabeth’s return. She wasn’t feeling too famished that day since the princess left some extra sandwiches and donuts behind when she left, but she was missing her company. She heard footsteps rounding the corner and perked up, squinting her eyes trying to make out a figure in the dim lighting. A breath of relief filled her when she saw Elizabeth’s wide eyes searching for her cell. Their eyes locked; Thea gave a wave to which Elizabeth returned a smile. “Alright, I found a way to buy us some time for the night but we should probably get as far as we can tonight- “

“Wait, slow down. What are you talking about?” Thea cut in as she looked down, she saw Elizabeth wiggling a key in her cell lock and began to understand. “Oh, ok, so how do we get past the guards?” Thea asked as she creeped out of her cell.

“Like I said,” Elizabeth flashed a smile. “I bought us time for the night.”

They crept along the wall around the corner where Thea found guards lying on the ground. “Did you kill them?” Thea shuttered, looking over to Elizabeth who chuckled as she pointed to the pastries in the sleeping guards’ hands.

“I just made them a little snack.” She assured Thea.

Elizabeth led Thea, who clung to her like a frighten child at a loud festival, through the castle and out to the barn. Two horses stood outside the barn already saddled up with bags strapped on their backs. The girls jumped on their horses and headed for the woods.

“Where are we going?” Thea asked knowing she was responsible for leading the way.

“You’re taking me to Amba, then you will be free to go back home”

“That’s a four-day journey.” Thea said bringing her horse to a slower pace.

“We aren’t running on a time limit here.” Elizabeth laughed.

“Ha, yeah I guess not...” Thea picked back up her pace as she calculated the time they were running on in her head. It was Wednesday night so technically they did have four days to work with. If they hurry, they could make it there before sundown on Sunday.

They travelled for a few hours that night, but as midnight approached, they decided they made a well enough dent to sleep for the night. Sleep came easy that night for the both of them as they settled into their blankets, but they knew morning was approaching fast and their disappearance would soon be recognized.

Elizabeth was lightly shaken awake the next morning to find Thea looking down at her. She rubbed the sand from her eyes and spread her arms as she yawned. “Why must daylight come so soon?” Elizabeth groaned.

“I’d let you get your beauty sleep, but the knights have probably been sent out to search for us by now and I’d like to keep my head intact.” Thea tugged Elizabeth up by her arm and sat her down on a tree trunk so she could drape her blanket back over the horse. Giving herself one last starfish stretch, Elizabeth heaved herself up and got onto her horse. They traveled at a steady pace, knowing that even if the knights have begun after them, they have already covered quite a bit of ground. As they journeyed, they spoke of childhood sto-

ries. Thea laughed as Elizabeth talked of her horse riding lessons and all the tumbles she took, and Elizabeth listened in awe when Thea told her the fairy tales her mother once read her.

The day passed quickly, and they noticed the light beginning to dim. Deciding it would be best to rest for the night soon they both started to scan for a place to set up camp. After an hour of searching Thea motioned for Elizabeth to stop and stood silent for a moment. "This way." She pointed to the left and Elizabeth followed. They came upon a stream of water and tied their horses up, as they unloaded to make some food. After they ate and refilled their water bags and laid out their blankets.

The next morning the smell of fish woke Elizabeth. She sat up to see Thea sitting over a fire holding a stick with two small fish kabobbed on it. She walked over and crouched next to Thea who handed her a cloth holding something inside. "I found some berries a little way upstream." Thea explained.

"How long have you been awake?" Elizabeth asked plopping a couple of raspberries in her mouth. "And how did you catch the fish?" she questioned, not remembering packing any fishing gear. Thea waved her stick in response to the second question.

"I've just been up for about an hour and a half. Figured I would make use of our sources while we have them." Thea extended her arm towards the river.

After breakfast they loaded back up their horses and headed onward. The day like the last went by quickly as their horses strolled along and the girls talked of what they wanted in their future. Elizabeth talked of how she enjoyed being in the kitchen and throwing together recipes as she once had as a child with her old maid. Thea mentioned how she had always had a green thumb and wanted to buy land someday to grow food and plant some meadows of flowers.

"What kind of flowers would you plant?" Elizabeth asked

"Probably tulips and irises, maybe throw in some marigolds." Thea shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, if I ever need produce for my kitchen I know where I will go." Elizabeth said, hoping that Thea could someday live out her dream so they may meet again in the future.

As the dark veiled over their heads once again they began to look for a spot to rest. They walked until they came across an area that was almost a clearing in the woods, yet much fuller of life than its surroundings that they came from. The moss was bright green even in the dim of day and vibrant flowers poked out of the ground. Everything almost had a glow to it and as soon as they approached the section of the woods, they had a sense of protection. Looking at each other and giving a nod of agreement they got off their horses and set up for camp. Their slumber was deep that night as they dreamt of warmth.

Thea awoke to something sharp sinking into her skin. "ow!" she exclaimed slapping her arm, but only hitting a fresh bitemark. "what the hell..." she examined the bite, it was almost human like, if humans' teeth were the size of needles.

"Eeeekkk!" Elizabeth squealed as she shot up to rub her leg. Both girls scurried onto their feet. Under Elizabeth's blanket they saw something moving about. Slowly Thea reached down and picked up the blanket letting the thing escape and out came a small human like figure with wings. The fairy flew up at face level to them then charged towards Thea. Elizabeth wacked it to the ground before it could get another chomp. This time when the fairy flew back up and floated away realizing it was outweighed. "Looks like your dad was right about one thing." Thea rubbed a kink out of her neck. "One thing." She added. Elizabeth laughed.

"Well the sun is about to rise. I guess it wouldn't hurt to get a head start today." Elizabeth pointed out as she began to gather up their blankets.

Midday was approaching and they had already covered a lot of ground. As they approached a valley an arrow shot in front of Elizabeth's head. "We're Being shot at!" she called to Thea as arrows began to come from every direction. They kept their eyes forward whipping their horses to move faster through the valley. "zig zag!" Thea hissed. Making it out of the valley they had to push their horses to run a little faster until they came across a forked path. Without stopping to think Thea directed her horse to the left. Down the

path they came across a hollowed-out tree with the hole facing away from the path. "Over there!" yelled Elizabeth pointing at the tree. "What do we do about the horses?" She asked in a low whisper as they came to a stop. Thea jumped off her horse and grabbed a water sack and a pouch of dried fruit and nuts. "Grab the blanket off your horse!" she replied to Elizabeth. Obeying the order Elizabeth jumped off her horse and yanked the blanket down with her. "Now, get in the tree trunk!" Thea demanded as she stepped on a stick to spook the horses. They trotted away neighing and Thea ducked into the tree trunk with Elizabeth. Stepping behind her she covered her mouth with her hand. They heard the bandits rumble past the tree following the sound of the horse's cries. They waited a moment before stepping out of the tree. "well we better get moving now that we lost our ride." Thea said yanking Elizabeth by the arm.

"Why the hurry?" Elizabeth asked still hesitating to get moving. "It's not like we have a time limit and it might be best to wait so we can be sure the road ahead is clear." She gestured her arm at the trail the bandits just a few moments ago began. Thea looked at the ground, grappling for a reason to get moving. "We're now low on food." She said grabbing at the small pouch of dried fruit and nuts she grabbed. This seemed to be a good enough reason to get Elizabeth to start walking.

The Rest of that Saturday was a quiet journey. Elizabeth had to jog to keep up with Thea's long stride and was beginning to tire out. The sun began to set, but Thea persisted on moving forward into the night. They trudged on through the woods until even Thea's steps were begging to slow. "Let's take a break here, but I think we can pull through this night." Thea insisted.

"I think we should just call it a night" Elizabeth argued.

"We are almost there, if we keep going now, we could make it by midday tomorrow."

"If we are already that close then it wouldn't hurt to rest now."

"Fine," Thea decided it would give them more energy to push forward the next day. "but we head onward at sunrise."

As they laid cramped under the one blanket they managed to bring, Elizabeth reached over and pinched Thea in attempt to lighten the mood.

"ow!" Thea jumped away. "what was that for?" But she was met with another pinch, this one on her side which pushed out a small giggle. "stop that!" she laughed as Elizabeth dove in for more. Suddenly Thea rolled on top of Elizabeth and pinned her hands down. Elizabeth was smiling up at her and as much as she wanted to be angry, she couldn't muster the feeling while looking into Elizabeth's round eyes. They gazed at each other for a moment before Thea leaned her face to Elizabeth's and placed her lips on hers. She pulled away fast, not realizing what came over her, but Elizabeth pulled her back down to meet her lips again.

The next morning Thea awoke with her head upon Elizabeth's chest, wrapped in her arms. She jerked up realizing the brightness of the day had arrived and shook Elizabeth awake. They gathered their food and blankets neither saying a word of last night. "We slept in a little later than I would have liked, but if we hurry, we can probably be there by mid-afternoon" Thea Started with her long stride Leaving some space between her and Elizabeth.

The further they got; the less anxious Thea became as she began to realize how close they were getting. After they stopped for a break to eat and drink Thea started to keep in pace with Elizabeth rather than striding ahead. Not too soon after Thea started to relax the woods began to darken. "It can't be much past mid-day, why are we losing daylight?" Thea began to panic, looking up at the sky to find the source of the problem. Seeing dark grey clouds roll in she grabbed Elizabeth's arm and yanked her to speed up. They ran a few yards before the rain began to pour. "Look!" Elizabeth pointed up ahead towards an opening to a cave. "Shelter."

"We're already soaked, what's the point?" Thea snapped.

"We can dry off and wait for the rain to pass."

Thea side eyed the cave entrance and when a streak of light illuminated the sky she muttered, "Alright then." A rumble of thunder picked up their step as they dove into the cave.

“I’ll try to start a fire.” Elizabeth wondered to find twigs.

“Don’t get too cozy.” Thea warned.

Elizabeth managed a fire and they both stripped to their undergarments laying their outer layers out to dry. Thea was sitting at the entrance of the cave examining the sky with worry in her eyes. Coming up behind her, Elizabeth wrapped the blanket around her shoulders and led her closer to the fire. “Your eyes are beginning to droop, why don’t you take a nap and I will wake you when the rain lets up?” Elizabeth suggested.

“you’ll awake me the moment the rain is clearing?” Thea wanted to protest sleep, but she could not deny her drowsiness, and there wasn’t much else to do while they waited the rain. Elizabeth gave her a reassuring nod and led her next to fire. As she curled her head onto Elizabeth’s lap the heat of the flames put her right to sleep.

The storm had passed, but Thea still lay asleep, when she opened her eyes, she found herself laying on top of a now dozed off Elizabeth. She looked for the opening of the cave but was met with darkness as the night had fallen. She didn’t know how late it was, but she knew she had to get as far away from Elizabeth while she had the chance. She carefully got up and felt her way to the exit as her eyes adjusted. Once she was outside, she ran. Ran as fast as her legs would allow and as far as she could before... and there it was. The pain shot through her, but she ran through it until she could no more.

In the cave Elizabeth was awoken by a warm breath on her face. She peeled her eyes opened and shrieked. Looking down at her was the face of a black panther but twice the size and two sharp teeth hanging out of its mouth forming an overbite. The cat’s eyes were dark green and looking into Elizabeth’s she could almost see a flash of grief hidden in them, but the lust of hunger outweighed it. She tried to squirm herself up, but a giant paw struck her down at the chest and claws dug in paralyzing her with pain. She glanced at the beast’s body and found a stretched piece of undergarment around its chest. Realization hit, but she didn’t want to believe it. When she glanced back at its eyes her thought was confirmed. “Thea...” she whispered tears dripping down her cheeks. The beast winced at the name and opened its mouth sinking teeth into Elizabeth’s neck.

Sunlight crept through the trees as knights rode their horses along the trail to Amba. The king had sent them out the night after the escape knowing his father’s fondness of her uncle who he despised. They all stopped at once and turned their head towards the sound of a gut-wrenching cry. “Over there!” Sir Rowley pointed at the cave in the distance. They jumped off their horses and crept to the entrance. Their faces went white with dread as they saw the same girl they had once captured a week ago, now huddled over the limp princess’s body. “Seize her!” Sir Mericus hollered, as the knights circled the Thea who had no strength to fight back. They brought her back to the castle once again. The knights dragged Thea to the king. “Where’s Elizabeth?” he asked raising his head in search of his daughter.

“Sire, I’m so sorry to bare you with this news...” Sir Mericus began

“Take her to the dungeons now! Her execution will take place tomorrow.” The king demanded. The knights turned around about to obey his orders when he spoke again. “Wait, an execution won’t be necessary. Take her below the dungeons, where she can be introduced to her new home.”

Sir Rowley and Mericus walked the girl down to the dungeon passing all the cells and rounded a corner where they came upon a set of stairs. The steps led to a stone door which took three men to open and inside was a cave like room. They threw her in and heaved the door closed. Every few days food scraps were disposed to the girl, but just enough to keep her barley alive.

On Sunday nights towns people complained of the roars that escaped the castle. The king decided the best solution would be to hold a festival, where his people could gather to play music and dance at the end of every week, to drown out the horrible agony attached to the beast’s cries.

Journey to the End of Time

By Dominick Knierman

It was a stormy day when Joseph was tending to his pigs. The barn was overflowing with water from the raging storm which made navigating the small space a hard task. The pigs were ornery and chomped down on anything resembling the stinky slop Joseph was feeding them. Life in this world was unforgiving and dreadful. The skies were always grey, the fields were always flooded, and the small cottage occupied by Joseph was merely four logs tied together with loose twine fabricated from pig hides. He was always working on his land. He made an honest living and tried his best to make the most of it. However, deep down in his soul he knew that he was destined to leave this ungodly world an honest man and would find more beautiful lands to graze upon and settle. That night, after the pigs were tended to and locked away safely, Joseph fell asleep. The world as he knew it was about to be turned upside down.

When Joseph awoke from his slumber, he found himself confused. He was not cuddled in his drab bed with stained pillowcases and sheets. He was in a luxurious cabin; the walls were made of an unfamiliar metal and the bed which he lay upon was made up of what seemed to be a golden material as soft as bird feathers. In his groggy state he found himself not sore from the hard days of work feeding pigs and shoveling manure. Because of this he sprung up from the soft sheets and began to explore the room around him, just as he began inspecting a peculiar device perched on top of the fireplace, he heard scratching at the door handle of his suite. Without warning, the door burst open and in rushed three little pigs. Each had a different outfit on, which he assumed was for the owner to tell them apart. However, instead of the too familiar shrieks and screams coming from their throats there were words! Taken aback, Joseph was terrified and confused. One by one the little pigs hopped onto the bed which he just came from and began speaking. Again, terrified Joseph sprinted for the door, but on the other side of the wall was a sight that he had never thought of seeing in his entire, boring life. Two pigs, seemingly male and female were both on two legs walking as if they were humans. Joseph could not believe his eyes.

“Sorry the children awoke you,” exclaimed the pig creature nearest to the cooker.

Joseph was in awe of how he would end up in such a place that the animals spoke in his language. He must have been dreaming, no, he must be dead.

“You are not dead; you have been called upon to complete the harrowing quest of ages.” said the male pig named Bert.

Joseph could not understand, why was he chosen for such a daunting task? How was he worthy of leaving his boring, grey world? Bert was sure to tell him the circumstances.

“You have been loyal to pigs ever since you were a boy, and we noticed how you have been craving adventure and to leave your miserable world,” stated Bert.

The pigs were in a century long feud with the Birds, a hybrid between a traditional bird and a rabbit. They were solid gold and wore four-inch-thick armor across their chests. The Bird army was sent to heavily enforce the region and spread their ways of living to every creature within it. However, the Pigs were reluctant to change, which led to hatred and death across the lands.

Joseph was reluctant to help but saw the desperation that rested in Bert’s sunken eyes.

“The birds stole our queen and her royal crown!” cried Bert.

Outside Joseph was met by a continuously gathering crowd of pigs, some bigger, some smaller, filled with whispers and shouts.

“Is that him?” cried a small, yellowish pig with a green cardigan.

“YES, NOW CARRY ON!” screamed Bert, who seemed ultimately frustrated at his fellow pigs. Once the crowd dispersed Joseph and Bert were left alone on a cracked, and broken road. Bert was willing to guide him to the bottom of the steepest mountain in the region. There, Bert claimed that his beloved queen and her

prized crown were locked away in a “human-sized cage” at the top. The supplies provided to Joseph was half of the amount he thought they would need. A rusty sword, a broken shield, and a thin chainmail breastplate (meant to be worn by a pig) were all that was provided.

“No food?” exclaimed Joseph

“Food is scarce in our village, as we are the last refuge for pigs in all the land,” said Bert.

This meant that any food needed was to be caught or foraged while on the journey. Joseph was prepared for the perilous trip through the thick, and uncharted territories that lay between the pig sanctuary and “Bird Mountain.”

“Tomorrow we set forth on our adventure. Time to get some rest,” whispered Bert.

As Joseph lay in the highly decorated room, he could not help but to inspect the sheets. The unexplainable fabric was explainable now: gold feathers - like a bird. The children that were so lively that morning had now succumbed to the effects of tiredness and lay at his feet fast asleep.

The next morning Joseph and the Bert’s family sat at the dining table feasted on wild berries, nuts, and slop to wash it down. However, Joseph was reluctant to try the slop even though that is what he fed his companions in his world. Bert presented Joseph with a large, worn, and mudded satchel which was used to carry the little supplies Joseph had. With his quest in the front of his mind he exited the large cabin with his trusted companion Bert. Joseph's mind was focused on one thing, he needed to restore peace and retrieve the Queen and crown. He had little note of his foes, or the troubles that lay ahead in the unknowns of this very different world. The pigs swarmed in once more, seeming to gather and whisper about the two travelers walking away. There were no celebrations amongst them, only whispers.

“We will restore our beloved sanctuary with your help!” announced Bert.

The two continued on the road until only soil was beneath their feet. The woods were thick and twisted amongst the branches were mangled bits of bone. Joseph thought to himself, *just what was he getting himself into.*

The first day of the three-day hike was clear skies and priorities were set. Bert occupied his time while walking by kicking rocks and singing old tunes from the times when his world was at peace. Joseph was in awe of the spectacle of this very different place. The trees seemed to stand still as if there was not a gust of wind for miles. Much different than the grey skies from before were the clear, windless environment he found himself in. As dusk grew more apparent to the two travelers, they both decided to seek shelter. They had walked more than ten miles in one direction, and Joseph was still determined to restore peace. Bert pointed to a rock jutting out of the thick brush and trees. Just as the sun was beneath the horizon they stumbled into a large cave. Inside, they could hear echoes from their footsteps, and a terrifying smell came upon them. Just as Joseph lit a match which illuminated a small portion of the cave, he came across an occupant of the space. A large entity fluttered down past his head and landed blocking the entrance. Bert, armed with a small dagger, thrust himself towards the shadow creature only to be swept off his feet in one blow. Terrified, Joseph ran to the entrance and illuminated the face of the shadowy creature.

“A bat?” exclaimed Joseph.

“Yes, I am a bat, and I am curious to know why you have entered my dwelling,” said the bat, unaffected by Bert’s maneuver of attack.

Joseph and Bert told the monstrous bat the effects of the Bird’s plan to take the queen on the neighboring village. The bat, known as “Twig,” was a simple-minded soul and decided to befriend the two travelers. Twig gestured to the far wall of the massive cave. “We can help,” said Twig. Just then, two more shadowy bats flew down from the ceiling.

With the permission from Twig, Cone, and Pop, Joseph lit a fire on the center of the floor near the entrance for ventilation. With food in mind, Joseph’s quest to find the queen was postponed until he had filled his belly. Bert foraged nuts and berries, but that filled the smallest section of his tumbling gut. Twig had big plans for them in the early hours before dawn, so the travelers rested their heads, Joseph’s on his satchel and Bert did fine with a rock. The fire kept them warm while the bats ensured no Birds would be able to locate

them. Joseph once again wondered what was next for him that morning in this crazy place.

With five miles behind them and ten to go, Joseph and Bert both woke up early. Bert complained that his neck was stiff but had the courage to continue to serve as a guide. Twig, Cone, and Pop were all standing in the shadows near the entrance, slightly illuminated by the embers from the previous fire.

“We will carry you, but we will not cross within a mile from the mountain,” announced Twig.

Joseph was flabbergasted. How was he going to feel comfortable putting his life in the hands of a giant simple-minded bat? However, Bert was glad because that meant that he did not have to walk two more days through thick and treacherous woodlands. With the main quest in mind the two jumped on the backs of Twig and Cone, Pops was too old to fly so he stayed in the dark cave. Before dawn, the two bats departed with the two companions on back. The skies were clear, not a storm cloud in sight. The wind was nonexistent which allowed the bats to glide effortlessly and undetected. Joseph's pig shaped chainmail fit awkwardly, and the hood covered his eyes. In a desperate effort to remove the hood the cloak and his only piece of armor ripped off and into the dark night. Just as the sun began to peak over the horizon the biggest mass that Joseph had ever seen had come into view. A mountain, taller than the highest hills on earth stood. With the sun beginning to glare off the peak a bright gold glimmered into the companion's eyes. The cage where the queen and crown were located. Just as the bats promised they were transported a mile from the ominous mountain.

“Thank you, you will be rewarded for your services,” sighed Bert as he presented Twig and Cone four crushed nuts and three smashed berries.

“Save them, you will need that food for yourself,” said Cone. With one swoop the duo of bats ascended into the air rapidly, seeming to try to maneuver themselves low to the tree line to be unseen.

Joseph was wearier of the sounds he made as the two made their way towards the giant rock. Bert, however, carried on kicking rocks and singing to himself. Joseph did not feel right about his environment. The smell began to sting his eyes, and the greenery that was once before had turned into less dense shrubbery. In an instant, they were attacked. Joseph drew his rusty sword from his side and fought the biggest bird he had ever seen. Unlike the tales he heard from Bert's friends at the village, the Bird was not wearing armor, but a tunic made of the hide of a pig. With one thrust he stabbed through the weathered vest of his opponent, striking its heart, and ending its life. Just then he heard a scream only heard back on his world. The shrieking cries and squeals of a pig. Joseph turned around just in time to see a Bird soldier flying away with his trusted friend. They flew farther and farther away until all that was left of their image in Joseph's mind was the cries of his companion. Once again, he was alone and isolated.

Now was not the time to give up on his main quest. His guide and friend may be gone but that was not going to stop him from restoring peace and order to the pig sanctuary. As he approached the base of the colossal mountain his mind was full of rage and determination to avenge his ally and find the Queen. The climb was not easy for Joseph. He was only used to the traditional flat land on his planet and did not have experience climbing rigid surfaces. Luckily, he located a beaten path carved into the rock ledge. The journey was immense, and Joseph respected that. He was patient to steadily climb along the path until, just before noon, he arrived at the peak.

With little Bird presence it was hard for Joseph to comprehend how this was even a prison to begin with. With only that single casualty that morning he had not encountered any resistance due to his stealth and patience. The gate was guarded by two ‘eagle-like’ birds that could only be described as wearing solid gold armor, not the tunic he previously witnessed. With the goal in sight Joseph must complete what he was summoned to this planet to do. He sneaked above the first guard by climbing the rock ledge.

Bravely and swiftly, he dropped onto the giant bird's head, and with one swing beheaded the unearthly creature. Alarming the second guard was a mistake. The powerful wings of the Bird guard blew a gust of wind stronger than anything he had ever encountered before. Knocked off his feet, Joseph scrambled over the corpse of his second victim while the guard flew towards him. Joseph's speed was a blessing and as the momentum of the guard's neck came down to peck him it was met with his sword. However, the Bird continued to peck Joseph leaving him disoriented and bloody. With little energy Joseph slashed at the opponent's armor which did not even dent. Then, rolled between the legs of the slow and injured guard and poked a hole clean through the back of the Bird's spine. It was over, he had won the battle.

He managed to search the bodies of the fallen guards and find a key ring. The gates were open. Joseph did not know what to expect behind the large wooden doors, and he had lost all desires to injure another soul. As he hobbled into the well-lit corridor, he used his sword as a crutch. At the end of the seemingly endless hallway the muted cries of a woman became more apparent. As he proceeded through the last set of double doors he came face to face with an innocent, blonde haired, green eyed beauty. She looked as if she had been stripped of all dignity and seemed too weak to stand up. A crown lay on the table beside her stone cot, without the precious gemstones that once occupied it.

“Who are you?” said Joseph, he was not expected to find such a beautiful woman locked inside the large cage on the highest peak.

“I am the queen of the pig sanctuary,” said she. “You can call me Nancy.”

Since she was unable to walk, Joseph carried her down the hallway and into the light. The sun was shining brightly in the sky, not a Bird in sight. Joseph never met back with his companion Bert; he did not find a trace other than the memories he had given Joe during their perilous journey. When he and the Queen arrived back at the village, there was an uproar. Every pig in the region celebrated with joy and laughter. Unfortunately, not every house was filled with excitement.

Back at Bert’s cabin, Joseph explained to his companion’s wife what an outstanding job Bert did in providing him with a safe passage to complete his quest.

“He will always be remembered as an honorable and courageous pig”, both agreed.

As a reward for restoring the sanctuary with their Queen, Joseph was celebrated as a hero. With his previous life being grey and boring, Joseph decided instead of returning to his previous life he wanted to start a new one. He married Nancy and became the King of the pig sanctuary. His life would never be boring ever again.

A Tale For Truffles

By Hank Fisher

I woke up in a daze. The last thing I remember was exploring with my pet pig Ponti. We were in search of truffles for the village, for my starving wife and beautiful children. Ponti led me towards the bridge into town. The bridge was poorly constructed, not unlike the rest of the town. It was made of cobble and miscellaneous stones, as well as weak wooden beams beneath it. It protected travelers not from a stream, but instead from a large trench used in a war years ago. I've had never been under the bridge, only over it, and even then, I have always had the hairs on my neck stand, as if something unnatural were to live under there.

As Ponti led me under the bridge, we came across a troll emerging from a cave. He wasn't big looking, about three feet tall and with a staff. He was very green, with grey hair along with oily skin and mumps all over his body. He wore a tattered cloak, droopy red hat with a mahogany staff with a glowing blue rock on top of it. He also had a hunched back like a fairy tale my parents told me about years before. I remember Ponti bringing me down under the bridge. The troll tapped his staff twice and everything went blue and spiraling, as if I were falling down an endless hole. My stomach was churning and I felt as if I had puked, as if something had left my body, but amongst the blue nothing visible had left me. Then everything went dark.

In my dazed state, attempting to remember the details of how I had arrived there, I had failed to properly realize where *here* was. I surveyed my surroundings. I was still under the bridge, cold and musty, but everything seemed off. I attempted to stand but found myself unable to do so. Looking around the barren ground, all I could see was moldy rocks and mushrooms of varying shapes and sizes. Over further, though, appeared to be someone lying down. I tried to stand but found myself unable to do so. I couldn't feel my fingers or toes. Attempting to look at my hands yielded a surprise I was not ready for: hooves. Looking around I realized my lowered viewpoint was not due to lying down, but because I was now quadrupedal.

My head began to spin as my senses became clearer and clearer. My sight wasn't hazy from passing out, but because I now had the eyesight of a lesser beast. My realization of the mustiness and dankness under the bridge was the result of an increased sense of smell. Looking over my shoulder I saw pink, naked flesh, and a corkscrewed tail. I have, somehow, become Ponti.

Hoping this to be a dream, I rammed my head a couple times into a rock, squealing. *I must be dreaming*, I kept telling myself, *I must be*. After feeling blood gushing from my forehead, and seeing tears of red fall into the mud, I realized the truth. *Maybe the troll did this, the nasty cur*. Then I remembered: the other body.

I walked over, not realizing my talent for being on all fours would come in handy like this, to examine the body. As I got closer, I saw what I had already expected: myself. I had never had such a clear look at myself, usually requiring a stream or shining metals to see myself. I was. . . less handsome than I expected. My bald head glistened in the sun along with my sunglasses, and my clothes were brown, muddy, and unsightly. My only protection from monsters such as the troll were my walking stick and Ponti. As I approached the body stirred slightly but did not stand up. Pushing my body over onto its back revealed a gushing wound on the temple where I had landed on a rock. There were bloody muscular tissues sticking out from the wound. The body groaned but again did not rise.

After a moment of analyzing my body, I heard rustling in the scraggly bushes nearby. Fearing scavengers, I didn't know to hide or to protect my body. A small squirrel jumped from behind the bushes, and I realized my fear was unfounded, until a large vulture swooped down onto the squirrel. The beast was massive to me, and Ponti was a large pig, *I was a large pig*. The beast must have been around eight feet tall, pitch black save for a fleshy, drooping face. Its beak was blood red, perhaps from an earlier meal. Its wingspan was probably triple my current body length. Its talons sunk deep into the squirrel, but the free foot revealed metal claws. It lowered its head and squawked at me, then swallowed the squirrel in one gulp.

Feeling a fluid dripping down my back leg, I was paralyzed with fear. I looked back at my incapacitated body in the mud and felt a sudden urge; an urge to defend my body. Whether it was some sort of primal urge from my new swine brain, or it was some twisted sense of self-preservation, but before I knew what was

happening, I was charging the vulture. My little hooved legs, while short, were shockingly fast. Before the vulture could even react, I was snout-deep in the fluffy down feathers of the vulture's breast. Ponti's . . . or, rather, my snout, was adorned with yellowed tusks, jutting awkwardly from my lower jaw. One of them must have punctured the vulture's chest as it squealed and screeched in pain, soft red feathers plastered to its chest. After a moment of realization shared between the two of us, we locked eyes and charged.

A metallic talon slashed across my head, briefly getting caught in my wound from bashing my head. The blood began to flow from the wound again, drenching my face with blood. I charged the vulture again but was knocked back by a blow from the creature's surprisingly sturdy wing. Rolling back onto my feet, it yet again charged me, but as I braced for impact, I instead felt eight sudden, sharp pains in my spine, and the weight lift off my feet. The vulture had taken off with me in its clutches. I attempted to bite the monster's foot but could not reach it. I lowered my head, and quickly raised it straight up, driving my tusk directly into the foot behind my head. Moments later I was in freefall.

I fell directly into the bush from which the creature originally attacked us. I was scratched to all hell, laying on my side and covered in an egg-like substance. With my eye facing the sky, I saw the creature above me, but still felt a pressure in my neck. Upon standing, I saw that I had fallen into the nest of the creature, and the substance that felt like egg yolks was in fact egg yolks.

The monstrous vulture landed under the other side of the bridge. Seeing my position, it began to charge me, its eyes bright red. It ran with a limp as I realized the pressure in my neck was the disembodied foot of the beast, still lodged inside my neck. I was weak and had no chance against the creature after my fall. It screamed as I began to accept my fate. Then the creature stopped suddenly, and behind it was my body screaming and biting the creature on all fours. The vulture turned to attack my body but bumped its head briefly on the bridge, making several rocks fall from the poor bridge. A support beam beside the bridge cracked slightly and shivered.

Feeling the same animal instincts overcome my body, I charged towards the fight. The avian beast turned to face me. It lowered its head, spread its wings and screeched an otherworldly screech. I turned right before contact with the monstrosity, and jumped off the support beam, back to the safety out from underneath the bridge. The bridge collapsed directly on to the vulture, instantly killing it. In my urge to protect myself from harm, I failed to remember to protect my body. I saw my body sticking up from the rubble, screaming a sound I've never heard a human make.

I ran across the rubble and attempted to pull the body from the rubble to no avail. As I looked down at my beautiful body, I had seen more blood than I cared to see in a lifetime. As the screech ended, I saw the life fade from my own eyes. With a final yelp of pain, my body was no longer one with the living.

"Well, that's kinda fucked." I heard a nasty voice behind me. "I don't know what I expected but hell's bells it wasn't that." It was the troll from earlier. It had a large umbrella to protect it from the sun's harmful rays, standing behind me amongst the bridge's rubble. It spoke in a cackle and a whisper, combined in an unpleasant speech cocktail.

Did he do this to me? I thought to myself. "Yeah, I did fucko. You were dickin' around my bridge with your pig. I thought this would be a good punishment, I'd Freaky Friday you two for like an hour but you managed to off your body there, huh? Cheeky bastard."

This couldn't be true. Only an hour of waiting and things would have gone back to normal? I began to experience a unique sensation. A mixture of grief, self-pity, anger, sadness, all within my simple pig brain. Should I attack this troll? He did this to me. But I couldn't take him, nor would that solve my issue. Should I try to kill myself? Where would that get me? I tried to speak to the troll, verbalizing for the first time since I became Ponti.

"Oink." Well, that didn't go as expected.

"Yeah, you're a pig, what did you expect shithead? Well, might as well take you back to my place. This bridge was more a summer home anyway. I did this to ya, might as well give ya a wish or a home or something."

A wish? I thought to myself.

“Yeah, a wish, but I can’t make your body come back and I’m taking a break from switching bodies. Something simple, like money, or toppling a kingdom.” He spoke with so much sass. I doubted he even felt pity for my situation.

I began to follow him. If he offered me shelter and a home, I was going to take it. My family, my children, they weren’t going to want to see me like this. Why would they want me? A pig with the brain of a peasant. Me and the troll would go on to live together for years as I waited for the perfect wish. Little did I realize, though, how nice the troll could be. As we lived together and both of us came to terms with what had happened, a friendship blossomed. As the friendship further developed, it became so much more. Eventually, I thought of the perfect wish.

Flower the Troll, I thought, *will you make me the happiest pig on this world?*

“Yes, yes, a million times yes!” We embraced and went on to live happily as two husbands for years afterward. As I lay there in my final nights, the troll having aged not a day while I lived an entire lifetime beside him, I couldn’t have thought of a better wish to have made. But a final wish did pop into my head.

“If you could change it, would you?” He said, stroking my hoof gently.

Not a thing. I wish that you live your best life, Flower. I already lived mine with you. After looking my final look into Flower’s cataract-ridden eyes, everything went dark for the final time.

The Untold Truth

By Hunter Knapczyk

Lately we've been training, planning, and organizing a rescue mission down on the surface, as Star regiment hasn't returned from their military operation for weeks. I don't belong here; I'm not meant to be in the military. I truly don't know where I belong, I don't even know my own parents. I stand here in the mirror washing away the blood from today's earlier training session. They always pair me up with Malik, the top cadet in Ender, he just turned 20 a few weeks ago, very tall, blonde hair, and highly skilled in close combat. I mean it showed today for sure.

"Come on Kavan, is that the best you can do?" shouted Malik.

"Cut it out already!" uttered a voice.

"There is nothing to see Marisa, it's just a two cadets training," exclaimed Malik.

All I heard was a ringing sound in my ear, I couldn't understand a single word, all I saw was the glare of the sun blinding my eyes. A large figure was standing over the top of me, blocking the sunlight. The figure grabbed me by my leather jacket and lifted me up to my feet. As my eyes began to focus on the tall figure, I realized it was Captain Vesper of Eagle Regiment.

"Alright that's enough training for the day... head back to the barracks cadets," Captain Vesper exclaimed.

I began to walk back to the barracks, body in pain and my straight black hair all messy. I noticed the horizon to my left; it was so sublime no words could describe the view I saw. The reddish gold hue that lit up the night sky was breath taking. My eyes began lock on to all the many independent floating islands that cover the skyline, each powered by large propellers that keep them up in the sky. You can barely see the world below from up here, the most you can see is a patch of forest or the ocean when the clouds break. I entered my room and fell flat on my bed and instantly descended into a deep slumber.

The next morning, I woke up around 10am, my view still very hazy from waking up, then a sharp pain rushed to my head. I moaned in pain,

"next time watch out for Malik's right hook," I uttered.

I walked out of the barracks to see the sun engulf the courtyard. The courtyard was filled with cadets from Eagle, Star, and Ender regiments, I was in Ender which is meant for the highest skilled cadets. Many of the other cadets from Eagle, Star, and even Ender looked at me with disgust as I was immediately transferred to Ender right after boot camp. Usually, you have to work your way up the ranks to get into Ender.

Today was our day off, no training or no mission briefing. As I crossed the bridge which led into the city of Domhnall, Marisa was standing on the railings of the bridge admiring the sky. I know Marisa, she is like my only friend, she is a 5'4", slim build, with tan skin color and curly long brunette hair. I have spoken to her in the past and I learned she is an orphan and is highly skilled in all areas of combat. As I walk along the bridge which connected the two islands, our eyes locked with one another. She gave me a smirk to acknowledge me and uttered.

"Where you are heading Kavan?"

"Just heading out into the town for a walk," I replied.

"Alright catch you later I guess," Marisa exclaimed.

I entered the city of Domhnall, the atmosphere was so elegant with buildings made of vibrant reds, yellows, whites, grays, and browns. Many of the buildings resembled much of the Victorian architecture and were usually out built of wood or brick with glass windows providing enough for citizens to see what was inside. Surprisingly for being high in the clouds the terrain of each island was at different levels. I came to the end of the cobblestone road where it split into two. When looking straight ahead you would see the center island which held the Castle of Viggo, the ruler of Domhnall. To the left of me was the island that held the Cathedral and to the right was the island that housed the museum. If you looked around about 15 islands surrounded the castle at various distances.

I followed the cobblestone road to the right towards the museum because the island next to it holds the Sorcerers shop. At this shop it tells you whether you can control magic. I wanted to see if I had the ability to harness magic because a small percentage of people were born with a certain type of magic (most were put into the military at a young age). Everyone has a golden bracelet on their left wrist and the bracelet has five slots in the shape of a rhombus embedded into it. Four slots where the rhombus meets and one in the middle. With magic, it is put into the form of a gem that is then placed in one of the slots in the bracelet. The more you understand and harness your magic the more slots you fill in the brace which increases your magic ability.

There are five forms of magic: Inferno gem (red), the ability to harness fire and lava, Hydra gem (blue), ability to harness water and the ocean, Araw gem (yellow), ability to harness lightning and the sun, Leon gem (green), ability to harness nature, and finally the Eira gem (black) ability of anti-magic and resides a demon. I finally reached the Sorcerers shop after the sky ferry reached the island. I ran swiftly toward the shop, but then I was met with a fist that hit me right in my stomach. I fell immediately to my knees clenching my stomach. I heard a voice, a particular one that I knew instantly, it was Malik.

“Look who we have here,” Malik said smirkingly.

“Leave me alone Malik,” I shouted.

I rose to my feet and looked straight at Malik,

“Let’s not do this in public,” I yelled.

“Doesn’t bother me, as long as I get to kick the shit out of you,” Malik uttered while cracking his knuckles.

Malik had this vendetta against me for reasons I did not know. We headed into a dark alley way where no one could see us. Malik seemed off today, his eye color wasn’t the same, his were blue, but now they were brown. I thought they were just contacts. He proceeded to thrust his right hook with an immense amount of speed, I ducked under his attack, I then countered with an upper cut to the stomach. I noticed it land as blood flew out of his mouth. I proceed to keep the pressure on him, I went in for a straight right, but Malik parried my attack with his left hand. He countered with a right to my chin. We both landed good shots, but we also were dodging each other respectfully.

I let my guard down for a second as Malik hit me with a kick to the head, I stumbled backwards a couple of feet, unable to stand I fell down on my back. Malik pushed me to the edge of the alley way, the only thing keeping me from falling off were the railings. On the floor sitting down with back my on the railing, Malik spoke.

“There is something about you that doesn’t add up.”

“What do you mean?”

“Captain Aideen requested for your transfer from Eagle to Ender a week before we head to the surface,” Malik said.

“Could you be the reason Captain Zemira and her cadets have gone missing.”

“How could you say that Malik?”

“Well that’s where Captain Aideen found you, alone in a house with no one around.”

Suddenly a memory flashed in my eyes, it was myself when I was seven hiding under my bed, because my parents told me to. I saw a young lady open my door, she was dressed in all white, with a large brown cap, and long blonde hair. She squatted down and stuck her hand out and said.

“Come on out, you’ll be safe with me.”

My vision disappeared after I felt my bracelet get removed off my wrist.

“Good luck finding this again,” said Malik

He then tossed it off the edge of the island, I tried to reach for it, but I was too late. Malik was gone by then. I stood up leaning over the rail to see if my bracelet was still there, fortunately the sun shined perfect-

ly and revealed my bracelet had latched onto a broken pipe a few feet below me. I jumped to the other side of the railing and started my descend. I now was in hands distances away from my bracelet. I grabbed my bracelet with my left hand, while my right was holding onto the railing to keep myself up. Suddenly the railing snapped away and I lost my grip. I began to fall rapidly down to what I thought was death. I tore through the large piece of tarp and landed on a small pile of old trash; I was knocked out for a moment.

I rose from my slumber, it was a dark, cold, and baren of any life form. I needed to find my way pack up to the surface, I started to walk down the beaten-up road which were missing pieces of stone. I pasted an alley way, catching a glance of small figure in the fetal position all the way in the back. I turned around to investigate.

I shouted, “Who is down there?”

There was no response, then a small creature crawled himself to the light. Our eyes locked onto each other and my countenance could only express fear and horror. The figure that fell upon me was thin, pale, and had grey hair. The figure mumbles.

“Is it really you... Kavan...do you remember me?”

I felt my heart sink, I couldn't bare to look at this creature anymore. I ran away with the uneasy feeling of fear.

I was breathing very heavily with my hands on my knees. I wondered how this creature knew who I was? Footsteps were walking slowly behind me, I shouted.

“What is with you Malik already?”

As I turned around to see the person behind me, it wasn't Malik, instead a taller person in stature in black trousers, white buttoned up shirt, and a black trench coat.

“So, I see you've finally met Max, or do you not remember,” said the tall figure.

That name didn't resonate with me, then another memory rushed into my mind and all I could see was myself and Max playing tag as little kids.

“Who are you,” I shouted.

The figure had no response and the only thing in the air was silence.

“Kingdom of Edred has asked me to bring you down to the surface dead or alive,” uttered the man.

“For what, I didn't do anything?”

“It's not only you but your whole family, has been accused of treason against the Kingdom of Edred,” said the figure.

I had no response because I did not know what he was talking about. The figure raised is left hand exposing his bracelet, abruptly snapping his fingers. Out of no where a beam of electricity shot from his hand, heading immediately for me. I dodged swiftly to the right, then a barrage of lightning bolts was heading my way. Unable to dodge and react fast enough because I hadn't recovered from the previous dodge, I knew for sure I was dead... suddenly I was lifted off my feet.

I felt the cold air rush all over my face and when I looked up I noticed it was Marisa in her cadets uniform which consisted of a white button up shirt, tan pants, leather boots, and a leather jack with the emblem of a green dragon which signify Ender regiment. Not only was she in her cadets' uniform, she was wearing her shadow gear. Shadow gear was an exoskeleton suit that had a slim back plate that held small thrusters on the users belts which could propel the user forward. Metal exoskeleton forearms ran along the outside of the user's arm and were connected with gauntlets that attached to the person wrists. The gauntlets housed grappling hooks that allowed for aerial movements between buildings. A small number of cadets could wield because it required a high skill set to control the movement.

“Your luck I followed you stupid,” uttered Marisa

“Thank you, I owe you one.”

After my little confrontation between Marisa, I headed back to the barracks to get some needed sleep. That night I laid in bed unable to sleep as memories of my past started to flood my vision. My memories were vague however, their voices brought a feeling of happiness to me. I heard a large “bang” sound come from the living room; I heard my mother’s voice tell me to stay in my room. I heard my mother and father scream in agony, which made me wake up out of my dream. I woke up in a dead sweat with my heart pounding heavily. In an instant I rose to my feet, put my clothes on, and grabbed my shadow gear. With the night being young and the moon shine throughout the sky I knew it was the perfect time to leave. I wanted to find the truth about my parents and why I was up here in Domhnall.

I headed straight for the island past the Cathedral which housed the docking bay. Anything coming in or out had to go through the docks first. I reached the docks as the moon was at its peak. I knew the shadow gear came equipped with a parachute, so I didn’t have to take the risk of stealing a ferry. I knew the only way towards the truth was down at the surface.

“Are you going alone,” a voice uttered.

I turned around and noticed it was Marisa behind me.

“You should let me tag along,” she said.

I looked at her and nodded. We both jumped down towards the surface in our cadets’ uniform and shadow gear. In my head I was thinking this could be considered treason, but my mind was clouded by devotion to finding the truth. We finally landed on the surface, specifically in the thick dense forest. From our mission debriefing we knew the Kingdom of Edred was to the east of us. We began to setup camp instantly, establishing a fire, sheltered, and perimeter because to us the environment was unknown.

We began our journey at dawn, heading east toward Edred. Walking through thick forest that towered over us, blocking any form of sunlight sat uneasy with Marisa and I. Finally, we broke through the dense forest and came upon an open plain. We noticed an outpost of some sort a couple of miles outside the Kingdom. Once we got closer three people appeared wearing brown robes. One began to speak towards Marisa and I.

“Look who we have here fellows, some up worlders,” said one of three.

“I’ll take my time killing these ones,” said the other

“Agree,” said the last one.

Out of nowhere three separate magical attacks were heading our way, one being a fireball, the next a spear of water, and beam of electricity. From the image I saw, I thought Marisa and I were dead because the attacks were so fast a dodge would be impossible at this rate. I closed my eyes hoping the attacks missed. Sounds filled my ears “boom” ... “whoosh”. I looked up confused until I noticed a wall made up of vines blocking the attacks. I looked to my right and saw Marisa motioned her finger upward which brought the wall up. I noticed she wasn’t wearing a bracelet, during my thought process she abruptly cut me off.

“Use your magic, come on, I can’t hold this any longer,” she yelled.

“I don’t have any magic,” I responded.

Marisa’s wall broke throwing her back in the process. I had no long-range weapon, all I had were the retractable swords that were built into the top of the shadow gear’s back plate. I used the grapple hook by shooting it at the cement wall behind the three sorcerers, this increased my speed as I was going in for a slashing attack with my swords. Suddenly in mid-air, the sorcerer that possessed the hydra gem casted a water spell that sent a wave of water that countered my attack putting me straight on my back. I couldn’t get up the attack immobilized my body; I still could see Marisa in the corner of my eye. She was suddenly stunned by a beam of light that blinded her. Two of the sorcerers throw a combo attack that sent an electric fireball that would deal the killing blow. I closed my eyes and suddenly my mind went blank.

I had no control, no sense of what happened, but I felt that it was an instinct. As I was now standing in front of Marisa. I looked at my left wrist, my golden bracelet was changing into a silver steel, with black gems filling each of the five slots. My arms change into the color black with my hands turning into claws, my eyes change to red cat like eyes, with large bat like wings protruding out of my back. My teeth change into fangs and my sword turning into a blackened steel. I noticed that that the attack had heading for Marisa had disap-

peared.

“Uhhh...he...nullify our attack,” said one of sorcerers

“That’s impossible... gems choose the wielder...a person does not make his own,” uttered the other sorcerer.

I felt this immense amount of power in my body, I dashed towards the three sorcerers in the blink of the eye. My slashing attack was so fast my two blackened steel blades cut cleanly with no blood; the three sorcerers were dead. I felt this feeling of rage and aggression that fill my whole body, I desired for more.

“You have finally shown your true self,” a voice stated.

It was the figure in the black trench coat, it continued to speak as I listened. My name is Cirillo, I am one of the knights’ guard of Edred and you know the reason why I am here. Once I was able to find out your location by torturing it out of your parents. I had to think of a plan to get you to come down to the surface. You see Kavan, this was all genius plan to get you down here. I brought Max up there to spark your desire to find the truth. Truth be told that little encounter you had with Malik in the alley... that was me. My magic is truly limitless in what I’m capable of doing. Another thing before I forget, at this very moment... is it Star regiment I believe... well they are about to be sent into slavery for Edred. I heard you wanted to find your parents... right? You see, your parents have committed an act of treason, smuggling your people up to Domhnall. When you live in Edred you owe your life to the kingdom and you see your parents have violated their oath. Freedom is earned not given, especially for your race... the holy Corinthians race is special for no reason, other than to serve the Zorians.

“Are they dead yet?” I shouted.

No not yet, but their execution is near, there is just one piece missing and that is you. If you wish to see them, just surrender and that will be it. If you try and fight back, I’ll just kill you where you stand. Your choice and he left it off at that.

My mind was clouded by so much rage and anger, I didn’t take any of his words into account. I needed to save my parents and Star regiment at all cost. Marisa stood up revealing that her source of magic came from her neckless, it had a heart shaped pendulum with a singular green gem embed into it. I could tell from her countenance that she knew already what decision I made. A black aura surrounded me; I drew my two swords. Cirillo knew what decision I made as he stated.

“So, death is what you choose.”

Marisa casted a spell that hurled a barrage of rocks towards Cirillo, his counter was a barrage of lighting. An explosion of dust rose from the contact of the spells. With every ounce of strength, I launched at him with increasable speed, he also dashed towards me with an aura of electricity around him, it ends here.

“UGHHHH”

“UGGGGHHHH”

“BOOM”, WHOOSH”.

Four Seasons

By Isaiah Melvin

Lone ago before horse and buggy set out to conquer the west, before we had gunpowder and lead ball the world was covered completely in water except four small islands. Mystical beast prowled the purple deep devouring anyone or anything brave enough to venture out from their island. Four small islands separated by only five miles formed a circle at the center of the planet. This circle of life was referred to as Vivita the center of existence. Vivita was created as an experiment by the gods. Four gods ruled over the galaxy, but as time passed the gods became lonely and longed for companionship from other beings. Thus humans were spawned into existence, but humans were different from the beast lurking in the deep. They required more than just water and sunlight, humans needed land with things to eat and places to rest. Each god had a vision of what the perfect environment was for humans but an agreement could not be made on which was best. Tevera believed a land with constant sunshine and heat would suit humans best. Mitashi envisioned a world freezing cold covered in ice and glaciers. Brasnu insisted that humans would thrive in a space constantly wet and rainy. Finally Ravick the youngest of the four gods recommended a land completely dry and void. After many lengthy debates it was decided that each god was to create an island of four thousand square miles and a sun that created their desired conditions. One hundred humans would be placed on each island and left to multiply for 100 years. After the first 25 years of testing the youngest god Ravick saw that his people were not well compared to the other islands. So one night behind the other gods' backs Ravick gave magic to his people to help them cope with the dry conditions of their island. Little did he know Mitashi, his big sister was watching. She was more vigilant than the other two gods and knew foul play was inevitable from Ravick. Instead of prosecuting him for his actions Mitashi decided to bless her people with a powerful magic that allowed her people to control ice. Mitashi was pleased with the new progress her people were making so she decided to rest for a year. But she had underestimated the intelligence of humans and as she slept people began constructing bridges to eventually connect with the other islands. As the first bridge came near Tevera's island heat from its sun collapsed the structure and plunged half of Mitashi's people into the sea and they were devoured by the beast lurking in the purple deep. When she awakened from her sleep to find so many of her people had perished Mitashi immediately blamed the other gods and instructed her people to prepare for war against the other islands. Tevera and Brasnu attempted to reason with Mitashi but she was not willing to listen. With war imminent Tevera and Brasnu blessed their people with magical abilities to match those of the other island people.

Again the gods underestimated the power of human's free will. As Mitashi's soldiers crossed over newly constructed bridges to invade Brasnu's island they were greeted with open arms of hospitality not war. The islanders were so thrilled to finally see other people they disregarded orders and dined together, sharing stories of struggle and of triumph over their respective islands. Brasnu's people shared their magic spells for controlling liquid water with the soldiers and they picked up the skill with little effort. Mitashi's people also shared their magic which the foreigners grasped with similar ease. With these new found the soldiers returned home and shared their experience with the remaining people of Mitashi. Thoroughly impressed by the new magic it was decided that every citizen should learn this new power and connect with the remaining two islands. Work began immediately on completing the other two bridges. Ravick's people were also surprisingly friendly and courteous to the foreigners. Tevera's island was still unreachable with an ice bridge but a new type of travel was discovered that allowed children who learned both the magic of Mitashi and the magic of Brasnu to run across water forming thin sheets of ice with every step. Young people who learned this skill were called skippers, because they could run from one island to the next as they pleased. Skippers were sent

from Mitashi's island to talk with the people inhabiting Tevera's land. When the skippers arrived to meet with her people it was clear that they were not quite as thrilled to have visitors as other humans. Their hearts were hard with anger towards Tevera for placing them on an island of constant heat and light. Even with their magic, life was miserable and they longed to be removed from their suffering. The skippers showed compassion to the people and demonstrated the powerful magic they possessed. Just as the other islanders did before spells were shared and new magic powers were revealed.

Tevera's people saw their new power as a chance to seek revenge and destroy Tevera. They believed that with the help of the other islands victory could be achieved in a war against the gods but none of the other islands supported their desire, so the uprising was halted before it ever began. But one boy from Tevera's island was not to be turned down so easily. He had suffered a more cruel and agonizing life than most of the other inhabitants of Tevera's land. His mother died of heat exhaustion and his father was eaten by a tentacle wielding monster while bathing in the ocean. He was only ten years old when the skippers arrived on the island so there wasn't much, he could do when his people tried and failed to convince the other islands to fight against the gods. Pippen knew that his time of reconciliation would arrive one day so he mastered all four of the other types of magic and became a skipper. Every island had a squad of eleven skippers who would deliver messages, supplies, weapons, and anything else a child could carry for a distance throughout Vivita. Leofwin, a native of Mitashi's island, was head of all skippers. She was twelve and had been appointed by the elders of all four islands as lead skipper.

Of course the god's seen all of this taking place but hesitated to intervene. It seemed that the people were beginning to form a more suitable living environment than any of the gods could ever have imagined. Each island was giving to the next and all the islands started expanding their population at a more rapid rate than ever before. Leofwin operated with extreme precision slashing delivery times as she dashed over the purple water. As head skipper her family was allotted the best housing, premium clothing, and the finest food to eat. The job did have its downsides however, every few weeks a child would run too slow across the water and be snatched down by a sea creature. In that case Leofwin would have to pick up for the decided skipper until a replacement was found. Children between the ages of nine and sixteen were eligible to be one the team if they could keep up. Adults were too heavy and slow to skim across the water without sinking and bridges took too long to construct. Pippen was undoubtedly the best skipper behind Leofwin and the two loved competing to see who could deliver the most packages in a single day. It's important for you to know that a day to the people of Vivita was equivalent to three days in time for you and me. After four years Leofwin was forced to retire as head skipper and Pippen took her place as lead skipper. Although Leofwin's time out on the water had come to an end she stayed in touch with Pippen, offering guidance to him whenever possible. Truth be told Leofwin knew that Pippen was a more talented skipper than her, but she had grown fond of him over their years working together and enjoyed his company. Even though it was forbidden for anyone over the age of sixteen to be on the water Leofwin would sometimes venture across the sea to visit Pippen on Tevera's island. The two would dash around just off the island laughing and telling stories from their days working together. One night Leofwin proposed a race around the island to see if she could still beat Pippen. Not one to ever back down from a challenge Pippen agreed and they sped off leaving shiny crystal patches of ice in their wake. For the first quarter of the race Leofwin was firmly in the lead moving with grace and elegance as she pulled away from Pippen. About halfway around the island Pippen sensed something was wrong and called out to Leofwin to halt but she was too far away. In the next instant four tentacles burst through the surface and were upon Leofwin! A massive sea serpent with tentacles for a tongue emerged from the water in pursuit of Leofwin. As she ducked and dodged the creature's attacks it was she could Pippen moving hastily towards her

with fire consuming his entire body. It was like nothing she had ever seen before, his body was emitting a light brighter than two suns and hotter than three. Pippen had closed the gap between him and the monster and with one burst of fire from his glowing hands severed the beast in two. Cutting through thick scales, flesh, and bone like a shovel pierces sand. In a fit of fiery rage Pippen shouted “Damn the gods!” Leofwin fled to the island to avoid being consumed in the blaze. “This is the same beast that took my father years ago. The gods wish to destroy everything I love, first my parents now you Leofwin.”

“You love me?” Leofwin inquired as she stood on the beach staring out at Pippen who was still a blaze. “Yes I always have but a soldier cannot love his captain, only respect them.”

“I have grown very fond of you over the years Pippen but you know it is forbidden that people from different islands be together.”

“I do not care for old laws that were written before I was born. I would give my life for you. You are the only person in Vivita that I truly care for.”

“I love you Pippen but our pairing would upset the gods.”

“Nothing would please me more than to see the gods unhappy. My people have despised Tavera for years and I believe that if we were to bring the strength of all four islands together the gods would fall to us in battle.”

“You may be right but would you risk the lives of so many for a victory that is uncertain?”

“What lives do my people live? Constantly hiding from the sun, buried underground all day only to emerge during the night to collect water.”

“The pain in your voice is palpable and I do feel sorry for you, but I do not believe the other islands will stand with you. Just as they refused to fight before.”

Pippen had quenched his fire and now sat next to Leofwin on the beach. The two sat and stared out into the water for the rest of the night as the two halves of the tentacle tongued serpent floated in towards the shoreline. When morning came Pippen prepared to return back to his daily duties as head skipper.

“Use the serpent!” Leofwin exclaimed as she bounced up from the sand and started towards the carcass. “What do I want with a dead monster Leofwin?”

“You can take its head as a trophy, an example to show the other people of this Vivita what power they truly have. And when you do I will be by your side and we will be together in the eyes of the gods.”

“Surely this will gain the attention of Vivita and the gods!”

“We should depart at once. Cut the serpent's head from its body so we can travel to each island and declare war on the gods.”

Before Pippen and Leofwin could reach the first island Tavera came to them and warned that their actions had upset the god's peace. “If you stop now we will have mercy on you but if you choose to continue, prepare to face the wrath of the gods.”

Pippen raised the head of the serpent and ignited into an inferno. “I have slain the most dreadful beast of Vivita with no effort, your head will be on pike soon enough.”

Tavera replied with a voice that boomed like thunder and shook the ground like an earthquake. “You fool! If you refuse to stop I will turn Vivita into dust!”

So Tavera gathered up the suns from each island and fused them into one. She then placed her new sun in the center of Vivita's sky.

Tavera returned to Pippen and Leofwin “Now you shall have four seasons everyday and no night. Storms shall swallow each island and wipe away you and all of your people from Vivita.”

The pair had only one day before all the islands were destroyed to convince all the people of Vivita to

stand and fight against the gods. With time running out Leofwin devised a plan that would cost her life but save Vivita. Leofwin ripped the serpents four tentacles from its mouth and without even saying goodbye dashed off to deliver one tentacles to the elders of every island and share this message. “My love Pippen slain the great serpent and saved my life, Tavera has cursed Vivita’s suns to cause a great storm and destroy our people! Rise up and fight against the gods to create a new future!”

Leofwin delivered this message to every island faster than an army of skippers could ever dream to. But when her task was complete her body froze and shattered into a million ice crystals. As the crystals floated into the air they began to grow and link together forming a stairway up to the heavens. With tears in his eyes and flames in his heart Pippen led the charge up the stairway to the house of the gods. There the gods and the people of Vivita their creation battled for forty-four days to decide the fate of the universe. Many lives were lost but when the fighting concluded the gods had fallen to their creation and humans had won the right to control their own destiny.



By Morgan Wood



By Morgan Wood



By Molly Shepler



By Kevin Farr

Laughter From the Flames

By Quintin Weaver

The year is 1902 in a small town in the state of Iowa. The town has a real sense of home to it. The people of the town are friendly and kind towards each other in the community. I live in a big old farmhouse right outside of town that was built long before I was born. The house used to be white, but over the years, it has decayed into a dark, greenish brown color. We moved here a few years back after we had to sell our old property due to unfortunate circumstances. I found out we got the farm for cheap when I overheard my parents talking one time. I am not sure why, but I have heard that something bad happened here 40 years ago. I never understood what that meant, and both my parents have assured us that our new home is going to be great for us.

My name is Samuel Steele, and I am 11 years young. I live with my parents and my younger brother Luke, who is 9 years old. Our family is close knitted as we spend most of the day together each day. A typical day for me includes waking up early to help our father on the farm, then spending a few hours with our mother doing my studies. After that, we have free time which we usually spend eating lunch and playing outside. Towards the end of the day, we again help father around the farm, and after that we eat dinner as a family. The weekends are different on Saturday; we don't have to do as much around the farm and we get more time to play. On Sunday, we go to church in the morning, then spend the rest of the day with other family or other community members. I hear our two roosters; I sit up and rub the blurriness away from my eyes.

I turn to my brother and command, "Luke, get up, it's morning." I crawl out of my bed and head for the bathroom. I splash some cold water on my face to help wake me up, then I proceed to brush my teeth. I return to my room to find my brother still asleep, with the blanket pulled over his head. I walk over to the side of his bed and shake his shoulder.

"Wake up Luke, or I'm getting Father," I say. Luke instantly jumps up and heads towards the bathroom. I chuckle under my breath and get dressed for the day. I finish and head to the kitchen to eat breakfast before our morning chores. Mother and Father are sitting at the table eating and talking amongst themselves. I sit in one of the empty chairs and start filling up the plate in front of me with food.

Mother turns to me and says, "Good Morning dear, how did you sleep?"

"Not well actually, I had a nightmare that woke me up in the middle of the night," I reply.

"Oh no, inform me, what was it about, Sam?" Mother asks.

Before I could answer, my brother walks into the kitchen asking what's for breakfast. At this point, Father is finishing up with his food.

He stands up and says, "You boys be out in 10 minutes to help me out this morning."

He puts his jacket on and walks out the door. Luke and mother continue to chat back and forth while we all finish eating. All of the sudden, ear piercing screeches rang from outside. Clucks from chickens, mooing of cows, and worse screams from Father. Mother jumps up and springs to the front door. She slings it open and gasps.

She screams, "Oh my God, boys come now."

She runs out the door and we jump up and follow. As soon as we reach outside, the stench of burning wood and hay rush up my nostrils. Thick, black smoke fills the blue morning sky. Flames engulf the guts of our old barn that stored equipment and housed animals. We get closer to the barn and at this point, the barn is now completely on fire.

Mother turns to me and yells, "Get your bike, ride into town and get the Fire Department! Hurry!"

I ran as faster than I ever have before towards my bike laying in the grass along the porch. I jump on and pedal like there's no tomorrow. We live about two miles from town, but I was able to get there in about five minutes. My legs were turning at a locomotive rate. I get to the fire station and run inside.

I burst through the doors screaming, "Help, please, our barn is on fire, and my father and our animals are trapped inside!"

I grab my bike and tell them to follow me. They get the horses and hook up their water buggy and follow me. Again, I am pedaling for my life and we soon reach the farm. By this time, the building is completely burnt and beginning to fall in. There are animals running around in panic, but still no sign of Father.

"Where's Father?" I yelled to Mother.

"He's still trapped inside, your brother and I couldn't go in there. It was too dangerous, what if all three of us were trapped in?" she replies.

The fire company springs into action as they fight the flames, using their giant tank of water to drench the barn. When the fire dies slightly, a few of the firefighters rush in after father. Panic and suspense rain on us as the crackling of the fire, animals screeching, cries from Luke and my mother all start to get louder. More parts of the barn start to fall in on itself. The uncertainty of them bringing my father out start to climb higher. My heart is beating through my chest. I don't know what to do as I just stand there and watch all of the chaos that is happening before me. After what seems like an eternity, Mother and the firefighters start to yell and run closer to the burning barn. I look and see two of the firefighters emerge from the flames carrying Father. One had him by the ankles and one had him by the shoulders. They run far enough away from the flames to escape the heat then they lay him on the ground. When we all lay eyes on him, tears and gasps burst out from all of us. His skin is bubbled over and covered in puss, while other parts of his body are burnt into a dark red, almost black, hard scale. He is still breathing, but barely. Worry and fear storm over me, as I don't know what to do or what's going to happen.

Father is gasping for air, coughing, but he turns to us and musters the words, "The door was locked."

He rolls the other way and begins coughing again. Blood shoots out from his mouth onto the ground. He starts to breath faster, then he rolls over and looks at us before his breathing stops. First, there is silence as we are all in shock, not knowing what to do. Reality sets in, and we realize that Father is gone. The silence turns into uncontrollable sobs from all three of us. While we are grieving over Father, the barn is still smoldering in smoke, but the flame is controlled and they will be able to kill it. We wail in sorrow, sitting in a circle around my father. The Fire Department gives their condolences and assists us with the after-death situation. They said they will take him and get him prepared for a proper burial. The fire is completely put out, it is now just a pile of burnt wood smoldering on the ground. Father is loaded in the buggy and they are taking him to the mortician. It is now just my mother, Luke, and I. We go back to the house and continue to grieve.

We gather around the kitchen table. "Mother, there's something that I need to say."

"What is it?" she replied.

I answer, "Well, this is going to sound strange, but the dream I was telling you about this morning, it was, uh..."

"What is it, just tell me," mother spurts out.

"The fire," I say.

Quickly answering she says, "What do you mean the fire?"

"I was inside a barn, but it was dark so I didn't know it was ours. There were flames everywhere and

animals running around. I heard a man that sounded like Father screaming, and weirdly I heard laughs quietly in the background. The laughs were terrifying as is sounded like they were enjoying the chaos.”

Mother cuts me off, “Ok that’s enough, I assure you it was just a dream. It has nothing to do with the fire. Those things just don’t happen, Samuel.”

“I mean, I know that, but this was oddly similar mother,” I reply.

She answers soothingly, “Yes, I know dear, but there’s nothing we can do about it, and thinking about it like that won’t solve anything.”

Suddenly, quiet laughter broke out and everyone at the table jumped in their seat and quickly looked around, trying to figure out where the noise came from.

“What was that?” asked Luke.

I answer in a quite, monotone voice as I can barely get the words out due to the shock: “that was the laughter I heard in my dream.”

“Alright Samuel, knock it off. I believed you about the dream, but it can’t be.”

The laughter breaks out again, except this time, louder. I jump up and say, “That’s the laugh from the dream and I promise something bad is about to happen. There was more to my dream.”

“Well, what was it?” Mother screams.

Just as I am about to inform them about seeing them in the flames too, a gust of wind blows the door shut and I hear the sound of the lock clicking. I speed to the door and try and open it, but it is locked.

I turn and yell, “Get out! Let’s go, we have to get out of here now!”

I run to the back of the house and try and open the back door. I rip the doorknob, but it is locked and it won’t budge. Panic starts to set in, and I rush back into the kitchen and try to break the window open.

“The window’s too small for any of us to fit through, plus the glass will cut them badly.”

“We have to at least try or we’re going die mother, trust me!” I exclaim.

I start smashing the window with the metal kitchen appliance, then suddenly the stench of gas leaks into the house. I frantically smash the glass and hop up on the counter. I shove my head and shoulder through the opening, then I get lodged and stuck. I try to wiggle through, but the shards of glass puncture my ribs and side. I let out a scream as I try and push through. Suddenly, a flash of light and the sound of a flick happen, and the house shoots up in flames. The sound of the laughter comes back louder and clearly. I give one last effort and muster every bit of effort I have left and emerge through the window. Gashes cover my sides and blood spews from my wounds, soaking my clothes in a thick, warm pool of blood. I yell to them, “I’ll be back, I promise, I’m going to get help!”

I turn and run for the town. The sound of the fire crackling and the screaming of my family fills my ears, taking over my mind. Playing back in my head just like the fire with the barn, and like the horrible dream I had. The house is burning faster than the barn due to the gas, and it is already starting to cave in. The laughter starts to ring in my ear again. Following me as I run away. I scream, “What do you want from me? Get out of my head!”

Looking back at the house, half of it has caved in. The little hope I had of being able to get help in time has dwindled. The sick laughter is still playing in my head along with the thought of living without all of my family. I stop and sprint back towards my house. As I get closer, I can hear the cries of my mother and brother. I find a break in the house where it has fallen in, and I jump into the burning house. The heat of the flames feels like thousands of knives piercing my skin. The pain is unbearable, but I don’t scream. I move

and try and find my family. I find them lying on the kitchen floor burned and holding each other, sobbing.

“Why did you come back?” asks mother.

I reply, “I can’t live without you guys. I couldn’t leave you.”

I get down and hug my brother and mother, then a loud crash rings in my ears. Suddenly, the weight of an elephant comes crashing down on us. Everything goes black in an instant.



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By Julia Wagner



“Sea of Flowers” by Katie Miller



By Morgan Wood



By Jakob Shingler



By Jakob Shingler



By Jakob Shingler



By Jakob Shingler



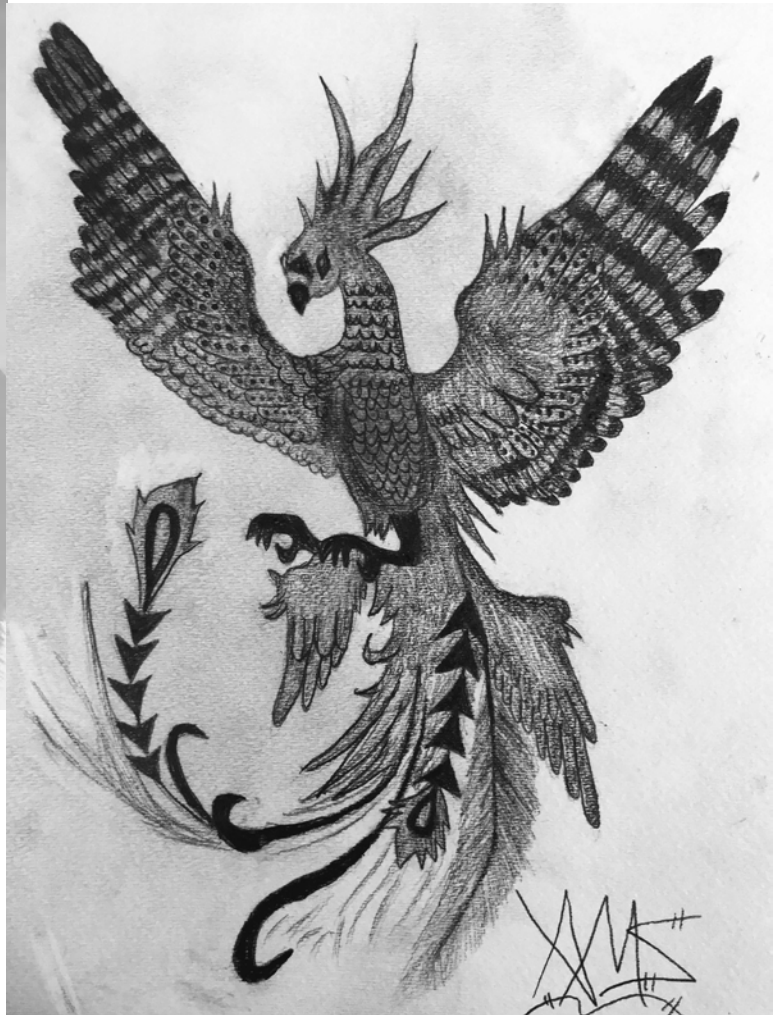
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Thank you to the students and staff of Thiel College for your submissions! Publication of *The Phoenix* would not be possible without your willingness to contribute your time, talents, and creativity to ensure that this journal continues to thrive.

—The Editors